Border State, Border War:
Fighting for Freedom and Slavery in Antebellum Maryland

The farmhouse lay just two miles from the Maryland line, in West Nottingham, Pennsylvania. It belonged to the Millers, Joseph and Rebecca, and it was Rebecca who answered the knock at the back door at eleven in the morning on the very last day of 1851. Through it barged their former postman, Thomas McCreary. A resident of Cecil County, Maryland, on just the other side of the state line, McCreary was notorious in the neighborhood for abducting free people of color to sell as slaves to dealers in Baltimore. Pushing Rebecca aside, he grabbed the Millers' domestic, Rachel Parker, bundled the seventeen-year-old into his buggy and took off toward the nearest train.

Joseph Miller soon gave chase. By the next morning he had tracked captor and captive to Baltimore and there filed charges of kidnapping to try to prevent his servant from being swiftly sold and shipped out to Natchez or New Orleans as a slave. Rachel would be stashed in the city's jail until the charges could be litigated. But Miller's intervention on her behalf would cost him dearly. On his way home that night, he disappeared. Two days later, locals found his dead body strung up from the branch of a tree by the side of railroad tracks not far from the city.[1]

Investigations followed on both sides of the border. Against all evidence to the contrary, a jury of inquest in Baltimore ruled that Miller had hanged himself. Their decision effectively exonerated Thomas McCreary, the prime suspect in his murder. Months later, the original kidnapping charge finally brought McCreary to court. But at the trial his defense lawyers alleged that Rachel was actually a fugitive slave from Maryland named

[1] The best account of this episode, and the source for this selective summary, is Lucy Maddox, *The Parker Sisters: A Border Kidnapping* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2016).

Eliza Crocus and so, under the terms of the new federal Fugitive Slave Act, the judge barred her testimony. After more twists and turns, McCreary's lawyers succeeded in getting the charges dropped and the case dismissed.

Across the line in Pennsylvania there was disbelief and outrage. Townsfolk in West Nottingham called the decisions preposterous and absurd, and cobbled together a reward of $1,000 for the arrest of Miller's murderer. Others threatened to lynch him. Bowing to extraordinary public pressure, Pennsylvania's Governor, William Bigler, eventually requested that Thomas McCreary be extradited to the state to face trial there. But Maryland's Governor, Enoch Lowe, refused the application. He was concerned, he claimed, that doing so would ignite sectional feelings.

In truth, that fire was already blazing. Ever since northern states had moved to disentangle themselves from race slavery, Maryland had been a battleground. Slavery's slow death in neighboring Pennsylvania, a process that began with passage of a gradual abolition law there in 1780, had turned the border between these two states into a theater of war in which enslavers, the enslaved, fugitives, freedpeople, and activists all struggled for advantage. Joseph Miller's murder on the first day of 1852 only confirmed what everyone along this stretch of the Mason-Dixon line had known for decades: that opportunistic kidnappers preyed repeatedly upon the fragile liberty of the region's free black community, producing fierce (sometimes murderous) flare ups of violence in and around the borderland where Pennsylvania and Maryland met.

Thomas McCreary's plan to abduct Rachel Parker should also be situated in a much larger context. As McCreary was well aware, by the 1850s Baltimore had become a major center for slave dealing, a hub for traders who made their living buying enslaved people

and then shipping them south to be sold to sugar and cotton planters in Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama. This domestic slave trade was big business, turning profits of $50 to $100 per head, and Baltimore's docks had been a primary point of embarkation since the 1820s. Demand for black bodies to fill departing ships was so high in the second quarter of the century that 'legitimate' slave traders sometimes did side deals with criminal traffickers like McCreary if the price was right and no one was looking. Oversight was minimal, and on the rare occasions that they were called to account, men like McCreary would simply hide behind the petticoats of national fugitive slave laws, protected by a political and legal establishment in Maryland that treated enslaved men and women as expendable machines and regarded free black people as nuisance non-citizens.[2]

This essay argues that Thomas McCreary's Maryland can best be understood as a border slave state engaged in a border war. To do so, it mines a rich vein of recent scholarship on the slave experience, interstate sales, fugitivity, free black life, colonization, and kidnapping in Maryland in the decades from 1825 to the election of Abraham Lincoln in 1860. It reconstructs several major shifts in power, politics, and population over this critical period as well as the fights and furies that resulted. In so doing, it shifts our attention away from other, more familiar flashpoints of the sectional crisis—Nat Turner, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, the Kansas-Nebraska Act, Dred Scott, and John Brown's raid on Harpers Ferry—and toward a new understanding of the war before the war as it unfolded in Maryland, a border slave state that Lincoln and the Union could not afford to lose.[3]

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[2] Thomas J. Preston, *Young Frederick Douglass*: *The Maryland Years* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), 79.
[3] My conception of antebellum Maryland as a site of intense border conflict owes a debt to Stanley Harrold, *Border War: Fighting over Slavery before the Civil War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2010); R. J. M. Blackett, *The Captive's Quest for Freedom: Fugitive Slaves, the 1850 Fugitive Slave Law, and the Politics of*

The Wasting Disease: Slavery in Antebellum Maryland

"It is generally supposed that slavery, in the state of Maryland, exists in its mildest form," Frederick Douglass reported in 1855, "and that it is totally divested of those harsh and terrible peculiarities, which mark and characterize the slave system, in the southern and south-western states of the American union." Born and raised in Talbot County on the Eastern Shore, Douglass knew from personal experience that this was nonsense. But the claim was commonplace nonetheless, turning up in a host of other antebellum sources ranging from reports generated by well-intentioned white anti-slavery activists to novels authored by pro-slavery propagandists. In John Pendleton Kennedy's *Swallow Barn* (1832), for example, the fictional enslaved Marylanders are carefree, playful people, more than happy to work in the fields from dawn to dusk.[4]

Commentators like Kennedy considered slavery in Maryland both tolerable and humane in comparison to labor regimes further south. They pointed to the fact that the cash crops cultivated in southern Maryland and around the Chesapeake Bay did not require the same grueling, all-consuming toil as cotton and sugar, that slaveholdings there were generally small enough to limit the worst excesses of plantation capitalism, and that there had never been any significant slave rebellions in the state. They argued that the proximity of free soil, just across the line in Pennsylvania, likewise meant that enslavers in Maryland were, in one contemporary's words, "afraid to whip [the slaves], because they knew, if they

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Slavery (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018); and Robert H. Churchill, *The Underground Railroad the Geography of Violence in Antebellum America* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2020).

[4] Frederick Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom* (New York: Miller, Orton & Mulligan, 1855), 61; Seth Rockman, *Scraping By: Wage Labor, Slavery, and Survival in Early Baltimore* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009), 238; Andrew Delblanco, *The War Before the War: Fugitive Slaves and the Struggle for America's Soil from the Revolution to the Civil War* (New York: Penguin, 2018), 147.

did, they would run away from them." They noted as well that some enslavers in the state entered into self-purchase agreements with their unfree workers and that many more allowed them to hire themselves out to third parties and to keep a small portion of their earnings for themselves, arrangements that allowed enslaved people considerable personal autonomy and some degree of control over their conditions of work.[5]

Yet, the truth was that slavery was slavery whatever the details, and African Americans who later spoke or wrote about their experiences of enslavement in Maryland were anything but nostalgic. One man remembered his former master as "an unfeeling tyrant" who had provided his unfree laborers with "hardly anything to eat" and "no chance to eat it." Douglass himself never shook the memory of Edward Covey, a smallholder on the Eastern Shore who specialized in "breaking young negroes." In 1833, when Douglass was just sixteen years-old, Thomas Auld, his owner, had sent him to work for Covey as punishment for trying to start a Sunday School. Covey beat the boy with abandon, lashing him with a cow-skin whip until Douglass eventually snapped.[6]

There was nothing mild and benign about the likes of Edward Covey, and the hundreds of enslaved Marylanders each year who risked everything to try to escape their bondage is the most damning proof of the regime's degradations. As we shall see, in the six

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[5] John W. Blassingame, ed., *Slave Testimony: Two Centuries of Letters, Speeches, interviews, and Autobiographies* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1977), 411; Barbara Jeanne Fields, *Slavery and Freedom on the Middle Ground: Maryland during the Nineteenth Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 23, 83

[6] Lewis Charlton, *Sketch of the Life of Mr. Lewis Charlton, and Reminiscences of Slavery* (Portland, ME: Daily Press Print, n. d.), 3, quoted in Damian Alan Pargas, *Slavery and Forced Migration in the Antebellum South* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 183; Douglass, *My Bondage,* 203; Calvin Schermerhorn, *Money over Mastery, Family over Freedom: Slavery in the Antebellum Upper South* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011), 20. Provoked by Covey, Douglass resolved to attack him. According to his often-repeated accounts of that struggle, their fight lasted for the best part of two hours, and left both men bloody and spent. From that day forward, Douglass claimed, Covey never touched him again.

counties closest to the Pennsylvania border (Baltimore, Carroll, Cecil, Harford, Frederick, and Washington), so many bondspeople took to their heels in the second quarter of the nineteenth century that slave labor began to lose some of its economic viability. By 1850, the cash value of enslaved people there had fallen to just $177.50 per person; a decade later, in 1860, enslaved people accounted for just five percent of these counties' populations.[7]

It was far more difficult, of course, for enslaved people to vote with their feet in the many counties that did not share a border with Pennsylvania, however much they wanted to. They could smell free soil, but never taste it, and their enslavement felt all the more bitter as a result. Slavery in the southern and eastern parts of the state remained robust—not quite thriving, but not quite stagnating either. Tobacco cultivation using slave labor continued apace in Montgomery, Prince George's, Charles, Calvert, and St. Mary's counties, while on the Eastern Shore planters had recently retooled and retrained their enslaved workers to raise wheat, corn, rye, and oats. By the time Frederick Douglass was born in 1818, that transition was largely complete, and a new equilibrium had emerged on the Delmarva peninsula. Visitors there in the second quarter of the century described it as stuck in time and set in its ways, a place where enslaved laborers continued on as they had for generations, living in "'rude log-cabins" on scattered smallholdings, their extended families divided across multiple farms.[8]

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[7] Max Grivno, *Gleanings of Freedom: Free and Slave Labor along the Mason-Dixon Line, 1790-1860* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2014), 88-89.
[8] Frederick Law Olmsted, *A Journey in the Seaboard Slave States in the Years 1853-1854, with Remarks on their Economy* (New York: Dix and Edwards, 1856), 11; Pargas, *Forced Migration*, 181, 234-5, 240; Fields, *Middle Ground*, 6-7, 23-4.

Table 1. African American Population of Maryland Counties, 1820-1860

	Region	Total Population	Enslaved	Free Blacks
1820	Northern	121,575	20,721	6,149
	Baltimore City	62,738	4,357	10,326
	Southern	101,328	47,016	7,555
	Eastern	121,709	35,303	15,700
1840	Northern	147,172	15,951	11,587
	Baltimore City	102,513	3,212	17,980
	Southern	103,003	44,945	11,162
	Eastern	117,331	25,629	21,349
1860	Northern	208,439	11,109	16,201
	Baltimore City	212,418	2,218	25,680
	Southern	121,064	48,905	13,784
	Eastern	145,128	24,957	28,277

Source: U.S Census; Barbara Jeanne Fields, *Slavery and Freedom on the Middle Ground: Maryland during the Nineteenth Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 62. Northern counties include Allegany, Baltimore County (excl. Baltimore City), Carroll, Frederick, Harford, and Washington. Southern counties include Anne Arundel, Calvert, Charles, Howard, Montgomery, Prince George's, and St. Mary's. Eastern counties include Caroline, Cecil, Dorchester, Kent, Queen Anne's, Somerset, Talbot, and Worcester.

Visitors to Baltimore, the city rising rapidly across the Chesapeake Bay, sang a very different tune, and the experiences of its small community of enslaved laborers were far more tumultuous and unpredictable. During a stay there in 1835, a New England-born lexicographer named Ethan Allen Andrews concluded that "in this city there appears to be no strong attachment to slavery, and no wish to perpetuate it." That sentiment only grew

over time, and in 1845 John Carey, a Baltimore politician, complained that slavery "is a dead weight and worse; it has become a wasting disease."[9]

In a city in which wage labor was the norm, such claims were common. But they obscure the subtle, enduring centrality of slavery to Baltimore's economy in the antebellum era. The city's lawyers and bankers made their money greasing the wheels of the entire southern slave system, and many of the hulls built at the shipyards near the docks were designed to serve the maritime slave trades. Baltimore was also a major processing center for slave-raised cash crops like tobacco and cotton. By 1850, it was home to 120 cigar-making businesses as well as factories that produced finished cotton worth more than a million dollars each year. Its several thousand enslaved workers were an essential element in Baltimore's labor market too, contributing crucial manpower to its manufacturing, commercial, and service sectors. Across the city, enslaved people pressed tobacco leaves, milled wheat, and forged iron. Some worked in construction, ship-building, caulking, and sail-making. Many more toiled each day as porters, waiters, servants, cooks, maids, and seamstresses in hotels, restaurants, and private homes.[10]

The nature of the urban labor market was such that Baltimore's enslaved population—many of them hired out by slaveowners living in surrounding counties—

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[9] Ethan Allen Andrews, *Slavery and the Domestic Slave Trade in the United States. In a Series of Letters Addressed to the Executive Committee of the American Union for the Relief and Improvement of the Colored Race* (Boston: Light and Stearns, 1836), 53; John L. Carey, Slavery in Maryland Briefly Considered (Baltimore: John Murphy, 1845), 33; Ira Berlin, *Slaves Without Masters: The Free Negro in the Antebellum South* (New York: New Press, 2007), 184.

[10] Schermerhorn, *Money Over Mastery*, 86; Fields, *Middle Ground*, 6-8, 47, 62; Rockman, *Scraping By*, 234-5; Berlin, *Slaves Without Masters*, 228-9. Legal bondage also collateralized enslavers' lines of credit and mortgages, and secured the Baltimore city government with a reliable source of tax revenue. For a list of slaveholders in Baltimore in 1840 and 1850 see Ralph Clayton, *Slavery, Slaveholding, and the Free Black Population of Antebellum Baltimore* (Bowie, MD: Heritage Books, 1993), 82-145. For their occupations see Stephen Whitman*, The Price of Freedom: Slavery and Manumission in Baltimore and Early National Maryland* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 167.

often worked side by side with free black wage earners doing similar tasks. Proximity to that much larger community created all sorts of opportunities. Baltimore was a place where enslaved men and women could seek out and join free black churches, Sunday schools, and self-improvement societies, and construct all sorts of social ties. When Douglass was dispatched to live with Thomas Auld's brother in Fell's Point, he did all that and more, teaching himself to read, buying books, and meeting his future wife, Anna Murray, at a gathering of the East Baltimore Mental Improvement Society, where he was the only enslaved member.[11]

In his memoirs, Douglass recalled his "ecstasy" when he learned he was to leave the wheat fields of Talbot County and go to work in the big city. But the move brought dilemmas and dangers of its own. When he arrived in Baltimore, the eighteen-year-old lad was confronted by "troops of hostile boys ready to pounce upon me at every street corner…. They chased me, and called me 'Eastern Shore man,' till really I almost wished myself back on the Eastern Shore." Worse was to come. Hired out to work in William Gardner's shipyard as a caulker, Douglass was beaten savagely by white journeymen who resented the downward pressure his employment there put on their wages.[12]

In Baltimore, Douglass found himself caught between slavery and freedom, a predicament that embodied the broader contradictions of the slave experience throughout this border state. Legislators in Annapolis reflexively batted down petitions to abolish slavery gradually, even as more and more white Marylanders complained that slavery was

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[11] Pargas, *Forced Migration*, 36-8, 129, 167-8; Fields, *Middle Ground*, 62, 83-4; Schermerhorn, *Money Over Mastery*, 87.

[12] Douglass, *My Bondage*, 134, 141; Pargas, *Forced Migration*, 72; Schermerhorn, *Money Over Mastery*, 82-3, 87-88. On his own first day in Baltimore, Isaac Mason was savagely beaten by two white men for passing between them on the sidewalk—not knowing that custom and law required urban slaves to "take the street to give place to their superiors.'" Pargas, *Forced Migration*, 209.

a drag on the state's economic fortunes. The size of the overall enslaved population held steady, decreasing by only a few thousand each year between 1830 and 1860, even as conditional manumissions, large numbers of escapes from northern counties, and ever more out-of-state sales frayed slavery's edges.[13]

Dead, Heavy Footsteps: Maryland and the Domestic Slave Trade

Those interstate sales propped up the value of slaves in several parts of border-state Maryland, maintaining the institution's viability there against mounting challenges. Most sales were to traders supplying planters setting up along the Gulf Coast. The American settlers crowding into that ever-expanding region demanded a nearly bottomless supply of forced labor to cut sugarcane and pick cotton. They preferred young men, but would take almost anyone, including women and children—and they would pay top dollar, usually $200 more per person than buyers in more settled regions could afford. With the legal supply of slaves limited to domestic sources, Maryland slaveowners struck deal after deal with interstate traders, helping to fuel the rise of the Deep South.[14]

On the face of it, enslaved people were sold away for all sorts of reasons, including debt, down-sizing, the death of a slaveholder, or to divest oneself of troublesome individuals. One man sold a woman in his possession because of her "Impertinent Language

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[13] T. Stephen Whitman, *Challenging Slavery in the Chesapeake: Black and White Resistance to Human Bondage 1775-1865* (Baltimore: Maryland Historical Society, 2007), 127-8; Calvin Schermerhorn, *Unrequited Toil: A History of United States Slavery* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 21, 29; Grivno, *Gleanings of Freedom*, 116; Berlin, *Slaves Without Masters*, 199. The enslaved population of Maryland was 102,994 in 1830. In 1860, numbers stood at 87,189. For more on manumissions in Maryland see the essay in this volume by Jessica Millward.

[14] Steven Deyle, *Carry Me Back: The Domestic Slave Trade in American Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005); Winfield H. Collins, *The Domestic Slave Trade of the Southern States* (New York: Broadway Publishing Company, 1904); Grivno, *Gleanings of Freedom*, 197; Pargas, *Forced Migration*, 25; Fields, *Middle Ground*, 5.

to her Mistress," while an enslaver in Frederick, Maryland, claimed that he sold a black family of six for no other reason than that he had "too many." But the main reason was money. Selling slaves raised cash. It turned assets into liquidity. It turned people into profits. When the Jesuit leaders of Georgetown University needed to raise funds quickly to shore up the school's finances in 1838, they did so by selling 272 of the African Americans they owned in Prince George's County to interstate traders who took them to Louisiana. The Jesuits pocketed $115,000 in that single transaction, enough to save the school.[15]

Maryland's slaveowners sold off as many people as they thought could fetch a price. Coffles, as these human convoys were known, were common sights on the roads of the state's six northernmost counties, as owners there tried to sell their slaves south before they could disappear in the direction of the Pennsylvania line. In Hagerstown, George P. Hussy recalled seeing "*hundreds* of colored men and women chained together, two by two, and driven to the south [and] tied up and lashed till the blood ran down to their heels." But the largest number of forced migrants came from southern Maryland and the Eastern Shore. In Talbot County slaveholders sold away a third of the enslaved population in the 1830s alone; they sold another sixth in the 1840s when a recession briefly depressed cotton prices, and another third in the 1850s. Almost every enslaver made a sale at one time or another, and between 1830 and 1860, owners forced 18,500 enslaved Marylanders to leave the state.[16]

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[15] Deyle, *Carry Me Back*, 232, 165, 249, 207; Pargas, *Forced Migration*, 62; Collins, *Domestic Slave Trade*, 47; Delblanco, *War Before the War*, 53-54.
[16] George P. C. Hussey quoted in Theodore Dwight Weld, *American Slavery As It Is; Testimony of a Thousand Witnesses* (New York: American Anti-Slavery Society, 1839), 76 (emphasis in original); Harrold, *Border War*, 10; Grivno, *Gleanings of Freedom*, 116-7; Fields, *Middle Ground*, 15-7; Schermerhorn, *Money Over Mastery*, 14.

Slave traders were the middlemen who made this happen, and in the second quarter of the century Maryland swarmed with dozens of them. They buzzed around the state's county towns from September to March "watching for chances to buy human flesh," Frederick Douglass recalled, "as buzzards to eat carrion." Because of the small size of most Maryland holdings, it could take weeks to put a coffle of thirty or forty slaves together, and so traders worked an area intensively, like loggers or strip-miners. They took up residence in hotels and taverns and filled local papers like the *Centreville Times*, the *Snow Hill Messenger*, and the *Cambridge Chronicle* with advertisements. Some, like John Denning, promised sellers that they would never separate any family groups "without their consent." Others, like William Harking, pledged to buy "all likely negroes from 8 to 40 years" old and to pay "the highest cash prices" with no questions asked.[17]

Some of these traders worked independently, but many more were agents for firms headquartered in the region's larger urban centers. On his visit to Baltimore in 1835, Ethan Allen Andrews counted "a dozen or more" slave dealers with offices and pens in the city. Each pen could hold "three or four hundred" enslaved captives at once and was usually "strongly built, and well supplied with *iron thumb-screws and gags*, and ornamented with *cowskins and other whips—often times bloody*." Most were concentrated in a few easy-to-

[17] Douglass, *My Bondage*, 298; *Baltimore American and Commercial Advertiser*, Jan. 7, 1835; Pargas, *Forced Migration*, 43; Centreville (MD) Times and Easter-Shore Public Advertiser, May 4, 1833; Deyle, *Carry Me Back*, 132, 222-3; William Calderhead, "The Role of the Professional Slave Trader in a Slave Economy: Austin Woolfolk, A Case Study," *Civil War History* 23, no. 3 (1977), 197-8, 209. Agents made the rounds of all the county towns on the Eastern Shore. In Dorchester County alone, more than 15 of them advertised in newspapers between 1831 and 1835, and Charles B. Clark estimated that in all "at least 40 or 50, perhaps 60 or 80, regular traders of various degree" operated there, including dozens of petty traders, some of whom were local residents. Charles B. Clark, *Eastern Shore of Maryland and Virginia,* 3 vols. (New York: Lewis Historical Publishing, 1950), I: 529, 532.

find downtown blocks on Lombard Street, Camden Street, and Pratt Street that were close to onward transportation.[18]

These businesses boomed. By the 1840s, Maryland traders exported huge numbers of enslaved people to the Deep South annually: three thousand over the first six months of 1845 according to a contemporary estimate. One Baltimore-based trader, Walter Campbell, sent fifty-nine shipments of slaves to New Orleans alone between 1844 and 1853, carrying about 120 people out of Maryland each year. Despite occasional bans on printing 'Cash for Negroes' ads in city newspapers, and howls of protest from local activists such as Hezekiah Niles, Benjamin Lundy, and William Lloyd Garrison, the domestic slave trade was a major part of Baltimore's economy. When Frederick Douglass lived in the city, he was often woken from sleep by "the dead, heavy footsteps and the piteous cries of the chained gangs" being marched towards the ravenous bellies of the waiting ships at Fell's Point.[19]

The most visible and successful slave dealer in Baltimore in the second quarter of the century was Hope H. Slatter. In the mid-1830s, Slatter set up shop on West Pratt Street, between Sharp and Howard, and did a brisk business there for more than a decade. He specialized in "purchasing for the New Orleans market" and built a state of the art, escape-

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[18] Andrews, *Domestic Slave Trade*, 78; Joseph Sturge, A *Visit to the United States in 1841* (London: Hamilton, Adams and Co., 1842), 31; Weld, *Slavery As It Is*, 60 (emphasis in original); Pargas, *Forced Migration*, 42-3, 46-7; Deyle, *Carry Me Back*, 104; Rockman, *Scraping By*, 235.

[19] Douglass, *My Bondage*, 448; Harrold, *Border War,* 10; Maddox, *Parker Sisters*, 79; Deyle, *Carry Me Back*, 38, 44, 51, 224; Robert H. Gudmestad, *A Troublesome Commerce: The Transformation of the Interstate Slave Trade* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2003), 79-80. William Lloyd Garrison, who lived in Baltimore in the early 1830s, prayed that slave traders should be arrested, convicted, and "sentenced to solitary confinement for life" and deserved to spend eternity in "the lowest depths" of hell. Delblanco, *War Before the War*, 28-9. On the role of Baltimore (and its most famous trader, Austin Woolfolk) in the domestic slave trade prior to 1825, see Deyle, *Carry Me Back*, 98-100; Calderhead, "Austin Woolfolk." Woolfolk resented activists' attacks on his character and reputation, especially those issuing from Benjamin Lundy, Baltimore's crusading newspaper editor, who decried Woolfolk's business as 'barbarous, inhuman, and unchristian." In January 1827 Woolfolk "beat and stamped upon" Lundy's head, "in a most furious and violent manner, until pulled off by the bystanders." Lundy sued for assault but the judge fined Woolfolk just one dollar plus court costs, and noted in his ruling that slave trading was legal and "beneficial to the state." Deyle, *Carry Me Back*, 179-80.

proof slave pen next to his office that he equipped with separate cellblocks for men and women and an enclosed yard for exercise—facilities, Slatter boasted, that were "not surpassed by any establishment of the kind in the United States." At first, he sent many of his captives to New Orleans by ship, hiring a fleet of omnibuses to carry them to the docks; later, he was one of the first Baltimore dealers to commandeer rail cars to dispatch them to New Orleans via the iron road. Slatter was a well-known man about town. He saw himself as a gentleman providing an essential service, and made a point of giving tours of his facilities and donating ostentatiously to charity.[20]

To the people he bought and sold, however, Slatter was a devil, the stuff of nightmares. Enslaved people were terrified of traders like him, and the constant dread of sale sent some of them mad, like the man Alexis de Tocqueville met during a tour of the Baltimore almshouse in 1831. "The Negro of whom I speak," Tocqueville later wrote, was terrorized by a vision of a slave dealer who "sticks close to him day and night and snatches away bits of his flesh." Enslaved Marylanders did everything in their power to resist these sales or negotiate their terms as best they could. One mother was able to prevent the transport of her son, William, to New Orleans by finding a local farmer who would purchase him instead. Other parents simply fell to their knees to beg their owners not to sell away their children and break up their families.[21]

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[20] *Baltimore Sun*, July 18, 1838; Delblanco, *War Before the War*, 28-9; Clayton, *Antebellum Baltimore*, 35; Deyle, *Carry Me Back*, 3, 212; Gudmestad, *Troublesome Commerce,* 163-4. Hope Slatter sold his business to Bernard Campbell in 1848.

[21] Alexis de Tocqueville, *Journey to America*, ed. J. P. Mayer, trans. George Lawrence (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1981), 159-60; Rockman, *Scraping By*, 236-7; Pargas, *Forced Migration*, 24, 61, 79; Deyle, *Carry Me Back*, 234. Enslavers exploited slaves' fears of sale without mercy, using the threat of it to deter misbehavior and spur productivity.

Occasionally that worked. Most often it did not, and so when an out-of-state sale seemed inevitable, enslaved people sometimes resorted to extreme measures. Some dug in, like the man who shot to death the trader who came to collect his wife and children. A few even turned weapons upon themselves, like the young woman who severed her hand with an axe to make herself unsellable, or the mother from Snow Hill who "first cut the throat of her child, and then her own" upon learning that the pair were to be sold and forever separated from one another.[22]

Planters and traders used every trick in the book to try to minimize such losses. Buyers would confer privately with potential sellers, out of sight of eavesdropping domestics, and return to the premises before dawn the next day to whisk their new purchases away before anyone was the wiser. "About six o'clock one morning, I was taken suddenly from my wife," Leonard Harrod recalled decades later. "She knew no more where I had gone than the hen knows where the hawk carries her chicken." Those snatched away did what they could to escape or resist en route out of state, occasionally succeeding in overpowering their captors and darting back the way they had come. Lined up at Baltimore's rail depots and wharves, others could see no way back and cut their own throats then and there.[23]

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[22] E. S. Abdy, *Journal of a Residence and Tour in the United States of North America, From April 1833, to October, 1834*, 2 vols. (London: John Murray, 1835), II: 93; Pargas, *Forced Migration*, 76, 81, 83; Grivno, *Gleanings of Freedom*, 75-6. In 1815 a Maryland woman named Anna had jumped from the attic of a tavern in Washington DC to try to prevent her sale and the breakup of her family. "I didn't want to go, and I jumped out of the window," she said later, having broken her arms and shattered her spine in this apparent suicide attempt, but still "they have carried my children off with to Carolina." Schermerhorn, *Unrequited Toil*, 151.

[23] Benjamin Drew, ed., *A North-Side View of Slavery. The Refugee: or the Narratives of Fugitive Slaves in Canada. Related by Themselves…* (Boston: John P. Jewett, 1856), 339; Pargas, *Forced Migration*, 45-6; Deyle, *Carry Me Back*, 255-6; Schermerhorn, *Money Over Mastery*, 16.

The loved ones they had been forced to leave behind were no less desperate, no less traumatized by these sales. One enslaved man in Washington County hanged himself after his master sold his wife south. Parents never recovered from such separations, and children remained scarred for life. Writing in 1836, nearly fifty years after the fact, Charles Ball admitted that the terrible memory of being ripped from his Maryland mother at the age of four still played "with painful vividness upon my memory." No enslaved family in the state was spared. Frederick Douglass lost his sister, two aunts, seven first cousins, and at least five other near relatives to sales. In Maryland, such fates were facts of life. "In no state in this confederacy," one beleaguered group of activists reported in 1826, were slaves "more subject to the painful and distressing evils of family separation, and the grievous consequences resulting from it."[24]

The Black Underground: Fugitivity before and after the Fugitive Slave Law

Vowing never to be sold south, enslaved men and women often fled north instead, turning Maryland into an epicenter of practical abolition. "I did not intend to go if I could prevent it," recalled Isaac Mason, who took to his heels when he learned of his master's plan to sell him to a new owner in Louisiana. Josiah Henson, who later became a leading antislavery orator and the inspiration for the character of Uncle Tom in Harriet Beecher Stowe's novel, escaped from his Montgomery County enslaver in 1830. Frederick Douglass made his own attempt to flee Talbot County in 1836, only to be thwarted. When in

[24] Charles Ball, *Fifty Years in Chains; or, The Life of an American Slave* (New York: H. Dayton, 1859), 11; *Minutes of an Adjourned Session of the American Convention for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery, and Improving the Condition of the African Race, Convened at Baltimore, on the Twenty-fifth of October 1826* (Baltimore: Benjamin Lundy, 1826), 29; Grivno, *Gleanings of Freedom*, 75-6; Deyle, *Carry Me Back*, 176, 228, 246, 252; Rockman, *Scraping By*, 238; Preston, *Young Frederick Douglass*, 76.

Baltimore two years later he tried again, this time making it safely to free soil by posing as a sailor and riding the rails northward toward Philadelphia.[25]

While most enslaved Marylanders found themselves stuck fast in bondage, "the thought of flight," as J. W. C. Pennington, a fugitive from Carroll County, once called it, was never far from their minds. They tried to run whenever they saw an opportunity and did not normally wait for a conductor on the Underground Railroad to come looking for them. Many timed their departures for Saturdays or Sundays, knowing that news of their escape would not appear in the weekly papers until the following Friday. They typically traveled at night, hiding in marshes or woodlands during the day, lacing their tracks with pepper or snuff to thwart bloodhounds who might come sniffing behind them. Some stole boats to cross the Choptank, the Nanticoke, and the Susquehanna Rivers, or hid aboard ships bound for free states. Others stole horses or even carriages to speed their flight. Most headed for Philadelphia, York, Harrisburg, or Pittsburgh, following one of several common freedom routes through this borderland. But the distance to the Pennsylvania line was daunting, especially for people stuck in slavery on the Eastern Shore or in the state's southern counties. Even the journey from Baltimore could take ten days on foot.[26]

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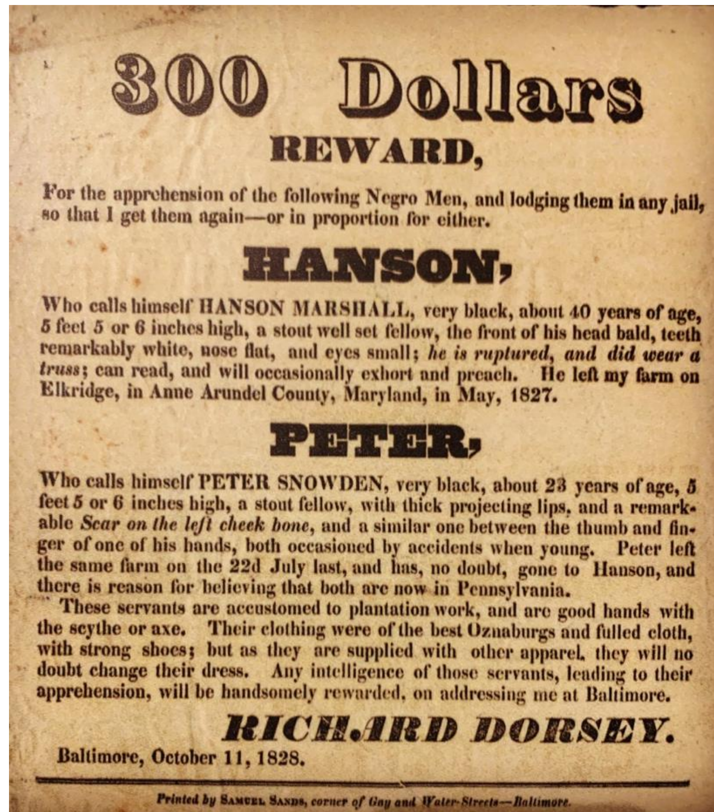
[25] Isaac Mason, *Life of Isaac Mason As a Slave* (Worcester, MA, 1893), 35; Pargas, *Forced Migration*, 79-80; Churchill, *Geography of Violence*, 45. "A vicious circle developed as slaveholders sold slaves south to prevent escape and slaves escaped to prevent sale south," explains Stanley Harrold. Harrold, *Border War*, 10.
[26] James W. C. Pennington, *The Fugitive Blacksmith; or, Events in the History of James W. C. Pennington, Pastor of a Presbyterian Church, New York, Formerly a Slave in the State of Maryland, United States,* 2nd ed. (London: Charles Gilpin, 1849), 14; Whitman, *Challenging Slavery,* 175-7; Elwood L. Bridner, "The Fugitive Slaves of Maryland," Maryland Historical Magazine 66 (1971), 39, 45; Blackett, *Captive's Quest*, 313; Harrold, *Border War*, 139.



300 Dollars

REWARD,

For the apprehension of the following Negro Men, and lodging them in any jail, so that I get them again—or in proportion for either.

HANSON,

Who calls himself HANSON MARSHALL, very black, about 40 years of age, 5 feet 5 or 6 inches high, a stout well set fellow, the front of his head bald, teeth remarkably white, nose flat, and eyes small; *he is ruptured, and did wear a truss*; can read, and will occasionally exhort and preach. He left my farm on Elkridge, in Anne Arundel County, Maryland, in May, 1827.

PETER,

Who calls himself PETER SNOWDEN, very black, about 23 years of age, 5 feet 5 or 6 inches high, a stout fellow, with thick projecting lips, and a remarkable *Scar on the left cheek bone*, and a similar one between the thumb and finger of one of his hands, both occasioned by accidents when young. Peter left the same farm on the 22d July last, and has, no doubt, gone to Hanson, and there is reason for believing that both are now in Pennsylvania.

These servants are accustomed to plantation work, and are good hands with the scythe or axe. Their clothing were of the best Oznaburgs and fulled cloth, with strong shoes; but as they are supplied with other apparel, they will no doubt change their dress. Any intelligence of those servants, leading to their apprehension, will be handsomely rewarded, on addressing me at Baltimore.

RICHARD DORSEY.

Baltimore, October 11, 1828.

Printed by Samuel Sands, corner of Gay and Water-Streets—Baltimore.

Fig 1. A broadside seeking the return of two fugitives from Anne Arundel County, 1828.

On the roads, would-be fugitives had to run the gauntlet, dodging slave patrols and new 'vigilance associations' set up across the state to round up runaways and protect the chattel principle. Anticipating that they might have to fight off pursuers, some took guns, bowie knives, and dirks with them, determined to resist capture with force. In 1845, a constable in Washington County intercepted a group of ten fugitives near Smithsburg. When he and a posse of townspeople confronted them, "the negroes being armed with hatchets, clubs, and pistols, refused to be taken peaceably." In the ensuing brawl, they wounded several white men, giving up only one of their number to the constable's custody. But things did not often go so well. When a group of almost eighty black men carrying scythe blades and other makeshift weapons marched towards the Pennsylvania line from

three of Maryland's southern counties later the same year, hundreds of well-armed white citizens came out to stop them. After a pitched battle, all of the fugitives were dragged back to their masters, who soon sold some of them out of state.[27]

Clashes like these were common across Maryland in the second quarter of the century. Fugitives won some and lost others, but the departures continued. In 1844, William Chaplin, a white antislavery activist, reported that enslaved Marylanders were "escaping in shoals." Two years later, a headline in a Hagerstown newspaper declared that "Oceans of Runaway Negroes" were now leaving Washington County for Pennsylvania, often in small family groups or with friends. Five here, fifteen there. Then seven more, then eleven. The stream never stopped, and only seemed to grow thicker and faster with time. In July 1850, census takers tallied 279 slave escapes from Maryland over the previous twelve months. As historian Barbara Fields has noted, that total was likely a substantial undercount of the number of slaves who had fled over that period. Even so, it was confirmation that Maryland was "the reluctant leader among slave states in this unsought competition."[28]

The Fugitive Slave Law, enacted in September 1850, could not stop this slow-motion migration. That October, a woman and her five children escaped from Middletown in Frederick County. In November, a couple from near Easton walked out of slavery with their

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[27] (Hagerstown) *Herald of Freedom*, 8 May 1849; Grivno, *Gleanings of Freedom*, 129; Harrold, *Border War*, 14, 127, 129-31, 177.

[28] *Albany Weekly Patriot*, January 8 1845; (Hagerstown) *Herald of Freedom*, 18 September 1846; Fields, *Middle Ground*, 15; Harrold, *Border War*, 103, 106, 139, 148, 153; Grivno, *Gleanings of Freedom*, 128-9. Writing in January 1850, before the passage of the Fugitive Slave Law that fall, a writer in the *Baltimore Sun* told city readers that "Every day but swells the number of absconding slaves from MD." *Baltimore Sun*, 7 January 1850; Berlin, *Slaves Without Masters*, 347. Maryland was also a major site of capture for northbound slaves escaping from states further south, like Virginia. When thirteen enslaved people escaped from Loudoun County, Virginia, in June 1858, twelve of them were later recaptured in Maryland, seven of them following a firefight in Boonsboro, a hamlet just south of Hagerstown. Blackett, *Captive's Quest,* 271

five children in tow. In December, a Chestertown woman left with her five offspring. On and on they came. In August 1852, a thirteen-person family fled northwestern Maryland and made it to Harrisburg. That October, more than half of one planter's twenty slaves left his labor camp together and headed for Lancaster. More and more enslaved Marylanders were now setting out in groups, seeking safety in numbers. Toward the end of 1855, twenty-eight enslaved people fled Chestertown en masse. A year later, a group numbering twenty-seven left Cambridge together. Another fifty followed in 1857. According to historian Richard Blackett, by the mid-1850s the volume of fugitive slave escapes from Maryland had reached an all-time high.[29]

Fig 2. Several families escaped together from Dorchester County, Maryland, in 1857, following directions provided by Harriet Tubman. William Still, *The Underground Railroad* (1872)

The state's slaveholders spent these years in all-out crisis mode, worried that this growing exodus posed an existential threat to their livelihoods, manhood, and way of life.

[29] Blackett, *Captive's Quest*, 51, 272, 306, 314, 322.

Each new escape was a significant financial loss, and by the 1850s fugitives were costing Maryland slaveholders about $80,000 a year in lost assets, an immense sum equivalent to many millions of dollars today. Anxious and embittered, enslavers lashed out in all directions, convincing themselves that Maryland had been infiltrated by white "abolitionist emissaries" sent there from the free states by kingpins like Horace Greeley, the antislavery editor of the New York *Tribune*.[30]

Under pressure from slaveholders across Maryland, local courts began prosecuting anyone suspected of helping slaves escape. Charles Torrey, a Liberty Party activist from Massachusetts, was arrested and imprisoned in Maryland three times in the 1840s for aiding fugitives and ultimately died in the state penitentiary; in 1844, a Dorchester County court sentenced Hugh Hazlett, a thirty-one-year-old white man, to forty-four years in prison for helping seven slaves escape. Vigilante action against people like Torrey and Hazlett was on the rise as well. At one meeting in Baltimore County, slaveholders openly threatened the lives of any "abolitionists caught in the act… of aiding slaves in their flight." Many made good on their word, terrorizing neighbors and strangers they suspected of antislavery sympathies. In 1858, for instance, a band of thugs in Kent County tarred, feathered, and threatened to murder one local man simply because he subscribed to Greeley's newspaper.[31]

To curb their losses, Maryland's slaveholders routinely hired slave catchers to pursue fugitives across state lines into Pennsylvania. They did this time and again in the

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[30] *Baltimore Saturday Visiter*, 19 July 1845; Harrold, *Border War*, 139; Blackett, *Captive's Quest*, 4-5, 322-4; Delblanco, *War Before the War*, 39.

[31] *New York Daily Tribune*, 18 August 1850; Harrold, *Border War*, 127; Sinha, *The Slave's Cause: A History of Abolition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016), 396-7; Whitman, *Challenging Slavery*, 185-6; Blackett, *Captive's Quest*, 319, 321.

second quarter of the century, in open defiance of Pennsylvania's 1826 personal liberty law. Enslavers in Maryland detested that law, which decreed that no one could be renditioned out of the state to be held as a slave, regarding it as an affront to their property rights, and in 1842 persuaded the Supreme Court of the United States to strike it down. The case, *Prigg v. Pennsylvania*, turned on the actions of Edward Prigg, a Maryland lawyer turned slave catcher who had crossed into York County, Pennsylvania, to grab a woman named Margaret Morgan and carry her back to her erstwhile owner in Baltimore. It was the first fugitive slave case to reach the highest court in the land, and the justices' ruling was unsparing. In a decision written by Joseph Story, the Supreme Court ruled that any and all state-level personal liberty laws were at odds with the federal 1793 Fugitive Slave Act and thus unconstitutional and invalid.[32]

Northern legislators refused to comply with the court's decision and tried to find loopholes and workarounds to keep Maryland's slave catchers out of their jurisdictions. Their defiance drew yelps of protest from the state's slaveholders and their representatives in Washington, and set in motion the events leading to the passage of the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, a vastly more muscular revision of the original 1793 statute. It became law on September 18, 1850, and marked a major escalation in the border war between the states. Eight days later, a black man from Baltimore named James Hamlet became the first person arrested under its powers. Hamlet had fled that city two years earlier and was living in

[32] H. Robert Baker, *Prigg v. Pennsylvania: Slavery, the Supreme Court, and the Ambivalent Constitution* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2012); Sinha, *Slave's Cause*, 390; Delblanco, *War Before the War*, 178-9; Harrold, *Border War*, 77. In 1842, Maryland state legislators had narrowly failed to pass a law offering "'large rewards for the detection of any person who induces or aids a slave to run away, (to) employ bailiffs to watch the arrival and departure of every steamboat and railroad car," and other similar measures. Two years later, legislators in Annapolis succeeded in setting up a fund that paid out $100 to anyone who could drag back to their Maryland masters any fugitives who had made it to Pennsylvania. Harrold, *Border War*, 127.

New York when a relative of his former enslaver arrived to drag him back. A porter in Manhattan, Hamlet was apprehended at his place of work and taken before one of the federal commissioners newly appointed under the terms of the act. Hamlet protested, but the new law rendered his testimony as a suspected fugitive inadmissible. He was handcuffed and driven to a pier and stashed on the first steamboat bound for Baltimore.[33]

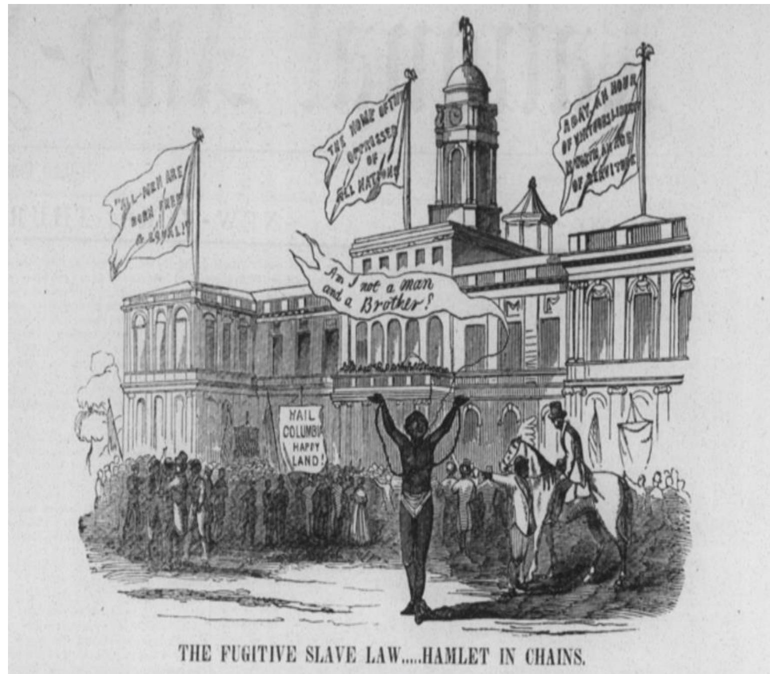

Fig 3. James Hamlet, shackled and loin-clothed, stands outside New York City Hall in a crucifixion pose. "The Fugitive Slave Law… Hamlet in Chains," *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, 17 October 1850.

Fugitive slave renditions like this mushroomed after 1850, and enslavers from Maryland led the charge, crossing state lines in pursuit of runaways and engaging fugitives in violent and explosive confrontations on free soil. For example, on September 11, 1851, Edward Gorsuch, a Baltimore County wheat farmer and slaveholder, arrived outside a

[33] Blackett, *Captive's Quest*, 3-42; Delblanco, *War Before the War*, 264; Sinha, *Slave's Cause,* 504. Hamlet's former owner, Mary Brown had planned to trade him to slave dealers to raise cash. Ultimately, however, she sold his life and labor to members of the New York's African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church for $800. The AME congregation, who counted Hamlet as one of their own, promptly freed him and by October he had returned to New York, this time with free papers in his pocket.

house in Christiana, Pennsylvania, intent on dragging the two runaway slaves holed up inside back across the border. Empowered by the new Fugitive Slave Act, Gorsuch was accompanied by a deputy federal marshal and a small posse of armed men. But local opposition proved substantial. The town of Christiana was a Black Underground stronghold, and Gorsuch found the stone house heavily fortified and its occupants—his former slaves and several other black men and women—entrenched. What began as a tense standoff soon gave way to a full-on firefight, and Gorsuch was shot to death in a hail of gunfire. When his men retreated in panic, the runaways bolted from the house and made their escape north toward Rochester, where Frederick Douglass helped them find their way to Canada.[34]

Douglass later wrote approvingly of those fugitive Marylanders' courage and resolve, declaring that "If it be right for any man to resist those who would enslave them, it was right for the men of color at Christiana to resist."[35]

Black Capital: The Experience of Black Freedom in Baltimore and Maryland

The Christiana fugitives received vital assistance from free black Pennsylvanians. But Maryland's black Underground was no less numerous, and the state's large and rapidly growing community of free people of color went to extraordinary lengths to help, hide, and protect self-liberating slaves who asked them for assistance. Each time Harriet Tubman returned to Maryland from Philadelphia to aid runaways, for instance, she relied upon a

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[34] Thomas P. Slaughter, *Bloody Dawn: The Christiana Riot and Racial Violence in the Antebellum North* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991). See also Delblanco, *War Before the War*, 183-5, 286-8; Harrold, *Border War*, 62, 102-3, 108-10, 154-5; Grivno, *Gleanings of Freedom*, 130-1.
[35] *Frederick Douglass's Paper* (Rochester, NY), 25 September, 1851.

network of free black allies on the Eastern Shore for critical support. No one was more crucial to her operations than Samuel Green, a former slave turned free black minister, who repeatedly collaborated with Tubman to help enslaved people escape from plantations across Talbot County. When deputies finally raided Green's home in 1858, they found it stocked with train timetables, maps of northern states and of Canada, and a copy of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*—enough evidence of his role as a station agent on the Underground Railroad to earn him ten years in the state penitentiary.[36]

Fig 4. Samuel Green, as depicted in William Still, *The Underground Railroad* (1872).

There were men and women like Samuel Green in every county and city in the state. In Hagerstown in western Maryland, for example, a crew of local free blacks once stormed the jail to liberate the captured fugitives detained inside. Baltimore, too, was home to several leaders of the Black Underground, including Jacob Gibbs, and the city was a haven

[36] Blackett, *Captive's Quest,* 315-7. No other slave state had a higher proportion of free people among its black population or anywhere near the absolute numbers of free people of color as Maryland, though the District of Columbia did. Fields, *Middle Ground*, 1-2. Over the eleven years between 1849 and 1860, Harriet Tubman made thirteen trips back to Maryland and helped dozens of enslaved people liberate themselves. Other lesser known figures, such as Richard Neal (who had escaped from Anne Arundel County), did likewise.

for fugitives who, in the words of Barbara Fields, "had not waited upon the grace of God, the majesty of the law, or the generosity of their owners to grant them their freedom."[37]

Fugitives who could not make it to free soil in Pennsylvania flocked to Baltimore because of the sheer size of the city's free black population. Baltimore was the capital of black America in the second quarter of the nineteenth century, boasting the largest community of free people of color anywhere in the United States. Fifteen-thousand strong, according to the 1830 census, their numbers hit 25,000 by 1850, about 15 percent of the city's entire population. Most were fresh from slavery, drawn to Baltimore by its thriving port, which required deep reserves of cheap labor, and by its reputation as the best place in the state, and perhaps the nation, for free black Americans to seek economic opportunity and carve out a rich family life.[38]

Table 2. African American Population of Baltimore City, 1820-1860

	Total Population	**Enslaved**	**Free Blacks**
1820	62,738	4,357	10,326
1830	70,620	4,120	14,790
1840	102,513	3,212	17,980
1850	169,054	2,946	25,442
1860	212,418	2,218	25,680

Source: Fields, *Middle Ground*, 62.

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[37] Fields, *Middle Ground*, 34; Grivno, *Gleanings of Freedom*, 129; Whitman, *Challenging Slavery*, 180.

[38] Thomas W. Griffiths, *Annals of Baltimore* (Baltimore: William Wooddy, 1824), 292; Fields, *Middle Ground*, 62; William S. Neeley, *Frederick Douglass* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1992), 67. Adam Malka, *Men of Mobtown: Policing Baltimore in the Age of Slavery and Emancipation* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2018), 22-23. In 1830 nine out of ten free black Baltimoreans were born elsewhere. Jennifer Hull Dorsey, *Hirelings: African American Workers and Free Labor in Early Maryland* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011), 58.

The low-cost, flexible labor of free people of color was the backbone of Baltimore's economy. As the city surged, growing to become the second largest in the country by 1840, free black men drove its carts, drays, hacks, coaches, and stages. They made Baltimore's nails, bricks, boots, shoes, brushes, combs, glue, cigars, and barrels. They sawed its wood, whitewashed its walls, cut its stone, blacked its shoes, butchered its meat, smithed its horses, and tanned its skins. A few owned and operated their own stores, cookshops, and oyster houses. Others ran basement grogshops or backstreet brothels. Many more worked at the shipyards as caulkers or carpenters, or as mariners on the ocean-going vessels made and maintained there. The pay packets these men took home were usually modest, so their wives also had to work, typically as cooks, domestics, laundresses, and seamstresses.[39]

Beyond their worksites, black Baltimoreans constructed a vibrant and robust community. Churches served as important building blocks in this effort, and by the eve of the Civil War, the city boasted fifteen free black meetinghouses representing six denominations. From these houses of worship emerged dozens of mutual aid societies promoting temperance, uplift, charity, and all manner of other social, intellectual, and moral improvements. The city's African Methodist Episcopal church also funded the building and operation of several free black schools, an abiding financial commitment to the core belief, expressed by black schoolmaster William Watkins in 1836, that a "good education is the great *sine qua non* as it regards the elevation of our people." By the mid-1840s Baltimore's AME schools enrolled six hundred students. Other denominations had

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[39] Bettye Jane Gardner, "Free Blacks in Baltimore, 1800-1860," PhD diss., George Washington University, 1974, 6. Christopher Phillips, *Freedom's Port: The African American Community of Baltimore, 1790-1860* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997), 76-7; Barbara Elizabeth Wallace, "'Fair Daughters of Africa': African American Women in Baltimore, 1790-1860," PhD diss., University of California Los Angeles, 2001, 81-135.

by then begun to follow suit, and by 1860 there were more than a dozen such schools up and running, enrolling 2,600 students across the city.[40]

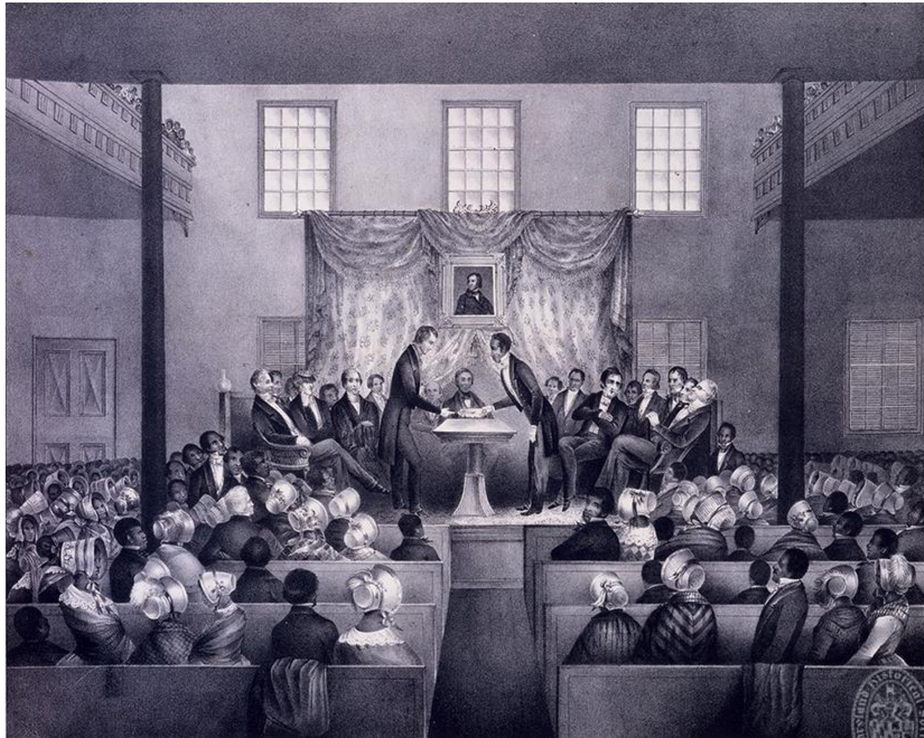

Fig 5. In 1845, congregants at Baltimore's Bethel AME church present a gold snuff box to a local Presbyterian minister who had lobbied against recent anti-black legislation. The Presentation of a Gold Snuff Box to the Rev. R.J. Breckenridge D.D. in Bethel Church, by Rev. Darius Stokes in behalf of the colored people of Baltimore as a gift of gratitude. Dez. 18th A.D. 1845. Courtesy of the Maryland Historical Society.

Free black Baltimoreans built this thriving, resilient community while living under siege. They had to claw and fight for every advantage, no matter how meager, checked at every turn by the many white residents of the city who resented their presence. Despite (or

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[40] William, Watkins, *An Address Delivered before the Moral Reform Society, in Philadelphia, August 8, 1836* (Philadelphia: Merrihew and Gunn, 1836), 13-14; Berlin, *Slaves Without Masters*, 288-9, 296, 304-5; "Condition of the Coloured Population of the City of Baltimore," *Baltimore Literary and Religious Magazine* 4 (1838), 171-5; Wallace, "Fair Daughters of Africa," 169; Malka, *Men of Mobtown*, 162. These sacred sites served functions almost too numerous to name—place of worship, Sunday school, unemployment office, soup kitchen, and fugitive sanctuary, for instance—and were the central sites of black community formation. Martha S. Jones, *Birthright Citizens: A History of Race and Rights in Antebellum America* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 72-3, It was a Baltimorean, Hezekiah Grice, who founded the black convention movement. Sinha, *Slave's Cause,* 169.

perhaps because of) their self-evident industriousness and willingness to work for low wages, their white job competitors lobbied the General Assembly in Annapolis to bar them from one occupation after another, bad-mouthing them as indolent, lazy, "more easily influenced by temptations to steal, less influenced by the desire of maintaining an honest reputation, and… less fear(ful) of the operations of the law than white people."[41]

Racism on these jobsites spiked each time the economy faltered and whenever European migration to the city climbed. Each time that happened, white employers and workers closed ranks. By the 1850s, Baltimore was buckling under a wave of job-busting riots on the docks, on the railroads, and everywhere else free people of color had the temerity to labor. In 1858, black bricklayers at one city yard were assaulted by a mob of thirty men calling themselves the White Tigers who were intent, one witness said, on "driving out the colored employees, and supplanting them in their places." The black bricklayers had to "run for their lives – pistols, and in several instances guns being fired upon them." The city's free black workers did their best to hold the line, organizing labor unions to try to boost their wages, insisting that black foremen keep their jobs, and trying to achieve collective bargaining. But the attacks on their livelihoods were relentless, and by the eve of the Civil War various scare tactics had driven African American caulkers, butchers, carpenters, sawyers, shoemakers, and shopkeepers into retreat and out of occupations they had once dominated. "The white man [now] stands in the black man's shoes, or else is fast getting into them," one approving local commentator observed.[42]

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[41] *Genius of Universal Emancipation* (Baltimore), 12 January, 1828; T. Whitman*, Price of Freedom,* 156. Wages for most black Baltimoreans were low, barely above survival rates, and by the 1850s less than one percent owned any real estate. Malka, *Men of Mobtown*, 108.
[42] *Baltimore Sun*, 18 May 1858; John H. B. Latrobe, *Colonization. A Notice of Victor Hugo's Views of Slavery in the United States, in a letter from John H. B. Latrobe, of Baltimore to Thomas Suffern, of New York* (Baltimore:

121;

Fig 6. A view of the Baltimore docks and shipyard, circa 1845. Henry H. Clark, Baltimore Harbor View. Courtesy of the Maryland Historical Society.

Black Baltimoreans felt the squeeze wherever they went, and not only at work. White thugs struck at black churches regularly, "throwing stones and breaking the doors and windows" of the Sharp Street AME Church in west Baltimore during one service in August 1838. The attack caused panic, and many congregants inside were injured "by rushing through the doors, jumping out of the windows, &c." City constables usually turned a blind eye to this sort of racial terrorism and instead embraced the task of enforcing restrictive ordinances that made it illegal for people of color to buy dogs, liquor, tobacco, bacon, or beef without special licenses, and that required them to observe a 10:00 pm nightly curfew. Some policemen did far worse, beating legally free blacks "bloody as a butcher" or throwing them in jail on suspicion of being runaway slaves—as if the fact of

John D. Toy, 1851), 14; Berlin, *Slaves Without Masters*, 231-2, 241, 349-50; Malka, *Men of Mobtown*, 111, 116-121;

their freedom was proof of their criminality. Whatever the alleged crime, the judges and juries of the city's circuit court rarely looked favorably upon defendants of color. As one Baltimore attorney explained, they were "inclined to convict a man merely because he was black," often sentencing those convicted of petty crimes of survival like stealing food or clothes to being transported out of state to be sold into slavery. [43]

The racial climate was no less toxic beyond Baltimore City. The state's breadbasket, the Eastern Shore, was home to more than twenty thousand free black Marylanders in the century's second quarter. Most worked as artisans of one sort or another, or as seasonal farm hands hired on terms that resembled debt slavery or peonage to do the "heavy, disagreeable, but *indispensable*, duties of 'laborers.'" Because most black codes applied statewide, these rural freedpeople lived under the same limits upon their freedom of movement and right to assembly as those in urban areas.[44]

This profusion of antiblack legal restrictions was difficult to enforce, but the ambivalence, disdain, and hostility that informed them were stark and unambiguous. While white people remained a substantial majority of the state's population throughout the antebellum decades, slaveholders in particular regarded the growing number of free black people living among them as dangerous sources of disorder, vice, and crime, and despaired that Maryland was "destined to be a free Negro state." The prospect repelled them. As

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[43] *Baltimore Sun*, 28 August 1838, 31 May 1837, 22 October 1839; Malka, *Men of Mobtown*, 112, 153-4; Berlin, *Slaves Without Masters*, 158, 232-3, 334-5. People of color boarding northbound trains or steamboats faced ticket checks, inspections of their free papers or passes, and interrogation. William Still called Baltimore "one of the most difficult places in the South for even free colored people to get away from, much more for slaves." Bridner, "Fugitive Slaves of Maryland," 45. In the last two years before the Civil War, eighty-nine black convicts were sold into term slavery on terms ranging from two years to more than sixty. Fields, *Middle Ground,* 35.

[44] *Annapolis Gazette*, 2 December, 1858 (emphasis in original); Blackett, *Captive's Quest*, 325-7; Berlin, *Slaves Without Masters*, 192; Clark, *Eastern Shore*, I: 515; Fields, *Middle Ground*, 35; Rockman, *Scraping By*, 250.

Maryland Senate President Richard Thomas candidly explained in 1838, a man like him would gladly consign "his daughter to the silent tomb than see her led to the hymenial altar by the hand of the colored man." The rest of the state's enslaving class thought much the same. Beginning in the 1840s, they held one panicked convention after another to brainstorm ways to wrestle a different future into being, debating proposals to forbid further manumissions, control or re-enslave free people or color, or expel them altogether.[45]

Any Practical Plan: Colonization, Opposition, and Maryland in Liberia

Plans to banish former slaves from Maryland had been on the drawing board for decades, and the state was home to some of the nation's most prominent proponents of colonization. Beginning in 1826, the Maryland Colonization Society (MCS) received a $1,000 annual appropriation from the Annapolis legislature, an extraordinary show of governmental support for its agenda. In the wake of Nat Turner's revolt in nearby Virginia in 1830, the MCS drew new attention and interest from white Marylanders worried that the state was on its own path to racial uprising and who were thus now "favourably disposed to any practical plan to get rid of the Free Blacks." The MCS proposed to do just that, and it

[45] *Baltimore American*, 4 March, 1842; *Maryland Colonization Journal* 1 (1838), 77; Berlin, *Slaves Without Masters*, 199-200, 210-1; Malka, *Men of Mobtown*, 168-9. Slaveholder conventions held in 1858 and 1859 succeeded in lobbying the Maryland legislature to outlaw manumissions and in 1858 lawmakers also authorized a statewide referendum in which the white population would vote on whether to enslave all free blacks within its borders. Thanks in part to vigorous 'vote no' campaign waged by black Baltimoreans, the plan was rejected at the ballot box. Whitman, *Challenging Slavery*, 171, 206-8; Berlin, *Slaves Without Masters*, 375, 380.

soon spawned several county-level subsidiaries, all of them focused on removing newly freed slaves quickly from Maryland to Africa.[46]

It was a Marylander, Robert Goodloe Harper, who coined the name 'Liberia,' and in 1831 the MCS sent its first cohort of black migrants there. Thirty-one made that maiden voyage from Baltimore, and 149 more followed the next year, most of them farmers and their families from Worcester County and Somerset County on the Eastern Shore. In 1834, the MCS established its own resettlement colony independent of Liberia near Cape Palmas, and over the next twenty years about a thousand more voyagers journeyed there through the port of Baltimore, searching for fresh economic opportunities and new lives free from racism.[47]

Looking only at the cumulative number of former slaves who boarded ships in Baltimore, however, obfuscates much more complicated and contested scenes on the docks themselves. Most black Marylanders vigorously opposed colonization and sometimes followed neighbors who had chosen to emigrate all the way to the gangplanks of these vessels to plead with them to reconsider. Many did, and MCS officers could persuade only 50 people each year, on average, to deport themselves. Most ships leaving Baltimore for Africa left half-empty, usually carrying more migrants from out of state than from Maryland. What's more, those who made these voyages often quickly returned, dismayed

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[46] *Baltimore Times*, 5 November 1851; Rockman, *Scraping By*, 249; Sinha, *Slave's Cause*, 212; Berlin, *Slaves Without Masters*, 202, 355; Whitman, *Challenging Slavery*, 128; Clark, *Eastern Shore*, I: 518. On support for colonization among Marylanders prior to 1825 see Jones, *Birthright Citizens*, 37-49. State support for colonization was renewed in 1852, despite protests from black leaders.
[47] Delblanco, *War Before the War*, 230; Blackett, *Captive's Quest*, 115; Rockman, *Scraping By*, 249; Berlin, *Slaves Without Masters*, 169-70, 357-9.

by the poor conditions they found in West Africa. In 1857, the MCS colony collapsed and had to be annexed by neighboring Liberia.[48]

Most black Marylanders were naturally suspicious of any plan that had the support of white enslavers. William Watkins, the leading anti-colonization figure in the state, denounced deportation as a brazen villainy pushed by those who "design to make us miserable here, that we may emigrate to Africa *with our own consent*." Watkins and other antislavery activists refused to participate in any scheme that tied the destruction of slavery to the removal of free people of color. They wanted ardently to build their futures within the United States and within Maryland, where most had been born, and pledged not to be "driven, like cattle, to Liberia."[49]

Black opposition was never monolithic, of course, and MCS officers worked hard to cultivate enthusiasm for colonization whenever they could, especially among the most beleaguered residents of rural counties. Those opposed to deportation had to organize to resist these propaganda efforts. They did so by disrupting MCS meetings and by turning churches and other free black gathering places in Baltimore, Cambridge, Hagerstown, and Annapolis into what historian Ira Berlin has called "beehives of anticolonizationist activity." Whenever delegates at local and state colored conventions took up the subject of colonization, the debates were often fierce. When a handful of black delegates spoke up in

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[48] Blackett, *Captive's Quest*, 126-7, 132; Berlin, *Slaves Without Masters* 207; Whitman, *Challenging Slavery*, 143-6. The state's small band of white antislavery activists were also dead set against deportation. Benjamin Lundy condemned colonization for its lack of interest in abolishing slavery. He published many black activists' denunciations of the scheme and was instrumental in convincing a young William Lloyd Garrison to renounce his own early support for it. Sinha, *Slave's Cause,* 170. For a divergent view (and a full list of emigrants to the Maryland in Liberia colony), see Richard Hall, *On Afric's Shore: A History of Maryland in Liberia, 1834-1857* (Baltimore: Maryland Historical Society, 2004).

[49] (Boston) *Liberator*, 23 March 1833 (emphasis in original), 4 June 1831; Rockman, *Scraping By*, 249-50; Whitman, *Challenging Slavery*, 142-3; Sinha, *Slave's Cause*, 243; Berlin, *Slaves Without Masters*, 204-6.

favor of a move to Liberia at one such meeting in 1852, several hundred anti-colonization protestors mobilized to surround the convention site, suspicious that those delegates had been paid off by MCS agents.[50]

A Refuge of Kidnappers: Maryland and the Reverse Underground Railroad

MCS agents were not the only Marylanders working to siphon off the region's surging free black population in the second quarter of the century. At the time, Maryland was well-known as a "refuge of kidnappers," a safe haven and target rich environment for bands of vicious opportunists who would prowl streets and burst into homes to snatch away anyone they thought they could sell on to interstate slave traders to carry into the Deep South. Kidnapping and human trafficking on this wholly illegal Reverse Underground Railroad carried obvious risks, both legal and physical, but demand for black bodies in the Cotton Kingdom was such that there was a lot of money to be made selling free people from the Upper South into slavery on the Gulf Coast. "An able-bodied colored man sells in the southern market for from eight hundred to a thousand dollars," a writer for the *Colored American* reminded readers in 1840.[51]

By then, black Baltimoreans had been fighting off these vultures for decades. Because of the size of the city's free black community, it had been a "den of man-hunters" since the early 1800s. Over the years, these kidnappers and human traffickers had grown ever more "daring in their depredations," sometimes knocking their targets unconscious on

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[50] Berlin, *Slaves Without Masters*, 204-6; Sinha, *Slave's Cause*, 215-6; Jones, *Birthright Citizens*, 38-9; Whitman, *Challenging Slavery*, 203-4.
[51] (Philadelphia) *Pennsylvania Freeman*, 20 April 1854; (New York) *Colored American*, 21 March 1840; Blackett, *Captive's Quest*, 293-4, 305; Clayton, *Antebellum Baltimore*, 53-4; Harrold, *Border War*, 53-4. On the Reverse Underground Railroad, see Richard Bell, *Stolen: Five Free Boys Kidnapped into Slavery and Their Astonishing Odyssey Home* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2019).

city streets in broad daylight, or enlisting older African Americans to lure youngsters into their clutches. By the second quarter of the century, black boys and girls under the age of sixteen had become prime targets. Missing persons ads in the city's papers filled with their names—Priscilla Blake, aged 14, Eliza Pisco, aged 11, Jane Harris, aged 10, Henny, aged 6—a roll call for a school of lost children.[52]

Baltimore was a particularly well-stocked hunting ground, but kidnappers operated across the entire state, a fact often remarked upon by visitors from New England and from Europe. Richard Blackett has identified at least one gang based in Hagerstown in western Maryland. Many more operated out of safehouses on the lower reaches of the Eastern Shore, in and around Talbot County, where settlement was thin, slaveholding common, and the politics decidedly conservative. No one knew for sure how many Marylanders made their livings on the Reverse Underground Railroad; there was no debate, however, as to its scale. "Kidnapping being a lucrative business it is not strange that it should be extensively practiced," a contributor to the *Colored American* wrote during one survey, but "it is

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[52] John S. Tyson, *Life of Elisha Tyson, the Philanthropist. By a Citizen of Baltimore* (Baltimore: B. Lundy, 1825), 79; *Baltimore Patriot*, 26 July 1817; Ralph Clayton, *Cash for Blood: The Baltimore to New Orleans Slave Trade* (Bowie, MD: Heritage Books, 2002), 39, 49; (New York) *Freedom's Journal*, 15 August 1828. For more on kidnappings in Baltimore see (Washington, DC) *Daily National Intelligencer*, 26 September, 1817; (Philadelphia) *Poulson's American Daily Advertiser*, June 12 1818; (Baltimore) *Niles Weekly Register*, 12 December 1818; *Easton Gazette*, 11 January 1819; *Easton Gazette*, 23 July 1821; (Baltimore) *American and Commercial Daily Advertiser*, 9 August 1822; (Baltimore) *Genius of Universal Emancipation*, 26 July 1826; Dorsey, *Hirelings*, 93-4; Rockman, *Scraping By*, 238-9; Wallace, "Fair Daughters of Africa," 257; Leroy Graham, *Baltimore: The Nineteenth-Century Black Capital* (Washington: University Press of America, 1982), 60; Phillips, *Freedom's Port*, 230-1; Bernard John Medairy Jr., *The Notorious Patty Cannon and Her Gang of Kidnappers on the Eastern Shore: Kidnappers, Robbers and Murderers* (Towson, MD: B. Medairy, 1995), 39-46;. On kidnappers of color see *Baltimore Patriot & Mercantile Advertiser*, 13 August 1821; (Baltimore) *Genius of Universal Emancipation*, June 9, 1827; Richard Bell "Counterfeit Kin: Kidnappers of Color, the Reverse Underground Railroad, and the Origins of Practical Abolition" *Journal of the Early Republic* 38, no. 2 (2018), 199-230.

difficult to estimate the extent to which illegal kidnapping is carried [out], since a large number of cases must escape detection."[53]

The concept of free soil meant little to these land-sharks and the most ambitious and predatory among them would launch multi-day raids into southern Pennsylvania from their home bases in Maryland. One of these "beasts of prey" was Thomas McCreary, who seized Rachel Parker from the Miller farm in West Nottingham in 1851. As Lucy Maddox, his biographer, has demonstrated, McCreary was a serial kidnapper. From his base in Cecil County in northern Maryland, McCreary had led at least five prior abduction expeditions into southern Pennsylvania and had made off with Rachel's sister, Elizabeth, two just weeks earlier. He was hardly alone. People like McCreary were crouched all along Maryland's northern border throughout the 1840s, ready to dart into Pennsylvania to snatch children, solo adults, and sometimes small family groups whenever they saw an opportunity.[54]

In the 1850s, men and women in McCreary's line of work stepped up their operations. They took ever more free people of color and tried to pass them off as suspected fugitives, a practice made much easier by the terms of the new Fugitive Slave Act of 1850. As Pauli Murray once observed, these people snatchers "cared little whether their victim was a fugitive, a freedman or a free-born person." While some ventured into Pennsylvania clutching warrants naming particular runaways, they often grabbed any

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[53] (New York) *Colored American*, 21 March 1840; Clayton, *Antebellum Baltimore*, 45-6; E. S. Abdy, *Journal of a Residence and Tour in the United States of North America, From April 1833, to October, 1834*, 2 vols. (New York: Negro Press, 1969), II:99-100; Blackett, *Captive's Quest*, 302; Bell, *Stolen*, 47-80; Harrold, *Border War*, 53-4.
[54] Jesse Torrey, *A Portraiture of Slavery in the United States, Proposing National Measures for the Education and Gradual Emancipation of the Slaves*…. 2nd ed. (Ballston Spa, 1818), 82; Maddox, *Parker Sisters*, 32-3. For Marylanders abducting free blacks in Pennsylvania prior to 1850 see Maddox, Parker Sisters, 17-18; David G. Smith, *On the Edge of Freedom: The Fugitive Slave Issue in South Central Pennsylvania, 1820-1870* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013), esp. 97-104; William C. Kashatus, *Just Over the Line: Chester County and the Underground Railroad* (University Park, Penn State University Press, 2002), esp. 29-30.

person of color they thought could fit those bills and fetch a price when sold to an interstate slave dealer. Traders like Baltimore's Hope Slatter cultivated reputations as respectable businessmen who operated wholly within the law, but as historian Robert Gudmestad has demonstrated, the reality was quite different, and at one time or another every major trader seems to have dabbled in buying people they knew to have been kidnapped.[55]

Monsters like McCreary operated with what historian Stephen Whitman has called "virtual impunity." All too few served prison terms, and Maryland's governors frequently pardoned or commuted the sentences of the few men and women convicted of abduction, human trafficking, or enslavement. Because free people of color had no reliable allies in state government or law enforcement, and only a small core of white activists were willing to lend them any practical aid, they had to defend themselves as best they could. So they did. They organized themselves into protection societies and neighborhood watches, staying "within doors after dark" and hollering, biting, and kicking if a stranger grabbed them. They were dogged and determined, but resistance was often futile and always dangerous. When a black husband "clambered up to one of the windows" of a rail car to try to stop his legally free wife being sold out of state, Hope Slatter himself "knocked him down from the car, and ordered him away."[56]

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[55] Pauli Murray, *Proud Shoes: The Story of An American Family* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1956), 97; Maddox, *Parker Sisters*, 17-9, 38-9; Gudmestad, *Troublesome Commerce*, 73-4. For Marylanders abducting free blacks in Pennsylvania after 1850, see Clayton, *Cash For Blood*, 38-9; Samuel May, *The Fugitive Slave Law and Its Victims*, rev. ed. (Freeport, NY: Books for Libraries Press, 1970), 23, 25, 121. The difference between a kidnapper and a slave catcher was often in the eye of the beholder. Blackett, *Captive's Quest*, 302-3.
[56] Whitman, *Challenging Slavery*, 169; *Baltimore Patriot*, 26 July, 1817; Daniel Drayton, *Personal Memoir of Daniel Drayton, For Four years and Four Months A Prisoner (For Charity's Sake) in Washington Jail, Including a Narrative of the Voyage and Capture of the Schooner Pearl* (Boston: Bela Marsha, 1853), 60; Schermerhorn, *Unrequited Toil*, 147; *Relf's Philadelphia Gazette*, 22 May 1822; Rockman, *Scraping By*, 240; Berlin, *Slaves Without Masters*, 309. On the Baltimore Quaker Elisha Tyson's lonely, unpopular, and dangerous crusade

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Things had not always been so dark, lonely, and desperate. In the 1820s, Baltimore had been a hive of antislavery activism and radical, inter-racial politics. In 1824, Benjamin Lundy had moved his crusading newspaper, the *Genius of Universal Emancipation*, to the city from Tennessee. It was the only explicitly antislavery newspaper published in a border state that decade, and Lundy soon began churning out a mix of polemical reporting and commentary, including his trademark 'Black List' which assiduously documented slavery's daily outrages. A year later, in 1825, a group of white city leaders in Lundy's orbit formed the Maryland Anti-Slavery Society (MAS), a rare accomplishment in a slave state, and over the next three years it attracted about 500 members and subscribers and spawned eleven county auxiliaries. In 1827, some of the same activists founded a sister organization, the Baltimore Society for the Protection of Free People of Color (BSP). These developments were direct responses to escalating racial oppression. But these were heady days nonetheless for the state's antislavery activists, and by the end of the decade, Baltimore had twice hosted the American Convention for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery, drawing delegates from organizations in several states to the city for national assemblies and confirming its emerging reputation as "the center of the abolitionist movement."[57]

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against kidnappers in the 1810s and the short-lived Protection Society of Maryland he founded in 1816, see Tyson, *Life of Elisha Tyson*, 82-7, 101-2, 108-10; Graham, *Black Capital*, 50-1; Whitman, *Challenging Slavery*, 105-6; *Niles Weekly Register*, 9 May 1818.

[57] Sinha, *Slave's Cause,* 190, 198-9; Deyle, *Carry Me Back*, 179-80; Whitman, *Challenging Slavery*, 155, 120; Harrold, *Border War*, 118.

By the eve of the Civil War, all that was a distant memory. The enduring influence of slavery's special interests and the crushing weight of rising 'Negrophobia' had long since driven Maryland's white antislavery activists to the point of extinction. Having been slandered, spat at, and physically assaulted, Lundy had finally fled Baltimore for Washington DC in 1830, taking his newspaper with him. By then, both the MAS and BSP had folded too, undone by flagging fundraising and by a foolhardy decision by MAS officers to put up overtly antislavery candidates in statewide elections. Those who had embraced the cause out of religious obligation were buckling under social and political pressure as well. In 1836, the Baltimore Annual Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church announced its absolute opposition to abolition, a striking turnaround for a group that had once contained several notable emancipationists. Two years later, in 1838, Maryland's Hicksite Quakers did the same, declaring that their members should avoid becoming further entangled in the antislavery cause if they wished to remain in good standing. Stripped of their white allies, the state's African American population had to soldier on alone, suffering through decades of humiliation and persecution that had all the trappings of a race war, unfolding in slow motion.[58]

A border slave state with an unusually large free black population, Thomas McCreary's Maryland was, in Barbara Field's famous formulation, "a society divided against itself." By the time Abraham Lincoln was elected president in 1860, those divisions were on full display. Maryland stood at a crossroads, torn between its embrace of Northern

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[58] Phillips, *Freedom's Port*, 231; Gordon E. Finnie, "The Antislavery Movement in the Upper South Before 1840," *Journal of Southern History* 35, no. 3 (1969), 324-5. At a June 1828 monthly meeting, the treasurer of the Baltimore Society for the Protection of Free People of Color reported that society funds amounted to just 37.5 cents. Regular meetings ceased soon thereafter. Baltimore Society for the Protection of Free People of Color. Minutes, 1827-1829. Friends Historical Library, Swarthmore, Pennsylvania.

mercantilism and its heritage of Southern cultural affinity and agrarianism. In the state's southern and eastern counties, many Marylanders prized the protection of race slavery and considered Lincoln's antislavery politics anathema. When those voters went to the polls that November, their ballots ensured that Lincoln placed fourth in statewide returns, trailing John Breckenridge, the Southern Democrat candidate, by a margin of more than eighteen to one.[59]

Yet most Maryland voters were more pragmatic. The long border with Pennsylvania meant that the state would be difficult to defend in the event of secession and war, something that white residents of the state's northern counties—who had been on the front lines of the fugitive crisis for decades—understood immediately. The same practical considerations produced pro-union voter turnout in Baltimore, a city that was situated on the wrong side of Washington, DC, and much closer to Philadelphia than it was to Richmond. Most civic leaders there considered secession a poor choice and worried that a war would lead to a blockade of Baltimore's port and recently-extended railroad, strangling trade and endangering fortunes and jobs. While white residents across the state had little love for Lincoln, most rallied around the Unionist cause, pledging a majority of their votes (54.2%) to one or other of the three Unionist candidates.[60]

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[59] Harrold, *Border War*, 201-2, 204-5; Michael J. Dubin, *United States Presidential Elections, 1788-1860: The Official Results by County and State* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2002), 170-1.
[60] Fields, *Middle Ground*, 6; Delblanco, *War Before the War*, 28.