THE HALF HAS NEVER BEEN TOLD

Slavery and the Making of American Capitalism

EDWARD E. BAPTIST

Published by Basic Books,
A Member of the Perseus Books Group

Designed by Timm Bryson

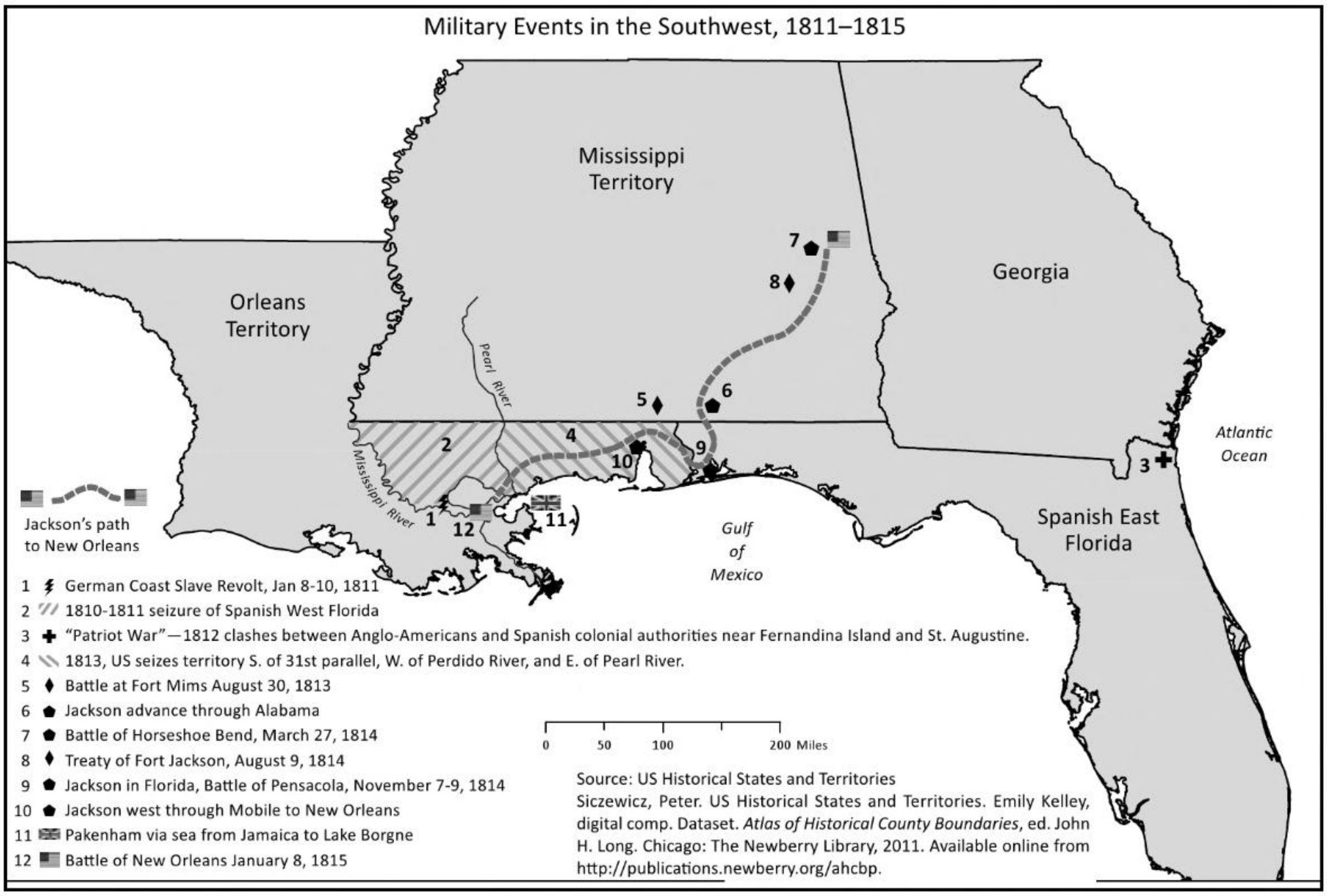
Baptist, Edward E.
The half has never been told : slavery and the making of American capitalism / Edward E. Baptist.
pages cm
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 978-0-465-00296-2 (hardcover : alk. paper) — ISBN 978-0-465-04470-2 (e-book)
1. Slavery—United States—History. 2. Slavery—Economic aspects—United States—History. 3. African Americans—Social conditions—History. I. Title.
E441.B337 2014
306.3'620973--dc23

2014012546

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

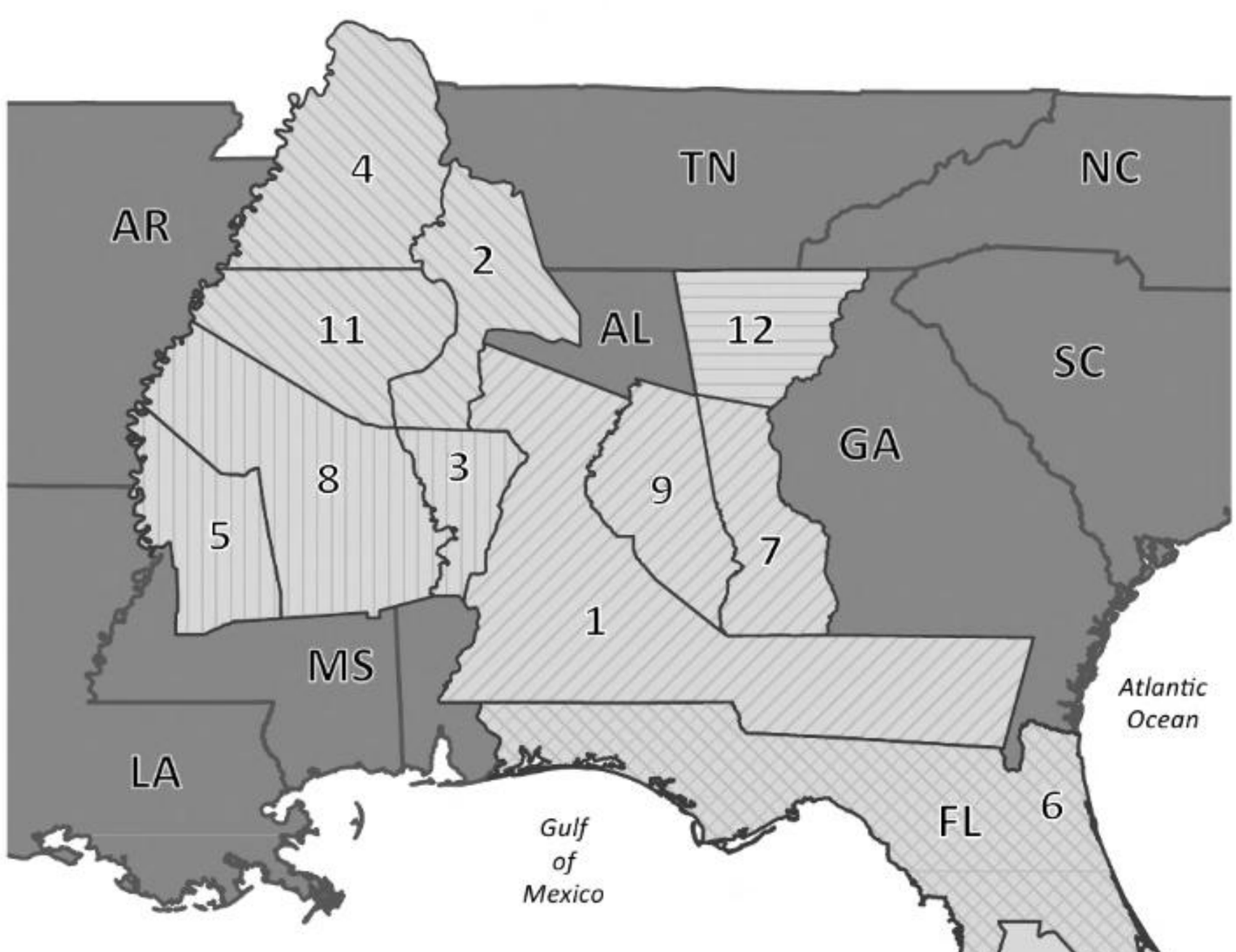
CONTENTS

Military Events in the Southwest, 1811–1815



Source: US Historical States and Territories
Siczewicz, Peter. US Historical States and Territories. Emily Kelley, digital comp. Dataset. *Atlas of Historical County Boundaries*, ed. John H. Long. Chicago: The Newberry Library, 2011. Available online from http://publications.newberry.org/ahcbp.

Major US Acquisitions of Cotton Land from Native American Nations, 1814–1840



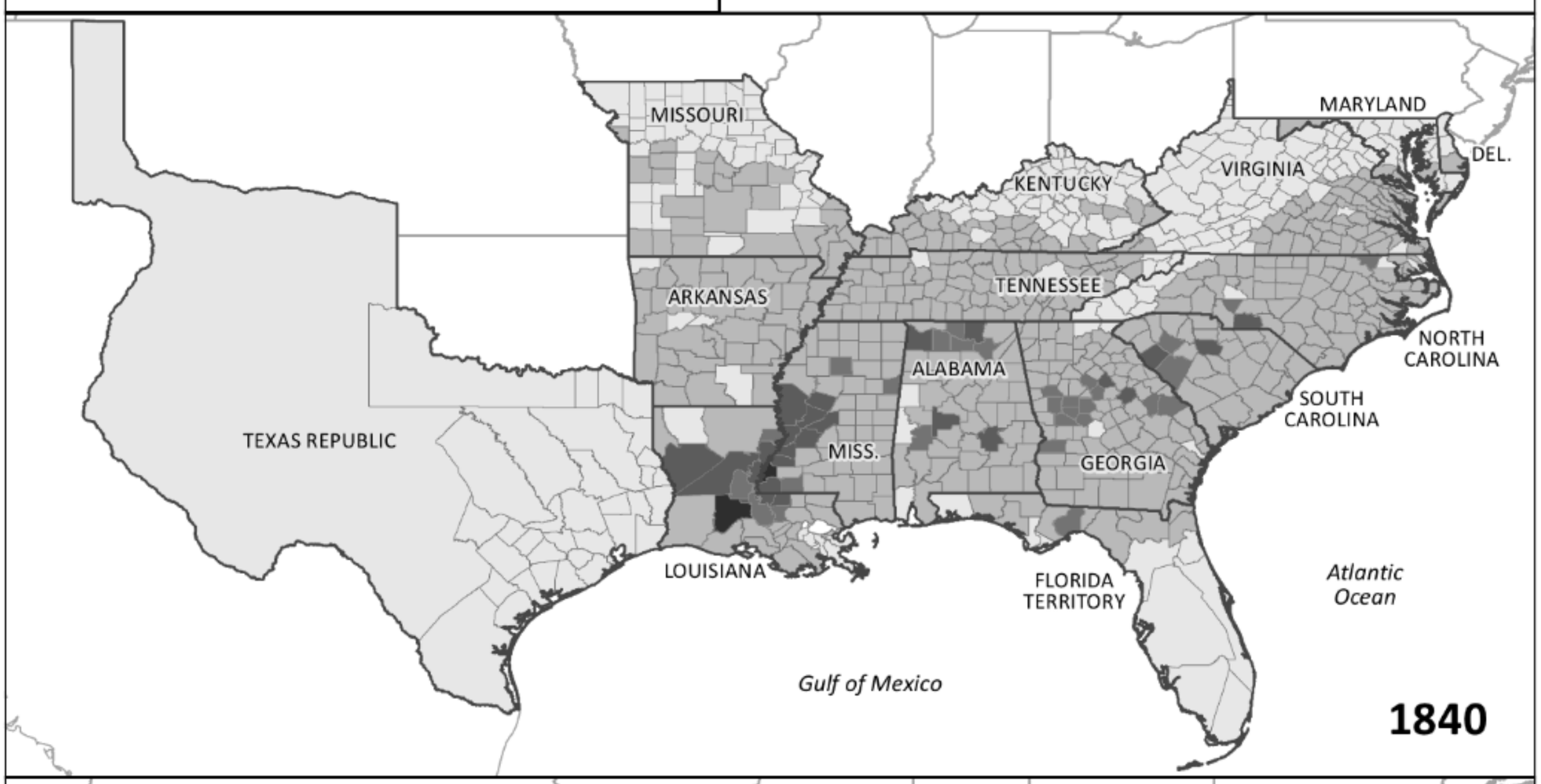
Source: US Historical States and Territories
Siczewicz, Peter. US Historical States and Territories. Emily Kelley, digital comp. Dataset. *Atlas of Historical County Boundaries*, ed. John H. Long. Chicago: The Newberry Library, 2011. Available online from http://publications.newberry.org/ahcbp.

Distribution of Cotton Production by County, 1800, 1840, and 1860

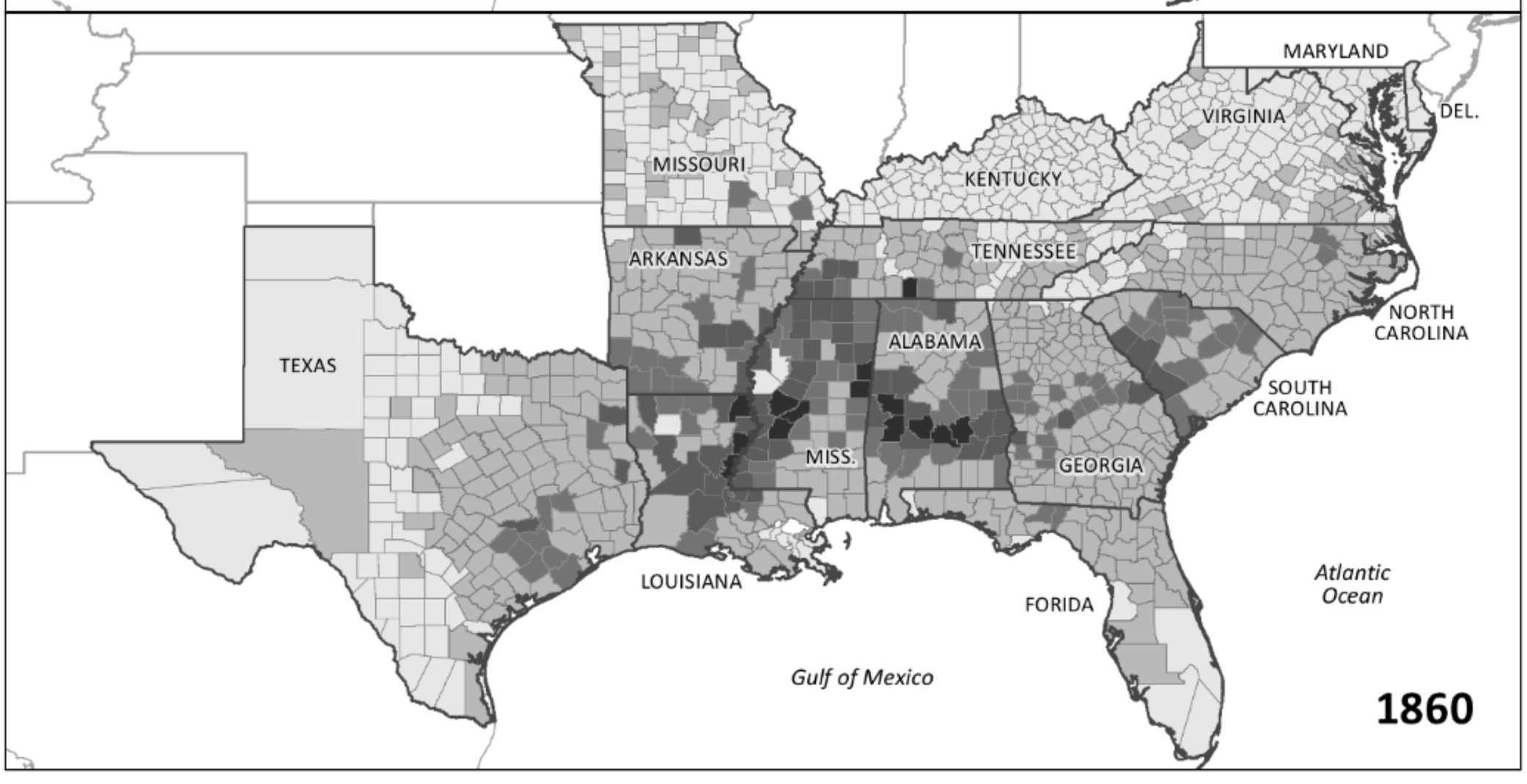
Bales of Cotton
(1 Bale = 400 Pounds)

- 0 or No Data
- 1 - 4,999
- 5,000 - 9,999
- 10,000 - 19,999
- 20,000 - 49,999
- 50,000 - 150,000

1800



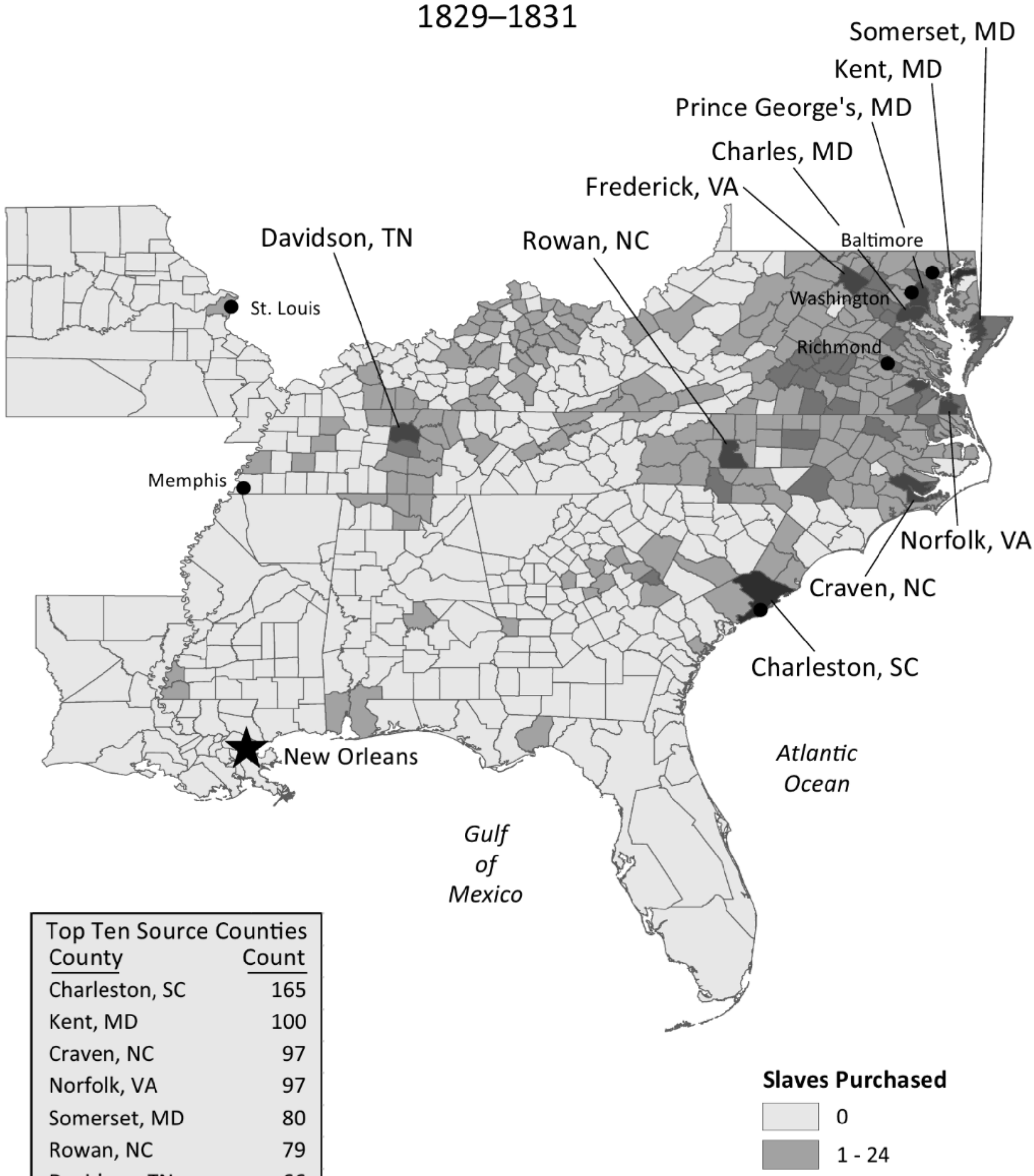
1840



1860

Source: US Census, 1840, 1860.
Gray, L. C., and Esther Catherine Thompson, *History of Agriculture in the Southern United States to 1860*. Washington, DC: The Carnegie Institution of Washington, 1933.

Domestic Slave Trade: Slave Purchases, by County, for Resale in New Orleans, LA, 1829–1831



Top Ten Source Counties	
County	Count
Charleston, SC	165
Kent, MD	100
Craven, NC	97
Norfolk, VA	97
Somerset, MD	80
Rowan, NC	79
Davidson, TN	66
Frederick, VA	63
Prince George's, MD	62
Charles, MD	57

Slaves Purchased

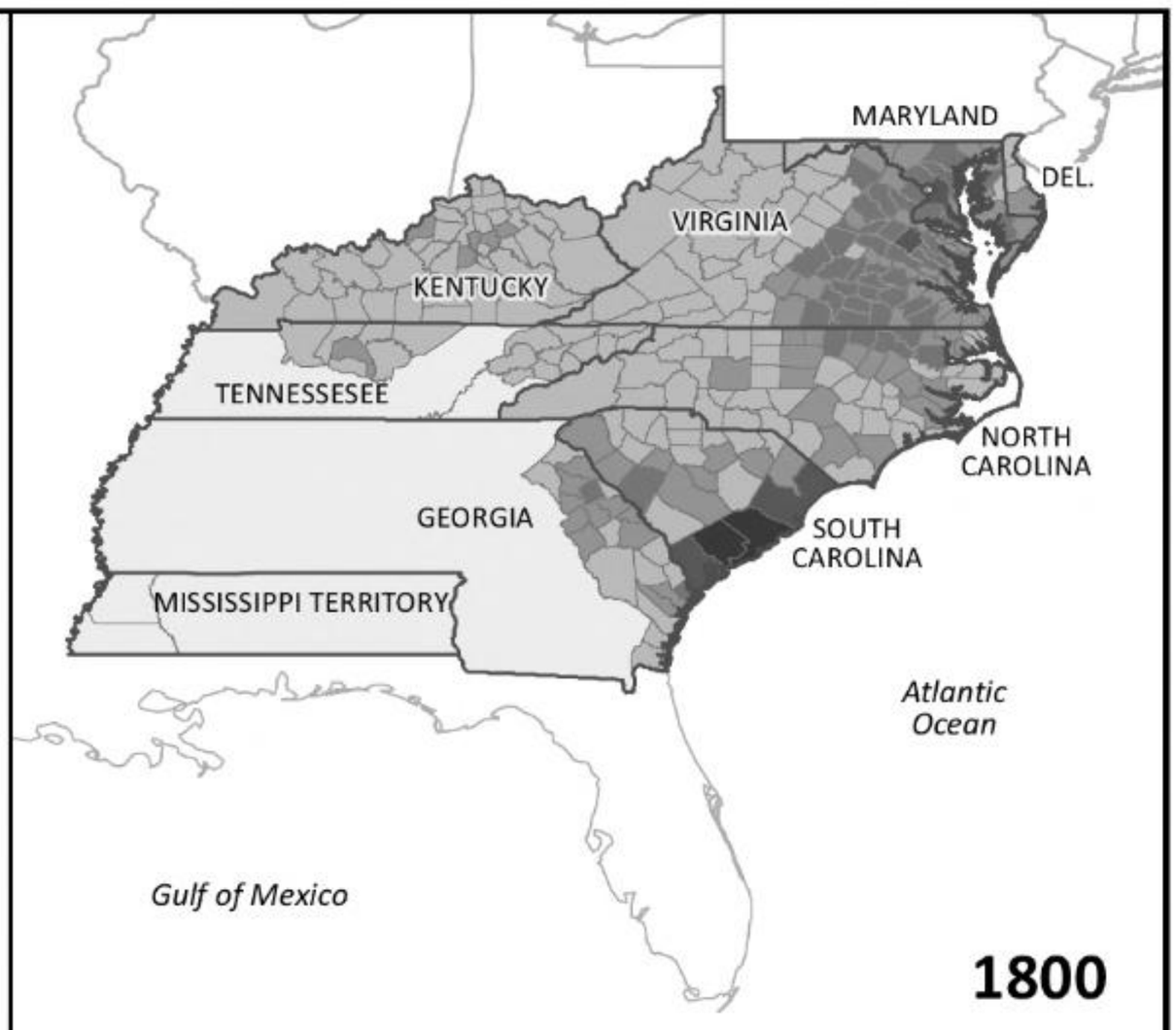
- 0
- 1 - 24
- 25 - 49
- 50 - 99
- 100 - 165

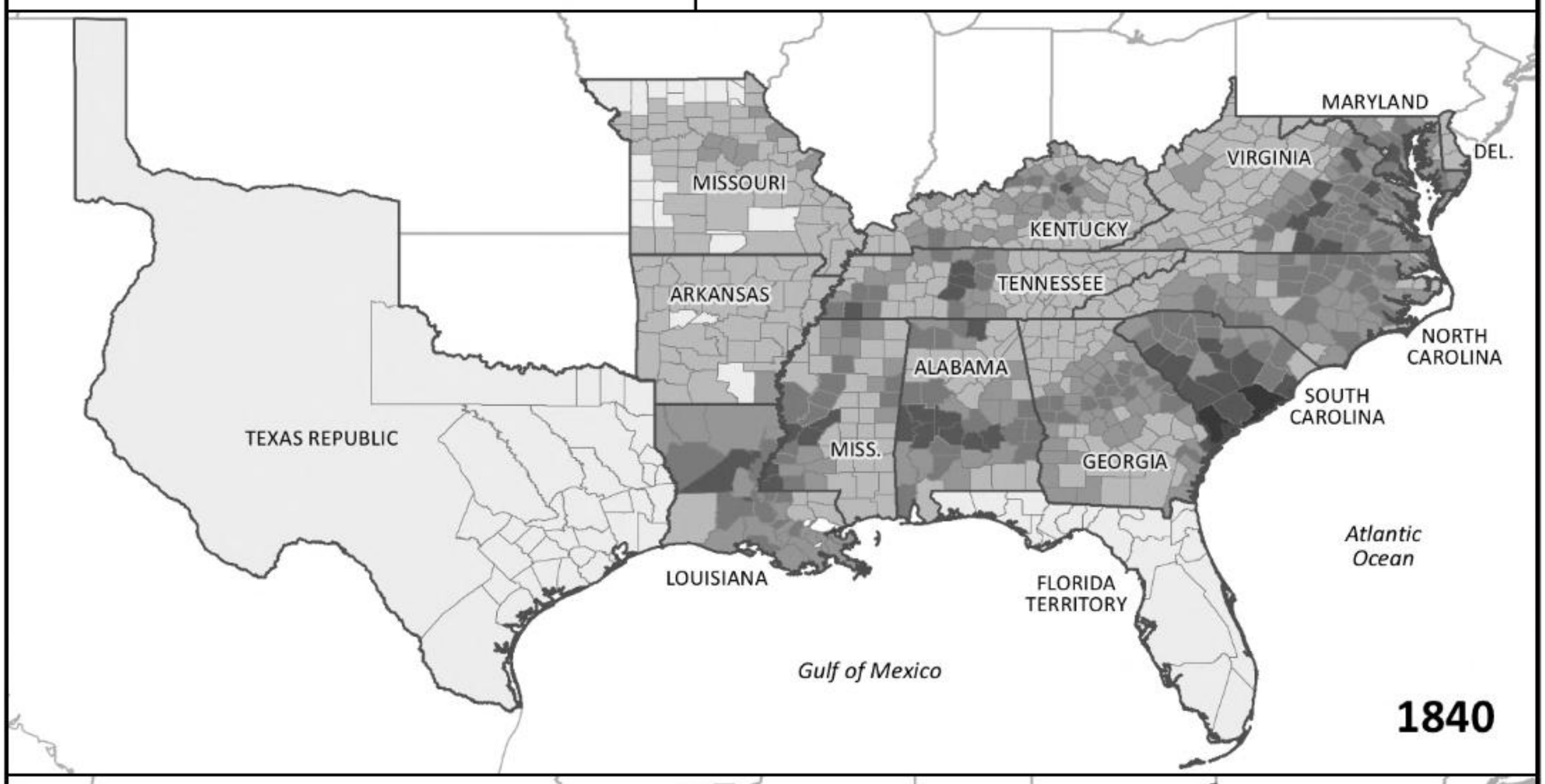
Source: US Historical Counties
Siczewicz, Peter. US Historical Counties. Dataset. Emily Kelley, digital comp.
Atlas of Historical County Boundaries, ed. John H. Long.
Chicago: The Newberry Library, 2011. Available online from http://publications.newberry.org/ahcbp.

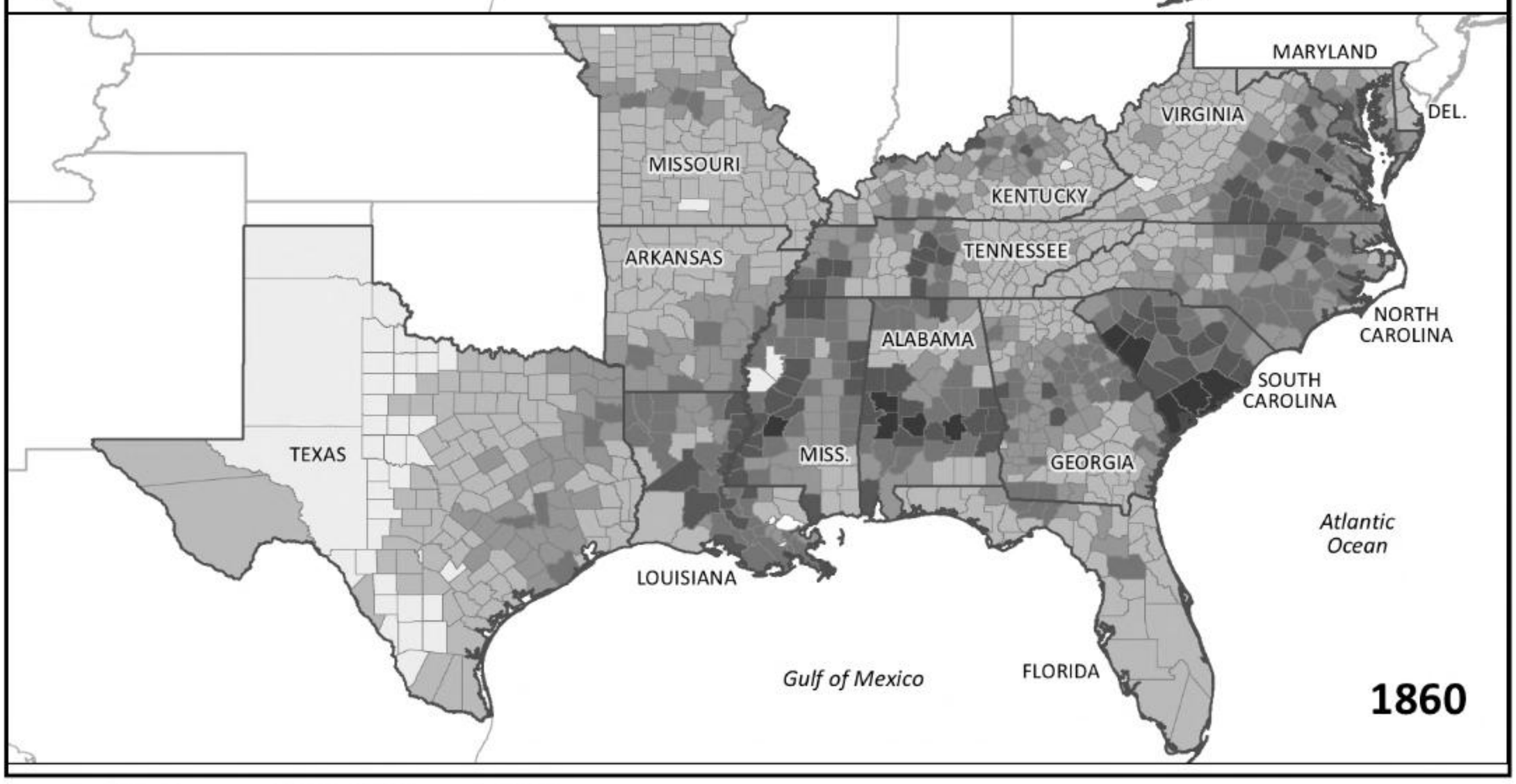
Distribution of Slave Population by County 1800, 1840, and 1860

Slave Population

- 0 or No Data
- 1 - 1,999
- 2,000 - 4,999
- 5,000 - 9,999
- 10,000 - 19,999
- 20,000 - 60,000







Source: US Census, 1800, 1840, and 1860.

INTRODUCTION: THE HEART

1937

A BEAUTIFUL LATE APRIL DAY, seventy-two years after slavery ended in the United States. Claude Anderson parks his car on the side of Holbrook Street in Danville. On the porch of number 513, he rearranges the notepads under his arm. Releasing his breath in a rush of decision, he steps up to the door of the handmade house and knocks.

Danville is on the western edge of the Virginia Piedmont. Back in 1865, it had been the last capital of the Confederacy. Or so Jefferson Davis had proclaimed on April 3, after he fled Richmond. Davis stayed a week, but then he had to keep running. The blue-coated soldiers of the Army of the Potomac were hot on his trail. When they got to Danville, they didn't find the fugitive rebel. But they did discover hundreds of Union prisoners of war locked in the tobacco warehouses downtown. The bluecoats, rescuers and rescued, formed up and paraded through town. Pouring into the streets around them, dancing and singing, came thousands of African Americans. They had been prisoners for far longer.

In the decades after the jubilee year of 1865, Danville, like many other southern villages, had become a cotton factory town. Anderson, an African-American master's student from Hampton University, would not have been able to work at the segregated mill. But the Works Progress Administration (WPA), a bureau of the federal government created by President Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal, would hire him. To put people back to work after they had lost their jobs in the Great Depression, the WPA organized thousands of projects, hiring construction workers to build schools and artists to paint murals. And many writers and students were hired to interview older Americans—like Lorenzo Ivy, the man painfully shuffling across the pine board floor to answer Anderson's knock.

Anderson had found Ivy's name in the Hampton University archives, two hundred miles east of Danville. Back in 1850, when Lorenzo had been born in Danville, there was neither a university nor a city called Hampton—just an American fort named after a slaveholder president. Fortress Monroe stood on Old Point Comfort, a narrow triangle of land that divided the Chesapeake Bay from the James River. Long before the fort was built, in April 1607, the *Susan Constant* had sailed past the point with a boatload of English settlers. Anchoring a few miles upriver, they had founded Jamestown, the first permanent English-speaking settlement in North America. Twelve years later, the crews of two storm-damaged English privateers also passed, seeking shelter and a place to sell the twenty-odd enslaved Africans (captured from a Portuguese slaver) lying shackled in their holds.

After that first 1619 shipload, some 100,000 more enslaved Africans would sail upriver past Old Point Comfort. Lying in chains in the holds of slave ships, they could not see the land until they were brought up on deck to be sold. After the legal Atlantic slave trade to the United States ended in 1807, hundreds of thousands more enslaved people passed the point. Now they were going the other way, boarding ships at Richmond, the biggest eastern center of the internal slave trade, to go by sea to the Mississippi Valley.

By the time a dark night came in late May 1861, the moon had waxed and waned three thousand times over slavery in the South. To protect slavery, Virginia had just seceded from the United States, choosing a side at last after six months of indecision in the wake of South Carolina's rude exit from the Union. Fortress Monroe, built to protect the James River from ocean-borne invaders, became the Union's last toehold in eastern Virginia. Rebel troops entrenched themselves athwart the fort's landward approaches. Local planters, including one Charles Mallory, detailed enslaved men to build berms to shelter the besiegers' cannon. But late this night, Union sentries on the fort's seaward side saw a small skiff emerging slowly from the darkness. Frank Baker and Townshend rowed with muffled oars. Sheppard Mallory held the tiller. They were setting themselves free.

A few days later, Charles Mallory showed up at the gates of the Union fort. He demanded that the commanding federal officer, Benjamin Butler, return his property. Butler, a politician from Massachusetts, was an incompetent battlefield commander, but a clever lawyer. He replied that if the men were Mallory's property, and he was using them to wage war against the US government, then logically the men were therefore contraband of war.

Those first three "contrabands" struck a crack in slavery's centuries-old wall. Over the next four years, hundreds of thousands more enslaved people

widened the crack into a gaping breach by escaping to Union lines. Their movement weakened the Confederate war effort and made it easier for the United States and its president to avow mass emancipation as a tool of war. Eventually the Union Army began to welcome formerly enslaved men into its ranks, turning refugee camps into recruiting stations—and those African-American soldiers would make the difference between victory and defeat for the North, which by late 1863 was exhausted and uncertain.

After the war, Union officer Samuel Armstrong organized literacy programs that had sprung up in the refugee camp at Old Point Comfort to form Hampton Institute. In 1875, Lorenzo Ivy traveled down to study there, on the ground zero of African-American history. At Hampton, he acquired an education that enabled him to return to Danville as a trained schoolteacher. He educated generations of African-American children. He built the house on Holbrook Street with his own Hampton-trained hands, and there he sheltered his father, his brother, his sister-in-law, and his nieces and nephews. In April 1937, Ivy opened the door he'd made with hands and saw and plane, and it swung clear for Claude Anderson without rubbing the frame.[1]

Anderson's notepads, however, were accumulating evidence of two very different stories of the American past—halves that did not fit together neatly. And he was about to hear more. Somewhere in the midst of the notepads was a typed list of questions supplied by the WPA. Questions often reveal the desired answer. By the 1930s, most white Americans had been demanding for decades that they hear only a sanitized version of the past into which Lorenzo Ivy had been born. This might seem strange. In the middle of the nineteenth century, white Americans had gone to war with each other over the future of slavery in their country, and slavery had lost. Indeed, for a few years after 1865, many white northerners celebrated emancipation as one of their collective triumphs. Yet whites' belief in the emancipation made permanent by the Thirteenth Amendment, much less in the race-neutral citizenship that the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments had written into the Constitution, was never that deep. Many northerners had only supported Benjamin Butler and Abraham Lincoln's moves against slavery because they hated the arrogance of slaveholders like Charles Mallory. And after 1876, northern allies abandoned southern black voters.

Within half a century after Butler sent Charles Mallory away from Fortress Monroe empty-handed, the children of white Union and Confederate soldiers united against African-American political and civil equality. This compact of white supremacy enabled southern whites to impose Jim Crow segregation on public space, disfranchise African-American citizens by

barring them from the polls, and use the lynch-mob noose to enforce black compliance. White Americans imposed increased white supremacy outside the South, too. In non-Confederate states, many restaurants wouldn't serve black customers. Stores and factories refused to hire African Americans. Hundreds of midwestern communities forcibly evicted African-American residents and became "sundown towns" ("Don't let the sun set on you in this town"). Most whites, meanwhile, believed that science proved that there were biologically distinct human races, and that Europeans were members of the superior one. Anglo-Americans even believed that they were distinct from and superior to the Jews from Russia, Italians, Greeks, Slavs, and others who flooded Ellis Island and changed the culture of northern urban centers.

By the early twentieth century, America's first generation of professional historians were justifying the exclusions of Jim Crow and disfranchisement by telling a story about the nation's past of slavery and civil war that seemed to confirm, for many white Americans, that white supremacy was just and necessary. Above all, the historians of a reunified white nation insisted that slavery was a premodern institution that was not committed to profit-seeking. In so doing, historians were to some extent only repeating pre–Civil War debates: abolitionists had depicted slavery not only as a psychopathic realm of whipping, rape, and family separation, but also as a flawed economic system that was inherently less efficient than the free-labor capitalism developing in the North. Proslavery writers disagreed about the psychopathy, but by the 1850s they agreed that enslavers were first and foremost not profit-seekers. For them, planters were caring masters who considered their slaves to be inferior family members. So although anti- and proslavery conclusions about slavery's morality were different, their premises about slavery-as-a-business-model matched. Both agreed that slavery was inherently unprofitable. It was an old, static system that belonged to an earlier time. Slave labor was inefficient to begin with, slave productivity did not increase to keep pace with industrialization, and enslavers did not act like modern profit-seeking businessmen. As a system, slavery had never adapted or changed to thrive in the new industrial economy—let alone to play a premier role as a driver of economic expansion—and had been little more than a drag on the explosive growth that had built the modern United States. In fact, during the Civil War, northerners were so convinced of these points that they believed that shifting from slave labor to free labor would dramatically increase cotton productivity.

It didn't. But even though the data of declining productivity over the ensuing three score and ten years suggested that slavery might have been the

most efficient way to produce the world's most important crop, no one let empirical tests change their minds. Instead, historians of Woodrow Wilson's generation imprinted the stamp of academic research on the idea that slavery was separate from the great economic and social transformations of the Western world during the nineteenth century. After all, it did not rely upon ever-more efficient machine labor. Its unprofitable economic structures supposedly produced antique social arrangements, and the industrializing, urbanizing world looked back toward them with contempt—or, increasingly, nostalgia. Many whites, now proclaiming that science proved that people of African descent were intellectually inferior and congenitally prone to criminal behavior, looked wistfully to a past when African Americans had been governed with whips and chains. Granted, slavery as an economic system was not modern, they said, and had neither changed to adapt to the modern economy nor contributed to economic expansion. But to an openly racist historical profession—and a white history-reading, history-thinking public obsessed with all kinds of race control—the white South's desire to whitewash slavery in the past, and maintain segregation now and forever, served the purpose of validating control over supposedly premodern, semi-savage black people.

Such stories about slavery shaped the questions Claude Anderson was to ask in the 1930s, because you could find openly racist versions of it baked into the recipe of every American textbook. You could find it in popular novels, politicians' speeches, plantation-nostalgia advertising, and even the first blockbuster American film: *Birth of a Nation*. As president, Woodrow Wilson—a southern-born history professor—called this paean to white supremacy "history written with lightning," and screened it at the White House. Such ideas became soaked into the way America publicly depicted slavery. Even many of those who believed that they rejected overt racism depicted the era before emancipation as a plantation idyll of happy slaves and paternalist masters. Abolitionists were snakes in the garden, responsible for a Civil War in which hundreds of thousands of white people died. Maybe the end of slavery had to come for the South to achieve economic modernity, but it didn't have to come that way, they said.

The way that Americans remember slavery has changed dramatically since then. In tandem with widespread desegregation of public spaces and the assertion of black cultural power in the years between World War II and the 1990s came a new understanding of the experience of slavery. No longer did academic historians describe slavery as a school in which patient masters and mistresses trained irresponsible savages for futures of perpetual servitude.

Slavery's denial of rights now prefigured Jim Crow, while enslaved people's resistance predicted the collective self-assertion that developed into first the civil rights movement and later, Black Power.

But perhaps the changes were not so great as they seemed on the surface. The focus on showing African Americans as assertive rebels, for instance, implied an uncomfortable corollary. If one should be impressed by those who rebelled, because they resisted, one should not be proud of those who did not. And there were very few rebellions in the history of slavery in the United States. Some scholars tried to backfill against this quandary by arguing that all African Americans together created a culture of resistance, especially in slave quarters and other spaces outside of white observation. Yet the insistence that assertive resistance undermined enslavers' power, and a focus on the development of an independent black culture, led some to believe that enslaved people actually managed to prevent whites from successfully exploiting their labor. This idea, in turn, created a quasi-symmetry with post–Civil War plantation memoirs that portrayed gentle masters, who maintained slavery as a nonprofit endeavor aimed at civilizing Africans.

Thus, even after historians of the civil rights, Black Power, and multicultural eras rewrote segregationists' stories about gentlemen and belles and grateful darkies, historians were still telling the half that has ever been told. For some fundamental assumptions about the history of slavery and the history of the United States remain strangely unchanged. The first major assumption is that, as an economic system—a way of producing and trading commodities—American slavery was fundamentally different from the rest of the modern economy and separate from it. Stories about industrialization emphasize white immigrants and clever inventors, but they leave out cotton fields and slave labor. This perspective implies not only that slavery didn't change, but that slavery and enslaved African Americans had little long-term influence on the rise of the United States during the nineteenth century, a period in which the nation went from being a minor European trading partner to becoming the world's largest economy—one of the central stories of American history.

The second major assumption is that slavery in the United States was fundamentally in contradiction with the political and economic systems of the liberal republic, and that inevitably that contradiction would be resolved in favor of the free-labor North. Sooner or later, slavery would have ended by the operation of historical forces; thus, slavery is a story without suspense. And a story with a predetermined outcome isn't a story at all.

Third, the worst thing about slavery as an experience, one is told, was that it denied enslaved African Americans the liberal rights and liberal

subjectivity of modern citizens. It did those things as a matter of course, and as injustice, that denial ranks with the greatest in modern history. But slavery also killed people, in large numbers. From those who survived, it stole everything. Yet the massive and cruel engineering required to rip a million people from their homes, brutally drive them to new, disease-ridden places, and make them live in terror and hunger as they continually built and rebuilt a commodity-generating empire—this vanished in the story of a slavery that was supposedly focused primarily not on producing profit but on maintaining its status as a quasi-feudal elite, or producing modern ideas about race in order to maintain white unity and elite power. And once the violence of slavery was minimized, another voice could whisper, saying that African Americans, both before and after emancipation, were denied the rights of citizens because they would not fight for them.

All these assumptions lead to still more implications, ones that shape attitudes, identities, and debates about policy. If slavery was outside of US history, for instance—if indeed it was a drag and not a rocket booster to American economic growth—then slavery was not implicated in US growth, success, power, and wealth. Therefore none of the massive quantities of wealth and treasure piled by that economic growth is owed to African Americans. Ideas about slavery's history determine the ways in which Americans hope to resolve the long contradiction between the claims of the United States to be a nation of freedom and opportunity, on the one hand, and, on the other, the unfreedom, the unequal treatment, and the opportunity denied that for most of American history have been the reality faced by people of African descent. Surely, if the worst thing about slavery was that it denied African Americans the liberal rights of the citizen, one must merely offer them the title of citizen—even elect one of them president—to make amends. Then the issue will be put to rest forever.

Slavery's story gets told in ways that reinforce all these assumptions. Textbooks segregate twenty-five decades of enslavement into one chapter, painting a static picture. Millions of people each year visit plantation homes where guides blather on about furniture and silverware. As sites, such homes hide the real purpose of these places, which was to make African Americans toil under the hot sun for the profit of the rest of the world. All this is the "symbolic annihilation" of enslaved people, as two scholars of those weird places put it.[2] Meanwhile, at other points we tell slavery's story by heaping praise on those who escaped it through flight or death in rebellion, leaving the listener to wonder if those who didn't flee or die somehow "accepted" slavery. And everyone who teaches about slavery knows a little dirty secret that reveals

historians' collective failure: many African-American students struggle with a sense of shame that most of their ancestors could not escape the suffering they experienced.

The truth can set us free, if we can find the right questions. But back in the little house in Danville, Anderson was reading from a list of leading ones, designed by white officials—some well-meaning, some not so well-meaning. He surely felt how the gravity of the questions pulled him toward the planet of plantation nostalgia. "Did slaves mind being called 'nigger'?" "What did slaves call master or mistress?" "Have you been happier in slavery or free?" "Was the mansion house pretty?" Escaping from chains is very difficult, however, so Anderson dutifully asked the prescribed questions and poised his pencil to take notes.

Ivy listened politely. He sat still. Then he began to speak: "My mother's master was named William Tunstall. He was a mean man. There was only one good thing he did, and I don't reckon he intended to do that. He sold our family to my father's master George H. Gilman."

Perhaps the wind blowing through the window changed as a cloud moved across the spring sun: "Old Tunstall caught the 'cotton fever.' There was a fever going round, leastways it was like a fever. Everyone was dying to get down south and grow cotton to sell. So old Tunstall separated families right and left. He took two of my aunts and left their husbands up here, and he separated altogether seven husbands and wives. One woman had twelve children. Yessir. Took 'em all down south with him to Georgia and Alabama."

Pervasive separations. Tears carving lines on faces. Lorenzo remembered his relief at dodging the worst, but he also remembered knowing that it was just a lucky break. Next time it could've been his mother. No white person was reliable, because money drove their decisions. No, this wasn't the story the books told.

So Anderson moved to the next question. Did Ivy know if any slaves had been sold here? Now, perhaps, the room grew darker.

For more than a century, white people in the United States had been singling out slave traders as an exception: unscrupulous lower-class outsiders who pried apart paternalist bonds. Scapegoaters had a noble precedent. In his first draft of the Declaration of Independence, Thomas Jefferson tried to blame King George III for using the Atlantic slave trade to impose slavery on the colonies. In historians' tellings, the 1808 abolition of the Atlantic trade brought stability to slavery, ringing in the "Old South," as it has been called since before the Civil War. Of course, one might wonder how something that was brand new, created *after* a *revolution*, and growing more rapidly than any

other commodity-producing economy in history before then could be considered "old." But never mind. Historians depicted slave trading after 1808 as irrelevant to what slavery was in the "Old South," and to how America as a whole was shaped. America's modernization was about entrepreneurs, creativity, invention, markets, movement, and change. Slavery was not about any of these things—not about slave trading, or moving people away from everyone they knew in order to make them make cotton. Therefore, modern America and slavery had nothing to do with each other.

But Ivy spilled out a rush of very different words. "They sold slaves here and everywhere. I've seen droves of Negroes brought in here on foot going South to be sold. Each one of them had an old tow sack on his back with everything he's got in it. Over the hills they came in lines reaching as far as the eye can see. They walked in double lines chained together by twos. They walk 'em here to the railroad and shipped 'em south like cattle."

Then Lorenzo Ivy said this: "Truly, son, the half has never been told."

To this, day, it still has not. For the other half is the story of how slavery changed and moved and grew over time: Lorenzo Ivy's time, and that of his parents and grandparents. In the span of a single lifetime after the 1780s, the South grew from a narrow coastal strip of worn-out plantations to a subcontinental empire. Entrepreneurial enslavers moved more than 1 million enslaved people, by force, from the communities that survivors of the slave trade from Africa had built in the South and in the West to vast territories that were seized—also by force—from their Native American inhabitants. From 1783 at the end of the American Revolution to 1861, the number of slaves in the United States increased five times over, and all this expansion produced a powerful nation. For white enslavers were able to force enslaved African-American migrants to pick cotton faster and more efficiently than free people. Their practices rapidly transformed the southern states into the dominant force in the global cotton market, and cotton was the world's most widely traded commodity at the time, as it was the key raw material during the first century of the industrial revolution. The returns from cotton monopoly powered the modernization of the rest of the American economy, and by the time of the Civil War, the United States had become the second nation to undergo large-scale industrialization. In fact, slavery's expansion shaped every crucial aspect of the economy and politics of the new nation—not only increasing its power and size, but also, eventually, dividing US politics, differentiating regional identities and interests, and helping to make civil war possible.

The idea that the commodification and suffering and forced labor of African Americans is what made the United States powerful and rich is not

an idea that people necessarily are happy to hear. Yet it is the truth. And that truth was the half of the story that survived mostly in the custodianship of those who survived slavery's expansion—whether they had been taken over the hill, or left behind. Forced migration had shaped their lives, and also had shaped what they thought about their lives and the wider history in which they were enmeshed. Even as they struggled to stay alive in the midst of disruption, they created ways to talk about this half untold. But what survivors experienced, analyzed, and named was a slavery that didn't fit the comfortable boxes into which other Americans have been trying to fit it ever since it ended.

I read Lorenzo Ivy's words, and they left me uneasy. I sensed that the true narrative had been left out of history—not only American history in general, but even the history of slavery. I began to look actively for the other half of the story, the one about how slavery constantly grew, changed, and reshaped the modern world. Of how it was both modernizing and modern, and what that meant for the people who lived through its incredible expansion. Once I began to look, I discovered that the traces of the other half were everywhere. The debris of cotton fevers that infected white entrepreneurs and separated man and woman, parent and child, right and left, dusted every set of pre–Civil War letters, newspapers, and court documents. Most of all, the half not told ran like a layer of iridium left by a dinosaur-killing asteroid through every piece of testimony that ex-slaves, such as Lorenzo Ivy, left on the historical record: thousands of stanzas of an epic of forced separations, violence, and new kinds of labor.

For a long time I wasn't sure how to tell the story of this muscular, dynamic process in a single book. The most difficult challenge was simply the fact that the expansion of slavery in many ways shaped the story of *everything* in the pre–Civil War United States. Enslavers' surviving papers showed calculations of returns from slave sales and purchases as well as the costs of establishing new slave labor camps in the cotton states. Newspapers dripped with speculations in land and people and the commodities they produced; dramatic changes in how people made money and how much they made; and the dramatic violence that accompanied these practices. The accounts of northern merchants and bankers and factory owners showed that they invested in slavery, bought from and sold to slaveholders, and took slices of profit out of slavery's expansion. Scholars and students talked about politics as a battle about states' rights or republican principles, but viewed in a different light the fights can be seen as a struggle between regions about

how the rewards of slavery's expansion would be allocated and whether that expansion could continue.

The story seemed too big to fit into one framework. Even Ivy had no idea how to count the chained lines he saw going southwest toward the mountains on the horizon and the vast open spaces beyond. From the 1790s to the 1860s, enslavers moved 1 million people from the old slave states to the new. They went from making no cotton to speak of in 1790 to making almost 2 billion pounds of it in 1860. Stretching out beyond the slave South, the story encompassed not only Washington politicians and voters across the United States but also Connecticut factories, London banks, opium addicts in China, and consumers in East Africa. And could one book do Lorenzo Ivy's insight justice? It would have to avoid the old platitudes, such as the easy temptation to tell the story as a collection of topics—here a chapter on slave resistance, there one on women and slavery, and so on. That kind of abstraction cuts the beating heart out of the story. For the half untold was a narrative, a process of movement and change and suspense. Things happened because of what had been done before them—and what people chose to do in response.

No, this had to be a *story*, and one couldn't tell it solely from the perspective of powerful actors. True, politicians and planters and bankers shaped policies, the movement of people, and the growing and selling of cotton, and even remade the land itself. But when one takes Lorenzo Ivy's words as a starting point, the whole history of the United States comes walking over the hill behind a line of people in chains. Changes that reshaped the entire world began on the auction block where enslaved migrants stood or in the frontier cotton fields where they toiled. Their individual drama was a struggle to survive. Their reward was to endure a brutal transition to new ways of labor that made them reinvent themselves every day. Enslaved people's creativity enabled their survival, but, stolen from them in the form of ever-growing cotton productivity, their creativity also expanded the slaveholding South at an unprecedented rate. Enslaved African Americans built the modern United States, and indeed the entire modern world, in ways both obvious and hidden.

One day I found a metaphor that helped. It came from the great African-American author Ralph Ellison. You might know his novel *Invisible Man*. But in the 1950s, Ellison also produced incredible essays. In one of them he wrote, "On the moral level I propose we view the whole of American life as a drama enacted on the body of a Negro giant who, lying trussed up like Gulliver, forms the stage and the scene upon which and within which the action unfolds."[3]

The image fit the story that Ivy's words raised above the watery surface of buried years. The only problem was that Ellison's image implied a stationary giant. In the old myth, the stationary, quintessentially unchanging plantation was the site and the story of African-American life from the seventeenth century to the twentieth. But Lorenzo Ivy had described a world in motion. After the American Revolution—which seemed at the time to portend slavery's imminent demise—a metastatic transformation and growth of slavery's giant body had begun instead. From the exploitation, commodification, and torture of enslaved people's bodies, enslavers and other free people gained new kinds of modern power. The sweat and blood of the growing system, a network of individuals and families and labor camps that grew bigger with each passing year, fueled massive economic change. Enslaved people, meanwhile, transported and tortured, had to find ways to survive, resist, or endure. And over time the question of their freedom or bondage came to occupy the center of US politics.

This trussed-up giant, stretched out on the rack of America's torture zone, actually grew, like a person passing through ordeals to new maturity. I have divided the chapters of this book with Ellison's imagined giant in mind, a structure that has allowed the story to take as its center point the experience of enslaved African Americans themselves. Before we pass through the door that Lorenzo Ivy opened, here are the chapters' names. The first is "Feet," for the story begins with unfree movement on paths to enslaved frontiers that were laid down between the end of the American Revolution in 1783 and the early 1800s. "Heads" is the title of the second chapter, which covers America's acquisition of the key points of the Mississippi Valley by violence, a gain that also consolidated the enslavers' hold on the frontier. Then come the "Right Hand" and the "Left Hand" (Chapters 3 and 4). They reveal the inner secrets of enslavers' power, secrets which made the entire world of white people wealthy.

"Tongues" (Chapter 5) and "Breath" (Chapter 6) follow. They describe how, by the mid-1820s, enslavers had not only found ways to silence the tongues of their critics, but had built a system of slave trading that served as expansion's lungs. Most forms of resistance were impossible to carry out successfully. So a question hung in the air. Would the spirit in the tied-down body die, leaving enslaved people to live on like undead zombies serving their captors? Or would the body live, and rise? Every transported soul, finding his or her old life killed off, faced this question on the individual level as well: whether to work with fellow captives or scrabble against them in a quest for individualistic subsistence. Enslaved African Americans chose

many things. But perhaps most importantly, they chose survival, and true survival in such circumstances required solidarity. Solidarity allowed them to see their common experience, to light their own way by building a critique of enslavers' power that was an alternative story about what things were and what they meant.

This story draws on thousands of personal narratives like the one that Lorenzo Ivy told Claude Anderson. Slavery has existed in many societies, but no other population of formerly enslaved people has been able to record the testimonies of its members like those who survived slavery in the United States. The narratives began with those who escaped slavery's expansion in the nineteenth century as fugitives. Over one hundred of those survivors published their autobiographies during the nineteenth century. As time went on, such memoirs found a market, in no small part because escapees from southern captivity were changing the minds of some of the northern whites about what the expansion of slavery meant for them. Then, during the 1930s, people like Claude Anderson conducted about 2,300 interviews with the ex-slaves who had lived into that decade. Because the interviews often allowed old people to tell about the things they had seen for themselves and the things they heard from their elders in the years before the Civil War, they take us back into the world of explanation and storytelling that grew up around fires and on porches and between cotton rows. No one autobiography or interview is pure and objective as an account of all that the history books left untold. But read them all, and each one adds to a more detailed, clearer picture of the whole. One story fills in gaps left by another, allowing one to read between the lines.[4]

Understanding something of what it felt like to suffer, and what it cost to endure that suffering, is crucial to understanding the course of US history. For what enslaved people made together—new ties to each other, new ways of understanding their world—had the potential to help them survive in mind and body. And ultimately, their spirit and their speaking would enable them to call new allies into being in the form of an abolitionist movement that helped to destabilize the mighty enslavers who held millions captive. But the road on which enslaved people were being driven was long. It led through the hell described by "Seed" (Chapter 7), which tells of the horrific near-decade from 1829 to 1837. In these years entrepreneurs ran wild on slavery's frontier. Their acts created the political and economic dynamics that carried enslavers to their greatest height of power. Facing challenges from other white men who wanted to assert their masculine equality through political democracy, clever entrepreneurs found ways to leverage not just that desire, but other

desires as well. With the creation of innovative financial tools, more and more of the Western world was able to invest directly in slavery's expansion. Such creativity multiplied the incredible productivity and profitability of enslaved people's labor and allowed enslavers to turn bodies into commodities with which they changed the financial history of the Western world.

Enslavers, along with common white voters, investors, and the enslaved, made the 1830s the hinge of US history. On one side lay the world of the industrial revolution and the initial innovations that launched the modern world. On the other lay modern America. For in 1837, enslavers' exuberant success led to a massive economic crash. This self-inflicted devastation, covered in Chapter 8, "Blood," posed new challenges to slaveholders' power, led to human destruction for the enslaved, and created confusion and discord in white families. When southern political actors tried to use war with Mexico to restart their expansion, they encountered new opposition on the part of increasingly assertive northerners. As Chapter 9, "Backs," explains, by the 1840s the North had built a complex, industrialized economy on the backs of enslaved people and their highly profitable cotton labor. Yet, although all northern whites had benefited from the deepened exploitation of enslaved people, many northern whites were now willing to use politics to oppose further expansions of slavery. The words that the survivors of slavery's expansion had carried out from the belly of the nation's hungriest beast had, in fact, become important tools for galvanizing that opposition.

Of course, in return for the benefits they received from slavery's expansion, plenty of northerners were still willing to enable enslavers' disproportionate power. With the help of such allies, as "Arms" (Chapter 10) details, slavery continued to expand in the decade after the Compromise of 1850. For now, however, it had to do so within potentially closed borders. That is why southern whites now launched an aggressive campaign of advocacy, insisting on policies and constitutional interpretations that would commit the entire United States to the further geographic expansion of slavery. The entire country would become slavery's next frontier. And as they pressed, they generated greater resistance, pushed too hard, and tried to make their allies submit—like slaves, the allies complained. And that is how, at last, whites came to take up arms against each other.

Yet even as southern whites seceded, claiming that they would set up an independent nation, shelling Fort Sumter, and provoking the Union's president, Abraham Lincoln, to call out 100,000 militia, many white Americans wanted to keep the stakes of this dispute as limited as possible. A majority of northern Unionists opposed emancipation. Perhaps white Americans' battles

with each other were, on one level, not driven by a contest over ideals, but over the best way to keep the stream of cotton and financial revenues flowing: keep slavery within its current borders, or allow it to consume still more geographic frontiers. But the growing roar of cannon promised others a chance to force a more dramatic decision: slavery forever, or nevermore. So it was that as Frank Baker, Townshend, and Sheppard Mallory crept across the dark James River waters that had washed so many hulls bearing human bodies, the future stood poised, uncertain between alternative paths. Yet those three men carried something powerful: the same half of the story that Lorenzo Ivy could tell. All they had learned from it would help to push the future onto a path that led to freedom. Their story can do so for us as well. To hear it, we must stand as Lorenzo Ivy had stood as a boy in Danville—watching the chained lines going over the hills, or as Frank Baker and others had stood, watching the ships going down the James from the Richmond docks, bound for the Mississippi. Then turn and go with the marching feet, and listen for the breath of the half that has never been told.

1

FEET

1783–1810

Not long after they heard the first clink of iron, the boys and girls in the cornfield would have been able to smell the grownups' bodies, perhaps even before they saw the double line coming around the bend. Hurrying in locked step, the thirty-odd men came down the dirt road like a giant machine. Each hauled twenty pounds of iron, chains that draped from neck to neck and wrist to wrist, binding them all together. Ragged strips flapped stiffly from their clothes like dead-air pennants. On the men's heads, hair stood out in growing dreads or lay in dust-caked mats. As they moved, some looked down like catatonics. Others stared at something a thousand yards ahead. And now, behind the clanking men, followed a marching crowd of women loosely roped, the same vacancy painted in their expressions, endurance standing out in the rigid strings of muscle that had replaced their calves in the weeks since they left Maryland. Behind them all swayed a white man on a gray walking horse.

The boys and girls stood, holding their hoe handles, forgetful of their task. In 1805, slave coffles were not new along the south road through Rowan County, here in the North Carolina Piedmont, but they didn't pass by every day. Perhaps one of the girls close to the road, a twelve-year-old willow, stared at the lone man who, glistening with sweat and fixed of jaw, set the pace at the head of the double file. Perhaps he reminded her of her father, in her memory tall. A few years back, he'd stopped coming to spend his Saturday nights with them. The girl's mother said he'd been sold to Georgia. Now in the breath of a moment, this man caught her staring eyes with his own scan as he hurried past. And perhaps, though he never broke stride, something like recognition flashed over a face iron as his locked collar. This man, Charles Ball, a twenty-five-year-old father of two, could not help but see his own

daughter ten years hence, years he knew she'd pass without him. Then he was gone down the road, pulling the rest of the human millipede past the girl. As the women's bare soles receded—the white man on the horse following last, looking down, appraising her—the overseer on the far side of the field called out "Hey!" to her stock-still self, and she would surely have realized that the coffle carried her own future with them.[1]

There are 1,760 yards in a mile—more than 2,000 steps. Forty thousand is a long day's journey. Two hundred thousand is a hard week. For eighty years, from the 1780s until 1865, enslaved migrants walked for miles, days, and weeks. Driven south and west over flatlands and mountains, step after step they went farther from home. Stumbling with fatigue, staggering with whiskey, even sometimes stepping high on bright spring mornings when they refused to think of what weighed them down, many covered over 700 miles before stepping off the road their footsteps made. Seven hundred miles is a million and a half steps. After weeks of wading rivers, crossing state lines, and climbing mountain roads, and even boarding boats and ships and then disembarking, they had moved their bodies across the frontier between the old slavery and the new.

Over the course of eighty years, almost 1 million people were herded down the road into the new slavery (see Table 1.1). This chapter is about how these forced marchers began, as they walked those roads, to change things about the eastern and western United States, like shifting grains moved from one side of a balance to another. It shows how the first forced migrations began to tramp down paths along which another 1 million walkers' 1.5 trillion steps would shape seven decades of slavery's expansion in the new United States. And it shows how the paths they made on the land, in politics, and in the economy—the footprints that driven slaves and those who drove them left on the fundamental documents and bargains of the nation—kept the nation united and growing.

For at the end of the American Revolution, the victorious leaders of the newly independent nation were not sure that they could hold their precarious coalition of states together. The United States claimed vast territories west of the Appalachian Mountains, but those lands were a source of vulnerability. Other nations claimed them. Native Americans refused to vacate them. Western settlers contemplated breaking loose to form their own coalitions. East of the Appalachians, internal divisions threatened to tear apart the new country. The American Revolution had been financed by printing paper money and bonds. But that had produced inflation, indebtedness, and low commodity prices, which now, in the 1780s, were generating a massive economic crisis.

TABLE 1.1. NET INTERNAL FORCED MIGRATION BY DECADE

IMPORTING STATE	1790–1799	1800–1809	1810–1819	1820–1829	1830–1839	1840–1849	1850–1859	TOTALS
Alabama	--	--	35,500	54,156	96,520	16,532	10,752	213,460
Arkansas	--	--	1,000	2,123	12,752	18,984	47,443	82,302
Florida	--	--	1,000	2,627	5,833	5,657	11,850	26,967
Georgia	6,095	11,231	10,713	18,324	10,403	19,873	-7,876	68,763
Kentucky	21,636	25,837	18,742	-916	-19,907	-19,266	-31,215	-4,173
Louisiana	--	1,159	20,679	16,415	29,296	29,924	26,528	124,001
Mississippi	--	2,152	9,123	19,556	101,810	53,028	48,560	234,229
Missouri	--	--	5,460	10,104	24,287	11,406	6,314	57,571
South Carolina	4,435	6,474	1,925	-20,517	-56,683	-28,947	-65,053	-158,366
Tennessee	6,645	21,788	19,079	31,577	6,930	4,837	-17,702	73,154
Texas	--	--	--	--	--	28,622	99,190	127,812
Decade Total	*38,811*	*68,641*	*123,221*	*134,365*	*211,241*	*140,650*	*128,791*	845,720

Source: Michael Tadman, *Speculators and Slaves: Masters, Traders, and Slaves in the Old South* (Madison, 1989), 12. Some states not included.

There was no stable currency. The federal government—such as it was—had no ability to tax, and so it also could not act as a national state.

Between the arrival of the first Africans in 1619 and the outbreak of Revolution in 1775, slavery had been one of the engines of colonial economic growth. The number of Africans brought to Maryland and Virginia before the late 1660s was a trickle—a few dozen per year. But along with white indentured servants, these enslaved Africans built a massive tobacco production complex along the Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries. Over those formative fifty years, settlers imported concepts of racialized slavery from other colonies (such as those in the Caribbean, where enslaved Africans already outnumbered other inhabitants by the mid-seventeenth century). By 1670, custom and law insisted that children were slaves if their mothers were slaves, that enslaved Africans were to be treated as rights-less, perpetual outsiders (even if they converted to Christianity), that they could be whipped to labor, and that they could be sold and moved. They were chattel property. And everyone of visible African descent was assumed to be a slave.[2]

After 1670 or so, the number of enslaved Africans brought to North America surged. By 1775, slave ships had carried 160,000 Africans to the Chesapeake colonies, 140,000 to new slave colonies that opened up in the Carolinas and Georgia, and 30,000 to the northern colonies. These numbers were small compared to the myriads being carried to sugar colonies,

however. Slave ships landed more than 1.5 million African captives on British Caribbean islands (primarily Jamaica and Barbados) by the late 1700s and had brought more than 2 million to Brazil. In North America, however, the numbers of the enslaved grew, except in the most malarial lowlands of the Carolina rice country. By 1775, 500,000 of the thirteen colonies' 2.5 million inhabitants were slaves, about the same as the number of slaves then alive in the British Caribbean colonies. Slave labor was crucial to the North American colonies. Tobacco shipments from the Chesapeake funded everyone's trade circuits. Low-country Carolina planters were the richest elites in the revolutionary republic. The commercial sectors of the northern colonies depended heavily on carrying plantation products to Europe, while New England slave traders were responsible for 130,000 of the human beings shipped in the Middle Passage before 1800.[3]

Now, however, the consequences of war and independence were threatening the economic future of the enslavers. Marching armies had destroyed low-country rice-plantation infrastructure. Up to 25,000 enslaved Carolinians had left with the British. Britain blocked North American trade from its home and imperial markets. Though tobacco markets in continental Europe were still open, the price of that product went into free fall in the 1780s.[4]

Slavery was also caught up in the most divisive political issues raised by the Revolution. The weak federal government was buried in debts owed to creditors all over the nation and Europe, but southern and northern representatives to the Continental Congress disagreed over whether the apportionment of tax revenue by population should count southern slaves. More broadly, the Revolution raised the question of whether slavery should even exist, since rebellion had been justified with the claim that human beings had a God-given right to freedom. Petitions flooded northern state legislatures in the 1770s and 1780s, charging that slavery violated natural rights. And Thomas Jefferson, who admitted that "the Almighty has no attribute which can take a side with us" against the demands of the enslaved, was not the only prominent southerner who acknowledged the contradictions.[5]

Yet during the 1780s and 1790s, the possibilities that enslaved people represented, the wealth they embodied, and the way they could be forced to move themselves would actually forge links that overrode internal divisions. Marching feet increased the power of enslavers, and the beginning of forced movement south and west created new financial links and new kinds of leverage. And even among a million pairs of feet one can find the first steps: the moves and decisions that opened up new territories to slavery after the American Revolution. Kentucky and Mississippi could have been closed

to slavery. Instead, during the 1780s, the early days of the American republic, decisionmakers in Philadelphia, New York, at Monticello, and elsewhere took crucial first steps that would allow slavery to spread.

BACK-AND-FORTH RAIDING DURING THE Revolution had stopped white settlement short of the mountains in South Carolina and Georgia. Few settlers had crossed the Appalachians into the Virginia and North Carolina districts that would become Kentucky and Tennessee. But potential migrants knew something about what lay beyond the bloody fringe of settlement. Since the early eighteenth century, white traders had walked deep into the woods of present-day South Carolina, Georgia, and Alabama, their mules laden with beads, guns, and liquor. Sometimes these merchants walked with enslaved African or African-American assistants. Those who returned alive told of rich soil and broad rivers. Further north, a trickle of settlers began to follow hunter Daniel Boone's reports of rich lands across the mountains that rose west of the Shenandoah Valley.[6]

Only after the American victory did waves of migration begin to surge west across the mountains. By the early 1780s, settlers were sending word back east of Kentucky acres that yielded a hundred bushels of corn apiece, an "Elysium . . . the garden where there was no forbidden fruit." But Native Americans called the region the "dark and bloody ground," a land of rich hunting over which they had long fought. In 1782, Indians began to raid the settlements, taking slaves with them as they retreated. Potential settlers became wary of the land, and of the journey there. The "Wilderness Road" through the mountain passes was slow, difficult, and dangerous. Shawnee and Cherokee killed dozens of travelers on the Wilderness Road every year. In winter, there were fewer Indian war parties about. But on their winter 1780 trip, John May and an enslaved man passed thousands of thawing horse and cattle carcasses in the "rugged and dismal" mountains, casualties of failed cold crossings.[7]

That year North Carolina enslaver Thomas Hart wondered whether he should send slaves to clear the land that he claimed in Kentucky: "to send a parcel of poor Slaves where I dare not go myself" seemed a kind of extreme taxation without representation, not in keeping with the ideals of the ongoing Revolution. But Hart changed his mind. He brought enslaved pioneers across the mountain road, even though the toil he planned for them to do in the woods, cutting down the forest and planting clearings with corn and tobacco, left them exposed to danger. "Lexington, Kentucky, August 22," read a 1789 newspaper story based on a letter from the western frontier. "Two

negro children killed and two grown negros wounded at Col. Johnson's." Sometimes the Shawnees scalped prisoners, and sometimes they took them back alive. Three Indians captured an enslaved man from a forge on the Slate River in Kentucky during 1794. They bound his arms, made him walk, and told him they were taking him to Detroit (where the British still maintained a fort, in defiance of the Treaty of Paris) to sell him for "taffy"—tafia, cheap rum. When they stopped to rest near the Ohio, they untied him and sent him to gather firewood, which was when he escaped.[8]

Over the 1780s, the invaders from the coastlands fought hundreds of battles. One such fight took place in 1786. Virginia-born migrant Abraham Lincoln (the sixteenth president's grandfather) was clearing a field on his land west of Louisville. The regular *thunk* of the axe was suddenly broken by the crack of a musket. Lincoln fell. The Indian emerged cautiously from the forest. Abraham's son Thomas, who had been playing in the field, crouched behind a log. The sniper searched. Where was the little white boy with the dark hair? Suddenly, another *crack*. The Indian, too, dropped dead. Lincoln's teenage son Mordecai had shot him from the window of a log cabin on the clearing's edge. And as the settlers won more and more little battles like this one, eventually fewer and fewer Shawnee came south across the Ohio.[9]

Back on the east side of the mountains, meanwhile, slavery in the old Virginia and Maryland tobacco districts was increasingly unprofitable, and even some enslavers were conceding that enslavement contradicted all of the new nation's rhetoric about rights and liberty. In his 1782 *Notes on the State of Virginia*, Virginia governor Thomas Jefferson complained that slavery transformed whites "into despots." Jefferson's first draft of the 1776 Declaration of Independence had already railed against British support for the Atlantic slave trade. Despite his ownership of scores of enslaved African Americans, Jefferson recognized that the selling of human beings could turn his soaring natural-rights rhetoric into a lie as sour as the hypocrisies of old Europe's corrupt tyrants. Eventually, Jefferson embraced the hypocrisy, even failing to free the enslaved woman who bore his children. "Sally—an old woman worth $50," read the inventory of his property taken after his death. Yet in 1781, his Declaration's claim that all were endowed with the natural right to liberty provided a basis to push the Massachusetts Supreme Court into conceding—in the case of a runaway slave named Quock Walker—that slavery was incompatible with the state's core principles.[10]

Virginia politicians shot down Governor Jefferson's feeble suggestions of gradual emancipation, but as he moved into the new nation's legislature, he still hoped to ensure that the western United States would be settled and

governed by free, self-sufficient farmers—not an oligarchy of slave-driving planters. In 1784, a committee of the Continental Congress, headed by Jefferson, proposed an "ordinance" for governing the territories across the Appalachians. Many in Congress feared that the western settlements might secede or, worse yet, fall into the arms of European empires. As Britain's Indian allies raided south from their base at Detroit, Spain claimed the English-speaking settlements around Natchez. In 1784, Spain also closed the mouth of the Mississippi at New Orleans, the main trading route for western US territories. Eastern states also disagreed vehemently over how to sort out their overlapping claims to blocks of western land, which legislators hoped to sell in order to pay bonds issued during the Revolution. In the area that became Kentucky, still technically part of Virginia, the confusion generated by the uncertain government made it hard for small farmers like the Lincolns to make hard-won homesteads good. There was no logical system of surveying, so claims overlapped "like shingles." Old Dominion attorneys steeped in Virginia's complex and arcane land laws swarmed across the mountains to sort out conflicts—in favor of the highest bidder.[11]

The western issues that the Continental Congress faced in 1784 thus had implications for everything from the grand strategy of international relations to everyday economic and legal power. Jefferson's Ordinance of 1784 aimed to define them in favor of young Thomas Lincoln and everyone like him. It proposed that the territory between the Appalachians and the Mississippi River would become as many as sixteen new states, each equal to the original thirteen. And a second act that Jefferson drafted—the Ordinance of 1785—created a unified system of surveying, identifying, and recording tracts of land. This design eliminated the possibility of shingling over post-Kentucky territories with contradictory claims.[12]

The small farmer whom Jefferson imagined as the chief beneficiary of western expansion was as white as Abraham Lincoln, but the 1784 proposal also stated "that after the Year 1800 of the Christian Era, there shall be neither slavery nor involuntary servitude in any of the said states." That would have put Kentucky and what eventually became Tennessee on the road to eventual emancipation, perhaps along the lines of the statewide emancipations already under way in New England. The cluster of farms and plantations near Natchez on the Mississippi relied even more heavily on slavery. By 1790, there were more than 3,000 enslaved Africans in the disputed Natchez District. If Jefferson's proposal passed, presumably emancipation would have been mandated there as well. Yet under the Articles of Confederation, the wartime compromise that shaped the pre-Constitution federal government,

a majority of state delegations in Congress had to consent for any proposal to become law. A majority of delegations, including his own Virginia one, rejected Jefferson's antislavery clause even as they accepted his other principles—that Congress should make rules for the territories, that the territories could become states, and that rational systems of land surveying and distribution should prevail. Frustrated, Jefferson sailed off to France to take up the position of American minister.[13]

Jefferson returned from France in September 1789. He had watched the Bastille torn down stone by stone, and he had seen ominous hints that the French Revolution would turn murderous. He had also started a relationship with a young enslaved woman. But the political changes he found upon his return gave him perverse incentives to think differently about the question of planting slavery in the western United States. Support for slavery's expansion had already become one of the best ways to unite southern and northern politicians—and Jefferson wanted to build a national political alliance that would defeat the older networks of power dominated by Federalist planting and mercantile gentries.

Congress had in the meantime taken one action to prevent slavery's expansion. In 1787 it reconsidered Jefferson's 1784 ordinance and passed it for the territories north of the Ohio, with the antislavery clause included. Perhaps this was no great moral or political feat. Few, if any, slaves had been brought to Ohio. Moreover, a handful of people would remain enslaved in the Northwest for decades to come, and the ordinance contained internal contradictions that left open the option of extending slavery into the states carved from the territory. Still, the ordinance became an important precedent for the power of Congress to ban slavery on federal territory.[14]

Yet in the four years between the end of the American Revolution in 1783 and the establishment of the Northwest Territory by Congress in 1787, the Congress had been able to accomplish precious little else to stabilize matters on either the western or the eastern side of the mountains. Chaos ruled: thirteen different states had thirteen different trade policies, currencies, and court systems. The Articles of Confederation, created as a stopgap solution for managing a war effort by thirteen different colonies against the mother country, had never allowed the federal government to have real power: the power to coerce the states, the power to control the currency, the power to tax. The result was not only economic chaos but also, wealthy men with much to lose feared, the impending collapse of all political and social authority. In rural Massachusetts, former Continental soldiers shut down courts after judges foreclosed on farmers who couldn't pay debts or taxes because of economic

chaos. In other states, angry majorities elected legislatures that were ready to bring debt relief to small farmers and other ordinary folk even if it meant economic disaster for creditors.

So after Congress adjourned in early 1787, delegates from twelve states converged on Philadelphia. Their mission was to create a stronger federal government. The participants included future presidents George Washington and James Madison; Alexander Hamilton, who did more to shape the US government than most presidents; and Benjamin Franklin, the most famous American in the world. As May ended, they went into Independence Hall, closed the shutters, and locked the doors. By the time they emerged in late summer they had created the US Constitution, a plan for welding thirteen states into one federal nation. Once it was approved by the states, its centralizing framework would finally give Congress the authority it needed to carry out the functions of a national government: collecting revenue, protecting borders, extinguishing states' overlapping claims to western territory, creating stable trade policy, and regulating the economy. A deal struck between the big states and the small ones allowed representation by population in the House of Representatives while giving each state the same number of delegates in the Senate.[15]

But the Constitution was also built from the timber of another bargain. In this one, major southern and northern power-brokers forced their more reluctant colleagues to consent to both the survival and the expansion of slavery. The first point of debate and compromise had been the issue of whether enslaved people should be counted in determining representation in the House. Representing Pennsylvania, Gouverneur Morris warned that this would encourage the slave trade from Africa, since the importing states would be rewarded with more clout in the national government. In the end, however, every northern state but one agreed that a slave could count as three-fifths of a person in allocating representation. The Three-Fifths Compromise affected not only the House, but also the presidency, since each state's number of electoral votes was to be determined by adding two (for its senators) to its number of representatives in the House. One result was the South's dominance of the presidency over the next seventy years. Four of the first five presidents would be Virginia slaveholders. Eight of the first dozen owned people.

Over the long run, those presidents helped to shape the nation's policy of geographic and economic growth around the expansion of slavery. But those policies were not just enabled by the consequences of compromise over representation. Their roots grew out of the Constitution itself. As Gouverneur

Morris had suggested, the convention had to consider the issue of the Atlantic slave trade, the cause of a continual influx of people destined for slavery in the New World society. By the 1780s, many white Americans and a growing cadre of British reformers believed that modern civilized nations could no longer engage in the brutalities of the Middle Passage. In the Constitutional Convention itself, Virginia slaveholder George Mason bragged that Virginia and Maryland had already banned the "infernal traffic" in human beings. But, he worried, if South Carolina and Georgia were allowed to import slaves, the greed of those states would "bring the judgment of Heaven" on the new nation. Mason charged that "every master of slaves is born a petty tyrant," and yet the curse might spread. "The Western people"—by which he meant the people of Kentucky and other newly settled areas—"are already crying out for slaves for their new lands," he said, "and will fill that country with slaves if they can be got thro' S. Carolina and Georgia."[16]

Mason's critique infuriated politicians from the coastal areas of the deepest South, who leapt to their rights. Mason claimed to be a freedom-loving opponent of slavery, but he was speaking from self-interest, charged South Carolina's Charles C. Pinckney: "Virginia will gain by stopping the importations. Her slaves will rise in value, and she has more than she wants." Pinckney hinted at something new in the history of New World slavery: the possibility of filling a new plantation zone with slave labor from American reservoirs. This was possible because the Chesapeake's enslaved population had become self-reproducing. Pinckney then defended slavery in the abstract. "If slavery be wrong," he said, "it is justified by the example of all the world. . . . In all ages one half of mankind have been slaves." The Carolinas and Georgia threatened to abandon the Constitutional Convention.

Just as the already hot, shuttered hall neared the boiling point, Oliver Ellsworth of Connecticut—a future chief justice of the Supreme Court—rose to dump ice water on the Chesapeake delegates. Having "never owned a slave," Ellsworth said, he "could not judge of the effects of slavery on character." Rather than simply attacking the international slave trade's morality, or bewailing the effects of slaveholding in the moral abstract, let the economic interest of white Americans dictate whether the Atlantic slave trade should be closed. And, "as slaves also multiply so fast in Virginia and Maryland that it is cheaper to raise than import them . . . let us not intermeddle" with internal forced migrations, either. Concurring with Ellsworth, South Carolina's John Rutledge—another future chief justice—insisted that "religion and humanity [have] nothing to do with this question." "Interest alone is the governing principle with nations," he said. "The true question at present is whether the

Southern States shall or shall not be parties to the Union. If the Northern States consult their interest, they will not oppose the increase of Slaves which will increase the commodities of which they will become the carriers." New plantations within US borders could fill the role of the British sugar islands, to which northeastern merchants had lost access in the American Revolution. So the convention made a deal: Congress would ban the slave trade from Africa, but not for at least another twenty years.[17]

Years later, Illinois politician Abraham Lincoln, named for his grandfather who had been killed in the Kentucky field, would argue that a possible slave trade ban—however delayed—was a concession made by men ashamed of slavery. The Constitution, he pointed out, did not even include the words "slavery" or "slaves." Instead, it used circumlocutions, such as "Person held to service or labor." Perhaps, however, it was Ellsworth and Rutledge who were right: interest was the governing principle shaping the Constitution. In the interest of both profit and unity, they and most other white Americans proved willing to permit the forced movement of enslaved people. In straight or in twisted words, the outcome was plain: the upper and lower South would get to expand slavery through both the Atlantic trade and the internal trade. Meanwhile, the Northeast would earn profits by transporting the commodities generated by slavery's growth.

There were many Americans, even many white ones, whose interests were not served by those decisions, at least not directly. Yet the consequence of not accepting the deal would be disunity, which would be devastating to their interests in other ways. Allowing slavery to continue and even expand meant political unity. So black feet went tramping west and south in chains, and the constitutional compromise helped to imprint an economy founded on the export of slave-made commodities onto a steadily widening swath of the continent. Slavery's expansion soon yielded a more unified government and a stronger economy based on new nationwide capital markets. In fact, instead of finding slavery's expansion to be something that they just had to accept, to avoid ushering in a kind of conflict that could break the infant bonds of nationhood, white Americans soon found in it the basis for a more perfect union. Southern entrepreneurship and northern interest were going to be yoked together for a very long time.

IN EARLY 1792, VIRGINIA enslaver John Breckinridge was worried. He owned considerable land across the mountains, in Kentucky. He knew that over there was sitting a convention tasked with writing a constitution that would enable Kentucky to emerge from its territorial chrysalis and become

a separate state of the Union. And he had heard that some in the convention might have the same doubts that Thomas Jefferson and George Mason had.

Breckinridge had no such doubts. He once advised a female relative: "Your land & Negroes let no person on this earth persuade you to give up." She wouldn't, however, be forced to do that by federal decisions. After the 1789 ratification of the US Constitution, the first Congress gathered in New York and immediately began to try to stabilize the chaotic territories. Congress confirmed the Northwest Ordinance's ban on slavery in what would eventually become Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, Wisconsin, and Minnesota. No one thought those areas would make the commodities that John Rutledge had promised back at the Philadelphia Convention. South of the Ohio, the new Congress left open a massive new region for enslavers, organizing the Tennessee Territory in 1790 by passing a Southwest Ordinance that was an exact copy of the Northwest one—except that it left out the clause banning slavery.[18]

In the Natchez District along the Mississippi, slaves were already growing massive quantities of indigo. And in Kentucky, the first national census in 1790 had counted 61,000 whites and more than 12,000 enslaved Africans. Kentucky was not becoming Jefferson's dream republic of land-owning white yeomen—especially since the territory's constitutional convention decided that all land disputes would be referred to a statewide court of appeals staffed by three elite judges. The twenty-one speculators who owned a full quarter of all Kentucky land surely approved. Meanwhile, convention delegate David Rice—both a slaveholder and a Presbyterian minister—told the convention that slavery inevitably produced theft, kidnapping, and rape. Although a given owner might be a good man, debts could force him to break up families. Rice also insisted that slavery weakened the new republic by incorporating a group of people against whom citizens had effectively declared war. But the other delegates rejected his emancipation proposal, concluding that slavery actually strengthened Kentucky because it attracted wealthy settlers who would buy land from speculators.[19]

Once he heard the good news, John Breckinridge prepared to move his slaves west across the mountains. He wasn't sure if he would avoid "the perplexity of a Plantation" by hiring out his slaves. He'd heard that in the labor-hungry West, "the hire of your Negroes & rent of your land will far exceed any annual income you ever enjoyed." Reluctant to do the job himself, he convinced his neighbor John Thompson to lead the Breckinridge slaves across the mountains to his Kentucky properties. By the morning of April 3,

Thompson was at Fluvanna County on the James River, ready to leave, with Breckinridge's eighteen enslaved people in tow.[20]

Francis Fedric remembered such a morning—a morning on which he, too, had begun a forced march to Kentucky. As those who were about to be led away formed up before dawn, he saw men and women fall on the damp ground behind the old I-style house "on their knees[,] begging to be purchased to go with their wives or husbands." Some were "abroad husbands," men owned by other enslavers, but who had been allowed Saturday night visits with their wives—and who were now watching the dawn end their marriages. Some were abroad wives who had risen at 3 a.m. to walk to the plantation, bringing the last change of clothes they would ever wash for their husbands. Holding the hands of parents who were staying were sobbing sons and daughters. Begging was "of no avail," remembered Fedric. The man guiding the slaves out to Kentucky—well, this was not his first time. When he was ready, off they went, walking down the road toward the Blue Ridge looming in the distance.[21]

They walked, indeed. For as long as John Breckinridge owned people on both sides of the mountain, he also owned the connections between them. He held the carrots, and he held the sticks. For instance, Breckinridge had inherited a man named Bill from his father-in-law, Joseph Cabell. Breckinridge decided that Bill would have to go to the Kentucky farms. So would Bill's sister Sarah. This was when Bill and Sarah's mother, Violet, went to her owner Mary Cabell, Breckinridge's mother-in-law. Don't let Sarah "go to Cantucky," Violet begged, not unless "Stephen her husband," owned by another enslaver, could go with them. Violet had Mary Cabell's ear. However, Stephen cost more money than Breckinridge wanted to spend. Keeping Sarah in Virginia was the way for Breckinridge to save himself grief in his own family. So Sarah stayed. But Bill marched up the Wilderness Road, knowing that if he ran away along the trail, all bets were off. Sarah, and any children she might have, would be gone from Violet's life. The best he could do was to make the utilitarian calculations of the unfree, so he traded himself for his sister's marriage and his mother's last years.[22]

Thompson led Breckinridge's slaves across the Blue Ridge by the same pass where I-64 now soars over the mountain to connect Charlottesville in the Piedmont to Staunton in the Shenandoah Valley. Then they marched up the valley until, as Fedric remembered from his own journey, they saw the Alleghenies looming "in the distance something like blue sky." Looking for the shortest line through the folded hills to the Monongahela River in Pennsylvania, the flatlanders climbed up "through what appeared to be

a long winding valley": "On every side, huge, blue-looking rocks seemed impending," thought Fedric—who feared that, "if let loose, they would fall upon us and crush us." It was April, but a late winter spell lowered upon Breckinridge's forced migrants. Snow or cold rain came almost every day, and by night, tired bodies shivered around roadside fires. Wolves howled at an uncertain distance. In the mornings, anger about forced separations bubbled up. "Never till then," wrote Thompson, "did I know the worth of whiskey." Indeed, it was valuable all day long: "When the Negroes were wet and almost ready to give out, then I came forward with my good friend whiskey and Once every hour, unless they were asleep I was obliged to give them whiskey."[23]

Sleep, however, was broken. Fedric remembered that "two or three times during the night . . . one of the overseers would call our names over, every one being obliged to wake up and answer." The men were not chained together, and the enslavers still worried that some wouldn't refuse the opportunity to escape—even with all the cards enslavers held over the migrants' families back east of the Blue Ridge. A slave named Mary, for instance, ran away from Jonathan Stout of Kentucky after Stout got her to the Ohio River. She had fled with a mulatto man, and they crossed the river together and struck out into the Northwest Territory. The causes of her run for freedom were written on her skin, as her enslaver's advertisement (in a newspaper called the *Herald of Liberty*) revealed: "She is stout made, with a scar over one of her eyes, and much scarified on her back."[24]

Some forced migrants marched through the mountains to Wheeling (in Virginia then, but now in West Virginia) on the Ohio River, while others floated down the Monongahela in Pennsylvania. Although Pennsylvania's glacial emancipation plan allowed slavery to exist for decades more, by the 1790s some white Pennsylvanians along the route to Kentucky had allegedly organized a "negro club" that sought to free enslaved people. In 1791, three Virginia slave owners, named Stevens, Foushee, and Lafon, on a flatboat with a group of enslaved men and women, heard someone on the shore calling them to come "take a dram." A chance to knock back a shot of whiskey and trade news in the wilderness sounded like a damn good idea. Soon the boat was scraping onto the gravel of the riverbank. That's when the white men on the bank pulled one of the slave men out of the boat and ran with him into the woods. The slave owners shoved hard on their steering poles, propelling the boat into the downstream current, while catcalls rang from the trees. In another case, when winter weather trapped a party of slaves and their owner at an inn in Redstone, Pennsylvania, three enslaved people slipped away. The

Virginia enslaver accused local whites of "seducing" the African Americans to escape. He returned to Redstone with allies, and local authorities arrested him for trying to recapture the people who had been "kidnapped" from him. The Redstone incident developed into a federal-level confrontation between Virginia and Pennsylvania. In 1793, southerners in Congress solved the crisis by passing the first comprehensive fugitive slave act.[25]

Once enslavers got their captives through the mountains and onto the Ohio River, these escape attempts declined. The flatboats didn't stop until they reached the growing frontier port of Louisville. From there, travelers made their way to Lexington and the Bluegrass region. This area was beginning to look like a more prosperous Piedmont Virginia, complete with economic winners and losers. In the counties around Lexington, 60 percent of all whites owned no land. There were two slaves for every white man over the age of twenty. Enslaved people toiled in fields that were lusher than Virginia's, growing tobacco, corn, and wheat. They also raised hemp, which enslaved workers made into cordage and rigging at the "rope-walks" around Lexington and Louisville. The US government, newly empowered by the federal constitution, rewarded Kentucky enslavers for their willingness to stay in the union by working to open the mouth of the Mississippi River to trade. The Treaty of San Lorenzo, signed with Spain in 1795, enabled planters to export shipments of tobacco, rope, and other products by taking them down the Mississippi to the world market via New Orleans.

The 1792 state constitution had made it illegal to bring slaves into Kentucky just to sell them, but this ban proved as porous as dozens of similar ones that would follow it. In 1795, William Hayden—a nine-year-old boy who would spend the next thirty years in the slave trade, first as commodity and then as a slave trader's employee—was sold at Ashton's Gap in Virginia. The man who purchased him brought him along the Wilderness Road and then sold him to Francis Burdett of Lincoln County, Kentucky. At his new owner's place, Hayden comforted himself by watching the reflection of the rising sun every morning in a pond, as he had done with his mother back in Virginia. He told himself that somewhere, she was watching, too. Meanwhile, slave buyers spread across the Southeast as far as Charleston, where Kentucky-based purchasers bought Africans from the Atlantic trade and marched them west to toil in the lead mines north of Lexington.[26]

The fact that slavery was now thriving in Kentucky enabled the new state to attract more people like John Breckinridge, folks whom George Nicholas, one of the key forces behind the 1792 state constitution, called "valuable emigrants from the five S. states." Such emigrants tuned the state's institutions

to help them maintain an ever tighter grip on human property. "Associations"—regional groups of Baptist and other churches—began to punish ministers who preached against slavery. Ordinary white farmers, discouraged by the wealthy settlers' control over the processes of land law, moved away. Thomas Lincoln, whose father had been murdered in the field as the boy played, was now grown, and he hoped to have a farm of his own. But he repeatedly lost claims on land he had cleared and planted in lawsuits launched by speculators who lived as far away as Philadelphia. In 1816, he moved his young family, including seven-year-old son Abraham, across the Ohio. Thomas's retreat was part of a wider defeat for a vision of Kentucky as land for yeoman farmers rather than as a region for high-capital speculation in land and human bodies. And as young people like Francis Fedric and William Hayden marched west, another set of forced migrations started coming out of Maryland and Virginia.[27]

ON A BRIGHT SPRING Maryland morning in 1805, Charles Ball rode comfortably on the board seat of a wagon, the lead rope of his owner's yoke of oxen in his hands. He was driving the team to a little town on the bank of the Patuxent River. Ball's latest owner—he'd had five in his twenty-five years—was a hard man: Mr. Ballard would make a slave work in the woods on the snowiest of days, with no boots. But Ball had hopes. All through the neighborhood, he was known as a strong, intelligent worker with a steady temper, unlike his irascible African grandfather or his runaway father. Charles Ball had been hired out to the Washington Navy Yard—and had come back, instead of running away like so many others had done when they had worked "abroad." Ball could figure out faster, smarter ways to do any job. He had incentives: a wife and children, owned by another white man. Ball's extra hours supplied his family with food and clothing. Although he would later laugh at his younger self, the twenty-five-year-old Charles Ball hoped for his own and his family's freedom. And he was not alone. In Maryland's decaying tobacco economy, enslavers were allowing many African Americans to buy their freedom. The free constituted 5 percent of the state's 111,000 people of African descent in 1790, and 22 percent of 145,000 by 1810. Maryland was becoming a "middle ground" between a slave society and a free one.[28]

When Ball reached the little town, he followed his master's instructions, tying the team of oxen up by the store that Ballard owned there. His owner eventually appeared on horseback, went inside, and sat down to breakfast with the storekeeper. Soon Ballard emerged and told Ball to come in and

Within days, Gunn persuaded the legislature to sell 35 million acres of land between the Chattahoochee and the Mississippi Rivers for $500,000 in gold and silver. The Georgia-Mississippi Land Company immediately sold the titles to other speculative entities, especially the Boston-based New England–Mississippi Land Company. That company, well provided with venture capital, broke up land into smaller parcels, which it then sold in the form of paper shares to investors. These Yazoo securities created a massive scramble in Boston, driving up the price of stock in the New England–Mississippi Land Company and creating paper fortunes. But in Georgia, people were furious. James Jackson, Gunn's fellow senator and political rival, pronounced the entire operation a fraud. Although he was a notorious land speculator in his own right, Jackson organized resentment of the Yazoo sale into a tidal wave at the next state legislative elections. In 1796, new representatives passed a statute overturning the previous legislature's land grant. They literally expunged by fire the record of sale from the 1795 session book of the legislature.[36]

The legal consequences of the sale itself remained unsettled. What was clear, however, was that people around the United States were willing to pour money onto slavery's frontier. They anticipated that slave-made commodities would find a profitable market. So did migrant enslavers, and so they demanded more slaves. In 1786, John Losson wrote to a Virginia planter whose Georgia land he managed. Crops were fine, he reported, impending war with the Indians promised more land acquisitions, and "likely negroes is the best trade for land that can be."[37]

Indeed, access to large supplies of "surplus" slaves from the Chesapeake was the best form of currency for buying land that one could possess. To get land in Wilkes County, Georgia, Virginian Edward Butler traded the promise of "three likely young negroes" who were still in Virginia. The buyer wished, Butler reminded himself in his diary, "one of the S[ai]d three negroes to be a girl or young wench." Back in Virginia, Butler hired Thomas Wootton to transport thirteen more enslaved people down to Georgia. Wootton delivered three "likely young negroes" to their purchaser and settled the rest on Butler's thus-purchased land. In this kind of process, less wealthy white men, such as Wootton, perceived a growing opportunity for those who were willing to buy slaves in the Chesapeake and march them south for sale. Such white men began to strike out on their own in greater numbers with each year in the 1780s and 1790s. So the "Georgia-man," an all-too-real boogeyman, became a specific type of danger in the oral book of knowledge of enslaved African Americans.[38]

firebrand Patrick Henry. Each was, boosters claimed, a company of most "respectable" gentlemen, whose endeavors would open up a vast and "opulent" territory for the "honor" of the United States. The companies struck a deal with the legislature of Georgia, acquiring 16 million acres for $200,000: twelve and a half cents an acre. And what a land it was rumored to be. Boosters claimed that it could produce all the plantation crops a North American reader could wish for in 1789. Indigo, rice, and sugarcane grew luxuriantly in the Yazoo of the mind: two crops a year! The most fertile soil in the world! A climate like that of classical Greece! Land buyers would flock there! And, "supposing each person only to purchase one negro," wrote one "Charleston," as he called himself in a Philadelphia newspaper, this would eventually create "an immense opening for the African trade." Charleston suggested that each planter of tobacco and indigo could trade slave-made crops for more slaves: "After buying one negro, the next year he can buy two, and so be increasing on."[33]

In 1789, investors' expectations already marked off the Yazoo for slavery, and investors attracted by Yazoo expectations counted on slavery's wealth-generating capacity to yoke together the interests of many parties across regional boundaries. People from the free states who might dislike the political ramifications of the Three-Fifths Compromise had few qualms about pumping investment into a slave country; they expected to make money back with interest from land speculation, from financing and transporting slaves, and from the sale of commodities. Investors nationwide bought the bonds of these land companies and put their securities into circulation like paper money.[34]

The 1789 Yazoo sale eventually collapsed, but within six years, the Georgia legislators found a second set of pigeons. Or perhaps it was the Georgia power-brokers who were the ones conned. Or, yet again, maybe the citizens of Georgia were being fleeced. In 1795, the Spanish government signed the Treaty of San Lorenzo, surrendering its claim to the Yazoo lands. A newly formed company—the Georgia-Mississippi Land Company—moved quickly to make a new deal. The roster of the company's leaders included a justice of the US Supreme Court, a territorial governor, two congressmen, two senators (Robert Morris of Pennsylvania and James Gunn of Georgia), and Wade Hampton of South Carolina, who was on his way to becoming the richest man in the country. Since the federal government would surely soon extinguish Georgia's western claims, speculators then would be dealing with a legislature that would be more expensive to bribe than a state. So the company sent Senator Gunn swooping down on Augusta, the Georgia state capital, with satchels of cash.[35]

Thus, as he sat mute and bound in the bow of a rowboat that had been hired to take him across the Patuxent River from Ballard's Landing, Charles Ball already knew his fate. The way enslaved African Americans talked about "Georgia" and "Georgia-men" was their way of describing the new economic, social, and political realities that were destroying the world they had built in the Chesapeake. Yet twenty years of fearing the Georgia-men did not make the instantaneous demolition of his family and future any easier. And while he had always feared the slave trade, Ball was beginning to realize that the Georgia-man who faced him across the body of the sweating oarsman was building a machine even more cunning than he had imagined.

Now, as they neared the other side, Ball saw a group of African Americans huddled on the bank. They were his fifty-one fellow captives. Nineteen women were linked together by a rope tied to the cord halters that encircled their necks. Thirty-two men were in a different situation, and Ball was about to be joined to them. A blacksmith waited with iron for him: iron collar, manacles, chains. The buyer cut loose the tight cords around Ball's wrists. Ball stood "indifferent" to his "fate," as he later remembered, while the two white men fitted the collar on his neck and slid the hasp of an open brass padlock through a latch in the front. Then they passed a heavy chain inside of the curve of metal and pushed the hasp and the body of the padlock together. Click.

The same heavy iron stringer now joined Ball to the other thirty-two men, sliding like fish strung through the gills. Then, for the last step in the process, the blacksmith took two bands of iron, put them around Ball's wrists, and pounded down bolts to fasten the manacles. He attached the manacle on Ball's right wrist by a short chain to the left manacle of the next man on the neck chain. The two of them would have to walk in step and next to each other. Ball was now becoming one moving part of something called a "coffle," an African term derived from the Arabic word *cafila*: a chained slave caravan. The hammer pounded hard, and the bolt pinched the wrist of Ball's chainmate, who began to cry. Ball sat stoically, but on the inside, his emotions ran just as wild. His mind raced uncontrolled, from "the suffering that awaited" him in a place that he believed had long since killed his mother to even more despairing internal sentences: *I wish I had never been born. I want to die. I cannot even kill myself, because of these chains.*[39]

They waited on the bank. The blacksmith yawned. By the time a flat-bottomed boat approached the bank, Ball's heart had stopped racing. "I concluded," he said as an old man, telescoping a recovery in reality more painfully won, "that as things could not become worse—and as the life of

man is but a continued round of changes, they must, of necessity, take a turn in my favor at some future day. I found relief in this vague and indefinite hope."

In the boat was the returning Georgia-man, who ordered them all on board. The women—Ball now noticed that a couple of them were obviously pregnant—and the sixteen pairs of men, plus one, clambered in with a chorus of clinking. The scow set off toward the south bank of the Patuxent. The slave rowers pulled. Probably they didn't sing this song that one white traveler heard Chesapeake watermen chanting: "Going away to Georgia, ho, heave, O! / Massa sell poor negro, ho, heave, O! / Leave poor wife and children, ho, heave, O!"[40]

A man or woman who discovered that he was being taken south might be desperate enough to do anything. Some ran. Some fought like tigers. William Grimes tried to break his own leg with an axe. No wonder sellers and buyers schemed to take men like Charles Ball unawares. And once buyers bought, no wonder they bolted fetters on men and ran links of iron through padlocks. Men could march together carrying their chains. But there was no way that they could all run together. There was no way they could leap off a boat and swim to shore, no way thirty-three men hauling one thousand pounds of iron could hide silent in the woods. The coffle-chains enabled Georgia-men to turn feet against hearts, to make enslaved people work directly against their own love of self, children, spouses; of the world, of freedom and hope.[41]

When the scow scraped bottom in the shallows on the other side of the river, and the people awkwardly staggered out, the Georgia-man led them up the bank and onto a road that they walked until evening fell, heading southwest. They stopped at a rough tavern. The proprietor put them in one large room. Fifty-two pairs of mostly manacled hands managed to share a large pot of cornmeal mush before it was too dark to see.

That night, Ball, nestled between the two men chained closest to him, lay awake for many hours. When at last he slept, his son came to him. In Ball's dream the little boy tried to break the chain between his father's manacles to set his father's hands free, so that he could fix the boy's broken world. But the iron held. Charles's son faded. Then Charles's grandfather appeared. Born in Africa in the 1720s, he'd been kidnapped as a teenager, and sold to men who brought him across the salt water to Maryland. There they renamed him, and by the time Charles had known him, "Old Ben" was gray with half a century in slavery. Ben never surrendered his own version of Islam, or his contempt for either the enslavers or the enslaved people who behaved submissively. Charles's father, in contrast, had tried to play a less defiant part. But after the

1785 sale of his wife and children, the father changed. He spent his free time at Old Ben's hut, talking about Africa and the wrongs of slavery. The owner grew worried that the younger man would run away. He arranged a posse to help seize Charles's father for a Georgia trader. But Old Ben overheard two white men talking about the plan. He crossed three miles of woods in the dark to Charles's father's cabin. Handing his son a bag of dried corn and a jug of cider, Ben sent him off toward Pennsylvania. No one in Calvert County ever heard from Charles's father again.

Ben would have come for his grandson, too. But the old man was dead ten years gone, and these locks and chains would have defeated even his survivor's cunning. When the sun came up, it found Ball stumbling forward, trying to keep time with the rest of the coffle.

In the days to come, Ball and the other men gigged on the Georgia-man's line marched steadily southwest, covering ten to twenty miles a day. The pregnant women complained desperately. The Georgia-man rode on. After crossing the Potomac, he moved Ball, who was physically the strongest of the men, from the middle of the chain and attached his padlocked collar to the first iron link. With Ball setting a faster pace, the two sets of double lines of people hurried down the high road, a dirt line in the Virginia grain fields that today lies under the track of US Highway 301.

Ball's emotions continued to oscillate. Yet slowly he brought his interior more in line with the exterior face that men in coffles tried to wear. "Time did not reconcile me to my chains," Ball recalled, but "it made me familiar with them." Familiar indeed—at night, as everyone else slept, Ball crawled among his fellow prisoners, handling each link, looking for the weak one. He found nothing. But sometimes slave traders were careless—like the ones who were taking Jack Neal down the Ohio River in 1801. They had shackled him to the side of the boat, but one night Neal worked loose the staple that fastened iron chain to wood. He crept along the deck to his sleeping captor, slipped the white man's loaded pistol from his pocket, and blew the man's brains out. Neal then went to the far end of the boat, where another white man was steering, and announced, "Damn you, it was your time once but it is mine now."

Neal was recaptured on the Ohio shore and executed. Others had already tried the same thing, such as the enslaved men who in autumn 1799 killed a Georgia-man named Speers in North Carolina. He'd spent $9,000 buying people in northern Virginia—money embezzled from the Georgia state treasury by a legislator, as it turned out. If Speers had brought the men all the way to the end of the trail and sold them, perhaps the money could've been replaced, and no one would have been the wiser. But he forgot to close a lock

day, Ball emitted a stream of exploratory chatter at the Georgia-man's ears, blathering on about Maryland customs, growing tobacco, and his time in the Navy Yard.

Enslaved people trained themselves all their lives in the art of discovering information from white people. But Ball couldn't pry loose even the name of the man who played this role of "Georgia-man." That role already did not have the best reputation among white folks in Virginia and Maryland. Some resented the way coffles, driven right through town, put the most unpleasant parts of slavery right in their faces. Others resented the embarrassment the traders could inflict. In the 1800 presidential election, Thomas Jefferson defeated the incumbent, John Adams, and the federal government shifted to the District of Columbia—and so the heart of the United States moved to the Chesapeake. Clanking chains in the capital of a republic founded on the inalienable right to liberty became an embarrassment, in particular, to Virginia's political leaders. Northern Federalist newspapers complained that Jefferson had been elected on the strength of electoral votes generated by the three-fifths clause of the Constitution—claiming, in other words, that, Virginia's power came not from championing liberty, but from enslaving human beings.[45]

Sometimes both Georgia-men and the enslaved intentionally irritated that particular sting. A few years after Ball was herded south, a slave trader marched a coffle past the US Capitol just as a gaggle of congressmen took a cigar break on the front steps. One of the captive men raised his manacles and mockingly sang "Hail Columbia," a popular patriotic song. Another such occasion relied for its emotional punch not on the sarcasm of captives but on the brashness of captors. Jesse Torrey, a Philadelphia physician, was visiting the Capitol when he saw a coffle pass by in chains. A passer-by explained that the white "drivers" of the caravan were "Georgy-men." The doctor walked up to one and inquired (in what must have been an accusatory tone), "Have you not enough such people in that country yet?" "Not quite yet," was the sneering reply.[46]

Another incident even became something of a media scandal. In the early nineteenth century, Americans were redefining the role of women, arguing that mothers needed to teach their sons the principles of self-sacrifice if the young men were to grow up to be virtuous citizens of the young republic. In December 1815, an enslaved woman named Anna dramatized the way in which slavery's expansion did not allow her to do that. Sold to a Georgia-man, separated from her husband and all but two of her children, she had been locked in a third-floor room at George Miller's tavern on F Street in

which could never be done whilst they were crowded together as they now are in the southern states." If the slaves were "diffused," enslavers would be more likely to free them, for whites were afraid to live surrounded by large numbers of free black people. Thus, moving enslaved people into new regions where their enslavement was more profitable would lead to freedom for said enslaved people. Make slavery bigger in order to make it smaller. Spread it out to contain its effects. And those most eager to buy this bogus claim were the Virginians themselves. Jefferson became the most prominent advocate of diffusion. The notion provided a layer of deniability for liberal enslavers who were troubled by slavery's ability to undermine their self-congratulation. Diffusion answered the clanking figures who sang "Hail Columbia," and the knowing sneer of the Georgia-man who knew the price of every soul.[50]

In 1798, Georgia ceded its lands to the federal government, and Congress organized the land between the Chattahoochee and the Mississippi Rivers into the Mississippi Territory, with slavery included. Congress proved unable to decide whether the Yazoo claimants had a right to the land bought in 1795. In the House debate, Virginia Federalist John Marshall was one of the claimants' most vigorous promoters. Long an advocate for investors who speculated on southwestern lands, Marshall would soon be appointed chief justice of the Supreme Court by President Adams.[51]

Once Jefferson was elected, he tried to settle the troubled waters of the political nation by proclaiming, in his 1801 inaugural address, "We are all Federalists, we are all Republicans." He might as well have argued, "We are all diffusionists, we are all Yazoo speculators." And then he could have added, reassuringly, "We are none of us Georgia-men." Yet, in 1805, the man on the horse directed Charles Ball and his coffle around Richmond, Virginia's capital. Perhaps he did so to spare the eyes and the consciences of those who weren't fully persuaded by diffusionism's sloppy logic. But Georgia-men didn't have to explain themselves to the likes of Charles Ball. Or to anyone, so long as the enslavers were willing to supply a stream of men and women to the backcountry. And the existence of Georgia-men allowed those who reacted to the ugliness of diffusion-in-actual-practice to waste their heat on an enemy who didn't care what they said.

So Ball and the coffle crossed the river on a ferry west of the city. The two lines, men in chains and women in ropes, walked southwest from Richmond for weeks. One day in southern Virginia, they passed a road leading up to a low house surrounded by sandy tobacco fields. A hundred men, women, and children toiled out there under the gaze of a white man with a long whip. The

Georgia-man stopped another white man coming up the road. "Whose land is that?" he asked. "Mr. Randolph, a member of Congress."

The coffle kept on. They crossed the Roanoke River, entering North Carolina's Piedmont. Next came a week of hard marching through this land of small farms, passing cornfields and the boys and girls toiling in them. Then water was sloshing around Ball's feet on the deck of an overloaded flat as a Yadkin River ferryman pulled on the rope: one trip for the men, going back for the women. Three days' marching later, and the Georgia-man told them they had entered South Carolina—a placename that was part of the greater Georgia in Ball's geography. Night fell. Thoughts of death returned.

In the morning, just to make sure they all understood that they had marched into a different part of the world, the Georgia-man pried open his compressed lips and made a little speech. They were now too far from Virginia or Maryland to ever get back again, he told them. They must give up all hope of returning. And there was much truth to what the Georgia-man said. These fifty-two enslaved African Americans had now walked into a place that the coffle-chain had inked onto the map with streaks of iron oxide from sweat and dirty manacles. Beside the road, they began to see a strange crop growing in the early summer fields: "It looked not unlike buckwheat before it blossoms," Ball remembered. This was the cotton plant. In this place where chains marched past plants that looked like food but turned into fiber, they were trapped in a deeper slavery, one shifted into being by two decades of Georgia-men traveling to and from the Chesapeake. When the American Revolution had ended, 20,000 enslaved people had lived in the South Carolina backcountry. Now 75,000 were there. Meanwhile, the Georgia slave population was growing, too, increasing from 30,000 in 1790 to 107,000 in 1810.[52]

The next day, as they walked, a stranger rode up, matching the Georgia-man's pace. "*Niggers* for sale?" He wanted to buy two women. The two men negotiated, argued, and insulted each other a little. The new man stared at the women and told them what he thought he'd do with them. The coffle kept moving. The white men rode along, bargaining. Maybe the deal could be sweetened, allowed the Georgia-man, if the South Carolinian paid to have the chains knocked off the men. One thousand dollars for the two, plus blacksmith fees. They stopped at a forge, and they kept arguing. The new man stated for everyone's benefit that he had worked African men to death in iron collars. The blacksmith came out, and he asked what "the two gentlemen were making such a *frolick* about," Ball later said. Frolicking: Down there, Ball realized, the Carolinians' play, the time when they were most fully

INDEX