

THE
BLACK
EXPERIENCE
IN NATCHEZ
1720-1880

SPECIAL HISTORY STUDY

By Ronald L.F. Davis

NATCHEZ NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK • MISSISSIPPI

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April 1993

by

Ronald L.F. Davis, Ph.D

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NATCHEZ

National Historical Park • Mississippi

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The following special history study of the black experience in Natchez, Mississippi, from 1720 to 1880, was undertaken at the request of the National Park Service to assist in the site interpretation of the Natchez National Historical Park. The author contracted with the Park Service in early 1991, with a deadline of six months for the completed report. Fifteen months later, in April 1992, a draft manuscript was submitted for review.

The successful completion of "The Natchez Project," as it has come to be known among my graduate students, is but an introduction to the subject. The report can be no more than a sampling of the topic in the brief time devoted to its preparation. As a result, many questions raised are left unanswered. The report will hopefully serve as a foundation for future scholarship, including continued work of my own.

As would be expected, a study of such complexity could not have been produced in the brief time allotted without the assistance of a number of people. Foremost among those to be acknowledged are several research assistants who did much of the scholarship upon which the report is based. Specifically, Linda Erdman and Cecie Shulman have been involved with the study from the start. Graduate students at California State University, Northridge, Ms. Erdman and Ms. Shulman transcribed and interpreted census materials, land records, and legal documents with painstaking care and attention. Most of the newspaper and census research in the study is their work. Ms. Shulman, moreover, did a final editing of the manuscript that greatly improved its style and coherence. A third graduate student, Ms. Joyce Hoggan, joined the team in August, 1991, assisting in detailed map and records analysis over the next several months. All three read and reread every word of the manuscript, closely edited the text, accompanied me on a research trip to Natchez in December of 1991, and greatly influenced my analysis of the evidence. Clearly, the report could not have been completed but for their contributions.

Assisting also in the research was my wife, Patricia Davis, my daughter, Stacey, and my son, Christian. Stacey, who is now a graduate student in history at Yale University, was (at the time of her work on the report) in her senior year as a history major at Princeton University; Christian, who is now a freshman majoring in history at Swarthmore College, was a high school senior. The three devoted a good part of the summer of 1991 to a research trip to the National Archives, to archival holdings at the University of North Carolina, Duke University, and Louisiana State University, and to Natchez. They transcribed manuscript materials, interpreted documents, and pored over legal records in the Office of Records in Natchez for days on end. Their assistance was no less than essential.

Additionally, a number of other graduate students at CSUN also participated in the Natchez Project. In March, 1992, after the completion of the draft version of the manuscript, I traveled to Natchez with my graduate seminar (funded by University monies) for ten days of research. Each student in the seminar examined an aspect of the report. Their resulting essays will be available for scholars in the archives at Melrose, one of the sites at the Natchez National Historical Park.

In undertaking the above research, several people in Natchez were invaluable for their assistance. First was Mimi Miller, a historic preservationist with the Historic Natchez Foundation. Ms. Miller is an expert on the history of Natchez, and she graciously shares her knowledge with no thought of return to herself. She, along with her husband Ron Miller, who is the director of the Historic Natchez Foundation, made available Foundation files, led me to numerous resources that I would never have found on my own, and introduced me to key individuals in Natchez. By all rights, Mimi Miller — in view of her expertise — should have undertaken this study. My own efforts can only approximate her grasp of the situation.

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which he is well-known at the University. Dr. Mack Johnson, Associate Vice President of Research and Graduate Programs, and Professor Thomas Bader, chair of the CSUN History Department, mindful of the importance of original research in the training of graduate students, provided financial support for the student seminar trip in March and much encouragement for my scholarship in the last eighteen months.

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Ronald L. F. Davis
November 1, 1992

THE ORIGINS OF SLAVERY IN NATCHEZ

The first evidence of African-Americans in Natchez dates from around 1720, when black slaves were brought into the area by the French. At that time, Natchez was a wilderness outpost of the French empire in the Mississippi River Valley. A few years earlier the French had established a fort (Rosalie) on the bluffs overlooking the Mississippi River about three hundred miles by water above New Orleans. Among other French settlements in the so-called Natchez district of West Florida were the older gulf ports of Mobile and Biloxi, the more recently founded New Orleans, and several isolated river encampments planted in the region between New Orleans and the mouth of the Yazoo River. These river nodes included Point Coupee and Baton Rouge, several days river journey below the Natchez settlement.¹ (See ILLUSTRATIONS A and B)

The introduction of black slaves into the Natchez wilderness was directly related to the plans of the infamous John Law. His Company of the West had been given the task, in 1717, of developing the lower Mississippi River Valley into a profitable component of the French empire in the New World. It was the Company's intent to bring some 3000 African slaves to Louisiana to cultivate a system of plantations stretching along the Mississippi River from New Orleans to as far north as the Arkansas. According to Law's plan, black slaves would plant and cultivate tobacco, grow and ferment indigo, cut timber, build forts, and work a thriving river traffic in upcountry furs, deerskins, corn, and salted meats (and possibly silver) in a trading network from Quebec to New Orleans. In times of war, moreover, the slaves would provide the Company with an army of enslaved soldiers to be used against opposing Indians and European competitors.²

1. See the following published volumes for source materials and bibliography on the early history of the Natchez settlement: J.F.H. Claiborne, *Mississippi as a Province, Territory and State*, I (Jackson, Miss., 1880); Verner W. Crane, *The Southern Frontier, 1670-1732* (Philadelphia, Pa., 1929); Marcel Giraud, *A History of French Louisiana*, V (Baton Rouge, La., 1991) pp. 388-440; Gwendolyn Midlo Hall, *Africans in Colonial Louisiana: The Development of Afro-Creole Culture in the Eighteenth Century* (Baton Rouge, La., 1992); Walter G. Howell, "The French Period, 1699 - 1763," in Richard Aubrey McLemore, (ed.), *A History of Mississippi*, I (Hattiesburg, Miss., 1973), pp. 110-133; D. Clayton James, *Antebellum Natchez* (Baton Rouge, La., 1968); Ulysses S. Richard, Jr., "African Slavery in Provincial Mississippi," in Patricia K. Galloway, (ed.), *Native European and African Cultures in Mississippi, 1500-1800*, (Jackson, Miss., 1991), pp. 77-90; M. Le Page du Patz, *The History of Louisiana* (Reprint Edition of 1758, Baton Rouge, La., 1972), pp. 18-100; Dunbar Rowland and Albert G. Sanders, (ed.), *Mississippi Provincial Archives: French Dominion*, 3 vols (Jackson, Miss., 1929). Volumes 4-5 are edited by Patricia Kay Galloway and published by LSU Press, Baton Rouge, 1984. In addition to these sources, further scholarship would have to rely on archival materials housed in the French Colonial Documents at the Library of Congress, the Mississippi Provincial Archives at the Mississippi Department of Archives in Jackson, Mississippi, and the Archives Nationale, Paris. Published materials for further study would include N.M. Miller Surrey's *Calendar of Manuscripts in Paris Archives and Libraries Relating to the History of the Mississippi Valley to 1803*, 2 vols (Privately Printed, 1928) and *The Commerce of Louisiana During the French Regime, 1699-1763*, *Columbia University Studies in History, Economics, and Public Law*, LXXI (New York, N.Y., 1916).

2. See especially John G. Clark, *New Orleans — 1718-1812: An Economic History* (Baton Rouge, La., 1970), pp. 3-158; Earl J. Hamilton, "The Role of Monopoly in the Overseas Expansion and Colonial Trade of Europe before 1800," *American Economic Review* XXXVIII (May, 1948), 33-53; Harold Dalgliesh, *The Company of the Indies in the Days of Dupleix* (Easton, Pa., 1833); Rowland, *MPA*, I, p. 55; Claiborne, pp. 34-43.

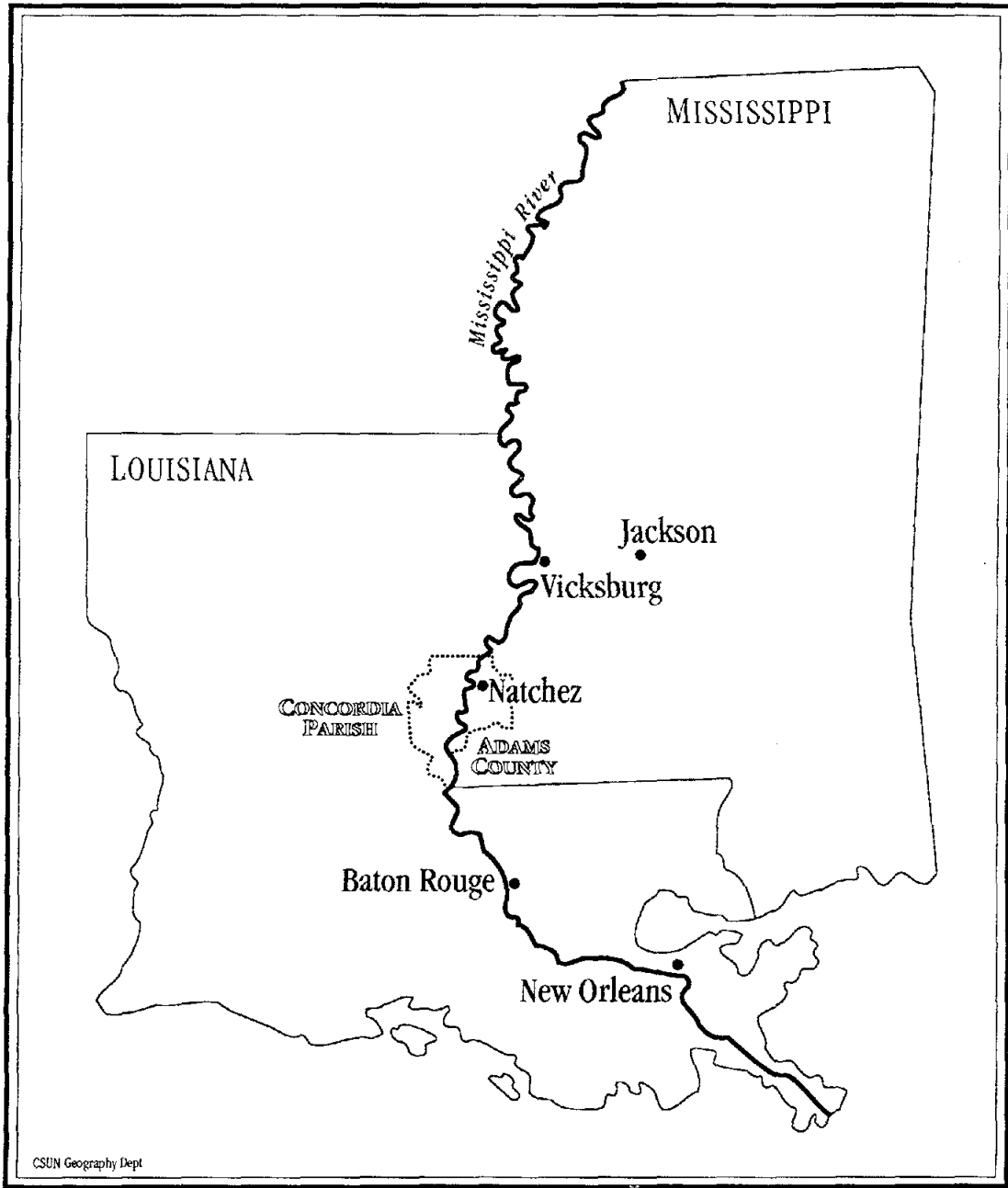


Illustration A: Historical Base Map

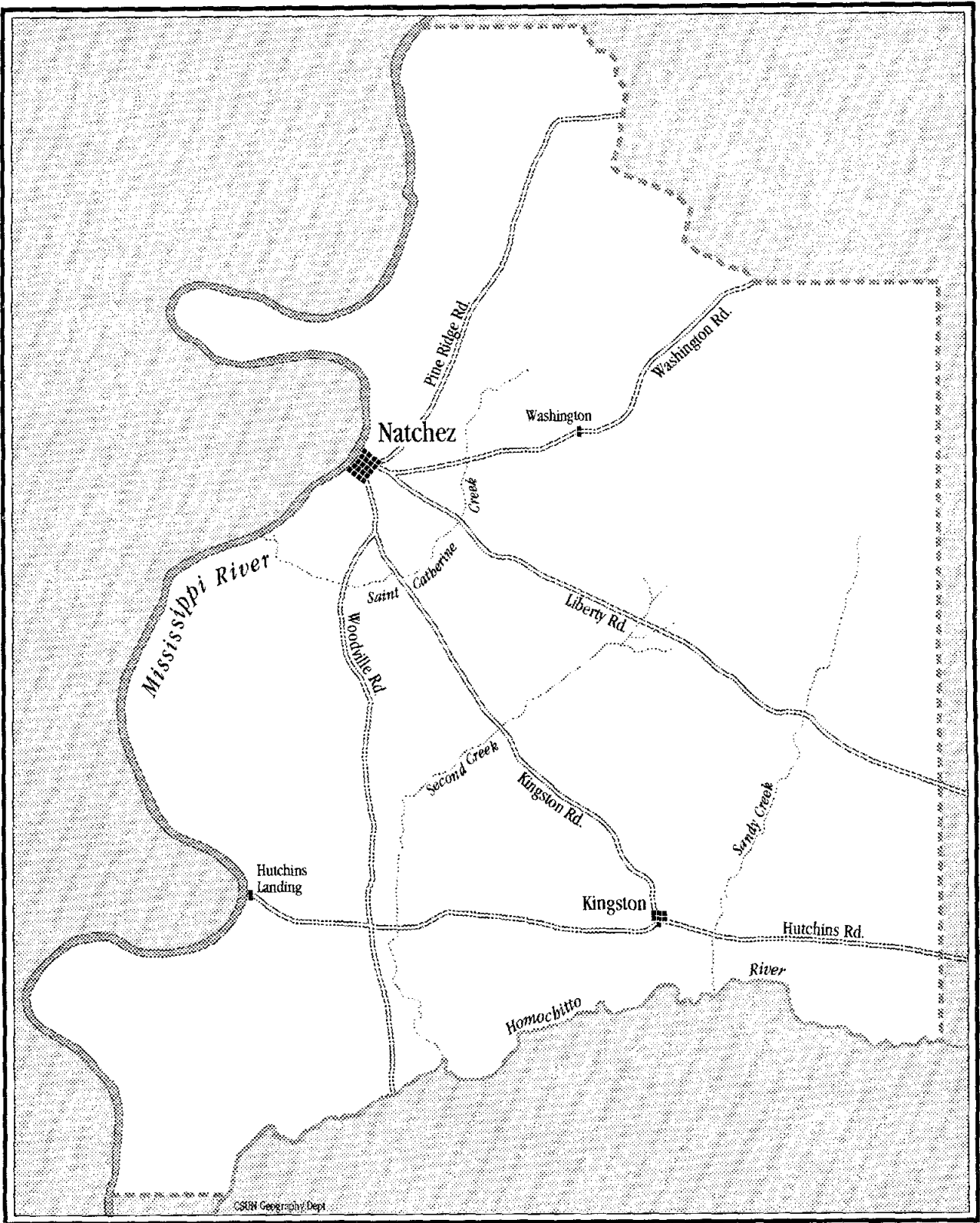


Illustration B: Antebellum Adams County

Fort Rosalie, named in honor of the wife of a French minister, was to be one of several garrisons erected by the Company to protect the plantation district in the making, and by 1724 a crude frontier settlement had been planted in its environs. Estimates of the non-Indian population in the Natchez settlement at the fort range from around 400 settlers in the mid-1720s to approximately 750 by 1729. Among these were 200 to 300 black slaves, most of whom worked in the production of tobacco. Although there is no sure way of knowing how many of the Natchez blacks were children, or the ratio of men to women, young males probably outnumbered all others given that the work was arduous and backbreaking. Besides making barrels and planting tobacco, Natchez slaves cleared the forest, hauled cargos upriver from New Orleans, dug trenches, fenced farm lands, and erected barricades and crude shelters for humans and animals alike. Most of the slaves were owned by French masters who held no more than three or four, except for one group of thirty brought to Natchez for the special purpose of developing a tobacco factory (the making of hogsheads and pressing tobacco leaves). So successful were the African slaves as an agricultural labor force that much of the tobacco shipped from New Orleans in the 1720s came from the Natchez region.³

In the decade prior to 1720, the French had experimented with enslaving Louisiana Indians as farm workers; but the scheme never worked very well for a number of related reasons: (1) local Indians easily escaped into the surrounding wilderness; (2) those Indians who failed to escape were thought to be hopelessly unsuited for disciplined work; and (3) military and church officials worried about having large numbers of female Indian slaves close at hand to garrisoned soldiers.⁴ African captives, on the other hand, were considered a better labor force than Native-Americans partly because (as aliens in a hostile wilderness) they would have little chance, by comparison, to escape. It was commonly assumed, moreover, that black slaves, because of their agricultural backgrounds in Africa, were more accustomed than Indians to the hard work of indigo and tobacco farming. Not to be forgotten, professional slave traders, with ready access to African slaves, used their influence with the French Company to support a policy that favored blacks as slave workers on the West Florida frontier.⁵

Law's Company of the West collapsed in 1723, in a spectacular case of bankruptcy that shook France to its foundation. A successor enterprise, the revived Company of the Indies, was granted Law's monopoly on the slave trade to Louisiana, which it held for the succeeding thirty years, even though the colony reverted to royal status in 1730. It has

3. Claiborne, *Mississippi*, p. 38; Committee of Louisiana to the Directors of the Company, November 8, 1724, *MPA III*; de Bienville to de Pontchartrain, January 2, 1716, *MPA III*; Memoir on Louisiana by de Bienville, 1726, *MPA III*; Memoir on Tobacco at Natchez, October 24, 1724, *MPA III*; Minutes of the Council of Commerce of Louisiana, October 19, 1719, *MPA III*; Minutes of the Superior Council of Louisiana, March 8, 1724, *MPA III*.

4. de Bienville to de Pontchartrain, July 28, 1706, *MPA II*; de Bienville to de Pontchartrain, October 12, 1708, *MPA II*; Census of Louisiana by De La Salle, August 12, 1708, *MPA II*; King Louis XIV to De Mury, Governor of Louisiana, June 30, 1707, *MPA III*; Minutes of the Council, January 2, 1716, *MPA II*; Perier to the Abbe Raguet, May 12, 1728, *MPA II*.

5. Clark, *New Orleans*, pp. 21-45; Howell, "The French Period: 1699-1763," McLemore, (ed.), *Mississippi*, pp. 110-132; Messrs. Perier and De La Chaise to the Directors of the Company of the Indies, March 25, 1729, November 3, 1728, *MPA II*.

been estimated that nearly 6000 black slaves were transported from Guinea and the French West Indies to Louisiana by 1763, when Louisiana was ceded to the Spanish — a surprisingly small number given the tens of thousands of slaves caught up at that time in the traffic to the New World. Indeed, so few slaves were brought into Louisiana by the French that its white settlers commonly blamed their economic woes on that fact above all others.⁶

As slavery settled itself — albeit sparsely — upon the Louisiana wilderness, the question of slave conduct and welfare emerged as a primary concern of the French government, Company officials, and the Catholic Church. In most cases, the white population outnumbered black slaves two to one. On isolated farms, however, such as those near the Rosalie outpost, the ratio of masters and slaves was often just the reverse. It was in this context that the government of French Louisiana attempted, in 1724, to systematize slave/master relations in its promulgation of the *Code Noire*. Part of this legal code was aimed at protecting the enslaved from the wanton brutality of their masters. Provisions about not working slaves on Sundays, the sanctity of slave marriages, and the proper burial of baptized slaves introduced a modicum of civility into an otherwise one-sided power relationship.⁷ But the main thrust of the *Code* defined the constraints within which slaves were expected to live out their lives. No slaves could carry weapons without written permission of their masters, gather in crowds, partake of liquor, or act in ways suggestive of a free people. Those who broke the law were subject to whippings, brandings, mutilation, and death.⁸

Although it is impossible to determine precisely how the *Code* affected blacks in the Natchez settlement, it is unlikely that it had much of a moderating influence. In 1727, for example, a belligerent slave in Natchez had his hands bound for five hours while 600 rawhide lashes were inflicted upon him. After the beating, the slave's hands were thrust into boiling water, causing the loss of two of his fingers.⁹ In another case, a runaway slave from the Natchez area was brought to court in New Orleans for having assaulted a soldier. The unfortunate slave was sentenced to be flogged every day including Sundays in a public place, to have his right ear cut off, and to carry a six-pound chain on his foot for life. Other slaves, when found guilty of murdering whites, were publicly burned or beheaded, with their body parts displayed on stakes as a gruesome warning to their fellow slaves.¹⁰

6. de Bienville and de Salmon to Maurepas, May 12, 1733, *MPA* III; Howell, "The French Period: 1699-1763," McLemore, (ed.), *Mississippi*, pp. 126-127; Council of Louisiana to The Directors of the Company of the Indies, August 28, 1725, *MPA* II; Minutes of the Council, March 20, 1725, *MPA* II; Perier to the Abbe Ragué, April 25, 1727, *MPA* II; Robert to de Pontchartrain, November 26, 1708, *MPA* II.

7. Oliver Blanchard, *Regulations, Edicts, Declarations and Decrees Concerning the Commerce. Administration of Justice and Policing of Louisiana and other French Colonies in American, Together with The Black Codes* (New Orleans, La., 1940); Donald Edward Everett, "Free Persons of Color in New Orleans, 1803-1865," (Ph.D. dissertation, Tulane University, 1952), pp. 12-54.

8. *Ibid.*

9. See Claiborne, *Mississippi*, pp. 36-86; Hall, *Africans in Colonial Louisiana*, p. 149-150

10. *Ibid.*

Among all the factors affecting the lives of African slaves in French Natchez, none were of greater consequence than the wilderness character of the settlement. Natchez was not only hopelessly isolated in the 1720s, it was also surrounded by well-established and defiant Indians. In the years from 1717 to 1726, the Natchez attacked the outpost in several bloody raids staged in defense of its lands and way of life. The French responded in kind with violent reprisals, eventually pushing the Natchez into a massive uprising wherein the entire white settlement at Fort Rosalie was wiped out in 1729. All white men save one (or two) within the Rosalie encampment were killed, and the settlement's women, children, and several hundred African slaves were carried off into captivity.¹¹

The French answered the loss of their settlement by sending a substantial army of slaves, soldiers, Indian mercenaries, and white planters against the Natchez. The fighting lasted for more than a decade as the French doggedly pursued the Natchez, enlisting the support of several neighboring Indian tribes (especially the Choctaws and the Arkansas) as eager as the French to exterminate the once powerful sun worshippers.

Exactly what happened to the captured African slaves is a story, like much of the story of slavery, that is yet clouded in history. The majority of them most likely stayed with the Natchez as either slaves or as adopted members of the tribe. Some of the African captives were undoubtedly sold to the British or to other Indians. Others, about fifty in number, were recaptured by the French and transported to New Orleans or to plantations below Baton Rouge. Dozens more remained captives of the French-allied Choctaws.¹²

Although the evidence is sketchy at best, some black slaves clearly fought on the side of the Natchez. Among the terms for peace laid down by the French in 1724, after a bloody but unsuccessful Indian attack on the Natchez settlement, was the surrender of a runaway black slave believed by the French to have encouraged the uprising. In the Natchez attack on the French settlement in 1729, there is sound evidence to contend that a large number of the African slaves joined in the attack on their European masters.¹³ So frequently, moreover, did Indian slaves assist their black workmates in running away, that one government official recommended abolishing Indian slavery as the only sure way of preventing such Red/Black alliances. It would be misleading, however, to make too much of these isolated examples without further evidence. In the main, district Indians killed

11. From Father Philibert, "Register of the Persons of the Post of the Natchez who were massacred on the 28th of November, 1729, by the Neighboring Indians Whose Name the Said Post Bears," June 9, 1730, *MPA I*; Diron d'Artaguetto to Maurepas, February 9, 1730, March 18, 1730, *MPA I*; Perier to Maurepas, December 5, 1729, *MPA I*. See also John A. Green, "Governor Perier's Expedition against the Natchez Indians," *Louisiana Historical Quarterly* (1936), XIX., 547-77.

12. Diron d'Artaguetto to Maurepas, March 20, 1730, *MPA I*; King to de Bienville, September 2, 1732, *MPA III*; Lusser to Maurepas, March 23, 1730, *MPA I*. Path-breaking scholarship by Gwendolyn Hall has added much information to our history of the Natchez area enslaved. See her study on *Africans in Colonial Louisiana*, pp. 102-106.

13. Minutes of the Council of War, November 23, 1723, *MPA III*. See especially Hall, *Africans in Colonial Louisiana*, pp. 102-104 and also the following quote from a manuscript journal, February 24, 1730, in Claiborne, *Mississippi*, pp. 46-47: "In the morning we dismantled our batteries and the captives were delivered. Recognizing among the negroes three that had united with the Natchez in the night attack on the 22d, I ordered them to be tied. Two were seized, but as we were in the act of blinding the third one, he placed a knife between his teeth and leaped into the river, when he was shot."

black slaves almost as often as they killed whites; and it was not uncommon for Indians to operate as slavecatchers, bringing in runaway slaves for the bounty.¹⁴

The French continued to station a small garrison of troops at Fort Rosalie for a number of years after the 1729 uprising — including eight or nine black slaves who worked at shoring up the fort's earthen walls, but few French settlers thereafter risked their lives or chattel property in the once thriving settlement. Indeed, in the years after 1730, Fort Rosalie reverted to an outpost surrounded by a wilderness more desolate of human life than at any time in the preceding thousand years when the area was first settled by the Natchez Indians.¹⁵

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Plagued by military setbacks all over the world, the French withdrew from Louisiana in the 1760s, giving their holdings east of the Mississippi River to Great Britain and those west of the River to Spain, except for the New Orleans area. The British, desiring to populate the stretch of land along the Mississippi River from just above Baton Rouge to the so-called Walnut Hills encampment located ten miles below the mouth of the Yazoo River, granted generous plots of land to veterans of the French and Indian Wars. Dozens of white settlers, coming in the main from Virginia, Maryland, and the Carolinas, moved to the Natchez district and planted self-sufficient settlements in and around the newly outfitted Fort Rosalie — now renamed Fort Panmure.¹⁶ (See ILLUSTRATION C)

The pattern of settlement in British Natchez had important consequences for its black participants. In the first place, the land concessions were frequently giant allotments ranging from 5,000 to 25,000 acres, grants of land far too large to be cultivated as small family farms. To be sure, many of the original holders quickly disposed of their grants to incoming settlers, as was the case with Capt. Amos Ogden who sold 19,000 acres to Richard and Samuel Swayze of New Jersey in 1772. There can be no doubt, however, in view of their eagerness to obtain slaves, that the majority of newcomers to the area had their minds set on establishing plantations to be worked by gangs of slave laborers.¹⁷

Regardless of their ambitions, few British slave masters arrived with a large work force in hand. The typical party of slaves brought into the district was always small in number, usually about three or four slaves to each migrating, white family. What the incipient

14. Regis du Rouletto Maurepas, March (?), Abstract of Journal: 1729-1733, *MPA I*.

15. Claiborne, *Mississippi*, pp. 87-101; de Bienville and de Salmon to Maurepas, April 1, 1734, *MPA III*; Jack D. Elliott, Jr., "The Fort of Natchez and the Colonial Origins of Mississippi," *The Journal of Mississippi History* LII (August, 1990), pp. 159-198. It is estimated that the French kept a garrison of about fifty men at the fort until 1763; various Indians also lived at the fort as provisioners, scouts, and mercenaries. These Indians included the Tunicas, the Arkansas, and a few of the Ofogoula tribe; but the once rich Indian environment of pre-European Natchez existed no more after 1731.

16. Jack D.L. Holmes, "A Spanish Province: 1779-1798," McLemore, (ed.), *Mississippi*, pp. 158-173; Byrle A. Kynerd, "British West Florida," McLemore, (ed.), *Mississippi*, pp. 134-157.

17. Claiborne, *Mississippi*, pp. 106-107;

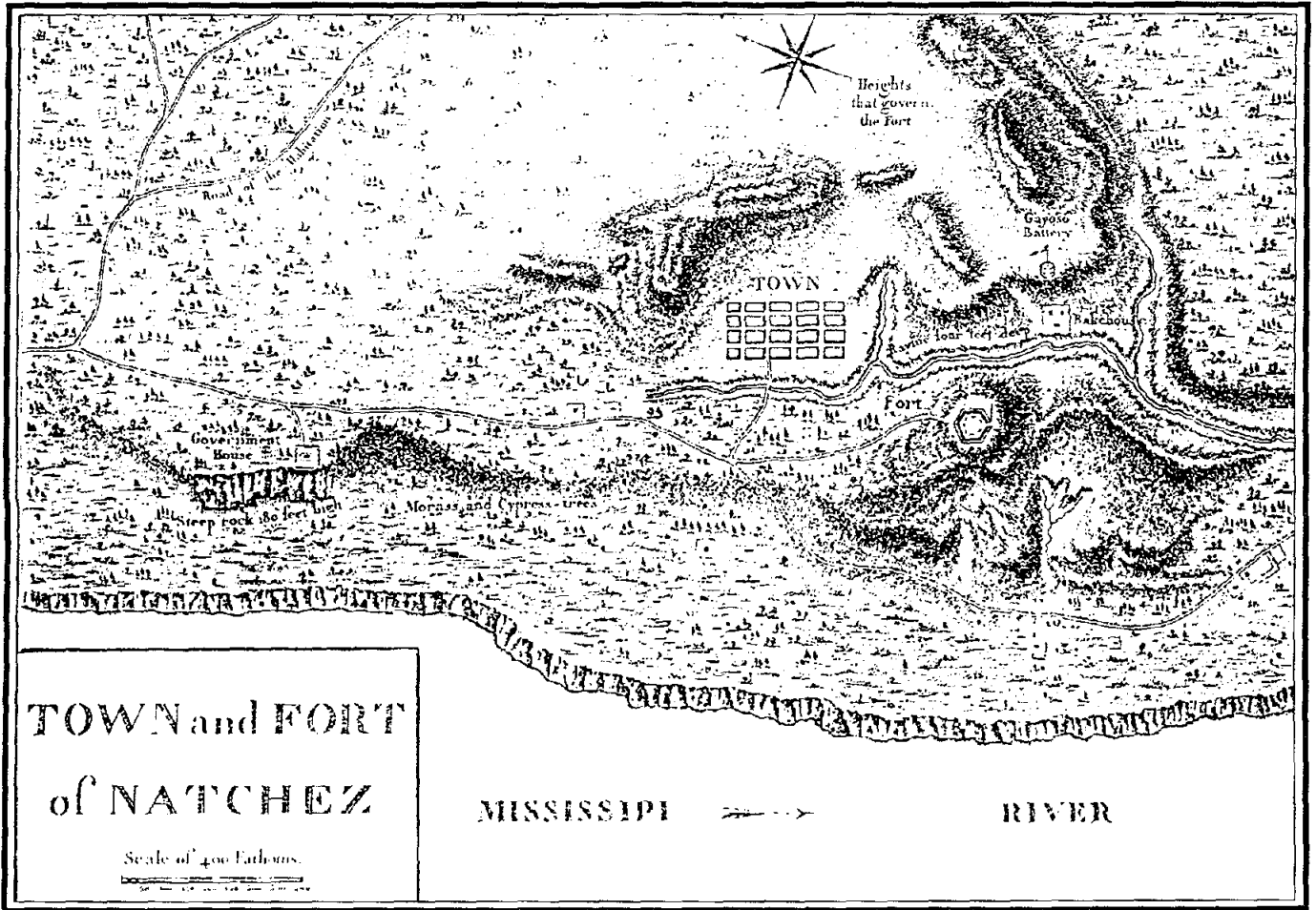


Illustration C: Town and Fort

planters needed, of course, was ample credit for the purchase of enough slaves to work the substantial lands handed out in the British concessions. Such credits, in turn, required a cash earning crop.¹⁸

For the most part, Natchez under the British achieved neither the crops nor markets to support a self-sustaining plantation labor force. European markets for Natchez lumber, tobacco, and indigo were all but ruled out due to Spanish control of the mouth of the Mississippi River. Put simply, the Spanish did not want British tobacco competing with the crops of their island plantations. Nor was there much of a market at New Orleans for Natchez corn, pork, and beef in view of the Ohio and Kentucky foodstuffs that poured down the Mississippi River. As a result, slaves in the Natchez area in the 1770s were principally self-sufficient workers laboring in a crude and wild frontier environment.¹⁹

Exactly what life was like for the slaves of Natchez under British rule is difficult to say. It is doubtful, however, that many Natchez blacks were worked to death, as was so often the case in the more market oriented sugar islands. On the other hand, the British-Spanish-American wars of empire and independence, exposed Natchez slaves to the terror of being treated as a contraband of war, mere property subject to the plundering exploits of the various warring factions.

When the American colonies revolted against Britain, the Spanish in New Orleans unofficially supported American efforts at weakening British control of West Florida. In the spring of 1778, a band of Americans led by James Willing raided Natchez, carrying off numerous slaves and generally terrorizing the settlement. Natchez area slaveowners, fearful for their property, frantically marched their slaves from one swamp haven and hiding place to another. Spain eventually entered the war on the side of the Americans, conquering Natchez and defeating the British in a series of brilliant maneuvers in the Gulf and at Baton Rouge. But peace did not come easily to the district. In April of 1781, several prominent Natchez slaveholders rose in rebellion against their Spanish conquerors only to be crushed — their slaves confiscated as war contraband and sold to Spanish loyalists. Clearly, the unsettled 1780s was a time of turmoil for the enslaved of Natchez, caught up as they were in the warfare of their masters.²⁰

18. Ibid., pp. 103-115; Jack D. Holmes, "Indigo in Colonial Louisiana and the Floridas," *Louisiana History* VIII (1967), pp. 329-349.

19. C.N. Howard, "Colonial Natchez: The Early British Period," *Journal of Mississippi History* VII (1945); Anna Lewis, (ed.), "Fort Panmure, 1779, as Related by Juan Delavillebeuvre to Bernardo de Galvez," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* XVIII (1931-32), pp. 541-548.

20. Kathryn T. Abbey, "Peter Chester's Defense of the Mississippi After the Willing Raid," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* XXII (1935), pp. 17-32; John W. Caughey, "The Natchez Rebellion of 1781 and Its Aftermath," *Louisiana Historical Quarterly* XVI (1933), pp. 57-83; John W. Caughey, "Willing's Expedition Down the Mississippi, 1778," *Louisiana Historical Quarterly* XV (1932), pp. 5-36; Margaret F. Dalrymple, *The Merchant of Manchac: The Letter books of John Fitzpatrick, 1768-1790*. (Baton Rouge, La., 1978); Robert V. Haynes, *The Natchez District and the American Revolution* (Jackson, Miss., 1976); Robert B. Haynes, "James Willing and the Planters of Natchez: The American Revolution Comes to the Southwest," *Journal of Mississippi History* XXXVII (1975), pp. 1-40; Kenneth Scott, (ed.), "Britain Loses Natchez, 1779: An Unpublished Letter," *Journal of Mississippi History* XXVI (1964), pp. 45-46; Wilbur H. Siebert, "The Loyalists in West Florida and the Natchez District," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* II (1930), pp. 553-609.

Once the fighting stopped, however, the Spanish conquest of Natchez brought a measure of stability to the district. Briefly told, the Spanish embarked on a bold program aimed at filling up the Mississippi River Valley with American and British settlers loyal to Spain. Four features of the plan dominated the period of Spanish rule: guaranteed markets in Mexico for subsidized Natchez tobacco, generous grants of land to Spanish loyalists regardless of their nationality, free access to the port of New Orleans, and encouragement of a trade in slaves by opening the Natchez market to credit granting Jamaican, French, and British traders. In view of Spanish policy, there was little opportunity for the emergence of a small, family farm economy in the Natchez region. Instead, planter-minded settlers rushed into the Natchez district eager to buy slaves and plant tobacco.²¹

A census of Natchez taken in 1787, reveals the character of the slave settlement won by the Spanish: 1275 whites, 22 mulattoes, and 675 blacks lived in eight distinct locations in and around the old fort at Natchez. (See ILLUSTRATION D) Within the next few years the number rose to more than 5300 people, including approximately 1000 slaves.

Who were these black men and women and what did their lives entail? To begin with, relatively few Natchez slaves lived on what would become the standard definition of a plantation — a farm with a minimum of twenty slaves. Economic historian John G. Clark has estimated that more than 60 percent of the white families in Natchez owned no slaves at all in 1789, and that only four or five of the 263 planter/farmers in the district owned twenty or more slaves. The vast majority of white slave masters probably owned but one or two. This means that the typical black person in Natchez most likely worked alongside a white master through much of the 1780s and 1790s.²²

Fortunately, Spanish court records provide a good supplement to the extant census data on the character of slavery in Natchez during the last decades of the eighteenth century. Among other things, the court materials document slave sales in the neighborhood, of which more than 800 individual transactions were identified for analysis. The large majority of these sales involved single transactions rather than group sales of even two or three people. Approximately 20 percent were children. All but 2 percent of the adults were men and women between the ages of 13 to 30 years. Very few slave families were purchased, and only a few men and women were sold as couples. A substantial number

21. Jack D.L. Holmes, *Gayoso: The Life of a Spanish Governor in the Mississippi Valley, 1789-1799* (Baton Rouge, 1965); D. Clayton James, *Antebellum Natchez*, pp. 30-76; John Hebron Moore, *The Emergence of the Cotton Kingdom in the Old Southwest* (Baton Rouge, La., 1988).

22. Claiborne, *Mississippi*, pp. 136-161; Clark, *New Orleans*, pp. 190-191; Carroll Ainsworth McElligott, "1787 Census of Natchez," unpublished manuscript, Historic Natchez Foundation, Natchez, Mississippi. It is probable that the typical black slave in the Natchez area worked in herding and butchering of cattle and swine but principally as the clearers of the land and the cultivators of tobacco and corn in the 1780s and early 1790s. Although there was little market for Natchez beef in New Orleans, the substantial numbers of half-wild cattle recorded in the census were raised and slaughtered for their hides. The census of 1787 lists 1,824 cattle, 6,374 horses, and 9,888 hogs in the district. On Anthony Hutchins plantation, one of the largest in the district in the Spanish-era, thirty-one slaves of all age groups tended 400 cattle, 30 horses, and 200 hogs while cultivating 30,000 pounds of tobacco and 4,000 bushels of corn.

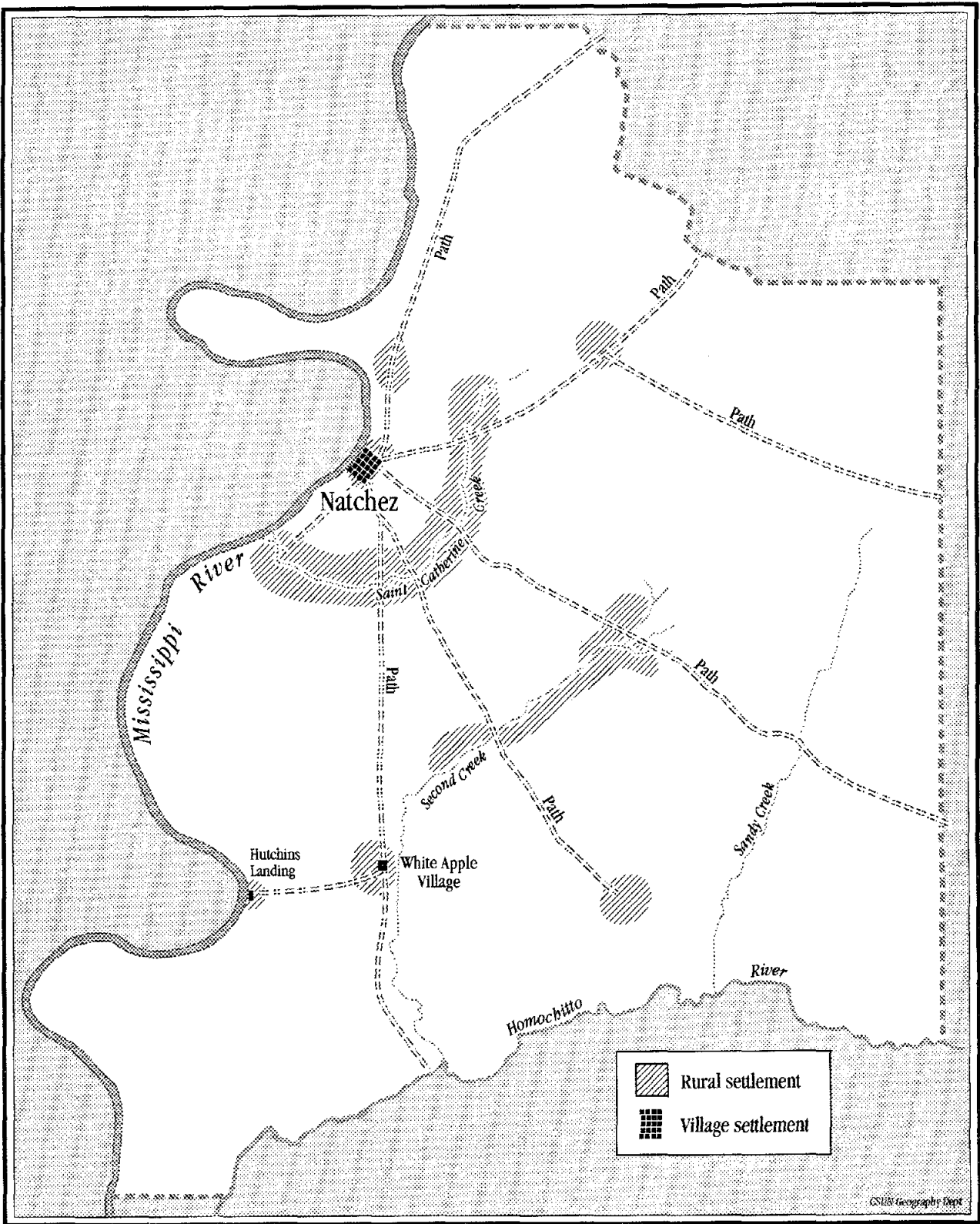


Illustration D: Outlying Pioneer Settlement Locations c1780s

of children (sixty-three) changed hands in transactions not involving any adult slaves.²³

Table 1: Slave Sales in Natchez: The Spanish Period

Sales	1780-1787		1788-1790		1791-1796	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Africa	87	47	160	56	113	43
Caribbean	19	11	18	6	11	4
America	17	9	36	12	63	24
Unknown	60	30	43	25	70	27

Source: Spanish Records of the Natchez District. Percentages do not equal 100 due to rounding off. See Footnote #23

The typical slave sold by traders, according to the information in Table 1, was a young man or woman newly arrived from Africa. Slave traders differentiated between slaves by listing their places of birth — Guinea, Jamaica, Virginia, etc., or by describing them as "brute negroes" in contrast to those already "seasoned," meaning those slaves who had already worked elsewhere in the New World.²⁴

In some cases, cargoes of African-born and Caribbean slaves were transported by ocean sailing ships directly to Natchez. Natchez planter and slave merchant Daniel Clark, in partnership with the Spanish Governor of Pensacola, brought eighty-three slaves to Natchez via the schooner *Governor Miro* (named for the Spanish governor of Louisiana) in 1791. The image here is of the slave ship *Miro* sailing to Natchez from Jamaica on a voyage in which the slaves literally pulled the vessel upstream with heavy ropes whenever the winds failed or the currents were too strong for navigation. Once in Natchez, Clark sold the slaves to thirty-seven residents, including four slaves to Spanish officials Don Manuel Gayoso (Governor of Natchez) and Don Carlos de Grand-Pre.²⁵

The vast majority of the African and Caribbean slaves sold in Natchez were probably transported to the settlement in small boats or pirogues. Planter William Dunbar frequently traveled to New Orleans, purchased African slaves from cargoes in from

23. Spanish Court Records of the Natchez District, A-G (1777-1802), Natchez Chancery Clerk's Office, Adams County, Mississippi; Transcript of Original Spanish Court Records, Books 1-11 (1777-1802), Adams County, Natchez Chancery Clerk's Office, Adams County, Mississippi; see also Mary W. McBee, *The Natchez Court Records, 1767-1805: Abstracts of Early Records*, 2 vols (Ann Arbor, Mich., 1953).

24. Ibid.

25. Book B. May 20, 1791, Spanish Court Records, p. 502.

Jamaica, and outfitted small canoes to carry the slaves upriver to Baton Rouge from where they were marched overland in chained coffles to Natchez. Other Africans came to Natchez by way of Mobile, Biloxi, and Pensacola. British slavers landed cargoes in these gulf ports for transport in smaller vessels along the coast to Lake Pontchartrain and up the Amite River to points within walking distance of Natchez.²⁶

In general, there were five major routes used in transporting slaves to Natchez in the Spanish period: (1) by water down the Tennessee, Ohio, and Mississippi rivers; (2) overland by way of an Indian route later to be known as the Natchez Trace; (3) across the interior from Georgia by way of the Three Chopped Trail; (4) upriver by water from New Orleans, with originating cargos from Africa and the Caribbean; and (5) along the coast from Mobile and Lake Pontchartrain to the Amite River. Although it is uncertain just how many American-born slaves from Virginia, Maryland, and the Carolinas arrived in Natchez via the coastal trail (the old route of the Conquistadors), there is some evidence that planters found it more convenient than the interior routes. (See ILLUSTRATION E)

All the slave routes to Natchez entailed deadly voyages in which only the strong survived. The land trails, for example, were little more than animal paths with no clear markers along the way. It could take from two to five months to travel from settlements in Georgia or Kentucky to Natchez, and travelers who lost their bearings (or else escaped into the wilderness) were most likely never heard from again. The river and ocean voyages were little better. Their history is the story of boat sinkings, Indian attacks, and death-dealing sickness suffered by countless slaves on the ocean crossings from the Caribbean islands to the mainland (eleven hundred miles).²⁷

Because the voyages to Natchez were so terribly arduous, incoming Africans, Jamaicans, and Carolinian blacks viewed the settlement (at its first sighting) with a profound sense of relief, both because the terrible voyage had ended and because of the opportunity for escape. Such was clearly in the mind of an enslaved African nobleman brought to Natchez from Guinea in 1789. Abd Rahman Ibrahima, better known as Prince, hit the land running almost the moment he arrived in Natchez. After two weeks in the swamps, however, the proud warrior returned to the settlement to lay himself at the feet of his white mistress in a gesture of physical submission. Thereafter the slave prince conducted himself in the manner of a proud but enslaved nobleman, resigned to his physical fate though somehow undaunted in spirit.²⁸

Once settled in and properly "seasoned," Natchez slaves had to face a crucial fact of life: they were, without exception, mere property in the eyes of the law. What this meant is that no slaveowners were compelled to observe any meaningful (moral or legal) limitations on how they handled their chattel. To illustrate the point, it is helpful to examine again

26. William Dunbar to Diana Dunbar, March 13, 1794, William Dunbar Papers, Mississippi Department of Archives and History, Jackson; see also Memorandum book of John Bisland, 1783-1799, John Bisland Papers, Department of Archives, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge.

27. Spanish Court Records, A thru G.

28. Terry Alford, *Prince Among Slaves: The True Story Of An African Prince Sold Into Slavery In The American South* (New York, N.Y., 1977).

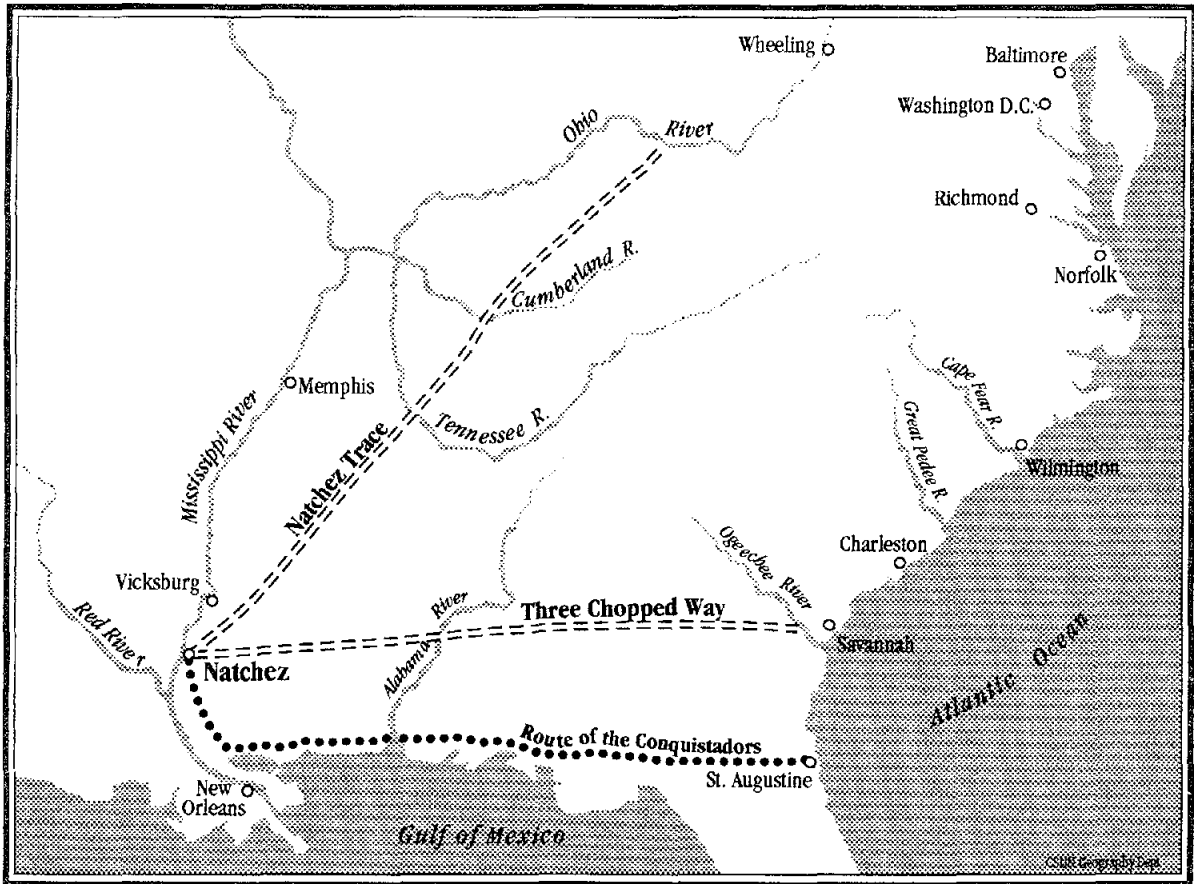


Illustration E: Early Slave Trade Routes

those sixty-three children and young people who were sold individually and apart from any adult parents or relatives. Most were youngsters 8 to 12 years of age. One slave trader in the area, Charles Proffit of Baton Rouge, seems to have specialized in children. Proffit sold "Patty," age 9, to William Ratcliff, and another girl, age 10, both recently from Guinea, to Edward McCabe on May 22, 1789. Two days later he sold three African boys and one girl (ages 10 to 12). On June 21, he delivered a "negro lad" (age 12) to a Natchez merchant and two African boys and one girl (ages 12 and 13), on June 22, to planter Moses Bonner.²⁹

Perhaps the above children were the orphans of parents who had died on the voyage to Natchez, but there is no evidence in the records to suggest such a conclusion. Indeed, the documents tend to support the idea that they were not orphans at all. In August 1795, Lestitia Culberson petitioned the court to sell a sickly seven-year-old boy who had been left to Culberson's young daughter. Culberson wished to sell the lad "Tony" in order to "purchase something else not liable to the same risk." The court in agreeing to the sale merely noted that the boy's mother was also owned by Culberson's daughter. Nor did the court offer any objections when planter James Cole sold a young boy, whom he had raised in his own family, to a local saddler.³⁰

If slave children enjoyed little protection in the Spanish-era, adult slaves had even less. The case of Nehemiah Albertson and his slave, Hector, is illustrative of what was undoubtedly a common experience. In 1783, Albertson entered into an agreement with a local merchant, St. Germain, to plant tobacco on land owned by St. Germain. Albertson agreed (according to contracts filed in the Spanish Court at Natchez) to furnish four work horses, five blacks, and the needed plantation tools for making the crops. St. Germain, for his part, would provide three blacks, two whites, and one hundred bushels of corn. The expense of five sows and a boar were to be shared equally.

Work proceeded smoothly at first with a labor force of two white "hirelings," one Indian, a free black, two slaves owned by St. Germain, the slave man Hector, and another slave named Carlos, purchased from a "half-breed" Indian. Late in the summer, however, work on the plantation came to an abrupt halt with the death of Albertson. The slaves Hector and Carlos were sold to settle Albertson's debts to St. Germain and other creditors, including the "half-breed" slave trader.³¹

Although slaves were mere property legally speaking, the wilderness character of Spanish Natchez greatly diluted and shaped the slave/master relationship. For one thing, danger lurked almost everywhere. In 1783, the Spanish Commandant at Natchez ordered all its district inhabitants fit for duty to unite in squads of twenty men for the purpose of capturing a band of robbers plundering the area. Included among the cutthroats to be

29. Book B, May 22, 1789, Spanish Court Records, p. 260; p. 261; May 25, 1789, p. 263; June 21, 1789, p. 298; June 22, 1789, p. 299.

30. Ibid., Book C, August 24, 1795.

31. Ibid., Book Eight, December 11, 1783, pp. 137-154.

brought to justice was at least one black man. Dozens of similar examples from the court records attest to the volatile nature of the place.³²

Beset by violence on all sides, unprotected by law or family, and subject to the vicissitudes of a market in which they were bought, sold, mortgaged, and exchanged as little more than cattle, the African-American inhabitants of colonial Natchez must have experienced a life tantamount to that of a living hell. And the dimensions of that hell were psychological as well as physical. To take one minor example of the changes with which the enslaved were forced to contend, of the hundreds of slave sales recorded in the Spanish court documents the names most frequently listed are English rather than African. The most common names for men were Dick, Jack, John, Peter, William, James, and Sam. Among the women, Maria, Catherine, Anna, and Nancy topped the list. Other names commonly cited were Joseph, Lucy, Ned, Jenny, Thomas, Kitty, Anthony, Charlotte, Paul, Kate, Bob and Sally.

Typically Anglo names in the main, the listing tells us much about the impersonalization and deculturalization of slavery as a process of alienation and psychological disfigurement. What is more, among the names in the records were those that heaped ridicule upon the enslaved in a process wherein humiliation was used as a means of social control. Names like Pharaoh, Caesar, Azor, Prince, Fortune, Coffee, Neptune, Ranger, Romeo, Dunce, January, Dublin, Jamaica Sam, Swift, Hamlet, Blizzard, Coco, Sampson, and Jupiter were especially favored by the slave masters.

There is no way of knowing to what extent the enslaved of colonial Natchez accepted the names given them by their white masters. Common sense would suggest that the slaves probably had double names — African and Anglo. For one thing, the typical slave lived in a small household with but one or two other slaves, allowing thereby the retention of African names at least informally. On the other hand, it was not unlikely to find newly arrived slaves from Africa living and working alongside slaves native to Jamaica and the upper South. Among the court records are citations of ten African locations — including seven distinct nations or tribes, twelve American states, and nine Caribbean islands as the birthplaces of Natchez slaves. African-American slaves from Guinea lived alongside African-Americans from the Ivory Coast, Biafra, the Congo region, the Windward Coastal areas, and Senegambia as well as second generation African-American-Virginians, native Jamaican slaves, and Louisiana Creoles. Given the ethnic diversity of the Natchez enslaved, their acceptance of Anglo names was probably unavoidable.³³

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The Spanish-era ended in 1795 when Spain transferred the Natchez district (above the 31st parallel) east of the Mississippi River to the United States in the Treaty of San Lorenzo. A few years later, the vast region west of Natchez was included in the Louisiana Purchase. But of more immediate consequence to Natchez blacks were the economic winds

32. *Ibid.*, Book Eleven, August 12, 1786, pp. 381-438.

33. Spanish Court Records, A thru G.

that swept over the district in the last years of Spanish rule. Almost overnight, black people in the district were caught up in the cultivation of a new crop — cotton — that fastened them within the grip of a plantation economy that not even the Civil War would fully loosen.³⁴

Toward the end of the Spanish-era, Spain abruptly ended all subsidies for Natchez tobacco. Almost immediately, economic depression engulfed the region. Planters desperately searched for a substitute crop in indigo and grain, but to no avail. Just when all looked hopeless, several Natchez planters experimented with a technological innovation (modeled on Eli Whitney's cotton gin) capable of separating the seed from short staple cotton far more efficiently than could be done by the traditional method of hand combing. The new ginning device — which a local slave mechanic had a hand in perfecting — wrought a revolution upon the land; and slavery in Natchez became an highly profitable enterprise linked to the production of an internationally valued staple crop. For blacks in Natchez, a relatively simple piece of farm machinery profoundly affected every aspect of their lives.³⁵

With the development of the cotton gin, the trickle of slaves coming into the neighborhood became a cascade. By 1810, more than 8000 slaves lived in Adams County, the political district of closest proximity to the original settlement around Fort Rosalie. That number increased to 14,292 on the eve of the Civil War. Across the river in Louisiana, the labor of tens of thousands of slaves transformed snake infested swamplands into a flood plain of large plantations stretching from the sugar fields around Baton Rouge to the cotton districts upriver and across from Vicksburg. Table 2 indicates just how completely the old Natchez district had become a slave-populated, plantation economy.³⁶

In the ensuing antebellum years, Natchez district slaves worked, in the main, on large plantations that specialized in the production of cotton. They also grew other crops such as corn, peas, potatoes, and hay, but not as cash crops or as substitutes for cotton. The essential purpose of slavery in the region was a simple one from which few slave masters deviated in the first sixty years of the nineteenth century: to grow cotton, in order to buy slaves, in order to buy land, in order to grow more cotton and buy more slaves and more land. In the process nearly every inch of land in Adams County had been taken up as plantations by 1840. And because the loosely packed soil of the Adams County highlands eroded easily, planters took to the river parishes in Louisiana with an energy that knew few bounds.³⁷

34. Moore, *The Emergence of the Cotton Kingdom in the Old Southwest*, pp. 1-18.

35. Charles S. Sydnor, *A Gentleman of the Old Natchez Region: Benjamin L.C. Wailes* (Westport, Ct., 1970).

36. Robert Dabney Calhoun, "A History of Concordia Parish, Louisiana," *Louisiana History Quarterly* XV (1932), pp. 44-67; pp. 214-233; pp. 428-452; pp. 618-645; XVI (1933), pp. 929-124; B.L.C. Wailes, *Report on the Agriculture and Geology of Mississippi Embracing a Sketch of the Social and Natural History of the State* (Jackson, Miss., 1854), pp. 1-123

37. Ronald L.F. Davis, *Good and Faithful Labor: From Slavery to Sharecropping in the Natchez District, 1860-1890* (Westport, Conn., 1982), pp. 24-57.

Most slaves in Adams County lived on plantations of fifty or more slaves; those across the river in the more fertile parishes of Louisiana lived on even larger places, plantations ranging up to two hundred slaves each. Accordingly, the Louisiana plantations resembled agricultural factories, relatively bare-boned with few appurtenances beyond an overseer's house, slave cabins, a gin shed, and barns. In Adams County, on the other hand, the typical plantation was more of a plantation estate, characterized by a mansion residence as well as appropriate estate dependency buildings housing those slaves needed as domestic retainers and groundspeople.³⁸

**Table 2: Mississippi River Counties and Parishes
Slave and Free Populations**

	Mississippi			Louisiana	
	Slave	White		Slave	White
Warren	13,763	6,896	Carrol	13,908	4,124
Claiborne	15,722	3,339	Madison	7,353	1,640
Jefferson	12,306	3,339	Tensas	14,592	1,479
Adams	14,292	5,618	Concordia	12,542	1,242
Wilkinson	13,132	2,799	W. Feliciana	9,571	2,036

Source: *Eighth Census of the U.S.: (1860) Population*

The town of Natchez, containing more than 2,100 slaves out of a total population of around 6,612 people in 1860, depended on the district's plantation economy and society for its existence. It was a river town that had long functioned as a stopping point for western farmers and adventurers moving cargoes and boats to New Orleans. In that capacity, the town had earned a notorious reputation as a point of rendezvous well beyond the law. Its riverboat landing, known as Natchez Under-the-Hill, serviced the river adventurers with drink, prostitutes, and gambling.³⁹

The town proper began some two hundred feet above the landing atop a bluff that protected its residents from high waters and low morals. Unlike Natchez Under-the-Hill, upper-Natchez functioned as a kind of service center for the plantation community of its immediate hinterland. Indeed, there were three distinct towns in the antebellum era: Natchez Under-the-Hill, which serviced the river trade; uptown Natchez, filled with shops and churches and middle-class business establishments; and outlying Natchez, a

38. Ibid.

39. Joseph Holt Ingraham, *The South West: By a Yankee*, (New York, N.Y., 1935), II, pp. 18-190; Edith Wyatt Moore, *Natchez Under-The-Hill*, (Natchez, Miss., 1958).

surrounding neighborhood of garden estates and beautiful mansion homes wherein dwelled those "nabobs" who owned plantations and slaves throughout the district.⁴⁰ (See ILLUSTRATION F)

The town of Natchez was held together by the common dependency of its parts (Under-the-Hill, uptown, and villa-like estates) on the district's vibrant slave economy. But perhaps most importantly, insofar as the district's slaves were concerned, the most compelling fact about the place was the pervasiveness of its trade in human chattel. Beginning as early as 1720, and lasting until the middle of the Civil War, thousands of slaves were sold on the steps of the town's courthouse, in uptown auction houses, at the landing Under-the-Hill (often while still embarked on boats and barges), across the river in Vidalia, and at an outlying slave depot (Forks-of-the-Road) situated in the very heart of the town's most prestigious estate neighborhood. The whole town, as every visitor to the place was likely to comment, simply reeked of the foul business.

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On the basis of the above overview, it is clear that there was in slavery, and its associated trade, an iron-like cord of continuity running through the Natchez district's culture, politics, economy, society, and spirit from the earliest days of the European settlement at Fort Rosalie. Few whites in the district had avoided its prospect; no blacks — slave or free — ever completely escaped its hold.

40. Ibid; Charles Lyell, *A Second Visit to The United States of North America: 1845-1846* (London, 1850), pp. 194-201; Tyrone Power, *Impression of American During the Years, 1833, 1834, 1835* Vol. I (Philadelphia, Pa., 1836), pp. 121-131.

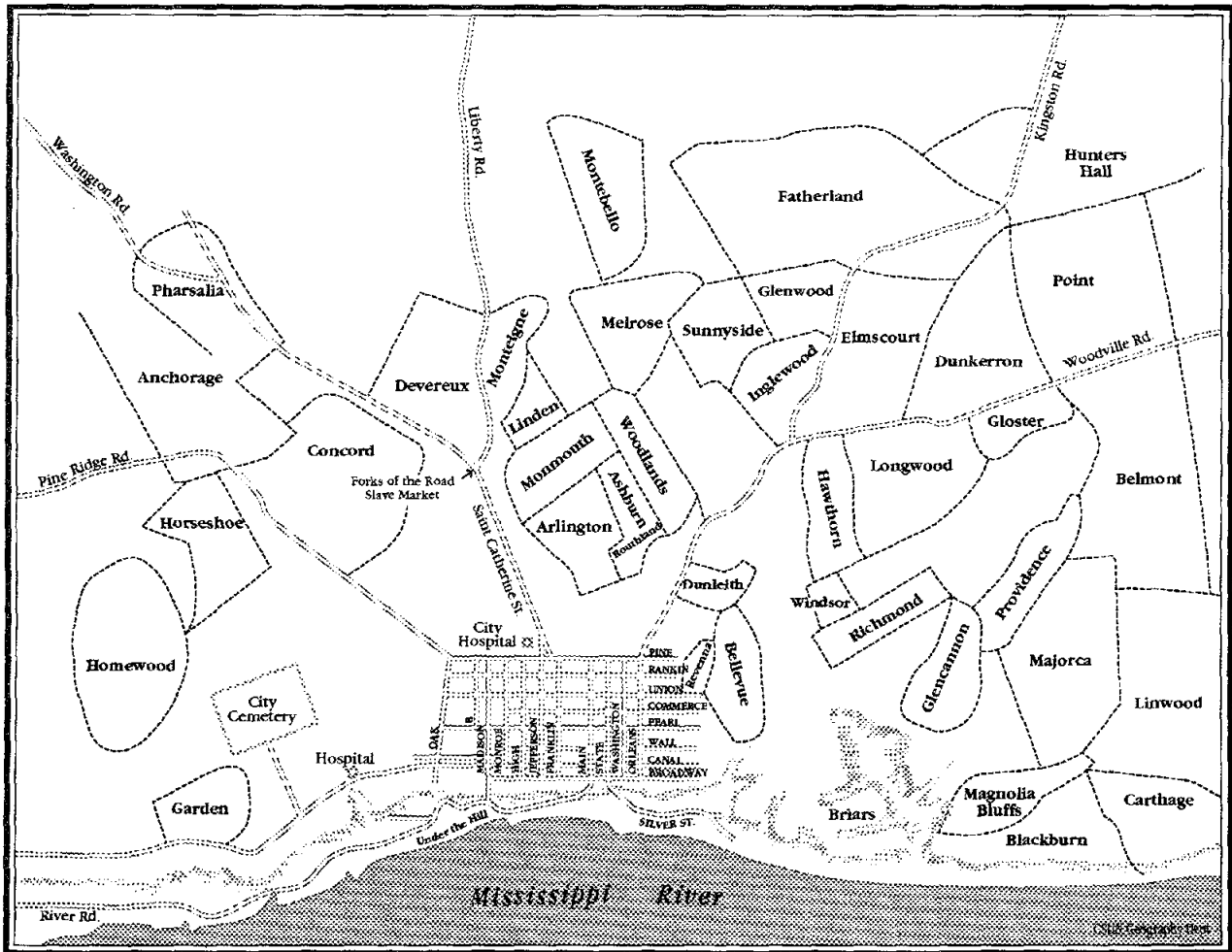


Illustration F: Suburban Estates — c1830 to 1860

CHARACTERISTICS OF NATCHEZ SLAVERY

The vast majority of African-Americans who lived in the environs of antebellum Natchez worked as enslaved people on plantations in hinterland counties and parishes, in the town of Natchez as laborers and petty business operatives, and on nearby estates as servants and gardeners and farm hands. A few of them, both slave and free, worked in lumber camps, on riverboats, and as the slaves and hirelings of small farmers. Each work experience involved essential similarities and significant differences affected by time and place and the age, gender, color, and status of the enslaved.

THE PLANTATION MILIEU

It is important to understand that 73 percent of the slaves in Adams County lived, in the 1850s, on large plantations of fifty or more slaves per plantation. Across the Mississippi River in Concordia Parish, the figure was higher: 85 percent. This means that the plantation setting was the typical experience for Natchez slaves.⁴¹

To be a plantation slave was to be entrapped in the cultivation of cotton as one's principal activity of life.⁴² Students of southern history generally agree that growing cotton required few skills which could not be quickly learned on the job. Basically, the duties were seasonal and could be easily compartmentalized. Once a plantation had been cleared of trees, brush, and roots (heavy duty that emphasized a male dominated slave force in the first years of a plantation's existence), a gang of laborers would be set to work ploughing the fields. This was done by means of horse, mule, and even oxen drawn iron and (later)

41. U.S. Census (1860), Manuscript Population and Slave Schedules, Adams County, Mississippi, and Concordia Parish Louisiana.

42. The following discussion of plantation agriculture is based on several secondary sources specific to Mississippi as well as sources dealing with southern agriculture in general. In addition, numerous manuscript collections pertinent to Natchez district farming have been consulted. The list includes the following: Aventine Diary of Charles Sauters for 1857, 58,59, Mississippi Department of Archives and History (hereafter cited as MDAH), Jackson, Mississippi; John W. Blassingame, *The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Ante-Bellum South* (New York, N.Y., 1972); James Brown Papers, MDAH; Audley Clark Britton Family Papers, Hill Memorial Library, Louisiana State University (hereafter cited as LSU), Baton Rouge, Louisiana; Lemuel Parker Conner Family Papers, LSU; Alexander K. Farrar Papers, LSU; Eugene D. Genovese, *The Political Economy of Slavery: Studies in the Economy of the Slave South* (New York, N.Y., 1971); J.A. Gillespie Family Papers, LSU; Lewis C. Gray, *History of Agriculture in the Southern United States to 1860*, 2 vols. (Washington, D.C., 1933); Lewis Harper, *Report on the Geology and Agriculture of the State of Mississippi* (Jackson, Miss., 1857); Eugene W. Hilgard, *Report on the Geology and Agriculture of the State of Mississippi* (Jackson, Miss., 1860); John C. Jenkins Diary, Natchez Historic Foundation, Natchez, Mississippi; Thomas W. Knox, *Camp-Fire and Cotton-Field: Life With the Union Armies and Residence on a Louisiana Plantation* (New York, N.Y., 1865); John Hebron Moore, *Agriculture in Ante-bellum Mississippi* (New York, N.Y., 1958); *The Emergence of the Cotton Kingdom in the Old Southwest* (Baton Rouge, La., 1988); William Newton Mercer Family Papers, LSU; William J. Minor Family Papers, LSU; Ulrich B. Phillips, *Life and Labor in the Old South* (Boston, Mass., 1948); Mack Swearingen, "Thirty Years of a Mississippi Plantation: Charles Whitmore of 'Montpelier,'" *The Journal of Southern History* I (1935), pp. 198-211; Charles S. Sydnor, *Slavery in Mississippi* (Baton Rouge, La., 1966, originally published in 1933); B.L.C. Wailes, *Report on the Agriculture and Geology of Mississippi, Embracing a Sketch of the Social and Natural History of the State* (Philadelphia, Pa., 1854).

steel ploughs used to turn up the soil in rows for planting. In some cases a field would be horizontally ploughed, even between the rows, but this was more a northern characteristic not commonly practiced in Mississippi. With the field ploughed, a planting gang dropped cotton seeds into the rows by hand or, later, by means of crude, horse-drawn drilling machines. This could all be accomplished during the spring planting season, which usually began in March. With the advent of April rains, all slaves would be set to work hoeing the weeds between the rows and especially near the young cotton plants. On most plantations, the four-foot spaced rows would be scraped clean of weeds again and again, using mules and horses and light scraping plough-like implements. Most hand hoeing was confined principally to the hills around the cotton plants. Such attention to weeding consumed most of the summer.

When the cotton was ready to be harvested, the entire slave force would turn out to gather the crop before the rains and winds could discolor or trash the fibrous bolls. Here the smallest and most dexterous slaves were often the most valued as pickers. The stooped labor placed a premium on small-handed women and teenagers who could work with less back fatigue and pick neater cotton because of their ability to pull the fiber more cleanly from the pods. Large-handed male slaves might work harder and faster in the field — picking more cotton, but the end result was usually a dirtier product.⁴³

Once the cotton was picked, and this work could last through October and November as plants matured at different times, the sacks of cotton had to be hauled to wagons for transport to the gin houses on the plantation or in town. Most often, the large plantations had their own gins or used machines on neighboring places. Here a team of five or six men fed the fiber into the mechanical devices that separated the seed from the cotton. Then the crop would be taken to the pressing screws for baling. Two men and a mule could turn the screws, compacting the crop into 450-pound squares bound by wood, iron, or rope straps. Once the cotton was baled, it would be hauled to the river, usually the landing at Natchez-Under-the-Hill, for transport aboard steamboats and riverbarges to New Orleans.⁴⁴

The work described above required strength and coordination above all else. Men were favored as the best plough hands simply because the work of keeping the mules in line, turning the team, and lifting the heavy oak and iron ploughs demanded brute strength. Hoeing and picking could be done by all hands together. How the work was allocated depended on the decisions of overseers and planters. Most planters preferred using gang labor in which a pace would be set by black drivers and lead field hands under the direct supervision of the overseer. This gang method could be adapted to ploughing, hoeing, and picking. Some planters, especially toward the end of the antebellum period, used the task system. This too involved gangs, but the work was organized around a given task — so many rows ploughed or hoed — to be accomplished by day's end. Tasking, it was commonly believed, motivated field hands by allowing them to quit the fields once their assigned jobs

43. Ibid. See especially the *Aventine Diary*.

44. Ibid.

were accomplished. The typical plantation used a combination of gang and task work arrangements in the decade before the Civil War.⁴⁵

Although cotton was the primary crop grown, most plantation slaves worked at a variety of farm jobs. Table 3 below indicates the diversity and near self-sufficiency of the typical plantation's economy. The tabular data lists the production figures for six plantations in the Natchez vicinity, randomly selected from the Manuscript Census of 1860.

Among other features of the large plantation, none was so consuming of labor as was the handling and upkeep of its assorted work animals. Plantation #4 (in Table 3), for example, employed some sixty-three working stock of horses, mules, and oxen. Usually, horses and mules were used as plough animals with oxen performing the heavy duty of hauling timber and wagon loads of supplies and cotton. These animals required constant attention by the slaves assigned to handle them. They had to be properly driven, fed (often three times a day), watered, and stabled at night. On most plantations, mules were the animals of preference because they were stronger than horses and more intelligent than oxen. Most importantly, mules could withstand the abuse of those slaves who might take out their frustrations on their master's property. Horses could be walked off a cliff, overworked, spooked into hurting themselves, or over-watered and over-fed in comparison to mules.⁴⁶

In addition, most plantations kept substantial numbers of cows, cattle, sheep, and pigs. It is doubtful whether these animals required much attention since they were not prized stock or bred for quality meat. Their principal purpose was to provide a degree of self-sufficiency in slave provisions. It was not uncommon, moreover, to find hogs and cattle running nearly wild on a plantation's woodlands. A few choice animals might be closely attended as food for the planter's household, but the number was probably never very large.⁴⁷

45. Ibid. There is little evidence to support the contention that tasking resulted in greater personal time for the enslaved. Rather, it is likely that tasks were set so as to enable a lead hand to pace the workers at a rate that would take up most of the working day. In this sense, the task system was actually tantamount to a kind of speedup in the work routine.

46. Ibid. See especially Phillips, *Life and Labor in the Old South*, p. 135; Kenneth M. Stamp, *The Peculiar Institution: Slavery in the Ante-Bellum South* (New York, N.Y., 1956).

47. Ibid. Some Natchez planters were the exception to this generalization, keeping large numbers of animals for breeding and provisions. See especially John Hebron Moore, *Agriculture in Ante-Bellum Mississippi*.

Table 3. Production for Select Plantations — 1860

Slaves	44	135	315	100	93	275
Horses	5	58	16	16	7	15
Mules	19	22	16	16	7	15
Oxen	12	22	158	31	13	84
Milch Cows	50	20	52	25	12	10
Cattle	50	50	116	50	105	30
Sheep	40	100	300	0	0	60
Wool (lbs)	50	200	900	0	0	100
Swine	40	80	128	125	90	150
Corn (bshls)	1,000	4,000	9,000	5,000	2,500	10,000
Hay (tons)	10	10	0	10	15	50
Cotton (bales)	150	375	985	700	296	1750
Beans & Peas (bshls)	50	500	160	1,000	1,000	500
Potatoes (bshls)	50	30	50	0	0	100
Swt Potatoes (bshls)	100	100	30	500	0	3,000

Source: U.S. Census (1860), Agricultural, Population, and Slave Schedules, Adams County, Mississippi and Concordia Parish, Louisiana.

All these creatures, prized or not, had to be fed. That is why a good portion of the slave's working day was devoted to corn, beans, and hay. The routine was simple enough. A plantation that produced 1000 bushels of corn and 700 bales of cotton typically practiced a two-field planting arrangement in which corn- and cottonfields would be ploughed, planted, and hoed often side-by-side. The exact acreage devoted to each crop was always an individual decision, but six acres in cotton and three in corn for every prime slave hand was the usual standard. Corn would be planted in April or March, using about the same routine as used in cotton. The stalks would be peeled of their leaves for fodder in mid-summer and the husks taken shortly thereafter. Then the animals would be turned loose in the cornfields to forage prior to a second ploughing and the planting of a second crop to be harvested after the cotton had been taken in October.⁴⁸

Cowpeas were usually planted among the corn, with the resulting peavines gathered in summer to be dried for hay or else left for the stock to forage in late summer. Sweet potatoes, the other large crop, could be planted along with corn and cotton and harvested for their fruit, just prior to cotton picking season, as winter feed for hogs and humans.⁴⁹

The work routine on the typical plantation was easily compartmentalized into several variations of the same labor. Men worked as plough hands using heavy and light instruments for turning the soil and scraping between the rows. This ploughing and

48. Ibid.

49. Ibid.

scraping activity continued from mid-February until late summer, when the plough hands took to the fields for harvesting the cotton and corn. Women and teenagers generally worked, during the same general time period, as hoeing hands, either in gangs or at tasks. All hands participated in peeling corn leaves for fodder, shucking husks, and picking cotton. Children too young to work in the fields toted water to the workers, rounded up animals, worked as trash gangs cleaning up around the gins, and helped serve the midday meals. Small-fry toddlers and infants were looked after by the elderly in corrals or nurseries located near the slave quarters or in proximity to the overseer's house.⁵⁰

The work journal of John C. Jenkins for his Elgin plantation in Adams County tells a typical story. Jenkins' plantation lay about six miles south of Natchez in the vicinity of Second Creek. The following excerpts show exactly what his slaves experienced as field hands for the first half of the year 1842.⁵¹

- | | |
|----------|--|
| Feb 16. | Finished today ploughing Hedges Field — it has taken 6 ploughing with 6 ploughs and say 5 days with 8 ploughs. |
| Feb. 18. | Sooran & John continue making post & rail fence — |
| Feb. 19. | Carpenter finished cupboard — and begin on fence next to house. |
| Feb. 22. | Left all the young locust and sassafras trees standing — trimmed them up to near top and cut out all the scrubby ones — Some of these trees to be transplanted next year along the road to Natchez — make an avenue of them. |
| Feb. 23. | John & Sooran at fence — 4 women & 2 men yet at hill in front of the house which has kept 4 men & 6 women hands steadily occupied since November with 2 scrapers and 2 carts. |
| Feb. 24. | Hoe hands continue to clear hillside & plant in corn. Moses & Charles went to Natchez — took in eleven bales cotton and brot out 100 cypress pickets — grind stone & linseed oil & Mr. Rose's pickets. |
| Feb. 26. | Finished half the garden fence this evening. . . . |
| March 1. | Heavy showers of rain this morning no ploughing done or corn planted — Ploughmen all cutting wood at home & some hands at the hillside between showers. Sooran |

50. Ibid.

51. See John C. Jenkins Diary, Historic Natchez Foundation, Natchez, Mississippi; also Mark Groen, "John C. Jenkins, An Antebellum Natchez Planter," unpublished graduate seminar paper, California State University, Northridge, in author's possession.

- & John clearing out cellars. Braddock sent into Natchez for letters and papers.
- March 3. 10 hands in the front yard — Sooran and John making fence around garden — Trimmed up all the young sassafras & locust trees in the hollows where we cleared today.
- March 11. Ploughs in the bottom breaking up for corn — other force planting corn.
- March 18. Moses brot out marbles & pork. Still hoeing corn.
- March 30. Sent Moses to Natchez after tomatoe plants — put down netting and set out plants in garden.
- April 1. Sent Oliver to Natchez to bring out pots for flowers. Hoe hands yet in Hedges field at Corn & ploughs next Henderson's breaking up.
- April 18. The rain yesterday has made the ground too wet to plough — all hoes hands at new road 4 making fence & 4 chopping down bushes in the cotton fields — Ben planting Bermuda grass. . . .
- April 19. Tuesday — all hands started again at Hedges corn field — suckler gang working new road to Natchez — Randle and Sooran making fence.
- April 25. Moses sent to Mr. Henderson's for bricks.
- April 26. Working with 4 hands in front of home planted out shrubbery & Bermuda grass.
- April 28. At Saragossa field & laying out grounds in front of house — Moses went to Natchez for cement — Dug large cistern at corner of V. House 10 by 16.
- April 30. Finished scraping out Saragossa field — having been 7 & 1/2 days with 40 odd hoes — finished cistern.
- May 2. Monday — commenced today scraping cotton on East side of plantation & planting the Egyptian sod behind the garden. Hilling potatoe crop. Sooran & Randle making fence.
- May 3. Replanting bad stand on east side Heges field — & planting sod.
- May 5. All hands yet at Hedges field — replanting and cutting out — Sooran and Randle at Big Cane Meadows for Locust posts.

- May 19. All hands in field in back of corn house — corn begins to thrive.
- May 23. Wilkins cutting oats — Sooran whitewashing and putting up fence. Wilkins finished oats and housed this evening.
- May 28. Nearly finished moulding field next to Henderson's & the ploughs nearly through Hedges pasture Corn.
- June 3. Cleared out spring in Bayou. . . .
- June 18. Cleansed out the cisterns yesterday. Dug pond by chicken yard & and put out on oats ground — broke up for peas. Ben planting corn in garden & putting in sod for vegetables.
- June 30. All hands at Saragossa field — fields very grassy since last rains — rushing the hands this week to keep down the tye vines.
- July 5. Put in some peach cuttings — budding apples, pears, and peaches.
- July 9. The boys who went to River Place to make baskets returned this morning on Barksville with 100 baskets — sent Braddock & Moses for them in afternoon.
- August 9. Bottled wine.
- August 10. Send Sooran to Natchez for coal, cotton & sundries for bottling wine.
- August 12. Put up 350 bottles claret & making vinegar
- August 13. Sooran went to Natchez brot out soap, salt. Made tomato ketsup. Now laying kitchen hearth.

Jenkins' journal ends in mid-August, but the entries for the first half of the year clearly indicate the slaves' work routine. In between all the work associated with planting and cultivating the crops was the endless work of general plantation maintenance. Wood cutting, fencing, ditching, levee construction and repairs, road building, basket making, etc., were done, when time permitted, by any and all available hands.

It was not uncommon, moreover, to have one slave afoot in the woods hunting game that ranged from wild turkeys to razorback hogs and deer. Other slaves might specialize as carpenters and blacksmiths. The latter was an especially important skill owing to the need for keeping hoes, scrapers, ploughs, ginning saws, and wagonwheels in good working order.

Slave women unable to do field work due to age or sickness frequently learned to sew and spin cloth or else functioned as nursery maids, butter maids, and washerwomen.⁵²

Few plantations, however, possessed enough skilled slave artisans to meet their needs. Although brickmakers, blacksmiths, carpenters, and mechanics were always in demand and fetched high prices, many plantations hired white artisans or a neighbor's skilled slaves to perform even the most routine jobs, such as repairing cisterns, building chimneys, and constructing cabins. Plantation diaries and journals are replete with entries denoting the constant outlay of money for hired craftsmen and skilled hands.⁵³ Entries in Jenkins' journal for August and September of 1855 reveal just how common was the practice of bringing in skilled crafts people — usually whites — for almost any work of some complexity.

- August 8. 1855. Mr. McPherson having finished fence and other jobs, begins today to prepare his lumber for addition to north end of the house. . . see how long this job will take. . . Mr. Craig was about 3 months at similar addition to other end.
- August 9. Set men to cutting out large popular beam in stable to make sills for addition to house. . . cut down china tree north of parlor and will begin tomorrow to dig foundation to house for addition.
- August 10. 2 men began today to whip saw the sills for my new addition. Began to dig out foundation north of parlor and hauled over some brick for kiln.
- August 28. Mr. Mcpherson raising addition to north end of house.
- August 31. Carpenters raising second or upper story to new addition, and got all up by dark. 1 team hauling up brick for new chimney.
- September 4. Carpenters framing and laying sleepers or joice for 3rd story of house — 4 hands digging cellar — this makes third week we have been engaged in digging out cellar. Most of the time 2 horse carts at it.
- September 6. Sent Archie to Natchez & got out the 2 bricklayers from Reynolds and Brown, began on Chimney at 11 o'clock. & by dark had got half way up first story of lower room. This chimney will take about 6000 brick.

52. See especially the *Aventine Diary of Charles Sauters*, MDAH. The *Aventine* plantation was owned by G.B. Shields, who lived at Montebello near Natchez.

53. See Eugene Genovese's discussion of the problem of low skills among plantation slaves in his *Roll, Jordan, Roll*, pp. 388-398.

The above notations refer to the construction of an addition to Jenkins' plantation mansion.⁵⁴ Slaves could be used for the heavy work of cutting trees, digging foundations, hauling brick, and even sawing timber for unfinished planks, but most skilled work was contracted off the plantation. Other items over the years indicate Jenkins' dependency on outside labor for both the amenities of life as well as the everyday tasks of repair and upkeep.⁵⁵

- | | |
|-------------------------|---|
| September 17.
1845 | Sent Moses to Natchez for the new Gin stand of Bates, Hyde & Co. |
| April 1. 1846. | Mr. Brown whitened the dining room walls today and the ceiling of the entry. |
| August 25. | Send Ab on the Natchez with walnut plant to Mr. Steward, who is to make a bookcase of it. Brot out Mr. Gray's lumber for the library. |
| August 31. | Mr. O'Brien from Natchez commenced building chimney in the library. |
| March (2nd wk)
1849. | The carpenter Paul, beginning to make our picket fence round Elgin front yard. The pickets I have purchased from Couzen's Saw Mill. |
| August 14. | Having put Gin House in tip top order the carpenter Paul begins this week upon a new stable and carriage house up side of old cotton house in Gin yard. |
| December 8. | Mr. Wells is papering Elgin parlor, and Mr. Paul making frame for hanging our curtains over the windows. |
| April 23. 1850. | Mr. Paul began to paint north side of house. |
| November 22. | Mr. Paul jobbing about the house this week — putting door upon shed room & sash over door in my room & fixing billiard room for Dr. Gried. Since our absence (some five months) Mr. Paul has put new sills under the corn house, made entirely new sheds posts of locusts, new rafters, new lathing & covered with new cypress shingles-making the house now better than when first built — he has also built a double privy in the yard — put a new cover of 3 ft cypress boards upon large cotton house in gin house yard — and is now building a summer house in garden besides doing several small jobs in & about the house. |

54. Jenkins Diary.

55. Ibid.

June 23, 1851.

Sent two teams to Natchez & brought out 1000 feet flooring dressed yellow pine and 500 white pine. From Dr. Young's kiln — 36 — in all. Mr. Cracy came out this afternoon with Mr. Black, & his boy Lewis, to begin work on addition to the house. George the brick mason has nearly finished cellar.

June 13, 1853.

The old kitchen house is to be torn down — also the house behind it used as a wash house, and sleeping rooms for servants — we shall also tear down the old kitchen for plantation and this will rid us of the old houses in yard. The wagon will soon have hauled over from the Forest, the 16,000 bricks I purchased — these brick will answer for the side walls & foundation of new kitchen house.

Nor was Jenkins alone in the limited use of his slaves. Gin houses, cotton presses, grist mills, barns, stables, mansions, and even crude slave cabins were seldom built by slave labor, except in the sense of a gang of field hands digging foundations and hauling supplies. In 1860, planter Gerard Brandon, employed William Scothorn to erect fourteen slave cabins, on his Canebrake plantation in Concordia. Scothorn, who had built similar plantation structures in the district — including overseers' houses and cook houses, supplied his own laborers and provisions. In this case, black workers employed or owned by Scothorn might have assisted him, but there is little indication that he used plantation slaves in erecting the relatively simply built slave quarters.⁵⁶

The above material suggests that plantation slaves were field hands pure and simple. Most were specialized in the sense of being plough hands, or hoeing hands, or scrapers, depending on seasonal needs, but all were expected, in addition to their field specialty, to do just about every simple thing on the place — from backbreaking labor to fetching and picking-up.⁵⁷

Regarding shelter, diet, clothing, and medical care, planters typically allocated just the bare minimum of resources needed to keep slaves healthy enough to work and reproduce. Looking first at the question of shelter, masters and slaves lived in similar accommodations during the so-called pioneer stages of plantation building: crude dirt-floored log cabins without fireplaces or windows. In Concordia Parish, the pioneer stage lasted, in some cases, up to the eve of the Civil War. But most well-established plantations in the Natchez region provided slaves with cabins somewhat more substantial than the log cabins of old. Taking Scothorn's contracts as a guide, the typical slave cabin in the 1850s was most likely a 20 x 19 x 10-foot high, two room structure, floored with pine or

56. Florence LeClercq Eisele, "Ante-Bellum Slave Dwellings on Plantations of Southern United State," unpublished manuscript, Historic Natchez Foundation, Natchez,, Mississippi.

57. This is not to say that planters did not designate certain slaves to specific tasks. On the Aventine plantation, for example, Charles Sauters used individual slaves as teamsters, carpenters, and seamstresses on a regular basis. These workers were undoubtedly more skilled than the average field hands, but their special duties never completely precluded them from working at general plantation labor whenever the need arose, from ploughing to picking cotton and shucking corn. See the Aventine Diary mentioned above.

cypress planks. Many such buildings featured an open hallway, or dog-trot, that ran through the center of the building allowing the air to circulate. Double cabins of the sort built for Canebrake plantation had at least two windows in each room and a fireplace or chimney of brick. The building was usually raised off the ground by about three feet on brick pillars.⁵⁸ (ILLUSTRATION G)

Planters tended to position the slave cabins in a section of the plantation known as the "quarters." The cabins were normally placed in a double row, making for a kind of lane or street, with doorways facing outward toward the center. The overseer's house was usually located at the front end of the lane. The "street's" opposite end, generally opened onto the fields. In many cases, especially on relatively well-established plantations, the slave cabins were placed between the gin houses, grist mills, barns, and the main plantation house, possibly as a better precaution against the spreading of fire — accidental or intended — from the work buildings to the "big house." House servants frequently lived apart from the slave quarters of the field hands in brick buildings near the big-house dependencies — meaning kitchens, washhouses, storage buildings, and toilets. Again, brick was the preferred construction material for big house dependencies as a precaution against fire. Adjacent to the slave quarters could be found cisterns, wells, ponds, cooking ovens, vegetable gardens, and poultry pens.

The census enumerators for Concordia Parish noted in the manuscript census records for 1860 the occupants of every slave cabin in the Parish. Although the evidence is sketchy at best, a close examination of these census records suggests that most cabins were occupied by slave families. (See Table 4) Individual plantations like Canebrake and Indian Village generally conform to the pattern for the Parish as a whole, with the striking observation that the slave quarters on some plantations (such as those at Indian Village) were principally occupied by slave families.⁵⁹

58. See Scothorn's work diary as quoted in Eisele, "Ante-Bellum Slave Dwellings on Plantations of Southern United States." In addition to Scothorn, the Probate Records of the estate of Lewis Evans contain a contract with carpenter James Moore for "14 negro cabins" on the Breunberg plantation in Claiborne County. The specifications for the Moore contract, drawn up in 1825, are strikingly similar to those noted in Scothorn's diary. See Box 13, Document No. 50, October 31, 1825, Probate Records, Estate of Lewis Evans, Office of Records, Adams County, Natchez, Mississippi.

59. U.S. Census (1860), Manuscript Population and Slave Schedules, Concordia Parish, Louisiana

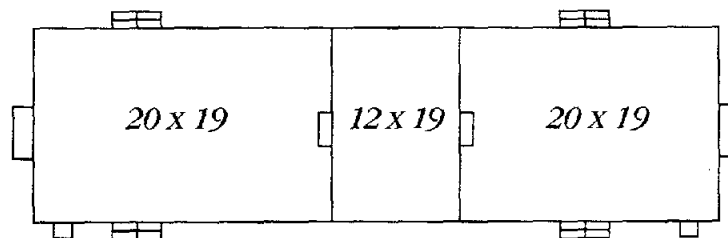
Willam B. Scothorn's Work Diary for the Year 1860*

Double cabins, with 12 feet open passage, floored, between cabins to be 10 1/2 feet high from top of sill to top of plate. To be planked with plank 10-12 inches wide 1 1/2 inches thick (up and down), & the joints covered with lathes, 3 inches wide, 3/4 inches thick. The flooring planks to be jointed & laid on laths, so that the joints may be covered.

The upright plank to project high enough above the plates to come close up to the shingles, & the gable and weatherboard so close as to exclude the air entirely. The houses to be raised on brick pillars, 3 feet from the surface of the earth to the top of the sills. To be covered with 3 feet boards, & the ends to project over the gables.

16 cabins of this size, 8 on each side of the center, & a space 120 feet left between the two center cabins.

The cabins to be built for Mr. D.M. Smiths (?) & owner to furnish nothing but the lumber & the nails & hinges and will hire a cook to the contractor, who must furnish his own provisions and his own hands.



CSUN Geography Dept

*The Scothorn Diary is the property of Florence Le C. Eisle. Copy in Natchez Historic Foundation, Natchez, Mississippi

Illustration G: Slave Cabins

Table 4. Occupants of Concordia Slave Cabins in 1860

	All Concordia	Canebrake Plantation	Indian Plantation
1. Mother, Father, Children	36 %	41 %	51 %
2. Mother, Father, Children plus Other Adults	24	10	21
3. One Adult and Children	10	15	17
4. Family and Elderly	3	0	0
Total	73 %	66 %	89 %
5. Male and Female	3	5	0
6. Two Adults or More	18	28	11
7. One Adult	1	0	0
8. Elderly	1	1	0
9. Other	4	0	0
Total	27 %	34 %	11 %
Children ages 0-15	28 %	29 %	41 %
Females slaves 16-65	37	37	29
Male Slaves 16-65	39	32	28
Old over 65	1	2	0
Number of Cabins	2,749	32	22
Number of Slaves	12,542	113	100
People per Cabin	4 to 5	3 to 4	4 to 5

Source: U.S. Census (1860), Manuscript Population and Slave Schedules, Concordia Parish, Louisiana

Prime age, male slaves lived in the quarters as husbands, fathers, and sons in approximately the same proportion as slave mothers, sisters, and daughters. Children were everywhere underfoot. On some places, like Indian Village, there were almost as many youths as adults. Only a handful of single parent families or childless couples occupied individual cabins. Rather, the typical cabin was occupied by what appears to have been slave families consisting of four or five people. On most places, a number of single men and women, four or five to a dwelling, shared the same roof. On Canebrake, nearly one-third of the slaves lived in cabins unoccupied by children and young people. Elderly slaves, either living alone or in a family, were extremely rare members of the plantation slave community.

Besides working from daybreak until darkness fell, slaves spent some of their limited free time eating and trying to rest. Their diets were fairly simple and quite standardized. A weekly ration of a peck of cornmeal and three to five pounds of salted pork per adult was the usual fare in the quarters. Corn was cheap, easily grown on the plantation, and could

be fixed in a variety of ways from bread and cakes to using the grain for hominy and grits.⁶⁰

Since the days when Spanish explorers brought herds of pigs into the Mississippi Valley as provisions, bacon was the companion food to corn in the slave's diet. Descendants of the Spanish porkers roamed the woods as razorback hogs, thus providing Indians and white settlers alike with ample meat, ready to be hunted, well into the nineteenth-century. Although it is doubtful that many razorback were still roaming at large in the Natchez district by 1850, the practice of provisioning the slaves with pork was so firmly established that salted "fatback" was viewed, by slaves and whites alike, to be an essential component of the slave diet. Most planters tried keeping hogs about the place, often branding them and allowing them the run of fenced woods and rough lands. And unlike beef and mutton that was better eaten fresh, pigs could be slaughtered, soaked in a salty brine, and then smoked and stored for later consumption. But because slaves appropriated the animals at every opportunity, there were never enough hogs to completely provision the typical plantation. Many planters simply gave up on keeping hogs because they could not prevent their slaves from killing them. Nearly every plantation, therefore, purchased barrels of salted pork, or fresh hogs on the hoof, from riverboat hustlers, Natchez merchants, or itinerant pig drovers.⁶¹

Other foods supplemented the slave's basic corn/pork diet. Peas and sweet potatoes were the most common additions which planters were willing to cultivate as field crops. Such food crops were used as fodder and feed for the mules and horses more than they were used to feed the slaves. Some slaves were literally awash in molasses, with planters issuing weekly dollops or extra pints and quarts of the syrupy liquid on holidays and special occasions. Then, too, slaves often gathered berries and nuts, cultivated salad plants like poke and turnip greens in patches around the cabins, and partook of more than a little nocturnal hunting for frogs, opossums, raccoons, and pond fish.⁶²

Almost anything that could be trapped during night hours was fair game for roaming slaves. Catfish lines and traps in ponds and bayous could be left unattended by day. Opossums and "coons" could be captured alive by laying out dead animals as bait. Slave quarters were filled with homemade cages wherein furry rodents of one sort or another were fed on grains poached from the cornfields.⁶³

60. See the Aventine Diary mentioned above as well as the following sources: Sam Bowers Hilliard, *Hog Meat and Hoecake: Food Supply in the Old South* (Carbondale, Ill., 1972), pp. 37-69; Lemuel P. Conner Family Papers, Plantation Journals, 1817-1854 LSU; *DeBow's Review*, III (1847), pp. 419-20; 7 (1849), pp. 380-383; 14 (1853), pp. 177-78; 25 (1858), pp. 571-72; Eugene D. Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll*, pp. 524-550; John H. Moore, *Agriculture in Ante-Bellum Mississippi*, pp. 93-144; Arthur Singleton, *Letters From the South and West* (Boston, Mass., 1824), pp. 110-115; *Souther Cultivator*, 8 (1950), pp. 162-164; Charles S. Sydnor, *Slavery in Mississippi*, pp. 23-66; *A Gentleman of the Old Natchez Region: Benjamin L.C. Wailes* (Durham, N. C., 1938), p. 98.

61. *Ibid.*; see also the wide-ranging testimony contained in George P. Rawick, (ed.), *The American Slave: A Composite Autobiography*, Supplement Series 1,6,7,8,10 *Mississippi Narratives* (Westport, Conn., 1977).

62. *Ibid.*

63. *Ibid.*

Beeves and sheep might be slaughtered two or three times a year to relieve the monotony of salted "fatback." Feasting of this sort was rare, however, partly because the meat did not keep as well as pork. Other foods were commonly hunted by white overseers, or specially designated slaves, for distribution among the quarters. In the early years, bear was valued for its hide, fat, and meat. Deer, too, was a good supplement, and relatively easy to bring down. In addition, the swamps and forests around Natchez were abundant with game birds of great variety, including wild turkeys.⁶⁴

There was also the occasional opportunity for raiding larders and smokehouses for those slaves willing to risk a flogging if caught. One elderly ex-slave interviewed in the 1930s fondly remembered how he had snuck 'taters" from the fields for roasting. Another told of rifling his master's picnic baskets and gorging himself to the point of sickness every time he got the chance.⁶⁵

Sickness, however, seldom resulted from over-eating. Indeed, if overseer diaries and plantation journals are any basis for judgment, plantation slaves were a sickly lot on the whole. Colds, sore heads, cholera, infections, yellow fever, dropsy, consumption, and scores of ailments kept plantation infirmaries filled to maximum capacity with debilitated slaves. Planter Henry Turner regularly wrote to his partner and brother-in-law, John Quitman, of the poor health of the slaves on their Palmyra plantation. The year's bill for a doctor's visit to treat the slaves came to \$709.50 in 1851. Typical entries in the expense ledger read:

April 9.	To visit, prescription & medicins to five Negroes
10.	15 hours attention & detention 12 hours at night
11.	Prescription & preparing lenament
19.	Lacing Harnut's foot & and bandaging the same
	Attention & detention 12 hours at night
May 2.	Night visit to upper place for William

In all, the doctor employed by Turner to treat his slaves made forty-three calls at Palmyra in a six-month period, noting ninety-three separate expenses. Most of the visits (90 percent) occurred during the more intensive working seasons associated with ploughing and picking. Fewer health problems, perhaps not surprisingly, required medical attention during the hoeing months of June and July.⁶⁶

Although some slaves undoubtedly feigned illness to avoid working, the normal rule was to ignore symptomless complaints. Most planters understood, however, that some health problems could be avoided. The most preventable seemed to be those afflicting newly

64. Ibid.

65. Ibid., see especially the narratives of Charlie Davenport, who was born a slave on the Aventine plantation, Rawick, *Mississippi Narratives*, VII, pp. 558-573.

66. Henry Turner to John Quitman, February 3, 1852, Quitman Family Papers, Southern Historical Collection, The University of North Carolina.

purchased slaves unaccustomed to laboring in swampy fields. Planters always preferred buying properly acculturated slaves if possible. "Seasoned" was the term normally used, and it was considered simple prudence to allow newly purchased slaves a transition period of two to four weeks before working them on a regular schedule of ten to fourteen hours a day.⁶⁷

Serious illness might require transporting hands to a slave hospital in Natchez. Several town physicians operated black infirmaries in the 1850s, although such places principally treated town slaves and newly arrived blacks destined for sale in the local slave markets.⁶⁸ Most ill plantation slaves were attended by a local doctor, with castor oil, quinine, cough medicines, and poltices being the usual remedies proscribed. Slaves with broken bones, cuts, wounds, and similar work related accidents required mending and rest more than anything else. But yellow fever — commonly referred to as the ague — contagious diseases, infected sores, malignant tumors, and debilitating intestinal pains had no easy cures.

The case of Matilda on the Eutaw plantation offers but one variation of the numerous and nearly untreatable sicknesses affecting slaves.⁶⁹ In September of 1862, Natchez banker Audley Clark Britton received a disturbing letter from the overseer of his Louisiana plantation. A portion of it is worth quoting at length:

There has been a great deal of sickness on the plantation, but at this time all are on the mend. I have one case of Matilda, John's wife, who was taken about five weeks ago with swelling of the face, which I took to be a rising. I applied a poultice, when lo' there droped out of her nose three of the largest maggets I ever saw in my life. I had made Elder tea and injected up the nose when there came about more than a double hand full — about fifty from first to last. When I sent for the Doctor, he said he could do nothing better than I had done, that she could not live more than three or four days.....and that I had better keep on with the treatment. For some days I have had some hopes of her recovery; but as she begins to feel again the motion of worms and says they are in the back of her ears I fear she is yet in danger.⁷⁰

Matilda continued to suffer agonizingly for some time with nothing able to cure her. Then another slave, Old Bill, fell victim to the worms. The doctor suggested injections of vinegar, but to no good effect. Finally, Britton's overseer discovered that "using

67. Aventine Plantation Diary; John Knight to William M. Beal, June 27, 1844, John Knight Papers, Duke University; Rawick, *Mississippi Narratives*, VII, pp. 558-573

68. *Mississippi Free-Trader*, January 7, 1846; March 12, 1856; William Dosite Postell, *The Health of Slaves on Southern Plantations* (Gloucester, Mass., 1970), pp. 130-135; Henry Tooley, *History of the Yellow Fever as It Appeared in the City of Natchez in the Month of August, September & October, 1823*, MDAH. A slave hospital, possibly state supported, operated near the Forks-of-the Road slave market in the last two decades before the Civil War.

69. See Audley Clark Britton Family Papers, LSU.

70. James W. Melvin to A.C. Britton, September 29, 1862, Britton Papers.

tobacco....made the worms let go." Although the concoction failed to completely cure Old Bill or Matilda, it seemed to drive the worms from their bodies at least temporarily.⁷¹ Other entries in the overseer's letters to Britton illustrate the array of illness — and the remedies — that typically afflicted plantation slaves:⁷²

October 2, 1862. Kitty has been suffering for two or three weeks from pain in the ear occasioned from an earwig getting into her ear. She says, she felt it when it got in and pulled it out. When the doctor came to see Bill, I had him to look at her. He said I was doing for her all that was right. . . . The pain she suffers prevents her from doing anything.

Dipsy also I had him examine. He told me as Dr. Wren had told me before that nothing ailed her. But I am of a different opinion. I fear that if she has not the Consumption she will have it befor long. ____ suggests getting Dr. D. Jayne's Expectorant for her. But perhaps you may know something that may answer for her case as well or better.

Kesiah suffering much from cessation of the menses. She has not been able to do anything for more than three months. I wish you could send up some pineroyal Herb which would be useful for her, and do good to some others. Also we wants sage. I can not get a bit of it here. It was all killed by the high water. Send too some Lineca Snakeroot. We still have a good deal of Ague here. Old Bill is getting much better, and there appears to be a cessation of worms. Matilda not so well, has running of the ears and says she still feels the working of the worms. Many of the Negroes have sore heads, I have the head penciled with Iodine, and they are getting better of the disease. — I want to use for Delphy Tartar eunnitic ointment. We have none here, please send me some.

November 20, 1862 The sick are getting better. Black Bill, who was attacked with Pneumonia, is at present out of danger. The 14th of this month at half past eleven O'Clock AM. Sarah was delivered of a Daughter, which she calls Jane.

December 8, 1862. Old Bill not yet being able to do any work. Aunt Philis in suffering from a cold. Black Bill of an attack of Plurisy. Some few have the Chills. But most all in general are on the mend. Violet was delivered the 10th this month, of a female chile (not yet named).

December 22, 1862. Black Bill is very sick with the typhoid fever. The Dr. says Bill must have some Whiskey. Please send Jack back as soon as possible with the Whiskey. . . . Barhan is suffering from an attack of Enflamation of the stomach and Bowels — Do not send me

71. Melvin to Britton, October 10, 1862, Britton Papers.

72. Britton Papers.

any rum. Dr. W says it is not good, that he wants Whiskey. (I suppose Brandy might do.)

January 1, 1863. Jane, Sarah's baby died suddenly on the 19th. She was never well. ___ thought that she was not well formed. . . . Nearly all on the place have had colds. Cases of Ague still continue. . . . For the Negroes I used all the quine you sent, and cannot keep the chills off. They always return again in a short time. I do not like to see too many confined to their houses with Ague fever and must beg you to try to procure if possible some quinine. Of Medicines most needed, we are now out. Such as Calomel Morphine, Spirito Camphor, Rlum Hire Syrup, Sena Manna Oil — (Be good enough to get for me a bottle of Prof. Haskel's Electric Oil, 1 Bottle Dr. D. Jayne's Expectorant, 2 Boxes of Dr. D. Jayne's Sanative Pills). Ten or 11 unable to work out, But no one dangerously ill.

February 11, 1863. In my last letter, I told you Black Bill was most well. He did get well, asked to go to work, but I would not let him go thinking it more prudent he should stay in a while longer. I was astonished when on Thursday he came to me early in the morning again sick. Complained of violent pains in the stomach and bowels, which symptoms. I took to be inflammation. I administered accordingly, and sent for the Docter who was not at home having gone somewhere on business. I had to do the best I could, stayed with Bill all the time. When he got easy I saw plainly that mortification had taken place and that he must die. He breathed his last on Saturday the 31st of Jan about 8 O'Clock in the morning.

Slaves on Britton's Eutaw plantation had to cope, clearly, with horrible health problems for which there seemed to be no easy remedy; ill health was often compounded, moreover, by the lack of appropriate medicines, which were considered expensive costs of production not to be used, according to Britton's instructions, unless absolutely needed. Britton's overseer, laboring under such economic constraints, felt it necessary to reassure his employer of his good efforts on behalf of the slaves under his care:

I takes the best care I can of the Negroes. Have wood and water hauled for them. Do not let them work out in the rain. Those who have no shoes do not go out until the dew or frost is off. I go to see the sick at all times and administer the medicines.⁷³

And perhaps he did, but it is difficult to read the correspondence without imagining the plantation to have been a filthy place, literally swarming with maggot-producing flies. Whatever the cause, however, the overall incidents of slave illness were never so chronic, on Eutaw or anywhere else, as to shut down operations. Indeed, Eutaw's slaves managed to work in such miserable and sickly conditions partly because of the limited demands required of them in plantation toil, but mainly because none had any real choice in the matter. The backbreaking and health-wrecking work of ploughing, hoeing, ditching,

73. Melvin to Britton, December 26, 1862, Britton papers.

shucking, and picking could be done by lame, ignorant, and sickly slaves in a fashion acceptable to most planters.

TOWN SLAVES

Although slaves made up nearly 50 percent of the population in Natchez in 1860, they represented a small minority of the total slaves in Adams County. Indeed, only about 15 percent of the slaves in the county lived in Natchez in 1860, in comparison to 76 percent of the county's whites. The life of the town slave, in other words, was not the typical life experience for slaves in the region.⁷⁴ (Table 5 below shows the relative population figures for the town in the generation preceding the Civil War.)

What did these town slaves do? Where did they live? Who owned them? The answers to these questions remain largely unknown and await detailed analysis of the manuscript census schedules wherein can be determined occupations, residences, origins, and gender of the men and women who owned Natchez slaves. Some inferences, nevertheless, can be made on the basis of our general knowledge of the town's economy. In the first place, Natchez was a market town exporting between 50,000 to 75,000 bales of cotton each year. These mountains of cotton had to be conveyed, stacked, and loaded at the docks in work that required strong backs above all else. Much of this labor was performed by plantation slaves who accompanied the wagons of cotton to town. Much of the work also fell on local slaves hired as dockhands by cotton merchants and boat captains. Secondly, the town contained nearly 600 buildings in 1840, an increase from 300 in 1809; and dozens of mansions and assorted dependency buildings ringed the town on nearby estates. All of these edifices required massive amounts of unskilled labor to dig foundations, hoist bricks, and haul timber and building materials. In addition, Natchez streets were in constant need of repair, footbridges required maintenance, sewage runoff trenches (the origins of the present day canal street) had to be excavated and lined with brick, and buildings damaged by fires and tornadoes had to be torn down and hauled away. It is likely that Natchez slaves did much of the crude labor associated with building, maintaining, and rebuilding the town.⁷⁵

74. U.S. Census (1860), Manuscript Population and Slave Schedules, Adams County, Mississippi.

75. Ronald L.F. Davis, *Good and Faithful Labor: From Slavery to Sharecropping in the Natchez District, 1860-1890* (Westport, Conn., 1982), pp. 1-58; Joseph Holt Ingraham, *The SouthWest By A Yankee*, (New York, N.Y., 1953), II, pp. 18-22; D. Clayton James, *Antebellum Natchez* (Baton Rouge, La., 1968); Edith Wyatt Moore, *Natchez Under-The Hill* (Natchez, Miss., 1958); Major Steve Power, *The Memento: Old and New Natchez 1700-1897*, 2 vols. (Natchez, Miss. 1984).

Table 5. Population in Natchez

	1840	1850	1860
Whites	2,995	2,710	4,272
Free Blacks	205	213	208
Slaves	1,625	1,511	2,132

Source: U.S. Census (1860, 1850, 1840), Manuscript Population and Slave Schedules, Adams County, Mississippi.

Natchez shops, offices, and taverns also needed unskilled hands for countless jobs from running errands to sweeping sidewalks, from slopping out latrines to hauling water for baths. The extant diary of the free black barber, William Johnson, is replete with indications of just how useful his unskilled slaves were around the shop.⁷⁶ The proud proprietor of the new City Hotel boasted, in 1858, of his competent staff of slaves whom he had raised himself.⁷⁷ Many of the whites who lived in Natchez kept slaves as personal servants, household domestics, washerwomen, and carriage drivers. Our best student of the subject, historian John Hebron Moore, suggests that perhaps the majority of Natchez slaves worked as domestics and in petty retail business establishments.⁷⁸

A few town slaves, although never a substantial number, hired out their labor for wages on contracts established by their masters. The terms of employment could range from a day's labor to a month's work, or even longer periods of time; but the array of jobs performed were quite limited. A young hireling, for example, was kept on the payroll at City Hall for odd jobs. One local resident advertized in the newspaper for an old black slave to do light yard work. Another Natchez citizen sought a meat, bread, and pastry cook. Washerwomen, housecleaners, and woodchoppers were always needed. Lumber yards hired hands by the day for unloading flatboats. Banks used hired slaves as doormen and porters. Doctors, including those at the U.S. Marine hospital, employed slaves as nurses, laundresses, and attendants of every sort. And town slaves drove carriages as hired draymen, paying their owners a portion of their earnings.⁷⁹

76. See the following for materials on Johnson: Edwin Adams Davis and William Ransom Hogan, *The Barber of Natchez* (Baton Rouge, La., 1954, 1973); Davis and Hogan, (ed.), *William Johnson's Natchez: The Antebellum Diary of a Free Negro*. Volumes I and II (Baton Rouge, La., 1951); The William Johnson Family Papers, LSU.

77. *Natchez Weekly Courier*, March 24, 1858.

78. Moore, *The Emergence of the Cotton Kingdom in the Old Southwest*, pp. 257-285.

79. *Mississippi Free-Trader*, January 7, 1846; February 5, 1846; August 19, 1854; March 3, 1855; March 12, 1856; *Natchez Weekly Courier*, January 13, 1858; April 28, 1858; August 18, 1858; October 29, 1858; February 16, 1859.

The question left unanswered, however, is to what extent did Natchez slaves work as skilled artisans, mechanics, and craftsmen? That some did is clear. One of the largest slaveowners in Natchez was lumber man Andrew Brown. His mills located at Natchez-Under-the-Hill employed dozens of slaves at occupations ranging from skilled blacksmiths to foremen of work gangs. One slave in particular, Washington Gray, supervised much of Brown's river business, captaining lumber boats to the mouth of the Yazoo River on voyages under his charge. But while Brown certainly employed skilled slaves at the mills, and used some slaves in supervisory roles similar to slave drivers on the plantation, most of the blacks who worked for him were unskilled lumber hands. No black sawyers, for example, the most skilled job in the yards, were ever trained, or hired, to man the blades as precision cutters.⁸⁰

Brown's use of slaves instead of white wage hands was not surprising. On the one hand, white loggers, boatmen, and draymen were never a surplus population in the town. In addition, a careful businessman would have found slaves both reliable (meaning they could be worked longer hours and were always available) and valuable. Slaves might run away, but usually they would be captured to work again another day. No slave could quit; and no free worker could enhance Brown's portfolio as a capitalized asset. Given the choice between using white workers, skilled or unskilled, and buying a slave to do the same job, most Natchez businessmen would have preferred to buy a slave.

Appropriate to the above logic, there should have emerged a recognizable group of skilled craftsmen among the slave population in Natchez. The editor of the *Mississippi Free Trader*, himself the owner of two slaves, suggested as much when he complained about the South's use of slave artisans to the detriment of its white workmen: ". . . slaves of the South. . . are our mechanics, carpenters, smiths, wagons and plough makers, sawyers, millers, ginners, etc." There is little hard evidence to substantiate such a claim for Natchez, although many of the town's white craftsmen owned slaves.⁸¹

Slave traders, to be sure, frequently ran notices about their slave carpenters, blacksmiths, mechanics, and engineers, but such advertisements were probably not taken at face value. One typical notice in a Natchez newspaper called attention to a multi-skilled slave for sale in the following words: "A likely negro man, about 27 years old; a good cook, white washer; has been a cook on a steamboat and is altogether a mechanical genius." And perhaps he was; it is more likely, however, that the slave in question was but a talented jack-of-all-trades.⁸²

More to the point was the experience of planter Haller Nutt, the owner and builder of Longwood. A wealthy Natchez planter, Nutt decided to erect a spectacular octagonal-shaped mansion about a mile and a half out of Natchez to the southeast on the Woodville Road. Because the Civil War interrupted the mansion's completion, the project came to be

80. Moore, *Andrew Brown and Cypress Lumbering in the Old Southwest* (Baton Rouge, La., 1967); "Simon Gray, Riverman: A Slave Who Was Almost Free." *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* XLIX (1962), pp. 223-238; Andrew Brown Papers, MDAH, (see especially Brown's Diary, Time Books, and Ledgers, 1840-1854).

81. *Ibid.*; *Mississippi Free-Trader*, May 5, 1855; May 23, 1855.

82. *Natchez Weekly Courier*, August 17, 1859.

known as "Nutt's Folly" among the local population. In time, however, the unfinished structure was recognized to be the largest and most elaborate of the octagon houses — reflective of the Oriental Revival style that flourished in the mid-19th century — ever built in the United States.⁸³

Briefly told, Nutt engaged a Philadelphia architect to design the house, a Philadelphia builder to supervise construction, local white brickmakers to produce 754,000 bricks, four expert Philadelphia bricklayers, a Philadelphia master carpenter, a Philadelphia tinner, and Andrew Brown's lumber mill for cutting the planks and boards to be used in the building's joists, rafters, scaffolding, and laths. One hundred and twenty-eight window frames, 106 columns and pilasters, 156 brackets, and 7,700 feet of cypress moulding, tin for the roof, tons of slate for floors and basement walls, and lime for stuccoing the walls were all produced in Philadelphia and sent by water to Natchez. A crew of Philadelphia craftsmen were in the process of producing blinds, sashes, doors, and staircases when the Civil War brought construction at Longwood to a halt.⁸⁴ The skilled Philadelphia workers had completed the exterior of the 32-room mansion except for the stuccoing of its brickwork, the installation of the exterior stair, and the glazing in of some of the windows on the upper floors. Nutt then used his slaves to finish off the eight-room basement, installing a floor and plastering the interior walls. Hoping for the best, Nutt moved his family into the slave-finished basement to await the War's outcome.⁸⁵

For our purposes, the correspondence between Nutt and his Philadelphia builder reveal much about what was probably a typical use of slaves in Natchez construction. On February 3, 1860, Nutt wrote to Sloan of his plans for Longwood:

My idea of preparation is to take 10 or 12 men down early in April and my carpenter also to go to work preparing — that is removing old furniture, tearing down house and removing the rubbish and get at work on the foundation so as to have something down before you come.

A week later he wrote:

I will go to Natchez tomorrow — take painter and carpenter to fix up outhouse for my family and we go down in March so as to remove things from the old house and get ready for carpenters to take it down. I will then take down 20 men to cut wood, prepare brick yard — to go to making so as to finish brick making by first of June.⁸⁶

83. See the diary of Haller Nutt as found in Merle C. Nutt, *The Nutt Family Through the Years* (Phoenix, Ariz., 1973), pp. 93-137; see also assorted materials on the building of Longwood in the Longwood Files of the Historic Natchez Foundation, Natchez, Mississippi.

84. Ibid.

85. Ibid.

86. Ibid.

Nutt confided to his wife a few days later that he had laid out the brickyard and hired a local, white brickmaker to make the bricks. On March 23, 1860, Nutt spoke of having his "mechanics in the grounds . . . taking down the old house."⁸⁷

By the end of March, still awaiting the arrival of his skilled Philadelphia workers, Nutt sent a letter to Sloan laying out the state of his preparation work and warning him of a potential problem in working whites and blacks together:

I will now be ready for the workmen whenever they come but would want you to be here to consult about the exact location of the house and digging out the Foundation and starting the wells. There will be two cisterns in the way of the wells.

I would like to call your attention to one point in having my Negro mechanics to work with white ones. White mechanics are usually accustomed to work so many hours a day. Whereas we cannot adjust that custom with our negroes. The only spare time they have is at breakfast and in the middle of the day, some two hours or so.

I have men engaged in digging out the Foundation and still taking down the old house. I have my hands full attending to all the various matters . . .⁸⁸

The point of these excerpts should be clear: Nutt used his black slaves, whom he often referred to as carpenters and mechanics, as unskilled laborers in tearing down buildings, preparing brickyards, and digging foundations. Little evidence supports the idea that Nutt valued any of his slaves as truly skilled laborers. For skilled work, Nutt used local craftsmen and imported artisans. Only when Nutt had no choice did he resort to using slaves in finished work.

If Longwood's construction is a good example, the fifty to eighty estate mansions erected in and around antebellum Natchez were probably not the products of skilled slaves. This is not to say that there were no skilled slave builders in Natchez, or that no slave masters allowed their slaves to acquire such skills. Rather, it is to suggest that skilled slaves were not the norm. Exactly why this was the case is difficult to know. Perhaps it had to do with the opposition of local white artisans. Perhaps it was because of the perceived (or actual) incompatibility of slavery with truly skilled work. Perhaps it was a question of status, with white craftsmen lending a note of prestige to mansion building. Whatever the reasons, there is little evidence to support the contention that a significant number of Natchez slaves functioned, on the eve of the Civil War, as highly skilled workers.

87. Ibid.

88. Ibid.

ESTATE SLAVES

Surrounding the town of Natchez was a plantation neighborhood so conspicuous as to have ranked with Charleston and New Orleans in the scale and opulence of its material culture. Students of Natchez history contend that district planters ranked among the richest slave masters in the South as well as among — in several cases — the nation's wealthiest citizens. Families like the Minors, Duncans, Metcalfs, Mercers, Bislands, Elliots, Surgets, McMurrans, Quitmans, the Davis brothers, Stantons, and Nutts, to name just a few, thought of Natchez as but an extension of their estate households. It was their practice and goal in life to amass substantial fortunes that could be displayed in lavish mansions and country residences wherein they could partake of all the amenities afforded the truly wealthy. Theirs was a lifestyle replete with horse racing, carriage rides, parties, elaborate marriage ceremonies, church goings, hunts, feasting, travels, gardening, and estate building.⁸⁹

The practice of ostentatious living originated early in the district's history. The first Spanish governor of Natchez, Manuel Gayoso de Lemos, set the pace when he enthroned himself in a grand domicile (named "Concord" in recognition of the good relations he hoped to encourage between Natchez citizens and his government) furnished with fine European trappings and delicate dress. A sort of Natchez mentality thereafter drove its planter elite to erect one stately mansion after another. Concord was followed by Gloucester, the home of the first American governor of Mississippi, and dozens of would-be Concords, with names like Clifton, Elgin, Melrose, Montebello, Elmscourt, Linden, Richmond, Sommerset, Ingleside, The Briars, Dunleith, Stanton Hall, and on and on. The wife of a Yankee officer stationed in Natchez during the Civil War recalled there being forty grand mansions in the Natchez vicinity — houses "built on the most beautiful lines of architecture, with broad verandas or galleries supported by noble columns." She had probably underestimated the number by half.⁹⁰

At times the pace of construction was almost feverish, especially in the 1830s and 1850s. Then hard times would hit, cyclones and tornadoes would strike, fires would break out, epidemics would sweep through, and the building activity would trail off, only to start up with renewed frenzy at the first sign of prosperity. Most of the estates within easy carriage journey of Natchez were relatively self-sufficient country farms, occupied by wealthy

89. See Davis, *Good and Faithful Labor*, pp. 1-55; D. Clayton James, *Antebellum Natchez*; Morton Rothstein, "The Antebellum South as a Dual Economy: A Tentative Hypothesis," *Agricultural History* XL (October 1967), pp. 373-82.

90. Matilda Gresham, *Life of Walter Quintin Gresham: 1832-1895*, 2 vols. (Chicago, Ill., 1910), I, p. 245; Jack D.L. Holmes, *Gayoso: The Life of a Spanish Governor in the Mississippi Valley, 1789-1799* (Baton Rouge, 1965); Harnett T. Kane, *Natchez on the Mississippi* (New York, N.Y., 1947); Morton Rothstein, "The Natchez Nabobs: Kinship and Friendship in an Economic Elite," in Hans Trefousse, (ed.), *Essays in Honor of Arthur C. Cole* (New York, N.Y., 1977), pp. 97-112; Mack Swearingen, "Luxury at Natchez in 1801: A Ship's Manifest From The McDonogh Papers," *The Journal of Southern History* III (1937), pp. 188-190; in addition to the above sources, The Historic Natchez Foundation, located in Natchez, has descriptive historical files on nearly all of the antebellum houses in and around Natchez. Most of the material in these files has been authored by Ms. Mimi Miller, a historical preservationist and architectural historian associated with the Foundation and the Mississippi State Department of Archives and History.

"nabobs" — men and women who enjoyed living close to town for business reasons and to better partake in the sheer pleasure of one another's company.⁹¹

Many of the estate mansions in suburban Natchez had evolved out of pioneer plantations, their cropped-out cotton fields given over to corn, vegetables, fruit trees, and park-like forest playgrounds. Others were simply showcase homes on property carved from older estate grounds by sons and daughters in emulation of honored and wealthy parents. Almost all of the estates contained gardens, ponds, terraces, orchards, livestock corrals, smokehouses, dairy sheds, hot-houses, carriage barns, kitchen buildings, servant quarters, tool cribs, hen-houses, cisterns, and dog kennels. Many were second generation additions to cruder dwellings or replacement homes for mansions lost in fires and damaged by storms.⁹²

Estates ranged from small cottages, set among three or four acres, to many roomed, multi-storied mansions located amid properties of several hundred acres. Melrose, for example, built by John McMurren, in the mid-1840s, spread over some 106 acres whereas neighboring Monmouth contained but thirty-one. D'Evereaux's eighty acres included twelve planted in gardens. Each place was in fact a household, wherein resided the estate's wealthy patriarch and his sons, daughters, wife, and slaves, intertwined within a network of similar households. Carriage paths and footways connected the estates to one another for easy access by slaves running countless numbers of errands and by slaveholders afoot on business and social doings. The 'nabobs' looked after one another's properties, intermarried, voyaged near and far together, shared tutors and schoolhouses, and worshipped in unison at Natchez churches. They partook, moreover, of an array of social events (weddings, funerals, birthdays, baptism celebrations, anniversaries, and visits) that fostered a sense of community, a bent of mind appropriately described as paternalistic, and a commitment to slavery as the ideal foundation for civilized and gracious living.⁹³

Whatever they represented to the white families who owned them, the slaveholding estates meant something else to the blacks who maintained them. It is difficult to know precisely how many blacks fell into the category of the estate slave in Natchez. A place the size of Melrose needed a staff of servants that could easily have numbered a dozen or more. The

91. Ibid.; see also Ingraham, 2 vols. *The South West By A Yankee*, II, pp. 27-96; Charles Lyell, *A Second Visit to The United States of North America: 1845-1846*, 2 vols. (London, 1850), I, p. 199.

92. Ibid.; see also the unpublished memoirs of Louisa Russel Conner, 1905, p. 1, *Historic Natchez Foundation*, Natchez, Mississippi.

93. Ibid.; see especially the numerous estate files of the Historic Natchez Foundation. In addition, the Quitman Family Papers housed at LSU, MDAH, and the Southern Historical Collection of the University of North Carolina are filled with examples of how estate slaves on the Monmouth, Linden, and Melrose estates functioned as retainers in the ways described above. In an undated note, one of the women at Melrose, Fanny McMurren, wrote the following to her cousin, Louisa Quitman, at Monmouth: "My Dear Cousin: Having just moved out here, all hands are as busy as can be - so it will not be convenient for sister to send me today in her carriage. As you owe Maria Duncan a visit, suppose we go in yours? If you will go, please send over for me at half past ten. Fanny. Write me by this bearer." Quitman Family Papers, LSU. See also: Robert E. May, "John A. Quitman and His Slaves: Reconciling Slave Resistance with the Proslavery Defense," *The Journal of Southern History* XLVI (November 1980), pp. 551-570; the Diary of A. Rosalie Quitman, 1852-1872, Quitman Family Papers, SHC, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, North Carolina (hereafter cited as SHC).

1850 manuscript slave schedule listed 23 slaves owned by John T. McMurren, the master of Melrose. Eight of these slaves were children under the age of twelve. Haller Nutt planned on keeping sixty slaves on his Longwood estate. The Quitman family owned seventeen slaves in 1840, forty-six in 1850, and twenty-six in 1860, most of whom were probably at Monmouth. At least one head cook, one dining room servant, two domestics, one driver, and two yard men were the bare minimum required to maintain the typical estate household. Although precise figures await detailed analysis of plantation records, estate documents, wills, manuscript census, and tax returns, the number of estate slaves in the Natchez neighborhood probably totaled in the hundreds, and possibly in the thousands.⁹⁴

Among the categories of estate slaves were four principal ones: housekeepers, groundsmen, personal servants, and drivers. In the first group were those men and women who worked at keeping the household and its white members clean, warm, dry, cool, and fed. Black men, women, and children labored as individuals and families in general domestic work that usually kept them on their toes eighteen hours a day. Chores included preparing and serving meals, washing clothes and bed materials, airing closets and trunks, polishing silver, washing dishes, drawing baths, emptying slop jars, darning socks and sewing buttons, hanging clothes on lines and bushes, spinning and weaving, quilting, soapmaking, and attending to the countless household wants of their masters and mistresses.⁹⁵

Estate, domestic slaves usually included several slave children brought into the household at a young age in order to be "properly" raised. These black youngsters frequently started out as playmates to the white children. In time, the slave children would become nurses, dairy maids, and dining room servants. One ex-slave recalled her youth in typical fashion in a WPA interview in the 1930s:

When I was a little thing dey dressed me in little checkedy slips wid strings in de necks, an' I wore aprons what tied in de back wid strings. Dey didn't never set me no heavy tasks. I et anything my folks et. Dey fed me from dey table aftah dey had finished and gone from de table. I slept in de big house till I was nearly grown an' I nebber done no fiel' wuk. I jus waited on de table and nussed de baby. I would dress de baby up all purty an' keep hits little clo'es clean.⁹⁶

94. The 1840 Census for Adams County listed fourteen slaves owned by John T. McMurren in the town of Natchez. This was prior to McMurren's construction of his suburban Melrose estate. The 1850 manuscript census shows two slave holdings for McMurren: the 23 slaves undoubtedly attached to Melrose, and another 78 slaves owned jointly by McMurren and James Carson, McMurren's law partner. See Elizabeth M. Boggess and J. R. Billings, "An Archaeological Survey of 'Monmouth,'" unpublished report, Monmouth File, Historic Natchez Foundation; Melrose File, Historic Natchez Foundation; Longwood File, Historic Natchez Foundation; Nutt, *The Nutt Family Through the Years*; F.G. Skinner, "A Southern Sportsman Forty Years Ago," *Chicago Field* (March 5, 1881); U.S. Census (1850, 1840, 1830), Manuscript Population and Slave Schedules, Adams County Mississippi.

95. Ibid.

96. Rawick, *Mississippi Narratives*, IX, pp. 1470. See also John R. Lynch's description of his youth as a house servant in John Hope Franklin, (ed.), *Reminiscences of an Active Life: The Autobiography of John Roy Lynch* (Chicago, Ill., 1970), pp. 23-30.

Groundsmen were mainly yard men in the sense of raking leaves, planting and cultivating vegetables, setting out fruit and variety trees, pruning trees and trimming bushes, caring for poultry and livestock, dredging fish ponds, digging graves, whitewashing sheds and cabins, washing windows, repairing roads, digging cisterns, slopping latrines, and running errands. On places like Monmouth or Magnolia Vale, yard work bordered on being horticultural labor. Indeed, there is evidence to suggest that some planters employed white, master gardeners who directed crews of yard slaves in sculpting gardens similar to English country yards. Brown's Garden, for instance, located beneath the bluff and adjacent the saw mills of the same name, was quite famous for its symmetry and detail.⁹⁷ Clifton sprouted beds of exotic blooms and fruit that one observer thusly described:

As you approach upon the broad carriage way that gracefully sweeps past the high columned portico, shaded by the Cypress & Magnolia & crape myrtle gorgeous in its bloom & blooming always, your feet crackling over the gravel & sea shells, now almost lost in labarynthine ways, over terraces & undiluting green sward, over rustic bridges, through cool & verdurous valleys of gloria mundi, Japan Plums, the live & water oak, literally a flowery pathway of exotics, exotics of gorgeous coloring and startling magnificence, almost indigenous to the soil in which they grow.

You return to the house by the orchards & cultivated land by the Green house, hot house & pineries, a house that cost a small fortune has been built to shelter a single banana tree that grows within its hot atmosphere bears fruit & puts forth its great green leaves three feet or more in length. Numbers of plants are clambering about the conservatories, the more ordinary beauties of the green house and of the parterre smile in boundless profusion & perfection of bloom. Pines & figs of three or four varieties, Melons I should be afraid to tell you how large for you would not credit me. Cantaloupes, peaches, pears & the most delicious nectarines are brought fresh to the table every day. Shooting galleries & billiard rooms elegantly fitted up for ladies as well as gentlemen are placed in picturesque positions in the grounds & gardens. Stables & office all concealed, nothing to offend the most fastidious taste. One continuously wonders that such a Paradise can be made on Earth.⁹⁸

Such splendid gardens must have required skilled hands for their cultivation. But the grounds of most estates were more rustic than landscaped, needing little more than weeding, cutting, trimming, and raking to keep the owners satisfied.⁹⁹

97. T.S. Buckingham, *The Slave States of America*, 2 vols. (New York, N.Y., 1968, originally published in 1840), pp. 447-458; Adam Hodgson, *Journey Through North America: 1819, 1820, 1821* (New York, N.Y., 1823), pp. 170-171; Lyell, *A Second Visit to The United States of North America: 1845-1846*, I, pp. 199-200; Powers, *The Memento*, I, pp. 25-26

98. General Thomas Kilby Smith to Mrs. Smith, July 19, 1863, Smith Papers, Clifton File, Historic Natchez Foundation, Natchez, Mississippi.

99. See Ingraham, *The South West By A Yankee*, II, p. 81

Personal servants may be considered a subclass of the domestic work group insofar as they often performed similar chores. What set them apart were their special duties in caring for the household in special ways. Among the slaves at Monmouth plantation, was a favorite, named Harry, who accompanied his master to the Mexican War. Such personal servants as Harry could be any member of the household favored by its white residents; often considered as friends as well as servants, they were expected to function as twenty-four-hour "body" attendants, mammies for the white children, faithful pets, and protectors of the household.¹⁰⁰ "Since you left," wrote Rosie Quitman to her father in 1855, "two or three old soldiers have called to see mama. They said that they were well acquainted with the general and only wanted a little money. Harry had to deal with these old soldiers, and generally gets them off without much trouble."¹⁰¹

Perhaps most skilled of all the estate slaves were the carriage hands and drivers. These men carted their white owners to town and between households in carriages that were difficult to handle even on the best of roads. Travel at night was especially precarious. In addition to driving the carriage, the drivers usually looked after the horses and did what they could to maintain their rigs. Much of the driver's time was spent in waiting around for the master to depart, to finish his or her business, and to issue orders. In those cases where the master was a lady, slave drivers were expected to be ever ready to service a daily array of social visits, message taking, shopping, and parcel toting that kept them on the roads at all hours of the day and night.¹⁰²

In comparison to the plantation slave, the estate slave enjoyed a standard of living that was undoubtedly enviable in some ways. Although they were more at the beck and call of their white masters, much of the estate slave's work was done out of sight and on their own. Orders would be given to prune and trim, but seldom did the master maintain a watchful eye over such yard work. Outside kitchens, dairies, and hot-houses were the slave's domain, with relatively little immediate supervision. Few drivers or overseers patrolled the estate grounds with whips in hand. Even nursery slaves could take their charges to play away from the commanding eyes of the mistress.

Scattered among the estate grounds were buildings that have come to be known as "dependencies" — a curious word used principally by architectural historians. For our purposes, the term is useful for highlighting the fact that the estate household was indeed a slave household rooted in the dependency of its laborers. Whether the big house was dependent on the outbuildings, the whole dependent on its parts, the whites on the blacks, or the blacks on the whites (as most whites would have believed at the time) is less relevant than the symbolic implications of the term as one representative of a social order running counter to notions of personal autonomy and unbridled individualism.

In any case, among the estate dependencies on a typical villa were the slave quarters, buildings strikingly unlike those on a working plantation. Often, they were brick, two

100. Ibid., pp. 252-253

101. Rosie Quitman to John Quitman, Quitman Family Papers, SHC, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

102. See Ingraham, *The SouthWest By A Yankee*, II, p. 204-215.

stories high, trimmed by galleries, and designed to complement the aesthetics of the big house. House slaves usually lived on the second floors, above a first floor kitchen and dairy. Yard and garden slaves typically lived in plank houses set a little farther back from the kitchen, storage, and dairy dependencies. In most cases, these dwellings were soundly constructed with finished floors, glass windows, and fireplaces. It was not uncommon to find well drained and enclosed privies on the grounds.¹⁰³

Not only did estate slaves live in cleaner and more protected housing in comparison to plantation slaves, they probably ate better, were more warmly clothed, and benefited from superior health care, partaking, most likely, in the bounty available to the white household. Even when food was not readily provided, it could be easily appropriated. Clothes were often hand-me-downs from masters and mistresses and of far greater variety than the crude linsey/woolsey common in the plantation quarters. Household medicines, it can be assumed, were more liberally administered to favorite estate slaves in comparison to the more distant field hands. Indeed, white slaveholders seem to have devoted significant time, if their complaints can be believed, in ministering to sickly household slaves.¹⁰⁴

Did estate slaves have families? At first glance, it would make sense to assume they did for the same reasons that all slaves were encouraged to marry and raise children: social control and the reproduction of a valuable asset. Moreover, slave children seemed to be everywhere underfoot on the typical Natchez estate. But whose children were they? Leaving aside the issue of miscegenation, questions can be addressed to the different components of the estate servant class. Did yardmen have a family structure different from house servants? How did drivers compare to kitchen servants when it came to being married? Were all the children on the place — the eight at Melrose, for example — the offspring of estate slaves, or were they brought in as house favorites for one reason or another regardless of who had parented them?

Perhaps another look at John Quitman's personal estate slave, Old Harry, may be useful. Harry lived and worked at Monmouth while his wife and children labored as field hands at Quitman's distant Palmyra plantation. It was a rare occasion for him to visit his wife or children, some of whom worked on separate farms.¹⁰⁵ Perhaps Harry preferred this arrangement, or it may have been that Quitman wanted Old Harry to be relatively unattached so as to be better able to devote his full attention to the Monmouth household. Indeed, when a young Quitman first arrived in Natchez in 1822, he wrote a letter to his Yankee father that told of how impressed he was by the pampered treatment afforded him by the slaves of a wealthy planter who would become his father-in-law:

Cordial hospitality is one of the characteristics of the Southern people. Their very servants catch the feeling of their owners, and anticipate one's wants. Your coffee in the morning before sunrise, little stews and sudorifies at

103. See Estate Files, Historic Natchez Foundation, Natchez, Mississippi.

104. May, "John A. Quitman and His Slaves: Reconciling Slave Resistance with the Proslavery Defense," pp. 551-570.

105. Henry Turner to John Quitman, November 18, 1853, Quitman Family Papers, SHC.

night, and warm footbaths, if you have a cold; bouquets of fresh flowers and mint-juleps sent to your apartment; a horse and saddle at your disposal; everything free and easy, and cheerful and cordial. It is really fascinating, and I seem to be leading a charmed life compared with my pilgrimage elsewhere. . . .¹⁰⁶

With the master's every need to be anticipated each moment of the day, estate slaves would have had little time for spouses and children. Perhaps "nabobs" like Quitman reasoned that it would be best for Old Harry and his type, in view of their duties, to remain bachelors and spinsters in effect if not in fact. Families would only get in the way of duty.

106. John A. Quitman to Frederick H. Quitman, August 12, 1822, SHC, as quoted in Katharine M. Jones, *The Plantation South* (Indianapolis, Ind., 1957), p. 237.

THE FREE BLACKS OF NATCHEZ

To be black and free in antebellum Natchez was to have membership in a caste-like community in which the color of your skin established the parameters of your life. Freedom was not the opposite of slavery unless you were white. Rather, free blacks were "people of color," a term that limited their experiences both legally and by social custom. Free blacks could not vote, hold public office, testify against whites, serve on juries in litigation involving whites, move around without written and certified proof of their freedom on their persons, trade with whom they wished according to the dictates of the market, carry or keep weapons without a license, or operate taverns or grocery stores. No "free person of color," moreover, dared to be a public nuisance, or too successful at the wrong business, or too friendly with the enslaved all around them else they ran the risk of being flogged, arrested, chased out of the state, and even enslaved.¹⁰⁷

Within these constraints, Natchez free blacks were free to conduct themselves as good and faithful servants of the white community in the roles of skilled barbers, hackmen, washerwomen, dressmakers, hired hands, cooks, nurses, and in other accommodating occupations. To the extent that free blacks were tolerated and accepted by the white community, they could, in turn, achieve some modicum of success as property owners, money lenders, and even slaveholders. Most importantly, the families of free blacks could not be bought and sold, easily abused, or routinely victimized. Their earnings were always their own to invest wisely or foolishly, and most "free people of color" could awake each morning and thank their good fortune (or, more likely, their fathers and lovers) for their freedom.

At any one time in the twenty years before the Civil War approximately 200 men, women, and children were members of a Natchez caste of free blacks. The number ranged from sixty-nine to eighty-one in the twenty years preceding 1840. By 1860, Natchez free blacks lived in thirty-eight households of surprising variety. Of the adults age eighteen and above, 24 percent were male and 30 percent female. Most of them were born in Mississippi, about 80 percent, and nearly all of them (94 percent) were the children of mixed parentage obvious enough to be listed as mulattoes by the census enumerators. Only one old man was listed as having been born in Africa. The places of birth most cited

107. A substantial body of secondary literature is available for study of antebellum free blacks. Among the most important are the following: *Ira Berlin, Slaves Without Masters: The Free Negro in the Antebellum South* (New York, N.Y., 1974); Leonard P. Curry, *The Free Black in Urban America, 1800-1850: The Shadow of a Dream* (Chicago, Ill., 1981); Edwin Adams Davis and William Ransom Hogan, *The Barber of Natchez* (Baton Rouge, La., 1954, 1973); ed.), *William Johnson's Natchez: The Ante-Bellum Diary of a Free Negro*, Volumes I and II (Baton Rouge, La., 1951); Carl N. Degler, *Neither Black Nor White: Slavery and Race Relations in Brazil and the United States* (New York, N.Y., 1971); Michael P. Johnson and James L. Roark, "A Middle Ground": Free Mulattoes and the Friendly Moralist Society of Antebellum Charleston, *Southern Studies* XXI (Fall 1982), pp. 246-265; *Black Masters: A Free Family of Color in the Old South* (Urbana, Ill., 21984; (ed.), *No Chariot Let Down: Charleston's Free People of Color on the Eve of the Civil War* (New York, N.Y., 1984); Leon F. Litwack, *North of Slavery: Free black in Antebellum South Carolina* (Columbia, S.C., 1973); Joel Williamson, *New People: Miscegenation and Mulattos in the United States* (New York, N.Y., 1980).

after Mississippi were Virginia (11 percent) and Maryland (3 percent). Three had been born in northern states.¹⁰⁸

Nearly 16 percent of the free black households were headed by females, with no adult males in the dwelling. Julia Yates, for example, a thirty-seven-year-old black dressmaker resided with her five children ranging in ages from 12 to 16, none of whom were listed as mulattoes. Dwelling number 100 in the census was occupied by three female headed families: Dressmaker Caroline Lawson, age 35, shared quarters with her four children, a thirty-one-year-old washerwoman named Frances Gustine and the two Gustine children, and washerwoman Rosalie Bazane, age 41, and her ten children. In another household lived Margaret Anderson, occupation unknown, and her seven children. Washerwoman Margaret Dent, age 28, was a single parent of five children ranging in ages from 1 to 12. So too was washerwoman Elizabeth Parker, 35, who lived with four children, ages 2 to 10. More fortunate, perhaps, was Emily Stevens, age 34. She had her seventeen-year-old son, Albert, a laborer, to help in supporting the four younger children in the household.

The largest group of free black households were adult-only dwellings (37 percent): places occupied by spouses, parents living with grown children, sisters and brothers, boarders, and friends. George Smith, a laborer, lived with his adult children Margaret and Jefferson. Maria Winston, a fifty-six-year-old dressmaker, lived with her two adult children and one other adult boarder or friend. Andrew Lieper, 60, lived with his three adult children — Andrew Jr., Margaret, and Caroline. Fifty-year-old washerwoman Rachel Burns stayed with her three adult children. Rosilla and husband Charles Harris, a drayman by trade, ages 40 and 50 respectively, lived with their seventeen-year-old daughter, Rosetta, and another relative, Edward, age 33, who was also a drayman. Included in the household was a young girl, Susan Collins, age 14.

Drayman Harry Marshal lived with his washerwoman wife, Cloe, (Both were in their fifties) as did husband and wife, John and Dery Smith, 42 and 35. A twenty-six-year-old free black artist, Alonza Nichols, resided with two women having the same last name, ages 19 and 16, and a twenty-three-year-old washerwoman named Louisa Spillers. Sisters — or perhaps cousins — Elizabeth and Julia Cessar, ages 38 and 36, shared quarters and the occupation of dressmaker in dwelling number 455. So too, in dwelling number 449, did dressmakers Sarah and Rachel Woods, ages 55 and 65. Sixty-year-old Peter Woods, occupation unknown, lived alone, a few houses away from Sarah and Rachel. All three had come from Virginia.

Deliah Davis, age 40, and Anthony Gordon, a drayman, occupied single resident dwellings. Household number 790, on the other hand, was shared by five adults: Rachel Nelson, 60; carpenter William Winston, 30; J. C. Norton, 25 and a barber by trade; Frank Norton, age 26, also a barber; and a thirty-six-year-old servant named Charles Young.

Of the remaining free black dwellings listed in the manuscript census of 1860, nine (24 percent) held nuclear type families consisting of two parents and their children. Table 6

108. The analysis above, running for several pages in the text, is based upon data found on free blacks in the unpublished manuscript census for Adams County: U.S., Census (1860, 1850, 1840), Manuscript Population and Slave Schedules, Adams County, Mississippi.

below lays out the census data for what many in Natchez may have considered the ideal household.

Table 6. Free Black Nuclear Families Profiled

Name	Occupation	Family Size	Value of Real Estate	Value of Personal Property
Nelson Fitzhugh	Servant	10	\$3,000	\$9,000
William Johnson, Jr.	Barber	9	10,000	6,000
Robert McCary	Barber	6	2,500	500
Matt West	Drayman	6	0	0
Claiborne Norton	Laborer	4	0	0
Jos Barland	Baker	5	0	0
Daniel Holly	Barber	2	0	0
Mark Farris	Laborer	5	0	0
Robert Lieper	Drayman	5	0	0

Source: U.S. Census (1860), Manuscript Population Schedules, Adams County, Mississippi

Scattered among the remaining households were eight (22 percent) that fit no easily described grouping. Carpenter John Foley, 49, lived with a woman eleven years his senior, possibly a sister, a young woman and three young men in their twenties, three teenagers, and one youngster — all named Foley. Mary Lej(oro), 44, occupation unknown, lived with the four Poiret males, ranging in age from 20 to 26, and their three teenage siblings. Washerwoman Cassandra Cessar, 57, lived with her three adult sons, a daughter or daughter-in-law, and one toddler, age 3. The eleven-member family of Elizabeth Smith, age 50, lived in the same household as a white woman named Mary A. Wa(itler). Two of the Smiths listed their occupations as servants. Five were children. Drayman Armstead Carter, his forty-year-old wife, Jeannett, and their four children lived in a dwelling that included barber William Shelby and his thirty-two-year-old son, George Williamson, a servant by occupation, and twenty-eight-year-old Matilda Dickson. Anthony Hoggatt, age 29, a carpenter by trade, lived with his twenty-seven-year-old brother, John, a male child named Elliot Hoggatt, a baby girl named Louisa, and two young seamstresses, sisters, ages 18 and 16. Perhaps the brothers and sisters were husbands and wives. Albert Tolbert, still active as a gardener at age 73, lived with his wife, Lucy, age 65, a three-year-old child, and a thirty-eight-year-old male relative named Bill. Household number 542 was occupied by a male infant and four women ranging in age from 17 to 85.

Free blacks in Natchez lived in a diversity of family arrangements to say the least. Most of the households included occupants with the same family names, but relatively few were limited to just family members. Whether these households were extended family units,

including real and so-called fictive relatives, is difficult to know. Some obviously were, but others may have been single and multi-family households in which their members lived together in dwellings more akin to boarding houses.

When the households of 1860 are compared to those for previous census years one fact is compellingly obvious: few free blacks lived with whites on the eve of the Civil War. Table 7 below shows the breakdown of households wherein free blacks resided in the same building as whites for the years 1820 to 1860. The information is arranged in two categories: free blacks (individuals and families) who lived in dwellings also occupied by whites; and free black households, or free black families, living in the same dwelling as white households, or white families.

What explains the emergence of the autonomous (non-white associated) free black household? Firstly, the data could be misleading in the sense that free black dwellings listed in the census as separate units might be servant quarters or dependencies attached to a white household. Secondly, and more likely, two generations of manumission in Natchez had produced separate residences in which free blacks no longer lived as servants in the households of the masters who had freed them, or as children and wives in the households of their white fathers and husbands. Nor had there developed a community of workers in which free blacks lived with white craftsmen and artisans as employees or apprentices. Workers living in white artisan households appear to have been exclusively slaves and white employees. Most importantly, manumissions fell off dramatically in the 1840s and 1850s as pressure increased to end the practice of freeing slaves altogether. No longer did masters free a favorite slave and then keep the slave on as a servant; or free a son or daughter and keep the child in the household. Instead, if a slave was manumitted, he or she was most likely sent out of state — probably to Ohio — never to return.¹⁰⁹

Table 7. Free Black and White Households

	1820	1830	1840	1850	1860
% FB living with Whites	85	64	30	11	6
% FB living within White Households	71	74	46	12	5
# Free Blacks	69	81	202	213	214

Source: U.S. Census (1820, 1830, 1840, 1850, 1860), Manuscript Population and Slave Schedules, Adams County, Mississippi.

Although most free blacks lived in dwellings apart from whites in the 1850s, their households were located throughout the town with no visible clustering in neighborhoods,

109. Sydnor, *Slavery in Mississippi*, pp. 203-239.

blocks, or districts. The white neighbors were fruit merchants, clerks, brick masons, carpenters, plasterers, painters, printers, lawyers, clergyman, tavern keepers, teachers, stonecutters, city watchmen, laborers, merchants, ginwrights, overseers, farmers, and laborers. In a word, whites from nearly every middling class occupation represented in the town lived in proximity — across the street and next door — to free black households.

This is not to say, however, that a similar variety of jobs and occupations were available to the town's "free people of color." Not surprisingly, free blacks were limited in their work to a relatively small number of occupations, of which certain ones were in the forefront. Among the adult males enumerated in the manuscript census, five occupations stand out: carpenters (23 percent), draymen (20 percent), servants (20 percent), laborers (17 percent), and barbers (11 percent). Only a few free blacks worked as bakers, blacksmiths, gardeners, and stewards; one was listed as an artist. Women fell equally into three categories of work: seamstress, dressmaker, and washerwoman.

Free blacks in Natchez worked principally at jobs that were service oriented. Few produced goods or facilitated commerce and trade, and no "free persons of color" worked at trades essential to the business of cotton or slavery. None, but one or two, functioned as skilled managers. None could be said to have been vital contributors of much economic importance to the larger society. They were, at least occupationally, a marginal people. Had all the free blacks of Natchez vanished from the scene, it would not have mattered much insofar as the functioning of the town (as a slave market and cotton entrepot) was concerned. Town slaves would have simply taken over as draymen, washerwomen, and servants; town whites would have filled in as barbers, carpenters, and dressmakers.

The plight of being marginally free and totally black in Natchez involved a drama that played itself out in ritualized conformity to the rules and expectations of behavior set down by the white community.¹¹⁰ In the first place, a free black's peculiar burden in life was to live with the knowledge that freedom had been a gift. Most adult free blacks in antebellum Natchez had been born into slavery and subsequently freed by their owners. It mattered little whether the manumission had resulted from a sense of guilt, appreciation, fatherly affection, or as a token of magnanimity. The mechanism of manumission left little doubt but that the freedom granted was a bestowed gift rather than an earned or natural right. Accordingly, the rules of behavior demanded that free blacks exhibit a profound sense of their own limitations. At times, these demands were little more than racism; at other times, when perpetrated by fathers, patrons, friends, and even the blacks themselves, the demands reflected a generally accepted belief in a scheme of life in which everything and everybody had its place — in which all of human life was limited and constrained.

Nor did it matter that one had been born free, say the son or daughter of a manumitted slave. Free blacks knew that the larger society in which they lived was committed to the notion that a black person's freedom had not accrued to him or her by right of birth, or as a human right; free blacks well understood just how pervasive was this white perspective,

110. See Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (Cambridge, Mass., 1982), pp. 209-344, for an important conceptual discussion helpful for understanding the so-called "freed persons" of slavery.

forced as they were by law to secure the sponsorship of white benefactors simply to stay in Natchez, to earn a living, and to avoid being re-enslaved or similarly abused.

The state legislature, moreover, (in the years 1831, 1842, and again, in 1857) set down a series of legal strictures delineating the constraints within which the gift of freedom could be given, allowed, and renewed. The rules were clearly spelled out. No black could be freed except by the consent of the state legislature upon special application of the slaveholder. All free blacks wishing to remain within the state were required to have the sponsorship of prominent white citizens, attesting to the good character of those who had been gifted with freedom. No free black could engage in business except after having obtained a license from a municipal or county authority. And under no circumstances would the town's "free people of color" be allowed to trade with slaves.¹¹¹

The white community tolerated the presence of free blacks as long as the "free people of color" recognized, acted in accordance with, and demonstrated an appreciation of their unworthy status. Those who did, could remain in the community, free and in place. Those who did not, those who violated the rules by which the gift had been granted, were chased away, beaten, and even re-enslaved.¹¹²

Because freedom was essentially a gift granted by one's master and with the consent of the white community (the state legislature), it involved a process of delivery and continuation that was almost always arbitrary, capricious, and one-sided, even when the gift-givers wanted to do what was considered morally correct. A brief sampling of manumission petitions and wills illustrate the point. In January, 1832, Alex Parker liberated a little boy named Richard, age 11. The remaining slaves in Parker's holding, probably Richard's parents, were to be sold to pay debts. Such discriminating treatment, freeing some slaves and selling others, was typical. Its effect, besides enabling the master to do as he wished with his property, was to strongly reinforce the idea that freedom was always a question of whim and fancy as much as it was a question of beneficence.¹¹³

The rather famous case of James Green's manumission of his slaves is a striking example of how arbitrary the granting of freedom could be even when given by a man of good will. Green is remembered as the Natchez planter who liberated twenty-six of his slaves, underwriting their passage to Liberia where they settled in the 1830s. The process of manumission that was played out involved a self-serving ritual that greatly strengthened Green's class (slave holder) position while seriously undermining the autonomy of his slaves.¹¹⁴

Green freed, to begin our story, one of his slaves, Granger, outright in "consideration of" his "faithful services and meritorious conduct. . . ." Another group of thirty-nine slaves,

111. Charles S. Sydnor, "The Free Negro in Mississippi Before The Civil War," *The American Historical Review* XXXII (July 1927), pp. 769-788.

112. Ibid.

113. Wills, January 12, 1832, Adams County Will Book, Vol. 2, Office of Records, Natchez, Mississippi

114. Ibid., May 13, 1832.; see also Sydnor, *Slavery in Mississippi*, pp. 203-238.

bequeathed to Green's sister, were to be liberated should his sister think them "deserving of emancipation." Those not freed were to be sold, with the "proceeds given to some charitable purpose — such as support of those emancipated or towards endowing an academy or school."¹¹⁵

To another sister, Green willed three slave families. Several other slave families were left to a brother-in-law. Both grants were constrained by the stipulation that his sister and brother-in-law could select any slaves from the Green estate in lieu of the ones named by him. Then Green liberated thirteen other slaves by name with the instructions that they be given a liberal sum to help them settle in Liberia or elsewhere.¹¹⁶

The point, of course, is that freedom was a gift bestowed, and one that could be revoked, prior to its implementation, if an heir thought it prudent to do so. Indeed, some years later, Green's sister Eliza demonstrated the precarious nature of the manumission process. Her will reads: ". . . I now declare and make known that but one of all said slaves bequeathed to me by my said brother is entitled his freedom, named Barnet, whom alone I think worthy of my emancipation and entitled to it according to the wish and desire of my said brother."¹¹⁷ But still the matter was not closed. Barnet's ultimate gift of freedom was left in the hands of her son-in-law, William G. Conner, who was directed "to pay a sum necessary in the payment of the value of the Negro slave, Barnet and his family, for their emancipation, if they should continue to be worthy of their freedom in his opinion." The bestowers of the gift now included three benefactors: James Green, Eliza Wood, and William G. Conner — and the granting of the gift had dragged on for nearly two decades.¹¹⁸

And because manumission was always considered a gift, slave holders could change their minds, at least up to the last moment. Planter John Minor's will carried with it a codicil, filed in May of 1830, that demonstrated how it could happen. The original document set free a slave in consideration of his faithful services. The codicil reads:

Whereas since making of my last will my said Negro man named Spencer has acted unfaithfully and I have sold him, I do hereby revoke my will that said Spencer be manumitted and hereby direct and will that said Negro Spencer be and remain a slave for life as he is now.¹¹⁹

Most of the wills sampled specifically linked the connection between faithful service and manumission. Thomas Brabston emancipated three male slaves in 1832 "on account of their loyal and faithful service." James Foster emancipated his slave William "in

115. Ibid.

116. Ibid.

117. Ibid., October 26, 1847.

118. Ibid., April 28, 1851. The details discussed above say nothing, on the other hand, of the stress that must have prevailed among Green's slaves in understanding that some of them would be freed, some would have to wait, and some would be sold to help underwrite their master's peculiar habit of mind.

119. Ibid., May 16, 1830.

consideration of his faithful service and good character. . . as soon as he pays my executor \$500. . . ." David Holmes freed some of his slaves outright, freed others with grants of money, gave others cash grants but not freedom in consideration of their faithful conduct, and bestowed \$50 to his "slave Sylvia as compensation for attending me during my illness."¹²⁰

Why some slaves were freed while others were not was left unstated in the documents and probably unclear in the minds of the slaves themselves. Zalmona Parker freed five faithful servants immediately upon her death and two slaves effective in ten years. Four other slaves were sold outright. William Bethell, grateful to his servant Joicey for her "unremementing attention" during his illness, decided to free his faithful slave in consideration of \$800. Slaveholder Elizabeth Flyn allowed John Black, "in consideration of his good character and faithful service," the right, at age 50, to "enjoy and possess his own time and labor subject only to such proper and necessary control and supervision as becomes his situation." Dickinson Macrery, "in high regard" for the boy Addison, instructed the executrix of his estate to allow Addison "the privilege of hiring himself wherever he may desire," with the understanding that the boy could gain his freedom whenever he "shall have paid to my heirs the sum of \$700."¹²¹

Most of the above manumissions, intentions of manumission, and assorted privileges were acts of beneficence in the eyes of the white community. All outright manumissions were subject to legislative approval or else the slaveholder's ability to transport slaves to a free state. Even in those cases where slave masters freed their own children and black mistresses, the notion of privilege remained central to the process although not always in the mind of the slaveholder. Fountain Winston freed his servant girl Rachael in consideration of her long and faithful service to him, in particular for her diligent care during his severe sickness thereby prolonging his life. But her son was to "continue in slavery that may better subserve the interest of society — and that he shall remain with his mother until he is old enough to be bound to some respectable mechanic until age 21, when he will be free." Winston also deeded his household furniture, cash, and property to William, at age 21, suggesting that the two were probably father and son.¹²²

Willford Hoggatt freed, in 1841, a slave woman and her seven children along with a four-year old mulatto girl. In addition he willed his entire estate, including 4000 acres in Texas, to the eight children in equal portions of land, slaves, stock, and household furniture. All money left over after paying his debts was to be used to purchase slaves in support of the eight children named in his will. There seems to be little doubt but that the slave woman named in the will was Hoggatt's mistress or that the eight children were his own. Indeed, all of the children took Hoggatt's name as their own. In justifying the manumission, Hoggatt explained that the slave woman had been free since 1824, when she had purchased her freedom from him for \$550. To emphasize his point he willed the woman

120. Ibid., December 8, 1832; March 5, 1833; July 8, 1833.

121. Ibid., October 30, 1834, December 28, 1847; January 8, 1853.

122. Ibid., September 20, 1834.

\$600 in payment for her sixteen years of work, as if to say that she had been an employee all along.¹²³

Natchez merchant Christopher H. Kyle petitioned, in Concordia Parish in 1819, to free his slave Nancy and her two sons. Successful with Nancy, Kyle manumitted Sally, age 30, in 1824. Three years later he sent his slave Caroline and her infant son John to the free state of Ohio, wherein they were freed and then returned to Natchez. Both Nancy and Caroline took Kyle's name as their own. In the cases of Nancy and Sally, Kyle swore, as was required by Louisiana law, that the women had been honest, faithful, and diligent, had never run away or committed any robberies or other criminal acts, and that he would "nourish and maintain" them should they ever "be in want owing to old age, sickness, insanity or any proven infirmity." Kyle would eventually leave most of his property to Nancy, who was listed in the census of 1850 as being 60, and to Caroline, listed as 35. Included in the Kyle household in 1850 was a twenty-year-old male named Christopher Kyle.¹²⁴

Earlier in the century, in 1815, William Barland had petitioned the General Assembly of Mississippi Territory for the right to manumit a woman, named Elizabeth, and her twelve offspring whom he "acknowledged" as his "children."¹²⁵ William Johnson manumitted his slave, Amy, for "her good conduct and fidelity," and a boy, William, for reasons of justice to another human being pure and simple:

Your Petitioner humbly prays your Honorable Body to permit him . . . [to give] that Liberty to a human being which all are entitled to as a Birthright, & extend the hand of humanity to a rational Creature, on whom unfortunately Complexion Custom & even Law in this land of freedom, has conspired to rivit the fetters of Slavery.¹²⁶

Few documents of manumission were so candid as Bartland's or so nobly stated as Johnson's. Regardless, however, of the good intentions of the grantors, the process remained that of owners bestowing the gift of freedom onto their slaves. But was the gift, once freely given, thereafter unencumbered in the eyes of the white community? What was expected of the newly freed "person of color"?

Students of Natchez history have identified several free black families as standing out from the rest. They were distinct for reasons of their stability over time, their comparative wealth, and their acceptance by the white community. Most of them owned slaves and real estate and operated their own businesses. At the top of the list stood William Johnson, Natchez barber who owned as many as thirty slaves during his lifetime, farm lands, several barber shops, a bathhouse, brick residences and buildings in town, racing horses,

123. Ibid., December 24, 1824.

124. Deeds, March 28, 1825; July 24, 1825, Adams County Deed Book, Vol. O; September 6, 1826, Adams County Deed Book, Vol. P; June 5, 1827, Adams county deed book, Vol. R, Office of Records, Natchez, Mississippi; U.S. Census (1850), Manuscript Population Schedule, Adams County, Mississippi.

125. Deeds, June 1, 1815, Adams County Deed Book, Vol. H, Office of Records, Natchez, Mississippi.

126. As quoted in Davis and Hogan, *The Barber of Natchez*, pp. 15-16.

livestock, and substantial household furniture. He loaned money at interest to whites and blacks alike, traveled about the county and across the river to Concordia Parish at will, carried firearms for hunting, whipped his slaves, employed white overseers and laborers, and made frequent trips to New Orleans for business and pleasure.¹²⁷

Equally accepted by the white community were the McCarys, Fitzhughs, Smiths, and Barlands. All mulattoes, these families had either been born free, such as Robert Smith, or had been manumitted by their white fathers. By 1850, they operated taxi services (Robert Smith), served as grocery clerks (Nelson Fitzhugh), owned barber shops (Robert McCary), and held slaves and substantial farm lands (the Barland family and William Johnson). Like William Johnson, they enjoyed freedom of movement and took advantage of opportunities for making money and living well. Other families — such as the Winns, Hoggatts, and Kyles — could be included in the list. But none were as prominent, or as accepted by Natchez whites, as were the first five.¹²⁸

What they shared in common, moreover, went beyond their freedom and the fair color of their skin. To a person, the above mentioned African-American families were bonded together by a common commitment to hard work as well as an aggressive eye for taking advantage of the opportune moment. Yet luck was always as important for them as talent and ambition. William Johnson, for example, had the good fortune to be the brother-in-law of the most successful black barber in Natchez. McCary's white father left few stones unturned in educating his mulatto children. Fitzhugh's master just happened to believe that faithful service and hard work should be rewarded with the gift of freedom. Smith enjoyed the favor of prominent white benefactors almost from the moment of his arrival in Natchez. Johnson, McCary, and the Barlands started out life with inherited property — quite substantial amounts in the case of the Barlands. And most of them had the good fortune, or keen insight, to work in occupations that the white community deemed totally appropriate for free blacks. The Barlands held one other advantage that set them apart: their women (sisters and daughters) had married white men.¹²⁹

Most importantly, the Smiths, McCarys, Fitzhughes, and Johnsons were led by men who well understood what was expected of them as free blacks. Each understood how important it was to have white benefactors and patrons. Each worked especially hard at establishing a reputation for faithful service to the white community that both reinforced the boundaries of their caste and secured their well-being in freedom. In a word, the Johnsons, McCarys, Fitzhughs, and Smiths conducted themselves with an attitude of respectful gratitude for the gift of freedom that had been bestowed upon them. Humility, a displayed sense of limitations, and a willingness to live in the margins of life is what they all shared

127. See the following for materials on Johnson: Edwin Adams Davis and William Ransom Hogan, *The Barber of Natchez* (Baton Rouge, La., 1954, 1973); Davis and Hogan, (ed.), *William Johnson's Natchez: The Ante-Bellum Diary of a Free Negro*, 2 vols. (Baton Rouge, La., 1951); The William Johnson Family Papers, LSU.

128. Ibid., see also the numerous manumission documents and land deed transactions contained in land, will, and mortgage records housed in the Office of Records, Natchez, Mississippi.

129. David and Hogan, *The Barber of Natchez*, pp. 240-251; Wills, April 11, 1816, Adams County Will Book, Vol. 1, Office of Records, Natchez, Mississippi. See also Black History Collection File, The Historic Natchez Foundation, Natchez, Mississippi.

in common. Their good luck and hard work were factors perhaps essential to their success, but fortune and industry would not have been tolerated without the proper display of gratitude in their conduct and manners of living.¹³⁰

The obituary for Robert Smith that appeared in the *Natchez Courier* on June 2, 1858, is worth quoting at length. The italicized portions are added for emphasis:

THE LATE ROBERT D. SMITH. All of our old citizens — indeed we may say — all our citizens — will regret to hear of the death of Robert D. Smith, a colored man of our city, but one who, by his *industry, probity of life, correctness of demeanor and Christian-like character, had won the favor and respect of the entire community.* Every citizen knew him, and there are but few travellers, who frequented our city, who could not *bear witness of his correct deportment and character.*

For long years gone by he had filled the office of sexton of the Presbyterian church and was highly regarded as a member, a most worthy member. He was indeed 'a *doorkeeper in the House of God*'. He died on Sunday of pneumonia, after an illness of some ten days, and his remains were followed to the grave, after affecting services in the Presbyterian Church, *by a large concourse of his colored friends and relatives. The Colored Temperance Society, some fifty in number preceeded the hearse which was followed by some twenty-five carriages and double that number of horsemen. We have not thought it inappropriate to mention the death of so worthy a man, or the respect and kindness which attended him.*¹³¹

Robert Smith was one of the most accepted free blacks in Natchez. He operated a taxi service, and was known around town as "the Hackman." He had arrived in Natchez sometime in the mid-1830s by way of New Orleans, having been born a free man in Maryland. By 1851, Smith owned slaves, carriages, and an impressive brick house on Broadway. But his middling wealth was not the key to his acceptance. It was instead his "industry, probity, [and] demeanor..." that enabled the *Natchez Courier* to comment — although apologetically — on his passing. In the eyes of the white community, Robert Smith was a free black who expressed his gratitude for the privilege of living and working as a free man by serving the community of whites with faithfulness and sobriety. Such is the image clearly conveyed by the words: "a doorkeeper to the House of God."¹³²

A similar deportment and attitude of respectful gratitude was associated, in the minds of white residents, with the free black Robert McCary. Like Smith's, McCary's occupation was but one step removed from that of servant and house slave. He cut, primmed, shaved, washed, styled, and dusted the bodies of white slaveholders — services often performed by slaves. Indeed, several of the barbers in his shop had once been slaves. What is more,

130. Ibid.

131. The *Natchez Courier*, July 2, 1858

132. Although known officially as the sexton of the most prestigious church in town, the words "doorkeeper" suggest that Smith's duties were more those of a house servant than a keeper of church property.

like Smith, he served as a role model and enforcer of white defined morality and discipline among the free black community at large. The records of the First Presbyterian Church of Natchez list McCary among its black participants. And like Smith, McCary proved to be a worthy member. He had joined the church in 1856, possibly at the invitation of Smith, and was appointed one of its so-called "colored visitors." McCary's role in the church was to set a good example to other black observers — many of whom were estate slaves, to see that its black members conducted themselves properly, and to serve as a vehicle of communication whereby the "wants, difficulties, or grievances" of the church's black participants could be expressed to its white officers.¹³³

On March 9, 1859, McCary brought before the church's governing board charges of misconduct against three of its black participants. The procedure required a hearing, and McCary was ordered to summon the three to answer the charges against their Christian character. When the three wayward members refused to appear at the hearing, McCary was instructed to threaten them with expulsion from "the communion of the church should they fail to obey. . . ." One of the accused, a woman, eventually met with the hearing officers and accepted their admonishment. The two others, both men, refused to respond and were excommunicated for their "contumacy" in failing to obey the second summons.¹³⁴

Putting aside as unanswerable the question of McCary's motivation for joining the First Presbyterian Church, his actions leave little doubt as to the basis of his reputation among its white congregation. If Smith was the Church's sober and respected doorkeeper, McCary was its faithful overseer.¹³⁵

Probity, industry, faithful service, and Christian-like deportment were other words for gratitude. And the properly grateful would have their marriages recognized, their children baptized, their shops frequented, and, most importantly, their freedom reaffirmed.¹³⁶ The case of Nelson Fitzhugh is a good example of just how crucial was a proper attitude for gaining and preserving the gift of freedom. A mulatto born into slavery in 1807, Fitzhugh was manumitted by Natchez baker Adam Bauers "for cause." He learned to read and write, married and raised a family of seven children — one of whom married the son of Robert McCary, and clerked in a succession of grocery stores and merchant establishments in the 1840s and 1850s. He listed his occupation as servant in the census,

133. J. Julian Chisolm, *History Of The First Presbyterian Church Of Natchez, Mississippi* (Natchez, Miss., 1972), pp. 36-38; Anita Wisner, "A Souther Church: The First Presbyterian of Natchez," unpublished manuscript in author's possession; Records of the Session, 1843-1868, First Presbyterian Church of Natchez, Natchez, Mississippi. See also the numerous entries in William Johnson diary wherein McCary, perhaps Johnson's closest friend, is alluded to with affection and in some detail: Davis and Hogan, (ed.), *William Johnson's Natchez: The Ante-Bellum Diary of a Free Negro*.

134. Ibid.

135. See also Black History Collection file, The Historic Natchez Foundation.

136. See especially the unpublished diary, 1843-1903, of Joseph Buck Stratton, Presbyterian minister of Natchez, Mississippi, Stratton Papers, LSU, Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

a term which belied his status as a slaveowner and man of real estate valued at more than \$3000 in 1860.¹³⁷

Among the white community, Fitzhugh was remembered as a kind of "factotum" who clerked in the grocery store of a "Capt. [Louis] Juliene," the esteemed commander of the Natchez Fencibles, a local militia group. When pressure mounted in the late 1850s to remove all free blacks from the state except those whom local communities judged worthy, Fitzhugh had no difficulty in obtaining the required sponsorship in support of his petition to remain in Natchez. The wording of the Order, which was published for all to read in the *Natchez Courier*, reads as follows:

Nelson Fitzhugh, a free man of color, having satisfied this Board that he and his family, . . . were of good character and honest deportment, and that it is the wish of a number of citizens of this county that they be permitted to remain in the state, It is therefore orderd by the Board, that the said Nelson Fitzhugh, and his said family be, and they are hereby licensed to remain in this state pursuant to the statute in this behalf.¹³⁸

Fitzhugh would in time lose the respect of the white community for writing a postbellum letter critical of the South and for his political activities after the Civil War. The anger expressed by an editorial in a Natchez newspaper indicates how closely free blacks had to walk the line in the era of slavery:

Included in the possessions of Adam Bauers in the list of his slave property was one Nelson Fitzhugh, a bright mulatto lad, humble, submissive, quiet, unobtrusive, seemingly possessed of many virtues, and few if any thoughts. . . . Citizens spoke of him as a proper man and named him in connection with such men as Wm. Johnson, the barber, and Robert McCary, the metereological reporter for this paper, both free men of color, both deceased, both occupying honored graves. . . , [and] all old citizens who knew them, all esteemed them. . . .

Nelson Fitzhugh has been wearing a mask. He is full of deceit and hypocrisy. He has worn two faces. He has been a systematic hypocrit all his life. He never was more than a mask which concealed deformity and turpitude. . . . He is now a radical agent and disseminating poison of the literary kind stirring up bad blood.¹³⁹

The free black whom historians know most about was barber William Johnson. His multi-volumed diaries, business records, and letters reveal exactly what options were open to the so-called free people of color in Natchez. Although this is not the place to present a

137. U.S. Census (1850, 1860), Manuscript Population Schedules, Adams County, Mississippi, Wills, February 5, 1868, Adams County Will Book, Vol. 3, Office of Records, Natchez, Mississippi.

138. *The Natchez Weekly Courier*, November 9, 1859; see also Black History Collection File, The Historic Natchez Foundation.

139. *The Natchez Weekly Courier*, November 10, 1866.

systematic interpretation of the Johnson materials, two points can be made: firstly, the legal constraints governing the "free people of color" in antebellum Mississippi were weakly applied in the case of those blacks who enjoyed the patronage of leading white citizens, who confined their business ventures to service work at the margins of the economy, and who exhibited in their attitude and deportment a sense of gratitude for the gift of their freedom. Secondly, the rewards offered to free blacks of initiative and proper deportment, while comparatively substantial, were always limited to the affirmation of their marginal roles in the larger Natchez community.¹⁴⁰

What is most striking about the Johnson diaries, is how revealing they are of the great satisfaction he took in the simple pleasure of being free. His diaries are filled with the busied details of his active (and vigorously embraced) freedom: hunting, eating, walking around, idleness, horseracing, footrunning, giving orders, loaning petty sums of money, endless though limited gossip, and dozens of inconsequential intimacies with whites of all classes, as if to proclaim — if only for his own eyes — that he was truly free.

What Johnson's diaries exclude, however, are observations, feelings, thoughts, and opinions about the life he lived. Nowhere in the journals do we find the slightest hint at self-reflection on what it meant to be a free person of color in Natchez. The reader is left to wonder what Johnson thought about: (1) the articles read in the numerous journals to which he subscribed, (2) not being able to race his horse (though he loved racing dearly) in formal competition, (3) why his slaves were so irresponsible in contrast to his own sense of responsibility, (4) his peculiar friendship with several white elites in the community, (5) the politics that raged all around him, (6) slavery, (7) his family, (8) not being allowed to strike a blow in righteous anger against any white who might have insulted him — a right which most whites carried around displayed on their shirt lapels, if Johnson's notes can be believed, (9) religion, and (10) life as a "free person of color."

What does come through, however, is the depth of Johnson's unexamined gratitude. To read his diaries is to observe that Johnson was indeed a grateful man, grateful that he was free to simply imbibe in life; grateful and proud of his good reputation, of the opportunity for being clever at games, for the patronage bestowed upon him, for his "mixed blood" heritage; grateful to be able to search for lost cows, to have boarders and customers, to shoot and slaughter wildlife with reckless abandonment, to shave and comb the faces and heads of white men and women both living and dead, to own second rate racing nags, to sup occasionally at the table of his white neighbors, to issue passes to his slaves enabling them to attend "darky" parties, to stand around where he pleased unaccosted, to read and to write without penalty, and to step aside for no man because no man took offense at his presence.

His diary, to sum it up, is a richly detailed outpouring of gratitude, written as if Johnson were offering testimony to some unknown, or perhaps internalized, overseer. Yet, to be fair, it would have been astounding for the largely self-educated barber to have recorded anything else. For one thing, the most noteworthy fact of Johnson's life was his freedom,

140. Edwin Adams Davis and William Ransom Hogan, *The Barber of Natchez* (Baton Rouge, La., 1954, 1973); Davis and Hogan, (ed.), *William Johnson's Natchez: The Ante-Bellum Diary of a Free Negro*, Volumes I and II (Baton rouge, La., 1951); the William Johnson Family Papers, LSU. (More information on Johnson is included in chapter V below)

and the freedom of simple physical movement was no mean thing to have, or to observe, in a day and age when almost all other "people of color" were confined to place and constrained by whips and rules and overbearing supervision, regardless of their deportment.

Still, the most blatant fact about the diaries, and one pregnant with implications, is the unreflecting shallowness of the (obviously ample and intelligent) mind that moved Johnson's quill to write. It is almost as if Johnson's manumission (perhaps by the very nature of its process) had only freed his body. Or else there is more to the diary than is easily revealed at first glance.¹⁴¹

Ironically, Johnson was killed by a fellow free black who escaped conviction by managing to pass himself off as a white man of mixed blood — the blood of an Indian parent. Under the limitations imposed on all blacks was the universally accepted notion that no black person could offer testimony against a white person, in this case a mulatto boy who had witnessed the murder. Thus Johnson's killer escaped justice. But a man of Johnson's character could not be allowed to pass unnoticed by the white community. His death was called the "shocking murder" of a "most inoffensive man," one who had gained a "respected position on account of his character, intelligence and deportment." In respect for his conformity to the limitations demanded of him, Johnson's body was buried — without protest insofar as we know — in the white section of the Natchez cemetery.¹⁴²

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Natchez "free persons of color," to summarize the points made above, lived in a highly complex world. At first glance, they were somewhat integrated in the sense of where they lived and with whom they associated. Some of them, moreover, achieved substantial property and status within the constraints established by the dominant white culture. Most of them could move around town freely, could shop and trade and partake of life without much physical threat to themselves or their families, and could earn and spend money without fear of confiscation or abuse. Freedom had its definite advantages.

141. Perhaps Johnson was simply a typical male diary keeper, unused to expressing feelings and emotions as a function of his gender. Yet, such a conclusion fails to explain why so much was left out of his diary that casual observation would have included. Johnson records life selectively, unreflectively, and with so little observation of his plight in life that his diary can be read almost as if it were written in an intellectual and emotional vacuum. To take the diary at face value is to assume that Johnson was genuinely unaffected by the dilemma of being a "free person of color" amidst a sea of slavery. What is even more intriguing is the evidence in the Johnson family papers suggestive of a secret life left unrecorded in the journals. For one thing, we know very little (from reading the diaries) about Johnson's religious beliefs, trips to New Orleans, or relations with his white patrons. Yet his papers indicate that Johnson's children were all baptized as Catholics in the St. Louis Cathedral in New Orleans, and that his association with leading members of the Natchez plantation elite resembled something close to family intimacy. See the Johnson Papers, LSU, Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

142. Davis and Hogan, (ed.), *William Johnson's Natchez: The Ante-Bellum Diary of a Free Negro*; pp. 262-272.

But freedom for Natchez blacks was not the opposite of slavery. Each "free person of color" was expected to function as an essentially marginal person. The extent of one's freedom depended upon one's deportment as well as one's conformity to a role in life limited to accommodating the white community in the work performed as well as in one's public demeanor. The free blacks of Natchez lived, in other words, somewhere between slavery and freedom.

THE NATCHEZ SLAVE MARKET

Antebellum Natchez was more than a settlement of white masters, free blacks, and enslaved people; more than a cotton depot and stopping point in the river trade. It was, most of all, the second largest market, after New Orleans, for the buying and selling of slaves in the lower Mississippi River Valley.¹⁴³

After 1808, with the abolishment of the international slave trade in the United States, Natchez district planters were forced to rely on domestic supplies of slaves to work their thriving plantation economy. It has been estimated that nearly 200,000 slaves were transported into Mississippi from the so-called "Old South" in the decades from 1810 to 1860. Although many of these slaves were brought by migrating planters, the majority, it seems clear on the basis of recent scholarship, were carried to Mississippi by professional slave traders. Planters and traders alike limited their cargos of slaves to droves and shipments of single men and women between the ages of 13 and 25. The middle-aged, elderly, and infant black children were usually left behind. Seldom did traders buy black husbands, wives, and children as family groups, although a substantial number of enslaved children were allowed (or required at times by Louisiana law) to accompany their mothers — or at least an adult woman who may have been the mother of the slave child (children) at her side.¹⁴⁴

How many of these adults were married is impossible to determine, but it is certain that most of them were taken from relatively stable families in Maryland, Virginia, Kentucky, and the Carolinas. There is good reason to believe, moreover, that many of the single women between the ages of 21 and 25 were forced to leave children and husbands behind. The same can be said for slave men ages 23 and older.¹⁴⁵

143. Frederick Bancroft, *Slave Trading in the Old South* (Baltimore, Maryland, 1931); Joseph H. Ingraham, *The South West by a Yankee* 2 vols. (New York, N.Y., 1835), II, pp. 120-270; Wendell Holmes Stephenson, *Issac Franklin: Slave Trader and Planter of the Old South* (Gloucester, Mass., 1968).

144. For introductory material on the character of domestic slave trade from the upper-to the lower-South see Bancroft, *Slave Trading*; E.A. Andrews, *Slavery and the Domestic Slave-Trade in the United States* (Boston, Mass., 1836); W. Calderhead, "How Extensive was the Border State Slave Trade? A New Look," *Civil War History*, XXVII (1972), pp. 42-55; Winfield H. Collins, *The Domestic Slave Trade of the Southern States* (New York, N.Y., 1904); T.D. Clark, "The Slave Trade Between Kentucky and the Cotton Kingdom," *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* XXI (1915), pp. 331-342; Robert W. Fogel and Stanley L. Engerman, *Time on the Cross*, 2 vols. (Boston, Mass., 1974), I, pp. 37-58; P. David, H. Gutman, R. Sutch, et al., *Reckoning with Slavery: A Critical Study in the Quantitative History of American Negro Slavery* (New York, N.Y., 1976), pp. 949-133; Ulrich B. Phillips, *American Negro Slavery* (New York, N.Y., 1918); Philip J. Schwarz, "The Transportation of Slaves from Virginia, 1801-1865," *Slavery & Abolition* VII (December, 1986), pp. 215-240; Stephenson, *Issac Franklin*; Donald M. Sweig, "Reassessing the Human Dimension of the Interstate Slave Trade," *Prologue* XII (Spring, 1980), pp. 5-19; Charles S. Sydnor, *Slavery in Mississippi* (New York, N.Y., 1933), pp. 131-180; Michael Tadman, *Speculators and Slaves: Masters, Traders, and Slaves in the Old South* (Madison, Wisconsin, 1988); A.A. Taylor, "The Movement of Negroes from the East to the Gulf States from 1830 to 1850," *Journal of Negro History* VIII (October, 1923), pp. 367-383.

145. Tadman, *Speculators and Slaves*, pp. 133-138

As had been the case in the colonial era, traders brought their slaves to Natchez via coastal, river, and land passages from the upper South. Tens of thousands of slaves were purchased, in the decades from 1810 to 1860, in Virginia, Maryland, the Carolinas, Alabama, and Georgia for shipment in coastal vessels to New Orleans. Ship's captains were required to register their slave passengers with customs officials and to certify that none of the slaves were from outside the United States. The slave manifests listed the outgoing ports, destinations, shippers, owners, and information on each slave on board: first name, sex, age, height, and color. The slave vessels, defined by law as ships forty tons or more, ranged from steamboats to brigs, schooners, and ships. Any captain failing to comply with the registry suffered stiff fines and possible confiscation of his cargo and ship. No regulations governed the sanitary conditions on board the slave vessels. Although the history of the coastal trade includes many cases of slaves being smuggled into the country from Africa and the West Indies, most of the slaves coming to Natchez via the coastal route were native born by 1850.¹⁴⁶ (See ILLUSTRATIONS E and H)

The voyage on the coastal ships could take from four to twenty days, depending on the distance traveled. Although relatively fast and reliable, with set sailing schedules and specialized slave ships, the coastal voyages were not without problems. Ships were known to capsize in storms, to blow up, and to be taken over by rebellious slaves. Debilitating seasickness affected most slaves, requiring expensive hold-over time in slave-pens at the markets of destination. Insurance policies, too, were expensive and difficult to collect on.¹⁴⁷

Shippers sent 100 to 150 slaves on trader-owned vessels or as few as one or two slaves on regular passenger and cargo ships. The average lot shipped was about twenty slaves. Costs from Baltimore to New Orleans, in the 1840s, stood at around \$12 per slave 12 years and older, and half that price for children.¹⁴⁸

146. An "Act to Prohibit the Importation of Slaves," passed in 1807, allowed the coastal movement of slaves aboard slave ships as long as cargo manifests giving specific information for each slave were filed at the point of delivery. The manifests were intended to prevent the smuggling of African or West Indian slaves among the lot of slaves on board either by switching or by adding them to the cargo once enroute. Substantial records of manifest for ships leaving Savannah, Mobile, Charleston, Baltimore, Alexandria, Norfolk, and Richmond for New Orleans are held at the National Archives in Records of the U.S. Customs Service, *Record Group 36*. As of this writing, most of the records for Savannah and Charleston have been examined for cargoes destined for New Orleans and transshipment to Natchez. The bulk of the Natchez bound manifests appear to be those out of Alexandria, especially the slave manifests for the firm of Isaac Franklin and Company. A cursory reading of the records indicates that further research should be able to identify slaves by surnames among the Franklin records headed for New Orleans and Natchez. See Sweig, "Reassessing the Human Dimension of the Interstate Slave Trade," pp. 5-19; Charles H. Wesley, "Manifests of Slave Shipments Along the Waterways, 1808-1864," *Journal of Negro History*, XXVII (April, 42), pp. 155-174.

147. Tadman, *Speculators and Slaves*.

148. The firm of Franklin and Company owned four slave ships used in the coastal trade: *The United States*, *the Tribune*, *the Uncas*, and *the Isaac Franklin*. One cargo of slaves bound for Natchez aboard the Brig *Isaac Franklin* in 1836 docked at New Orleans with 168 slaves on board, ranging in age from 72 years to several small children 2 years old. That same year Franklin's Brig, *the Tribune* landed at New Orleans with twenty-five slaves. Franklin sent such cargoes on a regular basis for most of the 1830s. See Cargo Manifest, 1836, among litigation materials of Henry Turner and Rice Ballard in the John A. Quitman Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, North Carolina (hereafter cited as SHC); also there is a price listing and manifest of slaves aboard the Brig *Victorine* out of Baltimore to New Orleans with a load of slaves bound for Natchez in 1844, John Knight Papers, Duke University, Raleigh, North Carolina (hereafter cited as DU).

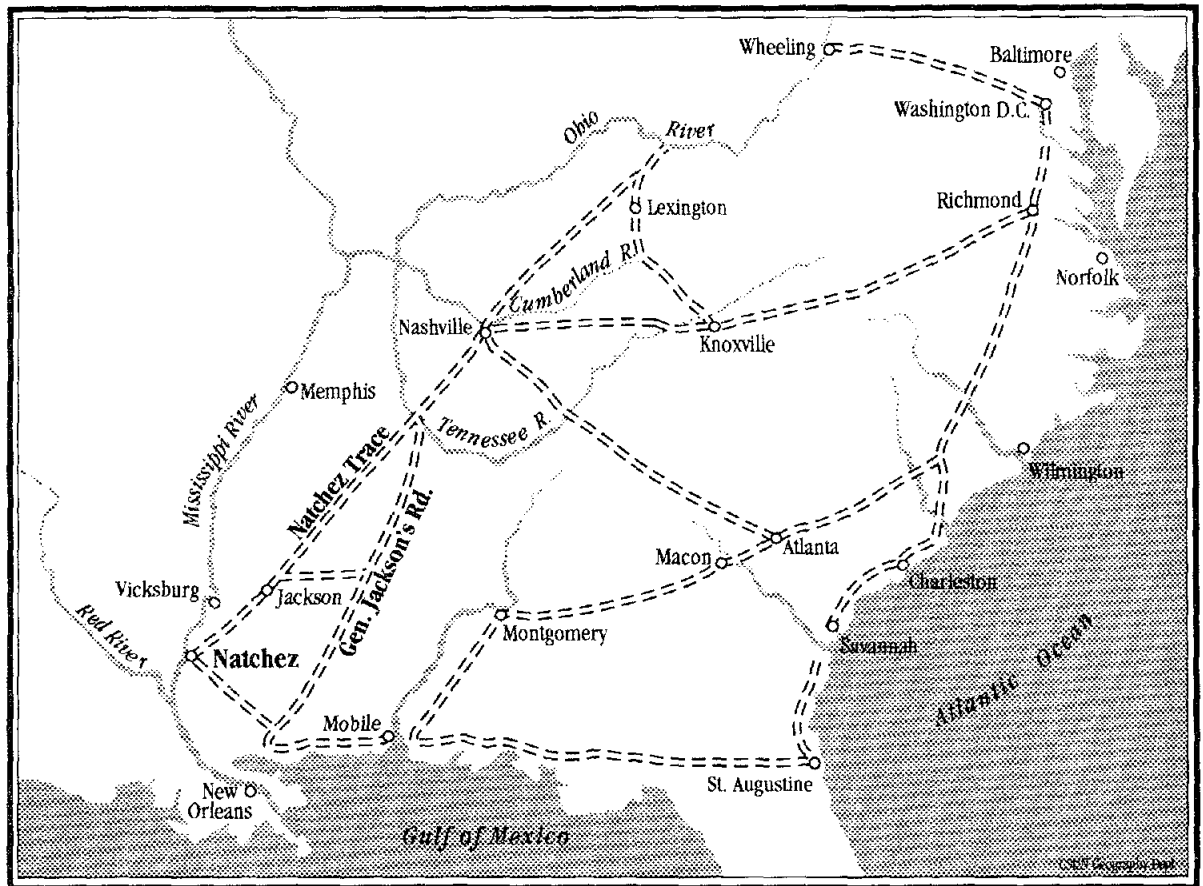


Illustration H: Slave Trade Routes 1830-1860

Quarters on the slave ships resembled stowage on the infamous "middle passage" according to one abolitionist observer:

The hold was appropriated to the slaves, and is divided into two apartments. The after-hold will carry about eighty women, and the other about one hundred men. On either side were two platforms running the whole length; one raised a few inches, and the other half way up the deck. They were about five or six feet deep. On these the slaves lie, as close as they can be stowed.¹⁴⁹

Once in New Orleans, the slaves would be housed in slave-pens and "jails" awaiting buyers or shipment to other markets. Local sugar planters, who preferred young men ages 13 to 25, bought the majority of coastal slaves that landed in New Orleans from the upper South; the rest were usually sold to upcountry cotton planters and interior traders, who generally preferred males and females equally, ages 13 to 25. Some New Orleans slaves were also transhipped to Texas and even back eastward to smaller ports in Mississippi, Georgia, and Florida.¹⁵⁰

A significant portion of the slaves brought to New Orleans were transhipped to Natchez for sale to Mississippi and Louisiana planters. Some traders sailed up the Mississippi River with Virginia and Maryland slaves in large slave ships similar to the practice of colonial slavers in the previous century. But most coastal slaves arrived at Natchez aboard steamboats and keelboats. The latter vessels would be poled and pulled upriver, occasionally using the slaves themselves as part of the towing gang. Few coastal slaves appear to have walked to Natchez from New Orleans in the period after 1830.¹⁵¹

Competing with the coastal water routes were the overland voyages made by slave coffles. Although it is not clear just how many Natchez slaves arrived via the overland route, the number was probably substantial. For most traders, the land routes were cheaper, less risky than water, and included the possibility of buying and selling slaves along the way. Mississippi slave trader R. C. Faulkner advised his agent in Virginia in no uncertain terms of his opinion of a coastal voyage:

Dear Powell: Yours of the 15th August was received last mail. In which you say that you have concluded to ship the negroes _____ by New Orleans. These arrangement, by all means, I wish you not to do, as it will cost you more in the end and a great deal of risque to run. . . .¹⁵²

149. Letter of anti-slavery clergyman Joshua Leavitt written January 23, 1834 as quoted in Tadman, *Speculators and Slaves*, pp. 80-81.

150. *Ibid.*, pp. 133-179; Sweig, "Reassessing the Human Dimension of the Interstate Slave Trade," pp. 5-19; Salve Manifests, Inward/Outward, Mobile, 1840-1860, RG 36.

151. J.H. Ingraham, *The SouthWest*, II, pp. 234-235, Stephenson, *Isaac Franklin*, pp. 34-85.

152. R.C. Clinton to William C. Fitzhugh Powell, September 4, 1835, W.C.F. Powell Papers, DU.

Faulkner complained about the costs of slave insurance by water, the unlikelihood of collecting on the policies should something go wrong, and the greater risk of sickness by sea. He also favored the land route because wagons and mules and horses used to transport the slaves could be sold for profit at journey's end. Other traders felt that the long walk overland strengthened the slaves and thereby increased their market value.¹⁵³

Whatever advantages land travel offered traders, it was not an easy journey for the slaves. A British traveler left the following account of a slave coffle he came across in western Virginia destined for Natchez:

Just as we reached New River, in the early gray of the morning, we came up with a singular spectacle, the most striking one of the kind I have ever witnessed. It was a camp of Negro slave-drivers, just packing up to start; they had about three hundred slaves with them, who had bivouacked the preceding night in chains in the woods; these they were conducting to Natchez, upon the Mississippi River, to work upon the sugar plantations in Louisiana. It resembled one of those coffles of slaves spoken of by Mungo Park, except that they had a caravan of nine wagons and singlehorse carriages, for the purpose of conducting the white people, and any of the blacks that should fall lame, to which they were now putting their horses to pursue their march. The female slaves were, some of them, sitting on logs of wood, whilst others were standing, and a great many little black children were warming themselves at the fires of the bivouac. In front of them all and prepared for the march stood, in double file, about two hundred male slaves, manacled and chained to one another.¹⁵⁴

Dozens of such coffles, ranging in size from fifteen to several hundred slaves, plied the stage roads and Indian trails from the upper-South to Natchez in the 1830s, 40s, and 50s. Although charting the slave routes to Natchez awaits systematic analysis of manuscript and travel records, three routes appear to have been the ones most frequently used: from the upper-South by way of the Wilderness Road through the Cumberland Gap and on to Nashville and the Natchez Trace, from the Carolinas via stage roads from Montgomery or Tuscaloosa, and across the coastal stretch from Florida swinging up to Natchez at Mobile or Pensacola. Traders commonly used any and all of the above routes depending on the circumstances of the moment.¹⁵⁵

The caravans could make about twenty to thirty miles per day, meaning that a trek from Virginia might take several months. The typical procedure was to march the slaves in lines segregated by gender and age. Men marched in single or double file linked together

153. *Ibid.*; Tadman, *Speculators and Slaves*, pp. 71-83.

154. G.W. Featherstonhaugh, *Excursions through the Slave States, from Washington on the Potomac to the Frontier of Mexico: with Sketches of Popular Manners and Geological Notices*, 2 vols. (London, 1844), I, pp. 36-37, 120-122; see also John W. Blassingame, (ed.), *Slave Testimony: Two Centuries of Letters, Speeches, Interviews, and Autobiographies* (Baton Rouge, La., 1977) for scattered references to the character of the slave coffles.

155. The piecing together of these routes resulted from reading travel accounts and diverse sources too numerous to list.

by iron collars and lengthy chains. The single women followed, tied to one another by ropes. Usually the children took up the middle, followed by mothers, wagons, and riders. With small groups, the line was less uniform. Some traders carried tents with them for shelter. Others made use of slave jails and slave barns along the way. Most appear to have simply camped out with blankets issued each evening and collected in the morning.¹⁵⁶

We have no way of knowing the loss of life and limb suffered by slaves on the trail. It is doubtful, however, that the risks were great seeing as traders seldom mentioned rebellions, accidents, or deaths in the extant records.¹⁵⁷ Nor do we have a systematic study of the emotional and spiritual costs borne by the enslaved as they trudged from Virginia to Natchez. Very few of the thousands who made the trip could hope to see again their families and friends. In this context, the land route was similar to the coastal trade — and, indeed, to the original passage from Africa.

Observers frequently commented on the customary and often involuntary singing of the slaves as they marched. Sullen despondent slaves would shuffle along the trails for weeks, ill housed, often sick, and frequently desperate in their anguish. Slave traders used whips and carried weapons to keep the group afoot. Singing was induced by drivers and traders to pace the slaves in step and to counter the emotional depression that often led to malingering and insubordination. The sad lyrics reproduced below were said to be commonly sung by slaves in coffles whenever they could sing the words of their own choosing:

156. Tadman, *Speculators and Slaves*, pp. 71-74; Blassingame, *Slave Testimony*, pp. 128, 131-134, 277-279, 303-304, 405, 504, 556, 575, 704-706.

157. Among the pertinent manuscript collections consulted for information on the overland trade are the following: Archibald H. Boyd Papers, DU; John A. Forsyth Papers, DU; Tyre Glen Papers, DU; Jarratt-Puryear Family Papers, DU; Ellison Keitt Papers, Black History Collection, The Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. (hereafter cited as LC); James A. Mitchell papers, DU; Sterling Neblett Papers, DU; William C. F. Powell Papers, DU; Francis Everod Rives Papers, DU;

Coffle Song¹⁵⁸

Oh! fare ye well, my bonny love,
I'm gwine away to leave you,
A long farewell for ever love,
Don't let our parting grieve you
(Chorus) Oh! fare ye well, etc.

The way is long before me, love,
And all my love's behind me;
You'll seek me down by the old gum tree
But none of you will find me

I'll send you my love by the whoop-o'-will;
The dove shall bring my sorrow;
leave you a drop of my heart's own blood,
For I won't be back to-morrow.

And when we're moldering in the clay,
All those will weep who love us;
But it won't be long till my Jesus come,
He sees and reigns above us.

Fugitive slave William W. Brown, who had worked as a slave for a trader on the Mississippi River, remembered far angrier words sung by enslaved African-Americans as they were being driven southwest in coffles:¹⁵⁹

158. From the testimony of Sella Martin, written in 1867, as reproduced in Blassingame, *Slave Testimony*, pp. 704-705.

159. William Wells Brown, *The Narrative of William W. Brown: A Fugitive Slave* (Boston, Mass.: 1848), pp. 20-21.

See these poor souls from Africa
Transported to America;
We are stole, and sold to Georgia [Mississippi]
Will you go along with me?
We are stolen, and sold to Georgia-
Come sound the jubilee!

See wives and husbands sold apart,
Their children's screams will break
my heart; —
There's a better day a coming —
Will you go along with me?
There's a better day a coming,
go sound the jubilee!

O' gracious Lord! When shall it be,
That we poor souls shall all be free?
There's a better day a coming —
Will you go along with me?
There's a better day a coming,
Go sound the jubilee!"

As the coffle approached Natchez, the enslaved party would encamp for several days a few miles from town so the slaves could be issued new clothes (usually two sets were taken along), bathe and prepare themselves for sale, and be lectured on how to conduct themselves in the market place. Then the slaves would be marched to town, forced to sing and step lively so as to appear to be a "likely" lot eager to please their new masters.

Coming "down river" from Kentucky, Missouri, Tennessee, and the upper-South was the third major route used to deliver slaves to the Natchez market. Although the river passage appears to have been less strenuous at first glance, it usually involved some overland trekking, risky boat trips, passage through mosquito infested territory, and heavy expenses. Slave coffles were frequently gathered in the principal Virginia and Maryland markets and marched over the mountains to Wheeling, Virginia, for passage on riverboats down the Ohio River to the Mississippi and on to Natchez. Carolina traders trekked overland through the Blue Ridge Mountains to Sycamore Shoals north of the Great Smokey Mountains, where they followed river routes through the mountains to the Holston River. On the Holston, a party could float into the Tennessee and eventually join the Ohio River en route to the Mississippi River at Cairo, Illinois. Six hundred additional miles would bring the group to Natchez. Kentucky, Tennessee, and Missouri slave traders followed a similar route to Natchez, via the Cumberland, Tennessee, and Ohio rivers. In all, a river venture might cover more than 2000 miles, taking several months to complete at the float rate of 4 miles per hour.

Although almost any type of river craft could be used in the river trade, four types seemed to predominate: flat-bottomed riverboats, arks, steamboats, and keelboats. Because most of the voyage was downstream, the passage could be undertaken with little resort to animal or steam power. Slaves would be loaded on flatboats and forced to sit on open decks, usually surrounded by boxes of cargo and supplies. Wagons and animals could also

be loaded for shipment. Arks were more typically used by migrating rural families and resembled farms afloat. Small traders could book passage on such vessels, confining their human cargo among the animals and farm produce aboard. Keelboats, used mainly to haul cargo up river by tow lines and poling, were less employed after 1830, but still offered a possible alternative for passage on boats returning from Memphis or Cincinnati to New Orleans. Steamboats carried slaves and ballast of all sorts, but were used principally by the traders for mainline trips, from Memphis or St. Louis for example to Natchez.

Again, precise information as to costs, duration, and the experience itself is unavailable at this writing so as to say much about what the river route entailed for the black slaves taken to Natchez. Impressionistic evidence suggests that the bulk of the slaves brought to the Natchez market probably arrived by riverboat or overland. Advertisements of traders in the local newspapers commonly spoke of boatloads of slaves arriving fresh from Kentucky, Virginia, and Maryland. Numerous travel accounts comment on the cargoes of slaves docked at the landing ready for unloading and sale. Nearly fifty flatboats were sunk at the landing in a devastating tornado that struck the town in 1840, drowning several hundred slaves.¹⁶⁰

The boat trip was usually a harrowing experience in which the slaves were confined by chains in steerage or on the open decks. One of the most insightful accounts of the river passage to Natchez was written by the ex-slave William W. Brown, who had worked briefly for a "soul driver" on the Mississippi. His account of one trip is reproduced below:

A few weeks after, on our downward passage, the boat took on board, at Hannibal, a drove of slaves bound for the New Orleans market. They numbered from fifty to sixty, consisting of men and women from eighteen to forty years of age. A drove of slaves on a southern steamboat, bound for the cotton or sugar regions, is an occurrence so common, that no one, not even the passengers, appear to notice it, though they clang their chains at every step.

.

When I learned the fact of my having been hired to a negro speculator, or a "soul driver," as they are generally called among slaves, no one can tell my emotions. On entering the service of Mr. Walker, I found that my opportunity of getting to a land of liberty was gone, at least for the time being. He had a gang of slaves in readiness to start for New Orleans, and in a few days we were on our journey. . . .

There was on the boat a large room on the lower deck, in which the slaves were kept, men and women, promiscuously — all chained two and two, and a strict watch kept that they did not get loose; a few cases have occurred in which slaves have got off their chains, and made their escape at landing-places, while the boats were taking in wood; — and with all our care, we

160. See *Mississippi Free Trader*, May 14, 1840; Tornado File, Historic Natchez Foundation, Natchez, Mississippi.

lost one woman who had been taken from her husband and children, and having no desire to live without them, in the agony of her soul jumped overboard, and drowned herself. She was not chained.

It was almost impossible to keep that part of the boat clean.

On landing at Natchez, the slaves were all carried to the slave-pen, and there kept one week, during which time several of them were sold. Mr. Walker fed his slaves well. We took on board at St. Louis several hundred pounds of bacon [smoked meat] and corn-meal, and his slaves were better fed than slaves generally were in Natchez, so far as my observation extended.

At the end of a week, we left for New Orleans, the place of our final destination, which we reached in two days. Here the slaves were placed in a negro-pen, where those who wished to purchase could call and examine them. The negro-pen is a small yard, surrounded by buildings, from fifteen to twenty feet wide, with the exception of a large gate with iron bars. The slaves are kept in the building during the night, and turned out into the yard during the day. After the best of the stock was sold at a private sale at the pen, the balance were taken to the Exchange Coffee-House Auction Rooms, kept by Isaac L. McCoy, and sold at public auction. After the sale of this lot of slaves, we left New Orleans for St. Louis.¹⁶¹

In the 1850s, more and more slaves were brought to Mississippi by train. Although Natchez had no rail connections prior to the Civil War, slaves could be transported by rail from Louisville, Kentucky, and Nashville, Tennessee, to Memphis, and from there on the river to Natchez, or to Jackson, Mississippi, and then via the Natchez Trace to Natchez. Richmond and Petersburg, Virginia, had rail connections on the eve of the Civil War via Chattanooga, Corinth, and Memphis. Atlanta was connected by rail and steamboat via Montgomery to Jackson, Mississippi, as was Charleston, South Carolina. Nearly every train heading southwest in the 1850s carried segregated "servants" cars wherein slaves — usually less than twenty — rode under armed guard. The rail trip from Richmond to Montgomery could be accomplished in two or three days. Another week of train, river, or overland trekking would bring a coffle to the Natchez market in relatively good time and health. But costs were probably higher than the overland, river, and coastal routes, with less opportunity for trading along the way.¹⁶²

Whatever the routes used, traders brought their slaves to Natchez in record numbers in the 1830s, 40s, and 50s. A crude estimate is that the Natchez hinterland (Table 2 in Chapter I), including Louisiana plantations, contained approximately 127,000 enslaved people in 1860. Assuming that 30 percent of the enslaved population had resulted from district births over deaths, that leaves nearly 90,000 slaves brought to the region by migrating planters and slave traders. Even if only a small percentage had passed through

161. Brown, *The Narrative of W.W. Brown*, pp. 11-17.

162. T.H. Wells, "Moving a Plantation to Louisiana," *Louisiana Studies* VI (1967), pp. 278-279; Tadman, *Speculators and Slaves*, pp.79-81.

the markets at Natchez, it would have meant several thousand slave sales yearly in the generation prior to the Civil War.

Although it is difficult to determine the precise number of enslaved people bought and sold in the Natchez market, a close reading of several extant newspapers tells us something about the trade's character and scale. Table 8 reflects the notices of sales in the Natchez *Weekly Courier* for the year 1850. According to the advertised sales, close to 1000 slaves were put on the market in 1850. In the five months from June to December, 1854, advertisements in the *Mississippi Free Trader* listed more than 800 slaves on the market in Natchez. The number totaled 549 in the *Free Trader* for 1858 and 1859 and 742 (different advertisements) for the *Weekly Courier*.

These advertisements certainly underrepresented the number of slaves in the Natchez market by several hundred or more. Many of the advertisements simply alluded to "large lots of slaves on hand" or about to arrive. Several ads were boldly printed notices calling attention to the words "SLAVES, SLAVES, SLAVES," followed by the name of the trader and the sale location. A typical notice in the *Weekly Courier* stated that "men, women, boys, and girls" were on hand to be sold on easy terms. The traders Blackwell, Murphy, and Ferguson — alerted their customers to the arrival of "#1 Negroes — positively the last lot of the season." Other traders felt that it was sufficient merely to announce that they were back at their "old stands at the Forks-of-the-Road."¹⁶³

Possibly the most active trader in Natchez in the 1830s was the firm of Franklin, Armfield, and Ballard. These Virginia and Maryland-based traders are said to have shipped 1000 to 1200 slaves annually to the New Orleans and Natchez markets. Most of their slaves arrived via the coastal route in firm-owned slave brigs that steamed upriver to Natchez with their transhipped cargoes. Individual consignments to Natchez frequently numbered between 40 to 150 slaves. The firm also sent slaves overland from Virginia and boatloads down the river from Tennessee. Although the company went out of business in the early 1840s, other operatives assumed their ships, slave depots in Alexander and New Orleans and Natchez, and — presumably — their far-flung service area.¹⁶⁴

Within Natchez, traders swapped, sold, exhibited, bargained, and plied the slave trade with an abandonment that turned the entire community into a veritable slave market for half the year. The observations of a Yankee traveler to Natchez in the mid-1830s are worth quoting at length as evidence of the degree to which the town was consumed with the trading of slaves. His comments describe a typical Sunday morning scene:

163. Natchez *Weekly courier*, December 1, 1858; December 12, 1858; December 15, 1858; December 12, 1858; March 16, 1859; October 12, 1859.

164. See Stephenson, *Isaac Franklin*; Sweigs, "Reassessing the Human Dimension of the Interstate Slave Trade," pp. 5-19; Sydnor, *Slavery*, pp. 180-131.

Table 8. Slave Sales in the Natchez *Weekly Courier* in 1850

	Type	#	Origins
January	Store	50	Virginia
	Store	40	Unknown
	Plantation	172	Local
	Store	5	Unknown
	Plantation	?	Unknown
	Auction	4	Unknown
February	Auction	?	Unknown
	Auction	?	Unknown
	Estate	34	Unknown
	Store	4	Unknown
March	Auction	60	Virginia
	Auction	68	Local
	Auction	1	Unknown
	Forks Mkt	80	Virginia
April	Store	1	Unknown
	Forks Mkt	50	Virginia
May	Forks Mkt	125	Virginia
	Store	1	Unknown
June	Forks Mkt	40	Virginia
August	Store	1	Unknown
September	Sheriff's Sale	1	Unknown
	Auction	2	Unknown
October	Auction	9	Unknown
	Auction	12	Unknown
November	Forks Mkt	96	Local
	Store	1	Local
	Store	1	Local
	Courthouse	60	Local
	Auction	?	Unknown
December	Estate Sale	<u>7</u>	Unknown
		923	

Source: Natchez *Weekly Courier*, January thru December, 1850

Main street is the "Broadway" of Natchez. It extends from the river to the eastern extremity of the city, about half a mile in length, dividing the town into nearly equal portions, north and south. The street is to Natchez what Chartres street is to New Orleans, though on a much smaller scale. Here are all the banks and most of the dry goods and fancy stores. Here, consequently, is the centre of business, and, to the ladies, that of attraction. . . . In passing up this street, which is compactly built with handsome brick blocks, generally but two stories in height, the stranger is struck with the extraordinary number of private carriages, clustered before the doors of the most fashionable stores, or millineries, rolling through the streets, or crossing and recrossing it from those by which it is intersected, nearly every moment, from eleven till two on each fair day. But few of the equipages are of the city: they are from the plantations in the neighborhood, which spread out from the town over richly cultivated "hill and dale," — a pleasant and fertile landscape far into the interior. Walk with me into this street about noon on a pleasant day in December. . . . Here, at the corner, surrounded by a crowd, is an auction store. Upon a box by the door stands a tall, fine-looking man. He is *black*; ebony cannot be blacker. Of the congregation of human beings there, he is the most unconcerned. Yet he has a deeper interest in the transaction of the moment than all the rest — for a brief space will determine whom, among he multitude, he is to call master! The auctioneer descants at large upon his merits and capabilities — "Acclimated, gentlemen! a first-rate carriage driver — raised by Col. ___ Six hundred dollars is bid. Examine him, gentlemen — a strong and atheletic fellow — but twenty seven years of age." He is knocked off at seven hundred dollars; and with "There's your master," by the seller, who points to the purchaser, springs from his elevation to follow his new owner; while his place is supplied by another subject. These scenes are every-day matters here, and attract no attention after beholding them a few times; so powerful is habit, even in subduing our strongest prejudices.¹⁶⁵

The author of the above words, Joseph Ingraham, was struck by just how casually the white town folk accepted the scene of buying and selling slaves even on Sundays. His words depict a pace of activity that was characteristic and long enduring in the town. Indeed, had a traveler stepped back into Natchez at any time in the period from the 1790s through the 1850s, the sight would have been similar to what Ingraham had observed.

A tax schedule for the 1830s listed thirty-two dealers in slaves in Natchez.¹⁶⁶ A close reading of Natchez newspapers in the 1850s found approximately the same number.¹⁶⁷ By consulting a local business directory for 1858, property records, and newspaper advertisements, it is possible to identify the major slave trading locations in Natchez. In general, four types of sales occurred: Probate and Sheriff sales on the steps of the courthouse located at State and Pearl streets; various auction and store sales of the sort

165. Ingraham, *The South West*, II, pp. 29-30.

166. Sydnor, *Slavery*, p. 152.

167. *Mississippi Free-Trader*, 1845-45, 1854-1857; *Natchez Weekly Courier*, 1850, 1857-1859.

described by Ingraham, stretching along Main for approximately five city blocks; sales at the landing on boats and in warehouses wherein river transported slaves were kept prior to being taken to the main market east of town; and those at the Forks-of-the-Road, located about a mile east of town at an intersection where several roads converged.¹⁶⁸ (See ILLUSTRATION I)

Store and auction sales principally handled local slaves in smaller lots in comparison to transactions at the Forks. Individual slaveholders often resorted to stores and auctions when private attempts failed or when the owners preferred not going public with a sale under their own names. Usually, a crier would handle the bidding just as if the slave were any other piece of property. Also, undesirable slaves left unsold at the Forks were frequently disposed of by auctioneers to the highest bidders.¹⁶⁹

Estate and Sheriff sales at the courthouse disposed of slaves thrown on the market at the direction of estate administrators, in foreclosure of unpaid debts, as the result of court judgments, and in numerous cases of unclaimed runaways sold to cover the expenses incurred in housing them in the town jail. In some of the above cases, slaves would be brought to the courthouse lawn where potential buyers could inspect them at will before bidding. When the sale involved a great many slaves, they might be warehoused at the landing, kept on their home plantations, or else housed in slave depots at the Forks. In such cases, buyers could inspect the slaves, by going to the various locations, before bidding on them by name at the courthouse steps on a publicly announced day of sale.

Although precise information is unavailable regarding slave sales at the landing, it seems likely that fewer sales occurred Under-the-Hill once the Forks came into prominence. The general congestion and unsanitary look of the place, along with its lawless reputation, were probably contributing factors to its decline as a slave mart. Still, slave boats moored just offshore for the whole of the antebellum period, and it is probable that trading occurred at the landing up to the eve of the Civil War. Franklin and Company, for example, owned a slave warehouse (possibly just a storage facility for cotton) Under-the-Hill for most of the time it traded in Natchez.¹⁷⁰

The market handling the majority of slave sales in Natchez was located, appropriately if somewhat incongruously, amid the town's most elite estate neighborhood: the Concord, Monmouth, Melrose, and Linden community east of town. Exactly when the Forks was first established as a slave depot is unclear. Some evidence suggests that it was used as a market even during the Spanish period. Virginia slave trader Isaac Franklin erected (or acquired) a major slave depot at the Forks for his own use, and to lease to other traders, in the mid-1830s. Although Franklin sold his market holdings to John O'Ferrall in the

168. For information on the location of the Forks-of-the-Road market see Jason Doolittle, "The Natchez Slave Market," unpublished paper in author's possession.

169. The above analysis of the Natchez market is based on sources (too numerous to list) found mainly in the Deeds, Lands, Wills, and Probate Record Books housed in the Adams County Office of Records at Natchez Mississippi for the years 1790 to 1860.

170. Rice C. Ballard to McCormick and Quigley, June 12, 1841, Adams County Deed Book DD; Rice C. Ballard to Samuel S. Boyd, February 2, 1847, Adams County Deed Book FF, Office of Records, Natchez, Mississippi.

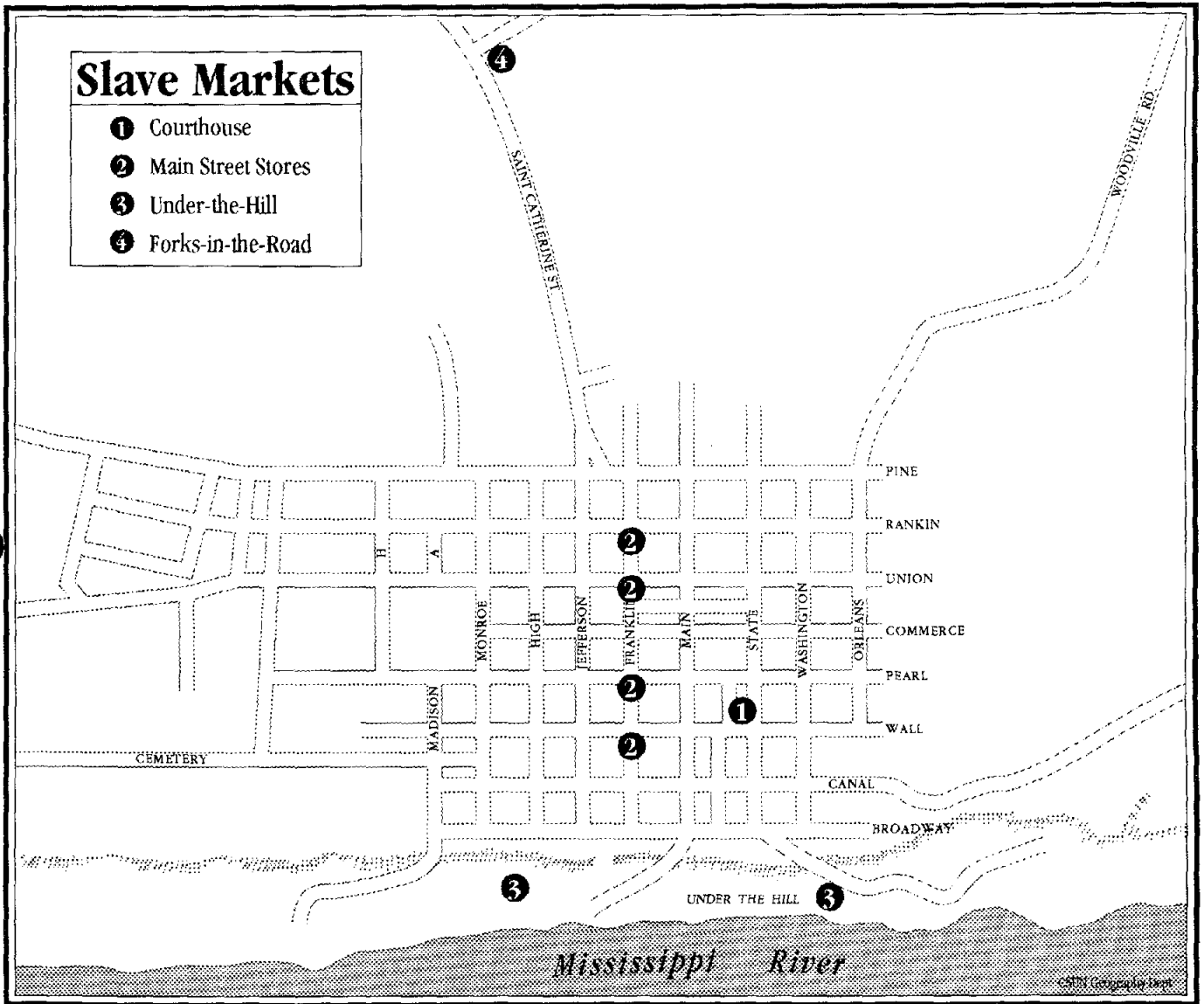


Illustration I: Natchez Slave Markets

1840s, the Forks remained the town's main slave depot until Natchez was occupied by Union forces in mid-July, 1863.¹⁷¹

The exact configuration of the slave market at the Forks is difficult to know for certain. Traveler Joseph Ingraham wrote, in the 1830s, of two other "extensive markets for slaves opposite each other, on the road to Washington three miles from Natchez." O'Farrell, in the mid-1850s, estimated the rents on his slave stalls at \$1000 a year.¹⁷² Eventually, O'Farrell built a gin at the site, several stores, and associated plantation supply facilities. A map of the town drawn by the U.S. Army in 1864 shows a number of buildings along St. Catherine Street as well as at the Forks in several locations. Property maps in land record books at the Adams County Office of Records, as well as insurance platings in the 1890s, offer suggestive insights but few firm conclusions. (See ILLUSTRATION J)

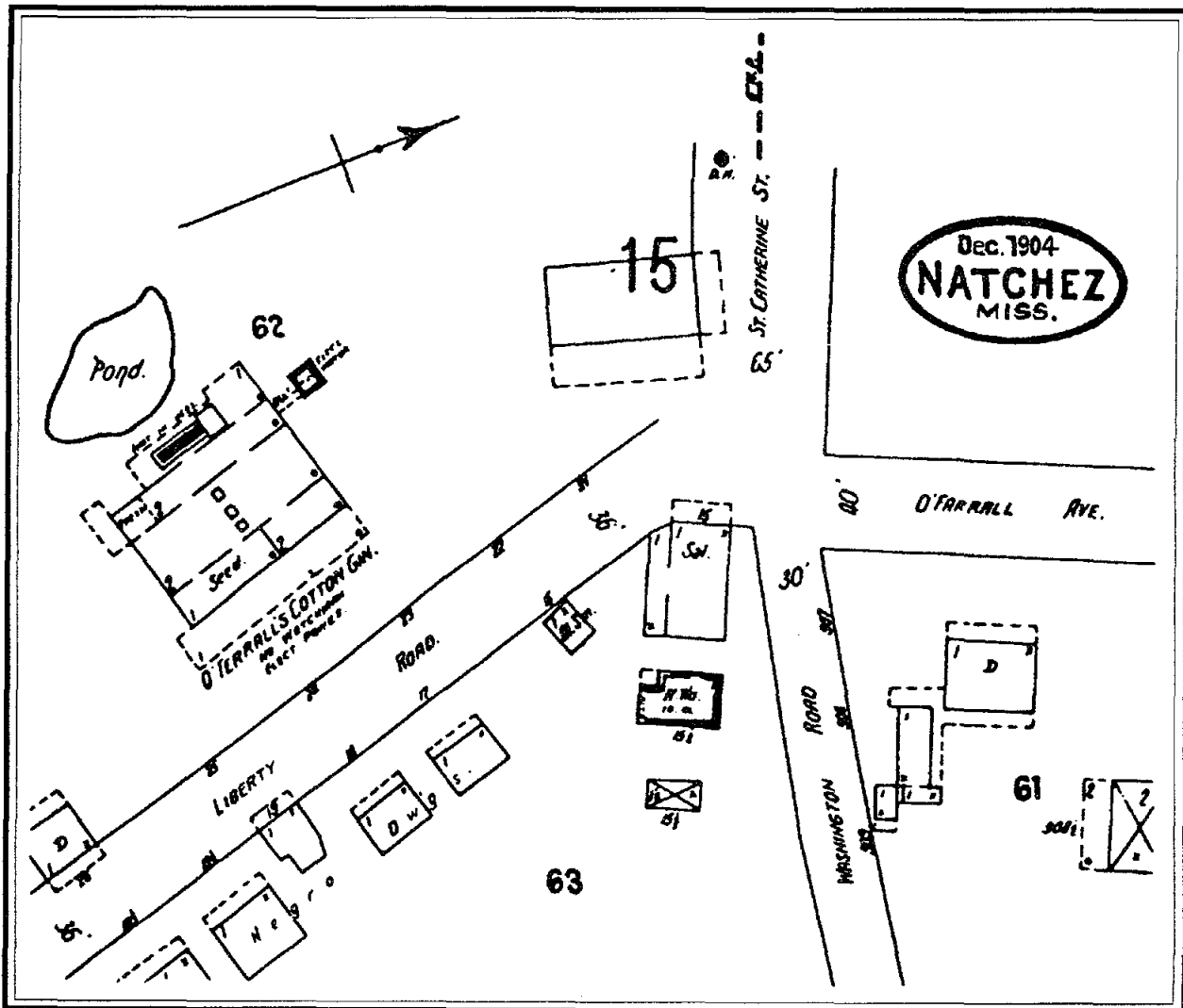
The Forks was undoubtedly founded as a slave market because of the convenience of its location. Far enough from town as to not be an eyesore (yet near enough to the landing to be easily reached), the site was a well-suited location from the perspective of traders and buyers alike. Slaves traveling on the Natchez Trace would arrive at the Forks via the Washington Road leading in from the North. Overland slave droves from Alabama arrived by the road from Liberty. And those slaves coming by river could be marched directly to the Forks by way of Jefferson or Franklin streets and then along St. Catherine Street, which met Washington and Liberty Road at the Forks. For most of the Forks' planter customers, the market was but a brief carriage ride from town or from the numerous estate plantations in the immediate vicinity.

Not to be forgotten, the site was easy to police and to isolate should the need arise, not unimportant considerations in view of the frequent outbreaks of cholera and other contagious diseases. Slaves could be conveniently quarantined, disciplined, punished, and "acclimatized" at the Forks, within easy reach of armed planters and, more importantly, the town militia. That such considerations may have played a role in the Forks' location seem likely in view of its proximity to several elite plantation estates.

Had the planter notables who lived near the Forks (the Minors, Quitmans, McMurrans, Surgets, Turners, Moores, and Bingamans) objected to having the market within their immediate domain, it would not have been difficult to have relocated the site. But there is no evidence that local slaveholders were at all concerned with its location. Rather, the Forks was an attraction of sorts — a place close at hand for gentleman dandies, respected ladies, esteemed "nabobs," whites of the middling class, and the just plain curious who wanted to view the fresh crops of slaves brought in from Virginia. Ingraham captures this

171. Ballard, Franklin, & Armfield to John O'Ferrall, December 15, 1845, Adams County Deed Book FF; Rice C. Ballard to Amelia A. Gillard, January 1, 1847, Adams County Deed Book GG; Ayers P. Merrill to Rice C. Ballard, November 2, 1840, Adams County Deed Book, CC; John O'Farrell to City of Natchez, October 20, 1859, Adams County Deed Book MM; John O'Farrell to Daniel Muse, January 13, 1842, Adams County Deed Book DD; John O'Farrell to Frederick Read, April 10, 1867, Land and Deed Book OO; Patrick O'Farrell to John Kierman, March 21, 1860, Adams County Deed Book MM; Patrick O'Farrell to Robert Wood, trustee for N. Hoggatt, Jr., August 12, 1858, Adams County Deed Book MM; Anthony Smith to Rice C. Ballard and Isaac Franklin, May 19, 1835, Adams County Deed Book W, Office of Records, Natchez, Mississippi, (Note: the name O'Ferrall is spelled variously as O'Farrell and O'Farrel in the record books.)

172. Ingraham, *The SouthWest*, II, pp. 202; *Mississippi Free-Trader*, February 11, 1857.



Source: Sanborn Insurance Maps, 1904, Historical Natchez Foundation, Natchez, Mississippi

Illustration J: Forks-of-the-Road c1900

aspect of the scene with his description of how at ease one visitor was to the place: "Shortly before leaving the slave mart — a handsome carriage drove up, from which alighted an elderly lady, who, leaning on the arm of a youth, entered the court. After looking at and questioning in a kind tone several of the female slaves, she purchased two, a young mother and her child, and in a few minutes afterward, at the solicitation of the youth, purchased the husband of the girls. . ."¹⁷³

Although close analysis of the Forks' impact on the black experience in Natchez awaits further study, several points seem obvious: firstly, the majority of non-Mississippi slaves sold in Natchez were undoubtedly traded at the Forks. The enslaved men and women under sale were segregated by gender regardless of family relations and sold for the most part in separate transactions. Because local buyers always suspected that trader-handled slaves were undesirable criminals and "rascals," the actual sale involved careful inspections for whip marks, physical ailments, aging, and, in the case of women, fecundity. Although traders were required by law to certify that the slaves were not criminals, faithless, or in poor health, few Natchez buyers trusted the certificates, Virginia credentials, or the trader's word. They wanted to see the slaves for themselves. As a result, the sale was almost always a terribly dehumanizing experience for the enslaved people.

A mile from Natchez, we came to a cluster of rough wooden buildings, in the angle of two roads, in front of which several saddle-horses, either tied or held by servants, indicated a place of popular resort. . . .

Entering through a wide gate into a narrow court yard, partially enclosed by low buildings, a scene of a novel character was at once presented. A line of negroes commencing at the entrance with the tallest, who was not more than five feet eight or nine inches in height. . . down to a little fellow about ten years of age, extended in a semicircle around the right side of the yard. There were in all about forty. . . . With their hats in their hands, which hung down by their sides, they stood perfectly still, and in close order, while some gentlemen were passing from one to another examining for the purpose of buying. With the exception of displaying their teeth when addressed, and rolling their great white eyes about the court — they were so many statues of the most glossy ebony. . . . As we approached them [the slaves], one of us as a curious spectator, the other as a purchaser; and as my friend passed along the line, with a scrutinizing eye — giving that singular look, peculiar to the buyer of slaves as he glances from head to foot over each individual, the passive subjects of his observations betrayed no other signs of curiosity than that evinced by an occasional glance.

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Then came a series of the usual questions from the intended purchaser. "Let me see your teeth — your tongue — open your hands — roll up your sleeves — have you a good appetite? Are you good tempered?"¹⁷⁴

173. Ingraham, *The South West*, II, pp. 200.

174. *Ibid.*, pp. 192-198.

Secondly, with regard to the mart's impact on the black experience, sales at the Forks tore apart the slave associations that had come about in the weeks and months of passage to Natchez.

"How old are you, George?" he [the buyer] inquired. "I don't recollect, sir, 'zactly — b'live I'm somewhere 'bout twenty-dree." "Where were you raised?" "On master R____'s farm in Wirginny." "Then you are a Virginia negro." "Yes, master, me full blood Wirginny." "Did you drive your master's carriage?" "Yes, Master, I drove ole missus' carrage, more dan four year." "Have you a wife?" "Yes, master, I lef young wife in Richmond, but I got new wife here in de lot. I wishy you buy her, master, if you gwine to buy me."

.

In a few minutes [George] returned and took leave of several of his companions, who, having been drawn up into line only to be shown to purchasers, were now once more at liberty, and moving about the court, all the visitors having left except my friend and myself. "You mighty luck, George," said one, congratulating him, "to get sol so quick."¹⁷⁵

Even had the buyer purchased George's new wife, the slave's separation from the friends he had made on the trail — from the man, for example, who had shared his chained collar for two months — must have been a wrenching experience. Locally-raised (and then sold) slaves could hope to see loved ones again, or could at least hear about them through the grapevine. The typical Forks sale, however, involved newly arrived slaves who undoubtedly understood that they would never see their families again. And while it would be too much to suggest that such differences in the sale experience of imported and local slaves were qualitatively more or less agonizing for the people being sold, they were differences that need to be considered.

As much as Natchez was a frenzied slave mart literally overrun by professional slave dealers, it was equally a place wherein black slaves were bought, sold, and exchanged in a wide array of private transactions. Natchez district planters, like businessmen everywhere, expanded their operations by borrowing money in good times and using their lands and possessions as collateral for loans during economic downturns. If crop prices bounced up, loans were repaid; if the economy stalled — as it did, for instance, in the late 1830s, planters defaulted, sold property to cover debts, or borrowed more heavily to tide them over.

But unlike businessmen elsewhere, southern planters used human beings as collateral for their loans in a tragic process that greatly altered the nature of southern enterprise. In Natchez, the heady character of investing in lands and human chattel left district slaves especially vulnerable to the gyrations of the business cycle as well as the opportunism, greed, whim, and mortality of their masters.

175. *Ibid.*

In February, 1859, forty-six slaves on the Laurel Grove plantation, including nine children, were mortgaged as collateral for a loan of \$200,000, repayable in installments over four years.¹⁷⁶ Twenty years prior to the Laurel Grove mortgage, merchant and planter William Ferriday had mortgaged four plantations (Hollywood, Liverpool, Peachland, and Melody), plus 24,238 acres in Louisiana, Arkansas, and Mississippi, an estate residence and fourteen "servants" in Natchez, and 243 slaves as collateral for debts amounting to \$777, 516. The lands and slaves were given in trust to local planter John F. Gillespie, who agreed to sell the properties at public auction at the door of the courthouse in Natchez should Ferriday fail to redeem the loan as scheduled.¹⁷⁷

A few years before the Ferriday transaction, Robert Moore, owner of the lands on which the fashionable Melrose estate would be built in the 1840s, had signed over fourteen slaves to local merchant James C. Wilkins as collateral on a promissory note of \$4000.¹⁷⁸ Indeed, the man who would eventually build Melrose, lawyer John McMurrin, held slaves as collateral for loans in trust to planters as a regular feature of his legal practice.¹⁷⁹

Prominent planter, second generation patriarch, and avid horseman Adam L. Bingaman, regularly mortgaged lands and slaves in support of his lifestyle and enterprise. In 1821, Bingaman borrowed \$46,671 from fellow planter Stephen Duncan, signing over his Poverty Hill plantation on St. Catherine Creek (property bordering what would become the Melrose estate) and ten of his estate slaves. Although Bingaman eventually redeemed the estate with no evidence of slaves changing owners, he continued to use his land and slaves for loans throughout the period: in 1842, Bingaman placed his plantation, Fatherland, sixty-five slaves, a "library of books," and all his mules, cattle, horses, and sheep in trust to Stephen D. Elliott for loans received from planters Anthony Hoggatt, James Surget, and James Ferguson. He borrowed another \$44,376 later that same year by mortgaging, once again, his 600-acre suburban estate, Poverty Hill, along with fifty-six slaves; and in 1847, Bingaman financed \$22,899 in debts by pledging his Adams County plantation, Oak Point, 173 slaves, race horses, household furniture, books, and livestock to Stephan Duncan and Gustavus Calhoun as collateral for the loan.¹⁸⁰

More often than not these private deals were paper transactions only, with the involved slaves never knowing about, or being affected by, the legal language that bound them to one master on another. Oftentimes, however, the contractual arrangements, mortgagees,

176. Philip R. Nichols to Alex C. Ferguson & Eustace Surget, February 14, 1859, Adams County Deed Book MM, Office of Records, Natchez, Mississippi.

177. William Ferriday to John F. Gillespie, June 12, 1839, Adams County Deed Book BB, Office of Records, Natchez, Mississippi

178. Robert Moore to James C. Wilkins & Co., March 22, 1826, Adams County Deed Book P, Office of Records, Natchez, Mississippi.

179. J.A. Lyle to John McMurrin, March 18, 1830, Adams County Deed Book S, Office of Records, Natchez, Mississippi.

180. Adam L. Bingaman to Stephen Duncan, January 3, 1821, Adams County Deed Book M; to Stephen Duncan, November 24, 1847, Adams County Deed Book GG; to Stephen D. Elliott, March 6, 1840, Adams County Deed Book CC; to Stephen D. Elliott, December 1, 1842, Adams County Deed Book DD; to James Surget, June 7, 1842, Adams County Deed Book DD, Office of Records, Natchez, Mississippi.

instruments of default, and court decisions ripped apart slave families in settlement of debts, and demonstrated to the slaves just how vulnerable they were as personal property to be used in the financial interests of their owners. It was in such cases as these that locally-reared slaves ended up on the auction block, the courthouse steps, and in the back rooms of private stores on Main Street.

Numerous enslaved people in Natchez were also purchased, transferred, sold, and traded in the settlement of estates at the death of the white slaveholders who owned them. In 1849, for example, Benjamin Hermon's 145 slaves were offered for sale as stipulated in his will. The bidding resulted in forty-nine transactions to seventeen local buyers. The largest lot went to Allen Davis, who acquired twenty slaves in seven separate negotiations. Four of the Davis transactions involved families. The smallest sale went to lawyer John McMurrin who purchased the slave, Henry James, age 22, for \$1050.¹⁸¹

On October 1, 1857, a common scene occurred on the plantation of the recently deceased James P. Ashford. The administrators of Ashford's estate met at the "residence of the said deceased and caused to be collected and assembled all the Negro slaves. . . [dividing] them into 7 lots — and in order to equalize each lot at \$13,739, the owner of lot #1 and 6. . ." was instructed to pay "\$317" to the owner of lot # 7, "so that valued received will be equal." Whether or not the lots were apportioned according to family relations among the slaves, is unclear. All that we know is that the lots contained 18, 16, 17, 18, 18, 24, and 18 enslaved people respectively.¹⁸²

The will of Volney (?) Metcalfe, March 30, 1860, though unclear about the family connections of his slaves, was quite specific as to how the slaves were to be distributed among his heirs: fourteen slaves were to be divided into two equal groups, with one lot going to Metcalfe's widow and the other, to his children. Lot #1 contained four adults and three children; lot #2 was made up of six adults and one child.¹⁸³

Some slaveholders put language in their wills aimed at safeguarding the slave families. William Blunt of Concordia Parish, in one of the most unusual wills filed, instructed his executors to "sell and dispose of [his] property in the best possible manner. . . for the benefit of the. . . heirs and legaters, allowing my negroes the privilege of selecting and choosing [their] masters."¹⁸⁴ David Holmes bequeathed to a sister and nephew in Virginia three adult slaves and several children upon the condition that the slaves be taken to Virginia "if it is their wish to leave the state of Mississippi. . ."¹⁸⁵ Job Routh's will instructed its executors to divide his slaves into "equal lots for distribution to heirs but without parting any member of any family or family of Negroes." In addition, the family cook, "old Ducky," was "entitled to go with any" of the Routh "children she may

181. See Adams County Record of Estate Sales, vol. I, Benjamin Harmon, October 23, 1849, Office of Records, Natchez, Mississippi.

182. Ibid., James P. Ashford, October 1, 1857.

183. Ibid., W. Metcalfe, March 30, 1860.

184. Ibid., William Blunt, January 28, 1833.

185. Ibid., Davis Holmes, July 8, 1833.

choose."¹⁸⁶ Similarly, Peter Rucker left instructions that "ten of [his] negroes. . . be given to John Bisland, so divided as not to interfere with the family connections of the Negroes."¹⁸⁷

Such precautions as expressed in the above wills were the exception to the rule. In most cases, the documents are silent, leaving to the heirs, administrators, and executors discretion over preserving the family connections of the slaves inherited and sold.

In addition to the sale, transferral, and disposal of slaves by traders, executors, storemen, sheriffs, and in private sales, hundreds of slaves were purchased by Natchez planters who traveled to Virginia and New Orleans to buy slaves for themselves. Others placed orders with agents or asked members of their families to secure "likely" slaves for shipment to Natchez. In the latter cases, the purchased slaves could be consigned to a ship or with a trader for passage west.

The case of John Knight, Natchez merchant, illustrates a fairly common process. Knight decided in 1844 to purchase a plantation in Louisiana, about twenty-five miles from Natchez, but he did not want to buy the slaves on the place because they were "a poor lot." Instead, he purchased "some ten or a dozen prime hands from the traders here," which he "put in the place at once, to get used to it and to gain some knowledge of the cotton business." He planned to work the plantation by hiring the slaves on the place for the season, supplemented by locally acquired slaves, and by adding, in the fall of the year, "some fifty or more" slaves purchased" on the Eastern shore of Maryland."¹⁸⁸

Accordingly, Knight wrote a series of letters to his father-in-law in Maryland pertaining to the purchase and shipment of the required work force. Knight wanted to buy tidewater Maryland slaves because of their reputation for being "more valuable for the swamps of Louisiana, being more easily acclimated, and with less sickness and danger, than those from the more healthy origins of Maryland or Virginia." Just what type of slaves would be best was a question that greatly bothered Knight. Some "old planters" of the region had advised him to "buy more in families. . . ." But Knight thought this unsound advice and urged his father-in-law:

to select only choice, first rate young hands from 14 to 25 years of age, (buying no children or aged negroes) half men and half women. This I presume is the best course, unless I could get such families as would have very few old persons in them and none inferior, and at _____ prices. I advise you of all of this so that if you should hear of any gentlemen wishing to sell a large number of *first rate* family slaves, you could at once get the lowest price. . . . You know the qualities and requisites to make first rate plantation hands. They should be young, say from 16 to 25 years old, stout and ____, large deep chest, wide shoulders & hips. . . . Before I come on, a valuable lot may be offered you, which would have to be sold before I can

186. Ibid., Job Routh, December 27, 1834.

187. Ibid., Peter Rucker, November 17, 1844.

188. John Knight to William M. Beall, February 7, 1844; August 12, 1844, John Knight Papers, DU.

see them. If so, it might be best to secure them, and perhaps could be safely done. *I wish first rate hands, young and stout. I should like to get a good carpenter and blacksmith and midwife among them. But they can be found separately perhaps.*¹⁸⁹

Knight reiterated, ten days later, his concern that all purchased slaves should be of the proper age and physical character. Families were to be taken only if a bargain price could be found:

. . . if a large lot of *number one family negroes* could be had *cheaper*, it would do to buy them as well probably. . . the *jet black* negroes stand this climate the best, and no matter how ugly faces, if they have large deep chests & wide hips, short limbs. . . .¹⁹⁰

Knight obtained his land and Maryland slaves according to plan. Forty-seven hands (plus two infants) were purchased for \$19,027 at bargain prices that averaged \$405 per slave. According to Knight, Virginia and Maryland slaves were selling at that time for \$500 to \$700 cash by Natchez traders. The range Knight paid for his slaves spread from a high of \$500 to a low of \$250. Nine slaves were older than 25, being 26, 40, 36, 30, 50, 28, 26, 26, and 28 years-of-age. None, but four children, were younger than fourteen years-of-age, and the entire group was almost equally divided by gender: twenty-six males and twenty-one females. Among the entire party of slaves, only two families were included: Charity and her two children, ages 4 and 1, and John (fifty-years-old), with his thirty-seven-year-old wife, Louisa, and their two little daughters.¹⁹¹

Knight's father-in-law employed two agents, probably local traders whom he trusted, to purchase the slaves from private sellers throughout the tidewater region, paying them between \$17 and \$40 per slave in commissions and expenses. None of the slaves, except for members of the two families mentioned above, were purchased from the same owner.¹⁹²

Knight's slaves were shipped via the coastal route to New Orleans from Baltimore in the Brig *Victorine* at a freight of \$558. Once at New Orleans, the slaves were transferred to a boat commissioned by Knight for passage to Natchez, arriving about June 27, 1844. Knight probably housed his slaves in pens at the Forks or in a warehouse at the landing prior to their final voyage to his Louisiana plantation.¹⁹³

The next year brought frustration to Knight and hardships to the enslaved people he had purchased. Incompetent overseers, according to Knight, had put the unacclimated slaves

189. Ibid., Knight to Beall, January 27, 1844.

190. Ibid., February 7, 1844.

191. Ibid., Beall to Knight, July 9, 1844.

192. Ibid.

193. Ibid., Knight to Beall, June 27, 1844.

to work too early in the fields, resulting in the death of at least four. Some slaves ran away. Sickness kept the plantation "hospital" filled with slaves unable to work. The plantation was in desperate need of a mid-wife and nurse, but none could be found at any price. Heavy rains and flood waters made it difficult for Knight to travel between Natchez and his plantation. And although his crop was "very good and promising," Knight confided to his father-in-law that he was "heartily sick and tired and disgusted with planting, especially so far as negroes are concerned, and I would gladly sell out tomorrow, say today, if I could satisfactorily."¹⁹⁴

The question of why Knight wanted to purchase slaves directly in Maryland, rather than Maryland slaves brought to Natchez or New Orleans by professional traders, is easily answered. Trader procured slaves, most planters would have agreed, could not be trusted because the traders could not be trusted:

. . . hundreds of the negroes sold in this country by traders doubtless were sold to them on account of their having committed crimes. . . . The fact is, as to the character and disposition of all slaves sold by traders here we know nothing whatever, traders themselves being generally such liars. Buyers therefore can only judge by the looks of the negroes, endeavoring to avoid getting old rascals, believing they can amend young ones.¹⁹⁵

The low reputation of professional slave traders partly explains the actions of Louisiana and Mississippi in passing laws (at various times) aimed at regulating and even abolishing (briefly) the domestic trade. Looking first at Louisiana, the state banned, in 1810, the importation of slaves convicted of crimes and, in 1826, the introduction of slaves as merchandise. Citizens of Louisiana and migrating planters could import slaves, but could not hire, exchange, or sell them for at least two years after bringing them to the state. But this law was barely written when it was repealed in 1828, to be followed the next year by legislation requiring all importers, traders and planters alike, to certify, with signatures of respected freeholders, the good character of all imported slaves. For three years, moreover, the state banned, until it was repealed in 1831, the importation of children under ten-years-old separate from their mothers. Then, in 1831, largely in reaction to Nat Turner's rebellion in Virginia, Louisiana once again banned the importation of slaves for sale. The law was short-lived, however, being repealed in 1834. No other attempts at regulating or banning the trade occurred thereafter in the state.¹⁹⁶

In Mississippi, laws required certification of the good character of adult slaves imported into the state (1808), excluded the importation of slaves convicted of crimes in other states (1817), and prohibited — by the new state constitution of 1832 — the "introduction of slaves" into the state "as merchandise. . . ." The provision banning importations of slaves for sale was not implemented by legislation until 1837, when the state government banned all further importations. Traders violating the law were subject to fines of \$500 for each

194. Ibid., May 25, 1845.

195. Ibid., March 18, 1844.

196. Collins, *The Domestic Slave Trade*, pp. 126-131; Sydnor, *Slavery*, pp. 131-179; Tadman, *Speculators and Slaves*, pp. 83-89.

slave and six months imprisonment. The law abolishing the trade remained on the books until 1846, when it was repealed.¹⁹⁷

There can be no doubt but that attempts to regulate (or ban) the domestic slave trade reflected the conviction that rebellious, troublesome, infirm, sick, and incompetent slaves were the common staple of the trader's business. But it is equally clear that Natchez traders, in open defiance of the law, brought slaves into the district throughout the period under review. Although traders transferred business across the river to Vidalia when uncertain about enforcement of the prohibitions, such actions were always momentary inconveniences. Indeed, it was in 1835, that slave trader Isaac Franklin purchased his Forks-of-the Road slave depot.

By 1837, however, with the onset of financial panic and economic depression, local support for the trade's curtailment reemerged. Some planters wanted to sell their own slaves and saw legislation enforcing the constitutional ban on the importation of slaves for sale as a means of reducing competition in a slow market. Others contested their debts to traders on grounds that all trader involved transactions violated the constitutional ban against importing slaves into the state as merchandise.¹⁹⁸

The court challenge by Natchez district planter Henry Turner of his debts to slave trader Rice Ballard is illustrative of the way in which Natchez slaves could be shifted around between debtors and creditors. At issue were forty-two slaves purchased, in 1835, by Turner (brother-in-law to prominent Natchez resident John Quitman) from the slave trading firm of Franklin, Armfield and Ballard for \$63,000 at 10 percent interest per year. Natchez lawyer John McMurren (brother-in-law to both Quitman and Turner) handled the case.

Among the issues contested was the character of the slaves purchased. Turner argued that seven of the slaves were so sickly that they had died within a year of their purchase. Others were "slow," "good for nothing," "idiots," "subject to fits," "worthless," and "runways." A witness to the purchase recalled that Turner had not trusted the certificates of character provided by Ballard, causing the trader to personally affirm the fitness of his slaves. When Turner, moreover, had tried to return several slaves as unfit, Ballard, according to the witness, refused to take them back.

Such questions of judgment about the character of slaves bought and sold were a weak basis for contesting debts in the federal courts. That is why McMurren included in Turner's defense the contention that the original sale had violated the constitutional ban on selling slaves in Mississippi. Ultimately, however, McMurren recognized that he had little hope of winning and agreed to settle out of court.¹⁹⁹

197. Ibid.

198. Ibid., Sydnor, *Slavery*, pp. 164-171.

199. Assorted correspondence between Turner, Quitman, Ballard, and McMurren in the John A. Quitman Papers, SHC; see also Robert E. May, *John A. Quitman: Old South Crusader* (Baton Rouge, La., 1985), pp. 111-112.

The essential Natchez experience — possibly even more than the business of cotton — was the business of buying and selling slaves. Thousands of African-Americans were bought, sold, returned as "unfit" or diseased, sold again, swapped, mortgaged, inherited, traded, and handled as mere property on the auction blocks and in the slave-pens and warehouses of Natchez. The principal market sites stretched from Under-the-Hill, along Main Street, to the Forks just east of town. Courthouse steps and public parks, across the way from churches and schools, hosted auctions whereupon black families were torn asunder in transactions that were the very underpinning of the district's life and economy. From the perspective of those African-Americans caught up in the trade, Natchez was little more than an incredibly horrible slave market.

COPING WITH SLAVERY

All black people in and around antebellum Natchez faced a central and essential dilemma in life: how to tolerate and cope with slavery while not fully submitting to it. How the enslaved and free blacks of Natchez managed to cope is difficult to know mainly because they were forced to struggle in silence, undercover, quietly, and in ways invisible to the whites all around them. What we can say up front, however, is that Natchez blacks endured 140 years of slavery by grasping at every shred of freedom within their reach.

The first groups of slaves brought into the Natchez district by French, Spanish, and British settlers were required to learn a second, Creole language as well as a new culture radically different from their African past and the dominant culture of their masters. Clearly, the "Princes" and "Congo Toms" who filled the plantation lists in the French, Spanish, and early American era, having been ripped out of firmly rooted African settings, were thrust into an alien world not of their making. They not only had to learn the work they were required to do as slaves but also how to survive emotionally as human beings divorced from their historical past. They were, in the words of sociologist Orlando Patterson, a dead people, like zombies (if we may be so crude), in the sense that their historic views and traditional values had been rendered non-applicable to the society in which they lived and worked.²⁰⁰

This is not to say that the enslaved African's past was completely obliterated. Historians well understand that much of what was African held true and survived the transportation into slavery; that a complex and rich African past largely enabled the officially dead to carve out a life for themselves in the shadows and interstices of the dominant culture into which they were thrust. The point to understand, however, is that African-born slaves in the Natchez district were the pioneer creators of a new African-American culture that would be handed-on relatively whole to their American-born, slave descendants.²⁰¹

Blacks coming to Natchez in the 1840s and 1850s, on the other hand, were mainly native-born transplants from the upper-South who partook of an African-American culture in which a new language, Enslaved-English, (for want of a better term) served as their primary means of communication and self-awareness. By the 1840s, incoming blacks to the district could communicate with all other blacks in a common style that drew upon a rich but distant African heritage, as well as their slave experiences, to form a shared culture of resistance, accommodation, and living. Slave newcomers to Natchez from Virginia well understood the limits of their world because they had been taught "survival" lessons from mothers and fathers who in turn had learned them from their own American-

200. See especially Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (Cambridge, Mass., 1982), pp. 1-104.

201. Among the literature on slave consciousness and the process by which slaves created an African-American culture see John W. Blasingame, *The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Antebellum South* (New York, N.Y., 1979), pp. 1-148; Eugene D. Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York, N.Y., 1974); Lawrence W. Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought from Slavery to Freedom* (New York, N.Y., 1977); Mechal Sobel, *The World They Made Together: Black and White Values in Eighteenth-Century Virginia* (Princeton, N.J., 1987), pp. 1-65; Mechal Sobel, *Trabelin' On: The Slave Journey to An Afro-Baptist Faith* (Princeton, N.J., 1988).

born parents in a shared experience that spanned several generations of slavery. They commonly understood the futility of armed insurgency, the ways of masters and overseers, exactly what it meant to be a fieldhand in contrast to an estate or household slave, and when to stand their ground and when to give in. The lessons of slavery were tried and true experiences for Natchez blacks in the 1840s in comparison to the more uncertain, pioneer world that had faced their African ancestors in the 1720s, 1770s, and the 1790s.

This does not mean, however, that the experience of native-born slaves was one frozen in time. Nothing could be more mistaken. Rather, slavery in the Natchez district was always a system in flux, growing more restrictive, for example, as the antebellum period advanced. Fewer manumissions occurred, slave patrols became more regularized and more frequent, and efforts at colonizing Natchez blacks in Africa withered away and disappeared by 1850. Moreover, emotionally charged outbursts of anti-black paranoia (called the "Inquisition" by Natchez barber William Johnson) broke out again and again among disgruntled whites in the 1830s, 1840s, and 1850s, usually manifested by efforts to expel free blacks from the region.

Exactly why slavery in the district became more constrained over time is open to conjecture. Common sense would suggest that it probably had something to do with the increased pace of anti-slavery agitation in the nation at large. The more blacks escaped, the more rigid the system became. The more talk there was about the immorality of slavery, the more Natchez slaveholders worried about the presence of non-enslaved blacks who were free to read, write, and conspire.

Equally telling, perhaps, is the fact that no viable class of mulattoes, slave or free, stood in good position for challenging the restrictive changes affecting all blacks in the district in the several decades before the Civil War. For all practical purposes, it made no real difference whether the enslaved or free African-American was light or dark skinned in terms of how that person was treated or was expected to behave by the white community. Perhaps the reason it made little difference was partly because black women were not needed as wives and companions for white planters. Perhaps there were enough white women in the district as spouses — at least in the early American period — that relatively few white males were compelled to embrace black females as wives and lovers.

Mulatto infants, to put it bluntly but tentatively pending further research, were as likely to have been the product of rape and force as the issue of consensual relations among whites and blacks. As a result, few white women could see any good reason for the mulatto offspring all around them except as could be explained by reference to white, male lust and black promiscuity. Most mulatto children, even those children conceived in mutual love, were most likely viewed with shame by their white fathers and, in all probability, with derision by the white women of Natchez.

If there had been fewer white women in Natchez there might have emerged a viable and influential class of mulattoes as the logical outcome of intimacy and sexual relations

among masters and slaves. Since no such class emerged, the so-called "Inquisition" went largely unchallenged by those blacks who bore the brunt of the attacks.²⁰²

Although Natchez district blacks confronted a changing world of slavery that required different survival tactics at different times, one fact of black life generally prevailed: no slaves in Natchez enjoyed any procedural rights to justice or to the redress of abuses against them. Although blacks were indeed protected by law as persons — i.e., whites could be tried and punished for murdering slaves or needlessly abusing them, no black could initiate the appropriate process of justice on their own. The security of Natchez blacks as persons was dependent on white intervention in their behalf.²⁰³

In view of their legal non-existence, what then was it like to have been a black person in antebellum Natchez? How did they cope? One of the best sources available for insight here is the personal journal of a free black man living in Natchez in the 1830s and 1840s. The black (slave-owning) barber, William Johnson, left a diary wherein he recorded the minutiae of his life for some fifteen years. Included among his notes are numerous, unguarded references to his black associates, employees, and slaves. What follows is an extraction — for a ten year period — of nearly all those entries that relate to the pace and character of black life in Natchez. Only those references to blacks are noted, gleaned from the thousands of words the barber wrote. The result is a virtual — although lengthy — panorama: a vivid and fast-moving picture of the world wherein blacks were forced to live.²⁰⁴

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202. The above analysis is largely tentative in presentation because it rests upon the attempt to explain why no mulatto class emerged in Natchez comparable to those in New Orleans and other slave societies in the New World. What is certain is that it made no real difference whether one was a mulatto or a totally black slave or free person in Natchez. For conceptual perspective on this question see John W. Blassingame, *Black New Orleans: 1860-1880* (Chicago, Ill., 1973), pp. 1-21; John B. Boles, *Black Southerners, 1619-1869* (Lexington, Ky., 1984), pp. 140-182; Willie Lee Rose, *Slavery and Freedom (New York, N.Y., 1982)*, pp. 150-163.

203. The best summation of black legal rights in Mississippi is in Charles S. Sydnor, *Slavery in Mississippi* (Baton Rouge, La., 1933-1966), pp. 82-85. Sydnor notes that Mississippi slaves were subject to three kinds of judicial proceedings in cases where they were alleged to have committed crimes. In crimes of petit or grand larceny, slaves would receive a maximum of thirty-nine lashes "well laid on." Capital felonies were punishable by death. Less than capital felonies were punished by brandings and other corporal punishments that could include whippings or labor on chain gangs. For scholarship on the legal position of blacks in the antebellum era see Donald G. Nieman, *Promises to Keep: African-Americans and the Constitutional Order, 1776 to the Present* (New York, N.Y., 1991), pp. 1-49.

204. William Ransom Hogan and Edwin Adams Davis, (ed.), *William Johnson's Natchez: The Ante-Bellum Diary Of A Free Negro 2 Vols.* (Baton Rouge, La., 1951). The above extractions have been included partly to give the reader a sense of the pace of life for Johnson's slaves as well as to indicate an example of how the diary can be used as a source of insight unrelated to Johnson himself.

- October 23. William & John Stayed Out untill after ten Oclock. I Beat them Both with my stick when they Came home. They were both down at Mr. Parkers Kitchen.
- November 1. Finds William at Mr. Parkers Kitchen with his Girls. Struck him with the whip 1st and then with the stick. He ran home and I followed him there and whiped him well for it having often told him about going Down there — .
- November 15. I met Col Throckmorton with 20 Darkeys. I Expect he bought them — yes he bot them of Collier.
- November 26. I herd by a Gentleman that . . . [the] man Hunter that was put in [Woodvill jail] for stealing a Negro from Dr. Carmicle was taken out of Jail by 5 or 6 persons and was shot 3 times and then hung on a tree
- December 16. Mr. Lilliard has his Boys sold at Auction. They were sold very high — Old Mr. Brustee offers a Little Yellow Boy at Auction. Tryed to get \$650.00 for him But he could not. He was not sold.
- December 24. I wrote a pass for John & William to the Theatre and for Lewis and Steven for the Circus.
- December 25. I worked until 11 Oclock and made \$7.371/2, then gave the Boys all they could make until night. John & William made \$8.50.
- December 25. One of Mr. Bells Boys was shot with a musket Ball threw the Left shoulder by Floyd the Black smith. He was ordered to stop and he would not stop so Floyd and Mr. Carpenter both shot at him. Carpenter had his gun Loadened with Buck shot.
- December 27. William & John & Bill Nix staid out until 1/2 10 O'clock at night. When they came they knocked so Loud at the Door and made so much noise that I came out with my stick and pounded both of the Williams and J. John ran Out of the Yard and was caught by the Padroll, Mr. McConnell and Reynolds. I made Mr. McConnell give him 12 or 15 Lashes with his Jacket off — .

- January 8. Old Sterns Catches Dick stealing money from the draw[er] — Dick ranaway carrying with him the Days work \$5 and what he himself had, making in all about \$10. — Steven went Out — The patroll caught him and whiped him and I whiped him myself in the morning afterward.
- January 11. Mrs Dunns Servants taken up by the Padroll. A white man take up that Left there the same Evening — Mr Stantons Cotten Yard was set on fire or there was an attempt to set it on fire, in the Noon Day time by some Dareing Ras(c)al or other — Mr Wells Stable was found with fire in some part of it in the daytime also — I went out about 9 Oclock at night and Garded my yard untill 12 Oclock — The padroll took up 12 or 15 persons about the streets.
- January 14. The Gard took Nancy Latimore and Cut her all over her Back, whiped her very much. She went through the Market the next morning with her clothes hanging all off at Each Shoulder. Her back was very much whipped. It was though Dr. Lattimore make her walk in the Streets that way.
- January 15. The Black Boy Jeff Belonging to the Miss Joys that Killed Collins the Overseer for Mrs Minors Plantation was Hung.
- January 27. Last night Walker Came Home Drunk and sliped off again. I then went under the Hill to Look for him — I intended to mall him well but I could not find him and to night he Came home the same way — I did not strike him but came very near it.
- January 29. Last night Hester told Mrs B and myself that _____ widow was in the Family way by her Overseer, _____, who was married one of the Miss _____ She stated that Mrs _____ was a going to Kentucky before Long To have the Child I presume. She said that one of Mrs _____ girls told her [mother] how Bad it Looked because her Overseer was a married man — She answerd — What if he was! She did not care for he was only married to a Negro.
- February 11. A Mr Smith from Lake Washington was robbed of \$25.00 at Mr. Bells by one of his servants — they whiped 2 of them — they got \$150 of the money.
- March 3. Col Bingaman Sold His Boy Milton to Col Os Clabourne for Fifteen Hundred and Fifty Dollars. He gave his note

payable in 60 Days for the \$1500 and he gave me the \$50 for Learning the Boy to shave.

- March 12. Mc and myself went to see the Benefit of Mr. Rice. He had a very good House. I made up my mind not to go up there any more untill there was some Regulations made up stairs.
- April 22. The Fencibles [a local militia group] Came by quantites to get shave and Bathed. I made an agreement with Mr. Thatcher to give him fourteen Baths for his Bathing tub. Fifteen or sixteen Volunteers from Vicksburgh Bathed here to day.
- May 19. The Volunteers from Madison County Left here for Texas. To Day it was that I Found Old Pagg. in possession of a Black man belonging [to] Mr. Barber. The Boys name was Patrick, I Brought him Out of his yard with the Saddle, Bridle, Martingale and all on the Horse. I got on him and rode home on him, After having showed the Horse to his master he promised me that he would pay any Damage that I seen proper to Charge him for the Horse.
- May 20. Mr. Barber sells the Black man Patrick that stoled my Horse, he Sold him on that account alone.
- June 1. I Bot Moses from a man by the name of William Good, at Least I Bot him at auction under the Hammer for four Hundred Dollars cash.
- June 8. Steven, Belonging to Mr Nickols came to me and asked my permission to Let him have Sarah, which I agreed to if he would always behave himself properly in my yard.
- July 5. Little William Winston came to stay with me to Lern the Barbers trade.
- August 8. To day it was that Dr. Potts was whiping a Black man and St. Clair walked up and took him by the Collar and Choked him and Slung him around and then Told him to get on his Horse and Clear Out, which he did do very soon.
- August 29. To Day a Boy belonging to Mr S. Davis was hung on the other side of the River. His name was Nim Rod — He was Hung for Killing the overseer by the name of Levels I believe.
- October 4. The Camp Meeting Broke up this morning — Jos Snider & Earl Clapp Brings Steven Down from the Camp Ground — . . . Earl Clapp has Steven stretched Out

whipping Him for Runing away. He gave him a genteel whipping for me.

- October 13. I Sent Steven Out to Col Bingamans to work in the Cotton Field.
- November 24. Bill, Mc and myself went to the Swamp on a hunt. . . and the Little Rascally Bill Lost all my Birds after we got to town, and the way I whiped him was the Right way.
- November 29. Col. Bingaman Sent Steven in town to me to day and instead of Coming in he went under the Hill and got Drunk I Supose; I found him on a Dray and I sent Dr. Hogg to see what was the mater with him and the Dr. pronounced him Drunk at first site.
- December 6. Charles and Bill Nix goes to the Circus to night, and they dont go any more to Browns Circus this Season, nor French Dont go this week.

1837

- January 11. I hyred Lewis to day to Mr Thom Jones to work with his cart and Horse at Esdras to Take Out Dirt at \$3 per day.
- January 27. This morning a Big Negro Belonging to the Miss Evanss undertook to take away a Horse & Cart from Milford Cary for a Debt Due to Mrs Overraker.
- March 6. Col. Clabourne has 40 of his Slaves put up to be Sold at auction, Report says they are sold for debt.
- Lawyer Baker has old Armstead [a free black named Armstead Carter] in Jail and gave him to day One Hundred & Fifty Lashes. He seys that he stoled four Hundred Dollars from him.
- March 21. Mr. Thom Evans Came up to my shop to tell French William that he must not Let him find Him coming about his primices again. French had bee peeping through his fence at one of His Girls on Sunday Last. Big Madison West [a free black] & a Black Fellow by the name of Lewis Wyley (free black) gave a party at Robt Liepers [free black]. French was invited and I would not Let him Go.
- April 10. I hyred Lucinda to Mr Spielman to day for five Dollars per month.

- May 2. Auction to Day at Mesrs Soria & C. It was mar[s]hal Sale of thirteen Slaves belonging to Mr. Whitney. They were Sold for a \$9000 Debt of Mr. C. Dart in which Mr. C. Dart got Mr Whitney to indorse for and that is the way in which he was Brought to this Situation. They Sold Cheap.
- May 21. I went Out to St. Catherine to fish this Evening and took Charles and Bill Nix with me and was to have met Mc on the Banks of the Creek but did not see [him].
- May 25. I arose very Early in the morning and took Bill Nix and Bill Winston and mounted Our horses and crossed the River and went a Fishing in the Concordia and Cocodria Lake — Mc, J. Lacrose and G. Butler went along at the Same time and when we got Over to the Lake we found Messrs Levi Harrison, Pond, Rufner, Cambell, Stevenson, Noyes and Some Darkeys and after a short time young Bell and H. Austin Came Down. Young Bell got Drunk and Lye down and went to sleep and Caught no fish of course tho all the persons that were over there caught a Greate many. . . . I Left Mc at the Lake a fishing. We Reached town quite Early in the Evening. . . . Mc and Mr. Rufner, Harrison and a good many more Left Late in the evening and did not Get home until Oclock. They treed a Coon on they way home. Mc took an active part in killing the Coon.
- May 27. Charles started Home this morning Early. He Wrote on my little mare.
- June 12. A Fight took place this morning between Mr. George Lancaster and Big Frank Little in the Market House, Frank Little it appears whiped Mary Lattimore [a slave owned by Dr. David Lattimore] as she terms herself, for being at the Bench Drinking Coffee. She was Left in charge of Mr. Lancaster and as soon as he herd that F Little had whiped her he went into market and commenced On F. Little as hard as he could with his fist. They had a pretty sharp fight but was at Last Seperated by the bystanders.
- June 29. I Caught old Mary to night with a Basket with 7 or 8 unbaked Biscuit — I have reason to believe that she got them at the City Hotel, and the way I cursed her was the right way and if Ever I can hear of her doing the Like again I will whip her until I make her faint.
- June 30. This morning M[other] Commenced as usual to quarrell with Everything and Every body, Knowing perfectly well what it Grew Out of, I thought I would take the quickest way to stop it, and I accordingly took a whip and gave her a few Cuts; As soon as that was done M. commenced

to quarrell and abuse me Saying that I done it to oblige Sarah and advancing on me at the same time Dareing me to strike, which I would not do for anything in the world. I shoved her back from me three times.

July 23.

I herd to day that my Negro man Walker had ran away on Bourd of Some Steam Bo[at] that Left here on Friday Evening, 21st inst.

July 24.

I was writing and Flying around Busy as you please in sea[r]ch of Waker, that ranaway from me. Sent a letter by Mr. Birk to be handed to the Sherrif of Louisville with a Discription of the thief and the Negro — and I also sent an advertizement to the office of the Courier to {be} published in the daily one week and to be published in the weekly until forbid.

August 5.

To day I had ocasion to go to the stable and whilst I was there I Discovered something Shaking the Loft and I staped to the troft and Loked up and there I found Little _____ with a Muscovia Duck in the act of _____. He was freightened very much _____ I took him and gave him a Genteel whipping and I intend to whip him again about it.

September 28.

Mr F. Taylor takes ten of Mr. Bells Boys for a Debt Due to Robins & Painter.

December 6.

To day Mr. F. Taylor Told me that there was to be a tryal on Saturday next at the Court House and the Question was to be this — That himself and Dr Guinn and Mr McAlister had signed a paper in behalf of Robert Smiths having a right to stay in Natchez and he said if the people of Natchez would not Let Smith stay here that he intended to prosecute the Ballance and that none should remain in the place — He also said that he believed Robt. Smith to be an Honest and as correct a Coloured Man as there was in Natchez — I then told him that I knew R. Smith better than he did and I knew that at this present time he was run off from New Orleans for Buying Goods from a Slave Negro and that when he came off he Left five hundred Dollars in Mr. Johnsons hand to pay his Bale for Johnson went his Bale — He confessed that he had heard some thing of it and I told him that he was wrong I thought in trying to make others suffer because he Could not gain his point.

December 10.

Young Winn was up this morning — Took Breakfast with us — He brought me a fine mess of fish from the swamp. . . . Winn [a free black] is a poor young man that [could] have been much above his present Circumstances if he had only Justice done him.

December 26. To day a man came in and wanted to [see] me, He inquired if I had lost a Negro man, and I told him I had. He wanted to Know how much I would give for the apprehension of him and told him fifty Dollars and all Expenses paid.

December 27. A Mr _____ and myself is about making a trade for my man Walker. He wanted me to give him three Hundred Dollars for the Delivery of Walker to me, Or that I would take three Hundred Dollars for him Just as he stood, We did not Close the trade, he said he would see me again.

1838

January 1. To night I Let all the Boys go to the theatre or Circus.

March 2. To day Robt. Smith from New Orleans came to me and wanted me to take a Boy that Has in New Orleans which is the son of J _____ S _____. He wanted me to take the Boy and Keep Him as Long as they were in this place which he supposed they would be Here about three Years. He said the Boy was not treated wright by Mr. S. _____ and for that Reason he wanted him away from thare. I agreed to take him on the above terms and He promised to write for him.

To day I had to Curse Mr. Brasiers Boy Norman about Throwing at my Chickens in his yard and for Sundry other offences — I had the promise from his master that if he misbehaves again that he would Correct him sevierly.

March 8. Mr. Braziers Boy Norman was caught up in a tree I understand stealing of Chickens Last night. They took him to Jail and Kept him there untill Late to day and whiped him and then turned him Out.

March 19. Steven got drunk Last night and went off] and remained all night and was not Here this morning to go to Market. I sent Bill Nix to the Jail to see if He was there and He was not there. I then sent Him out to Dr. Ogdons and in going there He found Him and brouhgt Him Down and Left Him in the gate and he Jumped over the Fence and went threw in Judge Montgomerys yard. Bill He ran around the Corner and found him and brought Him in. I kept him [in] the shop a little and then sent him to Help Mrs Lieper to move from the Old House Down to the House belonging to Bill Hazard. He ran off 4 times in about 3 hours and Bill Nix Caught Him Every Time, so He Brought Him Home after a while and I went to the stable and gave him a pretty

sevreere thrashing with the Cow hide — then he was perfectly Calm and Quite and could then do his work. Tis singular how much good it does som people to get whiped.

March 22.

I wrote the following Lines and gave them to Mr. Umphrys [:] Ranaway from the subscriber in Natchez on the 21st July 1837, a negro man by the name of Walker. He is about forty years of age — very Black Compection, smiles when spoken to and shows his teeth which are very sound and white tho he chews tobacco to Excess — Walker is about six feet High, raw Boned and muscular. He was brouhgt to this Country by Mr. Merrett Williams and Granville Smith and was sold by them to Dr. Duncan & Preston and was by them returned to Williams and Smith and was sold at Sorias Auction Room where I purchased him as an unsound Slave — Mr. John Clay of Bourbon County Ky. now owns a wife of Walkers and I presume he is now in that neighbourhood. He has a full head of hair and a heavy Beard, tho no grey hairs in his head that I know of I think that he is inclined to stoop or Lean to one side when walking. His feet is pretty Large — He I am told professes to belong to the Baptiste Church. I know of no marks on his person — If he is taken up to Ky I will Give a reward of two hundred Dollars when [he] is delivered to me in Natchez or if he is in Ohio I will Give three hundred Dollars for his safe Delivery to me in Natchez or I will Take three Hundred Dollars for the Chance of him. William Johnson.

March 27.

Steven ran off Last night and God Only Knows where he has gone to, for I dont, tho if I should have the Good Luck to Get Him again I will be very apt to Hurt his feelings — This is the second time he has ranaway in a week.

March 31.

I got on my Horse Early this morning and wrode Out to Washington in search of Steven but Could not find Him at all. I also went Out again in the afternoon to Becon Landing but could not hear of Him. During the time that I was in sea[e]ch of him He sent me word that if I would Only let him off without whiping him that he would never runaway again Durring His Life.

April 5.

I to day Saw a Man up at the auction Room and he wanted to buy my Girl Sarah. I told him he could have her for twelve Hundred Dollars in cash. I intend to see about it To morrow and if I can find out about him I will do something.

April 7.

I felt a degree of Suspicion about a man that I thought from his General apearance, would if he Could, do me a

- Damage, that is, I thought He wanted to steal my Girl Sarah.
- May 18. My Girl Lucinda Came Home two or three days ago from Mr. Stocktons.
- May 30. Mcs little Bill Button is now ranaway from Mc and he Sent Dick after him this morning and Dick ranaway himself and I caught him this night and Took him home to Mc.
- June 1. I went to the Methodist Church and Listened on the Out Side of it at Mr. Maffitt Preaching — He is a splinded speaker, The best I Ever herd in all my Life.
- August 24. To day 4 or 5 Darkeys was taken up for Gambling.
- September 17. I and the Boys Commenced to Dig Out the shoe makers yard and to make it Level, . . .
- November 4. When I Came home I found out that Charles and Bill Nix had Joined the Methodist Church and Sarah also.
- November 16. This morning quite Early I Came Down in my shop and found that the Boys had Just been smoking some of my Cegars which they Denied. I Listened a while and was satisfied that they had stolen them. I then Boxes Bills Jaws and Kicked his Back Side and I slaped Charles along side of the Head several times.

1839

- February 4. I Gave Winston a very Seviere Flogging to Day for impudence and other Small offences that He committed.
- February 5. I gave Winston & John to Day a comple[t]e Flogging this morning for Going home Last night without my Leave and for other small offences.
- February 12. I whiped Winston to Day again on account of his going Home to tell his Mother Lyes, &c.
- February 21. Mr Robt. Smigh Brought me His Little Boy to Day To See how I Liked Him To make a Barber Out of Him.
- June 18. I find by being absent for a few minutes that as I returned Bill and Charles had a Black Girl at the Shop Door. Oh how they were Shaking Hands and Cutting up in Greate Friendship — Oh what Pupys. Fondling — beneath a Levell, Low minded Creatures. I Look on them as Soft.

- June 19. Coming from Supper to night I [saw] Bill & Charles with a Big Nig Standing at the front Door as is usual when I am away — Oh what low minded wretches.
- June 27. The Boys Commenced to Day for to Level or move the Brick in the new yard that is to be.
- June 28. The Boys was a part of the Day in puting up a fence in the yard.
- July 13. Bill Nixs is up to this Day a pure Negro at Heart and in action, &c.
- August 19. Mr. Thomas Evans wal[k]ed over to Esqr. Robertiles office to Day and made othe to Willingtons [Wellington West] being a free Born Boy &c.

Natchez 16, 1839

To all who it may Concern. I do hereby Certify the Bearer of a Mullato Boy named Wellington West is a free Boy Born Free in Natchez in the year One thousand Eight hundred and Seventeen — his Mother was a woman of Black Complection named Judy West — was free and Lived in natchez many years before her Death.
William Parker

I with pleasure concur in the above Certificate
Noah Barlow

also do I
J. G. Taylor

State Miss Adams County Personally appeared before me the undersigned Justice of the Peace in and for the County of Thomas L Evans & made Oath that [he] has Known the Bearer of this instrument of writing & certificat for many years back. Since then I have always Known him to be a free man of Couler and was born here in the City of natchez and Born a free man to the Best of my belief and his name is Wellington West.
August 19, 1839 Thos. L. Evans

1840

- February 27. John ran away this morning and went under the Hill and cut several Shines for which I Gave him a Good Whiping to night together with some advice.
- May 2. I moved my man Phil and his wife Silvia up to my dwelling House the other day — I Bot them the day before yesterday from Col Waymouth of Main Street.

- May 18. There was a man Sold a negro yesterday at Auction and stole him again Last night, and a negro girl from Capt Barlow. The name of the Girl was Mary.
- May 24. I wrote some passes Last night, One for Phillip, 1 for Sarah [and] One [for] Lucinda to Go Out to Brackets to a Preaching and neither of them Came Home at all Last Night.
- May 25. I was Out of Humor this morning the first thing and by way of Commencing Business I whipped Lucinda, Sarah, and Steven On account of the Bracket meeting.
- June 1. James O'Farrell came up this morning from New Orleans and reports that Himself and some of the Guards arrested the man that Stole Mr. Barlows Black Girl Mary and that He was safe in the Jail in New Orleans.
- July 18. Steven ran off Last night and was Brought Home by Mr. Hendesee after Breakfast this morning and Beg Him off from a good whiping.
- July 24. I had a settlement with Sterns [Washington Sterns, free black barber] to night and told him I could not afford to Keep him any Longer and that his maner of doing business would never do. To be Drunk 1/2 of his time would never Suit me nor my Customers and I paid him twenty Dollars in good money and then He said that he work for his vituals, that he did not care for the wages.
- July 27. Mr Barlow gave Sterns a regular Flogging and so did one of [the] Negro men and the old Fellow wran over the Bluff — A. Lieper Hauled him home.
- August 10. Steven got Drunk to day and walked off[f] and I, after he had been Brot Home, hand Cuffed him and Floged Him. In the first place I knocked him Down at the Building — he then ran away, but was soon Brought Back again and when he came back he was so drunk that he Could not walk, talk or do any [thing] Else — I gave him Late in the afternoon a tolerable severe whiping and Left him, so the First thing I know the Rascal had ranaway.
- September 3. And Steven Got Drunk to Day also and walked off, tho Charles found him and Brought him Home and I have him now in Chains awaiting for better times.
- September 4. I Gave Steven a tall Flogging this morning and turned him Loose to work again.

October 3. I agreed to Let Bill Nix go up with Col Bingaman and the rest of the Whig Delegates from this place to Jackson.

To Night two strangers come in my Shop to get theare Hair Cut and after it was Done C looked at a Breast pin and they asked him what [he] thought it was worth, He said about \$50. The owner Said yes, a hundred of them, and remarked that C. put his hand to his Bosom when he got up, After which he Said that he never saw the pin any moore and after a Long and Tyresome search for it. He as good as said it was taken Out of his Bosom. C. deserves to be accused of it for puting his hand to the Mans Breast and B [Bill] for Leaving the Room when the search was agoing on. I am well Satisfied that it was not in the Room on the Floor to Night.

October 4. I walked Down to the Shop Early this moring and Enquired of Charles if he had found the mans Breast pin yet and he told me that he had not seen it and I Looked on the floor as I stood in front of my desk and thare Layed the Pin under my writing Desk on the Flour where it had Evidently been place by Some One — It was a plain Case as Ever Came under my observation. It Leaves me to think much, very much — Oh that Butter will run, will run so.

October 8. Bill and Charles went out to Camp meeting this morning, One on my Sorril Horse and the other on my Grey Horse. I very soon after wrote a Couple of passes, one for Phillip and the [other] for Stephen and Let them Go untill to morrow morning Early.

October 29. Steven ranaway soon this morning. He got Drunk and then put off.

October 30. I had Steven put in the Chain Gang to day after dinner — McCary found him on the top of wagon and took him off and sent me word.

1841

January 2. Mr McDania, Chain Gang man, ranaway from Natchez and took all of His Force.

January 8. Bill and Charles and Wellington all goes out to a Party Given by a servant of the Missis Evans out at there Residence — Butter, Butter will run in suitable wether.

February 7. I herd to day that John and Winston was up about the Lake a Hunting and I took my Horse in the afternoon and wrode up thare and Caught Both of them and gave

them Both a Flogging and took away there Guns — I threw away Winstons as far as I could in the Mississippi.

- February 22. I saw a number of negroes belonging to Capt Coton for sale at the Court House. . . .
- March 2. Steven got drunk this morning and ranaway — Bill found Him out in the Body of a Cart under the Brick shed and Brought Him Home.
- March 6. I met with several Disapointments during the day — In the First place when I got up this morning I found that Steven had not fed the Horses nor gone to work — After Breakfast I found Him in the Guard House. Had been taken up during the night drunk and put in thare — I had him Flogged and then turned Him Out and sent Him down to work.
- April 2. To Day the young man Phelps Came and wanted me to pay Him for catching Steven. I Gave Eight Pieces of Paper for it, Such as I sell for 5 Bits a Roll, which is Just five Dollars that the Infernal Rascal has Cost me precisely — not to Include His days work.
- April 4. I kept the Boys Home to day untill Dinner time at their Books.
- April 5. I, Bill & Charles were all down at the Animal Show and John was runaway at the same time.
- April 7. Charles & Winston & John all Looking for my Cow this Evening and could not find Her at all.
- April 29. A Man belonging to the Harman Estate was murdered Last Night in the Road. The Murderers tryed to Burn up the Corpse after they Had murdered Him.
- May 1. I took a Boy by the name of Edmond from Mr. N. Hoggatt to day to Lern the trade of Haircutting & shaving &c.
- May 4. To Day I went up to McCarys Shop and told Him that I had two Little Boys and was requested by Mr. Hogatt to get situations for them to Learn a trade of some Kind — He wanted one of them and I Gave Him Choice of the two, Jefferson and William. He Liked the Look of Wm Best tho Wm told Him that He wanted to Live with me so Mc then said He would take the other — Accordingly I sent jeff up to Him this Evening.
- May 12. This morning Shortly After Breakfast time The Boy William ran off and Took with Him Jeff, His Brother,

that I had put with McCary. They both went Out Home. They are Boys that were put with me by Mr. N. Hogatt. William was the Cause in Toto — From what I have seen of Him I am Inclined to think that He is a Boy of no kind of Energy.

May 14. I am Nervous to Day And will have some fighting to do before night I do Expect, Tho I hope not, Cincerely do I, and I will try to Keep Cool.

Very Sincular that Steven ranaway to day And the two Boys that ranaway the other day should have returned at the same time. Jus as One ranaway two Came back.

I wrode out this afternoon to the Forks of the Road to try and swop Stepen off for Some One Else, But could find no one that I would Like.

May 16. John has a Pistol Taken from Him to day and Caps. He was making Preperation to Hunt, After being foiled in his opperations He got on Bourd of Steamer Constelation and went to New Orleans — Steven is runaway too at the present time.

June 6. Pheebe, the mother of William & Jeff, Children of Mr. Wilford Hogatt, Came in together with Emeline & Misouri and Little January Hogat — they remained until after Dinner and then Left Leaving Misouri and January to stay in town — The Boy is to stay with the girl as Company for Her, for a few days. Tis a good Idea. But from the appearance of the Little Girl I am inclined to think she is stubborn and of Strong passions and not Easily managed — I am pretty shure that is the Case with her.

June 7. To Day the Capital offence Came off before the Court., i.e., the tryal of Isum for the murder of Mr. Wilford Hogatt — He was found Guilty (Later overturned by a state Appeals Court).

June 8. To Day the Trial of Mr. John Barland (free black) Comes on for the Murder of Fitzjeral and he will get clear of it as Easy as possible.

July 5. The Little Black fellow Shedrac Murdered the Cook Ned at the Mansion House to day in a fight — it was supposed to be an old Grudge.

July 6. . . . the Boy Shedrac . . . was tryed before Justice Robetile, Mr. Vannerson in the behalf of the Prisner and no one in behalf of the State He was cleared of Course.

- July 14. Charles made a run to night that was no way slow, the City Guard was after him.
- July 19. The Little Boy Gim of Mr. Hoggatts that I had, wran away this morning and went Out Home And I Sent Out William Winst and Edmond after him tho they did not find him. Edmond then Kept On Out Home and has not returned yet and it is now night.
- July 20. Edmond Came home from Mr Hoggatts to day and did not bring Gim with him.
- July 24. Large Comp of Our Citizens went out to day in the Bayous in search of Runaway Negroes. Capt Ruffner & Mr. McAlister, Mr Joseph Mensho and a number of Our Respectable Citizens was out — Mr R. finds a fire Burning in the woods — Jo Mesho finds a Bucket of meat in a tree where the Runaways has been tho there was no Negroes Caught that has been Known.
- August 18. The Horrows of the Inquisition is going On still in this City, It Seems that Dr. Merrell and the Jg [Judge] has a tryal this Evening I have not herd any thing moore about it. The report of Harriet Cullen or Harriet Johnson (free mulatto) being in Jail is not true, She was not put in Jail, Glad of it.
- August 20. Steven is drunk to day or this Evening and gone on the town somewhere.
- Yesterday Ann Perkins that was Committed to Jail some 3 days ago was tryed under Habeas Copus — She proved that She was of Indian Decent and Came off] Clear — Mr T. Armatt was her Council — Saunders & Thatcher V. S. Her — She was put in by a _____ by the name of Sandy Parsons — His witness [was] Peter Lardence — Big Berry Duncan was cleared at the same time and Ordered to Leave the state in thirty Days. Fullman was also tryed at the same time and the result was the same as in the case of Berry Duncan. To day Big Francis and her Daughter was tryed I believe and was put in jail for further notice, &c.
- August 21. The meetings are Still Going on in the Inquisitions Court, The Lord Only Knows the result, Phill Came up from the Swamp this Evening. Seys they are well. The Following Gentlemen Signed William's Petition To Day — Co. A. L. Bingaman, Mr. Duffield, Col. Wilkins, Capt. Nevitt, I confess there is Something about this Law that I do not understand, Report Seys that a Bond is required after the Lycences is obtained. I cannot understand the mater fully.

August 22.

To day I wrode down into the swamp and took Steven with me and Left him at Mr. Gregorys to work at the rates of 20 dollars per month — He had Just been Brot in from Mr. Minors Quarter and I had to pay 4 dollars for taking him up.

August 24.

Lotts of F. P. C. are running around Town with Petitions to have the Priveledge of remaining in the state, tis Laug[h]lable almost, Willington [West] was out into the Country this Evening to have his Petition signed and He got the following Gentlemen on his Paper — Dr. Steven Duncan & Col A L Bingaman, Dr Calhoun, Col. Wilkins, Mr. R. C. Evans, Mr J Routh, Mr S. D. Elliotte — Those names are Enough to make any Common man Proud. — Those Names are an Ornament to Any Paper — Those are Gentlemen of the 1st Order of Talents and Standing.

September 12.

I understood this morning Early that Steven was in town and I knew if he was in town that he must have runaway from Mr. Gregory where I had hired [him] to haul wood in the swamp. It was after Breakfast and I got on my Horse and wrode up the street and I found him in the Back Sr. near P. Bakers — Gave him a tap or two with my wriding whip and then Brot him to my shop and in a few minutes after I got to the shop Mr verson Came to inform me that Steven had took a watch from one of his men and that he had been seen to have it and that he had take it yesterday as he passed there. I Commenced a Search on his person and I found it in his Coat Pocket. I gave it to Mr. Vernon and was Glad that he Came So Soon for it. I then made him get on a horse and go on down to Mr. Vernons place and there I made his Driver Give him a good Flogging with his Big Whip. I then took him down as far as Mr. Fords Land and Left him with Mr. Gregory and he took him down and Set him to work.

Justices offce were full all day. They were trying a boy [of] Mr Fields. The Boy was sentenced to be whiped but was not. His master {entered} an apeal I herd.

September 29.

Two runaways, the One belonging to Mr. Sevier, the other belonging to Mr. Samuel Davis Esqr — They were found in the House of Mr Garnet Howell, Esqr. Said to have been Kept thare by his boy in the absence of Mr. Howell and Family.

September 30.

The officers went in search of Mr G. Howells Boy to day, to have him up about his having those runaways in his House, but they Could not find Him. Mr Earnest is the agent of Mr Howell, and was very Angry at the Proceedings of those Gentlemen who arrested the Boys.

- October 5. I gave the Boys Several Lessons to day in reading and writing in there Room.
- Charles Went to the Circus to night. He was perswaded to go by Bill Nix — Wellington went also — I Gave all three of them a pass to go.
- October 16. Steven ranaway this morning from fear of being Sold — Gregory Came up from the swamp to day and paid me twenty Dollar wages for Steven — Phill Came up from the Swamp to Day Sick.
- October 24. Steven was taken this morning by Bill Nix and Brot Home — When taken he had a hot loaf of Bread under his arm — Tomorrow is a week Since that He would have been Out — no 5 days.
- November 8. I Gave Lucinday a Good Floging this Evening for her Conduct on yesterday. She asked Leave to go to Church yesterday and in place of going to Church a[nd] rema[i]ning she went off in some private Room, the Little Strumpet.
- November 23. Steven ranaway this morning from Mr. Raby — Mr Rose Brought Steven to me this Evening Quite Drunk. I Took him Home and gave him about a Hundred then Let Him Go for Reasons.
- November 27. Col Bingaman and Mr Elliotte and Several others Left for New Orleans this Evening Taking allong Bill Nix as Body Servant.
- December 15. Gave my Little William a very seviere whipping to day up at the Shop for his bad Conduct, Throwing Brick and so forth, and sent Him Down Home — oh I gave him what I thought was right.

1842

- January 5. I saw Little Winn to day and he Had Mosbeys negro man up with him to Sell him to rais money to pay Mr. Withers.
- January 13. I was up at Mr Soria Auction Room and there they were selling a woman belonging to Mosbey and I at the request of Winn bid her in at 296 Dolls and I told him that if she suited my Family that I would Keep her and if not I would try and sell her for him.
- April 16. Steven was Home twice to day and wranaway again. He was Drunk but will be Caught when he Dont think about it.

July 9. I Spoke to A. L. Wilson the other day to procure me a passage on the Steam Boat, Maid of Arkensaw, which he promised to do and to day when the Boat Came I went down to see about it and I saw him and He told me that he had spoke to the Capt. and that he had Refused to let a State Room, But that my wife Could have the whole of the Ladies Cabbins to Herself but it was a Rule on his Boat not to Let any Col persons have State Rooms on Her — I askd him to go with me on Bourd — He went on Board and showed me the Capt. and I asked him if could not spare a State Room and he told me that He Could not spare one that it was against the Rules of His Boat and that he had said it once and that was Enough and that he was a man of his word and Spoke of Prejudice of the Southern people, it was damd Foolish, etc, and that he was doing a Business for other people and was Compelld to adopt thos Rules.

1843

January 26. Steven ran away this morning after geting drunk. I will astonish him some of these days if he is not Carefu..

January 27. Steven was in jail this mornig and I went and took him Out and Floged Him not a Little. He was taken up by a Duchman who had him before Esqr. Rivers and tried to make it appear that he had Stollen some things from Dr. Oghdens, but Steven got up and Cleared his own self before the Jury in a minute.

February 21. I bot a Little Boy by the name of Anderson from Mr. Thornton who signed his name as Agent for a Mr. Covington.

April 10. Bank Bill and Willis had there trial to day, was both Sentenced to receive thirty nine Lashes on ther bear Backs which was done.

August 7. Henry Adams and wife was sold to day at the Court House. They brot 1600 dollars I am told. 6 months Credit — Bot for old Mrs Brabston, I am told.

August 14. Steven ranaway yesterday and was brot Home to day by Bill Nix. I gave him a flogging and let him go.

August 15. Flavius Fletcher Killed Iccum belonging to Mrs McCray Last night. He was shot at Mr Amatt plantation, F has got out of the way — made himself Scarce.

August 23. Steven ranaway Monday and has not Come Home yet.

August 24. I came very near Cetching Steven to night. he was in the

Stable ajoin[in]g mine but he Jumped out and ran into the weeds somewhere.

August 27.

. . . more than one of Mrs Lintons Black men by the name of Rolla beat Mr. Preston this afternoon up at Mrs Lintons Gate. It was Whilst he was in Company with some Ladies. His friend Fouler or Fuller of Some Such name was with [him] and was prevented from assisting Mr Preston by Mrs Lintons Carriage Driver, who would seize him when Ever he attempted to interfear. Considerable fuss about it to night, 8 of the Guards Ordered Out. Greate time indeed — .

Charles was over the River to day a fishing and came home Drunk — Wanted to marry an old Black mans Daughter and told the old man to Refer to Wheelock & Sayers, A. L. Wilson, or Erhart & Foster if he wanted to know about his character.

August 28.

Nothing New but the Out Rage Committed yesterday on the Person of Mr Preston by a Black man belonging to Mrs Linton. The Boy has ran off and is not tobe found at all — there has been a greate deal to say about it.

September 2.

Mr. Collingsworth the overseer of Judge Covington made the Driver take hold of One of his Boys to flog him and the Fellow stabbed the Driver and cut off the arm of Collingsworth and ranaway but has been Caught Since and is in Jail. This was in La.

September 4.

Mr. Knight has his Boy Lenson whiped and he Confessed to have been stealing for some time from him, and he gave the names of Mrs Irvin Frank, Buckanans Grocery, and Whites and Sam Magruder and several others that I have nearly forgote. . . .

September 5.

To day Came off the tryal before Eskr Wood, Mr. Preston VS. Mrs Lintons Servants. Beverly was tried and Sentenced to thirty nine Lashes and the other, Rolla, was Comited to court. This offence was this that the black man Choked and beat Preston for striking or attempting to strike him.

September 24.

Near 11 Oclock to day Phill Came down Main St. Leading Steven who had gone up the street and had go drunk, very drunk. I was Buisy at the time and Could not get out to see him. He managed to Slip away from Phill and got in Mrs Dumax yard, Phill caught him and brot him to the Shop and put him Care for the minutes of Bill Nix who Let him Slip out and he broke a sash in the door or pane of Glass. he then ran off around the Corner and the Boys took after him and I followed but could not See him. They however Caught him Some

where up town and brot him down. When he found that I was not there he cut up Greate Shines, got in a fight with one of the men, and Italian that Lives in a part of my House, Antonio Lynch. He bit the Italians hand a Little. All this was done whilst I was up the street and when I came down they had put him in the Guard House.

Just before we went out [to the country] Winston whiped Mrs Jordans Ann. He pelted her with his fist. She had called him a Lyar the night before.

- September 25. I went to the guard House this morning after Breakfast and took Steven Out, tho not untill the Capt. Hanstable had given him thirty nine Lashes with a whip which the Italian Said he was satisfied. When i took him home the fellow would not agree to have the hand cuffs on after he had Sliped one of his hands out, tho I whip him a Little. No doubt will give more in time to Come. He is now jailed up in my Corn Cribb. I intend to send him to New Orleans Soon.
- October 1. Camp Meeting Commenced To Day, no it was yesterday. William Nick went down to Martin Millers and hyred a Horse, a Cabb or Buggy, and Drove out to Comp meeting taking Dick and Charles with him and they Started from thare Early and Came in Slow. . . .
- November 6. Tis [this] night that Bill acknoledged that he did Stay with a Black woman by the name of Lucinda that Belonged to the Gemmel Estate.
- December 2. Four Overseers on the other Side of the River Took Old Moses out and beat him nearly to death to night. The names of the men were Buck, Keiger, Deputy, and the Fellow that got his arm Cut so at Judge Covington place.
- December 19. Steven is drunk to day and is on the town but I herd of him arond at Mr. Brovert Butlers and I sent around thare and had him brot Home and I have him now up in the garret fast and I will Sell him if I Can get Six Hundred Dollars for him. I was offered 550 to day for him but would not take it. he must go for he will drink.
- December 29. Several Balls about town to night, An Irish ball or two, then there were Darkey Balls.
- December 30. I Expect from what past between Mr Cannon and myself that he will take Steven On Monday if Nothing Happens — And what is the Cause of my parting with him, why it is noting but Liquor, Liquor, His fondness for it. Nothing more, Poor Fellow. There are many worse

fellows than poor Steven is, God Bless Him. Tis his Own fault.

December 31.

To day has been to me a very Sad Day; many tears was in my Eyes to day On acct. of my Selling poor Steven. I went under the hill this Evening to See him off] but the Boat did not Cross over again and Steven got drunk in a few minutes and I took him Home & made him Sleep in the garret and Kept him Safe.

1844

January 1.

I rested bad last night. I had much Care On my mind, the night appeared very Long — I got up this morning Early and took Steven with me down to the Ferry Boat and gave him up to the Overseer of Young & Cannon. Crawford was his name. I gave Steven a pair [of] Suspenders and a pr of Socks and 2 Cigars, Shook hands with him and see [him] go On Bourd for the Last time. I felt hurt but Liquor is the Cause of his troubles; I would not have parted with Him if he had Only have let Liquor alone but he Cannot do it I believe.

January 6.

A trial Came off] before Esqr Woods to day and it was Parkhurst was tryed for Stealing a Darkey belonging to Fields. I herd that the man did belong to Parkhurst and to prevent his Creditors from geting him he gave Him to Wm Purnell and it appears that Purnell Sold the man to Fields and that PKT, thinking that he would get nothing for the man, He gives him a pass and tryes to get Him off] up the River and he was arested in it Some way or other and the Justice Woods required bail in the Sum of One Thousand Dollars, in default of which Parkhurst was Committed to Jail until Court, which is in May some time.

January 9.

William Nix Commences to work Again, got up from New Orleans Last Evening.

January 16.

Winston went Out this morning after Breakfast and after a very Long and tedious ride found my Horse in the dixon Field, He drove them Home.

January 17.

Baylor Winn Brot up the three Servants belonging to Judge Boyd, He told me that he Caught them Down in the Woods Close to the mouth of St. Catherine. He brot them up this morning, Yound Gim Kenney has made his Escape. He was the Cause of their runing away. They were put in Jail.

January 18.

I bought a man by the name of Billy from a Mr. Hanks to day. He was in Company with Mr Miderhoff at the

time. Our agreement was that I was to pay One hundred and Seventy Dollars for Billy in Cash, and thirty Dollars more Mr Miderhoff agreed to take Out in Shaving &c with me.

February 1. Just as I got Opposite the Shop I Saw Bill, Charles, Dick a[nd] Winston all Just walking Out to market to take Coffee, and I called Winston back and went in. Old Wilgus who I permitted to Lay on the Sofa all night was Just Geting up and I found that the Little Table had been moved and that the Boys had been playing Cards all night in my room.

February 29. I was up at the Wemple Store this Evening and I Saw Ellen sold, She was Bot in the name of Bridget, Her mother, and was struck off at 440 Dollars. Mr Emerson made a Long speech in her behalf and Said Some soft things, . . .

Then James was put up and I bid on Him a time or two and then Stoped. I had got a Gentleman to bid for me So that Some individuals would not run him up on me two high, tho they did run him on me to \$790 where he was then Knocked off] to me, through Mr. Canon.

March 4. James Came Home this morning to work, Brot His things down in the forenoon. I Set him to work to clean our the Corn House, . . . which he did with the assistance of Winston.

March 7. Jim and Frank Commenced to day to plough. They ploughed all over the yard.

March 14. I Receved a Letter from Mrs Miller to day and She Spoke of the dark Clerke and requested me never to Send anything more by him again, a Rascal &c.

March 17. To day Mr Walsh Brong the two Little Scoundrels that Broks into my shop under the Hill and stole my Razprs, &c.

May 2. Bill Nix and Henrieta Stut was married this morning Early and Left for Rodney Early this morning on the Steam Boat Concordia.

May 3. It was to day that I herd that Bill Nicks wife that ye he married yesterday had been once given to _____ and he made use of her. This it was Said was done for a House & Lot and afterwards he would not give it ___ So Seys report Current.

June 17. I Sent jack and ?Winston Out to Pick Black Barrys to day and they came back without any, Saying they Could

not find any. I went out and took Frank and Jim and my William and we got two Baskets quite full, Those we got to made a Cordial with. . . .

August 27. To day there was a tryal before Esqr Potter and the Parties were a Mr. Gibson VS. the Daughter of Poor Old Sam Gibson who the world Knows to be fræe, but during the Inquisition She and her mother went Out to Stay with this Gibson and now he puts a Claim to her, by Saying that Sam G. her father belonged to his Father and that he had went Out of the State and was set free and returned to it again. Thus he became the Property of Said Gibson under Some old Law passed so seys Potter in 1807 — Greate God, what a Country, the Suite went in favor of Gibson.

1845

January 8. Jim Ploughed up the Garden to day to Plant Oats in to day.

March 17. Jim was Laying Out the Garden To day, I Took the Children to the Animal Show to night. I paid for the following Children, My William, Richard, Byron, Anna Anderson, Mcs William & Robert, and Elen and Mary Jordan, &c.

July 3. I was down near the Waltern Lake when it [rain] Commenced. Myself & Jack got very wet. We Left Our Guns at Mrs Walterns Place, with Mr. Nickolson the Overseer.

July 5. It was to day that the Deed of Trust Sale took Place and I Bot 13 head of Cattle and 2 Horses and the woman Peggy.

1846

June 24. Old Jones sent his woman up to Cincinnatti & Children too. Nancy Kyle (free black) went also.

June 26. I left town this Evening. Took Jack & Robert & Sam with me. This is to see my Corn and things all put away in good order. . . . Georg Smith is accused of trying to kill a man to day or something — and has wran away.

July 1. I paid Winston Eighty Seven dollars and a Half for seven months wages, and Gave him as a present \$10, i.e., to get him cloathes with it.

July 6. I Flogged Zora this morning for neglect &c.

August 13. Jeff went in the Swamp to day to See how the Corn Crib Comes on. . . .

September 4. I whiped old Anderson this Evening for Striking a Little Boy in the Head with a Brick Bat. I gave him 5 Lashes for it.

September 8. I Stopd at Mr Mosbeys untill Late talking about Land and we did not trade at Least. Some one Stole his skiff while we were talking on the Galery. It was Jacky that Broke Jail I expect.

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Using the Johnson diary as a guide into the black world of Natchez, several points deserve attention. The first has to do with Johnson himself. Although we cannot be absolutely certain, the white community appears to have tolerated Johnson in ways experienced by no other black person in the community. The question, of course, is why? We know from the unexcerpted portions of his diary that Johnson loaned money to whites, hunted with them, bantered and gossiped with his white customers in his shop, and was generally accepted by whites at every level of the social structure. Even when there were efforts to expel free blacks from the state, Johnson observed the "Inquisition" with a certain detachment — as if the matter never really affected him. He only once alludes to his own situation when he noted that one of the local nabob had offered to help him if needed. But there is no mention in the diary about procuring a license or of any efforts made by him to obtain the endorsement of leading white citizens at a time when the law required all free blacks to petition the legislature for permission to remain in the state.²⁰⁵

Perhaps Johnson had simply refused to commit to paper his personal involvement in so trying a circumstance of life. Or perhaps the "Inquisition" never applied to him. Others — including his own free black employees — had to scurry around the countryside begging for the endorsements of prominent whites in support of their petitions to remain in Natchez. If Johnson was forced to do the same, he never mentioned it in his diary. Instead, one has the impression that such endorsements were a foregone conclusion in his case or else that Johnson had not been required to undertake a petition. In either case, the obvious question is Why? What had enabled Johnson to live so above the fray?²⁰⁶

A complete answer awaits further investigation of the Johnson manuscripts and related materials, but some conclusions can be made on the basis of the Johnson diary itself.

205. The appropriate entry is for September 3, 1841: "Maj J. Shields, One of Our noble, Generous and Gentlemanly young men came to me and said if I wanted any assistance or if he could do anything for me to Let him Know. I promised to do so — Such men as he is, is an ornament of Society —" *William Johnson's Natchez*, Vol.I., pp. 344.

206. *Ibid.*, p. 343. August 24, 1841. "Lotts of F.P.C. are running around Town with Petitions to have the Privilege of rama[in]ing in the state, tis Laug[h]able almost, Wellington was out into the Country this Evening to have his Petition signed and he got the following gentlemen on his Paper — Dr. Steven Duncan & Col. A.L. Bingaman, Dr. Calhoun, Col. Wilkins, Mr. R.C. Evans, Mr. J. Routh, Mr. S.D. Elliotte — Those Names are an Ornament to Any Paper — Those are Gentlemen of the 1st Order of Talents and Standing.

Numerous references appear in the diary (in portions unextracted above) to Johnson loaning money to whites in Natchez. This would seem at first glance to partly explain his protected role in the community, until it is realized just how petty were the sums involved. Johnson was not an important provider of funds to the Natchez white community in ways that protected him. Rather, Johnson was a source of momentary fiscal convenience for a few, select whites and blacks simply because he handled cash and could easily accommodate customers and friends with petty sums in a day and age prior to the existence of a national currency or small denominations of exchange. This is not to say that the white community was unappreciative of Johnson's occasional money-lending, but what he did was more in keeping with the standard role played by small-town barbers in general than with any special role that set him apart. Indeed, had Johnson played a more substantial role as a money-lender, it would have placed him in a dangerous position for a black man in that day and age — one subjecting him to the resentment of those indebted to him.

More important in explaining Johnson's protected position was the fact that his barbering service involved him, personally, with white people from all walks of life. Johnson operated uptown shops in which he shaved the faces of visiting patriarchs as well as an Under-the-Hill establishment servicing the rowdiest of clientele. His Main Street shop barbered lawyers, doctors, planters, and the most refined visitors to the town while his Under-the-Hill enterprise (staffed by faithful slave and free black barbers and occasionally by Johnson himself) handled the community's riff-raft and its unwashed population of boatmen, gamblers, and dandies.

In similar vein, and perhaps more importantly, there appear among the entries in Johnson's diary several references to his regular servicing of local militia groups: the Natchez Fencibles, The Natchez Guards, and the Vicksburg Volunteers. Johnson rented meeting rooms to them, barbered and bathed them, attended their parades, and, on at least one occasion, sent his barbers along on troop maneuvers.²⁰⁷ The very rank-and-file of the town's non-patriarchal class, from whom most free blacks had the most to fear, related to Johnson as though he were, in a sense, a personal body servant to them all.²⁰⁸

Johnson had another significant advantage not available to the average free black in Natchez. As the owner of slaves, he shared with the local militia, and all whites in the region, the task of disciplining his own and all other slaves in the community. A careful reading of the diary excerpts leaves little doubt but that Johnson used those local institutions designed to keep all slaves in line to keep his own slaves in line. Johnson showed little hesitation in having the local patrol whip his slaves or in resorting to the town jail and chain gangs when he thought them necessary. Similar to most other slave masters, Johnson used the newspapers to advertise rewards for his runaways, employing, at the same time, the system of slave passes in accordance with the customs of the local

207. Ibid., April 22, 1836. "The Fencibles Came by quantities to get shave and Bathed. ...fifteen or sixteen Volunteers from Vicksburg Bathed here to day —"

April 26, 1836. "To day I made Out account against the Natchez Fencibles or moneys due me from Vicksburg Volunteers. It was \$10."

208. Sydnor, *Slavery*, pp. 78. Every able-bodied white male eligible for militia duty was also subject to service int he slave patrols, usually serving one night every two or three weeks.

white community. As a result of his conformity to the letter and custom of slave control, Johnson was himself able to walk more freely among a white citizenry who might otherwise have regarded him with suspicion and even hatred.²⁰⁹

Johnson also walked, as a "free man of color," within a barely visible Natchez sub-community composed of white males, black mistresses, mulatto children, and those manumitted blacks, like Johnson, who helped hold the community together. One sees a glimpse of this silent community partly in the close friendship of barbers McCary and Johnson — in their long evening strolls and mutual conviviality. But one sees it even more in the way in which the Bingamans and Hoggatts and Barlands of Natchez (white planters who had fathered mulatto children and rather openly loved black women) entrusted their mulatto children to the Johnsons and McCarys to be trained in skills appropriate to "free people of color" in a world in which most blacks were slaves. Although this is not the place to spell it out in detail, there are simply too many indications of a dependency and empathy between the free mulattoes of Natchez and the white men who had sired them not to see the outlines of a viable sub-community at work. And Johnson stood at its very core.²¹⁰

Like many of his white benefactors, Johnson related to his slaves as though they were members of his own family. There can be no doubt that Johnson shed real tears in selling one of his most recalcitrant slaves, Steven, after years of trying to figure out what to do with him. Nor can the numerous floggings that Johnson so quickly administered be casually evaluated as but the actions of a hard-hearted master in light of the fact that he once took a whip to his own mother, whom he loved. The same slaves and employees whom he beat, chained, and confined to corn cribs and jails were also his hunting companions. He worked side-by-side in manual labor on his swamp farm with the same men he whipped and punished. He could lay on "five strokes" to his old men and women slaves, several "cuts" at a flash, and "mallings" with a stick in confidence that the whippings were for the good of the slaves beaten. But one gets the sense from reading his diary that Johnson used the whip rather gently in most cases. Indeed, he often referred to the type of whippings given as "genteel." One wonders if Johnson's bark was not worse than his blows — else how could the slave Steven have taken them so frequently with such little effect? For every flogging mentioned in the diary, moreover, there are also references to circuses, darky balls, hunting trips, fishing parties, and assorted goings-on which Johnson tolerated and often encouraged. And most revealing of his complex

209. Ibid., p. 776-79.

210. Perhaps it was Johnson's functionality (to use sociology jargon) as a free black able to help his white, patriarchal and back-loving friends that explains his relative security in life. What other reason would have kept him in Natchez for all those years but the centrality of his role among the type of people who had sired him? In this sense, the marginal Johnson — marginal when seen in the context of all free blacks in the larger society — stood at the very core of a world within a world. And within this community, William Johnson was an indispensable man. See *William Johnson's Natchez*, pp. 330-338. May 4, 1841. "To Day I went up to McCarys Shop and Told Him that I had two Little boys and was requested by Mr. Hogatt to get situations for them to Learn a trade of some Kind — He wanted One of them and Gave Him Choice of the two, Jefferson and William."

June 6, 1841. "Pheebe, the mother of William & Jeff, Children of Mr. Wilford Hogatt, Came in together with Emeline & Missouri and Little January Hoggat — they remained until after dinner and then Left Leaving Missouri and January to stay in town — The Boy is to stay with the girl as Company for Her, for a few Days..."

temperament are the several diary entries wherein Johnson mentioned his efforts at teaching his slaves to read and to write — confining them in their rooms at their books until they had learned their lessons. Johnson, clearly, was no ordinary slave master.²¹¹

In addition to insights regarding Johnson, the diary — when assessed along with other sources — tells us much about the instruments used by the white community to discipline and control its black population. All blacks within the district were subject to being questioned and detained by any white person at any time. This meant that all blacks out-and-about were required to have written passes giving them permission to be afoot. Those caught without passes were subject to detention and floggings. (One reason, in fact, why slaveholders opposed literacy in slaves had to do with the threat to the system presented by forged papers.) The city jail on State Street was the usual place of confinement for runaway and picked-up slaves, and masters were expected to pay the costs of the slave's temporary imprisonment. In addition, any white person grabbing an undocumented slave could expect a small reward for his trouble.

Also, a regular nightwatch operated in the town of Natchez as well as patrols in the countryside. Able-bodied men were expected to serve in the patrols and usually received fees for their time on watch. Although it is not clear at this writing just how well organized and staffed were the country patrols in the district, their duties ranged from general policing to keeping a sharp eye for runaways and arsonists — the most common fear of all property owners, free blacks and whites alike.²¹²

Proper methods of slave discipline in and around town, meaning those acceptable in the eyes of the white community, included verbal rebukes, a few "cuts" with a stick or riding whip, kicks to the body, boxing of ears, and confinement in corn cribs or tool sheds. On the remote plantations, overseers were expected to carry out whippings and stern measures if needed. But town slaves were frequently turned over to the local sheriff or the night patrol for the administration of proscribed whippings — usually no more than thirty-nine lashes. On the outlying plantations whippings could frequently get out of control and the white masters and overseers might find themselves occasionally hauled into court for slave abuse — especially if the abused slave belonged to someone other than the perpetrator of the abuse.

Besides punishment by floggings, Natchez jail authorities kept segregated chain gangs of slave and white criminals that worked at heavy manual labor ranging from street repairs to ditching and bridge construction. Slaves accused of serious crimes were locked away in windowless cells in the jail across from the courthouse on State Street to await trials that would result in death or, if acquitted, the freedom to return to slavery.²¹³

Just how frequently masters whipped their slaves is unclear, but it was probably a common practice on most plantations and slave households. Scholars of slave whippings have argued that they happened often enough on a large plantation to be a common

211. See the extracted portions of Johnson's diary listed above.

212. *Ibid.*, Sydnor, *Slavery*, pp. 67-130.

213. *Ibid.*

feature of slave life — meaning that the typical slave was whipped, or else witnessed other slaves being whipped, on a regular basis. What is especially confusing about the issue of slave whippings is that most slaveholders differentiated in their minds between serious whippings (when they would bare the backs of slaves and administer anywhere from twenty to several hundred lashes in a beating witnessed by the entire slave population on the place) and the constant and commonplace blows administered for minor offenses. Johnson, for example, gave approximately two dozen whippings over a ten-year period. When presented in a running line, the whippings appear to have been more frequent than they actually were. Only rarely did Johnson resort to having his slaves brutalized by the town guard. After Johnson sold his rebellious slave, Steven, he seldom noted whippings in his diary.²¹⁴

Five quite disparate pieces of impressionistic evidence, drawn from varied sources, tell us much about the pervasive atmosphere of brutality that surrounded all blacks in the Natchez district. The first is taken from the journal of Natchez district planter William Dunbar, dated November 12, 1777. It reads:

On Sunday last Adam was found to be drunk upon wh [which] I ordered him to be confined in the Bastile Ordered him 500 lashes next day, in order to draw a Confession from him how he came by the Rum — which had the desired effect. he acknowledge having secreted a Key when he was Cook, by which he got Entrance to the store on the Low Land, & stole rum — ordered a large Chain to be fixt to his leg, which he has carried until today; had it taken off, his leg being swelled, as I intend carrying him up to Point Coupee, where I shall sell him if I find an opportunity.

That Dunbar never actually applied the 500 lashes alters in no way the fact that the unfortunate Adam fully believed his master capable of administering them.²¹⁵

The second piece of evidence is an entry in Johnson's diary for January 14, 1836.

The Gard took Nancy Latimore and Cut her all over her Back, whiped her very much. She went through the Market the next morning with her clothes hanging all off of each shoulder. Her back was very much whipped. It was thought Dr. Lattimore make her walk in the streets that way.

The woman was a free woman of color once owned by Dr. Lattimore, yet still subject — even though she was free — to the most horrible of whippings and public humiliation. On the basis of the sources available, the reason for her brutal punishment is unknown.²¹⁶

214. Ibid., see also Boles, *Black Southerners*, p. 81, for a succinct statement on the controversy of slave punishment on the plantation.

215. Diary of William Dunbar, November 12, 1777, as published in Dunbar Rowland, *Life, Letter, and Papers of William Dunbar* (Jackson, Miss., 1930).

216. See *Johnson's Natchez*, p. 93.

Thirdly, a notice appeared in the *Natchez Weekly Courier* of September 15, 1858, entitled "Fellow Citizens." Written by a Mr. R. Parker, the piece was designed to quell the rumors that Parker had beaten one of his slaves to death. The controversy had arisen because Parker's slave, a woman named Georgiana, was found dead under a house in Natchez. An inquest had followed wherein Parker admitted to whipping the woman but not so severely as to having caused her death. Although a doctor's investigation of the decomposed body supported Parker's testimony, the rumors continued seemingly unabated.²¹⁷

Fourthly, there appeared in the *Mississippi Free-Trader*, June 2, 1847, an advertisement for a runaway slave owned by Mr. B. Zenor. The advertisement described a young man about twenty-five-years-old, 5 feet 7 inches in height, of spare build, who was called Archibald. In some detail, the notice stated the slave's place of birth, on a plantation in the vicinity of the nearby town of Washington. But what makes this notice significant for our purposes is its description of a "back" that had been "whipped and seared." It would take but little imagination to understand what the unfortunate slave Archibald had suffered prior to his flight.²¹⁸

And finally, although such impressionistic evidence could go on and on, there is an entry in Johnson's diary for February 23, 1847, that speaks of how local troublemakers were routinely handled.²¹⁹

Several Girls that was in a fight yesterday was whiped to day. The[y] got fifteen Lashes Each. Three of them, the Gibson girl and Betty Dumat and a Girl of Mrs. LaCrose. Thom Rose & L. David was on the Jury.

Whether or not every Natchez slave experienced a whipping at some time in their lives, similar evidence to the above leaves the clear impression that such whippings were a common, almost daily, occurrence in and around Natchez during the antebellum years. That slaves were flogged so frequently, however, suggests just how limited was a flogging's effectiveness in keeping the slaves in line. One gets the sense in reading the manuscript accounts of the beatings that they did little or no good at all. Indeed, Johnson, for one, seemed to grow weary of administering them.

Perhaps more effective in curbing rebelliousness than whippings and slave patrols was the threat of selling slave troublemakers, the soothing effect of slaveholder paternalism, the exercise of outright random terror, and the ability of Natchez district slaves to live largely out-of-sight of the white community. When taken together, these aspects of slave control produced a complex arena wherein whites and blacks played off their antagonisms toward one another.

217. *Natchez Weekly Courier*, September 12, 1858.

218. *Mississippi Free-Trader*, June 2, 1847.

219. *Johnson's Natchez*, p. 558.

THE SLAVE FAMILY AS A MECHANISM OF SOCIAL CONTROL

Looking first at the threat of selling troublesome slaves, it is crucial to understand that this method of discipline and social control was directly related to the strength of the slave family. Table 4 in Chapter II suggests that nearly 60% of all slaves in Concordia Parish lived in cabins that seem to have been family households. And while slave marriages were never legalized, they were recognized in some few cases by planters and local church officials. Regardless, however, of the official legitimacy of their bonding, slaves married and lived with one another as parents and children. What this means, ironically, is that slaveholders could discipline their chattel by threatening to put wives, children, and fathers on the auction block.

But selling slaves was not always an easy step to take. An entry in Johnson's diary for September 4, 1843, alludes to the confession of a slave to stealing.²²⁰ "Mr. Knight has his Boy Lenson [Henson] whipped and he Confessed to have been stealing for some time from him. . . ." The Mr. Knight in question was Natchez merchant and planter John Knight, a man uneasy with the idea of unloading troublesome slaves on unsuspecting planters:

As to selling Francis in Louisiana, it cannot be done without my guaranting that she has committed no crimes. And I will not sell her here to any acquaintance . . . without naming the fact of her having recently been guilty of the crime for which she was expelled from your state.²²¹

A one-sided version of the Henson story was told by Knight in several letters written to his father-in-law who lived in Maryland. Knight had used Henson and his wife as clerks in his store in Natchez in the early 1840s. By early summer of 1843, Knight was beginning to have second thoughts about the arrangement:

Intending positively, to sell Henson and his family next winter, if possible. . . . Henson suits me in most aspect better than I expect any other boy I can get, but he has contracted the habits of lying, drinking somewhat & being impudent and rather unmanageable when I am about. And if I sell him, of course, I will sell his wife and children also: for I will not separate them. Nor will I sell them to a bad master on a bad place.²²²

Several months later, Knight's worst fears were confirmed when Henson confessed to having looted and sold great quantities of corn, oats, hay, general store goods, saddles, and guns. According to Knight, Henson had enlisted a gang of slaves, free blacks, and competing white merchants to distribute several thousand dollars in stolen property. Now, having caught them, what was Knight to do with his thieving slaves?

220. *Ibid.*, p, 443.

221. John Knight to William M. Beall, March 15, 1844, William Knight Papers, DU

222. *Ibid.*, June 6, 1843.

During the last week I have kept Henson and his wife confined & handcuffed. This morning I sold and delivered them & their three children to a good man, with whom they will have a far better _____, if they behave properly, than they deserve. They will pass the balance of their days on a cotton plantation with plenty of hard work, under a tight but just overseer. . . . I will never trust another Negro out of sight in any thing. . . .²²³

Though difficult for some planters to carry off, there can be no question but that black families knew how serious was the threat of sale. Perhaps that is why they tolerated slavery, because they had too much to lose — their very families — by directly challenging it. As a result, the slaves had to struggle with the system in ways that hid their intentions from view. Slaves fought back by feigning irresponsibility, by acting lazy, by work slow-downs, by getting sick, by making mistakes, and by countless acts of what amounted to worker sabotage. Few would resist to the point of not doing assigned tasks, but few would do the tasks with great enthusiasm or efficiency. If they could be late for work, they would be late for work. If they could get lost on errands, they would get lost on errands. But seldom would they lift their hands or raise their voices in anger. Too much was at stake to risk retributions that could easily go beyond whippings and brandings — children and wives and parents might be sold in retaliation for overt resistance to the system.

PATERNALISM

Equally important in explaining how and why the system functioned as it did was the sense of family (whites and blacks together) that permeated most estate households and plantations. Confronted as they were by enslaved human beings who were difficult to control by beatings and threats, and because they lived in the same households as their slaves, slaveholders used kindness, consideration, affection, and sympathy to achieve faithful behavior from their slaves. And for most slaveholders, faithful service was even more important to them than effective service. Indeed, faithful service meant that a slave would at least follow orders, take directions, and work with a minimum amount of supervision. The slaves might not work with diligence and painstaking skill, but to have them fetch-and-carry and cook and wash without grumbling, to have them work lively under the threat of the whip, and to have them hoe and plough with perseverance if not with enthusiasm was about all the system required of its enslaved chattel.

In pursuit of faithful labor, planters showered gifts on their slaves at Christmas, nursed household servants in sickness, observed slave birthdays and weddings, fawned over devoted retainers, intervened on the slave's behalf with overseers and town officials, and looked the other way in the face of countless little indiscretions that non-slaveholders would have considered acts of impudence on the part of hired servants. Most importantly, slaveholders tried to establish ties of affection and membership between the slave servants of the household and the white members of his family. When the system worked, the domestic slaves lived as dependent members of the master's family. Several examples from among many should suffice to illustrate the point.

223. August 29, 1843.

On May 12, 1844, Elizabeth Quitman, mistress of Monmouth plantation, wrote her husband, John, of an occurrence at neighboring Melrose that spoke of a common event among the estate households of Natchez. McMurrans, who was Quitman's law partner, had barely finished the construction of Melrose when one of the family's more devoted slaves passed away. Elizabeth Quitman wrote: "The McMurrans have lost their servant girl Laura. She died on tuesday last and was buried at Melrose. Did you know that McM had a grave yard already proposed and planted with Evergreens out there?"²²⁴

Although it is not clear from this brief note whether the graveyard was a slave cemetery or the McMurrans family plot, it is likely — in view of its landscaping — that the site was a family cemetery, and that Laura was the very first member of the McMurrans "family" to be buried there. Elizabeth Quitman noted the event not because it was unusual to have slaves so interred in family plots, but because her husband obviously knew of the McMurrans family's affection for Laura. Also, Elizabeth was surprised that the McMurrans had a graveyard already prepared and ready for use.

Twelve years later, Mary McMurrans informed her cousin, Elizabeth Quitman, of a Melrose wedding party attended by the servants of both households. "A portion of the servants were here a few evenings since, to attend the wedding of Patrick and Mimi. Viola was bridesmaid. They married in our presence, behaved with perfect propriety, and they all seemed very merry and happy over their games and supper afterwards."²²⁵

One has to be careful in reading too much into such incidents of paternalism as the Melrose weddings and burials described above. There is no way of knowing just what the slaves thought about them because much of the evidence comes to us from the slaveholders' perspective. Clearly, most slaveholders believed that treating some slaves like members of the family was action well taken. The response by slaves was undoubtedly positive and encouraging enough to keep their masters busy with countless little considerations toward their slaves that acted as a lubricant of sorts in an otherwise highly abrasive world.

Along with weddings, burials, birthdays, gifts, and personal touches too many to document, some planters also tried to care for the souls of their slaves by allowing and encouraging enslaved and free blacks to participate in the services of various established churches in and around Natchez. Again, the question of the slave's religion is fraught with ambiguities and easily misinterpreted signals. What we know is this: five churches (four Protestant and one Catholic) were established in Natchez in the decades before the Civil War to minister to the white residents of the town. All of them included African-Americans among their congregations.²²⁶

224. Elizabeth Quitman to John Quitman, May 12, 1844, Quitman Family Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, N.C.

225. *Ibid.*, Mary Quitman to Elizabeth Quitman, August 11, 1856.

226. Sources for insight on religion in Mississippi include J. Julian Chisolm, *History of The First Presbyterian Church of Natchez, Mississippi* (Natchez, Miss., 1972); R.O. Gerow, *Cradle Days of St. Mary's at Natchez* (Natchez, Miss., 1941); *The History of Pine Ridge Presbyterian Church*; (Natchez, Miss., publication date unknown), pp. 9-11; James Pillar, "Religious and Cultural Life in Mississippi, 1817-1860," in Richard Aubrey McLemore, (ed.), *A History of Mississippi* (Hattiesburg, Miss., 1973), pp. 378-419;

The First Presbyterian Church of Natchez, located across from the courthouse, enrolled its first "colored" member in 1824, added a "colored gallery" to the inside of its main building in 1838, and numbered its black participants at nineteen in 1851. The Church's Pastor for much of the antebellum era, John Stratton, preached a special evening or afternoon service for blacks nearly every Sunday of the 1840s and 1850s. Stratton also employed special associates, the Reverend Colin McKinney in 1844 (followed by the Reverends Daniel McNair and Joseph Weeks), to minister to the needs of his black flock. The church even built a separate brick structure in 1849, at Pearl and Washington for use by its black "parishioners." Later, probably because the "brick Chapel" was too close to the main church, Stratton had a hall constructed on St. Catherine Street, nearer the Forks-of-the-Road, for his black Presbyterians. The black membership grew from a small handful in the 1840s to some fifty-nine members in 1860, out of a total membership of 311.²²⁷

Trinity Episcopal Church was founded in the 1820s by local planter elites uncomfortable with Baptist and Methodist practices. The magnificent structure at Washington and Commerce was renovated in the late 1830s in a Greek Revival style and it came to be, along with St. Mary's Cathedral and the First Presbyterian building, a vibrant part of the town's spiritual architecture. According to church records, black "servants" of white members were, in the 1850s, occasionally baptized, confirmed, and married as members of Trinity. The earliest record of black membership lists several "colored" marriages in 1853, 1854, and 1855.²²⁸

A number of black Catholics in Natchez — ten to fourteen in all — are found in the Parish baptismal records for the 1820s. More were listed in earlier Spanish records, mainly the offspring of slaves owned by pioneer Spanish and French settlers to the district. After the transferral of Natchez to American hands, the Catholic Church lost ground to the point where there was a time when no priests were assigned to the community. Indeed, Catholicism did not secure a firm footing in Natchez until the establishment of a Catholic Bishopric in the town in 1841. With the arrival of Bishops John Chanche and Henry Elder, we see stepped-up attention being paid to the needs of all Catholics in the area, including blacks. From 1839 to 1860, the Catholic priests stationed at St. Mary's constructed a magnificent Cathedral and baptized 304 blacks into the Catholic faith. The vast majority were children.²²⁹

It should not be assumed, however, that such a large number of black baptisms represented an equivalent number of black parents or large numbers of black worshippers in the cathedral on Sundays. Many of those baptized were slaves on neighboring plantations in a diocese that spread from the Yazoo River to Point Coupee, Louisiana. Nearly 60% of those baptized were plantation slaves. Bishops Chanche and Elder frequently traveled miles into the country to enroll dozens of slaves in group baptisms, using the slaves' owners as Godfathers. A close reading of the Parish records turned up

227. *The Presbyterian Church of Natchez*, pp. 1-53; The Diary of Joseph B. Statton, Copy on File with the Historic Natchez Foundation, Natchez, Mississippi.

228. Parish Registry Books, Vol.I., Trinity Church Archives, Natchez, Mississippi.

229. Register of Baptisms, March 20, 1820 - June 17, 1821; March 13, 1828 - April 13, 1828; January 27, 1839 - April 25, 1872, St. Mary's Cathedral, Natchez, Miss.

seventeen plantations that were listed among those wherein slaves were baptized in single visits. Very few of these plantation blacks ever saw the inside of St. Mary's Cathedral or had much opportunity for local attendance at weekly Mass services. There is little evidence, moreover, of any follow-up administering of the "sacraments" of confirmation, communion, matrimony, or burial to the officially baptized.²³⁰

Most of the black Catholics in town and on nearby estates were the servants of Catholic slaveholders who undoubtedly influenced the participation of their household slaves in the family faith. A cursory reading of the records indicates that a significant number of the slaves baptized were the children of household women servants, with no father listed in the accounts. Occasionally, the documents will note a child's "illegitimate" status, but most often the obvious went unrecorded.²³¹

Among the baptismal records are those showing frequent sponsorship and Godparenting of black slaves by prominent members of a well established French family: the Gireaudeau (or Girodeau) family of Gabriel and Felicite. A presentation of the Gireaudeau baptismal records gleaned from the hundreds listed in the registry illustrates several aspects of black life worth noting.²³²

The underwritten testifies to have Baptized in the Roman Catholic Church In the city of Natchez on the 26th of March 1820, A Negro girl belonging to Gabriel Gireaudeau to whom the name of **Sophy** was given. She was Seven years old had for Godfather Martial Pomet and for Godmother Virginia Gireaudeau.

The underwritten testifies to have Baptized in the Roman Catholic Church in the city of Natchez on the third of June 1820, **Mary** Daughter of John Z ___ and Elizabeth, negro woman belonging to Gabriel Gireaudeau; She was seven years old and had for Godfather, Martial Pomet and for Godmother, Victoire Colon.

The underwritten testifies to have Baptized in the Roman Catholic Church in the city of Natchez on the third of June 1820, **Maria Louisa**, Daughter of John ___ and Elizabeth, Negro woman belonging to Gabriel Gireaudeau; she had for Godfather Martial Pomet and for Godmother Louisa Du Cross.

The underwritten testifies to have Baptized in the Roman Catholic Church in the city of Natchez on the third of June 1820, **Victoire Rosalie** Bizou, Daughter of Narcoss Bizou and Nancy, Negro woman belonging to Gabriel Gireaudeau. She had for Godfather Martial Pomet and for Godmother, Victoire Colon.

230. Ibid.

231. Ibid.

232. Ibid.

On the Thirteenth Day of April in the year of 1828, the undersigned, pastor of this church, have solemnly baptized **Angela**, about eighteen months of age, a slave of Mrs. Gireaudeau. The Godfather has been James Pomet, the Godmother is Adele Gireaudeau.

The undersigned, have baptized **Adel**, born the 12 June 1836 of Rosalie Bizou free woman, and of a father unknown: The sponsors were Joseph Pomet and Felicite Girardeau.

The undersigned, have baptized **Ann**, born the 24th January 1839, servant of Mrs Girardeau. The father is unknown: The sponsors were Joseph Pomet and Nancy.

Jan. 16th, 1839. I baptized **Theodore**, illegitimate son of Caroline, Servant of Madame Gireaudeau, born Feb. 1st, 1837. Sponsors, Joseph Pomet & Maria David

January 30. I the undersigned, baptized **Mary Martha** born about October 1832 of Eliza, other particulars unknown; the child is servant of Felicite Girardeau.

September 26, 1841. I baptized **Maria Elizabeth**, daughter of Carolina, servant of Felicite Girodeau, born October 15th, 1840, Sponsors, Lucia Ludov. David, Servants.

On 13th of June, I have baptized **Joseph Jong**, 8 days old, natural child of Barba Jong. The god mother was Felicity Girodeau.

April 2, 1849. Was baptized, sub conditione, **Rachel** servant of Mrs Girodeau, aged 50 years, Sponsors, myself and Sophy Leeper.

May 20, 1849. Was baptized by the Rev. Mr. Grignon, **Henry**, son of Mary Jane, formerly a slave of Mrs. Girodeau. The child was born 16 of August 1848. Sponsor Rosalie Grillo.

May 20, 1849. Was baptized **Francis**, son of Mary Jane, formerly a slave of Mrs. Girodeau. The child was born 11 of June 1845. Sponsor, Rosalie Grillo.

I the undersigned hereby certify that on 17th of March 1854, I baptized **Eliza**, (colored) ten months old, daughter of Francis Gusta. Stood as God Mother Caroline Baptist I also baptized **Thomas Eugene** (colored), five weeks old, son of Claiborn and Isabella Norton, Stood as God mother Felicity Girodeau.

Fourteen Gireaudeau slaves, female and young household servants in the main, were baptized into the Catholic faith by Natchez priests over a range of years from 1820 to 1854. In some cases, several generations of children were so anointed: Rosalie was baptized, along with her sister Sophia, as a young girl in 1820; and she then had her own

child baptized in 1835. Rosalie's and Sophia's mother, and the grandmother of Rosalie's children, a Gireaudeau slave named Nancy, was herself the Godparent of another Gireaudeau slave, Ann, in 1839. Sophia served as Godparent of an older slave woman, Rachel, in 1849; her sister, Rosalie, did the same for a fellow slave, Jane, that same year. Two other household slaves, Lucie and David, were co-sponsors, in 1841, of the "illegitimate" child of slave woman Caroline .

Among the striking patterns revealed by these records is the ongoing participation of Gireaudeau slaves in the Catholic sacrament of baptism that seems to indicate their full involvement as spiritual equals to their white masters. On several occasions, black slaves served as Godparents alongside white Godparents in a sort of spiritual miscegenation that was apparently accepted by the white and black community alike. The white man, named Martial Pomet, who stood, in 1839, as a Godfather with the black Godmother, Nancy, was the same white merchant who had sponsored Nancy's children in 1820.

Gabriel Gireaudeau was a successful merchant who had thrived in Natchez in partnership with Martial Pomet. The firm owned, at various times, livery stables, taverns, and lots Under-the-Hill as well as town property that included the Gireaudeau residence wherein the above baptized slaves lived and worked as house servants. Mrs. Felicite Gireaudeau was remembered at her death in 1862, age 74, as one of the most important benefactors of St. Mary's Church, and her funeral procession to the Catholic Cemetery outside of town included the "whole congregation" as well as many non-Catholics.²³³

The image the baptismal records call to mind is that of a fully integrated slave household in which slave servants were baptized, probably included in the sacraments of the faith, and lived and died (Rachel) together for nearly two generations. Other documents relating to the Gireaudeau household reveal, moreover, fascinating aspects of a very complicated slice of life that went far beyond a paternalistic concern for the spiritual needs of its domestic slaves. Sometime in the decade after Sophia and Rosalie's baptism, their mother, Nancy, had achieved her freedom. Whether or not Nancy was manumitted as a gift for loyal service or had managed to purchase her freedom out of saved earnings is unknown. Whatever the origins of her freedom, the former slave Nancy continued to live in the Gireaudeau household.

In 1833, Nancy purchased (from Felicite Gireaudeau) her daughter Sophia and, in 1835, her youngest child, Rosalie. The two young women, 21 and 17, were then sent to Ohio and manumitted in Cincinnati, after which they returned to live with Nancy in the Gireaudeau household. Nancy also freed at the same time a slave woman (Sally McFadden) whom she had earlier acquired. It is likely that Nancy's actions were guided by Felicite Gireaudeau in view of the fact that the white matriarch had manumitted, in 1833, a slave woman

233. Gabriel Gireaudeau and Felicite Gireaudeau to Antoine Abat, September 22, 1827, Adams County Deed Book P; Gireaudeau & Pomet to Domingo Lamus, May 3, 1821, Adams County Deed Book L; Gireaudeau & Pomet to Joseph Quegles, July 14, 1821, Adams County Deed Book M; Gireaudeau and Wife to Peter M. Lapice, November 9, 1827, *Office of Records, Natchez, Mississippi*.

named Mary Jane, age 17. As in the cases of Sophia, Rosalie, and Sally, Mrs. Gireaudeau had sent Mary Jane to Ohio for the processing of her freedom.²³⁴

Almost all of the adult slaves baptized in the Gireaudeau household were women; and all but two of the children who were christened appear to have been "illegitimate." Only Nancy is mentioned in the baptismal records as having a husband at the time of the baptism of her children. Just who fathered the other children is unknown. But the rest of the picture is clear: Sundays at St. Mary's in the 1850s probably witnessed two old, white and black ladies, Felicite and Nancy Gireaudeau (Nancy eventually took the Gireaudeau name), ushering a brood of black women and children to Mass in a scene that must have been a commonly accepted sight in antebellum Natchez for years and years.²³⁵

The combined black members of the Catholic, Presbyterian, and Episcopal Church represented a relatively small percentage of the black population in Natchez. Most blacks in Natchez probably attended the local Methodist or Baptist churches. Both denominations had much greater success in attracting black members in Natchez and Mississippi in comparison to Catholics, Presbyterians, and Episcopalians. One scholar has estimated that the Baptist Church in Natchez, located at Wall and State Street, had a membership of 442 in 1846, of which 380 were black. The Methodist Church, located near Union and Main Street off Locust Alley, on land sold to the church in 1806 by William Barland (a white planter who had fathered several openly acknowledged mulatto children), may have had an equal number of black participants. Indeed, the Secretary of the Methodist Conference of Mississippi reported 11,008 black members in the state in 1860. Scattered evidence suggests, moreover, that Methodists and Baptists were more racially integrated in comparison to the Catholics, Presbyterians, and Episcopalians (separate buildings and church galleries).²³⁶

Much of the difference in black membership reflected differing attitudes toward the concept of ministry among the churches of Natchez. Baptists and Methodists placed much less emphasis on an educated ministry in comparison to the others. This is generally thought by scholars of southern religion to have resulted in a greater openness to the participation of the membership in church services, possibly including the opportunity for black preachers occasionally to be included.²³⁷

Outside of Natchez, numerous churches ministered to congregations that often included black slaves. Baptist churches at Cole Greek, New Hope, and Clear Creek had been

234. Ibid., Deed of Emancipation, May 28, 1835; Felicite Gireaudeau to William Smith, May 2, 1833; Nancy Gireaudeau to John R. Wells, May 5, 1835; Rosilla Gireaudeau to Deed of Emancipation, June 9, 1835; Sophia Gireaudeau to Deed of Emancipation, June 9, 1835; Sally McFadden to Deed of Emancipation, June 9, 1835; Adams County Deed Book W, Office of Records, Natchez, Mississippi

235. Register of Baptisms, St. Mary's Cathedral. The mystery of Felicite Gireaudeau is even more complicated than at first believed. She may have been the undetected offspring of a black parent in New Orleans. See Charles E. Nolan, *St. Mary's of Natchez: The History of a Southern Catholic congregation, 1716-1988*, I Natchez, Miss., 1992), p. 97.

236. Pillar, "Religious and Cultural Life in Mississippi — 1817-1860."

237. Ibid., Sobel, *Trabelin' On: The Slave Journey to An Afro-Baptist Faith*.

established since the early 1800s. A Methodist church at Washington, a few miles from Natchez, was the oldest Methodist Church in the state, having been organized in 1799. The Pine Ridge Presbyterian Church founded in 1807, established a separate African branch in 1832 with several hundred "colored" members. The following quotes from the church's Session book illustrate the point.²³⁸

April 15, 1832 In the Afternoon of the same day at 4 o'clock, a sermon was preached by the Pastor to a Congregation of Black people assembled in the body of the church to the number of 150 or 160 souls.

December 10, 1832After consultation it was resolved that in view of the spiritual wants of the Black population within the bounds of our congregation our Pastor be requested to devote the evening of every alternate Lord's Day to their religious instruction by preaching for their benefit in the Church in a style more simplified and suited to their capacity. Also resolved that those who give evidence of piety, and qualification for membership in the church be received and organized into a separate society which shall constitute a Branch of Pine Ridge Church and the Sacrament be administered to them in the presence of the congregation.

April 20, 1833. . . . In the evening at 3 o'clock the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper was administered for the first time to the African Branch of this Church and in addition to the number already received, Sukey, a woman belonging to C. Stowers was received on examination and baptized . . . the congregation [of] Black people amounted upwards of two hundred souls.

Exactly who were these black Christians that filled the Wall Street Baptist and Natchez Methodist churches and attended services every other Sunday at Pine Ridge? As of this writing, there is little basis for making any firm conclusions. Most likely, many of the town faithful were local slaves from nearby estates who enjoyed the freedom each Sunday to market, stroll around, and attend church in Natchez. Pine Ridge's membership may have been the slaves from several local plantations who attended services en masse at the urging of their masters. The fact that very few of the 200 "souls" at Pine Ridge were actual church members supports the idea that most of the participating slaves were there at the insistence of their masters. That such encouragement was a common practice among the country churches is born out by an entry in the diary of a visitor to a Natchez area plantation in 1853:

Sunday evening. — -What would you say to the little church we attended? It stands upon Mrs. Dunbar's grounds [Forest Plantation], but accommodates the whole neighborhood. Here a Presbyterian minister officiates, the singing coming from the congregation. They have service, however, but every other Sunday. But small as the congregation is, the ladies improve the opportunity for display, and I saw two ladies in white kids, and there was a goodly show of silks, black laces, and ribands. . . . This afternoon "the people," as the blacks are called, passed under my

238. *The History of Pine ridge Presbyterian Church*; "Washington methodist Church: 1799-1949," *Mississippi Methodist Advocate*, (October 19, 1949), p.7.

window on their way from Church. Mr. Ogden, a valetudinarian, preaches to them every other Sunday. This gentleman is one of the family. The dresses of the blacks are often very picturesque. Many of them at this season wear white flannel, blanket coats, long and loose, with open sleeves, and together with their very gay head-kerchief and very black faces, give an Oriental appearance among the trees.²³⁹

Whether or not slaves were required by their masters to attend church services is unclear. The gaiety and excitement associated with going to church on Sunday, and the large number of black Methodist and Baptist churches that sprang up in Mississippi after the Civil War, would suggest that more was involved than simple compulsion. Indeed, many planters and slaveholders may have felt it their Christian duty to allow their slaves the freedom to participate in church services. Such duty went hand-in-hand with the paternalistic ethos at work everywhere in Natchez, as well as with the prevailing idea that black participation in established white churches would undermine the emergence of an indigenous, and potentially dangerous, black religion. One has some sense of this reasoning in the Pine Ridge dictum that religious "instruction [should] be simplified and suited" to the "capacity" of the slaves in need of such instruction.

Nor is it clear just how many slaves participated in the district's established churches. Even if 25 percent of all black Mississippi Methodists (a purely arbitrary number) had been Adams County slaves, that would have still left the vast majority of district slaves outside of any organized church structure. When the Catholic Bishop John Chanche arrived in Natchez in 1841, he found only two black Catholics among the town population. A few years later in 1844, he wrote about the poor state of religion among the blacks in the Natchez hinterland:

It would be very important for religion in the country here that we could have zealous Priests who would be willing to give themselves entirely to the instruction of the Negroes. These poor people live in an entire ignorance of religion and die without Baptism. These Negroes are inclined to religion and they have not permission to go outside of the limits of the plantation. The good which would be there done would be a permanent good. Besides, the good would reflect upon their masters. When these would see the change that would be produced in their slaves they could not but esteem a religion which could produce such. . . effects, and would lead them to embrace it. I have already commenced one of these missions near Natchez, and I have every reason to be hopeful.²⁴⁰

Such efforts as the above resulted in large numbers of baptisms but little close involvement by plantation slaves in the on-going practice of an institutional church. Instead, it is more likely that plantation blacks were mainly left alone to their own devices. On the basis of what scholars know about religion and slavery in the larger South, it is almost certain that many Natchez district plantations were self-contained spiritual enclaves wherein slave preachers conducted Sunday services in the woods out of sight of

239. Eliza Allen Starr, *Diary*, November 16, 1850, Natchez Historic Foundation, Natchez, Mississippi.

240. Gerow, *Cradle Days*, pp.

the master, officiated at marriages and burials, and preached a spiritual message that drew upon an African past as well as the Christianity of the dominant white culture .

Bishop Chanche, to make the point clear, was dead wrong in his opinion that plantation slaves were ignorant of religion. Much of the burial practice, marriage activities, and daily lives of district slaves involved a highly religious character as expressed in songs, stories, and a set of moral values that emphasized a communal and spiritual consciousness vastly more complex than was apparent to their white masters. Students of black spirituals have amply documented the extent to which slaves resorted to musical prayer in their rowing, ploughing, picking, shucking, and recreational singing. Indeed, almost all aspects of plantation life were believed to be the manifestation of a cosmic and sacred order that could be expressed and dealt with in songs, story, and humor. Much more was going on, in other words, in the spiritual life of Natchez slaves than was obvious to the untrained eye.²⁴¹

Although this is not the place to document it, there can be no doubt but that much of the slave's spiritual life in the Natchez district was influenced by an African folk tradition that lived on in slavery. It is also clear that much of the slave's spirituality was deeply affected by those parts of Christianity commiserate with the realities of slavery. The Old and New Testament ideas of life being a spiritual journey, of just rewards and punishment for injustices done, of a personal and understanding God, of a spiritual family of brothers and sisters in grace, and of ultimate salvation, affirmation, and divine intervention were the spiritual values slaves found applicable to the life of slavery.

The Christian message that slaves took to heart and expressed in their songs and prayers came to them largely by means of outdoor camp-meetings that swept over the Natchez district beginning around 1800. The first camp-meeting held in Mississippi occurred at Clear Creek in Adams County in 1804. Thereafter, Protestant revivals were a regular feature of the countryside, usually occurring in the late fall of the year after the cotton had been picked. Baptists and Methodists would send their best preachers to exhort and plead with thousands of white and black participants to "get right" with God and accept His divine grace as the first step toward salvation.

Most importantly, the camp-meetings differed radically from the sermons and proclamations that slaves were forced to suffer through in the established church services on Sunday. Revivalist preachers seldom lectured slaves on their duties as slaves, but rather addressed their emotional needs and the importance of accepting Christ as a personal savior. The services required no hymnals, little fancy dress, and scant overseeing by their white masters. Instead, slaves could sing and shout, emote as sinners on the verge of deliverance, breathe in the fresh country air of religious exuberance, experience the joy of unshackled prayer, and embrace enthusiastically the conviction that if Moses had been delivered from Egypt so also would slaves find their promised land. And because slaves could easily fit camp-meeting Christianity into their hidden "brush-arbor" plantation

241. Blassingame, *The Slave Community*; Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll*; Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness*; Sobel, *The World They Made Together*; Sobel, *Trabelin' On: The Slave Journey to An Afro-Baptist Faith*.

services, successful revivals could inspire local black divines to continue the message betwixt-and-between meetings for months on end.²⁴²

THE USE OF TERROR

Because slavery was so brutish a way of life in the main, Natchez slave masters employed random terror as a means of dealing with those slaves not susceptible to whippings, paternalism, religion, or the threat of selling them or their families. Table 9 presents information on the array of stories printed in two Natchez newspapers for select years before the Civil War. In looking at the data it is seen that 212 items appeared in the papers during the five years assessed. Nearly 50 percent of the items were advertisements for selling slaves. Among the other 50 percent were 107 stories, opinions, notices, and statements that spelled out what was deemed worthy of note regarding slaves in the Natchez district.

242. Pillar, "Religious and Cultural Life in Mississippi — 1817-1860."

Table 9. Black Related Items in Natchez Newspapers: 1847-1859

	#	%
Major Crimes	22	20.5
Runaways	18	16.8
Social Control	17	15.8
Petty Crime	11	10.2
Damage to Slave	7	6.5
Free Blacks	6	5.6
Neutral Items	6	5.6
Blacks against Blacks	4	3.7
Arson	4	3.7
Revolts	3	3.7
Positive Items	2	1.8
Entertainment Items	2	1.8
Ridicule	2	1.8
Slave Stealing	2	1.8
Protection of Slaves	<u>1</u>	<u>0.9</u>
Total	107	99.3*
Attacks on Overseers	16	14.5
Overseer Items as Percent of Major Crimes		72.7
Major Crimes, Runaways, & Social Control Items as Percent of Total	68	72.7
Slave Advertisements	105	49.5

Source: *The Natchez Weekly Courier*, 1850, 1857-1859;
the Mississippi Free-Trader, 1847, 1854-1857.

*Percent does not equal 100 due to rounding off.

For the purposes of this study, the items reported were few in number and seldom about the daily life of blacks in Natchez. Only 107 items in two newspapers for five years works out to be about one item every two or three weeks. Relatively few items deal with free blacks, petty thefts, ridicule, praise, or noting the unusual. Minor social control issues came up now-and-then. These items usually had to do with blacks taking over the local market, drinking, and legislation aimed at regulating the slave trade or licensing free

blacks in the community.²⁴³ Not once, for example, was William Johnson's name, the most popular free black in Natchez, found in the papers, except among those residents having uncollected mail at the post office.

The local press, not surprisingly, seldom noted the routine aspects of black life. Instead, where blacks were concerned, the newspapers chiefly reported on their sale, running away, and violence. If the papers are read with just these notices in mind, the impression is that of a community overwhelmed by public spectacles wherein blacks were sold, captured, whipped, branded, and executed in a frenzied drive to maintain white control.

Looking specifically at the major crimes, the newspaper reports typically covered three aspects of the case: the alleged crimes, the ensuing trials, and the final verdicts. In most cases, it was usually assumed by the white community that slave criminals would be quickly caught, brought before a Grand Jury of the Circuit Court, and then tried, if the evidence so warranted it, by a "Petite Jury" of twenty white citizens. If found guilty of murdering, or attempting to murder, a white person, the punishment was execution by hanging.

It is important to understand that the judicial proceedings almost always generated a popular spectacle that was an important means of uniting whites into a common body of relative equality and a mutual interest in the delivery of swift and terrible punishment. Occasionally, vigilantism would occur, as was the case when five overseers in Concordia took the law into their own hands and almost beat to death a slave accused of cutting off the arm of a fellow overseer.²⁴⁴ Most often, the judicial spectacle — because of its openness and citizen participation — proved to be more satisfying as a social process than lynchings and random vigilantism.

At the first notice of a major crime, the town citizenry, both black and white, would gather at the courthouse to hear the evidence, to gossip about the matter on the street corners and in coffee shops at the market on Canal Street, and to trade opinions back-and-forth. As a trial proceeded, citizen groups would visit the murder sites, interview potential witnesses, present petitions, and pay close attention to the unfolding story. If the verdict was guilty, the execution would occur swiftly and with great public attention — often at a public place involving significant pomp and circumstance. The involvement of the town's entire white citizenry, moreover, in the public spectacles of slave punishment enabled non-slave owners to exercise an equal say with slave masters in the key societal issue of the day: the control of black people.

Just as whites were caught up in the spectacles of slave control, so too were the enslaved and free blacks of the community. Town blacks partook of the daily excitement that surrounded the unfolding story of the alleged crimes partly because of the nature of small-

243. Not included in the above assessments are the numerous sexton notices reporting the deaths of slaves and free blacks. See the *Natchez Weekly Courier*, December 17, 1859; September 1, 1858, for examples of mortuary statistics. For six months from January 1 to August 1, 1858, thirty-six blacks died in Natchez compared to sixty-five whites. The statistics for the full year of 1859 were reported as fifty-seven black compared to seventy-three whites.

244. See *Johnson's Natchez*, p. 462.

town life — picking-up on conversations in the carriages, at the market, and via the local grapevine — as would be expected in a slave environment wherein the enslaved had considerable freedom to move around as errand boys, hired hands, messengers, and domestic servants.

Slave participation in the pageantry, however, went far beyond the gossip and banter of small-town life. In fact, slaves were forced to participate as a very function of the proceedings. Slave witnesses to the crime would be marched to town for interrogation, with the court paying witness fees and expenses; or else the entire jury (or almost any group of concerned white citizens) would travel to the murder site to question potential slave witnesses. Once guilt was determined, the actual execution, flogging, branding, or confinement in stocks usually occurred in a public place (courthouse yard, jail yard, or the site of the murder). Slaves would be brought to the execution site to witness the local militia in their full parade dress, standing in symbolic as well as actual control of the social order.²⁴⁵

245. One of the issues hotly debated in the community involved the site of slave executions and whether it was more beneficial to have a public execution in town with slaves brought in as witnesses, a private execution in the backyard of the jail, or executions at the spot of the crime. All three types of executions occurred in the years surveyed. In December of 1857, verdicts were handed down in two separate trials in which six slaves (three in each case) were found guilty of murdering their overseers. The crimes, although happening at the same time, appear to have been unrelated. But the public pageantry associated with the murders consumed public attention for months. The condemned slaves were eventually executed by hanging "very near where they left" the bodies of the murdered overseers. See the *Natchez Weekly Courier*, December 16, 1857;

In another case of slaves to be executed for murdering an overseer, a major debate raged as to where the hanging would be held. A group of citizens circulated a petition objecting to the court decision to execute the slaves Frank and General in a public hanging because it was the conviction of the petitioners "that private executions carry with them more terror." The court had originally ordered a public execution at the town jail on State Street, but then decided to hold the hanging — in view of the public spectacle involved — in a vacant lot owned by L.R. Marshal a short distance south of Natchez. On December 22, 1854, the slaves Frank and General were marched to the execution place under "strong military guard" consisting of the Natchez Fencibles commanded by Edward Pickett, Jr., in the front column, the Adams Light guard under the command of "Captain Clark" in the center, and the Natchez Guard under the command of "Captain Midderhoff" in the rear. Approximately 3000 blacks and whites witnessed the execution. See the *Mississippi Free-Trader*, December 22; December 27, 1854.

An editorial in the *Natchez Weekly Courier*, June 6, 1858, is worth quoting to illustrate how whites used slave trials and executions as instruments of terror. The underlined portions are mine:

The solemn sentence of the law in the case of Peter, a slave, the property of John Robson, of this county, was carried into execution yesterday at 12 o'clock, in the back yard of the county jail. *But few were present, and those only specifically or officially invited by the Sheriff.*

Peter, unquestionably suffered righteously. He was found guilty of an attempt to commit murder on a white man, and the slave must be taught that an awful death is the certain punishment of so horrible a crime.

In this case, the condemned slave was not publicly executed mainly because the white person whom he had attempted to murder was one of those Under-the-Hill riff-raft, "white only in their color," who "place themselves on an equality with the negro, and who invite, by their familiarity with them over the whiskey jug, and greasy pack of cards, their animosity and occasional vengeance." But still the editor thought that the court had missed an opportunity in foregoing a public hanging.

THE INVISIBLE WORLD OF SLAVERY

Important, too, for understanding how Natchez slaves handled slavery is the fact that most of them lived within the chinks of the system, somewhat unobserved by the whites all around them. Johnson's slave, Steven, for example, would run away and be gone for days, hiding out Under-the-Hill or in the woods. Most runaways were never reported in the press or to the authorities because running away was probably accepted by all concerned as part of the system. Slaves commonly ran away to avoid punishment, usually to return when the overseer or master had calmed down. Even trusted body servants would take off for a few days only to return with an excuse that no one really believed but that everyone generally accepted.²⁴⁶

To a large extent, the life that slaves carved out for themselves within the system was invisible to white slaveholders partly because few whites wished to see it, and partly because whites did not have the resources to control all aspects of black life even had they wanted to. Travelers to Natchez frequently commented on the degree to which the town was overrun by slaves. Certainly Christmas was one such special day when blacks from miles around were allowed to visit Natchez; but so too was every Sunday, when neighborhood slaves brought their garden crops, fish, eggs, and chickens to town to sell. That was what a famous African slave prince (discussed in Chapter I) was doing in town (selling sweet potatoes) when discovered by the white man whose life his father had saved years before in Africa. So pervasive was the practice of allowing slaves to have the run of the town on Sundays that Natchez authorities usually rang a bell in the evening to let slaves know when they were expected to leave.²⁴⁷

Although slaves could not go just anywhere at anytime, there were ways around the restrictions as long as one's absence was not noticed or too disruptive of the system. Slaves frequently visited neighboring plantations with the written permission of their masters

246. See the *Mississippi free-Trader*, January 1, 1856, for an interesting comment on a runaway slave.

Isaac, a body servant of Gen. Quitman, arrived home a few days since. Shortly after the General reached Washington City, Isaac expressed a great desire to return home to Mississippi. Upon being pressed for his reasons for so sudden a wish, he told his master that he had been repeated beset by two white men from Boston who argued him to accept their aid to run from his master. He stated that he was afraid that he would be kidnapped into freedom, as he believed the two men were capable of any atrocity. The General gave Isaac a pass with which he safely reached home to his infinite satisfaction.

Quitman's family saw Isaac in a slightly different light. John Quitman's daughter, Antonia, wrote on December 23, 1855: "Isaac reached home yesterday morning. he took us quite by surprise with his sudden appearance, and seems quite delighted to be back home again. I think he has proved himself to be a very hearted faithful fellow." Another daughter, Rosalie wrote on December 30, 1855: "Isaac came home two or three weeks ago; we were quite surprised one morning to see him come walking up to the door. He says that it is entirely too cold for him up there, and he seemed very glad to be back home again. (See Quitman Family Papers, SHC, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, North Carolina).

Perhaps the reason why Quitman daughters were surprised to see Isaac is because of his history of running away. Quitman's law partner and neighbor, John McMuran had offered a reward for Isaac in September of 1847. (See the *Mississippi Free-Trader*, September 8, 1847).

247. See Terry Alford, *Prince Among Slaves: The True Story of An African Prince Sold Into Slavery in the American South* (New York, N.Y., 1986, Oxford University Press Edition), pp. 68-69; J.H. Ingraham, 2 vols. *The Southwest by a Yankee* (New York, N.Y., 1835), II, pp. 72-73; Sydnor, *Slavery*, pp. 81-85.

or else by evading slave patrols never numerous enough to keep all slaves encamped. Slaves stole away to the rivers to fish, to the woods to hunt, and to town for whatever opportunities awaited them. Johnson's diary presents abundant evidence of how easy it was for town blacks to be out-and-about:

- | | |
|----------------------|--|
| October 23,
1835. | William & John Stayed Out until after ten Olock. |
| November 1,
1835. | Find William at mr. Parkers Kitchen with his Girls |
| February 5,
1839. | I gave Winston & John to Day a complete Flogging this morning for Going home last night without my Leave. . . . |
| May 24, 1840 | I wrote some passes Last night, One for Phillip, for Sarah [and] One [for] Lucinda to Go Out to a Preaching and neither of Came Home at all Last Night. |
| February 7,
1841. | I herd to day that John and Winston was up about the Lake a Hunting and I took my Horse in the afternoon and wrode up thare and Caught Both of them and gave them Both a Flogging and took away there Guns — I threw away Winstons as far as I could in the Mississippi. |
| May 16, 1841. | John has a Pistol Taken from Him to day and Caps. He was making Preparation to Hunt, After being foiled in his operations He got on Bourd of Steamer Constelation and went to New Orleans — Steven is runaway too at present time. |
| February 1,
1844. | Just as I got Opposite the Shop I saw Bill, Charles, Dick, a[nd] Winston all Just walking Out to market to take Coffee, and I called Winston back and went in. . . . the Boys had been playing Cards all night in my room. |

So freely did blacks move around town — often as hired cabbies, carriage drivers on errands, and workers — that the white citizenry frequently tried to reign them in with laws forbidding "Negro" trade, banning the sale of alcohol to blacks, and establishing curfews. But few curbing efforts were successful. In 1858, the editor of the *Natchez Weekly Courier* wrote with emotion about an "evil that should be remedied," meaning the nearly complete control exercised by slaves and free blacks over the town produce market on Canal Street.²⁴⁸

248. *The Natchez Weekly Courier*, October 20, 1858.

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Most slaves in the Natchez district, by way of conclusion, managed to establish some breathing space for themselves within the chinks and interstices of the system. Plantation slaves lived in family cabins; prayed and worshipped in "brush arbors" of their own choosing; sang work songs and spirituals of their own composition; ran away for days and weeks at a time; and privately buried their dead in unmarked graves. In a multi-layered world usually just out-of-sight to the white eyes all around them, Natchez slaves participated in camp-meetings, had children by secret lovers whom the established white churches never officially recognized, stayed out until all hours of the night, stole off to the market for coffee and to the woods for hunting, and traveled around the countryside on the pretext of going to church or on errands. Even on closely supervised slave plantations, white overseers used black drivers as their eyes and ears, meaning that black supervisors most likely reported what they believed the overseers wanted to be told rather than what was actually happening in the quarters.²⁴⁹

This is not to say, however, that the hidden world of Natchez blacks was largely free from white overlordship. Rather, it is to say that Natchez blacks were forced to practice a kind of subterfuge of varied and complex character as a strategy of survival. For some slaves survival meant going to church on cue, working hard and long and well, or just "loving" their white masters. Being stupid or irresponsible worked well for others. A few, when pushed to the limits, coped by running away, fighting back, and murdering their masters and overseers in genuine acts of rage.²⁵⁰ Most slaves, however, just tried to stay out-of-sight as much as possible, creating, in the process, a shield of cultural and social invisibility that greatly (and ironically) undermined their official status (in the eyes of whites) as non-persons. The slave's invisibility nurtured (and this is the point of the irony) a certain independence of mind, body, and spirit not easily controlled by either terror or paternalism.

249. For discussion of slave drivers and overseers in general see William K. Scarborough, *The Overseer: Plantation Management in the Old South* (Baton Rouge, La., 1966); and William L. Van DeBurg, *The Slave Drivers: Black Agricultural Labor Supervisors in the Antebellum South* (Westport, Conn., 1979).

250. See Mark Ellis, "Crime and Punishment in Antebellum, Adams County: 1855-1860," unpublished paper in author's possession.

BREAKING FOR FREEDOM: THE CIVIL WAR YEARS

The Civil War years swept through the Natchez district like a raging prairie fire, burning to the roots all that had grown and flourished under the name of slavery. Masters became soldiers, servants in their own houses, and displaced refugees; estate mansions stabled horses and Yankee troops; cotton squares filled up with shanty shacks; slave marts were turned into army barracks; black soldiers patrolled where only white nightriders once rode; and slaves broke free of their entrapment in ways that puts to rest the old idea that most of them had been somehow content with their bondage.²⁵¹

Scorching as were the hot flames of war, at no time was Yankee victory altogether complete. Rebel soldiers and so-called "irregulars" raided plantations in the immediate hinterland, kidnapped blacks into slavery, and killed and terrorized Union sympathizers. With the town's occupation by Union forces, Confederate-leaning citizens, Union supporters, and so-called "turn-coats" used their political power, money, and shrewd dealings to influence their Yankee conquerors in support of racial policies designed to promote the stability and discipline of the so-called freedmen. For most Yankees, such policies seemed to be reasonable objectives at least in the short run.²⁵² For those Natchez slaves caught in the middle, however, the struggle with the enemy from without (Confederates) and the enemy from within (their white allies) was largely overshadowed by a tragic irony: thousands were struck down on the very threshold of their freedom by deadly wartime diseases that turned Natchez into a veritable death camp of human suffering. Both freedom and death were the twin realities for African-Americans in Civil War Natchez.

CONFEDERATE NATCHEZ

The first fourteen months of war hardly affected Natchez except in the minds of the district's white residents. The town and its immediate hinterland had been something of a Unionist stronghold prior to secession, sending Whiggish delegates to the state's secession convention in January of 1861. But when Mississippi cast its fate with the Confederacy, even the formerly skeptical generally went along. Able-bodied men flocked

251. For general background information on the Civil War in Mississippi see Edwin C. Bearss, "The Armed Conflict, 1861-1865," in Richard Aubrey McLemore, (ed.), *A History of Mississippi* (Hattiesburg, Miss., 1973), pp. 447-491; John K. Bettersworth, *Confederate Mississippi: The People and Policies of A Confederate State in Wartime* (Baton Rouge, La., 1943).

252. Sources for Natchez during the war include the following: Martha Mitchell Bigelow, "Freedman of the Mississippi Valley, 1862-1865," *Civil War History* VII (March 1962), pp. 38-47; Ronald L.F. Davis, *Good and Faithful Labor: From Slavery to Sharecropping in the Natchez District, 1860-1890* (Westport, Conn., 1982); John Eaton, *Grant, Lincoln, and the Freedman* (New York, N.Y., 1907); Matilda Gresham, *Life of Walter Quintin Gresham: 1832-1893* (Chicago, Ill., 1919), p. 239-264; Thomas W. Knox, *Camp-Fire and Cotton-Field: Life With the Union Armies and Residence on a Louisiana Plantation* (New York, N.Y., 1865 — De Capo Press Reprint), pp. 305-441; James E. Yeatman, *A Report on the Condition of the Freedmen of the Mississippi Valley* (St. Louis, Mo., 1864), pp. 1-16.

to be among the first volunteers to war, and the town eventually sent fourteen companies of Natchez youth off to battle the Yankee aggressors.²⁵³

At the head of the list were three venerable Natchez militia units: the Natchez Fencibles (144 men), Adams Guards A (128) and B (108), and Quitman's Light Artillery (71). Other groups followed in rapid order: Adams Troops (103), Natchez Rifles (123), Natchez Light Infantry (115), Tom Weldon Rebels (82), Natchez Southerons (127), Conner Battery (160), English Battery (75), Breckenridge Guard (115), Capt. Lynn's Squad (26), and the Bingaman Rangers (69).²⁵⁴

Some of the companies were funded in their entirety by wealthy planters. Most were ushered off to war with great pomp and circumstance. Tom Weldon's Rebels, for example, were treated to a special blessing of their flag and a high mass sung by Bishop John Elder in St. Mary's Cathedral. Eventually, 1444 Natchez white boys and men tramped off to war; 510 of them died, deserted, or were discharged for disabilities before the fighting had stopped.²⁵⁵

Among the residents who stayed at home, the focus of their early war time activities centered on politics and preparing for invasion. The state government encouraged a shift from cotton to corn as the war progressed with legislation limiting the amount of cotton planted to six acres per hand. Some Natchez area planters undoubtedly conformed to these decrees by altering the work of their slaves. More importantly, local planters stepped-up the supervision of their slaves in response to state laws to that end. State legislation limited the movement of slaves, requiring that they be housed in close proximity to overseers, with penalties imposed on those trading with or otherwise tampering with slaves. Planters also ended the practice of allowing their slaves the privilege of going to Natchez on Sundays for church services and marketing. More and more Natchez district plantations began to look like self-sufficient and enclosed camps.²⁵⁶

Feeding the growing militancy were rumors of pending slave insurrection. One incident in the spring of 1861 set militia groups to organizing home guards with a frenzy that reached nearly fever pitch. A runaway slave named Orange (according to testimony taken by fourteen slaves said to have been part of the plot) was alleged to have hatched a conspiracy among a group of slaves gathered at a fishing hole in Adams County. The conspirators had planned, according to the witnesses, to wait for the North to defeat the South, and then they would rise up and kill their masters and "ravish white wives and daughters." Whether there was any substance to the plot is difficult to say, but the energy

253. See Clover Moore, "Separation from the Union: 1854-186," in Richard Aubrey McLemore, (ed.), *A History of Mississippi* (Hattiesburg, Miss., 1973), pp. 443-446; Major Steve Power, *The Memento: Old and New Natchez, 1700-1897*, 2 vols. (Natchez, Miss., 1897), I: pp. 58-59.

254. Civil War Diary of Capt. T. Otis Baker, Baker Collection, Mississippi Department of Archives and History, Jackson, Mississippi.

255. *Ibid.*, Bittersworth, *Confederate Mississippi*, pp. 287-288.

256. John K. Bittersworth, "The Home Front, 1861-1865," in Richard Aubrey McLemore, (ed.), *A History of Mississippi* (Hattiesburg, Miss., 1973), pp. 492-571.

it unleashed suggests that most district whites believed their slaves capable of almost anything once the war had begun.²⁵⁷

Other than the efforts to curb insurgency and police the district, area whites made little preparation for war. The Natchez Board of Selectmen appropriated \$1000 for defense of the town and authorized preparation of two cannon on the bluff. But no Confederate flags flew at the courthouse or from the rise overlooking the river. Cotton continued to be stockpiled in the town through the winter and spring of 1861 and 1862, while area planters waited for the opportunity to get their crops to market. All eyes, nevertheless, watched the river with anxiety and expectations.²⁵⁸

In mid-May 1862, Union warships sailed up the Mississippi River to Natchez. Only a handful of Natchez residents turned out to defend the town, and Confederate Brig. Gen. C. G. Dahlgren, furious at the lack of response and the refusal of local "conscripts" to stand and fight, abandoned the town to its municipal authorities without firing a shot. On May 13, the mayor of Natchez communicated to the commander of the U.S. Steamer, *Iroquois*, anchored at the landing, his informal acceptance of Union terms. A few days later, a Union transport landed a thousand men at Vidalia on the Louisiana side of the river.²⁵⁹

For the next eight months, Union warships and gunboats steamed past Natchez in preparation for the coming battle of Vicksburg to the north. General Dahlgren, now stationed at Corinth, set his troops to work burning cotton within five miles of the town. But Natchez itself was not occupied until the following summer.²⁶⁰

On September 2, 1862, a Union ironclad gunboat, the USS *Essex*, sent a few men ashore for water and ice at Natchez only to have them fired on by hot-headed members of the local militia. The *Essex* shelled Natchez for several hours in retaliation, killing two residents and setting several houses aflame. The Union water crew had lost one dead and five wounded. But no Federal troops claimed Natchez until March 17, 1863, when Union Cdr. William "Dirty Bill" Porter presented the town's officialdom with an ultimatum

257. Undated testimony in Lemuel Parker Conner Papers, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, Louisiana; See also Bittersworth, *Confederate Mississippi*, pp. 161-163. Other rumors of rebellion literally engulfed the Natchez district, resulting in the hanging of forty Negroes. That so many slaves were executed is strong evidence that a major slave rebellion had occurred. Historian Winthrop Jordan (in a work not yet reviewed by the author) is presently researching the revolutionary character of slave insurrections in the district during the war.

258. Bittersworth, "The Home Front," pp. 492-571; Minutes of the Meeting of the Mayor and Board of Selectmen, Natchez, Mississippi, April 23, 1861; May 7, 1861; May 21, 1861; June 4, 1861; July 2, 1861; July 6, 1861; February 5, 1862; City Hall, Natchez, Mississippi.

259. C.G. Dahlgren, Commandant, Confederate Post Washington, Mississippi, to Brigadier General Thomas Jordan, May 17, 1862, in *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* (hereafter cited as *Official Records*), (Washington, D.C., 1880-1901), Ser. 1, Vol. 15: 737-38; "The Surrender of Natchez, Mississippi," *The New York Times* May 29, 1862.

260. See unpublished manuscript by Annette M. Wilson, "Natchez and the Civil War," in author's possession. It is also on file at the Natchez Public Library, Natchez, Mississippi.

demanding formal capitulation, in response to which the Mayor surrendered the town for a second time.²⁶¹

No formal action was taken by Union forces to occupy Natchez until after the fall of Vicksburg to Maj. Gen. Ulysses S. Grant's army on July 4, 1863. Two weeks later, Brig. Gen. T. E. G. Ransom occupied the town and found it well stocked with sugar, cotton, and lumber. Ransom also overtook, a few miles from Natchez, 5000 Texas cattle being driven toward Confederate forces in the east. By mid-summer of 1863, Natchez was securely in Union hands.²⁶²

Almost immediate with its occupation, Union forces in Natchez were overwhelmed by a stampede of black refugees from the countryside. Hundreds of district slaves had been on the run since summer of 1862, hiding out in the countryside as best they could. Many had fled the plantations to avoid being taken by their masters deeper into the Confederacy, to Texas and Georgia. Others had hid out with their families, hoping to find their way north. But once Vicksburg fell, the momentum became a tidal wave of humanity, much of it cascading in the direction of Natchez.

General Ransom eagerly sought orders on what to do with the refugees: "I also desire some instructions as to what policy I shall pursue with regard to the negroes. They flock in by the thousands (about 1 able-bodied man to 6 women and children). I am feeding about 500 and working the able-bodied men among them. I can send you any number encumbered with families. I can not take care of them. They are all anxious to go; they do not know where or what for."²⁶³

One of General Grant's corps commanders at Vicksburg responded with alacrity if not much practical advice:

With regard to the contrabands, you can say to them they are free, and that it will be better for them, especially the woman and children, old and infirm, to remain quietly where they are, as we have no means of providing for them at present.

With regard to the men who are strong, able-bodied, [and] will make good soldiers, you can bring them along with you [to Vicksburg] if they are willing to come and will leave their families behind.²⁶⁴

The ensuing sixteen months of war brought terrible suffering to the district's enslaved refugees. Briefly told, the fall of Vicksburg and Port Hudson broke the back of the Confederacy by placing the Mississippi River firmly in Union hands. But though the spine

261. Ibid., Thomas Reber, *Proud Old Natchez*, (Natchez, Miss., 1909), p. 39.

262. Brig. Gen. Thomas E.G. Ransom, U.S. Army, to Lt. Col. W.T. Clark, Assistant to the Adjutant-General, July 16, 1863, *Official Records*, Ser. 1, Vol. 24: 680-681.

263. Ibid.

264. Lt. Col. James B. McPherson to Brig. Gen. Thomas E.G. Ransom, July 17, 1863, *Official Records*, Ser. 1, Vol. 24: 521.

had been severed, the various parts of the Confederate body continued to resist. Rebel forces, especially partisan units, held much of the country on either side of the Mississippi River for most of the war. This meant that no plantation slave was safe from being taken into Texas or from being killed on the spot if thought to be a Union supporter. Also, because the Emancipation Proclamation freed only those slaves within Confederate lines, Natchez slaves, or Union controlled slaves, occupied the uncertain status — at least prior to January of 1863 — of being contrabands of war. By summer, however, any slave who had enlisted in the army or had runaway to Natchez from behind Confederate lines was considered a free person. But just who was free and who was not was always unclear because the district was governed by the vicissitudes of war and martial law.

In this uncertain atmosphere, the Union developed a policy for dealing with refugee slaves that subordinated the welfare of the refugees to larger military objectives in the region. The policy involved three pivotal points of reference: leasing plantations to government agents who would work the freedmen (as they were called) on a wage labor basis; enlisting able-bodied blacks as soldiers into "colored regiments" that would operate as home guards protecting, in theory, the women and children and elderly at work on the plantations; and establishing black refugee camps in and around Natchez to care for the sick, displaced, and unemployed.²⁶⁵

If all went according to plan, the river plantations in the Natchez hinterland would be staffed by a resident population of "freedmen" who would earn their keep by growing cotton. The ex-slaves would also learn valuable lessons about contracts, wages, and work. In time, the experience would transform the workers into replicas of northern laborers — men and women ready and willing to work long and hard and well for just wages, which they could use as the basis for buying family farms and achieving middle-class prosperity.

Black soldiers, moreover, would free the Union forces for fighting elsewhere and prove, by their valor, the validity of their emancipation. Able-bodied blacks, according to the plan, would be liberated from interior plantations by armed raiders — usually fellow black soldiers. Others would be recruited from the refugee camps and near-by plantations to defend Natchez and to fight for the freedom of their families and friends.

Refugee camps would operate as temporary shelters and employment agencies as much as welfare centers, channeling the displaced into the army and to jobs on the plantations. Northern schoolmarm, moreover, would be recruited to teach in the camps.

Tragically, almost nothing that happened to Natchez blacks during the war went according to plan. The leased plantations were poorly managed, subject to Rebel raids, and beset with all the horrors of a Civil War in which approximately 620,000 Americans would eventually die. Army barracks and refugee camps were poorly equipped, undermanned,

265. Davis, *Good and Faithful Labor*, pp. 58-88. See also Edwin C. Bearss, *Decision in Mississippi: Mississippi's Important Role in the War Between the States* (Little Rock, Ark., 1962), pp. 464-494.

and overwhelmed by sickness, disease, and racism. It is a wonder that any of the black participants in the above ventures lived through them.²⁶⁶

BREAKING FAITH WITH THE MASTER

In the months following July of 1863, Federal officials in the Mississippi River Valley launched an experiment in wage labor for "contraband" blacks that tossed thousands of district workers back-and-forth among competing agencies in ways that put a serious blight upon the first days of freedom. Initially, from the summer of 1862 to 1863, the Union's refugee program in the Mississippi Valley, directed by Col. John Eaton, a chaplain in the Fifth Regiment of Grant's army, was little more than an attempt to organize refugee slaves into work companies to pick, gin, and bale ungathered cotton on abandoned plantations. Proceeds from the cotton would pay for the rations consumed by the refugees. Once the cotton was picked, the plan called for employing the refugees as woodchoppers and in general fatigue labor for the army at Union camps in order to free white soldiers for fighting.²⁶⁷

Blacks were required to sign contracts wherein they agreed to labor under the direction of army officers for fixed wages set at subsistence levels. All earnings were to be channeled into a general fund supporting the entire refugee camp or else paid out in food and clothing rations on an individual basis. The conditions of work were similar to those in slavery — gang labor, overseers, and limited movement — except that chains and whips were essentially eliminated as methods of discipline.²⁶⁸

Although Eaton was able to make a start on some plantations, his program was simply overwhelmed by the numbers of refugees flocking to Union lines after the fall of Vicksburg. It was in this context that Washington appointed the Adjutant General of the U.S. Army, Brig. Gen. Lorenzo Thomas, to organize a full scale refugee program in the Valley. Thomas' plan assumed that the refugees should bear the burden of their upkeep by working on abandoned plantations leased to loyal whites willing to employ blacks for fixed wages. Provost marshals would oversee the general workings of the program with the full authority of military law at their disposal. Union patrols (mainly black soldiers) would police the plantations and protect them from Confederate raiders. In turn, the lessees

266. Ibid., see also Bigelow, "Freedmen of the Mississippi Valley, 1862-1865," *Civil War History*, pp. 38-47; J. Eaton, *Grant, Lincoln, and the Freedman*; and Yeatman, *A Report on the Condition of the Freedmen of the Mississippi Valley*, pp. 1-16.

267. Ibid., Dorothy Lois Ellis, "The Transition from Slave Labor to Free Labor, with Special Reference to Louisiana," (M.A. thesis, Louisiana State University, 1932), pp. 1-14; Bell Irvin Wiley, *Southern Negroes, 1861-1865* (New Haven, Conn., 1938), pp. 184-190; Ulysses S. Grant, *Personal Memoirs of U.S. Grant*, 2 Vols. (New York, N.Y., 1885), 1, pp. 424-26

268. Ibid.

would hire black refugees for wages of \$7 per month for adult males, \$5 for women, and \$3.50 for hands twelve to fifteen years old.²⁶⁹

The program was a disaster on all accounts. The full extent of the debacle came to light in a report filed with the U.S. Treasury by James Yeates who had toured the Mississippi Valley as the agent of the Western Sanitary Commission. Most plantations were poorly protected, staffed by incompetent ne'er-do-wells and corrupt army officials, and operated with little interest in the welfare of the hired refugees. The white lessees usually abandoned the places at the first sign of trouble or else absconded with all the profits, leaving the black workers with scant rations and no wages. In Yeates' view, the crux of the problem stemmed from leasing lands to speculators and northern capitalists with few safeguards built into the system.²⁷⁰

As a result of the charges, the Treasury Department took over the abandoned lands program in the Mississippi Valley, assigning a special agent, William P. Mellon, along with Yeates, to overhaul Thomas' program. The major revisions in the Treasury plan had to do with wage rates and speculation. Briefly, no lessee was permitted to rent more than one plantation, and wages were increased to \$20-25 for adult males, \$18-20 for adult woman, and \$15 for teenagers. Paying blacks higher wages, it was believed, would enable refugees to supply themselves and thereby break the connection between suppliers of rations and the lessees of plantations. Moreover, limiting leases to one plantation per lessee would favor, it was hoped, the emergence of a class of small farmers as renters.²⁷¹

General Thomas, whose son had leased several plantations in the Natchez district, vehemently opposed the Mellon program, and most lessees, merchants, and loyal planters in the area refused to make contracts under the new stipulations. The dispute finally reached the ears of President Abraham Lincoln who returned the control of all affairs involving freedmen to Thomas, with the understanding that Thomas was to work with Eaton in reforming the inequities of the system. Among the reforms to be implemented were those regulating the prices of rations and supplies charged to the workers, allowing hands to cultivate garden lands on their own accounts on Sundays, and eliminating the hire of those "old-time overseers" unaccepting of the "new situation" existing between workers and planters.²⁷²

269. Ibid., General H. Halleck to General U.S. Grant, U.S. Army, March 31, 1863, *Official Records*, Ser. 1, Vol. 24: 156-157; Special Order of General Lorenzo Thomas, No. 63, September 29, 1863, *Records of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands* (hereinafter cited as BRFAL), Record Group 752, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

270. Eaton, *Grant, Lincoln and the Freedmen*, pp. 142-66; Davis, *Good and Faithful Labor*, pp. 68-69; Louis Gerteis, *From Contraband to Freedman: Federal Policy Towards Southern Blacks, 1861-1865* (Westport, Conn., 1973), pp. 132-152.

271. Ibid.

272. General Lorenzo Thomas to E.M. Stanton, February 20, 1864, *Official Records*, Ser. 3, Vol. 4: 176-177; March 18, 1864, *Records of the Adjutant General's Office*, General's Papers, Record Group 94; L. Thomas to Major General W.T. Sherman, *Commander, Military Division of Mississippi*, *Official Records*, Ser. 3, Vol. 4: 210-211; L. Thomas to Lieutenant E.D. Townsend, Assistant Adjutant General, U.S. Army, Washington, D.C., April 19, 1864, *Official Records*, Ser. 3, Vol. 4: 166-170; Special Order No. 9, General Lorenzo Thomas, March 11, 1864, *Official Records* Ser. 3, Vol. 4: 166-170.

Much of the new Thomas program retained, however, the basic wage-labor ideology that had shaped government policy from the start, an ideology wherein blacks were to work as "good and faithful" laborers in a tightly disciplined environment. Wages were set at \$10 per month for adult males, \$7 for adult females, and half the above amounts for teenagers. To ensure faithful work, wages would be paid monthly rather than weekly or daily, with one-half the total to be held by the employer until the season's end to ensure that the laborers worked the entire contract year. No "colored soldiers" could visit the plantations to see wives or families without the permission of the planter, and never while bearing arms. And no blacks could leave the plantation unless granted permission in writing. Contracts were made binding under military law, and vagrancy would be punished by putting the unemployed to work on levees and roads.²⁷³

Although flogging was forbidden by the new policy, disobedience, insolence, and poor performance would result in lost wages; or else problem workers would be turned over to the provost marshal for labor on public works without pay. District blacks, according to Thomas, were thus expected to work much as they had in slavery because they were still a "people identified with the cultivation of the soil, however changed in condition by the revolution through which [they were] passing."²⁷⁴

Merchants and lessees readily embraced Thomas' program, but it met with little real success during the war years due to the inability of the U.S. Army to protect the plantations from being terrorized by Rebel guerrillas. To venture two miles outside of Natchez was to be in enemy territory, and numerous planters simply refused to enter contracts in the summer of 1864 for fear of being burned out by the Rebels.²⁷⁵

Across the river in the Louisiana parishes, the situation was even worse. Large Rebel forces attacked Vidalia on two separate occasions in September of 1863 and in February of 1864, and smaller partisan forces raided Louisiana plantations almost at will. The monthly report of 1st. Lt. W. H. Megrew, Assistant Provost Marshal of Concordia Parish, listed thirty-seven government leased plantations at work in June of 1864 — employing nearly 4000 hands. Of those under contract, Rebel raiders had hit four in the previous thirty days, burning gins and driving off all the stock on hand; two others, Bekhawk and Balamagan, were raided again and again, four and five times in just over two weeks.²⁷⁶

273. Ibid.

274. See Testimony of Brigadier General James S. Wadsworth before the Freedmen's Inquiry Commission, Records of the Adjutant General's Office, American Freedmen's Inquiry Commission, June 30, 1863. National Archives, Washington, D.C.; Robert Dale Owen, James McKaye, Samuel G. Howe, Commissioners, The American Freedmen's Inquiry Commission, to E.M. Stanton, June 30, 1863, *Official Records*, Ser. 3, Vol. 3: 430-454.

275. W. Burnett, Asst. Spec. Agent for Natchez, to General Lorenzo Thomas, April 27, 1864, Records of the Adjutant General's Office, Colored Troops Division, Record Group 363, National Archives, Washington, D.C. Burnett reported on the difficulty of working the Nevitt plantation just north of town. The owner refused to lease to a Northerner for fear of having his buildings burned by rebels.

276. Report of 1st Lt. W.H. Megrew, Assistant Provost Marshal for Concordia, June 19, 1864, BRFAL, Record Group 105.

Thomas Knox, a Yankee lessee of two Concordia plantations, reported with some chagrin on the extent to which the river parishes were subject to guerrilla raids:²⁷⁷

For nearly three weeks, the guerrillas had full and free range in the vicinity of the leased plantations. One after another of the lessees were driven to seek refuge at Natchez, and their work entirely suspended. The only plantations undisturbed were those within a mile or two of Vidalia. As the son of Adjutant-General Thomas was interested in one of these plantations, and intimate friends of that official were concerned in others. It was proper that they should be well protected. The troops at Vidalia were kept constantly on the look-out to prevent raids on these favored localities.

Nearly every day I heard of a fresh raid in our neighborhood, though, after the first half-dozen visits, I could not learn that the guerrillas carried away anything, for the simple reason there was nothing left to steal. Some of the negroes remained at home, while others fled to the military posts for protection. The robbers showed no disposition to maltreat the negroes, and repeatedly assured them they should not be disturbed as long as they remained on the plantations and planted nothing but corn. It was declared that cotton should not be cultivated under any circumstances, and the negroes were threatened with the severest punishment if they assisted in planting that article.

Even though a garrison of black soldiers was stationed at Waterproof, a small interior town, they were so ill equipped and uncertain of their mission as to have been nearly useless in combating the guerrilla threat.

We did not look upon the post at Waterproof as a sure protection. There was no cavalry to make the promised patrol between Waterproof and the post below it, or to hunt down any guerrillas that might come near. A few soldiers were mounted on mules and horses taken from the vicinity, but they were not effective for rapid movements. It was understood, and semi-officially announced, that the post was established for the protection of government plantations. The commandant assured me he had no orders to that effect. He was placed there to defend the post and nothing else. We were welcome to any protection his presence afforded, but he could not go outside the limits of the town to make any effort in our behalf.²⁷⁸

Knox continued to work his two leased plantations as well as he could until a band of thirty Rebels tortured and killed his overseer, abducted nineteen of his hands, and made off with twenty-four mules and horses. Finally broken by the raids, and frightened for his life, Knox paid off the remaining 141 black workers on the place and abandoned all efforts at making a crop. Some of Knox's wage hands then went to Natchez. Some went to the contraband camp at Davis Bend. Others hired themselves out to those district lessees still

277. Knox, *Camp-Fire and Cotton Field*, pp. 423-424.

278. *Ibid.*, p. 441.

foolhardy enough to stay in business. Only a few of the original work group stayed on the plantations, growing corn and garden vegetables in order to survive.²⁷⁹

So dangerous was the situation by the end of 1864, that some planters began recruiting private armies from among the ex-slaves.²⁸⁰ Major Gen. E. R. S Canby, Commander of the Military Division of West Mississippi, urged the War Department to give up on the idea of leasing lands altogether. He suggested in its place a system of colonies in which the refugees would be given plots of land to farm while living together in armed camps provisioned by the U.S. government. Canby saw in this colonial scheme the best hope of eliminating fraudulent speculators from the district while providing an adequate defense of the refugees. Needless to say, his plan was never implemented.²⁸¹

279. Ibid., p. 448. "Three days later we abandoned the plantation. We paid the negroes for the work they had done, and discharged them from further service. Those that lived on the plantation previous to our going there, generally remained, as the guerrillas had assured them they would be unmolested if they cultivated no cotton. A few of them went to Natchez, to live near their "missus." Those whom we had hired from other localities scattered in various directions."

280. Special Order No. 13, Lt. Col. C.S. Christenson, Assistant Adjutant General, December 14, 1864, BRAFL, Record Group 752, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

281. Maj. Gen. E.R.S. Canby, Headquarters of Division of West Mississippi, to E.W. Stanton, December 6, 1864, *Official Records*, Ser. 1, Vol. 48: 441-443.

The course that seems best calculated to work good results is that of subdividing the plantations and thus multiplying the interests connected with them for the purpose of attracting an active, enterprising, and arms bearing population, and the establishment of a system of military colonies capable of protecting themselves against anything except organized invasion. The colonists should be put into military organizations, armed and equipped at the expense of the United States, and mustered into its service for the special duty of preserving order and protecting the plantations from raids and protecting the approaches from the districts under the control of the rebels. It is necessary that they be mustered into the service in order to subject them to military control and to secure proper treatment for them if they should fall into the hands of the enemy. When employed in the protection of private interests, they should receive no pay, but if called upon to resist an invasion they should be placed on the same footing with other troops. To guard against the plantations becoming the center of unlawful trade with the enemy, and to secure the negroes employed on them from the danger of falling into the hands of the enemy and being reduced to a state of slavery, no leases should be given for any plantation that is beyond the reach of military supervision and protection, except in cases where the lessees are able to maintain a force to protect themselves from raids, and hold them until they can be relieved.

A major bone of contention that dominated policy disputes regarding abandoned lands had to do with the role of speculators and suppliers. A veritable horde of Yankee speculators descended on the district in 1863 and 1864. A careful reading of the trade permits issued by Thomas turns up between fifty to eighty individuals licensed to carry on trade with the plantations. Many of these traders established stores in Vidalia and Waterproof, Louisiana, and at Natchez and Washington, Mississippi, where they did a business in supplies ranging from a few hundred dollars to \$5000. Black workers would trade through the stores on the basis of wages to be paid when the crops were harvested at the end of the year, thus trying up their earnings at high interest rates for provisions above their normal rations. Many of these stores were run by antebellum merchants in Natchez who secured permits after swearing their loyalty to the Union. But most of the merchants were Yankee newcomers to the area. There is good evidence to suggest that these traders also dealt with stolen goods brought in by Confederate partisans. In any case, much of the criticism surrounding

Important as the various government plans were for handling the district's freedmen, it must not be forgotten that thousands of district blacks survived the full duration of the war by avoiding government-leased plantations and the refugee camps at Natchez. Most of these ex-slaves subsisted by growing corn and garden vegetables and by hunting and fishing. A report by Col. Samuel Thomas in the summer of 1864 noted that "there are a number of freedmen on nearly every plantation in the district, whether it be abandoned or not, as they manage to raise a little garden and live on what may be left by their former masters." Just how those freedmen on the more isolated plantations managed, however, to avoid being hauled off to slavery is unclear. Most of them survived simply by hiding in the woods and by keeping their eyes open for Rebel forces. Some freedmen, on the other hand, appear to have passively cooperated with local Rebels by growing corn and food crops, which could be confiscated by guerrilla forces.²⁸²

The attraction of working on government plantations was largely in the safety they provided and the opportunity of trying something new and exciting. But the few thousand blacks who tried the experiment of wage labor on the leased plantations were greatly discouraged by what they found. For one thing, the system was too much like slavery. The diary of one district planter, the Union loyalist William Minor, reveals just how desperately he had tried to hold onto the past.²⁸³

Overseer Rules, 1861

1. Overseer must treat negroes with kindness and humanity. When sick see that they have any necessary attention & that doc's directions are adhered to.
2. See that all hands are at work as soon as they can be — give particular attention to hands in the field.
3. Must not strike Negroes with anything but his whip, except in self-defense — Must not cut the skin when punishing — not use abusive language as it makes them unhappy and sometimes to run away.
4. Examine quarters after ringing of the bell to see if Negroes are all at home at night. Require drivers to report absentees every morning.
5. Retire to cabins by 9:15.
6. Negroes can't leave without permit
7. Not allow negroes to beat wives.
8. Divorce and remarriage requires 25 lashes — month's notice for divorce.
9. Keep record of quantity and condition of stock.
10. Do not allow the negroes to swear, do anything disrespectful, make noise in quarter, nor talk loudly while at work, nor allow querling or fighting among the people.
11. Do not allow negroes to keep or use spirituous liqueurs

Thomas's administration of the abandoned lands was in reference to his encouragement of speculators and traders of less than sterling character. See Miscellaneous Trade Permits and Associated Papers and Correspondence, Office of the Adjutant General, Colored Troops Division, Record Group 363, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

282. Col. Samuel Thomas to Brig. Gen. Lorenzo Thomas, June 15, 1864, Office of the Adjutant General, Colored Troops Division, Record Group 363, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

283. Dairy of William J. Minor, 1861-1865, William J. Minor Papers, LSU, Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

12. See that rations are properly delivered.
13. Visit stable every day at 12:00 and at night.
Note — Negroes are in the habit of regulating the depth of the plow by the back band, thereby nearly throwing the whole weight of the draft on the back of the animal working — they are also fond of running up on the heels of the animals in such manner as to prevent them from throwing their weight into the collar.
14. See that the houses and quarters are cleaned up once a week — especially the back yards.
15. See that the negroes dress clean every Sunday.
16. Do not allow mechanics to make or sell any of their own work without permission
17. Do not allow the mechanics to strike or mistreat the hands put under him.
18. When necessary to punish he will inflict it in a serious, firm, and gentlemanly manner.
19. Farming utensels are regularly put away and in order.
20. He will see that all the ditches drain well & he will not work them as he works the crop to keep them clear all year.
21. He must not allow the negroes to use the horsed, carts or wagons with out specific permission — neither must he allow the hands to ride to and from the fields in the carts. When they may happen to be going or coming at the same time, serious accidents have occurred from this habit.
22. Record all births and deaths.
23. Record all receipts and shipments.
24. Keep accurate plantation books
25. See that seamstress makes the cloths strong and neat.
26. Preserve all manure.
27. Never leave the plantation.

Directions to Overseer : 1863-1865

June 4, 1863.

1. Endeavor to get the hands out at daylight
2. Negroes must not be allowed to travel through the place nor come onto the place without papers.
3. Negroes must not bring stock onto the place.
4. When hands fail to work, rations must be stopped.
5. Negroes cannot ride mules and horses on the place at any time.

September 1, 1863.

Each full grown hand must be given 3 and 1/2 lbs of pork or bacon a week in 1/2 lbs a day and as much bread & molasses as they can eat. Also vegetable of the season — as many as they can eat — also the usual ration of sugar — which, as well as the molasses, must be given out every week instead of once in two weeks as heretofore. Smaller hands must be given in proportion.

But every negro who fails to do his share of work no matter what the cause is, must have 1/2 a pound of meat deducted for each day lost from his or her ration of meat & deducted from all other articles in proportion to the next ration. Until the whole of the previous ration is take out of the next. If this plan does not answer you will have to give

out the rations every night & give to those who have worked during the day in proportion to the work done.

February 22, 1864.

Working under general orders No. 23, the greater portion of my negroes have agreed in presence of Mr. Daniel Turner to work for 12 months under the above order — they must be required to do so — that is nine hours a day in the winter and 10 hours a day in other months. All lost time no matter whom or what cause must be deducted & and they must be credited only with the time they do actually work.

If the forfeiture of wages does not make them work, their rations of all kinds must be stopped & if that does not make them work than they must be put off the place.

May 23, 1864.

Not more than 1/2 a dollar must be paid a month to any negro who owes me work. Credit him with the balance of his monthly pay.

All workers must work 10 hrs a day — the time necessary to go to and from their work is not to be counted — all those who do not work the full 10 hrs must be docked 1/4 of a day.

All workers disobeying orders may be docked from 1/4 of a day to a week depending on the importance of the orders given.

June 28, 1864.

Married women who can but will not work must be supplied with rations and their husbands must be charged with them.

March 14, 1865.

Men whose wives or mother or sisters are allowed to remain on the place with out working, must be charged board house room & fuel for the wives and relatives — - 1/3 a month for fuel — for a room and rations at the current rate.

Hands docked for time under 10 hrs a day not credited for time over 10 hrs. The first morning bell must ring at 5. am, the 2ed bell to ring at 6:30 am — the 3rd bell must ring at 7 am., at which time all hands must be at work or docked 1/4 day. - - at 12:00 bell will ring for dinner, at 1:00 pm it will ring to turn out, and at 1:30 pm it will ring when all hands must be at work or docked 1/4 day's pay. — Stopping bell rings at 6:30 pm.

March 31, 1865.

The overseer and drivers must be close up with the hands all the time while they are at work. With most care must be taken in dropping the seed to have it all along the isle ____ & yet not waste the seed — If one dropper for each opener is not sufficient start one or two more according to the number of openers; So as not to have the sowers of seed ____ harmed, those sowers must be closely watched and those that do not do well must be changed at once.

April 16, 1865.

None but the regular teamsters must ever use a team. The team must not be used by the negroes except on Sat afternoon — the regular teamsters must be paid by the other negroes for hauling.

Negroes who have left the place must not be allowed to come on the place without papers & only on Sat. afternoons and Sundays — unless in case of sickness.

Except for the fact that wages had replaced the whip as the main incentive for working, very little else had changed. Minor still wanted his hands in the field from sunup to sundown, still insisted on gang labor supervised by an overseer, and still tried to operate his plantation as if it were a closed camp. There is more to these reforms, however, than appears at first glance. Minor could no longer dictate what his hands would wear, when they would "dress up," whether or not they could divorce or remarry, or at what hours they were to sleep at night. The most he could do was try to use wages to enforce a labor routine that he hoped would make a crop under new and trying conditions.

Few district blacks tolerated such strictures as Minor had hoped to establish. In a diary entry in early 1863, Minor reports that his ex-slaves were completely out of control: "they are practically free, going and coming and working when they please and as they please. They destroy everything on the plantation — In one night lost 30 hogs. They ride the mules off at all times."²⁸⁴

Such sentiments were echoed again and again by Natchez district planters unable to enforce strict rules of discipline on their former slaves. Wilmer Shields, long time manager of several Natchez area plantations owned by William Mercer, was nearly beside himself with the new character exhibited by even his most trusted former slaves. Excerpts from his correspondence are worth noting at length:²⁸⁵

December 11, 1863.

Cesar has already notified me of his intention to go to N. O. — he will return he says — but I am sure his wish is to make preparations to carry off his family. I do not expect to have a single servant here [Laurel Hill plantation] ten days after Johnson leaves

I am now harried. . . . Ellen alone is faithful — but of course will yield to Cesar's influences.

You can form no idea of my situation and anxiety of my mind. All is anarchy and confusion here. Everything is going to destruction and the negroes on the plantations insubordinate. My life has been several times in danger.

January 25, 1865.

Everything here [Laurel Hill], as you can well imagine, is in confusion. I have no longer any hope. Our cruel enemy has determined on our will here at least. Their continued visits will soon complete the destruction of the plantations. They are now

284. Ibid., January 2, 1863.

285. Wilmer Shields to William Mercer, William Newton Mercer Papers, LSU, Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

gathering the remnant of the cattle and negro men. Now they propose to take the able-bodied women.

... Add to this the outrageous conduct of the negroes who will not work for love or money — but who steal everything they can lay their hands on, and you form some idea of our situation here.

I am trying now to pick a little cotton, and have offered 50 cents per hundred. But alas I fear that will fail. They will not work. They go out about 10 or 11 o'clock pick 25 or 30 lbs and return to their quarters, stealing fence boards & and even portions of their houses with which to make fires to warm themselves and cook the hogs and beef they may have killed during the day.

June 10, 1865.

List of adult Negroes who have remained on the plantations

	Ormonde	Laurel Hill	Buckhurst	Elliscliffe
Perfectly Faithful	64	5	6	1
Comparatively Faithful	16	2	5	7
Behaved Badly, Out- rageously	37	0	34	29
Children	39	6	49	64

"Nearly all the negroes on this list have been away and returned — some of them half a dozen times."

Being faithful meant different things to different people in the district. For blacks working on leased plantations, the contractual arrangements were just pieces of paper which enabled them to earn some money while the war waged all around them. Although it is impossible to know what was perceived, it is unlikely that few blacks saw the arrangement as anything but a temporary phase between slavery and freedom.

Regardless of how the contracts were understood by the involved parties, only a small portion of the hinterland population worked as refugee slaves on the government leased plantations. Perhaps the small numbers reflect the few plantations that could be safely worked. Or perhaps it was just that the majority of freedmen were unwilling to work on terms that resembled the basic organizational look of slavery. Table 10 below sets out information drawn from numerous provost-marshal reports for the years 1864 and 1865.

For the several hundred slaves at work on the fourteen Concordia plantations listed below, their efforts — what with the wage deductions for time lost — probably brought them little more than what workers were paid on the Carthage place in Adams County. Indeed, more than half the slaves on Carthage received less than the \$11.08 cited as the average wage. The low wages stemmed partly from the high rates charged for provisions but also because the freedmen simply refused to work like slaves once they were free to do as they wished. And every infraction of time and labor was noted as time lost. J. T. Evans, lessee of Glen

Aubin plantation in Adams County, noted with great disgruntlement in his reports to the Provost Marshal just how difficult it was to work hands under the new conditions.

I have further to report that the laborers of this plantation have been doing short work. With the exception of three, none of the laborers want to work at the appointed hour, either morning or afternoon. When in the field the majority of them idle away their time. Compared with the work which was done on this plantation under a compulsory system, three laborers do now hardly as much as one did them — Besides idling away their time in the field, some feign sickness, and lay up for whole days, others absent themselves for the greater portion of the day attending to their own affairs.²⁸⁶

286. J.T. Evans, Lessee, Glen Aubin Plantations, Monthly Report, May, 1865, BFAL, Record Croup 105, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

Table 10. Provost Marshal Reports

	Freedmen	Registered	Working	Dependents	Infirm
Concordia (12, 31, 65)	15,000	2,300	2,298	534	5
Adams (12, 31, 65)	13,200	7,462	2,118	341	2,260

Concordia Parish

Plantations	Workers	Males	Females	Children	Infirm
Lucernia	121	36	40	25	20
Z. O'Brien	59	5	21	28	5
Toconia	147	30	49	50	18
Fletcher/York	59	18	19	16	6
Moro	105	31	34	26	14
Scotland	97	14	50	20	18
St. Genevia	91	20	43	15	13
Sycamore	206	59	60	41	46
Helena	111	22	40	41	8
Minocia	164	47	50	59	8
Roseland	107	40	51	15	1
Forest Home	144	41	59	39	5
Balmagan	124	33	37	49	7
Deer Park	140	35	70	30	5
Potowomat	171	45	61	50	15
Pittsfield	160	48	76	36	0
Palo Alto	163	39	78	46	0
Sahara	<u>112</u>	<u>35</u>	<u>40</u>	<u>47</u>	<u>0</u>
Total	2,287	598	878	623	177
Percent		26%	38%	27%	8%

Work Stoppages on Carthage Plantation in Adams County
January, February, and March, 1865

Workers	Day Lost	Average Wages Received After Deductions
47	862	\$11.08

Source: Provost Marshal Reports, BRFal, Record Group 105, National Archives.

Most provost marshal reports told a similar story. Lt. Benjamin F. Cherry, Assistant Provost Marshal stationed at Vidalia, spent a good portion of his time trying to mediate disputes between freedmen and their overseers. At one plantation the freedmen refused to labor as directed and had taken the mules to work for themselves. "I went with him [the overseer] to the plantation and found the hands lounging about their quarters. They were dissatisfied by the non payment of half their monthly wages." At another plantation, Lieutenant Cherry had to settle a dispute between the overseer and two black families who had taken the overseer's house as their own.²⁸⁷

What freedmen wanted most was time not wages, freedom to attend to their own affairs when the need arose, freedom to come and go as they wished to come and go, and a place to live while biding their time until the war's end would bring about the fundamental changes they expected to be close at hand. One old time planter in the district, James Gillespie, understanding how much the freedmen wanted to work for themselves, struck a deal with former slaves on his Hollywood plantation in Adams County.

I have hired Ruben, Maria, Lewis, Henrietta, Liz, Henry, Stephen, Sarah, Sophia, Adams, Fanny, Eliza and Dembo to work for me until 25th of December, 1865 on the following terms: they will work four days each week for me and do all and any kind of labor I may wish to be done or require of them faithfully and true, and take care of my property of all kinds on the place & study my interests in all things, preserve good order in the quarters and elsewhere for which services well and faithfully done. I agree to feed them in the usual manner (except molasses). I am not to furnish any clothing or pay Dr. bills for them. In consideration of said services I will allow them two days in each week, that is Friday & Saturday, to work for themselves & give them land & teams to work the same & to plant what crops they may please to do. I will assist them to sell & get to market their crops as much as I can.

Should any of the above named negroes leave or go off before the 25 December next, they forfeit their crops & all interest. When any one fails to work & do the duty of faithful hands I am at liberty to discharge them. It is hereby fully understood & agreed to that I do not hire any one for a particular work but they are to do any work I may require and that any loss of time by sickness or other causes is their loss not mine and they shall make good by work for me or their rations while sick and absent will be deducted.²⁸⁸

But such arrangements were few and not very workable. Planters had no way of enforcing discipline, no way of protecting their places from Rebel raiders, and no way of coercing freedmen to work after 1863. The end result was that only a handful of district plantations were in operation at the end of the war, and most of those were not likely to start up

287. Lt. Benjamin F. Cherry, Assistant Provost Marshal, Vidalia, to Gen. Lorenzo Thomas, May 5, 1864, BFAL, Record Group 105, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

288. James A. Gillespie, Contract With Labor For Hollywood Plantation, January 4, 1864, James A. Gillespie Papers, LSU, Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

again unless drastic changes could be made in the terms of contract. In September of 1865, the provost marshal for the district predicted that the coming year would see non-violent defiance of the contracting system by the freedmen:

The feeling and opinion among the Negroes throughout this District is almost unanimous on one point, viz: they will remain this year on their old places, for support and for such remuneration as the crops raised can give them, but next year they will leave and make other arrangements. They say that they have tried their old masters, know what They require and how they will be treated, and that as they are now free, they will try some other place, and some other way of working.

They take this view not because they are tired of work, or because they want to be idle, but because they are free, and want to find out in what their freedom exists.²⁸⁹

SOLDIERS AND REFUGEES

If the Natchez hinterland was a no-man's-land for most of the war, the town itself was an armed camp. At no time after Union occupation in the summer of 1863 was Natchez, isolated as it was without rail connections, seriously threatened by Rebel attack. The Union used Natchez as a refugee camp for freedmen, as a garrison for black soldiers, and as a stopping point on the river between Memphis and New Orleans. Daily life for blacks and whites alike was largely taken up with accommodating 5000 Union soldiers and thousands of refugee blacks. No resident of the place escaped the general chaos and disruption that engulfed the community. Private houses were taken over as officers quarters, barracks for enlisted men, and supply depots. Hotels became hospitals and refugee shelters. The town's two hospitals overflowed with the sick and dying, as did local orphan asylums. Churches held Yankee worshippers and were forced to conduct services in line with Yankee expressions of loyalty — including prayers for President Lincoln. Property was confiscated wholesale — whether it be silk curtains or carriages — and few white residents knew what to make of the revolutionary changes that had overtaken their lives.²⁹⁰

Of the 5000 soldiers stationed at Natchez in the summer of 1864, 3150 were black.²⁹¹ Most of them had been recruited at Natchez in the previous twelve months. The Union's recruitment policy was direct and practical. All able-bodied black males coming into Natchez as refugees were given the options of being put to work on fortifications, hired out as plantation laborers on abandoned plantations, or else recruited by the U.S. army as

289. Maj. Gen. George D. Reynolds, Acting Assistant Commissioner, Bureau of Freedmen for Southern District of Mississippi, to Maj. Gen. Carl Schurz, September 26, 1865, BFAL, Record Group 105.

290. A good description of war-time Natchez can be found in Matilda Gresham, *Life of Walter Quintin Gresham: 1832-1893* (Chicago, Ill., 1919), pp. 239-264.

291. Maj. C.T. Christenson, Assistant Adjutant General, Division of West Mississippi, to Maj. Gen. N.J.T. Dana, July 20, 1864, *Official Records*, Ser. 1, Vol. 39: 185.

soldiers.²⁹² The Emancipation Proclamation issued by Lincoln on January 1, 1863, also authorized the recruitment of "colored regiments" as regular troops in the U.S. Army.²⁹³ Some black militia units had been operating in Louisiana prior to official policy, but none were located anywhere near Natchez.²⁹⁴ In any case, within one year, four regiments of black soldiers were garrisoned at the town: The Sixth Regiment of U.S. Colored Artillery and the Fifty-Eighth, Sixty-Third, and Seventieth Regiments of the U.S. Colored Infantry.²⁹⁵

These four regiments, posted at Natchez for the duration of the war, shouldered the duty of securing the town and its river hinterland, building Fort McPherson in Natchez, and keeping the peace among the town's white and black residents. Most of the winter of 1863 and 1864 was devoted to recruiting black soldiers from the refugee camps and plantations in the district. Each regiment was officered by a white staff of volunteers from the regular army who saw working with colored troops as an opportunity for advancement or as a responsibility to which they were bound by a sense of moral duty. The officer component usually consisted of one colonel, one lieutenant colonel, one major, between eight and ten captains (one for each company), eight to twelve first lieutenants, six to eight second lieutenants, one to three surgeons, and one chaplain.²⁹⁶

Once the recruits were safely in Natchez, most of a soldier's time was spent in camp. Drilling and work details on the construction of Fort McPherson, a major garrison spreading over much of the town's north-western neighborhood, probably consumed the lion's share of a recruit's day. Although it is unclear to what extent the Union army employed black refugees and soldiers in building the fort, scattered references in the muster records show assignments to fortification duty on a fairly regular basis. The job involved tearing down and removing houses (including one of the most prestigious mansions in Natchez), erecting walls (probably earthen mounds around artillery placements), building barracks, and digging canals, latrines, and privies. (See ILLUSTRATION K)

Perhaps because of the priority given to building Fort McPherson, relatively little attention was given to equipping the soldiers for fighting. In September of 1863, for

292. Special Order No. 63, Vicksburg, Mississippi, September 29, 1863, BFAL, Record group 752; Special Order No. 85. Brig. Gen. Lorenzo Thomas, Natchez, Mississippi, October 24, 1863, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

293. See James M. McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era* (New York, N.Y., 1988), pp. 563.

294. See C. Peter Ripley, *Slaves and Freedmen in Civil War Louisiana* (Baton Rouge, La., 1976), pp. 102-125.

295. Frederick H. Dyer, *A Compendium of the War of the Rebellion* (Dayton, Ohio, 1979 printing), pp. 1721, 1733, 1734; *Official Army Register of the Volunteer Force of the U.S. Army*, Vol. VIII, (Washington, D.C., 1867); Muster, Order, and Regimental Description Books for Sixth Regiment of U.S. Colored Heavy Artillery, Fifty-Eighth Regiment of U.S. Colored Infantry, Sixty-Third Regiment of U.S. Colored Infantry, Seventieth Regiment of U.S. Colored Infantry, Colored Troops Division, Record Group 94, The National Archives, Washington, D.C. (Please note that the Seventy-First Regiment of U.S. Colored Infantry was also stationed at Natchez but was eventually merged with the Seventieth Regiment).

296. *Ibid.*, see also Joseph T. Glatthaar, *Forged in Battle: The Civil War Alliance of Black Soldiers and White Officers* (New York, N.Y., 1990), pp. 99-168

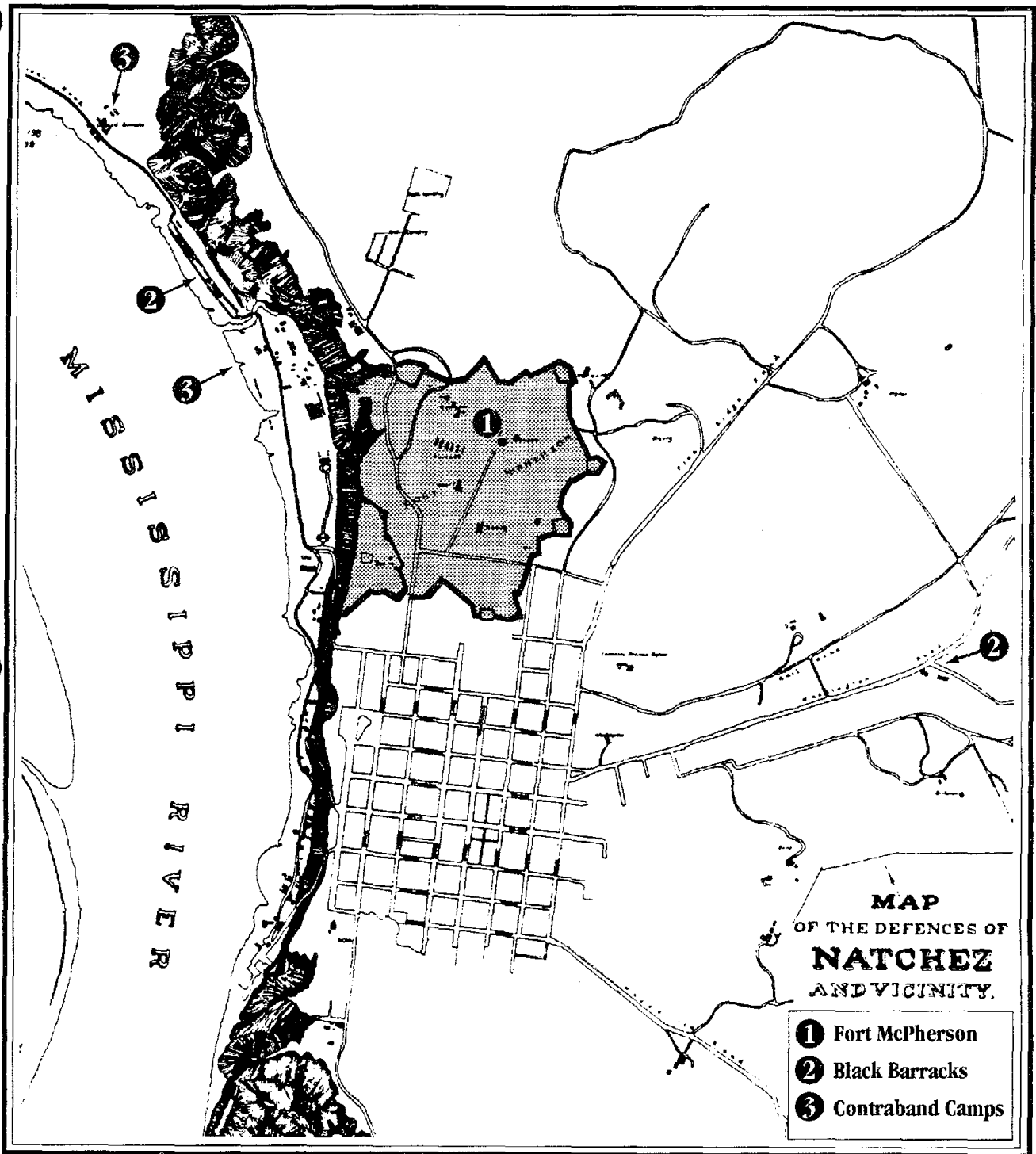


Illustration K: Occupied Natchez

example, a force of 200 Rebels attacked Vidalia in an attempt to capture a gang of black males recruited by Col. Bernard Farrar for his Sixth Artillery Regiment. The young colonel managed to transfer his recruits to Natchez just in time, and then counterattacked with a "small detachment of Negroes, partially armed with shotguns," and about forty white soldiers from the Thirtieth Missouri Infantry. This untrained band of black soldiers and white infantry chased the Rebels sixteen miles to the interior town of Trinity, where they encountered a Rebel force 800 strong. It is uncertain from the records whether the enemy was actually engaged, or if any casualties were sustained.²⁹⁷

But few black troops stationed in the Natchez area ever met the enemy in substantial battle. No Natchez regiments fought at Fort Pillow or at Milliken's Bend, where hundreds of black soldiers were killed or taken prisoner.²⁹⁸ Nor did the bulk of Natchez troops venture far from town. Rather, most black soldiers stationed at Fort McPherson had as their first duty the protection of Natchez from Rebel attack. Because that attack never came, the typical Natchez soldier saw relatively little action. Local engagements with the enemy most often involved Yankee outfits stationed in Vicksburg, including black infantry, on specific maneuvers throughout Mississippi and northeastern Louisiana. A review of the casualty lists for Natchez troops shows 17 killed in battle, 9 wounded, and 5 missing. Only one of those deaths — a soldier on picket duty — occurred at Natchez.²⁹⁹

Table 11 lays out the known military activities of the black soldiers stationed in Natchez. The data is undoubtedly incomplete and is useful principally for the character of the action it demonstrates.

What can be said about army life for the thousands of newly liberated black soldiers stationed at Natchez during the war? Who were they? How well did they cope with military discipline and the new adventure that was upon them? To start with, the typical soldier's day in Natchez left ample time for drilling, guard duty, cook detail, clean-up, and fatigue labor. The rules, when they were enforced, looked something like the following list of directions taken from the Muster Book of the 6th Regiment, U.S. Colored, Heavy Artillery.³⁰⁰

297. Ibid., Brig. Gen. Marcellus M. Crocker to Lt. Col. W.T. Clark, Assistant Adjutant General, 17th Army Corps, September 14, 1863, *Official Records*, Ser. 1, Vol. 26: 315.

298. Ibid., see also William Wells Brown, *The Negro in the American Rebellion: His Heroism and His Fidelity* (New York, N.Y., 1867, Reprinted in 1968); James M. McPherson, *The Negro's Civil War; How American Negroes Felt and Acted During the War for the Union* (New York, N.Y., 1965).

299. Ibid., see also Edwin C. Bearss, *Decision in Mississippi: Mississippi's Important Role in the War Between the States* (Little Rock, Ark., 1962), pp. 464-494.

300. Muster, Order, and Regimental Description Books for Sixth Regiment of U.S. Colored Heavy Artillery, Record group 94, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

Reveille	6:00 am
Roll Call	6:15
Quarters Cleaned by	7:00
Breakfast	7:00
Guard Mount	8:30
Dinner Call	12:00
Roll Call	12:30 pm
Retreat	5:00
Roll Call	5:30
Supper	5:30
Tattoo	8:00
Taps	8:30

Table 11. Service Records of U.S. Colored Troops at Fort McPherson

6th Heavy Artillery	58th Infantry
Skirmish, Vidalia, La., (7,22, 64)	Expedition to Gillespie's
Attack on Steamer, (7,24,64)	Plantation (8, 4-6, 64)
Expedition to Gillespie's Plantation in La., (8, 4-9, 64)	
Skirmish, Concordia Bayou., La. (8, 5, 64)	63rd Infantry
Skirmish at Bucks Ferry, (9, 19-22, 64)	Skirmish, Waterproof, La., (4, 20, 64)
Expedition to Waterproof and Sicily Island, (9, 26-30, 64)	Skirmish, Ashwood, Miss. (6, 25, 64)
Expedition to Homochitto River (10, 5-8, 64)	Skirmish Camp Marengo, (9, 4, 64)
Expedition to York Plantation, La., (10, 26-27, 64)	Skirmish, Bullitt's Bayou, (9, 24, 64)
Skirmish at Black River, (10, 31-11, 1, 64)	
	70th Infantry
	Skirmishes, Buck's Ferry (9, 19-22, 64)

Source: Frederick H. Dyer, *A Compendium of the War of the Rebellion* (Dayton, Ohio, 1979 printing), pp. 1721,1733,1734; *Official Army Register of the Volunteer Force of the U.S. Army*, VIII (Washington, D.C., 1867); Muster and Regimental Description Books for 6th Heavy Artillery, 58th Infantry, 63rd Infantry, 70 Infantry, Record Group 94, The National Archives, Washington, D.C.

Unlike white soldiers elsewhere, black troops in Natchez had to learn soldiering under wartime conditions without the advantages of having ever experienced militia duty or being able to read posted orders. Also, most of them must have been terribly anxious and gravely worried about family and loved ones. Many of their wives and children had been left behind on abandoned plantations or were among the refugee population somewhere in the camps at Natchez. Few black soldiers could read or write letters to find out what had happened to their families. Under these conditions, black soldiers would frequently sneak away after taps to try to find their relatives among the camps. Others would bring wives and children back to the barracks with them. Sometimes the women were family, sometimes they were sweethearts, and sometimes they were camp followers selling sex for survival.

The array of incidents intruding upon camp life at Natchez was met by orders issued in rapid succession, but few probably achieved their intended purpose. What follows is a sampling of directives, orders, communications, and proclamations emanating from the fort as the whites in charge tried to control the situation.³⁰¹

Circular January 4, 1865 — Fort McPherson: Passes to enlisted men to pass outside fortifications shall not exceed two to each company at a time.

Special Order #8 — October 26, 63: All negro women within our camps without a pass employed or unemployed will be arrested forthwith and sent to contraband camps. They will be allowed to stay until tomorrow morning.

Special Order #15 — November 14, 1863: Commanders will allow their men to rest until 3:00 at which time they will proceed to clean quarters. There will be inspection of quarters and clothing tomorrow morning at 9:00 am.

All colored women & children found within the lines after the hours of 8 o'clock tomorrow without proper authority will be arrested and sent to the coral under guard.

Commandant and companies will designate and give papers to four competent female cooks to each company and cause the same to be sent to H.Q. for approval. All others must be sent to the coral as their presence have a demoralizing effect.

General Order #3 — November 15, 1863: There must be proper sinks provided and it is engendered upon officers, non-coms, and privates to arrest and punish in severest manner any person found guilty of committing nuisances within camp lines other than at sinks.

Special Order #19 — November 16, 1863: Whiskey is to be issued in drinks only. The 1st. Sergeant will, immediately after morning and evening Roll, march their men to the Commissary, bring them to a point and dress them in a line and see that they remain silent and orderly with cup in hand. The commissary sergeant, beginning at the right, will issue to each his ration

301. See especially Muster, Order, and Regimental Description Books for Sixth Regiment, U.S. Colored Heavy Artillery; Seventieth Regiment, U.S. Colored Infantry, Record Group 94, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

from right to left. In no case will greater portions be issued without approval.

General Order #4 — December 3, 1863: There has recently been considerable firing in camp by men who know no better and by officers who ought [to], and do, know better. - All men coming off duty with loaded fire arms will be marched to the River Bank to fire their pieces. Violators will be severely punished.

General Order #7 — February 15, 1865: There will be company and squad drill every day between 2:00 and 4:00 pm.

General Order #2 — October 10, 1865: It having come to the attention of the captain that enlisted men are continually leaving camp without proper permission, some to commit depredations, others to lounge around the depot, and other places. To rectify this evil, It is hereby ordered that no enlisted man will be allowed to leave the camp limits except as follows: 1. When on duty. 2. In company with a commanding officer. 3. With a pass from Company Commander. 4. Enlisted men wishing to be absent from camp after retreat must have passes stamped by regimental commander.

Such directives as the above did little good, however, in preventing black soldiers, refugees, and the uprooted from spilling over into the community. It was an almost impossible situation to control. Col. Willard C. Earle said as much in response to a dressing-down he received from an acting superior officer:

In reply let me say that I value the reputation of my command as I do my own sacred honor and I shall defend it as such and I now say without fear of contradiction that for last ten days not one of my command have been out of camp after retreat, and, furthermore, that a gun has not been fired by any of my men in guard unauthorized. Any person who says to the contrary of this is false.

If I am to be responsible for the acts of the swarm of soldiers, both white and black, that passes up the valley to the _____ and lie around upon the side of the hill back of Brown's garden, I wish to know of it.³⁰²

Much of the confusion reflected the normal turmoil of war and the throwing together of a displaced population of refugees and soldiers. From the time Natchez was occupied in July of 1863, Union forces conducted nearly 700 raids, actions, skirmishes, battles, campaigns, operations, and expeditions in Mississippi. Many of these operations occurred in the southern part of the state, and soldiers on expedition looked to Natchez as a safe haven. Military records document expeditions and skirmishes in the immediate vicinity of Natchez by several dozen units stationed elsewhere, including the 98th Colored Infantry out of Vicksburg. Black and white soldiers often showed up in Natchez when lost from

302. Colonel W.C. Earle to Colonel B.G. Farrar, May 16, 1864, Order Books, Seventy-First Regiment, U.S. Colored Infantry, (Consolidated into the Seventieth Regiment), Record Group 94, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

their regiments or on stopovers for supplies. Others might be deserters from units as far away as New Orleans. Then, too, there were the camp followers and retainers that certainly included prostitutes, sutlers, merchants looking for supply business with the lessees of abandoned plantations, and northern adventurers, like the journalist John Knox quoted above, hoping to profit from the war as first-hand observers.³⁰³

Part of the general confusion also stemmed from training activities that required drilling and practice maneuvers on the bluffs above the river, in town squares, and on the open grounds of suburban estates. Soldiers needed space for exercise, for recreation, and just to turn around in. Also, because most of the squads and companies were poorly equipped, inadequately dressed, ill housed, and short on rations, the scene had a certain ragtag character to it. Food shortages were as much of a problem for the black units as was lack of ammunition and shoes. Col. W. C. Earle, of the 70th Colored Infantry, tried to remedy the problem by sending his troops into the countryside to forage for vegetables:

I have the honor to report that my command has had no vegetables fed to them for months past and it being necessary that vegetables be procured, I respectfully request that I be permitted to send a forage party to consist of two companies under the command of Major W. W. Boatwright into the country to forage for such vegetable as can be attained.³⁰⁴

Drilling parties, foraging squads, work details, expeditions, and the like were afoot at all hours of the day. Most soldiers were probably stationed within the confines of Fort McPherson toward the end of the war, but black recruits could be stationed just about anywhere in the community. The site of the original Fort Rosalie — at the western end of the bluffs overlooking Natchez Under-the-Hill — housed a mansion estate that was used as army headquarters in the first months of the war. Black troops were barracked Under-the-Hill near Brown's lumber camp, on the bluffs above the town to the north, and in the old slave market at the Forks-of-the-Road east of town. Squads of soldiers moved between the various locations all the time, giving the entire town the perpetual look of a military camp for much of the war.³⁰⁵

The question of just who were the black soldiers in Natchez cannot be answered with certainty at this writing. What can be said is that the soldiers were from all age groups between the ages of sixteen and fifty, with young men predominating. Most of them probably had families somewhere in the immediate vicinity. A significant percentage were second generation blacks from Adams County and adjoining counties and parishes in Mississippi and Louisiana. But many had been born in distant states — probably brought to Natchez in the slave trade. Indeed, one of the ironies of the war is that some of the black soldiers stationed at the slave market at the Forks had probably been housed there

303. Ibid., also Bearss, *Decision in Mississippi: Mississippi's*, pp. 464-494; Dyer, *A Compendium of the War*, pp. 766-787.

304. Col. W.C. Earle to Lt. C.B. Smith, Acting Adjutant General, September 12, 1864, Order Book, Seventieth Regiment, U.S. Colored Infantry, Record Group 92, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

305. See the Muster Books mentioned above as well as Bishop William Henry Elder's *Civil War Diary: 1862-1865* (Jackson, Miss., No Publication Date) and Register of Baptisms, May 9, 1861 to December 26, 1865, St. Mary's Cathedral, Natchez, Mississippi.

at least once before in their lives when sold by slave traders to the masters with whom they were now at war.

Tables 12 and 13 below are compilations of data taken from the Muster Books of the 58th U.S. Colored Infantry stationed at Natchez. Most of the recruits in the 58th hailed from the Mississippi side of the river and were mustered in shortly after the occupation of Natchez in the summer of 1863. Not all companies of the 58th are represented in the Table 12, but it is a large enough sample to get a feel for the situation.³⁰⁶

**Table 12. Age and Place of Birth of Black Soldiers at Natchez
58th U.S. Colored Infantry**

	Ages					Total
	16-20	21-25	26-30	31-40	41 +	
#	151	157	117	126	51	602
%	25%	26%	19%	21%	8%	100%

	Place of Birth							Total
	Adams County	Miss.	La.	Mo. Ky. Tenn.	N.C. S.C. VA. Myld.	Ga. Ala.	?	
#	101	218	44	82	134	9	14	602
%	17%	36%	7%	15%	22%	1%	2%	100%

Source: Muster Books and Regimental Description Records, 58th Colored U.S. Infantry, RG. 94, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

306. Muster, Order, and Regimental Description Books, Fifty-Eighth Regiment, U.S. Colored Infantry, Record Group 94, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

Table 13. Sample of Individuals Born in Adams County
58th. Colored U.S. Infantry: Co. E

Name	Age	Occupation	Owner	Married	Remarks
Richard Austin	24	Gardener	General Quitman	S	Appt Sergeant
Prince Albert	40	Coachman	Philip Nicholes	M	
Frank Burris	20	Field Hand	Thomas McGowin	M	Died, July 1864
Walter Bradley	25	Gardener	Major Chotah	M	
Elias Docker	22	Gardener	Benjamin Chase	S	
William Dorsey	18	Field Hand	Thomas McGowin	M	
Jacob Ellis	20	Field Hand	Sam Courin	?	
David Fletcher	20	Field Hand	Major Chotah	S	Died, March 1864
Anthony Farass	22	Field Hand	Samuel Haubert	S	
William Gray	23	?	Henry Chotale	S	
Jeff. Harding	40	?	Frank Reynolds	M	
Scott Simon	40	Field Hand	Johnson Rucker	?	Deserted, Sept. 63
Screws Simon	27	Field Hand	Johnson Rucker	M	Deserted, Sept. 63
Wallis Stevens	21	Butler	Richard Chotah	M	Died, May 1864
Charles Vessles	19	Butler	General Quitman	S	Corporal
George Walters	28	Field Hand	?	S	Died, Sept. 1863
Edward Whites	44	Field Hand	Judge Turner	M	
Joe Witherspool	45	Field Hand	Girard Stanton	M	
William Wood	22	Field Hand	Samuel Graham	S	Died, Sept. 1863
Geo Washington	38	Groom	A. L. Bingaman	M	Murd by Guerillas
Nathan Wright	21	Field Hand	John Rucker	S	
George Wright	28	Field Hand	John Rucker	M	Deserted, Oct. 63 Returned, June 65
James Wright	24	Field Hand	John Rucker	M	Deserted, Oct. 63 Returned, June. 65
Albert Nichols	18	Field Hand	Free	?	Corporal
Joseph Hinton	26	Field Hand	Jonathan Day	?	Died, Dec. 1865
John Jefferson	24	Butler	Mr. Martin	?	
David Stephens	44	Gardener	Major Chotah	?	
Edward Moor	23	Field Hand	Joseph Turpin	?	
G. Hubbard	23	Dining Car Svt.	?	?	
Oli Laster	20	Field Hand	?	?	
Frank Waters	18	Field Hand	?	?	
Elisha Clasly	32	Field Hand	E. Fowles	?	Died, Nov. 1864
Joe Baker	20	Field Hand	Widow Besley	?	Deserted, June 64
N. McNealey	18	Field Hand	Widow Besley	?	
Paris McNealey	19	Field Hand	Widow Besley	?	
George Williams	18	Field Hand	Widow Besley	?	
General Lewis	18	Field Hand	John Rucker	?	Dischg/Disblty
Major James	18	Field Hand	Mr. Lambling	?	Deserted, July 64
Jerimiah Hill	19	Butcher	?	?	Received \$100

Source: Muster Books and Regimental Description Records, 58th Colored U.S. Infantry, RG. 94, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

The individuals listed in Table 13 cannot be said at this point in the discussion to be representative of the black soldiers stationed in Natchez during the war. But several aspects of the profiles are noteworthy and probably typical. Company E of the 58th Colored U.S. Infantry recruited brothers (the McNealeys, Wrights, and Simons), slaves owned by the same owners, and domestic servants along with fieldhands. Many of the Adams County slaves recruited into Company E probably knew one another from before the war. Indeed, there are clear indications in the muster records that platoons, squads, and companies were often composed of slaves from the same plantations. A number of the recruits were married, and they undoubtedly had wives and children in one of the refugee camps in or around Natchez. Only one of the black recruits, a groom for planter nabob A. L. Bingaman, was killed in action, murdered by partisans with a pistol shot to the head. About 18 percent of the recruits died from diseases contracted in camp, and about the same number deserted. This represents a significant contrast with the data for the entire 58th Regiment. For the group as a whole nearly 32 percent died from diseases and natural deaths (487 soldiers), and 10 percent deserted (162).³⁰⁷ Both figures require further comment.

The number of soldiers who died in Natchez is simply astounding. Casualties for a sample of 3270 black soldiers stationed at Natchez (based on muster book reports) show that nearly 38 percent died in camp from diseases contracted after recruitment. That percentage translates into 830 men or about one out of every three black soldiers. Compared to the Union army overall, where the figure was one out of thirteen, the Natchez death toll was staggeringly high. Add to the dead the hundreds who came down with debilitating diseases — but lived — and you have the picture of a garrison beset by such rampant sickness as to render companies unfit for active duty most of the time. Gut-wrenching diarrhea, pneumonia, camp fevers brought on by malaria and unsanitary living conditions, and outbreaks of smallpox and measles kept camp hospitals overflowing with the dead and dying. (The range of ailments is displayed in Table 14 below).

307. Ibid.

Table 14. Casualties Among Black Soldiers in Natchez

Total	Dead	Measles	Colds, Lung, Pneumonia		
3,270	830*	64 (8%)	29 (3%)		
		Fevers	Dysentery	Diarrhea	
		21 (2%)	15 (2%)	34 (4%)	
		Small Pox	Diseases	Other	
		104 (12%)	470 (57%)	86 (10%)	
		Wounds			
		26 (3%)			

Source: Muster Books and Regimental Description Records, 6th U.S. Colored Heavy Artillery; 58th Colored U.S. Infantry; 70th U.S. Colored Infantry, R. G. 94, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

*This total does not include battle casualties.

**Percentage calculated on total deaths, including battle casualties.

In some companies the toll was even higher than the average. Company D of the 58th Regiment Colored U.S. Infantry recruited sixty blacks in a five-month period from August 19 to December of 1863. Forty-eight percent of these soldiers were dead within one year — one out of two recruits. Thirty percent had perished within three months of their enlistment, probably before they had even gone on their first outside maneuvers.³⁰⁸

No wonder that black soldiers deserted at every opportunity. Nearly 13 percent were AWOL at some time during the war. Some units had higher desertion rates than others: thirty-six percent of the recruits in Company A of the 70th Regiment, U.S. Colored Infantry, deserted within six to eight weeks of their enlistment. Where they went or why they left is unknown, but it is not difficult to understand that desertion may have seemed the only way of saving one's life in view of the death toll at Natchez.³⁰⁹

As difficult as the plight was for black soldiers in Natchez, that of the women and children huddled together in the refugee camps Under-the-Hill, across the river in Vidalia, and to the north at the town of Washington was probably worse. The town's principal refugee camp was located under the bluff just north of Brown's lumber yard, and it contained as many as 4000 refugees in the summer of 1863. When James Yeatman surveyed the camp in the fall of 1863, 2000 had already perished — as many as seventy-five in a single

308. Ibid.

309. Ibid.; Seventieth Regiment, U.S. Colored Infantry. See also Andrew black, "In the Service of the United States: Disease and Mortality in Black Civil War Soldiers," unpublished graduate seminar paper, California State University, Northridge, in author's possession.

day.³¹⁰ Most of the dead were probably children infected with smallpox and measles. The Catholic Bishop William Henry Elder told of his first visit to the camp's hospital on September 4, 1863:

For the first time I learned that there was a Hospital belonging to the Colored Camp. It was the two story frame house at the gate of the Camp near the Furnace & Mill. On the floor behind the door lay the corpse of a man with the hands tied. In the middle lay a boy breathing hard — apparently dying. He had no covering but a shirt — nothing to lie on but some coats & rags under his head & a part of his body. I talked with him. He seemed to understand and answer affirmatively. At a risk I baptized him & gave him absolution. An old man of 92 years lying on a bundle of rags in a corner, called to me to "Come & pray for him." I instructed him briefly - & had no hesitation about baptizing him. He accepted explicitly The Catholic Church, & promised to follow it if he shd. recover. The next day I gave him Extreme Unction & the Scapular wh. he received with sensible devotion. Baptized three infants, & four adults in danger of death.³¹¹

Bishop Elder and his associate priests at St. Mary's Cathedral devoted much of their time over the next sixteen months to ministering to the refugee population in the camps. Making almost daily visits, the Catholic priests baptized hundreds of refugee children and adults at nine locations in the town: the camp Under-the-Hill, the Negro Hospital adjacent the camp, the city hospital located at the eastern edge of town on the road to the Forks-of-the-Road Army barracks, a place referred to in the baptismal records as the "Pest House," the "smallpox hospital" located at the estate of "Mrs. Ogden" outside of town, the "colored" barracks at the Forks-of-the-Road, the Jefferson Hotel (which was used as a refugee depot for Louisiana refugees both white and black), a facility identified as Buckner's House, and across the river at a refugee camp and hospital in Vidalia. Most of the baptisms were administered to dying refugees, and the data provides significant insight into the location of the camps and the composition of the refugee population in and around Natchez.³¹² (See Table 15 below)

310. See James E. Yeatman, *A Report on the Condition of the Freedmen of the Mississippi Valley* (St. Louis, Mo., 1864), pp. 1-16.

311. Elder, *Civil War Diary*, pp. 62-63.

312. Register of Baptisms, May 9, 1861 to December 26, 1865, St. Mary's Cathedral, Natchez, Mississippi.

Table 15 (a). Baptisms of Black Refugees and Soldiers (Children)

Camps	Infants with Single Parents	Infants with Both Parents	Children ages 2-14 with Single Parents	Children Ages 2-14 with Both Parents	Total Infants	Total Children
Camp	62	21	162	60	83	222
Negro/Hosp	5	0	10	1	5	11
City Hosp	0	0	1	0	0	1
Pest House	1	0	2	3	1	5
Small Pox Hosp	4	2	12	1	6	13
Forks	0	0	0	0	0	0
Jefferson Hotel	0	1	1	1	1	2
Buckner's House	0	0	0	0	0	0
Vidalia	0	0	0	2	0	2
Total	72	24	188	68	96	255

Table 15 (b). Baptisms Continued (Adults)

Location	Males	Females	Elderly Males	Elderly Females	Total Adults	Total elderly
Camp	73	156	32	24	229	56
Negro/Hosp	2	19	7	1	21	8
City Hosp	21	3	3	4	24	7
Pest House	55	30	10	1	85	11
Samll Pox Hosp	49	11	9	1	60	10
Forks	89	1	0	0	90	0
Jefferson Hotel	1	0	0	0	1	0
Buckner's House	6	1	0	0	7	0
Vidalia	0	5	1	0	5	1
Total	296	226	63	27	522	93

Source: Bishop William Henry Elder, *Civil War Diary: 1862-1865* (Jackson, Miss., No Publication Date); Register of Baptisms, 1863-1865, St. Mary's Cathedral, Natchez, Miss.

Assuming that the baptized were somewhat characteristic of the population in the camps, it is clear that the vast majority of the refugees, 60 percent, were women and children. When the camp is assessed on its own, the proportion is significantly higher: nearly 80 percent of those baptized at the camp Under-the-Hill — meaning those dying — were women and children. And nearly 75 percent of the children and babies were the children of single mothers.³¹³

There were also hundreds of black residents and refugees living as best they could outside of the main camp. Bishop Elder confided in his diary that a barn owned by the Church near Pine Ridge road "was torn to pieces yesterday by Colored People, to make shanties under the hill. . . ." Barns, fences, and almost any scrap of wood in the town became fair game as black refugees dragged them away to build make-shift shelters in would-be camps at the Devil's Punch Bowl upriver, near the Forks-of-the-Road, and at a camp outside the town of Washington near Jefferson College.³¹⁴

The advantages of living in the Federal camps came down to a question of food rather than shelter. Hungry women received 10 ounces of pork or bacon a week, 1 pound of cornmeal five times a week, 1 pound of flour or soft bread — or 12 ounces of hard bread — twice a week, portions of sugar, vinegar, candles, soap, salt, potatoes, and rye coffee. Children under 14 were issued one half the adult rations. But the trade-off was the high risk of contacting infectious diseases, devastating sicknesses that turned the shanty town Under-the-Hill into a death camp. Under these circumstance, numerous black refugees avoided the federal camps at all costs.³¹⁵

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The tragedy of the black experience in wartime Natchez was that its black soldiers and refugees had gone there looking for a new life. What many of them found instead, whether in the camps or the army barracks, was death. And those few thousand blacks who had contracted as subsistence wage laborers on plantations leased by the government or operated by loyal planters, realized few wages for their work and enjoyed little freedom in the process. Perhaps that is why the vast majority of Natchez district blacks avoided the army camps, leased plantations, and refugee depots during the war. Better to stay put — they must have reasoned — and grow corn and vegetables (or else subsist by fishing and hunting) while waiting out the war than to face the almost certain death, terror, and restrictions associated with the other options available.

Yet, when all is said and done, the Civil War experience of Natchez district blacks was an uplifting tale of courage, valor, fortitude, and risk-taking. The documents are filled with examples of freedmen refusing to accept life on terms established by their former masters or their Yankee liberators. One of the most revealing sources is a diary kept by an

313. Ibid.

314. Ibid.

315. general Order No. 30, Col. E.D. Townsend, Assistant Adjutant General, January 25, 1864, *Official Records*, Ser. 3, Vol. 4: 44-45.

anonymous young white woman who lived on one of the plantation estates near Natchez. The entries excerpted below show a woman enraged over the "faithlessness" of her former slaves.³¹⁶

July 16, 1863:

This same evening Billy came back with a note to Aunt J. from Uncle R. This note had no name on the back and only George signed at the bottom. When we awakened the next, yesterday, morning Billy had returned to the Yankees. A good riddance, I say, as he is too lazy to work for himself and the biggest liar I ever knew.

The negroes are flocking to the enemy in town and the Yanks are cussing them and saying they wished they had never seen a negro. They are an ungrateful set and we are all tired of them. None of ours have gone from here yet but Billy & I hope they will all prove faithful to the end.

July 25, 1863:

We went to Grandma's — her maid and Maud's sister have left and a more arrent hypocrite I never heard of than Harriet. Grandma does not seem to care at all about the negroes leaving — she is right too for if they go let them and reap the benifit of it too. Pa's boy Allen has gone, fooled off by some old fool. Fred the carriage driver has gone to what they all think a better place but poor deluded creatures they will find out too late who are their best friends, Master or Massa. Mrs. Dunbar's two house servants, Nancy and Mary Ann, left Thursday morning and the latter took all of her children. Now Mrs. D. has to do the house cleaning and nearly all the house work. It seems that if the rest who are here if they had any feeling they would feel sorry for Mrs. D. and remain faithful.

July 28, 1863:

On Sunday, Mrs. D. let Joe come over and take us to church. Tillie went with us. Mr. Stratton gave us a good sermon and the most beautiful prayers. . . . When the services were nearly ended a negro man in ___ Sunday clothes came up the middle aisle to the pulpit, stopped a little while there, walked to the right hand side of the Church. Mr. Carradine got up and demanded what he wanted. The impudent scamp said he came to church and wanted a seat. All of the congregation looked astounded as did Mr. Stratton. Mr. C. showed him into the gallery where the servants sit. I was so angry. Miss Lucie Struve says she looked around and the Yankees were laughing heartily to themselves. I should not be surprised if some one of our enemies had sent him in the church as an insult to us. Old May and Rizzie left Sunday morning and that night old Sally

316. Anonymous Diary, Mississippi Department of Archives and History, Jackson, Mississippi.

decamped with all her "traps." Yesterday morning Jim and Frank left. I think the latter was persuaded off by some of the older negroes. Florence told us yesterday that her mother was packing up to go to the Yankees. We are in a delightful state of expectancy not knowing exactly what time his honor and wife will leave. I think negroes are a lot of ingrates and God punishes us for ingratitude as much as for any other sin. Let the foe take all the negroes — they are welcome to them and the sooner we are rid of them the quicker we will whip our enemy.

July 30, 1863:

Ned and May are still with us but they do no work. Ned goes to town every day after something connected with the Devil no doubt. Matilda left last night. We think all will go whensoever it pleases their majesties. Rose is sick so for the last two mornings we have been obliged to do a greater part of the house work. It is not hard to do. Taking out the slops is the only part that I do not like. I am going to help Sarah iron today as she has so much to do with Matilda's work. I do hope some of them will be faithful for if they are not, I shall lose entire faith in the whole race. Mr. Dunbar's Joe left Monday. He was a consummate hypocrite, in fact they all are.

August 23, 1863:

Celia left last Saturday afternoon with her two children. She was very cool about it, had a wagon to come out for her things. I wish that I had ordered the man away and then made her go, but I was fearful I should bring trouble upon Aunt Jenny. Anyway, she is gone and I have been helping old Emmeline to cook.

For white men and women who had never ironed or handled slop pots, the idea of doing menial work was simply infuriating. Such a response is understandable. But what is significant is the way black men and women had so eagerly embraced their new found freedom at every opportunity. For a black man to march down the center aisle of the most prestigious white church in town intent on sitting among his former masters, was less a mark of impudence than a display of contempt. Such actions as these were characteristic of the new relationship between masters and slaves everywhere in the Natchez district after the summer of 1863.

Contempt and empowerment and freedom is what freedman Sam Geoff displayed in his appeal, in March of 1864, to Treasury Agent R. S. Hart for intervention on his behalf, and on the behalf of the thirty-four other freedmen whom he represented, for wages due him by the lessees of the Johnson and Carr plantations in Concordia.³¹⁷ Such actions as Geoff's were described as "disgusting business" by planter Stephen Duncan in a letter to his father in January of 1865. Duncan was livid with anger because most of his

317. R.S. Hart, Assistant Special Agent, Treasury Department, to William P. Mellen, March 7, 1864, records of the U.S. Treasury Department, Record Group 366, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

"negroes . . . want to set their own terms for next year. . . but I could not allow everything they wanted — thus 1/2 at Oakley, Holly Ridge, and Duncannon will go."³¹⁸

And go they did. Or else they simply refused to work, conducting what amounted to sit-down strikes on the job, refusing to leave and refusing to labor. The Assistant Provost Marshal for Concordia Parish had his hands full in dealing with "strikes" by hands unsatisfied with working conditions and wages on the plantations.³¹⁹ Such things had never been heard of before in the Natchez district. John McMurran, Natchez lawyer and the owner of Melrose, echoed a common sentiment in saying to Duncan that "nothing can be made with the inefficiency of present labor."³²⁰

In response to nearly incessant complaints, Provost Marshal courts tried dozens of freedmen for assault, larceny, perjury, absence without leave, and vaguely defined insubordination. Sentences ranged from jail terms and duty on the public works to fines of \$5 or \$10 and forfeiture of wages.³²¹ One officer reported on a "regular organization of white men who employ negroes to steal cotton for them."³²² But historians of social history have to be very careful not to mistake class conflict for irresponsibility. Larceny may be clear and simple theft, or it may be a kind of expropriation; but insubordination is often quite something else: a conscious challenge of rank, authority, and the order of things.

Whether or not the ex-slaves were inefficient — or irresponsible — is debatable, but there can be little doubt that many of them were determined to test their freedom by acting freely. The black deacons of the Wall Street Baptist Church, for instance, shouldered their white ministers aside and ran the Church themselves during the war, eventually petitioning the director of the Freedmen's Bureau in Washington, D.C. for continued

318. Stephen Duncan, Jr. to Stephen Duncan, Sr., January 11, 1863, Duncan Papers, LSU, Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

319. Report of Maj. George G. Reynolds, August 1865, BFAL, Record Group 105, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

320. John T. McMurran to Stephen Duncan, July 22, 1865, Duncan Papers. McMurran owned a beautiful Natchez estate, Melrose, and two Louisiana (Moro and Riverside) plantations at the time of his note to Duncan. McMurran's Natchez estate was located close to the U.S. Army barracks for black troops in Natchez. The U.S. Army had occupied the old slave market at the Forks-of-the-road near Melrose probably because its slave-pens could be easily converted to barracks. Land deep maps for the 1880's show open space, a pond that was probably used for bathing slaves and (later) soldiers, and warehouse-like buildings at the Forks. A McMurran neighbor and relative by marriage, Rosie Quitman, of Monmouth writes in her diary of being able to see the soldiers on picket duty in the general vicinity of Melrose. An entry in a diary kept by McMurran's daughter-in-law tells of "Pa McMurran" being wounded by a black soldier on picket duty somewhere near Melrose. According to the diary, the soldier was then court-martialed and hung the next day. No records of such a court-martial have turned up in the muster books of the black regiments at this writing and it is unlikely that such a summary execution would have happened. See *Grandma's Diary from Melrose*, January 10, 1865, Melrose File, Historic Natchez Foundation, Natchez, Mississippi; *Diary of Rosalie Quitman Family Papers*, SHC, Chapel Hill, North Carolina.

321. Court Record of Sub-Commissioners of Freedmen, Concordia, Louisiana, May-September, 1865, BFAL, Record Group 105, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

322. *Ibid.*, Report of Major George D. Reynolds, August 1865.

authority to operate the establishment. Their petition was a proud expression of their loyalty as Unionists — in contrast to its white church members — as well as an appeal to common sense: ninety percent of the church's membership was black.³²³

Proud, too, must have been the 1080 black children who filled the eleven "colored" schools of Natchez. Ninety other youngsters studied at two schools across the river in Vidalia. Most of the twenty-two teachers who taught blacks in the district were members of the American Missionary Association or else affiliated with the Reformed Presbyterian Church. But two of the town's schools were owned and operated by "colored women, one of whom [was] very well educated."³²⁴

The Provost Marshal for Natchez handed out 869 passes to blacks in the town who were "employed on some legitimate business and supporting themselves" in May of 1865. Three hundred others were sent to camps at Vidalia and at Davis Bend. The same officer registered 129 "Returns of Marriages among the Freedmen, solemnized by duly authorized ministers."³²⁵

A few months earlier, in March of 1865, Federal authorities in Natchez had wanted to round up all "destitute" freedmen (and freedwomen) in town for transport to a plantation colony about three miles from Vidalia, to a camp at nearby Washington, and to the Davis Bend colony: "As the city of Natchez is crowded far beyond its capacity with a large and idle population, I am removing all freedmen without visible means of support, or living in unhealthy houses and shanties, to the colony — this is to prevent spread of disease." But the order to evict Natchez freedmen was stopped on directions from the War Department, which were interpreted to mean that the Provost Marshal had no authority to say where free people should live. As a result, those Natchez blacks who had survived the death camps found themselves in a relatively independent position at war's end: impoverished, illiterate, and without meaningful skills to be sure, but living on their own and looking ahead with determination to what the future would bring.³²⁶

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Blacks throughout the district, clearly, used every opportunity available during the Civil War to challenge the constraints that all sides had tried to place upon them. Indeed, the story of the Civil War, when told from the perspective of the enslaved, is a tale of resistance, combat, death, and a dramatic struggle to survive. Almost overnight, people who had been enslaved for over two centuries began to act like free men and women ready to take on the world.

323. Ibid., Edward Clayton, Tony Jones, Darnell Halty, and Henry Johnson to Maj. Gen. O.O. Howard, July 3, 1865.

324. Ibid., James Yeatman to Maj. Gen. O.O. Howard, May 25, 1865.

325. Ibid., Report of Maj. George D. Reynolds, May 1, 1865.

326. Ibid., Maj. George D. Reynolds to Brig. Gen. W.E. Strong, Inspector General, March 25, 1865.

FREEDOM'S PROMISE/FREEDOM'S REALITY

The ending of the Civil War launched the African-Americans of Natchez on a grand experiment unlike anything they had known as slaves. By the summer of 1865, all Natchez blacks were free. No matter that the Thirteenth Amendment still awaited ratification, slavery was dead. But what was to happen next? Where would the once enslaved go? Whom were they to trust? How would they live? Work? Cope? The future held out such bright promise that little could be seen clearly for the brilliance of it all.³²⁷

The future appeared far less promising, however, for the district's former masters; but, like the freedmen themselves, they were determined to make the most of it. Firstly, almost all district whites wanted to bind ex-slaves to plantations on contracts for yearly wages. Cotton prices were high and a good crop would do much to redeem the lost fortunes of war. Secondly, something had to be done, all whites generally agreed, about controlling blacks now that slavery's iron rule no longer held. Thirdly, the freedman's political status had to be carefully delineated so as to not to disenfranchise the white minority by extending suffrage to the black majority. Although some district whites favored suffrage for literate, property owning black males, most opposed the idea. Perhaps a few blacks might be allowed to own town property or to testify in court cases involving other blacks, but the

327. The relevant secondary literature affording insight to the black experience in Natchez in the post-war era from 1865 to 1880 is immense. Among the most important works are the following: Martha Mitchell Bigelow, "Freedmen of the Mississippi Valley, 1862-1865," *Civil War History* VIII (March, 1962), pp. 38-47; Ronald L.F. Davis, *Good and Faithful Labor: From Slavery to Sharecropping in the Natchez District, 1860-1890* (Westport, Conn., 1982); Michael W. Fitzgerald, *The Union League Movement in the Deep South: Politics and Agricultural Change During Reconstruction* (Baton Rouge, La., 1989); James Wilford Garner, *Reconstruction in Mississippi* (Gloucester, Mass., 1961, reprint of 1901 edition); Kenneth S. Greenberg, "The Civil War and the Redistribution of Land: Adams County, Mississippi, 1860-1870," *Agricultural History* XLII (April, 1978), pp. 292-305; William Ivy Hair, *Bourbonism and Agrarian Protest: Louisiana Politics, 1877-1900* (Baton Rouge, La., 1969); William C. Harris, *The Day of the Carpetbagger: Republican Reconstruction in Mississippi* (Baton Rouge, La., 1979); *Presidential Reconstruction in Mississippi* (Baton Rouge, La., 1967); Richard J. Haws and Michael V. Namorato, "Race, Property Rights, and the Economic Consequences of Reconstruction: A Case Study," *Vanderbilt Law Review* 32 (1979), pp. 305-326; Jane Sharp Hermann, *The Pursuit a Dream* (New York, 1981); William E. Highsmith, "Louisiana Landholding During War and Reconstruction," *The Louisiana Historical Quarterly* XXXVIII (January, 1955), pp. 39-54; George D. Humphrey, "The Failure of the Mississippi Freedmen's Bureau in Black Labor Relations, 1865-1867," *The Journal of Mississippi History* XLV (February, 1983), pp. 23-37; Gerald David Jaynes, *Branches Without Roots: Genesis of the Black Working Class in the American South, 1866-1882* (New York, 1986); Marshal Scott Legan, "Disease and the Freedmen in Mississippi during Reconstruction," *The Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences* XXVIII (July, 1973), pp. 257-267; Billy W. Libby, "Senator Hiram Revels of Mississippi Takes His Seat, January-february, 1870," *The Journal of Mississippi History* XXXVII (November, 1975), pp. 381-394; John R. Lynch, *The Autobiography of John Roy Lynch* (Chicago, 1970, reprint edition); William Alexander Mabry, "Disfranchisement of the Negro in Mississippi," *The Journal of Southern History* IV (August, 1938), pp. 318-333; Neil R. McMillen, *Dark Journey: Black Mississippians in the Age of Jim Crow* (Urbana, Ill., 1989); Donald G. Nieman, "The Freedmen's Bureau and the Mississippi Black Code," *The Journal of Mississippi History* XL (May, 1978), pp. 91-118; Whitelaw Reid, *After the War - A Tour of the Southern States, 1865-1866* (New York, N.Y., 1965, reprint of 1866 edition); George A. Sewell and Margaret L. Dwight, *Mississippi Black History Makers* (Jackson, 1984 edition); Jesse Thomas Wallace, *A History of Negroes of Mississippi from 1865-1890* (Clinton, Miss., 1927); Vernon Lane Wharton, *The Negro in Mississippi, 1865-1890* (New York, N.Y., 1965, reprint of 1947 edition); B.I. Wiley, "Vicissitudes of Early Reconstruction Farming in the Lower Mississippi Valley," *The Journal of Southern History* III (July, 1937), pp. 441-452; Theodore B. Wilson, *The Black Codes of the South* (University, Ala., 1965).

majority of ex-slaves should accept — it was commonly believed — their lot as field hands, secure in their families and the protection of their white employers.³²⁸

Accordingly, Natchez whites supported the passage and implementation of the infamous Mississippi Black Codes designed to define the rules of freedom for Mississippi blacks. Briefly told, the laws, passed by the Mississippi Legislature in 1865, deprived blacks of suffrage, the right to testify in court proceedings involving whites, the right to own or lease rural lands, and the right to be unemployed. All blacks were required to have signed contracts as plantation laborers or else permits to work elsewhere. Freedmen not under contracts or with approved permits would be arrested as vagrants, subject to a \$50 fine and ten days in jail. Those unable to pay the fine could be hired out as plantation workers at cost. Contracted workers, moreover, could be arrested as vagrants should they abscond from their employment prior to the termination of their contracts. Black children, up to the age of 18, could be apprenticed to responsible white employers. No freedmen, moreover, could carry or own firearms without a license.³²⁹

Mississippi's Black Codes met with a wave of protest from northern whites and southern blacks alike. So overwhelming was the opposition that even previous supporters of the Codes in Mississippi began to back away from them. The head of the Freedman's Bureau, Maj. Gen. Oliver O. Howard, instructed his Mississippi officers not to enforce the Code's strict provisions regarding property, firearms, apprenticeship laws, and court testimony. Within a year of their passage the Codes were revoked, but not before they had helped fuel the struggle between the nation's Republican Congress and President Andrew Johnson; a struggle that eventually witnessed the onset of Congressional Reconstruction.³³⁰

With the coming of the 1870s, Mississippi moved from Military Reconstruction into a period of civilian government in which black and white Republicans vied with white Democrats for political control of local and state offices. Black Mississippians, including several prominent Natchez residents, won (or were appointed to) high government positions in the state, and even served in the U. S. Senate. But the role of blacks in Mississippi politics was always dependent upon the willingness of the federal government to use soldiers in the protection of black suffrage. In those places where soldiers were present, such as at Natchez and Vicksburg, blacks held local office, participated in Republican political organizations, and achieved a measure of full citizenship for a time. In the rest of Mississippi, however, the late 1860s and early 1870s saw the rise of armed bands of state militia, irregular troops, and the Ku Klux Klan as nightriding terrorists intent on eliminating black participation in politics.³³¹

Reconstruction ended when the last federal troops pulled out of Mississippi in 1877. Thereafter Mississippi blacks were forced to fight a holding action in which they

328. See especially Davis, *Good And Faithful Labor*, pp. 58-169; Reid, *After the War*, pp. 475-575; Wharton, *The Negro In Mississippi*, pp. 91-105.

329. *Ibid.*, Fitzgerald, *The Union League Movement in the Deep South*, pp. 1-72; Harris, *Presidential Reconstruction in Mississippi*, pp. 1-185.

330. *Ibid.*, Garner, *Reconstruction in Mississippi*, pp. 75-257; *Natchez Democrat*, January 8, 1866, p. 2.

331. *Ibid.*

essentially lost their suffrage, faced heavy restrictions on their social rights, and experienced a hellish existence betwixt slavery and freedom tantamount to a caste milieu of clear and definite limitations.³³²

Although it is correct to say that full citizenship for Natchez blacks was eventually lost to them, the promise of freedom was never just an empty or completely forlorn gesture. Indeed, Natchez blacks, along with others in the state, defined the context of freedom's promise, shaped its course, and stood their ground on issues they deemed uncompromisable. If the promise of full freedom was never attained, it was not because none had struggled to achieve it.

GOOD AND FAITHFUL LABOR

The editor of the Natchez *Democrat* told his readers in 1866 that "no supernatural vision" was needed to see that the "child is already born who will behold the last negro in the State of Mississippi." Other whites generally agreed. The belief was not that the former slaves would leave the state wholesale, but that they would all perish simply because they were incapable of taking care of themselves. "With no one to provide for the aged and young," the editorial continued, "the sick and the helpless incompetent to provide for themselves, and brought unprepared into competition with the superior intelligence, tack, and muscle of free white labor, they [the ex-slaves] will surely and speedily perish."³³³

Such wishful thinking enabled planters to justify the Black Codes as legislation beneficial to the blacks themselves. In fact, however, freedmen did not perish. Nor did they become wards of their former masters. Rather, the period from 1865 to 1880 witnessed a confrontation between the races, and classes, in which Natchez freedmen resisted wardship and managed to stake out living space for themselves independent of their white employers. It began with a struggle over land.

Natchez district blacks emerged from slavery with several clear goals in mind. Most of them wanted land to farm on their own as the basic condition of their freedom. This was not to be unexpected since it was widely rumored that the Federal government would confiscate Rebel property and redistribute it to those loyal ex-slaves who had helped end the rebellion, especially those who had served as soldiers in the Union Army. Much of the initial effort of the Freedmen's Bureau was taken up in squelching this rumor. Numerous whites in the state were convinced that blacks planned to take the land by force in an uprising at Christmas, 1865.³³⁴

The hope for land, however, was largely a pipe dream. It was inevitable that neither Congress nor President Johnson would support so radical a move as the confiscation of private property for either class or racial goals. No hard evidence exists, moreover, of a

332. See especially McMillen, *Dark Journey*.

333. Natchez, *Democrat*, January 8, 1866, p. 2.

334. For a general discussion of this issue see Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution 1863-1877* (New York, N.Y., 1989), pp. 78-170.

planned insurgency among disgruntled blacks. This is not to say that freedmen were not determined to act. If they could not have land, they would have the next best thing to it: tenancy. Thousands of blacks throughout the Natchez hinterland refused to contract in 1865, 1866, and 1867, unless they were allowed to work on family plots under their own supervision. Some would call the new labor arrangement sharecropping (in which the freedmen received a share of the crop for wages), others would call it share tenancy (in which freedmen paid a share of their crop as rent). The key distinction between the two was over the resources contributed by the freedmen. Those able to supply mules and seed functioned as share tenants; those who offered only their labor worked on share wages. In most cases, however, the issue of pay was less important to blacks than the issue of independence from supervision on a daily basis. Freedmen simply refused to contract except on terms that enabled them to avoid the close overlordship of their daily work routine as had been the case in slavery.³³⁵

The low wage experiment, initially tried by the Federal government on leased and abandoned plantations during the war, had been unpopular with most district freedmen because it retained many of the features of slavery (gang labor and close supervision) with few of the advantages associated with the better run antebellum plantations. Freedmen were docked wages for time lost, for being late for work, for poor work, and for countless other infringements of the work routine. Numerous employers, moreover, had defrauded freedmen by running off once the crops were gathered without paying their wage bills at the end of the season. But most unsettling of all was the fact that a system of yearly wages involved a work routine similar to slavery, one in which workers were compensated with such low pay that few freedmen were able to save enough from their wages to buy land or to pay a fixed rent. Low pay and a slave-like supervision on the job resulted in an outcry by district freedmen in favor of working on shares as the only way to have some control over their lives.³³⁶

A careful study of mortgage records and the papers of the Freedman's Bureau indicates that most district fieldhands worked on a combined fixed wage and small share basis in 1864, moved to shares — usually one-third to one-half the crop as wages — in 1866, and then adopted share tenancy — paying one-half to two-thirds of the crop as rent — in the 1870s. A few black families leased lands in the district as fixed rent tenants, and a very few farmed small parcels of land as owner-operators. By 1880, numerous others, probably unattached single men and women, worked as fixed wage hands.³³⁷ (See Table 16)

Clearly, the majority of district freedmen in the Natchez hinterland were sharecroppers by 1880. The working arrangement on J. A. Gillespie's Hollywood plantation in Adams County was somewhat typical for the district. Gillespie, largely at the insistence of the freedmen on his place, had given up trying to impose fixed wages, mass contracts, and gang working conditions on his work force by 1868. Instead, the old planter contracted with squads of workers (usually composed of a family unit), paying them a share of the crops as wages. Eight or nine hands typically worked for one-third of the crop, with

335. Davis, *Good and Faithful Labor*, p. 59-186.

336. *Ibid.*

337. *Ibid.*

Gillespie paying half the cost of preparing the crop for market. Others on the place were hired as wage hands. Beyond the fact that the wage hands worked for a fixed wage, little difference existed between them and the sharecroppers. Their contracts stipulated the crops to be planted, in what proportions, and the conditions governing the issue of tools, teams, and supplies — the latter to be drawn from the plantation store and charged against wages earned. Gillespie retained overall supervisory authority with the power of ensuring the proper care of tools, teams, and property. If the crop fell behind, Gillespie could employ additional hands at the squad's expense. Freedmen were allowed use of the plantation gin, but only under the strictest supervision. All hands on the place agreed, moreover, to cut wood and shuck corn for the Gillespie household.³³⁸

**Table 16. Freedmen Agricultural Families
Adams County and Concordia Parish, 1880***

Status	Adams			Concordia		
	#	Family	%	#	Family	%
Owner	152	760	11	4	20	0
Tenants	251	1,225	18	98	588	3
Sharecroppers	991	4,955	71	1,009	5,045	34
Total Farmers	1,394	6,970	100	1,111	5,653	100
Full-time Wage Hands	264	792	28	514	1542	28
Casual Wage Hands	663	1,989	72	1,340	4,020	72
Total Hands	927	2,781	100	1,854	5,562	100
Total	2,327	9,751		2,965	11,215	

Source: U.S. Census (1880), Manuscript Population and Agricultural Schedules, Adams County, Mississippi and Concordia Parish, Louisiana.

In 1869, Gillespie began contracting with his squads for one-half the crop as rent; the squads paid their expenses out of their share of the crop. The wage hands now began to function as a squad of extra hands to be employed at the croppers' expense should they be needed to keep the crops in order. The next year, in 1870, Gillespie began leasing lands to his former slaves for a fixed rent in cotton. This practice remained the set terms of labor for the ensuing decade.³³⁹

338. See Contracts, January 1, May 5, 1868, J.A. Gillespie Papers, LSU, Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

339. Ibid., Contracts, January 1869; January 20, September 28, 1870; January 12, 1871; 1890. See also the Liens and Mortgage Records for Adams County and Concordia Parish, 1865-1900, Office of Records, Natchez, Mississippi and Vidalia, Louisiana.

A similar story could be told about nearly every plantation in the district. What is most striking about the numerous contracts filed in the mortgage records is the absence of language detailing the daily supervision of the freedman's work routine. The contracts on the Waterloo plantation in 1864 were a litany of rules and regulations: detailed instructions to the overseer to forfeit wages and rations for insubordination, short work, being tardy, and a host of other possible work infractions.³⁴⁰ By 1866, most of the Waterloo hands refused to contract under such conditions of labor. Instead, they left for Natchez or other plantations in the neighborhood. Eventually, most planters agreed to the essential terms demanded by the freedmen — family cabins, the right to come and go as they pleased, shares or a fixed rent over yearly wages, and no daily supervision of their work routine. The contract on the Hermitage plantation in Adams County in 1870 was typical: the landlord leased the entire place to twenty-six freedmen for five years at a rent of eighteen bales of cotton per year. A head man was named from among the workers, with the clear stipulation that he "was not to interfere in individual operations except to prevent abuse of oxen or other things of common use."³⁴¹

Few antebellum planters would have agreed to such terms on their own. Rather, former slaveowning landlords in the post-war era acquiesced to the arrangements because of a combination of complex interlocking factors: firstly, the Freedmen's Bureau, although generally sympathetic to the needs of white employers and landlords, insisted on the right of freedmen to seek out the best contract available to them from competing planters. The Bureau might well insist that freedmen live up to their contracts once they were signed, but the freedom to negotiate contracts satisfied the Bureau's definition of what freedom meant in theory and in practice. It was in this sense that the Bureau embraced the free labor ideology prevalent in the North. For the Bureau, regardless of the individual officers involved, freedom was less a question of suffrage, civil rights, and social justice than it was a question of freedmen being assured the earnings of their labor and the opportunity to make the most of themselves on the basis of their own hard work. Freedom to contract, according to reasonable terms of labor, set the context for the emergence of sharecropping in the district.³⁴²

Secondly, dozens of Northerners came into the district in the first few years after the Civil War to try their hand at planting. Some recruited workers from as far away as Georgia and Virginia. Some tried importing European farm laborers. But most sought to obtain hands by agreeing to shares and family work arrangements. For Northerners, the issue was simple: what did it matter if the old slave quarters were broken up, if the overseer had to move off the place, if the big house were to be vacated or given over to freedmen families as long as the landlord's agent could visit the place occasionally to check on the crop, could bring in extra workers at the cropper's expense, and could supervise the distribution of rations? It seemed of little consequence to most Northerners that freedmen wanted to contract in a fashion that resembled a family farming environment. Moreover,

340. See "Rules for Working Freedmen, February 22, 1864, W.J. Minor Papers, LSU, Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

341. Contracts between Thomas B. Shields and Freedmen, April 2, 1870, Office of Records, Adams County, Natchez District — A Case Study," *Journal of Negro History*, LXII (1977), pp. 60-80.

342. Davis, *Good and Faithful Labor*, pp. 58-88; "The U.S. Army and the Origins of Sharecropping in the Natchez District — A Case Study." *Journal of Negro History*, LXII (1977), pp. 60-80.

share wages and share tenancy carried with them several important cost advantages that, in Northern eyes, more than compensated landlords for the loss of supervision. Sharecropping enable the employer/landlord to share the risks of production with the workers in ways not possible under fixed wages. If ruined levees should break, the army worm devour the crop, or a cholera epidemic dissipate the labor force, half the loss — under share-cropping — would be borne by the workers.³⁴³

Thirdly, it must be remembered just how devastated was the Natchez economy and the old planter class by the war. Scores of plantations had been abandoned. Levees up and down the river had been destroyed. Most of the work animals had been confiscated or killed by Union and Confederate forces. Perhaps one-third of the district's male planter class was dead or crippled. Fields had gone to weeds and swamp. As a result, few planters emerged from the war with the financial ability to start planting again on their own. Those who had managed to procure the capital for mules, seed, rations, and wages were ruined by the devastating floods of 1866 and 1867; and what was saved from the flood waters, especially on the high grounds of Adams County, was taken by the ravenous "army worm" that descended upon the district like an invading horde in the immediate post-war years. By 1868, the number of plantations on the auction block for uncollected taxes ranged from fifty to more than one hundred. Under such conditions, antebellum planters (who had fought a war to avoid dealing with "freedmen") began competing with one another for the services of the men and women they had once owned.³⁴⁴

Fourthly, in the uncertain days following the occupation of Natchez by Union forces, outside merchants had swarmed into the area hoping to supply workers on leased government lands. The U. S. Army issued trade permits on a random basis at first, and then with an eye to favoring U. S. soldiers, disabled veterans, and those "old families" who had taken up the supply business as a last resort. More than a few U. S. soldiers joined in partnership with resident merchants, contributing capital and connections to eastern wholesalers. In any case, the district was literally overrun with storemen by the end of hostilities, setting the stage for the eventual decline of the landowner's supply connection to his workers. The matter was simple enough: freedmen much preferred doing business with peddlers and storemen because merchants almost always competed with one another in the price of goods; and dealing with storemen, most importantly, reduced the planter's role in farming. Accordingly, the Freedmen's Bureau made an important policy decision of significant long-range consequence when it decreed that the freedman's claim to the crop for wages exceeded the landlord's claim to the crop for rent. Freedmen could thus pledge their shares of the cotton for supplies furnished by peddlers and merchants. So quickly did this practice fasten itself onto the district that many landlords gave up the supply business altogether in favor of outside merchants.³⁴⁵

That development was soon followed by several closely related moves which tightened the merchant's hold on freedmen and planters in ways unprecedented in antebellum times. Numerous planters, trying to stay in operation after the disastrous crops of 1866 and 1867,

343. Davis, *Good and Faithful Labor*, pp. 89-1551.

344. *Ibid.*, pp. 59-151.

345. *Ibid.*

gave local merchants a first lien on their share of the crops due them as landlords. In this case, local merchants controlled the freedman's crop as collateral for supplies advanced as well as the landlord's crop for capital, mules, and tools advanced for planting. Time and time again, planters moved to leasing their plantations to merchants outright — giving up the business of active plantation management and becoming more like a class of rentiers. The merchants, on the other hand, found themselves operating like landlords, with the important difference that they had little interest in the daily supervision of the plantation. Sharecropping, in these circumstances, seemed like the ideal work arrangement.³⁴⁶

Variations of the above development played themselves out in the two decades after the Civil War with striking impact on the freedmen in the Natchez district. Merchants Singleton and Young, for instance, "united as partners" with freedmen, in 1874, in forty-two family contracts on five plantations, receiving one bale of cotton for every six acres farmed. The merchant "partners" furnished all supplies in return for "a pledge and a privilege on the crop to be made for rent, and [a] special lien on the crop for supplies advanced."³⁴⁷ Vidalia supply merchant, Isaac Friedler, had nearly one hundred accounts with sharecropping families on seventeen plantations in 1874. By 1889, Friedler serviced several hundred accounts on thirty-four plantations, piling up a supply bill in excess of \$25,000. Included in the accounts were mules as well as lands.³⁴⁸ It was not uncommon to find several merchants doing business on the same plantation but with different families of freedmen. In some cases, freedmen drew supplies from competing merchants, binding their crops among the suppliers in fractional amounts. Occasionally, landlords supplied their freedman croppers by sending them to local merchants with whom they [the planters] enjoyed a line of credit.³⁴⁹

Once sharecropping was initiated in the district, the life of black and white farmers and landlords was never the same again. Although a great many district plantations remained in the hands of their white antebellum owners, Natchez district landlords were no longer planters in the antebellum sense of the word. Gang labor had disappeared almost completely by 1880 in favor of family tenant patches. Merchants rather than landlords more frequently made the crucial decisions of what to plant and which resources would be used in planting. In time, the state legislature gave merchants a first claim on the crop for advances made in making the crop that superseded the landlord's claim for rent. With

346. Ibid.

347. Contracts, January 24, 1874, Liens and Mortgage Records, Office of records, Concordia Parish, Vidalia, Louisiana.

348. Contracts, August 13, 1874; August 11, 1889, Liens and Mortgage Records, Office of Records, Concordia Parish, Vidalia, Louisiana.

349. Davis, *Good and Faithful Labor*, pp. 133-151.

such crop lien legislation in place, there was little likelihood that the old antebellum planter class would reemerge as active managers of gang labor.³⁵⁰

With gang labor dead largely because of the freedman's refusal to accept it, the plantation scene underwent significant alteration. Most important were the modifications in life style. The old slave quarters were broken up, with the slave cabins repositioned throughout the plantation on family plots. The work routine was controlled by the workers themselves, resulting in drastic reductions in time devoted to farming. In sharecropping, freedmen left their fields to hunt and fish if they felt like hunting and fishing, to visit town and stores for shopping, and to take a rest from the midday heat. Some of them carried firearms to the fields to shoot rabbits and turkeys. Although the evidence is far from conclusive at this writing, a good case can be made supporting the idea that the reductions in time devoted to farming were of little real consequence in terms of efficiency or the productivity of labor. Much of the from dawn-to-dusk work routine on the slave plantation was probably aimed at keeping hands busy rather than being essential to crop yields.³⁵¹

One dramatic difference between the old slave plantation and the post-war work environment was the new role of black women. Planter William Mercer received a letter from his overseer, Wilmer Shields, in March of 1867, complaining of how difficult it was to manage the female wage hands on Mercer's Adams County plantation: ". . . my patience is sorely taken with the women. . . — it is useless to talk any more to them. . . as soon as one of them conceives, or thinks herself pregnant, she gives up work altogether. We have four at B who have not been in the field this year, and probably will not go during the balance of 1867." At another point, Mercer confided to his journal of "suckler difficulty — arranged by their losing 1/4 their time etc. Get 2 hours each day." Later he noted: "Harriet & Amelia nursing over 12 months. Disobeyed order to quit suckling." It was just this sort of conflict that freedmen hoped to avoid by sharecropping, and while the verdict is yet to be returned, it seems clear that sharecropping resulted in a different role for the black woman in comparison to slavery and the system of fixed gang wages. Field work became more and more the domain of male family members, with females doing the cooking, cleaning, gardening, ironing, and child rearing.³⁵²

350. Ibid., 151-197. Exactly how many of the old planter class survived the war as members of a plantation elite is a question of some dispute. Clearly, many old planters were still around as property owners in the Natchez district in the 1880s and 1890s, but whether or not they could be described as still among the preeminent families is hard to know. For one thing, being landlords without slaves was hardly the same status as a landlord in antebellum times. A number of planters retained their old estate houses while selling off the land all around them. Some coped by becoming merchants. The evidence seems overwhelming, however, that the continuity among the antebellum elites in the post-war era is a concept fraught with ambiguity and misleading implications. Among other secondary sources that discuss this issue see the following: Lawrence N. Powell, *New Masters: Northern Planters During the Civil War and Reconstruction* (New Haven, Conn., 1980); James L. Roark, *Masters Without Slaves: Southern Planters in the Civil War and Reconstruction* (New York, N.Y., 1977).

351. Davis, *Good and Faithful Labor*, pp. 153-197.

352. Wilmer B. Shields to William Newton Mercer, March 27, 1867, William Newton Mercer Papers, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, Louisiana; for appropriate secondary sources see especially Sally G. McMillen, *Southern Women: Black and White in the Old South* (Arlington Heights, Ill., 1992); Deborah Gray White, *Ar'n't I a woman? Female Slaves in the Plantation South* (New York, N.Y., 1985); Wharton, *The Negro in Mississippi*, p. 118.

Important, also, is the fact that more freedmen lived as members of nuclear families by 1880 in comparison to 1860. Table 17 provides data for Concordia Parish. Nearly 62 percent lived in family households limited to immediate family members. Another 23 percent lived with uncles, aunts, and elderly kinfolk. Only 15 percent lived in what was not a family unit. Compared to similar data for 1860, the change is immediately obvious.

Table 17. The Black Family in 1860 and 1880

Black Family in 1860 and 1880	1860	1880
Mother, Father, Children	36 %	62 %
Mother, Father, Children Plus other Adults	24	12
One Adult and Children	10	8
Family and Elderly	<u>3</u>	<u>3</u>
Black Family (Total)	73	85
Male and Female	3	7
Two Adults or More	18	5
One Adult	1	2
Elderly	1	0
Other	<u>4</u>	<u>1</u>
Total Non Family	27	15

Source: U.S. Census (1860, 1880), Manuscript Population and Slave Schedules, Concordia Parish, Louisiana.

Most fundamental about the new life style on the postbellum plantation were the little things. Whitelaw Reid, a young Northern journalist of radical inclinations, visited Natchez district plantations in 1866. In one instance, he recorded the following conversation in which a worker, hired to drive a wagon from the granary to the stables each day, presented his case for more wages:³⁵³

"Mas'r, I'se got my own 'pinion ob you. I does n't tink your'm de hardest mas'r in de world; an' all i wants is to hab you 'sidah my case. I's all 'lone; I's allus been a good niggah. Rain or shine, me an' my hoss am at your service. We hauls de feed for de mules to de lowah place every day; and on Saturdays we hauls for Sunday too, kase I's 'ligious, an' would n't work on Sundays no how. Now, mass'r, I wants you to please 'sidah my case. Doesn't you tink dat for dat extra work on Saturday you ought to 'low me anoder day's wages?"

353. Whitelaw Reid, *After the War: A Tour of the Southern States, 1865-1866* (New York, N.Y., 1965 Harper edition, originally published 1866), pp. 507.

The driver had a point, but it was lost on the planter who had hired the old man for a set task at fixed wages. It was just such differences of opinion as these that ended up in appeals to the Freedman's Bureau in the years 1866 through 1869. In most cases the Bureau sided with the employer. But the important point is not so much the outcome as it was the dispute itself and what it said about the freedman's willingness to assume a role unknown in slavery. Clearly, the cautious old driver in the example above knew enough to bow and scrape as a tactic of negotiation, but his logic was nearly flawless: double work should earn double pay.

Significant, too, was the driver's bold assertion that he "would n't work on Sundays no how." That, of course, was exactly what freedom meant for the formerly enslaved. The right to say just exactly when they would work and under what conditions. That the conditions were based on religious convictions indicates early on just how crucial was religious freedom in the ex-slave's definition of freedom. Reid described a "negro church" on a nearby Louisiana plantation prior to the move from gang labor and fixed wages to sharecropping:

When Sunday came I accompanied the overseer down to the negro church. It stood at the end of the street, on either side of which were ranged the quarters. It had originally been a double cabin, intended for a couple of slave families, like the rest of the quarters; but the middle partition had been knocked out; and space enough was thus secured to accommodate a much larger congregation than that which we found gathered. . . .

Services were just beginning as we entered. One or two of the headmen bustled about to get chairs for us; the rest continued their singing. . . . The woman all wore comparatively clean calico dresses; and the heads of all were wrapped in the inevitable checkered and gay-colored handkerchiefs. Even the preacher's head was bound up in a handkerchief, none too clean, and over this his brass-rimmed spectacles were made secure by means of a white cotton string.

The old fellow, (who was none other than the plantation gardner). . . seemed pleased at the chance to level his broadsides at two white men [Reid and the overseer], and he certainly showed us no mercy. 'White men might tink dey could git 'long, because dey was rich; but dey'd find demselves mistaken when damnation and hell-fire was after dem. No, my breddering an' sistering, black an'white, we must all be 'umble. "Umbleness'll tote us a great many places, whar money won't do us no good."³⁵⁴

At the completion of the old man's sermon, the congregation launched into song, chants, and emotional prayers that seemed "almost entirely destitute of any distinct, intelligible meaning" to Reid. Finally, the old preacher rose again to announce that on:

. . . next Sunday dere would be baptisin', an' all dat was ready for de water mus' be present. On de Sunday following' dare would be de funeral. Some forty or more had died since de las' o'ne, and he mus' hab deir names now

354. Ibid., pp. 519-524.

afore de funeral come off. Ef de water was n't too high, he would hab it outside de levee, at de burying groun'. . . .³⁵⁵

Reid thought it all very absurd, but noted in his journal that this "very preacher had more than once been dragged from the pulpit and given forty lashes for presuming to repeat passages of the Bible, and talk about them to the slaves."³⁵⁶

There is no way of knowing the truth of Reid's comment about the whipping of slave preachers. The main point is that freedmen preachers — unlike their slave forbearers — could exhort openly in black churches under their own direction, could lecture whites with force and clear meanings, and could make their own arrangements regarding burials and baptisms. And these were no small matters. Throughout the district, freedmen embraced religion with an enthusiasm that equaled their commitment to family farming and several other issues of heartfelt significance in their system of values.

Although the story is unclear, religious services similar to those described by Reid gave way by 1880 to regularly established churches located at crossroads and district towns such as Natchez, Washington, Kingston, Vidalia, and others. Black country folk, unlike in slavery, were free to travel about at will to their places of worship with few limitations placed on them. Just how many black churches in rural Adams County sprang up in the postbellum era is unknown. It is unlikely that there were more than six or seven, suggesting that rural blacks probably retained some form of plantation church service for years after slavery. Still, there can be no doubt but that Sundays in freedom found district roads busy with black churchgoers on their way to worship. Such was one of the obvious benefits of freedom in the early days of Reconstruction.³⁵⁷

Reid also wrote of an interior plantation where freedmen had "asked the proprietors to reserve out of their wages enough to hire a teacher for their children." All the hands on the place, even those without children, supported the idea.³⁵⁸ Students of southern history have amply documented the extent to which freedmen defined land, religious freedom, and schools as the essential elements of their freedom in the Reconstruction era. Natchez district blacks were no different. Indeed, much of the work of the Freedmen's Bureau was devoted to staffing freedmen schools with teachers, usually whites brought into the area from the North. The number and extent of those rural schools is unknown at this time.³⁵⁹

355. Ibid.

356. Ibid.

357. See also Wharton, *The Negro In Mississippi*, pp. 257-255.

358. Reid, *After the War*, p. 511.

359. John D. Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1988), pp. 1-32; Fitzgerald, *The Union League Movement in the Deep South*, pp. 112-135; Edward King, *The Great South* (Baton Rouge, La., 1972, originally published in 1874), pp. 291-295; McMillen, *Dark Journey*, pp. 107-173; Wharton, *The Negro In Mississippi*, pp. 45-46, 243-255.

In 1871, the Republican dominated School Board of Adams County — which included several black members — called for sealed proposals to furnish school sites throughout the county.³⁶⁰ The *Natchez Democrat*, in reporting the story, editorialized about the advantage to planters of building schools on their plantations as a means of contracting with freedmen and retaining those already under contract.³⁶¹ Three years earlier the same paper had attacked the Freedmen's Bureau's call for a crusade by Northern teachers against the reputed "immorality" of Natchez blacks:

Since Mr. Howard [General O. O. Howard] foreshadows that we are to be afflicted with another plague of long waisted, big-footed, dish-faced, blear-eyed schoolmarms from the land of God and morality, we may be pardoned for expressing the hope that they will this time be selected with the special regard to chastity and morals, since with few exceptions those heretofore sent South have done more to contribute to the increase of hybrids than to the elevation of the simon-pure negro.³⁶²

A few planters supported plantation schools, as long as the schools were staffed with non-radical teachers, as a means of holding on to their black workers. One of those who understood that the plantation school could be a means of social control was overseer Wilmer Shields:

Our negroes still harp on having the whole of Saturday and the teams for town. I have told them it would be useless to say anything more on the subject as it would not be given.

They are also, some of them, anxious to have a school established on one of the places for their children. While on this subject I may mention that the Rev. Mr. Douglas spoke to me some two weeks since, to know if it would prove agreeable to have a school established here at O for instance. Mr. D. is he chief school commissioner for this state, and he says he is anxious to employ proper teachers, and keep out radical meddlers.³⁶³

In a follow-up letter to Mercer, on December 12, 1866, Shields wrote again about offering freedmen schools as an inducement to keep them working:

As regards their engagements for the coming year, they seem undecided. Swartwout is very blue on the subject and seems to think that a very large majority will leave us, or the great offers of Hutchins & Metcalfe, even those who have already agreed to stay.

360. *Natchez Democrat*, February 22, 1871.

361. *Ibid.*

362. *Natchez Democrat*, October 19, 1868.

363. Shields to Mercer, December 1, 1866, Mercer Papers, LSU.

One of our negroes told me today that he thought that the whole of Saturday and a school would keep nearly all. I doubt this. I think well of the school, if we can get a proper school master — but the whole of Saturday ought not to be given. Should I see Mr. Douglas, I will do as you suggest — but I do not think that he visits your city often.³⁶⁴

Most district planters were probably not so enlightened, or as calculating, as was Shields and Mercer, and it would be a mistake to assume that Natchez planters were reconciled to black education on the basis of the Shields' correspondence alone. Col. Samuel Thomas, the assistant commissioner of freedmen in Mississippi, wrote in anger to his superior, Maj. Gen. O. O. Howard, commissioner of freedmen, about the opposition of the white citizenry to freedmen schools in Natchez:

The white citizens of this city [Vicksburg] and of Natchez have requested me not to establish Freedmen's schools inside the city limits; yet over one half the citizens of these towns are freedmen - men who are doing the work - men who are toiling all day in the sun while the white employer is laying back in the shade reaping the benefits of their labor through their superior knowledge, and constantly talking about the demoralization of negro labor, that the negro will not work, etc. I thank God that he will not work as he does in days that are gone. . . .³⁶⁵

In 1871, Brig. Gen. John Eaton, commissioner of the Federal Bureau of Education, blanketed the South with thousands of questionnaires on the subject of education for the freedmen. He found that the majority of southern planters were generally opposed to the public education of their plantation laborers.³⁶⁶ In this context, the support expressed for plantation schools by some Natchez planters like Shields was probably just a short-lived negotiating tactic. The fourteen black public schools operating in Adams County in 1870, were almost certainly the result of black political power in the county, supported by blacks as an alternative to plantation schools, and — most likely — opposed by district planters.³⁶⁷

Family farming, religious freedom, schools, the right to come and go as they wished, and other hard won freedoms were no real substitutes for the fact that nearly all district blacks were hopelessly impoverished and landless by 1880. Only a handful of black

364. Ibid., December 12, 1866.

365. Col. Samuel Thomas to Maj. Gen. O.O. Howard, Commissioner, Records of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, Record Group 105, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

366. See Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South*, pp. 5-32.

367. See Michael Wayne, *The Reshaping of Plantation Society: The Natchez District, 1860-1880* (Baton rouge, La., 1982), pp. 1336-1337, for a slightly different interpretation. The extent of white opposition to education for the freedmen was driven home by an incident that happened in 1868 in the town of Washington, a few miles northeast of Natchez. A white school teacher of black children was dragged from his cabin in the middle of the night by alleged members of the Ku Klux Klan, tarred and feathered, and nearly killed. The school teacher's offense, according to his testimony, was that of being a "d d Radical son of a . ." See the *Natchez Democrat*, August 3, 1868.

farmers, about 11 percent, owned their own farms a generation after slavery's end. Clearly, sharecropping had not functioned as an agricultural ladder with steps leading to tenancy and farm ownership. Few sharecroppers ended the year with enough cash from their crops to clear their debts to the country store. Most seemed resigned to the fact by 1880. High interest rates, low cotton prices, the added expenses of chemical fertilizers, and a judicial and legislative system that generally supported creditors over debtors placed freedmen within an economic box from which, like slavery, there was no easy escape. Perhaps that is why religious freedom, schools, and family farming were so important to the impoverished freedmen. For most Natchez blacks, gains such as these were all they had to show for the years of promise after slavery.³⁶⁸

BLACK LANDOWNERSHIP

As indicated above, relatively few district black farmers were land owning farmers by 1880. A careful reading of the manuscript census for Adams county turned up 153 black landowners with enough production to be listed in the agricultural schedules. The improved acreage owned ranged from a few acres to 155, but the typical black owner/operator farmed just about 20 acres of land. Nine farmers were exceptional operators with an average of 121 acres each.³⁶⁹

Adams County deed records tell, however, a slightly different story regarding black landowners. There is a striking amount of evidence in the records to suggest that a unique class of black landowners emerged in the twenty years after the Civil War. Several examples stand out. In 1869, an antebellum overseer turned planter purchased at public auction the China Grove plantation located a few miles south of Natchez. The individual in question, Wilmer B. Shields, had recently inherited several plantations in the immediate vicinity from his long-time employer, planter William Mercer. China Grove's white owners had lost their land for failure to meet payments due on a bill of sale negotiated prior to the Civil War. This was not an uncommon occurrence in postbellum Adams County. Dozens of plantations changed hands after the war in default on loans and due to unpaid taxes. In the case of China Grove, Shields purchased the place for just under \$5000, and then he immediately sold it to August and Sarah Mazique, former slaves of James Railey, the recently deceased owner of China Grove. In time, the Mazique family purchased the neighboring Oakland plantation, also once owned by Railey, and at least

368. Davis, *Good and Faithful Labor*, pp. 168-200; Jacquelin Jones, *The Dispossessed: America's Underclasses From the Civil War to the Present* (New York, N.Y., 1992), p. 1-166; Jonathan M. Wiener, "Class Structure and Economic Development in the American South, 1865-1955," *American Historical Review* LXXXIV (1979), pp. 970-1006; Harold D. Woodman, "Class Structure and Economic Development in the American South, 1865-1955," *American Historical Review* LXXXIV (1979), pp. 99-101; "Post-Civil War Southern Agriculture and the Law," *Agricultural History* LIII (1979), 319-337; "Sequel to Slavery: The New History Views the Postbellum South," *The Journal of Southern History* XLIII (1977), pp. 524-554.

369. U.S. Census (1880), Manuscript Population and Agricultural Schedules, Adams County, Mississippi.

one other plantation, Bourbon, within the next fifteen years. These properties remained in the Mazique family well into the twentieth-century.³⁷⁰

Just how the Maziques managed to raise the funds, why Shields operated as their agent, and what explains the ability of the Mazique family to avoid the general opposition to selling rural lands to blacks is a story that remains to be told. Part of the answer lies with the peculiar history of China Grove. By the time it was placed on the market, China Grove had deteriorated so badly that there is some doubt that anyone else would have purchased the place. Charles Railey, the heir of James Railey, was a drunken and imbecilic murderer and wife-beater incapable of managing the place let alone his personal affairs. It is not unlikely that the Maziques were the only buyers willing to take over the run-down plantation.³⁷¹

As importantly, the sale took place in 1869, at the precise moment when many local blacks were beginning to play a dynamic and decisive political role in the district. Adams County, with the appointment of radical Adelbert Ames as military governor of Mississippi, was becoming a hot-bed of political activism in the early 1870s, electing blacks as mayor, aldermen, sheriffs, and representatives to the state assembly. One Natchez African-American, Hiram Revels, was appointed to the U. S. Senate. Another local political leader, John R. Lynch, served as Speaker of the State Assembly. More will be said later about the political activism of Natchez blacks, but clearly the influence of a handful of black politicians undoubtedly helped create an environment in which a few non-political blacks (like the Maziques) could become property owners.³⁷²

370. See the numerous Mazique property transactions recorded in land and Deed records housed in the Adams County Office of Records in Natchez, Mississippi. Historical preservationist, Mimi Miller, of the Historic Natchez Foundation has compiled substantial documentation on China Grove, including references to the Mazique family for a span of years dating from 1865 through the 1940s. To add irony to irony, the person Charles R. Railey was acquitted of murdering was one of the Railey slaves, perhaps someone known by the Mazique family. James Railey's will makes the following reference to Charles in 1860:

It is humiliating to me to say what course I wish taken in regard to my son Charlie Randolph Railey. I desire my friend James G. Carson [lawyer in partnership with John McMurrin], to pay to Charles the sum of one thousand dollars per annum in quarterly payments & give as justification on my part for so doing, and to give to the courts a full evidence of the necessity of this course the following statement: Charlie was tried for murder, and confessed the act and nothing but the proof as was given by his school teacher and Dr. Metcalfe, my family physician, that Charlie had not mind enough to be responsible for his acts saved him from the penalties of the law. Under this state of things I feel it my duty not to place property or funds (only for his support) in his possession.

See China Grove/Mazique File Historic Natchez Foundation, Natchez, Mississippi. See also the Will of William Mercer, April 11, 1866, August 27, 1874, Adams County Will book 2, Office of Records, Natchez, Mississippi and the Will of James Railey, February 1, 1860, Adams County Will Book 3, Office of Records, Natchez, Mississippi and the *Mississippi Free-Trader*, May 17, 1858.

371. Ibid.

372. See Fitzgerald, *The Union League Movement*, pp. 37-112, 170-171; Eric Foner, "Black Reconstruction Leaders at the Grass Roots," in Leon Litwack and August Meier, (ed.), *Black Leaders of the Nineteenth Century* (Urbana, Ill., 1988), 219-236; Libby, "Senator Hiram Revels of Mississippi Takes His Seat, January-February, 1870," *The Journal of Mississippi History* XXXVII (November, 1975), pp. 381-394; Lynch, *The Autobiography of John Roy Lynch*, pp. ix-xxxix, 45-162;

Allison Davis, a twentieth-century sociologist who studied Natchez's caste and class structure in the 1930s, found that half the black landowners in Adams County had acquired their properties between 1865 and 1885, speculating that much of the land had been given to the blacks as gifts from their white parents. Perhaps that is the link between the Maziques and Shields, between Railey and the Maziques. Or, more simply, it may have been that Shields bought and sold properties adjoining his own to blacks whom he had grown to trust on the basis of having known them as loyal house slaves over the years.³⁷³

The property holdings in Adams County of the Lynch brothers — William and John — are somewhat less complicated at first glance. Born slaves in the Natchez district, the two brothers rose to substantial prominence in the state during the Reconstruction era. John R. Lynch quickly emerged as one of the state's most powerful black politicians due to his organizational activities in the Natchez Union League, beginning in 1867. His abilities propelled him from one political office to another following his initial appointment as Justice of the Peace in Adams County in 1869. Serving repeatedly in the U. S. House of Representatives in the 1870s and 1880s, he was the principal figure in the black Republican caucus in the state for most of the years from 1870 to 1890. John's brother, William, also born into slavery, handled most of the family's land dealings in Adams County.³⁷⁴

What is remarkable about the brothers Lynch in regard to landownership is the extent of their involvement. In the Adams County land books, the Lynch brothers account for more than 100 entries, beginning with a security deed in 1867, by which John Lynch loaned his white employer funds secured by the contents of the photography shop wherein the two worked. The records show the Lynch brothers buying and selling town lots (principally on or near St. Catherine street, old Pine Ridge Road, and the Forks-of-the-Road slave market area of antebellum notoriety) as well as substantial amounts of rural real estate. Between 1870 and 1897, the Lynch brothers acquired title to part or all of at least five antebellum estate farms and plantations: Providence, Homochitto, Hedges, Grove, Saragossa, and Ingleside. Most of these plantations were located south of Natchez in the direction of the Mazique property in the so-called Second Creek neighborhood.³⁷⁵ (See ILLUSTRATION L)

A review of the Lynch records shows an astonishing pace of land investment that defies easy explanation. Firstly, why did most of the family's rural property transactions take place south of town near the Mazique holdings? Lynch's town dealings were located in the St. Catherine neighborhood almost exclusively. Is it probable that urban and rural forms of segregation account for the locales? At first glance, it seems that most of the black

373. Allison Davis, Burleigh B. Gardner, and Mary R. Gardner. *Deep South: A Social Anthropological Study of Caste and Class* (Chicago, Ill., 1941), pp. 299-407; McMillen, *Dark Journey*, pp. 118-121.

374. See Fitzgerald, *The Union League Movement*, p. 240; Garner, *Reconstruction in Mississippi*, pp. 295-296; Lynch, *The Autobiography of John Roy Lynch*; McMillen, *Dark Journey*, pp. 4-63, 116, 167, 173, 291-300; Wharton, *The Negro in Mississippi*, pp. 114, 155, 159, 162-163, 169, 173, 197, 200-209, 211, 231;

375. Lynch's initial transaction is recorded on January 5, 1867, Adams County Deed Book OO, Office of Records, Natchez, Mississippi. His property dealings thereafter are continued throughout twenty succeeding volumes of records.

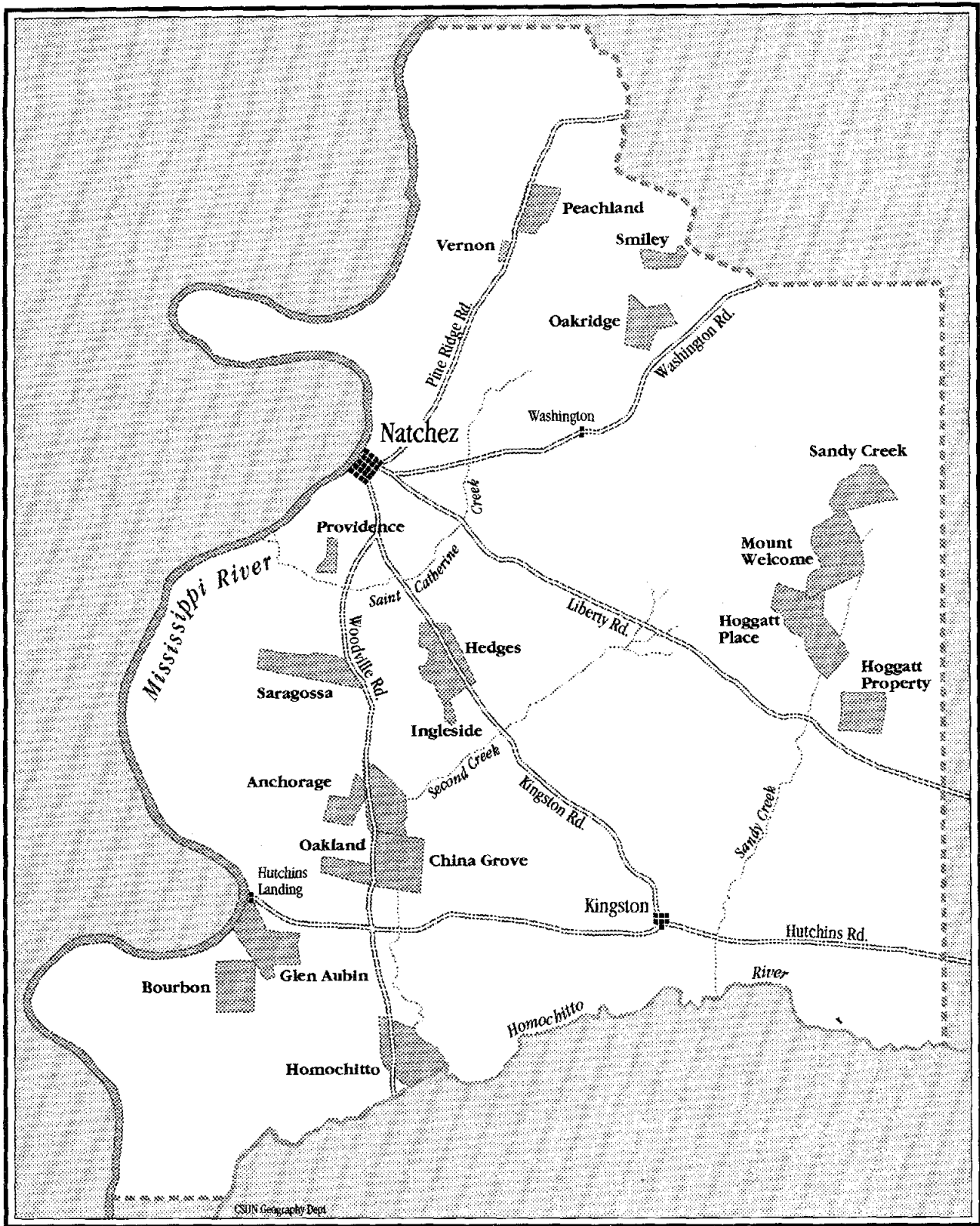


Illustration L: Black Owned Plantations c1880s

landowners were located in proximity to one another just south of Natchez. Former slaves, Charles and Charity Rounds, for example purchased the historic Glen Aubin plantation adjoining China Grove in the 1870s — in a sale also arranged by Wilmer Shields. When the Mazique, Rounds, and Lynch properties are taken together, it is clear that a significant chunk of the so-called Second Creek area south of Natchez had become largely black property by the 1880s.³⁷⁶

There is much more to the story of black landholding, however, than what occurred south of Natchez. The descendants of William Johnson, for example, acquired Peachland plantation north of town and leased several other places in Adams County (Carthage) and across the river in Concordia Parish (St. Genevieve and Black Lake).³⁷⁷ Louis Winston, prominent black lawyer and long-time Circuit Clerk of the county court, owned extensive property in Natchez, as well as a 1027 acre plantation (Mount Welcome) east of Natchez.³⁷⁸ Winston's easterly plantation lay in an enclave of property owned by several old-line black families. The prominent Hiram Revels, U. S. Senator from Mississippi and president of Alcorn college, had purchased a portion of the property in 1871, along with a piece of the adjoining Sandy Creek plantation.³⁷⁹ Revels' Sandy Creek property was a parcel of a larger tract of land (sometimes known as the Green Grove plantation) owned by the free black Hoggatt family, who had inherited the property from the clan's white patriarch.³⁸⁰

What did the Lynch, Hoggatt, Johnston, Rounds, Mazique, and Revels families do with their lands? On the basis of the agricultural census, only a few of them were farmers in 1880. The Johnston and Lynch families leased farm plots to black farmers on sharecropping contracts that were essentially indistinguishable from those struck between white landlords and black farmers. The Hoggatts, Maziques, and Rounds lived on the

376. See the numerous property recordings for the Rounds in the Adams County Land and Deed Books, Office of Records, Natchez, Mississippi as well as the Glen Aubin File, Natchez Historic Foundation, Natchez, Mississippi. The Glen Aubin plantation was part of the original plantation owned by the district's largest landholder in the eighteenth century, Anthony Hutchins.

377. Deed, March 1, 1874, Martha J. McCaleb to Anna L. Johnston et al, Adams County Deed book TT; Mortgage, May 5, 1875, Anna L. Johnston and others to William Lynch, Office of Records, Natchez, Mississippi; Lease, March 14, 1868, St. Genevieve Plantation, Ayers P. Merrill Jr. to Byron Johnson; Agreement with Freedmen, February 12, 1869, Carthage Plantation; Lease, February 15, 1869, Carthage Plantation, John Minor and K.L. Minor to Byron Johnson; Lease, February 3, 1870, Black Lake Plantation, Byron Johnson, Johnson Family Papers, LSU, Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

378. The Land and Deed Books record over sixty entries, mainly town lots, for Winston. See especially Mortgage, April 13, 1888, L.J. Winston with The Mississippi Land, Loan and Investment Company, Adams County Deed Book 3-C, Office of Records, Natchez, Mississippi.

379. See Deed, April 4, 1871, Fleming and Baldwin to Hiram R. Revels, Adams County Deed Book QQ, Office of Records, Natchez, Mississippi.

380. Deed, February 16, 1889, Anthony Hoggatt to Walter McCrea, Adams County Deed book 3-D, Office of Records, Natchez Mississippi; See Manumission Document, July 6, 1855, Nathaniel Hoggatt, Jr., to Fleming W. Harris et al, Adams County Deed Book LL, Office of Records, Natchez, Mississippi. (These are sample documents from among the hundreds consulted)

plantations as mainly subsistence farmers, possibly working in Natchez or as sharecroppers on other farms in the County.³⁸¹

Did the black landowners reside on the plantations they had purchased? The answer is rather mixed. Anna L. Johnston (the family name changed from Johnson to Johnston in the 1870s) lived on Peachland for most of her life. The Maziques, Hoggatts, and Rounds seem to have also occupied their respective places. Revels probably lived on Mount Welcome for a time; but there is no clear evidence that either of the Lynch brothers, or any of the Winstons, lived on the rural properties they had acquired. A telling note written by Mary Conner, the daughter of antebellum planter/lawyer John McMurren, to a friend in 1875, is suggestive of a pattern wherein old time planters sold off plantation acreage while holding on to their plantation houses for as long as possible:

Miss M. J. Veazie is to give a concert for her own benefit, or rather for her poor, sick mother. They are in utter poverty, needing the necessaries of life. Their place (Providence) was sold at Sheriff's sale last Friday, leaving them with only their cottage and a few acres around. The place was bought by one *Lynch* (a mulatto), our *representative* from the *County* in the *Legislature*. Miss Veazie hopes to make something by the use of her musical talent. I feel very sorry for her, and her mother. How many thousands are in the same condition in our unhappy country.³⁸²

Did black landowners like the Lynch and Mazique families prosper as landowners? Again the answer is unclear. Students of southern history have noted how frequently black landowners were duped in the purchase of lands, paying prices far out of proportion to the earnings likely to be gained from the land.³⁸³ Whether or not this was the case in Adams County is difficult to know. What seems clear, is that landownership did not result in substantial wealth for the Maziques, Rounds, Hoggatts, and Johnston families. Many of the transactions in the Land and Deed Books are for mortgages and indentures amounting to a few hundred dollars, funds too small to be anything but subsistence money. Evidence in the manuscript census schedules suggests that while lands farmed by black owners were reasonably productive, usually resulting in one bale of cotton per acre cultivated, the improved acres were too few to ensure even a shabby prosperity let alone any real security or independence. Numerous black landowning farmers, moreover, farmed marginal lands yielding but one-half to one-third bale per acre in cotton; and none of the Adams County landowning blacks of some size owned plantations across the river in Louisiana, although the Johnstons had occasionally leased Concordia plantations.³⁸⁴

In any case, the question of prosperity is a relative one. Very few black farm owners duplicated the Mazique family experience of acquiring additional property over the years

381. Ibid.

382. Mary to Marna, Woodlands, 1875, John T. McMurren Family papers, LSU, Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

383. See McMillen, *Dark Journey*, pp. 111-153.

384. Adams County Land and Deed Books, Office of Records, Natchez, Mississippi; U.S. Census (1870, 1880), Manuscript Agricultural and Population Schedules, Adams County, Mississippi.

or enjoyed the long-term security that must have characterized the Hoggatts, Lynch, and Winston family situations. Most black landowning farmers in the county were small operators who eked out a debt-ridden existence not much different from that of their sharecropping neighbors. Indeed, most of them owned their farms on lands surrounded by sharecroppers — small islands of independence amid a sea of tenancy. Unless one could have seen the mortgage records, most contemporary observers would have been hard pressed to differentiate between black landowners and black sharecroppers on the basis of how they lived.

THE SOCIAL AND POLITICAL MILIEU

Among the thousands of African-Americans in the Natchez district were those who looked to the town of Natchez as the most tangible evidence that slavery was truly dead. By 1870, some 5328 blacks lived in Natchez, more than double the black population of 1860. Women outnumbered men among the seventy occupations listed in the manuscript census schedules, and laborers and house servants dominated overall. Included among the occupations were nineteen teachers, six ministers, five policemen, and one municipal official.³⁸⁵

385. U.S. Census (1870, 1880), Manuscript Population Schedules, Adams County, Mississippi.

Table 18. African-Americans in Natchez in 1870*

Adult Males	1,616	30%
Adult Females	1,995	37%
Children	<u>1,712</u>	<u>32%</u>
Total	5,323	99% (Not equal 100% due to rounding off)

Total Households **1,969**

Number of Black Households Including White Residents 126

Occupations	Male	Female	
	%	%	
Laborer	22	14	
Keeping House	1	12	
Laundress	0	8	
Farmer	5	1	
Domestics	1	8	(Cooks, Servants, Housekeepers, etc.)
Estate Hands	3	0	(Gardeners, Grooms, Coachman, etc.)
Skilled Workers	4	0	(Carpenters, Blacksmiths, Shoemakers, etc.)
Other	<u>8</u>	<u>13</u>	
Total	44	56	

Occupations Listed in the Census of 1870

Laborer, Laundress, Farmer, Cook, Seamstress, Servant, Gardener, Carpenter, Blacksmith, Nurse, Groom, Shoemaker, Teacher, Wood Yard Keeper, Porter, Brick Mason, Restaurant Keeper, Waggoner, Coachman, Policeman, Housekeeper, Steward, Painter, Plasterer, Printer, Janitor, Whitewasher, Midwife, Clerk, Varnisher, Carriagedriver, Shinglemaker, Waiter, Harnessmaker, Hackman, Chambermaid, Washer, Planter, Milkmaid, Watercarrier, Contractor, Butcher, Saloonkeeper, Valet, Merchant, Gravedigger, Tanner, Minister, Baker, Huckster, Grocer, Barber, Teamster, Stocktender, Lady's Maid, Mechanics, Wheelwright, Teamster, Woodcutter, Boarding House Owner, Gunmaker, Mailcarrier, Horsetrader, Mattressmaker, Merchant, Coffee Seller, Dressmaker, and Boatman.

Source: U.S. Census (1870), Manuscript Population Schedule, Adams County, Mississippi.

*This table is based on an interval sampling of 10 percent of the black households, excluding those in which whites resided.

Except for the teachers and ministers, the occupational array is about what would be expected of Natchez blacks just out of slavery. Freedmen worked as draymen and hack men and barbers and valets much as free blacks and slaves had worked similar jobs before the war. Few skilled African-Americans worked in Natchez in 1860 or in 1870. Most blacks in the town were unskilled laborers both before and after the Civil War.³⁸⁶

Regardless of their occupations, Natchez blacks lived and recreated as free men and women in the 1870s in ways unlike anything they had been able to do in antebellum times. In the first days after the Civil War, white residents responded to the new milieu of black Natchez by attempting to enforce a limited type of segregation in the town. City officials posted instructions dividing the bluff promenade above the river into three quarters: the central part for white bachelors and blacks, the northern part for white women and children, and the southern section for all whites.³⁸⁷ It is unlikely, however, that such strictures were ever enforced: firstly, the town was simply overrun with so-called vagabond blacks and visiting freedmen who converged on Natchez with great enthusiasm; secondly, the town became a caldron of political activity beginning around 1867 as white and black carpetbaggers arrived in Natchez intent on establishing radical Republican clubs in support of black suffrage.³⁸⁸

Briefly told, full-blown black political machines emerged on the scene in the late 1860s aimed at organizing black voters in support of black and white Republican candidates for municipal, state, and national office. Although the exact details of the story are unknown, the town witnessed a fury of political activity involving three interlinking components: Black churches, radical Union Leagues, and the local free born black community. Almost immediately after the cessation of hostilities, black ministers, several of whom had served in black regiments during the Civil War, arrived in Natchez determined to found Baptist, AME, and Methodist associations and churches. They joined with prominent local blacks, like Nelson Fitzhugh, William McCary, and John R. Lynch, to press for black representation in municipal and state elections. Republican Union Leagues held public meetings in Natchez exhorting issues and fielding candidates in local and state political campaigns. So successful were their efforts that blacks won office as town aldermen, mayor, sheriff, school board trustees, and other political positions in the 1870s. It is no exaggeration to say that black politicians and office holders controlled nearly all aspects of town and county government positions, from mayor to teachers, in the 1870s. Several Natchez blacks, moreover, served in the state legislature and in the U. S. Congress. A small handful — men like Hiram Revels, John R. Lynch, and Louis J. Winston — were regularly appointed and elected to state and public office in demonstrations of patronage

386. What the census designation "laborer" actually meant is unclear. Nor is it clear what the words "Keeping house" meant to the black women so identified in the census. Did the words carry the same connotation as house wife, meaning someone unemployed outside the home? Or was "Keeping house" another way of identifying domestic workers employed as maids and cleaning women?

387. *Natchez Courier*, May 29, 1866.

388. *Natchez Courier*, October 11, 1867; *Natchez Weekly Democrat*, January 22, 1866; May 18, 1868; Fitzgerald, *The Union League Movement in the Deep South*, pp. 14, 87; Garner, *Reconstruction in Mississippi*, 2556; Harris, *Presidential Reconstruction in Mississippi*, p. 30.

for their loyalty to the Republican Party and their influence among blacks throughout the state.³⁸⁹ (See Table 19)

Table 19. Natchez Black Political Leaders, 1865-1890

Bowles, George F.	Free black lawyer who moved to Natchez from Tennessee in 1871. Elected city attorney and city weigher. Appointed colonel in militia in 1878. City marshal and chief of police in 1879. State house of representatives in 1888. Delegate to 1888 Republican Convention. Grand Chancellor of Black Knights of Pythias in Mississippi. Publisher and editor of Natchez black monthly, <i>Brotherhood</i> , 1887 to 1900.
Davis, Willis.	Elected to Miss. State Legislature from Adams Co., 1874-75.
Fitzhugh, Charles.	Free born son of leading Natchez free black family. Member of Mississippi Constitutional Convention and Miss. Legislature, 1874-1875.
Fitzhugh, Robert W.	Free born son of leading Natchez black family. Brother of Charles Fitzhugh. Served on first black membered city assembly in 1871. Member of Adams County Board of Education in 1871. Justice of the Peace in Natchez, 1874 and 1875. Managed, along with Robert Wood, the successful congressional campaign of John R. Lynch in 1870.
Foley, Hugh M.	Free born black mechanic and storekeeper educated by white teachers in Natchez. Ordained AME minister in 1869. Served in Miss. House from 1870-73. Publisher of Port Gibson <i>Vindicator</i> .
Gayles, George W.	Born a slave in Wilkinson County. Served in Union Army and appointed a Justice of the Peace by Governor James Alcorn in 1870. Ordained Baptist minister in 1867. Served in state senate and legislature in 1870s. Editor of the <i>Baptist Signal</i> published in Natchez from 1881 to 1893.
Hoggatt, Anthony.	Adams County Board of Supervisors, 1874, 1875. Member of Natchez Board of Education, 1878.
Hunt, Henry.	Adams County Board of Supervisors, 1878.
Jacobs, Henry P.	Born a slave in Alabama, Jacobs escaped with his wife, three children, and brother-in-law to Canada. Ordained Baptist minister in 1858. Came to Natchez during the Civil War to organize Baptist associations. Active as Union League Organizer. Tried to purchase plantations on behalf of a group of freedmen using veterans' bounties for funds. Rival of John R. Lynch in Adams County politics. Served in Mississippi

389. Natchez *Courier*, September 21, 1867; October 26, 1867; November 16, 1867; Natchez *Weekly Democrat*, June 10, 1867; July 6, 1868; December 16, 1869; November 23, 1879; December 7, 1870; Fitzgerald, *The Union League Movement in the Deep South*, p. 31, 58-59; McMillen, *Dark Journey*, pp. 35-71; Sewell and Dwight, *Mississippi Black History Makers*, pp. 26-48; Wharton, *The Negro in Mississippi*, pp. 144-145, 148, 152.

Legislature in 1870-73, and 1876-77. One of the original founders of the Natchez, Jackson, & Columbus Rail Road.

Lewis, W. B.

Adams County Board of Supervisors. 1876.

Lynch, James D.

Free black born in 1839 in Baltimore. Educated at Kimball Union Academy in New Hampshire. Moved to Jamaica, Long Island, where he taught school and joined Presbyterian church in 1858. Joined AME church in 1860 and moved to Indiana and then to Baltimore as a minister. Sent as a missionary to South Carolina in 1863. Noted preacher to black troops in Georgia and South Carolina. Eventually joined Methodist church and moved to Mississippi where he worked with Freedmen's Bureau while living in Natchez. Later moved to Jackson, Mississippi. Candidate for Secretary of State on the Alcorn ticket in 1870. Died in 1872.

Lynch, John Roy.

Born a slave in Concordia Parish, Louisiana, in 1847. Worked as a cook for U. S Army and as a waiter on a naval vessel during the Civil War. Became a photographer's assistant in Natchez and attended a freedmen's school in 1866 and 1867. Active in Natchez Republican politics and appointed Justice of the Peace in 1869. Served in Mississippi legislature in 1870-73, elected speaker in 1872. Served in U. S. Congress in 1873, 1876, and 1880. Delegate to Republican National Convention in 1872. Temporary Chairman of Republican National Convention in 1884. Admitted to Mississippi bar in 1894. Appointed auditor of U. S. Treasury in 1892, Major in U. S. Volunteers during Spanish-American War, and paymaster of the army. Moved to Chicago in 1912, where he published two books and numerous articles on Reconstruction. Died in 1939.

Lynch, William H.

Brother of John R. Lynch. Born a slave in Concordia Parish, Louisiana. Worked during the war as attendant for U. S. Army commandant of Natchez. Member of the Mississippi House in 1874-1875, and again in 1881 and 1885. Natchez city alderman in 1871, 1872, and 1873. Member of Adams County School Board in 1871. Business manager of brother's property in 1870s and 1890s. Partner in Natchez, Jackson, & Columbus Rail Road in 1870.

McCary, William.

Son of prosperous free black barber in Natchez, Robert McCary. Served in various municipal and county capacities in 1860s and 1870s: Adams County Sheriff, tax collector, city alderman, county treasurer, and Natchez postmaster. Joined with Citizens Reform Club in late 1870s in opposition to established black Republicans.

Revels, Hiram.

Born free in North Carolina in 1822 or 1827. Attended a Quaker Seminary in Indiana and Knox College in Illinois. Ordained AME minister in 1845, preached thereafter in Indiana, Illinois, Ohio, Missouri, and Maryland. Imprisoned in Missouri in 1854 for preaching to blacks. Left AME church for Methodist Episcopal Church North. Reunited with AME in 1856 and thereafter served as a minister and principal of a black high school in Baltimore from 1857 to 1863. Also taught school briefly in St. Louis. Organized black regiments in Maryland and Missouri in Civil War. Worked for Freedmen's Bureau

in Vicksburg, Mississippi — raising money for schools. Settled in Natchez after the war where he became a city alderman in 1868 and served in the Mississippi State Legislature. Joined the Methodist Episcopal Church in 1868. Appointed to U. S. Senate from Mississippi in 1870 for a brief term — first black in U. S. Congress. Appointed president of Alcorn Agriculture College in 1873 — became Alcorn University, a state college for blacks. Dismissed from the Presidency of Alcorn University in 1874 when he defected to Democratic Party. Renamed to the Presidency in 1874. Owned Mount Welcome plantation east of Natchez in the 1890s. Died in 1901.

Speed, Oscar.

Adams County Board of Supervisors, 1877.

Williams, Jeremiah M.P.

Virginia born ex-slave, Baptist preacher who was elected to Mississippi state senate in 1870-74 and again in 1878. Active in Union League in Natchez in 1870s.

Winston, Louis J.

Free black born in Natchez, became most successful black lawyer in Adams County. Represented numerous blacks in land dealings in county in 1870s and 1880s. Sheriff of Adams County in 1870s. Also served as circuit clerk of Adams County for twenty consecutive terms, County Assessor in 1876. Served three years as collector of port of Natchez in the late 1890s. Published the *Natchez Reporter*, 1890-1909. Also practiced law in Greenville, Mississippi after 1900. Generally believed to have been one of the most sophisticated and cultivated men of Natchez.

Wood, Robert H.

Member of free black family of Natchez. Worked in the same Natchez photography shop in Natchez as John R. Lynch in 1865. Appointed first black mayor of Natchez by Governor Alcorn in 1869. Justice of the Peace in Natchez in 1870. Elected mayor in 1871. President of Adams County Board of Supervisors, 1871 and 1872. Served as deputy post master of Natchez in 1873 and as post master from 1874 to 1876. Elected sheriff and tax collector of Adams County in 1875. County sheriff in 1877. Owned thirty-six acre farm in 1870. Served along with Robert Fitzhugh as political managers of John R. Lynch's election campaign to U. S. Congress in 1870.

Sources: The material above was compiled from sources too numerous to mention, including the *Natchez Democrat*, but principally from unpublished information provided in detail by Eric Foner on black officeholders in Mississippi.

The brief outline above, unfortunately, is all that is readily known about black politics in Natchez in the Reconstruction era. The questions left unanswered are both compelling and essential. For example, we know absolutely nothing of the black militia in Natchez in the late 1860s and 1870s. There is evidence that blacks paraded in militia units long after the last black soldiers of the USCT were mustered out of service in the summer of 1866. But

who were its leaders? How extensive were its operations. What political role did the militia play?

Along the same lines, what about the Ku Klux Klan? Again, we have scattered references to Klan activity in Natchez and the town's immediate hinterland, but no clear evidence that the Klan posed a threat similar to the terror it wrought in other parts of the state. According to our best evidence, the Klan was somewhat active in outlying areas near Kingston and the hamlet of Washington, but to no great effect. In the mid-1870s, although organized Klan activity apparently had stopped, local Democratic political clubs allegedly used force to replace Republican ballots with fraudulent Democratic votes in several rural precincts. Armed and mounted members of white Democratic clubs brandished clubs and weapons in displays of force at almost every election in rural Adams County from 1875 to the middle 1880s; but similar demonstrations by African-American Republicans also occurred. Just how extensive was the Klan of Adams County is a story yet to be told.³⁹⁰

Nor do we know much about the Union Leagues in Natchez. We have numerous newspaper references documenting heated organizational activities in which schoolhouses and church buildings were used as organizational halls by night. The Rev. Jeremiah P. Williams regularly used his church on Main Street to exhort his black constituency to vote for black Republicans. The *Natchez Democrat*, in further testimony of League activism, criticized a Union League organizer in Natchez for giving a speech that even "the arch Radical [Thaddeus] Stevens would have blushed to have heard. . . ." So effective was the Natchez based Union League that Adams County was considered a guaranteed district for black Republicans until the mid-1880s, returning blacks to local and state office regularly and with little effective opposition. But just how the League was structured, who were its leaders, and how the organization changed over time remains to be seen.³⁹¹

How radical, moreover, were the black political activists of the Natchez district? It seems that most of those Natchez black politicians who survived into the 1880s were decidedly moderate in their positions. Hiram Revels, for example, the first African-American to serve in the U. S. Senate, had little intention of getting into politics when he assumed the pastorship of the town's AME church. A conflict between two factions of Natchez blacks, in 1869, over whom they would support for state senator was the means of Revels' ascendancy. Supporters of the two principal candidates (Henry Jacobs and Jeremia M. P. Williams) turned to Revels as an unknown who "had never attended a political meeting," or "made a political speech. . . ." Respected, nevertheless, as an intelligent minister, Revels won appointment as a compromise candidate. Fortune struck a second time when Revels opened the newly convened Senate with a prayer. According to John Lynch, that prayer, "one of the most impressive" ever delivered in the Senate chamber, started a movement to appoint Revels to fill Jefferson Davis's unexpired term in the U. S. Senate. Although Revels commanded a great deal of attention while in Washington, his short career was a

390. *Natchez Weekly Democrat*, January 1, 1868; August 3, 1868; Fitzgerald, *The Union League Movement in the Deep South*, pp. 38, 66, 185, 224; Garner, *Reconstruction in Mississippi*, 338-353; Harris, *The Day of the Carpetbagger*, p. 382; Derrick Ward, "The Ku Klux Klan of Adams County, 1866-1875," unpublished graduate seminar paper, California State University, Northridge, in author's possession; Wharton, *The Negro in Mississippi*, pp. 131-233.

391. *Natchez Weekly Democrat*, June 10, 1867; December 7, 1870; January 4, 1871; April 9, 1871; November 13, 1872; November 2, 1875; July 3, 1876; November 4, 1879;

model of moderation, culminating in his support for a bill removing all political limitations on southern whites.³⁹²

If few Natchez black political leaders were as moderate as Revels, none were especially radical. No Natchez black leader, for example, supported the confiscation of lands for redistribution to the freedmen. Indeed, the most active black Union League organizer in Natchez, Secretary of State James Lynch, denounced confiscation. What set Natchez black politicians apart from their fellow white Republicans was their opposition to segregation and their insistence on being included on Republican tickets. What set them apart from white Democrats was their vocal support of political and economic equality.³⁹³

Beginning around 1875, as white home rule settled itself upon the state, fewer and fewer blacks were elected to public office in Natchez or Adams County. What followed in the years from 1876 to 1890 was a series of legislative, terroristic, and constitutional measures aimed at eliminating the black vote in the state. Natchez politician John Lynch met, in 1887, with race leaders from forty counties, in the largest "colored convention" in state history, to denounce the "violent and criminal suppression of the black vote" in Mississippi. In 1868, Mississippi registered voters numbered approximately 87,000 blacks; by 1892, the number had dropped to less than 9,000. In Adams county, black registered votes, in 1892, numbered 342 males out of a voting age population in excess of 4,000. The black delegate to the state assembly from Natchez, lawyer George F. Bowles, spoke of his people having been reduced, with the loss of their suffrage, to a position "more intolerable than the old-time slavery."³⁹⁴

And yet Natchez blacks continued to hold public office. John Lynch, a fairly substantial property owner in Adams County, won a hard fought battle to return to the U. S. Congress in the 1880s. Lynch also won, thereafter, continued appointment to public office long after blacks stopped voting in Mississippi, as did a number of his Natchez associates — including his partner in business, the black lawyer Louis J. Winston. Historians of Mississippi refer to the continued presence of black office holders in the face of declining black voters as a form of fusion politics in which white Democrats and black Republicans gave token representation to those black leaders in the community deemed acceptable to the white power structure. Something of this sort seems to have taken place in Adams County in the years after 1876, although the details of this arrangement are obscure and unresearched as of this writing. But the fact that African-American Louis J. Winston could serve twenty consecutive terms as circuit clerk of the county court suggests that more was

392. Lynch, *The Autobiography of John Roy Lynch*, pp. 75-84; Sewell and Dwight, *Mississippi Black History Makers*, pp. 7-16; Wharton, *The Negro in Mississippi*, pp. 158-180.

393. Natchez *Courier*, January 11, 1868; Fitzgerald, *The Union League Movement in the Deep South*, pp. 124-125. It is important to note that a number of Natchez blacks cast their lot with white Democrats in the Reconstruction era. A so-called Citizens Reform ticket ran "lily white" democrats and respected "colored Leaders" in several elections in the mid-1870s. Even the once radical William McCary joined forces with the Democrats in opposition to black Republicans in local contest. See especially the *Natchez Democrat*, July 20, 1868; December 7, 1870; November 2, 1875.

394. McMillen, *Dark Journey: Black Mississippians in the Age of Jim Crow*, p. 36, 47, 53; Wharton, *The Negro in Mississippi*, pp. 208-210; white election commissioners simply disallowed blacks to register or else dumped the black cast ballots at the end of the election day, substituting Democratic ballots in their place.

involved than mere fusion politics. Rather, the full story will have to take into account the viability of a black community rooted in antebellum linkages between free blacks and their white benefactors, the emergence of an organizationally strong but relatively conservative black political leadership in the 1860s and 1870s, the moderate political leanings of many of the town's white inhabitants, and the cohesive role of black churches and fellowship societies in channelling much of the town's black political energies into education, economic advancement, and societal autonomy.³⁹⁵

Regardless of how the story of the black experience in Natchez will eventually be told, its conclusion is quite unsatisfying in view of the promise held out in the immediate post-war years. By 1880, Natchez blacks, both rural and urban, were little more than a poorly educated and unskilled labor force with few political rights and little hope for the future. The great experiment of the 1860s and 1870s had largely come to naught. No black political clubs dotted the land or filled church halls with their excited members. No black politicians again held significant public office in Adams County on the strength of the black vote alone or in unity with white Republicans. In the countryside, nearly all of the district's ex-slaves were so heavily indebted to their supply merchants that the only escape was to run away — much as had been the case in slavery. It mattered little that they were sharecroppers, tenants, or even landowners. The hated crop lien held them all equally fast.

This is not to say, however, that nothing had changed in the district for the better. Among the town's seven churches and one temple were three black ones: the Zion AME Church located at the corner of Pine and Jefferson (Rev. Adam Jackson), the Rose Hill Baptist Church at Union and Rankin streets (Rev. Randall Pollard), and the Pine Street Baptist Church (No settled pastor). Also, 385 black children attended the black public school on Union street. Its principal, Theodore H. Green, employed a black staff of six teachers, four of whom were descendants of prominent free black antebellum families in Natchez — Anna Johnson, Mary F. Winston, Kate Smith, and Anna Hoggatt. There were two black volunteer fire companies in town, one located on Commerce Street between Main and State, and the other on the corner of Pearl and State. Company members elected officers and conducted themselves much like a social organization, the closest resemblance to political clubs tolerated in the constrained milieu following 1876. The 130 members of the Mississippi Good Will Fire Brigade looked to William McCary as their president. Its rival company, Deluge No. 2, numbered sixty members, including the prominent Anthony Hoggatt as its Treasurer.³⁹⁶ (See ILLUSTRATION M)

Other "colored" men of property, mainly descendants of antebellum free blacks, continued to function as Natchez civil servants for the duration of the 1870s. Robert W. Fitzhugh served as postmaster and Justice of the Peace. Anthony Hoggatt held a seat on the city's Board of Education. Robert Wood won a second term as county sheriff and tax collector,

395. Wharton, *The Negro in Mississippi*, p. 169.

396. *Natchez Directory For 1877-1878* (Natchez, Miss., 1878), Historic Natchez Foundation, Natchez, Mississippi. Some nineteen plantation and rural black schools were staffed throughout the county by African-American teachers under the supervision of an African-American controlled Board of School Directors in the 1870s and 1880s.

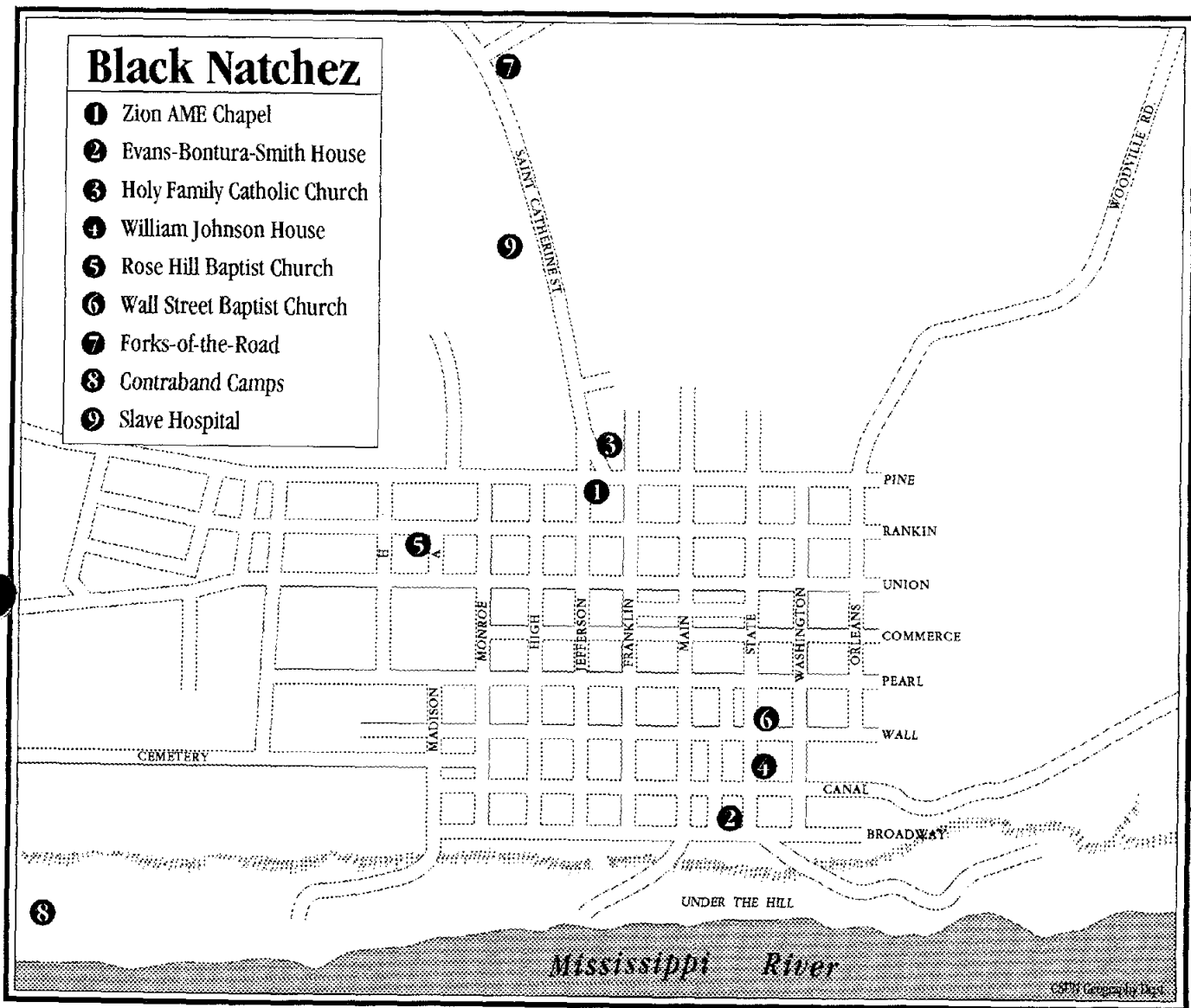


Illustration M: Black Natchez

and Louis J. Winston clerked for the Circuit Court of Adams County. The town's six Masonic organizations included the "colored" H. R. Revels Lodge, to which postmaster Fitzhugh and Sheriff Wood belonged.³⁹⁷

The Reconstruction era, in view of the above achievements and viable character of the black community, was a time of meaningful gain for the African-Americans of Natchez when compared to what they had known in slavery. The achievements, moreover, were specific and enduring: the right to freely associate with one another in churches and fraternal associations; to marry and hold property; to have recourse to the courts for redress of property disputes; to work free of daily overlording; and to largely come and go as they pleased. These were no small victories for a largely illiterate and impoverished people just "up from slavery."

In a fundamental sense, however, the gains were largely superficial in that all the hard won freedoms of assembly, property, education, and religion had failed to break the chains of poverty binding the vast majority of ex-slaves to the soil as lowly agricultural workers. The fact that these chains were left unbroken meant that little could be done to prevent the erosion of black suffrage once Reconstruction was brought to a close. As a result, most Natchez blacks in the 1880s (urban and rural alike) found themselves in an economic, social, and political box — much as had been the case in slavery — from which there was no obvious exit.³⁹⁸

397. Ibid.

398. See especially Davis, *Good and Faithful Labor*, pp. 168-197; McMillen, *Dark Journey: Black Mississippians in the Age of Jim Crow*. Wharton, *The Negro in Mississippi*, pp. 274-275.

EPILOGUE

Buried deep within the records of the William Johnson family papers are several letters that fit together like pieces of a puzzle, revealing much about the black experience in Natchez, about what had changed over the years and about what had not. The first to be noted is a letter written to Miss Anna Johnson, eldest daughter of the antebellum free black barber, William Johnson, dated August 17, 1897. The handwritten piece of paper, signed by W. G. Benbrook, Mayor of Natchez, requested a favor of Miss Johnson:

My son Dr. Otis Benbrook goes to Saint Joseph today for the purpose of remaining there to practice his profession. Will you be kind enough to give him a letter introducing him to Mr. Cunningham, requesting him to assist him among his friends in getting practice among them. By doing this you will greatly oblige.³⁹⁹

The second letter is a note written to Dr. William Johnson from John Roy Lynch, attorney-at-law, dated December 27, 1937, and mailed from Lynch's home in Chicago.⁴⁰⁰ The note from Lynch is personal and chatty, wishing health and regards:

I am writing you extending my congratulations and best wishes with the seasons greetings.

I regret very much to learn through Mabel that your health is not as good as we all hoped it would be. We are all anxious, however, about you and sincerely hope that you are on the road to recovery and that you will soon again be in the enjoyment of good health. I am pleased to be able to say that with the exception of defective vision and hearing, I am in the enjoyment of my usual good health, and Mrs Lynch is also well and hearty and joins me in extending to you our best wishes and sincere hope that when we hear from you again it will be to inform us of the fact that you are also enjoying the blessings of this life, including good health and future prosperity.

My wife's relatives and also Mabel and her husband join me in best wishes for your future health and prosperity.

With sincere regards to your wife and other members of your household, I remain

Very sincerely your uncle,
J. R. Lynch

399. W.G. Benbrook to Anna Johnson, August 17, 1897, Johnson Family paper. LSU, Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

400. John R. Lynch to Dr. William R. Johnson, December 27, 1937, Johnson Family Paper.

The Lynch of the signature above was the state's most powerful black politician in the thirty years following the Civil War. He had left Natchez for good in 1912 to live and work in Chicago as a lawyer, where he died at age ninety-two in 1939.⁴⁰¹ The Dr. Johnson to whom Lynch wrote was the grandson of the antebellum William Johnson. Dr. Johnson would be dead within a year of Lynch's letter. He had graduated from Wilberforce University in Ohio in 1897, taking thereafter a medical degree at Howard University. A lifelong resident of Natchez, Dr. Johnson was among a handful of black professionals — doctors, lawyers, and teachers — with deeply embedded antebellum roots. The link between Dr. Johnson, whose aunt was the Anna Johnson of whom Mayor Benbrook requested a personal favor, and the prominent Lynch (Uncle Lynch) is indicative of two interrelated aspects of the black experience in Natchez: (1) some members of the black community were among the best educated and most influential citizens of Natchez by 1900, and (2) the ties between the offspring of Natchez slaves and prominent antebellum free blacks were indeed closely strung. Whether they were relatives by blood or by mere communion, the prominent black middle-class of Natchez was no unkept group of upstarts. Rather, they were men and women of property and character who had risen about as far as one could have hoped in the milieu of the late nineteenth-century South.

The Anna Johnson addressed by Mayor Benbrook was the daughter of William and Ann Johnson, the eminent free black family of antebellum Natchez. After the deaths of her mother, in 1866, and her older brother, Byron, who was killed in 1872, Anna L. Johnson became something of the family's matriarch. Her oldest brother, William, suffered from mental illness and was confined to a mental asylum in New Orleans for most of his adult life. She had nine siblings in all, including three sisters — Alice, Josephine, and Katherine, who taught with Anna in Natchez primary schools. One other sister, Eugenia, appears to have been the only one of the Johnson daughters to have married. Of Anna's two surviving brothers in the 1880s, Richard and Clarence, only Richard appears with any consistency among the records. He operated the family plantation, Peachland, for much of the 1890s.

Anna L. Johnson undoubtedly did what she could for Mayor Benbrook's son, but that Benbrook should have asked the favor at all is the item of interest. Clearly, the Johnson family of Natchez had achieved a level of influence by 1900 similar to that accorded William Johnson in his lifetime.

Upon William Johnson's death in 1852, his widow sold the family's farm lands, some 1562 acres, to James Surget, for \$5 per acre. This sale netted nearly \$8000, a sum that helped to hold the family together as the older brothers came of age. Both William Jr. and Byron followed their father's profession of barbering, probably living in the family home on State Street while cutting hair in the family shops.⁴⁰²

Using the land sale money, widow Johnson invested carefully for the remainder of her life. In 1854, the family purchased two lots on Magnolia Street, a new division north of town just below the bluffs on property once owned by the Bellvue Cotton Press Company.

401. See Lynch, *The Autobiography of John Roy Lynch*, pp. ix-xxxix.

402. Deed, July 11, 1853, Anna Johnson to James Surget, Adams County Deed Book KK, Office of Records, Natchez, Mississippi.

Whether or not any members of the Johnson clan lived in the Bellvue Division is unclear, but it seems unlikely since most of the children were still quite young at the time.⁴⁰³

The family also contracted, in the same year, with a local builder, James Hardee, to construct a substantial building on Main Street at the cost of \$5278.64. Sons William and Byron operated a barber shop in the building for the next decade, at which time, in 1865, the building was leased as a storeroom to O. H. Ross & Co at "the monthly rent of one hundred dollars, to be paid in advance." A few years later, in November of 1868, Byron Johnson purchased a town lot in the Woodlawn Division just off Pine Ridge Road and near the present site of Natchez College; his sister Anna followed suit in 1869, acquiring a piece of property nearby for \$437.⁴⁰⁴

In addition, the family used some of its capital to loan at healthy interest rates to prominent whites in the area. In one case, Byron loaned several thousand dollars to Stephan Duncan, taking out a mortgage on Duncan's Magnolia plantation as security.⁴⁰⁵

After the war, and with widow Johnson's death, the family focused its financial attention on a goal long sought by the senior Johnson: to become landed planters. In partnership with family members, Byron Johnson leased several district plantations which he operated by using freedmen sharecroppers. Johnson rented St. Genevieve and Black Hill plantations in Concordia Parish, Louisiana and the well-established Carthage plantation located just south of town. His landlords for Carthage were John and Katherine Surget Minor — members of two of the community's most prominent antebellum families. The lease and sharecropping contracts ran from one to three years, on terms fairly typical for the district. In the case of Carthage, Byron agreed to pay his workers one-half the crops made and to furnish all mules, plows, and implements along with one-half the feed expenses. The freedmen contracted to furnish their own rations and proportionate feed for stocks. All hands agreed to work six days a week "commencing at day light until dark," taking one hour for dinner in winter and two hours in summer. Time lost was docked at \$1 per day. In all, nine hands signed the contracts.⁴⁰⁶

The owners of Carthage, John and Katherine Minor, allowed Johnson the use of all tenements and quarters on the place except the main residence, one end of the corn crib,

403. Deed, October 23, 1854, Alexander S. Postlethwaite and Wife, and Ayres P. Merrill to William Johnson et al, Adams County Deed Book KK, Office of Records, Natchez, Mississippi.

404. Deed, November 23, 1868, William H. Forbes to Byron Johnson, Adams County Deed Book PP, Office of Records, Natchez, Mississippi; see also various deed transactions in Johnson Family Papers, 1868 to 1888, LSU, Baton Rouge, Louisiana

405. See mortgage agreement with Stephen Duncan, 1862 to 1871, Johnson Family Papers, LSU, Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

406. Agreement with Freedmen on the Carthage Plantation, February 12, 1869; Lease agreement with John and K.L. Minor, Carthage Plantation, February 15, 1869; Lease agreement for Black Hill Plantation, December 31, 1872; Lease agreement for St. Genevieve Plantation, March 14, 1888, Johnson Family Papers, LSU, Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

and the gin house. In return, Byron agreed to work the place and pay the Minors \$500, secured by a lien on the crop.⁴⁰⁷

Hundreds of similar contracts were signed by district planters in the immediate post-war years, leasing their properties to outsiders or to any-one with capital enough to make a crop. Such leasing arrangements enabled the district's once affluent white elite to hold onto their lands while obtaining cash for taxes. In many cases, the experiments in renting lands to tenants (who then sharecropped with freedmen) ended poorly, and dozens of planters lost their lands because of crop failures or absconding tenants. The difference in the case of lessee Johnson was the color of his skin and the success he brought to the venture.

For reasons not fully clear, the Johnson family scaled back their leasing of district farms in the mid-1870s in favor of buying 450 acres north of Natchez on the Peachland plantation. The four Johnson sisters — Anna, Katherine, Alice, and Josephine — paid \$600 at 8 percent interest, and employed their brother Richard to operate the farm with sharecroppers and tenants. This arrangement lasted well into the twentieth-century, with Anna eventually establishing residence on the place in 1912.⁴⁰⁸

Although uncommonly prosperous and well-respected, the Johnson family was never far from hard times. They were forced to undertake several loans on their Peachland holdings in the 1870s and 1880s for rather trifling sums of money that were probably used to pay taxes or for some unspecified emergencies. The first mortgage was given to William Lynch in 1875 for \$325, secured by a parcel of Peachland. Ten years later, Anna raised \$200 with a note to Duncan Minor and James Surget, the latter being a member of the same Surget family that had purchased most of Ann Johnson's rural lands after William Johnson's death in the early 1850s. Another note was taken for \$600 in 1896. In addition to these secured loans, the Johnson women sold three town lots on State Street in 1892.⁴⁰⁹

Catherine Johnson, the wife of Clarence (born in 1851), invested in town lots and rural estate property seemingly independent of the family. She purchased a lot on Pearl Street from John R. Lynch in 1883. By 1891, she owned several more adjoining properties, adding a lot on Homochitto Street in 1898, which she purchased from Lynch for \$2000 on a two year note. That same year, Lynch sold 694 acres of the Grove Plantation to Catherine for \$3500 and all of his Providence plantation, amounting to 220 acres. Catherine Johnson

407. Ibid.

408. Deed, March 1, 1874, J.M. Calib to Anna Johnson et al, Adams County Deed Book TT, Office of Records, Natchez, Mississippi.

409. Deed, May 8, 1875, Anna L. Johnson et al, to William Lynch, Adams County Deed Book UU; February 16, Anna L. Johnson et al, to Duncan G. Minor, Adams County Deed Book ZZ; January 16, 1892, Anna L. Johnson to W.C. Martin, Adams County Deed Book 3-g; December 12, 1896, Anna L. Johnson to Ernest E. Brown, Adams County Deed book 3-N, Office of Records, Natchez, Mississippi.

and Lynch jointly mortgaged Providence eleven months later for \$2400, suggesting that Lynch had accepted a note from Catherine in payment for the plantation.⁴¹⁰

What the records reveal, clearly, is a measure of prosperity for the Johnson family that was substantial indeed. Landed property, connections, and an educated offspring were, in a fundamental sense, the earmarks of the American dream. Yet there is something amiss in the story. For one thing, one has the sense that the basic ingredients of black prosperity in postbellum Natchez were the same as those at play in the antebellum life of William Johnson: white patronage, circumspectness, limited goals, and probity.

The Johnson family (similar to the Maziques and Rounds) clearly benefited over the years from its association with wealthy members of the white community. Prior to the Civil War the wealthy Adam L. Bingaman had functioned as William Johnson's patron and close family friend; after the war, the prominent Surget family appears frequently in the Johnson business dealings.

Most telling, in regard to the white community's expectations, is the obituary that appeared in the *Natchez Democrat* on the death of Byron Johnson in 1872. The piece is quite striking in its resemblance to the one written for William Johnson some twenty years before:

Byron Johnson was born here in our midst, about 27 years ago. His father before him (a free man of color) had by a long life of probity and rectitude, won a high place in the estimation of this community, and about twenty years ago, died much lamented, at the hands of an assassin. Byron [**notice the diminutive use of the first name only**] emulated the example of his father, in whose worthy memory he ever felt a just degree of pride. And by emulating that good example, Byron easily attained to an enviable position in the estimation of all who knew him. This position he maintained always. He was quiet, decorous, respectful and polite in his demeanor to all men. Of modest and retiring habits, he attended closely to his business, eschewing political strife, though he was often urged to enter it, and had the intelligence, energy and ability to win place and distinction, had he chosen to be a public man since the enfranchisement of his race. . . . He was temperate, generous, public-spirited, moral. He was honest and true. In short he was an upright honest man.⁴¹¹

In summation, Byron Johnson, like his father, was a man unwilling to challenge, at least openly, the existing social and political order. Perhaps he worked behind the scenes, as was probably the case in view of the Johnson family's close links to John Lynch. There can be no doubt, however, that his activities were modest ones else something would have

410. Deed, July 2, 1883, John R. Lynch to Catherine E.L. Johnson, Adams County Deed Book YY; Deed, January 1, 1898, John R. Lynch to Catherine E.L. Johnson, Adams County Deed Book, 3-O; Deed, January 12, 1898, John R. Lynch to Catherine E.L. Johnson, Adams County Deed Book, 3-O; Deed, January 24, 1898, John R. Lynch to Catherine E.L. Johnson, Adams County Deed Book 3-P; Deed, December 31, 1898, John R. Lynch and Catherine E.L. Johnson to A.H. Gusenberger, Adams County Deed book, 3-P, Office of Records, Natchez, Mississippi.

411. *Natchez Democrat*, January 17, 1872.

appeared in the local press. That he died so early in the Reconstruction era makes using him as an example somewhat unfair; but it is clear that no member of the Johnson clan ever used their antebellum prominence as a stepping stone to political leadership in the postbellum era. Nor was it accidental or of no consequence that a number of the black propertied families (Rounds, Maziques, and Johnsons) of postbellum Natchez were non-political for the most part.

Finally, it is worth reiterating, that none of the community's handful of African-Americans of property, achieved substantial wealth compared to what owning plantations and farms had meant in antebellum days. To be a planter in Adams County, owning one or two plantations in the 1880s, was to be a person of rather shabby, middling class status. To own a Peachland or a China Grove was to own several hundred acres of relatively worn out soil. That is why the Johnson sisters remained public school teachers all their lives, borrowed petty sums when necessary, and educated their children as doctors and teachers. Slaveless plantations afforded their upland Adams County, postbellum owners (blacks and whites alike) a minimum of income, barely enough for their solvency. Clearly, the Johnson family enjoyed influence and relative prosperity in the decades after the Civil War; but the family never rose above a rather shabby standard of living — a mockery of the status once experienced by the white elites who had lorded over the same lands in antebellum days.

Still, it is important to emphasize in closing just how significant was the Benbrook note to Anna Johnson. It is evidence of a continuity of sorts in the close ties of some Natchez blacks and some prominent members of the white community. Clearly, the Johnson family, for whatever reasons, was a family of influence whom the Natchez community (blacks and whites alike) looked upon with favor and respect. Even while John Lynch and most other blacks were being deprived of their suffrage throughout the state in the 1890s, segregated by Jim Crow laws, driven (in the case of some) from the state, and even (in the case of many) lynched, the Johnson family held onto their lands, educated their children as doctors, and received complimentary notes requesting favors from prominent whites. Why and how the Johnson family managed to persevere with its antebellum status undiminished (and perhaps enhanced) — at least through the 1930s — is a tale that must someday be told.

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