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

Mareite, T.J.F.

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.

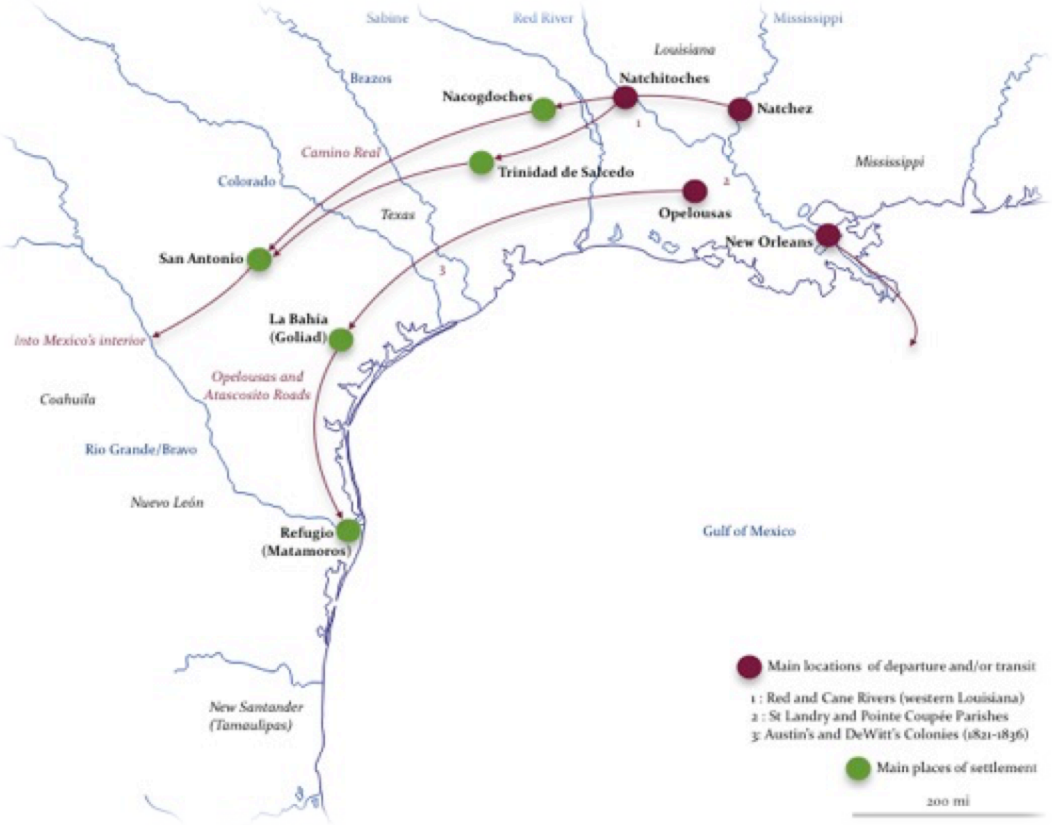
The trail connecting Natchitoches (Louisiana) to Nacogdoches (Texas), across the Sabine River – originally part of the Spanish *Camino Real* – was the most commonly walked by slave refugees before 1836.[32] Fugitive slaves from New Orleans and the lower Mississippi region, including Baton Rouge, Natchez 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".

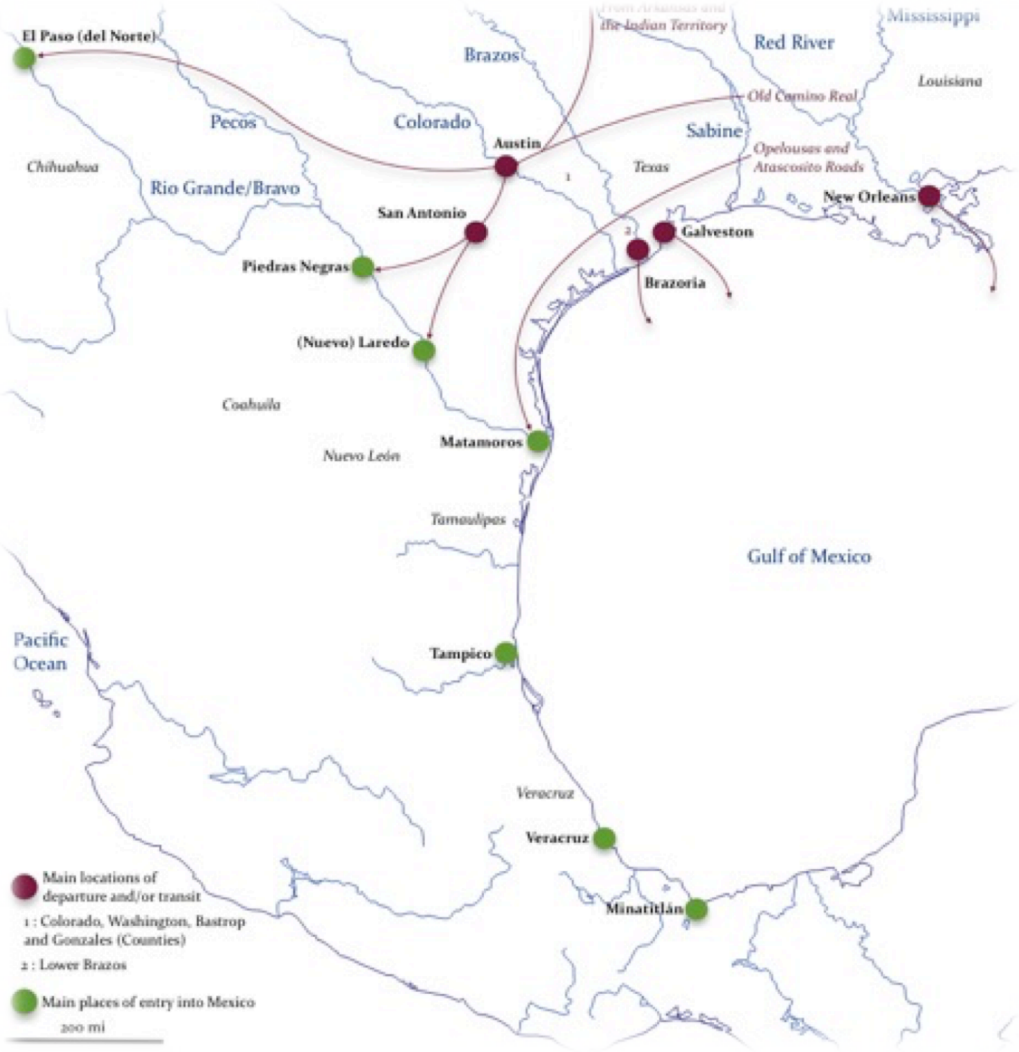
destination for slave refugees before 1836, San Antonio soon turned into the main nodal point for escape attempts from the US South to Mexico during the two decades leading up to the Secession War, as were Galveston and New Orleans for maritime flight. When in August 1837 a planter from Columbus lost 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.