In 1796 the African Society was organized by forty-four blacks in Boston. It declared its objectives to be benevolent and asserted that it would take "no one into the Society who shall commit any injustice or outrage against the laws of their country." It is said that this and similar organizations did much to bind blacks together and give them the experience of leadership and cooperation that was to mean much in a later day. They early sought integration into the political, social, and economic life of the nation. Having been generally rejected, there was no alternative except to forge out of their limited background and training institutions of their own. It is significant, moreover, that in the case of these institutions, just as in the case of individuals, considerable effort was made to share in the general development of the country and to contribute to its growth. The African American search for independence at the turn of the century was essentially, therefore, a struggle to achieve status in the evolving American civilization.

CHAPTER 7

Blacks and Manifest Destiny

Frontier Influences

Even before the turn of the century there were unmistakable evidences of profound economic and social changes taking place on the American scene. After 1800 the signs were much more discernible. Already there was talk about industrialization in the United States, and American businesspeople envied developments in England and Europe. Europeans were beginning to resume their migrations to the New World, once more hopeful about the bright future it held for them. The land beyond the areas of settlement was beckoning new settlers and began to exercise an influence on American life that seemed to increase with every passing year. This land beyond, the frontier land, rapidly became an influence in the evolution of the institution of slavery and, therefore, in the history of blacks in America.

In the early nineteenth century the United States could appraise its Western lands as one of its most valuable assets, especially after the purchase of Louisiana in 1803. Although it would be years before this area would be settled, Americans and Europeans were rapidly moving into the area beyond the mountains. Young, adventurous people from the seaboard states and Scotch-Irish and Germans from the Old World pushed back the frontier and became a part of the new states that were added to the American union.

Many of the settlers in the new West were affiliated with religions that emphasized equality and brotherly love, and those who were not ardent believers were without the means considered necessary to build a civilization based on slavery. Thus, a spirit of freedom was dominant on the frontier, but it was destined to be rendered unimportant and ineffective by the economic and social forces at work in the older states. Some residents of the seaboard states became attracted to the new lands because of their inability to adjust to the old environment. Others found it impossible to satisfy their economic needs in the areas already settled, where competition was keen and where the better opportunities were in the hands of a relative few. Still others, many of whom belonged to the upper class, sought new lands on which to grow the cotton for which there was now such a great demand. Frequently this last group had resources, occasionally slaves, with which to dominate the economic and social life of the frontier and to change the character of life there. The frontier, which had formerly been the haven to which social malcontents escaped and to which economic "ne'er do wells" retreated, now became the battleground on which lovers of freedom fought those who sought to entrench the institution of slavery.

It was not possible for the lovers of freedom to win their battle against the slaveholders. The Industrial Revolution and the invention of the cotton gin had already determined the course of events on the American frontier. The ideals of freedom succumbed before the powerful forces demanding slavery, and the attractive lands of the Southern Gulf states made inevitable the establishment of a cotton kingdom based on slavery. At first the frontier settlers fought the whole system of the East, but as the prospects of enrichment for all appeared, even they gradually gave their support to the institution.

Something may be said, moreover, of the manner in which frontier influences may have assisted in the westward march of slavery. The sentiment in favor of freedom and democracy in the West came as much from a new type of settler—German, Scotch-Irish, etc.—as it did from a transformation of the character of the people who moved from the seaboard to the back country. The greater portion of those who moved from the Atlantic coastal states were committed to the institution of slavery and, when possible, demonstrated this commitment by bringing slaves with them. If the spirit of freedom affected them at all, it was in the direction of confirming their right to control the lives of others and to engage in a ruthless exploitation of natural and human resources that was sanctioned by the frontier. The ideal of the West was not so much, as Frederick Jackson Turner, a historian of the frontier, has suggested, the right of everyone to rise to the full measure of his or her own stature. It was the right of everyone to take advantage of every opportunity that presented itself to gain the ends he or she desired and to ignore the basic ethical restraints that would have made some distinction between liberty and license. It was conceivable, therefore, that the frontier, with its attractive land and its spirit of ruthless freedom, may actually have encouraged the westward march of slavery in the early part of the nineteenth century.

Black Pioneers in the Westward March

All too frequently, students of history overlook the role of African Americans in the exploration and settlement of the American West. Whenever white Americans undertook the task of winning the West, there were black Americans, slave and free, who were involved in the process. Thus, when Meriwether Lewis and William Clark set out in 1803 under orders from President Jefferson, to explore the Louisiana Territory recently purchased from France, Clark took with him his trusted slave, York. A large and powerful man, York contributed to the success of the expedition by befriending and entertaining the Indians and providing sustenance for the explorers through his considerable skill in hunting and fishing. Upon completion of the expedition Clark emancipated York, and legend has it that York returned to the Western interior where he became a chief in an Indian tribe.

In the immensely profitable fur trade that followed in the wake of the Lewis and Clark expedition, there were black trappers who quite frequently were the most reliable liaison between white entrepreneurs and the Indians. While their reliability and integrity have often suffered at the hands of many recognized historians of the West, their presence and indeed their contributions can hardly be denied. In the 1820s, for example, Edward Rose served as a guide, hunter, and interpreter for the Missouri Fur Company. Despite the fact that Washington Irving was among those who spoke of his bad character and reputation, a contemporary, Col. Henry Leavenworth, wrote in 1823 that Rose had resided among the Indians for several years, "knew their language, and they were much attached to him." Leavenworth and, more recently, Kenneth W. Porter, have spoken of his invaluable services in the fur-trading activities in the West.

In the Minnesota Territory several blacks became prominent as trappers and traders. Among them was Pierre Bonga, a trusted slave of a Canadian fur trapper for the North West Company. Bonga was a skillful interpreter and did much of the negotiating with the Chippewas for his company. His son, George, became even more proficient, having learned English, French, Chippewa, and several other Indian languages. As an assistant and interpreter for Governor Lewis Cass of the Michigan Territory, George Bonga negotiated treaties with the Indians even while working as a voyageur for the American Fur Company. In time he became a free man and a "prominent trader of wealth and consequence." According to William L. Katz, Bonga Township in Cass County, Michigan, is named for his family.

Easily the most intrepid and remarkable of the black explorers of the American West was James P. Beckwourth. Born in 1798 of racially mixed parentage, Beckwourth served an apprenticeship to a St. Louis blacksmith. Desiring more freedom, he fled westward and secured employment with the Rocky Mountain Fur Company. Soon he became an accomplished wilderness fighter, equally skilled in the use of the gun, bowie knife, and tomahawk. In 1824 he was adopted by the Crow Indians, became their beloved "Morning

Star," and married the chief's daughter. He led the Crows in numerous bloody raids and, rising to the position of chief, was known as "Bloody Arm." He had a varied career, serving as a scout in the third Seminole war in Florida and trapping and prospecting for gold in California. In 1850 he discovered the pass in the Sierra Nevada near Reno that still bears his name.

There were others, including John Marsant and John Stewart, who served as missionaries to the Indians. Among other African Americans who participated in the westward march were those who had been emancipated by John Randolph of Virginia and who settled in Ohio; those who migrated from Northampton County, North Carolina, and settled in Indiana; and the celebrated sculptress Edmonia Lewis, part Chippewa, who attended Oberlin College before moving on to Boston, where she studied the art for which she later became famous. There were indeed hundreds of others—some obscure and others well known, at least in their time—who left their mark as black contributors in the winning of the West.

The War of 1812

The westward march was not seriously checked by the diplomatic stress and strain of the early nineteenth century or by the war in which it culminated. Indeed, it may be said that the War of 1812 was to some extent a part of the expansionist program of those who were moving westward. There were controversies over the impressment of American sailors by the British and the violation of neutral rights, but there was also the possibility that a war would result in the acquisition of new lands. If the newly acquired lands lay to the north, they could attract Northern settlers who otherwise might go into the emerging cotton kingdom and obstruct the extension of slavery. If, perchance, the expansionists could acquire more lands in the Southwest, it would help to satisfy the appetites of an economic system that was already showing signs of insatiability. In either case, a victorious war would encourage the extension of slavery, and the warhawks and expansionists knew it.

When war finally came in 1812, blacks had an opportunity once more to serve their country. The number who served, however, remained small, perhaps because the areas from which they naturally would have come—New England and the Middle Atlantic states—showed little enthusiasm for the war. There seemed to be no serious objections to blacks' serving in the armed forces of the United States, but there was little inclination to recruit them. New York, however, in 1814, passed an act providing for the raising of two regiments of men of color. Each regiment was to consist of slightly more than 1,000 men, who were to receive the same pay as other soldiers. If slaves enlisted with the permission of their masters, they were to receive their freedom at the end of the war. Doubtless these black soldiers served faithfully, for in 1854 at the New York State Convention of the Soldiers of

1812, a resolution was passed asking Congress to provide the officers, men, and their widows with a liberal annuity "and that such provisions should extend to and include both the Indian and African race . . . who enlisted or served in that war, and who joined with the white man in defending our rights and maintaining our independence."

Scattered through the white units were blacks who served largely in menial capacities. Some, however, fought gallantly, and the records testify to their heroism. One of the outstanding soldiers in the Battle of North Point was William Burleigh, a Philadelphia black. When the city of Washington was taken, Philadelphia and other Eastern cities were alarmed over the possibility of suffering the same fate. The Vigilance Committee of Philadelphia called on three leading black citizens, James Forten, Bishop Richard Allen, and Absalom Jones, and asked that blacks help erect adequate defenses for the city. More than 2,500 blacks met in the statehouse yard, went to Grays Ferry, and worked almost continuously for two days, after which they received the praise of a grateful city. A battalion of blacks was organized in Philadelphia and was on the verge of marching to the front when peace was announced.

A large number of blacks were enrolled in the navy, frequently without reference to race. It is estimated that at least one-tenth of the crews of the fleet on the Upper Lakes were blacks. Capt. Oliver H. Perry was not satisfied with the men, "blacks, soldiers, and boys," that were sent to him. Commodore Chauncey cautioned Perry that he should be proud of whomever he received and added that the fifty blacks on his ship were among the best men he had. Later, after the Battle of Lake Erie, Perry gave unstinted praise to the black members of his crew and declared that "they seemed absolutely insensible to danger." Other naval officers spoke of the gallantry of black seamen. Nathaniel Shaler, the commander of the *Governor Tompkins*, said that the name of John Johnson, a black seaman on his ship, should be registered in the book of fame. As Johnson lay dying after he had been struck by a twenty-four pound shot, he exclaimed, "Fire away my boys; no haul a color down." Another black, John Davis, who was struck in much the same way, begged to be thrown overboard, saying he was only in the way of the others.

It was with Gen. Andrew Jackson that blacks performed their most effective services during the War of 1812. Jackson, needing to augment his forces in the autumn of 1814, called upon the free blacks of Louisiana to answer the appeal from their country. He confessed that the policy of the United States in barring blacks from the service had been a mistake. He promised that all blacks who enlisted would receive the same pay and bounty as white soldiers and that although their officers would be white, their noncommissioned officers would be chosen from among them. Shortly before the Battle of New Orleans, after several units of black soldiers had been recruited and had served in the preliminary campaigns, Jackson told them that in their performance they had surpassed his hopes. He promised that the president would be informed of their conduct and that the "voice of the representatives of the American nation shall applaud your valor, as your general now praises your ardor."

In the Battle of Chalmette Plains, commonly known as the Battle of New Orleans, black soldiers occupied a position of strategic importance. They were very near Jackson's main forces—on the left bank of the Mississippi River, just at the right of the advancing left column of the British. One battalion, under Major Lacoste, was composed of men of color from New Orleans and numbered about 280. The other, under Major Daquin, was composed of blacks from St. Domingue and numbered about 150. These black soldiers erected the cotton-bag defenses for Jackson and contributed substantially to the American victory. As the British, under General Pakenham, attempted to take Jackson's position by assault, frontiersmen, blacks, regular army men, and others opened up a counterattack from behind their breastworks that was disastrous for the British. The war had already ended, but this belated victory for the Americans was significant psychologically as well as from a military viewpoint.

During the war blacks in search of freedom went over to the British. As in the War of Independence the British promised freedom to all fugitive slaves. It is impossible to make any estimate of the number who escaped to the British lines, but it is well known that some were later living in the British West Indies and in Canada. Some of those in the West Indies, however, had been sold into slavery. Many blacks entered the war on the side of America expecting to secure their freedom. Some did, but others were actually sent back to their masters at the end of the struggle. Thus, both sides betrayed, to some extent, the blacks who enlisted in the hope of getting their freedom. The Treaty of Ghent provided for the mutual restoration of properties. This applied to personal property—slaves—as much as to any territories that may have been won during the war. Since the British had been selling fugitive slaves in the West Indies, the Americans sought indemnities for this and other properties that were not restored by the British. It was not until 1828, however, that the British finally acceded to the demands of the United States and granted indemnities of more than $1 million.

Emergence of the Cotton Kingdom

The peace that settled over the United States in 1815 made possible the acceleration of the westward movement that was well under way before the war. The men of the South and West, the most enthusiastic supporters of the war, now felt that they had a right to move on to better lands. Many of the Indian dangers had been allayed, and the demand for cotton was increasing now that peace had come to the entire world. The years immediately following the close of the war witnessed an unparalleled movement of the population westward. Into the Gulf region went large numbers of settlers to clear the rich lands and cultivate extensive crops of cotton. Louisiana had

become a state in 1812, and the population continued to increase as cotton and sugarcane became profitable crops of slaveholding planters. Mississippi and Alabama became states in 1817 and 1819, respectively. There had been only about 40,000 people in this area in 1810, but by 1820 there were 200,000 inhabitants, and twenty years later the population had almost reached the 1 million mark. The black population had also grown rapidly. In 1820 there were only 75,000 blacks in the Alabama-Mississippi region, while by 1840 almost half a million were in the area. The increase of the white population, coupled with the tremendous growth of the black population, largely slaves, is essentially the story of the emergence of the cotton kingdom.

A considerable number of planters from the seaboard states moved into the cotton kingdom, realizing that only in the new area could slavery have a possibility of becoming profitable. Attempts to grow cotton in Virginia and North Carolina had not been altogether satisfactory. At the beginning of the century the Southeastern states had grown most of the cotton. By 1821, however, the South Central states were producing over one-third of the cotton grown in the United States. By 1834 the coastal states produced 160 million pounds, while Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, and the other newly settled areas dominated production with 297.5 million pounds. Small wonder that slaveholders were going into the cotton kingdom. In 1832 the Lynchburg *Virginian* complained that "the constant emigration to the great West of our most substantial citizens, the bone and sinew of the country . . . is the daily subject of complaint among our mercantile men and of which our naked streets and untenanted houses are such emphatic evidence." Four years later a South Carolinian wrote: "The spirit of emigration is still rife in our community. From this cause we have lost many, and we are destined, we fear, to lose more, of our worthiest citizens."

As the income of planters in the new lands grew enormously and as the news of their prosperity found its way back to the seaboard, the wave of migration increased. The demand for slaves grew and, naturally, the prices of slaves went up. This mad scramble for land in the West, for slaves to cultivate the land, and for huge profits with which to expand were the ingredients that made the cotton kingdom one of the most dynamic areas of economic and social activity during the first half of the nineteenth century. The emergence of the cotton kingdom, in which the work was carried on primarily by black slaves, had the effect of committing the Gulf region to a regime of slavery and of unifying the South against any group or section that threatened to destroy those peculiar interests of the South and the cotton kingdom.

The acquisition of Florida in 1819, the settling of Missouri and its entrance into the Union as a slave state in 1821, and the movement culminating in the acquisition of Texas in 1845 were to a large extent a result of the forces that the emergence of the cotton kingdom let loose. In order to safeguard slaveholders against the possibility of losing their slaves through escape to Spanish soil, Florida was considered both desirable and necessary. The controversy over the entrance of Missouri into the Union demonstrated the determination of the South to secure, if possible, a political balance, and an equal determination on the part of the North to maintain political domination. The question of blacks was consequently catapulted into national prominence, and the incident seems to be symbolic of the irrevocable commitment of the South to the institution of slavery. Nothing more clearly demonstrates the insatiable appetite of plantation slavery for new lands than the generation-long struggle for the acquisition of Texas. It was perhaps the high-water mark in the effort of the South to absorb all the lands into which the cotton kingdom could be extended.

Shortly before the beginning of the War of 1812 the people of the West expounded the doctrine that later came to be known as Manifest Destiny. R. M. Johnson of Kentucky, for example, said that he would not die happy until all of Britain's North American possessions were incorporated into the United States. Points of view like this came to be expressed more and more by inhabitants of the slaveholding states, though it is true that many Northerners shared the same ideas. One of the most important motives for expansionism was declared to be the extension of the area of freedom. The area of the United States must be extended so as to make possible the development of a great "empire for liberty" in the New World. It was rather strange, therefore, to hear this doctrine expounded by those who held slaves and who saw little incongruity in their position as slaveholders and their pronouncements in favor of extending freedom and democracy.

It is safe to say that the extension of democracy was probably neither a primary motive of any of the Southern expansionists nor even a secondary motive of many of them. Their preoccupation was with extending the area not of freedom, but of slavery. Many Southerners called for the annexation of new areas as a means of defeating those who were antagonistic to the rights of Southern states. Thus, Manifest Destiny became a platform from which the slaveholder could plead for an extension of the institution of slavery. Southerners, in their thinking, had excluded blacks from their religious and moral conceptions of freedom and had evolved the new notion that the enslavement of blacks was essential to the freedom of whites. It is not too much to say, therefore, that Manifest Destiny, one of America's most dramatic shibboleths in the nineteenth century, contributed substantially to the extension of slavery during the generation immediately preceding the Civil War.

Blacks were not only moving involuntarily into the South Central states, where slavery was deeply entrenched, but they were also moving voluntarily into the North Central states, where presumably slavery would not exist. By 1830 there were more than 16,000 blacks in Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, and Michigan, and although under the Northwest Ordinance slavery was not permitted, there were no fewer than 788 slaves in the region at the time of the fifth census. Some of these migrants were runaway slaves, but others were ex-slaves who were seeking greater opportunities, as were the whites who

moved into the North Central states after the War of 1812. An example of a fugitive slave moving into the region was William Trail, who in 1814 ran away from his Maryland master and with the aid of a forged pass went to Indiana. Although he was pursued and captured on two occasions, he finally won his freedom through court action and settled down to become a prosperous landowning farmer in Union County, Indiana. Another example of a free black on the frontier was an individual known as "Free Frank," who was born a slave in Kentucky but subsequently purchased his freedom as well as that of his wife and moved to Illinois. There, in Pike County, he founded the town of New Philadelphia and engaged in a variety of commercial enterprises. An outstanding citizen of Cleveland after 1830 was John Melvin, who moved to that community from Prince County, Virginia, where he was born of a slave father and a free mother. Melvin, through a succession of jobs, amassed sufficient money to purchase a lake vessel and engage in the carrying trade. He helped to organize the First Baptist Church and so vigorously opposed the segregation of blacks that the principle of free seating was adopted. He also assisted in organizing the first school for black children in Cleveland and sponsored the setting up of other such schools in Ohio. Thus, the same search for independence that characterized the efforts of blacks in the seaboard states was to be found in the activities of blacks in the newly settled states in the West.

The Domestic Slave Trade

One of the most important single factors augmenting the westward movement was the domestic slave trade. Although many migrants took slaves with them, others, less financially able, did not. Once in the South Central states and having realized some profits from their early ventures, the ambitious farmers began to seek slaves. Perhaps the best sources of supply were the states of the Atlantic seaboard that had found it increasingly difficult to maintain the institution at a profitable level. In the economic reorganization that circumstances forced upon Maryland, Virginia, and the Carolinas, slave trading took its place along with diversified farming as a solution to the difficult problems of economic readjustment. Even before 1800 the domestic slave trade in Maryland and Virginia was well developed. States like South Carolina that forbade importations from Africa permitted their citizens to purchase slaves from other states, thereby stimulating the domestic traffic considerably. Gradually, the interstate trade became profitable, and the consequent rising value of slave property had the effect of destroying much of the antislavery sentiment in Maryland and Virginia after the turn of the century.

With the official closing of the African trade in 1808 the domestic trade became more profitable, and by 1815, about the time of the great movement of the population into the cotton kingdom, it had become a major economic activity in the country. The machinery for handling the traffic developed rapidly, and before the very eyes of Americans there emerged an institution that served as a substitute, or a supplement, for the African trade, which was only slightly less obnoxious in its effects upon the social order. Many business firms that dealt in farm supplies and animals frequently carried a "line" of slaves. Auctioneers who disposed of real estate and personal property sold slaves along with their other commodities. Planters who were abandoning their farms or were undergoing some kind of retrenchment either passed the word around or advertised in the newspapers that they had slaves for sale. Benevolent organizations frequently sold slaves by lottery.

Almost every community in Maryland and Virginia had either traders or their agents scouring the countryside in search of slaves whom they could purchase at the lowest possible price and sell in the cotton kingdom at the highest possible price. Firms like Woolfolk, Saunders, and Overly of Maryland, and Franklin and Armfield of Virginia developed the slave-trading business to a point where it greatly enriched the members of the firm. Although they were generally held in low esteem, they were tolerated because they performed a service that was of great importance both to slaveholders and to those wishing to acquire slaves. Benjamin Lundy called Austin Woolfolk a "monster in human shape." When Woolfolk retaliated by beating Lundy mercilessly, the court fined him only $1, suggesting that the general disapproval of the traders was rather superficial. The newspapers cooperated with the traders in many ways. Not only did they serve them as advertising media, but they often received orders and acted as intermediaries between seller and purchaser.

The slave traders were a ubiquitous lot. They could be seen at general stores, at taverns, at county fairs, and on plantations. Wherever they heard of the possibility of the sale of slaves, they were there. When estates were to be probated or liquidated, they sought out the individuals involved and pressed them for whatever slaves were available. They could convincingly argue that a Virginian no longer needed his slaves, and then with equal firmness they could show a Mississippian that he needed at least ten new hands. Their advertisements are suggestive of twentieth-century methods. In 1834 Franklin and Armfield announced that they would pay cash for 500 blacks and would offer higher prices "than any other purchaser who is now, or may hereafter come into the market." Small wonder that these tycoons were able to move thousands of slaves each year from an area where they were not desired to a section where there was a pressing demand for them.

Baltimore, Washington, Richmond, Norfolk, and Charleston were the principal trading centers in the older states, while Montgomery, Memphis, and New Orleans were the outstanding marts in the newer areas. Although Washington was not the largest slave market, it was the most notorious until 1850 when the slave trade in the District of Columbia was brought to an end. Interstate traders headquartered in the District of Columbia operated in Maryland and Virginia. Alexandria, which was a part of the District of Columbia until 1846, was, moreover, a good place from which to ship slaves by water or overland. The District of Columbia was aptly called, therefore, "the very seat and center of the slave trade." Foreign visitors to the nation's capital were puzzled at the sight of slave auction blocks, slave jails, and slave pens. Many of them, as well as many Americans, such as John Randolph of Roanoke, roundly condemned the practice of selling human beings in the capital of the world's most democratic nation. Washington was not alone, however, in possessing the various buildings and other symbols of the slave trade. Practically every city in the upper South and lower South had pens, jails, and other necessary accouterments for the effective prosecution of this profitable traffic. Who could deny, anyway, that jails were necessary? Were not some of the slaves unruly, indolent workers or, worse still, under suspicion as conspirators?

Some slaves were sold in the centers of the upper South and shipped to the cotton kingdom via the Atlantic Ocean. As far north as New York and Philadelphia slaves were loaded on cargo ships and sent into the lower South. Chesapeake ports, such as Baltimore, Washington, and Norfolk, were especially important in the slave-trading activity. New Orleans was, of course, the important port of entry and became the most important slave-trading center in the lower South. Other slaves were sent overland, through southwestern Virginia to Tennessee, thence into Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana. If they went by land, they frequently walked most of the way. When they reached the Ohio, Tennessee, or Mississippi River, they were placed on flatboats and shipped down the river like any other cargo. In most instances, whether by water or by land, they were taken in chains. More than one traveler was startled at the sight of migrating slaves who were either handcuffed or chained together or both. They were always under the watchful eye of the long-distance traders or their agents, who saw to it that none escaped, lest the profits be therefore proportionally reduced.

There was always a fear that the supply of slaves would become exhausted while the demand was still great. One of the ways in which the slaveholders guarded against this distressing eventuality was the systematic breeding of slaves, one of the most fantastic manipulations of human development in the history of humanity. Despite the denials and apologies of many students of the history of American slavery, there seems to be no doubt that innumerable slaveholders deliberately undertook to increase the number of saleable slaves by advantageously mating them and by encouraging prolificacy in every possible way. As early as 1796 a South Carolina slaveholder declared that the 50 slaves he was offering for sale were purchased for stock and breeding. In 1832 Thomas R. Dew admitted that Virginia was a "Negro raising state" and that it was able to export 6,000 per year because of breeding. Moncure Conway of Fredericksburg, Virginia, boldly asserted that "the chief pecuniary resource in the border states is the breeding of slaves; and I grieve to say that there is too much ground for the charges that general licentiousness among the slaves, for the purpose of a

William Wells Brown Tells about the Domestic Slave Trade—1847

In the course of eight or nine weeks Mr. Walker [slave trader] had his cargo of human flesh made up. There was in this lot a number of old men and women, some of them with gray locks. We left St. Louis in the steamboat Carlton, Captain Swan, bound for New Orleans. . . . I was ordered to have the old men's whiskers shaved off, and the gray hairs plucked out where they were not too numerous, in which case he had a preparation of blacking to color it, and with a blacking-brush we would put it on. This was new business to me, and was performed in a room where the passengers could not see us . . . and after going through the blacking process, they looked ten or fifteen years younger. . . .

The next day [after Natchez] we proceeded to New Orleans. . . . In a short time, the planters came flocking to the pen to purchase slaves. Before the slaves were exhibited for sale, they were dressed and driven out into the yard. Some were set to dancing, some to jumping, some to singing, and some to playing cards. This was done to make them appear cheerful and happy. My business was to see that they were placed in those situations before the arrival of the purchasers, and I have often set them to dancing when their cheeks were wet with tears. As slaves were in good demand at that time, they were all soon disposed of. . . .

William Wells Brown, *Narrative of William Wells Brown, A Fugitive Slave, Written By Himself*, in Gilbert Osofsky, *Puttin' On Ole Massa* (New York, 1969), pp. 191–194.

large increase, is compelled by some masters and encouraged by many." Experiments in slave rearing were carried on, albeit surreptitiously, in much the same way that efforts were made to discover new products that would grow on the exhausted soil. Slave rearing was another evidence of the desperation that gripped the upper South after it lost its economic leadership to the states of the cotton kingdom.

Slave breeding, strangely enough, was one of the most approved methods of increasing agricultural capital. Traders were castigated by the slaveholding gentry as being inhuman, vicious, and extremely venal, but slave-breeding owners were far more common and much more highly esteemed in the community. One respectable Virginia planter boasted that his women were "uncommonly good breeders" and that he never heard of babies coming so fast as they did on his plantation. Of course, the very gratifying thing about it was that "every one of them . . . was worth two hundred dollars . . . the moment it drew breath." Indeed, breeding was so profitable that many slave girls became mothers at thirteen and fourteen years of age. By the time they were twenty, some young women had given birth to as many as five children. Bounties and prizes were offered for great fecundity, and in some instances

freedom was granted to mothers who had enriched their masters to the extent of bearing them ten or fifteen children. Arguments denying slave breeding by some recent students of slavery cannot successfully refute these and other contemporary testimonies regarding this practice.

Since the domestic slave trade and slave breeding were essentially economic and not humanitarian activities, it is not surprising to find that in the sale of slaves there was the persistent practice of dividing families. Husbands were separated from their wives, and mothers were separated from their children. This is not to say that there was never any respect manifested for the slave family. Here and there one can find sufficient respect for basic human rights or ample sentimentality to prevent the separation of families, but it was not always good business to keep families together. Since people sold and bought slaves largely for economic reasons, they eschewed the civilities that would have frowned upon separation. Louisiana law forbade separation of a mother from a child under ten years of age, and some other states discouraged the division of families. These laws, if enforced, would have done much to ameliorate the conditions of slavery; but they were almost wholly disregarded.

Few owners were sufficiently insensitive to human decency to admit that they were willing to divide slave families by sale. As a matter of fact, family members were frequently advertised as being for sale together, but they were not always sold together. Slaves often brought higher prices when sold separately. The large number of single slaves on the market bears testimony to the rather ruthless separation of families that went on during the slave period. Frederic Bancroft asserts that "the selling singly of young children privately and publicly was frequent and notorious." It was not unusual to see advertisements in which traders sought young blacks from eight to twelve years of age. Some traders, moreover, announced that they made a specialty of buying and selling young children.

In justification of the practice of separating families it was argued that family ties among slaves were either extremely loose or nonexistent and that slaves were, therefore, indifferent to separation. As Herbert Gutman has shown, this was not the case. Slaves responded to these assaults on familial relations by restructuring their social institutions into new forms, at times based on their African heritage, to establish distinctly African American relationships that often preserved their families in the face of the most adverse conditions. In every coffle of slaves shipped into the cotton kingdom by land or by water, slaves were handcuffed or chained, and hard-boiled traders often admitted that youngsters or oldsters, as the case might be, were unwilling to leave their families. Even more eloquent a denial of the claims of masters that ties of slave families were weak were the advertisements for runaways. All too frequently masters admitted that the fugitives had perhaps gone to a certain place where they were known to have had a wife, husband, or children. The frequency of such advertisements also belies the claim of many that slave families were hardly, if ever, separated.

TABLE 3
Average Prices of Prime Field Hands (young slave men, able-bodied but unskilled)

	1800	1808	1813	1818	1828	1837	1843	1848	1853	1856	1860
Washington, Richmond, and Norfolk	$ 350	$ 500	$ 400	$ 700		$ 900			$1,250	$1,300	
Charleston, S.C.	500	550	450	850	$ 450	1,200	$ 500	$ 700	900		$1,200
Louisville, Ky.	400		550	800	500	1,200				1,000	1,400
Middle Georgia	450	650	450	1,000	700	1,300	600	900	1,200		1,800
Montgomery, Ala.				800	600	1,200	650	800			1,600
New Orleans, La.	500	600		1,000	700	1,300	800	900	1,250	1,500	1,800

Source: Ulrich Bonnell Phillips. The Slave Economy of the Old South: Selected Essays in Economic and Social History. *Edited by Eugene D. Genovese. Louisiana State University Press (Baton Rouge 1968) p. 142.*

The prices of slaves in the domestic trade reflected all the forces operating to create supply and demand. In the early nineteenth century, the prices of prime field hands were modest, ranging from $350 in Virginia to about $500 in Louisiana. Later, as the demand increased in the lower South, the prices on both the Northern and Southern markets tended to rise. The high point of the number of slaves sold in the domestic market was reached just before the panic of 1837 when Virginia reported that in the previous year no less than 120,000 slaves had been exported into the lower South. After the panic, the slump both in price and in demand became so pronounced that some traders were forced to return to Virginia and Maryland with their slaves and to sustain staggering losses. The forces that operated to increase slave prices in the last decade before the Civil War were largely political and social. In order to convince themselves and the abolitionists that slavery was a moral and economic good and to convince their neighbors of their affluence, planters continued to purchase all the slaves offered on the market. Prices skyrocketed, and by 1860 prime field hands were selling for $1,000 in Virginia and $1,500 in New Orleans.

Closely allied with slave trading was the practice of slave hiring. Owners had various reasons for hiring out their slaves instead of selling them. Some wanted to spread the income from the investment over a long period of time, others wanted to escape whatever stigma there might have been attached to being known as a slave seller, and still others wanted to keep the slaves either for the good of the latter or for the prestige that came from ownership. At any rate, there was almost always an opportunity to make a temporary disposition of slaves because of the constant demand for servants. Some whites hired slaves because the purchase was, for the moment, beyond their means; others merely had a temporary need for the services of a slave and saw no need to purchase one; still others reasoned that it was more economical in the long run to purchase services rather than titles, thereby escaping the responsibility that devolved on the owner during the slave's illness or old age.

Slaves were hired by the day, by the month, or by the year. The employer promised in the agreement to provide food, clothing, shelter, and medical care in addition to the stipulated wage. If the slave became ill or ran away, the wage continued. If the slave died, the wage ceased but the person who had hired the slave was usually compelled to show that he or she was not in any way responsible for the slave's death. Annual contracts ran for fifty-one weeks and did not cover the period from Christmas to New Year's Day. Hiring day was January 1 or some other day early in the new year. Some communities set aside a hiring day and gave all interested persons an opportunity to transact their business with great ease since the owners as well as the hirers would be able to find each other easily. On January 1, 1858, hiring day in Warrenton, Virginia, 500 slaves were advertised as being for hire.

The business of hiring was almost as highly organized as slave trading. There were hiring agents who prepared the papers, collected the money, and performed other similar services. At times these agents were also slave traders. In some instances, however, they were men without the resources necessary to engage in slave trading. Interestingly enough, there was no stigma attached to the business of serving as a hiring agent, and in their advertisements agents frequently proudly listed the names of their "patrons."

Slaves were hired to engage in all kinds of labor, but it was usually customary to state the nature of work in the agreement. They were hired by small farmers who needed a few extra hands at harvest time. They also worked in forests as woodcutters and turpentine hands. Hired slaves could also be found in factories and mines, on railroad construction jobs, and in canal digging. There were, of course, a considerable number in the towns serving as maids, porters, messengers, cooks, and the like. The rates of hire varied considerably depending on the skill of the slave as well as the supply. In 1800 a slave hand brought $100 per year in the lower South. By 1860 the price had increased to $200 or more. Toward the end of the period a young blacksmith in Mississippi was hired for $500, while several hands in Texas brought as much as $600.

Slave trading and hiring were thus essential parts of the economic and social fabric of the South. While practices that may have developed within the system were frowned upon, there was almost universal acceptance of the general principle of buying and selling human beings. To the owners of the upper South it meant the opportunity to dump on the market those individuals who were a serious burden in the period of economic transition. By breeding slaves for the market, moreover, the same owners could go far in the direction of reconstituting themselves economically. To traders it meant commissions and profits that ranged all the way from 5 to 30 percent of the sale price of the slaves, no mean return on a short-term investment. The social stigma of slave trading reduced competition and consequently increased the opportunity for profits. To the planters of the lower South the domestic slave trade provided an opportunity to secure the supply of labor necessary for the development and cultivation of new lands. Without the slaves of the upper South they felt stymied and frustrated. With them their opportunities for amassing wealth and influence were considered almost limitless.

Persistence of the African Trade

As the demand for slaves increased in the nineteenth century and as prices went up, merchants and traders experienced a great temptation to engage in the African trade, although it had been officially ended by federal legislation in 1808. The long, unprotected coast, the certain markets, and the prospect of huge profits were too much for American merchants, and they yielded to the temptation. After the War of 1812 it was generally admitted that American capital, American ships, and American sailors were carrying on an extensive slave trade between Africa and the New World. England was greatly distressed because she was committed to a program of eliminating the slave trade. In all her treaties with the new republics of Latin America, England forced them to promise not to engage in the slave trade. But it was embarrassing to England to observe that her recent enemy, with whom she was now on friendly terms, persisted in winking at gross violations of her own laws. There was little that England could do except to bring the pressure of world opinion to bear on the United States, but American citizens were not ashamed of their activities and so did not even heed the words of their own leaders.

In 1839 President Van Buren asked for an amendment of the law against the African slave trade in order to preserve the "integrity and honor of our flag." In June 1841, President Tyler said that there was every reason to believe that the traffic was on the increase. Almost every year witnessed an appeal of the president or some public leader for a more rigid enforcement of the law, but nothing was done. The most flagrant violations did not arouse public opinion to the point of bringing action against those who were profiting from the trade, and in this instance, it was not a sectional profit. New York merchants as well as those of New Orleans were benefiting from the illicit traffic. In 1836 the consul at Havana reported that whole cargoes of slaves fresh from Africa were being shipped daily to Texas in American vessels and that more than 1,000 had been sent within a few months. Two months later it was estimated that 15,000 Africans were annually taken to Texas. Bay Island, in the Gulf of Mexico, was a depot where at times as many as 16,000

Africans were on hand to be shipped to Florida, Texas, Louisiana, and other markets.

By 1854 those engaged in the African slave trade had become so bold as to advocate openly the official reopening of the trade. Between 1854 and 1860 every Southern commercial convention gave consideration to the proposition to reopen the trade. At the Montgomery convention of 1858 a furious debate was carried on over the problem. William L. Yancey, the Alabama "fire eater," argued, with considerable logic, that "if it is right to buy slaves in Virginia and carry them to New Orleans, why is it not right to buy them in Cuba, Brazil, or Africa and carry them there?" The following year, at Vicksburg, the convention voted favorably on a resolution recommending that "all laws, State or Federal, prohibiting the African slave trade, ought to be repealed." Only the states of the upper South, enjoying the profits reaped from the domestic slave trade, were opposed to reopening the African trade.

The federal law of 1808 was so weak and the enforcement of it so lax that a repeal was unnecessary to reopen the trade. When offenders were caught, they were placed under bond, which they promptly forfeited. Sometimes cases involving offenders were never brought before the courts. Thus, for all practical purposes the trade was open in the last decade before the Civil War, much to the distress of the Quakers and similar organizations. As the intersectional strife increased in intensity, importations into Southern ports became "bold, frequent, and notorious." Newly arrived blacks were openly advertised for sale, and most of the cities of the South had depots where they could be purchased if, for some reason, blacks from the upper South were not desired. In doing everything possible to keep the African trade open, Southerners were merely seeking to secure themselves against the possibility that the domestic slave trade would eventually go into a state of decline. There was the possibility, moreover, that if they could increase the supply of slaves, they would be able to secure them at lower prices.

Without slavery and the slave trade the westward movement on the Southern frontier would have been unsuccessful. It was the slaves, brought in either by settlers or traders, who transformed the Southern frontier from a wilderness into flourishing cotton and sugarcane farms and plantations. It was the slaves, moreover, who represented one of the most substantial forms of capital to be found in the cotton kingdom. Frederick Jackson Turner always described the trader as having preceded the farmer. He was, of course, referring to the person who carried on barter with the Indians. In this instance, however, the trader *followed* the farmer. It was the trader who brought the labor supply to the farmer. Although the order is in this case reversed, it would not be too much to say that slave traders with their black workers had a more profound effect on the history of the Southern frontier than Indian traders with their trinkets and fire water.