

ABSTRACT

HIRN, LINCOLN MICHAEL. "Such Outrageous Crimes to Human Beings": Portrayals of the Domestic Slave Trade in Nineteenth-Century Slave Narratives. (Under the direction of Dr. Craig Friend).

This thesis argues that the narrators of nineteenth century slave narratives used their knowledge of America's economy of enslavement to condemn the cruelty of White enslavers, showcase the morality of enslaved people, and depict the triumphant liberation of enslaved people. The first chapter contends that formerly enslaved authors used existing patterns of resistance, borne of a deep knowledge of the domestic slave trade, as the basis for a literary resistance that relied on economic expertise to prove the importance of the slave trade to white Southern life. The second chapter argues that slave narratives used the slave trade as a link by which they connected white immorality and cruelty to Black morality and fidelity. Finally, the third chapter examines depictions of Black reunification and liberation and finds that Black authors subverted the language of the slave trade in order to create an oppositional vocabulary of redemption. Taken together, the chapters support the central argument: that enslaved resisters were experts in the systems of their own oppression, and they used that knowledge to create resistant spaces wherever possible.

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“Such Outrageous Crimes to Human Beings”: Portrayals of the Domestic Slave Trade in
Nineteenth-Century Slave Narratives

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DEDICATION

To my parents, for a lifetime of love and support.

BIOGRAPHY

Lincoln Hirn was born in Louisville, Kentucky, and lived there throughout his upbringing. He graduated from the University of Virginia in 2019 with a bachelor's degree in history. He moved to Raleigh, North Carolina in the Fall of 2019, where he began to pursue a master's degree in history from North Carolina State University.

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Introduction

William Wells Brown was the first Black man to publish a novel in the United States. He had been born enslaved but had liberated himself before dedicating his life to his writing and to anti-slavery activism. He also published a narrative of his life in 1849, straightforwardly titled *Narrative of William W. Brown, An American Slave. Written by Himself*. Brown opened his narrative with a poem, of his own devising. “Fling out the Anti-Slavery flag,” he begged his readers at the beginning of every stanza. “Fling out the Anti-Slavery flag/ Forever let it be/ The emblem to a holy cause/ the banner of the free,” he wrote, making plain his hopes for his memoir. Brown’s narrative was to be a polemic against the horrors of enslavement, an ode to that Anti-Slavery flag, and a call to action to all those who would fly such a banner. In the ensuing pages William Wells Brown recounted his experience as an enslaved man in America, he recounted the horrors he witnessed, the cruelty he endured, and he told of the triumph of his own eventual liberation. Even today, more than one-hundred and seventy years after Brown put pen to paper on his memoir, his words continue to shape the way his audiences perceive American enslavement. The work of authors like Brown remains as powerful as it was in the middle of the nineteenth century and, even today, the poems and tales and pleas of William Wells Brown remind the reader to fling out the banner of liberation, and to never let it fall.¹

Brown’s autobiography was but one of hundreds of anti-slavery narratives that were published throughout the nineteenth century. These nineteenth-century slave narratives constitute one of the most useful categories of primary source canon for the historian of Americans enslavement. The published narratives that emerged from the decades immediately preceding

¹ Meredith Malburne-Wade, “Summary of *Narrative of William W. Brown, an American Slave. Written by Himself*,” Documenting the American South, <https://docsouth.unc.edu/fpn/brownw/summary.html>; William Wells Brown. 1849. *Narrative of William W. Brown, and American Slave*. Documenting the American South. University Library, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. 1849. <https://docsouth.unc.edu/fpn/brownw/brown.html>, 80.

and following the American Civil War offer the historian, as Aliyyah I. Abdur-Rahman has argued, offer “useful sources of data on the internal operations of slavery and its harrowing personal and communal effects,” in large part because “slave narratives document the inner workings of slavery in ways that the official records do not.” As such, a number of contemporary historians have used slave narratives either as the evidentiary basis for, or supplement to, examinations of everything from enslaved masculinity to enslaved resistance to class distinctions between enslaved people in the antebellum South. But formerly enslaved peoples’ published testimonies have not always been as valued by historians of American enslavement. Writing in 2001, Charles Heglur noted that “in the past thirty years, the slave narrative has moved from the margins to a much more central place in the study of African American and American literature and culture.” Indeed, the place of the slave narrative in the historiography of enslavement has changed considerably over time, reflecting a broader commitment among scholars to focus on the voices of the enslaved.²

The historiographic shift toward privileging enslaved voices has, as Vanessa Holden and Edward Baptist have argued, paralleled the democratization of primary source access, with tensions “between histories of slavery and histories of the enslaved” dictating which types of sources scholars have relied upon. Walter Johnson has argued that early twentieth-century historians, exemplified by Ulrich B. Phillips, viewed slave narratives as “politically interested fabrications” to be “dismissed according to one of the most durable paradoxes of White

² Aliyyah I. Abdur-Rahman, ““The Strangest Freaks of Despotism”: Queer Sexuality in Antebellum African American Slave Narratives,” *African American Review* 40, no. 2 (2006): 223-37, 224-225; Sarah N. Roth, “How a Slave was Made a Man”: Negotiating Black Violence and Masculinity in Antebellum Slave Narratives, *Slavery & Abolition*, 28:2, 255-275; Stephanie Camp, *Closer to Freedom: Enslaved Women and Everyday Resistance in the Plantation South*, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004); William Andrews, *Slavery and Class in the American South: A Generation of Slave Narrative Testimony, 1840-1865*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019); Charles Heglur, *Rethinking the Slave Narrative: Slave Marriage and the Narratives of Henry Bibb and William and Ellen Craft*, (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2001), 1.

supremacy, the idea that those who are closest to an experience of oppression ... are its least credible witnesses.” This dismissal of enslaved testimonies has, however, evolved over time, and “the careful scholarship of John Blassingame, Joseph Logsdon, Sue Eaken, and others,” according to Johnson, helped to re-introduce the slave narrative the central canon of Southern historiography. Writing in 1977, historian John Blassingame credited Stanley Elkins with presenting “the most convincing argument on [the viability of slave narratives] when he wrote that eyewitness accounts of slavery ‘were both hostile and sympathetic in nature. It is perhaps best that each kind be given equal weight.’” Blassingame himself contended that it is essential for the southern historian to extensively study the narratives of both enslaved people and their White enslavers, while lamenting that, between 1902 and 1974, “Among the general studies of slavery, only Frederic Bancroft in *Slave-Trading in the Old South* (1931) and Eugene Genovese in *Roll, Jordan, Roll* (1974) use the testimony of former slaves extensively.” Blassingame’s commitment to the slave narrative proved critical to southern historiography in the closing decades of the twentieth century, and Charles Heglar credited Blassingame for sparking “the countertrend to [Ulrich] Phillips’ dismissal of the slave narratives,” charting an increased focus on slave narratives among historians from the 1970s onward.³

If the latter quarter of the twentieth century can be seen as an inflection point in the evolution of the slave narrative in Southern historiography, twenty-first-century histories of enslaved people, enslavement, and abolitionism can be seen as representations of the value of enslaved testimonies to the history of American enslavement. To begin with, twenty-first century

³ Vanessa Holden and Edward Baptist, “Nineteenth-Century Enslavement of Africans and African Americans in the United States,” in *Reinterpreting Southern Histories: Essays in Historiography*, ed. Craig Friend and Lorri Glover (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2020), 99-138, 100-101; Walter Johnson, *Soul by Soul: Life Inside the Antebellum Slave Market* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 9-11; John W. Blassingame, “Introduction,” in *Slave Testimony: Two Centuries of Letters, Speeches, Interviews and Autobiographies*, ed. John Blassingame (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1977), xvii-lxv, xvii, lxv; Heglar, *Rethinking the Slave Narrative*, 15.

scholars of enslavement have engaged critically with the narrative genre not just as testimony, but as an active representation of abolitionist resistance and political activity. In *The Slave's Cause* (2016), Manisha Sinha argued that fugitive slave abolitionists “wrote themselves not just into being but also into history,” and that their narrative works were critical to the anti-slavery movement. A similar focus on Black writers as critical players in abolitionist political strategy is echoed by a number of prominent twenty-first century Southern historians, with Edward Baptist, Steven Deyle, Ira Berlin, and Walter Johnson all citing the importance of the slave narrative to the anti-slavery cause. That slave narratives were central to abolitionist strategy is critical to what Aliyyah Abdur-Rahman has described as a “dual function as both historical document and literary genre,” a notion which itself is central to this thesis’ examination of the domestic slave trade within the slave narrative. The nineteenth-century slave narrative acted as both a representation of and polemic against enslavement, and so occupies a particularly useful place for historians seeking to investigate enslaved voices, resistance, and anti-slavery action.⁴

As a result of this dual purpose, the nineteenth-century slave narrative has become an increasingly important part of economic histories of enslavement. Michael Tadman, in *Speculators and Slaves* (1989), his comprehensive study of the domestic slave trade in America, used the narratives and testimonies of formerly enslaved people, such as William Wells Brown and Solomon Northup, to supplement his prodigious quantitative research into the economy of Southern enslavement. By enfolding the narratives of the enslaved into his monograph, Tadman represented a departure from previous social historians of the domestic slave trade, most notably

⁴ Manisha Sinha, *The Slave's Cause: A History of Abolition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016), pp. 421-436; Edward Baptist, *The Half has Never Been Told: Slavery and the Making of American Capitalism* (New York: basic Books, 2014), pp. 195-198; Steven Deyle, *Carry Me Back: The Domestic Slave Trade in American Life*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 187-188; Ira Berlin, *Generations of Captivity: A History of African-American Slaves* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003), 235; Walter Johnson, *Soul By Soul*, 9-11; Abdur-Rahman, “‘Strangest Freaks of Despotism,’” 225.

Robert Fogel and Stanley Engerman's *Time on the Cross* (1974), which Tadman himself criticized for making erroneous generalizations based on specific data. Indeed, Fogel and Engerman's overreliance on data and under-reliance on other source material drew criticism from historians at the time, with Herbert Gutman characterizing *Time on the Cross* as "Reductionist History" and for ignoring the human aspects of enslavement that did not translate to economic data.⁵

In contrast to the one-dimensionality of Fogel and Engerman's analysis, Michael Tadman's *Speculators and Slaves* charts a course for economic analysis tempered with a commitment to textual and narrative source material, a pattern which plays out on the pages of contemporary histories of slavery's economy. Edward Baptist, in his *The Half Has Never Been Told* (2014), made a conscious effort to use nineteenth-century slave narratives, along with a litany of other testimonial and narrative primary sources, as an expression of enslaved voice and perspective. Likewise, Walter Johnson's *Soul by Soul* (1999) and *River of Dark Dreams* (2013), Daina Ramey Berry's *The Price for Their Pound of Flesh* (2017), Stephen Deyle's *Carry Me Back* (2005), and Seth Rockman's *Scraping By* (2009) make use of slave narratives in order to inject enslaved voices and perspectives into their economic histories. Each of these works demonstrates the importance of using the slave narrative as an expression of the enslaved

⁵ Michael Tadman, *Speculators and Slaves: Masters, Traders, and Slaves in the Old South*, (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), pp. 22-25, 97-101; Robert William Fogel and Stanley L. Engerman, *Time on the Cross: The Economics of Negro Slavery*, (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1974); Herbert G Gutman, "An Archaic Historical Model." *The Journal of Negro History* 60, no. 1 (1975): 215-27. Accessed February 3, 2021. doi:10.2307/2716799, pp. 217; Allan J. Lichtman, "A Benign Institution?" *New Republic* 171 (1/2) (1974): 22-24. <https://search-ebshost-com.prox.lib.ncsu.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a9h&AN=9919222&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.

perspective, and the current generation of slavery's economic historians have shown the value of relying upon that perspective.⁶

If the evolving place of the slave narrative in the economic historiography of American enslavement speaks to published narratives' importance as testimonial evidence, the place of the slave narrative in the historiography of resistance and abolition stands testament to the multi-dimensionality of the nineteenth-century slave narrative as a primary document. Stephanie Camp's *Closer to Freedom* (2004) argues that the rise of print culture and published slave narratives was critical to the growth of anti-slavery resistance in the nineteenth century. Likewise, Stephen Deyle's *Carry Me Back* (2005) focuses on Black authors' anti-slavery narratives in exploring political and social contestations over the domestic slave trade, while Sarah Roth's "'How a Slave was Made a Man: Negotiating Black Violence and Masculinity in Antebellum Slave Narratives'" (2007) argues that "the main purpose of [slave narratives] was polemical," and asserts that formerly enslaved authors "were well aware of the political implications of their writings," while Manisha Sinha's *The Slave's Cause* (2016), devotes an entire chapter to fugitive slave abolitionism. While economic historians of slavery have found great value in the testimonial evidence of the slave narrative, twenty-first century scholars of resistance and abolitionism have made great strides in examining fugitive slaves' writing as acts of resistance themselves. In this way, we see the wide variety of historiographical uses for the

⁶ Edward Baptist, *The Half has Never Been Told*; Walter Johnson, *Soul By Soul*; Walter Johnson, *River of Dark Dreams: Slavery and Empire in the Cotton Kingdom*; Daina Ramey Berry, *The Price for Their Pound of Flesh: The Value of the Enslaved, from Womb to Grave, in the Building of a Nation*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 2017); Steven Deyle, *Carry me Back: The Domestic Slave Trade in American Life*, 187; Seth Rockman, *Scraping By: Wage Labor, Slavery, and Survival in Early Baltimore*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009).

slave narrative, and we see how it informs the historian not only of the enslaved experience, but enslaved peoples' efforts toward resistance and liberation.⁷

In focusing on slave narratives as expressions of resistance and of political discourse, historians have also begun to engage with the slave narrative as a representation of enslaved self-expression. In his *Slavery and Class in the American South: A Generation of Slave Narrative Testimony, 1840-1865* (2019), William Anderson argued that the fugitive slave narrator served as “a class exemplar” whose narratives played a central role in “rehabilitating the character of the slave by representing the fugitive slave as a heroic striver whose admirable qualities, epitomized by initiative, ‘intelligence,’ leadership, and resistance, set enslaved aspirants for freedom at odds with their enslavers and apart from their fellow slaves.” Andrews’ thesis fits into a broader historiographic canon of scholars interested in interrogating the role of the slave narrative in a construction of enslaved self-expression. Frances Smith Foster, in her essay “A Narrative of Interesting Origins and (Somewhat) Surprising Developments of African-American Print Culture” (2005) focuses on exploring the rise of Black print culture in the nineteenth century and argues that “The African-American pressed owed as much, if not more, to the desire to create a positive and purposeful self-identified African America as to any defensive gestures responding to racist attacks and libel.” Likewise, Martha Cutter’s “Revising Torture” (2014) examines how visual representations of the enslaved body in Moses Roper’s 1837 memoir conveyed a particular expression of the resistant enslaved body “through religious metaphors that manifest themselves on both a verbal and visual level.” Additionally, Sarah Roth’s “How a Slave was Made a Man” (2007) and Keith Michael Green’s “Remembering Black Masculinity, Slave

⁷ Stephanie Camp, *Closer to Freedom: Enslaved Women and Everyday Resistance in the Plantation South*, 100-104; Deyle, *Carry Me Back*, 184-188; Sarah N. Roth, “How a Slave was Made a Man,” 256; Sinha, *The Slave’s Cause*, 421-460.

Incarceration, and Cherokee Slavery in *The Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb, an American Slave*” (2014) both grapple with what the nineteenth-century slave narrative relates how Black authors represented their own masculinity, resistance, and family identity.⁸

In examining the slave narrative in the context of African-American self-expression, authors like William Andrews, Frances Smith Foster, Martha Cutter, Keith Michael Green, and Sarah Roth have shown the value of slave narratives not just as testimonial evidence, but as living expressions of anti-slavery resistance. By privileging the writing and narration of the formerly enslaved, new historians of enslavement, abolition, and African-American print culture have examined how Black authors chose to represent themselves, their families, and their enslaved comrades. Taken in concert with the increased use of the slave narrative as testimonial evidence by new historians of capitalism and American slavery, the contemporary historiography of the nineteenth-century slave narrative speaks to its unique value as a primary source. The slave narrative remains a crucial source of textual evidence of the enslaved perspective and experience and has helped historians of enslavement to contextualize their analyses with the voices of the enslaved, giving rise to much more multi-dimensional histories, rather than the prior, purely cliometric histories of America’s economy of enslavement. Likewise, the added historiographic emphasis on the slave narrative as a form of anti-slavery resistance has shown that the slave narrative affords the historian a unique opportunity to examine how formerly

⁸ Andrews, *Slavery and Class in the American South*, 25, 248-316; Frances Smith Foster, "A Narrative of the Interesting Origins and (Somewhat) Surprising Developments of African-American Print Culture," in *American Literary History* 17, no. 4 (2005): 714-740, 718; Martha J. Cutter, "Revising Torture: Moses Roper and the Visual Rhetoric of the Slave’s Body in the Transatlantic Abolition Movement," in *ESQ: A Journal of the American Renaissance* 60, no. 3 (2014): 371-411. 372-373; Keith Michael Green, "Am I Not a Husband and a Father?: Remembering Black Masculinity, Slave Incarceration, and Cherokee Slavery in *The Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb, an American Slave*," *MELUS: Multi-Ethnic Literature of the U.S.* 39, no. 4 (2014): 23-49; Roth, "How a Slave was Made a Man."

enslaved people chose to represent themselves for a broad, public audience. In both instances, historiographic developments during the last few decades have shown the importance of privileging enslaved voices in any history of enslavement, and they have shown the immense value of the slave narrative as an historic document.

I count myself fortunate, as a scholar of American slavery, to have a well-defined and coherent foundation for my research. Many of the scholars mentioned above have shown that anti-slavery authors used the domestic slave trade to prove enslavers' hypocrisy, demonstrate the cruelty of family separation via sale, and distinguish southern chattel slavery from other forms of bondage. In the spirit of this scholarship, I begin this thesis with the understanding that the domestic slave trade was central to moral condemnations of enslavement, and so my examination seeks to uncover the specific literary mechanisms through which Black authors used the domestic slave trade to achieve these ends. How did formerly enslaved authors and narrators talk about slavery's economy in relation to the enslaved family? How did they use the slave trade to attack specific aspects of enslavers' paternalist self-image? How did Black writers use the domestic slave trade to define not just enslavers, but the enslaved? What does the domestic slave trade's place in the nineteenth-century slave narrative tell us about the way formerly enslaved authors presented enslaved people to a larger, mostly White audience? Finally, and perhaps most importantly, this thesis asks what the nineteenth-century slave narrative tells us about the nature of enslaved resistance, and it asks how enslaved and emancipated people used their resistance not just to subvert their oppressors, but to elevate themselves.⁹

In pursuit of answers to these questions, the first chapter of this thesis seeks to put the domestic slave trade, as it appears on the pages of the slave narrative, into context with the trade

⁹ Sinha, *The Slaves Cause*, 432; Deyle, *Carry Me Back*, 187; Baptist, *The Half Has Never Been Told*, 195.

as it affected the everyday lives of the enslaved. Chapter One compares depictions of the slave trade in anti-slavery literature to the day-to-day resistance of enslaved individuals. In order to compare literary resistance to on-the ground resistance, I rely on the work of historians like Walter Johnson and Daina Berry, who have explored the ways that enslaved people thought about their own roles within the commodity economy of enslavement, and who have shown the ways that enslaved people manipulated slavery's economy as a mechanism of resistance. In using patterns of resistance forged at the auction block, on the plantation, and on the run as guidelines for my examination of anti-slavery literature, the first chapter of this thesis argues that enslaved people, forced to participate in slavery's economy, became experts in the trade, and used that expertise to subvert the trade whenever possible. I also find that this expertise translates to the written word and that the slave trade, as it appears in nineteenth-century fugitive slave testimonies, stands witness to the ways that Black authors adapted extant forms of resistance to large-scale literary and discursive anti-slavery efforts.¹⁰

The second chapter builds on the prior exploration of resistance patterns and asks how formerly enslaved people went about, specifically, tearing down the edifice of morality that enslavers attempted to build around themselves, while simultaneously offering testimonial evidence of the tragic subversion of Black morality, faith, and fidelity wrought by the cruelty of the domestic slave trade. In seeking to answer these questions, Chapter Two finds that Black authors focused heavily on the spiritual and moral pretensions of Whites while writing about the domestic slave trade, and it argues that the trade was a hinge by which White immorality and Black morality could be directly compared. Chapter Two focus primarily on the tragedy of the slave trade: it examines how Black authors used the slave trade to prove the hypocrisy of White,

¹⁰ Berry, *The Price for Their Pound of Flesh*; Walter Johnson, *Soul by Soul*.

Southern Christianity, all while using the tragedy of separation and sale to demonstrate the faith of enslaved people. It also examines depictions of family separation and argues that formerly enslaved narrators directly compared enslaved peoples' grief at the separation of family to the callous disregard that White enslavers had for the sanctity of the bonds of family. Ultimately, the second chapter argues that formerly enslaved narrators used the domestic slave trade as the foundation for an inverted, literary economy of enslavement, one in which the greed of White enslavers became direct evidence of their moral poverty, while the maintained morality of the suffering Black family became evidence of a wealth of moral virtue.

This thesis does not merely focus on the tragedy of the domestic slave trade, however. It is essential to interrogate Black authors' relationship with the trade in the context not just of cruelty, but of triumph. Although the slave narratives and testimonies that emerged from the nineteenth century were rife with vignettes of exploitation, pain, violence, cruelty, tragedy, and loss, they also often included scenes of transgressive victory. Be they minor (such as Moses Grandy's mother temporarily protecting her family from separation through a negotiation scheme) or major (the litany of self-liberation passages), enslaved people's triumphs over their enslavers constituted an important part of nineteenth-century slave narratives. Manisha Sinha has described these depictions of triumph and contestation as a "literature of resistance," that "challenged the military might and political power of the slaveholding republic," while Sarah Roth suggested that, by moderating their depictions of Black, masculine violence, formerly enslaved narrators tailored their depictions of enslaved resistance so as to better aid their political goals. Continuing in this scholarly tradition, the final chapter of this thesis explores the ways that

Black authors, advocates, and narrators treated the domestic slave trade in their efforts to portray scenes of enslaved triumph in their “literature of resistance.”¹¹

Each chapter contributes to the overall argument that formerly enslaved narrators used the slave trade to create a series of literary diptychs in which the cruelties of the slave trade found their match in the triumphs of the enslaved. Formerly enslaved authors depicted enslaved peoples’ attempts to negotiate with and manipulate the patterns of the market as a converse to the market-based cruelty of the slave trade, while presenting emotional and evocative scenes of family reunification in freedom as foils to the scenes of tragic separation endemic to the slave trade. Black authors and advocates used the commodity-value language of the slave trade to create a vocabulary of redemption, in which scenes of self-liberation (presented as “stealing” from the enslaver), self-purchase, and the purchase of loved ones allowed authors a means to put triumph and liberation in concrete terms. Ultimately, the triumphant tales which dotted nineteenth-century slave testimonies encourage us to return to the link between everyday resistance and the literary and political resistance of fugitive slave abolitionists. For enslaved people and formerly enslaved authors alike, the slave trade was a source of immense pain, but it was also an avenue for redemption, and a testament to the ways that structures of oppression could be manipulated and subverted by courageous and clever resisters.

¹¹ Moses Grandy. 1843. *Narrative of the Life of Moses Grandy: Late a Slave in the United States of America*. Documenting the American South. University Library, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. 1996. <https://docsouth.unc.edu/fpn/grandy/grandy.html>, 8; For self-liberation, see: Thomas H. Jones. 1862. *The Experience of Thomas H. Jones, Who Was a Slave for Forty-Three Years*. Documenting the American South. University Library, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. 1995. <https://docsouth.unc.edu/fpn/jones/jones.html>, 46-48; John Quincy Adams. 1872. *Narrative of the Life of John Quincy Adams, When in Slavery and Now as Freeman*. Documenting the American South. University Library, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. 1999. <https://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/adams/adams.html>, 47; Frederick Douglass. 1845. *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave. Written by Himself*. University Library, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. 1999. <https://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/douglass/douglass.html>, 100-110; Sinha, *The Slaves Cause*, 450; Roth, “How the Slave was Made a Man.”

Chapter One: The Domestic Slave Trade as a Mechanism of Literary Resistance

In the mid-1830s, Francis Fedric – an enslaved Kentuckian – learned that his enslaver had run up a series of gambling debts. Apparently, the debts were quite significant: everyone around seemed to know about the man’s proclivity for drink and chance, and “the sheriff’s officers were constantly on the premises” of his plantation. Such dire financial straits seem to have weighed heavy on Fedric’s enslaver, and it appears that his road to ruin was paved in drink, cards, and credit slips. But all was not lost, for the young man’s late father, and Francis Fedric’s former enslaver, had left his son a considerable inventory of enslaved property, which proved to be the son’s deliverance from penury. After all, when indebted slaveholders needed to tighten their belts, “the slaves are in general the first property parted with,” Fedric wrote, and it seems as though Fedric and his enslaved comrades were the only equity the man had not lost at the gambling tables.¹

To ameliorate the debt, Fedric’s enslaver sold a succession of enslaved people, over a period of a few weeks, to several different slave traders. One of the women sold had a son, “a little boy eight or nine years of age,” who ran after her, begging that she not be taken away from him. Some of the men sold over those few weeks were husbands and fathers. One had a wife and five children, another a wife and three children, and still another a wife and one child. One of the women sold, apparently for \$800, had a child in her arms when she was selected for sale, but the child was not part of the deal, and so was handed from the mother to a comrade. “Take care of my child, if you please,” the mother begged, as she was taken from her child. That parting, and all the others, were the consequence of a young man’s financial irresponsibility, and they lay

¹ Francis Fedric. 1863. *Slave Life in Virginia and Kentucky: Or, Fifty Years of Slavery in the Southern States of America*. Documenting the American South. University Library, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1999. <https://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/fedric/fedric.html>, 41, 41-45.

bare the devastation wrought when a spoiled heir's wealth was tied up in human capital. That a misplayed hand of cards or an impulsive wager could result in the separation of mother and child or husband and wife stands testament to the warped reality of the economy of the antebellum American South, an economy whose primary currency was not silver or gold, but human bodies.²

These stories of tragic separation appeared in Francis Fedric's autobiography, which he dictated to an English abolitionist and published in 1863. Horrific as his anecdotes of sale, violence, and family separation were, such tales were not at all uncommon, particularly during the nineteenth century. Fedric's narrative was one of hundreds of memoirs, autobiographies, and testimonies written or dictated by formerly enslaved authors in the decades preceding and immediately following the American Civil War. Those memoirs that were published prior to emancipation were a critical part of the abolitionist campaigns of the nineteenth century and as scholar Manisha Sinha has recently argued, it was "Fugitive slave abolitionists [who] represented a substantial countermovement to the slavery expansionism and proslavery imperialism of southern slaveholders in the 1850s." It is telling, then, what Fedric chose to include in his account. His visceral recounting of the individual acts of sale, replete with quotations and brimming with pathos, is, of course, central to the passage. But Fedric also made his reader privy to his former enslaver's economic circumstances. Fedric knew that his enslaver was drowning in self-inflicted debt and, through his own experience, knew what that meant. He knew that

² Francis Fedric, *Slave Life in Virginia and Kentucky*, 42, 43; Michael Tadman, "The Interregional Slave Trade in the History and Myth-Making of the U.S. South," in *The Chattel Principle: Internal Slave Trades in the Americas*, ed. Walter Johnson (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 130.

It should be noted that, while enslaver debt was certainly a driving force behind some sales, such as those of Fedric's anecdote, enslaver opportunism – not economic necessity – was more often than not the root cause of sale. As Michael Tadman has argued, "At the macro level, slave trading was vital for the growth of the slave economy, but at a micro level most of the individual sales were voluntary. Slaveholders had choices, and their choices hurt slaves." Regardless, both the sale of enslaved people as a means of recompense for debt and as a means of opportunistic profit demonstrate the centrality of enslaved capital to the Southern economy, and the destructive implications of that centrality.

enslavers often sold their enslaved property to cover debt. He knew that a dozen enslaved people, sold to the right buyer, could bring “in a tolerably round sum.” Francis Fedric even knew the individual prices of each enslaved person sold. Fedric’s choice to describe not only the sales themselves, but the economic circumstances behind those sales, demonstrates how he was invested in conveying not just the moral decrepitude of the slave trade, but the trade’s specific economic practices as well. In couching the heartbreak of the slave sale in the almost mundane economic language of debt and capital liquidation, Francis Fedric linked the tragedy of the slave trade to the South’s everyday economy. Through this process, the slave trade became a way for Fedric to use slavery’s economic foundation as a means to attack its moral underpinnings.³

By turning slavery’s economy into a mechanism of rhetorical resistance, Fedric became part of a longer lineage of enslaved and formerly enslaved resisters. Enslaved people had consistently found ways to subvert slavery’s economy and to exploit the opportunities for resistance that the slave trade offered. This resistance and opportunism were based in enslaved people’s clear understanding of slavery’s economy. Their expertise – gained through a forced participation in that economy – enabled enslaved people to subvert the very instrument of their oppression. In this chapter I argue that the rhetorical strategies of formerly enslaved authors paralleled the resistance strategies of enslaved people. I position slave narratives and abolitionist testimony as extensions of extant patterns of resistance, ones predicated on a deep knowledge of the economic and social foundations of the domestic slave trade. Just as enslaved people used their understanding of the slave trade to resist it from within, formerly enslaved writers used similar resistant strategies to devalue pro-slavery propaganda and to prove the centrality of the

³ Francis Fedric, *Slave Life in Virginia and Kentucky*, iii-v, 41-43; Manisha Sinha, *The Slave’s Cause: A History of Abolition*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016), 460; Also see: Sarah N. Roth, “‘How a Slave was Made a Man:’ Negotiating Black Violence and Masculinity in Antebellum Slave Narratives,” *Slavery and Abolition*, 28:2, 255-275, 156;

slave trade and its attendant moral bankruptcy to the economic and social lives of southern enslavers.

Enslaved People as Forced Participants in Slavery's Economy

The breadth of both written and oral testimony that emerged from formerly enslaved people in the nineteenth century shows that, for many of them, the domestic slave trade was never far from mind. Tales abound of enslaved people witnessing horrific acts of sale, which often included the separation of husbands from wives and parents from children. These vignettes often focused on the immense emotional pain felt at the moment of separation, and they showcased the deep human cost of the South's slave-trading economy. The acute instances of sale that formerly enslaved narrators recounted were knit together by the depiction of a less dramatic but equally insidious form of trauma: an ever-present anxiety surrounding sale that pervaded each aspect of enslaved life. This anxiety can be seen most clearly in the way that formerly enslaved authors (along with those who gave oral testimony) spoke of the slave trade's effect on the enslaved family, and in the way that authors wrote about their own understanding of the slave trade's economic importance.⁴

Formerly enslaved narrators often depicted the enslaved family, or instances of romantic affection, in direct relation to the prospect of separation via sale. Formerly enslaved people sometimes cited fear over family separation as a reason to avoid (or at least second-guess) decisions to marry or have children, while a constant fear of sale even induced some enslaved

⁴ For instances of sale and separation in slave narratives, see: Thomas Jones. ca. 1850s. *Experience and Personal Narrative of Uncle Tom Jones: Who was For Forty Years a Slave*. Documenting the American South. University Library, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. 1999. <https://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/jonestom/jones.html>, 8-9; Charles Ball. 1859. *Fifty Years in Chains, or, The Life of an American Slave*. Documenting the American South. University Library, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1997. <https://docsouth.unc.edu/fpn/ball/ball.html>, 10; William Anderson. 1857. *Life and Narrative of William J. Anderson*. Documenting the American South. University Library, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. 1997. <https://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/andersonw/andersonw.html>, 16.

people to flee their bondage altogether. Thomas Jones, for instance, chose to marry in spite of “thy desperate agony that the slave husband and father is exposed to. Had I not seen this in the anguish of my own parents? Yea, I saw it in every public auction.” Likewise, self-liberated people often cited fear of sale as the primary cause of escape: William Johnson recounted that “The fear of being sold South had more influence in inducing me to leave than any other thing,” while a Mrs. Ellis fled after her enslaver “threatened to sell me, and keep my children.”⁵

Additionally, after-the-fact testimony, taken from interviews conducted with formerly enslaved people during the 1930s, further points to the domestic slave trade as the basis for morbid folk tales, which endured far beyond the end of the Civil War. These tales featured stories of blood relatives – either mothers and sons or brothers and sisters – forcibly separated as children, before unwittingly reuniting and marrying. Invariably, the tales ended when some bit of chance revealed the truth to the horrified lovers:

“One day when she wuz washing her husband’s back she seen a scar on his back. De woman ‘membered de scar. Et wuz de scar her mastah had put on her son. ‘Course dey didn’t stay married, but de woman wouldn’t ever let her son leave her.”

Oedipal folk tales, the instances of self-liberation in the face of sale, and the anxieties over marriage and parenthood that appear in the historical record make it clear that the domestic

⁵ For fear over separation when deciding to marry, see: Thomas Jones, *Experience and Personal Narrative of Uncle Tom Jones*, 23; For fear of sale as impetus for escape, see: “William Johnson,” “Mrs. Ellis,” “William Grose,” in Benjamin Drew, 1856, *A North Side View of Slavery: or the Narratives of Fugitive Slaves in Canada*. Documenting the American South. University Library, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. 2000. <https://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/drew/drew.html#p19>, 29, 44, 82-83; Moses Grandy, 1843, *Narrative of the Life of Moses Grandy: Late a Slave in the United States of America*. Documenting the American South. University Library, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. 1996. <https://docsouth.unc.edu/fpn/grandy/grandy.html>, 8; For fear of sale as impetus for escape, see: “William Johnson,” “Mrs. Ellis,” in Benjamin Drew, 1856, *A North Side View of Slavery: or the Narratives of Fugitive Slaves in Canada*. Documenting the American South. University Library, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. <https://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/drew/drew.html#p19>, 29, 44, 82-83; “William Grose,” in Benjamin Drew, 1856, *A North Side View of Slavery: or the Narratives of Fugitive Slaves in Canada*. Documenting the American South. University Library, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. 2000. <https://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/drew/drew.html#p19>, 82-83; Moses Grandy, *Narrative of the Life of Moses Grandy: Late a Slave in the United States of America*, 8.

slave trade was a fundamental and inescapable part of enslaved peoples' psychological experience. By focusing on the constant anxiety fostered by the slave trade, formerly enslaved authors and activists proved the centrality of the trade to enslaved life in the American South.⁶

The constant fear of family separation felt by enslaved people was rooted in their knowledge of the slave-trade's economic importance, particularly to the Upper South. Depictions of the slave-trade's psychological prevalence enabled black authors and narrators to better convey the central place of the enslaved body within slavery's economy. Formerly enslaved authors routinely wrote of the importance of slaves as commodities, with William Wells Brown describing Missouri as "very much engaged in raising slaves to supply the southern market," while John Quincy Adams, writing soon after the Civil War, criticized how enslavers had "put their hands on one of the little negroes, and say, "here is \$1,000, or \$1,500 or \$2,000." Moreover, Francis Fedric's assertion that "the slaves are in general the first property parted with" in times of debt or financial hardship, or Isaac Williams' claim that "we were sold" to cover a new master's debts, shows that enslaved people recognized the importance of their sale value to enslavers' economic portfolios. Enslaved people also knew how tenuous their ownership status was, particularly when enslavers' deaths led to complicated probate cases. In his testimony, published in Benjamin Drew's 1856 *A North Side View of Slavery*, Elijah Jenkins claimed that "Knowing that on [his enslaver's] death I would have to be sold, I ran away," while Moses

⁶ Georgina Gibbs. "Mrs. Georgina Gibbs." Interview by Thelma Dunston. January 15, 1937. In *Weevils in the Wheat*, ed. Charles L. Perdue Jr., Thomas E. Braden, and Robert K. Phillips, (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1992), 105; Tom Epps. "Tom Epps." Interview by Faith Morris. In *Weevils in the Wheat*, ed. Charles L. Perdue Jr., Thomas E. Braden, and Robert K. Phillips, (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1992), 89.

There has been much debate over the veracity and reliability of the WPA Narratives, and some have criticized the narratives for their temporal removal – almost seventy years – from the end of the Civil War. However, in this instance, I believe the fact that these narratives emerged decades after emancipation is a feature, rather than a bug. That these folk tales remained etched in the consciousness of enslaved people and their descendants proves that, even long after emancipation, the domestic slave trade retained a measure of psychological and cultural ubiquity.

Grandy noted that his brother “was sold towards paying the debts” of his insolvent enslaver. That enslaved people were clearly aware their economic importance to their enslavers meant that fears of family separation or sale to the Deep South often stemmed from an intimate understanding of slavery’s economy. Enslaved people knew that sale was a distinct possibility because they knew how much their bodies were worth to their enslavers, and they lived in fear of the day when that worth would be turned to liquid cash.⁷

Enslaved peoples’ recognition of the slave trade’s economic importance also manifested in their clear and accurate depictions of the slave trade’s processes of valuation and appraisal. Many nineteenth-century slave narratives included specific prices given for enslaved individuals, indicating that enslaved people were well aware of the value-discourse that accompanied the economy of slave-trading. Moreover, formerly enslaved authors’ assessments of value were often quite close to listed prices for similar demographics of enslaved people, further proving enslaved peoples’ fluency in the economic language of slavery. For instance, Francis Fedric’s anecdote (which would have taken place sometime in 1830s Kentucky) maintains that two child-bearing-aged women were sold for \$800 each, while a man from a neighboring plantation had been sold to the same trader for \$1,000. Fedric’s appraisals, though perhaps a little high, roughly align with contemporary sales of other enslaved people in similar demographics. Likewise, prices given in the narratives of Henry Bibb (prices would have been from the 1840s), Isaac

⁷ William Wells Brown. 1849. *Narrative of William W. Brown, and American Slave*. Documenting the American South. University Library, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. 1996. <https://docsouth.unc.edu/fpn/brownw/brown.html>, 80; John Quincy Adams. 1872. *Narrative of the Life of John Quincy Adams, When in Slavery and Now as Freeman*. Documenting the American South. University Library, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. 1999. <https://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/adams/adams.html>, 9; Additionally, see: Moses Grandy, *Narrative of the Life of Moses Grandy*, 53; Francis Fedric, *Slave Life in Virginia and Kentucky*, 41; “Isaac Williams,” in Benjamin Drew, *A North Side View of Slavery*, 54; “Elijah Jenkins,” in Benjamin Drew, *A North Side View of Slavery*, 113; Moses Grandy, *Narrative of the Life of Moses Grandy*, 15.

Grandy writes of his sister in North Carolina, whose children were taken from her as soon as they were old enough to sell.

Williams (price from 1850s) and John Quincy Adams (price from 1862) all correspond roughly with sale prices from their associated decades. Taken on the whole, price estimates from slave testimony corresponded to the general rise in slave prices from the 1840s through the beginning of the Civil War. Such accuracy reveals the economic literacy of enslaved and formerly enslaved people. Through forced participation and lived experience, enslaved people became experts in the economic details of the domestic slave trade.⁸

They also knew of the trade's economic ubiquity because they saw its daily effect on enslaved families. They knew of the complex valuations of slavery because they were forced to experience the commodification of the trade, either in their own sale or the sales of those close to them. Through specific instances of sale, as well as the ever-present anxiety induced by the trade, the domestic slave trade was woven into the fabric of enslaved people's lives. The fact that the sale of enslaved people, as historian Michael Tadman has articulated, was "vital for the growth

⁸ Date of anecdote estimated from Fedric's telling of his own age at the time (Fedric, 40) and estimates of Fedric's birth year: "Fredric, Francis Parker," *Notable Kentucky African Americans Database*, accessed November 19, 2020, <https://nkaa.uky.edu/nkaa/items/show/2782>; Francis Fedric, *Slave Life in Virginia*, 41-44; *Fayetteville Weekly Observer*, "High Prices of Negroes." Jan 27, 1835. From Newspapers.com by Ancestry: North Carolina Collection. https://newscomnc-newspapers-com.prox.lib.ncsu.edu/image/63291980/?terms=Price%2Bfor%2BNegroes&pqsid=PYfxXgz-kJTTgHO_gMULZQ%3A1992000%3A274754804; "Bill of Sale for Two Slave Women, \$1,200, from Cole to Farmer, Halifax County [N.C., Va.]," American Slavery Documents Collection, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Duke University; Henry Bibb, 1849, *Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb, An American Slave*. Documenting the American South. University Library, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. <https://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/bibb/bibb.html>, 110; "Isaac Williams" in Benjamin Drew, *A North Side View of Slavery*, 60; John Quincy Adams, *Narrative of the Life of John Quincy Adams*, 47; Averages taken from: Michael Tadman, *Speculators and Slaves: Masters, Traders, and Slaves in the Old South*, (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1996), 290.

The bill of sale from Halifax, NC, lists two women sold for \$1,200 total. Newspaper entry from Fayetteville, NC lists a 20-year-old man sold for \$850, and a woman aged 17 sold for \$551. Bibb says he was purchased for \$1,200 in New Orleans. According to Michael Tadman, the average price of enslaved "no. 1 men" in Natchez was around \$1,000. Williams says he was purchased by a trader in Virginia in 1854, along with two other men, for a total price of \$3,400. This roughly corresponds to the average price for young men in 1854 in Richmond: around \$1,100. Adams, in recounting his self-liberation during the Civil War, says that – a man in his late teens – was valued at \$2,000 before his escape from enslavement in Virginia. Michael Tadman has found that, in Richmond in 1860, enslaved men of Adams' age could sell for more than \$1,600. \$2,000 may have been above average but is far from off-base.

of the slave economy” meant that enslaved people were forced into an intimate relationship with the slave trade on a day-to-day basis, which would ultimately lead them to develop a deep knowledge of the system’s innerworkings.⁹

Enslaved people, of course, were not just economic commodities; they were also economic actors. Their knowledge of the economic ubiquity of sale, as well as the importance of their own dollar value to that system, enabled enslaved people to execute resistance from within the slave-trading economy. Testimonies of formerly enslaved people includes accounts of enslaved individuals made to work to facilitate the slave trade, while instances of internal resistance from enslaved people at market show us that, despite the best efforts of white enslavers, enslaved resisters were an important part of the slave-trading ecosystem. The story of someone like William Brown – who, while enslaved in Missouri, was “hired to a negro speculator, or a ‘soul driver’” – shows that the functional patterns of the slave trade were themselves reliant on enslaved labor. Brown’s enslaver tasked him with preparing other enslaved people for auction, an exercise that evinced the peculiar duality at play within the Antebellum slave market: in order to effectively commodify enslaved bodies, enslaved people like Brown were made to operate as conscious actors within an economy that, ostensibly, was designed to minimize the agency of its chief commodity.¹⁰

This duality was not lost on those enslaved individuals made to stand at the auction block. Because their dollar value was central to the economic processes of the slave trade, enslaved people possessed a certain subversive leverage that could sometimes be used as a means to manipulate the terms of their sale. While it is important to acknowledge that the resistant acts of enslaved people should not obscure our understanding of the slave trade’s

⁹ Michael Tadman, “The Interregional Slave Trade in the History and Myth-Making of the U.S. South,” 130.

¹⁰ William Brown, *Narrative of William W. Brown*. 39, 42-45.

immense cruelty and violence, enslaved resistance at market does show that enslaved agency, despite the best efforts of white enslavers, was inextricable from the domestic slave trade. That an enslaved man like Henry Bibb was able to use his knowledge of slave trading evaluation to manipulate his own sale, or that enslaved people may have feigned sickness or even mutilated themselves in order to depress their market value, is evidence that the dollar values affixed to enslaved bodies gave the people behind those price tags a certain subversive agency. As historian Walter Johnson has argued: “the traders could not present their wares nor the buyers investigate them without offering slaves a chance to undermine their purposes.” This principle is a critical jumping-off point when examining slave narratives as resistant literature: the patterns of resistance which Walter Johnson found in the slave market are mirrored in the rhetorical strategies of formerly enslaved authors.¹¹

Enslaved peoples’ acts of resistance, along with the slave trade’s reliance on the labor of enslaved people like William Wells Brown, demonstrated a structural weakness at the heart of the domestic slave trade: that the notion of “human property” was a paradox that could not be mediated. In order to function, the domestic slave trade relied on both the labor and the value of enslaved people, a dual-reliance that enslaved people were well aware of. The auction-block resistance uncovered by historians like Walter Johnson, as well as the intimate detail with which William Brown recounted his role in the Mississippi River slave trade, shows that enslaved people were well aware of their own centrality to the South’s slave-trading economy, and that they sought to use that centrality as a mechanism of agency whenever possible. All of this is to

¹¹ Walter Johnson, *Soul by Soul: Life Inside the Antebellum Slave Market*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 176-188; Daina Ramey Berry, *The Price for Their Pound of Flesh: The Value of the Enslaved, from Womb to Grave, in the Building of a Nation*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 2017), 92; “Alexander Hamilton,” in Benjamin Drew, *A North Side View of Slavery*, 178; “John Warren,” in Benjamin Drew, *A North Side View of Slavery*, 187.

say that, because the slave trade necessarily relied heavily on enslaved people, it gave them the tools necessary to behave as subversive economic actors, allowing them to play their own unique role in the complex economy of the Antebellum slave trade.¹²

Sale as Social Control and Opportunity for Self-Liberation

Enslaved peoples' awareness of market processes, then, became central to both auction-block resistance and the literary abolitionism of the nineteenth-century slave narrative. From the way that formerly enslaved authors wrote about the domestic slave trade – and their willingness to recount the minutiae of its function – it is clear that a lifetime of forced participation in the slave trade gave enslaved people deep insight into the particular economic patterns of the slave-trading system. That someone like Francis Fedric knew that his enslaver's gambling debts would induce sale, or that Moses Grandy knew that his brother was sold in order to cover debts brought on by his enslaver's business failure, testify to the varying degrees to which enslaved people were forced to engage with the specific and variable economic circumstances of their place within slavery's economy. That they chose to write their narratives with such economic specificity further shows that the subversive economic leverage of the slave jail and auction block was not the only avenue of resistance that accompanied the domestic slave trade. The different ways that sales came about, slave traders' methods of transport, and enslavers' attempts to use threats of sale as coercive violence all appear, sketched in great detail, within the narratives and testimony of the formerly enslaved. These detailed accounts demonstrate that,

¹² For further examples, see: Daina Ramey Berry, "'In Pressing Need of Cash:' Gender, Skill, and Family Persistence in the Domestic Slave Trade," in *The Journal of African American History*, Vol. 92, No.1, Women, Slavery, and Historical Research (Winter, 2007), pp. 22-36.

Citing another example, Berry argues that "bondspeople recognized the benefits and limitations of different types of labor," demonstrating that enslaved people were well-versed in the values of particular labor-forms and sought to use that knowledge in whatever ways they could.

because of the deep anxiety fostered by the slave trade, enslaved people were made to become experts in the particular social and practical patterns and rhythms of the trade, an expertise that they were sometimes able to use as a means to protect both themselves and their families.¹³

This can be seen no clearer, perhaps, than in an examination of testimony taken from self-liberated people who settled in Canada. Taken down primarily in 1856 by “Benjamin Drew, an abolitionist journalist and school principal from Massachusetts,” the assorted testimony of fugitive slaves as presented in Drew’s *A North-Side View of Slavery* offers excellent insight into both the experience of enslavement and the process of self-liberation.¹⁴ It is clear in the testimonies that, in the experience of many enslaved people, the domestic slave trade was not only an instrument of economic opportunism for the enslaver, but also an important mechanism of social control and psychological violence. A number of Drew’s interviewees cited instances in which the explicit threat of sale was used in an attempt to ensure obedience or punish misbehavior. An enslaver’s threat to William Johnson that “if we didn’t suit him, he would put us in his pocket quick – meaning he would sell us,” appears to be indicative of many enslaved peoples’ experience. Sale, particularly sale that resulted in separation from loved ones, often became a means to keep enslaved people from escaping, to punish them for perceived transgressions, and to rid enslavers of troublesome or unproductive enslaved people. When John Little’s enslaver “found I was too stubborn to subdue,” he was sent “to Norfolk Jail;” William Grose was to be sold southward because his enslaver was afraid he would escape because “I had a free wife in Virginia,” and George Johnson testified that sale South was a frequent punishment

¹³ Francis Fedric, *Slave Life in Virginia and Kentucky*, 41-45; Moses Grandy, *Narrative of the Life of Moses Grandy*, 14-15.

¹⁴ Manisha Sinha, *The Slave’s Cause*, 459.

“if a man did any thing out of the way.” Threat of sale was ubiquitous within the confines of the plantation, and that this allowed enslavers to use slavery’s economy as a means of coercive control.¹⁵

The testimonies of fugitive slaves interviewed in Canada, along with the published narratives of formerly enslaved authors, show how the constant threat of sale forced enslaved people to become experts in the particular rhythms of the slave trade, which, in turn, allowed them to exploit those patterns as a means of resistance. The testimonials taken in Canada are replete with accounts of self-liberated people who fled enslavement because they recognized an impending sale, or of those who manipulated the process of sale itself to create opportunities for escape. One such testimony, given by a man named George Johnson, best illustrates the ways that enslaved people manipulated the patterns of sale – which they had been forced to become accustomed to – in order to flee their bondage. A man named Thomas – enslaved by the same man as George Johnson – was given a letter by his enslaver and instructed to carry that letter “to a soul-driver.” Thomas, immediately suspicious, got a literate man to read the letter, who confirmed that the note would seal Thomas’ sale to the trader. Turning his misfortune into opportunity, Thomas gave the letter to a free black man to carry to the soul driver and made off for Canada.¹⁶

¹⁵ “William Johnson,” “William Grose,” “Mrs. Ellis,” “Dan Josiah Lockhart,” in Benjamin Drew, *A North Side View of Slavery*, 29, 82, 44, 45; “John Little,” “Mrs. John Little,” “William Grose,” “George Johnson,” in Benjamin Drew, *A North Side View of Slavery*, 204, 225-226, 82, 52.

Grose claimed that he was sold because his enslaver was fearful that he would use his relationship with his wife – a free woman – to aid an escape attempt. George Johnson claims that “If a man did any thing out of the way, he was in more danger of being sold than of being whipped,” indicating that sale was as much a means of corrective punishment as was physical violence.

¹⁶ For instances of enslaved peoples’ knowledge of sale patterns enabling escape during sale/transport, see: Henry Bibb, *Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb*, 72-77; “Isaac Williams,” in Benjamin Drew, *A North Side View of Slavery*, 61; For instances of enslaved people escaping because of the constant threat of sale, see: “James Sumler,” in Benjamin Drew, *A North Side View of Slavery*, 98; “John Hunter,” in Benjamin Drew, *A North Side View of Slavery*, 115; “Charles Peyton Lucas,” in Benjamin Drew, *A North Side View of Slavery*, 107; Also see: “George Johnson,” in Benjamin Drew, *A North Side View of Slavery*, 52-55.

The threat of sale was an ever-present on Thomas and George Johnson's plantation; Johnson himself "knew [he] might have to leave [his friends] by going South" if he didn't escape. Because the trade and the prospect of sale was front of mind, Thomas was able to anticipate his enslaver's attempted sale. In countering his master's ruse with a trick of his own, Thomas employed his intimate knowledge of slave-trading patterns, and his story shows us how that knowledge often became an instrument of resistance. Thomas's story demonstrates that the slave trade relied on a social paradox as well as an economic one. Just as auction-block resistance was facilitated by the subversive agency that came with an understanding of market value, the fact that enslavers fostered a culture of fear around slave-selling was itself a catalyst for flight and resistance. Enslavers' efforts to use sale as a means of social control forced enslaved people to engage with the trade on an everyday basis, allowing enslaved people to recognize instances when sale was likely and to recognize how the actual practices of selling and transport could be manipulated in order to create openings for escape.¹⁷

The Centrality of the Slave Trade to White Economic and Social Life

The detail and accuracy with which formerly enslaved authors recounted the social and economic patterns of the domestic slave trade testified to their expertise in the industry. Borne of forced participation in the slave trade and a lifelong relationship with its practices, enslaved peoples' knowledge became key to a variety of different types of resistance. We have seen how enslaved people used their knowledge of the slave trade's practices to create chances for self-

Williams and a confederate escaped in the midst of their sale. By convincing their buyer that they were willing to be sold, they were able to create an opportunity to slip away. Lucas escaped after overhearing a prospective buyer offer \$1,500 for a blacksmith, knowing he was the only blacksmith his enslaver owned. His subsequent escape shows that: his knowledge of impending sale induced his escape, he knew the market value of his own labor, he used this knowledge to escape before he could be sold. It is also worth noting that the free black man who Thomas got to carry his letter was able to prove his freedom and, according to Johnson, was freed the next day.

¹⁷ "George Johnson," in Benjamin Drew, *A North Side View of Slavery*, 52-55.

liberation, we have seen how knowledgeable enslaved people were in the economic language of enslavement, and historians like Walter Johnson have shown how enslaved people manipulated market processes whenever possible. That type of resistance did not stop with liberation, however, and the slave trade became an important part of the abolitionist and post-bellum literature of formerly enslaved authors. Just as their expertise in the slave trade had offered enslaved people subversive economic leverage at the auction block and just as it had offered them the means of self-liberation, the same expertise offered black writers and narrators the opportunity to subvert the pro-slavery ideology of the white South and to construct their own resistant discourse of slavery.

Literary resistance was in direct conversation with the era's pro-slavery propaganda, in part because the moral ideology of the slaveholding South rested upon particularly precarious ground with regard to the domestic slave trade. On one hand, the slave trade was a major source of economic opportunity for many enslavers, particularly in the Upper South, for whom the slave trade "represent[ed] very substantial windfall profits," as Michael Tadman argued. On the other, the trade was an ideological albatross, one whose obvious cruelty was impossible to fully explain away, no matter how hard pro-slavery writers, advocates, and jurists tried. As Steven Deyle has argued, "The primary goal of the black abolitionists was to inform those outside of the South of the inherent cruelty of American slavery, and, not surprisingly, the domestic trade played a central role in their work."¹⁸

¹⁸ Michael Tadman, *Speculators and Slaves*, 130; Walter Johnson, *River of Dark Dreams: Slavery and Empire in the Cotton Kingdom*, (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2013), 5; Ira Berlin, *Generations of Captivity: A History of African-American Slaves*, (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003), 168-169; Steven Deyle, *Carry me Back: The Domestic Slave Trade in American Life*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 187.

In the decades preceding the Civil War and emancipation, the domestic slave trade and its attendant cruelties became a cornerstone of anti-slavery literature and advocacy.¹⁹ In response, enslavers were forced to confront a delicate ideological balance, one predicated both on maintaining the slave trade as an economic entity and on minimizing the ostensible scale of its cruelty. Stuck between allowing the trade to continue and a political and ideological need to absolve themselves of the cruelties of the slave market, enslavers and their allies employed three primary strategies to minimize the outward-facing cruelty of the domestic slave trade. First, they sought to de-emphasize the frequency of sales and of family separation. Second, they claimed that, when enslavers did sell enslaved people, it was often as a last-resort, meant to ameliorate an impossible debt or to punish an unruly or otherwise intractable slave. Finally, enslavers turned the itinerant slave trader into a literary caricature: a creature of greed, cruelty, and violence upon whom all the moral ills of slavery could be heaped, thus absolving the slaveholders themselves. Scholars of the domestic slave trade have long engaged with these Southern defenses and have proven them to be critical ideological cornerstones upon which the artifice of Southern paternalism was built. When placed alongside the rhetorical strategies of self-liberated abolitionists, however, enslavers' minimizations of the slave trade were thoroughly subverted, as formerly enslaved authors drew upon their own expertise to prove the full extent to which the slave trade tainted Southern life.²⁰

¹⁹ Edward Baptist, *The Half has Never Been Told: Slavery and the Making of American Capitalism*, (New York: Basic Books, 2014), 195; Michael Tadman, "The Interregional Slave Trade in the History and Myth-Making of the U.S. South," 121.

²⁰ Edward Baptist, *The Half has Never Been Told: Slavery and the Making of American Capitalism*, (New York: Basic Books, 2014), 195; Michael Tadman, "The Interregional Slave Trade in the History and Myth-Making of the U.S. South," 121; Steven Deyle, *Carry me Back*, 8-10; Michael Tadman, "Planter Speculation and the Myth of the Reluctant Master," in *Speculators and Slaves*, 111-132; Ariella Gross, *Double Character: Slavery and Mastery in the Antebellum Southern Courtroom*, (Athens, The University of Georgia Press, 2000), 101.

"The myth of the reluctant master and the evil trader allowed white Southerners to maintain both a paternalist ideal and a vigorous, often ruthless slave market."

The pro-slavery writings of white enslavers (and their descendants) – as well as non-slaveholding advocates for slavery – that emerged from the decades immediately preceding and following the Civil War demonstrated consistent and concerted discursive efforts to downplay the frequency of slave-selling, in particular the parting of family members. Although a significant percentage of enslaved people sold during the Antebellum Period were separated from family as a result of their sale, pro-slavery writers did what they could to portray family separation as a tragic anomaly, rather than a foundational aspect of slavery’s economy. White writers claimed knowledge of slaveholding families who had never sold a slave, arguing that selling enslaved people was always a dreaded last resort for the enslaver. Pro-slavery propagandists told tales of happy, elderly enslaved couples meant to emphasize the long-term familial stability of enslaved families. For instance: David Brown, writing in the 1850s, claimed to have known “a very highly respectable old family; who had never sold a slave,” while Letitia Burwell, writing after the Civil War, told of enslaved people whose ancestors had “belonged to our family since the landing of the African fathers on the English slave ships,” emphasizing the familial constancy of southern enslavement. This final rhetorical strategy hews closely to the “key slaves” principle put forth by Michael Tadman: that white enslavers, in attempting to justify their institution to themselves and others, focused on just a few enslaved people, rather than “rank-and-file slaves.” Tadman’s principle offers us a framework through which we can view these defenses of slavery: by offering anomalous (or completely fabricated) examples of enslaved felicity, pro-slavery authors were able to downplay the slave-trade’s significance to enslaved life while avoiding ever actually talking about the trade itself.²¹

²¹ Michael Tadman, *Speculators and Slaves*, xxi, 147; David Brown, 1853, *The Planter: or, Thirteen Years in the South by a Northern Man*. Documenting the American South. University Library, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. 1997. <https://docsouth.unc.edu/fpn/brownd/dbrown.html>, 71; Letitia Burwell, 1895, *A Girl’s Life in*

In working to absolve southern slaveholders of their role in the slave trade, pro-slavery writers found that they needed a scapegoat: a receptacle for the evils so clear and obvious that they could not be explained away or obfuscated. This scapegoat came in the form of the slave trader, a figure that could be portrayed as “of the very coarsest dimensions of vulgar brutality.” The slave trader, as was argued by Tadman, was seen as “the quintessential scapegoat, devoid of all honor in the South,” and as a “family wrecker,” a violent brute, and as the agent who brought death and destruction to the home of the paternalist slaveholder. The caricature of the slave trader enabled pro-slavery writers to address moral criticisms of the trade while exonerating the vast majority of enslavers. By creating two classes of enslaver – the paternalist slave owner and the insidious slave trader - pro-slavery authors were able to condemn one archetype while extolling the other, thus preserving a sense of general moral integrity. This rhetorical scapegoating became, as Tadman argues, “the lynch-pin of slavery’s defense,” and allowed southern authors to compartmentalize the immense cruelty of the domestic slave trade.²²

It was critical to pro-slavery writing that the slave trade be seen as the infrequent arena of social pariahs, rather than the foundational economic system that it was. Because white writers

Virginia Before the War. Documenting the American South. University Library, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. 1998. <https://docsouth.unc.edu/fpn/burwell/burwell.html>, 14; See also: Stephen Deyle, *Carry Me Back*, 8-10; *Semi-Weekly Standard*, “Jonathan Lemmon vs. *The People of the State of New York*: Facts and Points for the Plaintiff.” Oct. 14, 1857. From Newspapers.com by Ancestry: North Carolina Collection. <https://newscomnc-newspapers-com.prox.lib.ncsu.edu/image/168097714/?terms=negro&pqid=y5Az1TRoUmHDrTvsQ2aZGw%3A2094000%3A184561505>; For stable enslaved couples: James Battle Avirett, 1901. *The Old Plantation: How We Lived in the Great House and Cabin Before the War*. Documenting the American South. University Library, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. 1998. <https://docsouth.unc.edu/fpn/avirett/avirett.html>, 41, 49; Thomas Nelson Page, 1897. *Social Life in Old Virginia Before the War*. Documenting the American South. University Library, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1998. <https://docsouth.unc.edu/southlit/pagesocial/page.html>, 101, 102.

Legal argument from attorney H.D. Lapaugh, printed in Raleigh’s *Semi-weekly Standard*. Lapaugh’s italicization of “occasion” emphasizes cruelty and slave trade were aberrations. Full quote: “The cruelties of vicious slave owners and the horrors of the slave trade are topics quite irrelevant. It is universal experience that wealth and power afford occasion for the development of man’s evil propensities.”

²² David Brown, *The Planter: or, Thirteen Years in the South by a Northern Man*, 34; Michael Tadman, *Speculators and Slaves*, 184.

worked so hard to downplay the importance of the slave trade to southern enslavement, formerly enslaved authors used their own lived experience to refute the claims of slavery's defenders. Formerly enslaved authors were able to adeptly recount tales which indicated both the economic and social ubiquity of the slave trade, proving that it was the slaveholder – not just the slave trader – who was responsible for the evils of the slave trade. Whether it was Charles Ball writing that “in Maryland, I had always observed that men, who were the owners of large stocks of negroes, were not averse to having publicity given to their names,” William Wells Brown recounting the cold calculus of his first enslaver, who “recorded the births of all the infants which he claimed to be born his property,” or John Andrew Jackson's anecdote of an enslaver who, upon purchasing an enslaved girl named Jenny, forced another enslaved man named “Adam to leave his present wife and take Jenny,” formerly enslaved authors worked hard to prove that the slave trade was woven into patterns of southern life, implicating an entire society in the evils that pro-slavery writers tried to pawn off on a caricatured few.²³

Mundanity and Cruelty in the Antebellum Slave Market

Francis Fedric, notably, chose to relate the specific reason why his enslaver chose to part with some of his enslaved property and, in exploring why formerly enslaved narrators focused on these economic processes, we will further uncover the role of the slavery's economy in nineteenth-century slave narratives. Throughout nineteenth-century slave testimony, we see examples of slaves sold upon owners' deaths, as cover for a profligate enslavers' debts, or, simply, as a source of quick cash for enslavers looking to exchange a human being for spending money. Thomas Jones wrote that he “was purchased by Own Holmes” after his original enslaver

²³ Charles Ball, *Fifty Years in Chains*, 59-60; William Wells Brown, *Narrative of William W. Brown*, 13; John Andrew Jackson, 1862, *The Experience of a Slave in South Carolina*. Documenting the American South. University Library, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1996. <https://docsouth.unc.edu/fpn/jackson/jackson.html>, 29-30.

took ill and died, while Sella Martin was clear that he was used “as security for debt,” and John Quincy Adams maintained that white enslavers would sell enslaved people “to get money to take pleasure with.” Pro-slavery authors acknowledged that economic circumstances would, sometimes, lead to the sales of enslaved people, but often argued that such sales were the last resort of a financially desperate enslaver. “Houses, lands, - everything went first before giving up the negroes,” wrote Leticia Burwell, in her spirited, post-bellum defense of life in the Old South. “The owner prefer[ed] to impoverish himself in the effort to keep and provide for these [enslaved people].” But Burwell’s visions of caring enslavers, who preferred insolvency to the sale of slaves, find an almost uncanny inversion in Francis Fedric’s narrative. In Fedric’s experience, enslaved property was generally “the first property parted with,” in times of debt. Indeed, when a parade of slave traders came through the plantation of Fedric’s indebted enslaver, there was no sale of the manor house. There was only the sale of human beings, separated from one another as part of an everyday economy of debt, asset management, and commodity value.²⁴

That Francis Fedric, along with a litany of other formerly enslaved writers and advocates, chose to include the specific economic circumstances of slave-selling is critical to understanding portrayals of the slave trade in nineteenth-century slave narratives. Enslaved people were sold to cover estates, they were used as securities for loans, and they were commodified as assets through which debts could be ameliorated. They were even repositories of wealth, quickly liquidated as a means of supplemental income. Enslaved people knew all this; they were well aware that the commodity value of their bodies was very important to their enslavers, and to the

²⁴ Thomas Jones, *Experience and Personal Narrative of Uncle Tom Jones*, 21; “Sella Martin,” 1867, in John W. Blasingame, *Slave Testimony: Two Centuries of Letters, Speeches, Interviews and Autobiographies*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1977), 703-735, 708.; “Elijah Jenkins,” in Benjamin Drew, *A North Side View of Slavery*, 113-114; Leticia Burwell, *A Girl’s Life in Virginia Before the War*, 28; Francis Fedric, *Slave Life in Virginia and Kentucky*, 41-45.

economy in which their enslavers operated. Such awareness enabled enslaved people to resist their enslavement, as they used their own value as a means of resistant leverage. But awareness of this economy also enabled formerly enslaved authors and narrators to engage in a type of discursive resistance that was based in their own knowledge of the slave trade. By including the specific economic mechanisms of sale in their anti-slavery testimonies, black writers proved that the commodity value of enslaved individuals was central to the economic fabric of the antebellum South, tying all who participated in the southern economy to the stain of the slave trade. Take, for instance, Charles Ball's characterization of his enslaver as a business man who "regarded [his enslaved property] only as objects of traffic and the materials of his commerce," or Moses Grandy writing that his brother "was sold toward paying the debts" of their enslaver. In each passage, both Ball and Grandy place the enslaved body at the center of routine commercial activity. Charles Ball's enslaver dispassionately sold his enslaved property as instruments of commerce, while Moses Grandy was separated from his brother as part of a debt settlement. In both instances, it is the language of slavery's commodity economy, a language of debts, trade, and finance, which allowed formerly enslaved authors to demonstrate the centrality of the slave trade to the southern slaveholding economy.²⁵

Formerly enslaved people were able to use this pattern to prove the social ubiquity of the slave trade as well. Just as enslaved people had used their knowledge of the patterns of slave-selling to avoid sale or to create opportunities for self-liberation, formerly enslaved authors used that knowledge to prove that the slave trade permeated their enslavers' social, as well as economic, lives. Slave narratives and testimonies sometimes included accounts of the slave trade

²⁵ Michael Tadman, "The Interregional Slave Trade in the History and Myth-Making of the U.S. South," 130; Charles Ball, *Fifty Years in Chains*, 59-60; Moses Grandy, *Narrative of the Life of Moses Grandy*, 15.

See pages 8, 9 for discussion of value and resistance.

wielded as a means of social control, either as a form of punishment or as a deterrent. Such depictions indicate that formerly enslaved people sought to use the psychological violence of the trade, as well as the specifics of its economic role, to prove its ubiquity. When William Wells Brown re-told of when his enslaver threatened to sell Brown's mother rather than whip her, or when Moses Roper wrote that his enslaver sent him to a slave-trader because "I was determined to get away from him," they were using enslavers' threats of sale to prove the importance of slavery's economy to the coercive structure of the slaveholding economy. By showing that their enslavers used sale as a form of control on the plantation itself, formerly enslaved people asserted that the domestic slave trade was an important part of day-to-day life for both they and their enslavers, further subverting white claims regarding the slave trade.²⁶

Finally, formerly enslaved people used their experiences at slave markets to demonstrate the role that the slave trade played in the white social sphere. William Brown wrote that "no person forfeits his or her character or standing in society by being engaged in raising and selling slaves to supply the cotton, sugar, and rice plantations of the South." Other authors wrote that enslavers maintained their high-society style "off of the poor slave," and that, even "in this land of schools and Bibles," enslaved people were parted from their families by the cruel whim of the slave trade. Inclusion of such details shows that formerly enslaved authors were keen to subvert white attempts to pawn the blame for the slave trade's cruelties off on an odious few, and formerly enslaved advocates used their experiences within the slave market to directly link Southern pretensions of gentility and style to the cruelty of the slave trade. By including the specific social circumstances and practices of sale, just as they emphasized the specific financial

²⁶ William Wells Brown, *Narrative of William W. Brown*, 75; Moses Roper, 1838, *A Narrative of the Adventures and Escape of Moses Roper, From American Slavery*. Documenting the American South. University Library, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1996. <https://docsouth.unc.edu/fpn/roper/roper.html>, 52-53.

processes of sale, the authors of slave narratives were not only able to implicate the genteel southern slaveholder in the cruelties of the slave trade, but evidenced that the slave trade was, itself, a source of that gentility.²⁷

That the slave trade permeated enslavers' economic and social life proved crucial to the nineteenth-century slave testimonial because it added increased weight to each anecdote of family separation, of auction block violence, and the cruelty of the transport coffle. In reminding his reader that "Although the African slave-trader has been branded as a pirate, men are engaged in the traffic in slaves in this country, who occupy high positions in society" William Brown directly tied the Southern, high-society archetype to the wealth of the slave trade, using the domestic slave trade as an instrument to attack the artifice of enslaver gentility. The role of the slave *sale* in the slave narrative or testimony was one of pathos: intimate and detailed depictions of family separations, told with the rhetorical flourish of a literary tragedy, were meant to drive home the immense human cruelty of the slave trade and, by extension, enslavement itself. Authors like William Anderson wrote of enslaved family members who "howl[ed] like dogs or wolves, when being under the painful obligation of parting to meet no more." William Grimes lamented the pain of "the last look of a woman whom you know loves you, which is given through tears and with a consciousness that you are leaving her forever," and Frederick Douglass wrote that the prospect of being separated from his fellows "caused me more pain than any thing else in the whole transaction" when he was confined to a slave jail.²⁸

²⁷ William Wells Brown, *Narrative of William W. Brown*, 125.; John Quincy Adams, *Narrative of the Life of John Quincy Adams*, 20-21; Thomas Jones, *Experience and Personal Narrative of Uncle Tom Jones*, 25.

²⁸ William Wells Brown, *Narrative of William W. Brown*, 50, 126-128; William Anderson, *The Life and Narrative of William J Anderson*, 6; William Grimes, 1855, *Life of William Grimes, The Runaway Slave, Brought Down to the Present Time*, Documenting the American South. University Library, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. 2000. <https://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/grimes55/grimes55.html>, 15; Frederick Douglass, 1845, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave*, Documenting the American South. University Library, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. 1999. <https://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/douglass/douglass.html>, 91-93; A

In each of these instances, the act of sale, and the attendant separations and cruelties that came along with sale, carried an immense emotional weight, and served as an effective means of conveying both the cruelty of enslavers and the suffering of the enslaved. But the role of the slave *trade* in the slave narrative was altogether different. The South's economy of enslavement was shown as ubiquitous, it was a stain which touched everyone involved in southern enslavement and, as such, it was a system which affixed the cruelties of separation to each and every proponent of enslavement, not just those who pro-slavery advocates could cheerfully scapegoat. By proving the slave trade's ubiquity in Southern life, formerly enslaved people were able to implicate all in its cruelty, to subvert the paternalist propaganda of the Southern elite, and to prove that the trade's extraordinary cruelty had become an ordinary part of American enslavement.

selection of anecdotes of sale and family separation: Thomas Anderson, 1854?, *Interesting Account of Thomas Anderson, a Slave, Taken from his Own Lips*, ed. J.P. Clark. Documenting the American South. University Library, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. 2000. <https://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/anderson/anderson.html>, 5-6; Charles Ball, *Fifty Years in Chains*, 31-33; Francis Fedric, *Slave Life in Virginia and Kentucky*, 15; Moses Grandy, *Narrative of the Life of Moses Grandy*, 16; Thomas Jones, *Experience and Personal Narrative of Uncle Tom Jones*, 25; "George Johnson," "William Howard," in Benjamin Drew, *A North Side View of Slavery*, 54, 111-112; Also see: Steven Deyle, *Carry Me Back*, 188. "[Abolitionists] filled their publications with tales of children torn from their mothers and husbands from their wives, women sold for prostitution, forced breeding farms, and the depravity of licentious planters and their sons."

Chapter Two: Faith, Fidelity, and Cruelty in the Nineteenth Century Slave Narrative

In his autobiography, published in 1838 and intended to “counteract the false and wicked misrepresentations [in favor of] American slavery,” the formerly enslaved Moses Roper told of his visit to White House Church for a Baptist camp revival. Roper attended the revival alongside his enslaver – a man named Marcus Rowland – and a passel of enslaved people, all of whom Rowland intended to sell. Roper, Rowland, and the rest had come to the revival because religious meetings of the kind, particularly, Roper tells us, among Baptists and Methodists, were hubs of the slave trading business. The congregants at these outdoor revivals became so immersed in their religious bliss, “so well influenced towards their fellow creatures,” that they turned into the ideal customer base for the itinerant slave trader. Religious fervor and bonhomie amongst White men was such that the slave drover “carries on an immense traffic with the attendants at these places.”¹

That Marcus Rowland’s slave trading operation intersected with the White House Church, and many others like it, is, on one hand, unsurprising. After all, “the vast expansion of slavery in the United States happened in tandem with the emergence of evangelical Protestantism,” as historian Edward Baptist has argued. Yet there is still something stark about the way that Moses Roper juxtaposed the domestic slave trade and white, southern religion. In Roper’s telling, southern religiosity and the domestic slave trade were intertwined as symbiotic developments, in which the trading of human beings, a trade so cruel that one of Roper’s comrades “died of grief” upon “being parted from her parents,” was directly catalyzed by White religious devotion. That Moses Roper chose to place his experience within the domestic slave

¹ Moses Roper, 1838, *A Narrative of the Adventures and Escape of Moses Roper, From American Slavery*. Documenting the American South. University Library, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1996. <https://docsouth.unc.edu/fpn/roper/roper.html>, 3-4, 52-56.

trade in the context of White religious practice, going to far as to name the Protestant sects most heavily involved in revival camp slave trading, points to a larger rhetorical pattern within the resistant writings of formerly enslaved authors.²

Chapter One addressed the parallels between everyday resistance and literary resistance to slavery, particularly with regard to slavery's economy. This chapter will explore how literary resistance itself used the domestic slave trade as a nexus for the interrogation of white moral bankruptcy, as well as the showcase of the moral rectitude of enslaved people. Just as enslaved people used their knowledge of slavery's economy to translate patterns of resistance to the published page, formerly enslaved people used their knowledge of the domestic slave trade to create patterns of rhetorical resistance that created a distinct moral vocabulary of slavery. By analyzing how the slave trade related to morality within the nineteenth-century slave narrative, we will be able to use the trade as a lens through which we can explore the ways that enslaved and self-liberated Black authors juxtaposed the morality of enslaved people with the immorality of their enslavers. In this pursuit, we can begin to see the specific ways that formerly enslaved people went about their literary resistance, and we will see the specific mechanisms of literary resistance.

By translating these patterns of individual resistance to the pages of their autobiographies and memoirs, formerly-enslaved writers and activists had been able to turn the domestic slave trade into a critical rhetorical and ideological weapon. Roper's narrative, and the many like it, demonstrated how Black authors used their intimate knowledge of and experiences within the South's economy of slavery to attack the artifice of morality that pro-slavery whites had constructed around their institution. Many authors, like Roper, offered anecdotal evidence which

² Roper, *A Narrative of the Adventures and Escape of Moses Roper*, 54, 55; Edward Baptist, *The Half has Never Been Told: Slavery and the Making of American Capitalism*, (New York: Basic Books, 2014), 200.

directly tied Southern Christianity to the cruelties of the domestic slave trade. Others focused on the ways that the domestic slave trade subverted black fidelity and morality within the family, using slavery's economy to subvert the paternalist mythos of the white enslaver. Still others tied the domestic slave trade directly to white sexual violence and impropriety, further displacing white enslavers from the paternalist, genteel archetype that they sought to publicly embody. Through these rhetorical methods, formerly enslaved authors showed the strength of the domestic slave trade as an ideological weapon, enabling them to create a moral discourse that inverted slavery's commodity economy, and to turn the economic methods of the slave trade into specific means through which enslavers' base immorality could be proven.

The Slave Trade and White Christianity in Antebellum Slave Narratives

That religion featured heavily in Moses Roper's narrative and, indeed, the narratives of many formerly-enslaved memoirists, is not surprising when we consider the parallels between the literary resistance of the slave narratives and the individualized resistance of enslaved people. After all, for many enslaved people, religion stood, as historian Stephen Deyle wrote, as "One important rock of support, and subtle form of resistance to the system." Religion was, for many enslaved people, an avenue by which spiritual agency could be wrested from enslavers' attempts to assert social and bodily control over enslaved people. It is only logical that the importance of religion would find its way into slave narratives. As scholar Ruth Banes explained: "the antebellum slave community was an environment conducive to the emergence of autobiography; and the slaves' religion, which had fostered their sense of dignity and self-worth, became the basis for the antebellum narratives."³

³ Frederick Douglass, 1845, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave*, Documenting the American South. University Library, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. 1999.

The status of religion as resistance is an important foreground to any examination of the role of religious language in the resistant narratives of the Antebellum Era. While Stephanie Camp wisely cautions us not to overgeneralize the religiosity of enslaved people, she still asserts that, for many, Christianity served as a source of “hope and strength,” positioning “the rewards of congregation” inherent to both religious and social gatherings as an important space of enslaved resistance.⁴ Likewise, historian Daina Ramey Berry’s conception of “soul values,” “the spiritual value of [enslaved people’s] immortal selves,” is of particular relevance to any discussion of the relationship between resistance, spiritual self-perception, and the domestic slave trade. Berry’s argument that “soul values,” rooted in the inner being of the enslaved individual and were a form of resistant self-commodification that subverted the appraisals of the slave market offers an ideological framework for considering the role of religion in the reclamation of enslaved people’s value not as commodities, but as individuals. How then, if religion or spiritual understanding served as an avenue of internal redemption and resistance for

<https://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/douglass/douglass.html>, 92; Charles Ball, 1859. *Fifty Years in Chains, or, The Life of an American Slave*. Documenting the American South. University Library, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1997, 150; William Wells Brown. 1849. *Narrative of William W. Brown, and American Slave*. Documenting the American South. University Library, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 128; George M. Horton. 1845. *The Poetical Works of George M. Horton, The Colored Bard of North-Carolina*. Documenting the American South. University Library, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, <https://docsouth.unc.edu/fpn/hortonlife/horton.html>, xii; Thomas Anderson. 1854. *Interesting Account of Thomas Anderson, A Slave. Taken From His Own Lips*. Documenting the American South. University Library, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, <https://docsouth.unc.edu/fpn/hortonlife/horton.html>, 3,4; Steven Deyle, *Carry me Back: The Domestic Slave Trade in American Life*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 269; Ruth Banes. “Antebellum Slave Narratives as Social History: Self and Community in the Struggle Against Slavery,” in *Journal of American Culture* 5, no. 2 (Summer 1982): 62-70, 64.

⁴ Stephanie Camp, *Closer to Freedom: Enslaved Women and Everyday Resistance in the Plantation South*, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 61; Daina Ramey Berry, *The Price for Their Pound of Flesh: The Value of the Enslaved, from Womb to Grave, in the Building of a Nation*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 2017), 61.

many enslaved people, did religion act as an instrument of resistance in the pages of the slave narrative?⁵

Although religious rhetoric in slave narratives was by no means confined to depictions of the slave trade, slavery's economy stood as an important rhetorical tool through which Black authors linked Black piety to White religious hypocrisy, and the perversion of Christian value that was endemic to the slaveholding South. Religion played an important role in slave narratives because it was critical to both attacks of and support for slavery in the United States.⁶ Although pro-slavery White authors were careful to depict enslavers as "honorable Christians" and emphasized the "Christian love and devotion" of slaveholders, Black authors often turned to the domestic slave trade as evidence to refute paternalist tropes of benevolence and religious devotion. As we have seen in Moses Roper's autobiography, some formerly enslaved authors accomplished this by linking the physical spaces of the slave market with the physical spaces of religion. Roper offered evidence of slave sales at churches and religious revivals, Frederick Douglass contended that "the slave prison and the church stand near each other. The clanking of fetters and the rattling of chains in the prison, and the pious psalm and solemn prayer in the church, may be heard at the same time." By placing the physical spaces of the church and the slave market together in their narratives, Roper and Douglass expressed a particular perversion that accompanied the Southern slave trade. The physical proximity of the market and the church, so close that the sounds of anguish at market were mixed in with the sounds of worship, offered

⁵ Stephanie Camp, *Closer to Freedom: Enslaved Women and Everyday Resistance in the Plantation South*, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 61; Daina Ramey Berry, *The Price for Their Pound of Flesh: The Value of the Enslaved, from Womb to Grave, in the Building of a Nation*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 2017), 61.

⁶ For religion as important to abolition, see: Deyle, *Carry Me Back*, 189,190; Manisha Sinha, *The Slave's Cause: A History of Abolition*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016), 270, 271; For religion in paternalist text, see: *Raleigh Weekly Standard*, February 1, 1860, 2; *Raleigh Semi-Weekly Standard*, October 14, 1857, 2; David Brown, 1853, *The Planter: or, Thirteen Years in the South by a Northern Man*. Documenting the American South. University Library, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. 1997, 72.

a concrete expression of the degree to which the domestic slave trade and its cruelty infected Southern life, corrupting even the most sacred of physical spaces. Such a depiction of the sonic infiltration of the slave auction upon the white Southern church offers an extremely apt metaphor for the moral pollution that slavery's cruelty wrought among Southern whites, and it stands testimony to the brilliance of Frederick Douglass' resistant writing.⁷

By linking the physical spaces of white Christianity to the domestic slave trade, the authors of slave narratives were able to express the slave trade's ubiquity in a distinct, physical way. This type of expression was furthered by the ways that black authors addressed the specific, personal hypocrisies of the antebellum South, embodied in the archetypal personage of the devout, Christian slave-seller. Just as Douglass and Roper used the spatial proximity of the slave market and the church to prove the closeness of the two institutions, slave narratives such as that of John Quincy Adams sought to prove that closeness by focusing on individual enslavers.

Adams testified that:

They could take our children and sell them and you must not say a word. I ask, could a man who believed that there was a Just God do such outrageous crimes to human beings, and then say it was right, and have the face to go to church and come home and have the slaves out on the back end of the farm working on Sundays, and some of the ministers going around telling the slaves they must obey their master and mistress, and all would be right.⁸

⁷ For religion as important to abolition, see: Deyle, *Carry Me Back*, 189,190; Manisha Sinha, *The Slave's Cause: A History of Abolition*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016), 270, 271; For religion in paternalist text, see: *Raleigh Weekly Standard*, February 1, 1860, 2; *Raleigh Semi-Weekly Standard*, October 14, 1857, 2; David Brown, 1853, *The Planter: or, Thirteen Years in the South by a Northern Man*. Documenting the American South. University Library, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. 1997, 72; Moses Roper, *A Narrative of the Adventures and Escape of Moses Roper*, 55; Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, 120; Also see: William Wells Brown. 1849. *Narrative of William W. Brown, and American Slave*. Documenting the American South. University Library, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. 1996. <https://docsouth.unc.edu/fpn/brownw/brown.html>, 82.

Brown presented enslaved piety as having a monetary value at the auction block, as religion was used as a means to subdue enslaved people.

⁸ John Quincy Adams, 1872. *Narrative of the Life of John Quincy Adams, When in Slavery and Now as Freeman*. Documenting the American South. University Library, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. <https://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/adams/adams.html>, 19-20.

John Quincy Adams's narrative is but one of several that emphasized the internal hypocrisy of the supposedly Christian enslaver, and accounts such as his help to show the ways that black authors and narrators connected the domestic slave trade to the subversion of Christian values among Southern whites. In slave narratives, the domestic slave trade became part of a larger rhetorical pattern, which frequently emphasized the hypocrisy of Southern Christianity as it related not just to the slave trade, but the sexual, physical, and psychological violence of slavery as well. Thus, the domestic slave trade became an element of a broader rhetorical effort to disprove the Christian pretensions of Southern enslavers, and to show the "humane and Christian" readers of slave narratives that the trappings of Southern Christianity were inextricable from the lash and chains of enslavement. By drawing distinct connections between the physical spaces and personal embodiments of slave trading and the Southern church, formerly enslaved authors and narrators inverted the paternalist, Christian claims of pro-slavery advocates confirming that White Christianity in the South was not antithetical to, but rather supportive of, slavery's cruelty.⁹

On the pages of slave narratives, the religious devotion of Southern whites stood in stark contrast to the Christian devotion of enslaved people. Although Black authors decried the

⁹ William Wells Brown, *Narrative of William W. Brown, and American Slave*, 72; William Anderson. 1857. *Life and Narrative of William J. Anderson*. Documenting the American South. University Library, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1997. <https://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/andersonw/andersonw.html>, 74; Henry Bibb. 1849. *Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb, An American Slave*. Documenting the American South. University Library. The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. 2000. <https://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/bibb/bibb.html>, 203; Solomon Northup. 1853. *Twelve Years a Slave: Narrative of Solomon Northup, A Citizen of New-York, Kidnapped in Washington City in 1841 and Rescued in 1853, From a Cotton Plantation Near the Red River in Louisiana*. Documenting the American South. University Library, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. <https://docsouth.unc.edu/fpn/northup/northup.html>, 130; John Andrew Jackson. 1862. *The Experience of a Slave in South Carolina*. Documenting the American South. University Library, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. <https://docsouth.unc.edu/fpn/jackson/jackson.html>, 8; Moses Roper, *A Narrative of the Adventures and Escape of Moses Roper*, 36; Harriet Jacobs. 1861. *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*. Documenting the American South. University Library, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2003. <https://docsouth.unc.edu/fpn/jacobs/jacobs.html>, 115; Noah Davis. 1859. *A Narrative of the Life of Rev. Noah Davis, a Colored Man*. Documenting the American South. University Library, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. 1999. <https://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/davisn/davis.html>, 3.

hypocrisy of Bible-reading slave traders, they used the slave trade to exemplify the faith of enslaved people, often in the face of immense tragedy. William Wells Brown offered an excellent example of this rhetorical pattern, offering a tale of a husband and wife, sold separately at an auction house in St. Louis:

“As soon as they became aware that they were to be separated, they both burst into tears; and as she descended from the auction-stand, the husband, walking up to her and taking her by the hand, said, “Well Fanny, we are to part forever, on earth; you have been a good wife to me. I did all that I could to get my new master to buy you; but he did not want you, and all I have to say is, I hope you will try to meet me in heaven. I shall try to meet you there.”¹⁰

I have included this passage from William Wells Brown’s memoir in full because it offers an especially clear example of faith and tragedy in the slave narrative, but other black authors offered similar examples of black religious devotion in the face of the cruelty of the domestic slave trade. Thomas Jones told of how he kept his faith even in the face of violence by his enslaver and his sale at an estate sale, Thomas Anderson expressed his faith as strength and consolation after losing his children to sale, and William Anderson imagined heaven as a place free of “slavery, whipping, or selling Christian slaves for gold.”¹¹

These accounts show that Christianity appeared in slave narratives in a variety of different contexts and was certainly not confined solely to formerly-enslaved authors’ examinations of the slave trade. White religious perversion was often demonstrated through their immense violence, while religious awakenings typically served as redemptive moments in the

¹⁰ William Wells Brown, *Narrative of William W. Brown, and American Slave*, 126, 128.

¹¹ Thomas Jones. ca. 1850s. *Experience and Personal Narrative of Uncle Tom Jones: Who was For Forty Years a Slave*. Documenting the American South. University Library, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. 1999. <https://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/jonestom/jones.html>, 20-22; Thomas Anderson. 1854?, *Interesting Account of Thomas Anderson, a Slave, Taken from his Own Lips*, ed. J.P. Clark. Documenting the American South. University Library, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. 2000. <https://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/anderson/anderson.html>, 5-6; William Anderson, *Life and Narrative of William Anderson*, 10.

memoirs of black authors. The domestic slave trade, however, served as a rhetorical hinge by which the polluted religiosity of enslavers and the religious devotion of the enslaved could be linked. Just as historians like Daina Berry have proven the redemptive and resistant potential of black spirituality, I argue that formerly enslaved memoirists used the connection between white religious perversion, black devotion, and the domestic slave trade as a mechanism of resistance and reclamation, in which religion allowed formerly-enslaved authors to transpose patterns of every-day resistance on to the published page. By connecting faith, tragedy, and commerce, black authors turned the tragic separations of the auction block into instruments of liberation, in which faith in the face of cruelty became a currency in a literary economy that was presented as the direct inverse of slavery's commodity economy. In this economy, black authors turned the cruelties of the slave trade into instruments of moral and spiritual appraisal, in a way which proved the immense moral and religious poverty of their slaveholding adversaries.¹²

The Slave Trade and the Subversion of Black Fidelity

The moral economy of abolition, as related by Black authors and activists, was in direct conversation with the paternalist discourse of the pro-slavery South. Manisha Sinha, in her comprehensive study of abolitionism, argued that black abolitionists “sought to lift that veil” which Southerners had pulled over the unique horrors of their institution. An important component of that obfuscation were White efforts to minimize the domestic slave trade's impact on the enslaved family. Depictions of marriage between enslaved people, in fact, often appeared in pro-slavery texts, in which pro-slavery writers presented anecdotes of slave sales in which

¹² For white violence: Thomas Anderson, *Interesting Account of Thomas Anderson*, 3,4; Francis Fedric. 1863. *Slave Life in Virginia and Kentucky: Or, Fifty Years of Slavery in the Southern States of America*. Documenting the American South. University Library, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. 1999. <https://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/fedric/fedric.html>, 5; Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, 77; For religious awakening: Moses Roper, *A Narrative of the Adventures and Escape of Moses Roper*, 79; Thomas Jones, *Experience and Personal Narrative of Uncle Tom Jones: Who was For Forty Years a Slave*, 17.

slaveholders took care not to separate families, presenting an image of benevolent masters and mistresses who encouraged and facilitated marriage pairings between enslaved people. Take, for example, a feature which ran in Virginia's *Staunton Spectator* in 1851, and presented a vignette of a Baltimore enslaver, who sold an "incorrigible" enslaved man named Moses. Moses had "a woman and three children," and so the seller took care to purchase Moses' "wife and children too, that you [Moses] might not be separated." Likewise, the White writer David Brown, in his defense of Southern slavery, presented family separation as anomalous, and reported that "Christian masters encourage ... 'the sanctity of marriage, with all its joys, rights, and obligations,' and never, 'at their will,' separate the wife from the husband, and the children from the parents."¹³

The enslaved wedding itself appeared in proslavery propaganda and stood testament to enslaved felicity and White benevolence. Caroline Gilman, in her *Recollections of a Southern Matron*, presented an image of an enslaved bride "dressed in white, generally with an ornamented turban... After the marriage the party assemble together, and, if they have tickets of permission from their owner and a white spectator, they may stay until twelve o'clock." A similar depiction of the enslaved wedding appeared in Thomas Nelson Page's recollection of the slaveholding South, published in 1897: "The ceremony might be performed in the dining-room or in the hall by the master, or in one of the quarters by a colored preacher; but it was a gay occasion, and the dusky bride's trousseau had been arranged by her young mistress." Whether White propagandists tried to convey enslavers' commitment to preserving the enslaved family,

¹³ Manisha Sinha, *The Slave's Cause*, 427; *Staunton Spectator*, "Old Moses." Sep. 17, From *Chronicling America* by Library of Congress, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn84024718/1851-09-17/ed-1/seq-1/#date1=1850&index=6&rows=20&words=Negro+negro&searchType=basic&sequence=0&state=Virginia&date2=1860&proxtext=negro&y=7&x=9&dateFilterType=yearRange&page=1>; David Brown, *The Planter: or, Thirteen Years in the South by a Northern Man*, 47-48.

tried to emphasize the rarity of family separation, or focused on enslavers' facilitation of weddings themselves, marriage between enslaved people, as it appeared in pro-slavery writing, had the effect of turning the Black family into a mechanism of White propaganda, as defenders of slavery leaned on fictionalized or idealized accounts of black familial as evidence of the benevolent paternalism of Southern enslavers.¹⁴

Formerly enslaved authors presented black familial integrity and fidelity in a much different light. In slave narratives, Black fidelity appeared rooted in the love and affection of Black people, occurring in spite of, rather than because of, the efforts of White enslavers. The economy of slavery and the prevalence of the slave trade were critical to this rhetorical inversion and allowed formerly enslaved narrators used the domestic slave trade to attack White depictions of the Black family in two primary ways: they depicted white efforts to facilitate enslaved marriage and child-birth as being rooted in material greed, and they depicted, in stark and heart-wrenching detail, acute instances of family separation via sale. Whether it was Charles Ball recounting a slave trader's purchase of "two of the best breeding-wenches in all Maryland" or William Anderson lamenting the way family members would "howl like dogs or wolves" upon separation, Black authors used the economy of slavery as a literary crucible, through which they

¹⁴ Caroline Gilman. 1838. *Recollections of a Southern Matron*. Documenting the American South. University Library, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. 1998. <https://docsouth.unc.edu/fpn/gilman/gilman.html>, 271-272; Thomas Nelson Page. 1897. *Social Life in Old Virginia Before the War*. Documenting the American South. University Library, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. 1998. <https://docsouth.unc.edu/southlit/pagesocial/page.html#fig23>, 102; Michael Tadman, *Speculators and Slaves: Masters, Traders, and Slaves in the Old South*, (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1996), xxxvi; Patrick O'Neil, "Bosses and Broomsticks: Ritual and Authority in Antebellum Slave Weddings," *The Journal of Southern History* 75, no. 1(Feb., 2009), 29-48, 32-34.

Patrick O'Neil described the enslaved wedding as a fraught ritual, in which enslaved people attempted to maintain their own emotional spaces, but which enslavers sought to use, on some occasions, to denigrate enslaved people or prove their own benevolence.

presented a moral discourse that turned slaveholders' insatiable commercial greed into a proof of their immense moral poverty.¹⁵

The refutation of proslavery propaganda relied heavily on depictions of the domestic slave trade. In response to proslavery authors, Black authors constructed an inverted representation of the enslaved family, in which enslavers' supposedly benevolent actions were presented as the product not of virtue, but of greed. Andrew Jackson wrote of an enslaver who forced unwanted marriages upon his enslaved people, William Wells Brown described Missouri as "very much engaged in raising slaves to supply the southern market," while, as soon as each of Moses Roper's sister's "children became big enough, it was sold away from her." In each instance, the formerly enslaved narrator presented marriage and child rearing not as factors of white benevolence, but as economic processes that benefited the enslaver. This can be seen most clearly in discussions of "slave breeding," which appear in abundance in antebellum slave narratives and which were an important part of both white and black abolitionist discourse. While it is unlikely, as Michael Tadman argues, that Upper South enslavers operated slave-rearing "stud farms," it is also clear that many Southern enslavers did work to facilitate the natural increase of enslaved people for their own economic gain.¹⁶

In antebellum slave narratives, the intentionality of enslavers was left unambiguous. The same enslaved family that enslavers so touted as evidence of benevolence became, in the hands

¹⁵ Charles Ball, *Fifty Years in Chains, or, The Life of an American Slave*, 37; William Anderson, *Life and Narrative of William Anderson*, 6.

¹⁶ John Andrew Jackson, *The Experience of a Slave in South Carolina*, 29; William Wells Brown, *Narrative of William W. Brown*, 80; Moses Grandy. 1843. *Narrative of the Life of Moses Grandy: Late a Slave in the United States of America*. Documenting the American South. University Library, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. 1996. <https://docsouth.unc.edu/fpn/grandy/grandy.html>, 53; See also: Francis Fedric. 1863. *Slave Life in Virginia and Kentucky: Or, Fifty Years of Slavery in the Southern States of America*. Documenting the American South. University Library, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. 1999. <https://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/fedric/fedric.html>, 44, 95; Deyle, *Carry Me Back*, 46-47; Tadman, *Speculators and Slaves*, 128,129; See also Berry, *The Price for Their Pound of Flesh*, 32, for increased market-value for child-bearing aged women.

of black authors, evidence of the moral perversion of Southern slavery. The domestic slave trade provided the basis for this inversion, as the value affixed to the enslaved body became the basis for commodifying childbirth in slave narratives. For Moses Grandy's sister, childbirth and child-rearing was inextricably linked to the market: "As soon as each of the children became big enough, it was sold away from her. After parting thus with five, she was sold along with the sixth." In describing states that tended to export enslaved people to the deep South not just as "exporting" states, but as "breeding states," formerly enslaved authors were able to position enslaved family separations not as collateral damage within an economy of slavery, but rather as an intentional market process.¹⁷

In referring to states that exported high numbers of enslaved people, Black narrators ascribed economic intentionality to cruelties of family separations, making depictions of family separation all the more harrowing. In depictions of these separations slavery's economy found its most solid emotional purchase. Family separation packed a particular emotional punch, making it particularly useful for writers and advocates who sought to prove the moral poverty of Southern enslavement. Narratives that emerged during the nineteenth century are replete with deeply affecting tales of family separations, each of which present, in heart-wrenching detail, the cruelty wrought by the South's economy of enslavement. Whether it was Charles Ball telling of how his mother wept when he was sold away as a child, Henry Bibb writing that he "could never look upon the dear child without being filled with sorrow and fearful apprehensions, of being separated by slaveholders," Francis Fedric's account of men and women "down on their knees begging to be purchased to go with their wives or husbands," or the countless other examples of family separation in slave narratives, the destruction of the enslaved family in the service of

¹⁷ Moses Grandy, *Narrative of the Life of Moses Grandy*, 53.

slavery's economy is central to the emotional heft of the slave narrative. The economy of slavery came to take on its own currency within the slave narrative. It became a mechanism for disproving the paternalist claims of the pro-slavery literati, and it carried a particular rhetorical value which made it useful to writers engaged in discursive resistance to enslavement.¹⁸

But accounts of the domestic slave trade not only focused on grief and cruelty, and enslaved people in slave narratives appeared as more than just the victims of the slave trade's cruelty. The pain of separation was, of course, central to each of the slave-trade vignettes that appeared in the memoirs of formerly-enslaved authors and narrators. Narratives also engaged with their subjects as individuals and as characters who were defined by more than their pain and their suffering, and this multi-dimensional portrayal helps us to further understand the role that the slave trade played in the abolitionist slave narrative. We can see this clearly in depictions of family separation. Although scenes of separation in slave narratives certainly depict the immense pain of family separation, they also depict the depth of love and affection felt among enslaved people. Take, for example, formerly-enslaved author and activist William Wells Brown's depiction of the parting of a wife and her husband, taken from an essay written in 1848:

As soon as they became aware that they were to be separated, they both burst into tears; and as she descended from the auction-stand, the husband, walking up to her and taking her by the hand, said, "Well, Fanny, we are to part forever, on earth; you have been a good wife to me. I did all that I could to get my new master to buy you; but he did not want you, and all I have to say is, I hope you will try to meet me in heaven. I shall try to meet you there."¹⁹

The pain at separation between Fanny and her husband is, in the re-telling of William Wells Brown, compounded by the depth of love felt between them. Fanny had been a good wife

¹⁸ Edward Baptist, *The Half Has Never Been Told*, 192-195; Manisha Sinha, *The Slave's Cause*, 421; Charles Ball, *Fifty Years in Chains*, 10; William Anderson, *Life and Narrative of William J. Anderson*, 6; Francis Fedric, *Slave Life in Virginia and Kentucky*, 14-15; Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, 119; Henry Bibb, *Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb*, 44.

¹⁹ William Wells Brown, *Narrative of William W. Brown*, 128.

to her husband, and her husband had done all he could to convince his new enslaver to purchase his wife, that is, he had tried to manipulate the market in order to preserve his family. And yet they were still parted, their love and their affection had been unable to move the hearts of their enslavers, and so they met their separation with agony and grief, but also with piety and faith. Depictions of a slave auctions such as that which appears in Brown's essay are tragic, of course. They are evidence of the cruelty of enslavement, of the hard hearts of enslavers, and of the immense emotional pain associated with the loss of loved ones through sale. But Fanny and her husband are not just rhetorical vehicles to be acted upon by cruel and greedy Whites; they were conscious actors themselves. From Brown's brief sketch we see that Fanny and her husband loved each other deeply, that they were faithful, that they were good partners to each other, and that they fought to remain together until the end. Their bond was broken in tragic circumstances, but Brown also used that tragedy to showcase their love, simultaneously proving the morality and affection of the enslaved while condemning the immorality and cruelty of their enslavers.

Depictions of enslaved marriage in slave narratives was an extension of enslaved patterns of marriage more generally: marriage was a source of pain and anxiety, but also of affection and emotional agency. Historian Tera Hunter, in her comprehensive analysis of black marriage in the Antebellum and Postbellum Eras, argued that enslaved people did their best to maintain bonds of romantic intimacy, even though the circumstances of enslavement made that extremely difficult: "Slaves believed that their marriages were as "true" as they could be, but they also knew they were encumbered by unique burdens that free couples did not face." Moreover, Hunter maintained, "slaves adopted a variety of responses and strategies for negotiating and reckoning

with these challenges,” and “developed and articulated gradations of intimacy that were quite complex.”²⁰

Enslaved people, then, worked hard to find ways to make marriage and relationships work for them, despite the dramatic impact that the slave trade had on marriage patterns, and the fact that enslavers tried to use enslaved marriage as evidence of paternalist benevolence. Enslaved peoples’ complex relationship with marriage translated to the written word, and black authors worked to use slave marriages and familial affection as a means to prove the importance of romantic love and the family to enslaved people, even as they presented anecdotes of the forcible separation and ever-present anxiety of the slave trade. Francis Fedric, in his narrative, articulated this dual expression of love and pain clearly: “The social affections are so strong, that no hard usage can weaken them. Indeed, brutality, on the part of the master, seems to make the slave cling closer and closer; thus intensifying his sufferings, when the ‘trader’ comes to tear him away. William Grimes, in his 1855 narrative, lamented the immense pain of “the last look of a woman whom you know loves you” upon forced separation, but also rejoiced in “the emotions of pleasure with which her presence filled my bosom.”²¹

In slave narratives, affection, love, and loss were presented together, and formed an inseparable triptych. In proving the depth and intimacy of enslaved love and affection, formerly enslaved authors were able to use the tragedy of separation to position enslaved people as the custodians of romantic and familial morality, while white enslavers were ignorant or dismissive

²⁰ Tera Hunter, *Bound in Wedlock: Slave and Free Black Marriage in the Nineteenth Century*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2017), 29, 31.

²¹ For impact of slave trade on marriage see: Hunter, *Bound in Wedlock*, 25-27; Tadman, *Speculators and Slaves*, 176-178; For marriage as evidence of paternalist benevolence, see: Hunter, *Bound in Wedlock*, 30; Thomas Anderson, *Interesting Account of Thomas Anderson*, 6; Francis Fedric, *Slave Life in Virginia and Kentucky*, 25, 37; William Grimes. 1855, *Life of William Grimes, The Runaway Slave, Brought Down to the Present Time*, Documenting the American South. University Library, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. 2000. <https://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/grimes55/grimes55.html>, 15; Moses Grandy, *Narrative of the Life of Moses Grandy*, 16.

of the importance of bonds of marriage and family. Marriage and family separation in the slave narrative was a two-sided coin: it was demonstrative of the cruelty of enslavement and of enslavers, but it was also proof-positive of the morality and love of the enslaved.

In summation, we see that formerly-enslaved writers often used the domestic slave trade not just as a way to prove the cruelty of enslavement, but as a way to draw a distinct moral contrast between enslaved people and their White enslavers. In slave-auction anecdotes, love, affection, and faith were the domain of the enslaved, which was placed in direct conversation with the religious hypocrisy and immense cruelty of enslavers. This point is critical. We must understand that the domestic slave trade in slave narratives was not just an instrument through which the vile nature of enslavement could be proven, it was a hinge on which formerly-enslaved narrators could present an image of black morality in *direct relation* to white immorality, thus elevating enslaved characters in these narratives far beyond a mere victim-status.

The Domestic Slave Trade and White Sexuality

Family separations at market demonstrated both black fidelity and white apathy toward Black families, but the domestic slave trade also became a venue for formerly-enslaved narrators to showcase the sexual violence and impropriety of white enslavers. Formerly enslaved authors and narrators made clear reference to the sexual perversions of White enslavers, as well as the demeaning, violent, and exploitative practices endemic to both the auction block and the transport coffle. Although the slave trade was certainly not the only lens through which black authors condemned the exploitative sexuality of white enslavers, it offered specific scenes of impropriety and violence, and was used as a means to further subvert the narrative of white Southern nobility. In writing about the sexual violence endemic to the transport of enslaved people, in showcasing the sexually exploitative nature of the slave market, and in showing that

white enslavers would stoop so low as to sell their own biracial children, formerly-enslaved authors and narrators further dichotomized the relationship between white and black morality, using slavery's economy, sexuality, and the body to prove the vast chasm between the moral understanding of enslaved and enslaver.

The slave trade's impact on Southern family values was a useful tool for abolitionists interested in attacking white enslavers and, by extension, the institution of enslavement itself. As Stephen Deyle wrote, abolitionist writers "filled their publications with tales of children torn from their mothers and husbands from their wives, women sold for prostitution, forced breeding farms, and the depravity of licentious planters and their sons." Their rhetoric was particularly aimed at influencing white northern women to support abolitionism, and it was hoped that a focus on sexual morality and the family would induce support for anti-slavery as a means of protecting the domestic sphere. Critical to this effort was the idea that the domestic slave trade subverted White families as well as enslaved families, and many formerly enslaved narrators used the domestic slave trade as a means to demonstrate the sexual predation and callous disregard for family that slavery instilled in White enslavers.²²

Depictions of the domestic slave trade in nineteenth-century slave narratives often focused on the sexual avarice of enslavers and slave traders, and sometimes even explicitly mentioned how white enslavers subverted the sexual virtue of enslaved people. Frederick Douglass wrote of how "the pious advocate of purity" sold enslaved women for prostitution, William Wells Brown recounted how a slave trader attempted to coerce an enslaved woman into sex, while William Anderson described the birth of illegitimate children (the product of White enslavers' rape of enslaved women) as "one of the greatest curses about slavery." Some

²² Deyle, *Carry Me Back*, 188-191.

enslavers, such as the man who sold “his own daughter, a quadroon, to a gentlemen of New Orleans for 1,500 dollars” were so blinded by greed that they were willing to sell their own illegitimate enslaved children. The degree to which the domestic slave trade corrupted white enslavers was an important part of the slave narrative because it was a yet another avenue through which the morality of the enslaved and the immorality of the enslaver could be put in direct conversation. In the slave narrative, the domestic slave trade represented an institution that destroyed white morality to the point that enslavers were willing to destroy their own families and values, as well as those of their enslaved property.²³

That the predatory and cruel actions of enslavers subverted black morality or sexual virtue is, itself, a crucial part of the dual illustration of White immorality and Black virtue. Indeed, some formerly-enslaved authors were explicit with their discussion of enslaved peoples’ sexual virtue, and of how it was subverted and attacked during the slave trade. Henry Bibb lamented “female virtue trampled under foot with impunity,” while Charles Ball wrote of how enslaved men and women “all slept promiscuously” during the forced migration South. In these depictions, the author themselves presented an image of virtue defiled not by one’s own action, but by the moral bankruptcy of the enslaver. By associating the slave trade with the sexual violation of enslaved people, formerly-enslaved authors were able to show how white enslavers’ predation and greed subverted the sexual and familial morality of enslaved people. Slave narratives used the trade as means to explicitly prove the sexual immorality of enslavers, but also to implicitly and explicitly demonstrate the virtue of enslaved people, further using the domestic slave trade as a mechanism of literary contrast.

²³ Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Frederick Douglass* 119-120; William Wells Brown, *Narrative of William W. Brown*, 45-46; William Anderson, *Life and Narrative of William J. Anderson*, 12; Fedric, *Slave Life in Virginia and Kentucky*, 44-45; see also, John Andrew Jackson, *The Experience of a Slave in South Carolina*. 29.

Conclusion

Religion, sexuality, and the family were central to slave narratives' treatment of the domestic slave trade, in large part because it was an effective literary tool to showcase the immense cruelty of American enslavement. As even a cursory glance at a formerly-enslaved author's memoir demonstrates, black authors during the Antebellum and immediately Postbellum eras used the slave trade as the basis for their full-throated condemnation of enslavers. This principle has long been important to the study of abolitionism and discursive resistance during the nineteenth-century, and there is a litany of thoughtful and important scholarship that explores the importance of the slave trade to abolitionists' efforts to condemn enslavement and enslavers. But neither the condemnation of enslavers, nor the literary invocation of slavery's immense cruelty, were the sole purpose of the domestic slave trade as a rhetorical feature in the nineteenth-century slave narrative.²⁴

Alongside the accusations of religious hypocrisy that formerly enslaved narrators aimed at their former enslavers, the same authors worked hard to prove the depths of their own faith, and the faith of their enslaved fellows. Because of this, the domestic slave trade became not just a means of attacking white enslavers, but of comparing the religious ignorance of the enslaver to the faith and spiritual value of the enslaved. Likewise, the domestic slave trade was critical to black authors' efforts to prove how cruel the domestic slave trade could be, particularly in the context of the enslaved family. Formerly-enslaved memoirists included heartbreaking tales of loss, and they were explicitly clear about the deep impact that the domestic slave trade had on the formation and survival of enslaved families. But the pain of separation and the cruelty of the trade was not the only way enslaved families appeared in the context of the slavery's economy.

²⁴ Deyle, *Carry Me Back*, 188; Sinha, *The Slave's Cause*, 421; Tadman, *Speculators and Slaves*, 3;

In the pain of separation, formerly enslaved authors proved the importance of bonds of love, family, and fidelity to the enslaved family. In showing how the slave trade impacted family formation, authors reinforced their own determination “to love and to win a true heart in return,” despite the threat of separation. The relationship between the enslaved family and the domestic slave trade as it appears in the nineteenth-century slave narrative is proof of the monstrous horror of enslavement and of each and every enslaver whose conscious action perpetuated cycles of cruelty. That relationship was not just used to condemn the enslaver, it was also used to celebrate the enslaved. The domestic slave trade, in the hands of formerly-enslaved authors, was used as a means to prove that, despite the cruelty and pain and violence of enslavement, enslaved people endured, loved, and resisted.²⁵

The same is true of black authors’ treatment of the slave trade and white sexual predation. The domestic slave trade offered a means by which formerly enslaved narrators could juxtapose enslaved and enslaver morality, using the virtue of the enslaved to condemn the immorality of the enslaver, and vice versa. While enslaved people lamented the loss of loved ones at the auction block, enslavers sold their own children. While enslaved people fought to remain with loved ones, enslavers committed acts of sexual violence against enslaved people, while their greed overshadowed any pretensions of Christian gentility. In this way, the domestic slave trade served as a crucial point of connection between enslaved people and their enslavers. It was a moral crucible in which the immorality of white enslavers was defined against the morality and resistant struggles of enslaved people.

To focus on how the domestic slave trade was an instrument of literary resistance against structures of enslavement is important and laudable work, but it is only half of the story. Black

²⁵ Thomas Jones, *Experience and Personal Narrative of Uncle Tom Jones*, 23.

authors used slavery's economy to define enslavers' cruelty, of course, but they also used it as a means to define enslaved people themselves. The latter usage, however, did not focus solely on cruelty, and it did not focus on white enslavers. Instead, it showed how formerly-enslaved authors treated their enslaved subjects not as receptacles of white cruelty, but as individuals who loved in spite of their bondage, who held tight to their values in spite of the cruelty which raged around them, and whose resistance shone as a moral beacon, one made all the brighter by the moral bankruptcy of the white enslavers which surrounded it.

In the final chapter, we will push these themes further, and we will examine triumph, resistance, and redemption as it appears in the nineteenth century slave narratives. Here we have explored how the cruelty of the slave trade served as evidence of enslaved peoples' moral fortitude and of their enslavers' moral poverty, but we will now shift our focus towards different types of tales which appeared in slave narratives. We will swap tales of cruelty for those of resistance, we will swap tales of commodification for those of redemption, and we will swap tales of separation for those of reunification. Ultimately, we will look at the resistant discourse which surrounded the slave trade not as a way for enslaved and formerly-enslaved people to define their enslavers, but as a way that they defined themselves.

Chapter Three: The One Family: Scenes of Triumph Over the Slave Trade

In his introduction to Henry Bibb's 1849 memoir, White minister Lucius C. Matlack described the formerly enslaved man's testimony as that which "now exhibit[s] slavery in such revolting aspects, as to secure the execrations of all good men, and become a monument more enduring than marble, in testimony strong as sacred writ against it." For Matlack, Henry Bibb's narrative bore witness to the intense cruelty of bondage and stood as part of a collective literary action which would, ultimately "rush with wasting violence over the ill-gotten heritage of the oppressor." The minister laid out in stark terms the intentionality of nineteenth-century slave narratives, and he made clear the degree to which formerly enslaved authors were engaged in a concerted, resistant effort against slavery, an effort predicated on the true examination and portrayal of enslavers' cruelties.¹

Matlack's introduction was far from anomalous, and the narratives of formerly enslaved authors from throughout the Antebellum and Postbellum Periods were dotted with prefaces, written either by the narrator or a White sponsor, that made clear the anti-slavery intent of the piece. Francis Fedric's narrative, written during the Civil War, for instance, encouraged its audience "to pray God, in His own good time, and best way, to smite off every fetter and set the captives free." Likewise, Moses Grandy's memoir was engaged in "increasing the zeal of those who are associated from the purpose of 'breaking every yoke, and setting the oppressed free.'" Interestingly, these literary efforts did not end with emancipation, and Postbellum narratives like Peter Randolph's (published in 1893) and Louis Hughes's (published in 1897) well understood

¹ Henry Bibb. 1849. *Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb, An American Slave*. Documenting the American South. University Library. The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. 2000. <https://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/bibb/bibb.html>, I; Matlack, Lucius C. 1845. *Narrative of the Anti-Slavery Experience of a Minister in the Methodist E. Church*. The Anti-Slavery Collection from Oberlin College. 2014. <https://archive.org/details/ASPC0001906600>.

the importance of slavery's memory as an ideological battleground in the post-war United States. "Slavery, we say, is dead; but the rising generations will ask: What was it?" asked Randolph in his introduction. For his part, Louis Hughes said that he put forth his memoir in order to "add something of accurate information regarding the character and influence of an institution which for two hundred years dominated the country."²

The prefaces to Bibb's, Randolph's, Hughes's, Grandy's, and Fedric's memoirs present a cross section of intentionality within the slave narrative genre, and they help to place Black writers within a network of literary resisters who played an important role in both resisting slavery while it existed and contesting the institution's memories following the Civil War. The latter purpose is particularly fascinating, as the memory of enslavement continues to be contested in America. In this context, the resistant narratives of people like Peter Randolph and Francis Fedric are as relevant now as they were in 1893 and 1863, respectively. Such persistence of memory places the slave narrative in an interesting historic space, for the slave narrative stands not just as an act of resistance that we may study as historians, but as an act of resistance that we may *experience* as readers.³

And so, it is critical to analyze each aspect of the slave narrative as an example of resistance. We have already engaged with the slave narrative as an extension of everyday

²Francis Fedric. 1863. *Slave Life in Virginia and Kentucky: Or, Fifty Years of Slavery in the Southern States of America*. Documenting the American South. University Library, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1999. <https://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/fedric/fedric.html>, v; Grandy, Moses. 1843. *Narrative of the Life of Moses Grandy: Late a Slave in the United States of America*. Documenting the American South. University Library, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. 1996. <https://docsouth.unc.edu/fpn/grandy/grandy.html>, vi; Peter Randolph. 1893. *From Slave Cabin to the Pulpit. The Autobiography of Rev. Peter Randolph: The Southern Question Illustrated and Sketches of Slave Life*. Documenting the American South. University Library, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. 2000. <https://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/randolph/randolph.html>, 6; Louis Hughes. 1896. *Thirty Years a Slave*. Documenting the American South. University Library, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. 1997. <https://docsouth.unc.edu/fpn/hughes/hughes.html>, 3.

³ For the slave narrative as part of a larger literary network of anti-slavery, see: Manisha Sinha, *The Slave's Cause: A History of Abolition*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016), 423-425.

resistance strategies, and we have explored how formerly enslaved authors used the domestic slave trade to juxtapose White cruelty and immorality against the tragic morality of enslaved people. But faithful depictions of tragedy, “the wrongs that are still committed upon the slaves and the free coloured people of America,” as William Wells Brown put it, were not the only avenue of literary resistance in the slave narrative. Although it is, of course, imperative that we neither overlook the cruelty of White enslavers nor minimize the suffering of those enslaved, we must also examine the instances of triumph and success that also feature in the slave narrative canon. As Lucius Matlack reminds us, the story of the American slave is not just one of tragedy and suffering, but also of “a triumphant vindication of the slave’s manhood and mental dignity.” Indeed, the prefaces of slave narratives often addressed the moral triumph of their authors, in addition to the moral poverty of southern enslavers.⁴

Black abolitionist James M’Cune, for instance, lauded Frederick Douglass as “one of the most efficient advocates of the slave population, now before the public,” while the White sponsor George Thompson, in his preface to Moses Grandy’s memoir, extolled Grandy’s “benevolence, affection, kindness of heart, and elasticity of spirit.” These introductions made it clear that the authors, sponsors, and publishers of slave narratives recognized that slave narratives were not just a mechanism for proving the atrocities of enslavers, but for proving the resilience of enslaved people. In examining Black authors’ depictions of triumph and examples of the moral uprightness of enslaved people, and in experiencing these narratives as readers, we can understand how triumph and redemption factored in to the literary resistance against

⁴ William Wells Brown. 1849. *Narrative of William W. Brown, and American Slave*. Documenting the American South. University Library, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. 1996. <https://docsouth.unc.edu/fpn/brownw/brown.html>, iii, iv; Henry Bibb, *Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb*, i.

enslavement, which, in turn, offers us a means to examine and experience resistance as a mechanism of defining and celebrating a community of resisters.⁵

The function of slave narratives-as-resistance has not been lost on contemporary scholars, and writers like Sarah Roth and Ruth Banes have examined how formerly enslaved authors presented morality, masculinity, and the family in ways which both condemned enslavers and celebrated the enslaved. Banes argued that “slave narrators were committed to the betterment of their community and the advancement of their race. Each was conscious that his audience could interpret his autobiography as representative of black capacities.” Sarah Roth put forth that formerly enslaved authors used depictions of resistance as a means to define Black communities: “By emphasizing in their narratives a noble defiance of Southern slaveholders, slave authors boldly contested powerful stereotypes about Black men, just as they had contested the power of their masters by running away and otherwise resisting the degradations of slavery.” That scholars such as Banes and Roth have emphasized the importance of the slave narrative to defining and contesting White attitudes not just toward enslavers, but toward enslaved people, is a reminder of the importance of examining how formerly enslaved authors chose to depict themselves and their enslaved comrades, particularly for a largely White audience.⁶

Just as the domestic slave trade served as a mechanism to link everyday resistance to literary resistance and as a means to link White immorality to the subversion of Black morality, slavery’s economy offered formerly enslaved narrators a means to showcase Black triumph, and even offered way for self-liberated people to explicitly express their own redemption through a

⁵ Frederick Douglass. 1845. *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave*, Documenting the American South. University Library, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. 1999.

<https://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/douglass/douglass.html>, vi; Moses Grandy, *Narrative of the Life of Moses Grandy*, iv.

⁶ Ruth Banes, “Antebellum Slave Narratives as Social History: Self and Community in the Struggle Against Slavery,” in *Journal of American Culture* 5, no. 2 (Summer 1982): 62-70, 65; Sarah N. Roth, “‘How a Slave was Made a Man:’ Negotiating Black Violence and Masculinity in Antebellum Slave Narratives,” *Slavery and Abolition*, 28:2, 255-275, 261.

value-based vocabulary. As scholars like Sarah Roth have shown, contestations of White perceptions of Black people were important to the authors of slave narratives, and I argue that the domestic slave trade provided a powerful tool for these contestations. A focus on the slave trade allowed formerly enslaved authors to show how escape and negotiation were used to maintain the family in the face of sale, and how triumph over or beyond the slave trade allowed for the reunification of loved ones, and it offered a space for authors to demonstrate a literal redemption of human value. Taken together, the domestic slave trade formed an important part of the slave narrative's discourse of triumph, which itself was central to the definition of enslaved people not just as subjects of cruelty, but as a defined community of successful resisters.

Negotiation, Liberation, and the Preservation of the Family

The most obvious form of triumph over enslavement and the slave trade was self-liberation. Every author who testified about their enslavement prior to 1865 was no longer enslaved, meaning that many slave narratives referenced self-liberation, often-featuring detailed accounts of the author's flight from slavery. Many instances of self-liberation relied on a knowledge of the domestic slave trade in order to facilitate escape. Henry Bibb, for instance, made his first bid for freedom under the guise of hiring himself out, while William Wells Brown cited his sale to a riverboat owner as the impetus for his escape from bondage. Brown, in particular, lied to his new owner about his unwillingness to escape, in order to assuage his new enslaver's "fears as to the propriety of taking me near a free state," an act that demonstrated not just his ability to manipulate not just the processes of enslavement, but enslavers themselves.⁷

⁷ Henry Bibb, *Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb*, 46-47; William Wells Brown, *Narrative of William W. Brown*, 89.

Many testimonies also positioned self-liberation as the ultimate countermeasure to the threat of sale. In narratives taken from fugitive slaves in Canada, a litany of interviewees cited the threat of impending sale as the catalyst behind decisions to self-liberate. James Sumler “thought my chance [to be sold south] would come next, so I put out.” Henry Morehead ran away “because they were about selling my wife and children to the South,” while Alexander Hamilton freed himself because “I knew it might be so [that I would be sold], and I thought I would make hay while the sun shone. I left St. Louis in ’34.” The testimonies of Sumler, Morehead, and Hamilton each describe liberation in the clear context of the domestic slave trade, allowing them to present their own escape as an action within slavery’s economy. That liberation was often presented in the context of slavery’s economy allowed the slave trade to stand as a representation of enslaved people’s resistant ability, and it demonstrated the effectiveness of the subversion of structures of enslavement. When they wrote of how enslaved people used the wrinkles of the Southern economy as a means to escape, or of how they escaped as a response to impending sale, Black authors and interviewees were demonstrating Black triumph over the system. In this way, slavery’s economy stood as a rhetorical obstacle to be overcome, and as a literary device which demonstrated the triumphant success of certain actors.⁸

Depictions of liberation demonstrated the role that resistance played in the nineteenth-century slave narratives, but that type of resistance took on a variety of forms. Crucially, depictions of economic negotiation in slave narratives helped formerly enslaved authors to use slavery’s economy as a means of showcasing the resistant efforts of enslaved people. Often, this negotiation came as part of an effort to preserve familial integrity, with enslaved people seeking

⁸ “James Sumler,” “Henry Morehead,” “Alexander Hamilton,” in Benjamin Drew. 1856. *A North Side View of Slavery: or the Narratives of Fugitive Slaves in Canada*. Documenting the American South. University Library, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. 2000. <https://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/drew/drew.html#p19>, 98, 181, 178.

to protect themselves and their loved ones from violence or separation. Moses Grandy's mother, for example, would periodically escape into the woods with her children "to prevent master from selling us." She would then return, with her children, once her enslaver "would send word to her to come in, promising, he would not sell us." Tragically, Moses Grandy's mother was not able to hold out forever, and her enslaver eventually separated her from her children. But her use of resistant strategies and her own form of negotiation constituted a concerted and well-planned effort to subvert slavery's economy in order to preserve her family and, although her efforts eventually fell short, Moses's mother successfully kept her family together, at least for a time.⁹

Different types of negotiation appear at various points in slave narratives, and their appearance in the written testimonies speaks to place of the domestic slave trade in the literary depiction of enslaved resistance. Henry Bibb, for example, tried to appear more valuable when he was "satisfied with his estimation of a potential buyer," as historian Walter Johnson found. Likewise, Alexander Hamilton, testifying in Benjamin Drew's anti-slavery interview collection, told the tale of a man who "cut off the fingers of his left hand with an axe, to prevent his being sold South." Brutal as the man's methods may have been, the fact that he was able to assume any form of agency within the market, and the fact that this was relayed to Alexander Hamilton's abolitionist interviewer, demonstrate how the slave trade contextualized vignettes of resistance on the pages of the slave narrative or testimony. Henry Bibb was able to induce a buyer to purchase his family all together, but Bibb's success was somewhat anomalous within the slave narrative genre. Writers like Charles Ball described a mother's attempts to convince her enslaver to "not take me from my child." William Brown, likewise, offered an anecdote of a husband negotiating with the man to whom he had just been sold: "'Master, if you will only buy Fanny

⁹ Moses Grandy, *Narrative of the Life of Moses Grandy*, 8.

[the man's wife], I know you will get the worth of your money. She is a good cook, a good washer, and her last mistress liked her very much.” The man in Brown's tale was well-versed enough in the commodity language of the market to cite specific points of value, evidence that slavery's economy was deeply woven into the fabric of resistant negotiation.¹⁰

Sadly, however, Brown's man and wife were separated, as their efforts at negotiation and preservation fell upon deaf ears. Importantly, efforts at negotiation had decidedly mixed results. The triumph of someone like Henry Bibb was tempered by the failed negotiations and protestations of enslaved people like Charles Ball's mother, and the juxtaposition of successful and failed negotiation tactics, embodied by the trials of Moses Grandy's mother, speaks to the intimacy with which triumph and tragedy were linked when it came to enslaved resistance. Scholars like Robert Olwell have cited dialectical relationships between enslaved resistance and White, coercive power as essential to the formation of structures of colonial enslavement, a pattern which is useful for examining scenes of resistance within the slave narrative genre. Resistant negotiation, as it appears on the pages of nineteenth-century slave narratives, reveals a similar process, in which enslaved people attempted to subvert or manipulate the terms of slavery's economy. Although these attempts were often unsuccessful, they also indicate the scale of the triumph when such manipulations were successful. Tales of negotiation, flight, and resistance show how formerly enslaved authors positioned resistant victory in the direct context of slavery's cruelty. The successes of someone like Henry Bibb, or the initial preservation of Moses Grandy's family thanks to his mother's ingenuity and bravery, are juxtaposed within the

¹⁰ Walter Johnson, *Soul By Soul: Life Inside the Antebellum Slave Market*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 177; “Alexander Hamilton,” in Benjamin Drew, *A North Side View of Slavery*, 178; Charles Ball, 1859. *Fifty Years in Chains, or, The Life of an American Slave*. Documenting the American South. University Library, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1997. <https://docsouth.unc.edu/fpn/ball/ball.html>, 11; William Wells Brown, *Narrative of William W. Brown*, 127.

slave narrative such that they effectively demonstrate the stakes of resistance: they show the importance of victory, and they prove the tragedy of defeat.¹¹

Reunification as Triumph over Separation

Despite efforts at negotiation and manipulation which appeared in slave narratives, the separation of enslaved couples and families remained a central aspect of many slave memoirs. Black authors and narrators used tragic accounts of family separation, and the cruelty of the auction block, to condemn White enslavers and to underscore the morality and faith of enslaved people. But separation also found its inverse in nineteenth century slave narratives, particularly those written after the end of the American Civil War. There are some slave narratives that recounted scenes of family reunification, or of family formation after liberation, forging direct links between self-liberation, emancipation, and the triumph of Black families.

John Quincy Adams, in his 1867 memoir, lamented the cruelty of sale throughout his narrative, but also celebrated that God “made the slave free. He brought the husband and wife together that had been parted for years, the sister and brother, and the mother and children that had not been seen nor heard from for twenty and twenty-five years.” Adams even included a hymn in his text entitled “The One Family,” in which he rejoiced at the thought of the reunited family. John Quincy Adams’ memoir, published in 1867, explicitly linked this sort of joyous familial unity to liberation from enslavement: “We can sing those hymns better now than we could in those days.”¹²

¹¹ Robert Olwell, *Masters, Slaves, and Subjects: The Culture of Power in the South Carolina Low Country, 1740-1790*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), 99-100.

¹² John Quincy Adams, 1872, *Narrative of the Life of John Quincy Adams, When in Slavery and Now as Freeman*. Documenting the American South. University Library, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. 1999. <https://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/adams/adams.html>, 17, 19.

Tom Jones, in the 1862 version of his memoir, also offered a clear account of his reunification with his family, upon his self-liberation from bondage:

The meeting with my wife and children I cannot describe. It was a moment of joy too deep and holy for any attempt to paint it. Husbands who love as I have loved, and fathers with hearts of fond, devoted affection, may imagine the scene and my feelings, as my dear wife lay sobbing in her joy in my arms, and my three little babes were clinging to my knees, crying, "Pa has come: Pa has come."¹³

Jones's depiction of his reunification came directly after that of his own escape, and so was clearly linked to resistance and liberation. Much like John Quincy Adams' depiction of the family after emancipation, Tom Jones's detailed and emotional recounting of his reunification with his family positioned his own liberation as the catalyst for his familial triumph. In freedom, Jones found reunification, which he presented with the same rhetorical flourish and pathos as the heartbreaking scenes of separation that appeared across nineteenth-century narratives. Jones and Adams portrayed reunification as the inversion of separation, which, in turn, allowed them to concretely demonstrate how emancipation served as the inversion of the oppression of enslavement.

This inversion was developed further by authors who described marriage and family formation among self-liberated or emancipated persons. Henry Bibb, presenting a contrast to the inability of enslaved people to find marital security, wrote that, upon attaining their freedom, many couples "as soon as they got free from slavery they go before some anti-slavery clergyman, and have the solemn ceremony of marriage performed according to the laws of the country." Likewise, Louis Hughes wrote that many enslaved people "Desired freedom, thinking they could then reclaim a wife, or husband, or children," while formerly-enslaved pastor Peter Randolph

¹³ Thomas H. Jones. 1862. *The Experience of Thomas H. Jones, Who Was a Slave for Forty-Three Years*. Documenting the American South. University Library, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. 1995. <https://docsouth.unc.edu/fpn/jones/jones.html>, 47.

wrote that, after the end of the Civil War, “a large number [of emancipated couples] came to me to be married, seven and eight couples a night.”¹⁴

The anecdotes of Bibb, Hughes, and Randolph presented a new side of enslaved marriage, one which should not be obscured by the immense horror of the slave trade. As Randolph wrote, the trade meant that families “were often separated and sold into different parts of the South, never to see each other again.” And yet, in liberation, the horrors of separation via sale could be, at least for the fortunate, overcome. Separated loved ones sometimes “found their former companions and married again,” despite “expecting never to see them again.” People like Tom Jones reunited with their families, while John Quincy Adams could sing songs of family in fuller voice, confident that freedom could overcome the cruelty of sale. Again, the triumph of Black families in liberation showed how formerly enslaved narrators employed the domestic slave trade, that horrible instrument of familial destruction for those of bondage, as a rhetorical tool to demonstrate the triumphant reclamation of the Black family in freedom. Through this instrument, the authors of slave narratives condemned enslavement, extolled freedom, and proved the moral strength and triumphant courage of Black Americans.¹⁵

Direct links drawn between the triumphs of Black families and the importance of liberation served as rhetorical inversions of the plight of the enslaved family. This is evident in a comparison of the language that formerly enslaved authors used when describing both family separation and family reunification in freedom. Take for example, the parallels between Thomas

¹⁴ Henry Bibb, *Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb*, 39; Louis Hughes, *Thirty Years a Slave*, 79; Peter Randolph, *From Slave Cabin to the Pulpit*, 90; Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, 110.

¹⁵ Peter Randolph, *From Slave Cabin to the Pulpit*, 89, 90; Thomas Jones (1862), *The Experience of Thomas H. Jones*, 47; John Quincy Adams, *Narrative of the Life of John Quincy Adams*, 17-19.

Jones's account of his separation from his mother when he was a boy, and Jones's depiction of his own reunification with his wife and children.

Thomas Jones' separation from his mother, from the 1862 version of his memoir:

“I can't save you, Tommy; master has sold you, you must go.” She threw her arms around me, and while the hot tears fell on my face, she strained me to her heart. There she held me, sobbing and mourning.¹⁶

Jones's depiction of his own mother, clinging to him and crying, found an almost direct parallel in the later scene in which, upon escaping enslavement, Jones reunited with his own children: “My three little babes were clinging to my knees, crying, “Pa has come: Pa has come.” The language of narrators like Tom Jones shows how the domestic slave trade's cruelty could serve as a rhetorical point of reference for scenes of triumphant resistance or liberation, and offers further explanation as to the role of the trade in the anti-slavery narratives of the nineteenth century. The destruction of families via sale was an essential aspect of slave narratives, in large part because it proved the cruelty of enslavers and the immense sufferings of the enslaved. But it also demonstrated the gravity of individual triumphs over that cruelty, and it helped formerly enslaved authors to prove the moral fortitude and immense determination of enslaved people to protect themselves and their families. Because the cruelty of the slave trade found a counterpoint in triumphant anecdotes of liberation, family unification, and family formation in freedom, Black authors were able to turn the domestic slave trade into a mechanism to further define and celebrate enslaved and self-liberated people.¹⁷

¹⁶ Thomas Jones (1862), *The Experience of Thomas H. Jones*, 8.

¹⁷ Thomas Jones (1862), *The Experience of Thomas H. Jones*, 47.

Commodification, Reclamation, and Redemption of Value

The domestic slave trade appeared in nineteenth-century slave narratives as evidence of resistance patterns, as a condemnation of enslavers and southern society, as proof of the immense hardships endured by enslaved people, and as the measure against which the triumphant glory of liberation and emancipation could be compared. But slavery's economy offered formerly enslaved narrators one last tool: Black authors, who were experts in the economy of enslavement, reclaimed the commodity language of the market and used it as a literal expression of a liberated person's reclaimed value. Just as with depictions of the enslaved family, or of sale and morality, however, authors' expertise was not just employed to resist the actions and attacks of enslavers. Formerly enslaved narrators used their deep knowledge of the commodity system of enslavement, and of the commodity value of their own bodies, as a rhetorical mechanism to represent their own liberation, thereby turning a process of enslavement, intended to dehumanize and commodify, into a language of courage, reclamation, and redemption.

The ways that formerly enslaved authors wrote about enslaved peoples' commodity values offer evidence of the ways that the commodity economy of southern enslavement allowed for a resistant language of redemption. Historian Daina Ramey Berry, in her *The Price for Their Pound of Flesh*, reminded that enslaved people "knew they were chattel" by the time of their adolescence, and that they developed a conception of their own "soul value against the backdrop of market and appraised values." Berry's argument regarding enslaved peoples' self-perception within the market is borne out in the pages of nineteenth-century memoirs, as Black authors often specifically described enslaved peoples' awareness of the commodification practices of the market. I have already discussed, for example, William Wells Brown's anecdote of an enslaved man attempting to prove his wife's value "I know you will get the worth of your money," but

the man's negotiation tactics made it clear that he was well aware of the qualities attached to enslaved peoples' market values, and of how enslavers went about commodifying enslaved individuals.¹⁸

The same sort of understanding appeared in other nineteenth-century narratives. Louis Hughes, for instance, wrote of how slave traders aggressively questioned enslaved people so as to appraise value, demonstrating his own clear awareness of the ways in which enslaved people were valued. Likewise, Charles Ball recognized that his enslaver "regarded [his enslaved people] only as objects of traffic and the materials of his commerce," and Peter Randolph even pointed to an auctioneer's boast of a slave's piety as evidence that personal traits like honesty and faith had a market value. Such awareness allowed enslaved people to manipulate sales and to negotiate with enslavers, but enslaved peoples' economic expertise allowed formerly enslaved authors another avenue of resistance: by conveying the specific methods of the South's commodification of human traits, Black narrators foregrounded representations of personal redemptions, personal redemptions which used economic language as proof of liberation.¹⁹

The clearest and simplest example of this redemptive inversion of market language comes in the rhetoric around escape. Formerly enslaved authors and activists sometimes framed tales of their own self-liberation as an admission of "theft" from their erstwhile enslaver. Frederick Douglass famously declared to an English crowd in 1846 that "I am now in the eyes of American law considered a thief and a robber," exclaimed Douglass, "since I have not only stolen a little knowledge of literature, but have stolen my own body also." John Quincy Adams, meanwhile, wrote in his 1867 autobiography that "In 1862 I stole John Q. Adams from Mr.

¹⁸ Daina Ramey Berry, *The Price for Their Pound of Flesh: The Value of the Enslaved, from Womb to Grave, in the Building of a Nation*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 2017), 90; William Wells Brown, *Narrative of William W. Brown*, 127.

¹⁹ Louis Hughes, *Thirty Years a Slave*, 7,8; Charles Ball, *Fifty Years in Chains*, 60; Peter Randolph, *From Slave Cabin to the Pulpit*, 187.

George F. Colomese, of Winchester, Va. They valued me at \$2,000. At that rate I stole \$2,000.”

In both instances, Douglass and Adams used the language of the market as a rhetorical tool to not only display the hypocrisy of the South’s system of human commodification, but to define and convey the importance of their own resistance and liberation.²⁰

That Frederick Douglass referred to his body and his knowledge of literature as if they were commodities, commodities which he re-took in his self-liberation, echoes the commodification practices that someone like Louis Hughes attributed to the slave market. While Hughes told tales of enslavers appraising trade-skills - “What can you do? ... Are you a good cook? seamstress? dairymaid?” - Douglass positioned his own literacy as a similar type of commodity to be reclaimed. He alluded to the skill-based economy of enslavement when discussing the reclamation of his own literacy, a comparison that was particularly striking when considered in light of the importance of literacy-as-resistance in nineteenth-century slave narratives. Authors like John Quincy Adams wrote that his brother “stole a march on that old fellow” when he tricked his master’s children in to teaching him to read, and Peter Randolph wrote that “I could do my own writing, unbeknown to the overseer, and carry my own pass.” Such passages positioned literacy, specifically the act of learning to read, as a subversive action, an act of initial resistance which foregrounded the large-scale resistance of their eventual narrative. In this sense, Frederick Douglass’s description of his literacy as a skill that he “stole” took the valuation language of the slave market and used it to commodify not a trait which held

²⁰ Frederick Douglass, “The Horrors of Slavery and England’s Duty to Free the Bondsman: An Address Delivered in Taunton, England, on September 1, 1846.” *Somerset County Gazette*, September 5, 1846. Blassingame, John (et al, eds.). *The Frederick Douglass Papers: Series One—Speeches, Debates, and Interviews*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979. Vol. I, p. 371; Monique Price, “Summary of *Narrative of the Life of John Quincy Adams, When in Slavery, and Now as a Freeman*” Documenting the American South, <https://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/adams/summary.html>; John Quincy Adams, *Narrative of the Life of John Quincy Adams*, 47.

value to the enslaver, but a trait which aided the resistance of the enslaved. Douglass employed this rhetorical strategy in a public speech, demonstrating how formerly enslaved activists, who were fluent in the language of the market, used such language as the basis for creating commodities of resistance, inverting and subverting enslavers' economies of oppression.²¹

The same can be said of John Quincy Adams' proclamation that he "stole \$2,000" from his enslaver when he escaped to Canada. Just as Frederick Douglass used the language of commodification to reclaim his own body and literacy, Adams employed the language of slavery's economy to express the literal redemption of his own body and being. In liberating himself, in stealing "John Q. Adams from Mr. George F. Calomese, of Winchester, VA," Adams took himself back from his enslaver, and the language of the market allowed Adams to express that redemption to his audience. By invoking their dollar values, advocates like Douglass and Adams were not only critiquing the absurd cruelty of human commodification, they were defining their own redemptions.²²

These types of triumphs can also be seen in formerly enslaved narrators' depictions not just of their own redemption, but of the redemption of family members. Many nineteenth-century slave narratives mentioned how enslaved or self-liberated people would "lay up money to purchase either their own freedom or that of some dear one." Noah Davis, for instance, raised money in Baltimore throughout the 1850s in order to purchase the freedom of each of his children. In recounting the redemption of one of his children, Davis specifically cites both his daughter's dollar value, and her risk of sale to the Deep South:²³

²¹ Louis Hughes, *Thirty Years a Slave*, 7; John Quincy Adams, *Narrative of the Life of John Quincy Adams*, 9,10; Peter Randolph, *From Slave Cabin to the Pulpit*, 11.

²² John Quincy Adams, *Narrative of the Life of John Quincy Adams*, 47.

²³ Peter Randolph, *From Slave Cabin to the Pulpit*, 191.

The first of these, who was about to be sold, and taken away South, was my oldest daughter; and it was with great difficulty and the help of friends that I raised eight hundred and fifty dollars, and got her on to Baltimore.²⁴

Noah Davis was not alone: Moses Grandy purchased his own freedom, then that of “his wife, and one or two of his children,” while Thomas Jones purchased his wife, “for \$350.” It is not surprising that the purchase of family members constituted an important part of many slave narratives, as it was an integral part of some enslaved peoples’ strategy to protect themselves and their family members. As historian Tera Hunter has argued, “Many slaves tried to purchase themselves and other family members to protect their interests,” and the authors of slave narratives were quite clear about their desires to protect or reunify their families through purchase. The way in which formerly enslaved authors went about recounting these redemptions is fascinating, as well, offering further insight into how the authors of slave narratives treated slavery’s economy in their work. In each of the examples cited above, the author was clear about the economic processes behind each act of economic redemption. Thomas Jones, for instance, saved up, through “unceasing toil” the necessary funds to purchase his wife from her enslaver. Harriet Jacobs wrote of her grandmother’s tireless work to save money to purchase her own children and, while the efforts were ultimately unsuccessful, Jacobs’s anecdote offers further evidence of the ways that formerly enslaved authors used the commodity economy of enslavement as a literary arena for the showcase of creative acts of resistance. Likewise, Moses Grandy “borrowed 160 dollars of a friend... to send the 450 dollars to Norfolk: thus, at length, I bought my son’s freedom.” Finally, Noah Davis raised funds from White abolitionists and

²⁴ Noah Davis. 1859. *A Narrative of the Life of Rev. Noah Davis, a Colored Man*. Documenting the American South. University Library, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. 1999. <https://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/davisn/davis.html>, 55.

church congregants to fund the purchase of his various family members, demonstrating his ability to navigate the curious financial waters of freedom and enslavement alike.²⁵

In many narratives, the hard work and ingenuity of the narrator foregrounded self-liberation and the purchase of family members, but narrators presented the sale itself as an act of financial redemption. Instances of redemption through purchase appear in a variety of narratives, because they stand as the obvious inverse of the other time when enslaved bodies changed hands for money: the sales of the slave market. Links between the two different types of purchase are clear, and formerly enslaved authors made them so. The fact that Noah Davis's oldest daughter "was about to be sold and taken away South," dictated the order in which Davis redeemed his children, while Thomas Jones was motivated to purchase his family's freedom because "I felt that I could not bear another cruel separation from my wife and children." Such acts of redemption showed how slavery's economy served as a double-sided tool for formerly enslaved authors. Just as enslaved people exploited their own dollar value to redeem themselves and their families, formerly enslaved authors used those acts of purchase to weave a narrative of redemption alongside their condemnations of enslavers' cruelty. Although purchases of enslaved people by Whites stood as vignettes of trauma and grief, Black authors presented familial purchases and redemptions as mechanisms of triumph over the cruelties of separation.²⁶

The final confluence of slavery's economy, redemption, and the slave narrative genre comes in the actual economics of the published narratives themselves. The slave narrative genre

²⁵ Moses Grandy, *Narrative of the Life of Moses Grandy*, iv, 46; Thomas Jones (1862), *The Experience of Thomas H. Jones*, 34; Tera Hunter, *Bound in Wedlock: Slave and Free Black Marriage in the Nineteenth Century*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2017), 93; Harriet Jacobs, 1861. *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*. Documenting the American South. University Library, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2003. <https://docsouth.unc.edu/fpn/jacobs/jacobs.html>, 13-14; Noah Davis, *A Narrative of the Life of Rev. Noah Davis*, 54-58.

²⁶ Noah Davis, *A Narrative of the Life of Rev. Noah Davis*, 55; Thomas Jones (1862), *The Experience of Thomas H. Jones*, 34.

offered self-liberated authors economic opportunity, which they sometimes used for the purpose of redeeming family members or winning their financial security in liberation. As historian Manisha Sinha has written, “Some narratives, like those of Moses Grandy and Lunsford Lane, both from North Carolina, were written to raise money to buy relatives from slavery.” Likewise, Charles, Lee, in his preface to Francis Fedric’s dictated memoir, hoped that the money made from Fedric’s autobiography would “help him a little to thus obtaining a livelihood, and hoping that, before long, by the aid of whatever funds he may realize, he will be able to re-establish himself in some kind of business.” Noah Davis also had fundraising plans for his narrative: he intended to raise enough money through book sales to allow him to “redeeming my word to my last children now in bondage,” as well as help his indebted church.²⁷

In each of these instances, the narrative itself was presented as an instrument not just of resistance, but of redemption. The narrative was a tool not just of exposing the cruelties of enslavers and of extolling the resistant triumphs of the enslaved, it was a redemptive instrument itself. The slave narrative, therefore, can be seen as part of a resistant, transgressive economy of resistance, one which used the language and commodification of slavery’s economy in order to create inverted patterns of resistance. Formerly enslaved authors like John Quincy Adams and Frederick Douglass used their enslavers’ financial valuations as a means to quantify and extol their own liberation, while authors like Noah Davis and Thomas Jones, used enslavers’ own systems of value to liberate themselves or their family members. Finally, narratives themselves served as a both explanations of this transgressive economy and commodities within it. In selling their narratives for money which was then used for redemptive purchases, formerly enslaved authors furthered the resistance strategies that they themselves wrote about, transmitting the

²⁷ Manisha Sinha, *The Slave’s Cause*, 423; Francis Fedric, *Slave Life in Virginia and Kentucky*, iv; Noah Davis, *A Narrative of the Life of Rev. Noah Davis*, 71, 72.

redemptive power of the transgressive economy to the page and, through publication and dissemination, to the world.

Conclusion

The narratives and testimonies that enslaved people put forth throughout the nineteenth century did not merely concern themselves with tales of suffering and with condemnations of cruelty. To be sure, scenes of immense anguish were central to formerly enslaved peoples' stories, just as anguish was often central to their enslavement. It is critical to acknowledge this, because an historic focus on instances of triumph and resistance must not obscure our understanding of slavery's brutality, or of the cruelty of the White America which supported and sustained structures of bondage and violence. But it is also necessary not to let scenes of pain prevent us from seeing and examining scenes of glory, of triumph, and of success. These scenes abounded in the nineteenth century slave narrative: instances of successful resistance or negotiation, self-liberation, family reunification and redemption can all be found on the pages of formerly enslaved authors' memoirs.

That these triumphs appeared alongside instances of vile brutality speaks to the way that Black authors were able to use the domestic slave trade to construct a vocabulary with which they could discuss and transmit the connections between White cruelty and Black triumph. Just as Black resistors used their knowledge of slavery's economy to escape, negotiate, and redeem, Black authors used their fluency in the language of slavery's economy to create a rhetorical hinge which allowed them to link White cruelty to an inverted, literary economy of Black triumph. The callous appraisals of the auction block found their inverse in the negotiation practices of the enslaved, the cruelty of family separation found its inverse in the triumphant scene of the Black family in liberation, and the commodification of enslavement found its

rhetorical foil in the language of redemption employed by many Black authors. In the end, the domestic slave trade, a source of such cruelty and pain, was also an avenue through which clever and courageous enslaved people subverted the power of their enslaver, not just on the ground, but on the page. Black authors used their intimate knowledge of a complex system and language to create an anti-slavery vocabulary based around the slave trade. It was a vocabulary that allowed authors to turn Black triumph into a literary currency, one with immense value in the fight against enslavement itself and, later, the sterilization of slavery's memory. When John Quincy Adams remembered, in 1867, "how much a negro was worth then, and now not worth 25 cents a piece," he was using the language of slavery's economy to frame the triumph of emancipation. He used an inverted economy of slavery to remind his readers, and to remind us, of just "how things have changed."²⁸

Epilogue

This thesis has endeavored to examine the place of the domestic slave trade within the literary genre of the nineteenth-century slave narrative. This exploration has found, in accordance with the findings of a number of scholars of slave narratives, abolitionism, and the slave trade, that the domestic slave trade was an important part of the slave narrative canon, and that it served as a means by which anti-slavery authors attacked the immense cruelty of southern enslavers. However, this thesis has also sought to explore the relationship between formerly enslaved authors, larger patterns of enslaved resistance, and the appearance of the domestic slave trade in the nineteenth-century slave narrative. In this pursuit, it has found not only that formerly enslaved authors used the slave trade to attack enslavers, but that they used a deep and detailed

²⁸ John Quincy Adams, *Narrative of the Life of John Quincy Adams*, 9.

knowledge of the southern economy of enslavement to do so. This knowledge was forged in the patterns of everyday resistance that enslaved people relied on during their bondage, many of which exploited the liminal spaces of the domestic slave trade in order to execute resistance. Ultimately, formerly enslaved authors translated these patterns of resistance to written page, and they used their expertise in the economy of enslavement to refute the pro-slavery arguments of white propagandists.

Additionally, this thesis has explored how those patterns of literary resistance were used not just to prove the immorality of white enslavers, but to examine the morality of the enslaved. By focusing on religion, familial affection, and sexual fidelity, formerly enslaved authors used the slave trade to link the immense cruelty and immorality of enslavers to the often-tragic morality and fidelity of the enslaved. In this way, the slave trade became a rhetorical hinge that not only subverted the pro-slavery narrative of white enslavers, but that elevated the morality of the enslaved.

Finally, this thesis has argued that formerly enslaved authors presented the slave trade as an obstacle to be overcome, and that they inverted the language of the slave trade in order to construct a vocabulary of resistance that was centered on redemption and liberation, rather than commodification and oppression. By presenting family reunification as an analog to the separation of the slave market, formerly enslaved narrators used a reversal of the slave trade to present an image of familial triumph in liberation. In using the value-language of commodification to describe self-liberation or the purchase of loved ones, Black authors turned slavery's commodity economy into a means of literary redemption, lending a concrete and literal value to resistance and liberation.

At its core, this thesis is an exploration of resistance, even in the face of an institution as cruel and despotic as the United States' antebellum slave trade. In examining the role of the domestic slave trade in the nineteenth-century slave trade, it becomes clear that enslaved people were experts in the systems of their own oppression, and that they used this expertise to assert their own agency whenever possible. The story of the domestic slave trade is one of cruelty, of tragedy, and of immense anguish. But it is also one of triumph, of resistance, and of liberation. The literary resistance of nineteenth-century slave narratives serves as a case-study of the way that enslaved resisters worked to carve liminal spaces into the edifice of their oppression, and how they exploited those spaces whenever possible. In the way that formerly enslaved authors used their literary resistance to celebrate and redeem enslaved people, we also see that resistance served not only as a means of attacking and subverting oppressors, but of defining and elevating resisters themselves.

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