

## A 'Sorrowful Cavalcade': Enslaved Migration through Appalachian Virginia

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Between the American Revolution and the Civil War, more than one million enslaved African Americans were forced to leave the eastern seaboard and upper-south states. In the first two decades after the Revolution, they were moved across the Alleghenies to the plantation frontiers of Kentucky and Tennessee. The majority of these earliest enslaved migrants traveled with migrating planters and therefore also with many of the migrants' closest kin. But, with the cotton boom starting in the 1810s, slave traders predominated, buying individuals and small fragments of families, transporting them, and selling them to planters in the new Gulf Coast South: Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, and Texas.<sup>2</sup>

The motif of the journey has long held significance in African-American life and history. The first great migration, of course, was the middle passage of the transatlantic slave trade, but only a handful of survivors left first-hand accounts. In the antebellum United States, African-American fugitives narrated their individual journeys out of slavery and into freedom. These non-fiction accounts in turn inspired a literary and artistic tradition that informed the "exodusters" of the late nineteenth century and the great migrations of World Wars I and II.<sup>3</sup> The pre-Civil War movement of slaves, however, is often overlooked as a "great migration," especially for the Appalachian region.

Enslaved African Americans clearly left their mark on Appalachia, contributing significantly to the region's political economy and culture.<sup>4</sup> Appalachia also left its mark on African Americans just passing through the mountains, as the following documents illuminate. Participants in and observers of the domestic United States slave trade left quite divergent accounts of the meaning of enslaved migration. Traders focused on the business of forced migration, dwelling little on how African Ameri-

cans might have felt about it. Even sympathetic white witnesses did not fully perceive the trade's import to enslaved African Americans. The accounts written by slave buyers, observers, and slaves alike agree that the mountain journeys provided potential opportunities for escape. Slaves, however, tended to emphasize their own vulnerability on the journey rather than the possibility of flight. While former slaves left relatively few first-hand accounts of their lives, what they recorded is striking. In their letters and autobiographies, the Blue Ridge and Allegheny stood literally and sometimes metaphorically in their path. Mountains obviously constituted physical landmarks of enslaved journeys out of Virginia, but they could also serve as emotional landmarks as well. The hardship of the physical journey fixed in these narrators' minds the emotional hardship of separation from loved ones they were forced to leave behind.

Appalachian Virginia played a key role in the great slave migration. Over five hundred thousand enslaved African Americans were forced to leave Virginia between 1790 and 1860. Large numbers of these forced migrants traveled on foot through mountainous southwest Virginia, whether headed to Kentucky or Mississippi. Planters and traders tended to travel in winter, after harvest. Each week between September and April, residents of Christiansburg, Abingdon, and other towns along the route would have seen at least one or two and perhaps as many as four slave traders' gangs or "coffles" passing through, with at least 20 slaves in each group, sometimes many more. Migrant slaveholders usually traveled with smaller groups, but used the same routes as the traders. In all, an average of more than 80 enslaved migrants per week likely passed through southwest Virginia each trading season after 1810, peaking at perhaps 200 during the speculative boom preceding the panic of 1837.<sup>5</sup>

Something of the economic impact of this movement on areas along the southwestern route is implied in the account book kept by slave trader James A. Mitchell of Pittsylvania County, Virginia. In a small ledger he titled "The Expense of Travelin with negros from Va to Miss and Returnig home," Mitchell carefully noted his daily costs for the fall and winter of 1834–1835. He and the 51 slaves he intended to sell set out carrying only two days' worth of food. Nearly every day of the journey, therefore, Mitchell paid some unnamed farmer or merchant along the way for "provisions", which he sometimes elaborated on as "Bacon & provisions".

Mitchell's account also outlined the route itself by noting tolls at each major ford, bridge, or turnpike. The group crossed the New River

on October 24 and the Clinch River on November 5, and joined the turnpike at Crab Orchard, Tennessee, on November 6. They proceeded to cross the Cany Fork and the Tennessee River before joining another turnpike at "W. Mountain." They entered Mississippi on November 23 and crossed the Tombigbee River the next day. Joining the Nashoba turnpike, they crossed the Pearl River on the 29th and arrived in Natchez around December 6.<sup>6</sup> Thus, it took Mitchell and his caravan seven weeks to make the trek, averaging about 17 miles per day, a pace slightly slower than average for such journeys.<sup>7</sup>

In writing home to his wife, Sarah, about the journey, Mitchell paid some attention to individual slaves on the trip, but in the end their sentiments were not his concern. On December 10, he wrote to Sarah that "we are all injoyen good health. I have had a weat and moody jurny and bad weather but keep harty and injoy good health." He had had little luck so far in making sales; he had "only sold two negros yet ther a pers [appears] to [be] great demand for them but I cant get no money." The buyers, he complained, "all want on a credit and that dont suit me for I want cash." He reported to his wife on some of the slaves by first and even last name — men and women he had carried from the Mitchells' own household:

Mary Carter is got well and harty a gain and all the guirls that com from our house is doin very well and well satisfyd Mariah Finney Cooks for me and can do smart of the well but she is uncertain and mulish at times, Washington waits on me also and is the best that I have Ever seen &c all behaves well [so far' *inserted*] &c When I shall be able to make sales I cant tell but as soon as I can I will sell I must bair with pachence Sell [*illeg.*] when I can, and you mus[t] bair with good faith duren my absence and try to enjoy your self as well as possable, and Tell the children to be good boys & guirls Pair will come [*illeg.*] by and for them to go to school and learn thr Books [*illeg.*] like purty children and sho[w] Pair how smart they love him in his absence &c. I have nothing more at present but Remain yours &c.

Mitchell was obviously a little worried that these people he planned to sell might not "behave" well after all. No doubt they were even more unhappy to be in Mississippi than Mitchell was. In a post script, Mitchell wrote his wife, "I want to he[a]r from home very mutch, this Country is said to be [more] heathen than common." While Mitchell did return to

his family and home from out of this “heathen” land, the 51 African Americans did not. Mary Carter was sold together with Moses for \$1,550, the price indicating Moses was probably a working-age adult, perhaps her husband. Maria Finney, however, was sold alone, bringing Mitchell \$600. Washington appears to have remained with Mitchell until the end, perhaps expecting to accompany him back home. Instead, Mitchell sold the man for more than \$1,000 in order to return alone the way he had come.<sup>8</sup>

Like Mitchell’s 51 slaves, the vast majority of forced African-American migrants from Virginia came from the regions east of the Blue Ridge, where most slaves lived and where, in some counties, the labor glut in slaves had begun even before the Revolution.<sup>9</sup> Slaveholders and slave traders forced the emigration of 19 to 29 percent of the slave population from the Tidewater each decade after 1790. The Piedmont followed suit after 1810; slaveholders there sold or moved 15 to 25 percent of the region’s slave population out of the state each decade. Even the tobacco boom of the 1840s and 1850s did not slow the exodus of slaves. While the areas west of the Blue Ridge saw far fewer raw numbers of slave migrants than did the east, the rate of forced emigration from western Virginia equaled that of the eastern regions in the 1850s.<sup>10</sup>

Knowing that slaveholders everywhere might sell, slave traders scoured every part of the state for slaves to transport to the deep-south markets, as evidenced by their frequent announcements in local newspapers. The following late antebellum notices were typical of those from the 1840s through 1860. This one appeared in the *Lexington Valley Star* on January 26, 1860:

NEGROES! NEGROES!!

The undersigned wishes to buy ONE HUNDRED likely NEGROES, for which he will pay the highest Market Price in CASH.

J. F. TOMPKINS, Lexington, Va.

Tompkins had some local competition. Other traders — William Taylor of Brownsburg, some 15 miles north of Lexington, and J. E. Carson of neighboring Augusta County — published notices in the Lexington newspaper.<sup>11</sup> Further south, Abingdon auctioneer Joseph M. Crockett swaggered in a local advertisement that he “wants all the Negroes that are for sale in this part of the country, for which the highest prices will be paid in cash.” George Hardy of Abingdon worked the trade in partnership with

Dr. H. Clark of Rural Retreat. They advertised from spring to summer in 1859 that they "desire to purchase an unlimited number of likely young negroes, for whom they will give the highest prices in CASH!" In addition to these local men, Tidewater traders also worked the region beyond the Blue Ridge, sending out buying agents on itinerant missions.<sup>12</sup> Many of these traders funneled slaves through the Richmond markets, where auctioneers bought and sold on commission. There, buyers from the deep South frequently arrived to buy slaves, hoping to avoid the costs of buying in the more expensive markets of Natchez and New Orleans.<sup>13</sup>

A Louisiana sugar planter named Andrew Durnford learned the hard way that the money saved in Richmond came with its own set of headaches. Durnford was in one way an atypical planter, as he was a creole free man of color. He had established close ties to white planters in Louisiana, however, and his relative wealth and network of connections allowed him freedom of movement. At least, he met no resistance in Richmond when he traveled there in 1835 to buy slaves for his plantation. Perhaps his ancestry was sufficiently diverse that he allowed himself to be perceived as white in Virginia, where he was not well known. In any case, he clearly did not identify with those African Americans he bought and held as slaves.<sup>14</sup>

Durnford did seek to buy at least some slaves in family groups, but, like other purchasing planters, his main concerns on the trip were the costs and logistics of purchasing and transportation. He wrote his white fellow planter and apparent business partner John McDonogh on June 10th that he had "been advised to take them [his purchased slaves] through by land from here to Guyandotte on the Ohio, as there is no vessel that will leave here before the first of October."<sup>15</sup> Five days later, he had reconsidered this advice:

I find that I will have much more difficulty than I was aware of in their transportation. I thought of going to Guyandotte, on horses, &c, and then would not be nearer New Orleans than to be here. I have been making inquiries respecting the route. It is a job of twenty five days. If a few getts sick on the way I will have to stay up and expend what few dollars I may have left. I will do better if it can be done, that is, if the Steam Packets will take me from N[orfolk] to Charleston. I will go there and shipped my people, and come home by land, as the [coastal] passage will be long, and warm.<sup>16</sup>

While Durnford searched for a coastal vessel shipping soon enough, his fears about overland delays were confirmed by reports from the west:

I hear the cholera is at Wheeling, and all along the rivers of the western country. A few weeks ago a farmer of Alabama started by land, and I have been informed since, that one of them [his slaves purchased in Virginia] have been taken sick with measles he had to stop on the way. My lot is [i.e., includes] children. They can't walk, and if half a dozen should get sick on the way, it would fill my waggon, prevent me from traveling ...<sup>17</sup>

Despite these dire warnings, in the end Durnford was left to take this route. He continued also to be plagued by a rush of other out-of-state buyers like himself, who had bid up prices in Virginia. As he wrote McDonogh from Richmond on July 6th:

This is to say that I will leave here tomorrow for Guyandot with twenty five people of all description, for which I paid six thousand eight hundred & seventy six dollars. I will keep the ballance of the money, and it is probable on my way on the other side of the mountain I may gett a few more. There is so many of the Alabama farmers here, that there is no prospects of doing any more business... The [Virginia] farmers is aware of the prices, and will hold on, it is only after the harvest that people may be got cheaper, and not certain at that, then... I have agreed with a wagoner to take me to G[uyandotte] for 75\$, and a man to go with me for fear they [the slaves] might stow themselves away when near their home...<sup>18</sup>

Only by his interest in preventing any escapes did Durnford give any indication how his forced migrants might feel about the trip. Knowing that many had come from the Piedmont and western parts of the state through which they would be traveling on the way to Guyandotte, he was wary of this overland route, but he had little choice.

While professional traders did hire or operate their own steamboats to send slaves to New Orleans by the coastal shipping routes, most slave migrants traveled by foot throughout the antebellum period. Two white travelers documented this mass movement in southwest Virginia. Each perceived and portrayed African-American sentiments about the migration in his own characteristic way. On September 6, 1834, Englishman George Featherstonhaugh intercepted trader John Armfield of Alexan-

dria, who was directing the migration of an extraordinarily large coffle of three hundred slaves across a ford on the New River. Though an abolitionist, Featherstonhaugh remained steeped in the racial notions of his day, and he held an ambivalent view of what the forced migration meant for the African Americans themselves:

It was an interesting, but a melancholy spectacle, to see them effect the passage of the river: first, a man on horseback selected a shallow place in the ford for the male slaves; then followed a waggon and four horses, attended by another man on horseback. The other waggon contained the children and some that were lame, whilst the scows, or flat-boats, crossed the women and some of the people belonging to the caravan.



*Englishman George Featherstonhaugh witnessed trader John Armfield of Alexandria, Virginia, directing this large coffle of slaves across the New River in 1834. The traders wore black crepe on their hat bands in mourning for the death of the Marquis de Lafayette, a point Featherstonhaugh found hypocritical, given Lafayette's status as a symbol of liberty. (from Virginia Cavalcade, vol. 3, p. 10 (Autumn 1953).*

There was much method and vigilance observed, for this was one of the situations where the gangs — always watchful to obtain their liberty — often show a disposition to mutiny, knowing that if one or two of them could wrench their manacles off, they could soon free the rest, and either disperse themselves or overpower and slay their sordid keepers, and fly to the Free States. The slave-drivers, aware of this disposition in the unfortunate negroes, endeavour to mitigate their discontent by feeding them well on the march, and by encouraging them to sing “Old Virginia never tire,” to the banjo.

The poor negro slave is naturally a cheerful, laughing animal, and even when driven through the wilderness in chains, if he is well fed and kindly treated, is seldom melancholy; for his thoughts have not been taught to stray to the future, and his condition is so degraded, that if the food and warmth his desires are limited to are secured to him, he is singularly docile.<sup>19</sup>

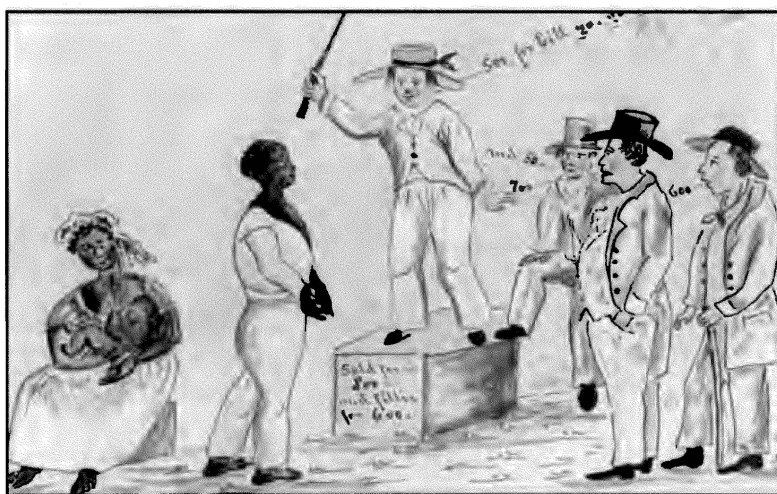
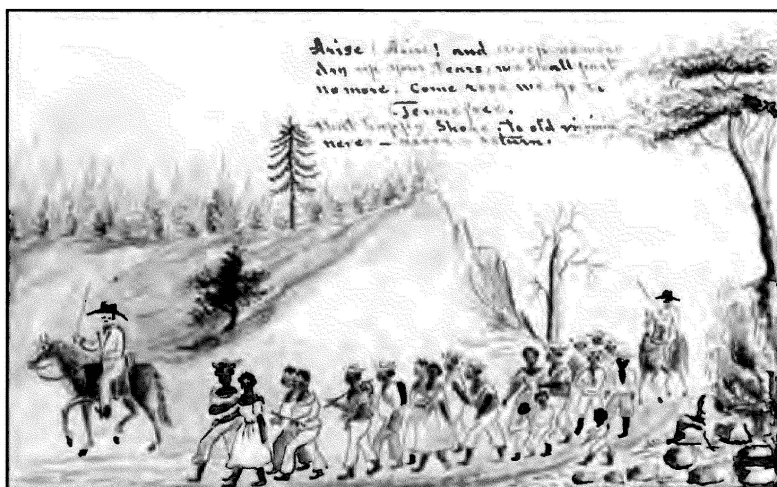
As Featherstonhaugh wrote about the New River crossing he witnessed, he clearly applied the pro-slavery argument that African Americans were happy in slavery. Particularly glaring was his failure to see how being “driven through the wilderness in chains” might not constitute “kindly” treatment. Yet the British observer did not imbibe that ideology in its entirety. Like the slave buyer Andrew Durnford, Featherstonhaugh assumed that slaves might openly resist and escape the trade. He went on to note, in fact, that he heard “that only two or three months before I passed this way a ‘gang’ had surprised their conductors when off their guard, and had killed some of them with axes.”<sup>20</sup> In Featherstonhaugh’s reckoning of the slave trade, then, slaves could prove both docile and violent.

Lewis Miller, a “Pennsylvania Dutch” native of York (Pennsylvania), captured the ironic way African Americans themselves might express their sentiments in the slave trade. Traveling widely, he kept journals in the form of watercolor sketchbooks. Miller filled these with both humorous and serious scenes — including, for example, a boy who accidentally shot another in the face, and a man who “made his water” in a tub of someone else’s sauerkraut. Miller was quite observant of issues of race, but he almost always displayed reticence, expressing his own opinions indirectly. He illustrated with equal restraint the “Large Fire in York



Borough 1803 set on fire by the negroes," and the 1863 celebration of African Americans at the news of emancipation.<sup>21</sup>

In an 1853 sketch of a trader's coffle heading down the Valley Turnpike south of Staunton, Miller demonstrated his characteristic perceptiveness and detachment. The group sang as they marched, and Miller recorded their words:



*On a trip to Virginia in 1853, Pennsylvanian Lewis Miller sketched in watercolors a slave coffle heading down the Valley Turnpike south of Staunton (top) and a slave auction in Christiansburg (bottom). He wrote of the trader's coffle: "I was Astonished at this boldness, the carrier Stopped a moment, then Ordered the march." (by permission, Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Folk Art Center, Williamsburg, Va.)*

Arise! Arise! and weep no more  
dry up your tears, we Shall part no more.  
Come rose we go to Tennessee, that happy shore.  
to old virginia never — never — return.<sup>22</sup>

Miller's sketch of enslaved African Americans singing as they were forced to leave their homes embodied the many contradictory layers of meaning involved in the scene. Featherstonhaugh had remarked that traders compelled the slaves to sing in order to keep them happy. Frederick Douglass, in his 1845 autobiography, undermined this pro-slavery notion that singing constituted "evidence of their contentment and happiness." "It is impossible to conceive of a greater mistake," Douglass countered. "Slaves sing most when they are most unhappy. The songs of the slave represent the sorrows of his heart; and he is relieved by them, only as an aching heart is relieved by its tears." Former slave John Sella Martin concurred in 1867, writing that when traders told departing slaves to "strike up lively," they meant the slaves to mask "any expression of sorrow for those who are being torn away from them; but the negroes, who have very little hope of ever seeing those again who are dearer to them than life, and who are weeping and wailing over the separation, often turn the song thus demanded of them into a farewell dirge."<sup>23</sup>

Thus the song Miller heard and transcribed — a hybrid between sentimental tune and spiritual — had been twisted by the enslaved chorus into a lamentation. That slaves should sing of "parting no more" while in the very act of parting had to strike everyone involved as terribly ironic. The interpolation of Tennessee as the River Jordan's "happy shore" of Biblical reunion would have seemed equally implausible to trader, enslaved migrant, and observant onlooker alike. The finality of the last line punctuated the contradiction, as these migrants would indeed "never—never—return" to their homes and families in Virginia. While Miller's sketching style may have rendered the slaves' situation somewhat comic, his sympathies seemed to be with them, and the wry wit with which he observed other events may have allowed him to hear the ironic overtones of their song.

African Americans, of course, held dear their attachments to their homes and families just as white people did. William, a free man of color from piedmont Amherst County, expressed his feelings in terms of an emotional geography. Attempting to avoid state-sponsored deportation to Liberia in 1836, he petitioned the legislature to allow him to stay,

attesting that he “loves the country where he was born and raised, in sight of the big mountains, and away from the Sea.” The sight of the sheltering Blue Ridge proved a comfort to him, while the ocean loomed as the conduit for his potential exile. William was not merely sentimental about Virginia; he knew that migration would mean separation from his family and friends. He pleaded in his petition that he was old and therefore “desires to form no new connections in this life.”<sup>24</sup>

Those “connections” were precisely what African Americans stood to lose through forced migration, whether at the hands of migrating planters or commercial traders. Some white slaveholders expressed their understanding of this attitude. One particularly attentive Virginia slaveholding woman wrote in 1804 about the impending migration of some of their slaves to Kentucky. “Tomorrow the negroes are to get off and I expect there will be great crying and mourning, children Leaving there mothers, mothers there children, and women there husbands.” This particular separation was supposed to be only temporary, but she clearly recognized the potential intervention of permanent separation through death. She wrote that “whoever Lives to see it both black & white will Leave this State” in the fall.<sup>25</sup>

Enslaved African Americans remaining in Virginia never knew if they would live to see their loved ones again. A few, however, were able to gain at least some information about those they had lost. A tiny minority of slaves — certainly fewer than five percent — learned to write, and those fewer still who had their masters’ permission to do so used their skills to seek information about emigrant family members. In 1807, an enslaved woman named Gooley wrote from Port Royal, in Caroline County, Virginia, to her former mistress, who had moved to Kentucky. Several of Gooley’s children had been taken along, and Gooley had learned troubling news about them. She wrote that she had “heard you have lost some of your Small Negroes by death. Do when you write me inform me which of them are dead.” Whether Gooley learned the fate of her children or even received a reply remains unknown.<sup>26</sup>

The economic logic of slavery meant that African-American kin were separated by sale and hire within Virginia as well.<sup>27</sup> These relatively short-distance separations complicated matters when bad news came, even when literacy aided communication. Maria and Richard Perkins faced a particular problem, separated as they were by the Blue Ridge. Maria Perkins was living in the Piedmont town of Charlottesville when

she learned that her master had sold her son to a trader in Scottsville, on the James River. Richard was living at the time in Staunton, in the Shenandoah Valley county of Augusta. She wrote him there, hoping he could find a suitable buyer for her. Slavery had strewn her family and her own life across that distance more than once, it seems. "My things is in several places," she wrote, "some is in Staunton and if I should be sold I don't know what will become of them. I don't expect to meet with the luck to get that way."<sup>28</sup>

Distance stood similarly in the path of Bethany Veney, an enslaved woman living in Page County near Luray, and her husband Jerry, who lived with a different master to the east across the Blue Ridge. In Veney's autobiography, the crisis they faced gave the mountain journey an emotional significance beyond the seven miles separating her home from Jerry's. They had been married only eight months when he was sold to pay his master's debts. Veney trudged over the pass to see him one last time in the jail at Little Washington, where he had been incarcerated to await sale. When she wrote her autobiography in 1889, she still remembered vividly what she had experienced and how she had felt on that dreadful night, as she walked along the carriage road over the mountain:

The sun might have been two hours high when I started; but, before I was half over the mountain, night had closed round me its deepest gloom. The vivid flashes of lightening made the carriage path plain at times, and then I could not see a step before me; and the rolling thunder added to my fear and dread.<sup>29</sup>

This harrowing journey marked the beginning of the end, as Jerry was bought by slave traders Frank White and David McCoy, who eventually carried him south, never to be heard from again. In Veney's narrative, the Blue Ridge literally represented the distance between her husband and herself. Moreover, the ravaging storm mirrored her own gloomy emotions, her dread at the task of separation that lay before her.

Ex-slave John P. Parker used the mountains and the slave trade even more explicitly in his narrative to mark his entrance into slavery itself. Dictating his autobiography in the 1880s, he recalled a crucial event in his young life. Sold from Norfolk to Richmond at age eight, he was sold again to a commercial trader, chained in a coffle, and marched west through the Alleghenies:

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I was trudging along a trail called a road through the mountains of Virginia. It was June. Every flower was in bloom, the wilderness was all about us, green and living. Azaleas and mountain laurels were in full bloom. Every thing seemed to be gay except myself. Picking up a stick, I struck at each flowering shrub, taking delight in smashing down particularly those in bloom. That was my only revenge on the things that were free.

I remember coming to a mountain brook. As the long chain of men, women, and children crossed through the brook, I kicked and splashed the running water. I struck at the bubbles with my stick — anything and everything that was without restraint was the object of wrath...

When we came out of the brook, there was a chestnut tree in full tassled bloom. In the midst of the clusters sang a red bird, to me a red blotch of blood. In an instant I had seized a rock and with all my youth and heart of hatred, I threw it at the red bird. It flew away careless[ly], but if it had been in my power I would have killed [it] and been glad of the deed. What I did do was to shake my fist at it and curse it. The rest of the slaves laughed at my anger.

For Parker, the sojourn in the mountains marked not only his forced exile from Virginia, but also his initiation into the meaning of slavery. The mountains' lushness had revealed to him a natural state of freedom, an Eden from which he had been unjustly banished. The freedom of the mountain "wilderness" mocked the enslaved child. He literally saw red and lashed out at it. "Ragged and barefooted," he wrote, "I was resentful of the freedom of nature." This experience proved crucial to Parker's self-awareness, for the scene, he avowed, had remained "indelibly fixed in my mind" nearly fifty years after its passing. It may even have helped inspire his later work as a key player on the Underground Railroad in Ohio.<sup>30</sup>

For another boy crossing the mountains in slavery, the journey proved more of a purgatory than a condemnation. Fourteen-year-old Francis Fedric was forced to move from Fauquier County, Virginia, to Kentucky, via Wheeling, around 1827, along with the rest of his master's slaves. His remembrance, written and published in England at the height of the American Civil War, served clearly as abolitionist polemic, but it also conveyed both factual and emotional truths about his experiences on

the journey through the mountains. Rather than mocking him, nature seemed to threaten him outright:

We set out with several waggons and a sorrowful cavalcade on our way to Kentucky. After several day's journey, we saw at a distance the lofty range of the Allegheny mountains. My master, by the use of his glass, had told us two or three days before that the mountains were near. They now became visible, looming in the distance something like blue sky. After a while we approached them, and began to pass over them through what appeared to be a long, winding valley. On every side, huge, blue-looking rocks seemed impending. I thought, if let loose, they would fall upon us and crush us. Our journey was, I may say almost interrupted every now and then, by immense droves of pigs, which are bred in Kentucky, and were proceeding from thence to Baltimore, and other places in Virginia. These droves contained very often 700 or 800 pigs. When we halted for the night we lit our fires, and baked our Indian meal on griddles; sometimes the cakes were very much burnt, but these, together with salt herrings, were the only food we had. Our drink was water from the surrounding rills running down the mountain-sides. In fact, torrents of water, arising from the ice and melting snow, were rushing down in hundreds of directions. The scenery was what I may term hard and wild, the tops of the mountains being hid by the clouds, in many places rolling far beneath. But my thoughts in passing over these mountains then were rather those of amazement and wonder than those of a curious and inquiring mind, such as now, with some enlightenment, I might have. I only remember large flights of crows, and what are called in America, black birds, which make a loud screaming noise, instead of a beautiful note, like the English bird of this name.

Two or three times during the night, when we were encamped and fast asleep, one of the overseers would call our names over, every one being obliged to wake up and answer. My master was afraid of some of us escaping, so uncertain are the owners of the possession of their slaves. The masters are ever feverishly anxious about the slaves running away, and this being always continued, necessarily produces an irritability characteristic of the slave-holder. The howling of the

wolves, and other wild animals, broke the solemn stillness which reigned widely around us. Now and then my master would fire his gun to frighten them away from us, but we never were in any way molested. Perhaps the fires kept them at a distance from us.<sup>31</sup>

Fedric envisioned the mountains as a wild place through which he had to pass. Here, unlike in Parker's narrative, "wilderness" threatened rather than mocked the enslaved boy. In place of babbling brooks, there were torrential streams; instead of a singing red bird, Fedric saw "screaming" black birds. Boulders threatened to crush him and wolves to eat him. The Appalachian mountains led, in Fedric's vision, out of the frying pan of Virginia only into the unknown fire of Kentucky.

As Fedric noted, echoing Featherstonhaugh and Durnford, masters had their own fear — losing slaves as runaways in the mountains. Perhaps his master's periodic gunfire served as much a warning to Fedric's enslaved fellow travelers as to the wolves. Fedric's abolitionist autobiography allowed slaveholders no quarter. He laid the blame fully on his master for separating the family in the migration. As for the old Virginia home he had been forced to leave, Fedric associated it not with reverie or nostalgia but with the pain of separation. "Still, after so many years," he wrote, the "lamentations and piercing cries" of spouses left behind "sound in my ears whenever I think of Virginia."<sup>32</sup>

Traveling in freedom did not lessen the hold of the mountain passages on African-American life histories. London Ferrill was sold from his mother at age eight or nine, but he traveled to Kentucky as a free man and a minister. His anonymous biographer, a proslavery apologist, minimized Ferrill's separation from his mother, emphasizing instead his religious calling and the kindness of white patrons in sponsoring Ferrill's mission work. Thus the mountain wilderness in his narrative held Biblical connotations:

Ferrill's desire to leave his native State increased; his mind was greatly troubled, thinking that some unenlightened population in some section were without a shepherd and needed his services in the cause of Christianity, he came to the determination to seek them, and his kind wife remarked to him that she would go with him any where.

He thought of New York and Philadelphia as good places to settle, but he was persuaded to come out to Kentucky. He bought him a Yankee wagon and two horses, and he and his

wife started on their journey on the old Wilderness road, which was very thinly settled. They had to sleep forty miles from any habitation whilst journeying to Kentucky, the bears and the wolves howling around their tent each night all night, keeping them in fear of an attack from those ferocious animals and being devoured by them, but through the protection of a kind Providence they escaped unhurt, and at length arrived in this State and went to Colonel Overton's, where they were cordially received.<sup>33</sup>

Ferrill's image of the wilderness struck similar chords with Francis Fedric's more secular one, howling wolves and all. But Ferrill gave it an interpretation more clearly biblical. As the Reverend Francis Ferrill knew well, Christ had suffered his own trials in the wilderness. And, as Ferrill himself asserted, it was only by "kind Providence" that he and his wife made it through.<sup>34</sup>

The mountains in Ferrill's narrative seemed to hold resonance with other religious biographies. Thomas Anderson's life history proved similar to Ferrill's in outline. Both were born in Hanover County in the 1780s; both gained freedom; both followed a religious calling; both moved west of the Alleghenies; and both had white patrons record their biographies. In 1854, when his narrative was published, Anderson lived near the mouth of the Guyandotte River. While Anderson did not record his trip over the Alleghenies, he did see the metaphorical religious significance of mountains in his own life's work. He told of one of his own personal struggles in his ministry:

The Lord lay out a little work, not long since, for me to do in Ohio, about twelve miles distant; and though I did not see at first how it was to be done, I wait patiently his time to remove the mountains out of my way, and when he did remove it, he make the path of duty very plain, and all opposition was remove out of the way, and then I perform the little labor to the peace of my soul, and, I trust, to the glory of God.<sup>35</sup>

While it was in fact the Ohio River that separated Anderson from his mission work, his focus on mountains was instructive. He did not make the obvious Biblical connection between the Ohio River and the River Jordan, with its promise of freedom and reunion, as other African Americans did. Instead, Anderson's Biblical reference focused on what he (and his white biographer) considered his life's work and struggle.



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Mountains stood as a metaphor for his own doubt, which only faith in the Lord would remove.<sup>36</sup> It is also possible that his own experience in passing over the Alleghenies to the Guyandotte informed his choice of metaphor. He had already experienced what was likely a trying journey through the mountains that he perhaps, like Ferrill, would have interpreted as providential: the Lord had cleared a path for him through actual mountains, and now the Lord had moved metaphorical mountains which lay in his spiritual path.

The image of the Appalachians as a place of trials continued, though less emphatically, in one of the last and most famous of Virginia's ex-slave autobiographies, Booker T. Washington's 1901 *Up from Slavery*. Born around 1856 in Franklin County, he experienced emancipation during the Civil War. After the war, his step-father settled in the Kanawha Valley in West Virginia to work in salt furnaces. "As soon as freedom was declared," Washington recalled, his step-father called for his wife and her children to join him near Charleston. Washington described the journey:

At that time a journey from Virginia over the mountains to West Virginia was rather a tedious and in some cases a painful undertaking. What little clothing and few household goods we had were placed in a cart, but the children walked the greater portion of the distance, which was several hundred miles.... We were several weeks making the trip, and most of the time we slept in the open air and did our cooking over a log fire out-of-doors. One night I recall that we camped near an abandoned log cabin, and my mother decided to build a fire in that for cooking, and afterward to make a "pallet" on the floor for our sleeping. Just as the fire had gotten well started a large black snake fully a yard and a half long dropped down the chimney and ran out on the floor. Of course we at once abandoned that cabin.<sup>37</sup>

Once again, now in postbellum freedom, this passage through the wilderness — as marked by the abandoned cabin and the encounter with the snake — served to mark a transition from one hard situation to another. Washington described his new home in the industrial town as worse than his cold slave cabin. His step-father quickly put the ten-year-old to work packing salt barrels at four o'clock every morning. Washington's life in freedom would indeed be a struggle.

While the slaveholders and slave traders who directed enslaved migration saw the migration chiefly in terms of their own economic interest, some white observers expressed limited sympathy. Even antislavery observers did not fully comprehend the meaning forced migration held for enslaved people. In African Americans' journey stories, the mountains of the Alleghenies often stood as emotional as well as physical barriers to be negotiated. Mountains represented a "wilderness" experience, one in which African Americans struggled with the meanings of their separation from well-known homes and families to the east. For some, like John P. Parker, mountains catalyzed an awakening to one's own enslaved status in the world. For others, like Bethany Veney, the mountain journey marked the dread of separation from a particular loved one. The passage through the mountains seared in their memory the pain of that particular life-changing event.

Others, like London Ferrill and perhaps Thomas Anderson, interpreted their mountain sojourns as guided by Providence. For them, mountains represented trials to overcome in doing their duty to the Lord's mission work in the world. Francis Fedric's purgatory was a secular one, as he passed only from one slave society to another. Some, like Gooley, found the distance across the Alleghenies to be an obstacle to communication, surmountable perhaps, but only imperfectly so. Others, like the petitioner William, found solace in the mountains' sheltering presence.

But none found redemption there. For these narrators, their Appalachian journeys were ones taken only under duress. Slaveholders directed their journeys, whether taken in the slave trade or with migrating planters. Local movement had long meant constant dislocation in family and community ties, but long-distance migration could mean "social death," the removal from all known kin and community.<sup>38</sup> This social death found metaphorical representation for some African Americans in the form of the mountains that struck them so impressively on their actual journeys. The physical hardships of mountain passages mirrored and amplified African Americans' emotional and spiritual experiences in the enslaved migration away from home. Despite the slave gang's song about Tennessee, that "happy shore" of freedom lay not in the mountains, but rather on the northern banks of the Ohio River, or across international boundaries, or, for nearly four million African Americans, on the far side of the Civil War.

## Endnotes

1. Phillip D. Troutman earned his Ph.D. from the University of Virginia in August 2000 and taught history at Virginia Tech in 1999–2000. He is currently a scholar in residence at the Center for the Study of the American South, revising his manuscript for publication as *SENTIMENT IN THE SLAVE MARKET OF ANTEBELLUM VIRGINIA*. He thanks Peter Wallenstein, Hugh Campbell, and the anonymous *Smithfield Review* readers for their comments on drafts of this essay.
2. Allan Kulikoff, "Uprooted Peoples: Black Migrants in the Age of the American Revolution, 1790–1820," in *Slavery and Freedom in the Age of the American Revolution*, ed. Ira Berlin and Ronald Hoffman (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1983), 152. Michael Tadman, *Speculators and Slaves: Masters, Traders, and Slaves in the Old South* (Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1989), 12, table 2.1, and 22–41. Jonathan Pritchett, "Quantitative Estimates of the U. S. Interregional Slave Trade, 1820–60," paper presented at the Social Science History Association Annual Meeting, 21 November 1998. Traders and planters both separated black family members in the process of migration. See Tadman, *Speculators*, 111–17, 170–71, and Herbert Gutman, *Slavery and the Numbers Game: A Critique of Time on the Cross* (Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1975), 105, 112.
3. For historical perspectives on these great migrations, see Ira Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard Univ. Press, 1998), 17–28; Sidney W. Mintz and Richard Price, *The Birth of African-American Culture: An Anthropological Perspective* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996), 42–46; Nell Irvin Painter, *Exodusters: Black Migration to Kansas after Reconstruction*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1986); and James R. Grossman, *Land of Hope: Chicago, Black Southerners, and the Great Migration* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1989). Literary studies of the journey motif include Farah Jasmine Griffin, "*Who Set You Flowin'?*": *The African American Migration Narrative* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1995) and William L. Andrews, *To Tell a Free Story: The First Century of Afro-American Autobiography, 1760–1865* (Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1986). For narratives of the African slave trade, see Jerome S. Handler and Michael L. Tuite, ed., *Pictorial Images of the Transatlantic Slave Trade*, <http://gropius.lib.virginia.edu/SlaveTrade/>; and Philip D. Curtin, ed., *Africa Remembered: Narratives by West Africans from the Era of the Slave Trade* (orig. 1967; repr., Waveland Press, 1997). For collections of African-American autobiographies see the University of North Carolina Libraries project, *Documenting the American South: North American Slave Narratives*, <http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/neh.html>, and Farah J. Griffin and Cheryl J. Fish, *A Stranger in the Village: Two Centuries of African-American Travel Writing* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1998). Artistic interpretations of the journey motif include Jacob Lawrence, *The Great Migration: An American Story* (New York: HarperCollins, 1993), and Toni Morrison, *Beloved* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1987).
4. The most comprehensive history of slavery on the smaller farms more typical of mountainous areas promises to be Wilma Dunaway, *Never Safe in a Family Way: Forced Labor Migrations, Slave Diasporas, and Reproductive Exploitation on Small Plantations* (forthcoming, Univ. of North Carolina Press); for a preview, see Dunaway, "Diaspora, Death, and Sexual Exploitation: Slave Families at Risk in the

- Mountain South," *Appalachian Journal* 26 (Winter 1999): 128-149. For other recent essays, see John Inscoc, ed., *Appalachians and Race: The Mountain South from Slavery to Segregation* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2000). See also Charles B. Dew, *Bond of Iron: Master and Slave at Buffalo Forge* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1994); John Inscoc, *Mountain Masters, Slavery, and the Sectional Crisis in Western North Carolina* (Knoxville: Univ. of Tennessee Press, 1989); "Olmsted in Appalachia: A Connecticut Yankee Encounters Slavery and Racism in the Southern Highlands," *Slavery and Abolition* 9 (Sept. 1988): 171-182; and "Mountain Masters as Confederate Opportunists: The Profitability of Slavery in Western North Carolina, 1861-65," *Slavery and Abolition* 15 (April 1995): 85-100; and Kenneth Noe, *Southwest Virginia's Railroad: Modernization and the Sectional Crisis* (Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1994). For other aspects of African-American history in Appalachia, see Joe William Trotter, *Coal, Class, and Color: Blacks in Southern West Virginia, 1915-1932* (Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1990), and William H. Turner and Edward J. Cabbell, ed., *Blacks in Appalachia* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1985).
5. These estimates are very rough, based on the following assumptions: in the decades 1790-1810, all slaves leaving Virginia walked; thereafter, 75 percent walked (the rest traveling by steamship or, in the 1850s, railroad); of those walking, 50 percent went via southwest Virginia for all decades (this is probably a conservative estimate). Base figures are from Tadman, *Speculators and Slaves*, 12, table 2.1. On duration of the trading season, see Herman Freudenberger and Jonathan B. Pritchett, "The Domestic United States Slave Trade: New Evidence," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 21 (Winter 1991), 463-72.
  6. James A. Mitchell, "The Expense of Travelin with negros from Va to Miss and Returning home Commenced the 18 of October 1834 and continued to the 13th Febuary 1835," Mitchell Papers, Duke University.
  7. On the average pace of overland coffles, see Freudenberger and Pritchett, "Domestic United States Slave Trade: New Evidence," 472.
  8. Mitchell, "Expense of Travelin," and James A. Mitchell to Sarah H. Mitchell, 10 Dec. 1834, Southside Virginia Collection, University of Virginia.
  9. The Virginia-born slave population had gained rates of natural reproduction equal to that of whites by the 1750s. From the 1760s, large slaveholders sought to prohibit further slave imports, hoping to keep slave prices relatively high and to create a monopoly on supplying native-born slaves to growing areas; they succeeded in legally banning African slave imports in 1783. Allan Kulikoff, *Tobacco and Slaves: The Development of Southern Cultures in the Chesapeake, 1680-1800* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1986), 71-73. Woody Holton, *Forced Founders: Indians, Debtors, Slaves and the Making of the American Revolution in Virginia* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1999), 66-73, 90-91, 99-105. W. E. B. DuBois, *The Suppression of the African Slave-Trade to the United States of America, 1638-1870* (orig. 1896; repr., New York: Schocken Books, 1969), 12-14.
  10. For maps and graphs illustrating the changing numbers and rates of slave migration for each decade, 1790-1860, see Phillip D. Troutman, *Mapping Virginia's Enslaved Exodus*, <http://fisher.lib.virginia.edu/slavetrade/>

11. *Lexington Valley Star*, 26 January 1860; 2, 9 August, 1860. For some of the activities of Carson, see Dew, *Bond of Iron*, 254–55, 279–280.
12. *Abingdon Democrat*, 11 June 1859. Traders routinely paid higher prices — and in cash — than local buyers, who normally could only pay on long credit. This economic incentive proved difficult to resist, even for slaveholders who considered themselves conscientious.
13. In 1836, for example, the average price for male “prime field hands” was \$800 in Virginia and \$1,250 in New Orleans. U. B. Philips, *American Negro Slavery* (1916; repr., Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 1966), table “Prices of Slaves and Cotton,” following p. 370.
14. For a nuanced account of another such slaveholding free man of color, see Michael P. Johnson and James L. Roark, *Black Masters: A Free Family of Color in the Old South* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1984).
15. Andrew Durnford to John McDonogh, 10 June 1835, in David O. Whitten, “Slave Buying in 1835 Virginia as Revealed by Letters of a Louisiana Negro Sugar Planter,” *Louisiana History* 11 (Summer 1970), 236. Guyandotte was on the site of present-day Huntington, West Virginia, at the mouth of the Guyandotte River (236 n).
16. Durnford to McDonogh, 15 June 1835, in *ibid.*, 237.
17. Durnford to McDonogh, 25 June 1835, in *ibid.*, 238–39.
18. Durnford to McDonogh, 6 July 1835, in *ibid.*, 240. Wheeling is on the Ohio River, now in West Virginia.
19. George W. Featherstonhaugh, *Excursion through the Slave States, from Washington on the Potomac to the Frontier of Mexico* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1844), also repr. in *A Documentary History of Slavery in North America*, ed. Willie Lee Rose (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1976), 157–58. Image from Featherstonhaugh repr. in Robert L. Scribner, “Slave Gangs on the March,” *Virginia Cavalcade* 3 (Autumn 1953), 10.
20. Featherstonhaugh, *Excursion*, 38.
21. Miller was born in 1796; thus, many of his early sketches appear to have been done from stories told to him rather than from his own witnessing of the events. For these examples, other published sketches, biographical and bibliographical information, see Lewis Miller, *Sketches and Chronicles: The Reflections of a Nineteenth Century Pennsylvania German Folk Artist*, edited by Robert P. Turner and with an introduction by Donald A. Shelly (York, Pa.: Historical Society of York County, 1996), examples cited, pp. 35, 50, 87, 152. After the Civil War, Miller settled in Christiansburg, Virginia, where he died in 1882 and was buried.
22. Lewis Miller, “Slave Trader, Sold to Tennessee,” watercolor sketch, Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Folk Art Center, Williamsburg, Virginia. Image from Featherstonhaugh repr. in Robert L. Scribner, “Slave Gangs on the March,” *Virginia Cavalcade* 3 (Autumn 1953), 11.
23. Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* (1845; repr., New York, Dover Publications, 1995), 9. [John] Sella Martin’s autobiography originally published in *Good Words* v. 8, 1 May 1867, pp. 314–21; and v. 9, 1 June 1867, pp. 393–99, repr. in John Blassingame, ed., *Slave Testimony: Two Centuries of Letters, Speeches, Interviews, and Autobiographies* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 1977), 702–35; quotation 705.

24. Amherst County Legislative Petitions, 8 December 1836, Library of Virginia, quoted in Sherrie S. McLeRoy and William R. McLeRoy, *Strangers in their Midst: the Free Black Population of Amherst County, Virginia* (Bowie, Md.: Heritage Books, 1993), 212. On Virginia's colonization scheme and African-American resistance to it, see Alison Goodyear Freehling, *Drift Toward Dissolution: The Virginia Slavery Debate of 1831–1832* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 1982), chs. 6, 7.
25. Unidentified letter [to Polly Cabell Breckinridge], 12 Oct. 1804, quoted in Gail S. Terry, "Sustaining the Bonds of Kinship in a Trans-Appalachian Migration, 1790–1811: The Cabell-Breckinridge Slaves Move West," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 102 (Oct. 1994), 464. Terry successfully evokes the cycles of hope and despair engendered by the serial migration slaveholders forced on slaves. White planter women also frequently resented these migrations, as well, since they separated their own white families; see Joan Cashin, *A Family Venture: Men and Women on the Southern Frontier* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991). See also David Hackett Fischer and James C. Kelly, *Bound Away: Virginia and the Westward Movement* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2000).
26. Gooley to "Dear Mistress," 30 November 1807, Duke Marion Godby Papers, Univ. of Kentucky, repr. in *We Are Your Sisters: Black Women in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. Dorothy Sterling (New York: W. W. Norton, 1997), 51. While very few slaves could write, far more could read; see E. Jennifer Monaghan, "Reading for the Enslaved, Writing for the Free: Reflections on Liberty and Literacy," James Russell Wiggins Lecture in the History of the Book in American Culture (Worcester, Mass.: American Antiquarian Society, 1999). For a unique example of slaves corresponding (with masters' permission) from Southwest Virginia, see the online collection, Hannah Valentine and Lethe Jackson Slave Letters, 1837–1838, Campbell Family Papers, Duke University, <http://scriptorium.lib.duke.edu/campbell/>. These enslaved women wrote from Abingdon after their master, David Campbell, was elected governor and took several slaves to Richmond with his own family. Their letters are also reprinted in *Blacks in Bondage: Letters of American Slaves*, ed. Robert S. Starobin (New York: New Viewpoints, 1974), 64–77.
27. Patterns of short-distance sales and hiring seen all over Virginia were first established in the Tidewater. See Allan Kulikoff, *Tobacco and Slaves: The Development of Southern Cultures in the Chesapeake, 1680–1800* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1986), 320–21, 339–40, 359–64; and Sarah S. Hughes, "Slaves for Hire: The Allocation of Black Labor in Elizabeth City County, Virginia, 1782–1810," *William and Mary Quarterly* 35 (April 1978): 260–86.
28. Maria Perkins to Richard Perkins, 8 October 1852, repr. in Rose, ed., *Documentary History of Slavery*, 151; facsimile repr. on the 'Valley of the Shadow' website, <http://jefferson.village.virginia.edu/vshadow2/>. Punctuation and capitalization have been added for clarity.
29. Veney did not give a date for her marriage and separation, but it was probably in the 1830s. Bethany Veney, *The Narrative of Bethany Veney, A Slave Woman* (Worcester, Mass.: Geo. H. Ellis, printer, 1889), 19, electr. repr. Chapel Hill, "Documenting the American South," Univ. of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1997, <http://metalab.unc.edu/docsouth/>

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30. *His Promised Land: The Autobiography of John P. Parker, Former Slave and Conductor on the Underground Railroad*, ed. Stuart Seely Sprague (New York: Norton, 1996), 27. Parker, born in Norfolk in 1827, eventually paid for his freedom and went on to serve in Ohio's Underground Railroad. He dictated his narrative to white journalist Frank M. Gregg in the 1880s and it remained unpublished until 1996. Sprague notes that Gregg seems to have been fairly loyal to Parker's own language; see 12–16.
  31. Francis Fedric, *Slave Life in Virginia and Kentucky; or, Fifty Years of Slavery in the Southern States of America*, by Francis Fedric, an Escaped Slave (London: Wertheim, MacIntosh, and Hunt, 1863), 15–16. Fedric's English amanuensis transliterated Fedric's initial destination as "Weiland" and as "Welland." Fedric described it as lying in "New Virginia," [i.e., West Virginia] and thus probably meant Wheeling.
  32. Fedric, *Slave Life*, 15.
  33. Anon., *Biography of London Ferrill, Pastor of the First Baptist Church of Colored Persons, Lexington, Ky., Published by the Request of Many Friends* (Lexington, Ky.: A. W. Elder, printer, 1854), 5.
  34. For Christ's temptation in the desert, see Matthew 4:1–11, Luke 4:1–13, and Mark 1:12–13.
  35. J. P. Clark, ed., *Interesting Account of Thomas Anderson, A Slave, Taken from His Own Lips* (n.p., ca. 1855), p. 11. Clark apparently took this interview on 24 December 1854; he cast the narrative in Anderson's first-person voice.
  36. Matthew 17:20, 21:21, and Mark 11:23.
  37. Booker T. Washington, *Up from Slavery: An Autobiography*, with introduction by Louis R. Harlan (New York: Penguin Books, 1986), 24–25. See also electr. repr. "Documenting the American South," Univ. of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1997, <http://metalab.unc.edu/docsouth/>.
  38. One key component of slavery worldwide has involved the alienation of the enslaved person from her or his community, effectively denying the slave any initial protective social ties. See Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1982). The ongoing domestic slave trade within the United States kept this process alive in America until emancipation in the Civil War.