COMMODIFIED KIN: ENSLAVED FAMILIES' RESPONSES TO THE ANTEBELLUM DOMESTIC SLAVE TRADE IN THE CHESAPEAKE

Master's Thesis

in North American Studies

Leiden University

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16 February 2018

Word count: 19.040

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Introduction

Henry "Box" Brown was born in 1815 in Louisa County, Virginia, and in some ways, his story is the story of many enslaved people. Henry was separated from his parents and siblings when he was only fifteen years old and was taken to Richmond, over forty miles away from his family. He attempted to recover from this trauma by entering into new relationships, getting married, and having children. However, these were likewise taken from him and sold away by an indifferent slaveholding society. Henry declared he could not "express, in language, what were my feelings on this occasion." Several times he tried to persuade his master to buy back his wife, but to no avail. Knowing that it was likely that he would never see her again, the only thing they could "give each other," he said, was "that we should yet meet in heaven." Events such as these led Henry to state the following:

> No slave husband has any certainty whatever of being able to retain his wife a single hour; neither has any wife any more certainty of her husband: their fondest affection may be utterly disregarded, and their devoted attachment cruelly ignored at any moment a brutal slave-holder may think fit.

Thus, Henry wanted to be free of slavery and he came up with the idea to climb into a box to get himself "conveyed as dry goods to a free state." There was considerable planning involved in this—he was required to find a proper box, the box had to stay upright during the entire journey, and he could only stay inside for a relatively short time. However, with the help of others, he was able to pull it off and at the end of his journey, he quite literally climbed out of the confinement that was the institution of slavery.[1]

As is clear from the story of Henry Brown, the domestic slave trade played a significant role in the lives of antebellum enslaved families. Researching this central idea allows us to form a better perspective on an important debate in the general history of slavery, namely that of resistance versus accommodation. Some historians, for example Michael Tadman, have emphasized the ways in which enslaved people resiliently withstood and resisted the horrors of the institution of the slave trade—for instance, by visiting family members who had been sold locally or by honoring the memory of lost loved ones by naming children after them. Others, however, such as Nell Irvin Painter, have argued that the slave trade essentially resulted in "soul murder," destroying black families and black family culture in its wake.[2]

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[1] Henry Brown, *Narrative of the Life of Henry Box Brown, Written by Himself* (Manchester: Lee and Glynn, 1851), 40, 9, 51.

[2] Michael Tadman, *Speculators and Slaves: Masters, Traders, and Slaves in the Old South* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989); Nell Irvin Painter, "Soul Murder and Slavery: Toward a Fully Loaded Cost Accounting" in *U.S. History as Women's History: New Feminist Essays*, ed. Linda K. Kerber, Alice Kessler-

For the purposes of this research, "resistance" is defined as any action taken by an enslaved person that resisted, opposed, defied, showed contempt for, or did not comply with the slaveholders' direct orders and/or the system of slavery's general rules. Accordingly, organizing or participating in a violent, full-scale rebellion such as Nat Turner's in 1831 is considered an act of resistance, but so is intentionally slowing down work or breaking a tool. In the case of enslaved families specifically, resistance was displayed, for instance, by organizing religious meetings, by visiting family members without permission, or by running away from their owners. "Accommodation," on the other hand, is defined as the acceptance of and the adjustment of the enslaved person's position within the slave system, with the aim of avoiding hostility. An example of this would be an enslaved person who betrayed his fellow bondpeople in order to better his own position within the system. Furthermore, it is important to be clear about what the domestic slave trade entailed. This study focuses primarily on three parts of the trade, namely the local slave trade, the interregional slave trade, and estate divisions. In defining what did and did not constitute a "local" sale, this study follows historian Emily West—that is to say, a sale was "local" when an enslaved person remained within visitation distance and "interregional" when he did not.

This study focuses on the ways in which enslaved families in Virginia and Maryland responded to the workings of the domestic slave trade. It argues that even though enslaved people were often unsuccessful in preventing a sale from happening despite offering resistance in several ways, they did display emotional resilience after a family separation took place. This was made possible by the collective action in various forms of everyday resistance and by the consequential political solidarities. The first chapter focuses on enslaved people's main goal, namely to prevent a family separation from ever happening. It explores bondpeople's reasons for fearing the domestic slave trade and the tools they utilized to resist it. Secondly, this study focuses on enslaved people's lives after a family separation had taken place. It delves into institutions such as motherhood, fatherhood, and childhood, which were under constant pressure in the system of slavery. Chapter 2 thus explores the ways in which mothers, fathers, and children who lost a family member responded to such a loss. Finally, this study examines life after being sold in the domestic slave trade. Some enslaved people tried to recover from the loss of their family by moving on and entering into new relationships, whereas others never truly stopped thinking about their lost loved ones and attempted to reconnect with them. By

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Harris, and Kathryn Kish (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 125-146; Nell Irvin Painter, *Southern History Across the Color Line* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002).

focusing on the perspective of the enslaved person, this study endeavors to provide a nuanced contribution to the resistance-versus-accommodation debate.

Much has been written on this debate. In 1959 Stanley M. Elkins published his book *Slavery: A Problem in Institutional and Intellectual Life*. In it he claimed that the North American antebellum slave was a "Sambo-type,"—referring to the late nineteenth century children's book *The Story of Little Black Sambo*—signifying that the enslaved person was docile and had a childish dependency upon his owner. With this book, he reacted to the writings of Ulrich Bonnell Phillips, who wrote his main works in 1918 and 1929. Phillips, whose work was influential for decades but who is now regarded as having been a racist, described the institution of slavery as quite benign. He identified a paternalistic master-slave relationship, wherein the masters took care of and had a genuine interest in their slaves. Elkins, as Kenneth M. Stampp had done in 1956 with his book *The Peculiar Institution*, responded to the debate on paternalism and the nature of the master-slave relationship. In doing so he opened up a new debate—on slave agency.[3]

The historical discussions on paternalism and slave agency were among the most prominent on the topic of American antebellum slavery. *Slavery*'s accommodationist view was highly controversial because characterizing enslaved African Americans' personalities in such a narrow sense actually originated with the slaveholders—just as with Philipps's paternalism—who would say, for example, that selling enslaved people was fine because they did not have strong family bonds. This led the book to come under heavy criticism in the 1960s and 1970s. The concept of a "Sambo" personality was denounced by John W. Blassingame in his book *The Slave Community*. He argued that that enslaved people had different owners, friends and families, and were required to perform many different tasks, ensuring that many different personalities developed—including resistant ones.[4]

Blassingame was part of a group of historical scholars that formed the New Social History. These historians contended that most historical writings had consisted of political history, which mainly looked at leadership groups or remarkably successful individuals in society. Doing so, they asserted, inevitably led to an "inherently elitist and untrustworthy"

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[3] Stanley M. Elkins, *Slavery: A Problem in American Institutional and Intellectual Life* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1959); Ulrich Bonnell Phillips, *American Negro Slavery: A Survey of the Supply, Employment and Control of Negro Labor as Determined by the Plantation Regime*, 1st Paperback E.]. ed. Louisiana Paperbacks (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1966); Ulrich Bonnell Phillips, *Life and Labor in the Old South* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1929); Kenneth M. Stampp, *The Peculiar Institution: Slavery in the Ante-Bellum South* (New York: Knopf, 1956).

[4] John Wesley Blassingame, *The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Antebellum South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972).

history. Instead, history should be written "from the bottom up," so that the common person would receive more attention.[5] Blassingame did exactly this with *The Slave Community*, by utilizing "black sources," such as the nineteenth-century slave autobiographies. Similarly, George P. Rawick employed a "black" perspective by looking at a relatively new source of slave narratives, namely the Federal Writers' Project (FWP) interviews. These were held with formerly enslaved people from the late 1930s and were conducted under the Works Progress Administration (WPA). He combined these interviews into one large work, *The American Slave*, and he published an interpretive introduction to these interviews in the form of *From Sundown to Sunup*.[6]

After Rawick had published the FWP interviews, other historians also started utilizing them, as did Eugene D. Genovese for his influential work *Roll, Jordan, Roll* (1974). He used Marxist theorist Antonio Gramsci's concept of "hegemony" to establish that the planter culture was dominant and that enslaved people did actively resist the slaveholders on a day-to-day basis, but also, to a degree, accommodated to their will. In fact, organizing religious meetings and visiting family members played right into the slave owners' hands, Genovese contended, as it prevented the enslaved from transforming their resistance into an insurgency. He also revived parts of Phillips's paternalism thesis, stating that the slaveholders, for their part, felt they had "a duty and a burden" to care for their bondpeople, though he added that this was the case because they needed to justify themselves to themselves.[7]

Moreover, in 1965 sociologist Daniel Patrick Moynihan published *The Negro Family*, also known as the "Moynihan Report," in which he argued that the rise of black single-mother families in current society had roots in slavery times and the Jim Crow era. Of the many historians that disagreed with Moynihan, Herbert Gutman was most outspoken. In his book *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom, 1750-1925* (1976), he argued that enslaved families were not broken up by slavery, but rather able to stay together and to resist the horrors of the institution. He has therefore been described as a very idealistic historian, who tried to get acknowledgment for black resistance and humanity through his writings.[8]

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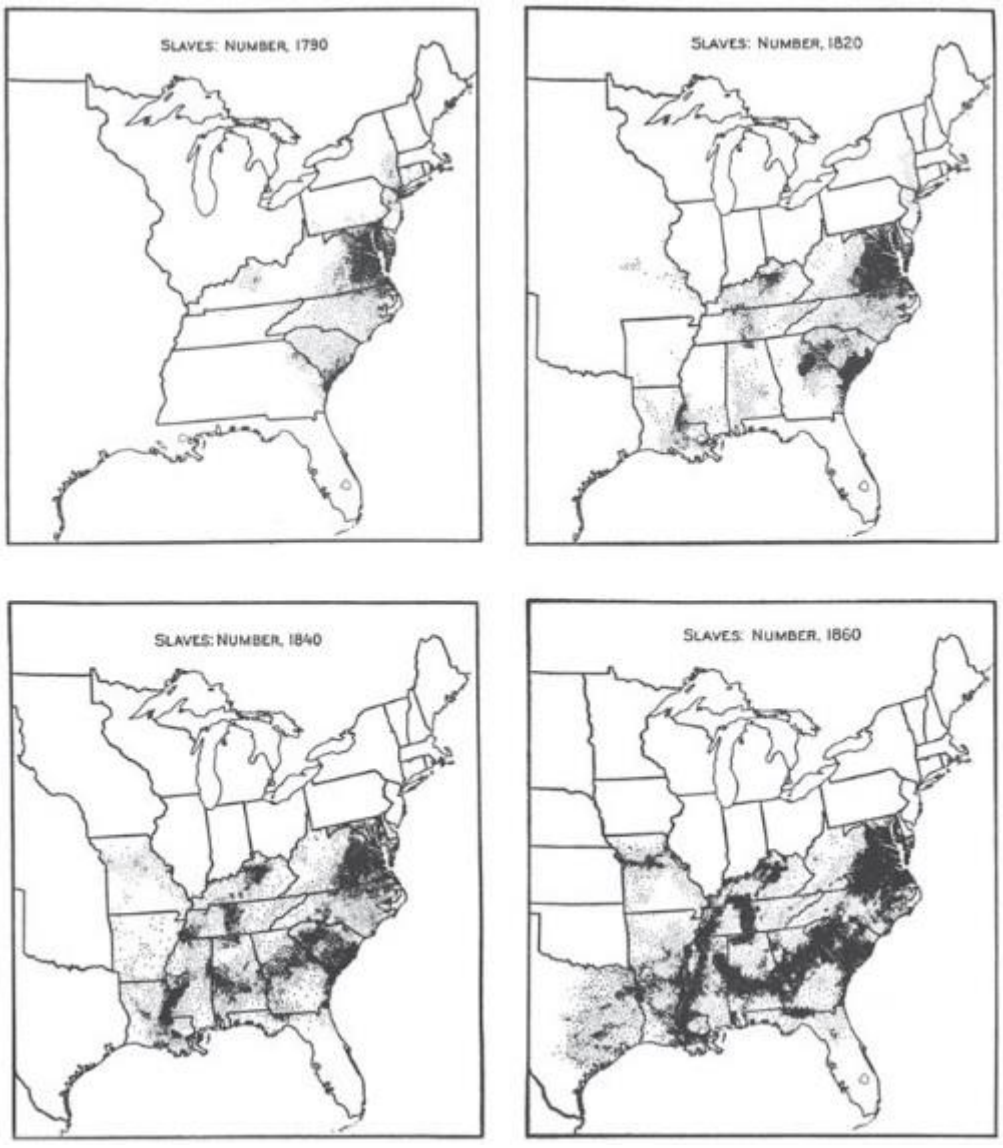
[5] Paul E. Johnson, "Reflections: Looking Back at Social History," *Reviews in American History* 39, no. 2 (2011); 380.
[6] George P. Rawick, *From Sundown to Sunup: The Making of the Black Community*, The American Slave: a Composite Autobiography / George P. Rawick; Vol. 1 (Westport: Greenwood, 1972).
[7] Eugene Dominic Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1974); Walter Johnson, "A Nettlesome Classic Turns Twenty-Five: Re-reading Eugene D. Genovese's Roll, Jordan, Roll," *Common-Place* [Internet], Vol. 1, no. 4 (2001), http://www.common-place-archives.org/vol-01/no-04/reviews/johnson.shtml.
[8] Herbert G. Gutman, *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom, 1750-1925* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1976); Nell Irvin Painter, "Remembering Herbert Gutman," *Labor History* 29, no. 3 (1988); 338.

During the 1970s there had been relatively many of these "sweeping" histories of slavery, whereas in the 1980s most historians conducted more microscopic research. Michael Tadman's *Speculators and Slaves* (1989) changed this. By looking more closely at the slave trader, Tadman demonstrated that the domestic slave trade played a far larger role in the lives of enslaved people than previously thought. Historians Fogel and Engerman, in their highly controversial book *Time on the Cross*, for example, had estimated that around 16 percent of enslaved African Americans were moved in the slave trade, but Tadman concluded that this was at least 60 percent. These findings were essential, as they indicated that slaveholders did not rule enslaved people with the whip, but rather with the threat of sale. Historian Walter Johnson elaborated on this, as he showed how astoundingly economic the slaveholders' mindset



The spread of enslaved people in the South, 1790-1860. Each dot represents 200 bondpeople.[9]

[9] Lewis Cecil Gray and Esther Katherine Thompson, *History of Agriculture in the Southern United States to 1860* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Institution of Washington, 1933), 652-55, as found in Steven Deyle, *Carry Me Back: The Domestic Slave Trade in American Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 43.

was during slave sales. He further estimated that "approximately one million enslaved people were relocated from the Upper South to the Lower South," two thirds of which, he stated, through "the domestic slave trade." Moreover, Steven Deyle described the role of the domestic slave trade in the rapidly growing cotton trade, and the consequential "transformed" southern society, as he displayed that in 1790 45 percent of the enslaved in the South lived in Virginia, while by 1860 this number "had sunk to 12 percent."[10]

These historians put the domestic slave trade at the center of American antebellum slavery and this significantly changed the resistance-versus-accommodation debate, as the perceived balance of power between slaveholders and the enslaved shifted even more in favor of the former. In *Generations of Captivity*, Ira Berlin applied the term "negotiation" to reiterate the argument that enslaved people were not passive victims of slaveholder cruelty, but were able, in part, to shape the outcome of both the production process and their lives. In other words, he argued that they had agency. Johnson, however, explored the limits of this agency in his book *Soul by Soul*. He argued that slaveholders were able to turn black people into commodities by putting specific values on enslaved people's bodies on the basis of very stereotypical and racialized theories on the black body and mind, while at the same time claiming that these enslaved people were in some instances partly able to influence their own sale. For example, an enslaved person could be put in the following impossible position: during potential sales, slave traders would give the slave specific instructions on what to tell the buyer that could increase the likeliness of the sale going through, even though these instructions were sometimes not true. In such a scenario, the enslaved person had two options: he could listen to the slave trader's instructions, thereby lying to the slaveholder's face, with the chance of consequently being bought and eventually being punished when the truth came out. Alternatively, he could disregard these instructions and tell the slaveholder the truth, thereby likely preventing the sale and having to deal with the slave trader's punishments.[11] Both scenarios were terrible for the enslaved person, but in the end, the actual choice, that impacted the trader as well as the slaveholder, lay with him. It is important to note that Johnson does not argue that enslaved people had no agency. Instead, he refuses to equate agency with resistance. He considers this

[10] Tadman, *Speculators and Slaves*, 22-23, 31; Robert William Fogel and Stanley L. Engerman, *Time on the Cross: The Economics of American Negro Slavery* (London: Little Brown, 1974), 38-58; Walter Johnson, *Soul by Soul: Life inside the Antebellum Slave Market* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 5; Deyle, *Carry Me Back*, 42; Robert H. Gudmestad, *A Troublesome Commerce: The Transformation of the Interstate Slave Trade* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2003), 44.

[11] Ira Berlin, *Generations of Captivity: A History of African-American Slaves* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003); Johnson, *Soul by Soul*, 173.

equation problematic because an enslaved person who collaborated with a slave owner against his fellow slaves also displayed agency, but not resistance.[12]Accordingly, this study does not refer to the *agency*-versus-accommodation debate, but rather to the *resistance*-versus-accommodation debate, though it does endeavor to contribute to the overarching historiography.

In order to make such a contribution, this study takes the perspective of enslaved people in antebellum Virginia and Maryland. The selection of this specific time period and geographical region makes sense because of the invention of the cotton gin in 1794—and the consequent increased production of cotton in the Deep South. This, in combination with the abolition of the Atlantic Slave Trade in 1808 which prevented Lower South slaveholders from acquiring more bondpeople via this institution, ensured an increased demand for Upper South slaves. In fact, Steven Deyle has found that "slave prices more than tripled" in the antebellum period, for instance, from $500 in 1800 to more than $1,800 for a New Orleans field hand when the Civil War commenced. Moreover, Michael Tadman identified certain "importing" and "exporting states," arguing that the "Upper South family […] was most affected by the trade."[13]

Moreover, Ira Berlin has convincingly pointed out the differences between a "society with slaves" and a "slave society." Most importantly, he identified that enslaved people in societies with slaves "were marginal to the central productive processes," whereas in slave societies, "slavery stood at the center of economic production." A transformation from a society with slaves to a slave society generally took place "upon the discovery of some commodity […] that could command an international market." Thus, the antebellum period—with its revolutionized cotton production—underwent such a transformation. Furthermore, Berlin claimed that "the arrival of freedom," most significantly the occurrence of the American, French, and Haitian revolutions, influenced the power dynamic between bondpeople and slaveholders during this period, as enslaved people were afforded considerable moral ammunition in their struggle for liberation. These developments characterized the antebellum period and led to the rise of the domestic slave trade, which Berlin termed the "Second Middle Passage."[14]

Since this study will take the perspective of the enslaved person, its most utilized material will be slave testimony. The nineteenth-century slave autobiographies will form the bulk of the primary sources used. During the times of the aforementioned Ulrich B. Phillips, these documents were heavily criticized for having been part of the abolitionists' propaganda

[12] Walter Johnson, "On Agency," *Journal of Social History* 37, no. 1 (2003), 114-115.
[13] Deyle, *Carry Me Back*, 56; Tadman, *Speculators and Slaves*, 175.
[14] Berlin, *Generations of Captivity*, 8-11, 161.

and were thus said to be unusable. John Blassingame, however, in his book *Slave Testimony*, convincingly argued that they *can*—and should—be used. He stated that the abolitionist editors were usually "people noted for their integrity," that "many of the procedures the editors adopted are now standard in any biographical study," and that the accounts were either poorly challenged by southern whites, or—as in most cases—not at all. Furthermore, he contended that most autobiographies could be "verified by independent sources" and that many of them were written and published after emancipation, thus making them independent of the abolitionist cause. Likewise, Walter Johnson opined that "the nineteenth-century narratives remain our best source for the history of enslaved people in the slave trade."[15]

However, Blassingame also observed some problems with the autobiographies. Most notably he pointed toward the fact that only 12% of them were written by women, that the percentage of fugitives among the formerly enslaved writers was much higher than among the general enslaved population, and that many of the authors were "among the most perceptive and gifted of the former slaves."[16] This is where the interviews with former bondpeople held by the FWP under the WPA, which this study will also employ, come into play. The interviews that were conducted in Virginia amount to a total number of 55, approximately half of which were held with female slaves. Not only are women much better represented in these narratives, they also have the advantage of offering a better insight into the "average" enslaved person, instead of the "most perceptive and gifted."

Yet, the WPA interviews are not without problems either. Prominent historian of the South C. Vann Woodward illustrated several issues with these narratives, such as the fact that many former slaves were of a high age when interviewed—in most cases at least eighty years old. Moreover, the fact that the interviews were held by white people during the late 1930s, i.e. during segregation, surely affected their atmosphere and outcome (although in Virginia there was a relatively high percentage of black interviewers). Besides that, an analysis of the situation that former slaves found themselves in—just recovering from the Great Depression—possibly meant that they looked back at the slavery period with more optimism.[17]

Should these complications mean that these sources cannot be used? No. The task of the historian is inevitably to analyze flawed sources and to discern their best interpretation. As

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[15] John W. Blassingame, *Slave Testimony: Two Centuries of Letters, Speeches, Interviews and Autobiographies* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1977), xvii-xli; Johnson, *Soul by Soul*, 9-10.
[16] Blassingame, *Slave Testimony*, xli.
[17] C. Vann Woodward, "History from Slave Sources," *The American Historical Review* 79, no. 2 (1974); 472-475; Norman R. Yetman, "Ex-Slave Interviews and the Historiography of Slavery," *American Quarterly* 36, no. 2 (1984); 187.

Vann Woodward contended, the WPA interviews "are not all that different from the norm." Much the same, Blassingame described many of the different kinds of sources and their potential (dis-)advantages. He concluded: "In the final analysis, the methodological skills possessed by the historian and the questions he wants to answer will determine what sources he uses."[18]

In establishing a careful exploration of the source material, then, this study follows Walter Johnson's method, as described in his book *Soul by Soul*. Firstly, he asserted that it is important to use slave narratives "in tandem" with other sources. Besides the autobiographies and the WPA interviews, it is also necessary to include letters and speeches of (former) slaves on the one hand, and academic secondary sources on the other. Secondly, Johnson explained that he looked for elements of the enslaved person's experience outside of the abolitionist cause, or as he stated "for the 'facts' provided by Frederick Douglass without which William Lloyd Garrison could not have fashioned his 'philosophy.'" For example, the authors in many cases recounted which of their family members were still alive and with whom they still had contact, which can be read as a sign that familial bonds were important to them. Finally, the narratives must be explored for "symbolic truths that stretch beyond the facticity of specific events." For instance, whether or not someone genuinely thought a fellow enslaved person was a witch is not exactly relevant, but it does say something about both the importance of trust in enslaved people's social lives, and about the existence of superstition within those lives. Following Johnson's methodology will allow this study to make a prudent analysis.[19]

[18] Vann Woodward, "History from Slave Sources," 475; Blassingame, *Slave Testimony*, lvi-lxiv.
[19] Johnson, *Soul by Soul*, 9-11.

Chapter 1: To Be Part of A Slave Sale

For the enslaved person in the antebellum Chesapeake the domestic slave trade was omnipresent and at the foundation of his reality. This chapter focuses on the importance of family and social bonds for slaves and the ways in which they attempted to keep them intact. Furthermore, it delves into the specific reasons why they feared this institution. For enslaved people, it was paramount to recognize a possible sale, and general knowledge and perceptiveness played considerable roles in this. After doing so, bondpeople had several ways of trying to prevent the purchase from going through, stretching from emotional appeals to self-mutilation and running away.

Many of the narratives underline the centrality of the concept of forced separation. For example, George Johnson, who grew up in northern Virginia, declared that "whipping and slashing are bad enough, but selling children from their mothers and husbands from their wives is worse." Similarly, Henry Brown described how an estate division separated him from both his parents and his siblings. He was only 15 years old at the time, but he remembered it as "the most severe trial to my feelings which I had ever [endured]." He went on:

> This kind of torture is a thousand fold more cruel and barbarous than the use of the lash which lacerates the back; the gashes which the whip, or the cow skin makes may heal, […], but the pangs which lacerate the soul in consequence of the forcible disruption of parent and the dearest family ties, only grow deeper.

Furthermore, when John Quincy Adams, a formerly enslaved person from Frederick County, Virginia, summed up some of the horrors of the institution of slavery, he strongly associated forced separation with death, stating, "All that could be done to [the fathers and mothers in slavery] was done. They were murdered. Many of them were starved to death. Husband and wife were parted. Sister and brother were parted. […] O how hard it was to see such things done to human beings."[20]

Some historians, such as Eugene Genovese and Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, have claimed a paternalistic nature to the master-slave relationship, implying a reluctance on the part of the slaveholder to sell his "extended family." However, the more recent trend in the historiography of this property-versus-paternalism debate has been to emphasize the slave owners' financial

[20] Deyle, *Carry Me Back*, 246-247; Gudmestad, *A Troublesome Commerce*, 42-44; Damian Alan Pargas, *Slavery and Forced Migration in the Antebellum South* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 57-59; George Johnson in Benjamin Drew, *A North-Side View of Slavery: The Refugee: or the Narratives of Fugitive Slaves in Canada, Related by Themselves, with an Account of the History and Condition of the Colored Population of Upper Canada* (Boston: J.P. Jewett and Company, 1856), 54; Brown, *Life of Henry Box Brown*, 16-17; John Quincy Adams, *Narrative of the Life of John Quincy Adams, When in Slavery, and Now as a Freeman* (Harrisburg: Sieg, 1872), 14.

interests in their slaves and their tendency to regard enslaved people as chattel, rather than human beings. Most notably, Walter Johnson convincingly showed how oftentimes the reasons for selling enslaved people were thoroughly economic—for instance when sales took place as a result of an estate division, or when a slaveholder required immediate cash to make a large purchase.[21]

Similarly, and in fact, before Johnson, Michael Tadman emphasized the economic character of the master-slave relationship by describing slaveholders' reasoning for selling enslaved people. For example, he demonstrated that slave owners regarded enslaved children aged eight to fourteen or fifteen years to be "full of potential, […] entering or [having] recently entered their period of very effective work output." This category of enslaved black people comprised 25 percent of the interregional trade as a whole and these children were often bought alone, resulting in family separation. Much the same, "women with first child"—which, once decoded, means young and fertile women—were another popular category, since it meant the guaranteed growth of property.[22]

This fundamentally economic mindset with regard to what they saw as their property, Tadman found, was consistent with the extensive scale at which family separations occurred. He asserted, "Just over half of all slaves who fell into the hands of the trader would either have been [forcibly] separated from a spouse or have been children who were forcibly separated from one or both of their parents." Moreover, he established that in almost every decade of the antebellum period around one in every ten enslaved people was relocated from the Upper to the Lower South. Slightly over half of these relocated bondpeople "experienced major family separations," meaning that either young children or teenagers were separated from their parents, or spouses from their each other. Besides that, Tadman's research demonstrated that approximately 25 percent of "first marriages" of enslaved people in the Upper South was broken up in either the interregional or the local slave trade. As for enslaved children, it showed that bondpeople aged fourteen or younger in the Upper South had an even higher chance of being involved in a family separation—which in this case meant losing contact with at least one parent. Due to the fact that children were not only separated from their parents when they were sold away from them, but also when they were sold away with either their mother or father, and

[21] Eugene D. Genovese and Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, *Fatal Self-Deception: Slaveholding Paternalism in the Old South* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Johnson, *Soul by Soul*, 26-28; Tadman, *Speculators and Slaves*; Wilma A. Dunaway, *The African-American Family in Slavery and Emancipation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); James Oakes, *The Ruling Race: A History of American Slaveholders* (New York: Knopf, 1982); Richard Follett, *The Sugar Masters: Planters and Slaves in Louisiana's Cane World, 1820-1860* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2005).
[22] Tadman, *Speculators and Slaves*, 141-143.

when a parent himself was sold away, the chance of being involved in a separation was around 33 percent. Finally, in expressing an essential discrepancy between enslaved people's forced migration and white westward migration during the frontier era, Tadman emphasized the permanent nature of the separation of enslaved families.[23]

It should be stressed, here, that Tadman's findings indicate that a majority of enslaved people was *not* entangled in the slave trade. Surely, however, the number of slaves that *were* is so significant that it constituted a kind of omnipresence: enslaved people certainly knew about slaveholders' and slave traders' practices and many of them feared to lose their families. Harriet Tubman, the very same as the one who became the famous civil rights figure, expressed in an interview with Benjamin Drew, "Every time I saw a white man I was afraid of being carried away. I had two sisters carried away in a chain-gang,--one of them left two children. We were always uneasy." For Mrs. John Little, who was born in Petersburg, Virginia, the slave trade was an inescapable institution as well. She described that after her owner died she remembered: "all the people were sold." At first, her mother and father were sold locally, only a mile away from her, but "after a year, they were sold a great distance, and [she] saw them no more." Reverend William Troy, on the other hand, was never personally involved in the slave trade—as his mother was a free woman, which also made him a free man—but he did encounter "scenes that made [his] heart bleed." He told several stories of seeing both his church "associates" and other people he did not necessarily know being sold in the slave trade. Similarly, William Thompson declared that he was never sold, and eventually even set free by his master—who was also his father. However, another slaveholder he knew who conceived several enslaved children with one of his slaves "sold all the children but the oldest slave daughter," who he ended up selling as well.[24]

Enslaved people were not only afraid of losing their families, but also of migration itself because it was possible that they might end up in the Deep South, where the institution of slavery was rumored to be even tougher to endure. Henry Williamson, for example, expressed such a belief when talking about his home state, Maryland: "Around that part of the country, the slaves are better treated than in some other parts because they are so near the line." Additional evidence of this regional fixation is offered by Thomas L. Johnson, who was born in 1836 and recalled that "all slave-traders were then called Georgia Traders." He added, "often

[23] Tadman, *Speculators and Slaves*, 147, 153, 169-171, 161; Gavin Wright, "Tadman, 'Speculators and Slaves' (Book Review)," *The Journal of American History* 77, no. 4 (1991); 1357.
[24] Deyle, *Carry Me Back*, 245-246; Gudmestad, *A Troublesome Commerce*, 36-41; Pargas, *Slavery and Forced Migration*, 59; Harriet Tubman, Mrs. John Little, William Troy, and William Thompson in Drew, *North-Side View*, 30, 224, 353-354, 136-137.

we were reminded that, if we were not good, the white people would sell us to Georgia, which place we dreaded above all others on earth."[25] Another formerly enslaved person, William J. Anderson, who was born in Hanover County, Virginia, remembered a song that expressed similar sentiments:

> "Farewell, ye children of the Lord,
> To you I am bound in the cords of love.
> We are torn away to Georgia, Come and go along with me.
> Go and sound the jubilee, [and see].
>
> To see the wives and husbands part,
> The children scream they grieve my heart;
> We are sold to Louisiana,
> Come and go along with me.
> Go and sound, [and see].
> […]
> Oh! Lord, we are going to a distant land,
> To be starved and worked both night and day;
> O, may the Lord go with us;
> Come and go along with me.
> Go and sound, [and see]."[26]

Songs such as this one are a strong indication that for enslaved people in the Upper South, the concept of being sold South and the fear that came with it was widespread, and even a part of their regional culture.

Such customs were instrumental in garnering "geopolitical literacy." Historian Phillip Troutman has argued that enslaved people "worked to acquire, disseminate, and apply geographic and geopolitical knowledge and information," which they used to their advantage against the slaveholders' power. He described the network through which this sort of information and knowledge was able to spread as a "grapevine," and regarded its existence as a rare positive consequence of forced migration. This network was established through

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[25] Gudmestad, *A Troublesome Commerce*, 43; Pargas, *Forced Migration*, 60; Henry Williamson in Drew, *North-Side View*, 133; Thomas L. Johnson, *Africa for Christ: Twenty-Eight Years a Slave* (London: Alexander and Shepheard, 1892), 10-11.

[26] 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 Deed 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 Book and Job Printing Office, 1857), 80-81.

"infrapolitics," or a shared black identity, which was strengthened by a common resentment of slaveholders, for example, but weakened by mistrust among bondpeople. The knowledge that was communicated through this grapevine could prove vital. After William Anderson had been kidnapped, for instance, he described how he felt "helpless" because he was "ignorant of the geography of the country," among others things—meaning that he simply could not make an escape without possessing the required knowledge. Moreover, when Isaac Williams and Henry Banks planned to escape from a trader's pen in Fredericksburg, they decided not to inform fellow enslaved person George Strawden of their intent—possibly because Isaac had been betrayed before. Quite some time into their escape attempt, they bought and then "lighted [their] cigars," and passed through Alexandria because they knew they had to appear as if they were free black men: "These cigars were the same as passports to us," Isaac declared. They were able to utilize their geopolitical literacy this way.[27]

Indeed, knowledge was key in many cases. For the enslaved person, it was imperative to find out that he was going to be sold, so that he could devise a strategy to resist it. Slaveholders were aware of this and tried to prevent such scenarios. Sometimes they would lie about it when an enslaved person asked them if they were going to be sold, and other times they would simply surprise the bondpeople in question. In the case of Louis Hughes, for instance, who was born in Virginia in 1832, both he and his mother were caught by surprise. They were under the impression that he was to be hired out, which would have allowed them to see each other occasionally. However, upon arrival in Richmond, a trader told him he had been sold. "We never met again," Louis concluded. Similarly, William Troy once witnessed a situation wherein the slaveholder made it impossible for an enslaved woman named Martha Fields to protest her sale, as she was "taken early one morning, without time to get her clothes, hurried off to Richmond, and sold to the highest bidder."[28]

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[27] Phillip Troutman, "Grapevine in the Slave Market: African American Geopolitical Literacy and the 1841 Creole Revolt," in *The Chattel Principle: Internal Slave Trade in the Americas*, ed. Walter Johnson (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 203, 208, 217-218; Isaac Williams in Drew, *North-Side View*, 59-67; Isaac D. Williams, *Sunshine and Shadow of Slave Life: Reminiscences as told by Isaac D. William to "Tege"* (East Saginaw: Evening News Printing and Binding House, 1885), 28; historians Stephanie Camp and Calvin Schermerhorn have made similar arguments; Camp by borrowing Edward Said's term, "rival geography," and applying it to the Old South, and Schermerhorn by using the term "networking." See respectively Stephanie M. Camp, *Closer To Freedom: Enslaved Women and Everyday Resistance in the Plantation South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 5-7; Calvin Schermerhorn, *Money over Mastery, Family over Freedom: Slavery in the Antebellum Upper South* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2011), 24.

[28] Deyle, *Carry Me Back*, 258; Dunaway, *The African-American Family*, 28; Johnson, *Soul by Soul*, 37-39; Louis Hughes, *Thirty Years a Slave: From Bondage to Freedom: The Institution of Slavery as Seen on the Plantation and in the Home of the Planter* (Milwaukee: South Side Printing Company, 1897), 5-7; William Troy in Drew, *North-Side View*, 354.

In many cases, however, enslaved people's general perceptiveness and insight into various aspects of the plantation business enabled them to evaluate their position. For instance, Charles Peyton Lucas, who was raised in Loudoun County, Virginia, was a journeyman blacksmith. In 1841, when his master brought a stranger with him to the house, Charles's sister "heard [his] master say, 'I won't take less than fifteen hundred dollars; he is a first-rate blacksmith.'" They knew it meant him, Charles said, "As I was the only blacksmith on the place." Similarly, Robert Belt, a formerly enslaved person from Maryland, had been in slavery for about 25 years when he "heard that there was a notion of selling me." A month later, he ran away. Helping each other thus worked effectively, but in other cases, it was also useful to employ one's own keen insight. Henry Brant, a formerly enslaved person from Frederick County, Virginia, displayed knowledge of the concept of estate division, when he declared, "In 1834, my mistress being old, I feared that in [the] event of her death, I might be placed on some farm, and be cruelly used." He looked for a chance to run away and eventually did so with the help of others. Another example of individual perceptiveness can be found in Benedict Duncan. He was enslaved for twenty-eight years before he "left through fear of being sold, as [his] master's business was going down hill." Benedict was apparently aware of the fact that slaveholders regularly sold their bondpeople when they were in financial trouble and he used this knowledge to his advantage.[29]

After an enslaved person either found out or was informed that a sale was going to take place, he had several different strategies for offering resistance. Firstly, he could make an emotional appeal to his master. Given the fact that there was hardly any downside to employing this particular tactic, it should come as no surprise that historians have described it as an integral part in trying to preserve the family unit. Phillip Troutman, for instance, has argued that "sentiment" was a "lingua franca," meaning that it was an important device in communications between slaveholders and enslaved people, as they were required to "communicate across the gulf of racial and social distinctions that divided them." In theory, moreover, this approach was compelling; slaveholders frequently expressed the existence of a paternalist ethos among the southern elite. One example of an enslaved person successfully appealing a slaveholder's paternalist sentiments is evidenced by Mrs. Henry Brant, from Maryland: her owner had

[29] Charles Peyton Lucas, Robert Belt, Henry Brant, and Benedict Duncan in Drew, *North-Side View*, 107, 112-113, 345, 110.

gambled her off to a trader, but she "made such a fuss […] that he felt ashamed of what he had done, and bought me back."[30]

In a vast majority of cases, however, such appeals were unsuccessful. Elizabeth Keckley, who would later become famous by working in the White House as a dressmaker for First Lady Mary Todd Lincoln, witnessed such an occurrence in Prince Edward County, Virginia. When her owner had made a bad financial call and needed some extra money, he decided to sell Little Joe, "the son of the cook." Despite the fact that Little Joe's mother was not informed of the sale, she became suspicious when her son was put in the wagon for Petersburgh. Keckley recalled, "She pleaded piteously that her boy should not be taken from her; but master quieted her by telling her that he was simply going to town with the wagon, and would be back in the morning." Nevertheless, the next morning, Little Joe did not return. Sometimes enslaved people were even told upfront that an emotional appeal would have no effect. For example, when Lydia Adams had her kids taken away from her one by one, she was told, "it's no use to cry about it." Likewise, Henry Parker wanted to grieve when his brother was sold away from him, but his master, Benjamin Cooper, told him "that when I grew to manhood I would forget that I ever had any brother."[31]

Besides instances wherein an *explicit* emotional appeal to the slaveholder was made, most cases actually contained an *implicit* appeal, namely an enslaved person—parent, child, or sibling—who cried when confronted with a forced separation. Peter Randolph, who was born in Prince George County, Virginia, provided some illustrations of this when he described the scenes at a slave auction. He detailed how an enslaved woman named Jenny, whose husband had already been sold away from her, lost all of her children—one by one. When Lucy, who at seventeen was Jenny's oldest child, was purchased, she cried. Then, when Harry was put on the auction block, she "began to scream out, 'O, my child! My child!'" Despite the fact that her (soon to be former) owner tried to quiet her down, Jenny's other children started crying as well. After that, when her daughter Mary was sold, she "became so much affected that she seemed like one crazy. So the old rough slaveholder went to the mother, and began to lay the lash upon her; but it mattered not to her—her little Mary was gone, and now her turn had come." William

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[30] Deyle, *Carry Me Back*, 267; Pargas, *Slavery and Forced Migration*, 76; Troutman, "Correspondences in Black and White: Sentiment and the Slave Market Revolution," in *New Studies in the History of American Slavery*, ed. Edward E. Baptist and Stephanie M. Camp (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2006), 215; Mrs. Henry Brant in Drew, *North-Side View*, 346.

[31] Deyle, *Carry Me Back*, 249, 262-263; Pargas, *Slavery and Forced Migration*, 76; Elizabeth Keckley, *Behind the Scenes, or, Thirty years a Slave, and Four Years in the White House* (New York: G.W. Carleton & Co., Publishers, 1868), 28-29; Lydia Adams in Drew, *North-Side View*, 338; Henry Parker, *Autobiography of Henry Parker, Documenting the South* [Internet], http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/parkerh/parkerh.html, 1.

Anderson, moreover, painted a similar picture when he described the events in the slave pen in Natchez, where he ended up after his owner had sold him to a trader in Richmond. He, too, saw husbands and wives become separated from each other, even though they had hoped to be sold together. They cried and wept when they had to say goodbye, but "for this demonstration of natural human affection the slaveholder would apply the lash or paddle upon the naked skin," William declared. Implicit appeals such as these, then, were usually no more effective than those that were explicit. It is clear, however, that when a slaveholder witnessed an African American weeping because of a family separation, he simply *had* to realize that his actions induced agony in enslaved families.[32]

Apart from making an emotional appeal, another prevention strategy for enslaved people was to try to negotiate with the slaveholder. In some cases, bondpeople were able to influence the destination of their sale, that is to say, they convinced the owner to sell them locally, instead of in the interregional trade—meaning that they would be limited in seeing their family, but not permanently divided from them. At other times, they persuaded their master to sell their family members with them, so they would not be separated. For example, Mrs. John Little got married when she was sixteen years old. Shortly after that, she stated, "My master sold me for debt. […] I was sold to F—T—, a planter and slave-trader, who soon after, at my persuasion, bought Mr. Little." Dan Josiah Lockhart, who was from Frederick County, Virginia, had a somewhat similar experience. He was in an "abroad marriage," which meant that his wife, Mary, lived on another plantation. After she had been sold to a slave owner in Winchester, eight miles from him, he evaluated that was too far to still visit her. He, therefore, asked his master to sell him, but he was threatened with being sold South, instead. Only after running away, he met a man whom he convinced to buy him. Then, "he […] rode forward to see my master. The bargain was made there, […] and southern traders who came for me were too late." After he arranged his own purchase, he was able to be with Mary again.[33]

Of course, in many cases such negotiations were unsuccessful. Henry Brown, for instance, met a girl named Nancy at one point. They wanted to get married, but they needed permission from her master for that to happen, as she lived on another plantation. Furthermore, Henry realized that her owner, Mr. Leigh, might abruptly sell her, possibly separating them from each other. Therefore, he stepped up to Mr. Leigh to get his permission to marry Nancy

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[32] Peter Randolph, *Sketches of Slave Life: Or, Illustrations of the "Peculiar Institution"* (Boston: The Author, 1855), 7-11; Anderson, *Life and Narrative*, 14.
[33] Deyle, *Carry Me Back*, 262-269; Pargas, *Slavery and Forced Migration*, 76-83; Mrs. John Little and Dan Josiah Lockhart in Drew, *North-Side View*, 225, 45-46.

and his promise that he would not sell her. Henry stated, "My wife was still the property of Mr. Leigh and, from the apparent sincerity of his promises to us, we felt confident that he would not separate us. We had not, however, been married above twelve months, when his conscientious scruples vanished, and he sold my wife to a Mr. Joseph H. Colquitt." Unfortunately, enslaved people oftentimes had very few bargaining chips to bring to the table.[34]

However, one card they *could* play was sabotage. Due to the fact that a slave sale was primarily a financial transaction and the fact that the valued product, in this case, consisted of a human being possessing agency, bondpeople had a few ways of influencing the course of events, such as feigning an illness. For instance, Bethany Veney, who grew up in Luray, Page County, Virginia, "had been told by an old negro woman certain tricks that I could resort to, when placed upon the stand, that would be likely to hinder my sale." And indeed, a doctor checked her and found her to be "in a very bilious condition." When the auctioneer initiated the bidding process, Bethany recalled, "the bids were so low I was ordered down from the stand." She achieved her goal—in part because of enslaved people's shared knowledge.[35]

Some other methods to prevent a sale were deeply disturbing, such as self-mutilation. For example, William Grimes, who was born in 1784 in King George County, Virginia, declared that at one point a man came up to his owner to buy him. William initially agreed to go with him to Savannah, Georgia, but within two days became unhappy with his new owner. In fact, William stated, "I was so much dissatisfied with him, that I offered a black man at that place, two silver dollars to take an axe and break my leg, in order that I could not go on to Savannah." The man refused to do it and advised William to run away instead. However, William did not want to run away, unless he was certain that he would attain his freedom. "Accordingly," he declared, "I took up an axe, and laying my leg on a log, I struck at it several times with an axe endeavouring to break it." Either fortunately or unfortunately, he was unable to proceed after a few attempts. Even more unsettling than self-mutilation, historians Steven Deyle and Robert Gudmestad have both found instances wherein enslaved people felt compelled to commit suicide, and even infanticide.[36]

By far the most important tool for sabotage, however, was running away. Enslaved people ran away in large numbers, which could lead one to determine that the threshold for

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[34] Henry Brown, *Life of Henry Box Brown*, 32-33; Berlin, *Generations of Captivity*, 241-244; Deyle, *Carry Me Back*, 269.
[35] Pargas, *Slavery and Forced Migration*, 82-83; Bethany Veney, *The Narrative of Bethany Veney: A Slave Woman* (Boston: Press of Geo H. Ellis, 1889), 30.
[36] William Grimes, *Life of William Grimes, the Runaway Slave: Written by Himself* (New York: W. Grimes, 1825), 21-22; Deyle, *Carry Me Back*, 256; Gudmestad, *A Troublesome Commerce*, 47; Pargas, *Slavery and Forced Migration*, 82-83.

doing so was quite low. Certainly, the case of Harry Thomas, who grew up in the counties of Brunswick and Southampton, would back up this assessment, since the number of times that he ran away must have been in the double digits. However, in almost every case he received severe punishments—as Harry stated, "three hundred lashes," "a hundred lashes"—and he, obviously, succeeded only once. This, then, was one of the most important reasons that, while there were thousands of bondpeople that ran away, the threshold for doing so was actually high. There was simply a poor chance of success and a significant chance of (sometimes brutal) repercussions.[37]

For so many enslaved people nevertheless to endeavor to take on such a risk, therefore, is telling of their dire situations—and in many cases, they chose to do so specifically because of the workings of the domestic slave trade. One illustration of this comes from William Johnson, who was from Virginia and declared, "the fear of being sold South had more influence in inducing me to leave than any other thing. Master used to say, that if we did n't suit him, he would put us in his pocket quick—meaning he would sell us." Elijah Jenkins experienced a similar situation. When his mistress died, he fell to her mother, who was considerably older. "Knowing that on her death I would have to be sold, I ran away," he stated. By contrast, Henry Atkinson, who grew up in Norfolk, Virginia, faced a dilemma. After his mistress had died, he was told that she had set him and his fellow bondpeople free in her will, and even that she would leave them the land she owned. However, after some time had passed and nothing had happened, Henry calculated that they were being lied to, so they would not attempt to escape. Meanwhile, he "expected every day to be carried up to Washington"—meaning that he would be sold. Thus, he was confronted with an impossible choice. He declared, "I found an opportunity to escape, after studying upon it a long time. But it went hard to leave my wife; it was like taking my heart's blood: but I could not help it—I expected to be taken away where I should never see her again, and so I concluded it would be right to leave her."[38]

Indeed, besides the unlikeliness of successfully running away, another threshold that many simply could not pass seems to have been that one had to abandon his family. For example, David West, who was born in King and Queen County, Virginia, expressed sentiments that were similar to those of Henry Atkinson. Even though he had made an escape to Canada and was "doing well at [his] trade," he could not help but think back to his family. "[They] are

[37] John Hope Franklin and Loren Schweninger, "The Quest For Freedom: Runaway Slaves and the Plantation South," in *Slavery Resistance, Freedom*, ed. Gabor S. Boritt, Scott Hancock, and Ira Berlin (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 23-31; Camp, *Closer To Freedom*, 36; Deyle, *Carry Me Back*, 257; Pargas, *Slavery and Forced Migration*, 79; Harry Thomas in Drew, *North-Side View*, 301-305.

[38] Deyle, *Carry Me Back*, 257; John Hope Franklin and Loren Schweninger, *Runaway Slaves: Rebels on the Plantation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 65-67; William Johnson, Elijah Jenkins, and Henry Atkinson in Drew, *North-Side View*, 29, 113, 80-82.

perpetually on my mind. I should be perfectly happy if I could have my wife and the four children. If my wife had known it, and had said half a word, I should have stayed to the moment of being sold." However, after his master died he was informed that he would be sold and he calculated that he would be separated from his family anyway, so he ran away. Likewise, George Johnson had always thought about running away from his master, as "the slaves were always afraid of being sold South," but never did so because he had a family. "However," he declared, "my wife died last year of cholera, and then I determined not to remain in that country."[39]

In most cases, running away was an individual action committed by an enslaved man. Historian Stephanie Camp identified certain gender roles within the enslaved family that played a part in the fact that most runaways were male, such as the fact that women were blamed more severely when they abandoned their family (although this is not to say that the role of the father was unimportant). Moreover, enslaved men often had tasks in transport, for example, giving them the required geographical knowledge to stay away. Finally, Camp showed that whereas historians have often described running away as a purely individual action, this was not always the case. She found that women who remained behind played an important role in supporting the absence of their husbands, for example by supplying them with food in the nights. With regard to the more permanent runaways, an example of this can be found with John Little's wife. Not only did she convince her new owner to buy her husband, as we previously saw, but she also helped him escape. After she discovered that he was going to get sold, she packed up his clothes for him so that he could leave immediately after work. The next day, "the master asked where he was; I could have told him, but would not." Her role was thus essential to the success of her husband's escape.[40]

The southern slaveholder society had many ways of retrieving fugitive slaves, such as patrols that made the rounds, and even professional slave catchers that masters could hire. Being alone under such circumstances had the advantage of being more flexible and staying under the radar more easily, although the downside was that merely staying alive was more difficult—not all food is edible and not every path is passable. For enslaved husbands and wives there was the added advantage of not having to leave a loved one behind, therefore some ran away together. For instance, Mrs. James Seward, who came from the eastern shore of Maryland,

[39] Franklin and Schweninger, "The Quest For Freedom," 30-31; David West and George Johnson in Drew, *North-Side View*, 87-89, 52-53.
[40] Camp, *Closer To Freedom*, 35-37, 47-48; Franklin and Schweninger, *Runaway Slaves*, 67-71. Mrs. John Little in Drew, *North-Side View*, 225-226.

wanted to run away for eight years before she finally did so. “I waited for Jim Seward to get ready,” she declared. When he finally was, he bought two suits for his wife—so she could stay warm—and they ran away to Canada. Henry Williamson’s group of runaways, on the other hand, is an example of an extreme case. He was from Maryland and he had been married for ten years when his wife’s sister was sold to a trader. His wife’s parents were devastated by this and they wanted to prevent such a thing from happening again, so they decided to run away to Canada. “I concluded to start with them with my family. In all eighteen of us came away at one time,” Henry declared. Unfortunately for many bondpeople, a vast majority of runaways was caught and had to face the consequences.[41]

All in all, then, much of the resistance that enslaved people offered was unsuccessful. Emotional appeals, either implicit or explicit, were shoved aside; negotiations were lost because bondpeople had little to bring to the table; for many, various ways of self-destruction were not an option; and, finally, running away simply required a high investment, with a small chance of return. Thus, in a vast majority of cases, when a slave owner wanted a sale to happen, it happened—and enslaved people were forced to deal with the consequences.

[41] Deyle, *Carry me Back*, 261-262; Franklin and Schweninger, “The Quest For Freedom,” 33-36; Mrs. James Seward and Henry Williamson in Drew, 42-43, 133.

Chapter 2: To Lose A Loved One

The workings of the slave trade formed yet another of slavery's direct assaults on the institutions of black motherhood, black fatherhood, and black childhood. This chapter focuses on the ways in which enslaved Chesapeake families responded to the sale of a family member. Additionally, the chapter explores the attacks that the institution of slavery placed on black kinships in general, and in which ways the domestic slave trade contributed to such stressful circumstances. Enslaved mothers had a central role in family life, while enslaved fathers often utilized the cross-plantation, or abroad marriage to stay involved after they had been purchased locally. Enslaved children were in many cases robbed of a safe and nurturing environment to grow up in and could not benefit from frequent contact with their parents. Finally, when a family member was not sold locally, but rather in the interregional slave trade, the remaining family grew closer and looked to religion and social gatherings to recover from their loss.

As mentioned above, the role of the mother was central to enslaved family life. A 1662 Virginia law declared that "all children borne in this country shall be held bound or free according to the condition of the mother," so whenever a husband and wife had different owners, enslaved children usually lived with their mother. Wilma Dunaway has argued that labor migrations, "whether forced or voluntary," systematically prevented fathers from playing a larger role in family life. Moreover, Brenda Stevenson has claimed that slaveholder culture prescribed certain gender-roles in family life which they also imposed on enslaved families, as the slaveholders believed that "childbearers" had a natural inclination to feel responsible in this area. From her research on Loudoun County, Virginia, she surmised, "The evidence overwhelmingly supports the conclusion that matrifocality was a fundamental characteristic of most slave families, even when fathers lived locally."[42]

Despite this significant role, however, there were still many aspects of motherhood that were undermined by the institution of slavery. Firstly, the workdays were very long. In the words of Archie Booker, who was born near Charles City in 1847, enslaved people "wuk fum sun to sun." This meant that parents mostly saw their children in the early mornings or late nights. Booker Taliaferro Washington, for example, declared that one of his first memories was of his mother "cooking a chicken late at night, and awakening her children for the purpose of feeding them." Perhaps this memory was precious to him because dinner was not usually

[42] William Waller, Hening, ed., *The Statutes at Large of Virginia (1619-1682)*, vol. 2 (New York: R.&W.&G. Bartow, 1823), https://ia800509.us.archive.org/26/items/statutesatlargeb02virg/statutesatlargeb02virg.pdf, 170; Dunaway, *The African-American Family*, 63-64; Brenda Stevenson, *Life in Black and White: Family and Community in the Slave South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 221-222; White, *Ar'n't I A Woman?: Female Slaves in the Plantation South* (New York: Norton, 1987), 159.

something positive to look back on. There was never a time "when our entire family sat down to the table together, and God's blessing was asked, and the family ate a meal in a civilized manner," he recalled. "Meals were gotten by the children very much as dumb animals get theirs." The short time span in which parents could see their child was true for field hands, but also for those who worked in the house. As Bird Walton recalled, "Mother was housemaid fo' Missus Walton, an' she never could leave de house to go to de quarters tell dinner was done." When parents on the larger plantations were working, the children were sometimes nursed by one of the grandparents who were too old to labor. Anna Crawford, for instance, declared that "grandmother was colored mammy nurse of all the children."[43]

Besides having enslaved people work such long days, slaveholders also intruded in other parts of the parent's authority. They decided for a large part what the children were allowed to eat, and how they could play. Furthermore, they took away the parents' right to discipline and punish their children. In some cases, they would give tasks to children when their parents felt they were actually too sick, and in others, they gave punishments that parents did not agree with. Specifically, the domestic slave trade played a significant part in the latter, since one of the more severe punishments was to be sold. Matilda Carter, for instance, remembered that her sister Sally was "a favorite" of her mistress. However, their master wanted Sally to work. "So," Matilda declared, "my mistess she jes' hide her when she think Marser goin git her. Marser got angry 'bout dis an' sell po' lil sis down South. Mother never did git over dis ack of sellin' her baby to dem slave drivers down New Orleans." Much the same, Caroline Hunter, who was born in 1847 near Suffolk, Virginia, recognized her mother's feeling of having no ownership over one's children. "Many a day my ole mama has stood by an' watched massa beat her chillun 'till dey bled an' she couldn' open her mouf."[44]

Finally, some aspects of slavery were worse for women in general.[45] Stephanie Camp has argued that bondwomen not only had a "double duty"—meaning that they had to work hard in the house all day, after which they had to take care of their family—but also that their bodies "were key sites of suffering." At the same time, however, they used their bodies to resist slaveholders. An example of such "body politics" can be found with a story told by Fannie

[43] Charles L. Perdue, Thomas E. Barden, and Robert K. Phillips, ed., *Weevils in the Wheat: Interviews with Virginia Ex-Slaves* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1976), 53; Booker T. Washington, *Up From Slavery: An Autobiography* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday &Co., 1901), 4-6, 9; Perdue, *Weevils in the Wheat*, 299, 77; Dunaway, *The African-American Family*, 68-72.
[44] Dunaway, *The African-American Family*, 74-75; Stevenson, *Life in Black and White*, 249; Perdue, *Weevils in the Wheat*, 68, 150.
[45] Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household: Black and White Women of the Old South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988); White, *Ar'n't I A Woman?*; Camp, *Closer To Freedom*, 3-4; Follett, *The Sugar Masters*, 66-67.

Berry. Fannie remembered a person named Sukie, whose master attempted to rape her. "He tell Sukie to take off her dress. She tole him no," she declared. After being turned down, the slaveholder ripped off Sukie's dress and pushed her to the ground, so she got mad. "She took an' punch ole Marsa an' made him break loose an' den she gave him a shove an' push his hindparts down in de hot pot o' soap," Fannie stated. The master, who was severely burned by the boiling soap, employed the slave trade in his punishment and decided to sell the enslaved woman. After having been too intimately examined on the auction block, Sukie got mad again, "and she pult up her dress an' tole ole [n-word] traders to look an' see if dey could fin' any teef down dere." "Marsa never did bother slave gals no mo'," Fannie looked back.[46]

In this story, Sukie, "a big strappin' [n-word] gal," literally used her body to fight off her owner at the risk of—and resulting in—being sold in the slave trade. After that, she once again employed her body to remind the traders that they were dealing with a human being, not a beast. Even if the story were untrue or exaggerated, it is evidence of the type of "female heroism" that enslaved women used to emotionally comfort and empower each other. Furthermore, it is clear that Fannie Berry recognized that the existence of the slave trade significantly contributed to the oppression of enslaved women.[47]

One institution that was especially sensitive to the workings of the slave trade was the abroad marriage. This was due to the fact that both the enslaved husband and the enslaved wife had separate slaveholders who could get involved in the trade. Male slaves especially struggled with parenthood in such arrangements, since—as mentioned before—a 1662 law ensured that children mostly lived with their mothers and bondmen were usually more involved in local labor migrations, such as hiring out. Moreover, slaveholders sometimes simply refused to let enslaved people have an abroad marriage, for instance, because they wanted more control over their bondpeople, or because allowing visitation could lead to decreased work efforts. For example, Noah Davis, who was born in 1804 in Madison County, Virginia, recalled that he fell in love with a girl after they had known each other for "several years." He expressed the difficulty of trying to get married while being someone's property: "We were both slaves, and of course had to get the consent of our owners, before we went further." Fortunately for him and his future wife, they were able to do so. George Johnson, on the other hand, was not so lucky. He declared, "At one time I wanted to marry a young woman, not on the same farm. I

[46] Deborah G. White, *Ar'n't I A Woman*, 123; Camp, *Closer to Freedom*, 3-4; Emily West, *Chains of Love: Slave Couples in Antebellum South Carolina* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004), 81-82; Perdue, *Weevils in the Wheat*, 48-49.
[47] Perdue, *Weevils in the Wheat*, 48; Stevenson, *Life in Black and White*, 236-237.

was then sent to Alabama, to one of my masters's sons for two years. When the girl died, I was sent for to come back." Such refusals by masters were more frequent on large plantations than on small ones—in part because there simply was a larger possibility of marrying on one's own plantation in such cases.[48]

However, historian Emily West has argued that enslaved fathers in cross-plantation marriages were in most instances able to overcome such difficulties and remained very much involved in family life. The most common way to do this was through visitation. During the weekends, usually between Saturday night and Monday morning, bondmen traveled to their spouse's plantation to spend time with them. For example, James Williams, who was born in 1805 in Powhatan County, Virginia, met Harriet when he was seventeen years old. She belonged to another master, who lived around four miles away and he "used to visit [her] on Saturday and Sunday evenings." Much the same, Martha Harper Robinson remembered that her grandparents belonged to different masters in Powhatan County. For their wedding, they received a pass for three days. "After the marriage grampa went back to his farm and gramma stayed at her place and he would come over on Saturday night to see her," Martha said. Time was precious, so the distance between plantations could not be too great, but what exactly was considered an acceptable distance could vary. For example, as mentioned previously, Dan Lockhart's wife was sold away to a slaveholder in Winchester, which was eight miles away. "This was too far," he said, so he ran away, after getting himself sold there had failed. On the other hand, Alexander Hemsley, who was from Queen Anne County, Maryland, recalled that he "was accustomed to leave home every Saturday night to visit friends seven miles inland, and to return on Sunday night." Similarly, Henry Banks remembered that at one point his owner "sold the farm and all his people." "We were scattered," he said, "but not very far apart—some six or seven miles."[49]

Of course, this is not to say that Dan Lockhart was necessarily *unwilling* to travel such a distance—the rules of visitation were established by the slave owner and could therefore vary. For example, Elizabeth Keckley's father was only allowed to visit his family twice every year—during Easter and Christmas. Peter Randolph, on the other hand, remembered that his father "was allowed to visit my mother every Wednesday and every Saturday night." Moreover, there

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[48] Dunaway, *The African-American Family*, 65-66; West, *Chains of Love*, 52-55; Noah Davis, *A Narrative of the Life of Rev. Noah Davis, a Colored Man: Written by Himself, at the Age of Fifty-Four* (Baltimore: J.F. Weishampel, Jr., 1859), 26-27; George Johnson in Drew, *North-Side View*, 54.

[49] West, *Chains of Love*, 3-4, 57; James B. Williams, *Narrative of James Williams, an American Slave, Who Was for Several Years a Driver on a Cotton Plantation in Alabama* (Boston: Isaac Knapp, 1838), 33; Perdue, *Weevils in the Wheat*, 240; Dan Josiah Lockhart, Alexander Hemsley, and Henry Banks in Drew, *North-Side View*, 45, 32-33, 73.

was a certain risk in visitation. Even when enslaved people had permission to visit family, they could still get into trouble. Austin Steward, who was born in Prince William County, Virginia, remembered that bondpeople were required to have written passes to leave the plantation. "Should any one venture to disobey this law, he will most likely be caught by the *patrol* and given thirty-nine lashes," he declared. Therefore, when Austin's mother had forgotten to bring the pass with her when they went to visit his grandmother, they got off lucky, as they were allowed to retrieve it. This "saved [them] a whipping," he said, "but we were terribly frightened."[50]

Slaveholders realized that enslaved people cherished their visitation privileges. One illustration of this comes from Frank Bell, who was born in 1834. His uncle, Moses Bell, was a foreman on the plantation—a position that was sometimes regarded with disgust by fellow bondpeople, because it required one to ensure that slaves worked hard enough. Therefore, Moses received certain privileges. Not only was he allowed to visit his wife and children, but he was even allowed to borrow the master's horse to ride the 12 miles that separated them. Similarly, Minnie Folkes, who belonged to a master in Chesterfield County, Virginia, used the same description when talking about visitation. She said that after a man and woman from different plantations got married, "both stay wid same masters (I mean ef John marries Sally, John stay wid his ole master an' Sal' wid hers but dey had privileges, you know like married folks)." The term *privileges*, of course, indicates that they could be taken away, but this did not always stop enslaved people. When the enslaved were sold locally, the abroad marriage could prove able to withstand some of the slave trade's blows. Bondpeople—due to gender-roles, mostly men—sometimes took risks and, through visitation, strove to keep their families together.[51]

Finally, besides motherhood and fatherhood, childhood was also under constant pressure in the system of slavery. Enslaved children were unable to grow up in a safe and nurturing environment. In fact, some parents realized this and were unwilling to bring children into this condition, both because they did not want to contribute to the slaveholders' wealth, and because of the conditions the child would come to face. Elizabeth Keckley, for instance, told the story of how she became acquainted with Mr. Keckley, "whom [she] had met in Virginia, and learned to regard with more than friendship." She repeatedly turned down his

[50] Keckley, *Behind the Scenes*, 22; Randolph, *Sketches of Slave Life*, 34; Austin Steward, *Twenty-Two Years a Slave, and Forty Years a Freeman; Embracing a Correspondence of Several Years, While President of Wilberforce Colony, London, Canada West* (Rochester, NY: William Ailing, 1857), 27.
[51] Perdue, *Weevils in the Wheat*, 26, 92-94; West, *Chains of Love*, 3-4, 57-60.

proposal to get married, because she "could not bear the thought of bringing children into slavery—of adding one single recruit to the millions bound to hopeless servitude." It was only after she had negotiated the terms to buy her freedom with her owner, and had thus acquired the assurance that her child would be born in freedom, that she agreed to get married. Furthermore, Charles Ball, who was born in Maryland in 1780, at one point met a woman named Lydia. Lydia's child fell sick shortly before Christmas and sadly died within three days. After the funeral service, however, she told Charles "she was rejoiced that her child was dead, and out of a world in which slavery and wretchedness must have been its only portion." In a way, she regretted that she had brought a child into slavery.[52]

Growing up was a difficult process for an enslaved child, even though the very youngest children were, in many cases, allowed to play all day—even with white children. For example, Samuel Walter Chilton, who grew up in Appomattox County, remembered he "didn't do nothin' 'tall but play." Similarly, Candis Goodwin recalled several games she used to play with white children. They "used to play Injuns an' soldiers. De whites was de soldiers an' me and de res' of de slave boys was de Injuns." Then, when the Civil War commenced, they played "Yankee an' Federates," Candis told interviewers in the 1930s. "'Course de whites was always de 'Federates." However, Samuel and Candis were born in 1859 and 1857, respectively. Indeed, it was usually only from the age of seven or eight that enslaved children were required to work for their owners, so it makes sense that they looked back on play, such a positive thing, as an important part of their childhood in slavery. Others, however, looked back on different activities that shaped much of their life. As did Katie Blackwell Johnson, who was sold with her mother in the Lunenburg County slave trade. When she was asked about work, she answered, "Man did I have to work. Sometimes grubbing, sometimes cuttin' wood, sometimes 'tending babies, and sometimes helping 'Uncle' Bob, the head hand, breaking Oxen." She went on: "Yes man, I worked harder at five years old than some grown folks does now." Similarly, Susan Jackson remembered the exact time when she was instructed to shift to another task: "At ten o'clock on work days dey would ring de bell an' dat was de sign fo' chillun to come fum de fiel'. Dey go back to de kitchen an' help Ant Hannah fix de food." Besides being required to work much of the day, and thus being robbed of playtime, a vast majority of enslaved children was not allowed to learn to read and write. Hence, William Anderson declared, "The truth is, I had no bringing

[52] Wilma King, *Stolen Childhood: Slave Youth in Nineteenth-Century America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 13, 8; Keckley, *Behind the Scenes*, 46-49; Charles Ball, *Slavery in the United States: A Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Charles Ball, a Black Man, Who Lived Forty Years in Maryland, South Carolina and Georgia, as a Slave Under Various Masters, and was One year in the Navy with Commodore Barney, During the Late War* (New York: John S. Taylor, 1837), 263-265.

up; I was whipped up, starved up; kick up and clubbed up. I had no schooling except what I stole by fire and moon light, with a little Sabbath light."[53]

Wilma King has argued that enslaved children had more confidence in themselves when their parents had a larger role in their life. Given the fact that fatherhood and motherhood were compromised by slavery in various ways, many children were already relatively low on self-esteem. On top of such difficult circumstances came the possibility of being sold in the slave trade. In order to prevent this from happening, it was important not to trigger a negative opinion in one's owner—in other words, making mistakes was not an option for enslaved children. Cornelius Garner, who was from Saint Mary's County, Maryland, testified that he was aware of such high stakes. "Dere bigges' punishment was to tell you, 'I'll sell you down souf to Georgia,'" he declared. Caroline Hunter, moreover, actually witnessed such events. At one point, her master felt that her brothers did not work hard enough, so he beat them severely. Once they had recovered from this, he sold them. "If de massa couldn' rule you dey would sell you, an' if you got so you couldn' wuk dey'd take you in a boat dey had an' dump you in de water." It would require quite a character to remain confident under such circumstances.[54]

For many enslaved children, then, it was the example that their parents set that allowed them to endure the horrors of the system of slavery. Kate Drumgoold, who was born near Petersburg, Virginia, offers one illustration of this. She fondly remembered her mother, "who had so many more [children] and had to work so hard to take care of us all that I have seen [her] sit up all night long working for her little ones." Kate greatly respected her, as she "was one that the master could not do anything to make her feel like a slave," and she recalled that her mother constantly resisted their owner. Kate added, "She was right." Along the same lines, the formerly enslaved Cornelia Carney told WPA-interviewers how proud she was of her father: "Now my father was de purties' black man you ever saw," and he "could make anything." He was whipped so many times that he decided to run away, but he kept visiting his family on Saturday nights. "Never did ketch him, though ole Marse search real sharp," Cornelia said proudly.[55]

Even though some enslaved people—those that were sold locally—were able to keep their family together, despite separation, others were not always so fortunate. Whether it was a father, a mother, or a child: when a family member was sold in the interregional slave trade, a

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[53] Perdue, *Weevils in the Wheat*, 71, 109, 161, 154; Anderson, *Life and Narrative*, 5
[54] King, *Stolen Childhood*, 17, 102; Perdue, *Weevils in the Wheat*, 102, 149-150.
[55] King, *Stolen Childhood*, 18, 113-114; Kate Drumgoold, *A Slave Girl's Story: Being an Autobiography of Kate Drumgoold* (Brooklyn: The Author, 1898), 31, 32-33; Perdue, *Weevils in the Wheat*, 66-67.

vast majority of remaining families had to definitively part with this person. When a parent was sold away, for example, a surrogate most often looked after the children. In some cases, a sibling fulfilled this role. After Kate Drumgoold's mother had been sold in the Richmond slave trade, for example, it was her older sister, Frances who took care of her: "On one bright Sunday I asked my older sister to go with me for a nice walk and she did so, for she was the one that was so kind to the rest of us." Somewhat similarly, when Archer Alexander's father "had been sold South" to pay for the master's debt, his mother "never liked to lose sight of him" anymore.[56]

Besides such specific examples, enslaved people generally grew closer to each other after they lost a loved one, and their religion and social community proved vital in the healing process. Peter Randolph presented an example of the importance of religious meetings when he described what happened when an enslaved person did not receive permission to attend one: "Should a pass not be granted, the slave lies down, and sleeps for the day—the only way to drown his sorrow and disappointment." Furthermore, he painted a picture of a group therapy session *avant la lettre*, as he declared that the first thing they used to do was to "ask each other how they feel, [about] the state of their minds, [etc.]." It should come as no surprise, then, that one of the songs Peter remembered went as follows:

> O, that I had a bosom friend,
> To tell my secrets to,
> One always to depend upon
> In everything I do!
>
> How I do wander, up and down;
> I seem a stranger quite undone;
> None to lend an ear to my complaint,
> No one to cheer me, though I faint.[57]

From this it seems clear that some enslaved people wanted to be heard and needed friends and family to be there for them. Others, however, rather found relief in spiritual phenomena. Bethany Veney, for instance, recalled the following song:

> When through the deep waters I call thee to go,
> The rivers of woe shall not thee overflow;
> For I will be with thee, and cause thee to stand,
> Upheld by my righteous, omnipotent hand

[56] Stevenson, *Life in Black and White*, 222; Drumgoold, *Slave Girl's Story*, 5-6; William Greenleaf Eliot, *The Story of Archer Alexander: From Slavery to Freedom, March 30, 1863* (Boston: Cupples, Upham and Company, 1885), 24-25.
[57] Randolph, *Sketches of Slave Life*, 30-31.

Bethany experienced these lines as her "Saviour speaking directly to me." She asked herself, "Would not this omnipotent hand uphold me and help me?" And she found her answer: "Yes, here was his word for it. I would trust it; and I was comforted."[58]

Despite the fact that such social gatherings were not always allowed, enslaved people still held them, which is telling, moreover, of their importance. For example, Thomas Johnson frequently gathered with fellow bondpeople for prayer, even though they realized that if the slaveholders knew, "[they] would be locked up for the night, and the next morning receive from five to thirty-nine lashes." Similarly, James Smith, who grew up in Virginia, used his quarters to hold religious meetings, even though "the rules were strictly against [this]."[59]

In sum, the system of slavery put constant pressure on the institution of the enslaved family and its various aspects. Enslaved motherhood, fatherhood, and childhood were considerably constrained by the slaveholders—and the domestic slave market was an integral part of this system. Bondpeople needed each other in their healing process after losing a loved one and they both created and defended certain institutions that allowed them to help one another.

[58] Veney, *Narrative of Bethany Veney*, 29.
[59] Johnson, *Africa for Christ*, 23; Blassingame, *Slave Testimony*, 278.

Chapter 3: To Be Sold

Being sold in the interregional slave trade and having to leave one's family behind was horrible. This chapter looks at the ways in which enslaved people adapted to their new environments. Even though regional attachments and trust issues hindered the assimilation process, many enslaved migrants were able to overcome such difficulties through forging new social bonds and solidarities. At the same time, some enslaved people attempted to recover from their loss by trying to move on with their lives, while others regularly tried to keep their old family connections alive in various ways.

After being sold in the slave trade, the social assimilation that followed upon arrival at a new place was not so easy. Enslaved people frequently had certain regional attachments that proved difficult to leave behind. For example, Austin Steward's owner planned on taking his bondpeople to New York. Austin remembered that many of his fellow slaves were anxious, as he wrote, "We were about to leave the land of our birth, the home of our childhood and we felt that untried scenes were before us." Expressing a similar sentiment, James Williams recalled that his master asked him in the winter of 1829 how he felt about potentially being free and going back to his "own country." He did not understand his owner, so he asked what he meant. "Africa, to be sure," was the answer. However, James made clear that, "that was not my country—that I was born in Virginia." He indicated that he did not wish to be sent to Liberia, but rather preferred to "be as [he] was." Along the same lines, several people spoke with an interviewer in Canada after they had escaped slavery, among whom was Harriet Tubman. She declared, "We would rather stay in our native land, if we could be as free there as we are here." Likewise, Mrs. Francis Henderson, who was born in slavery in Washington, D.C., testified, "I like liberty, and if Washington were a free country, I would like to go back there." Much the same, Isaac Williams said, "If slavery were abolished, I would rather live in a southern State."[60]

Such regional attachments sometimes also established that enslaved people adhered to particular traditions and customs that were not always maintained in their new home. William Grose, for example, was born in Virginia but sold and shipped to New Orleans with one of his brothers. There they were required to work as a house slave in the city. Life in New Orleans was so different for them, however, that they "were not acclimated," so they were sent to Alabama instead. Moreover, when William Anderson arrived in Mississippi, he was forced to change the way in which he coped with the institution of slavery since there was "no preaching

[60] Berlin, *Generations of Captivity*, 172-174; Pargas, *Slavery and Forced Migration*, 219-220; Follett, *The Sugar Masters*, 65 Steward, *Twenty-Two Years a Slave*, 47-48; Williams, *Sunshine and Shadow*, 30-31; Harriet Tubman, Mrs. Francis Henderson, and Isaac Williams in Drew, *North-Side View*, 30, 161, 67.

or Bible to read, or anything to give consolation." Unwilling to change his ways, William used up all his money to purchase the Holy Book, "but," he said, "it was taken from me and torn up, and I was whipped for reading it." In that moment, he remembered "the Sabbath enjoyments" of his old home in Virginia. Twice did he use the phrase "strange land," to emphasize how difficult this new environment was for him. After more than five years, and having switched owners several times, he ended up at a Mrs. Hampton, who he considered "the worst old lady I ever saw." After all this time, he still thought back on his "previous life in old Virginia" and his "mother and friends." In fact, this regional attachment partly induced him to run away.[61]

William's behavior, here, was not uncommon. Faced with a new and different social environment, combined with the prospect of never being able to see one's family again, many bondpeople ran away from their new owners and back to their old plantation. As did William Hayden, who was born in Stafford County, Virginia. When he was only five years old, he was sold away from his mother to Swan Point, Maryland, on the other side of the Potomac River. Then, after two years without his mother, he saw an opportunity to escape, as he "caught one of [his] master's horses, and started on [his] journey." He arrived at his mother's place, where she barely recognized him, and he was allowed to remain for a week. Unfortunately for William, after that, he was forced to go back. Examples of enslaved people running back to family members can also be found in some advertisements that slaveholders bought, wherein they set out rewards for the return of their property. In 1803, slave owner Jesse Thompson offered a fifteen-dollar reward for the return of a twelve-year-old girl named Ailcey. He helped the potential finder on his way by saying, "It is more than probable that she is now lurking in the neighborhood of Alexandria, as her mother lives with Major Wm. Reily of that place." Similarly, another slaveholder was looking for a bondman named Bob. "As his relations and connections are principally in town, it is presumed he is concealed somewhere in its vicinity," the advertisement read. Of course, Ailcey and Bob were not necessarily actually in these areas, but these examples do indicate that it was commonly believed that runaways tried to return to family members.[62]

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[61] Berlin, *Generations of Captivity*, 174; Pargas, *Slavery and Forced Migration*, 223-224, 220-221; William Grose in Drew, *North-Side View*, 82-84; Anderson, *Life and Narrative*, 8, 16-17, 24, 29-30.

[62] Franklin and Schweninger, *Runaway Slaves*, 109-110; Pargas, *Slavery and Forced Migration*, 221; William Hayden, *Narrative of William Hayden, Containing a Faithful Account of His Travels for a Number of Years, Whilst a Slave, in the South: Written by Himself* (Cincinnati: W. Hayden, 1846), 13, 18-19; Daniel Meaders, *Advertisements for Runaway Slaves in Virginia, 1801-1820* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 22-23, http://www2.vcdh.virginia.edu/gos/search/relatedAd.php?adFile=vg1803.xml&adId=v1803070028, 18-19, http://www2.vcdh.virginia.edu/gos/search/relatedAd.php?adFile=vg1803.xml&adId=v1803040012.

Besides the obstacle that regional attachment sometimes posed, enslaved people arriving in new communities also occasionally had trust issues. For example, shortly after his arrival at a plantation in South Carolina, Charles Ball was accused of murdering a white woman that had visited the plantation. A fellow bondman named Hardy had informed his master that he saw Charles going into the woods where the murder supposedly had taken place. "Hardy was known in the neighbourhood, and his character had been good," he declared. Charles, by contrast, "was a stranger," and some of the house slaves thus sided with Hardy on the issue. His social status was used against him by other bondpeople. Likewise, William Grimes described how he was a "poor friendless boy, without any connections" after he was purchased by a new master. Within a few weeks, his mistress entrusted him with every key, "which made some of the other servants jealous." One morning, his fellow bondpeople had put some of the master's medicine in the coffee. William always used to make the coffee, so he was charged with the offense and punished for it, but he maintained he was "entirely innocent." Furthermore, sometime later, another enslaved person, Frankee, accused him of stealing an umbrella from one of the white carpenters that came by every now and then. Since he was severely punished for this, William was angry, and he informed his master of the fact that Frankee had liquor in a chest, which was not allowed. Such lack of solidarity was often fostered by slaveholder society, as they rewarded betrayal. In the earlier mentioned example, Charles Ball was eventually absolved and later even able to prove that, in fact, Hardy had killed the woman. Charles recalled that at the funeral, he was pointed out to some of her family members, who, he declared, "commended my conduct and fidelity […] and several gave me money."[63]

Slaveholders benefited from enslaved people mistrusting and betraying each other, since—as mentioned earlier—it weakened bondpeople's "infrapolitics," for example when it came to forms of resistance that required collective action.[64] Jenny Patterson, who lived her whole life in Chesterfield County, Virginia, offers one illustration of this. One time, she heard of a fellow enslaved person who wanted to escape. Another slave overheard his plan and told her mistress. The would-be escapee was then asked to get some water from the spring, but he stayed away so long, Jenny said, "[that] another slave went to look for him an' do you know dat man was found al cut up in de water bucket." Mrs. John Little told a similar story, though fortunately without such a gruesome outcome. After she had helped her husband escape, she

[63] Berlin, *Generations of Captivity*, 196; Ball, *Slavery in the United States*, 222-259; Grimes, *Life of William Grimes*, 8-9, 23-24.
[64] To be sure, events such as those described actually led to *distrust* of particular slaves, but *mistrust* among enslaved people in general.

planned to do so herself. However, "when we made arrangements for leaving, a slave told of us," she told an interviewer in Canada. Luckily, she declared, "no irons were ready for me, and I was put under a guard." However, "I was too cunning for him, and joined my husband."[65]

Yet, enslaved people who had been sold away from their family were in many cases able to overcome such difficulties and to pick themselves up after having been so thoroughly knocked down. For instance, shortly after arriving in Mississippi, Louis Hughes stated, "everything was strange to me," and he had to get used to the size of the plantation since in Virginia they "did not have such large farms." However, Louis declared, "I soon became familiar with my work in the house and with the neighborhood." As a house servant, he was required "to dust the parlor and hall and arrange the dining room." Initially, these jobs were "awkward" for him, but he "soon learned to do it satisfactorily," and this seems to have made him quite proud. Besides gaining self-esteem in such personal ways, Louis also described certain social events that boosted his morale and made him feel accepted, such as the yearly Fourth of July barbecue. "The anticipation of it acted as a stimulant through the entire year," he recalled. The bondpeople "gathered in groups, talking, laughing, telling tales that they had from their grandfather, or relating practical jokes that they had played or seen played by others." Once more did he emphasize how enslaved people bonded with each other, stating, "Old and young, for months, would rejoice in the memory of the day and its festivities."[66]

Similar to the way in which remaining families recovered from a loss, another form of social integration that people who had been sold frequently utilized was the prayer meeting. Louis remembered how singing hymns would fill the cabin "with both old and young." He specifically recalled "a certain harmony, which had a peculiar effect" about the gatherings and the minister reached his fellow slaves, because "he knew the crosses […] and their hardships, for he had shared them himself." These happenings brought enslaved people together to such an extent that "even those who did not profess Christianity were calm and thoughtful while in attendance," Louis said. Sharing enslaved experiences, then, created certain bonds and solidarities that allowed enslaved people to heal. To highlight the importance of attending these meetings, James Lindsay Smith, who was born in Northern Neck, Northumberland County, Virginia, recounted how far he traveled. At sundown on a Saturday, after the work was finished, he "prepared to go ten miles" to visit the first one. Then, on Sunday, he traveled "two miles further" to show up at another meeting. At the end of the day, he had to walk back the entire

[65] Berlin, *Generations of Captivity*, 196; Troutman, "Grapevine in the Slave Market," 208; Johnson, *Soul by Soul*, 72-76; Perdue, *Weevils in the Wheat*, 218, 220; Mrs. John Little in Drew, *North-Side View*, 226-227.
[66] Berlin, *Generations of Captivity*, 183; Hughes, *Thirty Years a Slave*, 14-15, 17-18, 46-48.

way—"making in all twenty-four miles that day." Eli Johnson, who was sold from Orange County, Virginia, to Natchez, Mississippi, told an additional story that indicated the significance of religious gatherings. He reported how he was the one who presided the "prayer-meetings on Saturday night," but that his master wanted him to cease having such events, even threatening him with "five hundred lashes." Determined not to concede, however, Eli made his own threat—he would put his owners in "hot water," meaning he would reveal that his master had been unfaithful several times. He was apparently willing to play at high stakes to defend the slaves' religious meetings and, in the end, he was successful, as he "kept clear of the lash."[67]

An additional way in which religion empowered bondpeople was the fact that it enabled them to criticize slave owners. For instance, Henry Brown expressed, "The religion of the slave-holder is everywhere a system of mere delusion, got up expressly for the purpose of deceiving the poor slaves, for everywhere the leading doctrine in the slave-holder religion is that it is the duty of the slave to obey his master in all things." Describing a similar sentiment, William Anderson recalled a bondman named Joe, who witnessed his master pass away. A reverend was present as well, who instructed Joe to aid his mistress in her loss so that when he died, he will "go to heaven, where your master is gone." Joe, however, insisted that if God indeed "know ebery ting," the place his master was going to end up surely would not be heaven.[68]

The afterlife, then, was an important concept for many enslaved people. Not only did some apply it as a sort of revenge fantasy, but they also liked to imagine meeting their lost loved ones there. The thought that separation "only" lasted a lifetime, whereas reunion would last forever, comforted bondpeople. James Smith, for example, was forced to part from his family. Immediately after he had said goodbye to his children, his wrists were locked in handcuffs. Knowing that she would never see him again, "his wife seemed to bear up with Christian fortitude striving to console [him] by pledging herself to meet him in a better world than this." Much the same, Thomas Anderson, who was born in 1785 in Hanover County, Virginia, looked back on the moment three of his sons were taken from him and sold South. He remembered praying to God that he "might restore them again; but if not to meet again on this earth, that we may joyfully meet on that shore where parting, sighing and selling will be no more." Similarly, after David West had made his escape to Canada, he told an interviewer there he wished the members of his former church well, and that he hoped "to meet them in heaven." Likewise,

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[67] Pargas, *Slavery and Forced Migration*, 220, 224, 230-231; Berlin, *Generations of Captivity*, 207; Hughes, *Thirty Years a Slave*, 52-53; James Lindsay Smith, *Autobiography of James L. Smith, Including, Also, Reminiscences of Slave Life, Recollections of the War, Education of Freedmen, Causes of the Exocus, etc.* (Norwich: The Bulletin, 1881), 1, 26-27; Eli Johnson in Drew, *North-Side View*, 383-384.
[68] Brown, *Life of Henry Box Brown*, 29; Anderson, *Life and Narrative*, 47.

Elizabeth Keckley recalled that her parents were separated from each other, stating, "my father and mother never met again in this world," implying that they might do so in the afterlife.[69]

Indeed, the notion of "meeting in heaven" was such an important coping mechanism for enslaved people that they wrote songs about it. Peter Randolph remembered what bondpeople used to sing on the auction block:

> O fare you well, O fare you well,
> God bless you until we meet again;
> Hope to meet you in heaven, to part no more.
> CHORUS—Sisters fare you well; sisters, fare you well;
> God Almighty bless you, until we meet again.[70]

The famous Harriet Tubman also recalled expressing herself in song. After she had found out that she would be sold, she decided to run away. She did not want to leave without saying goodbye to her fellow bondpeople, but at the same time, she also feared that her intentions would be betrayed if she told people. Thus, on the evening before she left, she sang:

> Good bye, I'm going to leave you,
> Good bye, I'll meet you in the kingdom[71]

Making peace with their loss in such ways enabled enslaved people, to some extent, to move on with their lives. For some bondpeople, acceptance of the reality that they would never again see their family eventually led them to seek out new relationships. This was not always successful, however, as is clear from the story of William Grimes. William had been sold away from his family to Culpeper County, where he did not know anyone. However, nearby lived a girl he knew from his previous home, Betty Jourdine. He wanted to visit her, and on his way over, he said, "My bosom burned and my heart almost leaped from me, as I thought on this girl." Unfortunately, he could not find her and, afterward, his owners punished him for going. William longed to start a relationship and to fall in love, but he was unable to. By contrast, Louis Hughes had more luck. In Mississippi, he met a girl named Matilda, whose free family had been sold into slavery. After knowing each other for three years, they got married. Louis had been separated from his family in Virginia, but with Matilda, he was able to start his own family—they had twins. Similarly, Martha Showvely was born in Powhatan County, Virginia, but at the age of nine she was sold to a master who took her to Franklin County, nearly 150 miles away.

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[69] Pargas, *Slavery and Forced Migration*, 229-230; Blassingame, *Slave Testimony*, 277-278; J.P. Clark, *Interesting Account of Thomas Anderson, a Slave, Taken from His Own Lips* (Virginia, 1854), 5-6; David West in Drew, *North-Side View*, 89-90; Keckley, *Behind the Scenes*, 22-25.
[70] Randolph, *Sketches of Slave Life*, 10.
[71] Blassingame, *Slave Testimony*, 458.

There, she "married ve'y young" and she and her husband Moses had "twelve chillun all together," thus creating a new family after losing the one that partly raised her. After the war, however, Martha did visit Powhatan County one more time, "to see if I could find my mother," she said. One of her daughters had encouraged her to do this, but, unfortunately, her mother had passed away three years earlier.[72]

Martha's visit forms an example of something that happened in several cases, namely a family reunion after the Civil War ended. Arthur Green, who was born in Nottoway County, Virginia, told interviewers in the 1930s that his "brother was sold at one dem sales to South Caroliny when he was 'bout nine yeahs old," but that he "came back home de third yeah after de surrender." Similarly, Ishrael Massie's sister was sold to Southampton County, Virginia, and they "didn't see her no mo' till Lee's surrender. Den my father went after her," he said. Much the same, Sister Harrison told employees of the Virginia FWP that she had "two brothehs." "Jes' before the war, my mistress sold them an' a niece of Mother's away," she testified. Her family was lucky, as they came back home after the war, "but lots of people wuz separated that way."[73]

Wilma Dunaway contended that slaveholders systematically broke enslaved families' "collective histories." Certainly, the scale at which family separations occurred seems to strengthen this argument. As this study has shown, however, bondpeople made serious, frequently successful, efforts to prevent this from happening. Enslaved African Americans oftentimes had a "dual orientation," meaning that they were able to move on with their lives, but, at the same time, did not forget about their lost loved ones. Bethany Veney, for instance, was determined to stay with her son, Joe, after she had already been separated from a daughter, Charlotte. When her master's property was up for sale, she protested, "*I* won't be sold. He shall never find *me*, to sell me again." After that, a man from the North bought both her and Joe, and they gained their freedom. Bethany rejoiced, "A new life had come to me. I was in a land where, by its laws, I had the same right to myself that any other woman had." Despite this, however, she did not forget Charlotte and after the war had ended, she went back to Luray, Page County, Virginia, where she found her. Her daughter was now married, and the young couple joined Bethany in returning North.[74]

Another way of keeping collective family histories intact was by writing letters to loved ones. Philipp Troutman has argued how the act of writing a letter was often an act of resistance

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[72] Grimes, *Life of William Grimes*, 12-14; Hughes, *Thirty Years a Slave*, 91-95; Perdue, *Weevils in the Wheat*, 264-265.
[73] *Ibid.*, 123, 211, 135.
[74] Dunaway, *The African-American Family*, 82-83; Pargas, *Slavery and Forced Migration*, 228; Berlin, *Generations of Captivity*, 190; Veney, *Narrative of Bethany Veney*, 34-42.

in itself, as it was remarkably difficult to do so. William Hayden, for instance, explained the difficulty in becoming literate:

> The only book which I could command, was composed of the leaves of an old Spelling Book, which I had picked up, and sewed together, and from this I gleaned such instruction, that I was soon enabled to read the Testament with ease. From that—I attempted writing; which at first, was a difficult task […], as I was then under the impression that it was without the pale of a colored man's nature, to ever be able to write.

Furthermore, it was one thing to become literate; it was quite another to actually be both able and allowed to send letters as an enslaved person. Bondpeople were required to have insight into both the geographic landscape, as a letter would have to arrive at the right place, and the social landscape, as they had to either convince white people to let them send letters or work around those who would not do so. Hence, Troutman claimed, "Literacy involved stealth, an evangelical mistress, a tolerant master, or all three."[75]

Despite such unfavorable circumstances, some enslaved people were able to contact one another through written letters. For James Phillips, for instance, the stakes were very high. He was a fugitive slave who was caught and brought back to Virginia. He wrote his wife, Mary, to instruct her about his whereabouts and state of being, and to let her know that he "can be bought for $900." Similarly, in 1841 Sangry Brown wrote from Richmond to her husband Moses, who lived in Goochland County, Virginia, to express that she feared that the trader, who had "been here three times to Look at me," would buy her and take her away. It was urgent, as she wrote, "If you don't come down here this Sunday, perhaps you wont see me any more." Others attempted to bridge the space that divided them through their writing. Elizabeth Keckley, for example, recounted that her father, George Pleasant, wrote her mother, Agnes Hobbs, from Tennessee to Virginia. George recorded that he was "well satisfied at [his] living at this place," and asked her if she would "write [him] a letter." In case he never heard back from Agnes, he wrote, "I hope to meet you In paradise to prase god forever." Likewise, Elizabeth herself wrote her mother that she worried that Agnes "and all the family have forgotten" her since she did not receive any letters.[76]

Thus, even for those who were fortunate enough to be able to write letters, it could still be a painful process, as there was no guarantee that the letter would arrive, or a response would

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[75] Troutman, "Correspondences in Black and White," 216-217; Berlin, *Generations of Captivity*, 188; Hayden, *Narrative of William Hayden*, 31.
[76] Blassingame, *Slave Testimony*, 95-96, 46-47, 20-21; Keckley, *Behind the Scenes*, 26-27.

be given. However, enslaved people showed resilience by continuing to write anyway, just as they did in their attempts to keep family histories intact.

Conclusion

When Michael Tadman wrote his *Speculators and Slaves*, he significantly changed the resistance-versus-accommodation debate. His findings indicated that the domestic slave trade lay at the foundation of enslaved people's reality because the separation of families was what they perhaps feared above all other aspects of slavery. Slaveholders, on the other hand, liked to believe that enslaved African Americans did not forge such strong emotional bonds, but explicit and implicit emotional appeals made by enslaved people almost certainly reminded them that they were in the wrong when they separated families. Regardless, slave owners ruled bondpeople with the threat of sale, ensuring that enslaved African Americans lived under the "chattel principle."[77]

Enslaved people had several tools they used to resist this reality. Some tried to negotiate with their owners to prevent a sale from happening, while others straight out attempted to sabotage it by feigning an illness, running away, or, in unique cases, committed self-mutilation and suicide. Collective action played a specific role in these tools, as enslaved people learned tricks to fool slave traders from each other and aided fellow bondpeople in escape attempts. However, resistance often came at a price. Slaveholders frequently gave out punishments to enslaved people who did not comply with their wishes and this severely upped the threshold of maintaining disobedience. Moreover, given the fact that the balance-of-power disadvantage was so considerable for the enslaved, resistance was often unsuccessful. Therefore, countless sales were unpreventable and took place, and this ensured that many bondpeople were forced to deal with the loss of a family member.

All the while, the enslaved family was already under constant pressure. In most families, mothers had a central role, but this was compromised in several ways, such as the fact that long workdays prevented them from spending time with their children and that the slaveholders' rule often undermined their authority as parents. Enslaved fathers, on the other hand, were structurally even more absent than enslaved mothers were. However, fathers utilized visitation—whether this was allowed or not—to stay involved in family life. Finally, enslaved children lacked the safe and nurturing childhood that some needed to grow into confident adults. Yet, many of these adversities established certain networks that bondpeople had with each other, which helped them in their survival under slavery. It was these solidarities that allowed enslaved

[77] Walter Johnson reintroduced this term, which he derived from the formerly enslaved person, J.W.C. Pennington. It meant that "any slave's identity might be disrupted as easily as a price could be set and a piece of paper passed from one hand to another," see Johnson, *Soul by Soul*, 19.

people to recover from the loss of a family member in the interregional trade and to grow even closer to those who remained.

For those who were sold in the interregional slave trade themselves, the situation was even worse. Their losses were arguably greater than those of the people that remained behind and they often did not yet have emotional solidarities in their new environments. Moreover, they sometimes had certain regional attachments that prevented them from easily assimilating to their new homes. This process was made even more difficult due to forms of mistrust within enslaved communities. In time, however, bondpeople were, more often than not, able to overcome these issues and to move on with their lives. Religion especially had an important role in the healing process of those who had been sold, as it allowed them to make peace with their loss on the one hand, and to forge new relationships on the other. However, many enslaved people maintained a "dual orientation," as they refused to forget their lost loved ones and attempted to keep their family histories intact.

As this study has shown, some actions of enslaved people can definitely be categorized as either accommodation or resistance. Employing one's agency by betraying a fellow enslaved person, for example, certainly strengthened the slaveholders' power and the institution of slavery in itself, and was, therefore, a form of accommodation. Likewise, employing one's agency for events such as suicide and violence against slave owners were unambiguous acts of resistance. Yet, a vast majority of slave efforts *was* ambiguous. Writing a letter to a lost loved one when it was not even allowed to be literate, for instance, can certainly be constituted as an act of defiance. Nevertheless, it was often an effort within the confines that had been established by the slaveholders—that is to say, in such a scenario the enslaved person was apparently unable to, for instance, prevent a sale that would separate him from his loved ones from happening in the first place. Likewise, fantasizing about revenge in the afterlife was surely a display of contempt, not accommodation. However, it was also a sign of enslaved people's powerlessness to act against the slaveholder in their lifetime.

Eugene Genovese already described the ambiguity in such forms of "day-to-day resistance" in 1974 in his book *Roll, Jordan, Roll*. He characterized such acts as having an individual nature in most cases and, therefore, he argued that such resistance did not necessarily constitute a threat to the slaveholders' power—and, in fact, perhaps contributed to what he called their "hegemony." Collective acts of resistance, on the other hand, *did* threaten the institution of slavery. However, whether enslaved people acquired and passed on geopolitical literacy through their networks; or they held forbidden prayer meetings to bond over shared experiences; or they aided family members and friends in escape attempts; this study has shown

that collective action actually *did* play a significant role in everyday resistance and that the "personal" was oftentimes "political." After all, when Eli Johnson defended his and his fellow bondpeople's right to hold prayer meetings, was this not a political act? Such forms of "political solidarity," therefore, indicate that Genovese made a false dichotomy between "everyday" and more "revolutionary" resistance. Much the same, enslaved people's physical resistance and emotional resilience should not be seen as separate exertions—both were often made possible by the efforts of the slave network.[78]

In a sense, then, the effects of the slave trade did not result in Nell Irvin Painter's "soul murder," but rather in "*attempted* soul murder." A majority of enslaved people who were separated from family members were metaphorically hospitalized, but certainly not killed—and, in fact, they were able to recover due to the emotional resilience made possible through political solidarity.

[78] Johnson, "On Agency," 117-121; Johnson, "A Nettlesome Classic Turns Twenty-Five," http://www.common-place-archives.org/vol-01/no-04/reviews/johnson.shtml; Camp, *Closer to Freedom*, 3; in fact, historians such as Robert Gudmestad and Manisha Sinha have made strong arguments that everyday resistance supplied the abolitionist movement with the necessary "ammunition" to eventually end the system of slavery. See respectively Gudmestad, *A Troublesome Commerce*, 3-4, 41, 48; Manisha Sinha, *The Slave's Cause: A History of Abolition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016).

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