

**FLORIDA'S DISSENTERS, REBELS, AND RUNAWAYS:
TERRITORIAL DAYS TO EMANCIPATION**

BY

LARRY EUGENE RIVERS

A THESIS SUBMITTED FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

UNIVERSITY OF LONDON

(GOLDSMITHS COLLEGE)

(DEPARTMENT OF HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL STUDIES)

2001



ABSTRACT

This thesis examines slave resistance in Florida from the territorial period to emancipation. Florida bond servants manifested varying degrees of resistance. Much like other enslaved blacks throughout the South, the way slaves reacted to Florida's peculiar institution depended on their overall personality, size of the plantation or farm, and treatment by owners and managers (ie. overseers, stewards, foremen, and slave drivers). Enslaved blacks' behavior could range from mild daily dissidence to individual or collective violence against their masters, other whites, and occasionally fellow bond servants. Running away became the most frequent form of conservative resistance employed by bond servants to demonstrate their disenchantment with the day-to-day realities of slavery.

The introduction explains the overall purpose and focus of this study. Specifically, it covers Florida slave resistance from 1821 to 1865. Chapter

One explores the daily forms of slave dissidence that ranged from feigning illness to stealing food and other materials from the farms and plantations of Florida. Chapters Two through Four consider the various reasons slaves absconded including, but not limited to, their treatment, family and kinfolk concerns, and demands of the work routine. Chapter Five analyzes the most extreme form of slave resistance--physical violence. This type of resistance, either individual or collective, was a frequent result of bondservants' frustration and anger with the Florida slave regime. Chapter Six focuses on Florida slave holders' and society's responses to the perennial problem of slave runaways through the enactment of slave patrol laws. Although Florida statutes created them, slave patrols usually functioned only during times of crisis. Slave catchers--that is, owners, overseers, professionals, and other whites in the community--more frequently served in the capture and return of fugitives than did slave patrols.

Resistance in the form of slaves running away to join and fight for the Union army during the Civil War constitutes the primary focus of chapter Seven. Chapter Eight presents an overall profile of

Florida runaways. For example, it analyzes the types of slaves who more frequently absconded, their age, their personality traits as described by owners, and their gender. The concluding chapter summarizes and places in perspective the various forms of Florida slave resistance during the overall period under study.

PREFACE

I am very grateful for the patience and assistance of a great number of people both in London and the United States of America for their help in this project. First, I would like to thank Dr. Peter D. Fraser for supervising this thesis. His extremely helpful suggestions improved this thesis in many ways. I would also like to thank nineteenth-century-Florida scholar Canter Brown Jr. for reading several drafts of this thesis and making helpful suggestions for its improvement.

I offer thanks to Donnie D. Bellamy, regents professor emeritus of history at the Fort Valley State University; William W. Rogers, Sr., professor emeritus of history at Florida State University; Jane Landers, associate professor of history at Vanderbilt University, Jerrell H. Shofner, professor emeritus of history at the University of Central Florida; and Daniel L. Schafer, professor of history at University of North Florida.

Others merit recognition as well. I appreciate

the following for their generous research assistance and financial support: Florida A&M University sabbatical leaves committee; Charles U. Smith, distinguished professor of sociology, Florida A&M University, Aubrey M. Perry, professor of psychology, Florida A&M University; France J. Stafford, history professor emeritus, Florida A&M University; David Jackson, Jr., associate professor of history, Florida A&M University; Roland M. Smith, Vice President of Student Life, University of Delaware; David J. Coles, assistant professor of history at Longwood College; James M. Denham, Professor of history at Florida Southern College, Lakeland; Barbara Gray-Brown, Tallahassee; Joan Morris and Jody Norman, Florida Photographic Collection, Florida State Archives; Mary Ann Cleveland, Emily Hohmeister, Cynthia C. Wise, Dorothy Williams, and Randi Bailey, Florida Collection, State Library of Florida, Tallahassee; Joe Knetsch, Bureau of Survey and Mapping, Division of State Lands, Florida Department of Environmental Protection, Tallahassee; Peter A. Krafft, director of Cartography for the Florida Resources and Environmental Analysis Center at Florida State University; Nathan Woolsey, Milton; Elizabeth

Alexander and Bruce Chappel, P. K. Yonge Library of Florida History, University of Florida; David Nolan, St. Augustine; Taryn Rodriguez-Boette and Charles A. Tingley, St. Augustine Historical Society Research Library; Ann Murphey, Tampa; Fay Farmer and Bonney A. McClellan, Keystone Genealogical Library, Monticello; Charles Carroll Fishburn Jr., Quincy; Miles Womack, Quincy; Willie Speed, Apalachicola; George Chapel, Apalachicola; Tom Hambright, May Hill Russell Monroe County Public Library, Key West; Vernon Peeples, Punta Gorda; William G. Dayton, Dade City; Hal Hubener, Lakeland Public Library; Julius J. Gordon, Tampa; Tom Muir and Marshall L. Emerson, Historic Pensacola Preservation Board; Darcie MacMahon, Florida Museum of Natural History; Anthony Dixon, Tallahassee; and Clifton Lewis, Bartow.

And finally, I would like to thank my wife, Betty Jean Hubbard-Rivers, and our sons, Larry Omar and Linje Eugene for their support throughout this difficult and challenging project.

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INTRODUCTION

The question of slave resistance in the antebellum and Civil War South has confronted and divided scholars since the 1929 appearance of U. B. Phillips's Life and Labor in the Old South. In his influential work, Phillips provided a picture of contented slaves who were enrolled in a "school" that would teach and train them to become obedient and loyal workers. Fourteen years after its publication, Herbert Aptheker challenged Phillips while setting off a debate that has continued to the present time. Aptheker's American Negro Slave Revolts showed a different side to bond servants. In his eyes, slaves did not comprise a homogenous group of complacent workers on the farms and plantations of the Old South. Rather, he perceived that southern slaves displayed a revolutionary tradition during much of the antebellum period.¹

Now, the debate was off and running. Some scholars soon suggested that historical fact failed to support Aptheker's thesis of a revolutionary

tradition among slaves. Particularly, in 1956 Kenneth M. Stamp wrote The Peculiar Institution during the beginning of the nation's civil rights movement. He described slaves as a "troublesome property" for their owners. Stamp noted that bond people expressed unhappiness and dissidence when certain agreed upon boundaries were crossed or rules broken by their masters. He claimed that the most-common forms of resistance were conservative, involving slaves refusing to work or else simply disappearing from the plantations and farms.²

Yet, late 1950s revisionists such as Stamp did not always find themselves in agreement when it came to explaining slave behavior and personality. Stanley Elkins's intriguing book Slavery: A Problem in American Institution and Intellectual Life, for example, spurred debate concerning the dominant slave personality. Its thesis suggested that an oppressive system such as slavery produced a Sambo-type personality in most slaves. This personality prototype offered a portrait of bond servants as docile, irresponsible, loyal yet lazy, humble but deceitful.³

Historian John Wesley Blassingame's The Slave Community, written in 1976, became the first

book-length study that responded directly to the Elkins thesis. Where Elkins found a single Sambo-like personality, Blassingame declared that bond servants manifested a variety of personalities embracing possibly three different types. While Blassingame agreed that some slaves could have become Sambos, he also asserted that others developed a "Nat" personality, suggesting that they could be truculent and rebellious. He maintained, as well, that they could also take on the "Jack" personality type. This last classification could prove the most difficult to define. As Blassingame noted, though, a slave could become "sullen and uncooperative when he [or she] could afford to be, deferential when he [or she] could not, and who was cautious and calculating in his [or her] efforts to make the best" of a dehumanizing and abusive system.⁴

During the 1970s, other important revisionist works found their way into print. In 1972, Gerald W. Mullin's Flight and Rebellion: Slave Resistance in Eighteenth-Century Virginia demonstrated how Virginia society (including its institution of slavery) changed over time and how bond servants rebelled against the institution by running away.

Both Blassingame and Mullin stood among the first historians specifically to demonstrate that "running" away became for many bond persons a direct, yet conservative, form of resisting slavery.⁵

Indeed, the psychological impact of slavery on bond servants has emerged as a significant issue on the historiographical landscape since the 1970s. Scholars such as James Hugo Johnson, Harvey Wish, Raymond A. and Alice H. Bauer, Eugene D. Genovese, Bertram Wyatt-Brown, Leslie H. Owens, Paul D. Escott, Thomas L. Webber, Deborah Gray White, John Boles, Peter Kolchin, Jeffrey Robert Young, George P. Rawick, Brenda E. Stevenson, and William Dusinberre have weighed in on the subject. The majority of these scholars have focused more directly, though, on the black family, black consciousness, and black culture in the slave quarters and how these served to help bond servants resist and endure an oppressive system. Few scholars to date have offered comprehensive studies that specifically focus on slaves as dissenters, rebels, and runaways.⁶

A recent exception, John Hope Franklin and Loren Schweninger's seminal work Runaway Slaves:

Rebels on the Plantations focuses directly on slave flight and rebellion throughout the South from 1790 to 1860. As the authors remarked, "It shows how a significant number of slaves challenged the system and how the great majority of them struggled to attain their freedom even if they failed." The authors also believed that their study "reveals how slave owners marshaled considerable effort to prevent the practice of running away, meted out punishments to slaves who disregarded the rules, and established laws and patrols to control the movement of slaves." They added: "It exposed the violence and cruelty that were inherent in the slave system. It illustrates, perhaps better than any other approach, how slaves resisted with various forms of violence and how slave owners responded, at times brutally, to demonstrate their authority over their human chattel."⁷

With such a large time frame to consider and with a focus that covered most states in the South, Franklin and Schweninger admirably captured the essence of slaves who rebelled and those who ran from their owners. As is true with any such large study, however, their need for generalization due to constraints of time, resources, and space kept them

from revealing in great depth the multi-layered, richly textured experiences of bond servants who rebelled or ran away from their owners in each state of the Old South. To have done so obviously would have necessitated the writing of a volume for each of the slave states or else acceptance of a much-less-comprehensive grasp of the system in each place.

This study, building on these early works of scholars and especially the recent work of Franklin and Schweninger, examines slave resistance in Florida from 1821 to 1865. Why slave resistance in Florida from the territorial days to emancipation? In the previous works cited, slave resistance in Florida during the antebellum period received scant mention, if notice was taken at all. While an idea of Florida slave resistance in a general sense arises from the works of other scholars, we do not know how properly these generalizations applied to the Florida scene or if Florida's experience belied the general assumptions. Simply put, the fascinating story of slave resistance in nineteenth-century Florida has yet to be told or assessed as to its impact on the larger experience.

Florida offers an excellent laboratory for

investigating slave resistance. For one thing, its history as a "Rogue's Paradise" and its reputation as a haven for fugitives from within and from without the peninsula that date back to the Spanish era hint at the rich possibilities for slave resistance in a tumultuous and poorly policed frontier region. Further, the fact of Florida's sparsely settled condition permits a state-wide study.

Since the possession of the Spanish colony passed to the United States in 1821, a study naturally would cover the period beginning in that year and ending in 1865 if the colonial period were to be excluded. Fortunately, Jane Landers's excellent study Black Society in Spanish Florida already explores the lives of Africans and enslaved blacks in Florida through the years of Spanish and English possession. Notably, Landers's work covers many aspects of the African experience under Spanish rule, especially the development of maroon societies dating from the 1738 establishment of Fort Mose, probably the first "Southern" free black community, to maroon societies that had inhabited various parts of the panhandle and the peninsula by 1821.⁸

This study commences therefore in a general

sense where Landers concludes. To date, few historians of Florida other than Landers have focused systematically on slave resistance in the nineteenth century. Donorena Harris's study of abolitionist sentiment in Florida from 1821 to 1860 covers antislavery sentiment. It focuses, to a limited degree, on one main aspect of slave resistance--absconding bond servants. Yet, Harris's study did not afford its readers the type of detailed analysis that would afford insight concerning those slaves who fled because of abuse, those who disappeared in search of family or kinfolk, those who absconded because of the murder of a white or black person, or those who fled simply for the sake of seeking freedom. Her study adds much to our knowledge of Florida fugitives and the fears of abolitionist action that had been manufactured in the state by the 1850s, while leaving to other writers fuller analysis and interpretations of the many nuances, subtleties, and causes for slave rebellion and flight.⁹

Other publications have presented additional insightful and helpful information. Ray Granade demonstrated, for instance, that slaves did not accept their lot as willingly as apologists such as

Phillips would have us believe. His brief study attempted to cover such major topics and issues as slave murders, slave runaways, possible slave arson, and the day-to-day resistance of slaves in antebellum Florida. Despite its brevity, the author communicated a good sense of the various ways slaves rebelled against slavery. Still, an in-depth analysis of the crucial issues surrounding slave resistance could not be discussed adequately in a twelve-page article.¹⁰

Canter Brown Jr., Daniel Schafer, and James Michael Denham also have added to our knowledge of slave resistance in Florida during the antebellum period. Brown examined race relations during the territorial period in a manner that revealed fascinating complications and complexities. He convincingly argued that blacks possessed their own free will and that many exercised certain liberties such as selling goods and leaving their masters without permission. Brown further discussed how laws designed to curtail such actions were not enforced systematically from region to region or at certain times during the period from 1821 to 1845. But, Brown's purpose did not center specifically on a discussion of slave resistance but more on the

interaction between blacks and whites and the many forms it took during the territorial period.¹¹

Daniel Schafer has disclosed important facets of the transition of Florida from a Spanish colony to a territory of the United States. He explained that Spanish Florida possessed a three-tier society of whites, free blacks, and slaves. By the time the United States claimed the colony in 1821, though, the composition of the new settlers who came to the peninsula and the type of life most wanted to lead already was presaging a two-tier racial structure-- that of free white persons and black or African slaves. As will be seen, the reduction from a three-tier to a two-tier racial society produced a profound effect on slave resistance in Florida from 1821 to 1865.¹²

James Michael Denham's monograph "A Rogue's Paradise": Crime and Punishment in Antebellum Florida, 1821-1861 provided glimpses of the various responses of slaves when dealing with whites and other blacks. Denham argued that Florida, as a frontier society struggled with its share of violence in a manner similar to, if not more intense than, other frontier communities during this period. Whites murdered whites, blacks killed whites, whites

murdered blacks, and sometimes blacks murdered other blacks. Yet, Denham did not look specifically at nor did his study purport to focus on frontier Florida slave resistance in its totality during the period from 1821 to 1865.¹³

Besides random chapters in such books as Julia Floyd Smith's Slavery and Plantation Growth in Antebellum Florida, 1821-1860 and David Colburn and Jane Landers's The African American Heritage of Florida, few specific studies of slave resistance in nineteenth-century Florida have been published. Such a study not only would fill a significant gap in scholarship but also offer intriguing insight against the backdrop of Franklin and Schweninger's Rebels and Runaways. It would serve as an appropriate benchmark by which to test their interpretations and findings concerning slave runaways and rebels.¹⁴

The uniqueness of Florida lies in its location and the perception of both whites and blacks who considered the peninsula to be a runaway slave haven during much of the antebellum period. The pattern of slavery's development in its various regions shaped complex inter-racial relations. These dynamics also helped to determine how slaves were

treated, why some slaves absconded, and why others violently rebelled. For three centuries prior to the peninsula becoming a territory of the United States, as Jane Landers concluded, "blacks helped shape the geopolitics of the American Southeast and repeatedly created viable communities in Florida when conditions permitted." Yet, with the arrival of Anglo-Americans, blacks no longer enjoyed favorable conditions in which to live their lives as free persons and to develop their communities. This, too, would help to shape bond servants' responses to servitude in Florida.¹⁵

Following incorporation of Florida into the United States, the breaking of old ties added another dimension of the changing environment for blacks. By 1821, those who had lived in Florida almost--but not entirely--were cut off from the international world. European powers no longer competed for their services. Their links to the Caribbean also had been restricted by the end of the legal slave trade in 1808. Blacks, for the most part, soon could scarcely remember the African and Caribbean influences. They recalled mostly the impact of the English, French, and Spanish on their lives as race-cognizant Anglo-Americans took over

the peninsula. Their physical mobility and their cherished institutions stood in jeopardy. How would they respond to these modifications in their lifestyles?

With all the changes occurring in Florida after the arrival of Anglo-Americans intent on expanding slavery, the plight of free blacks and bond persons became desperate. With a tradition of resistance clearly embedded in the hearts and minds of blacks prior to the newcomers' arrival, many blacks would cement alliances with Seminoles, Creeks, and other Florida Indians in an attempt to stop the movement of whites into lands held by Indians, free blacks, and runaway slaves.

Given all that has been stated, what does this study seek to accomplish? It will strive to determine if Florida slave dissenters, rebels, and, especially, runaways differed markedly or only slightly from those discussed in the works of Franklin and Schweninger and others. To serve its purpose, this study will use such sources as travelers' accounts, slave narratives and ex-slave interviews, slave-owner's letters and diaries, plantation records, newspapers, as well as census and government data, to aid analysis of the various

forms and the frequency of slave resistance in Florida from 1821 to 1860.

The work's overriding theme, as summarized by its title, will suggest that slave resistance in Florida took on many forms, as well as profound twists and turns from 1821 to 1865. Stated another way, slave resistance, broadly defined, differed from region to region and over time. By examining the subject in intricate detail, this study also will suggest that slave resistance profoundly affected the overall development of Florida prior to and during the Civil War.

Resistance existed as an everyday occurrence for enslaved blacks on the farms and plantations of Florida. When work loads were too heavy, when food shortages existed, when loved ones and kinfolk were separated, when slaves perceived that they were being mistreated, and when slaves simply wanted their freedom, they resisted in subtle and profound ways. The presence of Native Americans, as well as the nature and character of frontier Florida, enhanced the potential for slave resistance throughout the antebellum period.

The frequency or probability of resistance usually depended on the disposition of the master or

person in charge of enslaved blacks. Consequently, bondservants were not fixed into a particular category of either rebel or docile slaves. To survive the overall harshness of the peculiar institution, slaves could be loyal and yet deceitful, responsible and at times irresponsible, humble most of the time yet a rebel on other occasions. They could acquiesce when plantation or farm rules were respected, and resist when masters crossed certain agreed-upon boundaries. Bondspeople simply moved between these categories based upon circumstances.

Thus, while this study affirms that slave resistance became a factor of almost constant concern for both slave and master, many slave holders, nonetheless, believed that they always controlled their bond people. Proslavery ideology encompassed a paradoxical dichotomy which posited slaves as docile and submissive on the one hand and dissenters and rebels on the other. This ideology came to dominate the thoughts of many whites during the antebellum period.

More particularly, this study seeks to answer, but not be limited to, the following questions: What became the most common forms of day-to-day

resistance for the majority of bond servants who remained on Florida's farms and plantations from 1821 to 1860? What were some of the destinations of those slaves who fled their masters? Did slaves often disappear in search of family, kinfolk, or loved ones? Did abuse or mis-treatment cause some slaves to absent themselves from their owners? What caused some slaves to kill their masters or other whites? Was the murder of whites by blacks an all-too-frequent occurrence in Florida? Did Florida experience any large scale slave rebellions? What was the typical profile of a Florida runaway during this period? Did Florida have a very well designed system to capture runaways or were slave catchers and white citizens used, haphazardly, to retrieve fugitives? This study hopes, then, to discover and examine, as far as is possible, the true nature of slaves' resistance in Florida from territorial days to emancipation.

NOTES

Introduction

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CHAPTER ONE

Daily Dissidence

"I rather be beat to death than worked to death."

Although the majority of slaves lived as nonviolent dissenters, some slaves physically resisted slavery in nineteenth-century Florida. This came in spite of the fact that bondservants understood the dire and deadly consequences of outright rebellion or retaliation. As early as 1828, Florida's criminal code stipulated that "Slaves, Free Negroes, and Mulattoes" could suffer whippings and even death depending upon the severity of the crime committed. James M. Denham correctly noted that "with some minor revisions, the code remained in force throughout the entire antebellum period, and all blacks--bond or free--were subject to its proscriptions."¹ Indeed, enslaved blacks were fully aware of what could happen to them if they violently acted against whites.

Accordingly, slaves utilized a wide variety of more conservative forms of dissent. Some showed their discontent or dissatisfaction with their lot by speaking their minds or else by stealing food, hogs, cattle, sheep, poultry, money, liquor, cotton, indigo, corn, or anything else on which they could get their hands. Others revealed their irritation with what they had to wear by making or acquiring additional clothing. Others worked slowly or carelessly. Some bondspeople quietly resisted by learning to read and write. Slaves destroyed wagons and carriages, while others damaged or burned buildings and mistreated livestock. Most at some time in their lives feigned illness for brief reprieves from work routines. Bondspeople, as Kenneth M. Stamp aptly noted, became a daily "troublesome property" for their owners.² Such too was the case in Florida.

Appropriately, then, this chapter explores the various forms of conservative resistance used by slaves in Florida. William Dusingberre called these types of action or inaction non-violent "dissidence."³ Indeed, bondservants actively, but discreetly, resisted their owners on a day-to-day basis. In doing so, many slaves believed that they

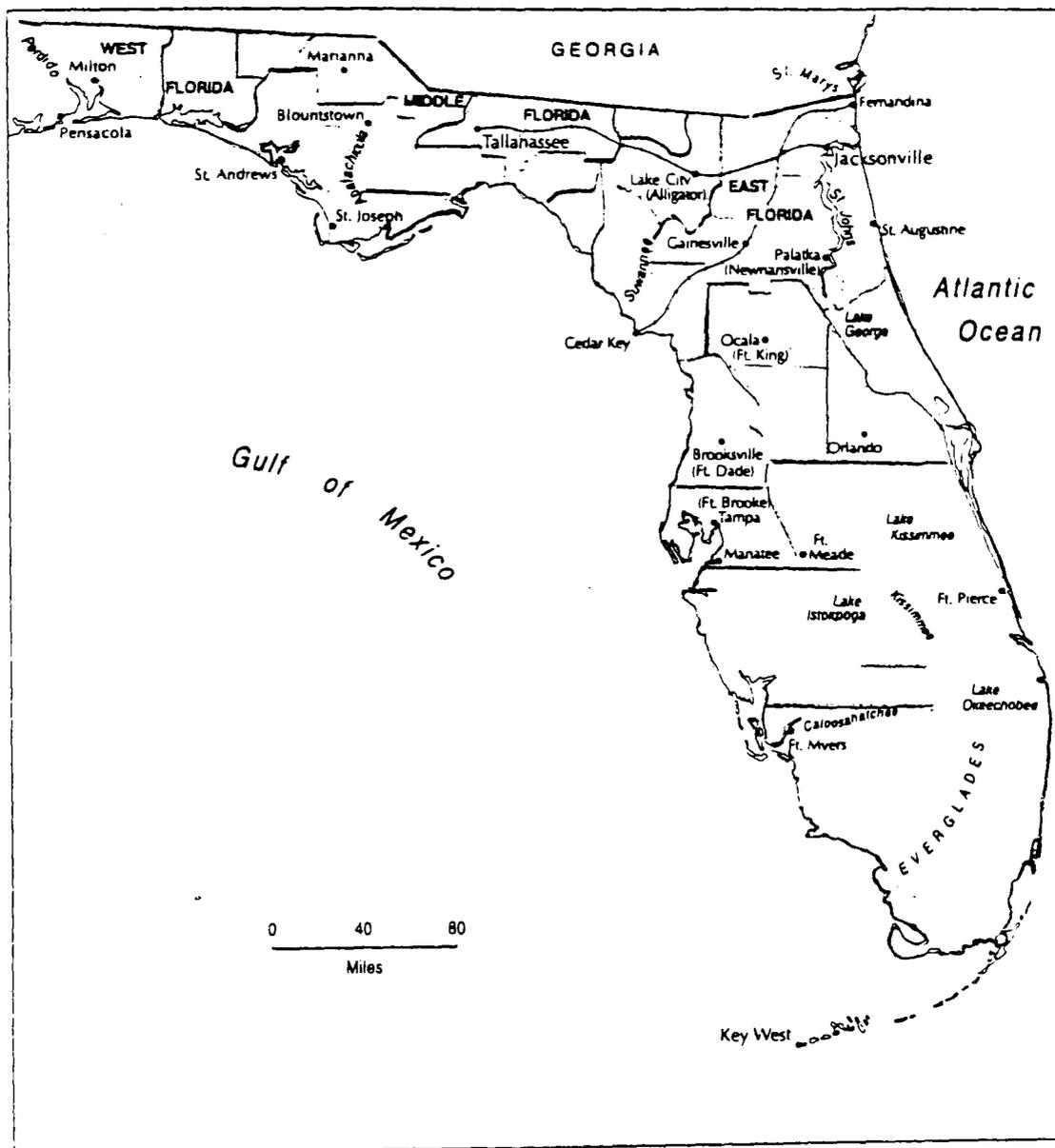
could either get away with their recalcitrance or use it to negotiate some concessions from their masters. Since enslaved blacks knew that violent attack might mean immediate death, they naturally and intelligently sought other means of expressing their discontent concerning plantation or farm regimens. Sometimes they made life uncomfortable for their masters, and sometimes they made life uncomfortable for themselves.

With the important exception of the Second Seminole War era of 1835-1842, few of Florida's slave owners overtly expressed concern about possible massive violent uprising by their bondservants. Yet, they sought and enacted various laws suggesting otherwise. By virtually copying the laws of the older slave states, Florida's slave owners presumably sought to shore up their control over their enslaved property.⁴ Day-to-day reality popped such bubbles of optimism. Many slave holders knew that placing laws on the books to control bondservants was one thing, while enforcing those laws in a consistent manner over a sustained period of time clearly was a distinctly separate matter.⁵ The laws framed to control slaves simply did not apply neatly to managing the realities of life on

Florida's farms and plantations.

Although masters remained aware that slaves could commit sudden and sometimes unprovoked acts of violence toward members of the slave holding class, the big problem most Florida owners faced with bondservants involved the day-to-day dissidence of "their people" which made them a quarrelsome and troublesome property. Indeed, this dissident army, as John Hope Franklin and Loren Schweninger fittingly called them, left an indelible impression on the minds of many Florida masters. It was so much so, that slaves owners even put into writing their concerns about the sometimes surly behavior of their bondspeople.⁶

To start with, slave holders' wills expressed the fears of many about how bondservants would behave upon their owners' demise. Planters in Middle Florida (the panhandle cotton belt region that stretched from the Apalachicola to the Suwannee River and where the largest concentration of bondservants lived and worked) left numerous provisions that gave specific instructions in light of such concerns. Considering himself a humane master, John Parkhill did not delude himself into believing that his "good" treatment of bondservants



Map Of Florida: 1821-1865

would keep them from being, at times, an unruly property. "Should any of the house servants now at Bel Air die or behave badly," he wrote, "their places are to be supplied from the plantation." Parkhill made it clear that any slaves who became cantankerous should be sold and their places filled with more agreeable and cheerful ones.⁷

Numerous other Middle Florida slave holders expressed concerns about their bondservants' behavior. Richard Whitaker of Leon County declared in his will that his executor could "sell any one or more of my negroes for disorderly conduct." Augustus Fisher of the same County wrote that "any negro who 'misbehaves' shall be whip[ped]." If the slave persists in his bad ways, Fisher continued, he "must be sold." George Galphin also knew he did not have all "contented" slaves or "Sambos" on his Leon County plantation. He wrote that "should anyone or more of my slaves become vicious or ungovernable it is my will that such slaves or slave be sold and the proceeds be equally divided between my wife & children."⁸

The case of Jack provides another example of the anxiety some whites felt concerning the predictable and unpredictable behavior of some

bondservants. In that instance, Jacob L. Felkel sought permission of the Leon County court to sell a particular slave belonging to the estate of Daniel Houck. Noting that the executors--Mrs. Houck and son John Wesley Houck--probably would find it difficult to manage this slave, Felkel petitioned to have him sold as soon as possible. He noted that "it would be to the interest of said estate to make immediate sale of said negro: that he is a bad & unruly negro, and this affiant believes that said boy if permitted to remain in the neighbourhood would probably give more trouble to the executrise of said estate than he is worth." No record exists concerning the outcome of this request. More than likely, Jack was sold from the estate.'

East and West Florida possessed more-diversified economies, and our knowledge of Spanish traditions, among other things, suggests that bondservants generally were treated more humanely in these regions than were their Middle Florida counterparts. Still, slave holders' wills from these regions show bond persons as troublesome property. Washington Geiger of Alachua County made it very clear that he saw a need for his executors to hire a first-rate overseer to manage his slaves.

He stipulated, "It is my desire that should any of my negroes become unmanageable or very wicked that my executors sell such negroes and purchase better ones in their stead."¹⁰

In the same vein, Duval County's John Hedges, the executor of James Fagin's estate, asked the court for permission to sell a slave by the name of Jimbo if he did not mend his ways. Hedges told the court that he wanted to sell Jimbo because he had been "doing much as he pleased." In the same county, the administrator of Daniel I. Turnkett's plantation desired to sell Nelson, a thirteen-year-old bondservant. The reason: "his bad character as a run away."¹¹

The story in the west mirrored that of the east. Fransco Cunningham of Escambia County held no illusions about the conduct or character of his slaves. Owner of a sawmill, Cunningham left specific instructions to his executor that, if the slaves "behaved badly," they were to be sold and other "more productive" bondservants purchased in their places. Thus, from this and other such examples it becomes evident that West Florida slave holders knew full well, as did their counterparts in East and Middle Florida, that many slaves could

become a trying and irritating property. Leon County's Hardy B. Croom probably summed up best the fears and apprehensions of most slave holders about their "people" when he declared, "I hope the negroes will behave themselves and that I shall find all things right when I reach Florida."¹²

The particular actions by which slaves proved themselves troublesome took many forms. Commonly, they grumbled and complained to masters about family matters that affected their productivity. Thomas Randall had to deal with a disgruntled slave upon his 1828 arrival in Leon County from Maryland. Much as was the case with thousands of unfree settlers who were torn from homes in Maryland, Virginia, and North and South Carolina during the late 1820s and early 1830s for places further south or in the West, David--a slave purchased from Nicholas Thomas in Maryland by Randall's father-in-law William Wirt--had to leave his family behind. After being away from his wife and children, the bondservant asked Randall to sell him if his children and wife were not purchased. The newly arrived owner and overseer, wanting to keep harmony in the Quarters, feared that David "would infect the whole body of the black community with his despondence." The

overseer/manager subsequently purchased David's wife and younger children who joined him on the Wirtland plantation. "I regret I was not at home to witness the reunion of David and his wife," Randall ultimately informed Wirt. "They are very happy."¹³

On George N. Jones's nearby plantation, overseer A. R. McCall found that "Mariah [had] got the Devel in her" concerning the chores her small daughter should perform on the plantation. McCall wanted Mariah's young daughter Mary to become a house servant for his wife and a playmate to his daughter. "Mariah put it in Marys head that she was not to wait on us and I had to give the child a whipen the next day," the overseer declared. "When she [Mariah] came in et diner she cut up a swell abot it [the whipping of Mary]." After her overt intransigence towards the overseer, McCall went to give her a flogging, and "she walked of[f]." Mariah returned shortly afterwards, endured her whipping, and returned to work. Whether Mary became a house servant to McCall remains unclear.¹⁴

As indicated by Mariah and Mary's story, a common pattern of slave agitation involved griping about work assignments. Slaves became quarrelsome when they believed they were being worked too hard

or too long. Although West and East Florida enjoyed a reputation for having less-harsh work routines and somewhat more flexible patterns of race relations because of its Spanish traditions, slaves in these two regions still criticized the harshness of their work and the amount they had to perform. Slave holders knew that their bond persons would become irritable and even obnoxious if they were assigned too much work. Zephaniah Kingsley, an experienced slave trader and owner, understood that slaves could become quite bothersome under such circumstances. He grew convinced that slaves were less ill-tempered when given the opportunity to work by the task (as opposed to the gang) system. This work routine permitted his bondservants to complete their assignments by two or three o'clock each day, allowing them time for personal matters and concerns. Kingsley believed that this approach helped to minimize day-to-day dissidence on his East Florida estate.¹⁵

Much like Kingsley in Duval County, Putnam County's Winston Stephens believed himself to be a caring and amiable master. In a pattern seemingly repeated everywhere, Stephens's perception (or misperception) did not keep his slaves from griping

about their work routines. His most trusted worker and driver of the a gang of the farm's bondservants, Burrel, murmured openly to the owner's wife Octavia about the amount of work the bondservants had to perform. Informed of Burrel's behavior while the owner was away serving in the Confederate Army, Winston complimented his wife that she had spoken "so short to him." The husband told Octavia to tell Burrel and the others, by way of a threat, that he would "hire the whole of them out" if they continued their cantankerous ways.¹⁶

Middle Florida slaves became just as angry over long and tedious work assignments as did--if not more so than--slaves in the east and west. As early as 1821, Middle Florida planters and overseers experienced the contrary ways of some of their bondservants. During the decade, for example, one slave probably believing that he had been pushed and overworked opted to pack his owner's cotton while it was still wet. Louis Goldsborough, the Wirtland plantation overseer, chastised the peevish bondservant by flogging him. In order to set an example by the contentious slave's punishment, Goldsborough whipped him in front of other bondservants.¹⁷

Naturally, many slaves preferred to work as house servants, but they did not hesitate to "speak up" when their status was threatened. This seemed to have been the case when one of Ellen Wirt McCormick's slaves articulated his displeasure with field work. He previously had been hired out to work in Tallahassee. When Charles's owner attempted to sell him, the bondservant seized the first opportunity to tell the prospective buyer that he had "never been in the field and done any hard work." Upset by this whole episode, Ellen recorded, "Of course, Mr. Crong declined[ed] closing the bargain."¹⁸

Holding open the threat of troublesome behavior, some enslaved blacks attempted to define how much work they would do and where they were willing to do it. One of William Wirt's slaves, Eliza, believed her task was to cook "and [she had] the notion that nothing else [is] to be expected of her." Occasionally successful at such attempts--but in most cases probably not--slaves nonetheless sometimes stated just what their masters should expect from them in the work they performed. Catherine Randall faced this situation when Eliza proved disagreeable after being asked to work in the

field. Yet, the owner's wife conveyed to her husband Eliza's sentiments, suggesting in the process that the bondservant did not have any problems with working in the house.¹⁹

On a separate occasion, Ellen Wirt McCormick echoed her sister's very words when she observed that "Lucy is unfit for field" work but "makes no objection to cooking for them." As often was the case with other slave holders, the McCormicks needed Lucy to help in the fields and said as much to her. "So, as soon as she [Lucy] is well enough for plantation work," Ellen commented, "it [is] understood she is to be recalled [from her house duties]." Maybe Lucy got to engage in the type of domestic work she wanted since surviving records fail to suggest that she was sent back to the fields.²⁰

Even though Eliza and Lucy probably performed their duties successfully most of the time after persuading their owners of their desire to be house servants, some of their associates in bondage felt compelled to criticize and protest domestic work routines. On the Wirtland plantation, the owner disapproved of the way a house servant was carrying out her work assignment. He noted that she had

become unmanageable and had started working to her own "liking." William Wirt's troubles did not stop with this particular house servant for ultimately he had to eject another woman from the kitchen who believed that she too had been overworked.²¹

The usually accepted contention that bondservants preferred to work in the "big house" did not always ring true in Florida. Former slave Claude A. Wilson, for example, claimed that his "mother was very rebellious toward her [house] duties and constantly harassed the 'Missus' about letting her work in the fields with her husband." Wilson also maintained that his mother had become so testy about her duties as a house servant that the Columbia County owner finally allowed her to work in the fields alongside her husband.²²

Sometimes slaves protested the actions of their owners and overseers by not working at all. An instance arose on one of George N. Jones's plantations when an overseer, the sawmill manager, courted the favor of one particular female slave. In reaction, the males on the plantation refused to report for work. Beyond the question of indignities of sexual exploitation, these men may have viewed Jonathan Roberson as an unwanted and unfair

competitor since the male slaves in question outnumbered females of marriageable age.²³

A similar situation occurred at another of Jones's plantations when slave complaints and grouchy ways reverberated in the wake of overseer actions. John Evans should have surmised that he was not making his management of the men any easier when he fathered a baby by Mariah, a slave woman. Much like the situation at Jones's first plantation (El Destino), men of courting and marriageable age outnumbered females in the same category at the second (Chemonie). This may not have been the only reason why male slaves became antagonistic towards Evans, but it could be counted as one of the causes for plantation troubles. It is no wonder that Evans repeatedly complained to the owner that he was behind in his work. "I am doing all I know [to make the slaves work]," he lamented.²⁴

Slaves openly complained about their work assignments in all sorts of situations. Henry Minor, a newcomer to the Wirtland plantation, had been accustomed to working as a hireling at Tallahassee. The bondsman seemingly accomplished little in the way of planting, picking cotton, or harvesting crops. When the overseer instructed

Henry to plant trees, he became petulant about the type of work he had to perform. The slave made it clear that he would rather be sold than do the assigned work. Irritated by Henry's gruff attitude, Mrs. Wirt attempted to assert that she controlled the slave's life. "He is not his own master, to come and go as he pleases to the arrogance of his owner," she insisted. Nonetheless, Henry continued to make his concerns known.²⁵

Some slaves demonstrated that they were not going to be driven to labor beyond a certain point no matter what the consequences. This was the case with Holly, a slave who lived and worked on William Carr's plantation. According to her sister, Margrett Nickerson, Holly refused to be pushed at any rate of speed other than the one she established for herself. Nickerson recalled that "Holly didn't stand back on non' uv em, when dey'd get behind' her, she git behind' dem; she wuz dat stubbo'n and when dey would beat her she wouldn't holler and jest take it and go on [at her own pace]."²⁶

Margrett, herself, resisted working other than at her own pace. The former slave recalled when she had to "tote tater vines on my haid" and how overseer Joe Sanders would hurry her and other



slaves by "beatin' us with strops and sticks." She told of an incident when the overseer beat her and another slave for working slowly, leaving Margrett somewhat crippled. She related that her injuries proved permanent even though her father "would try to fix me up cose I had to go back to work nex' day." She added, "I never walked straight from [that] day to now."²⁷

Sometimes slaves would conspire as a group to avoid being pushed too hard by an overseer or a driver. John Evans suggested such a scenario to his employer. The overseer asserted that he knew "the cause of Escaws and little Dicks runing away." He added: "Jacob and England and Nathan had made a plot to leave if I should atempt to flog them for picking cotton [in small amounts] and persuaded those two boys into it. So I gave Jacob and England and Nathan a flogging a peace."²⁸

Sometimes even floggings did not make slaves work faster or at all. Die, another one of George N. Jones's slaves, probably had been whipped by an overseer for not performing her duties. Still, the bondswoman would not work for this man. Frustrated with her actions, the overseer sent the recalcitrant slave to Jones's other plantation where she began to

work. Die's new overseer then asked that she be left under his supervision since she had no problems working for him. He went on to observe, "I have not had cause to strike her a lick." Winston Stephens's slave Sally probably summed up the sentiments of many other bondservants when she said that she would "rather be beaten to death than worked to death."²⁹

Suffice it to say, slaves in considerable numbers worked too slowly or inefficiently for their masters' liking. As early as 1828, Laura Randall voiced complaints that her slaves worked too slowly. On one occasion, Randall noted that Emmaline did not want to wash clothes. "She is very slow and loitering," the owner insisted. Another day Laura complained that Emmaline had taken a whole day scouring one side of the porch. Seven months later, Randall vented her frustrations to her father about Emmaline's behavior, charging that she was "impudent" and "unmanageable." When visiting her family at Wirtland in 1842, Ellen McCormick noted that John had not improved upon his performance. She claimed that the bondservant, who attended to the carriage, horses, garden and cattle, still "seemed to me to be might lazy & inefficient when I was there."³⁰

Some slaves appear to have known instinctively or else learned how far to go with overseers and managers when negotiating work assignments, and, upon detecting what they perceived as a "weak" overseer, they seized the opportunity to do as little work as possible. D. N. Moxley looked upon Roberson as an inept manager of the slaves under his supervision and related his perception to fellow overseer John Evans. According to the latter man, "Mr. Moxley ses that he had to flog one of the Judges [Roberson's] hands out of the Quarters for sleeping all morning until an hour or two after the sun before he left for the mill." He continued: "Ansler is the boy's name. Mr. Moxley ses that the Judge has not bin on the canal in nearly two weeks where the hands are at work. If this be the case they aint hurting themselves at work very much." Although Roberson allowed the bondservants under his supervision much more latitude than did either Moxley or Evans, Jones apparently declined to replace him.³¹

Refusal to work could occur in circumstances beyond those found at the farms or plantations. Slave holders understood that slaves who were hired out would not always work for their new employers.

The slaves expressed dissatisfaction with their situation in a variety of ways. Often the complaints proved sufficient to prompt owners to decline renting them out. Thomas Randall, for one, understood the potential problems involved with leasing out or employing hirelings. So, he encouraged his father-in-law to buy slaves outright instead of leasing them. According to Randall, the bondservants "worked better and were more contented where their situation was permanent than under the temporary circumstances of being hired out."³²

Randall's words rang true, especially for two slaves owned by Winston and Octavia Stephens. These hired-out Putnam County slaves distinctly showed their dissatisfaction with the changed circumstances. After being whipped several times for not working to the satisfaction of their new employer, the young fellows reported their "mistreatment" to the Stephenses on their weekend visits to the farm. Octavia listened to the slaves' allegations and showed some concern for their plight. Still, she sent the lads back to complete the lease agreements with their temporary master.³³

When bondservants could not modify their working arrangements to their liking, they tried to

manipulate their owners and overseers in other ways that involved troublesome behavior. Some slaves turned to faking ailments. If used carefully and sporadically, this technique offered another useful method for dealing temporarily with an undesirable labor system. Women especially took recourse to this option. As Debra Gray White has noted, "The most common form of female self-defense was feigning illness." Because owners and overseers could not clearly determine whether the illnesses of slave women were real or contrived, bondswomen were often given a certain amount of leeway when they reported sick. Masters knew that all women experienced certain "female problems" that sometimes required time off from the regular work routine.³⁴

Giving birth--together with related complications--provided many female slaves relatively easy opportunities for work stoppages or slowdowns. William D. Moseley's slave Hannah may well have taken advantage of her status as an expectant mother. She remained sick for fifty-two days prior to the birth of her mulatto son. Two weeks latter, the owner described the bondswoman as "still very sick" from child birth. Moseley did not indicate when Hannah returned to work.³⁵

Nelly, one of the Wirtland slaves, also took privileges as a new mother to prolong her stay away from the fields. "Nelly has never been in the field since the birth of her child," Ellen McCormick informed her mother, "having been a good deal invalid ever since; suffering with pains and a constant visitation of month[ly] sickness until last month when she misset." McCormick added, "So soon as she is dismissed from the hospital & doing [better], she will go into the field again." In the meantime, Nelly worked in the house doing a "little sewing." But, Ellen wanted Nelly to return to the fields as soon as possible. "I shall not keep her from the field when she can otherwise [be out there]," she insisted. Seemingly, Nelly did not return to the field during a convalescence period of about three months--a period of relief considerably longer than most slave women enjoyed. As long as they did not overdo using illnesses as an excuse, many bondswomen could take a few days off without suffering adverse consequences.³⁶

The process of determining whether slaves really were sick was one that plagued owners and overseers throughout the antebellum period. Some, and perhaps most, masters understood that bondswomen

were reporting illnesses that they did not have, but they erred on the side of caution in order to protect their investments and to aid in maintaining as manageable a work situation as possible. A case in point involved Ellen, a slave belonging to George N. Jones. According to overseer A. R. McCall, despite his protests Ellen had not been really sick but was only trying to "deceive" him to keep from doing any work. Alexander Randall reflected McCall's experiences when he declared that Nelly "is not much sick and supposes herself privileged [by not having to work]." ³⁷

Some slave women pushed owners into a corner, at least for a time, by insisting that they were so handicapped that they could not engage in real work. Laura Randall endured many trying times with her bondservant Emmaline. "With her uncouth figure and movements, holding up her broken arm as she always does," the mistress of the house reported, Emmaline did not want to lend herself to any hard work. Randall finally assigned the woman to a little washing and milking the cows. ³⁸

Similarly, an otherwise quiet and unassuming bondservant convinced her Leon County master and overseer that she could only do "light" chores

around the house since she could not walk or work without the assistance of crutches. Appearances deceived, though, according to the memory of her fellow slave Uncle Demps. As it turned out, both the master and overseer after seven years learned the error of their judgment. At the Civil War's end this allegedly calm and sedate woman, now free, threw down her crutches and walked briskly out of her former owner's house never to be seen again.³⁹

Women held no monopoly when it came to feigning illness to keep from working. Men also put on a mask of deception, claiming to be sick in order to get out of a day or more of work. By way of illustration, Washington held the record for sick days on Charles Bannerman's plantation. In a three-month period, the owner recorded that the bondservant lay out sick for forty-five days. Possibly, Washington did experience various illnesses, but available evidence suggests that a desire to avoid required labor probably played a major role in the way the slave presented his case. Louis Goldsborough, a son-in-law and overseer on William Wirt's Jefferson County plantation during the 1830s witnessed the same dynamics at play. "The Negroes are all well," he observed at one point,

"saving a couple of them who complained yesterday of pains and colds." The overseer would often allow these "sick" slaves a few days off to recuperate. It seems that Wirt's brother-in-law John Gamble also saw his share of "sickness" among slaves. In February 1835, the planter reported 119 days lost, eighty of them to various illnesses among his bondservants.⁴⁰

These "time-off" periods usually came during the height of the planting or harvesting seasons when the strain of work or the season could cause real illness but could stimulate, as well, an enhanced desire to avoid the fields. During the cotton picking season in September 1839, Ellen Wirt Voss complained that "almost every man, woman, and child with two exceptions have been sick." Her brother Henry Wirt echoed her sentiments by observing that their mother's bondservants constantly reported sick during the planting season. "I think Charlotte [a slave] told me there was more sickness during the months of May, June, and July among the negroes that she had ever known," recalled Henry Wirt on one occasion, likely with a sense of befuddlement as to what it all meant.⁴¹

Sometimes slaves feigned illnesses when they

did not want to be uprooted from their homes. Bondservants understandably found it extremely difficult to cut family and kinship ties when relocating to new places in the South and southwest. Owner Robert Gamble, who moved from Virginia to Leon County, Florida faced this situation. In 1827, he found it necessary to postpone coming to Florida due to the many illnesses reported by his slaves. Two months later Gamble's bondservants finally arrived safely in Florida. Few slaves ever won battles to stay in a certain location when owners moved. Bondservants could only hope to postpone the inevitable, an eventuality sometimes achieved by feigning illnesses as long as they could.⁴²

Slaves routinely expressed resistance to their lot not so much by what they said as by what they did. One common form of that expression came through theft. Virtually all plantations and farms--as well as society at large--prohibited stealing by slaves. Yet citizens commonly complained about slave theft. One newspaper reported that slaves frequently stole their owners' property. They would either keep what they confiscated or barter it for other goods. Florida slaves ignored, as did their fellow bondservants throughout the South, this

particular prohibition at some point in their lives. Bondspeople took what they believed belonged to them, since their labor had produced many of the goods their masters possessed. Of course, owners held other opinions concerning this type of behavior.⁴³

Stealing thus emerged as a nonviolent form of dissidence that marked day-to-day life on most farms and plantations. Overseer Louis Goldsborough, for instance, dealt with an epidemic of chicken stealing. "Our chickens were frequently stolen at the old cabin," he expressed on a typical occasion. The overseer/manager sought to rectify the problem by directing slave carpenter William to build a sturdier structure, one that Goldsborough could admire for its potential to stop thievery. "This shall now, I hope, [allow us to] have plenty of fresh eggs and young chickens to boot," he gleefully remarked. Goldsborough's optimism found itself quickly dashed, though, for bondservants shortly after helped themselves to the chickens and eggs from the "new cabin."⁴⁴

Chickens, one of the preferred foods of most slaves, stood high on the list of properties to be snatched. On Madison County's DeLaughter

plantation, overseer Amon DeLaughter, like Goldsborough, faced rampant theft. He ached from the fact that chickens were stolen with impunity. Sometimes he caught the rogues, but most of the time he did not. In 1854, the overseer delighted in finally nabbing Jack for the infraction. The malefactor thereafter suffered a whipping at the overseer's hand. Closely connected to chicken theft was the theft of eggs. John Gamble fretted as his coops were robbed until a measure of good luck led him to identify the two slaves who had denied him the highlight of his daily breakfast.⁴⁵

While chickens and eggs disappeared all too regularly, pigs or various parts of pigs represented the meat of choice for most nineteenth-century Florida slaves. It and they disappeared accordingly. Masters often passionately complained that they could not keep these animals around. Slaves time and again stole hogs and pigs with reckless abandon. Amon DeLaughter kept a watchful eye on Birl and Isaac or the hogs on the estate would disappear. The case of Wiley, one of Edward Bradford's Leon County slaves points to one of many other examples. The slave stole pigs to supplement his diet in spite of the owner's best efforts to the

contrary.⁴⁶

Pig theft caused dilemmas for some overseers who were unable to curtail the practice and unprepared to admit the same to their employers. One of George N. Jones's Jefferson County overseers, A. R. McCall, preferred not to consider that slaves were stealing hogs. On the one hand, he proudly informed the owner that he got along with the "Negros without much trouble." On the other hand, he felt compelled to admit that the hogs had neither improved or increased under his management. Henry Wirt confronted the same situation when the disappearance of hogs on his parents' plantation proved chronic. "The negroes have been behaving so badly about the hogs," he related to his mother. "Mr. Anderson [the overseer] will know [what to do] without any suggestion how to punish them for their rascality."⁴⁷

The occurrence of pig and pork thefts--for that matter all slave stealing--easily could move away from the home plantation to nearby establishments. William E. Kilcrease's estate administrator in Gadsden County knew he had his hands full with the 144 slaves on the plantation, a responsibility that encompassed their dissident actions off the place.

In his case, the character and behavior of slaves under his charge came to the county judge's attention. Several times the executor reluctantly paid out funds for restitution when slaves refused to accept the limits of this residential plantation when it came to liberating pigs or other desirable commodities. On one occasion, for instance, the administrator paid W. M. B. Jones as much as twenty dollars for hogs stolen by the estate's charges.⁴⁸

When it came down to it, slaves often helped themselves to whatever they could steal. For those slaves with a sweet tooth, watermelons and various fruits topped the list of desirable acquisitions. Dick became notorious for pilfering watermelons. He quit his recalcitrant ways only after a dog grabbed him by the "seat of his pants." John Gamble had a problem with George stealing "peaches." In Duval County, W. B. Fickling's estate administrator spent countless hours in ultimately frustrated attempts trying to curtail the theft of various fruits including oranges, grapefruits, and watermelons.⁴⁹

Crops such as potatoes, collard greens, and squash--for that matter everything edible--disappeared at one time or another from plantations and farms. Daniel and Scot stole potatoes from

Nancy DeLaughter, earning a whipping for their temerity. William Kilcrease's estate bondservants not only stole hogs from the home place and others from neighbors in the area, but they also pilfered collard greens, squash, tomatoes, corn, and other vegetables with impunity. Much like the Kilcrease slaves, "a regular outlaw gang of five fugitives" routinely "plunder[ed]" the Tampa Bay area during the mid-1850s for food and other items.⁵⁰

Sometimes slaves stole food or other items to exchange their ill-gotten gains for alcohol. Presumably, many perpetrators got away with this ploy, but others were not so lucky. Such was the case with several slaves who lived and worked on one particular Middle Florida plantation. Molly and Randall Junior, two "trusted" bondservants of Edward Bradford, attempted to steal bacon from the smokehouse to barter it for whiskey when they took a wagon load of goods to Tallahassee. Their master discovered their plot. As Bradford's daughter recalled, these bondservants suffered the consequences of their actions by being punished.⁵¹

Slave resistance at times took the form of arson. Slave holders did not want to believe bondservants committed these acts. Newspaper

accounts reported suspicious fires that ignited cotton and gin houses, storage houses, public buildings, and slave holders' homes. For example, the 1834 Tallahassee and the 1846 Apalachicola fires destroyed property in these towns as well as on some farms and plantations. No one ever solved these crimes. Did slaves set these places ablaze? The truth remains difficult to ascertain, but owners should have considered slaves as possible suspects.⁵²

Suspicious fires plagued West Florida. Most slaves did not work on farms or plantations in the region. As hirelings, they usually performed duties for various area employers. During the period 1850 to 1855, for example, William J. Keyser's store, the Arcadia cotton mill, the Bagdad and Door Factory, and one of William Criglar's mills burned. According to Brain Rucker, "The origins of area fires are difficult to determine, but disgruntled slaves, competitors, or carelessness many have caused many blazes."⁵³ Again, did slaves commit some of these acts? The answer may never be known with certainty, but circumstances suggest that they did.

Literacy, perhaps surprisingly to some, became

a form of quiet resistance for numbers of slaves. Although some masters taught their bondservants to read and write, the law prohibited such activities. While most masters would not teach their slaves to read and write, some bondservants did. Robert Meacham, a slave and son of planter Banks Meacham, taught fellow Tallahassee bondservants how to read and write during candle-lit nighttime sessions.⁵⁴

Literate slaves "threaten[ed] the slave owner's control." Slave holders knew that learned slaves could write their own passes as well as freedom papers, and newspaper accounts attest to the solid basis for such fears. William Alsop sought the capture of Wade, described as "very intelligent." "He can read and write and will probably forge passes for himself," the owner declared. Runaways George and Steven could read and write. Their owner "suspect[ed] that they will endeavor to pass as free, by means of forged papers, as they attempted to do so once before." Henry Bond's slave Mathew could also "read and write, and no doubt has a regular pass." Madame Marmillon described Abraham as a "Negro who reads and writes and may have made a false certificate of liberty." Most slave holders thus viewed literate enslaved blacks as a dangerous

element within the Quarter community.⁵⁵

Literate slaves also could read passages from the Bible that suggested equality in the sight of God. This ran contrary to the "slave obey your master" doctrine that most owners wanted to instill in their bondspeople. Douglas Dorsey recalled a slave driver's wife encouraging dissent among the slaves concerning their religious teaching. "[She could] read and write a little, [and] would tell the slaves that what the minister had just said was all lies," he claimed. Other former slaves who read the Bible also believed they were "jest as good as" whites.⁵⁶

As Shane and Graham White asserted, bondservants could protest their circumstances by what they wore. Historians of the Old South generally have agreed that slaves possessed only small quantities of "Negro" clothes. Usually they received two sets of clothing to wear per year--one for summer months and one for winter months. Given the financial circumstances of some owners, slaves might find themselves with barely any thing to wear. At least, this was how Deborah Gray White portrayed the dress of some women on plantations in the Old South. She described the clothing of some as

"particularly rugged." White continued by asserting that "some women had such tattered clothes that they were almost naked."⁵⁷

Florida sources allow helpful insight into this question of clothing and dissidence. Indeed, descriptions of how nineteenth-century Florida slaves dressed were recorded in slave owners' journals and other correspondence as well as in the newspapers. Particularly, advertisements for the capture of runaways gave descriptions of what fugitives were wearing and what other clothing they may have had on their person when they escaped. Many of the runaway advertisements, taken with other available information, suggest that slaves possessed more clothes than the usual one or two outfits normally given to them by their owners.⁵⁸

Some of the clothing possessed by blacks was of a quality greater than prescribed for them by whites. William B. McCall offered a reward for the capture of his mulatto slave Jesse. "He will be well clothed," McCall claimed, "as he took with him a variety of good clothing." When Smart's drowned body was found, a published notice specified that, beside what was found on the corpse, the bondservant carried with him far more than the traditional one

or two sets of clothing that most slaves owned. The advertisement detailed that he "had with him a bundle containing clothing, such as pants, shirts, one thin coat" and other items on his person.⁵⁹

Other examples abound. When twenty-eight-year-old Eulalia disappeared from an East Florida farm, her owner declared that she "carried a large bundle of clothing of her own, consisting of some muslin, calico and checked homespun dresses, blankets, handkerchiefs." He added, "She always wears a coloured handkerchief around the head, and will probably wear on her way a cloak of fine grey bath coating." Although Ivy wore a "Jacket and trowser made of White Plains, Osnaburgh shirt, felt hat, course shoes & a plaid cloak" when he fled, he kept with him numerous items of clothing his possession of which likely had remained unknown to his master until after the bondsman absconded. Ivy's owner, W. H. Houston, found out later that he "had altered his dress by putting on a great coat similar to those worn by the U. S. soldiers."⁶⁰

Additional instances permit an even-greater sense of the amount of clothing slaves might come to hold. R. K. West wanted George captured, asserting that he "had plenty of clothing" when he fled from

his Leon County plantation. R. L. Colvert offered a reward for the capture and return of twenty-year-old Ben to East Florida. The owner noted that Ben left wearing "cotton canaburg pants, and an old dark colored coat with no sleeves." Colvert made sure to inform the public that these clothes were not the only ones Ben possessed. "As he had other clothes," he observed, "it is probable he has changed his dress."⁶¹

Bondservants did not usually commit violent acts to acquire additional clothing for themselves and their loved ones, but, by wearing clothes other than what their owners provided them or thought they should wear, they made two important points to their owners and other whites. One, they could and would provide for themselves. This was so regardless of what clothing their owners gave them or thought they should wear. And two, the acquisition of different and better clothes offered another way of subverting white authority.

It may then be said that slaves knew that-- while quiet or conservative dissidence would not earn them liberty--it still allowed them to express their dissatisfaction concerning family matters, work routines, and what they were compelled to wear

on their bodies. Slaves understood how far their masters would allow them to go in retaliating against the slave regime. Bondspeople occasionally feigned illnesses, worked at their own pace, and stole food and livestock as a means of survival and to enhance the quality of life. They also "took" what they wanted to demonstrate their displeasure with plantation rules or realities. As long as they did not "over-do" these transgressions, they might succeed in getting temporary relief from the toils of slavery. When bond persons perceived an opportunity to skirt work assignments, many, on occasion, did so. After all, slave dissidence on plantations and farms lent itself to the amelioration of working conditions, permitting slaves a path for negotiating with owners and demonstrating dissatisfaction with masters when some agreed upon situation had been breached.

NOTES

Chapter One

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CHAPTER TWO

Away Without Leave

"Some uv de slaves run away, lots uv um."

A drama played out at St. Augustine in 1830 that was to see itself repeated countless times during the pre-emancipation era, a circumstance that spoke volumes about slave humanity and the courage to resist. Mary A. Sanchez purchased a man, George, from the estate of "the late Col. Weeks" of the Ancient City. Then, shortly after he arrived at his new home, George ran away. As sometimes happened, the new owner never recaptured her truant bondservant. His reasons for departure are not known with certainty. As discussed in this chapter, though, the mists of time may be parted somewhat and George's thinking may be surmised in a manner that permits insight on a broader basis into the courageous attempt of a single bondsman to discard his chains.¹

The causes of slave flight were many. In Mary Sanchez's case, the slave holder faced what many owners experienced when enslaved blacks feared the transition from one owner to another. They simply ran off. The event easily could have occurred for a host of reasons. Slaves time and again seized opportunities to abscond from the farms and plantations of Florida when they perceived, for example, a change in venue, a breakdown in plantation management, death or replacement of owners, or alterations in the master's household finances that might portend a modification in their status. Others disappeared because of abusive treatment by authority figures. This chapter, accordingly, will explore these and other causes that resulted in the important dynamic of slave flight to freedom.

The very nature of Florida's development over time caused bondspeople within and outside its boundaries to view the peninsula as a runaway haven. Not surprisingly, then, nineteenth-century slaves escaped from the farms and plantations of Florida-- and slaves from other jurisdictions left for the peninsula--at rates seemingly higher than were the case in other southern slave states. Many whites

understood this fact and reflected what they perceived as the high incidence of truancy in Florida. As early as 1824, a St. Augustine journalist expressed what many others had feared for years. As the editor proclaimed, many newcomers refused to settle in the territory "because they are liable to the loss of their negroes by elopement."²

The intra- and inter-state flight of bondservants would continue to plague nineteenth-century Florida until freedom came for slaves, and, as had been the case in 1824, the territory and state's image as a haven for runaways remained a constant source of concern to whites. Another newspaperman helped to make the point. "There are few things which have been subjects of greater complaint for the last two or three years," the writer declared in 1834, "than runaway negroes." The editor went on to portray the problem's depth. Fugitives, he insisted, "are permitted to go at large, and plunder the public."³

As mentioned, a wide range of reasons for slave flight emerges from historical sources. As apparently was true with Mary Sanchez's George, Florida bondservants often "took off" as an expression of their disapproval at being sold to a

new owner. Achille Murat, a large slave holder in Jefferson County, learned the reality of this situation first hand as he began a search for Chester a "few days after his arrival" on the plantation. The owner recently had purchased the slave from North Carolina. John Gamble of Leon County similarly experienced problems shortly after purchases from holders in nearby counties. Significantly, one might also surmise from surviving evidence that Gamble endured serious runaway problems throughout the 1830s because bondservants simply did not like their new home. Others had left family, kinfolk, and loved ones behind. When slaves purchased by Gamble from one particular Gadsden County owner disappeared, his overseer found most of the fugitives at their old plantation among family and friends. The bondservants returned to their new owners, took their punishment, and went back to work. Still, punishment did not deter some, for they continued to leave the plantation without permission.⁴

Some slaves feared being sold and ran away before the transaction could be made. Lawrence fled Tallahassee before he could be bargained away for the fourth time. Orrin disappeared from Pensacola

prior to his third change of ownership, this time to Tallahassee's mayor B. C. Willis. As was true with Orrin, Matthew absconded from Henry Bird's Tallahassee estate before being sold on a third occasion. Other examples abound. After acquiring Dennis on consignment, the Tallahassee slave trading firm of Hughes and Patterson lost the bondservant to flight. Also in Middle Florida and probably fearing that he would go on the auction block, Will departed Apalachicola several days after his owner's death.⁵

Some slaves ran away when new overseers took over the management of farms or plantations or else departed to demonstrate their disenchantment with new rules and directives. Mariah's case illustrates this fact. The bondswoman did not like the management style of new overseer A. R. McCall. Under former overseer John Evans she likely had enjoyed special privileges around the place since Evans had fathered at least one child by her. When McCall took over, things changed for Mariah and she grumbled about it. After telling her child Mary not to obey the directives of the new overseer, Mariah openly defied him as well. As a result, the overseer flogged Mary and started to do the same to Mariah when she fled the plantation for a few days.

Afterward, Mariah returned and received her punishment. The overseer ultimately made his point, but Mariah had made her's as well. Jack, bondservant of Leon County's William Harris, also experienced uneasiness in similar circumstances. Within one month of the new overseer's arrival, the enslaved black had absconded.⁶

Other slaves were inclined to run away when personnel in the "big house" changed. Mary Minus Biddle recalled that her master's first wife "was a very kind woman." Upon her demise, the owner relocated from Escambia to Columbia County where he remarried. At that point, the slaves grew apprehensive and uneasy about the new wife who, according to Biddle, was a veritable terror. "She was always ready and anxious to whip a slave for the least misdemeanor," the one-time slave recalled. Fearing that Mary and other slaves might run away because of this abuse, the master "told Mary and her mother that before he would take the chance of them running away on account of her [his wife's] meanness he would leave her." The master obviously did not leave his wife soon enough since Mary ran away to avoid a flogging. She and other slaves finally found some relief from the mistress's abusive ways.

This did not come about due to the master divorcing his wife; rather, it occurred because her angry son-in-law fatally shot her.⁷

Assignment to relatives of owners or to the administrators of owners' estates caused some slaves to disappear. When the administrator of William Kilcrease's Gadsden County plantation took over its management, fifteen of 144 slaves ran away. The executor recorded at the time, "Many slaves still out, hope to capture them soon." Sam fled the premises of the late Robert Sturges when a new overseer took charge. Thomas Munroe, executor of John W. Malone's estate, faced runaway problems shortly after taking control of Malone's Gadsden County plantation. Within one month, five of twenty slaves disappeared from the property.⁸

Some slave holders knew that hired-out slaves, who often enjoyed greater mobility, constituted a part of the runaway problem. John D. Parish yearned, for example, for the capture of Sam Jones. The bondservant was enabled to avoid the catchers with relative ease thanks to the fact that he had a "pass to hire his own time." In Key West, seven hired-out slaves absconded from the Dry Tortugas. The employer could not figure out why they fled

since "none of them have complained of harsh treatment." Many of these bondservants roamed around the countryside and towns independent of their owners, a fact that never ceased to irritate many white residents in various communities.⁹

The problem with runaway leased slaves grew so severe at times that local governments called for attempts at resolution. For instance, Gadsden County citizens determined to control slave movement by curtailing the idea of bondspeople hiring themselves out. The county's grand jury declared, "The permission by some owners of slaves in the county to hire themselves out [is against the law]." Their neighbors to the south in the port cities of St. Joseph and Apalachicola voiced similar complaints. The Apalachicola Commercial Advertiser intoned that "an evil not to be borne . . . such gallow-birds as flock here every winter from abroad to be hired out." As the item suggested, bondservants from around the state seemed to flock to these particular ports. Without systematic inquiry, something which rarely operated effectively, whites simply could not know if these freewheeling bondservants were runaways or not.¹⁰

Many enslaved blacks opted to leave their

employers simply because a window of opportunity presented itself at a time when they found themselves dissatisfied with working conditions. John, a hired-out slave of James Gadsden, disapproved of the poor working conditions at his new employer's establishment, so he absconded. Another slave showed his dislike for the work he was required to perform at the Pensacola Navy yard by disappearing. The slave hireling Joshua ran away shortly after arriving at the Pensacola Brick Yard. Winston Stephens's two young slaves left their employer's Putnam County farm based upon what they perceived as harsh working conditions. Work on the various rail systems in Florida from the 1830s to the late 1850s could be arduous and dangerous for many hired-out slaves. John and Albert were hired out for such labor around 1840. They escaped their employer and remained at large for over two years. In a not-dissimilar situation, large Leon County planter Benjamin Chaires advertised his hireling as missing from the "St. Joseph Rail-road" company.¹¹

Some Florida owners permitted slave traders, as their agents, to hire out their enslaved blacks, a fact that created another dynamic in the runaway equation. Some of the firms and individuals cared

little about the treatment or working conditions under which these individuals would have to labor. Charles Dupont of Gadsden County gave an old African named Aleck to the slave trading firm of R. J. Hackley of Tallahassee to be leased out. Hackley, in turn, hired the bondservant to John R. Lloyd. Ill disposed toward his new employer, Aleck fled three months later. Several additional slaves simply disappeared from the Tallahassee slave trading firm of Hughes and Patterson before they could be hired out.¹²

Clearly, slaves often ran because of the brutal treatment they received from masters, overseers, and drivers. Bondsmen and women were beaten, whipped, incarcerated, branded, collared, mutilated, and placed in stocks. Most frequently, they were punished by whipping. Severe floggings, some slave holders felt, would make the slaves stand in fear. Slaves naturally ran away to avoid flogging, although they ultimately had to submit to such punishment upon their return to the farm or plantation. John Evans, George N. Jones's overseer at El Destino, would at times apply the whip in large doses of "about 75 Lashes." Many slaves knew this to be a fact. So when Evans went to whip

Winter, the slave, according to the overseer, "said he would not take it and runaway."¹³

It appears that Evans and fellow overseer D. N. Moxley experienced runaway problems because of the whippings they inflicted upon slaves. Evans, for example, went to flog Escaws, little Dick, England, Jacob and Nathan, and they took off to avoid the cow hide. The truants returned voluntarily to the plantation a few days later. The overseer informed his employer that he had given them only a light "flogging a peace [since] they acknowledge they had done wrong." It seems that Moxley, according to Evans, continued to have runaway problems because of laying the lash on "thickly." Among the many who absconded, three slaves in particular ran to Tallahassee and placed themselves in jail instead of facing Moxley's severe floggings.¹⁴ Former slaves also recalled occasions when fellow bondsmen fled plantations and farms because of abusive treatment by other overseers and drivers. According to Shack Thomas, one "hard" overseer "used to 'buck and gag' us." This led some slaves to run away. Upon their capture, they were "gagged and tied in a squatting position and left in the sun for hours." Some runaways, he claimed, were "suspended by their

thumbs for varying periods." Douglass Parish claimed to remember overseers on other plantations who beat slaves to death. The former slave could have been speaking about such occurrences on the plantation where he lived and worked, but chose not to discuss them with the interviewer. He continued by saying that the master would simply show a "black whip which was usually sufficient" in making them stand in fear. Louis Napoleon gave the impression that his former master did not allow the driver to whip slaves for fear they might run away. But when slaves did abscond, the master flogged them himself.¹⁵

Margrett Nickerson recalled that some slaves were mistreated for no apparent reason, a fact that offered further incentive for flight. Uncle George was one of them. According to Nickerson, they would "jes take uncle George Bull and beat him fur nothin. . . . [Sometimes] dey would beat him tel de blood run outen him and den trow him in de ditch in de field." Nickerson related the result of this type of treatment:

Some uv de slaves [would]run away, lots uv um. Some would be cot and when day ketched em

dey put bells on em; fust dey would put a iron
ban' round dey neck and anuder one 'round de
waist and rivet um tegether down de back; de
bell would hang on de ban round de neck so dat
it would ring when de slave walked and den dey
woul'n' git 'way. Some uv dem wore dese bells
three and four mont'n and when dey time wuz up
dey would take em off em.¹⁶

Mistreatment--which could include serious
cruelty--might also encompass other actions such as
arbitrary refusal to permit reasonable absences that
would prompt bondservants to disappear from farms
and plantations. The experience of Judge
Wilkerson's plantation offers an example. There,
the bondspeople felt that they were being abused.
As Charlotte Martin remembered, "Wilkerson was very
cruel and held them in constant fear of him."
Despite Wilkerson's hard attitudes, slaves
nonetheless occasionally absented themselves in
order to attend various gatherings off the
plantation. If caught without a pass from the
owner, they were "severely flogged." Martin vividly
recalled that her eldest brother "was whipped to
death" for leaving the plantation without permission

so that he could participate in unsanctioned "religious ceremonies." Despite Wilkerson's actions, though, fugitives continued to disappear despite and because of the owner's cruelty.¹⁷

Some slaves fled plantations and farms before they could be abused. Such was the case with Renty and Winter. They departed temporarily to give an overseer time for his temper to cool. Renty's situation arose when the engine to a cotton gin on George N. Jones's Chemonie plantation suffered damage while the skilled slave mechanic and carpenter was tending to it. Concluding that the finger of blame would be pointed at him, Renty quickly took to the road. Overseer Jonathan Evans later recorded, "Renty runaway about the engine but have Came in since I came on the place." Instead of meekly submitting to a flogging, another slave on the same plantation disappeared for several days before returning. Overseer Evans noted: "Winter left the Plantation [for] 4 days. I went to give him a Floging [sic] for not coming to his work in due time and he told me that he would not take it and run off and went to El Desteno." Renty and Winter, just as was true of many of their peers elsewhere, probably fled to bide their time in hopes

of catching overseers and managers in better frames of mind for negotiation. Typically, when slaves returned in such circumstances they accepted their punishment and again took up work.¹⁸

Some slaves did not have specific reasons to run away except that they wanted to be free. Ellen McCormick, daughter of William Wirt, clearly understood that some bondspeople had a desire for liberty and seized any opportunity they could to obtain it. At least she indicated as much in a letter to her sister concerning one particular slave on the Wirtland plantation. McCormick wrote that neither she nor her husband wanted to buy Charles from Wirtland. The wary buyer noted that she had "no confidence in his fidelity or attachment if the temptation to run away . . . were offered him." Rev. A. J. Scott of Pensacola considered himself to be a "Christian slave holder" and one who treated his bondservant humanely. For no apparent reason but that he wanted his freedom, Scott's unnamed slave disappeared from the minister's home in 1859. When advertising the sale of a slave woman, one particular owner warranted his bondservant "to be sound, sober and honest-an excellent Cook, Washer and Ironer, and the only fault she has is running

away." This owner summed up what many slave owners probably knew about their bondservants-that many simply wanted their freedom and would flee if given the opportunity.¹⁹

As suggested by these and other accounts, some slaves proved unrelenting in their desire for freedom. Bondservants often escaped, were captured, and ran again. Running away emerged as a relatively common practice on some farms and plantations. A military officer attested to the habitual nature of one slave. As the officer informed his wife, this particular slave had been "caught three or four times but had succeeded every time in getting to the woods again." He went on to inform her:

We left Pilatka on Monday morning early (7 A.M.) with seven inside passengers & a negro runaway slave in irons in front with the driver. This negro afforded quite a diversion since he got away ten minutes before we reached the place he was to [be] given to his master. You may think I pitied him but I must say that had I had a chance I would have shot him as he left the stage. He is a regular outlaw & ruffian and one of a gang of five infesting the

pine barrens. As a matter of course these ruffians must live by plunder and make themselves very dangerous.²⁰

Besides the slave to whom the officer referred, others were known as habitual runaways. Of those with such a strong desire for freedom, Primus serves as a good example. He escaped from his owner a day before Christmas in 1839. After recapture, he fled from his new owner in September 1842. Following a brief sojourn, authorities apprehended him again. He ran away for the third time a month later. Primus may have succeeded in his third attempt since his name soon ceased to appear among advertisements for runaways. Much like Primus, George became an regular escapee from Augustus Lanier's plantation, having escaped over four times. As one advertisement noted, he wore the marks of the "whip" to prove it.²¹

Slave women, as well as men, tried to escape from bondage. Hannah became a chronic escapee or so her master thought. The bondservant sought to gain her freedom three or more times. She disappeared around 1851. After a brief taste of freedom, authorities captured her. Within six months, Hannah

fled again, only to be caught. On her third escape attempt, she stayed out for almost one year before being recaptured. According to his daughter, Edward Bradford's slave Affie routinely disappeared so often that the matter did not bother her father. The bondservant reportedly stayed away from the plantation for months at a time.²²

Even slaves with personal handicaps or pending health concerns hesitated little before leaving the plantations and farms. Newspapers accounts abound with descriptions of bondsmen who absconded with various physical impairments. Samuel Parkhill found this out when Edmund and his wife, who was eight months pregnant, vanished from his Lake Jackson plantation in April 1839. Andrew left Leon County despite being, as his owner claimed, "a little lame from the affect[s of] Rheumatism." Charles P. Maher of the same county described Kate as being about "sixteen years old. He added that due to rheumatism, "which makes her walk very lame, she has a much older appearance."²³

A considerable number of determined fugitives were described as cripples. Lewis's owner did not think that he would get far since he had a "crippled" left leg. Smart made his escape from the

wood yard of St. Rosa Sound despite having a lame "left leg." Described as having "a very lame walk," Kate did not let her malady hinder her from escaping. William B. McCall advertised the capture of Jesse, explaining that he had a scar on his left knee that caused "him to limp." William Tradwell described Ned as having to "limp somewhat when he walk." Favoring his "right leg while walking," Ben made his escape.²⁴

Some slaves were so desperate to leave their masters that they took canoes, small boats, or rafts to aid in their escape even though they had little familiarity with such vessels. In July 1843 seven bondservants escaped from St. Augustine for the Bahamas "in one of the boats belonging to the Pilots of the harbor." These fugitives apparently had planned their escape for some time. They had confiscated a "spy glass, compass, and lead line . . . about 400 rounds of cartridges, and a great quantity of provisions." The escapees successfully reached their destination. Dick, his wife Margaret, and their five-year old son were unsuccessful in their attempt. They were "picked up at sea in a canoe a few miles from St. Marks." Three fugitives arrived from places unknown at Key West in "a small

boat." Essex and Ben Owens fled from Pensacola in a boat. They were believed to be going "towards New Orleans." Hector left his master by floating away on a raft.²⁵

If they were willing to risk unfamiliar water craft to secure transportation for flight, it almost goes without saying that slaves would take ponies or horses when they had a long way to travel or in order to make a quick get away. When Lewis left Fort Brooke in 1837, he stole a horse to aid his attempt to get back to South Carolina. Like Lewis, George and Solomon stole horses for their dashes to freedom. In 1835, Peter fled on the back of a pony that he stole from his Jefferson County owner. Before Gabriel could get too far from Calhoun County, slave catchers apprehended him "riding a boy pony." They committed him to the Leon County jail.²⁶

Other bondservants tried to make their escape by hiding on ships. Leckstis and Ben were apprehended by the Duval County sheriff after they were discovered hidden away in the bowels of the ship Seminole. Ship's personnel discovered an Alachua County slave named Jim "concealed among the cargo" of the steamer William Gaston. "Two Leon

County slaves were discovered," the Tallahassee Floridian and Journal reported, "among the cotton on board the brig Ocilla which was bound for New York." Tom's owner believed that he would make his way to Port Leon "on a vessel." John Hunt also thought that John Betton might try escaping "in some vessel."²⁷

Interestingly, Florida slave holders often saw dark conspiracies behind the flight of their bondsmen or else perceived individual flight as the precursor of widespread slave revolt. On several occasions the evidence seemed to support their fears. Nat Turner's 1831 insurrection, for instance, set off waves of anxiety and apprehension, leading owners to sometimes-draconian measures to control every movement not only of their bondservants but of free blacks as well. The eruption of the Second Seminole War in 1835 caused even more-immediate fear. At that time, an ultimately futile attempt to curtail the movement of all slaves and free blacks appeared in the public press of Jacksonville. The announcement declared:

NOTICE

Is hereby given to all persons, that the

Commanding officers of the different Guard Stations, have strict orders to arrest and detain under guard, all slaves and free colored persons, found at large, except in the actual service and in company with their owner or overseer. Persons are therefore requested to govern themselves accordingly.

John W. Warren

Col. 4th Regt. F.M.²⁸

The dark eminences behind the fears often loomed in the form of abolitionists. The perception took root on the heels of the Nat Turner insurrection, as slave holders grew alarmed over what they perceived as widespread Northern abolitionist activities sweeping into the South. Many whites came to dread the possibility that this unwelcome group would assist large numbers of slaves in escaping to freedom. But reality was, as Donorena Harris has noted, that abolitionism never became a serious threat to Florida slave holders. She would not have convinced many Floridians of the time. An Apalachicola paper warned citizens in 1844 to "wake from this lethargy in time to save themselves from a general massacre." Its editor

went on to imply that abolitionists in the state were waiting for the day to incite "the slaves to discontent and disobedience." Specifically, large numbers of whites believed that abolitionists were encouraging bondservants to leave plantations and farms to join the Seminoles or outlaw groups in the peninsula.²⁹

Middle Florida owners possessed concerns about their region, but growing numbers of slave holders particularly believed that abolitionism would become a reality in East Florida if that area did not rid itself of anti-slavery activists. One newspaper expressed sentiments echoed elsewhere. "We shall have the germ of an Abolition State in east Florida, in less than five years," it insisted, "[and] it will be a receptacle for runaway slaves from the contiguous States, and more dangerous than the Seminole nation has been."³⁰

Floridians up to the Civil War would continue mistakenly to believe in abolitionist power to aid slaves escape, and they would attempt all manner of efforts to rid themselves of the few actual abolitionists. A sizeable number of whites believed, for example, that Peter S. Smith, who allegedly had open ties with northern abolitionist

organizations, should be run out of Florida. The brother of abolitionist Gerrit Smith, Smith had settled at St. Augustine around 1834 to speculate in land. To make matters worse, he had been accompanied by a cousin who was connected to women's rights advocate Elizabeth Cady Stanton. Slave holders soon convinced themselves that these Northerners held secret and nefarious plans. The problem only grew in intensity when additional Northerners such as John C. Cleland, Thomas Douglass, David R. Dunham, and D. W. Whitehurst settled nearby. Slave holders, as reflected by the local newspaper, now knew that slaves soon would be ushered off at the instigation of abolitionists. Accordingly, the community harassed Smith until he departed. No evidence suggests that he or his compatriots abetted abolitionism other than by denouncing slavery publicly, and it appears that they gave no bondservants assistance in fleeing servitude.³¹

One celebrated case involving abolitionist activities got the attention of virtually all white Floridians during the mid-1840s. That affair involved Jonathan Walker, a Boston abolitionist. This newly arrived West Florida migrant actually

assisted the escape of seven Pensacola bondservants. Eventually, the seven fugitives were seized and returned to their masters. Walker faced trial on charges of "aiding and abetting" runaways. The court crafted its actions to send a clear message to others who assisted with slave escape. The court ordered that Walker be placed in the pillory, that he be branded on the hand with the letters SS for slave stealer, and that he be incarcerated for fifteen days and fined \$150. Walker emerged as a celebrity of sorts in the North because of his Pensacola abolitionist activities.³²

If the public denouncements of slavery by abolitionists in East Florida concerned slave holders, the Walker case troubled white Floridians much more than any other single example of anti-slavery activity. They believed that large plots to assist slaves in fleeing the peninsula would threaten the very foundation of slavery. Some West Florida residents feared additionally that agents of Great Britain and other foreign nations were plotting to assist hundreds, if not thousands, of bondservants to escape. Many especially grew suspicious of Great Britain's motives after two letters from the British and Foreign Anti-Society

were found on Walker's person. The governor and legislative council subsequently demanded that the British stop "clandestinely co-operating with authorities of Massachusetts, in fiendish machinations against Florida's domestic [slave] institutions."³³

Whites' beliefs that abolitionists had gained a strong foothold in the state lasted at least as late as 1862. In a letter to his son during that year, one Floridian declared, "You must know, either by reading the newspapers, or from what you hear, that the abolitionists are determined at any hazard to let the slaves free, with out compensation for his loss, they are also determined to make the South, a wilderness and give the 'nigger' more privileges, than the white man for instance." During the same period, Robert Butler echoed Floridians' concerns about abolitionist influence. He believed that they had aided in the escape of his slave Julius Cezar from Leon County. To these men, abolitionists were awaiting any opportunity to incite slaves to flee farms and plantations and to search for whites to kill.³⁴

While large-scale abolitionist activity never touched the Sunshine State, individual whites acted

to assist slaves to escape throughout the antebellum period. When they were discovered, as former slave Shack Thomas recalled, abolitionist-leaning individuals usually were run out of town or county. More typically, though, simple slave stealing was involved when a white aided a black to depart. In such circumstances most slaves probably believed the motives of whites in assisting them with their escape to be genuine and good. Often, they were not. Those bondservants enticed away likely were promised their freedom, a promise that seldom was kept. As early as 1829, St. Augustine advertised the escape from jail of a white man named John Bryant for "negro stealing and sundry misdemeanors." In another incident, owner A. Danford insisted that Titus had "no cause for absenting himself." Danford's advertisement declared, "Taking no clothes except such as he wore off, he may have been stolen." Celia's owner presumed that she had been "stolen by [a white man named] Jonathan H. Coolidge, a yankee."³⁵

Details of many incidents of slave stealing have come down to us. One group of white men, by way of example, snatched one of Colonel Fleming's bondspeople. They released him only when he

pretended to be lame. Mary Roberts of Jackson County believed that Harry had been "carried off by some person." Her Middle Florida neighbors yearned to catch Stephen P. Yeomans who reportedly stole both slaves and free blacks before selling them to unsuspecting buyers.³⁶

Other whites enticed slaves away to become partners in crime. This seemed to be the case with Pensacolan John B. Harden and a runaway in his company. Around 1851, Harden traveled to Geneva, Alabama, and stole \$500 from West Florida native John R. Chapman. Authorities arrested Harden, but he soon broke out of jail, subsequently stealing the sheriff's buggy, a lawyer's mare, and a double-barrel gun. Harden returned briefly to Santa Rosa County and fled again with a runaway belonging to Joseph Forsyth. The two absconders did not remain at large for very long. They were caught with the stolen goods in southeast Mississippi and brought back to Santa Rosa County.³⁷

The plague of slave stealing beset Floridians, at least on an occasional basis, during much of the antebellum era. St. Augustine's city council even petitioned the United States government in 1843 to protect the coastline better in order to reduce the

amount of slave stealing and other related activities. The panel noted:

The coast of this Territory has been without any maritime protection--being a bare and exposed frontier, on which either smuggling, piracy, or the abduction of slaves, may be carried on with impunity--and as we have reason to believe have been perpetrated, both by the Indians and evil disposed white persons in connection with them.³⁸

Punishments came quickly and often hard for whites convicted of stealing slaves. Florida laws made clear the dire consequences of "aiding and abiding runaways," although, generally speaking, available documentation suggests that the statutes usually specified or permitted a harsher penalty than actually received by those who assisted slaves in escaping. The lucky ones might receive jail time. Irwin Granger of Jefferson County, accused of assisting fugitives slaves, served his sentence in the local lock-up. James Kelly of Leon County likewise landed in jail for sixty days for "aiding runaway slaves."³⁹

A few slave stealers and those who assisted slaves with their escape were not so lucky. As noted earlier, Jonathan Walker received a harsh punishment for his "crime." According to Tallahassee's Florida Sentinel, Stephen P. Yeoman was hanged for "negro stealing" in 1845. Redding Evans of Jefferson County suffered the noose in 1850 for stealing a female slave. In one celebrated incident, four members of the Holloman gang were hanged at Quincy in 1846 for their temerity at ushering bondsmen away from local plantations. In 1852, Governor Thomas Brown did pardon one convicted slave stealer, but he did so only on condition "that he leave the state of Florida Never to Return."⁴⁰

Some owners were not above taking the law into their own hands and dispensing their brand of frontier justice in punishing slave stealers or others who assisted fugitives. While Florida law expressly proscribed slave stealing and specified penalties, many slave holders knew that day to day realities of enforcement could bring about little if any actual result. So, individual action sometimes replaced official action. Some citizens even took the step of publishing what they would do to anyone caught aiding and abetting runaways. A. Watson

believed, for instance, that persons unknown had helped Ben to escape. Watson publicly announced that he would "apply the law of Judge Lynch to my own satisfaction, on those concerned in his concealment."⁴¹

Isolated incidents of slave stealing comforted slave holders in a sense, because such occurrences afforded justification for their desire to believe that their runaway bondsmen and women had been enticed away by other whites rather than that the slaves themselves had been the active agents in their flight. Many owners could not bear to think that their slaves would take the initiative in a search for freedom. Advertisements for runaways reflected as much, often referring to a mysterious third party as a "white scoundrel" or "thief." Among those who believed that his bondservants had been ushered off against their will was W. H. G. Saunders. He offered a reward of \$100 for the "recovery of the three negroes [George, Joe and Charles] and the thief." Like Saunders, George Willis claimed that Smart had "been enticed away by some worthless white man." Mary Forbes firmly believed that a white person had assisted her bondservant to escape. The enslaved black, the

owner claimed, had been "decoyed off by someone."⁴²

On rare occasions an owner might acknowledge or be forced to acknowledge his error in crediting whites for the escape of slaves. W. H. G. Saunders, as mentioned, had thought his slaves were stolen before he found out otherwise. His public and likely embarrassing confrontation with the truth came courtesy of an article that appeared in the local newspaper about a month following the slaves' departure. It stated, "We understand that two of the missing negroes belonging to Mr. W. H. Saunders of this county, supposed to have been stolen have been recovered." The report continued, "[They had] concealed themselves on Fleming's Island."⁴³

Enslaved blacks sometimes stole, enticed, or aided their brethren to escape, and whites were not shy in accusing them of the crime. Jefferson County owner W. C. Smith offers a case in point. In 1839 he advertised the capture of George who had been "charged [in charge] of his master's affairs [and was] rather . . . intelligent, and could read well and most probably write." What whites called slave stealing by other slaves usually boiled down, though, to bondservants assisting family members or kinfolk. W. C. Smith verified that fact by

suggesting that George had stolen his wife Lettus, their four children, and a grandchild. Jenny's owner claimed that she had been "seduced away by a stout negro man." Martha Macon advertised that Dilsey disappeared from her estate with the assistance of another slave. "[The runaway may be] harbored," the slave holder noted, "by a man by the name of Power." Another slave holder believed that Jim had "decoyed off his wife."⁴⁴

Although some whites perceived matters differently, free blacks--who never made up a large portion of Florida's population--rarely harbored or assisted their downtrodden brothers and sisters to escape servitude. Several examples illustrate the white perception. When Sylvia escaped from her Leon County plantation home, the owner noted that she had often been "in the city of evenings among the free negroes." Similarly, Ben's owner implied that blacks, free or enslaved, were harboring his bondservant in "several places in St. Augustine."⁴⁵

An exception to this general rule should be noted. Sometimes, free blacks living outside of Florida but working on board some vessel calling at a port, occasionally would assist slaves to make their escape. Apalachicola residents certainly knew

this to be the case. They grew very concerned about the influence free blacks, especially sailors, had on their slave population. In 1849, the whites acted. To stem the problem, they restricted free black sailors from "coming ashore in Apalachicola." Other Floridians also held legitimate concerns about the activities of these men. One report noted of an incident, "Two Leon County slaves were discovered among the cotton on board the brig Ocilla bound for New York." After their discovery, the bondservants confessed that "Ambrose Taylor, a free man of color, acting as a cook and steward" had secured them on board. For his crime, Taylor had "to spend his summer" in jail. Other consequences of his actions are not known.⁴⁶

Also on the subject of free blacks, some escaped slaves represented themselves as free by claiming that they had been liberated by their former owners. Others who could read and write probably composed documentation for themselves. The owner of Jack suggested that the bondsman had forged freedom papers and would present himself as a free man. It remains unclear whether Jack in fact had written his own freedom papers. It is known that the owner never caught him. According to^a separate

newspaper account, William Jones, John Johnson and Christopher Chambers "claim[ed] to be free and will endeavor to pass as such." These fugitives subsequently were arrested for not producing free papers.⁴⁷

Where the aforementioned slaves could not present free papers, others proved luckier. One master believed that a "stout Negro man [had] provided no doubt [his female slave] with forged passes." Jerry Smallwood passed himself off as a free black in the peninsula for three years. It seems that Robert James's runaway slave Sam did the same thing. According to the owner, Sam, who presented himself as a "bricklayer by trade," seemingly had "obtained free papers." Nonetheless, with the exception of the Second Seminole War period and in a few other circumstances, not many fugitives, with or without manumission papers, succeeded at living as free blacks.⁴⁸

One of those exceptions involved light skinned blacks who tried to "pass" for whites in their escape to freedom. John Butler claimed that his fair skinned slave would present himself as free. Describing his runaway as a "yellowish" mulatto, the owner also noted that the fugitive would try

"passing as a white man." Thomas Ledwith claimed that his slave Ned or Edward Dixon, a "bright quadroon," would attempt to "pass for a white man" because of his straight hair. According James Smith, his light complexioned fugitive--whose mother was a mulatto and father a white man--likewise would attempt to "pass for a freeman."⁴⁹

As noted earlier foreign countries such as England and Spain did not play a pivotal role in assisting runaways in Florida from 1830 to 1865. They did aid runaways, however, shortly after the United States came in possession of Florida in 1821. Fearing that their old allies ultimately would be hunted down by slave catchers, they allow hundreds of runaways to board their vessels. The Spanish also assisted fugitives with escapes to Havana, Cuba. British wrecking vessels picked up other fugitives in small boats and safely delivered them to New Providence Island in the Bahamas. The Spanish and the British publicly denounced slavery, but did little else to assist runaways in the peninsula after 1823.⁵⁰

Many slaves left the plantations without permission. Not exactly considered runaways, these

slaves wanted a reprieve from work, a chance to visit loved ones, or an opportunity to taste freedom, if not but for a few days. This type of truancy plagued the farms and plantations of Florida. Louis Napoleon remembered that slaves were often missing from their respective plantations or farms. He claimed that they were "whipped with a 'raw hide'" when caught leaving the premises "without a permit from the master." Douglass Dorsey echoed Napoleon sentiments. He remembered that "Sometimes the young men on the plantation would slip away to visit a girl on another plantation." If they were caught away from the plantation without permission, the ex-slave recalled, "they would be lashed on the bare backs" as a penalty for this offense. Amon DeLaughter, overseer for his mother Nancy DeLaughter, caught a slave from a neighboring plantation in the Quarters.⁵¹ He whipped the bondservant and sent him home. Many Florida slaves apparently roamed the country side without permission from owners.

It appears that slave women, like men, could receive severe floggings at the hands of an overseer or other authority figure. Some took off to avoid whippings, only to receive a "genteel flogging" upon

their capture or voluntary return to the plantation or farm. Four female bondservants fled George N. Jones's plantation to avoid a flogging. When the four fugitives voluntarily returned, the overseer whipped them so severely that one of the bondservant's brother tried to kill him. Nancy DeLaughter flogged several women on her Madison County plantation for what she perceived as various infractions.⁵²

Slaves disappeared often from the farms and plantations of Florida during the antebellum period, leaving the places they lived and worked for many reasons. Some bondservants left because of abusive treatment. Others absconded when the management of the farm or plantation changed hands. Some left because they disagreed with the labor arrangement or when some agreed upon situation or condition had been breached. Bondservants left, as well, because they simply wanted to be free. A few slaves were assisted by abolitionists, other slaves, and some whites. Few free blacks took part. Besides flight by foot, bondservants used various modes of transportation in fleeing their captivity. Some stole horses and mules, while others confiscated boats or hid away in the bowels of ships. Much like

other Southerners, Floridians lived with concerns about fugitive slaves. Although few slaves in comparison to the overall slave population successfully absconded, the runaway problem still plagued Floridians during much of the period from 1821 to 1860. To many whites, it became evident that a host of footloose slaves normally were away from their residences without leave.

NOTES

Chapter Two

1. St. Augustine Florida Herald, February 10, 1830.
2. St. Augustine East Florida Herald, October 16, 1824.
3. Tallahassee Floridian, January 18, 1834.
4. Tallahassee Floridian and Advocate, September 7, 21, 1829; Tallahassee Floridian, July 22, 1837; Pensacola Gazette, April 18, May 2, 1828, April 28, 1829, June 3, 1837; Gamble Diary, April 1835 to November 12, 1836; Tallahassee Florida Sentinel, June 3, 1855. See also Jerrell H. Shofner, Jefferson County, Florida (Sentry Press, Tallahassee), 137-39.
5. Pensacola Gazette, January 16, 1830, February 1, 1840; Apalachicola Gazette, November 2, December 21, 1839; Tallahassee Floridian, May 4, 1839; Tallahassee Floridian & Journal, May 20, 1854.

6. A. R. McCall to George N. Jones, June 21, 1856, in Phillips and Glunt, Florida Plantation Records, 156-57; will of William Harris, December 20, 1827, Case Style No. 1, Leon County probate records.
7. Rawick, American Slave, Florida Volume, 17, 35, hereafter cited as FSN for Florida Slave Narratives.
8. See in Book C, William E. Kilcrease will, May 26, 1860, 164-71; see also William E. Kilcrease will, date, case style no. 1005, and John W. Malone file, miscellaneous papers and inventory, 1845-1849, Gadsden County probate records; Tallahassee Florida Watchman, May 5, 1838; Tallahassee Floridian & Journal, September 7, 1850.
9. Apalachicola Gazette, April 20, 1839; Pensacola Gazette, August 2, 1841; H. G. Wright to Colonel F. G. Totten, July 21, 1847, Monroe County Public Library, Key West, Florida.
10. Apalachicola Commercial Advertiser, March 11, 1844.
11. Pensacola Gazette, May 18, 1829, May 1, 1830, July 25, 1840; Tallahassee Floridian, August 26, September 2, 1837, July 7, November 3, 1838, September 12, 1840; Apalachicola Commercial Advertiser, January 1, March 11, October 19, 1844; Jacksonville News, October 13, 1858; Fernandina

Florida News, March 10, May 5, August 11, 15,
December 16, 1858; Octavia Stephens to Winston
Stephens, November 6, 1863, in Blakey, Lainhart, and
Stephens, Rose Cottage Chronicles, 281-83.

12. Pensacola Gazette, December 19, 1829, June 9,
1838; Quincy Sentinel, September 18, 1840;
Tallahassee Floridian, August 2, 1839, January 15,
1840. The slave trading firm of McClintock and
Hayes also operated in the Middle Florida region;
see, for example, Tallahassee Florida Watchman,
April 21, 28, 1838.

13. John Evans to George Noble Jones, February 9,
1848, October 18, 1854, in Phillips and Glunt,
Florida Plantation Records, 57, 111; White, Before
Freedom Came, 106-107.

14. John Evans to George Noble Jones, October 18,
1854, September 9, 1854, in Phillips and Glunt,
Florida Plantation Records, 98, 108-109.

15. FSN, 243-46, 259, 337.

16. Ibid., 253-54.

17. Ibid., 166-67.

18. John Evans to George Noble Jones, February 9,
1848, October 23, 1856, in Phillips and Glunt,
Florida Plantation Records, 57, 169.

19. See, for example, "Slave Rentals to the Military: Pensacola and the Gulf Coast," Civil War History 23 (June 1977): 101-13; idem, Antebellum Pensacola and the Military Presence, 3 vols. (Pensacola: Pensacola News-Journal, 1974), I, 66; St. Augustine Florida Gazette, December 10, 1821.
20. Devoted Husband to My Dearest Wife, January 3, 1855, Alexander Stewart Webb Papers, Yale University Library, New Haven, Conn.
21. St. Augustine News, April 3, 1839, September 17, 1842, March 18, June 3, 1843; Tallahassee Star of Florida, September 9, 1843; Tallahassee Floridian & Journal, January 22, 29, 1851, December 22, 29, 1853.
22. Tallahassee Floridan & Journal, April 12, 1851, July 31, 1852, June 12, 1853.
23. Tallahassee Weekly Floridian, April 20, 1839; Tallahassee Floridian, May 1, July 3, 1841.
24. St. Augustine East Florida Herald, March 1, 1823; Pensacola Gazette, January 18, 1828, July 17, 1830, April 15, May 6, 1837; Tallahassee Floridian, February 9, 1839, July 3, 1841; Tallahassee Floridian & Journal, November 6, 1850, May 6, 1852; Jacksonville St. Johns News, April 12, 1840.

25. Pensacola Gazette, July 7, 1829, June 9, 20, 1838; St. Augustine Florida Herald, September 10, 1835; Tallahassee Weekly Floridian, September 2, 1848; Tallahassee Star of Florida, September 1, 1843; Jacksonville Courier, February 4, 1835; St. Augustine News, July 29, August 12, 1843; St. Augustine Florida Herald and Southern Democrat, July 11, 1843; Tallahassee Floridian and Advocate, July 12, 1844.

26. Key West Enquirer, June 8, 1839; Tallahassee Floridian, May 16, June 15, 1839; Tampa Florida Peninsular, September 18, 1858; Tallahassee Star of Florida, September 1, 1843; Marianna Star of Florida, June 28, 1844; Jacksonville Courier, February 4, 1835, February 11, 1836; St. Augustine Florida Herald, September 10, 1835; Pensacola Gazette, August 18, 1837.

27. St. Augustine Florida Gazette, September 15, 1821; St. Augustine Florida Herald and Southern Democrat, May 8, 15, 1840; Jacksonville Florida News, July 16, 1847, May 19, 1855; Tallahassee Floridian & Journal, July 7, 1849; Tallahassee Floridian, November 11, 1845.

28. Jacksonville Courier, December 10, 1835.

29. See Donorena Harris, "Abolitionist Sentiment in Florida, 1821-1860" (master's thesis, Florida State University, 1989), 14; Apalachicola Commercial Advertiser, September 30, 1844; Tallahassee Floridian, August 8, 1835; St. Joseph Times, April 7, 1840; Ray Granade, "Slave Unrest in Florida," Florida Historical Quarterly 55 (July 1976): 18-36; Charlton W. Tebeau, A History of Florida (Miami: University of Miami Press, 1971), 181.

30. Tallahassee Floridian, April 4, 1840; Jacksonville News, August 8, 1851; Jacksonville Courier, October 8, 1835; Tallahassee Weekly Floridian, September 5, 1835; Fernandina Florida News, June 23, 1858. On a few occasions, Middle Florida whites expressed concern over the influence of abolitionists in the region. See D. N. Moxley to George Noble Jones, October 21, 1854, pp. 113-14, in Phillips and Glunt, Florida Plantation Records.

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November 8, 1838; Tallahassee Floridian, May 9, 1840.

32. St. Augustine Herald and Southern Democrat, December 17, 1844; Jonathan Walker, Trial and Imprisonment of Jonathan Walker (Gainesville, University Press of Florida, 1974), 8-14, 32-45, 72-73, 108-110; Pensacola Gazette, June 29, 1844, February 8, 1845; St. Augustine News, July 26-29, 1844; Boston Liberator, December 6, 1844; Jacksonville Courier, August 3, October 8, 1835; Denham, "A Rogue's Paradise," 97.

33. Walker, Trial and Imprisonment, 82-85; Cincinnati Philanthropist, cited in the Boston Liberator, March 28, 1845, 50; Jacksonville Courier, September 17, October 8, December 10, 1835; Pensacola Gazette, February 8, 1845.

34. Tallahassee Floridian & Journal, November 20, 1858.

35. FSN, 337; Pensacola Gazette, May 20, 1837; St. Augustine Florida Herald, March 17, 1846, August 5, 1859; Tallahassee Florida Sentinel, May 5, 1839; Tallahassee Florida Herald, October 28, 1829, October 15, 28, 1858; Jacksonville Florida Republican, July 4, November 14, 1850.

36. Tallahassee Floridian, December 20, 1840, November 13, 1847; Jacksonville News, January 23, 1846.
37. Jacksonville Florida Republican, April 16, November 26, December 3, 1856; Rucker, "Blackwater and Yellow Pine," 592.
38. 1843 petition to the United States government by the St. Augustine city council to protect northeast Florida from "slave smuggling and pirate activities," St. Augustine Historical Society Library, St. Augustine, Florida.
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40. Walker, Trial and Imprisonment; Tallahassee Florida Sentinel, November 11, 1845; Brian Rucker, "Blackwater and Yellow Pine: The Development of Santa Rosa County, 1821-1865," 2 vols. (Ph.D. diss., Florida State University, 1990), 592; Jefferson County circuit court records, case files, October 23, 1850, State vs. Redding Evans, Order Book A, 215; FSN, 337; Jacksonville Courier, August 3, 20, September 2, 13, 1835; Harris, "Abolitionist Sentiment in Florida," 1-16; Denham, "Rouge's Paradise, 97.

41. St. Augustine Florida Herald, June 16, 1832, June 23, July 7, 14, 1838.
42. Tallahassee Floridian, July 5, 1834; Pensacola Gazette, September 22, 1838; Tallahassee Floridian and Journal, August 20, 1853, November 4, 1854; Jacksonville Florida News, October 14, 28, November 4, 1854; Jacksonville Standard, May 31, 1860; Tampa Florida Peninsular, October 6, 1860.
43. Jacksonville Florida News, October 12, 14, 28, November 4, 1854.
44. Pensacola Floridian, March 23, 1822; Tallahassee Floridian, May 11, 1833, June 1, 1839; Jacksonville Courier, January 14, 1836; Key West Gazette, April 8, 1840; Tallahassee Star of Florida, May 21, 1840; Tampa Herald, October 25, 1854.
45. Pensacola Gazette, August 12, 1837; Tallahassee Floridian and Journal, October 27, 1849, May 10, 1851; St. Augustine Florida Herald, June 16, 1832; Gainesville Cotton States, February 9, 1861.
46. Apalachicola Commercial Advertiser, January 4, 25, 1849; Tallahassee Floridian and Journal, July 7, 1849.
47. Pensacola Gazette, August 11, 1829; Key West Enquirer, January 24, February 7, April 11, 1835.

48. Tallahassee Floridian and Advocate, July 12, 1834; Apalachicola Apalachicolan, December 26, 1840; Pensacola Floridian, March 23, 1822; Pensacola Gazette, August 17, 1822.

49. Apalachicola Gazette, June 3, August 19, September 9, 1837; St. Augustine Floridan Herald and Southern Democrat, July 9, 16, 30, August 6, 13, 20, September 2, 10, 17, 24, October 1, 1841; Jacksonville Florida News, May 19, July 7, October 13, 1855; Jacksonville Weekly Republican, March 18, 1855.

50. Clarence E. Carter, ed., The Territorial Papers of the United States, 28 vols. (Washington, 1856), XXII, 745, 763; Harris, Abolitionist Sentiment in Florida, 39; Canter Brown, Jr., "The 'Sarrazota, or Runaway Negro Plantations': Tampa Bay's First Black Community, 1812-1821," Tampa Bay History 12 (fall/winter 1990), 14-16.

51. FSN, 97, 244; Amon DeLaughter journal, 30.

52. D. N. Moxley to George Noble Jones, October 8, 1854, John Evans to George Noble Jones, October 18, 1854, in Phillips and Glunt, Florida Plantation Records, 106-107, 110-111.

CHAPTER THREE

Destinations of Runaways

"Sylvia has been 'lurking around Tallahassee' "

The question of where slaves fled to has occupied historians for generations. Traditionally, the literature has pointed to slaves absconding northward. John Hope Franklin and Loren Schweninger recently have revisited the issue and argued, mostly in line with previous scholarship, that the majority of slaves who fled their respective states sought refuge in the northern or mid-western regions of the United States. Florida's situation, however, offers a different view. Instead of heading primarily to northern states, many nineteenth century Florida runaways traveled to other states in the Old South or to the West Indies, particularly the Bahama Islands. On the other hand, the majority of fleeing slaves remained in the state.¹

An explanation of context will help set the

stage for an understanding of Florida's runaway experience. Frontier Florida differed from the more established southern states to its north. The second largest state east of the Mississippi River (before Virginia's division during the Civil War), it possessed vast tracts of unpopulated or sparsely populated territory. If fugitives succeeded at fleeing their owners, havens almost without limitation awaited them in the Panhandle and, especially, in the peninsula. Slaves could run in any number of directions and remain undetected for months and, in some cases, for years.²

Just how many slaves ran away for a day, a few days, a week, a month, or years remains difficult to determine with any degree of certainty. By no means all fugitives appeared in newspaper runaway notices because some owners apparently did not want to incur the extra expense of advertising their disappearance or else desired to avoid the embarrassment such an advertisement might cause them. Surviving journals and other private correspondence of masters makes this fact clear.³

Other reasons may also help to explain the reluctance of owners to advertise runaways. Some almost certainly took the same position as did

planter Edward Bradford. While slave holders such as Bradford did not necessarily know where runaways were headed, he did not believe that his temporary fugitives would go far. Accordingly, the planter's daughter Affie fled the plantation for places unknown so often that her departure did not greatly alarm her father. Bradford never advertised for her capture since most people on the estate knew she had gone somewhere in the nearby woods and would return after a brief sojourn.⁴

Many runaways, as may or may not have been the case with Affie, left their residences with no particular destination in mind. They often desired merely to get away from the farm or plantation for a brief time. Notices referred to them as "lurking" around the vicinity in which they lived. As Franklin and Schweninger aptly noted, "The most common form of absconding was not actually running away at all, but what might be termed 'truancy,' 'absenteeism,' and in some cases, 'lying out.'" Thus, Florida's absentee bondservants followed a pattern seen elsewhere when they "lurked" around or simply "laid out" before returning to the places where they lived and worked.⁵

If truants such as Affie were "lying out," they

often did so very near the places where they lived and worked. At least, many slave owners thought this to be the case. One Leon County planter, reflecting a common belief, remained convinced that his fugitive lay close at hand. He noted that George "is about the Quarters and in the vicinity of Tallahassee." Another planter in the same county thought that Elias had not gone far. According to the planter's published notice, "[Elias] is supposed to be lurking alternately between this neighborhood and that of Samuel Parkhill's [plantation]." T. F. Ash also postulated that his two fugitives were only a few miles from his farm in Jefferson County. "It is supposed," he proclaimed, "they are in the neighborhood of Col. Bellamy's [plantation in] Jefferson County, as they have been seen there recently." Gadsden County's W. W. Croom thought that he knew the whereabouts of Green or Gilbert. "He is known to be lurking about the neighborhood of Quincy, at Mr. McBride's plantation," the owner confidently asserted.⁶

Some bondservants "lurked" close around home plantations and farms for long periods of time. John, a slave owned by Judge O'Neill of Fernandina, did not venture far from the estate. Amazingly,

though, he stayed out for almost two years by concealing himself in the nearby woods. Sylvia laid out near her master's plantation for seven months before detection. According to her owner, the fugitive had been "lurking around Tallahassee" only a few miles from his Lake Jackson home. In St. Johns County, Ben stayed out for one year, although he remained close to his old place.⁷

Not infrequently, slaves who "prowled around" or "laid out" near their owners' farms and plantations did so with the help of other slaves in the quarters. One slave holder, as was true of many of his contemporaries, strongly believed that his fugitive had received assistance from parties unknown but, presumably, fellow bondsmen. When referring to his fugitive's accomplices, the owner declared, "I have trace[ed] him [Ben] out in several places in St. Augustine and I am certain he is harbored." He continued, "This notice is given that I am determined that whenever he is taken, to punish him until he informs me who has given him food and protection." Henry D. Holland of Jacksonville stated the point more bluntly. While insisting that his slave had "an air" about him, Holland speculated that the runaway had not gone far. The owner did

more than imply that the bondservant had received protection and food from the slave quarters. "The said negro has been seen frequently by other negroes on the place," he advertised, "and is no doubt prowling around the neighborhood."⁸

Special havens for runaways are known to have been familiar to many slaves who chose to remain near their friends and loved ones. It appears, for instance, that Jefferson County fugitives who did not want to leave the area had a place to which they could go. John Byrd remembered his one-time slave father saying that a shelter existed "in a big section of the bush" in Jefferson County. It contained, he added, "pots and things . . . [and] could accommodate eighteen to twenty [runaways]." Byrd also recalled his father saying that this particular "den" served as a sanctuary for "tired" or "mistreated" bondservants. According to the Tallahassee Sentinel, Jackson County and the caves near the town of Marianna similarly became havens for "runaway negroes [who made them] their hiding place[s]."⁹

Even runaways who chose not to remain in the neighborhood of their former farm or plantation might travel only so far as a nearby county within

the Middle Florida cotton belt. Thomas W. Bush's slaves Reuben and Willis disappeared from his Jackson County plantation. Some ten months later they were discovered in Leon County and incarcerated in local jail. Gabriel took off from Calhoun County and also ended up in the Leon jail. From reports he had received, one Magnolia planter firmly believed that his fugitive "may be lodged in [nearby] Tallahassee." Leon County fugitive Levenia was seen in adjacent Gadsden County. Asa Munson also of Leon County believed that Dick had taken up residence in Gadsden County as well. As Jim had escaped before, his owner claimed that "his range is from about the Arsenal [at Chattahoochee], Quincy . . . and Tallahassee, as he has been seen in that town." And, Franklin County slave holder William Smith indicated that Willowby had been seen in the adjacent towns of Chattahoochee and Quincy in Gadsden County.¹⁰

Much as was true in Middle Florida, fugitives from East Florida often sought refuge in other counties within its massive territory. Bill, a slave belonging to Joseph Higginbotham, ran from Dunn's Lake in Putnam to nearby Nassau County. Tim left his St. Johns County master of fifteen years to

live around Fort Reed in Orange County. John M. Payne considered Alick an habitual fugitive who traveled between his plantation in Marion County and the Tampa Bay area. The owner claimed his bondservant "is supposed to be in the neighborhood of Tampa, in the company with one of Mr. James Turner's boys." Edward lurked between Putnam, St. Johns, and Duval Counties or, at least, A. H. Cole thought so. Andrew also moved about freely between Duval and St. Johns Counties before his capture and incarceration in the St. Johns jail. Hannah had disappeared from Lewis M. Coxetee's Duval plantation on three previous occasions. The owner thought that he knew her run away pattern. He confidently asserted that she would try to head to nearby Newmansville in Alachua County.¹¹

All of this is not to say that runaways faced few problems if they stayed out in their home area. Quite the contrary. Over time they easily could be spotted by whites and other slaves who would report their whereabouts. Although some runaways received assistance, many did not. With inadequate food, water, shelter, and clothing, runaways confronted starvation, freezing weather, and other natural obstacles. On one occasion, for example, three

runaways from the Fernandina area were caught "skinning a Beef" for food. Two were killed. Some six months later the remaining escapee, John, paid a fatal price as well. Likely an onset of hunger drove him to slaughter another cow. A slave catcher came across him in the process and killed the runaway who already had survived two years of fugitive freedom. As John's story indicated, the likelihood that a dreadful price would be paid could grow if such a slave stayed out too long. In some instances, the owner chose to advertise for the runaway's capture dead or alive. Chattahoochee's J. S. McDonnel, for one, placed such a notice. He offered "150 dollars . . . to any one killing the three [runaways] . . . or twenty dollars each for them if delivered alive at my plantation."¹²

Slaves who returned voluntarily after even short absences also took a chance on serious punishment. Owners and their overseers complained frequently and bitterly about bondservants either leaving their estates or truants coming onto the plantations or farms without permission, and they often sought direct action to stem the tide. Madison County's DeLaughter plantation serves as an example. Overseer Amon DeLaughter, the oldest son

of owner Nancy DeLaughter, whipped Prince for riding a horse at night without permission after it became obvious that the bondservant was sneaking away to see a loved one or to participate in some other activity. Less drastically, DeLaughter also ran off several of his neighbor's slaves whom he caught in the quarters without permission.¹³

Amon DeLaughter stood as one among many when it came to beating bondservants who had vanished temporarily from their residences to visit nearby plantations and farms. Shack Thomas recalled that truants were subjected to "buck and gag" upon their return. "Sometimes the young men on the plantation would slip away to visit a girl on another plantation," Douglass Dorsey remembered. If they left the plantation without permission, he continued, they were "lashed on the bare backs." Charlotte Martin recollected that extreme forms of punishment could be imposed for such truancy. According to Martin, her eldest brother was whipped "to death."¹⁴

Somewhat to the contrary, individual masters, seeking to encourage the voluntary return of temporary runaways, declined to punish those fugitives who stayed away for only a few days.

Susan B. Eppes implied that her father usually would not whip first offenders nor did he allow anyone else to punish his slaves. St. Augustine's Mary A. Sanchez offered a ten dollar reward for the capture of George. In doing so, she noted, "If he returns of his own accord he will be forgiven." Paul, a slave of minister A. J. Scott and a hireling in Pensacola, disappeared from the job site but reportedly remained in the city. Scott did not advertise for the capture of his slave in the newspaper, although in a letter to a friend the minister claimed that he only wanted "to protect him [Paul] . . . [by placing] him in the country with a planter." Paul obviously remained unconvinced since he continued to reside in the Pensacola area but never willingly returned to his master.¹⁵

Some fugitives, on the other hand, never intended to abscond in the sense of "going away" somewhere; rather, they desired only to disappear long enough to prompt an owner or overseer to bargain upon their return. Laurence of Leon County's Pine Hill plantation absconded when he heard that he would have to take a load of cotton to St. Marks. Upon his return, the owner asked Laurence what he had to say for himself. According

to his daughter, the slave said that he had run away to avoid going to St. Marks. The master apparently restrained himself thereafter from sending the bondservant to the small terminus and port town. Although it remains unclear if Laurence objected to driving cotton or going to St. Marks, it is obvious that he made his point by running away.¹⁶

While most slaves "laid out" or "lurked" around places close to their homes or in nearby counties, some tried to get far away from their masters while remaining in the state. The Seminole nation became an important destination for many of them. Blacks and Seminoles had established relationships and alliances dating back to the eighteenth century when the Indians first established viable communities in the peninsula. Both races shared a desire to find refuges in its remote areas. As a result, hundreds, if not thousands, of black runaways made their way over time to the Seminole lands in the central and southern peninsula.¹⁷

The existence of such peninsular havens for runaways infuriated southern planters and politicians. Repeatedly, they tried to thwart fugitive travel to the Indian territory. In 1816 United States troops destroyed one concentration of

blacks called the Negro Fort, which was located on the Apalachicola River a few dozen miles south of the colonial boundary. British agents had rewarded their War of 1812-era free black and runaway slave allies by handing over to them the keys to the well-planned fortification following the ill-fated British attempt to capture New Orleans in 1815. Many white settlers of newly opened lands in Georgia had viewed this fort as a magnet that would attract other runaways to freedom in the Spanish colony. Over 200 black men, women, and children died within the post as a mortar round exploded its gunpowder supply.¹⁸

Negro Fort survivors joined other free blacks and runaways (or "maroons," as they sometimes were called) in the peninsula. While some fugitives lived with Seminoles, most generally settled in their own places near particular groups of Seminoles to which they were allied. Others, seeking a location both protected and remote, ventured close to Tampa Bay. Their colony, located on the Manatee River at present-day Bradenton, was known to nearby Cuban fishermen as Angola. One party of explorers referred to it as the "Sarrazota, or Runaway Negro Plantations." Among others who learned of it was

General Andrew Jackson, who earlier had ordered the Negro Fort attack. As Spain prepared to transfer Florida to the United States in 1821, Jackson as provisional governor-designate saw Angola's destruction as a first step in plans to rid the peninsula of runaways. Denied official authority, he apparently dispatched his Lower Creek Indian allies to do the work for him. In a bloody raid in late May or early June they obliterated the sanctuary. This occurrence, tragic as it was, served to frustrate Jackson's ultimate purpose by bonding Indians and blacks more closely together, an outcome that soon would result in a second and more deadly Seminole war.¹⁹

Jackson's move on Angola slowed, but did not stop, the movement of runaways into the peninsula, and from 1821 to 1842 runaway slaves continued to reach Seminole lands. New American settlers felt that they had to break the back of the longstanding alliance between runaways and Seminoles if they were to build Florida's economy based upon slave labor. One newspaper reflected the sentiments of most whites. It summed up the matter by stating, "If [the Indians are] located in Florida, all the runaway slaves will find refuge and protection with

them."²⁰

Indeed, several new villages in around the remote areas of central and southwest Florida became sanctuaries of freedom for many fugitives. Peliklakaha ranked as the most popular for a time and probably constituted the largest such settlement during the late 1820s. Other destinations for Florida runaways included places known as Suwannee Old Town, King Heijah's Town or Payne's Negro Settlement, Buckra Woman's Town, and Mulatto Girl's Town. Two other colonies also welcomed Florida runaways. Located near the headwaters of the Peace River in today's Polk County, they were called Minatti and Tobasa (or Wahoo).²¹

As will be seen in a subsequent chapter, the alliance between runaways and Seminoles, as well as the viability of peninsular Florida as a refuge, would be tested by the United States military in the late 1830s and early 1840s. Nonetheless, runaways would continue to rank the Indian lands as a destination and haven through the 1850s. According to one newspaper report, three runaways from the St. Augustine area were heading to the furthest extremes of the peninsula late in that decade to join the Indians. Some fugitives may even have clung to

south Florida homes into the 1870s and 1880s.²²

For those intrastate runaways who chose not to flee to Seminole lands, refuge in coastal ports and peninsular communities offered welcome opportunities. The largest towns in the state by 1860 were Jacksonville, Key West, Pensacola, and St. Augustine. Accordingly, they became favored destinations for runaways. Why so? Many fugitives probably believed that they could remain largely undetected and free if they mixed with both the slave and free black populations roaming freely about in these busy places. Others likely felt that they could hide away on ships sailing to northern states or foreign nations.²³

Jacksonville became a favorite stop for Florida fugitives for these and additional reasons. It contained a large black population, laboring jobs were plentiful in and near the growing town, and, of course, its thriving port offered a variety of possibilities for escape. One slave holder believed that his seven runaways had found haven there. He noted that they had disappeared "very mysteriously" and that they had "a large connection in Jacksonville." The owner offered that he felt "assured they have made for that place where they

may be harbored for any length of time, or they may have been secreted on board some outward bound vessel." Two other fugitives, having made their way to the town's docks, were found hidden away on a ship. Isaac disappeared from Jacksonville but within its limits. His owner believed that he would try to make it to "the sea . . . [and will] attempt to ship as a freeman."²⁴

Even more than Jacksonville, St. Augustine became a destination for those runaways who wanted to escape further down the peninsula, while the town also enjoyed legacies of Spanish traditions that resulted in the relatively free movement of slaves there. To give an example of the town's allure, Sandy's experience may be helpful. When a slave catcher apprehended the runaway in Leon County, he soon broke out of jail. The sheriff thereupon offered the opinion that "he will probably make the best of his way for St. Augustine." In another instance, St. Augustine authorities boarded the vessel William Gaston in 1840. There, they found Jim. The Alachua County fugitive, they reported, had been "concealed among the cargo." City fathers, from the territorial period's beginning to the 1860s, saw the runaway situation as constituting a

constant problem but found themselves unable to change the town's patterns.²⁵

Pensacolans lived amid strong Spanish traditions and heritage, as well. This permitted the residence there of a noticeable free black community until around 1857, plus a relatively tolerant racial atmosphere. West and Middle Florida escapees especially found its climate congenial. When Sam vanished in 1822, his owner, Robert James, speculated that he would be making his way there first. Henry absconded from John Williamson of Tallahassee with Pensacola as his destination. Unfortunately for the fugitive, a welcoming party picked him upon reaching the city. James and Aaron had run off together. Authorities captured James who then told them that Aaron "intends going to Pensacola."²⁶

It may seem surprising then that more slaves ran away from Pensacola than to the town during much of the antebellum period. Over 90 percent of fugitive advertisements carried by the Pensacola Gazette indicated that bondsmen had disappeared from the city. Most of the escapees--the total numbers were small as the town also was small--fled to different parts of Alabama, with a few heading to

Georgia. A partial explanation may lay in the fact that many bondservants were brought from Alabama to Pensacola as hirelings and probably were trying to return to their former homes to be with kinfolk and friends. Numbers of Alabama fugitives were caught and jailed in Pensacola which might further suggest a strong kinship network between the two places.²⁷

Some fugitives planned to reach Key West in their escape to freedom. William Alsop, for one, believed that his slave Wade would "try to get to Key West." To survive there, the runaways often tried hiring themselves out in the city--a common practice--but without producing either freedom papers or other credentials. On numerous occasions this practice proved a serious mistake. For instance, fugitives William Jones, John Johnson, and Christopher Chambers arrived in Key West claiming they were free. The three truants subsequently were arrested and placed in jail when they could not produce free papers.²⁸

Although a smaller place than the four Florida towns previously mentioned, St. Marks served as a terminus for Middle Florida slave holders who shipped their cotton to the North and, as a result, became a destination within the Middle Florida

region for slaves who wanted to travel northward. The slave trading firm of Roman and Muse hypothesized, for example, that Albert had fled to St. Marks with the intention of boarding a ship traveling north. According to another slave holder, his bondsman had last been "seen at St. Marks."²⁹

The small port town of Apalachicola played a role, as well, as a destination for Florida runaways. R. K. West believed as much. His published notice specified that Cain might be there since he "is well known at Apalachicola" and previously had ridden on Apalachicola River steamboats. Unfortunately for him, Tallahassee slave Eaton Thompson did not meet with much success in the town. In 1838 he was captured there as a runaway and incarcerated. Another escapee who reached Apalachicola met a worse fate than did Thompson. Not only was he captured and jailed, but the sheriff sold the bondservant when no owner came forth to claim him.³⁰

For those who desired to leave Florida, few attempted to make their way to the North and Midwest, which Franklin and Schweninger have posited to be a more-typical destination. Albert's owner did believe such to be the case with his fugitive

bondsman. He insisted that Albert would make another attempt to escape to the "North by hiding away on a ship at St. Marks." Dick's master postulated that the fugitive possibly had procured papers to enable him to get to a "free state." One fugitive obviously made his way to Dayton, Ohio. Apparently under the fugitive slave law of 1850, this runaway became the concern of abolitionists in Ohio who sought to fight his extradition to Florida.³¹

Given some such exceptions, the majority of fugitives who left Florida never journeyed any farther north than Georgia, South Carolina, and North Carolina. As the state closest to most enslaved Floridians, Georgia understandably appeared to be the destination for the larger number of those who fled. Authorities caught Primus, an habitual runaway from St. Johns County in Savannah. Primus disappeared a second time three years later, again with a destination of Savannah. Sold in Savannah to his new Leon County master Augustus H. Lanier, Adam departed a few months later also for Savannah. George followed the same path. Isaac and Jack vanished from D. A. Gillard's plantation seemingly headed for Columbus. Slave preacher Jupiter

allegedly left the Jacksonville area for Glynn County. Although stout and considered clumsy at walking, Harrison made his way, in owner Henry Bond's estimation, to Bacon County.³²

Thomasville attracted more fugitives than any other single place in Georgia--at least as a stopover point--because of its proximity to the Florida boundary line and the Middle Florida plantation belt. Leon County fugitive Tom fled across the Florida line to Thomasville in 1835. The town became the destination for another Tom, a mulatto, some three years later. William from Leon County disappeared from his master but reappeared in the Thomasville jail. Henry Mash believed that Prince would head to the neighborhood of Thomasville, the place of his birth. Augustine H. Lanier figured that George would try to make it to Thomasville before continuing his journey.³³

A sizeable portion of the runaways fled to South Carolina. Since a large percentage of Florida slaves came from South Carolina's Low Country during the 1840s and 1850s, they sought to return to the Palmetto State. Cornelius Beasely of St. Augustine assumed that his bondservant Harrison, "a bright mulatto . . . 25 years old," would make his way back

there. Judge Thomas Randall purchased slaves from the same state. Rebecca was one. When she absconded, Randall claimed that she would try to return to her native place. Ned's master advertised that the fugitive would "probably . . . make for Columbia, S.C."³⁴

More than a few daring fugitives sought to reach North Carolina. After George disappeared, his owner believed that he would re-emerge somewhere in that state. Chester, a mulatto, had been sold three times. He fled his third master in Tallahassee who speculated that the fugitive would return to his last know home in Hanson County. C. Peacock postulated that Edmund, who had been purchased in Montgomery County, also had left for his former home. A. K. West speculated that George and William will try to "make for North Carolina." Jefferson County's D. A. Gaillard specified that Nelson had been raised in North Carolina and "May be trying to get back there."³⁵

Few Florida fugitives fled to Virginia, Alabama, or Tennessee, but that does not mean that individuals did not occasionally make the effort. Considered a "daring artful villain," Dick was believed by owner John Taylor to be making his way

to Virginia "where he was raised." Joshua Croom guessed that Hector had left his new home in Jefferson County for his old one in Muscle Shoals, Alabama. William and Maria would try to make their way back to their "original home of Tennessee," their master thought. Henry has "relations in Richmond," Samuel Richardson claimed, "and to which place no doubt he will attempt to make his way."³⁶

Very few fugitives departed for Mississippi or Louisiana. As to the former, many of the surviving accounts suggest that runaways were apprehended in Florida after fleeing from Mississippi rather than that they were caught running toward the state. Those runaways who headed to Louisiana usually did so in hopes of reaching the Crescent City. After Ben Owens, a tall mulatto, left Pensacola, for instance, Celestino Gazales believed that he had gone "towards New Orleans." Jacksonville's Mary J. Forbes conjectured that her slave named Mary would make her way to the same place. Delphine Jordon assumed that Oscar would head there, the city where he had been purchased. Like Jordon, G. W. Hutchins of East Florida surmised that Dick, his wife Margaret, and son Charles had set their sights ultimately on New Orleans.³⁷

What with Florida's coastal exposure to the Gulf of Mexico and the Bahama Islands, the Caribbean region received a reasonable amount of attention from its runaways. The attraction proved especially strong during and after the 1830s, when slavery became illegal in the British Empire. Many times, Key West and its neighboring keys served as the departure point, particularly to Caribbean destinations. In one incident that occurred in July 1847, seven bondservants of D. M. Whitehead (Jerry, Jack, John, George, Ephraim, Howard, and Robert) left the Dry Tortugas for Key West. Along the way they stole a boat to continue their journey toward an only vaguely understood Caribbean island and began sailing toward it. Sadly, the fugitives make it only as far as Indian Key before being captured.³⁸

The Bahamas offered places of choice for numerous runaways, and available evidence suggests that those who wanted to reach the islands usually did so in groups. A party of fugitives made a spectacular escape there from St. Augustine in 1843. "The seven negroes who ran away from this city some time since, and made their way south in a pilot boat, have been committing murder and plundering the

settlers on the coast," reported the St. Augustine News. "Should these negroes succeed in reaching the Bahama Islands," the account continued, "they should be immediately demanded by our Government." As it turned out, the fugitives made it successfully to the islands and to freedom. Back in Florida, citizens of St. Johns and Mosquito counties raged when the "British said there was insufficient evidence against the runaways, so they did not return the 7 or 9 [fugitives]." ³⁹

Several years later another group of fugitives consisting of over one dozen Key West bondservants made their remarkable escape to Nassau. A published account noted:

The slaves made their escape in a boat owned by the tender of the keeper of the Sand Key Light House which had been supplied with provisions the previous day from that establishment. The slaves had [probably] steered right over to Nassau as the wind was fair . . . or it [was] feared that they may [have been] picked up by some vessel bound north as they were the last lot that made their escape from here.

These twelve individuals met with the same success as had the previous seven even though American authorities unsuccessfully sought to have them extradited from the British controlled island.⁴⁰

The ability to make a successful getaway involved a mixture of luck, persistence, and cunning. The owner's insights could make a difference, as well. While some masters confidently believed that they comprehended the locations and intentions of their fugitives, others possessed little or no idea of the direction in which a runaway might travel. This could benefit a runaway enormously. Thus, Pompey's chances of escape from Gadsden County rose greatly when his owner was compelled to acknowledge his ignorance of the slave's whereabouts. Moses's master advertised his disappearance but, again to the slave's advantage, held no opinion concerning his destination.⁴¹

Slave holders who took the time to get to know their bondsmen understood that their runaways could display remarkable cunning and intelligence in masking their intentions and the direction of their escape. By the same token, some fugitives carefully and craftily attempted to confuse their owners as to their whereabouts. Fugitive Tom from Leon County

meant to confuse his master and a local jailor concerning his true identity. He escaped from his owner's plantation only to be captured and incarcerated in Thomasville, Georgia. At the time, he asserted that he had belonged to a Mr. Roach. Breaking out of jail, the bondservant made his way to Alligator Point on the Gulf of Mexico below Tallahassee only to be captured again. According to a newspaper account, he thereupon argued that he belonged to "Colonel [Achille] Murat [of Leon County]." ⁴²

Runaways' attempts to deceive their owners and anyone else who tried to apprehend them could rank as ingenious. Lee had no intention of giving his owner an indication of where he might be heading and succeeded well. John Rhodes believed that the bondservant would try to make his escape to Georgia but really had no idea exactly where. "I suppose he will endeavor to make his way to Mobile, Columbus, Griffin, or Atlanta," he noted. Augustus H. Lanier warned that his fugitive George, much as had been true of Tom in the illustration above, might try to deceive slave catchers by saying that "he belongs to some one else, as he has already played this game once." Obviously John Butler, a runaway from Duval

County also previously had played the game of deception. His owner asserted that the fugitive was "fond of changing his name and passing for a white man."⁴³

One final factor that played a key role in escapes, especially those at long distance, related to literacy. Florida's laws, like those throughout the South, forbade slaves learning to read and write. Individuals who were caught teaching bondservants were to be punished to the full extent of the law. Generally, this did not happen. A significant percentage of slaves learned at least the rudiments of reading and writing. For instance, slave holders in Middle Florida such John Parkhill and Achille Murat taught certain bondservants basic skills, which were indispensable when a slave was assigned to conduct plantation business or work in business establishments.⁴⁴

Those same skills would prove indispensable or, at the very least, extremely helpful to runaways in their escapes to freedom. The fact was that a literate or skilled bondservant had a better chance of reaching his destination. Some, for instance, wrote passes for themselves and others that allowed movement with relative ease. When Madison County's

J. D. Reid advertised for his runaway, he acknowledged the bondservant's acumen. Considered by Reid as "very intelligent," the slave holder postulated, "It is very probable that he has an instrument of writing, by which I think he will attempt to escape." Jenny's male companion probably knew how to read and write. When she absconded with him, her owner wrote that she would be provided "no doubt with forged passes." As his frustrated owner proclaimed, Dic had "procured papers to enable him to get to a free state." Wade's owner stated that he could "read and write and will probably forge passes for himself." The owner of Jerry from Duval County noted that the fugitive could read and write and might try to use a written "pass" to acquire his liberty.⁴⁵

Blacks fled to many destinations in and out of Florida during the period from 1821 to 1860. Generally speaking, most runaways in Florida did not go far. Some were "laying out" or "lurking" around plantations close to where they lived. A few fled to other southern states such as Virginia, Alabama, Mississippi, and Tennessee. More traveled to North or South Carolina. A larger number made Georgia their destination, but many never got further than

Thomasville. A few slaves even succeeded in reaching various Caribbean and Atlantic islands. Greater numbers sought refuge in the Seminole lands of the peninsula or else in Florida's few towns, especially the ports of Key West, St. Augustine, Jacksonville, and Pensacola. Here, they tried to blend in with the free black population or board vessels leaving the peninsula. The majority of Florida fugitives either were captured or returned to owners on their own accord. Based upon its overall historical development and image as a runaway slave haven, Florida presented real and profound problems for slave holders throughout the territorial and antebellum periods.

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CHAPTER FOUR

Runaways in Search of Family Members

Kinfolk, and Loved Ones

"Harrison [fled] in pursuit of his wife."

The direction that slaves traveled when running away varied far and wide, but the knowledge of where does not necessarily offer an explanation of why. The answer to that question, in good part, involved one of slavery's most-unfortunate aspects, the separation of family and kinfolk. The reality was that many bondsmen and -women headed in the direction that they thought would take them back to their loved ones. Countless men and women longed to be reunited with those whose memory they held dear, even if only for a few days, weeks, or months. Concomitantly, the fear of being sold away from family members caused constant apprehension and pain. Many times, this uneasiness alone provoked slaves to take flight. This chapter, then, will

focus on slaves who went in search of family members, kinfolk, and friends.

Owners' debts, trades, sales, and transfers to new heirs ranked among the many factors that acted to separate slave husbands from wives, parents from children, mothers from children, and fathers from sons and daughters, not to mention loving kinfolk from loving kinfolk. Deserving special note, as Ira Berlin has remarked, a great migration of white slave holding settlers from the Upper South poured into the uninhabited lands of the Lower South and Old Southwest during the 1820s and 1830. Historian Edward E. Baptist has assured us that this dynamic process repeated itself until the 1860s. Much like the experience of Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, and Texas, slave holders directed a part of this grand migration to Florida beginning shortly after it became a territory of the United States in 1821. In doing so, they often tore apart the families and kinship networks of their slaves.¹

Slave holder migration to Florida could not have helped but to strain, if not tear, slave families. Just as was the case with many other owners throughout the South during the antebellum period, masters left slave family members behind

when they established new residences in Florida. Leon County's Judge Thomas Randall, a Maryland native, was one such migrant. He experienced first hand the pressures upon slaves and the institution of slavery from involuntary separation of loved ones. Most likely in an effort to keep a bondservant from fleeing his new Florida home, Randall wisely purchased David's wife from her Maryland owner. Shortly after, the judge affectionately noted their reunion. Unfortunately, Randall's behavior probably illustrated the exception, rather than the rule. As John Hope Franklin and Loren Schweninger have noted, "The separation of families was an inherent part of the South's peculiar institution."²

Forced migration and separations apparently damaged or destroyed more than half of all slave family units in Florida during the period from 1821 to 1840. This conclusion reflects information derived from a survey of surviving probate records pertaining to the period. Simply put, many slave holding migrants left slave family members behind and felt no compunction about separating them as they became established in Florida society. Generally speaking, the slave family in Florida

began to achieve real stability only in the 1850s.³

Daniel Campbell and John Branch reflected the attitudes of many slave holders who arrived in the frontier territory. In common with many of their peers, as mentioned above, they did not shy away from the practice of separating slave family members. Upon his demise, Campbell stipulated for his son Archibald a negro woman but not her children or future increase. Campbell noted that Archibald would inherit Isabel "with the exception of her increase so far as her next two children, as well as one now at her breast." Daughters Nancy Webster and Sarah Patterson were to receive, the owner specified, Isabel's increase "so far as to extend to two children one for each and no further." John Branch bequeathed to one of his daughters "Ann & her children, with the exception of Ann's oldest," which he gave to another daughter. The separation of the slave family may have constituted somewhat less a problem for bondservants in West and East Florida than in Middle Florida because of ameliorated conditions based upon Spanish traditions. Still, in all regions it became fairly common during the period 1821 to 1850 for Florida owners to separate family members.⁴

As also was true in Virginia, the Carolinas, Georgia, Tennessee, and other slave states and territories, slave families often were broken up in Florida in order that their members could be sold or leased. The Tallahassee Sentinel, for example, regularly ran advertisements suggesting that persons could buy slaves in families or as individuals. To satisfy a debt, the Duval County sheriff sold John, a twelve year old boy, to satisfy the owner's debts. The notice carried no mention of John's parents. Another Tallahassee newspaper published an advertisement for "Negro" boys between the ages of six and ten, and/or "Negro" girls between the ages of ten and fourteen. In some cases, these adolescents were torn from families as masters sought to profit by hiring them out. Sometimes a slave trading firm would obtain a group of slaves, some in families and some not, with the simple intent of hiring them out as individuals or in family groups. One advertisement noted, "To be hired-about 40 negroes, consisting of men, women, and children."⁵

Babies and young children could be, and sometimes were, sold away from their parents. No evidence exists to suggest that Florida slave babies

were traded for horses, as one Kentucky woman reportedly did. Yet, Douglas Dorsey remembered his master selling an eight-month old baby on the Mattair plantation. The former slave recalled the master sold the child "to the highest bidder." Charlotte Martin recalled that her master profited from selling young male and female slaves. She recorded, "The huskiest babies were given the best of attention in order that they might grow into sturdy youths, for it was those who brought the highest prices at the slave markets." Numerous wills left by Florida slave holders clearly provided that babies and young children were to be given to heirs or sold to pay off debts.⁶

Given a world where their children could be snatched from them at any time, parents understandably fled farms and plantations in search of their young ones. Most of the time their efforts to locate offspring resulted in an exercise in futility. Similar to the plight of fugitives in other parts of the South, fathers and mothers fleeing to find children usually were captured within a few days and returned to the farm or plantation.⁷

Attempts to locate other loved ones competed

with attempts to find children as reasons for slave flight. With bondservants routinely being sold, hired-out, and otherwise separated, many fled from new owners in search of familiar surroundings and friends. For example, Jim, described as a "yellow Negro," had been sold from friends and loved ones at least three times. This fact probably led him to abscond from his third or fourth master. The advertisement described the slave as "a plausible villain" who had been "formerly owned by Mr. Vaughn, and then by Reuben Scott" and now by Tim Bush. Suggesting that Jim had family or friends in one particular area of Middle Florida, the most recent owner conjectured that the bondservant's range could be surmised as from "Quincy [to] Coe's River place" in Tallahassee. The owner believed he could be located among loved ones at a nearby plantation.⁸

Much like parents fleeing in search of their offspring, children fled in search of their mothers. Children who absconded stood less of a chance of finding kinfolk than older fugitives. Yet, they kept trying throughout the antebellum era. In 1851, a Jacksonville Courier notice offered a \$200 reward for the return of "two children; probably seeking freed mother." Joseph ran away from Black Creek in

Duval County for St. Augustine. At least the advertisement indicated as much since it mentioned that his "mother lives" in that town. "A small Negro girl" belonging to a Leon County man probably fled in search of her parent(s). After she had been out for about one day, the bondservant was returned to her master. Hannah previously had disappeared several times in quest of her parent. As such, Louis M. Coxetter assuredly asserted that she would head to Newnansville to reunite with her mother, "known by the name of Mary Ann Sanchez."

Sometimes slave families who had become accustomed to living in urban areas absconded when they learned that they were to be sold to a farmer or planter. Surviving records identify slaves from Key West, St. Augustine, Jacksonville, and Pensacola--Florida's four largest towns--who did so. Many of them did not want to leave mates and kinfolk. Robert James, who had recently purchased Sam for his farm, concluded that the slave would try to make it back to Pensacola or beyond. William B. Hammack of Crawford County, Georgia, discovered that Charles, whom he had purchased, soon disappeared. Hammack noted that the bondservant would try to get back to East Florida. Seemingly, this meant that

the fugitive would work his way back either to Jacksonville or St. Augustine to be among family and friends. William T. Hopkins, a transplanted Georgian who settled in Jefferson County, lost two slaves whom he had purchased in East Florida. Much like Hammack, he believed that his two fugitives would return to East Florida since they "were well known upon the St. Johns Rivers."¹⁰

On numerous occasions slaves acted, not always with success, to forestall the necessity of flight when rumors surfaced that masters were moving to new locations. Particularly, they requested that they be sold and left behind to be around loved ones. Some masters honored their bondservants' requests out of compassion or else from an understanding that the slaves might flee instead of relocating to new venues. By way of example, one slave family owned by William Croom requested that it be sold and allowed to remain in Florida instead of having to go to Mississippi. The owner obliged these bondservants by selling Manuel, his wife, and children as a group for thirty-eight hundred dollars. The family remained in Florida, and Croom quite possibly avoided a runaway problem.¹¹

No matter how far family members lived from

loved ones, some slaves still struggled to reunite. Most of the time the efforts resulted in the bondsmen and women being brought back to their owners in neck and leg irons. Still, this dire possibility did not stop the attempts, including one by a fourteen year old boy. He had been purchased by a Marion County man but quickly tried to make his way back to loved ones in South Carolina before being captured and jailed at Jacksonville. Charles, George, and Jacob fled their new master for their previous home. A. H. Cole of Orange Mill reported, "These negroes were purchased in Charleston in February last, and may be attempting to get back to Charleston or Savannah." Evidence substantiates that some slaves tried to reunite with loved ones at least as far away as North Carolina. Particularly, after Achille Murat purchased Chester from a Jefferson planter, the fugitive tried to make his way back home to Hanson County.¹²

Other examples abound of slaves escaping to return to a place they previously had lived among family and kinfolk. Jefferson County's D. A. Gaillard described his two runaways as having a "bold and impudent expression when addressed." He explained further, "They were both purchased in

Columbus, and may make an attempt to return there." Hector, twenty-two, and Simon, sixteen, were purchased from Alabama and brought to Middle Florida. According to their new owner Joshua Croom, the runaways probably were "making for" the Muscle Shoals area of Alabama. Abraham Brown, George, and William Isaacs absconded together one week after their arrival in the St. Augustine area. According to the advertisement, "These Negroes were brought from Charleston, S. C., last week, where it is expected they are now trying to make their way." Prince and Colerain did not like their new home in East Florida and fled the area for Jefferson County, Georgia to be with family and friends.¹³

Although most men traveled alone in their escape to freedom, brothers and male companions sometimes combined in flight. Brass and his brothers March and Monday left their Palatka home together. They also carried two other trusted companions Tom and Frank with them. James Riz advertised the capture of Edward and James Wanton, two quadroon brothers, who had disappeared from his Palatka farm. Brothers Tom and Dave, along with their friend Jesse, absconded in a single party. The owner believed that they were heading to North

Carolina.¹⁴

Women, as well as men, ran away to reunite with loved ones. Martha H. Macon believed that Dilsey fled to be with her mate. The owner noted of Dilsey that she "has lately been seen in the neighborhood of Shell Point." Given that fact, Macon believed that her bondservant had absconded to be with a man named Power. According to one slave advertisement, Levenia of Leon County disappeared in search of her husband who now lived over thirty miles away in Gadsden County, near the town of Quincy.¹⁵

Men certainly fled plantations and farms in search of wives. According to Cornelius Beazley of St. Augustine, "Harrison . . . a bright mulatto . . . 25 years old" fled to South Carolina "in pursuit of his wife [who is] in possession of [her new owner] Captain Bird." Three years later, the same newspaper advertised for the return of Abram who had left in search of his wife. Bill parted company with his Putnam County owner in search of his spouse whom he believed lived in Nassau County, while V. R. Dupont advised that Tim "has a wife at Arthur Gwin's at Fort Reed in Orange County and was seen since in that neighborhood." Willowby left the countryside of Gadsden County in search of his wife who lived in

Quincy. And, John--who feared that he would be shipped west by the United States Army in 1835-- absconded in order to be with his wife who lived on an East Florida plantation.¹⁶

Some slaves escaped as couples. Charles and his wife Mary, who had disappeared from Jekyll Island, Georgia, were said to be heading to "Musketo where they formerly lived." Another Charles and his companion Dorcas departed from Jacksonville. While Henry W. Maxey, their owner, did not know where they were going, he knew they had disappeared together. Edmund and his wife Rebecca absconded from a Leon County plantation shortly after being purchased from Benjamin Davis in Hamburg, South Carolina. The slaves originally had been purchased by a slave trader in Virginia and sold to Samuel Parkhill of Leon County. The new owner believed the two fugitives would try to return to their former Low Country home. June and his wife Staviea left their Leon County owner T. F. Ash. The fugitives were believed by the owner to be "in the neighborhood of Col. Bellamy's Jefferson County, as they have been seen there recently."¹⁷

Husbands and wives sometimes figured that they had a better chance of reaching their destination if

they escaped separately but as part of a coordinated plan. Typically, they would agree to rendezvous at some designated place on their journey to freedom. By way illustration, Clara disappeared first from R. H. Crowell's estate. Some three weeks later her husband Isaac absconded. The owner asserted in a frustrated tone that "from his [Isaac's] threats, made sometime back, I am apprehensive they are making their way back to North Carolina." Unlike most bondservants, Clara and Isaac may have been successful in reaching their destination since the owner never again advertised for their capture.¹⁸

Curiously, some slave holders did not or could not acknowledge that wives willingly absconded with their husbands or partners. These owners preferred that the public believe the women either were "decoyed off" or "seduced" away by these men. At least, Thomas J. Green propounded such a scenario. The owner asserted that Ime probably had "decoyed off" Martha, his wife. Much as Green, another slave holder postulated that his slave (Jenny) had been "seduced away by a stout Negro man." Such assertions, of course, did not change the fact that women possessed strong feelings for their husbands and often did not hesitate to flee with them in

search of freedom.¹⁹

Although not very common, some slaves fled in family groups. The three generational family of George, his wife Lettus, their children Adam, Beny, Liz, and Susan, plus Susan's one year old boy, fled Monticello. Dick, along with his wife Margaret and their five year old son, likewise absconded together in their search for freedom. One reason for the limited number of such flights was that bondspeople knew that traveling in family groups increased their chances of being captured. Yet, a number of families desired so strongly to remain together that they seized the opportunity to flee in a single party, discounting the strong possibility that they eventually would be caught.²⁰

More slaves ran away from East Florida in large family groups than from any other place in the peninsula. Hampton, his wife Nanny, and their five children "disappeared" from East Florida and were thought to be heading to Jacksonville. Implying that the runaways had family and friends who would receive and harbor them, the owner acknowledged, "They have a large connection [in that town]." Dick, his wife Margaret, and their five year old son absconded together, as well. They recently had been

purchased by Lloyd Hill of Marion County and were said to be "Making their way to New Orleans." At least one escaping family numbered seven members. It consisted of Davy, his sons Edmund and Henry, and his daughters Silla (with one small child), Lucy, and Lizzy. Their ages ranged from fifty-five or sixty to a two year old child.²¹

A few families managed to get away thanks to shrewd manipulation of events at the time Indian war threatened. John Dwight Sheldon's wife Jane Murray remembered, for example, the escape of a large group when Sheldon served as overseer of the Cruger and DePyster estate in East Florida. The large plantation, as Murray recalled, held many slaves. Among them were two-parent and one single-parent family units, as well as solitaires. In 1835, as the Second Seminole War erupted, most of the slaves deceived Murray and her husband into thinking that the Indians were about to attack the plantation. What Murray recorded about the details of the event are revealing:

A large number of negroes were captured .
. . [by the Indians, but] it came to light that
the negroes had been in sympathy & aided the

Indians from the first. Among the darkies I recognized a number of the Cruger & DePyster slaves. I learned from that that they had concealed many of the Indians about the plantation until the main body came up [to rescue them].

It appears that most of the men, women, and children on this East Florida plantation successfully found refuge in the swamps thanks to the Indians' assistance and their own shrewd planning.²²

Bondservants newly arrived in Florida occasionally devised schemes that also took advantage of fears of Indians in order to persuade owners to allow them to return to their original homes. At least, Mandy tried to use this particular strategy. Around 1835, she feigned running away from hostile Florida Indians in an attempt to get her owners to return her to Georgia. Years after the incident, Orange County's W. B. Watson recalled the following story concerning Mandy's plot:

Dr. [A. S.] Spear owned a mulatto girl by the name of "Mandy" who had become tired and disgusted with Florida and a deprivation of the

comforts of the "old plantation" up Georgia. One day the people were startled and alarmed with the most frightful screams down by the bay or swamp at whose edge the negroes did the washing for all hands. Five or six men quickly grabbed their guns and looked at the priming as they ran toward the swamp. They went from tree to tree and when within about seventy-five yards of the place out jumped that yellow girl, running like a scared antelope, as naked as the day she was born. As she ran she uttered the most terrorizing, blood freezing screams--"Run for your lives! Indians! Indians! run! For God's sake run," . . . Mandy immediately became the center of attraction, screaming: Oh Lawdy, oh, Lawdy! Dey like to kill me, but tank God I got away. . . . Like most liars "Mandy" overacted her part and on a close cross-examination her statement was made to appear shaky. Any where from one to one hundred Indians did the torturing, their hair kinky and their color like a rose and not at all copper colored.

The threat of a whipping soon made poor Mandy own the lie. She said she tried to

frighten the people into going back to "Gawgy."
. . . Years passed before they heard the last
of the kinky-headed, red-rose Indians.²³

Mandy may not have tricked her owners into returning to Georgia, but she got their undivided attention for a brief period. Instead of slaves running away from Indians as Mandy tried to deceive her owners into believing, their villages and towns became the destinations for hundreds, if not thousands, of Florida fugitives and their kinfolk from 1821 to 1838.

Families sometimes traveled within larger groups that included persons unrelated to them. To cite an example, a large party of fugitives, some clearly family members, made a remarkable escape from St. Augustine. According to the St. Augustine News, "The negroes, which passed up and down the Miami [River], were nine in number." Its account continued, "They were supposed to be the seven which went off from this place in the pilot boat, and the other two must have joined the party from some other quarter." After four months, Florida authorities acknowledged that the nine escapees had succeeded in reaching the Bahama Islands. They asked for the

fugitives' return, but British authorities refused to extradite them.²⁴

In the peninsula's southernmost extremity, several larger groups of fugitives used Key West as a place to help with their escape to the Caribbean or the Bahama Islands. In one such incident, over one dozen men, women, and children made their escape from the city to Nassau. Circumstances hint that one or more families were involved. The pertinent advertisement suggested that this relatively large slave group had made careful plans in their escape, taking "all of their clothing and possessions." The twelve bondservants reached their destination safely.²⁵

As Franklin and Schweninger have noted, it became a common occurrence for bondservants to flee their homes for nearby plantations and farms to be with kinfolk and friends. Given willingness by some to travel great distances, proximity obviously would have encouraged greater rates of unauthorized departure. As early as 1828, the legislative council prohibited slaves from "lurking" around places where they had no permission to visit. The law declared that "many times slaves run away, and hide, and [are] lurking in swamps, woods, and other

obscure places killing hogs and committing other injuries to the inhabitants."²⁶

As would be the case with other such stringent measures, the "lurking" statute proved mostly unenforceable. Men commonly "lurked" to be with their wives. According to M. De Fourgeres, George and John were "probably lurking in the neighborhood of Whitesville, on black Creek, Duval County . . . where they have their wives." Tom did not appreciate the forced separation from his wife after being purchased by Mrs. Sarah Knighton of Jefferson County. He disappeared from the plantation shortly after arriving to his new home. Knighton believed that he could be found "lurking around the plantation of Asa May and estate of Richard Cole, as he has a wife at the latter place."²⁷

As would be expected, bondswomen also "lurked" around plantations and farms to be with their husbands. Sophia, a woman in her early twenties who was described by her owner as "thick set, not very black" departed her home plantation, according to the master, "to be in the neighborhood of Strawberry Mills [where her husband lived]." W. Skeine believed that Sylvia had fled his plantation to be with her husband on the nearby "Treadwell place" in

Leon County. Obviously, women were disposed to "lurk," just as were men.²⁸

Regardless of gender, some fugitives suspected of "lurking" around or "lying out" did so either with friends or to be among friends. Sixteen-year-old Elias left his Jefferson County home to be among friends, and was "supposed to be lurking alternately between this neighborhood and that of Samuel Parkhill's" in Leon County. Charlotte had been traced to a certain slave community several times by his master. She probably had some attraction for a man or had friend[s] there since she usually would frequent "certain Negro quarters" not far from where she lived. Sylvia may have had kinfolk and friends in town, some few miles from her master's Lake Jackson home, since she had been "lurking around Tallahassee."²⁹

It should be noted that, because of their children, women did not enjoy quite the same opportunity as did men to "take off." Naturally, one virtually irresistible answer to the dilemma was for women to carry off their children with them. A small percentage even succeeded in making it to freedom. This seems to have been the case with two particular women fugitives. An un-named woman with

her child escaped to the Indian territory from St. Augustine. When Mr. R. Sanchez caught up with these runaways, Indians protected them and ushered them off to safe havens. It seems highly probable that they lived among the Indians for many years since their owner never sought to advertise their capture and return to St. Augustine. In another case, Venis along with her son Hannibald and daughter Georgiana, remained out for nearly four years. According to her owner John M. Pons, Venis may have had, excluding the two children she took with her, another "two or three" during her sojourn away from the plantation.³⁰

The long-distance transportation of bondservants did not open up as many opportunities for escape back to families and loved ones as might be expected. Especially, when slave traders transported their charges, they secured the slaves with shackles, chains, and irons that made a successful escape virtually impossible. Thus, although Franklin and Schweninger suggested otherwise, few slaves escaped from slave traders in route to Florida, but some made their escape shortly after being purchased.³¹

On the other hand, some bondservants did seek

to escape after the sale had been made by the slave traders to a buyer. For example, within a three month period new owners John W. Hale and Cornelius Beazley both advertised for the return of their newly acquired property purchased from the slave trading company of Patterson and Hughes of Tallahassee. Fugitives Nelson, Jenny his wife, and their son Jody and daughter Mary fled their new home in Jefferson County after being purchased from, as Beazley noted, these "well known . . . Negro traders" in Tallahassee. Jacob Stroman, like Hale, lost one slave shortly after purchasing his property from Patterson and Hughes. Robert Butler also lost his slave to elopement after purchasing him from the slave trader C. C. Williams of Tallahassee, "who brought them from Tennessee."³²

Travel through the peninsula offered special advantages to bondservants who were determined to reunite to loved ones. One owner advertised the return of his newly purchased slave. He wrote that the slave had escaped from him "while on his way in moving from Leon County to South Florida." The master believed the fugitive had returned to his old stamping grounds to be with family and friends since he had "been seen several times in Tallahassee."

Abraham Brown ran away from his new home in Duval County after living there for only a "few weeks." His Florida owner believed that he would try to make "his return to Charleston."³³

Looking at the same dynamic from a different viewpoint, slave holding settlers newly arrived in Florida--particularly to the peninsula--faced a constant threat of slaves absconding. Slave men, chafing at separation from kinfolk, took off with some small degree of regularity shortly after arriving at their new homes. William, a slave at Enterprise, fled his new master for South Carolina, as did Rebecca from Thomas Randall's Jefferson County plantation. Ned left his new owner after two weeks. "It is probable," the advertisement noted, "he will make for Columbia, S.C." Achille Murat declared that Chester had disappeared after only two months. "It is expected he will try to make his way [back home] to Hanson County [N.C.] travelling the Coffee road," Murat observed. The St. Augustine area's Edward T. Jenkes had "recently purchased [a Negro boy] in Charleston" before he disappeared. Thomas Randall's wife Laura, having few slaves upon her arrival from Maryland, complained bitterly after two slaves they had brought to the new territory

absconded. She informed a family member that her husband felt bad losing Leven, but that she "was sorrier for the loss of our eastern shore cook."³⁴

Smart owners attempted to frustrate desires for flight, or else to compel return of runaways, by encouraging and manipulating relationships between husbands and wives. George Noble Jones's overseer D. N. Moxley tried to control Dealier, who had run off but returned, by not allowing her husband Tom Blackledge of Tallahassee visitation privileges on the El Destino plantation. Eventually, the owner chose to take a different tack. During the time of Dealier's sojourn, Jones had experienced several problems with other runaways from his two plantations. Probably fearing that Dealier ultimately would run off with Tom, the master vetoed the overseer's policy and allowed Tom to visit his wife on the plantation.³⁵

Jones's neighbors struggled, as well, to find the right mix of reward and punishment. At the John Gamble, William Wirt, and Thomas Randall plantations, bondservants married among the three estates just as they did on the two plantations owned by Jones. Gamble, Wirt and Randall sought to control their bondservants by granting husbands the

privilege of visiting wives who lived on any of the three plantations. Other slave holders also granted visitation rights to men to visit their wives on other plantations and farms. They probably hoped, as did Jones, that this gesture would keep husbands and wives from fleeing together.³⁶

One important aspect of such marriage and visitation policies was that, by allowing bondsmen to visit their wives on other plantations, the owners knew where to start looking for a male fugitive. Some masters who advertised for the return of their male slaves would postulate that these fugitives might be seeking to reunite with their wives. Of the 364 runaway slave advertisements, 100 owners (or 33 percent) believed that their runaways were trying to find wives. Phrases such as "he may be on his way to find his wife" or "his wife lives in that town" were often used to pinpoint the possible whereabouts of the male fugitives.³⁷

Every planter reserved the right to make his own policy, though, and some refused to allow men to visit their wives. Naturally, this led more than a few bondsmen to take off at least occasionally to be with their spouses. As mentioned earlier in this

chapter, many had not absconded in the traditional sense but had departed only for a few days. Also as suggested above, whippings often awaited truants upon their appearance back at the old place. That punishment notwithstanding, the desire for family closeness often outweighed the pain of punishment and spouses took off repeatedly. Were he still alive, Gadsden County's John W. White certainly could attest as much with respect to his slave Joe.³⁸

The little evidence that comes to hand on the subject offers a portrait of masters confounded by slave departures because they believed that their slaves were satisfied with their lot since many did not voice dissatisfaction with living and working arrangements. Men such as A. Danforth quickly would insist that their slaves (in Danforth's case, Daniel) had no reason at all for absconding. They did not seem to be able to accept that some slaves were not as upset about their working and living arrangements as they were about their separation from loved ones. Thus, their surprise and chagrin when they found the slave cabin empty.³⁹

As throughout the South, most Florida slaves never ran away from the places where they lived and

worked, at least not in the sense of seeking permanent freedom. Those who did usually were captured and returned to their owners. Some simply "cooled" off and returned to their masters within a few days. Many did not go far but were, as owners often believed, merely "lurking" around the neighborhood. But, some fugitives traveled hundreds of miles to reunite with their spouses and family members. A few bondservants ran away when they were sold from a mother, another family member, or a loved one. Some fugitives tried either to return to another state or flee to a place within the peninsula to be with family and kinfolk. Slaves absconded as individuals and in family groups. Children fled in search of a parent or parents. Women absconded much less than men because of the special difficulties of taking children with them. Once in Florida some slaves fled in an attempt to return to their original home to be with family and friends. As long as they were separated, slaves fled from places within and outside the peninsula in search of family and loved ones. Some repeatedly sought to reach kinfolk, only to be caught over and over again.

NOTES

Chapter Four

1. Berlin, Many Thousands Gone, 359; idem, "The Slaves' Changing World" in The History Of The American People: The History, Traditions and Culture of African Americans (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1997), 44-45; Edward E. Baptist, "The Migration of Planters to Antebellum Florida: Kinship and Power," Journal of Southern History 62 (August 1996): 527-44.
2. Thomas Randall to William Wirt, December 20, 1828, November 20, 1829, Wirt Papers; Franklin and Schweninger, Runaway Slaves, 51.
3. See, for example, the probate records of slave holders of Florida, 1821 to 1865, deposited by the author in the Florida A&M University Black Archives, Research Center, and Museum, Tallahassee.
4. Daniel Campbell will, June 18, 1832, John Branch, Testamentary, February 16, 1863, Richard

Witaker will, August 15, 1854, Book A, 52-53, 383-88, Gadsden County Probate Records.

5. Jacksonville Standard, April 5, 1860;
Tallahassee Florida Sentinel, April 15, 1842;
Tallahassee Florida Advertiser, July 11, 1829;
Tallahassee Floridian and Advocate, January 5, 1830.

6. Franklin and Schweninger, Runaway Slaves, 51;
William Kilcrease estate, probate file no. 1005,
Gadsden County Courthouse, Quincy; Rawick, American Slave, Florida Slave Narratives, Vol. 17, pp. 95, 167, hereafter cited as FSN.

7. See, for example, Rivers, Slavery in Florida, 210-28.

8. Quincy Sentinel, May 9, 1843.

9. Jacksonville Courier, January 4, 1851; St. Augustine Ancient City, March 13, 1852; Jacksonville Florida News, May 25, October 30, 1852, January 1, 1853; Tallahassee Floridian and Journal, April 12, 1851, June 12, July 31, 1852; Tallahassee Florida Sentinel, June 15, 1852; Jacksonville Republican, October 9, 1851; William D. Moseley diary and other papers, 1848-1857, Florida State Archives, Tallahassee.

10. Pensacola Gazette, August 17, 1822; Tallahassee

Florida Intelligencer, October 6, 1826; St.

Augustine Florida Herald, July 3, 1838.

11. William W. Rogers and Erica R. Clark, The Croom Family and Goodwood Plantation: Land, Litigation, and Southern Lives (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1999), 140.

12. Tallahassee Floridian and Advocate, November 1, 1828, October 6, 1829, September 7, 1830; Tallahassee Floridian, February 9, 1839; Tallahassee Florida News, February 17, 1837; Jacksonville Republican, February 21, 1856.

13. Tallahassee Floridian, May 26, 1838; St. Augustine News, June 19, 1840; Tallahassee Floridian and Advocate, November 1, 1828; St. Augustine Florida Herald, July 3, 1838.

14. Pensacola Gazette, April 18, 1828; St. Augustine Florida Herald, April 21, May 13, 1830; Tallahassee Floridian, March 2, 1839; Jacksonville News, June 10, 19, 1848.

15. Tallahassee Florida Sentinel, March 4, 1842; Tallahassee Star of Florida, May 21, 1840.

16. Tallahassee Florida Sentinel, May 5, 1839, April 4, 1842; St. Joseph Mirror, May 7, 1861; Jacksonville Standard, May 31, 1860; Apalachicola

Gazette, September 4, 1839; Jacksonville Courier,
May 17, 1835.

17. St. Augustine East Florida Advocate, October
12, 1839; Jacksonville Courier, April 16, 1835;
Tallahassee Floridan and Journal, May 22, 1858;
Pensacola Floridian, March 23, 1822; Tallahassee
Floridian, November 11, 1845; St. Augustine Florida
Herald, March 25, 1829, May 11, 1833, April 6, 1839;
Magnolia Advertiser, January 13, 19, 26, 1830;
Tallahassee Florida Sentinel, April 4, 1842.

18. Tallahassee Floridian, December 12, 1840.

19. Pensacola Floridian, March 23, 1822.

20. Tallahassee Floridian, June 15, 1839;
Tallahassee Weekly Floridian, September 2, 1848.

21. Tallahassee Weekly Floridian, September 2,
1848; Tallahassee Floridian, January 10, 1846,
February 20, 1858.

22. Reminiscences of Jane Murray-Sheldon, 1884, pp.
3-4, Beaches Historical Society, Key West, Florida.

23. Jacksonville Florida Times-Union, July 20,
1891.

24. St. Augustine News, August 13, October 7,
November 4, 11, 25 1843.

25. Tallahassee Floridian, February 20, 1858.

26. Franklin and Schweninger, Runaway Slaves, 100-103; Laws of Territorial Florida (1827-1828), pp. 97-110; Denham, "A Rogue's Paradise," 121-24.
27. Jacksonville Courier, August 6, 1835; Tallahassee Floridian and Journal, November 3, 1835, October 27, 1849, May 10, 1851, November 3, 7, 1860.
28. Jacksonville Courier, June 25, 1835; Tallahassee Floridian and Journal, October 27, 1849.
29. Tallahassee Florida Watchman, February 17, October 6, November 3, 1838; Tallahassee Floridian and Journal, October 27, 1849, May 10, 1851; Tallahassee Floridian, October 17, 1835.
30. St. Augustine East Florida Herald, October 16, 1824; Jacksonville News, March 4, 1848.
31. Franklin and Schweninger, Runaway Slaves, 55.
32. Tallahassee Florida Watchman, April 2, 1838; Tallahassee Floridian, June 8, August 2, 1839, January 15, September 12, 1840; Tallahassee Floridian and Advocate, October 6, 1829.
33. Tallahassee Florida Sentinel, June 3, 1855; St. Augustine East Florida Advocate, September 1, 1840.
34. Jacksonville Republican, October 1, 1851; Tallahassee Floridian, February 9, 1834, August 22, October 17, 1835; Tallahassee Floridian and

Advocate, September 7, 1830; Laura Randall to Mother, December 14, 1827, Wirt Papers.

35. D. N. Moxley to George Noble Jones, October 08, 1854, John Evans to George Noble Jones, October 18, 1854, George Noble Jones to D. N. Moxley, April 20, 1856 in Phillips and Glunt, Florida Plantation Records, 107-108, 111, 152-53.

36. See, for example, Larry E. Rivers, "Dignity and Importance," 404-30; idem, "Madison County, Florida," 233-44; idem, "Slavery and the Political Economy of Gadsden County," 1-19; idem, "Slavery in Microcosm," 235-45; idem, "A Troublesome Property," 104-127.

37. Among newspapers that carried descriptions of Florida runaways in search of spouses from 1821 to 186 were the Apalachicola Commercial Advertiser, Apalachicola Gazette, Jacksonville Courier, Jacksonville East Florida Advocate, Jacksonville Florida News, Jacksonville Florida Union, Jacksonville News, Magnolia Advertiser, Pensacola Gazette, St. Augustine East Florida Herald, St. Augustine Florida Gazette, St. Augustine Florida Herald and Southern Democrat, Tallahassee Florida Advocate, Tallahassee Florida Intelligencer, Tallahassee Florida Sentinel, Tallahassee Florida

Watchman, Tallahassee Floridian, Tallahassee
Floridian and Journal, Tallahassee Star of Florida,
Tallahassee Weekly Floridian, and Tampa Florida
Peninsular.

38. David L. White diary, July 1835-June 1842, P.
K. Yonge Library of Florida History, University of
Florida, Gainesville.

39. Pensacola Gazette, May 20, 1837.

CHAPTER FIVE

Slave Violence in Nineteenth-Century Florida

"He drew an axe . . . and split in twain the head of
of his master"

Without doubt many more enslaved blacks absconded than committed physical violence against whites in Florida from 1821 to 1860, but acts of physical violence remained the ultimate demonstration of discontentment with the institution of slavery. Violence could result in the destruction of human lives but might entail simply stealing or destroying property. Large-scale rebellion certainly constituted the ultimate in violence against whites; yet, in Florida, not unlike the South as a whole, individual acts of violence perpetrated by slaves against whites represented the typical and far-more-common action. These individual and collective forms of violence committed by bondservants that resulted in the loss

of lives and the stealing or destruction of property offer this chapter its theme.¹

The possibility of slave-perpetrated violence persistently sent chills and panic throughout Florida's white community during the territorial and early statehood periods. The peninsula had enjoyed a long history as a haven for armed runaways from the Chesapeake region and Carolina Low Country dating back to the establishment of the free black community of Fort Mose in 1738. Whites knew that blacks could and would fight. When whites poured into Florida after 1821, they dealt repeatedly with armed free blacks and runaways who were prepared to defend their right to be free.²

Acts of violence committed by blacks against whites concerned Floridians so much that their councilmen and legislators time and again enacted measures designed to protect the public from bondservants and runaways. Enslaved blacks, as well as runaways, generally knew of the potential consequences of assaulting or killing a white person. Laws plainly delineated prescribed punishments. An 1824 statute declared:

Be it further enacted that if any slave

shall consult, advise, or conspire to rebel, or make insurrection against the white inhabitants of this territory, or against the laws of the government thereof, or shall plot or conspire the murder of any white person, or shall commit an assault and battery, on any white person with an intention to kill, he or she shall, on conviction of either of the said crimes suffer death.³

Other legislative acts followed the 1824 statute. Three years afterward the territorial council specified that a slave convicted of murder would not even be allowed assistance to save his mortal soul. The law clearly noted that "if any Negro should make an attempt to kill a white person, or aid or abet such attack," he was to suffer death without benefit of clergy. Historian Julia F. Smith aptly summed up other punishments that eventually were to be imposed on slaves convicted of felony or physically touching whites. As she noted, they were subject to "having his [or her] hands burned with a heated iron, his [or her] ears nailed to a post, or a certain number of lashes by the whip." As would be expected, Smith added, "[A] felony [was]

punishable by death."⁴

Whites' fears were not without a foundation in fact. The real potential and threat of a large scale uprising committed by runaways and bondservants existed and never ceased to be a concern to whites. In 1831, for instance, Pensacola mayor Peter Alba insisted that runaways, slaves, and free blacks in the city were about to rebel. He pleaded with Governor William P. DuVal to raise a voluntary army to control the town's black population. No rebellions occurred in the city as Alba thought would happen, but the incident nonetheless makes the point. The same fears especially circulated during times of crisis such as the Mexican War, suspected abolitionist plots, and the heightened national conflict over slavery during the 1850s. Florida newspapers routinely portrayed whites during such periods as firmly believing that blacks and runaways could and would rise up in rebellion.⁵

Slaves at times pursued quiet forms of violence against their owners, permitting them to rebel physically while hopefully avoiding the punitive consequences of their actions. One such assault particularly feared by whites involved attack by

poison. As Debra Gray White has noted, "No one will ever know how many slave owners and members of their families were poisoned." In Florida, some slaves probably were successful in this endeavor, while others attempted it but failed. Others dreamed of or pondered it but did not act.⁶

Quite a number of examples of poisonings have come down to us. Three of Thomas Randall's slaves, for instance, attempted to poison their overseer. Fortunately for the white man, they failed. Two of the women soon were sold away to an Alachua County buyer. The other woman, Sally, first was banished from the house but not sold because of the high regard Thomas Randall had for her parents. At his wife's urging, however, Randall sold the bondservant a year later.⁷

Surviving documentation fails to explain why Sally and her compatriots tried to kill the overseer, but, as John Hope Franklin and Loren Schweninger have noted, many reasons could have compelled the women's actions, ranging from anger at punishment of some kind to arguments over work assignments. It is clear why one former slave wanted to kill his master's wife. As Charles Joyner observed, "Cruel plantation mistresses . . . often

turned their ire upon female slaves." This seemed to have been the case with Douglas Dorsey. He chafed at the mistreatment suffered by his mother when the mistress slashed the slave woman's arm with a butcher knife. Further, the freedman remembered the master's wife as "a very mean cruel woman [who] would whip the slaves herself for any misdemeanor." As a result, he decided to put strychnine that was used to kill rats in her coffee. "Fortunately freedom came," an interviewer recorded, "and saved him of this act which would have resulted in his death." Madison County planter J. Pearce's luck did not prove as felicitous as Mrs. Mattair's. Several of his slaves killed him when he tried to whip them.⁸

Aside from poisonings, physical assault on whites by blacks occurred frequently. In a common incident, Cato struck a white man in 1848 and, subsequently, received 150 lashes for his insolent behavior. Adam also wore the scars of "the whip for fighting" authority figures. In yet another instance, an unnamed slave attacked Leon County planter and two-time governor Richard K. Call's overseer before fleeing the plantation.⁹

As common sense would suggest, many physical

attacks on whites came when a slave believed he (or she) or their loved ones were being mistreated. Even some whites acknowledged such mistreatment, if not the legitimacy of the reaction to it. Douglass Dorsey, for one, recalled whites admitting slave mistreatment. On the Pine Hill plantation, J. L. Taylor acknowledged that a slave, possibly one with some authority, had been whipping Frances "unnecessarily." The manager or overseer reassigned Frances to another slave. George N. Jones wrote overseer D. N. Moxley about a letter he had received from a neighbor concerning the mistreatment of his slaves. Another overseer acknowledged that Moxley could lay a "genteel" whipping on slaves at times.¹⁰

Incidents and courses of conduct occasionally drove slaves even to the point of murdering their owners or overseers. Such was the case with Jesse Watts's bondservants in Madison County. Here, the slaves' long term resentments at how they had been treated compelled them to act to alleviate their frustration. The slaves had long held grievances concerning their food rations and living conditions. Hailed into court several times regarding his standards for feeding and clothing his bondservants, Watts and his overseer nonetheless had ignored the

subtle and not-so-subtle criticisms of the court and the larger community. Over a two-year period, conditions worsened for the slaves. Six of them then retaliated by killing the overseer. They escaped from jail and were recaptured. Three eventually were hanged, and the fates of the remaining three are uncertain.¹¹

Despite the capture and punishment of Watts's overseer's murderers, this and similar incidents spread terror on many remote and tense farms and plantations. Any such event rekindled anxieties anew. Among others, they included the killing of Liberty County's Duncan A. McPhaul by the slave Ned. Also, the terror sometimes reverberated at occurrences subsequent to actual killings. On one such occasion, a runaway--who was awaiting trial for the murder of a local white man--broke out of Jacksonville's jail and sought friends, a hiding place, and, whites feared, other victims in the countryside.¹²

In an unusual twist on the issue of homicide by slaves, Hemp murdered his master not because of some apparent abuse but because he would be paid for his deadly deed. A Tampa newspaper described the circumstances surrounding this 1860 incident:

We learned that citizens of Hernando County of Saturday last, hung Hemp, a slave belong to the estate of Albert Clarke, for being the immediate cause of the death of his master. The negro confessed that he was promised \$200 by James Boyd (a step-son of the deceased) and Mrs. Clarke (decedent's wife) \$100,--as a compensation for taking the life of his master and that he committed the murder (as stated last week), accordingly.

Careful note should be taken that the available evidence does not prove conclusively that Hemp actually committed the murder or was forced into confessing that he did. James Boyd ended up in jail as a co-conspirator. Whether Mrs. Clarke was found guilty or innocent and the exact type and degree of punishment Boyd received for his role in this deadly plot are not known.¹³

Although never with the frequency that whites feared and, perhaps, believed, blacks occasionally molested or raped white women. Whites considered this to be one of the most violent acts a slave could commit and a heinous crime. Most rapes or alleged rapes were committed against lower class

white women, and the possibility of consensual sexual relations should not be disregarded in many cases. At least eight slaves were prosecuted to the law's full extent for rape, although it should be understood that bumping or touching a white woman in any way appeared tantamount to rape for whites. Of the eight, six were convicted and hanged. A jury acquitted one, and another panel could not reach a verdict in the final case. Unfortunately, Dick, a Leon County slave indicted and convicted of rape in 1840, died at the hands of a lynch mob while his case was being reviewed on a writ of error by the territorial court of appeals.¹⁴

Most individual acts of violence were premeditated, but some obviously were spontaneous. The case of one bondservant can serve as an example. George Noble Jones owned two large plantations in Middle Florida. He had hired very strict disciplinarians to run his operations. One of Jones's slaves, Aberdeen, knew that overseer D. N. Moxley could and would whip slaves unmercifully for various transgressions. When the overseer went to whip Aberdeen's sister for not picking her cotton allotment, the sibling tried to kill the white man with an ax, but "the driver [Prince] kept him from

it." Reporting on the incident, one of Jones's other overseers wrote that he "saw Mr. Moxley give him [Aberdeen] a genteel flogging [sic] which I think he deserved."¹⁵

As Aberdeen's attempt illustrated, fugitives and other blacks might use axes and a variety of other weapons during an act of physical rebellion against whites. Hatchets, guns, knives, clubs, and shovels numbered among them. For instance, Adam, a mulatto who had hired himself out, was charged with killing his Tampa-area employer Luke Moore. An account of the murder stated that Moore had been "killed by a blow with the butt of a hatchet [that] took effect in the upper part of the forehead, literally mashing the skull, and penetrating the brain." Tampa lawyer Ossian B. Hart, a future founder of the state Republican party and Reconstruction-era governor, served as counsel for the slave. Because of the trial's sensational nature and a prejudicial environment, Hart convinced the state supreme court to overturn a guilty verdict and order a new trial. Unfortunately for Adam, he never got another day in court. The bondservant's life ended when a mob violently overpowered the sheriff and lynched the accused.¹⁶

A gun was the weapon of choice for St. Augustine runaway Randall, who took the life of Christopher S. Thompson. After the shooting the fugitive continued on his journey to freedom, but authorities pursued and caught him. Randall confessed to his crime, although the local newspaper acknowledged, "How he came to be armed, or for what purpose, is not known." Such an unanswered question deeply concerned local citizens, who endeavored as well as they could--but apparently unsuccessfully--to convince the defendant to give up his source.¹⁷

As already seen, axes enjoyed a certain popularity when bondservants opted to murder their masters. These implements were commonly used by both whites and blacks on the farms and plantations of Florida. They could be purchased readily from most general stores. As Ray Granade noted, "The razor or axe was most liable to drip with the master's blood in an individual act." A news report described how one bondservant killed his owner with an axe and then fled the premises:

HORRIBLE TRAGEDY!

A Man Murdered by his own Negro!!

The Murderer Escaped

We are called upon this week to record one of the most heartrending tragedies that ever occurred in this State: On Tuesday night, the 30th ultimo, Mr. WILLIAM PEARCE, residing about five miles from this place [Madison] whilst he was eating supper, told one of his negro men, who had guilty of some misdemeanor, that so soon as he was through he would give him a flogging. According, when he got up from the table, he went out into the backyard and called the fellow out of the kitchen, and told him to come to him. Manifesting a great deal of submission, he obeyed; but so soon as he got within striking distance, drew an axe, which he had concealed and split in twain the head of his master--scattering the brains in every direction. We are not aware he survived a minute.

The Negro instantly fled--and up to this time (noon Friday) has not been captured. Mr. PEARCE was a good citizen, a kind husband, father and master, and was beloved by all who knew him. His melancholy fate has cast a pall of gloom over our whole community.

The Negro, beyond doubt, will be captured

before many hours. If he is, although we admire submission to the course pointed out by the law of the land, in this case, so much of the brute has been manifested, we would glad to see our citizens rise in mass, and avail themselves of Lynch Law-hang the rascal without court or jury.

As was Tampa's Adam, this fugitive was hanged by a mob after his capture.¹⁸

Slaves' attempts to kill whites, even with axes, failed on many occasions. One frustrated attempt came in the Jacksonville area during 1835. On that occasion Mrs. Thornton's slave approached her bed one night with "an uplifted axe," but he failed in his attempt to kill her.¹⁹ Washington attempted to use an axe and later a gun to kill Marianna's H. O. Bassett. According to the news account:

A most daring attempt was made in this place Tuesday night last, by a Negro, to take the life of one of our citizens, Mr. H. O. Bassett. Mr. B. had retired about 9 o'clock and was lying in bed, preparing to read before

going to sleep, and hearing a noise of some one in the room, asked who it was.--On turning around, he discovered a Negro man named Washington, belonging to Col. C. C. Young, of this place, standing at the bed with an axe upraised, in the act of striking him. Mr. Bassett rolled out of the bed in time to prevent the blow and grappled with the Negro. They scuffled for a while and the boy finding that Mr. B. was too strong for him let go the axe, and Mr. B. struck him; the boy dodged the blow and the axe stuck in the floor, making a deep indentation. Hearing someone coming the boy escaped through one door, and Mr. B. started through another to head him, but could not find him. Returning to his room, Mr. B. discovered the boy there, who escaped through the back door, to the yard. Some persons hearing the difficulty came to the assistance of Mr. B. and half an hour afterwards they walked out in the yard, thinking the Negro may have secreted himself somewhere, when a pistol was fired from under the kitchen, the ball missing Mr. Bassett, but passing through the clothing of one of the party. The premises were then

searched but without success.

Authorities apprehended Washington a day later, he having stolen a horse in his attempt to flee the area.²⁰

Knives offered another effective weapon to take white lives. One clearly was used by a slave in 1860 to kill Dr. W. J Keitt, a state senator and Marion County planter. According to one account, many people thought at first that he had "died suddenly, from an affliction of the heart." Soon, though, the details of the murder became clear. "On visiting his house," the report read, "his body was found bathed in blood, and his throat cut from ear to ear." Upon further investigation, an inquest concluded that the murder, in fact, had been at the hands of one of the doctor's own slaves.²¹

Easily available farm tools permitted a few slaves to dispatch their masters. Celia, a mulatto, killed her white father and master, Jacob Bryant of Jacksonville, with a hoe. An argument or disagreement between the bondservant and her mother seemingly drew in the elder Bryant. Celia subsequently blamed her mother for her action. According to the newspaper report, the slave split

open Bryant's head by striking him with a hoe. A jury found her guilty of murder, and she subsequently was hanged for her deeds.²²

There were times when slaves required no specific weapons in order to vent their fatal wrath on an owner. The three slaves originally charged in 1840 with the death of Jefferson County's Richard B. Cole did not use any of the previously mentioned weapons to kill him. According to the trial record, Ellick and Poor Boy won not guilty verdicts, but the court judged Simon the guilty one. The bondservant had pushed his master "against the ground [and then] did strike, beat and kick, and choke him." Simon finished off his deadly deed by suffocating and "drowning" his master in a stream. As Florida law prescribed, Simon was hanged for his crime.²³

Violence could ensue following apprehension for a physical attack (or an escape), as well as prior to and during the crime. This came despite--and, perhaps, in part because of--the fact that owners and authorities routinely locked offenders and those suspected of offenses in irons. J. Benwell, an Englishman who visited Leon County during the 1830s recorded his description:

At Tallahassee I saw in the street . . .
two negroes with heavy iron collars around
their necks. These were captured run-aways;
the collars which much have weighed seven or
ten pounds had spikes projecting on either
side. One of the poor creatures had hold of
the spikes as he walked along to ease the load
that pressed painfully on his shoulders.²⁴

In the same vein, army officer Alexander Stewart
Webb recalled seeing one captured runaway "in
irons," who had to sit in front with the stage coach
driver on his way back to his to Tampa. John L.
Beck's belligerent fugitive already had lost an eye
when he fled the plantation with an "iron round his
[left] ankle."²⁵

Margrett Nickerson recalled from a former
slave's perspective how belligerent bondservants and
captured fugitives would be dealt with on the
plantation where she once lived. She commented
that, once slaves were caught, the owners would:

put bells on em; fust dey would put a iron'
round dey neck and anuder one 'round de waist
and rivet um together down de bak; de bell

would hang on de ban 'round de neck so dat it would ring when de slave walked and den dey wouldn' git 'way. Some uv dem wore dese bells three and four mont'n and when dey time wuz up dey would take em off 'em.

Nickerson vividly remembered such bondsmen as Jake Overstreet, George Bull, John Croen, Ruben Golder, Jim Bradley, and others who "wore dem bells." Shack Thomas reminisced about one overseer who "used to 'buck and gag' us." This particularly applied, the former slave noted, to runaways who were sometimes "gagged and tied in a squatting position and left in the sun for hours." Some even were suspended by their thumbs for long periods of time, he concluded.²⁶

No doubt infuriated by the treatment, detainees often became violent upon their incarceration and endeavored by every available means to break out of jail. One example is know_n to us courtesy of Leon County's sheriff William Cameron advertisement for the capture and safe delivery of Sandy "who broke [out of] Jail." When six fugitives of planter Jesse Watts of Madison accused of murder were captured and incarcerated, they broke out of jail a few days

later. Twenty-four year old Harry and eighteen year old John both broke out of confinement in Palatka to continued their journey to freedom.²⁷

Despite all of these and many other accounts of actual violence, most slaves who fled farms and plantations during the antebellum period probably did not attempt to fight their would-be captors or to break out of jail. Many times, they were outnumbered and possessed little in the way of guns or other weapons with which to wage a successful fight. Yet, exceptions to the general rule obviously occurred. Of the few slaves who had guns, some were prepared to use them to maintain their freedom. The experience of John, a slave owned by Judge O'Neill of Fernandina, offers a case in point. He had eluded his captors for almost two years by hiding in the nearby woods. Ultimately, his hiding place had been discovered. According to the newspaper report, a white man who found John shot him when the slave allegedly went for his gun. A jury of inquest cleared a Mr. Pratt of killing the slave, finding the act to have happened in self defense.²⁸

As throughout the South and except for certain events of 1835-1838 during the Second Seminole War,

Florida's whites usually succeeded in capturing and punishing slaves for their acts of violence. As mentioned in an earlier chapter, a gang of seven who had escaped from St. Augustine during the 1840s, plundered the countryside, and killed a white man did eventually make their way to the Bahamas, having added two additional members to the party in the meantime. In one unusual case, whites did feel overpowered by blacks to the point of declining an attempt to bring them under control. This happened in Dade and Monroe Counties when a gang of fugitives passed through. Afraid of what the black runaways might do to them, an account noted, "The [white] settlers on the Miami [River] excused themselves for not arresting the murderers, by saying they 'were not strong enough' [to capture them]."²⁹

Prior to 1835 a different situation existed beyond the frontier of white settlement where groups of armed runaways lived with or near Seminoles and Creek Indians. A good number of the "maroons" had been supplied with guns and ammunition as a payback for their participation on the side of the Spanish during the Patriot War (1812-1814) and the British during the War of 1812. Anglo-Floridians feared these bands of black warriors. In company with

Seminoles, Creeks, and Mikasukis beginning in 1835, they would become a force truly to be reckoned with.³⁰

The very existence of communities of black warriors separated Florida's experience from that of states to the north. With the exception of Virginia's Dismal Swamp region and a limited number of similar places, "maroon" communities of runaways were less evident in the South than in the Caribbean or in South America. Spanish Florida, though, had held itself out as a refuge for runaways since at least the late 1600s. In the circumstances, hundreds--likely thousands-- of blacks made their way to havens in the central and southern peninsula. Their communities, which have received attention elsewhere in this work, including the Negro Fort, Peliklakaha, Angola, and Minatti. Twelve hundred to fifteen hundred or more such "maroons" were estimated to reside in Florida in the decade and one-half following 1821. As time passed, more and more of them could trace their origins to the plantations of Middle and upper East Florida.³¹

Such a concentration of armed blacks trained in the use of weapons and determined to maintain their freedom foretold violence as rich plantations

increasingly flourished in Middle Florida and the white frontier pressed deeper into the peninsula. Unaware of or little appreciating Florida's experience, some historians have suggested that the most significant black uprisings to occur in the antebellum South were the Stono, Denmark Vesey, Gabriel Prosser, and Nat Turner rebellions. To the contrary, historians of Florida's saga have argued convincingly that Second Seminole War (1835-1842) should be considered as the largest, deadliest, and most violent slave insurrection to befall the South prior to the Civil War.³²

The Second Seminole War's roots lay in the first war of the same name. Accordingly, the second conflict continued the Seminoles' struggle to maintain their Florida lands against a larger movement initiated by the United States government during the early 1830s to usher all Native Americans west of the Mississippi River. The resulting seven years' war in Florida would deliver a major impact on the settlement, character, and course of the territory and state's development.³³

Florida had reflected the image of a runaway slave haven back to the early sixteenth century. Fugitive bondservants from slave colonies and

(later) states to the north had made the sparsely populated land their home for centuries. By the 1820s hundreds, if not thousands, of runaway slaves had made the lands in and around the Seminole nation their destination in flight. Anglo-Americans also knew that fugitive slaves would join Seminoles in their attempt to resist deportation to the west while the latter would assist the former in maintaining their freedom. These events played out during the Second Seminole War.³⁴

By absconding to Seminole lands, fugitive slaves from the farms and plantations of Florida and other places demonstrated their sentiments about slavery--they would join their allies in violently fighting to both maintain their freedom and to protect the land occupied by these first Americans. General Thomas Jesup admitted as much. As commander of the United States Army in Florida, he openly acknowledged in 1836 that "this . . . is a Negro not an Indian war." The general went on to state that, if the war against the runaway blacks and Indians was "not speedily put down, the south will feel the effects of it on their slave population before the end of next season."³⁵

Moreover, Jesup's insights ran to the quality

of the black combatants as warriors. He declared that blacks who fought with the Indians "were the most fiercest warriors" he had encountered. Fugitive slaves such as John Cavallo (or John Horse), Abraham, Caesar, Cudjoe, Harry, and others fought bravely to maintain their freedom and that of their families and friends. Abraham, for instance, may well have started the bloody war in December 1835 when he urged Micanopy, the supreme chief of the Seminoles, to kill a column of soldiers approaching the Indian lands near the black leader's own town of Peliklakaha. Jesup underscored the importance of freedom to runaways and Black Seminoles by expressing that "throughout my operations I found the negroes the most active and determined warriors [that I met]." ³⁶

Jesup's astute perception of his black opponents led him quickly to realize that his struggle probably would be a long one. Blacks may well have been the most determined fighters the general had faced in his career. He initially had misjudged the tenacity of the runaways and maroons and their resolve to keep fighting to maintain their freedom at all cost. Jesup reluctantly concluded that the "warriors [would fight] as long as they had

life and such seems to me to be the determination of those who influence their councils--I mean the leading negroes."³⁷

The territory's premier political leadership, through the legislative council, expressed similar views of the violent nature of fugitive slaves. An act passed in early 1836 declared, "The present insurrection of the Seminole Nation of Indians has been chiefly excited by diverse mischievous Negroes and mulattoes living with the Indians some claiming to be free . . . and other fugitive slaves, runaways from citizens of Florida." Governor Richard Keith Call echoed such perceptions of the violent nature and fighting prowess of Florida runaways by observing that they "never failed to exercise against the white man, with whom he could expect only slavery and inequality."³⁸

Thanks in good part to the determination of black warriors, the Second Seminole War cost the United States dearly in lives lost and money expended. The conflict resulted in the deaths of over 1,500 United States soldiers and the enormous cost of more than \$20 million. Hundreds, if not more than one thousand, Seminoles and blacks lost their lives, as well. The war amounted to the most

expensive "Indian war" fought by the country's military prior to 1865.³⁹

Florida fugitives demonstrated their willingness to continued to fight alongside the Seminoles until they received guarantees of their freedom from United States authorities. General Jesup, for one, remained convinced that the war would continued until he granted freedom to them. By 1838, many of the runaways--having survived starvation conditions for some time--had worked out agreements with the government to surrender in exchange for specific guarantees and resettlement in the western territory of Arkansas. The departure of Florida's runaways or maroons ended a bloody chapter in what some historians now call the largest slave uprising in the antebellum South.⁴⁰

In sum, murders of whites by blacks in antebellum Florida did not occur with any degree of frequency other than during the Second Seminole War. Yet, fears of assault, murder, and attempts or thoughts of poisoning masters became a day to day reality in the peninsula from 1821 to 1865. The few slaves who murdered their masters or overseers typically did so from premeditated planning rather than from a spontaneous act. As in other southern

states, slaves generally did not defy their masters or the slave system openly. Some bondservants might fight masters and other whites when they tried to capture or punish them. Incidences where slaves were accused of raping white women occurred, but these were isolated cases and usually involved so called "lower class" white women. Convicted of the crime, slaves usually were hanged. Acquittal was possible.

The most common implements used to take the lives of masters and whites were knives, hoes, axes, and hatchets. Unlike slaves who rebelled in other southern states, few Florida slaves, if any, used shovels or clubs. Little, if any, evidence exists to suggest that runaways or slaves in general killed whites in self-defense. Most were driven to these acts because of the mistreatment of loved ones by masters, their wives, overseers, or other whites. Some slaves were driven to act from mistreatment over a long period of time. Whites demonstrated their understanding that slaves would rebel if provoked or given the opportunity by the terms of laws they enacted.

Scholars seriously should consider the Second Seminole War as the largest slave uprising in the

Old South, much more so than the Prosser, Nat Turner, Stono, and other commonly discussed rebellions. The Second Seminole War started as a result of Andrew Jackson's overall Indian removal policies that swept the South during the 1830s. Florida became the battleground to rid the peninsula of runaway blacks mostly from the Carolinas and Georgia and Seminoles and Creeks who originally had migrated from Alabama and Georgia. This could not be accomplished until the historical alliance between blacks and Seminoles had been shattered. Runaway blacks from the slave states to the north, as well as from Florida, knew that they would be re-enslaved if captured by Anglo-Americans in the peninsula. As a result, a bond developed between the two groups to resist the whites and the government.

Except during that conflict, few slaves tried to harm their masters physically as they fled for freedom or when they took a few days off from the slave system. Still, Florida would not rid itself of the potential and reality of slave violence until the coming of emancipation in 1865.

NOTES

Chapter Five

1. See for example, Franklin and Schweninger, Runaway Slaves, 77-88, 149-50, 169, 211; Mullin, Flight and Rebellion, 58-61, 177; Aptheker, American Slave Revolts, 207, 176, 346; Granade, "Slave Unrest in Florida," 18-26; Darlene Clark Hine, William C. Hine, and Stanley Harrold, The African-American Odyssey (Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 2000), 60-90; Smith, Slavery and Plantation Growth, 102-108; Blassingame, Slave Community, 120, 179-212; Randolph B. Campbell, An Empire for Slavery: The Peculiar Institution in Texas, 1821-1865 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 1989), 184-85; Peter Kolchin, American Slavery: 1619-1877 (New York: Hill and Wang, 1993), 159-60; Rivers, "Troublesome Property," 104-127; Harris, "Abolitionist Sentiment in Florida," 71-96; Denham, "A Rogue's Paradise," 120-40.

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9. Shofner, History of Jefferson County, 144;
Denham, Rogue's Paradise, 120-40; Tallahassee
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Florida Advocate, March 19, 1829.

10. J. L. Taylor to Sue, October 2, 1859, Pine Hill
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Noble Jones, October 21, 1854, in Phillips and
Glunt, Florida Plantation Records, 114.

11. Tampa Florida Peninsular, May 26, 1860; Amon
DeLaughter journal, April 16-May 4, 1860, 113,

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12. Fernandina East Floridian, March 29, 1860;
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CHAPTER SIX

Catch the Runaway

"'Paderollers' (a low class of whites who roved the country to molest a slave)"

Before Florida became a territory of the United States in 1821, many white settlers of the peninsula rightfully considered it a runaway slave haven. The colony's image as a sanctuary for runaways dated back in some respects nearly to the sixteenth century when the Spanish Empire first controlled the region. For almost two centuries, its officials officially or unofficially had embraced fugitives from the English colonies to the north who made their way south to freedom. Eventually, Spain would grant citizenship to runaways and allow them to serve in the military. In 1738, Ft. Mose, two miles north of St. Augustine, became the first free black community in North America. That situation would begin to change with the transfer of ownership to

the United States. Then, white settlers from established slave states started arriving, most determined to control and eventually stop the flow of freedom-seeking slaves coming into the territory.¹

Territorial Florida's leaders early sought to address the problem of runaways. For example, an 1824 law noted:

If a slave shall absent him or herself, a greater distance than five miles from his or her usual place of residence, or owner's service, without the leave of his or her owner, overseer or master, such slave shall be deemed to be a runaway, and may be apprehended by any one without a warrant.²

The statute provided further that, upon confining a fugitive, the sheriff should notify the "owner, overseer, or master, if known, by a letter by the public mail, and if unknown, by advertisement in the nearest newspaper."³

As suggested by this example, Florida lawmakers spent considerable time designing and enacting laws to deal with what they perceived as two great

potential slave problems-- rebellious slaves and runaways. The solons passed slave codes controlling the life and every movement of bondservants in 1822, 1823, 1824, 1825, 1828, 1833, 1835, and 1850. Based upon the evolutionary development of these laws, traders, sheriffs, constables, jailers, justices of the peace, slave catchers and patrols would play a critical role in assisting slave owners to recover their lost property.⁴

When it came to runaways, Florida's laws both differed somewhat from and partially echoed those of other slave states. For one thing, the territory, being chronically short of funds, could assure a person or persons who captured a runaway only six dollars in reward. Other states generally paid from \$30 to a high of \$50 per capture. As was true of the other slave states, the sheriff had to advertise the incarceration of a runaway for six months. If no one came forward within one year of the first newspaper advertisement, the runaway would be sold at public auction thirty days later. In a typical case, the Escambia County sheriff advertised in the Pensacola Gazette in 1839 for the owners to come forth and claim Jacob and Edward. How long the runaways had already been confined in the make-shift

jail is not known, since the notice did not specify that information. When the owner failed to come forward to claim them in a timely manner, the fugitives were sold at auction for a total of \$1800, the proceeds going to build "a substantial jail."⁵

Most southern states created a patrol system to monitor and capture fugitives during the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Florida followed this pattern, specifically establishing such a system in 1833. The code declared:

It shall be the duty of the several justices of the peace within this Territory to cause their respective districts to be divided into convenient patrol districts which division shall not be altered unless by the justices or a majority of them in said district and in case the said justices of the peace of any district, within this Territory, shall neglect to perform the duty herein before required by him or them, he or they, shall forfeit and pay the sum of fifty dollars to be recovered before any justice of the peace in said district.⁶

The patrol statute contained numerous

additional provisions of significance. It required all free white male inhabitants of the territory from ages eighteen to forty-five, for instance, to serve a three month term in the patrol. Unlike the pattern in some states, the Florida patrols did not operate like military units. They consisted simply of white males led by a "prudent and discreet person as commander." No privates, sergeants, lieutenants, or captains exercised authority, nor did the code specify the number of men that comprised a patrol.⁷

The law was designed to be self executing. Patrols were authorized to form immediately upon the threat of a slave uprising or the disappearance of bondservants. These men could enter any plantation or farm, disorderly houses, vessels, and boats suspected of "harboring, trafficking or dealing with slaves." They possessed authority to destroy property by breaking open "doors, gates or windows" where runaways might be hiding. Patrols were permitted to administer "moderate whipping, with a switch or cowskin commonly called a cowhide, not exceeding thirty nine lashes." If runaways resisted, they could be shot on sight.⁸

Slave patrols sometimes policed the countryside and towns of Middle Florida for runaways even in the

absence of a threat or notice of a specific flight. At least, former slave Shack Thomas recalled as much. He recorded that the "pu-trols" would give "him a lot of trouble every time he didn't have a pass to leave" the plantation.⁹ Douglas Dorsey vividly remembered male slaves being caught by the slave patrols and the consequences for not having a pass to be away from the plantation. Although he gives no direct indication, Dorsey may have been one of those males away from the plantation without permission. The former slave claimed:

Sometimes the young men on the plantation would slip away to visit a girl on another plantation. If they were caught by the "Patrols" while on these visits they would be lashed on the bare backs as a penalty for this offense.¹⁰

Other former slaves held their own vivid memories of experiences with slave patrols. "The various plantations had white men employed as 'patrols'," Louis Napoleon claimed, "whose duties were to see that the slaves remained on their own plantations." Much as the Florida law specified,

these absconders were "whipped with a 'raw hide.'" Mary Minus Biddle summed up what she thought of slave patrols by recording that "any slave caught without [a pass] while off the plantation was subject to be caught by the 'paderollers' (a low class of whites who roved the country to molest a slave at the least opportunity)." Biddle concluded by insisting that the patrollers would whip runaways "unmercifully." Thomas McKnight echoed Biddle's sentiments by acknowledging that he received "four balls from a double-barreled gun" when he failed to stop running at the command of patrollers.¹¹

Although some former slaves remembered slave patrols that policed farm and plantation areas routinely, these organized groups of unpaid slave hunters operated sporadically at best. The lack of enthusiasm of some white males to participate in such drafted work became increasingly evident over time. Plus, pursuing runaways could be a dangerous business, and some residents did not want to put their lives on the line to catch another man's slave. Accordingly, in the absence a crisis the patrols seldom operated. By way of illustration, mention has been made in an earlier chapter of the incident involving nine fugitives from the St.

Augustine who made their way to the Miami River and then on to the Bahamas. According to law, a slave patrol should have formed immediately to pursue the fugitives. That did not occur. "The settlers . . . excused themselves for not arresting the murderers," the local newspaper reported, "by saying they 'were not strong enough.'"¹²

Slave patrols were put on special alert during what became known as the Second Seminole War, which lasted from 1835 to 1842. Governor Robert Raymond Reid typically proclaimed, "All Justices of the Peace throughout the territory [are] strictly to carry into full effect the act concerning Patrols, approved February 11th, 1833." Such efforts proved practically worthless. The United States Army, Navy, and Marine Corps required almost seven years to subdue the Seminoles, Creeks, and their black allies. Through the early 1840s--despite patrols, militias, and regular military units--the combatants regularly raided deep into Middle Florida, occasionally almost to Tallahassee.¹³

Whether the times involved crisis or peace, slave patrols did little to curtail the runaway problem, and citizens continued to complain about the unauthorized movement of slaves through the

territorial and statehood periods. Often whites came together to voice their concerns as one. In one instance, for example, Jacksonville citizens, alarmed about the possibility of large numbers of slaves absconding from the area and the potential of slave unrest, held several public meetings to require that the "patrols do their duty strictly, and to call public meetings whenever in their opinion public safety shall require it." Yet, little resulted from such efforts.¹⁴

Overseer Amon DeLaughter's personal journal permits an inside glimpse at the operation of one Middle Florida county's slave patrols or, at least, its attempts to mount a patrol. Even in plantation-oriented Madison County, it appears from DeLaughter's writings that monitoring the movement of slaves did not appeal to the majority of the vicinity's white males. In a six-year period, DeLaughter recorded his attendance at a patrol or regulator meeting only once. His brothers Jasper and Pickens each attended only one or two over the same period of time. DeLaughter never recorded the formation of a patrol party to hunt for specific runaways. As mentioned, the DeLaughters' experience with slave patrols reflected the general trend

throughout Florida.¹⁵

Individuals who pursued fugitives seemingly succeeded more often at catching their prey than did slave patrols. These men often were hired by owners or else made it known that they were in the business of catching runaways. Typically, a slave holder might publish a notice to alert slave catchers of his desire to have his runaways retrieved. One advertisement of this sort commented, "A reward will be paid to any person catching the said negro wench, and all expenses for sending or going after her and returning her to the subscriber, will be cheerfully compensated." Since pursuing runaways could be extremely dangerous, these men offered their services for a set fee of about \$6 to \$10 for capturing the fugitive, plus expenses. Since most slaves usually returned to or were returned to their owners, many slave catchers apparently did their job well.¹⁶

Most slave catchers were not professionals but men who occasionally accepted the risks inherent to the task in order to cash in on the rewards. Leon County's Thomas Footman was one such man, and he learned of the dangers of the trade at first hand. In 1860 a slave shot and "very severely wounded"

Footman as he pursued the suspect. A man named Pratt very nearly suffered the same fate. His story concerned a slave called John, who belonged to Judge O'Neill of Fernandina and had successfully eluded capture for almost two years. Then, Pratt set out after him. The slave catcher tracked John for many miles before he found him near St. Mary's, Georgia, near that state's boundary with Florida. When Pratt ordered the fugitive to surrender, the bondservant went for his gun. Pratt thereupon shot and killed the runaway.¹⁷

Sometimes slave catchers used highly trained dogs to track runaways. Frederick Law Olmsted observed that dogs ranging from bloodhounds to Scot staghounds effectively pursued fugitives in other slave states. These dogs were trained to follow scents for miles. The Florida record suggests that highly trained bloodhounds were the tracking dogs of choice. The Pensacola Gazette regularly advertised the sale of bloodhounds. One such ad declared:

Blood Hounds

A healthy pair (dog and slut) black, Cuba
BLOOD HOUND PUPPIES, three months old, for
sale. These dogs are very valuable on the

trail of runaway slaves, which, they can trace thirty hours after. Inquire at this office.¹⁸

It is unclear exactly how many hunters used bloodhounds to catch runaways. As most of these canines were imported from ^{the} Caribbean, though, they were known widely to be excellent hunters and quite vicious attack dogs. The Florida slave codes did not mention the use of vicious bloodhounds to track runaways nor the consequences, if any, that slave catchers might face if such a dog killed a runaway.¹⁹

Often, the services of professional or even hired but unprofessional slave catchers were not sought or secured. Instead, local men, particularly including overseers, more or less voluntarily hunted many runaways. Madison County overseer Amon DeLaughter recorded his pursuit of runaways. He noted, for instance, that he unsuccessfully chased Jump, who got away. Usually DeLaughter, like most whites, succeeded in the hunt. On several occasions he apprehended a neighbor's slave at the DeLaughter slave quarters and returned him or her to the home plantation. He also joined others in pursuit of runaways in the general area. In April 1858, to

cite one example, he recorded that he had "help[ed] Joe Hampton hunt for a negroe." Another overseer, Bonsel Cochran, also tracked runaways for the DeLaughters. When the manager came upon several runaways who obviously did not heed his command to stop, he shot them.²⁰

Civilians and slave holder relations such as Jasper and Pickens DeLaughter might hunt for runaways, as well. The latter caught Charlott, one of his mother's slaves, in the fodder loft of O. E. Sullivan's barn. The former seized a runaway owned by a man named Sever, a Madison County neighbor and planter. C. Dougherty, another Middle Florida civilian, caught a slave "in the woods near Tallahassee" and placed him in the city jail. Although a reward had not been posted for this particular runaway, Dougherty probably felt confident that he would receive an award of some kind.²¹

Although most did not, some slave holders took the time to pursue their runaways or those owned by other masters. This disrupted the work routine on plantations and farms, but some masters believed that they had no other choice than to act. They could not wait to hire slave catchers in fear that

runaways would be long gone from the area. Nor could some afford to hire slave catchers or pay them for capturing and returning their property to them. A Madison County slave master named Sanders may have been one such owner. In pursuit of his runaway, as Amon DeLaughter recorded, Sanders came to the DeLaughter plantation during the night "to hunt his negro." William D. Moseley, a prominent planter and future governor of Florida, apprehended and received a reward of \$25 for returning a runaway to J. F. Higgs. About one year later, he captured and returned "a small negro girl belonging to Robert Hayward," his neighbor in Jefferson County.²²

On occasion, Native Americans, particularly the Seminoles, served as slave catchers. There were several reasons for this. Particularly, it appears that, following the Second Seminole War's conclusion, Seminoles found themselves vulnerable to government pressures and also resentful of their former black allies who had worked out suitable arrangements for their migration from Florida. By that point, most Black Seminole leaders had switched from the role of aiding Indians to supporting the United States military. In the circumstances, Seminoles sometimes helped to track, capture, and

return runaways to United States authorities.²³

The Fugitive Slave Law of 1850 and monetary rewards to slave catchers for enforcing it also motivated some Florida Indians to hunt runaways. The Upper Creek Indian Cotsa Fixico Chopko served as a slave catcher in south Florida. On at least one occasion in 1853, he received a reward of \$25 for the capture of a runaway. A report that recorded the details of an encounter with other runaways the same year offers interesting insight to the situation:

Three nights ago, a light was seen across the river--a boat was sent over & returned with three negro men who "all tattered & torn" said they belonged to [Billy] Bowlegs, had been out hunting & were out of ammunition! They had rifles & shot guns--hats & pants--jabbered "echo," "suc-cos-che" and talked good english. They were taken to the Com[mandin]g officer & ordered to the guard house, but ran from the Sergeant & made their escape, dropping a bundle of meat. They were yelling all night, endeavoring to get together, which they accomplished & no doubt made their way into the

interior. They were undoubtedly runaway slaves, & we will probably hear of them from the indians, who will execute the Fugitive Slave law, especially for a reward.²⁴

The monetary rewards mattered to Florida's poor Indians in the 1850s, prompting them sometimes to argue about the amount of money paid for runaways by United States authorities. In 1853, a year for which good records are available, the Indians protested that the small rewards did not justify their efforts. Late in the year Billy Bowlegs urged his fellow Seminoles not to give up runaways since whites were not willing to pay \$150 each for the fugitives. An officer reported, "Billy says, 'the Crackers stopped the trade, let them come and catch their own niggers.'"²⁵

When self-help failed, slave holders often advertised for the return of their property, perhaps hoping for a little good luck even more than the attention of a professional slave catcher. Depending on how long the runaway had remained at large, written and printed handbills offering rewards could vary from a few lines to lengthy and detailed paragraphs. Owners tried to be as accurate

as possible in describing the character, abilities, background, demeanor, dress, speech, and possible destination of runaways. Others went so far as to specify any unique features of their runaways such as color, gender, age, intellectual qualities, speech characteristics, facial expressions, body piercing, or distinguishing marks. Obviously, accurate and comprehensive data allowed slave catchers a better chance of apprehending the runaways.²⁶

Many of the advertisements also contained references to racial stereotypes as part of the descriptions. Since only a fraction of slaves ever ran away, it remains difficult to determine whether the perceptions of whites concerning these runaways properly reflected all or any part of the larger slave community, not to mention the slave to which reference was made. Some owners advertised, for example, that their runaways had a "rather downcast look" or that fugitives had "a rather guilty countenance." One master claimed that his runaway "hesitates and hems, when spoken to." Leon County planter John Braden characterized Levi as having a "down look and when spoken to his features put on an expression of wildness." A St. Joseph owner,

offering a perception similar to Braden's, claimed that Scipio had an "unmarkable wild look when alarmed." Some males were "loud spoken," while others had "a rather feminine voice." Simon's master portrayed him as having "thick lips" with a "dark sneaking look." H. P. Armestead described Andrew as being "generally sluggish in his appearance." Owners repeatedly depicted their runaways as "artful and cunning scoundrels" or words to similar effect.²⁷

Many other owners declined use of stereotypes in favor of more objective descriptions. Henry Bond probably described Matthew accurately when he noted that he "can read and write, and no doubt has a regular pass." Augustus Steele wanted Lewis captured and returned to him, giving slave catchers a better chance of apprehending him by providing them with detailed information. Steele portrayed Lewis as having a "dark complexion, short neck and full face, with a pleasing expression of countenance, of stout, athletic and muscular frame and 5 feet, 4 or 5 inches high, a carpenter by trade, and a quick and ready workman." Michael Ledwith knew his runaway well and obviously respected his intelligence. He characterized

Caution as a "bright mulatto, about five feet nine or ten inches . . . And is a little knock-kneed." Ledwith added, "When he left, he was well dressed, and will no doubt attempt to pass himself off as a free man."²⁸

Not too unusually, the advertisements--not always grudgingly--expressed slave holder admiration for runaways. One Gadsden County owner described George as a "healthy and well looking" man. Robert Butler admired Sandy's looks and skills. He explained that the runaway was "Low stature[d], good looking, with whiskers, mustache and perhaps a goatee, 27, plays the fiddle and dances well." Butler added, "[He is] an experienced body servant and has been enjoyed among the blacks as an exhorter." Henry Mash of Sopchoppy admired Prince, noting also that he had a "round face [and] remarkably beautiful white teeth."²⁹

Slave holders at times recognized and commented on the intelligence of their runaways. The Madison County slave George "speaks quick when spoken to, and is a smart sensible fellow," or so his owner declared. W. C. Smith and R. J. Roberts knew another George, who had absconded with his family, to be an intelligent bondservant. They observed,

"He has always had charge of his masters affairs, is rather an intelligent fellow, can read well and most probably write." William Alsop described Wade as "very intelligent" and a bondservant who "can read and write and will probably forge passes for himself." Five slaves disappeared from Mrs. P. U. Bryond's Madison County plantation. Most were described as intelligent, skilled bondservants. John Butler's owner considered him to be very smart, saying that he usually changed his name and "can read and is quite intelligent." Like Butler, Jerry was considered by his owner to be a skilled bondsmen who could "read and write and is very intelligent otherwise."³⁰

Masters offered substantial rewards for the return of runaways with special skills. Notices normally advertised payments that ranged from \$5 on the low side to around \$25. But, for those slaves who were considered literate, physically strong, young, articulate, handsome, or clever, owners offered considerably more for their capture. Considering him a "tolerable carpenter," Jim's Jackson County owner advertised a reward of \$50 for his capture and delivery. H. H. Chapman of Apalachicola also offered \$50 for Hol, "a well made

[bondservant], bow-legged, his hair is shimmering black, when combed is pretty straight." Chapman noted, as well, "He plays little on the violin [and] is by trade a tailor." Described as "healthy and well looking [and a] carpenter by trade," Augustus Lanier's slave merited a \$50 payment. John Parish offered \$100 reward for the capture of Hunter or Sam Jones, whom he described as having a "pass to hire his own time." Meanwhile, Leon County's Hamilton Hudson advertised a \$100 reward for the return of Lewis, a young man of eighteen. One slave owner promised to pay a \$200 reward for two children.³¹

The highest rewards offered during the 1830s and 1840s came when slave owners presumed a white person had "stolen" or "inticed" away their runaways. They usually pledged one amount for the slave and a larger sum for persons caught with the runaway. Thomas Bush concluded that his six runaways were ushered off by some white person. He offered a \$675 reward for the capture of his fugitives and "proof that will connect any white person or persons who caused them to leave." Like Bush, Leon County slave holder Jacob Stroman theorized that his slave had "been enticed away by some white man." He agreed to pay \$25 for the

runaway in the territory and \$50 if he was captured outside of Florida. Stroman made it clear that a \$100 reward would be given to the individual who could prove that a person assisted his slave in "absconding." W. H. Saunders offered \$30 (or \$10 each) for runaways George, Joe, and Charles. He vowed to pay \$100 for the "recovery of the three negroes and the thief" who took them.³²

Reflecting the general prosperity of the 1850s, slave holders paid substantially more for runaways they considered stolen by whites than they had during the previous two decades. W. J. Scott offered \$200 for the return of his slave and the "white man claiming him as his property." Another slave owner promised to pay the same \$200 reward for the capture of his runaway whom he believed "to have been stolen by a white man." Guaranteeing \$250, A. A. Fisher also wanted his slave and the person who stole him.³³

Owners paid a little more than the average of \$15 to \$20 dollars for runaways when they considered their bondsmen to be "harbored" or "hidden" by other slaves or whites. Slave holders apparently differentiated between "stolen" and "harbored" slaves since their rewards for the latter reflected

as much. Martha H. Macon, for one, guaranteed to pay \$50 for the return of Dilsey whom she surmised had been harbored by a slave named Power for several weeks. Madison County's James Osmond vowed to pay \$25 for his slave and another \$75 "for proof to connect his being harbored by a white person."³⁴

Some masters showed less confidence that out-of-county or out-of-Florida fugitives would be apprehended by offering even higher rewards. Robert W. Alston promised to pay \$40 for London's return in Florida but \$100 "if taken in Georgia." Qua's master feared that he had disappeared from Escambia County and guaranteed \$100 for his capture and return. John Hunt had lost confidence that Perry would be captured after he, too, left Escambia County. Like the reward on Qua's head, Perry's master pledged \$100 for his return. Hypothesizing that his runaway would head to South Carolina, Cornelius Beazley also vowed to pay \$100 for capture and return of his fugitive. As a general matter, slaves holders usually offered at least \$100 when they feared their runaways had left the county or state.³⁵

The converse also was true. Masters who concluded that their runaways had not gone far

offered smaller rewards. J. D. Fisher, owner of the Florida Works in Gadsden County, guaranteed only \$5 for capture of his mulatto Dyce. Fisher speculated that she would appear in Quincy, only a few miles from his business. Likewise, Francisco Moreno held out only \$5 for capture of his runaway, believing him to have stayed in the Pensacola area. Slave holders Henry Carr and George Fisher offered \$5 each for the return of their runaways, whom they believed were "lurking" their plantations. Tallahassee's John R. Lloyd only vowed to pay \$10 for an "African Negro named Aleck" since he postulated that Aleck had traveled only a few miles west of the master's plantation to Quincy.³⁶

Slave owners often took pains in runaway notices to make it clear to slave catchers that subduing or apprehending their runaway could be dangerous. When Jackson County's Mary Roberts advertised her "muscular" runaway, she suggested that Harry might put up some resistance given that he already had had one ear bitten off "close to his head." Madison County's A. H. Lanier warned would-be pursuers about his fugitive, as well. The owner commented that George "is a smart sensible fellow who ran off after an attempt to murder my manager

and one or two of my negroes." Lanier further commented, "George was shot some years back while on a runaway trip and received 8 or 9 shots in, I think, his left leg and thigh and has some small marks of the whip on his back." Adam, another of Lanier's runaways, possessed a reputation for meanness. The owner described him as having a "large scar on his back near . . . the left shoulder blade, with other marks by the whip for fighting." From the advertisement it appears that slave catchers and others who might pursue one of Governor Richard K. Call's slaves had their hands full. The fugitive stabbed the overseer in the back when he tried to apprehend him.³⁷

Especially high rewards were offered for the capture of runaways accused of murdering a white person. A large payment, for example, was offered for the capture of two slaves accused of killing James Roundtree. The two men, who lived and worked in Gadsden County, had been sold to Roundtree. As they made their way from Gadsden to Lowndes County, Georgia, the slaves killed their new owner in "Leon County, near the line between Georgia and Florida." Citizens of Tallahassee increased the original reward of \$100 each for the capture of these

runaways to a total of \$405. Newspaper accounts do not indicate whether the fugitives ever were caught.³⁸

The processing of captured runaways followed certain patterns. For one thing, those who refused to give their name or that of their masters were housed in the nearest jail. Most counties in Florida had at least a rudimentary jailhouse located near the county courthouse. Few descriptions of Florida jailhouses that existed during the territorial or antebellum period have come down to us. If they were anything like the dirt floor, poorly ventilated, hot in the summer and cold in the winter cabins that housed slaves and poor whites, they easily constituted a health hazard for incarcerated runaways. Slaves who did not want to give the jailer or sheriff any information about themselves remained in these unhealthy places for months or possibly years before they were sold at public auction to defray various expenses incurred by the county.³⁹

Some imprisoned fugitives obviously preferred to remain in jail until they could plan their escape. Since most jails were rather flimsy and poorly constructed affairs, numerous runaways were

able to make successful getaways. Leon County planter Samuel Parkhill's slaves were caught and confined in the Hawkinsville, Georgia, jail, which probably differed little from those of Middle Florida. "Edmund fired the jail," a report noted, "and subsequently broke out." The owner speculated that the bondservant and his wife thereafter persisted in their attempt to get back to Hamburg, South Carolina, where they once had lived. Six Madison County runaways accused of killing overseer Matthew D. Giffin were captured and confined to the county jail. Biding their time, they broke out two weeks later. They eventually were recaptured. Leon County runaway Tom made it to Thomasville, Georgia, before his capture. He refused to divulge his real identity and that of his master, while offering several misleading assertions. Creating enough confusion to permit him some time to plan, the slave took a mere five days to break out of jail.⁴⁰

In sum, Florida seriously attempted to address the problem of runaways but with mixed success at best. The legislative council passed numerous laws. Many reflected those of other southern states, although Florida offered lower rewards official rewards for the capture of runaways. The same laws

anticipated that most white, male Floridians would play a role in catching runaways. Private citizens, professional slave catchers, and others pursued and apprehended fugitives. Sometimes, they used bloodhounds; many times, they did not. Few owners and overseers pursued runaways personally because of the time involved away from plantations and farms. Slave patrols sometimes operated during times of crisis but proved, for the most part, ineffective in capturing runaways. Privately posted rewards generally brought far better results, especially when combined with published notices that provided accurate information.

NOTES

Chapter Six

1. See, for example, Landers, Black Society in Spanish Florida; idem, "Free and Slave" in The New History of Florida; idem, "Gracia Real de Santa Teresa de Mose," 9-30; idem, "Traditions of African American Freedom and Community in Spanish Colonial Florida,"; idem, "Slave Resistance on the Southeastern Frontier," 12-24.
2. Laws of Territorial Florida (1824), 290.
3. Ibid.
4. Jacksonville Courier, September 2, 17, October 8, 1835. For the various laws, see Laws of Territorial Florida (1825), (1828), (1833), (1835), and Laws of Florida (1850).
5. Franklin and Schweninger, Runaway Slaves, 156-57; Laws of Territorial Florida (1824), 291; Pensacola Gazette, June 15, 1839.

6. Laws of Territorial Florida (1833), 26-27, (1834), 31.
 7. Ibid., (1833), 27; Franklin and Schweninger, Runaway Slaves, 152.
 8. Laws of Territorial Florida (1833), 93.
 9. Rawick, American Slave, Florida, vol. 17, 338 (hereafter cited as FSN).
 10. Ibid., 97.
 11. Ibid., 37, 244; Key West Key of the Gulf, November 4, 1882.
 12. St. Augustine News, August 12, October 7, November 4, 1843.
 13. Quincy Sentinel, September 18, 1840; Ocala Argus, March 26, 1848; Jacksonville Courier, December 12, 24, 1835, January 7, February 11, 1836, December 17, 1837; St. Joseph Times, September 26, 1840.
 14. Jacksonville Courier, September 2, 3, 1835.
 15. See, for example, Amon DeLaughter journal, 57, 97, 104, collection of the author.
 16. St. Augustine East Florida Herald, March 1, 1823; St. Augustine Ancient City March 16, 1850.
- Most studies suggest that the majority of slaves were caught by slave catchers or other civilians. See, for example, Franklin and Schweninger, Runaway

- Slaves, 149-81; Campbell, Empire for Slavery, 180-84; Mullin, Flight and Rebellion, 39-47.
17. St. Augustine East Florida Herald, March 15, 1860; Fernandina Weekly East Floridian, August 30, 1860; Cedar Keys Telegraph, February 15, 1860.
18. Pensacola Gazette, April 28, 1837.
19. Franklin and Schweninger, Runaway Slaves, 161.
20. Amon DeLaughter journal, 30, 61, 79, 115.
21. Tallahassee Floridian, June 12, 1841.
22. Amon DeLaughter journal, 63; William D. Moseley diary and other papers (typescript at Strozier Library, Florida State University), 5, 23.
23. William H. French to J. C. Casey, November 19, 1853, John C. Casey Papers, Thomas Gilcrease Institute, Tulsa, Okla.
24. Ibid., William H. French to J. C. Casey, November 19, 1853, William J. Sloan to Dear Captain, June 16, 1853.
25. Ibid., French to Casey, November 19, 1853.
26. Franklin and Schweninger, Runaway Slaves, 170; Mullin, Flight and Rebellion, 39-41.
27. Tallahassee Florida Sentinel, February 18, 1842, February 2, September 21, 1847, April 16, November 26, 1850, October 12, 1852; St. Augustine Ancient City, March 16, 1850; Apalachicola Gazette,

November 23, 1856; Magnolia Advertiser, March 13, 1829; Tallahassee Floridian and Journal, February 20, 1858, November 17, 1860; Pensacola Gazette, August 29, 1840; Tallahassee Weekly Floridian, April 20, 1839; Tallahassee Floridian and Advocate, October 6, 1828; Tallahassee Floridian, September 6, 1834, April 7, May 19, November 3, 1838, April 20, May 4, 1839.

28. Tallahassee Floridian, May 31, June 15, 1839, March 21, 1840.

29. Tallahassee Floridian and Journal, April 27, 1850; November 20, 1858; Tallahassee Star of Florida, September 1, 1843.

30. Tallahassee Floridian and Journal, January 29, 1853; Tallahassee Floridian, June 15, 1839, April 18, 1846; Jacksonville News, July 16, 1847, July 7, December 22, 1855, October 10, 1857; Pensacola Florida Democrat, January 18, 1849.

31. Quincy Sentinel, January 1, 1841; Apalachicola Commercial Advertiser, January 25, 1845; Tallahassee Star of Florida, August 9, 1844; Tallahassee Floridian, March 30, 1839, June 19, 1841; Apalachicola Gazette, April 20, 1839; Jacksonville Courier, January 4, 1851.

32. Tallahassee Florida Sentinel, October 13, 1841, February 2, 1847; Jacksonville News, October 12, 14, 28, November 4, 1854; Tallahassee Floridian and Journal, August 20, 1853; Pensacola Gazette, October 11, 1837, February 1, 1840; Tallahassee Floridian and Advocate, July 13, 1830; Tallahassee Floridian, December 26, 1840, November, 13, December 25, 1847.
33. Tallahassee Florida Sentinel, November 26, 1850, November 25, 1851, October 12, 1852.
34. Key West Gazette, April 8, 1840; Tallahassee Floridian, August 15, 1846.
35. Tampa Florida Peninsular, October 3, 1857; Tallahassee Floridian, October 17, 1835, April 20, 1839, January 10, April 18, 1846; Pensacola Gazette, October 7, 1837, December 12, 1840.
36. Pensacola Gazette, September 23, 1828; Quincy Sentinel, August 14, 1840; Tallahassee Floridian, August 22, October 3, 1835, February 3, 1838, September 12, 1840; Tallahassee Floridian and Advocate, September 1, 1829, November 9, 1830; Tallahassee Floridian and Journal, May 10, 1851.
37. Tallahassee Floridian, February 14, 1835, January 22, December 30, 1851, January 22, 29, 1853; Tallahassee Star of Florida, September 1, 8, 1843;

Tallahassee Floridian and Journal, December 20,
1851.

38. Tallahassee Floridian, August 9, 1834.

39. Ibid., June 12, 1841.

40. Amon DeLaughter journal, May 4, 1860, 113; Laws
of Territorial Florida (1824), 289-92; Tampa Florida
Peninsular, March 17, 24, May 5, 26, 1860.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Florida Bondservants and the Civil War

"If everything is left to Negroes, . . . I know they will not take care of anything."

Florida contained nearly 62,000 slaves when the state seceded from the Union in January 1861, about 44 percent of its total population. Most of the bondservants lived in Middle Florida's black belt (the area framed by the Apalachicola River on the west and the Suwannee River on the east). Here, enslaved blacks accounted for over 75 percent of the total population in this region. East Florida (the territory eastward of the Suwannee River and including the peninsula) held the second largest concentration of slaves, about 20 percent of its total population. West Florida (the district in the western Panhandle laying between the Perdido River on the west and the Apalachicola River on the east) had the smallest number of bondservants. They

amounted to only 7 percent of the region's total residents. Yet, wherever they lived and worked, enslaved blacks, as scholar W. E. B. Du Bois asserted for the South as a whole, tipped the Civil War tide in favor of the North by waging a "general strike."¹ This chapter will focus on the various ways that these bondservants took the initiative to fight for their freedom during the war years.

Most obviously, African Americans struck against slavery by fighting for freedom as soldiers and sailors in the United States military. East Florida's bondservants, who also proved the most vocal in resisting slavery, most often physically sought to win their freedom by joining the Federals. Many of them knew early that their fates and futures were tied inextricably to the war's outcome. Area slaves, already inclined to cooperate with the freedom fight, became more assertive with the increasing proximity of Union troops. Since Federal gunboats patrolled the St. Johns River region, runaways could hope for freedom upon reaching the Union navy. Accordingly, during the war's early stages East Florida slaveholders witnessed significant losses of men, women, and children. For many of East Florida's enslaved blacks, as historian

Daniel L. Schafer aptly noted, "freedom became as close as the St. Johns River."²

Northeast Florida bondservants who joined the northern military contributed to the Union's triumph in numerous ways and, thus, to their own freedom. Most male runaways enlisted in the Union army. They eventually stood among the 180,000 black men who labored for the Union cause during the war. This allowed them not only to fight for their own freedom but also to earn money for themselves and their families. Thus, of the over one thousand slaves who absconded from Duval County alone, the majority became soldiers. They enlisted in numerous regiments, including the First, Second, and Third South Carolina Infantry, the Fifty-fourth Massachusetts Infantry, and the Second, Eighth, Twenty-first, Thirty-first, Thirty-third, Thirty-four, Thirty-fifth, Ninety-ninth, and 102d United States Colored Infantry (USCI).³

The East Florida runaways who joined the Union army included many men who believed firmly that freedom for their families and enslaved blacks in general could be achieved if they fought the Confederates. Pursuing that commitment, numbers of them participated in engagements throughout the East

and Middle Florida regions, including at the two largest of Florida's battles, those of Olustee and Natural Bridge. White officers noted their bravery. For instance, Colonel Thomas Higginson--an ardent abolitionist and one of the Secret Six who had provided financial support for John Brown's 1859 raid on the United States Arsenal at Harpers Ferry, Virginia--described the Florida soldiers as bold and brave fighting men. Another Union soldier voiced words of praise for black soldiers who fought at the Battle of Olustee on February 20, 1864. He asserted that the men of the Eighth and Thirty-fifth USCI and the Fifty-fourth Massachusetts, regiments that included Florida soldiers, fought "like devils." The Confederates killed over two hundred men and wounded more than eleven hundred at Olustee. Approximately three hundred additional blacks, among them more Floridians, received fatal wounds at the battle of Natural Bridge near Tallahassee in 1865.⁴

Much as was true for other black Union soldiers who fought in theaters of the South, wounded Florida slave recruits sometimes faced savagery and death at Confederates' hands after the fighting had stopped. James A. Seddon, the Confederate Secretary of War, set the stage for such atrocities by commanding that

captured black soldiers be executed. He ordered, "We ought never to be inconvenienced with such [slave] prisoners . . . summary execution must therefore be inflicted on those taken." At the Battle of Milliken's Bend on the Mississippi River on June 7, 1863, Seddon's orders were enforced by the murder of wounded black soldiers. Some eight months later at the Battle of Olustee, Colonel Abner McCormick of the Second Florida Cavalry also enforced Seddon's edict. The colonel directed, "Do not take any negro prisoners in this fight." Confederate officers and soldiers followed his instructions. When a high-ranking officer of the Fourth Georgia Cavalry heard gunshots and asked a Confederate officer what was happening, the man replied, "Shooting niggers sir." But, the worst atrocity against black troops would occur at Fort Pillow in Tennessee some two months later. Hundreds of black troops would be slaughtered by Confederate soldiers after they had surrendered.⁵

The black soldiers fought and died even though the War Department paid them less money than white soldiers received. Although black soldiers had proven that they would fight, they received ten dollars per month while white privates were allowed

thirteen. Most Florida soldiers probably accepted the lesser compensation in order to provide some assistance to their families and kinfolk, although blacks of the Fifty-fourth Massachusetts rejected the unequal pay. Money likely became an issue for black Floridians who risked their lives in various skirmishes and battles, but the war's outcome remained a bigger issue. By the time of the Battle of Olustee, Congress finally had enacted a law that equalized pay between black and white troops.⁶

Some East Florida slaves did not participate in actual combat but worked instead as laborers for the United States Army. For example, bondservants who had helped to establish one of Florida's earliest black churches, Bethel Baptist Institutional of Jacksonville, used the structure as a hospital for the care of Union soldiers. Some slaves such as Lettie and Aunt Eliza prepared food for the combatants. Former slave Amanda McCray recalled that she prepared food for the Federals, as well.⁷

Even when the slaves' roles did not involve combat, their health and lives nonetheless often were placed at risk. Service in the Florida peninsula often involved facing less-than-ideal conditions. To cite one example, during yellow

fever epidemics black workers--as opposed to white laborers--were compelled to work at Fort Jefferson in the Dry Tortugas and Key West's Fort Taylor. Many died from the "yellow jack" despite the beliefs of some military authorities that the bondservants enjoyed immunity to the disease. Although the large majority of affected blacks still wanted to lay their lives on the line regardless of unhealthy conditions, exceptions existed. Squire Jackson was one. He escaped slavery to join the Union army only to be discouraged by the lack of medical treatment black soldiers received from the Federals. The former slave made up his mind not to enlist after seeing "wounded colored soldiers stretched out on the filthy ground" with no one attending to them.⁸

Runaways from Northeast Florida also joined the Union navy. The tradition of blacks serving in the United States Navy dated back to its creation in 1790. Black sailors then were numerous on some ships and usually served in integrated units. The Civil War-era Gulf Blockading Squadron used blacks before other naval squadrons of its time. But, much as was true of other black sailors in southern reaches, Florida naval men encountered rampant discrimination and exploitation, particularly after

the 1862 reorganization of the Gulf Blockading Squadron into the West Gulf and East Gulf blockading squadrons. Secretary of the Navy Gideon Wells ordered that blacks "be allowed . . . no higher rating than boys, at a compensation of \$10 per month and one ration per day." These wages, like those for soldiers, averaged far below those of white sailors. As with their army comrades, the black mariners would not receive equal pay until January 1, 1864.⁹

Slaves who joined the Union navy often proved helpful as informants. Many assisted freedom's cause by aiding naval attempts to destroy the Confederacy's ability to preserve foods. Slaves knew, for example, the importance of salt to the conservation of food such as fish, pork, and other meats. Where salt works could be destroyed, the rebels would have find themselves with little to eat. Enslaved blacks had worked in these enterprises and knew where they were. At Cedar Keys, for instance, slaves who made salt furnished the Union information used to demolished that operation, at least according to Mary Minus Biddle.¹⁰

Beyond active service with the United States

government, East Florida's slaves engaged in what the scholar W. E. B. Du Bois called a quiet rebellion, an act of resistance that became more evident as word of Union Civil War victories circulated. The bondsmen and -women understood that their labor freed whites to fight for their continued enslavement. Most slaves naturally did not want to contribute to the Southern cause. In one instance, two East Florida slave holders concluded that slaves in the area intended to help the Union cause by not planting crops for human consumption, efforts that ultimately would impair the Confederacy's ability to feed its troops. They were convinced that the slaves would stop planting crops as early as 1862 when Confederate supplies were in critically short supply in the Upper South.¹¹

When owners attempted to force their bondspeople to labor for the South, increasingly they faced resistance. According to his daughter, William J. Watkins of what is now Bartow hired out his bondservants to aid local Confederate families. She recalled that this did not sit well with one of the slaves. When Watkins lent out this particular person to do laundry for a woman whose husband

fought for the Confederacy, the slave would not work for her. The bondswoman communicated to the mistress her position, declaring that "Miss L. she say your father he sending us to wash to help her husband fight to keep us slaves."¹²

It appears that Northeast Florida slaves generally became more vocal about their feelings as the war continued. As early as 1862 Octavia Stephens, the wife of Confederate officer Winston Stephens, found herself dealing with bondservants who refused to be worked hard. Her surviving correspondence implies that slaves refused to labor hard if the owners did not work. The mistress went on to insist that one slave had the gall to say that his Putnam County slave holder had worked before getting "married but . . . had not since." Bondservants continued to work poorly and complain about their assignments on the Winston Stephens farm. The Stephenses believed that their bondservants knew that the war was fought over slavery. Stephens urged his wife by letter not to "trust [the] negroes" or go "in the woods" if the Union army arrived nearby. He also did not want her to let "the negroes know where" she was going. Stephens, like many Floridians, had become convinced

that enslaved blacks covertly and overtly were doing what they could to impede the Confederacy's war efforts.¹³

Slaves in peninsular Florida also forthrightly voiced their thoughts and opinions as signs of the Confederacy's collapse became more evident. Tampa's Sarah Brown Bryant reflected the attitude of many slaves during the war years. A revealing interview with the former slave by a descendant of her one-time master illustrated her attitude toward her owners and soldiers fighting for the Confederacy:

One day during the war, Sarah went into the [John T. Lesley] house and found grandmother rocking Aunt India and both of them crying. She asked them why they were crying, and grandmother replied that her husband and father of her child was away in the war and that he might be killed and they would never see him again, etc. Sarah then asked her if she remembered when she was first brought to Tampa she would cry for her mother and they would spank her. And for her not to cry as it would not do her any good.¹⁴

West Florida slaves also contributed to their freedom by working in various military installations in the region. Most had been concentrated in Escambia and Santa Rosa Counties, which early found themselves under Union influence if not control. In the circumstances, the region's slaves aided the United States in many ways. For one thing, black recruits served out their time at Union-controlled Fort Barrancas from 1864 to the war's end. Few actually saw fighting, although Brigadier General Alexander Asboth used a small number of West Florida's black soldiers in his Jackson County raid of September 1864. The majority performed manual labor. They worked, for example, loading and unloading ships, helping to maintain the local railroad system, kept salt works running, and assisted the erection and repair of fortifications and bridges.¹⁵

Middle Florida slaves, who comprised by far the largest segment of the state's slave population, helped to shake the foundation of slavery in many subtle but effective ways. The Union failed to occupy the region, leaving runaways almost two hundred miles to travel to reach Federal lines. Fearing that they easily could be captured moving

about in large family groups, most slaves in the region opted to remain in place.¹⁶

Some whites in the Middle Florida region nonetheless believed through much of the war that a large slave uprising was imminent. The Tallahassee Florida Sentinel, on its part, encouraged Middle Florida residents to arm themselves in case of a large scale slave rebellion. Some citizens even called for Governor John Milton to declare martial law in the state to protect against the potential of violent slave unrest. As it turned out, no such event occurred.¹⁷

Although Middle Florida slaves did not run away to join the Union army or navy in large numbers, they did know about the war. Black wagoner Acie Thomas certainly numbered among them. He, in turn, passed on information about various battles to other blacks during his travels throughout the region. Enslaved blacks also witnessed the departure of the Confederate army from Florida for more pressing theaters of battle. Bondservants similarly looked on as masters and overseers left to fight for the southern cause. Former slave Willis Williams saw his master's "eldest son Charlie" volunteer for Confederate service. Louis Napoleon watched as his

master's "oldest sons went to war with the Confederate army."¹⁸

Other bondservants--such as Henry Call of Jackson County, George Washington Witherspoon of Gadsden County, and Lewis of Leon County--knew about the war because they had traveled with their masters to the battle front. They, like many other slaves, quietly passed the news on to other bondservants. Former slave Amanda McCray remembered that slaves on her plantation "first heard of the Civil War" from the local slave preacher. "He held whispered prayers for the success of the Union soldiers," she recalled.¹⁹

As mentioned earlier, scholar W. E. B. Du Bois stressed the significance of the quiet rebellion that took place among slaves throughout the Civil War South. The phrase "quiet rebellion" well mirrored the Middle Florida situation. Many area whites, from their perspectives, certainly believed this to be the case. The absence of planters and overseers on plantations and farms left many slaves without close supervision. Whites routinely believed that such a lack of close surveillance would encourage slaves to become more assertive in throwing off the shackles of bondage. One fearful

Tallahassee editor even called on slaveholders to abandon the fighting and return home. "Many men could serve the Confederacy better out of the military," he insisted, "than in it." The editor went on to assert that "The governor should take immediate steps to see that at least one white male adult was left on each plantation."²⁰

All the while, many of Middle Florida's enslaved blacks quietly assisted Union efforts to win their freedom. As historian Peter Kolchin noted, "The actions of slaves themselves helped [to bring down the Confederacy]" and bondservants took every opportunity of weakened authority to sabotage the old order through their behavior. As far as some slaves were concerned, slavery had collapsed by war's end thanks to their unwillingness to obey plantation rules. Mrs. M. N. Fletcher, for example, bluntly informed her son that the family's slaves would no longer obey her. She noted that "in spite of all that I can do they have broke[n] into the sugar house and took my calf skins and nearly a barrel of syrup . . . and I think about two hundred pounds of meat." Ms. Fletcher went on to note that she had informed the overseer about the disgraceful behavior of the bondservants. He had replied that

he "could not help" to stop what the slaves were doing.²¹

Other slaves contributed to the Union cause by their unwillingness to work consistently and productively. At least, Confederate Captain Rabun Scarborough thought so. By 1862, the officer was imploring his wife to keep his letters "strictly confidential" since he feared that the slaves on his small Gadsden County plantation might take advantage of their contents. Scarborough asked on one occasion, "Are the negroes more than half done picking cotton[?]" He continued, "Tell Prince [the driver] he must make hands do their best." Being away from home, Scarborough nonetheless grasped that his slaves were working poorly for his wife. In a subsequent letter, he remarked directly about his bondservants' work ethics. "I have suffered more uneasiness on that point than almost any other," he declared, "for I know if everything is left with Negroes until the middle of March we will make but a small crop, & I know they will not take care of anything."²²

Other Middle Florida bondservants became noticeably irksome as the war continued. Slaves Flora and Jane grew quite unmanageable on Governor

Milton's Jackson County plantation. Flora left the Milton's baby unattended while Jane ignored her daily tasks whenever she felt the inclination to do so. When the governess tried to punish the bondservants, they retaliated.²³

Some enslaved blacks decreased the amount of work they did even though they did so without displaying a disagreeable attitude towards their masters. Susan Bradford Eppes, daughter of large planter Edward Bradford, learned of the true character of one of their "trusted" house servants after the war. Eppes related this story about the house servant who "opened" eyes to her true nature:

[Mrs. Bradford] told her young daughter [Susan] to go to Emeline, the cook, give her the keys to the storeroom and pantry and tell her to provide bountifully for the guests. . . . It seemed an easy thing to deliver the keys and the message to Emeline. Extending the keys, [Susan] said, "Emeline Mother says she wants you to take these keys and have everything just as you know it ought to be. The doctors will be her [sic] to dinner." . . . Imagine the shock and surprise at her answer: "Take dem

keys back ter yer Mother an' tell her I don't
never 'spects ter cook no more, not while I
lives--tell her I's free, bless de Lord!"

Needless to say, young Susan Bradford could not persuade the former bondservant to change her mind.²⁴ It remains difficult to determine how many slaves actually absconded from Middle Florida during the war years. Many obviously did. Slaveowners during this period simply did not advertise their runaways. But, if former slave Margaret Nickerson's recollections are reflective of slaves' desires to disappear from the farms and plantations in the Middle Florida region during the war, many did so. Nickerson recalled that slaves on her former master's plantation ran away but lived in the nearby woods. She claimed that "when de big gun fiahed, de runaway slaves came out of the woods from all directions." Mrs. M. N. Fletcher noted that, on the Oak Grove plantation, Jim and Stephen had disappeared and they might "try to get to the yankees." Joshua Hoyet Frier, a Florida militiaman, also recalled tracking Middle Florida fugitives during the war years.²⁵

Enslaved blacks in Florida, much like other

slaves throughout the South, demonstrated in ways large and small that they wanted their liberty. Slaves in West and East Florida showed their willingness to effect change in their status by joining the Union military. Some fought in the Union army while others volunteered for service in the Union navy. Still other slaves in these two regions served as spies, laborers, and informants for the North.

In Middle Florida, slaves did not abscond as much as did their West and East Florida counterparts because of demographic restrictions. Most Middle Florida bondservants remained 200 miles from Union lines. Yet, they did not sit and wait for their change to come. Many became unruly by not working consistently and productively, while others took the opportunity to run away or to steal what they could from their owners. Some even quietly resisted during the war years before showing their true character at the war's end. But, as Du Bois noted, a quiet rebellion had started during the war years which would have escalated into more violence had the war not ended as it did.

NOTES

Chapter Seven

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CHAPTER EIGHT

Profile of a Florida Runaway

"Jack, about 22 years of age, medium size, about 5 feet 6 inches high, dark copper color, quick spoken, & rather intelligent."

Runaway slave advertisements appeared in virtually all Florida newspapers published from the territorial period's 1821 beginning to the Civil War's onset in 1861. Taken together, the notices offered a tremendous volume of information on runaways, their personalities and personal lives, their intentions, and their ambitions. Over time, they illustrated also intriguing and significant shifts as to who the runaway might be. Thus, a typical advertisement such as the following one permits, when viewed with hundreds of others published in Florida, an in-depth portrait of the slave runaway:

Ten Dollars Reward

RANAWAY on the 11th August, a Negro Man named ANDREW, twenty-one or two years old. Has dark complexion, five feet nine or ten inches high, generally sluggish in his appearance, and speaks very slow. He was formerly owned by Mr. Samuel Taylor of South Carolina, who sold him to Major Floyd of Apalachicola, and it is probable he may attempt to return to one of the above named places. The above reward will be paid on his delivery to the Subscriber at Aspalaga, with all reasonable expenses--or if taken up out of the Territory and lodged in jail, giving the necessary information to the subscriber to obtain him.¹

In general, the great majority of runaways, as suggested by Andrew's description, were young men. Many remained in their teens or else had attained only their twenties. During the period that began in 1821 and ended in 1840, 76 percent of those advertised in a broad sampling were males. Of those runaways, 72 percent ranged between the ages of thirteen and twenty-nine. Sixty-nine percent of

sampled runaway notices published from 1841 to 1860 involved males, with 70 percent consisting of males aged thirteen and twenty-nine. So, a somewhat higher percentage of women ran away during the second period. This statistic suggests that more women attempted to flee as slavery developed and expanded in Florida during the late 1840s and 1850s. Tables One and Two illustrate the point:

Table One

Gender of Runaways (1821-1840)

Number of Females	59
Percentage	24
Number of Males	186
Percentage	76

Table Two

Gender of Runaways (1841-1860)

Number of Females	137
Percentage	30
Number of Males	319
Percentage	70

Motivations and intentions of runaways ran a myriad of possibilities. Young men departed more frequently than did others for several reasons including that they had not yet forged ties of marriage or fatherhood. Slaves ran from places as well as to various destinations. Many of them even headed to goals outside of Florida. Joshua Croom offered a \$25 reward for fugitives Hector and Simon, the former of whom he described as "22 stout 5'9" or 10"" and the latter as "16 middle size, dark, stammers." He noted that they originally had been purchased in the Muscle Shoals area of Alabama, "Where I expect they are making for." Sometimes bondsmen were driven by motivations so intense that they would risk their lives amid wartime conditions.

Lewis's experience provides a good example. Aged twenty-two, the young man stole "a fine fleet grey horse from the United States horse yard at Fort Brooke." Owner Augustus Steele believed that Lewis was trying to get to "South Carolina, whence he was brought last fall," even though the journey would take him through the heart of hostile territory during one of the Second Seminole War's hottest periods.²

Additional reasons for flight came from the fact that young men typically were less afraid to challenge their owners' or overseers' authority, a fact that prompted many to take off to avoid punishment or else to return to a former and, presumably, happier residence. For instance, George confronted his master and overseer on several occasions. An 1844 Tallahassee advertisement declared of him:

Ranaway from the subscriber living in Gadsden a mulatto boy named George, about 28 years old, 5 feet 6 to 8 inches high, healthy and well looking, and weighing about 165 pounds, is a carpenter by trade. . . . George has some marks on his back caused by the whip.³

Ten years later, George again came to public attention for defying owner Augustus Lanier. This time Lanier noted, "George was shot some years back while in a runaway trip and received 8 or 9 shots in, I think, his left leg and thigh and has some small marks of the whip on his back." Along with George, fellow runaway Adam likewise had challenged the owner. According to the notice, Adam bore "a large scar on his back near, I think, the left shoulder blade, with other marks by the whip for fighting." Lanier considered both men to be mean runaways.⁴

Several factors help to account for why women ran away somewhat more frequently during the post-1840 period than was the case during the pre-1841 era. Particularly, during the mid 1830s and 1840s many slave owners felt themselves buffeted by the economic depression known as the Panic of 1837. Advertisements reflected large numbers of sales and auctions of slaves forced by the bad times. Many slave holders had been bankrupted, compelling emergency disposition of bondsmen to pay off debts.⁵ The circumstances separated countless slave families. Accordingly, in the early to mid-1840s women found themselves faced with the necessity of

running away if they were to reunite all, or at least part, of their families. For example, Dilsey fled in 1840 to be with her spouse who, according to owner Martha H. Macon, lived in the nearby "neighborhood of Shellpoint." In 1842, Levenia left her Leon County master in search of her husband. The owner claimed that she will try to get with her husband who lives "in the neighborhood of Quincy."⁶

The majority of slave women who absconded, just as was true of their male counterparts, departed as teenagers or young adults in their twenties or early thirties. From 1821 to 1840, 65 percent of female fugitives were young females, while 75 percent from 1841 to 1860 fell into the same category. Only 1 percent of the young women took their children with them. Few, if any, appeared to run away while pregnant. Runaway ads typically described the young female fugitive in words such as "negro wench, is intelligent, but cunning, and quick spoken." William B. Ross's advertisement, which described his two female fugitives, provides an additional illustration:

Negro Wench named Sophia about 23 or 24 years old, thick set, not very black. She is

supposed to be in the neighborhood of Strawberry Mills. Another Wench named Clarissa, about 25 years of age, rather black. She is supposed to be in the same neighborhood with the other. \$20.00 reward for both.⁷

While most women in their thirties and forties tended to flee in pairs or else in groups, those who were teens or in their twenties usually attempted the journey to freedom alone. Much like single young men, the larger number of the young females probably believed that they enjoyed a better chance of making it to their destinations if they traveled without company. Susan, a mulatto woman about twenty-four years of age, provided a case in point. Her owner speculated that she would head to South Carolina where she once lived. Betty or Betsy, who departed alone from her Pensacola owner's residence, was described as twenty-five years of age with a "short & chunky round full face, heavy sunken eyes." Sally took a solo freedom trip, as well. Her owner D. A. Gaillard described her as "light colored and very likely about nineteen years old."⁸

To summarize the point, during both the territorial and early statehood periods the largest

proportion of slaves left alone. Specifically, 82 percent of sampled advertisements dating from 1821 to 1840 had the fugitive setting out alone. Runaways such as Maria, John David, Caesar, Sally, William Rose, Robin, Sophia, John Butler, Sam, and others left their owners unescorted. During the following twenty years, the overall rate decreased slightly to 80 percent. These figures generally conform with the statistics for runaways from Virginia, North and South Carolina, Tennessee, and Louisiana for the later period. For both periods, an average of only 7 percent absconded in groups of 2 to 4, while a mere 2 percent on the average ran away in groups of five or more. It thus represented a rare occasion when, in 1839, Nelson, his wife Jinney, and their daughters Mary and Judy fled the Cornelius Beazley's Jefferson County plantation or when, eleven years later, Hampton and his wife left Palatka with their five children.⁹

One exception to the general rule on single departures should be noted at this point. A few slaves left in groups after committing a crime of some sort. Eleven such slaves fled the Madison County plantation of Jesse Watts after taking part in the murder of M. D. Griffin, the overseer.

Authorities convicted six fugitives of the homicide, and three subsequently hanged for their part in the murder. Seven slaves left as a group from St. Augustine. According to the local newspaper, the "seven negroes . . . have been committing murder and plundering the settlers on the coast."¹⁰

Only on rare occasions would young female fugitives travel with another person. According to John Carney, Tehnah and Nancy absconded together in one of those unusual attempts. The owner asserted, "Tehnah is yellow, age about 20 years; Nancy is a black girl, age about 15 years." Richard Sheffer offered another example in the case of his slave Mary. She was, he declared, "18, stout made, and well grown, her color is not black but a shade darker than mulatto." Sheffer added, "She was accompanied by a small girl, about ten years old, belonging to Christina Shay."¹¹

Only a few children under the age of thirteen fled. Of a total of 701 runaways sampled, a mere ten were declared by owners to be "very young" (probably under thirteen) and another fifteen to be twelve years of age or younger. When Joshua disappeared from Charles Lavette's Pensacola brick yard in 1827, the owner approximated the fugitive's

age as between twelve and fourteen. One owner simply advertised a \$200 reward for the capture and return of "two children; probably seeking [their] freed mother." R. J. Mays of Madison County considered Frances smart for her age. He described her as a "MULATTO GIRL . . . aged about 11, and says when questioned, that she belongs to Mr. Fisher [instead of Mays]." As mentioned earlier, Richard Sheffer remarked that his fugitive Mary absconded with "a small girl, about ten years old."¹²

As noted, few older men and women ran away from plantations, farms, or employers. This mirrored the situation in Virginia, North and South Carolina, Tennessee, and Louisiana. From 1821 to 1865, only ten (4 percent) of sampled runaways could be said to be somewhat older men and women, that is to say, those who were fifty years of age or older. Dick, aged fifty, disappeared from his owner's estate in 1835. Six years later, sixty-year-old Ben fled from the plantation of Charles P. Maher. Aleck may have reached sixty when he absconded. His owner, John R. Lloyd, simply described the fugitive as "an old African Negro."¹³

Florida's Indian presence played an important role in the runaway experience from 1821 to 1860.

The number of slaves who joined the Seminoles and other tribes during this period cannot be determined with any degree of specificity. As early as the 1750s, slaves were finding their way to the Seminoles in the peninsula. Ben, the property of Captain James R. Hanham, and a woman named Thomasa, owned by Mrs. Fuente, were thought in 1823 to be heading "to the Indian nation," an incident repeated often. Three captured slaves claimed in 1826 that they had lived with the "Florida Indians, about twelve years." Some ten years later, during the height of the Second Seminole War, a Jacksonville newspaper claimed that over 320 slaves recently had fled or were "carried off by the Indians." With the war's end in 1842, bondsmen found it much harder to join their one-time allies. Yet, a few still lived among their Indian protectors through the Civil War.¹⁴

Interestingly, through much of the territorial and early statehood periods slave holders continued to describe runaways as African born, although the numbers and percentages declined as time passed. From 1821 to 1840, for instance, five slaves (or 2 percent of sampled advertisements) were described as African-born fugitives. Some twenty years later,

only two bondservants were noted as African born. Much like African-born slaves in other parts of the South, African-born runaways advertised in Florida tended to be male (as would have been expected). Slave owners rarely indicated countries or region of origin. The advertisements simply described these men as "African born," "of African birth," "old African man," or "old African Negro."¹⁵

A few advertisements mentioned the color or other physical characteristics of African-born fugitives. One owner described John, as "about 28 years old, middle size, stout, fat, and of very black complexion." A second notice referred to another such man as "very black or very dark." Often, language disregarded references to age other than for the simple label "old." Thus, an irate owner acted typically when he published, "Ran away from the subscriber, residing near Tallahassee, on Tuesday night, the 30th of June last, an old African Negro named Aleck." Unlike the conclusion suggested by Franklin and Schweninger's profile of runaways, the few remaining African-born fugitives in Florida were considered quite old when they absconded from farms and plantations. Only two ran away in groups of two. None ran away in groups of three or more.¹⁶

Notices for African-born runaways suggested other attributes, whether by direct statement or omission. These slaves, generally speaking, did not take their children with them when they left the plantation or farm. A single advertisement of those sampled suggested that the departed possibly fled with family members or kinfolk. Owners declined to mention whether these fugitives could read or write. None of the advertisements reported African-born fugitives as having passes. One probably was bilingual, speaking both English and Seminole. Only one out of seven was described as multilingual.¹⁷

In the general fugitive slave population, most runaways were described as black or very black (82 percent of sampled notices). Advertisements depicted the bondsmen and -women as having dark skin, black, black or dark complexion, dark colored, very black, coal black, and remarkably black. Others were said to be jet black, exceptionally dark, and nearly quite black. Harry's owner referred to him as possessing a "coal black complexion," while Billy's owner insisted that he was "a very black fellow." R. K. West similarly depicted Cain as having a "black complexion." Clara, meanwhile, evidenced a "dark complexion" and

Will, a "dark color." John simply was "black."¹⁸

Mulattoes attempted escape slightly more often on the average than did slaves who were not mulattoes. According to census records, in 1850 they made up 6 percent of the slave population and, in 1860, 7 percent. Actual percentages for mulattoes likely ran higher and probably paralleled the general level throughout much of the South of at least 10 percent. Yet, if 362 advertisements and supplemental slave holder records are to be believed, they ran away in greater numbers than their proportion in the Florida slave population as a whole would imply. From 1821 to 1840, in twenty-seven out of 245 sampled cases (11 percent) the fugitives were described as mulattoes. During the remainder of the antebellum period, the numbers increased to 57 out of 456 runaways (or 12 percent). In both periods, mulatto males ran way at a rate approximately three-to-four times as great as was true of mulatto females.¹⁹

As might be anticipated, descriptions of mulatto runaways and their coloration differed markedly from that of other runaways. Many were characterized by terms such as "nearly white," "light or yellow complexion," "almond color," "a

light colored black," "light color," "a light dark color," "rather light," and "bright or light colored mulatto." Slave holders sometimes used other graphic words and phrases, including "a rather gold look," "copper color," "a dark copper color," "not very dark," and "light mulatto," to describe their runaway bondservants. In East Florida, one slave holder described Robin as "a little yellow." Several Middle Florida slave holders portrayed their mulattoes as "yellow fellows" or as "bright mulattoes." Typically, West Florida owners referred to their fugitives simply as having a "yellow complexion."²⁰

More so than for other runaways, owners singled out mulatto fugitives by reference to skills they possessed. A good number, for instance, were said to be literate to some degree. With the literacy rate among the slave population running between 1 and 2 percent from 1821 to 1840, nearly 12 percent of mulatto runaways possessed forged papers as compared to 3 percent among blacks. According to his owner, Sam, a "light colored mulatto," likely held a "forged passed" when he disappeared from the plantation. Robert D. Jones claimed that "it is expected that he [Sam, of dark yellowish

complexion], has free papers." Some twenty years later, nearly 14 percent of mulatto fugitives possessed free papers compared with 4 percent among blacks. Some even were described as writing their own passes to freedom. Many also held positions, according to the notices, as mechanics, longshoremen, construction workers, house servants, maids, cooks, tailors, and waiters. Although these occupations were considered "desirable" by some bondservants, the job or status slaves acquired in life obviously did not necessarily keep them from running away.²¹

Given varying shades of relative lightness, a few mulatto slaves tried to pass themselves off as whites. By way of illustration, one East Florida slave holder noted that his "bright mulatto, with straight hair of yellowish brown color" would attempt to change "his name and [try] passing for a white man." Describing Ned or Edward as a "bright Mulatto, or Quadroon," Thomas Ledwith claimed that the bondsman "will pass for a white man; his hair is straight." Lawrence's master described him as "nearly white; hair straight as a white boy's and would be taken for a white boy, without close examination."²²

If sampled runaway advertisements reveal the complete story, only one mixed-blood runaway attempted or, as perceived by his owner, might attempt to pass himself off as an "Indian." According to A. A. Fisher:

Wyatt about 21 or 22 mulatto, 5'10 or 11" intelligent spoken, bright and quick looking, and somewhat the appearance of an Indian, with straight, slick, black hair.²³

Mention should be made that many "Black Seminoles" lived within Florida's Indian lands from the early 1800s to about 1838. Most of them, however, were shipped West of the Mississippi River after 1838. Consequently, few, if any, appeared in runaway advertisements as "Black Indian Seminoles" or "Black Seminoles."²⁴

Owners frequently described runaways, whether black or mulatto, according to what whites perceived as their personality traits. Newspaper notices printed after 1840, for instance, often remarked on mulattoes as "smart," "quite intelligent," "very intelligent," "intelligent spoken," or "unusually intelligent." Yet, no account published from 1821

to 1840 has come to notice that described a mulatto as intelligent. One owner at least gave the impression that William was intelligent by remarking that he "reads and writes well." During the next twenty years, though, twelve of thirty-two sampled runaway notices described fugitives as having the mentioned traits. A. A. Fisher described Wyatt as "intelligent spoken." Depicted as "yellow complected and 22 years of age," Jack was portrayed by Sarah Ann Allen as "very sensible." Tallahassee's Charles L. Power depicted Thom as having a "light complexion, and an intelligent countenance."²⁵

Other terms complement such descriptions. Quick spoken, smart and intelligent, of intelligent countenance, self-confident, very impudent, artful and cunning, determined, conniving, and aggressive often appeared. J. S. McDonnell experienced the flight of three slaves in 1840. He commented that Noah was "6 feet 3 or 4 inches high" and "very impudent," while depicting Bill as "about 25 years of age 5 feet 3 or 4 inches high . . . and very quick spoken." Much like McDonnell's description, another slaveholder referred to Barney and his wife Rosanna as "quicken spoken." V. Powell of

Tallahassee, like many other slave holders, described his runaway as "smart and intelligent."²⁶

Some slave holders also indicated their respect for or fear of some of their fugitives; others suggested that they did not want to confront their runaways on a road or any other place, whether it be night or day. Two cases, one occurring in 1835 and the other in 1853, illustrate the very violent nature of some runaways. Harry's owner depicted the fugitive as mean and uncooperative, noting that "one of his ears has been bit off close to his head in a fight." Some eighteen years later August H. Lanier claimed that George absconded after trying to "murder the manager and 2 of my negroes."²⁷

Other traits repeatedly found reference in the notices. Some slave holders observed that slaves had an air about themselves that suggested, at least on the surface, that they were "sensible," "very sensible," or had a "pleasant, pleasing or smiling countenance." Some, the advertisements mentioned, had "pleasing manners" or would give a "plausible account" or "favorable account" of themselves. In fact, owners often described their runaways as giving either a "plausible" or "favorable" account of themselves. For example, Robert Sorkins of

Magnolia wrote in 1829 that, when approached, Luke would "give a plausible account of himself." Some six years later, a Jackson Countian noted that Harry would give "a favorable account of himself."

Perhaps even more frequently, at least from 1840 to 1860, slave holders described their fugitives as did R. L. Covert in 1858 when he declared that his slave evidenced a "pleasing countenance when spoken to."²⁸

Many fugitives were distinguished by marks, scars, or other abnormalities. The notices singled out some runaways by their African tribal marks. A few described bondsmen as having other distinguishing marks on their faces, arms, legs, foreheads, or other body parts. Others pointed out that a slave had lost a toe, hand, leg, or arm. Some bore scars from whippings. Among the 245 slaves listed in sampled runaway notices for the period 1821 to 1840, thirty-three (13 percent) showed scars from whipping, beatings, and other forms of severe violence. Among the 456 slaves listed for the post-1840 period, fifty-two (11 percent) carried the same types of marks. Only one owner reported having branded his fugitive with the letter O "on each cheek" from 1821 to 1840, while no newspaper notices reported runaways who were branded

during the second period. None appeared to have had ears cropped or cut off. Thus, it appears that few Florida owners resorted to extreme forms of punishment such as branding and the cropping of ears as did their counterparts in Virginia, North and South Carolina, Tennessee, and Louisiana.²⁹

Human examples of those who bore the scars of whippings and beatings help to make the point that, despite Florida's success in avoiding the worse forms of cruelty, the institution of slavery nonetheless involved brutality and intense physical pain. Edmund, to provide an illustration, wore the marks of at least one flogging "caused by a lash." In 1844, Gadsden County's Augustus Lanier described George as having "some marks on his back caused by the whip." Some seven years later the same slave holder described Adam as having "a scar or two on one of his arms up in a line with his thumb, and I think some scars on his breast." Lanier noted further, "He has a large scar on his back near, I think, the left shoulder blade, with other marks by the whip." And Milly, a slave owned by Leon County's V. Power, also carried "scars from [a] whipping."³⁰

Many advertisements mentioned what articles of

clothing fugitives were wearing when they ran away, a circumstance that may have led us to underestimate the incidence of whippings since scars and other markings could not be seen under clothing and owners may simply have opted to mention the obvious. Certainly, slaves commonly could be recognized by what they wore when they absconded. This fact allowed owners, employers, and slave traders to describe the fugitive with a substantial degree of accuracy. Slaves usually received one set of clothing during the winter and another set during the summer. The outfits normally consisted of a shirt, pants, and shoes for men during the winter. Women were issued dresses and shoes during the cold months. Children under twelve and not considered at least a "half hand" could expect a long shirt for both the winter and summer seasons. The young ones went around almost naked sometimes for, as Wilima King noted in her study of slave children, enslaved parents "had little to say about what their children wore." During the summer months, adult men and women received basically the same attire they received for the winter months without the shoes.³¹

On some occasions, though, slaves proved hard to describe by reference to what they were wearing

since they departed with a variety of clothing that their masters may or may not have been aware of when they absconded. Robert Sorkins observed that Luke took "a variety of clothing with him including a good fur hat and new brogans." Ben left his master wearing "cotton canaburg pans and an old dark colored coat with no sleeves, but," as owner R. L. Colvert noted, "he had other clothes it is probable he has changed his dress." R. K. West did not know how to describe George since he "had plenty of clothing" when he absconded. James Ormond summed up what numerous other slave holders experienced when he tried to describe the clothing wore by his fugitive. "He is well supplied with clothing," Ormond acknowledged, "so I cannot say how he was dress[ed] when he left."³²

Town-based slaves, the notices suggest, typically owned a wider variety of clothing than did their plantation counterparts. At least this seems to be the case for absentee Jacksonville, Key West, and Pensacola bondservants. Of 245 pertinent sampled advertisements dating up to 1840, fifty (20 percent) described fugitives as having either "many clothes" or a "variety of clothing." During the post-1840 period, seventy (15 percent) fell into the

same category.³³

Very rarely did advertisements mention runaways' hair styles. The few that did listed the type or grade of hair for mulattoes more often than for those described as "black" or "very black." Joseph Vaught referred to Maurice, aged thirty-five, as having "long hair and keeps it neatly arranged . . . [with] deep blue eyes." Only seven fugitives (2 percent) were described in sampled advertisements dating from 1821 to 1840 as having unusual or distinctive hair. During the following twenty-year period, eleven (2 percent) were pointed out as having unusual or distinctive hair. Owners commented more frequently about mulattoes as having straight or curly hair for both periods under study than blacks (first period--seven out of fourteen, and for the second period--ten out of thirty-four). A typical reference concerned Judge Thomas Randall's slave Rebecca. The advertisement informed readers that the fugitive had "long straight black hair." Joe's owner similarly described him as having black hair "much straighter than mulattoes in general." But, the Tallahassee slavetrading firm of Hughes and Patterson graphically depicted Dennis as having "remarkable kinky hair for a mulatto."³⁴

The publications singled out few women as having unusual hair styles. During the first period the hair of only one female fugitive received mention, as compared to that of six males. Leon County's Edward Houston commented in 1838 on Harry's hair as "well combed, with gray." One year later, Boston's hair was "disposed to be yellowish at the ends and very brishy," or so owner John S. Taylor observed. By the late 1850s, men were three times as likely to have their styles described as were women.³⁵

Florida's runaway advertisements reveal, as well, details of the departure. The majority of slaves left plantations, farms, and urban areas unassisted, by day and by night. Some ran away during the high tide of the growing season. Others absconded during holidays. The majority went on foot, while others left on horse back, in wagons, and on sailing vessels and steamboats. From 1821 to 1840, many tended to conceal themselves a few miles from the plantation or farm. From 1841 to 1860, others tended to seek refuge either further down the peninsula, in the cities and towns, or out of Florida. Some even found their way to the Everglades swamps of South Florida where they stayed

for months, if not for years.³⁶

The question of hired slaves also appeared in the advertisements. Hired and skilled slaves comprised 10 percent of the total fugitive slave population in Florida from 1821 to 1865. During the period up to 1840, at least fifteen advertisements described the overall characteristics of runaway hirelings who disappeared from the job site. As early as 1828 Andrew P. Simpson of Pensacola conjectured that Henry, who wanted to hire himself out, might be a runaway. The skeptical employer ran an advertisement averring:

Came To The residence of the Subscriber at the head of Escambia Bay, a Negro fellow, who says he is free and has hired himself as such: calls himself Henry . . . Said Negro, is very black, five feet six or eight inches high, and has a scar on the left cheek. He wishes to go to the North as soon as the month for which I have hired him is completed; but, as I think he is a runaway, I shall endeavor to hire him for a longer period, to give his owner an opportunity to get him.³⁷

Eleven years later, John D. Parish asserted that, when his runaway Sam Jones disappeared from his estate, he had "a pass to hire his own time."³⁸

The number of hirelings who disappeared from their employers increased from 1841 to 1860. By 1844, John and Albert had roamed at large for two or more years in the neighborhood of St. Joseph and Iola. Prior to their escape in January 1842, the fugitives' owner had hired them out to the railroad. Peter's owner Catolina Solana had hired him out to the steamer William Gaston as a steward when he disappeared from his employer. L. M. Coxetter claimed that his hireling, July, fled the steamer Carolina when it docked in Jacksonville. Much like Peter and July, Tim had been hired out to steamers along the St. Johns River, according to owner V. R. Dupont, for "the last 15 years" before he absconded.³⁹

Table 3

Runaway Seasonal Trends

1821 to 1840	Percentage	1841 to 1860	Percentage
Jan. To March	15		16
April to June	26		27
July to Aug	24		25
Sept to Dec	35		32

As indicated by Table Three, more runaways departed farms and plantations during the height of the harvesting or cotton picking season than at other times. The next largest group left during the clearing or hoeing season. With the exception of the first quarter of each year, slaves could be expected to abscond just about any time of the year.

Thus, fugitive slaves in Florida from 1821 to 1865 reflected a diversified group, as runaway slave notices permit us to learn. Many differed in skills, color, gender, age, appearance, language, and physique. Most runaways were between the ages of eighteen and forty, although a few young boys and

girls, as well as older women and men, absconded. Runaway patterns changed over time, with more men leaving farms and plantations during the post-1840 period than during the pre-1841 era. The motives of Florida fugitives varied. Some ran away from places as well as to places. Some disappeared because of mistreatment; others, because of the fear of being placed on the auction block after the death of an owner. A significant number desired to reunite with family, kinfolk, or loved ones.

NOTES

Chapter Eight

1. Tallahassee Floridian, September 6, 1834; Tampa Florida Peninsular, January 4, 1858.
2. Tallahassee Florida Advocate, November 1, 1828; Key West Enquirer, June 8, 1839.
3. Tallahassee Star of Florida, March 29, August 30, 1844.
4. Tallahassee Florida Advocate, March 29, 1829; Tallahassee Floridian and Journal, December 21, 1851, January 29, 1853. See also Fernandina East Floridian, March 15, August 30, 1860; Tampa Florida Peninsular, November 15, December 20, 1856, September 18, 1858, September 17, October 29, November 5, 1859, January 21, February 25, March 17, 24, May 5, 12, 26, October 20, 27, November 3, 1860; Key West Key of the Gulf, November 4, 1882; Tallahassee Floridian, August 9, 1834.
5. Tallahassee Floridian, February 28, March 7, 1835; Pensacola Gazette, May 20, 1837, January 7,

1843; Tallahassee Star of Florida, December 12, May 29, 1840, January 5, June 1, 1843, February 23, July 19, November 22, December 6, 1844, January 1, 1845; Jacksonville News, January 16, 1846; Ocala Argus, January 20, May 26, 1848.

6. Tallahassee Star of Florida, May 21, 1840; Florida Sentinel, February 18, 1842.

7. St. Augustine Florida Gazette, December 10, 1821; Jacksonville Courier, June 25, 1835; Fernandina Florida News, September 1, 1858.

8. St. Augustine Gazette, September 15, 1821; Pensacola Floridian, October 25, 1823; St. Augustine Florida Herald, May 17, 1832; Jacksonville Courier, April 16, June 25, 1835; Tallahassee Floridian, October 17, 1835, February 1, August 15, October 10, 1840, January 23, 1841, December 6, 1845; Pensacola Gazette, May 27, June 3, 1837; Tallahassee Florida Watchman, May 5, 1838; Key West Gazette, April 8, 1840; Quincy Sentinel, July 3, 1840; Tallahassee Star of Florida, August 16, September 6, December 27, 1844; Tallahassee Florida Sentinel, March 31, 1846, July 27, 1852; Tallahassee Weekly Floridian, March 6, 1847; Tallahassee Floridian and Journal, July 6, 1850, December 20, 1851, November 3, 1855, July 19, 1856, April 23, 1859, November 17, 1860;

Jacksonville Republican, February 21, 1856;

Fernandina Florida News, September 1, 1858;

Fernandina East Floridian, March 1, 1860;

Jacksonville Standard, May 31, 1860.

9. Tallahassee Floridian, October 24, 1831, March 7, August 22, October 17, 1835, January 6, 1836, August 26, November 1, 1837, January 1, April 4, September 14, October 20, 1838, January 10, April 20, June 8, 1839, January 10, 1846; Pensacola Gazette, August 17, 1822, March 10, 1838, May 31, August 2, 1839, January 15, 1840, November 1, December 6, 1845; Jacksonville Florida Republican, October 3, 1850, April 2, July 23, November 5, 1856, February 18, 1857; Jacksonville Courier, June 25, 1835, February 14, 1836; Jacksonville News, December 19, 1845; Jacksonville Florida News, March 19, 1847, October 1852, October 13, 1855; Tallahassee Florida Intelligencer, October 6, November 24, 1826; St. Augustine Florida Herald, February 3, 1830, April 5, May 17, August 9, 1832; St. Augustine East Florida Herald, March 1, 1823; St. Augustine Florida Gazette, September 15, 1821; Tallahassee Florida Watchman, April 28, May 5, 1838; Tallahassee Florida Sentinel, January 28, February 18, March 4, June 3, 1842, November 4, 1845, March 31, April 21, August

18, 1846, September 14, 1847, June 3, 1855;
Tallahassee Star of Florida, May 21, 1840; St.
Augustine Florida Herald and Southern Democrat, May
8, 1840; St. Augustine Ancient City, March 13, 1852;
Ouincy Sentinel, September 18, 1840, January 1,
1841, May 9, June 27, November 14, 1843; Tallahassee
Floridian and Advocate, July 20, 1830; Tallahassee
Floridian and Journal, October 27, 1849, April 12,
May 10, 1851, June 13, July 31, 1852, November 20,
1858.

10. Tampa Florida Peninsular, March 7, 14, May 5,
16, 1860; Denham, "A Rogue's Paradise", 126; Amon
DeLaughter journal, entry of May 4, 1860, 113; St.
Augustine News, August 12, October 7, November 4,
11, 1843.

11. Tallahassee Florida Watchman, May 5, 1838;
Tallahassee Floridian, March 6, 1841.

12. Pensacola Gazette, June 8, 1827; Tallahassee
Floridian, August 29, 1840, March 6, 1841;
Jacksonville Courier, January 4, 1851. The sheriff
of Jefferson County held a thirteen-year-old runaway
with a scar on his arm confined in jail who would
not give his name but who said he was from South
Carolina. See Tallahassee Floridian Journal,
November 3, 1855.

13. Tallahassee Floridian, August 22, 1835, September 12, December 12, 1840, July 3, 1841; Quincy Sentinel, September 18, 1840; Tallahassee Florida Sentinel, August 12, 1842; Tallahassee Floridian and Journal, May 1, 1852; St. Augustine Ancient City, March 9, 1859.
14. Pensacola Floridian, September 22, 1821; St. Augustine East Florida Herald, March 1, 1823, April 26, 1826, April 1, 1835; Jacksonville Courier, September 2, 9, December 10, 24, 1835, January 14, February 11, December 17, 1836; Tallahassee Floridian, June 8, 1839; St. Joseph Times, September 26, 1840; Fernandina East Floridian, March 15, 1860. Although newspaper accounts during the 1850s did not reflect that runaway slaves still lived among the Seminoles, a few did. See, for example, William J. Sloan to John C. Casey, June 27, November 2, 1853, William H. French to Casey, November 19, 1953, John C. Casey Papers.
15. Pensacola Gazette, December 19, 1829; Jacksonville Courier, May 17, August 6, 1835; Quincy Sentinel, September 12, 18, 1840; Jacksonville News, March 4, 1848.
16. Pensacola Gazette, December 19, 1829; Jacksonville Courier, May 17, August 6, 1835; Quincy

Sentinel, September 12, 18, 1840; Jacksonville News,
March 4, 1848.

17. Pensacola Gazette, December 19, 1829;
Jacksonville Courier, May 17, August 6, 1835; Quincy
Sentinel, September 12, 18, 1840; Jacksonville News,
March 4, 1848.

18. Pensacola Floridian, March 23, July 20, 1822;
Pensacola Gazette, May 18, 1827; Pensacola Gazette
and Florida Advertiser, November 17, 1828;
Tallahassee Floridian and Advocate, October 6, 12,
20, November 3, 10, 17, December 1, 15, 22, 1829;
Pensacola Gazette, June 8, 1827, May 20, May 6, 13,
October 10, 14, 1837, January 6, March 17, 1838,
August 3, 1845; Tallahassee Florida Watchman, April
21, 28, October 6, November 3, 1838; Apalachicola
Gazette, February 2, April 20, September 4, 1839;
St. Augustine Florida Herald, August 9, 1831, May
22, 1834, September 10, 1835, June 16, 23, July 7,
14, 1838, April 20, 1839; Apalachicola
Apalachicolian, December 26, 1840; Tallahassee
Floridian, October 24, 1831, February 14, October 3,
1835, March 4, 1837, April 7, May 19, June 9,
November 3, 1838, February 2, March 2, April 20, May
4, 31, June 8, 15, September 28, 1839, December 12,
1840, February 13, June 12, August 28, 1841, January

10, May 8, 1846, June 3, 6, 10, 1848; Jacksonville East Florida Advocate, September 1, 1840; Quincy Sentinel, January 1, 1841; Tallahassee Star of Florida, July 28, September 6, 1844; St. Augustine Florida Herald and Southern Democrat, August 20, 1844; Apalachicola Commercial Advertiser, October 4, November 9, 1844; Pensacola Florida Democrat, May 15, 1849; Tallahassee Floridian and Journal, October 27, 1849, December 20, 1851, May 1, 1852, February 4, March 4, June 30, 1854, February 5, 19, 1853, November 3, 1855, May 31, 25, 1856, July 11, August 15, 1857, October 22, November 3, 16, 1860; Jacksonville News, June 10, 1848, August 7, 1850, October 13, 1858; Tallahassee Florida Sentinel, April 26, 1836, February 24, April 20, 1852; St. Augustine Ancient City, March 16, 1850, June 14, 1851, March 3, 1859; Jacksonville Republican, April 17, 1851, November 5, 1856; Fernandina Florida News, February 17, 1857, May 17, 1858; Tampa Florida Peninsular, October 3, 1857, April 20, 1858; Jacksonville Standard, May 31, October 6, November 1, 1860; Fernandina East Floridian, May 22, 1860.

19. See, for example, Harris, "Abolitionist Sentiment in Florida, 1821-1860"; Rivers, "Troublesome Property," 104-127; slave runaway

profile data file, Florida A&M University
Research Center and Museum, Tallahassee.

20. Pensacola Floridian, August 17, 1822;
Tallahassee Florida Intelligencer, October 6, 1826;
Pensacola Gazette, August 17, 1822, October 26,
1827, April 18, 1828, April 15, October 7, 11, 1837,
June 30, 1838, February 1, July 25, 1840; St.
Augustine Florida Herald, April 21, May 12, 1830,
February 9, 1847; Tallahassee Floridian and
Advocate, September 7, 21, 1829, July 13, September
7, November 9, 1830; Pensacola Gazette, October 7,
1827, June 9, 1838; Pensacola Gazette and West
Florida Advertiser, December 7, 1827; Magnolia
Advertiser, February 9, 1830; Tallahassee Floridian,
January 17, October 3, 1835, December 23, 1837,
January 30, May 26, August 4, September 15, 1838,
March 30, June 15, 1839, January 15, August 29,
1840, January 2, August 28, 1841, January 1, 19,
February 19, 1842, April 18, August 15, 1846,
November 13, 1847; Quincy Sentinel, July 3, 1840,
May 9, 1843; Tallahassee Florida Herald and
Southern Democrat, July 9, 16, 30, August 6, 13, 20,
27, September 10, 17, 24, October 1, 1841, August 7,
1843; Tallahassee Star of Florida, May 5, 1838, June
1, 1843, February 23, March 29, 1844, August 18,

1845, May 1, 1846; Jacksonville News, December 19, 1845; Marianna Star of Florida, May 9, July 6, 1843; Pensacola Florida Democrat, January 18, 1849; Tallahassee Floridian and Journal, February 2, July 6, 1850, November 25, October 4, 1851, February 14, 1852, February 19, June 11, 1853, May 20, 1854, February 20, 1858; Tallahassee Florida Sentinel, March 16, June 1, 1839, February 18, May 27, 1842, August 18, 1846, February 2, December 25, 1847, January 1, 1850; Jacksonville Florida News, July 7, October 13, 1855; Jacksonville Weekly Republican, March 18, 1855; Apalachicola Gazette, November 23, 1856; Tampa Florida Peninsular, January 4, 1858; St. Augustine Ancient City, March 9, 1859; Monticello Family Friend, May 15, 1859.

21. Pensacola Gazette, August 17, 1822; Tallahassee Floridian, August 17, 1822, June 1, 1833, March 30, May 31, 1839, March 21, 1840, January 2, 1841, January 19, February 19, 1842, April 18, August 15, 1846; St. Augustine Florida Herald, June 7, 1831; Tallahassee Florida Sentinel, August 18, 1846; Pensacola Florida Democrat, January 18, 1849; Jacksonville Florida News, July 7, December 22, 1855, October 10, 1857.

22. Tallahassee Florida Herald and Southern Democrat, July 9, 16, 30, August 6, 13, 20, 27, September 2, 10, 17, 24, October 1, 1841; Tallahassee Floridian and Journal, May 20, 1854; Jacksonville Weekly Republican, March 18, 1855; Jacksonville Florida News, October 13, 1855.
23. Tallahassee Florida Sentinel, November 25, 1851.
24. See, for example, Rivers and Brown, "Indispensable Man," 1-23; Klos, "Blacks and the Seminole Removal Debate," 129-33; Porter, Black Seminoles; idem, Negro on the American Frontier, 302-303; idem, "Relations between Negroes and Indians within the Present Limits of the United States," 287-367; "Black Seminoles in Territorial Florida," 26-42; idem, "Florida Slaves and Free Negroes in the Seminole War," 390-421; idem, "Negroes and the Seminole War," 427-50; idem, "Negro Abraham," 1-43; idem, "Notes on the Seminole Negroes in the Bahamas," Florida Historical Quarterly 24 (July 1945), 56-60; idem, "Negro Guides and Interpreters in the Early Stages of the Seminole War, Dec. 28, 1835-Mar. 6, 1837," Journal of Negro History 35 (April 1950), 174-82; Mulroy, Freedom on

the Border; Mahon, History of the Second Seminole War, 29-33; Giddings, Exiles of Florida, 75-80.

25. Tallahassee Floridian, April 11, 1840, April 18, 1846, November 13, 1847; Jacksonville News, July 16, 1847; St. Augustine Florida Herald, February 9, 1847; Tallahassee Florida Democrat, January 18, 1849; Tallahassee Florida Sentinel, November 25, 1851; Jacksonville Weekly Republican, March 18, 1855; Tampa Florida Peninsular, January 4, 1858.

26. Magnolia Advertiser, May 13, 1829; Pensacola Gazette, July 17, 1830; Apalachicola Gazette, April 20, 1839; Quincy Sentinel, May 16, 1840; Tallahassee Floridian, March 16, June 15, 1839, January 2, February 13, 1841, January 19, February 19, 1842, January 10, February 18, April 18, August 15, 1846, November 13, 1847; November 25, December 20, 1851; Tallahassee Star of Florida, May 1, 1846; St. Augustine Florida Herald, February 9, 1847; Jacksonville News, July 16, 1847; Pensacola Florida Democrat, January 18, 1849; Tallahassee Floridian and Journal, August 18, 1849, January 29, 1853, May 22, 1858; Tallahassee Florida Democrat, January 18, 1849; Jacksonville Weekly Republican, March 18, 1855; Tallahassee Florida Sentinel, October 15, 1841, June 3, 1855; Jacksonville Florida News, July

7, December 22, 1855, October 10, 1857; Jacksonville Republican, July 23, 1856.

27. Tallahassee Floridian, February 14, 1835; Tallahassee Floridian and Journal, January 22, December 30, 1851, January 22, 29, 1853.

28. Magnolia Advertiser, March 13, 1829; Key West Key of the Gulf, April 10, 1835; Tallahassee Floridan, February 14, 1835, March 16, 1839, April 11, 1840, August 28, 1841, January 1, 19, February 19, 28, 1842, January 10, 1846, November 13, 1847; Key West Enquirer, June 8, 1839; Tallahassee Star of Florida, May 1, 1840; St. Augustine News, June 19, 1840; Apalachicola Gazette, September 12, 19, October 31, 1840; Jacksonville News, July 16, 1847; Jacksonville Republican, September 25, 1851; Tallahassee Floridian and Journal, January 29, 1853, June 16, 1855; Tampa Florida Peninsular, January 2, 1858.

29. Tallahassee Floridian and Advocate, October 6, November 11, 1828, September 1, 8, 1829, July 13, 1830; Pensacola Gazette, July 17, 1830, May 6, 1837, December 12, 1840, August 21, 1841; Tallahassee Floridian, July 5, 1834, February 14, May 23, 1835, September 10, 1836, May 4, 1839, January 2, 23, 1841, April 18, 1846, November 13, December 25,

1847; Apalachicola Gazette, January 13, 1838, September 12, 19, October 31, 1840; Tallahassee Florida Watchman, November 3, 1838; Apalachicola Apalachicolian, December 26, 1840; Key West Enquirer, June 8, 1839; Quincy Sentinel, May 16, 1840, January 1, 1841; Tallahassee Florida Herald and Southern Democrat, July 9, 16, 30, August 6, 13, 20, 27, September 10, 17, 24, October 1, 1842; Tallahassee Florida Sentinel, February 18, 1842, September 21, 1847, December 30, 1851; Marianna Star of Florida, May 9, 1843; Tallahassee Star of Florida, June 1, September 1, 8, 1843, March 29, August 8, 30, 1844, August 18, 1845; Apalachicola Commercial Advertiser, July 13, 1844; Tallahassee Floridian and Journal, November 13, 1847, August 18, 1849, October 5, 1850, January 22, December 20, 30, 1851, May 6, 1852, January 22, 29, 1853, June 16, 1855, October 25, 1856, May 22, 1858; Pensacola West Florida Times, March 17, 1857; Tampa Florida Peninsular, April 2, 1859.

30. Tallahassee Star of Florida, March 29, August 30, 1844; Tallahassee Floridian and Journal, August 18, 1849, June 16, December 20, 1851.

31. Smith, Slavery and Plantation Growth, 80; White and White, Stylin, 5-36; White, "Female Slaves in

the Plantation South," 108-10; John B. Boles, Black Southerners, 1619-1869 (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1983), 86; Joyner, "World of the Plantation Slaves," 55-56, 70; Wilma King, Stolen Childhood: Slave Youth in Nineteenth-Century America (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 15-16.

32. Pensacola Floridian, January 3, 1824; Pensacola Gazette, January 18, 1828; Tallahassee Floridian and Advocate, October 6, November 11, 1828, July 13, 1830; Magnolia Advertiser, March 13, 1829; Pensacola Gazette, July 17, 1830; Tallahassee Florida Watchman, April 21, 1838; Tallahassee Floridian, May 4, June 8, November 3, 1839, March 21, April 11, November 7, 1840, February 13, 1841, January 10, 1846; Tallahassee Star of Florida, May 1, 21, 1840, August 9, 1844; St. Augustine News, June 19, 1840; Tallahassee Florida Sentinel, February 18, 1842, November 4, December 2, 1845, April 21, June 16, 1846, January 1, 1850; Key West Key of the Gulf, April 10, 1845; Tallahassee Floridian and Journal, March 4, 1854, March 1, 8, 1856; Tampa Florida Peninsular, January 2, 1858; Fernandina Florida News, August 11, 1858.

33. Slave runaways profile data files, Florida A&M University Research Center and Museum.
34. Tallahassee Floridian, October 3, 1835, January 15, 1840, December 25, 1847; Apalachicola Gazette, June 3, August 19, September 9, 1837; Tallahassee Florida Herald and Southern Democrat, July 9, 30, August 6, 13, 20, 27, September 2, 10, 17, 24, October 1, 1841; Tallahassee Star of Florida, March 29, 1844; Jacksonville News, July 16, 1847, July 7, October 13, 1855; Tallahassee Florida Sentinel, November 25, 1851; Tallahassee Floridian and Journal, May 20, 1854; Jacksonville Weekly Republican, March 18, 1855.
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CHAPTER NINE

Conclusion

In ways great and small, slaves lived as day-to-day dissidents on the farms and plantations of Florida from 1821 to 1865. Many never participated in overt physical or violent rebellion against the institution of slavery, but their daily resistance persisted in numerous ways. One of the most common forms of non-violent conservative resistance among slaves, for instance, resulted from a decision by men and women to feign illness. So long as slaves did not overdo their alleged illnesses, they generally could gain one to several days reprieve from the daily toils of labor, taxing the owner accordingly.

Although they might resist direct action against other human beings, slaves often focused physical action on inanimate objects to the detriment of the masters. They destroyed tools, stole food, and committed arson to show their

discontent. Destruction of implements such as hoes, picks, shovels, and wagons also reduced the amount of work, at least temporarily, that they had to perform. Not unusually, farm animals such as chickens and pigs were stolen from owners. Slaves also took garden crops such as corn and other vegetables. These actions, to slaves, constituted not stealing but recompense for their unpaid labor expended to raise the animals and crops.

In these circumstances, the internal economy became a way of life for slaves who raised their own crops and animals or else stole them from their masters. Although owners successfully urged enactment of laws to prohibit slaves and runaways from participating in the clandestine slave economy, many habitually resisted the statutes by selling and purchasing stolen commodities. Some bondservants used the money earned thereby to support themselves, their families, and kinfolk. Sometimes, the gains went for vice and pleasure, rather than for necessities. The purchase and consumption of alcoholic beverages often resulted, a traffic which masters failed to stop in any significant degree.

Some slaves also became "troublesome property" through other means of non-violent rebellion.

Literate bondservants forged passes for themselves and others. This allowed some fugitives to seek freedom with papers that appeared genuinely authorized by whites. From 1821 to 1865, Florida runaways who possessed such passes tended to be mulattoes. Mixed-blood fugitives thus stood a better chance of escaping successfully because of such passes and since they sometimes appeared to be white. Given that many were literate and had acquired various occupational skills, the capture and return of mulattoes commanded premium rewards from masters when compared to those offered for darker-complected field workers.

Slaves rebelled against what masters gave them in the way of clothing. Although some owners saw themselves as paternalists who were concerned for the welfare of their bondservants, many did not undertake any serious efforts to take care of those under their charge. From those masters who considered themselves to be magnanimous, slaves usually received two sets of clothing each year. Children, male and female, under the age of twelve who were not considered "full working hands" generally received a large shirt to wear throughout the year. Some adults and children proved not so

fortunate; they could work the whole year almost devoid of clothing.

On the other hand, enslaved blacks did not simply settle for the arbitrary generosity of slave owners. They instead sold crops and other items obtained from owners to supplement their clothing. Others worked extra jobs or sold crops they grew in their own gardens to accomplish the same purpose. Nor did bondservants meekly accept as a fashion fiat the all-white homespun garments given them by owners. Many dyed their clothing in bright colors with the use of indigo roots and other substances. As indicated in runaway newspaper accounts, some fugitives possessed such a variety of clothing that their masters asserted that they really did not know what they had on when they absconded.

Moreover, many slaves did not rely on the goodness of their owners to accommodate their diets. They not only grew crops in their gardens but hunted and fished to supply their families with nutritious meals. Some slaves even possessed guns and rifles to hunt for their families as well as for master's household. Some owners allowed their bondservants to sell game at local markets and to use the cash to buy other foodstuffs for family and kinfolk not

readily available on the farm or plantation. Within the peninsula, slaves also could supplement their diets by eating the many fruits that grew there, such as oranges, peaches, cantaloupes, and grapefruits.

Many slaves physically rebelled by absconding. Although determination of the exact number of slaves that ran away remains difficult, hundreds, if not thousands, certainly did so. They left for a variety of reasons. Some departed when they perceived a change from an old order to a new one. Sometimes, this stemmed from the death of a master or the selling of a plantation or farm to new owners. Some bondservants left when a new overseer replaced an old one. Others disappeared when a breakdown in plantation management resulted in mistreatment. As is easily understood, many absconded either after a lashing or before a flogging could take place. More than a few headed for freedom when they were hired out to someone whom they either disliked or felt had mistreated them. Most such hirelings who became fugitives headed for urban areas--such as Pensacola, Key West, Jacksonville, and St. Augustine--where they could obtain jobs as either self-hires or as free blacks.

In searching for freedom, slaves left the plantations and farms of Florida for places near and far. Some ran to the swamps of South Florida or settled in the Everglades, while others headed to coastal areas in an attempt to board vessels leaving the peninsula. Unlike the findings of many studies on slave runaways, most Florida slaves did not head to the "promised land" of the North or Canada but tried returning to such states as Louisiana, Alabama, Georgia, Tennessee, Mississippi, South Carolina, and North Carolina. Individuals made their escape from Florida using boats, rafts, horses, ponies, and mules. Most made their sojourn on foot.

For those fugitives who disappeared on foot, many never left Florida. They usually lurked or laid out near the farms and plantations where they lived and worked. Some simply left to participate in religious activities or to enjoy a party. Many returned after a few days, hoping to strike a bargain or negotiate better treatment from their masters or other authority figures. Most fugitives left unassisted, but a few were coaxed off by whites. Many slave holders believed that bondservants either were harbored or stolen by

whites. A small number of whites who assisted fugitives were fined, branded, or received prison time for their actions. A few free blacks and other fugitives assisted runaways with their escape or else harbored them. Although not hostile or violent, some slaves became habitual runaways, leaving their residences periodically in search of freedom or, at least, some release time.

Many Florida slaves ran away because they had been separated from immediate family members, kinfolk, or other loved ones. They took off, as well, when they were about to be sold away from a parent, a spouse, a sibling, a loved one, or other kinfolk. When some slaves were sold from kinfolk, they headed in the direction where they thought their families members might be going. Men more often disappeared from the plantations and farms than did women, sometimes traveling hundreds of miles to reunite with their wives or other kinfolk. Males ran away more often because they did not have direct responsibility for the care of children. Young boys and girls also absconded in search of parents who were sold. In a few cases, entire families consisting of a husband, wife, children, and grandchildren tried to make their escape to

freedom. Some were able to stay out for months and years before their capture. Few older slaves, between the ages of forty and sixty, tried to make their escape to freedom.

Florida's Indian lands became a favorite destination for runaways. Enslaved blacks from in and outside of Florida made their way to the Seminoles and other tribes in Central and South Florida from the mid-1700s through the Civil War. Many fugitives looked at the remote regions and sparsely populated areas in and around the Seminoles and Creeks as most desirable in their attempt to maintain their liberty. Some lived with the Indians while others established black communities near their allies. The inseparable alliance between black fugitives and the Indians lasted until the late 1830s when the large majority of surviving "Black Seminoles" agreed to be transported west of the Mississippi River in lieu of re-enslavement. By the late 1850s, only an occasional black runaway made it to the Indian lands in search of freedom.

Most slaves who disappeared from farms and plantations avoided attempts to harm their masters and other whites, but exceptions existed. Although the murders of whites by blacks occurred rather

infrequently, a few did kill their owners using knives, clubs, hoes, axes, hatchets, and firearms before absconding. In such instances, axes became the weapon of choice against whites. This type of violence usually occurred when slaves became frustrated over mistreatment stemming from poor material conditions such as lack of adequate food and housing. Others became violent after an argument over work, over punishment of some kind, or over the treatment of a loved one at the hands of a master, overseer, or other authority figure. A few slaves tried killing their masters in a more indirect way through recourse to poison.

Most physical violence against whites stemmed from long-held resentment over mistreatment. Few slaves waged spontaneous violence against their masters. In a typical case, bondservants on one Gadsden plantation, killed the overseer after several years of mistreatment due to the lack of food, clothing, and poor housing. These particular slaves took off after committing the homicide.

Some slaves faced accusations of molesting white women and attempted to flee to escape what must have seemed the inevitable retribution. Enslaved blacks knew the consequences of assaulting

a white person. At least eight such slaves swiftly were brought before the bar of justice. Usually, the supposed sexual assault stemmed from contact with a poor white woman. A few slaves won acquittal of the crime, but others were found guilty and hanged. Several were lynched either before they could go to trial or while waiting for another trial on appeal. Generally, though, few Florida slaves or fugitives were accused of the rape of white women during the period from 1821 to 1865.

Private citizens, masters, overseers, and professional slave catchers served to retrieve runaways. Seldom did Florida's slave patrol system operate to capture fugitives. Usually a description of the slave and a reward for his or her capture were advertised in local and state newspapers. Rewards for the capture of runaways ran higher when they were thought to be leaving Florida. Many times, literate or skilled runaways commanded higher rewards than did field slaves. Some runaways who were captured tried using violence to maintain their freedom. Others were shot on sight, allegedly due to their belligerent reactions. Those captured sometimes were hauled to jail in iron collars weighing between five and eight pounds.

During the Civil War, many bondservants demonstrated their discontent with bondage by taking off for freedom. East Florida slaves especially showed their desire for freedom by stealing away to the Union lines. In fact, approximately one thousand runaways from the region of Jacksonville made their way to United States lines. As former slaves asserted, the majority of blacks preferred fighting for the Union since they equated the Federals with their eventual liberation. As for those slaves who lived and worked in West Florida, some fled and joined the United States Navy while others worked building fortifications for the Union army.

Few slaves absconded from Middle Florida since the Federals normally were positioned a substantial distance away. Yet, bondservants in the Middle Florida cotton belt region conservatively resisted their enslavement by their unwillingness to work long and hard. Some became more bold in their responses to instructions given by owners as the war continued.

In the world that the slave holder made, slaves held their own ideas of the obligations owed them by their masters. When owners promised certain

concessions and reneged on them, a conflict could ensue within the master-slave relationship. Some Florida bondservants became physically violent when some agreed-upon bargain was breached. Most slaves showed their discontent either by day-to-day conservative dissidence or by absconding. Clearly, most enslaved blacks did not desert the farms and plantations of Florida during the territorial or early statehood periods. With the possible exception of the Second Seminole War era from 1835 to 1842, the majority of owners did not face a large-scale runaway threat from their bondservants.

But, the fact that formerly enslaved blacks vividly could describe the whippings they and others received, the lacerated backs of bondservants detailed in runaway notices and captured in photographs, and the constant example of slaves who disappeared for a day, a week, a month, or for years, served to pronounce with a loud and clear voice that enslaved blacks did not accept the idea that they were a part of a "paternalistic extended family" of their owners. Given the almost absolute power of the master class that ruled largely through threat and fear, Florida's dissenters, rebels, and runaways fully knew that their owners did not have

their best interests at stake since they treated them largely as objects instead of as human beings. And, Florida slaves at times used every means necessary, non-violent and violent, to resist the arbitrary power owners waged against them in Florida from 1821 to 1865.

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