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

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Chapter Three

Finding Refuge: Social and Spatial Integration

In 1900, almost four decades after the formal abolition of slavery in the United States, Rosetta Douglass Sprague, daughter of the famous self-emancipator Frederick Douglass, recollected her mother, Anna Murray Douglass. Reproducing an oral memory, Sprague gave an account of black life in a southern city that speaks to the separation and simultaneous intermingling of free and enslaved African Americans, and the related attitudes of the slaveholding class: “The free people of Baltimore had their own circles from which the slaves were excluded, [yet] the ruling of them out of their society resulted more from the desire of the slaveholder than from any great wish of the free people themselves,” Sprague claimed. Thereby, she testified to the social division between those legally enslaved and their free counterparts of the same skin color. Yet, she also acknowledged that the chasm could be overcome: “If a slave would dare to hazard all danger and enter among the free people he would be received.”³⁸⁹

Not all refugees who aspired illegal freedom in southern cities were successful in their endeavors: hundreds were apprehended and jailed for running away each year. These were, however, only a small fraction of all runaways. As demonstrated in the previous chapter, the runaway population who aimed at staying in American cities within the slaveholding territory of the South, featured certain demographic characteristics that gave prospective freedom seekers both an advantage for successful flight and for a future life in southern cities. This chapter follows the statement by Rosetta Douglass Sprague and explicitly extends it from slaves to refugees as persons who “dare to hazard all danger and enter among the free people.” Under the umbrella theme of integration, it will examine how freedom seekers managed to integrate into the free black populations of southern cities. Important is the observation from chapter one that they joined urban communities that were in large parts of an undocumented status—just like slave refugees.

Emphasizing their experiences in urban spaces, central questions include where refugees lived, where they socialized, and how they interacted with the free black populations. Equally important to understanding how illegal spaces of freedom were shaped are the societal exclusion and hostilities African Americans experienced from the side of white society. As will be discussed, Baltimore, Richmond, Charleston, and New Orleans both overlapped and differed in their social dynamics framing the experiences of the illegal newcomers.

³⁸⁹ Rosetta Douglass Sprague, *Anna Murray Douglass, My Mother As I Recall Her* (1900), Manuscript/Mixed Material, LOC, URL: <https://www.loc.gov/item/mfd.02007/>, accessed January 26, 2017.

Urbanization

A considerable number of slave refugees gravitated to urban spaces which were proper cities by the definition of the time. In the southern states, the rate of urbanization was significantly lower and slower than in the northern states but towns were nevertheless steadily growing. From 1830 onwards, American cities expanded dramatically, in absolute size, in relation to the overall population, and in number. Baltimore and Charleston were historically embedded in a network of East Coast seaport cities that depended on commerce while fueling their respective hinterlands through marketing and distribution. New Orleans was the largest city in Louisiana, which was admitted to the Union as a slave state in 1812. Because New Orleans did not become American before 1803, its blossoming phase began later than these of Baltimore and Charleston, along with other urban centers on the Ohio and Mississippi rivers.³⁹⁰ Richmond, with its large manufacturing and factories, developed into the South's most important industrial site.³⁹¹ All four places were major cities in their respective regions as well as in the South as a whole.

Cities were modern and exciting. For many urban slaves, it was unimaginable to move anywhere else. An advertisement from Charleston from February 1835 informed about Bella, 35 to 40 years of age. She "absconded herself in November last, under the pretence that she did not wish to go to the country." Bella was "well known about the city; it is supposed she is harboured by a fellow named Joe, a Baker."³⁹² For slave refugees from the countryside, cities offered never before seen impressions. Mid-February was "the week of the Charleston Races, a season of much dissipation," wrote slaveholder William to his brother Jacob Read in 1800. Suspecting his brother's runaway slave Hercules to be drawn to the spectacle of the horse races, William informed that "I have got some persons looking out for your Hercules, as I think he is in or about this City, + that would be a very probable place to meet with such villains."³⁹³ The same spectacle, horse races, might have attracted Lewis from Chesterfield, Virginia. When he absconded in 1806, his owner thought Lewis would "attempt passing as a free man, and will attempt to make his escape to Norfolk by water," yet the owner also informed that "he was seen in Richmond during the Broad Rock Races, dressed in black" and added that "it is probable that he is still lurking about there."³⁹⁴

Southern cities had cultural activities for non-white people unimaginable even in the North. Various scholars have remarked on this: In Richmond, black people went to amusements alongside whites. There were dances and theaters and on Sundays, they gathered to game and drink.³⁹⁵ The probably most exciting city for visitors and foreigners was New Orleans. It offered cabarets for free and unfree black people and they could join the yearly celebrations of All

³⁹⁰ Raymond A Muhl, "The Industrial Town and City. Introduction," in *The Making of Urban America*, ed. Idem (Wilmington: Scholarly Resources, 1988), 6.

³⁹¹ John Ashworth, *Slavery, Capitalism, and Politics in the Antebellum Republic*. Vol. 1: Commerce and Compromise, 1820-1850 (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 108.

³⁹² *Charleston Mercury*, February 26, 1835.

³⁹³ William Read to Jacob Read, February 14, 1800, Read Family Papers, SCHS. Horse racing was documented in Charleston from 1786 on. Dolly Nasby, *Images of America: Charles Town* (Charleston, Chicago, Portsmouth, and San Francisco: Arcadia Publishing, 2004), 14.

³⁹⁴ *Richmond Enquirer*, August 1, 1806.

³⁹⁵ Kimball, *American City*, 38-39; and Takagi, *Rearing Wolves*, 101.

Soul's Day, Christmas, New Year's Eve, the Twelfth Night, and Mardi Gras.³⁹⁶ Its cultural diversity and ethnic heterogeneity filled daily life with incomparable emotions. Whether it was the unique composition of its inhabitants, "White men and women, and of all hues of brown, and of all classes of faces, from round Yankees to grizzly and lean Spaniards, black negroes and negresses, filthy Indians half naked, mulattoes curly and straight-haired, quadroons of all shades, long haired and frizzled," as Benjamin Latrobe summarized in 1819, or the rich supply of exotic food, New Orleans was extraordinary.³⁹⁷

Black Americans were overrepresented in southern cities, especially among the working population. The nature of urban slave work, with its strong bias towards domestic and related services, dictated these developments. The share of enslaved women was in all places higher than that of men; Richmond was the exception. There, the sex ratio among the enslaved was more balanced, with almost equal numbers in 1820 and 1860. The free black population counted more women, though, roughly 60 percent.³⁹⁸ From the 1830s on, European immigrants diversified the urban populations. Historians have stressed that, although in their majority driven to the northern states, those who did migrate south generally went to cities, too. These dynamics made the social composition of the urban populations grow more varied in ethnic and religious terms. In 1850, Charleston counted a white majority for the first time in its existence, with about 20 percent of its residents being born outside of the United States. In New Orleans, foreign-born residents had a share of around 40 percent of the city's population.³⁹⁹

Evidence of white men and women supporting runaway slaves is plentiful enough to give them a space in this narrative of networking and courage. Some of these accounts suggest that sexual relations formed the basis for aid. When Mary ran off in 1822, the newspaper announcement described her as "very neat in her person." The subscriber claimed to "have lately been informed that Mary is harboured by a white man residing near Rantoles Bridge [South Carolina]." ⁴⁰⁰ Rarer were relations between white women and enslaved men. *The Charleston Mercury* published one of these stories in 1860. Officers in Charleston arrested a white woman by the name of Ann Catherine Moore and a "negro boy" called William

who arrived that day [Friday] by the Savannah Railroad from Savannah. They were lodging at a private boarding house in Queen-street. On communicating with Savannah, it was ascertained that the boy had been a runaway for the last five years from his mistress, Mrs. N. RAHN, residing about thirty-five miles from Savannah.

Attesting to the much more beneficial contexts and opportunities for interracial couples in New Orleans, the editor informed that "It is supposed that the pair were travelling to 'Dixie's Land,'

³⁹⁶ Wade, *Slavery in the Cities*, 85, 158; and Gilbert C. Din, *Spaniards, Planters, and Slaves. The Spanish Regulation of Slavery in Louisiana, 1763-1803* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1999), 20.

³⁹⁷ Benjamin Henry Boneval Latrobe, *The Journal of Latrobe. Being the Notes and Sketches of an Architect, Naturalist and Traveler in the United States from 1796 to 1820*. With an Introduction by J. H. B. Latrobe (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1905), 162-163, originally 1876. Latrobe, born in England, was an architect from Baltimore and kept a diary during his residence in New Orleans.

³⁹⁸ Marianne Buroff Sheldon, "Black-White Relations in Richmond, Virginia," *Journal of Southern History* 45:1 (1979): 28. For more on the gender imbalance of the urban free black population, see chapter four.

³⁹⁹ Ira Berlin and Herbert G. Gutman, "Natives and Immigrants, Free Men and Slaves: Urban Workingmen in the Antebellum American South," *American Historical Review* 88:5 (1983): 1178; and Mohl, "Industrial Town and City," 9.

⁴⁰⁰ *City Gazette and Commercial Daily Advertiser*, July 29, 1822.

where they could live with less liability to interruption than at Savannah.”⁴⁰¹ Also in New Orleans, but less likely related to a romantic liaison, “Juan Mascarenas was taken up in the market at six o’clock yesterday morning, by Officer Boullosu, for forging a pass for the runaway slave Henry, belonging to Mr. Jacobs,” wrote a local paper in 1850.⁴⁰² When Lucy absconded, her slaveholder offered a reward of \$50 “on proof of her having been harboured by a responsible person.”⁴⁰³ “Responsible person” meant a white or free black person who could be held accountable by law. Clearly, it was more severe when a white person aided runaway slaves than when a free black person did the same. Prince, who “from an indolent habit usually wears a beard upon the upper lip, and a point of the chin,” went off in January 1832. In August of the same year, an announcement promised \$25 if he was apprehended and taken to the workhouse in Charleston, \$50 if harbored by a black person, and \$100 if proven that it was a white person.⁴⁰⁴

Despite hardening color lines and the construction of white supremacy, people of low social-economic standing often mixed. “I am struck with the close cohabitation and association of black and white—negro women are carrying black and white babies together in their arms; black and white children are playing together,” reported an astonished Frederick Law Olmsted from Richmond.⁴⁰⁵ The urban space facilitated contact even more than a rural setting. A white man called William Nelson was arrested in Charleston, “Drunk and Rioting with Negroes in Calhoun Street.”⁴⁰⁶ The interdependence of the lower classes became obvious to many at a young age. A teenage Frederick Douglass traded bread with hungry white children for teaching him to read. As Douglass claimed, they would then console him when he shared his sadness about being a slave, which “used to trouble them.”⁴⁰⁷

While slaveholding society was more sensitive to white helpers of refugees, enslaved people were much more often supported by people of African descent. Sometimes, interracial

⁴⁰¹ *Charleston Mercury*, June 25, 1860. Trying to live “with less liability to interruption” was seemingly also the idea of “A runaway negro and a white woman” in New Orleans in December 1852. They “were last night arrested by the police of the Third District, being found together under the Port Market.” The paper reporting this case tried to calm its surely excited readership by asserting that “Such occurrences are very rare.” *Daily Picayune*, December 20, 1852. In 1855, media covered the account of two white women who lived “in unlawful connection with a negro Wm. Jackson, who claims to be free but who is believed to be a runaway.” *Daily Picayune*, January 19, 1855, in Judith Kelleher Schafer, *Becoming Free, Remaining Free: Manumission and Enslavement in New Orleans, 1846–1862* (Baton Rouge, Louisiana State University Press, 2003), 106–107.

⁴⁰² *Daily Picayune*, April 5, 1850.

⁴⁰³ *Charleston Mercury*, May 8, 1832.

⁴⁰⁴ *Idem*, August 21, 1832.

⁴⁰⁵ Frederick Law Olmsted, *The Cotton Kingdom: A Traveller’s Observations on Cotton and Slavery in the American Slave States. Based Upon Three Former Volumes of Journeys and Investigations by the Same Author*. Vol. 1 (New York: Mason Brothers; and London: Sampson Low, Son, & Co., 1862), 39.

⁴⁰⁶ Because the police could not really believe that a white man would assemble with black people in this way, his case was “Turned over to [the] Magistrate for investigation as to whether Nelson is a white man or not.” Records of the Charleston Police Department, Arrest Records and Morning Reports, Lower Ward 1855–1856, January 19, 1856, CCPL.

⁴⁰⁷ Frederick Douglass, likewise, reported of two Irishmen trying to encourage him to flee to the North when he was working in Baltimore. Douglass, *Narrative of the Life*, 38–39, 42. Since black women were more numerous than men in most southern cities and European immigrants arrived with a strong inclination towards male overrepresentation, it only makes sense that white men and black women intermingled in the integrated neighborhoods. Traugott Bromme, a German traveler, wrote that poor German immigrants lived disorderly lives in New Orleans and often “fell already in their first summer victim to their own debaucheries.” They lived “outside of marriage, or keep negresses of which many have four to five children.” Traugott Bromme, *Reisen durch die Vereinigten Staaten und Ober-Canada*. Dritter Band (Baltimore: T. Scheid & Co.; Dresden: Walthersche Hofbuchhandlung, 1834), 156, JFK.

networks were in operation. In the case of Betsy and the four-months-pregnant Fanny, both 20 years old, who escaped with two “very fine children,” it looked like they were aided by a white man. Yet, the runaways were also “suspected to be accompanied by a very tall black Woman, sometimes called Nancy, and sometimes Mary,” and her husband Isaac or Henry. Fanny and Betsy were “well known in Charleston. [...] Nancy and her husband are believed to be old runaways.”⁴⁰⁸ White people could support refugees in ways different than black people could because they could pass them off as their servants. They were able to help them flee, could support them on the run, traffic them, and harbor and employ them at their destinations. However, they could not provide a receiving society for them as a whole. Here, the African American populations were of particular importance.

An important factor of urban life, particularly in commercial and growing cities, was that the streets were always swamped with new people. Benjamin Moore Norman considered New Orleans such a thriving destination for business and travels that he compiled a guidebook to the city in 1845. He speculated that around 20,000 businessmen were in New Orleans during business season alone. Besides them, 300 river boatmen streamed into the city monthly during half the year.⁴⁰⁹ Joseph Holt Ingraham witnessed that plantation slaves were allowed to visit Natchez, Mississippi, on Sundays adding to the presence of black people in the streets.⁴¹⁰ Antebellum cities were messy and chaotic and overwhelmed by a constant influx of newcomers. This was a welcome environment for slave refugees and others who, according to the laws of the time, should not have been there.

Next to those who planned on staying there, many more used southern cities as a springboard for their migration north and remained a couple of weeks or months. All cities under analysis were port cities with important ties to the Atlantic world. William Anderson, for one, who also helped other enslaved people escape, tried to use New Orleans as a point of departure for his escape to the North: “My plan at this time was to write myself a pass down to New Orleans, and when I got there, to take a ship to New York or Boston.”⁴¹¹ Caroline Hammond, later interviewed by the Federal Writers’ Project, was, together with her mother and father, first harbored by a white family in Baltimore “who were ardent supporters of the Underground Railroad,” before being smuggled into Pennsylvania.⁴¹² The disarray, anonymity, and dynamism of growing cities constituted ideal conditions for newcomers to dive into. In

⁴⁰⁸ Since they took with them clothes and had a high visibility due to the children, it seems plausible that they used Charleston as a way out of the slaveholding South. Whether Nancy and Isaac were their escape agents aiding the runaways to seek shelter in a southern city, or attempted to leave with them is unclear. *City Gazette and Commercial Daily Advertiser*, March 30, 1813.

⁴⁰⁹ Benjamin Moore Norman, *Norman’s New Orleans and Environs: Containing a Brief Historical Sketch of the Territory and State of Louisiana, and the City of New Orleans, from the Earliest Period to the Present Time: Presenting a Complete Guide to all Subjects of General Interest in the Southern Metropolis; With a Correct and Improved Plan of the City, Pictorial Illustrations of Public Buildings, Etc.* (New Orleans: B. M. Norman, 1845), 74-76.

⁴¹⁰ Ingraham, *South-West*, 54-55.

⁴¹¹ William J. Anderson, *Life and Narrative of William J. Anderson, Twenty-Four Years a Slave; Sold Eight Times! In Jail Sixty Times!! Whipped Three Hundred Times!!! Or The Dark Deeds of American Slavery Revealed. Containing Scriptural Views of the Origin of the Black and of the White man. Also, a Simple and Easy Plan to Abolish Slavery in the United States. Together with an Account of the Services of Colored Men in the Revolutionary War—Day and Date, and Interesting Facts* (Chicago: Daily Tribune, 1857), 20.

⁴¹² Caroline Hammond (A Fugitive), Interview, 1938, in *Federal Writers’ Project: Slave Narrative Project*. Vol. 8: Maryland (Washington, 1941), Manuscript/Mixed Material, LOC, URL: <https://www.loc.gov/item/mesn080/>, accessed February 20, 2019.

1844, Armstead Meckins, slave of A. B. Sheldon, ran away in Richmond “on friday night last [and] he has been seen every day since.”⁴¹³ Even when slaveholders were sure that their runaways had gone to a particular city, they often failed to catch them.

Different from rural areas, where privately organized patrols remained the norm, in urban spaces, city governments held the claim to maintain law, order, and tidiness.⁴¹⁴ Some of these considerations stemmed from actual necessities to avert dangers like the spread of diseases, others were designed to make life more comfortable for those in power. In New Orleans, the diverse cultural, ethnic, and political composition brought upon administrative challenges that at some point became seemingly insuperable. On the one side stood the Francophone community consisting of New Orleans Creoles and foreign French originating from France, Haiti and other Francophone places, as well as immigrants from the Caribbean and Latin America. Being united by their Catholic Faith, they formed the majority of New Orleans until mid-century. Anglophone Americans stood on the other side. Mostly drawn to Louisiana by business endeavors and in their majority Protestants, they were the dominating commercial force.⁴¹⁵ In 1836, responding to ongoing ethnic disputes, the city was divided into three separate parts, “granting to the three municipalities the exclusive privilege to pass or have executed all the public laws or regulations within their respective limits.”⁴¹⁶

The question arises whether undocumented persons had a harder time because it was easier to efficiently control a smaller, limited space than an entire city, or whether it was beneficial because they could versatily slip from one municipality over the demarcation line into the next where the watch of the former did not feel responsible. By the early nineteenth century, city guards rather resembled militias, as emphasized by criminal historians, who, in cities with high shares of enslaved residents, were agents of slave control. In the following decades, policing in the United State developed from an informal and communal watch system to a police force system. Yet, due to the division of the city, it still did not have a united organization in New Orleans.⁴¹⁷

⁴¹³ Daybook of the Richmond Police Guard, February 15, 1844, UVA.

⁴¹⁴ In the countryside, police organization developed out of the slave patrol, from the earliest beginnings disposed to hunt down runaway slaves. In the postbellum era, these vigilances went over to controlling freed slaves and to enforce Jim Crow segregation laws. Gary Potter, “The History of Policing in the United States,” *EKU Online*, URL: <https://plsonline.eku.edu/sites/plsonline.eku.edu/files/the-history-of-policing-in-us.pdf>, accessed January 24, 2019.

⁴¹⁵ Richard Campanella, “Culture Wars Led to New Orleans’s Most Peculiar Experiment in City Management,” *NOLA.com* (March 7, 2016), URL: https://www.nola.com/homegarden/index.ssf/2016/03/relics_remain_of_new_orleans_m.html, accessed January 27, 2019. Large parts of refugees from St. Domingue also settled in Baltimore. *Gens de couleur* and their slaves might have added 30 percent to the existing black population of Baltimore. They increased the share of non-white people in skilled crafts and of the Catholic religion. Sherry H. Olson, *Baltimore: The Building of an American City* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 30, originally published 1980.

⁴¹⁶ *Journal of the First Municipality of the City of New Orleans, Containing the Seatings, Reports, Ordinances and Resolutions, From the 10th August 1836 to the 19 November 1836* (New Orleans: J. Bayon, 1836), October 19, 1836, LaRC. The three municipalities were divided into wards that elected a number of eldersmen who, in turn, formed three Councils of Aldermen together constituting the General Council and answering to a single mayor. Campanella, “Culture Wars.”

⁴¹⁷ Dennis C. Rousey, *Policing the Southern City: New Orleans, 1805-1889* (Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State University Press, 1996), 4-6; and Stephen Spitzer, “The Rationalization of Crime Control in Capitalist Society,” *Contemporary Crises* 3:1 (1979): 200.

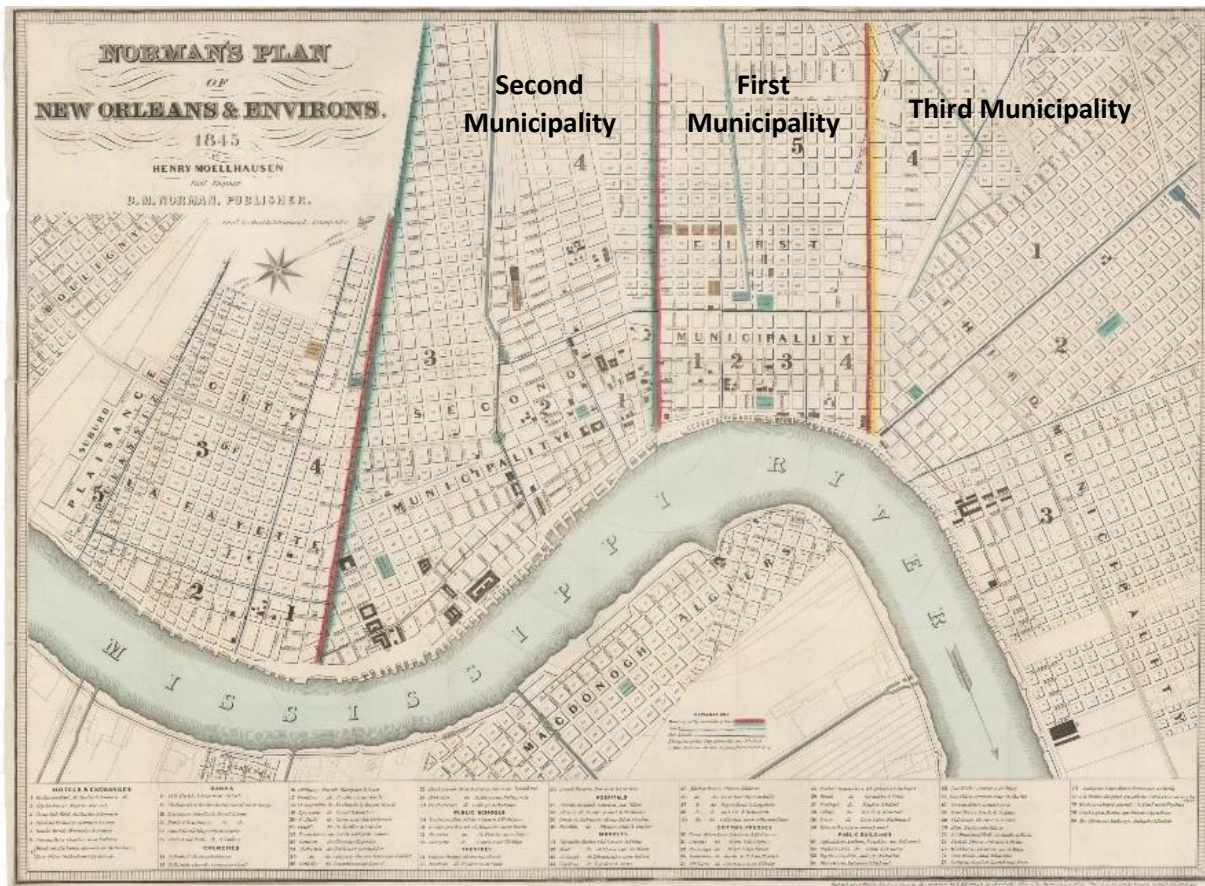


Figure 13: Map of New Orleans with Three Municipalities, 1845

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City legislature reveals that in 1840, the First Municipality reorganized its police and designed a distribution plan according to which the night watch was to patrol the streets of the sector and the suburb Trémé. Figure 13 shows the First Municipality, located between the Second Municipality on the left and the Third Municipality on the right. Left, next to the Second Municipality, lies the City of Lafayette which was incorporated in 1852. Zooming into the First Municipality (figure 14) shows the patrolling plan of the night watch (in yellow). With 34 privates, the First Municipality up to Rampart street (highlighted in orange) (corresponding with today's French Quarter) seemed to be a rather well-supervised area. In the suburb Trémé, north of Rampart street, the vigilance was more relaxed, with patrolling only taking place along the vertical streets and ending on Villeré or Robertson streets (in one case further up on Roman street). In Trémé, 13 watchmen were on duty during the night. The daytime police consisted of ten men for the First Municipality and three for Trémé of which one remained at the fort and two "scour the suburb."⁴¹⁹

This was a well-drafted plan to secure order and to detect possible agitators and in general people who breached the nocturnal curfew—at least on paper. What the watchmen really did during their shift, varied. That they were often asleep becomes clear by the fine of \$1

⁴¹⁸ Henry Moellhausen, Engraved by Shields & Hammond, Norman's Plan of New Orleans & Environs (New Orleans: B. M. Norman, 1845), URL: <https://bostonraremaps.com/inventory/1845-henry-moellhausen-new-orleans/>, accessed January 25, 2019.

⁴¹⁹ *Journal of the First Municipality of New Orleans*, July 27, 1840, LaRC.

that was set to be paid when found in that state.⁴²⁰ As historian Dennis Rousey has likewise remarked, reports on the inefficiency of the watchmen are passed down from all American cities. Police work was exhausting. In New Orleans, the shifts usually lasted 12 hours for seven days a week. From 1836 onwards, the constables were hardly supervised by a higher-ranking officer during their shifts. Men who worked as police for longer than a year were an exception, many did not show up or neglected their duties.⁴²¹ Based on the ineffectiveness of the patrol system, the lacking commitment of watchmen, and the split responsibilities over the city, it was for refugees and other black people possible to move about New Orleans at day and night.

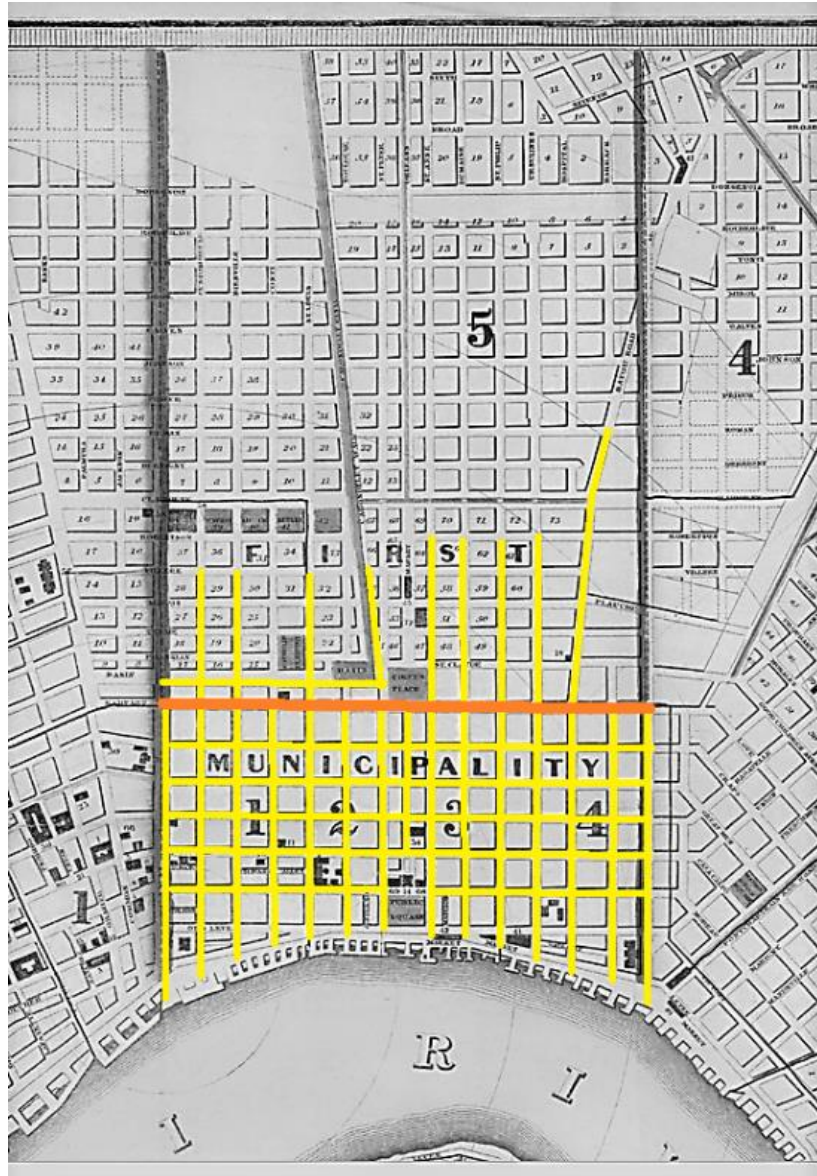


Figure 14: First Municipality and Trémé, with Patrolling Plan of Night Watch in Yellow, 1840

In 1852, the three municipalities were again consolidated into one city, and Lafayette was incorporated, too. The Anglo-American continent had allied up with German and Irish

⁴²⁰ Idem.

⁴²¹ Dennis C. Rousey, “‘Hibernian Leatherheads’: Irish Cops in New Orleans, 1830-1880,” *Journal of Urban History* 10:1 (1983): 63, 69.

immigrants and was now dominating politics.⁴²² Slave refugees remained an integral element of the usual crime patterns of the city, whether divided or not. The police report of New Orleans on a normal December morning informed that the Recorder Genois' Court was that day occupied with 17 cases of vagrancy, disorderly conduct, runaway negroes, etc., "which were hustled up by the police last evening." Routinized, *The Daily Picayune* wrote that "None of them were of sufficient interest to be worth narrating."⁴²³ Even as late as in 1855, a local paper reported that one could walk "at night two miles through the most thickly populated portions of New Orleans without encountering a single watchman, and more especially that this can be done night after night at different hours."⁴²⁴

With Charleston establishing its police force in 1852, New Orleans a year later, and Baltimore in 1857, the overwhelming time period under analysis meant for refugees (and all other persons living in these cities) that there were no centralized municipal police departments. Richmond opened a formal law enforcement agency in 1807, but the organization, with few watchmen, did not even come close to the tight control in, for instance, Charleston.⁴²⁵ Various scholars have added that under the watch system, with constables at day time and night watches at night, policing institutions were only partly financed by the public and semi-bureaucratic at best. Policemen were in most of the cases either volunteers, fee retainers, or part-time employees without economic security. Over time, the informal watches and constable systems were no longer sufficient to control disorder in the rapidly expanding cities—foremost drunkenness and prostitution, which became uncomfortably visible in the urban public spaces.⁴²⁶

Moreover, slave refugees were only one issue municipal authorities had to deal with. White residents were often more tumultuous than slaves and free blacks due to riots, gangs, incendiaries, and uproar on election days. City governments were weak and inefficient and failed to regulate their heterogeneous citizenry throughout the country.⁴²⁷ Because of their lack of distinction from other black residents and the general disorder in the streets of antebellum cities, any random African American that one encountered on the streets of southern cities could theoretically be a legal resident (slave or free), a runaway slave, or a free black residing illegally in the city. At first glance it was usually impossible to tell.

⁴²² With the consolidation came name changes. The First Municipality became the Second Municipal District, and the Second Municipality became the First Municipal District. Richard Campanella, "The Turbulent History behind the Seven New Orleans Municipal Districts," *NOLA.com* (October 9, 2013), URL: https://www.nola.com/entertainment_life/home_garden/article_931737d6-c922-5bd9-9062-80a7f5959d51.html, accessed July 15, 2019.

⁴²³ *Daily Picayune*, December 2, 1852.

⁴²⁴ *Picayune*, 1855, in Judith Kelleher Schafer, *Brothels, Depravity, and Abandoned Women: Illegal Sex in Antebellum New Orleans* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2009).

⁴²⁵ Records of the Charleston Police Department, 1855-1991, CCPL; Sidney Haring, *Policing in a Class Society: The Experience of American Cities, 1865-1915* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1983, and "History of the Richmond Police Department," Richmond, Virginia, URL: <http://www.ci.richmond.va.us/Police/HistoryPoliceDepartment.aspx>, accessed July 5, 2019.

⁴²⁶ Robert J. Lundman, *Police and Policing: An Introduction* (New York: Holt, Reinhart & Winston, 1980), 31; Potter, "History of Policing." See also Samuel Walker, *The Police in America: An Introduction* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1996).

⁴²⁷ Fields, *Middle Ground*, 53; and Mohl, "Industrial Town and City," 8.

Spatial Segregation

Despite not being easily recognizable, urban refugees typically tried to avoid whites. Their endeavors were facilitated by the social and physical developments of nineteenth-century cities. Most scholarship does not recognize racial segregation as a phenomenon of the antebellum period. Largely agreeing that a full-blown, top-down spatial segregation was an occurrence of the twentieth century, the debate centers around its origins. Some historians have claimed that segregation on the basis of race began in the South the years immediately following the Civil War, and few case studies have asserted that it did not take off before the 1880s.⁴²⁸ Following the living patterns of slave refugees, however, suggests that spatial segregation was indeed a perceivable development before the Civil War. Other than being purely race-based, it was a class-based segregation. Yet, in many instances, black people also lived in streets, blocks, or smaller neighborhoods that were almost entirely segregated along race.

This claim holds especially true for Richmond and Baltimore. Runaway slave advertisements offer windows into where African Americans lived. They reveal that as the nineteenth century progressed, more and more enslaved people had relatives who lived in Baltimore. In the late eighteenth century, by contrast, few of these ads had mentioned the family relations of the runaways.⁴²⁹ Increasingly, masters began to give information about the personal contacts of the absconder and, in numerous cases, also on presumed employment. Charles A. Pye, the legal owner of 20-year-old “rather handsome” Watt, who left him in March 1816, announced a reward of \$100. “He has some relations at Mr. Foxall’s, in Georgetown, and a free brother in Baltimore, where he will probably endeavor to reach. It is likely he will have a pass, as some of his relations read and write.”⁴³⁰ This and other comparable sources reveal important insight into the social networks of African Americans. With the number of black city dwellers increasing and urban slavery in Baltimore shrinking, city contacts were often free people. As early as the 1830s, free black inhabitants outnumbered the city’s enslaved residents by over 10,000, which meant they had more possibilities to shelter and aid runaways.

In the early nineteenth century, free and enslaved black people generally lived scattered over the city. For this period, it is correct to say that residential segregation was not very coined. As the antebellum decades passed, as David Goldfield has also confirmed, more and more visitors observed not only the poor living conditions of African Americans, but increasingly also the spatial division between black and white.⁴³¹ By mid-century, housing patterns in Baltimore and Richmond were slowly reorganized as whites who could afford new homes that met the new, modernized urban standards flocked together in certain areas. For Baltimore, this included the western part of the city or uptown. New luxury houses emerged around the cathedral, on Charles Street, Madison Avenue, Bolton, Hoffman, Preston streets, and on

⁴²⁸ Elsa Barkley Brown and Gregg Kimball, “Mapping the Terrain of Black Richmond,” *Journal of Urban History* 21:3 (1995): 302; Howard N. Rabinowitz, *Race Relations in the Urban South, 1865-1890*. Forward by George M. Fredrickson (Athens and London: University of Georgia Press, 1996), ch. 5, originally published New York: Oxford University Press, 1978; Wright, *Life Behind a Veil*, ch. 4; and Andrew Marvin Ambrose, “Redrawing the Color Line: The History and Patterns of Black Housing in Atlanta, 1940-1973” (Ph.D. diss., Emory University, 1992), 61.

⁴²⁹ Robert L. Hall, “Slave Resistance in Baltimore City and County, 1747-1790,” *Maryland Historical Magazine* 84:4 (1989): 306.

⁴³⁰ *Baltimore Patriot*, September 12, 1816.

⁴³¹ Goldfield, “Black Life,” 124, 140.

Lexington Street near Pearl. Mount Vernon and Bolton Hill were home to the upper classes and their servants (the latter often lived in alleys close by). White native-born mill workers and industrial workers dwelled close to the mills or wharves to the east (Canton), the mostly white construction workers of the Baltimore & Ohio railroad company lived on Mount Clare in the southwest. Skilled workers had houses in Oldtown, along the James Fall, Gay Street, Penn Avenue, or on Frederick Road. Black people often came to live amongst themselves or in precarious neighborhoods, which also absorbed the recently arrived (mostly Irish and German) immigrants, like Fells Point, the industrial area of Spring Garden, the middle ring, or the parameter wards. Prior to mid-century, a black concentration could be found in several of the narrow streets that ran north to south, like Happy or Star Alley.⁴³² (See figure 15.)



Figure 15: Map of Baltimore, 1848⁴³³

Buildings were constructed in a way that their residents were protected from outsiders' views. When cholera broke out in Baltimore in 1849, its origins were traced back to "some free

⁴³² Olson, *Baltimore*; and "Sanitary Report of Baltimore," *Ordinances of the Mayor and City Council of Baltimore* (1850), 208-209, in Berlin, *Slaves Without Masters*, 258.

⁴³³ Map of Baltimore, Maryland, 1848, in *Appletons' Hand-Book of American Travel* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1869). Courtesy of the University of Texas Libraries, University of Texas at Austin.

negroes, whose houses were only accessible by narrow alleys running into St. Paul street.”⁴³⁴ Slave refugees were often believed to be in poor areas with numerous African American inhabitants. 19-year-old runaway James Harris, with a “very large mouth [and] thick African lips,” could have used his private and work-related network to conceal himself in Fells Point, where he had lived prior to his sale. His new owner therefore believed him to be “lurking about that part of the city” in 1842.⁴³⁵

Richmond had an inner section occupied by industry and commerce. The James Falls to the southwest of the city powered the iron works and flourmills while tobacco manufacturers settled in the southeastern part.⁴³⁶ White people who could afford it moved away from the riverbank (and the iron industry) and up the hills into higher-lying neighborhoods. From the 1840s on, enslaved and free black city dwellers increasingly crowded together in the northwest and in Shockoe Creek near the docks, tobacco factories, foundries, and train depots. They were not alone; poor workers of all races and backgrounds housed there.⁴³⁷ Other lower-class neighborhoods were Oregon Hill, right above the Tredegar Iron Works, the dock area of Rocketts, Fulton, Port Mayo, Mount Erin, and Butchertown (a neighborhood of Shockoe Valley). People there lived in brick dwellings. Enslaved tobacco workers who were permitted (or forced) to secure their own boarding lived, for instance, in the African American neighborhood of Shockoe Bottom. Free black people owned or rented shacks in narrow back alleys, for example, in Bacon Bottom and Jackson Ward.⁴³⁸ Estimates suggest that by 1860, almost half of all Richmond slaves were hired out, the majority of whom also resided separate from their masters.⁴³⁹

Thomas Hanchett has explained that wealthy people moving outside of the city center marked the reverse trend of old-established patterns. Earlier, they had lived within the inner ring while less well-off residents occupied the periphery. With innovations in transportation, these schemes were turned upside down. By mid-century, carriages became widely accessible and city dwellers with money could afford to take the new streetcars and omnibuses pulled by horses; the middle classes went with hack drivers. But it was not only changes in transportation that propelled these new residential dynamics. The industrialization of cities, which included craft shops and residences fading from the highly visible main streets, was an even stronger force.⁴⁴⁰ Employees and workers had to follow their work sites out of the center because they depended on living in walking-distance from them. Since white people moved away from poor and black people more often than the other way around, the segregational patterns that emerged in the late antebellum decades were foremost a white product.

⁴³⁴ Thomas H. Buckler, *History of Epidemic Cholera, as it Appeared at the Baltimore City and County Alms-House, in the Summer of 1849, With Some Remarks on the Medical Topography and Diseases of this Region* (Baltimore: James Lucas, 1851), 31.

⁴³⁵ *Sun*, January 18, 1842.

⁴³⁶ Sorensen, “Absconded,” 20; and Brown and Kimball, “Mapping the Terrain,” 297.

⁴³⁷ Takagi, *Rearing Wolves*, 97.

⁴³⁸ Kimball, *American City*, 74-75; and Marie Tyler-McGraw and Gregg D. Kimball, Exhibit catalogue *In Bondage and Freedom: Antebellum Black Life in Richmond, Virginia* (Richmond: Valentine Museum, 1988), 12.

⁴³⁹ Tracey M. Weis, “Negotiating Freedom: Domestic Service and the Landscape of Labor and Household Relations in Richmond, Virginia, 1850-1880” (Ph.D. diss., Rutgers University, 1994), 38, 40.

⁴⁴⁰ Thomas W. Hanchett, *Sorting Out the New South City. Race, Class, and Urban Development in Charlotte, 1875-1975* (University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 9-10; and Graham Russell Gao Hodges, *Taxi! A Social History of the New York City Cabdriver* (New York: NYU Press, 2012), 12.

Upon arrival in a city, runaway slaves seem to have had clear ideas about where to go. In a city that was continuously changing and attracting new residents, visitors, commuters, and suppliers, it was relatively easy to hide, and slave refugees made use of their (often) extensive networks to do so. The neighborhoods of the lower classes, and consequently of African Americans, counted many grog shops where refugees could find sympathizers. In Charleston, for example, these were the Neck and the northern edge of the city; in New Orleans the second district just beyond Canal street.⁴⁴¹ Besides the areas where free and enslaved black people clustered, there were further places of refuge throughout the cities. Punctual locations like taverns were meeting places where refugees did not necessarily sleep or live but where they could arrive after their refuge from outside the cities or simply socialize. Examples in Richmond include the Bell Tavern and the Court House Tavern, the Washington Hotel (where slaves could dwell), the Eagle Hotel, the theater, and the Union Hotel.⁴⁴²

Taverns and grog shops were places where networks were affirmed and new connections laid. In these places, runaways were either seen or slaveowners suspected that they could be found there. They were not only a meeting point for men but also constituted places of networking for women. In November 1843, the Richmond police was looking for “Rebeca belonging to Jns Smith[,] Gingerbread Colour[,] tall and slim.” She had “been in the habit of washing in the back of the Bell Tavern”⁴⁴³ and it is very likely that she established ties there that helped her escape bondage. The police and slaveholders would look at these places for runaways. And so John Robertson was caught at the same Bell Tavern where Rebeca would later work before her escape.⁴⁴⁴ Although the effectiveness was limited, police at times complied with the requests of slaveowners to look out for their runaways.

The highest risk of discovery, however, was to be incidentally recognized by a familiar white person. This happened to Elihu who legally belonged to William Cochrone from Natchez. When Cochrone’s father died of cholera while being on a trip with Elihu to Albany, the bondsman “availed himself of the opportunity to gain his freedom. About four months since he shipped on board the *Adrian* as a cook, since which time he has been sailing to this port [Natchez], where, through a friend of his master, he was discovered and caused to be arrested.”⁴⁴⁵ Charles Ball, again, was in 1830, while living in the neighborhood of Baltimore in illegal freedom, recognized by his former mistress’s younger brother and recaptured.⁴⁴⁶ The information in countless runaway slave advertisements that a slave had been seen somewhere, relied mostly on the slaveholders’ networks, too. These networks included family members, neighbors, and business partners, who would not know every field hand but were familiar with those bondspeople who formed part of the mobile slave elite. For absconders from slavery it was therefore easier to blend in with African American communities that lived rather isolated from whites. It provided them with additional anonymity and made detection by coincidence less likely, a condition that favored the building of social structures.

⁴⁴¹ Wade, *Slavery in the Cities*, 150-151.

⁴⁴² Daybook of the Richmond Police Guard, UVA.

⁴⁴³ Idem, November 10, 1843, UVA.

⁴⁴⁴ Robinson was originally committed to jail in 1823 for want of his freedom papers. The Henrico County Court then decided that he was a runaway slave. Petition by Ruben Burton, Henrico County, December 21, 1825, Legislative Petitions, LVA.

⁴⁴⁵ *Daily Picayune*, September 8, 1850.

⁴⁴⁶ Ball, *Slavery in the United States*, 480-482.

These findings suggest the beginnings of residential segregation—not of street blocks and neighborhoods but of smaller sections of a neighborhood or single streets which were integrated in terms of wealth, race, ethnicity, and nativity of their inhabitants. Researchers from The Charleston Museum support this claim. They have found that free black people in Charleston were concentrated on streets like Nassau, Henrietta, America, and Line streets. North of Calhoun (the division between Charleston and Neck), they clustered along Coming and east of Meeting street.⁴⁴⁷ Free black people much less often lived south of Calhoun street, but sometimes enslaved people racially dominated a street block. To name just one example, in Clifford's Alley, west of King street between Queen and Clifford, 66 slaves and one white person lived in wooden houses.⁴⁴⁸

In 1856, segregated housing had become so extreme that the Grant Jury of Charleston dedicated a report to it. The jury criticized that in what previously had been Neck, there were

rows of buildings constructed expressly for and rented to slaves and persons of color; in these negro rows as many as fifty to one hundred negros, or persons of color, are sometimes residing, shut out from the public street by a gate, all the buildings having but one common yard, and not a single white person on the premises.

This living situation basically violated the prohibition of assembly at all times, the jury complaint.⁴⁴⁹ Moreover, the distribution of residents throughout the city along race was also in the early decades not even. Table 4 shows the population of Charleston's wards divided according to race and legal status in 1824. In ward four, for example, 6.9 percent of the residents were free blacks, compared to 2.6 percent in ward one. Refugees in ward four, hence, blended in with a free population that was in relative numbers 2.7 times larger than in ward one. Given the observation that freedom seekers were strongly pulled into free black communities, where they added to their numbers, the chances in ward four might even have been better for them to succeed.

Table 5: Population of Charleston Wards, 1824⁴⁵⁰

<i>Wards</i>	<i>Whites</i>	<i>Slaves</i>	<i>"Free Colored"</i>	<i>Total</i>
<i>1</i>	2,322	2,598	133	5,053
<i>2</i>	2,157	3,379	303	5,839
<i>3</i>	3,517	3,394	522	7,433
<i>4</i>	4,361	4,481	650	9,492

Charleston, additionally, was rather small. This was due to the natural limitations of the peninsula it was built on. Boundary Street (in 1850 changed to Calhoun street) was the city's demarcation to Charleston Neck. Apart from city directories that reveal where officially registered Charlestonians lived, there are other indices that hint to the non-integration of certain parts of the city. In 1838, an ordinance was passed to prevent the erection of wooden buildings

⁴⁴⁷ "Where Free Blacks Lived," SCIWAY (2019), URL: <https://www.sciway.net/hist/chicora/freepersons-3.html>, accessed June 11, 2019.

⁴⁴⁸ Also, Grove street counted two white and 48 enslaved residents, and in Hester street, 29 slaves lived without any white neighbors. Powers, "Black Charleston," 22. Both these streets were located further up in the North.

⁴⁴⁹ Presentment of Grant Jury of Charleston District, March 1856, Legislative Petitions, SCDAH.

⁴⁵⁰ *Charleston Courier*, August 7, 1824.

in the city. In order to prevent fire, it stipulated that only brick or stone was allowed to be used and the walls had to be of a minimum thickness. Violation of this ordinance called for fees between 500 and 1,000 dollars.⁴⁵¹ As a consequence, people from the lower social-economic level could not afford to build or buy houses in the city anymore. In 1857, this ordinance was partly loosened. Given the residents the opportunity to erect buildings within the coming 20 days, structures were exempted if they were located “south of Calhoun street, and east of that portion of East Bay street lying north of Market street, or to the west of Legare, Savage, Franklin, or Wilson streets, or of that portion of Smith street from Beaufain to Calhoun streets.”⁴⁵² Figure 16 shows the areas on the margins of the city where the erection of wooden buildings remained permitted (surrounded by yellow). These were streets where the lower classes lived (Calhoun street is marked in orange). It is striking how small the remaining areas are, amounting to the neighborhoods where the upper middle and upper classes resided, and which city authorities and police had most stake in patrolling and supervising.

Neck, not an incorporated part of Charleston City until 1850, was a historical hiding place for escaped slaves. This was widely known already in the late eighteenth century. “Charleston Neck, by its vicinity to the city, is rendered so extremely convenient a place of refuge for runaway negroes, &c. to commit thefts and robberies both in and out of the city,” lamented a local newspaper in 1788.⁴⁵³ In the nineteenth century, things did not improve for Charlestonians concerned about the less regulated neighboring town.⁴⁵⁴ In October 1822, enslaved Ben, Glasgow, and Peter ran away from a plantation on Wateree River in central South Carolina. Two month later, “They were since seen in Charleston Neck, and are supposed to be lurking about the Plantations, 12 to 14 miles on Ashley River, Dorchester Road, Charleston Neck or Charleston.”⁴⁵⁵ In 1845, a resident of Neck called for more police regulation in his home place because Charleston City’s effective police was pushing out criminals from the city and into Neck. He lamented that Neck was “situated in the immediate juxtaposition with a city where an active and vigilant police is ever in operation, and from which all suspicious and mischievous characters are speedily routed out.” The problem for white Neck residents was that they did have a night watch but there was no guard house to store offenders. And so, patrollers usually “immediately punished and discharged” black people they encountered.⁴⁵⁶ For refugees who were possibly taken up, this had no long-term consequences.

The importance of suburbs in absorbing slave refugees can hardly be overestimated. Along the ongoing antebellum era, black people moved further outside of the cities’ limits. Charleston Neck is one example where security and supervision regulations were weaker than in Charleston City. Richmond’s western and eastern suburbs were not official parts of the city and it is unlikely that the night watch ever went there. And so these neighborhoods, too, attracted large numbers of refugees. Other southern cities faced similar dynamics, like New

⁴⁵¹ *Charleston Mercury*, October 9, 1844. A similar ordinance is reported from New Orleans prohibiting the construction of wooden buildings “within what are denominated the fire limits.” Norman, *New Orleans and Environs*, 69.

⁴⁵² *Charleston Mercury*, August 24, 1857.

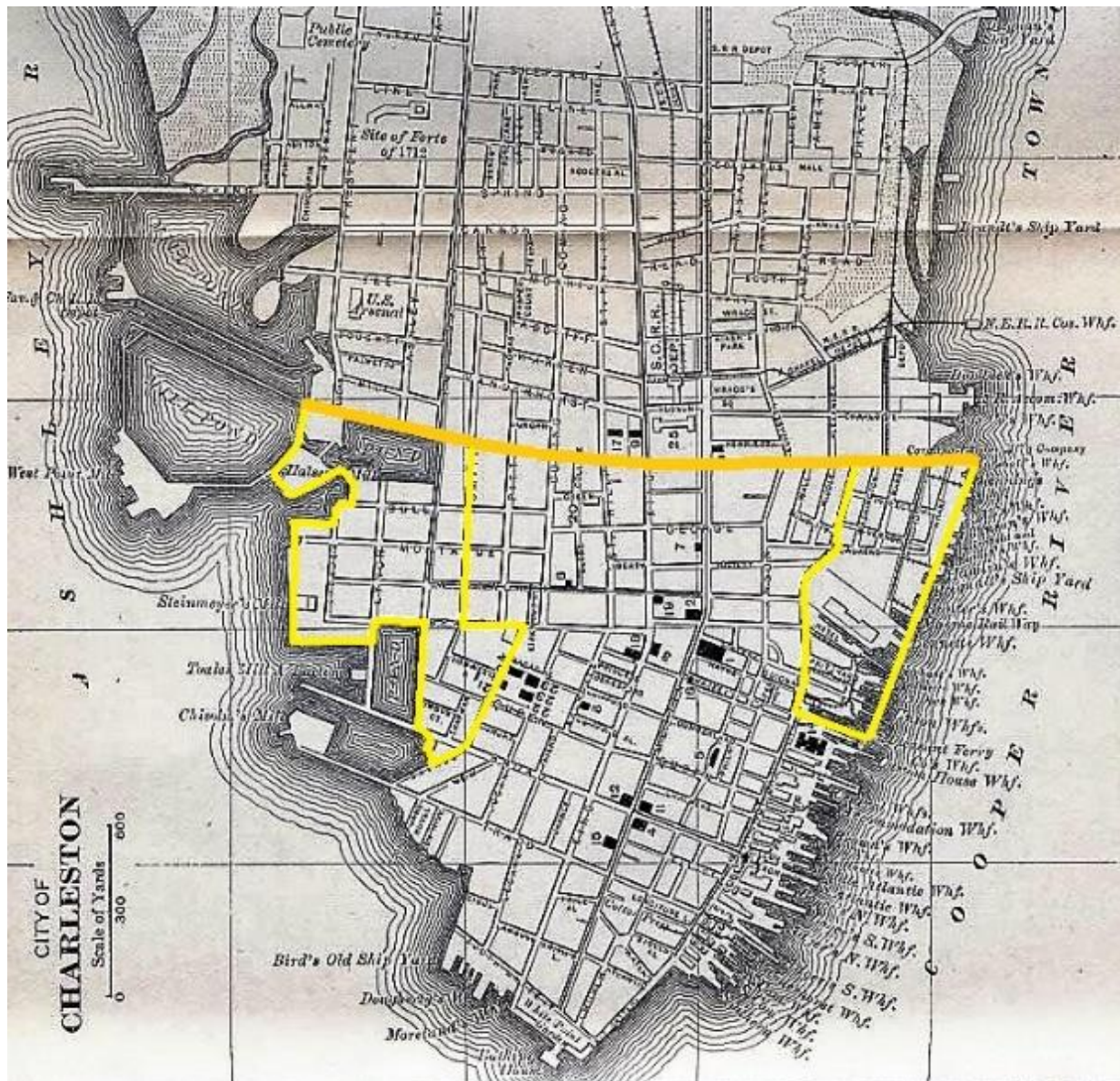
⁴⁵³ *City Gazette or the Daily Advertiser*, June 13, 1788.

⁴⁵⁴ In a public meeting of citizens of Charleston Neck in 1840 on whether or not to get incorporated into Charleston City, the concern was raised that Neck had a “defective organization of our police” and it was resolved “to form, if possible a new and efficient system of police [...]” *Southern Patriot*, November 2, 1840.

⁴⁵⁵ *City Gazette and Commercial Daily Advertiser*, December 16, 1822.

⁴⁵⁶ *Charleston Courier*, September 20; September 23, 1845.

Orleans with its *faubourgs* (suburbs outside the city limits). New Orleans' *Daily Picayune* moreover reported in June 1845 that "The suburbs of Mobile are said to be infested by large numbers of runaway negroes." The exact same wording was used a month later to refer to the situation around Natchez.⁴⁵⁷



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Figure 16: Charleston According to the Exemptions to the Prohibition to Erect Wooden Buildings, 1857

Nominally free African Americans were not the only ones to benefit from spatial segregation. Enslaved city dwellers did, too. It was not only the hiring system that rendered the daily lives of some bondspeople very close to those of free people but also the fact that some were able to live on their own. This was prohibited by law but it was a common practice throughout the urban South. Sylvia, with 55 years clearly above the average age of slave refugees, had enjoyed great autonomy before she was sold. In Charleston, she had been working and living alone, and

⁴⁵⁷ *Daily Picayune*, June 13; July 23, 1845.

⁴⁵⁸ Map of Charleston 1885, URL: http://www.carolana.com/SC/Towns/charleston_1885_map.html, accessed January 28, 2019.

being forced to change her life and to comply with the close supervision of a new owner could have been the reason for her escape in 1840. The ad read: “She has been in the habit for several years of selling about the streets and lately has been living in the yard No. 9 George street, where she hired a room.”⁴⁵⁹

Many enslaved women in New Orleans likewise had rooms or houses to themselves. This enabled them to help people who needed protection. At times things went wrong, for instance for “Mary Williams, slave of John G. Cocks.” Mary was in October 1853 “arraigned before Recorder Winter, on the charge of having for some time past, secreted and harbored the runaway slave Harrick, the property of C. V Burterbire, at her house in St. Paul street, between Gravier and Perdido streets.” In the same city, enslaved Albert, who was owned by a Mr. Moore, was fined \$25 in 1857 “for renting rooms to other slaves.” Martha, originally from Richmond, absconded within Charleston three months after having been sold to a new owner. “She was seen the night after she went away in a house occupied by negroes, on Boyce & Co’s wharf.”⁴⁶⁰

Living-out patterns, together with the hiring system and widespread personal networks were a combination which created spaces that absorbed hundreds of freedom seekers. The New Orleans *Daily Picayune* summarized this phenomenon in 1859:

The practice, so general in this city, of giving monthly passes to slaves, has proved injurious to the character and habits not only of those indulged, but to all those over whom they have influence. These passes make the slaves, for the time being, virtually free [and] furnish the means of concealment to any one who, to escape an irksome restraint, finally becomes an habitual runaway.

Testifying to the knowledge of New Orleans slaveholders about their slaves turning into runaways within the same place, the newspaper claimed to be “assured by those who have temporarily lost servants in this city, that without going more than a few squares from the residences of their masters, they have, in many instances, found security in the lodging places furnished by those who live under the protection of passes, for months.” The editor concluded that “a perfect system for mutual protection exists here among this class of population, rendering New Orleans one of the safest of hiding places for runaway slaves.”⁴⁶¹

Many different players were involved in this. Following up on the argument of the *Daily Picayune* editor, it was the negligence of slaveholders, the solidarity of black people, and the dynamics of urban development that created spaces of freedom. Cities hosted a variety of people who—advertently or inadvertently—contributed to creating cities of refuge.

Autonomy and Exclusion

New Orleans was far from showing the same level of segregation as Richmond. With slavery playing an important role and the intermingling of whites and mulattoes being stronger than anywhere else in the United States, emphasis was put on social distance rather than physical separation from dark-skinned free blacks and slaves. As the antebellum era moved on, whites increasingly tried to demarcate themselves and the spaces they inhabited from blacks.

⁴⁵⁹ *Charleston Mercury*, July 9, 1840.

⁴⁶⁰ *Daily Picayune*, October 4, 1853; August 27, 1857; and *Charleston Mercury*, February 9, 1844.

⁴⁶¹ *Daily Picayune*, October 22, 1859.

Interaction between the two races was socially acceptable only on a master-servant basis, and otherwise they essentially occupied different worlds. The nineteenth century marked the advent of city planning, which resulted in more structural exclusion of people who planners sought to keep out of sight.

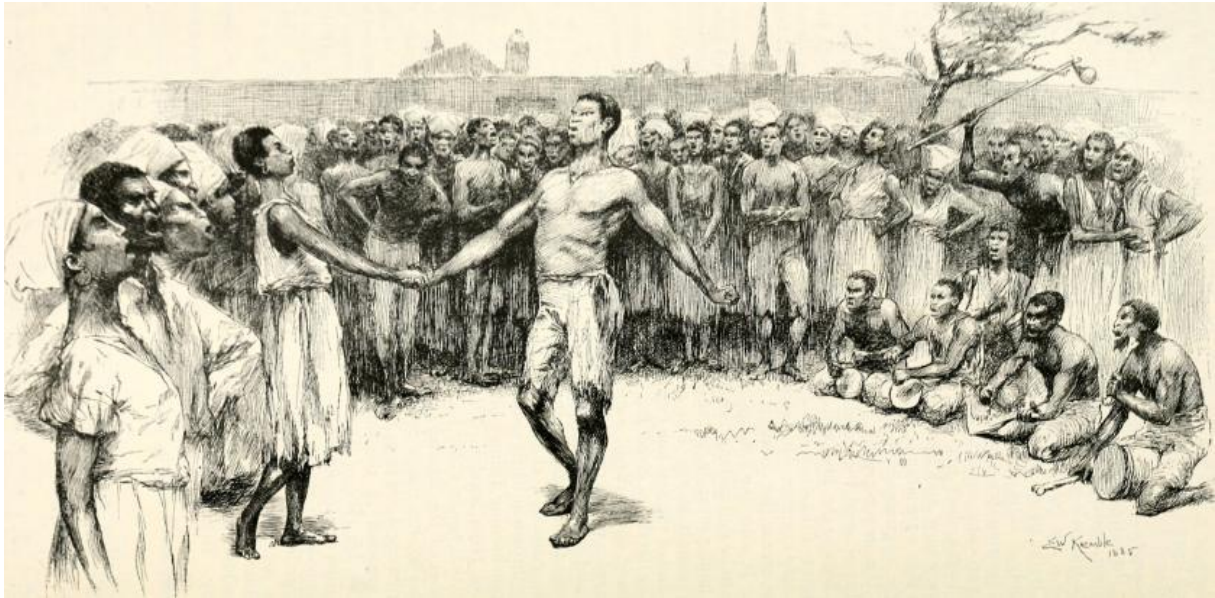


Figure 17: Dancing in Congo Square (depiction from 1886)⁴⁶²

New Orleans had a special meeting place for black people; a comparable spot in other southern cities did not exist. It was the so-called Congo Square, located just outside the original city walls, as contemporaries reported.⁴⁶³ Since 1812, it was a public space constituting a centralized congregation place for slaves. Before, urban slaves assembled throughout the city. The Sunday afternoon gatherings focused on dancing, singing, and musical performances and had social, cultural, economic, and religious meanings to those who participated.⁴⁶⁴ (See figure 17.) *The Daily Picayune* recommended Congo Square to visitors to the city: It had the appeal of a tourist attraction yet stood out for its exoticness rather than for being part of American culture. An editor wrote:

The scene is novel, interesting, and highly amusing. In various parts of the square a number of male and female negroes assemble, dressed in their holiday clothes, with the very gayest bandana handkerchiefs upon the heads of the females, and, accompanied by the thumping of a banjo or drum, or the squealing of a greasy cremona, perform the most grotesque African dances.

⁴⁶² Edward Winsor Kemble, "Dancing in Congo Square," 1886, in "New Orleans' Landscape Legacy," The Cultural Landscape Foundation, URL: <https://tclf.org/places/view-city-and-regional-guides/new-orleans/new-orleans-landscape-legacy>, accessed August 13, 2019.

⁴⁶³ It was "below Rampart street, with St. Claude on the rear, and St. Ann and St. Peter streets on its sides." Norman, *New Orleans and Environs*, 182.

⁴⁶⁴ Congo Square was also known as Circus Square and was renamed Place d'Armes in 1851. Gary A. Donaldson, "A Window on Slave Culture: Dances at Congo Square in New Orleans, 1800-1862," *Journal of Negro History* 69:2 (1984): 63-64. Consult the account of Benjamin Latrobe as one of the most insightful contemporary information on African and African American cultural expressions in the nineteenth century. Latrobe, *Journal of Latrobe*, 180-182.

Being attracted to and simultaneously repelled by what they perceived as African aesthetics, the editor described the most distinguished person at Congo Square, as of a “particularly killing appearance. [...] the very *beau ideal* of a master of ceremonies.”⁴⁶⁵

The city also allowed free black people to “give a ball or any other party.” When more than ten people attended, “they shall apply to the judge of the Parish [for] his permission.” Enslaved people were also allowed to join, under the condition that they obtained a written permit from their owners.⁴⁶⁶ With these practices and allowances, New Orleans was the most liberal place for people of African descent. In the other cities, the efforts to keep enslaved and free black Americans separated were higher, as accounted for by Anna Murray Douglass in the opening of this chapter. The more room there was to mingle, the easier it was for runaway slaves to join.

While the social worlds of black people grew together, the new obsession with race and the stark hierarchies within slavery intensified the social distance between African Americans and whites. If wealthy whites had to live in the same cities as black people and poor whites, they reasoned, at least they should demarcate their living and leisure areas from their undesired neighbors. In this light, Richard Wade has shown that black people, free and enslaved, were excluded from taverns, restaurants, hotels, and also hospitals and cemeteries. The Richmond Negro Code, for one, determined physical locations like the Capitol where “slaves not to Walk or be in.”⁴⁶⁷ Hand in hand with welcoming the spending of public money on exclusive areas and recreation sites like parks and cemeteries came an unwillingness to support those parts of the city not of interest to the managers of tax money. The unequal division of resources between poorer and wealthier streets, neighborhoods, or wards worsened the situation for the lower classes. For those who profited from city planning, it was a small step to link the disastrous sanitary conditions in certain parts of the city to the character of the people living there.⁴⁶⁸

When the spaces of whites and blacks overlapped, it was up to the black person to move aside. Frederick Law Olmsted gave account of this when he observed black Richmonders literally giving way to whites.⁴⁶⁹ To minimize interracial contact between the lower classes, it was in 1846 even suggested to remove black people from the penitentiaries in Virginia. Four years later, the city jail in Richmond followed these recommendations, announcing that “separate apartments ought to be provided for keeping the black + white prisoners + that they should not be kept together as present.”⁴⁷⁰ Many whites did not even want to share their houses with their slaves, unless they were domestic servants. Bondspeople accommodating themselves

⁴⁶⁵ *Daily Picayune*, March 22, ca. 1846. The Congo Square was such an emblematic cultural cornerstone that a New Orleans newspaper still remembered it in 1879. *Time Picayune*, October 12, 1879.

⁴⁶⁶ Transcriptions of Parish Records of Louisiana, Prepared by The Historical Records Survey Division of Professional and Service Projects, Works Project Administration, No. 26 Jefferson Parish (Gretna), Series I, Police Jury Minutes, Vol. I: 1834-1843 (New Orleans: Police Jury, Parish of Jefferson, June 1939), HML.

⁴⁶⁷ Wade, *Slavery in the Cities*, 266-267.

⁴⁶⁸ Moreover, basic services like portable water, water for fire extinction, and infrastructure for health improvement were provided by private companies that cared less about the meager revenues from lower social strata. Stanley K. Schultz and Clay McShane, “To Engineer the Metropolis: Sewers, Sanitation, and City Planning in Late Nineteenth-Century America,” in *The Making of Urban America*, ed. Raymond A. Mohl (Wilmington: SR Books, 1988), 83.

⁴⁶⁹ Olmsted, *Cotton Kingdom*, 37.

⁴⁷⁰ House of Delegates, Senate & Virginia State Papers, Annual Messages, *Journal of the House of Delegates of Virginia. Session 1846-1847* (Richmond: Manuel Shepherd, 1846), Speech by W. M. Smith, LVA; Hustings Court Suit Papers, Ended Causes, City Jail – Report Concerning, August 15, 1850, LVA.

became such a big issue in southern cities that it was outlawed. Since it was, however, never really sanctioned, the phenomenon prevailed and intensified.⁴⁷¹

Social distance between the races extended into the spiritual sphere. In New Orleans, the place of this study with the highest share of Catholics, free and enslaved men and women of this faith worshipped together, yet the communities grew more racially segregated from 1803 on, when Louisiana became American. A contemporary estimated that around half of black people claiming affiliation to a faith were Catholics.⁴⁷² The city even had, besides schools and seminaries for blacks, a school and convent for the education of free black girls, located on St. Claude street. The Catholic church and black Americans had a distinct relationship, with more possibilities for non-whites than in other denominations. Perhaps most interestingly, New Orleans' Catholic church was strongly feminized. In the early decades of the nineteenth century, women of African descent led propagation and missionary efforts and it was through matrilineages that Catholic faith was passed down over generations.⁴⁷³

Particular for the Catholic denomination were relations of godparenthood in which people other than the parents took roles of spiritual and worldly guidance. Often extending godparenthood to other enslaved people, attending church and furnishing one's children with godparents meant an enlargement beyond their own legal status and beyond one's own race or nativity. Catholics essentially expanded their family to include other people who had a stake in the well-being of the child.⁴⁷⁴ This was a combination of what Gwendolyn Midlo Hall has labelled "biological and fictive kin."⁴⁷⁵ Besides New Orleans, Baltimore had a noteworthy Catholic community and, to lesser extent, Charleston.⁴⁷⁶ On the one hand, the Catholic church might have extended the fictive kin network and, hence, the support networks for people escaping slavery. On the other hand, as historians researching the relation between churches and slavery have noted, it was allied with pro-slavery apologists. Comparably, the Methodist church, had moved away from its anti-slavery disposition in the late eighteenth century.⁴⁷⁷ Both congregations were therefore probably much more reluctant to help individuals exit bondage. The Methodist and other churches, however, played a part in the increasing autonomy of black Americans, which eventually was related to the topic of slave flight.

Being systematically excluded from white society, African Americans organized themselves independently, through ideology, religion, schools, benevolent societies, and social spaces.⁴⁷⁸ Scholars have shown that Baltimore's black community established its own religious

⁴⁷¹ Wade, *Slavery in the Cities*, 63; and Takagi, *Rearing Wolves*, 96.

⁴⁷² Mary Jones to Charles Colcock Jones, November 26, 1829, C. C. Jones Family Papers, Tulane University Library, in Cornelius, *Slave Missions*, 111; and Rodriguez, "Ripe for Revolt," 47.

⁴⁷³ Emily Clark and Virginia Meacham Gould, "The Feminine Face of Afro-Catholicism in New Orleans, 1727-1852," *William & Mary Quarterly* 59:2 (2002): 409-410, 412-413; and Jean-Pierre Le Glaunec, "The Formation of a Peculiar Afro-Catholic Slave Community in Antebellum Louisiana," Database Project Slave Baptisms, 1800-1802, St. Louis Cathedral (unpublished), in Sylvia R. Frey, "The Visible Church: Historiography of African Americans Religion since Raboteau," *Slavery & Abolition* 29:1 (2008): 96.

⁴⁷⁴ Dale Edwyna Smith, *African American Lives in St. Louis, 1763-1865: Slavery, Freedom and the West* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, 2017), 34; and Ingersoll, *Mammon and Manon*, 207.

⁴⁷⁵ Gwendolyn Midlo Hall, *Africans in Colonial Louisiana: The Development of Afro-Creole Culture in the Eighteenth Century* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1992), 294.

⁴⁷⁶ See Cornelius, *Slave Missions*, 111-113; and Suzanne Krebsbach, "Black Catholics in Antebellum Charleston," *South Carolina Historical Magazine* 108:2 (2007): 143-159.

⁴⁷⁷ W. Jason Wallace, *Catholics, Slaveholders, and the Dilemma of American Evangelicalism* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2010), 1-2; and Schermerhorn, *Money over Mastery*, 25-26.

⁴⁷⁸ On benevolent societies, see Wright, *Free Negro in Maryland*, 250-252.

institutions quite early. Free African Americans in Baltimore had their own official places of worship since the early nineteenth century. The African Methodist Bethel Society was founded in 1815, and by 1860, there were 16 black churches and missions in Baltimore with at least 6,400 registered members who worshipped in their own fashion. Unlike in rural areas, churches in towns and cities organized their members in a formal way. This relative autonomy allowed preachers the liberty to interpret the Bible in a way that did justice to black people's experiences. Segregation, moreover, extended into death. Since 1807, black people in Baltimore were buried in the African Burial Ground. Through churches, black communities in different places interacted with each other. The African Methodist Episcopal Church of Baltimore, established in 1816, was connected to the ones in Philadelphia, Charleston, and New Orleans.⁴⁷⁹ Yet, independent organization of black life did not mean that they were left in peace. Churches operated autonomously, but whites viewed their religious services with suspicion.

Suspicion translated into panic when black people occasionally decided to stand up against repression. In 1822, the Denmark Vesey conspiracy took place in South Carolina. Vesey was a carpenter in Charleston who bought his freedom. He was accused of planning a revolt which would involve thousands of slaves.⁴⁸⁰ Together with another wirepuller called Gullah Jack, Vesey was a member of the African Congregation, which was formed in Charleston and their church built in Hampstead, a suburb to the city. The meetings of the church were not attended by white people.⁴⁸¹ Historiography of the late nineteenth century lamented the suppression of the African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston after the discovery of the Denmark Vesey's conspiracy because "Being an independent ecclesiastical organization, it gave the idea and produced the sentiment of personal freedom and responsibility in the Negro."⁴⁸² African American churches indeed offered a separate space for black people to follow their own agendas and to create a black counterculture. The labelling of new institutions as "African" gave black people, regardless of their legal status, a feeling of unity, as Gregg Kimball has argued.⁴⁸³

In August 1831, Nat Turner organized a rebellion in Virginia, in which course slaves killed close to 60 whites. Although the rebellion was put down after a few days, white Virginians became panicky.⁴⁸⁴ Motivated by that Turner had been a preacher, they passed a law

⁴⁷⁹ Phillips, *Freedom's Port*, 133, 140-142; Kami Fletcher, "The History of African American Undertakers," *Black Perspectives*, URL: <http://www.aaihs.org/the-history-of-african-american-undertakers-in-baltimore/>, accessed July 11, 2017; and Albert J. Raboteau, *Slave Religion: The "Invisible Institution" in the Antebellum South* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 204. Numerous scholarly contributions have stressed the interracial nature of southern worshipping, particularly in the rural South. See John B. Boles (ed.), *Masters and Slaves in the House of the Lord. Race and Religion in the American South, 1740-1870* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1988).

⁴⁸⁰ Vesey and 34 others were executed before a revolt happened. James O'Neil Spady, "Power and Confession: On the Credibility of the Earliest Reports of the Denmark Vesey Slave Conspiracy," *William & Mary Quarterly* 68:2 (2011): 287.

⁴⁸¹ Lionel H. Kennedy and Thomas Parker, *An Official Report of the Trials of Sundry Negroes, Charged with an Attempt to Raise an Insurrection in the State of South-Carolina: Preceded by an Introduction and Narrative; and in an Appendix, a Report of the Trials of Four White Persons, on Indictments for Attempting to Excite the Slaves to Insurrection* (Charleston: James R. Schenk, 1822), 22-23, LOC. See also Cornelius, *Slave Missions*, ch. 4.

⁴⁸² Daniel A. Payne, *History of the African Methodist Episcopal Church*, ed. C. S. Smith (Nashville: Publishing House of the A. M. E. Sunday-School Union, 1891), 45, HML.

⁴⁸³ Kimball, *American City*, 143.

⁴⁸⁴ Local authorities apprehended or killed most of the rebels, and white mobs and militias additionally killed more than one hundred enslaved and free black people in the aftermath of the rebellion. Turner himself was hanged.

in 1832 prohibiting “slaves, free negroes and mulattoes [...] from preaching, exhorting, conducting or holding any assembly or meeting for religious or other purposes.” Black Richmonders reported two years later that, as a consequence, “many coloured human beings are interred like brutes, their relatives and friends being unable to procure white Ministers to perform the usual ceremony in the burial of the dead.” Capitalizing on the opportunity that was opening up, the petitioners asked for authorizing “free persons of colour, as well as slaves, to perform the ceremony usual on such occasions by white ministers, provided they obtain a License for that purpose from the Pastor of the Church to which [they] respectively belong.”⁴⁸⁵ Some 20 years later, Frederick Law Olmsted observed a “negro funeral procession” in the city with six hackney coaches, six well-dressed men on horses, and twenty or thirty men and women. “Among all there was not a white person.”⁴⁸⁶



Figure 18: Free African Americans in Richmond, 1865⁴⁸⁷

Like Turner, black people who fought against suppression were often affiliated with the church. In the northern states, independent African American churches and societies took a leading role in fighting for black rights. Their institution building was the cornerstone of black abolitionism, as stressed by historian Manisha Sinha. According to her, a distinct “black public sphere” gave birth to alternative discourses.⁴⁸⁸ Unlike in the North, these alternative currents could hardly have been exhibited publicly in the South. The question whether black churches and independent denominations nevertheless helped enslaved southerners in their escapes is difficult. What we know is that class leaders (of small groups of church members) of the black

“Nat Turner’s Rebellion, 1831,” Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History, URL: <https://www.gilderlehrman.org/content/nat-turner%E2%80%99s-rebellion-1831>, accessed August 28, 2019.

⁴⁸⁵ Gilbert Hunt, William B. Ballandine, Isham Ellis, Harison Dendridge, and James Greenhow to the Honorable the Legislature of Virginia, December 1834, Richmond City, Virginia, Accession #11683411, Legislative Petitions, VSA, Race and Slavery Petitions Project, Series 1, Legislative Petitions, LOC.

⁴⁸⁶ Olmsted, *Seaboard Slave States*, 24.

⁴⁸⁷ Free Blacks in Richmond in June 1865, Alexander Gardner/The Library of Congress Prints and Photo Division, in Henry Louis Gates, Jr., “Free Blacks Lived in the North, Right?,” *The Root* (July 8, 2013), URL: <https://www.theroot.com/free-blacks-lived-in-the-north-right-1790897180>, accessed July 5, 2019.

⁴⁸⁸ Sinha, *Slave’s Cause*, 130, 134-136.

Methodists and Baptists in Charleston used church funds to purchase and manumit enslaved people. This has been claimed by Bernard Powers, stating that these practices were discovered in 1815 and the churches were put under white surveillance.⁴⁸⁹ We also know that in the northern states, black activists were mostly church members. This points towards a relation between black congregations and abolitionism whose extensions also reached into the slaveholding South. *Walker's Appeal*, for example, a pamphlet distributed throughout the American North and South calling for black resistance, was, when imported south, handed over to black preachers in port cities.⁴⁹⁰

This suggests a possible involvement of church members with slave flight but this question cannot definitely be answered on the basis of archival sources. The silence of the archives is only logical when remembering that these institutions and organizations dealt with great mistrust. Supporting slave flight, harboring a slave, or using contacts in church networks for the person fleeing would have depended on the individuals involved in a certain place at a certain time. Under no circumstances would information on these illegal activities have appeared in minutes or other records. Black churches had to act carefully in order to avoid interference by whites.

Whether leniency or strictness was the chief attitude of white people towards black organizations greatly varied within the South. In Richmond, the First African Baptist Church (FABC) was founded in 1841 as an African American branch of the mixed First Baptist Church, from which they were increasingly excluded by white congregationalists.⁴⁹¹ It was part of a variety of societies and organizations that African Americans in Richmond formed to give structure to their community separate from the white community.⁴⁹² It is striking that whites first forced blacks out and then came to see them as threats because they lost supervision over their activities. The minute book of the church reveals that the FABC took on the function of social control and replaced official jurisdiction when the matter was about minor offenses. Robert Johnson, for instance, was summoned to answer a charge on gambling, Peter Robinson and Ned Harris were excluded for adultery, and two men who disagreed about a money transaction found a mediator in the church.⁴⁹³ The FABC provided a form of social security, for instance with regards to poor relief, and also provided a vehicle to growing intra-racial solidarity, autonomy, and eventually freedom as a number of black men took on leadership positions. The church was also a venue for concerts, entertainment, and political events.

⁴⁸⁹ Powers, "Black Charleston," 15-16.

⁴⁹⁰ Kantrowitz, *More than Freedom*, 21, 29; and David Walker, *Walker's Appeal, in Four Articles; Together with a Preamble, to the Coloured Citizens of the World, but in Particular, and Very Expressly, to Those of the United States of America, Written in Boston, State of Massachusetts, September 28, 1829* (Boston: David Walker, 1830).

⁴⁹¹ See the narrative of William Anderson on his "conclusion to withdraw from the Methodist Episcopal Society of whites, and join what is now the African Methodist Episcopal Church." As a Methodist preacher, he also helped slaves escape from Indiana, where he lived. Anderson, *Life and Narrative*, 40, ch. IX, X, XII.

⁴⁹² The Episcopal Church in Richmond also held separate services for blacks and whites. Reverend William Meade, for instance, "At Stony Point, he officiated in a Tobacco Factory, in the morning to the whites, and in the afternoon to the colored people." *Spirit of Missions*, September 1, 1848, 305, LOC.

⁴⁹³ First African Baptist Church (Richmond, Virginia), Minute Books, 1841-1930, May 6, December 28, 1848; [?] 1853, LVA. Many thanks to Gregg Kimball for making these sources known to me.

Expressing the sharp reality of exclusion, it was located across Broad street from Capitol Square, from where black Richmonders were banned.⁴⁹⁴

The division into a white and a black branch had reverberations for black people that increased their self-confidence. Since the Bible taught them that God was omnipotent and omnipresent, as stressed by Midori Takagi, black Baptists could address God directly without the mediation of whites.⁴⁹⁵ Over time, black Americans grew more assertive and autonomous. In 1852, as church minutes reveal, black Baptists stood up and left the church building during a lecture by a white man which displeased them. Judge Oneal of South Carolina was lecturing them on temperance. He apparently “gave offence, by sundry expressions, to the congregation, as was painfully evident by their murmurs, + by their leaving the house in large numbers!!”⁴⁹⁶

The increasingly segregated spheres of blacks and whites might have been desirable for whites but they were even more beneficial for blacks. It allowed them to form their own parallel society, even with organizations and institutions that replaced official jurisdiction and likely provided safety nets for slave refugees. The membership of the FABC in Richmond grew from 2,100 in 1843 to 3,300 in 1860, and the construction of second, third, and forth African Baptist churches soon followed.⁴⁹⁷ The members of the First African Baptist Church consisted of both legally and illegally free women and men, slaves, and very likely also runaways. In the minute book of the church, several names appear of persons whose legal status seemed to have been unknown to the institution. In 1848, William Jackson passed away, reported as a free man with a question mark next to the word “free,” suggesting that he was passing for free but had no papers to prove it, or that the church otherwise had cause to doubt that he was really free. In the following year, the legal status column next to Maria Frances Myers’ name, who was baptized that year, was simply left blank—church elders either did not ask about her legal status, or they did not wish to record this information in their register.⁴⁹⁸ The incomplete information in the church register is more than telling. The boundaries between freedom and bondage were so blurry that not even an institution of trust, whose very existence stood for black resistance and community, knew about the legal status of many of its members. How, then, would city authorities know which black people they found on the streets were free and which were runaway slaves?

Criminalization

Spatial segregation and societal exclusion created physical and social spaces where black Americans were among themselves and where illegal residents could move freely. These niches attracted escapees from slavery. The dangers inherent in urban flight for refugees was that they hid among people who were the targets of social control themselves. Although it has been

⁴⁹⁴ Kimball, *American City*, 28, 126; Raboteau, *Slave Religion*, 197; Takagi, *Rearing Wolves*, 547; and Kimball, *American City*, 8, 45. Despite the remarkable autonomy, it was not until 1866 that the FABC was led by a black pastor.

⁴⁹⁵ Takagi, *Rearing Wolves*, 58.

⁴⁹⁶ First African Baptist Church (Richmond, Virginia), Minute Books, 1841-1930, June 6, 1852, LVA.

⁴⁹⁷ Raboteau, *Slave Religion*, 197.

⁴⁹⁸ In the row behind the name, the church clerk would note whether a member was a free or, when a member was enslaved, write down the name of the owner. In surprisingly many cases, the row behind the name was either left blank or doubts were made visible by a question mark. First African Baptist Church (Richmond, Virginia), Minute Books, 1841-1930, July 2, 1848; May 12, 1849, LVA.

outlined that they were largely able to move within their own spaces, the fear white Americans had of the growing free black population led to plentiful restrictions on the social lives of free African Americans, the receiving society of freedom seekers.

Men, and to lesser extent women, of African descent were often arrested for offenses like disturbing the peace or vagrancy. Black Americans became criminalized for actions which did not qualify as offenses for white people. This phenomenon is called “status offense” referring to crimes that could only be committed by persons of a certain legal status, for instance slaves or people of African descent.⁴⁹⁹ The state of Virginia designed over 70 capital crimes only black people could commit. Besides the legislations that allowed for the enslavement of black people who moved into a state or returned from a trip outside the state, free African Americans could be sold into slavery for crimes for which whites were punished significantly less harshly. Very common was the crime of insolence towards white people that only people of African descent could commit.⁵⁰⁰

One of the most mortifying things was the randomness of black punishment. Whereas white Americans in most cases knew what to expect for a certain offense, African Americans were punished depending on the mood of the individual in charge. In Charleston, for instance, municipal ordinances stipulated that whites breaching the peace after curfew (10 PM in summer and 9 PM in winter) were to pay \$25. Black persons, by contrast, “shall be tried by the Guard Committee of Wardens, and suffer such fine or personal chastisement, as they in their discretion may award.”⁵⁰¹ Causing attention, like being out at night, could lead to discovery. In 1856, Charles, a slave to Mr. Barker, was arrested in Charleston at nearly midnight. Another bondsman, Moses, was found “Drunk on East bay & Tradd Street.” He must have raised attention since he was taken up half an hour before curfew.⁵⁰² Those illegally free had to keep their heads down and live an unsuspicious life.

Additionally, individual supervision of an enslaved person by their respective master gave way to the collective control of the whole black population. Whereas in the countryside, “the security of the whites” depended “upon the constant, habitual, and instinctive surveillance and authority of all white people over all black,” as Frederick Law Olmsted observed,⁵⁰³ in the urban context, the authorities took on the matter of social control. Richard Wade has claimed that the increasing centralized organization was also related to the practice of slave hiring which created a vacuum of responsibility filled by a public system.⁵⁰⁴

The first step in social control was to define the group to be targeted. Those in power implied that crime and disorderly conduct were the outcomes of a “biologically criminal, riotous, and intemperate group of persons located at the base of society,” with alcohol

⁴⁹⁹ Diana Paton, “Punishment, Crime, and the Bodies of Slaves in Eighteenth-Century Jamaica,” *Journal of Social History* 34:4 (2001): 923.

⁵⁰⁰ Laws of Maryland Vol. 141, 1068; Fields, *Middle Ground*, 79; Daniel J. Flanigan, “Criminal Procedure in Slave Trials in the Antebellum South,” *Journal of Southern History* 40:4 (1974): 543; and Berlin, *Slaves Without Masters*, 320.

⁵⁰¹ George B. Eckhard (ed.), *A Digest of the Ordinances of the City Council of Charleston, from the year 1783 to Oct. 1844. To which are annexed the Acts of the Legislature which relate exclusively to the City of Charleston* (Charleston: Walker & Burke, 1844), section “Disorderly Houses,” CCPL.

⁵⁰² Records of the Charleston Police Department, Arrest Records and Morning Reports, Lower Ward 1855-1856, January 7, and January 13, 1856, CCPL. A great many runaways were taken up either early in the morning or at night close to curfew.

⁵⁰³ Olmsted, *Our Slave States*, 444.

⁵⁰⁴ Wade, *Slavery in the Cities*, 40.

consumption being the trigger of these troublesome conducts, according to Robert Lundman. This “dangerous class” referred to was made up of lower-class whites, European immigrants, and free African Americans, and was therefore easy to identify.⁵⁰⁵ Liquor was of particular interest because most places enacted codes to prevent free African Americans from selling it, and enslaved people from buying it. Exceptions relieving free black people from these restrictions were, at least before 1850, Baltimore and New Orleans.⁵⁰⁶ In the antebellum South, there were no legal constraints on selling alcohol to free persons but authorities reacted rather sensitive when slaves were involved.

One of the worst-case scenarios was to have “white men, free men of color and slaves to play together at cards, or at any other game.” This got punished draconically in New Orleans, as municipal records show.⁵⁰⁷ Under no circumstances did slaveholders and defenders of slavery want to create the impression that slaves could be part of the drunk and ill-tempered underclass that threatened the public order in the cities. At the same time, it was not that easy to distinguish the “dangerous classes” from slaves, whose presence in the cities slaveowners explicitly defended. Given that urban bondspeople and free blacks moved within the same social, economic, spiritual, and residential spaces—which were segregated along race, legal status, sex, and class—, identification was quite a challenge. Drinking runaway slaves on the streets, like in Milledgeville, Georgia, as reported by the press, could not be accepted.⁵⁰⁸

At the same time, drinking runaways were very exceptional. Under normal circumstances, they held a strong interest in maintaining low profiles and sought to avoid police. So did many other African Americans. The hostility of white law and the undocumented status of many made them cautious when being in the streets. Refugees could always end up as by-catch, even when they were not explicitly targeted.⁵⁰⁹ In this context, a northern visitor in Natchez claimed that “Though negroes are proverbially lovers of whiskey, but few are to be found among them who get drunk, unless on Christmas holidays,” implying a higher alcohol consumption of working-class whites.⁵¹⁰ While runaways did everything they could to remain undetected, the Charleston police was busy picking drunken white men up from the streets, as arrest records show—among these arrests were more drunken slaves than sober runaways.⁵¹¹

For reasons of camouflage, refugees joined black people who were driven out of the white public space and into illegality. Clandestine life occurred in back alleys, shops, and taverns, often at night. Alcohol was consumed and illegal card games like Faro were played, mixing members of the lower classes of all ethnicities and legal statuses, including slave refugees.⁵¹² In Charleston, “Six negroes were arrested in a house on Savage-street on Saturday night, while engaged in gambling. Two of the negroes were recognized as runaways, who have

⁵⁰⁵ Lundman, *Police and Policing*, 28-30.

⁵⁰⁶ Curry, *Free Black*, 16.

⁵⁰⁷ *Journal of the First Municipality of the City of New Orleans*, December 31, 1838, LaRC.

⁵⁰⁸ *Southern Recorder*, August 6, 1822, in Wade, *Slavery in the Cities*, 150.

⁵⁰⁹ See, for instance, Records of Prisoners Committed to the Parish Prison, 1852 – 1862, June 18, 1852 – May 10, 1862, TX420, NOPL.

⁵¹⁰ Ingraham, *South-West*, 56.

⁵¹¹ Records of the Charleston Police Department, Arrest Records and Morning Reports, Lower Ward 1855-1856, CCPL.

⁵¹² Faro was a card game that enjoyed a comparable popularity as Poker today. Including a dealer and several players, it is close to being a mixture of Poker and Black Jack. John R. Sanders, “Faro: Favorite Gambling Game of the Frontier,” *HistoryNet* (December 12, 2006), URL: <https://www.historynet.com/faro-favorite-gambling-game-of-the-frontier.htm>, accessed January 30, 2019, originally published in *Wild West* (October 1996).

been absent from their master's service for several weeks."⁵¹³ Reports like these were common in southern urban newspapers pointing to both the interconnectedness of legally and illegally free black people and the fact that refugees were often discovered by engaging in activities black people (but not white people) were criminalized for.

Enslaved people officially needed an authorization from their owners to purchase practically everything, and also this statute was extended to free people; they had to secure permits from the municipality. Free black Baltimoreans were criminalized when they bought firearms, dogs, or liquor without a license.⁵¹⁴ Meeting points where these activities occurred, were usually located in alleys or were hidden venues altogether and included brothels. Slaveowners were often clueless about the secret activities of their bondpeople. Some, however, were aware of their clandestine lives, as one slaveholder wrote in a Charleston newspaper:

How many of us retire on a night under the impression that all our servants are on the premises, and will continue there till the morning. And how often is it quite the reverse, especially with our men servants, who are wandering to and fro all night, or are quietly esconced in some dark retreat of villany, exposed to all sorts of vices and temptations, alike destructive of their morals and their usefulness. It is thus that some of our best servants become *cast-aways*.⁵¹⁵

That these meeting places were an open secret to those who wanted to know becomes clear when reading that even Frederick Law Olmsted knew about them when he was just visiting Richmond for a short time. He wrote: "A great many low eating, and, I should think, drinking shops are frequented chiefly by the negroes. Dancing and other amusements are carried on in these at night."⁵¹⁶ William and Wellington Hawkins, members of the First African Baptist Church, were charged with visiting a "low house when dancing was going on," as were two other male members in December 1857.⁵¹⁷

The criminalization of black Americans and illegal residents had the ironic dimension that they committed less crimes than whites. This corresponds to research on other times and places, which has confirmed that undocumented immigrants have lower levels of criminal involvement.⁵¹⁸ For the antebellum period, it is not at first sight recognizable from the court records that African Americans adhered to the law more than whites because they were more often arrested for minor offenses, unlawful acts that counted only for black people, and they were more readily found guilty. James Campbell has demonstrated that in Richmond, slaves were taken into custody more than twice as often as whites, and free blacks twice as often as slaves in the 1850s.⁵¹⁹ Court cases allow extending his conclusions onto other places. In Baltimore, a free black man was convicted to being sold to a Georgia trader for theft. Following the argumentation in the case records, it is likely that he did not commit the theft. His legal counsel described the situation: "we know [...] that some men are so prejudiced ag[ain]st people

⁵¹³ *Charleston Courier*, April 9, 1860.

⁵¹⁴ Fields, *Middle Ground*, 35.

⁵¹⁵ *Charleston Courier*, September 23, 1845.

⁵¹⁶ Law Olmsted, *Seaboard Slave States*, 52.

⁵¹⁷ First African Baptist Church (Richmond, Virginia), Minute Books, 1841-1930, December 1857, LVA.

⁵¹⁸ Rubén G. Rumbaut, Katie Dingeman, and Anthony Robles, "Immigration and Crime and the Criminalization of Immigration," in *The Routledge International Handbook of Migration Studies*, ed. Steven J. Gold and Stephanie J. Nawyn (Routledge: forthcoming), 2.

⁵¹⁹ Campbell, *Slavery on Trial*, 22.

of colour so that they are ready to lay hold of the slightest evidence ag[ain]st them and convict when outhg not to be convicted.”⁵²⁰

In very few cases, it turned out during the trial that free black culprits had in reality a different legal status than assumed and were, for instance, runaways or undocumented residents. The rarity of these incidents supports the prevalent pattern that vulnerable people were less prone to criminal involvement. Hetty, for example, was such an exception. She escaped from Philip Fiddeman around the turn of the nineteenth century, went to Baltimore, passed as free, and committed theft, for which she was sent to the workhouse for 18 months. Another case was Maria Dickson aka Charity Riggs. In 1821, she was tried and convicted as a free black woman for stealing bedding, china, and muslin, and sent to the penitentiary of Maryland. Three years later, her owner John Chambers proved with the help of a witness that Dickson was his absconded bondswoman.⁵²¹ Although there is no way to state with certainty that Hetty and Riggs committed the crimes they stood accused of, it can be assumed that the bulk of refugees did not jeopardize their freedom by stealing.

One of the most dramatic criminalized practices regarded education. In the 1820s, what some historians label the “reading revolution” was taking ground. Thanks to the spread of common schools, literacy rose significantly in the first three decades of the nineteenth century. In the South as well as in the North, public education was made possible by public funds. Schools were the most essential means of elevation, and black Americans recognized this. In the South, they were not only excluded from public education but schooling was even prohibited for people of African descent. In Baltimore, institutions such as black schools and benevolent societies had to operate clandestinely and were frequently shut down. It was a similar situation in Charleston but sometimes, schools were allowed under close regulation.⁵²² In Norfolk, close to Richmond, a white woman faced jail time for teaching black children to read and write.⁵²³ Recognizing the close connection between a barred access to education and the maintenance of inequality, Virginia was particularly hostile to black education and African Americans in Richmond had to study in secret places.⁵²⁴

Free African Americans were legally discriminated against and criminalized for a variety of behaviors and activities. Being a visible contradiction to the justification of slavery as well as a constant—active and passive—enticement for bondspeople to emancipate themselves, they found themselves the targets of continuous refusal and suspicion. Black people were not completely defenseless, however. Although they were justly and unjustly accused and

⁵²⁰ Governor and Council (Pardon Papers), s1061, 1826 26-73, MSA.

⁵²¹ Idem, 1826 7-63; 1824 24-44, MSA.

⁵²² Patricia Cline Cohen, *The Murder of Helen Jewett. The Life and Death of a Prostitute in Nineteenth-Century New York* (New York: Vintage Books, 1999), 188; Kantrowitz, *More than Freedom*, 124; Berlin, *Slaves Without Masters*, 76; and Myers, *Forging Freedom*, 4;

⁵²³ Margaret Douglass, *The Personal Narrative of Mrs. Margaret Douglass, A Southern Woman, Who was Imprisoned for One Month in the Common Jail of Norfolk, under the Laws of Virginia, for the Crime of Teaching Free Colored Children to Read* (Boston: John P. Jewett & Co., and Cleveland: Jewett, Proctor & Worthington, 1854), 51, Educational Laws of Virginia, VHS.

⁵²⁴ Kimball, *American City*, 69. Here is another reason why the black churches that developed in the nineteenth century were key for the formation of black advancement. It was not only that they supported and brought forward autonomy, self-assurance, and protective segregation to the urban black communities. African American congregations also supported literacy because the members were keen on reading God’s word. George Teamoh recalled that, in order to learn about literacy and general education, he “took every opportunity to visit churches, political gatherings, theatres &c. with the hope that something might ‘leak out.’” Teamoh, *God Made Man*, 70.

tried for aiding slave refugees, it did not come to convictions that often. A Maryland free black woman called Rose Brown aka Barnes, for one, was brought to court for harboring enslaved Peter. She declared that she was ignorant of the law and did not try to conceal Peter but rather only fed him and washed his clothes. Testifying to Brown's having "always borne a good character," 60 signers supported her request for *nolle prosequi*, and the judge agreed. In 1821, Samuel Reilly was indeed convicted of assisting a slave to run away. As the court case reads, however, the testimony of the slave was extremely porous and Reilly was seemingly only committed because he had no money and no friends to collect a testimony. His sentence of 18 months was comparably very short and he was furthermore pardoned after 14 months.⁵²⁵

Discriminatory treatment was the result of a wide-spread belief among white people that black people only had a place in the country when they were slaves. The further south, the more lenient these attitudes became. The observation that the American Colonization Society and its state branches were much more active and successful in the Upper South than in the Lower South speaks volumes.⁵²⁶ In the late 1830s or early 1840s, also the dances at Congo Square ended or, at least, became strictly regulated. In 1845, a visitor described the Congo Square as "the place where the negroes, in olden times, were accustomed to meet to while away the cares of servitude,"⁵²⁷ implying that these events belonged to the past. A newspaper article of the same year, however, reported that "thousands of negroes" congregated there the previous Sunday because a couple of weeks prior "an ordinance was passed restoring to them their ancient privilege of resorting thither, and thither they now repair in countless throngs."⁵²⁸ Gary Donaldson claimed that the Sunday activities were probably continued with irregular frequency until 1862. Then, however, under the supervision of police.⁵²⁹

Conclusion

Slave refugees sought shelter in all those places where black people were living and moved within all the spaces where black people were moving. They lived within their communities, formed social ties, and went to church. They also married in black churches and were buried in black cemeteries. Thanks to the increasing spatial and social segregation, thousands of illegal city dwellers could remain in their own circles with basic services provided by the lower classes. There, they could live without being detected. In fact, discovery on the open street was extremely rare if not related to work. (See chapter four.) Of the four cities under analysis, the opportunities for black people to become invisible were largest in Baltimore and New Orleans. In Baltimore, the free black population was simply so numerous that refugees could move about without the suspicion of police. In New Orleans, residents of African descent had historically enjoyed leeway and social mobility unseen in other American places. The lighter-skinned people were, the easier it was, while in Baltimore tones of black did not really matter to white people.

⁵²⁵ Governor and Council (Pardon Papers), s1061, 1828 29-60; 1822 22-120, MSA.

⁵²⁶ Hugh Davis, "American Colonization Society," in *Abolition and Antislavery. A Historical Encyclopedia of the American Mosaic*, ed. Peter Hinks and John McKivigan (Santa Barbara and Denver: Greenwood, 2015), 14.

⁵²⁷ Norman, *New Orleans and Environs*, 182.

⁵²⁸ *Daily Picayune*, June 24, 1845.

⁵²⁹ Donaldson, "Window on Slave Culture," 67.

Over time, the legislative framework as well as the supervision in cities grew tighter. In 1859, the pastor of the FABC in Richmond “complained that often of late the deacons were absent from the public worship + it was told that in consequence of increased stringency in police regulations it was dangerous to attend to any business of the church at night.”⁵³⁰ After every real or perceived threat to white dominance, legislation became stricter. It mostly affected the assembly of black southerners, including their worship, burials, and social activities. Ironically, more control from above translated into less control from within as white people increasingly retrenched from black people. Especially important for African Americans to move freely were the early morning hours, the time between the beginning of work and curfew, and Sundays. These were times when the streets of Baltimore, Richmond, Charleston, and New Orleans were, even more than usually, swarmed with people heading home, to work, to church, and to visit friends, and slave refugees hoped to impalpably go with the flow. During these times, spaces of freedom were large.

The observation that thousands of them managed to find refuge and build up a new life in southern cities points to the successful integration into the urban black communities. White desire to segregate themselves from black people drove free and enslaved people together. This shows that it was not only people of African descent who consciously crafted spaces of freedom, but that also whites inadvertently contributed to this. The limitations the free black communities and everybody who joined them faced, however, were a severe setback with regards to the freedom runaway slaves were looking for, and the degree of freedom refugees and other undocumented received, depended to large parts on the freedom of their receiving societies. Collective control, illegalization, and criminalization, though, gave cities of refuge a bitter by-taste and diluted the quality of freedom.

⁵³⁰ First African Baptist Church (Richmond, Virginia), Minute Books, 1841-1930, January 1859, LVA.