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The Great Jugular Vein of Slavery: New Histories of the Domestic Slave Trade

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Abstract

This article offers a critical analysis of the historiography of the domestic slave trade in the 19th-century United States. Surveying a boom in scholarship on the subject over the past 25 years, it examines the political and intellectual currents that have shaped the study of the internal traffic in commodified human flesh and explains this sub-field's debts to ethnography, cliometrics, and Civil-Rights-era social history. It reviews claims regarding the economic impact, social significance, and cultural resonance of the two million slave sales that took place in the United States between the American Revolution and the Civil War and arbitrates recent disputes as to the trade's relationship to slave breeding, the integrity of the Black family, paternalist ideology, and the coming of the Civil War. This brief essay concludes with an assessment of critical needs for future scholarship.

Video abstract (click to view)

The domestic slave trade has long been easy to overlook. As one of its first chroniclers and critics, Ethan Allen Andrews, observed in 1836, the internal market that rose to supply the labor shortage created by the closing of the African slave trade by Act of Congress in 1808 "is not a clandestine one, but being offensive to the feelings of a large portion of the community, it is in a great measure withdrawn from public observation." At the trade's height, in the decades between 1820 and 1860, dealers commonly dispatched consignments of surplus slaves from the Chesapeake to the Cotton Kingdom at night to avoid antagonizing observers like Andrews. By day, the high walls of the slave pens dotted around Baltimore and Alexandria, Richmond and Memphis, Natchez, and New Orleans made it easy to ignore what went on inside.[1]

After the Civil War, evidence of this once vast traffic quickly began to disappear. Sometime, slave pens became boarding houses and cotton brokerages while show rooms and auction houses were razed or repurposed. After Reconstruction, southern heritage societies posted plaques on surviving structures that made no mention of their former functions while local

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histories and regional encyclopedias banished all talk of the trade from their pages. The traders themselves quickly moved on, making their mark in other fields of enterprise and using their accumulated wealth to fund philanthropic efforts that obscured the origins of their fortunes.

The result was a long period of national amnesia about the scope and significance of the domestic slave trade. In the early 20th century, two neo-abolitionist compendia of the traffic's atrocities by Winfield Collins (1904) and Frederic Bancroft (1931) sank with little trace. At the same time, *American Negro Slavery* (1918), Ulrich B. Phillips' popular yet highly controversial account of supposedly benevolent antebellum plantation regimes, concentrated scholarly attention for much of the post-war period on large-scale plantations, rather than on the massive domestic market that sustained them. Though new and equally provocative accounts of plantation slavery – by Kenneth Stampp (1956), Stanley Elkins (1959), Eugene Genovese (1974), and Robert Fogel and Stanley Engerman (1974) – challenged and eventually overturned the Phillips thesis, they too relegated the subject of domestic slave-trading to the margins.[2]

I.

Published in 1989, Michael Tadman's *Speculators and Slaves* kickstarted the development of a new subfield: domestic slave trade studies. The first monograph to tackle the subject for almost 60 years, *Speculators and Slaves* offered an explicit challenge to the long-lingering sense that the internal market for African-American chattel was inconsequential, inconsiderable, and even, perhaps, benign. Complete with 18 tables, maps, and graphs and 75 pages of appendices, Tadman's landmark study brought many of the econometric tools developed in the 1970s to bear upon scattered trading and transportation records. Tadman's robustly evidenced thesis confirmed antebellum abolitionists' view that this brutal trade served as "the great jugular vein of slavery," playing an essential role in the expansion, re-orientation, and nourishment of the entire southern slave economy. In Tadman's reckoning, the market in slaves was the most powerful engine of economic, demographic, and political development in the southern United States in the first half of the 19th century.[3]

Using computational techniques familiar to readers of Fogel and Engerman's *Time on the Cross*, *Speculators and Slaves* asserted that slave traders and migrating planters forced as many as one million slaves across state lines between 1790 and 1860, a second middle passage three times larger than the first. Drawing upon three overlapping data sets – census population information, shipping manifests from coastwise convoys, and business records belonging to large firms – Tadman demonstrated how once tiny capillaries of forced migration soon became the pumping arteries of a vast, regional slave system (Fig. 1).

Tadman's decennial estimates of trading volume have largely survived a battery of queries and challenges from other historians and economists and are now frequently cited as the best available approximations. His conclusion that traders accounted for somewhere between 60 and 70 percent of all out-of-state slave migrations in the post-1808 period has also gained common currency, largely superseding earlier estimates by William L. Miller (1965), William

1790-99: 49,511
1800-09: 65,791
1810-19: 123,386
1820-29: 154,712
1830-39: 284,750
1840-49: 183,902
1850-59: 250,728

Source: Tadman, *Speculators and Slaves*, 12.

Fig. 1. Estimates of Net Interregional Slave Movements, 1790–1859.

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Calderhead (1972), and Fogel and Engerman (1974), that instead interpreted this interstate diaspora primarily as a function of planter migration to the South and West.[4]

While Tadman focused almost exclusively on the long-distance, interstate trade, two articles in law reviews (1993, 1996) by Thomas Russell have since revealed the extent of the intra-state traffic in slaves. Extrapolating from the manuscript sale books of court officials in five South Carolina districts, Russell's work suggests that at least a million more slaves were separated from their loved ones in sales conducted locally, between neighbors. Mandated by state courts for the settlement of estates and the clearance of debts, and executed by professional auctioneers, the majority of these sales took place on the steps of county court houses on the first Monday of every month. Russell's work corrects decades of neglect and misunderstanding of the intra-state slave trade and recovers the central role of state courts and government officials, though it is complicated by Emily West's recent claims (2004) that cross-plantation marriages were sufficiently resilient to withstand the damage inflicted by short-distance sales.[5]

II.

Russell, West, and a handful of others excepted, much of the recent renaissance of scholarly interest in the domestic slave trade continues to focus upon the scale and significance of long-distance migration. This partly reflects the source problems attendant to the field. Because of registration requirements mandated by Congress in an effort to prevent the smuggling of foreign slaves after 1808, the brigs that shuttled human freight between like Norfolk, Baltimore, and Richmond, and Gulf Coast hubs like New Orleans left an impressive archive of cargo manifests. Cliometricians in particular have employed these data-laden shipping records to calculate everything from trade volume, shipment sizes, and the costs of food, clothing, and insurance to height, weight and nutritional profiles, infant mortality rates, and age of menarche.[6]

While these studies have added much to our knowledge of the economics and demographics of this coastwise trade, they have also served to obscure and minimize the importance of the vastly more extensive but unsystematically documented interior traffic. Before the spread of the railroads in the 1840s, traders transported chattel from the Upper South to the Lower South in one of three ways: by sea, by overland trail, and by river. As Robert H. Gudmestad's new study of southern steamboats (2011) makes clear, many dealers, especially those with active trading profiles in the Old Northwest, sent their slaves south by way of the nation's internal waterways, turning the Ohio, Missouri, and Mississippi rivers into "common highway[s] for the traffic." As a result, Wheeling, Louisville, St. Louis, Memphis, and Natchez became important trading centers and entrepots, so much so that the dealers there sometimes sold their arriving human merchandize direct from the boat decks. These sales generated many fewer records than the highly regulated coastal trade.[7]

Devoid of fixed routes, regular schedules, and dedicated vessels, the extensive overland traffic has received even less scrutiny. Its piecemeal sources – travelers' accounts, ex-slave testimony, and the occasional business record – resist quantitative analysis, though the odysseys themselves were evidently deliberate, methodical, and carefully timed to maximize efficiency and profit. While no dedicated study of the overland coffle experience has yet appeared, the combined wisdom of a handful of recent articles and book chapters suggest that these trudging convoys usually embarked in late summer to allow the slaves to gradually acclimatize as they walked, before arriving in the Cotton Kingdom around the turn of the year, in time for the spring trading season. If the fragmentary correspondence of traders such as Thomas Burton and JD Long are to be credited, the various overland routes took far longer than

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a coastwise passage – about eight weeks, compared to about three weeks at sea – but cost slightly less. Coffles were flexible too: while most comprised 30 or 40 people, they could range in size from a half dozen to several hundred slaves stretching "in lines reachin' as far as you kin see."[8]

III.

The ready availability of coastwise manifests has also skewed scholarship in other ways, notably by focusing attention upon the largest operators and their activities within the largest slave markets, especially New Orleans. In truth, the domestic slave trade was considerably more variegated, and there was no such thing as a typical trader. While large well-documented firms such as Alexandria's Franklin & Armfield had the capacity to send as many as 1,200 slaves south each season, small-scale itinerant operators dealing in just a few hundred slaves a year conducted the majority of business. In 1830, for example, the four largest traders in the New Orleans market accounted for just 16 percent of slaves sold in that city that year.[9]

New Orleans itself was an aberration. As critics of Walter Johnson's masterful rendering of that city's slave markets have argued, New Orleans catered mostly to the peculiarly intensive labor needs of Louisiana sugar planters. The vast majority of slave sales in the Deep South were, by contrast, to cotton-growers whose inland plantations coffles serviced better than coastwise shipments. In fact, slaves trafficked overland rarely saw the Crescent City. Many small-time operators had no fixed destination. Liable to sell anywhere along their routes, they only ventured into the largest urban markets if they had particularly hard-to-sell slaves to shift. Middling traders favored smaller centers like Memphis, Montgomery, and Natchez, while the lowliest itinerants sold the bulk of their slaves in ones and twos on dusty roads, in taverns, or roadhouses to anyone with ready cash. Larger dealers, by contrast, set up shop in New Orleans and let buyers come to them. Firms such as those run by Isaac Franklin and John Armfield of Virginia, the Slatter and Woolfolk families of Maryland, and the Hagan family of South Carolina maintained well-marked, well-known, and often well-appointed addresses in that city's central business district. Inside these emporia, their workers processed a steady supply of new arrivals from the Upper South, increasing their rations, dressing their wounds, taming their hair, oiling their skin, and measuring their Black bodies for the blue suits and calico dresses they would wear for sale.[10]

Contrary to popular belief, grand commercial auctions were remarkably rare in the Lower South. Even in the showrooms of New Orleans' largest traders, most buyers preferred to strike private deals, though only after a sequence of debasing physical inspections and verbal interrogations of the merchandize. As we learn in Johnson's *Soul by Soul* (1999), everything about that transaction turned on perception. "The price a slave fetches depends, in a great measure, upon the general appearance he or she presents to the intending buyer," the ex-slave John Brown later recalled. "A man or a woman may be well made, and physically faultless in every respect, yet their value be impaired by a sour look, or a dull, vacant stare, or a general dullness of demeanour." With the stakes so high – prime male field hands sold for $1000 in 1837 and $1750 by 1859 – the city's traders often bribed or threatened slaves before buyers arrived, drilling them to hide problematic histories, and exaggerate their aptitudes.[11]

IV.

Planters in the Upper South sold slaves to interstate traders for many reasons: to cut losses, to clear debts, to punish, or simply to profit. Historians remain divided, however, on the subject of slave breeding. In the 1830s, several abolitionists alleged that the struggling tobacco and

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wheat plantations of the Chesapeake concealed stud farms on which masters compelled sexual congress between fertile enslaved men and women for the express purpose of selling their offspring. Theodore Dwight Weld, compiler of the widely read catalog of horrors *American Slavery At It Is* (1839), published pages of testimony alleging that Virginia was a "negro-raising state."[12]

While neo-Confederate apologists such as Ulrich B. Phillips were quick to deny the existence of widespread slave-breeding programs, the topic has continued to attract attention, not least among cliometricians; who, in the 1970s, engaged in a much wider debate about competitiveness and profitability across the entire slave economy. In 1975, the economist Richard Sutch scrutinized 5,700 notarized acts of sale from New Orleans and deduced that the scarcity of intact family units and the over-representation of enslaved males in the New Orleans slave market implied that slaveowners in exporting states had no respect for monogamous sexual unions among their enslaved property. Using census records for 1850 and 1860, Sutch went on to calculate that many Upper South plantations contained "abnormally high ratios of women to men," that slaves in exporting states manifested higher rates of fertility than those in importing states, and that a greater differential was observable in the fertility rates of slaves and free Whites in the Upper South than in the Lower South. Sutch concluded, albeit with caveats, that birth rates on certain Chesapeake plantations could not be adequately explained without considering "polygamy or promiscuity." Thus, he reasoned, "a substantial portion of [Virginia and Maryland] slaveowners were overtly practicing slave breeding."[13]

In recent years, cultural historians such as Thelma Jennings (1990), Thomas Foster (2011), and Gregory Smithers (2012) have profitably explored the ways in which stories of slave breeding came to haunt ex-slave life-writing and the WPA narratives. However, the Sutch thesis itself has gained little ground among social and economic historians. Michael Tadman took Sutch to task in 1989, dismissing talk of a network of stud farms as overly-literal, neo-abolitionist paranoia. While condemning masters' often obsessive interest in the fertility of their female slaves and their coarse discourse about breeding and sale, Tadman refuted Sutch's statistical evidence point by point, drawing attention to the scarcity of unaccompanied infants and young children in the traffic southwards. Moreover, Tadman found no mention of breeding farms in the many hundreds of traders' letters he consulted and concluded that only a minority of masters likely ever overtly interfered with the normal sexual activity of their slaves or held them in bondage solely in order to harvest their increase.[14]

In a way, however, Tadman's findings are the more chilling. Rather than engaging in long-range breeding plans designed to satisfy future market conditions, planters preferred to play it by ear, dividing pre-existing slave families as opportunities arose. Indeed, there is a tragic irony about all this. In the 1970s, Civil-Rights-era historians such as John Blassingame (1972) and Herbert Gutman (1976) demonstrated the remarkable vibrancy of plantation families and argued that masters often relied on the integrity and resilience of slave kinship ties to ensure discipline, productivity, and natural increase. However, it now appears that the same planters thought nothing of dividing those families if the occasion to profit from the sale of young, able-bodied enslaved people presented itself. Their resolve was unyielding. Raising prior estimates by Fogel and Engerman, Michael Tadman calculated that the interstate trade destroyed 25 percent of first marriages and fully 50 percent of nuclear families and that one out of every two enslaved children lost one or both parents to local or long-distance trafficking. Indeed, every transaction destroyed one family bond or another; even in the most comprehensive estate sale or planter migration, extended families were never preserved entirely intact.[15]

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This terrible truth ensured that every enslaved person lived with the dread of sale. When their time came, many slaves threw themselves at their masters' feet, begging piteously for mercy. Others hid from their 'kidnappers' or slashed at their throats, knowing that their parting was likely to be permanent. According to Walter Johnson, precious few of the men, women, and children who made the soul-sick exodus to the South and the West were ever able to return or even send word home. Those carried away and those left behind suffered equally. Grief was never far from consciousness. "People wus always dyin' frum a broken heart," Susan Hamlin, a former South Carolina slave, remembered decades later.[16]

V.

Such brazen destruction of families for the purpose of profit makes a mockery of the fallacious myth that slavery and capitalism were somehow antithetical. Echoing and extending earlier arguments by Eric Williams (1944), the present cohort of historians and economists generally denies that the South stood apart from the economic transformations roiling the North in the 19th century. This argument, most fully and forcefully articulated by Steven Deyle in *Carry Me Back* (2005), provides a welcome corrective to that of Charles Sellers, whose much-debated synthesis, *The Market Revolution* (1991), largely ignored the monumental flow of Southern labor and Southern capital in the domestic slave trade.[17]

In Deyle's view, the domestic slave trade powered a massive economic expansion and re-orientation in the South, a transformation equivalent in scale and scope to the market revolutions unfolding north of the Mason-Dixon line. Most significantly, the rise of an inter-regional trade in slaves after 1808 shifted the geographic center of slavery from tidewater Virginia in 1800 to the western border of Georgia by 1860, thereby spurring the development of the cotton economy in the Deep South. Traders made this happen. Indeed, they prided themselves upon their ability to speak the language of the market with fluency, and they privately embraced their burgeoning reputations as profit-driven speculators.[18]

Deyle's study of surviving business records indicate that those reputations were well earned. Take for example the company created by Isaac Franklin and John Armfield in 1828. By the early 1830s, Franklin and Armfield had become one of the largest business operations in the South, thanks in great part to its partners' ferocious appetite for innovation, efficiency, and growth. To stimulate their business, the two men hired buying agents to fan across the Upper South, they developed elaborate, multi-state mass-marketing strategies, and they even offered their Louisiana clients money-back guarantees. To monitor accounts receivable worth hundreds of thousands of dollars and to reduce inventories, they standardized accounting practices and adopted double-entry book-keeping. To lower costs and achieve vertical integration, they invested heavily in infrastructure, building their own slave pens in Alexandria and New Orleans, and leasing out spare cells. They even purchased three brigs in order to establish reliable bi-monthly shipping service between their two depots. Franklin and Armfield pioneered the capitalist development of the domestic market in slaves. In the 1840s and 1850s, other traders sought similar economies by embracing the use of steamships and railroads. Indeed, Harry L. Watson has shown that Democratic proposals for internal improvements in the 1850s were often the result of lobbying by slave-trading interests.[19]

Entrepreneurial energy like this transformed the southern economy. Deyle's calculations reveal that traders succeeded in flooding the Upper South with $10.8 million of new liquidity per year, not only filling planters' coffers but also supporting the livelihoods and consumer

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spending habits of the many laborers and professionals who sustained the domestic slave trade, from jailers, tailors, blacksmiths, provisioners, ship crews, and shipping agents, to doctors, lawyers, and insurance brokers. In addition, traders' activities supported hundreds of banks and private investors and buoyed the budgets of cities and states that grew quickly accustomed to relying on this human traffic as a major source of tax revenue. Second, only to land in terms of their book value, slaves quickly became the central assets of the southern economy, their value directly dependent on their owners' ability to trade them as fungible commodities in the inter-regional market (Fig. 2). [20]

While Douglas Egerton has cautioned historians of the domestic slave trade to differentiate between modest commercial development and a paradigmatic capitalist revolution, Walter Johnson's interpretation of the trade's ideological significance to southern society and culture is unqualified. In *Soul by Soul* (1999), Johnson argues that the more extensive and elaborate this economic exchange system became, the easier it was for planters to exploit their slaves as a source of capital, using them as collateral to clear debts, to purchase shares, and to secure mortgages. "Everyday all over the antebellum South," Johnson writes, "slaveholders' relations to one another – their promises, obligations, and settlements – were backed by the idea of a market in slaves, the idea that people had a value that could be abstracted from their bodies and cashed in when the occasion arose."[21]

VI.

Each slave sale then, held transformative possibilities, and because the internal trade served the labor needs of fortune-hunting cotton planters in a half dozen new slave states, it succeeded in broadening the base of slaveownership markedly. As Johnson's dazzling history of desire and commodification in the New Orleans slave marts makes clear, buying a first slave turned a man into a master in a single stroke. It expanded the universe of self-identifying paternalists, allowing even the most down-at-heel purchaser to daydream about their gentility and capacity for moral stewardship and to fantasize about their upward progress through slaveholding society. "They imagined who they could be," Johnson writes, "by thinking about whom they could buy."[22]

Why, then, did so many slave owners initially denounce the domestic trade and its agents so vociferously? In *A Troublesome Commerce* (2003), Robert H. Gudmestad skillfully unravels this paradox, arguing that established planters in the Upper South long denied their obvious dependence on this internal market. Instead, they regarded its growing visibility as a threat to their self-image as virtuous, honorable, and restrained father-figures engaged in life-long, 'non-market' paternal relationships with their dependent workforce.

To perpetuate their own visions of benevolent mastery, antebellum slave-owners set about scapegoating slave dealers, casting them as brazen and remorseless predators upon the

Assessed value of real estate	$6,973,106,049
Slave population	$3,000,000,000
Capital invested in manufacturing	$1,050,000000
Capital invested in railroads	$1,166,422,729
Capital invested in banks	$421,890,095
Currency in circulation	$442,102,000
Livestock	$1,107,490,216
Farm implements and machinery	$247,027,496
U.S. cotton crop	$250,291,000
Expenditures of U.S. government	$63,131,000

Source: Deyle, *Carry Me Back*, 59

Fig. 2. Estimated Value of U.S. Wealth and Expenditures in 1860.

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integrity of the Black family and the sanctity of the master-slave relationship. As Gudmestad's careful cultural analysis demonstrates, a distinct image of this debauched and debased arch-villain began to coalesce over time. Most fully elaborated in proslavery novels of the 1850s, the stereotypical slave trader was a coarse, oily, and ill-bred provincial, possessing, in Daniel Hundley's memorable phrasing, "a cross-looking phiz, a whiskey-tinctured nose, cold hard-looking eyes, a dirty tobacco-stained mouth, and shabby dress." The character was, of course, a composite of several stock personas from genre fiction: the unscrupulous horse-trader, the shady tavern keeper, the ruthless card-sharp, the artful gambler, and the garrulous but dissembling politician. Lacking remorse, conscience, common decency, or even basic humanity, these "Southern Shylocks" were properly understood as the antitheses of southern gentlemen, outcasts, and aberrations upon whose shoulders could be loaded all the guilt and culpability for two million slave sales.[23]

Ulrich B. Phillips repeated these binary caricatures as documentary fact in *American Negro Slavery*. In truth, the burden of responsibility was evenly shared among traders and planters. As Michael Tadman has demonstrated, the vast majority of planters dealt readily and repeatedly with traders they deemed honorable and fair-minded, and it was planters, of course, who decided which families to divide, uproot, and sell. In this sense, then, paternalism functioned as an obvious pose. Overturning Eugene. D. Genovese's (1974) influential characterization of planter paternalism as a daily series of Gramscian negotiations between unequal agents, almost every practicing historian of the domestic slave trade now argues that this ideological system amounted to little more than a pack of lies that planters told to themselves.[24]

The appeal of this fantasy was so strong that a handful of plantation owners even attempted to reconcile the brutal business of slave-trading with their own benevolent self-image. According to Walter Johnson, as the threat of sale and separation became ubiquitous in the antebellum South, some Southerners informed the Northern reading public that the trade in flesh offered them a new tool to enforce discipline and maintain productivity without recourse to the dreaded lash. "I govern them… without the whip," Thomas Maskell proudly explained in 1838, "by stating to them that I should sell them if they do not conduct themselves as I wish." By this perverse logic, the domestic slave trade supposedly rendered plantation slavery more humane.[25]

VII.

The power of such self-serving delusions has long made it difficult for historians to reconstruct the extent of enslaved persons' resistance to the chattel principle. Many of the primary sources pertaining to the domestic slave trade compound that problem: coastwise manifests and scattered business records, which reify the commodification of people into property and prices, offer only oblique clues as to the myriad ways by which Black men and women asserted their enduring personhood. To circumvent those silences, several historians, guided by pioneering responses to similar problems by scholars of the transatlantic middle passage, have turned to ex-slave autobiographies. As Steven Deyle's exhaustive review of these life narratives reveals, coffled slaves, in particular, seized opportunities for resistance and rebellion on the long trek to the Cotton Kingdom wherever they could find them, so much so that their drivers made conspicuous display of the pistols, dirks, and whips they carried in their belts. It was not always enough. Slaves slipped their fetters and tried to run off all too frequently, especially at the start of their journeys when they were still close to home and knew the lay of the land. Others attempted self-harm or suicide.[26]

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Outnumbered five or ten to one, the drivers most feared that their charges would attack them. They did all they could to prevent conversation and collusion among these Black strangers and kept the strongest men in heavy chains until they were hundreds of miles away from their homes. Still, their captives sometimes overpowered them. In 1834, for example, a coffle of Maryland slaves succeeded in cutting the throats of the two Georgia men transporting them south, cleaving open the head of one man with an axe and relieving the two butchered bodies of $3,000 in cash before disappearing into the night.[27]

For all this bloodshed and violence, ethnographers such as James C. Scott (1985, 1990) have long understood that the arts of resistance and the weapons of the weak are often more likely to be subtle and quotidian. In *Soul by Soul*, Walter Johnson applied these assumptions to the study of the domestic slave trade, finding great profit in an examination of the disputed warranty cases – known as redhibition files – that clogged the Louisiana Supreme Court in the half century prior to the Civil War. Reading closely and carefully among these complaints by buyers dissatisfied with the human property they had purchased in New Orleans' showrooms, Johnson demonstrates that slaves offered resistance by repeatedly attempting to shape the conditions of their sale. Sometimes they begged to be bought or challenged buyers to purchase their kin along with them, while on other occasions they pretended to be sick or disobedient in order to avoid their sale to buyers they suspected of a particular capacity for cruelty.[28]

Deeply indebted to Johnson and to the glut of recent work on plantation slaves' community development, an important new study by Calvin Schermerhorn brings us full circle, revealing the array of non-violent methods by which slaves in the Upper South sought to postpone or prevent the market-made separations that powered the entire trading system. In *Money over Mastery, Family over Freedom* (2011), Schermerhorn argues that thousands of bondsmen and bondswomen, including notables such as Frederick Douglass, Harriet Jacobs, and Solomon Bayley, succeeded in resisting removal by demonstrating their aptitude and enthusiasm for new roles beyond the plantation. Using the ongoing commercial redevelopment of the Mid-Atlantic opportunistically, they made themselves newly indispensable to their masters, securing self-hiring arrangements as domestics in city houses, as watermen and pilots on the Chesapeake Bay, or as construction workers on regional road, rail, and telegraph projects.[29]

VIII.

Johnson's and Schermerhoron's attention to infra-political resistance mirrors a concomitant renaissance of interest in the political challenges to the domestic slave trade mounted by former bondsmen and their White, northern allies. A trio of usefully overlapping studies by Adam Rothman, Matthew Mason, and David Lightner has recently highlighted the half-century struggle to expose, regulate, and destroy the southern market for slaves. In *Slavery and Politics* (2006), Mason contends that by the 1810s debates about the legitimacy of the internal trade had already become a defining feature of state and federal politics. In *Slavery and the Commerce Power* (2006), Lightner details antebellum activists' unceasing but repeatedly unsuccessful efforts to persuade Congress to employ constitutional powers to limit this interstate traffic; while in *Slave Country* (2005), Rothman examines the economic imperatives that informed Southerners' remarkably effective political opposition to every judicial, legislative, and activist attempt to interfere with the trade.

Though their emphases differ markedly, these three studies agree on a great deal. They agree that northern opposition to the traffic first coalesced around abductions of legally free Blacks living in border states at the turn of the century. They agree that as organized antislavery radicalized in the 1810s and 1820s, activists including Jesse Torrey and William

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Duane in Philadelphia, Hezekiah Niles and Benjamin Lundy in Baltimore, and Samuel Cornish and John Russwurm in New York succeeded in calling into question the business practices of every slave dealer, law-abiding or otherwise, by sending a string of petitions and memorials to state governments demanding closer oversight.[30]

As Mason demonstrates, canny southern legislators were only too happy to oblige, passing a series of high profile bills designed to preserve local authority to regulate the trade and obviate the need for more draconian federal action. Significantly, however, these well-publicized laws proved largely toothless. They imposed minimal registration and certification requirements, contained large loopholes, and lacked provision for the enforcement of fines.[31]

Such laws, then, held little terror for traders and did nothing to curtail the flows of slaves through the region. Indeed, as David Lightner argues, their existence served to permanently blunt attempts by Garrisonians such as Lydia Maria Child and Theodore Dwight Weld to subject the trade to robust federal regulation. Among these frustrated reformers was Abraham Lincoln, whose path to national office required him to publicly affirm that he would do nothing to interfere with the traffic. Southern Democrats, of course, remained suspicious of his radicalism and predicted that the new president would exterminate the trade once in power, thereby strangling slavery's vital expansion into new territories in the West and eventually isolating the South. Secessionists, Lightner explains, trumpeted these fears, forcing a series of conciliatory promises to insulate the trade from any possibility of future federal interdiction, notably the failed Crittenden Compromise of December 1860.[32]

When the war came, the new Confederate Constitution, drafted in Richmond in March 1861, explicitly protected the rights of its citizens to "transit and sojourn in any State of this Confederacy, with their slaves and other property." It further guaranteed "the right of property in said slaves shall not be thereby impaired." Ironically, disunion prevented President Lincoln from taking any action against the domestic slave trade; the four slave states that remained within the Union – Delaware, Kentucky, Maryland, and Missouri – tied his hands. In the end, emancipation, not federal regulation or abolition, dispatched the domestic slave trade, as Union soldiers took possession of abandoned slave marts in southern cities, stripping them for souvenirs.[33]

IX.

Once moribund, the historiography of the domestic slave trade now grows richer by the day. Yet, many scholarly needs remain unmet. The field still awaits a study tracking the spread of southern railroads against patterns of slave migration as well as a sustained single-author comparison of the internal traffic in the United States with the domestic trades of other slave economies in the Western hemisphere. More work is needed regarding children, kidnapping, the coffle experience, the expansion of the slave trade to the western territories and states, and the use of race as a technology of commodification. The time is ripe, too, for a broad study of traders' social backgrounds and a series of micro-histories of individual firms and discrete migrations, especially those that examine the institution as it existed before its maturity in the 1850s. There is also room for several well-chosen biographies to complement Wendell Holmes Stephenson's outdated biography of Isaac Franklin (1938).[34]

Most glaring is the absence of a monograph that places the relationship between gender and the chattel principle at the center of analysis. Despite the fact that antislavery activists often remarked upon the endemic rape of the women and young girls trafficked in coffles and groped in slave pens, only a handful of scholars in this subfield have so far employed gender as a conceptual tool. In a tour-de-force essay in the *American Historical Review* in

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2001, Edward Baptist demonstrated that carnal desire and coercive sexual abuse were "business as usual" in the domestic slave trade; indeed, the relentless objectification and fetishization of Black women's bodies – notably the fixation upon light-skinned 'fancy maids' who could be sold as prostitutes – was, Baptist argues, part and parcel of their commodification. With his own monograph forthcoming later this year, Baptist has, as yet, had less to say about the destabilizing effects that this brutalizing sexual culture wrought upon the adults and children forced to witness the rape of their loved ones: for instance, upon coffled men's sense of themselves as masculine actors capable of resistance or upon coffled women's concepts of their own sexuality.[35]

The gendered identities of White traders were surely no less affected by the practice and culture of slave trading. As Walter Johnson reminds us in *Soul by Soul*, most itinerant traders operated in a hyper-masculine world pervaded by competition, ambition, physicality, lechery, and brash self-confidence. Yet, understanding how those values intersected with identities forged by social background and status remains a project for another day. Indeed, it may be that further work will chip away at the prevailing assumption that White women were peripheral figures in the trade. Johnson readily acknowledges that White women made the clothes that slaves wore when they were sold. However, a recent and as yet unpublished essay by Stephanie Jones-Rogers (2012) offers preliminary evidence to suggest that White women were also sometimes active as buyers, sellers, and speculators, while my own ongoing research finds a few White, Black, and mixed-race women making careers as kidnappers and traffickers.[36]

Time will tell. Indeed, over the next few years, we can expect a steady stream of new work that will further problematize our understanding of the scale and significance of the domestic slave trade, and in so doing secure this sub-field's now central position at the heart of slavery scholarship.

Short Biography

Richard Bell is an Associate Professor of History at the University of Maryland in College Park, where he teaches courses in early American studies, social history, and violence in American culture. He is the author of *We Shall Be No More: Suicide and Self Government in the Newly United States* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012) and co-editor of *Buried Lives: Incarcerated in Early America* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2012); he has also published articles on dueling, suicide, slavery, and the history of reading. He is the recipient of more than a dozen national fellowships, including, most recently research awards granted by the Huntington Library, the Library of Congress, the American Antiquarian Society, and the Virginia Historical Society. He is currently at work on a book length micro-history of kidnapping and the domestic slave trade. He holds a BA in History from the University of Cambridge and a PhD in American History from Harvard University.

Notes

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[1] Andrews, *Domestic Slave Trade* 80. For debates about closing the African trade, see Kulikoff, 'Uprooted Peoples,' 149, Rothman, 'Domestication of the Slave Trade,' 35–39, Finkelman, *Slavery and the Founders*, 3–36, and Mason, *Slavery and Politics*. On small-scale local and long distance slave trading prior to 1808, see Deyle, 'Most Profitable Trade,' and Deyle 'Irony of Liberty.'

[2] Phillips, *American Negro Slavery*, 187–204, Stampp, *Peculiar Institution*, 239–278, Elkins, *Slavery*, 53, 211, Genovese, *Roll Jordan Roll*, 419, 453, 625, and Fogel and Engerman, *Time on the Cross*, 1:38–58.

[3] Henry B. Stanton quoted in Deyle, *Carry Me Back*, 4.

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[4] For the comparison to the transatlantic middle passage, see Berlin, *Making of African America*, 15, 105, Eltis, 'The Transatlantic Slave Trade.' For a critique of Tadman's methods, see Freudenberger and Pritchett, 'New Evidence.' For earlier estimates of trading volume, see Weld, *Slavery As It Is*, 184, Calderhead, 'How Extensive,' Conrad and Meyer, 'Economics of Slavery,' Sutch, 'Breeding of Slaves' and Sweig, 'Interstate Slave Trade.' On planter migration, see Wells, 'Moving a Plantation.'

[5] West, *Chains of Love*, Deyle, *Carry Me Back*, 142–173. West is one of Tadman's former students. Her sources are primarily WPA narratives and other ex-slave testimony.

[6] For an introduction to the econometric scholarship derived from the coastwise shipping manifests now held at the National Archives, see Pritchett and Freudenberger, 'Peculiar Sample,' Pritchett, 'Interregional Slave Trade,' Freudenberger and Pritchett, 'New Evidence,' Komlos and Alecke, 'Antebellum Slave Heights,' Sweig, 'Interstate Slave Trade,' McMillan, 'Savannah's Coastal Trade.' On smuggling efforts after 1808, see Fehrenbacher, *Slaveholding Republic*, 135–172.

[7] *New Orleans Mercantile Advertiser*, Jan. 21, 1830 quoted in Deyle, *Carry Me Back*, 147. See also Welsey, 'Manifests of Slave Shipments,' McMillan, 'Journey of Lost Souls.'

[8] Lorenzo L. Ivey quoted in Deyle, *Carry Me Back*, 146. On comparative transportation costs, see Freudenberger and Pritchett, 'New Evidence,' 472–475, Evans, 'Economic Aspects of the Slave Trade,' 336.

[9] Freudenberger and Pritchett, 'New Evidence,' 462. For an excellent case study of a small-time trader, see Tansey, 'Bernard Kendig.' For an introduction to debates as to the profitability of slave dealing, see Tadman, *Speculators and Slaves*, 292–295.

[10] In 1830, Louisiana residents constituted 71 of customers in the New Orleans market. Freudenberger and Pritchett, 'New Evidence,' 462, Tadman, 'Demographic Cost of Sugar,' Rothman, *Slave Country*, 83, 198.

[11] John Brown quoted in Berry, 'Pressing Need of Cash,' 30–31, Freudenberger and Pritchett, 'New Evidence,' 457. For a promising new study of gender and slave prices, see Berry, 'Pricing of Human Property,' and Berry, *The Price for their Pound of Flesh* (forthcoming).

[12] Weld, *Slavery As It Is*, 182. See also Bancroft, *Slave Trading*, 66–87, Smithers, *Slave Breeding*, 20–43.

[13] Sutch, 'Slave Breeding,' 192–5, Phillips, *American Negro Slavery*, 362, Aitken, ed., *Did Slavery Pay?*

[14] Tadman, *Speculators and Slaves*, 121–9. For early skepticism about the extent of slave breeding, see Collins, *Domestic Slave Trade*, 70–74, Stampp, *Peculiar Institution*, 245–50, Conrad and Meyer, 'Economics of Slavery,' 113–4.

[15] Tadman, *Speculators and Slaves*, 47–82, 133–78, Fogel and Engerman *Time on the Cross*, 1:49–52. For early attention to the extent of family separations in the trade, see Andrews, *Domestic Slave Trade*, 193–4 and Bancroft, *Slave Trading*, 197–221. Scholars are divided as to whether planters used sales to interstate traders to maximize profits or to systematically dispose of lower quality slaves, a practice known among economists as adverse selection. See Greenwald and Glasspiegel, 'Adverse Selection.'

[16] Susan Hamlin quoted in Deyle, *Carry Me Back*, 246. See also Johnson, *Soul by Soul*, 30–44.

[17] On the relationship between slavery and capitalism, see Johnson, 'The Pedestal and the Veil,' Stokes and Conway, *Market Revolution*, Fogel and Engerman, *Time on the Cross*, Egerton, 'Markets without a Market Revolution,' Aitken, Ed., *Did Slavery Pay?*, Gilje, *Wages of Independence*, Ellis et al, 'Symposium on Charles Sellers,' and Rockman and Beckert, eds., *Slavery's Capitalism* (forthcoming).

[18] Schermerhorn, *Money over Mastery*, 15, Tadman, *Speculators and Slaves*, 200–204, Deyle, 'Rethinking the Slave Trade.'

[19] Deyle, *Carry Me Back*, 96–141, Johnson, *Soul by Soul*, 126–133, Watson, 'Slavery and Development,' 61.

[20] Deyle, *Carry Me Back*, 96–141.

[21] Johnson, *Soul by Soul*, 25–6, Egerton,'Markets without a Market Revolution,' 210. On slave hiring as a related market phenomenon, see Martin, *Divided Mastery*.

[22] Johnson, *Soul by Soul*, 78–116 (quotation on 79).

[23] Hundly, *Social Relations*, 140.

[24] Phillips, *American Negro Slavery*, 200–1, Tadman, *Speculators and Slaves*, 113–118, 179–210, Johnson, *Soul by Soul*, 8, 24–30. For critiques of Genovese in the context of the domestic slave trade, see Ford, 'Reconsidering the Internal Slave Trade' and Johnson, 'Nettlesome Classic,' http://www.common-place.org/vol-01/no-04/reviews/johnson.shtml.

[25] Thomas Maskell quoted in Johnson, *Soul by Soul*, 22.

[26] Deyle, *Carry Me Back*, 254–262. On shipboard resistance, see, for example, Rediker, *Slave Ship* and Smallwood, *Saltwater Slavery*.

[27] Deyle, *Carry Me Back*, 255

[28] Johnson, *Soul by Soul*, 117–188.

[29] On plantation families' survival strategies, see, for instance, Berlin, *Generations of Captivity*, Dusinberre, *Them Dark Days*, Kaye, *Joining Places*, Glymph, *Out of the House of Bondage*, Penningroth, *Chains of Kinfolk*, and. Stevenson, *Life in Black and White*.

[30] On kidnapping and antislavery, see also Wilson, *Freedom at Risk*, 67–102. Examples of early outrage over the domestic traffic include Torrey, *Portraiture of Slavery*, and Humanitas, *Reflections upon Slavery*.

[31] Mason, *Slavery and Politics*, 158–176.

[32] Lightner, *Commerce Clause*, 90–164. Washington, DC, which was under the direct control of the federal government, was a significant exception and became subject to trading regulation as early as 1794. For calls by proslavery politicians to reopen the African Slave Trade in the 1850s, see Johnson, *River of Dark Dreams*, 374–376, 395–420.

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[33] Confederate Constitution quoted in Lightner, *Commerce Clause*, 167.

[34] A recent essay collection edited by Walter Johnson makes comparative gestures but is formulated as a series of self-contained case studies of internal trades in the United States, Cuba, Brazil, and the British Caribbean. Johnson, ed., *Chattel Principle*.

[35] Baptist, '"Cuffy," "Fancy Maids,"' 1619, Baptist, 'Absent Subject,' Weld, *Slavery As It Is*, 69–70, Andrews, *Domestic Slave Trade*, 164–6. Among the many studies of race and gender in plantation contexts, see those by Deborah Gray White, *Ar'n't I a Woman*, Kathleen Brown, *Good Wives, Nasty Wenches and Anxious Patriarchs*, and Jennifer L. Morgan, *Laboring Women*. On Black Masculinity, see, for example, Thomas Foster, 'The Sexual Abuse of Black Men,' Gutman, *Black Family*, Marshall, *Manhood Enslaved*, Elkins, *Slavery: A Problem*, Black, *Dismantling Black Manhood*, Hine and Jenkins, eds. *Manhood Rights*. Both Jennifer L. Morgan and Daina Ramey Berry are currently at work on studies of gender and commodification. For a preview, see Berry, 'Pressing Need of Cash.'

[36] Deyle, *Carry Me Back*, 124–5, Johnson, *Soul by Soul*, 56, 89–96, Jones-Rogers, 'A Better Market.' Significantly, most of Jones-Rogers' evidence dates from the late 1850s.

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