

## Maroonage and Flight: An Overview

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Unshackled Spaces: Fugitives from Slavery and  
Maroon Communities in the Americas  
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In 1821, the South Carolina slave Joe, who lived near the state capital of Columbia, escaped from his plantation and began a one-hundred-mile journey as a runaway slave. Following the river systems to the southeast, he went along the Congaree and Santee rivers to the low-lying forest and swamp areas stretching back from the coast. He went undetected until he reached the Georgetown District, where he was confronted by a planter named George Ford, described by his neighbors as a “worthy and respectable Citizen.” Joe rose up against the white man, killed him, and fled into the woods along the lower Santee River.<sup>i</sup>

He quickly convinced other outlying runaways from plantations in the Claremont, Clarendon, St. Johns, St. Stephens, and Richland parishes and districts to join him. They established a base camp deep in the woods. Joe--or Forest as he came to be known because of his ability to disappear without a trace into the dense tree-lined river areas--was a born leader of men: bold, intelligent, cunning, and fearless. He knew how and when to strike and how and where to escape. During the next two years he led a

band of runaways as they pillaged, stole, attacked, and wreaked havoc on plantations in the area. "Most of the runaways flew to his Camp and he soon became their head and their life," a group of eighty slave owners, farmers, and planters explained in a petition to the state legislature. "He had the art and the address to inspire his followers with the most Wild and dangerous enthusiasm." The petitioners continued:

He was so cunning and artful as to elude pursuit and so daring and bold at particular times when no force was at hand as to put every thing at defiance. Emboldened by his successes and his seeming good fortune he plunged deeper and deeper into Crime until neither fear nor danger could deter him first from threatening and then from executing a train of mischief we believe quite without parallel in this Country.

Local residents asked for help from the "proper Military department" and petitioned the Governor to assist them in bringing Forest to justice. Meanwhile, Ford's relatives offered an enormous reward of one thousand dollars for his capture. When one considers that the average reward for a runaway slave in South Carolina at this time was between ten and fifteen dollars and that it would take a common laborer several years to earn one thousand dollars, to offer such a sum was truly extraordinary.

In 1822, the South Carolina General Assembly awarded the leader of a militia unit \$160 for supplies following an extensive search for the slave. But Forest remained at large. His and his men's intimate knowledge of the countryside, its hidden swamps and overgrown creeks, surpassed that of all others.

Finally, in August 1823, the planters and slave owners in the vicinity organized themselves into "companies as Infantry." They traversed Santee River Swamp from "the Confluence of the two rivers that form it to Munys Ferry a distance even by land,"

they noted, “of sixty miles.” In fact, the distance they searched was many miles more considering the numerous tributaries and meandering riverbeds. They trudged through the dense foliage in the insufferable heat of late summer and fought off insects and snakes, searching as many possible hideaway locations as they could. Finally, fatigued by living in the wilderness and dispirited by the enormity of their task, they called off the expedition. Indeed, they complained, they might have passed within a few feet of the slaves and not known they were even in the same proximity so dense were the vines, undergrowth, and cypress trees.

It was at this point that Royal, a slave patrol who knew Forest, came to their aid. Owned by a Richland District woman who promised him freedom if he provided assistance, Royal led a small company of white men to a landing near Forest’s camp. As the slave owners lay flat in Royal’s boat, Royal beckoned Forest and his followers to come out of the woods. The fugitives trusted Royal and came toward the boat, discovering his betrayal too late. As they began to flee the whites rose up and discharged their muskets in “a single well directed fire” that killed Forest and three of his followers instantly. The rest of the gang were either chased down and shot, captured and hanged, or “frightened to their respective homes.”<sup>ii</sup> That Forest was able to avoid capture for more than two years was remarkable. There was little doubt that his brief career as a rebel leader along the lower Santee River struck fear into the hearts of slave owners.

Judging from the response of area slave owners and farmers, Forest’s activities were unparalleled and unprecedented in their audacity and their cunning, and the runaways achieved a greater success than many of their counterparts. However,

Forest and his band of rebels were by no means unique. Beginning in the early years of South Carolina slavery, outlying slaves established settlements in the lowland swamps and backcountry. While their numbers fluctuated over time, pockets of outlying slaves were always a part of the region's landscape. During the 1730s, some fugitives fled to Spanish Florida, especially to a community populated by free blacks called Garcia Real de Santa Teresa de Mose.<sup>iii</sup> In 1765, some forty runaways, including women and children, lived in a settlement with four substantial buildings in the swamp north of the Savannah River. They subsisted by hunting and fishing and trading with plantation slaves. They possessed blankets, pots, pails, axes, tools, shoes, and fifteen bushels of "rough Rice."<sup>iv</sup>

In the Chesapeake region, the terrain and majority white population made establishing runaway encampments difficult. One group of African-born slaves ran away to the mountainous backcountry and lowland swamps. There, according to several scholars, men, women and children attempted to recreate an African society on the frontier. In 1729, another band of a dozen slaves absconded from a James River plantation taking tools, clothing, provisions, and arms; they later established a farming community near Lexington. However, such endeavors were rare and by the late eighteenth century, with the decline of Africans in the slave population, these resurrected African enclaves became virtually nonexistent.<sup>v</sup>

Before and during the Revolutionary War, outlying colonies in South Carolina and Georgia grew in size, and after the war bands of runaways openly defied local authorities. One group of more than one hundred fugitive slaves established a small fort twenty miles north of the mouth of the Savannah River. They called themselves

“the King of England’s soldiers,” and they raided farms and plantations and even attacked the Georgia militia. Thomas Pinckney, the Governor of South Carolina, informed the legislature that this and other fugitive gangs posed a serious problem; they were armed and included those who had fled to the British during the war. They were waging guerilla warfare against local residents.<sup>vi</sup>

During the Revolutionary era, colonies of runaways in West Florida and Louisiana grew as well, evolving from small enclaves of African and Indian raiders to what one author termed permanent settlements. Their residents were well-armed and moved “freely through trackless swamps and dense forests.” They established “independent settlements that equaled plantations in complexity.” Some hunted and fished while others raised corn and rice. In either case they traded with plantation slaves who provided them with supplies and occasionally sold their handicrafts in New Orleans. Many among them had friends and kin on plantations. One of the largest sanctuaries was Gaillardeland, an area equidistant between New Orleans and the mouth of the Mississippi River. The inspirational leader of the group was Juan Malo, a runaway from the German Coast north of New Orleans, who led raids on plantations, rustled cattle, and taunted Spanish authorities.<sup>vii</sup> From the colonial period until the end of slavery, bands of slaves, living in isolated, heavily wooded or swampy areas, or running to the mountains and beyond, attempted to maintain a separate existence. Some of these groups sustained their cohesiveness for several years, a few for longer periods. They made forays into populated farming sections for food, clothing, livestock, and trading items. Sometimes they bartered with free blacks, plantation slaves, and

whites who owned no slaves. The ideas of freedom enunciated during the Revolutionary era may well have influenced the outlying slaves, and they may well have been inspired by African “patterns of resistance and warfare.”<sup>viii</sup> But mainly they were responding to local conditions and local circumstances. They were willing to rise up against their owners and others by engaging in a futile, often suicidal, guerilla warfare.

Despite their ephemeral nature, runaway bands sometimes sent entire communities into panic. During the summer of 1795, residents of Wilmington, North Carolina, spoke of sporadic attacks from a “number of runaway Negroes,” who secreted themselves in the swamps and woods during the day but came out at night to commit “various depredations on the neighboring plantations.” They ambushed and killed a white overseer before they were subdued and before their leader, the “General of the Swamps,” was shot and killed by members of a posse.<sup>ix</sup> During the summer of 1821, an “insurrection” broke out in Onslow County, North Carolina, when a number of “outlawed and runaway Slaves and free Negroes” banded together. Located between the White Oak and New rivers in the southeastern portion of the state, the long estuaries and forested sections provided good cover. The outlying slaves “daily increased in strength and numbers,” William L. Hill, head of a militia unit, wrote. Their bold acts of defiance became so alarming that “no inhabitant could feel himself at any moment secure in his life, person or property, from plunder, rapine, and devastation committed by them, daily and nightly in every corner of the County.” They were well-armed, cunning, daring, and desperate, Hill revealed; in broad daylight, they ravaged farms, burned houses, broke into stores, and “ravished a number of females.” It took Hill’s two-hundred-man militia unit twenty-six days searching through “Woods, Swamps & Marshes” to quell the

“Outlaws.”<sup>x</sup>

Even more audacious was a group of runaways in the Piedmont section of North Carolina two decades later. In Halifax County, where deep ravines and rolling hills rather than dense forest and impenetrable swamps provided cover, armed runaways shot and killed livestock and threatened local farmers. When one farmer tried to pursue them, the slaves killed and butchered seventy-five of his hogs. The fugitives then sent word to him that if he would not hunt them again they would not kill any more of his hogs; however, if he continued to stalk them, they would stop killing his hogs and kill him instead. When another farmer, described as a “respectful Citizen,” was shot as he returned home one evening, area planters petitioned the legislature. They demanded a new law be enacted permitting them to shoot on sight slaves “lying out, lurking in the woods swamps & other secret places doing serious injury to the public.” The citizens also requested that the state treasury compensate the financial loss incurred by any slave owners dispatched in such a manner.

The legislators sympathized with the plight of the farmers, but responded by saying the “such a law would be unnecessarily cruel & sanguinary;” it would lead to great abuses and would render slave property insecure and consequently diminish its value. The law as it existed, a Select Committee pointed out, was sufficient to “suppress the evil.” In 1741, North Carolina lawmakers enacted legislation permitting any two justices of the peace to declare outlying slaves “outlaws,” thus permitting slave owners, overseers, or other whites to shoot them on sight “without Accusation or Impeachment of any Crime.”<sup>xi</sup>

Similar circumstances existed in other southern states, especially the Carolinas

and the lower tier of states from Georgia and Florida to Louisiana. Runaway bands hid in remote to isolated areas and intimidated and harassed local farmers and planters. Even “negro hunters” who came after them with tracking dogs were cautious about pursuing them too far into the backcountry. Sometimes runaways attacked slave owners and overseers; other times they committed “daring and atrocious” acts of highway robbery on innocent travelers.<sup>xii</sup> During his 1850s tour of the South, Frederick Law Olmsted stopped at a boardinghouse in Mississippi. After he had drifted off to sleep, a fellow traveler entered the room, awakening him from his slumber. His new roommate then took most of the sparse furniture in the room and pushed it against the door. Next he placed two small revolvers on a small end table near his bed “so they could be easily taken up as he lay in bed.” Even though it was a hot night and the room was stuffy and uncomfortable, the traveler said he would not feel safe if anything were left open. ““You don’t know,”” he confided, ““there maybe runaways around.””<sup>xiii</sup>

Sometimes groups of runaways were able to sustain themselves without marauding, pillaging or committing various “crimes.” In 1843, freeholders and other white inhabitants of King William County, Virginia, asked the legislature to sell fifteen hundred acres on the Pamunky River and other lands that were set aside during the colonial era for the Pamunky Indians. The lands were only “set apart,” not “granted away,” they argued. Now the tribe formed only a “small remnant” of the population, having “so largely mingled with the negro race as to have obliterated all striking features of Indian extraction.” The lands, the petitioners stated, are now inhabited by two “unincorporated bands of free mulattoes in the midst of a large slave holding community.” These free people of color might easily be converted “into an instrument of

deadly annoyance to the white inhabitants by northern fanaticism." The lands have also become a haven for worthless and abandoned whites and fugitive slaves. In short, tracts of land designated for Indians were a "harbor for every one who wishes concealment."<sup>xiv</sup>

Historians have long been interested in these and other groups of outlying slaves in the southern United States. In 1939, Herbert Aptheker wrote a seminal article, published in the Journal of Negro History, titled "Maroons Within the Present Limits of the United States." In subsequent years, Kenneth Stampp, Gerald Mullin, Eugene Genovese, Peter Kolchin, Ira Berlin, Phillip D. Morgan, among others, have commented on, as one historian stated, "groups of escaped slaves known as maroons that found refuge on the frontier and in unsettled internal areas."<sup>xv</sup> In our recent book Runaway Slaves, John Hope Franklin and I also touch on fugitive gangs who survived by their wits and violence.<sup>xvi</sup>

If, as Peter Kolchin suggests, all history is comparative, it might then be beneficial to place these southern United States fugitive bands into the broader contextual framework of maroonage in other parts of the Americas. The literature about Maroon societies elsewhere is far more comprehensive than writings about groups of runaways in the United States. Scholars have examined communities created by runaway slaves in the Spanish Americas (Cuba, Venezuela, Colombia, Mexico); in the French Caribbean (Saint-Domingue, Martinique); and in Brazil, Guiana, Haiti, and Jamaica.<sup>xvii</sup> Some of these societies evolved into powerful states with thousands of members and survived for generations, even centuries. This "marronage on a grand scale," Richard Price argues, struck directly at "the foundations of the plantation system,

presenting military and economic threats which often taxed the colonists to their very limits.” In a number of cases, whites were forced to negotiate with their former slaves.<sup>xviii</sup> Of course, maroon societies were not monolithic; each bore the stamp of its geographic location, resulting in distinct differences, including differences among those who were allowed to join. In addition, it was not always an African heritage that bound them together; the New World realities of geography, treatment, language, and the ratio of blacks to whites also played a major role.<sup>xix</sup>

Even considering these variations, runaway groups in colonial America and the United States were quite different from those in other parts of the Americas. Indeed, the very term “maroon” meant something different to southerners who owned slaves. Its usage in the West Indies, as a corruption of the Spanish *cimarron*, meaning “wild” or “untamed,” was discarded; instead, “maroon” was employed as an adjective to describe a pleasure party, especially a hunting or fishing excursion that lasted several days. Only the Great Dismal Swamp, on the border of Virginia and North Carolina, and the marshes and morasses of south-central Florida sheltered generational communities of outlying slaves in North America, and even these two were not comparable to maroon societies in other parts of the New World. During the Second Seminole War (1837-1843), for example, the federal government defeated the Florida maroons and removed them and their Indian allies to the American West.

The obvious question is why did such differences emerge? Why was slavery in colonial America and the United States so unique in this regard? Scholars have advanced a number of reasons. Slaves in North America suffered less from disease, were better fed, worked comparatively less, and lived on farms and plantations with

resident owners as opposed to the many absentee owner plantations in the Caribbean and Latin America. The smaller proportion of African-born slaves and the larger percentage of whites in the general population in British North America was also a mitigating factor. Others have argued that there were fewer places to establish separate communities in the United States compared with the impenetrable mountains and forests of Hispaniola or Jamaica. Furthermore, the periodic instability of colonial governments in the Americas gave slaves more opportunities to escape.

While all of the comparisons delineated above have some validity, one factor with equal importance has not been emphasized by scholars. Perhaps colonial America and the United State provide the best example of the futility of creating a separate society of runaway slaves in the Americas. It was not due to its geography; lack of remote and isolated locations abounded. The recesses along the rivers of Virginia, North and South Carolina, and Georgia, as well as the dense forests of Alabama and Mississippi, and the isolated islands and bayous of the Lower Mississippi River Valley provided many possible locations. One observer noted that the islands in St. Mary Parish, Louisiana were desolate, isolated and located in the most “remote corner of the Globe.”<sup>xx</sup> Indeed, it was striking that twenty or thirty miles from several of the largest cities in the South—Charleston, Savannah, Mobile, New Orleans—there were areas where, as was the case for Forest, fugitive slaves could easily conceal themselves.

The problem from a slave’s perspective was the determination and vengeance of whites who rooted out and destroyed the camps of runaways. A recent study of slave patrols in the Carolinas and Virginia reveals how these patrols, consisting of slave owners and other whites, effectively destroyed the outlying bands. The patrols were far

more active and, as time passed, more successful, especially in discovering groups of fugitive slaves, than scholars have previously thought. Following his successful (and rare) escape from the Lower South, Charles Ball noted that he ran only between midnight and three o'clock in the morning when the patrollers were resting. From nightfall until midnight and from three until daylight, "the patrol[s] are watchful, and always traversing the country in quest of negros."<sup>xxi</sup> Slave owners, overseers, and other whites formed their own search parties when the patrols were unsuccessful.

At the same time Forest was moving up and down the Santee River, another group of runaways formed in Christ Church Parish. The ringleader was a slave who belonged to the estate of a recently deceased resident. He was joined by another runaway, who was owned by a female slaveholder; a family of five slaves, who had recently been put up for sale, completed the band. The group managed to stay at large for some time—the ringleader for three years—but planters in the area finally hunted them down. "They continued out until October last, when the Children surrendered," the pursuing slave owners testified, "(one having been born in the woods) the Father and Mother having been shot and killed."

A short time later, another group in the same vicinity suffered a similar fate. During their time as outlying slaves they wreaked havoc on nearby plantations, butchering cattle, carrying off sheep and hogs, stealing tools and guns, and burning outbuildings. One captured slave boasted that within a month he had butchered forty-head of cattle. But search parties also caught this group that included eighteen slaves from one plantation who ran off "under their driver;" one slave was shot and killed.<sup>xxii</sup> The fate of a gang who hid out in a cypress swamp near New Orleans, raiding farms

and plantations, was similar. In 1837, the leader was killed and the runaways disbanded.<sup>xxiii</sup>

Planters and slave owners could also call upon militia units to root out gangs of runaways. Sometimes patrollers served in the local militia but often these groups, primarily of young men, were separate from the patrols. Militiamen could command larger numbers of men and were often called out when residents became especially fearful of “conspiracy” or “insurrection.” The units included captains, sergeants, and privates; they had legal authority to search virtually any slave quarters or plantation house. In times of crises they could hold appointment through executive authority, as in Virginia, in 1808, when special units were formed to suppress a rumored slave insurrection. As one militiaman recounted, they were instructed to search “the negro cabins, & take everything which we found in them, which bore a hostile aspect, such as powder, shot &c.,” and were told to “apprehend every negro whom we found from his home; & if he made any resistance, or ran from us, to fire on him immediately, unless he could be stopped by other means.”<sup>xxiv</sup> In 1832, a major general in the Mississippi militia called out a regiment because a “projected insurrection” had been discovered. He ordered his men to break up into groups consisting of one officer and sixty men and scour the area around Woodville to “apprehend all slaves under Suspicious Circumstances.” It proved to be a false alarm, as it was in Georgia in 1848 when the Glynn County Rangers were given a similar order. Learning of a possible plot, Ranger Captain Hugh F. Grant quickly mobilized a cavalry company and went out to “protect the Community and County from insurrections.”<sup>xxv</sup>

Coincident with the growing success of patrols, slave owner search parties, and

the militia was the shrinkage of secluded areas that had previously provided cover for runaways. This does not mean that inaccessible locations in the South totally disappeared; however, by the 1840s and 1850s much of the land across the Black Belt of Alabama, the Delta of Mississippi, and the sugar parishes of Louisiana was under cultivation. The forests in these areas and in the Upper South had succumbed to the ax while marshes were drained and lands reclaimed. The population density among white land owners increased substantially in the west during the generation before the Civil War. What were once remote and barely inhabited sections of Tennessee, Kentucky, and Arkansas during the 1820s were spotted with farms and plantations by the 1850s. The westward migration of owners and slaves was immense, as historians have noted, and the demographic realities of the new, relatively heavily populated west shrunk the possible sites for groups of absconders to remain hidden or at large.

But regardless of the landscape, it was clear that even in the eighteenth century, runaways in the United States stood the best chance of success by going it alone. The profile of runaway slaves in the Southern colonies and states remained remarkably constant from one generation to the next. They were overwhelmingly young men in their teens and twenties who set out by themselves to pass for free blacks or mingle in urban areas with other runaways. Only about one out of five absconders was a woman. Female slaves remained behind on the plantations and farms to care for their children who might suffer grievously if taken on an escape attempt. Most of those who fled, even in the second half of the eighteenth century, were American-born slaves, or Creoles; many among them spoke, acted, dressed, and behaved in a manner indistinguishable from free people of color. They were not easily spotted from their

physical appearances or demeanor. This profile remained unchanged, even after the infusion of African-born blacks, in what one author calls a re-Africanization of the Lower South, in the decade prior to the 1808 prohibition of the African slave trade.<sup>xxvi</sup>

If runaway gangs seldom lasted more than a year or two and often ended with many among them being killed, some individual slaves managed to sustain themselves in freedom by posing as free blacks. The towns and cities of the South became harbors for escaped slaves and a number of them, especially the most wily and skilled, were able to hire their own time and sometimes meld into the free black population. Although there were ebbs and flows in the economies of southern cities, there were few periods when hired slaves were not in demand. Wages varied but black workers could command between \$75 and \$150 a year in the 1820s and 1830s and up to \$20 a month during the 1850s. They worked as laborers, dockhands, domestics, laundresses, gardeners, brick layers, stone masons, waiters, cooks, barbers, and in other capacities.

In many urban areas, as competing whites pointed out, slaves dominated certain occupations. Although prohibited by law, self-hire was widespread and if runaways could convince a potential employer that they had been sent by their owner to find work they could be hired with few questions asked.<sup>xxvii</sup>

A few runaways, often the most ingenious, persistent, and lucky, made it to the North. About twenty-five years old, quick-spoken, articulate, and clever, the Tennessee slave Jim Lace set out in June 1839 for a free state. "This fellow has once before attempted to make his escape to a free State and was taken in Kentucky on his way to Illinois," Asa Jackson, a farmer who lived a few miles west of Lebanon, explained. "I am apprehensive that he will again make a similar attempt and probably aim for the same

State.” Among those who made it to the North were some who received assistance from Quakers, the Underground Railroad, and anti-slavery whites.<sup>xxviii</sup>

While the picture for individual runaways in the South was not as bleak as that for gangs of runaways, it was nevertheless one of failure. The overwhelming majority of fugitives was captured, jailed, returned to their owners, and punished. Those who remained out either in cities or towns or remote areas near their owners’ plantations, or who made it to the so-called Promised Land in the North or Canada, remained a tiny fraction of the runaway population. John Hope Franklin and I estimated that during the 1830s through the 1850s, perhaps only one or two thousand slaves a year made it to the North out of a annual runaway population conservatively estimated at fifty thousand.

Those who began the flight in the lower tier of states were almost always captured or came in of their own accord. On James Henry Hammond’s Silver Bluff Plantation on the Savannah River in South Carolina between 1831 and 1855, there was an average of two escapes per year (a total of fifty-three). Even though they often received sustenance, support, and encouragement from slaves on the plantation as well as help from slaves on neighboring plantations, not a single runaway gained permanent freedom. Hammond was well aware that those who deserted were “lurking” about in a nearby swamp. He waged a continuous but unsuccessful battle to stop the flow of food and provisions to outlying blacks, including punishing all the slaves on his plantation for the “misdeeds” of a few. Plantation management, Hammond ruefully commented, is “like a war without the glory.”<sup>xxix</sup>

Those who persisted in absconding usually paid a heavy price. Most

contemporaries affirmed that what were called habitual or perpetual runaways received cruel and brutal punishments. Slaves escaped with the mark of the whip on their backs, irons on their ankles, missing fingers and toes, and brands on their cheeks and forehead. The punishments of slaves in the Lower Mississippi River Valley seemed especially severe. In 1833 one runaway, age about thirty, described as having sunken-cheeks, and sulky looks, would not be difficult to spot, his owner reported. He had an inch-high cross branded on his forehead, the letter “O” branded on his cheek, and the word “Orleans” branded across his back.<sup>xxx</sup> The sheriff of Points Coupes Parish, Louisiana, described a captured runaway in 1826 as having “an Iron collar three prongs extending upwards” and “Many scars on his back and shoulders from the whip.”<sup>xxxi</sup> It was habitual runaways who prompted the most harsh and brutal response from owners and overseers.

Some scholars have suggested that this was a time when owners and slaves came together and negotiated some type of compromise or accommodation. It made sense, so the argument goes, that owners did not wish to damage their property and that slaves who had no chance of remaining at large permanently would seek concessions concerning family visitations, food allowances, hiring arrangements, housing, or living conditions. The oft-quoted journal of slave owner Robert “Councillor” Carter, the largest slaveholder in pre-Revolutionary Virginia, reveals how he discussed family matters with runaways and sought to accommodate their requests. In response to a paper discussing the harsh treatment of habitual runaways, one distinguished scholar of slavery asserted, “Christian masters did not treat their slaves that way.”<sup>xxxii</sup>

In fact, Christian masters did treat their slaves that way, and worse. Some tried

to reason with their human property after a first or second escape attempt, but it was a rare owner who did not inflict painful punishments following the fourth or fifth episode. Moreover, the great majority of slave owners in the South were forced to confront the problem. During his tour of the southern states Olmsted recounted that he did not visit a single plantation where owners did not discuss the problem of runaways. It was so common, he noted, that southern whites described it as “a disease—a monomania, to which the negro race is peculiarly subject.” The New Orleans physician Samuel Cartwright called it by another name, “drapetomania,” an hereditary disease afflicting Negroes causing them to abscond. It should be kept in mind that “throughout the South,” Olmsted concluded, “slaves are accustomed to ‘run away.’”<sup>xxxiii</sup>

Another current argument concerns sympathetic whites assisted fugitive blacks in their quest for freedom. There was a network of conductors on the Underground Railroad who guided slaves from station to station along routes that began just about anywhere in the South, including Charleston, South Carolina. The recent publication of Raymond Dobard and Jacqueline L. Tobin’s Hidden in Plain View: the Secret Story of Quilts and the Underground Railroad, which has sold more than one hundred thousand copies, the founding of the Underground Railroad and Freedom Center in Cincinnati, with millions of dollars of state and private funding, and the efforts of the National Park Service to designate sites that served as hideaways for fugitives are but a few examples of how contemporaries wish to project the present into the past.<sup>xxxiv</sup>

Forest knew the risks he was taking when he ran away and enticed his brethren to join him in the woods and swamps along the Lower Santee River. His life was one of fear, anger, hatred, hostility, movement, and within a relatively short time, death. With

few exceptions the leaders of groups of outlying slaves suffered a similar fate. The power of those in control was brought to bear with rapid efficiency against slaves who sought to sustain themselves in freedom in the midst of the plantation South. If the great majority of runaways did not die at the hands of a group of white planters led by slave (who later received his freedom for his betrayal) theirs was largely a futile effort. There was little in the way of accommodation or negotiation on the part of masters. When runaway blacks were captured they faced harsh physical punishments, or sale to a distant land, or both. What is surprising, given the results, was that the stream of runaway slaves continued unabated over the decades and indeed increased as time passed. It served as a constant reminder to the slaveholding class that the property they were seeking to control was not controllable and the image they were trying to project, as benevolent paternalistic masters, was a lie.

Endnotes:  
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i. Petition of the Inhabitants of Clarendon, St. John, St. Stevens, and Richland Districts to the Senate of South Carolina, ca. 1824, Records of the General Assembly, #1874, South Carolina Department of Archives and History [hereafter SCDAH], in Loren Schwening, ed., The Southern Debate Over Slavery: Petitions to Southern Legislatures, 1778-1864 (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001), 83-85.

ii. Ibid.

iii. Phillip D. Morgan, Slave Counterpoint: Black Culture in the Eighteenth-Century Chesapeake & Lowcountry (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 450.

iv. Ira Berlin, Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), 67, 120-21, 170.

v. Ibid.

vi. Herbert Aptheker, "Maroons Within the Present Limits of the United States," Journal of Negro History, 24 (April 1939), 170-71.

vii. Berlin, Many Thousands Gone, 329.

viii. Sylvia R. Frey, Water from the Rock: Black Resistance in a Revolutionary Age (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1991), 51. See also idem, "Between Slavery and Freedom: Virginia Blacks in the American Revolution," Journal of Southern History 49 (\*1938), 375-98.

ix. Jeffrey Crow, "Slave Rebelliousness and Social Conflict in North Carolina, 1775-1802," William and Mary Quarterly, 3d ser., 37 (January 1980), 93-94.

x. Records of the General Assembly, Session Records, Petition of William L. Hill to the North Carolina General Assembly, ca. 1823, in Petitions (Miscellaneous, November 1820–January 1824, Box 4, North Carolina Division of Archives and History [hereafter NCDAH]; Report of the Committee on Claims, 8 December 1823, in House Committee Reports, Box 3, ibid.; Petition of John Rhem to the North Carolina General Assembly, November 1822, in House Committee Reports, November 1823-January 1824, Box 3, NCDAH; Report of the Committee of Claims, ca. 1824, ibid.

xi. Petition of the Citizens of Halifax County to the North Carolina General

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Assembly, 1844, in Schweninger, ed., The Southern Debate over Slavery, 188-190.

xii. Petition of Peter Gourdin to the South Carolina House of Representatives, 1835, #21 and #22, SCDH; John Hope Franklin and Loren Schweninger, Runaway Slaves: Rebels on the Plantation (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 89.

xiii. Frederick Law Olmsted, A Journey in the Back Country (New York: Mason Brothers, 1860), 30.

xiv. Petition of the Citizens of King William County to the Virginia General Assembly, 1843, in "Race, Slavery, and Free Blacks: Petitions to Southern Legislatures, 1775-1867," microfilm edition, University Publications of America, 1999. The petition was rejected. Search: <http://history.uncg.edu/slaverypetitions>

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