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Fugitive Slave Abolitionism: The role of fugitive slave narratives and slave testimony in the American antislavery campaigns (1812-1861)

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Fugitive Slave Abolitionism

The role of fugitive slave narratives and slave testimony in the American antislavery campaigns (1812 - 1861)

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Voor papa

Acknowledgements

Writing this thesis was like putting together a 2000-piece jigsaw puzzle whose pieces kept changing. I was confronted with the fact that my thesis would never be completely finished. Historical research is an ongoing process in which there will always be loose ends which could be interesting for further research. In the end, I am quite satisfied with the puzzle I have put together.

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Willemijn Schouten

Leiden, 19-12-2023

“Slavery has never been represented, slavery never can be represented.”

William Wells Brown, *Clotel, or The President’s Daughter: A Narrative of Slave Life in the United States* (London 1853).

Abstract

Fugitive slave narrators operated as a textual community within the abolitionist movement to contribute to the construction of broad and coherent arguments for the immediate abolition of slavery in the Southern states. According to the Oxford Dictionary, a textual community is "a place or social circle where manuscript texts are or were produced, read, and circulated by and for a certain group."¹ Through the production of fugitive slave narratives, the fugitive slave textual community formed a coherent discourse within the abolitionist movement that sought to persuade northern readers to support the abolition of slavery through the pluralistic nature of the production of slave narratives and the construction of overlapping forms of consensus. At the same time, by presenting themselves to the outside world, the narrators created a new collective identity of (ex)slaves. It was precisely by not focusing entirely on forming antislavery arguments that it resulted in becoming one of the most powerful antislavery arguments: through the manifestation of political agency and collective identity by writing themselves into a shared history, there was both expression in resistance to slavery and an important form of identification with northern readers.

¹ Peter Beal, *A Dictionary of English Manuscript Terminology 1450-2000* (Oxford 2008), 414-415.

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Introduction

During the summer of 1835, the American Anti-Slavery Society attempted to sway public opinion in the slaveholding states with a publicity stunt: thousands of antislavery pamphlets were mailed to Southern addresses.² The mailing of the pamphlets provoked a strong and angry response. Southerners invaded post offices, confiscated the mail and set the pamphlets on fire in the streets to the cheers of the crowds.³ The idea of sending thousands of antislavery pamphlets to proslavery states began to circulate in the early 1830s. The growing abolitionist movement could not send human messengers to oppose slavery because it would put their lives in danger. Therefore, investments were made in professional printing techniques through which pamphlets and broadsides were distributed that depicted the horrors of slavery.⁴ The fact that abolitionists had the financial resources and manpower to produce printed material of considerable quality was unsettling to proslavery Americans.⁵ After a wave of protests in the South, during which antislavery pamphlets were burned and thrown into bonfires, the conflict shifted to Congress. A controversy over postal censorship during the seventh annual address to Congress in December 1835 of President Andrew Jackson ended the pamphlet campaign.⁶ Legislation to open and search the mail failed in Congress, but local postmasters, with the approval of their superiors in the federal government, continued to suppress the pamphlets.⁷

The struggle over the use of the mail made clear how the issue of slavery divided the nation in the antebellum period. In the North, calls to censor the mail were seen as a violation of constitutional rights. In contrast, in the proslavery states of the South, the literature of abolitionist movements was seen as a serious threat to Southern society.⁸ Eventually, the antislavery campaigners accepted that mass mailing of pamphlets to the pro-slavery states as a tactic would not work again and was a waste of resources. Above that, their campaign had attracted attention and their point had been made. The antislavery movement began to focus on other initiatives, most prominently to create a strong antislavery campaign in the House of Representatives. The campaign to submit petitions on slavery to

² Susan Wylie-Jones, 'The 1835 Anti-Abolition Meetings in the South: A New Look at the Controversy over the Abolition Postal Campaign', *Civil War History* 47:4 (2001) 289-309, 289.

³ Richard R. John, *Spreading the News* (Harvard 1995) 258.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 260.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 261.

⁶ Andrew Jackson, Seventh Annual Message, in: Andrew Jackson Papers: Series 8, Messages and Speeches, Circa 1829 to 1836 (vol. 180).

"In connection with these provisions in relation to the Post-Office Department, I must also invite your attention to the painful excitement produced in the South by attempts to circulate through the mails inflammatory appeals addressed to the passions of the slaves, in prints and in various sorts of publications, calculated to stimulate them to insurrection and to produce all the horrors of a servile war."

⁷ John, *Spreading the News*, 269.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 271-272.

Congress eventually led to a crisis on Capitol Hill.⁹ Congressmen from slavery-supporting states managed to introduce the so-called "gag rule," which outlawed any debate on issues of slavery in the House of Representatives.¹⁰ The pamphlet campaign of 1835 may have lasted only a year, but it was an important moment in the history of antislavery sentiment in America. By acting against the horrors of slavery, it provoked a reaction that brought the issue to the attention of a wider audience.¹¹

Influencing public opinion

Antislavery activists in the United States operated in a context where, by 1820, American society was growing into the world's largest slave economy. After states began to divide into free states and slave states in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, this triggered a flow of slave refugees from the Southern to surrounding areas such as Mexico or the Northern states. Yet even reaching a free state did not guarantee freedom for the fugitives.¹² In the Northern free states, there was still the danger of being kidnapped and sent back to slave owners in the South. In addition, widespread resistance to the 1793 Fugitive Slave Act to make it easier for slave owners to recapture fugitives, caused the enactment of the passage of the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, which added more regulations regarding runaways and imposed even harsher penalties for obstructing their capture.¹³

A key element in the fight against antebellum slavery was influencing public opinion. In this, the United States differed from the two other major nineteenth-century slave societies Cuba and Brazil. Unlike these two countries - one was a Spanish colony, the other an empire - the United States was a constitutional democracy, in which the voice of the white male adult population determined state policy.¹⁴ Consequently, in order for those who wanted to use either moral persuasion or the state's authority to abolish slavery, the abolitionist activists needed to understand how to phrase their appeals in such a way that they appeal to politically active Americans.¹⁵ To influence public sentiment, abolitionists proceeded with caution to avoid provocation among their readers. By carefully tailoring their message to a middle-class northern audience, abolitionists tried to reach out to the part of the American electorate most receptive to antislavery appeals.¹⁶

The strongest abolitionist activity came from the African American community. From the start of the Revolution in 1775 to the Civil War in 1861, African Americans dedicated themselves to the

⁹ Wylie-Jones, 'The 1835 Anti-Abolition Meetings in the South: A New Look at the Controversy over the Abolition Postal Campaign', 291.

¹⁰ Wylie-Jones, 'The 1835 Anti-Abolition Meetings in the South: A New Look at the Controversy over the Abolition Postal Campaign', 308.

¹¹ Richard R. John, *Spreading the News* (Harvard 1995) 261.

¹² Damian A. Pargas, *Freedom Seekers: Fugitive Slaves in North America, 1800-1860* (Cambridge 2021) 7.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 4.

¹⁴ Laird Bergad, *The Comparative Histories of Slavery in Brazil, Cuba, and the United States* (Cambridge 2007) 272.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

abolition of slavery.¹⁷ Black abolitionists used a range of means to challenge slavery and demand equality, from fleeing slavery to demanding freedom in the courts in the 19th century. As Manisha Sinha described in *The Slave's Cause: A History of Abolition* (2016), "the actions of slave rebels and runaways, black writers and community leaders were not outside abolition and its goals, but shaped the movement."¹⁸ Most abolitionists had a direct interest in the abolition of slavery, so they understood that the argument for abolition had to begin with the struggles of the enslaved. Fugitive slaves united all factions of the interracial movement and led abolitionists to justify revolutionary resistance to slavery. Prominent slave revolts marked the turn towards immediate abolition, demonstrating the direct and continuous connection between slave resistance and abolition.¹⁹

The abolitionist movement pursued different tactics in order to make their voice heard. Nonviolent tactics such as the distribution of pamphlets in 1835 (or literary protests, anti-slavery speeches and petitions) allowed abolitionists to claim moral dominance in both word and deed, and in no small measure defined African American protest between the Revolution and the Civil War.²⁰ Free blacks from Philadelphia for example, petitioned the federal Congress in 1799 to end both slavery and the slave trade. Richard Allen (1760-1831) and Absalom Jones (1746-1818) – two of the most prominent black abolitionist leaders and founders of the Methodist Episcopal Church – seized upon the death of George Washington in 1799 to publicly issue an anti-slavery proclamation, praising the country's founder for admonishing his slaves and calling on the rest of the country to follow in his footsteps.²¹ Both enslaved and free African Americans considered more radical action, including physical confrontation, when nonviolent political action failed. Slave rebels from Virginia to Louisiana to South Carolina used violent tactics to free themselves from slavery between the 1790s and 1850s.²² Similarly, free blacks in the North used physical confrontation to help runaway slaves across the Mason-Dixon line (a barrier along the southern border of Pennsylvania, informally known as the border between the slave states of the South and the free states of the North).²³

No tactic however proved more effective in the struggle of the abolitionist movement than the circulation of slave narratives, an entirely new genre of literature cultivated from the late 18th century by formerly enslaved people and their allies in the Atlantic world.²⁴ These slave narratives could range from short testimonies in court records to publications in pamphlets, newspapers and separately published books. One study unearthed some 6,006 different slave narratives written between 1703

¹⁷ Manisha Sinha, *The Slave's Cause: A History of Abolition* (Yale 2016) 1.

¹⁸ Sinha, *The Slave's Cause*, 2.

¹⁹ Sinha, *The Slave's Cause*, 2-3.

²⁰ Sinha, *The Slave's Cause*, 5.

²¹ Sinha, *The Slave's Cause*, 139; Petition of Absalom Jones and Others to Congress, Jan. 2, 1800, National Archives and Records Administration.

²² Kellie C. Jackson, *Force and Freedom: Black Abolitionists and the Politics of Violence* (Philadelphia 2019) 39-40.

²³ Pargas, *Freedom Seekers*, 7.

²⁴ Sinha, *The Slave's Cause*, 421.

and 1944.²⁵ In addition, there are some 2,500 oral histories of former slaves collected by the Federal Writers' Project in the 1930s.²⁶

By the 1830s the concept of the slave narrative achieved great popularity and influence among a mainly white, northern audience and began to develop into a literary genre in American literature.²⁷ The authors of these narratives – mostly runaway slaves – emerged and gradually began to dominate the antislavery movement, writing a new and authentic critique of the slaveholding party that included detailed stories of family separation, abuse and the deranged attitudes of slaveholders. Through the writing of these narratives, fugitive slaves conveyed the main argument for the abolition of slavery.²⁸ The narratives of the struggles of African Americans highlighted the horrors of slavery in America and challenged the white middleclass, northern audience to embrace abolitionism as a worthy cause. By the 1840s and 1850s, American society was drenched with stories about slaves, making abolitionism a hot topic in both social and political circles.²⁹

The aim of this thesis is to examine the antebellum fugitive slave narratives and slave testimony as abolitionist texts – in particular as instruments of what Manisha Sinha has dubbed “fugitive slave abolitionism.”³⁰ How were fugitive slave narratives and slave testimony weaponized and employed by abolitionists in the struggle to influence public sentiment about slavery in antebellum America? How did fugitive slave narrators contribute to the construction of broad and coherent arguments for the immediate abolition of slavery in the Southern states? In order to contribute to these broader questions in the debate about the role of fugitive slave narratives in the abolitionist movement, this thesis will address the following main question: How were specific themes in enslaved people's testimonies highlighted and publicized by abolitionist activists to build a broad and coherent case for the immediate abolition of slavery in the southern states? By applying a textual analysis, this study looks into three specific themes from runaway slaves' life stories that were highlighted and publicized by the abolitionist movement in the development of a broader case against slavery, namely: (1) the threat and reality posed by the domestic slave trade; (2) the rejection of paternalistic ideals and the “worthiness” of African Americans of (Christian) assistance; (3) and the nature of slave flight to the northern (free) states, which constituted a major refugee crisis.

²⁵ Marion Wilson Starling, *The Slave Narrative: Its place in American Literary History* (ProQuest Dissertation Publishing 1946).

²⁶ Library of Congress, *Born in Slavery: Slave Narratives from the Federal Writers' Project, 1936-1938* (online database collection).

²⁷ Lynn O. Scott, ‘Autobiography: Slave Narratives’, *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Literature* (2017) 1-8, 1.

²⁸ Sinha, *The Slave's Cause*, 421.

²⁹ William L. Andrews (series ed.), introduction from ‘North American Slave Narratives’, in: Documenting the American South (online database collection): <https://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/about.html>.

³⁰ Sinha, *The Slave's Cause*, 421.

Historiography

Within the scholarly discourse, there are two main historiographical developments to which this study connects. First, this study contributes to an ever-growing body of literature about the nature of black abolitionism. Black abolitionism characterises itself as the movement which addresses the centrality of the role of black people themselves in the struggle against slavery.³¹ Although black abolitionism has recently received increasing attention in historical scholarship by Manisha Sinha, Eric Foner, Kate Masur and others, most historiography until the mid-20th century paid little attention to the role of African Americans in the abolitionist movement.³² Major African American figures such as William Wells Brown, Harriet Jacobs or Frederick Douglass were referred to only incidentally, and usually only as contributors whose efforts complemented the work of white leaders of the movement.³³ Related to this form of misrecognition were explanations for the rise and success of the abolitionist movement that ranged from economic causes to religious arguments.³⁴ While these factors were important in understanding the context in which abolitionism emerged, they effectively marginalised people of African origin from the essence of the historical narrative. It was not until the publication of Benjamin Quarles' retrospective work *Black Abolitionists* in 1969, that historical attention began to shift to fully emphasising the key importance of African Americans in abolition history. Quarles recorded the involvement of African Americans in many aspects of abolitionist activities, from organisation and fundraising to running political campaigns and public speaking, demonstrating the diverse nature of the movement and the essential role of African American activities in determining its growth and strategies.³⁵

Since Quarles' publication, history-writing about black abolitionism accelerated. A new generation of historians, publishing in the mid-1960s and throughout the 20th century, began to revise traditional accounts of slavery in the United States. Historians such as David W. Blight, James McPherson, John Hope Franklin and Steven Hahn analysed slavery in more depth, with altering views on the relationships between masters and enslaved people, and the different modes of resilience used

³¹ Manisha Sinha, 'Coming of Age: The Historiography of Black Abolitionism' in: T.P. McCarthy and J. Stauffer (eds.), *Prophets of Protest: Reconsidering The History of American Abolitionism* (New York 2006) 23-40.

³² Sinha, *The Slave's Cause*; Eric Foner, *Gateway to Freedom: The Hidden History of the Underground Railroad* (New York 2015); Kate Masur, *Until Justice Be Done* (New York 2021); Steven Deyle, *Carry me back: the domestic slave trade in American life* (New York 2005); Walter Johnson, *Soul by Soul* (Harvard 2009); Daina R. Berry, 'Soul values and American slavery', *Slavery & Abolition* 42:2 (2021) 201-218.

³³ William Wells Brown, *Narrative of William W. Brown, a Fugitive Slave. Written by Himself* (Boston: The Anti-slavery office, 1847); Harriet Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl. Written by Herself* (Boston: Published for the Author, 1861); Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave. Written by Himself* (Boston: Anti-Slavery Office, 1845).

³⁴ Andrew Delbanco (ed.), *The Abolitionist Imagination* (Harvard 2012).

³⁵ Benjamin Quarles, *Black Abolitionists* (New York 1969).

by the latter.³⁶ The same is argued in the essays in the volume *Prophets of Protest*, which showed that the abolitionist movement was more racially and culturally diverse than previously acknowledged.³⁷ The historians of this volume placed themselves in line with Martin Duberman and Lewis Perry and Michael Fellman who reinvigorated the debate on abolitionism in the 1960s and 1970s about the recognition of the importance and the more beneficial effects of the abolitionist cause.³⁸ *Prophets of Protest* anticipated this by attempting to chart the true scope and resilience of the movement and shows the racial diversity of the abolitionist movement and their continued presence in American society between the Revolution and the antebellum period.³⁹

The current generation mainly focuses on deepening our knowledge of the struggles to building up communities, the ways in which black nationalism is used, and the impact of engaging in political activism and social protest.⁴⁰ Manisha Sinha has made an important contribution by criticizing the way the abolitionist movement has been described throughout time: "The history of abolition is an integrated story even though it is usually not told in that manner."⁴¹ Black abolitionists were part of a broader, interracial movement. To separate them from the abolitionist movement is to seriously misunderstand their role in the development of political protest. As Sinha states: "The insidious division between white thought and black activism that pervades some abolitionist books is both radicalistic and inaccurate. No such racial division of political activity existed in the abolitionist movement. Early African American literature, the intellectual response of black abolitionists to the pseudo-science of race, and debates about citizenship and emigration did the work of political protest." Sinha argues that the role of African Americans in the abolitionist campaign was much larger than previously thought and rejects the idea of a separation between slave resistance and antislavery activism: slave resistance was the main driving force of anti-slavery activism. Accordingly, Sinha explains that "the actions of slave rebels and runaways, black writers and community leaders, did not lie outside of but shaped abolition and its goals."⁴² This study seeks to expand the historiography of black abolitionism by understanding how fugitive slaves influenced the antislavery campaign through the writing of slave narratives. By approaching fugitive slave narratives as a form of political protest, it

³⁶ D.W. Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Harvard 2001); J. McPherson, *The Struggle for Equality* (Princeton 1964); J. H. Franklin, *From Slavery to Freedom* (Harvard 1947); S. Hahn, *The Political Worlds of Slavery and Freedom* (Harvard 2009).

³⁷ T.P. McCarthy and J. Stauffer (eds.), *Prophets of Protest: Reconsidering The History of American Abolitionism* (New York 2006).

³⁸ M. Fellman, *Antislavery Reconsidered: New Perspective on the Abolitionists* (Cambridge 1979); M. Duberman, *The Antislavery Vanguard* (Princeton 1965).

³⁹ T.P. McCarthy and J. Stauffer, 'Introduction' in: T. P. McCarthy and J. Stauffer (eds.), *Prophets of Protest: Reconsidering the History of American Abolitionism* (New York 2006) xxii.

⁴⁰ Deyle, *Carry me back*; Johnson, *Soul by Soul*; Berry, 'Soul values and American slavery'; Walter Johnson (ed.), *The Chattel Principle: internal slave trades in the Americas* (Yale 2004).

⁴¹ Sinha, *The Slave's Cause*, 2.

⁴² Ibid.

seeks to examine their role in the abolitionist movement as important eyewitnesses by analysing their responses to proslavery ideology.

Second, this thesis nuances the current literature on abolitionist strategy in antebellum America. "The art of persuasion" as Timothy McCarthy and John Stauffer put it - using language and images to "convert" people to their cause - was a core part of the abolitionists' work.⁴³ The abolitionists campaigned against slavery at a time when print and literary culture were expanding and gaining considerable influence, as well as when literacy was also advancing. In the fight against slavery, using visual images and print culture proved to be some of the most effective weapons for the abolitionists. But, as McCarthy and Stauffer state, besides "their use of etchings, illustrations and daguerreotypes, the abolitionists, wrote, edited, published, and distributed tens of thousands of pamphlets and broadsides, thousands of poems and petitions, hundreds of songs and newspapers, and dozens of novels and autobiographical narratives."⁴⁴ Not only what abolitionists wrote mattered, also the manner in which their message was spread and communicated to the audience weighed in.

A concept that comes to mind in this context of print culture is the emergence of a textual community. According to Peter Beal a textual community is "a place or social circle where manuscript texts are or were produced, read, and circulated by and for a certain group."⁴⁵ In the case of an antislavery textual community, it could be defined as an interracial community in which different types of texts were produced such as legal texts like petitions, but also antislavery papers and pamphlets in which for example slave narratives and the attachments of official documents or exchanges of letters were publicized. It is interesting that the literature on abolitionist strategy in antebellum America has not yet paid considerable attention to the idea of an antislavery textual community, even though it had an important and perhaps decisive role in the abolitionist campaign. The production and circulation of these texts led to the construction of a dossier of evidence to support the antislavery campaign to abolish slavery and a call for racial equality.

The abolitionists used a crucial opportunity during the expansion of print culture to debate slavery through the use of relatively inexpensive printing presses, the establishment of publishing companies, and a wide variety of press and distribution tools provided by the many different national, regional and local reform organisations. As printing techniques rapidly developed and public education, literacy and publishing expanded in the antebellum era, abolitionists began to spread their message using a tactical strategy that extended far beyond the confines of antislavery radicalism into the private and public spheres of American society. Over time, more and more prominent writers of the antebellum era – both black and white, male and female – joined the growing textual community

⁴³ McCarthy and Stauffer, 'Introduction' in: *Prophets of Protest*, xxi- xxii.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, xxi.

⁴⁵ Peter Beal, *A Dictionary of English Manuscript Terminology 1450-2000* (Oxford 2008), 414-415.

advocating the abolition of slavery. In fact, abolitionists created what McCarthy and Stauffer called a “broad culture of dissent,” in which they freely used print and image - language and representation - to shape political discourse and change public opinion in an effort to free the nation from the bonds of slavery and move it towards a more inclusive society.⁴⁶ According to McCarthy and Stauffer “It is high time we paid more attention to these issues.”⁴⁷

As Manisha Sinha has made clear in her publication *Slave's Cause*, the role of African Americans has been central to the antislavery movement. This is also the case for the antislavery textual community. Prior to the publication of Garrison's *The Liberator*, the most prominent newspaper of the abolitionist movement since January 1, 1831, northern free blacks established a variety of institutions and media - including African American church congregations, annual liberation celebrations, political pamphlets and follow-up newsletters - in which they expressed their resistance to not only slavery but also colonisation within the wider struggle for freedom and racial equality.⁴⁸ The formation of these textual communities and the tactical production and distribution of texts became one of the key factors in the recruitment of supporters for the abolition movement and its commitment to abolish slavery and call for racial equality.⁴⁹ This study further explores the role of African Americans in the antislavery textual community by examining how the production and circulation of their experiences and ideas - focused on fugitive slave narratives and slave testimony - legitimized the standpoint of the antislavery movement.

Methodology

In order to adequately analyse fugitive slave narratives, it is important to reflect on what historians have encountered over time when studying abolitionist texts. One of the issues for consideration is the use of rhetoric. The abolitionists were aware of the value of rhetoric. Their main aim was to win over their audience to the idea that enslavement was a horrible crime that had to be stopped. While the abolitionist textual communities have ignored some facts and altered others so that their argument would fit their pre-existing beliefs, they were keen that their evidence should be correct in order to be taken seriously. Proslavery activists, however, were in a position of power in which they were able to legitimately construct their own version of the past, in which they rejected the narrative of the abolitionists as misinformation and centred on the view in which slavery was beneficial to slaves and society. This ideological struggle influenced the historiography on abolitionism, as McCarthy and Stauffer state: “Well into the twentieth century, in their efforts to “redeem” the South, professional

⁴⁶ McCarthy and Stauffer, ‘Introduction’ in: *Prophets of Protest*, xxi- xxii.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Sinha, *The Slave's Cause*, 5.

⁴⁹ McCarthy and Stauffer, ‘Introduction’ in: *Prophets of Protest*, xviii – xix.

historians continued to dismiss or ignore evidence from abolitionists and slaves on the grounds that it was unreliable, or “unscientific.”⁵⁰

Not only was the use of rhetoric by both sides confusing for historians, also the way historians have approached abolitionist texts in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries has caused confusion. Robert Forbes argues that “the pursuit of objectivity in history is especially problematic in the study of abolitionism.”⁵¹ It was understood in the Rankean sense of history: *wie es eigentlich gewesen*. Forbes explains how the treatment of history as a science, that coincided with the rise of social sciences, led to “scientific” evidence claiming that Africans and their offspring were innately inferior to other “races”. This dual emergence of scientific history and pseudo-scientific racism had huge implications for the historiography of abolitionism: for nearly a century, historians assumed that history was getting more scientific - more exact and more knowable - while never questioning the racist convictions anchored in that science.⁵²

Moreover, the approach of history as a formal science led to the downgrading of its rhetorical aspects. In response to this approach, Louis Menand noted that “the test of a successful history is the same as the test of any successful story: integrity in motion. It is not the facts, snapshots of the past, that make history; it is the story, the facts that run through the eye at the right speed.”⁵³ The terms in abolitionist texts are not static in space and time: while the terms are the same, they are interpreted differently by different contexts and therefore take on different meanings over time. Therefore, Forbes argues, “we must attempt to understand earlier interpretations on their own terms, and to be attentive to the meaning of changes in perspective in the context of their own times.”⁵⁴ The abolitionist textual community played an important role in the struggle for the abolition of slavery, and so did the texts produced by these communities. These texts became part of the conflict. Rather than problematise the integrity of these sources, the rhetoric used and the emphasis on its integrity can provide us with new insights into the role of abolitionist writings within the conflict.

Having established how abolitionist texts can be approached, it is now possible to discuss how slave narratives specifically are studied in this thesis. First, it is necessary to determine what defines a slave narrative. Frances Smith Foster defines the narratives as follows: “Slave narratives are the personal accounts by black slaves and ex slaves of their experiences in slavery and of their efforts to obtain freedom.”⁵⁵ The narratives have a retrospective character, as the stories were recorded after

⁵⁰ McCarthy and Stauffer, ‘Introduction’ in: *Prophets of Protest*, xxiii.

⁵¹ McCarthy and Stauffer, ‘Introduction’ in: *Prophets of Protest*, xxii; Robert P. Forbes, “‘Truth Systematised’: The Changing Debate Over Slavery and Abolition, 1761-1916’ in: J.P. McCarthy and Stauffer (eds.), *Prophets of Protest: Reconsidering the History of American Abolitionism* (New York 2006) 3-22.

⁵² McCarthy and Stauffer, ‘Introduction’ in: *Prophets of Protest*, xxii.

⁵³ Ibid., xxiii; Louis Menand, ‘The Historical Romance’, *The New Yorker* March 24 (2003) 80.

⁵⁴ Forbes, “‘Truth Systematised”, 6.

⁵⁵ Frances Smith Foster, *Witnessing Slavery: The Development of Antebellum Slave Narratives* (Connecticut 1994, 2nd ed.) 3.

the flight was complete. According to Foster, this helped define, even create, their identity, while the narrators set out the patterns and implications of their experiences as slaves. More importantly, by casting a different perspective on an institution that was becoming increasingly important to the continued prosperity of the white population, fugitives sought to call for change and eventual abolition of slavery.⁵⁶ In making the selection of in total 29 narratives for the research of this thesis, a number of criteria were adhered to: the stories were of runaway slaves who fled to the northern free states or Canada, and were published during the rise of the radical abolitionist movement in the 1830s until the end of the antebellum period in 1861. These narratives are all archived in an online database of the University of North Carolina.⁵⁷ The database "North American Slave Narratives" collects and documents books and articles that address the individual and collective story of African Americans' struggle for the abolition of slavery and equal rights. This collection contains, among other materials, all existing autobiographical narratives of former slaves (fugitives, emancipated etc.) up to 1920 published in English as broadsides, pamphlets or books.⁵⁸ Using a thematic approach, the examined narratives are categorised into three themes (domestic slave trade; paternalism; and flight) and further organised into corresponding sub-themes. The identified sub-themes and associated narratives within the three themes are highlighted in Table 2, 3 and 4 in the Appendices. Table 1 lists the full titles of the corresponding narratives.

Second, it is important to consider the influence of (white) editors and the credibility of slave narratives as a historical source. Slave narratives evolve in form and content over time. Narratives originating in the 18th century set themselves against slavery, especially the transatlantic slave trade. The narrators characterised themselves as African-born free people of relatively high status. The transition from a life before captivity to a life as a slave features prominently in these narratives, as do their experiences of being enslaved during transatlantic slave trade and their eventual flight to freedom. These experiences were often presented in conjunction with their conversion to Christianity and westernisation. Adapting to the standards of contemporary popular literature, such as stories of conversion, narratives about Indian captivity and criminal confessions, narrators of slave narratives tried to reach the largest audience possible.⁵⁹ Most autobiographical accounts originating in the eighteenth century were dictated to a white editor who in turn picked and organised the ex-slave's verbal account, "corrected" the language style and phrasing, and provided explanatory content in the foreword and in the choice of metaphors that shaped and conveyed meaning to the ex-slave's story.

⁵⁶ Foster, *Witnessing Slavery*, 3.

⁵⁷ William L. Andrews (series ed.), 'North American Slave Narratives', in: Documenting the American South (online database collection): <https://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/>.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Scott, 'Autobiography: Slave Narratives', 1-2; K. Sinanan, 'The slave narrative and the literature of abolition', in: Fisch, A., (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion of the African American Slave Narrative* (Cambridge 2007) 61-80.

This means that for many early African American autobiographies, separating the voice of the black autobiographical subject from that of the white writer recording and interpreting the story is often impossible. As William L. Andrews notes, "It was the editor who controlled the manuscript and thus decided how a 'statement of facts' became a 'fiction of factual representation.'"⁶⁰

In the early nineteenth century, slave narratives underwent a transformation. After the abolition of the African slave trade in 1807 domestic slave trade increased, partly due to the growth and profitability of cotton production leading to increasingly harsh conditions for many slaves in the Southern states. The shift from the transatlantic slave trade to the domestic slave trade also changed the character of slave narratives. Instead of the African freeborn narrator, it was replaced by one born in America - into slavery - who had fled to the northern states. The antebellum narratives made an explicit criticism against American slavery by addressing the hardships and dehumanising aspects endured by enslaved people and advocating the abolition of slavery.⁶¹ There are a number of shared literary traits among the antebellum narratives, such as a title page that states that the narrative was "written by myself" or dictated to a friend.⁶² Another similarity is that the preface and sometimes the epilogue include documents for authentication, authored by high-profile white editors and publishers describing their connection to the fugitive slave and attesting to the virtue and veracity of the narrator. It is also written that anyone who thinks the narrator is exaggerating to strengthen his argument is wrong: the cruelty of slavery can only be captured in so many words and the reality of slavery was often much more cruel and severe than described in the narratives.⁶³

At the same time, the voice of the fugitive narrator was constrained in various ways. The subjective experiences of the former slave were modified or removed, in order to count as a more objective and 'representative' witness to Southern slavery and thus persuade white northern audiences to join the antislavery movement.⁶⁴ As a result, the narrator's individual voice and discussions about their inner lives were given minimal space, except when specifically related to slavery. While these narrators themselves might have wanted to show that they were more than just a former slave, the main focus of the narratives is instead on the experiences of life as a slave and its hardships. Frances Smith Foster aptly states that: "the desire to recognize oneself and to be recognized as a unique individual had to counter the desire to be a symbol, and it created the tension that is a

⁶⁰ W.L. Andrews, *To Tell a Free Story: The First Century of Afro-American Autobiography, 1760-1865* (Illinois 1986) 20.

⁶¹ Scott, 'Autobiography: Slave Narratives', 2-3.

⁶² James Olney, "I Was Born": Slave Narratives, Their Status as Autobiography and as Literature', in *Callaloo* 20:4 (1984) 46-73, 50-51.

⁶³ Ibid.; Scott, 'Autobiography: Slave Narratives', 3-5.

⁶⁴ See for example the preface of the slave narrative of William Parker, *The Freedman's Story: In Two Parts, Part I* (Boston 1866) 152: "The manuscript of the following pages has been handed to me with the request that I would revise it for publication, or weave its facts into a story which should show the fitness of the Southern black for the exercise of the right of suffrage."

basic quality of slave narratives."⁶⁵ It is also notable that the narratives do not directly criticise white supremacy or racism, but only the institution of slavery. This cautious approach shows that editors did not want to antagonise their audience, partly for the sake of safety, but also to keep the conversation going.⁶⁶

Third, it is relevant to consider what these sources can tell us about public opinion and abolitionist strategy in antebellum America. The abolitionist strategy expressed itself in various ways with regard to slave narratives: for instance, the narratives were distributed at antislavery meetings and promoted in abolitionist media. A reviewer of Henry Bibb's narrative in 1849 wrote: "This fugitive slave literature is destined to be a powerful liver. We have the most profound conviction of its potency. We see in it the easy and infallible means of abolishing the free states. Argument provides argument, reason is met by sophistry. But narratives of slaves go right to the heart of men."⁶⁷ It appears that slave narratives were emerging into activist literature that developed against the background of an expanding and progressively more militant antislavery movement.⁶⁸

The narratives undoubtedly offer important clues to the emergence of more general trends affecting the nature of the antebellum public sphere. The narratives were intended not only to attract new supporters to the antislavery movement, but also to shape the ideas and even the motives of those who became involved in the movement. Therefore, the African American voice was central to the antislavery campaign as eyewitness accounts of the slavery institution and the definition and spread of the antislavery movement.⁶⁹ For historical understanding, then, slave narratives go beyond slavery and abolitionism. Not only do they help indicate such important cultural concerns, when their literary character is fully examined, they also help make clear important political and rhetorical concerns in American thought. The slave narratives have become significant documents for historians of antebellum America, with, as Dickson states, "a richness that is increasingly appreciated."⁷⁰

This thesis is divided into three thematic chapters. The first chapter looks at how the domestic slave trade was emphasised in enslaved people's testimonies, and attempts to explain why. Central to answering this question is the "chattel principle" formulated by fugitive slave James Pennington – the right to own and trade people – and its relation to commodification, speculation and perception, and forced migration. The second chapter builds on the first chapter by trying to understand the connection between the chattel principle and paternalistic ideals, examining how fugitive slave

⁶⁵ Foster, *Witnessing Slavery*, 5.

⁶⁶ Scott, 'Autobiography: Slave Narratives', 5.

⁶⁷ Anonymous reviewer of the narrative of Henry Bibb, *Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb, an American Slave, Written by Himself* (New York 1849) 207.

⁶⁸ Scott, 'Autobiography: Slave Narratives', 2; See for example the narrative of Charles Ball, *Fifty Years in Chains, or, The Life of an American Slave* (New York 1859) xi-xii.

⁶⁹ Dickson D. Bruce, Jr., 'Politics and political philosophy in the slave narrative' in: Audrey Fisch (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to the African American Slave Narrative* (Cambridge 2007) 28-43, 65.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 65-66.

narratives countered the proslavery ideology of paternalism and how the “worthiness” of African Americans for (Christian) assistance is formulated by looking into family trauma, domestic values and Christian morality. The third chapter discusses the legacy of the American Revolutionary ideology that rebellion is necessary for freedom and thus legitimises the continued existence of slavery and how slave narrators defined their response to this powerful liberal republican ideology by describing their flight to freedom with reference to the Exodus story. Together, the chapters try to show how the narratives helped to define the antislavery textual community by describing the hardships the fugitives had to endure in slavery and in order to achieve freedom.

Chapter One

The domestic slave trade: Commodification, speculation and mass migration

In 1849, the fugitive slave James W. C. Pennington wrote about Rachel, "a beautiful girl about twenty-four," who had fallen victim to the domestic slave trade in the United States which was at its height in the first half of the nineteenth century.⁷¹ Rachel grew up in an enslaved family owned by a lawyer who was known for his "eminent abilities and great fame."⁷² However, when the man failed in business because of a drinking problem, Pennington's master bought Rachel from him. After Pennington's master had her in his possession for about a year, she was sexually abused by one of his sons, something that was both well known among all slaves, but something that also became "a source of unhappiness to his (the son's) mother and sisters."⁷³ To guard the honour of his family, Pennington's master decided that "poor Rachel" had to be sold to "Georgia," into the Lower South.⁷⁴ Rachel was transported with her few garments in "the one-horse cart" and taken to the town where her parents lived, and was there "sold to the traders before their weeping eyes."⁷⁵ The girl's father asked Pennington's master if it was allowed "to get some one in the place to purchase his child."⁷⁶ Pennington's master however was implacable, replying that she had insulted their family, and he could only restore trust "by sending her out of hearing."⁷⁷ After her new owner took her with other newly acquired slaves to the Lower South, her parents never heard from her again.

The story of Rachel is one of many who fell victim to the domestic slave trade. The aim of this chapter is to examine different characteristics of domestic slave trade within antebellum fugitive slave narratives and slave testimony as instruments of fugitive slave abolitionism. By applying a textual analysis, this chapter will look into the threat and reality posed by the domestic slave trade described in runaway slaves' life stories. Therefore, this chapter will examine the following question: how did enslaved people's testimonies highlight the domestic slave trade and contribute to the construction of broad and coherent arguments for the immediate abolition of slavery in the southern states?

Rachel's fate was not an incidental outcome, but shows, as Pennington stated, the "legitimate workings of the great chattel principle."⁷⁸ According to Pennington, slavery was a system in which the

⁷¹ James W.C. Pennington, *The Fugitive Blacksmith; or, Events in the History of James W. C. Pennington, Pastor of a Presbyterian Church, New York, Formerly a Slave in the State of Maryland, United States* (London 1849) vi.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid., vii.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

price on someone's head determined what happened to them, and with this chattel principle "you cannot save" those from outcomes similar to Rachel's. Thus, Pennington argued, no one but the system decided: "Slaveholders are not masters of the system. The system is master of them, and the slaves are their vassals."⁷⁹ He defines "the being of slavery" as a system that "lives and moves in the chattel principle," which means slave trading and slaveholding are intertwined.⁸⁰ This new definition of slavery constituted a powerful rebuttal to the existing proslavery arguments regarding slaveholding, the associated paternalism and the trading of slaves separately. As Walter Johnson argues, Pennington captured the connection between the domestic slave trade and the rest of slavery in a way "that was both spatial and temporal."⁸¹ Through the domestic slave trade, slavery was both spread out over space and transformed over time.

Pennington raised an important question that has been central to the debate on the domestic slave trade: what relationship did the slave trade have with the system of slavery and its ideology? According to defenders of the slave trade, the scale and economic interests of the domestic slave trade were insignificant. White Southerners claimed that the slave trade was rare, that they abhorred the slave trade and that slave traders were outcasts scorned by respectable people.⁸² Pastor Nathan Lewis Rice from Cincinnati, Kentucky, for example said the following about slave traders: "The slave-trader is looked upon by decent men in the slave-holding states with disgust. None but a monster could inflict anguish upon unoffending men for the sake of accumulating wealth."⁸³ Contrary to Rice's claims, domestic slave trade was big business. Slave traders such as Isaac Franklin, John Armfield and Rice Ballard, were very powerful, respected and influential businessmen.⁸⁴ But, along with Southern paternalism, downplaying the slave trade became a standard part of defending the slave trade.

Although the domestic slave trade in America existed on a small scale before the antebellum period, it became the main driver of the American slave trade after the congressional ban on importing slaves into the United States in 1808.⁸⁵ Together with the unprecedented growth of the cotton industry in the Lower South which led to an increase in the demand of slaves, slaves became very valuable commodities. The domestic slave trade had become a domestic enterprise, leading to the second Middle Passage: about a million slaves were forced to migrate from the Upper South to states in the

⁷⁹ Pennington, *The Fugitive Blacksmith*, vii.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, iv-v.

⁸¹ Walter Johnson, 'Introduction: The Future Store' in: Walter Johnson (ed.), *The Chattel Principle: internal slave trades in the Americas* (Yale 2004) 1-31, 1.

⁸² Deyle, *Carry me back*, 16.

⁸³ A debate on slavery: held in the city of Cincinnati, on the first, second, third, and sixth days of October, 1845, Upon the question: is slave-holding in itself sinful, and the relation between master and slave a sinful relation? Debate between Rev. J. Blanchard, pastor of the Sixth Presbyterian Church, Cincinnati (affirmative) and N. L. Rice, D.D., pastor of the Central Presbyterian Church, Cincinnati (negative). Moore & Co., Publishers Cincinnati (1846) 28.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*; J.R. Young, 'Proslavery Ideology', in: Paquette, R., and Smith, M., (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Slavery in the Americas* (Oxford 2010) 399-423.

⁸⁵ Deyle, *Carry me back*, 4.

Lower South where the demand for slaves was highest.⁸⁶ The interregional slave trade formed an economic bond between the Upper South and the Lower South, thereby connecting the two main Southern subregions. As the monetary value of human property increased, the slaveholding class became richer. This meant the increase in slave prices played an important role in the emergence of a national slave market. By linking the two main sub-regions of the South into a common economic interest and thereby making the entire slaveholding class richer, the creation of a national slave market strengthened the region's commitment to slave trade. In effect, it made domestic slave trade an essential part of the southern slave system.⁸⁷

Fugitive slave narratives on domestic slave trade

Opponents of slavery like Pennington also noticed the economic stakes of the domestic slave trade were high, which is why the movement shifted its focus to the domestic slave trade. The antislavery movement acknowledged the vital role of the interregional slave trade between the Upper and Lower South as an engine for maintaining the Southern slave trade and considered this the key to destroy the slavery institution for once and for all.⁸⁸ In addition, the movement saw an opportunity for a political attack on the domestic slave trade through the Commerce Clause of the US Constitution, which meant the interstate trade was subject to regulation by Congress.⁸⁹ Through petitions addressed to Congress and the launch of a campaign in which pressure was steadily increased by spreading criticism on the domestic slave trade, the antislavery movement sought to demand abolition of slavery. The production and distribution of pamphlets, newspapers and books by the abolitionist movement provided a large dossier of supporting material that could be used in their political arguments. In particular, the fugitive slave textual community, which produced eyewitness accounts of runaway slaves, played a crucial role in the abolitionist movement. In the majority of the slave narratives studied for this research, the domestic slave trade was an important theme. By recording their experiences of being seen as commodities, being sold into the Lower South, separated and forced to migrate southwards, a powerful stand could be taken against the proslavery movement.⁹⁰ Ultimately, three subthemes were identified within the theme *domestic slave trade*: (1) commodification of the body, (2) speculation and sale, and (3) forced migration southwards in coffles. The identified subthemes and associated narratives within this theme are highlighted in Table 2 in the Appendices. Table 1 lists the full titles of the corresponding narratives. The table shows that there is a large overlap in the number of narratives

⁸⁶ Deyle, *Carry me back*, 16.

⁸⁷ Richard Bell, 'The Great Jugular Vein of Slavery: New Histories of the Domestic Slave Trade', *History Compass* 11:12 (2013) 1150-1164, 1155-1156; S. Deyle, 'The Domestic Slave Trade in America: The Lifeblood of the Southern Slave System', in: Johnson, W., (ed.), *The Chattel Principle: internal slave trades in the Americas* (Yale 2004) 91-116.

⁸⁸ Deyle, *Carry me back*, 192

⁸⁹ Bell, 'The Great Jugular Vein of Slavery', 1159; Deyle, *Carry me back*, 192.

⁹⁰ Sinha, *The Slave's Cause*, 421.

and associated subthemes. This means that despite differences in person, place and time, there are many similarities in the argumentative structure of the narratives. The following in-depth analysis will attempt to explain these similarities.

Commodification

The chattel principle, as articulated by Pennington, showed how easily a slave could be transformed into a tradable commodity. Whether a slave was in an "ill or favoured condition" regarding personal treatment, it was the chattel principle that robbed him of "his manhood," and transferred "his ownership in himself," and "the proprietorship of his wife and children" to another.⁹¹ Unlike slave owners, who often argued that the slave trade was confined to speculative slave markets, Fugitive slave narrators had a very different idea of slaves as commodities because of the constant threat of sale: it could happen to any of them, and they were all expendable. As Walter Johnson states: each slave was comparable to another slave and replaceable because of his or her monetary value, with differences being factored into the price.⁹²

The commodification of enslaved people could manifest itself in a number of ways. One form of commodification was the monetary valuation of enslaved people. For example, John Quincy Adams, a fugitive slave from Virginia who fled to Pennsylvania in 1862, described that his "old master's family" was "very wealthy, but off of negroes and land," and "you would see them going around sometimes and put their hands on one of the little negroes, and say, "here is \$1,000, or \$1,500 or \$2,000.""⁹³ Another form of commodification is that personal information, such as an exact age, is often not known, but is usually expressed in indefinite dates such as "corn-planting," "corn-husking" or "Christmas."⁹⁴ William Parker, leader of the Christiana Riot in 1851 and a fugitive from Maryland who fled to Pennsylvania and later to Canada, explained how slaveholders are indifferent about the age of their slaves, unlike "the pedigree and age of favorite horses and dogs."⁹⁵ Only when "they want to purchase," they pay attention to select "young persons, though not one in twenty can tell year, month, or day."⁹⁶ Parker ended with the fact that he himself is to this day uncertain how old he is. The same was true for James Watkins, a fugitive slave from Maryland who fled to Connecticut in 1844. Watkins appealed to the Christian morale of his readers by confronting them with the question of how "the chattel of a man" like himself, dares to deprive him of his birthright, "the right to act and think, and

⁹¹ Pennington, *The Fugitive Blacksmith*, xii.

⁹² Johnson, *Soul by Soul*, 58.

⁹³ John Quincy Adams, *Narrative of the Life of John Quincy Adams, When in Slavery, and Now as a Freeman* (Harrisburg 1872) 8-9.

⁹⁴ William Parker, *The Freedman's Story: In Two Parts*, Part I (The Atlantic Monthly, 1866) 157.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

speak” in the sight of “High Heaven.”⁹⁷ Moreover, according to Henry Watson, who was born into slavery in Virginia in 1813, escaped to Boston and published his narrative in 1848, slaves rarely have only one name: “Slaves seldom have but one name; and I never heard her called by any other. I was at that time called Bill.”⁹⁸ The narrators showed that slave owners were careless with the personal information of enslaved people. This is an important manifestation of commodification: these people were not seen as human beings with an age and a name, but as a product to be sold, and only information relevant to that purpose was remembered.

In response to commodification, several narrators confronted their readers with the consequences of what dehumanisation and commodification did to enslaved people. Leonard Black, a fugitive slave from Maryland who fled to New England and published his narrative in 1847, for example, described the “untold curses of slavery” when he explained the implications of commodification: “to be at the will of another, to be owned like a cow or horse, and liable at any moment to be sold to the highest bidder, to be transported to a distant part of the country, leaving the dearest relatives behind; to be, in fine, ground down mentally and physically,” is “death to the slaves.”⁹⁹ The “death” Black described here can refer to two kinds of death: physical death or “social death” as articulated by Daina Ramey Berry, which refers to depression, fear and despair.¹⁰⁰ In this way, Black emphasised enslaved people as living human beings in the face of the inhumane commodification of their bodies.

The same can be said of the comparison between enslaved people and cattle being traded and sold: the contradiction between humanity and inhumanity is central. Several narrators made the comparison of being traded and sold like cattle. William Anderson, a fugitive slave from Virginia who escaped to Indiana and published his narrative in 1857, explained what it was like to be “reduced to chattelism – bought and sold like goods or merchandise, oxen or horses!”¹⁰¹ He described he has nothing he “can call his own – not even his wife, or children, or his own body.”¹⁰² Similarly, Samuel Ringgold Ward, who was born into slavery in Maryland and fled with his family to New Jersey, described how he and his mother were sold like cattle. Ward explained that he was a “sickly boy” and therefore the sale was delayed until he was recovered by mockingly stating that “the young animal was to run awhile longer with his (...) dam.”¹⁰³ William and Ellen Craft's narrative also made the

⁹⁷ James Watkins, *Narrative of the Life of James Watkins, Formerly a “Chattel” in Maryland, U.S.; Containing an Account of His Escape from Slavery, Together with an Appeal on Behalf of Three Millions of Such “Pieces of Property,” Still Held Under the Standard of the Eagle* (Bolton, Eng. 1852) 13.

⁹⁸ Henry Watson, *Narrative of Henry Watson, a Fugitive Slave* (Boston 1848) 5.

⁹⁹ Leonard Black, *The Life and Sufferings of Leonard Black, a Fugitive from Slavery. Written by Himself* (New Bedford 1847) 5-6.

¹⁰⁰ Berry, “Soul values and American slavery,” 204-205.

¹⁰¹ William Anderson, *Life and Narrative of William J. Anderson, Twenty-four Years a Slave* (Chicago 1857) 6.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

¹⁰³ Samuel Ringgold Ward, *Autobiography of a Fugitive Negro: His Anti-Slavery Labours in the United States, Canada & England* (London 1855) 17-18.

comparison with commodification and being sold like cattle. Both born into slavery in Georgia, they escaped together to Boston and later to England to avoid recapture under the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850. It was in London that they wrote their narrative, which was published in 1860. After the Civil War and the abolition of slavery, the family returned to Georgia in 1868, where they spent the rest of their lives. Craft described how the very thought that he and his wife "were held as chattels," that they were "deprived of all legal rights," and the thought that they could not regard their "bones and sinews, which God gave us" as their own, while their owner, "a tyrant," lived "in idleness and luxury," had haunted them for years.¹⁰⁴

Another form of resistance to commodification was described by Charles Ball, a fugitive slave from Maryland who was sold into Georgia, escaped and was recaptured multiple times trying to free his family. Eventually, after buying his family free, they had been sold into slavery again and Ball had to return to Pennsylvania to minimize the chance of being recaptured. Ball discussed the significance of the high value of enslaved people: "Slaves are regarded, in the south, as the most precious of all earthly possessions; and at the same time, as a precarious and hazardous kind of property, in the enjoyment of which the master is not safe."¹⁰⁵ Ball referred to the constant threat of rebellion. A dichotomy existed: while there was a constant threat of being sold, there was also a constant threat of rebellion or resistance among the slaves. In this way, Ball showed that, contrary to what slave owners wanted people to believe, enslaved people were in a position of power, and the oppression of enslaved people could be understood as a form of vulnerability on the part of the enslavers.¹⁰⁶

By confronting their readers with the realities of commodification, slave narrators showed a powerful picture of the people behind the commoditized slaves. Pennington asked his readers whether a man "has no sense of honour" because he was born a slave, and ended with the question, "Has he no need of character?"¹⁰⁷ He emphasised that despite the dehumanisation and commodification of their bodies, enslaved people had a human identity with norms and values that placed them above slave traders and owners. By valuing themselves, the narrators retained their dignity and rejected the price tag placed on them. This corresponds to what Berry calls the *spiritual soul value*, which resisted monetisation and represented their self-worth through their spirit and soul of who they were as human beings.¹⁰⁸ By valuing their souls, a kind of survival tactic against commodification emerged: while enslavers objectified them as commodities for auction, enslaved people's souls could not be owned or traded. That was the enslaved person's own and was cherished. Enslaved people were the only ones

¹⁰⁴ William Craft, *Running a Thousand Miles for Freedom; or, the Escape of William and Ellen Craft from Slavery* (London 1860) 1-2.

¹⁰⁵ Charles Ball, *Fifty Years in Chains, or, The Life of an American Slave* (New York 1859) 405.

¹⁰⁶ Johnson, 'Introduction: The Future Store', 6-7.

¹⁰⁷ Pennington, *The Fugitive Blacksmith*, xii.

¹⁰⁸ Daina R. Berry, *The price for their pound of flesh: the value of the enslaved, from womb to grave, in the building of a nation* (Boston 2017) 6.

who could own their souls.¹⁰⁹ At the same time, Pennington observed that “however humiliating and degrading it is to his feelings to see his name written down among the beasts of the field,” because of the chattel principle it was “precisely the place, and the only place assigned to him.”¹¹⁰

By explaining how the commodification associated with the chattel principle could not be avoided if slavery continued, Pennington urged his readers to take responsibility and use their political voices to speak out on behalf of the enslaved: “I beg our Anglo-Saxon brethren to accustom themselves to think that we need something more than mere kindness. We ask for justice, truth and honour as other men do.”¹¹¹ Commodification was used by the community of fugitive slave writers as an argument for abolition, to argue that slavery could not take place in a ‘proper’ way, as proslavery activists argued. The narrators used their personal experiences to show that slavery was an inhumane system in which people were no longer seen as human beings but as tradable commodities. The only solution, the narrators argued, was for their readers to express their humanity and work for the abolition of slavery.

Speculation and sale

Among the more than one million slaves traded in the domestic slave trade, most were sold from regions of the Upper South through itinerant speculators and slave traders into the Lower South. There were several scenarios that could lead to a sale: the slave owner could be in financial trouble, debase or relocate, but enslaved people could also be sold for extra earnings or as a form of punishment. Tadman argues that most Upper South slaveholders who sold enslaved people to slave traders did so by choice: first, it was profitable because there was natural growth in the slave population; second, the exportation of slaves constituted a “supplemented income” in addition to successful staple crop production.¹¹²

How was the value of enslaved people determined? Fugitive slave John Brown argued that “the price of a slave” depended largely on the “general appearance he or she presents to the intending buyer.”¹¹³ This corresponds with two forms of external assessment Daina Ramey Berry has formulated: appraisal and market value. Appraisal refers to projected values that planters, doctors, traders and others assigned to enslaved people based on their potential labour performance. Market value refers to a selling price for their human flesh, negotiated in a competitive market.¹¹⁴ The studied narratives reveal what this negotiation was like in practice, especially at public auctions. Although most sales

¹⁰⁹ Berry, “Soul values and American slavery,” 204.

¹¹⁰ Pennington, *The Fugitive Blacksmith*, xii.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹¹² Michael Tadman, ‘The Interregional Slave Trade in the History and Myth-Making of the U.S. South’ in: Walter Johnson (ed.), *The Chattel Principle* (Yale 2004) 117-142, 129.

¹¹³ John Brown, *Slave Life in Georgia: A Narrative of the Life, Sufferings, and Escape of John Brown, a Fugitive Slave, Now in England* (1854) 115; Caitlin Rosenthal, *Accounting for Slavery: Masters and Management* (Harvard 2018) 140.

¹¹⁴ Berry, *The price for their pound of flesh*, 6-7.

were private, most narrators wrote about public auctions because these were especially revealing about the treatment of enslaved people and could therefore be more meaningful to their readers.¹¹⁵ The narrators highlighted the speculation and manipulation of the sellers, and in what ways their bodies were turned into commodities: traders changed the appearances of slaves, instructed slaves to behave in a certain way, and would tell backstories that did not correspond with the actual backstory of the slave.

Fugitive slave William Anderson described the extent to which buyers' perceptions were manipulated by speculation. Being driven from Virginia to a slave pen in south Natchez, he witnessed scenes which were "too wicked to mention."¹¹⁶ Anderson described how slaves had to shave and wash "in greasy pot liquor, to make them look sleek and nice," their hair had to be combed and they had to put on their best clothes.¹¹⁷ Then, "when called out to be examined," the men and women had to stand in separate rows, until they were "picked out and taken into a room, and examined."¹¹⁸ By giving an insight into how slave trading was done in practice and what it meant for those who were sold, Anderson also emphasized the deceitful character of the slave traders. He made readers aware of the impact of "examinations" on enslaved people, especially enslaved women, and how they were abused by slave owners and potential buyers: "See a large, rough slaveholder, take a poor female slave into a room, make her strip, then feel of and examine her, as though she were a pig, or a hen, or merchandise. O, how can a poor slave husband or father stand and see his wife, daughters and sons thus treated."¹¹⁹ Louisa Picquet, a fugitive who was born into slavery in South Carolina in 1828 and escaped to Ohio with her children in 1847, described a similar situation, where all the men are placed in one room and all the women in another, "and then whoever wants to buy come and examine, and ask you whole lot of questions."¹²⁰ Picquet continued that "they began to take the clothes of me," but that her buyer didn't think that was necessary and bought her: "he didn't strip me only just under my shoulders."¹²¹ Picquet's example demonstrated the ease with which enslaved people were dehumanised, and how it was the exception rather than the rule when this practice did not continue.

This form of dehumanisation through speculation is further explored by Henry Watson, who was born into slavery in Virginia in 1813 and escaped by ship to Boston in 1839. Watson's ironic description of public auctions was intended to show his readers the dehumanisation that took place: "The auctioneer was busy examining the slaves before the sale commenced. At last everything was

¹¹⁵ Johnson, 'Introduction: The Future Store', 5.

¹¹⁶ Anderson, *Life and Narrative of William J. Anderson*, 14.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹²⁰ Louisa Picquet, *Louisa Picquet, the Octoroon, or, Inside Views of Southern Domestic Life* (New York 1861) 16.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*

ready, and the traffic in human flesh began."¹²² Likewise, James Watkins introduced himself as if he were being sold at auction, while at the same time showing what it meant for enslaved people to be traded as commodities through speculation: "And now, behold be a man! strong, active, energetic, but not owned by myself! ... behold me! body, soul and spirit valued at 900 dollars, and Slave"¹²³ The narrators confronted their readers with the impact of speculation on enslaved people by describing how negotiations and bids took place. This was done to emphasise their dehumanisation and treatment as chattel. Charles Ball described how he was held back from sale along with "several of the stoutest men and handsomest women."¹²⁴ Only after the others had been sold at lower prices was Ball's group announced by the speculator, "who made a most extravagant eulogium upon our good qualities, and capacity to perform labour."¹²⁵ William Wells Brown, a runaway slave born on a Kentucky plantation in 1814 who escaped from Ohio to Canada in 1834 after two failed attempts, described a similar situation when he explained how enslaved people had to prove their worth at auction by demonstrating physical vitality and emotional insensibility: "Before the slaves were exhibited for sale, they were dressed and driven out into the yard. Some were set to dancing, some to jumping, some to singing, and some to playing cards."¹²⁶ This, according to Brown, was done to make them look "cheerful and happy."¹²⁷ Physical characteristics and qualities were openly discussed in public auctions. By describing how negotiations and bidding took place, narrators like Brown were able to give a clear picture of how enslaved people were seen and sold as commodities. Public auctions thus came to symbolise the slave trade in the antislavery campaign.

Henry Bibb, who was born into slavery in Kentucky in 1815 and escaped to Canada in 1837 after several attempts, wrote of a similar situation in which enslaved people had to behave in a prescribed way: "They were made to stand up straight, and look as sprightly as they could; and when they were asked a question, they had to answer it as promptly as they could, and try to induce the spectators to buy them."¹²⁸ If they did not do that properly, "they were severely paddled after the spectators were gone."¹²⁹ Bibb argued that one of the most "rigorous examinations" however, "is on the mental capacity."¹³⁰ He described that buyers are very careful "to inquire whether a slave who is for sale can read or write," because when that is the case, "it undermines the whole fabric of his chattelhood," and increases the risk of running away and "exterminating war against American

¹²² Watson, *Narrative of Henry Watson*, 8.

¹²³ Watkins, *Narrative of the Life of James Watkins*, 13.

¹²⁴ Ball, *Fifty Years in Chains*, 126.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*

¹²⁶ William Wells Brown, *Narrative of William W. Brown, a Fugitive Slave. Written by Himself* (Boston 1847) 45-46.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 46-47.

¹²⁸ Henry Bibb, *Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb, an American Slave, Written by Himself* (New York 1849) 103.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 101.

slavery."¹³¹ This way, Bibb offered insight not only into slaveholders' fears of rebellion and revolt on their grounds, but also into the growing resistance and threats to the continuation of slavery in general. With this argument, Bibb linked directly to the antislavery movement's argument for the emancipation of the enslaved and the abolition of slavery. On the one hand, the textual community of fugitive slave narrators intended to shock their readers by describing their personal accounts of speculation and being sold, which included both experiences of physical and psychological violence and the dubious nature of speculators. On the other hand, narrators like Bibb managed to turn this oppression into a fear of rebellion, in which the violence against enslaved people symbolised this fear.

Forced migration

In 1858, the fugitive slave Isaac Williams wrote about his mother Sally, who was born around the year 1796 "in a small cabin on a plantation not many miles from Fayetteville, North Carolina."¹³² About seventeen years later Isaac Williams himself was born. Williams wrote that "she loved him with a mother's tenderness, but not with a mother's joy;" because "young as she was," she had experienced the harsh reality of slavery, which resulted in the fact "that she could not regard life to one in her condition as a blessing."¹³³ The family was broken up in the following years. Family members were sold off one by one: first Sally's husband, then her three children Daniel, Isaac and three-year-old Lewis. For Sally and her family, this had devastating consequences. Williams described how Sally tried to cope with the separation of her family by doing "her tasks mechanically," how "weeks went by, during which she went her daily rounds in a kind of stupor, and of which afterward she could remember nothing" and "her step, which was once so elastic," grew "slow and heavy."¹³⁴ Three months later she met the speculator who sold Lewis, and he told her he felt sorry she lost her boy, "but then we must expect such things in this world of trial," and stated that her son probably "forgot by this time that he ever had a mother."¹³⁵ Sally's only answer was "a low groan" as she turned away.¹³⁶

This interaction of Sally and the speculator described by Williams reveals the centrality of the domestic slave trade in antebellum southern society. While the speculator expressed regret that Sally has lost her youngest son, he tried to defend his actions by explaining that this is the way of this "world of trial," distancing himself from his own role in the system by invoking the chattel principle: the right to possess and trade human beings. Consequentially, the actual indifference of the speculator about the separation of Sally and her youngest son Lewis is telling. Not only does it demonstrate the ease

¹³¹ Bibb, *Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb*, 101-102.

¹³² Isaac Williams, *Aunt Sally: or, The Cross the Way of Freedom. A Narrative of the Slave-life and Purchase of the Mother of Rev. Isaac Williams of Detroit, Michigan* (Cincinnati 1858) 25.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 63

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 91

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 95, 97

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 96-97

with which the separation and sale of enslaved families, with children in particular, was handled in the domestic slave trade, but it also shows that the 'business sense' of the buyer or trader prevailed over everything else. Tadman's historical research shows that about one in three children in the Upper South states of Maryland and Virginia were separated from their parents; either by the sale of the child; the sale of the mother along with the child; or the sale of the father or mother.¹³⁷ Although a sale was often settled in a relatively short time, it had major and lifelong consequences for the person being sold and for those left behind. For many, the separation created a traumatic experience and found themselves in a state of mourning. Charles Ball, for example, recounted that after his entire family was sold and he and his father were left behind, his "father never recovered from the effects of the shock, which this sudden and overwhelming ruin of his family gave him."¹³⁸

By describing their family ties and traumatic experiences during these events, fugitive slave narrators sought to counter the idea of turning people into commodities and instead emphasise enslaved people as human beings. For example, William Craft wrote with grief and anger about his sister's separation during the auction without being allowed to say goodbye to her: "The thought of the harsh auctioneer not allowing me to bid my dear sister farewell, sent red-hot indignation darting like lightning through every vein. It quenched my tears, and appeared to set my brain on fire, and made me crave for power to avenge our wrongs! But, alas! we were only slaves, and had no legal rights; consequently we were compelled to smother our wounded feelings, and crouch beneath the iron heel of despotism."¹³⁹ Ellen Craft (partner of William Craft) was separated from her mother as a child. Like her husband, she condemned "the wretched system of American slavery."¹⁴⁰ As opposed to William Craft, who emphasised pain and anger and his inability as a male to direct the fate of his family, Ellen Craft's part highlighted the mother-child relationship and how separating families destroyed those relationships: "She had seen so many other children separated from their parents in this cruel manner, that the mere thought of her ever becoming the mother of a child (...) appeared to fill her very soul with horror."¹⁴¹

It was necessary to make their readers aware of the severity of the situation by explaining the traumatic consequences for both those driven south in coffles and those left behind, as well as to counter the proslavery argument that black people lacked emotions. James Watkins, for example, wrote about how his master ridiculed "the idea of black people having any feelings."¹⁴² William Green, a fugitive slave born in Talbot County, Maryland who fled to New York and later settled in

¹³⁷ Michael Tadman, *Speculators and Slaves*, 7, 12, 42.

¹³⁸ Ball, *Fifty Years in Chains*, 15.

¹³⁹ Craft, *Running a Thousand Miles for Freedom*, 13.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 27.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴² Watkins, *Narrative of the Life of James Watkins*, 11.

Massachusetts, wrote about his younger brother. He described how he lost his brother when he is sold to "the far South to toil and die upon a sugar or cotton plantation."¹⁴³ Green addressed his readers by asking them to consider for a moment how they would feel if a brother or sister were taken from them, "chained with a heavy iron, and driven off" and never to see them again: "What would be your feelings? Would your blood not boil with you, and would not you visit with sudden vengeance the perpetrator of such a deed?"¹⁴⁴ By asking their readers how they would feel if they were in their position, Green was able to make readers think about the consequences of forced migration for enslaved people.

Isaac Williams confronted his readers in a similar way when he described how his mother Sally moved south in a coffle: "All had been torn from home and friends, and were going every hour further from what they hold dear. Is it strange that their steps were slow, and that every gloomy and evil passion was aroused in their hearts?"¹⁴⁵ As well as raising a rhetorical question, he also appealed to the emotional empathy of his readers by describing the forced migration in a coffle that his mother, Sally, had to endure. Similarly, William Anderson described the grief and panic he witnessed among enslaved people as he migrated south in a coffle and ended up in a slave pen in Natchez: "too shocking to relate--for the sake of money," families "are sold separately, sometimes two hundred miles apart, although their hopes would be to be sold together."¹⁴⁶ Sometimes their little children are torn from them and sent far away to a distant country, never to see them again. O, such crying and weeping when parting from each other!"¹⁴⁷ In the case of Henry Bibb, family ties were actually used to prevent Bibb from running away. Bibb described how he travelled south by ship with his family in coffles, and stated he could flee "had it not been for the sake of my wife and child who was with me. I could see no chance to get them off, and I could not leave them in that condition."¹⁴⁸ Garrison, Bibb's master, knew of Bibb's earlier "sacrifices" to "rescue them from slavery" and his "attachment was too strong" "to run off and leave them in his hands."¹⁴⁹ In this way, writers such as Green, Williams, Anderson and Bibb showed readers the importance of family ties in slave families, the destruction that slavery inflicted on their families, and the cruelty of slave owners in separating families.

A subtle form of resistance that emerged in the narratives is an appeal to the afterlife. As Christians, they found comfort in the fact that in the afterlife they would be reunited with those from whom they had been separated.¹⁵⁰ For example, John Thompson, a fugitive who fled from Maryland to Pennsylvania, described how, when his sister was sold to the Lower South, family found comfort in

¹⁴³ William Green, *Narrative of Events in the Life of William Green, (Formerly a Slave). Written by Himself* (Springfield MA 1853) 6.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁵ Williams, *Aunt Sally; or, The Cross the Way of Freedom*, 114.

¹⁴⁶ Anderson, *Life and Narrative of William J. Anderson*, 14.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁸ Bibb, *Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb*, 100.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁰ Deyle, *Carry me back*, 269; Berry, *The price for their pound of flesh*, 94, 110.

their faith that they would see each other again after death: “though we are separated in body, our separation is only for a season, and if we are faithful, we shall meet again where partings are no more.”¹⁵¹ William Parker described a similar situation when he witnesses how several enslaved people were separated from their families to be sold south: “parents and children, husbands and wives, brothers and sisters, were separated to meet no more on earth,” referring to the fact that they would see each other again in the afterlife.¹⁵² Henry Box Brown, born in Louisa County, Virginia and enslaved for thirty-three years before escaping to Philadelphia in a three-by-two-foot box, also wrote how, when separated from his wife, “the look of mutual love” they shared before being separated was “all the token” they gave each other that they would “yet meet in heaven.”¹⁵³ They were grieving because they would probably never see each other alive again. At the same time, by holding on to their faith, they created a form of inviolability when separated from each other: they were separated from each other in this life, but they will see each other again in the afterlife, thus placing their faith in an ultimate form of freedom after death. Here, too, there is a dichotomy in argumentation: on the one hand, the textual community of fugitive slaves showed the consequences of forced migration by recording personal experiences, arguing that slavery cannot be justified and to advocate for its abolition; on the other hand, by deploying an alternative definition of freedom through Christian thought, they were able to emphasise their own humanity and dignity and move away from the identity of enslaved imposed by slave traders and owners.

The threat and reality of the domestic slave trade was highlighted in the testimonies of enslaved people for several reasons. Central in the argumentation of the narratives was the “chattel principle” formulated by fugitive slave James Pennington - the right to own and trade human beings - and its relation to commodification, speculation and perception, and forced migration. By describing their personal experiences of the trade, the narrators were able to show their readers the greatest crime of slavery: the trade in human bodies as if they were cattle. Two features explain why slave narratives played a crucial role within the abolitionist movement. First, they were important eyewitness accounts that served as counter-arguments to proslavery arguments and as expressions of political protest. Second, through a coherent discourse, fugitive slave narratives formed a textual community within the abolitionist movement that sought to persuade northern readers to support the abolition of slavery.

¹⁵¹ John Thompson, *The Life of John Thompson, a Fugitive Slave; Containing His History of 25 Years in Bondage, and His Providential Escape, Written by Himself* (Worcester 1856) 16.

¹⁵² Parker, *The Freedman’s Story*, 154.

¹⁵³ Henry Box Brown, *Narrative of the Life of Henry Box Brown, Written by Himself* (Manchester 1851) 47.

Chapter Two

Opposition to paternalism: The “worthiness” of African Americans of (Christian) assistance

In 1848, Henry Watson, a runaway slave who had been born into slavery in Virginia in 1813 and eventually escaped to Boston, wrote about a sermon justifying slavery on the basis of paternalistic (Christian) values which was widely published and circulated in the South. It began with the phrase "All things whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye even so unto them," meaning that you should treat everyone as you would want them to treat you if you were in their place and they were in yours.¹⁵⁴ Watson explained how according to this reasoning enslaved people were expected to serve their masters in the way that they themselves would want to be served: "You are servants; do, therefore, as you wish to be done by."¹⁵⁵ Furthermore, enslaved people were seen as servants not only of their masters but also of God. As long as they devoted themselves to their duties as servants, they would ultimately prosper: "you will be both good servants to your masters and to your God, who requires this of you, and will reward you well for it, if you do it for the sake of conscience, in obedience to his commands."¹⁵⁶ It was God's will that enslaved people lived in bondage because according to God this "condition" was best for them in this world. As long as they fulfilled their duty, God would help them to go to heaven. Any "discontent" at not being "free or rich or great like some others" was seen as "quarrelling" with their "Heavenly Master and finding fault with God Himself."¹⁵⁷ Watson described how enslaved people were led to believe how "God made them slaves, that they are always to remain slaves, and bear with patience and humility the unjust punishment they receive on earth, that it may be their glory hereafter."¹⁵⁸ At the end of this part of his narrative, Watson remarked: "such, my readers, is the doctrine which is preached to the poor slave."¹⁵⁹

The same doctrine gave slave owners and traders a powerful position, as they were appointed by God for their position to rule over enslaved people. It was their role and responsibility to care for their slaves and act on their behalf, with the idea that it was best for everyone because it was God's will.¹⁶⁰ In this way, they fulfilled their Christian morality and were able to show that slavery was compatible with Christianity and even beneficial to enslaved people. By claiming that they were acting on behalf of the people they had bought to do their bidding, those active in the slave trade sought to

¹⁵⁴ Watson, *Narrative of Henry Watson*, 29.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 29.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 30.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 31.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁰ Johnson, *Soul by Soul*, 107.

legitimise their actions based on the chattel principle through paternalism.¹⁶¹ This connection between the chattel principle and paternalism has been articulated by Walter Johnson as the slaveholders' idea of "a person with a price" that was "smoothed over and covered up" with a constant tendency to filter their actions through notions of paternalism.¹⁶² Johnson sees paternalism as a proslavery language, developed by those who had an active interest in the slave trade and had to form a defence against increasing criticism of the trade from outside.¹⁶³ Therefore, this chapter examines the following question: how did enslaved people's testimonies counter the proslavery ideology of paternalism and contribute to the construction of broad and coherent arguments for the immediate abolition of slavery in the southern states?

Although paternalism was already a familiar phenomenon, its use in the antebellum slavery debate created a new set of ideas about slavery, particularly about the relationship between master and slave. Between 1790 and 1820, a proslavery campaign emerged to communicate this paternalistic ideology to the public and legitimise the growing slave economy in the South. This campaign focused on transforming slavery into a 'domestic' institution, emphasising domestic values between master and slave. Through the use of religious and literary texts that supported their views on slavery, an ideal 'moral master' emerged to convey to slave owners that they should maintain personal relationships with their slaves and be able to show that they could make the best decisions for their slaves and had their best interests at heart.¹⁶⁴ The proslavery community turned to these ideas to legitimise the growing southern slave economy in the face of growing resistance from inside, criticism from outside, and a federal ban on the foreign slave trade. In the Upper South, economic growth in tobacco production stagnated. In the Lower South, however, there was an explosion in cotton production, which only increased dependence on slave labour and had huge financial interests at stake with the aforementioned threats. Lacy Ford identified several factors that the proslavery community had to address in order to ensure the continued existence of slavery: the search for 'slave management techniques' that would increase productivity and the natural growth of new slaves and reduce resistance; the opportunities for expansion of cotton plantations in the Lower South; and the importance of presenting slavery to the outside world as a humane institution in response to increasing antislavery criticism. Using paternalism as a defensible ideology, efforts were made to create a social

¹⁶¹ Johnson, *Soul by Soul*, 107-108.

¹⁶² Ibid., 217; Lacy Ford, 'Reconsidering the Internal Slave Trade: Paternalism, Markets and the Character of the Old South', in: Walter Johnson (ed.), *The Chattel Principle* (Yale 2004) 143-164, 148-149.

¹⁶³ Johnson, *Soul by Soul*, 22-23.

¹⁶⁴ Jeffrey Young, *Domesticating Slavery: The Master Class in Georgia and South Carolina, 1670-1837* (North Carolina 1999) 123-160.

system within slavery in which, as Lacy Ford has put it, "the morality of masters could be easily defended, the treatment of slaves justified, and the safety of whites guaranteed."¹⁶⁵

Fugitive slave narratives on paternalistic ideals

In reaction to the growing claims in the South about the paternalist essence of the institution of slavery, Watson and other slave narrators constructed an argument that directly countered paternalism by describing the consequences of the domestic slave trade for enslaved people. It was through descriptions of the inhumanity of the system, for example by writing about extreme forms of (sexual) abuse or the Christian immorality of their masters, that the community of fugitive slave writers was able to expose the hypocrisy and hypocrisy of paternalism as a language of humanitarianism in the slave owners' world. Ultimately, three subthemes were identified within the theme *paternalism*: (1) family trauma, (2) domestic values, and (3) Christian morality. The identified subthemes and associated narratives within this theme are highlighted in Table 2 in the Appendices. Table 1 lists the full titles of the corresponding narratives. It becomes clear once again that the narratives convey a coherent discourse. The following in-depth analysis attempts to explain these similarities in argumentative structure.

Family trauma: extreme violence and sexual abuse

Chattel slavery as practised before the Civil War was legally defined in so-called Slave Codes. Although these varied slightly from state to state, they came down to the same point: slaves were the personal property of their owners and were bought and sold as commodities.¹⁶⁶ In addition, slaves did not have the right to testify in a lawsuit against a white person, were not allowed to enter into contracts, leave the plantation without permission, beat a white person (also not in self-defence), buy and sell goods, possess firearms, meet without the presence of a white person, possess anti-slavery literature, or visit the homes of whites or free blacks.¹⁶⁷ Because slaves were seen as property, and not as people, this meant that slave owners – the legal owners of their 'property' – also had the legal right to set their own boundaries of punishment in chattel slavery without repercussions: killing a slave was almost never considered murder, and rape of a slave was treated as a form of trespassing. As a result, enslaved people were often subjected to horrific cruelty, sexual violence and sometimes murder.¹⁶⁸ By detailing the extensive cruelties and sexual assaults by slave owners and overseers in their narratives, fugitive slave narrators challenged the pro-slavery campaign that the relationship between slave and master

¹⁶⁵ Lacy Ford, *Deliver Us from Evil: The Slavery Question in the Old South* (Oxford 2009) 143.

¹⁶⁶ J.R. Wunder, J.W. Ely, B.G. Bond, *The New Encyclopedia of Southern Culture* (North Carolina 2014) 128.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

was not only commercially but also morally based. It also meant that proslavery campaigners could no longer argue that Northern criticism was misplaced and that Northerners had no idea what the situation of slaves in the South was really like. There were now eyewitness accounts with a clear message: slavery was real, it was widespread, and it was cruel.

There are several ways in which the narrators tried to engage their readers. The first way was to confront the reader with the extreme forms of violence and the impact it had on themselves and their families. The narratives described how family members and other fellow slaves endured violence in which the narrators expressed their despair and distress in these situations. For example, William Wells Brown described "the position which an American slave occupies" by recounting his experience in which his mother was being whipped: "I could hear every crack of the whip, and every groan and cry of my poor mother."¹⁶⁹ Brown elaborated on this memory by stating that his experience had taught him that "nothing can be more heart-rending than for one to see a dear and beloved mother or sister tortured, and to hear their cries, and not be able to render them assistance."¹⁷⁰ The same kind of helplessness described James Curry, a fugitive who fled from North Carolina to Pennsylvania in 1837 and moved to Canada a year later, when his mother was beaten by her master and one of her master's daughters whom she raised: "Oh! It was dreadful, to see the girl whom my poor mother had taken of from her childhood thus beating her, and I must stand there, and did not dare to crook my finger in her defence."¹⁷¹ Curry described the traumatic memory as "one of the most daring scenes I ever passed through" and that he would have given his life to protect her "if I had dared."¹⁷² James Pennington similarly described his traumatic experience of his master's verbal and physical violence against his father and the trauma this caused to their family: "This act created an open rupture with our family (...) the spirit of the whole family was roused."¹⁷³ By asking his readers: "How would you expect a son to feel at such a sight?", he emphasised both his (male) sense of responsibility and the trauma experienced by his family.¹⁷⁴

Second, in addition to describing a sense of helplessness, the narrators focused in particular on the hypocrisy and opportunistic attitudes of their masters and overseers as the cause of their trauma in order to counter paternalistic ideals. William Anderson addressed the hypocrisy of slave owners by stating that "the most of slaveholders are very intemperate indeed."¹⁷⁵ He explained this with an example of how his own master's misbehaviour resulted in extreme violence and cruelty: "My master often went to the house, got drunk, and then came out to the field to whip, cut, slash, curse,

¹⁶⁹ Brown, *Narrative of William W. Brown*, 15.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 16.

¹⁷¹ James Curry, *Narrative of James Curry, A Fugitive Slave* (The Liberator 1840) paragraph 6 (no pages available).

¹⁷² *Ibid.*

¹⁷³ Pennington, *The Fugitive Blacksmith*, 7.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

swear, beat and knock down several, for the smallest offense, or nothing at all."¹⁷⁶ Anderson went on to discuss the strict rules enslaved people had to abide by from their master by describing how they were obliged to work exceedingly hard, and were not permitted to talk or laugh with each other while working in the field" or "speak to a neighbor slave who chanced to pass along the road."¹⁷⁷ Anderson described what happened if, according to the slave owner, he did not follow these rules, or did not work hard enough in his eyes: "How great my sufferings were the reader cannot conceive. I was frequently knocked down, and then whipped up, and made to work on in the midst of my cries, tears and prayers. It did appear as if the man had no heart at all."¹⁷⁸ He concluded this traumatic recollection by saying that his "sufferings" were "too intense" for his "poor brain to describe" and that his "bodily anguish" could only be understood by someone who had experienced the same.¹⁷⁹

John Thompson addressed the cruelties committed by his master by arguing that "he would whip unreasonably and without cause."¹⁸⁰ His master also forced "one slave to flog another, the husband his wife; the mother her daughter; or the father his son." Thompson recounted that this practice seemed "very amusing" to his master and his children, especially his son John, who would become "characteristically a tyrant."¹⁸¹ Thompson elaborated by describing how he faced violence as a young child. When his master's son John would come home from school, he would often want to oversee the "black children (...) to sweep and clear the yard from weeds." With a "whip in hand," he would walk among them, "and sometimes lashed the poor little creatures, (...) until the blood streamed down their backs and limbs, apparently for no reason whatever, except to gratify his own cruel fancy."¹⁸² Thompson described how well he remembered the tears of his mother, when she would see his back while she was bathing him and taking care of his wounds. Nothing could be done about it: "she had no appeal for justice, save to high heaven; for if she complained, her own back would be cut in a similar manner."¹⁸³ Henry Bibb likewise was confronted with extreme violence early in his life by stating that he "drank deeply of the bitter cup of suffering and woe" and has "been dragged down to the lowest depths of human degradation and wretchedness, by Slaveholders."¹⁸⁴ Bibb recounted that when growing up as a child, he was not "brought up," but "flogged up," for where he "should have received moral, mental, and religious instruction," he "received stripes without number, the object of which was to degrade and keep me in subordination."¹⁸⁵

¹⁷⁶ Anderson, *Life and Narrative of William J. Anderson*, 19.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 18-19.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 19.

¹⁸⁰ Thompson, *The Life of John Thompson, a Fugitive Slave*, 19.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 20.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, 21.

¹⁸⁴ Bibb, *Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb*, 13-14.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

Third, the narrators addressed their readers directly to support their cause by appealing to their Christian compassion and morality when it came to extreme violence and cruelty. Pennington described that his "feelings are always outraged" when he heard professing Christians "speak of "kind masters,"--"Christian masters,"--"the mildest form of slavery,"--"well fed and clothed slaves," as extenuations of slavery;" and noted that he either is satisfied that they meant "to pervert the truth, or they do not know what they say."¹⁸⁶ Charles Ball was also critical of the fact that "it has been supposed, by many, that the state of the southern slaves is constantly becoming better; and that the treatment which they receive at the hands of their masters is progressively milder and more humane" and argued that the opposite is the case.¹⁸⁷ The treatment of enslaved people was getting worse: they were intoxicated "with fear and reduces him below the condition of man," and made slaveholders "the prey of all vices which render human nature loathsome."¹⁸⁸

Austin Steward, a fugitive born on a plantation in Prince William Country, Virginia, who escaped when he moved with his master to New York, asked his readers "who, with feelings of common humanity, could look quietly on such torture? Who could remain unmoved, to see a fellow-creature thus tied, unable to move or to raise a hand in his own defence; scourged on his bare back, with a cowhide, until the blood flows in streams from his quivering flesh?"¹⁸⁹ Steward continued by explaining that the life of a slave is desperate, without the "outgushings of an affectionate heart."¹⁹⁰ The slave, according to Steward, "toils on, in his unrequited labor, looking only to the grave to find a quiet resting place, where he will be free from his oppressor" and asked his reader "who have hearts to feel," to "think of the sufferings of the helpless, destitute, and down-trodden slave."¹⁹¹ Samuel Ringgold Ward as well confronted his readers with a question with a critical and mocking undertone, as to whether it would be possible that enslaved people are not subject to a master's supreme right over his slaves: "Would this be endurable, in a republican civilised community, A.D. 1819? By no means."¹⁹² Both Steward and Ward tried to evoke empathy from their readers by addressing the contradiction between the 'civilised community' in which their readers find themselves and the existence of slavery. In this way, the narrators attempt to show that the republic in which their readers find themselves is illegitimate as long as slavery persists. If they truly supported the republican values of a 'civilised community', slavery would not exist.

¹⁸⁶ Pennington, *The Fugitive Blacksmith*, iv.

¹⁸⁷ Ball, *Fifty Years in Chains*, 15.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 16.

¹⁸⁹ 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* (New York 1857) 17.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 19.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁹² Ward, *Autobiography of a Fugitive Negro*, 16.

Although less extensively discussed than extreme violence and cruelty, another important subtheme that emerges from the narratives is the sexual abuse and exploitation of mainly enslaved women. The narrators described how African American women were subjected to sexual harassment, rape or mutilation by white Southern men, or were used as concubines by slave owners or overseers. Their narratives emphasised the insanity of slave owners, the threat and practice of sexual abuse that enslaved women had to endure, and the inability of enslaved men to protect their wives.¹⁹³ Several narratives described the extreme forms of physical and sexual violence specifically directed towards enslaved women. William Anderson wrote about "a poor female slave of all wearing apparel," who is tied up by her owner and "whipped (...) with a handsaw until he broke it over her naked body."¹⁹⁴ Subsequently, it became clear that he also sexually abused her: "In process of time he ravished her person, and became the father of a child by her."¹⁹⁵ Henry Bibb also confronted his readers with specific abuse against enslaved women by slaveholders. He described how his slave master, Garrison, sexually abused his wife Malinda. When she refused, he threatened to sell their child and whipped her.¹⁹⁶ Once Garrison got so angry with Malinda he paddled her, while Bibb was unable to protect her because "the strong arm of the law, public opinion and custom" were all against him.¹⁹⁷ In addition, Bibb went on to explain what a terrifying man Garrison was by remembering how Garrison often said that "he had rather paddle a female, than eat when he was hungry – that it was music for him to hear them scream, and too see their blood run."¹⁹⁸

Another way of making their readers aware of the vulnerable position of enslaved women was by describing how many enslaved women were structurally sexually abused as concubines. Louisa Picquet explained in her narrative how her master – a "southern gentleman" – asked her to come up to his room at night when she was "a little girl, not fourteen years old," with the notion that if she didn't "he'd give me hell in the mornin'"¹⁹⁹ William Wells Brown also recounted how his owner Mr Walker made a "housekeeper" of one of his female slaves: "Poor Cynthia! I knew her well. She was a quadroon, and one of the most beautiful women I ever saw."²⁰⁰ Brown further wrote that she had "an impeccable character of virtue and decent behaviour."²⁰¹ In this way, the narrators showed that while the slave owners may have played a dominant role, the enslaved people were superior to them when it came to morality. Brown was ordered by his owner to put her in a "state-room he had set up for her, separate from the other slaves," and commented on this that he had "seen too much of the workings

¹⁹³ Sinha, *The Slave's Cause*, 456-457.

¹⁹⁴ Anderson, *Life and Narrative of William J. Anderson*, 19.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁶ Bibb, *Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb*, 98.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 105.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁹ Picquet, *Louisa Picquet, the Octoroon, or, Inside Views of Southern Domestic Life*, 12.

²⁰⁰ Brown, *Narrative of William W. Brown*, 45.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*

of slavery not to know what this meant."²⁰² Cynthia refused to cooperate at first, but eventually had no choice: "The next morning poor Cynthia told me what had happened, and bewailed her sad fate with floods of tears."²⁰³ Brown explains how he tried to comfort Cynthia despite the fact they both realised what the consequences were: her master "took her back to St. Louis, established her as his mistress and housekeeper on his farm, and before I left, he had two children by her."²⁰⁴

This high frequency of sexual abuse confirmed gendered racist views about the dominant role of white men and the subordinate, sexualised role of black enslaved women. For example, Henry Box Brown stated that "the relation of husband and wife, parent and child," exists only through the indulgence of the master, who may at any time insult the slave's wife, or assault her, "and there is no law to punish him for what he has done."²⁰⁵ Anderson condemned this sexual abuse by saying it is "another curse of Slavery."²⁰⁶ He also addressed the role of enslaved men whose wives are sexually abused by stating that "a poor slave man" living near his wife is rarely allowed to visit her and other men, both "white and colored, cohabit with her."²⁰⁷ Anderson showed that the sexual abuse of enslaved women was both traumatic for the women as their husbands. He then addressed his readers by saying that he knows "these facts will seem too awful to relate," but that it is his duty to write about "such revolting deeds, as they are some of the real 'dark deeds of American Slavery.'"²⁰⁸

In addition, frequent sexual and physical abuse of women led to relationships between slave families being broken up. Bibb recounted how "licentious white men can do and enter at night or day the lodging places of slaves, break up their bonds of affection in families, destroy all their domestic and social union for life; and the laws of the country afford them no protection."²⁰⁹ Bibb personally experienced how his family ties were broken when his own wife was made concubine of a slave owner (not Garrison): "my wife was living in a state of adultery with her master."²¹⁰ Bibb did not blame his wife Malinda: "Poor unfortunate woman, I bring no charge of it against her, for I know not all the circumstances connected with the case. It is consistent with slavery, however, to suppose that she became reconciled to it."²¹¹ Bibb acknowledged that the relationship with her master was forced, and that his wife was a victim of sexual abuse. For Bibb, this personal example made it clear that enslaved women "can not be true to her husband contrary to the will of her master. She can neither be pure nor virtuous, contrary to the will of her master. She dare not refuse to be reduced to a state of adultery

²⁰² Brown, *Narrative of William W. Brown*, 45.

²⁰³ *Ibid.*, 46-47.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁵ Brown, *Narrative of the Life of Henry Box Brown*, 9.

²⁰⁶ Anderson, *Life and Narrative of William J. Anderson*, 9.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 19.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁹ Bibb, *Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb*, 38.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 188.

²¹¹ *Ibid.*

at the will of her master; from the fact that the slaveholding law, customs and teachings are all against the poor slaves."²¹² Enslaved women were denied not only the right to their bodies but also the right to choose their personal relationships. This broke up their original family life and reinforced the role of white masculinity.

Another way to showing southern elite white masculinity regarding sexual abuse was by reinforcing economic dominance. This was done by forcing intercourse between enslaved people, with the aim of economic profit to 'breed' more slaves. This form of reproductive labour through sexual abuse was legally supported: slaveholders held an economic incentive to be able to force enslaved men and women to have intercourse. Because all children born of enslaved women were legally considered slaves, American law authorised white males to exploit enslaved black women and girls sexually for financial gain without juridical consequences or liability to themselves.²¹³ For example, Harriet Jacobs, a victim of sexual harassment and physical abuse at the hands of her master, Dr James Norcom, who finally escaped by ship from North Carolina to New York in 1842, wrote of her master's structural control of enslaved men and women sleeping together: "He entered every cabin, to see that men and their wives had gone to bed together, lest the men, from over-fatigue, should fall asleep in the chimney corner, and remain there till the morning horn called them to their daily task."²¹⁴ Jacobs concluded by saying: "Women are considered of no value, unless they continually increase their owner's stock. They are put on a par with animals."²¹⁵

Domestic values and Christian morality

Other methods by which the fugitive slave textual community countered paternalism were to emphasise their own Christian morality and domestic values, along with the corresponding sincerity and emotional value, in contrast to the 'paternalistic' master. First, despite the hardships they faced, narrators showed that enslaved families provided a personal sphere in which family members could fulfil their own roles within the family. The emphasis on this 'normality' of a family helped readers to overcome the stereotype of slaves as helpless, passive victims and provided a familiarity that allowed readers to identify with the slave narrator. Harriet Jacobs for example, recounted that her father was a carpenter, and "considered so intelligent and skilful in his trade, that, when buildings out of the common line were to be erected, he was sent for from long distances, to be head workman."²¹⁶ Northern American ideals about family – more specifically, expressing affection towards each other

²¹² Bibb, *Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb*, 191-192.

²¹³ Rachel A. Feinstein, *When rape was legal: the untold history of sexual violence during slavery* (New York 2019); B.E. Stevenson, 'Family and Community in Slave Narratives', in: Ernest, J., *The Oxford Handbook of the African American Slave Narrative* (Oxford 2014) 277-297.

²¹⁴ Harriet A. Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl. Written by Herself* (Boston 1861) 76.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 11.

and the role of women in domestic affairs – can also be recognised when Jacobs described her brother and grandmother: she described her brother who was two years younger, as "a bright, affectionate child," and her maternal grandmother as "an indispensable character in the household, officiating in all capacities, from cook and wet nurse to seamstress."²¹⁷

The nineteenth century can be seen as a transitional period for American ideals about family relationships: although ideals about hierarchy and financial obligations within the family persisted, sentiment and affection within the family became increasingly important.²¹⁸ This transition is reflected in the slave narratives of the antebellum period: enslaved men were described as moral, hardworking, able to earn a living; enslaved women were described as both attentive domestic workers and loving and affectionate family members - traits that, not coincidentally, made them potential American citizens. Narrators described how newly freed or fugitive black men were able to successfully participate in the labour market, and free black women were engaged in domestic chores and childcare. These narratives showed that black men and women, whether enslaved or free, were fully capable of caring for their families and dedicated to their domestic responsibilities.²¹⁹ Lunsford Lane, who bought himself free but had to flee from North Carolina in 1840 to Boston and later to Philadelphia with his family, described how he cared for his family, while at the same time saving money to buy himself and then his wife and children free.²²⁰ After legal opposition, Lane described how he felt when he eventually managed to free him and his family from slavery and settled in Boston: "The thought that I was now in my loved, though recently acquired home – that my family were with me where the stern, cruel, hated hand of slavery could never reach us more (...) almost overwhelmed me with emotion."²²¹ Jacobs as well described how her father tried to save money to buy his children's freedom on the condition that he paid his mistress two hundred dollars a year to be allowed to work at his trade and to manage his own affairs: "His strongest wish was to purchase his children."²²² These narratives showed that if black men and women were able to maintain some form of family life according to the stable and moderate work, gender and family ethics of the northern American middle class within the institution of slavery, they would be worthy potential citizens in a free and equal society. Indeed, the narrators argued that resisting the conditions, ideologies and legislation that made family life almost impossible in bondage can be seen as a manifestation of resistance to slavery.²²³

²¹⁷ Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, 12.

²¹⁸ Peter Bardaglio, *Reconstructing the Household: Families, Sex, and the Law in the Nineteenth Century South* (North Carolina 1995); Richard Broadhead, 'Sparing the Rod: Discipline and Fiction in Antebellum America', *Representations* 21 (Winter, 1988): 67–96.

²¹⁹ Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, 5–7, 11.

²²⁰ Lunsford Lane, *The Narrative of Lunsford Lane* (Boston 1842) 15.

²²¹ *Ibid.*, 51–52.

²²² Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, 11.

²²³ Rebecca de Schweinitz, "'Loving hearts'" and "brave ones": slavery, family, and the problem of freedom in antebellum America', in: *Slavery & Abolition* 41:3 (2020) 479–504, 485.

At the same time, the narrators showed the harsh reality that enslaved families faced. In this way, the narrators highlighted the contrast between dignified citizens in an undignified world. Pennington for example, described the importance of loving and protected family ties and how slavery broke up these family ties: "I began to feel another evil of slavery--I mean the want of parental care and attention. My parents were not able to give any attention to their children during the day. I often suffered much from hunger and other similar causes."²²⁴ Slavery deprived enslaved children of "the benefit of its natural guardians," throwing them into a world "without a social circle to flee to for hope, shelter, comfort, or instruction. The social circle, with all its heaven-ordained blessings, is of the utmost importance to the tender child; but of this, the slave child, however tender and delicate, is robbed."²²⁵ Several narrators shared a similar argument. William Parker for example, described how he was indebted to his grandmother for "the very little kindness" he received in his childhood, and "this kindness could only be shown" to him "at long intervals, and in a hurried way."²²⁶ The same was the case for James Curry, a fugitive who fled from North Carolina to Pennsylvania in 1837, moved to Canada a year later and published his narrative in 1840, conveyed to his readers that despite his mother having too little time for her children, she still wanted to take care of them as best she could: "she would then be so tired that she could scarcely stand; but she would find one boy with his knee out, and another with his elbow out, a patch wanting here, and a stitch there, and she would sit down by her lightwood fire, and sew and sleep alternately, often till the light began to streak in the east; and then lying down, she would catch a nap, and hasten to the toil of the day."²²⁷

Henry Box Brown also wrote about the affection of his mother before he was separated from her. Brown described how it was not his "fortune" to be long under his "mother's care," but he still possesses "a vivid recollection of her affectionate oversight."²²⁸ Therefore, he confronted his readers by addressing the "Mothers of the North!" with the question how they would feel if their "idolised little ones" would be separated from them by "the will of a tyrant," who "neither could nor would sympathise with your domestic feelings" and "whose cold hearts cannot sympathise with your feelings, but who will mock at any manifestation of tenderness, and scourge them to satisfy the cruelty of their own disposition; yet such is the condition of hundreds of thousands of mothers in the southern states of America."²²⁹ The accounts of fugitive slave narrators like Brown show how the domestic values of the time were embraced by black people - enslaved or free - and how they struggled with slave owners

²²⁴ Pennington, *The Fugitive Blacksmith*, 2.

²²⁵ Ibid.

²²⁶ Parker, *The Freedman's Story*, 153.

²²⁷ Curry, *Narrative of James Curry*, 6.

²²⁸ Brown, *Narrative of the Life of Henry Box Brown*, 2.

²²⁹ Ibid., 3.

who could easily break cherished family ties.²³⁰ As a result, readers were encouraged to think about slavery as an institution that caused family trauma. This message was intended to encourage readers to empathise with and respect the lives of enslaved and free African Americans.

Second, the narrators emphasized their own Christian morality and that of other enslaved people in a variety of ways to contrast the immorality of their 'paternalistic' masters. William Craft for example emphasised the Christian morality of enslaved people when he observed the sale of a girl Antoinette, who was "the flower of the family," and was "much beloved by all who knew her, for her Christ-like piety, dignity of manner," as well as "her great talents and extreme beauty," when she was bought by an "uneducated and drunken slave-dealer."²³¹ Samuel Ringgold Ward's emphasis on Christian morality was also strong, especially when he wrote about his mother, as he described her as a person of "deep, devoted, religious character."²³² Both his parents converted early in life, and were members of the Methodist denomination. The narrators not only created a contrast between morality and immorality, they also described how their faith in Christianity gave them a form of protection in the harsh world of slavery. Isaac Williams, for example, described how his mother, Sally, inspired by the story of Christ's passion and death, wrote that she "felt that, in some way, every trial she had, if born for His sake, brought her nearer to Him and heaven."²³³ Similarly, Isaac Hopper, biographer of the life of Thomas Cooper, described how despite Cooper's "body was held in cruel bondage," his "mind was free," and he would frequently pray "to his merciful Creator," for freeing him "from his sufferings."²³⁴

Some narrators went even further in their appeal to Christian morality, attributing to enslaved people the role of martyrs. John Thompson described how in his enslaved community "Christianity seemed to gain ground, and a glorious revival of religion sprang up" which was harshly beaten down by patrollers from his slaveowner.²³⁵ Yet this did not stop "the progress of God's mighty work, for he had laid the foundation for the building, and his workmen determined to carry on the work until the capstone was laid."²³⁶ Enslaved people struggled as martyrs to practise their faith. Taking it a step further, Aaron, a former slave who fled from the South and published his narrative in 1845, described a form of martyrdom that involved ultimate freedom after death, explaining how enslaved people have "to bear patiently with their hard task masters, and live humble and faithful to God, and then at the end of warfare God will richly crown them in heaven."²³⁷ Thompson and Aaron showed a form of

²³⁰ Kete M. Louise, *Sentimental Collaborations: Mourning and Middle-Class Identity in Nineteenth-Century America* (Durham 2000) 3, 7–9.

²³¹ Craft, *Running a Thousand Miles for Freedom*, 20–21.

²³² Ward, *Autobiography of a Fugitive Negro*, 8.

²³³ Williams, *Aunt Sally: or, The Cross the Way of Freedom*, 92.

²³⁴ Isaac T. Hopper, *Narrative of the Life of Thomas Cooper* (New York 1832) 5–6.

²³⁵ Thompson, *The Life of John Thompson, a Fugitive Slave*, 25.

²³⁶ *Ibid.*, 25–26.

²³⁷ Aaron, *The Light and Truth of Slavery. Aaron's History* (Worcester, MA 1845) 4.

martyrdom in which suffering is endured for religious reasons. But in these cases the argument developed further, as Christian worship was also a form of resistance to slavery and an attempt to create a collective form of freedom. Using Bible verses, Aaron and other narrators sought to prove the sinfulness of slavery and contradict the popular belief that slavery was an institution sanctioned by God.

By adhering to their own Christian morality, the narrators also created a contrast to the hypocritical slave owners who claimed to be devout Christians, while at the same time doing the most cruel things to their slaves inconsistent with Christianity. This way, the narrators were able to contradict the paternalistic ideology of the proslavery campaign and contributed to the creation of a new identity of the 'fugitive slave'. Aaron described the ambiguity of slaveholding men, explaining how "their heads is full of the knowledge of the Almighty and their hearts is shut up with sin and iniquity."²³⁸ The same ambiguity is described by Henry Box Brown, who noted that he had no means of gaining a proper understanding of religion in a state of slavery, where those who claimed to be followers of Jesus Christ "evinced more of the disposition of demons than of men."²³⁹ An example of the opportunistic side of slaveholders was given by William Wells Brown, who described how Delphia, an enslaved woman with whom Brown was good friends, was nearly whipped to death by her slaveholder, even though "he was a deacon in the Baptist church, in good and regular standing."²⁴⁰ In a similar manner, Smith H. Platt, describing the life story of the runaway slave Caesar, who eventually escaped from Virginia to Pennsylvania, described how on a neighbouring plantation lived a slave owner who was "a kind and Christian man."²⁴¹ The slaveowner, Dr. Withlow, would read the Bible to his slaves and pray with them; for he also knew that if "they were contented and happy," his slaves would not run away.²⁴² Subsequently, Platt addressed the paternalistic notion that "slaves are better off than if they were free" with slaveowners like Dr. Withlow with the argument that no "greater injury can be inflicted" upon enslaved people, than enslaving their bodies.²⁴³ Platt continued with the notion that a slave is not yet a slave "while he detests his chains and struggles against them," but when he learns "to love them, he has sunk to the lowest possible depths of degradation."²⁴⁴

In line with Platt's example, Henry Watson gave his remarks on the way the Christian religion is used as a doctrine to make enslaved people believe "God made them slaves, that they are always to remain slaves, and bear with patience and humility the unjust punishment they receive on earth, that

²³⁸ Aaron, *The Light and Truth of Slavery. Aaron's History* (Worcester, MA 1845) 3.

²³⁹ Brown, *Narrative of the Life of Henry Box Brown*, 3.

²⁴⁰ Brown, *Narrative of William W. Brown*, 39.

²⁴¹ Smith H. Platt, *The Martyrs, and the Fugitive; or a Narrative of the Captivity, Sufferings, and Death of an African Family, and the Slavery and Escape of Their Son* (New York 1859) 78.

²⁴² *Ibid.*, 78-79.

²⁴³ *Ibid.*, 79.

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

it may be to their glory hereafter."²⁴⁵ Watson ended by asking his readers if it is not "an unpardonable sin" to "defile the holy sanctuary, and pollute the sacred word of God by using it for such base purposes."²⁴⁶ Again, an appeal is made to the morality of their readers, in this case for the need for Christian assistance. For example, Aaron wrote that "men, again, who live up to the moral law, wont enslave their brethren. Aaron says that no true hearted Christian will begin to hold his brother in bonds."²⁴⁷ By appealing to the Christian morality of his readers, Aaron wrote his readers into a certain role in which it was their responsibility to offer Christian assistance to enslaved people. In addition, Aaron was critical of northern abolitionists, who openly advocated freedom for slaves but refused to help him when he asked them for food and shelter while he fled to the North. He called them "wolves clothed in sheep's clothing" and reminded his readers to think about "those in bonds, as though you were bound with them," and to "assist runaway slaves as you would wish to be assisted."²⁴⁸ This way, Aaron also tried to evoke empathy in his readers by emphasising how they themselves would wanted to be treated if they were in the position of enslaved people.

By providing their readers with examples of the extreme violence, rape, attempts at resistance, and feelings of hopelessness in which the narrators and their families found themselves, the textual community of fugitive slave writers was able to show the opportunistic side of slaveholders and counter the paternalistic ideals that supported the proslavery campaign. It also forced its readers to reflect on their own (Christian) morality: how long could they allow such an unchristian institution as slavery to continue without intervention? By describing the realities of slavery, the narrators urged their northern readers to empathize with their Christian brothers and sisters in bondage, take their moral responsibility and to take action against the institution of slavery.

²⁴⁵ Watson, *Narrative of Henry Watson*, 31.

²⁴⁶ Watson, *Narrative of Henry Watson*, 31.

²⁴⁷ Aaron, *The Light and Truth of Slavery*, 4.

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 15.

Chapter Three

Flight to Freedom: The physical and spiritual journey towards collective freedom

Free Americans how long

Calmly will ye suffer wrong,

See the feeble by the strong

*Held in chains and Slavery?*²⁴⁹

Blush Americans for shame,

There's a blot upon your fame:

Wipe it out, and get a name

*For justice, truth, and equity.*²⁵⁰

These are two passages from an anti-slavery song from the narrative of William Green, a fugitive slave who fled from Maryland to New York in his mid-twenties along with his friend Joseph. Green described how dangerous it was for them to travel, fearing getting lost or being recaptured by searching patrols. During their journey, they were assisted by several people, including enslaved African Americans and Quakers who helped them avoid dangerous areas, cross rivers or travel from one safehouse to another.²⁵¹ After describing how his flight was successful and that he had now been a free man for thirteen years, Green ended his narrative with an anti-slavery song criticizing how "Free Americans" could allow slavery to continue while standing for the freedom ideals of the American Revolution: "justice, truth, and equity."²⁵²

Green raised an important question in the controversy over slavery: why was slavery allowed to continue after the American Revolution? After all, the Declaration of Independence stated that all men were created equal with unalienable rights, including the right of life, happiness and liberty. David Brion Davis described this contradiction between freedom and slavery as "a problem of slavery in the age of revolutions."²⁵³ François Furstenberg, however, argued that the focus should be shifted to "a problem of *freedom* in the age of revolutions" and that consideration should be given to what different definitions of freedom were developing at the time.²⁵⁴ This "problem of freedom" had its origins in the

²⁴⁹ Green, *Narrative of Events in the Life of William Green*, 22

²⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 23

²⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 18-19

²⁵² *Ibid.*, 21-22

²⁵³ David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture* (New York 1966) 3.

²⁵⁴ François Furstenberg, 'Beyond Freedom and Slavery: Autonomy, Virtue, and Resistance in Early American Political Discourse', *Journal of American History*, vol. 89, issue 4, (2003) 1295-1330, 1296; Richard Follett, Eric Foner and Walter Johnson, *Slavery's Ghost: The Problem of Freedom in the Age of Emancipation* (Maryland 2011) 2.

biblical figuralism of the New England Puritans, who imagined their migration from the Old World similar to the story of the Exodus - the second book of the Hebrew Bible - which described how Moses led the Israelite people out of Egypt, through the wilderness, into the Promised Land. This idea was applied to the rhetoric of the American Revolution, which argued that the revolution was the fulfilment of biblical prophecy of the divine plan: the American Revolution marked the definitive shift from Old Canaan to a New Canaan. In this context, the idea of independence was conceived as a form of national progress that would gain unconditional support or consensus. It became clear that the use of biblical typology, especially Exodus, was an important key to legitimising cultural and political change. So much that, according to Eddie S. Glaude Jr. in the United States, "most political events are recorded and understood within the terms of the story. We all know the story. And in a sense, it is our story. We are the new Israelites. That is, unless you are black."²⁵⁵ African Americans have been actively excluded from this narrative. The narratives in this study show how, in response, the African American textual community wrote itself into a common history by describing their physical and spiritual journey towards freedom. Therefore, this chapter addresses the following question: How did accounts of enslaved people's physical and spiritual journeys to freedom help to build a broad and coherent case for the immediate abolition of slavery in the southern states?

The exclusion of African Americans from the national narrative, and the continued existence of slavery after the American Revolution, was defended by a dominant conception of freedom defined by Samuel Adams (1722-1803), Founding Father and one of the leaders of the movement that culminated in the American Revolution. Adams argued that freedom might be a natural state of being, but it was nevertheless necessary to act to protect that freedom: "The liberties of our country, the freedom of our civil Constitution are worth defending at all hazards; and it is our duty to defend them against all attacks."²⁵⁶ This liberal republican ideology propagated a call for freedom, with the commitment to revolt if this freedom was threatened, and the prioritisation of freedom over life. For example, on 23 March 1775, Patrick Henry, Founding Father and one of the leaders of the American Revolution, spoke at the Second Virginia Convention in support of the Revolutionary War, saying: "Is life so dear, or peace so sweet, as to be purchased at the price of chains and slavery?"²⁵⁷ And continued with the famous words, "I know not what course others may take; but as for me, Give me Liberty or give me Death!"²⁵⁸ Henry's words resonated in the antebellum period: in 1817, Henry's speech was published and widely circulated after U.S. Attorney General William Wirt published a biography of him

²⁵⁵ Eddie S. Glaude, *Exodus! Religion, Race and Nation in Early Nineteenth-Century Black America* (Chicago 2000) 48.

²⁵⁶ Samuel Adams, "Candidus," in the *Boston Gazette*, Oct. 14, 1771, in: William V. Wells, *Life and Public Services of Samuel Adams, Being a Narrative of His Acts and Opinions, and of His Agency in Producing and Forwarding the American Revolution*, vol. 1 2nd ed. (Boston 1888) 425.

²⁵⁷ William Wirt, *Sketches of the Life and Character of Patrick Henry* (Philadelphia 1817) 123.

²⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

that included Henry's speech. Similarly, in the antebellum period public opinion tended to lean towards the idea that a struggle for freedom – with risking their lives in the worst instance – was the only way to legitimate freedom. Without the virtue to be able to defend freedom, people would end up under tyranny and live in slavery. Thus, Thomas Paine stated that "when republican virtue fails, slavery ensues."²⁵⁹ The ideology shows how freedom and slavery are interconnected by the virtue to resist repression.²⁶⁰

This had implications for how people regarded slavery. Through this ideology, people in slavery themselves were implicitly held responsible for their lives in bondage. For instance, Adams argued that "all might be free," as long as people "valued freedom and defended it as they ought."²⁶¹ It seemed that as long as enslaved people had not fought for freedom, it was their own choice to live in slavery. Following this line of reasoning, Adams stated that he believed that "no people ever yet groaned under the heavy yoke of slavery but when they deserved it."²⁶² According to Adams, people who "will not be free," did not have "virtue enough to maintain their liberty against a presumptuous invader," and deserved "no pity, and are to be treated with contempt and ignominy."²⁶³ As long as people could demonstrate their virtue by standing up for their freedom, it simultaneously highlighted the lack of virtue of people who were subject to slavery and did not revolt. This connection between freedom and slavery through virtue to resist oppression characterised the will for freedom or a life in slavery as an individual choice. As such, this influential liberal-republican ideology legitimised slavery based on principles derived from the American Revolution.²⁶⁴

Fugitive slave narratives on the physical and spiritual journey towards collective freedom

It is important to consider that political ideals of freedom were closely intertwined with Christian arguments: politics was religious, and religion was political. Because of the legacy of the American Revolution's notion of freedom as individual choice, there was a belief that African Americans had to take responsibility for their own liberation. As a result, African Americans turned to religious narratives to create understanding and solidarity for their situation, while developing a kind of self-awareness that was essential for finding one's own identity in a society with a slave economy and racial discrimination. The narratives reveal how closely political ideals of freedom were intertwined with religious arguments by reflecting the emergence of a Christian paradigm alongside American

²⁵⁹ Thomas Paine, *Common Sense* (1776), in *Common Sense and Related Readings*, ed. Thomas P. Slaughter (Boston, 2001), 86.

²⁶⁰ Furstenberg, 'Beyond Freedom and Slavery', 1296.

²⁶¹ Samuel Adams, "Candidus," in the *Boston Gazette*, Oct. 7, 1771, in: William V. Wells, *Life and Public Services of Samuel Adams, Being a Narrative of His Acts and Opinions, and of His Agency in Producing and Forwarding the American Revolution*, vol. 1 2nd ed. (Boston 1888) 422.

²⁶² *Ibid.*

²⁶³ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁴ Furstenberg, 'Beyond Freedom and Slavery', 1296.

revolutionary ideals, with a particular focus on the story of Exodus which “explores classic biblical themes of oppression and redemption, human enslavement and divine salvation.”²⁶⁵ The religious story of bondage of the Israelite people in Egypt, a narrative already embedded in the national consciousness, describing the trials of the wilderness, and the final entrance into the promised land demonstrated how God actively intervened in history on behalf of his chosen people.²⁶⁶

The Exodus story found resonance in the stories of fugitive slaves, where it was deployed as a metaphorical framework for their own experience of slavery, their physical journey and hardships of their flight, their individual spiritual emancipation and ultimately how, by comparing themselves to the slaves of Egypt, they should be seen as God's chosen people and gain collective freedom. Eddie S. Claude Jr. stated that “the brutality of the peculiar institution and of American racism was blunted as the sacred history of God’s deliverance of his chosen people was transformed into an account of black liberation.”²⁶⁷ The African American textual community referred to the Exodus not only to show the resemblance with their own experiences, but also to formulate a narrative in which they were included by forming a shared history and ultimately a shared future.

Three subthemes were identified within the theme *flight*: the sacrifices for freedom during their physical journey, their spiritual awakening, and the search for a collective freedom. The identified subthemes and associated narratives within this theme are highlighted in Table 4 in the Appendix. Table 1 lists the full titles of the corresponding narratives. Again, it becomes clear that there are many similarities. The table shows that there is a large overlap in the number of narratives and associated subthemes. This means that despite differences in person, place and time, there are many similarities in the argumentative structure of the narratives. The following in-depth analysis will attempt to explain these similarities.

Sacrifices for freedom

"Hope, fear, dread, terror, love, sorrow, and deep melancholy were mingled in my mind together." Those were the words of James Pennington, a twenty-one-year old "first rate blacksmith," to describe his emotions the moment he was about to run away from Maryland, "one of the smallest and most northern of the slave-holding states" to the free state Pennsylvania.²⁶⁸ Pennington stated his "serious apprehension" when overthinking his plan for his flight, realizing he had no "knowledge of distance or direction" and not knowing where Pennsylvania’s "soil begins, or where that of Maryland ends."²⁶⁹ At the same time, there was no room for mistakes. The consequences of being recaptured as a runaway

²⁶⁵ Joel S. Baden, *The book of Exodus* (Princeton 2019) 158.

²⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁷ Glaude, *Exodus!*, 4-5.

²⁶⁸ Pennington, *The Fugitive Blacksmith*, 13-14.

²⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

were very serious, which could entail being flogged, being sold into the Lower South, or even being killed. Pennington however, described that despite the risks such as "the human blood-hounds that would be set on my track - the weariness - the hunger," as well as leaving his family and friends behind, would not result in giving up "the thought of flight."²⁷⁰ He decided to take the risk to flight to freedom: "the hour was now come, and the man must act and be free, or remain a slave for ever."²⁷¹ After a difficult journey, Pennington managed to reach the free ground of Pennsylvania.

Like Pennington, most fugitives were aware of the dangers that could come their way during their journey towards (in this case) the northern states. For example, Charles Ball described a conversation with another enslaved man who did not dare to runaway: "'Where could I run, or in what place could I conceal myself?" said he. "I have known many slaves who ran away, but they were always caught and treated worse afterwards than they had been before. I have heard that there is a place called Philadelphia, where the black people are all free, but I do not know which way it lies, nor what road I should take to go there; and if I knew the way, how could I hope to get there? would not the patrol be sure to catch me?"²⁷² By describing the consideration of whether or not to flee, Ball was able to make northern readers realise what a major and life-threatening undertaking this is. Many enslaved men and women did not or could not dare make this journey, due to being physically unable to do so, by not wanting to leave their families behind, by not knowing where to go, or by fearing the consequences if they were recaptured.

At the same time, it also shows the desperation of enslaved people who did flee despite the many dangers. John Thompson, a fugitive slave who escaped from Maryland to Philadelphia and later to Massachusetts around 1825, described how at a moment when he was still enslaved, three of his friends had decided to run away. On the night on which they intended to flee, they first knelt in prayer to "the great God of Heaven and Earth, invoking Him to guard them through every troublesome scene of this life, and go with them to their journey's end."²⁷³ Afterwards his friends sang a parting hymn to the people surrounding them:

Farewell my dear brethren, I bid you farewell!
I am going to travel the way to excel;
I am going to travel the wilderness through,
Therefore, my dear brethren, I bid you adieu!²⁷⁴

The thought of parting doth cause me to grieve,

²⁷⁰ Pennington, *The Fugitive Blacksmith*, 14.

²⁷¹ Ibid.

²⁷² Ball, *Fifty Years in Chains*, 92.

²⁷³ Thompson, *The Life of John Thompson, a Fugitive Slave*, 76.

²⁷⁴ Ibid., 77

So well do I love you; still you I must leave;
Though we live at a distance, and you I no more see,
On the banks of old Canaan united we will be.²⁷⁵

In this hymn they expressed their grief at leaving their loved ones. However, they were determined to "excel" as pioneers and travel through the wilderness, similar to Moses and the Israelites on their journey to the Promised Land. And although they were leaving their loved ones behind, they would be united on the "banks of old Canaan," a reference to eventual collective freedom. Like the Israelites in Exodus, narrators like Thompson described the hardships that fugitives endured and the sacrifices they had to make to reach free land; how they turned to God at times when they needed protection; and how they were chosen by God to lead the way for their people in their flight to free land to eventually achieve collective freedom, similar to how Moses led the Israelite people to the Promised Land.

Similar to the struggles of the Israelites as they wandered in the wilderness for 40 years, slave narrators described the many dangers and difficulties runaway slaves faced on their journey north. S.H. Platt described how fugitive slave Caesar decided to flee as he was treated very badly by his master and feared for his life. Platt wrote how Caesar travelled at night and would climb in a tree and stay there throughout the day so "that the hounds might not track him."²⁷⁶ At a certain point "he heard the hounds, and gave up all for lost."²⁷⁷ Caesar decided to move towards a large stream, "with the intention of drowning himself in it rather than be captured."²⁷⁸ Caesar was willing to give his life for freedom, in accordance with the revolutionary ideal of freedom that originated in the American Revolution. The dogs disappeared as suddenly as they had come. Caesar's relief was great: "with safety from that danger, came the overwhelming sense of his loneliness and wretchedness. Alone in the vast forest, with hundreds of miles of weary travel before him, and every man a foe, he sat down and wept."²⁷⁹ This sense of loneliness during their flight, and the inability to ask for help for fear of being betrayed and recaptured, emerged in many of the narrators' accounts. For example, Josiah Henson, a fugitive slave who was born into slavery in Charles County, Maryland, and escaped with his family to Canada in 1830, described how he and his family "were thrown absolutely upon our own poor and small resources, and were to rely on our own strength alone. (...) We dared look to no one for help."²⁸⁰

In addition, William Anderson showed an example in which the risk for asking for help comes to light, by describing the flight of Phill Sharp who ran away from his master, Mr Beacher. Sharp

²⁷⁵ Thompson, *The Life of John Thompson, a Fugitive Slave*, 77.

²⁷⁶ Platt, *The Martyrs, and the Fugitive*, 84.

²⁷⁷ Ibid.

²⁷⁸ Ibid., 84-85.

²⁷⁹ Ibid., 85.

²⁸⁰ Josiah Henson, *The Life of Josiah Henson, Formerly a Slave, Now an Inhabitant of Canada, as Narrated by Himself* (Boston 1858) 50-51.

decided to flee after being separated from his wife and sold to a new master who “continued to flog, drive and starve him.”²⁸¹ He decided to flee on a Saturday night to travel by night and “lay by in the day time, in the swamps.” Sharp had to cross several rivers, encountered an alligator and a panther, and was “espied and chased by dogs a long distance out of his way.”²⁸² At one point he arrived at a farm house and asks the cook, “a colored woman,” for something to eat and he stated “he was a runaway slave, and most starved.”²⁸³ In the end, the woman betrayed Sharp: “She said she would supply him if he would wait her return. Just as she got to the house she said, “master, master, here is a runaway at the kitchen.”²⁸⁴ Sharp managed to escape in time, but Anderson notes here that “this is the way the poor colored people are taught to betray each other for a good name, or a little tobacco, or a few pounds of meat.”²⁸⁵ Anderson wrote that Sharp had eventually seen his wife one more time and “came through safe; but few there are who are so successful.”²⁸⁶

A shocking example of someone who was less successful, was described by Platt when Caesar, during the 11th week of his journey in the Blue Mountains of Virginia, was confronted with the body of a female slave. Platt noted that Caesar “had found several before, some in different stages of decay, and some with only the bleaching bones to tell how vainly they had sought for earthly freedom.”²⁸⁷ This passage shows the seriousness and severity of the many dangers and uncertainties that fugitive slaves faced on their journey. Anything could happen along the way: drowning while crossing a river, encountering wild animals such as wolves, or general exhaustion from hunger, cold and travelling long distances. Platt described how Caesar's “food was soon exhausted and his slippers worn out, and he was compelled to bear hunger and pain as he had never anticipated. Still, he found a poor subsistence upon nuts, wild oranges, persimmons, and such small game as he could shoot.”²⁸⁸ Josiah Henson as well described how he and his family followed a very rough and overgrown trail that “was cut through the wilderness.”²⁸⁹ They were also running out of food. They had to continue their journey “all day without seeing one, and laid down at night, hungry and weary enough.”²⁹⁰ In addition, Caesar and Henson were both confronted by wolves. Henson described how he thought he heard “the howling of wolves” at night and decided to keep them at bay by making a lot of noise.²⁹¹ Platt described how Caesar “was suddenly confronted by a large wolf” and “nerving himself by a mental prayer, he fastened

²⁸¹ Anderson, *Life and Narrative of William J. Anderson*, 28.

²⁸² *Ibid.*

²⁸³ *Ibid.*

²⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 28-29.

²⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 29.

²⁸⁷ Platt, *The Martyrs, and the Fugitive*, 86.

²⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 85.

²⁸⁹ Henson, *The Life of Josiah Henson*, 52.

²⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁹¹ *Ibid.*

his eyes upon her while he struck a match, kindled a torch, and hurled it at her, upon which she turned and slowly galloped off.”²⁹²

Besides these dangers, there was also the constant threat of being recaptured by slave catchers. Thompson described how he had to hide under a fallen tree for a search patrol along the way: “We lay still, and held God to his promise, though when danger came so near, our hopes began to vanish, and like Israel we began to mourn. But stand still and see the salvation of God, which he will show thee to-day.”²⁹³ With reference to the Book of Exodus, Thompson explained how they were saved from the slave catchers by putting their trust in God. Austin Steward, in a similar situation as Thompson, confronted his readers with the injustice faced by runaway slaves. Steward described how a search patrol was looking for him and he “with the agility of a deer,” ran “for the woods for his life.” When he had hidden in the woods, he had the “opportunity to reflect on the injustice and cruelty” of his “oppressors,” and asked himself why it was that he was obliged to flee from his home: “Why was I there panting and weary, hungry and destitute – skulking in the woods like a thief, and concealing myself like a murderer? What had I done? For what fault, or for what crime was I pursued by armed men, and hunted like a beast of prey?”²⁹⁴

The injustice faced by runaway slaves led to criticism of the contradiction between the ideals of the American Revolution and the continued existence of slavery. William Green wondered how although “a far-stretched idea to some in this enlightened age,” it is nevertheless possible that “white Americans think that the colored people ought not to have and do not deserve any better treatment from them as a people than they receive.”²⁹⁵ Similarly, Pennington observed that “during the last year or two, we have heard of nothing but revolutions, and the enlargements of the eras of freedom, on both sides of the Atlantic.”²⁹⁶ He explained his dismay over the fact that “our white brethren everywhere are reaching out their hands to grasp more freedom.” Yet, “when we speak of slavery, and complain of the wrong it is doing us, and ask to have the yoke removed,” the “white brethren” reverts to paternalism: “we are told, “O, you must not be impatient, you must not create undue excitement. You are not so badly off, for many of your masters are kind Christian masters.””²⁹⁷ “Masters”, who still sustained chattel slavery and commodification: families were separated and relatives sold off “to the far South, where they have to toil without requite to supply the world’s market with cotton, sugar, rice, tobacco, &c.”²⁹⁸ Likewise, William and Ellen Craft did not understand “by what right we were held as “chattels,” given “the rights which are so vividly set forth in the Declaration.” Therefore, they state

²⁹² Platt, *The Martyrs, and the Fugitive*, 85-86.

²⁹³ Thompson, *The Life of John Thompson, a Fugitive Slave*, 90.

²⁹⁴ Steward, *Twenty-Two Years a Slave, and Forty Years a Freeman*, 111-112.

²⁹⁵ Green, *Narrative of Events in the Life of William Green*, 10.

²⁹⁶ Pennington, *The Fugitive Blacksmith*, xi.

²⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

with an almost ironic undertone, they felt “perfectly justified in undertaking the dangerous and exciting task of “running a thousand miles.””²⁹⁹

Most narrators understood very well that the Adam's doctrine was an important answer to the question why it was possible for this “injustice” as Steward described to continue after the American Revolution. Therefore, describing their sacrifices for freedom was an important part of legitimising their freedom. By showing that they had fought for their freedom they were able to demonstrate their right to liberty and American citizenship. In fact, several narrators refer back to ideals originating from the American Revolution. For example, William Anderson described that he made up his mind to run away and “let the consequences be what they would. Patrick Henry’s words became my motto, via: “Give me liberty or give me death.””³⁰⁰ Harriet Jacobs likewise explained when she started “this hazardous undertaking,” she had resolved that, “come what would, there should be no turning back. “Give me liberty, or give me death,” was my motto.”³⁰¹ By showing their resistance in the fact that they would rather die than remain a slave, the fugitive narrators demonstrated their ‘virtue’ for freedom.

Frederick Douglass also linked to revolutionary ideology when he described the obstacles fugitives face: “We were stung by scorpions, chased by wild beasts, bitten by snakes, and finally, after having nearly reached the desired spot,—after swimming rivers, encountering wild beasts, sleeping in the woods, suffering hunger and nakedness,—we were overtaken by our pursuers, and, in our resistance, we were shot dead upon the spot!” Douglass continued by noting that fugitives “did more than Patrick Henry, when he resolved upon liberty or death. With us it was doubtful liberty at most, and almost certain death if we failed. For my part, I should prefer death to hopeless bondage.”³⁰² Douglass, like other fugitive narrators, took on the message that a virtuous struggle led to justified freedom in order to appeal to a wide audience. At the same time, it reveals how the liberal republican ideology of the American Revolution influenced and defined ideas about slavery and freedom in the antebellum period. Many narrators described the realities of their flight, pointing out the threat of violence from slave catchers and their dogs, the fear of being recaptured, hunger, cold, exhaustion, travelling long distances at night and a sense of loneliness. The description of the realities of their flight was intended to shock their readers into understanding the grievances they had suffered, while at the same time demonstrating that they were worthy of freedom. It was a powerful way for the narrators to show the sacrifices they had made for their freedom.

²⁹⁹ Craft, *Running a Thousand Miles for Freedom*, iii.

³⁰⁰ Anderson, *Life and Narrative of William J. Anderson*, 30.

³⁰¹ Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, 151.

³⁰² Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave. Written by Himself* (Boston 1845) 85-86.

Individual spiritual emancipation for collective freedom

Besides undertaking a physical journey, many fugitive slave narrators also made a spiritual journey. The personal accounts of fugitive slave narrators documented a wide variety of religious experiences and practices. There is one particular theme that often recurs in the examined narratives: individual spiritual emancipation. Central to this was their conversion and religious devotion for “being in the Spirit.”³⁰³ The narrators described this “awakening” by becoming aware – either prior to or during their flight – of being chosen by God to be destined for redemption. Josiah Henson for example described how he experienced his “awakening to a new life” and how it led to an “awareness of superior powers and destiny.”³⁰⁴ After this sign – which could for example occur in the form of a dream or at a dangerous or life threatening situation – narrators like Henson described how they were guided by God during their flight to persevere by resigning themselves to the will of God, “and take with thankfulness, (...) whatever he might decide should be my lot.”³⁰⁵ Both enslaved and free African Americans who had converted to Christianity adapted their faith in ways that corresponded to their own experiences.³⁰⁶ Using the Exodus story, the narrators could argue how they were destined, by means of their individual spiritual emancipation, to lead the black people in bondage to freedom, like Moses led the Israelites, God’s chosen people. Through the use of this biblical metaphor, the African American textual community managed to convey a powerful political message: namely, that they had a right to collective freedom and equality.³⁰⁷

Individual versions of the Exodus have been found in the narratives, in which the narrators described themselves as instruments of God. Solomon Bayley for example described how at a dangerous moment during his flight his “distress was bitter,” and stated that the moment he said he was “past all hope, it pleased the father of all mercy to look on me, and he sent a strengthening thought into my heart, which was this: that he that made the heavens and the earth, was able to deliver me.”³⁰⁸ Bayley then described how a scripture came to his mind, which he “had heard before, and that was, “they that trust in the Lord, shall never be confounded.””³⁰⁹ This passage contains both an element of the liberal-republican ideology of the American Revolution and an element of the Exodus. The liberal-republican ideology is reflected in the moment when God deemed Bayley worthy enough because he had fought hard for his freedom, and would therefore assist him in the rest of his flight. The Exodus is

³⁰³ Marcella Grendler, Andrew Leiter, and Jill Sexton, ‘Guide to Religious Content in Slave Narratives’, in: William L. Andrews (series ed.), ‘North American Slave Narratives’, *Documenting the American South* (online database collection).

³⁰⁴ Henson, *The Life of Josiah Henson*, 13.

³⁰⁵ Henson, *The Life of Josiah Henson*, 43.

³⁰⁶ Andrews, *To Tell a Free Story*, 7.

³⁰⁷ Glaude, *Exodus!*, 81.

³⁰⁸ Solomon Bayley, *A Narrative of Some Remarkable Incidents in the Life of Solomon Bayley, Formerly a Slave in the State of Delaware, North America; Written by Himself* (London 1825) 2.

³⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 2-3.

reflected in the idea of putting their trust in God because of being chosen, similar to the Israelite people who were delivered from slavery and led to the promised land as chosen people. By writing themselves into a shared history, it became easier to argue for a shared future in which collective freedom played a crucial role. It was also Bayley's way of giving his readers a message of hope and at the same time of irreversibility: since the Bible declared that God was active in the history and salvation of peoples, it was only a matter of time before they too would be able to rejoice in being chosen by God and their freedom.³¹⁰

This idea of a linear process is characteristic for the use of Exodus in runaway slave narratives. There is a progression or journey forward, with a clear distinction between beginning and end. This transformation involved a people in slavery (the beginning), their journey through the wilderness (the middle), and a promised land with collective freedom (the end). Slavery in Egypt is replaced by the promised freedom in Canaan after a 40-year journey through the wilderness; similarly, the bondage of fugitive slaves ends when they decide to flee through the wilderness or travel overseas seeking a promised land of freedom.³¹¹ What is important to keep in mind in this transformation is that it is not about an individual or disparate group, but about a people, the people of Israel, who collectively obtained their freedom. While the narratives are about individual interpretations of the Exodus, they also focus specifically on collective freedom. Aaron for example, a runaway slave who published his narrative *The Light and Truth of Slavery* in 1845, used the Exodus to argue for their right to freedom. According to Aaron, "God foreknew everything" and declared that if God was not against slavery, he would never have freed the Israelite people. Aaron compared himself to Moses in leading the freed people: "God sent Moses and Aaron to deliver them," referring to the Israelite as well as the African American people, who had been chosen by God to be set free from slavery, to travel to the Promised Land and to live in collective freedom.³¹² In addition, Aaron made a comparison between the Pharaoh of Egypt and slave owners, by expressing his concern that slave owners "will not hearken to justice until the Lord sinks them in sin and folly in the same way he did the wicked Pharaoh."³¹³

Through their individual spiritual emancipation, such as Aaron's description of being chosen by God to lead the freed people, the narrators wrote themselves into a political history and defined themselves by an identity in which collective freedom and the abolition of slavery were central. They not only appropriated an alternative identity that no longer centred on the imposed master-slave relationship, but also reinforced a form of self-awareness for the enslaved community. For example, Glaude Jr. argues that using Exodus as a biblical metaphor for their own lives "empowered black

³¹⁰ Kenneth Chelst, *Exodus and Emancipation: Biblical and African-American Slavery* (Jerusalem 2009) 311.

³¹¹ Glaude, *Exodus!*, 5.

³¹² Aaron, *The Light and Truth of Slavery*, 25.

³¹³ *Ibid.*

Christians to look beyond their present situation and envision a future of collective freedom and equality.”³¹⁴ At the same time, this metaphor and its emphasis on individual spiritual emancipation had a condition: only when the fugitive slave was able to surrender his life to God would he succeed in freeing the black people in bondage. Anderson for example, described to be “fully resolved to put my trust in God, fear no danger, and travel from the South to the North in search of light and liberty.”³¹⁵ This requirement shows how individual spiritual emancipation was an important foundation for black collective action.

The journey, with its characteristic linear progression and distinct difference from beginning to end, offers answers to the question of why the African American textual community deployed the Exodus in their narrative. Not only did they write themselves into a political history, but they also wrote themselves into a political future in which they were no longer excluded from the national narrative. Through a form of 'moral alertness', it was considered important to remember the experiences of people in slavery in order to gain and protect their freedom. Aaron, for example, discussed the immorality of slavery, stating that “we must take the bible as it reads, (...) “thou shalt not hold thy fellow mortal in bondage.” The slaveholders can’t see to read the bible, because their hearts are shut up with sin and iniquity, and is stained with the African’s blood. (...) Any man blessed with moral principles will not stand up and justify slavery and say that it is right.”³¹⁶ By emphasising the contradiction between the word of God and the immorality of slave owners, Aaron was able to appeal to the morality of his readers. By outlining the expectation that those with moral principles would speak out against slavery, he wrote his readers into a certain role and expected them to act according to their values: if they did not speak out against slavery, they would be immoral. A moral alertness of the kind Aaron described was necessary to remind people of the horrors of slavery and not only to gain their collective freedom, but to protect it. This moral component, Glaude Jr. argues, is precisely the strength of the use of Exodus by the African American textual community: the society was “not imagined alongside religion but precisely through the precepts of black Christianity.”³¹⁷

A key question central to answering how accounts of enslaved people's physical and spiritual journeys to freedom contributed to the formulation of a case for the immediate abolition of slavery in the southern states was whether freedom was an individual choice or a collective right. It was not the freedom fighters of the American Revolution, but the community of fugitive slave writers, who advocated freedom for those who were enslaved. This was evident both in the description of their physical journey and the sacrifices they had to make to gain their freedom, as well as in the spiritual

³¹⁴ Glaude, *Exodus!*, 4.

³¹⁵ Anderson, *Life and Narrative of William J. Anderson*, 31.

³¹⁶ Aaron, *The Light and Truth of Slavery*, 25.

³¹⁷ Glaude, *Exodus!*, 5-6.

journey in which they opposed the perpetuation of slavery and demanded its abolition, while seeking a form of equality with society by no longer being excluded. By arguing that they were a chosen people entitled to freedom as a whole, the textual community deployed the Exodus story as a religious narrative as a tool in a political struggle. By writing themselves into a collective history as a community, they defined themselves as a community with an identity entitled to collective freedom. In doing so, they created a new definition of freedom in which they were no longer excluded as a group.

Conclusion

"Let us die to make men free" was the theme of 'The Battle Hymn of the Republic', the marching song of the Northerners in the Civil War. Partly because of the antislavery campaign, the issue of slavery became the main cause of the war. Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation was followed in 1865 by the Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution, which banned slavery. However, African Americans still had to endure many setbacks – and unfortunately still do – before emancipation and equality could be achieved. In 2019, Nikole Hannah-Jones developed the New York Times' 1619 Project – an award-winning, extensive series on the heritage of slavery – that could be considered as an interpretation of the development of an identity that focuses on the history of the African-American people.³¹⁸ The project has sparked a fierce debate about the roots of the United States as a slave economy based on racial inequality, which has intensified with the death of George Floyd (25 May 2020) and the Black Lives Matter protests. The 1619 Project explores the history of slavery in the United States and asks the question: is the United States founded on ideals of liberty or slavery?

The year 1619 represents the moment when the first ship – The White Lion – an English privateer operating under a Dutch letter of marque, transported slaves to the port of Virginia in North America. In this project, Hannah-Jones has interviewed several people who are descendants of enslaved people. The people she interviewed expressed the importance they attach to knowing who they are descended from and what happened to their ancestors. At the same time, it became increasingly clear that even after the abolition of slavery, freed slaves and the descendants of freed slaves were still second-class citizens. There seems to be a growing awareness, partly due to the Black Lives Matter movement, of the current inequality between black and white people in society, which traces its roots back to the transatlantic and later domestic slave trade of the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The 1619 Project itself can be traced back to the early nineteenth century, when fugitive slave narrators placed the experience of slavery and the history of enslaved people at the centre of the American nation.

The aim of this thesis was to examine the antebellum fugitive slave narratives and slave testimony as abolitionist texts – in particular as instruments of what Manisha Sinha has dubbed "fugitive slave abolitionism."³¹⁹ How were specific themes in enslaved people's testimonies highlighted and publicized by abolitionist activists to build a broad and coherent case for the immediate abolition of slavery in the southern states? Fugitive slave narrators functioned as a textual community within

³¹⁸ Nikole Hannah-Jones, 'The 1619 Project: America Wasn't a Democracy Until Black Americans Made It One', *New York Times (online)* 14-08-2019 (New York).

³¹⁹ Sinha, *The Slave's Cause*, 421.

the abolitionist movement to contribute to the construction of broad and coherent arguments for the immediate abolition of slavery in the Southern states. According to the Oxford Dictionary, a textual community is "a place or social circle where manuscript texts are or were produced, read, and circulated by and for a certain group."³²⁰ Through the production of fugitive slave narratives, the fugitive slave textual community formed a coherent discourse within the abolitionist movement that sought to persuade northern readers to support the abolition of slavery through the pluralistic nature of the production of slave narratives and the construction of overlapping forms of consensus.

The narratives were intended not only to attract new supporters, but also to influence the ideas and even the motives of those who became involved in the antislavery movement. As such, the African American voice was central to the antislavery campaign as eyewitness accounts of life in bondage. The community of fugitive slave writers influenced the antebellum public sphere by creating contrasts: they defined oppositions between morality and immorality, humanity and inhumanity, individuality and collectivity, and life in bondage and life in freedom. At the same time, by presenting themselves to the outside world, the narrators created a new collective identity of (ex)slaves. It was precisely by not focusing entirely on forming antislavery arguments that it resulted in becoming one of the most powerful antislavery arguments: through the manifestation of political agency and collective identity by writing themselves into a shared history, there was both expression in resistance to slavery and an important form of identification with northern readers. In this way, fugitive slave narrators were responsible for a major shift in public opinion about freedom and slavery in American society.

For further research, it would be interesting to consider the role of the fugitive slave textual community in forming testimonies for legal proceedings and petitions. The narratives appear to represent a sort of legal record: alongside the testimony of the fugitives themselves, the narratives often contain a range of legal documents, such as manumission papers, notes from masters, and character references.³²¹ For abolitionists and other readers, slave narratives were valuable because, through the testimony of (former) slaves, they provided evidence of the workings and horrors of domestic slavery.³²² How these legal documents were used in the legal struggle to gain rights and status for black communities in North America would be interesting to further explore.

³²⁰ Beal, *A Dictionary of English Manuscript Terminology 1450-2000*, 414-415.

³²¹ N.N. Aljoe, 'Going to Law: Legal discourse and testimony in Early West Indian slave narratives', *Early American Literature* vol. 46, no. 2 (North Carolina 2011) 351-381; J.M. DeLombard, 'Slave narratives and U.S. Legal History' in: J. Ernest (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of the African American Slave Narrative* (Oxford 2014); J. Greene, 'A Plain and Natural Right to Life and Liberty': An Early Natural Rights Attack on the Excesses of the Slave System in Colonial British America' in: William and Mary Quarterly 3rd ser. 57.4 (2000) 793-808, 793; C. Davis and H. L. Gates Jr. (eds.), *The Slave Narrative* (Oxford 1985) xxvi.

³²² B.W. Higman, *Writing West Indian Histories* (London 1999) 54; N.N. Aljoe, 'Going to Law: Legal discourse and testimony in Early West Indian slave narratives' in: *Early American Literature* vol. 46, no. 2 (North Carolina 2011) 351-381, 358.

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Appendices

Table 1: selected narratives with corresponding titles

Narrative (Nx)	Narrative (title)	Author	Date and place of publication
N1	The Light and Truth of Slavery. Aaron's History	Aaron	Worcester, MA: The Author, 1845
N2	Narrative of the Life of John Quincy Adams, When in Slavery, and Now as a Freeman	John Quincy Adams, b. 1845	Harrisburg, Pa.: Sieg, 1872
N3	Life and Narrative of William J. Anderson, Twenty-four Years a Slave; Sold Eight Times! In Jail Sixty Times!! Whipped Three Hundred Times!!! or The Dark Deeds of American Slavery Revealed. Containing Scriptural Views of the Origin of the Black and of the White Man. Also, a Simple and Easy Plan to Abolish Slavery in the United States. Together with an Account of the Services of Colored Men in the Revolutionary War--Day and Date, and Interesting Facts.	William J. Anderson, b. 1811	Chicago: Daily Tribune Book and Job Printing Office, 1857
N4	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.	Charles Ball, Ed. Isaac Fisher.	New York: Published by John S. Taylor, 1837
N5	A Narrative of Some Remarkable Incidents in the Life of Solomon Bayley, Formerly a Slave in the State of Delaware, North America; Written by Himself, and Published for His Benefit; to Which Are Prefixed, a Few Remarks by Robert Hurnard	Solomon Bayley	London: Harvey and Darton, 1825
N6	Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb, an American Slave, Written by Himself	Henry Bibb	New York: Author, 1849
N7	The Life and Sufferings of Leonard Black, a Fugitive from Slavery. Written by Himself	Leonard Black	New Bedford: Benjamin Lindsey, 1847
N8	Narrative of the Life of Henry Box Brown, Written by Himself	Henry Box Brown	Manchester: Printed by Lee and Glynn, 8, Cannon Street. 1851.
N9	Narrative of James Curry, A Fugitive Slave	James Curry	<i>The Liberator</i> , 10 January 1840
N10	Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave. Written by Himself	Frederick Douglass	Boston: Anti-Slavery Office, 1845
N11	Running a Thousand Miles for Freedom; or, the Escape of William and Ellen Craft from Slavery	William Craft	London: William Tweedie, 1860
N12	Autobiography of Rev. Francis Frederick of Virginia	Francis Frederick	Baltimore: J.W. Woods, Printer, 1869
N13	Narrative of Events in the Life of William Green (Formerly a Slave), Written by Himself.	William Green	Springfield, MA: L.M. Guernsey, 1853.
N14	Life of William Grimes, The Runaway Slave. Written by Himself.	William Grimes	New York, 1825
N15	The Life of Josiah Henson, Formerly a Slave, Now an Inhabitant of Canada, as Narrated by Himself	Josiah Henson	Boston: A.D. Phelps, 1849
N16	Narrative of the Life of Thomas Cooper	Isaac T. Hopper	New York: Published by Isaak T. Hopper, 1832

N17	The Freedman's Story: In Two Parts	William Parker	The Atlantic Monthly, vol. XVII, Feb. 1866 (152-166), Mar. 1866 (276-295)
N18	The Fugitive Blacksmith; or, Events in the History of James W.C. Pennington, Pastor of a Presbyterian Church, New York, Formerly a Slave in the State of Maryland, United States	James W.C. Pennington	London, Charles Gilpin, 1849
N19	The Martyrs, and the Fugitive; or a Narrative of the Captivity, Sufferings, and Death of an African Family, and the Slavery and Escape of Their Son	Smith H. Platt	New York: Daniel Fanshaw, 1859
N20	Louisa Picquet, the Octoroon, or, Inside Views of Southern Domestic Life	Louisa Picquet, b. 1828? – and Hiram Mattison, 1811-1868	New York: The Author, 1861
N21	Twenty-Two Years a Slave, and Forty Years a Freeman; Embracing a Correspondence of Several Years, While President of Wilberforce Colony, London, Canada West	Austin Steward, 1794-1860	Rochester, NY, William Alling 1857
N22	The Life of John Thompson, a Fugitive Slave; Containing His History of 25 Years in Bondage, and His Providential Escape. Written by Himself.	John Thompson	Worcester: John Thompson, 1856
N23	Autobiography of a Fugitive Negro: his antislavery labours in the United States, Canada & England	Samuel Ringgold Ward	London: John Snow, 35, Paternoster Row, 1855
N24	Narrative of the Life of James Watkins, Formerly a "Chattel" in Maryland, U.S., Containing an Account of His Escape from Slavery, Together with an appeal on behalf of three millions of such "pieces of property", still held under the standard of the eagle.	James Watkins	Bolton, Eng.: Kenyon and Abbatt, 1852
N25	Narrative of Henry Watson, a Fugitive Slave	Henry Watson	Boston: Published by Bela Marsh 1848
N26	Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl. Written by Herself.	Harriet A. Jacobs	Boston: Published for the Author, 1861
N27	THE NARRATIVE OF LUNSFORD LANE, FORMERLY OF RALEIGH, N. C. Embracing an account of his early life, the redemption by purchase of himself and family from slavery, And his banishment from the place of his birth for the crime of wearing a colored skin. PUBLISHED BY HIMSELF.	Lunsford Lane	Boston: printed for the publisher: J.G. Torrey, Printer (1842, 2nd ed.)
N28	Narrative of William W. Brown, a Fugitive Slave. Written by Himself	William Wells Brown	Boston: The Anti-slavery office, 1847.
N29	Aunt Sally: or, The Cross the Way of Freedom. A Narrative of the Slave-life and Purchase of the Mother of Rev. Isaac Williams of Detroit, Michigan	Isaac Williams	Cincinnati: American Reform Tract and Book Society, 1858

Table 2: identified theme *domestic slave trade* and subthemes per narrative

Theme	Feature	Narrative (Nx)	Reference	Page
Domestic Slave Trade	Commodification	N2	Adams, John Quincy, <i>Narrative of the Life of John Quincy Adams</i> (1845)	8-9
		N3	Anderson, William J., <i>Life and Narrative of William J. Anderson</i> (1857)	6
		N4	Ball, Charles; ed. Fisher, Isaac, <i>Slavery in the United States</i> (1837)	405
		N6	Bibb, Henry, <i>Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb</i> (1849)	xi, 101
		N7	Black, Leonard, <i>The Life and Sufferings of Leonard Black</i> (1847)	5-6, 51, 59-61
		N10	Douglass, Frederick, <i>Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass</i> (1845)	18-19
		N11	Craft, William, <i>Running a Thousand Miles for Freedom</i> (1860)	1-2
		N15	Henson, Josiah, <i>The Life of Josiah Henson</i> (1849)	3
		N17	Parker, William, <i>The Freedman's Story</i> (1866)	157
		N18	Pennington, James W.C., <i>The Fugitive Blacksmith</i> (1849)	iv-xii
		N20	Picquet, Louisa; Mattison, Hiram, <i>Louisa Picquet, the Octoroon</i> (1861)	16
		N23	Ward, Samuel Ringgold, <i>Autobiography of a Fugitive Negro</i> (1855)	14-15, 17
		N24	Watkins, James, <i>Narrative of the Life of James Watkins</i> (1852)	13
		N25	Watson, Henry, <i>Narrative of Henry Watson</i> (1848)	5, 8-9
		N26	Jacobs, Harriet A., <i>Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl</i> (1861)	122
	N28	Brown, William Wells, <i>Narrative of William W. Brown</i> (1847)	13	
	N29	Williams, Isaac, <i>Aunt Sally: or, The Cross the Way of Freedom</i> (1858)	97-98	
	Speculation	N3	Anderson, William J., <i>Life and Narrative of William J. Anderson</i> (1857)	11, 14-15
		N4	Ball, Charles; ed. Fisher, Isaac, <i>Slavery in the United States</i> (1837)	100-101, 123-127
		N6	Bibb, Henry, <i>Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb</i> (1849)	101-103
		N13	Green, William, <i>Narrative of Events in the Life of William Green</i> (1853)	3-4
		N15	Henson, Josiah, <i>The Life of Josiah Henson</i> (1849)	4
		N20	Picquet, Louisa; Mattison, Hiram, <i>Louisa Picquet, the Octoroon</i> (1861)	17-18
		N24	Watkins, James, <i>Narrative of the Life of James Watkins</i> (1852)	13
		N25	Watson, Henry, <i>Narrative of Henry Watson</i> (1848)	7-8
		N26	Jacobs, Harriet A., <i>Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl</i> (1861)	160-161
		N28	Brown, William Wells, <i>Narrative of William W. Brown</i> (1847)	41, 46-47
		N29	Williams, Isaac, <i>Aunt Sally: or, The Cross the Way of Freedom</i> (1858)	102-103
		Forced migration	N3	Anderson, William J., <i>Life and Narrative of William J. Anderson</i> (1857)
	N4		Ball, Charles; ed. Fisher, Isaac, <i>Slavery in the United States</i> (1837)	15, 36-44, 45-50
	N6		Bibb, Henry, <i>Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb</i> (1849)	14, 98-100
	N11		Craft, William, <i>Running a Thousand Miles for Freedom</i> (1860)	10-13, 19-20, 27
	N13		Green, William, <i>Narrative of Events in the Life of William Green</i> (1853)	6
N15	Henson, Josiah, <i>The Life of Josiah Henson</i> (1849)		6	
N16	Hopper, Isaac T., <i>Narrative of the Life of Thomas Cooper</i> (1832)		10	
N17	Parker, William, <i>The Freedman's Story</i> (1866)		154	
N18	Pennington, James W.C., <i>The Fugitive Blacksmith</i> (1849)		vi	
N19	Platt, Smith H., <i>The Martyrs, and The Fugitive</i> (1859)		39	
N20	Picquet, Louisa; Mattison, Hiram, <i>Louisa Picquet, the Octoroon</i> (1861)		6, 18	
N22	Thompson, John, <i>The Life of John Thompson</i> (1856)		14-16	
N24	Watkins, James, <i>Narrative of the Life of James Watkins</i> (1852)		12	
N25	Watson, Henry, <i>Narrative of Henry Watson</i> (1848)		6	
N28	Brown, William Wells, <i>Narrative of William W. Brown</i> (1847)		74	
N29	Williams, Isaac, <i>Aunt Sally: or, The Cross the Way of Freedom</i> (1858)		113	

Table 3: identified theme *paternalism* and subthemes per narrative

Theme	Feature	Narrative (Nx)	Reference	Page	
Paternalism	Domestic values	N2	Adams, John Quincy, <i>Narrative of the Life of John Quincy Adams</i> (1845)	5-8	
		N8	Brown, Henry Box, <i>Narrative of the Life of Henry Box Brown</i> (1851)	2-4, 8-9	
		N9	Curry, James, <i>Narrative of James Curry</i> (1840)	(Alinea) 1, 5-6 (no pagenumbers available)	
		N12	Frederick, Francis, <i>Autobiography of Rev. Francis Frederick of Virginia</i> (1869)	26-31	
		N15	Henson, Josiah, <i>The Life of Josiah Henson</i> (1849)	1	
		N16	Hopper, Isaac T., <i>Narrative of the Life of Thomas Cooper</i> (1832)	6	
		N17	Parker, William, <i>The Freedman's Story</i> (1866)	153-154	
		N18	Pennington, James W.C., <i>The Fugitive Blacksmith</i> (1849)	2	
		N19	Platt, Smith H., <i>The Martyrs, and the Fugitive</i> (1859)	91	
		N23	Ward, Samuel Ringgold, <i>Autobiography of a Fugitive Negro</i> (1855)	5	
		N26	Jacobs, Harriet A., <i>Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl</i> (1861)	11-12	
		N29	Williams, Isaac, <i>Aunt Sally: or, The Cross the Way of Freedom</i> (1858)	10-11, 50	
		Family trauma	N3	Anderson, William J., <i>Twenty-four Years a Slave</i> (1811)	5, 16-19, 25-30
			N4	Ball, Charles; ed. Fisher, Isaac, <i>Slavery in the United States</i> (1837)	15, 16-19, 35-36
			N6	Bibb, Henry, <i>Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb</i> (1849)	33-44, 111-118
	N7		Black, Leonard, <i>The Life and Sufferings of Leonard Black</i> (1847)	15	
	N8		Brown, Henry Box, <i>Narrative of the Life of Henry Box Brown</i> (1851)	16-17, 39-40	
	N9		Curry, James, <i>Narrative of James Curry</i> (1840)	(Alinea) 4, 12	
	N10		Douglass, Frederick, <i>Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass</i> (1845)	62-63	
	N11		Craft, William, <i>Running a Thousand Miles for Freedom</i> (1860)	3, 27	
	N12		Frederick, Francis, <i>Autobiography of Rev. Francis Frederick of Virginia</i> (1869)	13-15	
	N14		Grimes, William, <i>Life of William Grimes</i> (1825)	5-6	
	N15		Henson, Josiah, <i>The Life of Josiah Henson</i> (1849)	9	
	N16		Hopper, Isaac T., <i>Narrative of the Life of Thomas Cooper</i> (1832)	6-9	
	N18		Pennington, James W.C., <i>The Fugitive Blacksmith</i> (1849)	7-8, 10	
	N20		Picquet, Louisa; Mattison, Hiram, <i>Louisa Picquet, the Octoroon</i> (1861)	10-15, 22	
	N21		Steward, Austin, <i>Twenty-Two Years a Slave</i> (1857)	16-18, 25	
	N22		Thompson, John, <i>The Life of John Thompson</i> (1856)	21	
	N23		Ward, Samuel Ringgold, <i>Autobiography of a Fugitive Negro</i> (1855)	15	
	N24		Watkins, James, <i>Narrative of the Life of James Watkins</i> (1852)	7-8, 10	
	N25		Watson, Henry, <i>Narrative of Henry Watson</i> (1848)	19	
	N26		Jacobs, Harriet A., <i>Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl</i> (1861)	95	
	N27		Lane, Lunsford, <i>The Narrative of Lunsford Lane</i> (1842)	5-9	
	N28	Brown, William Wells, <i>Narrative of William W. Brown</i> (1847)	14-16		
	N29	Williams, Isaac, <i>Aunt Sally: or, The Cross the Way of Freedom</i> (1858)	9-10		
	Christian morality	N1	Aaron, <i>The Light and Truth of Slavery</i> (1845)	2, 6-7, 16-19	
		N2	Adams, John Quincy, <i>Narrative of the Life of John Quincy Adams</i> (1845)	11-17	
		N3	Anderson, William J., <i>Life and Narrative of William J. Anderson</i> (1857)	8-10, 26	
		N6	Bibb, Henry, <i>Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb</i> (1849)	21-23, 163-164	
		N7	Black, Leonard, <i>The Life and Sufferings of Leonard Black</i> (1847)	9, 50-53	
		N8	Brown, Henry Box, <i>Narrative of the Life of Henry Box Brown</i> (1851)	3-7, 26-27	
		N10	Douglass, Frederick, <i>Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass</i> (1845)	78, 118-125	
N11		Craft, William, <i>Running a Thousand Miles for Freedom</i> (1860)	10, 20-21		
N12		Frederick, Francis, <i>Autobiography of Rev. Francis Frederick of Virginia</i> (1869)	7, 18-19		
N13		Green, William, <i>Narrative of Events in the Life of William Green</i> (1853)	5, 14-15		
N14		Grimes, William, <i>Life of William Grimes</i> (1825)	28-29, 34, 44-45		
N15		Henson, Josiah, <i>The Life of Josiah Henson</i> (1849)	3, 23-25		
N16		Hopper, Isaac T., <i>Narrative of the Life of Thomas Cooper</i> (1832)	5		
N18		Pennington, James W.C., <i>The Fugitive Blacksmith</i> (1849)	x		
N19		Platt, Smith H., <i>The Martyrs, and The Fugitive</i> (1859)	79		
N21		Steward, Austin, <i>Twenty-Two Years a Slave</i> (1857)	xii		
N22		Thompson, John, <i>The Life of John Thompson</i> (1856)	26		
N23		Ward, Samuel Ringgold, <i>Autobiography of a Fugitive Negro</i> (1855)	8		
N24		Watkins, James, <i>Narrative of the Life of James Watkins</i> (1852)	11		
N25		Watson, Henry, <i>Narrative of Henry Watson</i> (1848)	28-31		
N26	Jacobs, Harriet A., <i>Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl</i> (1861)	105-116			
N27	Lane, Lunsford, <i>The Narrative of Lunsford Lane</i> (1842)	10-11, 13-14			

N28
N29

Brown, William Wells, *Narrative of William W. Brown* (1847)
Williams, Isaac, *Aunt Sally: or, The Cross the Way of Freedom* (1858)

ix-x, 39
10, 50-54

Table 4: identified theme *flight* and subthemes per narrative

Theme	Feature	Narrative (Nx)	Reference	Page		
Flight	Physical journey	N1	Aaron, <i>The Light and Truth of Slavery</i> (1845)	3-4, 27		
		N3	Anderson, William J., <i>Life and Narrative of William J. Anderson</i> (1857)	20, 31-41		
		N4	Ball, Charles; ed. Fisher, Isaac, <i>Slavery in the United States</i> (1837)	388-392, 393-415		
		N5	Bayley, Solomon, A Narrative of Some Remarkable Incidents in the Life of Solomon Bayley (1825)	3-6		
		N6	Bibb, Henry, <i>Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb</i> (1849)	45-56, 122-123, 154-169		
		N7	Black, Leonard, <i>The Life and Sufferings of Leonard Black</i> (1847)	22-27		
		N8	Brown, Henry Box, <i>Narrative of the Life of Henry Box Brown</i> (1851)	50-57		
		N9	Curry, James, <i>Narrative of James Curry</i> (1840)	(Alinea) 16		
		N10	Douglass, Frederick, <i>Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass</i> (1845)	86-88, 100-101		
		N11	Craft, William, <i>Running a Thousand Miles for Freedom</i> (1860)	2, 29-32, 40-80		
		N12	Frederick, Francis, <i>Autobiography of Rev. Francis Frederick of Virginia</i> (1869)	32-35		
		N13	Green, William, <i>Narrative of Events in the Life of William Green</i> (1853)	15-21		
		N14	Grimes, William, <i>Life of William Grimes</i> (1825)	51-55		
		N15	Henson, Josiah, <i>The Life of Josiah Henson</i> (1849)	50		
		N16	Hopper, Isaac T., <i>Narrative of the Life of Thomas Cooper</i> (1832)	13		
		N17	Parker, William, <i>The Freedman's Story</i> (1866)	158		
		N18	Pennington, James W.C., <i>The Fugitive Blacksmith</i> (1849)	14-39		
		N19	Platt, Smith H., <i>The Martyrs, and The Fugitive</i> (1859)	84-93		
		N20	Picquet, Louisa; Mattison, Hiram, <i>Louisa Picquet, the Octoroon</i> (1861)	23-25		
		N21	Steward, Austin, <i>Twenty-Two Years a Slave</i> (1857)	112		
		N22	Thompson, John, <i>The Life of John Thompson</i> (1856)	83-90		
		N23	Ward, Samuel Ringgold, <i>Autobiography of a Fugitive Negro</i> (1855)	20		
		N24	Watkins, James, <i>Narrative of the Life of James Watkins</i> (1852)	15		
		N25	Watson, Henry, <i>Narrative of Henry Watson</i> (1848)	35		
		N26	Jacobs, Harriet A., <i>Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl</i> (1861)	145-149		
		N28	Brown, William Wells, <i>Narrative of William W. Brown</i> (1847)	70		
		N29	Williams, Isaac, <i>Aunt Sally: or, The Cross the Way of Freedom</i> (1858)	118		
			Spiritual journey	N1	Aaron, <i>The Light and Truth of Slavery</i> (1845)	4-5
				N3	Anderson, William J., <i>Life and Narrative of William J. Anderson</i> (1857)	30-31, 42-45
N5	Bayley, Solomon, A Narrative of Some Remarkable Incidents in the Life of Solomon Bayley (1825)			3, 10-15		
N8	Brown, Henry Box, <i>Narrative of the Life of Henry Box Brown</i> (1851)			49		
N12	Frederick, Francis, <i>Autobiography of Rev. Francis Frederick of Virginia</i> (1869)			32-35		
N14	Grimes, William, <i>Life of William Grimes</i> (1825)			28-29		
N15	Henson, Josiah, <i>The Life of Josiah Henson</i> (1849)			12-13		
N16	Hopper, Isaac T., <i>Narrative of the Life of Thomas Cooper</i> (1832)			5		
N17	Parker, William, <i>The Freedman's Story</i> (1866)			153		
N18	Pennington, James W.C., <i>The Fugitive Blacksmith</i> (1849)			29-30		
N19	Platt, Smith H., <i>The Martyrs, and The Fugitive</i> (1859)			79-80, 87, 94-95		
N20	Picquet, Louisa; Mattison, Hiram, <i>Louisa Picquet, the Octoroon</i> (1861)			52		
N21	Steward, Austin, <i>Twenty-Two Years a Slave</i> (1857)			xi		
N22	Thompson, John, <i>The Life of John Thompson</i> (1856)			76, 79-82		
N23	Ward, Samuel Ringgold, <i>Autobiography of a Fugitive Negro</i> (1855)			23-24		
N24	Watkins, James, <i>Narrative of the Life of James Watkins</i> (1852)			19		
N28	Brown, William Wells, <i>Narrative of William W. Brown</i> (1847)			99		
N29	Williams, Isaac, <i>Aunt Sally: or, The Cross the Way of Freedom</i> (1858)			119		
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				N3	Anderson, William J., <i>Life and Narrative of William J. Anderson</i> (1857)	59
		N4	Ball, Charles; ed. Fisher, Isaac, <i>Slavery in the United States</i> (1837)	490, 517		
		N6	Bibb, Henry, <i>Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb</i> (1849)	187-190		
		N7	Black, Leonard, <i>The Life and Sufferings of Leonard Black</i> (1847)	33		
		N8	Brown, Henry Box, <i>Narrative of the Life of Henry Box Brown</i> (1851)	59-61		
		N9	Curry, James, <i>Narrative of James Curry</i> (1840)	(Alinea) 7, 18		
		N11	Craft, William, <i>Running a Thousand Miles for Freedom</i> (1860)	3, 29, 80		
		N13	Green, William, <i>Narrative of Events in the Life of William Green</i> (1853)	10-11, 22-23		
		N15	Henson, Josiah, <i>The Life of Josiah Henson</i> (1849)	43, 58-59		
		N16	Hopper, Isaac T., <i>Narrative of the Life of Thomas Cooper</i> (1832)	11		
N17	Parker, William, <i>The Freedman's Story</i> (1866)	158				

N18	Pennington, James W.C., <i>The Fugitive Blacksmith</i> (1849)	xi
N19	Platt, Smith H., <i>The Martyrs, and The Fugitive</i> (1859)	47, 94
N20	Picquet, Louisa; Mattison, Hiram, <i>Louisa Picquet, the Octoroon</i> (1861)	60
N21	Steward, Austin, <i>Twenty-Two Years a Slave</i> (1857)	xii
N22	Thompson, John, <i>The Life of John Thompson</i> (1856)	143
N23	Ward, Samuel Ringgold, <i>Autobiography of a Fugitive Negro</i> (1855)	77
N24	Watkins, James, <i>Narrative of the Life of James Watkins</i> (1852)	12
N25	Watson, Henry, <i>Narrative of Henry Watson</i> (1848)	33
N27	Lane, Lunsford, <i>The Narrative of Lunsford Lane</i> (1842)	22
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N29	Williams, Isaac, <i>Aunt Sally: or, The Cross the Way of Freedom</i> (1858)	213