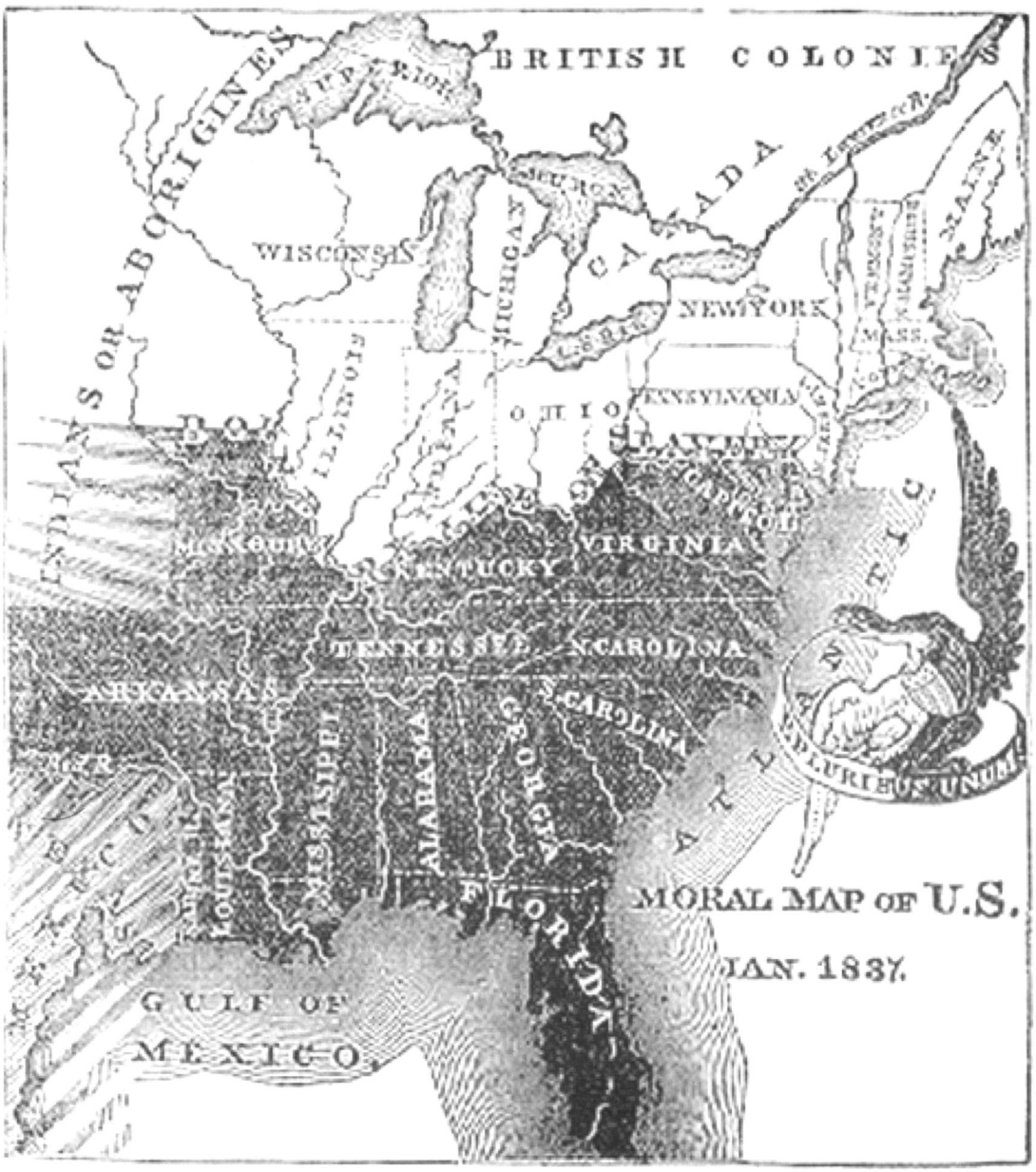


Slavery is a dark spot on the face of the nation! —*Lafayette.*

This 1837 "Moral Map of [the] U.S." literally depicted slavery as "a dark spot on the face of the nation!" Anti-slavery activists included Washington in the darkened section of the country that they argued was stained by the institution of slavery. From The Legion of Liberty! and Force of Truth (1843).

Imaginary Cruelties?

A History of the Slave Trade in Washington, D.C.

by Mary Beth Corrigan

Before the Civil War, the District of Columbia had the most active slave depot in the nation. Early-nineteenth century economic changes in the upper South motivated large numbers of slave owners from Maryland, Virginia, and the District to reduce their holdings. They readily sold slaves to dealers, who speculated on slaves by reselling them to planters in the newly settled cotton-growing regions of the Deep South, including Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana. Washington offered dealers a convenient transportation nexus between the Upper and Lower South, as the city connected to southern markets via waterways, overland roads, and later rail. Often, dealers held slaves in Washington for weeks or even months, and implemented strict security measures to prevent their flight. Slaves stayed in crowded and dimly lit pens, including several near the Capitol. For exercise, they walked together in coffles, chained at their hands and feet and guarded by dealers and their assistants. In addition, slaves lived in constant fear of the lash, which dealers employed at the slightest misstep, and of their ultimate destination in the Deep South.[1]

As early as the mid-1810s, anti-slavery activists decried the presence of the depot in the nation's capital and built a compelling case for its abolition. Visitors to Washington often commented on the cruel and unjust workings of the slave trade and the resulting anguish of the slaves in newspapers, pamphlets, and books. These re-

Anti-slavery activists juxtaposed the idea of America as "the land of the free" with the reality of slavery in Washington, "the home of the oppressed." According to Philadelphia anti-slavery author Jesse Torrey, this slave coffle marched past the Capitol and one of its members raised "his manacles as high as he cou'd reach, [and] commenced singing the favorite National Song, 'Hail Columbia! happy land.'" Courtesy, HSW.

Mary Beth Corrigan, Ph.D., archivist and curator at Riggs Bank, wrote her dissertation on the slave and free black communities in Washington, D.C.

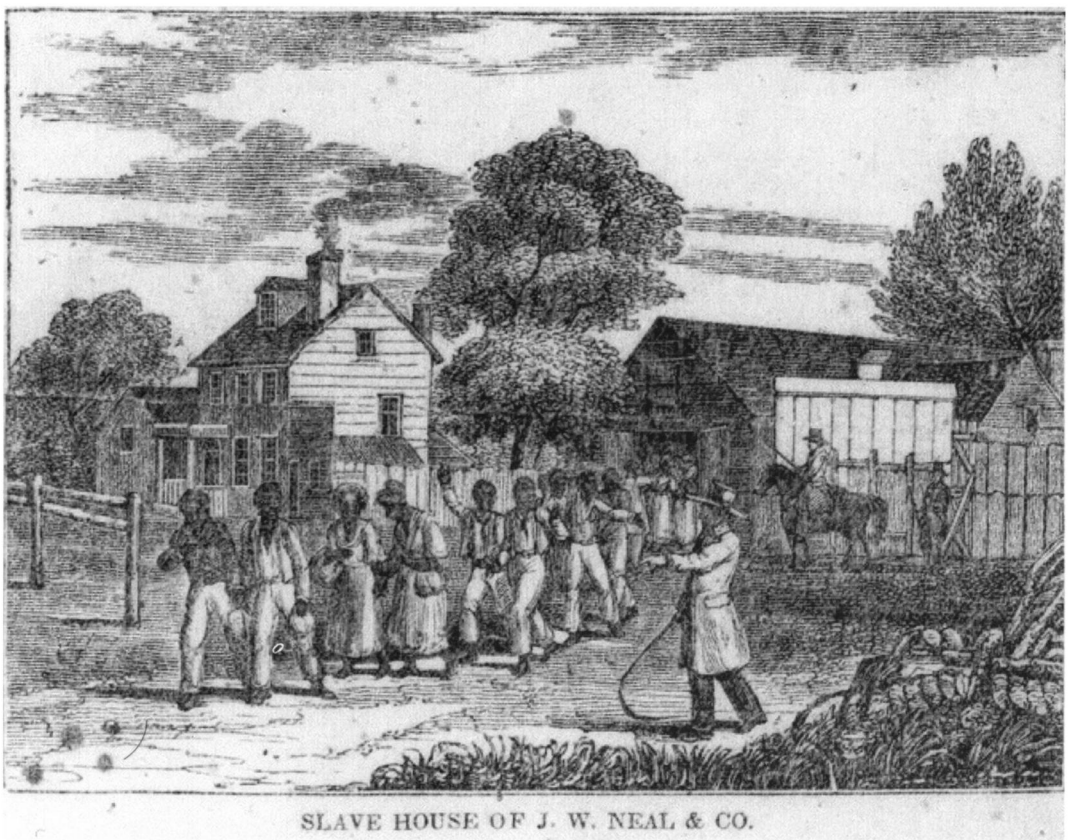
porters effectively juxtaposed the imagery of the Capitol with the repressive techniques of dealers to question whether slavery should exist in a democratic republic. By the 1830s, activists beseeched Congress to exercise its constitutional authority over the District by abolishing its slave system or, failing that, its trade. Congress finally responded to this argument by abolishing the slave depot in the District as part of the Compromise of 1850. At best, this constituted only a mild reform of slavery. The retrocession of Alexandria to Virginia in 1846 minimized the impact of the compromise because dealers could simply cross the river to house slaves prior to transport.

Washington residents resented the federal intrusion of this bill but hoped it would remove the city from the vortex of the national debate over slavery. They proudly maintained that the District occupied a "middle ground" between slavery and freedom; after all, free laborers, black and white, dominated the work force. At the very least, District residents hoped that suppression of the slave trade would erase their association with the most visible and repressive aspects of the trade. To the frustration of residents, however, the compromise bill did not take the spotlight off the capital city. The rhetorical impact of Washington's role as a slave depot lingered because of the trade's continued operation in Alexandria, and activists continued to report on its workings through the 1850s.[2]

With good reason, historians have emphasized the stability and cohesion of the District's free black community and accepted antebellum Washingtonians' portrayal of slavery there as moderate and relatively benevolent.[3] To a greater extent than most, slaves in Washington had access to freedom. Through the early nineteenth century, the District's free black population increased sharply. In 1800, slaves outnumbered free blacks by four to one. Only 30 years later, free blacks slightly outnumbered slaves, and by 1860, free blacks outnumbered slaves by three to one.[4] Perhaps more impressive than its size, the free black community built institutions that also addressed the concerns of its slave members, and thus mitigated their conditions.

While it provided relatively fertile ground for the development of a large free black community, the middle ground proved harsh terrain for slaves. The regional economy accounted for this apparent contradiction. At the same time that tobacco agriculture was declining in the upper South, cotton, rice and sugar plantations were booming in the lower South. The labor demands of the cotton states provided Chesapeake planters with ready buyers for any slaves they no longer needed. Regardless of their ability to work, slaves had customarily received food, shelter, and health care from their owners. Given the new opportunities down South, many slave owners began to pursue strategies to relieve themselves of these responsibilities. Some whites chose to manumit or sell their "excess" slaves. Other owners hired out their slaves to employers and generally received the wages earned by their slaves. Slaves hoped for and sometimes successfully pressed for their own manumission. Slaves prayed not to be sold south. Whatever their fate, slaves faced the continual disruptions of family separation, the nearly inevitable result of sale and even hiring out.[5]

The number and proportion of slaves in Maryland and the District declined, suggesting how extensively owners used the slave trade and manumission. The District's slave population declined between 1820 and 1860 from 6,400 to 3,100. During those years in Maryland, the slave population dropped from 107,000 to 87,000. This decrease is especially striking in both jurisdictions as the general population soared during this period. Accordingly, slaves represented an increasingly smaller proportion of the population. Within the District, slaves accounted for one out of five residents in 1820 and less than one of 20 resi-



Slave dealers operated throughout the District, including the slave house of Joseph W. Neal & Co., located on Seventh Street. Washington owners participated in every aspect of the District's slave trade, and District law did not place significant restrictions on the sale of slaves. HSW.

dents by 1860. Maryland's proportion of slaves declined by half, from one-fourth to one-eighth by 1860. During these decades, many slaves born in Maryland and the District spent their adulthood clearing and cultivating the lands of Mississippi, Alabama, and Louisiana.[6]

Urbanization accounted for the diminishing importance of slavery in the District. Residential housing, manufacturing concerns, and federal buildings replaced the farms that had relied on slaves to perform a variety of tasks throughout the year. In the beginning of the century, employers used slave labor on projects such as the construction of the Capitol, the rehabilitation of the White House following the War of 1812, and the digging of the C & O Canal in the 1820s. In these endeavors, white laborers resented working alongside slaves and consequently employers used slaves less frequently on the numerous construction projects in the city. Increasingly, most slaves in Washington worked as domestic servants, fulfilling duties as cooks, washers, and butlers.[7]

As the work roles of slaves became limited to domestic service, owners kept their holdings to one or two slaves, and increasingly preferred slave women to perform household duties. Women performed a broad range of duties, including child rearing, cooking, sewing, and the most undesirable chore of all, washing clothes. Some women also worked as wet nurses, breast feeding the infants of their mistresses. Owners looked for the more specialized

skills of butlers or carriage drivers, jobs performed by men, only after meeting their general household needs. Most men generally did not live in urban households with their kinswomen, as they worked on farms in the surrounding countryside. As the Civil War approached, this division of labor became more pronounced. Among slaves in Washington and Georgetown in 1820, women outnumbered men by six to five. During the 1850s, they outnumbered men by two to one.[8]

Changes in the work system as a whole prompted District slave owners to demand greater flexibility from and specialization among their workers. This led some to manumit their slaves, while others sold them. Others hired out their slaves to achieve the necessary division of labor among their workers. For owners who held onto their slaves, the slave trade remained an important safety valve, as insolvency often necessitated sale.

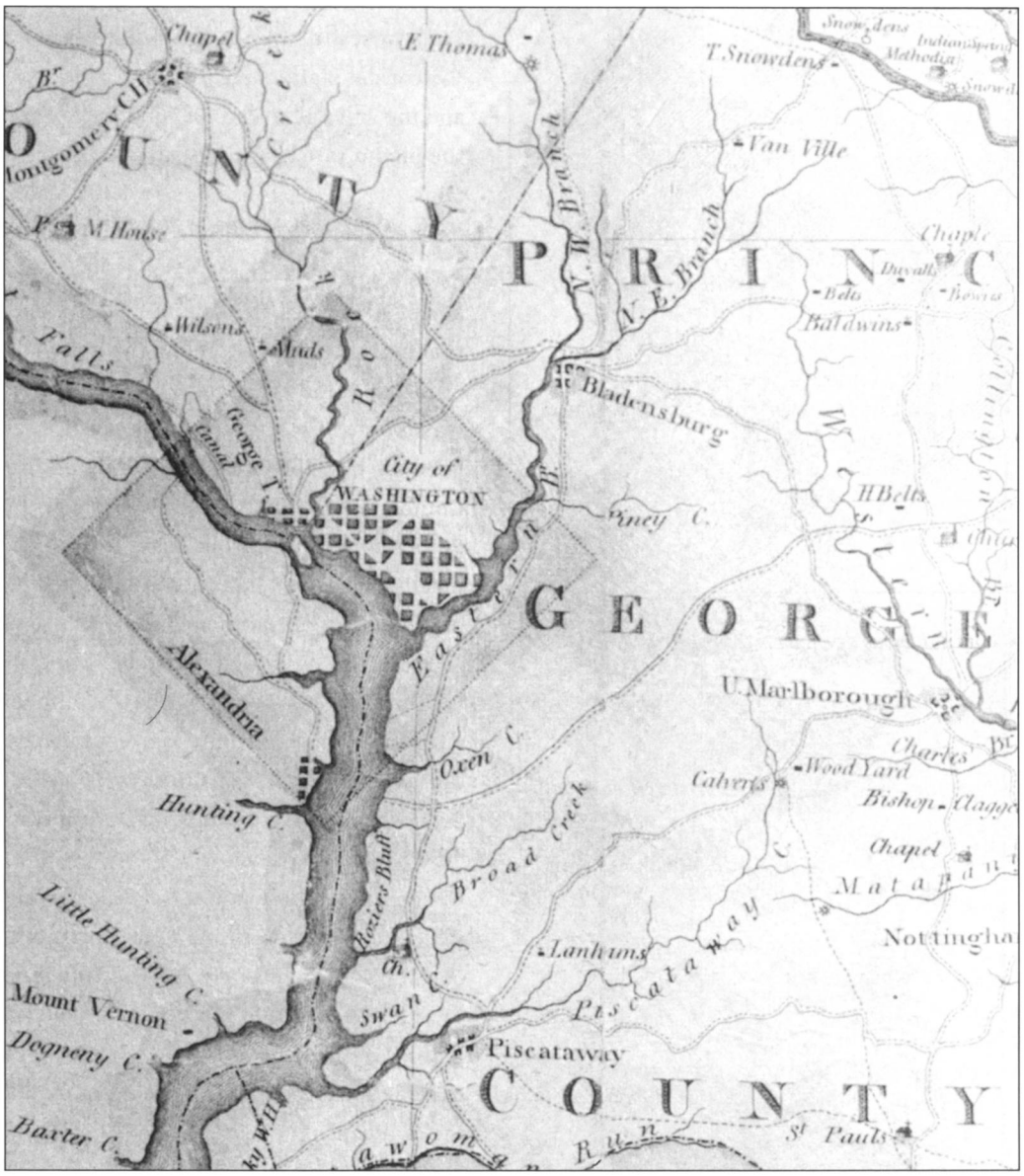
Washington residents participated in every aspect of the District's slave trade. The practices of local slave owners were tied to those of dealers. These ties refute contemporaries' arguments that anti-slavery focus on Washington was undeserved. While impossible to determine the numbers of slaves contributed by Washington owners to the city's coffles and pens, the slave trade yielded profit to more than a few owners, sundered the family ties of numerous slaves, and provided anti-slavery activists with a clear illustration of the contradictions of slavery and democracy.

While at least one prominent historian has argued otherwise, District law did not place significant restrictions upon the sale of slaves. When incorporating the capital, Congress mandated that Washington, Georgetown and Alexandria retain the distinct legal traditions of their parent states. Maryland law still applied to the lands north of the Potomac River, while Virginia law still governed Alexandria to the south. As part of a revision of its general code in 1796, Maryland enacted a slave non-importation law to prevent visitors entering the state from selling their slaves for merely speculative purposes. This law subsequently restricted the perogatives of slave owners moving into Washington and Georgetown from areas outside of Maryland, by requiring them to achieve residency of three years before selling their slaves. Slave owners who violated the non-importation law faced a harsh penalty—the forced manumission of their slaves. A small number of slaves demonstrated their owners' violations and successfully sued for their freedom in this manner.[9]

The bifurcation of the District's law created confusion, particularly for Alexandria's slaveholders. As non-District residents, Virginians needed to establish residency over a three-year period in order to sell slaves in Washington and Georgetown. This restriction applied equally to Alexandria slave owners, despite the fact that they were District residents. When several Alexandria residents sold their slaves in Washington, some of the slaves argued in court that their owners had imported their slaves into Washington for the purpose of sale without establishing residency (on the Maryland side of the District). Subsequently, the court ruled that the non-importation law applied to these Alexandrians and provided freedom to their slaves.[10]

This law had a number of expressly defined exclusions. Slaveholders entering Maryland, Washington or Georgetown to establish residency could bring slaves with them. The law even allowed these owners to circumvent the three-year restriction if outstanding debts necessitated the sale of slaves. Finally, the law ensured that all visitors, including residents of boardinghouses, could enter with their slaves though they could not sell or otherwise dispose of them.[11]

In the end, the non-importation law neither diminished the number of sellers and buyers nor undermined the development of the slave trade in the District.



The District of Columbia consisted of a number of legal jurisdictions when it was founded. Maryland law applied north of the Potomac; south of the river, Virginia law still governed Alexandria. Therefore, the slave code of Washington and Georgetown was distinct from that of Alexandria. Alexandria was retroceded back to Virginia in 1846 and the remaining jurisdictions were consolidated into one District government in 1871.

After establishing residency on the northern side of the Potomac, slaveholders could sell their slaves to any buyer. In addition, new residents could always use the markets on the southern side of the river in Alexandria. Further, the law placed no direct regulation upon the purchase of slaves, as anyone could do so regardless of their residency. Established residents had no reason to worry about the

Solomon Northup was a free black from New York who visited Washington in 1841. He was drugged, kidnapped, and sold to slave dealer James H. Birch, who destroyed his freedom papers and beat Northup with a hardwood board when he insisted he was a free man. Free blacks, particularly visitors from the North, were vulnerable to kidnapping by slave dealers in mid-nineteenth century Washington. Abolitionists used stories like Northup's to show the brutality of slavery in the nation's capital. From Solomon Northup, Twenty Years a Slave *(1853).*

residency restriction and could speculate freely on the sale of slaves.

The law, therefore, neither limited the full participation of District residents in the slave trade nor hindered the emergence of dealers who provided the critical nexus between the urban centers of the Upper and Lower South. In both the District and Maryland, there were several dealers, long-standing and *bona fide* residents, who purchased slaves in large numbers and housed them in Washington before transporting them to slave markets in New Orleans, Richmond, or Charleston. With the support of slaveholders, these dealers held auctions, steered slaves in coffles down the streets, loaded them onto trains and boats, and detained them in slave pens.

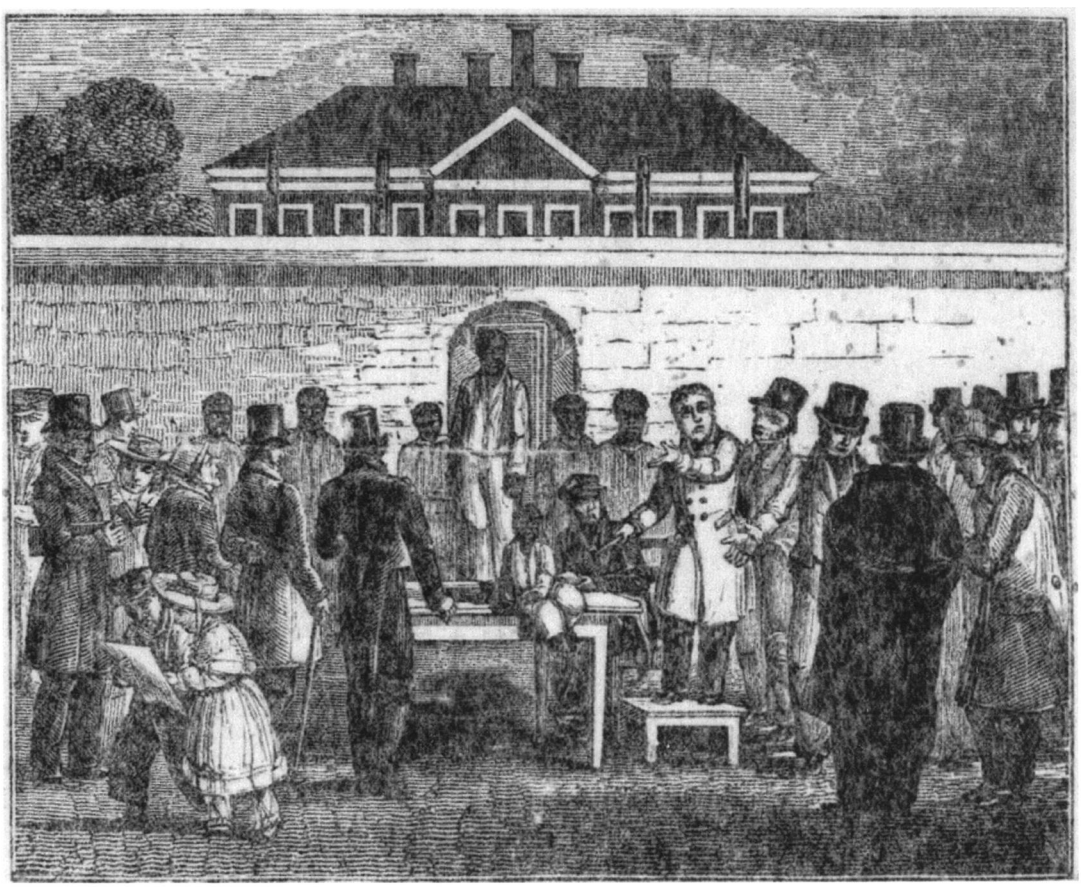
Dealers provided the critical connection between the Maryland countryside and the slave markets of the deep South. In January 1846, slave dealer Thomas Williams advertised in the *National Intelligencer*, which enjoyed a large readership in the city and in the surrounding countryside. Williams offered to buy "any number" of slaves for the New Orleans market and "will give at all times the highest market price in cash for likely young Negroes. Those willing to sell, call at his est., corner of 7th Sts. and Md. Ave., where he and agent can be seen at any time."[12] Apparently, Williams's operation was large and well-known to traders in Richmond and New Orleans. In June 1847, Williams informed Richmond-based auctioneer R.H. Dickinson that he had "six agents out in the country buying" so that he "may look for negroes from [him] pretty often." Two weeks later, he informed

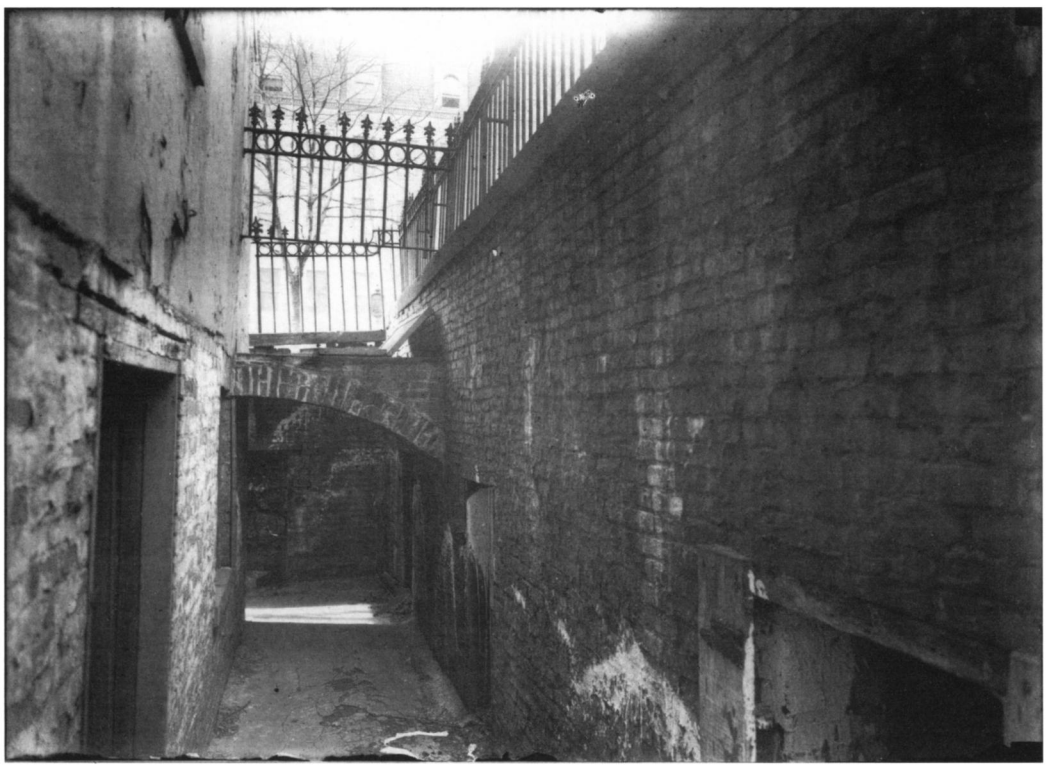
Auctions like this one were a common occurrence in antebellum Washington. Some catered to slave dealers, while others targeted local buyers. Whatever the circumstances, auctions regularly separated Washington's enslaved families and fueled abolitionists' portrayal of Washington slavery as cruel and inhumane. HSW.

Dickinson that "if your market [at Richmond] will justify it I will send some 40 to 60 or perhaps 75 negroes between now and July 15. I am determined to buy 150 from now to 1st September."[13]

Not even free blacks were safe from the slave trade. Dealers frequently seized free blacks, beat them, held them in the slave pens in the city and then sold them into slavery. The penalty for the crime of kidnapping a free black was $800, yet such fines did not deter dealers.[14] Little protected free blacks other than the recognition of white residents, as kidnappers easily destroyed any proof of freedom that their victims carried. Free black visitors to the city, particularly northern free blacks, were especially vulnerable to kidnapping as they usually had no local white benefactors who could identify them in a coffle.

Solomon Northup vividly illustrated the techniques of slave kidnappers in his memoir *Twenty Years A Slave*. A free black visitor from Saratoga, New York, Northup attended the funeral of President Henry Harrison during his visit to Washington in 1841. Northup recalled dining in a tavern with two white men from the city, who probably administered the drug laudanum to the unsuspecting Northup. Headaches, extreme thirst and disorientation prompted Northup to find an infirmary. On his way, in an alley off Pennsylvania Avenue, Northup passed out. When he awoke, he found his money and freedom papers gone and, three hours later, realized that he had been kidnapped, purchased by slave dealer James H. Birch, and was sitting in Williams's slave pen on C Street near the Capitol. Northup protested to Birch that he





Slave pens and prisons existed throughout the District of Columbia, many of them within blocks of the Capitol. This one at Third Street and Pennsylvania Avenue depicts the cramped and dirty conditions slaves endured in these pens. HSW.

was a free man. Birch responded by beating Northup with a hardwood board 18 to 20 inches long. The whipping continued until Birch tired, as Northup never relented.[15]

Washington's prisons likewise proved an excellent source for dealers in search of slaves to sell. Any slave at large without a travel pass or free black without his certificate of freedom faced imprisonment. Police posted public notices to enable owners to identify the whereabouts of their fugitive slaves. Free blacks bore the burden of proving their own freedom and, until then, were presumed slaves. Prison guards retained these alleged and fugitive slaves for up to two months. If no owner surfaced, the prison sold them to recoup the cost of imprisonment. Slave dealers regularly stopped at the Old Capitol Prison and secured fugitive slaves, including free blacks unable to furnish their papers, for sale.[16]

The auction block remains one of the most poignant symbols of the slave trade. Dealers facilitated the auctions that regularly occurred in Washington and Georgetown and District residents were frequently among the customers. In some cases, the indebtedness of an owner compelled the auction, as creditors could demand the proceeds from the sale of slaves. Such sales were particularly frequent in settling the debts of an estate. The heirs of Jesse Brown, a proprietor of a hotel on Pennsylvania

These buildings in an alley behind G Street between 4½ and Sixth Streets served as slave pens in the nineteenth century. Dealers temporarily housed slaves in such pens until they had enough people to transport down south. These pens were torn down in 1889. Courtesy, Library of Congress.

Avenue between Sixth and Seventh Streets that had served as the site of many auctions, held an auction to settle the debts of Brown's estate. The sale included an 18-year-old deaf man and his 10-year-old sister. Considered an invalid, the man "was the pet of his mother, who was present, in great distress." Marshall Brown, the son of the deceased, wished to buy him, but a slave trader named Naylor outbid Brown. The grief of the young man's mother helped convince the auctioneer to offer Naylor $25 to end the bidding and thereby enabled Brown to purchase the man for $325. However, a judge from Georgia bought his sister and carried her away "in the presence of its agonized mother."[17]

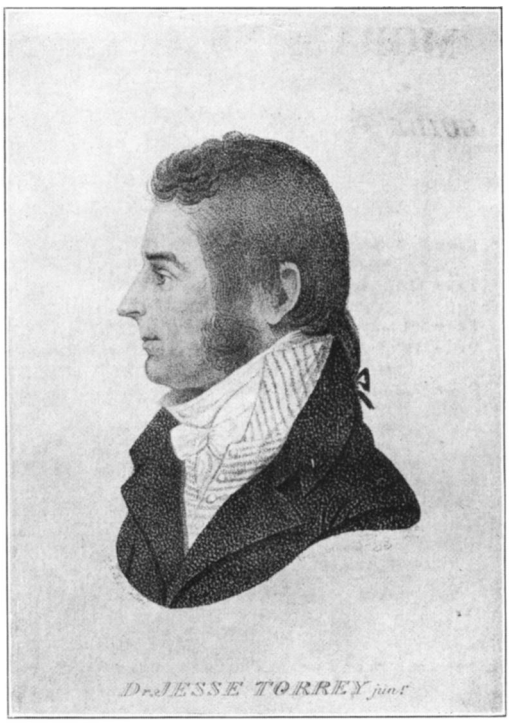
Interestingly, sellers at some auctions preferred to sell their slaves to local buyers rather than slave dealers. In May 1847, "by order of the administrator," R. W. Dyer announced an auction of eight slaves at the residence of Mrs. Joseph Smoot on K Street across from the brewery. He specified his intention to sell these slaves for the use of a local buyer rather than resale: "The above servants are slaves for life and are not restricted and I would respectfully call the attention of citizens wishing very desirable servants for their own use, to the sale, as a more favorable opportunity of getting good servants may not again occur." Some auctioneers ensured local sales by advertising the "private sale" of slaves, usually reflecting the desire of owners to sell within the District. In November 1849, E. C. and G. F. Dyer listed a sister and brother, aged 13 and 11 respectively, raised as house servants for private sale to residents of the District.[18]

On the other hand, owners rarely showed mercy to recovered fugitives and frequently sold them to faraway places, with devastating consequences to the slaves and their kin. These runaways were rarely sold within Washington, partly because local slave owners preferred

dependable, honest, and efficient slaves, not ones with reputations for trouble. In 1840, Hamilton Edmonson, whose family lived in Washington and Prince George's County, unsuccessfully tried to run away. Hamilton's owner sold the recalcitrant slave to a dealer, and a wealthy planter ultimately purchased him in New Orleans. The new owner changed Hamilton's surname to Taylor and intercepted the letters Hamilton wrote to his parents. Another aborted escape restored his ties with his family. His brother and sister were captured in 1848 on the schooner *Pearl*, which attempted to carry away more than 70 runaway slaves from Washington. Many of the recaptured fugitives were brought to New Orleans for sale. Two of the Edmonson siblings were among them and managed to find Hamilton.[19]

Washington provided more than transportation connections for dealers: slave pens dotted the neighborhoods of the city, particularly those near the Capitol. Visitors and residents regularly witnessed slave coffles and auctions. More importantly, District slave owners furnished a steady supply of slaves that supplemented those provided by Maryland owners. The District's active slave trade provided anti-slavery activists with a clear illustration of the contradictions of slavery and democracy.

Anti-slavery activists of all types pointed to Washington's slave depot to illustrate the horrors of slavery. Throughout the antebellum period, the anti-slavery movement included a spectrum of opinions about how to resolve the problem of slavery. Moderate reformers sought gradual and voluntary emancipation with provisions for a colony for newly freed blacks. Abolitionists desired immediate and federally imposed emancipation followed by an integrated society. Most in the movement fell between those extremes. In pamphlets, broadsides, and newspapers, anti-slavery activists argued that slavery undermined the republican and Christian character of the nation. The close proximity of slave pens and coffles to the Capitol provided activists with powerful symbols of freedom and slavery, indeed of good and evil.



Jesse Torrey helped foment anti-slavery and abolitionist protests of Washington slavery with his 1817 book, A Portraiture of Domestic Slavery in the United States. *Torrey successfully contrasted Washington as a symbol of freedom and justice with the reality of the city as "an emporium of slavery." From* The Moral Instructor *(1824).*

Throughout the antebellum period, anti-slavery activists referred to the rich descriptions of slavery provided by Jesse Torrey, a physician from Philadelphia, in *A Portraiture of Domestic Slavery in the United States*, published in 1817. Torrey's book

Slave coffles were regular features of Washington life. Washington served as a major depot in the interstate slave trade, so dealers were constantly moving slaves in from the surrounding countryside and out to points south. Abolitionists like Torrey decried the cruelty of the slave trade and juxtaposed it with the freedom supposedly symbolized by the Capitol, depicted in the background of this engraving. Courtesy, Library of Congress.

offered a comprehensive view of the players in the domestic slave trade with interviews with some of the principal actors, including slaves and dealers. Torrey concluded that slavery in a republic was unsuitable and advocated gradual and voluntary emancipation. He also believed that free blacks could never be equal to whites in American society and therefore advocated the creation of a colony for former slaves and their progeny. Torrey's argument helped lay the groundwork for the formation of the American Colonization Society in 1822, when it founded Liberia on the west coast of Africa. Over the next 40 years, 12,000 African Americans moved to that colony.[20]

Though he visited several areas in the South, Torrey concentrated on Washington. He juxtaposed the city as a symbol of the greatest experiment in republican government and "an emporium of slavery." He elaborated that the frequent "instances of the streets of the city consecrated to free-

A Slave-Coffle passing the Capitol.

dom, being paraded with people led in captivity" often included not only legal slaves "but many kidnapped freemen and youths bound to service for a term of years."[21]

On his way to a session of Congress, Torrey reported that his "agreeable reverie was suddenly interrupted by the voice of a stammering boy, who, as he was coming into the house, from the street, exclaimed, 'There goes the Ge-Ge-orgy men with a drove o' niggers chained together two and two.'" Torrey then turned his attention to "a light colored wagon a procession of men, women, and children resembling that of a funeral. . . They were [slaves] bound together in pairs, some with ropes, and some with iron chains." Torrey confronted the driver of this caravan and then learned that the slaves were going to Georgia. "'Have you not, said I, enough such people in that country yet?' 'Not quite enough,' he said. I found myself incapable of saying more, and was compelled to avert my eyes immediately from the heart-rending scene!" Torrey further investigated the situation and found that owners throughout Maryland, Delaware and the District threatened their slaves with sale to Georgia or "to Carolina" as punishment for bad behavior.[22]

Torrey further juxtaposed the imagery of slavery and the republic with an account of a manacled slave that he witnessed singing the national anthem in front of the Capitol in 1815. Several members of Congress witnessed the slave "elevating his manacles as high as he could reach," and breaking into the favorite national song, *"Hail Columbia! happy land."* Torrey interpreted this action as a compelling indication of the universality of the national ideals of freedom, as they moved even "Americans, with manacles on their hands and chains round their necks" to break out into song. More than simple patriotic feeling moved this slave to song. He demonstrated the contradictions of his status in a republic in this single defiant act. Perhaps his dealer viewed this act as resistance and later whipped him. But the slave made his point to at least one onlooker.[23]

One of the most infamous stories that Torrey recounted about Washington slavery was the suicide attempt of a slave woman awaiting transport to Georgia. She was so distraught over the prospect of being separated from her family that she threw herself from a third story window of a tavern on F Street. She survived the fall with multiple injuries, but not the separation from her family. From A Portraiture of Domestic Slavery in the United States *(1817).*

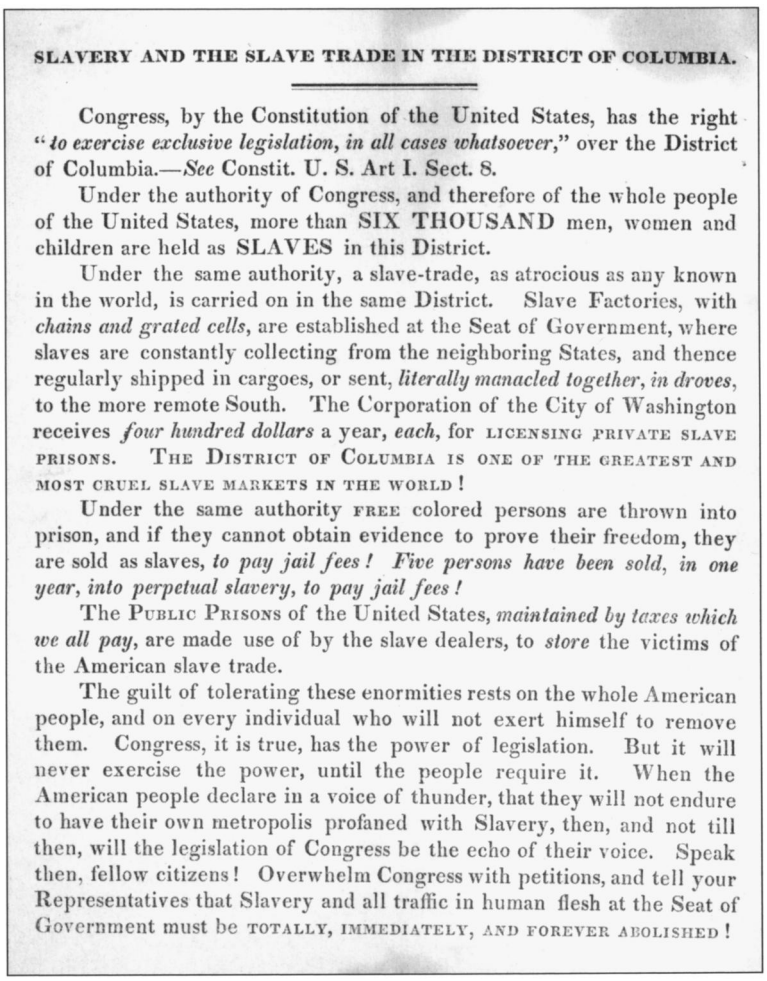
In addition to evoking the contradictions of slavery in a republic, Torrey demonstrated the anguish caused by family separation, most compellingly through the story of an attempted suicide by a slave woman awaiting transport to Georgia. When Torrey interviewed her, she lay in bed with two broken arms and a shattered spine. She had jumped from a window of a tavern located on F Street and later explained to Torrey:

> They brought me away with two of my children, and wouldn't let me see my husband — they didn't sell my husband, and I didn't want to go; — I was so confused and 'istracted, that I didn't know hardly what I was about — but I didn't want to go, and I jumped out of the window; — but I am sorry now that I did it; — they have carried my children off with 'em to Carolina.

Torrey sympathized with this woman's plight, as her family was spread "from north to south. . . without a shadow of a hope of ever hearing or seeing her *children* again!"[24]

An abolitionist movement aimed at the immediate emancipation of all slaves emerged in the next decade and intensified the spotlight on the District of Columbia. In 1831, William Lloyd Garrison published *The Liberator* to promote his abolitionist views. His calls for immediate and universal emancipation were so influential that pamphlets and broadsides adopting his argument flooded the northern states. The authors of these often made their case for abolition by using anecdotes of slavery in the nation's capital, including some borrowed from Torrey's book.[25] In the hands of abolitionists, these stories assumed new significance as abolitionists pressed the federal government to use its power to limit slavery in territories directly under its control, particularly the nation's capital. Abolitionists demanded the end of slavery and, failing that, the slave trade in the District.

A one-page broadside, "Slavery and the Slave Trade in the District of Columbia," demonstrates the rhetoric of the abolitionist movement. The authors of the broadside held Congress largely responsible for the existence of slavery and the slave trade in the District. It quoted the section of the U.S. Constitution that established the right of Congress "to exercise exclusive legislation, in all cases whatsoever" in the District. With implicit mandate



SLAVERY AND THE SLAVE TRADE IN THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA.

Congress, by the Constitution of the United States, has the right "*to exercise exclusive legislation, in all cases whatsoever,*" over the District of Columbia.—*See* Constit. U. S. Art I. Sect. 8.

Under the authority of Congress, and therefore of the whole people of the United States, more than SIX THOUSAND men, women and children are held as SLAVES in this District.

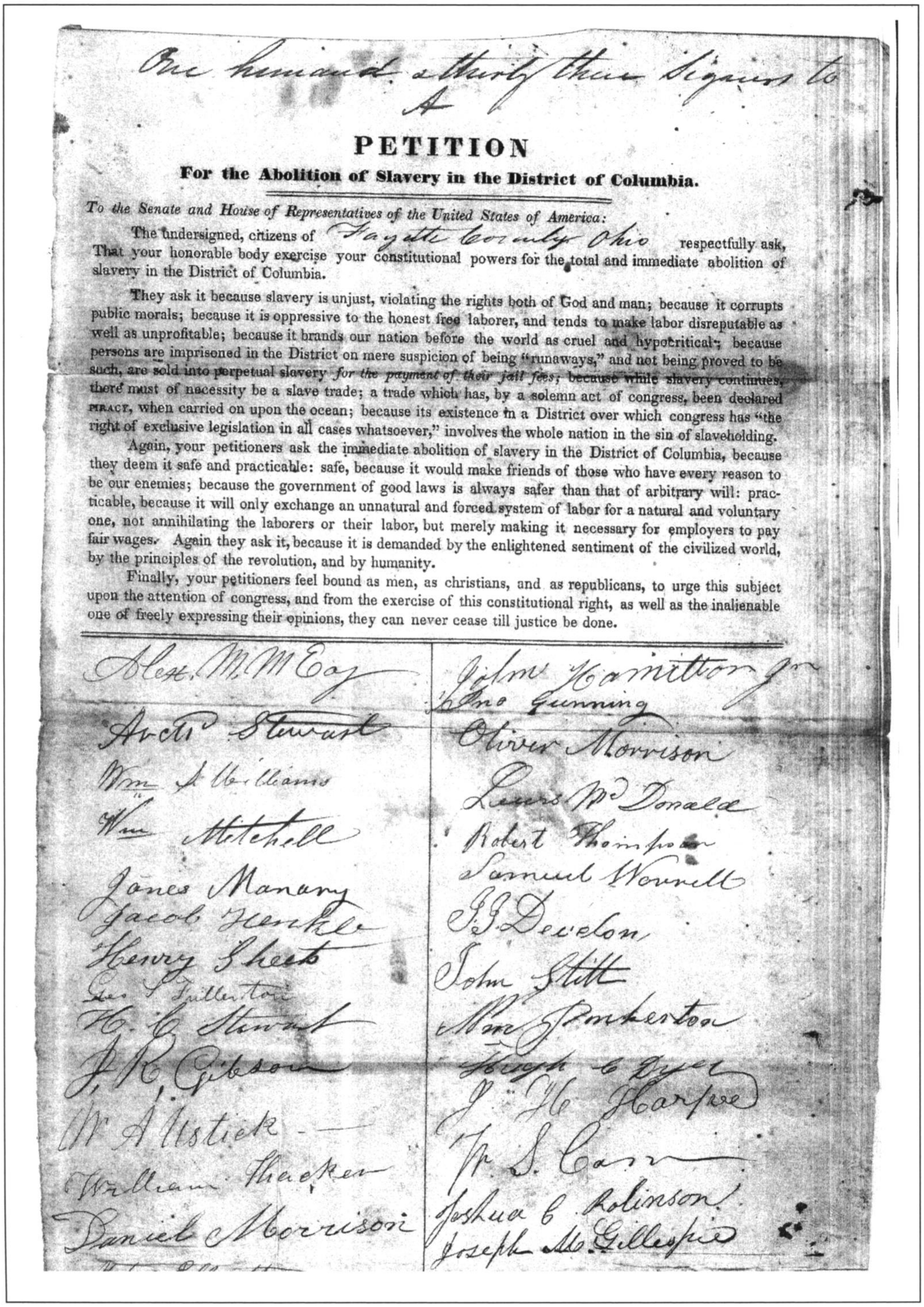
Under the same authority, a slave-trade, as atrocious as any known in the world, is carried on in the same District. Slave Factories, with *chains and grated cells*, are established at the Seat of Government, where slaves are constantly collecting from the neighboring States, and thence regularly shipped in cargoes, or sent, *literally manacled together, in droves*, to the more remote South. The Corporation of the City of Washington receives *four hundred dollars* a year, *each*, for LICENSING PRIVATE SLAVE PRISONS. THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA IS ONE OF THE GREATEST AND MOST CRUEL SLAVE MARKETS IN THE WORLD!

Under the same authority FREE colored persons are thrown into prison, and if they cannot obtain evidence to prove their freedom, they are sold as slaves, *to pay jail fees! Five persons have been sold, in one year, into perpetual slavery, to pay jail fees!*

The PUBLIC PRISONS of the United States, *maintained by taxes which we all pay*, are made use of by the slave dealers, to *store* the victims of the American slave trade.

The guilt of tolerating these enormities rests on the whole American people, and on every individual who will not exert himself to remove them. Congress, it is true, has the power of legislation. But it will never exercise the power, until the people require it. When the American people declare in a voice of thunder, that they will not endure to have their own metropolis profaned with Slavery, then, and not till then, will the legislation of Congress be the echo of their voice. Speak then, fellow citizens! Overwhelm Congress with petitions, and tell your Representatives that Slavery and all traffic in human flesh at the Seat of Government must be TOTALLY, IMMEDIATELY, AND FOREVER ABOLISHED!

This one-page broadside, "Slavery and the Slave Trade in the District of Columbia," is a good example of the rhetoric of the abolitionist movement. It urged citizens to "Overwhelm Congress with petitions" to abolish slavery in the District. Courtesy, HSW.



One hundred & thirty three Signers to
A

PETITION

For the Abolition of Slavery in the District of Columbia.

To the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America:

The undersigned, citizens of Fayette County Ohio respectfully ask, That your honorable body exercise your constitutional powers for the total and immediate abolition of slavery in the District of Columbia.

They ask it because slavery is unjust, violating the rights both of God and man; because it corrupts public morals; because it is oppressive to the honest free laborer, and tends to make labor disreputable as well as unprofitable; because it brands our nation before the world as cruel and hypocritical; because persons are imprisoned in the District on mere suspicion of being "runaways," and not being proved to be such, are sold into perpetual slavery *for the payment of their jail fees;* because while slavery continues, there must of necessity be a slave trade; a trade which has, by a solemn act of congress, been declared PIRACY, when carried on upon the ocean; because its existence in a District over which congress has "the right of exclusive legislation in all cases whatsoever," involves the whole nation in the sin of slaveholding.

Again, your petitioners ask the immediate abolition of slavery in the District of Columbia, because they deem it safe and practicable: safe, because it would make friends of those who have every reason to be our enemies; because the government of good laws is always safer than that of arbitrary will: practicable, because it will only exchange an unnatural and forced system of labor for a natural and voluntary one, not annihilating the laborers or their labor, but merely making it necessary for employers to pay fair wages. Again they ask it, because it is demanded by the enlightened sentiment of the civilized world, by the principles of the revolution, and by humanity.

Finally, your petitioners feel bound as men, as christians, and as republicans, to urge this subject upon the attention of congress, and from the exercise of this constitutional right, as well as the inalienable one of freely expressing their opinions, they can never cease till justice be done.

Alex. McMCoy	John Hamilton Jr
Arch Stewart	Jno Gunning
Wm J Williams	Oliver Morrison
Wm Mitchell	Lewis McDonald
Jones Manary	Robert Thompson
Jacob Henkle	Samuel Worrell
Henry Sheets	J. J. Develon
Geo Fullerton	John Stitt
H. C. Stewart	Wm Pinkerton
J. R. Gibson	Hugh C Dyer
W Alstick	J. H. Harper
William Thacker	W. S. Carr
Daniel Morrison	Joshua C Robinson
	Joseph McGillespie

This petition from Fayette County, Ohio, was one of thousands that inundated Congress in the 1830s. Reading the petitions so slowed the work of Congress that it voted in 1836 to table any further petitions relating to slavery. This decision became known as the "gag rule" and infuriated abolitionists. Courtesy, National Archives.

from Congress, the slave trade "as atrocious as any known in the world, is carried on in the same District. Slave Factories, with *chains and grated cells*, are established at the Seat of Government. . . and thence regularly shipped in cargoes, or sent, *literally manacled together, in droves*, to the remote South." The broadside further explained that congressional appropriations sustained the trade, as "the Corporation of the City of Washington receives *four hundred dollars* a year, *each*, for LICENSING PRIVATE SLAVE PRISONS. THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA IS ONE OF THE GREATEST AND MOST CRUEL SLAVE MARKETS IN THE WORLD!"[26]

Reflecting a commitment to Garrison's views, this broadside placed "the guilt of tolerating these enormities" on the nation as a whole. Congressional power would not be exercised until forced to do so. "When the American people declare in a voice of thunder, that they will not endure to have their own metropolis profaned with Slavery, then, and not till then, will the legislation of Congress be the echo of their voice." The broadside's authors advocated speaking out as a way to alleviate the guilt of previous inaction. "Overwhelm Congress with petitions, and tell your Representatives that Slavery and all traffic in human flesh at the Seat of Government must be TOTALLY, IMMEDIATELY AND FOREVER ABOLISHED!"[27]

Overwhelm Congress, they did. Abolitionists demonstrated the extent of their organization throughout the North and heartfelt advocacy of abolition by sending thousands of petitions to Congress between 1834 and 1837. Nearly all petitions borrowed text from a broadside, pamphlet, or newspaper. Most of these called for Congress to exercise its constitutional perogative and abolish slavery, or at least the slave trade. One petition from the city of New York even attributed its source as another memorial circulating in Massachusetts, citing "advantage in securing a large number of signatures to the same petitions." Organizers often cut and pasted the memorial text onto a long sheet and then acquired signatures, often numbering in the hundreds. These memorials provided women, who could not vote, a voice, as they signed in large numbers. The reading of these petitions so slowed the work of Congress that, in 1836, it issued a gag rule and thus tabled any petitions relating to slavery.[28]

These petitions invigorated the basic anti-slavery argument regarding the District with a moral urgency. Like earlier reformers such as Jesse Torrey, abolitionist petitioners could not square slavery with Christian and republican principles. Men and women from Burlington, New Jersey, asked Congress to abolish slavery in the District, as it was "utterly incompatible with the free institutions of our Republican Government."[29] Torrey had also provided the facts used by these petitioners. They justified calls for abolition by citing the evils of the slave trade, particularly the separation of families and the sale of suspected runaways imprisoned in District jails into slavery. Yet, petitioners echoed the call for action in "Slavery and the Slave Trade in the District of Columbia." Equating slavery with sin, these petitioners were asking Congress to remove a great evil. Men, women and children from Granville, New York, wrote of slavery as "a hainous[sic] sin against God, and a flagrant violation of the rights of man, inconsistent with Christianity" and "a national crime, exposing us to the judgments of Heaven." They asked for the abolition of slavery and the slave trade in the District for "the abatement and removal of this great evil."[30]

These petitions revealed how effectively organizers used the presence of slavery in the capital, and particularly the slave trade, to galvanize support for the movement as a whole. Activists spread images of chain gangs and slave pens in the shadow of the Capitol throughout the North to illustrate the incompatibility of slavery within the republic. This representation of the capital prompted large numbers of

northerners to political action and brought into national focus the practices of District slaveholders.

Local and national events after 1848 heightened national attention in District affairs. That year, two abolitionist seamen unsuccessfully tried to take 77 slaves from Washington and Georgetown to their freedom. This well-publicized affair and its aftermath provided anti-slavery activists further tangible evidence of slavery's evils and provoked congressional debate over slavery. The end of the Mexican War led to more congressional attention. The acquisition of the territories of California, New Mexico and Utah added urgency to the festering issue of federal authority over the expansion of slavery in its territories and new states. Congress did not separate the District from this broader consideration.

In 1848, a viable anti-slavery newspaper opened in Washington. Gamaliel Bailey, an abolitionist from Ohio, established the *National Era* near Center Market at Seventh Street and Pennsylvania Avenue. Bailey sought the abolition of slavery, but denounced violent action as he maintained that states, not the federal government, legitimately held the political power to emancipate slaves. Bailey's interpretation of the Constitution did concede federal power over the District, however, including its slave system. He defined his audience as the anti-slavery movement as a whole rather than any particular segment within it.[31]

His efforts coincided with other activists' efforts to assist 77 slaves to escape the city. Earlier that year, Paul Jennings, a free servant belonging to Daniel Webster, contacted abolitionist seaman Daniel Drayton to arrange for the transport of two slave families to Philadelphia on his schooner *Pearl*. As word spread of this venture within the African-American community, the plot mushroomed. On April 15, 38 men, 26 women, and 13 children boarded the schooner with plans of sailing from Washington towards their ultimate destination of Philadelphia. Upon discovery of their missing slaves, owners quickly mobilized, organizing a posse that used a steamship to catch the *Pearl* on the Potomac approximately 140 miles from Washington.[32]

District whites blamed the influence of northern anti-slavery activists, particularly Gamaliel Bailey, founder of the *National Era* newspaper, for this mass escape. Mobs of angry whites engaged in stone throwing, pillaged the area around Center Market in Washington, destroyed Bailey's offices, and brutally attacked abolitionist Representative Joshua Giddings of Ohio who, on the House floor, argued that Drayton and Sayres exercised their constitutional rights by taking the slaves to free territory. On April 20, the riots ended.[33] In response, anti-slavery Senator Everett Hale of New Hampshire introduced anti-riot legislation for the District of Columbia and provoked a debate regarding the extent to which mobs could organize to protect the rights of slaveholders.[34]

In the meantime, slaveholders punished their recovered slaves. Most of the 77 awaited their sale in the Washington Jail, although some owners authorized the transfer of their renegade slaves to the Alexandria slave pens and sold them south without delay. Meanwhile, members of their families sought means of preventing their sale, but most of the prisoners were unable to visit and talk to their kin and friends before their transfer south. Slave dealers led 50 fugitives onto a railroad car at a depot for transport to Georgia. Fearful of never seeing their kin again, many of the onlooking blacks clung desperately to their parents, spouses, and children who boarded this train.[35]

This scene received attention throughout the North and reinforced the prevalent negative characterization of the city's slave system. The *Boston Whig* reported:

> An Affecting Scene—Last eve as I passed the railroad depot, I saw quite a large number of colored people gathered round

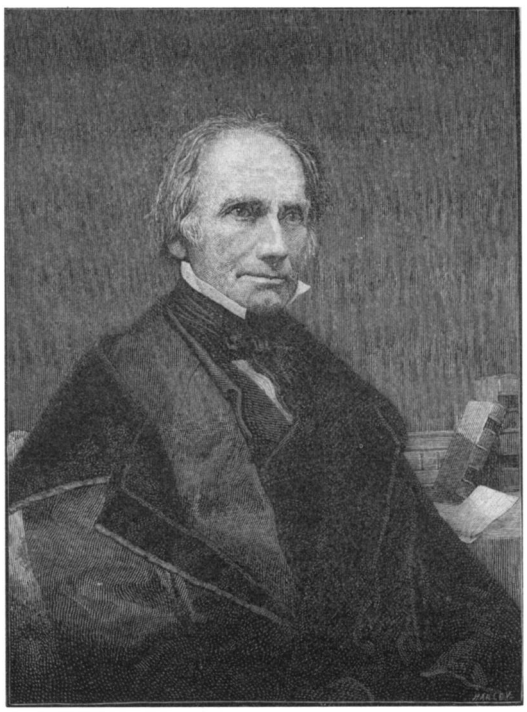
> one of the cars. . . I found in the car towards which they were so eagerly gazing fifty colored people some of whom were nearly as white as myself. A majority of them were among those who attempted to gain their liberty last week. . . The men on the train were ironed together. [At the end of the car]. . . stood two ruffianly looking personages, with large canes in their hands and if their countenances were an indication of their hearts, they were the personification of hardened villainy itself.[36]

One reporter described the break up of families and the kidnapping of a free black:

> Wives were there to take leave of their husbands, and husbands of their wives, children of their parents, and parents of their children. Friends parting with friends, and the tenderest ties of humanity severed at a single word of the inhuman Slave Broker before them. A husband, in the meridian of life, begged to see the partner of his bosom. He protested that she was free—that she had free papers, and was torn away from him and shut up in the jail. He clambered up to one of the windows of the car to see his wife, and, as she was reaching forward her hand to him, the black-hearted Slave Dealer ordered him down. He did not obey!
>
> The husband and wife, with tears streaming down their cheeks, besought him to let them speak to each other. But no; he was knocked down from the car, and ordered away! The bystanders could hardly refrain laying violent hands upon the brute.[37]

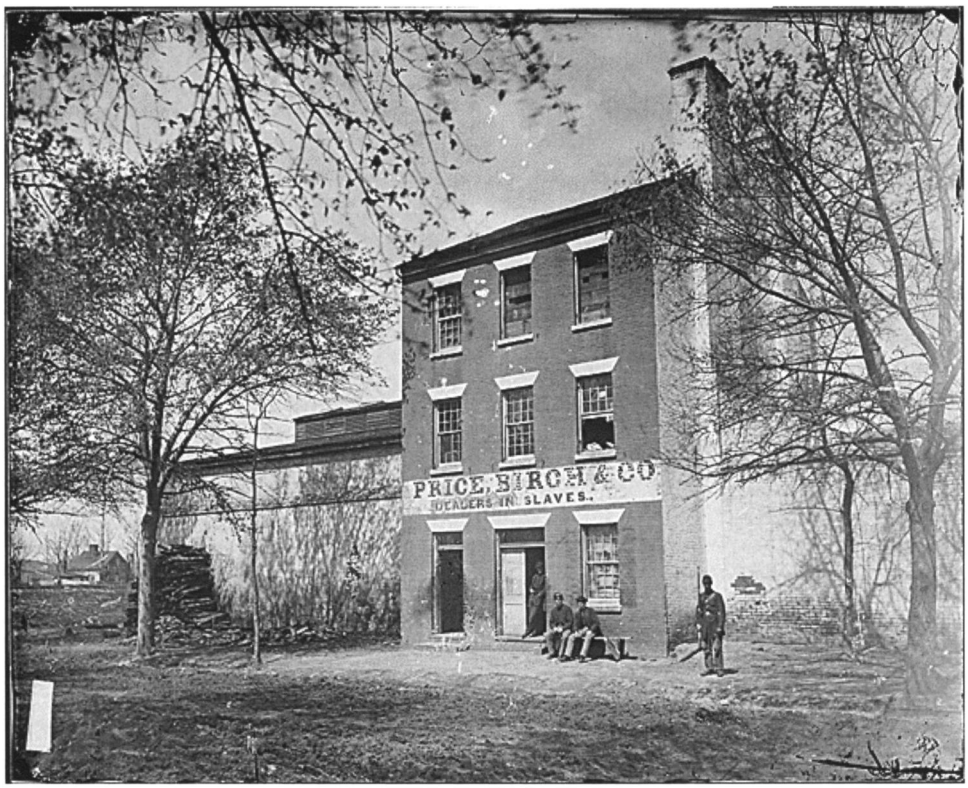
True to form, anti-slavery organs concentrated on the slave trade and its consequences in addition to reporting the escape itself.

As reports of the *Pearl* affair fueled the controversy surrounding the District, Senator Henry Clay of Kentucky proposed the abolition of its slave depot as part of the Compromise of 1850, which also included provisions for the admission of California as a free state, a harsh fugitive slave law that allowed owners to enter free states and form posses to seize their runaway slaves without legal proof of ownership. His outlook was similar to his neighbors in and around the District. Slavery was in decline in Kentucky, just as in Maryland and the District. A national politician since 1808, Clay used slaves to serve his household in Washington. Like most of his neighbors, Clay did not oppose slavery. Holding that ground in Congress, he navigated between the extreme anti- and pro-slavery positions.[38]



Senator Henry Clay of Kentucky helped broker the Compromise of 1850, which included a provision to end the slave trade in the District of Columbia. A slaveholder himself, Clay did not oppose slavery nor the slave trade, but hoped to remove Washington from the abolitionist spotlight. Southern congressmen protested any federal interference with slavery, but also recognized how little the Compromise did to actually end the slave trade in Washington. With slave territory just across the Potomac River in recently retroceded Alexandria, Virginia, Washingtonians could still partake of the trade at their convenience. Courtesy, HSW.

Clay wanted to lay to rest the heated issue of abolition in the District of Columbia. By the end of September 1850, he successfully guided the ban of Washington's depot, in part because he knew it would hardly affect the slave sys-



"Price, Birch & Co., Dealer in Slaves" operated in Alexandria even after the Compromise of 1850. Alexandria became one of the most active slave trading centers in the decade before the Civil War. Courtesy, Library of Congress.

tem in the District or the nation as a whole. The final bill read:

> That from and after the first day of January, eighteen hundred and fifty-one, it shall not be lawful to bring into the District of Columbia any slave whatever for the purpose of being sold, or for the purpose of being placed in depot, to be subsequently transferred to any other State or place to be sold as merchandize. And if any slave shall be brought into the said District by its owner, or by the authority or consent of its owner, contrary to the provisions of this act, such slave shall thereupon become liberated and free.[39]

Every member of Congress who voted on that bill understood that it merely ended the transport of slaves into the District for sale, affecting Maryland owners in particular, without diminishing the ability of District slave owners to sell their slaves. Accordingly, Senators Thomas G. Pratt and James A. Pearce of Maryland vitriolically opposed the measure. Clay reminded the congressmen of the advantage of Alexandria's retrocession back to Virginia in 1846. At worst, crossing the river presented an inconvenience to Maryland owners, as Alexandria completely absorbed the District's role and emerged as the major slave depot of the South during the 1850s.[40]

At the least, Clay hoped to remove the source of negative images of the District. Even a longstanding slaveholder such as Clay found abhorrent the images of coffles:

> Why should the feelings of those who are outraged by the scenes that are exhibited, by the corteges which pass along our avenues of manacled human beings—not collected in our own District, nor in our own neighborhood, but brought from distant

> portions of the neighboring States—why should the feelings of those who are outraged by such scenes—who are unable to contemplate such a spectacle without horror—why should they be thus outraged by the continuance of a trade so exceptionable, so repugnant, as this?[41]

More important, Clay saw that the District would remain at the center of the debate as long as these images provoked horror. He wanted to remove them to give District residents the peace they deserved.

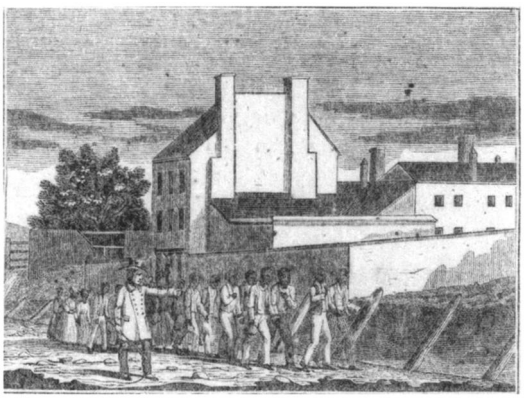
Though apparently innocuous, this bill generated intense reaction among southern congressmen who objected to federal interference in slavery on principle. In two successive conventions, in February and June of 1850, representatives from southern states, including Maryland, threatened secession if the federal government regulated any aspect of the slave trade, Washington's in particular. When the bill finally passed, the southerners took no special action, however. Clay hoped the bill would remove the nation's capital from the center of the great debate. In the initial compromise proposal, Clay introduced a companion bill to reassure District slaveholders that Congress would not interfere with their right to hold slaves. It set conditions for emancipation in the District: compensation for owners and the expressed approval of its own and Maryland citizens. This provision did not allay anxieties. Northern congressmen refused to surrender one of the central planks of the anti-slavery movement. Meanwhile, southerners considered even these conditions a federal intrusion upon slavery.[42]

Within Congress as in the public, the anti-slavery argument concerning the slave depot in the capital was effective. Though radical southerners argued otherwise, most congressmen regarded their authority over the slave system within the capital as legitimate. In addition, the oft-mentioned chains, pens, and whips provoked disgust among those outside the movement as well. Anti-slavery rhetoric prompted at least one slave owner, Henry Clay, to reform, at least to some degree.

Though local residents resented the attention of the anti-slavery movement to their way of life, the reaction to the compromise measure was muted. In the mid-nineteenth century, most newspapers did not offer daily editorials, particularly on local events, so evidence of contemporary attitudes towards Congress is scant. Two distinct editorial opinions have survived however. Both deplored federal interference and anti-slavery agitation in the District of Columbia.

Shortly after Clay's initial compromise proposal, Robert Gales and W. W. Seaton of the *National Intelligencer* wrote a widely reprinted article that placed responsibility for the growing sectional conflict upon federal interference. The editors emphasized that they spoke reluctantly on the issue of slavery: "we have studiously refrained from adding, by any voluntary act of ours, fuel to the flame." Yet, "the progress of this hateful contest" induced them to speak out. They characterized the extreme views of Garrisonian abolitionists as mad fanaticism and sympathized with southerners who sought to defend slavery but condemned secession as an alternative to the Union. Gales and Seaton believed, however, that the views of North and South could be reconciled if the federal government refrained from regulating slavery, a local institution.[43]

The editors of the *National Intelligencer* blamed anti-slavery petitioners for much of this interference. From the ratification of the Constitution, anti-slavery activists had asked "Congress to do what was not within the power of Congress—that is to say, to interfere with the relation of slavery in the States in which it existed when the Constitution was framed." Gales and Seaton argued that the continued stream of memorials created undue excitement in Congress in the form of "offensive demonstrations from the People of the Non-slaveholding States." They sympathized with



Franklin and Armfield was one of the largest slave trading companies in the United States. Located off of Duke Street in Alexandria, it was one of several companies that continued to provide slave trading services to Washingtonians after the Compromise of 1850. HSW.

southern members of Congress, as the petitions "led at length to a state of exasperation of the public mind of the South."[44]

Intense resentment of anti-slavery petitioners comes across loud and clear. The memorials regarding the District constituted the overwhelming majority of petitions received by Congress between 1835 and 1840. As no others, these petitions instigated the excitement on the floor of Congress that so angered Gales and Seaton. Perhaps these editors generalized for rhetorical effect, hoping to enlist broad support for local concerns by arguing in broad, overarching principles. Regardless, their weariness with anti-slavery tactics was clear.

Throughout this editorial, Gales and Seaton did not specifically mention the peculiar position of the District of Columbia in the sectional conflict, though their attitude is discernible. Certainly, their constitutional arguments for local autonomy easily extended to the District. They invoked the sanctity of local law prior to the formation of the Constitution, that is, before the creation of a federal capital. In their view, federal law did not supercede Maryland law. Congress could not therefore legislate upon matters affecting District slaves.

The Republic, a pro-slavery newspaper, conceded that the abolition of Washington's slave depots would diffuse the attention of abolitionists and therefore they embraced the bill. *The Republic*'s editors maintained the bill would ultimately strengthen the institution of slavery locally and nationally. The editors contended that northerners and foreigners, who seldom knew "of the comfort or content of the slave," had wrongly attempted to make the District's trade an example for the rest of the South. *Republic* editors recognized the power of abolitionist rhetoric by belittling it:

> The neophyte of abolition is pointed to the slave jail as a miniature Bastile — 'whips, racks, and scorpions dance through his excited imagination.' He slinks by in silent horror, and departs from the District of Columbia with a soul as thankful as if he had just escaped from the coast of Barbary. His whole opinions of slavery are formed upon the imaginary cruelties of the slave trade in the District.

Noting that the number of slave pens in the District equaled those in the entire state of Virginia, *The Republic* asserted the Washington depot hardly represented the South as a whole: "The South should no more desire to expose this penal peculiarity of their institutions to misrepresentations and to censure." In their view, the compromise measure removed the glare from not only the District but also from the South. Such acceptance of the ban by a proslavery newspaper proves how meaningless the bill really was.[45]

In addition, an active slave trade still operated in and around Washington after 1850. Perusal of the *National Intelligencer* reveals that owners frequently traded slaves with each other.[46] In other instances, they sold their slaves south. In 1853, *The National Era* depicted a slave auction that resulted in the sale of a ten-year-old girl to a judge from Georgia.[47] During the late summer of 1860, a Georgetown owner sold Sarah Maranda Plummer to a slave trader who first held her in a pen in Alexandria for two months and then conveyed her to

New Orleans. Sarah Maranda used her time in the pen to say her good-byes to her family, though neither her father nor her mother could get away from their respective farms in Hyattsville and Mount Hebron (near Baltimore).[48]

The ban of the Washington slave depot neither ended the proliferation of its repressive images nor the trade of slaves in Washington. Activists continued to feature the District's slave depot in the anti-slavery literature. In 1852, *The National Era* published in serial form *Uncle Tom's Cabin* by Harriett Beecher Stowe. Published as a book, this novel sold 10,000 copies in the first week and 300,000 during the next year. In a subsequent publication, Stowe explained that she based several of her fictional accounts about the slave trade and escapes on some Washington slaves. In 1853, Solomon Northup published his memoir detailing his kidnapping, enslavement and rescue with tremendous impact, as the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850 denied due process to alleged runaways seized by slave owners. Its full nineteenth-century title brought attention to the old depot: *Twelve Years a Slave, Narrative of Solomon Northup, a Citizen of New York, Kidnapped in Washington City in 1841, and Rescued in 1853, from a Cotton Plantation Near the Red River in Louisiana.*

The ban of the slave depot within the Compromise of 1850 was largely an ineffective measure. Even its author, Henry Clay, understood that the bill would not affect District slave owners. He anticipated that the removal of the depot would shift the attention of anti-slavery reformers away from the District. Weary of the constant agitation, many District residents were willing to sacrifice local autonomy to diffuse the gaze of northern reformers. Their hopes were in vain, as the images lived on in pamphlets, books, and other printed matter.

Anti-slavery reformers drew a rich and largely accurate portrait of Washington's slave depot that effectively motivated large numbers of northerners to call for the end of slavery. The juxtaposition of the most odious aspects of slavery with the symbols of the democratic republic provided powerful illustrations of the central contradictions of slavery in a republic. As abolitionism took hold, organizers used these images to press for immediate emancipation. By the 1850s, Congress appeased these demands and legislated a mild, and largely ineffective, reform of the District's system. Not until emancipation did the District see relief from northern attention on the point of slavery. In 1862, Congress provided for the emancipation of more than 3,000 slaves living in the city. Unlike the end of the slave trade, the end of slavery brought widespread changes for both the white and black residents of Washington. ◻

NOTES

1. This article is based largely on research for my dissertation, "A Social Union of Heart and Effort: The African-American Family in the District of Columbia on the Eve of Emancipation" Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Maryland, 1996. On Washington's role as a slave depot, see Michael Tadman, *Speculators and Slaves: Masters, Traders, and Slaves in the Old South* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), 11-82.
2. The concept of the middle ground is borrowed from Barbara J. Fields, *Slavery and Freedom on the Middle Ground: Maryland During the Nineteenth Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 40-63; U.S. Census Bureau, *The Seventh Census of the United States: 1850* (Washington, D.C.: Robert Armstrong, 1853), 232-35.
3. For the most influential portrayals of the African-American community, see Letitia Woods Brown, *Free Negroes in the District of Columbia: 1790-1846* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972); and, Constance McLaughlin Green, *Washington: Village and Capital* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1962).
4. U.S. Census Bureau, *Fifth Census or Enumeration of the Inhabitants of the United States, 1830* (Washington: Duff Green, 1832), 10-11, 160-63; idem, *The Population of the United States in 1860* prepared by Joseph G. Kennedy (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1864), 588.
5. For an elaboration of this view, see Mary Beth Corrigan, "It's a Family Affair: Buying Freedom in the District of Columbia, 1850-1860," in Larry Hudson, ed., *Working Toward Freedom: Slave Society and Domestic Economy in the American South* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 1994), 163-91. On the deleterious impact of urban slavery upon family ties, see Richard C. Wade, *Slavery in the Cities: The South, 1820-1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), 117-21, and Herbert G. Gutman, *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom, 1750-1925* (New York: Pantheon, 1976), 564-65n.
6. U.S. Census Bureau, *Fifth Census*, 10-11, 160-63; *The Population of the United States in 1860*, 588; Ira Berlin, *Slaves Without Masters: The Free Negro in the Antebellum South* (New York: Pantheon, 1974), 396-99. Michael Tadman mistakenly attributes the decline in the slave population in Maryland and District solely to the slave trade, *Speculators and Slaves*, 11-12.
7. Mary Beth Corrigan, "The Ties That Bind: The Pursuit of Community and Freedom among Slaves and Free Blacks in the District of Columbia, 1800-1860," in Howard Gillette, ed., *Southern City, National Ambition: The Growth of Early Washington, D.C.* (Washington: The American Architectural Foundation and The George Washington University Center for Washington Area Studies, 1995), 70-73.
8. U.S. Census Bureau, *Fifth Census*, 10-11, 160-63; *The Population of the United States in 1860*, 588.
9. Letitia Woods Brown argues that the non-importation law effectively limited the District's slave trade to its own borders. See *Free Negroes*, 121-25.
10. Brown, *Free Negroes*, 122; *Negro John Battles v. Thomas Miller*, Cranch Circuit Court Reports, v. 3 (May Term 1828), 296-98.
11. *Negro Maria v. White*, Cranch Circuit Court Reports, v. 3 (December Term, 1929), 662-63; *Negro Christopher Harris v. Nelly Alexander*, Cranch Circuit Court Reports, v. 4 (April Term, 1830) 1-3.
12. *National Intelligencer*, Jan. 2, 1846.
13. Quoted in Tadman, *Speculators and Slaves*, 67.
14. Worthington G. Snethen, *The Black Code of the District of Columbia* (New York: American and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society, 1848), 38-39.
15. Solomon Northrup, *Twenty Years A Slave*, edited by Sue Eakin and Joseph Logsdon (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1968), 12-40.
16. Snethen, *The Black Code of the District of Columbia*, 12-13; Old Capitol Prison Journal, Anacostia Neighborhood Museum, Washington, D.C.
17. *The National Era*, Jan. 6, 1853.
18. *National Intelligencer*, May 22, 1847, and Nov. 21, 1849.
19. John Paynter, *The Fugitives of the Pearl* (Washington: Associated Publishers, 1930), 154-56.
20. Jesse Torrey, *American Slave Trade* (Philadelphia. by the author, 1817: repr. ed. London: J.M. Cobbett, 1822). Torrey had changed his title for the reprint edition.
21. Ibid., 66.
22. Ibid., 54-55. See also Jesse Torrey, "A Portraiture of Domestic Slavery" (Philadelphia: 1817) reprinted on the Africans in America website, http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/part3/3h324t.html.
23. Jesse Torrey, *American Slave Trade*, 64.
24. Torrey, *American Slave Trade*, 69-70; W.B. Bryan, "A Fire in an Old Time F Street Tavern and What it Revealed," *Records of the Columbia Historical Society* 9 (1906), 198-215.
25. For example, see the American Anti-Slavery Society's use of Torrey's account of the singing manacled slave passing the Capitol in *The Liberty Almanac*, 1847.
26. Emphasis in original. "Slavery and the Slave Trade in the District of Columbia" (Washington, D.C., n.d.) in "An American Time Capsule: Three Centuries of Broadsides and Other Printed

Ephemera," American Memory, Library of Congress, http://memory.loc.gov/.

27. Emphasis in original.
28. Petitions and Memorials Laid on the Table Concerning Slavery in the District of Columbia, 25th Congress, 1837, Record Group 233: Records of the House of Representatives, National Archives; particularly tray 1, folder 5 for the individual petition cited above. On the impact of the petitions in Congress, see Dwight L. Dumond, *Antislavery: The Crusade for Freedom in America* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1961), 234-41.
29. Petitions on Slavery in the District of Columbia, Tray 1, Folder 4.
30. Ibid., Tray 1, Folder 5.
31. *The National Era*, Jan. 24, 1850.
32. Daniel Drayton, "Personal Memoir of Daniel Drayton," in Paul Finkelman, ed., *Slavery, Race and the American Courts, ser. 4, Slave Rebels, Abolitionists, and Southern Courts*, vol. 2 (New York: Garland Publishing, 1988), 490-93; *The National Intelligencer*, Apr. 19, 1848; John H. Paynter, *Fugitives of the Pearl* (Washington: Associated Publishers, 1930), 20-36, 50-51.
33. *The National Intelligencer*, Apr. 21 and 24, 1848; *Congressional Globe Appendix*, 30th Cong., 1st sess., vol. 19 (Apr. 25, 1848): 518-23.
34. *Congressional Globe*, 30th Cong., 1st sess., vol. 18 (Apr. 20, 1848): 656; *Congressional Globe Appendix* 30th Cong., 1st sess., vol. 19 (Apr. 20, 1848): 500-10.
35. "Captains Drayton and Sayres: Or, the Way in Which Americans are Treated, for Aiding the Cause of Liberty at Home," in *Slave Rebels, Abolitionists, and Southern Courts*, vol. 2, 440; see also Paynter, "The Fugitives of the Pearl," *Journal of Negro History* 1 (July 1916), 251.
36. Quoted in Tadman, *Speculators and Slaves*, 79.
37. "Captains Drayton and Sayres," in *Slave Rebels, Abolitionists, and Southern Courts*, vol. 2, 440.
38. Between 1826 and 1830, Henry Clay resided at Decatur House (726 Jackson Place, N.W.), now a museum administered by the National Trust for Historic Preservation. Their exhibitions feature his slaves.
39. *U.S. Statutes at Large*, vol. 9: (Sept. 20, 1850): 467-68.
40. *Congressional Globe Appendix*, 31st Cong., 2nd Sess., vol. 22: pt. 1 (Feb. 6, 1850), 120-127.
41. *Congressional Globe Appendix*, 31st Cong., 2nd Sess., vol. 22: (pt. 1: Feb. 6, 1850), 122.
42. *Congressional Globe Appendix*, 31st Cong., 2nd Sess., vol. 22: pt. 1 (Feb. 6 & 13, 1850), 122, 152-153; pt. 2 (Sept. 3-28, 1850), 1630-74.
43. *The National Intelligencer*, Feb. 2, 1850. Gales and Seaton received support of their views from *The Georgetown Advocate*, Mar. 2, 1850.
44. Ibid.
45. *The Republic*, Sept. 16, 1850.
46. For more on the slave trade, including an examination of advertisements placed in *The National Intelligencer* during the 1850s, see Corrigan, "A Social Union of Heart and Effort," 222-45.
47. *The National Era*, Jan. 6, 1853.
48. Emily Plummer to Adam Plummer, Sept. 7 and 18, 1860 and Sarah Maranda Plummer to Emily Plummer, May 24, 1861, in Carter Woodson, ed., *The Mind of the Negro as Reflected in Letters Written During the Crisis, 1800-1860* (New York: Negro Universities Press, 1926), 527-28.