Conditional freedom : free soil and fugitive slaves from the US South to Mexico's Northeast, 1803-1861

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Conditional Freedom

Free Soil and Fugitive Slaves from the US South to Mexico's Northeast, 1803-1861

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List of Abbreviations

AEMEUA: Archivo de la Embajada Mexicana en los Estados Unidos de América
AGEC: Archivo General del Estado de Coahuila
AGI: Archivo General de Indias
AGN: Archivo General de la Nación
AHDF: Archivo Histórico del Distrito Federal "Carlos de Sigüenza y Góngora"
AHM: Archivo Histórico de Monterrey
AMC: Archivo Municipal de Cadereyta
AMG: Archivo Municipal de Guerrero
AMMVA: Archivo Municipal de Monclova
BA: Bexar Archives
Beinecke: Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library
Benson: Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection
Bolton: Herbert E. Bolton Papers
Briscoe: The Dolph Briscoe Center for American History
CDS: Cartas de Seguridad
CP: Correspondance Politique
CPN: Comisión Pesquisidora del Norte
Cuba: Papeles de Cuba
FO: Foreign Office
FCMO: Fondo Colonias Militares de Oriente
FJPB: Fondo Jefatura Política de Béjar
FSXIX: Fondo Siglo XIX
FWP: Federal Writers' Project
Guadalajara: Audiencia de Guadalajara
LA: Laredo Archives
LAGP: Luis Alberto Guajardo Papers on the History of Coahuila
LE: Legajo Encuadernado
LOC: Library of Congress
MA: Matamoros Archives
MAE(C): Ministère des Affaires Etrangères, Centre des Archives Diplomatiques, La Courneuve (France)
MR: Muzquiz Records
NA: Nacogdoches Archives
NARA: National Archives and Records Administration
PI: Provincias Internas
RBBC: Robert Bruce Blake Collection
RSPP: Race and Slavery Petitions Project
SA: Saltillo Archives
SAMA: San Antonio Municipal Archives
SEDNA: Archivo Histórico Militar de la Secretaría de Defensa Nacional
SJMASC: Samuel J. May Anti-Slavery Collection
SML: Sterling Memorial Library
SRE: Archivo Histórico de la Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores
TBL: The Bancroft Library
TCA: Travis County Archives
TSLAC: Texas State Library and Archives Commission
UT(A): University of Texas (Austin)
UT(SA): University of Texas (San Antonio)
YU: Yale University

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INTRODUCTION

As he was travelling through the Texas-Mexico borderlands during the mid-1850s, Frederick Law Olmsted, an antislavery journalist commissioned by the *New York Daily Times* to report on the southern slaveholding states, reflected upon the condition of enslaved African Americans who absconded to the Mexican border in the hope of finding freedom across the Rio Grande. The chronicler wondered: "the impulse must be a strong one, the tyranny extremely cruel, the irksomeness of slavery keenly irritating, or the longing for liberty much greater than is usually attributed to the African race, which induces a slave to attempt to escape to Mexico".[1] The reputation of Mexico as a site of asylum for fugitive slaves was by then already decades in the making, not just among enslaved people living in Texas, but also among those who lived further afield. Solomon Northup, a free black from the northern states who was abducted in Washington DC in 1841 and sold into slavery in the Deep South, described in his iconic narrative how a year before his own arrival, some enslaved African Americans on a plantation near Bayou Boeuf in Louisiana had "conceived the project of organizing a company sufficiently strong to fight their way against all opposition, to the neighboring territory of Mexico".[2]

Set during the last two decades of US slavery, both testimonies underscore how during the course of the nineteenth century, Mexico's northeastern borderlands came to be understood as gateways to freedom by enslaved African Americans living in the US Southwest. As underlined in John Hope Franklin and Loren Schweninger's pioneering study on self-liberated slaves in the US South, enslaved people in the southwestern slaveholding states of Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Arkansas and even the Indian Territory often sought to achieve freedom by absconding to Mexico, following routes that ran in the opposite direction to the Underground Railroad that led other freedom seekers to the North.[3] Although their numbers paled in comparison to their northern counterparts (who numbered upwards of 1.000 per year, according to some estimates), they were far from insignificant. Precise estimates of how many fugitive slaves crossed the Mexican border remain elusive. In a letter to Olmsted, Adolf Douai, a German-born free-soiler and editor of the *San Antonio Zeitung* in Western Texas, asserted that the number of enslaved people who had absconded to Mexico in 1854 "scarcely can be short of a hundred", a figure that lawyer, writer and Douai's fellow countryman Friedrich Kapp rounded up to 150.[4] Estimates by pro-slavery

[1] Frederick Law Olmsted, *A Journey through Texas: or a Saddle-Trip on the Southwestern Frontier* (New York: Edwards & Co., 1857), 328-329.
[2] Solomon Northup, *Twelve Years a Slave: Narrative of Solomon Northup, a Citizen of New York, Kidnapped in Washington City in 1841, and Rescued in 1853* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1997), 247.
[3] John Hope Franklin, Loren Schweninger, *Runaway Slaves: Rebels on the Plantation* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 112.
[4] LOC, Frederick Law Olmsted Papers, General Correspondence, 1838-1928; "Douai to F.L. Olmsted, 16 Dec. 1854"; *New York Daily Tribune*, 20 Jan. 1855. On the Olmsted-Douai connection: Mischa Honeck, *We are the Revolutionists: German-Speaking Immigrants and American Abolitionists after 1848* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2011), 38-70.

apologists yielded similar results. The *Telegraph and Texas Register* contended in July 1851 that "about two hundred fugitives from Texas crossed at one of the principal ferries on the Rio Grande, during the last two years". By the mid-1850s, the Texan journalist and legislator John Salmon Ford (who had a vested interest in making an exaggerated claim) argued that about 4.000 enslaved African Americans had already escaped across the river.[5]

Even if Mexico never developed into the major beacon of freedom that the northern US or Canada would become, the fact that enslaved people attempted to seek freedom there at all speaks volumes as to how African Americans viewed the landscape of slavery and freedom in North America during the first half of the nineteenth century. During this period, two conflicting developments – the simultaneous retreat and expansion of slavery – found themselves on a collision course. While in certain parts of the continent free-soil territories emerged, slavery massively expanded in others, trapping millions into a life of exploitation with little hope of emancipation. These two developments gave rise to new waves of slave flight from the latter regions to the former, as runaway slaves increasingly sought out new spaces of freedom. This study examines how these developments played out in the Mexican borderlands, focusing on two main themes. First, it provides a social history of enslaved freedom-seekers. Second, it also provides a political history of the contest between Mexican free soil and the spread of slavery west of the Mississippi river valley between 1803 and 1861. Its main question is: what was the nature of slave flight in the Mexican borderlands, and how and why did Mexico develop into a site of "conditional freedom" for slave refugees from the American South?[6]

Free Soil and Spaces of Freedom in the Age of the Second Slavery

In order to understand why enslaved people absconded to Mexico, it is important to first understand the changing legal and political landscape of freedom and slavery in

[5] *Telegraph and Texas Register*, 18 July 1851; *Texas State Times*, 2 June 1855. On numbers, see ch.1.

[6] The expression "slave refugees" used in this study (alongside "self-liberated slaves" or "self-emancipated slaves", among others) refers to people more commonly designated by the existing literature as "runaway" or "fugitive" slaves. While the latter will sometimes be used for the sake of convenience, the use of a more diverse lexicon represents a first step in ridding ourselves of the legalist and criminal connotations carried by the vocabulary of "runaway" and "fugitive", both of these terms reflecting the enslaver's perspective and its underlying stigmas, prejudices and racial ideology. It further introduces enslaved people's own perspectives and motives regarding their own flight, and thus rescues their own identities as refugees from slavery, instead of portraying them as criminals. Historians have emphasized the historicity of refugees long before the modern invention of the legal category of "refugee" in the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and the emergence of the "refugee regime" over the twentieth century: Peter Gatrell, *The Making of the Modern Refugee* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 1-13, esp. 2; Philip Marfleet, "Refugees and history: why we must address the past", *Refugee Survey Quarterly*, v.26, issue 3 (2007), 136-148; J. Olaf Kleist, "The History of Refugee Protection: Conceptual and Methodological Challenges", *Journal of Refugee Studies*, v.30, n°2 (2017), 161-169.

North America during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The "Age of Revolution", rooted in enlightened ideals of equality, liberty and natural rights, profoundly reshaped the Atlantic world. Importantly, the period witnessed the first serious blows against slavery in the western hemisphere and the emergence of spaces of "formal" and "informal" freedom for fugitive slaves. In parts of the Americas, there arose formal variants that legally abolished slavery according to free-soil principles (beginning with the northern US and Haiti), thus providing fugitive slaves with new refuges. At the same time, a spike in individual manumission and self-purchase arrangements in the wake of the American Revolution (1776) led to a significant growth of urban free black populations within the slaveholding US South. Cities increasingly became spaces of "informal" freedom for thousands of runaway slaves, who attempted to get lost in the crowd and clandestinely pass for free.[7]

Even as such spaces of formal and informal freedom emerged throughout the hemisphere, however, other parts of the Americas strengthened their commitment to slavery, a development Dale Tomich has dubbed the "Second Slavery" – a process of revival, intensification and territorial expansion of the production of slave-grown commodities, especially in Cuba, Brazil and the US South.[8] Indeed, with the cotton boom of the early nineteenth century (augmented by renewed sugar and tobacco production), the US South was transformed into one of the last bastions of the "peculiar institution". Following the US purchase of Louisiana from Napoleon's France in 1803, the southwestern borderlands were transformed into a thriving and rapidly expanding frontier of slavery, stretching from riverine areas to their upcountry hinterlands. An unprecedently dynamic plantation economy – connected to capitalist Atlantic markets for cotton, sugar and tobacco – fueled an insatiable demand for slave labor and gave rise to a massive domestic slave trade that drew a million slaves from the Upper South to the lower Mississippi Valley and its western frontier – augmented by illegal smuggling from the "Hidden Atlantic," especially the Caribbean, but also Africa. With slave-based agriculture booming and the domestic slave trade thriving, Southerners began to double down on their ideological commitment to the institution, even as support for slavery faded in the northern states following the American Revolution (for motives including its economic inefficiency and its moral illegitimacy).[9] As Anthony E. Kaye has emphasized, understanding the relationship

[7] Damian A. Pargas, "Urban Refugees: Fugitive Slaves and Spaces of Informal Freedom in the American South", *Journal of Early American History*, 7 (2017), 262-284.

[8] On the Second Slavery: Dale W. Tomich, *Through the Prism of Slavery: Labor, Capital and World Economy* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2004); Javier Laviña and Michael Zeuske (ed.), *The Second Slavery: Mass Slaveries and Modernity in the Americas and in the Atlantic Basin* (Berlin: Lit Verlag, 2014); Dale W. Tomich (ed.), *Slavery and Historical Capitalism during the Nineteenth Century* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2017).

[9] Adam Rothman, *Slave Country: American Expansion and the origins of the Deep South* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2005); Richard J. Follett, *The Sugar Masters: Planters and Slaves in Louisiana's Cane World, 1820-1860* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2005); Walter Johnson, *River of Dark Dreams: Slavery and Empire in the Cotton Kingdom* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2013); Michael Zeuske, "Out of the Americas: Slave Traders and the Hidden Atlantic in the Nineteenth Century", *Atlantic Studies*, v.15, n°1 (2018), 103-135.

between the cotton and sugar frontier in the southwestern borderlands and the advent of the Second Slavery enables us to connect slavery in the antebellum South to larger developments at play in the Atlantic world, thus challenging notions of Southern exceptionalism. This resilient Second Slavery, contrasting in scale and nature with colonial slavery, significantly contributed to the US frontier's expansion to the west, with a coercive "empire of cotton" clashing with Jeffersonian ideals of an "empire for liberty". Through the formation of new slaveholding territories, slavery's entrenchment and frenetic progress in the southwestern corner of the Union spectacularly contradicted those republican discourses of liberty and democracy that had gained momentum through the American Revolution.[10]

In the ever-shifting US-Mexico borderlands, the expansion of slavery on the US side violently clashed with the simultaneous rise of free soil on the Mexican side – in other words, the Second Slavery collided with the emergence of sites of formal freedom. As Mexico's commitment to the abolition of slavery gained traction in the opening decades of the nineteenth century, the incompatibility of these two developments became visible in conflicts involving refugees from slavery – "runaway negroes", according to their enslavers – who sought refuge from the Second Slavery by attempting to reach Mexican free soil.[11] The emergence of free-soil principles during the first half of the nineteenth century along the lines set by the *Somerset* case (1772) offers the most tangible expression of the "Age of Revolution" as an "Age of Emancipation" for many African Americans, especially from the mid-1830s onwards.[12] Mexico's own free-soil policy developed haphazardly in a nonlinear fashion throughout the first half of the nineteenth century, a development that was ultimately enshrined in the liberal constitution of 1857, following a series of piecemeal policies dating back to the colonial period. The practice and legal principle of free soil had roots in Spain's colonial policy of granting protection (also referred to as "refuge",

[10] Anthony E. Kaye, "The Second Slavery: Modernity in the Nineteenth-Century South and the Atlantic World", in Tomich (ed.), *Slavery and Historical Capitalism*, 190. Kaye's observation forms an antithesis to: Frederick J. Turner, *The Frontier in American History* (New York: Holt and Company, 1921), 1-38. On Jefferson's "empire for liberty": Peter S. Onuf, "Jefferson, Louisiana, and American Nationhood", in Peter J. Kastor and François Weil (ed.), *Empires of the Imagination: Transatlantic Histories of the Louisiana Purchase* (Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 2009), 23-33; Sven Beckert, *Empire of Cotton: A Global History* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2014).

[11] On free soil in the Age of Revolution: Keila Grinberg, Sue Peabody, "Free Soil: The Generation and Circulation of an Atlantic Legal Principle", *Slavery & Abolition*, Special Issue: Free Soil in the Atlantic World, 32:3 (Sep. 2011), 331-339; Ada Ferrer, "Haiti, Free Soil and Antislavery in the Revolutionary Atlantic", *American Historical Review* (Feb. 2012), 40-66; Jean M. Hébrard, Rebecca J. Scott, *Freedom Papers: An Atlantic Odyssey in the Age of Emancipation* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012); Johnhenry González, "Defiant Haiti: Free-Soil Runaways, Ship Seizures and the Politics of Diplomatic Non-Recognition in the Early Nineteenth Century", *Slavery & Abolition*, 36:1 (2015), 124-135.

[12] David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999 [1st ed. 1975]); Ira Berlin, *The Long Emancipation: the Demise of Slavery in the United States* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015); Manisha Sinha, *The Slave's Cause: a History of Abolition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016). By 1834, British Canada, the US North and Mexico, among others, had completely banned slavery.

"asylum", "sanctuary" or "*amparo*") to foreign self-emancipated slaves from the late seventeenth century onwards, despite still legally sanctioning slavery within its own imperial limits. Legitimated on religious grounds, this policy originally applied to enslaved people fleeing from Protestant colonies – mostly British, Dutch and Danish territories – who sought refuge in the Spanish possessions in the Americas, being consecrated by a *Real Cédula* issued in 1750. During the eighteenth century, the northeastern fringes of the Viceroyalty of New Spain (colonial Mexico until 1821) constituted a very occasional site of refuge for enslaved African Americans running away from their masters in French Louisiana. Because France was not a Protestant power, however, Spain's agents in the province of Texas never actively welcomed these fugitives to settle, as was for instance the case in Florida – which attracted bondspeople from the British colonies of the Carolinas and Georgia – and Venezuela. Between 1763 and 1800, Louisiana became part of the Spanish Empire, and administrators in the latter and Texas systematically collaborated for the rendition of runaways from one province to the other.[13]

The combination of a new, although initially poorly defined, border between Spain and the US through the Louisiana Purchase and the spectacular emergence of a plantation economy in the lower Mississippi region accounts for the increase in escape attempts from Louisiana to New Spain's borderlands after 1803. By contrast with other possessions of the Spanish Empire, in which specific legal provisions had explicitly enshrined the policy of sanctuary, no locally specific orders as to whether or not to welcome refugees had previously been issued for Spanish Texas, except for generic and sometimes conflicting *Real Cédulas*. As a result, Spanish officials often resorted to *ad hoc* policies of protection or restitution according to political circumstances and the willingness of refugees' to embrace Roman Catholicism.[14] The independence of Mexico from Spain, following a long and deadly conflict (1810-1821), brought about new changes in the political geography of slavery and freedom in North America, further deepening the divide between the Second Slavery and the cause of abolition and free soil that many of the Mexican revolutionaries – from military leaders to self-

[13] Gwendolyn Midlo Hall, *Africans in Colonial Louisiana: the Development of Afro-Creole Culture in the Eighteenth Century* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1992), 148; Gilbert C. Din, *Spaniards, Planters and Slaves: the Spanish regulation of slavery in Louisiana* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1999), 18-34; Douglas Richmond, "Africa's Initial Encounter with Texas: the Significance of Afro-Tejanos in Colonial Texas, 1528-1821", *Bulletin of Latin American Research*, 26:2 (2007), 200-221. On Spain's sanctuary policy, see in particular: José Luis Belmonte Postigo, "'No siendo el mismo echarse al mar, que es lugar de libertad plena': Cimarronaje Marítimo y Política Trans-Imperial en el Caribe Español, 1687-1804", in Consuelo Naranjo (ed.), *Esclavitud y Diferencia Racial en el Caribe Hispano* (Madrid: Doce Calles, 2017), 43-70; Jane Landers, "'Giving Liberty to All': Spanish Florida as a Black Sanctuary, 1673-1790" in Viviana Díaz Balsera, Rachel A. May (ed.), *La Florida: Five Hundred Years of Hispanic Presence* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2014), 117-140; Eliga H. Gould, "Entangled History, Entangled Worlds: the English-Speaking Atlantic as a Spanish Periphery", *American Historical Review*, v.112/3 (June 2007), 764-786. See more in ch.3, note 5.

[14] Bram Hoonhout, Thomas Mareite, "Freedom at the Fringes? Slave Flight and Empire-Building in the Early Modern Spanish Borderlands of Essequibo-Venezuela and Louisiana-Texas", *Slavery & Abolition* 40:1 (2019), 61-86.

emancipated slaves themselves – had supported. During the 1820s, the new republic gradually eradicated slavery (culminating in president Vicente Guerrero's national abolition on 15 September 1829), strengthened its commitment to free soil and emerged as an ostensible beacon of liberty for foreign enslaved African Americans. Just four days before Guerrero's decree of emancipation, a correspondent for the *St. Louis Beacon* argued that escape to Mexican Texas now represented an "easy and certain" way out of slavery for an increasing number of bondspeople from the US South.[15] However, newly-independent Mexico's first offers of formal freedom to runaway slaves from adjacent countries remained timid, being constrained by the new republic's lingering inconsistencies over slavery. Indeed, after 1821, Mexico opened Texas up to settlement by foreign settlers (mostly from the US) and their enslaved workforce, being anxious to develop a province that had historically stagnated both in demographic and economic terms and that had been further devastated by the wars of independence. Attempts by the Mexican federation to end slavery in Texas (which by the 1830s had been transformed into a thriving slaveholding territory) failed. Nevertheless, they infuriated the new settlers, thus contributing to the outbreak of the Texas Revolution (1835-1836), which pushed the border between slavery and freedom further west, from the Sabine River to the Rio Grande.[16]

Mexico's loss of Texas further encouraged its officials to take the side of enslaved people absconding from north of the Rio Grande. As such, it was increasingly viewed by African Americans in the US Southwest as an enticing place of refuge. The southern federation now began opposing the so-called "peculiar institution" in a more straightforward way, both domestically and internationally. As one scholar has noted, the steady arrival of self-emancipated slaves in independent Mexico contradicted the republican paradigm of a nation composed by racially indistinguishable citizens and challenged the new federation's abstract discourses of racial liberalism and equality, forcing the republic's authorities to convert such rhetoric into practice.[17] Mexico gradually embraced a full and unequivocal free-soil policy for foreign runaways, granting them formal or unconditional freedom on paper. Yet the transition from an early modern conception of free soil as *conditional* to its modern interpretation as *unconditional* was not as linear as has often been assumed. In Mexico's northeastern borderlands, this promise of formal freedom often failed to materialize (even after the Texas Revolution), considering that free soil – the legal principle and practical precept from which it derived – remained highly contested, both in legal discussions and informal debates. While Mexican officials themselves occasionally disagreed on the

[15] *Richmond Enquirer*, 11 Sep. 1829; Elena Abbott, "Beacons of Liberty: Free-Soil Havens and the American Anti-Slavery Movement, 1813-1863", PhD Diss. (Washington DC: Georgetown University, 2017), 102.

[16] On Mexico's process of abolition and the expansion of the Second Slavery in Texas: Sean M. Kelley, *Los Brazos de Dios: a Plantation Society in the Texas-Mexico Borderlands, 1821-1865* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2010); Andrew J. Torget, *Seeds of Empire: Cotton, Slavery and the Transformation of the Texas Borderlands, 1800-1850* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015).

[17] Marisela Ramos, "Black Mexico: Nineteenth-Century Discourses of Race and Nation", PhD Diss. (Department of History, Brown University, 2009), 113-157.

extent to which to apply free soil, US diplomats and ministers strove for the conclusion of agreements providing for the restitution of fugitive slaves from the US South. In addition, by violating Mexican sovereignty, armed incursions launched by slaveholders and mercenaries threatened self-liberated bondspeople in Mexico with re-enslavement. Finally, frequent discrepancies between federal laws and their local enforcement, state policies and borderlands practices – in the midst of fierce contests for political hegemony in independent Mexico (centralists vs. federalists, conservatives vs. liberals) – often jeopardized the status of runaways who had settled across the border.

The polarization between the US and Mexico regarding slavery further strained their already contentious relationship, fueling a larger process of closure of national spaces, whereby the borderlands evolved from a relatively neglected and unsettled colonial frontier at the beginning of the nineteenth century to an intensely disputed territory by the time of the US-Mexican War (1846-1848). Slave flight to Mexico, a rather secondary although unpleasant nuisance in the wake of the Louisiana Purchase (especially for planters located along the Red and Cane rivers), came to constitute a more ostensible threat to proslavery interests across the US Southwest by midcentury, becoming a controversial political issue that involved the diverse borderland communities and national governments that shared the Rio Grande. In the US South, slaveholders, along with influential politicians and editors, grew concerned that slave flight to Mexico risked undermining not only the development of slavery in Texas, but also the very economic prosperity of the Lone Star State itself. Discursively and militarily targeting Mexico for welcoming fugitive slaves, Southerners also expressed their growing impatience at their own national government for its inability to curb the steady flow of fugitive enslaved people crossing to Mexico, further nourishing the sectional divides that slowly but surely led to the Civil War (1861-1865).

Even though the consolidation of the legal, political and social power of slaveholders in the US Southwest led to the entrenchment of coercive institutions and restrictions against enslaved populations, as well as an increasingly monitored international border, the sight of enslaved bondspeople crossing the Sabine River and then the Rio Grande nonetheless became remarkably common. Military conflicts themselves, far from bringing the struggle between the Second Slavery and free soil to a close, served only to further emphasize their contradiction, while providing new stimulus to would-be fugitives, eager to capitalize on the struggle between Mexico and the US. During the US-Mexican War – which secured the status of Texas as a slaveholding territory within the Union – a "Louisiana Slaveholder" bitterly predicted in the *New Orleans Delta* that "very soon the slave population will be crowding to the Rio Grande". Across the southern border, he argued, "the runaway slave will find a place of security nearer than Canada", besides being warmly welcomed by a mixed-race population (among whom would presumably feature "white friends" or abolitionists), in a climate "more congenial to his constitution".[18] Interestingly, many

[18] *The Examiner*, 1 Jan. 1848.

critics of slavery in the northern states also shared this intuition. A correspondent in Iowa for the anti-slavery *National Era*, for instance, paradoxically viewed the progress of the Second Slavery in Texas as involuntarily supporting abolition at a national level: enslaved people brought to the Texas-Mexico borderlands would inevitably abscond across the border, further reinforcing this exit from slavery for bondspeople from all over the US South.[19] Indeed, the search for available asylum territories moved steadily westward, in tandem with wars and international treaties that continuously shifted the boundary between slavery and freedom. Black freedom-seekers attempted to promote their own goals within the struggles between rival states and borderlands communities, with the hope of achieving legal freedom, racial equality and social mobility once in Mexico. As such, they became agents of historical change, and not simply mere subjects in conflicts between polities over sovereignty. Just as slave revolts in Barbados (1816), Demerara (1823) and Jamaica (1831-1832) paved the way for the British Empire's 1833 Abolition Act in the Caribbean, self-liberated bondspeople in Mexico's Northeast offered a reminder of the extent to which emancipation from the Second Slavery came from enslaved people themselves.[20]

In order to explore how enslaved freedom-seekers fared between the expanding fronts of free soil and the Second Slavery in the US-Mexico border area, this study builds upon the distinction laid out by Damian Pargas between spaces of *informal*, *semi-formal* and *formal* freedom for self-emancipated slaves from the US South. While the northern states and Canada have long been considered as the unique locus for freedom in the "Age of Revolution", this categorization does justice to the multiplicity of geographical spaces in which enslaved freedom-seekers worked out their emancipation. It sheds light on a spectrum of emancipation between slavery and formal freedom, identifying both free-soil territories and slaveholding territories as potential spaces for freedom. In this typology, formal freedom could be attained in free-soil territories – such as Mexico, Canada and Haiti – where slavery had been abolished and foreign refugees from slavery were officially protected. At the other end of the spectrum, spaces of informal freedom developed in the US South, "where slaves attempted to escape by blending in with newly augmented free black populations". In the middle of the spectrum, escaped slaves in the northern states benefited from semi-formal freedom, as they "found themselves theoretically on free soil, but their claims to freedom from re-enslavement remained precarious at best and often contested in courts".[21] Adopting this framework, this study argues that Mexico emerged as a site of *formal* freedom over the course of the century, with the significant nuance that many self-emancipated bondspeople from the US South *de facto* experienced *conditional* freedom across the border. Before and during escape attempts, enslaved people's ability to attain freedom in Mexico was deeply conditioned by a series of demographical, socioeconomic, environmental and political structures. Across the

[19] *National Era*, 6 May 1847.
[20] Jeffrey R. Kerr-Ritchie, *Freedom Seekers: Essays on Comparative Emancipation* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2014).
[21] Damian A. Pargas (ed.), *Fugitive Slaves and Spaces of Freedom in North America* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2018), 4-6.

Mexican border, the capacity to secure freedom was rendered contingent by violent incursions by slaveholders and mercenaries into Mexican territory, as well as by the inconsistencies of Mexico's free-soil policy.

As stated earlier, this study's main question is: what was the nature of slave flight in the Mexican borderlands, and how and why did Mexico develop into a site of "conditional freedom" for slave refugees from the American South? In order to answer this question, it is necessary to consider a number of subsidiary questions, all of which will be analyzed in the individual chapters of this book. These subsidiary questions include: who among the US enslaved population escaped to Mexican territory, and what were their motives? How did they attempt to turn the rising contradiction between the Second Slavery and free soil in the US-Mexico borderlands to their advantage? What strategies, networks and routes did they use to achieve freedom (both formally and informally) across the Mexican border? How did slave flight in the US-Mexico borderlands impact relationships between borderland communities and mobilize national governments along the border? And to what extent were slave refugees on the Mexican side of the border protected from rendition (whether legal or not) to slavery?

Conditional Freedom: Free Soil and Fugitive Slaves from the US South to Mexico's Northeast (1803-1861) presents a comprehensive social and political history of the intertwined contests over free soil and the self-emancipated slaves from the US South who settled in Mexico's territorial and maritime borderlands. While the literature has commonly focused on fugitive slaves escaping to the northern states and Canada through the "Underground Railroad", this study aims to provide new insights into the evolving social and political geography of freedom and slavery in nineteenth-century North America, particularly by exploring the development of southern routes of escape from slavery in the US South and the experiences of self-emancipated slaves in the US-Mexican borderlands.[22] *Conditional Freedom* contends that nobody embodied the violent entanglement between emerging free-soil areas and the

[22] Studies emphasizing the existence of southern routes of escape from the US South's slavery represent a growing field. Consult especially: Jeffrey R. Kerr-Ritchie, *Rebellious Passage: the Creole Revolt and America's Coastal Slave Trade* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019); Jeffrey R. Kerr-Ritchie, "The U.S. Coastal Passage and Caribbean Spaces of Freedom", in Pargas (ed.), *Fugitive Slaves and Spaces of Freedom in North America*, 275-315; Matthew J. Clavin, *Aiming for Pensacola: Fugitive Slaves on the Atlantic and Southern Frontiers* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015); Irvin D.S. Winsboro, Joe Knetsch, "Florida Slaves, the "Saltwater Railroad" to the Bahamas and Anglo-American Diplomacy", *Journal of Southern History*, v. LXXIX, n°1 (2013), 51-78. The historiography on the "Underground Railroad" to the northern states and Canada is so massive that not even an exhaustive summary would do it justice. Among recent titles, consult especially: Richard J.M. Blackett, *Making Freedom: the Underground Railroad and the Politics of Slavery* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2013); Eric Foner, *Gateway to Freedom; The Hidden History of the Underground Railroad* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2015); Karolyn Smardz Frost, Veta Smith Tucker (ed.), *A Fluid Frontier: Slavery, Resistance and the Underground Railroad in the Detroit River Borderland* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2016).

advancing frontier of the Second Slavery better than enslaved people absconding to Mexican territory.

Historiographies and Insights

Conditional Freedom builds upon a body of scholarship that can be schematically divided into two groups. First, it connects to a corpus of studies – the origins of which can be traced back to the 1940s – that have addressed the legacy of people of African-descent in colonial and postcolonial Mexico. Second, it is embedded in a historiography examining slave flight in the US-Mexico border area that has emerged since the 1970s, at the intersection between borderland and slavery studies. So far, these literatures have seldom been combined.

The presence of people of African descent in colonial and postcolonial Mexico was first explored by a literature that, over the course of decades, has solidified into a distinctive historiography known as "Afro-Mexican".[23] Published in the 1940s, Gonzalo Aguirre Beltrán's *La Población Negra de México* excavated the economic and demographic structures of African slavery and the experiences of enslaved and free blacks in colonial Mexico.[24] This pioneering study reflected a then-dominant ideology of *mestizaje*, focusing on the assimilation and acculturation of people of African heritage in colonial Mexico. Other scholars soon extended Aguirre Beltrán's work, especially US historians, who, from the 1960s onwards, sought to employ Mexico as a case study to test the validity of Tannenbaum's classic comparative thesis on slavery in the Americas.[25] Scholarship on Afro-Mexico substantially increased from the 1980s onwards, through a series of regional studies examining black populations in colonial Mexico. By the time of the government-backed program "*la tercera raíz*" (1993), which

[23] For an exhaustive historiographical discussion: Ben Vinson III, "Afro-Mexican History: Trends and Directions in Scholarship", *History Compass* 3, LA 156 (Sep. 2005), 1-14; Irene Vázquez, "The Longue Durée of Africans in Mexico: the Historiography of Racialization, Acculturation, and Afro-Mexican Subjectivity", *The Journal of African American History*, v.95, n°2 (2010), 183-201.

[24] Gonzalo Aguirre Beltrán, *La Población Negra de México, 1519-1810: Estudio Etnohistórico* (México: Ediciones Fuente Cultural, 1946). This groundbreaking study expanded the early insights exposed in: Germán Latorre, *Relaciones geográficas de Indias (Contenidas en el Archivo General de Indias de Sevilla. La Hispanoamérica del siglo XVI). Virreinato de Nueva España (México. Censos de población*), 4 (4), 1920; Carlos Basauri, *Breves notas etnográficas sobre la población negra del distrito de Jamiltepec, Oaxaca* (México: Consejo Editorial del Primer Congreso Demográfico, 1943).

[25] Especially: David M. Davidson, "Negro Slave Control and Resistance in Colonial Mexico, 1519-1650", *Hispanic American Historical Review*, XLVI/3 (Aug. 1966), 235-253; Patrick J. Carroll, "Estudio Demográfico de Personas de Sangre Negra en Jalapa, 1791", *Historia Mexicana*, 23/1 (1973), 111-125; Colin A. Palmer, *Slaves of the White God: Blacks in Mexico, 1570-1650*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976); Patrick J. Carroll, "Mandinga: The Evolution of a Mexican Runaway Slave Community, 1735-1827", *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 19/44 (Oct. 1977), 488-505; Patrick J. Carroll, *Blacks in Colonial Veracruz : Race, Ethnicity, and Regional Development* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1991). On Tannenbaum's comparative thesis (essentially, that slavery in Spanish America took a milder and more paternalist form than its counterpart in North America): Frank Tannenbaum, *Slave and Citizen: the Negro in the Americas* (New York: A.A. Knopf, 1946).

explored Mexico's African legacies, this historiography had gained full academic legitimacy.[26] Since the turn of the century, the re-emergence of Afro-Mexican self-identification and activism in civil society – especially among black communities in Veracruz, Guerrero and Oaxaca – has inspired the formulation of new questions and perspectives, which have often challenged Aguirre Beltrán's markedly assimilationist approach. [27] From the perspective of social and cultural history, the recent historiography has analyzed the diversity of tactics for social emancipation and resistance that were employed by enslaved and free blacks, ranging from carving out spaces of autonomy and mobility within colonial structures, such as urban militias (Ben Vinson III) and religious confraternities (Nicole von Germeten), to resorting to outright resistance (Frank "Trey" Proctor III).[28] It has also focused more distinctly on black agency and processes of identity-formation, as well as on cultural hybridity and reconfigurations of blackness by enslaved and free blacks in a colonial context. Matthew Restall has analyzed black-indigenous relations (especially in the Yucatán peninsula), while Joan Bristol, María Elisa Velázquez and María Elena Martínez have approached these issues through the lens of gender, religion, the experiences of Afro-Mexican women and *limpieza de sangre* (purity of blood).[29] Herman L. Bennett's *Colonial Blackness* provides an even clearer illustration of this historiographical evolution, delving into enslaved and free black people's domesticity, intimacy and family formation. He has especially underlined how early modern Afro-Mexican

[26] The outcome of "*Tercera Raíz*" can be consulted in: Luz María Montiel Martínez (ed.), *Presencia Africana en México* (México: Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes, 1993). Within this historiography, consult in particular: Adriana Naveda Chávez-Hita, *Esclavos Negros en las Haciendas Azucareras de Córdoba, Veracruz, 1690-1830* (Xalapa: Universidad Veracruzana, Centro de Investigaciones Históricas, 1987); Carlos Manuel Valdés, Ildefonso Dávila, *Esclavos Negros en Saltillo, siglos XVIII-XIX* (Saltillo: Ayuntamiento de Saltillo, 1989).

[27] Odile Hoffmann, "Renaissance des études afro mexicaines et production de nouvelles identités ethniques", *Journal de la Société des Américanistes*, 91-92 (2005), 123-152; Talia Weltman-Cisneros, Candelaria Donaji Méndez Tello, "Negros-Afromexicanos: Recognition and the Politics of Identity in Contemporary Mexico", *Journal of Pan African Studies*, v.6, issue 1 (2013), 140-156. Organizations such as "México Negro" and "Alianza Fortalecimiento de las Regiones Indígenas y Comunidades Afromexicanas" (AFRICA) have provided an essential impulse to this movement.

[28] Ben Vinson III, *Bearing Arms for His Majesty: The Free-Colored Militia in Colonial Mexico*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001); Nicole von Germeten, *Black Blood Brothers: Confraternities and Social Mobility for Afro-Mexicans* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2006); Frank "Trey" Proctor III, "Slave rebellion and Liberty in Colonial Mexico", in Ben Vinson III, Matthew Restall (ed.) *Black Mexico: Race and Society from Colonial to Modern Times* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2009), 21-50.

[29] Matthew Restall, *Beyond Black and Red: African-Native Relations in Colonial Latin America* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2005); Matthew Restall, *The Black Middle: Africans, Mayas, and Spaniards in Colonial Yucatan* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009); Joan Bristol, *Christians, Blasphemers and Witches: Afro-Mexican Ritual Practices in the Seventeenth Century* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico, 2007); María Elisa Velázquez, *Mujeres de Origen Africano en la Capital Novohispana, Siglos XVII y XVIII* (México: INAH, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2006); María Elena Velázquez (ed.), *Debates Históricos Contemporáneos: Africanos y Afrodescendientes en México y Centroamérica* (México: Centro de Estudios Mexicanos y Centroamericanos, 2011); María Elena Martínez, *Genealogical Fictions: Limpieza de Sangre, Religion, and Gender in Colonial Mexico* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008). See also the contributions of: Vinson III and Restall (ed.), *Black Mexico*.

conceptions of liberty were articulated around notions of non-servitude, honor and power, beyond the abstract understandings of freedom later associated with the political culture of the Enlightenment.[30] Consequently, this literature has emphasized the richness and plurality of Afro-Mexican experiences in colonial Mexico, thus challenging the remnants of the "social death" paradigms – the conception of enslaved people as agency-deprived victims – that permeated some of the early historiography. *Conditional Freedom*, especially Part 1, seeks to extend these insights into the postcolonial period, particularly by looking at the spatial, material and social strategies used by runaways. Furthermore, it also broadens the temporal scope of Bennett's insights regarding subjectivity, freedom and kinship.

Slave flight became ubiquitous wherever slavery was introduced in the Americas.[31] Debunking the myth of slave docility, the literature on self-liberated slaves in colonial Mexico has mostly focused on large maroon settlements (*palenques* or autonomous communities of escaped slaves), such as San Lorenzo de los Negros and Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe de los Morenos de Amapa (in the modern-day states of Veracruz and Oaxaca), where slave uprisings and marronage had become commonplace by the start of the eighteenth century.[32] Historians have underlined the resilience of *palenques*, the influence of geographical and environmental conditions in their creation and maintenance, as well as the role played by social networks between maroons and actors within colonial society, such as free blacks and small peasants. They have also underscored how *palenques* often managed to negotiate a *modus vivendi* with colonial authorities (while the latter frequently failed to effectively crack down on maroons), converting initial hostility into coexistence and informal freedom into formal freedom.[33] Adriana Naveda Chávez-Hita has described this process as a

[30] Herman L. Bennett, *Colonial Blackness: a history of Afro-Mexico* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2009), 161-182.

[31] Within the vast historiography on marronage across the Americas, the following titles adopt a broad scope (by chronological order): Richard Price, *Maroon Societies: Rebel Slave Communities in the Americas* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 3rd edition, 1996); Alvin O. Thompson, *Flight to Freedom: African Runaways and Maroons in the Americas* (Kingston, Jamaica: University of West Indies Press, 2006); Jeffrey R. Kerr-Ritchie, "Fugitive Slaves across North America", in Leon Fink, *Workers across the Americas: The Transnational Turn in World History* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 363-384; Marcia Amantino, Manolo Florentino, "Runaways and Quilombolas in the Americas" in David Eltis, Stanley L. Engerman (ed.), *The Cambridge World History of Slavery*, v.3 (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 708-740; Damian A. Pargas (ed.), *Fugitive Slaves and Spaces of Freedom in North America* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2018).

[32] Aguirre Beltrán, *La población negra de México*, 285-287; Davidson, "Negro Slave Control and Resistance in Colonial Mexico"; Carroll, "Mandinga"; Adriana Naveda Chávez-Hita, "Veracruz en el Caribe: Esclavitud y Cimarronaje en el siglo XVIII", *El Caribe Contemporáneo*, 21 (1990): 45-51; Bennett, *Colonial Blackness*, 176-182; Frank "Trey" Proctor III, "Rebelión Esclava y Libertad en el México Colonial", in Juan Manuel de la Serna (ed.), *De la libertad y la abolición: africanos y afrodescendientes en Iberoamérica* (México: Centro de Estudios Mexicanos y Centroamericanos, 2010), 111-159; Luis J. García Ruiz, "Esclavos de la subdelegación de Xalapa ante el Código Negro de 1789: insubordinación, justicia y represión", *Ulua*, 23 (2014), 37-64.

[33] The expression *modus vivendi* is borrowed from: Eugene Genovese, *From Rebellion to Revolution: Afro-American Slave Revolts in the Making of the Modern World* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1979), 52.

"cycle of marronage", through which many *palenques* came to be recognized as legalized settlements (*villa*) and were guaranteed protection against slaveholders, usually in return for military service and pledges of refusing to accept (and even of arresting) further runaways, thus complicating the link usually established between running away and resistance to slavery and colonialism.[34] Turning away from the mountainous maroon as an emblematic figure of this historiography, Juan Manuel de la Serna and Magdalena Díaz Hernández have underlined that self-liberated slaves settled in urban environments as well, especially during the eighteenth century, as generations of racial mixing and acculturation facilitated the blending in of the free black within colonial society. These studies have shed light on the plural geography of marronage in colonial Mexico and shown how freedom could be informally obtained – both in urban and rural areas – in the midst of a slaveholding society. *Conditional Freedom* responds to De la Serna and Díaz Hernández's contributions, emphasizing the diversity of patterns of settlement for escaped slaves in the nineteenth-century Mexican northeast. Though Mexico gradually emerged as a site of formal freedom for runaways, their recourse to informal forms of settlement and freedom persisted well after 1829. *Conditional Freedom* therefore seeks to challenge the usual assumption that, in the Mexican context, the clusters "informal freedom/colonial period" and "formal freedom/postcolonial period" functioned as exclusive tandems.[35]

Nonetheless, the historiography on Afro-Mexico has usually focused on regions where black populations were the most demographically and culturally present, such as central Mexico and the coastal areas (or *tierra caliente*) of Veracruz, Oaxaca and Guerrero. By contrast, enslaved and free blacks in the northeastern frontier have received far less attention. This study therefore aims at decentering Afro-Mexican narratives, connecting the borderlands with the nation's core, and thus providing a counter-perspective to the centripetal narrative of Mexican nation-building.[36] Moreover, as several scholars have argued, this literature has dedicated most of its attention to Mexico's colonial period (up until 1821), while the postcolonial period

[34] Naveda Chávez-Hita, *Esclavos Negros en las Haciendas Azucareras de Córdoba*, 145.
[35] Juan Manuel de la Serna, "Los Cimarrones en la Sociedad Novohispana", in de la Serna (ed.), *De la libertad y la abolición*, 83-109; Magdalena Díaz Hernández, "En Busca del Patrimonio Perdido: la Pena de Excomunión por el Robo y la Fuga de Esclavos en México (S.XVI-XVII)" in Sol Tarrés Chamorro, Pilar Gil Tébar, *Patrimonio Cultural Inmaterial y Funerario de la Diversidad Religiosa en España y América* (Online Minutes of Symposium, edited by Sol Tarrés Chamorro and Pilar Gil Tébar, 2019), 189-195.
[36] Ben Vinson III, "The Racial Profile of a Rural Mexican Province in the "Costa Chica": Igualapa in 1791", *The Americas*, 57/2 (Oct. 2000), 269-282; Andrew Fischer, "Negotiating Two Worlds: The Free-Black Experience in Guerrero's Tierra Caliente", in Vinson III and Restall (ed.), *Black Mexico*, 53-62. Noteworthy exceptions for Mexico's Northeast such as: Valdés and Dávila, *Esclavos Negros en Saltillo*; Pedro L. Gómez Danés, *Negros y Mulatos en el Nuevo Reino de León, 1600-1795* (Monterrey: Gobierno de Nuevo León, Archivo General del Estado, 1996). On Mexico's long-term tendency of "historiographical centralism", or the marginalization of the history of geographical peripheries from national historical narratives: Patricia Osante, "El Noreste Fronterizo de México en la época colonial", in Evelia Trejo and Álvaro Matute (ed.), *Escribir la historia en el siglo XX: treinta lecturas* (México, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Instituto de Investigaciones Históricas, 2009), 51-68.

remains unexplored in many regards.[37] In particular, slave flight *within* and *directed to* nineteenth-century Mexico has remained a blind spot of the Afro-Mexican historiography until fairly recently. The focus of the latter on the Black Seminole community – composed by descendants of fugitive slaves who had mixed with Native Americans in Spanish Florida during the eighteenth century – and its negotiated settlement in Coahuila during the 1850s has served to obscure the diversity of experiences of slave flight in postcolonial Mexico, and it is these that this study seeks to recover.[38]

Similarly, the broader literature on escaped slaves in North America has often treated slave flight *to* Mexico during the nineteenth century as an exotic issue, worthy only of passing mention. Instead, it has focused more on marronage *within* Mexico during the colonial era (by relying on the aforementioned historiography).[39] First, scholars have for a long time demonstrated more interest in traditional maroon geographies and slave flight in areas of "great slaveries", as Michael Zeuske termed them, thus neglecting regions like the Mexican Northeast, which are considered to be peripheral.[40] Second, whereas slave flight to the US North and Canada has been thoroughly examined by North American slavery specialists, the emergence of southern and western escape routes from the US South during the nineteenth century has long been overlooked.

For a long time, the notion of Mexico as a land of freedom for African Americans has been underrepresented in both popular memory and the historiography. This is because it collided with stereotypical preconceptions cultivated in the US about Mexico – derived from the Spanish *leyenda negra* (Black Legend) – as a place of violence, clientelism and failed liberalism. While the northern states and Canada were magnified in the abolitionist hall of fame as a unique geographical expression of free-soil principles, Mexico's past as a land of refuge for oppressed black people has remained neglected.[41] As a result, scholars (such as Ronnie C. Tyler and Rosalie Schwartz) only began to analyze slave flight from the US South to Mexico as a subject *in itself* from the early 1970s onwards, focusing almost exclusively on the post-

[37] Vinson III, "Afro-Mexican History", 7; María Elisa Velázquez, *Poblaciones y Culturas de Origen Africano en México* (México: INAH, 2005), 14.
[38] The literature on the Black Seminoles (or "*mascogos*" as they became known in Mexico) is relatively extensive. Consult especially: Kevin Mulroy, *Freedom on the Border: the Seminole Maroons in Florida, the Indian Territory, Coahuila and Texas* (Lubbock: Texas Tech University Press, 1993); Martha Rodríguez, *Historias de Resistencia y Exterminio: los Indios de Coahuila durante el Siglo XIX* (México: CIESAS-INI, 1995); Kenneth W. Porter, *The Black Seminoles: History of a Freedom-Seeking People* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1996); Paulina del Moral, *Tribus olvidadas de Coahuila* (Saltillo: Conaculta, Gobierno de Coahuila, 1999).
[39] Genovese, *From Rebellion to Revolution*; Price, *Maroon Societies*; Franklin and Schweninger, *Runaway slaves*; Thompson, *Flight to Freedom.*
[40] Michael Zeuske, "Historiography and Research Problems of Slavery and the Slave Trade in a Global-Historical Perspective", *International Review of Social History*, 57 (2012), 87-111.
[41] Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995).

Texan independence era.[42] The early historiography particularly emphasized the political and diplomatic implications of slave flight in the US-Mexico borderlands, usually from a top-down perspective, as a by-product of its reliance upon sources produced by state governments (such as congressional documents) and influential proslavery figures (especially newspaper articles and notices). As such, it focused mostly on geopolitical controversies arising from illegal raids by Southerners into Mexico and conflicts regarding self-liberated enslaved people's rendition. By contrast, this study seeks to balance this state-centric perspective with a narrative that captures the experiences of runaways themselves. Furthermore, because the nature of slave flight to the Mexican borderlands and Mexico's free-soil policy after 1836 cannot be properly understood without an extensive analysis of the pre-1836 period, *Conditional Freedom* expands the timeframe commonly used in the wake of these studies.[43]

Randolph Campbell's path-breaking *An Empire for Slavery* significantly contributed to the emerging field of slavery studies in Texas. It also fostered the emergence of new perspectives stemming from social and cultural history with regards to slave flight in the US-Mexico borderlands.[44] Several studies have recently addressed the experience(s) of self-liberated bondspeople in the US-Mexico borderlands, seeking to move beyond the aforementioned diplomatic-political focus.[45] In particular, Sean M. Kelley has examined the rising reputation of Mexico as a beacon of freedom for enslaved people in Texas during the last decades of US slavery. Exploring the changing perception of the Mexican border (how people got "Mexico in [their] heads"), Kelley has underlined how independent Mexico's antislavery policies and discourses inspired a culture of slave resistance in the US Southwest, in particular after the Texas Revolution. Seeking to develop Kelley's insights, this dissertation (ch.1) discusses the extent to which these representations of Mexico as a land of freedom and racial equality translated into actual slave flight, and among which segments of the enslaved

[42] Ronnie C. Tyler, "Fugitive Slaves in Mexico", *The Journal of Negro History*, 57/1 (Jan. 1972), 1-12; Rosalie Schwartz, *Across the Rio to Freedom: US Negroes in Mexico* (El Paso: Texas Western Press, 1975).

[43] Tyler and Schwartz's approach followed the path set by earlier studies of conflicts in the Texas-Mexico borderlands such as: J. Fred Perry, "Border Troubles along the Rio Grande, 1848-1860", *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly,* v.23, n°2 (1919), 91-111.

[44] Randolph Campbell, *An Empire for Slavery: the Peculiar Institution in Texas, 1821-1865* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1989). Recent studies on slavery in Texas from a social history approach especially include: Kelley, *Los Brazos de Dios* and Torget, *Seeds of Empire.*

[45] By order of chronological appearance: Sean M. Kelley, "Mexico in his Head: Slavery and the Texas-Mexican Border, 1810-1860", *Journal of Social History*, 37:3 (2004), 709-723; Rachel Adams, *Continental Divides: Remapping the Cultures of North America* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 61-100; Ramos, "Black Mexico", 113-157; James D. Nichols, "The line of Liberty: Runaway Slaves and Fugitive Peons in the Texas-Mexico Borderlands", *Western Historical Quarterly*, 44/4 (2013), 413-433; Sarah E. Cornell, "Citizens of Nowhere: Fugitive Slaves and Free African Americans in Mexico, 1833-1857", *Journal of American History*, 100:2 (2013), 351-374; Mekala Shadd-Sartor Audain, "Mexican Canaan: Fugitive Slaves and Free Blacks on the American Frontier, 1804-1867", PhD Diss. (Graduate School-New Brunswick Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, 2014); Jeffrey R. Kerr-Ritchie, *Freedom Seekers: Essays on Comparative Emancipation* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2014); James D. Nichols, *The Limits of Liberty: Mobility and the Making of the Eastern U.S.-Mexico Border* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2018), ch.3, 6 and 7.

population this occurred. Its inquiry into the background experiences, profiles and motives for escape of individual self-liberated slaves moves beyond Kelley's focus on imaginaries. Another scholar, Sarah E. Cornell, has proposed new avenues of research into the settlement experiences in Mexico of enslaved people who absconded from the US South (although only from 1833 onwards). She has argued that freedom for self-liberated slaves across the Mexican border was particularly contingent. This was due to racism, legal obstacles related to their status as illegal immigrants into Mexico, the non-recognition of black people by US consular officials in Mexico, and the danger of re-enslavement back to the US South. The main way to secure this "contingent freedom", according to Cornell, was through the integration of slave refugees into Mexican local societies via military service, trade, intermarriage and conversion to Catholicism, which together provided a basis for "cultural citizenship". As *Conditional Freedom* demonstrates, however, Cornell neglects the question of why *de facto* tolerance and protection were provided to enslaved freedom-seekers by officials of the Mexican state, especially at a municipal level, regardless of the respective degrees of integration of fugitive slaves into Mexican society (ch.4). Moreover, Cornell's analysis overemphasizes the importance of attaining legal freedom for enslaved freedom-seekers, failing to consider the fact that some of the latter sought not *amparo* from the Mexican state, but rather informal freedom in Mexico.

Recent studies by James D. Nichols have presented an extremely comprehensive analysis of the interplay between mobility and state-making across the eastern US-Mexico border from the 1830s to the 1860s, thus providing insights into marginalized people, including escaped slaves, indigenous communities and Mexican *peones*. Nichols has convincingly argued that Mexican officials and borderlands populations usually managed to protect fugitive slaves. Moreover, he has insisted on the polarizing effect of the border. Whereas the early historiography on the subject tended to disconnect the US and Mexican sides of the story, often treating the Mexican border as a finishing line, Nichols has transcended state divisions, in keeping with Jeffrey R. Kerr-Ritchie's contention that "the transformative role of 'fugitive' slaves, and how this took on continental significance, goes unappreciated if the focus remains only upon movements within national boundaries".[46] However, while scholars have emphasized how fugitive slaves took advantage of the defined border between Texas and Mexico after 1836, a more thorough understanding of how self-emancipated slaves turned the undefined and malleable boundaries between the US and Mexico to their advantage before the Texas Revolution is still required. This is the subject of chapter 3.

In fact, the aforementioned literature has paid limited attention to the pre-Texas Revolution era. (Some exceptions, especially for the first decade of the nineteenth century, are nevertheless noteworthy. Lance Blyth, for instance, has examined the intertwined flights of enslaved people and army deserters in the early nineteenth-century borderlands between territorial Louisiana and Spanish Texas,

[46] Kerr-Ritchie, "Fugitive Slaves across North America", 368.

following up James C. Harrison's early insights [47]). As a result, the experience(s) of slave refugees on Mexican soil before 1836 still need to be explored. Equally, while the period 1836-1861 as a historical unit has for the most part been treated in isolation, *Conditional Freedom* innovatively analyzes continuities and discontinuities between the pre- and post-Texas Revolution periods, in terms of escaped bondspeople's patterns of flight and settlement across the border, as well as popular and political responses to their arrival. The disappearance, continuation or emergence of popular forms of mobilization regarding slave flight as well as the *ad hoc* nature of borderlands diplomacy and official exchanges on protection or rendition between both periods will receive attention in a *longue durée* perspective. As *Conditional Freedom* shows, studying the complex transition from a sanctuary policy of conditional asylum under the Spanish Empire to an emerging principle of unconditional freedom (at least on paper) after Mexico's independence is crucial to understanding the long-term maturation of Mexico's free-soil policy from 1803 to 1861 and its effect on self-liberated bondspeople's freedom. While Mexico progressively adopted modern free-soil principles on runaways, the making of its asylum policy was fraught with debates and challenges – not least the threat of bounty hunters crossing the border to abduct runaways in northern Mexico. While the progress towards unconditionality is often assumed in the literature to have been linear and irreversible (especially after 1836), *Conditional Freedom* analyzes the fragmentary, contradictory and uneven development of Mexico's free-soil policy, such as when Mexican officials themselves contested the extent of its concrete application (ch.4). The fragile development of Mexico as a free-soil territory inevitably impacted self-emancipated slaves who settled in Mexico's territorial and maritime borderlands. Furthermore, an awareness of the uncertainties in the making of the boundaries of free soil prompts us to examine so-called "sojourning" slaves – enslaved people who set foot on Mexican soil without necessarily absconding – as distinct from fugitive slaves proper. While "the conflict between the enslaver and the enslaved spilled over into Mexican space" (as argued by James D. Nichols), Mexico's free-soil policy also had an impact on US slavery, ranging from discussions over the practicability of territorial expansion to enslaved people's freedom suits. [48] In this sense, this study adds to recent studies that have stressed how antislavery politics in the Atlantic world impacted slavery-related controversies in the US as well as fostering sectional divides.[49]

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[47] Lance Blyth, "Fugitives from Servitude: American Deserters and Runaway Slaves in Spanish Nacogdoches, 1803-1808", *East Texas Historical Journal*, v.38, issue 2 (2000), 3-14; James C. Harrison, "The Failure of Spain in East Texas: The Occupation and Abandonment of Nacogdoches, 1779-1821", PhD Diss. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 1980). Other studies worthy of mention here are: Christina Marie Villarreal, "Colonial Border Control: Reconsidering Migrants and the Making of New Spain's Northern Borderlands, 1714-1820", Master Thesis (Austin: University of Texas, 2015); Eric Herschtal, "Slaves, Spaniards and Subversion in Early Louisiana: the Persistent Fear of Black Revolt and Spanish Collusion in Territorial Louisiana, 1803-1812", *Journal of the Early Republic*, 36 (2016), 283-311.

[48] James D. Nichols, "Freedom Interrupted: Runaway Slaves and Insecure Borders in the Mexican Northeast", in Pargas (ed.), *Fugitive Slaves and Spaces of Freedom in North America*, 256.

[49] Especially: Edward B. Rugemer, *The Problem of Emancipation: the Caribbean Roots of the American Civil War* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2009); Matthew Karp, *This*

Sources and Outline

In order to reconstruct the entangled stories of slave refugees and free soil in the US-Mexico borderlands, this study draws mostly upon municipal, county and state archives, military and judicial records, diplomatic and personal correspondence, newspaper articles, "runaway slave" advertisements (more than 350 of them), petitions, memoirs and travel accounts. Nevertheless, such an enterprise remains constrained by the exceptionally scarce and fragmentary character of the evidence, which, alongside an unequal distribution of power and resources between academic circles in the US and Mexico, accounts for why Mexico's past as a land of refuge for enslaved African Americans has eluded the attention of historians for so long. By contrast with the experiences of self-emancipated slaves escaping from the US South to the northern states and Canada, which were often documented by volumes of former slave narratives recorded both during and after the Antebellum period, enslaved people who absconded to Mexico seldom left auto-biographical records that historians can use in order to reconstruct their experiences. For instance, very few freedom suits – a convenient way of collecting enslaved people's own voices – involved bondspeople in the US-Mexico borderlands.[50] Rachel Adams has rightly underscored that "the circumstances of fugitive slaves in Mexico pose an interesting challenge to the logic of the slave narrative, which assumes that the desire for freedom was necessarily coupled with the desire to be literate and to record one's experience on paper".[51] While abolitionist societies and antislavery networks organized in the North were keen to rescue the voices of enslaved people who had absconded from the South, their absence in the US-Mexico borderlands means that it is difficult to access self-emancipated bondspeople's experience through their own voices.[52] A small number of first-hand

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Vast Southern Empire: Slaveholders at the Helm of American Foreign Policy (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2016).

[50] Edlie L. Wong, *Neither Fugitive nor Free: Atlantic Slavery, Freedom Suits and the Legal Culture of Travel* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 7.

[51] Rachel Adams, *Continental Divides: Remapping the Cultures of North America* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 73.

[52] The popular (re)discovery of this historical subject is relatively recent on both sides of the border, especially on the Mexican one. Recently, for instance, the newspaper *El Mañana de Reynosa* dedicated some of its pages to the story of the abduction of the Henderson family (see ch.4), six African Americans kidnapped from a *rancho* just across the Rio Grande by mercenaries in 1859. *El Mañana de Reynosa*, 30 Oct. 2016, 6 Nov. 2016 (part 2), 13 Nov. 2016 (part 3), "1859 El rapto de una familia negra" (Martín Salinas Rivera). Fugitive slaves in the US-Mexico borderlands are progressively entering popular imagination on both sides of the border, for instance through the realm of literary fiction. Mexican novelist Carmen Boullosa published an opus set in late 1850s Matasánchez, a fictional border town on the Rio Grande valley, where escaped slaves were noticeable, such as Jones, a runaway bondsman "leaning against the (so-called) cathedral portico [...] selling candles and soaps from his basket", or "El Tigre", a Guinea-born man once "captured by the Comanches and returned to his owner for a handsome reward". Carmen Boullosa, *Texas: The Great Theft* (Deep Vellum Publishing, 2014), 33 and 38. Author Tina Juárez similarly published an historical novel set in the Texas-Mexico borderlands during the US Civil War that includes characters such as Teresa, presented as a conductor of an

testimonies represent exceptions to this rule, such as James Williams' self-narrated experience as a refugee from slavery in Mexico's Pacific coast (ch.4). Some former slaves interviewed during the 1930s by the Works Progress Administration reminisced about Mexico as an imagined land of freedom for enslaved African Americans living nearby, sometimes mentioning runaways in the Texas-Mexico borderlands. Nonetheless, despite the increase in academic interest in these interviews since the 1970s following John Blassingame's groundbreaking *The Slave Community* (1972), historians have often raised doubts about their overall trustworthiness and accuracy. The process of collection and transcription of these testimonies involved a series of omissions, inaccuracies and transformations, resulting in a final product that at times betrayed the original reminiscences. On the one hand, the (overwhelmingly) white interviewers held a considerable sway in the written outcome, often being selective in their collection and treatment of the data, inoculating racial biases in the process and revising transcripts to their own taste. (This last observation is especially valid for the Texas Narratives comprised in the collection's sixteenth volume). On the other hand, former slaves often introduced memorial composure and self-censorship into their accounts of slavery's violence – given the continued weight of racial etiquette in the South, the skin color of their interviewers and the fact that they often lived close to the descendants of their former masters – thus involuntarily portraying plantation slavery as a paternalistic institution. In our present case, these general epistemological issues dovetail with a frequent idealization of the experiences of fugitive African Americans in Mexico, a mythicized recollection combined with the fact that there were almost no interviews dealing with the concrete experiences of self-liberated slaves once they had effectively settled across the border. For the specific setting of the US-Mexico borderlands, the Slave Narrative Collection does not yield many insights regarding the social experiences of slave refugees across the border with Mexico. Nevertheless, it does constitute a precious resource for a cultural history of imaginaries of Mexico as a beacon of freedom in US abolitionist culture and among enslaved African Americans in the US South (ch.1).[53] Considering the almost complete absence of first-person accounts, this study therefore relies on a variety of alternative sources collected in Mexico, the US, Spain, France and Germany, which together address fugitive enslaved people's experiences in the US-Mexican border area, and which were produced by actors who were not (escaped) slaves themselves. Following up James D. Nichols' analysis of the local archives of Matamoros (Tamaulipas), *Conditional Freedom* relies largely upon municipal records from northeastern New Spain and independent Mexico, using these as a source of insights into plantation violence, settlement

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underground railroad aiding enslaved people absconding to Mexico. Tina Juárez, *South Wind Come* (Houston: Arte Público Press, 1998).

[53] On the values and limits of the WPA interviews, consult: John W. Blassingame, "Using the Testimony of Ex-Slaves: Approaches and Problems", *Journal of Southern History*, 41 (1975), 473-492; Walter Johnson, *Soul by Soul: Life Inside the Antebellum Slave Market* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 10-11. On the epistemological issues affecting the Texas Narratives: George P. Rawick, *The American Slave: a Composite Autobiography, Supplement, Series 2* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1979), volume 2, part 1, xxx-xxxix. On the use of the WPA interviews when studying fugitive slaves in Mexico: Cornell, "Citizens of Nowhere", 371.

patterns, enslaved people's networks of support, requests for *amparo* and self-representations.

In comparison with slave narratives, for instance, "runaway slave" advertisements and jail notices – produced by slaveholders, editors and police officials – arguably stand at the other end of a spectrum of subjectivities that ranges from enslaved people themselves to their enslavers. Nevertheless, in addition to providing access to proslavery perspectives, "runaway slave" ads, jail notices and newspaper articles are also useful in studying self-liberated enslaved people's experiences of slavery and freedom in the US-Mexico borderlands, especially when read against the grain. Historians such as John H. Franklin, Loren Schweninger, Sylviane Diouf, Jonathan D. Martin, Walter Johnson and Eric Foner (among others) have underlined not only the variety of epistemological issues that scholars face when studying the enslaved African American population of the US South through this lens, but also the positive insights that these resources can provide when subjected to a critical reading. On the one hand, being written from the master's perspective, runaway slave ads tended to obscure the extreme violence of master-slave relationships by means of euphemisms and omissions. They criminalized enslaved people who attempted to escape from slavery as intrinsically dangerous, deviant or worthless, and often racially stereotyped runaways, for instance describing them as being "lazy" on account of their African origin. On the other hand, however, because their enslavers had a vested interest in retrieving their slaves – and thus attempted to describe them as thoroughly and accurately as they could – "runaway slave" ads contain valuable factual insights into fugitive bondspeople's personal backgrounds and profiles, often representing the *only* source that existed on a given enslaved person. In these short notices, slaveowners often drew individual and social portraits of their enslaved workforce, providing information regarding family connections, physical appearances, speech habits, technical and linguistic skills as well as social abilities. They included not only common markers of traumatic experiences of violence (such as stammering), but also evidence of enslaved people's self-identification and agency. As such, they are drawn on in this dissertation (Part 1).[54]

The structure of *Conditional Freedom* reflects a desire to connect a social history of enslaved freedom-seekers with a political history of the contest between Mexico's free soil and the spread of the Second Slavery west of the Mississippi river valley. Part 1, "*Fleeing Slavery*", examines the nature of slave flight in the Mexican borderlands, following the trajectory of self-emancipated African Americans from the

[54] On the insights of "runaway slave" ads, see especially: Richard C. Wade, *Slavery in the Cities: the South, 1820-1860* (New York and London: Oxford University Press, 1964), 219; Franklin and Schweninger, *Runaway Slaves*, 120 and 264; Johnson, *Soul by Soul*, 205; Jonathan D. Martin, *Divided Mastery: Slave Hiring in the American South* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), 55; Sylviane Diouf, *Slavery's Exiles: The Story of the American Maroons (*New York and London: New York University Press, 2014), 13 and 84; Foner, *Gateway to Freedom*, 23; Antonio T. Bly, "'But calls himself': Rereading Runaway Slave Advertisements as Slave Narratives", The Joint 32nd European Association for American Studies & 63rd British Association for American Studies Conference, London, 4-7 April 2018.

US South to the Mexican border. Chapter 1, "*Experiencing Slavery, Imagining Freedom*", touches upon the combination of specific motivations and demographic profiles that fostered escape to Mexico. Its first section delves into the construction of imaginaries of Mexico as a promised land of freedom for enslaved and free African Americans, particularly among abolitionist circles and the slave regions of the US South. The following sections explore fugitive enslaved people's background experiences and motives for escape. These include the role of forced migration through the interstate slave trade, the urge to preserve and re-create ties with relatives and loved ones, the prominence of violence in the US Southwestern borderlands, the importance of broken arrangements between masters and slaves and deficiencies in the ethos of southern paternalism. Finally, the last section of this chapter analyzes how gender, age and qualification intersected to shape a specific average demographic profile for would-be fugitives. Chapter 2, "*Geography, Mobility and Networks: Escaping through the US-Mexico Borderlands*", deals with the various spatial, material and logistic strategies used by enslaved people absconding to Mexican land. It focuses, for instance, on the multiple routes used by slave refugees, underlining the twofold character – both limiting and empowering – of environments in relation to escape attempts and how bondspeople reacted to geographical hardships.[55] Furthermore, it examines the origin and nature of assistance provided to self-emancipated slaves. In particular, it discusses the diverse purposes underlying support offered to fugitives as well as the multiple expressions that such help took, questioning to what extent a southern "underground railroad" to Mexico existed for absconding slaves. Ultimately, it explores the expansion of legal structures and extralegal violence throughout the US Southwest that aimed at curtailing enslaved people's mobility and autonomy as a means to crack down on slave flight.

Part 2, "*Crafting Freedom*", examines how Mexico developed into a site of "conditional freedom" for runaways from the US South. It delves into the formation of Mexico's free-soil policy and the experiences of self-emancipated African Americans across the Mexican border. Chapter 3, "*Self-Liberated Slaves and Asylum in Northeastern Mexico, 1803-1836",* analyzes the settlement of escaped bondspeople in late colonial and early independent Mexico's northeastern fringes and scrutinizes its (geo)political implications from the Louisiana Purchase to the Texas Revolution. It thus examines the sinuous development of Mexico as a site of refuge for foreign runaways. While tracing the emergence of unconditional free soil as official policy, this chapter also examines Mexico's remaining ambiguities on slavery prior to 1836, the impact of foreign colonization in Mexican Texas and the continuance of *ad hoc* policies at a local level, all of which persistently jeopardized the status of enslaved asylum-seekers, who, in reaction, relied on both informal and formal strategies for settlement. Finally, Chapter 4, "*'Mexico was free! No slave clanked his chains under its government': the (Contested) Nature of Free Soil and Settlement, 1836-1861"*, addresses the settlement

[55] Mekala Audain has recently offered an analysis of environmental constraints and slave flight in Texas which chapter 2 supplements: Mekala Audain, "'Design his Course to Mexico': the Fugitive Slave Experience in the Texas-Mexico Borderlands, 1850-1853", in Pargas (ed.), *Fugitive Slaves and Spaces of Freedom in North America*, 232-250.

of self-emancipated slaves in Mexico and its variegated political and diplomatic ramifications before 1861, in a context of rising polarization between free-soil Mexico and the expanding slaveholding frontier of the US South. It analyzes the controversial entrenchment of Mexico's free-soil policy towards US escaped slaves after 1836, presenting the wide range of debates, both locally as well as internationally, that its practical enforcement generated. The following sections touch upon escaped bondspeople's settlement in Mexico, the responses to their arrival by Mexican officials both in the borderlands and at a federal level, along with the diverse threats to their formal freedom in Mexico, including slaving raids and wars. In conclusion, the chapter explores how slave flight intersected with separatist pressures in northeastern Mexico and rising sectionalism in the US.

PART 1

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FLEEING SLAVERY

I
Experiencing Slavery, Imagining Freedom.

Introduction

In his memoirs, former borderlands pioneer and unionist Noah Smithwick recalled his encounter one night in 1857 with "a powerful black fellow" who was absconding from Texas to the Mexican border. Smithwick, along with five other vigilantes, had previously noticed "a bright light like a campfire" that they deemed suspicious. His "storming column" reached the place, and a fierce fight ensued with a group of "runaway negroes, which were not desirable additions to the neighborhood". The "powerful black fellow" was, according to Smithwick, "as brave a man as [he] ha[s] ever met". The fugitive spectacularly repelled the assailants: "singlehanded – his companion being unarmed – he had whipped six white men, all armed, and as many fierce dogs". Some days later, the escaped slaves were detected further south, where they forced a man named Jim Hamilton to "give them directions for reaching Mexico". Despite several patrols pursuing them, the runaways eluded arrest and successfully reached Mexican soil.[1]

Written in the late nineteenth century, Smithwick's account resembles many other dramatic tales of daring enslaved men and women fleeing to the Mexican border. Together, these came to form part of the Texas frontier's folklore during the last decades of US slavery. Apart from travellers and local chroniclers, newspapers also pointed out the exceptional character of some fugitive slaves in their columns, portraying the absconders as extraordinarily strong, intelligent and enterprising. The southern press was prone to sensationalize stories on runaways, emphasizing the physical prowess as well as the special dangerousness of the absconders. In this regard, the "powerful black fellow" described by Smithwick arguably stood as the archetypal figure around which a half-romantic, half-terrifying narrative for a white audience was commonly built. Clearly, self-liberated slaves absconding to Mexico were without doubt "intrepid, dynamic, adaptable, self-reliant and self-confident risk-takers", as historian Sylviane Diouf has put it.[2] However, thrilling depictions of enslaved absconders such as Smithwick's hardly shed light on who the real men and women were, the deeper motivations that drove them to abscond to the Mexican border, and the characteristics and backgrounds that determined who among the enslaved population of the US South was able to attain self-emancipation and freedom.

Who fled to Mexico's Northeast and why? How did Mexico come to represent a beacon of freedom for runaway slaves from the US South? What were the demographic and occupational profiles of runaways in the borderlands? This chapter analyzes the profiles and backgrounds of enslaved refugees to Mexico, such as the abovementioned

[1] Noah Smithwick, *The Evolution of a State, Recollections of Old Texas Days by Noah Smithwick (Nonagenarian)* (Austin: Gammel Book Company, 1900), 324-327.
[2] Sylviane Diouf, *Slavery's Exiles: the Story of the American Maroons* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2014), 305.

"powerful black fellow". It addresses the usual motives as to why so many of the latter were ready to defy slave patrols and a series of mortal dangers in order to reach the border that separated freedom from slavery. The first part of the chapter will briefly retrace the decades-long formation of an idealized image of Mexico as a racial Eldorado for both free and enslaved African Americans, and its effect on slave flight in the US southwestern borderlands. The second part will address the diverse motives that commonly underlay these escape attempts. Finally, the chapter will examine the salient characteristics (in terms of personal experiences and sociological markers) of fugitive slaves absconding to the Mexican borderlands.

"A Spirit of Great Insubordination": Mexico as Imagined Land of Freedom for African Americans

In the early nineteenth century, New Spain constituted a relatively ambiguous site of asylum for foreign runaway slaves. For the most part, its attractiveness as a beacon of freedom was limited to the enslaved population residing in Louisiana's western borderlands close to the Sabine River. Yet by the eve of the US Civil War, the image of Mexico as a land of freedom for African Americans had become thoroughly entrenched in the minds of the enslaved. In fact, the growing "liberationist significance" of the Mexican border paralleled the expansion of the plantation economy and the Second Slavery into the Deep South during the antebellum period.[3] As American slavery extended its tentacles further west, enslaved people increasingly imagined the Mexican borderlands as a refuge from slavery, especially among slave communities in Texas, Louisiana, Arkansas and Mississippi. Significantly, the Mexican republic increasingly took steps to eradicate slavery throughout its national territory during the same period, and rumors of Mexico as not only a refuge from the United States, but also as a land of legal freedom, racial equality, official color-blindness and social mobility spread throughout communities of enslaved people living within reach of its border. While early testimonies by fugitive slaves revealed a loose understanding of official Mexican racial and slavery-related policies, along with usually imprecise expectations about their future existences in Mexico, later accounts demonstrate a sophisticated understanding and knowledge of an increasingly binary landscape of slavery and freedom. Growing tensions between the US and Mexico after the Texas Revolution of 1836 – in particular their discrepancy on slavery – drew a more and more conspicuous line between slavery and freedom for enslaved African Americans. The simultaneous rise of militant abolitionism in the US North from the 1830s onwards further reinforced Mexico's appeal as a sanctuary for African Americans, especially for fugitive slaves. Abolitionist leaders increasingly depicted the country as a racial haven and promoted plans for black emigration to Mexico. Furthermore, the closure of alternative beacons of freedom on a continental scale strengthened Mexico's reputation. In particular, the

[3] Sean M. Kelley, "Mexico in his Head: Slavery and the Texas-Mexican Border, 1810-1860", *Journal of Social History*, 37:3 (2004), 710.

passage of the Fugitive Slave Act in 1850 – jeopardizing freedom for fugitive slaves in the northern cities – reinforced this image of Mexico as ideal asylum.[4]

The Genesis of an Imagined Sanctuary (1803-1836)

In the aftermath of the US purchase of Louisiana in 1803, enslaved laborers in the Territory of Orleans (after 1812 redubbed the state of Louisiana) increasingly endeavored to obtain freedom through self-emancipation by reaching the Spanish province of Texas. The acquisition of new territories for the US South at the turn of the nineteenth century (Mississippi becoming part of the federation in 1798) had dramatically expanded the scale of plantation slavery west of the seaboard states, and spurred a massive slave trade that forcibly displaced almost a million slaves from the Upper South (especially Virginia, Maryland and Delaware at that time) and countless more from foreign lands to the new southern frontier. These forced migrants, however, did not arrive in a vacuum, but rather entered a Mississippi delta region already famous for its history of slave resistance under French and Spanish rule. Massive slave uprisings had broken out in 1795 in Spanish Louisiana, for example, inspired by the Haitian Revolution (some of the rebel bondspeople were natives of the former French colony). After 1803, planters in the now American territory still feared slave insurrection with the same anxiety as they had under Spanish rule. Urban marronage in the city of New Orleans, meanwhile, started to become endemic, adding to the fear that runaway slaves in the city would collaborate with the enslaved population there to rise up against the white population. In September 1804, several settlers from the Crescent City petitioned the territorial authorities regarding an alleged plot among enslaved people that they likened to the events of Saint-Domingue.[5]

In this explosive context, the new boundary between American Louisiana and Spanish Texas – although contested by both governments – provided a new impulse to slave resistance in the western part of the Orleans Territory, especially around Natchitoches on the Red River. Slavery in the former French outpost had substantially expanded under Spanish rule during the last third of the eighteenth century. The enslaved population of Natchitoches amounted to slightly more than half of the town's residents in the first decade of the nineteenth century, in great part due to the introduction of *bozales*, mostly from the Congo region.[6] As petitions and Spanish and

[4] Richard J.M. Blackett (ed.), *Fugitive Slaves, the 1850 Fugitive Slave Law, and the Politics of Slavery* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

[5] NARA, RG 59 T-260 State Department Territorial Papers, Orleans Series, reel 5, "Pétition des habitants et colons de la Louisiane, New Orleans, 17 Sep. 1804"; Jean-Pierre Le Glaunec, "Slave Migrations and Slave Control in Spanish and Early American New Orleans" in Peter J. Kastor and François Weil (ed.), *Empires of the Imagination: Transatlantic Histories of the Louisiana Purchase* (Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 2009), 204-238.

[6] On slavery in Natchitoches: H. Sophie Burton, F. Todd Smith, *Colonial Natchitoches: A Creole Community on the Louisiana-Texas Frontier* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2008), 55-88. On the relationship between the new political and commercial landscape of the Lower South and slave flight to New Spain: Peter J. Kastor, *The Nation's Crucible: the Louisiana*

American diplomatic correspondence testify, the new border with Texas placed slavery in this region under pressure. As early as the fall of 1804, rumors began to proliferate in slave quarters that crossing the border to Nacogdoches – the nearest town in Spanish Texas – was tantamount to becoming free. Residents of Natchitoches grew alarmed as they accused the Spanish military commandant in Nacogdoches of having spread the word that a Royal Decree guaranteed asylum to foreign escaped slaves.[7] About thirty slaves from plantations along the Cane River, some miles south of Natchitoches, left for Texas in October 1804, though only nine of them reached Nacogdoches. Enslaved people from deeper inside Louisiana soon heard about the rumor of Spain's asylum policy, such as in the district of Pointe Coupée, a hotspot of slave rebelliousness. In November, local officials became fearful that, with news of the escape attempt at Cane River, enslaved people might launch an insurrection at Pointe Coupée, as they reported to governor William C.C. Claiborne. Concerned about the maintenance of peaceful US-Spain relations, the Marqués de Casa Calvo – a Cuban slaveholder and former Spanish governor of Louisiana – stressed that "the inhabitants should have kept that information secret, and not have made it known before their Blacks, who [he] presume[d] learned it in no other way". The diplomat condemned the planters' "lack of precaution" in disseminating rumors about free soil in Spanish Texas that had to "be kept confidential". Claiborne quickly warned district commandants across the Territory that new prospects of freedom across the Sabine River had inspired a "spirit of great insubordination" among enslaved African Americans. To Edward D. Turner, military commandant at Natchitoches, he underscored "the late unpleasant movements among the negroes at Point Coupée" that reports from Nacogdoches had generated.[8]

Purchase and the Creation of America (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 62-69; Adam Rothman, *Slave Country: American Expansion and the origins of the Deep South* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2005), 100.

[7] AGI, Guadalajara, 398, "Residents of Natchitoches to Ugarte, 14 Nov. 1804", "Casa Calvo to Ceballos, 20 Aug. 1804"; AGI, Cuba, 73, f.1180-1181, "Ugarte to Casa Calvo, 11 Sep. 1804"; Dunbar Rowland, *Official letter books of W.C.C. Claiborne, 1801-1816* (Jackson: State Department of Archives and History, 1917), v.2, 315-316, "Claiborne to Casa Calvo, 1 Sep. 1804"; *ibid.* 319-320, "Casa Calvo to Claiborne, 4 Sep. 1804"; *ibid.* 326-327, "Claiborne to Casa Calvo, 7 Sep. 1804"; Francis A. McMichael, *Atlantic Loyalties: Americans in Spanish West Florida, 1785-1810* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2008), 72-73; Luis García Navarro, "Las Provincias Internas en el Siglo XIX", *Anuario de Estudios Americanos*, n°21 (Jan. 1964), 294. It remains unclear whether commandant Ugarte was accused of communicating the *Real Cédula* of 24 Sep. 1750, or the one issued on 14 April 1789, and whether these accusations were grounded or not. Ugarte denied them.

[8] NARA, RG 59 T-260, reel 5, "Petition to Claiborne, Post of Pointe Coupée, 9 Nov. 1804"; *ibid.*, reel 5, "Claiborne to Butler, 6 Nov. 1804"; Clarence Edwin Carter, *The Territorial Papers of the United States* (Washington DC: United States, Government Printing Office, 1940), v.9, 323 (6 Nov. 1804), 325 (8 Nov. 1804) 331 (10 Nov. 1804); Rowland, *Official Letter Books*, v.3, 6-7 (Claiborne to Turner, 6 Nov. 1804). For a contemporary's account of slavery at Pointe Coupée: Claude C. Robin, *Voyage dans l'intérieur de la Louisiane, de la Floride Occidentale, et dans les isles de la Martinique et de Saint-Domingue* (Paris: F. Buisson, 1807), v.2, 242-248. On the fear of US authorities of mass slave desertion to New Spain during Louisiana's territorial period: Eric Herschtal, "Slaves, Spaniards and Subversion in Early Louisiana: the Persistent Fear of Black Revolt and Spanish Collusion in Territorial Louisiana, 1803-1812", *Journal of the Early Republic*, n°36 (2016), 283-292.

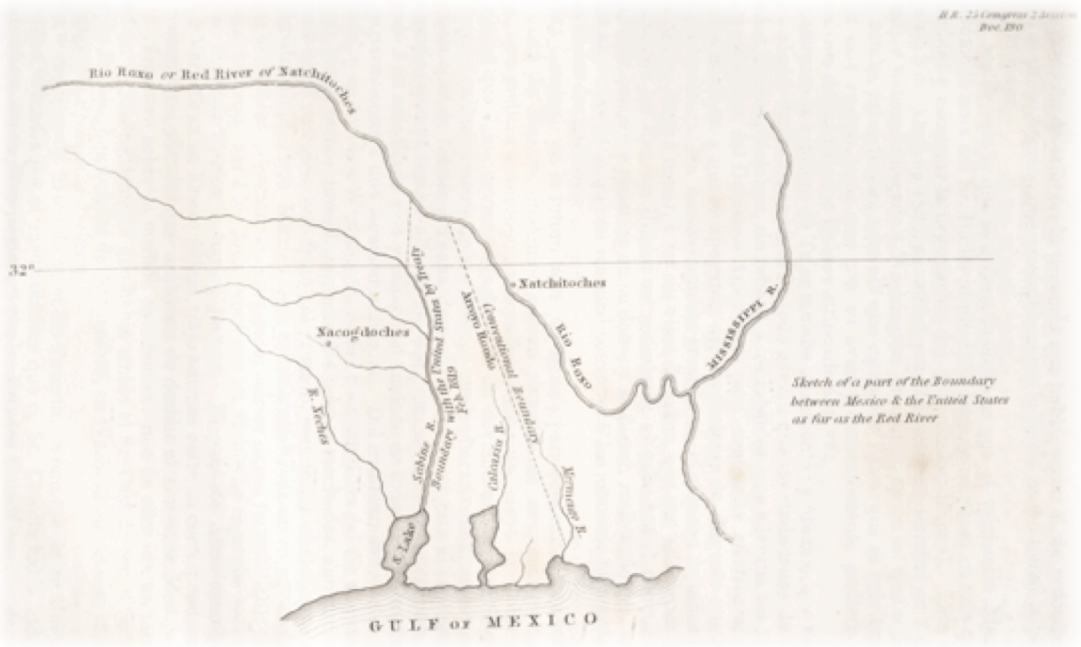

Figure 1: the Louisiana-Texas borderlands after 1803.
Source: Sketch of a part of the Boundary between Mexico & the United States as far as the Red River. 1838. From Rice University http///hdl.handle.net/1911/35335.

As between Natchitoches and Pointe Coupée, enslaved people in the US South maintained active communication networks regarding the evolving geopolitics of slavery and freedom throughout North America. The Cane River flight stimulated a series of similar escape attempts from Louisiana, mainly from the regions of Natchitoches, Opelousas and even further east. Escaped slaves sought refuge in Texas with increasing frequency during the 1800s, highlighting the particular harshness of frontier slavery in the Mississippi delta as well as the rising hope of finding free soil in Spanish Texas. During these early years, the latter point was not entirely clear, especially since slavery continued to exist throughout New Spain, including on the Texan side of the border. Runaways from west of the Sabine River occasionally crossed into Louisiana, in the opposite direction to runaway slaves from the US. In September 1807, an enslaved man named Santiago absconded from Nacogdoches, although he eventually fled back in the opposite direction, to San Antonio.[9] In general, however, the lands west of the Sabine River continued to attract Louisiana's enslaved population, a process only partly interrupted by the Mexican war for independence (1810-1821). An enslaved freedom-seeker named Andrés who absconded from Louisiana in 1817 declared that, apart from his imminent sale to another enslaver, he had been motivated by the ideal of "benefiting from his freedom under the [Spanish] Government". Some months later, the fugitive Pivi stated that besides mistreatment, she journeyed to San Antonio assuming that "the Spaniards would treat her better".[10]

[9] Lance Blyth, "Fugitives from servitude: American Deserters and Runaway Slaves in Spanish Nacogdoches, 1803-1808", *East Texas Historical Journal*, v.38/2 (2000), 11.
[10] UT(A), Briscoe, BA, reel 58 frames 97-105 (10 March 1817) and 108 (13 March 1817); UT(A), Briscoe, Charles Ramsdell Collection, Box 2Q238, "Negro Slaves in Spanish America, 1563-1820",

As early as 1819, abolitionists Stratford Gowen and Benjamin Lundy approached the former slave James C. Brown – a native from Virginia once forcibly brought to Kentucky through the interregional slave trade – for a mission "to find shelter and suitable situations for free people of color" in Texas.[11] The liberal antislavery discourses that accompanied Mexico's separation from Spain in 1821 further reinforced its image as a land of freedom for African Americans. The following year, residents of Natchez, Mississippi, were already complaining that some local enslaved people were crossing the Sabine River in search of asylum.[12]

Matters were complicated by the spread of US-style slavery across the Sabine River into Mexican Texas during the 1820s and 1830s, which ironically coincided with Mexico's first attempts at gradually eradicating slavery within the new republic. Starting in 1821, the official opening of Mexican Texas to Euro-American settlers triggered an unprecedented expansion of slavery into the northern fringes of the new nation. As Texas became a new frontier of slavery-based plantation, the contradiction between the emerging fronts of free soil and the Second Slavery in the US-Mexico borderlands grew all the more acute. Rumors of emancipation – both stemming from state and federal authorities – began circulating among people held in slavery in northeastern Mexico during the 1820s, as for instance during the drafting of Coahuila y Tejas's state constitution (1824-1827).[13] By the late 1820s, on the eve of abolition, former settler Noah Smithwick recalled that enslaved people in Texas "became aware of their legal status in Mexican territory, and it was probably owing to their ignorance of the language and country that more of them did not leave". On John McNeel's plantation along the San Bernard River, Smithwick reminisced, a slave named Jim "threw down his hoe and started away", hoping to free himself under Mexican rule, before being shot by his enslaver's son, the ill-named Pleasant.[14] Tom, a "very black" slave from the colonies of central Texas, likewise "started for the Interior" in May 1828. In fact, because Texas was on its way to becoming a slaveholding territory at the time, enslaved freedom-seekers began to conceive the Rio Grande as a more unequivocal line of freedom.[15]

"Fugitive slaves from the United States, captured in Texas by the expedition against Long, trial at Monterrey, 1820".

[11] Benjamin Drew, *A north-side view of slavery. The refugee: or, the narratives of fugitive slaves in Canada. Related by themselves, with an account of the history and condition of the colored population of Upper Canada* (Boston: J.P. Lewett and Co., 1856), 241.

[12] *American Journal*, 27 Feb. 1822.

[13] Andrew J. Torget, *Seeds of Empire. Cotton, Slavery and the Transformation of the Texas Borderlands, 1800-1850* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015), 91-92 and 104.

[14] Smithwick, *The Evolution of a State*, 37; James D. Nichols, *The Limits of Liberty: Mobility and the Making of the Eastern U.S.-Mexico Border* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2018), 57-58. On McNeel's plantation: Mary Austin Holley, *Texas. Observations, Historical, Geographical and Descriptive: in a Series of Letters written during a visit to Austin's Colony, with a View to a Permanent Settlement in that Country, in the Autumn of 1831* (Baltimore: Armstrong and Plaskitt, 1833), 44.

[15] The Portal to Texas History (online), Austin Papers: series IV, 1828-1829, "Transcript of a letter from Robert H. Williams to Stephen F. Austin, 18 May 1828" [accessed 8 Nov. 2017].

Mexico's abolition of slavery (15 September 1829) encouraged "large numbers of slaves from Louisiana" (according to the *Niles's Register*) to cross the border, drawn by the promise of "freedom and equality" that Mexico was thought to offer to black people in its territory. It also considerably altered the precarious balance upon which a fast-developing plantation economy rested in Texas. Rumors of abolition agitated both slaveowners and bondspeople, before Texas received an exemption from the decree in December 1829 as a result of intense lobbying efforts by the Euro-American planters, backed by Bexar's *Jefe Político* Ramón Muzquiz and José María Viesca, governor of Coahuila y Tejas. José de las Piedras, military commandant at Nacogdoches, delayed the decree's publication, out of concern that some colonists might otherwise stage an uprising against Mexico.[16] As Andrew Torget has noted, confusion as to whether or not Texas would be included in the abolition decree emboldened slaves, some of whom fled, concerned that this window of opportunity might later be shut (as it effectively was). An unnamed woman and a man named Robert, both in their mid-twenties, fled alongside sixteen-year-old John to the small village of Guerrero (Coahuila). All were Creole slaves born in New Orleans, brought to the new frontier of Texas by their master, and explained that they had absconded out of fear of being deported back to Louisiana by their enslaver in the case that the decree were to be enforced in Texas.[17]

As the Mexican state began articulating a more definitive rejection of racial slavery and openly defied the US for its abidance to the institution, freedom-seekers escaping to Mexican settlements became less and less exceptional between 1829 and 1836. As underlined by Sean M. Kelley, enslaved people in the lower Brazos region in particular – a thriving hub for the illegal slave trade in the early 1830s – began imagining the new republic as an ally for their emancipation.[18] When inspector Juan Francisco Lombraño visited the colonies of *empresarios* Austin and DeWitt during the summer of 1831, local slaves informed him that some Euro-Americans were contemplating a revolt against the Mexican state to ensure that their interests prevailed. Lombraño urged his informants to resist alongside Mexicans in case of war, promising them they would "be free and qualified for any office of honor". Francisco Pizarro Martínez, Mexico's consul in New Orleans, forecasted in 1832 the ruin of the colonies in Texas since, among the slaves, "the word begins to spread that according to the laws, they are free". Two years later, inspector Juan Nepomuceno Almonte was sent to Texas with secret instructions "to inform the slaves of their liberty under Mexican

[16] TBL, Bolton, 46:8, "De las Piedras to Elozua, 9 Dec. 1829"; "Elozua to Mier y Terán, Béjar, 17 Dec. 1829"; "Secretaría de Guerra y Marina to Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores, 22 Jan. 1830" and "Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores to Secretaría de Guerra y Marina, 6 March 1830"; Marion Gleason McDougall, *Fugitive Slaves (1619-1865)* (Boston: Ginn and Co. 1891), 25; Paul D. Lack, "Slavery and the Texas Revolution", *Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, 89 (October 1985), 187; Raúl A. Ramos, *Beyond the Alamo: Forging Mexican Ethnicity in San Antonio, 1821-1861* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 117-118; Nichols, *The Limits of Liberty*, 57.

[17] AGEC, FSXIX, c.12 f.8, "Lombraña to the Governor of Coahuila-Texas, 19 Dec. 1829"; YU, Beinecke, LAGP, box 3, "Notes on 1829-1830"; Torget, *Seeds of Empire*, 147.

[18] Kelley, "Mexico in his Head", 709-723; Diouf, *Slavery's Exiles*, 39.

law and to promise them land as freemen".[19] When open conflict between Mexico and the Euro-American colonists eventually broke out, the official *Diario del Gobierno de la República Mexicana* contended that "black slaves" and "embattled Mexicans" now stood together as enemies of the Euro-Americans.[20]

Simultaneously, representations of Mexico as a haven for African Americans blossomed within abolitionist circles in the US North, for instance through reports of Mexico's refusal to extradite US fugitive slaves from 1825 onwards.[21] US abolitionism as a political movement experienced a profound revival and transformation during the late 1820s and early 1830s. A new generation, led by William Lloyd Garrison in Massachusetts, came to prominence with more radical objectives – carried out through popular and combative methods of action – than those of the Pennsylvanian generation. This new abolitionism provided more explicit support for violent resistance against slavery, at a time when David Walker's *Appeal to the Colored Citizens of the World* (1829) incited black people throughout the Union to unite and resist racial oppression and Nat Turner's revolt in Virginia (1831) emphasized US slavery's agonistic nature.[22] By contrast, the image of Mexico (along with Canada and Haiti) as a racial haven spread in the abolitionist press, which began promoting black emigration to the new republic. In 1831, Benjamin Lundy's *Genius of Universal Emancipation* – founded in 1821 – led a campaign promoting Mexican Texas as "that fine region where the rigors of winter are unknown, and where man, without distinction of color or condition, is looked upon as the being that Deity made him – free and independent". Mexico, more generally, was considered as "an asylum for hundreds of thousands of our oppressed colored people". The American Colonization Society (1817) was subjected to fierce criticism and many African Americans viewed emigration to West Africa with growing "discontent and uneasiness", in Charleston merchant William Turpin's words: in fact, "great numbers [were] seeking an asylum in Canada and Mexico" instead. When Garrison's *Liberator* published a few articles on emigration in 1832, drawing especially upon testimonies from free blacks in Cincinnati (where racial discrimination and violence was escalating), many stressed they would "never remove to Africa" but instead to "Canada or Mexico, as countries far more congenial to our constitutions, and where our rights as freemen are secured". Such plans were under way. The attendees of the third annual "Convention for the Improvement of the Free People of Color" held in June 1833 (Philadelphia)

[19] RBBC, NA, v.12, 253-254, "Governor of Coahuila and Texas to Múzquiz, 16 July 1831"; SRE, AEMEUA, 20/9, f.43, "Pizarro Martínez to Encargado de Negocios de los EU Mexicanos, 23 March 1832"; Paul D. Lack, *Texas Revolutionary Experience: a Political and Social History, 1835-1836* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1992), 240-241.
[20] *Diario del Gobierno de la República Mexicana*, 11 Aug. 1836.
[21] *Genius of Universal Emancipation*, v.2/14, 2 Jan. 1827, "Runaway slaves in Mexico"; *ibid*. v.4/12, 27 Nov. 1829, "Glorious News from Mexico", 90.
[22] Richard S. Newman, *The Transformation of American Abolitionism: Fighting Slavery in the Early Republic* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002); Sarah E. Cornell, "Citizens of nowhere: Fugitive Slaves and Free African Americans in Mexico, 1833-1857", *Journal of American History*, 100:2 (2013), 360; John Hope Franklin, Loren Schweninger, *Runaway Slaves: Rebels on the Plantation* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 15.

contemplated projects of emigration to Mexico. Abolitionists Samuel Webb and David Lee Child maintained an active correspondence with Mexican officials on plans for black colonization. However, the most active in this regard was undoubtedly Benjamin Lundy. [23]

Lundy made three trips to Mexico during the first half of the 1830s, looking for a tract of land on which to settle a colony of black migrants in a country where, in his words, "one complexion is as much respected as another". In September 1833, the abolitionist met in San Antonio "a black Louisiana creole" named Felipe Elua. Born a slave, the man had purchased his own freedom and migrated with his family to Texas in 1807, where he now owned "five or six house or lots, besides of fine piece of land". In Nacogdoches, Lundy became acquainted with the family of David Town, a white slaveowner from Georgia who had settled in Eastern Texas during the mid-1820s with his enslaved wife and their children, all of whom he emancipated after crossing the border. According to Lundy, the family was now living "here in harmony" and made "a very respectable appearance", with local residents being "very sociable with them". In Matamoros (Tamaulipas), Lundy met "two young mulatto men, formerly of New Orleans", who had become prosperous as a cabinet-maker and an engineer. Both of them expressed "great aversion to returning to the United States". Lundy concluded from his journeys into northeastern Mexico that there was "no distinction in this place as to freedom, or condition, by reason of color".[24] In March 1835, he finally signed a contract with the state of Tamaulipas for the settlement of about 250 African American families in the Nueces Strip over a period of less than two years. Abolitionist Lydia Maria Child expressed confidence in Lundy's project – "several hundred miles from the scene of difficulty in Texas" – which however collapsed as the first shots of the Texas Revolution were fired. Nonetheless, Lundy's travel accounts represented the most prominent abolitionist essays promoting Mexico as a land of racial equality, social

[23] *Genius of Universal Emancipation*, Oct. 1831 (87) and Dec. 1831 (Supp., 114); "William Turpin to James Madison, 4 July 1833", Madison Papers, Founders Online (LOC); *The Liberator*, 4 Feb. 1832; SRE, LE 1057, f.56, "Samuel Webb to Legación Mexicana, 31 March 1832"; *L'Abeille*, 15 May 1833 and *Niles Weekly Register*, 18 May 1833 (in SRE, LE 1057, f.68-69 and f.72); TBL, Bolton, 46:15, "David Lee Child to Juan Almonte, New Rochelle, 15 Sep. 1835"; Benjamin Lundy, *The War in Texas; a Review of Facts and Circumstances, Showing that this Contest is a Crusade Against Mexico* (Philadelphia: Merrihew and Gunn, 1837), 5; E.S. Abdy, *Journal of a residence and tour in the United States of North America, from April 1833 to October 1834* (New York: Negro University Press, 1969 [1835]), 12; Carlos Bosch García, *Documentos de la relación de México con los Estados Unidos (31 de diciembre de 1829-29 de mayo de 1836) II - Butler en persecución de la provincia de Texas* (México: UNAM, 1983), v.1, 299-300; Elena K. Abbott, "Beacons of Liberty: Free-Soil Havens and the American Anti-Slavery Movement, 1813-1863", PhD Diss. (Washington DC: Georgetown University, 2017), 141-147; Newman, *The Transformation of American Abolitionism,* 132.

[24] Thomas Earle, *The Life, Travels and Opinions of Benjamin Lundy, including his Journeys to Texas and Mexico, with a Sketch of Contemporary Events, and a Notice of the Revolution in Hayti*, (Philadelphia: W.D. Parrish, 1847), 54, 63, 116 and 142-143; SRE, AEMEUA, 20/9, f.21, "Encargado de Negocios to Pizarro Martínez, 25 Feb. 1832"; Leroy P. Graf, "Colonizing Projects in Texas South of the Nueces, 1820-1845", *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, v.50, n°4 (April 1947), 440-444.

integration, economic mobility and political rights for African Americans, free and enslaved alike.[25]

In the wake of Lundy's colony project, other abolitionists began to take an interest in Mexico as a beacon of freedom for enslaved and free African Americans. Jonathan W. Walker, a Massachusetts-born ship captain – who came to be known subsequently as "the man with the branded hand", after he was branded with the sign "S.S." for "slave-stealer" during his trial in Pensacola in 1844 for helping seven slaves to escape to the Bahamas – "had some correspondence" with Lundy himself. Lundy and Walker were supposed to meet in Texas to discuss colonization plans. The latter endeavored "to establish a refuge for blacks who wished to escape slavery and prejudice", including fugitive slaves, in 138.000 acres of the grant recently acquired by Lundy. With this purpose in mind, Walker left for Matamoros in November 1835 aboard his *Supply of New Bedford* with his twelve-year-old son John and a young mechanic, Richard Marble, a friend of the family in New Bedford. As they reached the Mexican coast, Walker "found the country in a very unsettled state". He sustained himself for some months by shipping goods for mercantile houses between New Orleans and Matamoros, while "expecting to be joined by others" in his project. In the course of a journey between the two ports in June 1836, pirates attacked Walker's ship as it lay ashore on the coast of Texas. The captain received two gunshot-wounds in the arm and the stomach, before escaping with his son by swimming through the ocean, while the young Richard was murdered. Later, Mexican villagers rescued the two bleeding and starving victims, but just like Lundy's project, Walker's ideal colony never came to fruition.[26]

"The land of his fellows" (1836-1861)

After 1836, the separation of Texas from Mexico created a sharp boundary between lands of slavery and non-slavery in the US-Mexico borderlands. The "peculiar institution" dramatically expanded north of the Nueces River, spurred by slave-grown

[25] LOC, Benjamin Lundy Papers, 1814-1906 ("Lundy to his father Joseph, Mouth of the Mississippi, 4th mo. 13th, 1835"); Patricia G. Holland, Milton Meltzer, *Lydia Maria Child: Selected Letters, 1817-1880* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1982), 43-44 and 48-49; Nicholas Guyatt, "The Future Empire of Our Freedmen: Republican Colonization schemes in Texas and Mexico, 1861-1865", in Adam Arenson and Andrew R. Graybill, *Civil War Wests: Testing the Limits of the United States* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2015), 97; Nichols, *The Limits of Liberty*, 64-67.

[26] Jonathan Walker, *Trial and Imprisonment of Jonathan Walker, at Pensacola, Florida, for aiding slaves to escape from bondage. With an appendix, containing a sketch of his life* (Boston: Anti-Slavery Office, 1845), 108-110; Frank Edward Kittredge, *The Man with the Branded Hand: An Authentic Sketch of the Life and Services of Capt. Jonathan Walker* (Rochester: Frank Edward Kittredge, 1899), 12-14; Julius A. Laack, "Captain Jonathan Walker, abolitionist", *The Wisconsin Magazine of History*, v.32, n°3 (1949), 313; Alvin F. Oickle, *The Man with the Branded Hand: the life of Jonathan Walker, Abolitionis*t (Yardley, Pennsylvania: Westhome Publishing, 2011), 26-33; Matthew J. Clavin, *Aiming for Pensacola: Fugitive Slaves on the Atlantic and Southern Frontiers* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015), 125.

cotton exports. Galveston's annual cotton exports, for instance, rose from 65.809 bales in 1853 (worth $2.701.500) to 148.362 bales by 1859 (worth $8.139.910).[27] Simultaneously, enslaved people standing in-between competing political entities in the borderlands grew aware of their leverage as a third party and often embraced Mexico's cause for their own emancipation.[28] James Silk Buckingham noted that "the emancipation of all slaves in Mexico, [was] known to them [US bondspeople]". Through Mexican peons and abolitionists active on the southern frontier after the Texas Revolution, news of Mexico's refusal to extradite runaways reached slave quarters. Travelling from Kentucky during the late 1830s, journalist Charles Wilkins Webber met in Texas a planter from the Brazos, who had lost one of his slaves fleeing to the border and who observed that "escaping to Mexico is a favorite scheme of the slaves of Texas", since "they have the impression that their condition is very greatly bettered by the change".[29]

Increasingly, Mexico began to permeate the abolitionist's mental landscape of asylum territories for fugitive slaves and oppressed free blacks.[30] Laudatory (and often romanticized) depictions of Mexico blossomed in the northern abolitionist press after 1836. The *Colored American*, for instance, framed the new nation as an inspiration for black emancipation, noting that "with all her wars and commotions, [she] has never yet had cause to regret that she bestowed the boon of freedom to her slaves".[31] "Let the emancipated negro find himself on the borders of Mexico and the states beyond, and his fate is no longer doubtful or gloomy", enthusiastically exclaimed an editor from Illinois: Mexico was "the land of his fellows, where equal rights and equal hopes await him and his offspring".[32] Mormon leader Joseph Smith advocated for the annexation of Texas on the ground that emancipated slaves could be sent "from Texas to Mexico, where all colors are alike".[33] Just as the relationship between Mexico and the United States became increasingly strained over Texas, the causes of African Americans and Mexico became closely intertwined. In May 1839, Jabez Delano Hammond put forward plans to establish military academies in Mexico (as well as in Canada), aimed at training escaped slaves from the US South for the eradication of American slavery

[27] W.&D. Richardson, *Galveston City Directory, 1859-1860* (Galveston: "News" Book and Job Office, 1859), 82.
[28] Pekka Hämäläinen, Samuel Truett, "On Borderlands", *Journal of American History*, 98 (2011), 338; Andrés Reséndez, *Changing National Identities at the Frontier: Texas and New Mexico, 1800-1850* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Sean M. Kelley, *Los Brazos de Dios: a Plantation Society in the Texas borderlands, 1821-1865* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 2010).
[29] James S. Buckingham, *The Slave States of America* (London: Fisher, 1842), v.2, 433; Charles W. Webber, *Tales of the Southern Border* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott, 1887), 48-49.
[30] See for instance: Henry B. Stanton, *Remarks of Henry B. Stanton, in the Representatives' Hall, on the 23nd (sic) and 24th of February: before the Committee of the House of Representatives, of Massachusetts, to whom was referred sundry memorials on the subject of slavery* (Boston: Knapp, 1837), 62 (SJMASC).
[31] *Colored American*, 16 Nov. 1839.
[32] *The Ottawa Free Trader*, 9 Aug. 1844.
[33] B.H. Roberts (ed.), *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lack City: Deseret News, 1912), v.6, 243-244; Michael Von Wanegen, *The Texas Republic and the Mormon Kingdom of God* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2002), 26.

through armed force.[34] Likewise, Juan Nepomuceno Almonte – now Mexican minister in Washington – reported in 1844 that some free blacks in the US had offered their services to the Mexican government in case of war with the Union, assuring him that the African American population would take the side of the southern republic.[35] In the wake of the annexation of Texas in 1845, even slave refugees in Canada clearly identified Mexico as their ally for black emancipation in North America. In September 1845, "the head-quarters for the runaway slaves" in Canada urged African Americans to support Mexico "in the anticipated war, and render that government all the assistance they can", tentatively predicting that about 100.000 men would respond to its call to take arms in defense of the foreign nation. Solomon Northup "well remembered the extravagant hopes that were excited" among his fellow bondspeople in Louisiana during the war itself, whereas by contrast, Mexico's final defeat "produced only sorrow and disappointment in the cabin".[36] In a similar vein, from the late 1840s onwards, free blacks in Louisiana increasingly conceived of Mexico as a suitable land – along with Haiti and Jamaica – to which to emigrate as they faced growing racial discrimination. During the 1850s, several colonies of free African Americans from Louisiana (and to a lesser extent Florida) blossomed in the coastal state of Veracruz. As argued by Mary Niall Mitchell, would-be migrants now entertained high expectations about life in the southern republic and seemed to strongly believe in the presumed inexistence of racial discrimination in Mexico. This was far from the uncertainties expressed by free blacks in Philadelphia in the early 1830s.[37]

After the US-Mexican war, the promotion of Mexico as a safe haven for African Americans in antislavery networks and newspapers – especially in the *National Anti-Slavery Standard* and *The Liberator* – reached its pinnacle. The *National Era*, for instance, dedicated several articles to Mexico's free-soil policy and its protection of foreign runaway slaves, as reasserted by the 1857 liberal Constitution.[38] While the brothers John Mercer and Charles Henry Langston were contemplating setting up an emigration scheme in some part of the Mexican Cession lands, abolitionist Martin Robison Delany's *Condition, Elevation, Emigration and Destiny of the Colored People of*

[34] Manisha Sinha, *The Slave's Cause: a History of Abolition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016), 419-420.
[35] SRE 4-12-6280, "Negros de los Estados Unidos de América en favor de México en caso de guerra, informes de la Legación de México en dicho país y memorial presentado por los citados negros"; TBL, Bolton, 47:6, "Arrangoíz to Ministro de Relaciones Exteriores, 28 March 1842".
[36] *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, 1 Sep. 1845; Solomon Northup, *Twelve Years a Slave: Narrative of Solomon Northup, a Citizen of New-York, Kidnapped in Washington City in 1841, and Rescued in 1853* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1997), 249.
[37] Alexandre Barde, *Histoire des Comités de Vigilance aux Attakapas* (Saint-Jean-Baptiste: Imprimerie du Meschacébé et de l'Avant-Coureur, 1861), 336-338; Carl Christian Sartorius, *Mexico: Landscape and Popular Sketches* (London: Trübner & Co. 1859), 82; Bosch García, *Documentos de la Relación de México (...) II - Butler en persecución de la provincia de Texas*, v.1, 299-300; Mary Niall Mitchell, *Raising Freedom's Child: Black Children and Visions of the Future after Slavery* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2010), 29-38. On free blacks from Pensacola migrating to Tampico in the spring and summer of 1857 aboard the schooners *Pinta* and *William*: Clavin, *Aiming for Pensacola*, 67.
[38] *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, 9 March 1848; *National Era*, 21 Aug. 1851, 19 Oct. 1854, 16 April 1857; *The Liberator*, 15 May 1857.

the United States (1852) incited "all colored persons who can, to study, and have their children taught Spanish", with the prospect of "going South" to Mexico. Delany, the correspondent of Henry Bibb's *Voice of the Fugitive* in Pittsburgh, represented Mexico as a land of freedom, equal rights and opportunities, in contrast to the more skeptical opinions expressed by Frederick Douglass and Mary Ann Shadd on the subject. As with Garrison two decades earlier, Delany's pamphlet stemmed both from a criticism directed at the American Colonization Society's emigration plans to Liberia as well as a reaction to the passage of the Fugitive Slave Act (FSA) in September 1850.[39] The FSA, passed under the aegis of Virginia senator James M. Mason, strengthened legal provisions on the rendition of escaped slaves from the US South taking refuge in the North, making the status of slave refugees *within* the US even more precarious than before. Consequently, the attractiveness of Canada and Mexico as spaces of formal freedom for enslaved asylum-seekers was enhanced.[40]

The "National Emigration Convention of Colored People" held at Cleveland (Ohio) in August 1854 noted that self-emancipated slaves "already find their way in large companies to the Canadas" and advised would-be fugitives to consider Mexico as well, underscoring that "there is as much freedom for them South, as there is North, as much protection in Mexico as in Canada". The attendees who supported self-emancipation to Mexico further argued that, by contrast with the North and Canada, "the fugitive slave will find it a much pleasanter journey and more easy to access, to wend his way from Louisiana and Arkansas to Mexico". Regarding the FSA, they asserted that once on Mexican land, self-liberated bondspeople would not be threatened by "miserable, half-starved, service Northern slave-catchers by the way, waiting cap in hand, ready and willing to do the bidding of their contemptible southern masters".[41] Both Delany and the Convention attendees drew similar conclusions after 1850. Enslaved people now had to seek freedom across national borders, even though the FSA's provisions remained loosely implemented and often

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[39] Martin Robison Delany, *Condition, Elevation, Emigration and Destiny of the Colored People of the United States* (Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 1993 [1852]), 178; Mary Ann Shadd, *A Plea for Emigration, or Notes of Canada West, in its Moral, Social and Political aspect: with Suggestions respecting Mexico, West Indies, and Vancouver Island, for the Information of Colored Emigrants* (Detroit: George W. Pattison, 1852), 40-42. Shadd had a rather negative view on emigration to Mexico. Although she noted that an antislavery culture predominated among Mexicans, she argued that black migrants' prospects in Mexico would be doomed by internal social and political instability, as well as the threat of US imperialism. Cornell, "Citizens of Nowhere", 359-360; Guyatt, "The Future Empire of Our Freedmen", 98; Rachel Adams, *Continental Divides: Remapping the Cultures of North America* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 70.

[40] Don E. Fehrenbacher, *The Slaveholding Republic: an Account of the United States Government's Relations to Slavery* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 231-251; Kerr-Ritchie, *Freedom Seekers*, 25 and 30. Kerr-Ritchie asserts in particular that, by contrast with fugitives absconding to the northern states, "those who crossed either the southern border into Mexico or the northern border into Canada were guaranteed greater security". We will discuss this assertion more thoroughly in ch.3-4.

[41] National Emigration Convention of Colored People, *Proceedings of the National Emigration Convention of Colored People: held at Cleveland, Ohio, Thursday, Friday and Saturday, the 24th, 25th and 26th of August 1854* (Pittsburgh: A.A. Anderson, 1854), 69 (SJMASC).

inoperative, while spaces of informal freedom persisted even at the heart of the US South.[42] The years following the passage of the FSA represented the heyday of slave flight to Mexico and arguably some fugitives who would have previously ran away to the North now opted for Mexico (table 1).

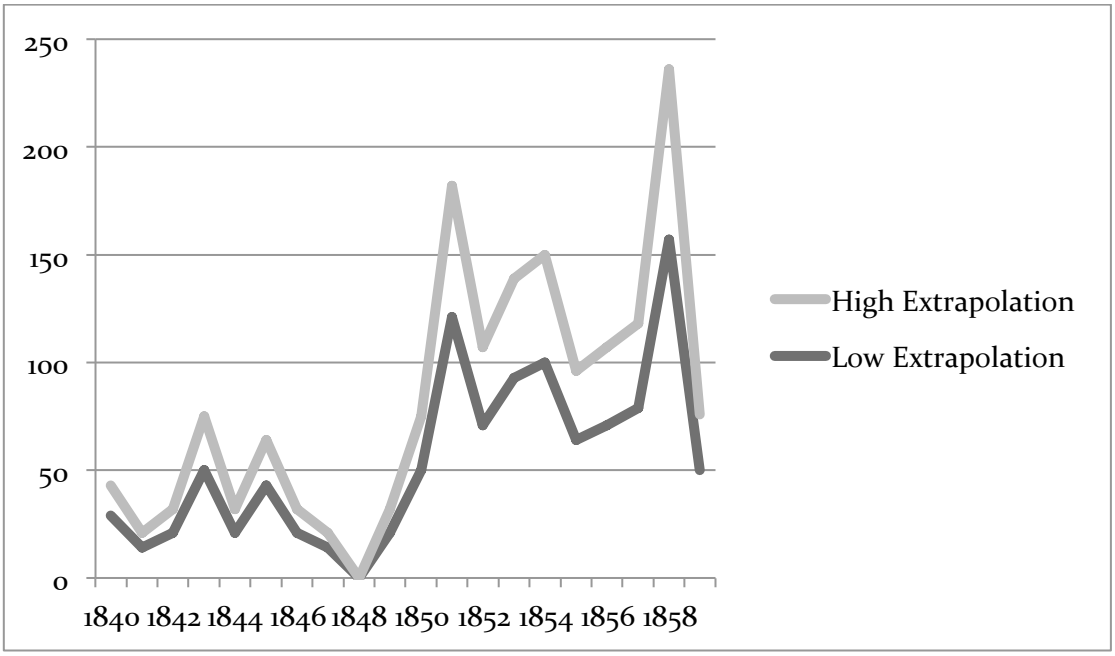

Table 1: High and low extrapolations of yearly numbers of self-emancipated slaves to Mexico (1840-1859).[43]

Following the US-Mexican War, Texas's slave community gradually came to associate Mexico with non-slavery, and the enslaved population of Texas rose from about 58.000 in 1850 to 182.000 only ten years later. As a result, escape attempts from

[42] Damian A. Pargas, "Urban Refugees: Fugitive Slaves and Spaces of Informal Freedom in the American South", *Journal of Early American History*, 7 (2017), 262-284; Viola F. Müller, "Illegal but Tolerated: Slave Refugees in Richmond, Virginia, 1800-1860", in Damian A. Pargas (ed.), *Fugitive Slaves and Spaces of Freedom in North America* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2018), 137-167.

[43] These yearly estimates of the number of enslaved people fleeing to Mexico are based on statistical data retrieved from a sample of 153 individual or collective escape attempts collected from runaway slave advertisements, arrest notices and other archival material on slave refugees to Mexico, from 1840 to 1859. The cases included in this sample were selected according to the consistency and reliability of the information they provided on criteria such as escape time, geographical origin, age, gender, physical and personal description. This sample provided a basis for extrapolating Douai and Kapp's 1854 estimates (see introduction) for this whole period. An extrapolation of Douai's low estimate provides a total estimate of 1.090 freedom-seekers, while an extrapolation of Kapp's high estimate provides a total estimate of 1.638 freedom-seekers. (The year 1848 has been left out of the sample/extrapolation due to numerical insignificance). The graph is consistent with claims by other historians regarding a substantial increase in escape attempts during the 1850s. See especially: Nichols, *The Limits of Liberty*, 127. The relative decrease of escape attempts to Mexico registered for the second part of the 1850s (except for 1858) seems to corroborate William D. Carrigan's assertion that "slave flight became a less realistic option" after the mid-1850s. William D. Carrigan, "Slavery on the Frontier: the Peculiar Institution in Central Texas", *Slavery & Abolition*, 20:2 (August 1999), 82-83.

the US Southwest increased in a spectacular way.[44] As underlined by James D. Nichols, former refugees from slavery in Mexico who were abducted and re-enslaved in the southwestern borderlands incited other enslaved American Americans to abscond. The *Texas Monument*'s editor, for instance, considered these tales of freedom circulating in slave quarters as especially explosive. "One recaptured fugitive who has been in a free State or Mexico for a few years will corrupt a whole community of slaves", he remarked.[45] Such narratives of freedom were indeed influential and the appeal exerted by the Mexican border on enslaved people provoked the ire of many Southerners. While self-liberated slaves residing across the border generally did not leave written accounts of their experiences, post-Reconstruction testimonies by former slaves born in antebellum Texas suggest that the enslaved community increasingly associated self-emancipation with Mexico. When he was interviewed during the mid-1930s about his experience as a former slave in Texas, Felix Haywood recalled that "sometimes someone would come 'long and try to get us to run up North and be free. We used to laugh at that. There wasn't no reason to run up North. All we had to do was to walk, but walk South, and we'd be free as soon as we crossed the Rio Grande. In Mexico you could be free. They didn't care what color you was, black, white, yellow or blue". James Boyd likewise argued that "most in general 'round our part of the country, iffen a nigger want to run away, he'd light out for ole Mexico. That was nigger heaven them days, they thought".[46] Walter Rimm stated that by the eve of the US Civil War, Mexico had come to be seen as the land "where a lot of de slaves runs to".[47] Most slaveholders understood that an enslaved person born or brought to the US Southwest would soon conceive of Mexico as "his El Dorado for accumulation, his utopia for political rights, and his Paradise for happiness". They grew increasingly alarmed by this, at a time when slavery's apologists felt that the lower South was on the verge of "becom[ing] Bostonized with Abolition".[48] A resident writing to the *Washington American* in November 1855 expressed concern at the rising "geopolitical literacy" of enslaved people in the borderlands. In his words, "nearly all the negroes of Texas, have some ideas, more or less extensive, of the general disposition of the Mexican people toward them, and, I believe, it is only a matter of expediency with more than half of the slave population of Texas; that they do not raise in a body and go over to the Mexican side of

[44] Omar Valerio-Jiménez, *River of Hope: Forging Identity and Nation in the Rio Grande Borderlands* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013), 184.
[45] *The Texas Monument*, 12 March 1851; Nichols, *The Limits of Liberty*, 137-138.
[46] FWP, *Slave Narratives: A Folk History of the United States of America from Interviews with Former Slaves*, v.16/2 (Washington: Works Progress Administration, 1941) 132; Andrew Waters (ed.), *I was born in slavery: personal accounts of slavery in Texas* (Winston-Salem: John Blair, Real Voices, Real History Series, 2003), 6.
[47] FWP, *Slave Narratives,* v.16/3, 262. Rimm himself settled in Mexico after the US Civil War, where he married a certain "Martina" in Matamoros in 1869. Rimm had four children in Matamoros, before coming back to Texas. His experience illustrates the long-lasting effect of Mexico's appeal for African Americans from the US South, even after the abolition of slavery.
[48] *The Northern Standard*, 25 Dec. 1852; Randolph Campbell, *An Empire for Slavery: the Peculiar Institution in Texas, 1821-1865* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1989), 180. The last quote is from *New Orleans Delta*, 3 Dec. 1856.

the Rio Grande".[49] The coincidence of Mexico's liberal stance on foreign escaped slaves with frontier slavery's violence inspired enslaved rebels: in 1856, local settlers on the Colorado River thwarted the alleged preparations of about 100 slaves "to fight their way to Mexico".[50] Similarly, during the so-called "Texas Troubles" of 1860, slaves across Texas were suspected of staging plots to kill whites and flee in large numbers to Mexico. Not all of these suspicions were ungrounded: some detained runaways in Bastrop for instance stressed that "their intention was to enter Mexican territory, where they expected to be free after their arrival there". One of them had made "two attempts to reach Mexico, but has been thwarted in his plans both times, by being caught en route".[51]

Fully aware of the developing reputation of Mexico as a land of freedom for runaway slaves, southwestern slaveholders increasingly viewed Mexico's antislavery appeal as a threat to their social and economic interests. Moreover, they also sought to portray Mexico's abolition of slavery as a sign of national decadence.[52] During the early 1800s, civilian and military officials in western Louisiana attempted to sow doubt regarding New Spain's rumored openness to foreign runaways. However, by the eve of the US Civil War, Mexico's reputation as a beacon of freedom among slaves and abolitionists could no longer be concealed, as Mexico's criticism of slavery grew increasingly outspoken. Thus, after the Texas Revolution, influential slaveholders, journalists, writers and chroniclers committed to the defense of the "peculiar institution" developed proslavery narratives with the hope – conscious or otherwise – of stemming the flow of self-liberated blacks to Mexico and of reassuring slaveholders who were contemplating settlement in the Southwestern frontier. These counter-narratives usually depicted the slavery of the US South as benevolent, while liberty across the border was presented as a mere illusion.[53] Guides for prospective settlers in frontier Texas, for instance, frequently introduced frontier slavery as idyllic, such as in A.B. Lawrence's *Emigrant Guide to the New Republic* (1840). Newspapers denounced Mexican peonage as a labor regime far more destructive than the supposedly patriarchal southern slavery, while self-emancipated slaves in Mexico were described as being trapped in "the most squalid wretchedness, poverty and starvation", as argued by the Clarksville's *Standard*.[54] The *Telegraph and Texas Register*, for instance,

[49] *The Washington American*, 22 Nov. 1855. The concept of "geopolitical literacy" is borrowed from: Phillip Troutman, "Grapevine in the Slave Market: African American Geopolitical Literacy and the 1841 *Creole* Revolt", in Walter Johnson (ed.), *The Chattel Principle: Internal Slave Trades in the Americas* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 203-233.
[50] Kelley, *Los Brazos de Dios*, 100. See ch.2 on the Colorado rebellion of 1856.
[51] *Galveston Weekly News*, 21 Aug. 1860.
[52] Consult for instance: *De Bow's Review, Agricultural, Commercial, Industrial Progress and Resources,* v.25 (Jul.-Dec. 1858), 624, "Acquisition of Mexico – Filibustering".
[53] James D. Nichols, "The Limits of Liberty: African Americans, Indians, and Peons in the Texas-Mexico Borderlands, 1820-1860", PhD Diss. (State University of New York at Stony Brook, 2012), 71. "Proslavery writers pointed to the allegedly sharp contrast between the destitution of the hacienda system and the benignity of Southern slavery".
[54] A.B. Lawrence, *Texas in 1840: or the Emigrant's Guide to the New Republic, being the result of Observations, Inquiry and Travel in that Beautiful Country* (New York: W.W. Allen, 1840), 54; *The Standard*, 21 Oct. 1854. Lawrence's guide fits into what historian Graham Davis has termed

published in January 1837 commentaries on the "relative evils of negro and white slavery", which asserted that in Mexico, "half of the population are in a state of slavery intolerable compared with that of most of the southern negroes". Many fugitives "would be glad to get back to their old homes", argued another editor.[55] In 1858, a press correspondent in Laredo reported how a man named Bartlett allegedly met in Nuevo Laredo a "little girl belonging to him", who "came up to him crying, saying that she wanted to go home and wanted something to eat", being "nearly starved".[56] Southwestern newspapers published stories of slaves who allegedly returned voluntarily to their masters, thus preferring slavery in Texas to freedom in Mexico. Willis, a former slave refugee, was said to have deemed "slavery in Texas far preferable to peonage in Mexico".[57] However, the vast majority of former runaways did not choose to return voluntarily but were rather abducted in Mexican territory. Therefore, such "testimonies", presenting enslaved people as relieved and joyful to return to bondage, should not be taken at face value. Instead, they should be understood as part of a larger concern among slavery's supporters about Mexico's effect on slave resistance. These accounts give an idea of just how effective an idealized conception of Mexico as a land of freedom had become in inspiring escape attempts, and how this in turn prompted proponents of slavery to develop counter-discourses that twisted the very meanings of the words freedom and slavery. Nevertheless, ideals and representations alone can hardly account for why slaves increasingly fled across the Mexican border. A closer look at the social experiences of bondspeople *within* the US Southwest's regime of slavery is therefore necessary.

The issue of assessing exactly *why* a slave would attempt to escape from his or her enslaver always remains fairly slippery for scholars of North American slavery. In fact, being held in slavery was an experience traumatic enough in itself to induce any bondsperson to abscond. Nonetheless, as Eric Foner has argued, for most self-

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"exercises in promotion" of Texas to a public of potential new recruits. These presented the western frontier as an Arcadian and racial utopia, in which the myths of abundant land and providential slavery worked in tandem. Graham Davis, *Land! Irish Pioneers in Mexican and Revolutionary Texas* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2002), 14. Additionally, diaries of military officers, soldiers and militiamen who fought in Mexico often featured narratives that reversed the liberal imaginary regarding slavery and freedom in the US-Mexican borderlands. See for instance: Thomas J. Green, *Journal of the Texian Expedition against Mier* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1845), 427-429; George C. Furber, *The twelve months volunteer, or, Journal of a private, in the Tennessee regiment of cavalry, in the campaign, in Mexico, 1846-7* (Cincinnati: J.A. & U.P. James, 1849), 209. In a similar vein, for travellers: Ashbel K. Shepard, *The land of the Aztecs, or two years in Mexico* (Albany, NY: Weed, Parsons & Co., 1859), 72; Ashbel K. Shepard, *Papers on Spanish America* (Albany, NY: Munsell, 1868), 45.

[55] *Telegraph and Texas Register*, 3 Jan. 1837; *Fayetteville Observer*, 5 March 1857. Actual (as opposed to represented) settlement experiences for fugitive slaves in Mexico will be analyzed in ch.3-4.

[56] *Nueces Valley Weekly*, 13 Feb. 1858.

[57] *The Northern Standard*, 25 Dec. 1852. Traveller Carlo Barinetti also argued that during the Texas Revolution, "General Filisola told [him] that some negroes from Texas, who he had taken prisoners, requested, as soon as the campaign was over, to go back to their owners": Carlo Barinetti, *A Voyage to Mexico and Havanna, including some General Observations on the United States* (New York: C. Vinton, 1841), 126.

emancipated slaves, "even if the desire for freedom was the underlying motive, the decision to escape usually arose from an immediate grievance".[58] In particular, scholars have emphasized that cruelty, concerns over the maintenance of family ties, poor material and sanitary conditions, scarcity of food, precarious housing, as well as multiple forms of violence, deprivation and broken promises, all pushed slaves to abscond from their enslavers in North America. In the specific context of the borderlands, which was defined by a clash between the Second Slavery and emerging free-soil policies, however, much remains to be written about how exactly such frustrations, humiliations and violence prompted desertion to northeastern Mexico between 1803 and 1861.[59] The following sections touch upon the particular motives and personal experiences that underlay slave flight to Mexico.

Relatives and loved ones

Uprooted Fugitives

The historiography on fugitive slaves in North America has thoroughly addressed the role played by the maintenance and the (re)formation of family ties among enslaved people in fostering escape attempts in the decades leading up to the US Civil War.[60] Interestingly, in the US-Mexico borderlands, the *absence* of family ties also spurred bids for self-emancipation across the border. Throughout the US South, many individuals who had been forcibly transported to the receiving societies of the interstate slave trade, through a process which Ira Berlin has termed a "second middle passage", were separated from their relatives in the Lower or Upper South, the Caribbean or even Africa, with reunion being virtually impossible.[61] In Texas, the disproportionate importance of the domestic slave trade after the Texas Revolution

[58] Eric Foner, *Gateway to Freedom: the Hidden History of the Underground Railroad* (New York: W.W.Norton and Company, 2015), 197.

[59] John Hope Franklin and Loren Schweninger, *Runaway Slaves: Rebels on the Plantation* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 19; Campbell, *An Empire for Slavery*, 134-143; Jonathan D. Martin, *Divided Mastery: Slave Hiring in the American South* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), 152; Gwendolyn Midlo Hall, *Africans in Colonial Louisiana, the development of Afro-Creole Culture in the Eighteenth Century* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1992), 142; Torget, *Seeds of Empire*, 1-2. Child mortality provides an indication of poor sanitary condition. For instance, the fugitive George from Peach Point Plantation lost his first daughter Valentine (born in January 1851) in 1852. UT(A), Briscoe, James F. and Stephen S. Perry Papers, Box 2J43.

[60] Franklin and Schweninger, *Runaway Slaves,* 49-74; Damian A. Pargas, *The Quarters and the Field, Slave Families in the Non-Cotton South*, (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2010); Damian A. Pargas, *Slavery and Forced Migration in the Antebellum South* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014); Campbell, *An Empire for Slavery*, 163-164; Sylviane Diouf, *Slavery's Exiles: the Story of the American Maroons* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2014), 77-78; Midlo Hall, *Africans in Colonial Louisiana*, 218-219, Harriet C. Frazier, *Runaway and Freed Missouri Slaves and Those who Helped Them, 1763-1865* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2004), 100.

[61] Ira Berlin, *Generations of Captivity: a History of African-American Slaves* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 161. For a comprehensive discussion of slave family formation in the Brazos region: Kelley, *Los Brazos de Dios*, 72-82.

accounted for the presence of so many uprooted fugitives in the borderlands. According to Michael Tadman, between 1840 and 1859, the net balance of enslaved people imported to Texas through the interstate slave trade reached 127.812.[62] A painful legacy of the interstate slave trade and the south- and westward migrations of American planters, "information wanted ads" published in the Reconstruction press shed light on countless formerly enslaved African Americans, who had been held in bondage in the US Southwest, and who were now looking for relatives and acquaintances scattered throughout the Old South.[63] By that time, others had already left for Mexico. Indeed, many uprooted bondspeople who had been separated from their relatives and who were unable to recreate family ties in the US Southwest ran away to Mexico. Judging the prospect of reunion with loved ones to be unrealistic, they adapted their strategy for self-emancipation. By absconding across the Mexican border to achieve freedom, escaped slaves knew that they were leaving behind almost any hope of reunion with relatives. Remarkably, the lack of reference to runaways harbored by relatives in the borderlands speaks volumes about the uprooted character of many self-liberated slaves in Mexico. Among them, previously arrested fugitive slaves throughout the US South, such as the famous self-liberated Nelson Hackett from Arkansas, were frequently sold into the new borderlands of slavery.[64] Consequently, many escape attempts to the Mexican border represented the culmination of a *carrier* (in Erving Goffman's sense), in which rootlessness, shattered family life and fugitive antecedents came together.[65]

Particularly illuminating are the experiences of South Carolina-born Martin and Juan Pedro (as written in Mexican sources), two men who fled in 1819 from the borderlands of Louisiana to San Antonio. During the 1810s, the Carolinas had become significant suppliers of the domestic slave trade. Both Martin and Juan Pedro were young men, the class of slaves preferentially traded to the Lower South.[66] Martin, a twenty-seven-year-old blacksmith, was raised on the plantation of a certain Jesse Koonthree, who inflicted two scars on his face in retaliation for a first escape attempt ("to the English") when Martin was a young slave. Martin was then sold to Koonthree's

[62] As a comparison, this figure represents more than the net balance of enslaved people transported to Louisiana between 1800 and 1859 (124.001). Michael Tadman, *Speculators and Slaves: Masters, Traders, and Slaves in the Old South* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), 12. Personal communication, Sean M. Kelley, 5 February 2019.

[63] Last Seen: Finding Family After Slavery (accessible through informationwanted.org); Heather A. Williams, *Help me to Find my People: the African American Search for Family Lost in Slavery* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 139-168.

[64] Karolyn Smardz Frost, Veta Smith Tucker, *A Fluid Frontier: Slavery, Resistance and the Underground Railroad in the Detroit River Borderland* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press 2016), 71-72.

[65] Erving Goffman, *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity* (New York, London, Toronto, Sydney, Tokyo and Singapore: Simon & Schuster Inc., Touchstone Edition, 1986 [1963]).

[66] Andrew J. Torget, "Cotton Empire: Slavery and the Texas Borderlands, 1820-1837", PhD Diss. (Charlottesville: University of Virginia, 2009), 47-48; Berlin, *Generations of Captivity*, 161; Sean M. Kelley, "Blackbirders and Bozales: African-born Slaves on the Lower Brazos River of Texas in the Nineteenth Century", *Civil War History*, v.54, n°4 (Dec. 2008), 408; Kelley, *Los Brazos de Dios*, 35-38.

nephew, before he was removed to Louisiana, in order to work as a slave for planter James Kirkham. When questioned in Monterrey (Nuevo León) in April 1820 by captain Francisco Bruno Barrera, Martin stressed the "very bad treatment" he had received from Kirkham as the motive for which he had "passed the line to request his protection in the domains of Spain". Martin's flight was thus embedded in long experience of mistreatment and forced displacement from South Carolina to Louisiana. Isolation and despair were the outcome. When asked by Barrera whether he was aware of "the insult and damage" he had done to Kirkham by escaping, Martin replied that he had suffered a much deeper loss after he was separated from his relatives, who had remained in the possession of Koonthree. In Louisiana, Martin did not reconstruct the family ties he had lost in the turmoil of the interstate slave trade (while the Mississippi Delta was booming as a receiving area during the 1810s), if he ever tried at all. He neither married nor had children. His testimony to Spanish frontier officials provides a glimpse of a past strained by separation, and by physical and psychological violence. It illustrates how the lack of family ties in receiving societies prompted many slaves to flee. Like his fellow runaway Martin, Juan Pedro was also a particularly alienated man, whose family ties and sense of geographical stability had been destroyed by forced migration to Louisiana. Unlike Martin, Juan Pedro had married an enslaved woman from a neighboring plantation in Kentucky in 1814, although she died soon after their union. Juan Pedro was later sent by his deceased master's widow to the vibrant slave market of Natchez, in Mississippi. Simon Mares, a planter from Opelousas in western Louisiana, bought him from the slave pen. Some hundreds of miles away from home, Juan Pedro chose to abscond across the Sabine River.[67]

"To Save his Family from Slavery"

Black bondspeople uprooted and scattered by the interstate slave trade were not the only enslaved African Americans to populate the new frontiers of the Second Slavery. Slaveholders migrating from the Upper to the Lower South frequently brought their entire enslaved workforce with them, while many bondspeople quickly recreated family ties anew far from home. As in the US South in general, slaves in the borderlands sought to preserve such bonds. In this context, anticipation of forced separation represented a significant motive for flight to Mexico, as did actual removals,

[67] UT(A), Briscoe, Charles Ramsdell Collection, Box 2Q238, "Negro Slaves in Spanish America, 1563-1820", "Fugitive slaves from the United States, captured in Texas by the expedition against Long. Trial at Monterrey, 1820"; RBBC, NA, v.10, 212-3 (23 Dec. 1820); RBBC, NA, v.16, 136 (10 Dec. 1819); RBBC, NA, v.17, 323 (1 Dec. 1819); Torget, *Seeds of Empire,* 47; Cornell, "Citizens of nowhere", 356; Tadman, *Speculators and Slaves,* 12. Journalists sometimes expressed surprise at escape attempts to Mexico by such slaves. In 1860, when two slaves "recently brought" from South Carolina to Texas were arrested near Rio Grande City, the editor of *The Ranchero* deemed it "strange that they should attempt to make their way to Mexico, being entirely ignorant of the geography of the country" (*The Ranchero*, 17 March 1860). See ch.2 on geography.

as Damian Pargas has argued for the US South more generally. In sum, family ties also inspired escape attempts to the Mexican border in a positive sense.[68]

Although they were relatively unusual in the US-Mexican region, instances of entire families escaping in a southward direction drew the attention of contemporaries. David Thomas, a slave from Texas, introduced himself to the municipality of Allende (Coahuila) in April 1849, along with his daughter and three nephews, intending "to save his family from slavery". Similarly, an enslaved couple and their two children fled twice from the surroundings of Corpus Christi during the summer of 1861, heading to the Rio Grande delta along the coast of the Gulf of Mexico. The three Gordon brothers (Albert, Isaac and Henry), who absconded together from slavery in Texas, provide another example of a family escape. The eldest, Albert, described as a "strong, healthy man" by the *Western Texan*, initially escaped alone to the Mexican borderlands around 1852. Arrested in San Antonio, Albert absconded from the upper part of the county jail with other prisoners, after they "made a hole in the wall" and "let themselves down by the aid of blankets". Once in Mexico, he joined the *mascogos* in Coahuila. Apparently pleased with his new life across the border, he decided after two years to come back to Texas in order to encourage Isaac and Henry to join him. Albert was arrested again, but managed to abscond once more, and the brothers successfully sought refuge among the Black Seminoles.[69]

The desire to secure matrimonial bonds against separation often prompted slaves to flee to Mexico's Northeast, especially as laws in the US South traditionally offered no solid legal support for unions among bondspeople.[70] During the first decade of the century, numerous slave refugees absconding to New Spain from the US South sought the validation of their marriage ties. "*Hacer vida maridable*" (to live a matrimonial life) under Catholic benediction – implying the will to convert, if necessary – constituted a frequent motive as to why slave refugees had fled across the Sabine River. In the early nineteenth century, the asylum from slavery available in New Spain for bondspeople stemmed from the policy of granting religious sanctuary to foreign Catholics from Protestant territories. Fugitives were well aware of this connection and adapted their rhetoric, as Matthew Restall has argued in relation to enslaved people fleeing from the mahogany logging camps of British Honduras ("*Negros de Walix*") to Yucatán's settlements of Bacalar, Campeche and Mérida before

[68] Damian A. Pargas, "The Gathering Storm: Slave Responses to the Threat of Interregional Migration in the Early Nineteenth Century", *Journal of Early American History* 2/3 (2012), 286-315.
[69] AGEC, FSXIX, c.2 f.8 e.3, 23 April 1849; *The Ranchero*, 8 June 1861 and 6 July 1861; *The Western Texan*, 15 April 1852; *The Texas Monument*, 21 April 1852; *The Independent Press*, 13 Oct. 1854; Kenneth W. Porter, *The Black Seminoles: History of a Freedom-Seeking People* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1996), 162. As with the Gordon brothers, some runaways who had experienced non-slavery under Mexican law came back to the US South (voluntarily or not) and assisted other slaves in fleeing across the Rio Grande.
[70] Campbell, *An Empire for Slavery*, 154.

the British Abolition Act of 1833.[71] The stated motive of preserving matrimonial bonds by formalizing marriage under Catholic rule should not be interpreted as merely instrumental, however. Jean-Louis ("Juan Luis") and Marguerite ("Margarita"), two slaves from Louisiana who had spent fifteen years as *de facto* wife and husband before their master decided to sell Marguerite, underlined their desire to formalize their union under Catholic rule.[72] A couple that arrived a year later in Nacogdoches from Opelousas justified their request for freedom in a similar way, although with the noticeable difference that only the woman declared herself Catholic.[73]

Past experience of forced removals, combined with the fear that upcoming sales might result in the definitive separation of one's family, also motivated many runaways to abscond across the Mexican border. In January 1819, two young couples, Hope and Nancy, along with George and Rachel, escaped from Bayou Boeuf (Louisiana), along with a fifth refugee, Jack, from the town of Alexandria, on the Red River. The fugitives had "successively belonged to Mr. Davenport of Nachitoches, Mr. David Pannill, Mr. Byoym and Judge Johnson, from which they were last purchased", and realistically anticipated another removal. Pregnancy represented an important trigger for escape. The wish to spare children the infamous label of "slave" for the rest of their lives, to raise them in a bondage-free environment in which racial equality and social mobility were (at least theoretically) attainable and to circumvent the threat of having children abruptly taken away by traders or heirs, prompted couples and single women to abscond to the Mexican borderlands. Sarah – a pregnant slave – fled with three other enslaved persons to the Rio Grande in 1839. Likewise, two refugees from Missouri, "a man with long grey hair and beard, about sixty years old" and his pregnant companion (unsuccessfully) attempted to reach Mexico overland through Texas during the winter of 1855-1856.[74]

Escape attempts were also undertaken with the aim of preserving unions between slaves and free people that had been forged in the US Southwest. Both in Mexico's Northeast and the US Southwest's periphery, inhabitants of the frontier tended to subvert existing racial norms emanating from core territories. In Texas, unions across legal and racial lines originated in the earliest days of Spanish colonization, out of both demographic realism and a lesser disciplinary pressure from the state. This legacy of relative racial flexibility, inherited from the colonial period, persisted well into the nineteenth century. In many cotton, sugarcane and tobacco plantations across the US South – especially in post-1836 Texas – proximity between Mexican peons and enslaved African Americans (both marginal social groups) favored

[71] Matthew Restall, "Crossing to Safety? Frontier Flight in Eighteenth-Century Belize and Yucatán", *Hispanic American Historical Review*, 94/3 (2014), 381-419.
[72] UT(A), Briscoe, BA, reel 37 frame 503 (22 Jan. 1808). Jane Landers similarly stressed the importance of conversion to Catholicism in gaining asylum as a foreign slave refugee in colonial Florida. Jane Landers, *Black Society in Spanish Florida* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1999), 24.
[73] UT(A), Briscoe, BA, reel 38 frame 71 (1 May 1808); Blyth, "Fugitives from servitude", 10.
[74] *Louisiana Herald*, 25 March 1819; *Telegraph and Texas Register*, 31 July 1839; *The Galveston News Tri-Weekly*, 20 March 1856.

the development of casual and formal interracial relationships. During the summer of 1842, a Mexican peon fled from Texana with "a negro girl belonging to a citizen of that place, and with whom he had been living as a wife". In subsequent years, the image of Mexican laborers absconding with enslaved women became a cliché of the Southwestern press, usually through derogatory narratives meant to criminalize both peons and slaves. This Black-Mexican connection was complemented by other amorous relationships between free and enslaved people that also generated attempts to escape to Mexico's free soil. The environment of the plantation, in particular, created daily contacts between white overseers or laborers and enslaved workers, giving rise to relationships that transgressed racial divides. For example, the young Thomas Short from Fayette County recalled – in a confession pronounced in the summer of 1849 – that "some time this last season a Mr. Carrington, overseer for Mr. Hill, carried off a woman slave and two children to Mexico", the children being Carrington's.[75]

Apart from preserving family bonds, slave flight to Mexico also aimed at re-creating lost ties with relatives in a new setting, as municipal archives demonstrate. In January 1808, Trinidad de Salcedo's military commander Pedro López Prieto reported the arrival of a slave named "Rechar" (Richard), his wife and three of their children from Louisiana. Richard's whole family (including seven children) had been brought to and scattered throughout the Territory of Orleans, embodying the symbiosis between the colonization of the Mississippi valley and the domestic slave trade. Himself sold to a planter from Opelousas, Richard declared that defending his family's unity had prompted his escape, along with his knowledge that Spanish laws on slavery compared favorably to the "harshness of American laws". Richard did not abscond alone, but instead endeavored to rescue his wife and all of their children from slavery (succeeding only in three cases) before heading to the Sabine River. Likewise, in 1825, a fifty-year-old slave with a "grey beard and grey head" named Paul escaped with some other bondspeople from the steamboat Florence, "while lying to in the north side of Red River, four miles above Bayou Rouge in the Parish of Avoyelles" (Louisiana). His master, from Alexandria (Louisiana), reported that Paul had a wife in Mexican Texas, and that this was the reason why he was attempting to cross the Sabine River. Given that Euro-Americans settling in northeastern Mexico after 1821 often carried their entire enslaved workforce away from the US South, Paul's attempt to reunite his separated, enslaved relatives by fleeing across the border was not unique.[76]

As a result, most slaveholders conceived of family ties as the main device by which to stabilize their enslaved workforce. Indeed, this accounts for the public declarations by some buyers at slave auctions that they would prefer to avoid separating relatives in order to prevent flight.[77] Olmsted, in his *Journey in the Back*

[75] *The Red-Lander*, 7 July 1842; *Texas State Gazette*, 25 Aug. 1849.
[76] UT(A), Briscoe, BA, reel 37, frame 495 (21 Jan. 1808); *The Ariel*, 7 Nov. 1825.
[77] Gilbert C. Din, *Spaniards, Planters and Slaves: the Spanish Regulation of Slavery in Louisiana, 1763-1803* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1999), 22; Douglas Richmond, "Africa's

Country, reminisced that while journeying through the lower Mississippi region, a local planter ("a Mr. S., from beyond Natchez") questioned him about whether or not "slave property" was secure in western Texas. As a connoisseur of the southwestern borderlands, Olmsted replied negatively. "Mr. S" then expressed his faith in the family unit as the "only way" to keep slaves from fleeing. "Negroes have such attachments", he felt. Yet the (re)formation and maintenance of family units among slaves did not always deter escape attempts to the Mexican borderlands, and numerous fugitives left relatives behind, with little to no hope of reunion. For instance, a slave from Louisiana named "Marcos" (in Spanish colonial sources) renounced his wife and children when he absconded to New Spain in 1808. Several decades later, George left his wife Betsy and their children Ellen, Clarissa, Clara and George W., aged between three to seven years old, when he escaped from Peach Point plantation in Brazoria.[78] As these examples suggest, the wish to maintain family units sometimes clashed with more compelling factors for flight.

"Por maltrato": the Second Slavery's Violence and Serial Runaways

Apart from preserving or reconstituting family units, finding protection from the physical and psychological violence of slavery motivated black freedom-seekers in the Mexican borderlands.[79] The description of Charles, a fugitive from Austin in 1854, speaks volumes regarding the destructive effects of a life spent in slavery. His enslaver underlined that Charles was often "subject to attacks of convulsion". He warned readers "to be on their guard in approaching him" while Charles was in this condition, since he was then "unmanageable and dangerous".[80] The damage inflicted on Charles by slavery was by no means exceptional: stammering, stuttering and other (small or serious) mental disorders were frequent among bondspeople in the US-Mexico borderlands. Many stemmed from physical abuse – an omnipresent and dreadful prospect for slaves across southwestern plantations – as evidenced by the multiple wounds, injuries and deformities (mainly caused by whippings, beatings, branding, cropping practices and burn marks) that many slave refugees bore on their bodies. Intentional violence by masters, overseers or third parties complemented industrial accidents generated by plantation labor – for instance amongst so-called receivers in sugar mills – in a general context of limited medical care against diseases and injuries. An increasingly brutal regime of slavery in the US southwestern borderlands led many bondspeople to abscond across the Mexican border. Slaves running away to Mexico from violent masters sought to preserve their physical integrity and to gain a sense of

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Initial Encounter with Texas: the Significance of Afro-Tejanos in Colonial Texas, 1528-1821", *Bulletin of Latin American Research*, 26:2 (2007), 215-217.

[78] UT(A), Briscoe, BA, reel 37, frame 495 (21 Jan. 1808); Frederick Law Olmsted, *A Journey in the Back Country in the Winter of 1853-4* (New York: Mason Brothers, 1860), 22; UT(A), Briscoe, James F. and Stephen S. Perry Papers, Box 2J43.

[79] On violence and escape attempts: Diouf, *Slavery's Exiles*, 84; Pargas, "The Gathering Storm", 294-295.

[80] UT(A), Briscoe, Texas Slave Laws, Box 2J186.

self-respect and personal worth, dignifying them as human beings rather than commodities at the mercy of slaveholders.

As Lance Blyth has argued, fugitive slaves from territorial Louisiana who sought refuge in New Spain usually emphasized that mistreatment had motivated them to abscond to Spanish land.[81] In December 1807, Nemesio Salcedo, the commandant general of the *Provincias Internas de Oriente* (Eastern Internal Provinces), ordered captains Pedro López Prieto and Francisco Viana – respectively at Trinidad de Salcedo and Nacogdoches – to conduct a thorough inquiry into the slave refugees, mostly francophone Creoles, residing in both settlements. Their report ("*Relación general de los negros esclavos fugitivos*") underscored that most escapes had originated in experiences of abuse ("*maltrato*") in Louisiana. Juan Luis and Margarita had fled in August 1807 from the brutality of their deceased master's widow. Narciso had absconded from planter François Rouquier's frequent beatings as well as from extreme hunger. Once, after having asked in vain for food, Rouquier's son-in-law had beaten him so harshly that Narciso saw no other choice than "to look for protection" in Texas. The body of Ambrosio, from Opelousas, likewise bore abundant scars running from his back to his knees, the result of frequent punishments for failing to pick a hundred pounds of cotton per day. Luis had fled from Natchitoches following his wife's death during a barbaric whipping. Beaten "with much tyranny" as well, and fearing for his own life, he executed an escape that he had already been contemplating for months.[82]

Far from decreasing over time, the violence and intrinsic harshness of frontier slavery continued well into the nineteenth century, contributing to the Southwest's reputation among enslaved people as a land of cruelty.[83] Some slaveholders notorious for their violence, such as Jared Kirby, Pleasant D. McNeel and Jesse Burditt in Texas, frequently experienced escape attempts to Mexico by enslaved people from their

[81] Blyth, "Fugitives from servitude", 9-10.

[82] BA, reel 37, frames 465 (14 Jan. 1808), 495 (21 Jan. 1808), 503 (22 Jan. 1808) and 643 (9 Feb. 1808). The lack of concern among territorial Louisiana's authorities regarding mistreatment of slaves further motivated bondspeople to abscond. A slave named Luis, for instance, explained that he had absconded due to the extremely harsh punishments he received from his master in Natchitoches and the lack of concern displayed by the local Civil Judge (when Luis approached him), who argued that the treatment of slaves remained a merely domestic issue. Mentions of abuses committed against slaves were common. Pierre-Louis Berquin-Duvallon, a planter from Saint-Domingue, for instance, argued that French Creoles in Louisiana were "vulgarly familiar with their equals, insolent towards their inferiors, cruel to their slaves, and inhospitable to strangers". Pierre-Louis Berquin-Duvallon (tr. John Davis), *Travels in Louisiana and the Floridas, in the Year 1802, giving a Correct Picture of those Countries* (New York: Riley and Co., 1806), 62.

[83] The harshness of frontier life for slaves during the early years of Mexican Texas can be grasped through the description of Jared Groce's enslaved workforce by official Víctor Blanco: SRE, LE 1075, "Blanco to López, 9 Dec. 1822" ("Muchos que han traído sus negros no han podido mantenerlos con la caza, y uno que trajo ciento ha gastado mucho en pagar cazadores, y no siendo suficiente la cíbola y el venado han comido caballos, y otros se han ido estrechados del hambre").

estates.[84] Arrested fugitive slaves often bore harrowing proofs of the humiliations and physical barbarities inflicted upon their persons, something which contradicts the assertion that high prices on the slave market implied better treatment for slaves in the southwestern frontier.[85] A slave baker named David was arrested in 1840 in Liberty County (Texas) while heading to Mexico with "three scars on his breast, and many on his back". William Woodward, a planter from Eastern Mississippi, had hired him out to William Brandon, a colonist residing a few miles east of Nacogdoches, who badly mistreated him. Instead of going back to Mississippi, David decided to flee to the Mexican border. When jailed in Texas in April 1853, Grant, a twenty-five-year-old fugitive slave from Holly Springs (Mississippi), had a body that had been mutilated with "a scar over his right eye, another on his right cheek, and another one on the back of his neck".[86] Drawn for identification purposes, the detailed descriptions of scarred and injured bodies by masters provided a glimpse into their harsh dominion and indirectly acknowledged that abuses and brutality had triggered escape attempts.[87] Corporal marks as scars and swellings left by the whip were occasionally mentioned. A forty-eight-year-old blacksmith slave (named alternatively as Tom or Martin), who had absconded from Attakapas (Louisiana) in March 1854, was described as "marked with the whip" and had "marks of cupping on both temples and back of neck". During the fall of 1858, Charlie escaped from the Stevenson plantation (North Texas) with "a scar about one and a half inches long, immediately under one eye, extending from the nose". [88] The not-so-seldom mention of crooked and missing body parts reveals the extreme violence of the Second Slavery in the region.[89] In 1859, Brad escaped from Clarksville (Texas) with "one of his thumbs cut close to the hand", while a young slave fled from Seguin during the same winter with his right arm "cut off just below the elbow". Such mutilations represented grim reminders of the violent environment created by plantation society in the new frontiers of the Second Slavery. They were

[84] To take one example, Pleasant D. McNeel, the man who had shot dead the refuge-seeker Jim who fled seeking asylum under Mexican rule during the 1820s, faced numerous escape attempts at different stages of his life as slaveholder. Kelley, "Mexico in his Head", 712; Lack, *Texas Revolutionary Experience*, 246; *The Western Texan,* 6 March 1851; *The San Antonio Ledger*, 11 Sep. 1851. The occasional repetition in primary sources of the names of certain enslavers affected by slave flight to Mexico reflects the particular harshness of some plantations in the US Southwest, and suggests that a first absconder could inspire other flights from the same estate.

[85] The ungrounded assertion that high prices for enslaved people constituted an incentive for better care by their owners is argued for instance in: Earl Wesley Fornell, "The Abduction of Free Negroes and Slaves in Texas", *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, v.60, n°3 (Jan. 1957), 379.

[86] *The Morning Star*, 15 Aug. 1840; *Texas State Gazette*, 21 May 1853.

[87] Foner, *Gateway to Freedom*, 23.

[88] UT(A), Briscoe, Texas Slave Laws, Box 2J186; *Dallas Herald*, 15 Sep. 1858.

[89] Though mutilation usually originated from white people or was purely accidental, self-mutilation also very occasionally represented a "strategy" by slaves to diminish their value as "property" on the market. Besides mistreatment, some physical deformities were also legacies of diseases, such as the so-called Guinea worm. James Doswell from Mississippi, for instance, reported in 1836 the flight of Solomon, a thirty-eight-year-old "dark brown" slave, who had "his toes turn in somewhat pigeon toe" (RBBC, NA, v.15, 150).

tangible hints as to why so many bondspeople seemed willing to risk their life by fleeing to the border.[90]

Plantation labor in itself greatly contributed to the special harshness of the Southwest's regime of slavery. Seasons of intensive work gave rise to an exceptionally high number of escape attempts to Mexico, as contemporaries recognized (table 2).[91] During the fall of 1854, for instance, the Opelousas *Courier*'s editor advised slaveholders to keep an eye on their slaves, as "we approach the harvest works [for sugarcane] and everyone knows that this is the moment which the Negroes generally choose to run away".[92] Flight to Mexico from cotton-producing plantations – the main crop in the US Southwestern borderlands – noticeably increased both before and during the fall harvest, from July to October. As with the grinding season for sugar, this surge represented a reaction to the hardships involved in the picking season for cotton, which required an extensive and mostly unskilled workforce, as Sean M. Kelley has noted. Cotton harvests constituted an especially painful task for enslaved people. The repetitiveness of the work often led to severe back pain, while the thorny plants made workers' hands bleed. The stifling, warm and humid late-summer climate further added to the difficulty of the work. Moreover, because harvest times involved the imposition of very strict standards of productivity, slaves were subjected to greater scrutiny, and punishments for failing to produce the expected daily amount of bales were routine. As such, many slaves from cotton plantations fled during the summer, as they anticipated the difficulties related to the upcoming picking season and took advantage of the relatively relaxed period between planting and harvest.[93]

Period of the year	Jan-Feb.	Mar.-Apr.	May-Jun.	Jul.-Aug.	Sep.-Oct.	Nov.-Dec.
Occurrence percentage	14,5%	10,5%	16,1%	24,2%	24,2%	10,5%

Table 2: Periodicity of escape attempts to Mexico (1840-1859)[94]

Many bondspeople in the borderlands made repeated attempts to abscond to Mexico, convinced that fleeing to the border was the only way to achieve self-emancipation. Frederick Law Olmsted, for instance, heard about a particularly determined runaway "who had been three times brought from beyond the Rio Grande" while visiting Piedras Negras (Coahuila). Likewise, Frank, a slave from Montgomery

[90] *The Standard Gazette*, 22 Jan. 1859 and 3 March 1860; *State Gazette,* 2 April 1859; *San Antonio Texan*, 6 Jan. 1859.
[91] On the periodicity of slave flight: Franklin and Schweninger, *Runaway Slaves*, 231; Walter Johnson, *River of Dark Dreams: Slavery and Empire in the Cotton Kingdom* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2013), 219-220.
[92] *Le Courrier des Opelousas (The Opelousas Courier),* 4 Nov. 1854 ("nous approchons des travaux de la roulaison et chacun sait que c'est le moment que les nègres choisissent généralement pour partir marrons").
[93] Kelley, *Los Brazos de Dios*, 106-120; Torget, *Seeds of Empire*, 83-84.
[94] On data: see table 1.

County (Texas) unsuccessfully absconded to Mexico in 1839 with three other bondspeople. Ten years later, Frank escaped south again, this time alone.[95] One night in January 1851, John fled from a plantation on the Colorado River to the Rio Grande. Aged twenty, John already had a solid fugitive record. He had escaped at least once to Nuevo Laredo from Lavaca, before being arrested. Yet his enslaver was firmly convinced that, far from being discouraged by this failure, John would capitalize on his experience and "endeavor to get to Mexico by the way of Quero, San Antonio and Laredo".[96]

Most "repeat offender" runaways in the US Southwest had originally and unsuccessfully attempted to flee from slavery within the US South or to the North before finally opting for Mexico. The story of Matthew Gaines (elected to the Texas State Senate in 1869) illustrates the relationship between slave flight to Mexico and previous (smaller-scale) escape attempts. Born a slave in 1840 near Pineville (Louisiana), Matthew grew up in Bernardo Martin Despallier's plantation, where English, French and Spanish were spoken. Gaines quickly became literate and escaped to Arkansas when aged ten, trying to avoid his imminent sale. Six months later, he headed to New Orleans, hoping that the manhunt aroused by his flight would now have come to an end. However, he was soon arrested in the Crescent City. Sold to a planter of Robertson County (Texas), he then fled to the Mexican border during the US Civil War, before being arrested by some Texas Rangers about 150 miles northwest of San Antonio. In Eastern Texas, Olmsted met a settler looking for "a mighty resolute nigger" that he had bought in Mississippi, despite having been informed that the man "was a great runaway". He had absconded from his previous enslaver at least three times, always to Illinois, yet his new Texan master was initially confident that he "could break him of running away by bringing him down to this new country". The "great runaway", though, adapted his strategy for self-emancipation. After three failed escape attempts to the North, he now headed for Mexico's Northeast. As Matthew Gaines, the "great runaway", now understood, freedom was more likely to be obtained by fleeing south than anywhere else. Thus, escaping to Mexico often represented the culmination of repeated attempts to seek refuge from slavery.[97] Remarkably, the numbers of serial runaways had significantly increased by the last decade of American slavery, giving a sense of the rising determination of many bondspeople to escape from the clutches of the Second Slavery. Sandy, a slave from Big Cypress Creek who "had lately run away and was retaken at Columbus", once again deserted during the fall of

[95] *Telegraph and Texas Register*, 31 July 1839; *Democratic Telegraph and Texas Register*, 1 March 1849; Frederick Law Olmsted, *A Journey through Texas: or a Saddle-Trip on the Southwestern Frontier* (New York: Dix. Edwards & Co., 1857), 323-329; *The Crayon*, v.3-4 (New York: W.J. Stillman & J. Durand, 1856).
[96] *The Western Texan*, 9 Oct. 1851.
[97] Ann Patton Malone, "Matt Gaines: Reconstruction Politician", in Alwyn Barr and Robert A. Calvert, *Black Leaders: Texans for Their Times* (Austin: Texas State Historical Association, 2007), 49-82; Frederick Law Olmsted, *The Cotton Kingdom: a Traveller's Observations on Cotton and Slavery in the American Slave States* (New York: Mason Brothers, 1861), v.2, 7. I agree here with Randolph Campbell's comments on serial runaways in Antebellum Texas: Campbell, *An Empire for Slavery*, 182.

1858 "to make his way to Mexico". In the meantime, Gin, a slave blacksmith, escaped from Galveston, but soon got "lost and nearly starved", eventually surrendering himself to a Dutchman near San Antonio. Looking for a reward, the settler commissioned another man to carry Gin to the city jail. He "returned stating that negro, horse and gun were all gone".[98]

"Más mal que lo corriente": Paternalism, (Broken) Compromises and Conflicts

Although violence was a predominant feature of slavery in the US-Mexico borderlands, masters often conceived their role in southern society and their relationship with their slaves through the discourse of paternalism.[99] As underlined by the existing literature, most slaveholders sought to project an image of themselves as the household's benevolent and intransigent *paterfamilias*. Paternalism as an emotional regime imposed certain amendments to the daily routine of slavery, since the "affection" and the "protection" provided by the enslaver were conceived as natural counterparts to a total subordination of the enslaved. "Care" from masters and absolute servility from bondspeople were thought to function in symbiosis. But paternalism also implied that, to some extent, slaveowners should reach compromises with their slaves, thus demonstrating their benevolence. Sean M. Kelley has argued that in Texas, such "negotiations" essentially revolved around community time, control over labor conditions and basic material wellbeing. Nonetheless, the endeavor to gain small concessions from their owners should not be interpreted as evidence of an acceptance of slavery on the part of slaves. Bondspeople appropriated and manipulated the language of paternalism used by their masters to their own benefit. Incidentally, the southwestern press denounced excessive paternalism as an expression of leniency and an incentive to resistance. When Brenham planter Thomas Erwin – known to be "a kind master" – and his wife were shot in bed by two of their slaves absconding to Mexico in 1860, the *Brenham Ranger* deemed the event "a lesson to those who permit undue privileges to slaves", further adding that "a strict discipline should be observed to preserve a proper subordination".[100] Yet, in Texas, the plantation system's relative proximity to Mexico inevitably altered master-slave relationships. While some enslavers intensified their violence, others sought to negotiate the terms of their enslaved people's servitude, hoping to thereby curtail their resistance.[101] Thus, slaves used the border as a bargaining chip. For instance, Anthony, an enslaved blacksmith

[98] *The Tri-Weekly Telegraph*, 13 Oct. 1858; *Galveston Weekly News*, 19 Oct. 1858; *The Texas Monument*, 29 Jan. 1859.
[99] Richard J. Follett, *The Sugar Masters: Planters and Slaves in Louisiana's Cane World, 1820-1860* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2005); Martin, *Divided Mastery*, 151; David J. Libby, *Slavery and Frontier Mississippi, 1720-1835* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2004), 80. The ideology of paternalism has been deeply analyzed by the historiography, from Eugene D. Genovese, *The World Slaveholders Made: Two Essays in Interpretation* (New York: Vintage, 1971) to Eugene D. Genovese, Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, *Fatal Self-Deception: Slaveholding Paternalism in the Old South* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011).
[100] *The True Issue*, 2 Aug. 1860.
[101] Kelley, *Los Brazos de Dios,* 79.

from Chappell Hill (Texas), fled during the autumn of 1861 across the Rio Grande after he had made "repeated threats to go to Mexico". Like Anthony, many bondspeople did not hesitate to abscond when their enslavers broke off "negotiations" in a way that violated the imagined ethos of paternalism.[102]

For instance, Juan Pedro, the aforementioned refugee from Louisiana, informed his interrogators that he "would never have thought of such a flight, if [his] master had given [him] the treatment that commonly is given to slaves, as [his] previous master had done". Like Juan Pedro, who fled because his master treated him "worse than normal" ("*más mal que lo corriente*"), many slaves considered customary rights and minimal standards of treatment to be indispensable.[103] The escape of Marcos illustrates how the failure to reach compromises between slaveholders and slaves led to desertion. Arriving in Eastern Texas in 1808, Marcos emphasized that "[his] master was very cruel with [him]", and that he "could not stand being chastised anymore". Marcos initially attempted to negotiate with his master, hoping that his situation would improve. He requested to be sold to a new owner – a customary right for enslaved people in Spanish America – and threatened to abscond otherwise. This request exemplifies the lasting impact on master-slave relations of Spanish rule in Louisiana, well after the Louisiana Purchase, at a time when earlier customary rights were being gradually revoked from bondspeople under US rule. The new "Black Code", elaborated by the territorial legislature in 1806, had erased the more liberal policies on slave treatment practiced by the Spanish Crown in its former colony – for instance, the right of *coartación* or manumission – as well as the protective dispositions of the *Real Cédula sobre Educación, Trato y Ocupaciones de los Esclavos* (1789). Instead of finding an acceptable "middle ground" for both parties, the enslaver tied Marcos up and whipped him so furiously that even the intervention of neighbors could not halt the punishment. Marcos concluded from this traumatic event that his owner was not disposed to concede anything in his favor. Absconding across the Sabine River was undoubtedly preferable to futile negotiations. Like Marcos, many bondspeople in the US Southwest sought to negotiate (so far as possible) the terms of their enslavement, and escaped to the Mexican borderlands as a last recourse, when masters seemed unwilling to respect or to reach such compromises with them. In short, the inability to carve out spaces of autonomy within slavery prompted enslaved people to flee to Mexican territory as an alternative.[104]

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[102] *San Antonio Herald*, 16 Nov. 1861. On "borderlands paternalism" in Texas: Kelley, *Los Brazos de Dios*, 120-121. On the relation between breaking settled arrangements between master and slaves and running away: Franklin and Schweninger, *Runaway Slaves,* 141.

[103] UT(A), Briscoe, Charles Ramsdell Collection, Box 2Q238, "Negro Slaves in Spanish America, 1563-1820", "Fugitive slaves from the United States, captured in Texas by the expedition against Long, trial at Monterrey, 1820", Box 2Q238. Original sentences in Spanish are as follow: "Preguntado: si no conoce la grave injuria que le ha hecho a su Amo con haversele fugado después de haver dado tanto precio por él responde: que si conoce le ha hecho mucho daño con haversele huido, y que nunca havría pensado en tal fuga, si su Amo le huviese dado el tratam.to que corrientem.te se les da a los Esclavos, y como se lo dava su anterior Amo" (spelling and syntaxes conserved as in the original).

[104] BA, reel 37, frame 495 (21 Jan. 1808). On enslaved people's treatment during the territorial period in Louisiana: Herschtal, "Slaves, Spaniards and Subversion in Early Louisiana", 292-301.

The increasingly hermetic nature of slavery in the southwestern borderlands did little to curb the numbers of self-emancipated slaves who streamed towards Mexico. In post-independence Texas, for instance, in light of the almost unattainable prospect of manumission (not least because parliamentary approval was required to emancipate bondspeople), slaves increasingly viewed flight as an immediate and more reliable solution. For slaves themselves, self-purchase was virtually impossible, since their value on the frontier often skyrocketed. For instance, in his personal correspondence, John Hamilton, a settler from Zavalla (Texas), stressed that in the early 1850s, "$500 would not buy a negro in this country" as "they sell from seven to eight hundred and sometimes more".[105] In antebellum Texas, legally resident free blacks were therefore scarce (a mere 397 in 1850 and 355 in 1860) – the outcome of social hostility combined with restrictive institutional provisions for their settlement – and the size of urban settlements remained limited when compared with elsewhere in the US South. Concealment among free blacks (a strategy commonly used by runaways in the US South) was therefore almost unthinkable for enslaved absconders in the US-Mexico borderlands. All these factors combined to increase the appeal of the Mexican beacon of freedom.[106]

To be sure, escape attempts were spurred by motivations, timings and strategies specific to black freedom-seekers themselves. However, they were also conditioned by conjunctural factors, incentives and opportunities. In particular, disruptions of daily routines and transitions in mastery represented moments at which slaves were more likely to abscond.[107] A master's death, for instance, often created inconsistency and confusion in the management and supervision of slaves, a golden opportunity for would-be fugitives. Such was the case when the small planter James Alston died in Bastrop County in November 1851. Alston still owed a very substantial debt (close to $3.000) to his brother Elijah Alston, a settler from northwest Arkansas, which he had mortgaged through three "negroes and other property". One of the deceased's executors, Charles Miller, declined to honor the debt, and a legal conflict ensued between him and Elijah Alston over the question of who actually owned the deceased bondspeople. During the following winter, two slaves belonging to James Alston's estate named Dick and Bill escaped, feeling empowered by this ambiguous situation. Dick absconded "east of the Trinity River", while Bill fled "to the Rio Grande". Slave-hunters were mobilized to pursue the runaways, but they returned

[105] LOC, John Hamilton and William Hamilton Correspondence, Box 1, 7 Jan. 1852. For Western Texas, see for instance: LOC, George Denison Papers, Box 1 "Denison to his sister Eliza, San Antonio, 21 April 1855" ("There are not many slaves here, and nigger women cost about $1000 apiece. I have not invested much property in them yet").
[106] See ch.2. United States of America, Bureau of the Census *Seventh Census of the United States* (Washington DC: National Archives and Records Administration, 1850); United States of America, Bureau of the Census *Eighth Census of the United States* (Washington DC: National Archives and Records Administration, 1860).
[107] Franklin and Schweninger, *Runaway Slaves*, 17; Walter Johnson, *Soul by Soul: Life Inside the Antebellum Slave Market* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 31; Pargas, "The Gathering Storm", 296.

empty-handed to Bastrop County.[108] Equally, uncertainties deriving from the prospect of an imminent sale and doubts about unknown new owners – apart from the inherently traumatic reminder of one's condition as a sub-human commodity – were met with deep anxiety among slaves.[109] The vast majority of bondspeople resented being sold, especially when the process was conducted in secret, as was often the case. For instance, Andrés, a refugee from slavery who arrived at San Antonio from Natchitoches in 1817, underscored that his master had "sold [him] without [his] knowledge" to an English planter, which had prompted him to flee to Spanish Texas.[110]

Alongside those anticipating sale and its implications, enslaved persons recently acquired by a new master were also particularly likely to abscond, especially when the transaction had significantly worsened their existences, in the form of separation from their relatives and conflicts with new masters, overseers or fellow slaves. Many enslaved African Americans, especially young enslaved people who had been forcibly transported to such new environments, escaped soon afterwards. Brought from Tennessee during the winter of 1851-1852, young Abraham twice attempted to abscond to Mexico over the following months from the town of Egypt on the Colorado River (he was arrested the first time in Seguin). Hammock, Henry and Oses, sold in March 1859 to a planter from Opelousas by some slave traders from New Orleans, escaped at night during their very first week in the service of their new enslaver, who had "some reason to believe that these negroes will try to cross Texas to reach Mexico". Cato – a deformed version of the Yoruba name Keta – a "carpenter by trade" who had previously resided in Houston and Mound Prairie, fled four months after being sold to a settler from Grimes County. Similarly, a twenty-five-year-old slave formerly from Goliad escaped from Columbus (Texas) in 1852, where he had recently been sold. His enslaver William Bridge suspected that the fugitive would head back to Goliad – suggesting that he would visit relatives or acquaintances in the town – on his way to the lower Rio Grande region.[111]

Moreover, in addition to escape attempts resulting from broken compromises with no hope of immediate or future improvement, some enslaved people followed a "nothing-to-lose" process of reasoning. Extreme circumstances compelled some bondspeople to flee to the border, especially confrontations with masters, overseers, third parties and even fellow slaves, all of which at times led to unpremeditated homicides. For instance, Frederick Law Olmsted recalled his encounter with an "old man" on the road to Indianola (Texas), looking for a "small black, screwed-up-faced

[108] RSPP, Petition n°21585201, "Elijah B. Alston to the Hon. William H. Garett Chief Justice of Bastrop County, 19 Jan. 1852"; Franklin and Schweninger, *Runaway Slaves*, 287. The fact that two enslaved people from the same plantation escaped in two opposite directions suggests that geographical proximity cannot be exclusively held accountable for slave flight to the Mexican border, while particular background experiences and profiles significantly contributed to choices of destination.
[109] Johnson, *Soul by Soul,* 194; Din, *Spaniards, Planters and Slaves*, 27.
[110] BA, reel 58, frames 97-105 (10 March 1817) and 108 (13 March 1817).
[111] *The Texas Monument*, 14 July 1852; *The Opelousas Patriot*, 7 May 1859; *The Texian Advocate*, 12 June 1852 and 18 Sep. 1852.

nigger" who had been on the run for two weeks following a violent dispute with his master, a judge, whom he had cut "right bad". According to the "old man", his enslaver had given him a week of rest for Christmas, after which the slave had refused to return to work and "got unruly". Facing an imminent whipping after having inflicted the wound, the enslaved man ran away. Despite being arrested, he managed to escape once again to northeastern Mexico.[112] Conflicts within the slave community also occurred. Within the violent environment of the US-Mexican borderlands plantation, masters and overseers encouraged competitive and atomistic tendencies among their enslaved workers as a way to maximize profits and crush resistance. Slaveowners usually set material or immaterial incentives for efficient work by rewarding highly productive slaves. By doing so, they fostered insidious forms of individualism and rivalries among bondspeople, which undermined community spirit and generated conflicts. In San Antonio, two slaves belonging to army major Jeremiah Yellott Dashiell "got into a dispute" in 1854. One of them "seized a large cedar club with which he killed the other instantly". After wandering overnight outside of the town, conscious of the gravity of the act and probably fearing for his life in case of arrest, the man returned the next day to Dashiell's estate, stole a horse and "started for Mexico". During his escape to the Rio Grande, a Mexican attempted to capture him, but was stabbed with a knife by the fugitive. Despite his wounds, the Mexican eventually shot the runaway dead.[113] This last example illustrates the desperate nature of most escape attempts to the Mexican Northeast. To many fugitives, *grand marronage* to the southern border represented a last resort, and was not intended merely as a tactic to extract concessions or protect existing "rights" from masters, as was sometimes the case elsewhere in the Americas.[114]

In sum, a wide range of motives incited or compelled the enslaved African American population of the US Southwest to abscond across the Mexican border. During the decades leading up to the US Civil War, slaves from the Texas frontier, the lower Mississippi delta region and port cities scattered along the US South coast increasingly came to associate Mexico with the cause of antislavery. More and more often, self-emancipated bondspeople envisioned – and opted for – the Mexican borderlands as a suitable destination for their quest for freedom. They did so in order to avoid separation from relatives, in reaction to separation from relatives, in response to physical and psychological violence and as a result of broken compromises or the impossibility of negotiating with masters. All the above-mentioned fugitives provide spectacular and inspirational examples of resistance to slavery. However, as in the case of the "big fellow" described by Noah Smithwick, archival evidence suggests that bondspeople absconding to Mexico were not quite representative of the overall enslaved population of the US Southwest. Despite Mexico's attractiveness as a sanctuary for refugees from the Second Slavery, not all enslaved African Americans stood in an equal position when contemplating an escape to Mexico's free soil. A closer

[112] Olmsted, *A Journey Through Texas*, 256-257.
[113] *The South-Western*, 4 Oct. 1854.
[114] Johnson, *Soul by Soul*, 32; Franklin and Schweninger, *Runaway Slaves*, 41.

look at the demographic and occupational profiles of self-emancipated slaves who risked their lives to reach Mexico is therefore required.

The Intersection of Gender, Age and Qualifications

> "RANAWAY from the undersigned, living in Caldwell, Burleson County, some time in June last, a negro boy named Simon, about twenty-five or thirty years of age, dark complexion, of an easy long tone of voice, has a foot very broad across the toes, and a narrow heel; his hair comes down rather low on his forehead – he weighs about 150 or 160 pounds and is a tolerable good blacksmith. He said, on leaving home, he would not own his master. *He is making his way to Mexico*. I will give a liberal reward for his capture and safe delivery to me – or any information that will enable me to discover his whereabouts will be thankfully received. Address W.C. Mosely, Caldwell, Burleson Co., Tex."[115]

Such was the advertisement published in the *State Gazette* in October 1859 by the owner of an enslaved man named Simon. In terms of gender, age, and occupation, the "boy" matched the average profile of enslaved people escaping to Mexico, which itself closely matched the profile of runaways in Texas (as recently analyzed by Kyle Ainsworth).[116] Simon's case suggests a larger tension at play between the structures of slavery and the agency of individual fugitives. Slave flight to the Mexican borderlands undeniably involved all categories of slaves, male or female, old or young, skilled or unskilled. However, a closer analysis of the main demographic characteristics of a sample of slave refugees who absconded from the US to Mexico between 1840 and 1859 sheds light on dynamics of under- and over-representation in terms of gender, age, and qualification, corroborating similar qualitative observations regarding earlier periods of time.[117]

First, the most striking imbalance that emerges from the collected data relates to gender. Historical studies of runaway slaves in the Americas have emphasized that enslaved men fled in significantly higher proportions than enslaved women.[118]

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[115] *The State Gazette*, 8 Oct. 1859 and 10 Dec. 1859; *The Daily State Gazette and General Advertiser*, 12 Oct. 1859.

[116] Kyle Ainsworth, "Advertising Maranda: Runaway Slaves in Texas, 1835-1865", in Pargas (ed.), *Fugitive Slaves and Spaces of Freedom in North America*, 197-230.

[117] On profiles: Franklin and Schweninger, *Runaway Slaves*, 209-233.

[118] Alvin O. Thompson, *Flight to Freedom: African Runaways and Maroons in the Americas*, (Kingston: University of West Indies Press, 2006), 72; Diouf, *Slavery's Exiles*, 89; Johnson, *Soul by Soul*, 31. Johnson argued in particular that two-thirds of fugitive slaves were men. Studying another borderland of the US South, S. Charles Bolton underlined that in Arkansas, women represented 18,2% of "runaways" between 1820 and 1836, and merely 7,5% between 1861-1861. S. Charles Bolton, *Fugitives from Injustice: Freedom-Seeking Slaves in Arkansas, 1800-1860* (National Park Service, 2006), 21. A comparison with frontier slavery geographies in Brazil is also consistent with the results of table 3. For instance, during the first half of the nineteenth century, men represented more than 80% of fugitive slaves in Minas Gerais (83,62% according to Marcia Amantino, and even up to 87% according to Ana Caroline de Rezende). Marcia Amantino, "Os escravos fugitivos em Minas Gerais e os anúncios do Jornal "O Universal", 1825 a

According to Franklin and Schweninger, during the first half of the nineteenth century, four out of five fugitives in the US South were men. In the US-Mexico borderlands, this discrepancy between men and women was even sharper, being consistent with Randolph Campbell's assessment.[119] As table 3 shows, during the two decades leading up to the US Civil War, slightly less than nine out of ten individual and collective escape attempts to Mexico *exclusively* involved men. By contrast, the proportion of enslaved women absconding to the Mexican border appears dramatically less significant as, including mixed-gender escape attempts, they took part in slightly more than one out of ten escape attempts (11,4%). The over-representation of male fugitives reflects diverging socioeconomic experiences among enslaved African Americans depending on gender, as opposed to alleged stronger tendencies to resistance among men than women, as contemporaries sometimes assumed.

Gender	Men only	Men and women fleeing together	Women only
Percentage	88.6%	7.9%	3.5%

Table 3: Gender imbalance in escape attempts to Mexico (1840-1859)[120]

A generational imbalance complemented this gender imbalance, with young slaves absconding in significantly greater numbers than their older fellows (table 4). The following table demonstrates the *likelihood* that individuals belonging to selected age groups would be found in individual and collective escape attempts to the Mexican border. In the US-Mexico borderlands, enslaved asylum-seekers were usually in their twenties: in terms of probability, at least one fugitive aged between 20 and 30 was to be found in roughly two-thirds of all escape attempts. This observation matches Franklin and Schweninger's medium age estimate of 27 for escaped slaves from the US South between 1838 and 1860.[121]

1832", *Lócus, Revista de Historia*, v.12, n°2 (2006), 59-74; Ana Caroline de Rezende Costa, "Fugas de Escravos na Comarca do Rio das Mortes, Primeira Metade do Século XIX" (São João del-Rei: Universidade Federal de São João del-Rei, Departamento de Ciências Sociais, Dissertação a Pós-graduação, 2013).

[119] Franklin and Schweninger concluded that about 19% of all US South fugitive slaves between 1790-1816 and 1838-1860 were women. Franklin and Schweninger, *Runaway Slaves*, 211-212. On the predominance of men among runaways in Texas: Campbell, *An Empire for Slavery*, 181-182.

[120] The figures in table 3 are consistent with observations formulated for earlier periods of time, in comparable geographical settings across the US South. For instance, David J. Libby issued similar estimates for nineteenth-century frontier Mississippi. Between 1805-1808, the *Natchez Mississippi Messenger* advertised 101 runaway slaves, among whom 85 were men. Libby, *Slavery and Frontier Mississippi,* 54.

[121] Franklin and Schweninger, *Runaway Slaves.* For Arkansas, S. Charles Bolton established a medium age of 25,8 years old for the period 1820-1836, and 27,1 years old for the period 1836-1861. S. Charles Bolton, *Fugitives from Injustice,* 21.

Age group	10 to 20	20 to 30	30 to 40	40 to 50
Likelihood	10.75%	67.7%	27.7%	6.15%

Table 4: Generational under- and over-representation in escape attempts to Mexico (1840-1859)[122]

The nature of the Second Slavery in the US Southwest favored the escape of young and qualified enslaved men.[123] Within the hierarchies of slavery, only a limited part of the enslaved population had access to some degree of mobility and autonomy due to their status as skilled and/or hired laborer. Men (most of them young) predominantly composed this particular category of enslaved workers. By contrast, enslaved women were proportionately more likely to labor as domestic slaves within the strict boundaries of the master's estate. They also often bore responsibility for the care and education of children, which frequently deterred flight.[124]

Slave labor, being the essential economic structure of the US South, permeated a wide range of activities, and was by no means restricted to unskilled plantation work. On the contrary, it extended to more qualified and mobile occupations linked to the Second Slavery's qualitative diversification and development – both geographical and numerical. In the lower Brazos region, for instance, the expansion of sugarcane production from the mid-1840s onwards created a need for a (semi)-skilled enslaved workforce. Around Brazoria, sugarcane and its more sophisticated production process fostered certain occupational hierarchies within slavery. Occupational skills represented valuable resources for slave refugees, before escape, on the run, and while resident in Mexico. Skilled slaves had greater scope for negotiation with their masters. The repeated publication of a runaway slave ad or gradually increasing rewards reveal how financially valuable and essential to the process of production a skilled slave could be. For instance, in 1806, James Bludworth, a planter from nearby Natchitoches, offered a reward of $1.100 for Jerry, a shoe and boot maker he had hired for a month from another settler, who had subsequently fled to Nacogdoches. Like Jerry, a significant number of absconders came from the most valuable workforce of their estates. (For small slaveowners especially, escape attempts entailed dramatic economic losses). Qualified fugitives were not always easily replaceable, since they were usually

[122] Percentages reflect the *likelihood* of finding an individual of a given age group in an escape attempt – be this individual or collective. As a result, the total of separate percentages presented in this table surpasses 100%, since fugitive slaves from different age group sometimes escaped together in a single escape attempt. Children under ten years old were deliberately excluded from the table (on the assumption that flight was not a conscious choice for children), as well as individuals aged over fifty (due to the insignificant numbers involved).

[123] Kyle Ainsworth has concluded that "the average runaway slave from Texas was a twenty-eight-year-old man who had escaped by himself, departed from either Brazoria or Harris County, and was most likely headed making his way to an urban area or Mexico" (Ainsworth "Advertising Maranda", in Pargas (ed.), *Fugitive Slaves and Spaces of Freedom in North America*, 207).

[124] Nichols, "The Limits of Liberty", 24; Clavin, *Aiming for Pensacola,* 93; Franklin and Schweninger, *Runaway Slaves,* 4-5.

less available and more expensive than common "plantation hands", which accounts for the desire of some masters to get their slaves back at almost any price.[125]

As Jerry's case suggests, being qualified also increased the potential for personal mobility and autonomy through slave hiring. This practice partly stemmed from the need for skilled bondspeople and became increasingly popular throughout the US Southwest after Texan independence. The ledgers of the Peach Point plantation belonging to the Perry brothers near Brazoria, for instance, are replete with names of hired bondspeople during the last two decades preceding the Secession War. Hired slaves constituted a segment of enslaved African Americans that benefited from greater inter-estate mobility (a state of "*quasi-freedom*", as Jonathan D. Martin has argued) than bondspeople ascribed to a single workplace. They were mostly men, such as Tom and Esau, two of the slaves of Sam Houston, who absconded to Matamoros during the fall of 1840 while being hired out from Cedar Point plantation.[126] Some mobile enslaved women also fled to the Mexican border, although in fewer instances. Matilda, a "mulatto girl", had been "peddling goods for the last two years" around Natchez, the economic hotspot of Mississippi's cotton production during the first third of the nineteenth century, before she absconded to "the Spanish country" in 1825.[127] Relatively less confined than their "sedentary" counterparts, enslaved people such as Matilda had gained knowledge of local geographies and had created economic as well as social networks outside of the plantation. In the case of slave-hiring, the division of mastery generated by the separation between proprietor and hirer – a breach in the fundamental authority of the master – loosened supervision while, being conscious of their bargaining power, hired slaves were more reactive to mistreatment. Drawing upon their contacts with white people, free blacks and Mexican workers (among others), mobile and hired slaves developed elaborate social abilities and came to understand behaviors, speech manners and dress customs that would later help them to pass more easily as "likely" and "plausible" to the eyes of the wider (white) society when clandestinely running for freedom. Developing spatial, social and even economic autonomy within slavery proved essential in sustaining creative and successful escape strategies (ch.2).[128]

Blacksmiths, carpenters, shoemakers and other craftsmen, in particular, stood at the fruitful intersection between skills and mobility. When Henry, an enslaved

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[125] Dunbar Rowland, *Official letter books of W.C.C. Claiborne, 1801-1816*, v.4 (Jackson, Miss.: State Department of Archives and History, 1917), 163-164.

[126] Abigail Curlee, "The History of a Texas Slave Plantation 1831-63", *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, v.26, n°2 (Oct. 1922), 106; Joseph D. McCutchan, (ed.) Joseph Milton Nance, *Mier Expedition Diary: a Texan Prisoner's Account* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2014), 67; Allen Andrew Platter, "Educational, Social and Economic Characteristics of the Plantation Culture of Brazoria County, Texas", PhD Diss. (Houston: University of Houston, 1961), 26-65; Campbell, *An Empire for Slavery*, 82; Martin, *Divided Mastery*, 161-187.

[127] *The Ariel*, 19 Dec. 1825. On Natchez as a slave trade hub: Libby, *Slavery and Frontier Mississippi*, 244.

[128] Martin, *Divided Mastery*; Franklin and Schweninger, *Runaway Slaves*, 22 and 140; Audain, "'Design his Course to Mexico': the Fugitive Slave Experience in the Texas-Mexico Borderlands, 1850-1853", in Pargas (ed.), *Fugitive Slaves and Spaces of Freedom in North America*, 233.

blacksmith, absconded in November 1853 from Port Lavaca, he was described by his master as "very smart" and likely to "tell a very plausible story", given that he was well acquainted with the geography of the coastal region and its people. Likewise, a thirty-five-year-old "very likely mulatto" mechanic and Baptist preacher was arrested near Austin in December 1855. Lewis, a skilled slave carpenter who escaped from Washington (Texas) in September 1854, was similarly described as "smart, active and likely" as well as able to elude pursuit and suspicion thanks to his former occupation.[129] Masters seemed well aware of the close connection between skilled occupational experiences, familiarization with diverse social environments and escape to Mexico. In 1852, when James S. Hanna introduced the fugitive slave Jim, brought from Mississippi to Texas, as "quite an intelligent and polite negro, having been a waiter in a hotel", he knew that Jim had acquired some social and cultural resources through this experience that would help him disguise his identity as a runaway.[130] Qualifications and social skills were convertible in strategies of deception and were also mobilized to earn a living on the run. When Brad, a slave painter and "preacher by profession", fled in 1858 from a cabinet-maker from Clarksville, James B. Shanahan, the enslaver warned readers that the fugitive would likely "be apt to demonstrate his professional proclivities". Shahanan's concern proved grounded, as Brad indeed hired his skills out on the streets of Independence (Texas) for about a year before heading to Mexico, using two forged passes to pretend that he had the consent of a master residing far away.[131]

Besides technical skills, literacy represented a significant asset for self-emancipated blacks. Many slaveholders bitterly emphasized this ability – which most of them attempted to undermine – among fugitives. Among Bill, Taylor and Henry, who absconded from the plantation of the notoriously violent Jared Kirby near Hempstead in 1857, at least "one of them [was] a good scribe", a man who would likely counterfeit freedom or travel passes. Forty-year-old Fortune, who escaped during the summer of 1858, could "read and write, [speak] very politely and [preach] very well for a negro" according to his master in Freestone County (Texas). The next year, Dick Tyler, a slave skilled in carpentry who could "read, write and play on the violin", fled from notary and attorney Peter MacGreal in Brazoria.[132] Connected to literacy and education, the capacity to speak Spanish (as a native language or otherwise) represented another incentive to abscond to Mexico. In the early nineteenth century,

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[129] *The San Antonio Ledger*, 19 Jan. 1854; *The State Gazette*, 22 Dec. 1855; *Texas Ranger*, 23 Nov. 1854; *The Washington American*, 8 Feb. and 22 Feb. 1856, 12 March 1856.
[130] *Texas State Gazette*, 25 Dec. 1852; *Nacogdoches Chronicle*, 4 April 1853.
[131] *The Standard*, 22 Jan. 1859 and 3 March 1860; *The State Gazette*, 2 April 1859. Shanahan had opened his shop in 1844, and it burned down in February 1857. The mention of scars in ads narrating Brad's escape suggests conflicts with Shanahan, although the record does not provide any further hint as to why Brad fled, and whether or not his flight was connected to the fire some months earlier. On runaways pretending to be hired slaves: Franklin and Schweninger, *Runaway Slaves*, 134-135.
[132] *The Washington American,* 21 April 1857; *The Southern Intelligencer*, 28 July 1858; *The San Antonio Ledger*, 24 Aug. 1858; *Daily Ledger*, 30 Sep. 1858; *The Weekly Telegraph*, 16 Nov. 1859; *The Daily Ledger and Texas*, 22 Nov. 1859.

apart from French and English, Spanish was commonly spoken in the plantations of the lower Mississippi valley – both by slaveholders and bondspeople – as a legacy of Spain's rule over Louisiana. The Second Slavery and the introduction of enslaved African Americans from foreign lands across the "Hidden Atlantic" through the Caribbean into the US South (although made illegal from 1808 onwards) brought further bondspeople acquainted with the Spanish language to the US-Mexico borderlands.[133] During the early 1830s, especially, traders from Mexican Texas smuggled slaves from Cuba and beyond to the province. Some of these bondspeople were Creole slaves born in Cuba. Others were *bozales* slaves (most of them of Yoruba and Kikongo origin) forcibly transported from Africa – especially from Ouidah, Lagos and Gadamey at the time of the Oyo Empire's decline – who had transited in Cuba before being smuggled to the coasts of Texas, for instance through the lower San Bernard River, where they were unloaded at the so-called "African landing".[134] Equally, in post-independence Texas, the frequent contact between bondspeople and low-skilled Mexican laborers in plantations familiarized local slaves with the Spanish language. Some slaveholders underscored that mastering this language played a role in fostering escape attempts to Mexico. In 1845, two slaves from Fayette County were advertised as having absconded to the south through San Antonio, as one of them was "well known to many of the Mexicans in San Antonio" and spoke "their language well". Eight years later, the master of a twenty-five-year-old slave named Charles also reported that the man "[spoke] Spanish and intend[ed] going to Mexico".[135]

Conclusion

As underlined in this chapter, not all bondspeople with Mexico in their heads had equal chances of successfully fleeing to the southern border. Running away to Mexico was often an endeavor for the male, the skilled and the young. Qualified slaves, in particular, were usually more likely to be hired out by their masters. Those slaves

[133] Michael Zeuske, "Out of the Americas: Slave Traders and the Hidden Atlantic in the Nineteenth Century", *Atlantic Studies*, v.15, n°1 (2018), 103-135.
[134] Juan Nepomuceno Almonte, *Noticia Estadística sobre Tejas* (México: Ignacio Cumplido, 1835), 61; Louis E. Brister, Eduard Harkort, "The Journal of Col. Eduard Harkort, Captain of Engineers, Texas army, February 8-July 17, 1836", *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, v.102, n°3 (Jan. 1999), 354; Monroe Edwards (ed. Paul D. Lack), *The Diary of William Fairfax Gray: from Virginia to Texas, 1835-1837* (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1997), 141; SRE, AEMEUA, 20/9, f.18-20, "Pizarro Martínez to Mier y Terán, 2 Feb. 1832"; SRE, LE 1077, "Martínez to Secretario de Estado y del Despacho de Relaciones, 16 Feb. 1833"; SRE, AEMEUA, 22/3, f.101, "Martínez to Encargado de Negocios, 20 May 1833"; SRE, AEMEUA, 25/1, f.70, "Martínez to Encargado, 22 May 1835"; SRE, AEMEUA, 25/1, f.107, "Martínez to Encargado, 11 July 1835"; Eugene C. Barker, "The African Slave Trade in Texas", *Texas Historical Association Quarterly*, VI (1902), 145-158; Platter, "Educational, Social and Economic Characteristics", 150; Lack, "Slavery and the Texas Revolution", 186; Robin Law, *Ouidah, The Social History of a West African Slaving "Port", 1727-1892* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2004), 155-188; Kelley, *Los Brazos de Dios*, 53; Kelley, "Blackbirders and Bozales", 406-23; Sean M. Kelley, Henry B. Lovejoy, "The Origins of the African-Born Population of Antebellum Texas: a Research Note", *Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, v.120, n°2 (2016), 216-232.
[135] *La Grange Intelligencer*, 23 Jan. 1845; *The Texian Advocate*, 24 Sep. 1853.

(most of them male) – who possessed some technical, cultural and intellectual skills, had developed social networks and knowledge of geographies through inter-estate mobility – stood on the front line of escape attempts across the borderlands. As an outcome of their (occasional) itinerancy, they had gained a sense of personal autonomy and were able to accumulate local intelligence that would prove advantageous during their escape to Mexico. By contrast, enslaved women were more likely to carry out indoor tasks related to domestic service and were often less specialized than men, undermining chances of inter-estate mobility, while they usually took care of family responsibilities in line with prevalent gender norms. Moreover, slaves aged between twenty and thirty were overrepresented among runaways to Mexico. Apart from their comparative physical strength and stamina, making them more likely to overcome exhausting distances, environmental hardships and a series of life-threatening perils, such young slaves usually had had less time than older individuals to form family bonds. To a significant extent, the very prospect of freedom through marronage in the US-Mexico borderlands was conditional upon diverse factors such as gender, age, skills as well as other personal characteristics that provided bondspeople with relatively unequal opportunities from the start. In particular, access to partial freedom(s) within slavery, as well as the possession of resources and social contacts, all eased self-emancipation. The *typical* escaped bondsperson to Mexico was remarkably *atypical* when compared to the general enslaved population of the US South. [136] This also implied that fugitives to Mexico were not necessarily the most oppressed bondspeople of the US South, but individuals with particular characteristics who successfully developed networks and strategies enabling them to flee (ch.2)[137]. While slave flight to Mexico represented a remarkable proof of individual agency and collective resistance to slavery, its magnitude remained nonetheless deeply constrained by existing demographic and socioeconomic structures. As Sean M. Kelley has argued, more and more slaves from Texas and further east viewed Mexico as a land of freedom for African Americans. Yet acting accordingly by escaping to Mexico's Northeast remained a fairly different issue in practice. Nevertheless, the individual actions of hundreds of self-emancipated slaves absconding to Mexico, responding to structural factors and contextual incentives for flight, had a significant cumulative and systemic impact on the regime of slavery north of the Rio Grande.[138]

During more than half a century, Mexico's appeal as an idealized racial haven among enslaved people and abolitionists throughout the US consistently intensified.

[136] For similar observations for nineteenth-century Brazil and Cuba, the other hearts of the "Second Slavery": Ian Read, Karl Zimmerman, "Freedom for too few: slave runaways in the Brazilian Empire", *Journal of Social History*, v.48, n°2 (2014), 404-426 (see conclusion); Manuel Barcia, *Seeds of Insurrection: Domination and Resistance on Western Cuban Plantations, 1808-1848* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2008), 51.

[137] Interestingly, this very point is more largely made by the historiography on modern refugees. See, *inter alia*, Michael R. Marrus, *The Unwanted: European Refugees in the Twentieth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985); Peter Gatrell, *The Making of the Modern Refugee* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

[138] Kelley, "Mexico in his Head", 709-723.

Its reputation as a beacon of freedom spread from western territorial Louisiana's slave quarters to most of the Lower South's plantations by the eve of the US Civil War. During the first decade of the century, the emancipatory appeal of the border separating the US from New Spain had remained rather vague and for the most part limited to plantations along the Red and Cane Rivers, while self-emancipated slaves deserting westward to Texas were relatively few and did not represent a major threat to southern society. However, as Secession loomed, many more fugitives began to follow in the footsteps of the Cane River pioneers. Slaves from the Texas frontier, the lower Mississippi delta region and port cities scattered along the US South coast had become well aware of an increasingly clear and appealing connection between Mexico and the cause of anti-slavery. Self-liberated bondspeople increasingly ran away in order to avoid separation from their relatives, or as a reaction to separation; they fled from physical and psychological violence; and they absconded in response to broken compromises and the impossibility of negotiating with masters. From Brownsville to Pensacola, *bozales* newcomers and Creole slaves, urban and rural bondspeople, plantation hands and domestic servants, entertained visions of freedom across the southern border. Seeking refuge, some undertook a life-threatening journey to Mexico's Northeast, as we will discuss in the next chapter.

II
Geography, Mobility and Networks:
Escaping through the US-Mexico Borderlands.

Introduction

The travelogue *Journey through Texas*, published in 1857 by anti-slavery advocate and journalist Frederick Law Olmsted and commissioned by the *New York Daily Times*, contains several interesting accounts of bondspeople from the US South who escaped to the Mexican borderlands in the decade prior to the US Civil War. One anecdote in particular describes the harrowing escape of two enslaved men to the Rio Grande some years previously. While making their way towards the border, Olmsted was told, the fugitives noticed the silhouette of another traveller far away on the horizon, "driving a sulky" from the border town of Eagle Pass to San Antonio. The two runaways initially dismissed him as harmless, thinking that he was simply one of the many Mexican teamsters (*carreteros*) who conducted commercial activities between the two cities. As they got closer, however, they realized that the silhouette in the distance was that of a US mail carrier, not a *carretero*. Acknowledging that they were in danger of being recaptured, they attempted to lie down in the surrounding *chaparral* (low-bush vegetation), but it was too late. Their fears were justified when the mail carrier saw them and quickly endeavored to arrest them, drawing his pistol and commanding the runaways to surrender. He then attempted to tie them up with "a piece of rope". In the process, one of the fugitives "turned and grappel him, while the other ran up, and, snatching the revolver, put the muzzle to his head". Ultimately sparing his life, the two refugees tied up the traveller and without further ado, they "jumped into the sulky, and drove off rapidly towards Mexico".[1]

Encounters of this sort seem to have occurred frequently in the 1850s Texas-Mexico borderlands, and the narrative touches upon important issues related to geography, mobility, and networks in the experiences of escaped slaves. First, it highlights the nature of assistance networks – not only did the enslaved men choose to flee together, confiding in each other for support, but they were also initially unafraid of what they perceived to be a Mexican *carretero*, since the latter had a reputation for helping or at least being sympathetic to the plight of US fugitive slaves. Their misperception soon gave way to a more sinister reality when the runaways were confronted with violence and arrest at the hands of a white American man, only managing to defend themselves by working in tandem to overpower the mail carrier, again underscoring how important assistance networks were to a successful escape. Second, the account makes reference to the fugitives' interaction with the natural environment, as the two men attempted to avoid detection by hiding in the sparse vegetation that dominated the local landscape. Finally, the end of the story refers to

[1] Frederick Law Olmsted, *A Journey through Texas: or a Saddle-Trip on the Southwestern Frontier* (New York: Dix. Edwards & Co., 1857), 329-330.

the escaped slaves' decision to flee in the stolen sulky, highlighting the logistics and various material strategies that fugitives employed to increase their mobility when absconding towards the Mexican border. What types of material and spatial strategies did fugitive slaves employ to escape to Mexico? What characterized their interactions with the natural environment, and what types of networks did they create to assist them in their journeys? This chapter will examine these questions in relation to enslaved people escaping through the US southern borderlands to the Mexican Northeast, with a particular focus on the period spanning from 1836 to 1861.

Easing Mobility: Spatial and Material Strategies

Joining Others

Once they had determined to escape to Mexico's Northeast, slaves were inevitably faced with the daunting task of having to figure out how to flee. One of the most pressing concerns was to decide whether to abscond individually, or rather in the company of other fugitives (table 5). Although the majority of bondspeople escaped alone (and more and more so over time), runaways who decided to join others, especially in small groups of two to five fugitives, remained fairly common.[2] According to Adolf Douai, "single negroes have bad escaping" given the "enormous hardships" they encountered while absconding. Collective marronage therefore merits scrutiny as a significant logistic strategy of desertion, especially in times of authority breakdown and (geo)political crisis.[3]

Groups of runaways could be constituted from the very start of the flight or they could simply develop as the outcome of *ad hoc* encounters on the road, whether voluntarily or not.[4] For instance, when the *mascogos* journeyed to Coahuila during the early part of 1850, large numbers of slaves escaped and joined them.[5] Fleeing in large groups could guarantee military strength. Even if violence was employed in a defensive way in the vast majority of cases, it could thwart slave-catchers, as implied by Solomon

[2] The observation of a (rising) prevalence of single runaways matches Ainsworth's study of runaways throughout Texas. Kyle Ainsworth, "Advertising Maranda: Runaway Slaves in Texas, 1835-1865" in Damian A. Pargas (ed.), *Fugitive Slaves and Spaces of Freedom in North America* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2018), 207-208.

[3] LOC, Frederick Law Olmsted Papers, General Correspondence, 1838-1928; "Douai to F.L. Olmsted, 16 Dec. 1854". As early as the mid-1800s, officials in Texas and Louisiana began discussing collective escape in the US-Mexico borderlands: Alwyn Barr, *Black Texans. A History of African Americans in Texas, 1528-1995* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1996), 30; James Harrison, "The failure of Spain in East Texas: the Occupation and Abandonment of Nacogdoches, 1779-1821", PhD Diss. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 1980), 212. On collective flight: Sylviane Diouf, *Slavery's Exiles: the Story of the American Maroons* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2014), 5. While this section focuses on assistance *among* runaways, assistance by non-fugitives will be analyzed below.

[4] Diouf, *Slavery's Exiles,* 92.

[5] Shirley Boteler Mock, *Dreaming with the Ancestors: Black Seminole Women in Texas and Mexico* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2010), 59.

Northup's recollection of enslaved people in Louisiana willing "to fight their way to Mexico".[6] Spectacular large-scale escape attempts occurred, such as the flight of fifty-two slaves from Webbers Falls in the Cherokee Nation during the fall of 1842 as well as the successful escape of more than forty slaves from a single Arkansas plantation to Múzquiz, Coahuila.[7] During the winter of 1850-1851, a large group of enslaved people was concealed "in a cave fifteen miles from Brenham". They had paused their trip for some weeks, likely due to climatic conditions, and gathered in the meantime "guns" and "powder", according to the local press.[8] Newspapers of the US Southwest often reported encounters between white people and large groups of escaped bondspeople, such as a fight near the Nueces River between mounted Rangers and a large number of self-liberated slaves "making their way towards Mexico" in 1851. Several had absconded from plantations on the Brazos River, and "while they have been lurking on the Guadalupe bottoms, there have been slaves out with them, belonging to settlers in this region". Collective escape seemed to have been frequent enough that in 1858, one newspaper editor from Kansas commented that "it is no uncommon thing for the slaves to run away to Mexico, in parties of twenty or thirty", adding further that "a large number of slaves thus escape annually".[9] Yet although it provided runaways some protection from assaults by slave-catchers and Native Americans, forming large groups did not always guarantee a successful journey. In October 1841, a party of about ten runaways from the Red River in northern Texas faced a company of minutemen from Milam, who had followed the trail they had left behind, and were captured as a result. Likewise, the aforementioned "gang of runaway negroes" discovered near the Nueces River in 1851 was entirely annihilated by the Rangers.[10]

Smaller groups, by contrast, could result from short opportunistic gatherings of bondspeople who decided to band together for logistical efficiency. They provided runaways with greater invisibility and mobility, as they could dissolve easily in case of pursuit by slave patrols or other circumstances. In 1851, a group of slaves in Colorado County was arrested on charges of preparing a "considerable plot" to flee to Mexico. According to the local press, to evade suspicion in areas of relative high settlement density, "their plan was to divide into small parties until they crossed the San Antonio

[6] Solomon Northup, *Twelve Years a Slave: Narrative of Solomon Northup, a Citizen of New-York, Kidnapped in Washington City in 1841, and Rescued in 1853* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1997), 247; Randolph Campbell, *An Empire for Slavery: the Peculiar Institution in Texas, 1821-1865* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1989), 183.
[7] *Civilian and Galveston Gazette*, 11 Jan. 1843; *Telegraph and Texas Register*, 18 July 1851; *Texas State Gazette*, 26 July 1851; *The Northern Standard*, 16 Aug. 1851; *The Choctaw Intelligencer*, 20 Aug. 1851.
[8] *The Western Star*, 29 March 1851. Concerns about slaves being concealed in Texas dated back to the early days of Euro-American colonization, as illustrated by the accusations made against Leonard Williams, in February 1824, for harboring an enslaved couple (RBBC, NA, v. 10, 128, 10 Feb. 1824).
[9] *The Baltimore Sun*, 1 May 1851; *Gallipolis Journal*, 15 May 1851; *Freeman's Champion*, 1 April 1858.
[10] *Austin City Gazette,* 20 Oct. 1841.

[River], when they were to meet".[11] Proximity and the possibility of inter-estate communication were usual pre-conditions for collective escape attempts. For instance, Ricardo, Martin and Pivi from western Louisiana described how they decided to abscond to Texas while picking cotton and cutting wood for a fence together. Martin crafted the plan, to which Ricardo and Pivi agreed, while Samuel, from a neighboring plantation, soon joined them. The case of Berry, a twenty-eight-year-old slave who fled from Elijah Sterling Robertson's plantation near Belton in January 1855, also illustrates how small groups of slave refugees were formed. Berry had "left alone and on foot", but his owner stated that the "fugitive" would likely join "some other negroes that are running from the neighborhood". In August 1856, the *Liberty Gazette* likewise reported the arrest of three runaways "evidently making tracks for Mexico" from three different plantations in Liberty County. Similarly, in May 1852, Ike, fleeing from Samuel Pilkington's estate near Tres Palacios Bay, joined Jake and Willis, both from the same plantation in Matagorda County, also on the run. Enslaved people who met while absconding sometimes came from completely different places or backgrounds, such as two refugees arrested north of Nacogdoches in 1845 who were fleeing from Arkansas and Mississippi, respectively.[12]

Far from being purely trivial, the decision to join or not join groups of runaways could determine a runaway's final destination, for instance when fugitives had no specific plan in mind beyond the fact of escaping. In 1840, the fugitive slave Virgil was, according to his master, "apparently making his way eastward, towards Nashville", which was likely where some of his relatives lived. Shortly afterward, though, Virgil joined "a party of five other negroes who ran off from Austin at the same time", and his master ascertained that Virgil was now "on his way to the Rio Grande". Lewis, aged twenty-two, fled from E.J. Palmer's estate in September 1854, seemingly without aiming to cross the border, but he soon made up his mind after meeting a small party of five or six other fugitives heading to Mexico. Some escape patterns therefore suggest some degree of improvisation, even in terms of the geographical objective. Final locations could incidentally change during the escape as a result of changing circumstances, especially when individual fugitives somehow crossed paths with other groups of runaways who were determined to reach Mexico.[13] The stories of Virgil and Lewis therefore fit into what historian Rebecca Ginsburg has described as

[11] *The Texas Monument*, 26 Feb. 1851. Fleeing from Natchitoches in October 1808, another group of eight slaves were caught on their way to Nacogdoches after they separated from the rest of the party that had crossed the border further south in order to avoid the town. Harrison, "The failure of Spain in East Texas", 212. On opportunistic gatherings, see Alvin O. Thompson, *Flight to Freedom: African Runaways and Maroons in the Americas* (Kingston: University of West Indies Press, 2006), 66-67.

[12] UT(A), Briscoe, Box 2Q238, "Negro Slaves in Spanish America, 1563-1820"; *Texas State Times* (Austin), 24 Feb. 1855; *Liberty Gazette*, 3 Aug. 1856, in Ronald Taylor, "Liberty and Slavery: the Peculiar Institution in Liberty (and Chambers) County, Texas", *East Texas Historical Journal*, v.149, issue 1 (2011), 124; *The Indianola Bulletin*, 13 May 1852; *The Texas National Register*, 29 March 1845.

[13] *Austin City Gazette*, 3 June 1840; *Texas Ranger*, 23 Nov. 1854. On the issue of improvised escape: Eric Foner, *Gateway to Freedom: the Hidden History of the Underground Railroad* (New York: W.W.Norton and Company, 2015), 2.

"journeys of circumstance", that is, escape attempts "relying more on luck and opportunity than on prearranged plans, networks of 'conductors'".[14] In particular, violence (or simply its threat), disorientation and a lack of geographical knowledge outside of familiar areas, combined with the fear of detection when following established tracks, all contributed to the development of non-linear and unpredictable trajectories of escape. This often substantially undermined fugitive enslaved people's chances of success, as in the case of Henry, Melinda and Morgan (see below), three self-emancipated bondspeople who got lost in the semi-desert landscapes of western Texas on their way to El Paso del Norte (Ciudad Juárez).

Number of slave refugee(s)	1	2 to 5	More than 5
Percentage of occurrence	52.65%	34.2%	13.15%

Table 5: Individual and collective escape attempts to Mexico (1840-1859)[15]

Across Rivers and Seas

The dilemma of escaping alone or in a group was only one issue to consider, however. Next, fugitives had to figure out whether to flee overland or by sea. While a majority of them followed the more conventional terrestrial route to Mexico, maritime marronage represented an alternative strategy, especially after 1836, given that the independence of Texas from Mexico provided self-liberated slaves who were fleeing overland with a new large and hostile territory to cross.[16] The proximity of major slaveholding areas of Texas and Louisiana to the coast greatly facilitated the possibility

[14] Rebecca Ginsburg, "Escaping through a Black Landscape", in Clifton Ellis and Rebecca Ginsburg (ed.), *Cabin, Quarter, Plantation: Architecture and Landscape of North American Slavery* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 53.

[15] Data: see ch.1, table 1. From the data available for other geographical areas, it seems that slave flight in the Texas-Mexico borderlands was a slightly more collective enterprise than in the rest of the US South, despite the overall prevalence of individual flight (close to 53%). See: John Hope Franklin, Loren Schweninger, *Runaway Slaves: Rebels on the Plantation* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 229. For instance, according to S. Charles Bolton, between 1836-1861, individual flight accounted for 70,7% of all escape attempts in Arkansas. S. Charles Bolton, *Fugitives from Injustice: Freedom-Seeking Slaves in Arkansas, 1800-1860*, (National Park Service, 2006), 21.

[16] On ports and escape: Larry E. Rivers, *Rebels and Runaways: Slave Resistance in Nineteenth-Century Florida* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2012), 79-82; Thompson, *Flight to Freedom*, 103; Gad Heuman (ed.), *Out of the House of Bondage: Runaways, Resistance and marronage in Africa and the New World* (London: Frank Cass and Co. Limited, 1986), 101. Scholars increasingly emphasize the importance of maritime flight in the Caribbean: Neville A.T. Hall, "Maritime Maroons: Grand Marronage from the Danish West Indies", *William and Mary Quarterly*, Series 3, XLII (Oct. 1985), 476-497; Linda M. Rupert, "Marronage, Manumission and Maritime Trade in the Early Modern Caribbean", *Slavery & Abolition*, 30:3 (2009), 361-382; Joe Knetsch, Irvin D.S. Winsboro, "Florida Slaves, the 'Saltwater Railroad' to the Bahamas and Anglo-American Diplomacy", *Journal of Southern History,* v. LXXIX, n°1 (2013), 51-78.

of escape across the Gulf of Mexico. The main slave-based agricultural districts of central Texas were connected to the Gulf by flat-bottomed steamers, which plied the Colorado River all the way down to Matagorda Bay, and further east along the Trinity River and Buffalo Bayou, which led to Galveston Bay. In his study of the coastal town of Galveston – located at the heart of slaveholding central Texas and the second largest city in Texas at the outbreak of the US Civil War – Robert S. Shelton underscored that, "alive with sailors, immigrants and travellers, seaports provided a nexus of contacts between plantation, slavery and the wider Atlantic world".[17] Further east, New Orleans formed a natural outlet for the hinterland Mississippi region. Serving as trading conduits with the larger Atlantic world, port cities such as New Orleans, Galveston, Matagorda and Lavaca not only contained large enslaved populations and transient labor populations to service their busy wharves, but they also maintained commercial links with Mexican ports such as Matamoros, Tampico, Veracruz, Minatitlán and Campeche. The maritime interconnection between Mexican ports and the US South intensified from the 1820s onwards due to Mexico's trade liberalization.[18] African Americans were commonly passengers on US schooners bound to Mexico. For instance, Benjamin Moore Norman recalled that while aboard the *Belle Isabel* in a journey from New Orleans to Tampico, he met numerous "negroes" and "mulattoes".[19]

Enslaved people could and did embark on commercial vessels sailing to Mexican ports, either clandestinely or as crew, as newspaper articles and diplomatic correspondence corroborate. In 1834, an escaped slave was found in Matamoros, hidden aboard the Mexican schooner *Juxpeña*, which was arriving from New Orleans. The fugitive was jailed along with the boat's captain, Domingo Hernández – presumably on the charge of slave smuggling – who was later bailed out.[20] Ten years later, an enslaved woman named in the Mexican press as "Emilia Bais" and her son secretly boarded the *Petrita* from New Orleans to Veracruz, escaping slavery by traversing the Gulf of Mexico.[21] Likewise, in July 1847, the captain of the *Cygnet* bound

[17] On Galveston's Atlantic links (especially with New Orleans): San Antonio Public Library, Port of New Orleans, Louisiana, Outward Bound Slave Manifests, 1812-1860, reel 5, 1841-1845; Robert S. Shelton, "Slavery in a Texas Seaport: the Peculiar Institution in Galveston", *Slavery & Abolition*, 28:2 (2007), 156.

[18] Omar Valerio-Jiménez, "Neglected Citizens and Willing Traders: the Villas del Norte (Tamaulipas) in Mexico's Northern Borderlands, 1749-1846", *Mexican Studies/Estudios Mexicanos,* v.18, n°2 (2002), 280-285.

[19] Benjamin Moore Norman, *Rambles by Land and Waters* (New York: Paine and Burgess, 1845), 196-197.

[20] SRE, AEMEUA, 22/14, f.144-146, "Pizarro Martínez to Encargado de Negocios, 8 Dec. 1834" and "Pizarro Martínez to Secretario de Estado y del Despacho de Relaciones, 6 Dec. 1834"; *ibid.*, 25/1, f.11, "Pizarro Martínez to Encargado de Negocios, 15 Jan. 1835".

[21] *El Siglo XIX*, 11 Sep. 1844 and 1 Oct. 1844; *Diario del Gobierno de la Republica Mexicana*, 29 Sep. 1844; SRE, AEMEUA, 29/2, f.219, "Manuel Crecenci Rejón to Juan N. Almonte, 11 Nov. 1844". On the New Orleans-Veracruz-Tampico connection: Mary Niall Mitchell, *Raising Freedom's Child: Black Children and Visions of the Future after Slavery* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2010), 33; Andrés Reséndez, *Changing National Identities at the Frontier, Texas and New Mexico, 1800-1850* (Davis: University of California, 2004), 95; Octavio Herrera Pérez, Maribel Miro Flaquer, Juan Fidel Zorrilla, *Tamaulipas, una historia compartida, I (1810-1921)* (Ciudad Victoria: Universidad Autónoma de Tamaulipas, Instituto de Investigaciones

to Tampico found "a slave concealed on board" some days after leaving Pensacola, and returned him to Florida.[22] Apart from constituting direct interfaces with Mexico, US port cities also provided runaways with temporary concealment before attempting to flee the country; they often found employment in such towns, made important contacts, and gathered information about potential destinations.[23]

Alternatively, some runaways also stole small skiffs and fled by their own means without relying on commercial maritime connections. Slaves who had easy access to waterways connected to the Gulf and in regions with a high density of river plantations, as along the Brazos and Colorado rivers in Texas, especially used this strategy. For example, in November 1845, the *Telegraph and Texas Register* narrated the arrest of an enslaved man whose enslaver had commissioned him to travel to Galveston Bay (from the Trinity River) to "get oysters". Aboard a "small skiff", the man took this opportunity to head further south towards the Gulf hoping to reach the Mexican coast. But reaching the outskirts of Matagorda, he "was so much exhausted with hunger and fatigue, that he had scarcely strength sufficient to make his way through the breakers to the beach". Three days without any food, as well as six days "without water or anything to drink", was the price the man had paid for his taste of freedom.[24] The escape attempt of three enslaved sailors and a Mexican ship captain named José Maria Poso speaks volumes about the dangerous nature of maritime flight. All four of them, originally from Campeche, were seized and detained by French pirates near the coast of Veracruz in August and September 1816. They escaped together on a small sailboat in mid-January 1817, following the coast where they saw Karankawas natives seasonally migrating from inland to the Gulf during the summer. As they reached the coast near Corpus Christi Island about three weeks later, the four men were rescued by the Spanish officer Andrés de Muguerza and his men, who provided them with "hot water, meat and victuals", as "they were starving to death subsisting with watercress, without knowing where they were".[25]

Históricas, 1993), 176-181. Ships departing to Mexican ports were routinely advertised in newspapers such as *L'Abeille*. Its edition on 2 July 1828, for instance, reported schooners bound to Tampico, Veracruz and Campeche.

[22] *The New York Herald*, 23 July 1847.

[23] For instance, the *San Antonio Ledger* issue on March 11, 1852 included an article entitled "The Galveston Negro Case" (originally published in the *New Orleans Delta*) which reported the arrest and sale as slaves at Galveston of four free African Americans from Massachusetts (Anthony Hays, Levance Smith, John Fourtkey and William Brown) for allegedly aiding slaves escape oversea to Boston aboard the *Billow*. *Le Pionnier de l'Assomption*, 22 Jan. 1852; *Geneva Courier*, 18 Feb. 1852.

[24] *Telegraph and Texas Register*, 5 Nov. 1845. Hunger was a prime concern when fleeing (oversea). A man was "discovered stowed away in the locker" of a schooner leaving New Orleans to Mexico in 1858, looking "weak and emaciated" as he "evidently had nothing to eat on the trip" (*San Antonio Daily Herald*, 14 Oct. 1858).

[25] José Eleuterio González, *Colección de noticias y documentos para la historia del estado de Nuevo León, corregidos y ordenados de manera que formen una relación seguida* (Monterrey: Tip. De Mier, 1867), 354-355. More on the privateers of Galveston Island in the mid-1810s in ch.3. On seasonal migrations by Karankawas: Sean M. Kelley, "Plantation Frontiers: Race, Ethnicity, and Family along the Brazos River of Texas, 1821-1886", PhD Diss. (Austin: University of Texas, 2000), 19.

Enslaved people from even more remote locations considered maritime flight as well, such as eight slaves who escaped in May 1844 from La Balize (Louisiana). The newspaper advertisement that announced their escape revealed that the fugitives had "recently stole a boat, and made off" to Mexico. The editor contended that "as they were ignorant of navigation it is probable that they may miss their way and touch upon our coast", promising a reward of $500 for both the boat and the slaves. However, the refugees eventually reached Mexico.[26] Less successful were the four runaways who escaped in 1850 from Calcasieu (Louisiana) aboard a small boat to the Rio Grande following the coast. According to Helen Chapman, the wife of an officer posted in Brownsville, "when near the mouth of the river", the steamer *Mentoria* captured the slaves.[27] While maritime flight was usually undertaken with the intention of reaching the final destination, it occasionally represented a transitory strategy. Escaped slaves used waterways as a fast means to flee their home regions in the very first days of the escape, and then turned back to a safer overland route later. Likewise, some fugitives walked along the riverbanks, hiding their tracks in the water in order to disorient slave patrols. Regardless of the relative success of escape attempts through rivers, along coasts or across seas, maritime flight to Mexico seems to have been common enough by midcentury to induce Galveston's mayor and board of aldermen to release an ordinance on the issue in January 1852. Strict scrutiny of ships bound to foreign ports – including those reaching "the mouth of the Rio Grande River" – was to be exerted. Prior to departure, an official "searcher" was to inspect vessels, thoroughly looking for potential fugitives hidden aboard. Captains failing to report to the inspection agent were liable to fines from $25 to $100.[28] Equally, the Texas State Legislature passed an act in February 1854 condemning masters of steamboats and vessels who – consciously or not – carried off runaway slaves to a penitentiary sentence of between two and ten years.[29] In the early 1840s, an editor from Houston lamented that "if the Ferry men would arrest all negroes who presented themselves at the ferries without passports many runaways might thus be secured and restored to their owners". But provisions of this kind did little to prevent boat conductors across the region from assisting runaways, whether consciously or not. In November 1860, for instance, a slave refugee in Laredo "persuaded the ferryman to pass him over the Rio Grande, by representing himself as a free negro".[30]

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[26] *New Orleans Daily Picayune*, 31 May 1844; *The Civilian and Galveston City Gazette*, 8 June 1844; Shelton, "Slavery in a Texas Seaport", 163.

[27] Caleb Coker, *The News from Brownsville: Helen Chapman's Letters from the Texas Military Frontier, 1848-1852* (Austin: Barker Texas History Center & Texas State Historical Association, 1992), 183-184 and 378-379.

[28] Great Britain, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, *British and Foreign State Papers*, v.41, ed. W.Ridgway (1851-1852), 575-576 (Consul Lynn to Viscount Palmerston (inclosure 1), Galveston, 17 Jan. 1852). The fourth disposition of the ordinance explicitly extended inspection by a designated "searcher of vessels" to boats bound for the "Rio Grande River". Peter Delbrel fulfilled this function during the rest of the decade, with the exception of 1853. *Galveston City Directory for 1859-60*, W.&D. Richardson, 1859), 33-38; *The Times Picayun*e, 10 March 1852.

[29] Hans Peter Nelson Gammel, *The Laws of Texas* (Austin: The Gammel Book Company, 1898), v.3, 1511.

[30] *Telegraph and Texas Register*, 12 July 1843; *The Ranchero*, 17 Nov. 1860.

Despite the frustration of southern legislators and slaveholders, however, escaping by sea to Mexico remained relatively marginal in comparison with self-liberated slaves fleeing overland. For reasons of efficiency, most enslaved asylum-seekers followed the beaten track to Mexico, depending on their often-limited geographical knowledge of the region. Occasionally, however, previous familiarity with a certain route or landscape – for instance linked to networks of relatives or acquaintances – influenced trajectories of flight. Thus, when twenty-nine-year-old John – "a sensible negro" according to his enslaver John H. Brown – fled from Belton in June 1858, Brown emphasized that, instead of reaching Mexico by Austin and San Antonio (a southward direct route), John would very likely escape through San Saba (further west), "where he has twice been this spring".[31] An indirect and unexpected trajectory of escape like John's was not unique. Despite the inherent diversity of routes followed by escaped slaves to Mexico, though, some general patterns can be identified.

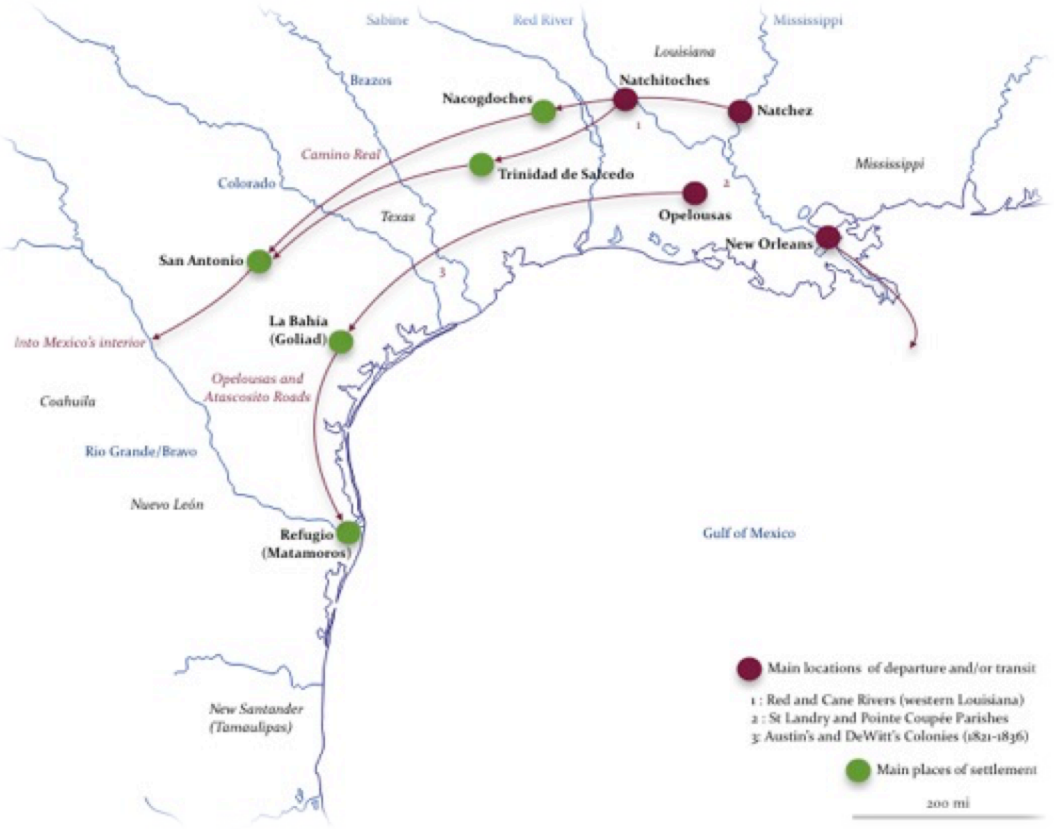
The trail connecting Natchitoches (Louisiana) to Nacogdoches (Texas), across the Sabine River – originally part of the Spanish *Camino Real* – was the most commonly walked by slave refugees before 1836.[32] Fugitive slaves from New Orleans and the lower Mississippi region, including Baton Rouge, Natchez or Vicksburg, followed tracks along the Mississippi River in a northward direction. At the junction between the latter and the Red River, they took a more northwestern path to Natchitoches, and then crossed into Spanish territory near the former Spanish post of Los Adaes, abandoned in the early 1770s. Slave refugees reaching Nacogdoches could eventually travel to San Antonio de Bexar following the same trail.[33] An alternative

[31] *The State Gazette*, 19 June 1858; *San Antonio Texan*, 24 June 1858; UT(A), Briscoe, John Henry Brown Family Papers, Box 2E2.

[32] Andrew J. Torget, "Cotton Empire: Slavery and the Texas Borderlands, 1820-1837", PhD Diss. (Charlottesville: University of Virginia, 2009), 24; Francis X. Galán, Joseph N. de León, "Comparative Freedom in the Borderlands: Fugitive Slaves in Texas and Mexico from the Age of Enlightenment through the U.S. Civil War", in Milo Kearney, Anthony Knopp, Antonio Zavaleta, *Ongoing Studies in Rio Grande Valley History*, v.10 (Brownsville: Texas Center for Border and Transnational Studies, University of Texas Brownsville and Texas Southmost College, 2011), 28.

[33] Escaped slaves had been using the *Camino Real* as a gateway to freedom before the Louisiana Purchase. For instance, a slave absconded in 1802, "riding on a grayish mare, and by the Camino Real toward Bexar" (RBBC, BA, v.20, 6, Jan. 1802). On this route: Galán, De León, "Comparative Freedom in the Borderlands", 28; Lance Blyth, "Fugitives from Servitude: American Deserters and Runaway Slaves in Spanish Nacogdoches, 1803-1808", *East Texas Historical Journal*, v.38, issue 2 (2000), 8; Gwendolyn Midlo Hall, *Africans in Colonial Louisiana: the Development of Afro-Creole Culture in the Eighteenth Century* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1992), 148. Even after 1836, enslaved people from Louisiana continued to escape to the west, to Texas, with some of them presumably intending to reach Mexico. Adolphus Sterne, a settler at Nacogdoches, for instance, mentioned that self-emancipated slaves from Louisiana kept passing through eastern Texas during the early 1840s. Archie P. McDonald (ed.), *Hurrah for Texas! The Diary of Adolphus Sterne, 1838-1851* (Waco: Texian Press, 1969).

route followed the Opelousas Road and later the Atascosito Road, a former military trail established during the mid-eighteenth century near the coast of Texas, linking Refugio (Matamoros after 1826) to La Bahía (Goliad after 1829) as the entry point to central Texas.[34] Employed as gateways to freedom during the entire antebellum period, both axes quickly grew in importance as settlements developed in the region from the 1820s onwards. Furthermore, escaped slaves followed the numerous smuggling routes that connected western Louisiana and eastern Texas during the first third of the century, such as the *Camino del Caballo* (the horse's trail) extending south of Nacogdoches (map 1).[35]



Map 1: Approximate routes of escape for slave refugees in the Louisiana-Texas borderlands and through the Gulf of Mexico, c.1803-1836

After the Texas Revolution, a majority of slaves who absconded to Mexico had departed from the Brazos-Colorado Region, especially from Washington, Travis, Bastrop, Colorado and Fayette counties. Brazoria and Bexar counties were also home to many enslaved freedom-seekers fleeing across the Rio Grande.[36] A predominant

[34] Torget, "Cotton Empire", 48.
[35] Matthew Babcock, "Roots of Independence: Transcultural Trade in the Texas-Louisiana Borderlands", *Ethnohistory*, v.60, n°2 (2013), 255.
[36] On escape attempts in the Brazos-Colorado Region in general: Ainsworth, "Advertising Maranda: Runaway Slaves in Texas, 1835-1865", in Pargas (ed.), *Fugitive Slaves and Spaces of Freedom in North America,* 208. The Brazos-Colorado Region, especially the triangle Austin-Brenham-Columbus, became the main area of departure after 1836, ahead of the other geographical areas analyzed by Ainsworth, the "Brazos-Trinity Region" and "East of the Trinity".

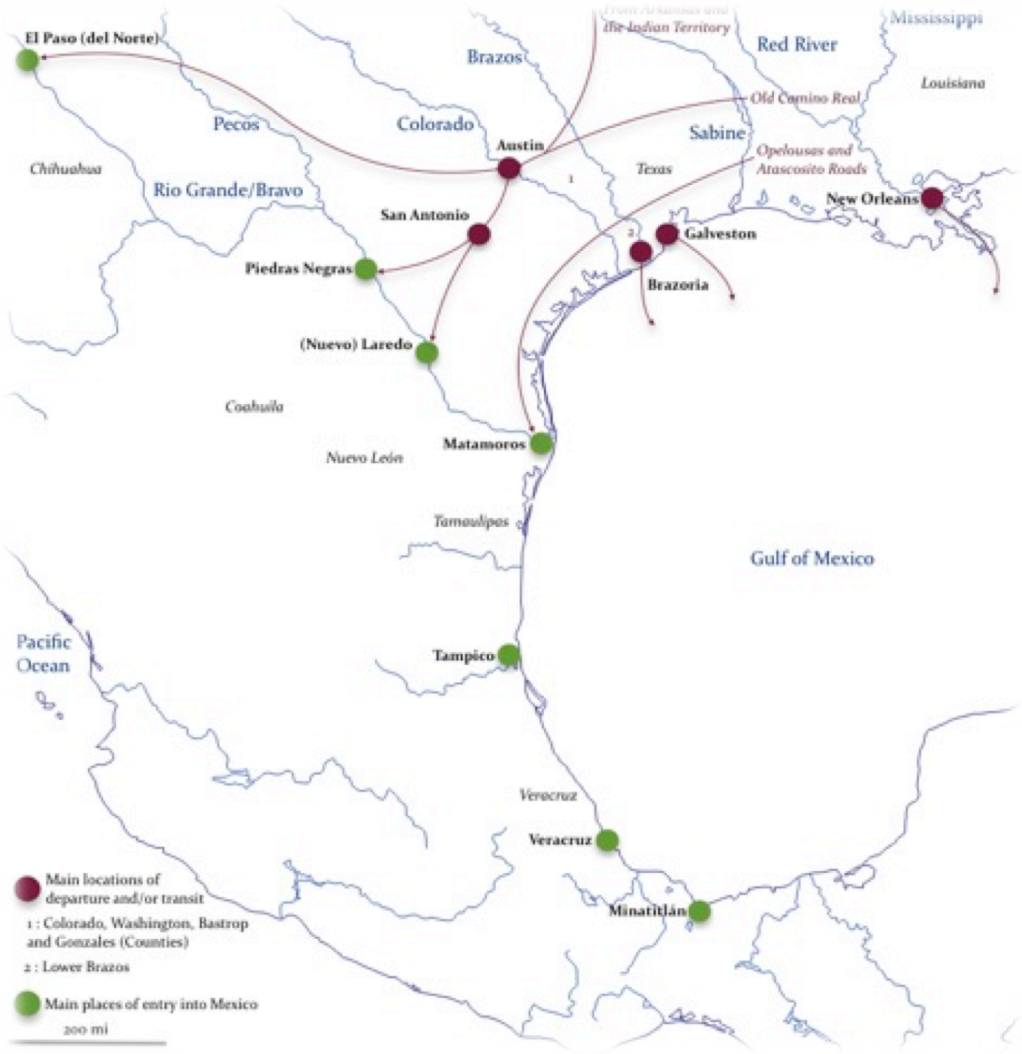
destination for slave refugees before 1836, San Antonio soon turned into the main nodal point for escape attempts from the US South to Mexico during the two decades leading up to the Secession War, as were Galveston and New Orleans for maritime flight. When in August 1837 a planter from Columbus lost some of his slaves who "had started for Mexico, and would endeavor to get into that country as soon as possible", he dispatched two of his sons along with a young Scottish immigrant on the route that led to San Antonio, suspecting that the refugees would pass through the city. In July 1843, a slave refugee from the Brazos was arrested in San Antonio, and apparently many more were expected to arrive in his wake, because sentinels were mobilized for the occasion. Likewise, in May 1853 a slave from Indianola denounced – out of fear of punishment or for a reward – a group of eight slave refugees from eastern Texas that had, only for a while, persuaded him to join them and planned to reach San Antonio on their way to Mexico.[37] The old Spanish outpost, now the outpost of slaveholding Texas on its western frontier, stood at the intersection of trails that linked the town with Austin and northern Texas on the one hand, and the sugar, tobacco and cotton-producing areas of Eastern Texas on the other. Even fugitives from coastal regions such as Matagorda and Port Lavaca sometimes passed through San Antonio.[38] In addition to providing temporary refuge, San Antonio was strategically located for escaped slaves aiming to traverse South Texas. As pointed out by chronicler Charles W. Webber, "the San Antonio route was the only one practicable across the desert plains to the Rio Grande".[39]

Arrest notices indicate that slave refugees usually headed on to a range of destinations across the Rio Grande. For instance, fugitives escaping through the coast and by sea were likely to head to Matamoros, Camargo and Reynosa, all in the Rio Grande delta region. Further north, Laredo also increasingly welcomed slave refugees, while Piedras Negras, opposite Eagle Pass on the upper part of the river, became an important place of settlement and transit further into Coahuila, especially to Monclova and Santa Rosa. Self-emancipated bondspeople often walked the route toward Eagle Pass during the later period, such as the migrating *mascogos* described by Cora Montgomery in 1850.[40] The sight of runaways crossing the Rio Grande from Eagle Pass was increasingly familiar. In September 1853, during one single night, ten fugitives left the town under the cover of darkness to reach the Mexican side. Frederick Law Olmsted visited Eagle Pass in 1854 – where "runaways were *constantly* arriving" – and reported that during the night just prior to his arrival, two of them had crossed the

[37] William B. Dewees (comp. Cara Cardelle), *Letters from an early settler of Texas* (Louisville: New Albany Tribune Print, 1858), 211; *Telegraph and Texas Register,* 12 July 1843; *The Indianola Bulletin*, 24 May 1853.
[38] UT(A), Briscoe, Texas Slave Laws, Box 2J186; *The San Antonio Ledger*, 19 Jan. 1854. On cities as a temporary stage for slave refugees: Franklin and Schweninger, *Runaway Slaves*, 126-129.
[39] Charles W. Webber, *Tales of the Southern Border* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott, 1887) 48-49; Audain, "'Design his Course to Mexico'", in Pargas (ed.), *Fugitive Slaves and Spaces of Freedom in North America,* 241.
[40] Cora Montgomery (Jane McManus Cazneau), *Eagle Pass, or Life on the Border* (New York: Putnam, 1852), 73-77; Martha Rodríguez, *Historias de Resistencia y Exterminio: los Indios de Coahuila durante el Siglo XIX* (México: CIESAS-INI, 1995), 97.

border.[41] But after the treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, patrols along the border were reinforced and new military forts along the Rio Grande were established. In November 1850, troops stationed on the border received strict orders to arrest any fugitive slaves bound to Mexico. This induced many self-emancipated slaves to look for more distant and unusual destinations, such as El Paso del Norte (map 2).[42] In 1856, nineteen-year-old slave Henry escaped from near Fort Belknap to El Paso del Norte. However, on his way to the border he was arrested and jailed at San Antonio.[43] Self-emancipated slaves began taking more west- and northward routes than before, despite the danger involved in crossing the vast *Comanchería,* or the prospect of encountering potentially hostile Lipan Apaches and Mescaleros (see below). New Mexico, especially before its military occupation (1846) and eventual incorporation as a US territory (1850), attracted a few daring bondspeople, such as the five African Americans, "no doubt runaways from the United States" according to a local resident, who reached Taos in 1845 guided by some *comancheros*.[44] Even after the US-Mexican war, fugitive slaves continued to head to New Mexico. During the summer of 1850, an enslaved man escaped from Washington County, Texas, to New Mexico, before a posse of Texans abducted him, despite the support of New Mexican free-soilers.[45]

[41] *The Galveston Journal*, 9 Sep. 1853; Olmsted, *A Journey through Texas,* 323-329. Italics from the original author.
[42] Ronnie C. Tyler, "Fugitive Slaves in Mexico", *The Journal of Negro History*, 1 (Jan. 1972), 5.
[43] *State Gazette*, 15 Nov. 1856.
[44] James F. Brooks, *Captives and Cousins: Slavery, Kinship and Community in the Southwest Borderlands* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 308.
[45] *Democratic Telegraph and Texas Register*, 1 Aug. 1850.



Map 2: Approximate routes of escape for slave refugees in the Texas-Mexico borderlands and through the Gulf of Mexico, c. 1836-1861.

Slave Flight, Environment and the Second Slavery

However, flight to the border meant more than simply following routes and tracks that led to lands of freedom. The journey itself was treacherous, and numerous sources underscore the hardships experienced by runaways while crossing the hostile natural environment of the US-Mexico borderlands, as noted by Mekala Audain.[46] For instance, Mexican officer José María Sánchez – travelling to Texas in 1828 in the midst of rising concerns about the (dis)loyalty of the Euro-American settlers of Texas –

[46] On flight and environment in central Texas: Audain, "'Design his Course to Mexico'", in Pargas (ed.), *Fugitive Slaves and Spaces of Freedom in North America*, 237-245; William D. Carrigan, "Slavery on the Frontier: the Peculiar Institution in Central Texas", *Slavery & Abolition*, 20:2 (Aug. 1999), 75. This relationship was not entirely negative. While Audain insists on the restricting influence of environment on flight, Carrigan describes the Upper Brazos river, for instance, as an empowering environment to elude capture, as "Central Texas' wooded hills, forested river bottoms, plentiful game, and abundant wild plants proved to be key advantages" for runaways.

extensively reported such hardships. In his diary, the officer described some of the natural obstacles slave refugees faced, especially west of the Nueces River, a dry and inhospitable region where only *chaparral* provided cover from patrols and bounty hunters. His reports were filled with accounts of dangerous storms and heavy rains (in an otherwise arid area). Crossing the Nueces River in February, Sánchez stated that "during floods it overruns and overflows both tree-covered banks to such an extent that it is impossible to cross it". According to Sánchez, "travelers often [had] to wait eight or ten days to try to ford it", an account comparable to those of the *mascogos* descendants who described the hardships their ancestors experienced while crossing the Red River during the 1850 great migration. Furthermore, Sánchez noted "the terrible floods caused by the rivers which form horrible marshes and lakes where immense numbers of mosquitoes, ticks, red bugs, gnats, gadflies, etc. breed". In winter, moreover, "the furious northwest winds and the heavy snows" added to the difficulty of fleeing.[47] Frederick Law Olmsted – deriving a great part of his information from Douai – depicted a similarly frightening panorama three decades later. He remarked that west of San Antonio, piney woods and prairie grass turned into a "great dry desert country to be crossed, with the danger of falling in with savages, or of being attacked by panthers or wolves, or of being bitten or stung by the numerous reptiles that abound in it; of drowning miserably at the last of the fords; in winter, of freezing in a norther, and, at all season, of famishing in the wilderness from the want of means to procure food". As Olmsted's comments implied, the area's aridity jeopardized self-liberated bondspeople's ability to find water, while the absence of tall and dense vegetation increased their visibility to patrols, bounty hunters and other predators.[48]

Most escaped slaves suffered from fatigue as well as from extreme environmental and climatic conditions. Failing to master the aforementioned hardships could promptly lead to starvation and death. In early June 1841, a retired Mexican soldier encountered an escaped slave wandering three *leguas* away from Laredo, "dying from hunger and thirst".[49] A decade later, three runaways named Melinda, Henry (both of them from Mississippi, on the run for at least a year) and Morgan got disoriented in the western part of the Nueces Strip. Some travellers back from El Paso to San Antonio reportedly found the first two fugitives near the Pecos River, "in a state of misery almost impossible to be described". The fugitives had "derived what sustenance they could from the hides of oxen which had died, starving "in a most emaciated condition" after ten days spent in the desert without any food, lacking "any means of killing game". In a desperate attempt to save their lives, Melinda and Henry had presumably decided to sacrifice Morgan while he was asleep (allegedly

[47] Carlos E. Castañeda (transl.), José María Sánchez, "A trip to Texas in 1828", *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, v.29, no.4 (April 1926), 249-288; Boteler Mock, *Dreaming with the Ancestors*, 58.
[48] Olmsted, *A Journey through Texas,* 323-329; Nichols, *The Limits of Liberty*, 140. Former slave Carey Davenport recalled for instance "old man Jim", described as a serial runaway, whose "legs git frozen" by extreme cold and were cut off: FWP, *Slave Narratives: A Folk History of the United States of America from Interviews with Former Slaves*, v.16/1 (Washington: Works Progress Administration, 1941), 282.
[49] TSLAC, LA, folder 145, doc.25, 11:943 "Mayor to Military Commander, 2 July 1841".

to eat him). In fact, the desert landscape west of the Nueces River was considered so deadly that a newspaper editor commented that, as the horses of a group of four runaways from Bastrop "had nearly given out", the fugitives "would evidently have perished before reaching Mexico, the place of their destination". The landscape continued to present mortal dangers until the very last inch of US soil; indeed, attempting to cross the tumultuous Rio Grande was itself wrought with peril. High water sometimes abruptly stopped border-crossers, who regularly drowned in its waters, such as one of the five runaways from Bexar County who tried to escape across the border in October 1854.[50]

Just as geography partly shaped escape attempts to Mexico, the relationship between natural environments and self-liberated bondspeople's mobility also warrants further examination. While flight to Spanish and later Mexican Texas never significantly altered the geographical development of slavery in early nineteenth-century Louisiana, during the period following Texan independence the constant threat to the interests of slaveholders that escape attempts to Mexico represented seems to have partly checked the spread of the Second Slavery west of the Nueces River.[51] In the minds of slaveowners, the likelihood of flight increased in proportion to the proximity of Mexican territory, contributing to the almost complete absence of slavery in the Nueces Strip. As local chronicler Teresa Viele observed, "on the lower Rio Grande, there are no slaveholders; the close neighborhood of Mexico renders escape so easy that no slaves are ever brought here".[52] The *Texas Almanac* of 1860 stressed that "the agricultural resources of this region have been little developed, owing to the fact, that we can not hold slaves here to till the soil, as they escape to Mexico whenever brought here".[53] "There are few negro slaves on the Rio Grande, because they have but to cross the ponds at low water and be free", argued another observer. In May 1851, the New Orleans *Daily Crescent* likewise underscored "one drawback on Western Texas, and that is the escaping of slaves into Mexico, as they now do into Canada". As a threat to the westward expansion of the Second Slavery, slave flight to Mexico provided a key argument to the supporters of the extradition of fugitive slaves from Mexico to the US. An article in the *Weekly-Telegraph* in October 1859, for instance, stated that without such an agreement, "we can never expect that

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[50] Julius Fröebel, *Seven years travel in Central America, Northern Mexico, and the Far West of the United States* (London: Richard Bentley, 1859), 422; in Nichols, *The Limits of Liberty*, 140; *The Northern Standard,* 12 April 1851; *Texas Republican*, 19 April 1851; *The Western Texan*, 17 July 1851; *Edgefield Advertiser*, 19 Oct. 1854; *The Galveston Weekly News*, 27 July 1858.

[51] *The Southern Press*, 17 June 1850.

[52] Teresa Viele, *"Following the Drum": a Glimpse of Frontier Life* (New York: Rudd & Carleton, 1859), 156-157. By this time, Cameron, Starr and Hidalgo counties had a slave population of fourteen people. United States of America, Bureau of the Census, *Eighth Census of the United States, 1860*. (Washington, DC: National Archives and Records Administration, 1860), Slave Schedules, Texas.

[53] *The Texas Almanac, for 1860, with Statistics, Historical and Biographical Sketches, &, Relating to Texas*, 1860 (Galveston: W. & D. Richardson, 1860), 127. Similar observations are included in: *The Texas Almanac for 1858* (Galveston: Richardson & Co., 1858), 92; Edward Atkinson, *Cheap Cotton by Free Labor* (Boston: A. Williams and Co., Printed by H.W. Dutton and Son, 1861), 46 (SJMASC).

the fertile valley of the Rio Grande and the whole of the great west will be brought into anything like the cultivation and consequent production of which it is capable".[54] The southern Texas borderlands seemed full of promises for slaveholders who were eager to expand the plantation frontier. By contrast, the almost completely deserted landscape posed serious obstacles to slave flight. Therefore, in this hostile geography, freedom through flight across the US-Mexico borderlands was usually conditional upon a high level of planning before departure.

Empowerment and Deception

When bondspeople fled in small or large groups, maintaining secrecy and deciding upon a suitable time for departure were essential.[55] Pressing issues such as when, how and via which route to abscond were soon joined by the need to acquire material items facilitating the escape. The necessity to abscond as quickly and directly as possible was not only motivated by the desire to avoid detection, but also by natural obstacles, such as central Texas' steep hills. Consequently, more than anywhere else in the US South, fugitive slaves in the borderlands understood that the possession of horses was to a great extent crucial to their flight's success, as noted by Kyle Ainsworth. While horses were usually stolen from masters, fugitives considered taking away horses from their owner's estate as a fair recompense for years of servitude.[56] Runaways riding horses or mules were fairly common from the early nineteenth century onwards. For instance, in eastern Texas, officer Pedro López Prieto discussed with governor Manuel de Salcedo how to deal with a horse that a fugitive named José Luis Marin had carried away in his (successful) flight attempt in the summer of 1809.[57] The use of horses understandably soared after Texas became a vibrant frontier of the Second Slavery. Virgil, "a very black negro" from Nashville according to his master, left Austin during the summer of 1840 with two horses, and "when last seen he was riding one horse and leading the other". In July 1858, Fortune, Jacob, Tom, Shade and Dave, all aged between about twenty and forty, escaped to Mexico from three medium-sized plantations in Freestone County, riding horses stolen from their owners. The very detailed descriptions of the horses in runaway slave advertisements suggests that the fugitives took care to select the most valuable ones prior to their departure.[58] Besides a means of escape, horses served as a

[54] *The Southern Press*, 17 June 1850; *The Daily Crescent*, 6 May 1851; *The Weekly Telegraph*, 26 Oct. 1859. I agree here with James D. Nichols' view on the limited expansion of slavery in Western Texas, by contrast with Campbell's. Nichols, *The Limits of Liberty*, 127-130.
[55] Thompson, *Flight to Freedom*, 65-67.
[56] Ainsworth "Advertising Maranda", in Pargas (ed.), *Fugitive Slaves and Spaces of Freedom in North America,* 216. On theft as just retribution: Franklin and Schweninger, *Runaway Slaves*, 79-80; Gilbert C. Din, *Spaniards, planters and slaves: the Spanish regulation of slavery in Louisiana, 1763-1803* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1999), 21. See the case of runaway slave Ricardo Moran: UT(A), Briscoe, "Negro Slaves in Spanish America, 1563-1820", box 2Q238.
[57] UT(A), Briscoe, BA, reel 42, frames 720-723 (2 Aug. 1809) and 788-794 (2 Sep. 1809).
[58] *Austin City Gazette*, 3 June 1840; *The Southern Intelligencer*, 28 July 1858; *The San Antonio Ledger*, 24 Aug. 1858; *Daily Ledger*, 30 Sep. 1858. United States of America, Bureau of Census, *Eighth Census of the United States, 1860,* Slave Schedules, Texas.

potential monetary reserve, as they could be sold or exchanged along the way.[59] When seven slaves fled from the Brazos River in January 1845, their enslaver mentioned that they had "taken with them four of [his] fine blooded mares, a large pacing horse, and about twenty head of common horses". This abundant number of horses was surely unnecessary for mobility in itself, but some of them could have easily been traded to pay for guides or hosts, money and other items, or exchanged upon reaching the Mexican borderlands.[60]

The technology of the Second Slavery indirectly provided essential instruments for flight to free soil. Besides horses, weapons such as guns, rifles, knives and ammunition were frequently carried away by self-liberated slaves, as runaway slave advertisements pointed out. Such equipment was needed for physical defense against assailants, as well as for hunting animals for food. As inhabitants of the borderlands, some bondspeople were skilled with firearms, and had relatively easy access to them.[61] John, Sam and Frank, "three likely negro men" in their twenties who escaped from Brazoria in March 1851, took "with them two double barrel shotguns and a rifle".[62] Naturally, cash was a highly sought after item for escaped slaves, and possession of money determined to some extent whether to flee or not. Prior to his departure in March 1861, Wash stole $100 from his master W.H. King. In June 1840, six fugitives left Austin with "about $150 in specie, and $600 or $700 in Texas money", before their arrest in San Antonio. Under the whip, two other slaves revealed that they "had agreed to go with them", but ultimately did not join as they were unable to find "any money to bear their expenses". If not taken away from the master's house, cash could also be acquired through assaults during flight itself. During the summer of 1860, the *Texas Republican* informed its readers that three self-emancipated slaves "well armed with pistols and guns" had attacked a Virginian trader travelling back from Reynosa (Tamaulipas), securing $480 in the operation.[63] During the late 1830s, a certain Stinett, recently elected sheriff of Gonzales County, "discovered a smoke in a grove of timber, and supposing it to be a camp of hunters, went to it". The man soon encountered two slave refugees "seeking their way to Mexico". In the confusion, the fugitives killed Stinett and left with his horse, some provisions and $700.[64] Any other objects convertible into effective money were similarly sought out by absconding slaves. Before leaving for Spanish Texas in June 1819, an enslaved man from Mississippi named Robert made sure to steal "a silver watch with a gold chain worth 45 dollars". The slave

[59] Rosalie Schwartz, *Across the Rio to Freedom: US Negroes in Mexico* (El Paso: Texas Western Press, 1975), 44; Johnson, *River of Dark Dreams*, 222.
[60] *The Texas National Register*, 11 Jan. 1845.
[61] Malcolm McLean, *Papers concerning Robertson's Colony* (Arlington: University of Texas at Arlington, 1993), v.18, 241-243; Nichols, *The Limits of Liberty*, 136-137.
[62] *The Western Texan*, 6 March 1851; *The San Antonio Ledger*, 11 Sep. 1851.
[63] *Austin City Gazette,* 3 June 1840; Winnie Allen, Katherine Elliott, Charles Adams Gulick Jr., Harriet Smither, *The Papers of Mirabeau Buonaparte Lamar* (Austin and New York: The Pemberton Press, 1968), v.3, 412-413 ("Jewett to Lamar, 21 June 1840"); *The Weekly Telegraph*, 16 April 1861; *Texas Republican*, 9 June 1860.
[64] James T. DeShields, *Border Wars of Texas; being an Authentic and Popular Account, in Chronological Order, of the Long and Bitter Conflict waged between Savage Indian Tribes and the Pioneer Settlers of Texa*s (Tioga: The Herald Company, 1912), 192-193.

peddler Matilda likewise escaped from Natchez (Mississippi) in December 1825 with merchandises worth $150, which she probably clandestinely traded for goods and services.[65]

The substantial numbers of horses and weapons, and the amount of money that were taken by runaway slaves revealed meticulous preparation. The nine bondspeople who escaped in October 1804 from Alexis Cloutier's *vacheries* (cattle-ranches) near Natchitoches (Louisiana) carried away "eleven horses, some merchandises, five firearms, about thirty pounds of gunpowder and a hundred pounds of lead in bullet". Likewise, as five slaves from Anderson County decided to go south in August 1857, newspapers asserted that, given the variety of items they took away, it was "evident from the preparation they had made that they have had this trip in view for some time". In February 1849, Frank, aged thirty, attempted to escape to Mexico for the second time in his life, and was "supposed to be on a stolen horse, and to have considerable cash, stolen likewise". Frank also "had on woolen pants, blue frock coat, jeans black cap" as well as "a large quantity of holiday clothes, pen, ink, and paper and some books", a list indicating that he carefully prepared his journey.[66] Forged passes (either by literate slaves or by relatives) also revealed thorough planning, as they faked masters' authorizations for travel, or even freedom. In December 1836, twenty-four-year-old Edmond from Pine Bluffs (Arkansas) thus attempted "to pass himself off as a free man". Some twenty years later, in a similar scheme, a man named Primus also used an old pass written by his master to ease his journey from Louisiana to Mexico.[67] Yet exhaustive precautions of this kind never fully guaranteed success (just as a lack of preparation did not inexorably lead to failure). For example, thirty-five-year-old slave John Taylor absconded alone from Austin to Mexico before he was shot near Blanco in March 1856, as he was thought "to be an Indian" by his murderer. He had carried with him some shoes and "was well dressed" to defuse suspicion. He also "had in his wallet two white shirts, 25 pounds of bacon, 1-2 gallons of corn meal, several pens and pencils, 12 sheets of paper" (likely to forge passes), as well as "two horses", "two broides, a halter, and a quilter seat saddle".[68] Slave refugees also used dogs. Olmsted described his encounter with an "old man" on his way to Indianola who had been chasing a runaway for two weeks. The "old man" asserted that his dog, trained for tracking fugitive slaves – a widespread technique for slave patrols – "got close to him once, but he had a dog himself", the reason why the runaway was able to escape unmolested from the encounter.[69]

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[65] *The Louisianan*, 5 June 1819; *The Ariel*, 19 Dec. 1825.
[66] BA, reel 32, frame 707 (25 Oct. 1804); *The Galveston News*, 5 Sep. 1857; *Trinity Advocate*, 15 Sep. 1857; *Democratic Telegraph and Texas Register*, 1 March 1849.
[67] *Arkansas Gazette*, 27 Dec. 1836, quoted in S. Charles Bolton, *Arkansas Runaway Slaves: 1820-1865* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas, 2013), 56; *The South-Western*, 5 Aug. 1857.
[68] *Texas State Times*, 15 March 1856; Nichols, *The Limits of Liberty*, 136.
[69] Olmsted, *A Journey through Texas*, 256-257. Former slaves in Texas also recalled dogs being used against them: FWP, *Slave Narratives*, v.16/1 (10 (William M. Adams), 261 (Green Cumby) and 282 (Carey Davenport). Outsiders also noticed the repressive used of canine power, such as in Abbé Emmanuel Domenech, *Journal d'un Missionnaire au Texas et au Mexique, 1846-1852* (Paris: Gaume Frères, 1857), 264. *The Bastrop Advertiser* (Bastrop) on 14 March 1857 advertised a

Carrying a wide range of clothes was also crucial. Being able to cope with extreme climatic conditions explains why numerous slave refugees took good care to gather various clothes before escaping, especially warm clothes during wintertime.[70] More fundamentally, diversifying wardrobes helped to conceal one's appearance and to deceive patrols, as was the intention of aforementioned slave John Taylor. Twenty-one-year old Sam left LaGrange in June 1857 riding a horse, and carried away a wide range of clothes, so much so that the advertisement reporting his escape regretted that no full description of his clothes could satisfactorily be provided, "as he left with more suits than one". However, some slaveowners suspected the trick. The same year, the master of a young fugitive slave named Tom reported from Gatesville that the refugee left wearing, among other things, a "broad brim fur hat" along with brogan-like shoes, as well as some clothes "which he may change for others". Self-transformation through clothes and other items anonymized fugitives and partly enhanced their mobility.[71] In June 1858, a newspaper from Belton extensively narrated the story of "Jack Thompson" (as he called himself), a slave refugee from Coryell County. The man was well provisioned with money, arms, ammunition and "all other requisite appendages", as well as "a wig which disguised him so that he was not at first recognized by any one". This "ingenious contrivance", according to a witness, allowed Thompson to pass himself off as a Mexican free black travelling to El Paso to visit an alleged brother dubbed "Don Cuchillo Negro", until he was arrested.[72]

Self-transformation as a strategy could at times even involve changing sex appearance. In 1832, when Dutch immigrant Paul A. Guire and the enslaved woman Grace fled together to Mexican Texas from Lake Washington (Mississippi), her enslaver mentioned that he could not recollect her dress, as "she had a great many fine clothes, and will probably change them often". He had no doubt that "the thief will dress her in boy's clothes and attempt to pass her off as a boy, as he was seen the day after he left with a mulatto boy in possession, who he said he had purchased, but was no doubt described girl". A remarkably similar instance of visual deception through disguise was that of the enslaved couple Dreish and Rhoda. They escaped in November 1855 from distant Missouri. Five months later, their flight came to an end. The Texas press reported that "a man with long gray hair and beard, about sixty years old, traveling in company with a mulatto, was arrested on suspicion, between San Antonio

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"pack of hounds well trained for catching runaway negroes", with diverse prices per day according to distances. On dogs and escaped slaves: Franklin and Schweninger, *Runaway Slaves*, 160-164.

[70] On clothing: Franklin and Schweninger, *Runaway Slaves*, 219. Examples involving fugitive slaves paying particular attention to clothing in winter times are numerous. For instance, in December 1855, a "very likely mulatto man" fleeing from Austin, mechanic and Baptist preacher of 35 years old, was described as wearing "a cap, round coat and No. 12 Russet shoes" (*State Gazette,* 22 Dec. 1855).

[71] Johnson, *River of Dark Dreams*, 138-139; Amani Marshall, "'They will endeavour to pass for free': Enslaved Runaways' Performances of Freedom in Antebellum South Carolina", *Slavery & Abolition,* 31:2 (June 2010), 161-180.

[72] *Belton Independent*, 19 June, 26 June 1858 and 2 Oct. 1858; *Matagorda Gazette*, 31 July 1858.

and Castroville". Dreish managed to escape, unlike "the mulatto", who "turned out to be a woman" named Rhoda, "dressed in men's cloths", and shortly thereafter gave birth to a child.[73] As this last case suggests, the strategies developed by self-emancipated slaves with the prospect of enhancing mobility were often insufficient against recapture systems; acquiring material means of escape, such as stealing or trading horses, arms, food or any other items, was in itself dangerous, and could quickly lead to arrest or death. Detected by local residents and patrols, a group of five slaves travelling with a "white man" in November 1854 was forced to flee from their temporary encampment near Barton's Creek, as "they were gathering corn and killing some hogs in the neighborhood". A year later, two fugitives were "found lurking around the premises of a gentleman living on Bull Creek, evidently with the intention of stealing horses". A patrol with dogs went out for a search but was too late: both of them were already heading to Mexico.[74] Apart from material and spatial strategies, attaining freedom was often conditional upon securing networks of support while escaping.

Abolitionists, Smugglers and Scapegoats

Networks of Assistance: an "Underground Railroad" to Mexico?

When escaping overland to the northern Mexican states of Coahuila, Nuevo León and Tamaulipas, most fugitive slaves primarily relied on their own skills. Like their fellow runaways fleeing to the northern states and Canada, they usually absconded alone or in small groups of fugitives across the Rio Grande. But seeking external assistance to ease their flight was an essential concern for most of them, as familiarity with space and people decreased with time and distance.[75] Support could be material, through food, water, clothes and shelter. Assistance also took the form of immaterial assets such as geographical information, intelligence regarding local patrols and purely emotional input such as entertainment.[76] Passing as a free person, for instance, often required outside complicity, especially if self-emancipated slaves lacked forging skills. When Dick Tyler, a twenty-year-old enslaved carpenter, escaped from Brazoria, his master Peter McGreal claimed that he had been "supplied with forged papers or pass, or letters to travel with", which allowed him to introduce himself alternatively as "Richard Tyler" and "William Wright" and "pass for a white".[77] Sheltering runaways

[73] *The Vicksburg Register*, 5 Dec. 1832; *The Galveston News Tri-Weekly*, 20 March 1856; *The San Antonio Ledger*, 15 March 1856.
[74] *Texas Ranger*, 23 Nov. 1854; *Texas State Times*, 28 July 1855.
[75] Karolyn Smardz Frost, Veta Smith Tucker, *A Fluid Frontier: Slavery, Resistance and the Underground Railroad in the Detroit River Borderland* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press 2016), 12.
[76] Richard Price, *Maroon Societies: Rebel Slave Communities in the Americas* (Baltimore & London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 12-13; Thompson, *Flight to Freedom*, 14-15, 80; Diouf, *Slavery's Exiles*, 79-81.
[77] *The Weekly Telegraph*, 16 Nov. 1859; *The Daily Ledger and Texan*, 22 Nov. 1859. On slave refugees attempting to pass as white: Keri Leigh Merritt, *Masterless Men: Poor Whites and*

constituted another common form of assistance. When Dan and Eliza, two enslaved people from Galveston Bay absconded in June 1843, their enslaver Henry White claimed that they were "in all probability concealed in the lower part of the county". In 1858, a fugitive man from Matagorda County was arrested in Eagle Pass after having spent some months there (he had decided not to cross to the Mexican side after learning that escaped slaves were often abducted and returned to Texan slaveholders), hidden by "a white man who was villain enough to give him shelter and protection".[78]

Some assistance was provided to runaways by the community of bondspeople that had been scattered throughout the US Southwest by the geographical expansion of the plantation economy, the Second Slavery and the interstate slave trade. From this scattered community of enslaved African-Americans emerged what historian Rebecca Ginsburg has termed a "black landscape": an alternative spatial network eluding white people's scrutiny, shaped by secret territorial markers and passages, in which runaways could find assistance.[79] Enslaved or free relatives were the most obvious sources of support, despite the frequent dislocation of enslaved families across the new frontiers of slavery. After a journey of twenty-two days, Andrés arrived at San Antonio in March 1817 "mounting a fine mule with regular saddle", along with a "rifle, powder and bullets" and "the clothes necessary for his use". The refugee stressed that "the mule was not [his], as when [he] departed from Natchitoches [he] was carrying [his] two horses", which he traded for a mule with his niece.[80] When Berry, a twenty-eight-year-old slave, absconded from Belton in January 1855, his master Elijah S.C. Robertson reported that he had "no doubt" that Berry would pass by Gilleland's Creek on his way to the border, as he had been raised there by a reverend who "still own[ed] a brother of his".[81]

Within the "black landscape", support also stemmed from more anonymous fellow enslaved African Americans. Former slave Walter Rimm reminisced being once "in de woods and meet[ing] de nigger runawayer". The man "[came] to de cabin and mammy [made] him a bacon and egg sandwich" before leaving. "Maybe he done got clear to Mexico, where a lot of de slaves runs to", underlined Rimm. However, cooperation implied high risks for both slaves and runaways. Self-emancipated slaves were often forced to retreat to escape from patrols. Former slave Auntie Thomas Johns recollected that once "my mama would get word to bring 'em food and she'd start, out to where they was hidin' and she'd hear the hounds, and the runaway niggers would have to go on without gettin' nothin' to eat". Furthermore, former slave Green Cumby's testimony hints at the occasional distrust existing between enslaved people and runaways, especially as slaveholders sometimes offered rewards to loyal bondspeople:

Slavery in the Antebellum South (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 263.

[78] *Telegraph and Texas Register*, 5 July 1843; *The Morning Star*, 22 July 1843; *The Matagorda Gazette*, 31 July 1858.

[79] Ginsburg, "Escaping through a Black Landscape", 54; Rebecca Ginsburg, "Freedom and the Slave Landscape", *Landscape Journal*, v.26, n°1 (2007), 36-44.

[80] BA, reel 58, frames 97-105 (13 March 1817).

[81] *Texas State Times*, 24 Feb. 1855.

"to see de runaway slaves in de woods scared [him] to death" as "they'd try to snatch you and hold you, so you couldn't go tell".[82]

Moreover, slave refugees often joined other people journeying to Mexico, especially free African Americans migrating from the US South. During the spring of 1851, about twenty slaves absconded from Arkansas alongside about fifty Black Seminoles heading to the *mascogos* settlement (Coahuila). Likewise, some fugitive slaves joined about 100 free blacks from St. Landry Parish (Louisiana) who emigrated in 1857 across the Gulf of Mexico to establish the Donato colony in Tlacotalpan (Veracruz).[83] Some enslaved people even reached Mexico by accompanying masters mistakenly confident of their loyalty, thus bypassing the danger of escape itself. For instance, the servant of colonel George W. Hockley (one of the two commissioners for Texas sent to arrange armistice with Mexico in 1843) fled to Matamoros, "persuaded by the negroes and Mexicans, and seduced by the ideas of freedom and equality". In 1849, a slave named "Bock" who had accompanied his master to Mexico City similarly "applied for his freedom to the governor of the federal district", Pedro María Anaya. Likewise, former slaves Bill and Ellen Thomas, when interviewed by the Works Progress Administration in the 1930s, recalled how their master used to sell cotton bales across the border with Mexico, and how they once took advantage of a journey to escape from his possession.[84]

Fugitive slaves did not solely rely on fellow enslaved African Americans for assistance, or on the occasional involuntary cooperation of some slaveholders with so-called sojourning slaves. Some "conductors" seem to have been active in the Texas-Mexico borderlands after 1836, although to a lesser extent than their counterparts of the Underground Railroad (UGRR) to the North. Influential slaveowners and editors increasingly complained about the actions of real or imaginary abolitionists. Nacogdoches, in eastern Texas, was already "thrown into some alarm" in 1841 by "lurking scoundrels," supposed to be abolitionists.[85] During the 1850s, residents of Waco often complained about northern abolitionists allegedly "agitating" their enslaved workforce by dispatching antislavery literature. By the end of the decade, the initial scare of abolitionists had turned into a real witch-hunt. [86] In 1858 in Chihuahua,

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[82] FWP, *Slave Narratives*, v.16/3, 262 (Walter Rimm), v.16/2, 206 (Auntie Thomas Johns), v.16/1, 261 (Green Cumby). On distrust: Franklin and Schweninger, *Runaway Slaves*, 166.

[83] Kenneth Porter, *The Black Seminoles: History of a Freedom-Seeking People* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1996), 133; Sidney J. Lemelle, "The 'Circum-Caribbean' and the Continuity of Cultures: the Donato Colony in Mexico, 1830-1860", *The Journal of Pan African Studies*, v.6, n°1 (July 2013), 65.

[84] *The Weekly Dispatch*, 5 Nov. 1844; MAE(C), General Woll (Adrien), PA-AP/180/22 (Armistice du Texas, juin 1843-mars 1844), 269-274; *El Arco Iris*, 24 July 1849; *Daily Crescent of New Orleans*, 20 Aug. 1849; FWP, *Slave Narratives*, v.16/4, 109-111. See ch.4 on "sojourning" slaves.

[85] *The Morning Star*, 14 Sep. 1841; *Telegraph and Texas Register*, 15 Sep. 1841.

[86] Franklin and Schweninger, *Runaway Slaves*, 278. On abolitionism in Texas: Campbell, *An Empire for Slavery*, 221. Pressures exerted on the few abolitionists in Texas can be estimated through the "Proceedings of a public meeting, Galveston, July 7, 1856", directed to Lorenzo Sherwood, a lawyer and representative at the State legislature for Galveston (UT(A), Briscoe, Texas Slave Laws, Box 2J186).

a resident of San Antonio abducted a fugitive slave who had absconded from Anderson County. The prisoner later revealed that, while escaping along the Butterfield Overland Mail Route, "he was assisted and fed at the stations all along the road by the employees of the line". Once in El Paso, the runaway allegedly became a station keeper for the company in exchange for twenty dollars a month. Although the assistance of Butterfield's employees was later contested – being considered by some as simple "falsehood" – residents around El Paso staged a rally to denounce the company's alleged complicity.[87] During the spring of 1859, the Grayson County Court sentenced an employee of the company, New York-born George Humphreys, to exile in California for gambling with a slave and acting like what the *Dallas Herald* termed "an avowed abolitionist".[88] Similarly, a young white man named Granwell was jailed that same year with two slaves near Dallas. Labeled vaguely as a "negro-stealer" and abolitionist by the press, he had supposedly enticed slaves to follow him "upon the pretext of taking them to Mexico, and the promise of freeing them". It turned out that just before the incident, another man had unsuccessfully proposed to the bondspeople to flee with him to Santa Fe (New Mexico). Likewise, citizens of Williamson County wrote to the *Austin Gazette* complaining about "avowed abolitionists" in their jurisdiction, who were supposedly responsible for a recent increase in flights, as six slaves had been "missing from their owner's farms lately". The related article "Freesoilers and Runaways" thus asserted that "we do not know who they are, or what connection they may have with running off negroes, but the loss of slaves is occurring in our upper counties". Thus, German freethinkers and "forty-eighters" who had settled for instance in San Antonio, Fredericksburg and New Braunsfels were viewed with resentment by local slaveowners, since their liberal leanings contradicted the proslavery consensus and plausibly led some of them to assist fugitives (see below).[89] Grounded and ungrounded accusations in the press against abolitionists had become more and more frequent by the eve of Secession. This reflected just how anxious slaveowners had come to feel about runaways or any sign of opposition to institutionalized slavery, especially given that the Mexican authorities repeatedly refused to conclude any agreement with US governments regarding the rendition of fugitive slaves.

[87] *Civilian and Gazette Weekly*, 21 Dec. 1858; *Galveston Weekly News*, 21 Dec. 1858; *The Southern Intelligencer*, 9 Feb. 1859. The Butterfield Overland Mail Route was a stagecoach service founded in 1857 for the transport of both passengers and mail via the transcontinental route from Memphis and St. Louis to San Francisco.

[88] Glen Sample Ely, *The Texas Frontier and the Butterfield Overland Mail, 1858-1861* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2016), 34-35.

[89] *Dallas Herald*, 31 July 1858 and 9 Nov. 1859; Joseph E. Chance, *José María de Jesús Carvajal: The Life and Times of a Mexican Revolutionary* (San Antonio: Trinity University Press, 2006), 90.

Figure 2: El Paso
Source: the Plaza and Church of El Paso. 1857. From Rice University http///hdl.handle.net/1911/35793.

However, when compared to the UGRR, there is little evidence of similar (semi)-organized networks of assistance for slave refugees in the Texas-Mexico borderlands. Support networks for flight in the US Southwest were especially precarious when compared to (relatively) more stable northern escape routes. As underlined by Randolph Campbell, a proslavery hegemonic culture reigned in Texas among most slaveholders and non-slaveholders. Presumed abolitionists and transgressors of the code of loyalty to southern identity (which included respect for slavery) were harshly punished, both by the law as well as vigilantism and mob violence. Additionally, the community of free blacks in Texas after 1836 never amounted to more than a few hundred people. Slave refugees occasionally received the help of free blacks like Tom Raymond, a "free person of color" jailed in Travis County in December 1860 for "planning with certain slaves in Austin and vicinity for the purpose of leaving the county [...] and going to Mexico".[90] Nevertheless, by contrast with other regions of the US South where temporary – and even permanent – concealment among urban free African American residents was attainable, such a strategy remained extremely risky in Texas, as underlined by Kyle Ainsworth.[91] Furthermore, no abolitionist committees existed on the Mexican side of the border to welcome slave refugees. All these factors meant that networks of support for slave

[90] TCA, Texas Justice of the Peace Criminal Case Papers (Precinct 1), "State of Texas vs. Tom Raymond, Affidavit and Warrant", Box CR46.002, folder 3 (1860).
[91] "Advertising Maranda", in Pargas (ed.), *Fugitive Slaves and Spaces of Freedom in North America,* 214-215.

refugees were scarce, weak, contingent and volatile. These observations raise the question of whether the metaphor of an Underground Railroad, traditionally used in the historiography on fugitive slaves in nineteenth-century North America, and even by a few scholars of the US-Mexico borderlands, is applicable in this case.[92] In the specific context of the Texas-Mexico borderlands, assistance (when it existed) came as much from mobile people in frequent contact with slave refugees, or interested financially in such action, as from ideologically committed individuals striking against institutionalized slavery. To an even greater extent than for the UGRR, social proximity and opportunity were conducive to support in the borderlands, independently of antislavery ideals. [93]

Mexicans, Germans and Poor Whites

The overlap of ideological and socioeconomic reasons for assisting escaped slaves was particularly obvious among the Mexican population of the US Southwest. The connection between slave refugees and the Spanish speaking population of the borderlands dated back to at least the beginning of the century. In October 1804, Edward D. Turner corresponded from Natchitoches with territorial governor Claiborne regarding the involvement of two "Spaniards" in the successful escape of several slaves across the Sabine River. A twenty-nine-year-old *Afrotejano* – a free *labrador* from Nacogdoches – named Julián Grande was afterward suspected to have "excited [the bondspeople] to insurrection, robberies and desertion", and had himself to flee from the city jail to Louisiana in order to evade prosecution.[94] As slave flight across the Rio Grande increased after 1836 – and rose even more dramatically during the 1850s – low-skilled Mexican workers in Texas often assisted fugitives.[95] Soon after his arrival in Texas during the spring of 1839, Charles W. Webber argued that "the Mexican population of Texas had always exhibited a warm sympathy for them, and never failed to assist them in getting off by every means in their power". Webber recalled in particular the story of a Mexican blacksmith charged with having assisted a slave in his escape from San Antonio's city jail, which stood next to his shop, out of "human sympathy for the boy". The craftsman confessed that he had "advised him to the

[92] Mekala Shadd-Sartor Audain, "Mexican Canaan: Fugitive Slaves and Free Blacks on the American Frontier, 1804-1867", PhD Diss. (Graduate School-New Brunswick Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, 2014), 2; Ainsworth, "Advertising Maranda", in Pargas (ed.), *Fugitive Slaves and Spaces of Freedom in North America,* 211.

[93] Correspondence between antislavery reporter Frederick Law Olmsted and western free-soilers in Texas (such as the German "fourty-eighter" Adolf Douai) suggests that some abolitionists communicated between the northern states and Texas, and saw Mexico as a potential outlet for the enslaved population of the US South by way of slave flight. Yet a concerted plan to set up a replica to the classic Underground Railroad in the Texas-Mexico borderlands never emerged: LOC, Frederick Law Olmsted Papers, General Correspondence, 1838-1928; "Douai to Olmsted, 4 Sep. 1854", "*idem*., 17 Nov. 1854" and "*idem*., 16 Dec. 1854".

[94] TBL, Bolton, 45:9, "Diligencias practicadas contra Julián Grande [...] Año de 1805"; Rowland, *Official Letter Books,* v.2, 385-386; Harrison, "The failure of Spain in East Texas", 211; UT(A), Briscoe, BA, reel 34, frame 258 (11 Feb. 1806) and frame 478 (5 April 1806).

[95] Nichols, *The Limits of Liberty*, 162-168.

utmost as to the manner of his escape, and guided and accompanied him in his flight to the thicket". Likewise, when Frederick Law Olmsted met in eastern Texas an old man looking for a "great runaway" of his, the slaveholder argued that "every nigger or Mexican [the fugitive] could find would help him".[96]

The word "Mexican", in most runaway slave advertisements, press articles and jail notices, did not necessarily imply legal nationality, but rather referred to a perceived ethnicity (by Anglo-Americans), usually without distinction between Mexican Texans (*Tejanos*) and Mexican nationals.[97] Slaveowners and editors especially accused native non-qualified Mexican laborers of spreading "false notions of freedom", according to some residents of Austin in October 1854. Influential journalists often recommended expelling Mexican peons because, according to an editor from Indianola, they "have no domicile, but hang around the plantations, taking the likeliest negro girls for wives", before stealing horses and running to Mexico.[98] Legally free, peons nonetheless shared with African American slaves a similar socioeconomic condition as marginalized manual workers, a factor that was conducive to mutual sympathy. Such physical and socioeconomic proximity proved to be a decisive motive for empathy and assistance. On the farms, ranches and plantations of the US Southwest, both groups labored alongside one another, developing personal ties, sociability and entertainment.[99] As argued by James D. Nichols, mobility was an essential component of the lives of indebted or migrant *peones*, who commonly crossed the border seeking to improve their living conditions. Peons from Mexico were especially useful in transmitting social, geographical and linguistic skills and knowledge, while tales of runaway peons crossing borders inspired would-be escapees.[100] "By placing themselves on an equality with the slave, they stir up among our servants a spirit of insubordination", concluded the delegates representing the western counties of Texas at a state convention held in Gonzales in October 1854. The

[96] Webber, *Tales of the Southern Border*, 48-49 and 56-57; Frederick Law Olmsted, *The Cotton Kingdom: a Traveller's Observations on Cotton and Slavery in the American Slave States* (New York: Mason Brothers, 1861), v.2, 7; Nichols, *The Limits of Liberty*, 154.

[97] The broad label of "Mexican" as an imagined community accounts for the absence of any distinction between Mexican Texans and Mexican nationals in these sources. The word "Mexican" will therefore be used in this study only in its original context, not as a valid analytical category.

[98] *Texas State Times*, 14 Oct. 1854; *The Indianola Bulletin*, 6 Sep. 1853. The image of Mexican laborers absconding with enslaved women became a cliché of the US Southwest press in the 1850s, usually meant to criminalize both peons and slaves through derogatory narratives.

[99] On slaves drinking, gambling and dancing with Mexicans in plantations: *Texas State Gazette*, 14 Oct. 1854; Nichols, *The Limits of Liberty*, 166.

[100] Nichols, "The line of Liberty", 713-733; Raúl A. Ramos, *Beyond the Alamo: Forging Mexican Ethnicity in San Antonio, 1821-1860* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008); David Montejano, *Anglos and Mexicans in the Making of Texas, 1836-1986* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1987); Arnoldo De León, *They Called Them Greasers: Anglo Attitudes Toward Mexicans in Texas, 1821-1900* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1983); Juan Mora-Torres, *The Making of the Mexican Border: the State, Capitalism, and Society in Nuevo Leon, 1848-1910* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2001), 23 and 49-50. For the testimonies of former slaves Jacob Branch and Sallie Wroe on Mexicans assisting slave refugees: Jeffrey R. Kerr-Ritchie, *Freedom seekers: Essays on Comparative Emancipation* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2014), 25.

Clarksville *Standard*'s editor concurred: to him, "the inducements for a negro to run off to Mexico is the idea that he will there be on a footing with the peon Mexican whom he sees here, and with whom he associates on a perfect equality". [101]

On the run, Mexicans performed the role of guides and intermediaries in soliciting provisions and information, as in the case of twenty-three-year-old Isham, who absconded from Nacogdoches in July 1853 "in company with a large Mexican rather white". Entire groups were sometimes formed. In November 1856, a party of five slave refugees and three Mexicans, all of them "well armed and mounted", crossed the border at Camargo (Tamaulipas) after patrols from Rio Grande City failed to capture them. Two years later, a newspaper from Bastrop similarly underlined that "a plot between two Mexicans and a lot of negroes was discovered" at Gonzales, according to which the slaves "were to be run off to Mexico".[102] Increasingly frustrated by the issue, proslavery journalist John S. Ford wrote that "sometimes [slaves] come in bands of ten or twelve, escorted and guarded by a Mexican, who has guided them above the settlements and through the upper prairies of Texas".[103]

The symbiosis between both groups seemed so clear to slaveowners that the *Texas State Times* asserted that Mexicans and slaves maintained a deeply-rooted "fellow-feeling", pessimistically stressing that "no precautionary movements, no committees of vigilance, will ever prevent negroes from running away or Mexicans from helping them off".[104] At Seguin in August 1854, a public meeting organized by slaveholders alarmed by the rise of escape attempts to the southern border denounced Mexican peons as "fugitives from justice", "highway robbers, horse and cattle thieves, and idle vagabonds". According to the attendees, self-emancipated slaves easily corrupted "the straggling Mexican population of this county", as "they scruple at nothing, and a few dollars from a negro, is sufficient to secure their services".[105] Consequently, some defenders of slavery proposed isolating bondspeople from such influences. In December 1853, "an act to prevent Mexicans from keeping negro slaves as wives" was briefly considered by the House of Representatives in Texas. Four years later, while Limestone County was "thrown into confusion and excitement" by a supposed plot between several Mexicans and "some ten or twelve slaves" whose "plans were accidently overheard" by local residents, a proslavery editor recommended the

[101] *Texas State Times*, 14 Oct. 1854; *The Standard*, 21 Oct. 1854; Menchaca, *Naturalizing Mexican Immigrants*, 28.
[102] *Nacogdoches Chronicle*, 12 July 1853; *Richmond Enquirer*, 21 Nov. 1856; *The Bastrop Advertiser*, 5 June 1858; *The Belton Independent*, 12 June 1858; Audain, "'Design his Course to Mexico'", in Pargas (ed.), *Fugitive Slaves and Spaces of Freedom in North America*, 236.
[103] *The South-Western*, 7 Nov. 1855.
[104] *Texas State Times*, 8 Sep. 1855.
[105] "Seguin, Texas Citizens circular regarding proceedings of a meeting to discuss the end of slave trafficking", 26 Aug. 1854 [University of Houston, Digital Library, accessed 18 Sep. 2018]; *Texas State Gazette*, 9 Sep. 1854; James Marten, *Texas Divided: Loyalty and Dissent in the Lone Star State, 1856-1874* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1990), 13; Franklin and Schweninger, *Runaway Slaves*, 25-26; Nichols, "The line of Liberty", 424; De León, *They Called Them Greasers*, 50-51.

immediate separation of peons and enslaved workers.[106] Yet the white community's "class-based racialization" of the Mexican population of Texas continued to blur the line between them and the enslaved population.[107] Some fair-skinned runaways occasionally passed themselves off as Mexicans, while others were reported as looking like Mexicans.[108] In some instances that strengthened even more this infamous Black-Mexican connection to the eyes of slaveholders, escaped slaves joined Mexican *caudillos* (such as Vicente Córdova, Antonio Canales and Juan Cortina) in roaming across the borderlands looking for spoils.[109]

The frustration of southwestern slaveholders gradually rose and several towns and counties across Texas passed provisions discriminating against or expelling Mexican laborers.[110] Violence against Mexicans spread, including extrajudicial punishments. In 1842, a peon "attempting to run away with a negro girl" from Texana was captured near Lavaca and swiftly "hung in a tree", while near San Felipe, a Mexican was whipped and had his ears cut off by a planter who accused him of enticing his slaves "to run away with him to Mexico".[111] Rumors of Mexican "greasers" allegedly assisting fugitives often unleashed furious mobs. During the autumn of 1854, a Mexican peon suspected of attempting to run away with a slave was lashed 150 times in Goliad, while "the letter T [was] branded on his forehead". Some weeks later in San Antonio, "five Mexicans and two Americans" were hastily arrested on the charge of planning to depart with "four negroes" to Mexico, and were most probably "punished summarily".[112]

Anti-Mexican xenophobia related to the question of slave flight had reached its pinnacle by the eve of the US Civil War. Following the discovery of an alleged plot by several dozen slaves across Colorado County in September 1856, inquiries naturally concluded that "without exception every Mexican in the County was implicated".

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[106] *Journal of the House of Representatives of the State of Texas, Fifth Legislature* (Austin: S.W. Hampton, 1853), 34; *The Galveston News,* 24 Sep. 1857; Nichols, "The line of Liberty", 425.
[107] Carrigan, "Slavery on the Frontier", 69; Omar Valerio-Jiménez, *River of Hope: Forging Identity and Nation in the Rio Grande Borderlands* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013), 233-234; Menchaca, *Naturalizing Mexican Immigrants*, 27.
[108] *New Orleans Daily Picayune*, 26 Oct. 1844; *New Orleans Delta*, 25 Sep. 1849; *The Nueces Valley*, 18 March 1854; *The South-Western*, 8 Sep. 1858; Nichols, *The Limits of Liberty*, 136. For instance, this last article reports the escape of an enslaved man from Shreveport, Wash[ington] described as having the "appearance of a mongrel Mexican".
[109] *Brazos Courier*, 10 March 1840; *Telegraph and Texas Register*, 29 April 1840; James Wilson Nichols, (ed.) Catherine W. McDowell, *Now you hear my horn: the Journal of James Wilson Nichols, 1820-1877* (Austin and London: University of Texas Press, 2010), 36-38; John Holmes Jenkins III (ed.), *Recollections of Early Texas: Memoirs of John Holland Jenkins* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2003), 84-85; Valerio-Jiménez, *River of Hope,* 222; Stephen L. Moore, *Savage Frontier: Rangers, Riflemen and Indian Wars in Texas, 1838-1839* (Denton: University of North Texas Press, 2006), v.2, 186; Nichols, *The Limits of Liberty*, 73.
[110] José Ángel Hernández, *Mexican American Colonization during the Nineteenth Century: A History of the U.S. Mexico Borderlands* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 68-80. Expulsions in the 1850s were especially carried out in Seguin (1854), Austin (1853 and 1855), Matagorda (1856), Uvalde County (1857), and Colorado County (1856).
[111] *The Red-Lander*, 7 July 1842.
[112] *The Texas Monument*, 26 Sep. 1854; *The South-Western*, 18 Oct. 1854.

While five enslaved people were sentenced to death by whipping and hanging, the "incendiaries" were all "arrested and ordered to leave the county within five days and never again to return under the penalty of death".[113] Likewise, during the summer of 1860, a statewide panic about slave insurrection and flight to Mexico – termed the "Texas Troubles" – broke out among white residents following series of fires in North Texas (especially around Denton and Dallas). Fear reached every corner of the Lone Star State, from Lyons, Fayette County, where "traces of a band of runaways [were] being organized with the intention of escaping to Mexico" to Bastrop's woods, which "seem[ed] to be alive with runaway slaves". Many suspected "abolitionists" (especially south of Dallas, in Ellis County) were summarily lynched, and the involvement of Mexicans in the supposed conspiracy was at first strongly presumed. Yet with no concrete evidence of this, the press eventually observed that the planned uprising had likely been the fantasized outcome of the rising paranoia of Texan slaveholders.[114] Though ethnic conflict was narrowly avoided this time, it was never far away. During the 1850s, Mexican *carreteros* trading across the southern border were accused of fomenting insubordination among southwestern slaves, in order to "carry them out of the State in the oxteams". In an incident deceptively referred to as the "Cart War" (in fact, more of an ethnic pogrom than a proper war), about seventy-five *carreteros* were murdered near San Antonio in 1857 on these grounds.[115]

By contrast, Mexicans who arrested runaways were praised as loyal to the slaveholding community and held up as models for emulation. Santos Benavides, a wealthy and influential *Tejano* landowner residing in Laredo and future distinguished Confederate, was often celebrated for the success of his slave-catching activity. The Corpus Christi *Ranchero* once related how Benavides crossed the border with ten men to arrest an escaped slave, emphasizing that he "has ever been foremost in confronting danger in support of the laws and institutions of Texas". The editor hoped that his

[113] On the Colorado conspiracy: *Texas State Times*, 27 Sep. 1856; *Galveston News*, 11 Sep. 1856; UT(A), Briscoe, Texas Slave Laws, Box 2J186; Campbell, *An Empire for Slavery*, 217-219; Sean M. Kelley, "Mexico in his head: Slavery and the Texas-Mexican Border, 1810-1860", *Journal of Social History*, 37:3 (2004), 717; Sean M. Kelley, *Los Brazos de Dios: a Plantation Society in the Texas Borderlands, 1821-1865* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2010), 100; David Grimsted, *American Mobbing, 1828-1861: Toward Civil War* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 174; Carrigan, "Slavery on the Frontier", 81-82; Marten, *Texas Divided*, 13-14; Hernández, *Mexican American Colonization,* 74-75.

[114] *Memphis Daily Appeal*, 7 Aug. 1860; *Galveston Weekly News*, 20 Aug. 1860; *The Weekly Mississippian*, 8 Aug. 1860; *Texas Christian Advocate*, 30 Aug. 1860; *Boston Advertiser*, 15 Sep. 1860; Ginny McNeill Raska and Mary Lynn Gasaway Hill (ed.), *The Uncompromissing Diary of Sallie McNeill, 1858-1867* (College Station: Texas A&M University, 2009), 82-83. On the "Texas Troubles": Campbell, *An Empire for Slavery*, 225-228; Donald E. Reynolds, *Texas Terror: the Slave Insurrection Panic of 1860 and the Secession of the Lower South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2007).

[115] Elisha M. Pease, *Informe del gobernador del Estado de Tejas: i documentos relativos a los asaltos contra los carreteros mejicanos* (Austin: John Marshall & Co., 1857); *The Washington American*, 22 Nov. 1856; *The Colorado Citizen*, 23 Jan. 1858; Neil Foley, *The White Scourge: Mexicans, Blacks and Poor Whites in Texas Cotton Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 24-25; Marten, *Texas Divided*, 29-30. On *carreteros* being employed in Perry's Peach Point plantation: Kelley, *Los Brazos de Dios*, 7.

devotion to slavery would "go far towards opening the eyes of many to the erroneous impressions so generally entertained regarding the portion of our fellow citizens of Mexican origin".[116] As Omar Valerio-Jiménez has argued, Mexicans in post-1836 Texas "gained acceptance as legitimate American citizens when they denied freedom to African American slaves, who had no similar recourse to citizenship". Yet such reappraisals were often reserved to old *Tejano* families, while the vast majority of Mexicans, especially newcomers, were kept under close scrutiny.[117]

To a lesser extent, German immigrants, most of whom were small non-slaveholding farmers, also faced resentment from local slaveowners. The new settlers' frequently critical views on slavery, as well as the scarcity of German slaveholders in Texas, put them at odds with the local proslavery culture.[118] In his *Journey through Texas* (1857), journalist and antislavery advocate Frederick L. Olmsted recalled that a poor German immigrant "happening to find a half-starved fugitive, when looking after his cattle, melted in compassion". Once back at his home, the man "bound up his wounds, clothed him, gave him food and whisky, and set him rejoicing on his way again".[119] Olmsted's comments were indicative of a larger trend.[120] For instance, some fugitives were arrested in February 1855 "in a German settlement near Texana".[121] Former slave Sarah Ford reminisced about the experience of her father Mike as a serial runaway. As he repeatedly absconded from the estate of planter Charles Patton in Columbia – on one occasion reaching the Mexican border – Mike had consistently received support from the family of a German settler named Charles Eberling, in Brazoria County.[122] Self-liberated slaves such as Mike frequently sought protection in

[116] SRE, CPN, c.3 e.13, f.6-7, "Alcalde constitucional de Nuevo Laredo, 6 Nov. 1860"; *The Ranchero*, 17 Nov. 1860. A similar defense of Mexicans arresting runaways can be found in *San Antonio Herald*, 18 Oct. 1856. On Santos Benavides as slave-hunter in Laredo: UT(SA), John Peace Library, Sneed Wilcox Papers, Box 1/9; Gilberto Miguel Hinojosa, *A Borderlands Town in Transition, Laredo, 1755-1870* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1983), 81-86; Valerio-Jiménez, *River of Hope*, 251; De León, *They Called Them Greasers,* 50.

[117] Valerio-Jiménez, *River of Hope*, 234. Similarly, an editor from Rio Grande City praised a Mexican resident, Rodrigo Hinojosa, for his capture of two runaways, underlining that "some of our Mexican population are of service to the community at large, as well as being law-abiding citizens": *The Ranchero*, 17 March 1860.

[118] Gilbert Giddings Benjamin, *The Germans in Texas: a Study in Immigration* (Philadelphia: Reprinted from German American Annals, 1909), VII, 90-109; Zoie Odom Newsome, "Antislavery sentiment in Texas, 1821-1861", Master Thesis (Texas Technological College, 1968), 62-65.

[119] Frederick L. Olmsted, *A Journey through Texas: or a Saddle-Trip on the Southwestern Frontier*, (New York: Dix. Edwards & Co., 1857), 327-328.

[120] See for instance the story of a "German boy" and a fugitive slave "journeying lovingly together to the Rio Grande" published in *The Texan Mercury*, 8 Oct. 1853.

[121] *The Texas Ranger*, 3 Feb. 1855. By contrast, the *Colorado Citizen* praised the German population of Fredericksburg and its surroundings for their role in the arrest of twenty-three fugitive slaves in one of its issue (14 Aug. 1858).

[122] Sarah Ford in George P. Rawick (ed.), *The American Slave: a Composite Autobiography* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1979), Supplement Serie 2, v.4, Texas Narratives, part 3, 1365-1366.

German settlements, "knowing very well that no German will deliver a fugitive slave to his owner", according to writer and journalist Friedrich Kapp.[123]

Apart from Germans, the southwestern press also accused other "white" individuals (Euro-Americans) of providing support to self-emancipated slaves, infuriating slaveholders who viewed them as betrayers of their own race.[124] From the Louisiana Purchase onwards, enslaved people in the borderlands fled alongside deserting soldiers from the US (many of them Irish and French Catholics), as underlined by Lance Blyth.[125] Just like army deserters, "whites" often guided slave refugees to the border. In September 1856, San Antonio's police "discovered a white man and a negro passing leisurely through [the] city, on horseback, each, at noonday". Upon closer inquiry, it turned out that the enslaved man had escaped a few days earlier from King Holstein with a man named Alford. Six self-liberated slaves who had left DeWitt County during Christmas day in 1850, "led by a white man, who they called Gee", were arrested about two months later near Corpus Christi as "a gentleman of that place discovered them a few miles above the town whilst out hunting cattle".[126] Others counterfeited passes. John, an enslaved man carried away from Baltimore to Natchez, decided to flee "to the Spanish country" in October 1806 after securing a forged pass "from a white man", thanks to which he now endeavored "to pass for a free man".[127]

Unsurprisingly, slaveholders portrayed "white" supporters of slave refugees in the same derogatory terms that they applied to Mexican "greasers" and Germans. Here, class played an essential role. In particular, slaveholders targeted poor and transient "white" workers as outsiders to the slaveholding white community, whose commitment to institutionalized slavery seemed questionable. Henry Dance, a planter from Columbia (Texas), argued that the enslaved man Julius "had gone off with some vagabond white man", given that "on one or two occasions, [he] discovered him in parley with one". When Davy absconded from Independence, his enslaver likewise underscored the troublesome influence of "some rascall white person" with whom the "mulatto boy" had likely fled to Mexico. As James D. Nichols and Kyle Ainsworth have argued, blaming "meddlesome intruders" conveniently reassured slaveholders who were attempting to preserve the image of benevolent *paterfamilias* they sought to project to the southern community. For instance, the enslaver of thirty-one-year-old

[123] *New York Daily Tribune*, 20 Jan. 1855, 6: "The History of Texas, Early German Colonisation, Princes and Nobles in America, The Future of the State, a Lecture by Frederick Kapp".
[124] *Texas State Times*, 8 Sep. 1855: "Mexicans are not the only people who persuade negroes to abscond - *other foreigners do so too* - and there are many unprincipled Americans engaged in these rascalities". As for "Mexican", the term "foreigners" refers in this context not only to legally foreign individuals, but also to newcomers whose commitment to slavery and southern identity was questioned.
[125] Blyth, "Fugitives from servitude", 4. More on army deserters and runaways in the following chapters.
[126] Olmsted, *A Journey through Texas*, 327-328; *The Galveston News Tri-Weekly*, 30 Sep. 1856 and 2 Oct. 1856; *The Northern Standard*, 15 Feb. 1852.
[127] *Mississippi Herald and Natchez Repository*, 28 Oct. 1806.

George, an enslaved man who absconded from Milam in August 1854, claimed that the fugitive "[had] been persuaded off by some white man", thus trying to avoid losing face while denying George's own agency.[128]

The Usual Suspects

Thus, although at times based on objective facts, accusations against Mexicans, Germans and poor whites were also indicative of slaveholders' rising frustration in the context of increasing slave flight to Mexico.[129] Slaveowners arguably exaggerated the extent to which escaped slaves received assistance and frequently accused (without evidence) perceived traitors to the proslavery consensus. In a patronizing denial of enslaved people's will and capacity to abscond by themselves, the blaming of Mexicans, Germans and poor whites served to downplay the intrinsic violence of slavery while assuming that only external interference by foreign troublemakers could corrupt slaves' minds. For instance, the *Indianola Bulletin*'s report on the escape of at least four slaves from Bastrop in May 1855, who were formerly "considered good and trusty negroes by the community" before being "piloted to Mexico by Mexican peons", draws upon a portrayal of Mexicans as external agitators corrupting previously obedient slaves, thus obscuring the agency of the latter.[130] In fact, the chronic scapegoating of Mexicans, Germans and poor whites as alleged accomplices reflected rising concerns among the Euro-American community about the loyalty of new immigrants to white supremacy, paternalism and southern identity, of which defense of slavery was the main expression.[131] Other non-Anglo Europeans newly arrived in Texas, such as Czechs and Norwegians, faced the wrath of local proslavery populations for their real or imagined abolitionism.[132] Newspaper articles and district court records suggest that members of the religious communities and evangelical movements that emerged in Texas in the wake of the Second Great Awakening were also occasionally

[128] *Texas State Gazette*, 30 July 1853; *Texas State Gazette*, 6 May 1854; *Nacogdoches Chronicle*, 8 Aug. 1854. On the "theory of meddlesome intruders corrupting the morals of slaves", consult for Texas: Nichols, "The Limits of Liberty", 54; Ainsworth "Advertising Maranda", in Pargas (ed.), *Fugitive Slaves and Spaces of Freedom in North America,* 210-211; and for the US South: Franklin and Schweninger, *Runaway Slaves*, 274-277; Rivers, *Rebels and Runaways*, 58-63.

[129] Ainsworth "Advertising Maranda", in Pargas (ed.), *Fugitive Slaves and Spaces of Freedom in North America,* 210-214.

[130] *The Indianola Bulletin*, 31 May 1855; *El Bejareño*, 9 June 1855.

[131] On the relationship between slave flight and deceived paternalism: Walter Johnson, *Soul by Soul: Life inside the Antebellum Slave Market* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 205; Shelton, "Slavery in a Texas Seaport", 159; Franklin and Schweninger, *Runaway Slaves*, 264. On mastery, masculinity, honor and whiteness: Jonathan D. Martin, *Divided Mastery: Slave Hiring in the American South* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), 155.

[132] Darwin Payne, "Early Norwegians in Northeast Texas", *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, v.65, n°2 (Oct. 1961), 196-203; Miroslav Rechcigl, "The Lone Star State of "Moravci" in its Formative Years", *Česky Dialog, Czech Dialogue* (2009), 9-10 [accessed 27 September 2017]. Some known abolitionists from these two groups faced death (such as Norwegian emigrant J.M.C.W. Waerenskjold, who had settled in Northeast Texas in 1847) or exile (such as the Czechs Leopold Karpeles, in South Texas, and Michal Anthony Dignovity, in San Antonio) before the US Civil War. Newsome, "Antislavery sentiment in Texas", 68-69.

accused of antislavery subversion and assistance to fugitives, such as a Methodist yeoman named Leonard S. Friend, indicted in Austin in 1851 on such charges.[133] In 1841, residents of Northeast Texas opposed the planned settlement of Mormons near the Red River, on the ground that the newcomers would propagate "the accursed doctrine of Abolitionism; a doctrine that embraces within itself treason and robbery", and even "form leagues with the Indians and runaway negroes".[134] In June 1858, John Donegan, a white preacher living near Waxahachie, was lynched by a mob of about one hundred people that "believed him guilty of arson, burglary, horse-stealing and tampering with negroes".[135]

Yet harboring antislavery sentiments did not necessarily imply active support for fugitives. For instance, Sean M. Kelley has underscored that Germans, fearing reprisals, "rarely articulated [their beliefs] publicly". Albeit underlining their general empathy towards fugitives, Olmsted also argued that "most of the Germans", considering the risks involved in assisting enslaved asylum-seekers, "would refuse to take in a negro whom they knew to be running away".[136] And when, at the initiative of the *Freien Verein*, some Germans from San Antonio held a discussion on slavery and its abolition as part of the 1854 Sangerfest, very few people attended it. Nonetheless, the very event in itself convinced influential local slaveholders that all Germans from nearby – especially exiled "forty-eighters" – were dangerous accomplices of slave resistance. One of its promoters, Adolf Douai, eventually left Texas due to the fierce hostility he faced after expressing abolitionist opinions (in the context of gains by the anti-immigrant "Know-Nothing" party in San Antonio's 1854 municipal elections).[137] Stereotypes linked to ethnicity and nationality often led to self-fulfilling prophecies, in which any disagreement with institutionalized slavery was interpreted by slaveholders as evidence for having actively provided assistance. For instance, runaway slave advertisements often suggested the collusion of Mexicans, even when there were no tangible grounds for such accusations. When twenty-five slaves from Bastrop fled together in December 1844, newspapers hastily "supposed that some Mexican [had] enticed them to flee to the Mexican settlements west of the Rio Grande", without further details.[138] When four slaves named Jim, Stephen, Alfred and Arthur absconded

[133] TCA, Texas District Court Records, State of Texas vs. Leonard S. Friend, case n°138, Indictment, 1 May 1851; John Early (ed.), *Minutes of the Annual Conferences of the Methodist Episcopal Church South for the years 1846-1847* (Richmond: Advocate Office, 1847), 97-98.
[134] *Telegraph and Texas Register*, 22 Dec. 1841; *Charleston Mercury*, 18 April 1859.
[135] *The Weekly Telegraph*, 21 Oct. 1857; *The Liberator*, 17 Sep. 1858.
[136] Olmsted, *A Journey through Texas*, 327-328; Kelley, *Los Brazos de Dios*, 174-177.
[137] On the German Convention and "free-thinkers" of Die Freie Verein (The Free Society): Moritz Tiling, *History of the German Element in Texas from 1820-1850 and historical sketches of the German Texas Singers' league and Houston Turnverein from 1853-1913* (Houston: Tiling, 1913), 140-141; Laura Wood Roper, "Frederick Law Olmsted and the Western Texas Free-Soil Movement", *The American Historical Review*, v.56/1 (Oct. 1950), 58-64; Larry P. Knight, "Defending the Unnecessary: Slavery in San Antonio in the 1850s", in Bruce A. Glasrud (ed.), *African Americans in South Texas History* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2011), 32-48.
[138] *Telegraph and Texas Register*, 15 Jan. 1845 and 22 Jan. 1845; *The Northern Standard*, 27 Feb. 1845; Campbell, *An Empire for Slavery*, 182. Seventeen of them were eventually captured above

together from Fort Bend County in July 1852, their master Patrick Perry hastily suggested that, as "a Mexican by the name of Phillippi [was] also missing", the latter very likely bore responsibility for the flight, although he did not provide further evidence to support his claim.[139]

Contrary to such accusations, support for fugitives in the borderlands did not necessarily stem from moral, religious or ideological convictions against slavery. Pragmatic considerations and monetary interests also prompted assistance, as illustrated by the escape of Miguel Arcienega and his slaves across the border in 1855. A *tejano* resident of San Antonio, Arcienega was indebted to a certain John Riddle. "Lots and parcels of land adjacent to San Antonio" along with "three negro slaves" were held as securities, which were to be returned as soon as the sum was paid. To avoid an impending foreclosure, Arcienaga encouraged the slaves to escape from their new master and join him across the Mexican border, and then sued Riddle. His intention certainly was not grounded in philanthropy. Yet once in Mexico, the three men became (in theory) free by law.[140] Similar financial motivations also account for Georgia-born John Short's alleged assistance to slave refugees in Fayette County during the early 1840s. Short became notorious in his locality (despite being a veteran of the Texas Revolution) for apparently abetting slaves escaping to Mexico. Short sold slaves who subsequently fled from their new owners and rejoined him. The trick was then repeated further south until reaching Mexico, where the slaves were set free. In the meantime, Short secured substantial benefits, which seemed to be his prime motivation, until he was eventually hanged in February 1847 for cattle theft and counterfeiting.[141] In the fall of 1854, similarly accusations were made against two transient workers named Wells and Morgan in Navarro County, suspected of performing the very same trick while guiding slaves down to Mexico. After Morgan's "forced confession" at the hands of an angry mob, Wells' body was found several days

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the town of Seguin, near the Guadalupe River. Wendell G. Addington, "Slave insurrections in Texas", *Journal of Negro History*, v.35, n°4 (Oct. 1950), 414.

[139] *The San Antonio Ledger*, 19 Aug. 1852.

[140] *Reports of cases argued and decided in the Supreme Court of the state of Texas at Austin, 1855, v.15* (St. Louis: The Gilbert Book Company, 1881), 289-291 (Arcienaga v. Riddle 15 TX 331). Other cases followed similar patterns (although not always leading to escape to Mexico). For instance, a man named Sherman Case, indebted to some trade partners, sold his slave Celia before enticing her to run away from her new enslaver. *Reports of cases argued and decided in the Supreme Court of the State of Texas during the latter part of Tyler session, and the former part of Austin session, 1856, v.17* (St. Louis: The Gilbert Book Company, 1881), 587-599 (Case v. Jennings and Henderson 17 TX 663). Similarly, in 1845, a resident of Mississippi named Joshia H. Stafford, indebted to the Union Bank of Louisiana (he had mortgaged 102 slaves in 1837), sought to avoid foreclosure by sending his bondspeople to Texas and threatening "to remove them out of that State to Mexico". U.S. Supreme Court, Union Bank of Louisiana v. Stafford, 53 US 327, 1851; U.S. Supreme Court, Stafford v. Union Bank of Louisiana, 57 US 135-142, 1853 (via Justia, online); Linda Sybert Hudson, *The Database of Black Texans in the Texas Supreme Court, 1840-1907* (online database), 2004, 48.

[141] Ernest Obadele-Starks, *Freebooters and Smugglers: The Foreign Slave Trade in the United States after 1808* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2007), 127; Marie W. Watts, *La Grange* (Charleston SC, Chicago IL, Portsmouth NH, San Francisco CA: Arcadia Publishing, 2008), 97.

later, "thrown in a creek", with evidence that he had been tortured, mutilated and summarily executed.[142] As with abolitionists, Mexicans and Germans, the veracity of accusations directed at presumed slave smugglers like Short, Wells and Morgan remains difficult to establish, as some were entirely fabricated. However, the observations of some contemporaries seem to suggest that such suspicion was not always ungrounded. In his *Excursion through the Slave States*, for instance, geographer and geologist George W. Featherstonhaugh underscored that smuggling slaves (including to free states) through the borderlands was one of many "modes of getting a livelihood".[143]

The boundaries between assistance and exploitation, aid to fugitives and abuse of enslaved people, often proved to be ambiguous. Attaining freedom was to a significant extent conditional upon mastering the ambivalence of these boundaries. Outright "slave-stealing" by ill-intentioned individuals occasionally occurred, though to a lesser extent than slaveholders claimed. Pedro and Sarah, two slaves from Attakapas (Louisiana), reached the military post of Atascosito in March 1811 accompanied by an Englishman, Aaron Wiggins, who claimed to be their legitimate master. In fact, Wiggins had forcibly removed them from their actual enslaver, Jean Grison, during a hunting expedition, after Grison had fallen ill. Wiggins at first endeavored to kill Grison but, instead, eventually abandoned him near the Sabine River. Pedro and Sarah were then forcibly embarked on a small canoe. They sailed until reaching the mouth of the Trinity River. In Spanish Texas, the group survived by planting corn and hunting game. Yet after exhausting their gunpowder and being overcome by hunger, they encountered Spanish troops from Atascosito. Wiggins' account did not convince captain Juan Ignacio Arrambide, who described him as a *vago mal entretenido* (vagrant and lingerer) who had abducted the two slaves with the hope of exploiting them in Texas.[144] Four decades later, near Austin, John and Benjamin Perry Grumbles were likewise convicted of slave-stealing. An inquiry ascertained their intention to settle "beyond the limits of the state" and to exploit a fourteen-year-old girl "to their own use", after keeping her "in secrecy" for about ten months.[145]

Other cases seemed less straightforward. Notices published in the *Arkansas Gazette* between 1821 and 1836, the early stage of the Euro-American colonization of Texas, exemplify the ambivalent boundary between self-interested kidnapping of slaves and philanthropic assistance to fugitives. When the enslaved Basil and Ned absconded from Montgomery plantation in Tensaw (Alabama) in May 1821, their master promptly accused a certain Stephen Stapleton of "slave-stealing". During the

[142] *Washington Texas Ranger and Lonestar*, 18 Nov. 1854; Nichols, "The Limits of Liberty", 55-56.
[143] George W. Featherstonhaugh, *Excursion through the Slave States, from Washington on the Potomac to the frontier of Mexico* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1844), 64.
[144] BA, reel 49, frames 13-42 (1811-1812). Pedro and Sarah's case illustrates the fact that, apart from more conventional fugitive slaves, "sojourning" slaves and "stolen" slaves could also hope to be considered as refugees from slavery once in Mexican territory.
[145] RSPP, Petition n°21585211 (Dec. 1852).

same evening, the man had "left his wife and family in distress and absconded with another woman, taking with him two small Negroes of his own, and I have reason to believe stole mine", before heading to North Texas. It is unclear whether Basil and Ned voluntarily left Alabama with Stapleton for Mexico or were rather forced to follow him as slaves to be worked or sold. Likewise, an enslaved man absconded from the farm of John Flowers near the Arkansas River with a certain "Robertson", reaching Nacogdoches during the spring of 1827, where they were arrested. Upon interrogation, "said Negro says he was stolen from near his master's farm by a man".[146] Incidentally, the argument of "slave-stealing" could appeal to both slaveholders and arrested runaways: while the former could downplay their own responsibility in prompting escape, the latter could deny having had any agency in their own flight, thus hoping to minimize retaliation.

Nevertheless, when soliciting external help, self-emancipated slaves always ran the genuine risk of being fooled by individuals promising protection and support, but turning out to be frontier outlaws who planned to re-enslave or sell them in a remote territory. In August 1854, the *New Orleans Daily Crescent* reported the arrest of a man between Lockhurt and San Marcos "traveling not exactly in company with a negro, but just behind him". To the local police, the smuggler confessed being "one of a party of ten or fifteen men, engaged in carrying negroes from Texas to Mexico". According to him, after being sold for $200 to *hacendados* in Mexico, fugitives were to be made indebted workers – earning about "twenty-five cents per day" – until they could repay the sum to their new owner.[147] Smuggling slaves across the border seems to have been a widespread practice in the US Southwest. Already in the early 1830s in the Mississippi delta region, the famous bandit John Murrell and his brother enticed away an "old negro man and his wife and three sons" from the Choctaw Nation with "many fine stories". Among these lies – the smugglers actually planned to sell the family near New Orleans – the two men had promised freedom in Mexican Texas to the fugitives in exchange for a year of work once settled across the Sabine River.[148] In the summer of 1853, a presumed "extensive gang of negro thieves, operating on the Nueces and Rio Grande" made the headlines. Other "gangs of desesperados" – such as the one led by a certain Kuykendall near Galveston – were accused of falsely promising to set slaves free in Mexico, and instead selling them elsewhere. As underscored by James D. Nichols, a "domesticating" agenda usually underlay such rumors. Stories of ruthless bandits were counter-narratives to freedom, intended to deter would-be fugitives from attempting

[146] *Arkansas Gazette*, 11 Aug. and 25 Aug. 1821; *Arkansas Gazette*, 8 May 1827. In March 1835, David Royster from Little Rock (Arkansas) also claimed that his two missing slaves Ralph and Judith were "taken off by a band of villains" and conducted "for sale" to neighboring Texas *Arkansas Gazette*, 3 March 1835. Cases transcribed in Bolton, *Arkansas Runaway Slaves: 1820-1865*, 2, 10 and 39.
[147] *New Orleans Daily Crescent*, 9 Aug. 1854.
[148] Augustus Q. Warton, *A History of the Detection, Conviction, Life and Designs of John A. Murel* (Athens: G. White, 1835), 32-33.

to escape.[149]

Yet slave refugees were not simply the passive victims of slave-stealers. In fact, they regularly twisted the "moral economy of smuggling" to their own advantage, adapting their escape strategy to the peculiar social landscape of the Texas-Mexico borderlands.[150] Guides and intermediaries were contracted through bribes, and smuggling slave refugees for financial benefit seems to have been a common activity. For instance, in May 1844, about ten slaves near Brazoria were accused of having engaged two men, Jesse Blades and Robert Redding, to escort them to Mexico, with each of them offering $100 to their guides. Similarly, in the town of San Antonio, a Mexican was accused in 1851 of having accepted a bribe from a fugitive slave to provide information about the route leading to Mexico.[151]

Escaping to the Mexican border proved to be a complex and deceptive game of illusions for both enslaved asylum-seekers and their arresters. Mercenaries, mobile Mexican peons, convinced abolitionists and "conductors" all co-existed in the Texas-Mexico borderlands. The coalescence of such various individuals into precarious and loose networks of assistance depended on an alignment of their diverse interests, which in turn rendered the boundaries between assistance and exploitation uncertain and permeable. The literature on the UGRR to the northern states and Canada has increasingly depicted the latter as a fairly informal structure, yet arguably, assistance along escape routes to Mexico was even more informal: almost no networks of assistance existed, and those that did were at best *ad hoc* ones, which were established in the process of flight. Consequently, these sporadic instances of assistance hardly qualify as an UGRR to the south. The multifaceted and fluid nature of assistance to fugitive slaves in the Texas-Mexico borderlands (even more than for the UGRR) partly accounts for the need felt by some southern slaveholders to search for scapegoats amongst the usual suspects for anti-slavery sympathies: Mexicans and Germans, as well as other minorities.

Cracking Down on Mobility: Legal and Extra-Legal Violence in the Borderlands

Laws and Outlaws

Guiding self-liberated slaves could be a lucrative business in the US-Mexico borderlands. However, so was arresting fugitive slaves, an activity that appealed to the very same kind of mercenaries. Capturing fugitives for a reward was one of many ways

[149] *The Gonzales Inquirer*, 18 June 1853; *The Western Texan*, 18 Nov. 1854; Nichols, "The Limits of Liberty", 54. On Kuykendall: Earl Wesley Fornell, "The Abduction of Free Negroes and Slaves in Texas", *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, 60/3 (Jan. 1957), 378-379.
[150] The expression is borrowed from: George T. Díaz, *Border Contraband: a History of Smuggling across the Rio Grande* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2015), 13.
[151] *The Planter*, 31 May 1844; Kelley, "Mexico in his Head", 717; TSLAC, Box 100-357, "Petition to Samuel Augustus Maverick and members of Bexar delegation", 20 Dec. 1851; *The Standard*, 21 Oct. 1854; Nichols, "The Line of Liberty", 424.

of earning revenue in the borderlands, apart from legal trade, smuggling and soldiering. Larger rewards were usually provided to individuals arresting runaways close to the Mexican border, or even beyond it. For instance, in 1859, a slaveowner on the Cibolo offered $25 (each) for the arrest of his slaves George and Wily, $50 (each) "towards the Nueces or Rio Grande", and even $100 (each) "in Mexican territory".[152] During the 1850s, (semi)-professional slave-hunters resided in the border towns of South Texas, such as William Neale in Brownsville, or Afro-descendant David Town Jr. at Eagle Pass.[153] Olmsted remarked that on the frontier, "there [was] a permanent reward offered by the state for their recovery, and a considerable number of men [made] a business of hunting them", with bounties of up to $500. Olmsted emphasized that when reaching Eagle Pass, bounty hunters often approached him asking whether he had "[seen] any niggers".[154] When a family of four slaves escaped from Padre Island (south of Corpus Christi) in June 1861, newspapers emphatically incited borderlanders to arrest them: "boys on the Rio Grande, times are hard, and now you have a chance to get a large reward". A Mexican later captured them near Carricitos, between Reynosa and Matamoros, and received $250. When Washington, Butler and Joshua escaped from Nassau plantation in November 1843, their German master was advised in San Antonio to commission a posse of local robbers led by a certain "Leal" to retrieve the absconders. Financial rewards account for the occasional participation of non-professionals, such as the "returning gold hunters" who brought back the aforementioned fugitive Jack Thompson, "whom they caught on the head waters of the Pecos [...] and who was undoubtedly making his way to Mexico".[155] The contribution of such people expanded repression beyond institutionalized structures of slave-hunting.

The Texas State Legislature actively supported the creation of a wide web of potential slavecatchers through monetary incentives, at a time of rising concern among slaveholders regarding slave flight to Mexico. In January 1844, a provision was passed which provided that for each slave arrested west of the San Antonio River, professional or amateur slave-hunters could "demand and receive the sum of fifty dollars", as well as two dollars for every thirty miles of distance travelled when returning fugitives directly to the owner.[156] In February 1858, the State Legislature

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[152] *San Antonio Daily Herald*, 18 Aug. 1859 and 3 Sep. 1859.
[153] W.H. Chatfield, *The twin cities (Brownsville, Texas; Matamoros, Mexico) of the border and the country of the lower Rio Grande* (Brownsville: Brownsville Historical Association, 1959 [1893]), 12; Porter, *The Black Seminoles*, 137-138.
[154] Olmsted, *Journey through Texas*, 323-327; William T. Kerrigan, "Race, Expansion, and Slavery in Eagle Pass, Texas, 1852", *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, v.101 (July 1997-April 1998), 287; Chance, *José María de Jesús Carvajal,* 90; Michael L. Collins, *Texas Devils: Rangers and Regulars on the Lower Rio Grande, 1846-1861* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2008), 64.
[155] *The Ranchero*, 8 June 1861 and 6 July 1861; *Belton Independent*, 19 June, 26 June and 2 Oct. 1858; *Matagorda Gazette,* 31 July 1858; James C. Kearney, *Nassau Plantation: the Evolution of a Texas-German Slave Plantation* (Denton: University of North Texas, 2010), 70-71.
[156] George W. White, Williamson S. Oldham, *A Digest of the General Statute Laws of the State of Texas* (Austin: J.Marshall & Co., 1859), 408; *Journals of the House of Representatives of the Eighth Congress of the Republic of Texas* (Houston: Cruger & Moore, 1844), 162; *Journals of the Senate: Eighth Congress of the Republic of Texas* (Houston: Cruger & Moore, 1844), 76 and 105; *Telegraph and Texas Register*, 6 March 1844; Andrew J. Torget, *Seeds of Empire, Cotton, Slavery*

passed another "act to encourage the reclamation of slaves escaping beyond the slave territories of the United States", clearly referring to Mexican territory, but without explicitly mentioning it. The state treasury guaranteed a special reward of one third of the fugitive's value to the arrester, to be recovered from owners or sale at public auction. This act, implicitly legitimizing violations of Mexico's sovereignty, suggests how alarmed Southwesterners became about slave flight to the south, and represented the climax of a long process of crackdown on runaways along the US-Mexican border.[157]

Provisions against slave flight constituted an essential way of cementing the Second Slavery against the threat of free soil wherever it was introduced. Just a year after its purchase by the United States, Louisiana enacted its first slave code as part of the "Laws for the government of the District of Louisiana" (October 1804), partly based on the French *Code noir* of 1724 and its Virginian counterpart. It included strict proceedings for the arrest of runaway slaves, while "slave-stealing" and assistance for escape were considered felonies liable to death penalty.[158] Likewise, as soon as the first Euro-American colonies in Texas were established during the early 1820s, countering slave flight to neighboring Mexican towns became a priority. The criminal regulations of Austin's code (January 1824) for his settlement entrenched legal sanctions against self-emancipated slaves, as well as for individuals suspected of complicity in escape attempts. Stealing, concealing or enticing away a slave from the colony could lead to fines up to $1.000, "hard labor" and payment of "all the damages which the owner of such slave may sustain in consequence of the loss of his labor". *Jefe Político* José Antonio Saucedo approved the code in May 1824 on behalf of the federal authorities, which *de facto* created a regime of exception for Austin's colony.[159] But after the independence of Texas, slaveholders no longer had to rely on such legal exceptionality. The Texas State Legislature enforced provisions aimed at repressing slave flight even more drastically than in Austin's 1824 code and prohibiting advice or assistance to fugitive slaves.[160] In 1836, the first congress of Texas considered slave-stealing or complicity in escape attempts as liable to death penalty; a punishment

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and the Transformation of the Texas Borderlands, 1800-1850 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015), 235; Campbell, *An Empire for Slavery*, 108 ; Franklin and Schweninger, *Runaway Slaves,* 151. The explicit mention of fugitives arrested in Mexico was carefully avoided, contradicting a proposition made in that sense by a representative for Brazoria County.

[157] *The Texas Almanac for 1859* (Galveston: Richardson & Co., 1859), 25; Campbell, *An Empire for Slavery,* 109; Robert E. May, *Slavery, Race and the Conquest: Lincoln, Douglas, and the Future of Latin America* (Indiana: Purdue University, 2013), 171.

[158] *Laws for the government of the District of Louisiana, 1804* (Washington DC: Statute Law Book Co., 1905), 107-120. Article 13 regulated the process of runaway slaves' arrest, while complicity during flight was also severely repressed (art.22). A pass system was established (art.2), while mobility for slaves from one plantation to another was further restricted. Assembling of more than five slaves was declared illegal (art.8). On the 1724 Code Noir: José Andrés-Gallego, *La Esclavitud en la América Española* (Madrid: Encuentro, 2005), 288-289.

[159] Randolph Campbell, *The Laws of Slavery in Texas: Historical Documents and Essays* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2010), 10-11 (articles 10-14); Torget, *Seeds of Empire*, 86; Campbell, *An Empire for Slavery*, 18-19.

[160] Douglas Richmond, "Africa's Initial Encounter with Texas: the Significance of Afro-Tejanos in Colonial Texas, 1528-1821", *Bulletin of Latin American Research*, 26/2 (2007), 215-217.

reduced four years later to thirty-nine lashes and a jail sentence from one to five years. From January 1839 onwards, harboring a fugitive was also punishable by heavy fines (up to $1.000) or one year in the penitentiary.[161] Further proceedings in case of arrest of escaped slaves were subsequently formalized in February 1841.[162]

Slave flight to Mexico became a pressing issue for Southwestern slaveholders during the last two decades leading up to the US Civil War. Correlated to the westward expansion of slavery, the geography of anti-runaway slaves legislation mirrors the geographic expansion of slave flight across the US South.[163] From the early 1840s onwards, escape attempts to Mexico turned from a limited and rather private and domestic matter into a major concern for Texas authorities and slaveholders. When six bondspeople fled from Austin in June 1840, the *Austin City Gazette* expressed its hope that "the citizens in all sections of the country, and the commanders and men at the various military posts, will arrest all blacks whom they may find wandering at large through the country without satisfactory passes in their possession". The next year, fears of a massive insurrection by enslaved people spread throughout eastern Texas. Local residents suspected the involvement of "some lurking scoundrels, who have been prowling about that section for several months". Influential slaveowners, backed by the newly independent institutions of Texas, started organizing crackdowns in a more systematic way, although never fully replacing amateur and professional slave hunters. Regular patrol companies were established in Nacogdoches following the 1841 scare.[164] Such local initiatives inspired the formalization of a statewide slave patrol system in May 1846, partly replicating the one designed in South Carolina's 1739 slave code. Units composed of at least six individuals for each county's district would patrol the jurisdiction at least monthly, for a minimum service period of three months. They had full authority to search "suspected places for harbored, runaway or fugitive slaves" and

[161] Nicholas Doran P. Maillard, *The History of the Republic of Texas* (London: Smith, Elder and Company, 1842), 489; Campbell, *An Empire for Slavery,* 101; Carrigan, "Slavery on the Frontier", 78-83.

[162] White and Oldham, *Digest,* 407-409 (articles 1869-1872); The National Archives, Kew (England), FO, 84/532, frames 233-237, "Consul W. Kennedy to Foreign Office, Galveston, 14 June 1844". The law on fugitive slaves passed on 5 February 1841 provided that the arrested fugitive slave was to be presented before local justice, and that the detention was to be advertised in local newspapers on a weekly basis, for at least one month. If the runaway had been arrested by a third person (as opposed to police and regular patrols), the latter was supposed to receive ten dollars per slave. A slave left unclaimed after being advertised for more than six months was to be sold at the county's courthouse for the exclusive benefit of the county treasury. Thereafter, the original owner could nonetheless be fully indemnified, if he proved property rights in a delay of less than three years.

[163] Carrigan, "Slavery on the Frontier", 68; Campbell, *An Empire for Slavery*, 62-63; Diouf, *Slavery's Exiles,* 17. Even territorial New Mexico enforced restrictive two black codes by the end of the 1850s, thus confirming its political allegiance to the US South. William S. Kiser, *Borderlands of Slavery: The Struggle over Captivity and Peonage in the American Southwest* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017), 112-141.

[164] *Austin City Gazette*, 3 June 1840; *The Morning Star*, 14 Sep. 1841; *Telegraph and Texas Register*, 15 Sep. 1841; Paul D. Lack, "Slavery and Vigilantism in Austin, Texas, 1840-1860", *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, n°85 (July 1981), 1-20.

divided rewards among themselves after arrests.[165] Patrols proved to be an efficient deterrent. Former slave Lou Williams recalled that some of his enslaved acquaintances had attempted to escape, but patrols "catch dem mos' times", and "dey treat' em so bad dey wouldn't never want to run away no more". Encounters with slave patrols, Rangers and army soldiers not infrequently resulted in death for escaped slaves willing to resist arrest. When two bondspeople absconded in April 1853 from an estate bordering the San Antonio River by riding "two of the best horses" of the plantation, heading to Matamoros through the coast, they "were overtaken by a party of US soldiers" and "were immediately shot down" after seemingly refusing to surrender.[166] Just like narratives on escaped slaves allegedly trapped in horrible conditions across the border and frontier bandits abusing fugitives, stories of runaways massacred on their way to Mexico constituted another counter-narrative forged by the proslavery southern press to thwart the appeal of Mexico to bondspeople. When a fugitive slave was killed near the Rio Hondo by his arresters in 1858, the editor of the *Southern Intelligencer* argued that his "example should be worth something to the blacks who dream of 'freedom' in Mexico".[167]

Along with direct and violent repression at the moment of flight itself, a series of legal restrictions on mobility and sociability, such as curfews, were increasingly imposed on enslaved populations in order to curtail networking and opportunities for escape.[168] Southwestern proslavery editors used real and imagined instances of slaves attempting to escape to Mexico to urge policy-makers to further restrict slave mobility and autonomy. In 1851, an alleged plot between slaves from Fayette County "prepared to force their way" to Mexico was discovered and the local press soon attributed the conspiracy to the supposedly disruptive effect of alcohol, recommending a strict enforcement of the prohibition of sales of liquor to bondspeople, especially on Sundays.[169] From the 1840s onwards, Galveston and San Antonio, both important gateways for runaways, passed municipal decrees aimed at restricting black mobility and sociability. Galveston's port, according to Robert Shelton, created an environment favorable to a "dangerous blurring of established racial lines" from the perspective of slaveholders. Local authorities viewed casual interracial interactions between enslaved people (comprising 17% of the city's population in 1860), free black sailors, and property-less white individuals (a lot of them transient people, whose commitment to the proslavery consensus and white supremacy was therefore thought to be unreliable) as a major factor in unrest and escape attempts overseas to Mexico among slaves.[170] In August 1840, mayor J.H. Wharton directed an initial crackdown on structures of interracial sociability by targeting drinking, gambling and dancing. An ordinance

[165] White and Oldham, *Digest*, 347-348. On slave patrols: Sally E. Hadden, *Slave Patrols: Law and Violence in Virginia and the Carolinas* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 24.
[166] FWP, *Slave Narratives,* v.16/4, 198 (Lou Williams); *Texas Ranger and Lone Star*, 24 April 1853.
[167] *The Southern Intelligencer*, 4 Aug. 1858.
[168] County Court records suggest that curfews were strictly enforced: TCA, Texas County Court Probate Case File, Guardianship of Alfred T. Luckett, case n°50, Receipt, 30 April 1859.
[169] *The Lone Star and Southern Watch Tower*, 21 June 1851; *Texas Wesleyan Banner*, 28 June 1851.
[170] Robert S. Shelton, "On Empire's Shore: Free and Unfree Workers in Galveston, Texas, 1840-1860", *Journal of Social History*, 40, n°3 (2007), 717-721.

provided for a curfew affecting all enslaved people – except those with "a written permit from their owner" – after nine in the evening. The curfew was advanced by one hour from the spring of 1842 onwards – "in light of the concerns of many citizens" – while any "assemblage of negroes" was prohibited. Harsh penalties for self-hired slaves and those arranging their own dwellings, buying or consuming liquor, dancing, gambling, or simply gathering in groups larger than five persons were enacted.[171]

Figure 3: San Antonio.
Source: Military Plaza — San Antonio, Texas. 1857. From Rice University http///hdl.handle.net/1911/35622

Serious concerns about curtailing slave sociability, mobility and autonomy arose later in San Antonio, a frontier town where slavery (essentially for domestic service) remained numerically limited when compared with central Texas. As stressed earlier, although not many of its own slaves escaped to Mexico, the city represented a gateway for runaway bondspeople on their way to the border. In July 1851, four slaves from San Marcos running away to Mexico stayed around San Antonio for about "ten or twelve days". Local residents suspected they intended to leave "in a few days" after eluding pursuit. To crack down on such runaways, during the early 1850s, a curfew was established, slave "assembling" was restricted to less than five individuals, the practice

[171] *Civilian and Galveston Gazette*, 4 Nov. 1840 and 16 April 1842; Torget, *Seeds of Empire*, 234-235.

of slaves hiring themselves without their master's authorization was strictly banned, and bondspeople carrying weapons or consuming alcohol were severely punished.[172]

Desperate Conflicts

Self-liberated bondspeople undertaking the perilous journey to the border had to face violence as a fundamental feature of their flight, especially given the broad and uncertain nature of repressive structures. Extrajudicial crackdown on fugitive slaves remained a common occurrence in the US Southwest borderlands. Arrest was a constant danger, as it could potentially result from any encounter while fleeing. Former slave Willis Winn reminisced that "if the patrollers didn't cotch you, some white folks would put you up and call you massa", adding that "they had a 'greement to be on the watch for runaway niggers". Two slaves absconding in July 1851 from a plantation near Bastrop were spotted and arrested close to San Antonio by a member of a topographical engineers mission, Samuel Cherry, who was walking ahead of his group "looking out for deer".[173] Instances of physical violence committed against slaves running away to the Mexican borderlands, for instance through fortuitous encounters with travelers and local inhabitants, abound in sources. Benjamin Lundy reported how in September 1833, a slave-hunter named Williams "shot dead" a fugitive slave hiding in a ranch "thirty miles south" of Bexar, while another seemingly escaped from the encounter.[174] Such violence reached a peak by midcentury. In the early 1850s, the body of a woman who had recently escaped to the south with "a blanket, shawl and bundle of clothes" was found in the northern part of San Antonio, "with the neck broke, and the right side of the head and eye very much bruised and fractured, which was evidently done by a heavy blow". Similarly, in November 1860, "a party of Americans" on the San Antonio-Laredo road discovered two runaways from Lavaca and Atascosa counties. In the skirmish that ensued, one was wounded and imprisoned, while the other managed to escape before being captured the next day and jailed in Laredo. Some months earlier, the press had reported the "desperate conflict" of a trader back

[172] A curfew was set in October 1850 (at 9.30 pm from October to April and at 10.15 pm from April to October), and extended ten years later (to 7.15 pm and 8.15 pm, respectively). Masters whose slaves were arrested after these hours were liable to fines, or have their runaway slaves worked in public labors. *The Western Texan*, 31 July 1851; Knight, "Defending the Unnecessary", 32-48; SAMA, "An ordinance concerning negroes", Ordinance Books (OB), 01-3, Oct. 2, 1850, Office of the City Clerk; SAMA, "An ordinance relating to slaves", OB, 01-6, Feb. 26, 1851; SAMA, "Ordinance to prevent disturbances within the city", 01-21, July 25, 1851; SAMA, "An ordinance concerning slaves", OB, 01-25, April 16, 1852; SAMA, "An ordinance to regulate the conduct of slaves and free persons of color in the city of San Antonio", OB, 01-6, Aug. 25, 1860.

[173] Adam Hodgson, *Remarks during a journey through North America in the years 1819, 1820 and 1821* (New York: Samuel Whitting, 1823), 171-177; FWP, *Slave Narratives,* v.16/4, 237 (Willis Winn); *The Western Texan,* 17 July 1851. On this patrol/private symbiosis: Hadden, *Slave Patrols*, 7; Carrigan, "Slavery on the Frontier", 70.

[174] Thomas Earle, *The life, travels and opinions of Benjamin Lundy, including his journeys to Texas and Mexico, with a sketch of contemporary events, and a notice of the revolution in Hayti*, (Philadelphia: W.D. Parrish, 1847), 53. The *Indianola Bulletin* (Indianola) on 26 April 1854 also narrated this encounter and differed from Lundy's account, as it argued that Williams killed both of the escaped slaves.

from Mexico with three fugitives who "wounded him in the right arm" before successfully escaping. Another slave was less fortunate when he escaped from John M. Story near Burleson in 1851, killed a man and his wife who sought to arrest him, and was subsequently captured (after hiding in a corncrib) and "executed in the presence of a large concourse of spectators".[175]

Self-liberated bondspeople who overcame restrictions on mobility and sociability, and avoided arrest by slave patrols, mercenaries and mobs, still faced the potential prospect of conflict with Native Americans, as violence occasionally resulted from encounters with indigenous people whose attitude towards fugitive slaves varied. Among the main groups, Comanches, Lipan Apaches and Wichitas traditionally populated the vast Southern Great Plains of Texas while Caddoes mostly roamed the northeastern side of the state. Karankawas initially occupied the coastal plains while central Texas was home to the Tonkawas and Wacos. Their respective reactions towards fugitive slaves ranged from sympathy to adversity, depending on their responses to advancing Euro-American colonization (especially from the 1820s onwards) and the expansion of plantation slavery. Some indigenous groups sought to come to an arrangement with Euro-American settlers, including on the rendition of runaways. During the eighteenth century, for instance, Caddoes had a long tradition of agreements with French authorities over the return of slaves escaping in the Louisiana-Texas frontier.[176] After the Louisiana Purchase, local authorities and slaveowners in the lower Mississippi region also used Native Americans to track down runaway slaves. For example, some Coushattas, along with six settlers from Louisiana, participated in Alexis Cloutier's expedition from Natchitoches to Spanish Texas during the autumn of 1804 in pursuit of four fugitives. Similarly, during the mid-1820s, Tonkawas agreed to protect the newly founded Austin's colony, and continued to restore runaways well after the Texas Revolution. Such alliances hindered escape, since absconding slaves would likely be returned to their owners if caught. Some decades later, the Fort Martin Scott Treaty, concluded in December 1850 at Spring Creek between John H. Rollins, "special agent for the United States for the Indians of Texas", and "the Comanche, Caddo, Lipan, Quapaw, Tawakoni and Waco Tribes of Indians", provided for "not

[175] *The Western Texan,* 28 Aug. 1851; *The Ranchero*, 17 Nov. 1860; *State Gazette*, 9 June 1860; *Texan Republican,* 16 Sep. 1860; *Texas State Gazette*, 2 Aug. 1851; *The Weekly Journal*, 12 Aug. 1851; RSPP, Petition n°1585105 (1851); *Journal of the House of Representatives: The State of Texas, Fourth Legislature* (Austin: Cushney & Hampton, 1852), 72. The enslaver of the last mentioned self-emancipated slave sought financial compensation in a petition to the Texas General Assembly on 25 September 1851, which was rejected on 11 November 1851. On mobs and lynching: William Carrigan, *The Making of a Lynching Culture: Violence and Vigilantism in Central Texas, 1836-1916* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004).

[176] Torget, *Seeds of Empire*, 18; H. Sophie Burton, F. Todd Smith, *Colonial Natchitoches: a Creole Community on the Louisiana-Texas Frontier* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2008), 71; Carrigan, "Slavery on the Frontier", 71-76. Carrigan examined contacts between Native Americans and fugitive slaves in Central Texas, depicting a complex interaction of racial prejudice, violence but also cooperation and peaceful encounters.

knowingly [allowing] any negro or negroes to pass through the Indian country into Mexico, without arresting him or them".[177]

Even in the absence of such formal treaties, Native Americans (some of them being slaveholders, as in the Indian Territory) occasionally confronted bondspeople absconding to the southern border. In January 1843, Creeks and Cherokees pursued "about 200 miles from Fort Gibson" the aforementioned group of fifty-two slaves that was absconding from Arkansas to Mexico. Two runaways were killed, twelve others were captured by the assailants, while the remainder successfully reached Mexico.[178] Many Native Americans saw the enslaved and the enslaver as two sides of a single coin, both embodying an aggressive colonization that threatened them with extermination. Hostility towards runaways resulted. According to chronicler Randolph Barnes Marcy, Comanches in particular "took an inveterate dislike to the negroes", which led them to assault runaways, such as "two negro girls" who "had been with a number of Seminole negroes who attempted to cross the Plains to join Wild Cat [Coacoochee] upon the Rio Grande". Both survived an attack committed by Comanches, but were soon "taken to the camp, where the most inhuman barbarities were perpetrated upon them". According to Marcy, out of morbid curiosity, the Comanches mutilated the girls "believing that beneath the cuticle the flesh was black like the color upon the exterior".[179]

Other instances in which the lines between abduction and flight were blurred seemed more ambiguous. In 1822 near the Colorado river, as some Karankawas (an indigenous group expelled from the Brazos region during the 1820s) attacked the convoy of a Euro-American prospective settler referred to as "Juan Aciona" by Mexican authorities, it remained unclear whether the four "servants" who were accompanying him had been taken away by force or had voluntarily escaped with the assailants.[180] This last possibility seemed plausible, as some runaways did find refuge in indigenous camps. Living as a captive among Comanches for years following a fur-trading expedition launched in 1835, James Hobbs, originally from Missouri, remembered that some Comanches captured six self-liberated slaves who had absconded from the Cherokee Nation. Back at the camp, "the whole nation flocked to see these human curiosities, and crowded around them, raisin[g] uncontrollable terror in the minds of the negroes", fearful of what would follow. After a week, local chief "Old

[177] RBBC, BA, v.20, 242-244 (1 Nov. 1804); Dorman H. Winfrey, James M. Day, George R. Nielsen, Albert D. Pattillo, *Texas Indian Papers: edited from the original ms. copies in the Texas State Archives*, v. 3 (Austin: Texas State Library, 1959), 130-137; *Texas State Gazette*, 11 Jan. 1851.
[178] *Civilian and Galveston Gazette*, 11 Jan. 1843; Kelley, *Los Brazos de Dios*, 97.
[179] Randolph Marcy Barnes, *Thirty Years of Army Life on the Border* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1866), 30-31 and 55-56; Kenneth Porter, *The Black Seminoles: History of a Freedom-Seeking People* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1996), 134. On the fear of "Indians" as discouraging flight: Maurice Garland Fulton (ed.), *Diary and Letters of Josiah Gregg, Southwestern Enterprises, 1840-1847* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1941), v.1, 112-113; Kelley, "Mexico in his Head", 713; Carrigan, "Slavery on the Frontier", 72.
[180] TBL, Bolton, 45:30, "F.García to Comandante General y Gefe Superior Político de esta Provincia, Bahía, 31 Oct. 1822".

Wolf" eventually ordered that an escort would accompany the runaways to the Mexican border. Before leaving, he gave them "buffalo robes to sleep on, a supply of buffalo meat", as well as "fresh horses to ride", and "four days afterward, the escort returned, having conducted their charge into the main road to Mexico".[181] Despite such cases of assistance, however, narratives of indigenous atrocities in the southwestern borderlands coalesced into a popular "black legend" among Texas settlers – and, by extension, probably within slave quarters too – that may have deterred some enslaved people from escaping south. But for others, it made no difference: violence and its threat were not enough to discourage enslaved people from seeking refuge in Mexico.

Conclusion

This chapter has addressed the question of how attaining freedom in Mexico through self-emancipation was, to a large extent, conditional upon successfully forging a series of material and spatial strategies for escape, alongside securing networks of support. Remarkably, despite the gradual entrenchment of institutional and social coercive pressure against slave refugees and their assistance networks, as well as the strengthening of border military control by nation-state authorities, the numbers of enslaved people escaping through the US-Mexico borderlands never declined. However, it ought not to be concluded that anti-runaway legislation and local vigilantism were entirely ineffective. Indeed, structures of repression and mechanisms of flight deterrence served to confine the flow of bondspeople absconding to the neighboring republic to a rather limited segment of the US South's enslaved population. The relative inexistence of an organized and stable UGRR might also have restricted the number of fugitives successfully reaching Mexico, even though in this context, loose and situational networks of assistance emerged (when they existed at all), based on ideology and philanthropy, socioeconomic proximity, as well as more opportunistic and money-related considerations. Although partly grounded on intellectual motivations, support provided to slave refugees in the US-Mexico borderlands also stemmed from more practical factors. Material and monetary incentives could turn otherwise neutral actors into good Samaritans. Yet these very same incentives, when originating from slaveowners and State legislatures, could also enlarge the ranks of repressors with wide and dispersed networks of mercenaries eager for a reward. As a result, this fluid web proved to be just as ambiguous and unstable as support networks for slave refugees attempting to reach Mexico. In this complex borderlands context, where the boundaries between assistance and violence were not always easily identifiable, it is no wonder that escaped slaves mostly relied on their

[181] James Hobbs, *Wild Life in the Far West: Personal Adventures of a Border Mountain Man*, (Hartford: Wiley, Waterman and Eaton, 1874), 30-31. On James Hobbs: James F. Brooks, *Captives and Cousins: Slavery, Kinship and Community in the Southwest Borderlands* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 263-265 and 307. See also: UT(A), Briscoe, Greenwood Collection, Boxes 3J312 (1850-1854) and 3J313 (1855-1858).

own strategies for mobility, just like the two men escaping with a stolen sulky described in Olmsted's reminiscence.

PART 2

* * *

CRAFTING FREEDOM

III
Self-Liberated Slaves and Asylum in Northeastern Mexico, 1803-1836

Introduction

During one of his several trips to Mexican Texas to promote black emigration from the US to Mexico, abolitionist Benjamin Lundy arrived at San Antonio de Bexar in August 1833 and recognized a "free black man" named Mathieu Thomas, whom he had met the previous summer in Nacogdoches. According to Lundy, the man was originally from North Carolina and had been brought to the region as a slave by his owner in the 1820s, but had been subsequently manumitted. Now employed as a blacksmith in Bexar, he appeared to be doing well for himself and he enthusiastically asserted that "the Mexicans pay him the same respect as to other laboring people", regardless of the color of his skin. What Lundy was apparently not aware of was that Mathieu Thomas was in fact not a free black man at all, but rather a fugitive from slavery.[1] His apparent success in Mexico (which neatly fit with Lundy's goal of presenting Mexico as a racial haven), moreover, obscured a series of fierce struggles the blacksmith had had to overcome in order to secure his own freedom in the years before the Texas Revolution, as we will see.

Countless fugitive slaves settled in the Mexican Northeast prior to Texan independence in 1836. However, a thorough analysis of refugees' experiences upon arrival during this period, such as those of Mathieu Thomas, is largely lacking in the scholarly literature. Indeed, the growing historiography on slave flight and the experiences of self-liberated bondspeople in the northeastern borderlands of New Spain/Mexico has largely focused on the four decades spanning from Mexican independence to the US Civil War, with an emphasis on the Texas-Mexico borderlands after 1836.[2] By contrast, the first third of the nineteenth century has received far less scrutiny, and research on the experiences of freedom and unfreedom for self-liberated US slaves in the New Spain/Mexico northeastern borderlands before 1836 – in the context of Mexico's independence and gradual abolition of slavery, and the evolution of its asylum policy (particularly in its northeastern fringes) for foreign fugitive slaves – remains for the most part in its infancy.[3]

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[1] Thomas Earle, *The life, travels and opinions of Benjamin Lundy, including his journeys to Texas and Mexico, with a sketch of contemporary events, and a notice of the revolution in Hayti*, (Philadelphia: W.D. Parrish, 1847), 48.

[2] Rosalie Schwartz, *Across the Rio to Freedom: US Negroes in Mexico* (El Paso: Texas Western Press, 1975); Sean M. Kelley, "Mexico in his head: Slavery and the Texas-Mexican Border, 1810-1860", *Journal of Social History*, 37:3 (2004), 709-723; James David Nichols, "The Line of Liberty: Runaway Slaves and Fugitive Peons in the Texas-Mexico Borderlands", *Western Historical Quarterly*, v.44, n°4 (2013), 713-733; Sarah E. Cornell, "Citizens of Nowhere: Fugitive Slaves and Free African Americans in Mexico, 1833-1857", *Journal of American History*, 100:2 (2013), 351-374.

[3] James Harrison, "The failure of Spain in East Texas: The Occupation and Abandonment of Nacogdoches, 1779-1821", Ph.D. Diss. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 1980); Lance Blyth, "Fugitives from Servitude: American Deserters and Runaway Slaves in Spanish Nacogdoches, 1803-1808", *East Texas Historical Journal*, v.38, issue 2 (2000), 3-14.

This chapter will examine settlement patterns and the (geo)political repercussions of slave flight to northeastern Mexico between 1803 and 1836. How did escaped bondspeople experience settlement in New Spain/Mexico before the secession of Texas? To what extent were they granted freedom(s), and if so, what kinds of freedom and through which strategies were they achieved? How did Spanish and Mexican (local and national) authorities respond to the arrival of US fugitive slaves, and to what extent were official policies enforced in practice? How did slave flight to Mexico affect relations between borderland communities and state governments?

Drawing extensively upon municipal and state records, this chapter will explore these questions chronologically. The first part of the chapter traces the experience of US fugitive slaves in late colonial Mexico from the Louisiana Purchase in 1803 to Mexican independence in 1821, examining in what ways their reception and status in northeastern Mexico was entangled with local borderlands politics as well as with wider geopolitical developments in the Atlantic world. The second part of the chapter analyzes the settlement of enslaved absconders from the cotton states in early independent Mexico (1821-1836), with a special emphasis on the conflicting trends of the Mexican abolition of slavery, on the one hand, and US westward expansion and the spectacular expansion of slavery into the Mexican province of Texas, on the other.

Slave Refugees in Late Colonial New Spain (1803-1821)

Imperial Contests and Borderland Interactions in Late Colonial Circum-Caribbean and North America

In order to fully understand fugitive slaves' settlement practices and their political consequences for the region, it is important to sketch the ever-evolving landscape of slavery and freedom prior to Mexico's independence. Spanish America had long enjoyed a reputation for granting asylum to foreign fugitive slaves, even before US slaves began trickling into Mexico. As early as the seventeenth century, asylum policies were employed as part of a geopolitical strategy in Spain's broader contest with other European powers over land and population resources in the Circum-Caribbean and North America (see table 6). Despite the legal sanction of slavery in the Spanish empire, colonial administrators in the Americas early on foresaw the disruptive potential of welcoming fugitive slaves from foreign possessions in order to weaken imperial competitors by draining their colonies of their workforce. This Spanish sanctuary policy began as a patchwork of local provisions and grew more extensive over time. It began with the island of Trinidad in 1680, Florida in 1693 and Venezuela in 1704. Freedom for enslaved fugitives was usually conditional upon their conversion to Roman Catholicism. These early local decrees paved the way for a more extensive asylum policy put forward in Fernando VI's *Real Cédula,* which on 24 September 1750 stated that slaves from Protestant empires would be declared free in Spanish domains upon conversion to Catholicism.

Date ***(and confirmations)***	**Place**
Mar. 1680	Trinidad
(May 1680, May & Aug. 1740, Feb. 1773)	
Nov. 1693	Florida
(Oct. 1733)	
June 1704	Venezuela
Dec. 1739	Central America
Sep. 1750	Spanish America
(Apr. 1789)	(all encompassing)
Oct. 1764	Hispaniola

Table 6: Main royal decrees and provisions for the Spanish free-soil policy in the early modern Americas (1680-1789).
Sources: note 4.

During the second half of the eighteenth century, then, Spain's sanctuary policy offered better prospects for slaves from neighboring colonies. Mostly justified by religious motives, asylum was occasionally granted for humanitarian reasons, as in the case of fugitive slaves from the French side of Hispaniola who had absconded because of maltreatment in 1764. Carlos IV's *Real Orden* on 14 April 1789 reiterated the protection provided to foreign escaped slaves on Spanish soil. Some months later though, the empire "temporarily revoked" asylum in its American colonies on 17 May 1790, due to the widespread fear of revolutionary contamination that followed the French and Haitian Revolutions and the pressures exerted by the British planters in North America on Florida regarding ending its sanctuary policy.[4]

Parallel to the development of Spanish asylum policies, the French began to colonize Louisiana as part of New France after René Robert Cavelier de La Salle symbolically took possession of the territory for the French King in 1682. In its early years, the French empire employed Basse-Louisiane (roughly corresponding to

[4] UT(A), Briscoe, BA, reel 20, frame 466, "Lieutenant Manuel de Espada to Martínez Pacheco, 14 Aug. 1790". On Spain's asylum policy: Manuel Lucena Salmoral, *Leyes para Esclavos: el Ordenamiento Jurídico sobre la Condición, Tratamiento, Defensa y Represión de los Esclavos en las Colonias de la América Española* (CD-ROM Colección Proyectos Históricos Tavera, Madrid, 2000); Manuel Lucena Salmoral, *Regulación de la Esclavitud en las Colonias de América Española (1503-1886): Documentos para su Estudio* (Alcalá de Henares, Madrid: Universidad de Alcalá; Murcia: Universidad de Murcia, 2005); Maria Verónica Secreto, "Asilo: Direito de Gentes. Escravos Refugiados no Império Espanhol", *Revista História*, São Paulo, n°172 (January-June 2015), 197-219; Linda M. Rupert, "Marronage, Manumission and Maritime Trade in the Early Modern Caribbean", *Slavery & Abolition*, 30:3 (2009), 361-382; Linda M. Rupert, "'Seeking the Water of Baptism': Fugitive Slaves and Imperial Jurisdiction in the Early Modern Caribbean", in Richard J. Ross, Lauren Benton, *Legal Pluralism and Empires, 1500-1850* (New York: New York University Press, 2013), 199-232. For an analysis of Spain's asylum policy to foreign escaped slaves, in the context of eighteenth-century Spanish Florida, see Jane Landers, *Black Society in Spanish Florida* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1999), 24-45 and 75-83. Spain's sanctuary policy towards foreign escaped slaves was rooted in the provisions of the *Siete Partidas*, as the Fourth *Partida*, Title 21, Law 8 in particular outlawed the possession of Christian slaves by non-Christian individuals (*Las Siete Partidas del Sabio Rey D. Alonso, extractadas por el Licenciado D. Ignacio Velasco Pérez y una sociedad de abogados del Ilustre Colegio de esta Corte* (Madrid: Imprenta de los señores viuda de Jordán é hijos Editores, 1843).

present-day state of Louisiana) as a back colony for its thriving Saint-Domingue. The introduction of enslaved African Americans by French creole planters slowly began during the first third of the eighteenth century, and from the 1720s onwards, incidences of slaves running away gradually increased. Escaped bondspeople took refuge in swamps, forests, among Native American populations or within urban environments. They also occasionally crossed the Sabine River to Spanish Texas in an attempt to reach freedom through *grand marronage*. However, no royal decree or provision officially granted freedom to these fugitives, and the 1750 *Real Cédula* did not apply to escaped slaves from the (formally Catholic) French possessions. Policymaking in the Louisiana-Texas borderlands was simply left to local officials, who alternatively sheltered or delivered the few runaways arriving from Louisiana. In April 1753, the governor and captain general of Texas (1751-1759) Jacinto de Barrios y Jauregui proposed to grant asylum to slaves escaping from the French post of Natchitoches to the *presidio* of Los Adaes (one of the two posts, with Bucareli, often reached by runaways at the time), but he received no support from his Vice-Royalty on the matter.[5] As Louisiana was subsequently integrated into the Spanish empire between 1763 and 1800, slaves absconding between the former French province and Texas were considered "internal" runaways and therefore actively pursued by colonial administrators and sent back to their masters. As the eighteenth century drew to a close, large-scale plantation slavery began to develop in Louisiana. The numbers of cross-border fugitives rose accordingly, generating frequent exchanges between Spanish agents in Louisiana and Texas on the subject.[6] Following a brief French interregnum (1800-1803), the acquisition of Louisiana by the US in 1803 provided an unprecedented stimulus to the expansion of cotton and sugar production in the Mississippi delta region, bringing an army of enslaved newcomers to the territory. Combined with the particular harshness of slavery in the US Lower South and the

[5] Charles W. Hackett (ed.), *Pichardo's Treaties on the Limits of Louisiana and Texas* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1946), v.4, 65-66, "Jacinto de Barrios y Jauregui to Viceroy de Revillagigedo, 17 April 1753"; Francis X. Galán, "Last Soldiers, First Pioneers: the Los Adaes border community on the Louisiana-Texas Frontier, 1721-1779", PhD Diss. (Southern Methodist University, 2006), 117-119. On fugitive slaves in Louisiana and the Mississippi region in the late colonial period: Gwendolyn Midlo Hall, *Africans in Colonial Louisiana, the Development of Afro-Creole Culture in the Eighteenth Century* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1992), 98-118, 142-148 and 202-236; Sylviane Diouf, *Slavery's Exiles: the Story of the American Maroons* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2014), 33; Rosalie Schwartz, *Across the Rio to Freedom: US Negroes in Mexico* (El Paso: Texas Western Press, 1975), 5-6; Sean M. Kelley, "Mexico in his Head: Slavery and the Texas-Mexican Border, 1810-1860", *Journal of Social History*, 37:3 (2004), 711.

[6] For the three years leading to the Louisiana Purchase: BA, reel 29; frame 430, "Felix Trudeaux to Governor of Texas, 29 March 1800"; BA, reel 29, frame 744, "Casa Calvo to Elguezabal, 17 Oct. 1800"; BA, reel 29, frame 1032, "Casa Calvo to Elguezabal, 26 March 1801"; BA, reel 30, frame 103, "Casa Calvo to Elguezabal, 9 June 1801"; BA, reel 30, frame 324, "Elguezabal to Casa Calvo, 29 Sep. 1801"; BA, reel 30, frame 324, "Elguezabal to Carrasco, 11 Nov. 1801"; BA, reel 30, frame 442, "Elguezabal to Manuel de Salcedo, 4 Dec. 1801" ; BA, reel 31, frame 567, "Ugarte to Elguezabal, 3 Sep. 1803"; RBBC, BA, v.20, 5; James Harrison, "The failure of Spain in East Texas: the Occupation and Abandonment of Nacogdoches, 1779-1821", PhD Diss. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 1980), 207; H. Sophie Burton, F. Todd Smith, *Colonial Natchitoches: A Creole Community on the Louisiana-Texas Frontier* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2008), 71.

erasure, through the 1806 Black Code, of the progressive Spanish legislation on slave rights and treatment passed during the late eighteenth century, this process sparked an increase in slave resistance in territorial Louisiana which culminated in the 1811 German coast uprising.

As the first slaves from the US territory of Orleans (or territorial Louisiana) started appearing after 1803 in Texas, Spanish administrators on both sides of the border wondered which piece of legislation should prevail. Was the "temporary" revocation of free-soil policy in 1790 still in legal force, undermining the protective dispositions of Carlos IV's Royal Decree of 1789? Was it applicable to Texas at all? Were foreign runaways to be protected or not and, if so, under which terms? In July 1803, Nemesio Salcedo, the general commandant of the Eastern Internal Provinces (*Provincias Internas de Oriente*), decided to base his policy on the Royal Decree of 1789, either dismissing or ignoring for the time being the Royal Order issued a year later. Salcedo's enforcement of a pro-sanctuary policy was tantamount to setting a boundary between slavery and freedom for self-emancipated slaves from Louisiana.[7]

The Spanish empire's acceptance of foreign escaped slaves in eastern Texas also stemmed from several practical motives. First, protecting fugitive slaves from the US could weaken the rival's fast-growing plantation slavery in the Mississippi delta region, which was the cornerstone of US economic and political westward expansion and thereby threatened Spanish sovereignty in eastern Texas, where development had stagnated in the eighteenth century. Second, as new settlers, runaways from the US would contribute to the economic development of the borderlands and strengthen the demographic presence of the empire in the province. This was important, since settlers from the heart of New Spain came in chronically insufficient numbers to the northeastern part of the Viceroyalty. Interestingly, Carlos IV simultaneously encouraged the introduction of African American slaves for the agricultural development of the Eastern Internal Provinces through a *Real Cédula* (April 1804). In this context, as Eric Herschtal has argued, "escaped slaves could be used as a bargaining chip in local diplomatic relations" along the Sabine River, while sheltering slave refugees from territorial Louisiana represented a symbolic assertion of clear sovereignty over an endangered territory.[8] In August 1805, Nemesio Salcedo dispatched orders to Texas stating that any hostile US action over Texas would trigger

[7] BA, reel 31, frame 442, "N. Salcedo to Elguezabal, 3 July 1803"; *ibid.*, reel 38, frame 180, "N. Salcedo to Gov. Cordero, 31 May 1808"; Harrison, "The failure of Spain in East Texas", 207. Nemesio Salcedo's claim that he was not aware of the 1790 royal order's existence until May 1805 seems to validate this second hypothesis (AGI, Guadalajara, 398, "N. Salcedo to Ceballos, 9 July 1805").

[8] BA, reel 32, frame 273, "Certified copy of royal decree requesting information as to the need of negro slaves in Interior Provinces for the encouragement of agriculture, 22 April 1804"; Eric Herschtal, "Slave, Spaniards and Subversion in early Louisiana: the Persistent Fear of Black Revolt and Spanish Collusion in Territorial Louisiana, 1803-1812", *Journal of the Early Republic*, n°36, (Summer 2016), 289.

a public declaration granting freedom to foreign fugitive slaves crossing the Sabine River.[9]

Settlement and (Re)-Settlement

Once in New Spain, slave refugees could opt for strategies of formal or informal settlement. In other words, they could attempt to gain legal freedom from Spanish military and civilian administrators, or deliberately stay out of the reach of the agents of the empire. Following Aron and Adelman's terminology, the "borderland" that stretched from Natchitoches to Nacogdoches did not yet form a "bordered land". In the first decade of the nineteenth century, transgressors of national laws could easily find refuge on either side of the Sabine River, especially given that in November 1806, a "neutral ground" was constituted in part of the borderlands (upon which no state could claim sovereignty), since the two governments could not agree on clear boundaries.[10] Settlers were formally banned from the strip, yet this provision went largely unheeded, as frontier bandits, criminals, mercenaries, deserters and illegal settlers soon invested this grey zone. Slaves absconding from Louisiana entered a jurisdictional limbo when setting foot on this neutral ground. Reaching a legally ambiguous space, they found themselves on neither US territory nor Spanish soil.[11] In December 1811, John Sibley, the US Indian Agent in post at Natchitoches (1805-1814), regretted that the neutral ground had turned into a refuge for escaped slaves, as for instance west of Big Woods, in the western part of Calcasieu Parish. Further north, at Pecan Point on the Red River, escaped bondspeople mingled among other fugitives from justice, squatters, hunters, traders and all sorts of traffickers. Pecan Point represented, in Sibley's words, "an asylum for runaway negroes and all bad people".[12]

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[9] Christina Marie Villarreal, "Colonial Border Control: Reconsidering Migrants and the Making of New Spain's Northern Borderlands, 1714-1820", Master Thesis (Austin: University of Texas, 2015), 42-70. On *comandante general* Nemesio Salcedo, consult in particular: Arturo Berrueto González, *Diccionario Biográfico de Coahuila* (Saltillo: Gobierno del Estado de Coahuila, Consejo Editorial, 1999), 533; Juan Villasana Haggard, "The Neutral Ground between Louisiana and Texas, 1806-1821", *Louisiana Historical Quarterly*, n°28, (October 1945), 142.

[10] Blyth, "Fugitives from Servitude", 4; Jeremy Adelman, Stephen Aron, "From Borderlands to Borders: Empires, Nation-States, and the People in Between in North American History", *The American Historical Review*, v.104, n°3 (1999), 814-841. On the "neutral ground": Villasana Haggard, "The Neutral Ground", 1001-1128. As the US and Spain were unable to define a clear border in this contact zone, and fearing that tensions over the issue might escalate into an open conflict, this agreement was reached between lieutenant colonel Simon de Herrera and US general James Wilkinson, by which none of their governments would be allowed to claim sovereignty over the lands located east of the Arroyo Hondo and west of the Sabine River.

[11] Matthew Babcock, "Roots of Independence: Transcultural Trade in the Texas-Louisiana Borderlands", *Ethnohistory*, v.60, n°2 (2013), 259; Felix D. Almaraz Jr., *Tragic Cavalier: Governor Manuel Salcedo of Texas, 1808-1813* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1991), 17-18; David Head, "Slave Smuggling by Foreign Privateers: The Illegal Slave Trade and the Geopolitics of the Early Republic", *Journal of the Early Republic*, v.33, n°3 (fall 2013), 452.

[12] Julia Kathryn Garrett (ed.), "Dr. John Sibley and the Louisiana-Texas Frontier, 1803-1814", *Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, XLIX (Jan. 1946), 403-404; Jack Johnson, "Nicholas Trammell's difficulties in Mexican Texas", *East Texas Historical Journal*, v.38, issue 2 (Oct. 2000), 18-19; Odie B. Faulk, "The Penetration of Foreigners and Foreign Ideas into Spanish East

Apart from this quest for *informal* freedom, fugitive slaves also attempted to gain *formal* freedom from the agents of the Spanish empire in New Spain. Some of them journeyed deep into its interior, as far as the Pacific coast. The slave "Juan Bron" (in Spanish sources) deserted from a schooner (likely engaged in the illegal otter fur trade) in the Bay of San Quintín (Baja California) in March 1804. He arrived at the *presidio* of San Diego (Alta California) three months later, looking for freedom. The "*negro Americano*" was kept in custody, living mostly on maize, beans and some beef. By the month of November, a local military commandant commissioned captain Agustín Bocalan to transfer Juan Bron to the port of San Blas (in present-day Nayarit) aboard his *Princesa,* from where the refugee was conducted to Guadalajara. At the Real Audiencia, the fugitive expressed his desire to convert to Catholicism and, as his office as a carpenter allowed him to make a decent living, he was likely set free by the institution.[13] Closer to the northeastern edges of New Spain, Pedro introduced himself as a refugee from slavery to officer José de Jesús Rodríguez at the *presidio* of San Juan Bautista del Río Grande (Guerrero after 1827) in Coahuila. Likewise, a man named Evangéliste who had fled during the spring of 1808 from Emmanuel Prudhomme (the owner of fifty-eight slaves in 1810) decided to pass himself off as free and changed his name to "Manuel" when residing in San Antonio, where he worked for a priest named Cembrano. Yet the vast majority of slaves fleeing from the US settled in the easternmost fringes of Spanish Texas. Across the border, self-liberated slaves from Louisiana settled in the frontier towns of Nacogdoches and Trinidad de Salcedo.[14]

Nacogdoches (a town developed around the foundations of an old mission established in 1716) represented the gateway to Spanish Texas. Its settlers maintained intense cross-cultural and economic ties with western Louisiana, eluding restrictions imposed by the Spanish empire on trade with foreign powers. Complementing agriculture and ranching, contraband trade (including with Amerindians) flourished along the Sabine River. As slave traders from New Orleans and Natchez expanded their networks across the border, at the turn of the nineteenth century Nacogdoches had twice as many slaves as the rest of the province (enslaved African Americans numbered 56 out of 811 inhabitants by 1805, apart from free blacks). Escaped slaves from Louisiana thus settled in a small, albeit visible, black community.[15] Further west, the *villa* of Trinidad de Salcedo was founded in January 1806 with the purpose of

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Texas, 1793-1810", *East Texas Historical Journal*, v.2, issue 2 (1964), 87-98; Cooper K. Ragan, "The Diary of Captain George W. O'Brien, 1863", *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, v.67 (July 1963-April 1964), 45.

[13] AGN, PI, v.18, e.6. The population of *presidio* of San Diego numbered 160 inhabitants by 1803, alongside the 1593 inhabitants hosted by the neighboring mission of San Diego. Martha Ortega Soto, *Alta California: una frontera olvidada del noroeste de México, 1769-1846* (México: Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana, Unidad Iztapalapa, 2001), 133-134.

[14] BA, reel 41, frame 885, "Rodríguez to Manuel de Salcedo, 27 June 1809"; *ibid*, reel 40, frame 153, "Emmanuel Prudhomme to Cordero, 15 Feb. 1809".

[15] Felix D. Almaraz Jr., *Tragic Cavalier: Governor Manuel Salcedo of Texas, 1808-1813*, (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1991), 11; Matthew Babcock, "Roots of Independence: Transcultural Trade in the Texas-Louisiana Borderlands", *Ethnohistory* 60, no. 2 (2013), 249-250.

settling an intermediary military and civilian post between San Antonio de Bexar, the province's capital, and Nacogdoches. Designed according to the urban template for the foundation of *villas* of the *Provincias Internas* passed in August 1783, Trinidad's initial population consisted of twenty-three settlers who had relocated from Louisiana after 1803 along with five families from Bexar and a unit of cavalry soldiers.[16] Enslaved freedom-seekers from the US sought refuge in Trinidad very early on. Zebulon Pike's expedition, for instance, found "a number of runaway negroes" as well as "some Frenchmen and Irishmen" along the Trinity River in June 1807.[17]

In these two towns, Spanish officials exerted a close scrutiny over slave refugees. In December 1807, *comandante general* Nemesio Salcedo commissioned a "general report on the black fugitive slaves" ("*Relación general de los negros esclavos fugitivos*") residing in Nacogdoches and Trinidad de Salcedo. The inquiry exposed their background experiences, their motives for escape as well as an assessment of their current situation, in order to ascertain the economic utility of the refugees in the settlements.[18] As the number of fugitives had increased by the end of the decade, borderlands military and civilian officials were wary not to host burdensome settlers in eastern Texas, displaying concern that the arrival of slave refugees might economically destabilize the always-fragile settlements.[19] In Nacogdoches though, by January 1808, all the enslaved freedom-seekers were employed for wages hovering around eight to ten *pesos* per month. Most of the asylum-seekers found work in agriculture and stock raising.[20] For instance, the enslaved freedom-seeker "Peray" worked on Indian trader William Barr's ranch.[21] Additionally, some others were employed as domestic servants throughout the town (such as "Juan Luis" and "Margarita"), including by military

[16] AGN, Estado, 37, n°28, "Nemesio Salcedo, sobre traslación de familias de la Luisiana a Texas, Chihuahua, 1 Jan. 1805"; Bradley Folsom, "Trinidad de Salcedo: A Forgotten Villa in Colonial Texas, 1806-1813", *East Texas Historical Journal* 52, no. 2 (2014), 49-78; Jean l. Epperson, *Lost Spanish Towns: Atascosito and Trinidad de Salcedo* (Woodville: Dogwood Press, 1996), 42-71; Ernesto de la Torre Villar, Ramiro Navarro de Anda, *Coahuila: Tierra Anchurosa de Indios, Mineros y Hacendados* (México: Sidermex, 1985), 313; Mattie Alice Austin Hatcher, *The Opening of Texas to Foreign Settlement, 1801-1821* (Austin: Texas University, 1927), 102.

[17] Zebulon Montgomery Pike, *An account of expeditions to the sources of the Mississippi, and through the western parts of Louisiana, to the sources of the Arkansaw, Kans, La Platte, and Pierre Jaun rivers* (Philadelphia: C. & A. Conrad, 1810), 273; Josiah Conder, *The Modern Traveller: a description, geographical, historical and topographical of the various countries of the globe, in thirty volumes. v.26, Mexico (continued), Guatemala* (London: James Duncan, 1830), 116.

[18] BA, reel 37, frames 465-466, "Cordero to Viana, 14 January 1808"; BA, reel 37, frames 495-496, "López Prieto to Cordero, 21 Jan. 1808"; BA, reel 37, frames 503-509, "Viana to Cordero, 22 Jan. 1808"; BA, reel 37, frames 643-644, "Cordero to Nemesio Salcedo, 9 Feb. 1808"; BA, reel 37, frames 820-831, "Nemesio Salcedo to Cordero, 8 March 1808".

[19] Almaraz Jr., *Tragic Cavalier*, 47.

[20] BA, reel 39, frame 549, "López Prieto to Manuel Salcedo, 6 Dec. 1808".

[21] Francis X. Galán, Joseph N. de León, "Comparative Freedom in the Borderlands: Fugitive Slaves in Texas and Mexico from the age of Enlightenment through the U.S. Civil War", in Milo Kearney, Anthony Knopp, Antonio Zavaleta, *Ongoing studies in Rio Grande Valley History*, (Brownsville: Texas Center for Border and Transnational Studies, University of Texas Brownsville and Texas Southmost College, 2011), v.10, 33.

personnel, such as officer José María Guadiana.[22] Yet some of the new settlers also made a living through smuggling and petty theft. In February 1808, the young refugee "Luis" was detained in Nacogdoches for stealing some property belonging to *vecino* José Ignacio Ibarbo.[23] Apart from inquiring into the economic use of slave refugees, the agents of the Spanish empire in eastern Texas were instructed to closely scrutinize their moral and religious conduct as well. Officials in Nacogdoches and Trinidad de Salcedo sought to ensure that the escaped slaves genuinely respected their conversion to Roman Catholicism (if they had converted upon their arrival), married following the settled ceremony and respected pledges to live a marital life (*vida maridable*). Such promises were not always kept. It was soon established, for instance, that two escaped slaves in the *villa* of Trinidad publicly maintained an extra-marital relation (*amancebamiento*), to the great dismay of local officer Pedro López Prieto.[24]

Resettlement represented another form of control by colonial agents over self-emancipated slaves. When judged economically or politically expedient, the Spanish side regularly relocated slave refugees from Louisiana deeper into the interior of Texas, officially out of a concern to protect them. In August 1806, Nemesio Salcedo argued that some freedom-seekers unable to find employment in eastern Texas "due to the bad qualities of said negroes" (referring here to injuries and diseases experienced during slavery) were to be transferred to other settlements.[25] Trinidad de Salcedo, for instance, regularly received re-settled fugitive slaves from the eastern fringes of Texas. The personal diary of commandant López Prieto mentioned that on 27 June 1808, "two deserters from the United States and a fugitive mulatto slave" had arrived from Nacogdoches.[26] A month earlier, *comandante general* Salcedo had ordered the transfer (completed during the fall) of twenty-seven escaped slaves from Nacogdoches to the *villa*. This decision stemmed from a concern to de-escalate border tensions by discouraging groups of US slave-hunters and Amerindians who had been dispatched to retrieve the fugitives.

Challenging or Asserting Asylum Policy: the Salcedo-Ugarte Controversy

In Spanish Texas, Salcedo's free-soil policy soon received its first challenge, as the first groups of slaves began crossing the Sabine River. A posse led by tobacco planter Alexis Cloutier from Natchitoches that was pursuing nine fugitives arrived at Nacogdoches on 23 October 1804, and threatened the Spanish military commandant José Joaquín Ugarte that they would continue their search westward if necessary.[27] The military

[22] BA, reel 37, frame 493, "Report of Guadiana, 21 Jan. 1808"; Harrison, "The failure of Spain in East Texas", 213.
[23] BA, reel 37, frames 728-729, "Viana to Cordero, 20 Feb. 1808"; *ibid.* reel 37, frame 796, "Cordero to Viana, 3 March 1808".
[24] BA, reel 39, frames 393-399, "Prieto to Manuel de Salcedo, 22 Nov. 1808".
[25] BA, reel 34, frames 947-960, "Nemesio Salcedo to Cordero, 14 Aug. 1806".
[26] Epperson, *Lost Spanish Towns,* 50, "Diary of López Prieto, 27 June 1808".
[27] Dunbar Rowland, *Official Letter books of W.C.C. Claiborne, 1801-1816* (Jackson: State Department of Archives and History, 1917), v.2, 382-387.

commandant in Natchitoches urged his counterpart to act for a "good understanding" between both nations. A former Spanish governor in Louisiana (Casa Calvo) also suggested returning the fugitives following the Royal Order of 17 May 1790, in the hope that the restitution would prevent border conflicts.[28] Under pressure from diverse fronts, Ugarte on his own initiative ordered the arrest of the escaped slaves. After a first unsuccessful search, two inhabitants spotted the fugitives along the Attoyac River, and a second expedition formed by six soldiers was dispatched to arrest and deliver them to Cloutier.[29] Once in Natchitoches, some of the former absconders were confined in the town's jail (in particular fugitives who had stolen property from their masters), as according to Claiborne, "their liberation would give alarm to the good Citizens".[30] Ugarte's improvised decision brought him into conflict with his superior, *comandante general* Nemesio Salcedo, who disapproved of the restitution. From Nacogdoches, Ugarte advocated ignoring the royal order of 1789, and added that the restitution of fugitive slaves from Louisiana prior to its purchase by the US in 1803 had been the custom. For Salcedo, by contrast, military commandants on the frontier were to keep hold of foreign escaped slaves until receiving a clear instruction from the Spanish King on the subject (for which he wrote to Viceroy Iturrigaray in January 1805, without success).[31] Ugarte's arguments did not convince Salcedo, and the following month, Dionisio Valle replaced him and received strict orders not to return foreign runaways.[32]

Salcedo's asylum policy stood firm during the following years. In January 1808, Salcedo (who was still waiting for orders from Spain and the Viceroy) instructed governor Antonio Cordero that the planned expulsion of undocumented foreigners from eastern Texas did not "include nor ought to include the negro slaves who present themselves in order to obtain their freedom".[33] An exception to the rule came in 1806. Eight slaves absconded from Opelousas (western Louisiana) to Nacogdoches during the summer. Military commandant Francisco Viana initially denied restitution to their master, yet the prospect of further aggravating an already tense geopolitical situation eventually prompted the borderlands officials to order their delivery.[34]

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[28] AGN, PI, v.200, e.3, "Casa Calvo to Ugarte, 10 Nov. 1804", "Ugarte to Elguezabal, 26 Dec. 1804"; BA, reel 32, frames 743-744; NARA (College Park, MD), RG 59 T-260, State Department Territorial Papers, Orleans Series, reel 5, "Turner to Ugarte, 15 Oct. 1804"; Harrison, "The Failure of Spain in East Texas", 208; Herschtal, "Slave, Spaniards and Subversion in Early Louisiana", 290.

[29] BA, reel 32, frames 707 and 786; RBBC, BA, v.20, 242-244; Harrison, "The Failure of Spain in East Texas", 208-210; Herschtal, "Slave, Spaniards and Subversion in Early Louisiana", 289-290; Galán and De León, "Comparative Freedom in the Borderlands", 32. On Alexis Cloutier: H. Sophie Burton, F. Todd Smith, *Colonial Natchitoches: A Creole Community on the Louisiana-Texas Frontier* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2008), 160.

[30] Clarence Edwin Carter, *The Territorial Papers of the United States* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1940), v.9, 335 and 388.

[31] AGN, PI, v.200, e.3, "Memorandum of Nemesio Salcedo to Viceroy Iturrigaray, 23 Jan. 1805"; BA, reel 33, frames 361 and 538-539; Babcock, "Roots of Independence", 249.

[32] BA, reel 33, frames 8, 15 and 23-4; Harrison, "The Failure of Spain in East Texas", 209-210.

[33] Rowland, *Official Letter Books*, v.4, 166-167.

[34] BA, reel 34, frames 777, 880 and 947; AGI, Estado, 35, n.91, "Cartas del Comandante General de Provincias Internas (n°21, undated 1806)"; SEDNA, Expediente 1191, "Correspondencia de d.

As Ugarte's unilateral initiative and this last example illustrate, whether or not foreign escaped slaves were to receive *amparo* (protection) remained closely tied to the evolving balance of power in the Texas-Louisiana borderlands during the first decade of the nineteenth century. Securing the border along the Sabine River and preserving the few settlements Spain had in eastern Texas stood as the primary concern of local colonial administrators. The protection provided to foreign fugitive slaves could jeopardize the territorial integrity of the Spanish empire in its northernmost province, particularly by encouraging illegal expeditions launched to retrieve the runaways. Under pressure, Ugarte prioritized the maintenance of sovereignty and peace over sheltering fugitive slaves.

Local Pressures, National Concerns

As petitions and diplomatic correspondence testify, the frequent escape of slaves from western Louisiana to eastern Texas generated rising resentment among US planters. As early as the autumn of 1804, settlers in Natchitoches accused Ugarte of inciting their slaves to flee.[35] The new proximity of free-soil territories for lower Mississippi's slaves, and a growing uncertainty regarding the slave trade's future in Louisiana (peaking with the federal ban on slave importation to the US in 1807), fueled this discomfort.[36] In August 1807, John Sibley (himself the owner of about thirty slaves in 1810) argued that the Spanish side was "encouraging [their] negroes to desert to Nacogdoches, and not only protecting them on their arrival, but protecting them in the enjoyment of the fruits of their theft and roberies from us".[37] Governor Claiborne often informed secretary of state James Madison about "the asylum afforded to fugitive slaves, in the province of Taxus [which] gives much uneasiness to the Planters of this Territory". In June 1808, settlers in Opelousas grew extremely upset about the escape of some slaves to Texas and were awaiting "with much impatience the interference of the General Government", according to Claiborne.[38] With the number of fugitive slaves increasing, planters in Louisiana oscillated between an adherence to legal solutions and the

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Antonio Cordero, Gobernador de Texas, con el Gral. José J. Wilkinson (…) Año de 1806"; YU, Beinecke, Henry Raup Wagner Collection of Texas Manuscripts (WS MSS S-339), box 1 folder 22, "Expediente sobre ocurrencias de la frontera hasta la retirada a Nachitoches del ejército Americano, 1806"; YU, Beinecke, Jean-Louis Berlandier Papers (WA MSS S-300), box 15, v.1, "Wilkinson in the border with Texas"; SRE, LE 1075.

[35] Rowland, *Official Letter Books,* v.2, 385-386.

[36] John Craig Hammond, "'They Are Very Much Interested in Obtaining an Unlimited Slavery': Rethinking the Expansion of Slavery in the Louisiana Purchase Territories, 1803-1805", *Journal of the Early Republic,* 23, n°3 (2003), 353-380; Ernest Obadele-Starks, *Freebooters and Smugglers: The Foreign Slave Trade in the United States after 1808* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2007).

[37] John Sibley, Penny S. Brandt (ed.), "A letter of Dr. John Sibley, Indian Agent", *Louisiana History: The Journal of the Louisiana Historical Association*, v.29, n°4 (Autumn 1988), 380.

[38] Rowland, *Official Letter Books*, v.4, 135-136 and 179-180, "Claiborne to Madison, 17 Oct. 1807"; Claiborne to Madison, 21 June 1808".

temptation of informal means to retrieve their "property". Over time, however, the planters became increasingly assertive.

In early September 1807, three settlers from Natchitoches led by tobacco-planter François Rouquier petitioned the Spanish side with the assistance of parish judge John C. Carr for the recovery of some slaves who had escaped from their estates. The planters expressed confidence in reaching a legal agreement, though they also hinted at resorting to force should negotiations fail. As Salcedo refused to grant the request, officials on both sides of the Sabine River feared that "a force of 250 men" might storm eastern Texas searching for escaped slaves (although this remained merely a threat).[39] When petitioning the Spanish officials did not work, Louisiana planters turned to their own government. From the autumn of 1807 onwards, several planters from Natchitoches – most of them French-speaking Creole residents – directly petitioned the territorial government of Louisiana for this purpose. Some of the claimants had previously engaged in ineffective inter-personal negotiations with the military authorities of Nacogdoches. For instance, one of them, André Rambien, had first sent his son-in-law, Michel Chamard, to Nacogdoches to negotiate for the return of nineteen-year-old Louis, who had absconded from Natchitoches in July 1807. Dominique Davion had similarly commissioned his brother Jean-Baptiste to retrieve a thirty-five-year-old slave who had absconded in August 1806. The planters attempted to pressure the territorial government of Louisiana into exerting its influence to conclude an agreement with Spanish representatives in Texas, for either the delivery of the slaves or financial compensation. For instance, settler Marie-Louise Rouquier requested 1.000 *piastres* (the word used by most French-speaking colonists in Louisiana to designate a US dollar at the time) for thirty-five-year old Narcisse, a man who had deserted in September 1807, along with thirty *piastres* per month for the net economic loss due to his flight. Likewise, Jean-Baptiste Besson demanded the rendition of Marguerite (or "Margarita") and Jean-Louis (or "Juan Luis") who had absconded together during the summer of 1807, or alternatively, a grand total of 1.700 *piastres*. Yet no records exist suggesting that these petitions did indeed bear fruit. As state governments seemed unable or unwilling to conclude an agreement on the return of escaped slaves, slaveowners began contemplating other means of action. For example, those in western Louisiana favored the use of armed force to kidnap escaped slaves.[40]

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[39] AGI, Guadalajara, 398, n°27, "N. Salcedo to Ceballos, 12 Jan. 1808" and "N. Salcedo to Cordero, 28 Oct. 1807"; BA, reel 36, frames 843-845 and 897-899; *ibid.,* reel 37, frames 140 and 327; Harrison, "The Failure of Spain in East Texas", 212-213, Villarreal, "Colonial Border Control", 64. The settlers based their claim on article 20 of the "treaty of friendship, limits and navigation between Spain and the United States" (27 Oct. 1795), stating that inhabitants of both nations would "be permitted to prosecute suits for the recovery of their properties, the payment of their debts, and for obtaining satisfaction for the damages which they may have sustained".

[40] NARA, RG 59 T-260, reel 9, "Claiborne to Madison, 14 March 1808, with in appendix: declarations of André Rambien, Dominique Davion, Jean-Baptiste Besson, James Bludworth, Marie-Louise Rouquier"; Rowland, *Official Letter Books*, v.4, 163-164. Some runaway slave ads provided direct incentives for invasion, promising higher rewards for fugitive slaves "if taken in the Spanish territory": *Mississippi Herald and Natchez Repository*, 15 July 1807.

Some Euro-American settlers hired Native Americans (especially Caddoes, Choctaws and Coushattas) to abduct runaways in eastern Texas. Both groups maintained strong commercial and political ties, exactly as on the Spanish side of the Sabine River. For instance, in April 1808, three enslaved asylum-seekers living in Nacogdoches requested their relocation to Trinidad de Salcedo or San Antonio de Bexar, arguing that some "*indios*" commissioned by their owners with "large offers" might otherwise come to capture them. Whether their fear was grounded or not, the threat seemed plausible enough for Nemesio Salcedo to transfer the three petitioners to the *villa* of Trinidad.[41] At times, planters also endeavored to abduct escaped slaves in Texas themselves by organizing armed expeditions. Although these borderland raids were rare, small detachments of slave hunters commissioned by western Louisiana residents occasionally roamed eastern Texas looking for fugitives. For instance, in March 1812, two men named Paterson and McLunamhan reached San Marcos de Neve, where they abducted two fugitives named Abraham and Bill.[42] Furthermore, the threat of violent invasion was frequently used as a bargaining chip. Following the escape of about thirty slaves from Natchitoches in October 1808, planters contemplated sending 200 armed men to Trinidad de Salcedo, since they did not trust their state and federal governments to act for their interests: the change of sovereignty in 1803 had entailed yet greater uncertainties regarding their enslaved workforce.[43] National loyalty was at stake, as often stressed by the territorial government.[44] In addition to pressures exerted from below by angry planters from Louisiana, the Spanish agents in Texas faced threats of overt conflict from the Louisiana territorial government should the empire fail to revise its asylum policy on foreign escaped slaves. To Governor Claiborne, "a good understanding between our two Governments ought not and cannot be preserved" with Spain's pro-asylum policy, on which he defiantly challenged governor Simón de Herrera: "if the Sword be drawn, let those be responsible, whose unfriendly conduct has rendered it indispensable".[45]

While in the end US planters got their way, it was only because of reasons related to the stability of the Spanish empire, as colonial records from the Archivo General de Indias show. Despite increasing tensions, the political authorities on both banks of the Sabine River always maintained an extensive correspondence on restitution. By the end of 1807, secretary of state James Madison approached the Spanish plenipotentiary minister Valentín de Foronda regarding the delivery of slave refugees in Spanish Texas. Foronda agreed to Madison's request, provided that the agreement would provide for the restitution of slaves who had escaped from Spanish

[41] BA, reel 38, frame 71.
[42] BA, reel 50, frame 856; Hatcher, *The Opening of Texas*, 125.
[43] NARA, RG 59 T-260, reel 9, "Parish Judge of Natchitoches John C. Carr to Governor Claiborne, 21 Oct. 1808" and "Claiborne to Carr, 6 Nov. 1808"; Rowland, *Official Letter Books*, v.4, 244-245 and 258; Harrison, "The Failure of Spain in East Texas", 212.
[44] Rowland, *Official Letter Books*, 4: 283; Herschtal, "Slave, Spaniards and Subversion in early Louisiana", 285.
[45] Rowland, *Official Letter Books*, v.3, 383-386, "Claiborne to Herrera, 26 Aug. 1805"; *ibid*., v.3, 393, "Herrera to Claiborne, 28 Aug. 1805".

Florida to Georgia as a counterpart. Yet Carlos Martínez de Irujo, a former Spanish minister to the US, warned Foronda that such reciprocity would surely prove illusory in practice (an opinion shared by the *Secretaria de Estado* in the metropolis as well), given the tense relationship between Spain and the US, which caused these negotiations to fail.[46] Meanwhile in the borderlands, Nemesio Salcedo made clear to Claiborne in the early part of 1808 that he was not entirely opposed to restoring US fugitive slaves. However, he had a condition: in case of a ruling by the Spanish Crown favoring freedom for foreign runaways, Louisiana would have to send the slaves back to Texas – a condition that Claiborne found "wholly unadmissible". As a result, their correspondence on the issue lapsed for some months.[47] Yet by November 1808, Claiborne had underlined to secretary of state Madison his belief that – given the current crisis of the Spanish monarchy after the King's forced abdication – Spain's agents in Texas would be inclined to ignore free-soil policies and take the initiative to deliver foreign escaped slaves out of a concern to maintain peaceful relations with the US.[48]

Claiborne proved to be right, as Salcedo agreed on 18 November 1808 to restore fugitive slaves (without any royal backing), provided that their masters could document their property rights, and on the condition that the fugitives would not be injured when returning to Louisiana.[49] Military commandants in Nacogdoches and Trinidad de Salcedo soon received instructions regarding restitution: the idea was to transfer the freedom-seekers in several groups of fifteen individuals in order to prevent the possibility of a large collective revolt, while potential rebels were to be identified. In Nacogdoches, "Jacques" and "Julian" were described as the leaders of the local escaped slave community, while in Trinidad de Salcedo, the *mulato* "Remigio" was designated as the *caudillo* of "seventeen of the last fugitives". Regardless, some asylum-seekers did resist restitution. In Trinidad de Salcedo, Jean-Louis and Marguerite absconded from the guards by riding a horse and a mare, crossing the Brazos River and following a southward route to La Bahía del Espíritu Santo.[50] Despite such spontaneous acts of resistance, officer López Prieto in Trinidad deported forty-one escaped slaves to Nacogdoches for their restitution to Louisiana between January and

[46] AGI, Guadalajara, 398, "Madison to Foronda, 20 Nov. 1807", "Foronda to Casa Irujo, 21 Nov. 1807", "Casa Irujo to Foronda, 21 Nov. 1807", "Casa Irujo to Foronda, 25 Nov. 1807" [and "Copia de la minuta del Marques de Casa Irujo"], "Foronda to Madison, 25 Nov. 1807", "Foronda to Ceballos, 27 Nov. 1807", "Secretaría de Estado to Gobernador del Consejo de Indias, 21 May 1808, with appendix".
[47] AGI, Guadalajara, 398, "N. Salcedo to Claiborne, 2 Jan. 1808"; Rowland, *Official Letter Books*, v.4, 162-163; Harrison, "The Failure of Spain in East Texas", 215.
[48] NARA, RG 59 T-260, reel 9, "Claiborne to Madison, 27 May 1808" and "Claiborne to Madison, 6 Nov. 1808".
[49] BA, reel 39, frames 489-494, 588-595, 677-684, 687-695, 750 and 758; Folsom, "Trinidad de Salcedo", 55, Harrison, "The Failure of Spain in East Texas", 215; Almaraz Jr., *Tragic Cavalier*, 28-29; Villarreal, "Colonial Border Control", 68. Salcedo might have been convinced by Claiborne's argument that enslaved runaways' rendition was effective between Louisiana and Spanish Florida (Rowland, *Official Letter Books*, v.4, 254-255, "Claiborne to Salcedo, 22 Nov. 1808").
[50] BA, reel 40, frame 266; ibid., reel 42, frames 720 and 788; Almaraz Jr., *Tragic Cavalier*, 10.

February 1809, while fourteen others were jailed awaiting expulsion.[51] Claiborne interpreted the decision as evidence of New Spain's "friendly disposition", and in May 1809, instructed parish judges across Louisiana to ensure that "an entire pardon of the offence of Desertion" was granted to the fugitives who "were lately deliver'd to their owners".[52] As advised by secretary of state Madison in 1807, Louisiana's territorial Legislative Council and House of Representatives enforced a unilateral act providing for the return of escaped slaves by New Spain's authorities in an attempt to legally strengthen the agreement.[53]

The accord between the Spanish side and Louisiana on escaped slaves was effective for some months.[54] Slaveowners in Louisiana (such as François Rouquier and a man named "Santiago Bloudant") began sending property deeds to Nacogdoches in attempts to recover – by virtue of the agreement – the slaves who had absconded from their plantations.[55] Yet, on 7 August 1809, Salcedo unexpectedly rescinded the restitution policy after receiving instructions from the *Junta Gubernativa* in Spain. Spanish Texas once again welcomed foreign slaves escaping from the US, though the restitution agreement continued to be brandished in discussions on enslaved asylum-seekers even after its repeal.[56] In November 1811, Claiborne attempted to revive it when requesting the delivery of two fugitive slaves, reminding the Spanish side of the "amicable arrangements" concluded some years earlier. Likewise, in February 1812, John C. Carr backed a woman's request for the return of the fugitives Jean-Louis and Marguerite, and argued that "in consequence of this order, the whole of the slaves with the exception of those of the unfortunate widow Besson were delivered to their masters", as both had escaped from the restitution caravan. In this particular case, a compromise was eventually found between both parties, even though the accord was not re-implemented. Through the mediation of Nacogdoches settler Pedro Samuel Davenport and in exchange for ten *pesos*, the couple was eventually brought back to Natchitoches, years after they had found refuge in eastern Texas.[57] While some degree of ambiguity still persisted about the fate of self-emancipated slaves from beyond the Sabine River (despite the withdrawal of the restitution agreement), internal runaways

[51] BA, reel 40, frames 380-384. Influential slaveholders from Natchitoches benefited from the rendition, such as Michel Chamard, Ambroise Lecompte, Alexis Cloutier, Jean-Baptiste Lecompte and Louis Derbanne.
[52] Rowland, *Official Letter Books*, v.4, 299, 336 and 350.
[53] BA, reel 40, frames 258-259, "Clayborne to Legislative Council and House of Representatives of the Territory of Louisiana. Acts governing recovery of slaves escaping from owners on border of Spanish territory, 21 Feb. 1809"; *ibid.*, reel 41, frame 759, "Nemesio Salcedo to Bonavia, 18 June 1809"; *ibid.*, reel 42, frame 198, "Bonavia to Manuel de Salcedo, 18 July 1809"; Galán and De León, "Comparative Freedom in the Borderlands", 33.
[54] BA, reel 41, frames 193, 885 and 909; *ibid.*, reel 42 frame 511; RBBC, BA, 20, 325-326.
[55] RBBC, BA, 20, 325-326; BA, reel 41, frame 193, "Nemesio Salcedo to Bonavia, 2 May 1809"; *ibid.,* reel 41, frames 909-918, "Manuel de Salcedo to Bonavia, 28 June 1809".
[56] AGI, Guadalajara, 429, n°12, "N. Salcedo to Garay, 5 Sep. 1809", "N. Salcedo to Bonavia, 5 Sep. 1809", BA, reel 42, frames 500-503, 737-739, 757, 838 and 946; Harrison, "The Failure of Spain in East Texas", 216; Luis García Navarro, "Las Provincias Internas en el Siglo XIX", *Anuario de Estudios Americanos*, 21 (1964), 295.
[57] BA, reel 49, frame 524; *ibid.,* reel 50, frame 281 and 306; Rowland, *Official Letter Books*, v.5, 388.

continued to be tracked in Texas. During the fall of 1809, an enslaved man who had absconded from a settler in San Antonio narrowly escaped from the troops dispatched to arrest him near Trinidad de Salcedo, where he was now suspected to be employed in Juan Megui's *rancho*.[58]

Freedom for slave refugees settled in Texas remained highly contingent upon various factors during the last decade of Spanish (effective) rule over the province. Their fate depended almost entirely on the good will of local administrators and state governments at a local level, in the absence of a clear and consistent official policy on foreign fugitive slaves. Even though free soil was applied as official policy as a result of Nemesio Salcedo's initiative, the prospect of deportation back to western Louisiana still hung over their heads, either in the form of slaveowners' legal actions or illegal incursions, Amerindians acting as unofficial slave patrols for planters, or even Spanish military commandants' shifting attitudes on *amparo*.

Royalists, Revolutionaries and Freebooters: Self-Emancipated Slaves during the Mexican War for Independence

As the eighteenth century drew to a close, the institution of slavery in colonial New Spain was already undergoing a process of gradual and sustained demise. Following the conquest, African slaves had been intensively imported through the licensed port of Veracruz between roughly 1570 and 1650 to replace a dramatically depleted Native American population. Enslaved African Americans were employed in (urban) domestic service, in sugar and tobacco plantations in the eastern regions of Córdoba and Orizaba, as well as in silver and lead mines throughout the northern frontier, especially in Guanajuato and Zacatecas, but also to a lesser extent in Nuevo León and present-day Tamaulipas. The relative demographic recovery of the Native population from the mid-seventeenth century onwards sustained the (re)-emergence of alternative forms of coerced labor, while a free creole population of mixed European, indigenous and African origins developed, all of which made the introduction and trade in black slaves comparatively less profitable. Nonetheless, as Tatiana Seijas and Pablo Sierra have underlined, African slavery still constituted a prevalent form of coerced labor in the Viceroyalty during the second half of the seventeenth century (as was Asian slavery). Slavery's long demise in New Spain occurred during the course of the eighteenth century, though some slaveholding enclaves (such as the coastal areas surrounding Veracruz) seemed unaffected by the process. As domestic demand in New Spain plummeted, the volumes of slaves imported from the Atlantic world decreased, while the late colonial period saw relatively high rates of manumission.[59] By contrast

[58] BA, reel 43, frames 48-68, "López Prieto to Manuel de Salcedo, 6 Oct. 1809".
[59] On the demise of slavery in late colonial Mexico: Dennis N. Valdés, "The Decline of Slavery in Mexico", *The Americas*, v.44, n°2 (Oct. 1987), 167-194; Adriana Naveda Chávez-Hita, *Esclavos Negros en las Haciendas Azucareras de Córdoba, Veracruz, 1690-1830* (Xalapa: Universidad Veracruzana, Centro de Investigaciones Históricas, 1987); Patrick Carroll, *Blacks in Colonial Veracruz: Race, Ethnicity, and Regional Development* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1991).

with central Mexico, slavery did not play a primordial economic and social role in the largely unsettled borderlands of Coahuila and Texas during the Spanish period. In the northeastern frontier of the Viceroyalty, slaves mostly worked as domestic servants (for instance in Saltillo and San Antonio). The relative availability of an indigenous captive workforce as well as high prices for black slaves largely inhibited the use of African bondspeople in the area, with some local exceptions such as in Nacogdoches.[60]

As wars for national independence broke out in Spanish America, calls for the abolition of slavery and the slave trade permeated the Mexican revolutionary discourse as part of a larger combat against colonialism, imperialism and New Spain's *sociedad de castas*.[61] The first decrees passed by the Mexican revolutionaries following Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla's *Grito de Dolores* (15 September 1810) reflected this agenda. Hidalgo himself provided for the abolition of slavery in his *Bando de Valladolid*, as enforced by mayor José María Anzorena. Before the end of the year, the insurgent leader issued a similar *bando* for Guadalajara (Jalisco), by which unconditional freedom was to be granted to the region's enslaved population in a delay of less than ten days. Masters unwilling to comply with the order were liable to capital punishment. The *Elementos de la Constitución* published by Ignacio López Rayón (1812) reiterated Hidalgo's prohibition of slavery and offered legal protection to all foreigners willing to favor "the freedom and independence of the Nation". José María Morelos, during the fall of 1813, reasserted the antislavery commitment of the radical pro-independence faction in his *Sentimientos de la Nación* as well as in a *bando* passed in Chilpancingo. Criticism of slavery arose from within the imperial structure as well. When the *Cortes* gathered at Cádiz, several representatives for New Spain advocated gradual abolition schemes. During the course of the crafting of the 1812 liberal constitution, José Miguel Guridi y Alcocer (deputy for Tlaxcala) and Miguel Ramos Arizpe (Coahuila) argued for a free-womb law and an immediate prohibition of slave trafficking.[62] Slaves throughout the

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Tatiana Seijas and Pablo Miguel Sierra Silva have argued that in central Mexico, the decline of slavery and the slave trade occurred later than Valdés has assumed (around 1640 or the end of Portugal's *asiento*), as both persisted well into the seventeenth century. Tatiana Seijas and Pablo Miguel Sierra Silva, "The Persistence of the Slave Market in Seventeenth-Century Central Mexico", *Slavery & Abolition*, 37:2 (2016), 307-333. On Asian slaves: Tatiana Seijas, *Asian Slaves in Colonial Mexico: From Chinos to Indians* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

[60] Carlos Manuel Valdés, Ildefonso Dávila, *Esclavos Negros en Saltillo, Siglos XVIII-XIX* (Saltillo: Ayuntamiento de Saltillo, 1989).

[61] Eric Van Young, *The Other Rebellion: Popular Violence, Ideology, and the Mexican Struggle for Independence, 1810-1821* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002); Jaime E. Rodríguez, *"We are now the true Spaniards": Sovereignty, Revolution, Independence and the Emergence of the Federal Republic of Mexico, 1808-1824* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012).

[62] Ernesto Lemoine, Horacio Labastida, Oscar Castañeda, *Documentos para la Historia del México Independiente, 1808-1938* (México: Porrúa, 2010), 74-75, "Primer bando de Hidalgo aboliendo la esclavitud publicado en la Ciudad de Valladolid por el intendente Ansorena, 19 de octubre de 1810"; *ibid.* 104-108, "Primer proyecto constitucional para el México independiente. Elementos de la Constitución por Ignacio López Rayón. Zinacantepec, 30 de abril de 1812"; *ibid.* 128-129, "Sentimiento de la Nación. Chilpancingo, 14 de septiembre de 1813"; *ibid.* 138-139, "Abolición de la esclavitud por José María Morelos, Chilpancingo, 5 de octubre de 1813"; Schwartz, *Across the Rio to Freedom,* 6-7; Manuel Ferrer Muñoz, *La Cuestión de la Esclavitud en el México Decimonónico: sus Repercusiones en las Etnias Indígenas* (México: Instituto de

Viceroyalty took advantage of the political and military conflicts that disrupted the established colonial order during the 1810s by striving for emancipation in multiple ways. Some joined royalist forces with the hope of being manumitted (just like the Black Loyalists during the American Revolution), while others fought alongside the insurgents with a similar purpose in mind. A third way consisted in escaping from enslavers and joining maroon communities for *de facto* freedom, especially in regions with long-lasting legacies of marronage, such as the coastal *Tierra Caliente*.[63] News of the Mexican war for independence and its eroding effects on slavery spread across the Gulf of Mexico. The slaveholders of the US South began to fear that it would further worsen relations between enslavers and enslaved people that were already strained by the Haitian liberationist model. Those in regions bordering New Spain grew especially concerned that Mexican revolutionaries might use free-soil policy as a political instrument, granting freedom to foreign escaped slaves in exchange for military service.[64]

In addition, the unrest unfolding in New Spain (in particular in its northern fringes) encouraged freebooters and revolutionaries to invade the northeastern borderlands of the Viceroyalty from the US. Filibusters led by former US army lieutenant Augustus W. Magee and Mexican merchant José Bernardo Maximiliano Gutiérrez de la Lara left Natchitoches in August 1812, with the tacit backing of US officials.[65] Defeating royalist troops, they seized Nacogdoches and San Antonio, forming an independent polity in Texas in the name of the Revolution, before Spanish forces led by general José Joaquín de Arredondo swiftly cracked down on the rebels

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Estudios Constitucionales Carlos Restrepo Piedrahita, 1998), 13-15; Jaime Olveda Legaspi, "La abolición de la esclavitud en México, 1810-1917", *Signos históricos*, 29 (Jan.-Jun. 2013), 8-34 ; Jaime del Arenal Fenocho, "La Utopía de la Libertad: La Esclavitud en las Primeras Declaraciones Mexicanas de Derechos Humanos", *Anuario Mexicano de Historia del Derecho*, n°6 (1994), 7-10; María Camila Díaz Casas "¿De esclavos a ciudadanos? Matices sobre la "integración" y "asimilación" de la población de origen africano en la sociedad nacional mexicana, 1810-1850", in Juan Manuel de la Serna (coord.), *Negros y Morenos en Iberoamérica: Adaptación y Conflicto* (México: UNAM, 2015), 284-285; Antonio Tenorio Adame, "La esclavitud en el discurso de José Miguel Guridi y Alcocer", in Eduardo Alejandro López Sánchez, José Luis Soberanes Fernández, *La Constitución de Cádiz de 1812 y su impacto en el Occidente Novohispano* (México: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2015), 401-422.

[63] *Gaceta del Gobierno de México*, 8 May 1812 and 8 Feb. 1814. On slavery's abolition and fugitive slaves before and during independence wars in the state of Veracruz: Adriana Naveda Chávez-Hita, "El Nuevo Orden Constitucional y el fin de la Abolición de la Esclavitud en Córdoba, Veracruz, 1810-1825", in Juan Manuel de la Serna (ed.), *De la Libertad y Abolición: Africanos y Afrodescendientes en Iberoamérica* (México: Centro de Estudios mexicanos y centroamericanos, 2010), 195-217; Magdalena Díaz Hernández, "Esclavos y la Imagen de la Justicia Paternalista del Rey y del Virrey en el Veracruz Colonial", *Nuevo Mundo Mundos Nuevos* [accessed 23 June 2015].

[64] Adam Rothman, *Slave Country: American Expansion and the Origins of the Deep South* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2005), 109; Herschtal, "Slave, Spaniards and Subversion in early Louisiana", 306.

[65] Raúl A. Ramos, *Beyond the Alamo: Forging Mexican Ethnicity in San Antonio, 1821-1861* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 39-41; Sean M. Kelley, *Los Brazos de Dios: a Plantation Society in the Texas Borderlands, 1821-1865* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 2010), 18. On (geo)political developments in the eastern *Provincias Internas* during the 1810s: García Navarro, "Las Provincias Internas en el Siglo XIX".

and ousted them to Louisiana during the summer of 1813. However, other incursions into Texas followed Arredondo's re-conquest. Over the next three years, the province was invaded at least six times by privateers. In this uncertain and violent political context, self-emancipated slaves from the US South seldom contemplated settling in Texas, and those who did became embroiled in the wars for national independence, especially as royalist officers in New Spain's Northeast endeavored to use them as intelligence providers against pirates, smugglers and revolutionaries.[66]

The US federal ban on slave importation (1807) gave a new impetus to slave smuggling activities between the US South and the Caribbean islands. As Spain's grip over northeastern New Spain loosened during the 1810s (its sovereignty over the region being practically fictional), a significant part of this illegal slave trade was conducted through the relatively ungoverned coast of Texas. Galveston Island represented a key smuggling hub for slaves transported from the Gulf into Louisiana and the US South, in a trade mostly controlled by the French filibusters Jean and Pierre Laffite.[67] In the aftermath of the Louisiana Purchase, the two brothers had ruled their own privateer "Kingdom" in Barataria Bay, south of New Orleans, where they mainly focused their efforts on slave smuggling. In November 1815, Spain officially commissioned Jean (until June 1816) to occupy Galveston Island and to spy on the activities of mercenaries and revolutionaries. Yet, once settled in a spot named "Campeche", Jean mostly engaged in piracy and smuggling, running these shady businesses in connivance with privateer and revolutionary Louis-Michel Aury (also occupying the island), a corsair who had fought alongside the revolutionaries during the royalist siege of Cartagena de Indias (New Granada) between August and December 1815.[68]

Some enslaved people escaped from smugglers during the 1810s. By the end of the decade, about thirty people illegally introduced into East Texas reportedly absconded from James Bowie, heading west to the Colorado River, and eventually found an informal refuge among Comanches.[69] Likewise, three enslaved men absconded from the privateer camp on Galveston Island in May 1817. Sailing along the coast of Texas (without landing out of fear of the Karankawas), the three fugitives were found by Spanish troops near the mouth of the Rio Grande and conducted to the settlement of Refugio (Matamoros) for interrogation. A US-born doctor residing in

[66] Babcock, "Roots of Independence", 260; Davis, *Land*, 20; David Head, *Privateers of the Americas: Spanish American Privateering from the United States in the Early Republic* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2015), 98.
[67] Andrew J. Torget, *Seeds of Empire. Cotton, Slavery and the Transformation of the Texas Borderlands, 1800-1850* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015), 43.
[68] *Niles' Weekly Register*, 27 Dec. 1817, "Galvezton and Amelia, Official Papers of Galvezton, Mr. Chew, Collector at N. Orleans, to Mr. Crawford, Mr. Chew to Mr. Crawford, Memorial of Merchants of New Orleans, to Com. Patterson, of the 28th of July, 1817"; William C. Davis, *The Pirates Laffitte: the Treacherous World of the Corsairs of the Gulf* (Orlando, Austin, New York, San Diego, Toronto, London: Harcourt, 2005); Head, "Slave Smuggling by Foreign Privateers", 451-455.
[69] Frederick C. Chabot, *With the Makers of San Antonio: Genealogies of the Early Latin, Anglo-American and German Families, with Occasional Biographies* (San Antonio: Artes Gráficas, 1937), 245-246.

Camargo helped translate their statements. Lorca introduced himself as a Guinea-born enslaved man who had been abducted by corsairs along the Mexican coast between Veracruz and Campeche, forcibly brought to Galveston and exploited there as a log-house builder for three years. Ennalt, a thirty-year-old bondsman originally from St John's (in the British island of Antigua), had been detained on the island for six months where he was worked hunting and unloading boats, after pirates had abducted him in an attack on the Spanish vessel *Dandy* between Charleston and Havana. The last self-emancipated man, Juan, described himself as an Anguilla-born enslaved man "trained as a boat-cook". While simultaneously fearing that the three refugees might be spies sent to New Spain by the filibusters themselves, Spanish officials persistently required them to provide detailed accounts of activities on the island. The self-emancipated slaves described the military and logistic preparation of a large-scale raid on the Mexican coast, as well as a failed attempt by Aury to establish a filibuster base in Matagorda Bay, and his retreat following revolutionary Francisco Xavier Mina's failed expedition to Soto la Marina (New Santander) in April 1817. Both *comandante general* Arredondo and governor of Texas Antonio Martínez grew alarmed by the declarations, and ordered heightened vigilance over the filibusters. Despite their role as informants (in exchange for which they probably hoped to be liberated from slavery), the fate of the three escaped slaves remains unclear.[70] Others already in Texas since the first decade of the century – and who had avoided rendition – struggled to make a living. In 1819 (eleven years after his escape from slavery), the aforementioned asylum-seeker "Manuel" (or originally "Evangéliste") was smuggling commodities with local Wacos to make a living, along with many other African Americans.[71]

Notwithstanding this political turmoil, some slaves from the US absconded to New Spain. As Sean M. Kelley has contended, before Mexican independence, "because slavery was legal in both areas, slaves did not attach any particular significance to the border", but "some fled to Texas recognizing that it would be difficult for masters to pursue runaways into Spanish territory".[72] Escaping from western Louisiana while his master had gone to hunt and negotiate a trade agreement with local Caddoes, Andrés introduced himself as a baptized Catholic at San Antonio, in an attempt to strengthen his claim for freedom. With this purpose in mind, Andrés collaborated with the Spanish officials, who nonetheless remained wary of his intentions. When asked about US filibusters who could pose a threat to the eastern borderlands of Texas, Andrés

[70] BA, reel 60, frames 971-82, "Roque de la Portilla to Arredondo, 9 May 1817"; *ibid.*, reel 61, frame 1, "Arredondo to Martínez, 16 May 1818"; *ibid.*, reel 61, frame 401, "On receipt of testimony of three negroes who escaped from Galveston, 21 July 1818". On privateering and piracy in the early nineteenth-century Gulf of Mexico: Frank L. Owsley Jr., Gene A. Smith, *Filibusters and Expansionists: Jeffersonian Manifest Destiny, 1800-1821* (Tuscaloosa and London: The University of Alabama Press, 1997), 164-180; Davis, *The Pirates Laffitte.* The story of Ennalt, Juan and Lorca can also be found in: Obadele-Starks, *Freebooters and Smugglers*, 66-67; Jean L. Epperson, "Testimony of Three Escaped Prisoners from Galveston in 1818", *Laffite Society Chronicles*, v.4, n°1 (1998), 6-7. On Arredondo: Bradley Folsom, *Arredondo: Last Spanish Ruler of Texas and Northeastern New Spain* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2017).

[71] AGN, PI, v.187, e.12, f.291-297 (Monterrey, 27 Oct. 1819); TBL, Bolton, 45:24, "Pérez to Arredondo, 3 Dec. 1819".

[72] Kelley, "Mexico in his Head", 710.

underlined that his enslaver had once hosted Gutiérrez de Lara and that, indeed, another invasion of Texas was likely imminent.[73] By the eve of Mexico's independence, adventurism in eastern Texas peaked with Mississippi-born filibuster James Long's two expeditions into Texas (June 1819-October 1821), attempts to form an independent government and endeavors to seize control over the slave smuggling trade in the Texas-Louisiana borderlands.[74] Once again, self-emancipated slaves like Bill Mecate, a young slave native from Georgia, sought to capitalize on their (uneasy) position as middlemen. Spanish forces in eastern Texas arrested Bill during the spring of 1820. Brought to Monterrey (Nuevo León) for interrogation, the man initially claimed to have escaped from Long himself (who was then preparing a second attack on Texas from Nacogdoches) after four years in his possession. Under the pressure of his interrogators, Bill's replies became imprecise and he finally confessed having absconded from an anonymous merchant from Natchez. Provided that his declaration was truthful, Bill's tactic of passing himself off as absconding from Long might suggest that, long before the Texas Revolution, slave refugees were well aware of their strategic value in the US-Mexico borderlands.[75]

Yet the treatment of slave refugees often proved erratic: many of them were kept in detention, neither being formally freed nor being sent back to their original masters or re-enslaved. Jacob Kirkham, a small planter from Natchitoches, travelled to San Antonio in November 1820 with "the purpose of claiming four negroes who ran away" (Samuel, Richard, Tivi and Marian), including three who were his own property.[76] The four fugitives had previously been arrested during one of the expeditions launched by lieutenant colonel Ignacio Pérez against Long's men, and were thereafter transported to San Antonio for detention alongside foreign prisoners. In January 1821, governor Martínez received a letter from his counterpart in Louisiana requesting the rendition of the runaways to Kirkham. Martínez, despite his willingness to "conserve a good friendship" (*buena amistad*) between both states, replied negatively to the request: the slave refugees were soon to be transferred to Monterrey for interrogation, at the initiative of the *Comandante General* of the Eastern Internal Provinces.[77] During the siege of La Bahía in October 1821 by Spanish troops, which

[73] BA, reel 58, frames 97-105, "Depositions made by American Negro Andrés, 10 March 1817"; Torget, *Seeds of Empire,* 44.
[74] Obadele-Starks, *Freebooters and Smugglers*, 66-67; Kelley, *Los Brazos de Dios,* 18.
[75] UT(A), Briscoe, Charles Ramsdell Collection, Box 2Q238, "Negro Slaves in Spanish America, 1563-1820", "Fugitive slaves from the United States, captured in Texas by the expedition against Long, trial at Monterrey, 1820"; Obadele-Starks, *Freebooters and Smugglers*, 66-67.
[76] RBBC, NA, v.10, 212-213. On Austin's plans for colonization: Randolph Campbell, *An Empire for Slavery: the Peculiar Institution in Texas, 1821-1865* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1989), 10-34; Sarah K.M. Rodríguez, "'The Greatest Nation on Earth'. The Politics and Patriotism of the First Anglo American Immigrants to Mexican Texas, 1820-1824", *Pacific Historical Review*, v.86, n°1 (Feb. 2017), 50-83; Sean M. Kelley, "Plantation Frontiers: Race, Ethnicity and Family along the Brazos River of Texas, 1821-1886", PhD Diss. (Austin: University of Texas, 2000), 48-52; Davis, *Land*, 21-27; Kelley, *Los Brazos de Dios*, 18-19.
[77] UT(A), Briscoe, Charles Ramsdell Collection, Box 2Q238, Provincias Internas Transcripts, 251, "Villaré to Martínez, 12 Sep. 1820"; BA, reel 66, frames 497-501, "Conde del Venadito to

marked the end of Long's enterprise in Texas, another young enslaved man named John reached Pérez's lines, escaping from Long. Once back at San Antonio, Pérez kept the refugee in his own house, waiting for instructions on what treatment he should accord to John, while fifty-one prisoners from the siege were transferred to the interior because resources to maintain such a large detainee population were lacking. Ultimately, the fate of Richard, Marian, Tivi, and John remains uncertain (Samuel died in a hospital in Monterrey). Although it seems very unlikely that they were delivered to their enslavers, archival records do not provide evidence that they formally received freedom across the Sabine River.[78] But in spite of political and military instability and the ambiguity of the status awaiting them once reaching New Spain, enslaved people continued to look for an escape from servitude in the Texan borderlands. Slaveholders sometimes assumed that their enslaved workforce would abscond in a westward direction, such as the enslaver of Phil (a bondsman native from South Carolina) in Opelousas in March 1820. The independence of Mexico from Spain (1821) fueled the antislavery sentiment that had arisen during the 1810s. The newly founded nation's attraction for fugitives from the US South accordingly rose.[79]

Self-Liberated Slaves in Early Independent Mexico (1821-1836)

Slavery and Euro-American Colonization after the Plan de Iguala[80]

As Agustin de Iturbide's *Plan de Iguala* (1 March 1821) marked the definitive formation of an independent Mexican state, a national discourse emerged that was hostile to the continued existence of slavery in the new republic. With only about 3.000 slaves left in Mexico at the moment of independence, the institution had eroded to near economic and social insignificance, and its legal eradication seemed only a matter of time. Since preserving African slavery involved almost no practical advantage, given that other forms of free and unfree labor had largely replaced it, a general emancipation would hardly entail substantial economic readjustments for *hacendados* (large landholders), and its social and political effects could easily be contained.[81] The *Plan de Iguala* pledged equality among Mexicans regardless of race, although it did not explicitly mention slavery. In its wake, a *comisión de esclavos* ("slaves committee") was formed at the *Junta Provisional Gubernativa* (the first provisional national government) under the aegis of lawyer Juan Francisco Azcarate y Lezama. In October 1821, the committee proposed to abolish slavery and slave trafficking in exchange for an indemnity to

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Martínez, 30 Jan. 1821"; *ibid.*, reel 66, frame 790, "Martínez to Villaré, 26 Feb. 1821"; AGN, Operaciones de Guerra, v.778, e.61, "Martínez to Virrey, 16 Mar. 1821".

[78] SRE, LE 1055, f.34-38 "Martínez to López, 19 Oct. 1821"; Torget, *Seeds of Empire*, 46.

[79] *Louisiana Advertiser*, 31 March 1820.

[80] The expression "Euro-American" is used in: Pekka Hämäläinen, *The Comanche Empire* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 2. By contrast with "Anglo-American", "Anglo" or "American", it accounts for the diversity of foreign colonizers in Mexican Texas by including non-Anglophone settlers.

[81] Kelley, "Mexico in his Head", 709.

slaveholders, and to protect foreign slaves willing to reside in Mexico with a "law of asylum".[82]

In the end, this early abolitionist proposal was never implemented. However, antislavery sentiment continued to grow in Mexico throughout the 1820s, finding expression in newspaper editorials as well as in popular and political culture. In September 1825, the *Gaceta Diaria de México* included a short antislavery pamphlet ("*Reflecsiones sobre la esclavitud*"), in which the author argued that "anyone that justifies such an obnoxious system deserves contempt from the philosopher, and vengeance from the black".[83] The same year, Mexican writer José Joaquín Lizardi published a theatre play entitled *El negro sensible.* In this drama set in a sugar plantation somewhere in the Spanish Caribbean, Lizardi displayed the violence of slavery as an institution and implicitly legitimized slave resistance through the story of a "negro sensible" (a "sensitive negro") named Catul, a man running away to reunite with his wife (Bunga) after their former master had separated them.[84] In the context of increasingly strained relations with the US, Mexican opposition to slavery represented a clear expression of the young nation's moral superiority to its northern neighbor. The construction of a distinct sense of Mexicanness through antislavery rhetoric deliberately contrasted with the proslavery ideology of the US South. General José María Tornel y Mendivil, a staunch abolitionist, for instance, condemned the contradiction between the ideals of 1776 and the preservation of slavery in the US, calling it hypocritical.[85] Masters emancipated their slaves as an act of patriotism. Symbolic manumissions of slaves were carried out every year on September 15 in commemoration of Hidalgo's *Grito de Dolores,* further consolidating the myth of the new nation's indifference to color. In 1826, president Guadalupe Victoria promised to raise a fund aimed at manumitting the last slaves in Mexico. Tornel proposed an abolition bill in 1827, and the *Cámara de diputados* began discussing the abolition of slavery in January 1828 with no substantial disagreements on the subject, except on explicitly granting freedom to slaves from foreign lands who were merely passing through Mexico. With some regional exceptions, enslaved labor had declined in large parts of Mexico. Surveying some of Mexico City's *cuárteles*, *regidor* Isidoro Olvera underlined that "there [we]re very few of these unfortunates in the Federal District".[86] Making use of temporary extraordinary powers, president Vicente Guerrero ultimately banned slavery in Mexico on 15 September 1829 (with the promise to indemnify

[82] Juan Francisco de Azcarate, *Dictamen de la Comisión de Esclavos* (México: Imprenta Imperial de Alejandro Valdés, 1821); AGN, Gobernación Sin Sección, c.11 e.15 (Dec. 1821); Salvador Méndez Reyes, "Hacia la Abolición de la Esclavitud en México: el Dictamen de la Comisión de Esclavos de 1821", in de la Serna (ed.), *De la libertad y Abolición*, 179-193.
[83] *Gaceta Diaria de Mexico*, t.1, n°2, 16 Sep. 1825; *El fénix de la libertad*, 23 Jan. 1834.
[84] José Joaquín Lizardi, *El negro sensible* (México: Ontiveros, 1825); Catherine Raffi-Béroud, *En torno al teatro de Fernández de Lizardi* (Amsterdam, Atlanta: Rodopi, 1998), 152-164. *El negro sensible* was an adaptation of the manuscript of a play authored by Luciano Francisco Comella around 1770-1789, which text was prohibited by the Inquisition in 1809.
[85] José María Tornel y Mendivil, *Breve Reseña de los Acontecimientos mas notables de la Nación Mexicana, desde el Año de 1821 hasta Nuestros Días* (México: Cumplido, 1852).
[86] AHDF, Historia, v.2256, e.173, "Olvera to de la Cadena, 25 April 1828".

slaveholders). The decree sparked some resistance among residents and *hacendados* of Córdoba and Jalapa (Veracruz), Campeche, Villa del Carmen and the department of Texas, which was eventually exempted from the decree in December.[87]

Furthermore, Mexican state officials often expressed support for foreign African American immigration.[88] For example, Agustín Jerónimo de Iturbide (the former Emperor's son and Mexico's representative in Washington) and Vice-president Gómez Farías supported it in the hope of using the new settlers as a demographic and military buffer against Comanche attacks and US westward expansion, while the *Secretaría de Estado* promised land and instruments for cultivation to the newcomers.[89] Discretion was nonetheless recommended to the Mexican *Encargado de Negocios* (minister) in the US, Joaquín María del Castillo, when advertising Mexico's official support for black colonization, for fear of antagonizing the northern republic.[90] Mexican officials grew more willing to welcome US fugitive slaves as well. Senator Francisco Manuel Sánchez de Tagle (an ex-integrant of the *comisión de esclavos* in 1821) argued that by openly welcoming US fugitive slaves, Mexico would gain new subjects loyal to the republic and willing to help defend it against the US or Native Americans.[91] Overall, the liberal press demonstrated a favorable disposition to their plight. For instance, *El Procurador del Pueblo,* a newspaper from Veracruz, criticized the US Fugitive Slave Act of 1793 and expressed sympathy towards escaped slaves using

[87] *El Sol*, 31 Jan. 1828; AGN, Gobernación Sin Sección, c.116 e.16, "Decreto de Vicente Guerrero a Bocanegra, 15 Sep. 1829"; AGN, Justicia y Negocios Eclesiásticos, v.48 e.34 f.306-307; TBL, Mexico Miscellany, 1822-1892, "Ángela Gorrindo de Díaz to Presidente de la República, sobre la libertad que se dará a dos esclavas de su propiedad, 22 Oct. 1829"; María Camila Díaz Casas, "¿De Esclavos a Ciudadanos? Matices sobre la "Integración" y "Asimilación" de la Población de Origen Africano en la Sociedad Nacional Mexicana, 1810-1850", in De la Serna (coord.), *Negros y Morenos en Iberoamérica*, 273-303; Raúl A. Ramos, *Beyond the Alamo: Forging Mexican Ethnicity in San Antonio, 1821-1861* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 117; Andrew J. Torget, *Seeds of Empire: Cotton, Slavery and the Transformation of the Texas Borderlands, 1800-1850* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015), 144; Schwartz, *Across the Rio to freedom*, 6-7 and 15-16; Kelley, "Mexico in his head", 714-715; Matthew Restall, *The Black Middle: Africans, Mayas, and Spaniards in Colonial Yucatan* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 67-74.

[88] Exceptions to this tendency include for instance Francisco Pizarro Martínez, Mexico's consul at New Orleans, who saw black settlers as the antithesis of the "people of good morals and industry" that Mexico required, and black migration to Texas as a way for Euro-American planters to dispose of a large, cheap and coerced workforce: SRE, AEMEUA, 18/7, f.35-36, "Pizarro Martínez to Mier y Terán, 4 April 1831"; SRE, AEMEUA, 22/3, f.99-100, "Pizarro Martínez to Secretaría de Estado, 15 May 1833"; SRE, LE 1057, f.82, "Legación Mexicana en los E.U. de América to Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores, 3 July 1833"; SRE, LE 1057, f.85-86, "Legación Mexicana en los E.U. de América to Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores, 25 Sep. 1833".

[89] SRE, LE 1075, "Exposición de Víctor Blanco, 5 Dec. 1822" and "Blanco to López, 9 Dec. 1822"; SRE, LE 1057, f.73-74, "Agustín J. de Iturbide y Huarte to Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores, 19 May 1833"; SRE, AEMEUA, 21/2, f.114, "Secretaría de Estado to Encargado de Negocios (de los E.U. Mexicanos), 20 Aug. 1833"; SRE, AEMEUA, 21/2, f.80-85, "Gómez Farías to Castillo, 26 Oct. 1833"; SRE, AEMEUA, 23/8, "Lombardo to Castillo, 17 Jan. 1834"; Cornell, "Citizens of nowhere", 357; Schwartz, *Across the Rio to Freedom,* 21-22; Nichols, *The Limits of Liberty*, 63-64.

[90] SRE, AEMEUA, 23/8, f.167, "Lombardo to Encargado de Negocios, 17 Jan. 1834".

[91] Schwartz, *Across the Rio to Freedom,* 18-19.

the Underground Railroad to the northern states and Canada.[92] The horizon would have thus been clear for slaves willing to abscond from the US South to northeastern Mexico, had it not been for one very influential development: the Euro-American colonization of Texas.

During his journey to Texas to retrieve four slaves who had absconded from his estate and a neighbor's plantation in western Louisiana, slaveholder Jacob Kirkham met a Connecticut-born pioneer named Moses Austin. Both men travelled together to San Antonio (along with a native of Virginia named James Forsythe), with distinct – yet to some extent related – objectives in mind. As he made clear in December 1820 when interrogated by the Spanish authorities, Austin's goal was not to secure runaways, but instead to obtain a large land grant for colonization and the cultivation of cotton and sugar. Governor Martínez, initially reluctant to contemplate Austin's scheme, soon admitted that all past plans to bring settlers to the Northeast had failed. A decade-long economic and demographic devastation of the province, the presence of hundreds of squatters illegally occupying land in Texas, and the threat posed by Native Americans to under-militarized settlements, all convinced Martínez of the benefits of foreign colonization as a means to secure the region for New Spain. The opening of the northeastern borderlands to foreign colonization (under the condition of political and religious loyalty) had already been attempted in Louisiana (from 1788 onwards), although with no substantial success.[93] Moses Austin, who had originally settled in Spanish Louisiana in 1797, was thus granted two hundred thousand acres of land for the settlement of 300 (Catholic) families on the Brazos and Colorado rivers. Yet the old man died in June 1821 while visiting Missouri (where he owned a mine) to recruit settlers. On his deathbed, Moses expressed his last will: his son Stephen was to pursue his project in Texas. A new phase in the (geo)political landscape of slavery and freedom in the US-Mexico borderlands began, one which dramatically shaped the experiences of US fugitive slaves across the border.

Stephen F. Austin's efforts to carry out his father's wishes succeeded, and the first settlers arrived by the end of 1821, many of them driven away from the US by the financial panic of 1819. Yet colonization underwent an early setback with the advent of an independent Mexican government, as prospective settlers began to worry that property rights in slaves, which lay at the very core of Austin's enterprise, would no longer be guaranteed. Over the following years, fierce discussions broke out in the Mexican Congress about whether or not to allow slavery in the northeastern colony, and under which terms foreign colonization should be allowed. For Mexican political leaders, Austin's plan was riddled with moral and practical dilemmas. While they

[92] *El Procurador del Pueblo*, 12 June 1834 ("¿Cuando un pobre negro esclavo llega con su industria a huir de los estados en los cuales esta admitida por las ímprobas leyes la esclavitud, y que se salva en los departamentos septentrionales de los Estados-Unidos, en donde se goza de la libertad, puede ecsistir una ley divina o humana que permita a los hombres libres de proceder al arresto de sus semejantes por la miserable suma de 25, 30 o 40 pesos?").
[93] Graham Davis, *Land! Irish Pioneers in Mexican and Revolutionary Texas* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2002), 20-21.

regarded the northern frontier's colonization by US settlers as a potential geopolitical threat, Mexican officials also favored the prospect of a large-scale migration to Texas that would create a demographic and economic buffer against "*indios bárbaros*" and foreign adventurers. As the Spanish empire abandoned to Mexico a problem it had never solved (securing its northeastern border in Texas), Austin's project represented a unique opportunity to populate and develop the northeast part of the nation. However, it also clashed with rising antislavery voices. Despite the instability of early Mexican political leadership, Stephen F. Austin actively defended his colony, ensuring its survival and development, though at times facing unequivocal adversity.[94] From November 1823 onwards, a new *Congreso General Constituyente* formed to draft a federal constitution discussed a ban on the slave trade in Mexican territory. After heated debates, the decree issued on 13 July 1824 finally outlawed both the domestic and foreign slave trades, with a six-month exception for the Isthmus of Tehuantepec. Smugglers would be imprisoned for a year, and their cargo confiscated. Additionally, slaves "introduced" into Mexico were considered free simply by entering its territory.[95]

Yet the ban's consequences were not entirely clear, due to the ambiguities underlying the term "introduction". Did the decree apply only to slave traders? Or did it also include individuals travelling with their slaves? This ambivalence played in favor of foreign colonization in northeastern Mexico, and new colonists kept arriving along with their enslaved men and women. Subsequent legislation only added to these ambiguities. The federal colonization law of 18 August 1824 and the federal constitution enforced shortly thereafter both left the matter of slavery to the discretion of the individual states of the republic. This meant that despite amenability to the manumission of slaves, the immediate and unconditional abolition of the slave trade and the passing of free-womb laws, the outcomes of this Mexican progressiveness were decidedly mixed. In the Mexican Northeast for instance, while Tamaulipas *de facto* abolished slavery in 1825 by declaring all of its residents (including slaves) free and equal, Nuevo León simultaneously issued a free-womb law and prohibited slave introduction, without outlawing slavery altogether (see appendix 1).[96]

It was in this climate of uncertainty about the future of slavery in Texas that Coahuila y Tejas's constitutional congress began to draft its state constitution in August 1824. The process was to last for almost three years. Two parties soon took shape. On the one hand, the Euro-Tejano faction of the state legislature (along with the *Coahuilenses* Viesca brothers) advocated the legal support of slavery in the new constitution. On the other, an antislavery faction led by Manuel Carrillo and Dionisio Elizondo from Coahuila sought to achieve full abolition. Yet by contrast with

[94] Campbell, *An Empire for Slavery*, 10-34; Ramos, *Beyond the Alamo,* 27-110; Torget, *Seeds of Empire,* ch.2-3.
[95] Joaquín Ramírez y Sesma, *Colección de Decretos, Ordenes y Circulares expedidas por los Gobiernos Nacionales de la Federación Mexicana, desde el año de 1821 hasta el de 1826* (México: Martín Rivera, 1827), 177.
[96] On state-by-state constitutional provisions: Jaime Olveda Legaspi, "La abolición de la esclavitud en México, 1810-1917", *Signos históricos*, 29 (Jan.-Jun. 2013), 22-25, Díaz Casas, "¿De esclavos a ciudadanos?", 292.

Tamaulipas, Coahuila y Tejas could not afford a general emancipation that would imply a large financial compensation to the slaveholding population of Texas. Nor could it free slaves unconditionally without provoking the wrath of its increasingly influential Euro-American planters. A middle ground between the two parties was therefore reached. The state constitution (11 March 1827) ruled that enslaved men and women already in Texas would retain this status until their death. However, all children born to enslaved parents would be free, and the introduction of slaves was prohibited, starting six months after the publication of the constitution (a.13). The constitution also underlined the "imprescriptible rights of liberty, security, property and equality" of the state's inhabitants, including those in transit, although slaves were not explicitly mentioned in it (a.11). New settlers in Texas largely ignored the provision after its implementation and, at the initiative of San Felipe de Austin's *ayuntamiento* (municipality), a decree permitting the introduction of indentured servants (5 March 1828) effectively nullified the constitutional prohibition. US slaves were brought to Texas under the disingenuous title of indentured laborers, with service contracts of up to ninety-nine years.[97]

In the midst of these political developments, colonists and slaves kept arriving in Texas. Austin secured three more contracts after he met the terms of his initial contract in 1825, and his colony (developed around San Felipe de Austin) seemed the most attractive for prospective settlers. Other Euro-American colonies blossomed, economically connected to Atlantic capitalist markets through Louisiana. According to Graham Davis, between 1823 and 1835, no less than forty-one land contracts were signed between *empresarios* (most of them foreigners) and the Mexican state. Most of these entrepreneurs failed to develop their colonies, with some exceptions, such as Green DeWitt. DeWitt founded his colony in 1825 around the town of Gonzales, along the Guadalupe and Lavaca rivers. At the close of the 1820s, the foreign-born colonists had settled mostly east of the Colorado River in small slave societies, and had developed a fast-expanding plantation economy mostly producing cotton for foreign markets. By contrast, the *Tejano* and Mexican population of Texas lived mostly in the old settlements of San Antonio, Goliad (previously known as La Bahía) and Nacogdoches, with the exception of De León colony (around Victoria).

Extradition or free-soil policy?

From the beginning of his colony in Texas, where slaves came to compose a fourth of its 1.800 residents by 1825, Austin strove to institute laws regulating slavery and

[97] On slavery in early independent Mexico: Torget, *Seeds of Empire,* ch.2-3; Campbell, *An Empire for Slavery,* 10-34. On article 13 and its de facto nullification: J.P. Kimball (transl.), *Laws and Decrees of the state of Coahuila and Texas* (Houston: Telegraph Power Press, 1839), 78-79 and 314; David Woodman Jr., *Guide to Texas Emigrants* (Boston: M. Hawes, 1835), 25 and 145; William Hooker Fiske, *A visit to Texas, being the Journal of a traveller through those parts most interesting to American* Settlers (New York: Goodrich and Wiley, 1834), 10; Benjamin Lundy, *The War in Texas; a Review of Facts and Circumstances, Showing that this Contest is a Crusade Against Mexico* (Philadelphia: Merrihew and Gunn, 1837), 5.

fugitive slaves. Criminal regulations passed in January 1824 formalized proceedings for the arrest of escaped slaves from inside and outside Austin's colony. The settlement of US escaped slaves in Texas was clearly at odds with the development of such a slave society. As early as December 1824, Austin expressed concern to the legislature of Coahuila y Tejas about self-emancipated slaves arriving from Louisiana and beyond, and requested (in vain) formal instructions on how to react. Austin's view was clear: "if the runaway remains here, he is a nuisance to the Country – if his owner claims him and he is not given up it will destroy all harmony between the Citizens of that State [USA] and this".[98] In August 1825, Benjamin Rush Milam bitterly underlined "that the Stait of Louisianna have lost a grait maney slaives that have taken refuge in this Republick of Mexico", urging US minister in Mexico Joel R. Poinsett to conclude an extradition agreement with the Mexican government. [99] Dutch-born Texas representative at the Congress of Coahuila y Tejas Philip Hendrik Nering Bögel (who passed himself off under the moniker "Baron de Bastrop") also began pressing for extradition, apart from attempting to secure a legal sanction for slavery in Texas. Even US state secretary Henry Clay grew concerned by slaves escaping to "the adjacent territories of Mexico". In March 1825, when Clay sent Poinsett instructions for the negotiation of a treaty of "amity, commerce, navigation and neighborhood" with Mexico, he underlined the necessity of inserting a provision "for the regular apprehension and surrender [of fugitive slaves] to their respective proprietors, or their lawful agents".[100]

By the end of September 1825, US and Mexican officials had reached an agreement regarding mutual restitution (article 33). The final treaty was concluded on 10 July 1826, with a period of eight months for its ratification by both parties. Yet despite an initial agreement on article 33, the Mexican House of Representatives' Foreign Relations Committee advised its rejection in April 1827 on both practical and ideological grounds. To begin with, the notion of Mexican slaves fleeing to the US was absurd, and therefore the clause of "mutual restitution" was of little real use to the young republic, while protecting US fugitive slaves would undermine foreign influence over Texas. In addition, the Committee underscored the need to protect the fugitive slave's "inalienable right" to freedom, while Mexican Secretary of State Sebastián Camacho stressed that restitution would represent a "violent collision with the feelings of the Mexican people". This sentiment was echoed outside the parliamentary arena in

[98] Eugene G. Barker, "The government of Austin's Colony, 1821-1831", *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, v.21 (January 1918), 229; Eugene Barker (ed.), *Annual Report of the American Historical Association for the Year 1919: The Austin Papers* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1924), v. 1/1, 996-1002, "Austin to Legislature of Coahuila y Texas, 22 Dec. 1824".

[99] George R. Nielsen, "Ben Milam and United States and Mexican Relations", *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, v.73/3 (Jan. 1970), 393-395; Jeffrey R. Kerr-Ritchie, *Freedom Seekers: Essays on Comparative Emancipation* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2014), 23; Schwartz, *Across the Rio to Freedom*, 8-9.

[100] Eugene C. Barker (ed.), *Annual Report of the American Historical Association for the Year 1919, v.2, part 2, The Austin Papers* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1924), 1088; James Franklin Hopkins, *The Papers of Henry Clay*, v.4 (Lexington: University of Kentucky, 1959), 166-177, "Clay to Poinsett, Washington, 26 March 1825".

Mariano Arévalo's *Dialog between a barber and his merchant*, which expressed indignation at slavery and openly criticized Poinsett's efforts to secure restitution.[101] Delays in the ratification finally prompted both administrations to drop the treaty during the year 1827. After new negotiations, another treaty was concluded in the first weeks of 1828, again providing for the restitution of fugitive slaves. Yet again Mexican representatives expressed uneasiness with some articles, including the new article 33, on the ground that it directly contradicted the federal ban on the slave trade (1824). The House of Representatives once again rejected the article, compelling Poinsett to use "very strong language" to push the cause of restitution, which he considered essential "to the future understanding between the two nations". Nonetheless, the Mexican Senate eventually supported the deputies in their opposition, and the treaty failed once more to be ratified.[102]

Poinsett's failure to secure a restitution agreement with Mexico did not discourage his successor Anthony Butler. On 5 April 1831, a treaty of "amity, commerce and navigation" formalized the mutual return of fugitive slaves, provided that they had reached Mexico less than a year before their extradition (original article 34). Once more, the implied reciprocity was fictional: slavery had already been *formally* abolished in Mexico (except in Texas) and escape attempts across the border were entirely one-directional; and once again, Mexican representatives (at the *Cámara de diputados*) soon objected to restitution and eventually rejected article 34 (though by a majority of only one vote) in October 1831. By contrast with previous negotiations however, the Senate's *Comisión de Relaciones Exteriores* insisted on including the article to prevent border tensions, fearing private slaving raids from the US to Mexico, as well as out of respect for private property. Yet the *Cámara de diputados* sustained its decision against the Senate by a constitutionally-required majority of more than two thirds of its members. By the end of the year, Butler grudgingly agreed to omit article 34 as it was delaying and jeopardizing the treaty's ratification (effective in April 1832). To president Andrew Jackson, he nevertheless defiantly underscored that:

> "the rejection impairs no right nor will it interpose any restraint in the employment of all such means as may become necessary for enforcing these rights should the evil resulting from the loss of slaves to our Citizens by them

[101] Mariano Arévalo, *Diálogo entre un Barbero y su Marchante* (México: Imprenta de Galván, 1828), 5 ("¿no es este aquel pueblo que vio con horror la esclavitud, el mismo a cuyo nombre se pretende exigir de nosotros que devolvamos los esclavos que busquen asilo entre nosotros, y que se cree con derecho para disponer de mas de un millón de infelices como si fuesen bestias de carga, y sobre los que ninguno puede tener dominio?").

[102] UT(A), Benson, Despatches from US ministers in Mexico (microfilm), reel 4, "US Legation in Mexico to Clay, 18 March 1828"; William R. Manning, *Early diplomatic relations between the United States and Mexico* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1916), 227-231 and 240-245; Schwartz, *Across the Rio to Freedom,* 10-14; Carlos Bosch García, *Problemas Diplomáticos del México Independiente* (México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1947), 30 and 282-294; Carlos Bosch García, *Historia de las Relaciones entre México y los Estados Unidos: 1819-1848* (México: Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores, 1985), 31-36.

seeking refuge in the Mexican Territory ever grow into such magnitude as to require the interposition of the Government".[103]

US abolitionists retrospectively condemned the federal government's attempts to extract restitution from Mexico. Gerrit Smith for instance termed it a "heaven-defying crime".[104] David Lee Child, editor of the *Anti-Slavery Herald*, stressed in 1843 – as controversies on Texas were raging – that Mexico had been "bullied into a surrender of one of the clearest and dearest rights of a sovereign and independent people, by threats of violating that right by force and invasion". During the US-Mexican War (1846-1848) that followed the US annexation of Texas in 1845, Loring Moody from the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society vehemently criticized the US government's pressure on Mexico "to act the part of watchdogs to the plantations of the South-Western slave-holding states".[105] Similarly, just after the conflict, the jurist William Jay of the American Antislavery Society published an essay exposing the war's pro-slavery origins. It was the failure to secure the Mexicans' agreement on restitution, Jay claimed, that had reinvigorated "the efforts of slaveholders to possess themselves of Texas."[106]

In addition to the fact that negotiations on extradition repeatedly resulted in deadlock, Mexican free-soil policy towards foreign escaped slaves acquired momentum in the wake of the 1824 federalist constitution. While the slave trade ban passed in July 1824 *formally* provided for the freedom of smuggled slaves, some states chose to enforce provisions freeing self-liberated slaves from outside their jurisdictions. For instance, in 1825, both the states of Tamaulipas and Occidente granted "unalienable rights of freedom, safety, property and equality" to all of their citizens, as well as to outsiders "in quality of transient" (theoretically protecting runaways from outside the

[103] SRE, AEMEUA, 23/5, f.25-29, "Comisión de Relaciones, 2 Dec. 1831" and f.18-22, "Comisión de Relaciones, 14 Dec. 1831"; UT(A), Briscoe, Anthony Butler Papers (2B179 and 2B180), "Butler to Van Buren, 26 May 1831", "Butler to Livingston" (25 Oct. 1831 and 15 Dec. 1831); UT(A), Benson, Despatches from US ministers in Mexico, reel 6, "Hall of the Committee of Senate, 21 Oct. 1831", "Butler to Livingston" (22 July 1831, 23 Nov. 1831, 6 Dec. 1831 and 24 Dec. 1831), "Butler to Jackson" (25 May 1831 and 23 Dec. 1831); Manning, *Early Diplomatic Relations*, 251; William R. Manning, *Diplomatic Correspondence of the United States. Inter-American Affairs, 1831-1860, v.8 (Mexico, 1831-1848)* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1937), 269; David M. Hunter, *Treaties and other International Acts of the United States of America* (Washington D.C., U.S. G.P.O., 1931-1948), v.3, 633-634 and 638-639; Carlos Bosch García, *Documentos de la Relación de México con los Estados Unidos* (México: UNAM, 1983), v.2, 70-72; Schwartz, *Across the Rio to Freedom*, 7-18; Irene Zea Prado, *Gestión Diplomática de Anthony Butler en México, 1829-1836* (México: Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores, 1982), 31.

[104] Gerrit Smith, *Substance of the Speech made by Gerrit Smith, in the Capital of the state of New York, March 11th and 12th, 1850* (Syracuse: V.W. Smith and Co. Printers, 1850), 23 (SJMASC).

[105] David Lee Child, *Texas Revolution: republished with Additions from the Northampton (Massachusetts) Gazette, to which is added a letter from Washington on the Annexation of Texas, and the late outrage in California* (Washington, DC: J. and G.S. Gideon Printers, 1843), 67-68 (SJMASC); Loring Moody, *Facts for the People: showing the Relations of the United States Government to Slavery* (Boston: Anti-Slavery Office, 1847), 33-34.

[106] William Jay, *Review of the Causes and Consequences of the Mexican war* (Boston, Philadelphia, New York: Benjamin B. Mussey and Co.; Uriah Hunt and Co.; M.W. Dodd, 1849), 15 (SJMASC).

two states). Likewise, in August 1827, San Luis Potosí's governor Ildefonso Díaz de León explicitly guaranteed freedom to any escaped slave from adjacent states from 16 September 1827 onwards, while also abolishing slavery within his jurisdiction as a tribute to Hidalgo's *Grito de Dolores*. San Luis Potosí's sanctuary policy was rooted in a liberal and anti-imperialist tradition that had emerged during the Mexican wars for independence. Protection provided to escaped slaves was unconditional and tied to inalienable rights inspired by progressive ideals: unlike the late colonial period, freedom granted to runaways was detached from the observance of Catholicism. As a result, slaves from neighboring states such as Coahuila y Tejas and Nuevo León escaped to San Luis Potosí in an attempt to secure formal freedom. For instance, in January 1828, Cosme Cervantes and Francisco Nuñez, two slaves fleeing from Santa Rosa de Múzquiz (Coahuila), addressed the *comisión de peticiones* (petition committee) of San Luis Potosí's state legislature. The two men solicited *amparo* from what they termed the "great Mexican Republic". Introducing themselves as part of a "disgraced class", Cosme and Francisco successfully requested *cartas de libertad* (freedom papers) from the state legislature. Likewise, seventeen-year-old José Ubaldo Díaz, gravely abused by his master Melchor Sánchez Navarro "despite [his] young age", was also granted liberty.[107] Simultaneously, debates on the extent of the application of Mexican free-soil policy began to permeate US-Mexico diplomatic correspondence. In April 1828, the Mexican war vessel *Bravo* arrested a Spanish schooner (navigating under a false US flag) off the Cuban coast near Sagua la Grande on the charge of piracy and smuggling, and conducted it to the nearby port of Key West (Florida). Among the "commodities" seized from the vessels was an enslaved woman. She was thereafter detained by the customhouse of Key West, before her sale at auction. The *Bravo*'s captain, Alejandro Thompson, dissented, deeming her now free by Mexican law (the 1824 ban on slave trade), for which he unsuccessfully requested her return.[108]

Such free-soil policy at a local level prefigured the development of federal free-soil policy; the latter slowly emerged from the second half of the 1820s, reaching full fruition in the 1830s. This was to be seen in the Mexican state's response to a request from Louisiana's Senate and House of Representatives for the restitution of escaped slaves. Although the Mexican consul in New Orleans, Francisco Pizarro Martínez, favored acquiescing to Louisiana's request – citing the growing frequency of escape attempts and the danger of further straining relations with the US – the new liberal

[107] YU, SML, Mexico Collection, reel 13, box 51, folder 874; *ibid.* box 52, folder 898; Manuel Muro, *Historia de San Luis Potosí, desde 1810 hasta nuestros días*, tomo I (San Luis Potosí: Esquivel y Cía., 1910) 460-467; Centro de Estudios de Historia de México, XLIX-2 serie 1-1, caja 17, "San Luis Potosí, agosto 31 de 1827, José Eulogio de Esnaurrizar, Gobernador [...] se dará libertad a los esclavos que residan en el Estado de San Luis Potosí". On legislation for Tamaulipas and Occidente: Olveda Legaspi, "La abolición de la esclavitud en México", 22-25, Díaz Casas, "¿De esclavos a ciudadanos?", 292. On self-emancipated slaves escaping from the Sánchez Navarro family in the 1820s: UT(A), Benson, Sánchez Navarro Collection, part II (1805-1825), 3424, "F. Vidaurri to J.M. Sánchez Navarro, 26 May 1822".

[108] SRE, AEMEUA, 15/1, f.98 "Thompson to Pickney, 29 April 1828"; f.101-102 "Pickney to Thompson, and viceversa, 3 May 1828"; f.105-106 "Richard Fitzpatrick, Notary Public Monroe County, Key West, Deposition of Alejandro Thompson, 30 April 1828".

government formed in early 1833 declined.[109] Instead, it asserted its staunch commitment to free soil, and all subsequent efforts by Louisiana representatives, such as Edward Douglass White, to conclude an accord failed.[110]

Formal and informal settlement(s)

From 1821 onwards, US planters migrating westward in the hope of making a fortune through cotton brought to Texas an ever-increasing number of slaves. As the Mexican government grew wary of Euro-American immigration after the release of general Mier y Terán's alarmist report on Coahuila y Tejas in 1828, a new colonization law (6 April 1830) outlawed the further introduction into Texas of US settlers and slaves. Yet by May 1834 (when this formal prohibition was dropped), the total number of US migrants and slaves in Texas had nearly doubled, with slaves composing a tenth of nearly 20.000 inhabitants. Two years later, bondspeople numbered at least 5.000, while the general population was estimated at about 30.000 individuals.[111] US migration to Texas was part of a larger trend. From the 1790s onwards, thousands of planters left the Atlantic seaboard for territorial Mississippi (1798) and territorial Louisiana (1803), drawn by the possibilities for the production of sugar, corn, indigo and, most importantly, cotton (the production of which boomed after the invention of the gin). As a result, Louisiana and Mississippi's combined population (including slaves) more than tripled between 1810 and 1830, reaching slightly less than 350.000 inhabitants (a number ten times higher than the population of Texas at the time).[112] Because of this long southward and westward extension of slavery, and because slaves in the US South and Texas grew increasingly aware of Mexico's rising antislavery stance, the ranks of fugitive slaves looking for freedom in Mexico swelled. For instance, abolitionist

[109] *Acts passed at the first session of the tenth legislature of the state of Louisiana* (New Orleans: John Gibson State Printer, 1831), 78-79; SRE, AEMEUA, 20/9, f.51, "Pizarro Martínez to Encargado de Negocios, 7 April 1832"; *The Arkansas Gazette*, 14 March 1832. On Pizarro Martínez's complaints on the increase of white settlers and "people of color" illegally entering Texas: SRE, AEMEUA, 18/7, f.18, "Pizarro Martínez to José María Tornel, 10 Feb. 1831"; SRE, AEMEUA, 22/14, f.34-35, "Pizarro Martínez to Encargado de Negocios, 24 Feb. 1834"; and on a projected deportation of Jamaican maroons to Texas in 1833: SRE, LE 1057, f.70, "Pizarro Martínez to Secretario de Estado y del Despacho de Relaciones, 16 May 1833"; SRE, AEMEUA, 22/3, f.101, "Pizarro Martínez to Encargado de Negocios, 20 May 1833".

[110] American Memory (Library of Congress), A Century of Lawmaking for a New Nation: US Congressional Documents and Debates, 1774-1875, *Journal of the House of Representatives of the United States, 1833-1834, Wednesday, March 5, 1834*, 385; American State Papers, House of Representatives, 23rd Congress, 1st Session, Public Lands, v.6, 950 [accessed 6 June 2017]; Cornell, "Citizens of nowhere", 353 and 356-357.

[111] For an extensive economic, demographic, natural and topographical contemporary account of early 1830s Texas, see: Mary Austin Holley, *Texas: Observations, historical, geographical and descriptive. In a series of letters written during a visit to Austin's Colony, with a view to a permanent settlement in that country, in the Autumn of 1831* (Baltimore: Armstrong and Plaskitt, 1833), 133-140. On the process described above: Davis, *Land,* 112; Alwyn Barr, "Freedom and Slavery in the Republic: African American Experiences in the Republic of Texas", in Kenneth W. Howell, Charles Swanlund, *Single Star of the West, The Republic of Texas, 1836-1845* (Denton: University of North Texas Press, 2017), 423-436.

[112] Third and Fifth U.S. Federal Census, Population Schedule, Louisiana (1810 and 1830).

Benjamin Lundy recalled that all the slaves belonging to a Francis Berry from Virginia, who had settled at Gonzales (Texas), had absconded "to the Spaniards", and that for this reason the planter did not wish to acquire others.[113] When escaping from the US South and the Euro-American colonies in Texas, runaways used two main strategies to achieve freedom. First, they looked for *informal* (or *de facto*) freedom by settling in Mexico without seeking the recognition of the Mexican state. Second, they sought formal (or *de jure*) freedom through Mexico's acknowledgment of their legal status as "free".[114] This second option was the most popular.

Some enslaved freedom-seekers settled deep in the Mexican interior in the hope of escaping deportation by Mexican officials, abduction by slave-hunters and attacks by Native Americans. In 1825, a man named "Jack Yaczon" escaped from Opelousas (Louisiana) to Monterrey (Nuevo León). A year later, Maryland-born slave-trader and Jack's master Alexander Robb dispatched an associate to lobby Monterrey's *alcalde segundo* Nicanor Martínez to return Jack, an enterprise that seemingly succeeded, despite the legal defense provided for Jack as *apoderado* by local resident José de Garay. Another slave named "Andrés Dortola" fled to Mexico in 1823. Instead of settling in Texas, the man continued his escape until reaching Guadalajara (Jalisco), where he requested freedom: since he had converted to Catholicism, Andrés expected to be protected by the *Real Cédula* passed in 1750 that guaranteed freedom to foreign Catholic slaves.[115]

Yet most bondspeople fleeing to Mexico settled in its immediate territorial and maritime borderlands. Runaways regularly reached civilian settlements or military posts looking for formally recognized freedom. As during the late colonial period, Nacogdoches represented the main gateway to freedom for runaways, though the freedom they acquired in eastern Texas was extremely precarious. According to a local folktale, "a handsome young gentleman in good style" reached the town in 1827. The distinguished traveler introduced himself as "Claud[e] Riviere", from Baton Rouge, "the son of a wealthy sugar planter, seeking investments here", while in fact he was an escaped slave. He joined a local ball, and became "the leader, popular partner for the beauties of the ball-room". Soon enough though, Tennessee-born Rezin P. Bowie, James Bowie's brother (both of them were famous land speculators and slave smugglers), "walked across the floor to Riviere, and touched him on the shoulder", and promptly carried Claude back as a slave to Louisiana.[116]

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[113] Harold Schoen, "The Free Negro in the Republic of Texas, I", *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, v.39/4 (1936), 298.
[114] The terms "de facto" and "de jure" are borrowed from: Bram Hoonhout, "The West Indian Web: Improvising Colonial Survival in Essequibo and Demerara, 1750-1800", PhD Diss. (Florence: European University Institute, 2017), 117.
[115] AGN, Gobernación Sin Sección, c.58, e.12, f.28-29, "Solicitud de Andrés Dortola a Sección de Gobierno, 8 Feb. 1823"; Nichols, *The Limits of Liberty*, 64; AHM, Capital del Estado, Colección Correspondencia, v.17, e.67, f.1, "Poder a favor de Diego de Lachica, 5 Jan. 1826"; *ibid.*, v.137, e.16, f.10, "Reclamo por ser esclavo, 1826". On Robb: Bryan Prince, *A Shadow on the Household: One Enslaved Family's Incredible Struggle for Freedom* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 2010), 24-25.
[116] RBBC, NA, v.45, 339-341.

Along with Nacogdoches, escaped slaves viewed San Antonio as an increasingly attractive beacon of freedom before 1836. The *Indianola Bulletin* reminisced in 1854 that fugitive slaves occasionally "found their way to that city of blood, chivalry and greasers", where "the population was numerous, isolated and disposed to protect them".[117] Free blacks were already a common sight among its multiracial population by the mid-1820s (especially in the southern *barrios* of Laredo and Sur, two likely places of settlement for runaways).[118] While the *ayuntamiento* often took a proslavery approach, the federal government's representatives in San Antonio seemed more sympathetic to the plight of slaves (whether fugitives or not). For example, in January 1823, governor José Felix Trespalacios granted freedom to thirty-year-old slave Phil as a reward for denouncing his master's attempt to steal cattle.[119]

Furthermore, fugitive slaves could and did embark on commercial vessels sailing to Mexican ports, either clandestinely or as crew, such as the man found in Matamoros (Tamaulipas) hidden aboard the *Juxpeña* arriving from New Orleans in 1834.[120] By the early 1830s, the growing port city on the Rio Grande delta hosted an expanding population of free blacks (natives mostly of Louisiana and Haiti) and US fugitive slaves, a by-product of the liberalization of its maritime trade with New Orleans during the 1820s. Matamoros was attractive for its relative commercial prosperity, in addition to being more sheltered from Comanche incursions than other towns on the upper river.[121] Along the Caribbean coast, Tampico, Veracruz and Minatitlán increasingly welcomed US runaways as a result of an increased maritime interconnection with US southern ports after 1821. Veracruz's strong connection to the Black Atlantic dated back to the early colonial period, as slaves introduced in New Spain transited through the port. In the 1820s, foreign travelers frequently evoked the presence of African Americans (free or otherwise) in Veracruz, where "crowds of Negro porters [were] in constant motion, discharging and carrying the cargoes of boats to the Custom-house within the gates, where a noisy concourse of cart-men [were] scrambling and quarrelling for the chance of employment".[122] Further south, in January

[117] *The Indianola Bulletin*, 26 April 1854, "Reminiscences of Western Texas – no. XII. First abolition movements in Texas – Adventures among runaway slaves in San Antonio, 1833".
[118] Jesús F. de la Teja, John Wheat, "Bexar, Profile of a Tejano Community, 1820-1832", *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, v.89, n°1 (July 1985), 7-34.
[119] BA, reel 73, frame 994, "Trespalacios' affidavit of the emancipation of American negro Phil, 8 Jan. 1823"; Ramos, *Beyond the Alamo,* 92 and 116-123.
[120] SRE, AEMEUA, 22/14, f.144-146, "Pizarro Martínez to Encargado de Negocios, 8 Dec. 1834" and "Pizarro Martínez to Secretario de Estado y del Despacho de Relaciones, 6 Dec. 1834"; SRE, AEMEUA, 25/1, f.11, "Pizarro Martínez to Encargado de Negocios, 15 Jan. 1835".
[121] Stanley C. Green, *The Mexican Republic: the First Decade, 1823-1837* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh, 1987), 119; Vito Alessio Robles, *Coahuila y Texas, desde la Consumación de la Independencia hasta el Tratado de Paz de Guadalupe Hidalgo* (México: Porrúa, 1979), v.1, 242; Gilberto Miguel Hinojosa, *A Borderlands Town in Transition, Laredo, 1755-1870* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1983); Omar Valerio-Jiménez, "Although we were the last soldiers: Citizenship, Ideology and Tejano Unionism", in Jesús F. de la Teja (ed.), *Lone Star Unionism, Dissent and Resistance* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2016), 129-132.
[122] William Bullock, *Six Months Residence and Travels in Mexico* (London: J. Murray, 1824), 493; Henry George Ward, *Mexico in 1827* (London: Henry Colburn, 1828), 29; Josiah Conder, *Mexico*

1831, Mexican authorities at Minatitlán freed three slaves arriving from the US with their master Charles C. River. One of them, Elia Green, was a laundress and dressmaker. Another, a man named Anthony Collins, was sent to work on maize *milpas* (crop-growing areas) in the hills surrounding the town, likely with the third liberated slave, eighteen-year-old Isaac.[123]

Yet even after slavery definitively ceased to exist in Mexico, not all fugitive slaves presented themselves to Mexican civilian and military settlements: instead of negotiating their status as formally free refugees with the Mexican authorities, some runaways attempted to gain freedom informally by remaining out of the reach of the federal state. For instance, some sought shelter with settlers in Texas, even in Euro-American colonies, where some planters hired them in the interest of acquiring cheap labor. This is suggested by Lundy, for instance, who told of a planter from Louisiana who attempted in August 1834 to retrieve some of his slaves from Texas, where a planter named Nathaniel Robbins was keeping them.[124] Likewise, in January 1829, a slaveowner from Nacogdoches lost one of his slaves who "took the Brazos Road". Yet instead of heading to San Antonio, or even beyond the Rio Grande, the fugitive sought protection in Austin's Colony, where he received the assistance of a certain John Williams.[125] Additionally, some fugitive slaves looked for refuge among Native Americans, in particular among the Comanches who had *de facto* sovereignty over vast areas extending from the Rio Grande to the Colorado River. As underscored by Sean M. Kelley, the naturalist and physician Gideon Lincecum noted the presence of numerous self-emancipated slaves in the *Comanchería* during the early 1830s. Tawélash groups, along the Red River, also welcomed runaways.[126]

Finally, escaped slaves in Mexican Texas often deliberately remained in forests and swamps. As an example of the borderland maroons described by Sylviane Diouf, Dilue Rose Harris reminisced that in 1834, an escaped "African negro" was wandering along the Navidad River at the fringes of local plantations.[127] Likewise, while travelling through Texas during the winter of 1834-1835, traveler Andrew Parker met a slave "chained in a baggage wagon, for the purpose of carrying him home to his master". The

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and Guatemala (London: James Duncan, 1830), v.1, 212; George Francis Lyon, *Journal of a Residence and Tour in the Republic of Mexico in the year 1826* (London: J. Murray, 1828), v.2, 214 and 225.

[123] AGN, Movimiento Marítimo, Fondo Pasaportes, v.32, f.84-86.

[124] Schoen, "The Free Negro in the Republic of Texas, I", 297.

[125] Kelley, "Mexico in his Head", 712-713.

[126] Kenneth W. Porter, "Negroes and Indians on the Texas Frontier, 1831-1876", *Journal of Negro History*, v.41/3 (July 1956), 191-197; Kelley, "Mexico in his Head", 712.

[127] Dilue Harris, "The Reminiscences of Mrs. Dilve Harris. I", *The Quarterly of the Texas State Historical Associatio*n, v.4/2 (Oct. 1900), 105-108. The legendary character of the "Wild Man of the Navidad" (also known as "Wild Woman" or "Jimbo") who, for about fifteen years, lived along the same river is most likely the same person: *Texas Wesleyan Banner*, 22 Feb. 1851 "Wild Woman Caught"; *Texas Monument*, 5 March 1851: *The Texian Advocate*, 7 Aug. 1851. On "borderland maroons" (fugitives settled at the fringes of plantations and farms): Sylviane Diouf, *Slavery's Exiles: the Story of the American Maroons* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2014), 72-96.

fugitive had "run away from [him] three months previous, and had all that time lived in the woods, and obtained his food by hunting".[128] Such wilderness marronage still represented a realistic solution for fugitive slaves before 1836. Most of the new planters had settled with their slaves along the fertile banks of the Colorado and Brazos rivers, the original location of Austin's colony. Population density outside of this plantation-centered region remained fairly low and lands peripheral to it had not yet been cleared for cotton, sugar and tobacco production. The social, political and environmental hegemony of Euro-American settlers was still limited to their immediate surroundings before the plantation economy and slavery dramatically expanded in post-independence Texas.[129]

Precarious and contextual freedom(s)

Mexican civilian and military officials in Texas did not receive clear instructions on how to treat escaped slaves, except for the ambiguous federal slave trade ban of 1824 and article 11 of the 1827 state constitution. As such, they often had to make to their own decisions. In September 1827, Encarnación Chirino, *alcalde* at Nacogdoches, solicited orders from José Antonio Saucedo, Bexar department's *Jefe Político* (political chief), on how to deal with a slave and two army deserters from Louisiana who had just reached the town. Waiting for instructions, Chirino decided to shelter the runaway in exchange for his work. Coahuila y Tejas' state government forwarded Chirino's request to the federal government in vain, and whether or not the slave was returned to Louisiana remains unknown. In May 1829, Juan Ignacio Ibarbo, Chirino's successor, similarly requested instructions from Bexar department's *Jefe Político* Ramón Múzquiz. Ibarbo reiterated his demand for some months, yet not receiving any reply, he eventually chose to deliver the runaways to their identified masters.[130] Requests for formal instructions originating from Coahuila y Tejas' government went up to the federal *Consejo de Gobierno*, but all were left unanswered.[131] Thus, when three US escaped slaves reached Nacogdoches in January 1832, Chirino (once more *alcalde)* again expressed his confusion. The master of one of the escapees, an enslaved woman, had journeyed to the town intending to retrieve her, but the department's *Jefatura*

[128] Andrew A. Parker, *Trip to the West and Texas* (Concord: W. White; Boston: B.M. Mussey, 1836), 242.
[129] On landscape and slave flight: Walter Johnson, *River of Dark Dreams: Slavery and Empire in the Cotton Kingdom* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2013).
[130] RBBC, NA, volume 21, 19 (17 Sep. 1827); AGEC, FJPB, c.5 e.60, "Saucedo to Gobernador del Estado de Coahuila y Texas, 12 Oct. 1827"; BA, reel 108, frame 946, "Viesca to Jefe Político del Departamento de Bexar, 3 Nov. 1827"; RBBC, NA, v.21, 204-205 (12 May 1829); BA, reel 122, frames 384-395 "Ibarbo to Múzquiz, 12 May 1829"; *ibid.*, reel 125, frames 270-273, "Ibarbo to Múzquiz, 31 Aug. 1829"; RBBC, NA, v.12, 134 (17 Sep. 1829); *ibid.,* v.12, 147 (26 Nov. 1829); AGEC, FJPB, c.11, e.62 "Múzquiz to Gobernador del Estado de Coahuila y Texas, 22 June 1829". On Ramón Múzquiz: Andrés Reséndez, "Ramón Múzquiz: the ultimate insider", in Jesús F. De la Teja (ed.), *Tejano Leadership in Mexican Revolutionary Texas* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2010), 128-145.
[131] AGEC, FSXIX, c.5 f.9 e.2, "Letona, Gobierno del Estado de Coahuila y Texas, a Consejo de Gobierno, 19 May 1831".

Politica instructed Chirino not to deliver the woman before receiving orders from Saltillo. They came in March 1832: the three runaways were to be returned, unless they and their enslavers had settled in Coahuila y Tejas after 11 September 1827 (six months after the publication of the state constitution of 1827).[132]

The treatment of self-liberated slaves by civilian and military officials proved inconsistent, since it was usually based on a personal interpretation of the laws. As Tawakoni and Waco natives attacked San Antonio in August 1830, Mexican military forces swiftly retaliated. The First Permanent Company of Tamaulipas soon launched a large punitive expedition. By mid-September 1830, the party reached a Tawakoni settlement on the San Gabriel River. The company killed eight Tawakonis during the ensuing assault, and a slave originally from Austin's Colony was seized along with four Native American children and sent to Monterrey. While the slave was being transferred to Lavaca, General commandant and inspector of the Eastern Internal Provinces Manuel de Mier y Terán instructed commandant Antonio Elosua "to locate his owner" using newspaper advertisements, likely reasoning that the fugitive could not benefit from Mexico's asylum policy due to Texas's exemption from the abolition of slavery.[133] Likewise, a self-emancipated slave named Adam who had escaped from the Brazos in April 1829 was eventually arrested a year and a half later by corporal Eusebio Ansunez and soldier Romualdo Pérez near Bexar. Thereafter, the town's *alcalde* informed settler Thomas Barnett that Adam would be transferred back to Austin's Colony, and requested a financial reward be sent to Ansunez and Pérez for the arrest.[134] Even slave refugees fleeing deeper into Texas had no firm guarantee of being granted freedom. In February 1828, Manuel absconded from the property of Haium Frayle, a resident of San Felipe de Austin. The enslaved asylum-seeker took refuge in the *hacienda* of Palmira, near the *villa* of Gigedo in the northeast of Coahuila. Instead of benefiting from the protection of local municipal authorities, Manuel was arrested and detained in the nearby town of Guerrero (Coahuila). *Alcalde* Luis San Miguel consulted his counterpart in San Antonio, who was actively looking for the slave, regarding the man's rendition to his master, while Manuel's arrester received twenty *pesos* as a reward.[135]

Restitution occurred especially when willingness to maintain friendly relationships with the US government and the Euro-American colonists prevailed over

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[132] AGEC, FJPB, c.22, e.29, "Múzquiz to Gobernador de Coahuila y Texas, 3 March 1832"; BA, reel 147, frame 438, "Chirino to Múzquiz, 17 Jan. 1832"; *ibid.* reel 147, frames 756-62, "Múzquiz to Letona, 30 Jan. 1832"; *ibid.* reel 148, frame 362, "from Leona Vicario to Jefe político del Departamento de Bexar, 3 March 1832"; *ibid.* reel 148, frame 885, "Jefe Político de Bexar to Leona Vicario, 24 March 1832".

[133] Malcolm McLean, *Papers concerning Robertson's Colony* (Arlington: University of Texas at Arlington, 1974-1993), v.5, 59-60 and 65-67; *ibid.,* v.4, 483-484 and 498-523. On the expedition: Foster Todd Smith, *From Dominance to Disappearance: The Indians of Texas and the Near Southwest, 1786-1859* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2005), 141-142. Runaway slave ads emerged in the early 1830s in Mexican Texas. See for instance: *Mexican Citizen*, 21 April 1831.

[134] *Texas Gazette*, 6 Feb. 1830; BA, reel 135, frames 88-90, "Barnett to Arciniega, 7 Oct. 1830".

[135] BA, reel 115, frame 177, "Luis San Miguel to Alcalde de Bexar, 17 July 1828".

the Mexican state's need to assert its exclusive sovereignty over the province. Decision-making on fugitive slaves was to a large extent shaped by diverging visions of foreign settlement in Texas, considered alternatively as a threat or an opportunity for Mexico. Officials who viewed the Euro-American colonization in a positive light (as a source of economic development and safety against Native Americans) showed more eagerness to deliver escaped slaves to their Euro-American masters. In September 1831, a runaway reached Fort Tenoxtitlán (along the old *Camino Real* between San Antonio and Nacogdoches), one of the two posts (with Lavaca) where free black immigrants were *officially* supposed to settle, and sought the protection of *Tejano* lieutenant colonel José Francisco Ruíz, a former Indian commissioner. Tenoxtitlán had been established in 1830 as part of an attempt to "Mexicanize" Texas following Mier y Terán's alarming report (1828), and to protect civilian settlements from Native Americans. No translator was present at the fort and communication between Ruíz and the fugitive was not easy. Ruíz wrote to Samuel May Williams (secretary at San Felipe de Austin's *ayuntamiento*) that "according to what [he] [had] been able to understand", the slave was claiming to have escaped from the US. Yet Ruíz was skeptical about this account: he thought instead that the asylum-seeker had "run away from some inhabitant of this department" and was attempting to evade restitution by strategically claiming to have absconded from beyond the Sabine River. The officer therefore decided to send the runaway to Austin's Colony, where he maintained friendly contacts: to him, this *ad hoc* restitution was a show of goodwill to conserve amicable relations between the planters and the Mexican state in Texas.[136]

While some officials like Ruíz actively pursued and delivered enslaved freedom-seekers to their masters, others nonetheless sheltered them even at the risk of heated conflicts with planters. In August 1831, two escaped slaves from Louisiana solicited the protection of Virginia-born John Davis Bradburn, the military commandant for Mexico at the fort of Anahuac, on the northeast side of Galveston bay, on Trinity River's delta. Bradburn welcomed the two men and enlisted them in the ranks. In exchange, the refugees were employed as brick-makers and construction workers, building part of the fortress and some houses for the officers. When their owner William M. Logan personally requested their restitution, Bradburn relied upon a personal interpretation of an ambiguous set of laws, and refused to comply. The officer assumed that Texas's exemption from the abolition of slavery applied *exclusively* to the Euro-American colonies of Texas, not to Texas as a whole (an interpretation advocated by the planters). The Euro-American population on the Trinity River quickly viewed Bradburn's refusal to deliver the two men as a serious *casus belli*. Retrospectively, Bradburn underscored that protecting the two men had become "a circumstance that kept damaging [him] a lot and attracting [him] the hate of the colonists".

[136] McLean, *Papers concerning Robertson's Colony*, v.6, 414; Ramos, *Beyond the Alamo,* 121-122. On Tenoxtitlán and Lavaca as places of settlement: SRE, AEMEUA, 18/7, f.39, "Pizarro Martínez to Mier y Terán, 4 April 1831"; SRE, AEMEUA, 20/9, f.16, "Pizarro Martínez to Encargado de Negocios, 2 Feb. 1832"; *Marine Journal*, 2 Feb. 1832.

A mob of resentful planters soon surrounded Anahuac pressing for the return of the slaves to Logan. *Comandante General de los Estados Internos de Oriente* Mier y Terán advised Bradburn to argue that claims on runaways should be addressed directly to the Mexican government through US ministers in Mexico, not to local officers like him. The general commandant thereby sought to deflect pressure from Euro-American settlers in Texas and the US to the federal level in the hope of *locally* safeguarding peace and sovereignty on the republic's northern fringes. However, this response did not please local planters, and the discrepancy of interpretations between Bradburn and the mob quickly escalated into an open conflict. Settlers rose in rebellion against the military authorities of Anahuac, after some men who had plotted to illegally retrieve the two slaves were detained. Against the backdrop of increasingly frequent regionalist rebellions in 1830s Mexico, this particular controversy soon culminated in a pledge of allegiance to Santa Anna by the planters, in support of federalism and local autonomy against a perceived trend towards centralization under conservative president Anastasio Bustamante. With slavery at its very roots, the resulting months-long conflict (remembered as the "Anahuac disturbances") further divided the Mexican state and the Euro-American colonists in Texas, Margaret S. Henson even describing Anahuac as "the cradle of the Texas Revolution".[137]

Mexico's lack of legal and moral support for institutionalized slavery on its northeastern periphery constituted a constant source of annoyance for slaveholders in Texas. The intervention of state officials into the realm of slavery conflicted with the new colonists' sense of liberty, deeply embedded in attributes and performances of whiteness, masculinity and household mastery. It also clashed with a common preference by US settlers for minimal interference by central governments.[138] While the Mexican state increasingly strove to reassert its authority over Texas and rejected

[137] YU, Beinecke, Henry Raup Wagner Collection of Texas Manuscripts, Box 3, folder 86, "Bradburn to Comandante General, Estados Internos de Oriente, Anahuac, Texas, 2 Feb. 1832"; *ibid*., Box 3, folder 91, "Bradburn, Report to the Comandante General, Estados Internos de Oriente, Report of events in Anahuac, 1832"; Winnie Allen, Katherine Elliott (and al.), *The Papers of Mirabeau Buonaparte Lamar* (Austin and New York: The Pemberton Press, 1968), v.1, 91; YU, Beinecke, Thomas W. Streeter Collection of Texas Manuscripts, Box 1, folder 19, "Austin to Múzquiz, 26 June 1832"; YU, Beinecke, "Communications forwarded from San Felipe de Austin relative to late events in Texas" (MS – Zc52832co); SRE, AEMEUA, 20/9, "Pizarro Martínez a Encargado de Negocios, 14 June 1832"; Margaret S. Henson, *Juan Davis Bradburn: a Reappraisal of the Mexican Commander of Anahuac* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1982); Paul D. Lack, "Slavery and the Texas Revolution", *Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, 89 (Oct. 1985), 184; Nichols, *The Limits of Liberty*, 61-62. On federalist uprisings in the 1830s: David J. Weber, *The Mexican Frontier, 1821-1846* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1982), 245-253; Timothy Anna, *Forging Mexico, 1821-1835* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2001), 34-41.

[138] William Harris Wharton, one of the leaders of the Texas Revolution, directly linked the intervention of the Mexican government in slavery-related matters and the conflict of 1835-1836, arguing that "with a sickly philanthropy worthy of the abolitionists of these United States, they have, contrary to justice, and to law, intermeddled with our slave population, and have even impotently threatened in the war now pending, to emancipate them, and induce them to turn their arms against their masters". William H. Wharton, *Texas. A brief Account of the Origin, Progress and Present State of the Colonial Settlement of Texas; together with an Exposition of the Causes which have induced the existing War with Mexico* (1836), IV/1st.

extradition, legal strategies gradually lost popularity among Euro-American slaveholders. In a climate of rising defiance, inaugurated by the Fredonian revolution led by *empresario* Haden Edwards in eastern Texas (1826), they began to illegally retrieve their "property", especially by commissioning "slave-hunters" such as Joseph and Job Bass.[139]

In April 1832, Peter and his son Tom escaped from the plantation of Alexander Thompson on the Brazos River to San Antonio, where they requested *amparo* (protection) from the town's civil court. The two men had been brought to Texas as slaves in March 1831, along with six other enslaved people, after "agreeing" to a service contract of 70 years legalized by a notary in New Orleans. In March 1832, in relation to another case, the state authorities had affirmed the freedom of slaves who had been introduced into Texas after 11 September 1827 (six months after the publication of the 1827 state constitution). As such, Peter and Tom were indeed eligible for such protection. Nonetheless, despite their status as "*amparados*", they were not yet formally considered as free men. As the court was financially unable to maintain the refugees, it temporarily sent them to John William Smith's house to be employed as domestic servants in exchange for food and a small salary. Yet during a night of May 1832, Smith "maliciously" delivered them (for a bounty) to several *norteamericanos* led by Henry Stevenson Brown. According to a contemporary, the renowned slave-hunter "understood the Spanish language and was well acquainted in and around San Antonio". A settler on the Red River had also commissioned Brown's crew to retrieve five of his slaves in San Antonio, where they had "received countenance and protection from the authorities and population generally". One of the mercenaries, Basil Durbin, found out that while "one of the negroes was making shingles on the Medina [River], the others were employed about the city". Brown's men came down from their camp "in the hills above the city" and abducted the man working on the Medina "after a brief struggle". Later on, the mercenaries kidnapped "another [runaway] hauling wood between the powder house and town" after a fierce conflict. A third runaway was arrested while the first two abducted men were "hurried off to Gonzales".

This filibustering expedition infuriated most of San Antonio's *Tejanos*. *Jefe Político* Ramón Múzquiz termed it "atrocious": the affair "[was] so serious as to [have provoked] the attention of the people of the City regarding the outrage that [had been] committed against the legally constituted laws and authorities". Military expeditions were launched to arrest the kidnappers. Lieutenant Pedro Rodríguez was sent to the former Spanish mission of San José y San Miguel de Aguayo, some miles south of San Antonio, where some of the raiders were thought to have escaped. The troops found and fired at Basil Durbin, before jailing him at San Antonio. His accomplices had seemingly sought refuge in Gonzales, on the Guadalupe River in DeWitt Colony. Múzquiz therefore instructed captain Gaspar Flores to head to Gonzales, where he would arrest Brown's crew at whatever cost ("up to the point of being dead men in case they are obstinate"). Commanding a force of thirty-two men, Flores reached Gonzales

[139] UT(A), Briscoe, Joseph and Job Bass Papers, 1828-1831, Box 2E549.

and began negotiating with *comisario* Ezekiel Williams and *empresario* Green DeWitt for the arrest of the raiders and the recovery of the abducted slave refugees. However, the search proved to be unsuccessful. The self-liberated men had seemingly been sent away from Gonzales. Only one of the mercenaries, Benjamin Duncan, was arrested and transferred to San Antonio's *calabozo*, where he waited "to have his case more fully investigated". Captain Flores soon became aware of the complacency of the new municipality of Gonzales (controlled by Euro-American settlers) towards Brown and his men. Despite pledges of good will, it demonstrated no intention to actively look for the abducted slave refugees. Williams and DeWitt argued in favor of Duncan, who according to them, "[had] conducted himself in this Colony honestly". Both men told Flores that they had seen Brown heading to Austin's Colony just before the Mexican officer's arrival at Gonzales and argued that Peter and Tom had expressed willingness to return to Thompson. In San Antonio, however, this version of events was contradicted by the testimony of *mulato* Jon (who himself had narrowly escaped abduction), who asserted that the raiders were very likely still lurking in DeWitt Colony, although no further evidence could be found.

The state of Coahuila y Tejas ordered the prosecution of John William Smith, intending to make the case into a show of firmness against the increasingly rebellious Euro-American population. Yet all the prisoners connected to the case were bailed out and, in the midst of Múzquiz's vain attempts to arrest the other culprits, *comisario* Williams even openly acknowledged having participated in Peter and Tom's forced return to Alexander Thompson. The *ayuntamientos* of Gonzales, San Felipe de Austin, Brazoria and Nacogdoches eventually terminated their (pretense of) cooperation, to the point of not even replying to letters sent from San Antonio on the issue. The state authorities finally dropped the case in August 1833, concerned that, under the "current political circumstances", any further prosecution would affect the "tranquility of the department" and trigger serious conflicts between the Mexican state and the Euro-American settlers, as in Anahuac. Although a criminal case against two participants in the expedition was held dormant on the shelves of *licenciado* José María Aguirre in Saltillo, no further attempt to prosecute the raiders was made.[140] Peter and Tom's case

[140] BA, reel 150, frame 203, "De la Garza to Múzquiz, 23 May 1832"; *ibid.*, reel 150, frames 218-222, "Múzquiz to Alcaldes of Goliad and Austin, 24 May 1832" ; *ibid.*, reel 150, frame 249, "Elozua to Treviño, 26 May 1832"; *ibid.*, reel 150, frames 262-271; *ibid.*, reel 150, frame 339, "Williams and De Witt to Múzquiz, 30 May 1832"; *ibid.*, reel 150, frame 452-456, "Múzquiz to De la Garza, 1 June 1832"; *ibid.*, reel 150, frames 608-614, "Múzquiz to Alcalde of Austin, 6 June 1832" and "Múzquiz to Chief of Police of Gonzales, 6 June 1832"; *ibid.*, reel 150, frames 719-725, "Williams to Múzquiz, 12 June 1832" and "Arciniega to Múzquiz, 12 June 1832"; *ibid*, reel 151, frames 355-356, "Chisman's affidavit of Brown's delivery of two negroes to Thompson, 4 July 1832"; *ibid.*, reel 151, frames 769-771, "Ruíz to De la Garza, 21 July 1832"; *ibid.*, reel 152, frame 250, "Santiago del Valle to Jefe Político del departamento de Béjar, 3 August 1832"; *ibid.*, reel 152, frame 489, "Williams to Múzquiz, 10 Aug. 1832"; *ibid.*, reel 156, frames 416-422, "Seguín to Jefe Político interino del departamento de Béjar, 17 May 1833"; *ibid.*, reel 156, frames 493-495, "Jiménez to Seguín, 23 May 1833"; *ibid.*, reel 157, frame 773, "Ayuntamiento's acknowledgment of decrees, Bexar, 4 Aug. 1833"; TBL, Bolton, 46:9, "Secretaría de Fomento [...] Texas, correspondencia relativa a la introducción de esclavos"; AGEC, FJPB, c.22, e.55 "Múzquiz to Gobernador de Coahuila y Texas, 3 June 1832"; AGEC, FJPB, c.22, e.56 "Múzquiz to Gobernador de Coahuila y Texas, 4 June 1832";

illustrates the adoption of more aggressive tactics by slaveholders to retrieve self-emancipated slaves. The Mexican state's powerlessness to convict the mercenaries, along with the complicity of proslavery municipal authorities influenced by Euro-American planters, points to just how wantonly slaveholders acted during the years leading up to the Texas Revolution. Tensions regarding runaways in the Louisiana-Texas borderlands also took more global expressions. In March 1834, rumors that the US intended to occupy Texas as far as the Nueces River in retaliation for the escape of criminals, deserters and slaves across the border began alarming the Mexican government, a concern shared for instance by French consul at New Orleans Martin-François-Armand Saillard.[141]

In addition to fugitive slaves, (Mexican and American) free blacks in Texas were frequent collateral victims of slaving raids. In October 1823, an official at Nacogdoches reported that "some Englishmen" had crossed the border and captured a "mulatto" who had been living in the town for four years and "was known here as free", on the false charge of being a runaway.[142] Five years later, three enslaved men who had absconded from Petites Coquilles and New Orleans (Jim Wilkins, John, and Nathan Richardson), accompanied by a free black named Andrew Roche, were arrested near the Neches River (Texas) while "on board of a yawl" and were imprisoned in Lafayette Parish.[143] In this context, fugitive slaves in the borderlands faced an almost constant threat of re-enslavement, especially given the occasional collusion between some local agents and slaveholders. In January 1831, Manuel de los Santos Coy, *alcalde* at Nacogdoches, wrote to colonel José de las Piedras regarding instructions issued to local indigenous communities by Tennessee-born colonel Peter Ellis Bean (Mexico's appointed agent for Native Americans in eastern Texas) to extra-legally return to him any fugitive slave "found in the countryside". Two runaways had already been returned to their master following these instructions. Bean first denied the accusations, before arguing that such restitutions had already been practiced elsewhere in the borderlands.[144] Unsurprisingly, then, freedom for slave refugees in Nacogdoches proved fragile. In October 1831, San Antonio's *alcalde* requested information from Coy regarding the legal status of a black man named "Anderson", who had resided for two years in Nacogdoches before settling in San Antonio. Coy replied that, although "it is

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AGEC, FJPB, c.23, e.74, "Jiménez to Gobernador de Coahuila y Texas, 18 May 1833"; YU, Beinecke, LAGP, Box 4, "Notes for the apuntes 1833-1849"; *Journal of the House of Representatives of the State of Texas, Sixth Legislature* (Austin: Marshall & Oldham, 1855), 165; *State Gazette*, 16 August 1856; Torget, *Seeds of Empire*, 160; Andrés Reséndez, *Changing National Identities at the Frontier: Texas and New Mexico, 1800-1850* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 162; Nichols, *The Limits of Liberty*, 59-61.

[141] SRE, AEMEUA, 23/8, f.36, "Lombardo to Joaquín María del Castillo, 1 March 1834"; SRE, LE 1057, f.109; MAE(C), CP, Texas, v.1 (1833-1839), 127 CP/1, "Consulat de France, Mémoire de 1833".

[142] BA, reel 75, frame 675, "Seguín to García, 12 Oct. 1823"; RBBC, BA, Supplement v.8, 341.

[143] *New Orleans Argus*, 14 Oct. 1828.

[144] RBBC, NA, v.52, 36-38, "Santos to Piedras, 13 Jan. 1831" and "Piedras to Santos, 13 Jan. 1831"; Jack Johnson, *Indian Agent: Peter Ellis Bean in Mexican Texas* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2005), 149; Torget, *Seeds of Empire*, 97-98. In July 1826, Bean had suggested to Austin to classify slaves as indentured laborers (an idea followed after the 1827 constitution for Coahuila y Tejas was published), thus circumventing any future ban on slavery.

sure that until now no one claimed him", he believed Anderson had arrived in Texas "fleeing from the United States of the North". After two relatively safe years at Nacogdoches, "Anderson" suddenly had to flee along with another runaway (who was arrested at San Felipe de Austin after failing to present evidence of his freedom). Though the exact motives for his second flight remain unclear, Anderson's story shows the precariousness of self-emancipated slaves' freedom in Texas, of which Mathieu (or "Matthew") Thomas's case below offers another striking illustration.[145]

Mathieu Thomas, born a slave in 1780, arrived east of Nacogdoches (near San Augustine) in 1824 from the US South along with his master Robert Callier. In 1826, members of the "Yokum Gang" – a group of thieves and slave-stealers active in the Louisiana-Texas borderlands – murdered Callier because he had rejected Matthew Yokum's demand to marry his daughter Susan. In February 1828, Susan Callier sold her deceased father's slaves Mathieu, Sally (aged forty) and Luisa (aged two) to settler Elijah Lloyd at Nacogdoches for 1.000 *pesos*. Yet soon afterwards, Lloyd was convicted of murder and imprisoned. He promised Mathieu Thomas unconditional freedom in exchange for his help in escaping from the municipal jail of Nacogdoches, to which Mathieu consented. Lloyd fled from the Mexican authorities riding a horse to Louisiana (where he subsequently died), leaving the promise unfulfilled. Fearing that Lloyd's heir(s) would attempt to nullify the informal agreement between the two men, Mathieu Thomas ran away to Nacogdoches in May 1830, seeking the *amparo* of local administrators.

In his petition to *alcalde* Vicente Córdova, Mathieu Thomas sought to appeal to antislavery ideals and justified assisting his master's escape as "the only means of liberating [him]self from the slavery to which [he] was reduced by account of [his] color, and to which death is preferable". Thomas based his request on a state decree issued on 15 September 1827 providing for the emancipation of slaves whose deceased master had no natural heirs ("*herederos forzosos*"). State authorities in Saltillo nonetheless rejected it in October 1830, arguing that such an article only applied to masters "naturally dead", not to ones who had disappeared. Despite this verdict, Mathieu Thomas obtained freedom papers from colonel de las Piedras in June 1831 and worked as a domestic servant in exchange for his protection. As the private and the public realms overlapped on *amparo*, Mathieu Thomas lost his protector and prospects of freedom with De las Piedras's fall from grace and eviction in August 1832. Fearing re-enslavement, he headed to San Antonio where he eventually settled, unaware that his difficulties were not over yet.

In October 1832, Elijah Lloyd's unique heir and nephew, a native of Tennessee named William M. Lloyd (in Texas since 1828), arrived claiming Mathieu Thomas as his "property", presenting evidence of the transaction made at Nacogdoches in 1828. San Antonio's *alcalde*, José Antonio de la Garza, expressed his confusion, since Mathieu Thomas had previously showed him his *carta de libertad*. With two

[145] BA, reel 145, frame 851, "Manuel de los Santos Coy to alcalde de Bexar, 8 Nov. 1831".

conflicting documents in his hands, de la Garza flipped the burden of proof by requiring Lloyd to prove that Mathieu Thomas was effectively his slave. A month later, Lloyd returned from Nacogdoches and San Felipe de Austin after collecting several testimonies supporting his cause. However, he failed to convince José A. de la Garza. Despite the fact that Lloyd could have qualified as a natural heir as defined by the law, Mathieu Thomas was eventually freed from custody. He met Lundy for the second time some months later, now a free man.[146]

Conclusion

As this chapter has demonstrated, although the principle and practice of *unconditional* free-soil policy took root during the years leading up to the Texas Revolution, freedom for runaways in northeastern New Spain/Mexico before 1836 remained deeply *conditional* upon local decision-making, unstable balances of power and the prevalence of grassroots administration in the borderlands. Flight represented a risk-laden decision, with often unpredictable consequences for enslaved absconders such as Mathieu Thomas. The shared story of Spanish and Mexican administrators and escaped slaves from the US South and the new colonies in Texas was first and foremost a tale of convergence (or divergence) of interests between both sets of actors. The fate of runaways was always dependent on the responses of officials to larger borderlands dynamics and geopolitical developments. Local civilian and military administrators regularly ignored, dismissed or disobeyed complex (and sometimes contradictory) instructions on free soil, or simply devised their own policies on the settlement of foreign fugitive slaves when clear orders from above were wanting. By contrast with the religion-based asylum policy that characterized the late colonial period, the ideal and practice of unconditional free soil for foreign self-liberated slaves, inspired by the liberal doctrine of transcendental human rights, emerged during the first decade of Mexico's independence. In the midst of a gradual abolition of slavery and the slave trade (with the ambiguous exception of Texas), Mexican governments repeatedly refused to return US slave refugees from 1825 onwards. Independent Mexico's growing intransigency over slavery, including an increasingly consistent enforcement of free soil, eventually prompted many Euro-American planters to take (illegal) action themselves. As a result, the threat of abduction by armed raiders constantly jeopardized slave refugees' bids for freedom in northeastern Mexico, especially from the early 1830s onwards. While the massive expansion of slavery generated by the Euro-American colonization of Texas progressively strained the relationship between

[146] BA, reel 153, frame 738, "De la Garza to alcalde of Nacogdoches, 25 Oct. 1832"; *ibid.*, reel 154, frame 70, "Investigation of Elias Loid's claim for runaway slaves, 20 Oct. 1832"; RBBC, NA, v.16, 395-399, "Petition of Matthew Thomas, 15 May 1830"; AGEC, FJPB, v.10, e.5, "Nacogdoches, José Ignacio Ybarbo, alcalde del pueblo de Nacogdoches, informa al secretario del Supremo Tribunal de Justicia, haberle enviado la información sumaria formada contra el negro Mathe y el Americano Juan A. Robert, acusados de haber auxiliado al criminal Elias Loy en su fuga del calabozo" (Jan. 1829); *Laws and decrees of the state of Coahuila and Texas* (Houston: Telegraph Power Press, 1839), 79 (Decree n°19, article 5, 15 Sep. 1827). In his request, Mathieu Thomas mistakenly based his argument on "the law n°18 of the 19th of September, 1827".

the Mexican state and the new colonists, the independence of Texas in 1836 reinforced Mexico's emerging antislavery commitment, and shaped an even more binary political landscape of slavery and freedom in the borderlands.

IV
"Mexico was free! No slave clanked his chains under its government": the Contested Nature of Free Soil and Settlement, 1836-1861.

Introduction: the Texas Revolution and the political landscape of slavery and freedom in the US-Mexico borderlands

Conflicts over fugitive slaves contributed to the growing divide between the Mexican federal state and the Euro-American slaveholders in Texas during the early 1830s. In July 1835, when the military vessel *Correo* sailed close to Galveston, asserting Mexican sovereignty against an incipient rebellion, planters in central Texas feared that the ship's presence might embolden their slaves. As a Texan settler recalled, "there was much uneasiness felt in regard to the threatened loss of slave property; and the owners of slaves were disposed to favor the peace policy".[1] The following autumn, as Mexican troops were gradually dispatched to Texas, colonists in Matagorda grew concerned that the army would "give liberty to our slaves and make slaves of ourselves". Enslaved people had by then "acquired some familiarity with the emancipationist leanings of Mexico", making them ready "to embrace the invading force as an army of liberation", as Paul D. Lack has argued.[2] Mier y Terán – who had already envisioned such an alliance as a buffer against the rising influence of Euro-American settlers while inspecting Texas in 1828 – argued that slaves were "becoming restless to throw off their yoke" as they grew aware of Mexico's liberalism regarding slavery.[3] In October 1835, about 100 slaves near Brazoria, the heart of slavery in Mexican Texas, were accused of planning a rising against their masters in order to enslave them for the production of cotton bales for the Louisiana market. A local vigilance committee thwarted the suspected uprising; its leaders were hanged. Nonetheless, the Texas Revolution would have serious disruptive repercussions on local slavery over the following months.[4]

As the crisis intensified by early 1836, most Texan settlers did not fight against Santa Anna's army, but instead fled back to Louisiana in an exodus termed the "runaway scrape". The ensuing dislocation of the established social order gave way to expressions of long-held resentment among slaves: many of them defected to the

[1] John J. Linn, *Reminiscences of Fifty Years in Texas* (New York, 1883), 114.
[2] Paul D. Lack, *Texas Revolutionary Experience: a Political and Social History, 1835-1836* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1992), 243-244.
[3] *Telegraph and Texas Register*, 17 Oct. 1835; Graham Davis, *Land! Irish Pioneers in Mexican and Revolutionary Texas* (College Station: Texas A&M Press, 2002), 28, Paul D. Lack, "Slavery and the Texas Revolution", *Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, 89 (Oct. 1985), 188-191.
[4] Eugene Barker (ed.), *The Austin Papers* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1927), v.3, 190; Nichols, *The Limits of Liberty*, 67-70; Quintard Taylor Jr., *In Search of the Racial Frontier: African Americans in the American West, 1528-1990* (London: W.W. Norton & Co., 1999), 41-42; Sean M. Kelley, "Mexico in his Head: Slavery and the Texas-Mexican Border, 1810-1860", *Journal of Social History*, 37:3 (2004), 716; Sean M. Kelley, *Los Brazos de Dios: a Plantation Society in the Texas Borderlands, 1821-1865* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2010), 100; Lack, *Texas Revolutionary Experience*, 241; Wendell G. Addington, "Slave Insurrections in Texas", *Journal of Negro History*, v.35, n°4 (Oct. 1950), 411-412.

Mexican troops. Ann Thomas, a resident of Caney Creek since 1832, claimed that she and her husband lost seven slaves (four of whom fled to Mexico's interior) while fleeing to New Orleans from their cotton plantation in February 1836.[5] The conflict remained limited to the vicinity of San Antonio until the fall of the Alamo on 6 March 1836. Thereafter, the Mexican army marched eastward to the Colorado and Brazos rivers, the location of most of the Euro-American settlements, before the battle of San Jacinto (on 21 April 1836) marked the final Texan victory. In the meantime, many slaves from central Texas plantations had deserted to the Mexicans, capitalizing on the panic among their masters. While reaching Ashworth's Ferry on Lake Sabine in late April 1836, William Fairfax Gray described his encounter with "three runaway Negroes, who fled and plunged through a bayou at [his] approach". William Parker likewise underscored the difficulty of preventing "the negroes from joining the enemy in small parties". The Mexican side echoed this observation. Officer Juan Nepomuceno Almonte described how, while waiting to ambush the *norteamericanos*, "a negro passed at short distance" from his troops. The man later served the Mexican army as a guide for river crossings (as did many other male fugitives, while women often became washerwomen).[6] After San Jacinto, many runaways who had taken advantage of the confusion were arrested. For example, in early May 1836, three escaped slaves were forcibly brought back from the old Fort Tenochtitlán to San Antonio.[7] The retreating Mexican army nonetheless continued to attract asylum-seekers. Returning home a few days after the defeat of the Mexican army, a resident of Matagorda noted that thirteen slaves had "left [his] neighborhood" and joined the returning troops.[8]

Escape attempts affected plantations in Texas so deeply that the armistice signed between defeated General Santa Anna and the Republic of Texas president David G. Burnet (the Treaty of Velasco, 14 May 1836) specifically provided for the restitution of all slaves that "may have been captured by any portion of the Mexican army, or may have taken refuge in the said army since the commencement of the late

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[5] UT(A), Briscoe, Ann Raney Thomas Coleman Papers, Box 2Q483 and Box 3D125. On the "Runaway Scrape": James D. Nichols, "The line of Liberty: Runaway Slaves and Fugitive Peons in the Texas-Mexico Borderlands", *Western Historical Quarterly*, v.44, n°4 (2013), 417; William D. Carrigan, "Slavery on the Frontier: the Peculiar Institution in Central Texas", *Slavery & Abolition*, 20:2 (Aug. 1999), 67; Kelley, "Mexico in his head", 715-716; Randolph Campbell, *An Empire for Slavery: the Peculiar Institution in Texas, 1821-1865* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1989), 44.

[6] Vicente Filisola, Juan Nepomuceno Almonte, *Memorias para la historia de la Guerra de Tejas, por el General de División D. Vicente Filisola* (México: Cumplido, 1849), v.1, 25; Monroe Edwards (ed. Paul D. Lack), *The Diary of William Fairfax Gray: from Virginia to Texas, 1835-1837* (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1997), 160; John H. Jenkins (ed.), *The Papers of the Texas Revolution, 1835-1836* (Austin: Presidial Press, Brig. Gen. Jay A. Matthews Publisher, 1973), v.6, 119-123; Samuel E. Asbury (ed.), "The Private Journal of Juan Nepomuceno Almonte, Feb. 1-April 16, 1836", *Southern Historical Quarterly*, XLVIII (July 1944), 32; José Enrique de la Peña (ed. Jesús Sánchez Garza), *La Rebelión de Texas: Manuscrito Inédito* (México: A.F. de Sánchez, 1955), 128.

[7] Malcolm McLean, *Papers concerning Robertson's Colony* (Arlington: University of Texas at Arlington, 1988), v. XIV, 319.

[8] Chester Newell, *History of the Revolution in Texas: particularly of the war of 1835 and '36* (New York: Wiley and Putnam, 1838), 114; Lack, "Slavery and the Texas Revolution", 195; Lack, *Texas Revolutionary Experience,* 244-245.

invasion".[9] The new Republic insisted that the Mexican troops be inspected for the retrieval of Texan prisoners and slaves.[10] Some runaways were recovered, along with about sixty-five soldiers. Meanwhile, other Mexicans were abducted simply because of their skin color or because they seemed to be runaway slaves, as brigadier-general José Manuel Micheltorena observed in June 1836.[11]

Some Mexican officers nonetheless actively sheltered escaped slaves, in an effort consistent with Santa Anna's private preference for free soil.[12] For instance, General José Urrea freed fourteen enslaved men and their families, resettled them in Ciudad Victoria (Tamaulipas) and criticized his counterpart Vicente Filisola for restoring some slave refugees to the Texans.[13] Urrea's actions were not exceptional, and soon the Republic of Texas complained about such non-compliance. In November 1836, members of the Texas House of Representatives, stressing that the negotiation of the Treaty of Velasco had partly stemmed from the concern "that in [Mexico's] retreat our cattle and negroes might be driven off", noted that half a year later, a similar fear (that Mexico would use escaped slaves as a bargaining chip) still persisted.[14] Groups of fugitives who had absconded during the Revolution were still at large, as "a number of African slaves" from Brazoria (a hotspot of slave resistance where African-born slaves composed half of the enslaved population) were reported to be wandering "since last winter" along the Colorado River. Warfare's disruptive effects on slavery persisted well into the second half of the decade. In August 1837, a settler from Columbus (Texas) noted that another resident "had some negroes run away from him", suggesting that "they had started for Mexico and would endeavor to get into that country as soon as possible".[15] Bondspeople born in Africa who had been smuggled through Galveston Bay

[9] MAE(C), General Woll, v.21, f.69-70, "Rusk to Filisola, 8 May 1836"; Genaro García, *Documentos inéditos ó muy raros para la historia de México* (México: Vda. de C. Bouret, 1905), v.29, 158-160; Jenkins, *The Papers of the Texas Revolution,* v.6, 273-275.

[10] SEDNA, L-1149, f.37, "Ejército de Operaciones to Ministro de Guerra y Marina, 22 July 1836"; Jenkins, *The Papers of the Texas Revolution, 1835-1836*, v.6, 508; Ramón Martínez Caro, *Verdadera Idea de la Primera Campaña de Tejas y Sucesos Ocurridos después de la Acción de San Jacinto* (México: Pérez, 1837), 46.

[11] Jenkins, *The Papers of the Texas Revolution, 1835-1836*, v.7, 67-69, 370-371; MAE(C), General Woll, v.22 (180 PA-AP/22), f.72, "Ministro de Guerra y Marina to General en Gefe del Ejército del Norte, 1 July 1843".

[12] SEDNA, L-1150, f.26, "Comandancia militar de Laredo to Comandante General de estos Departamentos, 20 June 1836"; Jenkins, *The Papers of the Texas Revolution, 1835-1836*, v.6, 314-315.

[13] Kelley, "Mexico in his head", 716; Campbell, *An Empire for Slavery,* 44; Rosalie Schwartz, *Across the Rio to Freedom: US Negroes in Mexico* (El Paso: Texas Western Press, 1975), 24-25. Confirmation of asylum being granted to escaped slaves reaching the Mexican army in Texas as early as March 1836 can be found in: Vicente Filisola, *Memorias para la Historia de la Guerra de Tejas* (México: R. Rafael, 1849), v.2, 375-376, "Tornel to Santa Anna, 18 March 1836". On Santa Anna's position and the Urrea-Filisola controversy: Carlos E. Castañeda (trans.), *The Mexican Side of the Texas Revolution, by the Chief Mexican Participants* (Dallas: Turner Company Pub., 1928), 65, 177-178, 238 and 269-270.

[14] *Journal of the House of Representatives of the Republic of Texas, First Congress* (Houston: Office of the Telegraph, 1838), 136-137.

[15] *Telegraph and Texas Register*, 9 Nov. 1836 (in Lack, "Slavery and the Texas Revolution", 196); William B. Dewees, *Letters from an Early Settler of Texas* (Louisville: New Albany Tribune,

and the Sabine Lake regularly absconded during this period, such as "three African negro men" named Sanco, Doo and Lufa who, after being arrested near Victoria, managed to escape once more to the border.[16]

The Texas Revolution generated a markedly polarized boundary between slavery and freedom.[17] After 1836, Mexico increasingly asserted its abidance to abolition and free soil, while the Second Slavery thrived in the Republic of Texas and the US Southwest. The enslaved population of Texas quintupled between 1846 and 1860, reaching an all-time high of nearly 160.000 by the eve of the US Civil War.[18] However, after crossing the border, freedom seekers did not necessarily obtain the freedom they had envisaged in Mexico's northeastern borderlands. On the one hand, *unconditional* free soil, independent Mexico's official policy on foreign runaways, remained debated and contested, in its very principle as well as its concrete implementation, both among Mexican and US officials. On the other hand, slaving raids launched by US slaveholders, as well as larger geopolitical developments such as war threatened to abruptly end the liberty of black freedom-seekers in Mexico. This chapter will examine the settlement of self-emancipated slaves in Mexico, and its varied implications for the political landscape of slavery and freedom in the US-Mexico borderlands, between 1836 and 1861. How did free-soil policy develop in Mexico and what shortcomings and challenges did its enforcement face in practice? Where and how did escaped slaves settle in the Mexican borderlands? How did the Mexican federal and local states respond to their settlement as well as to threats posed to their formal freedom? To what extent did the question of slave flight intersect with separatist pressures in northeastern Mexico and rising sectionalism in the US over slavery?

The disputed making of Mexico's free soil after 1836

The Revolution further strengthened Mexico's staunch commitment to anti-slavery and to free-soil principles for foreign escaped slaves. Mexican governmental and parliamentary representatives, as well as the press and public opinion, took increasing national pride in slavery's abolition and the existence of a sanctuary policy for runaway slaves. Yet, practical enforcement of this official asylum policy did not necessarily match its abstract provisions. Instead, Mexican civilian and military officials, US agents and even enslaved freedom-seekers themselves debated and interpreted free soil as a binding legal principle. Free soil's practical boundaries were disputed, both domestically and internationally. Sometimes, the very principle's legitimacy was even

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1858), 211; Alwyn Barr, "Freedom and Slavery in the Republic: African American Experiences in the Republic of Texas", in Kenneth W. Howell, Charles Swanlund, *Single Star of the West, The Republic of Texas, 1836-1845* (Denton: University of North Texas Press, 2017), 424.

[16] *Telegraph and Texas Register*, 1 May 1839. Lack observed that in 1837, eight out of ten fugitive slaves were reported as African-born, compared to only one of the sixteen advertised runaways in the *Telegraph and Texas Register* for 1838 (Lack, "Slavery and the Texas Revolution", 196-197).

[17] Kelley, "Mexico in his head", 716.

[18] Campbell, *An Empire for Slavery*, 50-67; Barr, "Freedom and Slavery in the Republic", 423-436.

fundamentally called into question. The making of Mexico's free soil after the Texas Revolution was thus by no means a linear process.

Antislavery and Asylum Policy

On 5 April 1837, Mexico's government reiterated Guerrero's abolition of slavery, this time "without any exception", although it granted financial compensation to the few remaining (non-Texan) slaveholders affected by both the current and past abolitions. That same year, the *Cámara de Diputados* reasserted Mexico's commitment to free-soil policy in its correspondence with the federal Foreign Ministry.[19] During subsequent years, a couple of aborted constitutional projects reasserted the asylum policy, before the publication of the *Bases Orgánicas de la República Mexicana* in June 1843. Article 9 of this centralist Magna Carta, enforced until the fall of the Centralist Republic in August 1846 and the re-implementation of the 1824 federalist constitution, prohibited slavery and explicitly placed foreign slaves under the "protection of the laws".[20] Moreover, Mexico and Great Britain concluded a treaty for the suppression of the slave trade on 24 February 1841, an activity legally designated as piracy after 8 August 1851. Captains of suspected slave-ships were thereafter liable to the death penalty (and their crews to imprisonment) by order of the District Courts of Veracruz on the Atlantic coast, and Acapulco and San Blas on the Pacific coast. Investigations were often launched against vessels and individuals suspected of participating in the *Carrera de África,* such as the *negreros* Francisco Viñes and Francisco Martorell, two slave traders closely linked to La Havana's slave market. In 1859, Pablo de la Lastra, the captain of the *Laura*, was sentenced to death at Veracruz following his arrest off the Congo coast by the British warship *Archer*. After receiving a petition signed by more than 230 residents of Veracruz begging him to use his "supreme recourse of indult", liberal president Benito Juárez eventually commuted Lastra's sentence to a ten-year jail term in June 1860.[21]

Simultaneously, Mexican official and popular opinion on slavery became even more closely intertwined with anti-American sentiment, shifting the focus of the joint rejection of slavery and imperialism from Spain to the US. Abolition and free soil were increasingly viewed as evidence of Mexico's moral superiority over Texas and the northern Union.[22] Some weeks before the US-Mexican War, Veracruz's *El Indicador*

[19] Manuel Ferrer Muñoz, *La Cuestión de la Esclavitud en el México Decimonónico: sus Repercusiones en las Etnias Indígenas* (Bogotá: Instituto de Estudios Constitucionales Carlos Restrepo Piedrahita, 1998), 24-25; The National Archives, Kew (England), FO, 84/225, f.11-14 and 24-32.
[20] Ferrer Muñoz, *La Cuestión de la Esclavitud,* 26-27.
[21] AHDF, Bandos, c.19, e.91 (11 Aug. 1851) and c.20, e.1 (20 Sep. 1851); The National Archives, Kew (England), FO 84/1092, f.5-14, 25, 84-85; AGN, Justicia y Negocios Eclesiásticos, v.614, e.27, f.206-209, "Juzgado del distrito de Veracruz to Ministro de Justicia, 11 Mar. 1858"; *ibid.*, v.616, e.8 and *ibid.* v.616, e.11.
[22] See for instance in: *El Látigo de Tejas*, 19 Sep. 1844. An exception was made for the US anti-slavery movement. For example, by the eve of the US Civil War, an adaptation in Spanish of

contrasted the continuance of slavery north of the Rio Grande with its disappearance in Mexico "through a law that declares free anyone setting foot on Mexican beaches".[23] In the autumn of 1846, the official *Diario del Gobierno de la República Mexicana* explicitly praised Mexico's asylum policy and denounced the US for deriving most of its prosperity from "usurped lands" (a direct reference to Texas) and the oppression of the "unfortunate African race".[24] Likewise, most of the Mexican press assiduously followed their northern neighbor's controversies on slavery and condemned the passage of the Fugitive Slave Act in 1850.[25] Enforcing unconditional free soil did not elicit complete unanimity in Mexico, however. In February 1855, the conservative newspaper *El Universal* approved the principle of providing asylum to US escaped slaves, yet it also argued that those who had committed criminal acts outside of Mexico should be liable to restitution to US justice.[26]

Wars, interruptions of official diplomatic relations and Mexico's chronic governmental instability hindered official negotiations on slave flight. Yet after the treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo (February 1848), US representatives renewed their attempts to formalize the return of enslaved asylum-seekers. At the initiative of Tamaulipas (just as with Coahuila four years later), Luis de la Rosa, Mexican minister in the US, proposed during the summer of 1849 the conclusion of a treaty of

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"Uncle Tom's Cabin" by Ramón Valladares Saavedra was performed in at least five theaters in Mexico City. See "La Cabaña del tío Tom, o la Esclavitud de los Negros" (Centro de Estudios de Historia de México, Digital Collection, LXI-3, 285, 290, 299, 320, 326, 370, 372, 409, 429 and 480); Nichols, *The Limits of Liberty*, 71-72.

[23] *El Indicador*, 23 Feb. 1846. Veracruz's press was particularly vocal in denouncing US slavery. See for instance: *El Arco Iris*, 3 and 29 Oct. 1849. From a liberal and nationalist perspective, on contrasts in slavery and freedom between the US and Mexico: *El Siglo XIX*, 28 Dec. 1850.

[24] *Diario del Gobierno de la República Mexicana*, 12 Sep. 1846 and 5 Oct. 1846.

[25] With few exceptions, such as *El Universal*. The newspaper took a legalist approach, as it defended the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, arguing that US federal law was to be respected and accusing abolitionists of fomenting unrest: *El Universal*, 20 Nov. 1850, 5 Dec. 1850 and 25 March 1851. By contrast, the stance taken by the liberal *El Siglo XIX* (21 Nov. 1850 and 1 Jan. 1851) reflects the dominant opposition to the Act in the Mexican press.

[26] *El Universal*, 23 Feb 1855. The newspaper also violently criticized the welcoming attitude of the Mexican authorities toward the Black Seminoles who settled in Coahuila in 1850. *El Universal*, 19 Nov. 1850 and 27 Jan. 1852 (reprinting columns from the *Correo de Chihuahua*). Not all Mexican newspapers embraced black immigration. Some conservative newspapers such as *El Monitor Republicano* and *El Observador Católico* expressed racist disgust and opposition to African American immigration to Mexico, one of the many signs of colonial racism's persistence despite the official de-racialization of Mexico's early independent society and administration. In the case of US escaped slaves, as anti-American sentiment coalesced with a rejection of blackness, these refugees bore the double stigma of race and nationality, making them even less desirable immigrants than white US citizens. *El Observador Católico*, 29 July 1848; Moisés González Navarro, *Los Extranjeros en México y los Mexicanos en el Extranjero, 1821-1970* (México: El Colegio de México, Centro de Estudios Históricos, 1993), 185-189; María Camila Díaz Casas, "¿De Esclavos a Ciudadanos? Matices sobre la "Integración" y "Asimilación" de la Población de Origen Africano en la Sociedad Nacional Mexicana, 1810-1850", in Juan Manuel de la Serna (coord.), *Negros y morenos en Iberoamérica: Adaptación y conflicto* (México: UNAM, 2015), 282.

extradition for common criminal charges to US Secretary of State John M. Clayton.[27] After de la Rosa submitted a first draft in January 1850, Clayton attempted to take advantage of Mexico's new openness to extradition by including escaped slaves in a new version of the text composed on 15 February 1850. Unsurprisingly, the Mexican minister dissented: he contended that Mexico's Congress would never back such a provision. The treaty was signed in July 1850 regardless, although it was never mutually ratified.[28] During the 1850s, proslavery advocate and US minister in Mexico James Gadsden repeatedly voiced his resentment at this official intransigency on slavery, which to him "would seem to have emanated from Exeter Hall [home to the Anti-Slavery Society] in London", providing yet more evidence of what he perceived as Mexico's "bigoted detestation of every thing Protestant and American".[29] In 1857, his successor, the Georgian James Forsyth Jr., made a final attempt regarding extradition, including escaped peons. However, Mexican representatives again "resolutely refused".[30] Furthermore, Mexico's free-soil policy became explicitly enshrined in the new liberal constitution of 1857, especially thanks to radical *diputados* José María del Castillo Velasco and José María Mata's efforts. An article approved at the *Congreso Constituyente* on 18 July 1856 by a unanimity of eighty-two votes thus specified that foreign slaves "setting foot on national territory recover by this mere fact their freedom and are entitled to the protection of the laws" and formally outlawed any treaty of extradition between Mexico and another government regarding enslaved people.[31]

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[27] SRE, AEMEUA, 31/1, f.343-346, "Lacunza to Enviado Extraordinario, 8 June 1849". The *enviado* received clear instructions on free-soil policy for escaped slaves ("Guiado V[uestra] E[xcellencia] por este principio lograra esquivar la cuestión de esclavos fugados pues según nuestras leyes, ellos son libres en el momento que pisan el territorio nacional, y por el mismo hecho queda garantizada su libertad y protejida por las propias leyes, de manera que la fuga considerada como medio de adquirirla no podemos estimarla como crimen"); UT(A), Benson, Despatches from US Ministers in Mexico (microfilm), reel 19, "Díez de Bonilla to Gadsden, 21 Oct. 1853" and "Gadsden to Díez de Bonilla, 2 Nov. 1853".

[28] SRE, AEMEUA, 32/2, f.14, "De La Rosa to Ministro de Relaciones Exteriores, 21 Jan. 1850"; f.321-322, "De La Rosa to Ministro de Relaciones Exteriores, 18 Feb. 1850"; f.137, "De La Rosa to Ministro de Relaciones Exteriores, 22 May 1850"; f.201, "De La Rosa to Clayton, 6 June 1850"; John Bassett Moore, *A Treatise on Extradition and Interstate Rendition* (Boston: The Boston Book Company 1891), v.1, 95-97; Schwartz, *Across the Rio to Freedom*, 32; Don E. Fehrenbacher, *The Slaveholding Republic: an Account of the United States Government's Relations to Slavery* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 101.

[29] William R. Manning, *Diplomatic Correspondence of the United States: Inter-American Affairs, 1831-1860,* v.9, Mexico, 1848-1860 (Washington: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1937), 750-751, "Gadsden to Marcy, Mexico, 3 April 1855".

[30] Manning, *Diplomatic Correspondence of the United States*, v.9, Mexico, 1848-1860, 888-890, "Forsyth to Marcy, 2 Feb. 1857"; Schwartz, *Across the Rio to Freedom*, 50.

[31] *Diario Oficial del Supremo Gobierno de la República Mejicana*, 19 July 1856; *El Siglo XIX*, 19 July 1856; *Legislación Mexicana*, 12 Feb. 1857, 385-386; Francisco Zarco, *Historia del Congreso Constituyente de 1856 y 1857: Estracto de todas sus Sesiones y Documentos de la Época* (México: Imprenta de Ignacio Cumplido, 1857), v.2, 994-995 (articles 2 and 15); Ferrer Muñoz, *La Cuestión de la Esclavitud*, 29. Nonetheless, the discussion on these articles was not entirely consensual, as suggested by *diputado* Joaquín Ruíz's proposal that escaped slaves who had committed criminal acts outside of Mexico could be liable to extradition as an exception to free-soil policy.

Officially endorsed at a federal level, the responsibility for carrying out this free-soil policy mostly lay with local administrators, with varying outcomes. The first real challenge to free soil occurred in August 1838, as seven African American mechanics from New Orleans reached Tampico and sought to obtain *cartas de seguridad* (security papers). Starting in May 1828, obtaining these *cartas* within a month of arrival constituted a legal requirement for any male foreigner intending to reside permanently in Mexico. (Women were exempted under the assumption that they would be covered by male patronage). The *carta* had to be renewed annually for a small fee. Individuals not complying with this law were nominally liable to fines (20 *pesos*) or imprisonment (ten days) in case of insolvency.[32] However, local US consul John G. McCall refused to certify the mechanics as US subjects in filiation documents (*filiaciones*), a pre-requisite that was indispensable for being granted *cartas de seguridad*. Since they failed to present evidence of their freedom at the consulate, McCall contended that doubts existed over whether the men were originally free or enslaved in Louisiana. (It is indeed likely that they were self-liberated slaves, as suspected by the consul). As stressed by Sarah E. Cornell, McCall's treatment of the seven men as "citizens of nowhere" left them in a legal limbo and set a stark precedent for US policy toward escaped slaves in Mexico.[33] In response, the government of Tamaulipas consulted minister of foreign relations Juan de Dios Cañedo on the affair. US minister in Mexico Powhatan Ellis, backed by US secretary of state John Forsyth, argued that such cases – especially if Mexico were to take the side of US runaways – "may hereafter become a matter of serious discussion between the two Governments". Ellis supported McCall's stance, contending that by absconding from US territory and seeking refuge in Mexico, these men had rescinded their rights to receive protection from US diplomatic agents abroad. By November 1839, however, Cañedo eventually upheld the issuance of *cartas de seguridad* to the mechanics, provided that the refugees proved not to be "vagrant, turbulent or disrespectful" and that some Tampiqueño citizens would post bonds for their good behavior. By doing so, the

[32] Mariano Galván Rivera, *Nueva Colección de Leyes y Decretos Mexicanos, en forma de Diccionario* (México: T.S. Gardida, 1854), v.2, 1111-1120; *Colección de las leyes y decretos expedidos por el Congreso General de los Estados-Unidos Mexicanos, en los años de 1829 y 1830* (México: Imprenta de Galván, 1831), 126; Basilio José Arrillaga, *Recopilación de Leyes, Decretos, Bandos, Reglamentos, Circulares y Providencias de los Supremos Poderes y Otras Autoridades de la República Mexicana* (México: J.M. Fernández de la Lara, 1837), 289-292; Sarah E. Cornell, "Citizens of Nowhere: Fugitive Slaves and Free African Americans in Mexico, 1833-1857", *Journal of American History,* 100:2 (2013), 361-362.

[33] From June 1854 onwards, under the aegis of US minister James Gadsden, US consuls in Mexico began declining applications for *cartas de seguridad* from all US-born African Americans, free or otherwise, a reaction to the alleged free issuance by Mexico of *cartas* to US deserters in general. The exclusion's practical application elicited internal discussion, as suggested by the correspondence of US consuls in Veracruz and Matamoros. UT(A), Benson, Despatches from US consuls in Veracruz, reel 6, "Gadsden to US consuls in Mexico, 28 June 1854"; "Pickett to Gadsden, 10 July 1854"; "Pickett to Cushing, 25 Jan. 1855", Pickett to Marcy, 21 Feb. 1855"; UT(A), Benson, Despatches from US consuls in Matamoros, reel 2, "Dirgan to Marcy, 25 Nov. 1854"; Manning, *Diplomatic Correspondence of the United States,* v.9, 720-721 "Gadsden to US consuls in Mexico, 28 June 1854" and 734 "Gadsden to Marcy, 16 Oct. 1854"; Cornell, "Citizens of Nowhere", 363-364.

minister prioritized enforcing free soil for escaped bondspeople over laws on *cartas de seguridad* and the entry of foreigners.[34]

Most subsequent decisions in Mexico's territorial and maritime borderlands were consistent with this precedent. In January 1842, for instance, Laredo's *alcalde constitucional* consulted his *partido* sub-prefect Policarpio Martínez at Mier, Tamaulipas, on how to deal with an enslaved couple just arrived from Texas. Martínez authorized their settlement under the protection of "an enlightened liberty [...] that our laws had guaranteed them", instructing the *alcalde* to ensure they would "live honestly and subsist from their work".[35] Often on the verge of demographic and economic collapse, due to a revival of attacks by Native Americans from the late 1830s onwards, smallpox and cholera epidemics, filibustering raids and military and political conflicts, the *villa* gladly welcomed these new settlers.[36] After 1848, the newly founded Nuevo Laredo (on the right bank of the Rio Grande) attracted black freedom-seekers such as a man jailed in Laredo who "contrived to break the fetters" and crossed the river. By the late 1850s, its municipal authorities seemed so keen to harbor escaped slaves that several press correspondents in South Texas warned their southwestern readership about "the hospitalities of the Alcalde of the little Mexican town" to enslaved asylum-seekers.[37]

Debating Free Soil's Limits: Immigration Laws and Sojourning Slaves

However, the story of "Emilia" and her son "Guillermo" (as written in Mexican sources) offers an example of the erratic enforcement of Mexico's free-soil policy before the US-Mexican War. Both left their enslaver from Canal Street in New Orleans. After a first attempt to present themselves as free to the captain of a ship had failed, they were secreted aboard the *Petrita* with the assistance of a fifty-three-year-old French hat-maker and Emilia's purported lover, François Michel. The vessel reached Veracruz on 22 July 1844. However, local port administrator Blas Godínez Brito soon arrested Emilia and Guillermo. They were not included in the ship's list of passengers and therefore could not present a *boleto de desembarco*, a requisite for legal entry into Mexico by way of sea. While trying to determine their legal status on US soil under pressure from US consul Francis M. Dimond, the administrator ordered the transfer of Emilia and

[34] AGN, CDS, v.16, f.220-230 and 237-238; UT(A), Benson, Despatches from US Ministers in Mexico, 1823-1906, reel 10, "Mexican Minister of Foreign Relations to US Legation in Mexico, 21 Aug. 1839"; "US Legation in Mexico to McCall, 23 Aug. 1839"; "US Legation in Mexico to Mexican Minister of Foreign Relations, 23 Aug. 1839" and "*idem*, 11 Nov. 1839"; "McCall to US Legation in Mexico, 9 Sep. 1839"; "US Legation in Mexico to Secretary of State John Forsyth Sr., 12 Nov. 1839"; Nichols, *The Limits of Liberty*, 77.

[35] TSLAC, LA (microfilm), folder 149, doc19, 12:84, "Martínez to Alcalde Constitucional de Laredo, Mier, 7 Feb. 1842".

[36] Hinojosa, *A Borderlands Town in Transition,* 45-47 and 96; Leticia Martínez Cárdenas, César Morado Macías, J. Jesús Ávila Ávila, *La Guerra México-Estados Unidos: su Impacto en Nuevo León, 1835-1848* (México: Senado de la Republica, 2003), 91-100.

[37] *The San Antonio Herald*, 15 Dec. 1857; *Nueces Valley Weekly*, 13 Feb. 1858 and 20 March 1858.

Guillermo aboard the schooner *Ana Luisa*. Meanwhile, François Michel petitioned the *Comandancia General* of the department of Veracruz for Emilia's release on the ground that she was his servant ("*criada suya*"). Local officials investigated the affair. Emilia and Guillermo's case eventually reached the Mexican president in mid-August. He granted them freedom by virtue of "having introduced themselves into the waters of the Republic". The Ministry of War and Marine dispatched the presidential decision to Veracruz's *Comandancia General* on 16 August 1844. Godínez Brito received the order five days later, but it was too late, for the pair had already been sent back to New Orleans aboard another schooner named *Rosa Alvina*. The administrator had either ignored the existence of free soil for foreign escaped slaves altogether, or he was aware of it, and, caught between two conflicting pieces of legislation, he considered cracking down on the illegal introduction of foreigners as more important than enforcing free soil. Dimond's pressures – which included threatening the *Petrita*'s captain and crew with legal suits and a ban from entering any US ports – for the delivery of the refugees might also have influenced Godínez Brito's conduct. Although Veracruz's governor Benito Quijano regretted the outcome, he stressed that Godínez's decision did not arise from "a sinister intention but rather a misinformed zeal to fulfill the functions of his office". Soon after, however, the affair was made public and sparked the ire of the liberal press. *El Siglo XIX* contended that a crowd had attempted to rescue Emilia and Guillermo at Veracruz, an account challenged by the official *Diario del Gobierno*.[38]

The port captain's reaction sharply contrasted with his successor's in 1857, when James and George Frisby, two slave sailors, absconded from the vessel *Metacomet* arriving from New Orleans. John T. Pickett, US consul at Veracruz, strove for the arrest of the brothers, eventually securing that of George. However, the port captain refused to detain James, now openly "walking about the streets of the city". According to him, "the deserter had declared himself a slave in New Orleans, and that by the laws of Mexico, he [was] *a free man*". This stance infuriated US minister in Mexico John Forsyth Jr., who deemed it an "impolicy, injustice and invalidity". He contended that if James were white and free, the port captain would not have hesitated in restoring him to the *Metacomet*. Despite acknowledging the legality of Mexico's free-soil policy, Forsyth Jr. suggested to Mexican foreign minister Lerdo de Tejada that it should be limited to slaves "untrammelled by special obligations", and thereby called for an exception concerning "articled seamen" from the US. According to the US minister, granting freedom to runaways like the Frisby brothers would endanger an "increasing and beneficent commerce" between Mexico and the US, considering that many enslaved African Americans were employed aboard ships as cooks, seamen and stewards. Forsyth threatened that such a precedent would inevitably undermine

[38] *El Siglo XIX*, 11 Sep. 1844 and 1 Oct. 1844; *Diario del Gobierno de la República Mexicana*, 29 Sep. 1844; SRE, AEMEUA, 29/2, f.219 "Manuel Crescenci Rejón to Juan N. Almonte, 11 Nov. 1844"; AGN, Movimiento Marítimo, v.12, legajo 4, f.176-178. On Veracruz's US consulate: Ana Lilia Nieto Camacho, "La practica consular en el siglo XIX a través del consulado de Estados Unidos en Veracruz, 1822-1845", *Estudios de Historia Moderna y Contemporánea de México*, 31 (Jan.-June 2006), 5-30. By virtue of Mexican laws on *cartas de seguridad*, vessel captains were personally liable to 100 *pesos* for the falsification of their manifest, as well as 20 *pesos* for each undeclared passenger (Galván Rivera, *Nueva Colección de Leyes y Decretos Mexicanos,* 1111-1120).

commercial (and political) relations between the two countries. However, Mexico's foreign ministry did not give in to the minister's intimidations.[39]

Advocacy of exceptions to free soil did not stem only from US representatives in Mexico, but also from some Mexican officials themselves. In early March 1844, an enslaved man named "Felipe Molin" absconded from George W. Hockley, one of the two commissioners (along with Samuel M. Williams) sent by the Republic of Texas to negotiate an armistice with Mexico. On their way back, the self-emancipated slave sought refuge in the city of Matamoros but was soon detained by soldiers from the local *Cuartel de Zapadores*. While jailed, Felipe lodged a request for *amparo* with the *Prefectura del Norte de Tamaulipas* based on the slave trade ban of 1824 and article 9 of the *Bases Orgánicas*. Prefect Jorge López de Lara backed Felipe's petition and began lobbying for his liberation. Manuel Rodríguez de Cela, the General commanding the garrison of Matamoros, disagreed. In his opinion, the two commissioners were protected by diplomatic immunity. As such, their "right of transit" with slaves was to be protected. To Rodríguez de Cela, implementing free soil in Felipe's case would undermine "the dignity of the Supreme Government and the honor of the Republic", along with violating a certain military ethos and generating serious tensions between the US and Mexico. Local military officers and *vecinos*, among them Molin's lawyer and the town's *Juez de Hacienda* (both of them had rescued the man before his arrest), eventually raised $800 to secure Felipe's freedom. Sailing back to Galveston, Hockley and Williams left Matamoros without Felipe, but with a fortune in their pockets.[40] Five years later, the sojourning slave Bock was granted formal freedom by the Federal District's government in Mexico City.

By contrast with pre-1848 ambiguities, Mexico's complete refusal to consider any purported "rights of travel" (or "sojourner laws") for slaveholders in its free-soil territory after the US-Mexican War, thus putting an end to the liminal condition of sojourning slaves, coincided with a very similar and simultaneous process in the US North.[41]

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[39] UT(A), Benson, Despatches from US Ministers in Mexico, 1823-1906, reel 21, "Forsyth Jr. to Cass, 27 July 1857" and "Forsyth Jr. to Lerdo de Tejada, 27 July 1857"; Schwartz, *Across the Rio to Freedom*, 51-54. Under Gadsden's exclusionary policy, sailors were the only class of African Americans protected by US consuls in Mexico for the sake of commercial interests.

[40] MAE(C), General Woll, v.22 (180 PA-AP/22), "Armistice du Texas, Juin 1843-Mars 1844", f.269-274; MAE(C), General Woll, v.8 (180 PA-AP/8), "Correspondance particulière, M. De Cela à Cortazar", f.17-18; *Northern Standard*, 22 May 1844; *The Weekly Despatch,* 5 Nov. 1844; Nichols, "The Limits of Liberty", 130. Felipe Molin's eventual freedom through popular subscription is reminiscent of Anthony Burns' experience in Boston.

[41] *El Arco Iris*, 24 July 1849; *Daily Crescent of New Orleans*, 20 Aug. 1849. See also the story of Pancho, a South-Carolina born "negro cook", soon after the US-Mexican War: "Narrative of the First Trip from San Antonio, Texas, to El Paso, Mexico, No.I", *Appletons' Journal: a Magazine of General Literature*, v.4, issue 89 (Dec. 1870), 703. On slavery and the legal principle of "right of transit": Judith Kelleher Schafer, *South of Freedom: Manumission and Enslavement in New Orleans, 1846-1862* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2003), 15-33; William S. Kiser, *Borderlands of Slavery: the Struggle over Captivity and Peonage in the American Southwest* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017), 27.

Mexico's Free Soil and Freedom Suits in the US

The legitimacy and the boundaries of Mexico's free soil were debated not only in Mexican territory, but also occasionally north of the border, to the (potential) benefit of slaves themselves. After 1836, some slaves in US territory endeavored to secure freedom using Mexican free-soil policy, especially bondspeople and "sojourning slaves" who had set foot in Texas while under Mexican rule. From March 1843 to April 1847, an African-born enslaved woman named Isabella petitioned for her freedom in Louisiana's Fifth Judicial District Court (St Mary's Parish) as well as in the Supreme Court. Isabella stood among the many Africans who had been smuggled into Texas in 1835 by slave trader James Fannin. Following her arrival, Isabella was held in the Mexican department as a slave by New York-born Thomas Gates. In March 1836, however, Gates fled the advancing Mexican army to Louisiana with Isabella. In the US, a heavily indebted Gates sold the woman to a certain Milton Johnson. Upon Johnson's death in 1840, his estate administrator John Carson ceded Isabella to slaveholder William C. Dwight for $700. The transaction seemed to go smoothly at first, but after learning about Isabella's past presence in Mexican Texas, Dwight refused to pay the second planned installment. Peter Pecot, another interested buyer, also showed some reluctance to acquire Isabella, although he eventually consented to the transaction after receiving Carson's assurances of indemnification if Isabella were to be freed from slavery. Soon after, Isabella filed a freedom suit on the grounds of having been "illegally, unjustly and willfully held as a slave" from the moment she had touched Mexican soil, as well as having been subsequently introduced as a bondswoman into the US, in contradiction with the 1807 federal ban on slave importation. After years of litigation, Louisiana's Supreme Court eventually rejected Isabella's arguments on appeal. It ruled that slavery was tolerated in Texas before 1836 and considered that the introduction of slaves into the US in the context of the "Runaway Scrape" did not violate the 1807 federal ban on the foreign slave trade, since refugees had been fleeing from a "hostile" army in a state of exception. Isabella's claim to be a free refugee from slavery by virtue of Mexico's free soil was thus flatly rejected.[42]

Other refugees were more successful. The same year that Isabella was smuggled into Texas, Cuggoe, an enslaved man (likely of Yoruba origin), absconded

[42] RSPP, Petition n°20884339, "Isabella, a woman of color, to the Hon. The District Court of the Firth Judicial District of the State of Louisiana, 20 March 1843-5 April 1847", also in Ernest Obadele-Starks, *Freebooters and Smugglers: The Foreign Slave Trade in the United States after 1808* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2007), 125; Merritt M. Robinson, *Reports of cases argued and determined in the Supreme Court of Louisiana, volume V, from 29 May to 30 September 1843* (New Orleans: The Reporter, 1845), 484-485, "Carson v. Dwight and another"; Sean M. Kelley, "Blackbirders and Bozales: African-born Slaves on the Lower Brazos River of Texas in the Nineteenth Century", *Civil War History*, v.54/4 (Dec. 2008), 418. Likewise, Thomas Scott, "a man of color", filed a suit for his freedom at the St-Louis Circuit Court in 1848. His enslaver James Harrison had hired him out in August 1847 to Cesar St Vrain, a trader active in Santa Fé (New Mexico), where he was kept for about five months. Arguing that slavery was illegal in New Mexico at the time of his stay, Scott contended (unsuccessfully) that he was entitled to freedom "according to the laws of the land" (RSPP, Petition n°21184808).

from his enslaver in Alabama, W.E. Price, and crossed the Sabine River to Mexican Texas. Twenty-one years later, now a resident of Walker County (Texas), Price came across the runaway and re-enslaved him. With the assistance of a white settler, James Davis, Cuggoe filed a petition for his freedom at the District Court of nearby Polk County, arguing that he had settled in Texas "under the Mexican government", when free soil applied. In turn, Price turned to the State Legislature, deeming Cuggoe's claim for freedom "wholly contrary to the Constitution of the Republic of Texas", and requesting the passage of a law providing for the arrest and rendition of the "many other negroes" who had absconded to Texas before 1836. The Legislature's Judiciary Committee turned down both his demands, arguing that legislation on the subject was unnecessary, since District County Courts were the "proper tribunals" for such questions. Cuggoe's freedom was thereby confirmed, validating the retroactive and emancipatory effect of Mexico's free soil.[43]

From the Texas Revolution to the US-Mexican War, then, the extent – if not the existence – of Mexico's free soil and formal freedom for self-emancipated slaves continued to be debated *on paper*. This involved a wide range of actors, from Court judges in the US South to Mexican military and port officials. But even more importantly, the liberty of blacks seeking refuge from bondage in Mexico was also contested *in practice,* by threats of re-enslavement by filibusters from the US South as well as larger (geo)political conflicts (see below).

Black Freedom-Seekers and their Contested Settlement in Mexico

The experiences of escaped African Americans in Mexico gave rise to two conflicting myths, which render historical investigation problematic.[44] On the one hand, defenders of slavery usually portrayed the settlement of self-emancipated slaves south

[43] *Journal of the Senate of Texas: Eighth Legislature* (Austin: John Marshall & Co., 1860), 159; RSPP, Petition n°11585903 ("W.E. Price to the Senate and House of Representatives of the State of Texas in session at Austin, Dec. 1859", Records of the Legislature, Memorials and petitions, RG100, TSLAC); Harold Schoen, "The Free Negro in the Republic of Texas I", *Southern Historical Quarterly*, v.39/4 (1936), 297. "Cudjoe" was a common Akan day name referring to Monday, see: Peter Charles Hoffer, *Cry Liberty: The Great Stono River Slave Rebellion of 1739*, (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 45. Debates on the retroactivity of Mexico's free soil did not only apply to fugitives from slavery like Cuggoe. Harriet, an enslaved woman's daughter born in the summer of 1827 on the Brazos, successfully filed a request for her freedom at Bexar County's District Court in 1852. The court ruled (much to the surprise of the northern press) that, like her, any children born of enslaved parents in Mexican Texas after the publication of the Constitution of Coahuila y Tejas (1827), which provided for the freedom of enslaved woman's womb (*libertad de vientres*), and before the Texas Constitution of 1836 would be considered free. The southwestern press was concerned that the ruling, "if confirmed in the Supreme Court, will operate [...] to declare several thousands of blacks free". *South-Western American*, 14 July 1852; *Texas State Gazette*, 17 July 1852; *The Anti-Slavery Bugle*, 28 Aug. 1852; *Christian Watchman and Reflector*, 2 Sep. 1852; *Friends' Review; a Religious, Literary and Miscellaneous Journal*, 4 Sep. 1852.

[44] Jeffrey R. Kerr-Ritchie, *Freedom Seekers: Essays on Comparative Emancipation* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2014), 35.

of the Rio Grande in a bleak light, as they sought to demonstrate the degradation of freed slaves in free-soil territories, the superiority of slave labor and Mexico's cultural inferiority. Indeed, to many Southerners, the Mexican borderlands were a testing ground for claims of southern civilizational superiority.[45] On the other hand, US abolitionists and anti-slavery proponents held a quite optimistic view of settlement across the border, stemming from Mexico's reified image as a beacon of freedom. For instance, the radical Republican and representative of the Ohio Western Reserve at the US Congress (1838-1858) Joshua Reed Giddings described the arrival of the *mascogos* in northern Coahuila as idyllic: "Mexico was free! No slave clanked his chains under its government. [...] In that beautiful climate, they found a rich, productive soil. Here they halted, examined the country, and finally determined to locate their new homes in this most romantic portion of Mexico".[46] Consequently, reconstituting the experiences of escaped slaves in nineteenth-century Mexico remains a difficult task, which historians have only recently begun to attempt.[47]

Reaching Black Communities along the Gulf and in Coahuila

After the Texas Revolution, Matamoros became the main gateway to liberty for blacks seeking refuge from slavery. According to a contemporary observer in 1836, fugitive slaves numbered "between fifty and a hundred in the city", although many of them temporarily fled when the Texas commissioners sought to retrieve them after San Jacinto. Some white Southerners assumed that the port city would serve as a final destination for their runaway slaves, joining free blacks who had emigrated or been forced into exile, including manumitted slaves from Texas.[48] Many observers confirmed this suspicion. A settler from Nueces County, Texas, underlined that "you often meet your own property in Matamoros".[49] In 1842, about 300 Texans raided the borderlands of Mexico in retaliation for general Woll's northern *incursión* to San Antonio, before they were made prisoners at Mier (Tamaulipas) by general Ampudia's troops. The militiamen were later paraded along the way to Matamoros. Crowds of *vecinos* flocked to the patriotic celebration. William Preston Stapp, one of the arrested

[45] Consult for instance: "Rambles about Monclova, part 1", *Southern Literary Messenger, devoted to every department of Literature and the Fine Arts*, v.21/6 (June 1855), 345-353; *The Standard*, 21 Oct. 1854. Occasionally though, slavery's apologists viewed US escaped slaves as an involuntary outgrowth of southern society that would contribute to "civilizing" Mexico: *De Bow's Review, Agricultural, Commercial, Industrial Progress and Resources*, v.29, issue 1 (Jul. 1860), 18 ("Amalgamation" by W.W. Wright).

[46] Joshua R. Giddings, *The Exiles of Florida: or the Crimes Committed by our Government against the Maroons, who fled from South Carolina, and other Slave States, Seeking Protection under Spanish Laws* (Columbus: Follett, Foster & Co., 1858), 325. See also: *The Methodist Quarterly Review*, v.12, Oct. 1860: 554 "The Florida Maroons".

[47] Nichols, *The Limits of Liberty*, ch.3, 6 and 7; Cornell, "Citizens of Nowhere".

[48] *Texas Sentinel*, 26 Feb. 1840; Adalberto J. Argüelles, *Reseña del Estado de Tamaulipas, 1810-1910* (Ciudad Victoria: Tip. del Gobierno del Estado, 1910), 128; R.M. Potter, "Escape of Karnes and Teal from Matamoros", *Texas Historical Association*, v.IV, n°2 (Oct. 1900), 73 and 78.

[49] Paul Schuster Taylor, *An American-Mexican Frontier, Nueces County, Texas* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1934), 33.

raiders, recalled seeing "the ebony visages of runaway slaves from Texas, who find refuge and protection from the philo-negrists of this place".[50] Thomas Green saw "a number of negroes who had absconded from Texas", arguing that they were doing "vastly worse" in Mexico.[51] When a survey of the population of Matamoros had been conducted a year earlier, local African American residents had been listed in a specific section. To be sure, not all of them were included: only men were mentioned (twenty "*negros*"), and the survey likely omitted the less socially and economically integrated black residents of the city's outskirts, where black freedom-seekers often resided. The registered "*negros*" had been residing in Matamoros for about five years on average. Most of them were small artisans, including barbers, carpenters, masons, tailors or coachbuilders, while others worked as *labradores* and *jornaleros*.[52] Matamoros was an especially attractive location. First, the expanding port city's economy required both skilled and unskilled labor. Foreign manufactured products were imported to Mexico through the Delta, while the latter provided an outlet to a flourishing commercial economy in the lower Rio Grande region (from Camargo to the Gulf), which exported cotton, leather, hides and meat, as well as lead and silver extracted from the mines of Vallecillo and Cerralvo (Nuevo León).[53] Second, as shown by parish records, integration into Mexican society (for instance through intermarriage) in Matamoros was accessible for people of African origin, while black freedom-seekers could count on effective social networks of support in case of necessity, as suggested by Felipe Molin's aforementioned experience.[54] The residents of Matamoros "always have been deadly hostile to every American unless he is a negro or mulatto", concluded a US consul just before the US Civil War. The black colony of Matamoros grew accordingly.

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[50] William Preston Stapp, *The prisoners of Perote: containing a journal kept by the author, who was captured by the Mexicans, at Mier, December 25, 1842, and released from Perote, May 16, 1844* (Philadelphia: Zieber and Company, 1845), 43; Gilberto Miguel Hinojosa, *A Borderlands Town in Transition, Laredo, 1755-1870* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1983), 53-54.

[51] Thomas J. Green, *Journal of the Texian Expedition against Mier* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1845), 122-124 and 431; Nichols, *The Limits of Liberty*, 73-75. Ironically, a newspaper editor from South Carolina had expressed his confidence that "if the invading army [the Somerville expedition] be promptly reinforced, much valuable property of this kind [runaway slaves] will be recovered" (*Farmers' Gazette and Cheraw Advertiser*, 24 Jan. 1843).

[52] AGN, CDS, v.29, f.226, ""Negros" in Distrito del Norte, Secretaría del Gobierno de Tamaulipas, 23 Aug. 1841"; Nichols, *The Limits of Liberty*, 142-143. From the analysis of the collection of *cartas de seguridad*, many African Americans residing in Matamoros in 1841 were not registered in the census (see the Rivier family below).

[53] Miguel Ángel González-Quiroga, "Conflict and Cooperation in the Making of the Texas-Mexico Border, 1840-1880", in Benjamin H. Johnson, Andrew R. Graybill, *Bridging National Borders in North America* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2010), 33-58; Milo Kearney, *More Studies in Brownsville History* (Brownsville: Pan American University at Brownsville, 1989), 46-47; Ernesto Garza Sáenz, *Crónicas de Camargo* (Ciudad Victoria: Universidad Autónoma de Tamaulipas, Instituto de Investigaciones Históricas, 1980), 14.

[54] Many African Americans intermarried with Mexicans in Matamoros and the Northeast. To name a few: Bartolo Passement with Trinidad Farías in 1835 (Nuestra Señora del Refugio, Matamoros, Matrimonios, v 3, 66 [reel 4563845]); Melchor Valenzuela with Margarita Sierra in 1846 (Santiago Apóstol, Monclova, Matrimonios, v.4, 297 [reel 222422]); Drausin Rivier with Macedonia Bernal in 1852 (Sagrario Metropolitano, Monterrey, Matrimonios, v.6, 124 [reel 605181] [accessed: ancestry.com, 8 Oct. 2018].

The 1853 city census registered about 450 "*negros*" and "*mulatos*", out of about 11.000 inhabitants.[55]

Further south along the Huasteca coastal borderlands, the port cities of Tampico and Veracruz became increasingly prominent gateways for runaways. Furthermore, after the US-Mexican War, occurrences of yellow fever declined, making them even more attractive for settlement. In addition to a colonial legacy of slavery and connection to the Black Atlantic, the maritime borderlands continued to receive black emigrants from the US South, Cuba and Caribbean islands such as the French Antilles, all of whom sought a refuge from racial exclusion throughout the nineteenth century.[56] From the spring of 1844 onwards, many of Cuba's *negros expulsados* – who had been banished or emigrated voluntarily in the aftermath of a large slave revolt in Matanzas, the conspiracy of La Escalera and the ensuing crackdown on urban *libres de color* – settled at Tampico, Veracruz and Campeche, where they found employment as casual workers, artisans and shopkeepers.[57] Faced with a revival of racial discrimination and vigilante violence, free blacks in the Attakapas and Opelousas (Louisiana) equally contemplated removal to Mexico during the 1850s. Some formed colonies in the state of Veracruz. In 1857, African Americans from St. Landry Parish founded the Eureka colony, led by Louis Nelson Fouché. Further south, others established the Donato colony at Tlacotalpan, on the Río Papaloapan.[58]

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[55] UT(A), Benson, Despatches from US consuls in Matamoros, 1826-1906, reel 3, "Fitzpatrick to Cass, 6 Jan. 1860"; María Luisa Herrera Casasús, *Raíces Africanas en la Población de Tamaulipas* (Ciudad Victoria: Universidad Autónoma de Tamaulipas, 1998), 69-71.

[56] Carl C. Sartorius, *Mexico, Landscapes and Popular Sketches* (London: Trübner & Co., 1859.), 82; George F.A. Ruxton, *Adventures in Mexico, From Vera Cruz to Chihuahua in the days of the Mexican war* (Oyster Bay: N. Doubleday, 1915), 36; Alexandre Barde, *Histoire des comités de vigilance aux Attakapas* (Saint-Jean-Baptiste: Imprimerie du Meschacébé et de l'Avant-Coureur, 1861), 336-338; Waddy Thompson, *Recollections of Mexico* (New York and London: Wiley and Putnam, 1846), 5; José Enrique Covarrubias, *Visión Extranjera de México, 1840-1867* (México: UNAM/Instituto Mora, 1998), v.1, 72. On black people from the French Antilles in Mexico, see for instance: AGN, CDS, v.85, f.463, "23 Feb. 1850, Légation de France au Mexique, Certificat de nationalité française à Auguste Médéric, nègre" and f.520, "25 Feb. 1850, Légation de France au Mexique, Certificat de nationalité française à Pierre Moris, nègre".

[57] AGN, Movimiento Marítimo, 12/4 (1844). See in particular the ship manifests of the schooners *Dos Hermanas*, *Adela* and *Carmen*. Albert Gilliam witnessed at Tampico "the arrival of some twenty to thirty free exiled negroes from Havana" which, in his opinion, "elicited much attention". Albert M. Gilliam, *Travels Over the Table Lands and Cordilleras of Mexico, During the Years of 1843 and 1844* (Philadelphia: J.W. Moore, 1846), 355. Michele Reid-Vásquez, *The Year of the Lash: Free People of Color in Cuba and the Nineteenth-Century Atlantic World* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2011), 68-97. Many of the Cuban *negros expulsados* declared their professions to be "*labrador*", "*lavandera*", "*carbonero*", "*carpintero*", "*acerrador*", "*zapatero*", "*sastre*", "*falabastero*", "*platero*", "*albañil*", "*calderatero*", "*vendedor de ropas*".

[58] Cornell, "Citizens of Nowhere", 372; Rachel Adams, *Continental Divides: Remapping the Cultures of North America* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 71; Mary Niall Mitchell, *Raising Freedom's Child: Black Children and Visions of the Future after Slavery* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2010), 29; Schwartz, *Across the Rio to Freedom*, 40-43; Sidney J. Lemelle, "The "Circum-Caribbean" and the Continuity of Cultures: the Donato Colony in Mexico, 1830-1860", *The Journal of Pan African Studies*, v.6, n°1 (July 2013), 65.

Refugees from slavery settling on the Caribbean coast were almost undistinguishable from other countless black residents, and were sheltered – geographically and demographically – from Texan filibusters.[59] For instance, on Veracruz's coast at the close of the eighteenth century, the vast majority of Tamiahua's population was composed by free *pardos* dedicated to fishing, soldiering and subsistence cultivation. Some of them were descendants of fugitive slaves who had been illicitly smuggled through the Panuco and Tuxpan rivers or had survived from shipwrecks. Given this fact, it is unsurprising that when a slave ship ran aground near Cabo Rojo (Veracruz) in 1858, at the extremity of Tamiahua's lagoon, local officials rushed to support the smuggled bondspeople. *Licenciado* Ramón María Nuñez and Ozuluama's *Jefe Político* endeavored to rescue them from their enslavers (the outcome of which remains unknown) by emphasizing the free-soil provision of the 1857 federal Constitution.[60] Mexican civilian and military administrations along the Gulf coast became staunchly attached to the defense of free soil, especially after the treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. In August 1855, John T. Pickett, US consul at Veracruz, underlined that "there [were] here a number of refugiated negro slaves from the States of Louisiana, Texas [...] banished from the United States", but considered by the local authorities as "worthy and peaceful Mexican citizens".[61] Some years later, in a letter to Jefferson Davis, he recalled that "during [his] long residence as US consul at Veracruz, [he] never succeeded in reclaiming by intervention of local authority a single negro deserter", while he "scarcely ever failed to have the white sailor returned promptly", thus providing proof that "Mexico [was] thoroughly abolitionized".[62]

Besides an almost complete protection from re-enslavement, black refuge-seekers along the Gulf seemingly did not face significant objections to their social integration. Between Huamantla and Orizaba, a North American traveler met a black driver named Sam, previously from Texas, who asserted that escaped slaves from the Lone Star State and Louisiana often intermarried with local Mexicans and European immigrants.[63] Furthermore, in continuity with the colonial era – when militias of *pardos* represented an essential component of New Spain's coastal defense –

[59] For instance, a US army lieutenant, Daniel Harvey Hill, argued that "a large portion of the Vera Cruz population is made up of negroes, presenting all the distinctive features, habits and manners of the negroes in the United States". Nathaniel Cheairs Hugues Jr., Timothy D. Johnson (ed.), *A fighter from way back: the Mexican War Diary of Lt. Daniel Harvey Hill, 4th artillery, USA* (Kent, Ohio: The Kent State University Press, 2002), 95.

[60] Filiberta Gómez Cruz, "La Población Afrodescendiente de la región de Tamiahua: la Pesca y la Resistencia a tributar a finales del Siglo XVIII", *Ulua*, 19 (2012), 147-164; María Herrera Casasús, *Presencia y Esclavitud del Negro en la Huasteca* (México: Porrúa, 1989), 25-26 and 70; Raymond A. Hall, *An Ethnographic Study of Afro-Mexicans in Mexico's Gulf Coast: Fishing, Festivals and Foodways* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 2008), 28-31.

[61] UT(A), Benson, Despatches from US Consuls in Veracruz, 1822-1906 (microfilm), reel 6, "Pickett to Arzamendi, 12 Aug. 1855".

[62] LOC, Confederate States of America Records (online), reel 5 (microfilm edition), [https://www.loc.gov/item/mss16550005/, accessed 30 April 2018], f.177-193, "Pickett to Davis, 11 Jan. 1864" (quotes: f.189).

[63] Edward Taylor, *Anahuac: or Mexico and the Mexicans, Ancient and Modern* (London: Longman, Green, Longman and Roberts, 1861), 36 and 307-308.

professional and volunteer soldiering became such a common occupation for self-emancipated men that rumors spread throughout the US that the latter were "immediately seized and enrolled in the Mexican army".[64] Foreign travelers underscored the presence of black people in the Mexican armies and militias, such as Robert A. Wilson, who met "one of them [who] held the post of captain".[65] While Mexican natives generally met military recruitment with reluctance, for black asylum-seekers, a military career could represent a shortcut to social integration and formal freedom, as Sarah Cornell has convincingly argued.[66] With the support of high-ranking officials, about fifty black people from New Orleans – locally known as "*los Orleaneses*" – requested their naturalization following the US-Mexican War, "as a compensation for the sacrifices that [they] had made" for Mexico during the conflict.[67]

Escaped slaves also settled in another significant African American community in Coahuila established by *mascogos* originally from the US in the wake of the US-Mexican War.[68] Migrating from the Indian Territory to Mexico alongside Seminoles and Kickapoos in 1850, the exiled *mascogos* formally negotiated their settlement with Mexican borderland officials in exchange for military service, a policy of refuge resembling Spanish Florida's approach to runaways from the British colonies.[69] El Moral, between Piedras Negras and the *colonia* of Monclova Viejo, became their first

[64] Stapp, *The Prisoners of Perote,* 43; *New Orleans Daily Crescent*, 1 Nov. 1854; Ben Vinson III, *Bearing Arms for His Majesty: Free-Colored Militia in Colonial Mexico* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002).

[65] Robert A. Wilson, *Mexico and its religion: with incidents of travel in that country during parts of the years 1851-52-53-54, and historical notices of events, connected with places visited* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1855), 311.

[66] *Periódico Oficial del Estado de Durango. El Registro Oficial*, 27 Sep. 1846; Cornell, "Citizens of Nowhere", 368; Timo Schaefer, "Citizen-Breadwinners and Vagabond-Soldiers: Military Recruitment in Early Republican Southern Mexico", *Journal of Social History*, v.46, n°4 (2013), 953-970.

[67] AGN, CDS, v.130, f.174-175, "Díez de Bonilla to Gobernador de Querétaro, 1 Aug. 1853"; f.178-81, "Dupuis to Prefecto de San Juan del Río, 22 July 1853"; *ibid*., v.145, f.298-300, "Oficio del Gobierno de Querétaro a Manuel Díez de Bonilla" and "Carta de seguridad y filiación de Francisco Dupnis [sic], español, 1 Aug. 1853"; *ibid.*, v.29, f.212-226, "Gobierno de Tamaulipas to Sebastián Camacho, Ministro de Relaciones Exteriores, 23 Aug. 1841"; Nichols, *The Limits of Liberty,* 77-78.

[68] The *mascogos* were descended from enslaved people who had escaped from the British colonies and joined Seminole Natives in Spanish Florida during the eighteenth century. Following Florida's annexation by the US in 1821, the Seminoles were first forced to decline accepting new runaways (1823), before the federal government ordered their removal to the Indian Territory (Indian Removal Act of 1830, Treaty of Payne's Landing in 1832). Resistance to these injunctions sparked the Second Seminole War (1835-1842). After being defeated, the Seminoles were forced to cohabit with Creek Natives in the Indian Territory, who often enslaved them. Aware that they were seeking refuge outside of the US, the Mexican authorities had made official contact with the Seminoles and their black allies as early as 1843.

[69] In the wake of the US-Mexican War, the Mexican federal state launched overarching reforms, especially concerning its northeastern border. A Department of Colonization was established (1848), which emphasized the settlement of *terrenos baldíos* (empty lands) in the northern borderlands. Border defence underwent substantial reforms as well. Abandoning the old presidial system, a new plan of military colonies for northern Mexico was laid out, which included the formation of seven *colonias* on its eastern front.

settlement in Coahuila. By the end of 1851, the Seminoles and *mascogos* had received four *sitios de ganado mayor* formerly pertaining to the Sánchez Navarro family (although abandoned for a long time due to Native American incursions) as a reward for their military service against Comanches and Apaches. The Black Seminoles settled at Nacimiento de los Negros, near Múzquiz (or Santa Rosa), where they soon began planting maize and sugarcane, partially converted to Roman Catholicism and hispanicized their names.[70] From the outset, the *mascogo* community constituted a source of annoyance for Texas slaveholders. As lieutenant Duff C. Green put it, the settlement was "very injurious to the slave interests of Texas, as runaways will always find a safe home".[71] Some self-emancipated slaves already in Mexico as well as new runaways joined the Black Seminoles, benefitting from some of the rights they had negotiated with the Mexican authorities for their settlement, such as land, instruments for cultivation and religious and school instruction. However, white southerners routinely exaggerated the community's magnetic effect on fugitive slaves. In October 1851, a Texan returning from the Mexican borderlands falsely assessed the number of escaped slaves from Texas among the *mascogos* as being 500, an inaccuracy given that the black colony itself did not amount to such a population.[72]

As the closure of official channels for the rendition of escaped slaves in Mexico became each year more evident, especially after 1848, Southwestern slaveholders often launched armed expeditions across the Mexican border to retrieve runaways with the explicit support of Texas government officials and southern public opinion. In 1859, an editor in western Texas openly encouraged "bold and enterprising men in our State" to violate Mexican sovereignty by organizing a large party aimed at crossing the border to "bring away the large number of fine likely runaways known to be not far over the line, forming a pretty respectable African colony".[73] Many slaveholders felt empowered by such discourses. When the final report of a "Committee of Investigation" regarding border incidents since the US-Mexican War commissioned by the Mexican government was released in 1873, it documented only three cases of abduction of

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[70] UT(A), Briscoe, SA, XLV, 1-194. For more on the *mascogo* migration to Mexico: Kenneth W. Porter, *The Black Seminoles: History of a Freedom-Seeking People* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1996), 124-162; Kevin Mulroy, *Freedom on the Border: the Seminole Maroons in Florida, the Indian Territory, Coahuila and Texas* (Lubbock: Texas Tech University Press, 1993), 52-107; Martha Rodríguez, *Historias de Resistencia y Exterminio: los Indios de Coahuila durante el Siglo XIX*, (México: CIESAS-INI, 1995), 97-111; Gabriel Izard Martínez, "De Florida a Coahuila: el grupo Mascogo y la presencia de una Cultura Afrocriolla en el Norte de México", *Humania del Sur*, n°3 (2007), 13-24; Eduardo Enríquez Terrazas, José Luis García Valero, *Coahuila: Textos de su Historia* (Saltillo: Gobierno del Estado de Coahuila, 1989), 137-143.

[71] Duff C. Green (ed. Ronnie C. Tyler), "Exploring the Rio Grande: Lt Duff C. Green's Report of 1852", *Arizona and the West*, v.10, n°1 (Spring 1968), 60.

[72] *The Baltimore Sun*, 6 Oct. 1851; Shirley Boteler Mock, *Dreaming with the Ancestors: Black Seminole Women in Texas and Mexico* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2010), 72; Mulroy, *Freedom on the Border*, 61; Obadele-Starks, *Freebooters and Smugglers*, 104; Kerrigan, "Race, Expansion, and Slavery", 283; Porter, *The Black Seminoles*, 150-151. By May 1852, the total population of Nacimiento included 272 individuals, according to the alcalde of Múzquiz: *El Universal*, 9 May 1852.

[73] *New Orleans Daily Crescent*, 14 Feb. 1859, "How to get them back" (original article: *San Antonio Herald*).

African Americans, but countless others were omitted.[74] Slaving raids usually involved small and mobile groups of white slaveholders or mercenaries, although sometimes Native Americans roamed the Mexican borderlands looking for runaways as well, such as two Choctaws who chased a fugitive black man into Mexico during the summer of 1858 before returning empty-handed.[75] These expeditions preyed indiscriminately upon all African Americans regardless of their legal status or nationality. In 1855, a Mexican citizen named Enrique Sánchez was abducted as an escaped slave near Brownsville and transferred to Galveston for sale at public auction, before the Mexican consul at Brownsville managed to free him after seventeen days of detention.[76]

After the US-Mexican War, the magnitude, organization and audacity of slaving raids against black communities in Mexico's Northeast significantly increased. In early November 1851, with the support of Texas governor Peter H. Bell and US Indian agent Marcellus Duval, filibuster Warren Adams gathered troops to attack Monclova Viejo, as well as Morelos and San Fernando de Rosas (two other significant black settlements), "for the purpose of recapturing runaway slaves". Seventeen mercenaries were already camping near Leona, ready to cross the river at any moment. Mexican troops assembled to repel the assailants, after Mexican border soldiers led by Danish-born sub-inspector Edvard Emil Langberg received intelligence from Fort Duncan's colonel Morris. A force of about 150 men was raised, composed by volunteers from the nearby towns of Rosas, Morelos, Allende, Gigedo, Guerrero and Nava. Although they defeated the filibustering company's foray into Coahuila, Adams and his men still managed to abduct an entire family of runaways near Múzquiz, despite the armed assistance of about thirty-five residents to the refugees.[77] Rumors of an invasion by 400 men agitated northern Mexico in 1854, but proved to be a false alarm, unlike the expedition led by James H. Callahan in October 1855.[78] Prior to the Callahan Raid, attempts to negotiate the recovery of escaped slaves between a party of western Texas residents and Langberg had failed, as governor Vidaurri was unwilling to discuss

[74] *Reports of the Committee of Investigation sent in 1873 by the Mexican Government to the Frontier of Texas* (New York: Baker & Godwin, 1875), 178; Gastón García Cantú, *Las Invasiones Norteamericanas en México* (México: Serie Popular Era, 1980). For an exhaustive analysis of these raids: Nichols, *The Limits of Liberty*, 147-169. However, following Kyle Ainsworth's recent quantitative research on instances of capture, self-emancipated slaves still enjoyed a relatively larger chance of avoiding arrest once in Mexico compared to those remaining in Texas. Ainsworth "Advertising Maranda", in Pargas (ed.), *Fugitive Slaves and Spaces of Freedom in North America,* 220-223.

[75] *The Weekly Telegraph*, 11 Aug. 1858.

[76] SRE, AEMEUA, 46/11, f.45-46, "Erdozain to Ministro Plenipotenciaro, 31 Dec. 1855".

[77] SEDNA, L-3254, f.2-13, 16 and 19-25; SRE, LE 1593, "Invasiones de los Indios Bárbaros de los Estados Unidos de América a México, Estudio de las Reclamaciones por la Comisión Pesquisidora de la Frontera del Norte"; Emilio Langberg, *Itinerario de la expedición San Carlos a Monclova el viejo hecha por el coronel d. Emilio Langberg* (Chihuahua: 1852), Días 2-3 and 10 (Noviembre 1851); *El Siglo XIX*, 15 Aug. 1851 and *El Universal*, 17 Aug. 1851 (original article from *Eco de Veracruz*, 10 Aug. 1851); *National Era*, 4 Sep. 1851; *La Patria*, 22 Nov. 1851; *El Constitucional*, 6 Dec. 1851 ; Porter, *The Black Seminoles*, 141-142; Mulroy, *Freedom on the border*, 69-70.

[78] SEDNA, L-4562; AGEC, FSXIX, c.8 f.7 e.9 "Gobierno de Coahuila to Ministro de Gobernación, 5 Oct. 1854".

extradition with private citizens. Callahan, commissioned by Texas governor Elisha M. Pease to police the borderlands, was more receptive to their claims. On 1 October, 111 Texas Rangers crossed the border near Eagle Pass claiming to be pursuing Lipan Apaches. Mexican militiamen – seeing the column as an invading force violating Mexican sovereignty – repelled Callahan's crew at Río Escondido two days later. In their retreat to Texas on 6-7 October, the Rangers looted and burned Piedras Negras.[79] Historians continue to debate whether the raid's goal was to crack down on Lipans or rather to recover escaped slaves. An enigmatic letter from Callahan to Edward Burleson suggests that some members of the expedition were attracted by the promise of spoils in the form of slaves, and that private arrangements to this effect may have been agreed prior to the raid, although the sources provide no definitive evidence.[80] What seems clearer, however, is that contemporaries on both sides of the river perceived enslaving black freedom-seekers as a key factor for the expedition. Lawyer George S. Denison from San Antonio recounted how some of his acquaintances, "confident of having great spoils to divide", decided to take part in the expedition.[81] Across the river, the interpretation was no different, as several testimonies of *vecinos* of Guerrero suggest. Militiaman Evaristo Madero claimed that he had found a diary lost by a Ranger during the battle of Río Escondido stating his intention to abduct "as many negroes he could", which Madero judged to be "what they really wanted". Pablo Hernández, a *lavrador*, likewise recalled asking a shopkeeper the object of the invasion, who without hesitation replied: "to catch the negroes of Santa Rosa".[82]

Forming New Beacons of Freedom

While many self-liberated slaves reached areas which already hosted significant black communities, others formed new beacons of freedom for themselves from scratch, especially in the northeastern borderlands. By contrast with the Gulf, nascent black communities emerged almost *ex nihilo* in the borderlands as a result of the settlement of enslaved refuge-seekers from the US South. In June 1855, the *Southern Literary Messenger* published the "Rambles about Monclova" of a former participant in the US-Mexican War. The town's large African American population, most of them "probably runaways from Texas", caught the attention of the observer, being an "element not common to Mexican towns", in his opinion.[83] Likewise, the looted town of Piedras

[79] SEDNA, L-5538; *Boletín Oficial*, 8 and 19 Oct. 1855; LOC, Frederick Law Olmsted Papers, General Correspondence, 1838-1928, "Douai to Olmsted, 23 Oct. 1855"; Ronnie C. Tyler, "The Callahan Expedition of 1855: Indians or Negroes?", *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, v.70/4 (April 1967), 574-585; Schwartz, *Across the Rio to Freedom*, 34-36; Michael L. Collins, *Texas Devils: Rangers and Regulars on the lower Rio Grande, 1846-1861* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2008), 73-76 and 79-88; Nichols, *The Limits of Liberty*, 196-203.
[80] UT(A), Briscoe, Edward Jr. Burleson Papers, Box 2B158, "Callahan to Burleson, 31 Aug. 1855".
[81] LOC, George S. Denison Papers, "Denison to his mother, 1 July 1855".
[82] UT(A), Briscoe, SA, XLVI, 128-156.
[83] *Southern Literary Messenger, devoted to every department of Literature and the Fine Arts*, v.21/6 (June 1855), 345-353, "Rambles about Monclova, part 1". In Monterrey (Nuevo León), an escaped slave cook from South Texas became known as "don Dionisio de Echevarría" (likely the name of his protector), according to Eagle Pass resident and Young America's advocate Jane

Negras, founded after the US-Mexican War just across Eagle Pass, had by the time of the Callahan Raid become a haven for refugees from slavery, alongside numerous other fugitives who "could not drink water on the other side", as a contemporary resident of San Antonio put it.[84] But the presence of escaped slaves in northern Coahuila was not new. During the early 1840s, for instance, an informal settlement of fugitive slaves existed seven miles away from San Fernando (Zaragoza, Coahuila), adjacent to nearby Cherokee communities who had migrated from the Indian Territory to Mexico.[85] Piedras Negras was mainly inhabited by casual laborers, herders, carriers and *carreteros* engaged in the transit trade for cotton, corn, wool, lead, hides and manufactured goods between Texas and northern Mexico, living mostly in precarious *jacales*, *chamacueros* and *soterraneos*. Before the raid, Frederick L. Olmsted encountered many escaped slaves on the streets of Piedras Negras. In April 1854, he conversed with a Virginia-born self-emancipated slave, a mechanic once forcibly brought to Texas by a trader. The refugee stressed that at least forty fugitive slaves had reached Piedras Negras over the previous three months. Having been in Mexico for at least four years, he was employed alternatively as a muleteer and servant, "could speak Spanish fluently" and had converted to Roman Catholicism, therefore seeming "very well satisfied with the country", notwithstanding his nostalgic desire "to see old Virginia again". His testimony, along with discussions with Mexican witnesses and foreign travelers, convinced Olmsted that most enslaved asylum-seekers in Mexico "could live very comfortably". They prospered through trade, intermarried with the local Mexican population and saw "their rights as fully protected as if they were Mexicans born". According to Olmsted, however, other escaped slaves, being less fortunate, hard-working or skilled, soon found themselves with "nothing to live upon".[86]

Most self-emancipated slaves who settled in the borderlands worked as craftsmen or domestic servants (*criado/a*). African Americans often performed domestic service in the borderlands, such as Melchor Valenzuela, the servant of a certain Bernardo Baker at Mier, Tamaulipas. The eminent *vecinos* Evaristo Madero and Bruno García, in Guerrero, were known to employ self-emancipated enslaved people such as Juan Pérez and Manuel Wones as domestic servants ("*sirvientes a sueldo y ración*") during the late 1850s. In rural areas, fugitives often sought refuge in *ranchos*

McManus Cazneau. Cora Montgomery (Jane McManus Cazneau), *Eagle Pass: or Life on the Border* (New York: Putnam, 1852), 138-140; William T. Kerrigan, "Race, Expansion and Slavery in Eagle Pass, Texas, 1852", *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, v.101 (July 1997-April 1998), 292.

[84] SRE, AEMEUA, 204/6, American and Mexican Joint Commission, n°679, Pedro Tauns vs. The United States: Arguments for the United States, Depositions of Adelaida Van, James B. Ricketts, Amos O. Strickland, Edmund W. Wallace and George W. Brackenridge.

[85] Nichols, "The Limits of Liberty", 192.

[86] Frederick Law Olmsted, *A Journey through Texas: or a Saddle-Trip on the Southwestern Frontier* (New York: Edwards & Co., 1857), 323-329; Nichols, *The Limits of Liberty*, 125-127; Kelley, "Mexico in his head", 717. Catholicism continued to facilitate integration into local Mexican societies. See for instance the request for *amparo* by "José" in China (Nuevo León): TBL, AMC, reel 579, "Juzgado de Paz de China to Prefecto del Distrito de Cadereyta Jiménez, 31 Aug. 1844".

dedicated to husbandry and *haciendas* that produced wheat, maize, cotton, beans, agave and sugarcane, working as low-skilled *jornaleros* and *labradores*, such as Antonio, a slave refugee employed in the *rancho* "La Sanguijuela", located three *leguas* away from Guerrero. Entire families of escaped slaves were sometimes found, such as the Henderson family (comprised of a couple and their four children) in a *rancho* belonging to Juan Longoria Tijerina near Reynosa, Tamaulipas.[87]

African Americans scattered through the northeastern borderlands seemed more exposed to re-enslavement than black freedom-seekers in larger black communities (including the Black Seminole settlement). In November 1852, two foreigners (named in Mexican sources as "Yoche Gitim" and "Hebrain Morrell") tricked Julián Sombra, a black man living in Saltillo, into following them to the military colony of Río Grande under the false promise of a contract as soldier. Instead, the two men forcibly removed Sombra across the Rio Grande through the Pachuache Pass, a well-known crossing point for both runaways and slave-hunters about six miles northeast from Guerrero, as landholder José Rodríguez witnessed. Fortunately, Julián managed to escape from his kidnappers back to the Mexican side.[88] Throughout the borderlands, in places where black communities were either inexistent or emerging, slave refugees were relatively more isolated, and forging local networks of support and *compadres* seemed therefore more essential to securing freedom than along the Gulf coast, as a closer look at El Paso del Norte suggests.[89] An increasing number of black asylum-seekers settled in the border town from the mid-1840s onwards. Two slave refugees who had fled from the Cherokees enlisted in the municipal volunteers units, who defended the town against Apache attacks during the autumn of 1846, while others reportedly fought alongside James Kirker, a scalp-hunter commissioned by the state of Chihuahua.[90] In the *villa*, those who did not escape with relatives or had

[87] SRE, CPN, c.3, e.13, f.1-13 "Justo Treviño, Juzgado de 1a instancia del distrito del norte de Tamaulipas to Comisión Pesquisidora del Norte, 13 Jan. 1873". Through focused on abductions, the aforementioned files of the Commission provide less visible and spectacular information on the economic and social networks developed by escaped slaves in the *villas del norte*. SRE, AEMEUA, 32/3, f.15-19; SRE, LE 1596, f.112-114, "Alcalde Primero de Guerrero to Prefectura de Rio Grande, 28 March 1859 and 15 April 1859"; AGEC, FSXIX, c.2 f.10 e.2, "Espinoza to Alcalde Primero de Guerrero, 18 April 1859" and c.4 f.1 e.13 "idem, 12 Sep. 1859"; Nichols, "The Limits of Liberty", 188.

[88] SRE, LE 1595, f.95, "Presidencia del Ayuntamiento de Guerrero to Gobierno de Coahuila, 21 June 1851" and f.123 ("ídem, 12 Nov. 1852"); LOC, AMG (microfilm), c.5, e.138, "Serapio Fragoso to Presidente de Guerrero, 11 Dec. 1852".

[89] Many African Americans hispanicized their names in Northern Mexico, such as "Miguel Cooper" or "Miguel Copano" in Cadereyta Jiménez (Nuevo León): TBL, AMC, reel 579, "Gobierno de Nuevo León to Alcalde primero de Cadereyta Jiménez, Monterrey, 21 Jan. 1850"; AGN, CDS, v.85, f.99, "Gobierno de Nuevo León, 27 Jan. 1850, on Juan Anderson and Miguel Cooper". On local networks of support and "membership from below" to Mexican society: Cornell, "Citizens of Nowhere", 366-373; Omar Valerio-Jiménez, *River of Hope: Forging Identity and Nation in the Rio Grande Borderlands* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013), 228.

[90] George F. A. Ruxton, *Ruxton of the Rockies* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1950), 162; Ralph A. Smith, "The Scalp Hunter in the Borderlands, 1835-1850", *Arizona and the West*, v.6, n°1 (1964), 7. In 1853, Green, "a tall black" also escaped to El Paso from a party of Cherokees travelling to California after "he quarrelled with some of the company", before he was re-enslaved back to San Antonio and then Bastrop (*Tri-Weekly State Times*, 6 Dec. 1853).

previously lost all family ties through forced migrations sometimes created new families with Mexican *fronterizos*. In 1850, with the complicity of some officers at Fort Duncan, a slaveholder from Brenham retrieved one of his slaves who had absconded to the city and married a Mexican woman, confronting the man's new family-in-law in the process. A year later, the abducted refugee escaped again from Brenham with other bondspeople and returned to the town.[91] Thus, even as far as El Paso del Norte, self-liberated bondspeople always lived on the verge of re-enslavement and relied on their local community's support. Traveler Albert D. Richardson recalled witnessing a fierce conflict during the autumn of 1859 between locals and some Texans who were attempting "to carry back an alleged fugitive after the alcalde had tried the case and declared the negro free". As escaped slaves generally "found sympathy and refuge" in El Paso del Norte, local residents and filibusters exchanged "a good deal of random shooting". This time though, the slaving expedition was defeated, and its members arrested and fined.[92]

The often welcoming attitude of Mexicans towards African Americans in the borderlands frequently provoked astonishment and reprobation among white southerners. [93] However, several developments threatened to undermine the relationship between local Mexicans and self-liberated African Americans. In 1855, commandant Langberg contended that Mexican borderlanders had begun to resent the presence of escaped slaves due to the perpetual insecurity generated by raids.[94] Additionally, as stressed by Nichols, Mexican residents and authorities began to resent the involvement of some black freedom-seekers in smuggling activities along the border, such as the band of horse and cattle rustlers (*abigeos*) led by the "negro Francisco" and "others of the same color", active between Piedras Negras and Guerrero during the early 1850s. Escaped slaves who had settled among *mascogos* had a notorious reputation as *abigeos*. By the end of the decade, governor Santiago Vidaurri recommended that the Black Seminoles should distance themselves from them.[95] Some African Americans around Múzquiz seemed so poorly integrated into formal socioeconomic structures that local officials described them as "drawn to vagrancy and vice" ("*entregados a la vagancia y a los vicios*"), suspecting them of petty

[91] SRE, AEMEUA, 32/2, f.235-240, "De la Rosa to Ministro de Relaciones Exteriores, 21 July 1850"; *LaGrange Monument*, 8 Jan. 1851; Obadele-Starks, *Freebooters and Smugglers*, 124; Nichols, *The Limits of Liberty*, 138.
[92] Albert D. Richardson, *Beyond the Mississippi: from the Great River to the Great Ocean, Life and Adventures on the Prairies, Mountains and Pacific Coast* (Hartford: American Publishing, 1867), 244.
[93] See for instance: Josiah Gregg, *Commerce of the Prairies: or, the Journal of a Santa Fé trader, during Eight Expeditions across the Great Western Prairies, and a Residence of Nearly Nine Years in Northern Mexico* (Philadelphia: J.W. Moore, 1851 [1844]), v.2, 91. Teresa Viele also wrote that "this admiration for negroes somewhat disgusted [her] with the Mexicans". Teresa Viele, (ed.) Sandra L. Myres, *Following the Drum, a Glimpse of Frontier Life* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1984), 158.
[94] *El Ómnibus*, 7 Nov. 1855.
[95] AGEC, FSXIX, c.8 f.1 e.1, "Jesús Castillo to Secretario de Gobierno, 1 Aug. 1851"; LOC, AMG, c.5, e.54, "Fragoso to Presidente Municipal de Guerrero, 15 Aug. 1851"; Porter, *The Black Seminoles*, 156; Nichols, *The Limits of Liberty*, 135-136.

theft. The state government recommended that the municipal authorities strive to set them on the "path of morality" (that is, to subsist from their own work), or to otherwise take "energetic measures" ("*enérgicas providencias*") against them. At the same time, rumors spread that black colonists living in central Coahuila were to be removed to Mazatlán on the Pacific coast, under the joint pressure of both Seminoles and local Mexicans.[96]

Considering the increasing boldness of slaving raids in the immediate borderlands combined with the defiance they sometimes inspired among local authorities and residents, it is unsurprising that many escaped slaves "[began] to feel insecure near the borders of the United States" and opted instead to settle far away from the border.[97] In September 1846, traveler George F.A. Ruxton "was accosted by a negro, a runaway slave from the United States", who was now employed as a cook in Aguascalientes.[98] Like him, other escaped slaves "who have got far into the interior are said to be almost invariably passably well".[99] After 1836, the changing nature of land and maritime transportation also served to expand the scale of settlement of escaped slaves. Self-emancipated slaves ventured as far as the Pacific coast of Mexico, as suggested by James Williams's experience. Born a slave in Maryland, James was thirteen when he absconded to Pennsylvania in 1838. Following the passage of the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, he left for California, attracted both by the Gold Rush and prospects of racial tolerance, just like many other African Americans who sought better fortune in the west.[100] Sailing via Panama, James arrived in San Francisco in May 1851. He settled for some time in Sacramento before mining at Kelsey's Diggins. Back in Sacramento, he "bought out the goodwill and fixtures of a large restaurant". Nonetheless, James got into trouble after enticing an enslaved woman away from her enslaver. For this reason, he was forced to leave for San Francisco, where "a party of Missourians" attacked him. In 1852 (incidentally the very year that California passed its own Fugitive Slave Law, despite formally constituting a free state), James sailed from California to Guaymas (Sonora) on the Mexican Pacific coast. In the port city, he "was robbed by a woman" while resting in bed and spent "some three or four weeks without any means at all to depend upon". He managed to get a passage to Mazatlán (Sinaloa), further south, where "all [he] had to live on was a sixpence a day", which he obtained

[96] YU, Beinecke, LAGP, Box 5, Cuarta Época de Apuntes y Noticias para la historia de Coahuila 1850-1873, 2/2, "Gobierno [...] de Nuevo León y Coahuila to Primera Autoridad Politica de Múzquiz, s.f. 1856". On *abigeato*: Octavio Herrera Pérez, *Breve Historia de Tamaulipas* (México: Colegio de México, 1999), 161-163.
[97] *The South-Western*, 7 Nov. 1855.
[98] Ruxton, *Adventures in Mexico,* 143. After the Texas Revolution, the presence of black freedom-seekers in central Mexico became more common. In the village of Lagos (Guanajuato), traveller Albert Gilliam, in 1843-1844, "found an American negro at the Casa de la Diligencia", a former servant named Simon, a native from Louisiana, whose "English was very broken, like that of a Frenchman". Now in Mexico, Simon was grinding the organ to make a living, after an Italian had taught him, "travelling through Mexico with that instrument". Gilliam, *Travels Over the Table Lands and Cordilleras of Mexico*, 43.
[99] Olmsted, *A Journey through Texas*, 323-324.
[100] Asa Bement Clarke, *Travels in Mexico and California* (Boston: Wright & Hasty, 1852), 36; Bayard Taylor, *Eldorado, or Adventures in the Path of Empire* (New York: Putnam, 1860), 38.

by begging from sailors. Continuously under the threat of arrest by local police on charges of vagrancy, James left for Talcahuano (Chile) before returning to San Francisco during the fall of 1853, subsequently working between California and Nevada as a wage laborer in mines, as the owner of a restaurant and a junk shop, and even as an express wagon driver.[101]

Defending fugitive slaves in Mexico's Northeast

Beyond a mere nominal commitment to free-soil policy, Mexican state and borderlands officials after 1848 usually sought to protect slave refugees in three ways: by tolerating their settlement despite their lack of requisites for legal residency; by defending them from raiders seeking to re-enslave them; and by relocating them for, ostensibly, better living conditions and personal safety.

As it became evident that US officials in Mexico would not consent to deliver nationality certificates to self-emancipated slaves, many Mexican officials turned a blind eye to the fact that most US slave refugees did not carry (and even did not seek to obtain) *cartas de seguridad* – just like many other foreigners – although some were exceptionally fined or jailed for this reason.[102] They thus forged a state of legal exception for many self-emancipated slaves. This informal freedom enabled many of the latter to evade the duties associated with Mexican citizenship, such as taxation and militia service.[103] Most municipal authorities *de facto* exempted former slaves from applying for *cartas de seguridad*, such as the *alcalde* of Nadadores (Coahuila) did for three fugitives in 1853.[104] Other officials sometimes automatically sent *cartas* to enslaved asylum-seekers in exchange for (military) services. Eight slave refugees who had reached Matamoros in September 1843 were *ipso facto* granted *cartas* (without any fees) the following year at the initiative of the *Prefectura del Norte de Tamaulipas*, as a recompense for their service in the National Guard, and in view of the fact that "they [were] of low color", did "not recognize any consul", and that "most of them [were]

[101] James Williams (intro. Malcolm J. Rohrbough), *Fugitive Slave in the Gold Rush: Life and Adventures of James Williams* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2002), vii-xiii and 24-25.
[102] Cornell, "Citizens of Nowhere", 367.
[103] This point is made more largely for hacienda tenants by: Timo H. Schaefer, *Liberalism as Utopia: the Rise and Fall of Legal Rule in Post-Colonial Mexico, 1820-1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 97-128.
[104] AGEC, FSXIX, c.1, f.2, e.6, "Presidencia Municipal de Nadadores to Supremo Gobierno de Coahuila, 12 Jan. 1853"; Nichols, *The Limits of Liberty*, 131. Initially limited to the month of January, the legal period for annual renewal was extended in 1854 until the end of March, in order to reduce the consistently high number of foreigners evading the law despite multiple reminders from the federal government. The liberal Constitution of 1857 eventually abolished the requirement for a *carta de seguridad*. Galván Rivera, *Nueva Colección de Leyes y Decretos Mexicanos,* 1111-1120; Macrina Rabadán Figueroa, *Propios y Extraños: la Presencia de los Extranjeros en la Vida de la Ciudad de México, 1821-1900* (México: Porrúa, 2006), 27-28.

insolvent".[105] Some of the free and formerly enslaved African Americans living in Mexico who did apply for a *carta de seguridad* reacted to the gradual closure of US consulates to all black people by attempting to circumvent US non-recognition. Some introduced themselves as "Africans" throughout the country, such as Tomás Murphy at El Paso, Alejandro Jardi, a thirty-two-year-old *lavrador* who settled at San Buenaventura (Coahuila) with his family, and Juan Cifre, an old man residing at Veracruz. All registered as being "*color Moreno*", declaring their fatherland to be "*África*".[106] More generally, African Americans anxious to secure legal protection resorted to a wide range of tactics. For instance, some natives from Louisiana claimed or were reported to be Haitian or French nationals. Born in 1809 at New Orleans, the mason Henry Powell first (unsuccessfully) requested his naturalization as a Mexican citizen in Matamoros in 1837. (By contrast, foreigners in Mexico usually chose not to become Mexican citizens in order to conserve access to diplomatic protection from their native nation).[107] The "*trigueño*" man later applied for *cartas* as a "*Haytiano*", despite the fact that local officials had at least twice registered him as from the US.[108]

The extended Rivier family, settled from 1835 onwards at Matamoros and later across Mexico's Northeast, best illustrates this dynamic. In 1852, the twenty-one-year-old coachbuilder Amaci first applied for a *carta* as an "*Americano*", before presenting himself as a "*súbdito de Haití*" in subsequent demands.[109] Born in 1813 in New Orleans, the carpenter Drausin was initially registered by municipal authorities at Matamoros as "*francés*", when aged twenty-five. In 1841, he successfully requested a *carta de seguridad* directly from the local First Court on the ground of "not having a representative of his nation" in town, thus circumventing the obstacle that his "*color negro*" represented. Yet in subsequent annual renewals of his *carta*, Drausin was referred to alternatively as an "*Americano*" and a "*Norteamericano*".[110] When aged seventeen, the carpenter Cesario was registered as "*francés*" in Matamoros. After the US-Mexican War, now residing between San Buenaventura and Ciénagas (Coahuila),

[105] AGN, CDS, v.37, f.74-77; Nichols, "The Limits of Liberty", 123. Insolvency was a common motive for the occasional free issuance of *cartas de seguridad* to some applicants.
[106] AGN, CDS, v.101, f.197, "Gobierno del Estado de Chihuahua to Ministro de Relaciones, 3 July 1852"; *ibid.*, v.143, f.186-188, "Gobierno de Coahuila to Ministro de Relaciones Exteriores, 30 Oct. 1854"; *ibid*., v.85, f.342, "Filiación del estrangero Juan Cifre, Jefatura del Departamento de Veracruz, 4 Feb. 1850".
[107] Jürgen Buchenau, "Small Numbers, Great Impact: Mexico and its Immigrants, 1821-1873", *Journal of American Ethnic History*, I/1 (2001), 28.
[108] UT(A), Briscoe, MA, XXIV, 41 (1837); *ibid.*, MA, XXIX, 24-32 (1838); AGN, CDS, v.29 f.226; *ibid.*, v.146, f.197-198, "Secretaría del Gobierno de Tamaulipas, 13 Jan. 1854".
[109] AGN, CDS, v.109, f.270-272, "Gobierno de Nuevo León to Ministro de Relaciones Interiores e Exteriores, 1 Feb 1852"; UT(A), Briscoe, MA, LXVI, 192-193, "Filiaciones de los extranjeros que solicitan sus cartas de seguridad para el presente año de 1854"; AGN, CDS, v.146, f.285-286, "Gobierno de Tamaulipas to Ministro de Relaciones Exteriores, 24 Feb. 1854".
[110] UT(A), Briscoe, MA, XXIX, 24-32 (1838); AGN, CDS, v.25, f.32-34, "Gobierno de Tamaulipas to Ministro de Relaciones Exteriores, filiación del estrangero Drausin Rivier, 22 April 1841"; AGN, CDS, v.33, f.45, "Gobierno de Tamaulipas to Ministro de Relaciones Exteriores, 20 Jan. 1843"; AGN, CDS, v.45, f.184, "Prefectura del Norte de Tamaulipas, 22 Jan. 1845"; AGN, CDS, v.74, f.157-158; AGN, CDS, v.109, f.270-272; Cornell, "Citizens of Nowhere", 367.

the man applied for a *carta* as a US subject (in 1850) and later as a "*natural de la República de Haití*".[111]

Besides tolerating (illegal) settlement, Mexican federal and local authorities usually combatted, prosecuted and sometimes jailed foreigners or Mexican nationals assisting or conducting slaving raids, along with providing support to slave refugees when danger loomed, as Nichols has forcefully argued.[112] Authorities at the federal level frequently addressed the issue. In January 1850, four soldiers from Fort Duncan abducted the aforementioned slave refugee Antonio in the *villa* of Guerrero, with the complicity of three Mexican peasants and despite the opposition of some local citizens led by the Gonzales family. When foreign minister De la Rosa requested an explanation from Clayton, US officers on the Texas-Mexico border denied the charges and blamed private citizens for the raid.[113] Officials at a local level also sought to assist slave refugees, such as sub-inspector Juan Manuel Maldonado, who once petitioned the government of Texas for the liberation of two African Americans abducted near Piedras Negras.[114] Municipal authorities were the most proactive in providing support to self-emancipated slaves, with some particularly zealous officials such as Manuel Flores, head of the *presidencia municipal* (municipality) of Guerrero**.** On a spring day of 1851, a young *labrador* named Jesús Rodríguez came rushing into Flores' office. He had spotted some miles away from the village an "*Americano"* (whose named turned out to be James Bartlett) riding a horse and dragging on the ground a former slave, Manuel Bonis (or "Wones"), who had absconded from Bartlett's brother in Matagorda County. Manuel did not speak Spanish well but could count on other African Americans like Vivian, a man who served as his interpreter. With the complicity of a Mexican (who would later "flee upon the hills"), Bartlett captured Manuel and retreated back to Texas, eastward from Guerrero. Meanwhile, Flores quickly enlisted three local residents, Vicente Garza, Felix Cano and Pedro Guerrero, to track the footprints left by the kidnapper and the abductee. They found the slave refugee's hat before coming across Bartlett and shooting him through his left lung after he refused to surrender. (Bartlett later died from his wounds).[115] Over the following months,

[111] UT(A), Briscoe, MA, XXIX, 24-32; AGN, CDS, v.125, f.15-33; AGN, CDS v.95, f.250-251, "Gobierno Supremo de Coahuila to Ministro de Relaciones Exteriores, 30 Jan 1851"; AGN, CDS, v.101, f.203-204, "Gobierno Supremo del Estado de Coahuila to Ministro de Relaciones Interiores e Exteriores, 20 April 1852"; AGN, CDS, v.143, f.134, "Cesario Rivier to Comisario Municipal de San Buenaventura, 1 Jan. 1854".

[112] Nichols, *The Limits of Liberty*, 147-169.

[113] AGEC, FCMO, c.5 f.2 e.16, "Francisco Maldonado to comandante Falcón, colonia militar de Rio Grande, 15 Jan.1850"; *ibid.*, c.5 f.2, e.20 "Juan Manuel Maldonado (subinspector) to Varela, 24 Jan. 1850"; SRE, AEMEUA, 32/2, f.42, "De la Rosa to Ministro de Relaciones Exteriores, 20 March 1850"; f.43, "De la Rosa to Clayton, 18 March 1850"; f.74, "De la Rosa to Ministro de Relaciones Exteriores, 23 March 1850"; f.235-240, "De la Rosa to Ministro de Relaciones Exteriores, 21 July 1850"; *ibid.*, 32/3, f.15-9; SRE, LE 1096, f.14, "Cuartel de Ringgold Rio Grande to Cuartel del Departamento General, San Antonio, 18 May 1850".

[114] AGEC, FCMO, c.14 f.9 e.131, "Juan M. Maldonado to Ayuntamiento de Guerrero, 23 Sep. 1851".

[115] AGEC, FSXIX, c.3 f.8 e.8, "Flores to Secretario de Gobierno, Guerrero, 20 March 1851". The incident was reported quite differently between the US South and the northern states: *The Texas Monument*, 23 April 1851; *Galveston Weekly News*, 6 May 1851; *The Southern Press*, 23 May

Flores kept an eye on filibusters roaming along the river with enslaving and vengeful intentions, a daunting prospect that prompted the official to suggest that black residents should relocate further away from the border.[116]

The Mexican authorities retaliated not only against foreigners, but also against the Mexican citizens who collaborated with the *norteamericanos* raiders. As the *San Antonio Ledger* argued, "with very little difficulty a concert is effected with Mexicans on the Rio Grande, who, for small compensation, are ready to aid in captivating our colored runaways".[117] In Guerrero, two *vecinos*, Luis Arredondo and Cruz Hernández, were prosecuted in January 1855 after unsuccessfully attempting to forcibly carry two refugees from slavery back across the river.[118] Sentences were not only nominal: in Matamoros, the brothers Luis and Timoteo Cobos, commissioned by a resident of Cameron County to abduct an African American man named Anastasio Aguado from Juan Cos' *rancho*, both received four-year jail sentences in 1859.[119] Such convictions served as proxies for asserting the federation's authority over Mexican borderlanders, punishing collaborators as the antithesis of the ideal of the professional or volunteer *citizen-in-arms* – a core component of postcolonial Mexican republican citizenship – and defending national honor and escaped slaves against foreign filibusters.

State authorities also backed efforts led at a municipal level to tackle the involvement of Mexican nationals in slaving raids. In October 1860, Nuevo León y Coahuila's government officially targeted residents of the *partidos* of Monclova and Río Grande who might contribute – in any form – to the abduction of US former slaves in Mexican territory. The state government reminded *alcaldes* to effectively enforce the free-soil provision of the 1857 Constitution and recommended severe punishments for accomplices, such as embargoes on properties. Funds thereby amassed would be employed to "rescue at whatever price the very negroes that are extracted from the national territory".[120] Moreover, state authorities in the northern frontier actively defended free-soil principles by ensuring that African Americans introduced into Mexico (as contract laborers or otherwise) by foreign immigrants would be considered as free. In 1859, when a US citizen sought to settle across the Rio Grande with a family of eight African Americans under service contracts, the government of Nuevo León y

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1851; *Anti-Slavery Bugle*, 31 May 1851; *New Orleans Daily Crescent*, 20 Aug. 1851; Nichols, *The Limits of Liberty*, 158. On *alcaldes*: Schaefer, "Citizen-Breadwinners", 956.

[116] SRE, LE 1595, f.94, "Presidencia del Ayuntamiento de Guerrero [Flores] to Gobierno de Coahuila, 14 June 1851"; AGEC, FSXIX, c.6 f.6 e.3, "Flores to Secretario de Gobierno, Guerrero, 27 June 1851".

[117] *The San Antonio Ledger*, 15 Sep. 1853.

[118] AGEC, FSXIX, c.1, f.1, e.13, "Maldonado to Comisario Municipal de Guerrero, 2 Jan. 1855" and *idem*., c.1, f.4, e.8, "Maldonado to Comisario Municipal de Guerrero, 13 Jan. 1855".

[119] SRE, CPN, c.3, e.13, f.3-5; Nichols, *The Limits of Liberty*, 160-161. As with Enrique Sánchez (aforementioned), the Mexican consul at Brownsville secured Aguado's release from Cameron County's jail.

[120] AMMVA, Decretos y circulares, c.9, f.4., e.1, "Secretaría del Gobierno del Estado Libre y Soberano de Nuevo León y Coahuila to Señor Alcalde 1° de Monclova, 28 Oct. 1860".

Coahuila instructed *partido* authorities to remind the prospective settler of the legal freedom of his indentured workers on Mexican soil.[121]

Finally, as carried out by Spanish officials in the Louisiana-Texas borderlands during the 1800s, individual and collective resettlement represented another form of protection provided by Mexican frontier authorities to self-emancipated slaves, although not necessarily out of exclusively humanitarian motives.[122] The relocation of escaped slaves from north and central Coahuila alongside the *mascogos* living at Nacimiento de los Negros to southern Coahuila in 1859 provides an interesting case in point. On 5 March, the *alcalde* of Piedras Negras learned from military officers at Fort Duncan (near Eagle Pass) that filibusters were planning to gather at San Antonio under the aegis of William R. Henry to abduct runaways in Coahuila. Information soon reached the *Prefectura de Partido* of Río Grande at Morelos. Three days later, four companies of about eighty volunteers each (at Múzquiz, San Buenaventura, Nadadores and Abasolo) had been mustered under colonel Miguel Blanco. Increasingly concerned that the affair might escalate into open warfare between both countries, Nuevo León y Coahuila's government ordered on 23 March the removal of *all* African Americans "residing in pueblos, haciendas and ranchos" in the *partidos* of Monclova and Río Grande to the *hacienda* of Hornos, at Parras (southern Coahuila). Local officials complied: Ramón Musquiz – now prefect of Monclova's *partido* – saw in the relocation a way to protect the villages of his jurisdiction from filibusters and argued that it promoted "everyone's interest", since, in his opinion, "the country had not benefited" from the black refugees.[123] In fact, Múzquiz's *ayuntamiento* had already formulated a request for the displacement of black settlers in September 1857, deeming the *mascogos* detrimental to frontier communities as presumed thieves, cattle-stealers and magnets for slaving expeditions. While the *mascogos* left travelling with four carts, two more were provided by affluent *vecinos* from Múzquiz for the remaining African Americans, such as the black settlers of the *rancho del Rincón* in the northern part of the state. A self-emancipated slave, originally from Arkansas, who had absconded from San Antonio, presented himself to Múzquiz's *ayuntamiento* during the first days of May, just in time to join the displaced African Americans on their journey to Parras on 12 May. More than 170 of them arrived at Parras, three weeks later. Some refugees arrived later at Hornos, especially those arriving from Guerrero and Morelos. For

[121] SRE, LE 1595, f.136, "Secretaría de Gobierno de Nuevo León y Coahuila to Prefectura del Partido de Río Grande, 15 March 1859".

[122] Porter, *The Black Seminoles*, 143. Some fugitives were relocated on an individual *ad hoc* basis to places where they would likely be more protected from filibusters and get better opportunities to make a living. In April 1846, a runaway from Texas thus reached Laredo and was sent to the *partido* capital of Mier to live "under the safeguard and protection of the laws". TSLAC, LA, folder 179, doc. 16, 14:968, "Policarpo Martínez to Alcalde constitucional de Laredo, Mier, 30 April 1846".

[123] By 1859, the main bones of contention consisted in the rising tension between Seminoles and *mascogos* over land and water (intensified by a recent smallpox outbreak), an increasing political neutrality and reluctance by the latter to engage in military campaigns at a time when governor Vidaurri was attempting to control and coopt them into his regional revolution, as well as frequent complaints (both grounded and ungrounded) by local *vecinos* about theft and smuggling committed by black settlers.

instance, Rio Grande's *partido* authorities transferred a man named "Alberto" to Múzquiz, which he reached on 6 June. From there, Alberto was displaced to the nearby village of San Buenaventura, where he was supposed to join other black settlers assembling for their future transfer to the southern *hacienda*. However, some other black people in Coahuila simply evaded the removal order.[124]

Just like the 1808 transfer to Trinidad de Salcedo, the 1859 relocation was intended as a pragmatic response to an escalation of tensions over slave flight and illegal raids. Rising discord between borderland communities on these issues meant that risks of open warfare loomed large by the late 1850s. However, by contrast with the Mexican authorities, US representatives in Mexico and the US government expressed few qualms about slaving raids, even when committed by federal soldiers. The abduction of African Americans and the violation of Mexican sovereignty mattered little, an exception being made when economic interests or white US citizens in Mexico were at stake. S.D. Mullowny and Joseph Walsh (respectively from Texas and Louisiana), both US consuls at Monterrey during the second half of the 1850s, reported concerns related to these expeditions only to the extent that they risked jeopardizing the very maintenance of US-Mexico commerce. Due to "this continual threat of invasion", Walsh feared rising animosity between local Mexicans and "Americans [that is, white US citizens] residing and travelling through the country", such as migrants to California, who, due to these raids, came to be "very naturally [...] looked upon with great suspicion".[125] Raids did indeed strain relations between different national communities on the Mexican side of the borderlands. During the spring of 1859, a close scrutiny was maintained over three foreigners at Múzquiz suspected of plotting with Texan filibusters to abduct local African Americans. One of them, "Santiago Van Bieber", a Kentucky-born resident, was even expelled from the town on this charge.[126] In Matamoros, the *vecino* Manuel Luís del Fierro suspected the

[124] UT (A), Briscoe, Ramón Múzquiz Documents, "Múzquiz to De la Garza, Monclova, 11 March 1859"; YU, Beinecke, LAGP, box 5, Cuarta Época de Apuntes y Noticia para la historia de Coahuila, 1850-1873, 2/2, "Marzo 31 de 1859", "Sept. 6 de 1857", "Marzo 6 de 1859", "Marzo 9 de 1859" and "Abril 14 de 1859"; MR, box 10, folder 117, "Comisario Municipal de Múzquiz to Prefecto de Monclova, 22 May 1859", "idem, 24 May 1859", "idem, 13 June 1859" and "idem, 6 July 1859"; "Comisario Municipal de Múzquiz to Alcalde de San Buenaventura, 18 June 1859"; MR, box 10, folder 116, "R. Múzquiz to Alcalde Primero de Múzquiz, 9 March 1859" and "Galindo to Prefectura de Monclova, 18 March 1859"; MR, box 11, folder 132, "R. Múzquiz to Primera Autoridad de Múzquiz, 31 March 1859", "Galindo to Alcalde Primero de Múzquiz, 6 March 1859", "idem, 8 March 1859"; "R. Múzquiz a Alcalde Primero de Múzquiz, 15 March 1859"; SRE, LE 1595, f.147, "Polanco to Galindo, 7 Feb. 1859" and f.149 "Secretaría del Gobierno [...] de Nuevo León y Coahuila to Prefectura del Partido de Rio Grande, 10 March 1859"; AGEC, FSXIX, c.3 f.4 e.7, "Espinoza to Alcalde Primero de Guerrero, 27 May 1859" and c.3 f.4 e.9 "idem, 29 May 1859"; *The Texas Baptist*, 25 Aug. 1859; Porter, *The Black Seminoles*, 158; Boteler Mock, *Dreaming with the Ancestors*, 81-82.

[125] UT(A), Benson, Despatches from US consuls in Monterrey, reel 1, "Mullowny to Marcy, 23 Oct. 1855" and "Walsh to Cass, 30 June 1859".

[126] SRE, LE 1595, f.135 "Secretario del Gobierno del Estado Libre y Soberano de Nuevo León y Coahuila to Prefectura del partido de Rio Grande (Morelos), 12 March 1859"; YU, Beinecke, LAGP, Box 5 Cuarta Época de Apuntes y noticias para la historia de Coahuila 1850-1873 2/2,

"foreigners who live[d] below" of complicity in the attempted abduction of his servant Mathilda Hennes and her child, two self-emancipated slaves from the US.[127] Tensions at a local level echoed larger conflicts on the question of black freedom-seekers and free soil in Mexico after the Texas Revolution. For self-emancipated slaves south of the Rio Grande, freedom seemed never fully secured, as larger geopolitical developments between Mexico and the US (alongside Texas) threatened their liberty across the border.[128] Following the Texas Revolution, the relationship between the two republics became extraordinarily contentious, a tension reaching its pinnacle in the US invasion and occupation of Mexico (1846-1848) and the heyday of Southern southward expansionism during the 1850s. Consequently, many self-emancipated slaves who found themselves in the midst of states competing for sovereignty, either as residents or Mexican soldiers, saw their fates as tied to the disputed future of the rebellious Republic of Texas, as well as to the ever-present prospect of US annexation and Southern filibustering.

Free Soil and Escaped Slaves in-between Conflicting States and Allegiances

"A Second Canada only a River's Width Away?" Self-Emancipated Slaves and the Divisive Future of the Republic of Texas (1836-1848)

After 1836, many self-liberated bondspeople in the borderlands sought to secure *informal freedom* – especially alongside Córdova rebels and Native Americans – in the disputed area between Mexico and Texas from the Rio Grande to the Nueces River. In April 1840, negotiations between Comanches and Texans over a mutual exchange of prisoners included runaway slaves who had taken refuge among the former.[129] Mexico's non-recognition of Texas as an independent state implied that no official diplomatic channels existed between Mexico and the Republic of Texas for the reclamation of escaped slaves between 1836 and 1845. Mexico's officials on the frontier occasionally used fugitives as casual informants against Texan and Mexican revolutionaries and filibusters, thus replicating a feature of Spain's anti-insurgency policy in the 1810s. For instance, Eduardo Ros, a twenty-five-year-old enslaved baker from San Antonio – heading to San Fernando where a friend of his, "Guadalupe", would welcome him – was interrogated at Laredo in 1840 regarding the conduct of revolutionary leader

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"Abril 25 de 1859"; YU, Beinecke, MR, Box 11 folder 132, "R. Múzquiz to P.A. de Múzquiz, 28 April 1859".

[127] SRE, CPN, c.3, e.13, f.1-3.

[128] Kerr-Ritchie, *Freedom Seekers,* 24.

[129] Nathan Boone Burkett, "Early Days in Texas" [unpublished manuscript, accessed 24 April 2018: http://www.sonsofdewittcolony.org/nathanmenframe.html]; Paul D. Lack, "Los Tejanos Leales a México del Este de Texas, 1838-1839", *Historia Mexicana*, XLII:4 (1993), 900; Stephen L. Moore, *Savage Frontier*: *Rangers, Riflemen, and Indian Wars in Texas, 1838-1839*, v.2 (Denton: University of North Texas Press, 2006) 51-52: Stephen L. Moore, *Savage Frontier*: *Rangers, Riflemen, and Indian Wars in Texas, 1840-1841*, v.3 (Denton: University of North Texas Press, 2007), 40.

Antonio Canales.[130] Many Mexican officials viewed enslaved people in Texas as allies for the re-conquest of the rebellious Republic.[131] In this context, rumors often spread throughout the Republic of Texas that Mexico would invite US free blacks and runaways, along with Native Americans displaced from the US South (Cherokees, Creeks, Choctaws and Seminoles), to settle in Texas in order to "form a barrier between the northern confederacy and Mexico", as representative for Brazoria County William H. Jack put it.[132]

Such concerns dovetailed with fears over alleged plans by Great Britain from the late 1830s onwards to abolish slavery in the Republic and establish African American colonies in exchange for diplomatic recognition, with the hope of thereby undermining prospects of US annexation. Ashbel Smith, representing the Republic of Texas in London and Paris, privately thought that the British government's "ultimate purpose [was] to make Texas a refuge for runaway negroes from the United States", following Irish abolitionist and member of parliament Daniel O'Connell's proposal to establish black colonies in Texas (August 1839) and the presumed lobbying of the British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society for this purpose.[133] Duff Green, acting as US consul at Galveston, and Jules E. de Cramayel (representing France's interests in Texas), resented the British abolitionist influence over the Republic of Texas, considering the potential creation of a free-soil state at the US South's fringes as an encouragement to the formation of colonies of runaway slaves; a Trojan horse serving London's grand continental designs against the Union.[134] Officially, Great Britain opposed the expansion of slavery in the US southwestern frontier on abolitionist grounds, and in order to maintain peaceful US-Mexican relations. According to Charles Elliot, British representative at Galveston (and former "Protector of slaves" in 1830s British Guiana), the western line of slaveholding territories in the region was to be kept away from the Mexican border, as the contiguity of slave and free territories

[130] SEDNA, L-1544, f.51-52, "Comandante de Mier to Ampudia, declaración tomada al negro Eduardo Ros, 14 April 1840"; and f.130, "Arista to Ministro de Guerra, 7 May 1840"; Nichols, *The Limits of Liberty*, 70.
[131] TBL, Bolton, 47:11, "S. Vidaurri to M. Arista, 5 May 1841".
[132] Harriet Smither (ed.), *Journals of the Fourth Congress of the Republic of Texas, 1839-1840, v.2, The House Journal* (Austin: Texas Library and Historical Commission State Library, von Boeckmann-Jones & Co., 1931), 97-106.
[133] John H. Barrow (ed.), *The Mirror of Parliament for the Second Session of the Fourteenth Parliament of Great Britain and Ireland [...] appointed to meet February 5, and from thence continued till August 27, 1839* (London: Longman, Ore, Brown, Green & Longman, 1839), v.6, 5242; Clyde Wilson (ed.), *The Papers of John C. Calhoun* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1987), v.17, 252-253 ("Smith to Calhoun, 19 June 1843"); Ashbel Smith, *Reminiscences of the Texas Republic, Annual Address Delivered before the Historical Society of Galveston* (Galveston: Historical Society, 1876), 50-53; Marjorie D. Brown, "Diplomatic Ties: Slavery and Diplomacy in the Gulf Coast Region, 1836-45", PhD Diss. (Nashville: Vanderbilt University, 2017), 46-82 and 116-178.
[134] *The Cincinnati Weekly Herald and Philanthropist*, 5 Feb. 1845, "Late from Texas – Duff Green"; TBL, Bolton, 47:7, "Almonte to Ministro de Relaciones Exteriores, 17 Feb. 1844"; MAE(C), CP, Texas v.6 (127 CP/6), f.224-232, "Cramayel to Guizot, 11 Oct. 1843"; *Diario del Gobierno de la Republica Mexicana*, 30 April 1844 (original article: *Le Commerce,* Paris); Edward B. Rugemer, "Robert Monroe Harrison, British Abolition, Southern Anglophobia and Texas Annexation", *Slavery & Abolition*, 28:2 (2007), 179.

would spark "constant frontier dispute and raid arising out of the escape of slaves".[135] Thus, during the months leading up to the annexation of Texas by the US (formally ratified on 29 December 1845), rumors circulated in Texas that Mexico was contemplating granting actual, if not nominal, sovereignty over the Nueces Strip to Great Britain, "for the purpose of establishing there a colony of free blacks and runaway negroes", in an attempt to secure its northern border along the Nueces River. Such a prospect, combined with Great Britain's lobbying for an entirely non-slaveholding Texas, "*a second Canada* only a river's width away", prompted many proslavery Texans to support US annexation, viewing the US federal government as a potentially useful ally in reclaiming their escaped slaves from Mexico.[136] Equally, some Northern abolitionists contended that the desire to avoid the formation of a non-slaveholding state (another future haven for escaped slaves) at the US South's margins inspired democrat US president James K. Polk's pro-annexation policy and the US government's final move towards incorporating the Republic, this being the *casus belli* that triggered war between Mexico and the US.[137]

As war between Mexico and the US over Texas was looming, proslavery forces grew concerned about the involvement of self-emancipated slaves as a fifth column seeking to capitalize on the geopolitical situation.[138] During the autumn of 1845, settlers along the Colorado River observed an increase in insubordination and escape attempts among their enslaved workforce, such as two arrested men from LaGrange who had attempted to reach the border. Planters suspected that Mexico had sent emissaries to Texas "to excite an insurrection among the slaves" and to encourage bondspeople "to act in concert with the Mexican troops" in case of war. Likewise, rumors spread in the Union that a "battalion of six hundred runaway negroes from Texas, well drilled in flying artillery tactics", had joined General Mariano Arista's *Ejército del Norte* at Monterrey.[139]

From August 1845 onwards, the US army was stationed near Corpus Christi, and later opposite Matamoros, until just before the conflict's outbreak (April-May

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[135] Ephraim Douglass Adams, *British Diplomatic Correspondence Concerning the Republic of Texas, 1838-1846* (Austin: The Texas State Historical Association, 1918), 518-519. US abolitionists advocated similar arguments during the US-Mexican War, opposing the extension of slavery to the Mexican Cession lands. See for instance: Daniel Rose Tilden, *Speech of Hon. Daniel R. Tilden, of Ohio, on the Mexican War and slavery: Delivered in the House of Representatives, February 4, 1847* (Washington DC: Blair and River, 1847), 11.

[136] *El Siglo XIX*, 6 Jan. 1844. The original article is from the *New Orleans Tropic*, 6 Dec. 1843. *Texas National Register*, 4 Jan. 1845; *The New York Herald,* 27 Jan. 1846. The expression "second Canada" is from: Nathaniel W. Stephenson, *Texas and the Mexican War: a Chronicle of the Winning of the Southwest* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1921), 142.

[137] Edwin E. Hall, *Ahab and Naboth: or, The United States and Mexico. A discourse, delivered in the First Church of Christ in Guilford, on the annual Thanksgiving of 1846* (New Haven: A.H. Maltby, 1847).

[138] Peter Guardino, *The Dead March: A History of the Mexican-American War* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2017).

[139] MAE(C), CP, Texas, v.9 (127 CP/9), f.181-182, "Dubois de Saligny to Direction Politique, Bureau D'Amérique et des Indes, Oct. 1845"; *Telegraph and Texas Register*, 1 Oct. 1845 and 25 June 1845.

1846). On the Rio Grande, General Taylor's 4.000 officers and soldiers brought slaves as servants, cooks and mechanics. (To pay for this, they were given an extra allowance of about $10 per month). Contemporaries underlined the "great difficulty in keeping the slaves upon this river", given that many slaves had been "enticed away by the inhabitants of Matamoros, and, for effect, treated with marked consideration". Captain Phil Barbour recalled that "several slaves belonging to officers have left their masters and gone over to Matamoros" (such as six bondspeople who deserted with more than forty US soldiers, most of them Irish Catholics, during one single day in April 1846) and became so infuriated by such incidents that he contemplated exchanging black bondspeople for white servants.[140] On the Mexican side, self-liberated African Americans were mobilized for war. In Tampico, "*los Orleaneses*" were mustered alongside black people from La Havana for the port's defense just before the US invasion of Mexico, but they proved unable to counter it.[141] Following the three-week-long siege of Veracruz in March 1847, about six thousand Mexican soldiers were taken prisoner, "nearly all what we called black men", including "real negroes" (some of them presumably escaped slaves), according to a US official.[142]

To a lesser extent, escape attempts by self-liberated bondspeople continued after the early stage of occupation. In 1847, a Mexican resident of Cadereyta (Nuevo León) found a mule that an escaped slave had abandoned on the town's outskirts while absconding.[143] However, the presence of a US army of occupation in Mexico also endangered the existence of all fugitive slaves south of the border. Many faced the threat of re-enslavement and deportation back to the US, especially those serving on the frontline as Mexican soldiers. Black freedom-seekers stood among the defenders of Monterrey during the siege led by General Zachary Taylor's army.[144] In September 1846, after Monterrey's evacuation and capitulation, a soldier from Texas recognized one of his former slaves, "Big Jim", now a captain in the Mexican army, "grasped the poorly man by the collar and shook him fiercely", before removing him from the ranks. A US officer intervened and the man was released, although "the Texan sought

[140] Raphael Semmes, *Service Afloat and Ashore during the Mexican War* (Cincinnati: William H. Moore & Co., 1861), 316; Thomas B. Thorpe, *Our army on the Rio Grande* (Philadelphia: Carey and Hart, 1846), 25; Philip N. Barbour, Martha Isabella Hopkins Barbour (ed.), *Journals of the late Brevet Major Philip Norbourne Barbour* (New York and London: G.P. Putnam's sons, 1936), 25-50, quoted in Robert E. May, "Invisible Men: Blacks and the U.S. Army in the Mexican War", *The Historian*, v.49/4 (Aug. 1987), 473; Nichols, "The Limits of Liberty", 35; Paul Foos, *A Short, Offhand, Killing Affair: Soldiers and Social Conflict During the Mexican-American Conflict* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 98; Karl Jack Bauer, *The Mexican War, 1846-1848* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1974), 42; José Paul Canseco Botello, *Historia de Matamoros* (Matamoros: Litográfica Jardín, 1981), 119-122.

[141] *Christian Secretary*, 3 July 1846; *Democratic Telegraph and Texas Register*, 8 July 1846. All together they formed a force of about 80 to 100 individuals.

[142] Jacob Oswandel, *Notes of the Mexican war 1846-47-48* (Philadelphia: 1885), 98-99.

[143] AHM, Fondo Monterrey en el Gobierno Interino, Sección Guerra México-Estados Unidos, Serie Correspondencia, Colección Guerra México-Estados Unidos, v.2, e.2, f.14, "Reporte acerca del individuo apellidado Gutiérrez" (1847).

[144] Samuel Chester Reid, *The Scouting Expeditions of McCulloch's Texas Rangers, or, the Summer and Fall Campaign of the Army of the United States in Mexico, 1846* (Philadelphia: John E. Potter and Company, 1859), 223; Foos, *A Short, Offhand, Killing Affair*, 98.

anxiously for Big Jim for several days, determined to inflict condign punishment on him".[145] Another bondsman who escaped from the army and "took shelter among the Mexicans at Presidio [Guerrero, Coahuila]" was less fortunate. His enslaver, along with US captain Lyman Mower, reached the town and abducted him. "Several Mexicans attempted to rescue the slave" and gunfire broke out. Two Mexicans were shot, leaving the kidnappers' retreat unopposed.[146] In this regard, the best illustration of warfare as a combination of opportunities and threats for US runaways in Mexico is provided by Dan's misfortune. A fugitive slave passing as white after enlisting in the US army at New Orleans, Dan's real identity was discovered while he was stationed at Veracruz, after which he was "dishonorably discharged from the service of the United States without pay or allowances".[147]

Separatism(s), Manifest Destiny and the Fugitive Slave Issue (1848-1861)

With the number of escaped slaves such as Dan heading to the Mexican border constantly on the rise during the last quarter century of US slavery, proslavery activism steadily soared in the US southwestern borderlands. Slaveholders, influential editors, political representatives and other private citizens began pressing the governments and legislatures of Texas as well the US federal authorities to curb the flow of fugitives. Most specifically, they demanded extradition, but also other measures including stricter punishments for fugitives and their accomplices, absolute cooperation by federal troops patrolling the Mexican border and outright military invasion of northeastern Mexico. However, while intersecting with separatist movements in northeastern Mexico, growing tensions over fugitive slaves in the US-Mexico borderlands further strained US-Mexican relations, widened the divide between proslavery Southwesterners and the federation and further fueled South-North sectionalism.

In Texas, bottom-up pressure exerted by residents on political officials for the return of runaways (similar to that of planters in late 1800s Louisiana) can be traced back to the beginnings of the Republic. Exasperated by years-long attempts to retrieve one of his slaves who had absconded during the Texas Revolution with the Mexican army, a settler residing along the lower Lavaca River wrote directly to Texas president Mirabeau B. Lamar during the spring of 1840. Urging him to intercede in his favor with Mexican president Cardenas and General Canales, the petitioner argued that he was "sufficiently acquainted with the Mexican character to know that a demand from any but the highest authority of the Government would have no effect on them whatever". But at a time of serious difficulties between the newly formed Republic and Mexico, it

[145] *Nashville Patriot*, 23 Feb. 1859.
[146] *The Ottawa Free Trader*, 5 March 1847.
[147] George Winston Smith, *Chronicles of the Gringos: the US Army in the Mexican war, 1846-1848; Accounts of Eyewitnesses & Combatants* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1968), 465.

is very unlikely that Lamar even began negotiating with his Mexican counterparts on the issue.[148]

Simultaneous to Mexico's hardening stance on free soil for foreign escaped slaves after 1836, popular proslavery mobilization against runaways north of the Rio Grande gradually took on a more organized form, particularly through petitions and conventions. Inhabitants of central and western Texas felt especially concerned (with the exception of a large part of its German population), including the elite *Tejano* community.[149] As early as 1841, in an address to the Texas Senate, citizens of San Antonio expressed their concerns about "the numerous runaway slaves of the Eastern counties" passing on their way to Mexico. Ten years later, close to fifty residents called upon their representatives at the State Legislature to actively address the issue.[150] Throughout the 1850s, popular and commercial conventions increasingly underscored the urgent need to address the "insecurity" of "slave property" on the Texas frontier. In 1855, the attendees of a convention held at Caldwell County formed a committee of vigilance and advised the State Legislature to pass a law convicting individuals who had sought to "persuade negroes to abscond".[151] To most southerners, slave flight to Mexico risked undermining the South's economic prosperity. Slaveholders in San Antonio, incidentally, formed an insurance company against the losses incurred by slave flight to Mexico. Brownsville's representative at the Southern Commercial Convention (an organization born in 1852 for the defense of Southern slavery against the North's rising industrial prominence) held at New Orleans in January 1855 likewise put forward a resolution calling for the rendition of self-emancipated slaves now residing in Mexico.[152]

The US Southwest press actively lobbied for the reclamation of escaped slaves in Mexico: the "action of the general government" in securing slavery meant securing the "freedom" of local planters.[153] The *Texas State Times* was especially vocal in complaining about a net loss of capital (represented by runaways to Mexico) which it estimated by 1851 as about $2.4 million (for 3.000 runaways worth on average $800), and four years later as $3.2 million.[154] As early as 1843, newspapers such as the Galveston *Independent Chronicle* often suggested the mutual restitution of fugitives

[148] Winnie Allen, Katherine Elliott, Charles Adams Gulick Jr., Harriet Smither, *The Papers of Mirabeau Buonaparte Lamar* (Austin and New York: The Pemberton Press, 1968), v.5, 426 ("Silvanus Hatch to Lamar, 5 May 1840").
[149] *El Bejareño*, 9 June 1855.
[150] Joseph Milton Nance, *After San Jacinto: the Texas-Mexican Frontier, 1836-1841* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1963), 472-473; John Hope Franklin, Loren Schweninger, *Runaway Slaves: Rebels on the Plantation* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 115-116.
[151] *Texas State Times*, 8 Sep. 1855.
[152] LOC, Frederick Law Olmsted Papers, General Correspondence, 1838-1928, "Douai to Olmsted, 31 Oct. 1854"; *Proceedings of the Southern Commercial Convention held in the city of New Orleans, on the 8th, 9th, 10th, 11th, 12th, 13th and 15th of January 1855* (New Orleans: Office of the Crescent, 1855), 21.
[153] *The Weekly Telegraph*, 26 Oct. 1859.
[154] *Texas State Times*, 2 June 1855.

and criminals with Mexico, including runaway peons in exchange for runaway slaves.[155] An alternative proposal consisted in unilaterally passing a fugitive peon law in the hope that it would encourage reciprocity from Mexican officials.[156] Between the annexation of Texas and the Civil War, borderlanders and their representatives continued to call federal attention to the issue. During the 1850s, the Texas State Legislature (especially its House Committee on Federal Relations) passed annual resolutions urging its representatives and senators in Washington to exert their influence for the conclusion of a US-Mexican extradition treaty on runaways.[157] US consuls and ministers in Mexico exerted a similar pressure, recognizing that the issue "had become one so exciting among the planters in Texas", in Gadsden's words.[158]

The Mexican federal government's staunch refusal to contemplate extradition increasingly radicalized proslavery Southwesterners. From the early 1850s onwards, the belief that a "perfect safety [for slave "property"] may require dismemberment of a Mexican State or two, located to the west of us" became increasingly prevalent in the US Southwest.[159] The particularly contested nature of the Mexican nation-state and the evolving character of national allegiances in the northeastern borderlands of Mexico further added to the contingency of freedom for former enslaved African Americans under Mexican rule.[160] Many Southerners lent support to separatist projects in northeastern Mexico, hoping that a new political entity located between them and Mexico's free soil might prove more amenable to their interests. South of the border, the close connection between slavery and separatism had become evident by the time of the Texas Revolution. Concerns regarding the formation of a grand "slaveholding confederacy" in northern Mexico, encompassing "San Luís Potosí, Chihuahua, Coahuila y Texas, Zacatecas, Durango, Sonora, [and] Tamaulipas", dated back to at least the late 1830s – when Pizarro Martínez, now Mexico's minister in Washington, had expressed such worry to Mexican foreign minister Gorostiza – a grounded fear, given the strong federalist and separatist traditions of most of northern Mexico's states and the increasing proslavery pressure exerted from the north.[161] In August 1851, an "ex-

[155] *Independent Chronicle*, 15 Oct. 1843.
[156] *Nueces Valley Weekly*, 10 Jan. 1858.
[157] *Journal of the House of Representatives of the State of Texas: Fourth Legislature, Extra Session* (Austin: J.W. Hampton, 1853), 227; *Journal of the Senate of the State of Texas, Sixth Legislature* (Austin: Marshall & Oldham, 1855), 58; *Official Journal of the House of Representatives of the State of Texas at the Adjourned Session, Sixth Legislature* (Austin: Marshall & Oldham, 1856), 17; *Journal of the Senate of Texas: Seventh Biennial Session* (Austin: John Marshall & Co., 1857), 438 and 590; *The Galveston News Tri-Weekly*, 24 Dec. 1857; *State Gazette*, 23 April 1859; Schwartz, "Across the Rio to Freedom", 32.
[158] UT(A), Benson, Despatches from US Ministers in Mexico, 1823-1906, reel 19, "Gadsden to Marcy, 5 Nov. 1854".
[159] *The Texian Advocate*, 27 Nov. 1852.
[160] On the interplay between regional and national allegiances in the Mexican *noreste*: Andrés Reséndez, *Changing National Identities at the Frontier: Texas and New Mexico, 1800-1850* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Valerio-Jiménez, *River of Hope*. Local separatism often contested federal sovereignty over the northern frontier. For instance, between 1838 and 1840, a secessionist *República de Rio Grande* was formed with Laredo as its capital.
[161] SRE, LE 1065, f.85, "Pizarro Martínez to Gorostiza, 4 May 1839".

senator of the US" anonymously informed both De la Rosa and Percy Doyle (British minister in Mexico) of his suspicions that southern slaveholders were acting "gradually and secretly to get African slavery introduced into the Mexican states bordering in the Rio Grande del Norte", with the collusion of northeastern Mexican *hacendados*. In this context, De la Rosa expressed uneasiness about the very presence of African Americans in the northern frontier, which he viewed as a further incentive to such plots.[162]

As scholars have emphasized, the proclamation of the *Plan de la Loba* (September 1851) by José María Carvajal, standing for the formation of a *República de Sierra Madre* south of the border, therefore came as a golden opportunity for Texas slaveholders.[163] First, Carvajal's raids created an ideal smokescreen for slave-hunters – it is no coincidence that at this time Warren Adams chose to raid central Coahuila – so much so that both threats seemed unmistakably intertwined for Mexican borderlanders.[164] Second (and more importantly in the long-run), the potential separation of the Sierra Madre from Mexico provided Texans with promises of new lands for slave-produced cotton and tobacco, and maybe even access to Sonora's mines. It would also conveniently bypass Mexico's free-soil policy through a new proslavery buffer state. Carvajal, who was endorsed by Texan officials and editors attracted by his promise to reduce tariffs on border trade, had pledged to pass a law convicting absconders from involuntary servitude as felons, including runaways from the US Southwest.[165] However, he never secured hegemony over the coveted Sierra Madre region, despite a fierce attack on Matamoros during the fall of 1851. Nonetheless, his threatening presence persisted for some years, as did the aspirations of slaveholders, who were convinced that the return of US escaped slaves "on the part of the government west of the Rio Grande would place slavery on a secure basis in Texas".[166]

The interference of proslavery Southwesterners in Mexico's factionalist politics continued well into the 1850s, as evidenced by their courting of regional *caudillo* Santiago Vidaurri. The liberal governor of Nuevo León (and Coahuila after 1856), Vidaurri seemed well disposed to Texan interests, as long as they coincided with his own. In the summer of 1855, rumors spread that Vidaurri, anxious to secure the northern border and to centralize custom revenues to his own advantage, was close to reaching an agreement with a delegation of Texan slaveowners on the principle of compensated restitution. (Planters around San Antonio were thought to be ready to

[162] SRE, AEMEUA, 33/1, f.228-231, "'An ex-senator of the US' to De la Rosa, Boston, 15 Aug. 1851" and "De la Rosa to Ministro de Relaciones, 27 Aug. 1851".
[163] Ronnie C. Tyler, "Fugitive Slaves in Mexico", *The Journal of Negro History*, 57/1 (Jan. 1972), 5; Schwartz, *Across the Rio to Freedom*, 34; Joseph E. Chance, *José María de Jesús Carvajal: the Life and Times of a Mexican Revolutionary* (San Antonio: Trinity University Press, 2006), 161; Nichols, *The Limits of Liberty*, 133-134.
[164] *National Era*, 5 Feb. 1852. In fact, many Texans volunteered alongside Carvajal's own men.
[165] UT(A), Briscoe, John S. Ford Papers, "Memoirs of John S. Ford", v.4, 628 and 655-656; Mike Dunning, "Manifest Destiny and the Trans-Mississippi South: Natural Laws and the Extension of Slavery into Mexico", *The Journal of Popular Culture*, v.35, issue 2 (2001), 119.
[166] *South-Western American*, 17 Nov. 1852.

contribute about $200.000 and place 1.000 armed men at Vidaurri's disposal.) Yet such an agreement never materialized on account of Vidaurri's unwillingness to negotiate with private citizens.[167] Such lobbying by Texans nonetheless came close to bearing fruit by the end of the decade. During the winter of 1858-1859, Vidaurri commissioned Juan N. Seguín (a native *Tejano* and former volunteer army leader during the Texas Revolution) to ascertain whether Texas state authorities would be disposed (and if so, for how much) to negotiate the return of US escaped slaves with Nuevo León y Coahuila. However, by the end of March 1859, Seguín informed Vidaurri that the Texas government did not feel able to forge such a deal without the approval of the Union, and that concerns had arisen that self-liberated slaves in the Mexican borderlands would escape into the country's interior after learning of such an accord, thus rendering any compensation a waste of money.[168]

A thin boundary divided supporting regionalism or separatism in Mexico from endorsing US expansion as an alleged solution to slave flight. By the late 1850s (the height of the fugitive slave scare in Texas), Southern faith in the creation of an independent state in northern Mexico was fading away and calls to remove "the line between Mexico and the United States to the Sierra Madre" became increasingly frequent.[169] Despite the "All-Mexico" movement's political defeat after 1848, its expansionist ideology proved resilient in the US-Mexico borderlands and dovetailed with the issue of slave flight. Territories conquered from Mexico would act as buffers for existing slave states against runaways, besides providing a prime outlet (especially the coastal *Tierra Caliente*) for the southward progress of slavery-based plantation economy into equatorial lands, considered by many southerners to be the "natural law of slavery".[170] Proponents of an aggressive pursuance of Manifest Destiny in the Gulf turned Mexico's free-soil policy – a sign of supposed national inferiority – into a motive

[167] *Maine Farmer*, 30 Aug. 1855; *Texas State Times*, 8 Sep. 1855; *Wilmington Journal*, 7 Sep. 1855; *The Athens Post*, 7 Sep. 1855.
[168] *San Antonio Daily Herald*, 12 Oct. 1858; *New York Times*, 7 Dec. 1858; *The Weekly Telegraph*, 29 Dec. 1858; *The Washington Union*, 31 Dec. 1858; *La Sociedad, Periódico Político y Literario*, 1 Jan. 1859; *Dallas Herald*, 5 Jan. 1859; TSLAC, Texas Governor Hardin Richard Runnels, Box 301-28, folder 14, "J. N. Seguin to Runnels, 8 Jan. 1859"; Tyler, "Fugitive Slaves in Mexico", 10-11; Santiago Roel (ed.), *Correspondencia particular de d. Santiago Vidaurri, Gobernador de Nuevo León, 1855-1864* (Monterrey: Universidad Autónoma de Nuevo León, 1946), v.1, 184; Mario Anteo, *Texas y Nuevo León, 1821-1911* (Monterrey: Universidad Autónoma de Nuevo León, 2008), 49; Reséndez, *Changing National Identities*, 169. On Vidaurri and the War of *La Reforma*: Luís Alberto García, *Guerra y Frontera: el Ejército del Norte entre 1855 y 1858* (Monterrey: Fondo Editorial de Nuevo León, 2007); Santiago Roel, *Apuntes Históricos: Primera Edición Corregida y Aumentada* (Monterrey: Castillo, 1985), 168-191.
[169] *Nueces Valley Weekly*, 3 April 1858 and 17 April 1858. On southern expansionism in the US-Mexico borderlands: Robert E. May, *The Southern Dream of a Caribbean Empire, 1854-1861* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2002), 136-162.
[170] On the "natural law of slavery": Robert E. May, *Slavery, Race and the Conquest: Lincoln, Douglas, and the Future of Latin America* (Indiana: Purdue University, 2013). See for instance: Marvin T. Wheat, *Progress and Intelligence of Americans* [...] (Louisville: M.T. Wheat, 1862), 450-457 ("the onward advance of Americans to the South West with the institution of slavery to serve as a pioneer labor, to reclaim the forests and swamps of Mexico, Central America, the West Indies, and South American, notwithstanding the popular rage of *abolitionism* against it, is, and will be the inevitable result of *reason* and *common sense*"). Italics from original source.

for conquest. Jane McManus Cazneau, an All-Mexico proponent and active Young America member, viewed the fact that US escaped slaves had – according to her – "all the social rights and honors of the most esteemed citizens" across the border as a racial heresy, which she cited as evidence of the degradation of "unprepared, undisciplined races, when left to themselves".[171] In October 1857, filibuster William Walker (who four years earlier had briefly invaded Baja California and Sonora) authored an article in *DeBow's Review* in which he heaped scorn on Latin American abolitionism. He especially attacked Mexico's endorsement of free soil in its 1857 Constitution, regretting that its "border territories furnish[ed] a place of refuge for the runaways" escaping from the US South, while exhorting southerners not to "remain quiet and idle while impassable barriers [we]re being built on the only side left open for [their] superabundant energy and enterprise".[172] At the heyday of expansionism and adventurism, some walked the talk, such as the Knights of the Golden Circle (KGC). A secret society founded in July 1854 at Lexington (Kentucky), the KGC aimed to establish a large slaveholding empire encompassing the US South, the Caribbean, Central America and Mexico, and Texas quickly became its main stronghold. In the spring of 1860, small companies of KGC paramilitaries assembled near the Rio Grande, threatening to invade Mexico. Some months later, a US army officer on the border observed that "the runaway negroes living on the Rio Grande had all gone back into the interior, fearing a raid upon Mexico by the K.G.C.'s".[173] Yet, as James D. Nichols has pointed out, escaped slaves did not experience real or presumed expansionist threats solely in a passive manner. For instance, in September 1848, "*los Orleaneses*" of Tampico cracked down on a revolutionary movement originating from the nearby Huasteca region and recovered the town, fighting out of fear that the insurgents sought to unite Tamaulipas to the US. A year later, the "natural enemies of the Americans" would again take up arms for the port's defense, after rumors that a filibustering expedition led by Colonel White from New Orleans was about to cross the Gulf of Mexico.[174]

Filibusters and militiamen like the KGC were not the only advocates for conquest, as some local political representatives in the US Southwest began to advocate for the occupation of the northeastern part of Mexico in retaliation for its asylum policy. During the May 1859 Texas State Democratic convention held at Houston, John D. Stell, representative for Leon County, stressed the urgent need to formalize rendition with Mexico. His co-representative Henry J. Jewett even proposed a resolution considering that "in case the Authorities of Mexico shall refuse to enter into treaty stipulations for the extradition of runaways slaves, it will then be politic and necessary for our members of Congress to urge in that body the adoption of such

[171] Montgomery, *Eagle Pass*, 138-140.
[172] *DeBow's Review and Industrial Resources, Statistics, etc.*, Oct. 1857, 441, "Slavery in Central and South America and Mexico. William Walker".
[173] *The Evansville Daily Journal*, 18 April 1861; May, *The Southern Dream of a Caribbean Empire*, 149-155.
[174] SRE, LE 1094, f.127-128, "Jesús Cárdenas to Ministro de Relaciones Exteriores, 25 Nov. 1848"; UT(A), Benson, Despatches of US Consuls in Tampico, 1824-1906, reel 2, "Chase to Buchanan, 4 Oct. 1848"; SEDNA, L-3072, f.43-45, f.76-77, and 813; Nichols, *The Limits of Liberty*, 77-78.

measures for the occupation and holding of the Mexican states adjacent to the Rio Grande frontier". On similar grounds, another representative amended Jewett's proposal to make it applicable to the Canadian borderlands, Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, as well.[175]

Through the "Texas question" and the US-Mexican War, the question of slave flight combined with the policy and practice of free soil in Mexico had entered into the Union's domestic controversies on slavery.[176] After the failure of the Wilmot Proviso (1846), which had proposed a ban on introducing slavery into conquered territories, opponents of the southward and westward expansion of African slavery in the Mexican Cession lands (California and the territories of New Mexico and Utah) stressed that such an extension of slavery would clash with Mexico's contiguous free soil. Sanctuary policy south of the border impeded plans for the expansion of slavery into the soon-to-be conquered lands, as many newspapers in the North argued. The New York *Daily Tribune* for instance underlined that "the moment a slave crosses the Rio Grande his shackles fall off: he becomes a free man, by force of Law, unless our bayonets have subverted that law".[177] The antislavery press was adamant in pointing out that the institution's recognition in the Cession lands, especially New Mexico, would only generate more escape attempts to Mexico. In April 1848, the New Haven *New Englander* underscored that, with black slavery introduced in New Mexico, slaves would be "constantly escaping to freedom upon Mexican soil [...] and whom the masters will therefore pursue in array or arms, shooting them down if they resist, and bringing them back in chains".[178]

As William S. Kiser has argued, Mexico's free soil came to represent an essential feature of public and congressional discussions on whether or not to extend slavery in the Cession lands, before the option of "popular sovereignty" (except for California that became a "free state") emerged through the Compromise of September 1850. In May 1850, in a letter addressed to Truman Smith, senator for Connecticut, William C. Skinner, James L. Collins and Henry Connelly, three residents of Santa Fe (New Mexico), identified several factors that undermined the practicality of introducing slavery into New Mexico. The proximity of numerous Native American

[175] *The Daily Delta*, 10 May 1859; *The Weekly Telegraph,* 18 May 1859; *The Standard*, 28 May 1859; *Democratic Platform: for the Campaign*, 2 June 1859.
[176] Taking as an example the expenses incurred by slave-catching parties in Florida, Congressman Joshua R. Giddings opposed the annexation of Texas in January 1845 in connection with slave flight: "I object to placing ourselves in a situation to be called upon to catch the runaway slaves of Texas. If this be economy, may Heaven save us from its extension". Joshua R. Giddings, *Speeches in Congress, by Joshua R. Giddings* (Boston: John P. Jewett & Co., 1853), 134.
[177] *New York Daily Tribune*, 16 July 1846.
[178] *New Englander*, v.6/22, 292 (April 1848). By the end of the US-Mexican War, newspapers in the North were especially adamant in reminding their audiences of Mexico's anti-slavery laws. See for instance: *Christian Register*, 21 Oct. 1848, "Mexican Laws and Decrees Concerning Slavery". Some proslavery advocates, by contrast, argued that military conquest had erased any prior prohibition of slavery (*De Bow's Review, Agricultural, Commercial, Industrial Progress and Resources,* v.7 (1849), 62-72 "Slavery in the New Territories").

groups (in particular the Navajos) along with the hostility expressed by most *Nuevomexicanos* towards African slavery – albeit tolerating alternative forms of slavery and unfree labor – would unmistakably favor a runaway slave. According to the three citizens, New Mexicans would express "every sympathy for his condition as a bondman" to the point of "offering every facility to his escape from servitude". Furthermore, the introduction of slavery into New Mexico would also have to overcome an environment favorable to escape attempts and the existence of antislavery laws south of the border. In their words, "the southern portion- and this is the part, if any, where slave labor ever could be profitable- of our territory borders upon that of the Republic of Mexico: a narrow stream, fordable at almost every point, presenting no obstacle to the escape of a slave to a country where he would be free as in the land of his forefathers, and far more secure from recapture".[179] Like many other Northerners, such as Horace Mann, who fiercely opposed the introduction of African slavery into the Cession lands, Truman Smith would later use these arguments in heated debates on the subject with proslavery southerners and senators Jefferson Davis (Mississippi) and John C. Calhoun (South Carolina). Through these congressional debates, Mexico's free soil and escaped slaves had become to some extent embedded in North-South controversies on slavery and free labor.[180]

Debates over Mexico's asylum policy continued to fuel sectionalism well after the Compromise of 1850. Some months later, the *Southern Quarterly Review*, a staunchly proslavery journal, denounced the Compromise, judging it unfavorable to Southern interests, especially in New Mexico. Because the popular sovereignty option applied with regard to slavery in the new US territories, leaving the principle of Mexico's free soil for now legally unchallenged, the journal expressed its displeasure at the fact that "the moment the negro touches the sacred soil of New Mexico – soil purchased, it may be, by drops of his master's blood – he becomes not only free, but, under the Mexican law, the equal of his master".[181] By contrast, in a context of rising polarization over slavery (internationally and *within* the US), northern abolitionists criticized the lobbying for extradition and the expansion of slavery into Mexico conducted by US officials. In April 1847, for instance, the *National Era* expressed concern that the Union would attempt to force Mexico into signing an accord on fugitive bondspeople's return in exchange for peace.[182] Abolitionists praised Mexico's

[179] John C. Rives, *The Congressional Globe, volume 22, part 2: Thirty-First Congress, First Session, Appendix* (United States, Congress, 1850), 1180, "Connelly et al. to Smith, 18 May 1850" and "Address of Truman Smith, 8 July 1850"; Kiser, *Borderlands of Slavery*, 15-56. Congressional discussions further questioned whether slavery had effectively been abolished in 1829 and 1837 in New Mexico (as in the rest of the Cession lands), since by status it constituted a province of Mexico (equated as US territory) instead of a proper state. although no consensus existed about the subject, black slavery was indeed opposed by a majority of Spanish speaking residents of New Mexico. *The Santa Fe Weekly Gazette*, 16 April 1853.

[180] Horace Mann, *Horace Mann's letters on the Extension of Slavery into California and New Mexico* (Washington DC: Buell & Blanchard, 1850); Eric Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: the Ideology of the Republican Party before the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995); Kiser, *Borderlands of Slavery*, 15-56.

[181] *The Southern Quarterly Review*, v.3/5 (Jan 1851), 206-207.

[182] *National Era*, 29 April 1847.

staunch refusal to deliver runaways. Anti-slavery journalist James Redpath stressed the strength of Mexico's "national animosity" towards slavery, given that "there are numbers of fugitives from American slavery among them", and argued that the institution could "never be extended into Northern Mexico".[183] Some editors, however, voiced their concern that Mexico's asylum policy would be used as a convenient excuse for a new US military invasion. For example, as early as 1852, the *Vermont Watchman and State Journal* argued that "the protection given in Mexico to runaway slaves" had led some people to suggest "the idea of annexing two or three of the Mexican border States to our own".[184]

Such sectionalism at a national level also took on very local expressions. For instance, the conflict that raged between slave-hunter William R. Henry (a former participant in Callahan's expedition) and brevet major general David E. Twiggs personified the discrepancy of interests between local borderland residents and the US federal authorities. In February 1859, Henry called for the organization of a large armed force named the "San Antonio and Brazoria Emigration Company". Drawing the ire of northern editors who denounced the enterprise as "piratical", its aim was to abduct enslaved refuge-seekers settled at San Fernando and Múzquiz in order to sell them at the slave market of New Orleans. Twiggs, the US army's commander in Texas (a veteran of the Seminole and the US-Mexican wars and future major general under the Confederacy), at first seemingly tolerated the planned border-crossing expedition. However, he soon withdrew his backing, as noted by Ronnie Tyler. Instead, anxious to maintain a fragile peace with Mexico, Twiggs ordered the arrest of any US citizen attempting to retrieve escaped slaves beyond the river, which quickly infuriated Henry. In a public letter published in a Galveston newspaper, the filibuster violently accused Twiggs of the infamous act of providing escaped slaves with "the protection of the United States army".[185]

Henry's discourse constituted only the tip of an iceberg of grievances expressed by Southwesterners against the federal government regarding the question of escaped slaves in Mexico after 1848. Criticism was directed at the treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo itself, which did not include any provision on fugitive slaves, "a great omission or oversight" that the New Orleans *Daily Crescent* (among other newspapers) soon

[183] James Redpath, *The Roving Editor, or, Talks with Slaves in the Southern States* (New York: A.A. Burdick, 1859), 303. Interestingly, Southerners opposed to the southward extension of slavery also used this argument. For example, John H. Reagan from the House of Representatives of Texas (*National Era*, 30 Dec. 1858, "The South Becoming Conservative") considered calls for the introduction of slavery into Mexico as a first step towards territorial acquisition, as "by the law of that country the slaves would be free as soon as there".

[184] *Vermont Watchman and State Journal*, 16 Dec. 1852. See also *National Era*, 21 Aug. 1851 (original from Albany *Evening Journal*'s). Equally, the Mexican press usually viewed rising sectionalism in the US on slavery as inciting Southerners to conquer Cuba as a first step toward acquiring the tropics, including Mexico (*El Siglo XIX*, 28 Dec. 1850).

[185] TSLAC, Texas Governor Hardin Richard Runnels, Box 301-28, folder 15, "Henry to Gov. Runnels, 3 Feb. 1859"; *The Southern Intelligencer*, 23 March 1859; *Dallas County*, 13 April 1859; *Meigs County Telegraph*, 26 April 1859; *National Era*, 5 May 1859; *Boletín Oficial*, 29 July 1859; Tyler, "Fugitive Slaves in Mexico", 10.

forecasted as, potentially, "the cause of another war with Mexico in less than ten years".[186] In a similar vein, the San Antonio *Western Texan* stressed that the federal government should have annexed the territory east and north of the Sierra Madre to the US, for it afforded "a safe refuge for runaway negroes and renegades from justice".[187] Texas Ranger and journalist John S. Ford's violent diatribes in his *Texas State Times* against the federal government were symptomatic of the rising resentment felt by proslavery Texans towards Washington. The "General government [was] bound to protect its citizens", according to Ford. Infuriated by its presumed inaction, he encouraged slaving raids in Mexico on the ground that "if the government fails to protect us, we must protect ourselves". Ford's radicalism became commonplace during the years leading up to the US Secession War.[188] For example, the *State Gazette*, the organ of the local Democratic Party, suggested that slaveholders send descriptions of their slaves to its office in preparation for such raids, being justified in doing so by the federal government's failure to perform the "paramount duty" of protecting slave property in the borderlands.[189] Sectional discord grew accordingly.

On 22 March 1858, planter and colonel Henderson McBride Pridgen gave a public address at Clinton (Texas) on the issue of slave flight to Mexico, which he fiercely condemned as "striving to break down [Texas] slave institutions by holding *the false banner of liberty to our slaves*". Pridgen urged the federal government to conclude a restitution accord modeled on the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 with Mexico, implicitly blaming Washington for the occasional deaths of slave-hunters in Mexico, such as three residents of De Witt County "murdered and robbed in cold blood, while in pursuit of runaway slaves" near Laredo. In a discourse connecting individual freedom and slave property, Pridgen emphasized what he perceived as a slaveholder's constitutional right to receive guarantees regarding possession of his enslaved workforce. He suggested that Texan slaveholders would never have backed annexation in 1845 if they had been aware of US presidents Franklin Pierce and James Buchanan's insensitivity to the "grievances" of Texas. Moreover, Pridgen also threatened that slaveholders would soon either invade Mexico or withdraw from the federation in order to satisfy the "great law of self-preservation". His threats voiced an ever-

[186] *New Orleans Daily Crescent*, 6 May 1851. Concerns of military conflicts fueled by slavery-related disputes between the US and Mexico became commonplace in the press: *Houston Telegraph*, 18 July 1851; *National Era*, 4 Sep. 1851; Martha Menchaca, *Naturalizing Mexican Immigrants: a Texas History* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2011), 18.
[187] *The Western Texan*, 3 June 1852.
[188] *Texas State Times*, 2 June 1855; *Texas State Gazette*, 2 June 1855; Nichols, *The Limits of Liberty*, 150-151. Ford contemplated commissioning John A. Quitman to lead an expedition into Mexico for the retrieval of enslaved asylum-seekers, arguing that they "[were] running off daily": May, *The Southern Dream of a Caribbean Empire,* 137.
[189] *Texas State Gazette*, 14 Oct. 1854. Such opinion extended well beyond the southwestern borderlands. During the winter of 1853-1854, Olmsted met a "well-dressed man" on the route between Natchez (Mississippi) and Tuscaloosa (Alabama). With him he conversed on Mexico's sanctuary policy, which his interlocutor considered outright "stealing", rhetorically asking: "what good is the government to us if it don't preserve the rights of property, sir?". Frederick L. Olmsted, *A Journey in the Back Country in the Winter of 1853-4* (New York: Putnam, 1907 [1860]), v.1, 188-192.

increasing sense of exasperation among southern slaveholders. When Pridgen summed up his arguments in a memorial sent to US senator for Texas James Pickney Henderson, five hundred residents signed it.[190] The presumed ineffectiveness (if not complicity, as in William R. Henry's view) of the federal government regarding fugitive slaves in the US-Mexico borderlands represented one of the many bones of contention between Southwesterners and the federation, and fueled both the growth of sectionalism and the overwhelming support of Texans for Secession.[191]

Conclusion

Following the Texas Revolution, in a North American political environment more and more clearly divided between pro- and anti-slavery proponents, Mexico's official commitment to protecting fugitive slaves from the US South grew firmer. These self-emancipated bondspeople settled in the Rio Grande's border towns, in northeastern Mexico's *haciendas*, in the Black Seminole colony in Coahuila and in the Gulf of Mexico's port cities (such as Veracruz), finding employment as casual laborers, domestic servants or craftsmen. Local administrators, such as municipal *alcaldes*, usually welcomed the arrival of these new residents as an opportunity for their communities (economically, demographically and militarily), only occasionally challenging their deservingness and their contribution to local societies. Immersed in rising antislavery sentiment, officials at the federal, state and local levels usually sought to guarantee self-emancipated bondspeople's freedom both on paper (by rejecting demands for restitution and explicitly inscribing free soil in constitutional texts) as well as in practice against multiple legal and extra-legal threats. However, controversies regarding the enforcement of free soil in Mexico persisted at least until the US-Mexican War. These involved Mexican military and administrative officials and US agents in Mexico, all of whom debated to what extent this sanctuary policy should apply in the face of conflicting legal principles and provisions.[192] Furthermore, the intensification of slaving raids in the Texas-Mexico borderlands, military conflicts between Texas, the US and Mexico and the heyday of Southern expansionism during the 1850s all jeopardized the effective maintenance of Mexico's free soil and the preservation of self-liberated bondspeople's freedom. As such, the escape of US bondspeople to Mexico became a sensitive issue for Mexican borderlanders and

[190] Henderson McBride Pridgen, *Address to the People of Texas, on the Protection of Slave Property* (Austin: 1859). The murder alluded to by the author was reported not long before in: *San Antonio Herald*, 15 Dec. 1857 and 30 Dec. 1857; *The Civilian and Gazette*, 22 Dec. 1857.
[191] Ernest Winkler (ed.), *Journal of Secession Convention of Texas* (Austin: Austin Printing Company, 1912), 61-65.
[192] One could argue here that debates on the extent to which to apply free-soil principles and provisions in nineteenth-century Mexico mirrored contemporary discussions about the applicability and limits of the legal doctrine of *non-refoulement* (literally, no forcing back) applying to modern-day refugees: Jari Pirjola, "Shadows in Paradise: Exploring Non-Refoulement as an Open Concept", *International Journal of Refugee Law*, v.19, issue 4 (2007), 639-660; Seline Trevisanut, "The Principle of Non-Refoulement and the De-Territorialization of Border Control at Sea", *Leiden Journal of International Law*, v.27, issue 3 (2014), 661-675.

residents of the US South alike, with the latter increasingly resorting to transnational violence to recover enslaved asylum-seekers. While an unprecedented number of slaving expeditions into Mexico further divided national communities along the border, the related issues of free soil and slave flight to Mexico planted another seed of discord between Southerners and Northerners during the years leading up to the US Civil War, partly accounting for the support for Secession by a majority of Southwesterners in 1861.

CONCLUSION

"Mexico will assuredly be overrun by the slaves from the Southern States": The Making of Free Soil, The Unmaking of the Second Slavery

At the outset of this study, the following research question was posed: what was the nature of slave flight in the Mexican borderlands, and how and why did Mexico develop into a site of "conditional freedom" for slave refugees from the American South? First, *Conditional Freedom* has demonstrated that flight and freedom across the Mexican border was largely conditional upon enslaved people's background experiences, resources, strategies and networks. Mastering social and geographical skills, forging networks of support before, during and after flight and devising bold escape strategies were all crucial to successfully escaping to Mexico. They were accessible mostly to young, skilled and male enslaved people. Second, Mexico's development as a space of formal freedom (on paper) was fraught with a series of external challenges and internal debates. This complex, contradictory and disputed making of free-soil policy in Mexico accounts for the conditional freedom that, in practice, most fugitive slaves experienced across the Mexican border. These are the succinct answers to the questions posed above. This concluding chapter seeks to further reflect on these issues. The first section will yield some critical insights into the non-linear and contested making of free soil in Mexico during the nineteenth century, emphasizing how the development of Mexico as free-soil territory was anything but inexorable, before setting out the main conclusions and contributions of *Conditional Freedom*. By way of closing, the second section will delve into how the long-lasting tension between free soil and bondage came to an end. Returning to some of the main insights of ch.1 and 2, it succinctly addresses the demise of the Second Slavery in the US-Mexico borderlands during the 1860s through the prism of slave flight to Mexico.

The Making of Free Soil

By the eve of the US Civil War, slaveholders in the US South seemed to be surrounded by free-soil areas, with Canada, the British Caribbean, Haiti and Mexico all supporting an "imagined community of transnational abolitionism", as Edward B. Rugemer once put it.[1] For enslaved people from the US South using their "geopolitical literacy", the variety of destinations in which to obtain formal freedom had significantly expanded since the geographical and political front of free soil had first emerged in late-eighteenth century Pennsylvania.[2] This expansion of opportunities is illustrated by the

[1] Edward B. Rugemer, *The Problem of Emancipation: the Caribbean Roots of the American Civil War* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2009), 12.

[2] Phillip Troutman, "Grapevine in the Slave Market: African American Geopolitical Literacy and the 1841 *Creole* Revolt", in Walter Johnson (ed.), *The Chattel Principle: Internal Slave Trades in the Americas* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 203-233; Richard S. Newman, "'Lucky to be born in Pennsylvania': Free Soil, Fugitive Slaves and the Making of Pennsylvania's Anti-Slavery Borderland", *Slavery & Abolition*, 32:3 (2011), 413-430.

response of the enslaver Jonathan Harris to the escape of George, a thirty-five-year-old "mulatto boy" employed as a "brick-layer by trade". George escaped from Jonathan Harris's estate in Opelousas (Louisiana) in August 1859. His enslaver had absolutely no clue as to where George was headed, except that he would strive to reach a free-soil territory by "mak[ing] his way to the underground railroad to reach the North or Canada or to go West across Texas, for Mexico".[3]

After the Louisiana Purchase, the fame of Mexico's Northeast as a haven for refugees from slavery considerably widened. Following the Texas Revolution, especially, self-emancipated slaves mostly from Texas, Louisiana and Mississippi crossed the border in increasing numbers, despite the rise to power of proslavery social, legal and political interests west of the Mississippi valley. However, the real and imagined association between Mexico and the cause of antislavery among enslaved people, abolitionists and slaveholders throughout the US, fostered by the entrenchment of slavery's abolition and free-soil principles in the independent republic from the 1820s onwards, should not obscure its tortuous trajectory from a society with slaves to a space of unconditional freedom (on paper) for all enslaved people. Although Mexico banned the slave trade in 1824 and abolished its own slavery in 1829 – with the controversial exception of Texas – a completely unified and consistent asylum policy for enslaved freedom-seekers took far longer to emerge. Slave emancipation and free soil did not fully overlap. By contrast with teleological narratives on the emergence of Mexico's free-soil policy, *Conditional Freedom* has shown that there was no historical inevitability in Mexico's formation as a space of formal – although in practice conditional – freedom for foreign enslaved people, nor in its emergence as an antithesis to the American "peculiar institution".

Mexican Texas (1821-1836) offered a prime ground for the observation of free soil's incomplete realization, the persistence of grey areas and the ensuing liminality of self-emancipated enslaved people's status before the Texas Revolution. This liminality is illustrated by the case of Peter and Tom, two self-emancipated slaves who absconded to San Antonio de Bexar's Civil Court during the spring of 1832. They were regarded by *Jefe Político* Ramón Múzquiz as "*en clase de depósito*" (as a deposit). Thus, despite being formally "*amparados*" (protected) by the Mexican state's local agents, their transition from slavery to freedom was still incomplete.[4] Before their abduction by Euro-American mercenaries Peter and Tom's liminal condition as *amparados,* while not yet fully free, stemmed from the fact that free soil, though gaining momentum after Mexico's independence, remained a contentious issue among Mexican officials before the Texas Revolution. Proponents of its strict enforcement viewed it as an expedient way to curb the westward progress of the Second Slavery and a Euro-American colonization that increasingly encroached upon Mexican sovereignty. The architect of the 6 April 1830 restrictive law on immigration, *comandante general*

[3] *The Opelousas Patriot*, 3 Sep. 1859.
[4] See ch.3 for detailed case. For the specific terminology discussed here: AGEC, FJPB, c.22, e.55 "Múzquiz a Gobernador de Coahuila y Texas, 3 June 1832"; AGEC, FJPB, c.22, e.56 "Múzquiz a Gobernador de Coahuila y Texas, 4 June 1832".

Manuel de Mier y Terán, for instance, proposed in 1831 to consider all black people entering Texas from now on as free by means of an explicit declaration to be published in municipalities throughout Texas as well as in New Orleans. Supporting free soil as the official policy for all newcomers, Mier y Terán nevertheless did not dare to challenge the legal existence of the slaveholding enclaves that had already formed in Texas. Moreover, the *comandante general* advocated the settlement of free African Americans from the US in Coatzacoalcos (Veracruz) as well as in Lavaca and Tenoxtitlán (Texas), so as to raise a much-needed workforce for the production of cotton. By doing so, he hoped to replicate the bonanza experienced along the Brazos and Colorado rivers, this time for Mexico's exclusive benefit. However, Mier y Terán's main concern was to establish these settlements sufficiently far from slaveholding areas, judging that enslaved people might otherwise attempt to abscond from the adjacent Euro-American colonies and further strain the relationship between the Mexican state and foreign slaveholders, with the US potentially intervening as their ally.[5]

Preoccupied by similar considerations, some officials in the borderlands adopted a more conciliatory approach by denying asylum to enslaved freedom-seekers and returning them to Euro-American settlers in Texas and the US South, as official correspondence from the *Secretaría de Fomento* substantiates. Many advocated the closing of Mexican soil to fugitive slaves (often despite their own aversion to slavery) as a way to curb the "Americanization" of Texas. An example of this is Jorge Fisher (Đorđe Ribar), born in Hungary to Serbian parents, who was naturalized as a Mexican in 1829 and later became collector of customs at Anahuac (Texas). Fisher suggested establishing a new military fort on the eastern border of Texas to "prohibit the introduction of negro fugitive slaves from Louisiana into our territory" along with illegal settlers and criminals. Likewise, Francisco Pizarro Martínez, Mexico's consul in New Orleans, favored a ban on the introduction of all black people into the department of Texas. In his view, it was impossible to distinguish free African Americans from enslaved people who were routinely smuggled from Louisiana as indentured servants. Mier y Terán, Fisher and Pizarro Martínez highlight the wide spectrum of positions adopted by Mexican officials on slave refugees – and black people more generally – before 1836. They show the extent to which debates over slave flight, free soil and the progress of the Second Slavery west of the Mississippi River had become inextricably entangled at the eve of the Texas Revolution. They also show how freedom for American black people in Mexico remained conditional upon the visions of nation builders in New Spain and Mexico throughout the nineteenth century, as they constantly weighed the benefits of asylum policies (mainly the colonization of

[5] TBL, Bolton, 46:26, "Reflexiones que hago sobre cada articulo de la ley de 6 de abril de este año [...], Mier y Terán, 6 June 1830"; Bolton, 46:8, "Mier y Terán to Gobernador de Coahuila y Texas, 6 March 1831"; "Mier y Terán to Ministro de Relaciones Interiores y Exteriores, 23 Oct. 1830"; "Mier y Terán to Secretario de Relaciones Interiores y Esteriores, 22 June 1831".

frontier areas along with economic and moral gains) against their practical disadvantages (increased geopolitical tensions), as *Conditional Freedom* has revealed.[6]

The Texas Revolution (1835-1836) pushed Mexico to embrace the cause of free soil against its aggressively expanding slaveholding neighbor, as argued in chapter 4. Reasserting its nation-wide abolition of slavery in April 1837, the federation became staunchly committed to the enforcement of an unconditional free-soil policy for foreign self-emancipated blacks. Yet this transition was far from inexorable. For instance, in the wake of the Texas Revolution, representatives for *hacendados* from Orizaba and Córdoba (Veracruz) petitioned the *Secretaría de Fomento* for the transfer to their estates of formerly enslaved people who had taken refuge in the Mexican army during the military campaign in Texas. While claiming to protect slave refugees from Texan slaveholders, their main motivation was rather to solve the problem of labor shortages on Veracruz's cotton, coffee, tobacco, cacao, vanilla, indigo and sugarcane estates. According to the proposal, the laborers were to contract a debt to the *hacienda* (transferable to the whole family in case of death), and would have to work for at least ten years to reimburse it. They could not leave the estate – temporarily or permanently – and they had to have their patron's permission to hold "reunion, games, dances". The landowners were eventually denied permission. Nonetheless, this petition suggests that a quite different (free-soil) policy regarding enslaved freedom-seekers could have emerged in Mexico after 1836. It also reflects the very real coercive and exploitative work relationships, such as debt bondage, that many former bondspeople faced in Mexico's Northeast.[7]

Because the legal right of recapture never extended beyond US national borders, and Mexican officials and citizens for the most part sought to protect self-emancipated slaves, Mexican territory came close to fully becoming a space of *formal* freedom for foreign refugees from slavery before 1861. The *longue durée* perspective of *Conditional Freedom* has made it possible to trace how, from an asylum policy initially grounded on religious foundations, a new perspective arose which linked the secularized notion of free soil to the nation-state. This happened during the interval between the wars for independence and the 1860s.[8] Mexico's politics of refuge relied,

[6] TBL, Bolton, 46:24, "Fisher to A. Cerecero, 10 Feb. 1830" and Bolton, 47:9, "Fisher to M. Muro, 13 April 1832"; Bolton, 46:9, "Secretaría de Fomento [...] año de 1831, Texas, correspondencia relativa a la introducción de esclavos a aquel territorio". On Fisher's mandate at Anahuac: Ernest Obadele-Starks, *Freebooters and Smugglers: the Foreign Slave Trade in the United States after 1808* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2007), 77-78.

[7] TBL, Bolton, 46:15, "Hacendados de Orizaba and Córdoba to Secretaría de Fomento, soliciting that slaves who after the conclusion of the war in Texas will become free be destined to their estates, 16 April 1836". On the *hacienda* system in nineteenth-century Mexico: John Tutino, *From Insurrection to Revolution in Mexico: Social Bases for Agrarian Violence, 1750-1940* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986); Timo H. Schaefer, *Liberalism as Utopia: the Rise and Fall of Legal Rule in Post-Colonial Mexico, 1820-1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 97-128.

[8] This secularization of asylum policies in early nineteenth-century Mexico, as analyzed in *Conditional Freedom* (especially in ch.3), can be framed within a larger transition with regard to sanctuary policies as being increasingly guaranteed by state authorities over religious

most of the time, however, on the use of discretion by local officials, who turned a blind eye to the presence within their communities of escaped slaves who often did not comply with legal requirements for lawful residency. Although US agents in Mexico did treat enslaved freedom-seekers as "citizens of nowhere", as Sarah Cornell has shown, the Mexican state's recognition and protection of fugitive slaves as denizens, if not full citizens, far outweighed the interventions of US diplomats regarding self-emancipated bondspeople's lives in Mexico. Local residents, militias and governments sought to ensure – with success – the freedom of the vast majority of enslaved refuge-seekers across the border by thwarting or simply preventing invasions by foreign mercenaries. Despite the persistent fear of abduction, a fugitive slave enjoyed far more prospects of remaining free by settling across the Rio Grande than by remaining in slaveholding Texas, as Kyle Ainsworth has argued. The spectacular nature of abduction cases (gaining ground during the 1850s) must not mislead historians into concluding that access to and enjoyment of formal freedom in Mexico's Northeast was merely an illusion. In this respect, crossing the US-Mexican border did make a significant difference for fugitives. *Conditional Freedom* thus supports the argument recently made by James D. Nichols, by contrast to Cornell's slightly overstated emphasis on the precariousness of freedom for fugitive slaves from the US South in Mexico.[9]

However, notwithstanding the entrenchment of formal freedom on paper, freedom-seekers in Mexico never came to be completely shielded from re-enslavement. *Conditional Freedom* thereby argues that for most of the period between 1803 and 1861, the level of personal security that Mexico's Northeast offered to self-emancipated bondspeople oscillated somewhere between the US North's (*semi-formal freedom*) and Canada's (*formal freedom*), due to two main factors. First, the decreasing trust of southern slaveholders in the outcome of diplomatic negotiations and legal actions for the rendition of self-liberated slaves fostered the rise of violent raids into Mexican territory. The porosity of national boundaries that facilitated enslaved people's flight also helped mercenaries storming Mexican settlements to abduct and re-enslave them. Second, the transition towards formal freedom clashed with the liminality of some escaped bondspeople's status on Mexican soil between the Texas Revolution and the US-Mexican War. After 1836, Mexican and US officials debated potential exceptions to free-soil policy with regard to so-called sojourning slaves, enslaved seamen and self-liberated slaves who had committed criminal acts in the US.

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authorities during the early modern period and the Age of Revolution across the Atlantic world: Philip Marfleet, "Understanding 'Sanctuary': Faith and Traditions of Asylum", *Journal of Refugee Studies*, v.24, n°3 (2011), 440-455; Phil Orchard, "The Dawn of International Refugee Protection: States, Tacit Cooperation and Non-Extradition", *Journal of Refugee Studies*, v.30, n°2 (2016), 282-300.

[9] Kyle Ainsworth, "Advertising Maranda: Runaway Slaves in Texas, 1835-1865" in Damian A. Pargas (ed.), *Fugitive Slaves and Spaces of Freedom in North America* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2018), 197-230; James D. Nichols, *The Limits of Liberty: Mobility and the Making of the Eastern U.S.-Mexico Border* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2018); Sarah E. Cornell, "Citizens of Nowhere: Fugitive Slaves and Free African Americans in Mexico, 1833-1857", *Journal of American History*, 100:2 (2013), 351-374.

Formal freedom for refugees from slavery could always become a dead letter in practice, depending on choices made by foreign mercenaries, Mexico's local officials and distant bureaucrats. In sum, as *Conditional Freedom* has shown, after the Texas Revolution, Mexico came close to constituting a model free-soil territory, not only on paper but also in practice. However, the real or imagined threat of abduction by slaveholders as well as US and Mexican mercenaries, combined with the inconsistencies of Mexico's free-soil policy, imposed serious limitations on the promise of formal freedom.

Conditional Freedom has presented a panorama of the specific personal characteristics, skills and strategies that shaped enslaved people's prospects of attaining and securing freedom from the US South to Mexico, against the backdrop of clashing nation-building processes and labor regimes. By doing so, it has contributed to scholarly discussions on how enslaved people across the Americas accessed and crafted "fractional freedoms" during slavery and "degrees of freedom" after emancipation.[10] This study has demonstrated the contrast between the rise of unconditional freedom on paper and the persistence of conditional freedom in practice in Mexico. It has shed light on the range of experiences of self-emancipated slaves between informal and formal freedom and has nuanced our understanding of free soil in North America in the age of the Second Slavery. Furthermore, fugitive slaves, more than any other group of people living in the US-Mexico borderlands, revealed the increasing tension between the Second Slavery and free-soil territories as rival political geographies in the Age of Revolution. Ada Ferrer has recently elucidated the entangled processes of the end of slavery in Haiti and its continuation in Cuba, showing the connection between free soil and the Second Slavery in the nineteenth century. *Conditional Freedom* has added to this, yielding new insights on this entanglement. It has shown that freedom for slave refugees in Mexico's Northeast remained conditional upon the growth of slavery in the US South, while the progress of the Second Slavery west of the Mississippi valley was undermined by Mexico's free-soil policy. Slaveholders encroached upon Mexican territory to illegally retrieve their fugitive "property", while Mexico's free-soil policy preyed upon the minds of both enslavers and enslaved throughout the US South.[11]

The Unmaking of the Second Slavery

Through these entanglements, resistance to the Second Slavery in the US Southwest became synonymous with slave flight to Mexico after the US-Mexican War. As chapter 4 has shown, the promise of formal freedom across the Mexican border undermined

[10] Michelle A. McKinley, *Fractional Freedoms: Slavery, Intimacy and Legal Mobilization in Colonial Lima, 1600-1700* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016); Rebecca J. Scott, *Degrees of Freedom: Louisiana and Cuba after Slavery* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005).
[11] Ada Ferrer, *Freedom's Mirror: Cuba and Haiti in the Age of Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

slavery in the US. First, the proximity of Mexican free soil discouraged settlers from further colonizing the southwestern frontier with enslaved people. Slaveholders who traveled with enslaved people to Mexico ran the risk of losing capital.[12] Second, and more fundamentally, Southwesterners, with Texans at the forefront, flaunted Mexican authority through filibustering and slaving raids. In doing so, they denounced the US federal government's failure, in their view, to crack down on self-emancipated slaves absconding to Mexico and to resolve the tension between slavery and free soil. These attacks on the political credibility of the US in relation to slave flight were one of the symptoms of the radicalization of the US South's proslavery party during the 1850s, as they were made in the context of calls for the annexation of Cuba, the reopening of the slave trade and debates regarding apprenticeship laws as disguised schemes for the introduction of African Americans as *de facto* slaves.[13]

When the first shots of the US Civil War were fired and a French Intervention in Mexico (1861-1867) seemed imminent, the Mexico City *Mexican Extraordinary* (a British newspaper that four years earlier had expressed dissatisfaction at free black immigration into Mexico) wrote about the position enslaved people would take in a war. According to the newspaper, enslaved people would "seek liberty by revolts and flights" and their "natural asylum will be Mexico, on account of its convenience and the consideration and sympathy here enjoyed by the negro race". Its editor argued that, with its "climate and soil [being] both favorable", "Mexico will assuredly be overrun by the slaves from the Southern States". He added: "they will naturally fall upon the low lands of Tamaulipas, Vera Cruz, Oajaca, Tehuantepec, Nuevo León and Coahuila", the tropical regions of Mexico, and "they will control the districts they at first settle in, and carry their aggressions upon others that attempt to coerce them".[14] Enslaved people from the US Southwest did abscond across the Mexican border during the Secession War. However, they never came close to "overrunning" Mexico – which had declared political neutrality in the conflict between the Confederate South and the Union – as dreaded by the *Mexican Extraordinary*. Warfare and nearby free soil empowered enslaved people in the borderlands willing to make an escape to freedom. Union troops never invaded Texas (except for a short-lived occupation of Galveston).

[12] The case "Thompson v. Berry 26 Tex 263", at the Texas Supreme Court, evidences how free soil and its threat deterred the settlement of slaveholders and further progress by the Second Slavery into Mexico. In 1831, a woman named Milly Billy moved from Arkansas to Mexican Texas with an unknown number of enslaved people, but out of fear that they would be considered free in Coahuila y Tejas, she removed them to Louisiana some months later where they were seized as "contraband". Charles M. Robards, A.M. Jackson (ed.), *Reports of cases argued and decided in the Supreme Court of the State of Texas, during Austin session 1861; Galveston, Tyler and Austin sessions 1862; Galveston and part of Tyler sessions 1863, v. 26* (St. Louis: The Gilbert Book Company, 1881), 211-216.

[13] Obadele-Starks, *Freebooters and Smugglers*, 109-167; Walter Johnson, *River of Dark Dreams: Slavery and Empire in the Cotton Kingdom* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2013), 392-420.

[14] *Mexican Extraordinary*, 6 Aug. 1857, 30 July 1858; *The Pine and Palm*, 17 Aug. 1861. The 1857 controversy with *Le Trait d'Union*, *El Monitor* and *El Siglo XIX* on black immigration is analyzed in Rosalie Schwartz, *Across the Rio to Freedom: US Negroes in Mexico* (El Paso: Texas Western Press, 1975), 40-42; and Cornell, "Citizens of Nowhere", 372-373.

However, as Andrew Torget has shown, the Confederate army draft jeopardized the supervision of the enslaved population as well as the booming train trade in cotton with Mexico's *villas del norte* that bypassed the Union's blockade of Galveston (from October 1862 onwards). This provided new opportunities for enslaved people to abscond south of the border. Following Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation on 22 September 1862 – promising freedom to any escaped slave who would reach Union lines after 1 January 1863 – resistance by enslaved people in the US-Mexico borderlands peaked.[15] Many escaped slaves sought to reach the Union troops, who during the year of 1862 had made a decisive foray into the Mississippi Valley. Around Galveston, others sought to flee oversea to the Union war vessels that were enforcing the coastal blockade, echoing the actions of antebellum maritime self-emancipated slaves seeking to reach Mexican shores.[16] Finally, some absconded to the Mexican border, such as the twenty-nine-year-old enslaved man Henry, who fled from the suburbs of Austin in June 1863 after he "made his brags that he won't serve a white man and that he [was] going to Mexico".[17]

Like Henry, enslaved people absconding to Mexico shared many characteristics with other fugitive slaves in North America. However, *Conditional Freedom* has shown that they were unique in many other respects. In the US-Mexico borderlands, slave flight was an overwhelmingly male enterprise (even more so than across the rest of the US South), and despite the prevalence of individual escape attempts, collective flight (especially in small groups of 2 to 5 runaways) was relatively more common than in the US South as a whole. Moreover, the omnipresent figure of the "uprooted" fugitive slave, a bondsperson whose ties with relatives had been broken by the interregional slave trade, also represented a salient specificity of the US-Mexico border area.[18] *Conditional Freedom* has asserted that enslaved people escaped from the US South to Mexico for a wide range of reasons (especially due to separation from relatives, the extreme violence of slavery in the borderlands as well as broken compromises with enslavers), not the least being that they increasingly had "Mexico in [their] heads", as Sean M. Kelley has argued.[19] However, *Conditional Freedom* has also shown that the small minority of the enslaved population who had itinerant jobs, interstate mobility and skills were more likely to conceive and be capable of absconding to the Mexican border. As Ian Read and Karl Zimmerman have pointed out for runaway slaves in nineteenth-century Brazil, slave flight was frequently the result of a "lucky

[15] TCA, Texas Probate Records, Minute Book C, 527 (Dec. 1864); Andrew J. Torget, "The Problem of Slave Flight in Civil War Texas", in Jesús de la Teja (ed.), *Lone Star Unionism, Dissent and Resistance* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2016), 37-59; W. Caleb McDaniel, "Involuntary Removals: 'Refugeed Slaves' in Confederate Texas", in De la Teja (ed.), *Lone Star Unionism, Dissent and Resistance*, 60-83; Sean M. Kelley, *Los Brazos de Dios: a Plantation Society in the Texas-Mexico Borderlands, 1821-1865* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2010), 162-188.
[16] Torget, "The Problem of Slave Flight", 53-54.
[17] *The State Gazette*, 3 June 1863.
[18] John Hope Franklin, Loren Schweninger, *Runaway Slaves: Rebels on the Plantation* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 209-233.
[19] Sean M. Kelley, "Mexico in his Head: Slavery and the Texas-Mexican Border, 1810-1860", *Journal of Social History*, 37:3 (2004), 709-723.

configuration of position and skills within a sharply gendered and hierarchical society".[20] In sum, while the prospect of slave flight to Mexico could appeal to enslaved people for a wide range of reasons, the concrete opportunity to do so was less widely available. Indeed, this testifies to the increasingly hermetic nature of the Second Slavery in the US South. This tension was no different during the US Civil War. In the midst of the conflict, enslaved people's capacity to successfully make a bid for freedom from the US South to Mexico was conditioned by political, demographic, socioeconomic and environmental structures that predominantly favored the escape of young skilled men.

Conditional Freedom has challenged the indiscriminate use of the metaphor of an "Underground Railroad" as applied by some scholars to slave flight to the Mexican border, since networks of support over the nineteenth century were mostly *ad hoc*, fragile and ambivalent.[21] However, by navigating in-between conflicting nation-states, self-emancipated bondspeople were able to draw support from diverse communities inhabiting the borderlands whose interests and values at times aligned with theirs. During the 1860s, slave refugees built upon strategies, networks of assistance, skills, routes and patterns of escape that had been cultivated during earlier decades. Forging casual alliances with third parties, escaped slaves secured the assistance of Mexican laborers, capitalizing upon a long record of interracial coexistence and sympathy. A fifteen-year-old enslaved man named Bob provides an example. He "[spoke] sufficiently well to make himself understood in that language [Spanish]" and left San Antonio with a Mexican peon in February 1863, "in company with some of the trains going into Mexico with cotton".[22] Skills and contacts thus shaped Bob's flight. Fleeing slaves stole horses, guns and money from their masters, turning the instruments of the Second Slavery's expansion to their advantage when escaping to Mexico's free soil. They knew from their predecessors that attaining freedom was, to a great extent, conditional upon mastering bold and inventive material and spatial strategies.[23]

Slave flight to Mexico during the US Civil War contributed to the fall of slavery at a time when its collision with free-soil territories was reaching a pinnacle. Across the Mexican border, refugees from slavery joined other self-emancipated blacks who had formed communities in northeastern Mexico. By the start of the war, a Texas newspaper's correspondent in Monterrey described how "a good supply of runaway darkies here, over 50", resided in the city. They shared their space with a growing number of exiled Southerners, as Monterrey became a focus of Confederate exodus

[20] Ian Reed, Karl Zimmerman, "Freedom for too few: Slave Runaways in the Brazilian Empire", *Journal of Social History*, 48:2 (2014), 417.
[21] Mekala Shadd-Sartor Audain, "Mexican Canaan: Fugitive Slaves and Free Blacks on the American Frontier, 1804-1867", PhD Diss. (Graduate School-New Brunswick Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, 2014), 2; Ainsworth, "Advertising Maranda", in Pargas (ed.), *Fugitive Slaves and Spaces of Freedom in North America,* 211.
[22] *San Antonio Herald*, 14 Feb. 1863.
[23] *San Antonio News*, 9 July 1864; *The Ranchero*, 17 Dec. 1864; *The San Antonio Weekly Herald*, 14 Jan. 1865.

both during and after the conflict.[24] Patterns of flight persisted during the Civil War, as the case of so-called "sojourning" slaves shows. Some enslaved people absconded from Confederate masters who they were accompanying in their flight to Mexico from the advance of the Union troops, using their presence on Mexican soil to secure their emancipation.[25] Eliza McHatton and her husband, for instance, were slave masters fleeing from the Union's foray into Louisiana, and travelling westward to Texas and, later, Piedras Negras. Four enslaved people, Delia, Humphrey, Martha and Zell, went with them. When they were returning to San Antonio during the spring of 1864, Delia "disappeared the morning [they] left Piedras Negras… [she] had drifted down to Mier and was living there". At the end of the Civil War, as the McHattons escaped to Matamoros hoping to embark for Cuba, one of the last strongholds of the Second Slavery, Humphrey "raced straight to the Mexican authorities" anxious to secure freedom for Martha, Zell and himself. While "Humphrey departed with his new-made Mexican friends", the leniency (or outright sympathy) of many of the Empire's agents in the *villas del norte* towards exiled Confederate explains how the McHattons were able to keep Martha as their property in Matamoros before sailing to Cuba.[26]

Figure 4: Matamoros during the US Civil War and the French Intervention
Source: Bonwill, C.E.H., Artist, Loading Wagons on the Calle de Cesar, Matamoras, for Piedras Negras, from sketch by our special artist, C.E.H. Bonwill, Matamoras, Mexico, 1864. Photograph. https://www.loc.gov/item/97518764/.

[24] *Galveston Weekly News*, 10 Sep. 1861; Todd W. Wahlstrom, *The Southern Exodus to Mexico: Migration Across the Borderlands after the American Civil War* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2015), xiii.
[25] *New York Herald*, 20 Nov. 1862, "Four hundred wagonloads of negroes"; Wahlstrom, *The Southern Exodus to Mexico*, 39.
[26] Eliza Chinn McHatton-Ripley, *From Flag to Flag: a Woman's Adventures and Experiences in the South during the War, in Mexico, and in Cuba* (New York: D. Appleton, 1896), 112, 119 and 123-124; Matthew Pratt Guterl, *American Mediterranean: Southern Slaveholders in the Age of Emancipation* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008), 89-90; Wahlstrom, *The Southern Exodus to Mexico,* 40-41.

The enslaved had a wide spectrum of tactics from which they could choose, depending on their own characteristics and opportunities. Similarly, masters in the US South relied on a broad variety of regular and irregular forms of repression that, for decades, had been employed to curb slave flight. As described by Ronnie Tyler and James D. Nichols, invasions by mercenaries into Mexican territory persisted during the 1860s. For instance, on 18 November 1861, about fifty Southern filibusters stormed the small frontier settlement of La Resurrección (present-day Ciudad Acuña) to claim a fugitive slave under the pretext of chasing "Indians". Two days earlier, the town had suffered a devastating attack by Native Americans. While coming to the rescue of La Resurrección alongside more than 170 armed volunteers from central Coahuila, commandant Vicente Garza met on the road about fifty families who had packed their belongings on carts and left the area.[27] Meanwhile in Texas, the lynching of real or presumed accomplices to self-liberated slaves absconding to Mexico continued.[28] At the other end of this spectrum, alongside extending the mandate of slave patrols, Confederate authorities sought to secure the rendition of fugitive slaves from Mexico's northern officials. [29] Unsurprisingly, the Lerdo de Tejada-Corwin extradition agreement, signed between the US and Mexico in June 1862, did not include escaped slaves. Confederate Southerners, who were not bound by the treaty, nonetheless directly negotiated with borderlands officials as they had done before the war. In early 1863, military and civil commandant of Tamaulipas Albino López and Brigadier-General Hamilton P. Bee drafted an extradition agreement (although not a binding international treaty, since Mexico did not recognize the Confederacy and Mexican states could not formalize accords with foreign powers on their own initiative). In this draft, fugitive slaves were included under the vague category of "stolen property" to be mutually returned. However, López eventually chose to abide by the 1857 Constitution's free-soil provision, which explicitly exempted people "in a state of slavery" from the convention.

Like most of his predecessors on Mexico's northeastern borderlands, from Nemesio Salcedo to Santiago Vidaurri, López had thus been tempted to evade the official free-soil policies for foreign self-emancipated slaves that stemmed from Mexico City. They did so for the sake of maintaining friendly relations and preserving commerce across the border (apart from, in the present case, safeguarding a precious source of tax revenue).[30] In December 1864, the Confederates likewise made an agreement with the Franco-Austrian Imperial authorities led by General Tomás Mejía (that had taken control of the northeastern border) regarding the principle of mutual restitution of deserters and criminals. This accord was eased by ideological proximity

[27] SRE, LE-1595, f.159-161 and LE-1594, Manuel Rejón to Secretario de Gobierno del Estado, 22 Nov. 1861 (1873, Invasiones de los Indios Bárbaros de los Estados Unidos de América a México, Estudio de las Reclamaciones por la Comisión Pesquisidora de la Frontera del Norte); Tyler, "Fugitive Slaves in Mexico" 11; Nichols, *The Limits of Liberty*, 217-220.
[28] *The Galveston News, Tri-Weekly*, 7 Feb. 1864; *Flake's Daily Journal*, 15 Nov. 1865.
[29] Torget, "The Problem of Slave Flight", 42.
[30] Robert N. Scott (ed.), *The War of the Rebellion: a Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* (Washington: Gov. Print. Off., 1886), series 1, v.15, 975-978, 992-998 and 1006-7; Tyler, "Fugitive Slaves in Mexico", 11.

between Emperor Ferdinand Maximilian Joseph's Mexico and the Confederate South. Although fugitive slaves were once again excluded from this formal arrangement, some were nonetheless informally extradited from Mexico to the Confederacy, as a spirit of borderlands cooperation prevailed, stemming from the mutual profits derived from bootlegging cotton. Claiming that "runaway negroes will find that they have not got among abolitionists after crossing the Bravo" [Rio Grande], the apologists of the "peculiar institution" rejoiced, not knowing that its days in the US Southwest were numbered. On 19 June 1865, slavery ceased to exist in Texas, when US army officer Gordon Granger officially proclaimed its abolition at Galveston.[31]

Well after the demise of American slavery, however, the impact of the Mexican border in sealing spaces of freedom and bondage continued to be felt. African Americans scattered by the clash between the Second Slavery and free soil in the US-Mexico borderlands – either as former self-liberated enslaved people or as one of their relatives – continued to search for missing family members. In 1885, a man named Stephen Collins was still searching for his uncle Robert Brown (or "Coleman"). Robert had "belonged to Dr. Brown in Gonzales" (Texas), from where he "went to Mexico in 1864". When last heard of, during the late 1870s, the former slave was still living south of the Rio Grande. Even as late as the eve of the twentieth century, slave refugees were still trying to pick up the pieces of slave communities destroyed by the institution of slavery, as the story of the former fugitive slave Thomas Sheals shows. Sheals sought to reunite with some of his relatives as late as 1892. He had once absconded from Industry, Texas, by "[taking] a horse and mule and [going] to Mexico", leaving behind his wife Amanda. Now living in Stockton, California, he was "anxious" to find her.[32]

[31] *The Galveston News (Tri Weekly),* 30 Nov. 1864; *The Houston Tri-Weekly Telegrap*h, 27 Jan. 1865; George W. Davis, Joseph W. Kirkley and Leslie J. Perry (ed.), *The War of the Rebellion: a Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* (Washington: Gov. Print. Off., 1896), series 1, v.48 (part.1), 1311-1312 and 1329-1330; Thomas Schoonover, "Confederate Diplomacy and the Texas-Mexican Border, 1861-1865", *East Texas Historical Journal*, v.11, issue 1 (1973), 33-39; Guterl, *American Mediterranean*, 57; Torget, "The Problem of Slave Flight", 53.

[32] *The Southwestern Christian Advocate*, 28 May 1885; *The Freeman*, 30 April 1892. *Last Seen: Finding Family After Slavery* [accessed 4 Oct. 2018].

Appendices

Appendix 1: the process of abolition of slavery in early independent Mexico following the federalist constitution of 1824.

State	Date	Decision
Durango Jalisco Occidente (Sinaloa and Sonora) San Luis Potosí	1826 (art.14) 1824 (art.9) 1825 (art.4) 1827 (decree)	Abolition of slavery (*without* indemnity to slaveholders) and slave trade
Chiapas Michoacán Querétaro	1826 (art.7) 1825 (art.14) 1825 (art.7)	Abolition of slavery (*with* indemnity to slaveholders) and slave trade
Guanajuato Tamaulipas	1826 (preamble) 1825 (art.9)	*De facto* abolition (freedom and equality for all citizens)
Tabasco	1825 (art. 10.4)	Citizenship to manumitted slaves
Chihuahua Coahuila y Tejas Estado de México Nuevo León Oaxaca Puebla Yucatán	1825 (art.7) 1827 (art.13) 1827 (art.6) 1825 (art.12) 1825 (art.7) 1825 (art.8) 1825 (art.4)	Free-womb law and ban on slave introduction/slave trade
Veracruz	1825 (art.10)	Free-womb law
Zacatecas	1825 (art.7.3)	Abolition of slave trade

Sources:

Constitución política del Estado de Querétaro, sancionada por su Congreso constituyente el 12 de Agosto de 1825 (México: Imprenta de la Águila, 1825); *Constitución política del Estado de Oajaca* (México: Imprenta de la Águila, 1825); Manuel Muro, *Historia de San Luis Potosí, desde 1810 hasta nuestros días*, tomo I (San Luis Potosí: Esquivel y Cía., 1910); Jaime Olveda Legaspi, "La abolición de la esclavitud en México, 1810-1917", *Signos históricos*, 29 (Jan.-Jun. 2013), 8-34; María Camila Díaz Casas, "De esclavos a ciudadanos? Matices sobre la "integración" y "asimilación" de la población de origen africano en la sociedad nacional mexicana, 1810-1850" in Juan Manuel de la Serna (ed.), *Negros y Morenos en Iberoamérica: Adaptación y Conflicto* (México: UNAM, 2015), 273-303.

Appendix 2: José Joaquín Ugarte to Señor Brigadier Marqués de Casa Calvo [Sebastián Calvo de la Puerta y O'Farrill], Nacogdoches, 11 September 1804.

Source: Archivo General de Indias (Seville, Spain), Papeles de Cuba, 73, "Correspondencia dirigida a los gobernadores de Luisiana, 1802-1806", f. 1180-1181.

Spelling and syntax conserved as they appear in the original document.

"Atento a todo lo q.e V.S. me comunica en su oficio de 11 del mes próximo pasado de Agosto, acerca de la queja que dio a VS. el Gov.or interino de esta Prov.a Dn Guillermo C.C. Claiborne, dimanada de la instancia que promovieron algunos habitantes de Natchitoches con su com.te, por la Cédula Real que rije en estos Dominios de S.M., en la que se manda de que ningún negro esclavo fugitivo de Pays Estrangero se vuelva a su legitimo dueño: le remito a V.S. copia de la que existe en el Archivo de este Pueblo, que por orden del Ex.mo Señor Virrey de esta N.E. Conde de Revilla-Gigedo se publicó en el año de 1790. De ella me hallava tan ignorante como VS. asta que se me fue preguntado pr los mismos havitantes de Natchitochis en combersación de amistad; entonces movido a los perjuicios que podían sobrevenir, la busque, y haviendome echo cargo de su contenido, les dije que me parecía que no refería pa. con ellos dha soberana resolución, siempre que por conducto de VS. Solicitasen de S.M. la abolición de ella, haciendo presente que su susbistencia y caudales, que consiste en esclavos, fueron adquiridas en el Suabe y venéfico gobierno de S.M. Esta es la narración sensilla, y consejo que les di con mi corazón sano, para resguardo de sus vienes, y no para comprometerme, como lo han hecho, pero espero del corazón venéfico de V.S. Que atendiendo así a estas razones, como a lo poco versado que me hallo en semejantes asuntos me salvara de este Yerro que me servirá de escarmiento, y a V.S perpetuare para siempre mi reconom.to. Por quanto me significa V.S. Que combiene mucho guardar la mas perfecta armonía con los vecinos y evitar al mismo tiempo que se internen en esta Provincias, hago un estudio particular en esto como puntos mas esenciales que deven atenderse. Es quanto tengo q.e manifestarle a V.S. Pa su superior conocim.to Dios que a V.S. […], Nacogd.s 11 de Sep.re de 1804. José Joaq.n Ugarte. Señor Brig.r Marqués de Casa Calvo".

Glossary of Spanish words

Abigeato: cattle-rustling
Abigeo(s): cattle-rustler(s)

Alcalde: mayor (highest-ranking official of the municipality)
Alcaldía: mayoralty

Amancebado(s): individuals maintaining an intimate relationship not formally sanctioned by marriage (in the Spanish colonial context)

Amparo: protection, asylum
Amparado/a(s): protected

Apoderado/a: delegate

Arroyo: small river

Ayuntamiento: municipal council

Bando: edict

Calabozo: prison

Cámara de Diputados: House of Representatives

Carrera de África: Africa's run/route (slave trade)

Carretero(s): cart driver(s) and merchant(s)

Carta(s) de libertad: freedom paper(s)

Carta(s) de seguridad: safety paper(s)

Caudillo(s): local political and/or military leader(s)

Chamacuero(s): straw-thatched house(s)

Chaparral: low-lying thicket composed by drought-resistant shrubs

Comanchero(s): in New Mexico and western Texas, Mexican merchants trading with Native Americans, in particular Comanches, Apaches, Navajos and Pueblos

Comisario(s): district administrative and judiciary commissioner(s) elected for a one-year mandate under the Ayuntamiento's authority (in the context of Mexican Texas)

Compadre(s): godfather(s)

Cuartel(es): administrative district (in Mexico City)

Empresario(s): land agent and settlers recruiter(s) (in the context of Mexican Texas)

Frontera: carries both the meanings of "border" and "frontier"
Fronterizo(s): inhabitants of the "frontier"

Hacienda: large country estate employed mostly for husbandry and agricultural production
Hacendado(s): owner(s) of the hacienda

Huasteca (region): region of northeastern Mexico encompassing parts or totality of the states of Veracruz, Tamaulipas, Hidalgo, San Luís Potosí and Querétaro

Incursión: military raid (often used to refer to invasions by Native American and US filibusters into Spanish and Mexican territory)

"Indios bárbaros": in Spanish and Mexican sources, designates Native Americans with whom the state could not/did not wish to establish peaceful relations

Jacal(es): hut(s)

Jefe Político: Political Chief (administrative office)
Jefatura Politica: Political Head Office

Jornalero(s): day laborer(s)

Juez de Hacienda: tax judge

Labor (farmland unit): 177 acres

Labrador(es): farmworker(s), laborer(s)

Legua: 4.19 km

Libertad de vientres: free-womb law (all new-born children from an enslaved mother are deemed free by law)

Licenciado/a: graduate

Mascogo(s): otherwise known as "Black Seminoles", Afro-Amerindian community that settled in Coahuila from 1850 onwards.

Mestizaje: racial mixing

Mulato/a: designates a person of mixed European and African origins (in the Spanish colonial context)

Negrero(s): slave trader(s)

Nuevomexicano(s): person born in New Mexico whose origin/lineage is Hispanic

Noreste: in this context, synonym for northeastern Mexico

(Norte)americano/a(s): term often used by Mexicans to refer to US and Texan citizens

Pardo(s): see "mulato(s)"

Partido: administrative unit in independent Mexico (between the municipal and state levels)

Peón(es): peons

Piloncillo: unrefined sugar

Realista(s): royalist(s)

Real Cédula: royal decree

Real Orden: royal order

Regidor(es): commissioner(s)

Sitio (grazing land unit): 4428 acres

Soterraneo(s): underground house(s)

Tejano/a(s): person born in Texas whose origin/lineage is Hispanic

Trigueño/a: literally "wheat color", or brown (used in Mexican sources)

Vecino/a(s): status, refers to a person's membership to the local community, usually at a municipal level (in the Spanish colonial context)

Vida maridable: marital life

Villa: town or city

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Summary

Conditional Freedom: Free Soil and Fugitive Slaves from the US South to Mexico's Northeast (1803-1861) proposes a social and political history of the intertwined contests over free soil and the settlement of self-emancipated slaves from the US South in Mexico's Northeast during the first half of the nineteenth century. While the scholarly literature has commonly focused on fugitive slaves escaping to the northern states and Canada through the "Underground Railroad", it provides new insights on the evolving social and political geography of freedom and slavery in nineteenth-century North America by exploring the development of southern routes of escape from slavery in the US South and the experiences of fugitive slaves in the US-Mexico borderlands. *Conditional Freedom* thereby examines how the soaring tension between free soil and slavery affected self-liberated slaves from the US South who escaped to Mexico and how enslaved freedom-seekers sought to intensify and benefit from this contradiction. Building upon the typology laid out by Damian Pargas between informal, semi-formal and formal freedom, this study argues that Mexico emerged as a site of *conditional freedom* for self-emancipated slaves from the US South across the border. Before and during escape attempts, enslaved people's ability to attain freedom in Mexico was deeply conditioned by series of demographical, socioeconomic, environmental and political structures. Across the Mexican border, the capacity to conserve freedom was made conditional by violent incursions by slaveholders and mercenaries into Mexican territory as well as the inconsistencies of Mexico's free-soil policy.

Mexico turned from a colonial society with slaves into an abolitionist nation during the 1820s, with the general suppression of slavery in 1829, reasserted eight years later, as culmination. As scholars such as Sean M. Kelley and James D. Nichols have pointed out, enslaved people's rising familiarity with Mexico's progressive legal provisions on slavery led hundreds of them to make a bid for freedom across the border. Bondspeople who absconded to Mexican lands from the burgeoning slaveholding territories of Louisiana, Texas, Mississippi and Arkansas embodied the violent entanglement between emerging free-soil areas and the advancing frontier of the Second Slavery in the US-Mexico borderlands from 1803 to 1861. Free soil and the Second Slavery were, to some extent, mutually constitutive. Because the cotton frontier progressed west of the Mississippi River after the US purchase of Louisiana, Mexico gradually adopted free-soil policy both as claim-making in the international concert of nations and a means to defend its sovereignty against slavery's encroachments into its lands. Equally, Mexico's asylum policy impacted the development of the Second Slavery in the borderlands, which underpinnings were made precarious by the emancipatory calling of the border.

This dissertation builds upon a scholarship that can be schematically divided into two sets of literature. Firstly, it connects to a corpus of studies that has addressed the legacy of people of African-descent in colonial and postcolonial Mexico. Secondly, it is embedded into a historiography examining slave flight in the US-Mexico border

area that has emerged during the 1970s at the junction between borderland and slavery studies. Part 1, "*Fleeing Slavery*", follows the trajectory of self-emancipated African Americans from the US South to the Mexican border. Part 2, "*Crafting Freedom*", delves into the formation of Mexico's free-soil policy and the experiences of self-emancipated African Americans across the Mexican border.

Through the Mexican case, this study demonstrates the limits of the enlightened paradigm that ties freedom and literacy together, a connection that originated in the production of large volumes of accounts on and by escaped slaves under the aegis of antislavery societies in the northern states and Canada during and after the Antebellum period. Because self-emancipated African Americans in the US-Mexico borderlands left very few autobiographical traces, this study draws mostly upon municipal, county and state archives, military and judicial records, diplomatic and personal correspondence, newspaper articles and "runaway slave" advertisements, petitions as well as memoirs and travel accounts in reconstructing the entangled stories of slave refugees and free soil in the US-Mexico borderlands.

Building especially upon Sean M. Kelley's study, Chapter 1 seeks to advance the still limited existing scholarly knowledge on self-liberated bondspeople's backgrounds, profiles and motives for escape from the US South to Mexico's Northeast. A complex set of reasons determined enslaved people to flee, including (but not limited to) experiences of forced migration, extreme plantation violence, the will to recreate family units, attempts to avoid separation from relatives, the lack of family ties in receiving environments as well as conflicts between enslavers and enslaved people. Its main argument lies in the observation that, despite the progress of Mexico's emancipatory image as a safe haven for African Americans after national independence, not all bondspeople stood equal when it came to fleeing, with young – aged between 20 and 30 – and qualified male slaves more likely to abscond (successfully or otherwise) than the rest of the enslaved population.

Chapter 2 explores how enslaved freedom-seekers developed a wide array of social, logistic, material and geographical strategies to ensure their flight's success. It retraces the development of *ad hoc* networks of assistance to fugitive slaves as well as opposite web of legal and extra-legal crackdown. Challenging the use of the notion of "Underground Railroad" for the US-Mexican case, its main argument is that support to slave refugees, when and where it existed, remained for the most part loose and precarious. This chapter further emphasizes both the empowering and limiting nature of geographical and environmental structures in relation to slave flight in the US-Mexico borderlands. In so doing, *Conditional Freedom* thus offers a case study of individual agency being exerted within and against the oppressive social, legal and political structures of racial slavery throughout the US South.

Chapters 3 and 4 depart to some extent from the micro-historical focus on self-emancipated slaves to locate their individual struggles for freedom within the wider political, social and economical developments affecting the US-Mexico borderlands

from 1803 to 1861. They retrace the transition from fairly inconsistent and unorganized official responses to the arrival of self-emancipated bondspeople under the Spanish colonial period to the legal entrenchment of the principle of unconditional or formal freedom that became independent Mexico's policy towards foreign self-emancipated slaves. Yet, far from tracing an absolutely linear movement, these two chapters instead argue that, at least up to the US-Mexican war, the development and enforcement of Mexico's free-soil policy was controversial not only among US agents, slaveholders and public figures, but also to some extent among Mexican officials themselves.

Given the contested nature of Mexico's free-soil policy towards fugitive slaves, it is unsurprising to notice that many enslaved freedom-seekers consciously sought to remain out of reach from civilian and military Mexican officials across the border, thus enjoying freedom in an *informal* way, instead of negotiating their *formal* freedom with local authorities across the border. For instance, many self-liberated bondspeople found refuge among independent indigenous populations inhabiting the border area, or simply remained in the woods, swamps and mountains, away from their enslavers and away from the state. Even in a state of official recognition and (uncertain) support, self-emancipated slaves turned out to be mostly self-reliant and in search of their own interests while settling in Mexican territory, as for instance illustrated by the small slave refugee communities residing at Nacogdoches and Trinidad de Salcedo before 1809.

These two chapters also delve into the many ways (and not only foreign filibustering raids) by which the newly acquired freedom for enslaved freedom-seekers was *contested* in Mexico's Northeast and, as a result, made *conditional* despite the federal state's rising commitment to granting formal freedom to foreign refugees from slavery. Both chapters 3 and 4 seek to explore forms of continuities and discontinuities in official discussions about slave flight, the political responses accompanying the arrival of fugitive slaves in Mexican towns, as well as patterns of settlement across the border. While slave flight became a particularly contentious issue in the wake of the US-Mexican war, many of the components of the fugitive slave crisis analyzed in chapter 4 had already been forged during the previous decades.

Mexico's free soil not only jeopardized the country's northeastern borderlands but also backfired into the US, as it impacted the nature (as well as the territorial expansion) of the US Southwest's regime of slavery. While previous scholarly literature has rightly focused on the deleterious impact of mercenaries violating Mexican sovereignty in search of fugitive slaves, slave flight arguably turned into a far more burning issue on the US side of the border than on the Mexican one, as it gradually intersected with the ideological and political warfare raging between the South and the North on slavery in the late Antebellum period. In the US Southwest, frontier communities became fearful of economic ruin and grew concerned that fugitive slaves (and enslaved people in general) might turn into a fifth column in the fight for hegemony between the US and Mexico. Slave flight was one of the motives why so many Southwesterners turned against their federal government at the height of the

sectional crisis during the late 1850s, as they considered it a threat to the South's expansion and, more fundamentally, to their own individual freedom to exploit black people.

Samenvatting

Conditional Freedom: Free Soil and Fugitive Slaves from the US South to Mexico's Northeast (1803-1861) beschrijft de sociale en politieke geschiedenis van de strijd tussen "vrije grond" (*free soil*) en zelf-geëmancipeerde slaven uit het zuiden van de Verenigde Staten die settelden in het noordoosten van Mexico tijdens de eerste helft van de negentiende eeuw. Terwijl de wetenschappelijke literatuur vooral is gefocust op de tot slaaf gemaakte Afrikaanse Amerikanen die naar de noordelijke staten en Canada zijn gevlucht via de "Underground Railroad", biedt dit proefschrift nieuwe inzichten in de ontwikkeling van de sociale en politieke geografie van vrijheid en slavernij in het negentiende-eeuwse Noord-Amerika door het bestuderen van de opkomst van ontsnappingsroutes uit het zuiden van de VS en de ervaringen van de voortvluchtige slaven in de VS-Mexico borderlands. *Conditional Freedom* onderzoekt hoe de stijgende spanningen tussen "vrije grond" en slavernij zelf-geëmancipeerde Afrikaanse Amerikanen die naar Mexico zijn gevlucht heeft beïnvloed, en omgekeerd, hoe zogenaamde "weggelopen slaven" profiteerden van deze tegenstrijdigheid.

Dit proefschrift is gebaseerd op de typologie van Damian Pargas over informele, semi-formele en formele vrijheid. Het betoogt dat Mexico zich ontwikkelde tot een plek van *formele vrijheid*, met de belangrijke nuance dat vele zelf-geëmancipeerde slaafgemaakten vanuit het zuiden van de VS *voorwaardelijke vrijheid* over de grens feitelijk ondervonden. Voor en tijdens de vluchtpogingen was de mogelijkheid om vrijheid te bereiken in Mexico geconditioneerd door een aantal demografische, sociaaleconomische, ecologische en politieke structuren. Over de Mexicaanse grens kwam het vermogen om vrijheid te behouden in gevaar door gewelddadige invasies van slavenhouders en hun huurlingen in het Mexicaans grondgebied en het inconsistente Mexicaanse vrije grond beleid.

Mexico evolueerde van en koloniale maatschappij met slaven tot een Staat waar slavernij tijdens de jaren 20 van de 19de eeuw afgeschaft werd, een proces met als hoogtepunt de algemene afschaffing van de slavernij in 1829. De historici Sean M. Kelley en James D. Nichols merkten al op dat de stijgende gewaarwording over het Mexicaanse progressieve beleid rondom slavernij ertoe leidde dat honderden van hen over de grens vluchten. Dit onderzoek naar de tot slaaf gemaakte Afrikaanse Amerikanen die ontsnapte naar Mexico uit de bloeiende slavengebieden van Louisiana, Texas, Mississippi en Arkansas tonen een gewelddadige verband tussen groeiende vrije grond gebieden en de uitbreiding van de grenzen van de Tweede Slavernij ("Second Slavery") in the VS-Mexico borderlands vanaf 1803 tot 1861. "Vrije grond" en de Tweede Slavernij waren in zekere mate onderling verweven. Omdat het katoen grensgebied ten westen van de Mississippi Rivier na de aankoop van Louisiana bij de VS hoorde, voerde Mexico geleidelijk een vrije grond politiek in om zich op het internationale toneel te

plaatsen en om zijn soevereiniteit te behouden tegen de schending van slavernij op haar grondgebied. Tegelijkertijd heeft de Mexicaanse asielpolitiek de ontwikkeling van de Tweede Slavernij in de grensgebieden beïnvloedt.

Deze thesis bouwt voort op wetenschappelijk onderzoek dat verdeeld is in twee soorten literatuurstudies. *Conditional Freedom* sluit ten eerste aan bij onderzoeken over de erfenis van mensen van Afrikaanse afkomst in het koloniale en postkoloniale Mexico. Ten tweede is het ingebed in de historiografie over marronage in het VS-Mexico grensgebied dat in de jaren zeventig opkwam op de kruising tussen de studies over grensgebieden en slavernij. Deel 1, "Fleeing Slavery", volgt het traject van zelf-geëmancipeerde Afrikaanse Amerikanen vanuit het zuiden van de VS naar de Mexicaanse grens. Deel 2, "Crafting Freedom", behandelt de ontwikkelingen rondom de Mexicaanse vrije grond politiek en de ervaringen van de zelf-geëmancipeerde Afrikaanse Amerikanen over de Mexicaanse grens.

Dit proefschrift benadrukt de grenzen van het verlichte paradigma dat vrijheid en geletterdheid verbind, een connectie die afkomstig is uit de publicatie van grote hoeveelheden (auto)-biografieën geschreven door en over voorvluchtige slaven onder auspiciën van anti-slavernij organisaties in de noordelijke staten en Canada tijdens en na de Antebellum periode. Omdat zelf-geëmancipeerde Afrikaanse Amerikanen in de VS-Mexico borderlands zeer weinig autobiografische bronnen hebben achtergelaten, is er gebruik gemaakt van gemeentelijke, provinciale en Staatsarchieven, militaire en juridische documentatie, diplomatieke en persoonlijke correspondentie, krantenartikelen en "gevluchte slaaf" advertenties, verzoekschriften, memoires en reisverhalen voor het reconstrueren van de verhalen van voortvluchtige slaven en vrije grond gebieden in de VS-Mexico borderlands.

Voortbouwend op de studie van Sean M. Kelley, streeft hoofdstuk 1 naar een verfijning van de bestaande wetenschappelijke kennis over de achtergronden van zelf-geëmancipeerde Afrikaanse Amerikanen, hun profielen en motieven voor de vlucht uit de VS naar het noordoosten van Mexico. Een complex geheel van redenen bepaalde dat slaven moesten vluchten, waaronder (maar niet beperkt tot) gedwongen migraties, extreem plantage geweld, de wil om gezinsbanden te herenigen, ter voorkoming van het uit elkaar halen van families, het gebrek aan familiebanden in nieuwe slaven-gemeenschappen en conflicten tussen slavenhouders en slaven. Het voornaamste argument ligt in het feit dat, ondanks de toename van het emancipatoire imago van Mexico als een veilige haven voor Afrikaanse Amerikanen na de onafhankelijkheid, niet alle slaven gelijk stonden wanneer het ging om ontsnapping: jonge – tussen 20 en 30 jaar – en gekwalificeerde mannen hadden meer kans om te vluchten (succesvol of niet) dan de rest van de tot slaafgemaakte bevolking.

Hoofdstuk 2 verkent hoe voortvluchtige slaven een reeks sociale, logistieke, materiële en geografische strategieën ontwikkelden om het succes van hun vlucht te garanderen. Het schetst de ontwikkeling van *ad hoc* bijstandsnetwerken aan voortvluchtige slaven, evenals juridische en extralegale restricties. Het voornaamste

argument is dat de steun aan zelf-geëmancipeerde Afrikaanse Amerikanen, wanneer en waar deze bestond, los en precair bleef. In dit hoofdstuk wordt verder nadruk gelegd op zowel het stimulerende als het beperkende karakter van geografische en ecologische structuren ten aanzien van ontsnapping in de VS-Mexico borderlands. *Conditional Freedom* biedt hierdoor een casestudy van individuele *agency* ten tijden van onderdrukkende sociale, juridische en politieke structuren van raciale slavernij.

Hoofdstukken 3 en 4 wijken enigszins af van de micro-historische focus op zelf-geëmancipeerde Afrikaanse Amerikanen door hun individuele strijd voor vrijheid te plaatsen binnen de bredere politieke, sociale en economische ontwikkelingen die van invloed zijn geweest op de VS-Mexico borderlands tussen 1803 en 1861. Het analyseert de overgang van onsamenhangende en ongeordende officiële reacties op de komst van gevluchte slaven in Spaanse koloniale periode naar de juridische verankering van het principe van de onvoorwaardelijke (of formele) vrijheid van het onafhankelijk Mexico jegens buitenlandse zelf-geëmancipeerde Afrikaanse Amerikanen. Niettemin betogen deze twee hoofdstukken dat ten minste tot de Amerikaanse-Mexicaanse oorlog, de ontwikkeling en de uitvoering van het Mexicaanse vrije grond beleid controversieel bleef, niet alleen bij agenten, slavenhouders en publieke figuren uit de VS, maar in zekere zin ook door Mexicaanse ambtenaren zelf en dat dit verre van een absoluut lineair proces was.

Gezien het omstreden karakter van het Mexicaanse vrije grond beleid voor voortvluchtige Afrikaanse Amerikanen is het niet wonderbaarlijk dat veel slaven bewust probeerden buiten het bereik van civiel en militaire Mexicaanse autoriteiten te blijven en dus informele vrijheid genoten, in plaats van over hun formele vrijheid te onderhandelen met lokale Mexicaanse overheden. Veel voortvluchtige Afrikaanse Amerikanen vonden bijvoorbeeld bescherming bij onafhankelijke inheemse bevolkingen welke in de borderlands woonden of verbleven simpelweg in bossen, moerassen of gebergten, ver weg van slavenhouders en de Staat. Zelfs in een situatie van officiële erkenning en (onzekere) bescherming, waren zelf-geëmancipeerde Afrikaanse Amerikanen meestal zelfstandig en op zoek naar hun eigen belangen tijdens het neerstrijken op Mexicaans grondgebied, zoals bijvoorbeeld wordt geïllustreerd door de voortvluchtige slaven-gemeenschapen gevestigd in Nacogdoches en Trinidad de Salcedo voor 1809.

Deze twee hoofdstukken onderzoeken ook de diverse manieren (niet alleen bij de buitenlandse invallen) waarop de nieuw bevochten vrijheid voor zelf-geëmancipeerde Afrikaanse Amerikanen in noordoosten Mexico onder druk stond, en daardoor hoe deze vrijheid – ondanks de stijgende betrokkenheid van de federale Staat bij de toekenning van formele vrijheid aan buitenlandse gevluchte slaven – kwetsbaar bleef. Beide hoofdstukken 3 en 4 verkennen vormen van continuïteit én verandering in officiële besprekingen over de vlucht van tot slaaf gemaakte Afrikaanse Amerikanen, de politieke reacties op de komst van voortvluchtige slaven in Mexicaanse steden en de vestigingspatronen in Mexico. Terwijl de gevluchte slaven een zeer omstreden discussiepunt werden tijdens de VS-Mexicaanse oorlog, waren veel van de

componenten van de voortvluchtige slaven “crisis”, geanalyseerd in hoofdstuk 4, al decennia eerder gevormd.

Het Mexicaanse “vrije grond” bracht niet alleen een dreiging in de noordoostelijke borderlands, maar ook in het karakter en de territoriale expansie van slavernij in het zuidoosten van Amerika. Wetenschappelijke literatuur is vooral (en terecht) gefocust op de negatieve effecten van huurlingen op zoek naar gevluchte Afrikaanse Amerikanen op de Mexicaanse soevereiniteit, terwijl de vlucht van tot slaaf gemaakte personen ongetwijfeld een veel nijpender probleem aan het Amerikaanse zijde van de grens dan aan de Mexicaanse werd toen de ideologische en politieke strijd tussen het zuiden en het noorden over slavernij in de late Antebellum periode toenam. In het zuidoosten van de VS, heerste angst over economische achteruitgang en werd gevreesd dat voortvluchtige Afrikaanse Amerikanen een nieuwe partij zouden gaan vormen in de strijd om de hegemonie tussen de VS en Mexico. De vlucht van veel tot slaaf gemaakte personen was één van de drijfveren waarom zoveel “Southwesterners” zich tegen hun federale overheid keerden op het hoogtepunt van de crisis in de late 1850s, omdat zij de voortvluchtige slaafgemaakten “crisis” als een bedreiging beschouweden voor de zuidelijke expansie, en belangrijker, voor hun eigen individuele vrijheid om zwarte mensen te exploiteren.

Curriculum vitae

Thomas Mareite was born in Chartres, France on 11 November 1992. In 2013, he graduated with a bachelor degree, at the Collège Universitaire of Sciences Po Paris, with a *cum laude*. As part of his undergraduate education, he studied at the Universidad Diego Portales, in Santiago de Chile, for one academic year. In 2015, he graduated with a Master of Research in History at the Ecole Doctorale of Sciences Po Paris. His master thesis, "Africains et Afrodescendants du Chili: Esclavage, Conflictualités, Emancipations (1750-1850)", was supervised by Professor Dr. Roberto Zaugg (University of Zurich). In October 2015, Thomas Mareite started his PhD at Leiden University, as part of the NWO-funded project "Beacons of Freedom: Slave Refugees in North America, 1800-1860". His dissertation, *Conditional Freedom: Free Soil and Fugitive Slaves from the US South to Mexico's Northeast, 1803-1861*, was conducted under the direction of Professor Dr. Damian A. Pargas and the co-direction of Professor Dr. Marlou Schrover.