

Adam Rothman

Slave Country



American Expansion and the
Origins of the Deep South

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HARVARD UNIVERSITY PRESS
Cambridge, Massachusetts
London, England

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Printed in the United States of America

First Harvard University Press paperback edition, 2007

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Rothman, Adam, 1971—

Slave country : American expansion and the origins of the Deep South /

Adam Rothman

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN-13 978-0-674-01674-3 (cloth: alk. paper)

ISBN-10 0-674-01674-2 (cloth: alk. paper)

ISBN-13 978-0-674-02416-8 (pbk.)

ISBN-10 0-674-02416-8 (pbk.)

1. Slavery—United States—History—19th century.
2. United States—Territorial expansion.
3. Slavery—Southern States—History—19th century.
4. Southern States—History—1775-1865. I. Title.

E446.R67 2005

306.3'62'0973—dc22

2004057658

For my parents

There warn't nothing to do now but to look out sharp for the town, and not pass it without seeing it. He said he'd be mighty sure to see it, because he'd be a free man the minute he seen it, but if he missed it he'd be in a slave country again and no more show for freedom.

—MARK TWAIN,

Adventures of Huckleberry Finn

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Preface

WHY DID SLAVERY expand in the early national United States? This question is central to some of the most important issues in nineteenth-century American history, including the transition from colonial society to independent nation-state; the process of continental expansion and the character of the frontier; and the origins of the Civil War. Yet it is not a question that has been answered convincingly. Many Americans regard slavery as an embarrassment to the revolutionary commitment to liberty, an example of sordid interests temporarily blocking the fulfillment of the country's ideals. Some believe that it is unrealistic to wonder why the revolutionary generation did not abolish slavery or overcome racism in addition to all its other achievements. But why did such an imaginative group of people declare independence from one of the greatest empires on earth and establish a truly novel polity but not get rid of an institution that most of them thought was immoral and dangerous? The question is not merely why the revolutionary generation did not abolish slavery, but why slavery expanded under its watch.

For it cannot be denied that slavery expanded in the United States for fifty years following the American Revolution. These formative

years of the republic represent a dynamic but mysterious middle period in the history of American slavery, bridging the colonial slave system and its antebellum descendant. During this middle period, the slave population grew in number, moved across space, and changed in composition. It had taken more than 100 years for the slave population of colonial North America to reach 500,000—a threshold crossed sometime between 1770 and 1790—but by 1820 more than 1.5 million slaves lived in the United States.¹ While slavery contracted in the northern states in the early national era, it expanded geographically to the south and west. Six new slave states joined the Union during the period: Kentucky, Tennessee, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, and Missouri. As slavery expanded in the new United States, slaves forcibly transported to the new plantation areas were put to work cultivating cotton and sugar, which had not been important crops in North America during the colonial era. Thousands of slaves arrived from Africa and the Caribbean during these years, although the United States ultimately divorced itself from transatlantic sources of slave labor by banning the importation of slaves. At the same time, forced migration reappeared within North America as an internal slave trade emerged to satisfy the growing demand for slaves in the country's expanding plantation areas. All these changes molded the slave system of the United States into the distinctive form that it assumed in the decades leading to the Civil War.²

Why did this happen, and how? Discovering the origins of the Deep South—the region that became the states of Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama—helps to answer the question. In the 1780s, the region was thinly populated by a congeries of peoples subject to the overlapping jurisdictions of several American Indian nations, Spain, and the United States. Plantation slavery was limited to a thin strip of settlement in the lower Mississippi Valley devoted to the cultivation of indigo and tobacco. Compared with other places in the Americas, the region scarcely registered in the roll of slave societies.³ Everything changed over the next thirty years. As the United States extended its sovereignty—at times by force of arms—thousands of free

and enslaved people arrived there and jointly made the region one of the major producers of slave-grown commodities in the world. By the beginning of the 1820s, it was the leading edge of a dynamic, expansive slave regime incorporated politically into the United States and firmly tied to the transatlantic system of commodity exchange. Explaining these developments goes a long way toward understanding the early United States as a “slave country.”

Nothing is ingrained more deeply in American ideology than that ours is a free country. Yet freedom and slavery were densely entangled in the early United States. After the American Revolution won independence for most of the British colonies of North America, the United States became a free country in an important sense of the term. Moreover the new country’s citizens (and many of its other inhabitants) insisted on their own individual freedom by opposing excessive taxation, extending the franchise, and throwing off habits of deference to social superiors. Nevertheless slavery permeated virtually all human relations in the new country in direct and indirect ways. Slavery was a social reality for millions of people, an important economic institution, and a basic metaphor of power in the prevailing rhetoric of politics that emerged from the Revolution. The entangling of freedom and slavery in the early national era was starkly revealed in the popular claim among slavery’s defenders that the legacy of the American Revolution included the right to own other human beings as slaves, and that government-sponsored abolition was a despotic infringement of individual liberty. To identify the early national United States as a “slave country” is thus not merely an epithet. It is also the starting line for an analysis of the new country’s most vexing predicament.⁴

Few living in the 1780s could have predicted what lay ahead. Slavery’s expansion in the Deep South emerged from contingent global forces, concrete policies pursued by governments, and countless small choices made by thousands of individuals in diverse stations of life. All these are the subject of this book.

Slave Country

[To view this image, refer to
the print version of this title.]

A map copied in 1785 from one drawn by Old Tassel, headman of the Cherokee Indians, to clarify the boundaries of the Cherokee nation. It offers an indigenous view of territory and sovereignty in the region that later became the Deep South. Natchez is in the lower left corner of the map and Augusta in the lower right corner. Fort Pitt is located in the upper right corner. Old Tassel was assassinated in 1788. REPRODUCED FROM AMERICAN STATE PAPERS, INDIAN AFFAIRS (WASHINGTON, D.C.: GALES AND SEATON, 1832), 1: 40.

Jefferson's Horizon

FOR THOMAS JEFFERSON, the cataclysms of history dissolved into the soothing scene of the American landscape. In *Notes on the State of Virginia*, written in the early 1780s, Jefferson described the sensation of gazing at the majestic confluence of the Potomac and Shenandoah Rivers in western Virginia's Blue Ridge Mountains: "The first glance of this scene hurries our senses into the opinion, that this earth has been created in time, that the mountains were formed first, that the rivers began to flow afterwards, that in this place particularly they have been dammed up by the Blue ridge of mountains, and have formed an ocean which filled the whole valley; that continuing to rise they have at length broken over at this spot, and have torn the mountain down from its summit to its base." The agents of nature were historical forces, powerful and catastrophic. They left marks of a tumultuous past all over the landscape. By contrast, the future lay in the "distant finishing" beyond the cloven mountains. There Jefferson found solace in "a small catch of smooth blue horizon, at an infinite distance in the plain country, inviting you, as it were, from the riot and tumult roaring around, to pass through the breach and participate of the calm below. Here the eye ultimately composes itself; and that

way too the road happens actually to lead.” The full view suggested that beyond the tumultuous landscape of history lay the harmonious landscape of the future, a pleasant scene of agricultural and commercial activity. That future beckoned to Jefferson, who viewed it from a distant promontory.¹

One aspect of the American vista especially troubled Jefferson, and that aspect was slavery. Jefferson recognized that slavery was the most dangerous and intractable problem that the infant nation confronted. He wrote that slaveholders were despots and slaves were their enemies. Slavery corrupted the manners of slaveowners and threatened to bring the just wrath of God down upon them. Of all the social problems in Virginia that Jefferson identified, only the problem of slavery compelled him to contemplate the kind of cataclysmic forces that had created the Potomac Gap. But just as Jefferson’s gaze moved from the valley to the horizon, Jefferson expected that slavery would eventually disappear. “The spirit of the master is abating, that of the slave rising from the dust, his condition mollifying, the way I hope preparing, under the auspices of heaven, for a total emancipation, and that this is disposed, in the order of events, to be with the consent of the masters, rather than by their extirpation.”² Jefferson’s optimism was not entirely unfounded. In the northern United States and in parts of the upper South where slavery was not a dominant social relation, many white people had come to believe that slavery was an obstacle to progress. The presence of slavery in the United States, they argued, inhibited economic development, endangered national security, and undermined the virtue of the people. Private acts of manumission and public acts of emancipation slowly undermined slavery from New England to the northwestern districts of Virginia in the decade following the American Revolution.³

At the same time, Jefferson ignored powerful demographic, economic, and political circumstances that strengthened slaveowners’ power and set slavery on the road to expansion. The slave population of the new United States was large and growing. In a country of almost 3.9 million people in 1790, nearly 700,000—or 15 percent—

were enslaved. Slaves lived in every state except Massachusetts and Vermont, but they were concentrated in the states south of Pennsylvania. Almost 95 percent of all enslaved people in the United States in 1790 lived in Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, and the territory that would become Kentucky. Jefferson's Virginia, the most populous state in the Union, also contained the most slaves—nearly 300,000. One-third of the people living in the southern states were slaves, and about one-third of all households there included slaves. Especially in the southern states, then, slavery was a vital part of society.⁴

Natural reproduction and importation swelled the number of slaves in the southern states. The slave population in the Chesapeake region began to reproduce itself naturally by the 1720s, and that of the Carolina lowcountry by midcentury. Relatively equal numbers of enslaved men and women, and an increasingly native-born slave population, were both features of slavery in British North America that distinguished it from slavery in the Caribbean.⁵ Yet the ongoing importation of slaves partly masked the natural growth of the slave population. More than 300,000 enslaved Africans arrived in the British North American colonies between 1700 and 1790. Slave imports peaked in midcentury, then declined until the end of the American Revolution, when they picked up once again.⁶ Contemporary observers did not have precise statistical knowledge of the relative importance of natural reproduction and importation, but they generally knew that the slave population was increasing, and that knowledge stoked white Southerners' fears of being overwhelmed by a growing black population in the event of a general emancipation.

Most of all, slavery's contribution to the economy of the new United States militated against emancipation. The crucial export sectors of the southern states—tobacco in the upper South, rice and indigo in the lower South—depended on the labor of enslaved people and had done so for almost a century. Exports from the southern states accounted for almost half of the value of all exports from the United States in 1789–90, with tobacco, rice, and indigo accounting

for almost one-third of the value of the country's exports. Planters put slaves to work cultivating the new crops that emerged as profitable commodities in the 1790s—wheat in the upper South, short-staple cotton in the lower South.⁷ The phenomenal expansion of short-staple cotton production in the 1790s especially strengthened the connection between slavery and national economic development. South Carolina's governor, John Drayton, declared in 1800 that his state's cotton production had become a "matter of National Joy."⁸ To their owners, enslaved people were valuable property, worth on average \$200 each. One early nineteenth-century statistician estimated that slaves accounted for 12.5 percent of the country's total wealth in 1800.⁹ They were bought and sold, rented out, mortgaged, and inherited. ("Slaves pass by descent and dower as lands do," Jefferson blandly explained in his *Notes*.)¹⁰ Many dreams and a great deal of suffering flowed from these transactions. The routine of economic life frequently disrupted slaves' families and communities, as slaves were sold to pay off debts or distributed among the heirs of an estate.¹¹

While their numbers and economic might guaranteed that slaveowners would constitute a formidable political bloc in the new republic, the structure of politics amplified their power. Despite the popular mobilization of the revolutionary era, national office holding remained the province of elites, who were more likely to be slaveowners than were the mass of free people.¹² Added to this elitist bias was a regional accommodation. The new Union could not survive without the participation of the southern states, and the price of the southern states' participation was a guarantee that the national government would refrain from trampling on the rights of slaveowners. Thus, the federal Constitution protected slavery without ever using the word. The three-fifths clause (Article 1, Section 2) gave an advantage in the House of Representatives to states with large slave populations. The slave-trade clause (Article 1, Section 9) prevented the national government from prohibiting the importation of slaves for twenty years. And the fugitive clause (Article 4, Section 2) prevented runaway slaves from finding any legal refuge in "free" states.¹³

Slaveowners dominated the national government from the start. President George Washington was one of the country's largest planters. His secretary of state (Jefferson) and attorney general (Edmund Randolph) were also large slaveowning planters from Virginia. In the first federal Congress, twenty-nine of sixty-five representatives (45 percent) and ten of twenty-six senators (38 percent) were from Maryland, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia. Of these, fourteen representatives and eight senators were planters.¹⁴ They threw their weight around Congress early in 1790 when three antislavery groups petitioned Congress to determine the powers of the national government with respect to slavery. No senator came forward to defend the petitions, and the Senate refused to consider them. The petitions got a friendlier reception in the more democratic House, which—over the vehement objections of representatives from Georgia and South Carolina—formed a committee to investigate the issue on the strength of support from the North and the upper South. Composed by six northerners and a Virginian, the committee's report upheld some basic restrictions on the power of the national government to emancipate slaves, outlined some modest powers to regulate the African slave trade, and promised that Congress would pursue the "humane objects" of the abolition societies "so far as can be promoted on the principles of justice, humanity, and good policy." Representatives from the upper South now joined their fellows from the lower South in eviscerating the report's antislavery tone and content. While allowing that Congress had the power to restrain American citizens "from carrying on the African trade, for the purpose of supplying foreigners with slaves," the final report declared that Congress had "no authority to interfere in the emancipation of slaves, or in the treatment of them within any of the States; it remaining with the several States alone to provide any regulations therein, which humanity and true policy may require."¹⁵ Slavery would be a matter for the states, not the national government, to regulate.

The debates over the Constitution and the antislavery petitions reveal regional and ideological fissures in the early national politics

of slavery. Many white northerners disliked slavery on philosophical grounds but opposed immediate emancipation even in their own region. Respect for slaveowners' property rights and disdain for black people's capacity for citizenship resulted in laws for gradual rather than immediate emancipation in most of the northern states. Most northerners were reluctant to extend this pattern of gradual emancipation to the southern states. Some were relatively indifferent toward slavery in the southern states, and others were downright hostile to emancipation, believing that it would send hordes of free black people to the North. Slaveowners found a useful ally in the northern states' powerful merchants, who profited from carrying slave-produced agricultural commodities from the southern states to foreign markets. Moreover, northern politicians in Congress needed southern support for their own favorite measures, including the assumption of state debts. Northern antislavery societies could not surmount the low priority accorded to emancipation by their representatives on the national stage.¹⁶

Elites in the upper South condemned the Atlantic slave trade but staunchly defended the rights of white people to own slaves. Their position flowed directly from the combination of population growth and economic transition that bequeathed a surplus of slave labor to the region.¹⁷ James Madison articulated the anti-slave trade, pro-slavery position during the Virginia debates over the ratification of the proposed Constitution. He argued that the Constitution improved the odds for an eventual prohibition on the importation of slaves while affording greater protection for slaveowners' special property interests through the fugitive slave clause.¹⁸ Representatives from the upper South reiterated their position in the first Congress during the debates over the antislavery petitions. They joined opponents of slavery in giving the petitions a hearing and in affirming the power of the national government to regulate American citizens' participation in the foreign slave trade, but joined slavery's defenders in strictly prohibiting the national government from interfering with slavery in the states.¹⁹ These developments on the national level coincided with a

renewed defense of slavery on the state and local level, exemplified in a series of petitions addressed to the Virginia state legislature in 1784 and 1785 attacking the liberalization of the state's manumission laws and repudiating a Methodist antislavery campaign. Petitioners from Lunenburg County declared that they had "seald with our Blood, a Title to the full, free, and absolute Enjoyment of every species of our Property, whensoever, or however legally acquired." They argued that emancipation would invite poverty, crime, and "final ruin to this once happy, free, and flourishing Country." Others charged that the Methodists' attack on slavery was "unsupported by Scripture," citing chapter and verse to show that the Bible sanctioned slavery.²⁰

The most vigorous defense of slavery in all its aspects came from the lowcountry elites of South Carolina and Georgia. It was the delegates from the lower South who had blocked the federal Constitution from immediately prohibiting the importation of slaves, and during the debates over the antislavery petitions in 1790, they were the ones who threatened to leave the Union or resist by force of arms if Congress contemplated emancipation.²¹ They did not shirk from defending slavery in forthright language. In a long speech to the House of Representatives in March 1790, South Carolina's William Loughton Smith assaulted the antislavery petitions with the full arsenal of pro-slavery doctrine. He argued that Congress had no power to emancipate slaves, that the citizens of the southern states would not allow it, and that if it occurred, the freedpeople would "either starve or plunder." He taunted the emancipationists for their racist views, asking if any of the Quakers had "ever married a negro, or would any of them suffer their children to mix their blood with that of a black?" He denied that slavery weakened his part of the country or degraded its citizens. Rather, he insisted, the civilization of the lowcountry depended on slave labor and would not survive without it: "Remove the cultivators of the soil, and the whole of the low country, all the fertile rice and indigo swamps will be deserted, and become a wilderness."²² While slaveowners in the upper South unanimously opposed slave importation, those in the lower South split on the issue. Following a

four-year revival of slave imports after the American Revolution, South Carolina prohibited slave importation in 1787 and—against pressure from the upcountry—maintained the prohibition until 1803. Georgia, which had come late to slavery and was rapidly increasing in population, continued to admit foreign slaves until 1798.²³

Given its social importance, slavery was bound to have ideological consequences. Fear of enslavement suffused the Americans' revolutionary rhetoric. It was the most potent metaphor of injustice in their vocabulary. No less a figure than George Washington described the war against Great Britain as "a struggle which was begun and has been continued for the purpose of rescuing America from impending Slavery."²⁴ But a hatred of slavery could easily shade into contempt for slaves. If slavery was degrading, demoralizing, and dishonoring, then did it not follow that enslaved people were degraded, demoralized, and dishonored?²⁵ And did it not also follow that if emancipated, freedpeople would be unfit for citizenship, and might even try to avenge the horrible wrongs done to them? The structure of the revolutionary antislavery argument thus created a terrible dilemma. Slavery was unjust—so the argument went—but the consequences of its injustice made immediate emancipation untenable. In Query 14 of his *Notes*, Jefferson proposed a way out: a program of gradual emancipation and deportation (euphemistically termed "colonization" by later advocates) of the emancipated. Deportation, he argued, was made necessary by "deep rooted prejudices entertained by the whites; ten thousand recollections, by the blacks, of the injuries they have sustained; new provocations; the real distinctions which nature has made; and many other circumstances."²⁶ Jefferson's long and infamous rumination on the biological differences between black and white people in his *Notes* was itself a literary eruption of the deep-rooted prejudices against people of African descent that had been produced by slavery and now vexed its abolition. "This unfortunate difference of colour, and perhaps of faculty, is a powerful obstacle to the emancipation of these people," Jefferson concluded.²⁷

Thus the newly independent United States entered into history as a

slave country. Its population included many slaves. Vital economic sectors depended on slave labor. Elite slaveowners and their allies composed a dominant political coalition. Racism flourished under these conditions. Despite the decline of slavery in the northern states, slavery was deeply woven into a national fabric that had begun to stretch across America.

“beginning the world”

Jefferson's vision for the new country was geographically expansive. It ran all the way to the Mississippi River, which he predicted would become “one of the principal channels of future commerce for the country westward of the Allegheny.”²⁸ Jefferson's prophecy for the Mississippi holds a clue to the kind of country he imagined. The North American interior would be inhabited by commercial farmers whose livelihood depended on their ability to sell their surplus to distant markets. As Jefferson penned his *Notes on the State of Virginia*, white and black Americans were already crossing the mountains into the trans-Appalachian frontier, but contrary to Jefferson's vision of peaceful expansion, mass migration into the North American interior brought the United States into conflict with the indigenous groups already there. It also generated pressure on the United States to secure sovereignty over the interior rivers that carried backcountry commodities to the Gulf of Mexico, their outlet to the world market. These continental struggles coincided with sustained international turmoil caused by the French Revolution and the Napoleonic wars that followed. One result was a vast geographic expansion of the sovereignty of the United States in North America, and the absorption of the region that eventually became the Deep South—the present states of Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama—into the Union.²⁹

Sovereignty over the North American interior was ambiguous and heterogeneous. The peace settlement between Great Britain and the United States in 1783 had left the southern and western boundaries of the United States in dispute. Spain, Georgia, North Carolina, and

the United States all claimed jurisdiction over territory north of the thirty-first parallel and east of the Mississippi River, while most of the lands in dispute were actually occupied by the southern Indian nations—the Creek, Choctaw, Chickasaw, and Cherokee Indians—who also claimed them. An indication of the contested character of the boundaries can be seen in contrasting maps from the period. The nationalist perspective is illustrated in a map of the southeastern region of North America published in *Morse's Geography* in 1792. Morse's map recognized the western land claims of Virginia, North Carolina, and Georgia. It stretched the names of these states all the way to the Mississippi in boldface and large type, overshadowing the names and boundaries of the Indian nations. In contrast, a 1794 map published by Laurie & Whittle in London diminished the jurisdictional claims of the United States while emphasizing the American Indian nations and Spanish dominions. It was more thorough in marking Indian towns and trading paths but did not mark any boundaries between the territorially indeterminate Indian nations. A third map drawn by the Cherokee headman Old Tassel in the 1780s presented an indigenous perspective. Drawn to clarify Cherokee territorial claims, Old Tassel's map emphasized rivers and clearly marked the boundary between Tassel's country and the United States. "I have shown you the bounds of my country on my map," he explained to a delegation of commissioners from the United States.³⁰

Men and women from the original states poured into these contested regions. Census takers counted almost 75,000 white and black people in Kentucky in 1790. Ten years later, census takers counted more than 220,000 white and black people in Kentucky and another 105,000 in Tennessee.³¹ They came largely from Pennsylvania, Virginia, and North Carolina. Some were pushed out by rural overcrowding, others by soil exhaustion or indebtedness. Others were pulled by the western country's reputation for good, cheap land and the opportunity to get rich or gain status.³² Levi Todd, one of the first lot holders in the town of Lexington, Kentucky, witnessed the opening of the post-Revolutionary War migration. "Emigrations into this

Country from Virginia and Pennsylv[ani]a have been very great since last Summer," he wrote to a relative in February 1784. "Our Number since then has nearly doubled—and the People who have been confined to Forts are now entering the Woods, beginning the World." Todd's rhetoric offers a key to the mental map of westering migrants. They were not rugged individualists but participants in an act of social creation. "I believe we shall in a few years be a free a rich and happy People," he wrote.³³ Additional pressure against the southern frontier came from Georgia, which grew rapidly after the war. Its free and slave population almost doubled in the 1790s, the largest percentage increase in population of any of the original states. The sense of rejuvenation was echoed here as well. One Savannah merchant observed in 1783 that the inhabitants of Georgia were "settling again and beginning the World anew." He associated population growth with the expansion of commerce and slavery. "Trade will expand here beyond conception," he wrote. "Negros will be in great demand."³⁴

White settlers in Kentucky, Tennessee, and Georgia saw two big threats to the progress of the southern frontier. The first was the prospect of war with the Cherokee and Creek Indians, who regarded the migrants as intruders. The violence of the postrevolutionary southern frontier was real, and its consequences were devastating. One observer estimated that 300 Kentuckians were killed between 1783 and 1787.³⁵ Georgia authorities reported that the Creeks had killed 72 white and 10 black people, and taken 30 white and 110 black prisoners, between 1787 and 1789.³⁶ More than 100 black and white inhabitants of the Southwest Territory were killed, wounded, or taken prisoner from January 1791 to November 1792.³⁷ Statistics on Indian casualties were not reported to the authorities, but Creek and Cherokee diplomats made it clear that their people suffered greatly from trespassing, theft, and murder at the hands of the white intruders. As one Cherokee agent protested, "Their flourishing fields of corn and pulse were destroyed and laid waste; some of their wives and children were burnt alive in their town houses, with the most unrelenting barbarity; and to fill up the measure of deception and cru-

elty, some of their chiefs, who were ever disposed to peace with the white people, were decoyed, unarmed, into their camp, by the hoisting of a white flag, and by repeated declarations of friendship and kindness, and there massacred in cold blood." Among the victims was Old Tassel, the mapmaker, deceitfully assassinated under a white flag of truce.³⁸

Reviewing the situation on the southern frontier in 1789, Secretary of War Henry Knox found a Hobbesian world where "the sword of the republic only, is adequate to guard a due administration of justice, and the preservation of the peace."³⁹ But the sword of the republic had all it could handle north of the Ohio, where a coalition of Shawnee Indians and their allies defeated U.S. armies in 1790 and 1791, diverting the attention of the United States away from the southern frontier. Hoping to mollify the Creeks, Knox invited their mestizo leader Alexander McGillivray to a parley in New York in the summer of 1790, where the two men negotiated a treaty that failed to bring peace.⁴⁰ Instead, violence intensified. The Shawnee victories north of the Ohio emboldened militant factions among the Cherokees and Creeks, whose bravado reverberated in the words of White Lieutenant, an Upper Creek war leader. "Your mad men may think they can tear us up branch and root," he wrote to an American official in 1793, "but tell them the woods are large, and the days are not all gone."⁴¹ Some months later when the same official ran into a company of Georgia militiamen, the company commander declared "that he would destroy all Indians he came across, whether friend or foe; and that he was opposed to peace."⁴² Indian assaults on frontier settlements provoked severe and unauthorized reprisals by local white militias. The culmination of these reprisals came in September 1794, when more than 500 mounted troops from the Southwest Territory burned Nickajack and Running Water, two strongholds of militant Cherokees. A fragile peace prevailed thereafter for almost twenty years, during which time the United States launched a program to "civilize" the southern Indians and gradually acquire the rest of their land.⁴³

Slaveowners on the southern frontier found their human property to be especially vulnerable in this anarchic milieu. Not only did enslaved people run to the Indians, but they also could be victims of violence, along with their owners, at the hands of the Indians. John May discovered the difficulty and complexity of keeping slaves in the wilderness as he surveyed lands at the falls of the Ohio in 1780. Unable to hire labor, May brought one of his slaves with him into the woods. May wrote that the man “fell in with some worthless Negroes who persuaded him to run away & attempt to get with the Indians; however, after ten days absence he thought it prudent to return.” The surveyor concluded that the western districts “will be a bad place to bring Slaves to, being so near Indians that they will frequently find their way to them.”⁴⁴ Slaves were frequently taken captive by Indian raiding parties, adding to the list of white settlers’ grievances. Some black people were killed along with their white owners and neighbors, though the official records rarely name them. For example, Michael Cupps testified in 1793 that he saw thirty Indians near the Oconee River “firing upon and massacring Richard Thresher, two children, and a negro wench.”⁴⁵ So long as the border wars endangered black people, neither plantation slavery nor African American community life could flourish on the southern frontier.

For white settlers, Spanish control over the rivers—especially the Mississippi—constituted another threat to the progress of their society. Farmers in the Ohio and Tennessee river valleys recognized that the Mississippi offered the cheapest way to get their commodities to lucrative markets. Boatmen floated whiskey, tobacco, hemp, pork, and many other goods down the Mississippi to New Orleans, where the goods were transferred to seafaring vessels and shipped to the eastern states, Spanish America, the West Indies, and Europe. Back-country farmers who could not easily carry their goods to the Mississippi looked to the other rivers that flowed into the Gulf of Mexico—the Apalachicola, Tombigbee, Mobile, and Pearl—which Spain also controlled. American settlers in the trans-Appalachian interior considered the free navigation of these rivers to be a right derived from

nature and nature's God. In 1788, a correspondent from Davidson County in western North Carolina (which would later become part of Tennessee) explained that his neighbors believed God had given them the Mississippi River for the use of all mankind, and no European power should have the power to restrict their access to it: "These inhabitants say that Spain has no more right to impede our navigation than to hinder the Sun's shining on our Fields."⁴⁶ A few years later, the Democratic-Republican Society of Lexington, Kentucky, insisted that Kentuckians had a "natural right" to the free navigation of the Mississippi. The society expressed a providential view of American geography. "It cannot be believed," declared its members, "that the beneficent God of Nature would have blessed this Country with unparalleled fertility, and furnished it with a number of navigable streams, and that, that fertility should be consumed at home, and those streams should not convey its superabundance to other climes."⁴⁷ The delegates to Tennessee's first constitutional convention in 1796 were so committed to this principle that they inscribed the right to free navigation of the Mississippi into their state constitution, declaring, "An equal participation of the free navigation of the Mississippi is one of the inherent rights of the citizens of this State; it cannot, therefore, be conceded to any prince, potentate, person or persons whatever."⁴⁸

Not everyone shared the view that the westerners had a natural right to free navigation of the rivers, nor did everyone think that expansion was good policy. Northeasterners worried about the diminishment of their power, the insecurity of the frontier, and the character of the western emigrants. "Shall we not fill the wilderness with white savages?—and will they not become more formidable to us than the tawny ones which now inhabit it?" asked John Jay.⁴⁹ It was Jay, a New Yorker, who most provoked the western settlements when he proposed in 1786 to give up navigation rights on the Mississippi for twenty-five to thirty years in exchange for a favorable commercial treaty with Spain.⁵⁰ Detecting a northeastern plot to abandon the west, southern delegates to the Continental Congress vehemently de-

fended free navigation of the Mississippi. "I look upon this as a contest for empire," argued Virginia's William Grayson in 1788. "The Southern States are deeply affected on this subject." Grayson worried that the closing of the Mississippi would stop emigration, prevent the formation of new states to the west, and preserve northeastern power in Congress.⁵¹ The conflict over the Mississippi revealed a widely held assumption that the patterns of internal migration favored the southern states, and that most of the emigrants would end up in the southwest rather than the northwest.⁵²

That prospect rather worried Spanish officials in Louisiana. Baron de Carondelet, the Spanish governor of Louisiana, wrote a report in 1794 warning his superiors of powerful expansionary tendencies within the United States. Carondelet saw that the United States had begun to push the trans-Appalachian Indian nations out of their lands and was "attempting to get possession of all the vast continent which those nations are occupying between the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers and the Gulf of Mexico and the Appalachian Mountains." He feared that the United States also had designs on Spanish holdings in North America: the rivers that emptied into the Gulf of Mexico, the fur trade of the Missouri, and, ultimately, the rich mines of New Spain. For Carondelet, one of the most remarkable aspects of this expansionary tendency was the United States' "prodigious and restless population." He feared that the Spanish were going to be overrun: "Their method of spreading themselves and their policy are so much to be feared by Spain as are their arms."⁵³ Carondelet and other Spanish officials pursued a variety of strategies to protect Louisiana from the United States. They dangled the prospect of navigation rights on the Mississippi in front of western settlers in the hope of divorcing them from the United States. They tried to attract European immigrants to counterbalance the Anglo-Americans. And finally, mired in the European wars, they gave up New Orleans, the Mississippi River, and Louisiana.⁵⁴

While the United States' "restless population" pressed toward Spanish Louisiana, a volatile international context contributed to the country's territorial expansion. In 1793, revolutionary France de-

clared war on Great Britain and Spain. The alliance of those two traditionally hostile powers ended in the summer of 1795, when Spain independently made peace with France. Anticipating a clash with Great Britain, Spain sought to head off an alliance between the British and the Americans by making an overture to the United States in the form of concessions concerning territorial claims and navigation rights on the Mississippi. These concessions were codified in the 1795 Treaty of San Lorenzo, also known as Pinckney's Treaty in honor of the cosmopolitan South Carolinian Thomas Pinckney, who negotiated it for the United States. The treaty settled the boundary between the United States and West Florida at the thirty-first parallel, conceding the valuable Natchez district to the United States. It also granted citizens of the United States the right of navigation on the Mississippi River and provided to them a three-year privilege of landing and transferring cargoes at New Orleans without paying custom duties. Pinckney's Treaty won broad support and was quickly ratified by the Senate. Robert Goodloe Harper summed up the attitude of most congressmen. "The Spanish Treaty is very favourable," he wrote to his constituents in South Carolina.⁵⁵

The Mississippi question remained quiet until 1800, when Spain secretly ceded Louisiana to France in the Treaty of San Ildefonso, inaugurating a famous chain of events that led to the Louisiana Purchase.⁵⁶ Republicans and Federalists alike considered French possession of New Orleans to be a direct threat to the security and prosperity of the Union. They feared that France would strangle the western settlers' free navigation of the Mississippi, entice the western states and territories away from the Union, and block what they had come to regard as the continental destiny of the United States. Southern politicians also worried that French officials—in league with the former slaves of St. Domingue—would intrigue with American slaves in dangerous ways. In 1798, Mississippi's territorial governor Winthrop Sargent warned Secretary of State Thomas Pickering that if Louisiana fell into the hands of the French, "a few French Troops with a Cordial Co-operation of the Spanish Creoles, and arms put into the hands of the Negroes, would be to us formidable indeed."⁵⁷ In 1801, James

Madison predicted that French possession of Louisiana would foster “inquietude . . . among the Southern States, whose numerous slaves [had] been taught to regard the French as patrons of their cause.”⁵⁸ And speaking in Congress in 1803, Representative Samuel Purviance of North Carolina warned that if the French retained control of Louisiana, “the tomahawk of the savage and the knife of the negro would confederate in the league, and there would be no interval of peace.”⁵⁹ In fact, the slaveholders of the United States had the rebellious former slaves of St. Domingue and their ally, yellow fever, to thank for helping to deliver Louisiana into their hands by foiling Napoleon’s plans for a greater French empire in the Americas. Starved for cash, eager to prevent an Anglo-American alliance, and stripped of his most important colony by the former slaves of St. Domingue, Napoleon sold Louisiana to the United States in 1803.⁶⁰

The Louisiana Purchase was the great triumph of Jefferson’s presidency, generating an outpouring of nationalist self-congratulation. Jeffersonian Republicans defended it as a nation-building measure that would strengthen the Union. By guaranteeing Americans the free navigation of the Mississippi, the acquisition secured the prosperity of the western states, which in turn opened up a market for eastern goods. By ridding North America of the French, the Louisiana Purchase eliminated the possibility that westerners might be tempted away from the Union by a powerful European nation. By placing at the government’s disposal vast lands in the western regions of North America, it raised the possibility that the United States might resolve its pressing difficulties with the American Indians by removing them to the western side of the Mississippi. Jefferson summed up his view in his annual message to Congress in October 1803: “While the property and sovereignty of the Mississippi and its waters secure an independent outlet for the produce of the western States, and an uncontrolled navigation through their whole course, free from collision with other powers and the dangers to our peace from that source, the fertility of the country, its climate and extent, promise in due season important aids to our treasury, an ample provision for our posterity, and a wide-spread field for the blessings of freedom and equal laws.”⁶¹

With Pinckney's Treaty and the Louisiana Purchase, the United States acquired the region that eventually became the states of Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama. It was not empty. About 50,000 white and black people already lived there, as well as 40,000 American Indians of the Choctaw, Chickasaw, and Creek nations. The rapidly increasing white and black population was concentrated along the banks of the Mississippi River from Natchez to New Orleans, while the Indians inhabited the country between the settled Mississippi River districts and the western limits of Georgia. The region's communities were ethnically and linguistically diverse, having been molded during the eighteenth century by indigenous migrations, successive waves of French, Spanish, and British colonists, and the introduction of people of African descent.⁶² The economy of the Deep South was varied and changing. Planters and slaves in the plantation districts along the banks of the Mississippi were shifting their energies from indigo and tobacco production to more lucrative cotton and sugar. The raising of livestock—especially cattle and horses—was another important element of economic life, and one gaining acceptance among the Choctaws, Chickasaws, and Creeks.⁶³ New Orleans was increasingly becoming an entrepôt for agricultural commodities—flour, cotton, tobacco, whiskey, cordage, and peltry, to name a few—originating in the upper country and exported to the Caribbean and Spanish America, the eastern seaboard, and Europe.⁶⁴ The Deep South had already begun an enormous demographic, economic, and social transformation under Spanish rule. That transformation would accelerate after the region became a part of the United States, but not until the national government decided on the legal status of slavery in its new possessions.

“extenuate the general evil”

Territorial expansion in the early republic raised the question of slavery in a new context. The Northwest Ordinance passed by the Continental Congress in 1787 famously prohibited slavery in federal terri-

tory north of the Ohio River but not in the territories south of the Ohio. Kentucky and Tennessee had been admitted as slave states in the 1790s, and the prospect of even more slave states emerging from the territories acquired in Pinckney's Treaty and the Louisiana Purchase alarmed northern opponents of slavery. Furthermore, expansion intersected with two related developments having to do with slavery. One was white Americans' invigorated fear of slave rebellion and the other was a hardening of national opposition to the importation of slaves. All of these issues fused in the brief but important congressional debates over the legal status of slavery in the Mississippi Territory in 1798 and the Orleans Territory in 1804, which laid a political foundation for the domestication and extension of slavery in the United States.

The concept of "domestication" connects several related elements in the transformation of slavery in the United States during the early national era.⁶⁵ It describes the country's fitful withdrawal from the Atlantic slave trade, which made the United States essentially autarkic with respect to slave labor during the nineteenth century. Paradoxically, the process of withdrawal occurred during the same era that the importation of slaves into North America reached its highest levels. One assiduous historian has recently estimated that approximately 170,000 slaves were introduced into North America between 1783 and 1810, with more than 100,000 of these arriving in the first decade of the nineteenth century.⁶⁶ But rising slave imports coincided with a hardening political consensus against the Atlantic trade. State after state banned foreign slave importation for reasons of humanitarianism and prudence. By 1807, when Congress finally passed a law banning further slave importation after 1 January 1808, the trade was legal only in South Carolina—and even there it was controversial.⁶⁷

At the same time that they prohibited the importation of foreign slaves, many states tried to regulate the interstate movement of enslaved people. In 1792 the Virginia legislature required immigrants from other states to swear that they did not intend to violate the state's laws preventing the further importation of slaves, and that they

had not brought any slaves with them into Virginia “with an intention of selling them.” In the same year, South Carolina’s legislature banned the importation of African slaves and slaves from other states but permitted settlers to bring their slaves with them. In 1796 Maryland provided for the emancipation of any slave unlawfully admitted into the state but permitted citizens of the United States taking up “*bona fide* residence” in the state to bring their slave property with them. In 1798 Georgia prohibited the importation of slaves for sale from other states but adopted a constitutional provision enabling migrants from other states to bring their slaves with them.⁶⁸ After a protracted debate over slavery, Kentucky adopted a constitution that allowed the state legislature to prohibit the importation of slaves as merchandise for sale but not to prohibit migrants from other states from bringing their slaves with them into Kentucky.⁶⁹

Laws banning the importation and interstate transfer of slaves contributed to the evolution of proslavery doctrine by drawing a line between slave trading and slaveholding. That line originated as a useful fiction written by planters in the upper South during the revolutionary era. They contrasted the vicious commercial world of the Atlantic slave trade, which was dominated by British merchants, with the more virtuous agrarian world of the American plantation.⁷⁰ Implicit in the contrast were the rudiments of a patriarchal defense of slavery. Slaveowners increasingly argued that their slaves were an integral part of their households—even families—and were bound to them by ligaments of mutual obligation and affection. The patriarchal perspective held that enslaved people were obliged to labor for and submit to their owners in return for their owners’ protection and care. A slaveholder was entitled (even required) to punish his slaves for disobedience or poor performance, but he could not treat them sadistically or neglectfully without endangering the peace of the community or risking his honor. The patriarchal outlook endowed slavery with a moral justification, but it also opened slaveowners to charges of hypocrisy when, in time, law and honor failed to prevent the emergence of a sizable interstate slave trade.⁷¹

A final element in the concept of domestication involves the process by which slaveowners and their allies in the United States tried to protect their country from the most democratic, egalitarian, and terrifying prospect of the Age of Revolution: a generalized slave rebellion. If they were not aware of it before, the American Revolution had made slaveowners acutely aware that enslaved people were a dangerous form of property. Thousands of enslaved men and women fled to the British during the war. Some even took up arms against their former masters. The Revolution did not overthrow the slave system in the American South, but it did engender a new language of liberty and equality among enslaved people.⁷² Nobody thereafter could deny that slaves were human beings with the will, passion, and natural desire for freedom common to all people. Many white Americans concluded that slaves were therefore the inveterate enemies of their masters, and if given a chance, would avenge themselves. They could not and would not take part in the national solidarity essential to the new United States, as Jefferson declared in one of the most famous passages in *Notes on the State of Virginia*. Slaves could have no patriotism, he warned, for “if a slave can have a country in this world, it must be any other in preference to that in which he is born to live and labour for another.”⁷³

White Americans' fears became more acute in the 1790s, when the slaves of St. Domingue rose up in a rebellion that ended with the formation of the first independent black nation-state in the Americas, the Republic of Haiti, in 1804. Letters, newspaper reports, and refugees from the island disseminated information about the ongoing slave rebellion throughout the Atlantic world, where for better or worse, it became a ubiquitous sign of both the universal passion for liberty and slavery's latent dangers. The impact of the events in St. Domingue on the debate over slavery and abolition in the United States cannot be overestimated. The slave revolt penetrated the consciousness of North Americans in every rank and station, which is not to say that they all drew the same lessons from it. It inspired some people and appalled others. It was invoked by slavery's opponents to

justify emancipationist measures and by slavery's defenders to head them off. It stiffened southern slaveowners' efforts to curtail the importation of foreign slaves in the 1790s. It also echoed in the behavior of rebellious slaves and in the repression that greeted them. Like ashes from a volcanic eruption, the legacy of the St. Domingue slave revolt was carried throughout the Atlantic world by what the poet William Wordsworth called "the common wind."⁷⁴

The common wind blew through Virginia and North Carolina between 1799 and 1802 in a series of real and alleged slave conspiracies inspired in part by the Atlantic radicalism of the prior decade. The most spectacular occurred in Richmond in the summer of 1800, where an enslaved blacksmith named Gabriel allegedly masterminded a plot to take over the city. One slave informer testified that the rebels planned to march under the banner "Death or Liberty."⁷⁵ White Virginians were not willing to applaud this echo of their own revolution. John Randolph of Roanoke observed that the conspirators "exhibited a spirit, which, if it becomes general, must deluge the southern country with blood."⁷⁶ But whose blood would it be? Bad weather and frayed nerves undid the plot, and as with so many failed slave conspiracies, it was the authorities rather than the conspirators who performed most of the bloodletting. After seventeen slaves were executed, a mortified Thomas Jefferson warned the governor, "There is a strong sentiment that there has been hanging enough."⁷⁷

As Governor James Monroe and the Virginia General Assembly wrestled with the flurry of violence, they looked to the West for alternative solutions to the crisis. Under an 1801 law passed for the occasion, they sentenced some of the slaves convicted of conspiracy to be transported outside the United States. Nine of the convicts were purchased by the traders John Brown and William Morris for transportation to Spanish territory. The slaves were taken down the Ohio River, where two of them escaped into the Northwest Territory. The traders recaptured the runaways and continued down the Mississippi to Louisiana, where they discovered to their chagrin that "the Crimes Trials & convictions of the s[ai]d Slaves were well known to the inhab-

itants.” Unsuccessfully petitioning the Virginia assembly for relief, Brown and Morris complained that they were unable to sell the convicts “except upon a Considerable credit, and at an Under Value.”⁷⁸ It is difficult to say what is the most remarkable aspect of this chain of events: the will to freedom of the conspirators, the audacity of the traders, or the willingness of purchasers in New Orleans to buy slaves convicted of capital crimes. More important, though, is the implication that the continental slave trade originated in a marriage of convenience between slaveowners in the upper South who wanted order and slaveowners in the Deep South who needed labor.

Louisiana also figured in another of the Virginia assembly’s responses to Gabriel’s conspiracy: an inquiry into the possibility of purchasing land in the west or elsewhere to serve as a colony to which “persons obnoxious to the laws or dangerous to the peace of society may be removed.” Monroe intimated to Jefferson that the plan for removal might expand beyond the immediate object of getting rid of the Richmond slave conspirators to “vast and interesting objects”—a veiled allusion to Jefferson’s pet project of gradual emancipation and the expulsion of people of African descent from Virginia. A proposal of that very nature had recently been published by George Tucker, who recommended locating such a colony in Spanish Louisiana. Jefferson’s response to Monroe and his fellow Virginians paired continental expansion with ethnic cleansing (to use a modern phrase). Jefferson doubted whether the citizens of the United States would tolerate a colony of free people of color in or near them, nor did he believe that Great Britain, Spain, or the various Indian nations would be willing to establish one. Again he looked to the horizon of the future. “It is impossible not to look forward to distant times,” he predicted, “when our rapid multiplication will expand itself beyond those limits, and cover the whole northern, if not the southern continent with a people speaking the same language, governed in similar forms and by similar laws. Nor can we contemplate with satisfaction either blot or mixture on that surface.” Here was Jefferson’s fantasy of a geographically extensive and sociopolitically homogeneous Amer-

ica. Neither slavery nor black people plagued Jefferson's fantastic empire.⁷⁹

All of these concerns with the moral, social, and political aspects of slavery surfaced in the contests over the organization of the Mississippi and Orleans Territories. In each case, a minority of northern Federalists led the opposition to the extension of slavery. They were motivated by moral revulsion against slavery and a political interest in blocking the growth of southern power. Opposing them were proslavery stalwarts, largely from the lower South, who defended the expansion of slavery as a matter of rights and policy. The stalwarts were convinced that restrictions on the expansion of slavery in the southwest violated the property and constitutional rights of the inhabitants in the territories as well as in the original states. They also believed that restrictions on slavery would prevent the economic and social development of the Deep South. Another source of opposition came from the upper South, where Jeffersonian Republicans advocated a two-pronged policy of prohibiting the importation of foreign slaves into the new southwestern territories while allowing slaveowners from the original states to carry their slaves there. The Jeffersonians hoped that this policy—called “diffusionism” by historians—would diminish the growing strength of the North American slave population and set the stage for gradual abolition. The diffusionist position would ultimately resolve the status of slavery in the Deep South, but contrary to Jefferson's hopes, it did not lead to emancipation or to the disappearance of black people.⁸⁰

In March 1798, Congress began to consider a bill to resolve Georgia's western limits and organize the territory ceded to the United States by Spain in the Treaty of San Lorenzo. Representative George Thacher, a Massachusetts Federalist, “rose and said he should make a motion touching on the rights of man.” The motion was to prohibit slavery in the Mississippi Territory. Thacher intended to jab at the Republicans, who had recently been harping on the rights of man, but he was also a committed opponent of slavery. “The existence of slavery in the United States,” he declared, was “an evil in direct hostility to

the principles of our Government.”⁸¹ Thacher had a few allies, including the Republican Albert Gallatin of Pennsylvania, who argued that the principles of the Northwest Territory should apply to Mississippi. Another Republican, Joseph Varnum of Massachusetts, agreed that the prohibition on slavery was responsible for the prosperity of the Northwest Territory, and added that he “looked upon the practice of holding blacks in slavery in this country [the United States] to be equally criminal with that of the Algerines carrying our citizens into slavery.”⁸² The restrictionists emphasized the moral evil and political hypocrisy of allowing slavery in the new southwestern territories.

Both Federalists and Republicans objected, largely on prudential grounds. The South Carolina Federalist Robert Goodloe Harper argued that the motion “would be a decree of banishment to all the persons settled [in the Territory], and of exclusion to all those intending to go there.” Another Carolina Federalist, John Rutledge, warned that debate over restrictions on slavery “lead to more mischief than gentlemen are aware of.” Harrison Gray Otis, a Boston Federalist, joined the two South Carolinians. He feared that Thacher’s motion would provoke a slave insurrection and the inhabitants of the Natchez district would be “massacred on the spot.” Otis also accepted Harper’s argument that the Mississippi Territory would be settled by southerners “who cannot cultivate the ground without slaves.” Two Virginia Republicans, William Giles and John Nicholas, articulated the diffusionist argument for gradual emancipation. “If the slaves of the Southern States were permitted to go into the Western country,” Giles explained, “by lessening the number in those States, and spreading them over a large surface of country, there would be a great probability in ameliorating their condition, which could never be done whilst they were crowded together as they now are in the Southern States.” Nicholas asked his colleagues “if it would not be doing a service not only to them [the slaves] but to the whole Union, to open this Western Country, and by that means spread the blacks over a large space, so that in time it might be safe to carry into effect the plan which certain philanthropists have so much at heart, and to which he had no objec-

tion, if it could be effected, viz., the emancipation of this class of men?"⁸³ Confronted with the threat of insurrection and the promise of diffusion, Thacher's motion won only twelve votes in the House and was easily defeated.

Shortly after the debate on Thacher's motion, Robert Goodloe Harper introduced a motion to prohibit the importation of foreign slaves in the Mississippi Territory. Thacher moved to amend Harper's motion to prohibit the introduction of slaves from the rest of the United States, but his amendment was not seconded. Harper's motion, by contrast, was approved by the House without any recorded debate.⁸⁴ The act organizing the Mississippi Territory thus codified the basic program of the diffusionists: a prohibition on the importation of foreign slaves combined with an allowance for the introduction of slaves from elsewhere within the United States.⁸⁵ It is strange that Harper and the other representatives from the lower South did not have any constitutional scruples against prohibiting the importation of foreign slaves into the Mississippi Territory, which seems on its face to have violated the slave-trade clause of the Constitution. One possible reason is that they understood the geographical location and political situation of the Mississippi Territory made it almost impossible to stop illegal smuggling of foreign slaves from Spanish Louisiana and West Florida. They also may have interpreted the slave-trade clause as not applying to federal territory but only to the original states.

Five years later, the nation again confronted the question of slavery as Congress organized the territories gained in the Louisiana Purchase. New circumstances charged the debate with a vital energy. The slave conspiracy scares between 1799 and 1802 rendered the problem of slave resistance more palpable and acute. Moreover, the election of 1800 had catapulted Thomas Jefferson into the presidency on the strength of slaveowners' constitutionally sanctioned advantage in the electoral college. The specter of new slave territory further augmenting slaveowners' national power was more than the beaten Federalists could bear.⁸⁶ The Jeffersonians themselves raised the stakes of the debate by investing the Louisiana Purchase with a profoundly liberal

symbolism (“a wide-spread field for the blessings of freedom and equal laws”). The greater the promise of liberty embodied by Louisiana, the more important would be the question of slavery there. The magnitude of the issue resonated in a petition drawn by the American Convention for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery, which called on Congress to recognize its God-given opportunity to prohibit the importation of slaves into Louisiana. “While the Governments of Europe are shaken by civil discord, or surrounded by the incalculable cruelties and horrors of national warfare,” the petitioners argued, “a beneficent and overruling Providence has been pleased to preserve for our country the blessings of peace, to grant us new proofs of his goodness, and to place us in a condition of prosperity, unrivalled in the records of history. Does it not become the duty of a nation, so crowned with the blessings of peace, and plenty, and happiness, to manifest its gratitude, to the whole world, by acts of justice and virtue?”⁸⁷

The question of slavery in the vast Louisiana Purchase related to broader issues of continental governance, economic development, and public safety. All these themes were in evidence during the Senate debate on the issue in late January 1804. The proceedings were not preserved in the official records of Congress, but Senator William Plumer, a New Hampshire Federalist, roughly captured his colleagues’ arguments in his valuable *Memorandum*.⁸⁸ Plumer’s record reveals a complex series of alignments without obvious partisan or sectional axes. The senators from the slave states were roughly divided between those willing to accept some federal restrictions on the interstate movement of slaves and those unwilling to accept any restrictions at all. Northern senators were also fragmented. A handful used the slavery debates to register a dissent against the whole enterprise of Louisiana. Others searched for a way to impose a politically tenable restriction on the expansion of slavery. One or two even aligned themselves with slavery’s most ardent southern defenders. In this morass of ideals and interests, diffusionism provided enough solid ground to support a majority coalition.

The most vocal supporters of slavery in Louisiana were James Jack-

son of Georgia and Jonathan Dayton of New Jersey. They argued that the terms of the Louisiana Purchase obliged the United States to respect the rights of the territory's inhabitants, including their right to own slaves. Moreover, Louisiana's climate made slave labor necessary if coffee, cotton, and sugar were to be cultivated. Dayton drew particular attention to the prospect of growing sugar in Louisiana—"That we can do if we have slaves," he contended. Without slavery, Louisiana would relapse into wilderness. As Jackson put it, "Slavery must be established in that country or it must be abandoned."⁸⁹ Jackson and Dayton found oblique support from Vermont's two Republican senators, Israel Smith and Stephen Bradley. The two Vermonters thought that restricting the importation of foreign slaves into Louisiana would be ineffective and counterproductive, as it would simply encourage the eastern states to import more slaves and send their worst to Louisiana. The two senators from Massachusetts, John Quincy Adams and Timothy Pickering, opposed any legislation respecting slavery in Louisiana. "I think we are proceeding with too much haste on such an important question," Adams complained.⁹⁰

Opponents of the importation of foreign slaves into Louisiana insisted that the slave trade was a moral evil, that an increasing slave population posed grave dangers to the safety of the country, and that white laborers could tolerate Louisiana's climate. One of the most pointed arguments came from Samuel White, a Federalist from Delaware. Decrying the "disgraceful traffick in *human flesh*," White argued that the treaty of cession did not guarantee to the Louisianians "the power, I will not say *right*, of holding slaves." He insisted that Congress had a duty to oppose slavery "& thereby avoid the fate of St. Domingo." He reminded his colleagues that only a thunderstorm had prevented the fulfillment of Gabriel's conspiracy in Richmond, and pointed to the many provisions enacted by slave states to guard against slave rebellion. He also countered the idea that white people were unfit for labor in Louisiana's climate by arguing that it was slaveholding rather than the climate that made white people in the South disdain hard work. "Let white men be accustomed to the cul-

ture of that country," he suggested, "& they will, I believe, find they are able to bear the fatigue of it." Prefiguring an argument that would eventually become vital to the political antislavery movement, White concluded that slavery was responsible for the noticeable difference between the eastern states, where the people were "strong, powerful & wealthy," and the southern states, where the people were "poor, weak & feeble." Most southern Senators would have disputed White's critique of slavery, but they joined him in opposing the importation of foreign slaves into Louisiana. Plumer saw self-interest at work in this alignment. The southerners' motives, he wrote in his *Memorandum*, were "to raise the price of their own slaves in the market—and to encrease the means of disposing of those who are most turbulent & dangerous to them."⁹¹ On 26 January the Senate voted twenty-one to six to prohibit the importation of slaves into Louisiana from outside the United States, and to entitle any slave illegally imported into the territory to receive his or her freedom. Four of the six negatives came from New England, and the other two came from Georgia's pro-slave trade stalwarts.⁹²

The debate then turned to the question of regulating the movement of slaves from the United States to Louisiana. Here the diffusionists made their decisive contribution by offering an antislavery rationale for the expansion of slavery. Their leader was John Breckenridge, a Kentucky Republican and a confidant of Thomas Jefferson. Breckenridge had migrated from Virginia to Kentucky in the early 1790s with his family and slaves. He quickly became a leading planter, lawyer, and advocate of southwestern interests. He defended slavery during Kentucky's constitutional debates of 1798 and 1799, publishing a broadside that asked, "Where is the difference whether I am robbed of my horse by a highwayman, or of my slave by a set of people called a Convention?"⁹³ As a member of Kentucky's House of Representatives in 1798, Breckenridge presented the Kentucky Resolutions, secretly written by Jefferson in opposition to the Alien and Sedition Acts. He was subsequently elected to the United States Senate, where he became one of Jefferson's most trusted lieutenants. It

was Breckenridge who shepherded the Louisiana bill through the Senate, and it was Breckenridge who staked out the diffusionist position. He declared that it was “good policy” to send slaves from the eastern states to Louisiana. “This will disperse and weaken that race—and free the southern states from a part of its black population, & of its danger.”⁹⁴

Diffusionism bridged the gap between the extensionists and restrictionists. It appeared to provide a way to supply Louisiana with slave labor without necessarily increasing the total population of slaves in the country as a whole. It also appeared to provide a way to diminish the danger posed by slaves, by cutting them off from the sources of transatlantic resistance and dispersing them across a larger territory. Among those who recognized the logic of diffusionism was Lewis Kerr, the well-traveled sheriff of New Orleans. In a remarkable letter written in March 1804, Kerr analyzed the impact of slave migration. If Congress allowed foreign slaves to be admitted to Louisiana, he believed, nothing but trouble could be expected. “It is surely to be dreaded that a considerable share of that importation will be derived from the french islands, and consist principally of such negroes as cannot be retained there with safety to their owners or the public peace,” he explained. If foreign slaves were proscribed, however, “the Louisianians could from time to time draw off the slaves now in the western states, and thereby at least extenuate the general evil.” Because slaves were more necessary in Louisiana than in Kentucky or Tennessee, Kerr argued, “it would therefore render those states an essential service to open an advantageous foreign market for what is probably their most useless stock: and this province would be at the same time furnished with a race of servants already acquainted with our habits and attached to our country.”⁹⁵ In short, diffusionism promised to insulate the United States from black Jacobinism while allowing market forces within the country to transplant the native-born slave population into the southwest, where slavery was daily becoming more profitable.

On 30 January, the Senate debated several motions regarding the

introduction of slaves into Louisiana from the United States. James Hillhouse, a Federalist from Connecticut, presented a motion that would have emancipated adult slaves taken to Louisiana, but it was defeated by a vote of eleven to seventeen. Hillhouse then introduced a new motion to prevent recently imported slaves from being transported to Louisiana, and to limit the introduction of slaves into Louisiana to "person or persons removing into said territory for actual settlement, and being at the time of such removal *bona fide* owner of such slave or slaves." The motion was intended to prevent the emergence of an internal slave trade while allowing slaveowners to migrate to Louisiana with their human property. On the first of February the Senate approved Hillhouse's restriction by a vote of eighteen to eleven. Eight senators who had opposed Hillhouse's first motion (including five from slave states) supported his second motion. Led by Breckenridge, this group of moderate restrictionists swung the Senate to its diffusionist conclusion. They did so over the objections of the senators from Virginia and Georgia, who considered Hillhouse's second motion to be overly restrictive.⁹⁶

That the restrictions on the internal movement of slaves were supported largely by senators from the northern and western states and opposed largely by senators from the southeastern states suggests that the law had genuine but limited antislavery intentions. In the end, the 1804 act prohibited the importation of foreign slaves into the newly organized Orleans Territory and restricted the introduction of slaves from the United States to those accompanying *bona fide* owners who intended to settle there. In effect, it nationalized the strategy of domesticating slavery already under way in most of the states.⁹⁷

The law drew criticism from opposite ends of the political spectrum. Many of Louisiana's sugar planters thought the ban on African slave importation was "a serious blow at the Commercial and agricultural interest of the Province."⁹⁸ For instance, Joseph Dubreuil complained to Jefferson that a prohibition on the importation of African slaves would turn Louisiana into a "vast swamp unfit for any creatures outside of fishes, reptiles, and insects."⁹⁹ The planters sent a memorial

to Congress enumerating their grievances. They charged that the United States had violated the treaty rights of inhabitants of Louisiana, accorded preference to using English in public proceedings, and—most important—threatened the economy of Louisiana by closing off the African slave trade. The planters argued that the region’s civilization would collapse without African slaves. Not only were Africans naturally and habitually better suited to labor in the climate of the country, they argued, but also their labor was necessary to redeem the land from the forces of nature. “The banks raised to restrain the waters of the Mississippi can only be kept in repair by those whose natural constitutions and habits of labor enable them to resist the combined efforts of a deleterious moisture, and a degree of heat intolerable to whites,” the memorial claimed. “This labor is great, it requires many hands, and it is all important to the very existence of our country. If, therefore, this traffic is justifiable anywhere, it is surely in this province, where, unless it is permitted, cultivation must cease, the improvements of a century be destroyed, and the great river resume its empire over our ruined fields and demolished habitations.”¹⁰⁰ Like sugar planters throughout the Americas, those in the Orleans Territory unequivocally associated the African slave trade with progress. They discovered to their chagrin that many of their new countrymen in the United States did not share that view. One anonymous poet ridiculed their argument: “Receive us to your arms as Brothers / And grant us *to make slaves of others.*”¹⁰¹

Another critic was Tom Paine, the cosmopolitan democrat recently returned to America, who published an open letter lambasting the Louisiana planters for seeking to continue the African slave trade. “Dare you put up a petition to Heaven for such a power, without fearing to be struck from the earth by its justice? Why, then, do you ask it of man against man?” he charged.¹⁰² In a private letter to Jefferson a few months later, Paine outlined a plan to encourage American and European migration to Louisiana, focusing especially on the transportation of German redemptioners who would work as bonded laborers until they had paid off the price of their transatlantic passage. Under

Paine's proposal, not only would Congress provide a bounty to ship owners carrying redemptioners to Louisiana, but it would also grant twenty acres of land to each redemptioner once his term of service had expired. By this means Louisiana "would become strong by the increase of citizens," rather than weakened by the increase of slaves. But Paine did not want to exclude black people from Louisiana altogether. Reminding Jefferson of a plan they had discussed years earlier, Paine suggested that Congress also pay for the passage of free people of color to New Orleans, where they could hire themselves out to local planters for one or two years in order to "learn plantation business." The government would then place them on land of their own, just as if they were redemptioners. Though Paine's proposal was politically infeasible, it serves as a useful reminder of a path imagined but not pursued—what might have been if things had not been as they were. There were alternatives to the expansion of slavery.¹⁰³

Still another protest came from outraged Massachusetts Federalists who thought they saw a Virginia-led conspiracy to oppress their section of the Union. They feared that the Louisiana Purchase would revive the slave trade, augment southern power, and eventually lead to the debasement of New England. "Ranked by Virginia as a fit people for hewers of wood and drawers of water," one overheated essayist predicted, "we shall soon find the driver at our back, and our native land become a plantation, with her hardy sons for slaves."¹⁰⁴ The Federalists concentrated their anger against the three-fifths clause of the Constitution, which took the slave population into account in apportioning the House of Representatives. They charged that the clause gave the southern states a political interest in reopening the slave trade and expanding slavery. In the spring of 1804 a congressman named William Ely drafted a constitutional amendment to abolish the three-fifths clause of the Constitution and instead apportion representation according to the free population of each state. Defending the amendment, Josiah Quincy described Louisiana as a "new hot bed of slavery."¹⁰⁵ The Massachusetts legislature endorsed the amendment, but its supporters could hardly have expected to win on the national

stage. Instead they hoped to draw attention to the ways slavery skewed the distribution of power among free people in the United States. So deep was the New England Federalists' dissatisfaction that some of them even began to toy with the idea of secession. Their protests foreshadowed more consequential struggles over the expansion of slavery in the decades ahead.¹⁰⁶

Those who predicted that Congress's restrictions on the introduction of slaves into the Orleans Territory would be ineffectual were prophetic. Congress quickly elevated the Orleans Territory to the second stage of territorial government, which ended the restrictions on the interstate movement of slaves.¹⁰⁷ Hundreds of African slaves imported into South Carolina between 1803 and 1808 were shipped to the Orleans Territory. Others were smuggled in. Thousands of slaves belonging to refugees from the Caribbean were also allowed to enter the Orleans Territory under humanitarian pretexts. But after 1808, when Congress applied the prohibition on slave importation to the whole country, the influx of foreign slaves diminished. The diffusionist pattern that emerged from the debates over the status of slavery in the Mississippi and Orleans territories prevailed over the long run. Unlike Cuba and Brazil, where the nineteenth-century expansion of slavery relied largely on the continued importation of Africans, the expansion of slavery in the United States relied on natural population growth and the forced migration of enslaved people from one part of the country to another. As the slave country began its half-century tilt toward the Deep South, Thomas Jefferson admitted that he had "long since given up the expectation of any early provision for the extinguishment of slavery among us."¹⁰⁸ Jefferson's horizon—a free and white America—appeared more distant than ever.

Territorial expansion tragically dovetailed with new opportunities for slaveowners to profit from slavery in the region that became the Deep South, where two distinct but overlapping economies based on slave labor arose between 1790 and 1812. The first was the cotton frontier, which spread unevenly in the extensive fertile districts from

western Georgia through the Indian backcountry to Natchez. The second, more narrowly limited to New Orleans and its neighboring sugar-producing parishes along the Mississippi River, comprised a zone of especially dense commercial activity. The rise of cotton and sugar transformed the region and generated extraordinary tensions among the people who lived there.

[To view this image, refer to
the print version of this title.]

Plan of the Creek Agency on the Flint River, drawn around 1810. The Creek Agency was the headquarters of the Jeffersonian program for civilizing the southern Indians. Note the twelve "Negro houses" among the double row of buildings. A road on the west bank of the Flint River leads to New Orleans. COURTESY OF MORAVIAN ARCHIVES, WINSTON-SALEM, NORTH CAROLINA.

Civilizing the Cotton Frontier

SURVEYING THE BOUNDARY between the Mississippi Territory and Spanish dominion in 1798, Thomas Freeman reported that he and his company were “immersed in an impenetrable Forrest condensed by Cane & cemented by grape vines, so that a dozen trees must be cut before one can fall, & this on the most irregular hilly broken & unfinished part of the globes surface.”¹ Freeman’s evocative description of a wild landscape signaled the great challenge that lay ahead for advocates of U.S. expansion. Beginning in the late 1790s, a host of public officials, economic entrepreneurs, and evangelical Protestants struggled to “civilize” a region they considered wild and benighted. Their civilizing mission entailed fundamental political, economic, social, and cultural changes intended to create a republican society. Infused with a providential sense of American destiny and supported by the twin pillars of the national government and the transatlantic cotton economy, the civilizers molded the southern frontier in ways that advanced plantation slavery.

New habits of life were not merely imposed on the region by outsiders. Some of the region’s inhabitants welcomed change, including tobacco and indigo planters who had already established themselves

along the Mississippi River, and who led the transition to a cotton economy. Factions among the southern Indians joined with the civilizers to reform their customs and practices, while others increasingly resented the erosion of native sovereignty that these changes brought about. Many slaves also participated in the civilizing of the Deep South. Their labor supported the cotton economy, and their religious zeal supported the spread of evangelical Protestantism, but at the same time conflict and violence tinged relations between slaves and other people on the cotton frontier. Countless episodes of collaboration, adaptation, and antagonism shaped the slave country in the years leading to the War of 1812.

The Jeffersonian civilizing mission began with an idea about the proper relation between land, people, and self-government. "Cultivators of the earth are the most virtuous and independent citizens," Jefferson wrote in *Notes on the State of Virginia*.² That belief colored his vision of westward expansion. The continual addition of new land would allow the United States to remain a nation of industrious, commercially oriented farmers. So long as it did, republicanism would endure. The Jeffersonian vision was conservative in that it intended to keep the country's social structure at an agrarian state of development, delaying its inevitable march toward a more decadent, industrial society.³ But the Jeffersonian vision was also progressive in that it demanded the transformation of the western "wilderness" into a commercially oriented agricultural society, which involved a broad policy to convert the western lands into saleable property and encourage widespread landownership. Jeffersonians hoped that the creation of a vast market in land would provide the basis for a prosperous economy and a loyal citizenry by attracting migrants from the eastern United States.

From a Jeffersonian perspective, stimulating migration was also the best way to guarantee security without sacrificing liberty. The American grip on the Deep South seemed precarious. The region was distant from the centers of government and inhabited by foreigners and indigenous people who possessed no special loyalty to the country.

The peacetime military establishment was small and ineffective, and, moreover, republican sensibilities viewed standing armies as a threat to liberty. The solution to this predicament was to populate the Deep South as quickly as possible with what one public official in the Mississippi Territory called “real Americans” and to organize them into citizen-militias.⁴ Jeffersonians argued that a strong militia would keep the peace while at the same time inculcating habits of discipline and patriotism within the citizenry. As Governor William C. C. Claiborne reminded the people of the Mississippi Territory in 1802, “The Yeomanry of a Country, should constitute its chief defence, against internal commotion, external violence, and that where this Sentiment is not fostered, Liberty must soon cease to dwell.”⁵

The Land Ordinance of 1785 provided the template for the settlement of the Deep South. Passed by the Continental Congress under the Articles of Confederation, the Ordinance initiated a system of rectangular survey for the United States’ national domain. It imposed an abstract, Cartesian order on the western landscape, which contrasted with the irregular patterns of land ownership that prevailed in districts settled under French, British, and Spanish authority in the eighteenth century. It contrasted even more sharply with the communal patterns of land use and possession that prevailed among indigenous peoples. The rectangular survey was intended to make it easier for purchasers to secure title to land without fraud or conflict, and therefore to facilitate orderly settlement through the mechanism of the market. Once the land was sold to private citizens, the government would retreat into the background, providing invisible support for the natural laws of supply and demand that American officials hoped would create an “empire of liberty.”⁶

In the Deep South, however, the national government had to accommodate myriad interests with competing claims to the land. One important group comprised landowners who traced their titles back to the years of French, British, and Spanish dominion. Solicitous treatment of these landed interests would cement their allegiance to the United States and ensure continuity in the region’s booming agri-

cultural economy. The national government established several commissions to confirm the validity of extant titles and to protect against the fraudulent engrossment of land. The commissions also granted land and preemption rights to claimants who could prove they had “inhabited and cultivated” their land before the United States took possession of the region. These policies eventually exempted from the public domain several million acres of land located in areas colonized by Europeans during the eighteenth century. Colonial patterns of landownership would thus persist in the established plantation districts—for instance, along the Mississippi River from Natchez to New Orleans—that would become the core of the slave country.⁷

Another complication originated in Georgia, which claimed sovereignty over lands extending to the Mississippi. Early in 1795 the state legislature sold 35 million acres of “Yazoo” land (named after one of the region’s rivers) to four private companies for the paltry sum of \$500,000. Outrage spread quickly through Georgia and the rest of the country. Anti-Yazooists argued that “immense monopolies of land” threatened democracy, robbed the coffers of the state, and stifled the progress of the frontier. The offending politicians were swept out of office and the sale was repealed by a new legislature the following year, but by that time much of the land had already been gobbled up (on paper) by northern speculators who contended that the repeal violated their constitutional rights of contract. In 1802 Georgia ceded its western lands to the United States, which placed responsibility for resolving the Yazoo claims in the hands of the national government. Another decade of lobbying and litigation (including the landmark 1810 Supreme Court case of *Fletcher v. Peck*) earned holders of Yazoo stock more than four million dollars in compensation, and ultimately cleared the way for the sale of Georgia’s ceded lands by the national government.⁸

The Creek, Choctaw, and Chickasaw Indians also laid claim to millions of acres between Georgia and the Mississippi River. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the American Indians of the Deep South outnumbered the white and black population and possessed

much of the territory that eventually became the states of Mississippi and Alabama. Three or four thousand Chickasaws inhabited what is today northern Mississippi, northwestern Alabama, and western Tennessee.⁹ The Choctaws included fifteen thousand people divided into three major geographic districts stretching from the Pearl River in the west to the Tombigbee-Alabama-Mobile river system in the east. Their territory covered much of what is today the heart of Mississippi and western Alabama.¹⁰ The Creek Indians, also numbering fifteen thousand people, occupied the lands from the ambiguous western boundary of Georgia near the Ocmulgee River to the Coosa River in present-day Alabama. The Creek confederacy comprised loosely affiliated towns divided into two major districts. The Upper Creeks, as they were known to American officials, lived along the Coosa-Alabama-Tallapoosa river system, while the Lower Creeks inhabited the lands watered by the Chattahoochee and Flint rivers.¹¹ Another group, the Seminoles, had emerged in Florida as an offshoot of the Creek Indians but did not include more than three thousand people. Their numbers grew in part from the absorption of runaway and captured slaves from Georgia and East Florida.¹² Small Indian settlements could also be found in lower Louisiana, mostly the scattered remnants of various nations that once predominated in the lower Mississippi Valley, including the Biloxi, Natchez, Tunica, Houma, Chitimacha, Opelousas, Atakapas, and Qapaw Indians. One exception was the Caddo nation, on the Red River beyond Natchitoches, which remained sizable and intact if battered by conflict with the Choctaws to the east and the Osages to the west.¹³

The United States recognized the southern Indians' right to the soil based on prior occupancy, but it was also committed to extinguishing Indian title. Most American policy makers believed that the Indians had too much land and failed to use it productively—that indigenous dependence on hunting amounted to a monopoly that stunted the progress of civilization. In the 1790s the United States began to encourage native peoples to abandon the hunt in favor of settled agriculture and animal husbandry. Government officials hoped that the shift

would lead the Indians to discover that they possessed surplus land, which the laws of supply and demand would induce them to sell to the United States. As Jefferson put it in 1803, the civilizing process would create a “coincidence of interests” between the Indians, who had “lands to spare” but needed “other necessities,” and the citizens of the United States, who had other necessities to spare but needed land. Market exchange rather than conquest would be the instrument of American expansion.¹⁴ Yet from 1795 to 1810 the United States acquired only a small proportion of Choctaw, Chickasaw, and Creek land in the Deep South. One major cession came via the Treaty of Mount Dexter in 1805, in which the Choctaws sold about five million acres of land in the southwestern portion of the Mississippi Territory, but that treaty was an exception to the general pattern of refusal among indigenous peoples to part with their land. Most of what is today Mississippi and Alabama remained in indigenous hands on the eve of the War of 1812.¹⁵

While the national government sorted through these many and varied claims, its surveyors set the Jeffersonian land machine in motion. They were a vanguard of the republican civilizing mission. Usually expert in astronomy and mathematics, surveyors took the measure of the land and mapped a national domain that could be parceled out and sold to the highest bidder. Isaac Briggs, appointed surveyor general of lands south of Tennessee in 1803, supervised the initial stages of this process in the Deep South. Briggs was the son of Quakers from Haverford, Pennsylvania. He enrolled in Pennsylvania College in 1780, where he earned two degrees and a name for himself in mathematics. After college, Briggs helped Andrew Ellicott lay out the District of Columbia, taught at a Friends’ School in Maryland, contributed calculations for almanacs, and finally, in 1799, published his own *Friends’ Almanac*. Along the way, he became acquainted with Thomas Jefferson, who praised him as “a Quaker, a sound republican, and of a pure and unspotted character” and one of the best scientists in the country. Pious, precise, and patriotic, Briggs appeared to be the kind of man Jefferson was looking for in a surveyor.¹⁶

Briggs’s brief career in the Deep South reveals some of the physi-

cal, psychological, and political difficulties that plagued agents of the Jeffersonian civilizing mission. In the spring of 1803, he left his wife, Hannah, in Maryland and embarked for Natchez to take up his duties as surveyor. Accompanied by his brothers Joseph and Samuel, Briggs arrived in Natchez in late August after an eventful trip down the Ohio and Mississippi rivers from Pittsburgh during which he was attacked by dysentery and had a close encounter with a notorious river bandit. Homesick, he described himself as “a poor strayed sheep in the wilderness!”¹⁷ In the ensuing months, Briggs would often lament the irregularity of the mail, which did not bring letters from his beloved wife often enough. Perhaps this is one reason why Briggs agreed to survey the route for a new post road connecting New Orleans to the eastern states, a difficult task that took him through the Indian country early in 1804.¹⁸ Among his other activities, Briggs became the first president of the Mississippi Society for the Acquirement and Dissemination of Useful Knowledge. Its goals included “Cultivation of social harmony,—Improvement of natural science, primarily Agriculture—and the establishment of a Library.” The society’s founders hoped it would spread enlightened values through the territory’s rude settlements.¹⁹

Briggs’s main task was to survey the public lands and prepare them for sale, but it was not an easy task. The two men Briggs hired as deputies, Charles De France and George Davis, ultimately found the work too difficult and the remuneration too small. Defeated by nature and the high cost of labor, the two men quit in January 1804 after falling into debt. De France complained of “the many insurmountable Difficulties a surveyor had to encounter in this country, (such as lakes, swamps, extremely steep hills, and numerous cane brakes, that in many places are almost impenetrable, and also the extravagant prices of Labor and provisions).”²⁰ The slow progress of the surveyors led to problems with squatters, as migrants arriving in the Deep South planted themselves on lands that were not yet ready for sale. Many officials feared that the squatter communities would degenerate into lawlessness and impede the sale of the land. “It is a matter of regret that the surveying should have been so long delayed,” lamented Albert Gallatin, the secretary of the treasury.²¹

Briggs finally chose his family over his country. As Congress expanded his duties to include both the Mississippi and Orleans Territories, Jefferson and Gallatin stepped up the pressure to complete the surveys, especially of the land district west of the Mississippi. Conscious of security problems on the southern frontier, Jefferson urged Briggs “to use all possible expedition in surveying lands for sale on the western side of the Mississippi . . . that we may be enabled to hasten the settlement in those parts most convenient for the defence of New Orleans.”²² While all this was going on, Briggs asked Hannah to join him in the Mississippi Territory, but she politely, firmly, refused.²³ Briggs’s desperation mounted. “I ardently long, for a release from the labyrinth of difficulty and unhappiness into which I have fallen in this Country,” he wrote to Jefferson in the fall of 1806, “and to have it in my power to return to the peaceful bosom of my dear family.”²⁴ Briggs soon abandoned his office, left the Mississippi Territory, and returned to Hannah in Maryland. His passage through the “labyrinth of difficulty” suggests that the civilizing of the Deep South depended on public officials who faced considerable challenges in the fulfillment of their duties. If, like Briggs, more of them had given up and gone home—or more of them had paid attention to their wives’ wishes—the whole enterprise might have failed.

But others stepped in. Briggs’s successors eventually brought the first public lands in the Deep South to market. From 1807 through 1812, the government sold almost half a million acres of public land in the Mississippi Territory for a total of more than one million dollars—about 10 percent of the land-office business up to that point.²⁵ The opening of the public lands in the Deep South enticed eagle-eyed planters who could spot opportunity at a distance. “You will have discovered that the U.S. Land Office is opened and lands offered on good terms,” Leonard Covington wrote to his brother in the Mississippi Territory. (His cousin Levin Wailes served as a deputy surveyor in the territory.) “Will it be possible for all of us to get together upon some of this rich and cheap land?”²⁶ Alexander Donelson, a nephew of the Tennessee planter Andrew Jackson, could hardly restrain his

praise after scouting lands on the Tombigbee River in 1811. "I am much pleased with a great proportion of that country," he reported to his uncle. Its easily navigable river, healthy climate, and extraordinarily fertile soil made it "the most desirable country I have ever seen, if settled by civilized people."²⁷ Donelson's idea of a civilized people did not include the southern Indians who already inhabited the region. Instead it included free, white, propertied citizens of the United States—many of whom owned slaves.

The Jeffersonian land system did not create a yeoman's paradise in the Deep South. Public land was cheap but not free, and at two dollars per acre, the market favored the wealthy. A memorial to Congress from citizens of the Mississippi Territory in 1803 argued that land should not be sold to the highest bidder but rather granted to actual settlers. If sold, the memorial warned, the land would fall into the hands of "the rich," who are "generally attached a certain species of population, which would endanger the country in proportion to its increase."²⁸ Yet Congress consistently rejected proposals to donate land to settlers (including a proposal offered by Jefferson himself in 1806) because the public lands were too valuable a resource to give away for free. Important national goals, including the reduction of the country's debt, depended on revenue earned from the sale of public lands. As the petitioners had warned, the sale of public lands allowed rich and well-connected planters like Leonard Covington to get a jump on their poorer competitors in the race for the best land.²⁹ The public land system—perhaps the most important instrument of the Jeffersonian civilizing mission—thus facilitated the spread of the plantation system in the Deep South just as a burgeoning cotton economy increased the value of the land and the profits to be earned from slave labor.

"we are all mostly in cotton"

In the late eighteenth century, industrial capital began to stride the world in seven-league boots, but it did not leave the same footprint

everywhere. In the 1780s, cotton textile manufacturers in England discovered an almost insatiable worldwide demand for cheap calicoes and muslins. Manchester capitalists erected textile mills and employed wage workers in a relentless and ever-expanding quest for profits. After experimenting with various raw cottons from around the world, they found that “upland” cotton, a black-seeded variety of the genus *Gossypium*, which happened to grow astoundingly well in the southern regions of North America, best suited their purposes. Responding to this new opportunity for profit, North American planters, farmers, and slaves began to grow cotton for export to distant markets. By their efforts, North America claimed a rapidly increasing share of the British market—almost 45 percent by 1803—outranking producers in the Caribbean, Brazil, and the East Indies.³⁰

The cotton revolution transformed and solidified the Deep South’s connections to the world market and induced more of its people to enter into the “civilizing” economy of commercial agriculture. Jeffersonian political economy held that mere subsistence economies were primitive and barbaric, while commercial agriculture stimulated industriousness and wealth, qualities considered essential for a virtuous citizenry.³¹ The salutary effect of commercial agriculture was obvious to Ephraim Kirby, an official sent by the United States to resolve land claims in the eastern district of the Mississippi Territory in 1804. Kirby thought that the region was poor and backward, but that once the land titles were settled and the rivers opened to navigation, commerce would civilize the frontier. “Industry and laudable enterprize will find their reward; law and justice, which have been long disregarded, will be properly respected; and honest, virtuous people take the place of the vicious and profligate,” he predicted.³²

Various circumstances had combined to persuade planters and farmers in the lower Mississippi Valley to grow upland cotton for export. In 1790, Spain had opened up its markets to tobacco from the United States and withdrawn its subsidy for Louisiana tobacco, crippling growers there. Around the same time, indigo manufacturers found themselves up against natural pests, declining prices, and for-

eign competition. In contrast to the gloomy picture in tobacco and indigo, cotton prices in the 1790s were extremely high, consistently above twenty-five cents per pound and reaching a peak of forty-four cents per pound in 1798. Furthermore, versions of Eli Whitney's cotton gin reached the lower Mississippi Valley by 1795, eliminating the most serious technical obstacle to the commercial production of short-staple cotton. Taking advantage of new technology and high prices, planters and farmers from Natchez to Baton Rouge rapidly abandoned tobacco and indigo and adopted cotton.³³ Riding through the Mississippi Territory in 1800, the Presbyterian minister James Hall observed that cotton "is now the staple commodity in the territory."³⁴ The following year, the New Orleans merchant Shepherd Brown encountered fierce competition when he tried to procure cotton from Natchez planters. "There are not less than twenty persons now here who are engaged by the Orl[ean]s Merch[an]ts to buy for them and are daily riding throu' the Country to contract with the Planters," he complained.³⁵ The cotton boom was under way.

Soon thereafter, upland cotton from the Deep South appeared on the international stage. James Maury, the United States' consul in Liverpool, registered its entrance in 1802, when he noted that two vessels had arrived from New Orleans with cotton.³⁶ Around the same time, Liverpool cotton merchants Ewart and Rutson began to worry that the increasing quantities of New Orleans and Mississippi cotton sold in the British market would depress the price of their own West India cotton.³⁷ They had reason for concern. Green & Wainwright, another Liverpool firm, favorably reported to a Mississippi planter late in 1803, "The Manufacturers have substituted the better kinds of Natchez Cotton for Demerara & We have had the satisfaction of seeing those who have once tried it become constant Customers."³⁸ Planters in the Deep South had the satisfaction of seeing the value of their foreign exports—mostly cotton—more than double between 1804 and 1807, from about \$1.7 million to more than \$4.3 million.³⁹

Established planters along the Mississippi River led the charge toward cotton in the 1790s, with William Dunbar out in front. A native

of Scotland, Dunbar had been educated in Glasgow and London before he traveled to North America in 1771 at the age of twenty-two. Dunbar's mercantile pursuits took him to Spanish Louisiana, where he established a plantation and set his slaves to the business of making staves for the West Indian market. In 1783, he moved to a plantation near Natchez and went into indigo, but he transferred his operations to cotton in the mid-1790s. Dunbar and his slaves experimented with new strains of cotton, improved on the design of the cotton gin, invented a screw press for packing cotton, and pioneered techniques for extracting cottonseed oil. With the help of his London factors Green & Wainwright, he also gained an international reputation for his cotton, an important advantage in a competitive world market. Other large planters followed Dunbar's lead. "We will think ourselves very happy if we can tread in your footsteps," wrote Julian Poydras, an indigo planter. And follow in Dunbar's footsteps he did, declaring some months later, "We are all mostly in cotton."⁴⁰

As established planters like Poydras and Dunbar turned their indigo and tobacco plantations over to cotton, migrants from the eastern seaboard and elsewhere joined them. Thomas Rodney noted a "continuous influx of people" into the Mississippi Territory in 1805.⁴¹ Similarly, the French naturalist Michaux wrote in his 1805 memoir, "The great profits derived from cotton entice an immense number of foreigners into that part."⁴² One of these "foreigners" was David Bradford, a leader of the Whiskey Rebellion in Pennsylvania, who fled to Spanish Louisiana and became a cotton planter in the Bayou Sarah district. In 1802 a traveler found Bradford "well Settled" and prosperous in "the Richest Uplands I ever Saw."⁴³ When John Steele emigrated to the Mississippi Territory in 1799 to take up a commission as secretary of the new territorial government, he stayed at the house of "a very hospitable Irishman" near Natchez. The man was wealthy, Steele reported, and "will send to market very shortly near thirty thousand wt of clean Cotton, like the driving snow as it comes from the Gin."⁴⁴

The territorial government helped planters as a class by regulating the cotton market and cracking down on independent selling by

slaves. Officials in the Mississippi Territory established inspections for cotton gins and presses, and graded cotton according to its quality. The regulations were intended “to promote the interests of this territory, by establishing at foreign markets the good reputation of the staple of this country.”⁴⁵ Another notable reform prohibited slaves from growing and marketing their own cotton, a practice “permitted by some few Planters to the probable injury of most of them,” as the governor of the territory put it. The avowed purpose of the law was to prevent slaves from stealing cotton, but it had the additional effect of limiting slaves’ independent production and enabling their owners to gain more complete control over their time and labor.⁴⁶

Slave labor was central to the whole enterprise. Cotton planters assumed they needed slave labor just as they needed soil and rain. The Natchez elite made this clear in a 1797 petition urging Congress not to abolish slavery in their territory. Without slaves, claimed the petitioners, “the farms in this District would be but of little more value to the present occupiers than equal quantity of waste land.”⁴⁷ Migrants identified cotton growing with slave labor as if the relationship were natural. Edward Turner decided “to purchase a plantation not exceeding 1000 Dollars, which in a few years say two or three I am in hopes to be enabled to put 5 or 6 Negroes upon and shortly after my self.”⁴⁸ Nathaniel Cox urged a friend to sell his lands in Kentucky and come out to the Mississippi Territory: “If you could reconcile it to yourself to bring your negroes to the Miss. Terr, they would certainly make you a hansom fortune in ten years by the cultivation of Cotton.”⁴⁹ Among those who recognized the profits to be gained from using slaves to grow cotton were agents of the U.S. government. When Hore Browse Trist arrived in Natchez in 1803 to serve as collector of customs, he observed that his new home was a good country “for making money by cultivation” because of the productivity of slave labor, including children and women. “Hands from 10 years old & upwards of both sexes clear upon an average 12 to 1500 weight of clean cotton besides corn & meats for their own consumption,” he informed his wife.⁵⁰ Garrisoned near New Orleans in the spring of

1811, the young soldier William Hamilton estimated that forty slaves cultivating 200 acres of land could earn a planter \$10,000 every year. "If the negroes will follow me I will place myself at their head and march them here with ease & facility," he proposed to his father in North Carolina.⁵¹

National power and the plantation economy merged in the person of Winthrop Sargent, the first governor of the Mississippi Territory. Sargent was a native of Massachusetts, a Harvard graduate, an accomplished surveyor, and a partisan Federalist. He presided over the establishment of territorial courts, a militia, and a criminal code in the Mississippi Territory between 1798 and 1801.⁵² Described by one acquaintance as "a pen and ink man," Sargent carefully observed his new environment.⁵³ He logged his journey to Natchez in the summer of 1798, recorded meteorological data and the height of the Mississippi River, and published an analysis of the New Madrid earthquakes of 1811 in the journal of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences.⁵⁴ Soon after he arrived in Natchez, he married Mary McIntosh Williams, "a very amiable young widow with a considerable fortune," whose property included two large plantations, Grove and Bellemont, and dozens of slaves.⁵⁵ The marriage made Sargent one of the territory's biggest cotton planters, and as governor, he looked after the interests of his class. After learning about Gabriel's conspiracy in Virginia, for instance, Sargent instructed militia officers in the territory to regard the enforcement of the slave code as "a point of honor."⁵⁶ Sargent placed the power and authority of the national government at the disposal of the territory's slaveowners.

The rising cotton economy generated a brisk demand for slaves among the farmers and planters of the Deep South. John Steele directed his brother in December 1799 to sell his property in Richmond and buy slaves with the proceeds. "I would take two Negroes for it," he calculated, "they would here sell for 1,000 or 1200 Dollars."⁵⁷ Early in 1801, William McIntosh arrived on Maryland's Eastern Shore only to find the price of slaves "very high, owing to the number of Purchasers." Several other Natchez planters, quicker out

of the gate than McIntosh, were heading home with “Eighty or Ninety neagros young & old.”⁵⁸ Wishing to emigrate to the Mississippi Territory, the Tennessee planter Robert Butler wrote that he would “invest my funds in Negroes, and as I am informed that land can be purchased very low on the west side of the [Mississippi] river, and Negroes bearing a high price then I can make sale of some for that purpose.”⁵⁹ Around the same time, Leonard Covington sent fifty slaves from his tobacco plantation in Maryland to his new cotton plantation in the Mississippi Territory, which he called “that land of promise.”⁶⁰ William Rochel floated “twenty likely Virginia born slaves” down the Mississippi in a flat-bottomed boat to Natchez, where he advertised his intention to sell some of the slaves and barter others in exchange for a small farm.⁶¹ John Hutchins, the son of a wealthy Natchez planter, traveled all the way to New York to purchase slaves. The New Yorkers tried to run away in Pittsburgh, but Hutchins foiled their plot and transported them to the Deep South, where he put them to work on his father’s plantation.⁶² Schemes such as these contributed to the fourfold increase of the slave population of the Mississippi Territory in the first decade of the nineteenth century, from 3,499 slaves in 1801 to 16,703 in 1810.⁶³

Masters and slaves collaborated in the creation of a cotton economy but not as equals. They lived and worked together in a hierarchical, coercive relationship. Slaves had little choice but to participate. The plantation economy provided enslaved people with their means of subsistence, and they were subjected to physical punishment and the threat of sale if they resisted their enslavement. On Winthrop Sargent’s Grove and Bellemont plantations, the slaves planted a wide variety of food crops, including peas, beans, celery, potatoes, sweet potatoes, carrots, lettuce, parsley, turnips, radishes, artichokes, and corn. They also planted apple, locust, and willow trees; gelded lambs; constructed dams; and cleared new fields. Cotton planting began in late March, and when that was done, the slaves turned their attentions once more to food crops and rye, pausing in mid-June to thin the growing cotton, which was left to grow on its own (“laid by”) in early

July. Picking began in late August and continued through the fall, interspersed with the harvesting of corn, pumpkins, potatoes, and other produce. Then the picked cotton had to be dried, ginned, baled, and shipped to market. All of this was accomplished by the slaves, who then prepared for another year of the same tedious work. The labor regime was accompanied by a harsh cycle of birth and death, which Sargent tersely recorded in his journal: "August 13th last night Sophie delivered of mulatto female child alive, but premature birth and it soon died—for the three or four days past Negroes employed in gathering corn blades for fodder."⁶⁴

Collaboration was also the rule on John Palfrey's cotton plantation. A Bostonian who moved to New Orleans around the time of the Louisiana Purchase, Palfrey bought 900 acres of land in Attakapas near the Gulf coast of the Orleans Territory in 1810. He judged the region to be "well calculated for new beginning without much capital." After buying twenty-one slaves, Palfrey moved to his new plantation, aptly named Forlorn Hope.⁶⁵ (The significance of Palfrey's naming his plantation Forlorn Hope may be gleaned from Crèvecoeur's famous description of American backwoodsmen: "They are a kind of forlorn hope, preceding by ten or twelve years the most respectable army of veterans which come after them.")⁶⁶ Beginning in March 1811, Palfrey's slaves cleared land, built fences and dwellings, and planted cotton, corn, and vegetables. They endured bad weather and sickness. Harry, one of the slaves, occasionally ran away but never got very far. ("Caught Harry in the neighborhood of the cabins in pursuit of provisions nearly famished," Palfrey noted in his journal entry for 7 April 1812. "By his account he has eaten but once since he ran away.") Beginning in September, Palfrey meticulously tallied each day's cotton harvest, noting the weight of cotton picked by every slave. Women and children picked about 80 percent of the cotton. Three women—Phillis, Mimy, and Aimy—picked more than 40 percent of it, and seven children—Tom, Bob, Ephraim, Joe, Ben, Elsey, and Fanny—picked another 40 percent. The adult men—Harry, Sam, Amos, and Daniel—picked less than 15 percent of the cotton. They were more

likely to be found engaged in odd jobs elsewhere on the plantation, from splitting and hauling fence rails to chopping firewood. Altogether the slaves picked about 37,000 pounds of cotton in the plantation's first year.⁶⁷ Early in 1813 Palfrey's son, Edward, proudly reflected on the household's achievement. "During the two summers that we have been here, notwithstanding we came on a piece of land without fence, house, or any thing of the kind and never had a plough been put to it, we made nearly fifty bales of Cotton, besides an immense stack of Plantation food, such as Corn, Pumpkins, Potatoes etc. etc."⁶⁸ Fences, houses, plows, a saleable crop, and an abundance of food—for Edward Palfrey and others of his ilk, these were signs of progress in the civilizing of the southern frontier.

Life on the cotton frontier did not appeal to everyone. A boatman descending the Mississippi River was overhead to declare, "D—n my precious eyes if I would not rather be at allowance of a mouldy biscuit a day, in any part of Old England, or even New York, Pennsylvania, or Maryland, than I would be obliged to live in such a country as this two years, to own the finest cotton plantation, and the greatest gang of negroes in the territory."⁶⁹ Slaves also found ways to register their dissatisfaction. A correspondent in Richmond observed in 1807: "There is a very great aversion amongst our Negroes to be carried to distant parts, & particularly to our new countries."⁷⁰ Forced migration severed many of them from their families and communities. Writing from Natchez, John Steele observed that his slave George was "extremely uneasy to hear from Millie and his Children" in Virginia.⁷¹ Some enslaved people tried to return home, or at least that is what their owners thought they were attempting to do. In 1807, for instance, Ferdinand L. Claiborne of the Mississippi Territory advertised for the return of two runaway slaves, Sandy and Lewis. Sandy was from the mouth of the Cumberland, and Lewis had been brought from near Nashville the previous spring. "It is supposed that their object will be to return to the state of Tennessee," Claiborne surmised.⁷² Samuel Elkins guessed that his runaway slave Nathaniel would "attempt to cross the lake and return to Kentucky, from whence he was

brought last spring by Mr. Joseph Miller, of Bourbon county.”⁷³ But these fugitives were exceptional. Under duress, most enslaved people collaborated in the civilizing of the cotton frontier and contributed to its progress.

The Deep South’s first cotton boom ended when the national government enacted a countrywide embargo on exports in December 1807. The embargo was intended to force the belligerent nations of Europe, especially Great Britain, to respect the neutral rights of American shipping, and ultimately to open foreign markets for U.S. agriculturalists.⁷⁴ The measure received wide support in the Orleans and Mississippi territories even though it battered the region’s cotton growers. Unable to export their crop, purchasers of public lands found themselves mired in debt with no means of escape. As a petition from the Mississippi Territory’s House of Representatives reminded Congress, “Our produce lies unsold and unsaleable in our Barns.”⁷⁵ The value of exports from New Orleans and Mobile fell to a mere \$540,000 in 1809 and would not return to pre-embargo levels until 1815.⁷⁶ Late in 1811 a New Orleans merchant reported to John Palfrey that the cotton market was still depressed. “Business was never perhaps in so great a State of Stagnation,” he observed, “nor can we flatter ourselves with any revival unless some understanding should fortunately be effected with the British Government, or some great change take place in Europe.”⁷⁷ As the merchant suggested, the prospects of the Deep South now rested on distant economic and political forces that the people of the region could not control. They had not yet achieved the kind of independence promised by Jeffersonian republicanism, nor would they so long as their livelihood rested on the unreliable foundation of international trade.

“so many wolves or bares”

The Jeffersonian civilizing mission presented a special challenge to the indigenous inhabitants of the Deep South. Increasing numbers of white and black people, an expanding cotton economy, and an activist

U.S. government all pressured the southern Indians to partake in what one public official called “the sweets of civilization.”⁷⁸ Jeffersonians hoped that America’s native people would abandon hunting, adopt animal husbandry and commercial agriculture, and sell their surplus land to the United States. These changes would prepare the Indians either to be assimilated into civilized, American society or to be removed west of the Mississippi River—an alternative that gained favor among many Jeffersonians after the Louisiana Purchase doubled the country’s size. In the Deep South, the Creek, Choctaw, and Chickasaw peoples responded to the Jeffersonian challenge in complex and contradictory ways, ranging from the eager adoption of chattel slavery to the violent repudiation of U.S. expansion.

The southern Indians’ geopolitical position steadily declined after the American Revolution. Accustomed to navigating balanced imperial rivalries for much of the eighteenth century, the southern Indians now confronted a hegemonic power in the United States. The expulsion of the British had left Spain as the only major European counterweight to U.S. expansion into the Deep South, and the southern Indians quickly discovered that Spain was an unreliable ally. One Chickasaw leader accused Spanish officials of leaving his people “to the jaws of the Tiger and the bear.”⁷⁹ Nor did the southern Indians present a united front. Historical animosities between different indigenous groups, disputes over boundaries, and the highly decentralized, consensual character of their internal politics inhibited pan-Indian solidarity. Equally important was American officials’ ability to use the considerable financial and diplomatic resources at their disposal (including bribery) to disrupt Indian unity. In 1805 and 1806, for instance, the United States took advantage of disagreements among the southern Indians to acquire lands in what is today central Tennessee and northern Alabama. The twists and turns of the negotiation almost brought the Cherokee and Chickasaw Indians to blows. The southern Indians did not stand together, so they risked falling apart.⁸⁰

The rapidly growing white and black population of the Deep South pressed against the southern Indians’ land and sovereignty. Indigenous

people considered the immigrants to be intruders. The Creek Indians called them *Ecunnaunuxulgee*, which one official roughly translated as “people greedily grasping after all their lands.”⁸¹ It was an apt term, as many of the intruders did indeed want the Indians out of the way. In 1810, for instance, more than four hundred American squatters living on lands claimed by the Chickasaws petitioned the president and Congress to expel them. The squatters promised to support the government, cultivate the land, and build a civil society. They could not understand why fertile land should be denied to those who would “improve” it, for the sake of “a heathen nation” who seemed content to “saunter about like so many wolves or bares.”⁸² The squatters’ petition echoed a long tradition of Anglo-American political philosophy, expressed most famously in John Locke’s *Second Treatise of Government*, which held that land possessed by a savage people could rightfully be claimed by those who would convert the land into property and cultivate it as God intended.⁸³

While white migrants clamored for the Indians’ land, U.S. officials were busy encouraging the Indians to adopt farming, animal husbandry, and domestic manufactures. The most important and influential of these officials was Benjamin Hawkins, the U.S. agent to the Creek Indians. Born in North Carolina and educated at the College of New Jersey, Hawkins was a man of the American Revolution. He was elected to the North Carolina legislature in 1778, to the Continental Congress in 1784, and to the United States Senate in 1790. He began his thirty-year career among the southern Indians as one of the federal treaty commissioners at Hopewell in 1786, where he developed a keen interest in the Indians’ languages. President George Washington sent him to the southern backcountry in 1796, where for twenty years he supervised American efforts to promote agricultural and political reform among the Creek Indians. “This is his hobby horse,” Isaac Briggs reported to Jefferson.⁸⁴ Like other Indian agents, Hawkins provided material and political support for the civilizing project. He supplied agricultural implements and machinery to those who wanted them. He gave advice and rewarded those who took it. One

of his greatest achievements was the Creek Agency, his headquarters on the Flint River and an outpost of republican civilization. By 1809 the agency included a large plantation cultivated by slaves, a post office, saw and grist mills, a tanyard, various artisans' shops, two looms, and a school for Indians. In the unlettered southern backcountry, Hawkins kept a library of nearly two hundred books covering law, history, and philosophy, including Jefferson's *Notes on the State of Virginia*.⁸⁵

Hawkins and the other U.S. agents discovered many allies in the Indian backcountry, especially among those men and women who wanted to participate in the cotton economy. The Choctaw agent Samuel Mitchell indicated in 1800 that some of the Choctaws "appear willing to attempt the raising of cotton." He offered them seed and lessons in planting, and looked forward to the arrival of a cotton gin—"a great spur to industry."⁸⁶ In 1802 a trader named Abram Mordecai set up a cotton gin below the junction of the Coosa and Tallapoosa rivers in south-central Alabama and bought cotton from the Creeks.⁸⁷ That same year, William Claiborne authorized the establishment of a cotton gin in the Choctaw nation and directed the factor in the Chickasaw nation to buy cotton from the chiefs for cash or barter.⁸⁸ White travelers lauded these developments. The Presbyterian missionary James Hall reported in 1800 that federal agents were teaching Indian men to farm and the women to spin and weave. Cotton gins had been raised and, he predicted, "it is probable that in a few years the cotton trade will be considerable among them."⁸⁹ Cotton provided the southern Indians with an alternative to the declining deerskin economy. It could be exchanged for the European commodities they had become accustomed to acquiring through trade, or turned into clothing and used at home.⁹⁰

Mestizos made up the vanguard of the cotton economy in the Indian backcountry. Throughout the eighteenth century, the indigenous peoples of the Deep South absorbed small numbers of European traders who married Indian women and raised their children among the Indians. These mestizos helped to mediate between the Indians and

the outside world, especially through trade and diplomacy, where multilingual literacy was particularly useful. They often assumed positions of influence within their Indian communities even as they remained socially and culturally distinctive. The Colbert family provides an outstanding example of *mestizaje* among the Chickasaw Indians. The Scottish trader John Logan Colbert established himself among the Chickasaws in 1729, marrying three Chickasaw women in succession. Colbert's sons—William, George, Levi, Samuel, Joseph, and Pittman—became leaders among the Chickasaw people by the late eighteenth century. Levi Colbert became familiar to travelers passing through the Chickasaw country between Tennessee and New Orleans because he managed an inn along the road. "He has at this place a large well cultivated farm, about 30 or 40 likely slaves and a white overseer to superintend them—a good stock of cattle and hogs," observed one traveler. "He keeps a Public house in a large frame building & affords very tolerable accommodations; & as many travellers on their road to and from N. Orleans, Natchez, &c, call on him, he through that medium obtains an ample market for his superfluous produce." Levi Colbert was a friend to travelers, an ally to the U.S. government, and a beneficiary of the Jeffersonian civilizing mission. He was also a slaveowner.⁹¹

As the description of Levi Colbert's compound indicates, black slavery suffused the mestizo milieu. The African presence among the southern Indians had begun to grow in the latter half of the eighteenth century, when English merchants plying the deerskin trade took slaves into the backcountry to serve as teamsters, drovers, handymen and agricultural laborers at the trading houses. Slaves also fled into the backcountry from the frontier settlements of the Carolinas, Georgia, and Florida, leading British officials to reward Indians for capturing runaways and handing them over to the colonial authorities. During the American Revolution, Indians raiding Anglo-American settlements transported more people of African descent into the backcountry, and when the war ended, refugee Loyalist merchants and traders carried still more slaves to the Indian country, where they

settled.⁹² Long experience in the backcountry gave some multilingual black people an opportunity to serve as intermediaries between whites and Indians. One of the most notable was Cesar, a slave hired by Governor Winthrop Sargent in 1798 to communicate with the Choctaws who frequented Natchez. Sargent regarded Cesar's work to be "highly important to National Dignity and Interests," but a racist grand jury in Adams County denounced his employment as shameful to "a free and independent people." Cesar eventually accompanied Philip Nolan's ill-fated expedition to Texas in 1801, and was later discovered living with a Spanish military officer in Chihuahua. It was Cesar, more than Nolan, who might aptly have been called a man without a country.⁹³

Slaves were already a coveted commodity among the Indians by the 1790s, and the cotton boom made them even more valuable. During negotiations over the return of runaways and captives, a Creek delegation pointed out that the slaves "cause great disputes among us . . . as some are sold, and bartered, from one to another, and the property paid for them consumed."⁹⁴ Benjamin Hawkins frequently noted the presence of black slaves in the Indian backcountry. Peter McQueen, a leading man among the Upper Creeks, "has a valuable property in negroes and stock and begins to know their value." Some of the Lower Creeks "have negroes, taken during the revolutionary war," he reported, "and where they live, there is more industry and better farms." Hawkins associated slaveowning with the progress of civilization among the Indians, but he did not think it was enough merely to have slaves. They must be disciplined and put to work in economically productive activities, including the growing and spinning of cotton. One Creek woman possessed eighty slaves, Hawkins reported, but "from bad management they are a heavy burthen to her and to themselves, they are all idle." Early in 1802, the interpreter Alex Cornells brought the old Creek leader Efaul Haujo to Hawkins and told him that "the old man had no corn and his negroes were under no government." After supplying Efaul Haujo with agricultural tools, Hawkins advised him to shape up: "Put your negros and family to work, make

them pen and milk your cattle, let me see your fields enlarged and well fenced." A civilized farmer, he implied, should manage his slaves properly.⁹⁵

Although U.S. officials occasionally worried about a black-Indian alliance endangering the peace of the frontier, the Indian backcountry was no haven for slaves. Runaways fleeing into the Indian country sometimes suffered greatly from cold and hunger. One frostbitten fugitive was captured in the Choctaw nation in 1793.⁹⁶ Indians on the west side of the Mississippi River discovered two runaway slaves belonging to Winthrop Sargent "in the woods almost perished" in 1802.⁹⁷ As these episodes indicate, the native inhabitants of the Deep South often recovered runaway slaves and delivered them to U.S. officials, who encouraged the practice.⁹⁸ There are even records of slaves escaping from Indian owners. For instance, a black woman appeared at Fort Pickering in 1800 with five children. She declared that she had been the property of a white man named Pettigrew who was killed six years earlier on the Tennessee River, and she had been carried into the Cherokee nation by an Indian warrior named White Man Killer, who was now dead. White Man Killer's sons were abusing her and selling her children. She feared, wrote Major Zebulon Pike, that "the Moment the Indians got them in their power a distance in the Wilderness They would kill Her Oldest Son and Daughter."⁹⁹ And in 1809, the Chickasaw leader George Colbert requested assistance in the recovery of a slave who had fled into the United States and was allegedly in jail in North Carolina.¹⁰⁰ Whatever their nationality, slave-owners shared a common interest in keeping slaves from running away, and recovering those who fled.

Lethal violence scarred relations between black people and the southern Indians. Some killings occurred in the context of the Indians' retaliatory customs of justice. In 1797, for example, a Creek headman executed two slaves for stealing horses, and warned other slaveholders "that they must take care of their slaves, as he would undoubtedly put the law in force against them."¹⁰¹ Five years later, the Cusseta Creeks killed an American slave in retaliation for the murder

of a Creek man.¹⁰² Acting at the behest of Benjamin Hawkins, who wanted the Creek Indians to formalize their system of justice, the Creek National Council tried a slave for the murder of an Indian woman in 1806. The slave was found guilty and executed in the Creek style, as Hawkins reported to Jefferson. "The warriors took him to a river bank, the brother of the deceased knocked him down with a stake, stabbed him and threw his body into the river." Notwithstanding its gruesome conclusion, Hawkins considered this to be the first fair trial ever conducted by the Creek nation and, hence, another sign of the civilizing of the Indians.¹⁰³ Black slaves were also attacked merely for being adjunct to their owners. A particularly dramatic case was reported in 1816 by the U.S. agent to the Chickasaw Indians. "Several negroes in this nation have been murdered in a most cruel, barbarous, and unprovoked manner," he asserted. "One belonging to Mr. Thomas Love was shot by an Indian while in his master's yard riving boards. The only excuse for this murder is, that the Indian says he did not like Mr. Love, and that he would spoil his property."¹⁰⁴ The murder of Love's slave suggests that it is romantic to imagine an alliance between African Americans and the Chickasaw, Choctaw, or Creek Indians in opposition to the expansion of slavery. Formidable obstacles impeded such an alliance. Black people faced economic exploitation, social isolation, and violence at the hands of indigenous people as the slave country expanded into the Indian backcountry. Only among the Seminoles did fugitive slaves find refuge (at least until the 1810s), and that was because neither chattel slavery nor U.S. power had yet spread through Florida.¹⁰⁵

Contrary to the Jeffersonian hope, the republican program for civilizing the southern Indians did not lead to the peaceful transfer of surplus lands to the United States. The expansion of the plantation complex within indigenous communities increased the market value of the Indians' lands, and stiffened their resolve not to sell out cheaply. If they had to cede land to the United States, they would at least try to bargain for a fair price. Meanwhile, migrants from the United States flocked to the cotton frontier in anticipation of new lands coming to

market. Many Indians resented the daily increasing numbers of white intruders who passed through their country, fished in their streams, hunted in their forests, drove livestock on their pastures, cut down their trees, and squatted on their lands. The U.S. government's inability to restrain its citizens undermined the Indians' trust in the intentions and authority of the American agents. Younger warriors wished to prove their manhood by resisting the intruders and attacking their property. Wrote Benjamin Hawkins in the summer of 1811, the Creek leadership was "apprehensive they cannot restrain their young people from committing depredations on property passing thro' their Country, which will involve their Country in ruin."¹⁰⁶ Over time, the civilizing of the southern frontier intensified conflicts within indigenous communities as well as between the Indians and the United States.

"live long in heathen land"

The civilizing of the cotton frontier had a spiritual dimension. "As to every thing Religious," lamented the Quaker surveyor Isaac Briggs, "I am here in a howling wilderness."¹⁰⁷ Where Briggs despaired, others saw a glorious chance to spread the Gospel. Beginning in the late 1790s, missionaries from various evangelical Protestant denominations responded to the scandal of frontier impiety by trolling the Deep South for souls. They handed out Bibles, established congregations, and built churches in the new territories. They carried a message of Christian love that attracted white and black people but not the southern Indians, who eschewed the evangelicals' appeal in the years before the War of 1812. Protestant Christianity on the cotton frontier was thus a biracial collaboration, but at the same time, the demands of chattel slavery inescapably limited the egalitarian potential of religious fellowship across the color line.¹⁰⁸

Practicing Christians considered the Gospel to be indispensable to the civilizing process. New York Presbyterians asserted the connection in the late 1790s, when they organized a society dedicated to

converting the Indians to Christianity. As John Mason announced in his 1797 sermon "Hope for the Heathen": "Instead of waiting till Civilization fit our Indian neighbors for the gospel, let us try whether the gospel will not be the most successful means of civilizing them."¹⁰⁹ The New York Missionary Society appointed Joseph Bullen to begin its work, sending him and his son to the Chickasaw nation in 1799. "You are going to a region which the joyful sound of the gospel has never yet reached," announced the president of the Missionary Society, "where the arts of civilized life are almost unknown—to a people covered with the gloom of ignorance, superstition, and barbarism."¹¹⁰ Bullen taught English and preached the Gospel among the Chickasaw Indians for four years. He eventually left the Chickasaws and settled down on a small farm in Jefferson County in the Mississippi Territory. There he established the territory's first Presbyterian church in 1804.¹¹¹

Bullen achieved a special rapport with the black slaves living among the Chickasaw Indians. In June of 1799, George Colbert's slaves solicited Bullen to preach to them. He met with twenty of the slaves, read to them from the New Testament, and explained to them that Christ "loves poor blacks as well as others." One week later, Bullen noted in his journal that an elderly black woman owned by William Colbert had traveled thirty miles to hear his sermon. "Me live long in heathen land, am very glad to hear the blessed gospel," she said. During his first summer, Bullen baptized an enslaved man ("a true disciple of Jesus") and his four children. The slaves were owned by James Gunn, who prayed with them and taught them reading and catechism. "It is a blessed thing to have such a master," the slaves told Bullen. The missionary was impressed by the black Christians' zeal. They had been "visited with the outpouring of the spirit of God, inducing them to worship him, to keep the Sabbath day, and to be exemplary, in their lives, while their masters remain in a carnal state." Bullen's experience was not unique. Other missionaries and preachers who came to the cotton frontier were also embraced by black slaves who professed to be Christians. While most southern Indians

kept their distance, many black people reached for the Gospel as if it were a rope pulling them from quicksand.¹¹²

In addition to the Presbyterians, the Baptists and Methodists rooted themselves among the white and black people of the Deep South at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Organized in 1806, the Mississippi Baptist Association included five churches with 196 members in 1807, and eighteen churches with 914 members in 1813.¹¹³ Among the Baptist congregations was an African church, which assembled once a month at Josiah Flower's sawmill on Bayou Pierre, and an African congregation organized in Mobile around 1806.¹¹⁴ Joseph Willis, a North Carolina-born free man of color, founded a small church on Bayou Chicot in the Orleans Territory. He petitioned the Mississippi Baptist Association in 1810 to ordain him and recognize his church, which it finally did six years later.¹¹⁵ Methodist church membership increased from 60 people in 1800 to 360 in 1810, when more than one-fourth of the territory's Methodists were black.¹¹⁶ Their numbers were small, but the congregations carved a niche for evangelical Protestantism on the cotton frontier. Biracial fellowship shaped the contours of Christian civilization in the slave country.

Some clergymen harbored antislavery principles, a legacy of the social radicalism that infused the nascent evangelical movement in the eighteenth century. One example was Tobias Gibson, the first Methodist minister in the Mississippi Territory, who emancipated his slaves before leaving South Carolina to emigrate to the southwest.¹¹⁷ But strong pressures muted evangelical antislavery. When the Methodists debated slavery at their annual conference held in Tennessee in 1808, recalled the itinerant preacher Jacob Young, "We were sitting here in a slave state, and we had to move with a great deal of caution."¹¹⁸ Denominational competition compelled clergymen to hold their tongues, lest they lose souls to their rivals. Even more important was a general indifference toward religion among the region's farmers and planters. As the missionaries John Schermerhorn and Samuel Mills reported in 1814, "Most of the emigrants to this country came here

for the purpose of amassing wealth, and that object seems to have absorbed their souls.”¹¹⁹ Clergymen had particular trouble getting the inhabitants to keep the Sabbath, or at least to allow the slaves to do so. James Moore, an overseer in the territory, complained that “a man in my Occupation is oblig’d to pay no Regard to Sundays if he pleases his employer.”¹²⁰

The problem of slaves working on the Sabbath symbolized a tension between the economic and religious dimensions of the civilizing process in the Deep South. That tension was resolved in favor of the economic because white evangelicals were restrained by their own dependence on the prevailing social order. For instance, an account book for the Fayette Circuit of the Mississippi Conference reveals that in 1809 Methodist preachers were paid in receipts redeemable for ginned cotton.¹²¹ Thus pious white people in the Deep South turned their attention to improving slaves’ conditions instead of attacking slavery. The very first question taken up by the Mississippi Baptist Association was: “What steps would be most advisable to take with members of our society, whose treatment to their slaves is unscriptural?” Their generous answer was to treat such members “with brotherly love according to the rules of doctrine,” which apparently meant establishing an investigating committee, demanding repentance from offenders, and inflicting disciplinary sanctions on the unrepentant.¹²² This would probably have been a meager consolation to the mistreated slaves, but it may have been better than nothing at all. Evangelicalism did not offer equality or freedom in the corporeal world, but it did provide an alternative to the arrant materialism and social isolation that slaves endured on the cotton frontier.

Innumerable episodes of collaboration and conflict involving white and black people forged the Protestant dimension of the slave country. Most of these episodes are undocumented and have been lost to the past, which makes the few available sources all the more important. One valuable source is the journal of Johann Burckard and Karsten Petersen, two German artisans who lived at Benjamin Hawkins’s Creek Agency from 1807 to 1812. The two men had been sent

to Hawkins to build looms and spinning wheels, machines coveted by the advocates of civilization. They happened to be Moravians, a central European evangelical sect with missionary outposts around the globe from Ceylon to Dutch Guiana. Moravians had a history of converting people of African descent to Christianity throughout the eighteenth century, and their settlements in Pennsylvania and North Carolina welcomed black people. Once on the cotton frontier, Burckard and Petersen struggled to convey their understanding of Christianity to the slaves who lived and worked at the agency, men and women with their own ideas about the meaning of the Gospel.¹²³

The Moravian artisans and the slaves slowly got to know each other. Hawkins's slaves helped transport the two Moravians from Fort Hawkins in Georgia to the Creek Agency, helped erect the Moravians' house there, and from time to time helped to repair it.¹²⁴ In April of 1810, Burckard and Petersen bought a slave of their own, but he ran away two weeks later, only to be captured by the authorities in Georgia and hanged for murdering a white man. Hawkins recommended caustically that the two men "confine themselves in future to their gardens and workshops."¹²⁵ The two men spent their first Christmas at the Creek Agency in silent prayer, while the slaves "celebrated Christmas, alas, by drinking to excess." During the summer, one of the slaves asked the Moravians to read him the story of creation. He came back several weeks later and listened to Burckard read the story of Maunday Thursday. The following Christmas, some of the slaves dropped in on the two men with holiday greetings and a request for liquor. Burckard and Petersen sadly observed that the slaves "think they know more about Christmas than we can tell them." In the winter of 1811, local black people began to attend Burckard and Petersen's weekly Bible lessons, which were conducted in English. The Moravians altered the schedule of their meetings to accommodate the slaves' work schedule. On 6 April, fourteen people assembled to hear the story of Christ on the way to the Cross. Two days later the congregation reached a high of thirty-one, but then it declined and stabilized at between ten and fifteen congregants, most of

whom were African American. The morning of Easter Sunday, twelve black men and women listened to the story of the Resurrection. After the meeting, Burckard and Petersen overheard the slaves saying to each other, "That is the right doctrine. It is the true Word of God."¹²⁶

A slave named Phil became the most devout and most difficult of the Moravians' followers. Phil had shown religious inclinations years earlier, when he had been banned from preaching incendiary sermons to other slaves. Toward the end of March in 1811, Phil passed by the Moravians' hut on his way to draw water from the well. He stopped by the open door to listen to the liturgy and was captivated by what he heard. He began to attend services regularly, becoming a staunch defender of the local church. Inquisitive, intelligent, and independent, Phil plumbed the Moravian doctrines of sin and salvation. One day he asked Burckard "whether the local Negroes who knowingly do wrong in many matters, the evil of which is very evident, could receive forgiveness." Burckard replied that "forgiveness for them was certainly to be had if in their sinful state they turned to the Savior, confessed their sins from the bottom of their hearts and in faith asked His forgiveness." Stimulated perhaps by this conversation, Burckard and Petersen prepared a special sermon for the next liturgy, admonishing the congregation "to turn from the sinful ways and look to the Savior."¹²⁷

In mid-April, the Moravians decided to allow Phil to attend their Sunday liturgy. He claimed to have been baptized twice already, once by the Methodists and once by the Baptists, so Burckard admonished Phil to renew the pledge he gave when he was baptized. Phil responded "that he fully intended diligently to pray to the Savior." With his prophetic yearnings awakened, Phil revealed to the Moravians that he went out to the woods to pray every evening. He began to hear voices. Concerned about these ominous signs, Burckard and Petersen rebuked Phil for "his misleading false sermons and prayers, which are only too well known and which lacked real humility." Phil responded with characteristic bravado, asserting that "he understood the Word of God perfectly and he knew that no one would again be made crazy

by his sermons." Phil soon challenged the Moravians' religious authority. In July, Burckard and Petersen agreed to provide sanctuary for a craftsman working at the Creek Agency named Lewis, who was wanted by the authorities in Georgia for murdering a man at a game of cards. Phil instructed the other black Christians at the agency that they should no longer attend the Moravians' services. Murderers were beyond salvation, he insisted, and the Moravians had erred grievously in protecting Lewis. Phil presented himself as the righteous alternative, declaring, "I will preach to you, I know the Bible as well as they." His gambit split the black community. Some stayed with Phil as he "loudly announced Lewis' death sentence late into the night," but others, like a slave named Bob, defied his judgment and allied themselves with the Moravians.¹²⁸

Phil went too far when he tried to turn faith into power. His actions threatened the Creek Agency's social order and had to be punished. With Hawkins temporarily absent, Hawkins's companion Lavinia Downs had Phil and his collaborator, Sam, tied to a tree and whipped. One of the Moravians intervened weakly on the slaves' behalf, but Lavinia insisted on discipline. The slaves had crossed the line and their antics would not be tolerated. To bolster her argument she accused Phil of harboring illicit erotic desires. "You do not know this hypocrite," she charged, "He is haughty and wants to be a preacher and preach in his house where he is able to take the women to his lap, which he is not able to do at your house."¹²⁹ Downs thus reiterated the classic conservative indictment that antinomianism led to sexual disorder. Lurking within the Creek Agency, the very model of civilized society, was the specter of a backwoods bacchanal. The whipping of Phil and Sam amounted to the intervention of political authority—indeed, the U.S. government—to suppress a radically subversive flowering of Protestant Christianity in the Indian backcountry.

Yet Phil's rebellious spirit was not quenched by the whipping, nor did the punishment settle all religious questions at the Creek Agency. Some weeks later a slave loyal to the Moravians informed them that

Phil was “washing the feet of some of the Negroes and Negresses as was written in the Scriptures.” A symbolic reenactment of John 13, foot washing had been a hallmark of racial egalitarianism in the Moravian communities of North Carolina until 1809, when the Moravian Conference declared that black brothers and sisters might attend the ceremony but could not participate. In the spiritually charged atmosphere of the Creek Agency, the slaves’ secret foot washing was an unmistakable gesture of defiance.¹³⁰

Religious conflict again split the Creek Agency during a rash of thefts committed by slaves in March 1812. A slave named Claster (whom the Moravians had described earlier as “badly confused by dreams and visions”) came to the Moravians and asked that the slaves be absolved of their crimes. Otherwise their meetings “would be of no value.” Seeking forgiveness, some of the slaves broke off into a separate meeting led by Claster. Six or seven remained loyal to the Moravians. Burckard and Petersen complained that many of the slaves were “possessed of the devil and overcome by blindness.” A few months later the Creek planter Alex Cornells refused to let Burckard preach to his slaves. He complained that they “had already been made sullen and crazy by those who had preached to them.”¹³¹ Clearly, black men and women living among the southern Indians continued to draw subversive lessons from the Gospel, but for Protestant Christianity to grow and flower along with the slave country, its adherents would ultimately have to reconcile themselves to the restraints of chattel slavery. As they did, they laid the foundations of Afro-Protestantism in the Deep South.

The civilizing of the cotton frontier thus advanced on a variety of fronts between 1795 and 1812, and with it marched slavery. Public officials mapped the land and prepared it for sale, hoping to attract migrants and stimulate population growth. They used the resources at their disposal to encourage the southern Indians to adopt a republican way of life and, ultimately, to cede their land to the United States. At the same time, a booming transatlantic cotton economy financed the conversion of a relatively undeveloped region into what Jeffersonians

regarded as a more civilized landscape of farms and plantations—like John Palfrey’s Forlorn Hope. In a different kind of conversion, Protestant evangelicals toiled among the rough and unchurched people of the southern frontier, where—to their surprise—black slaves welcomed them with special fervor. All these forces and pressures shaped the slave country as it emerged in the Deep South.

At the same time, the civilizing dynamic gave rise to tensions, contradictions, and unfulfilled promises. The Jeffersonian ideal of a society dominated by yeoman farmers was not realized. Difficult terrain, the high cost of labor, legal disputes, and opposition from indigenous groups all delayed the transformation of “wilderness” into saleable property. When the land finally did finally come to market, wealthy planters rather than yeoman farmers got the best of it—increasing the black population along with the white. But even planters were disappointed when Jefferson’s embargo cut off access to overseas markets and ended the cotton boom. Many found themselves indebted to the very government that had promised them independence. One petition to Congress summed up circumstances on the cotton frontier in 1811 by describing prospects for the future as “clouded, uncertain, and extremely gloomy.”¹³²

The transformations taking place on the cotton frontier provoked immense resentments among those indigenous men and women who saw land cessions, intruders, and reformers as a threat to their sovereignty and customs. As the southern Indians experienced “rapid and solicitous advances in civilization,” they rippled with conflict over how best to respond to the challenge of American expansion.¹³³ Traditionalists clashed with the civilizers, and young militants challenged older leaders. Resistance to the United States was emboldened by a mystical movement that originated among the Shawnee Indians north of the Ohio River and swept through the southern Indian backcountry in 1811 and 1812. The Jeffersonians never imagined that their seemingly benign program to civilize the southern frontier would boil into war, but that is precisely what happened.

[To view this image, refer to
the print version of this title.]

Christophe Colomb, White Hall Plantation, ca. 1800. This painting depicts the plantation of Marius Pons Bringier on the Mississippi River. The vitality of the scene illustrates the dynamism of life in lower Louisiana in an era of change and growth. Note the flatboat manned by black oarsmen, carrying cotton down the river. Colomb married Bringier's daughter, Françoise. Reproduced with permission.

Commerce and Slavery in Lower Louisiana

LOWER LOUISIANA—more precisely defined as New Orleans and its environs—emerged as a distinctive milieu within the Deep South alongside the sprawling cotton frontier. The region had been a colonial backwater through much of the eighteenth century, despite its favorable location at the junction of a vast continental network of rivers and a nearly limitless circum-Atlantic world. Strong currents of change began to flow in the 1790s, initiating an era of commercial re-orientation and expansion. Planters along the Mississippi River began to cultivate sugar, while New Orleans turned into the “the great mart of all the wealth of the western world,” as one traveler put it.¹ The commercial boom intensified demand for slave labor in the region, which resulted in the arrival of thousands of enslaved people from many different places and the further diversification of an already heterogeneous slave population. As lower Louisiana became part of the United States, it also experienced fundamental transformations in its connections to the broader Atlantic world.

As on the cotton frontier, the extension of U.S. sovereignty over lower Louisiana intersected with the expansion of slavery. The Louisiana Purchase forced the United States government to confront the

problems of social order provoked by the sugar boom. One set of problems involved slave importation. Government officials struggled to enforce the national government's laws banning foreign slave importation, while local planters subverted them. Another set of problems involved slave resistance. Government officials struggled to prevent slaves from taking advantage of lower Louisiana's multiplying avenues for escape. They also had to come to grips with New Orleans's increasing population of free people of color, whom many local whites regarded as potentially dangerous. Ultimately all the tensions of commercial and political development in lower Louisiana overflowed in January 1811, when enslaved people in the sugar plantation districts above New Orleans rose in the largest slave rebellion in the history of the United States.

Lower Louisiana's rise to significance began under Spanish rule. The European and African population of Louisiana almost tripled in the first twenty years of Spanish dominion, reaching about 30,000 in 1785, approximately half of whom lived in or near New Orleans.² The colony's principal exports—indigo, tobacco, lumber, and fur—reached almost \$1.5 million per annum in the late 1780s, a significant increase from twenty years earlier.³ Several policies adopted by the Spanish Crown contributed to the increase. One was the Crown's decision in the late 1770s to purchase Louisiana tobacco for the Mexican market, which subsidized a boom that lasted until the early 1790s, when Spain withdrew its support and threw Louisiana's tobacco planters into a crisis.⁴ Another was its liberalization of trade between New Orleans and the French West Indies, which returned Louisiana to the commercial orbit of the French Caribbean world just as that world was about to fall apart.⁵ To stimulate economic development, the Spanish Crown also relaxed its restrictions on the importation of slaves into Louisiana, which boosted the supply of Africans.⁶ Among them was Abd al-Rahman Ibrahima, a Muslim prince of the Fulbe nation from West Africa. Captured in battle and sold to an English slave trader on the Gambia River, Ibrahima was transported across the Atlantic Ocean to Dominica, where he was purchased by

Thomas Irwin and shipped to New Orleans, then to Natchez, where he was sold 18 August 1788 to Thomas Foster, who cut off his hair to shame him, then put him to work in a tobacco field.⁷

Events in the French Caribbean colony of St. Domingue initiated a qualitative transformation in Louisiana's development. In 1789 that island had been the leading producer of sugar in the world, exporting almost fifty million pounds of white sugar and more than ninety million pounds of raw sugar, about 30 percent of the world's sugar exports. Then came the French Revolution, the agitation by St. Domingue's free people of color for equal rights, and finally the revolt of the slaves against their owners, which plunged the island into a ten-year war.⁸ By 1800–1801, St. Domingue's exports had fallen to less than twenty thousand pounds of white sugar and less than twenty million pounds of raw sugar.⁹ Planters elsewhere in the Americas filled the void. In areas where sugarcane was already grown, planters expanded their production; others dedicated new regions to the crop. Jamaica, Cuba, and Brazil won the lion's share of the reshuffled market, but high sugar prices in the latter half of the 1790s and the early 1800s opened up the possibility of profitable sugar production elsewhere.¹⁰ In lower Louisiana, sugar promised to reverse the declining fortunes of indigo growers around New Orleans. "Our planters are founding all their hopes on sugar cane," one of them wrote in 1795.¹¹

The slave rebellion in St. Domingue also reorganized world production of sugar by strewing large numbers of what today might be called technical experts around the Greater Caribbean.¹² These people brought useful knowledge and important skills to the places where they ended up, and one of their principal destinations was Louisiana. The Louisiana-born planter Etienne de Boré, who conducted the first successful experiments in the commercial production of sugar in Louisiana in the mid-1790s, worked with Antoine Morin, a sugar maker said to have been a refugee from St. Domingue.¹³ Other knowledgeable people from St. Domingue, including skilled slaves, found their way to Louisiana, where a sugar maker lucky enough to be a free person could earn as much as \$1,500 a year.¹⁴ Himself one

of the many refugees from St. Domingue who passed through New Orleans, Pierre-Louis Berquin-Duvallon understood what had happened. Louisiana, he explained in his memoir, “owes its principal advantage to the calamities of St. Domingo, which raised the demand for sugar from Louisiana, and sent many planters and workmen of that unhappy island to seek a settlement on the Mississippi.”¹⁵

Louisiana planters adapted the Caribbean sugar complex to their own local ecology. In tropical climates, sugarcane required at least fourteen months to mature, but Louisiana’s winter frosts shortened the growing season to eight or nine months and threatened planters with failure if the cane was planted too early or cut too late. To meet the challenge of their climate, Louisiana planters imported a new and hardier strain of cane called Otaheite, which had been introduced to the Caribbean in the early 1790s by the intrepid William Bligh.¹⁶ They used advanced irrigation systems to control the water content of the cane, and invented new ways to protect the cane from freezing once it had been cut, first covering it with bagasse (the remains of milled cane), and later adopting the practice of “windrowing,” or laying the cane lengthwise in rows with the leaves left on.¹⁷ Breaching the circadian rhythms of premodern labor, planters ran their mills day and night in the winter months, racing against time to collect the juice before it spoiled.¹⁸ They continued to improve their methods of production for the next half-century, belying the idea that slavery and technological progress are incompatible.¹⁹

Large indigo planters led the quick transition to sugar. Their plantations were already protected from the Mississippi by levees maintained by slaves, so they did not have to waste precious labor claiming land from the swamps.²⁰ They commanded large forces of enslaved men and women who could be compelled to perform the difficult work of raising cane. These two primary advantages of land and labor led to a third: the ability to raise capital. Sugar plantations cost money, which large planters were able to borrow from factors and merchants in New Orleans on better terms than could their poorer and less reputable neighbors. They used that money to erect mills,

where their cane would be crushed and processed into sugar, and to buy more slaves. These investments paid off. The sugar planters “are now generally free of Debt, and many have added considerably to their fortunes,” Governor William Claiborne reported to Thomas Jefferson in 1806.²¹ Sugar plantations—as many as seventy-five in 1802, producing more than five million pounds of sugar—sprang up along the Mississippi River in lower Louisiana.²² Their ever-improving big houses, slave cabins, chimneyed mills, neat gardens, orange groves, and cane fields embossed the alluvial landscape with a stamp of civility. Passing up the river from the English Turn to New Orleans in 1801, one traveler thought he saw “a lively picture of a west india settlement.”²³ In less than a decade, lower Louisiana became an outpost of the Atlantic sugar plantation complex.

Sugar planters entered a difficult but rewarding business. Bad weather and disease were daily concerns. In August 1807, Henry Brown found himself with a great deal of work to do on his sugar plantation, and only half the number of slaves he needed to do it. Fifteen slaves were sick with a respiratory ailment, and one woman had died. Yet Brown himself prospered. “I grow fat in spite of heat and fatigue,” he admitted.²⁴ Similarly, the grinding season began on William Kenner’s Somerset plantation in November 1811 with his overseer and driver ill and Kenner himself “never more completely put to my wits.” Still he remained optimistic. “We have been making sugar since the 1st and are making about three Hogsheads of nice stuff pr day and expect soon to make four,” Kenner wrote to a friend. “In the midst of all this hard Duty and bustle we (I mean my own family & self) continue thank God to enjoy fine health.”²⁵ It is unlikely that the same could have been said of the enslaved people who lived and died at Somerset.

Although sugar distinguished the economy of lower Louisiana, most free people in the region were not sugar planters. A mixed agricultural economy survived alongside the sugar plantations, and a thriving urban milieu complemented growth in the countryside. Small farmers with and without slaves grew rice, corn, and vegeta-

bles. They also raised livestock. Some sold their produce to neighboring plantations, others—especially in St. Bernard and Lafourche—sold to the New Orleans market.²⁶ In the Opelousas and Attakapas prairies west of the sugar district, ranchers tended vast herds of cattle, which also fed the city and the river plantations.²⁷ Then there was New Orleans itself, “destined by nature to become one of the principal cities of North America, and perhaps the most important place of commerce in the new world,” wrote Berquin-Duvallon, who loathed it.²⁸ Febrile and motley, New Orleans collected the goods of the increasingly populated North American interior and reshipped them to the Caribbean, South America, the eastern United States, and Europe.²⁹

Lower Louisiana’s population and economy advanced rapidly. Between 1806 and 1810 alone, the sugar district’s population increased by more than 40 percent, from almost 40,000 to more than 55,000. The fastest growth occurred in and around that swelling node of commerce, New Orleans, which increased from 17,000 to 27,000 people, and in Iberville and Baton Rouge, which increased from 2,500 to 4,000. The slave population everywhere increased faster than the white population, and the population of free people of color more than doubled, with most of the increase occurring in New Orleans.³⁰ Census takers counted ninety-one sugar works in the Orleans Territory in 1810, making almost 10 million pounds of sugar and 180,000 gallons of molasses. There were also seventeen distilleries, making more than 225,000 gallons of low-quality cane liquor known as tafia.³¹ River traffic increased despite the restrictive embargo and nonintercourse policies implemented by Jefferson and Madison. The number of vessels arriving in New Orleans from upriver more than doubled, going from 723 in the twelve months beginning April 1806, to 1,624 in the twelve months beginning April 1810.³² “From the Geographical position of this Territory,” Governor Claiborne boasted, “our traders will always be intimately connected with the great Commercial Houses of the Northern and Middle States; and our exporting merchants will have large and extensive dealings, with the Inhabitants

of that rich and immense tract of Country West of the Alleghany Mountains, whose various products descend annually to New Orleans, the Great Commercial Depot of the Western World."³³ Nothing seemed more obvious than that New Orleans was destined for greatness.

The profits from sugar and the prospects of New Orleans induced Americans from the eastern seaboard to migrate to lower Louisiana, where, despite cultural differences with the Francophone locals, they insinuated themselves into the local economy and helped to bind the region into the United States.³⁴ Perhaps the most important migrant was Edward Livingston, a prominent Republican lawyer and politician from one of New York's aristocratic families. In 1803, the same year that his elder brother negotiated with Talleyrand for Louisiana, Livingston served as U.S. attorney for the district of New York and mayor of New York. Shortly after recovering from yellow fever, he learned that one of his clerks had embezzled \$40,000 from the U.S. Treasury and fled New York. Livingston took responsibility for the fraud, resigned from both offices, and turned over his property to trustees. Mired in debt, he emigrated to New Orleans, where he hoped to recoup his fortune. Like many others, Livingston saw the city as a promising destination for entrepreneurs.³⁵

Livingston quickly established economic, social, and political bonds that made him a leading figure in New Orleans. His law practice blossomed, and a fortuitous choice of clients turned him into a major Louisiana landholder. He married the widow Louise Moreau de Lassy, a refugee from St. Domingue whose father had been a wealthy sugar planter there. The marriage opened doors in New Orleans's French-speaking society, as did Livingston's political commitments. He assumed leadership of a faction in New Orleans that opposed the first governor of the Orleans Territory, William Claiborne. He joined the French-speaking planters who challenged Congress's ban on the importation of African slaves. Livingston's political standing would suffer from his unpopular effort to claim ownership over disputed riverfront property, but he rescued his reputation during the Battle of

New Orleans, when he served informally as an aide-de-camp for Andrew Jackson.³⁶

In addition to his diverse economic activities in New Orleans, Livingston became an absentee rice planter.³⁷ He hired Francis O'Duhigg to operate a rice farm in Plaquemines Parish, and early in 1805 O'Duhigg began the work of surveying the land, clearing it, and preparing it for planting rice.³⁸ Estimating that each arpent (about five-sixths of an acre) of rice would earn 100 dollars, O'Duhigg wrote to Livingston: "If you send me till the month of May only twelve good task negroes you will make money and defray your expences this year."³⁹ But O'Duhigg began to have trouble with the slaves. Cudjo complained of a stomach ailment and asserted that he had been poisoned. "I am afraid to see him die in my hands," O'Duhigg wrote, "and if you are answerable to for him, I would advise you to give him up, for he is of no service." Three other slaves who had been hired for the year "are good for nothing," he asserted; "it is stealing your money to hire such negroes."⁴⁰ Despite sickness and *marronage* (running away) throughout the spring, the slaves planted fifty arpents of rice along with twelve arpents of corn. O'Duhigg was pleased with the crop. The rice, he wrote in August, "flatters the eyes of every one that sees it."⁴¹

The harvest commenced in early September and with it, more work for the slaves and headaches for O'Duhigg. Four of the slaves fell sick and had to be sent to town to recover their health. O'Duhigg hired slaves from his neighbors to replace the sick hands, but dismissed them after "finding they did not work to my liking." Desperate for more labor, O'Duhigg decided to pay his own slaves fifty cents a day to work on Sundays. "You'll have a long account to settle with them," he warned Livingston.⁴² Two aspects of O'Duhigg's managerial strategies are worth emphasizing, because they do not fit the stereotype of plantation slavery. One is the routine hiring of slaves during seasons of peak labor, a practice that appears to have been widespread in the Deep South if not very effective for O'Duhigg. Another is the direct payment of slaves for extra work, one of the many

alternatives to torture that managers used to elicit labor from their slaves.⁴³

Francis O'Duhigg had dreams of his own. He understood his arrangement with Livingston as a stepping-stone to better things, financed in part by the profits from slavery. Exasperated with the shortage of labor and the unreliability of his neighbors' slaves, O'Duhigg proposed to Livingston a slave-buying junket to the North. "I am a good Judge of Negroes. I am born among them," he wrote. "I will go there [to the North] by the next opportunity, and buy any quantity you chuse. I'll be back in the winter and ready for the crop. I won't charge no commission but my passage." O'Duhigg represented the junket as a way to express his gratitude to Livingston. He also wanted to purchase a few slaves for himself. He yearned for gentility. "I have bought a beautiful tract of land . . . there is on it forty acres of cleared land & fit for plough in the middle of which is a Hill twenty five feet high, forty feet Broad, and ninety long, that Hill is fit to set a house upon, and in future, I hope to be able to have it settled in a genteel manner."⁴⁴ For O'Duhigg and other free men in his position, slaveholding afforded passage from deference to independence.

Livingston's concerns were not merely local. While he inserted himself into Louisiana's Francophone society and local economy, he also maintained connections to his native New York that helped to facilitate Louisiana's integration into the Union. Ambitious emigrants arriving in New Orleans carried letters of introduction to Livingston. New York merchants wrote to him, eager to procure New Orleans sugar and cotton.⁴⁵ And when Robert Fulton and Robert Livingston plotted to introduce the steamboat to the lower Mississippi, they turned to Edward for valuable information and political assistance.⁴⁶ After the *New Orleans* paddled into the city for which it was named early in 1812, one of Livingston's many correspondents lauded its arrival: "I am happy to find that the Steamboat is so well addapted to the trade of the Mississippi & so admerably calculated for the accommodation of passengers."⁴⁷ Over time the steamboat lowered shipping

costs, increased capacity, and accelerated the circulation of goods and people around North America.⁴⁸

Other entrepreneurs hoped to use steam power on dry land. The planter Evan Jones ordered a steam engine from Samuel Briggs (Isaac Briggs's inventive brother) in 1805, but the engine was lost in a shipwreck on its way from Philadelphia to New Orleans.⁴⁹ In 1809 the architect and engineer Benjamin Latrobe (who had recently designed a Custom House for New Orleans) proposed to use a steam engine to deliver water to the residents of New Orleans. "Perhaps the whole is a Castle in the air," he wrote secretly to his brother-in-law, "but it is a good looking one."⁵⁰ The arrival of the *New Orleans* in 1812 inspired Governor Claiborne to think about using steam power to increase sugar production. "If the force of Steam, could be applied to Sugar Mills, & in a manner simple & not attended with great expence," he mused, "the invention would greatly conduce to the welfare of this Territory, & to the private Interests of the inventor."⁵¹ Other beneficiaries were eastern manufacturers, who would eventually find a market for steam engines among the sugar planters of lower Louisiana.⁵²

A vast waterwheel of commerce thus began accelerate in the first decade of the nineteenth century. It powered an extensive national economy involving different sections of the expanding United States. The French naturalist Michaux witnessed its revolutions during a tour through the trans-Appalachian West. In an 1805 memoir, he reported that agents of Philadelphia mercantile houses arranged for corn, pork, whiskey, linen, bar iron, and other commodities to be floated down the Ohio and Mississippi rivers from Pittsburgh to New Orleans. Brokers in New Orleans would then sell the goods locally or reexport them to the Caribbean in exchange for indigo, cotton, and sugar, which they would then ship back to Philadelphia.⁵³ Louisiana's contribution to the national economy, and vice versa, was a central theme of the *Louisiana Gazette*, which boasted the slogan "America, Commerce and Freedom" on its masthead. In an 1806 editorial, the newspaper argued that Louisiana's growing population would provide a market

for goods from the western states, while the shipping of its cotton and sugar would profit eastern mercantile interests. Echoing the Jeffersonian idea of diffusion, the *Gazette* also reminded residents of the “middle and southern states” that Louisiana offered “an outlet for the superabundance of their black population, and an extravagant price for what will shortly be to them, an incumbrance instead of an advantage.”⁵⁴ With the commercial expansion of New Orleans and its hinterlands came a proliferating slave trade.

“confounded with other nations”

The sugar boom intensified demand for slave labor and turned New Orleans into one of the principal slave markets in North America. Between 1790 and 1810, the transatlantic currents of commerce and politics carried almost eighteen thousand slaves from Africa, the Caribbean, and the United States into lower Louisiana.⁵⁵ Their arrival helped to create the most dynamic, heterogeneous, and tumultuous plantation region in North America. Yet the slave rebellion in St. Domingue that made these developments possible also made them problematic. Public officials, whose concern was safety as well as profit, struggled to regulate slave importation to prevent Louisiana from becoming another St. Domingue. After the Louisiana Purchase, U.S. officials in the Orleans Territory took up the difficult task of suppressing slave smuggling while trying to win the allegiance of local planters eager to import slaves.

Local authorities had tried to control the flow of foreign slaves into Spanish Louisiana even before the slave rebellion broke out in St. Domingue. In 1786, Louisiana governor Esteban Miró prohibited the introduction of slaves born in the Caribbean, although he continued to allow traders to reexport African-born slaves (*bozales*) from the Caribbean to Louisiana. Then, fearful of Jacobin influences, the Spanish Crown issued a royal order in 1790 prohibiting the entry of slaves or black refugees from the French islands into Spanish colonies. The New Orleans Cabildo, or city council, issued its own edict two years

later banning the importation of slaves from the Caribbean, receiving the support of the Spanish Crown the following year. After a conspiracy among the slaves of Pointe Coupee was uncovered in 1795, the Cabildo and the governor, Héctor Baron de Carondelet clashed over the proper measures for policing slaves, with Carondelet finally banning the importation of all slaves into Louisiana in 1796. Then, bolstered by the sugar boom, a substantial faction of planters petitioned for a reopening of the trade in 1800, inaugurating a new wave of debate. The members of the Cabildo were divided, while the leading Spanish colonial officials in Louisiana, the Marquis de Casa Calvo and Nicolás María Vidal, supported the reopening of the African trade in order to promote economic development. A clash between the governor and the council complicated the disagreement over slave importation and prevented any coherent and undisputed policy from being enacted. In the confusion, African slaves began to arrive in New Orleans after 1800.⁵⁶

The slave trade to Louisiana was thriving at the very moment of the Louisiana Purchase. Arriving in the Orleans Territory late in 1803, the Quaker surveyor Isaac Briggs discovered to his dismay that “the number of slaves in this country is already great, and the infatuated inhabitants are in the habit of increasing it, by large importations.”⁵⁷ Three French vessels carrying nearly 500 Africans had recently been admitted to the port.⁵⁸ Africans continued to arrive in 1804. The schooner *Josephine* arrived in late May 1804 from Kingston with 40 Africans, and returned again in August—this time from Havana—with another 56. Another vessel, the *Diana*, also arrived from Havana in August with 77 “New Negroes.” The *Margaret* arrived in July from Angola with 207 “New Negroes.” And the *Sarah* arrived in August with 205 African slaves procured in Angola and Nassau. Henry Kennedy advertised them in the *Louisiana Gazette* as “choice healthy young Negroes.”⁵⁹ Although Governor Claiborne regarded the importation of foreign slaves as inhumane and dangerous, he did not believe that he had any legal authority to block the trade until Congress banned it.⁶⁰

In contrast to Claiborne, most local planters wanted to continue African slave importation. One reason was that they believed Africans were more industrious and less dangerous than enslaved people born into the revolutionary world of the Americas. In 1804 the New Orleans City Council received a series of petitions protesting that the arrival of slaves and free people of color from the Caribbean had exacerbated *marronage* around New Orleans. One petition warned that slaves from St. Domingue “with their hands still reddened with the blood of our unfortunate fellow countrymen are arriving daily in great number in our midst and that perhaps tomorrow their smoking torches will be lighted again to set fire to our peaceful homes.” The council drafted a resolution declaring that “any slave not absolutely recognized to be uncivilized cannot be admitted under any pretext, not even as a servant of the captain or of some passenger, unless he belongs to some resident of the Colony who had taken him along on a sea voyage.”⁶¹ According to the New Orleans City Council, a civilized slave society could not function with civilized slaves, which meant slaves born and raised in North America or the Caribbean. Many planters agreed that “uncivilized” African slaves, being uncontaminated with the revolutionary ideas of liberty and equality, were less dangerous. In his memoir of Louisiana in 1802, the St. Domingue refugee planter Berquin-Duvallon explained to his readers that slaves born in the Americas were more intelligent and healthier than slaves brought from Africa, but that they were “the most indolent, vicious and debauched.” Slaves from Guinea were less skilled in domestic service and trades and more prone to weaknesses of body and mind, he believed, but these disadvantages were offset by the fact that they were “more robust, more laborious, more adapted to the labours of the field, less deceitful and libertine than others.”⁶²

Congress’s initial ban on the importation of foreign slaves into the Orleans Territory fell short of its goal. South Carolina circumvented the ban by reopening the African slave trade in 1803. Many of the almost forty thousand African slaves imported into Charleston from the beginning of 1804 to the end of 1807 were shipped to New Or-

leans. Late in 1806, two agents for the Rhode Island firm of Gardner and Dean reported that sales of African slaves in Charleston were brisk. "Our market is at this moment extremely favorable for the sale of Africans," they wrote. "They are now worth \$300–320 and the probability that they will maintain the prices all the approaching winter and spring as the demand from the back country and New Orleans is very considerable."⁶³ Slave traders in that city openly advertised the sale of African slaves brought from Charleston. The firm of Kenner and Henderson advertised the sale of "74 prime slaves of the Fantee nation on board the schooner *Reliance* . . . from Charleston" in the *Louisiana Gazette* on 4 July 1806.⁶⁴ The following winter, Patton and Mossy advertised the sale of "140 Prime Congo Negroes . . . the first choice from a cargo of four hundred" shipped from Charleston on the *Ethiopian*.⁶⁵ These Africans were among the last human beings legally imported into the United States as slaves and among the first to be shipped from the eastern seaboard to the Deep South through the coastal trade.

Enslaved Africans faced death, piracy, and shipwreck on their way to New Orleans. Already weakened by an Atlantic crossing that generally killed one of every seven of them, African slaves kept on dying on their way to Louisiana.⁶⁶ In 1806 the *Charleston Courier* reported that the brig *Three Sisters*, bound from Charleston to New Orleans with slaves, had put in at Havana in distress, "30 of the slaves having died on the passage." The *Lucy* departed from Charleston on 4 July 1806, carrying thirty slaves insured from Charleston to Natchez and eleven slaves insured from Charleston to Havana, but was captured en route to Havana and sent to Nassau. At Nassau, the eleven slaves insured to Havana were removed as a lawful prize, but several others had died. The remaining slaves were sent on to New Orleans.⁶⁷ Slaves transported from Charleston to New Orleans also faced the danger—and opportunity—of shipwreck. In March 1806 the *Atalanta* was wrecked off Abaco Island. "On the vessel striking," reported the *Charleston Courier*, "two seamen (foreigners) and three slaves took to the boat, and have not since been heard of." The following year, the

Sally was also wrecked off Abaco, but her cargo of slaves was recovered by another vessel and carried on to New Orleans for sale.⁶⁸ Forced transatlantic migration entailed a concatenation of traumas that weakened those who survived and made it easier for them to be abused at the end of the journey. This, perhaps, was an unspoken reason why Louisiana planters wanted to keep importing African slaves. Plus they were cheap.

The forces of supply and demand together dictated the shape of lower Louisiana's slave market. One way to perceive the shape of that market is by tracing fluctuations in the price of slaves and comparing the prices of different groups of slaves—all of which can now be done with some reliability using the historian Gwendolyn Hall's *Louisiana Slave Database*. The mean price of a male slave between the ages of fifteen and forty-five more than doubled from 1792 to 1802, probably in response to the rising demand for slaves linked to the sugar and cotton booms, along with episodic restrictions on their importation. Prices declined by about 40 percent from 1802 to 1805, reflecting the reopening of the slave trade, which eased pressure on the market. Prices then stabilized from 1805 to 1814. Buyers paid higher prices for men than women, and higher prices for adults than children. Although the prices of slaves of different origins generally rose and fell together, buyers always paid more for Louisiana born "creole" slaves than for slaves from Africa, the Caribbean, or the United States. Buyers did not pay consistently higher prices for slaves of any particular African region, indicating that they did not really care where on the continent African slaves came from.⁶⁹

Nevertheless the regional origins of African slaves appear in newspaper advertisements for their sale as if their ethnic and national origins mattered to purchasers. In 1806 Henry Molier & Co. advertised the sale of "12 Young Brute Negroes of the Mandingo and Congo nations, fit for a sugar estate."⁷⁰ E. Frazier & Co. advertised the sale of twenty-five "Congo Negroes" at Port Gibson in 1807.⁷¹ One advertisement in 1808 enticed planters with news of a public auction of sixty-two slaves, some of whom were "New Negroes of the Man-

dango Nation” who had been in the country for two years.⁷² In 1810 John McDonough purchased thirteen Congo slaves from the Maryland Louisiana Company for a total of \$6,050. The slaves included Jean Louis, a “first rate negro of the Congo Nation, being acquainted with the use of the axe, hoe, spade, [?], basket making and other kinds of plantation work having been 3 years in the country”; his wife, Rose, a “good field wench in the country since three years” and their son William; Clarissa and her child Sally; François and his wife, Henrietta; Antielle and his wife, Jannaton; Atys; Nancy; and Pauline, a “strong wench in the country since 3 years acquainted with house & plantation work,” and her son Hardtime.⁷³ Even when they recognized differences of national origin among enslaved people, slave-owners lumped all slaves together under the racist category “Negro.” In 1806, for instance, a slaveowner advertised in the *Moniteur de Louisiane* for the recovery of “three Negro men, one of the Congo nation and another of the Bambara, and another from a nation whose name I have forgotten.”⁷⁴ Time, distance, and the homogenizing force of slavery began to efface the national identities of enslaved men and women in the minds of their owners.

One planter who did pay attention to the African origins of the slaves he purchased was William Dunbar. In 1807 he requested that the Charleston firm of Tunno & Price purchase £3,000 worth of African slaves and ship them to his factors in New Orleans, specifically instructing the merchants to procure Africans between the ages of twelve and twenty-one, “well formed & robust,” with one-quarter to one-half being girls or women. He preferred slaves from certain parts of Africa over others but understood that he was unlikely to receive the kind of Africans he wanted: “The Iboa nation lies under a prejudice here & may be excluded. There are certain nations from the interior of africa, the individuals of which I have always found more Civilized, at least better disposed than those nearer the Coast, such as Bornon, Houssa, Zanfara, Zegzeg, Kapina, Tombootoo, all or near the river Niger, but I suppose they do not arrive in any considerable numbers and [are] always confounded with other nations who have made

them prisoners.”⁷⁵ Dunbar knew that Atlantic slave traders drew from vast slave-supplying hinterlands in Africa, gathering slaves from many different ethnic groups and nations and cramming them together—confounding them, as he put it—in the slave ships that crossed the Atlantic. And after collecting their cargo, Atlantic slave traders sailed to many different ports in the Americas, where the slaves were sold and dispersed. In the context of the slave trade as a whole, New Orleans was a minor destination for Atlantic slavers, even during the years of peak importation at the beginning of the sugar boom. The broader patterns of the transatlantic and intra-Caribbean slave trade, not the preferences of local planters, dictated which Africans would end up in the lower Mississippi Valley.⁷⁶

Local planters connived with smugglers and privateers to bring African slaves into the Orleans Territory. “These abuses are seen and regretted,” Claiborne complained to Jefferson, “but (under existing circumstances) cannot be prevented.”⁷⁷ The smugglers were not engaged in a systematic program of slave smuggling but were ad hoc and opportunistic entrepreneurs. They were mostly privateers who preyed on Spanish shipping in the Caribbean, and most of the slaves they smuggled into the United States were captured from slavers sailing for Havana and other Spanish American ports.⁷⁸ The privateers’ operations mixed adventure with legal wrangling. For instance, Luis Aury captured the *Mossavito*, a Portuguese slaver, off the coast of Cuba in 1810. He put a prize crew on board the vessel and instructed them to take it to St. Bartholemews. After being chased by a British cruiser for three days, the *Mossavito* sailed to New Orleans for provisions then to “long island,” about twenty leagues from New Orleans in La Fourche. There the crew burned the ship and sold the slaves, 100 in all, to a Mr. Fortier for \$17,000. All of this was attested to by Louis Crispin, a free man of color who described himself as a “subject of the Empire of Hayti.” After sailing out of Aux Cayes in a shallop, Crispin had encountered Aury’s corsair the *Guillaume* and joined its crew. When the *Guillaume* captured the *Mossavito*, Crispin boarded the slaver as part of the prize crew and ended up in New Orleans, where Aury

paid him \$126. Slave smuggling had its rewards, even for a free man of color from Haiti.⁷⁹

The laws against slave smuggling did not liberate smuggled slaves.⁸⁰ In February 1810 the *Alerta* sailed from the coast of Africa laden with 153 slaves. Four months later, it was captured about thirty miles south of Havana by the French privateer *L'Epine*, which transferred its crew to the slaver and headed for New Orleans "with the intention, as the Captain frequently said, of smuggling the slaves into the Territory and selling them." But the *Alerta* was wrecked in shallow water off the coast of Louisiana, which is where the vessel's desperate crew were discovered "endeavoring to pick up a miserable and precarious subsistence by catching pelicans for their food." After extensive litigation, 145 slaves from the *Alerta* (60 men, 52 boys—including 1 who was very sick—and 33 women and girls) were sold in New Orleans for a total of \$44,975.⁸¹

The lawless tides of Atlantic commerce also swept up a young Brazilian man named Candido Gomez, the son of a slave woman and her owner from Salvador, Brazil. He was supposed to have been a shoemaker. Sometime around 1810, Gomez's father "placed him on board of a vessel bound for the coast of Guinea," allegedly as a punishment for drunkenness. His vessel, the *Falcon*, was captured by privateers near Havana and taken to Louisiana, where he was sold with other Africans at the smugglers' roost of Grande Terre. Several years later, Gomez sued for his freedom in a New Orleans court, but ultimately lost his case because he could not prove he had been free in Brazil, nor did the laws prohibiting the illegal importation of slaves into Louisiana allow for his emancipation. The severe judgment of the Louisiana Supreme Court was that the plaintiff "cannot be listened to in a court of justice."⁸²

Federal officials in New Orleans complained to their superiors about the ineffectiveness of laws prohibiting the importation of slaves. Worried that African slaves imported into Mobile were being transported from Spanish Florida to the United States, Governor Claiborne urged Commodore John Shaw to patrol the Gulf Coast as far as

the Perdido River and to capture “any Vessel from a Foreign Port, with Slaves on board, that you may find hovering on our Coast or attempting to enter the Bay of Mobile.”⁸³ After the annexation of West Florida, smuggling through Barataria became the bigger problem. Collector of Customs Thomas Williams contended that slave smuggling could not be prevented without “a vigilant cooperation of the Navy,” but he complained that the Navy lacked the requisite vessels and manpower to enforce the laws.⁸⁴ Over the next two years, the Baratarian smugglers (including Jean Lafitte) became bolder and better organized, preying on Spanish vessels at will, smuggling slaves into the territory with impunity, and clashing with local militias and customs officials. The Baratarian smugglers and the U.S. government famously made their peace when the British invaded Louisiana in December of 1814, but when peace resumed so did the illegal slave trade. The crannied coast, local planters’ demand for Africans, and a feeble naval presence made it difficult to stop slave smuggling.

International politics brought still more Caribbean slaves to New Orleans. Thousands of the refugees who had fled St. Domingue in the 1790s ended up in Cuba, where they made important contributions to the development of coffee and sugar. When Napoleon removed Ferdinand VII from the throne of Spain and replaced him with Joseph Bonaparte in 1808, Cuban loyalists began to attack the French-speaking refugee communities on the island. After riots erupted in Havana in March of 1809, the Francophone refugees from St. Domingue began to abandon Cuba. Ten thousand of them fled to New Orleans over the following year, including more than three thousand free people of color and another three thousand slaves. “We are in a fair way of being over run with french people & Negroes from St. Iago, Havana & other ports in Cuba,” complained James Sterrett, a former U.S. army officer living in New Orleans.⁸⁵ The refugees’ arrival was part of the long shadow cast over Louisiana by the slave rebellion in St. Domingue.

The slaves and free black migrants were allowed entry as a humanitarian gesture toward the white refugees, whom Claiborne described

as “persons of good character . . . industrious mechanics and planters.” He did not expect the blacks to pose a threat to the safety of the territory, but he wanted to prevent too many from arriving in New Orleans at once.⁸⁶ Anticipating that no more than three hundred slaves would arrive with the white refugees, he intended to consider each case on its own merits.⁸⁷ In the meantime, the New Orleans City Council established a relief committee and welfare fund to provide the white refugees with clothing, shelter, and medical care. The French-language newspapers exhorted the citizens to contribute to the philanthropic project.⁸⁸ In addition, Francophone Louisianans and their allies lobbied to allow the refugees to bring their slaves into Louisiana, insisting that the slaves were “faithful domestics” and no threat to the territory.⁸⁹ The claim was plausible because more than two-thirds of the refugees’ slaves were women and children, who were not considered dangerous.⁹⁰ Mayor James Mather explained to Claiborne that the refugees’ slaves were “trained up to the habits of strict discipline and consist wholly of affricans bought up from Guineamen in the Island of Cuba, or of faithful slaves who have fled with their masters from St. Domingo as early as the year 1803.”⁹¹ Claiborne finally allowed the slave-owning refugees to retain their slaves after posting security. Congress ultimately settled the matter by remitting the penalties that refugees from Cuba had incurred in the effort to bring their slaves into the United States but instructing Claiborne to divert further immigration away from Louisiana.⁹²

Unsatiated by the flow of Africans and Caribbean slaves to the Deep South, planters and merchants began to transplant slaves from the eastern United States to the sugar districts of the Orleans Territory. In 1807 P. F. Dubourg & Company advertised the sale of 103 slaves from Maryland “accustomed to plantation work,” to be sold in families forming two large gangs.⁹³ In 1809 the Louisiana planter Daniel Clark suggested to his business partner in Philadelphia that the two men enter into a venture to bring slaves from Virginia to the Orleans Territory. Clark planned to sell some of the slaves immediately upon their arrival, to pay for initial costs of the venture, while the re-

mainder of the slaves would either be set to work on Clark's lands or be sold in small groups "either to emigrants who daily flock here, or to people desirous of bettering there situation by becoming planters."⁹⁴ In May 1811 the New Orleans firm of Fortier & Son advertised the sale of fifteen slaves, all from the same plantation in South Carolina. They were being sold "to extinguish a mortgage," according to the advertisement. The slaves included two families: George (a wagoner), his wife, Priscilla, and their two children, Dinah and Christmas; and Isaac (a sawyer), his wife, Nancy, and their two children, Jack and Monday. The remaining slaves included two women, Corry and Rose, and five men, Jacque, Jack, Thom, Mouzon, and March. The family affiliations of these seven slaves were not recorded.⁹⁵ The mercantile correspondence, newspaper advertisements, and business records that document the nascent internal slave trade do not reveal very much about enslaved people's own consciousness, but when the Louisiana sugar planter John McDonough, Jr., requested that his father send him some slaves from Baltimore early in 1804, the elder McDonough wrote back, "There is no Negroes to be got hear that would be willing to go to your countree."⁹⁶ Already, it seems, the cane fields had earned a bad reputation among slaves in the eastern United States.

Transatlantic currents of commerce and politics thus swelled Louisiana's slave population and changed its composition in the two decades following the outbreak of civil war in St. Domingue. Estate inventories from the period 1790 to 1794 reveal that almost half (47 percent) of the slave population was born in Louisiana. The African population was heterogeneous, with 13 percent of the slaves coming from the Bight of Benin, 12 percent from Senegambia, 7 percent from Central Africa, 5 percent from Sierra Leone, and 4 percent from the Bight of Biafra. Slaves from the British mainland of North America and the Caribbean accounted for less than 6 percent of the slave population. The remaining slaves included people from the Gold Coast and Mozambique, and American Indians. Two decades of commercial development produced a new ethnic pattern. Estate invento-

ries for 1810 to 1814 reveal a substantial increase in the proportion of slaves from West-Central Africa, British North America, and the Caribbean. Enslaved people born in Louisiana remained the most numerous group, but their proportion declined to 40 percent of the slave population. West-Central Africans became the second most numerous group, accounting for 16 percent of the slave population, with British North American slaves increased to 10 percent. Slaves from the Bight of Benin and Senegambia together declined to 15 percent of the slave population, while slaves from the Caribbean increased to 5 percent. Slaves from Sierra Leone slightly increased, while those from the Bight of Biafra slightly decreased. In short, the proportion of the slave population from West-Central Africa, British North America, and the Caribbean increased from 12 percent to 31 percent, while almost every other group's share declined.⁹⁷ It appears that John Mills, a planter in Bayou Sara, was basically correct when he reported to a New York cousin in 1807, "Great numbers of Affricans has been brought to this country lately, as well as great numbers brought down the River from Kentucky, Cumberland Virginia, Maryland &."⁹⁸ The amalgamation of these disparate newcomers with the extant slave population would become a central dynamic of the region's African American cultural formation throughout the first half of the nineteenth century.

The growing slave population troubled many white observers. Charles Robin observed that the white inhabitants of Pointe Coupee, surrounded by their slaves, lived in a constant state of fear. "One can see how gnawing is the anxiety," he wrote, "which far from diminishing with time, is growing, because the colored population is growing faster than that of the whites."⁹⁹ Fearing that the scenes of rebellion in St. Domingue would replay themselves in Louisiana, Isaac Briggs blasted the importation of slaves into the Orleans Territory as a "crying, dangerous, national Sin," and warned Thomas Jefferson that the slaves were "already discontented and disposed to throw off their yoke—on the least prospect of success."¹⁰⁰ John Mills agreed. "The great numbers [of slaves] daily imported is alarming to the thinking

part of the people,” he wrote to his cousin. “I am fearful that unless a stop is soon put to the increasing of the number, that the day is fast approaching when the Whites will fall a sacrifice to the Blacks.”¹⁰¹ The same commercial expansion that brought economic opportunity to New Orleans and its hinterland now appeared to threaten the region with the catastrophe of slave rebellion.

“order and subordination”

Every slave society has been the scene of constant struggle between enslaved people and their owners, but the balance of power between them—and hence the forms their struggles take—has varied at different times and in different places.¹⁰² During the early years of the sugar boom in lower Louisiana, commercial development and political turmoil increased opportunities for individual and collective resistance by slaves, which in turn provoked new responses from local authorities. Moreover, the region was home to a large and growing population of free people of color whose sympathies and allegiances were complex. Determining their rights and responsibilities was another major challenge facing U.S. officials after the Louisiana Purchase. From the booming port of New Orleans to the borderland of Natchitoches, authorities in lower Louisiana struggled to keep the peace in a country Isaac Briggs called a “Pandemonium.”¹⁰³

The first line of defense was the plantation itself. Enslaved people were put to work, kept under close watch, and punished within its confines. John Mills observed the system in all its brutality. Louisiana slaves were “always under the eye of their Master or Overseer, or what is sometimes more unfortunate for them, under a *Driver*,” he explained in his letter to his cousin. Slaves who violated the rules of the plantation were whipped by the driver or overseer: “three stakes is drove into the ground in a triangular manner, about 6 feet apart. the culprit is told to lie down, (which they will do without a murmur), flat on the belly. the Arms is then extended out, side ways, and each hand tied to a stake hard and fast. The feet is both tied to the third

stake, all stretched tight, the overseer, or driver then steps back 7, 8 or ten feet and with a raw hide whip about 7 feet long well plaited, fixed to a handle about 18 inches long, lays on with great force and address across the Buttocks, and if they please to assert themselves, they cut 7 or 8 inches long at every stroke." Aware that his northern relation would be shocked at such bloodletting, Mills condemned and defended slavery at the same time. "You must know," he reasoned, "that unless there is order and subordination kept up, amongst negroes, they would soon be masters, instead of Slaves, for tho they are black, they have as great a propensity to command and be tyrants as white people generally has."¹⁰⁴ The cruelty of slavery became its own justification.

Slaveowners tried to maintain personal dominion over their own slaves, but the daily routine of commerce removed slaves from their oversight. Many owners allowed their slaves to trade with *caboteurs* who peddled goods from canoes and pirogues on the region's many waterways, and even to sell produce and goods in the New Orleans and Natchez markets. Public authority stepped in to quash slaves' independent economic activity and to curtail their geographic mobility.¹⁰⁵ One of Governor William Claiborne's first directives to local commandants in the Orleans Territory, for instance, was to "to prevent slaves from wandering about either day or night, without passes, or from trading among themselves, or with free people without permission from their owners."¹⁰⁶ The local patrols that policed the countryside performed a double service for slaveowners. They compensated for the owners' inability to control their own slaves while at the same time driving the slaves back to their owners for protection.¹⁰⁷ Pierre-Louis Berquin-Duvallon observed that slaves traveling through the woods at night in Louisiana "frequently meet a patrol of the whites, who tie them up and flog them, and then send them home."¹⁰⁸

Some slaves took advantage of the commercial pathways in and out of New Orleans to escape from slavery, but not all who tried succeeded. Local officials suspected the boatmen who plied the waters

around New Orleans of assisting runaway slaves. In 1808, the commander of Fort St. John complained to the mayor of New Orleans about the movement of slaves across Lake Pontchartrain. "Continually a multitude of negroes and mulattoes come and go by canoe, calling themselves fishermen," explained Lieutenant Marshall, and "under this pretext run-away negroes go through who from then on are lost to their masters."¹⁰⁹ Two years later, the City Council decreed that men going from New Orleans to Lake Pontchartrain to fish must have a pass that included their name and description.¹¹⁰ Local authorities also suspected that New Orleans's physical expansion was creating new hiding places where slaves and free people could drink, gamble, and trade beyond the reach of the law. "The establishment of the Faubourgs without number around the City adds a large surface of land in the quarters already existing," the City Council argued in 1808. "These new Faubourgs will be for a long time yet without inhabitants, they will serve as a harbor of thieves, to people who receive stolen goods and to run-away negroes."¹¹¹ And in 1812 the council complained that "a number of slaves, among whom runaways are even found, frequently indulge in games of chance at various places in the City and especially in the Faubourg St. Marie, which incite them to rob their masters and commit thefts elsewhere."¹¹²

Slaves escaped New Orleans on ships bound for foreign ports. In 1804 Claiborne directed the commander of the station at Belize to inspect all vessels departing from the mouth of the Mississippi because "Negroes belonging to persons residing in this city and its vicinity often escape from the service of their Masters and by concealing themselves on board of Vessels (sometimes by the connivance of the Captain or Crew) pass out of the province."¹¹³ One advertisement for a fugitive slave in 1805 cautioned that the man would "pretend to be free and try to get employment on board a ship and get a berth to go abroad."¹¹⁴ Similarly, Elijah Smith of Natchez wrote to Nathaniel Evans in 1810 seeking two runaways, one of whom "is something of a Sailor which induces us to suppose that he may attempt to go to New Orleans and get on Board a Vessel."¹¹⁵ The Black Code adopted by the

Louisiana legislature in 1806 to regulate the behavior of slaves and free people of color permitted slaveowners to sue ship captains for hiring a slave without permission from the slave's owner. The legislature strengthened this provision in 1816, making ship captains liable to criminal prosecution and civil penalties for hiring black men without the permission of their owners if they were slaves, or without free papers if they claimed to be free.¹¹⁶

With or without the permission of their masters, some slaves shipped out to sea. Several incidents reveal the travail of slaves who attempted to escape from New Orleans by that route. In June 1804, George Morgan wrote to David Rees from New Orleans, explaining that he had found Rees's slave Dick concealed on board the ship *Augusta*. The ship steward had betrayed the runaway to Morgan, thereupon claiming a reward. Morgan refused to pay, however, believing that the steward had concocted the entire scheme "with the hope of gain." He took Dick to the New Orleans jail, "where I ordered him a dozen [lashes] which were sufficient to make him remember," and placed him in irons to be shipped back to Rees. Morgan concluded the story with a warning: "[Dick] says that Adam & the other boy of yours advised him to run off. I hope you have not had any trouble with them yet but I think you will have to look sharp after them."¹¹⁷

Other slaves got farther before being captured. One New Orleans slaveowner petitioned Governor Claiborne for a passport to travel to the Mexican port of Campeche, where his slave Isidore had been imprisoned after escaping from New Orleans on the *San Francisco de Borghe*. Isidore had been discovered by the captain while at sea and incarcerated once the vessel arrived in port.¹¹⁸ Though Isidore traveled far, he did not get so far as a man named John Wild. On the first of May 1807, the *Thomas Jefferson* sailed from New Orleans bound for Liverpool. According to the deposition of the ship's second mate, Francis Whitmill, the entire crew was surprised when "a dark mulattoe who called himself John Wild appeared on deck from his concealment in the forecastle." Wild declared himself to be "a freeman born" but had been taken from Charleston to New Orleans by a cap-

tain who “sold him along with some slaves.” When the *Thomas Jefferson* arrived in Liverpool, the captain had Wild “secured on deck with a watch over him” while he went ashore to consult with the American consul. Before the captain returned, Wild and several of the crew deserted the vessel. But Wild did not breathe the free air of England for long. According to Whitmill, he was impressed into His Britannic Majesty’s Navy. Back in New Orleans, the Reverend Philemon Chase sued the captain of the *Thomas Jefferson* for the loss of his slave “Jack.”¹¹⁹

Runaways taken up in New Orleans were thrown in jail and—after the New Orleans City Council established a chain gang in 1805—compelled to join other slaves laboring on public works. Slavery and municipal progress were thus conjoined in New Orleans, where chained slaves kept up the levee, demolished and erected public buildings, cleaned the streets, and expanded the city beyond its colonial boundaries.¹²⁰ City officials tinkered with the regulations governing the use of slave labor on public works. They instituted and revoked compensation for owners of chained slaves, haggled over the proper rations of food and clothing, and disputed claims for slaves injured or lost while working on the public account. They even extended the chain-gang system to female slaves held in the city jail. Rather than allow the jailed women “to lie around idle and lazy,” Major Nicholas Girod argued in 1813 that “the shame and humiliation they would experience in seeing themselves led to these laborious duties, would serve as a greater punishment, more keenly felt than even the prison or the lash.”¹²¹ An unequivocal public endorsement of slavery, the chain-gang system provided slaveowners with another instrument for disciplining their slaves while, at the same time, affording the city a cheap source of labor for civic improvement, which had become an important measure of progress in the United States. Local officials’ experience using slave labor on public works would prepare them well for the dangerous winter of 1814–15, when a veritable legion of slaves was compelled to dig the ditches and erect the fortifications that stood between the British and the city of New Orleans.

A new political as well as commercial geography created opportunities for some slaves to escape. Just as slaves had often fled from Carolina and Georgia to Florida in the colonial era, so too did they run to Spanish territory once the Louisiana Purchase redrew the lines of sovereignty in the Deep South.¹²² In the summer of 1804 the American civil and military commandant of the district of Natchitoches, Edward Turner, reported to Governor Claiborne that planters in his district were “extremely and justly alarmed” at rumors that Spanish authorities had issued a decree declaring all slaves entering their jurisdiction to be free.¹²³ Months later Turner reported that Spanish emissaries were “mediating mischief” in Natchitoches. Nine slaves had already run off to Nacogdoches; thirty in all were embroiled in the conspiracy. Four runaways had dared to return “to rouse and stimulate their confederates.”¹²⁴ The enraged slaveowners in Natchitoches were prepared to march on Nacogdoches to retrieve their slaves. “If something is not immediately done, they will not have a Slave left in three months,” warned Turner.¹²⁵ Casa Calvo, Louisiana’s last Spanish governor, assured Claiborne that the Spanish had no intention of freeing any slaves, and he promised that any fugitive slave found in Spanish territory would be returned to his or her owner—if the owner pledged not to injure, maltreat, or abuse the slave on account of the flight.¹²⁶

After the establishment of the “Neutral Ground” between Louisiana and Texas in the fall of 1806, enslaved men and women continued to seek refuge across the border, but they did not always find it. “The evil Cannot be born & Something Must be done about it,” protested John Sibley from Natchitoches in 1807.¹²⁷ Claiborne pressed the Spanish authorities to stop giving asylum to slaves and to return those who had crossed over. Among them, Claiborne asserted in 1809, was a band of thirty slaves who “were furnished all with Spanish Cockades at Nacogdoches, a dance given them, and since have been marched off to the Trinity River, singing Long live Ferdinand the Seventh.”¹²⁸ Their brief freedom ended some months later when the governor of Texas, Manuel de Salcedo, restored the slaves to their saber-rattling

owners.¹²⁹ Whether they successfully escaped from slavery or not, slaves who ran to Nacogdoches and New Orleans, or who stowed away on vessels bound for foreign ports, or who returned through the wilderness to the eastern seaboard, challenged their owners' power over them. One unintended but inevitable consequence of their persistent efforts to escape from slavery was the perpetual reinvention of punitive institutions—the whip, the patrol, and the jail, to name a few—that kept enslaved people in their places.¹³⁰

Lower Louisiana's conspicuous and growing number of free people of color complicated the problem of controlling the slave population. Neither slaves nor citizens, free people of color occupied an intermediate social position, which Louisiana's public officials struggled to understand and define. Were free people of color subversive or merely subaltern? Would they endanger or defend plantation society? These were the questions that lay behind Benjamin Morgan's query to Chandler Price shortly before the United States took over Louisiana. "Upon what footing will the free quadroon mulatto & black people stand; will they be entitled to the rights of citizens or not?" he asked. Morgan argued that the attitude of the free people of color toward the United States depended on the policy of the government toward them: "They may be made good citizens or formidable abettors of the black people."¹³¹

Louisiana's free colored population in the early nineteenth century was large, diverse, and increasing. A census in 1806 counted 3,350 free people of color in the Orleans Territory, or about 6.5 percent of the total population. More than two-thirds lived in or near New Orleans, where they made up about 13.5 percent of the city's population.¹³² Most had gained their freedom under Spanish rule, either through manumission or self-purchase, a right guaranteed to slaves under Spanish law. Almost two-thirds of all slaves emancipated in New Orleans during the Spanish era were women, reflecting the disproportionate number of women in the slave population of New Orleans, where opportunities to earn money were greater than in the countryside.¹³³ The influx of refugees from Cuba in 1809 brought an-

other 3,000 free people of color to Louisiana (including more than 2,600 women and children), with most of these ending up in New Orleans.¹³⁴ By 1810 the number of free people of color in the Orleans Territory had more than doubled to over 7,500, of whom almost 6,000 lived in or near New Orleans. Free people of color made up 10 percent of the total population in the Orleans Territory and more than 18 percent of all free people. They made up 20 percent of the total population in or near New Orleans and almost 40 percent of the free population there, which made New Orleans home to the largest proportion of free people of color in any city in the United States.¹³⁵

Meaningful entitlements distinguished free people of color from slaves. The law allowed free people to enter into civil contracts, marry, accumulate property, and pass it to their heirs.¹³⁶ Some even owned slaves. An 1805 census of New Orleans revealed 278 households headed by free people of color, of which 112 (40.3 percent) included slaves.¹³⁷ One property-owning man of color in New Orleans was James Johnson, who had once been the slave of Henry Clay's parents. Writing to the senator in 1807, Johnson reported that he owned a small grocery and livery stable and was "doing something for myself." He had earned enough money to purchase the freedom of his brother Daniel, then in the possession of Henry Clay's brother John, a merchant in New Orleans. Later that year, John Clay sold Daniel to James Bristow, who then sold him to Henry Clay, who emancipated him at Johnson's behest.¹³⁸ A small number of free men of color became substantial planters. When Louis Dusau of Conti Street died in 1814, for instance, he owned a sugar plantation at Bonnet Carré with thirty-seven slaves, a farm in Metairie with three slaves, a city lot, and a tract of land in Attakapas.¹³⁹ Free men and women of color were a vital part of the urban economy.

The law enlisted free people of color to help manage and control the slave population. The 1806 Black Code required every plantation to have "a white or free colored man as manager or overseer."¹⁴⁰ One such overseer was Jacob, a free black man, who managed a plantation

owned by an order of Ursuline nuns. From 1796 until his death in 1811, he supervised “a very fine gang of negroes” who produced milk, vegetables, rice, corn, and fuel for the Ursulines.¹⁴¹ In 1805 the New Orleans City Council decreed that night patrols should be composed of a captain, eight subaltern officers, and twenty-four men, including six free men of color. Five years later, a new regulation authorized “colored men” to serve on night patrols, “provided that the said colored men are free landowners and well known” in their communities.¹⁴² Similarly, in 1812 the council decided to form two companies of firemen from “free colored men, well known and property owners.”¹⁴³ In all these instances, the council limited the enlistment of free men of color to the wealthiest and most respectable elements of the population—men who were presumed to have a stake in the social order and could be trusted in its defense.

At the same time, free people of color suffered under legal and social disabilities that subordinated them as a group to white people. Spanish authorities adopted sumptuary clothing laws for free women of color, restricted the ability of free people of color to carry guns and ride horses, and required them to show deference to white men and women. They also prohibited free people of color from marrying white people.¹⁴⁴ (This last restriction did not prevent sexual relations between free people of color and whites, which were frequently acknowledged in legal documents.)¹⁴⁵ The 1806 Black Code retained most of the Spanish discriminations and eliminated the right of self-purchase that had been so important in the growth of the free population of color.¹⁴⁶ The exclusion of free people of color from the political “people” became complete in 1811, when the U.S. Congress excluded them from participating in the creation of the new state government for Louisiana.¹⁴⁷ Neither slaves nor citizens, free people of color lived in a legal limbo.

They had expected better. Early in 1804, free men of color “universally mounted the Eagle in their Hats” and declared their loyalty to the United States.¹⁴⁸ Fifty-four men of color calling themselves “free Citizens” avowed “a lively Joy” that Louisiana had joined the United

States, and in a petition to Governor Claiborne, they expressed confidence in the justice of their new government. Having fought in the colonial militia under Spanish rule, the petitioners reminded Claiborne of their record and offered to serve the United States “with fidelity and zeal” as a volunteer corps.¹⁴⁹ The petition inaugurated a decade-long contest between friends and foes of the free colored militia over whether they would be commissioned, or, in other words, whether the government and white Louisianians would formally enlist free people of color in the defense of plantation society and treat them as citizens. To do so would violate slavery’s racist justifications; to fail to do so would alienate a large class of people and possibly throw them into an alliance with the slaves.¹⁵⁰

The militia issue was complicated by international tension, local conflict between free people of color and whites, and the influx of St. Domingue refugees. In the spring of 1806, as tensions between Spain and the United States escalated on the Louisiana-Texas border, some officials in New Orleans suspected that disaffected free men of color might form a fifth column.¹⁵¹ Reports of a conspiracy among the free men of color led Claiborne to conclude that they had been “tamper’d with” by Spanish agents, but he did not take any direct action other than ordering nightly patrols in New Orleans.¹⁵² In 1808 city councilors in New Orleans discovered that a free man of color had been offering fencing lessons to other men of color and urged the mayor to stop him. One official complained that “mulattoes have the insolence to challenge whites to a duel” and warned that the fencing lessons might have “very disastrous consequences.” White Louisianians must have been relieved when the mayor banned free men of color from teaching the martial arts to their brethren. In New Orleans, it seems, good fencers did not make good neighbors—especially when they were colored.¹⁵³

The free colored population of Louisiana included men who had fought in St. Domingue. In 1804 a slave named Marseille was arrested on suspicion of having served with the “insurgent armies” in St. Domingue. The City Council ordered him deported, but allowed him to

remain when his owner posted a \$500 bond for his good behavior.¹⁵⁴ A few months later, “a colored man named Dutaque, accused of having taken a very active part in the revolt of St. Domingo,” was discovered on board a vessel in the river. The City Council demanded that the governor apprehend the man “so that the city may be protected from such a dangerous character.”¹⁵⁵ In 1811 authorities in New Orleans arrested a Congolese man who had been emancipated by the French government in St. Domingue in return for his military service, before coming to New Orleans.¹⁵⁶ More notable was Charles Savary, who had been the mayor of Saint-Marc in St. Domingue. He was alleged to have been the brother of Vincent Ogé, the pioneering spokesman for the rights of free people of color in St. Domingue. When Saint-Marc was under British occupation, Savary had commanded a colonial infantry corps known as the Prince de Galles. He eventually abandoned St. Domingue and ended up in Louisiana.¹⁵⁷

The presence of such men troubled local officials. Governor Claiborne estimated that there were at least eight hundred free men of color capable of bearing arms in New Orleans in 1810. “Their conduct hitherto has been correct,” Claiborne warned, but “in a country like this, where the negro population is so considerable, they should be carefully watched.”¹⁵⁸ The Louisiana state legislature finally organized a free colored militia in 1812, but it restricted enrollment to a small number of propertied, native-born men and required them to serve under white officers. The poor and alien were excluded. The act was a grudging acknowledgment of the colored Creoles’ place above slaves—but below whites. It was adopted with war looming and Louisiana widely believed to be a prime British target, which suggests that the legislators might have seen it as a merely temporary measure.¹⁵⁹

The commercial dynamism and political turbulence in lower Louisiana brought new prospects for social disorder. Public officials believed that there were too many “unfortunate strangers” arriving in the region, too many slaves toiling in the plantation districts, too many fugitives absconding from their owners, too many armed free

men of color, and that there was too much communication among all these groups.¹⁶⁰ In response to the nettlesome realities of an expanding slave country, the authorities tried to curb foreign slave importation to keep out dangerous elements. They tried to regulate the movement of slaves along the river and between town and country. They tried to enlist the most reputable free people of color in defense of slavery. These policies were plainly motivated by the fear of slave insurrection, which, as it turns out, was well grounded.

“colours displayed and full of arrogance”

Few people today have ever heard of it, but the largest slave rebellion in the history of the United States took place in the sugar parishes above New Orleans early in 1811. The rebellion was an important event because it dramatically expressed the deep discontent among enslaved people who endured the first phase of the sugar boom in lower Louisiana, and also because it starkly exposed the overwhelming military force that always buttressed slavery but was rarely apparent. As with so many other instances of slave conspiracy and rebellion, evidence concerning the rebellion is fragmentary, and most of it was produced by people directly involved in the suppression of the rebellion. Inevitably the sources (which include correspondence among government officials, court records and trial transcripts, and newspaper articles) reveal more about how the rebellion ended than why it began. These gaps and biases should be regarded not merely as a problem but as a symptom of the imbalance of power that sustained slavery and allowed it to spread.¹⁶¹

The rebellion took place on the Mississippi River’s “German Coast,” St. John the Baptist and St. Charles Parishes, a district that was making the bittersweet transition to sugar. In the 1780s and 1790s, the German Coast had been a district of midsize plantations and farms. Its principal crops were indigo and rice, and a majority of its population was enslaved.¹⁶² Then came the sugar boom. From 1785 to 1810, the population of the German Coast almost doubled,

from 3,203 to 6,281, while the proportion of slaves in the district increased slightly from about 58 percent to 61 percent of the population. The year of the Louisiana Purchase, planters in St. Charles produced more than 1.3 million pounds of sugar, with a handful of big planters leading the way. The Meullion, Destréhan, and Labranche plantations together accounted for more than half of the sugar produced in the parish.¹⁶³ Francophone planters dominated the early sugar economy on the German Coast, but a few Anglo-American capitalists had joined them by 1810. Among them were William Kenner, James Brown, and Richard Butler. Kenner had migrated to the Natchez district of Mississippi in the 1790s and had married the daughter of one of the region's biggest planters. He moved to New Orleans and established a mercantile business in partnership with Stephen Henderson. The partners' varied economic pursuits included sugar planting and the importation of African slaves via Charleston.¹⁶⁴ James Brown, another Virginian, had especially close ties to political leadership in Kentucky, where his brother served as a U.S. senator. Brown himself served as the U.S. attorney general in the Orleans Territory and was elected to represent the German Coast in the convention that drafted Louisiana's first state constitution. In 1812 he became one of the state's first two senators.¹⁶⁵ Richard Butler was one of many former U.S. military officers who established themselves in the lower Mississippi Valley. Like Kenner, Butler married the daughter of a wealthy Natchez-district planter, whose local ties brought him into good standing with the established planter elite of lower Louisiana.¹⁶⁶ The appearance of such men among the planters of the German Coast helped to integrate lower Louisiana's sugar districts into the United States.

The slave rebellion ran its course along the eastern bank of the Mississippi River, where a ribbon of particularly large plantations ornamented the landscape. Here lived one of the densest concentrations of slaves in North America, comparable to that in the rice districts of the Carolina lowcountry. According to the 1810 census, 274 whites, 89 free persons of color, and 1,480 slaves inhabited the households

from Manuel Andry's plantation, where the rebellion began, to Zenon Trudeau's plantation, the southernmost plantation in St. Charles Parish. Eighty-six percent of households included slaves, and the average number of slaves in those households was 43. As the rebels marched down the river toward New Orleans, the plantations they challenged—Picou, Brown, Trépagnier, Bernoudy, Destréhan, Fortier, Labranche, Piseros, Meuillon, Trudeau—were larger and were home to more slaves.¹⁶⁷

The German Coast slave population was diverse, not monolithic. An analysis of estate inventories from the first decade of the nineteenth century suggests that more than half of the enslaved people in the region had been born outside of Louisiana. These foreigners included substantial proportions of people from Central Africa, Sierra Leone, the Bight of Benin, and Senegambia. Roughly one in every twenty slaves had been in the Caribbean or the eastern United States, and some of the Africans had probably lived in the Caribbean before arriving in Louisiana. The diversity of the slave population was an obstacle to collective resistance, though obviously not an insurmountable one.¹⁶⁸

Enslaved people had not been dormant before the rebellion. In 1796 local authorities foiled what they believed to be a large-scale plot by slaves to revolt during the Easter mass, but as the details of the plot were extracted by the lash, the extent and even existence of an actual conspiracy cannot be presumed. Slaveowners sometimes concocted rebellions out of rumors.¹⁶⁹ It is more certain that fugitive bands lurked in the swamps. In 1805 a patrol headed by Louis Planchard arrested four runaway slaves, three men and one woman, and recovered some stolen property in their possession. The woman, Celeste, disclosed that she had run away from her owner about two months earlier and joined a group of thirteen runaways, many of whom were women.¹⁷⁰ In 1808 Charles Paquet, a free Negro, was found guilty of harboring runaway slaves and was forced to pay a considerable fine. The slaves—Honoré, Lindor, and Gabriel, who belonged to prominent planters in St. Charles Parish—had maintained

clandestine ties to their neighborhood even as they hid out in the cypress swamp. Armed and dangerous, they procured food from a slave woman named Rosette on Delhomme's plantation, killed livestock on Piseros's and Reine's plantations, joined and left other bands of fugitives, and roamed the countryside. Honoré was discovered in Adélarde Fortier's slave quarters, and Lindor, hiding in Paquet's chimney. Gabriel remained abroad.¹⁷¹ Slaves known to have been runaways participated in the 1811 rebellion. Early in 1810, for instance, two slaves, Mandingo Charles and an Ibo man named Cracker, ran away. A year later, Cracker (or Croaker) was killed in the combat between the rebels and the authorities, and Charles was executed in the sanguinary judicial proceedings that followed.¹⁷² These patterns of *marronage* were not unusual in slave societies, nor did they usually lead to rebellion. Something more must explain the outbreak of a full-blown slave revolt early in 1811.

Political turmoil may well have influenced the timing of the slaves' revolt. A popular insurgency led by the priest Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla had broken out in Dolores, New Spain, in September 1810. Carrying the banner of the Virgin of Guadalupe, Ferdinand VII, and independence, the Hidalgo revolt swept through the Mexican Bajío. Within weeks an enormous rebel army had sacked Guanajuato, a city twice as large as New Orleans. Hidalgo advanced a radical social agenda, calling for an end to the tribute system and a reduction in taxes. He also proclaimed the abolition of slavery, and death to slaveowners who refused to free their chattel. The rebellion was not thwarted until mid-January, when royalist forces won a decisive victory outside of Mexico City. Hidalgo and the other rebel leaders were eventually captured and executed, their heads sent to Guanajuato for a grisly display.¹⁷³ News of the Hidalgo revolt quickly reached Texas and crossed into Louisiana, carried by rebel agents and frightened refugees. It is possible that slaves on the German Coast learned of the revolt, and even of Hidalgo's call for the abolition of slavery, through the clandestine channels of communication available to them.¹⁷⁴

Simultaneous turbulence in West Florida might also have inspired the rebellion. In September, a group of Anglo-Americans seized Baton Rouge, declared independence from Spain, and requested admission into the United States, to which President James Madison promptly acceded. In December, Governor Claiborne traveled to West Florida to organize the territory. He returned to New Orleans just after Christmas, having asserted American sovereignty from Baton Rouge to the Pearl River.¹⁷⁵ News of the West Florida takeover—and the rhetoric of liberty that accompanied it—may well have been communicated to the slaves in Louisiana by the *caboteurs* and slave rivermen who navigated the Mississippi and Lake Pontchartrain, or even unwittingly by the slaves' owners themselves. It was a risk considered by David Holmes, the governor of the Mississippi Territory, who wrote in late September, "At present I do not apprehend danger from any possible occurrence, except that of an insurrection of the Slaves."¹⁷⁶ Enslaved people on the German Coast might have seen the coup in West Florida as marking a propitious moment for their own uprising.

The historical record does not reveal exactly when or where or how the slaves formed their plot to rebel—perhaps at a New Year's revel or back in the swamp, sealed in oaths of blood and magic. Or it may have begun at the house of Charles Paquet, the free man of color convicted of harboring runaway slaves some years earlier. A suspected rebel, interrogated by the authorities on 14 January accused one Joseph the Spaniard of "having called the brigands to the levee before the habitation of Charles Paquet, free man of color, saying to them—Comrades come drink from the tap."¹⁷⁷ If true (and here it should be recalled that everything the slaves said under interrogation was probably extracted from them by torture), it is still not clear what this gesture meant, or when it was made, or who Joseph the Spaniard was. Perhaps this is the evidence that convinced General Wade Hampton that the rebellion was "of Spanish origin."¹⁷⁸ What is known is that sometime in the first week of January 1811 it dawned on local authorities that something was amiss, for on 7 January Governor

Claiborne warned Hampton to provide an escort for the post rider “who carries the Mail thro’ such part of the Territory, as you suppose may be infested by the Brigands.”¹⁷⁹

The following evening in St. John the Baptist Parish, rebellious slaves attacked the plantation of Colonel Manuel Andry, one of the leading men on the German Coast. The rebels wounded Andry, killed his son Gilbert (“Gone to a better and a happier world!” mourned the Governor), and seized a cache of public arms stored on the plantation. Ironically, the weapons had been distributed as a caution against unrest among the slaves.¹⁸⁰ Fortified by liquor and well armed, the slaves proceeded downriver—some on horses—toward New Orleans. After marching five leagues, the rebel band reached Fortier’s sugar plantation in Orleans Parish around four o’clock on Wednesday afternoon, where they paused to eat, drink, revel, and rest. The most precise estimates placed the rebels’ numbers between 200 and 300 people. Never in the history of North America had as many slaves taken up arms against their masters. One slave allegedly confessed that their goal was to “go to the city to kill whites.”¹⁸¹ In fact, they burned down three plantations and killed one other planter, Jean-Francois Trépannier, whom local folklore holds was hacked to death by a trusted slave.¹⁸²

Trial records and declarations for compensation submitted by the planters after the rebellion make it possible to identify some of the slaves who participated. Most of the leaders appear to have been Creoles and mulattoes. One leader was Charles, a mulatto slave owned by the widow of Jean-Baptiste Deslondes. He had been working on Andry’s plantation when the rebellion broke out. Other “chiefs” included Amar, owned by Widow Charbonnet; Cupidon, a Creole owned by the Labranche brothers; Gilbert, a mulatto slave owned by Andry; Dagobert, a Creole slave driver owned by Delhomme; Guamana, owned by James Brown; and Harry, a mulatto slave owned by Kenner and Henderson.¹⁸³ The rebellion drew foot soldiers, like its leadership, from the several plantations spread along the river. Of the 115 slaves killed, jailed, or missing as of 18 January, 15 were

from Andry's plantation, 13 from the Meuillon estate, 11 from Kenner and Henderson's plantation, 8 from Daniel Clark's, 7 from Achille Trouard's, 7 from George Wenprender's, 6 from Widow Trépagnier's, and 6 from the widow of George Deslondes, in addition to others from more than twenty plantations.¹⁸⁴ They comprised a diverse lot of Creoles and Africans, domestic servants and field hands. Two of the slaves from the Meuillon estate, Apollon and Henri, were Congolese, as was Acara of Joseph Delhomme's plantation and Hippolite of Etienne Trépagnier's. Louis, also of Etienne Trépagnier's, was from Guinea. Quamley and Cook of James Brown's plantation, Joseph of Widow Trépagnier's, and Charlot of Etienne Trépagnier's are all recorded to have been "African." Some of the rebels, like the leaders Charles and Dagobert, held positions of authority on their plantations. A few—like Butler and McCutcheon's cook Daniel—served as domestics, but most worked around the sugar plantations as field laborers or artisans. There may have been women involved in the rebellion, but only one appears in the official record, Marie Rose, owned by Lewis de Feriet. Sentenced to perpetual imprisonment in the parish of Orleans, she might have been seen in the years to come shoveling muck from the city's fetid streets.¹⁸⁵ The German Coast slave rebellion fits into a general pattern of growing Creole leadership in American slave revolts (at least outside of Brazil) but it also demonstrates that a diverse group of enslaved people could join together in an effort to liberate themselves by force of arms.

As the revolt began, terrified white inhabitants spread the alarm from the German Coast to New Orleans, and local authorities scrambled into action. Several groups of armed men converged on the rebels. The first was an assemblage of roughly eighty volunteers from the German Coast's west bank, organized by Charles Perret and the wounded, bereaved Manuel Andry, who had escaped from his assailants and crossed the river. Perret's band included several free men of color, whom he would later praise for their "tireless zeal, & a dauntless courage."¹⁸⁶ The second, dispatched from New Orleans by Governor Claiborne on the morning of the ninth, comprised a detach-

ment of army regulars and two companies of city volunteers serving under General Wade Hampton. John Shaw, the naval commander in New Orleans, dispatched a group of several naval officers and forty sailors who joined Hampton's band as they marched up the river "through roads half leg deep in Mud." A third force of light artillery and dragoons under Major Homer Milton had been ascending the river on their way to Baton Rouge; they turned around when they caught wind of the rebellion and headed for the German Coast. Another ragtag group of about a hundred volunteers congregated near Fortier's plantation on the evening of the ninth. As they prepared to attack, Hampton arrived ahead of his troops and cautioned the volunteers to wait for reinforcements. Later that evening a band of hot-heads rashly advanced on the plantation, inadvertently alerting the rebels to the encircling danger. The rest of Hampton's force arrived around four o'clock in the morning and they immediately prepared to attack, but in the crepuscular predawn light the rebels spotted them, rang an alarm, "and with a degree of extraordinary silence for such a rabble" retreated up the coast. The next morning the rebels reached Bernard Bernoudy's plantation and made their stand (as Manuel Andry observed) with "colours displayed and full of arrogance."¹⁸⁷

The rebellion ended at Bernoudy's plantation, where Andry's volunteers routed the slaves. Dozens were killed, many others wounded and captured, and the rest chased into the woods. "We made considerable slaughter," boasted Andry.¹⁸⁸ Patrols scoured the countryside for another week.¹⁸⁹ Hampton ordered a company of light artillery and one of dragoons to descend from Baton Rouge and "touch at Every Settlement of Consequence," crushing any remaining pockets of rebellion.¹⁹⁰ Special mounted and foot patrols policed New Orleans, where taverns had been closed and weapons dealers had been prohibited from selling to Negroes. Claiborne even called out a company of free men of color to help patrol the city.¹⁹¹ When news of the rebellion reached the Mississippi Territory on 17 January, public officials and private citizens there also took precautionary measures. Governor David Holmes immediately called out the militia and ordered a

distribution of arms.¹⁹² The inveterate scribbler Winthrop Sargent noted in his journal, "Intelligence this day of an Insurrection of the negroes near Orleans but not the particulars—have directed Vigilance upon my own Plantations."¹⁹³ These deployments kept the rebellion from reigniting or spreading elsewhere in the Deep South.

As the jails in and around New Orleans filled with suspected rebels, local authorities began to decide who should live and who should die. Judge Pierre Bauchet St. Martin and a tribunal of five prominent planters constituted a court on Jean Noel Destrehan's plantation in St. Charles Parish, which, after three days of interrogations and trials, sentenced twenty-one slaves to death.¹⁹⁴ One week after the battle at Bernoudy's, St. Martin reported that sixty-six slaves had been killed or executed, with another twenty-two in jail and twenty-seven still missing and "supposed generally to be dead in the woods."¹⁹⁵ Local authorities orchestrated the rebels' executions to magnify the degrading and terrorizing effects of their punishments. St. Martin's court directed that the condemned slaves be taken to the plantations of their owners, shot to death without torture, and their heads placed on stakes "as a terrible example to all who would disturb the public tranquility in the future."¹⁹⁶

Other slaves were tried in New Orleans before a jury composed of leading planters: Etienne de Bore, Daniel Clark, Charles Jumonville, Denis de la Ronde, and Jacques Villeré. They sentenced John Janvier to hang on the plantation of his owner, Israel Trask, "in the presence of the whole gang where his body shall remain exposed." Hector was sentenced to hang "between the plantations of Mr. Villeraï and Norbert Boudusquie, where his body shall remain exposed." Louis was sentenced to hang "on the levee in front of the Powder magazine on the left bank of the River Mississippi . . . where his body shall remain exposed."¹⁹⁷ The proceedings made an impression on white people in New Orleans. John Shaw reported that "executions by hanging and beheading, are going on daily."¹⁹⁸ Another witness, young Edward Palfrey, described the grisly proceedings to his brother in Massachusetts: "Poor wretches! They are now suffering the punishment of their

foolish wickedness. Government has hung one everyday since their trial commenced. They hung one yesterday and one today. After they have hung the negroes, they cut off their heads and stick it on a pole, and set it up in the street."¹⁹⁹ Some three months after the rebellion, a journal-keeping traveler descending the Mississippi to sell flour in New Orleans observed "a number of Negro heads sticking in poles on the levee."²⁰⁰

A few slaves received less severe punishments or clemency on account of special circumstances. Gilbert, one of Manuel Andry's slaves and alleged to have been one of the leaders, was found guilty of insurrection and sentenced to death, but "on account of the good and exemplary conduct of Louis Meilleur the uncle of the prisoner who delivered him to justice," he was merely ordered to be shot in Fort St. Ferdinand and his body delivered to the family for a decent burial. Jean, a teenager, was convicted of insurrection but the court spared his life on account of his youth; he was sentenced to thirty lashes and compelled to witness the execution of his comrade Jerry. Theodore, also convicted of insurrection, was eventually pardoned by the governor for having fully confessed his crimes and being "of fair character, and a most faithful Domestic."²⁰¹ Still other slaves were commended for their loyalty. Dominique, a slave owned by Bernard Bernoudy, had warned Etienne Trépagnier and several other planters of the approaching rebels on the morning of 9 January. Hermogene Labranche praised his slave driver Pierre, who after learning of the rebellion from slaves fleeing the Delhomme plantation, rushed to his master's room to warn him. Labranche also praised his slave François, whom he sent to spy on the rebels.²⁰² And the heirs of Meuillon petitioned the legislature to allow them to emancipate the mulatto slave Bazile "in consideration of his good conduct and zeal with which he has extinguished the fire which the brigands had set to the principal house of the plantation . . . and of the courageous resistance which he has solely opposed to many of those brigands, who endeavoured to hinder his good action."²⁰³ Evidently the rebellion had not won universal support among the enslaved; some actively helped to defeat it.

Public officials in the Orleans Territory grappled with thorny issues in the wake of the rebellion. Several planters had lost property, including slaves killed during the rebellion or executed afterward. Whether those planters should be compensated was “a delicate, interesting and novel question,” admitted the members of the territorial House of Representatives.²⁰⁴ In an act that revealed the planters’ influence on public policy, the Orleans Territory ultimately awarded \$300 for each slave killed or executed, as well as one-third of the appraised value of dwelling houses burned by the rebels, at a cost of \$29,000 to the government.²⁰⁵ Governor Claiborne also urged the legislature to strengthen the militia laws and to prohibit the “indiscriminate importation of slaves,” which endangered the territory in ways that no longer needed to be spelled out.²⁰⁶ The legislature did revise and reform the territorial militia, but it did not act on the matter of slave importation. The sugar planters’ need for slave labor continued to trump other considerations, especially because they now knew that the United States military would protect them in the event of an insurrection.²⁰⁷

The slaves’ rebellion failed because the rebels were outmanned and outgunned. It would have been difficult enough for them to overcome the local patrols and militias, but they also had to face the U.S. Army and Navy. About 1,500 soldiers and sailors, or 30 percent of the regular peacetime military establishment, were stationed in lower Louisiana when the rebellion broke out. This military presence reflected the national government’s concern over the vulnerability of the country’s southwestern frontier and its strategic prize, New Orleans.²⁰⁸ Whatever doubt the sugar planters may have harbored about the commitment of the U.S. government to the protection of slavery was alleviated by what Wade Hampton called the “prompt display & exhibition” of national military power along the bloodied banks of the Mississippi River in January 1811.²⁰⁹ Indeed, the very next month the legislature of the Orleans Territory invited President James Monroe to increase the number of regular troops permanently stationed around New Orleans.²¹⁰ For slaveowners in lower Louisiana, the

United States offered security, an essential precondition for the expansion of slavery.

In the end the rebellion exposed the lurking tension between commercial development and social order in lower Louisiana, but it did not swamp the slave country. "All the negro difficulties have subsided and gentle peace once more prevails," wrote one observer less than a month after the rebellion ended.²¹¹ Planters carried on the business of making sugar. Flatboats and barges floated downriver in record numbers. New Orleans thrived. General Hampton signaled his confidence by purchasing several large plantations along the Mississippi and transferring gangs of slaves from South Carolina to his new holdings. A soldier wrote that Hampton regarded Louisiana as "the paradise of the new world."²¹² But the memory of slave rebellion lingered. When the journalist Henry Marie Brackenridge descended the Mississippi River on a tour of the western United States late in 1811, he delighted in the sugar planters' elegant houses, tasteful gardens, and beautiful orange groves, until he remembered that these coexisted with the evils of slavery, including the threat of rebellion. Sadly he mused, "It is not in this world we are to expect a paradise."²¹³

Political turmoil and economic growth beginning in the 1790s fundamentally transformed the region that became the Deep South. Jeffersonian efforts to civilize the southern wilderness and its peoples led to the expansion of slavery on the southwestern cotton frontier, while the rise of a sugar plantation complex in lower Louisiana forced the United States to confront the contradictory legacies emanating from St. Domingue. The slave country survived its own slave rebellion in January 1811, but more serious dangers loomed ahead.

[To view this image, refer to
the print version of this title.]

Benjamin Latrobe, View of the New Orleans Battleground, 1819. Latrobe was one of America's most influential architects and civil engineers. He worked on several projects in New Orleans, including the city's waterworks and the Louisiana State Bank. Latrobe died of yellow fever in New Orleans in 1820. Compare the desolation in Latrobe's watercolor with the vitality in Colomb's painting of White Hall Plantation (see Chapter 3). COURTESY OF THE MARYLAND HISTORICAL SOCIETY, BALTIMORE.

The Wartime Challenge

THE WAR OF 1812 represented an opportunity and a crisis for the budding slave country of the Deep South. Many white inhabitants embraced war against Great Britain because it gave them a chance to realize long-standing nationalist goals of loosening foreign restrictions on American commerce, shattering indigenous power, and eradicating foreign influence in their region. William C. C. Claiborne, now governor of the state of Louisiana, called the war “the only measure that could preserve the Independence of the Nation.”¹ But the war also threatened the new society that had been established in the Deep South in the previous two decades. It stopped the influx of migrants, depressed the plantation economy, and shrouded the region in violence. Many white people feared that slaves, free people of color, and Indians would join with foreign powers to strike a blow against the United States’ remote southwestern frontier. Whether they could protect themselves and their way of life against such a formidable coalition was an open question at the beginning of the war. Galvanized by the Tennessee planter Andrew Jackson, the citizens of the slave country confronted a fundamental challenge to U.S. sovereignty in the Deep South between 1812 and 1815.²

The United States declared war against Great Britain to vindicate the Jeffersonian republican vision of a virtuous agrarian-commercial republic, which could prosper only if the country's agriculturalists were freely able to sell their produce in foreign markets. The Napoleonic Wars had jeopardized that vision. French and especially British efforts to control the flow of Atlantic trade were hurting the United States. American vessels were intercepted, cargoes seized, and sailors impressed into foreign service. In response, the United States implemented a series of retaliatory commercial policies—the embargo and nonintercourse acts—intended to force the warring European powers to stop interfering with American shipping. The republican strategy, however, overestimated British and French reliance on American goods while further crippling American export-oriented interests. The failure of the republicans' strategy for peaceful economic coercion drove the United States to war in 1812.³

Most of the citizens of the Deep South, and certainly their political leaders, supported the war. The region's export-oriented farmers and planters had basic economic interests at stake. Cotton planters blamed the British for the declining price of their staple, which had fallen from twenty-three cents per pound in 1805 to less than nine cents per pound in 1811. They viewed war as a last resort to open restricted European markets and increase the price of cotton.⁴ A more transcendent principle—the defense of American honor—also animated the citizenry's enthusiasm for war. The country had to choose between “base submission & manly resistance,” wrote a resident of the Orleans Territory.⁵ Five hundred citizens turned out for a public meeting in Woodville in the Mississippi Territory to support the Madison administration's war measures in July of 1812. The crisis with Great Britain “calls on our free and Independent Government either to proudly assert its inalienable rights, or dastardly submit to the humiliating impositions of our overbearing foe,” they declared. In the town of Washington, another meeting of citizens resolved that the United States “has been ultimately compelled to vindicate the rights essential to the sovereignty and Independence of our Country against

the unjust pretensions and aggressions of the British Government.”⁶ These declarations announced the patriotism of the territories’ republican citizenry, and asserted a national unity that stretched even to the remote and vulnerable southwestern frontier.

Some ardent nationalists seized on war as an opportunity to strengthen and extend U.S. sovereignty on the southwestern frontier. Their champion was Andrew Jackson, a Tennessee cotton planter and politician. Jackson was born in the Carolina backcountry in 1767 and orphaned during the Revolution, when he developed a bitter hatred for the British. After studying law in Charleston, Jackson migrated to Tennessee, where he became a lawyer, land speculator, slaveowner, planter, and politician. Strong willed and possessed of a keen sense of personal honor, Jackson fought several duels in his lifetime, including one in 1806 in which he killed a rival. Like other Tennessee planters, Jackson had many connections to the Deep South. He often visited Natchez, a popular destination for horseracing and gambling. It was there that he married Rachel Robards in 1791. He sent cotton, staves, and other goods down the Mississippi and sold goods sent up in exchange. His business dealings entangled him in the slave trade.⁷ When the war broke out, Jackson laid out an expansionist vision in an address to Tennessee volunteers. He wanted to seize West Florida for the United States. Its conquest would improve southwesterners’ commercial access to the Gulf of Mexico and deprive the Spanish and British of an “asylum” from which to incite the southern Indians to “rapine and bloodshed.”⁸

Preoccupied with the war on the country’s Canadian border, the Madison administration kept Jackson and the southwestern expansionists at bay until the fall of 1812, when it authorized Tennessee’s governor to send 1,500 Tennessee volunteers to New Orleans to help defend the city against a rumored British invasion. Placed in command of the volunteers, Jackson believed that he would finally secure U.S. sovereignty in Florida and have his revenge against the hated British. “I hope the government will permit us to traverse the Southern coast and aid in planting the American eagles on the ramparts of

Mobile, Pensacola and Fort St. Augustine," he admitted to Louisiana's governor, William Claiborne. "British influence must be destroyed, or we will have the whole Southern tribe of Indians to fight and insurrections to quell in all the Southern states."⁹ Here Jackson revealed the southern citizenry's ultimate nightmare: a triple alliance of British soldiers, Indian warriors, and slave rebels. But the rumored invasion did not materialize, and the administration called off Jackson's expedition. He halted his army in Natchez and returned to Tennessee in mid-March. During the spring and summer of 1813, Jackson chafed at the Madison administration's apparent indifference to the southwestern frontier.¹⁰

Economic depression intensified the wartime sense of crisis. The number of vessels arriving in New Orleans from upriver declined from 1,680 in 1811 to 513 in 1814.¹¹ The value of exports from New Orleans and Mobile dropped from more than \$2.5 million in 1811 to less than \$500,000 in 1814.¹² Distress was widespread. John Palfrey found himself mired in debt with no hope of escape. "Altho' my crops have been good & even great they procure me nothing," he complained.¹³ George Foote found the wartime conditions difficult to endure. "Indeed it is a hard struggle with me, to pay my rent and keep clear of debt," he grouched in 1812.¹⁴ A year later, Foote's health and cotton were ruined, and he ached to return to Virginia. "I find it impossible for me to remain in this climate much longer, if I do it will be under ground."¹⁵ The pressure of the times caused many purchasers of public lands to fear that they would have to default on their payments to the government. In January of 1814, Mississippi's territorial legislature implored Congress to protect purchasers of public lands from "the rude grasp of the Merciless Speculator." Many citizens worried that they would be pauperized as the region fell back into mere subsistence production and a war for national independence drove them deeper into debt.¹⁶

The territorial legislature's petition hinted that as moneyed men bought up land from distressed farmers, slaves would replace free men and the territory would become less secure. The legislature thus

raised the unsettling question of whether a slave society could defend itself in a crisis. Others on the national stage asked the same question. John Randolph of Virginia, a fierce opponent of the war, cautioned the House of Representatives in 1811 that twenty years of French radicalism had left their mark on the country's slave population. "God forbid, sir, that the Southern States should ever see an enemy on their shores, with these infernal principles of French fraternity in the van!" he stormed.¹⁷ Even so staunch a supporter of the war as Thomas Jefferson allowed himself to imagine its revolutionary potential on the slave population. Emancipation "will come," he wrote in a famous letter to Edward Coles in the summer of 1814, "and whether brought on by the generous energy of our own minds; or by the bloody process of St Domingo, excited and conducted by the power of our present enemy, if once stationed permanently within our Country, and offering asylum & arms to the oppressed, is a leaf of our history not yet turned over."¹⁸ In other words, a British invasion might have an electric effect on American slaves.

Following soon after the German Coast rebellion of 1811, war rekindled the white citizenry's deep anxieties about the loyalty of enslaved people.¹⁹ Days after news of the declaration of war reached the Deep South, local authorities discovered a conspiracy among the slaves of Mississippi's Second Creek. "The Negroes were making Every preparation a few Days ago to Rise and Destroy the white inhabitants of this Territory, Women & Children Excepted," reported the overseer James Moore.²⁰ David Holmes, the governor of the territory, used the occasion to petition General James Wilkinson for guns, powder, and shot. "I am impressed with the belief that real danger exists, and that it is my duty to loose [*sic*] no time in procuring arms for the defence of the Country," he insisted.²¹ When Wilkinson ordered Holmes to send territorial militia to Baton Rouge in October, the governor protested that the move would leave the inhabitants defenseless against their domestic enemies. "Nearly one half of the entire population are Slaves and the frontier Counties are thinly inhabited," he reminded Wilkinson. "In Slave Countries the Danger of

insurrection always exists, and the Inhabitants should be prepared to meet the event.”²² Real and alleged slave conspiracies plagued lower Louisiana after the declaration of war against Great Britain. Several slaves in New Orleans were hanged or shot for plotting an insurrection in the fall of 1812, and the City Council took the opportunity to prohibit slaves from gaming and dancing.²³ In the spring of 1813, the city’s mayor reported that “the negroes intend to hatch a new plot against the safety of the public.”²⁴ Later that year, the commander of the Louisiana militia, Jacques Villeré, was reminded to watch out for slave insurrection: “The rumors might be true or false, but in the present circumstance one must always be ‘en garde.’”²⁵ War placed the civil and military officials in the Deep South on a heightened alert for signs of conspiracy and rebellion among the slaves.

Along with economic distress and fears of slave rebellion came a ripening conflict in the Indian backcountry, where the Jeffersonian program of civilization and the expansion of the cotton plantation system had polarized indigenous communities. The sharpest struggle took place among the Upper Creeks, who occupied what is today western Georgia and eastern Alabama. Essentially the Creek nation split between those who were willing to accommodate the increasing influence of the United States in their lives and those who were not.²⁶ The Shawnee leader Tecumseh, who was organizing a pan-Indian revolt against the United States in the northwest, visited the southern Indians in the fall of 1811 to bring them into an alliance with their northern brethren. Tecumseh failed in his mission, but he did inspire some of the southerners to take a more militant stance against the Anglo-American intruders and those who collaborated with them. At the same time, a spiritual revival infused the indigenous militants with a religious ardor. Several of the Creek shamans spent time in the Shawnee country, where they were exposed to the traditionalist teachings of Tenskwtawa, Tecumseh’s mystic brother, whose lessons included the dangerous promise that Indians could not be harmed by bullets.²⁷

The southwestern backcountry broke out in violence during the

winter of 1812–13 when a delegation led by Little Warrior, a Creek Indian familiar with the Shawnees, returned to the land of his nativity after visiting Tecumseh. Sympathetic to Tecumseh's appeal for pan-Indian solidarity, Little Warrior fought in the Battle of River Raisin near Detroit before heading south in February of 1813. Tecumseh cautioned him to delay any military action south of the Ohio until the northern Indians and the British could come to his aid, but on their way home, Little Warrior's band killed seven white people near the mouth of the Ohio River. Benjamin Hawkins, the U.S. agent to the Creeks and the champion of Jefferson's civilizing program, urged the Upper Creek leadership to deliver Little Warrior and his followers to the United States; instead the Upper Creeks took matters into their own hands. Led by Big Warrior (Tustunnuggee Thlucce) and assisted by a party of Lower Creeks, they hunted down Little Warrior and his fellows in late April and killed them.²⁸ Outraged dissidents among the Creeks—called Red Sticks because of their vermilion-stained war clubs—began to retaliate against those responsible for the executions. They killed a pro-American Creek shaman along with his family. They wrecked looms, killed livestock, and assassinated Creek leaders hostile to their cause. They besieged Big Warrior at Tuckabatchie until he and his followers were rescued by William McIntosh and a party of warriors from the Lower Creek towns of Kasihta and Coweta.²⁹ What began as a cycle of killing and retribution quickly widened into a civil war within the Creek nation.

The Red Sticks targeted the new forms of property and commerce associated with the Jeffersonian program of civilization, including cotton production. The Scottish-born Robert Grierson, a cotton planter living among the Creeks and one of Benjamin Hawkins's allies, "had all his negroes (73) and every eatable living thing taken from him." Grierson's daughter-in-law, who had taught many Creek women in the town of Hillaubee to spin and weave, "had much of her stock, her loom and bolt of cloth destroyed." Adding insult to injury, the Red Sticks humiliated her by stripping her of her clothing "except the shift and petticoat on her back." Assaults such as these

convinced Hawkins that his campaign to civilize the southern Indians stood in danger. "The declaration of their prophets is to destroy every thing received from the Americans, all Chiefs and their adherents who are friendly to the customs and ways of the white people, and to put to death every man who will not join them," he reported to the U.S. secretary of war. Hawkins concluded that the Red Sticks' campaign dovetailed with a larger plot "to unite the [Creek] nation in aid of the British and Indians of the Lakes, against their white neighbors as soon as their friends the British will be ready for them."³⁰ He believed that the outbreak of violence on the southwestern frontier was part of a larger, unscrupulous British strategy to win the war.

As the fighting intensified in the Mississippi Territory, white settlers and their slaves, along with their Indian allies, scrambled into makeshift palisades and prepared for battle. "The clouds thicken around us," wrote a concerned correspondent from Fort Stoddert. He observed that the inhabitants had abandoned their homesteads: "Some are in swamps, some are retired to places of more imagined security."³¹ Margaret Austill's family took refuge in a stockade built by "all hands, negroes and whites." Austill described her first days there as "confusion and dismay, expecting at any moment to be scalped or tomahawked." Hannah, an enslaved woman owned by Margaret's father, tended to the Austill homestead while the family huddled inside the pickets. "She made the garden, milked the cows, churned the butter, raised chickens, and came every other day to the Fort with a large basket on her head," Austill recalled.³² On 27 July at Burnt Corn Creek, a group of American settlers and Creek warriors under the command of James Caller skirmished with a party of Red Sticks led by Peter McQueen, who was returning to the Upper Creek country from Pensacola. Caller's company lost five men, the Red Sticks two.³³ A slave was shot while running from McQueen's party to Caller's.³⁴ After the battle, Caller's party retreated to a fortification on the site of Samuel Mims's plantation near the confluence of the Tombigbee and Alabama rivers. There, at Fort Mims, came the cloudburst.

As many as 500 men, women, and children of all complexions crowded into Fort Mims in the summer of 1813.³⁵ About 140 Ameri-

can and Creek volunteers under the command of Major Daniel Beasley and Dixon Bailey defended the post. On 29 August in the evening, two slaves who had been sent out to tend cattle came back to the fort and reported that they had seen hostile Indians in the vicinity. Beasley sent out an armed party to investigate, and when it returned at sundown having found no sign of danger, Beasley had the two slaves whipped for lying. The next morning, 700 Red Sticks attacked, led by the Creek planter William Weatherford (Red Eagle). They rushed through gates that Beasley had carelessly left opened, set fire to the wooden buildings with burning arrows, and slaughtered many of the people they found inside, including women and children. At least 250 of the inhabitants and 200 of the attackers were killed in the battle.³⁶ “Indians, negroes, white men, women and children, lay in one promiscuous ruin,” observed Major Joseph Kennedy, who helped to bury the dead. “All were scalped, and the females, of every age, were butchered in a manner which neither decency nor language will permit me to describe.” War came to the Deep South with a vengeance.³⁷

Events at Fort Mims demonstrate how slavery shaped the social terrain on which the Creek War raged. Slaves helped to build the American stockades and feed the inhabitants. Captive slaves guided the Red Sticks to Fort Mims. Slaves owned by the Red Stick leaders William Weatherford and Alexander McGillivray helped to overrun the fort. The Creek chronicler George Stiggins claimed that when the attack faltered in the face of fierce resistance from Fort Mims’s defenders, the black Red Sticks “would not cease” and urged their fellow warriors to destroy the fort. And although the Red Sticks killed most of the whites and mestizos in Fort Mims, they spared most of the black people, taking more than 200 of them as prizes of war—a customary practice among the southern Indians.³⁸ One anonymous slave reported that he had been hiding in Mims’s house when an Indian told him to come out, saying, “The Master of Breath has ordered us not to kill any but white people and half breeds.” He managed to escape to the Creek town of Coweta, whence his description of the fall of Fort Mims was forwarded to Benjamin Hawkins, who sent it to the secretary of war.³⁹ Hester, another slave who escaped from Fort

Mims, swam across the Alabama and Tombigbee rivers and made her way to Mount Vernon in the Mississippi Territory, where she reported the massacre to Ferdinand Claiborne, brigadier general of the territorial militia.⁴⁰ More than half a century later, there were still black people living in the Deep South who claimed to have experienced the events at Fort Mims.⁴¹ Some black people joined the Red Sticks and others fought against them, and most tried as best they could to come out of the conflict alive if not unscathed.

As news of the fall of Fort Mims spread, American outrage at the massacre combined with anxiety over the possibility that the Red Sticks might find an ally in the territory's black population. One territorial official worried that "many of the Negroes will run off to the enemy."⁴² Another reported that the slaves had "excited considerable uneasiness, many have gone off with arms, one or more have been tried for saying that the Indians were to pass through this and the Mississippi countries, when the blacks were to join them." He feared that the slaveowners were unwittingly endangering themselves with loose talk: "There are many unwary fools who are in the habit of speaking of these things before their own slaves, acknowledging an inferiority in the whites to withstand the blacks and the reds."⁴³ Writing shortly after the fall of Fort Mims, Washington County resident Edmund Andrews sensed a crisis. With the whole frontier "left to the ravages of the enemy," he explained to a correspondent in distant New Hampshire, "it is at present very doubtful weather the Chacktaws will remain friendly with us—this added to the danger amongst ourselves—namely the revolt of the negroes whenever opportunity offers, makes our situation rather critical. Property is now out of the question, those who have the least to lose are best off."⁴⁴ Once regarded as necessary for the civilization of the southern frontier, slavery now seemed to be a dangerous weakness in the social order.

"no frolic War"

The Fort Mims massacre brought the United States into the Creek civil war and opened one of the worst episodes of violence in the

tragic history of antagonism between the people of the United States and the indigenous inhabitants of North America. The Americans intervened to avenge the massacre and crush the hostile Creeks, and to seize West Florida from Spain, but it would not be easy. The Red Stick revolt tested the military resources and organization of the citizenry in the Mississippi Territory, Georgia, and especially Tennessee. The Tennessee planter Andrew Jackson led the campaign against the Red Sticks and was principally responsible for its outcome. His most difficult challenge was not defeating the Red Sticks but keeping an army together to accomplish the task.⁴⁵

Preparations for war were frenzied. The country was “again in arms & in motion,” observed John Reid, one of Andrew Jackson’s aides in Tennessee.⁴⁶ The United States intended to strike against the Creeks from several angles. One force, led by Ferdinand Claiborne, included regulars from the U.S. Army and militiamen from the western portions of the Mississippi Territory. Another, led by General John Floyd, was to enter the Creek nation from Georgia. The third army, from eastern Tennessee under General John Cocke, and the fourth, from western Tennessee under General Andrew Jackson, were supposed to merge in northern Alabama and march south into the Red Sticks’ stronghold, where they would unite with the other American forces and stamp out the rebellion. Pro-American Creek, Cherokee, Chickasaw, and Choctaw warriors also joined with the United States to crush the dissidents. Some calculated that the Red Sticks’ strategy of direct armed confrontation with the American hegemon was suicidal, while others must have believed that helping the United States to suppress the revolt would win them gratitude and breathing space once the war ended.⁴⁷

In late September, Tennessee’s governor ordered Andrew Jackson to organize 2,000 volunteers and militiamen from western Tennessee. He summoned the volunteers who had served with him on the Natchez expedition, and whom he had never formally released from service. Appealing to their sense of manhood, he warned them that the Red Sticks would “advance towards your frontier with their scalping knife unsheathed, to butcher your wives, your children, and your

helpless babes.”⁴⁸ Jackson’s volunteers assembled at Fayetteville and marched south, arriving at Ten Islands on the Coosa River in late October, where they erected Fort Strother. They believed that they could whip the Red Sticks if hunger did not block their path. The land on the way to the Creek country was not yet thickly settled, and the war had eroded its agricultural surplus. Provisions in Tennessee were not cheap, nor was it easy for Jackson’s contractors to get supplies to the army, owing to poor roads and low water in the rivers.⁴⁹ “All I dread is a famine,” John Reid wrote to his wife.⁵⁰

The western Tennesseans scored two victories against the Red Sticks in early November but could not conquer hunger. On 2 November John Coffee led 900 volunteers and a force of Cherokee and Creek warriors against the Red Stick town of Tallasahatchee. Coffee established what would become a familiar pattern. His men killed 186 Red Sticks and took 84 prisoners, while losing only 6 men and suffering 41 wounded. A week later Jackson attacked the town of Talladega, killing more than 300 Red Sticks while losing 17 of his own men and suffering 85 wounded.⁵¹ Jackson saw the destruction of Talladega as both a resounding success and a missed opportunity. General Hugh White, in command of the eastern Tennessee army, had refused to rendezvous with the western Tennesseans, and Jackson faced a critical shortage of provisions. Instead of pressing his advantage at Talladega, an anguished Jackson explained to his wife, he was forced to return to Ten Islands to await supplies.⁵² With food scarce and hunger mounting, Jackson’s soldiers began to grumble. Petitions poured in to Jackson requesting that he allow the men to move north where they could procure supplies. Many threatened to desert if Jackson would not let them go.⁵³ “You have no conception of our privations, or of the ungovernable spirit of the men,” complained John Reid.⁵⁴

The combination of victory and distress was not unique to Jackson’s soldiers. The eastern Tennessee and Georgia armies also lacked provisions and suffered from disease, but they still managed to kill Red Sticks.⁵⁵ Hugh White’s eastern Tennesseans destroyed the town

of Little Ocfuskee, then on 18 November laid waste to the Hillabees, who were negotiating terms of surrender with Jackson at the time.⁵⁶ The Georgians, along with a large party of Creeks under the command of William McIntosh, routed the Red Stick stronghold of Autossee on the Tallapoosa River in late November.⁵⁷ Ferdinand Claiborne tried to engage the Red Sticks in mid-October but could not draw them out. His men, too, suffered from serious privations. After returning from a foray in late October, David Ker wrote that the officers and soldiers in Claiborne's camp were "pretty much tired of the service." They discovered that pursuing the Indians through swamps was difficult work. They lacked tents, slept poorly, and resented the high price of buttermilk. But Ker himself was stalwart. "Do not think however that I am one of those who are going to desert the Standard of their Country," he assured his mother. "I expected no party of pleasure no frolic War."⁵⁸ Indeed the Creek War was no frolic for any who fought in it, but it was particularly bad for the Red Sticks.

The Mississippians enjoyed two morale-lifting successes. In a famous skirmish in November, Captain Sam Dale and a small band of soldiers waged hand-to-hand combat with a Red Stick war party, in canoes in the middle of the Alabama River. Paddling Dale's canoe was a black man named Caesar, whom subsequent accounts of the "canoe fight" always mentioned.⁵⁹ A more important victory came at the Red Sticks' Holy Ground, or Econochaka, on the upper Alabama. The Holy Ground was the retreat of Josiah Francis, one of the Red Stick prophets, who claimed to have endowed the site with a magical invulnerability. A sizable number of black runaways were reported to count themselves among its defenders.⁶⁰ Claiborne attacked the Holy Ground on 23 December with more than 650 Mississippi volunteers, militia, and Choctaw warriors. As they overran the town, most of the Red Sticks escaped, including William Weatherford. Approximately thirty Red Sticks were killed at the Holy Ground, including several black people. Only one of Claiborne's soldiers was killed.⁶¹ The contrast between Caesar at the canoe fight and the black Red Sticks at the Holy Ground reflects the diversity of slave experiences during the

Creek War. But while Caesar was commemorated in white Alabamians' folklore of the Creek War, the black Red Sticks were later reviled—even by Creeks themselves. Kinnie Hadjo, a Creek warrior who had fought at the Holy Ground, later told the historians Halbert and Ball “that the proud and warlike Muscogeese on this occasion had compromised the dignity of their nation in stooping so low as to call to their aid the services of such a servile and degraded race as negroes to assist them in fighting the battles of their country.”⁶² Chattel slavery turned Indians into racists, too.

As 1813 drew to a gory close, Andrew Jackson's army began to abandon him. First the militiamen threatened to leave, then the volunteers. Jackson and his soldiers had differing views of what patriotism required of them. Although the western Tennesseans disliked the Indians and wished them expelled from the frontier, they had enrolled for specified terms of service and were unwilling to fight any longer than legally required. Nor did they believe that the interests of the United States compelled them to starve in the field or altogether abandon their homes and families. They had private obligations as well as public ones. Colonel William Martin, the commander of one of the regiments of volunteers, explained their position to Jackson. He argued that the men were rushed into service and lacked proper clothing for cold weather. Many were persuaded to muster only after being assured that their term of service would expire on 10 December and thus had not prepared for a long campaign. They honored Jackson, but “having devoted [a] considerable portion of their time to the service of their Country, by which their domestic concerns are much deranged: they wish to return & attend to their own affairs.”⁶³

Jackson's more demanding view of the soldiers' obligations drew from his deeply felt patriotism and sense of personal honor. He could not believe that the men would put a narrow construction on their contractual obligations at a moment of national crisis. In his address to the First Brigade of the Tennessee Volunteer Infantry on 13 December, Jackson demanded to know how they would face their families and friends when they returned to Tennessee: “Will you tell them

that you abandoned your General & y[our] late associates in arms, within fifty miles of an assemblage of a savage enemy, that as much delights in shedding the blood of the innocent female & her sleeping babe as that of the warrior contending in battle?"⁶⁴ Jackson (who had one legally adopted son) considered himself as a father to his soldiers, and consequently saw the soldiers' mutiny as a childish rebellion. Recounting his standoff with the volunteers to his wife, Jackson wrote that he "felt the pangs of an affectionate parent, compelled from duty, to chastise his child—to prevent him from destruction & disgrace."⁶⁵ But the western Tennessee soldiers were not children; they were full-grown men and American citizens with children of their own, and not even Andrew Jackson or hatred of Indians could keep them in the field when they felt within their rights and obliged to go home.

The two different understandings of patriotic duty reflect the different class positions of Jackson and his men. Most of the Tennessee volunteers were farmers who had few slaves or none at all. Many of them were poor. A long campaign would have kept them from their farms and deprived them of their livelihood for another year. It was less the hardships the soldiers encountered in the Creek country than those they imagined awaiting them in Tennessee that sent them home. Jackson, in contrast, was a cotton planter with more than twelve hundred acres of land and at least twenty slaves.⁶⁶ In mid-October, as his soldiers' grievances mounted, Jackson directed his wife to hire an overseer to manage the plantation and gather the year's cotton, which she did.⁶⁷ His wealth put Jackson in a position to endure a long and difficult campaign away from home, and prevented him from grasping the true cause of his soldiers' unhappiness. He called them cowards. He accused their officers of sowing discontent. In a startling turn, he even blamed the Red Stick prophets, whose "Phisic," he suggested to Rachel, had addled them.⁶⁸ By rhetoric and force Jackson staved off his troops' departure as long as possible, but he had to relent in the end. The western Tennessee volunteers left Fort Strother on 14 December, embittered by their experience.⁶⁹

Jackson's army crumbled. Another fifteen hundred eastern Tennes-

see volunteers had arrived in Jackson's camp on 12 December, but they, too, expected to complete their term of service within a matter of weeks. Jackson sent half of them home, and instructed their commander to raise fresh troops to finish the campaign and to prod the army contractors in Tennessee. John Coffee's cavalry, which had been temporarily dismissed to allow the men to refresh their supplies and horses, reassembled at Huntsville in diminished numbers. As they marched toward Fort Strother in mid-December, they ran into the disgruntled volunteers and caught the spreading homesickness. Shamefaced, Coffee wrote of his brigade, "I don't believe they'll ever do any thing right again."⁷⁰ Finally, the remaining Tennessee militiamen concluded that their term of service ended on 4 January rather than three months later, as Jackson insisted. They, too, went home, leaving fewer than 150 men huddled in Fort Strother, and the bulk of those men determined to leave within two weeks. "I am left almost destitute of an army," Jackson raged.⁷¹ If the Red Sticks had fallen on Fort Strother at that moment, the course of southern and even American history might have been different, but that is not what happened.

The first months of 1814 brought thousands of fresh citizen-soldiers to Fort Strother, as Jackson's strident letters to various government officials and the frenzied recruiting efforts of his officers finally bore fruit. Undeterred by cold weather and rain, one Tennessee volunteer later recalled, "We never yet murmured the Least we was going out on liberty's caus to subdue the indians."⁷² First to Jackson's rescue was William Carroll, who arrived at Fort Strother on 14 January with more than eight hundred volunteers. As Carroll's men had enlisted for a meager sixty days, Jackson immediately put them in the field. Joining with two hundred Cherokee and Creek soldiers, the troops marched against the Red Stick town of Emuckfau on the Tallapoosa River, which they destroyed on 22 January. On their march back to Fort Strother, they skirmished further with the Red Sticks at Enotochopco Creek and routed them. Jackson's troops killed almost two hundred Red Sticks and lost only twenty of their own

men, including Jackson's nephew Alexander Donelson. The victories boosted Jackson's morale after an exceptionally difficult two months. "When I move again," the newly optimistic general assured his wife, "I shall soon put an end to the creek war, carry into effect the ulterior objects of my government and then return to your arms to live & love together thro life."⁷³ Throughout the Creek War, the tenderness of Andrew Jackson's letters to Rachel contrasts sharply with his harshness toward his own soldiers and, of course, his Red Stick foes.

A lack of troop discipline and supply shortages continued to plague Jackson through February and mid-March. He even executed one unfortunate soldier, John Wood, for mutiny. But as increasing numbers of new troops gathered at Fort Strother, Jackson readied them for a final push against the Red Sticks. He marched out on 14 March—the day of Wood's execution—with approximately 4,000 men under his command. The army moved south to the recently built Fort Williams on the Coosa River, and from there Jackson marched on to Emuckfau with a slightly smaller force composed of 2,000 infantry, 700 cavalry, and 600 Cherokee and Creek Indians. Their ultimate destination was a horseshoe-shaped bend in the Tallapoosa River called Tohopeka, where more than one thousand Red Stick men, women, and children braced themselves behind an impressive barricade.⁷⁴

On 27 March 1814, Tohopeka became a death trap for the Red Sticks. Jackson's army encircled the encampment, set fire to the wooden dwellings, and killed all those who tried to escape. When the slaughter finally ceased, Jackson's troops had killed nine hundred people, including three hundred shot as they swam across the river. "The Carnage was *dreadful*," Jackson wrote to his wife after the battle.⁷⁵ In contrast, the U.S. forces suffered only fifty casualties, including twenty-three allied Cherokee and Creek soldiers. The Tohopeka massacre, known afterward as the Battle of Horseshoe Bend, was the bloodiest battle in the long history of conflict between American Indians and the United States. It may also have been one of the most consequential, for it shattered the Red Sticks' rebellion and put the southern Indians at the mercy of the U.S. government. As Andrew

Jackson explained to Thomas Pinckney, "The power of the creeks is I think forever broken."⁷⁶

Jackson praised his troops as the vanguard of progress and Providence. He predicted that civilization would rise from the ruins of hellish barbarism. "The weapons of warfare will be exchanged for the utensils of husbandry," he declared, and "the wilderness which now withers in sterility & seems to mourn the desolation which overspreads it, will blossom as the rose, & become the nursery of the arts." Jackson warned that "other chastisements remain to be inflicted" before the task of securing the foundations of civilization was complete. He vowed to punish the remaining Red Sticks until they completely abandoned their prophets and atoned for their crimes. He revealed to the soldiers that they were agents of divine justice: "How lamentable it is that the path to peace should lead through blood & over the carcass of the slain!! But it is in the dispensations of that providence which inflicts partial evil, to produce general good."⁷⁷ It would not be the last time Andrew Jackson recognized the hand of God at work in behalf of the United States and its republican civilization.

Over the next few months, U.S. troops scoured the Creek country, burning Red Sticks' towns, building fortifications, and collecting refugees. One frustrated North Carolina soldier stationed at the newly erected Fort Jackson on the Coosa and Tallapoosa rivers reported in June that 1,500 Indians had come into the camp. "It appears to me that we came to feed more than to fight them," he complained.⁷⁸ Many other Red Sticks fled to Florida, where they hoped to find refuge and aid from the Spanish. One of the first people to inform Jackson of the situation in Pensacola was a black woman captured at Fooshatchee on the thirteenth or fourteenth of April. Claiming to have run away from Pensacola, she told Jackson that the Red Sticks had been furnished with ammunition by a clerk with the mercantile firm of Pantou & Leslie.⁷⁹ Slaves taken by the Red Sticks at Fort Mims and elsewhere also began to trickle in.⁸⁰ Many of their owners were dead or missing, making their legal status uncertain. Jackson person-

ally took control of some of the slaves. He sent several to his plantation in Tennessee, where they were put to work.⁸¹ In August, W. C. Middleton wrote to Andrew Jackson from Natchez to claim a boy named Ambrose owned by Middleton's brother Captain Hattan Middleton, slain at Fort Mims.⁸² In September, Theophilus Powell sold Jackson five slaves—Seller, Jack, Hannah, Sam, and Amey—whom he claimed “by virtue of his intermarriage with one of the daughters and legal heirs of Wm. Dwyer who was killed at the siege and destruction of Fort Mimms.”⁸³ Lemuel Early wrote to Jackson in 1815 looking for twenty-five or thirty slaves belonging to his wife's family; Early's mother-in-law, six brothers-in-law, and a sister-in-law had all died at Fort Mims.⁸⁴ In 1818 a slave named Eliza, captured by the Red Sticks at Fort Mims, ended an odyssey nearly five years long when Jackson shipped her to Fort Montgomery to be united with her owner, Susannah Stiggins.⁸⁵ For these enslaved men and women, the Creek War wrote a new chapter in their personal experiences of forced migration.

All of this was a sidelight to the main task of securing a peace treaty with the Red Sticks. Jackson and many other political leaders in the Deep South demanded a wholesale expropriation of the Red Sticks' land. In a letter dated 18 May, Jackson laid out his vision of a proper settlement. He believed that the Upper Creek country belonged to the United States by right of conquest, and that territorial contiguity and population were the keys to security. “The grand policy of the government,” he explained to John Williams, “ought to be to connect the settlements of Georgia with that of the Territory and Tennessee, which at once forms a bulwark against foreign invasion, and prevents the introduction of foreign influence to corrupt the minds of the Indians.” He recommended that the government “ought to adopt every means to populate speedily this section of the Union, and perhaps if she would give a preference right to those that conquered it at two dollars per acre of three hundred and twenty acres, it would be settled by a hardy race that would defend it.”⁸⁶ Jackson's vision carried forward the Jeffersonian idea that converting Indian land

into private property would invite migration, strengthen security, and ultimately guarantee U.S. sovereignty in the Deep South, but the war had ruined Jefferson's naive hope that republican expansion would occur without bloodshed and with the free consent of all aboriginal peoples.

The Creek War introduced many American soldiers to the Upper Creeks' attractive and fertile lands, which they immediately coveted. Howell Tatum, Andrew Jackson's topographical engineer, was one of those who kept an eye out for marketable lands. Coming across one "elegant red bluff" on the Alabama River, he recorded in his journal that it was "the handsomest situation for a town of any to be found on the river," owing to its proximity to fertile land and its easy access to Mobile.⁸⁷ Early in 1814, George Strother Gaines wrote from St. Stephens to James Taylor Gaines in Tennessee: "Should the Alabama lands fall into the hands of our Govt & I will not doubt it, you must come out & select you a tract of land & bring all our friends with you if possible. The Alabama will be the garden of America ere many years."⁸⁸ And writing from Fort Jackson in May, William McCauley of North Carolina reported to his brother, "I have been down the Alabama nearly as far as Mobbille—some fine lands below here."⁸⁹ Observations such as McCauley's helped to fuel the popular clamor for dispossessing the Upper Creeks of their territory.

Over the summer Jackson himself negotiated the terms of peace with the Creek Indians—terms far more punitive than those stipulated by the secretary of war.⁹⁰ It was a curious parley, because most of the Red Stick leaders had escaped to Florida and did not participate. Thirty-four of the thirty-five Creek leaders who signed the treaty of surrender had supported the United States during the war, and they were understandably astonished and embittered to find themselves stripped of much of their land. The treaty delivered more than twenty-three million acres of Creek land to the United States, including most of what is today southwest Georgia and central Alabama.⁹¹ After concluding the treaty on 9 August, Jackson descended the Alabama River to Mobile, where he penned a rapturous letter to

his wife describing the country he had seen. "I have no doubt but in a few years, the Banks of the allabama will present a beautiful view of elegant mansions, and extensive rich & productive farms," he predicted.⁹² Implicit in this vision of elegant mansions and wealth was the advance of plantation slavery rather than Jefferson's hardy yeomanry. Yet those elegant mansions would have to wait, for just as Jackson was mopping up the Creek country, an old enemy appeared on the Gulf Coast.

"a Black Regiment on their Coast"

The war in the North was not going particularly well for the British. They had lost both Tecumseh and Lake Erie in the fall of 1813 and had failed to dislodge the United States from the Canadian border. When Napoleon began to retreat in the face of the allied European monarchs, Britain prepared to widen the war in America. As early as 1812, British commanders thought about encouraging the southern Indians—as well as southern slaves—to rebel against the United States. By 1814, opening a southern front seemed an excellent way to divert the attention and resources of the United States away from the Canadian front and perhaps to undermine southern support for the war. In March the commander of the North American station, Admiral Cochrane, dispatched Captain Hugh Pigot to contact the Creek Indians. Pigot arrived at Apalachicola Bay in Florida in May with arms and ammunition—too late to prevent the Tohopeka massacre. Pigot sent George Woodbine to reconnoiter the region, gather the Indians to the British standard, and train them. Learning of the Red Sticks' perilous situation, Woodbine sailed with provisions to Pensacola, where more than two thousand hungry refugees (including many African Americans) pressed him for assistance.⁹³

News of the British presence in Florida once more kindled the Americans' fears of a slave insurrection, especially as that presence was rumored to include black soldiers. In June 1814, Brigadier General Thomas Flournoy notified the secretary of war that an English

force had landed at Apalachicola. He supposed that its purpose was “to give fresh vigor to the Creeks, & to encourage & give countenance to insurrection among the negroes of the southern states.”⁹⁴ Around the same time, George Strother Gaines heard that “several thousand black troops were on their way from the W. Indies” to Apalachicola.⁹⁵ Mississippi’s territorial judge Harry Toulmin warned Jackson that a British schooner had recently left Pensacola “for the purpose of bringing from Jamaica a body of black troops to some part of the Shores of the gulph of Mexico.”⁹⁶ Jackson’s fears were confirmed in late July, when a new British musket given to the Indians at Apalachicola fell into his hands. He warned Louisiana governor William Claiborne that the British probably intended to strike against Mobile or New Orleans. “I have no doubt these will be their objects,” he concluded, “combined with that of exciting the black population to insurrection & massacre.”⁹⁷ This fear weighed heavily on Jackson as he stripped the Creeks of their land and scurried to Mobile.⁹⁸

American anxieties were not entirely hysterical. The British had black troops and intended to use them in the South. Early in 1813 Senator William Hunter of Rhode Island reminded his colleagues that Spain and England both employed black soldiers. “That unhappy species of population which prevails on our Southern country,” he said, “aroused to reflection by the sight of black soldiers and black officers, may suspect themselves to be fellow-men, and fondly dream they likewise could be soldiers and officers. The bloody tragedy of St. Domingo may be acted over again in this devoted country.”⁹⁹ The West India Regiments, as Britain’s black troops came to be known, grew out of the experience of the British military during the American Revolution and the Caribbean disasters of the 1790s. The wars for St. Domingue particularly accelerated the incorporation of African and African American soldiers in Britain’s colonial military establishment. British officers found that people of African descent could be worked at military labor and were well suited to guerilla warfare. The astonishing mortality rates of European-born soldiers in the Caribbean convinced the British command to employ soldiers of African descent, whom they considered less vulnerable to tropical diseases.

Over the vehement objections of colonial slaveowners, the British began to organize the West India Regiments in 1795.¹⁰⁰

Composed mostly of African-born men, the West India Regiments performed useful services under difficult conditions throughout the British Caribbean. They helped to police the local slave populations wherever they were garrisoned, and they occasionally saw combat. But they faced discrimination and prejudice that hampered their effectiveness. Until 1807 most of the soldiers in the regiments were slaves themselves, and colonial authorities sought jurisdiction over them according to local slave codes. Their ambiguous legal status occasionally led to problems of morale. In 1802, for instance, black soldiers of the Eighth West India mutinied at St. Rupert's Bluff in Dominica, apparently fearing that they were about to be sold as field hands. The Mutiny Act of 1807 finally settled the legal status of Afro-British soldiers by effectively emancipating all slaves in British military service. The act freed about ten thousand slaves in the largest act of emancipation in the British West Indies before 1833.¹⁰¹

Even after the soldiers were freed, the West India Regiments continued to suffer from poor morale and bad discipline. Because many of the soldiers did not speak English or spoke it poorly, a language barrier separated them from their commissioned officers. Also, few of the black noncommissioned officers could read or write.¹⁰² Moreover, the regiments were generally divided and dispersed throughout the colonies to guarantee that black soldiers did not outnumber white soldiers at any one station. Even when it was not dispersed, a regiment might be sent to a remote location and find itself all but forgotten. After several years in British Honduras, for instance, the Fifth West India Regiment was found by an inspecting officer to be "in a very poor State of Discipline." The officer reported in 1808 that "both Officers & men have become so domesticated, that they almost seem to have forgotten that they are Soldiers, except that Guards are mounted."¹⁰³ The West India Regiments also suffered from chronic shortages of clothing, which would hamper their effectiveness in the cold Louisiana winter of 1814-15.¹⁰⁴

British military officials were well aware of the impact the West In-

dia Regiments might have in the American South—especially in Louisiana. Early in 1813 Captain James Lucas Yeo asserted, “The Population of Slaves in the Southern Provinces of America is so great, that the People of Landed Property would be Panic-struck at the sight of a Black Regiment on their Coast and nothing would more effectually tend to make the War with this Country unpopular than the knowledge of such a measure being in contemplation.”¹⁰⁵ A few weeks later Captain James Stirling wrote a long memorandum to Lord Viscount Melville detailing the strategic significance and tactical vulnerabilities of New Orleans. He reported that Louisiana’s black population outnumbered its white and that blacks recently had been “very troublesome.” Stirling drew the obvious conclusion. “A body of Black Troops,” he suggested, “would consequently do much mischief in an attack upon this country if it should not be thought improper to exasperate the white inhabitants by employing them.”¹⁰⁶

In fact the British command did not intend to use the West India Regiments to provoke slave insurrections in the South. It was thought that such a tactic might be counterproductive, although the threat of it could be useful. As he set out for Louisiana, the British commander in chief, Lieutenant General Sir Edward Pakenham, was specifically instructed neither to incite a slave insurrection nor to quiet the slave-owners’ fears that he might. “There is nothing so calculated to unite the Inhabitants against you as an attempt of this description,” explained Lord Bathurst, “while the apprehension of your being obliged to resort to such a measure for your own Protection may be made to act as an additional inducement with them to make no resistance to His Majesty’s Troops.”¹⁰⁷ But there were other reasons to send the West India Regiments to the Gulf Coast. One was that the British hoped to recruit men from the American slave population to replenish the ranks of the West India Regiments, whose strength had been declining ever since the abolition of the slave trade in 1808.¹⁰⁸ It also appears that soldiers from the West India Regiments were to garrison New Orleans if the British took it—a plan consistent with the basic purpose of the regiments, which was to spare European soldiers the unhealthiest assignments.¹⁰⁹

These strategies were enacted in the Chesapeake region and in Florida in the summer and fall of 1814. In late August a British expeditionary force that included one of the West India Regiments entered Washington and burned the capital's public buildings. It did not incite a slave insurrection, but did invite hundreds of slaves to run away from their owners and, ultimately, to escape from the United States. Three hundred were convinced to enter British military service as a battalion of the Royal Colonial Marines.¹¹⁰ When Louisiana governor William Claiborne reported the sack of Washington to Andrew Jackson, he added a note of local concern. "Louisiana has at this moment much to apprehend from Domestic Insurrection," he warned. "We have every reason to believe that the Enemy has been intriguing with *our slaves*, and from a variety of circumstances, we have much cause to suspect that *they* on their part, meditate mischief."¹¹¹ The fear of slave insurrection ran like a red thread through Claiborne's correspondence as he readied Louisiana for the expected British invasion.

Meanwhile in Pensacola, George Woodbine and Major Edward Nicolls, a young but esteemed officer of the Royal Marines, recruited Red Sticks, Seminoles, and black people to the British standard. Their activities infuriated slaveowners in Pensacola and alarmed Benjamin Hawkins and other U.S. officials.¹¹² Jackson criticized the governor of Pensacola, Mateo González Manrique, for harboring Britain's agents. Using undiplomatic language, he warned González Manrique that he would hold him personally responsible for any depredations committed against citizens of the United States, and that he would exact an Indian vengeance: "An Eye for an Eye, Toothe for Toothe, and Scalp for Scalp."¹¹³ Nicolls organized an attack on Fort Bowyer in Mobile Bay in mid-September, but the attack failed and Nicolls (who lost an eye in the battle) retreated to Pensacola, where he continued to attract disgruntled Indians and runaway slaves.¹¹⁴ Five of Benjamin Hawkins's own slaves ran off in late October. "The business must be put a stop to," Hawkins cautioned the governor of Georgia, "or the evil will soon become highly alarming to the citizens throughout your state."¹¹⁵ Finally Jackson had had enough. Acting without authority

from the president, he marched to Pensacola in early November and drove Nicolls and Woodbine out. "Thus Sir I have broken up the hot bed of the Indian war," he boasted to James Monroe.¹¹⁶

Even as he attended to the hornet's nest in Florida, Jackson did not forget New Orleans. He corresponded frequently with William Claiborne, who was coordinating the effort to fortify and defend the city from both foreign and domestic enemies. Louisiana planters freely acknowledged their vulnerability. In September a Committee of Safety formed in New Orleans to help defend the city. In a report sent to Jackson in mid-September, the committee admitted that a society dependent on plantation slavery could not defend itself. "This Country is strong by Nature," the committee asserted, "but extremely weak from the nature of its population." According to the committee, the high ratio of slaves to white inhabitants on the sugar plantations along the Mississippi and the mixed population in the city made Louisiana vulnerable to a slave rebellion, which it expected the British to foment.¹¹⁷ In mid-October, Jacques Villeré personally implored Louisiana senator Eligius Fromentin for assistance. "We are determined to defend ourselves to the last extremity," he pleaded, "but you know very well the population of this part of the country. You know how much we have to fear about the 'domestic enemy,' and you know very well how limited is our defense in case of invasion. To that horror will our wives, our children as well as ourselves be exposed? Add to this agents of the English Government found everywhere, and who by the most infamous methods incite our slaves to revolt, murder, pilfering, and you will have an idea of our anxiety."¹¹⁸

One of the thorniest questions Jackson and Claiborne considered was whether to make use of Louisiana's free men of color as soldiers. Their deliberations echoed those leading to the formation of the West India Regiments. After years of stonewalling, the first Louisiana state legislature had grudgingly authorized the establishment of a militia corps composed of free men of color in 1812. The legislature limited the corps to four companies of sixty-four men each, restricted enlistment to native-born men (and their sons) who had paid a state tax

and owned landed property worth at least \$200 for at least two years before enlistment, and put the battalion under the command of white officers. The terms were obviously intended to restrict military service to the most privileged and established free men of color. The large group of recent migrants from the Caribbean was excluded, as was the majority of free men of color, who did not meet the property qualification. Command of the battalion was given to Michael Fortier and Pierre Lacoste, both wealthy Creole planters.

In early August Claiborne met with the officers of the free colored battalion, who urged him to extend the privilege of military service to all native-born free men of color in and around New Orleans. Claiborne stalled for time, authorizing a census of the free men of color to be taken and writing to Jackson for further instructions. Claiborne recommended in favor of the men of color. "These men for the most part sustain good characters," he explained, "many of them have extensive connections and much property to defend, and all seem attached to Arms." He argued that their constitutions and habits would make them useful in the event of an invasion, and that if they were not allowed to serve, the British would "be encouraged to intrigue & to corrupt them." Claiborne suggested that another three or four hundred men could be recruited for six-month terms of service, so long as they were assured of serving in Louisiana and not out of the state.¹¹⁹ Jackson accepted Claiborne's recommendation and replied with instructions to expand each company to 100 men, but he did not promise to keep them in Louisiana.¹²⁰

Claiborne expected that the local planter elite would oppose Jackson's decision to expand the free colored battalion, which had not been popular among them in the first place. In mid-October he reported to Jackson that two "Gentlemen of Influence" had suggested that the planters would accept the arming of free black soldiers if Jackson guaranteed that the soldiers would be removed permanently from Louisiana at the end of the war. If the men were allowed to return to Louisiana after the war "with a Knowledge of the use of arms, & *that pride of Distinction*, which a soldier's pursuits so naturally

inspires,” the gentlemen insisted, “they would prove dangerous.”¹²¹ Jackson acknowledged the planters’ concern but insisted that it was better for the free men of color to be enrolled in the service of their country and subject to military discipline than not. “If their pride and merit entitle them to confidence, they can be employed against the Enemy,” he explained to Claiborne. “If not they can be kept from uniting with him.”¹²² Buoyed by Jackson’s support, the governor continued to recruit, organize, and arm the free men of color, who rallied to the American standard despite the prejudice and discrimination they endured.

Throughout the slave societies of the circum-Caribbean world, the wartime pressures of a revolutionary age forced military authorities to arm people of African descent, despite slaveowners’ objections. Consequently, soldiers of African descent confronted each other as enemy combatants at the Battle of New Orleans.

“my body it shall remain here”

More than six thousand British soldiers gathered in Jamaica’s Negril Bay and embarked for Louisiana in late November 1814.¹²³ After two weeks at sea, the fleet anchored off the Gulf Coast, where a sharp frost and driving rain greeted them. The vanguard of the British troops packed into barges on the morning of 22 December and rowed across a windswept Lake Borgne, reaching the boggy coast in the dark of night. Wending their way through Bayou Bienvenue and Bayou Mazant, they reached a canal leading through the cypress swamp to Jacques Villeré’s plantation—a route probably taken by countless smugglers before them. Concealed by tall reeds, the soldiers slogged through the canal until morning, when they broke into the open clearing that marked the left bank of the Mississippi River. An advance company seized Villeré’s plantation, which became the British headquarters for the duration of their ill-fated stab at New Orleans.¹²⁴

Beautifully rendered in Benjamin Latrobe’s 1819 watercolor of the

New Orleans battleground, the agrarian civility of the sugar plantation landscape impressed the British, particularly as it contrasted sharply with the quagmire they had just traversed. Several aspects of the terrain stand out from the various descriptions recorded by other British soldiers and officers: the levee guarding the river; the ditches and fences crisscrossing the cane fields; the formal gardens and orange groves; and the scattered big houses, outbuildings, and slave cabins rising from the alluvial flatness. The artillery officer Alexander Dickson described the view in his journal: "The cleared land on the left bank of the Mississippi at this point is from 1000 to 1500 Yards wide, being a flat Cultivated plain principally Sugar plantations, fenced by high and strong railings, and much intersected by Ditches, bounded on one side by the Artificial bank of the river against inundations, and on the other by the wood which is every where thick, Marshy, and nearly impenetrable."¹²⁵ The day after Christmas, Alexander Dickson commandeered one of the Villeré slave cabins that had the luxury of a fireplace. "The Weather Continuing to be piercing Cold the fire is most agreeable," he wrote in his journal. He did not indicate what had happened to the cabin's previous inhabitants.¹²⁶

The plantations below New Orleans were full of people, and most of them were slaves. According to the 1810 census, almost fifteen hundred people lived on the plantations on the left bank below New Orleans within the Seventh District of Orleans Parish, and of these, almost three-quarters were slaves. The 1810 census lists twenty-five slaves on the Lacoste plantation, forty-seven on the Villeré plantation, and fifty-three on the Jumonville plantation.¹²⁷ In his memoir, the British officer Benson Earl Hill recalled a memorable encounter with a slave on the Villeré plantation. While wandering around the plantation, Hill met a young black boy named George, who was wearing a spiked iron collar. In perfect French, George told Hill that the collar was a punishment from his master for trying to run away. It prevented him from sleeping. Hill took George to a blacksmith, who removed this "ingenious symbol of a land of liberty." In exchange for the favor, George pledged to work as Hill's servant and was employed making

marmalade from Villeré's oranges. The story may be apocryphal, but it is a plausible introduction to the problem of slavery at the Battle of New Orleans.¹²⁸

The Battle of New Orleans unfolded in one of the richest districts in North America, amid sugar plantations that had been carved out and built up and worked over by thousands of enslaved men and women. Plantation slavery shaped the physical, psychological, and political terrain of the battle even if it did not decide its outcome. As the British approached, U.S. officials took steps to keep the enslaved population under control. They deployed thousands of slaves in military labor, turning potential weakness into strength. Soldiers of African descent fought on both sides, but their presence did not incite a slave revolt as many people feared it would. Instead, as the confrontation between American and British forces dragged on, conflicts over labor tainted relations between Andrew Jackson, local planters, and the free soldiers of color. And when the British finally retreated from the Gulf Coast, several hundred enslaved Louisianians went with them in a bold rejection of life in the slave country.

As usual in moments of crisis, public authorities stepped up their surveillance of enslaved people. City officials in New Orleans took special precautionary measures covering slaves, free people of color, and other suspicious persons.¹²⁹ Governor William Claiborne issued general militia orders in early September mandating nightly patrols and recommending "the strictest discipline" among the slaves.¹³⁰ The legislature allowed armed men to stay behind to guard the slaves in plantation districts away from New Orleans and granted them unusually broad authority to search slave cabins for arms, ammunition, and signs of rebellion. Evidence from Attakapas demonstrates the vigilance of local authorities. In September 1814, the Attakapas planter David Rees received a circular from Governor Claiborne advising that British agents were "busily engaged in inciting our negroes to insurrection." Rees was instructed to organize a regular patrol with the power to search "all negro cabins and other places where Arms are most likely to be concealed," and to arrest everybody "whose con-

duct, and character, should furnish reasonable ground of suspicion, of his or their intrigues with the negroes, or being in any manner connected with the Enemy.”¹³¹ Claiborne redoubled vigilance measures in Attakapas in early November, asking Rees to raise a company of one hundred “minute men” capable of repelling a British force ascending the Bayou Teche, or for use “in the case of insurrection among the Negroes, whether in St. Mary, in Attakapas or Opelousas.”¹³² After the British landing, the patrol was again reinforced. Claiborne ordered Rees to maintain “strict & vigilant Patrols night and day,” and to “have organized all the exempt from Militia Duty within the bounds of your Regiment, and order that they Perform Patrol Duty.” Rees was to guard against a slave insurrection and a British invasion.¹³³

Slaves were put to work to defend New Orleans. From December 1814 to March 1815, thousands of slaves (mostly men) were sent to strategic locations and forced to perform the arduous work of military fortification. They helped to dig the trenches, raise the breastworks, and erect the batteries that stood between the British forces and New Orleans. Years of bickering between city officials and local slaveowners had produced a workable system of conscription and compensation for slaves employed on public works in New Orleans, and several of the engineers who directed fortifications under Jackson, including Latour, had previously managed slaves on public and private projects in New Orleans. Moreover, military labor resembled the kind of hard work that enslaved adult men had always performed on sugar plantations. The capacity of Louisiana’s officials to mobilize slave labor in defense of New Orleans counteracted to some degree the military disadvantages of plantation society.

Andrew Jackson’s first task upon arriving in New Orleans was to scout the American defenses and shore up vulnerable spots. Several batteries were needed to protect the city, and Jackson concluded that only slave labor could build them. “It will require considerable labour to erect the various Batteries contemplated,” Jackson instructed Governor William Claiborne, “and this Labour in a great measure must at this rainy season be performed by your Slaves.”¹³⁴ Louisiana’s legisla-

ture allocated funds to fortify the city, and requested that Claiborne solicit slaveowners in and around New Orleans to provide slaves for the work.¹³⁵ Claiborne sent a circular to slaveowners in the parishes around New Orleans, asking that they send male slaves to Fort St. Charles or to English Turn.¹³⁶ Jackson also authorized Jacques Villéré to requisition “negroes, Horses, Oxen, Carts, &c. as he may deem necessary.”¹³⁷

Jackson’s army relied heavily on slave labor. In late December Howell Tatum noted in his journal that slaves had been procured “to ease the labour of the soldiery and preserve their health and activity for more important service.”¹³⁸ Many of the slaves were dispersed to corps on the front lines, while others found themselves in large gangs working on specific projects. On Christmas Day, Edward Livingston (now Jackson’s aide-de-camp) instructed one officer to “take all the negroes you can collect from the plantations” and cut the levee below the British lines.¹³⁹ One hundred fifty slaves worked to construct a line of defense at “Madame Dupree’s Mill & Canal” about one mile in the rear of the principal line, under the guidance of Benjamin Latrobe’s son, Henry. Another 150 slaves under engineer Lefevre completed a parapet along Boisgervais’s Canal on the right bank of the Mississippi, three miles from New Orleans.¹⁴⁰ The commander at Fort St. Leon had almost 200 slaves working on the fort in early January, but these were not enough.¹⁴¹ “I have had a party of men out every day since I took command of the fort pressing the negroes within my reach,” he reported to Jackson.¹⁴² One slave caught up in the dragnet was Archy, a “smart able negro man” hired out to a barge heading down the Mississippi to New Orleans in November 1814. When the barge reached the city, Archy was drafted into military labor and forced to cut timber in the swamps for almost a month. After laboring “incessantly in the water & mud,” he took sick and died. Slaves, too, became casualties of war.¹⁴³

After the Battle of New Orleans, the Louisiana legislature praised the state’s planters, who “furnished thousands of their slaves, and sent them to every particular place where labour was thought neces-

sary.”¹⁴⁴ Slaveowners profited, because they were paid for their slaves’ labor. Moreover, some owners surely calculated that their property was more secure under the watchful eye of Jackson’s army than on undefended and vulnerable plantations. A few weeks after the decisive battle, Robert Hilliard Barrow wrote to his uncle Bennett Barrow, “The negroes about New Orleans were very serviceable in throwing up breastworks, and thereby kept out of mischief.”¹⁴⁵ But military labor did not entirely prevent slaves from getting into mischief themselves. Edward Livingston’s son, Lewis, who was stationed at Camp Macarty, reported on 9 January that most of the slaves at work there had run away during the previous day’s battle.¹⁴⁶ Similarly, the commanding officer at Fort St. Leon reported at the end of the January that the number of slaves at the fort “diminishes every day.” Some were ordered elsewhere, but others ran away.¹⁴⁷

While slaves labored, free men of color fought on both sides in the Battle of New Orleans. About one in every ten soldiers was of African descent—probably the largest concentration of black soldiers in the United States before the Civil War.¹⁴⁸ On the British side were the First and Fifth West India Regiments, numbering around one thousand soldiers, most of them African-born. The poorly equipped soldiers suffered greatly from the cold Louisiana winter and the arduous labor they were compelled to perform.¹⁴⁹ One British officer recalled seeing soldiers from the West India Regiments enlarging a canal. “Poor wretches!” he wrote, “They worked awkwardly and groaned incessantly, under an occupation which inflicted deadly suffering, and sent numbers to the hospital, and most likely to their graves.”¹⁵⁰ When the Fifth West India Regiment returned to the Caribbean, the wear of the campaign showed on the soldiers’ bodies. Their commander reported that “a good many man arrived sick on the return of the Corps” and that some of them had to be transferred to garrison duty “having their feet injured by the Frost on the Expedition.” Even the regimental surgeon had died from exposure.¹⁵¹

The West India Regiments also suffered casualties from combat. Five privates from the First West India and 9 privates from the Fifth

West India were killed in action between 25 December and 8 January.¹⁵² Another 160 men from the First and Fifth West India Regiments died in hospital or at sea between 25 December 1814 and 24 March 1815.¹⁵³ British military records afford the merest glimpse of these men. Private James Augustine, for instance, was born in Cape Nicholas Mole in St. Domingue. An upholsterer by trade, he joined the British service on May first, 1801. At five feet ten inches, he was taller than most of his fellow soldiers. He is listed in the records as having black hair, a long face, and black eyes. He would have been eligible for an increase in pay had he survived through May of 1815, but he was killed in action on 28 December 1814. The four other Fifth West India privates killed in action were George Byng, Robert Corbet, William Pattin, and Robert Pegan. They were all "Eboe" men, probably bought by the British specifically to serve as soldiers. Byng's African origins were etched on his face; according to the Description and Succession Book, he had "country marks on his forehead." Byng and Corbet had been enrolled in the regiment on 25 January 1802, while Pattin and Pegan were enrolled on 25 March 1804. All served in the British military for more than a decade before giving their lives on the battlefield below New Orleans. They lived Atlantic odysseys but never made it home.¹⁵⁴

An American soldier may have gotten a glimpse of one of these men. When the smoke of the battlefield had cleared, reported an anonymous private from Kentucky, the carpet of prostrate, red-coated bodies made the battlefield look like "a sea of blood." Some British soldiers had taken cover among the piles of dead and dying, and as the gunfire ceased, they began to run away or surrender. To the Kentuckian they appeared to rise from the dead. One man in particular caught the attention of the private and his comrades. "Among those that were running off, we observed one stout looking fellow, in a red coat," he wrote, "who would every now and then stop and display some gestures toward us, that were rather the opposite of complimentary." Though many shots were fired at the disrespectful soldier, none hit the mark. A cry went up for the company sharpshooter,

a “cadaverous looking Tennessean” nicknamed Paleface: “Hurra, Paleface! load quick and give him a shot. The infernal rascal is patting his butt at us!” Paleface “rammed home his bullet, and taking a long sight, he let drive” at the rascal, who was by now “two to three hundred yards off.” The soldier staggered and fell and one of Paleface’s company ran across the corpse-littered field to his body. Rolling the man onto his back, the American discovered that the British soldier “was a mulatto and was quite dead.”¹⁵⁵

Two distinct groups of free men of color served on the American side. One group comprised the native-born militiamen under Michael Fortier, and the other, recent migrants from the Caribbean who responded enthusiastically to Jackson’s call to arms. The foreign-born were placed under the command of Louis Daquin, a white refugee from St. Domingue. One of their leaders was Charles Savary, a free man of color with long military and political experience in St. Domingue, whose son Joseph served as a captain in the battalion. The men of color performed admirably, especially in the aftermath of the decisive battle on 8 January, when Captain Savary’s men sallied onto the field to protect those gathering up the wounded.¹⁵⁶ During that afternoon, the soldiers of color suffered fourteen casualties, including the death of Savary’s brother. The thirteen wounded African American soldiers on the day constituted one-third of all American casualties, a higher proportion than in any other confrontation during the defense of New Orleans.¹⁵⁷ American officials praised the soldiers of color. Adjutant General Robert Butler declared that the colored companies “have not disappointed the hopes that were formed of their courage and perseverance in the performance of their duty,” and the Louisiana legislature lauded “brave Savary.”¹⁵⁸ The men of color were proud of their accomplishments. Reporting on his activities in early February, the native-born Captain Louis Simon declared, “I think however to have done more than my duty serving one’s country is a thing which every man of honor glories in.”¹⁵⁹

The British forces retreated to the Gulf Coast in mid-January but remained within striking distance of New Orleans through March.

News of the peace treaty with Britain (which had been signed at Ghent on Christmas Eve) reached the city in early February, but Andrew Jackson refused to relax until he received official notification in mid-March that the Senate had ratified it.¹⁶⁰ In this twilight of the war, Jackson struggled to fortify the American position in the face of intensifying discontent within his own ranks. The central issue was Jackson's continuation of martial law, which some of Louisiana's more prominent citizens believed to be unnecessary, heavy-handed, and even despotic.¹⁶¹ But contributing to this very public controversy were other less publicized tensions connected to the ramifications of war in a slave country.

After the decisive battle of 8 January, Jackson redoubled his efforts to fortify New Orleans, but his officers found it more and more difficult to procure slaves for the work. Local planters believed the danger from the British had passed and wanted their slaves back on the plantations.¹⁶² Facing a labor shortage, Governor Claiborne proposed paying planters one dollar a day for each slave, but Jackson thought that rate of hire was "extravagantly expensive."¹⁶³ Claiborne defended the cost, arguing that a dollar a day was usually allowed for short-term labor, even though the United States generally hired slave labor at \$20 per month. The planters, he told Jackson, were "not as ready to meet our requisitions as formerly, attributable I presume to the necessity of preparing their farms for the crop of the present year, & which have for some months been neglected."¹⁶⁴ The sugar planters' determination to make money brought them into conflict with Jackson, who was more concerned with the public good. As the planters returned to business as usual, the work of fortifying New Orleans proceeded haltingly.¹⁶⁵ It was not until the British finally departed from the Gulf Coast that the conflict between the security imperatives of the state and the labor needs of the planters evaporated in the dry air of peace.

The shortage of slave labor impinged on the soldiers of color, eventually provoking a serious conflict between them and the officers directing the defense of New Orleans. Many soldiers eager to return to

their homes—including a good number of the soldiers of color—began to abandon their posts.¹⁶⁶ On January 19, Michael Fortier reported to Jackson that Louis Daquin had sent out a party “with an order to arrest & confine all the deserters” from his battalion.¹⁶⁷ The colored soldiers’ dissatisfaction intensified in February, when Jackson called on them to perform military labor. He ordered Louis Daquin’s battalion to Chef Menteur in the middle of February, but many of the soldiers refused to go. Daquin explained to Brigadier General Robert McCausland that his soldiers were willing to sacrifice their lives in combat but preferred to die rather than be subjected to the degradation of military labor. They did not want to be treated like slaves.¹⁶⁸ Savary refused to march his company to Chef Menteur, and soldiers already there deserted in droves. On 24 February, McCausland sent Jackson a list of deserters, warning him that without “rigid steps,” Daquin would soon “be left without a private to command.”¹⁶⁹ Jackson began to suspect that British agents were sowing discord among the colored troops. “The Enemy is still near us, and no doubt remains upon my mind that his emissaries have for some weeks been busily engaged amongst us,” he explained to a subordinate. A “speedy corrective” was required.¹⁷⁰

Amid the controversy, Savary and fifteen other colored officers in Daquin’s Battalion of St. Domingue Volunteers appealed to Jackson for help. The men asserted that they were loyal to the United States and “ready to fly to any post which may be assigned to them to defend a contry which has given them an asylem.” Hoping to enjoy the benefits of peace, they called on Jackson to protect them from the “future insult” of discriminatory laws and prejudice.¹⁷¹ The soldiers’ plea contrasts sharply with the language of the petition submitted to William Claiborne a decade earlier by Louisiana’s Creoles of color, who had expressed “the fullest confidence in the Justice and Liberality of the Government towards every Class of Citizens.”¹⁷² Savary and his fellow officers lacked that confidence. Their protest was cautious and limited. They trusted neither the government of Louisiana nor the people of the United States but instead sought shelter under Jackson’s

“paternal care.” They appear to have been speaking only for themselves and not for free people of color in general. Along the same lines, Charles Savary, Captain Joseph Savary’s father, wrote a personal letter to Jackson pleading for “that succour which his age, infirmities and indigent family so urgently demand.” Jackson endorsed the plea and recommended that Congress provide for his support in recognition of the great service father and son had performed. “It is Just to do so,” he noted on the back of the letter.¹⁷³ Congress never acted, but the Louisiana legislature did grant Joseph Savary a generous pension of \$30 per month in 1819 and again in 1823.¹⁷⁴

In addition to disgruntled planters and free people of color, troublesome slaves continued to preoccupy Andrew Jackson. Fears of slave unrest prompted several anxious communications from Attakapas. Southwest of New Orleans, the region along the coast of Louisiana was particularly vulnerable to a British incursion. In January four state legislators urged Jackson to allow the militias of St. Mary and St. Martin to remain in their parishes to guard against a slave uprising. Their coastal location, they explained, exposed them to a British raid, and the danger “is much increased at the moment, by the great disproportion between the white & black Population.” Even in time of peace, “serious apprehensions have been felt from the great number of Slaves in said Parishes, as there is scarcely white Men sufficient at any time to form the necessary Patrols & keep the Blacks in order.”¹⁷⁵

Fear of slave insurrection persisted in Attakapas after the fighting had ended. The longer Jackson kept the Louisiana militiamen in the field, the greater the danger from slaves. In early February Jackson received a letter that confirmed the planters’ fears. Writing from Camp Jackson in the parish of St. Mary’s, Joshua Baker relayed some chilling news: “There has been a grate alarm amongst the inhabitants of Opelousas, And St. Martin, owing to a rebellion amongst the negroes of these Parishes.” According to Baker, seventeen “neegroes” had been jailed, and although the men had not yet been tried, “sum of the neegroes confessed to the fact.” According to the testimony of the al-

leged conspirators, “the signal of the attack was to be the firing of the British Cannon.” The slaves’ confessions may have been coerced; indeed the entire story may have been concocted to induce Jackson to allow the Attakapas militiamen to return home. Like so many similar episodes in the history of the American South, it may have been the figment of a fevered collective imagination. Still, that collective imagination grew from real conditions and palpable anxieties.¹⁷⁶

Runaway slaves were another matter, and a very real one at that. Eyewitness accounts and narratives of the Battle of New Orleans written by American participants or observers asserted that the retreating British forces kidnapped two or three hundred slaves from the plantations that they had occupied during the invasion of Louisiana. On 20 January the Chevalier de Tousard complained to his son-in-law that the British “took with them the harvest of three plantations and more than two hundred negroes.”¹⁷⁷ The national press repeated the claim. In February, *Niles’ Weekly Register* celebrated the American victory at New Orleans but added a melancholy note: “The English have destroyed the plantations below their camp, and carried away the slaves and behaved generally like vandals.”¹⁷⁸ Lacarrière Latour acknowledged that some of the slaves “were very willing” to follow the British but argued that most of the slaves—especially the women—were “carried off by force.”¹⁷⁹ The story that the British had kidnapped the slaves strengthened the widely held belief that the American victory prevented a wholesale disruption of the plantation economy. It also implied that slaves would have preferred to remain in the febrile swamps of Louisiana.

In fact the slaves who left with the British freely chose to abandon the plantations, and everyone knew it. According to Alexander Dickson, the retreating British had neither expected nor wanted the slaves to accompany them. “A good many Negroes, both Men, Women and Children have taken the opportunity of the night to accompany the Army down to the Huts,” he noted in his journal, “which Genl. Lambert was extremely displeased at.”¹⁸⁰ John Lambert, who had inherited command of the British troops in Louisiana after the deaths of

Packenham and Gibbs, subsequently apprised Andrew Jackson of the slaves' activities. "To my great surprise," he wrote, "I found upon reaching my Head Quarters, that a considerable number of Slaves had assembled there under the idea of embarking with the army." He assured Jackson that his men had tried to convince the slaves to remain at home but they came anyway.¹⁸¹ In the 1820s a series of depositions were taken in preparation for an adjudication of claims for compensation submitted by Americans who suffered loss of property at the hands of the British in the War of 1812. These depositions contain detailed information about the Louisiana slave refugees and their erstwhile owners' attempts to recover them. They reveal that the refugees were not kidnapped but, rather, chose to abandon Louisiana.¹⁸²

Who were these refugees? Louisiana planters submitted claims for the value of 163 slaves.¹⁸³ Most were owned by the planters whose estates had been taken over by the British forces—Jacques Villeré alone owned more than 50 of them—but some may have fled to British lines from Jackson's camp. Considered property by their owners, they were valued at a total of \$182,050. The slaves ran the gamut of plantation occupations. The men had been drivers, sugar makers, coachmen, carpenters, bricklayers, cartmen, and field hands. The women had worked as field hands and house servants. Without their labor, Latour observed, "the masters could not cultivate their plantations."¹⁸⁴ Most were adult men, and among those whose nativity was recorded, most were native-born Louisianians. One of the most remarkable of the refugees was a thirty-six-year old Louisianian named Osman, described in the depositions as "a good carter, carpenter, and negro-driver, of uncommon intelligence." He was spotted in December of 1814 on a plantation near the Pearl River, where he was procuring oxen and other provisions for the British. A witness contended that the British were "very much attached to *Osman* because he was not only a very smart, active & cunning fellow, but could speak with the indians whose language he understood very well."¹⁸⁵

The slaves' flight provoked two months of intricate negotiations. Their owners wanted their slaves back, and it briefly appeared that

they might get them. Lambert assured Jackson in mid-January that the British intended to return the slaves “to any proprietors that may claim them & sending a Person who may have influence with them as soon as possible.”¹⁸⁶ Representing the interests of the planters, Governor Claiborne pressed Jackson to send agents to the British camp to retrieve the slaves, but Jackson resisted. “Would it not be a degradation of that national character of which we boast to condescend to solicit the restoration of stolen property from an enemy who avows plunder & burning to be legitimate modes of warfare?” he asked the governor.¹⁸⁷ Interest eventually trumped honor, as Jackson authorized a delegation to recover the slaves from the British. By mid-February, Jackson concluded that the delegation would obtain nothing but “fallacious promises,” but he continued to bicker with the British commanders over the fate of the runaways.¹⁸⁸ The sticking point was that the British commanders refused to force the slaves to return to their owners. As Lambert explained to Jackson, “I shall be *very happy*, if they can be persuaded all to return, but to compel them is what I cannot do.”¹⁸⁹ When an American officer arrived at the British camp at Dauphin Island in Mobile Bay, Lambert informed him that he would not comply with the articles of the treaty having to do with slaves, “as it was totally incompatible with the spirit and constitution of his government to recognize *slavery* at all.”¹⁹⁰ Lambert certainly knew that the British government had no difficulty recognizing slavery in its overseas colonies and would continue to do so for another generation, but he was in no mood to do the bidding of Louisiana’s planters.

Several slaveowners visited the British camp at Dauphin Island hoping to retrieve their slaves. When Hugues Lavergne arrived there at the end of February, Lambert gave orders to have the slaves assemble “in order that they could be seen & spoken to.” About two hundred slaves gathered to hear Lavergne’s appeal, but most rejected his assurances of good faith and refused to return.¹⁹¹ Jacques Loutant sailed to Dauphin Island to recover the slaves of Antonio Méndez and Louis Reggio. James, a slave belonging to Reggio, agreed to return, but three other Reggio slaves and four Mendez slaves refused.

Loutant blamed the British officers for turning them against their owners. He was “sorry to say that those slaves were more induced by the English to stay with them than to return to their masters.”¹⁹² By the end of March, those slaves still bivouacked on Dauphin Island had tired of the planters’ speeches. When Chevalier Delacroix and Michael Fortier arrived there on 29 March, they found that the slaves had “concealed themselves in the tents” and would not come out.¹⁹³

After commanding a regiment of free men of color in the defense of New Orleans, Colonel Pierre Lacoste returned home to discover that thirteen of his own slaves had fled with the British. When he reached Dauphin Island in an attempt to recover them, he encountered a slave named Jean-Baptiste, owned by Louisiana planter Jean Canon. Canon had hired out Jean-Baptiste to Jacques Villeré prior to the British invasion, receiving \$15 a month for his labor. According to Canon, the thirty-five-year-old Jean-Baptiste was a “Carter & good servant,” and worth \$1,200 in the slave market. In January 1815, Jean-Baptiste had retreated with the British in the company of the other Villeré slaves. Lacoste failed to persuade him to return to New Orleans. He testified that Jean-Baptiste was “very insolent” and told him “you may carry my head along with you but as to my body it shall remain here.”¹⁹⁴ And so Jean-Baptiste, like several thousand other enslaved people throughout the southern United States, seized the opportunity of war to take his leave from the slave country. Many of these refugees ended up in Trinidad, where British authorities gave them land, freedom, and a new beginning “on Canaan’s happy shore.”¹⁹⁵

The Battle of New Orleans ultimately reinforced the Americans’ providential view of their country’s destiny. The famous battle of 8 January resulted in almost 200 British soldiers killed and more than 1,200 wounded, as against only 13 Americans killed and 13 wounded.¹⁹⁶ Among the British casualties was the commander in chief, Lieutenant General Sir Edward Pakenham, brother of the Duke of Wellington. Rumor had it that his body was packed in a pipe of rum and returned to England (as Henry Palfrey joked) in “high spir-

its.”¹⁹⁷ There had been no major slave rebellion, no plunder of New Orleans, no loss of American honor. Many observers saw the hand of God in the outcome. “The Almighty was pleased to Crown us victorious,” Ensign David Weller wrote to his brother on 13 January.¹⁹⁸ Andrew Jackson agreed. “If ever there was an occasion on which providence interfered, immediately, in the affairs of men it seems to have been on this,” he mused. “What but such an interposition could have saved this Country?”¹⁹⁹

The idea of freedom rippled through the deluge of nationalist propaganda that followed the Battle of New Orleans. Letters, orations, sermons, plays, poems, and toasts all praised Jackson’s victory over the British as a victory for freedom. A young North Carolina congressman named Israel Pickens told his constituents that events on the southwestern frontier proved “a free republic is capable of self-preservation, and of standing the shock of war.”²⁰⁰ One dramatist titled his play *The triumph of liberty, or, Louisiana preserved: a national drama, in five acts*.²⁰¹ No propagandist identified the Battle of New Orleans more fully with the cause of freedom than an anonymous poet in Boston, whose verse symbolically abolished slavery.

Let Britain in sackcloth and ashes deplore,
That her PACKINGHAM, KEAN, and her GIBBS are no more;
Where the wide *Mississippi* her waters now lave,
Shall ne’er be defil’d by the foot of a *slave!*
Our heroes shall conquer by land and by sea,
No despot enslaving,
Our strip’d flag still waving,
And proves to the world that America’s free.²⁰²

The propagandistic representation of Jackson’s victories in the Creek War and the Battle of New Orleans not only suppressed the tensions over slave resistance that had plagued the nation during the war but also denied that the United States was a slave country. At an extreme, the rhetoric of freedom obliterated the reality of slavery.

Contrary to expectation, the Deep South became the arena for the United States' greatest wartime triumphs. Under Andrew Jackson's indomitable leadership, the citizens of the region stamped out the Red Stick revolt and expropriated millions of acres of Indian land. Then they beat back the British at the Battle of New Orleans, redeeming the honor of a country humiliated by the burning of its national capital. Jackson's victories were a balm for a troubled country. "Old Hickory" became a hero, and a nationalist self-confidence buoyed the Deep South. John Reid described the general's triumphal procession up the Mississippi in April 1815. "He is everywhere hailed as the saviour of the Country," Reid reported to his mother. "All the way up the Coast (which is really a town for more than a hundred miles) he has been feasted, caressed, & I may say idolised. They look upon him as a strange prodigy; & women, children, & old men line the road to look at him as they would at the Elephant."²⁰³ A naval officer witnessed the resurgence of commerce and pleasure in New Orleans. "Now Every one is in bustle & commotion," he observed in April, "the wharves crowded with merchantmen continuously pouring in—carts rattling through the streets—& beautiful Girls to be seen in all directions."²⁰⁴ Writing from the nation's capital, Louisiana's senator James Brown rejoiced in the victory. "Property in Louisiana will rapidly appreciate," he wrote to Edward Livingston, "Every body talks of either visiting that country or settling there."²⁰⁵ And Henry Johnson of Donaldsonville, Louisiana, wanted to know, "What is the price of negroes in Kentucky?"²⁰⁶

[To view this image, refer to
the print version of this title.]

William Darby, Map of Louisiana, 1816. A onetime surveyor, Darby was a leading geographer of the southwestern United States in the early nineteenth century. His maps and books encouraged people to migrate to the Deep South after the War of 1812. Note the differences between Darby's map and the one drawn by Old Tassel three decades earlier (see Chapter 1). COURTESY OF THE LOUISIANA STATE MUSEUM.

Fulfilling the Slave Country

WHILE IN THE nation's capital in the fall of 1815, Andrew Jackson often dined with North Carolina's young congressman Israel Pickens, whom he convinced to visit the new lands coming to market in the Deep South.¹ Pickens scouted the Mississippi Territory in the summer of 1816, sold his plantation in North Carolina at the end of the year, and sent most of his slaves to the southwest under the supervision of his brother James.² His prospects brightened when President Monroe appointed him as register of the land office east of Pearl River, a position of considerable influence in the rapidly growing territory. Accompanied by his wife, Martha, and their two young children, Pickens settled into a log cabin in St. Stephens in January 1818, where he hoped to "take a fair start with that new world which promises so much to industry & enterprize."³ By the end of 1819, Pickens had purchased more than a thousand acres of land and was the proud owner of a cotton plantation on the Tombigbee River worked by a large gang of slaves. He helped to draft Alabama's first state constitution, and in 1821 the state's voters made him their governor.⁴

It hardly needs to be said that the Deep South was not a "new world" but an old and inhabited one when Pickens settled there. Call-

ing it a new world was part of the ideological justification for U.S. expansion. (Indeed the idea of its newness was one of the aspects of its history that was not new at all.) But Pickens was right in the sense that the region was about to enter a new phase of its history, namely, a profound and prolonged expansion of plantation society. He and thousands of other people participated in that remarkable expansion; their individual decisions contributed to it. At the same time, those decisions were shaped by deeper, structural pressures that shaped the postwar world. Slaveowners benefited from vigorous policies of nation building pursued by the U.S. government—especially the conversion of millions of acres of Indian land into marketable real estate—as the country worked to thicken its sovereignty in the Deep South. The end of the Napoleonic Wars also brought rising commodity prices and invigorated opportunities to profit from the use of slave labor. Free migrants to the Deep South, as well as planters and farmers already living in the region, responded by expanding their cultivation of cotton and sugar. Taking advantage of opportunities created by American nationalism and the transatlantic economy, southern slaveholders and their allies created a contiguous plantation system stretching from Georgia to Texas.

These developments were catastrophic for American slaves. Forced migration uprooted thousands from their long-standing communities, friends, and kin in the older states and transplanted them in the cotton and sugar fields of the Deep South, where they were subjected to more difficult kinds of work and more lethal disease environments. The swollen slave markets in Huntsville, Mobile, Natchez, and New Orleans boosted slave prices throughout the South and gave slaveowners a potent new weapon in the ongoing struggle to control their human property. As Americans of all stripes confronted the many dilemmas of the market revolution—the quantitative and qualitative transformations of American life associated with the expansion of commerce—developments in the Deep South and the increasing visibility of forced migration provoked both opponents and defenders of slavery to think anew about this American institution. While slav-

ery's opponents realized that slavery was not going to die a slow and natural death, its defenders wrestled with the social, political, and moral consequences of expansion. The Missouri crisis of 1819 crystallized these tensions in the cauldron of national politics and ultimately distilled a solution acceptable to the slave country (though not to the slaves themselves) for another generation.

Early in 1817 a Senate committee on public lands issued an influential report that described the area between the Mississippi River and the Appalachian Mountains as an "irregular frontier" with isolated American settlements scattered in and around Indian country. Its irregularity compromised American sovereignty and had nearly led to disaster during the War of 1812. The committee recommended that the Indians living east of the Mississippi River should be relocated to the west, and the frontier settlements should be integrated as quickly as possible into the economic, social, and political life of the country. Over the long run, it predicted, migration would create a compact, dense, and contiguous population of citizens in the trans-Appalachian West, strengthening American sovereignty there and guaranteeing that the Indian risings of the previous war would not recur. The report spelled out the logic of western expansion and nation building already at work in the Deep South, where the destruction of the Red Sticks and the elimination of British influence had shifted the balance of power further toward the United States.⁵

One expression of that underlying logic was the acquisition of Florida—a goal long sought by Jeffersonian Republicans. So long as Florida remained in Spanish hands, southwestern settlers feared for their access to the Gulf of Mexico and, thus, the world market. Moreover, a weak Spanish government in Florida allowed the coastal region to become a haven for all kinds of dissidents and outlaws.⁶ The U.S. ran roughshod over Spanish sovereignty in Florida in the years after the end of the war. American troops invaded Florida three times between 1815 and 1820: first to destroy the so-called Negro Fort established by the British at the end of the War of 1812, then to suppress an ersatz republic of privateers, and finally to crush Seminole and fu-

gitive slave resistance in the colony. Neither wholly endorsed nor decried by the national government, these controversial interventions assisted the United States in its negotiations with Spain, which increasingly understood that it could not keep Florida out of the Americans' grasp forever. The Adams-Onís Treaty, signed in 1819 and ratified in 1821, secured Florida for the United States and further eroded the already vulnerable position of the remaining Indians and fugitive slaves on the Gulf Coast. The editor of the *Mississippi State Gazette* praised the treaty in 1819. "It rounds off our southern possessions," the newspaper argued, "and for ever precludes foreign emissaries from stirring up Indians to war and negroes to rebellion, whilst it gives the southern country important outlets to the sea."⁷ Still, it took twenty years and another nasty little war to quell resistance in Florida's swamps.

The United States acquired vast amounts of Indian land in the five years after the defeat of the Red Sticks, establishing in the process the pattern for Indian removal west of the Mississippi. The Treaty of Fort Jackson, negotiated by Andrew Jackson after the defeat of the Red Sticks at Horseshoe Bend, wrested twenty-three million acres of land from the Creek nation in the Mississippi Territory and Georgia. Following the Treaty of Fort Jackson, the United States negotiated three additional cessions from the Creeks, Chickasaws, and Choctaws in the fall of 1816, acquiring millions more acres of land in the north-central region of the Mississippi Territory. The crowning moment in this postwar flurry of land acquisition was the Treaty of Doak's Stand, which Jackson negotiated with the Choctaw nation in the fall of 1820. The Choctaws ceded five million acres of the most fertile land in the United States in exchange for almost thirteen million acres of inferior land in what later became southern Oklahoma and southwestern Arkansas. These postwar treaties did not wholly eliminate Indian sovereignty in the Deep South, but they went a long way to consolidating U.S. sovereignty in the region and laid the groundwork for the expulsion of the Indians in the 1830s.⁸

The new land had to be surveyed and sold—and the sooner the

better. A rapid distribution of these public lands would bring greater security to the southern frontier and precious revenue into the public coffers.⁹ Andrew Jackson constantly reminded the national government of the benefits to be gained by turning the land into real estate. "We will now have good roads, kept up and supplied by the industry of our own citizens, and our frontier defended by a strong population," he explained to James Monroe after completing negotiations with the Chickasaw and Cherokee Indians.¹⁰ But familiar complications prolonged the surveys. Thomas Freeman, the surveyor general for the southern lands, was swamped with applications from aspiring surveyors, few of whom (he suspected) had any idea of the "difficulties, privations, & hardships, unavoidably connected with the Surveying of Public Lands in a wilderness."¹¹ At the same time he found it difficult to hire and retain sufficient numbers of laborers. Rough terrain, the high price of provisions, Indian harassment, and disease also slowed his work.¹² The delays allowed thousands of squatters to plant themselves on unsold public lands, where they clashed with government officials.¹³

The squatters' defenders argued that they were good if poor citizens whose industry increased the value of the public domain. Settlers in Amite County in the Mississippi Territory pointed out that their "little improvements add so much to the value of the lands." They also reminded the government that it owed them money "for services rendered both in the indian & British wars some of whom laid down their lives while in the service of their Country whose widows & orphan children are now dependent on their friends and a grateful Country for subsistence."¹⁴ Judge Harry Toulmin agreed that squatters should be protected because they aided the development of the frontier. "Men of capital do not like to vest their active property in a wilderness,—where it will take two or three years before they can raise provisions enough to enable them to carry on a plantation on an extensive scale," he explained to the Mississippi Territory's delegate to Congress. "But if 'pioneers' had gone ahead to clear and farm the land, facilitating travel and selling provisions to those coming later,

those same men of capital would give fifty percent more for the same land.¹⁵ Such arguments from economy ultimately convinced Congress to grant preemption rights to selected groups of white squatters, although it did not establish a general right of preemption for settlers until 1830.¹⁶

Land officers fought an uphill battle against illegal manipulations of the land sales by squatters intent on preserving their holdings and speculators hoping to reap windfall profits on undervalued lands. In December of 1815, the surveyor general warned Lewis Sewall at St. Stephens that “intruders” in possession of public lands had threatened to assassinate any person who dared to bid for their lands, so Sewall employed a marshal to keep order at the sale.¹⁷ In 1818 John Coffee and James Jackson ran across a private company that had been organized to monopolize the purchase of lands at Huntsville. James Jackson refused to take part, as he informed Andrew Jackson, “first because there was too much illiberality in the rich combining to push out of market those who were unfortunate enough not to have [. . .] funds, second because I dislike those large combinations and thirdly because I had no confidence in the greater part of those concerned.” The company’s scheme collapsed as the best lands sold for high prices. “The handsomest game of sink pocket you ever seen was played on them,” wrote Jackson, “& you never seen a set of great proud gentry so compleatly foiled, vexed & mad.”¹⁸ Such combinations sometimes exerted considerable influence. In 1819 land officers postponed a public sale because they detected the operation of a “combination of land speculators.”¹⁹ In 1820 land sales at Big Spring in northern Alabama were suspended “from the supposition that the lots were purchased by a company of gentlemen who were determined not to bid against each other.”²⁰

Despite all these difficulties, the federal government sold plenty of land in the Deep South, almost five million acres by October 1819. Land officers in the region sold just over one-quarter of all the land sold by the United States but generated 40 percent of the revenues earned from the sale of all public lands in the United States. Hunts-

ville's land office by itself sold almost \$8.5 million of public land, more than any other office.²¹ The best lands rarely sold for the minimum price, and land in the Deep South generally sold higher than elsewhere. The high prices paid for lands were inflated by competition among purchasers, easy credit practices, and the influx of "Mississippi scrip," a notorious currency paid to claimants in the Yazoo speculation, redeemable only for federal land. But these circumstances only augmented the root cause of the Deep South's land mania: high cotton prices.²² The average price of cotton in New Orleans rose from seventeen cents per pound in 1814 to twenty-seven cents per pound in 1815 to almost thirty cents per pound in 1817, before declining rapidly starting in late 1818.²³ Small wonder, then, that one Baptist preacher wishing to give his congregation a better idea of Heaven called it "a fair Alabama of a place."²⁴

While the national government's land policy gave indirect support to the cotton economy, sugar planters enjoyed a more direct encouragement. Before the war, Louisiana's sugar planters benefited from a two-and-a-half-cent tariff on brown sugar, which was increased to five cents during the war. Early in 1815 the sugar planters petitioned Congress to maintain the wartime tariff. Drawing on nationalist rhetoric, they argued that "the interests of the Union loudly demand that this distant State should be assisted in securing to herself, and, consequently, to the nation, the vast advantages which its climate and situation promise." Louisiana would be able to supply the rest of the country with sugar, rum, and molasses, and would in return consume the other states' produce and manufactures. Support for the sugar industry would increase Louisiana's population and strengthen a "distant and frontier State."²⁵ Louisiana's representative Thomas Robertson forcefully opposed a motion to reduce the tariff to its prewar levels in 1816. "It is as important to the interests of the nation to protect the cultivation of the cane and the manufacture of sugar, as any other merchandise whatever," he declared.²⁶ The Baltimore newspaper editor Hezekiah Niles supported the protective tariff on sugar, even though he recognized that it made the sugar planters the wealthiest of

men. "Everything that tends to relieve my country of its dependence on others," he rhapsodized, "is to me like the beams of the morning to the wearied traveller, who had wandered the night in search of a place of repose."²⁷ Congress ultimately approved a compromise three-cent tariff on brown sugar, which was lower than what the sugar planters wanted but higher than many sweet-toothed Americans thought they deserved.²⁸

The national government also sponsored infrastructural development designed to "bind this Republic together," as South Carolina's ambitious John Calhoun put it.²⁹ The government concentrated its efforts in the Deep South on cutting a road from Nashville, Tennessee, to Madisonville, Louisiana, appropriating \$10,000 for the object in 1816.³⁰ Colonel A. P. Haynie predicted, "In a national, commercial and military point of view, this road will be of utmost importance."³¹ Brewster Jayne, who lived at the southern terminus of the road, thought it would "open a fine communication to the upper Country, and facilitate the progress of the People of Pen & Ohio, Indiana, Illinois Ter., Kentucky & Tennessee in their return to their families after having disposed of their produce in N. Orleans, which they convey there in flat boats."³² The route was surveyed in the winter of 1816–17 (it partly followed established Indian trails), and construction began in 1817 under Andrew Jackson's supervision. Several hundred soldiers labored on the road for three years, completing it in 1820. When it was finished, Jackson signaled the road's public purpose by telling the secretary of war that the government "can, if it pleases, run the mail stages from the seat of general government to New Orleans in 17 days."³³ A decade later Jackson soured on what he called the "scramble for appropriations" that attended federal support for internal improvements, but in the palmy postwar era, he and other southern nationalists scrambled as well as anyone.³⁴

The national government encouraged political as well as economic development. Louisiana was already a state, but Congress still had to decide the fate of the Mississippi Territory—particularly the question of whether it should enter the Union as one or two states. This was a

question with significant consequences for the citizens of the territory and for the country as a whole. Before the war, citizens living in the western portions of the territory generally wanted it to be admitted as one state, while those living in the eastern districts wanted to split off and form their own state. When Madison County and the other eastern districts rapidly increased in population after the war, the two groups swapped positions, with the westerners favoring division and the easterners preferring that the territory remain intact in the transition to statehood. The regional clash was tinged with a whiff of class conflict, with the westerners representing the wealthy plantation districts along the Mississippi River and the easterners speaking for a poorer population of yeomen farmers and smallish planters. Congress split the territory in 1817, authorizing the citizens of the western half to form a constitution and government for the state of Mississippi, and organizing the eastern half into the Alabama Territory, which became a state in 1819. At Mississippi's constitutional convention in 1817, William Lattimore explained why he had supported the splitting of the territory. "Division," he told the assembled delegates, "would give to this section of the union an additional state, and of course two additional senators, and two additional electors of President, to maintain its political influence and rights." Lattimore's reasoning would prove its merit during the Missouri crisis.³⁵

A comparison of the first state constitutions of Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama suggests that the stronger a state's planter class was, the more conservative was the structure of its politics. Louisiana's 1812 constitution was the most conservative of the three. Its stated purpose was "to secure to all the citizens thereof the enjoyments of the rights of life, liberty and property." A skewed system of representation favored the established plantation districts at the expense of New Orleans and the rural districts, which were filling with migrants from the eastern states, while steep property qualifications for office holding made the state government a rich man's club. Suffrage was limited to free white male citizens who paid a state tax and met a residency requirement. The governor—a strong executive with

extensive powers to appoint local officials—was selected by the legislature from the two candidates receiving the most popular votes. Louisiana's constitution omitted any mention of slavery, perhaps because the overtly undemocratic structure of its political life rendered unnecessary any explicit guarantees of the rights of slaveowners.³⁶ The first postwar governor of Louisiana after William Claiborne (who died in 1816) was Jacques Philippe Villeré, who appears to have recovered nicely from the loss of his slaves during the Battle of New Orleans. "What other people can flatter themselves, fellow citizens, to enjoy, under the sole government of laws, an extent of liberty and happiness comparable to ours?" he asked the legislature in 1818.³⁷

At Mississippi's constitutional convention in 1817, representatives of the established plantation districts in the southwestern part of the state held sway but had to reckon with delegates from the newer counties, which contained a greater proportion of yeoman farmers. The convention generally rejected the most conservative proposals on representation and suffrage, including motions for viva voce voting and apportionment in the lower house according to the federal ratio (all white people plus three-fifths of all others). The constitution established militia service and taxpaying requirements for suffrage that in practice did not exclude many white men from voting, and its property qualifications for office holding were comparable to Louisiana's. Mississippi's governor was relatively weak, and many local offices were subject to election. Copying Kentucky's constitution, the legislature was prohibited from emancipating slaves without the consent of their owners except when a slave had performed distinguished service for the state, in which case the owner had to be compensated for the value of the slave. The legislature was also permitted to prohibit the importation of slaves as merchandise as well as the introduction of criminal slaves, but it was not allowed to prevent immigrants to Mississippi from bringing their slaves with them into the state.³⁸

Forty-four delegates to Alabama's constitutional convention met in Huntsville in July 1819. Their number included a former president of Transylvania University, a onetime trustee of South Carolina College, and three former congressmen (including Israel Pickens). The secre-

tary of the convention, John Campbell, boasted of the delegates' "urbanity and intelligence."³⁹ The Alabama Territory was divided politically between the northern, yeoman-dominated counties and the southern, planter-dominated counties. The northerners outnumbered the southerners at the convention, which goes a long way to explaining why Alabama's first constitution was the most liberal of those of the three southwestern states. Indeed, as far as white men were concerned, it was one of the most liberal in the entire country. The constitution established free white male suffrage, eliminated property qualifications for office holding, and apportioned representation according to the free white population. The Alabamians adopted Mississippi's provisions on emancipation and the slave trade while authorizing the legislature to pass laws obliging the owners of slaves "to treat them with humanity."⁴⁰

Paradoxically, the country's nation-building efforts in the Deep South—especially the selling of the public lands and the formation of state governments—diminished the importance of the national government in the daily lives of citizens. This diminution was just as well for slaveowners in the Deep South, who immediately adopted the doctrine of state sovereignty to inoculate themselves from federal interference with slavery. The country got an early hint of this tactic in 1818, when a congressman from New Jersey called for an inquiry into the expediency of passing a federal law prohibiting the migration or transportation of slaves from one state to another in cases where the laws of each state already prohibited that transportation. Mississippi's George Poindexter objected. "Any man, he said, had a right to remove his property from one State to another, and slaves as well as any other property, if not prohibited from doing so by the State laws," he asserted. Moreover, the United States had "no right to interfere" with the operation of state laws.⁴¹ And so as the nation consolidated its sovereignty in the Deep South, slaveowners placed firm limits on the power of the national government to regulate slavery in the states where it existed. At the same time, the original constitutions of Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama all but guaranteed that slavery could not be challenged on the state level either. This impregnable position

was achieved in Louisiana through a skewed political structure that implicitly protected slaveowners' interests, and in Mississippi and Alabama by explicit restrictions on the power of their more popular legislatures to violate the rights of slaveowners. Most important of all, slaves and free people of color were necessarily denied democratic rights and were excluded from the political "people." Slavery placed inescapable limits on democracy.

James Birney's career exemplifies the impossibility of challenging slavery in the Deep South through internal political channels. Birney was a member of Alabama's constitutional convention and a representative in its first General Assembly, where he helped to enact a provision guaranteeing the right of trial by jury to slaves accused of crimes worse than petty larceny. He advocated the humanitarian treatment of slaves and restricting the migration of slaves into the state. In the 1820s he became the principal agent in the Deep South for the American Colonization Society, which he genuinely believed could pave the way for a general abolition and removal of all black people from the country. Birney soon became frustrated by slaveowners' intransigence and began to doubt the efficacy and justice of colonization. He abandoned Alabama, manumitted his slaves, and publicly repudiated colonization in 1834. Moving first to Kentucky and then to Ohio, Birney became active in the antislavery movement, and when an antiabolitionist mob in Cincinnati heaved his printing press into the Ohio River, he became one of the movement's celebrities. Running for president as the candidate of the newly formed Liberty Party in 1840, he won a mere 7,059 votes but gained a foothold for the antislavery movement in Jacksonian politics. Like other southern abolitionists, ranging from Frederick Douglass to the Grimke sisters, Birney had to leave the slave states to fight against slavery.⁴²

"bustle and business"

The postwar boom launched the hopes and ambitions of merchants, lawyers, surveyors, farmers, and planters in the Deep South. Scouting

lands in northern Alabama, John Campbell promised to take advantage “of every opportunity I see presented to make me independent of the world.”⁴³ Abraham Inskeep thought his prospects as a grocer in New Orleans were very encouraging and in a few years “will lead to an independence.”⁴⁴ Brewster Jayne of Covington, Louisiana, observed that “every brand of business appears to succeed well, and every prudent man may in a few years obtain a competency.”⁴⁵ And when Andrew Collins traveled to Louisiana to collect on debts owed to his father, a merchant in Rhode Island, he decided to stay—“as this is the most promising Country for a young man in my circumstance or for any one that has a living to get in this world.” Collins partnered with a man aptly named Cash and opened a store in St. Francisville, where the two entrepreneurs expected to “do as much business as any one of the Merchants in this Town.”⁴⁶ The entrepreneurial energies of men such as these contributed to the fulfillment of the slave country.

The fortunes of the Deep South rested on cotton and sugar. The cotton crop almost tripled, from 54,000 bales in 1814–15 to 159,500 bales in 1819–20, increasing in the same period from 15 percent of the country’s cotton production to more than 25 percent.⁴⁷ Statistics from Liverpool provide another index of the rising significance of cotton from the Deep South. Between 1816 and 1819, the Atlantic states provided almost 39 percent of Liverpool’s cotton. Brazil was second at almost 30 percent, followed by India at 13 percent. New Orleans cotton ranked fourth, but its share of the Liverpool market steadily increased from 6.5 percent in 1816 to 12.2 percent in 1819—a signal for the future.⁴⁸ Cotton planters prospered. “My crop on my plantation has a very promising appearance & should Cotton continue at its present price my income from it will be very handsome the ensuing year,” predicted John Palfrey.⁴⁹ In 1814 James Magruder’s slaves picked 25,909 pounds of cotton on his Mississippi Territory plantation, but in 1817 they picked more than 42,000 pounds.⁵⁰ After selling his employer’s cotton crop in 1816, the overseer James Moore boasted, “I don’t know what it is of late to be without cash.” Moore purchased three slaves and his own cotton farm

three years later. He even hired an overseer. In the spring of 1822, Moore happily reported that he had eight slaves working on sixty acres of cotton land and would soon “live quite easy and above the frowns of the world, and buy 2 or three Negroes.”⁵¹

Although U.S. slavery became increasingly regional in the nineteenth century, its fruits were national. Northern merchants and industrialists purchased one-third of the cotton shipped out of New Orleans in 1822, and while much of this was reshipped to Europe, northern textile manufacturers purchased the rest and spun it in their factories.⁵² The political economist Tench Coxe warned his countrymen to pay attention to the cotton economy. “So important, in a direct and indirect view, is cotton wool to the landholders and cultivators of the whole union,” he asserted in 1818, “that the right system for its production, its commerce, and its manufacture, is of incalculable value to the United States.”⁵³ Coxe worried that increasing worldwide production would eventually ruin cotton planters in the United States, and he argued that only protecting the domestic cotton textile manufacturing could ensure the long-run profitability of cotton growing. Coxe predicted the fall in cotton prices that began in 1818 but not the recovery that followed, nor did he imagine that U.S. cotton planters would dominate the world market for fifty years.

Unlike their fellows in cotton, Louisiana’s sugar planters could not compete in the world market, but the tariff protected them like a levee. Sugar cultivation increased moderately after 1815 as established planters improved their productivity and new ones broadened Louisiana’s sugar bowl to the north and southwest.⁵⁴ One tally of domestic produce arriving in New Orleans indicated that the sugar crop increased from 12,000 hogsheads in 1814–15 to 20,000 in 1816–17, while molasses increased from 500,000 gallons to one million, and tafia increased from 150,000 gallons to 400,000.⁵⁵ The *Louisiana Gazette* reported in April 1818 that the year’s sugar crop would exceed thirty thousand hogsheads, and in 1820 the New Orleans merchant John Clay informed his more famous brother that the sugar and cotton crop would exceed the previous year’s by 25 percent if the

weather remained favorable.⁵⁶ At a time when the annual production of sugar did not exceed thirty million pounds, the geographer William Darby predicted that Louisiana's annual sugar production would eventually reach two hundred million pounds (which it did in the 1840s).⁵⁷ Already the sugar planters were earning a reputation for wealth. The first rank of sugar planters included Wade Hampton, whose 400-slave plantation in Ascension Parish was one of the largest in North America. One traveler observed that Hampton's estate equaled "that of almost any English nobleman."⁵⁸ In 1821 a tour of the plantations along the river convinced Henry Palfrey that "the Mississippi Planters (from the distance of 250 miles from its mouth) are the happiest & most independent class of people in the Union, & generally speaking, theirs is the most profitable business."⁵⁹

The postwar prosperity enlivened New Orleans—"a scene of bustle and business," boasted the *Louisiana Gazette*.⁶⁰ In a commentary on the new peacetime priorities, the New Orleans City Council urged Congress to move the arsenal, military hospital, and barracks outside the city and to demolish Fort St. Charles, because the buildings were "particularly injurious to commerce and navigation."⁶¹ Cotton, sugar, tobacco, corn, flour, pork, hemp, fur, whiskey, staves, and many other products arrived daily from upriver and were shipped out of New Orleans in ever-increasing quantities.⁶² By 1819 Louisiana's exports ranked third highest of any state in the country, trailing only New York and Massachusetts, and accounted for 14 percent of the value of all goods exported from the United States.⁶³ People also flooded into the city, and its population increased from about 25,000 in 1810 to more than 40,000 in 1820, including 15,000 slaves and 7,000 free people of color.⁶⁴ When Benjamin Latrobe landed there in 1819, he found a city "doing so much & such fast-increasing business that no man can be said to have a moment's leisure." In his journal he noted that everyone had money on his mind. "Their limbs, their heads, & their hearts move to that sole subject. Cotton & tobacco, buying & selling, and all the rest of the occupation of a money-making community fills their time, & gives the habit of their minds."⁶⁵

Nothing symbolized the postwar boom better than the growing number of steamboats plying the rivers of the Deep South. While the number of all river vessels arriving in New Orleans more than tripled from 1814 to 1817, the number of steamboats jumped from fewer than 20 in 1815 to more than 200 in 1820. A negligible proportion of river traffic during the war years, by the end of the decade steamboats accounted for more than one-fifth of all river vessels arriving in New Orleans.⁶⁶ They lowered the cost of transportation and altered the natural flow of commerce. After Henry Shreve's successful ascent of the river in his aptly named steamboat *Enterprise* in 1815, steamboats began to carry goods and passengers upriver to Natchez, St. Stephens, Huntsville, Memphis, St. Louis, and Cincinnati. Shreve then challenged the Fulton-Livingston steamboat monopoly, winning a decision in Louisiana court in 1817 that effectively destroyed its exclusive hold on steamboat navigation on the river. Many of Shreve's countrymen credited him with overcoming both the natural and human obstacles to "free" navigation of their waters.⁶⁷

The steamboat meant different things to different people. To Israel Pickens it signified the broader spirit of progress and enterprise. "This country is advancing fast in settlement & improvement," Pickens crowed. "St. Stephens looks every day more like a town. It contains a great number of active intelligent citizens, perhaps so many as any town on the continent of the same numbers. The general morals of the people are the reverse of what they were two years ago. We have a large steam boat which has passed every few days between this & Mobile. Another is proposed to be built to run from here to the falls of the Black Warrior. We expect to be made a State next session of Congress. Our new bank is beginning business here."⁶⁸ To other inhabitants of the Alabama Territory, the steamboat was a spectacle. The surveyors James Cathcart and John Landreth ascended the Tombigbee River aboard the steamboat *Mobile* in April 1819. When they passed two barges laden with cotton, the bargemen "exclaimed a Steam boat by G-d & then complimented us in the stile of the Kentucky boat men on the Mississippi." And when they arrived in St. Stephens, Landreth

noted that “a great many people came down to the Landing to see the steam boat both white and black and Indians.”⁶⁹ Some of the black people may have taken a special interest, as the advent of steamboat traffic opened a new escape route for them. James Williams attested to the phenomenon in an 1819 letter written on behalf of his neighbor, who requested to have a runaway slave captured in Natchez, “where he thinks he has gone in a steam boat.”⁷⁰

The opportunities available in the Deep South were publicized through the country by word of mouth, letters, gazetteers, travelogues, and newspapers. The military officer Gilbert Russell reported to James Monroe that he was “delighted” with the lands ceded by the Creek Indians and intended “to concentrate what interest I have in the world and locate myself on the Alabama River.”⁷¹ Andrew Jackson tantalized Israel Pickens with dinnertime stories about the same lands that caught Russell’s eye. A Major Thomas returned to Tennessee in the summer of 1818 after surveying lands in the Alabama Territory. “I have seen his map of the country,” wrote James Campbell, “and from his description of it it must be one of the richest spots in the whole southern country.”⁷² John Sims instructed his cousin not to visit the southwest unless he was in a position to move there. “If you was to see this country you never would be satisfied where you are,” he warned.⁷³ James Wilkinson urged his friend Stephen Van Renssalaer to join him in Louisiana, where a \$30,000 investment would earn \$5,000 in the first year and \$10,000 in the third. “Will you sell, pack up and embark and land at New Orleans where I will meet you and carry you home in a Steam boat?” asked the general.⁷⁴ A voluminous travel literature regaled readers with tales of flatboat voyages down the Mississippi, stories of Indian manners and habits, and certification of the astonishing productivity of the southwestern lands.⁷⁵ Eastern newspapers published articles and essays documenting the opportunities available in the southwest. *Niles’ Weekly Register* enticed “the Planters of Maryland and Virginia” with a long description of the extraordinary profits to be earned from slave labor in the Opelousas and Attakapas districts of Louisiana. Among the examples cited was that

of Andrew Jackson and Donelson Caffery, whose twenty-seven hands together produced 72 hogsheads of sugar from 54 acres of cane, ten bales of cotton, 3,000 gallons of molasses, and 1,000 barrels of corn, earning \$465 per hand besides provisions. "Is not this the country for the slaveholder?" the article concluded.⁷⁶

Knowledgeable geographers mapped the Deep South for the English-reading world, binding the republic with the printed word. The most renowned geographer of the Deep South was William Darby, a man whose career tracked the early history of U.S. involvement in the region. Darby was born in Pennsylvania in 1775 to parents who were continually moving west. When he was twenty-four, Darby traveled down the Ohio and Mississippi rivers and settled in Natchez, where he married Elizabeth Boardman, the widow of a wealthy slaveowner. Darby quickly became a cotton planter, an officer in the local militia, and his district's tax assessor. After suffering losses in a fire and clashing with the Boardman family, William and Elizabeth abandoned Natchez for Opelousas, recently incorporated into the United States. There his work as a private surveyor came to the attention of Isaac Briggs, and Darby was appointed deputy surveyor for the western district of the Orleans Territory in 1806. While surveying southwestern Louisiana, Darby hit on the idea of writing a geography of Louisiana. He quit his position in 1811 and explored the region for the next three years, rushing to New Orleans in the fall of 1814, where he participated in the Battle of New Orleans as a "topographical advisor" and supervisor of slave labor. After the war, Darby traveled to Philadelphia, the center of geographical knowledge in the United States. His *Geographical Description of Louisiana* came out to acclaim in the spring of 1816 and was shortly followed by a second edition and an *Emigrant's Guide to the Western and Southwestern States and Territories* in 1818. Darby never returned to the Deep South but his publications helped many others who moved there.⁷⁷

And many did. The population of the region that became Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama more than doubled between 1810 and 1820, increasing from natural reproduction, the addition of new ter-

ritory, and, above all, migration. The white population increased to 210,000, and the slave population to 143,000. The population of free people of color grew more slowly, to 11,500. Even presuming a high natural-growth rate of 2.5 percent per year, no fewer than 125,000 people migrated to the Deep South in the 1810s, including at least 75,000 white people and 50,000 slaves, and the actual numbers were probably a good deal higher.⁷⁸ “I never saw such a Migration in my life,” Philip Foote reported to his father from a crowded Huntsville in 1816.⁷⁹ Helen Toulmin limned the international parade that passed through Fort Stoddard the following year. “We have, French, English, Spanish, Germans, & from every part of the United States, particularly the New England States,” she wrote. “The English appear amused at everything they see, and if they are pleased, it is because *we* are not as much like savages as they expected. The Spaniards always remind me of some mysterious novel characters. The Germans are fine healthy looking people, but their dialect is perfectly unintelligible to me, and their dress bears a striking resemblance to the Choctaws.”⁸⁰ Conspicuously excluded from Toulmin’s catalog were people of African descent, even though they also passed through Fort Stoddard in large numbers.

As the public lands came to market, emigration to the Deep South seemed to reach epidemic proportions. John Little of North Carolina observed in the fall of 1817, “The *Alabama* Country is all the rage in this quarter now—Many of our people are moving to it, & more would go, if they could sell their Land.”⁸¹ Samuel McDonald reported to his sister that the “Alabama Fever” had struck in Georgia. “Scarce any of those who are attacked by it ever recover,” he noted, “it sooner or later carries them off to the westward.”⁸² Another North Carolinian, James Graham, was astonished to see some of his oldest and wealthiest neighbors succumbing to the epidemic. “The *Alabama Fever* rages here with great violence and has *carried off* vast numbers of our Citizens,” he wrote to a friend, “for as soon as one neighbour visits another who has just returned from the Alabama, he immediately discovers the same symptoms which are exhibited by the person who has

seen the alluring Alabama.”⁸³ Graham feared that, if unchecked, the rush to the new country might depopulate the old. Such anxieties became a major theme among southeastern agricultural reformers beginning in the 1830s, but in the early days of the postwar boom they seemed the grumblings of a curmudgeon.⁸⁴

The irony in the rhetoric of migration fever was that many migrants to the Deep South suffered from all-too-real fevers when they got there. The danger was especially acute in New Orleans and Natchez, which were prone to outbreaks of yellow fever. The appearance of yellow fever in Natchez “swept off great numbers and put a stop to all business whatever,” reported Thomas Gale in 1817, “perhaps no disease has ever been so fatal in any of the seaports of the U.S.”⁸⁵ Edward Palfrey succumbed to yellow fever in New Orleans in 1817. His brother mourned him as “a very promising, noble hearted young man, affectionate Brother & beloved by all his acquaintances, possessed of the best disposition & every good quality that adorns the Human soul.”⁸⁶ The yellow fever also killed Henry and Benjamin Latrobe, whose scheme to supply water to New Orleans ultimately led them to their graves.⁸⁷ Deep South boosters, including William Darby, insisted that the risk of disease could be minimized by caution and proper habits. Migrants should move to Louisiana in the fall to allow themselves to acclimate before the “fervid heats of summer,” wrote Darby. He also suggested that the richest lands were not the healthiest, and that migrants would do well to settle on “land of second quality,” where they would not make a fortune but would not die trying.⁸⁸

Despite the risk of disease and failure, wealthy planters grasped the new opportunities available in the Deep South. Isaac Lewis Baker informed Andrew Jackson that Louisiana was “daily receiving large accessions of rich, respectable inhabitants from Maryland Virginia & the Carolinas.”⁸⁹ Thomas Lewis witnessed the same phenomenon. “Ouachita is looking up at last,” he wrote to Edward Livingston in 1819. “Many respectable planters from the Mississippi—Florida—

Rapide Tennessee, N & S Carolina, Georgia & Virginia have visited us this last fall & winter all appear pleased with the Country, some have purchased, others have expressed their intentions.”⁹⁰ John Read, register of the land office at Huntsville, reported that “many gentlemen from the Eastern States (very considerable capitalists too) have arrived in this Country.”⁹¹ Among them were John and James Campbell, Virginians who visited northern Alabama in December of 1817. In a gushing letter home, John reported that the town was “full of gentlemen from Virginia Kentucky and the Carolina’s who like ourselves have been exploring the country.” The excitement of the moment produced an esprit de corps among the explorers. “Today I accidentally stepped into a Tavern and found a number of young Virginians with whom I am intimately acquainted,” John admitted. “We had a most cordial salutation Some of them swore I must settle in the Territory and not think of Tennessee.”⁹²

Superior resources and connections allowed men of wealth and standing to make the most of their opportunities. They could depend on government surveyors for reliable information—at a price. John Coffee, the surveyor general of the Alabama Territory, contracted with his clerks for half of the proceeds they earned “for purchasing, locating, or giving information” to land seekers.⁹³ A confidant of Andrew Jackson and one of his lieutenants in the Creek War, Coffee was also a founding member of the Cypress Land Company and a prolific speculator in Alabama land. He eventually became one of the leading planters in northern Alabama.⁹⁴ Wealthy men also had the luxury of sending advance parties to scout out the best lands or appointing knowledgeable agents to make their purchases for them. Georgia’s one-legged senator, Charles Tait, sent his son James with three slaves to Wilcox County, Alabama, in 1817 to build the new Tait homestead. The four men squatted on public land, raised a crop of corn, and waited for the government auction, when James could buy the land for his family.⁹⁵ Similarly, Israel Pickens sent his slaves to Alabama under the supervision of his brother before emigrating him-

self with his wife and children. Wealthier migrants could also afford better land and more of it. They generally purchased bottom lands with easy access to river transportation, relegating poorer migrants to the hill country or piney woods farther from the main routes of commerce.⁹⁶

The spatial distribution of the slave population within the Deep South reflected the power of the wealthy to monopolize the most profitable land. In Mississippi, for instance, the four counties with slave majorities—Adams, Wilkinson, Jefferson, and Claiborne—all lined the Mississippi River. The seven counties whose slave populations amounted to less than one-quarter of the population—Perry, Pike, Lawrence, Hancock, Monroe, Jackson, and Covington—comprised pine barrens. The 1815 tax lists for Alabama's Madison County reveal a differentiation between plantation and yeoman districts at the local level. Slaveowning households were a majority in two of Madison County's fourteen militia districts, while in six districts, fewer than one-third of households owned slaves.⁹⁷ But there was no rigid segregation of planters and yeomen. Wealthy planters always had modest farmers as neighbors, and yeoman-oriented districts always contained some wealthy planters. Moreover, the majority of counties and parishes in the Deep South in 1820 (thirty-seven of sixty-nine) were middling districts, where slaves made up between one-quarter and one-half of the population.

The growth of Mississippi's Jefferson County between 1810 and 1820 reveals the expansion and enrichment of a plantation district. The county's total population increased by 75 percent in the decade, from about 4,000 people to about 7,000, but its slave population increased more than twice as fast as its free population, and the proportion of slaves in the population increased from 43 percent to 53 percent. The number and proportion of non-slave-owning households declined, while the number and proportion of households with larger slaveholdings more than doubled. Leading the pack was Isaac Ross, the county's largest slaveowner, who increased his holdings from 78

to 158 enslaved people over the decade. Almost half of all the enslaved people in Jefferson lived in households with at least 20 other slaves. Still, even with this expansion in slaveowning, almost two-thirds of the county's households contained 5 or fewer slaves in 1820. Most free people in Jefferson County lived on farms, while slaves were more likely to live on plantations.⁹⁸

The postwar bubble burst at the end of the decade. The price of cotton in New Orleans began to fall in 1818 and kept falling until the mid-1820s, when it bottomed out below ten cents per pound. The value of the Deep South's exports declined from \$13 million in 1818 to \$7.7 million in 1820. After increasing every year from 1814 to 1818, the average price of an adult male slave in Louisiana also fell.⁹⁹ "We have seldom seen our market so much depressed as it has been during the present week," wrote John Minor's factors in New Orleans in the fall of 1819: "The numerous failures to the Eastward have caused great alarm among those who generally buy here, & we know none who are willing to do business to any extent for the present."¹⁰⁰ Debtors despaired. Purchasers of public lands in Alabama alone owed the national government more than \$11 million dollars.¹⁰¹ Worried that they would have to forfeit their lands to the government, debtors flooded Congress with petitions for relief. Along with other western politicians, Senator John Walker and Representative John Crowell of Alabama championed their cause in Washington. Congress eventually passed a law in 1821 allowing purchasers of public lands to relinquish the unpaid portion of their lands and retain the rest.¹⁰²

Yet exposure to the boom-and-bust cycle of nineteenth-century capitalism did not scare the Deep South's farmers and planters away from the market. Burdened with debt, they involved themselves even further in the cotton and sugar economies, and production of both staples climbed throughout the 1820s. As John McRea wrote to Andrew Jackson in the spring of 1819, "Such an impetus has already been given to the settlement of the Lands in Alabama on the Tennessee River, that nothing can permanently retard the growth of that section

of our Country.”¹⁰³ The Panic of 1819 ended the postwar boom, but the great nineteenth-century expansion of slavery in the Deep South had been set in motion.

“everyone will go without a murmur”

The expansion of cotton and sugar generated an unrelenting demand for slaves in the Deep South. “The value of Negroes has enhanced to a surprizing degree within a short time past & all sorts meet a speedy & brisk sale,” observed Henry Palfrey, whose vantage in a New Orleans merchant house made him a reliable witness of the postwar boom.¹⁰⁴ Slaves’ labor was needed everywhere: in cotton fields and kitchens, in sugar mills and on steamboats, even in the stinking streets of New Orleans. To meet that demand, thousands of black people were forcibly transported to the Deep South. Some were smuggled in from Texas and Florida. Others were kidnapped from more northerly states. An increasing number were ensnared in the burgeoning—and legal—internal slave trade. As the postwar boom invigorated the buying and selling of human beings, white and black Americans both struggled with the consequences. For conscientious white people, no aspect of the postwar boom contradicted their identification of economic progress with moral progress as fully as the revival of the slave trade. Their disquiet is amply recorded in their letters, speeches, and laws. The enslaved people, who were most directly affected by the trade, faced the terror of disease, the rigor of new kinds of work, and the challenge of rebuilding their families and communities. Most adjusted to their circumstances as best they could, while others registered their discontent through flight, rebellion, and even suicide.

“Money Negroes Sugar and cotton and Land Seems to engross all their time and attention,” John Landreth wrote of the citizens of St. Mary’s Parish in Louisiana.¹⁰⁵ This is clear to all who read the correspondence of planters from the era. Their ability to amass and command slaves made the difference between mere subsistence and wealth—something Israel Pickens knew very well as he scratched

away in the Alabama Territory. "I have made a settlement in the Sunflower Bend of the Tombickbe R. 15 miles below here, on a tract I bought in September 1817 at about \$4 per acre," he boasted. "About 50 acres are cleared & every rod of the ballance a stiff cane break; the hands are busily cutting cane . . . I think I can make a good crop there if my hands have health."¹⁰⁶ The economy of the Deep South called for many different kinds of labor. There was the work of clearing, ditching, sawing, and hauling; the work of planting, weeding, cutting, and picking; and the work of gardening, cooking, washing, and cleaning. When Michael Fortier's sugar plantation was put up for sale in 1820, the advertisement in the *Louisiana Gazette* indicated that 40 of the 100 slaves being sold "have callings, such as carpenters, coopers, bricklayers, cabinet makers, plain cooks & pastry cooks &c and among the wenches good washers, ironers, pleaters and cooks."¹⁰⁷

Enslaved people did not work only on sugar and cotton plantations. They worked just about everywhere there was manual labor to be done. In 1815, the Creek Trading House recorded a payment of \$120 "for two negro slaves James & George for beating out the insects from the skins for the last six months."¹⁰⁸ Several slaves helped the Congregationalist missionary Cyrus Kingsbury erect buildings for his mission in the Choctaw nation in 1818.¹⁰⁹ Slave women peddled dry goods in the streets of New Orleans.¹¹⁰ Those same streets were cleaned by gangs of chained slaves from the city jail, who never failed to attract the notice of visitors. "The clanking of their chains, which being fixed round the ankle are brought up along the leg and fastened to the waist, is a distressing sound," observed Benjamin Latrobe early in 1819. "They are now employed in leveling the dirt in the unpaved & cut up streets, in making stages from the levee to the ships in the harbor, & other works of mere labor, about all which they seem to go very much at their leisure."¹¹¹ In August 1820 the city leased out twenty or thirty of its chain-gang slaves to dig a ditch for Latrobe's waterworks.¹¹²

Like free migrants, slaves suffered from disease. They were subjected to illnesses endemic to the lowland environments where they

were concentrated. "We lost a negro girl Chainy a daughter of old Esther, since coming here. Her complaint was consumption," Israel Pickens noted shortly after moving to the Alabama Territory.¹¹³ John Minor reported to his sister that illness had struck the plantation: "20 hands are down besides a number of Children with the whooping cough." Two slaves had died and Old Roy, a skilled artisan, had contracted a hip ailment that threatened to prevent him from ever working again.¹¹⁴ Twelve of Major Thomas's twenty slaves died after he transported them to Louisiana.¹¹⁵ Israel Trask, the owner of a cotton textile factory in Massachusetts and a cotton plantation in Mississippi, painted a glowing portrait of his southern operations in an 1819 letter to his wife. "I have been moving our hands from 2nd Creek to Wilkinson. I spent four or five days at the lower plantation—things go on very well," he related. "The negroes are very well contented with their new habitations. They say the land is very good & they will prefer cultivating it to the 2nd Creek place . . . William has got his house whitewashed inside & out and his house makes a great show. Harriet keeps the inside very neat, but they move next week to Woodville."¹¹⁶ Trask may have been doing a little whitewashing of his own. The following year James Trask reported to Israel that the slaves at the river plantation were sickly and the corn harvest poor: "The clearing, fencing, Building, and furnishing provisions &c. have been troublesome."¹¹⁷

The notoriety of the Deep South among enslaved people and their understandable reluctance to leave their homes and communities presented a problem for migrating planters who wished to move them. Before sending his people from Georgia to Alabama under the supervision of his son, Charles Tait wrote that he hoped "every one will go without a murmur." He reminded his son to treat the slaves well, especially Hercules, whose "noble & disinterested example" helped convince the others to acquiesce in their removal.¹¹⁸ Another planter, James Hollyday of Mississippi's Adams County, recognized that slaves who formed their own judgments about the propriety of migration could endanger the whole enterprise. Hollyday worried about allow-

ing his slave Emanuel to visit family back in Maryland, "as he certainly has it in his power to speak many things against the country and a word from one of their own colour will be very apt to outweigh all the persuasion that can be used by a master." Despite the risk, Hollyday seems to have leaned toward letting Emanuel go. "He is generally cautious and as he means to come back will probably be guarded. The people will I dare say give him a hearty welcome and rejoice in the opportunity of getting accurate information of their relatives & connexions here," Hollyday predicted.¹¹⁹ Travel and correspondence allowed slaveowners to maintain connections to their family and friends across long distances, but most enslaved people lacked basic means of maintaining the human ties sundered by forced migration.

Farmers and planters already in the Deep South tapped distant markets for their slaves. Some looked to the North, where unscrupulous men danced around laws protecting people of color from being kidnapped or exported to the Deep South. Others bought from privateers smuggling African slaves through Texas and Florida. But even the slave country had its rules, and kidnapping and smuggling violated these. Most slave seekers turned to the upper South, especially the Chesapeake, which was quickly becoming the great fountain of forced migration. As entrepreneurs began to apply their savvy to the business of ripping families apart and dispersing them across half a continent, a regular interstate commerce in slaves began to take shape. "Should the price of negroes fall to the North," Israel Pickens plotted in 1819, "I shall wish to send to Maryland for a few next season."¹²⁰

In 1815, slavery was legal but waning in New Jersey and New York, and all the mid-Atlantic states had substantial black populations. As demand for slave labor intensified in the South, slaveowners began to prey on black communities in the North, often with the connivance of northern authorities. It was not a new problem, but public controversy over the practice intensified.¹²¹ In 1818 a sordid affair in New Jersey brought to light the semilegal trade in black slaves and servants.¹²² A conspiracy to export black people from New Jersey appears to have been organized by Jacob Van Wickle, a judge in New

Jersey's Middlesex County, and Van Wickle's brother-in-law, a Louisiana cotton planter named Charles Morgan, who had moved from New Jersey to Louisiana in 1800. In early June, a Middlesex County grand jury charged Charles Morgan with violating New Jersey's anti-exportation law by removing sixteen black children without their consent, and one adult by force. The grand jury indicted Jacob Van Wickle's son and several other men for conveying nine black children to Morgan with intent to send them out of the state. The charges shocked local opinion, especially the accusation that the traders attempted to remove free black children to the South where, presumably, they would have been enslaved. In the end, nobody indicted in the affair was convicted. Nevertheless, responding to petitions from Middlesex, Essex, and Somerset counties and the publicity surrounding the matter, the New Jersey legislature revised and strengthened its antiexportation laws in November 1818.

Neither the publicity nor the laws deterred Morgan's associates. After passage of the new law, Lewis Compton (who had been among those indicted and acquitted) tried to remove a group of people from New Jersey for whom Jacob Van Wickle had previously signed certificates of removal. Compton took them to Pennsylvania on 7 November, three days after the law was passed. Two of his accomplices were stopped in Lebanon, where they faced trial for violating New Jersey's antiexportation laws. The judge ordered the people of color freed and placed in the custody of the Pennsylvania Abolition Society. When Compton arrived in Philadelphia to retrieve them, he was thrown in jail. In early December William Stone, Compton's frustrated partner, reported that some of Philadelphia's "straight Coat Gentry" had tried to recover one of the disputed slaves. "I ordered them out of the house," he boasted, "and told them if they ever Came to it again pimping for Negroes to spoil them I would send them out faster than they came in."¹²³ Though it may seem odd for Louisiana planters to have traveled all the way to New Jersey to procure slaves, the economic rationale was clear enough. Sam Steer, one of the many agents involved in the Van Wickle affair, reported having bought

eighty slaves in New York at an average price of \$300 each. "I think this is doing pretty well," he explained, "when even fresh imported Guinea Negroes were lately sold in NOrleans at \$1500."¹²⁴

While some planters in the Deep South looked to the North for slaves, others tapped into illegal sources of African slaves, the "fresh imported Guinea negroes" whom Sam Steer referred to. Privateers attacking Spanish shipping in the Caribbean smuggled Africans into the United States through Galveston in Texas and Amelia Island in East Florida.¹²⁵ These entrepôts drew the attention of the U.S. Navy beginning in 1817, when the captain of the U.S. frigate *Congress* reported that several hundred slaves were being held in Galveston, awaiting purchase by planters in New Orleans. They would be smuggled into Louisiana through the state's innumerable western waterways. "Every exertion will be made to intercept them," he promised, "but I have little hope of success."¹²⁶ Later that summer, the collector of customs at New Orleans, Beverly Chew, complained about Luis Aury's "motley mixture of freebooters and smugglers" operating out of Galveston. Chew reported that a New York schooner had arrived in Galveston with 287 slaves on board, all of whom were sold "to the Lafittes, Sauvinet, and other speculators in this place, who have or will resell to the planters."¹²⁷ The navy ran Aury out of Galveston in September 1817, but he reappeared on Amelia Island, just south of Georgia on the Atlantic coast in East Florida. During his two months' sojourn at Amelia, Aury managed to smuggle approximately \$500,000 worth of contraband goods into Georgia, including as many as one thousand slaves.¹²⁸

Slaveowners weighed the benefits of smuggling against its moral and social dangers. It was widely reported that Aury relied on black mercenaries and sailors. One nervous Georgian described them as "about one hundred thirty brigand negroes—a set of desperate bloody dogs." He warned the secretary of the treasury that their presence on the Gulf Coast was dangerous to the southern states: "I am told that the language of the slaves in Florida is already such as is extremely alarming."¹²⁹ Upon arriving in Amelia Island in December

1817 with the express purpose of dislodging Aury, the U.S. officers in charge took special pains to ensure that “all his black soldiers” left the island first.¹³⁰ Southern planters also worried about the Gulf Coast smugglers’ indiscriminate piracy. In 1817 many of the prominent merchants of New Orleans petitioned the navy to protect their shipping from Spanish privateers. They complained that the insecurity of commerce had raised their insurance premiums to intolerably high levels.¹³¹

A few years later, former Louisiana congressman Thomas Bolling Robertson complained that the navy had been sent off to the coast of Africa to interdict illegal slave trading “whilst our Coast and the adjoining seas are exposed to the most daring depredations that the world has witnessed since the days of the celebrated Morgan.” Although seventeen or eighteen pirates had been tried and convicted in New Orleans and condemned to death, the display of justice did not reassure Robertson. “Threats of an alarming nature thrown out by their numerous confederates have kept the inhabitants of the neighborhood and the City in a state of much anxiety and uneasiness,” he informed the secretary of war. In a remarkable synthesis of all the fears of southern slaveowners, Robertson connected these local alarms with the long-standing fear of slave resistance as well as the antislavery sentiment provoked by the Missouri controversy: “I confess I do not think they will carry their audacity so far, but when I reflect on the nature of our population compounded as it is of all nations & colors, of a vast disproportion of Slaves and gangs of Pirates & desperadoes, when I observe the spreading influence of the new born black colored sympathy of our Northern and Eastern brethren, I cannot but consider our situation somewhat dangerous.”¹³² Southern planters wanted slaves, but they also wanted to be safe. They determined, therefore, to suppress the illegal slave trade with all its dangers.

Even after Aury’s expulsion, smugglers continued to send slaves into the southern United States through Texas and Florida. Government authorities scored only a few victories against illegal slave trad-

ing, but the cases were highly publicized. The most controversial slave-smuggling case featured David Mitchell, the United States' agent to the Creeks. Mitchell was accused of conspiring to smuggle slaves from Amelia Island into Creek territory, and from there to sell slaves to planters in Georgia, Mississippi, and the Alabama Territory. Though Mitchell was never convicted of violating the laws of the United States, he was removed from his position as Creek agent under a cloud of controversy.¹³³ Mitchell's disgrace reflected the national consensus hostile to the importation of foreign slaves. Even Andrew Jackson called smuggling a "dreaded evil."¹³⁴ By the end of 1821, the federal government had revised the slave trade laws to provide greater incentives for enforcement and harsher penalties for violation. These laws were not completely effective, but they raised the economic and political costs of smuggling and, consequently, helped to domesticate the North American slave trade. The efforts to suppress slave smuggling rank among the various nation-building measures adopted in the Deep South during the postwar boom.¹³⁵

Yet even in the fight against smuggling, where the constitutional authority of the U.S. government was indisputable, the southern states successfully retained their ability to control the laws' enforcement. Smuggled Africans captured by American authorities were not returned to Africa or liberated in the United States. Instead—usually after extensive litigation—they were sold in public auctions and the proceeds distributed to the state that conducted the auction and various other interested parties. After one of these auctions in Louisiana, a local newspaper bragged, "Were any proof wanting to show the riches of our state, the enormous price offered for these rude children of Africa, would be of itself sufficient."¹³⁶ One smuggling case went all the way to the Supreme Court of the United States. In June of 1818, during one of the Andrew Jackson's invasions of Florida, American naval officials near Pensacola captured three vessels (the *Louisa*, the *Merino*, and the *Constitution*) carrying more than one hundred slaves. All three vessels had embarked from Havana and were allegedly bound for New Orleans.¹³⁷ The case was heard before Judge

Charles Tait in the federal district court in the Alabama Territory, and was appealed to the U.S. Supreme Court. While the case worked its way through the courts, ten of the Africans disappeared under disputed circumstances. "No doubt they will all have new names given them," one official predicted.¹³⁸ In the end, most of the Africans were restored to the Spanish trader who had sued for them. Fifteen who were determined to have been illegally introduced into the country were ultimately auctioned by the Court of the Southern District of Alabama in front of the Mobile Hotel on 19 April 1825. They sold for a total of \$8,223.¹³⁹

In addition to grappling with the kidnapping of northern black people and the smuggling of foreign slaves, slaveowners in the Deep South also worried about the introduction of criminal and dangerous slaves from the eastern states. Proslavery reformers in the upper South had long envisioned the west and the Deep South as outlets for the most recalcitrant and dangerous slaves. In his *Arator* essays published in 1818, John Taylor argued that slave states should pass laws "compelling the sale of every negro who should run way or be convicted of theft, out of the state, or at a considerable distance from his place of residence."¹⁴⁰ It was customary to sell runaway slaves who had been incarcerated but not claimed by an owner, and many appear to have been bought up by slave traders. Even free blacks incarcerated in the jails of Washington, D.C., were being sold into slavery, declared John Randolph, who demanded a congressional investigation.¹⁴¹ When a vessel carrying black convicts from New York arrived in New Orleans, the City Council petitioned the legislature to prevent criminal slaves from entering the state, which it did.¹⁴² "Louisiana appears alarmed at being made the depot of the very worst class of slaves, vomitings of the jails and penitentiaries and the refuse of all the rest of the states," observed *Niles' Weekly Register*.¹⁴³ But slave traders continued to pluck slaves from eastern jails. On board the *Clio*, en route from Baltimore to New Orleans, Benjamin Latrobe encountered several slaves belonging to "the notorious slave dealer Anderson." One of these, a man named Tom, was purchased from the Balti-

more jail where he had been incarcerated. Anderson paid \$800 for Tom in the expectation that he would sell for \$1,000 to \$1,200 in New Orleans, but Tom's death on board the *Clio* cancelled the expected profit.¹⁴⁴

Slaveowners used sale and the threat of sale to discipline their slaves without resorting to physical torture.¹⁴⁵ "Big Nance's conduct last winter caused me to determine that I should sell her," wrote Thomas Lenoir of North Carolina in 1816, "and in June last I did sell her and her two youngest children (the youngest about 6 or 8 weeks old, both girls) for 637 1/2 Dollars in bank paper."¹⁴⁶ James Monroe instructed his overseer in 1819 to tell a "worthless scoundrel" named Daniel "that you are authorized to sell him to the New Orleans Purchasers, and that you will do it, for the next offense."¹⁴⁷ Slaveowners in the Deep South also used the slave market as a means of discipline. In the summer of 1819 Henry Palfrey sent two of his slaves, Scott and Jack, to his father to be sold in Attakapas. Palfrey described the formidable Scott as "about 24 years old, a first rate Cooper, a good Blacksmith Carpenter Bricklayer Cartman & [?], can handle almost any kind of tools, is of an ingenious disposition, has been accustomed to plantation work & I will venture to say hasn't his match in Attakapas for mauling rails & chopping, speaks French English & Spanish has been in the Country about 12 years & cost me 1000\$ Cash in Sept last, was once enticed away from me by a white man & was absent a month, will steal but seldom gets drunk." Jack, who was about the same age as Scott, was "a good Servant Drayman & Field Hand has been accustomed to House work & taking care of Horses, never runs away but steals & drinks sometimes has been a long time in the Country cost 700\$." Palfrey wanted to sell them because they were "too unmanageable" and kept bad company in New Orleans. Hard work and a tough master would improve their character, he believed. He advised his father to sell them at the first auction "but not let them know any thing about it until the sale."¹⁴⁸ Louisiana's civil code gave purchasers some protection against those who would fob off difficult or diseased slaves, but in the postwar rage for labor, some

purchasers did not really care whom they were buying. So Jacques Charlot purchased an African man named Bombara in January 1818 knowing full well that he was “a drunkard and has many other vices.”¹⁴⁹

Slaves were brought to the Deep South over land, down river, and by sea. Of all these routes, the coastal trade route is the best documented—a consequence of regulations adopted to prevent smuggling. United States Custom Service records provide some evidence as to the organization and scale of the coastal slave trade from the eastern seaboard to New Orleans. From January 1819 through December 1821, at least seventy vessels arrived at the port of New Orleans, carrying more than 3,000 slaves from the eastern seaboard. More than 850 slaves landed in New Orleans in 1819, but owing to the economic panic that gripped the Deep South late in that year, the number dropped almost by half in 1820. As the economy recovered, the slave trade rebounded vigorously in 1821, when more than 1,700 slaves were shipped to New Orleans. Just over 60 percent of the slaves shipped on these vessels were described as fifteen years old or older, and just under 60 percent of the adults were men—a reflection of the sugar planters’ preference for adult male slaves. The slaves under the age of fifteen were divided almost equally between boys and girls.¹⁵⁰

Most of the slaves transported by sea embarked from the Chesapeake. The Custom Service data for 1819 to 1821 reveal that almost 40 percent of the slaves embarked from Norfolk, the leading port of embarkation. Just over 25 percent of the slaves sailed from Baltimore, almost 14 percent from Richmond, and 10 percent from Petersburg and Alexandria. Another 8 percent, more than 225 slaves, sailed from Charleston, while small numbers of slaves were also shipped from Savannah and Mobile. Addressing an audience of abolitionists on the Fourth of July in 1852, Frederick Douglass recalled the dark days of his youth in Baltimore, when he “watched from the wharves the slave ships in the Basin, anchored from the shore, with their cargoes of human flesh, waiting for favorable winds to waft them down the Chesa-

peake.”¹⁵¹ In all, almost 90 percent of the slaves transported to New Orleans via the coastal trade during these years came from the Chesapeake region. What was it about the political economy of the region that made it so prodigal with slaves? Certainly the answer lies in the ongoing transition from tobacco to wheat production and the remarkable fecundity of the slave population, but dovetailing with these economic and demographic patterns was a lurking desire on the part of some white people not to be—as Spencer Roane put it—“dammed up in a land of slaves.”¹⁵²

Although some of the slaves transported on these vessels traveled with migrating owners; many others were shipped by merchants who recognized an opportunity for profit. In 1817 Abner Robinson started to send shipments of slaves from Richmond to New Orleans. In 1818 and 1819 the firm of Allan and Spann sold South Carolina slaves to Alabama. Between 1817 and 1820 Francis Everod Rives sent at least 53 slaves (28 men and 25 women) from Virginia to the slave market in Natchez, earning a profit of more than \$10,000.¹⁵³ David Anderson, the “notorious slave dealer” described by Latrobe, sent at least 175 slaves from Baltimore to New Orleans from 1819 to 1821. The Anderson slaves were consigned to Hector McLean, a New Orleans merchant, who sold them in the New Orleans market. One hundred ten of the slaves that Anderson sent to New Orleans were adults, and of these, 70 were men. Among the 65 slaves under the age of fifteen that Anderson sent to McLean, 34 were girls and 31 were boys. Perhaps some of the Anderson slaves were included in McLean’s July 1819 advertisement in the *Louisiana Gazette*: “We have just received from Maryland new young NEGRO MEN, which we will sell low for Cash.”¹⁵⁴ Other merchants active in the slave trade were John Isnard and Dutillet & Sagory of New Orleans, Edwin Lee and James Tabb of Norfolk, and Samuel Woolfolk of Charleston.

Planters sometimes traveled to the upper South themselves and returned with slaves. In the spring of 1820 the Attakapas planter David Rees went to Maryland in search of slaves. He carried a letter of introduction from a fellow planter from Attakapas that identified him as

a “gentleman” rather than a “*speculator or trader*.”¹⁵⁵ When he arrived in Maryland, however, Rees changed his spots. Writing to a friend back home, he reported that “prime fellows” could be purchased for \$350, women and boys aged twelve to sixteen could be purchased for \$250, and girls for \$200. At these prices, Rees suggested, investors could reap 100 percent net profits by reselling the slaves in Louisiana. “I have thought you might perhaps wish to purchase some more Negroes yourself for your plantations or that perhaps some of your friends might be willing to adventure in a speculation of that kind.”¹⁵⁶ When Rees returned to Louisiana in November, he advertised the sale of sixteen “likely young negroes of both sexes, among which are two young women, one with four & the other with three fine children, a young creole girl &c.”¹⁵⁷ For the right price, a man could be a respectable planter one day and a slave trader the next.¹⁵⁸

Undocumented by customs officials, the interior slave trade from Kentucky and Tennessee to the Deep South also flourished. Responding to an inquiry from Edward Livingston in 1816, a merchant in Shippingport, Kentucky, discovered that his state’s cupboard was momentarily bare. “We find that within the last three or four months there has been four or five persons purchasing for the New Orleans Market,” he reported, “they have been all over the State and have purchased every Negro (good or bad) that has been offered for sale within that time.”¹⁵⁹ On his way from Virginia to the Alabama Territory in November 1818, John Owen and his family found themselves “pestered with travelers & negro drivers” in Tennessee.¹⁶⁰ That same year, Henry Bradshaw Fearon claimed to have seen fourteen flatboats loaded with slaves floating down the Mississippi River from Kentucky.¹⁶¹ Traders already had a bad reputation, as one resident of Nashville indicated when he advertised a slave for sale in the *Nashville Whig*. The notice stipulated that the man “will not be sold to those who buy to carry down the river.”¹⁶² Further evidence of the interior slave trade comes from advertisements for runaways. Harry, a slave incarcerated in the jail of Ascension Parish, told the sheriff that “he lately came from Baltimore to Kentucky, and was brought thence to this country by one Mr. John Denney, with a drove of horses.”¹⁶³

Becca, an “artful” twelve-year-old girl with dimples, ran away from J. Metcalf in March 1819. “She came from Kentucky in December last, where she was bought by Mr Ross Prather, of Mason County,” he noted.¹⁶⁴

Like kidnapping, smuggling, and the transportation of criminals, the interstate slave trade became controversial. Northern visitors were horrified at the trade, which treated human beings no better than animals. Aghast at the sight of a slave auction in Huntsville, the missionary Elias Cornelius noted in his journal, “The miserable objects of this traffic are bought in the old states and driven like cattle to the western market where they are sold & bought with as little compunction of conscience as if they were so many hogs or sheep.”¹⁶⁵ After witnessing the slave markets of Natchez and New Orleans in 1818, the New Hampshire native Estwick Evans lamented in his memoir, “How deplorable is the condition of our country! So many bullocks, so many swine, and so many human beings in our market!”¹⁶⁶ But it was not just northerners who decried the internal slave trade. Mississippi governor David Holmes warned the state legislature in 1817 that “great numbers [of slaves] will be brought to this State, and principally those of the most vicious character, unless by some means we can render the trade at least precarious to those who engage in it.”¹⁶⁷ The state legislature went so far as to pass a law in 1819 regulating the importation of slaves into the state. The law required all persons bringing a slave into Mississippi to register the slave with local authorities and to swear that the slave had not been guilty of murder, burglary, arson, rape, or grand larceny, according to the knowledge or belief of the owner. Furthermore, each slave brought into the state for sale as merchandise would be subject to a \$20 tax, and if the tax was not paid, the slave could be seized and sold at public auction. Pursuant to the state’s constitution, the law did not apply to residents of the state who imported a slave from another state or territory “for their own use.”¹⁶⁸

Mississippi’s law was quickly challenged by a group of slaveowners and struck down by the state’s High Court, which—in a remarkable concession to national sovereignty—held that the law violated the in-

terstate commerce clause of the U.S. Constitution. Chief Justice John Taylor “would not say, because it was not before him, how far the state might go in prohibiting the importation or introduction of slaves from other states in the regulations of its intercourse with them, but that we had no power to *permit* the introduction and raise a *revenue* from it he was clear.”¹⁶⁹ The interstate slave trade defied statutory regulation for another fifty years, despite sporadic attempts by legislatures in the Deep South to rein in the trade. It is hardly surprising that the trade was not curtailed, since this could not have been done in any serious way without trampling southern slaveowners’ cherished rights of property. The fact that legislatures in the Deep South even considered the problem indicates white southerners’ lingering dissatisfaction with the slave trade.¹⁷⁰

Forced migration took a terrible toll on black people. At Mitchell’s Stand in the Choctaw nation, the missionary Elias Cornelius came across a black man named Aaron who declared himself to be a member of a Baptist church near Frankfort, Kentucky. In a drunken rage, Aaron’s former owner had sold him to a slave trader heading down the river, severing the unfortunate man from his wife and two children. The trader abandoned Aaron in New Orleans, where yellow fever was raging. He tried to return to Kentucky but was captured by the trader and sold to Mitchell in the Choctaw nation, which is where Cornelius met him. Aaron informed the clergyman that he had refused to take another black woman for his wife “on the ground of Christian principle.” The story moved Cornelius, who recorded it in his journal. “It was very affecting to my heart to hear the poor creature lament his absence from his wife & children whom he said he loved,” Cornelius wrote. “His last request was that I would pray for him.”¹⁷¹

Most transplanted slaves appear to have resigned themselves to their fate, but at least some fought back by running away. Southwestern slaveowners’ own advertisements for runaway slaves attest to the dislocations and discontent caused by the transplantation system.¹⁷² E. E. Parker advertised a reward for the return of his slave David, “only a short time come from Washington County, Kentucky, where

he probably intends returning.”¹⁷³ Dick, another Kentucky slave, was brought to New Orleans toward the end of June 1818 and entrusted to the slave-trading firm of DuBourg and Baron. The company hired Dick out as a cook and a shoemaker “to be assured of his capacity,” then sold him to Giuseppe Jourdani on 31 July, but he ran away while working on the levee in Faubourg St. Mary.¹⁷⁴ Charles “alias Seymour” arrived in New Orleans from Baltimore on the *Clio* in the spring of 1818 and soon ran away. He was discovered on board the *Eagle* bound for Liverpool and was returned to his owner.¹⁷⁵ That same year Peter Isler, a Natchez slaveowner, advertised a \$100 reward for Nace, a mulatto slave in his late teens who was “accustomed to riding races, is fond of that sport, and boasts of his talent as a rider.” Nace had been born in Maryland, had traveled to Tennessee with a new owner in 1812 or 1813, and was purchased by Isler in Natchez in late 1817 but had run away soon afterward. Isler supposed that Nace would be “lurking” in New Orleans, but suggested that he might have gone to New York “in order to be remote and avoid apprehension.”¹⁷⁶ Although New Orleans was a locus of the slave trade, its maritime milieu offered opportunities for escape and more violent resistance.

A few enslaved people took great risks and committed heinous acts to prevent themselves from ending up in the Deep South. Early in 1820, thirty Virginia slaves on a vessel sailing to New Orleans plotted “to murder all the passengers and crew except two sailors who was to steer them to St. Domingo.” A woman belonging to Henry Blanchard exposed the plot, and the conspirators were put in irons.¹⁷⁷ The following year, *Niles’ Weekly Register* reported that a Baltimore man had cut his own throat rather than board a ship bound for New Orleans.¹⁷⁸ Episodes such as these were very rare—slavery would not have survived if they had been common—but their occurrence reveals the deep despair of those at the bottom of the market revolution.

“everything at stake”

The postwar boom forced white people in the United States to reckon with slavery in a new and urgent way. One side recognized

that American slavery would not die a natural death; the other feared that it might be legislated into oblivion. The Deep South had a part to play in this reckoning. The expansion of slavery there—accompanied as it was by reports of slave smuggling, kidnapping of free people of color, and slave coffles trekking across the country—contributed to the growth of antislavery opinion in the North. At the same time, the emergence of the Deep South bolstered the strength of what would later be known in the North as the “slave power.” Slaveowners in the Deep South believed in the need for slavery and in their own benevolence as masters. The region’s proslavery representatives in Congress gave the slave power added leverage during the Missouri crisis, an important moment in American political history and the history of American slavery.¹⁷⁹

When Ethan Allen’s grandson Henry Hitchcock arrived in the Alabama Territory from the Green Mountains of Vermont, he was still enough of a Yankee to believe that slavery was unnecessary. “White men can work here as well as elsewhere,” he wrote to a friend in 1817.¹⁸⁰ Hitchcock was right. Nonslaveholding free white men and women managed to grow corn and cotton on their farms in Alabama and Mississippi, as they did elsewhere in the South, generally for household consumption and local markets.¹⁸¹ (And after emancipation, cotton production in the southern United States would far surpass antebellum levels.) But Hitchcock succumbed to the relentless social pressure to buy slaves and get rich. By 1820 he had come to believe that slaves were “the most profitable species of property” and that people of African descent were better off enslaved.¹⁸²

The Louisiana planter and former general James Wilkinson explained why southwestern cotton and sugar planters relied so heavily on slave labor. Although all men “of virtue & Intelligence” believed slavery was a curse, he admitted in 1821, slaveowners yielded to “habit, indolence & ease.”¹⁸³ Each term in Wilkinson’s frank and pithy self-indictment merits elaboration. Slavery had been a dominant relation in the southern regions of North America for more than a century, and even longer in the Caribbean and elsewhere. Antislavery,

rather than slavery, was the world-historical innovation of the era. This was essentially the position taken by the Louisiana Supreme Court in an 1817 case. "Slavery," it asserted, "notwithstanding all that may have been said and written against it, as being unjust, arbitrary, and contrary to the laws of human nature, we find, in history, to have existed from the earliest ages of the world, down to the present day."¹⁸⁴ The argument from habit sloughed off slaveowners' moral responsibility for slavery like dead skin.

But the expansion of slavery in the Deep South was not merely the continuation of a conventional social relation. It was also the specific response of southwestern planters to the difficulty of exploiting free people in a system dedicated to the production of agricultural commodities for the world market. Slaveowners argued that people of African descent were better suited for hard labor in the southern climate than were white people. This racist libel masked a deeper truth about power. Free people demanded exorbitant wages, resented close supervision, and struck off on their own as soon as they were able. Whatever their national origin or racial designation, free people chafed at working in other people's fields, and they could avail themselves of local, regional, and national resources—especially access to land—to fend off exploitation. Slaves, in contrast, lacked these resources, and as a result, they could be forced to labor under the most severe climatic and epidemiological conditions. Slaves could be forced to perform tasks that free people would not accept and had the capacity to refuse. The disrupted character of their communal networks and their exclusion from the political "people" rendered them exploitable.¹⁸⁵

When planters actually expressed a preference for white or black workers, they invariably preferred the black. In March 1818 Henry Palfrey suggested to his father that he expand his labor force, which was small compared with the extent of his arable lands. "I might be able to get a few hands either white or black," he wrote.¹⁸⁶ His father replied that he did not need any more workers for the present year, and he especially did not need any of the recently arrived German im-

migrants. "I do not think they would at any time answer as labourers to depend on to make a crop," he wrote, "several of them have been brought to Attakapas within a month or two past, they are very apt to run away & besides being natives of a northern climate they would not be able to stand the heat of a vertical sun & I should from motives of humanity be unwilling to expose them to it."¹⁸⁷ Palfrey thus tangled together the various logics that underpinned the racism of slavery. White workers were harder to capture if they ran away. They were less accustomed to work in a hot climate. And finally, principles of "humanity" applied to them and, presumably, not to people of African descent. Edward Livingston's overseer also compared Germans unfavorably with black slaves. The German workers employed on Livingston's plantation were very hard to please, he complained, and "the work that can be got from them is about half the work that could be got out of the same number of Negros."¹⁸⁸ In 1821 Robert Cary Nicholas invited a friend to join him as an overseer on a new plantation in Mississippi. All he needed was ten laborers and a woman to cook and wash. "The hands may be black or white," he wrote, "black much to be preferred."¹⁸⁹ The preference for slave over free labor had even infiltrated the national government by 1820. Federal contractors fortifying the Deep South appealed to Secretary of War John Calhoun for funds to hire or purchase slave laborers. Calhoun agreed that, in the climate of Louisiana, "the employment of slaves to work on the fortifications has many advantages over that of white men, drawn from the northern States."¹⁹⁰

Wilkinson's third and last rationale for slavery was ease, meaning affluence or wealth, one of the unmistakable benefits of slave-owning. "A man's estate consists in the number of his slaves, which here vary from 5 to 50," Henry Hitchcock observed in the Alabama Territory.¹⁹¹ A planter's income was largely determined by the size of his crop, which was in turn determined by amount of labor—or "hands"—he commanded. "All the farmers in this country are clearing between four and five hundred dollars to the hand. I am told from the best authority that there has not been a single instance of any per-

son settling in this country who has had anything of a capital who has not become wealthy in a few years," wrote John Campbell.¹⁹² Visiting a large plantation on the Bayou Teche, John Landreth learned that it produced "one hundred and twenty hogs heads of Sugar and Eighty Bales of Cotton from the labour of Sixty hands and corn more than sufficient for home consumption which will leave for Sale produce which from the present prices will amount to twenty two thousand dollars."¹⁹³ Chattel slavery was at bottom a class relationship enforced by physical coercion in which some people lived off the labor of others.

Some slaveholders, particularly those with religious scruples, tried to infuse the master-slave relationship with ethical content.¹⁹⁴ The effort was not unique to the Deep South, but the evident commercialism of slavery there made it a more difficult and more crucial task. Some masters prided themselves on their benevolence. Thus Fulwar Skipwith, a Louisiana planter, bragged to his kinswoman Lelia Tucker about his treatment of his slaves. Even though his slaves had started out as "stiff labourers" and "awkward pickers," Skipwith wrote, "I have succeeded in bringing them to a sense of duty and subordination, surpassed by none, and with less severity, than I have ever witnessed elsewhere."¹⁹⁵ In a similar vein, John Coffee required his overseers "to keep the Negroes in good order and subjection at all times, as well as on Sundays and nights as when they are at work, to correct them when it is necessary, and at the same time treat them humanely, as much so as their conduct merit."¹⁹⁶ Edward Livingston braided together interest and humanity in an offer to purchase thirty slaves from Andrew Jackson. He promised to keep the slaves on his own plantation, where "they will be sure of good treatment, which from your humanity I know will be a considerable inducement."¹⁹⁷ It may have been exchanges such as these that compelled Timothy Flint to assert that slaveowners in the Deep South "have finally become impressed, that humanity is their best interest, that cheerful, well-fed, and clothed slaves, perform so much more productive labour as to unite speculation and kindness in the same calculation."¹⁹⁸

Evangelical leaders in the Deep South looked to Scripture to defend slavery and reform it at the same time. Thomas Griffin, a Virginia-born Methodist who had risen to prominence in Mississippi, criticized antislavery Methodists from the North at the Methodist General Conference in 1820. "If it be offensive and sinful to own slaves," Griffin remarked, "I wish someone would just put his finger on the place in Holy Writ."¹⁹⁹ Griffin urged Methodists to do more to convert slaves to Christianity, which he thought would be a great boon to the slave regime. Like the Methodists, the Mississippi Baptists did not oppose slavery but urged instead a more godly form of it. In an 1819 circular letter titled "Duty of Masters and Servants," the Mississippi Baptist Association urged masters to be just, kind, and prudent in their treatment of slaves, and to attend to the slaves' food, clothing, and religion. In turn, they instructed slaves to accept that their position was ordained by God. They should be "industrious, honest, faithful, submissive and humble," and should "obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, whether they are perverse and wicked, or pious and gentle."²⁰⁰ These efforts laid the groundwork for the maturation and elaboration of proslavery Christianity later in the nineteenth century, when Deep South clergymen routinely championed the duties of masters and slaves, emphasizing especially the duties of slaves.

There were white people in the Deep South who deprecated slavery, but finding them is not easy. The Mississippi slaveowner William Johnson petitioned the state legislature in 1820 to allow him to free a slave. The act of manumission, he explained, would "extend the hand of humanity to a rational creature, on whom unfortunate complexion custom & even Law in this Land of freedom, has conspired to rivet the fetters of Slavery."²⁰¹ During the Missouri debates, the editor of a Natchez newspaper argued that slavery would ruin the West as large capitalists engrossed the land and slaves wore out the soil. He even expressed regret over "the singular anomaly of a nation boasting of its freedom, asserting itself the champion of the rights of man, and establishing a constitution, securing those rights, and at the same time pos-

sessing no power to prevent, but on the contrary, by that very constitution recognizing the perpetuation of bondage.”²⁰² Yet even as he deplored slavery, the newspaper’s editor advocated the strictest possible policing of Mississippi’s slave population. “If slavery must be kept up at all,” he insisted, “no half way measures will answer.”²⁰³

It was easier to criticize from afar. William Darby’s migration to Pennsylvania appears to have loosened his tongue with respect to slavery. In his otherwise laudatory 1817 treatise on Louisiana, Darby charged that slaveholding demoralized and debauched white people. “No country where negro slavery is established,” he argued, “but must bear in part the wounds inflicted on nature and justice.”²⁰⁴ An Alabamian studying medicine in London in 1818 wrote a long letter to a friend suggesting a plan of (very) gradual emancipation. The further introduction of slaves into Alabama should be prohibited, he proposed, and the offspring of slaves already in the state emancipated at the age of twenty, with their owners obligated to educate them. The white population would eventually overwhelm the black, which would “soon be amalgamated and lost in the map.” The medical student (and future delegate to the Confederate Provisional Congress) anticipated that his friend might consider him a “fanatical enthusiast” and allowed, if that was the case, to “let the subject rest in silence.” But he also warned, “It cannot sleep eternally.”²⁰⁵ And having returned from the wilds of Mississippi to the comforts of Delaware, the Quaker surveyor Isaac Briggs implored John Calhoun to find an antidote to the “moral and political poison” of slavery.²⁰⁶

In his 1825 memoir, the former overseer James Pearse authored probably the harshest critique of slavery in the Deep South to appear in the first quarter of the nineteenth century. A Massachusetts native, Pearse moved to Mississippi in the winter of 1818–19 with his wife and children. Once there, the family struggled with disease—one of his daughters died from a fever. He got a job as an overseer but clashed with the slaves he managed and the planter who employed him. Pearse finally gave up on the Deep South and returned his family to the North, where he wrote his memoir “to shew the evil of emi-

grating from free, to slave states.” He argued that the Deep South was no place for poor white people. The climate wrecked their health and morals: “I have known many of this class, who have died in a few years; others become broken in health and spirits, fall into dissipation, and become lost to themselves, and to the world.” Pearse further argued that slavery bred habits of cruelty and arrogance among slaveowners—not just toward black people but toward everyone of inferior status. And then there were the special terrors inflicted on enslaved people, including the whip and the threat of sale. Pearse knew these well; he had handled a whip himself. Reflecting on his experience, Pearse concluded that slavery was “a moral evil” and should be abolished.²⁰⁷

Controversy over slavery came to a national head early in 1819, with what became known as the Missouri crisis. Missouri applied for admission into the Union with a state constitution that resembled Alabama’s, including an article protecting slaveowners’ right to hold slave property. Representative James Tallmadge of New York, leading those opposed to the expansion of slavery, moved to amend the bill for Missouri’s statehood to prohibit the further introduction of slaves into Missouri and to provide for the freedom of the children of slaves already there.²⁰⁸ Northern supporters of the Tallmadge amendment launched a fierce, unprecedented volley of opinion against expanding slavery into the new state. Slavery was cruel and immoral, they contended, and had to be stopped. It retarded economic and social progress. It vivified the domestic market for slaves, which would stimulate illegal smuggling and kidnapping. And it augmented the slave power—the political strength of slaveowners in Congress. None of these arguments was new, but they were tied to a novel political tactic and advanced with a new urgency. The novel tactic was Tallmadge’s attaching a restrictive condition to Missouri’s admission as a state, rather than to its organization as a territory. The new urgency derived from the weakness of diffusionist logic in the face of the slave population’s evident natural increase. As the Baltimore political economist Daniel Raymond charged, diffusion was “about as effectual a remedy for slavery as it would be for the smallpox.”²⁰⁹

That Tallmadge did not demand the same restrictions on slavery in Alabama as he did in Missouri suggests how deeply rooted slavery had already become in the Deep South. Alabama unequivocally belonged to the slaveholding section of the country. The 1818 census of the Alabama Territory had already disclosed a slave population exceeding 21,000 people, or more than 30 percent of the territory's population.²¹⁰ They lived adjacent to the slave states of Georgia, Tennessee, and Mississippi, and Tallmadge acknowledged the danger of mixing emancipated black people with slaves. "I had learned from southern gentlemen the difficulties and dangers of having free blacks intermingling with slaves," he told the House of Representatives, "and, on that account, and with a view to the safety of the white population of the adjoining states, I would not even advocate the prohibition of slavery in the Alabama territory; because, surrounded as it was by slaveholding states, and with only imaginary lines of division, the intercourse between slaves and free blacks could not be prevented, and a servile war might be the result."²¹¹ But Missouri was differently situated. It belonged to the West, not the South. White people could tolerate the climate, so slavery was not necessary. Few slaves already lived there, so emancipation would not threaten its neighbors. If the march of slavery across North America was going to be halted, opponents of slavery had to hold the line in Missouri.

Tallmadge's amendment and its accompanying antislavery polemics threatened slaveowners' power and insulted their way of life. Slavery's defenders in the Deep South felt no less a sense of urgency than their northern opponents. "We have everything at stake," wrote Charles Tait, "not only political power & consideration, but domestic tranquility & social repose."²¹² Writing to his wife during a break in the debate, Louisiana representative Thomas Butler insisted that the Missouri question was "of immense importance to the Southern section of the union & it is absolutely necessary that every southern member should be at his post."²¹³ Leading planter-politicians in the Deep South considered the proposed prohibition on slavery in Missouri a harbinger. "It is believed by some, & feared by others, that [Tallmadge's amendment] is merely the entering wedge," reported Ala-

bama senator John Walker, “and that it points already to a total emancipation of the blacks.”²¹⁴ Mississippi representative Christopher Rankin was one of those who saw a dangerous precedent in the restrictionist position. “These doctrines lead to an unlimited exercise of power,” he asserted, “to a declaration that slavery does not exist within the United States; but if it does, that congress may abolish it, or confine it to narrow limits.” Rankin warned supporters of the Tallmadge Amendment: “You conduct us to an awful precipice, and hold us over it.”²¹⁵ The urgent tone of these warnings and Tait’s allusion to “domestic tranquility” hint at slaveowners’ fear that the agitation over slavery in Missouri might provoke a slave rebellion. Andrew Jackson was explicit on the point. The Missouri question, he wrote to his nephew, “will excite those who is the subject of discussion to insinuation & massacre.”²¹⁶ Such fears were not entirely irrational. In 1816 Barbadian planters had blamed a large slave rebellion on a debate in Parliament over the registration of slaves in the West Indies. The insurrection and its alleged causes were reported in American newspapers, and slaveowners were surely aware of it.²¹⁷

Opponents of the Tallmadge amendment devoted most of their attention to the constitutional argument that the restriction violated state sovereignty. They argued that requiring Missourians to accept a restriction that had not been required of any other state violated the principle of equality between the states. It also violated the terms of the treaty with France that guaranteed to Missouri’s inhabitants the same rights enjoyed by citizens of the United States. All that the Constitution required of a new state was that it should exceed a certain threshold of population and extent, and its form of government should be “republican.” Slavery, moreover, belonged to Missouri’s domestic affairs and was not a proper object for regulation by the national government. The constitutional authority to prohibit the importation of slaves did not extend to the migration of slaves from one state to another, argued opponents of restriction. Among the many debaters who articulated the sovereignty argument was Mississippi senator Walter Leake, who contended that because “the power to

hold, possess, and regulate this property, has not been delegated to the United States, nor prohibited to the States; then a State, within the meaning of the Constitution, possesses sole control over it, and the United States possess none.”²¹⁸

Some of the more ardent defenders of slavery were not content to let the argument rest on constitutional grounds. They also felt compelled to answer for the morality and policy of slavery, and in particular, for slavery’s expansion. Representative William Pinckney of South Carolina boldly stated the proslavery case. “The great body of slaves are happier in their present situation than they could be in any other,” he declared on the floor of the House, “and the man or men who would attempt to give them freedom, would be their greatest enemies.”²¹⁹ Some white southerners, including Thomas Jefferson, clung to the fiction that the dispersal of the slave population would lead to gradual emancipation, but the diffusionist argument shifted in a subtle and important way. Its advocates shied away from gradual emancipation and toward the amelioration of slaves’ conditions. In its rehabilitated form, diffusionism yoked the new proslavery humanitarianism to the expansion of slavery. It would be cruel, charged diffusionists, to confine slaves to the southeastern states, where increasing poverty and repression would be their fate. As Christopher Rankin bluntly argued, “No man has passed through the States of Kentucky, Tennessee, Mississippi and Alabama, who does not know that [the slaves’] condition is much better there than in the old States.”²²⁰

The Missouri question tested slaveowners’ strength in Congress, where all the demographic, social, and political developments of the previous three decades had changed the balance of power between the free and slave portions of the country. The most important development was that the population in states where slavery did not exist or was dying out had increased faster than the population in states where slavery did exist and was expanding. This demographic trend widened the free states’ advantage in the House of Representatives despite the three-fifths clause, which more and more slaveowners recognized was not the bulwark they had once anticipated. The first House vote on

the Tallmadge Amendment in 1819 demonstrated the dominance of the nonslaveholding states. Representatives from the slave states voted sixty-six to one against the Tallmadge Amendment, but it passed on the strength a vote of eighty-six to ten in its favor by representatives from the nonslaveholding states. Southern representatives were nearly unanimous in opposing the restriction, and a small but significant number of northern representatives sided with them.²²¹

Losing ground in the House of Representatives, slaveowners fell back on the Senate, where the addition of five slave states between 1789 and 1819—Kentucky, Tennessee, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama—allowed them to maintain their power. In particular, the division of the Mississippi Territory and the recent admission of Alabama had solidified the slave power just in time to confront the Missouri challenge. The six votes of Louisiana, Alabama, and Mississippi weighed more in the Senate than did their three votes in the House. Charles Tait, who had been so instrumental in dividing the Mississippi Territory and ushering Alabama into statehood, congratulated himself on his own foresight in 1820, explaining to John Walker that the gambit “has given us more strength in the Senate.”²²² Indeed, the Senate rejected the restriction on slavery in Missouri and pressured the House to relent. As in the House, in the Senate slaveowners’ power benefited from the support of a few northerners. During the Missouri debates, the two senators from Illinois, Ninian Edwards and Jesse Thomas, as well as Harrison Gray Otis of Massachusetts, Abner Lacock of Pennsylvania, and William Palmer of Vermont, opposed restriction, along with every southern senator.²²³

In the end, the Missouri Compromise famously admitted Missouri as a slave state and—in a measure proposed by Illinois’s Jesse Thomas—prohibited slavery in all other territories of the Louisiana Purchase above the thirty-sixth parallel. Maine was also admitted, but as a free state, preserving the sectional balance in the Senate. The Deep South largely supported the compromise. Missouri’s admission as a slave state passed in the House by three votes—coincidentally, the number of votes cast by representatives from Louisiana (Thomas Butler), Mis-

issippi (Christopher Rankin), and Alabama (John Crowell). Rankin and Crowell joined the compromisers who voted for the Thomas proviso, while Butler joined the southern radicals who opposed it. All six senators from the Deep South states voted for the admission of Missouri as a slave state, and five of the six supported the Thomas proviso. The Deep South's support for the Missouri compromise distinguished it from the old centers of the slave power, where opposition to the Thomas proviso was strong. (Seven of eight senators and thirty-two of forty-nine representatives from Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia voted against the Thomas proviso.) Though direct evidence is lacking, there are several possible explanations for the strong support for the Missouri Compromise in the Deep South. One is the powerful postwar nationalism of its leaders. They owed much to the United States. Another is that the future of the Deep South depended on attracting slaveowning migrants from the southeastern states, and so its leaders had little incentive to see the whole, vast Louisiana territory opened up to them. Finally it must be remembered that the citizens of the Deep South were concerned about securing relief for the purchasers of public lands in the wake of declining cotton prices, and their political representatives may have been trying to forge a western alliance to accomplish that goal.²²⁴

The controversy surrounding the admission of Missouri signaled to leading nationalist politicians in the United States that the slavery issue could break the Union and should be removed from national debate. James Monroe, for instance, concluded that "the further acquisition of territory to the west & South, involves difficulties of an internal nature, which menace the union itself."²²⁵ By the end of 1821, the two major controversies over slavery—the slave trade and geographic expansion—were settled for a generation. Revisions in the slave trade laws quelled agitation over smuggling, while the slave power blocked any consideration of further federal regulation or prohibition of the internal slave trade. The Adams-Onís Treaty secured Florida to the United States and abandoned U.S. claims to Texas and northern Mexico. In tandem with the Missouri Compromise, the treaty effectively

resolved the explosive question of slavery's territorial expansion for a generation. No new states were added to the Union for fifteen years. So far as slaveowners in the Deep South were concerned, these arrangements inaugurated a golden age, which lasted twenty-five years. The white and black population steadily increased, cotton and sugar production expanded, and the remaining southern Indians were either expelled or brought under the jurisdiction of state laws. Not until the various settlements of 1819 to 1821 collapsed following the Mexican War did the slave country again face a serious challenge from its northern foes.²²⁶

Epilogue

JOHN EADIS'S ODYSSEY spanned an epoch in the history of American slavery. Born around 1790 in Africa, he was transported across the Atlantic Ocean and ended up as a slave in Virginia. He was later taken to the Mississippi Territory "for sale." There (he claimed) he served as a drummer with Jackson's army. In the summer of 1818, he shipped out from New Orleans on the *Mary* but was captured at the mouth of the Mississippi and thrown in jail. A sparse account of his travels appeared in a notice published in the *Louisiana Gazette* requesting that his legal owner come to get him. There is a bitter irony in the fact that Eadis's life in the slave country was documented only because of his failed attempt to escape it.¹ This book has tried to map John Eadis's vast world of captivity and movement, paying special attention to the topography of power, and it has explored one part of that world in great detail, the region that became the Deep South of the United States in the decades following the American Revolution.

A unique conjunction created the Deep South between the 1780s and 1820s and shaped it in distinctive ways. Two new crops, each with its own geographic, economic, and demographic characteristics, took root in the Deep South. The takeoff of industrial production in

the cotton-textile manufactories of Great Britain increased demand for short-staple cotton, which flourished in the soil and climate of the Deep South. Meanwhile the slave rebellion in St. Domingue reshuffled sugar production throughout the Americas and made it possible for planters around New Orleans to profit from the commercial cultivation of sugar, which was sold largely to North American consumers. The rise of cotton and sugar renewed, intensified, and enlarged the region's connections to the North American, Caribbean, and transatlantic economies. For better or for worse, the slave-owning farmers and planters of the Deep South placed themselves in the transatlantic division of labor as producers of agricultural commodities, which left them dependent on outside market forces largely beyond their control. "We only breathe by commerce," explained a New Orleans merchant.²

New economic opportunities drew people to the Deep South by the thousands. Free and enslaved migrants arrived from the United States, the Caribbean, and Africa, swelling the population to roughly 400,000 by 1820. Migrants' adjustment to life in the Deep South was often difficult, and the attempt was occasionally fatal, especially for the downtrodden. "A stranger without money need have no surer passport to his grave than to be taken with a fever any where along the banks of the Mississippi," observed a military officer.³ Relations between newcomers and the prior inhabitants defied simple generalizations. The pattern of interaction ranged from violent conflict in the Indian backcountry to casual intermingling on the New Orleans levee, where Benjamin Latrobe observed "white men and women, & all hues of brown, & all classes of faces, from round Yankees, to drisly & lean Spaniards, black negroes & negresses, filthy Indians half naked, mulattoes, curly & straight-haired, quarteroons of all shades, long-haired & frizzled, the women dressed in the most flaring yellow & scarlet gowns, men capped & hatted."⁴ The influx of diverse peoples enriched what was already one of the most culturally diverse corners of the world.

The extension of U.S. sovereignty shaped the Deep South in important ways. The United States absorbed the region through diplo-

macy and conquest, administered its territorial governments, and then incorporated it into the federal structure of the American Union as the three states of Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama. The national government encouraged economic development in its new acquisitions through nation-building measures that included the survey and sale of public lands, the improvement of the transportation infrastructure, and the imposition of a tariff on foreign sugar. It eventually restricted the importation of foreign slaves but allowed the transfer of slaves into the region from elsewhere in the United States in a policy of domestication and diffusion that reflected proslavery economic interests and national concerns over the safety of the slave country. Slaveowners and their allies successfully harnessed the resources of the new United States to defend and extend plantation slavery in the early national era. By the time that antislavery forces took a firm stand against the introduction of Missouri as a slave state in 1819, the phenomenal expansion of slavery in the southwestern states was well under way.

The whole enterprise involved terror and violence. An epoch of war and revolution throughout the Atlantic world brought the Deep South into the United States and carried many thousands of people to its shores. The American Revolution, the slave rebellion and civil wars in St. Domingue, the Napoleonic Wars and their North American adjunct, the War of 1812, all contributed to the rise of the Deep South. The Creek War allowed the United States to wrest millions of acres of fertile land from the southern Indian nations, which were left immeasurably weakened as a result. The expansion of slavery spread violence throughout everyday life in forms ranging from individual struggles between masters and slaves to the once-in-a-lifetime slave rebellion on the Mississippi River's German Coast in 1811. In the words of Alexander Meek, one of Alabama's first historians, the region was "wrought and consecrated through a bitter sacrament of blood."⁵ The violence that accompanied American expansion in the Deep South tragically followed from Jefferson's utopian vision of an empire of liberty moving peacefully across the continent.

Though the expansion of slavery in the Deep South may seem inev-

itable in hindsight, it did not go unchallenged at the time. Isaac Briggs and Tom Paine registered their dissent in eloquent, futile letters to Thomas Jefferson. Small numbers of congressmen actively opposed slavery's expansion in the Deep South, but they did not prevail. Dissident Indians tried to prevent the United States from gobbling up their lands. Enslaved people ran away from their owners, and some even rebelled. It is tempting to wonder what might have happened if the German Coast slave rebellion, the Creek War, and the British invasion had all occurred at the same time. Would the citizens of the Deep South have been able to respond to these crises all at once, or would the combination have overwhelmed them? At the very least the disruption to plantation slavery in the Deep South would have been deeper and more enduring. But that is not what happened. Each challenge followed its own historical rhythm and, consequently, the citizens of the slave country were able to beat them back, one after the other. These victories gave powerful material and ideological support to the expansion of slavery in the subsequent generation. Slavery marched together with Jacksonian nationalism.

From the 1820s to the 1850s, the demographic, economic, and political weight of plantation slavery in the United States continued to shift to the south and west. A few statistics demonstrate the point. The population of Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana increased from about 400,000 people in 1820 to almost 2.5 million in 1860, evenly divided between white and black. The three states accounted for 20 percent of the population of the southern states and 8 percent of the whole country's population in 1860. Almost one in three slaves in the United States lived in the Deep South on the eve of the Civil War.⁶ As the Deep South grew in population, the region was drawn more closely into the cultural orbit of the southeastern United States. English-speaking, Protestant migrants came to outnumber the original inhabitants. More than half of all white people in the Deep South in 1850 were born outside the region, and about one-third came from the southeastern states.⁷ The slave population was also augmented by migrants. Historians estimate that more than 1.1 million enslaved

people moved from slave-exporting to slave-importing states during these years, and more than half of them went to the Deep South. Forced migration was central to their experience.⁸

The plantation complex of the Deep South advanced along with the population. Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana produced just over 600,000 bales of cotton in 1819–20, which accounted for about one-fourth of the country's cotton production. By 1859–60, they were the top three cotton-producing states in the Union, generating almost five million bales annually, or more than 60 percent of the country's cotton.⁹ Louisiana's sugar growers, the technological vanguard of southern agriculture, increased their output tenfold from the 1820s to the 1850s. During the peak years in the 1850s, Louisianians annually produced about four hundred million pounds of sugar.¹⁰ More than half of all U.S. plantations with 100 or more slaves were located in the Deep South in 1860. At the same time, New Orleans rose nearly to the prominence that all its early nineteenth-century boosters had imagined. The average annual receipts at New Orleans increased from \$16 million in the years 1823 to 1825 to \$165 million in 1856 to 1860. The dollar value of its exports far exceeded that of any other southern port and was second only to New York, which processed a substantial share of the cotton shipped from New Orleans. Along with its other distinctions, New Orleans became the biggest slave market in the United States.¹¹

National integration crowded out the Deep South's marginal social groups. The southern Indians could not fend off the expansion of the slave country, especially after Andrew Jackson's victory in the presidential election of 1828 threw the power of the federal government behind Indian removal. Forty-two thousand Creeks, Choctaws, and Chickasaws were expelled from the Deep South in the 1830s and transported to land west of the Mississippi River. Their deportation sparked a new frenzy of speculation and development that further advanced plantation interests.¹² The region's free people of color also suffered, but in more subtle ways. As the number of free white and enslaved people grew, the proportion of free people of color fell to

just 1 percent of the Deep South's population in 1860. The number of free people of color in Louisiana and Mississippi actually declined in the two decades before the Civil War. They were subjected to intensifying pressures, ranging from public insult to the threat of deportation and reenslavement.¹³

The Deep South's political power reached its apogee during Andrew Jackson's presidency. No national political leader had been more closely associated with the region's slaveowners than Jackson, who was linked to them by blood, interest, and sentiment. The citizens of the Deep South supported Jackson when South Carolina's planter elite challenged the authority of the national government to impose a protective tariff, and Jackson helped the citizens of the Deep South to deport the remaining southern Indians in the 1830s. But as the Deep South increased its influence within the southern bloc through the antebellum era, that bloc suffered a relative decline with respect to national political power. The trend was most conspicuous in the House of Representatives, where the Deep South increased its presence from 8 percent of the southern representation in 1820 to 19 percent in 1860 while the proportion of southern representatives overall in the House declined from 42 percent to 35 percent in the same period. The southern bloc struggled to hold on to power as the national government's most democratic branch slipped from its grasp.¹⁴

Southern slaveowners owed their political predicament to the southern states' failure to match the rapidly growing free population of the rest of the country, which left them at a disadvantage in the struggle against the rise of a popular antislavery movement in the North. That failure was most pronounced in the original southeastern states, which did not attract nearly as many foreigners as did the northeastern and mid-Atlantic states in the antebellum era. But it also shaped the demography of the new, western states. The total population of Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama was less than half that of Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois throughout the first half of the nineteenth century. Was slavery responsible for the difference? Did free people

prefer to move to free states rather than to slave states? Many critics of slavery thought so. This book has argued that the expansion of slavery was crucial to the origins of the Deep South as it actually emerged, but it is also possible that the expansion of slavery blocked the emergence of a very different Deep South where—if he had chosen to go there—John Eadis might have lived in peace and freedom.

The Deep South presents a leading example of the general increase in forced labor in many parts of the world during the first half of the nineteenth century. The process differed from place to place according to geographic, economic, demographic, and political circumstances. The expansion of slavery in Cuba and Brazil depended on the continued importation of African slaves, which had a profound and still-palpable impact on Cuban and Brazilian culture. In West Africa, by contrast, the increased use of slave labor in “legitimate trade” accompanied British efforts to end slave exportation. Forced labor also expanded to the east. Omani and Swahili planters built up a plantation system in Zanzibar that encompassed more than 100,000 slaves by the 1830s. The use of convict labor proliferated all along the Indian Ocean and in Southeast Asia. Serfdom deepened in Russia. Notwithstanding local differences, forced labor was propelled wherever it expanded by increased demand for agricultural commodities, including cotton, sugar, coffee, cloves, peanuts, grain, and palm oil, linked to new patterns of production and consumption associated with the Industrial Revolution. Forced labor did not merely precede transnational capitalist networks of commodity exchange. It was also enmeshed in those networks as they proliferated around the world in the nineteenth century. That forced labor gradually became discredited at the same time as it expanded is surely one of the great paradoxes of world history in the nineteenth century.¹⁵

Some of the basic issues that roiled the Deep South in the early national era are still relevant today. The expansion of slavery was part of the history of “globalization,” which is a euphemism for the ongoing integration of all humanity into a capitalist world-system. That process continues to have disparate effects on many groups of people.

Not all benefit equally, and some suffer. Slavery also created a heterogeneous population at the same time that it stratified that population along new contours of race and class. Few travelers who visited New Orleans in the early nineteenth century failed to note its astonishing diversity, but the experience of living in a diverse society did not automatically lead to tolerance of others, let alone mutual respect. In the context of inequality and economic exploitation, it led instead to deepening antipathy and horrible violence. Nationalism, racism, and other toxic prejudices likewise corrode our own global society. We live in a world in which slavery has not been eradicated and, if we are not vigilant, may again flourish under a new dispensation of global inequality.¹⁶

Abbreviations

Notes

Acknowledgments

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Abbreviations

ADAH	Alabama Department of Archives and History, Montgomery
AJP	Andrew Jackson Papers, Library of Congress
BH	<i>Letters, Journals and Writings of Benjamin Hawkins</i> , ed. C. L. Grant, 2 vols. (Savannah, GA: Beehive Press, 1980)
BSP	Briggs-Stabler Papers, 1793–1910, MS 147, H. Furlong Baldwin Library, Maryland Historical Society, Baltimore
CAJ	John Spencer Bassett, ed., <i>Correspondence of Andrew Jackson</i> , 7 vols. (Washington, DC: Carnegie Institution of Washington, 1926–1935)
CVMM	<i>New Orleans (La.) Conseil de Ville, Messages from the Mayor, 1805–1836</i> (trans.), Louisiana Division, New Orleans Public Library
CVOP	<i>New Orleans (La.) Conseil de Ville, Official Proceedings, 1803–1829</i> (trans.), Louisiana Division, New Orleans Public Library
DU	Special Collections, Perkins Library, Duke University
ELP	Edward Livingston Papers (CO280), Manuscripts Division, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library; published with permission of the Princeton University Library
LBC	Dunbar Rowland, ed., <i>Official Letter Books of W. C. C. Claiborne, 1801–1816</i> , 6 vols. (Jackson, MS: State Department of Archives and History, 1917)
LC	Library of Congress
NA	National Archives, Washington, DC
PAJ	Harold D. Moser, Sharon McPherson, and Charles F. Bryan, Jr., eds., <i>The Papers of Andrew Jackson</i> , 6 vols. (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1980–)
PFP	Palfrey Family Papers, Houghton Library, Harvard University; by permission of the Houghton Library, Harvard University
PRO	The National Archives of the UK: Public Record Office, London
RASP	Kenneth N. Stampp, ed., <i>Records of Ante-Bellum Southern Plantations from the Revolution through the Civil War</i> (Frederick, MD: University Publications of America, 1985–)
TPUS	Clarence Carter, ed., <i>Territorial Papers of the United States</i> , 26 vols. (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1934)
UNC	Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Notes

Preface

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 176. David Holmes to Thomas Cushing, 28 September 1810, *TPUS*, 6: 121–122.
 177. St. Charles Parish Original Acts, 14 January 1811, "Interrogation of Jean," St. Charles Parish Colonial Record Books, Book 41, University of Southwestern Louisiana Library.
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 179. William Claiborne to Wade Hampton, 7 January 1811, *LBC*, 5: 94.

180. William Claiborne to Colonel Andre, 13 January 1811, *LBC*, 5: 97; Thompson, “Louisiana’s Deslondes Slave Revolt,” 7.
181. Act #17, 20 February 1811, St. Charles Parish Original Acts, Book 41, 1810–1811, in Thrasher, *On to New Orleans!* 216.
182. *Louisiana Gazette*, 10 January 1811; *Louisiana Gazette*, 17 January 1811. The legend of Trépagnier’s death is reprinted in Thrasher, *On to New Orleans!* 54. Commodore John Shaw estimated the number of rebels at 200 to 300. John Shaw to Paul Hamilton, 18 January 1811, Papers of John Shaw, LC. John Nancarrow estimated their number at 300. John Nancarrow to Edward Livingston, 20 January 1811, Folder 19, Box 31, ELP.
183. These men were identified as principal leaders during the interrogations of 13–14 January. Many historians indicate that Charles was from St. Domingue, but I have found no evidence supporting this claim.
184. “Statement of the slaves killed, arrested, and missing after the insurrection,” 18 January 1811, Act #2, St. Charles Parish Original Acts, Book 1810–11, 3–4.
185. Declarations, Act #24, 7 March 1811, St. Charles Parish Original Acts, Book 1810–1811, 149–162. All the available declarations for compensation are translated and published in Thrasher, *On to New Orleans!* 216–224. For Marie Rose, see *Acts Passed at the Second Session of the Third Legislature of the Territory of Orleans 1811*, 18, in Thrasher, *On to New Orleans!* 277.
186. *Moniteur de la Louisiane*, 17 January 1811, in Thrasher, *On to New Orleans!* 63.
187. William Claiborne to Robert Smith, 9 January 1811, *TPUS*, 9: 915–916; Wade Hampton to William Eustis, 16 January 1811, *TPUS*, 9: 917–918; Thrasher, *On to New Orleans!* 59; Shaw to Hamilton, 18 January 1811; *Louisiana Gazette*, 17 January 1811; Manuel Andry to William Claiborne, 11 January 1811, *TPUS*, 9: 915–916.
188. Manuel Andry to William Claiborne, 11 January 1811, *TPUS*, 9: 915–916; *Louisiana Gazette*, 11 January 1811; Hampton to Eustis, 16 January 1811, *TPUS*, 9: 917–918; *Moniteur de la Louisiane*, 12 January 1811, in Thrasher, *On to New Orleans!* 282. Quotations from Andry’s letter to Claiborne.
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Acknowledgments

I am solely responsible for this book, but many people have contributed to it through their hospitality, generosity, curiosity, and expertise.

This book rests on materials that many professional librarians and archivists helped me to locate. I am especially grateful to the hard-working people at the Alabama Department of Archives and History, Columbia University's Butler Library, the Filson Historical Society, LSU's Hill Memorial Library, the Historic New Orleans Collection, Houghton Library of Harvard University, the Library of Congress, the Louisiana Division of the New Orleans Public Library, the Maryland Historical Society, the Mississippi Department of Archives and History, the National Archives, Perkins Library at Duke University, Princeton University Library, the Southern Historical Collection at the University of North Carolina, and the Supreme Court of Louisiana Collection at the University of New Orleans.

Every writer needs time and money. These were generously given to me by the Mrs. Giles Whiting Foundation, the American Council of Learned Societies, and the Georgetown University Graduate School of Arts and Sciences. Columbia University's Bancroft Dissertation Award provided Harvard University Press with funds to support the publication of *Slave Country*. Along these same general lines, I am also indebted to the Columbia University Probability Seminar.

I have presented earlier versions of parts of this book at various scholarly gatherings, including meetings of the American Historical Association, the Organization of American Historians, the Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture, and the Society for Historians of the Early American Republic. I would like to

thank the Catholic University History Department and the Maryland Early American Seminar at the University of Maryland for inviting me to present chapters. I also benefited from participating in Bernard Bailyn's Atlantic History Seminar at Harvard University in 1998 and a conference on the domestic slave trade in the Americas sponsored by the Gilder Lehrman Center for the Study of Slavery, Resistance, and Abolition at Yale University in 1999.

I have received invaluable help from many extraordinary mentors, colleagues, and friends at Columbia, Georgetown, and elsewhere. Thanks to Tommaso Astarita, David Ball, Ed Baptist, Ira Berlin, Betsy Blackmar, Alan Brinkley, Paul Cheney, David Brion Davis, Eric Foner, Alison Games, Eugene Genovese, Gwendolyn Midlo Hall, Sam Haselby, Walter Johnson, Michael Kazin, Martin Kenner, Amy Leonard, Rebecca McLennan, John McNeill, Phil Morgan, Marcy Norton, Jim Oakes, Joe Reidy, Olatunde Rodney, Irving Rothman, Daryl Scott, Anders Stephanson, Scott Taylor, John Tutino, Steve West, and Michael Zakim. I am especially grateful to Barbara Fields, whose uncompromising intellect and dedication to the craft of history have profoundly shaped my own aspirations as a scholar and teacher.

Thanks also go to Joyce Seltzer for her guidance, to the outside readers for Harvard University Press for their suggestions, and to Julie Hagen for copy editing.

Most of all, I would like to thank my family for their humor, kindness, and love.

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