

THE
HALF HAS NEVER
BEEN TOLD

SLAVERY AND THE MAKING
OF AMERICAN CAPITALISM

EDWARD E. BAPTIST

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For Ezra and Lillian

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1783-1810

NOT LONG AFTER THEY heard the first clink of iron, the boys and girls in the cornfield would have been able to smell the grownups' bodies, perhaps even before they saw the double line coming around the bend. Hurrying in locked step, the thirty-odd men came down the dirt road like a giant machine. Each hauled twenty pounds of iron, chains that draped from neck to neck and wrist to wrist, binding them all together. Ragged strips flapped stiffly from their clothes like dead-air pennants. On the men's heads, hair stood out in growing dreads or lay in dust-caked mats. As they moved, some looked down like catatonics. Others stared at something a thousand yards ahead. And now, behind the clanking men, followed a marching crowd of women loosely roped, the same vacancy painted in their expressions, endurance standing out in the rigid strings of muscle that had replaced their calves in the weeks since they left Maryland. Behind them all swayed a white man on a gray walking horse.

The boys and girls stood, holding their hoe handles, forgetful of their task. In 1805, slave coffles were not new along the south road through Rowan County, here in the North Carolina Piedmont, but they didn't pass by every day. Perhaps one of the girls close to the road, a twelve-year-old willow, stared at the lone man who, glistening with sweat and fixed of jaw, set the pace at the head of the double file. Perhaps he reminded her of her father, in her memory tall. A few years back, he'd stopped coming to spend his Saturday nights with them. The girl's mother said he'd been sold to Georgia. Now in the breath of a moment, this man caught her staring eyes with his own scan as he hurried past. And perhaps, though he never broke stride, something like recognition flashed over a face iron as his locked collar. This man, Charles Ball, a twenty-five-year-old father of two, could not help but see his own

daughter ten years hence, years he knew she'd pass without him. Then he was gone down the road, pulling the rest of the human millipede past the girl. As the women's bare soles receded—the white man on the horse following last, looking down, appraising her—the overseer on the far side of the field called out “Hey!” to her stock-still self, and she would surely have realized that the coflle carried her own future with them.¹

There are 1,760 yards in a mile—more than 2,000 steps. Forty thousand is a long day's journey. Two hundred thousand is a hard week. For eighty years, from the 1780s until 1865, enslaved migrants walked for miles, days, and weeks. Driven south and west over flatlands and mountains, step after step they went farther from home. Stumbling with fatigue, staggering with whiskey, even sometimes stepping high on bright spring mornings when they refused to think of what weighed them down, many covered over 700 miles before stepping off the road their footsteps made. Seven hundred miles is a million and a half steps. After weeks of wading rivers, crossing state lines, and climbing mountain roads, and even boarding boats and ships and then disembarking, they had moved their bodies across the frontier between the old slavery and the new.

Over the course of eighty years, almost 1 million people were herded down the road into the new slavery (see Table 1.1). This chapter is about how these forced marchers began, as they walked those roads, to change things about the eastern and western United States, like shifting grains moved from one side of a balance to another. It shows how the first forced migrations began to tramp down paths along which another 1 million walkers' 1.5 trillion steps would shape seven decades of slavery's expansion in the new United States. And it shows how the paths they made on the land, in politics, and in the economy—the footprints that driven slaves and those who drove them left on the fundamental documents and bargains of the nation—kept the nation united and growing.

For at the end of the American Revolution, the victorious leaders of the newly independent nation were not sure that they could hold their precarious coalition of states together. The United States claimed vast territories west of the Appalachian Mountains, but those lands were a source of vulnerability. Other nations claimed them. Native Americans refused to vacate them. Western settlers contemplated breaking loose to form their own coalitions. East of the Appalachians, internal divisions threatened to tear apart the new country. The American Revolution had been financed by printing paper money and bonds. But that had produced inflation, indebtedness, and low commodity prices, which now, in the 1780s, were generating a massive economic crisis.

TABLE 1.1. NET INTERNAL FORCED MIGRATION BY DECADE

IMPORTING STATE	1790–1799	1800–1809	1810–1819	1820–1829	1830–1839	1840–1849	1850–1859	TOTALS
Alabama	--	--	35,500	54,156	96,520	16,532	10,752	213,460
Arkansas	--	--	1,000	2,123	12,752	18,984	47,443	82,302
Florida	--	--	1,000	2,627	5,833	5,657	11,850	26,967
Georgia	6,095	11,231	10,713	18,324	10,403	19,873	-7,876	68,763
Kentucky	21,636	25,837	18,742	-916	-19,907	-19,266	-31,215	-4,173
Louisiana	--	1,159	20,679	16,415	29,296	29,924	26,528	124,001
Mississippi	--	2,152	9,123	19,556	101,810	53,028	48,560	234,229
Missouri	--	--	5,460	10,104	24,287	11,406	6,314	57,571
South Carolina	4,435	6,474	1,925	-20,517	-56,683	-28,947	-65,053	-158,366
Tennessee	6,645	21,788	19,079	31,577	6,930	4,837	-17,702	73,154
Texas	--	--	--	--	--	28,622	99,190	127,812
<i>Decade Total</i>	<i>38,811</i>	<i>68,641</i>	<i>123,221</i>	<i>134,365</i>	<i>211,241</i>	<i>140,650</i>	<i>128,791</i>	<i>845,720</i>

Source: Michael Tadman, *Speculators and Slaves: Masters, Traders, and Slaves in the Old South* (Madison, 1989), 12. Some states not included.

There was no stable currency. The federal government—such as it was—had no ability to tax, and so it also could not act as a national state.

Between the arrival of the first Africans in 1619 and the outbreak of Revolution in 1775, slavery had been one of the engines of colonial economic growth. The number of Africans brought to Maryland and Virginia before the late 1660s was a trickle—a few dozen per year. But along with white indentured servants, these enslaved Africans built a massive tobacco production complex along the Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries. Over those formative fifty years, settlers imported concepts of racialized slavery from other colonies (such as those in the Caribbean, where enslaved Africans already outnumbered other inhabitants by the mid-seventeenth century). By 1670, custom and law insisted that children were slaves if their mothers were slaves, that enslaved Africans were to be treated as rights-less, perpetual outsiders (even if they converted to Christianity), that they could be whipped to labor, and that they could be sold and moved. They were chattel property. And everyone of visible African descent was assumed to be a slave.²

After 1670 or so, the number of enslaved Africans brought to North America surged. By 1775, slave ships had carried 160,000 Africans to the Chesapeake colonies, 140,000 to new slave colonies that opened up in the Carolinas and Georgia, and 30,000 to the northern colonies. These numbers were small compared to the myriads being carried to sugar colonies,

however. Slave ships landed more than 1.5 million African captives on British Caribbean islands (primarily Jamaica and Barbados) by the late 1700s and had brought more than 2 million to Brazil. In North America, however, the numbers of the enslaved grew, except in the most malarial lowlands of the Carolina rice country. By 1775, 500,000 of the thirteen colonies' 2.5 million inhabitants were slaves, about the same as the number of slaves then alive in the British Caribbean colonies. Slave labor was crucial to the North American colonies. Tobacco shipments from the Chesapeake funded everyone's trade circuits. Low-country Carolina planters were the richest elites in the revolutionary republic. The commercial sectors of the northern colonies depended heavily on carrying plantation products to Europe, while New England slave traders were responsible for 130,000 of the human beings shipped in the Middle Passage before 1800.³

Now, however, the consequences of war and independence were threatening the economic future of the enslavers. Marching armies had destroyed low-country rice-plantation infrastructure. Up to 25,000 enslaved Carolinians had left with the British. Britain blocked North American trade from its home and imperial markets. Though tobacco markets in continental Europe were still open, the price of that product went into free fall in the 1780s.⁴

Slavery was also caught up in the most divisive political issues raised by the Revolution. The weak federal government was buried in debts owed to creditors all over the nation and Europe, but southern and northern representatives to the Continental Congress disagreed over whether the apportionment of tax revenue by population should count southern slaves. More broadly, the Revolution raised the question of whether slavery should even exist, since rebellion had been justified with the claim that human beings had a God-given right to freedom. Petitions flooded northern state legislatures in the 1770s and 1780s, charging that slavery violated natural rights. And Thomas Jefferson, who admitted that "the Almighty has no attribute which can take a side with us" against the demands of the enslaved, was not the only prominent southerner who acknowledged the contradictions.⁵

Yet during the 1780s and 1790s, the possibilities that enslaved people represented, the wealth they embodied, and the way they could be forced to move themselves would actually forge links that overrode internal divisions. Marching feet increased the power of enslavers, and the beginning of forced movement south and west created new financial links and new kinds of leverage. And even among a million pairs of feet one can find the first steps: the moves and decisions that opened up new territories to slavery after the American Revolution. Kentucky and Mississippi could have been closed

to slavery. Instead, during the 1780s, the early days of the American republic, decisionmakers in Philadelphia, New York, at Monticello, and elsewhere took crucial first steps that would allow slavery to spread.

BACK-AND-FORTH RAIDING DURING THE Revolution had stopped white settlement short of the mountains in South Carolina and Georgia. Few settlers had crossed the Appalachians into the Virginia and North Carolina districts that would become Kentucky and Tennessee. But potential migrants knew something about what lay beyond the bloody fringe of settlement. Since the early eighteenth century, white traders had walked deep into the woods of present-day South Carolina, Georgia, and Alabama, their mules laden with beads, guns, and liquor. Sometimes these merchants walked with enslaved African or African-American assistants. Those who returned alive told of rich soil and broad rivers. Further north, a trickle of settlers began to follow hunter Daniel Boone's reports of rich lands across the mountains that rose west of the Shenandoah Valley.⁶

Only after the American victory did waves of migration begin to surge west across the mountains. By the early 1780s, settlers were sending word back east of Kentucky acres that yielded a hundred bushels of corn apiece, an "Elysium . . . the garden where there was no forbidden fruit." But Native Americans called the region the "dark and bloody ground," a land of rich hunting over which they had long fought. In 1782, Indians began to raid the settlements, taking slaves with them as they retreated. Potential settlers became wary of the land, and of the journey there. The "Wilderness Road" through the mountain passes was slow, difficult, and dangerous. Shawnee and Cherokee killed dozens of travelers on the Wilderness Road every year. In winter, there were fewer Indian war parties about. But on their winter 1780 trip, John May and an enslaved man passed thousands of thawing horse and cattle carcasses in the "rugged and dismal" mountains, casualties of failed cold crossings.⁷

That year North Carolina enslaver Thomas Hart wondered whether he should send slaves to clear the land that he claimed in Kentucky: "to send a parcel of poor Slaves where I dare not go myself" seemed a kind of extreme taxation without representation, not in keeping with the ideals of the ongoing Revolution. But Hart changed his mind. He brought enslaved pioneers across the mountain road, even though the toil he planned for them to do in the woods, cutting down the forest and planting clearings with corn and tobacco, left them exposed to danger. "Lexington, Kentucky, August 22," read a 1789 newspaper story based on a letter from the western frontier. "Two

negro children killed and two grown negros wounded at Col. Johnson's." Sometimes the Shawnees scalped prisoners, and sometimes they took them back alive. Three Indians captured an enslaved man from a forge on the Slate River in Kentucky during 1794. They bound his arms, made him walk, and told him they were taking him to Detroit (where the British still maintained a fort, in defiance of the Treaty of Paris) to sell him for "taffy"—tafia, cheap rum. When they stopped to rest near the Ohio, they untied him and sent him to gather firewood, which was when he escaped.⁸

Over the 1780s, the invaders from the coastlands fought hundreds of battles. One such fight took place in 1786. Virginia-born migrant Abraham Lincoln (the sixteenth president's grandfather) was clearing a field on his land west of Louisville. The regular *thunk* of the axe was suddenly broken by the crack of a musket. Lincoln fell. The Indian emerged cautiously from the forest. Abraham's son Thomas, who had been playing in the field, crouched behind a log. The sniper searched. Where was the little white boy with the dark hair? Suddenly, another *crack*. The Indian, too, dropped dead. Lincoln's teenage son Mordecai had shot him from the window of a log cabin on the clearing's edge. And as the settlers won more and more little battles like this one, eventually fewer and fewer Shawnee came south across the Ohio.⁹

Back on the east side of the mountains, meanwhile, slavery in the old Virginia and Maryland tobacco districts was increasingly unprofitable, and even some enslavers were conceding that enslavement contradicted all of the new nation's rhetoric about rights and liberty. In his 1782 *Notes on the State of Virginia*, Virginia governor Thomas Jefferson complained that slavery transformed whites "into despots." Jefferson's first draft of the 1776 Declaration of Independence had already railed against British support for the Atlantic slave trade. Despite his ownership of scores of enslaved African Americans, Jefferson recognized that the selling of human beings could turn his soaring natural-rights rhetoric into a lie as sour as the hypocrisies of old Europe's corrupt tyrants. Eventually, Jefferson embraced the hypocrisy, even failing to free the enslaved woman who bore his children. "Sally—an old woman worth \$50," read the inventory of his property taken after his death. Yet in 1781, his Declaration's claim that all were endowed with the natural right to liberty provided a basis to push the Massachusetts Supreme Court into conceding—in the case of a runaway slave named Quock Walker—that slavery was incompatible with the state's core principles.¹⁰

Virginia politicians shot down Governor Jefferson's feeble suggestions of gradual emancipation, but as he moved into the new nation's legislature, he still hoped to ensure that the western United States would be settled and

governed by free, self-sufficient farmers—not an oligarchy of slave-driving planters. In 1784, a committee of the Continental Congress, headed by Jefferson, proposed an "ordinance" for governing the territories across the Appalachians. Many in Congress feared that the western settlements might secede or, worse yet, fall into the arms of European empires. As Britain's Indian allies raided south from their base at Detroit, Spain claimed the English-speaking settlements around Natchez. In 1784, Spain also closed the mouth of the Mississippi at New Orleans, the main trading route for western US territories. Eastern states also disagreed vehemently over how to sort out their overlapping claims to blocks of western land, which legislators hoped to sell in order to pay bonds issued during the Revolution. In the area that became Kentucky, still technically part of Virginia, the confusion generated by the uncertain government made it hard for small farmers like the Lincolns to make hard-won homesteads good. There was no logical system of surveying, so claims overlapped "like shingles." Old Dominion attorneys steeped in Virginia's complex and arcane land laws swarmed across the mountains to sort out conflicts—in favor of the highest bidder.¹¹

The western issues that the Continental Congress faced in 1784 thus had implications for everything from the grand strategy of international relations to everyday economic and legal power. Jefferson's Ordinance of 1784 aimed to define them in favor of young Thomas Lincoln and everyone like him. It proposed that the territory between the Appalachians and the Mississippi River would become as many as sixteen new states, each equal to the original thirteen. And a second act that Jefferson drafted—the Ordinance of 1785—created a unified system of surveying, identifying, and recording tracts of land. This design eliminated the possibility of shingling over post-Kentucky territories with contradictory claims.¹²

The small farmer whom Jefferson imagined as the chief beneficiary of western expansion was as white as Abraham Lincoln, but the 1784 proposal also stated "that after the Year 1800 of the Christian Era, there shall be neither slavery nor involuntary servitude in any of the said states." That would have put Kentucky and what eventually became Tennessee on the road to eventual emancipation, perhaps along the lines of the statewide emancipations already under way in New England. The cluster of farms and plantations near Natchez on the Mississippi relied even more heavily on slavery. By 1790, there were more than 3,000 enslaved Africans in the disputed Natchez District. If Jefferson's proposal passed, presumably emancipation would have been mandated there as well. Yet under the Articles of Confederation, the wartime compromise that shaped the pre-Constitution federal government,

a majority of state delegations in Congress had to consent for any proposal to become law. A majority of delegations, including his own Virginia one, rejected Jefferson's antislavery clause even as they accepted his other principles—that Congress should make rules for the territories, that the territories could become states, and that rational systems of land surveying and distribution should prevail. Frustrated, Jefferson sailed off to France to take up the position of American minister.¹³

Jefferson returned from France in September 1789. He had watched the Bastille torn down stone by stone, and he had seen ominous hints that the French Revolution would turn murderous. He had also started a relationship with a young enslaved woman. But the political changes he found upon his return gave him perverse incentives to think differently about the question of planting slavery in the western United States. Support for slavery's expansion had already become one of the best ways to unite southern and northern politicians—and Jefferson wanted to build a national political alliance that would defeat the older networks of power dominated by Federalist planting and mercantile gentries.

Congress had in the meantime taken one action to prevent slavery's expansion. In 1787 it reconsidered Jefferson's 1784 ordinance and passed it for the territories north of the Ohio, with the antislavery clause included. Perhaps this was no great moral or political feat. Few, if any, slaves had been brought to Ohio. Moreover, a handful of people would remain enslaved in the Northwest for decades to come, and the ordinance contained internal contradictions that left open the option of extending slavery into the states carved from the territory. Still, the ordinance became an important precedent for the power of Congress to ban slavery on federal territory.¹⁴

Yet in the four years between the end of the American Revolution in 1783 and the establishment of the Northwest Territory by Congress in 1787, the Congress had been able to accomplish precious little else to stabilize matters on either the western or the eastern side of the mountains. Chaos ruled: thirteen different states had thirteen different trade policies, currencies, and court systems. The Articles of Confederation, created as a stopgap solution for managing a war effort by thirteen different colonies against the mother country, had never allowed the federal government to have real power: the power to coerce the states, the power to control the currency, the power to tax. The result was not only economic chaos but also, wealthy men with much to lose feared, the impending collapse of all political and social authority. In rural Massachusetts, former Continental soldiers shut down courts after judges foreclosed on farmers who couldn't pay debts or taxes because of economic

chaos. In other states, angry majorities elected legislatures that were ready to bring debt relief to small farmers and other ordinary folk even if it meant economic disaster for creditors.

So after Congress adjourned in early 1787, delegates from twelve states converged on Philadelphia. Their mission was to create a stronger federal government. The participants included future presidents George Washington and James Madison; Alexander Hamilton, who did more to shape the US government than most presidents; and Benjamin Franklin, the most famous American in the world. As May ended, they went into Independence Hall, closed the shutters, and locked the doors. By the time they emerged in late summer they had created the US Constitution, a plan for welding thirteen states into one federal nation. Once it was approved by the states, its centralizing framework would finally give Congress the authority it needed to carry out the functions of a national government: collecting revenue, protecting borders, extinguishing states' overlapping claims to western territory, creating stable trade policy, and regulating the economy. A deal struck between the big states and the small ones allowed representation by population in the House of Representatives while giving each state the same number of delegates in the Senate.¹⁵

But the Constitution was also built from the timber of another bargain. In this one, major southern and northern power-brokers forced their more reluctant colleagues to consent to both the survival and the expansion of slavery. The first point of debate and compromise had been the issue of whether enslaved people should be counted in determining representation in the House. Representing Pennsylvania, Gouverneur Morris warned that this would encourage the slave trade from Africa, since the importing states would be rewarded with more clout in the national government. In the end, however, every northern state but one agreed that a slave could count as three-fifths of a person in allocating representation. The Three-Fifths Compromise affected not only the House, but also the presidency, since each state's number of electoral votes was to be determined by adding two (for its senators) to its number of representatives in the House. One result was the South's dominance of the presidency over the next seventy years. Four of the first five presidents would be Virginia slaveholders. Eight of the first dozen owned people.

Over the long run, those presidents helped to shape the nation's policy of geographic and economic growth around the expansion of slavery. But those policies were not just enabled by the consequences of compromise over representation. Their roots grew out of the Constitution itself. As Gouverneur

Morris had suggested, the convention had to consider the issue of the Atlantic slave trade, the cause of a continual influx of people destined for slavery in the New World society. By the 1780s, many white Americans and a growing cadre of British reformers believed that modern civilized nations could no longer engage in the brutalities of the Middle Passage. In the Constitutional Convention itself, Virginia slaveholder George Mason bragged that Virginia and Maryland had already banned the "infernal traffic" in human beings. But, he worried, if South Carolina and Georgia were allowed to import slaves, the greed of those states would "bring the judgment of Heaven" on the new nation. Mason charged that "every master of slaves is born a petty tyrant," and yet the curse might spread. "The Western people"—by which he meant the people of Kentucky and other newly settled areas—"are already crying out for slaves for their new lands," he said, "and will fill that country with slaves if they can be got thro' S. Carolina and Georgia."¹⁶

Mason's critique infuriated politicians from the coastal areas of the deepest South, who leapt to their rights. Mason claimed to be a freedom-loving opponent of slavery, but he was speaking from self-interest, charged South Carolina's Charles C. Pinckney: "Virginia will gain by stopping the importations. Her slaves will rise in value, and she has more than she wants." Pinckney hinted at something new in the history of New World slavery: the possibility of filling a new plantation zone with slave labor from American reservoirs. This was possible because the Chesapeake's enslaved population had become self-reproducing. Pinckney then defended slavery in the abstract. "If slavery be wrong," he said, "it is justified by the example of all the world. . . . In all ages one half of mankind have been slaves." The Carolinas and Georgia threatened to abandon the Constitutional Convention.

Just as the already hot, shuttered hall neared the boiling point, Oliver Ellsworth of Connecticut—a future chief justice of the Supreme Court—rose to dump ice water on the Chesapeake delegates. Having "never owned a slave," Ellsworth said, he "could not judge of the effects of slavery on character." Rather than simply attacking the international slave trade's morality, or bewailing the effects of slaveholding in the moral abstract, let the economic interest of white Americans dictate whether the Atlantic slave trade should be closed. And, "as slaves also multiply so fast in Virginia and Maryland that it is cheaper to raise than import them . . . let us not intermeddle" with internal forced migrations, either. Concurring with Ellsworth, South Carolina's John Rutledge—another future chief justice—insisted that "religion and humanity [have] nothing to do with this question." "Interest alone is the governing principle with nations," he said. "The true question at present is whether the

Southern States shall or shall not be parties to the Union. If the Northern States consult their interest, they will not oppose the increase of Slaves which will increase the commodities of which they will become the carriers." New plantations within US borders could fill the role of the British sugar islands, to which northeastern merchants had lost access in the American Revolution. So the convention made a deal: Congress would ban the slave trade from Africa, but not for at least another twenty years.¹⁷

Years later, Illinois politician Abraham Lincoln, named for his grandfather who had been killed in the Kentucky field, would argue that a possible slave trade ban—however delayed—was a concession made by men ashamed of slavery. The Constitution, he pointed out, did not even include the words "slavery" or "slaves." Instead, it used circumlocutions, such as "Person held to service or labor." Perhaps, however, it was Ellsworth and Rutledge who were right: interest was the governing principle shaping the Constitution. In the interest of both profit and unity, they and most other white Americans proved willing to permit the forced movement of enslaved people. In straight or in twisted words, the outcome was plain: the upper and lower South would get to expand slavery through both the Atlantic trade and the internal trade. Meanwhile, the Northeast would earn profits by transporting the commodities generated by slavery's growth.

There were many Americans, even many white ones, whose interests were not served by those decisions, at least not directly. Yet the consequence of not accepting the deal would be disunity, which would be devastating to their interests in other ways. Allowing slavery to continue and even expand meant political unity. So black feet went tramping west and south in chains, and the constitutional compromise helped to imprint an economy founded on the export of slave-made commodities onto a steadily widening swath of the continent. Slavery's expansion soon yielded a more unified government and a stronger economy based on new nationwide capital markets. In fact, instead of finding slavery's expansion to be something that they just had to accept, to avoid ushering in a kind of conflict that could break the infant bonds of nationhood, white Americans soon found in it the basis for a more perfect union. Southern entrepreneurship and northern interest were going to be yoked together for a very long time.

IN EARLY 1792, VIRGINIA enslaver John Breckinridge was worried. He owned considerable land across the mountains, in Kentucky. He knew that over there was sitting a convention tasked with writing a constitution that would enable Kentucky to emerge from its territorial chrysalis and become

a separate state of the Union. And he had heard that some in the convention might have the same doubts that Thomas Jefferson and George Mason had.

Breckinridge had no such doubts. He once advised a female relative: "Your land & Negroes let no person on this earth persuade you to give up." She wouldn't, however, be forced to do that by federal decisions. After the 1789 ratification of the US Constitution, the first Congress gathered in New York and immediately began to try to stabilize the chaotic territories. Congress confirmed the Northwest Ordinance's ban on slavery in what would eventually become Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, Wisconsin, and Minnesota. No one thought those areas would make the commodities that John Rutledge had promised back at the Philadelphia Convention. South of the Ohio, the new Congress left open a massive new region for enslavers, organizing the Tennessee Territory in 1790 by passing a Southwest Ordinance that was an exact copy of the Northwest one—except that it left out the clause banning slavery.¹⁸

In the Natchez District along the Mississippi, slaves were already growing massive quantities of indigo. And in Kentucky, the first national census in 1790 had counted 61,000 whites and more than 12,000 enslaved Africans. Kentucky was not becoming Jefferson's dream republic of land-owning white yeomen—especially since the territory's constitutional convention decided that all land disputes would be referred to a statewide court of appeals staffed by three elite judges. The twenty-one speculators who owned a full quarter of all Kentucky land surely approved. Meanwhile, convention delegate David Rice—both a slaveholder and a Presbyterian minister—told the convention that slavery inevitably produced theft, kidnapping, and rape. Although a given owner might be a good man, debts could force him to break up families. Rice also insisted that slavery weakened the new republic by incorporating a group of people against whom citizens had effectively declared war. But the other delegates rejected his emancipation proposal, concluding that slavery actually strengthened Kentucky because it attracted wealthy settlers who would buy land from speculators.¹⁹

Once he heard the good news, John Breckinridge prepared to move his slaves west across the mountains. He wasn't sure if he would avoid "the perplexity of a Plantation" by hiring out his slaves. He'd heard that in the labor-hungry West, "the hire of your Negroes & rent of your land will far exceed any annual income you ever enjoyed." Reluctant to do the job himself, he convinced his neighbor John Thompson to lead the Breckinridge slaves across the mountains to his Kentucky properties. By the morning of April 3,

Thompson was at Fluvanna County on the James River, ready to leave, with Breckinridge's eighteen enslaved people in tow.²⁰

Francis Fedric remembered such a morning—a morning on which he, too, had begun a forced march to Kentucky. As those who were about to be led away formed up before dawn, he saw men and women fall on the damp ground behind the old I-style house "on their knees[,] begging to be purchased to go with their wives or husbands." Some were "abroad husbands," men owned by other enslavers, but who had been allowed Saturday night visits with their wives—and who were now watching the dawn end their marriages. Some were abroad wives who had risen at 3 a.m. to walk to the plantation, bringing the last change of clothes they would ever wash for their husbands. Holding the hands of parents who were staying were sobbing sons and daughters. Begging was "of no avail," remembered Fedric. The man guiding the slaves out to Kentucky—well, this was not his first time. When he was ready, off they went, walking down the road toward the Blue Ridge looming in the distance.²¹

They walked, indeed. For as long as John Breckinridge owned people on both sides of the mountain, he also owned the connections between them. He held the carrots, and he held the sticks. For instance, Breckinridge had inherited a man named Bill from his father-in-law, Joseph Cabell. Breckinridge decided that Bill would have to go to the Kentucky farms. So would Bill's sister Sarah. This was when Bill and Sarah's mother, Violet, went to her owner Mary Cabell, Breckinridge's mother-in-law. Don't let Sarah "go to Cantucky," Violet begged, not unless "Stephen her husband," owned by another enslaver, could go with them. Violet had Mary Cabell's ear. However, Stephen cost more money than Breckinridge wanted to spend. Keeping Sarah in Virginia was the way for Breckinridge to save himself grief in his own family. So Sarah stayed. But Bill marched up the Wilderness Road, knowing that if he ran away along the trail, all bets were off. Sarah, and any children she might have, would be gone from Violet's life. The best he could do was to make the utilitarian calculations of the unfree, so he traded himself for his sister's marriage and his mother's last years.²²

Thompson led Breckinridge's slaves across the Blue Ridge by the same pass where I-64 now soars over the mountain to connect Charlottesville in the Piedmont to Staunton in the Shenandoah Valley. Then they marched up the valley until, as Fedric remembered from his own journey, they saw the Alleghenies looming "in the distance something like blue sky." Looking for the shortest line through the folded hills to the Monongahela River in Pennsylvania, the flatlanders climbed up "through what appeared to be

a long winding valley": "On every side, huge, blue-looking rocks seemed impending," thought Fedric—who feared that, "if let loose, they would fall upon us and crush us." It was April, but a late winter spell lowered upon Breckinridge's forced migrants. Snow or cold rain came almost every day, and by night, tired bodies shivered around roadside fires. Wolves howled at an uncertain distance. In the mornings, anger about forced separations bubbled up. "Never till then," wrote Thompson, "did I know the worth of whiskey." Indeed, it was valuable all day long: "When the Negroes were wet and almost ready to give out, then I came forward with my good friend whiskey and Once every hour, unless they were asleep I was obliged to give them whiskey."²³

Sleep, however, was broken. Fedric remembered that "two or three times during the night . . . one of the overseers would call our names over, every one being obliged to wake up and answer." The men were not chained together, and the enslavers still worried that some wouldn't refuse the opportunity to escape—even with all the cards enslavers held over the migrants' families back east of the Blue Ridge. A slave named Mary, for instance, ran away from Jonathan Stout of Kentucky after Stout got her to the Ohio River. She had fled with a mulatto man, and they crossed the river together and struck out into the Northwest Territory. The causes of her run for freedom were written on her skin, as her enslaver's advertisement (in a newspaper called the *Herald of Liberty*) revealed: "She is stout made, with a scar over one of her eyes, and much scarified on her back."²⁴

Some forced migrants marched through the mountains to Wheeling (in Virginia then, but now in West Virginia) on the Ohio River, while others floated down the Monongahela in Pennsylvania. Although Pennsylvania's glacial emancipation plan allowed slavery to exist for decades more, by the 1790s some white Pennsylvanians along the route to Kentucky had allegedly organized a "negro club" that sought to free enslaved people. In 1791, three Virginia slave owners, named Stevens, Foushee, and Lafon, on a flatboat with a group of enslaved men and women, heard someone on the shore calling them to come "take a dram." A chance to knock back a shot of whiskey and trade news in the wilderness sounded like a damn good idea. Soon the boat was scraping onto the gravel of the riverbank. That's when the white men on the bank pulled one of the slave men out of the boat and ran with him into the woods. The slave owners shoved hard on their steering poles, propelling the boat into the downstream current, while catcalls rang from the trees. In another case, when winter weather trapped a party of slaves and their owner at an inn in Redstone, Pennsylvania, three enslaved people slipped away. The

Virginia enslaver accused local whites of "seducing" the African Americans to escape. He returned to Redstone with allies, and local authorities arrested him for trying to recapture the people who had been "kidnapped" from him. The Redstone incident developed into a federal-level confrontation between Virginia and Pennsylvania. In 1793, southerners in Congress solved the crisis by passing the first comprehensive fugitive slave act.²⁵

Once enslavers got their captives through the mountains and onto the Ohio River, these escape attempts declined. The flatboats didn't stop until they reached the growing frontier port of Louisville. From there, travelers made their way to Lexington and the Bluegrass region. This area was beginning to look like a more prosperous Piedmont Virginia, complete with economic winners and losers. In the counties around Lexington, 60 percent of all whites owned no land. There were two slaves for every white man over the age of twenty. Enslaved people toiled in fields that were lusher than Virginia's, growing tobacco, corn, and wheat. They also raised hemp, which enslaved workers made into cordage and rigging at the "rope-walks" around Lexington and Louisville. The US government, newly empowered by the federal constitution, rewarded Kentucky enslavers for their willingness to stay in the union by working to open the mouth of the Mississippi River to trade. The Treaty of San Lorenzo, signed with Spain in 1795, enabled planters to export shipments of tobacco, rope, and other products by taking them down the Mississippi to the world market via New Orleans.

The 1792 state constitution had made it illegal to bring slaves into Kentucky just to sell them, but this ban proved as porous as dozens of similar ones that would follow it. In 1795, William Hayden—a nine-year-old boy who would spend the next thirty years in the slave trade, first as commodity and then as a slave trader's employee—was sold at Ashton's Gap in Virginia. The man who purchased him brought him along the Wilderness Road and then sold him to Francis Burdett of Lincoln County, Kentucky. At his new owner's place, Hayden comforted himself by watching the reflection of the rising sun every morning in a pond, as he had done with his mother back in Virginia. He told himself that somewhere, she was watching, too. Meanwhile, slave buyers spread across the Southeast as far as Charleston, where Kentucky-based purchasers bought Africans from the Atlantic trade and marched them west to toil in the lead mines north of Lexington.²⁶

The fact that slavery was now thriving in Kentucky enabled the new state to attract more people like John Breckinridge, folks whom George Nicholas, one of the key forces behind the 1792 state constitution, called "valuable emigrants from the five S. states." Such emigrants tuned the state's institutions

to help them maintain an ever tighter grip on human property. "Associations"—regional groups of Baptist and other churches—began to punish ministers who preached against slavery. Ordinary white farmers, discouraged by the wealthy settlers' control over the processes of land law, moved away. Thomas Lincoln, whose father had been murdered in the field as the boy played, was now grown, and he hoped to have a farm of his own. But he repeatedly lost claims on land he had cleared and planted in lawsuits launched by speculators who lived as far away as Philadelphia. In 1816, he moved his young family, including seven-year-old son Abraham, across the Ohio. Thomas's retreat was part of a wider defeat for a vision of Kentucky as land for yeoman farmers rather than as a region for high-capital speculation in land and human bodies. And as young people like Francis Fedric and William Hayden marched west, another set of forced migrations started coming out of Maryland and Virginia.²⁷

ON A BRIGHT SPRING Maryland morning in 1805, Charles Ball rode comfortably on the board seat of a wagon, the lead rope of his owner's yoke of oxen in his hands. He was driving the team to a little town on the bank of the Patuxent River. Ball's latest owner—he'd had five in his twenty-five years—was a hard man: Mr. Ballard would make a slave work in the woods on the snowiest of days, with no boots. But Ball had hopes. All through the neighborhood, he was known as a strong, intelligent worker with a steady temper, unlike his irascible African grandfather or his runaway father. Charles Ball had been hired out to the Washington Navy Yard—and had come back, instead of running away like so many others had done when they had worked "abroad." Ball could figure out faster, smarter ways to do any job. He had incentives: a wife and children, owned by another white man. Ball's extra hours supplied his family with food and clothing. Although he would later laugh at his younger self, the twenty-five-year-old Charles Ball hoped for his own and his family's freedom. And he was not alone. In Maryland's decaying tobacco economy, enslavers were allowing many African Americans to buy their freedom. The free constituted 5 percent of the state's 111,000 people of African descent in 1790, and 22 percent of 145,000 by 1810. Maryland was becoming a "middle ground" between a slave society and a free one.²⁸

When Ball reached the little town, he followed his master's instructions, tying the team of oxen up by the store that Ballard owned there. His owner eventually appeared on horseback, went inside, and sat down to breakfast with the storekeeper. Soon Ballard emerged and told Ball to come in and

finish the leftovers. As Ball sat down, he saw, through the wavy glass of the kitchen window, his owner talking emphatically with another white man.

Uneasily swallowing a last mouthful, Ball stood up and walked slowly out. He began hitching up the oxen, fumbling with the leather and rope. Suddenly he felt the presence of several people looming around him. He turned. As out of nowhere, a dozen white men had surrounded him. Before his eyes had time to flicker from one hard face to the next, his head jerked back as someone seized him by the collar from behind. "You are my property now!" a voice shouted in Ball's ear, and as Ball whipped his head around, he saw the man with whom Ballard had been whispering. "You must go with me to Georgia!" the stranger snarled.²⁹

Ball stood in shock. White men grabbed and bent his arms. Quickly someone knotted his hands together behind his back. Mr. You Are My Property Now abruptly shoved Ball forward, and he stumbled. The crowd giggled. The enslaved man was suddenly helpless, barely able to stay on his feet. Playing desperately for time, Ball asked to see his wife and children. "You can get another wife in Georgia," countered his captor. Ball "felt incapable of weeping," and so, he later said, "in my despair I laughed loudly."

Proslavery writers later sneered at reformers who depicted slave transactions as sentimental tragedies, as if to say: "They laugh when they are sold—how bad can it be?" In their daily lives, enslavers understood that a laugh could be the only way to keep alive the ability to express something, anything. But behind the laugh, the word "Georgia" was racing through Ball's mind. Every African American in Maryland knew that word. By 1805, almost every slave had a personal Georgia story. Ball's was the only thing he remembered about his mother. In 1784, when Charles was four, his mother's owner went broke as tobacco prices collapsed. Doing the only thing he could do to escape his debts, the man died. And when the day came for the sale of the dead man's property, Charles, his mother, and his older brothers and sisters stood in the yard in front of the old Calvert County, Maryland, house.

Ball's father, who was owned by another man, was not allowed to leave work to see them before they were sold off. This was for safety's sake. A man who had to see his son stand naked before buyers might do anything. But among those who showed up were several men who had traveled a long way to Maryland. They came from South Carolina and Georgia. These men wanted to buy workers to work in the rice swamps and indigo fields and to fell the interior forests as the Catawba Indians retreated. Although by 1784 they hadn't yet figured out what they would plant on that raw new upcountry soil,

they could pay a higher price than any Maryland buyer—what local sellers called a “foreign price.” Several Carolina men divided up Ball and his brothers and sisters. A Georgia man bought his mother. Charles was too young to be worth carrying five hundred miles. A Maryland man bought the little boy and wrapped him in his own child’s spare gown. Putting Charles up in front of him, the buyer turned his horse’s head toward home. Before he could leave, Charles’s mother came running up, weeping. She took Charles down into her arms, hugged him, and pleaded through tears for the man to buy them all. She only got a moment to make her case. Down came the Georgia man, running in his heavy boots, wading into her with his whip, beating her shoulders until she handed Charles over. The Georgia buyer dragged her screaming toward the yard. The crying boy clung to the Maryland man, his new owner.³⁰

Only about 5,000 enslaved people were made to walk down the old Indian-trading trails to South Carolina and Georgia during the 1780s. But their significance was greater than their numbers suggest. They were the trickle that predicted the flood. As tobacco prices plummeted in the 1780s, the prices of long-staple, or “Sea-Island,” cotton rose. Then, in the early 1790s, Carolina and Georgia enslavers started to use a new machine called the “cotton gin.” That enabled the speedy processing of short-staple cotton, a hardier and more flexible crop that would grow in the backcountry where the long-staple variant would not. Suddenly enslavers knew what to plant in the Georgia-Carolina interior. Down south, enslaved people in Maryland and Virginia began to whisper to each other, you had to eat cotton seed. To be sold there “was the worst form of punishment,” wrote a man who ran away after hearing that a “Georgia man” had bought him.³¹

These were rumors on the grapevine, not witness testimonies. Black people did not come back from Georgia. “Georgia-men” like John Springs did, and he brought so much gold for buying slaves that his bouncing saddlebags bruised his horse’s sides. Georgia-men also brought information about opportunities that lay even farther southwest. Georgia, for instance, claimed the territory that eventually became the states of Alabama and Mississippi. Beginning in the late 1780s, state officials and northern investors launched multiple schemes to sell millions of southwestern acres to a variety of parties. Southwestern and northeastern entrepreneurs were using the allure of investment in future commodity frontiers developed by enslaved labor, and in the process they created a national financial market for land speculation. The North American Land Company, owned by American financier Robert Morris, a signer of the Constitution, purchased 2 million acres of what was



THE FIRST COTTON-GIN.—DRAWN BY WILLIAM L. NISBETH.—(ENG. FINE ARTS.)

Image 1.1. “The First Cotton Gin,” *Harper’s Weekly*, December 18, 1869, p. 813. This image of the creation of one of the founding technologies of slavery’s post-Revolution expansion was drawn after the Civil War by an artist who—judging by the grinning workers and watching child—couldn’t decide whether slavery was businesslike or idyllic. Library of Congress.

at best infertile pine-barrens, and at worst simply fictitious. However, even bigger schemes were to follow, and some speculated on land that was both rich and real—although the multiple claims of states, empires, and Native Americans contradicted each other. The land at stake was the 65 million acres that became Alabama and Mississippi. In the breezy shorthand of land speculators and con men, the region was called “the Yazoo,” after a river in present-day Mississippi.³²

There were two chief Yazoo schemes. The first was launched in 1789, when it began to seem likely that Georgia would surrender the land south of Tennessee to the federal government. Indeed, the ratification of the US Constitution, and North Carolina’s relinquishment of Tennessee to the federal government, made this step seem imminent. To establish a claim to as much of this land as possible, financiers put together three investment companies: the South Carolina Yazoo Company, the Tennessee Yazoo Company, and the Virginia Yazoo Company. The last was headed (on paper) by revolutionary

firebrand Patrick Henry. Each was, boosters claimed, a company of most "respectable" gentlemen, whose endeavors would open up a vast and "opulent" territory for the "honor" of the United States. The companies struck a deal with the legislature of Georgia, acquiring 16 million acres for \$200,000: twelve and a half cents an acre. And what a land it was rumored to be. Boosters claimed that it could produce all the plantation crops a North American reader could wish for in 1789. Indigo, rice, and sugarcane grew luxuriantly in the Yazoo of the mind: two crops a year! The most fertile soil in the world! A climate like that of classical Greece! Land buyers would flock there! And, "supposing each person only to purchase one negro," wrote one "Charleston," as he called himself in a Philadelphia newspaper, this would eventually create "an immense opening for the African trade." Charleston suggested that each planter of tobacco and indigo could trade slave-made crops for more slaves: "After buying one negro, the next year he can buy two, and so be increasing on."³³

In 1789, investors' expectations already marked off the Yazoo for slavery, and investors attracted by Yazoo expectations counted on slavery's wealth-generating capacity to yoke together the interests of many parties across regional boundaries. People from the free states who might dislike the political ramifications of the Three-Fifths Compromise had few qualms about pumping investment into a slave country; they expected to make money back with interest from land speculation, from financing and transporting slaves, and from the sale of commodities. Investors nationwide bought the bonds of these land companies and put their securities into circulation like paper money.³⁴

The 1789 Yazoo sale eventually collapsed, but within six years, the Georgia legislators found a second set of pigeons. Or perhaps it was the Georgia power-brokers who were the ones conned. Or, yet again, maybe the citizens of Georgia were being fleeced. In 1795, the Spanish government signed the Treaty of San Lorenzo, surrendering its claim to the Yazoo lands. A newly formed company—the Georgia-Mississippi Land Company—moved quickly to make a new deal. The roster of the company's leaders included a justice of the US Supreme Court, a territorial governor, two congressmen, two senators (Robert Morris of Pennsylvania and James Gunn of Georgia), and Wade Hampton of South Carolina, who was on his way to becoming the richest man in the country. Since the federal government would surely soon extinguish Georgia's western claims, speculators then would be dealing with a legislature that would be more expensive to bribe than a state. So the company sent Senator Gunn swooping down on Augusta, the Georgia state capital, with satchels of cash.³⁵

Within days, Gunn persuaded the legislature to sell 35 million acres of land between the Chattahoochee and the Mississippi Rivers for \$500,000 in gold and silver. The Georgia-Mississippi Land Company immediately sold the titles to other speculative entities, especially the Boston-based New England-Mississippi Land Company. That company, well provided with venture capital, broke up land into smaller parcels, which it then sold in the form of paper shares to investors. These Yazoo securities created a massive scramble in Boston, driving up the price of stock in the New England-Mississippi Land Company and creating paper fortunes. But in Georgia, people were furious. James Jackson, Gunn's fellow senator and political rival, pronounced the entire operation a fraud. Although he was a notorious land speculator in his own right, Jackson organized resentment of the Yazoo sale into a tidal wave at the next state legislative elections. In 1796, new representatives passed a statute overturning the previous legislature's land grant. They literally expunged by fire the record of sale from the 1795 session book of the legislature.³⁶

The legal consequences of the sale itself remained unsettled. What was clear, however, was that people around the United States were willing to pour money onto slavery's frontier. They anticipated that slave-made commodities would find a profitable market. So did migrant enslavers, and so they demanded more slaves. In 1786, John Losson wrote to a Virginia planter whose Georgia land he managed. Crops were fine, he reported, impending war with the Indians promised more land acquisitions, and "likely negroes is the best trade for land that can be."³⁷

Indeed, access to large supplies of "surplus" slaves from the Chesapeake was the best form of currency for buying land that one could possess. To get land in Wilkes County, Georgia, Virginian Edward Butler traded the promise of "three likely young negroes" who were still in Virginia. The buyer wished, Butler reminded himself in his diary, "one of the S[ai]d three negroes to be a girl or young wench." Back in Virginia, Butler hired Thomas Wootton to transport thirteen more enslaved people down to Georgia. Wootton delivered three "likely young negroes" to their purchaser and settled the rest on Butler's thus-purchased land. In this kind of process, less wealthy white men, such as Wootton, perceived a growing opportunity for those who were willing to buy slaves in the Chesapeake and march them south for sale. Such white men began to strike out on their own in greater numbers with each year in the 1780s and 1790s. So the "Georgia-man," an all-too-real boogeyman, became a specific type of danger in the oral book of knowledge of enslaved African Americans.³⁸

Thus, as he sat mute and bound in the bow of a rowboat that had been hired to take him across the Patuxent River from Ballard's Landing, Charles Ball already knew his fate. The way enslaved African Americans talked about "Georgia" and "Georgia-men" was their way of describing the new economic, social, and political realities that were destroying the world they had built in the Chesapeake. Yet twenty years of fearing the Georgia-men did not make the instantaneous demolition of his family and future any easier. And while he had always feared the slave trade, Ball was beginning to realize that the Georgia-man who faced him across the body of the sweating oarsman was building a machine even more cunning than he had imagined.

Now, as they neared the other side, Ball saw a group of African Americans huddled on the bank. They were his fifty-one fellow captives. Nineteen women were linked together by a rope tied to the cord halters that encircled their necks. Thirty-two men were in a different situation, and Ball was about to be joined to them. A blacksmith waited with iron for him: iron collar, manacles, chains. The buyer cut loose the tight cords around Ball's wrists. Ball stood "indifferent" to his "fate," as he later remembered, while the two white men fitted the collar on his neck and slid the hasp of an open brass padlock through a latch in the front. Then they passed a heavy chain inside of the curve of metal and pushed the hasp and the body of the padlock together. Click.

The same heavy iron stringer now joined Ball to the other thirty-two men, sliding like fish strung through the gills. Then, for the last step in the process, the blacksmith took two bands of iron, put them around Ball's wrists, and pounded down bolts to fasten the manacles. He attached the manacle on Ball's right wrist by a short chain to the left manacle of the next man on the neck chain. The two of them would have to walk in step and next to each other. Ball was now becoming one moving part of something called a "coffe," an African term derived from the Arabic word *cafila*: a chained slave caravan. The hammer pounded hard, and the bolt pinched the wrist of Ball's chainmate, who began to cry. Ball sat stoically, but on the inside, his emotions ran just as wild. His mind raced uncontrolled, from "the suffering that awaited" him in a place that he believed had long since killed his mother to even more despairing internal sentences: *I wish I had never been born. I want to die. I cannot even kill myself, because of these chains.*³⁹

They waited on the bank. The blacksmith yawned. By the time a flat-bottomed boat approached the bank, Ball's heart had stopped racing. "I concluded," he said as an old man, telescoping a recovery in reality more painfully won, "that as things could not become worse—and as the life of

man is but a continued round of changes, they must, of necessity, take a turn in my favor at some future day. I found relief in this vague and indefinite hope."

In the boat was the returning Georgia-man, who ordered them all on board. The women—Ball now noticed that a couple of them were obviously pregnant—and the sixteen pairs of men, plus one, clambered in with a chorus of clinking. The scow set off toward the south bank of the Patuxent. The slave rowers pulled. Probably they didn't sing this song that one white traveler heard Chesapeake watermen chanting: "Going away to Georgia, ho, heave, O! / Massa sell poor negro, ho, heave, O! / Leave poor wife and children, ho, heave, O!"⁴⁰

A man or woman who discovered that he was being taken south might be desperate enough to do anything. Some ran. Some fought like tigers. William Grimes tried to break his own leg with an axe. No wonder sellers and buyers schemed to take men like Charles Ball unawares. And once buyers bought, no wonder they bolted fetters on men and ran links of iron through padlocks. Men could march together carrying their chains. But there was no way that they could all run together. There was no way they could leap off a boat and swim to shore, no way thirty-three men hauling one thousand pounds of iron could hide silent in the woods. The coffe-chains enabled Georgia-men to turn feet against hearts, to make enslaved people work directly against their own love of self, children, spouses; of the world, of freedom and hope.⁴¹

When the scow scraped bottom in the shallows on the other side of the river, and the people awkwardly staggered out, the Georgia-man led them up the bank and onto a road that they walked until evening fell, heading southwest. They stopped at a rough tavern. The proprietor put them in one large room. Fifty-two pairs of mostly manacled hands managed to share a large pot of cornmeal mush before it was too dark to see.

That night, Ball, nestled between the two men chained closest to him, lay awake for many hours. When at last he slept, his son came to him. In Ball's dream the little boy tried to break the chain between his father's manacles to set his father's hands free, so that he could fix the boy's broken world. But the iron held. Charles's son faded. Then Charles's grandfather appeared. Born in Africa in the 1720s, he'd been kidnapped as a teenager, and sold to men who brought him across the salt water to Maryland. There they renamed him, and by the time Charles had known him, "Old Ben" was gray with half a century in slavery. Ben never surrendered his own version of Islam, or his contempt for either the enslavers or the enslaved people who behaved submissively. Charles's father, in contrast, had tried to play a less defiant part. But after the

1785 sale of his wife and children, the father changed. He spent his free time at Old Ben's hut, talking about Africa and the wrongs of slavery. The owner grew worried that the younger man would run away. He arranged a posse to help seize Charles's father for a Georgia trader. But Old Ben overheard two white men talking about the plan. He crossed three miles of woods in the dark to Charles's father's cabin. Handing his son a bag of dried corn and a jug of cider, Ben sent him off toward Pennsylvania. No one in Calvert County ever heard from Charles's father again.

Ben would have come for his grandson, too. But the old man was dead ten years gone, and these locks and chains would have defeated even his survivor's cunning. When the sun came up, it found Ball stumbling forward, trying to keep time with the rest of the coffle.

In the days to come, Ball and the other men gigged on the Georgia-man's line marched steadily southwest, covering ten to twenty miles a day. The pregnant women complained desperately. The Georgia-man rode on. After crossing the Potomac, he moved Ball, who was physically the strongest of the men, from the middle of the chain and attached his padlocked collar to the first iron link. With Ball setting a faster pace, the two sets of double lines of people hurried down the high road, a dirt line in the Virginia grain fields that today lies under the track of US Highway 301.

Ball's emotions continued to oscillate. Yet slowly he brought his interior more in line with the exterior face that men in coffles tried to wear. "Time did not reconcile me to my chains," Ball recalled, but "it made me familiar with them." Familiar indeed—at night, as everyone else slept, Ball crawled among his fellow prisoners, handling each link, looking for the weak one. He found nothing. But sometimes slave traders were careless—like the ones who were taking Jack Neal down the Ohio River in 1801. They had shackled him to the side of the boat, but one night Neal worked loose the staple that fastened iron chain to wood. He crept along the deck to his sleeping captor, slipped the white man's loaded pistol from his pocket, and blew the man's brains out. Neal then went to the far end of the boat, where another white man was steering, and announced, "Damn you, it was your time once but it is mine now."

Neal was recaptured on the Ohio shore and executed. Others had already tried the same thing, such as the enslaved men who in autumn 1799 killed a Georgia-man named Speers in North Carolina. He'd spent \$9,000 buying people in northern Virginia—money embezzled from the Georgia state treasury by a legislator, as it turned out. If Speers had brought the men all the way to the end of the trail and sold them, perhaps the money could've been replaced, and no one would have been the wiser. But he forgot to close a lock

one night, and as a newspaper reported, "the negroes rose and cut the throat of Mr. Speers, and of another man who accompanied him." Ten slaves were killed in the course of local authorities' attempts to recapture them.⁴²

Every enslaved prisoner wanted to "rise" at one point or another. Properly closed locks disabled that option. Cuffs bound hands, preventing attack or defense. Chains on men also made it harder for women to resist. Isolated from male allies, individual women were vulnerable. One night at a tavern in Virginia's Greenbrier County, a traveler watched as a group of traders put a coffle of people in one room. Then, wrote the traveler, each white man "took a female from the drove to lodge with him, as is the common practice." Ten-year-old enslaved migrant John Brown saw slave trader Starling Finney and his assistants gang-rape a young woman in a wagon by a South Carolina road. The other women wept. The chained men sat silently.⁴³

Chains enabled another kind of violence to be done as well. Chains saved whites from worrying about placating this one's mother, or buying that one's child. Once the enslaved men were in the coffle, they weren't getting away unless they found a broken link. For five hundred miles, no one had to call names at night to ensure they hadn't run away.

Men of the chain couldn't act as individuals; nor could they act as a collective, except by moving forward in one direction. Even this took some learning. Stumble, and one dragged someone else lurching down by the padlock dangling from his throat. Many bruised legs and bruised tempers later, they would become one long file moving at the same speed, the same rhythm, no longer swinging linked hands in the wrong direction.

Of course, though they became a unit, they were not completely united. Relationships between the enslaved could play out as conflict, or alliance, or both. People were angry, depressed, despairing, sick of each other's smell and the noises they made, how they walked too fast or slow, how no one could even piss or shit by themselves. At night, lying too close, raw wrists and sore feet aching, men in chains or women in ropes argued, pushed, tried to enforce their wills. John Parker, chained in the coffle as a preteen, remembered a weaker boy named Jeff who was bullied until John came to his aid, helping him stand up against a big teenager who was taking food from the younger children.⁴⁴

None of that mattered to the Georgia-man as long as the chain kept moving, and Ball led the file down through Virginia into North Carolina at a steady pace. As the days wore on, the men, who were never out of the chains, grew dirtier and dirtier. Lice hopped from scalp to scalp at night. Black-and-red lines of scabs bordered the manacles. No matter: The Georgia-man

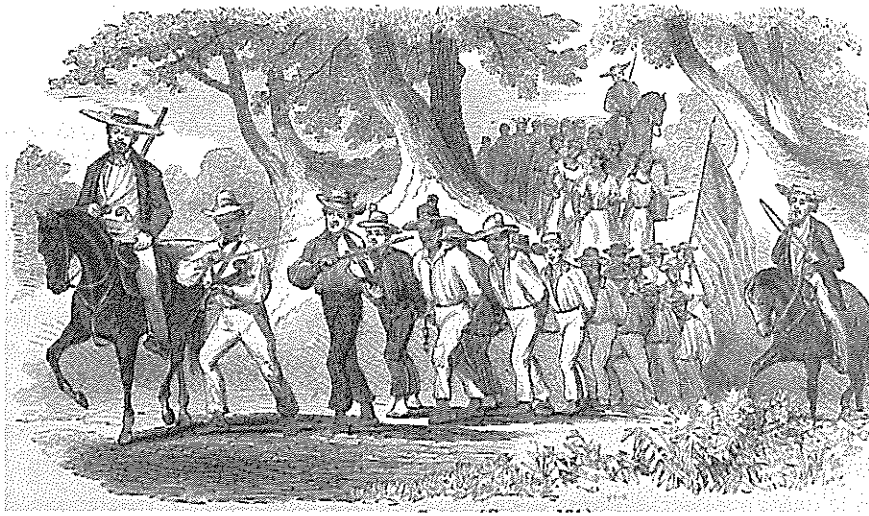


Image 1.2. Coffle scene, from Anonymous, *The Suppressed Book About Slavery* (New York, 1864), facing p. 49. The coffles marched south and west, with men linked together by a long chain, manacled hands, and women following them, under guard. Fiddles, songs, and whiskey were typical expedients to keep the chain moving forward.

would let the people clean themselves before they got to market. In the meantime, the men were the propellant for the coffle-chain, which was more than a tool, more than mere metal. It was a machine. Its iron links and bands forced the black people inside them to do exactly what entrepreneurial enslavers, and investors far distant from slavery's frontier, needed them to do in order to turn a \$300 Maryland or Virginia purchase into a \$600 Georgia sale.

At some point after they crossed the Potomac, Ball decided that as long as he was in the coffle, he could only do two things. The first was to carry the chain forward like a pair of obedient, disembodied feet. That, of course, benefited the Georgia-man, and a whole array of slave-sellers, slave-buyers, and financiers-of-the-trade, while carrying him farther from home and family, and he had to do it whether he wanted to or not. The second thing, unlike the first, was something he could choose whether to do or not do. Charles decided to learn about his path, because understanding the path might eventually be for his own benefit. So he carefully watched the dirt roads of Virginia and North Carolina pass beneath his feet. He whispered the names of rivers as he lay in irons at night. He noted how far the cornfields had gone toward making ears as May crawled toward June. And he tried to draw out the grim man who sat on the horse clop-clopping beside the line. Day after

day, Ball emitted a stream of exploratory chatter at the Georgia-man's ears, blathering on about Maryland customs, growing tobacco, and his time in the Navy Yard.

Enslaved people trained themselves all their lives in the art of discovering information from white people. But Ball couldn't pry loose even the name of the man who played this role of "Georgia-man." That role already did not have the best reputation among white folks in Virginia and Maryland. Some resented the way coffles, driven right through town, put the most unpleasant parts of slavery right in their faces. Others resented the embarrassment the traders could inflict. In the 1800 presidential election, Thomas Jefferson defeated the incumbent, John Adams, and the federal government shifted to the District of Columbia—and so the heart of the United States moved to the Chesapeake. Clanking chains in the capital of a republic founded on the inalienable right to liberty became an embarrassment, in particular, to Virginia's political leaders. Northern Federalist newspapers complained that Jefferson had been elected on the strength of electoral votes generated by the three-fifths clause of the Constitution—claiming, in other words, that, Virginia's power came not from championing liberty, but from enslaving human beings.⁴⁵

Sometimes both Georgia-men and the enslaved intentionally irritated that particular sting. A few years after Ball was herded south, a slave trader marched a coffle past the US Capitol just as a gaggle of congressmen took a cigar break on the front steps. One of the captive men raised his manacles and mockingly sang "Hail Columbia," a popular patriotic song. Another such occasion relied for its emotional punch not on the sarcasm of captives but on the brashness of captors. Jesse Torrey, a Philadelphia physician, was visiting the Capitol when he saw a coffle pass by in chains. A passer-by explained that the white "drivers" of the caravan were "Georgymen." The doctor walked up to one and inquired (in what must have been an accusatory tone), "Have you not enough such people in that country yet?" "Not quite yet," was the sneering reply.⁴⁶

Another incident even became something of a media scandal. In the early nineteenth century, Americans were redefining the role of women, arguing that mothers needed to teach their sons the principles of self-sacrifice if the young men were to grow up to be virtuous citizens of the young republic. In December 1815, an enslaved woman named Anna dramatized the way in which slavery's expansion did not allow her to do that. Sold to a Georgia-man, separated from her husband and all but two of her children, she had been locked in a third-floor room at George Miller's tavern on F Street in

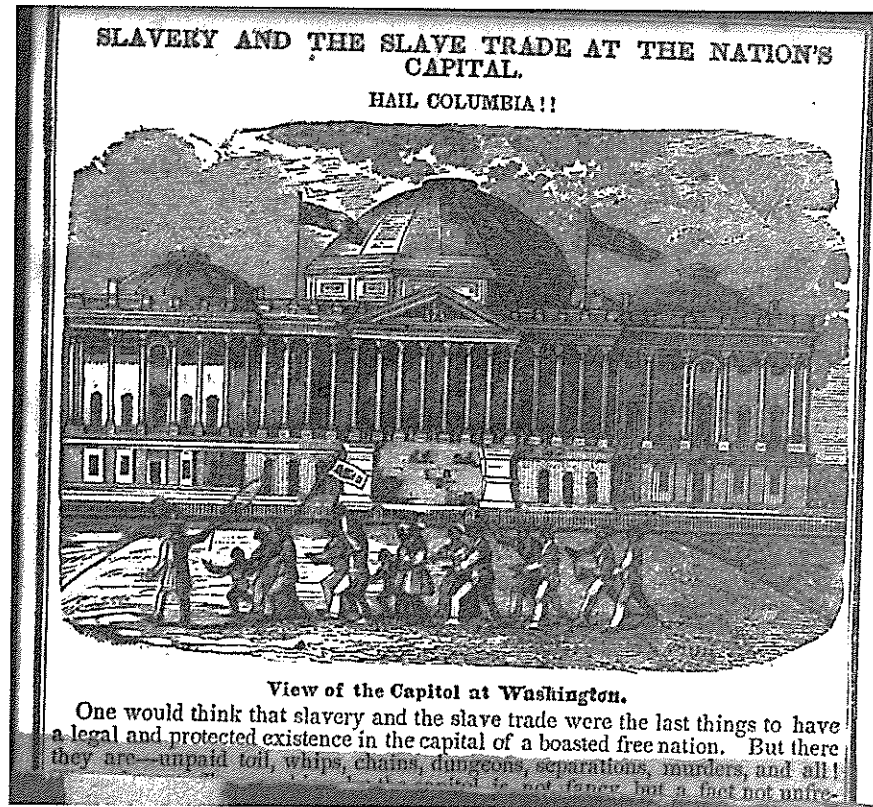


Image 1.3. “Hail Columbia!! View of the Capitol at Washington,” illustration from Theodore Weld, *American Slavery As It Is* (New York, 1839). Though published in 1839, this image attempts to depict an incident that was first reported in the late 1810s. A coffin of enslaved people marching through Washington, DC, in plain view of congressmen taking a cigar break on the Capitol steps, saluted those representatives of a free people with an ironic rendition of the patriotic American song “Hail Columbia.”

Washington, DC. Squeezing through a garret window, she was either trying to escape or jumping from despair. Whichever it was, gravity took over and Anna fell twenty-five feet, breaking her spine and both arms. Dragged into a bed, she said before dying, “I am sorry now that I did it, they have carried my children off with ‘em to Carolina.”⁴⁷

Jefferson and his allies wanted to neutralize discussion of slavery. With the help of northerners, they were eventually able to do just that. Jefferson and his allies had fought their Federalist opponents over many things in the 1790s: the French Revolution; the Federalists’ perceived desire to centralize power in the federal government; whether political opposition to the

president was treason. But they almost never fought over slavery. During the 1800 election, a few northern Federalists charged Jefferson with keeping a “harem” of enslaved lovers at Monticello, but southern Federalists—and most northern ones—kept the slavery question sheathed. They did so because of interest. Slavery’s expansion was one topic in which political leaders from all sides could find common interest. In Congress, prominent southern Federalists, led by Robert Goodloe Harper of South Carolina, blocked Georgia’s 1796 attempt to repeal the Yazoo sale. Together with northern advocates for financial capital, such as Jefferson’s nemesis Alexander Hamilton, Harper insisted that a contract was a contract, and a sale was final. Both investors and the cause of developing the southwestern United States should be protected from a legislature elected by popular demagoguery and out to overturn a legal transaction.⁴⁸

The debate over the Yazoo claims might seem straightforward: big money versus small farmers meant Federalists versus Jeffersonians, nationalists versus states’ righters. Yet things were not so simple. Many northern Republicans had invested in Yazoo bonds. Many Georgians recognized how they could benefit if the sale stood. And there was a potential quid pro quo on the table. In 1798, Congress was debating whether to organize the Mississippi Territory—the land sold off by the Georgia legislature in 1795. Several northern Federalists attempted to add the Northwest Ordinance’s Article VI to the bill, proposing to outlaw slavery in a land where it already existed—especially around Natchez. Although the territory would obviously become at least one Jefferson-leaning state, Federalist Robert Goodloe Harper gathered an interregional coalition of both Federalists and Republicans to defeat the amendment. These were not only southerners, but also northerners who knew that trying to ban slavery could jeopardize Georgia’s surrender of land claims to the federal government. That would delay the survey and sale of land, and thus the time when Yazoo investors could recoup their investments. And the investors knew that these millions of acres would yield much more value if purchasers could count on setting slaves to labor on them.⁴⁹

Many congressmen examined their direct financial interests and chose to ensure that Mississippi became a slave territory. To soothe their consciences, some of Jefferson’s followers began to claim that expanding slavery would actually make it more likely that slavery could eventually be eliminated. “If the slaves of the southern states were permitted to go into this western country,” argued Virginia congressman William Branch Giles, “by lessening the number in those [older] states, and spreading them over a large surface of country, there would be a greater probability of ameliorating their condition,

which could never be done whilst they were crowded together as they now are in the southern states." If the slaves were "diffused," enslavers would be more likely to free them, for whites were afraid to live surrounded by large numbers of free black people. Thus, moving enslaved people into new regions where their enslavement was more profitable would lead to freedom for said enslaved people. Make slavery bigger in order to make it smaller. Spread it out to contain its effects. And those most eager to buy this bogus claim were the Virginians themselves. Jefferson became the most prominent advocate of diffusion. The notion provided a layer of deniability for liberal enslavers who were troubled by slavery's ability to undermine their self-congratulation. Diffusion answered the clanking figures who sang "Hail Columbia," and the knowing sneer of the Georgia-man who knew the price of every soul.⁵⁰

In 1798, Georgia ceded its lands to the federal government, and Congress organized the land between the Chattahoochee and the Mississippi Rivers into the Mississippi Territory, with slavery included. Congress proved unable to decide whether the Yazoo claimants had a right to the land bought in 1795. In the House debate, Virginia Federalist John Marshall was one of the claimants' most vigorous promoters. Long an advocate for investors who speculated on southwestern lands, Marshall would soon be appointed chief justice of the Supreme Court by President Adams.⁵¹

Once Jefferson was elected, he tried to settle the troubled waters of the political nation by proclaiming, in his 1801 inaugural address, "We are all Federalists, we are all Republicans." He might as well have argued, "We are all diffusionists, we are all Yazoo speculators." And then he could have added, reassuringly, "We are none of us Georgia-men." Yet, in 1805, the man on the horse directed Charles Ball and his coffle around Richmond, Virginia's capital. Perhaps he did so to spare the eyes and the consciences of those who weren't fully persuaded by diffusionism's sloppy logic. But Georgia-men didn't have to explain themselves to the likes of Charles Ball. Or to anyone, so long as the enslavers were willing to supply a stream of men and women to the backcountry. And the existence of Georgia-men allowed those who reacted to the ugliness of diffusion-in-actual-practice to waste their heat on an enemy who didn't care what they said.

So Ball and the coffle crossed the river on a ferry west of the city. The two lines, men in chains and women in ropes, walked southwest from Richmond for weeks. One day in southern Virginia, they passed a road leading up to a low house surrounded by sandy tobacco fields. A hundred men, women, and children toiled out there under the gaze of a white man with a long whip. The

Georgia-man stopped another white man coming up the road. "Whose land is that?" he asked. "Mr. Randolph, a member of Congress."

The coffle kept on. They crossed the Roanoke River, entering North Carolina's Piedmont. Next came a week of hard marching through this land of small farms, passing cornfields and the boys and girls toiling in them. Then water was sloshing around Ball's feet on the deck of an overloaded flat as a Yadkin River ferryman pulled on the rope: one trip for the men, going back for the women. Three days' marching later, and the Georgia-man told them they had entered South Carolina—a placename that was part of the greater Georgia in Ball's geography. Night fell. Thoughts of death returned.

In the morning, just to make sure they all understood that they had marched into a different part of the world, the Georgia-man pried open his compressed lips and made a little speech. They were now too far from Virginia or Maryland to ever get back again, he told them. They must give up all hope of returning. And there was much truth to what the Georgia-man said. These fifty-two enslaved African Americans had now walked into a place that the coffle-chain had inked onto the map with streaks of iron oxide from sweat and dirty manacles. Beside the road, they began to see a strange crop growing in the early summer fields: "It looked not unlike buckwheat before it blossoms," Ball remembered. This was the cotton plant. In this place where chains marched past plants that looked like food but turned into fiber, they were trapped in a deeper slavery, one shifted into being by two decades of Georgia-men traveling to and from the Chesapeake. When the American Revolution had ended, 20,000 enslaved people had lived in the South Carolina backcountry. Now 75,000 were there. Meanwhile, the Georgia slave population was growing, too, increasing from 30,000 in 1790 to 107,000 in 1810.⁵²

The next day, as they walked, a stranger rode up, matching the Georgia-man's pace. "Niggers for sale?" He wanted to buy two women. The two men negotiated, argued, and insulted each other a little. The new man stared at the women and told them what he thought he'd do with them. The coffle kept moving. The white men rode along, bargaining. Maybe the deal could be sweetened, allowed the Georgia-man, if the South Carolinian paid to have the chains knocked off the men. One thousand dollars for the two, plus blacksmith fees. They stopped at a forge, and they kept arguing. The new man stated for everyone's benefit that he had worked African men to death in iron collars. The blacksmith came out, and he asked what "the two gentlemen were making such a frolick about," Ball later said. Frolicking: Down there, Ball realized, the Carolinians' play, the time when they were most fully

themselves, was evidently when they were arguing, negotiating, dealing, and intimidating the enslaved.

For \$2.50, the blacksmith would take off the chains. As he knocked off the bolts and the Georgia-man unkeyed the locks, the South Carolina buyer took the two women away. One was a Calvert woman, the mother of four. Ball had known her most of his life. He hoped he wouldn't end up with a man as frightening as the one who had taken her.

Freed of the heavy iron, Ball was giddy, but not happy. Five weeks in the chains had changed him just as surely as it had changed his location on the map. The enslaved people toiling in the fields kept their heads down as the new feet from Maryland walked past. He could see that more power hung over them, and now him, too.

White people now treated Ball as a different kind of property. Under Virginia and Maryland law, the slave had been chattel since the seventeenth century. Slaves could be sold by their owners, moved by their owners, and separated from others by their owners. Georgia and Carolina cut-and-pasted many aspects of the Virginia slave code into their laws. But in practice, the laws were implemented differently. Almost all of the slaves down here were new to the whites who owned them, and they used them without constraint. The Chesapeake enslavers were bound by many different considerations when it came to buying or selling human beings: family ties between enslaved people that were important to other whites, fear of angry slaves, fear of one's evangelized conscience, fear of foreign criticism of the land of the free. Still, by 1805 the coffer-chain was breaking that pattern, even back in Virginia. Up and down the path that ran from east to west, north to south, the chain made a person's feet work against him or her. The person in irons became more truly owned by someone else, more easily separated from family, and more easily traded and commodified.

The coffer helped make Ball's enslavement deeper and more flexible; it linked his marching feet to the needs of the nation's most successful people. It provided defenses for those who did not want to deal with their own half-hearted moral failure, with the inclusion of slavery in new state constitutions. The existence of the "Georgia-man" and the "Yazoo" as options also made a chained Ball into a movable piece in the political economic puzzle of the young United States. For although coffles got no closer than Pennsylvania Avenue to the room in which John Marshall read out his 1810 decision in *Fletcher v. Peck*, their chained footprints walked all over the case file. The technical issue before the Court was whether the Georgia state legislature could overturn a contract of sale into which a previous session had entered.

Marshall and the Court ruled that the people of Georgia could not overturn the sale. The contract might have been accomplished by bribery. It may have contravened the will of the majority of white Georgians. But the sale to the investors' land companies was a sale of property all the same, and property rights, by the chief justice's interpretation of the contract clause of the Constitution, were absolute. The people who invested in the company—mostly New England money-market types and bankers—should be repaid from the sale of the land, which was now held by the federal government.

Federalists were happy. But so were many of Jefferson's party. In Massachusetts, in New York City, and in Philadelphia were large nests of Jeffersonians whose financial fortunes were as invested in the development of stock and bond markets as those of their local Federalist rivals. Congress now had to compensate the Yazoo bondholders. The payout to speculators who had bought up the bonds would in turn strengthen confidence in all American capital markets. The Court was providing security that would bring more money into the southwestern territories over time. Some southern Jeffersonians felt betrayed by the Court's Republican appointees. Georgia politicians were furious in public. Tellingly, though, neither Jefferson nor his protégé, President James Madison, had attempted to influence the outcome of the Yazoo situation in favor of Georgia's desire to overturn the earlier legislature's sale of half of Alabama and Mississippi.

The principle that a contract is inviolable and that property is absolute was now the accepted conclusion of the federal constitution. In the *Fletcher* decision, the chief justice never mentioned slavery. But the Court's decision made possible the survey and sale of more than 20 million acres for slavery's expanding footprint. Marshall's ruling also gave every future defender of slavery and its expansion an incredible tool. Consider this: If the people of Georgia couldn't overturn a contract born from obvious corruption, how could a legislature or any other government entity take slaves away from owners? Enslaved African Americans were property acquired by contract, according to the law of slave states. Nor, the decision implied, could legislatures constrain enslavers' right to treat said property as being as absolute, as mobile, and as alienable as they liked.

The interlinked expansion of both slavery and financial capitalism was now the driving force in an emerging national economic system that benefited elites and others up and down the Atlantic coast as well as throughout the backcountry. From Jefferson and Madison's perspective, the soon-to-be states of the Mississippi Territory would yield votes in the Electoral College and Congress, votes to use against the Federalists—and more than they

would have gained by courting hard-core states' righters. One of the latter was Jefferson's onetime lieutenant, the increasingly erratic Yazoo-hater John Randolph—whose whip-wielding overseer had seemed to Charles Ball like an omen of the Georgia looming up at the end of his road. Instead, the Republicans now formed a pro-finance, pro-expansion coalition that ingested many onetime Federalists and dominated US politics until, by the 1820s, it became a victim of its own success. Randolph was one of the few southern enslavers consistent enough to insist that both the stigmatization of Georgia-men and the diffusion scam were hypocrisies. That kind of truth-telling drives an implicated man mad, and Randolph, once Speaker of the House, eventually spiraled into a level of insanity remarkable for even a Virginia politician.

More typically hypocritical was Bushrod Washington, George's nephew and a Supreme Court justice. This classic Virginia gentleman, who inherited Mount Vernon in 1799 when his uncle died, had concurred with Marshall in 1810. Perhaps he had done so because of the sweet reasonableness of the chief justice's arguments. More likely, the principle of property and contract offered men like Washington a series of un-trumpable "outs." Such justifications came in handy in 1821, for instance, when it became public knowledge that Washington had sold fifty-four people from Mount Vernon to a slave trader who had then taken them through the Yazoo territories. In response to a newspaper editor who complained that the Father of Our Country's nephew had sold human beings like "horned cattle," Bushrod Washington wrote "on my own behalf and on that of my southern fellow citizens to enter a solemn protest against the propriety of any person questioning our right; *legal or moral*, to dispose of property which is secured to us by sanctions equally valid with those by which we hold every other species of property."³

Men like Washington the younger could use the property story underlined by *Fletcher v. Peck* to slip away from confronting the contradictions of slavery's expansion, even if singing coffles and snickering Georgia-men waved the contradictions under Congress's collective nose. Having said of himself in 1788 that "nobody will be more willing to encounter every sacrifice" to bring about emancipation, in 1814 Jefferson ruefully shook his head and said that the old generation had moved too slowly. Now, instead of finding that "the generous temperament of youth" raised the new generation "above the suggestions of avarice," he realized that the young men of this new day dawning had digested the lessons of Georgia and were racing to create fortunes from slavery's expansion.

Bushrod Washington also got good mileage from Jefferson's diffusion story. His decision to sell off enslaved people was, he insisted, not a tale of

greed but a demonstration of how forced migration protected white lives. As the African Americans living at Mount Vernon grew in number, he claimed, they had become insubordinate. A couple of Washington's slaves escaped to the North, using their feet to undermine his right to property. The rest came to believe that when he died they would be free. And the justice began to fear that they were speculating about where the sharpest knives were, and how they might hide poison in his food. No more Bushrod, no more slavery. Jefferson had blurred analogous fears, famously speaking of a possible "reversal of fortunes" and describing the situation of Chesapeake slaveholders as being like riding a "wolf [held] by the ears[;] . . . we can neither hold him, nor safely let him go." Even if whites had agreed to general emancipation, whites had "deeply rooted prejudices," and blacks "ten thousand recollections." "New provocations" would divide and whip them into an apocalyptic race-war crescendo. These "convulsions" would end only with "extermination of the one or the other race."⁴

So Jefferson and Washington and other white Virginians stuck to a third choice, a financially profitable one: to "diffuse" enslaved African Americans south and west. And the existence of the Georgia-men allowed such respectable leaders to draw alleged emotional and moral distances between themselves and the unpleasant side of "diffusion." They wrung their hands as coffles and Georgia-men passed. Or they asserted that slaves lived better in the new states than in the old. But while Washington contended that forced migration was carried out for the benefit of enslaved people, one observer, who stood in Leesburg in August 1821 and watched as Bushrod Washington's coffle went by, saw "unhappy wretches," among whom were "husbands [who] had been torn from wives and children, and many relatives left behind." Those left at Mount Vernon whispered bitter words to tourists who visited the national father's home.⁵

BETWEEN THE END OF the American Revolution and the *Fletcher v. Peck* decision in 1810, slavery's expansion linked the nation together. The needs of the nation encouraged the growth of a complex of institutions and patterns—and, just as significantly, excuses—that made national political and financial alliances possible. The needs of individual enslavers and others who hoped to profit from the expansion of all sorts of economic opportunities encouraged the growth of a more powerful set of national capabilities, more market-friendly laws, and more unified markets. The needs of national expansion, plus the ability of chained people to walk, trapped enslaved people as absolutely held property in the political compromises, political alliances,

and financial schemes of the United States and in the very map of the young country. Slavery, and specifically, the right of enslavers to sell and to move their slaves into new territory, became a national practice: as a strict definition of property under constitutional law, as habit and expectation, and as a pattern of political compromise.

Turning this wheel of cause and effect were moving feet—those of Charles Ball, of the thirty-two other men to whom he was connected, of the nineteen women roped together behind them, and others still growing toward sellable height. From old Maryland and Virginia, which were crumbling beneath the glossy veneers offered to the world by their politicians, the coffee-chains and the people who toted them clanked across hundreds of miles into a new world where everything was flux and frolick. Forced migration and the expansion of slavery became a seemingly permanent and inevitable element of the mutually-agreed-to structure of lies that, defended by the agile legal realism of Marshall and the myth of diffusion, made the nation. To put the machine in motion, Washington could now rely on a set of chaining experts, Georgiamen who took the financial and physical and status risks of moving enslaved people. Charles Ball could now be moved more easily in every sense, with less political, ideological, legal, and personal friction.

Thus the coffee chained the early American republic together. In South Carolina, Charles Ball's neck and hands were finally freed of the coffee's chains, but only so his owner could finish the chain's work of converting Charles and the other remaining Maryland slaves into market goods. Because they had left sweat from pores and pus from blisters on the road, and had drawn down their meager stores of body fat, the Georgia-man rested them for twenty days at a property owned by a cotton farmer. Ball and his companions were given butter to eat so they would become sleek and "fat." The lice were driven from their bodies and clothes by repeated washing. And soon, white people began to come and examine them, ask them questions, speculate on their bodies. Here, the Georgia-man was among people who respected him, calling him "merchant" instead of "negro driver" or "Georgia trader." Here he was needed, and not as the scapegoat for other enslavers' sins. He even let his name drop from his tight lips: "My name is M'Giffin, sir," he said in response to a prospective buyer's inquiry.³⁶

After two weeks, M'Giffin moved the drove of slaves south into Columbia. There, on the Fourth of July, the local jailor auctioned them off in front of a crowd of hundreds who had just finished eating a fine banquet and listening to a patriotic speech. The sale eventually narrowed down to the last three, the stoutest men, including Ball. The jailor now theatrically announced that

if M'Giffin did not get \$600 for each man, he would take them to Georgia and sell them there. An "elderly gentleman" announced that he would pay that amount for "the carpenter." Ball was not really a carpenter, but many lies were told on that day that celebrated freedom from tyranny: not one of the slaves for sale had ever run away, or stolen from their masters, or been whipped. Each was sold by a fine Maryland or Virginia gentleman who had sadly fallen into debt.

The other whites deferred to this "elderly man." Ball pegged him as a major slave-owner. He was actually one Wade Hampton, among other things a major Yazoo investor. Having inherited rice plantation wealth in the low country, Hampton was in the process of shifting his slaves into cotton—for now, on acres he owned near Columbia, South Carolina. Later, his quest for wider vistas would lead him into Georgia, Mississippi, and Louisiana endeavors. Today, however, Hampton was drinking, and celebrating the Fourth. He told Charles to find a corner of a stable and go to sleep. The next day, they would make the trip to Hampton's nearby property—one last step of the journey that Ball's feet had made from the old to the new.

Vernacular History," in Edward E. Baptist and Stephanie M. H. Camp, eds., *New Studies in the History of American Slavery* (Athens, GA, 2006), 243–274. For links between vernacular storytelling by slaves and former slaves, on the one hand, and literary production by African Americans, on the other, see William L. Andrews, *To Tell a Free Story: The First Century of Afro-American Autobiography, 1760–1865* (Urbana, IL, 1985), 274; Marion W. Starling, *The Slave Narrative: Its Place in American History* (Boston, 1981, repr. of 1946 diss.); Charles T. Davis and Henry Louis Gates, eds., *The Slave's Narrative* (New York, 1985); Henry Louis Gates, *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of Afro-American Literary Criticism* (New York, 1988).

CHAPTER 1. FEET: 1783–1810

1. In this book, some of the vignettes told from the perspective of enslaved people incorporate not only the specific content of the historical documents cited, but also details from other sources, as is the custom with evocative history. By drawing upon a wide variety of sources, I attempt to provide a richer depiction of the landscape, work practices, and cultural practices of the time and a more intimate portrait of the enslaved African Americans whose experience is the center of this history. These sources include the testimony of other formerly enslaved people who went through virtually identical experiences. This particular story, for instance, is drawn from Charles Ball, *Slavery in the United States: A Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Charles Ball . . .* (New York, 1837), but it was written in the light of dozens of other accounts, including descriptions of people's reactions to coffles, descriptions of slavery in early nineteenth-century Piedmont North Carolina, reports of the family demography of enslaved people during the era of the early domestic slave trade, and enslaved people's stories of their experience during the era of the domestic slave trade. All of these are cited copiously in the coming pages, but for firsthand accounts of enslaved people's reactions to the slave trade, see Charity Austin, AS, 14.1 (NC), 59; Ben Johnson, AS, 14.1 (NC); Dave Lawson, AS, 15.2 (NC), 49; Lila Nichols, AS, 14.1 (NC), 147–150; Mary Hicks, AS, 14.1 (NC), 184; Josephine Smith, AS (NC); Alex Woods, AS, 15.2, (NC), 416–417; Jeremiah Loguen, *The Rev. J. W. Loguen, As Slave and Free Man* (Syracuse, 1859), 65–67; "Recollections of a Runaway Slave," *Emancipator*, September 20, 1838; Isaac Williams, *Aunt Sally: The Cross, the Way of Freedom* (Cincinnati, 1858), 10–15; ASAI, 76; and, for rich documentation of enslavement and the domestic slave trade in the area of North Carolina through which Ball was driven in chains, see Tyre Glen Papers, Duke; Jarratt-Puryear Papers, Duke, and Isaac Jarratt Papers, SHC. Unless otherwise noted, italics, underlining, and boldface type within quotations are reproduced from the original.

2. Edmund Morgan, *American Slavery, American Freedom: The Ordeal of Colonial Virginia* (New York, 1975); Kathy Brown, *Good Wives, Nasty Wenches, and Anxious Patriarchs: Gender, Race, and Power in Colonial Virginia* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1996); Lorena Walsh, *Motives of Honor, Pleasure, and Profit: Plantation Management in the Colonial Chesapeake, 1607–1763* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2010).

3. Again, a few starting points: Philip Curtin, *The Rise and Fall of the Plantation Complex: Essays in Atlantic History* (Cambridge, UK, 1990); Richard Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves: The Rise of the Planter Class in the English West Indies, 1624–1713* (Chapel

Hill, NC, 1972); Peter Wood, *Black Majority: Negroes in Colonial South Carolina from 1670 Through the Stono Rebellion* (New York, 1973); Leonardo Marques, "The United States and the Transatlantic Slave Trade to the Americas, 1776–1867" (PhD diss., Emory University, 2013).

4. Robert Olwell, *Masters, Slaves, and Subjects: The Culture of Power in the South Carolina Low Country, 1740–1790* (Ithaca, NY, 1998), 270.

5. David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution, 1775–1820* (Ithaca, NY, 1975); Donald Robinson, *Slavery in the Structure of American Politics, 1765–1820* (New York, 1970); Christine Heyrman, *Southern Cross: The Beginning of the Bible Belt* (New York, 1997); Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia* (New York, 1984 [Library of America]), 289.

6. Rachel Klein, *Unification of a Slave State: The Rise of the Planter Class in the South Carolina Backcountry* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1990); Richard Beeman, *The Evolution of the Southern Backcountry* (Philadelphia, 1984); Allan Galloway, *The Indian Slave Trade: The Rise of English Empire in the Colonial South* (New Haven, CT, 2002); James Merrell, *The Indians' New World: Catawbas and Their Neighbors from European Contact Through the Era of Removal* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1989).

7. John Filson, *Adventures of Colonel Daniel Boone* (Norwich, CT, 1786), and his *Discovery, Settlement, and Present State of Kentucky* (New York, 1793), 74; Daniel Blake Smith, "'This Idea in Heaven': Image and Reality on the Kentucky Frontier," in Craig Thompson Friend, ed., *The Buzzel About Kentuck: Settling the Promised Land* (Lexington, KY, 1998), 78; *Massachusetts Spy*, January 27, 1785; *Philadelphia Gazetteer*, November 27, 1784; Ellen Eslinger, "The Shape of Slavery on the Kentucky Frontier," *Kentucky Historical Society Register* 92 (1994): 1–23, esp. 4; Steven Aron, *How the West Was Lost: The Transformation of Kentucky from Borderland to Daniel Boone* (Baltimore, 1996).

8. Thomas Hart to [N. Hart], August 3, 1780, "Shane Collection, No. 22"; *Philadelphia Gazetteer*, November 27, 1784, May 16, 1788; *Massachusetts Spy*, May 29, 1782; *Connecticut Journal*, November 4, 1789; *New York Packet*, October 22, 1789; *New York Weekly*, June 20, 1792; *Philadelphia Advertiser*, October 4, 1792; *Norwich Western Register*, May 20, 1794.

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