



PROJECT MUSE®

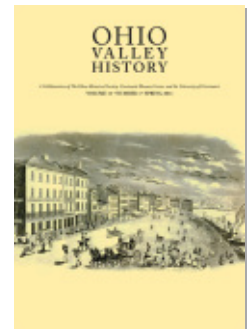
---

## Servants and Slaves in Louisville: Race, Ethnicity, and Household Labor in an Antebellum Border City

Stephanie Cole

Ohio Valley History, Volume 11, Number 1, Spring 2011, pp. 3-25 (Article)

Published by The Filson Historical Society and Cincinnati Museum Center



➔ For additional information about this article

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/571436/summary>

# Servants and Slaves in Louisville

## *Race, Ethnicity, and Household Labor in an Antebellum Border City*

Stephanie Cole

In June 1836, Mrs. J. R. Taylor placed an advertisement in the *Louisville Daily Journal* looking for domestic help. “Wanted to hire, two good house servants of steady habits who are qualified to fill the station of cook and washerwoman,” the ad announced, “A woman and girl would be preferred.” The wording revealed neither the legal status of the domestics the widow Taylor hoped to engage nor whether she would in fact make the final hiring decision, directing interested parties

to “refer to J. R. Taylor,” her son, at his grocery on Main Street or directly to her at her home on the “corner of Seventh and Walnut.”

Mrs. Taylor may have planned to hire slaves from their owners, and simply substituted the term “servant” for “slave,” avoid-

ing the latter term out of discomfort. During an earlier era, Louisville readers would have assumed that Mrs. Taylor meant *slaves* “of steady habits.” But by 1836 such an interpretation, while still likely, was not the only possibility. E. W. Rupert’s want-ad later the same month reflects an open interest in non-slave domestic workers; he advertised for a “black or white girl of 10 to 13 years of age . . . to take care of a small child.” Mrs. Taylor may have had in mind hiring a free woman of color—15 percent of the city’s black population was free by 1840—and one, R. Carter, lived

just down the street from Mrs. Taylor’s son, listing her occupation as washerwoman. Possibly, Taylor hoped the advertisement would catch the eye of one of the

Irish or German women beginning to arrive in the city; in September 1836, Louisville entrepreneurs F. A. Nauts and Thomas Sims expanded their new “Intelligence Office” to include translation and other services to “emigrants, free of charge.”<sup>1</sup>

**WANTED TO HIRE**—Two good House Servants of steady habits, who are qualified to fill the station of cook and washerwoman. A woman and girl would be preferred. Refer to J. R. Taylor, Main, between Third and Fourth, or Msr. Taylor, corner of Seventh and Walnut. june 6—d6

Advert of Mrs. Taylor, *Louisville Daily Journal*, June 6, 1836.

THE FILSON HISTORICAL SOCIETY

**WANTED**—A black or white girl, from 10 to 13 years of age, of good habits and disposition, to take care of a small child. Apply to E. W. RUPERT.

Advert of E. W. Rupert, *Louisville Daily Journal*, June 8, 1836.

THE FILSON HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Mrs. Taylor's call for applicants to come to her own home—indicating that she could make the hiring decision—suggests another perhaps related social change. Prior to 1840 few women, even in cities, played a public role in the effort to staff their homes. Instead, they relied on husbands—or in the case of widows, other male agents—as their contractual representatives. Because most of these early ads concerned buying, selling, and year-long hiring contracts for slaves, their reliance probably reflected men's roles in making large-scale capital decisions as much as a proper woman's invisibility in the public realm of the newspaper. After 1840, women's names appeared more often in the “help-wanted” advertisements of border city newspapers, reflecting both the declining importance of slavery and an emerging sense of the home as entirely women's domain, regardless of the presence of slaves. Whether or not Mrs. Taylor herself sought slaves, the advertisement reveals her willingness to assess a domestic's suitability and worth. Recent scholarship has demonstrated that housekeepers remained embedded in economic activity, even as the rhetoric of separate spheres rendered household labor less visible.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, in Louisville maintaining a home increasingly required public transactions, both for wage negotiations and market purchases.

The confusion Mrs. Taylor's help wanted advertisement engenders emerges from the complexity of the transitions underway in Louisville and other antebellum border cities, as well as historians' limited understanding of the changing nature of household labor and the growing diversity of the servant workforce. A close reading of newspaper want ads, public records left by census enumerators and court reporters, and private correspondence and account books of border city housekeepers suggests that urbanization and the intensification of the market economy altered the work done within southern urban households—although not at the uniform pace earlier studies of the decline of household production implied. More significantly, urban economic growth transformed the domestic servant labor pool even in this slave economy and “southern” housekeepers proved remarkably willing to adapt to those changes. They looked beyond the legal status of potential domestics and considered free and enslaved women when hiring adults, and often ignored adults altogether in favor of youths, whom they believed more tractable and inexpensive.

In antebellum Louisville, everyday life blurred the line between slave and “free” labor, and the presence of slavery did not close options that existed in wage labor societies. Recent work by historians of slavery and the antebellum economy has chipped away at the notion of southern distinctiveness, especially previous assumptions about the South's place in the emerging market economy. Walter Johnson's description of “the chattel principle” highlights the awareness of slaves and slaveholders alike about the role of the market in determining their choices. Seth Rockman's study of the poor in Baltimore convincingly demonstrates the critical importance of slave labor in early national market expansion; rather than

serving as a barrier, slavery and other forms of coerced labor helped to create the pool of capital that made market development in Baltimore possible. Robert J. Steinfeld and other scholars of labor law have undercut myths about freedom of choice and mobility among wage workers in the antebellum North, and thereby revealed the coercion experienced by “free” labor.<sup>3</sup>

By the late antebellum period, politicians so freely employed the rhetoric of ‘free North’ and ‘slave South’ that they created a fictional sense of absolute opposition between the two regions. Furthermore, historians seeking to explain the Civil War have until recently amplified the sense of a dichotomous opposition and assumed that the presence of slavery determined every element of antebellum Americans’ lives. In Louisville, however, both “southern” labor laws and “northern” urban and economic development shaped and constrained the choices of residents. Between 1810 and 1860, Louisville grew from a small frontier outpost where only a handful of slaves resided to a thriving transportation and manufacturing center, with a workforce made up of slaves, free African Americans, immigrants, and northern- and southern-born whites. While slaves and the slave trade continued to occupy an important niche in the city’s economy, the value of slave holdings declined as a proportion of the overall wealth of the city. In this, the Falls City resembled other cities on the margins of the South, especially Baltimore (though the Chesapeake port developed earlier and more extensively). This diversity highlights the importance of looking past strict regional frameworks in uncovering the impact of the market revolution on antebellum American domestic life.<sup>4</sup> In Louisville, the degree to which urban residents lessened their dependence on slavery and on household production depended upon their economic perspectives and developments within the city that often had little to do with the legality of slavery. The strength of Louisville’s economy, the state of an individual’s finances, shifts in the value of slave labor in the state, and the extent of immigration helped determine patterns of consumption and domestic servant employment.

As Mrs. Taylor’s cook and washerwoman knew, the work lives of Louisville’s domestics were not testimonials to urban progress. Part of their drudgery owed to the fact that the technological revolution that transformed manufacturing and transportation before 1850 had a limited impact on households. Historians of housework have observed that only two inventions—the cookstove and the egg-beater—reached most antebellum middle-class homes.<sup>5</sup> But the difficulties of housework in Louisville were also tied to the city’s uneven economic development and the varied choices of housekeepers, some of whom sought to maximize their investment in slave labor, while others lacked the financial means to take advantage of labor-saving housekeeping strategies. Slavery remained important, and some of Louisville’s enslaved domestics faced different assignments than their

free counterparts. But other factors shaped slaves' work experience, including the relative wealth of their employers and whether they worked in the city before or after its economy had taken off.

Despite Louisville's location at the Falls of the Ohio, early settlers and urban amenities arrived slowly. Initial editions of Louisville's newspapers reveal that the city's backwater status lessened the availability of inexpensive household goods such as candles and soap. In 1814, confectioners Martin and Ames offered baked goods "done in the most elegant manner" and "sea biscuits of the best quality," while a few merchants such as Fitzhugh and Gwathmey claimed a "splendid assortment of goods" but listed only staples such as sugar and coffee. The limited accessibility of manufactured household goods forced housekeepers and their domestics to produce most of their necessities. Louisville elites could purchase "elegant" baked goods as a signal of their gentility, but they also needed many hands to maintain the basics of survival. The absence of a public water system contributed to the problems of Louisville's narrow consumer market. Early efforts to finance a water system privately failed, and the city did not complete the works for pumping water from the Ohio River until October 1860. Whereas housekeepers in other southern and border cities could potentially benefit from piped water much earlier—Charleston chartered a water system in 1799, Baltimore in 1804, Cincinnati by 1820, and Richmond a decade later—Louisville households needed individuals (usually servants) to haul water for cooking, laundry, and consumption on a daily basis.<sup>6</sup>

Not surprisingly, Louisvillians found keeping a respectable house a daunting task in the city's first decades. For some easterners—those without sufficient means to buy slaves for hauling water and making soap—the prospect of life in the west brought a shudder. Virginian Judith McGuire fretted that her son Edward would move his wife to the West to accept a call to the pulpit. The younger Mrs. McGuire, "poor thing," was "very badly suited to a life . . . where so much manual labour is required in domestic arrangements." Up river in early Cincinnati, domestic servant shortages sentenced even well-off women "to the wash tub [and] occasionally the kitchen," in the words of one resident. As a result, many established middle-class families quit housekeeping altogether in favor of boarding. Louisville's large numbers of boardinghouses, including some who sought to appeal to "genteel small families" in their advertisements, suggests that a similar fate befell families in the Falls City. While the aforementioned beleaguered Cincinnati housewife announced her removal to a boardinghouse with relief, most well-to-do Americans found such a prospect far from ideal. Bachelors and the newly married most often lived in public quarters, while others in the middle class shunned such accommodations because they did not provide the domestic intimacy bourgeois families desired.<sup>7</sup>

**P**PRIVATE BOARDING.—One or two genteel small families can be accommodated with rooms and board in a private house, situated in a pleasant and genteel part of the city. Also, a number of regular day boarders. Enquire, first door North of Christ's Church, on second street, between Green and Walnut.  
 References—Mr. Wm. Nock or Mr. Chas. D. Loveland, Druggists.      april 11 d3eod3\*

Boardinghouse advert, *Louisville Daily Journal*, April 11, 1837.

THE FILSON HISTORICAL SOCIETY

By the late 1820s, Louisville's economic doldrums had abated, along with some of the most egregious complaints of frontier housekeeping—at least for those with money. Merchants' ads doubled, then trebled, then became too numerous to count in the pages of the local newspapers, and they regularly offered to Louisville residents the same things housekeepers in Baltimore and Richmond had come to expect. In one November 1830 issue of the *Daily Journal*, for example, five different merchants competed for housekeepers' custom by touting the quality of their "Lexington spun cotton," "Ohio cheese," "kegs of pickles," muslins, flannels, umbrellas, and a "wide variety of dry goods." Such a variety of goods enabled housekeepers to depend less on their own or servants' labors. And those with adequate funds had access to newly designed cook stoves, now manufactured in Cincinnati. The stove, advertisers contended, could cook, bake, keep water warm for washing clothes, and heat homes, and came in sizes appropriate for small or large families. Together the advent of manufactured goods and urban amenities had the potential to alter the daily lives of Louisville's domestics. But the changes did not necessarily mean *less* housework. Because stoves made so many different tasks easier, including a multi-course rather than one-pot meal, employers raised their expectations of cooks accordingly. Moreover, stoves were difficult to operate. Heat travelled in different patterns in stoves than it did in brick ovens, forcing cooks to learn and perfect new methods. Mistresses often complained about servants' inability to grasp these methods, a circumstance that prompted one Louisville advertiser to claim that his "range [was] simple in management; the most careless servant can cook with it without trouble."<sup>8</sup> That this stove design did not sweep the nation leaves his claim open to question.

If stoves compounded labor demands by raising expectations and increasing the time needed to accommodate new technology, the burdens of other types of housework remained depressingly unchanged and burdensome. Housekeepers could purchase "Ohio cheese," but their servants still had to convert most food from its raw form, haul and heat water for laundry, gather fuel, and keep fires



stoked. Even after most households quit making their own textiles, candles, and soap, women still hemmed all linens and sewed most clothing, including undergarments, by hand. Antebellum Americans did not share today's expectations for dust-free households (a product of the raised standards that accompanied vacuums), but dusting and sweeping nevertheless remained daily jobs for urban servants. Seasonally, domestics converted winter drapes and carpets into summer-weight curtains and floor mats; on those occasions, they not only beat, cleaned, and stored the off-season accouterments, but also cleaned and whitewashed walls throughout the house in order to obscure the effects of smoky fires and lamps. Even in wealthy, modernizing, urban households, workloads for domestics remained heavy.<sup>9</sup>



Caroline H. Preston (1785-1847).  
THE FILSON HISTORICAL SOCIETY

But not all Louisville households modernized, even when they had the means to do so. Wealthy housekeepers with market access did not necessarily begin to purchase their families' needs. Instead, southern housekeepers followed a variety of approaches to integrating market goods, their decisions shaped in part by their commitment to slavery but also by their own idiosyncratic ideas about housekeeping. As a result, the movement from household production to market consumption was not linear in Louisville—nor was it anywhere else in the United States. Caroline Preston, a widowed slaveholder with homes both in and outside Louisville, kept her daughters and slaves focused on a wide variety of household needs. In 1828, while visiting relatives in Virginia, Preston

worried that the women at home would fall behind in their tasks. “The cherries should be drying,” she directed them, “and the cucumbers also planted . . . get 10 or 15 pounds of raw cotton for Sally to spin a chain for the carpet.” Later that summer, she pressed her domestics further. “What have you preserved or what pickles have [you] made? . . . Have you ever got the refuse wool for the mattresses from the machine?” Although local merchants supplied pickles by the keg and “mattresses made of hair, shucks, moss, and of various sizes,” Preston had access to country produce and ten slave hands to keep busy.<sup>10</sup>

Such “country connections” remained important for antebellum housekeepers, many of whom relied on rural relatives to help provide crucial economies for their urban households. Whereas Preston used her own plantation's resources to produce everything from carpets and mattresses to most of the food the family

consumed, others used kinship networks with rural family members to get butter and eggs at a lower price and to exchange town goods like stockings and ribbon for farm-produced jams and sausages. These same urban households often kept milk-producing cows and acquired urban lots large enough for gardening, in essence keeping part of the farm inside the city limits.<sup>11</sup> If some boardinghouse residents and other consumption-oriented households produced little of their families' needs, and Caroline Preston and her fellow slaveholders produced virtually all of them, the majority of Louisville residents fell somewhere in between. Thus, even after urban markets developed, household production and market consumption comprised the opposing ends of a continuum, with most antebellum Americans occupying some point in the middle. They moved back and forth across this continuum, alternately purchasing more or less with the ebb and flow of family fortunes, including the state of their health, the strength of rural ties, and access to the labor of servants, neighbors, and older children.

If scholars' assumptions about a linear transition toward a consumption-based household economy need revising, then so too do their depictions of the enslaved domestic servant workforce in southern cities. For Louisville, at least, the legality of slavery did not mean housekeepers focused entirely on slaves. While newspaper advertisements continued to offer slaves with domestic skills for hire or sale, Irish and German immigrant women found employment in the city's middle-class households. Yet the growing population of northern- and foreign-born residents familiar with wage labor, and the presence of inexpensive immigrant female laborers did not mean a "northern" pattern of service supplanted a "southern" reliance on slaves. In 1850, almost one-third of the residents of the city's wealthier census districts owned or hired slave women, with successful northern-born residents a significant segment of this group. But owning or hiring slaves did not preclude using free domestics, and more than a few households held both enslaved and free workers. In the city's new middle-class neighborhoods, those who dealt only with slaves, those who only hired free servants, and those who apparently held no slave or free preferences lived side-by-side.<sup>12</sup>

Moreover, counting the numbers of slave versus free servants does not reveal the pace or nature of the transition because the labels "free" and "slave" were ambiguous. Men and women who worked as Louisville domestics, like black residents of every border city, knew that their legal status as "slave" or "free" represented only one factor shaping their everyday lives. Waged domestics lacked control over their work, and most had little time off. In contrast, urban slaves, especially those who were hired out, formed part of black communities in which free blacks, hired slaves, and runaways enjoyed a measure of autonomy. Throughout the border region, elites struggled and failed to maintain a social order in which *black* and *slave* meant the same thing. As part of their strategy, they restricted free



African Americans so that they led slave-like lives. Black codes and occupational restrictions made up part of elites' attempts to associate the most menial jobs—the ones with the least autonomy such as domestic servant—with blacks.<sup>13</sup> Still, by 1850 Falls City housekeepers regularly chose white servants and many cared little about maintaining a clear line between slave and free and black and white in their domestic hires. The genesis and extent of such disinterest reveals the problematic nature of scholars' assumptions regarding how the presence of slavery shaped calculations about the employment of domestic servants.

Before 1830, the city and its housekeepers were undoubtedly tied to slavery. In 1820, slaves made up more than one-fourth of the city's population, and over half of the white residents owned slaves. Until 1830, all twenty-nine advertisements for domestic servants that appeared in a sample of Louisville newspapers mentioned slaves, and between 1830 and 1850, 141 of 149 did. Throughout the antebellum period, slave hiring played a significant part in Louisville's domestic labor market. Not only did slaves for hire dominate newspaper ads for domestics, but the city held on to the traditional custom of "hiring day." The intersection of Fourth and Market Streets "presented a busy scene" each January 2, according to one newspaper account from 1855, as "thousands of men and women servants" gathered "to be hired for the ensuing year." So important was this tradition in Louisville that employers who hired slaves at other times of the year promised employment only temporarily through December—and they did so much more frequently than slave hirers in either Richmond or Baltimore.<sup>14</sup>

Although the ability to profit from slave capital through hiring out may have shored up slave owners' finances, it weakened their control over bondsmen. Many of Louisville's slaves experienced less than "slave-like" conditions. Masters profited from their slaves' compliance with hiring out decisions, as excessive resistance might negate the terms of the contract. Slaves knew masters needed their acquiescence, and they exploited the small opportunity this gave them. Kentucky slaveholders frequently discussed their chattels' perspectives on their hires. In 1841, Garnet Duncan wrote to slave owner Orlando Brown at the request of Duncan's slave Nathan, noting that Nathan had begun proceedings to find a new master for his wife currently hired out in Louisville. Because his wife Leticia actually belonged to Brown, Nathan's letter amounted to an update to the owner of imminent changes in his chattel's situation. Discovering their slaves engaged in making their own arrangements apparently did not faze the Brown family. Mary Brown reported that Julia, one of their slaves angered by a whipping at the hands of her current hired mistress, had refused to return to the woman's employ. "Although they [the offending Grahams] are anxious to have her again," Mary wrote, Julia "had selected Mr. Shelby's" and was "very much pleased with her situation." Laws mandated that owners not turn slaves loose to make their own arrangements, but weak enforcement meant that little prevented masters like the

Browns from offering their slaves significant latitude. Newspaper editorials helplessly railed against the “corrupting tendency” of slaves without supervision. As one observer explained, “those who hire their own time, not only act without restraint themselves, but their example induces others to believe that they can take the same liberties [to] work or play as they please.” Such rants were in vain, however, as owners had come to depend on slaves’ wages, and the enslaved grew accustomed to the autonomy this market transaction brought.<sup>15</sup>

Complicating matters, white Louisvillians found it hard to distinguish semi-autonomous slaves from free blacks, who themselves labored under slave-like restrictions. Both commonly held menial jobs such as domestic service. When African American applicants presented themselves for a job as a domestic, many potential employers apparently accepted their suitability. Thus white elites’ assumption that *black* equaled *servant* inadvertently contributed to slaveowners’ difficulties in controlling their property. Runaway ads often cautioned readers against hiring escaped slaves, a warning that would have been unnecessary had the practice not been common. Because they knew white housekeepers would continue to hire autonomous black workers, owners listed skills as well as physical descriptions of their runaway slaves, thereby attempting to stop whites—ostensible supporters of the slave system—from providing sanctuary and support to escaped slaves. Some advertisers even spelled out their intent, as in the case of the runaway slave Nancy: “People are therefore particularly requested not to employ said negro, if she should apply for a situation.” In July 1826, Mary Holloway informed Louisville readers that her slave Richie, who “calls himself Richie Hunter,” was “35 years old, 5'7",” of “thin visage” and “mild” speech, “unless out of humor, and then he speaks quick.” As a “good house servant” who “understands waiting on a table,” Richie, she added, would probably “try to pass as a free man.” The same year another slave owner confessed that his escaped slave “was permitted to hire his own time in Louisville” before making his escape, and was probably still doing so.<sup>16</sup>

These runaways disappeared into a growing African American community, while the proportion of slaves within the population declined every census after 1810. The percentage of free black residents almost doubled between 1830 and 1840 (from 8.8 percent to 15.3 percent), and by 1860 fully 28 percent of Louisville’s black residents were free. Like free African American communities elsewhere in the U.S., the Louisville population was disproportionately female and poor. Women mostly worked as laundresses and servants; in 1860, 281 of Louisville’s free women of color identified their occupation as either washer-woman or seamstress.<sup>17</sup> Slave owners knew this community could interfere with their ability to retrieve escaped slaves.

Perhaps because their numbers gave them confidence, or perhaps out of a sense of moral obligation, free African Americans proved an important asset for escaping slaves. Diana’s former owner believed she was “no doubt lurking about

the city, or county, as all of her relations reside here.” As Diana probably realized, hiding in plain sight with a bevy of relatives willing to offer cover gave escaped slaves a decent shot at remaining free. Amanda, the escaped slave of Benjamin Adams, sought to secure her freedom by befriending Sarah Ann Lucas, a free woman of color who maintained residences in both Louisville and New Albany, Indiana, directly across the Ohio River. Lucas apparently guided Amanda across the river, probably providing her with forged free papers. In New Albany, she may have worked as a servant in a boardinghouse belonging to Andrew Israel, a white man suspected of abetting slaves’ escapes. As a domestic in a lodging frequented by travelers, Lucas would have been well-placed to learn of escaped slaves needing help. In January 1854, Lucas faced the Louisville Police Court, charged with “enticing slaves.” The court demanded that she give a six hundred dollar bond for good behavior for the period of one year. But the fate of the runaway, Amanda, remains unknown.<sup>18</sup>

Although the police court and runaway advertisers hoped for white support for the institution of slavery, their underlying assumptions about Louisville’s household employers may have been misplaced. Recall the warning issued by Nancy’s owner, mentioned above: She “particularly requested” readers “not to employ said negro, if she should apply for a situation.” Did the owner include such an explicit request because she feared readers *could not deduce* Nancy’s status? Or did she perhaps fear (or know) that unless a legalistic phrase in a public notice suggested consequences for obstructing Nancy’s recapture, readers *would not acknowledge* it? The latter possibility suggests that those who hired escaped slaves were not oblivious to their status, but sought a cheap servant, much like contemporary Americans avoid inquiring about the legal status of their foreign-born nannies, housekeepers, and lawn care workers. When considered alongside the large number of successful escapees and regular harangues about the “dangerous” free black community, this attitude suggests that some among the servant-employing class had little investment in the peculiar institution. In 1848, one observer of Louisville society believed that “slavery exists in Louisville . . . only in name.” His assessment was not precisely true, but slave ownership had become concentrated, with less than a tenth of the white population owning slaves in 1850.<sup>19</sup>

The same year, almost a third of Louisville’s white residents were born outside the United States, mostly in Germany and Ireland. The vast majority of immigrants were wage laborers and less than 3 percent owned slaves. In 1850, men constituted a disproportionate number of immigrants in Louisville, but over the course of the following decade Irish women came in large enough numbers to transform domestic hiring practices, as they had done in other, more northerly cities. Consider the shifting composition of the staffs of Louisville’s premier hotels. In 1850, the proprietor of the Galt House, Aris Throckmorton, owned fifty-six slaves, most of whom worked as porters and maids in his hotel.



The first Galt House, Louisville, Kentucky, c. 1860.

THE FILSON HISTORICAL SOCIETY

The proprietors of the Louisville Hotel and the Marble Hall Hotel each owned twenty slaves. By 1860, however, Throckmorton owned no slaves, and most of the Galt House's fifty-six servants were Irish. Its rivals of the day, the National Hotel and the United States Hotel, also employed Irish women as domestics almost exclusively. The proprietor of the Louisville Hotel, Michael Kean, no longer owned any female slaves, though he hired thirty slaves, twenty-nine of whom were men.<sup>20</sup>

Private housekeepers also started hiring Irish servants, but because the shift to this labor source was not as dramatic as among businesses, and because much of the scholarship about slavery has emphasized the role household slaves played in bolstering white southerners' social status, historians have missed it. They have placed too much emphasis on aggregate statistics of urban slave ownership, and assumed that those who owned slaves used them exclusively. In Louisville, slaveholding could indeed be a marker of status for upwardly mobile middle-class residents, and many in this group owned household slaves. A few statistics have overshadowed historians' understanding of domestic service in Louisville. The bulk of the city's 1,400 slaveholding households held moderate wealth or were headed by men with middle-class occupations; the slave populations consisted of significantly more women and men; and most slave owners held only one or two slaves. Moreover, newly successful northern-born men owned slaves at numbers slightly higher than their southern-born counterparts and they usually owned no more than two slaves, suggesting that they bought slaves for domestic use and to confer status on their families. Kentuckians, like other southerners, often



The Louisville Hotel, c. 1850.

THE FILSON HISTORICAL SOCIETY

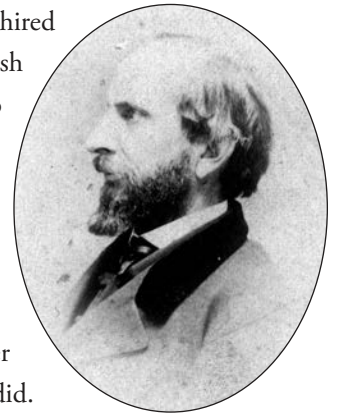
hired or bought slaves to increase domestic comfort and relieve “their women of household drudgery.” And like other southerners, Kentuckians regularly railed about the incompetence and inconstancy of servants during northern travels, conveniently forgetting their own frequent complaints about forgetful or ignorant enslaved servants back home.<sup>21</sup>

But these facts—that Louisvillians used slaves as status markers, and that they appreciated the ways in which owning or hiring slaves could promote household comfort—do not demonstrate that middle-class southern urbanites relied on an enslaved domestic workforce. Housekeepers in the Falls City pursued a variety of hiring strategies, and looked increasingly to wage laborers in the late antebellum period. A sample of typical middle-class households in 1850 and 1860 suggests that interest in hiring foreign-born domestics rose dramatically—perhaps keeping pace with Louisville’s growing immigrant population and the rising price of slaves (see Table One).<sup>22</sup> The numbers are too small to offer a definitive statement, but the increase in households using Irish and German domestics is noteworthy. Between 1850 and 1860, hires of foreign domestics climbed from a quarter of the sample to more than one half, and employers of Irish or German women were almost as likely to come from a southern state as to be born outside the slave region. Charles Duffield, a Virginia-born entrepreneur in Louisville’s thriving food processing industries, hired German domestics exclusively in both 1850 and 1860, and he was not alone. Focusing on slavery obscures Louisvillians’ underlying flexibility in hiring household domestics.

A surprising number of Louisville housekeepers did not insist on either slave or free domestics but instead used both, revealing their growing adaptability to a changing labor market. Two merchants, New York-born D. L. Benedict and



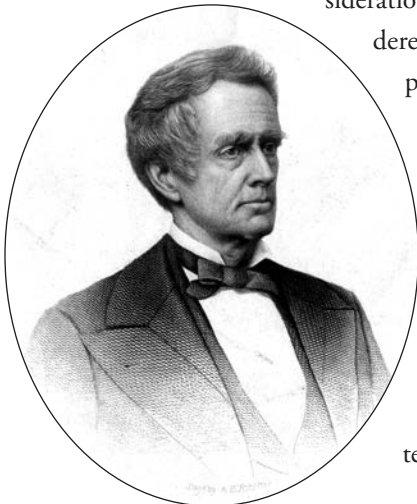
Kentucky-born James Trabue, each owned slaves but also hired Irish women—in Benedict's case, a fourteen-year-old Irish girl in 1850. Attorney James Speed, a Kentuckian who eventually became an opponent of slavery (and member of Abraham Lincoln's cabinet) despite coming from a wealthy slave owning family, owned one fourteen-year-old mulatto female in 1850. But three Irish women—May Campion, and Julia and Mary Mayan—performed most of his household's labor. By 1860, Speed no longer owned slaves, though members of his extended family did.



James Speed (1812-1887).  
THE FILSON HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Pennsylvanian-born merchant Cyrus Bent owned four slaves in 1850; by 1860, he was dead but his widow, Annie Bent of Virginia, had divested herself of all slaves and relied instead on the services of Mary Tierney and Maggie Dugan, two young women born in Ireland. Their compatriots, Ellen Castleton and Catherine Harrison, worked as domestics for Edward Ayers in 1850, probably helping his wife keep track of their five children, two of whom were one-year-old twins. Ayers, a steamboat captain, owned no slaves. Whether householders' flexibility reflected their discontent with the institution of slavery, or if it emerged out of a cost-benefit analysis is difficult to pinpoint. On one hand, southerners debated the value of slaves as children's nurses, with some describing enslaved nurses as loyal and maternal and others, perhaps influenced by a culture that increasingly reified the role of the mother, finding them untrustworthy or incompetent. On the other hand, economic con-

siderations, especially late in the antebellum period, may have rendered such debates purely philosophical; the explosion in slave prices and increased immigration could have tempted even the most committed slave owners to consider employing waged household labor.<sup>23</sup>



James Trabue (1791-1874).  
THE FILSON HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Evidence suggests that Louisvillians divided on the question of slaves' suitability for their homes, and especially for new standards of childrearing. In 1839, Ellen Green's Philadelphia mother pressed her to use white women exclusively in the nursery. "Your slaves," Ellen's mother argued, are "calculated to spoil [your children's] tempers and give them bad habits," and "make tirents of them." Whether Green followed this advice is unknown, but her friend Elizabeth Williams apparently arrived at a similar conclusion. Williams boasted to Green that she was

taking "more comfort than we ever have before in Louisville," due to the efforts of her newly hired "white Dutch girl." Kentucky slaveowner Susan Grigsby hired white women to help with the nursing of her children on occasion; she found



“Mrs. Jones” a “poor old creature” who was particularly “thoughtful” and Mrs. Anderson “very sensible and practical.” The latter, however, earned her employer’s wrath with an unexpected departure (the characteristic of free workers most often mentioned by those who stated a preference for slaves). When the former nurse, “delighted with the prospect of quitting Kentucky,” went to “a free state,” Grigsby felt betrayed by a “hardened” soul who “performs her duties solely from mercenary motives and would engage to perform any kind of service for increased wages.” Grigsby’s frequent references to laudatory childcare from her slaves—Jenny’s “affection” and Sarah’s “kindness”—may indicate that her original preference for a white nurse did not equal that of Ellen Green’s mother, or perhaps it reflects the fact that Mrs. Anderson’s departure soured her on the free labor market. Assumptions about the young slave’s loyalty and affection may explain why Louisville attorney James Speed kept a single slave, a fourteen-year-old girl, in 1850, when he had three young boys, but had divested himself of all slaves by 1860. Grigsby and Speed both came from prominent slaveholding families, but Grigsby, whose support for chattel slavery remained relatively unquestioned, sought a free nurse for her children, while Speed, whose doubts about the institution were apparent by 1850, seems to have employed an enslaved one. In Louisville, individuals did not respond in a unified way to the new cultural imperatives concerning women’s gender roles, anymore than housekeepers did elsewhere in the antebellum United States. The presence of racial slavery just made the potential for contradictions more likely.<sup>24</sup>

Young slaves were also inexpensive, and cost surely played a significant role in most employers’ decisions, notwithstanding southerners’ praise for slaves as servants. Early in the antebellum period, the supply of enslaved domestics was sufficiently large to ensure their affordability as nurses, cooks, and in other household capacities. Until the 1840s, prospective buyers could purchase a slave woman in Kentucky for approximately four hundred dollars, though the actual price depended on the age, skill level, and health of the woman; children and older women could be purchased for as little as one-half the price of a healthy adult. The cost of hiring a slave for a year usually ran about 10 to 15 percent of the slave’s value. In December 1833, Hector Green, commissioned to find places for two enslaved women belonging to family friends in Henderson, Kentucky, reported he could secure “\$30—clothes, taxes etc etc included” for slaves hired for the year. Detailed records of hires elsewhere in central Kentucky confirm that middle-aged women trained in domestic skills brought owners between thirty and forty-five dollars a year, or about four dollars a month. Well-trained cooks and male servants cost a bit more. In the late 1830s, “Joe,” a “body servant,” earned twelve dollars a month for his owner.<sup>25</sup>

Getting the best prices relied on maintaining connections with those who had slaves to hire out. Slave owners distrusted strangers who rented slaves, knowing that they (like all capitalists) wanted to get the most productivity for the least

expenditure, which often meant overworked and neglected slaves. On the open market, monthly hiring fees for domestics ran high. While Hector Green negotiated a price of thirty dollars a year for a slave hire, another Louisville resident pressed her son in Lexington to purchase “the woman you have in view for Sidney.” If he did not, she warned, they would face yearly hiring costs “from sixty to eighty [dollars]” to acquire a similar slave in Louisville. A year later, Caroline Preston faced conflict with a fellow slaveholder who claimed Preston’s purchase of his female slave was invalid because the agent making the sale did not have his permission. Until Preston returned the slave he expected ten dollars a month in wages, the equivalent of one hundred and twenty dollars a year. Susan Grigsby’s agent spelled out the difference between putting “servants on the block” and “hiring privately to reliable persons who would take care of them.” Those who resorted to public auctions could expect higher prices, while slave hirers who dealt with owners they knew believed that “the interest of the Estate would be better preserved and humanity better served.” By the 1850s slaves prices had skyrocketed because of the demand for labor in the booming cotton regions of the Southwest, and anyone interested in affordable household slaves found maintaining connections with slave hirers essential. Male and female slaves generally cost between eight hundred and one thousand dollars, and could bring as much as fifteen hundred to two thousand dollars (in today’s values, equal to the cost of a small home). Slave owners in Louisville might have to pay as much as fifteen hundred dollars for a good cook (or twelve dollars a month to hire her) because women with cooking and domestic skills often commanded a premium price above average slave values.<sup>26</sup>

Newcomers without connections could expect, conservatively, to pay at least eighty dollars a year to hire an adult slave woman, as well as furnish clothes and healthcare for her—the “clothes, taxes, etc etc” to which Hector Green referred and which was a common part of any slave-hiring arrangement. The cost, then, averaged nearly seven dollars a month. Irish women’s labor was almost certainly less expensive, with most estimates of urban domestic wages ranging between four and six dollars a month. These rates included room and board and perhaps a uniform that remained the property of the employer, but free workers could not count on employers providing additional clothing or paying for doctors’ visits. In the early 1840s, one Baltimore matron, Ann McKenzie Cushing, paid her cook six dollars a month, but most other adult female servants earned between four and five dollars. Louisville wages in the 1850s were likely slightly higher, but probably did not reach seven dollars. Moreover, hiring free workers did not require that employers tie up capital in slaves or contract for an entire year’s wages, as did most slave-hiring arrangements. If a free worker did not suit, employers could fire her on the spot, whereas slave hirers often found it difficult to renegotiate (or end) a hired slave’s contract. In Cushing’s case, employees quit or were fired on a regular basis. But the “servant problem” hid significant economies. In 1842, for example, Cushing paid her servants one hundred and twenty-five dollars

in wages for the year. She sought to keep between three and four servants, but because they came and went, their frequent vacancies enabled her to save on salaries (even if she had a surfeit of frustration). Averaged over the course of the year, Cushing spent only about \$2.60 per month, per servant. Had each of the four servants been slaves hired for a year at a modest rate of forty dollars each plus clothing and healthcare, her yearly servant costs would have exceeded one hundred and sixty dollars, or more than thirty-five dollars higher than she paid her free workforce.<sup>27</sup>

If nothing else, hiring free workers created some elasticity in one's financial commitments. Using enslaved domestics often circumvented the annoyances associated with free workers' comings and goings, and southern historians have understandably assumed antebellum employers preferred them as a result. But employers' willingness to pay a premium for relatively constant service (relative because slaves could and did run away) had its limits. Once slave hiring costs rose above free labor wages, some housekeepers on a budget chose the more economical and flexible option, immigrant Irish and German domestics. In 1850, for example, Oscar Wilder, a recently married apothecary owned four female slaves but still employed an Irish immigrant, eighteen-year-old Mary Ady, as a domestic. Wilder, who did not yet have children, had not hired Ady in the capacity of nurse. Given the capital invested in slaves and the growing prevalence of slave hiring in southern cities, the most logical explanation of Wilder's census information is that he treated the four slaves as an investment, hiring them out for high wages while relying on an inexpensive foreign-born maid to serve in his household. Other slaveholders followed his strategy, hiring free workers to maximize the value of the capital they invested in slaves.<sup>28</sup>

Wilder's investment strategy and Louisville housekeepers' integrated slave/free workforces illustrate an important feature of antebellum society: Southerners, even southern slaveholders concerned about their domestic comfort, made market calculations. Perhaps the best evidence of their desire for domestics who acted as loyal dependents but came at a discounted rate lies in the youth of Louisville's domestic servant workforce. The cheapest and perhaps most compliant servants were girls who had little training and whose parents, guardians, or masters bound them out or asked for only minimal wages or upkeep. In part, the low average age of servants mentioned in advertisements resulted from the need to maximize investment in slaves. By the time enslaved children reached eight or nine years old, most masters had put them to work, either in their own households or by hiring them out. They commonly tended infants or small children, served at table, or took on other minor household tasks. But recall for a moment E. W. Rupert's 1836 ad for a nurse which declared that he did not care if his new nurse was "black or white," but specified an age—from ten to thirteen years old. By 1840, Rupert owned three slaves, but his status as slave owner did not dispose him to hire a slave as his children's nurse nor did he care if the servant was black.<sup>29</sup> While his disinterest in the race of his children's nurse was unusual, his pursuit of a young servant was not.

Throughout the antebellum era, and in cities throughout the border region, evidence of housekeepers' preference for young domestics abounds: Advertisements called for slaves or white girls as young as ten to bind; householders hired Irish girls as young as fourteen to work as domestics; and the boards of orphan asylums as well as justices for apprenticeship courts indentured young girls both black and white to learn "the art of housewifery" or "the business of being a servant."<sup>30</sup> In their effort to find compliant, inexpensive household help, urban residents—E. W. Rupert and other Louisvillians included—did not stop to evaluate their ideological commitment to freedom or slavery. Rather they wanted a bargain, and they knew that free children could be hired or bound without a capital investment, and enslaved children usually required a comparatively small outlay. Their decisions about household servants reflected their overall participation in a market economy; they sought to limit debt, preserve capital, and maintain some fluidity in their cash reserves. Housekeepers' inclination to let financial considerations govern their hiring decisions should not surprise observers of the contemporary illegal immigration debate. Many Americans complain about illegal immigration while regularly employing undocumented immigrants to clean their houses, mow their lawns, and care for their children. Contemporary hirers of illegal aliens are not unlike the ideologically impure residents of antebellum Louisville, who ostensibly supported slave laws, but hired runaway slaves and supported the market for enslaved domestics only as their pocketbooks allowed. In their concern for maximum comfort and a low bottom line, southerners acted much as people do today because, like employers today, they acted in a market economy.

Rather than continue to see slavery as a significant arbiter of Americans' attitudes toward market development—or to try to fit Louisville into a specific region, whether "southern," "northern," or a unique "border region city"—scholars instead should consider how Louisville's social order reveals many of the processes that shaped antebellum America. The market revolution transformed households whether they lay north of the slave boundary or south of it. Across the nation, housework altered by fits and starts, so that servants sometimes needed to know how to make a carpet, sometimes required a good understanding of purchasing items at a store, and sometimes had to do both. Whatever a household's placement along the spectrum of production to consumption, housekeepers still sought compliant, dependent domestic workers. Shifting demographics and a growing cotton economy, however, meant that they could neither count on finding nor often afford slaves in this capacity. As a result, the workforce included slaves, hired slaves, free blacks, immigrant women, and children. In Louisville, the transition to a market economy and a wage labor force was not predictable, nor did it occur in a smooth, linear fashion. Moreover, the messy calculus in the domestic decisions of Louisville households suggests how problematic it is to oversimplify the larger political and cultural forces that eventually propelled the nation toward civil war.<sup>31</sup>

## SERVANTS AND SLAVES IN LOUISVILLE

**Table One:** Sample of Households from Louisville's Third and Fourth Wards

Name	Place of birth	Servants in 1850	Servants in 1860	Change?
<b>Richard Atkinson</b> (merchant)	KY	3 slaves (2 adult women, 1 man)	1 adult male slave	All slave
<b>D. L. Benedict</b> (merchant)	NY	Both: 4 slaves; 1 14 yr Irish	1 own, 1 hire; 2 Irish	Mixed both
<b>Cyrus/Annie Bent</b> (merchant)	PA –Cyrus VA- Annie	4 slaves (Cyrus)	Widow Annie – 2 Irish	Slave to Irish
<b>Thos. C. Coleman</b> (rolling mill operator)	Ireland	Owned 4 slaves	Hire 3 slaves; 4 Irish women	Slave to mixed
<b>William Diller</b> (cigar mftr/ tobacconist)	PA	None	None	Never any of either group
<b>Hamilton/ Jane Dobbin</b> (worth \$50,000)	Ireland- Hamilton KY-Jane	3 slaves (2 women)	1 slave woman	All slave
<b>Charles Duffield</b> (flour/pork packer)	VA	4 German women	4 German women	All German
<b>David P. Faulds</b> (clerk, then store owner)	NY	Boarded at Galt House–no slaves	Owned/hired slaves	Move to slave
<b>Joshua B. Flint</b> (prof. med/physician)	Mass.	3 slaves -2 adult woman, 1 girl	2 Irish women only	Slave to Irish
<b>Wm. R. Hervey</b> (bank clerk, then at chancery court)	KY	2 slave women	Hires 2 slave women + one 17 yr boy	All slave (hired)
<b>Mary Ann McGrath</b> (worth \$14,000)	KY	No slaves, claimed 2 fugitives	8 slaves (4 adult women, 4 children)	All slaves
<b>Dan McMullen</b> (merchant)	MD	2 slaves (1 woman age 40, 1 11 yr old girl)	Hire 2 women, (exact same ages as 1850)	All slave, (hired)
<b>Lewellyn Powell</b> (physician)	KY	8 slaves (4 fugitives)	5 owned	All slave
<b>F. S. J. Ronald</b> (sheriff; tobacco warehouse)	KY	3 slaves – 1 60 yr woman 1 60 yr man, 1 girl	1 German woman, 4 slaves (same + one other)	Slave to mixed
<b>Dr. J. S. Seaton</b>	KY	5 slaves	7 slaves	All slave
<b>James Speed</b> (atty)	KY	Both: 1 14 sl girl; 3 Irish women	2 Irish women	Mixed to Irish
<b>Margaret Steele</b> (bdg house)	PA	1 Irish girl (15) 2 slaves, 1 woman, 1 man	1 Irish girl (14) Hires 1 slave woman, 1 girl (9)	Mixed both

- 1 *Louisville Daily Journal*, June 6, 8, Sept. 5, 29 ("Intelligence office"), 1836. *The Louisville Directory for the Year 1836* (Louisville: Prentice and Weissinger, 1836), Special Collections, Ekstrom Library, University of Louisville (hereafter Louisville Directory [year]). The 1840 census lists E. W. Rupert as employed in commerce and supporting a household of nine. His household included two white children under the age of five and three slaves, one of whom—a female between the age of ten and twenty-four—he might have acquired as a result of his advert. See 1840 U.S. Census, Jefferson County, Kentucky, manuscript schedule, Louisville Township, <http://www.ancestry.com> (accessed June 5, 2010). In 1840, Louisville's black population totaled 4,049, of whom 619 were free. Slaves declined as a proportion of the black population every year after 1820. See Leonard P. Curry, *The Free Black in Urban America, 1800-1850: The Shadow of a Dream* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), appendix A.
- 2 On the legal and cultural obstacles to women's participation in the public slave market, see Walter Johnson, *Soul by Soul: Life Inside the Antebellum Slave Market* (Cambridge, Ma.: Harvard University Press, 1999), 89-102. In a Washington D.C. sample of over a hundred advertisements for domestic servants, 80 percent referred to male names prior to 1840, while only 60 percent did so thereafter. This trend is confirmed in a database of two hundred and fifty advertisements for the border cities of Baltimore, Richmond, Louisville, Washington, and Cincinnati; no city, including Louisville, contradicted this trend. See Stephanie Cole, "Servants and Slaves: Domestic Service in the North/South Border Cities, 1800-1850" (PhD diss., University of Florida, 1996), 26, 46. On the invisibility of women's household labor, see Jeanne Boydston, "The Woman Who Wasn't There: Women's Market Labor and the Transition to Capitalism in the United States," *Journal of the Early Republic* 16 (Summer 1996), 183-206. See also Boydston, *Home and Work: Housework, Wages, and the Ideology of Labor in the Early Republic* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994); and Ellen Hartigan-O'Connor, *The Ties That Buy: Women and Commerce in Revolutionary America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009).
- 3 Johnson, *Soul by Soul*; Seth Rockman, *Scraping By: Wage Labor, Slavery, and Survival in Early Baltimore* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009); Robert J. Steinfeld, *The Invention of Free Labor: The Employment Relation in English and American Law and Culture, 1350-1870* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991); Steinfeld and Stanley L. Engerman, "Labor—Free or Coerced? A Historical Reassessment of Differences and Similarities," in *Free and Unfree Labour: The Debate Continues*, Tom Brass and Marcel van der Linden, eds. (Bern and New York: Peter Lang, 1997), 107-26. For a recent effort to summarize and extend scholarship on the blended nature of the southern economy, see L. Diane Barnes, Brian Schoen, and Frank Towers, eds., *The Old South's Modern Worlds: Slavery, Region, and Nation in the Age of Progress* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011). See also James Oakes, *Slavery and Freedom: An Interpretation of the Old South* (New York: Knopf, 1990); Jonathan D. Martin, *Divided Mastery: Slave Hiring in the American South* (Cambridge, Ma.: Harvard University Press, 2004); Tom Downey, *Planting a Capitalist South: Masters, Merchants, and Manufacturers in the Southern Interior, 1790-1860* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2009); Bruce Eelman, *Entrepreneurship in the Southern Upcountry* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2008); John W. Quist, *Restless Visionaries: The Social Roots of Antebellum Reform in Alabama and Michigan* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1998); and Christopher L. Tomlins, *Law, Labor, and Ideology in the Early American Republic* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993). For an analysis that emphasizes non-capitalist elements of the southern economy, especially in the plantation South, see Douglas Egerton, "Markets without a Market Revolution: Southern Planters and Capitalism," *Journal of the Early Republic* 16 (Summer 1996), 207-21. For interesting summaries of the debate, see Harry L. Watson, "Review of Downey," *Journal of Economic History* 66 (Sept. 2006), 839-41; and Watson, "Slavery and Development in a Dual Economy: The South in the Market Revolution," 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), 43-73.
- 4 Barnes, et al., "Introduction," *The Old South's Modern Worlds*, 8-12, argue that historians have seen the South as distinctive because they have assumed that Britain's path toward industrialization (replicated in the antebellum U.S. North), was the norm by which to measure all economic development. Recent global and comparative history demonstrates a wide variety of paths to modernization, and thus makes reliance on the Anglo-American standard questionable. See also Towers, "The Southern Path to Modern Cities: Urbanization in the Slave States," in *ibid.*, 145-65. According to Jefferson County's 1850 Tax List, the value of slaves held in the county was \$548,195, or 7 percent of the overall taxable wealth in the county. In 1860, the value of slaves had increased to \$989,000, but the proportional value had dropped to 4 percent of the county's taxable wealth. See Jefferson County Tax Lists, 1850 and 1860, microfilm rolls 189 and 199, Dallas Public Library, Tx. On the slave trade in Louisville, see Marion B. Lucas, *A History of Blacks in Kentucky: From Slavery to Segregation, 1760-1891* (1992; Frankfurt: The Kentucky Historical Society, 2003), 90-92. See also George H. Yater, *Two Hundred Years at the Falls of the Ohio: A History of Louisville and Jefferson County* (Louisville: Heritage Corp., 1979). On Baltimore, see Rockman, *Scraping By*; Christopher Phillips, *Freedom's*



- Port: The Free African American Community of Baltimore, 1790-1860* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997); and Barbara Jeanne Fields, *Slavery and Freedom on the Middle Ground: Maryland During the Nineteenth Century* (New Haven, Ct.: Yale University Press, 1984). In 1850, Louisville's foreign-born residents made up 28.8 percent of the population, and in 1860, Jefferson County's population was 29.2 percent foreign born. In comparison, Baltimore had 21 and 24.7 percent foreign-born residents in 1850 and 1860 respectively. See Campbell J. Gibson and Emily Lennon, "Historical Census Statistics and the Foreign-Born Population of the United States, 1850-1990," Population Division Working Paper No. 29 (Feb. 1999), <http://www.census.gov/population/www/documentation/twps0029/twps0029.html> (accessed Mar. 22, 2011). For scholarship on the importance of immigration in southern cities, see Ira Berlin and Herbert G. Gutman, "Natives and Immigrants, Free Men and Slaves: Urban Workingmen in the Antebellum American South," *American Historical Review* 88 (Dec. 1983), 1175-200; and Dennis C. Rousey, "Aliens in the WASP Nest: Ethnocultural Diversity in the Antebellum South," *Journal of American History* 79 (June 1992), 152-64.
- 5 Susan Strasser, *Never Done: A History of American Housework* (1982; New York: Henry Holt, 2000), 33. See also Ruth Schwartz Cowan, *More Work for Mother: The Ironies of Household Technology from the Open Hearth to the Microwave* (New York: BasicBooks, 1983).
  - 6 *Louisville Correspondent*, July 6, 1814. For gentility in the early national and antebellum South, see Barbara G. Carson, *Ambitious Appetites: Dining, Behavior, and Patterns of Consumption in Federal Washington* (Washington: The American Institute of Architects Press, 1990), 90; and Cynthia A. Kierner, *Beyond the Household: Women's Place in the Early South, 1700-1835* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1998), 44-48. On urban water supplies, see Nelson Manford Blake, *Water for the Cities: A History of the Urban Water Supply Problem in the United States* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1956), 69-77, 265-67. A private company attempted an earlier system in Louisville, but failed due to lack of subscriptions. The city eventually took over the development, but did not complete its work until 1860. Middle-class wards were, however, among the earliest beneficiaries of the system. See also Marie Tyler-McGraw, *At the Falls: Richmond, Virginia, and Its People* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994), 112; and Martin V. Melosi, *The Sanitary City: Urban Infrastructure in America from Colonial Times to the Present* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), 27-38.
  - 7 Judith McGuire to Mary Anna Claiborne, Jan. 8, 1858, Claiborne Family Papers, Virginia Historical Society (hereafter VHS). Emma Carrington demonstrated a similar awareness of the difficulties without urban amenities. She relished her idleness now, she wrote, because her future held "a country life doing country things" such as spinning, weaving, and other laborious tasks; see Emma Carrington to Elizabeth Wirt, Oct. 15, 1827, William Wirt Papers, vol. 2, Library of Congress (hereafter LC). Landon C. Rives to W. C. Rives, Sept. 2, 1830, and Maria Rives to Judith Rives, May 21, 1832, William C. Rives Collection, LC. *Louisville Public Advertiser*, Apr. 26, 1826; *Louisville Daily Journal*, Apr. 11, 1837. Boardinghouse keepers such as Mrs. Mary Husten, who in 1838 kept a house on Market Street between Fifth and Sixth Streets, are easily located in the city directories and census records (see *Louisville Directory*, 1838-39). For references to middle-class boardinghouse keepers and boarders, see Alexander Irwin Burckin, "The Formation and Growth of an Urban Middle Class: Power and Conflict in Louisville, Kentucky, 1828-1861" (PhD diss., University of California, Irvine, 1993), 27, 87. Harriet Martineau, *Society in America* (1837; New York: Anchor Books, 1962), 301, noted that "boarding-house life has been rendered compulsory by the scarcity of labour—the difficulty of obtaining domestic service." For an analysis of middle-class discomfort with boardinghouses, see Barbara Ryan, *Love, Wages, Slavery: The Literature of Servitude in the United States* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006), 68-69; Wendy Gamber, *The Boarding House in Nineteenth Century America* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007), 42-44; Gamber, "Away from Home: Middle-Class Boarders in the Nineteenth Century City," *Journal of Urban History* 31 (Mar. 2005), 289-305; and Gamber, "Tarnished Labor: The Home, the Market, and the Boarding House in Antebellum America," *Journal of the Early Republic* 22 (Summer 2002), 177-204.
  - 8 *Louisville Daily Journal*, Nov. 26, 1830; *Louisville Public Advertiser*, July 12, 1820; *Liberty Hall and Cincinnati Gazette*, Feb. 1, 1820; Judith McGuire to Mary Anna Claiborne, Jan. 8, 1858, Claiborne Family Papers, VHS. See also Kim M. Gruenwald, *River of Enterprise: The Commercial Origins of Regional Identity in the Ohio Valley, 1790-1850* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), 116; Priscilla J. Brewer, "'We've Got a Very Good Cooking Stove': Advertising, Design, and Consumer Response to the Cookstove, 1815-1880," *Winterthur Portfolio* 25 (Spring 1990), 35-54; Strasser, *Never Done*, 33-36, 51-55, 60-63; and Cowan, *More Work for Mother*, 21-23.
  - 9 Faye E. Dudden, *Serving Women: Household Service in Nineteenth-Century America* (Hanover, N.H.: Wesleyan University Press, 1983), 104-46; David M. Katzman, *Seven Days a Week: Women and Domestic Service in Industrializing America* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1978), 119-38; Strasser, *Never Done*, 11-66; and Cowan, *More Work for Mother*, 16-68.
  - 10 Caroline Preston to Maria Pope, June 27, Sept. 18, 1828, Preston Family Papers—Joyes Collection, The Filson Historical Society, Louisville (hereafter FHS); *Louisville Daily Journal*, Nov. 26, 1830.

- 11 For examples, see Maria Steiger to Elizabeth Shriver, Feb. 24, Mar. 6, Oct. 16, 1834, July 21, 1835, Jan. 26, Aug. 22, 1836, Shriver Family Papers, Maryland Historical Society (hereafter MHS); and Miscellaneous Account Book, 1836-1849, Cincinnati Historical Society, Cincinnati. For a fuller explanation, see Cole, "Servants and Slaves," 106-12. See also Leslie C. Stewart-Abernathy, "Urban Farmsteads: Household Responsibilities in the City," *Historical Archaeology* 20, no. 2 (1986), 5-15; Anya Jabour, *Marriage in the Early Republic: Elizabeth and William Wirt and the Companionate Ideal* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 32-35, 71-73; and Kierner, *Beyond the Household*, 172.
- 12 Richard Wade, *Slavery in the Cities: The South, 1820-1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), 30-33. In the intervening half-century, the impression that southern households depended on slave labor has seen little movement. Rockman, *Scraping By*, 111, notes the use of non-slaves in Baltimore's households, but scholarship on southern households regularly discusses domestic service and female slavery as though they entirely overlapped. In addition to the scholarship on slaves and slave hiring cited elsewhere, see V. Lynn Kennedy, *Born Southern: Childbirth, Motherhood, and Social Networks in the Old South* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010). Manuscript census records for 1850 and 1860 reveal the significant employment of Irish domestics, discussed further below. For statistics on middle-class slave ownership, see Burckin, "Formation and Growth of an Urban Middle Class," 129-30. In a sample of 178 advertisements for domestics in Louisville newspapers between 1814 and 1850, 95 percent concerned slaves; see Cole, "Servants and Slaves," appendix I, for listing of newspapers and methodology of sampling.
- 13 On domestic servants' lack of control, see Dudden, *Serving Women* 193-235; and Ryan, *Love, Wages, Slavery*, 15-44. Wade, *Slavery in the Cities*; Curry, *Free Black in Urban America*, 15-48; and Lucas, *History of Blacks in Kentucky*, 101-17.
- 14 Antebellum traveler Henry Bradshaw Fearon, in *A Narrative of a Journey of Five Thousand Miles Through the Eastern and Western States of America* (1818; New York: August M. Kelley Publishers, 1970), 242, often disparaged the impact of the peculiar institution, but he did not believe slavery impeded Louisville's growth. Instead, he noted that the city was "daily becoming a most important town." See also Allan J. Share, *Cities in the Commonwealth: Two Centuries of Urban Life in Kentucky* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1982), 89-91. For statistics on slave ownership, see Richard Wade, *Slavery in the Cities*, 14-16. For slave advertisements, see Cole, "Servants and Slaves," 254. For slave hiring day, see *Louisville Daily Courier*, Jan. 3, 1855 (I am indebted to George Yater for this reference). Whereas 53 percent (57/108) of slave-hiring ads in Louisville papers noted that the hire would end at the next hiring day in January, only 13 percent (6/45) of ads in Richmond and 11 percent (23/202) of those in Baltimore did so.
- 15 On slave hiring and weakened control over slaves, see Martin, *Divided Mastery*; and Johnson, *Soul by Soul*. Garnet Duncan to Orlando Brown, Dec. 19, 1841, and Mary Watts Brown to Elizabeth Brown, Jan. 6, [1839?], Orlando Brown Papers, FHS. Correspondence between Brown family members, and between Brown family members and their slaves, provides frequent illustrations of the independence slave hiring brought. *Louisville Public Advertiser*, Nov. 30, 1835 ("corrupting tendency"); Share, *Cities in the Commonwealth*, 91 ("those who hire"). As early as 1820, one advertiser interested in purchasing a "Negro girl from the county of good character" insisted that said slave not have "the hiring of her own time"; see *Louisville Public Advertiser*, July 2, 1820.
- 16 *Louisville Daily Journal*, June 28, 1836; *Louisville Public Advertiser*, Jan. 18, July 6, 1826.
- 17 See Curry, *Free Black in Urban America*, 245-57; Blaine Hudson, "The Free African American Community in Louisville," presented at "Land, River, and Peoples: Louisville before the Civil War," University of Louisville, May 30, 2009; and Alexander I. Burckin, "A 'Spirit of Perseverance': Free African Americans in Late Antebellum Louisville," *The Filson Club History Quarterly* 70 (Jan. 1996), 70.
- 18 *Louisville Daily Journal*, June 8, 1836; Pam Peters, "Gateway to Freedom: New Albany-Floyd County, Indiana," <http://www.in.gov/dnr/historic/files/newalbany.pdf> (accessed Dec. 15, 2009). For a fuller discussion of the joint efforts of free African Americans and escaped slaves to secure slaves' freedom, see Peters, *The Underground Railroad in Floyd County, Indiana* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 2001); 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; and Richard J. Blackett, "Emancipate Yourself: Louisville Slaves and their Quest for Freedom in the 1850s," presented at "Land, River, and Peoples: Louisville before the Civil War," University of Louisville, May 29, 2009.
- 19 Share, *Cities in the Commonwealth*, 89 (quote). According to Burckin, "Formation and Growth of an Urban Middle Class," 129, Louisville had 1,398 slaveholders in 1850; the 1850 U.S. Census lists total white population at 36,224.
- 20 Burckin, "Formation and Growth of an Urban Middle Class," 128-30, 185-86, notes that 238 of 1,398 slaveholders in 1850 were foreign-born.
- 21 Burckin, "Formation and Growth of an Urban Middle Class," 131-35, states that northern-born residents constituted 14.6 percent of the population and 15.4 percent

- of slaveholders. However, almost 65 percent of those slaveholders owned only one or two slaves, whereas over half of southern-born slaveholders (54 percent) owned more than two slaves. According to Leonard Curry, *Free Black in Urban America*, 252, there were 1,2539 slave women for every slave man in Louisville in 1850. 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), 459; and Herbert A. Kellar, "A Journey through the South in 1836: Diary of James D. Davidson," *Journal of Southern History* 1 (Aug. 1935), 349, 353-54.
- 22 The sample begins with the typical middle-class Louisville residents identified by Alexander Burckin ("Formation and Growth of an Urban Middle Class," chap. 1) augmented by adding their neighbors, as well as the neighbors of those men who still lived in the city in 1860. Every household head in the sample either had a middle-class occupation or held moderate to substantial amounts of property, and all lived on a street that had other middle-class residents. Each of the thirty households was checked for slave holdings and whether a domestic, foreign-born or free, resided in the home. For 1850 and 1860, information was collected on twenty-four households; seventeen households resided in Louisville in both the 1850 and 1860 censuses.
- 23 For Trabue, see Burckin, "Formation and Growth of an Urban Middle Class," 46-47. For Benedict, Speed, Bent, and Ayers, see 1850 and 1860 U.S. Censuses, Jefferson County, Kentucky, manuscript schedule, Louisville Township, <http://www.ancestry.com> (accessed May 14, 2009, June 23, 2010). On nurses, see Cole, "A White Woman, Of Middle Age, Would Be Preferred': Children's Nurses in the Old South," in *Neither Lady, Nor Slave: Working Women of the Old South*, Michele Gillespie and Susanna Delfino, eds. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 75-102. Historians have long debated the viability of slavery in the urban environment. Wade, *Slavery in the Cities*, argues that slavery could only play a peripheral role in cities, because controlling slaves required disciplining and stabilizing one sector of the population, but antebellum cities were by definition characterized by diversity, growth, and mobility. Claudia Dale Goldin, *Urban Slavery in the American South, 1820-1860* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976), responds that the decrease in urban slavery arose not from any structural problems with slavery, but rather that the market pulled them southwest as new lands opened up and the cotton economy boomed. Peter J. Parish, *Slavery: History and Historians* (New York: Harper and Row, 1989), 101, notes that both scholars accept that slavery could continue in cities as long as it involved peripheral populations such as domestic servants. Though she does not refer to domestic servants, Fields, *Slavery and Freedom on the Middle Ground*, counters that slavery could not continue to survive eternally on the boundaries of the South because urban employers preferred the flexibility and low cost of free, often immigrant laborers. This essay suggests that even the "peripheral" segment of domestic servants was subject to housekeepers' preferences for a flexible, low-cost workforce.
- 24 Sarah Ruggles to Ellen Green, Aug. 1, 1839, and Elizabeth Williams to Ellen Green, Mar. 27, 1842, Green Family Papers, FHS; and Susan Grigsby to Virginia Breckinridge, undated letters from the 1850s, Grigsby Collection, FHS. Cole, "A White Woman, Of Middle Age," 76-82.
- 25 Lucas, *History of Blacks in Kentucky*, 84-85. The Charles William Thruston Papers, Miscellaneous File, FHS, confirm these numbers in Louisville: Oct. 4, 1831 saw the sale of Mary, with her infant Celia, for four hundred dollars; on Mar. 23, 1823, a "negro woman" unencumbered with child, went for five hundred dollars; and on Nov. 1, 1846, an older male slave trained as a body servant cost five hundred and fifty dollars. Hires for men ran between forty and sixty dollars a year. Likewise, E. Polk Johnson, *A History of Kentucky and Kentuckians: The Leaders and Representative Men in Commerce, Industry, and Modern Activities*, 3 vols. (Chicago: Lewis Publishing Company, 1912), 1:378, reported that on Dec. 30, 1863, two enslaved women aged eighteen and nineteen, sold for four hundred and fifty and three hundred and eighty dollars respectively. Hector Green to Ellen Green, Dec. 19, 1833, Green Family Papers, FHS; Barton, "Good Cooks and Washers," 440-42; Mary Watts Brown to Margaretta Brown, July 3, [1838 or 1839?], Orlando Brown Papers, FHS.
- 26 R. Anderson to George Anderson, Jan. 21, 1832, Anderson Family Papers, Margaret I. King Library, University of Kentucky, Lexington; Col. White to Caroline Preston, Sept. 30, 1833, Preston Family Papers—Joyes Collection, FHS; J. P. Mitchell to Susan Shelby Grigsby, Jan. 2, 1851, Grigsby Collection, FHS; Lucas, *History of Blacks in Kentucky*, 85. Martin, *Divided Mastery*, 88-93, discusses masters' fears of exploitative slave hirers. He also notes that hiring prices for slave women could run as high as one hundred and twenty dollars a year when demand rose (37-39). On the premium skilled women slaves commanded, see Robert William Fogel, *Without Consent or Contract: The Rise and Fall of American Slavery* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1989), 70.
- 27 Martin, *Divided Mastery*, 86-87 (sub-hiring), 97-99; Barton, "Good Cooks and Washers," 442-43; Dudden, *Serving Women*, 65-66, 95, 97; Katzman, *Seven Days a Week*, 306-14; Account book of Ann Mackenzie Cushing, 1835-1842, MHS, covers and passim. Midori Takagi, in "Rearing Wolves to Our Own Destruction": *Slavery in Richmond, Virginia, 1782-1865* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1999), 87-89, suggests that in the 1850s many Richmond households could no longer afford slaves because of their rising value.

- 28 Barton, "Good Cooks and Washers," 458. 1850 U.S. Census, Jefferson County, Kentucky, manuscript and slave schedules, Louisville Township, <http://www.ancestry.com> (accessed June 23, 2010). According to the 1850 Tax Lists for Jefferson County, Wilder owned three slaves worth a total of six hundred dollars; they were his only significant asset, besides a silver watch. For evidence that masters could hire out even young slaves profitably, see Lucas, *History of Blacks in Kentucky*, 102, who cites an advertisement by a Louisville firm interested in "50 Boys and Girls for tobacco stemmeries." Parish, *Slavery*, 105, provides similar evidence in his account of Frederick Law Olmstead's meeting with a small farmer in Mississippi. Olmstead learned the farmer had hired his slaves out as servants and porters in Natchez, while employing a white laborer to help him on his farm. Martin, *Divided Mastery*, 19, argues that slave hiring allowed masters to see their slaves in more capitalistic terms.
- 29 Marie Jenkins Schwartz, *Born in Bondage: Growing Up Enslaved in the Antebellum South* (Cambridge, Ma.: Harvard University Press, 2000), 108. Fogel, *Without Consent or Contract*, 54-56, finds that 50 percent of enslaved girls entered the labor force by age seven or eight, usually earning only the costs of their upkeep; by age nine some made a profit, and nearly all slave children worked by age twelve. Takagi, *Rearing Wolves*, 88, indicates that 22 percent of the female slaves in Richmond were under the age of ten, in comparison to only 5 percent of the male slaves. The skewed population suggests that slaveholders commonly brought young girls to the city to serve in households. For Rupert, see *Louisville Daily Journal*, June 8, 1836; and 1840 U.S. Census, Jefferson County, Kentucky, manuscript schedule, Louisville Township, <http://www.ancestry.com> (accessed May 25, 2009).
- 30 The average age of all advertisements for enslaved nurses was 15.9 years; ads concerning general servants—that is, requests that did not specify a specific skill—also had a low average age of 16.1. For a fuller discussion of young domestics, see Cole, "Servants and Slaves," chaps. 4 and 5.
- 31 For a provocative assessment of how a recognition of shared economic outlook can reconfigure our understanding of the causes of the Civil War, see William G. Thomas III and Edward L. Ayers, "The Differences Slavery Made: A Close Analysis of Two American Communities," *American Historical Review* 108 (Dec. 2003), 1299-1307.