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Introduction: spaces of freedom in North America

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Introduction

Spaces of Freedom in North America

DAMIAN ALAN PARGAS

On the Fourth of July 1825, most white residents of Washington, D.C., celebrated the anniversary of their freedom and independence from Great Britain with parades, elaborate theater productions, and other amusements that included a "GRAND OLIO of Song, Dance, and Recitation" and "a GRAND SCROLL DANCE by the Corps de Ballet." At the same time, dozens of enslaved people from the surrounding farm districts of Maryland and Virginia were making their own attempts to secure freedom and independence from a life of bondage. The *Daily National Intelligencer* printed no less than ten runaway slave advertisements that day—some of them for groups and even entire families—a significant number for any single issue. The presumed whereabouts of the runaways ran the full gamut of possible destinations, illuminating the complicated geography of slavery and freedom that existed throughout the continent.

Some runaways, for example, were explicitly presumed to be disguising their visibility as slaves and attempting to pass for free, even while remaining within the slaveholding South. Indeed, three were supposedly posing as *whites*. Granderson, a twenty-three-year-old carpenter who was described as "remarkably white for a slave, and might be readily taken for a white man," had absconded with the intention "doubtless to pass as a free man" and practice his trade right in Washington. Two brothers named Rezin and Harry (eighteen and sixteen years old, respectively), who were also "of so bright a complexion, that

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they would hardly be taken for mulattoes," were likewise suspected of lurking about the city and passing for white. Even runaways with a dark complexion could hope to disguise their visibility as slaves in Washington, which in the antebellum period had a sizable free black population that at times outnumbered the slave population by as much as four to one. Tom, a local bondsman and a skilled wagoner, was presumed to be passing himself off as a free black in the city, where he would "probably offer his services." Others like him were described as having changed their names and run off "with forged papers" to live among the free blacks of the District.[1]

Predictably, a handful of freedom seekers had safer territory in mind. With the Pennsylvania border a mere sixty miles north of Washington as the crow flies, free soil seemed tantalizingly close to bondspeople living in the capital region. Daniel, Moses, and Scipio, all between the ages of twenty-five and thirty, were suspected of having "obtained [forged] passes" to travel "out of the States of Virginia, Maryland, and the District of Columbia" to a northern free state. Another bondsman named George was also thought to be making his way north, his master so baffled by the flight of his "most industrious and faithful field hand" that he concluded that his slave "must have been decoyed off" by somebody who had provided him with a false pass. To some runaways, however, even the northern states—where federal laws allowed for southern masters to reclaim their fugitive slaves and drag them back to the South—did not seem quite safe enough. One entire family consisting of an enslaved carpenter named Ben, his three daughters, and his son-in-law—all from Stafford County, Virginia—executed a daring attempt to leave the United States altogether and make for free territory elsewhere in the hemisphere. The group reportedly fled to Washington with forged free papers, having told friends that they intended to board a vessel bound for the Caribbean because they wanted "to go to St. Domingo," where slavery had not only been abolished but where the government also promised asylum and citizenship to all runaway slaves who reached its shores. Their secret plans had somehow become known to their master, but the other slaves who were advertised as missing on that Fourth of July slipped away more quietly and left no trace of their intentions or possible whereabouts; their masters presumed them to be either hiding out in Washington or making their way to a free state—it was anybody's guess.[2]

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What is so striking about these advertisements is that the presumed destinations of the runaway slaves were so diverse. They included places where slavery had been abolished (such as the northern states and Haiti) *and* places where it still existed (such as Washington). From the perspective of enslaved people seeking to flee bondage in the antebellum South, in other words, freedom in one form or another could be found in a wide variety of geographical, political, and social settings. Freedom could be forged in the north, south, east, or west; it could be reached by crossing political borders or by remaining within the borders of the slaveholding territories; it could be attained by disguising one's true identity or by openly claiming asylum. Different destinations required different strategies of absconding, and no place constituted an *ideal* destination for runaway slaves, but, however imperfect, North America in the decades preceding the Civil War provided enslaved people with various spaces to which they could flee to try to escape slavery.

The essays in this volume examine the experiences of permanent runaway slaves—those who had no intention of returning to their masters—in various settings in North America during a period of important structural transitions. Throughout the Americas, the geography of slavery and freedom was radically and irrevocably transformed in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. For many African Americans, it was an age of emancipation. Whereas prior to the American Revolution human bondage was legally sanctioned and rarely questioned in every part of the hemisphere, the last quarter of the eighteenth century witnessed what Steven Hahn has called a "deepening crisis of slave regimes" as growing moral doubts about slaveholding among Quakers and Protestant evangelicals dovetailed with economic and intellectual challenges to the institution's perceived inefficiency, social undesirability, and political unsustainability among prominent thinkers in Europe and America.[3] Transatlantic discourses in the age of revolutions had a profound effect upon slavery in the New World, ultimately leading to the legal abolition of the transatlantic slave trade and of slavery itself in various parts of the Americas. Moreover, this period witnessed a spike in individual manumissions and self-purchase schemes by slaveholders who for ideological or financial reasons struggled with the idea of keeping some or all of their bondspeople enslaved for life, which resulted in the emergence or bolstering of free black communities *within* slaveholding territories (especially in urban areas). In short,

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significant numbers of black people in the Atlantic world legally exited slavery in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.[4]

Yet for countless other African Americans it was an age of what Dale Tomich has called "the second slavery," a period of intensification of slavery in regions such as the American South, Brazil, and Cuba. Indeed, the entrenchment of slavery, even as antislavery scored its first victories, constituted one of the great paradoxes of the Atlantic world. While some parts of the Americas saw their free black populations considerably augmented, others devolved into "freedom's mirror," as Ada Ferrer recently put it. For those still enslaved, the changing landscape of slavery and freedom provided new opportunities to escape and therefore gave rise to waves of asylum-based migration as droves of slave refugees crossed into geographic spaces and places that constituted sites of *formal freedom* (where slavery was abolished according to "free-soil" principles, such as Haiti) or *informal freedom* (regions within slaveholding territories, especially urban areas, where slaves attempted to escape by blending in with newly augmented free black populations).[5]

In North America, the geography of slavery and freedom that emerged in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries was even more complicated as it included sites of formal, semiformal, and informal freedom for fugitive slaves. The northern United States, British Canada, and Mexico all abolished slavery between 1777 and 1834. Yet only in British Canada and Mexico did spaces of *formal freedom*—eventually—emerge on paper (although in practice the meanings and security of this freedom were contested in a multitude of ways). And even there the shift to free soil was protracted and wrought with inconsistencies. For example, the legislature of Upper Canada passed An Act to Prevent the Further Introduction of Slaves and to Limit the Term of Contracts for Servitude within this Province in 1793, nobly declaring it "unjust that a people who enjoy Freedom by Law should encourage the introduction of Slaves" and "highly expedient to abolish Slavery in this Province, so far as the same may gradually be done without violating private property." Yet the law fell short of fully abolishing slavery outright, merely decreeing that no new slaves could be imported or brought into the province and that children born to slave mothers would be freed at age twenty-five. According to the act, those already enslaved would remain so for life. Subsequent legislation hastened the

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transition to freedom in the province, and the dominion went to great lengths not to extradite fugitive slaves from the United States, but it would take until the final abolition of slavery throughout the British Empire in 1834 for bondage in all of Canada to end definitively. The development of an independence movement in early-nineteenth-century Mexico, meanwhile, also took place in a revolutionary atmosphere hostile to slavery, with the movement's founding document—Father Hidalgo's Grito de Dolores (1810)—explicitly calling for the eradication of bondage throughout New Spain. But there, too, the transition to freedom was a painfully slow and nonlinear process. Upon achieving independence in 1821, Mexico continued to experience political struggles between various pro- and antislavery factions, which brought about a series of confusing and often contradictory decrees regarding the legality of the institution, but the central government nevertheless ordered unequivocally in 1823 that all slave children under the age of fourteen be emancipated, and on September 15, 1829, President Vicente Guerrero formally abolished slavery outright, announcing in the simplest and most unambiguous terms possible: "Queda abolida la esclavitud en la República" ("Slavery in the Republic is abolished"), and "Son consiguiente libres los que hasta hoy se habian considerado como esclavos" ("Those who until today were considered slaves are hereafter free"). By the 1830s both Canada and Mexico had become spaces of unconditional formal freedom, where runaway slaves were theoretically safe from extradition and reenslavement, at least on paper. (In practice, illegal border raids in the Texas borderlands made recapture a possibility for fugitive slaves in northern Mexico).[6]

In the northern United States, state-level abolition—what scholars have dubbed the "First Emancipation"—was achieved through a complicated maze of constitutional clauses, court verdicts, and gradual emancipation acts. With the notable exceptions of Vermont and Massachusetts, most northern states abolished slavery in the same protracted manner that Canada and Mexico did, and, like both of those countries, most had to eventually pass subsequent legislation to definitively end the institution. The northern transition to free soil, which began with Vermont in 1777, was virtually set in stone by 1804, however, when all states and territories north of the Mason–Dixon line and Ohio River—including the federal Northwest Territory—had either prohibited slavery or enacted gradual abolition acts. By the early decades of the

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nineteenth century, slaves were all but absent in the North. Unlike in Canada and Mexico, however, northern legislation against slavery was theoretically curtailed by overarching federal fugitive slave laws—embedded in Article IV of the United States Constitution and reaffirmed in the Fugitive Slave Acts of 1793 and 1850—that upheld the rights of slaveholders to recover their runaway slaves. Although northern representatives to the federal government specifically supported federal fugitive slave laws (especially those of the Constitution and of 1793), ordinary citizens and local authorities often felt that federal laws forced them to accept slavery in their midst, and as the rift over slavery grew wider in the antebellum period many northern communities went to great lengths to prevent the recapture of runaway slaves. Indeed, most northern state legislatures attempted to safeguard the refugees within their jurisdictions by passing various "personal liberty laws" that required jury trials for fugitive slave cases and placed the burden of proof on slave catchers. After the deeply unpopular Fugitive Slave Law of 1850 some went so far as to prohibit state officials from complying with federal authorities in such instances, and Wisconsin even attempted to nullify the law altogether. Abolitionist organizations, meanwhile, made a point of harboring fugitive slaves and helping them to reach sites of formal freedom in Canada. These actions certainly helped to protect runaway slaves from reenslavement, but they were still a far cry from full legal immunity from extradition. Sites of freedom for fugitive slaves in the northern states therefore remained semiformal: refugees found themselves theoretically on free soil, but their claims to freedom from reenslavement remained precarious at best and often contested in the courts.[7]

Meanwhile, sites of informal freedom for fugitive slaves emerged within the slaveholding South itself after a wave of individual manumissions in the (post-)revolutionary and early federal periods—especially between 1790 and 1810—bolstered free black populations in countless towns and cities across the region, attracting innumerable runaways who attempted to escape their masters by getting lost in the crowd and passing for free. The same revolutionary climate that resulted in the abolition of slavery in the northern states also convinced many southern lawmakers to open the doors of freedom—if ever so slightly—for enslaved people by enacting legislation that greatly facilitated and even encouraged manumissions. Virginia's manumission

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law of 1782—passed in an era of not only revolutionary fervor but also declining tobacco productivity and a growing pessimism in the future of slavery—provides an illustrative case in point. While it did not abolish slavery itself (although abolition was proposed by some lawmakers), the Act to Authorize the Manumission of Slaves nevertheless simplified the freeing of bondspeople under the age of forty-five held by slaveholders of the revolutionary generation who wished to bestow this "privilege" upon their slaves. The act specified that "it shall hereafter be lawful for any person, by his or her last will and testament, or by any other instrument in writing . . . to emancipate and set free, his or her slaves, or any of them, who shall thereupon be entirely and fully discharged from the performance of any contract entered into during servitude, and enjoy as full freedom as if they had been particularly named and freed by this act."[8] Considering that Virginia was the largest slave state, and one where manumissions had theretofore been very difficult to get approval for (only the governor could approve a manumission request, and then only for "meritous service"), the act of 1782 certainly seemed to usher in a change in course. Although strongly opposed by many white residents and largely reversed in the early nineteenth century, it was a piece of legislation that more than a few Virginia slaveholders made use of in the three decades subsequent to its passage. Whereas before 1782 less than 1 percent of Virginia's African American population was free, by 1790 free blacks accounted for 4.2 percent of the total, and by 1810 they had reached 7.2 percent, surging in absolute numbers from 1,800 to 30,570 in less than thirty years. The number of free blacks living in the port town of Alexandria alone grew from 52 in 1790 to 1,168 in 1820—Richmond, Petersburg, and Norfolk showed proportionally similar trends.[9]

Throughout the Upper South more than 10 percent of African Americans were classified as free by 1810, many of them concentrated in cities such as Baltimore, Washington, and Richmond. In the Lower South the number of free blacks increased less dramatically—from 1.6 percent of the black population in 1790 to 3.9 percent in 1810—but enough to significantly augment the free black populations of places like Charleston, New Orleans, and countless smaller towns across the southern states. This wave of manumissions at the turn of the nineteenth century "provided the basis for the South's free black population in the antebellum period," as Peter Kolchin has argued, for after

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1810—as the revolutionary fervor died out and the South became more openly committed to slavery—manumission became much more difficult, and relatively few slaves were freed.[10]

Indeed, in the South as a whole, the institution of slavery continued to grow at a feverish pace between the American Revolution and the Civil War, following the expansion of cotton into the southern interior and generating a lucrative domestic slave trade that washed almost a million American-born slaves from the Upper South and eastern seaboard to the Deep South, tearing families and communities apart in its wake. The more entrenched bondage became in the American South during the era of the second slavery, the more determined some slaves became to flee captivity altogether, enticed by the prospect of freedom in various geographical settings. The border regions of the North, Canada, and Mexico as well as urban free black communities within the South became the destinations of thousands of runaways. Various spaces and places throughout the continent teemed with freedom seekers looking to escape slavery.[11]

Running away from slavery was of course nothing new in antebellum America; the endemic slave flight that characterized black resistance in the age of the second slavery indeed built upon strategies of absconding that were originally established in the colonial period. Long before the first states moved to facilitate manumission or abolish slavery, enslaved people in North America tried to escape bondage whenever they were presented with opportunities to do so. Sites of formal freedom were absent, but sanctuary spaces and places did exist where daring refugees from bondage could (and did) attempt to carve out lives of informal and even semiformal freedom for themselves and their loved ones. Three strategies in particular were employed, all of which were extremely risky and only seldom successful on a long-term basis. Whatever their shortcomings, however, they established a culture of seeking, creating, and even forcing sanctuary spaces that would later more widely be employed—in a changed landscape of slavery and freedom—in the nineteenth century.

The first two strategies entailed fleeing to sites of informal freedom. First, runaway slaves practiced wilderness marronage, hiding out in forests, swamps, and other sparsely settled areas. The Great Dismal Swamp in southern Virginia alone was thought to harbor hundreds of runaway slaves, to the great consternation of local slaveholders and

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colonial authorities, who often enlisted the help of the state militia to raid maroon settlements and recover their human property. Colonial authorities up and down the Atlantic seaboard faced similar challenges, as wilderness areas, mountain ranges, and swamps from New York to South Carolina provided refuge for untold numbers of fugitives.[12] Second, runaway slaves in colonial America concealed themselves in urban areas or even attempted to pass for free in towns that already had free black populations, again clandestinely navigating sites of informal freedom. Ad hoc manumissions in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries had created small clusters of free black communities throughout the colonies, even in the southern colonies where manumissions were legally most circumscribed. Their numbers were tiny: on the eve of the Revolution, free blacks composed less than 5 percent of the entire black population in the colonies, but their communities nevertheless served as beacons of freedom to some daring runaway slaves.[13]

Finally, enslaved people in colonial America took advantage of temporary wartime situations and geopolitical conflicts to flee to their masters' enemies. More specifically, they sought asylum in Spanish Florida, with local indigenous communities, and—to enter the revolutionary era itself—behind British lines and in British-occupied territories during the American Revolution. In these sites of semiformal freedom, runaways clearly pressed for—and were often granted—protection from extradition and reenslavement, but there were no guarantees. The official status of slave refugees in such theaters of conflict was indeed usually conditional, ambiguous, and unclear. For example, Spanish Florida—itself a society with slaves—promised asylum to runaway slaves from the British colonies as early as 1687 upon the condition that the refugees convert to the "True Faith." But uncertainties regarding the correct interpretation of royal policy led to some runaways remaining enslaved or even being sold abroad. In a notorious example, Governor Antonio de Benavides sold a group of newly arrived fugitive slaves at public auction in 1725 because South Carolina slaveholders were threatening to come and reclaim them by force, and when he wrote to Spain to inquire if the slaves were entitled to sanctuary no reply was forthcoming.[14] Likewise, fleeing to Native American communities offered no guarantees of protection; some Native Americans willingly harbored runaway slaves in the colonial period, but others returned

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slaves to their masters or even killed them, depending on their relations with local white authorities. The Creek even signed a treaty with the governor of South Carolina in 1721 in which they promised to apprehend and return "any Negro or other Slave which shall run away from any English Settlements to our Nation."[15] And although the British famously granted freedom to runaway slaves who enlisted in the king's cause during the American Revolution—and subsequently evacuated thousands of African American refugees following capitulation—they were unable and unwilling to help all those who sought protection. As Sylvia Frey has argued, the British were never genuinely committed to liberation for slaves during the Revolution—their wartime policy constituted at best a "selective offer of freedom" that was designed to meet their specific manpower needs and help suppress the rebellion.[16]

In all of these cases freedom was (vaguely) promised to fugitive slaves purely as a matter of geopolitical expediency and not as a matter of ideological or moral principle. Even in Spanish Florida, where the policy of protecting slaves who ran away from the English colonies was publicly justified on religious and humanitarian grounds, the idea was mainly to attract a much-needed source of labor (both military and civil) and to populate the border with mortal enemies of the English colonists on the other side. What changed in the wake of the American Revolution, and in the age of revolutions more broadly, was a structural reordering of the geography of slavery and freedom that provided enslaved people who wished to permanently escape bondage with a greatly expanded realm of opportunities to do so. Crucially, this reordering was ideologically motivated and permanent, thereby greatly enhancing runaway slaves' chances of success. Colonial strategies of running away of course did not disappear—marronage continued to be employed by some, and the War of 1812 provided a repeat scenario of British promises of freedom and subsequent evacuations of slave refugees from the Chesapeake—but most enslaved people who sought to flee the antebellum South did so by exploiting the changing social and political landscape and fleeing to various spaces of freedom.[17]

The last few years have witnessed a surge in academic interest in the experiences of runaway slaves, with a number of recent publications garnering widespread acclaim among historians of American slavery. Much of this new scholarship focuses on the traditional northern routes to sites of formal and semiformal freedom (although they do

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not employ those terms) as well as the abolitionist networks that assisted fugitive slaves in those regions. Sydney Nathans' *To Free a Family* (2013) and Eric Foner's latest book *Gateway to Freedom* (2015) stand out in particular for their meticulous research on these themes. But historians are also intensifying their examination of runaway slaves who attempted to attain freedom by fleeing southward, including into Mexico and the British Caribbean. Scholars such as Andrew Torget, Sarah Cornell, James David Nichols, and Mekala Audain are pioneering new perspectives on how fugitive slaves pursued and navigated freedom in the Texas–Mexico borderlands, and Matthew Clavin's recent book *Aiming for Pensacola* (2015) constitutes a watershed in understanding how southern port towns served as "gateways to freedom" for runaway slaves who wished to undertake escape attempts to the Bahamas and elsewhere in the Caribbean.[18]

By contrast, runaway slaves who sought to escape bondage by living clandestine lives of informal freedom within the slaveholding South remain relatively understudied. Yet a handful of historians are not only revisiting this group but also beginning to challenge the traditional view that such fugitives consisted mainly of truants or outliers, as has often been argued in standard works such as John Hope Franklin and Loren Schweninger's *Runaway Slaves* (1999). Sylviane Diouf, for one, forcefully argues in her book *Slavery's Exiles* (2014) that many of the "borderland maroons" of the antebellum South were in fact permanent freedom seekers, and my own research has come to the same conclusion for runaways who attempted to pass for free in antebellum southern cities.[19]

What these pioneering studies collectively reveal is that slave flight in the age of the second slavery was a truly continental phenomenon. As various spaces of freedom opened up throughout North America, enslaved people in the antebellum South sought to escape slavery by fleeing in every possible direction. Time and space were intrinsically interlinked with the various flows of slave flight, with British Canada increasingly becoming a beacon of freedom with the passage of the 1850 Fugitive Slave Law in the United States, with Texas and Mexico attracting more and more runaways after Mexican abolition in the 1829, with southern cities concealing increasing numbers of fugitive slaves as urban free black populations grew ever larger and as the domestic slave trade increasingly wrought havoc on slave communities,

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and with northern border states such as Pennsylvania receiving disproportionate numbers of slave refugees as they completed their transition from slavery to freedom in the early nineteenth century. Not only did these spaces of freedom emerge at different times but the meanings of freedom within these spaces changed over time as well—the status of fugitive slaves in the northern United States was always vulnerable and made significantly more so after 1850, for example, while that of slave refugees in British Canada evolved in the opposite direction as the British became more devoted to abolition. This complicates our understanding of the geography of slavery and freedom in the period between the American Revolution and the outbreak of the U.S. Civil War. The need to "reroute" and reconceptualize the geography of freedom in America during the age of slavery, as Rachel Adams has argued, constitutes a poignant gap in the historiography and is long overdue.[20]

The innovative character of *Fugitive Slaves and Spaces of Freedom in North America* lies in two specific methodological elements. First, it offers a new typology for understanding the changing geography of slavery and freedom in North America. This volume is the first book on slave refugees in the Americas to make a conceptual distinction between spaces of formal, semiformal, and informal freedom. This typology does not pretend to be static or absolute but rather encourages scholars to rethink how various legal regimes affected the nature of slave flight in the era of the second slavery. The contributions in this volume examine themes such as slaves' motivations for choosing various sites of freedom, their status and the ways in which they navigated these types of freedom, the networks that assisted them, and the interconnectedness of different spaces of freedom. And, second, this volume is first of its kind to provide a truly continental perspective of fugitive slave migration in the antebellum period. It includes not only the latest scholarship on runaway slaves in the "traditional" North–South axis but also in the Mexican borderlands, urban environments within the South, and even the British Bahamas. As such, it moves away from narrower national and regional paradigms of analysis.

The volume is largely structured geographically, but it begins with a contribution by Graham Hodges that explores the extent, meaning, and impact of slave flight during the era of the American Revolution (up until the final northern abolition act of New Jersey in 1804). Hodges argues that black self-emancipation via flight—including individual

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actions but also the mass movements of the revolutionary Black Loyalists—was the single greatest method for enslaved people to gain freedom in this rapidly changing political landscape. Slave flight indeed affected American construction of slave laws during the revolutionary era.

The next three chapters, by Gordon Barker, Roy Finkenbine, and Matthew Pinsker, examine the legal complications and experiences of slave refugees in sites of both formal and semiformal freedom in the northern United States and Canada. Barker explores the meaning of freedom for fugitive slaves in Canada West by examining the legal framework relating to slavery and race that emerged in what is now modern-day Ontario. Changes in statutory law, jurisprudence, and British free-soil diplomacy are addressed in this chapter, revealing the evolution of Canada West as a safe haven from which fugitive slaves were largely protected from slave catchers or state-sanctioned extradition. Finkenbine argues that the "Indian Country" of northwestern Ohio—inhabited primarily by the Shawnee, Ottawa, and Wyandot—provided runaway slaves with a unique space of freedom where fugitives on the northbound routes were frequently assisted by Native American communities sympathetic to their plight. Pinsker's chapter reexamines the legal and sometimes violent contest between antislavery and proslavery forces regarding enforcement of the federal fugitive slave code in the urban North. It argues that recent scholarship on this subject has made clearer that northern vigilance committees were remarkably successful in pursuing various legal and political strategies on the ground, even in cities with strong antiblack, proslavery sentiment and even after passage of the draconian 1850 Fugitive Slave Act.

The next three chapters, by Damian Alan Pargas, Viola Müller, and Sylviane Diouf, explore the experiences of fugitive slaves who fled to sites of informal freedom by remaining within the slaveholding South during the era of the second slavery. The chapter by Pargas broadly examines the experiences of fugitive slaves who fled to southern cities between 1800 and 1860. It touches upon themes such as the motivations for fleeing to urban areas, the networks that facilitated such flight attempts, and the ways in which runaway slaves navigated sites of "informal freedom" after arrival in urban areas. Following up on Pargas' contribution, Müller zooms in on a specific case study and focuses on the residential and economic integration of runaway slaves within

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the bustling environment of antebellum Richmond, Virginia. Drawing from police registers, runaway slave ads, and court documents, Müller specifically reveals how fugitive slaves and free blacks intermingled in urban spaces, and how runaway slaves navigated informal freedom in ways similar to the migration experiences of today's undocumented immigrants. The contribution by Sylviane Diouf—drawn from her recent monograph *Slavery's Exiles*—examines the nature and prevalence of "borderland maroons" in the antebellum South: permanent enslaved runaways who created lives for themselves in the forests and swamps that bordered the plantations.

The next cluster of chapters, by Kyle Ainsworth, Mekala Audain, and James David Nichols, all focus on the Texas–Mexican borderlands as spaces of formal and informal freedom for fugitive slaves from the U.S. South. Drawing from the Texas Runaway Slave Project database, Ainsworth's chapter examines how runaways navigated the changing geography of slavery and freedom in that state in the antebellum period. It breaks new ground by placing Texas in the growing Atlantic historiography of runaway slaves and by considering the impact that horses had on the methods of flight in the southwestern borderlands. Audain broadly examines the process in which runaway slaves from Texas escaped to Mexico in the antebellum period. Specifically, she explores how enslaved people learned about freedom south of the border, the types of supplies they gathered for their escape attempts, and the ways in which Texas' vast landscape shaped their experiences. Her study argues that the routes that led fugitive slaves to freedom in Mexico were a part of a precarious southern Underground Railroad, but one that operated in the absence of formal networks or a well-organized abolitionist movement. Nichols, meanwhile, argues that Mexican spaces of legal formal freedom did not always provide runaway slaves with full protection from reenslavement in practice. Focusing on Tamaulipas, Mexico, as a case study, he reveals how U.S. American jurisprudence could continue to affect Mexican space formally and informally from the outside, greatly troubling Mexican sovereignty in the process and rendering the status of fugitive slaves there insecure in practice.

The volume ends with a fascinating chapter by Jeffrey Kerr-Ritchie, which examines the understudied maritime dimensions of the domestic slave trade as well as slave revolt at sea. Zooming in on the 1841 slave revolt aboard the *Creole*, whereby slaves destined for New Orleans

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steered to formal freedom in the British Bahamas and claimed asylum, Kerr-Ritchie focuses on south-to-south fugitive slave actions at sea in contrast to the more familiar narrative of south-to-north over the land. Moreover, its examination of the *Creole* revolt's international dimensions differs from antebellum sectional rivalry that usually frames the event.

In short, the contributions in this volume provide new continental perspectives on slave flight in very different spaces of freedom between the American Revolution and the U.S. Civil War, thereby revealing the differences and similarities between various beacons of freedom and in the process remapping the geography of slavery and freedom in North America in an age of important transitions.

NOTES

1. *Daily National Intelligencer*, July 4, 1825. Between 1820 and 1850 the free black population of Washington increased dramatically, from 1,696 in 1820 to 8,158 in 1850. That of nearby Baltimore—also a popular destination for runaway slaves—increased from 10,326 to 25,442, making it relatively easy for runaways to pass for free. See the Federal Population Census Schedules for 1820 and 1850, National Archives and Records Administration (hereafter, NARA), Washington, DC (microfilm). See also Julie Winch, *Between Slavery and Freedom: Free People of Color in America from Settlement to Civil War* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield, 2014), 85.

2. *Daily National Intelligencer*, July 4, 1825; see also Ada Ferrer, "Haiti, Free Soil, and Antislavery in the Revolutionary Atlantic," *American Historical Review* 117, no. 1 (February 2012): 40–66.

3. Steven Hahn, "Forging Freedom," in *The Routledge History of Slavery*, ed. Gad Heuman and Trevor Burnard, 298–99 (New York: Routledge, 2011).

4. Christopher Brown, *Moral Capital: The Foundations of British Abolitionism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006); Seymour Drescher, *Capitalism and Antislavery: British Mobilization in Comparative Perspective* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987); David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999); David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Emancipation* (New York: Knopf, 2014); Robin Blackburn, *The American Crucible: Slavery, Emancipation and Human Rights* (London: Verso, 2011), 162–69; and Seymour Drescher, "Civil Society and Paths to Abolition," *Journal of Global Slavery* 1, no. 1 (April 2016): 44–71. For the emergence of "free soil" politics in the revolutionary Atlantic, see, for example, Ferrer, "Haiti, Free Soil, and Antislavery," 40–66. Ferrer more fully develops her comparison between sites of liberation and entrenchment of slavery

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in her book *Freedom's Mirror: Cuba and Haiti in the Age of Revolution* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014). For more on the prevalence of manumissions in revolutionary North America, see Peter Kolchin, *American Slavery, 1619–1877* (New York: Hill & Wang, 2003), 80–85; Ira Berlin, *Generations of Captivity: A History of African-American Slaves* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003), 119–23, 135–50; and Rosemary Brana-Shute and Randy J. Sparks, eds., *Paths to Freedom: Manumission in the Atlantic World* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2009).

5. For more on the "second slavery" in the Atlantic world, see Dale W. Tomich, "The 'Second Slavery': Bonded Labor and the Transformations of the Nineteenth-Century World Economy," in *Rethinking the Nineteenth Century: Contradictions and Movement*, ed. Francisco O. Ramírez, 103–17 (New York: Greenwood, 1988); Dale W. Tomich, *Through the Prism of Slavery: Labor, Capital, and World Economy* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield, 2004); Dale W. Tomich and Michael Zeuske, eds., "The Second Slavery: Mass Slavery, World Economy, and Comparative Microhistories, Part I" [special issue], *Review: A Journal of the Fernand Braudel Center* 31, no. 2 (2008); Anthony E. Kaye, "The Second Slavery: Modernity in the Nineteenth-Century South and the Atlantic World," *Journal of Southern History* 75, no. 3 (August 2009): 627–50; Javier Lavina and Michael Zeuske, eds., *The Second Slavery: Mass Slaveries and Modernity in the Americas and in the Atlantic Basin* (Berlin: Lit Verlag, 2014); and Ferrer, *Freedom's Mirror*, 10.

6. An Act to Prevent the further Introduction of Slaves and to limit the Term of Contracts for Servitude within this Province (July 9, 1793), in *A Collection of the Acts Passed in the Parliament of Great Britain, Particularly Applying to the Province of Upper-Canada, and of Such Ordinances of the Late Province of Quebec, as Have Force of Law Therein* (York: R. C. Horne, 1818), 30–32, 30 (quotes); Sigrid Nicole Gallant, "Perspectives on the Motives for the Migration of African Americans to and from Ontario, Canada: From the Abolition of Slavery in Canada to the Abolition of Slavery in the United States," *Journal of Negro History* 86 (Summer 2001): 392–93; Sean Kelley, "'Mexico in His Head': Slavery and the Texas–Mexico Border, 1810–1860," *Journal of Social History* 37 (Spring 2004): 711–15; Andrew Jonathan Torget, "Cotton Empire: Slavery and the Texas Borderlands, 1820–1837" (PhD diss., University of Virginia, 2009), 210–11; and *Decreto del gobierno—Abolición de la esclavitud* (September 15, 1829), in *Legislación mexicana; o colección completa de disposiciones legislativas expedidas desde la independencia de la República*, Manuel Dublán et al. (México: Imprenta de Comercio, 1876), vol. 2: 163 (quotes).

7. Gary Nash, *The Unknown American Revolution: The Unruly Birth of Democracy and the Struggle to Create America* (New York: Penguin, 2005), 157–65, 223–31, 320–38, 407–16; Berlin, *Generations of Captivity*, 119–23, 135–50, 159–244; Kolchin, *American Slavery*, 80–85; U.S. Congress, An Act Respecting Fugitives from Justice and Persons Escaping from the Service of their Masters (1793); U.S. Congress, An Act to Amend, and Supplementary to, the Act Entitled "An Act Respecting Fugitives from Justice and Persons Escaping from the Service of their Masters" (1850); Graham Russell Gao Hodges, *Root & Branch: African Americans*

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in New York and East Jersey, 1613–1863 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 161–165; and Shane White, *Somewhat More Independent: The End of Slavery in New York, 1770–1810* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1991), 141–47.

8. An Act to Authorize the Manumission of Slaves (May 1782), in *The Statutes at Large; Being a Collection of All the Laws of Virginia from the First Session of Legislature, in the Year 1619*, vol. 11, ed. William Waller Hening (Richmond, Va.: George Cochran, 1823), 39.

9. Kolchin, *American Slavery*, 81; U.S. Population Census, 1790 and 1820, NARA; Eva Sheppard Wolf, *Race and Liberty in the New Nation: Emancipation in Virginia from the Revolution to Nat Turner's Rebellion* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2006), 110–11; and Ted Maris-Wolf, *Family Bonds: Free Blacks and Re-enslavement Law in Antebellum Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015), 24–44.

10. Kolchin, *American Slavery*, 80–85, 81; see also Nash, *The Unknown American Revolution*, 157–65, 223–31, 320–38, 407–16; Berlin, *Generations of Captivity*, 119–23, 135–50, 159–244; Sean Condon, "The Slave Owner's Family and Manumission in the Post-Revolutionary Chesapeake Tidewater: Evidence from Anne Arundel County Wills, 1790–1820," in *Paths to Freedom: Manumission in the Atlantic World*, ed. Rosemary Brana-Shute and Randy J. Sparks, 339–62 (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2009); and Ellen Eslinger, "Liberation in a Rural Context: The Valley of Virginia, 1800–1860," in *Paths to Freedom: Manumission in the Atlantic World*, ed. Rosemary Brana-Shute and Randy J. Sparks, 663–80 (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2009).

11. There is a rich literature on the domestic slave trade and the extent to which it forcibly separated slave families in the antebellum period. See, for example, Michael Tadman, *Speculators and Slaves: Masters, Traders, and Slaves in the Old South* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), esp. 133–78; Walter Johnson, *Soul by Soul: Life Inside the Antebellum Slave Market* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999); Steven Deyle, *Carry Me Back: The Domestic Slave Trade in American Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 246–47; Robert H. Gudmestad, *A Troublesome Commerce: The Transformation of the Interstate Slave Trade* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2003); and Damian Alan Pargas, *Slavery and Forced Migration in the Antebellum South* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

12. Herbert Aptheker, "Maroons within the Present Limits of the United States," *Journal of Negro History* 24 (April 1939): 167–84; Richard Price, *Maroon Societies: Rebel Slave Communities in the Americas* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973); Eugene D. Genovese, *From Rebellion to Revolution: Afro-American Slave Revolts in the Making of the Modern World* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1979), 51–81; Gad Heuman, ed., *Out of the House of Bondage: Runaways, Resistance and Marronage in Africa and the New World* (London: Frank Cass, 1986); John Hope Franklin and Loren Schweninger, *Runaway Slaves: Rebels on the Plantation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999),

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98–103; Timothy James Lockley, ed., *Maroon Communities in South Carolina: A Documentary Record* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2009); Sylviane A. Diouf, *Slavery's Exiles: The Story of the American Maroons* (New York: New York University Press, 2014); and Nathaniel Millett, "Defining Freedom in the Atlantic Borderlands of the Revolutionary Southeast," *Early American Studies* 5 (Fall 2007): 367–94.

13. Donald R. Wright, *African Americans in the Early Republic, 1789–1831* (Arlington Heights, Ill.: Harlan Davidson, 1993), 126; and Berlin, *Generations of Captivity*, 21–49. Manumission was severely circumscribed in the southern colonies. In 1691 Virginia required manumitted slaves to be transported out of the state at the master's cost, and in 1723 it forbade manumission except by approval of the governor, and then only for "meritous services." See Ariela Gross and Alejandro de la Fuente, "Slaves, Free Blacks, and Race in the Legal Regimes of Cuba, Louisiana, and Virginia: A Comparison," *North Carolina Law Review* 91 (2013): 1727–30; Edmund Morgan, *American Slavery, American Freedom: The Ordeal of Colonial Virginia* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1975), 154–55, 337; General Assembly of Virginia, "An Act for Suppressing Outlying Slaves (1691)," reprinted in *The Statutes at Large: Being a Collection of All Laws of Virginia, from the First Session of the Legislature, in the Year 1619*, vol. 3, ed. William Waller Hening, 86–88 (Philadelphia: R. & W. & G. Bartow, 1823); and Mariana L. R. Dantas, *Black Townsmen: Urban Slavery and Freedom in the Eighteenth-Century Americas* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 97–99.

14. Jane Landers, "'Giving Liberty to All': Spanish Florida as a Black Sanctuary, 1673–1790," in *La Florida: Five Hundred Years of Hispanic Presence*, ed. Rachel A. May and Viviana Diaz Balsera, 125–26 (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2014); Jane Landers, *Black Society in Spanish Florida* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999), 24–25; Peter Wood, *Black Majority: Negroes in Colonial South Carolina* (New York: Knopf, 1974), 239; Millett, "Defining Freedom," 367–94; and Larry E. Rivers, *Slavery in Florida: Territorial Days to Emancipation* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2000), 4–5.

15. Wood, *Black Majority*, 260–261; see also Lockley, *Maroon Communities in South Carolina*, 132. Even in the northern colonies, such as New York, slaves often sought protection with Native American communities. See, for example, Richard E. Bond, "Ebb and Flow: Free Blacks and Urban Slavery in Eighteen-Century New York" (PhD diss., Johns Hopkins University, 2005), 242–43; and Eric Foner, *Gateway to Freedom: The Hidden History of the Underground Railroad* (New York: Norton, 2016), 30–32.

16. Sylvia R. Frey, "Between Slavery and Freedom: Virginia Blacks in the American Revolution," *Journal of Southern History* 49 (August 1983): 375–98, 387; see also Kolchin, *American Slavery*, 70–73; Benjamin Quarles, *The Negro in the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1961); Sylvia Frey, *Water from the Rock: Black Resistance in a Revolutionary Age* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1992); Douglas R. Egerton, *Death or Liberty: African Americans and Revolutionary America* (New York: Oxford University

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Press, 2011); Nash, *The Unknown American Revolution*, 157–66, 163; and Alan Taylor, *The Internal Enemy: Slavery and War in Virginia, 1771–1832* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2014).

17. Landers, "'Giving Liberty to All,'" 125–26; Diouf, *Slavery's Exiles*; and Taylor, *Internal Enemy*, 245–74.

18. Some recent studies that examine runaway slaves in the northern United States and Canada include, for example, Sydney Nathans, *To Free a Family: The Journey of Mary Walker* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2012); Richard Blackett, *Making Freedom: The Underground Railroad and the Politics of Freedom* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013); Graham Russell Gao Hodges, *David Ruggles: A Radical Black Abolitionist and the Underground Railroad in New York City* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012); Karolyn Smardz Frost and Veta Smith Tucker, eds. *A Fluid Frontier: Slavery, Resistance and the Underground Railroad in the Detroit River Borderland* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2016); Foner, *Gateway to Freedom*; Gordon Barker, *Fugitive Slaves and the Unfinished American Revolution: Eight Cases, 1848–1856* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 2013); and Steven Lubet, *Fugitive Justice: Runaways, Rescuers, and Slavery and Trial* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010). For new studies on fugitive slaves in Mexico, see, for example, Andrew J. Torget, *Seeds of Empire: Slavery, Cotton, and the Transformation of the Texas Borderlands, 1800–1850* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015); Sarah E. Cornell, "Citizens of Nowhere: Fugitive Slaves and Free African Americans in Mexico, 1833–1857," *Journal of American History* 100, no. 2 (2013): 351–74; Kelley, "Mexico in His Head," 709–23; James David Nichols, "The Line of Liberty: Runaway Slaves and Fugitive Peons in the Texas-Mexico Borderlands," *Western Historical Quarterly* 44, no. 4 (Winter 2013): 413–33; and Mekala Audain, "Mexican Canaan: Fugitive Slaves and Free Blacks on the American Frontier, 1804–1867" (PhD diss., Rutgers University, 2014). Matthew Clavin's recent work views Pensacola as a conduit for fugitive slaves fleeing southward into the Caribbean (especially the British Caribbean). Matthew J. Clavin, *Aiming for Pensacola: Fugitive Slaves in the Southern and Atlantic Frontier* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2015). For a brief overview of the diplomatic consequences of fugitive slaves in North America (only those who crossed international borders), see Jeffrey Kerr-Ritchie, "Fugitive Slaves across North America," in *Workers across the Americas: The Transnational Turn in Labor History* (Oxford Scholarship Online, 2011).

19. For brief treatment of truancy within the South, see, for example, Stephanie M. H. Camp, *Closer to Freedom: Enslaved Women and Everyday Resistance in the Plantation South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 35–59; and Franklin and Schweninger, *Runaway Slaves*, 97–103, 124–48. Franklin and Schweninger argue that "few absconders [within the South] remained permanently at large." John Hope Franklin and Loren Schweninger, "The Quest for Freedom: Runaway Slaves and the Plantation South," in *Slavery, Resistance, Freedom*,ed. Ira Berlin, Scott Hancock, and G. S. Boritt, 21–39 (New York: Oxford

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University Press, 2007), 25. For southern runaways as permanent freedom seekers, see, for example, Christopher Phillips, *Freedom's Port: The African American Community of Baltimore, 1790–1860* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997); Clavin, *Aiming for Pensacola*; Amani Marshall, "'They Will Endeavor to Pass for Free': Enslaved Runaways' Performances of Freedom in Antebellum South Carolina," *Slavery and Abolition* 31 (May 2010): 161–80; and Diouf, *Slavery's Exiles*.

20. Rachel Adams, *Continental Divides: Remapping the Cultures of North America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 61–100.

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