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Searching for Slavery: Fugitive Slaves in the Ohio River Valley Borderland, 1830–1860

Matthew Salafia

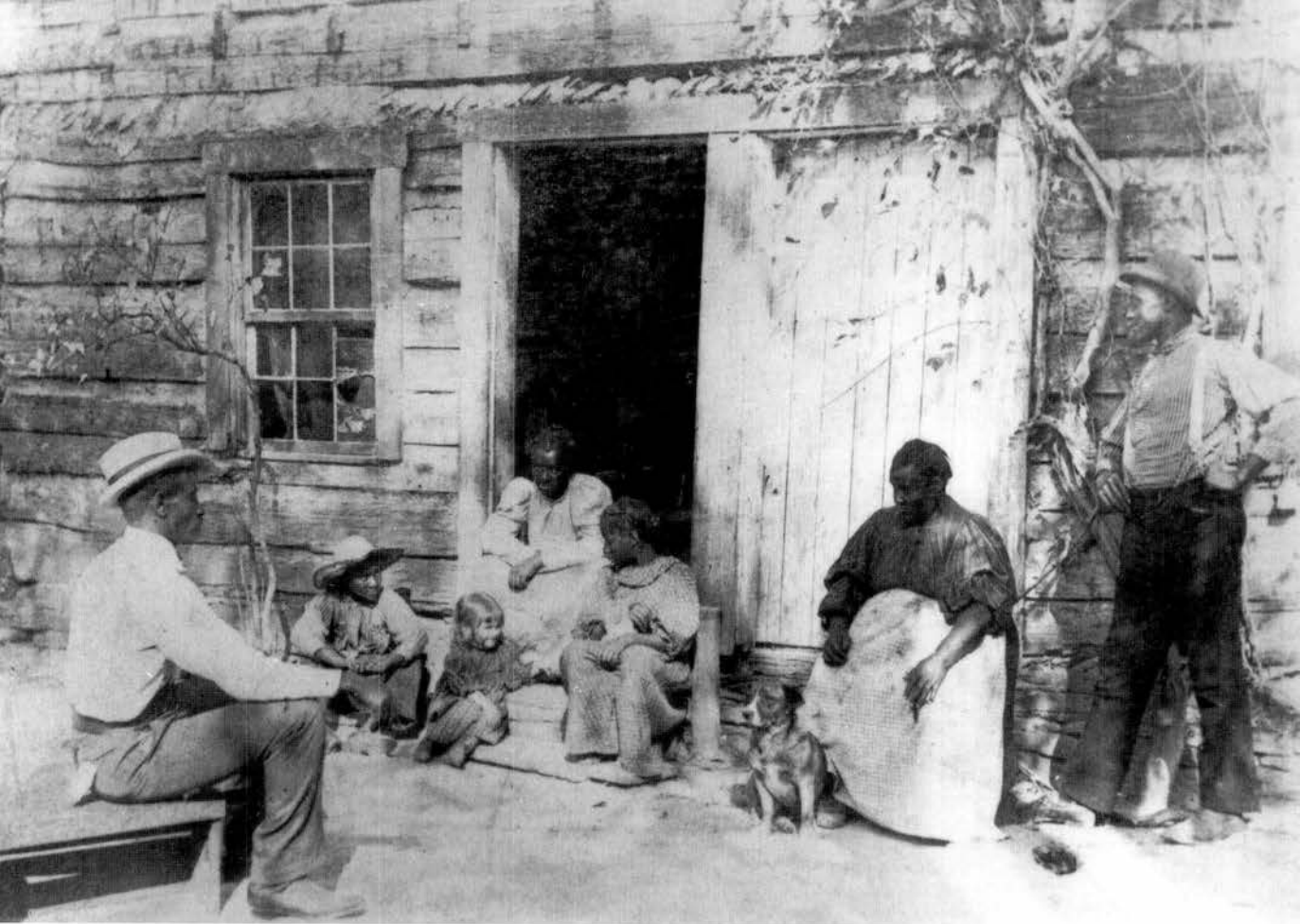
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Former slave quarters on the Winston place, Burlington, Boone County, Kentucky, 1868. THE FILSON HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Searching for Slavery

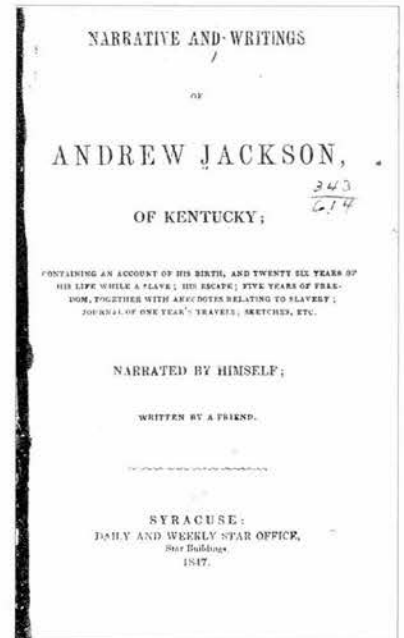
*Fugitive Slaves in the Ohio River Valley
Borderland, 1830–1860*

Matthew Salafia

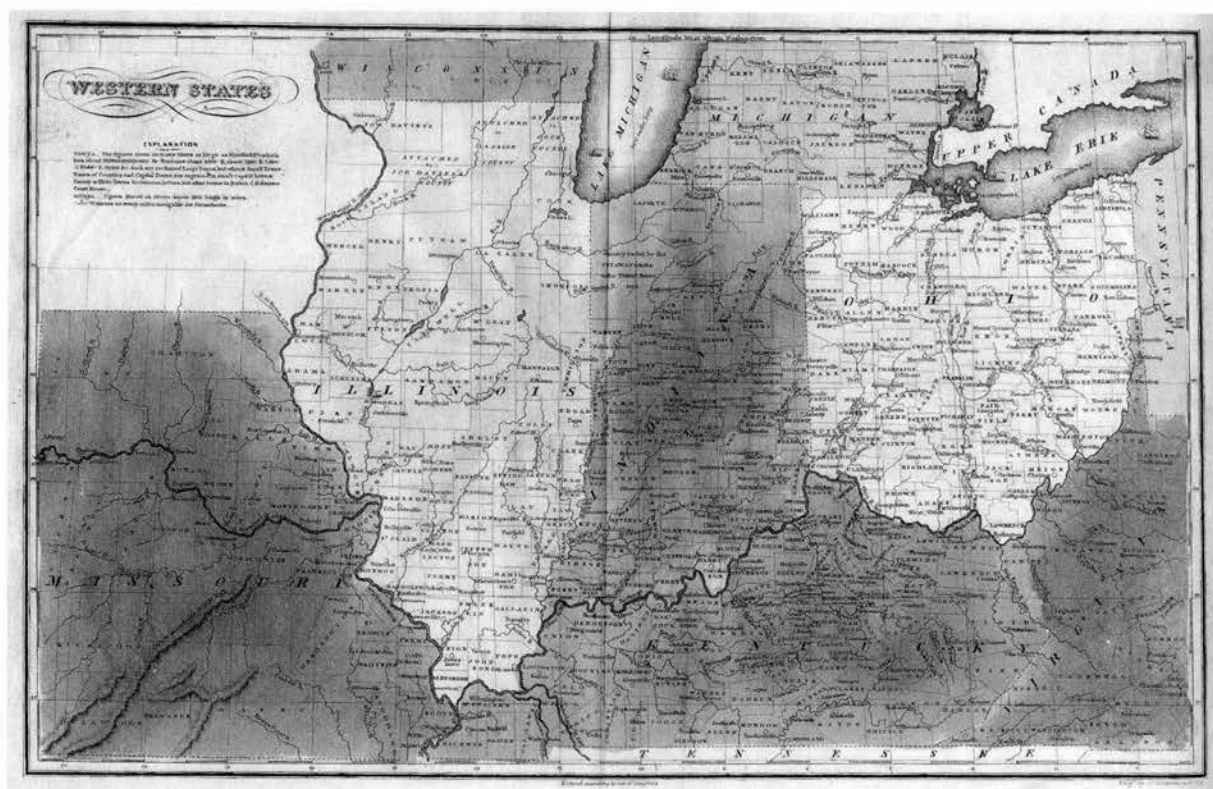
In the 1850s, Richard Daly enjoyed considerable freedom for a man in bondage. Daly lived in Trimble County, Kentucky, on a plantation along the Ohio River owned by two brothers, Samuel and George Ferrin. Daly worked on the farm and regularly attended the market in Madison, across the river in the nominally free state of Indiana. He married Kitty, a house servant from a neighboring plantation, and they had four children before Kitty died in childbirth at the age of twenty. Daly protected his family as best he could and visited his children nightly. According to Daly's later description, in the 1850s he yearned to be free,

but he also recognized that despite his enslaved status he still enjoyed some opportunities and autonomy. Daly understood that he could obtain freedom whenever he wanted but he later claimed that he never thought about running away. He did not accept the legitimacy of slavery nor was he satisfied with his enslaved status; by his own estimate he helped thirty slaves escape from bondage. However, Daly did not believe that the uncertain status he would hold in the "free" states was necessarily better. More important, his affection for his family overshadowed the advantages of freedom. Bondage conditioned his life, but love motivated Daly. He loved his family more than he wanted freedom. Only when "Mrs. Hoaglin," the woman who owned Daly's children, decided to give his daughter Mary to her own daughter in Louisville did he decide to escape slavery. For Daly, who had not considered escape before, running away or "stealing" his freedom and the freedom of his children became the only way he could keep his family intact. In 1857, the devoted father escaped to Canada with his four children.¹

Daly's story provides a window into how personal considerations and the geographic border between slavery and freedom complicated the decisions of African Americans in the Ohio River valley. The boundary between slavery and freedom carried special significance for African Americans because in crossing it they enjoyed the possibility of escaping their enslaved status. However, rather than defining a boundary that slavery could not penetrate, the Ohio River marginalized freedom by weakening slavery. A central anomaly of this borderland region was the similarity between the work regimes of racial slavery and black wage labor. The Ohio River thus represented a periphery of both slavery and freedom, and the resulting racial and labor ambiguities both provoked violence and muddled distinctions between slave and free status. Consequently, enslaved blacks faced substantial barriers to freedom that did not end at the Ohio River. The Fugitive Slave Laws of 1793 and 1850 enabled slaveholders to retrieve their escaped property throughout the country, meaning that fugitives' legal status did not change when they escaped to a free state. Even after fleeing from their owners, moreover, run-aways faced a largely hostile and suspicious white population north of the Ohio. Fear of pursuit, punishment, and death strongly discouraged slaves from escaping north. As the former Kentucky slave Andrew Jackson noted: "If anyone wishes to know what were my feelings during this time, let them imagine themselves a slave, with the strong arm of the law extended over



Title page, *Narrative and Writings of Andrew Jackson, of Kentucky* ... (Syracuse: Daily and Weekly Star Office, 1847). THE FILSON HISTORICAL SOCIETY



Western States Map, J. Hammond (1835). CINCINNATI MUSEUM CENTER

their heads—doomed, if retaken, to a severe punishment, and almost unendurable torture.”²

Racism, in short, made free blacks “slaves without masters” throughout the country, a situation that was no different in the Ohio Valley. Indeed, some free blacks saw little difference between slave and free status. Upon arriving in Cincinnati free black John Malvin recalled, “I thought upon coming to a free state like Ohio that I would find every door thrown open to receive me, but from the treatment I received by the people generally, I found it little better than . . . Virginia.” The constant interaction between enslaved and free African Americans ultimately made white Americans suspicious of all black laborers. As African American minister Elisha Green explained, “I was more of a slave after I bought myself than before. Before . . . I could go many places without interruption, but when I became a free-man I could not cross the Ohio River.” Green’s statement illustrates the contradictions of black freedom in the Ohio Valley. His freedom of mobility declined when he became legally free because he could no longer enter the slaves states; as a slave, in contrast, he could enter free states.³

In addition, both free and enslaved African Americans enjoyed access to the same kinds of work and as a result most remained locked in the same meager economic web. After 1830, Kentucky’s economy grew increasingly

diverse, which in turn prompted many slaveholders to hire out their slaves. Hired bondspeople generally performed the same kind of labor as free workers. They worked in fields and factories, on steamboats and in hospitals, and as barbers, musicians, draymen, and most commonly as domestic servants. A select few self-hired slaves chose their employers, rented houses, and maintained a certain measure of control over their lives. Such work facilitated movement across the river and created unique opportunities for enslaved river workers. Some enslaved people who hired their own time resided in the same wards as free blacks. As Isaac Throgmorton, who worked as a barber in Louisville, later explained, "I lived with free people, and it was just as though I was free." But, the freedoms associated with hiring out revealed the similarity of slave and free labor in the Ohio Valley. These hired slaves were well aware of what freedom along the border did and did not offer. As Kentucky slave John Davis noted, "I can't say that I suffered anything particular down South; but they always kept my nose down to the grindstone, and never gave me anything for my labor." When Davis set out in pursuit of freedom he did not settle in the free states immediately to the north. Instead, he traveled to Canada, where after sixteen years he amassed \$3,500 worth of property, because he believed that only there could he enjoy economic freedom.⁴

Indeed, black Americans on both sides of the river found their occupational opportunity and physical mobility limited by race regardless of their legal status. For a small number of African Americans freedom offered the opportunity to work for oneself. Moreover, free blacks kept all of their wages and could better provide for themselves and their families. A few free blacks even amassed considerable fortunes. Washington Spradling, freed in 1814, worked as a barber in Louisville and by 1850 had amassed over thirty thousand dollars, much of which he used to purchase the freedom of thirty-three slaves. However, Spradling was in the minority, and many found little opportunity for advancement. After gaining his freedom, former slave J. C. Brown hoped to join the ranks of financially successful free blacks in the Ohio Valley. Brown tried to conduct his mason



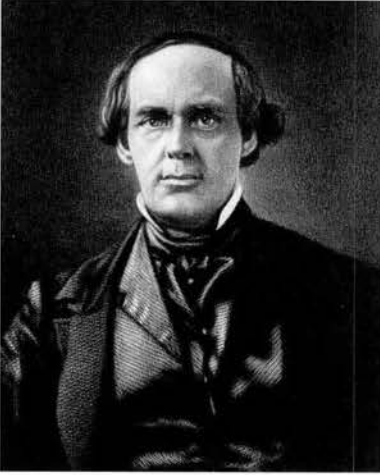
Lewis Garrard Clarke (1812-1897), frontispiece, *Narratives of the Sufferings of Lewis and Milton Clarke* ... (Boston: B. Marsh, 1846). THE FILSON HISTORICAL SOCIETY



J. Milton Clarke (1817-1901), from *Narratives of the Sufferings of Lewis and Milton Clarke* ... (Boston: B. Marsh, 1846). THE FILSON HISTORICAL SOCIETY

business on both sides of the Ohio River, but whites threatened him with violence and conspired to kidnap and sell him south, which ultimately convinced him to head to Canada. Brown's experience suggests that the racial limitations established by slavery followed borderland African Americans throughout the Ohio River valley.⁵

Moreover, the racial boundary, if not always physically enforced, was always psychologically present. Although residence in a free state promised



Salmon P. Chase (1808-1873).
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freedom, African Americans north of the Ohio River recognized the uncertainty of their situation. As John Chapman explained, "I was originally from Kentucky, but removed into Indiana at fourteen. I did not feel safe in Indiana, and removed with my family into Canada at Gosfield." The precariousness of African American freedom north of the Ohio discouraged many slaves from taking flight. Runaway slave narratives reveal fugitives' awareness of the racial boundaries present on both sides of the river. Milton Clarke, a light-skinned fugitive from Kentucky, understood that though he had crossed the geographic divide between slavery and freedom the racial boundary remained after a confrontation with an

Ohio farmer in whose haystack he had surreptitiously hidden. The following day the farmer confronted "Mr. Austin," a local white at whose home Clarke was staying, "to know if it was so." Clarke remembered that the farmer angrily announced that "if he had known that a nigger slept there, 'he would have burned the hay and him all up together.'" He then turned to Clarke, unaware that he was the runaway, and asked him if he had seen "that nigger." "I told him I had," replied Clarke. Austin then asked the farmer "what he would say if they [slave catchers] should come and attempt to take" Clarke "into slavery." "Why," replied the farmer, "I would shoot them." For Clarke the lesson was clear: The farmer's "philanthropy was graduated, like many others, upon nothing more substantial than color." He knew that his light skin carried the assumption of freedom, but his story also highlighted the tenuousness of assumed freedom. Clarke, like many other free blacks north of the Ohio River, realized that he could only "pass" as a free person.⁶

In the Ohio River valley, fugitives like Clarke never stopped "passing" as free persons because African Americans needed proof of their freedom. Whites questioned and even jailed black Americans traveling without papers in Ohio, Indiana, and Kentucky on the suspicion that they were runaways. Madison Jefferson, a slave living along the Ohio River,

was jailed in Ohio on three separate occasions while trying to escape. In Kentucky, an appellate court ruled that “color and long possession are such presumptive evidences of slavery as to throw the burden of proof on a negro claiming freedom.” The laws of the states on both sides of the Ohio River required free blacks to carry written proof of their freedom. In Ohio and Indiana, free blacks had to post a bond and register with the local county court upon entering the state. Due largely to the efforts of anti-slavery lawyer Salmon P. Chase, by 1841 the Ohio Supreme Court determined that slaves brought voluntarily by their owners into Ohio were free. Fugitives, however, remained technically enslaved and, equally important, confronted a largely hostile white population in the state. The sheer number of kidnapping and violent reclamation incidents that appeared in Ohio newspapers attest to the dangers that black Americans faced in the region. Slavery was only an unvigilant moment away because the law put the burden of proof on African Americans, and dark skin color undermined the security that freedom supposedly guaranteed. Though enslaved people living close to the Ohio River had opportunities to run away from their owners, the tenuousness of freedom north of the river had important implications and shaped their decision-making process.⁷

The border juxtaposed the lived experience of slavery and freedom in a way that gave enslaved Americans “a clear view of life outside of slavery.” From this vantage point, border slaves could see the opportunities that freedom offered as well as those it limited. Consequently, in their published narratives and recollections former slaves tended to portray the Ohio River as a borderland in which a slave-like experience characterized life on both banks. Some fugitives even concluded that because of the constraints imposed by race north of the Ohio River freedom as a fugitive was not a desired state in and of itself. All things being equal, of course, African Americans chose freedom over slavery; however, all things were *not* equal, and slaves understood better than anyone the nature of slavery and freedom in America. Former border slave Frederick Douglass said it best: “We knew of no spot this side of the ocean we could be safe. We had heard of Canada, then the only real Canaan for the America bondman, simply as a country to which the wild goose and swan repaired at the end of winter . . . but not as the home of man.”⁸

In their narratives, Kentucky slaves often described a point when an opportunity to escape presented itself but they decided not to run. These moments of decision—or indecision—reveal that enslaved African Americans along the border constantly evaluated the costs and benefits of an escape attempt. Historians can easily explain why field hands toiling on cotton plantations in antebellum Mississippi did not run away in large numbers. The sheer power of the white community combined with the

forbidding distance to free territory ensured a minimal likelihood of success while failure guaranteed severe physical punishment and perhaps sale. Proximity to the border, in contrast, offered enslaved people more opportunities to flee, but the barriers to successful escape remained high, as did the price of failure. African Americans understood that the stigma of slavery followed them across the border. Fleeing across the river did not end their second-class status or ensure their legal status as free people. So while they may have had the opportunity to flee across the river, they could not escape from slavery that easily. Thus many slaves along the border escaped only

after a triggering event threatened to tear them away from their community or forced them to reevaluate their enslaved condition. The complicated motivations of slaves in the borderland suggest that while the desire for freedom always gave them a reason to escape, some enslaved people needed an additional rationale.⁹

In short, African Americans' experiences in the Ohio River Valley led them to view the region as a borderland in which slavery and freedom lay on a continuum rather than representing antithetical conditions. While black Americans recognized the marked differences between the status of enslaved people south of the river and free people to the north, many concluded that freedom did not offer all the privileges that slavery denied, nor did slavery deny all



"My heart is almost broken."

Fugitive slave Henry Bibb (1815-1854), with wife and child, from *Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb: An American Slave* (New York: The Author, 1849).

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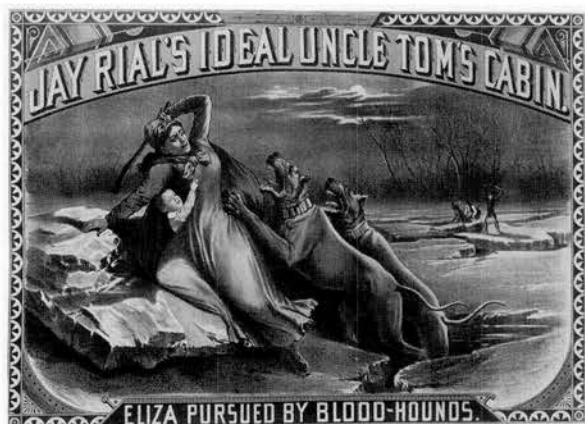
the privileges of freedom. As a result, the decision to escape from bondage was rarely simple because the choice between slavery and freedom was far from intuitive. Recognizing the complicated motives of fugitives also enhances our understanding of them as rebels. As historians John Hope Franklin and Loren Schweninger note, "To examine the motives of those who challenged the system does injustice to the complexities of the human experience," but at the same time exploring "the conditions and factors that caused slaves to go 'on the run' is one of the best ways to comprehend the attitudes of slaves." The present study, then, examines these human "complexities," particularly how personal and geographic conditions became reasons to flee. But such factors were only part of the story, because often the same reasons that induced some slaves to escape convinced others to endure bondage. To understand this apparent contradiction requires considering

borderland slaves' understanding of slavery, their initial decisions not to escape, and the factors that sparked their ultimate decision to run.¹⁰

Following his escape, former Kentucky slave Henry Blue explained that "some poor, ignorant fellows may be satisfied with their condition as slaves, but, as a general thing, they are not satisfied with being slaves." With this pithy comment, Blue made a careful distinction between the idea and practice of slavery. He articulated how slaves both rejected the legitimacy of bondage and tolerated their conditions as slaves. Being well-fed or properly clothed did not convince slaves that slavery was preferable to freedom. As erstwhile Kentucky slave Henry Bibb wrote, "Freedom to act for oneself though poorly clad, and fed with a dry crust, is glorious when compared with American slavery." But some years earlier Bibb had offered a different account of his motivations for escape when he wrote to his former owner, "You had it in your power to have kept me there much longer than you did. I think it is very probable that I would have been a toiling slave on your plantation today, if you had treated me differently." Historians have devoted thousands of pages to explicating the methods African Americans employed both to reject and endure their bondage. In the borderland, where geography intermingled with slaves' personal motivations, the reasons for—and methods of—tolerating slavery were both unique and profoundly ordinary.¹¹

As a slave in Madison County, Kentucky, south of Lexington, Lewis Clarke hired his own time, provided for his own room and board, and enjoyed considerable geographic mobility. In order to retain his liberties as a hired slave, Clarke denied his desire for freedom. As he later explained, "Now if some Yankee had come along and said 'Do you want to be free?' What do you suppose I'd have told him? . . . Why, I'd tell him to be sure that I didn't want to be free; that I was very well off as I was. If I didn't, it's precious few contracts I should be allowed to make." Clarke certainly wished for freedom, but he also wanted to remain in Kentucky because his close proximity to the border made gaining freedom a tangible possibility. So he put on the mask of a happy slave in order to protect his current situation. Only the threat of sale to the Deep South prompted Clarke to make his escape in 1841. During his flight, Clarke encountered a Baptist minister who suspected that he was a runaway and, according to Clarke, attempted to "read [his] thoughts." In order to allay the minister's suspicions, Clarke emphasized his favorable situation as a slave, noting, "I wondered what in the world *slaves could* run away for, especially if they had such a chance as I had had for the last few years." This apparently satisfied the minister who believed that a slave who enjoyed so many privileges would not run away. Clarke closed this tensely comic conversation by adding, "I do very well, very well, sir. If you should ever hear that I had run away, be certain it must

be because there is some great change in my treatment.” With these words, Clarke actually explained to his credulous white interlocutor why he was fleeing. Clarke had long entertained the idea of escape, but sale was the



Eliza Pursued by Blood-hounds. Poster for *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.

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“great change” that convinced him to run away. On a Deep South cotton plantation Clarke would have few or no opportunities to hire out his time and live independently. More important, sale away from the border extinguished his hope for eventual freedom. Nearness to the North did not ameliorate the conditions of bondage; indeed, slaves like Clarke regularly detailed the injustices of

slavery in the borderlands. However, they tolerated harsh treatment because they believed the relative proximity of the free states held out the possibility of eventual freedom.¹²

While the border provided hope for freedom, escape was still a risky endeavor precisely because the Ohio River was not a hard and fast division between slavery and freedom. Death and punishment represented significant deterrents and planters commonly punished unsuccessful runaways with sale south. Indeed, selling slaves south became a profitable business during the antebellum period. The insatiable demand for bondpeople in the “cotton kingdom” of the Deep South, transformed the Border South into a slave-exporting region. The internal slave trade moved close to one million slaves from the eastern seaboard and the Upper South to the cotton plantations of the southwest. Kentucky exported about 22 percent of its male slaves between the ages of ten and nineteen in the 1850s, whereas Mississippi imported 27 percent of its male slaves of the same age. Between 1830 and 1860, the percentage of African Americans in Kentucky’s population dropped from about 25 to 21 percent. Most slaves either experienced sale personally or witnessed the sale of family members, friends, and fellow slaves, often at public auction. Sale was the fullest expression of the brutal individuating force of slavery because it broke all ties of kinship, leaving slaves totally isolated.¹³

The slave trade represented a material link between the Ohio River borderlands and the Deep South, one that placed Kentucky slaves in a



Harriet Beecher Stowe (1811-1896).

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precarious position. Sale generated the greatest fear among slaves in the Upper South and became the most common trigger for escape. Sale left borderland slaves with two options: take a chance at freedom by heading north or endure a lifetime of servitude and die a slave in the Deep South. As Kentucky slave Harry Smith recalled, "going to New Orleans was called the Nigger Hell, few ever returning who went there." When local enslaved people became "aware of the presence of . . . slave buyers," he noted, "a number of them would run away to the hills and remain often a year before they returned. Some would reach Canada for fear of being sold." Likewise, when Louisville slave Henry Morehead learned of his family's potential sale to the Deep South, he decided it was time to act. "I knew," he remembered, "it was death or victory." The slave trade brought the oppression of bondage in the Deep South to the borderland, a fact that antislavery novelist Harriet Beecher Stowe dramatized in her account of Eliza Harris's

escape attempt across the Ohio River in the opening pages of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Robert Nelson, another Kentucky slave, ran north after his master mortgaged him. "The sheriff got after me," Nelson recalled, "and I ran to Canada" without money or an apparent plan because "I was to have been taken to a cotton farm in Louisiana."¹⁴

Of course, slaves ran away for a variety of reasons. Historians Franklin and Schweninger provide a detailed survey of the many factors that prompted escape throughout the antebellum South, ranging from fear of punishment, to change in ownership, to simple opportunity or emotion.¹⁵ Many slaves required no specific trigger at all, finding enough motivation in their hatred of slavery and desire for freedom. In their published narratives, in contrast, most former Kentucky slaves described their flight as a rational response to a specific event. In particular, many carefully evaluated how escape would impact their hopes for self-purchase, family unity, and self-improvement. Each of these triggers, however, functioned both as prompts to escape and deterrents against flight. In short, the very factors

1853 broadside for the purchase of slaves for the New Orleans market. CINCINNATI MUSEUM CENTER

**\$100 REWARD,
IN SPECIE!!**

RANAWAY from the subscriber's farm in Jefferson county, Ky. in the month of August last, a Negro Man named

H O P E.

He is about 5 feet 8 or 9 inches in height, a sturdy stout man, quite black, and of rather a dull and surly countenance; he is supposed to be about 25 years of age, and is a good ploughman and waggoner. About a year since, he lost, in part, the ball of the thumb of one of his hands (I think it is the right hand,) and also the little finger of the same hand at the second joint, from a disease in his hand, which was then fully cured by a physician.

If he is apprehended in this county or state, and safely lodged in the Louisville jail, Jefferson county, I will give a reward of *Fifty Dollars*, currency of this state---If he is apprehended in any other state or territory, and secured in prison at the place where he is apprehended, so that I get him, I will give *Fifty Dollars* in Specie, or, if in the latter case he is committed to the Louisville jail so that I may get him, I will give to the taker up **ONE HUNDRED DOLLARS** in Specie.

WM. C. BULLITT.

Oxmore, Jefferson County, Oct. 7, 1822.

William Bullitt's broadside for fugitive slave Hope, Jefferson County, Kentucky, October 7, 1822.

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that enabled former slaves to endure their bondage eventually prompted them to escape. This duality lies at the heart of understanding why and when Kentucky slaves decided to escape their bondage.

Though slave hiring enabled a small number of Kentucky slaves to earn enough both to pay their owners and save money to purchase their freedom, most hired slaves could only pay their owners and feed and clothe themselves. Lavina Bell, for example, hired herself as a washerwoman for eleven years and made just enough money to cover food, shelter, doctor's bills, and clothing for her young children. Her husband earned three hundred dollars a year working in a hotel, but was only able to keep five dollars a year for himself. Their owner hired their children out when they turned eleven. For the Bell family, hiring out was hardly a step toward freedom and, as Lavinia lamented, it separated her from her children for long periods of time. As census data reveal, moreover, the Bells' experience was common. Between 1790 and 1860, the percentage of African American freemen in Kentucky remained low, rising from roughly 1 to 4.5 percent of the state's black population. In the border slave state of Maryland, in contrast, the free black population grew from around 7 to nearly 50 percent of the state's African American population in the same years. While some slaves who purchased their freedom moved to free states and Canada, the slow growth of Kentucky's free black population indicates the limited opportunities for self-purchase in the state. Even in Louisville where owners commonly

hired out their slaves as domestics and in the tourism and manufacturing sectors, free blacks made up only 3 percent of the city's African American population in 1850. Indeed, former slaves who escaped from the state commonly cited a broken promise of self-purchase as their reason for fleeing. The frequency of this trigger reveals the bias of published narratives, which tended to be written by privileged bondpeople rather than by field hands, but it also suggests that those slaves who had the opportunity to purchase their freedom were more likely to escape.¹⁶

The causal relationship between self-purchase and escape was complicated, however, because the promise of future freedom operated as a contract between slaveholder and slave. Self-purchase functioned like a free labor contract, putting a time limit on servitude and creating a mutual obligation between slave and slaveholder. African Americans' need for proof of freedom allowed owners to extract labor from extremely mobile slaves while reducing the threat of escape. Once they had entered into an agreement, slaves strove to earn and expressed great pride in their ability to purchase their freedom. "If a slaveholder offers his servant freedom, on condition that he will earn and pay a certain sum, and the slave accepts freedom on that condition," explained ex-slave Henry Blue; "he is bound in honor to pay the sum promised." Other slaves worked in Cincinnati to purchase their freedom from Kentucky owners. Richard Keys paid twenty dollars per month for twelve years and then paid an additional eight hundred and fifty dollars for his freedom, while another individual worked in the city and sent his master one hundred dollars every year for seven years before receiving his free papers.¹⁷

Not all slaves accepted this logic, but some former slaves stated quite plainly that the prospect of self-purchase kept them from running away. Most famously, Josiah Henson led fellow slaves from Virginia to his owner's brother in Kentucky via the Ohio River. Despite prodding from free blacks in Cincinnati, Henson encouraged his fellow slaves not to run. "The idea of running away," Henson later explained, "was not one that I had ever indulged. I had a sentiment of honor on the subject, or what I thought such, which I would not have violated even for freedom." Henson's "sentiment of honor" seems to have embarrassed him later in life when he dictated his narrative, and he likely used the phrase pejoratively. Nonetheless, while enslaved he apparently accepted the appropriateness of purchasing his freedom. Owners used the future prospect of freedom to secure short-term loyalty and labor from their slaves. And because it functioned as a deterrent to escape, owners allowed their most trusted and privileged bondpeople considerable mobility and freedom to labor. Mobility was, however, a double-edged sword, convincing some slaves to make their escape.¹⁸

Slaveholders' willingness to break these contracts by refusing freedom, raising the price of purchase, or selling the slave down the river also

frequently triggered escape. Kentucky slave Alfred Jones explained that he made an arrangement to purchase his freedom for three hundred and fifty dollars, but “before the business was completed, I learned that my master was negotiating with another party to sell me for \$400.” Upon learning of this betrayal, Jones wrote himself a pass and left for Canada. Likewise, enslaved millwright Jonathan Thomas contracted with his owner to buy himself for one thousand dollars, and by the age of thirty-three had paid his master four hundred dollars. But the untimely death of the master left the estate to a son who promptly sold Thomas to a slave trader. An angry Thomas approached the son and informed him of the agreement “with old master for my freedom” and that he “had paid . . . four hundred dollars towards it.” The son, however, denied knowledge of the agreement and “cared nothing about it.” In response, Thomas made arrangements for his free wife and children to travel to Canada and then made his escape.¹⁹

The contract of self-purchase functioned as a pathway to freedom for Blue, a reason not to run for Henson, and, once broken, a motivation for escape for Jones and Thomas. In each case, their participation in the market economy informed their understanding of freedom and slavery. These former slaves recognized self-purchase as a morally just method of “earning freedom,” and its prospect made temporarily enduring bondage more honorable than escape, which broke the contract. Historians’ discussions of self-hiring and self-purchase as a step toward freedom or as another form of exploitation are incomplete when they focus on the end result, because self-purchase began with slaves’ understanding of freedom as a product of the market. For them, self-ownership was freedom, and this market conception of liberty enabled them to tolerate market slavery in the borderland. As Kentucky slave Israel Campbell explained after having to delay his self-purchase:

Now that my hopes were deferred, I settled down to the conviction that things were not so bad, after all,—that I was well treated, had plenty to eat, allowed a fine riding horse, kept cattle, hogs, chickens, bees, had shoemakers’ and carpenters’ tools; and I settled down to the conviction that it would be better for me to remain as I was awhile longer.

Campbell’s grudging acceptance of his enslaved situation suggests that he believed freedom in the borderlands would effect only limited change in his work and physical conditions. Still, Campbell wanted to buy his liberty and the fact that he conceived of freedom as something he could purchase reveals his understanding of how the market shaped both slavery and freedom. Freedom had a price.²⁰

In the 1850s, the price of freedom increased dramatically for Kentucky slaves, fueled by the growth of the interstate slave trade. Prime field hands,

valued at four hundred dollars in the 1830s, sold for more than fifteen hundred dollars twenty years later. In 1849, Kentucky repealed a non-importation law enabling whites to bring slaves into Kentucky for the purpose of sale. The repeal increased the volume of slave sales within the state, spurring the growth, increasing sophistication, and profitability of the domestic slave trade. By the 1850s, several large slave-trading firms based their operations in Kentucky and the state's white residents shipped 3,400 slaves annually to the Deep South. In order to regulate the rising trade, the city of Louisville passed an 1851 ordinance requiring slave vendors to purchase a three-hundred-dollar license. The sharp spike in slave prices put the prospect of self-purchase out of reach for many enslaved people, as the price of freedom rose from under a thousand dollars in the 1830s and 1840s into the thousands in the decade before the Civil War. Washerwoman Mrs. Lewis Bibb, for example, paid \$323 for her freedom in 1833, while in 1859 Lydia Reed and her husband used their lottery ticket winnings to purchase their freedom for \$2,125. In short, the increasing difficulty of purchasing freedom made escape the only option for many Kentucky slaves.²¹

Family ties influenced the lives of even more enslaved African Americans in Kentucky than did the prospect of self-purchase. Historians have demonstrated that family provided the first line of defense against the isolation of bondage throughout the antebellum South. Familial affection both eased the suffering under bondage and created ties that made slaves think twice about escape. Group flight presented multiple challenges, making it more difficult for runaways to blend into the surroundings, find shelter, and gather food, but individual escape required fugitives to abandon their family to the yoke of bondage. William Wells Brown's affection for his mother and sister tied him to slavery more than the force of his master. Brown worked as a slave on steamboats that plied the Mississippi River and admitted that he had many opportunities to escape. When he thought of escaping to Canada, however, his "resolution would soon be shaken by the remembrance that my dear mother was a slave in St. Louis, and I could not bear leaving her in that condition." Brown felt a tension between his desire for freedom and his affection for his kin, but he endured slavery to remain with his family.²²

Family ties complicated slaves' decision to run everywhere in the South, but for borderland slaves the nearness of the free states emphasized the matter of choice in escape. The proximity of the border both increased the chance of successful escape and highlighted the tension between family ties and the desire for freedom. Some slaves sacrificed freedom to save their family. Mrs. L. Strawthor, a free black woman from Kentucky, recalled that her husband earned enough to purchase his family before he was sold to the Deep South. Strawthor never saw her husband again and was unsure if he remained alive. In other cases, the loss of a family member convinced those remaining to make their break. The wife and children of enslaved Kentucky blacksmith George Ramsey belonged to another owner who

sold them to the Arkansas Territory. "I went after her once, and got her," Ramsey recalled, "but they took her away from me. Canada was not in my head till I lost her completely, and then I thought I would go." Similarly, J. D. Green explained:

From 18 to 27 I was considered one of the most devout christians among the whole Black population, and under this impression I firmly believed to run away from my master would be to sin against the Holy Ghost—for such we are taught to believe—but from the time of my wife's being sent away, I firmly made up my mind to take the first opportunity to run away."²³

In each of these examples, distance interacted with family ties. Former slaves lamented that sale to the Deep South shattered the connection between husband and wife, but they also realized that those family members transported far from the border had little chance to gain freedom. While families remained together slaves endured their bondage because they hoped eventually to gain freedom as a group. When sale extinguished this hope—when a spouse or child was lost to slavery—those who remained in the Upper South saw no reason to suffer bondage further. Without family, only freedom mattered.

But escape north also threatened family ties. Mary Younger fled to Canada without her children and sadly recalled, "The barbarity of slavery I never want to see again. I have children now who have got the yoke on them. It almost kills me to think that they are there, and that I can do them no good. There they are—I know how it is—it brings distress on my mind." William Brown, another former slave who escaped to Canada, expressed similar grief: "It is three years ago that I left my family, and I don't know whether they are dead or alive. I want to hear from them." In contrast, at least one slave used escape to Indiana to keep his family together. John Moore ran away from his owner in Kentucky in 1850, hiring his time in Indiana. Two months later, he returned to Kentucky, gave his wages to his master, and announced that "he was sick of freedom, and the abolitionists." He also pretended that he wanted nothing to do with his wife and children, who lived on a neighboring farm. Moore hoped that his subterfuge would enable him to gain the confidence of local slaveholders and make it easier for him to free his family. His plan worked. Convinced that the family had no plans to escape, the neighboring owner gave Moore's wife permission to visit her husband on Saturday night and return on Sunday. Once together, the couple fled to Canada. In short, Moore's temporary foray into Indiana was a stepping stone in his effort to free his family. When the Moores sought permanent freedom, they escaped to Canada beyond the reach of the Fugitive Slave Law.²⁴

Former Kentucky slave Henry Bibb's escapes from slavery highlight how distance from the Ohio River borderland sharpened the distinction

between freedom and slavery. Bibb demonstrated incredible devotion to his family in his repeated attempts to rescue his wife and child from bondage. He lived as a slave in Shelby County, Kentucky, near Louisville, and escaped north on three separate occasions, finally securing his freedom in 1841. Each time Bibb escaped, however, the duplicity of white and black Americans in southern Ohio made him vulnerable to recapture. He could escape the grasp of his master in Kentucky, but he could never become truly free in Ohio because of the constant risk of recapture. Nonetheless, Bibb placed himself in danger and returned to Kentucky because he wanted to save the wife and child he had left behind. "I felt," he wrote, "as if love, duty, humanity, and justice, required that I should go back." For Bibb, freedom was not as sweet without his wife. Bibb made his final escape after his owner sold him and his wife to the Deep South. With permanent slavery looming, Bibb's commitment to freedom became equally permanent. When sale separated him from his wife in Louisiana, Bibb decided to make his final escape and did not stop until he reached Detroit, far enough north to secure his freedom once and for all.²⁵

Even after Bibb reached Detroit, he did not give up hope of saving his wife. He returned to Madison, Indiana, four years later in 1845 to inquire after her and learned that she was "living in a state of adultery" with her owner. Feeling betrayed, Bibb announced, "she has ever since been regarded as theoretically and practically dead to me as a wife." Before this discovery, however, Bibb remained committed to his family. In an 1844 letter to his former owner, Bibb explained that the master's constant whipping of his wife and child "drove me from home and family, to seek a better home for them." Slavery left Bibb helpless to safeguard his family and he originally escaped in order to find a way to protect them. The fate of his wife demonstrated, however, that Bibb's vulnerability followed him into freedom. Bibb had wanted liberty to protect his family, but the tenuousness of that freedom prevented him from saving his family from slavery. The loss of his wife destroyed Bibb's hopes of having both family and liberty, leaving individual freedom as his only choice.²⁶

Bibb demonstrates that family devotion could be a powerful motivation for escape. As mothers charged with the care of their children, enslaved women shared motivations for escape similar to those of male slaves. Indeed, more female than male slaves resided in Kentucky, especially in Louisville, and women were as likely to be sold and hired out as men, though they usually served as domestic workers and washerwomen. Nonetheless, men made 80 percent of the escape attempts from Kentucky before 1850 and 73 percent thereafter. Though the percentage of women runaways in Kentucky was higher than elsewhere in the South, they still fled in far fewer numbers than enslaved men. Historians Franklin and Schweninger argue that fewer women escaped because they had to care for children and most could not withstand the physical demands necessary to escape. More broadly, limited

opportunity and a sense of responsibility for the welfare of their family stifled female escape attempts.²⁷

Slave women in the borderland often lived apart from husbands, many of whom resided on another farm or were hired out to work elsewhere. As a result, the responsibilities of child care fell largely to women. Hired female slaves had to earn enough to pay their owner, and support themselves and their children. Kentucky slave Charlotte, for example, worked as a washerwoman to support her family. She took pride in her ability to fend for her family, even covering the difference when her employed children failed to make their contractual earnings. "I get along very well," she stated, "you couldn't pay me to live at home, if I could help myself. My master doesn't supply me with anything . . . no more than if I didn't belong to him." Charlotte tolerated her bondage because she lived on her own and could provide for her children. If given the option, slave women like Charlotte undoubtedly would have purchased their freedom, but few had that choice. A number of factors worked against them. Multiple children placed the purchase price out of reach for many. Equally important, gender limited the occupational opportunities of female slaves. Most worked as domestic servants, washerwomen, and in other service professions, jobs that offered low wages and limited their mobility in comparison to the work performed by some enslaved men. For example, Cox worked as a steamboat steward where he earned "\$250 a year for myself when I hired my time." Cox made enough money to pay his owner and purchase his freedom for \$2,100, an amount beyond the reach of a washerwoman like Charlotte. In short, enslaved women's circumscribed opportunities limited the possibility that self-purchase could become a motivation for escape.²⁸

Charlotte was relatively fortunate compared to other slave women because she did not witness the sale of her children. In the Upper South, approximately one of three slave children suffered separation from their families through sale. Most cruelly, slaveholders made slave women care for their children until they reached an age when they could work and then tore them away by sale. Runaway advertisements indicate that the threat of such sales inspired some enslaved women to attempt escape with their children. However, female slaves' limited mobility and the difficulty of traveling with children reduced the number of women who ran away. Instead, women protected their children at home. Households depended on women for their survival, and many enslaved women viewed escape as an abandonment of their family responsibilities. Thus, enslaved women's resistance to slavery was more likely to take the form of temporary truancy than permanent escape. In addition, slaveholders punished enslaved women more frequently than men for verbal and physical resistance. The separation of husbands and wives, coupled with the constant threat of sale, likely heightened enslaved women's protectiveness of their children. They best protected themselves and their family by staying put.²⁹

Enslaved women also sought to defend their bodies. They understood the difficulties of escape, the possibility that failure could result in sale, and that transfer to a new owner could increase their risk of sexual exploitation. Historians do not know how widespread rape was among slave women, but the rapid growth of the mulatto population and its prevalence in slave narratives suggests that interracial sex was widespread. Women who were not sexually exploited likely understood that they could protect their bodies by remaining in their current situation. Stasis, then, could be a means for enslaved women to resist bondage and control their bodies within the unequal power dynamics of slavery. Although Kentucky bondswomen faced difficult circumstances, many may have concluded that freedom was not worth running the risk of sale.³⁰

The actions of Margaret Garner, a slave woman who lived eighteen miles from Cincinnati in Boone County, Kentucky, highlight how the threat of rape and attempts to protect family shaped the perspective of slave women. Garner served as a nurse for her owner's child and even accompanied the family to Cincinnati in 1840. In 1849, her owner sold his slaves, including the pregnant Garner to his brother. She soon gave birth to two daughters, Mary and Cilla, who contemporaries described as "nearly white" and "bright mulatto," respectively. Though no conclusive evidence exists, Garner's new owner may have fathered these children. What is certain is that after the birth of her two girls, Garner determined that escape was the only means to protect her family and herself. The opportunity to flee came during the harsh winter of 1856. When the Ohio River froze, the Garner family crossed the river on foot and hid in the Cincinnati home of Elijah Kite. Alerted to the presence of the fugitives, federal marshals descended on the Garners. When they burst into Kite's cabin, they saw Garner holding a knife dripping with blood, screaming that she had killed one child and would murder the rest rather than see them reduced to slavery. Garner's actions constituted an extreme manifestation of enslaved women's protective instinct. But the same protectiveness motivated female slaves who lived with their children and did not suffer sexual exploitation to forgo freedom and endure their bondage. In short, the experience of women highlights how and why family influenced slaves' decisions to flee.³¹

For slaves who lacked a nuclear family or whose families had been torn apart by sale, the African American community provided emotional, psychic, and sometimes physical support. In response to the isolation, prejudice, and instability that was part of life in the Ohio River valley mobile slaves mingled with free African Americans and built communities that emphasized racial solidarity and muted the distinctions between slavery and freedom. This process took place more often in urban places that afforded greater opportunities for interaction between free and enslaved African Americans, but it embraced the entire black community. Slaves who worked on small farms and plantations often ran errands into urban

centers and interacted with African American residents. The church formed the center of the black community on both sides of the river, and within it African Americans, enslaved and free, developed racial solidarity. Black ministers traveled throughout the Ohio Valley and preached sermons of deliverance and liberation in the black churches. For rural slaves who had limited interaction beyond the plantation, the division between black and white mirrored the division between enslaved and free. However, the correlation between race and status muted the distinction between slavery and freedom because in the experience of plantation-bound slaves the division between black and white superseded the division between enslaved and free. Thus even among less mobile rural slaves race reinforced status.³²

Whether blacks were enslaved on isolated hemp plantations in the Kentucky interior, hired out in Louisville, or lived as free people in Cincinnati, the African American community provided better protection against the hazards of white racism than the law. When whites kidnapped Frank Cranshaw, a Louisville slave active in the black religious community, and held him on a docked steamboat, crowds of local African Americans, mostly fellow members of his church, marched to the river. The protest prompted the sheriff to check the boat, where he discovered Cranshaw. Learning that Cranshaw had been illegally seized, the sheriff released him. In Cincinnati, the African Methodist Episcopal Church served as a safe-house for fugitives, and church members often harbored and aided fugitives. And despite repeated attacks by white mobs, Cincinnati's African American community grew and matured through the antebellum years.³³

In contrast, blacks found that isolation increased their vulnerability. As Mrs. Colman Freeman, a free black woman explained: "I lived in Ohio ten years, as I was married there,—but I would about as lief live in the slave States as in Ohio. In the slave States I had protection sometimes, from people that knew me—none in Ohio." Freeman believed she was vulnerable to white racism regardless of which side of the river she lived. Personal contacts had a greater impact on her safety than geographic location. For African Americans like Freeman who found solace in the protection and solidarity afforded by the black community, the river did not constitute a clear border. Indeed, for many slaves escape meant leaving behind friends and the protection of the black community for an uncertain and potentially dangerous future.³⁴

Still, many borderland slaves found the known future of slavery more distressing than the uncertainties of freedom. As Henry Bibb noted, the "idea of utter helplessness, in perpetual bondage," was "distressing" because there was "no period even with the remotest generation when it shall terminate." Slaves like Bibb and Margaret Garner strained against the bonds of slavery in part because their helplessness undermined notions of personal improvement. Nothing highlighted how slavery destroyed the possibility

of future improvement more than raising enslaved children. African Americans in the Ohio Valley believed education was the key to their children's future, and once out of bondage they set to work educating their children. After purchasing his wife and children, former slave Andrew Fredhew sent two of his daughters to Oberlin College. Likewise, Cox, the steamboat steward, sent his children and his nephews to school after he purchased his freedom. In contrast, enslaved parents had few opportunities to improve their children's situations. Both Bibb and Garner fled from bondage in hopes of salvaging their children's future. But crossing the river did not ensure greater access to schools. In fact, Ohio blacks complained bitterly about the unequal educational opportunities in the state. As Henry Johnson explained:

I left the States for Canada, for rights, freedom, liberty. I came to Buxton [Ontario] to educate my children. I lived twenty-three years in Massillon, Ohio, and was doing well at draying and carting—wanted for nothing—had money when I wanted it, and provisions plenty. But my children were thrust out of the schools, as were all the colored children—one must know how I would feel about it.³⁵

When enslaved people viewed bondage as the ultimate impediment to personal improvement, freedom became the only viable alternative. Notions of improvement depended on individual identity and varied from slave to slave. For some, it rested in their children's future. In contrast, after his religious conversion Kentucky slave Francis Fedric equated freedom with spiritual development. "Work, work, work, one day like another," wrote Fedric, "only I had now been to several prayer-meetings, and had got a knowledge of religion, which comforted me. I thought about the future, when I should be free from my master." Fedric decided to run away after his master flogged him for attending a prayer-meeting, which Fedric viewed as an impediment to spiritual growth. For Fedric, religion marked the distinction between slavery and freedom; only as a free man could he overcome the barriers to spiritual progress created by slavery. Fugitive slaves who shared Fedric's belief in individual progress distinguished between the physical conditions and personal limitations of slavery. Lewis Clarke, for example, admitted that he did not suffer much as a slave in Kentucky, and that he had as much autonomy as most free African Americans. He lamented, however, that "a slave can't be a man! Slavery makes a brute of a man." "It was not my enslavement, at the then present time, that most affected me," explained Frederick Douglass; "the being a slave *for life*, was the saddest thought." Many fugitive slaves suffered the physical cruelties of slavery, but their concern for individual improvement convinced them of the unbearable personal limitations of bondage.³⁶

Historians link Americans' fascination with self-improvement to the nineteenth-century rise and maturation of the market economy. The new middle class embraced personal growth, they argue, in response to the market economy's disruption of the traditional social order. Slaves at the border who lived and worked among white and black free persons may have imbibed this desire for improvement from their free neighbors. But the narratives and recollections of former slaves suggest that something else was at work—namely, that bondage itself contributed to their interest in self-improvement. For Upper South slaves, proximity to the border offered hope for liberty, hope for the future, and hope that their aspirations for self-improvement might be achieved.³⁷

Over the course of the antebellum period, sectional animosity and the rise of the free labor ideology in the northern states erased the connections between slavery and freedom so that by 1860 white Americans understood the commodification of labor power and the commodification of laborers as two entirely opposite things: freedom and slavery. The division took physical form when the country split during the Civil War. However, formerly enslaved African Americans reached a different conclusion. In their narratives, borderland fugitives recognized how the limitations imposed by race on both sides of the river often overshadowed the differences between the border slave and free states. For African Americans in the Ohio Valley, slavery was national. As former Kentucky slave Lewis Clarke wrote after he escaped his bondage: "I am yet accounted a slave, and no spot in the United States affords an asylum for the wanderer. True, I feel protected in the hearts of the many warm friends of the slave by whom I am surrounded; but this protection does not come from the LAWS of any one of the United States." Despite his successful flight across the Ohio River, Clarke could not escape from slavery entirely. The fugitive was never entirely free.³⁸

1 John W. Blassingame, *Slave Testimony: Two Centuries of Letters, Speeches, Interviews, and Autobiographies* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1977), 519-21.

2 Darrel E. Bigham, *On Jordan's Banks: Emancipation and Its Aftermath in the Ohio River Valley* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2006), 5-55; Joe William Trotter, *River Jordan: African American Urban Life in the Ohio Valley* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1998), 3-51; Marion B. Lucas, *A History of Blacks in Kentucky*, vol. 1: *From Slavery to Segregation, 1760-1861* (Frankfort: Kentucky Historical Society, 1992), 101-17; Hanford Dozier Stafford, "Slavery in a Border City: Louisville, 1790-1860" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Kentucky, 1982), 112-28; Andrew Jackson, *Narrative*

and Writings of Andrew Jackson of Kentucky . . . (Syracuse: Daily and Weekly Star Office, 1847), 12 <http://docsouth.und.edu/neh/jacksona/jacksona.html>. On the 1793 fugitive slave law, see Paul Finkelman, *Slavery and the Founders: Race and Liberty in the Age of Jefferson* (Armonk, N.Y.: M. E. Sharpe, 1996), 81-104. On fugitive slaves as a national issue, see Don Edward Fehrenbacher, *The Slaveholding Republic: An Account of the United States Government's Relations to Slavery* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 205-51. On fugitive slaves in the Upper South, see Ira Berlin, *Generations of Captivity: A History of African American Slaves* (Cambridge, Ma.: Harvard University Press, 2003), 204-41. On the ways in which the legal systems of Kentucky, Ohio, and Indiana deprived African Americans of their rights, see Juliet E. K. Walker, "The

- Legal Status of Free Blacks in Early Kentucky, 1792-1825," *The Filson History Quarterly* 57 (Oct. 1983), 382-95; Stephen Middleton, *The Black Laws: Race and the Legal Process in Early Ohio* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2005), 157-200; Emma Lou Thornbrough, *The Negro in Indiana: A Study of a Minority* (Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Bureau, 1957), 119-50.
- 3 John Malvin, *North into Freedom: The Autobiography of John Malvin, Free Negro, 1795-1880* (1879; Cleveland, Oh.: Press of the Western Reserve University, 1966), 39; Elisha Winfield Green, *Life of the Rev. Elisha W. Green, One of the Founders of the Kentucky Normal and Theological Institute—Now the State University at Louisville . . . and Over Thirty Years Pastor of the Colored Baptist Churches of Maysville and Paris, Written by Himself* (Maysville, Ky.: The Republican Printing Office, 1888), 14-15. The historiography well documents the circumscribed lives of free African Americans; see Leonard P. Curry, *The Free Black in Urban America 1800-1850: The Shadow of the Dream* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 249-51; Joanne Pope Melish, "The 'Condition' Debate and Racial Discourse in the Antebellum North," and James Brewer Stewart, "Modernizing 'Difference': The Political Meaning of Color in the Free States, 1776-1840," in *Race and the Early Republic: Racial Consciousness and Nation Building in the Early Republic*, Michael A. Morrison and Stewart, eds., (Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield, 2002), 75-94, 113-34; Leon F. Litwack, *North of Slavery: The Negro in the Free States, 1790-1860* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), 30-186; Ira Berlin, *Slaves without Masters: The Free Negro in the Antebellum South* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1975), 182-249; Berlin, *Generations of Captivity*, 230-44; Melish, *Disowning Slavery: Gradual Emancipation and "Race" in New England, 1780-1860* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1998), 261-74; Eugene W. Berwanger, *The Frontier Against Slavery: Western Anti-Negro Prejudice and the Slavery Extension Controversy* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1967), 7-59; Middleton, *Black Laws*, 42-73; Bigham, *On Jordan's Banks*, 15; Thornbrough, *Negro in Indiana*, 92-150.
 - 4 Blassingame, *Slave Testimony*, 432-33, 444; Bigham, *On Jordan's Banks*, 16-18; Account Book 1830-1860, James Rudd Papers, The Filson Historical Society, Louisville, Ky.; Lucas, *History of Blacks in Kentucky*, 101-17; Trotter, *River Jordan*, 3-51; Jonathan D. Martin, *Divided Mastery: Slave Hiring in the American South* (Cambridge, Ma.: Harvard University Press, 2004), 39; Clement Eaton, "Slave-Hiring in the Upper South: A Step toward Freedom," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 46 (Mar. 1960), 663-78; Keith C. Barton, "Good Cooks and Washers: Slave-Hiring, Domestic Labor, and the Market in Bourbon County, Kentucky," *Journal of American History* 84 (Sept. 1997), 436-60; Bigham, *Towns and Villages of the Lower Ohio* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1998), 63; John Hope Franklin and Loren Schweninger, *Runaway Slaves: Rebels on the Plantation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 124-48; J. Blaine Hudson, "Crossing the 'Dark Line': Fugitive Slaves and the Underground Railroad in Louisville and North-Central Kentucky," *The Filson History Quarterly* 75 (Winter 2001), 33-83. Historians argue that hired slaves forced to pay their wages back to their owners desired their freedom that much more; see Franklin and Schweninger, *Runaway Slaves*, 33-35; and Lucas, *History Blacks in Kentucky*, 105. However, hired slaves' experience in the market also raised their awareness of the way race limited their economic opportunities. Hired slaves, especially along the border, were well aware of the limits of freedom and some remained at the same job even after emancipation; see Blassingame, *Slave Testimony*, 387. The 1842 Cincinnati directory reveals that the occupations of free blacks included barber, laborer, cook, river workers, domestics, and washerwomen—that is, the same type of jobs held by enslaved people in Kentucky; see *Cincinnati Directory for the Year 1842*, Charles Cist, comp. (Cincinnati: E. Morgan and Co., 1842).
 - 5 Benjamin Drew, *The Refugee: A North-Side View of Slavery*, in *Four Fugitive Slave Narratives* (1856; Reading, Ma.: Addison-Wesley, 1969), 241; Blassingame, *Slave Testimony*, 385-86. In New Albany, Indiana, directly across the river from Louisville, two free African Americans, Joshua and Jessie Wilson, commanded their own fleet of steamers and were among the wealthiest men in Indiana; see Pamela Peters, *The Underground Railroad in Floyd County, Indiana* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland and Co., 2001), 61. Some recent works that revise the view of a wholly racist North include, Keith P. Griffler, *Front Line of Freedom: African Americans and the Forging of the Underground Railroad in the Ohio Valley* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2004); Nikki M. Taylor, *Frontiers of Freedom: Cincinnati's Black Community, 1802-1868* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2005); Paul Finkelman, "Ohio's Struggle for Equality Before the Civil War," *Timeline* 23 (Jan.-Mar. 2006), 28-43.
 - 6 Drew, *The Refugee*, 266; Lewis Garrard Clarke and Milton Clarke, *Narratives of the Sufferings of Lewis and Milton Clarke, Sons of a Soldier of the Revolution, During a Captivity of More than Twenty Years Among the Slaveholders of Kentucky, One of the So-Called Christian States of North America* (Boston: Bela Marsh, 1846), 98 <http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/clarkes/clarkes.html>. In the 1950s, journalist John Howard Griffin traveled to the South disguised as a black man to highlight the psychological barrier posed by race. Griffin stated that as a black man he was always aware of racial boundaries even when they were not explicitly stated. The looks he received from whites constantly reinforced

- the racial boundary between them. See Griffin, *Black Like Me* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1961).
- 7 Blassingame, *Slave Testimony*, 218-24; Davis (*a man of color*) v. Curry, 2 Bibb 238, Fall 1818, in Helen Catterall, ed., *Judicial Cases Concerning American Slavery and the Negro*, 5 vols. (Washington D.C.: Carnegie Institution, 1926-1937), 1:286. On Chase's legal efforts, see Middleton, *Black Laws*, 195-200; Paul Finkelman, *An Imperfect Union: Slavery, Federalism, and Comity* (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1981), 157-78. Examples of kidnapping and fugitive reclamation regularly appeared in the antislavery *The Philanthropist* in the late 1830s and the early 1840s. Although the paper publicized these incidents to gain public support for the repeal of Ohio's black laws, the many examples reveal how common kidnapping and fugitive reclamation were. See *The Philanthropist* (Cincinnati), Oct. 8, 1838, Mar. 24, Nov. 11, 1840, Mar. 24, May 12, 1841. The most thorough examination of kidnapping is Carol Wilson, *Freedom at Risk: The Kidnapping of Free Blacks in America, 1780-1865* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1994).
- 8 Berlin, *Generations of Captivity*, 223; Frederick Douglass, *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass*, in *Douglass: Autobiographies* (1881; New York: Library of America, 1994), 609-10.
- 9 Historians have placed too much emphasis on opportunity in their discussions of fugitive slaves; while opportunity played a vital role, it interacted with the personal beliefs and situations of slaves. The substantial literature on fugitive slaves has greatly influenced the interpretation offered herein. See Walter Johnson, *Soul by Soul: Life Inside the Antebellum Slave Market* (Cambridge, Ma.: Harvard University Press, 1999), 31-32; James Oakes, *Slavery and Freedom: An Interpretation of the Old South* (New York: Knopf, 1990); John W. Blassingame, *The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Antebellum South* (1972; New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 192-222; Eugene D. Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1974), 657; J. Blaine Hudson, *Fugitives Slaves and the Underground Railroad in the Kentucky Borderland* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland and Co., 2002), 156; and Griffier, *Front Line of Freedom*, 1-29. Two works that argue that a desire for freedom, while always present, was not necessarily enough to prompt escape are, Larry Gara, *The Liberty Line: The Legend of the Underground Railroad* (1961; Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1967), 19; and Steven Hahn, *A Nation Under Our Feet: Black Political Struggles in the Rural South, from Slavery to the Great Migration* (Cambridge, Ma.: Harvard University Press, 2003), 19, 485.
- 10 Franklin and Schweninger, *Runaway Slaves*, 19. The present consideration of the interplay of human conditions and resistance draws on Walter Johnson, "On Agency," *Journal of Social History* 37 (Fall 2003), 113-24. For studies of the borderland, see Gloria Anzaldua, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1987); David E. Johnson and Scott Michaelsen, "Border Secrets: An Introduction," and Russ Castronovo, "Compromised Narratives Along the Border: The Mason-Dixon Line, Resistance, and Hegemony," in *Border Theory: The Limits of Cultural Politics*, Michaelsen and Johnson, eds. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 1-39, 195-220; Jeremy Adelman and Stephen Aron, "From Borderlands to Borders: Empires, Nation-States, and the Peoples in Between in North American History," *American Historical Review* 104 (June 1999), 814-41; "Responses: Borders and Borderlands," *American Historical Review* 104 (Oct. 1999), 1221-39; James Brooks, *Captives and Cousins: Slavery, Kinship, and Community in the Southwest Borderlands* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002); Thomas M. Wilson and Hastings Donnan, "Nation, State, and Identity at International Borders," in *Border Identities: Nation and State at International Frontiers*, Wilson and Donnan, eds. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 1-30; Joel S. Migdal, "Mental Maps and Virtual Checkpoints: Struggles to Construct and Maintain State and Social Boundaries," in *Boundaries and Belonging: State and Societies in the Struggle to Shape Identities and Local Practices*, Migdal, ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 3-26; Mark Simpson, *Trafficking Subjects: The Politics of Mobility in Nineteenth-Century America* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005).
- 11 Drew, *The Refugee*, 189; Blassingame, *Slave Testimony*, 48, 53. Since Genovese's seminal work, historians have generally characterized the master/slave relationship as a negotiation, though they disagree whether paternalism or the chattel principle more strongly influenced the relationship. The most influential studies include, Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll*; Johnson, *Soul by Soul*; James Oakes, *The Ruling Race: A History of American Slaveholders* (New York: Knopf, 1982); Oakes, *Slavery and Freedom*; Christopher Morris, "The Articulation of Two Worlds: The Master-Slave Relationship Reconsidered," *Journal of American History* 85 (Dec. 1998), 982-1007. The now cliché understanding that slavery changed over time and space comes from the work of Ira Berlin; see his *Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America* (Cambridge, Ma.: Harvard University Press, 1998); and *Generations of Captivity*.
- 12 Blassingame, *Slave Testimony*, 152-53; Clarke and Clarke, *Narratives of the Sufferings*, 33-34. On slaves' deceptions of masters, see Gilbert Osofsky, "Introduction to Puttin' on Ole Massa: The Significance of Slave Narratives," in *Puttin' on Ole Massa: The Slave Narratives of Henry Bibb, William Wells*

- Brown, and Solomon Northup, Osofsky, ed. (New York: Harper and Row, 1969), 9-44. For broader discussions of slave culture in the Deep South, including slaves' understanding of and desire for freedom, see Michael Gomez, *Exchanging our Country Marks: The Transformation of African Identities in the Colonial and Antebellum South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998); Sterling Stuckey, *Slave Culture: Nationalist Theory and the Foundations of Black America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 3-97; Lawrence Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought from Slavery to Freedom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 3-135; Blassingame, *The Slave Community*; Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll*; and Hahn, *Nation Under Our Feet*, 14-61.
- 13 Michael Tadman, *Speculators and Slaves: Masters, Traders, and Slaves in the Old South* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), 301-02; Hudson, *Fugitive Slaves*, 14; William W. Freehling, *The Road to Disunion*, vol. 1: *Secessionists at Bay, 1776-1854* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 23-24; Berlin, *Generations of Captivity*, 161; Oakes, *Slavery and Freedom*, 151.
 - 14 Harry Smith, *Fifty Years of Slavery in the United States of America* (Grand Rapids: West Michigan Printing Co., 1891), 15 <http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/smithhar/smithhar.html>; Drew, *The Refugee*, 126, 260; Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin or Life Among the Lowly* (1853; New York: Signet Classic, 1998), 56-60, 67-68. Historians have long understood that sale was a defining feature of life for Border South slaves; see Berlin, *Generations of Captivity*, 167-75; and Johnson, *Soul by Soul*, 19-44.
 - 15 Franklin and Schweninger, *Runaway Slaves*, 17-74.
 - 16 Blassingame, *Slave Testimony*, 390-91; Lucas, *History of Blacks in Kentucky*, 105-08; Eaton, "Slave-Hiring," 663-78. There are several examples of slaves who purchased their freedom and moved to Canada in Drew, *The Refugee*, 131, 174, 189, 199. Still, the slaves who purchased their freedom and moved north represented only a small fraction of the more than two hundred thousand who remained enslaved in Kentucky. For the contrasting story of Maryland, see Christopher Phillips, *Freedom's Port: The African American Community of Baltimore, 1790-1860* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997); T. Stephen Whitman, *The Price of Freedom: Slavery and Manumission in Baltimore and Early National Maryland* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1997); and Barbara Jeanne Fields, *Slavery and Freedom on the Middle Ground: Maryland During the Nineteenth Century* (New Haven, Ct.: Yale University Press, 1985).
 - 17 Drew, *The Refugee*, 189; *Proceedings of the Ohio Anti-Slavery Convention Held at Putnam on the 22, 23, and 24th of April, 1835* (Cincinnati: Beaumont and Wallace, 1835), 30, 43. Such practices closely follow what Whitman and Phillips have called "term slavery"; see Whitman, *Price of Freedom*, 98-101; and Phillips, *Freedom's Port*, 30-31, 42-46.
 - 18 Josiah Henson *The Life of Josiah Henson, Formerly a Slave, Now an Inhabitant of Canada, as Narrated by Himself* (Boston: Arthur D. Phelps, 1849), 22-25 <http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/henson49/henson49.html>. While self-purchase was a contract, slaves and owners viewed it in different ways. For a similar interpretation of the master/slave relationship, see Morris, "Articulation of Two Worlds," 982-1007.
 - 19 Drew, *The Refugee*, 106; Blassingame, *Slave Testimony*, 251-52.
 - 20 Israel Campbell, *An Autobiography. Bond or Free: Or Yearnings for Freedom, from My Green Brier House. Being the Story of My Life in Bondage, and My Life in Freedom* (Philadelphia: The Author, 1861), 121-22 <http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/campbell/campbell.html>. Hired slaves' desire for market freedom suggests that the shift in values associated with the market revolution influenced them, and that those market values held more sway than the precapitalist moral economy explicated by Genovese and others. See Charles Sellers, "Capitalism and Democracy in American Historical Mythology," in *The Market Revolution in America: Social, Political, and Religious Expressions, 1800-1880*, Melvin Stokes and Stephen Conway, eds. (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1996), 311-29; Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll*, 44-49, 587-98; Genovese, *From Rebellion to Revolution: Afro-American Slave Revolts in the Making of the Modern World* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1979); and James C. Scott, *The Moral Economy of the Peasant: Rebellion and Subsistence in Southeast Asia* (New Haven, Ct.: Yale University Press, 1976). Commodification strongly influenced both slavery and freedom; see Stephanie Smallwood, "Commodified Freedom: Interrogating the Limits of Anti-Slavery Ideology in the Early Republic," *Journal of the Early Republic* 24 (Summer 2004), 292; Edward E. Baptist, "'Cuffy,' 'Fancy Maids,' and 'One-Eyed Men': Rape, Commodification, and the Domestic Slave Trade in the United States," *American Historical Review* 106 (Dec. 2001), 1619-50; Johnson, *Soul by Soul*, 117-34. The idea of "stealing" versus "earning" freedom is loosely drawn from Baptist, "'Stol and Fetched Here': Enslaved Migration, Ex-slave Narratives, and Vernacular History," in *New Studies in the History of American Slavery*, Baptist and Stephanie M. H. Camp, eds. (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2006), 243-74.
 - 21 Lucas, *History of Blacks in Kentucky*, 84-86, 92, 99; Harold D. Tallant, *Evil Necessity: Slavery and Political*

- Culture in Antebellum Kentucky* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2003), 141-43; Henson, *Life of Josiah Henson*, 40-41; Blassingame, *Slavery Testimony*, 386, 89; Hudson, *Fugitive Slaves*, 32-33. Josiah Henson planned to purchase his freedom in the 1830s, negotiating a price of four hundred and fifty dollars with his owner. When his master backed out and raised the price to an unreachable and unreasonable one thousand dollars, Henson despaired of ever raising enough money.
- 22 William Wells Brown, *Narrative of William W. Brown, an American Slave, Written by Himself* (London, Eng.: C. Gilpin, 1849), 30 <http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/brownw/brown.html>. On the ways family shaped slaves' motives for flight, see Franklin and Schweninger, *Runaway Slaves*, 50-53, 66; Hudson, *Fugitive Slaves*, 55-58; Berlin, *Generations of Captivity*, 190-95; Hahn, *Nation Under Our Feet*, 19.
- 23 Blassingame, *Slave Testimony*, 389, 440; J. D. Green, *Narrative of the Life of J. D. Green, a Runaway Slave, from Kentucky, Containing an Account of His Three Escapes, in 1839, 1846, and 1848* (Huddersfield, Eng.: Henry Fielding, 1864), 22 <http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/greenjd/greenjd.html>.
- 24 Drew, *The Refugee*, 182, 197; Blassingame, *Slave Testimony*, 275-76.
- 25 Henry Bibb, *Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb, an American Slave, Written by Himself* (New York: The Author, 1849), 83 <http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/bibb/bibb.html>.
- 26 Bibb, *Narrative of the Life*, 189; Blassingame, *Slave Testimony*, 49 Bibb wrote: "Sometimes standing on the Ohio River bluff, looking over on a free State, and as far north as my eyes could see, I have eagerly gazed upon the blue sky of the free North, which at times constrained me to cry out from the depths of my soul." These words suggest that he viewed the Ohio River as a border between slavery and freedom. However, he added, "Oh! Canada, sweet land of rest—Oh! when shall I get there? Oh, that I had the wings of a dove, that I might soar away to where there is no slavery"—language that indicates he viewed freedom in Canada differently than freedom in southern Ohio; see Bibb, *Narrative of the Life*, 29.
- 27 Barton, "Good Cooks and Washers," 447-48; Bigham, *On Jordan's Banks*, 16; Hudson, *Fugitive Slaves*, 36; Franklin and Schweninger, *Runaway Slaves*, 60-63; and Camp, *Closer to Freedom: Enslaved Women and Everyday Resistance in the Plantation South*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004).
- 28 Blassingame, *Slave Testimony*, 388-90; Berlin, *Generations of Captivity*, 215; Wilma A. Dunaway, *The African American Family in Slavery and Emancipation* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 51-114.
- 29 Jacqueline Jones, *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow: Black Women, Work, and the Family from Slavery to the Present* (New York: Vintage Books, 1995); Wilma A. Dunaway, *Slavery in the American Mountain South* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 193-97. On the impact of gender on truancy and escape, see Camp, *Closer to Freedom*, 33-47.
- 30 Baptist, "'Cuffy,' 'Fancy Maids,' and 'One-Eyed Men,'" 1619-50. Slaveholders and enslaved people recognized that control of the movement of enslaved bodies lay at the center of the slave regime and slave resistance; see Camp, *Closer to Freedom*, 12-34.
- 31 Hudson, *Fugitive Slaves*, 143-47; Middleton, *Black Laws*, 229-31.
- 32 Blassingame, *Slave Testimony*, 432-33; Lucas, *History of Blacks in Kentucky*, 121; Middleton, *Black Laws*, 31; Berlin, *Generations of Captivity*, 215; Hahn, *Nation Under Our Feet*, 35, 42; Taylor, *Frontiers of Freedom*, 44; Gomez, *Exchanging our Country Marks*, 186-243; Lyle Koehler, *Cincinnati's Black Peoples: A Chronology and Bibliography, 1787-1982* (Cincinnati: University of Cincinnati, 1986), 4; Xenia Cord, "Free Black Communities in Indiana: A Selected Annotated Bibliography," mss., Indiana Historical Society, Indianapolis, iii-vi. Examples of enslaved black ministers who traveled extensively include Elisha Winfield Green, *Life of the Rev. Elisha W. Green*, 5-9; and Josiah Henson, *Life of Josiah Henson*, 26-27.
- 33 Lucas, *History of Blacks in Kentucky*, 92-93; Taylor, *Frontiers of Freedom*, 138-60.
- 34 Drew, *The Refugee*, 233. Historians agree about the importance of racial solidarity among the African American community in the Ohio River valley. They argue that fugitive slaves turned to the black community for protection but fail to note how this relative security could reduce slaves' desire to escape north. See Hudson, "Crossing the 'Dark Line,'" 33-83; Hahn, *Nation Under Our Feet*, 35, 42; Taylor, *Frontiers of Freedom*, 29; Berlin, *Generations of Captivity*, 43, 215; Griffier, *Front Line of Freedom*, 30-57.
- 35 Bibb, *Narrative of the Life*, 19; Drew, *The Refugee*, 214; Blassingame, *Slave Testimony*, 391, 390; Philip S. Foner and George E. Walker, eds., *Proceedings of the Black State Conventions, 1840-1865*, vol. 1: *New York, Pennsylvania, Indiana, Michigan, Ohio* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1979), 214-315.
- 36 Francis Fedric, *Slave Life in Virginia and Kentucky; or, Fifty Years of Slavery in the Southern States of America* (London: Wertheim, Macintosh, and Hunt, 1863),

- 75-76 <http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/fedric/fedric.html>; Blassingame, *Slave Testimony*, 152; Frederick Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom* (1855; New York: Arno Press, 1969), 170.
- 37 Charles Sellers, *The Market Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 364-95; Daniel Feller, *The Jacksonian Promise: America, 1815-1840* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 14-32; Andrew R. L. Cayton, *Ohio: The History of a People* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2002), 45-72; Cayton, *Frontier Indiana* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 261-300.
- 38 Clarke and Clarke, *Narratives of the Sufferings*, 33; Walter Johnson, "The Pedestal and the Veil: Rethinking the Capitalism/Slavery Question," *Journal of the Early Republic* 24 (Summer 2004), 299-308; Morris, "Articulation of Two Worlds," 984. Johnson and Morris offer new ways to move beyond the hoary question of whether or not slavery was capitalist by examining how slavery, freedom, and capitalism were related. For the older debate, see Genovese, *The Political Economy of Slavery: Studies in the Economy and Society of the Slave South* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1965); and Oakes, *Ruling Race*.