Seeing Emancipation: Scale and Freedom in the American South

Edward L. Ayers, Scott Nesbit
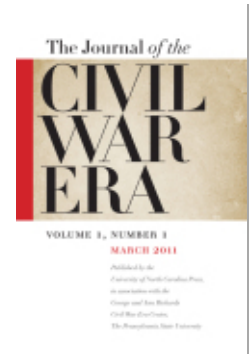
Seeing Emancipation Scale and Freedom in the American South

Emancipation in the United States was vast, distended, and chaotic. Shifting boundaries surrounded the struggle, unfolding unevenly over years and an expanse the size of Continental Europe. Some enslaved people were able to escape to Union lines within months of the beginning of the war, yet millions remained firmly bound by slavery in 1865. The president, legislatures, judges, and generals played crucial roles in ending slavery, as did enslaved people, who seized freedom at every opportunity. Military and political struggle were inextricably interwoven with the struggles of individuals held in slavery; thus Abraham Lincoln kept a map of the distribution of slavery—the first map of its kind in the United States—close at hand.

Trying to make sense of this complexity, historians of emancipation have tended to focus on agency, on the ways actors in different spheres and places strove for freedom. In its simplest form, that inquiry has turned around the question of who freed the slaves. Thanks to innovative work since the 1980s, we now see that freedom came as a result of many struggles—in cataclysmic battles and in protracted debates, on farms and in bureaucracies, in political parties and on lonely roads. Freedom demanded action on many fronts because slavery was entrenched throughout American society. A full understanding of emancipation requires that we put the pieces together. To do that—to comprehend the patterns, proportions, and timing of emancipation, to see multiple forms of power in interaction in space and time—we need an analytical framework that is inclusive, self-aware, and disciplined.[1]

Much of the debate over emancipation has, knowingly or not, turned on the issue of scale. Those who emphasize the role of Abraham Lincoln and the Republicans focus on the national scale; those who emphasize the role of the enslaved people focus on the scale of individual struggle and the cumulative effects of that struggle. Other historians focus on intermediate scales of armies, states, or regions. The debate to this point

has often focused on agency—who possessed the capacity for action and who used that capacity for what purposes and when. The concept of agency, however, tends toward dichotomies: passive versus active, top versus bottom, middle versus periphery, black versus white, military versus home front. The work of historians of emancipation has shown us that those dichotomies cannot explain the dynamic complexity of emancipation, in part because each side of the dichotomy restricts itself to a single scale.[2]

Since scale makes such a difference in our understanding, it would be good to analyze that concept more explicitly. Scale carries two fundamental meanings. First, it defines the varying spatial and temporal reach of specific practices. People act in networks of different sizes, with different degrees of awareness of those networks. It is also a matter of perception, the frame that observers lay down over evidence of social activity. That perceptual scale reveals and obscures, emphasizing some actions while truncating or ignoring others. Being self-conscious about scale, in both these meanings, is crucial if we are to understand the patterns of the past. Most important, an intentional focus on scale allows us to integrate multiple perspectives and social action of many kinds.

Emancipation certainly unfolded at multiple scales simultaneously. It occurred at the scale of grand strategy and the nation-state, dictated from Washington. Abraham Lincoln understood that the military success of the United States depended on destroying the ability of slave labor to feed the armies of the Confederacy. He also understood that enslaved people could be both aid and hindrance in the success of the Union armies, helping guide those armies through alien territory, yet burdening fast-moving troops with thousands of desperate men, women, and children. Lincoln also understood all too well the race he was running in the political realm, winning the war before his considerable opposition, fed by every move he made against slavery, mobilized to remove him from power.

Emancipation played out, too, at the level of the military district and theater. In 1862, for example, while commanding forces stationed off the South Carolina and Georgia coast, Gen. David Hunter temporarily created a large potential zone of emancipation, assuming the authority to enroll able-bodied former slaves as soldiers, with or without their consent, and declaring all slaves in the district free. This District of the South held authority over nearly one million slaves, according to the 1860 census, and Hunter hoped to leverage these demographics to his military advantage. In announcing emancipation, he cut against the strategies of war that the president had outlined by August 1862. Lincoln quickly revoked Hunter's abolition of slavery, even as he prepared to announce his own.[3]

Emancipation also occurred at the scale of local action. In Virginia, at Fort Monroe in 1861, enslaved men and women living nearby fled to Union lines. Maj. Gen. Benjamin Butler's reaction to their initiative created the legal verbiage through which emancipation could be incorporated through existing law: contraband of war. A year later, up the James River from Fort Monroe, these local initiatives emerged in seeming lockstep with military maneuvers. Edmund Ruffin, among the most ardent secessionists and defenders of slavery on the eve of war, noted with distress how slavery disintegrated with the approach of Union arms in the Peninsula Campaign of 1862. While watching emancipation in his own neighborhood, Ruffin noted glumly that the "number, & general spreading of such abscondings of slaves are far beyond any previous conceptions." The relation between nearby Union armies and escape from slavery was clear, too, in newspaper advertisements offering rewards for the capture of runaways. Figure 1 displays the percentage of items in the *Richmond Daily Dispatch* devoted to such advertisements over the course of the war. The highest peak comes in summer and fall 1862, in the wake of the Union approach to Richmond via the Peninsula.[4]

Each of those advertisements told a story of local scale and calculation. Some enslaved people fled because concrete opportunities presented themselves, others did so because life had simply become intolerable. Some ran away to particular destinations, with intimate knowledge of their intended routes, while others fled only in the rumored direction of Union armies. Whatever the case, the fugitives moved across a landscape wracked by the most profound dislocations of history at every scale.

Scale, as this brief survey of emancipation reveals, is hardly a simple concept. Since the early 1980s, geographers have carried on a wide-ranging debate over the meanings of scale, and historians can learn from those debates. We can see that scales of action are produced by men and women at particular points in time and for particular political, economic, and cultural purposes. Scale is self-consciously enacted; people intend their acts to have consequences of varying reach, though they can seldom perceive how far that reach extends and what results it brings to people and places they cannot see. We can also see that scale is imposed by interpreters of social action. Historians shape their conclusions in the moment they define the frame of their story, as soon as they establish a scale. Analyzing scale rather than taking it for granted is the best way to avoid its pitfalls. Keeping in mind the dual meanings of scale—as practiced and as perceived—helps us avoid conflating them.[5]

Making scale explicit can help us better understand how various kinds of action shaped American slavery and freedom. The broadest
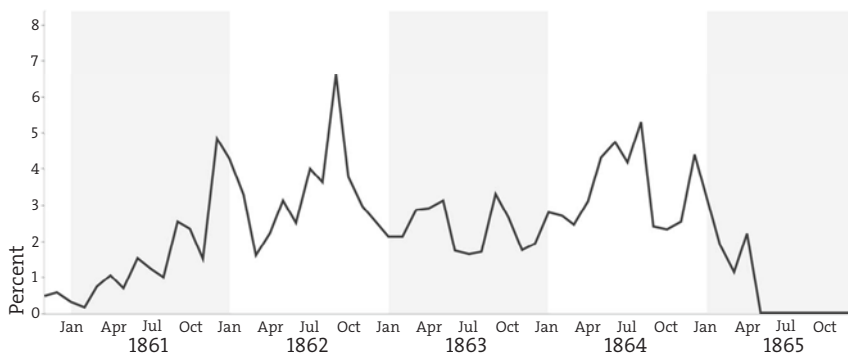
Figure 1

Fugitive slave advertisements as a percentage of newspaper items in the Richmond Daily Dispatch, 1861–1865.

perspective, the scale over the largest area, reveals that rapidly changing global commodity chains profoundly influenced the material conditions of slavery and thus emancipation. In the 1850s high cotton prices bolstered planters' profits and fed their hunger for an independent nation. At the same time, the world's largest manufacturer of cotton textiles, Great Britain, began to look for cotton in other, very different places in order to better control labor and regulate with more precision the price of raw materials. The American Civil War shattered the existing pattern. As the French statistician Charles J. Minard demonstrated 150 years ago in a pioneering representation of global scale (reproduced here in figure 2), the shift in the global cotton market, particularly British imports from India, began as early as 1861; by 1864, because of the U.S. naval blockade, the South was not a significant exporter of cotton. These fluctuations registered far beyond the cotton South, shaping human geography in the upper South, lower Egypt, and western India. The cotton South would suffer from that loss of position for generations to come, emancipation arriving in a hostile economic environment not of its own making.[6]

From the widest perspective, too, historians have seen political fortunes and ideologies spanning continents. Southerners flush with profits from the cotton trade sought to adapt the conservative ideologies and strategies of Europe in the 1850s to their purposes, but they also caught currents of nationalism that pushed along revolutions in China, Germany, India, and Italy. African Americans were inspired and influenced by the actions of freedpeople and their allies in the Caribbean and beyond. They sought grounding for their political claims in the material concerns and organizational structures of the countryside and in
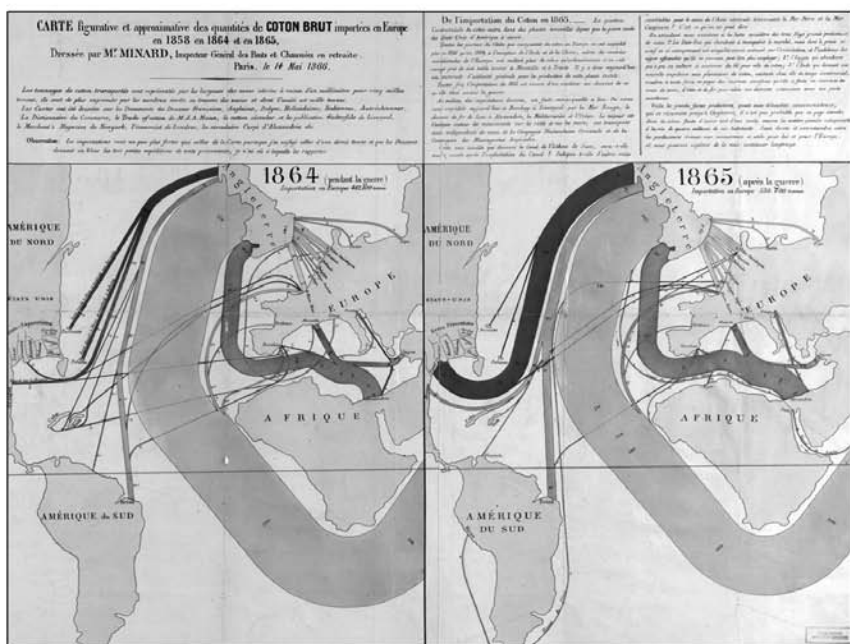
Figure 2
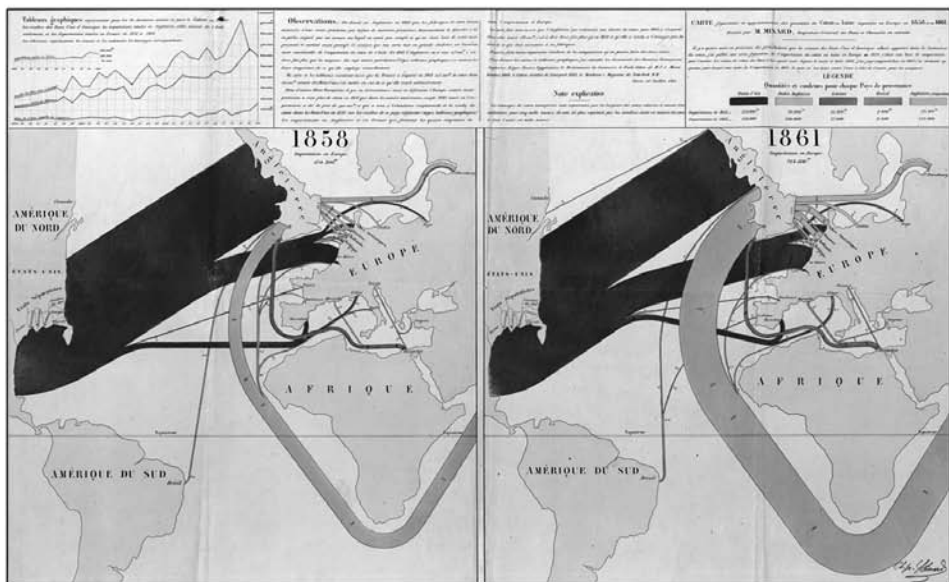
Charles J. Minard, "Carte Figurative et approximative des quantités de Coton en Laine importées en Europe en 1858 et en 1861," and "Carte Figurative et approximative des quantités de Coton Brut importées en Europe en 1858, 1864, et en 1865."

transnational, pan-African political desires, leading to expanding interest in the American Colonization Society and Liberian emigration.[7]

Historians increasingly emphasize that the struggles in the United States were parts of larger struggles. An international scale emphasizes both material and ideological layers of action larger than the nation-state, deemphasizing the particular partisan struggles and the march of sectional crises that have dominated our textbooks and common narratives. Pulling the camera back, paradoxically, also emphasizes the role of the enslaved people in their own freedom, showing that they were active advocates of their emancipation long before the Liberty or Republican Parties emerged. Both the global and hemispheric perspectives, in other words, reveal scales that play down the role of the nation-state, locating contingency beyond the usual borders of our understanding.

For its part, the national scale of study has its own surprises. Examined from Washington's perspective, historians now see, emancipation followed an uncertain path toward an uncertain destination. Abraham Lincoln agonized over the timing, wording, and implementation of every step of abolition, and the Thirteenth Amendment followed a tortuous path that proved "anything but predictable," Michael Vorenberg has discovered. The amendment "was not originally part of a carefully orchestrated political strategy; nor was it a natural product of prevailing legal principles; nor was it a direct expression of popular thought." Instead, it was the product of interaction, its meaning "contested and transformed from the moment of its appearance."[8]

The contest over freedom was fought over the shifting meanings of emancipation for race, citizenship, and gender. As Christian Samito reminds us, at war's beginning even many who hated slavery could not imagine full citizenship for former slaves, and "the idea of citizenship and suffrage for blacks had been unpopular within even the wartime Republican Party." But things began to change during the war and accelerated afterward. "African American arguments for inclusion, as well as the exigencies created by postwar white Southern resistance," Samito points out, "led Republicans to make a profound shift during the 1860s to embrace the idea that blacks stood entitled not just to the rights of persons but to those of a broadened concept of citizenship as well." As Amy Dru Stanley has shown, freedom for many African American women solidified in 1864 out of wartime arguments about black soldiers' ownership of their wives and children. Congress fused the abolition of slavery with freedom that had been "endowed by marriage, thereby tethering a new birth of human rights to enduring domestic bonds." The national scale shows that lawmakers brought about change that few of them had

foreseen, a level of contingency at what has often been considered the most intentional scale.[9]

At another scale, historians have discovered that life at the local level possessed its own powerful dynamic. Recent studies of plantations before the war have found that enslaved people lived in geographies attuned to their own needs, desires, and perceptions. White men voted in ways that make little sense until the most local information, the voting of their fathers or neighbors, is taken into account. The Civil War, moreover, came to every part of the South in a unique way, triggered both by actions a thousand miles away and events around the next bend. The more we have learned about the conflict, the more the complex patterns of scale emerge.[10]

Emancipation is particularly confusing—and useful—in thinking about scale because it reveals what geographers have called "scale-jumping." Despite a lack of formal access to power at state or national levels, enslaved people nonetheless bent large institutions of both the United States and the Confederacy to their purposes. Abraham Lincoln and the U.S. Army, with their vast resources, met the challenges of the Confederacy through decisive military action possible only through the nation-state. Their strength, in turn, gave force to individual or communal efforts at freedom the enslaved could not have had otherwise. But that state and its armies would not, could not, have exerted that force without the disruption and determination of the enslaved and freedpeople themselves. That was true from 1861 through Reconstruction.[11]

An interpretation attuned to disparate scales of action and the relations between them thus emphasizes how profoundly, and thus how intricately, the structures of state, military, and economic power connected to personal dramas. The challenge is to relate the scales of human action without collapsing them into each other, without reducing them to one or the other. Scales are not like Russian nesting dolls that fit inside one another. The local is not merely a subset of the national or the global, but a site of action that can change and challenge more geographically dispersed networks. One scale of analysis, too, is not necessarily more accurate or useful than the others. Just as a traveler relies on maps of international air travel, airports, cities, neighborhoods, and streets, each containing layers of information relevant to its scale, so do historians. No map is intrinsically better than the others; rather, they each take on their full utility only in the context of others.[12]

The concept of deep contingency is a way to think about social action across scales; it argues that different aspects of social life connect with others in unpredictable ways in the flow of time, creating important shifts in structures and self-understanding. Deep contingency is inherently

spatial. The "deep" component of that concept invokes the interpenetration of personal, household, local, regional, national, and global scales. The "contingent" component invokes the connections, often unpredictable, across various facets of self-understanding and action. Deep contingency means that change at one scale can trigger change at other scales, with systemic change resonating at all scales. Deep contingency requires that we imagine social life in four dimensions, with change and space continually making one another.[13]

Deep contingency marked each stage of the American Civil War. In secession, the outcome of elections in 1860 and 1861 triggered a cascade of consequences that led white Southerners to redefine their relationship to not only the United States but their own families and even God. Later, battles redefined the geography of war, which in turn redefined the possibilities of emancipation hundreds of miles away. An unanticipated product of war, freedom came with greater speed and proceeded farther than anyone could have predicted in 1861. Emancipation, once begun, displayed what appeared an inexorable logic, but freedom followed channels not of its own making.

For all its complexity, emancipation occurred on a bounded landscape over a fixed number of years, with enormous documentation, and so we can see some of its patterns. Visualizations can represent those patterns better than words alone. Images permit us to see processes that unfold unevenly and simultaneously over time, across different scales. Without mapping, it is easy to remain vague about social action, assuming consequence and reach. By requiring that evidence be apparent, visualizing a process permits us to understand how actions overlap, penetrate, and conflict with one another. Historians' characteristic and crucial focus on the singular and the anomalous provides a necessary check against overly schematized representations, and any representation suitable for history will have to be dynamic in every dimension, embodying change as part of its fundamental assumptions. But visualization allows us to see patterns and processes that are invisible in words alone. Visualization allows—even requires—that we take account of scale and its consequences.

By examining the entire Civil War South in a single season of the war—summer 1864—we can see interaction between geographic layers of legal enactments, military control, and shifting demography. By then, four changing, discontinuous regions had emerged on the landscape, each with its own complex internal geography and dynamic, as we show in figure 3. A border region stretched through slave states that had not seceded and therefore in which slave-owners had the greatest legal recourse against emancipation. It encompassed those places where federal and
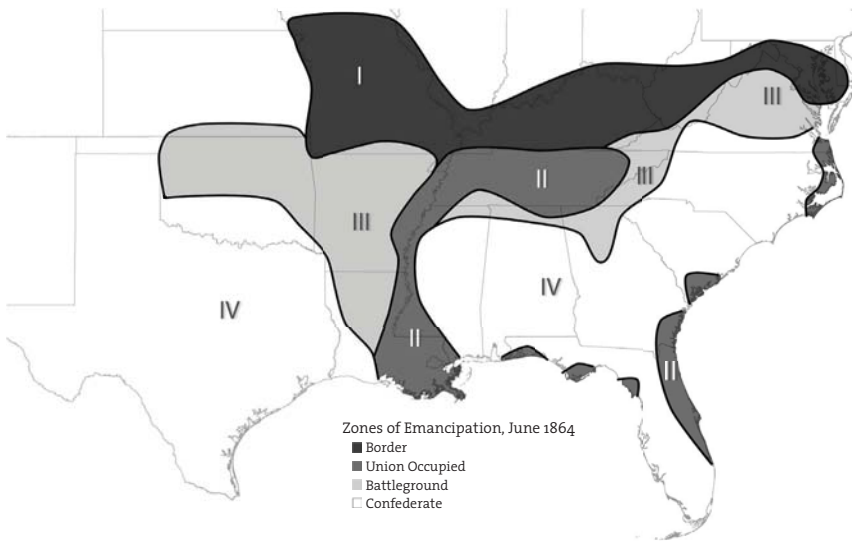
Figure 3

Approximate Zones of Emancipation, June 1864.

state law protected slavery and the slave trade even while military practices undermined the institution. By summer 1864, for example, Kentucky had become an unlikely new center of the slave trade and the most fertile recruitment center for the United States Colored Troops, an anomalous product of the uneven political and legal geography of emancipation.

Zones of relatively long-lasting Union control in the seceded South, by contrast, beading the coastline and the environs of Washington, lining the Mississippi, and extending to middle Tennessee, left very different marks on slavery. The institution had all but fallen apart in these places. African Americans living in the occupied South crowded into garrisoned cities and towns, leaving behind them a landscape nearly devoid of coerced labor. These regions also held Union-sponsored plantations, where reconstruction might be tested and free labor transitions assessed but which proved vulnerable to Confederate raids.[14]

Even late in the war, Confederate strongholds covered enormous territory, encompassing nearly all of Texas; much of Alabama's black belt and the Florida panhandle; as well as the Piedmont from Augusta, Georgia, to southern Virginia. These spaces had seen few, if any, Union troops after three years of warfare and seemed to provide few chances for enslaved men and women to escape. Still, even in these spaces, slavery had been transformed. Rumors of Yankee incursions interrupted work routines; refugee

planters carried what property they could from other districts, disrupting local power relations; trading with those outside neighboring counties had become even less reliable than Confederate scrip; escaped slaves and deserters menaced many plantation districts. Enslaved men and women across the Confederate strongholds refused to work for their old masters.

In summer 1864, finally, much of the South remained a battleground, where emancipation had the possibility of sweeping through entire districts with United States arms. This was certainly the intent of Union officers, who devised a coordinated strategy spanning thousands of miles and including attacks up the Red River of Louisiana, Sherman's march southeast toward and then northward from the sea, and assaults around Richmond and up the Shenandoah Valley. These campaigns would deprive Confederate armies of the most productive lands of the South, where hundreds of thousands of enslaved people lived. These zones were also the spaces of Confederate initiative and movement even late in the conflict, to the detriment of African Americans. In spring and summer 1864, these spaces encompassed Nathan Bedford Forrest's atrocities, Jubal Early's invasion of Pennsylvania, and a large number of less spectacular points where emancipation ebbed. Military movements, in other words, overlay legal and demographic geographies to create a complex terrain for emancipation. Each element changed according to its own dynamic. Pulling layers of action apart and holding them in relation to each other at the same scale of analysis and representation, as in figure 4, we begin to see patterns more clearly.

The emancipation regions of the South, always moving, could also suddenly shift. Preliminary emancipation proclamations and congressional acts between May and September 1862 had revolutionized the legal geography of slavery. Before these acts, federal law throughout the American South protected slavery. After them, United States law put the institution into question in most of the Confederacy. Relatively few of the spaces where slavery had been endangered, however, were held securely by Union troops in 1864. Slavery existed, if in a threatened state, throughout much of the Confederacy.

Nowhere was the threat more urgent than in Virginia, where actions taken at various scales collided. By summer of 1864, David Hunter had been transferred there to take up Maj. Gen. Franz Sigel's position in the Shenandoah Valley when Sigel was removed from command after the Battle of New Market. During Hunter's movement up the valley, he would work with his troops and enslaved men and women to enact emancipation less flamboyantly but more effectively than he had earlier in the war, operating on different layers and scales to different effect.
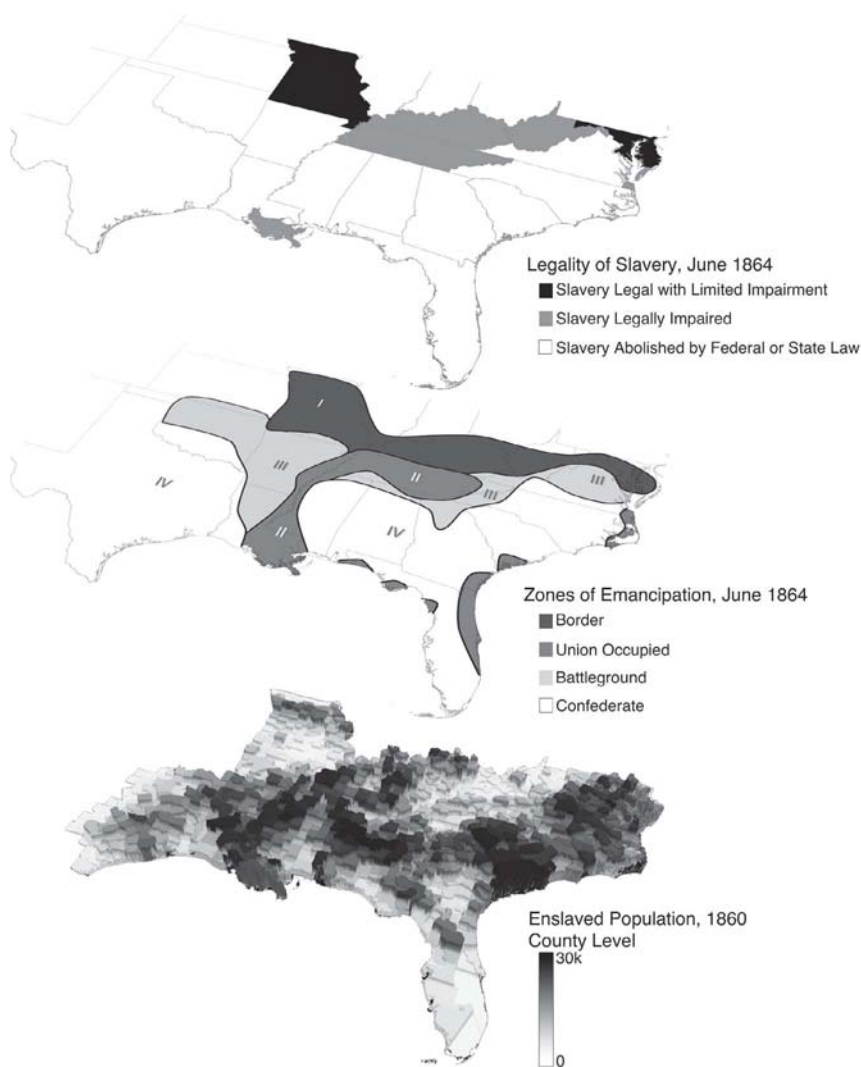
Figure 4

Legal, military, and demographic layers of emancipation, June 1864.

In the valley, Hunter was dependent on enslaved men and women to accomplish his military objectives and his object of emancipation. Some African Americans were willing to help, providing local knowledge of enemy positions and of the same terrain that Thomas "Stonewall" Jackson's dramatic campaign had spanned two years earlier. In helping Hunter, and in using Hunter to escape to freedom, men and women in the

valley changed the demographic pattern of slavery, enacting emancipation on the local level, tracing a parallel line, we might say, alongside enactments of Congress.[15]

In escaping slavery with the U.S. Army and in providing Hunter's soldiers with intelligence, these enslaved people operated within a geographic context impossible to see if we focus solely on strategic military zones, legally prescribed areas of freedom and lack thereof, or statistical representations of the census. Black men and women acted at other scales, particularly within the existing familial and political networks created by migration and the slave trade. These networks, like the contingencies of battle, had a great impact on the contours of emancipation. They were part of an extended black geography, created in part through the expansive slave trade of the 1830s, 1840s, and 1850s.[16]

Black families, especially in long-settled districts, were often marked by the forced absence, by sale as well as by hiring, of children and spouses. In Augusta County, Virginia, for example, where Hunter arrived in 1864, most black families were composed of migrants from other Virginia counties. The majority of migrants, a sample of whose journeys are represented in figure 5, came from counties across the state. Local history was also state and regional history, all tied to networks of trade and profit with centers far from Virginia. Antebellum history was also wartime history, postbellum history.

Connecting history across some of these scales makes some otherwise invisible stories visible. Figure 6 maps the positions of significant U.S. Army units in Virginia in summer 1864 alongside all the flights of enslaved men and women reported in the *Richmond Daily Dispatch* and *Staunton Vindicator*. These relative positions and timings show a loose coordination between enslaved men and women fleeing slavery and the paths of large armies. Some, but certainly not all, slave escapes this summer in Virginia closely accompanied Union troops. The electronic version of this map is available along with the other maps presented in this essay at the Digital Scholarship Lab's website on the *Hidden Patterns of the Civil War*, http://dsl.richmond.edu/civilwar/. It combines information from the National Archives; the *Official Records of the War of the Rebellion;* and newspapers, diaries, and letters to create a matrix of emancipation. This snapshot and the narrative that follows reveal one moment in the complex processes that the larger and more dynamic map encodes. Visualization must be translated into words that bring their own kind of clarity even as they necessarily sacrifice others.

In June 1864, an otherwise anonymous "Jack" took leave of West View, a farming neighborhood about five miles west of Staunton in the
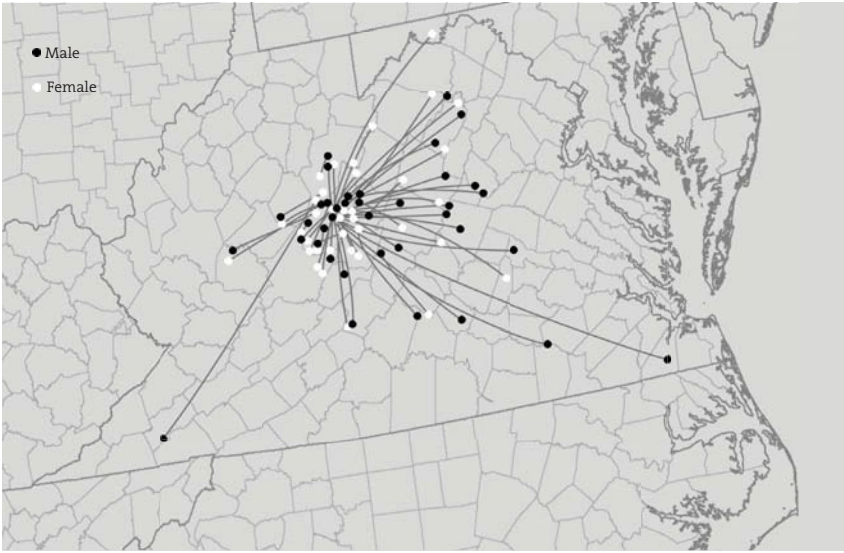
Figure 5

Migrations of married Augusta County freedmen and women, recorded 1866.

Shenandoah Valley. The immediate cause of his departure, most likely, was the approach of U.S. troops under Hunter. That command—about twelve thousand men once they were reinforced with soldiers from the Department of West Virginia—stormed up the Valley, pressing the relatively undermanned Confederate forces east of the Blue Ridge as the Union forces headed south, taking the small cities of Staunton, Lexington, and, they hoped, Lynchburg.[17]

In this shifting military geography, thousands of men and women escaped slavery in Virginia. Among those leaving were people who had worked on farms and in industries around Augusta, including a number of enslaved employees at the Virginia Insane Asylum who followed Hunter's troops, first southward, then eventually toward West Virginia. Hunter's party had two primary aims: to destroy the food-producing capacity of the valley and to destroy the railroad depot at Lynchburg, cutting off any escape or supply route feeding the Army of Northern Virginia around Richmond and Petersburg.[18]

Jack had lived on the Keller farm in Augusta County for a number of years and had little desire to remain. When U.S. troops arrived in Staunton on June 6, the nineteen-year-old had ample opportunity to head for likely freedom in West Virginia. Confederate authorities had abandoned the city, and discipline was light in the countryside where he resided. Jack's
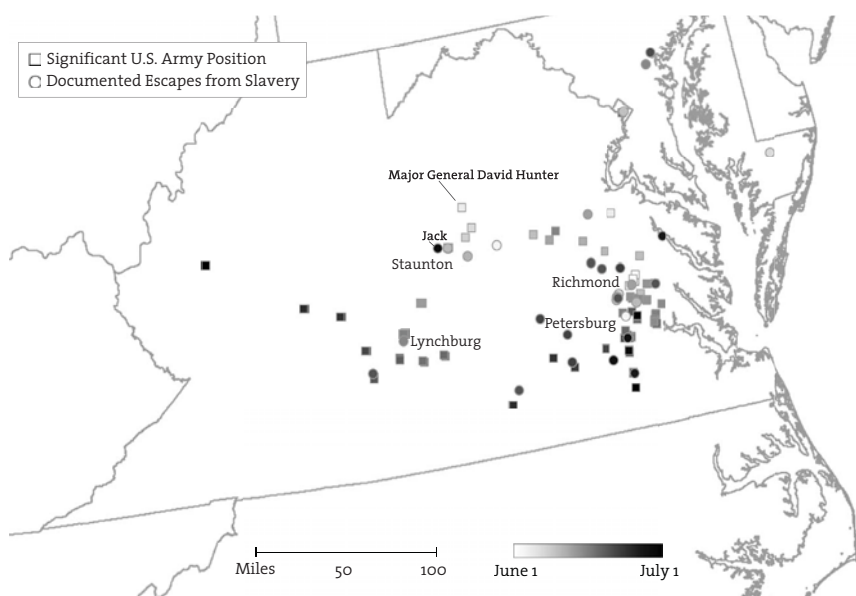
Figure 6
U.S. military movements and select, documented escapes from slavery in Virginia, June 1864.

designs, however, likely turned toward Petersburg. He had grown up there and had been moved to Augusta County unwillingly, almost certainly one of the thousands who made the trek every year from eastern Virginia to points west in the state, an oft-traveled if seldom analyzed part of the second middle passage.

A large number of enslaved Virginians took the considerable risk of leaving farms to attempt to join with U.S. Army units. By late June, the Army of the Potomac's maneuvers around Richmond toward Petersburg were well known. Throughout the state, news traveled quickly that U.S. cavalry units, attached to Benjamin Butler's Army of the James, had raided along the Richmond and Danville railroad to the Staunton River junction several days' journey from West View. By the time of the Petersburg campaign in 1864 and 1865, enslaved men and women throughout eastern and central Virginia had been able to find their way to Union lines. Such journeys were risky: the presence of Lee's army, Early's cavalry, and a number of active militias and slave patrols between Staunton and Petersburg made journeys such as the one Jack took particularly dangerous. Yet he and others took the opportunity created by the U.S. Army's campaigns in the state.

Jack was "copper color, with a white speck in the ball of one eye. He was wearing a green slouch hat and a pair of capped boots." John Keller had little doubt that Jack was headed for his family in Petersburg. We do not know whether Jack was able to complete his journey, and we can only guess that, in fact, Keller was correct in his assumption that Jack went to Petersburg. These intimate geographies are shrouded in hearsay, rumor, and circumstantial evidence that described freedmen and women according to the ideological purposes of their authors. That Jack's would-be owner understood the power of the familial network is, by itself, testimony to the importance of that network.

At this scale, impossible to see without concatenating information usually bound in different scales and categories—military and civilian, regional and local, white and black—the complex consequences of the U.S. Army's incursions become apparent. The most successful attempts to attack Confederate infrastructure enabled increasing numbers of African Americans to find and follow Union troops. In Spotsylvania, Hanover, and Essex Counties, slaveholders reported landscapes "entirely stripped" of enslaved people as African Americans left plantations to follow Union arms during the Overland campaign. Smaller movements of troops into territory that U.S. troops had not before encountered also found men and women eager to flee when those forces came near.[19]

Indeed, the Union army cast a shadow over a much wider area than the immediate vicinity of its marches. Large armies created an extensive penumbra where slavery was disrupted. Slave patrols fell apart, allowing individuals such as Jack to elude capture long after nearby armies had passed. Confederate authorities conscripted enslaved men from farms to work on fortifications long before a U.S. regiment threatened a county. Towns and cities miles from armed conflict were flooded with immigrants, creating opportunities for urban anonymity. At the most fundamental level, the Union army broke up slavery wherever it went and a good many places it did not.[20]

At a yet more intimate scale, however, we can see that armies were unreliable vehicles for emancipation, bringing heartbreak as well as liberation. After pressing through the valley, for example, Hunter sent his wagon train ahead of his main body of troops en route to Charlestown, West Virginia. Many of the enslaved people who made off with Hunter originally were able to escape northward, eventually ending up in Indianapolis. Only a few were reenslaved during the ambushes led by John Imboden's cavalry and other units.[21]

But African Americans who fled Southside Virginia plantations, a few days' walk east of Lynchburg, in what seemed similar circumstances at

virtually the same time, were not nearly as fortunate as those with Hunter's men. The route of Brigadier Generals James H. Wilson and August V. Kautz's cavalry units along the Danville Railroad, the Union army's first foray into Southside Virginia, was marked by slaveholder complaints of escaped slaves. During the cavalry's return to Petersburg, however, Wade Hampton's Confederate unit caught the U.S. troops at Ream's Station. Union soldiers scattered, suffering nearly fifteen hundred casualties and abandoning between two and four hundred men and women to reenslavement. Coming as the U.S. Congress seemed poised to end slavery through constitutional amendment, as officers and enlisted whites in the U.S. military came to support emancipation, and as the Confederacy found itself increasingly hemmed in, such instances remind us that the patterns of emancipation worked at different scales in different ways, often chaotically, seeming to gather momentum at the national scale while suddenly disappearing with the fortunes of cavalry raids.[22]

In this time and place, action at different scales produce discernable patterns: changes in the law of slavery by 1864, enacted at the national scale, made flight toward Union lines in Virginia a more certain mode of emancipation than it had been earlier or than it was elsewhere in the South at that time; enslaved men and women sought out home and family at every opportunity, an ambition that combined the scale of the household with the scale of the interstate slave trade; at times, pursuit of family made it more likely that they would flee their current residence, at other times less likely; individual slaves found large and stable Union armies, organized at the scale of the army or army group, more effective vehicles for emancipation than fast-moving, smaller units; household and local control over slavery became increasingly frayed over the course of the war.

Emancipation was a deeply patterned, deeply contingent affair that depended on the interaction of processes occurring at multiple scales. Greater self-awareness about scale and geography can help us find the patterns in that vast variation, making us more alert to the nature of the contexts and the stories enacted there. To see emancipation, we have to imagine stories unfolding thousands of times across the South, each unique but each bearing the marks of its place and time.

Thanks to the work of generations of historians, we know more about emancipation than we might have thought possible. Imaginative work at every scale has revealed the determination of the enslaved to be free in whatever measure they could—and of the complications of politics, policy, and warfare that both aided and compromised that freedom. Every scale mattered, and every scale connected with the others. Seeing those patterns

of emancipation can help us understand the most profound social transformation in American history.

1. On the question of agency in U.S. slave emancipation, see W. E. B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1935); Benjamin Quarles, *Lincoln and the Negro* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1962); Leon F. Litwack, *Been in the Storm So Long: The Aftermath of Slavery* (New York: Knopf, 1979); Ira Berlin, Barbara J. Fields, Thavolia Glymph, Joseph P. Reidy, and Leslie S. Rowland, eds., *Freedom: A Documentary History of Emancipation 1861–1867,* ser. 1, vol. 1, *The Destruction of Slavery* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 1–56; James McPherson, "Who Freed the Slaves?" *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 139 (1995): 1–10; and Stephen Hahn, *A Nation under Our Feet: Black Political Struggles in the Rural South from Slavery to the Great Migration* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003); Walter Johnson, "On Agency," *Journal of Social History* 37 (2003): 113–24. On Lincoln's map of slavery, see U.S. Coast Survey, *Map Showing the Distribution of the Enslaved Population of the Southern States and the United States. Compiled from the Census of 1860,* Geography and Map Division, Library of Congress; Francis Bicknell Carpenter, *First Reading of the Emancipation Proclamation of President Lincoln* (oil on canvas, 1864), U.S. Capitol, Washington, D.C.; and Susan Schulten, "The Cartography of Slavery and the Authority of Statistics," *Civil War History* 41 (2010): 5–32.

2. On the limits of debates about agency, see John Rodrigue, "Black Agency after Slavery," in *Reconstructions: New Perspectives on the Postbellum United States,* ed. Thomas J. Brown (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 40–65 and Walter Johnson, "On Agency," *Journal of Social History* 37 (2003): 113–24.

3. Ira Berlin, Joseph Reidy, and Leslie Rowland, *Freedom: A Documentary History of Emancipation, 1861–1867,* ser. 2, *The Black Military Experience* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 1–34, 37–41, G. M. Wells to E. L. Pierce, enclosed in S. P. Chase to Edwin M. Stanton, May 21, 1862, 49–50.

4. Edmund Ruffin, May 18, 1862, *The Diary of Edmund Ruffin,* ed. William Kauffman Scarborough, 3 vols. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 1972–89), 2:307; James Marten, "A Feeling of Restless Anxiety: Loyalty and Race in the Peninsula Campaign and Beyond," in *The Richmond Campaign of 1862: The Peninsula and the Seven Days,* ed. Gary W. Gallagher (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 121–52.

5. Peter Taylor, "A Materialist Framework for Political Geography," *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers,* n.s., 7 (1982): 15–34; Neil Smith, *Uneven*

Development: Nature, Capital, and the Production of Space (Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell, 1984); Sallie A. Marston, "The Social Construction of Scale," *Progress in Human Geography* 24 (2000): 219–42; Nina Siu-Ngan Lam and Dale A. Quattrochi, "On the Issues of Scale, Resolution, and Fractal Analysis in the Natural Sciences," *Professional Geographer* 44 (1992): 88–98; Sallie A. Marston, John Paul Jones III, and Keith Woodward, "Human Geography without Scale," *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers,* n.s., 30 (2005): 416–32; and Andrew E. G. Jonas, "Pro Scale: Further Reflections on the 'Scale Debate' in Human Geography," *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers,* n.s., 31 (2006): 399–406. This recent debate is a resuscitation of older work on scale and the problems of representation, for example, David W. Harvey, "Pattern, Process, and the Scale Problem in Geographical Research," *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 45 (1968): 71–78.

6. The literature on slave emancipation in a global context is rich and will not be cited in detail. For recent transnational histories of slave emancipation that deal in depth with the U.S. context, see Seymour Drescher, *Abolition: A History of Slavery and Antislavery* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009); David Brion Davis, *Inhuman Bondage: The Rise and Fall of Slavery in the New World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006); Rebecca J. Scott, *Degrees of Freedom: Louisiana and Cuba after Slavery* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005); Edward B. Rugemer, *The Problem of Emancipation: The Caribbean Roots of the American Civil War* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2008); Matthew P. Guterl, *American Mediterranean: Southern Slaveholders in the Age of Emancipation* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2008). For a fuller survey, see Joseph Miller, *Bibliography of Slavery and World Slaving,* http://www.vcdh.virginia.edu/bib/. Cotton had already undergone dramatic material and conceptual changes that made such a rise in prices possible. See Giorgio Riello, "The Globalization of Cotton Textiles: Indian Cottons, Europe, and the Atlantic World, 1600–1850," in *The Spinning World: A Global History of Cotton Textiles, 1200–1850,* eds. Giorgio Riello and Prasannan Parthasarathi (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 261–87. On cotton and the U.S. role in world trade, see Sven Beckert, "Emancipation and Empire: Reconstructing the Worldwide Web of Cotton," *American Historical Review* 109 (2004): 1405–38. On the postwar fortunes of the cotton South, see Susan O'Donovan, *Becoming Free in the Cotton South* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2007); Joseph P. Reidy, *From Slavery to Agrarian Capitalism in the Cotton Plantation South: Central Georgia, 1800–1880* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992); Roger L. Ransom and Richard Sutch, *One Kind of Freedom: The Economic Consequences of Emancipation* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1977); Gavin Wright, *The Political Economy of the Cotton South: Households, Markets, and Wealth in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Norton, 1978), 89–102, 158–84.

7. On international trade and secession, see Brian Schoen, *Fragile Fabric of Union: Cotton, Federal Politics, and the Global Origins of the Civil War* (Baltimore:

Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009) and Nicholas Onuf and Peter Onuf, *Nations, Markets, and War: Modern History and the American Civil War* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2006). On nationalism as an international phenomenon in the midnineteenth century, see C. A. Bayly, *Birth of the Modern World, 1780–1914* (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 2004), 199–208; and Hahn, *Nation under Our Feet.*

8. Michael Vorenberg, *Final Freedom: The Civil War, the Abolition of Slavery, and the Thirteenth Amendment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 2–3.

9. Christian Samito, *Becoming American under Fire: Irish Americans, African Americans, and the Politics of Citizenship during the Civil War Era* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell Univ. Press, 2009), 9; Amy Dru Stanley, "Instead of Waiting for the Thirteenth Amendment: The War Power, Slave Marriage, and Inviolate Human Rights," *American Historical Review* 115 (2010): 732–33.

10. Notable studies attendant to the local contexts of enslaved peoples' lives include Anthony Kaye, *Joining Places: Slave Neighborhoods in the Old South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007); John Michael Vlach, *Back of the Big House: The Architecture of Plantation Slavery* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993); Maurie D. McInnis, *The Politics of Taste in Antebellum Charleston* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 240–76; Charles Joyner, *Down by the Riverside: A South Carolina Slave Community* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986); Amy Murrell Taylor, "How a Cold Snap in Kentucky Led to Freedom for Thousands: An Environmental Story of Emancipation," in *Weirding the War: Tales from the Civil War's Ragged Edges,* ed. Stephen Berry (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2011); Walter Johnson, "The Slave Trader, the White Slave, and the Politics of Racial Determination in the 1850s," *Journal of American History* 87 (2000): 13–38. On partisan politics at the local level, see Daniel W. Crofts, *Old Southampton: Politics and Society in a Virginia County, 1834–1869* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1992), 172–86; William G. Thomas and Edward L. Ayers, "The Differences Slavery Made: A Close Analysis of Two American Communities," *American Historical Review* 108 (2003), 1299–1307, http://www2.vcdh.virginia .edu/AHR; Glenn C. Altschuler and Stuart M. Blumin, *Rude Republic: Americans and Their Politics in the Nineteenth Century* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2000).

11. Originally, Marxian geographers conceptualized scale jumping—the process whereby "political claims and power established at one geographical scale are expanded to another"—to describe the behavior of companies seeking ways to escape state-based regulatory regimes and to operate instead as multinational corporations. See Marston, Jones, and Woodward, "Human Geography without Scale," 418, and Smith, *Uneven Development.* Smith later applied the concept to the actions of those with relatively little access to formal levers of power. Neil Smith, "Contours of a Spatialized Politics: Homeless Vehicles and the Production of Geographical Scale," *Social Text* 33 (1992): 54–81. On political power and the Confederacy, see Stephanie McCurry, *Confederate Reckoning: Power and Politics in the Civil War South* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2010). Historians have long

understood what is required for a full history of emancipation and its consequences. Eric Foner declared of all Reconstruction that "instead of proceeding in a linear, predetermined fashion, these developments arose from a complex series of interactions among blacks and whites, Northerners and Southerners, in which victories were often tentative and outcomes subject to challenge and revision." *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution* (New York: Harper, 1988), xxv–xxvii.

12. John Western, "Russian Dolls or Scale Skippers? Two Generations in Strasbourg," *Geographical Review* 98 (2008): 532–50.

13. On deep contingency, see Edward L. Ayers, *In the Presence of Mine Enemies: War in the Heart of America, 1859–1863* (New York: Norton, 2003); Edward L. Ayers, "What Caused the Civil War?" in *What Caused the Civil War? Reflections on the South and Southern History* (New York: Norton, 2005), 131–44.

14. Stephen V. Ash, *When the Yankees Came: Conflict and Chaos in the Occupied South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995); Willie Lee Rose, *Rehearsal for Reconstruction: The Port Royal Experiment* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1964).

15. *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* (Washington, D.C., GPO, 1880–1901), ser. 1, vol. 37, 1: 98–103 (hereafter *OR*).

16. Ira Berlin, *Generations of Captivity: A History of African American Slaves* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003); Hahn, *Nation under Our Feet;* Philip Troutman, "Slave Trade and Sentiment in Antebellum Virginia" (Ph.D. diss., University of Virginia, 2000), 419.

17. *Staunton Vindicator, Valley of the Shadow: Two Communities in the American Civil War,* http://valley.lib.virginia.edu/, July 15, 1864, p. 2, col. 4. The details of the story we tell of the enslaved man Jack are based on a single, brief source, Staunton *Vindicator, Valley of the Shadow,* July 8, 1864, p. 2, col. 5. On microhistories of historical figures who leave few traces, see, among other works, Wendy Anne Warren, "'The Cause of Her Grief': The Rape of a Slave in Early New England," *Journal of American History* 93 (2007): 1031–49.

18. *Staunton Vindicator, Valley of the Shadow,* July 15, 1864, p. 2, col. 4; *The Shenandoah Valley Campaign of 1864,* ed. Gary W. Gallagher (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), ix–xii.

19. "Outrages in Essex County," *Richmond Daily Dispatch,* June 30, 1864, p. 1, col. 3.

20. James Marten, "A Feeling of Restless Anxiety: Loyalty and Race in the Peninsula Campaign and Beyond," in *The Richmond Campaign of 1862: Peninsula and the Seven Days,* ed. Gary W. Gallagher (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 121–52.

21. Brig. Gen. John Imboden to Maj. Gen. John C. Breckinridge, June 11, 1864, and Col. A. Moor to Maj. Gen. F. Sigel, June 22, 1864, *OR,* ser. 1, vol. 37, 1:155, 663–64; "The Retreat of Hunter," *Richmond Daily Dispatch,* June 28, 1864, p. 1, col. 3.

22. Earl J. Hess, *In the Trenches at Petersburg: Field Fortifications and Confederate Defeat* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 38–39; John

Horn, *The Petersburg Campaign* (Mechanicsburg, Pa: Combined Publishing, 1993), 75–95; "Reports from Petersburg," *Richmond Daily Dispatch,* July 1, 1864, p. 1, col. 2; "Negro Troops," *Boston Daily Advertiser* [from *Richmond Dispatch*], August 13, 1864, p. 1, col. 8.

NOTES FOR CAPTIONS

Figure 1. Robert K. Nelson, *Mining the Dispatch,* http://americanpast.richmond. edu/dispatch/, accessed June 8, 2010. Nelson has adapted MALLET, a text-mining program, to develop a "topic model" of the *Richmond Daily Dispatch* during the Civil War. On topic modeling and historical research, see Sharon Block, "Doing More with Digitization: An Introduction to Topic Modeling of Early American Sources," *Commonplace* 6 (2006): http://www.historycooperative.org/journals/cp/vol-06/no-02/tales/. The *Daily Dispatch* was digitized by the University of Richmond Library in collaboration with the Tufts University Perseus Project.

Figure 2. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

Figure 3. This figure draws inspiration from Mark Swanson and Jacqueline D. Langley, *Atlas of the Civil War, Month by Month: Major Battles and Troop Movements* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2004).

Figure 4. This exploded diagram of emancipation in three layers draws on the following sources. Legality of slavery layer: "Chronology of Emancipation," in *Free at Last: A Documentary History of Slavery, Freedom, and the Civil War,* Ira Berlin, Barbara J. Fields, and Steven F. Miller (New York: New Press, 1992); Abraham Lincoln, "The Emancipation Proclamation," www.archives.gov; Approximate Zones of Emancipation, see figure 3; aggregate enslaved population at the county level, 1860 census, Minnesota Population Center, *National Historical Geographic Information System* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2004).

Figure 5. Augusta County (Va.) Circuit Court, *Augusta County (Va.) Register of Colored Persons cohabiting together as Husband and Wife, 1866 Feb. 27,* Library of Virginia, Virginia Memory online, http://www.virginiamemory.com/collections/ collections_by_topic. For this exercise, we mapped approximately 10 percent of the Augusta cohabitation register, which encompassed 772 couples. Of the whole, 278, or 36 percent, were natives to Augusta.

Figure 6. Information on emancipation represented here comes from the *Staunton Vindicator,* the *Richmond Daily Dispatch,* and the *OR* for June 1864, sources available online through the *Valley of the Shadow: Two Communities in the American Civil War,* http://valley.lib.virginia.edu, the University of Richmond's *Daily Dispatch Online,* http://dlxs.richmond.edu/d/ddr/, and Cornell's *Making of America,* http://digital.library.cornell.edu/m/moawar/waro.html. We have also made use of documentary evidence found in bound volumes or behind pay walls, including such sources as the *Freedom* series, by Ira Berlin, Barbara J. Fields, Thavolia Glymph, Joseph P. Reidy, and Leslie S. Rowland, eds. [1983–2006] and the *North American Women's Letters and Diaries* collection, published by Infotrac. Army movements are largely taken from the *OR,* though we also consulted relevant sections of Frederick H. Dyer, *Compendium of the War of the Rebellion,* available online at

http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/; *Supplement to the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies,* ed. Janet Hewett, et al., 80 vols. (Wilmington, N.C.: Broadfoot, 1994); James M. McPherson, ed., *The Atlas of the Civil War* (New York: Macmillan, 1994) and Aaron Sheehan-Dean, *Concise Historical Atlas of the U.S. Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008). Further work on this mapping project will be funded by a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities' Office of Digital Humanities.