

SOUTH CAROLINA FUGITIVES
AS VIEWED THROUGH
LOCAL COLONIAL NEWSPAPERS
WITH EMPHASIS ON
RUNAWAY NOTICES 1732-1801

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During the period 1732-1801, despite the most difficult and extraordinary circumstances, thousands of slaves resisted the institution of slavery by running away. A careful study of 1,863 runaway notices placed in the South Carolina colonial papers during this period by irate planters anxious to regain some 2,002 slaves help to answer many questions about the fugitives. Such questions as how old were they? Did they run away in tribes or groups? How many women ran away? Did they carry their children with them? How many women were pregnant? Did the planters whip or torture the fugitives? Did any planters forgive their slaves for running away? Did the planters want their slaves back dead or alive? Why did the slaves run away? We must first ask: What was the function of the runaway notice? In what way did it differ from the "For Sale" advertisement or the "Pickup" notice?

The typical runaway advertisement contained a terse description of the fugitive's name, sex, physical traits, personal traits, and other characteristics of the slave. It was unusual for a master to list the occupation of the runaway, since only ten percent of all slaveholders posted this information.

A distinction must be made, however, between the "runaway" and the "For Sale" advertisements which always contained the slave's positive qualities as well as his occupation. One planter, for instance, published a "For Sale" and a runaway notice for "A Negro fellow named Jack, this country born and his wife named Sapho of the Guinea country." In the runaway notice the couple was supposed to be "harboured at James Island where they formerly lived." He added that whoever "delivers them to me or to the Workhouse shall have fifty pounds reward and whoever will prove their being harboured, by a white person shall have fifty pounds, by a Negro ten pounds." But the planter changed his advertisement and listed the fugitive's occupation when he subsequently decided to sell him. In the "For Sale" notice he

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stated that the fugitive is “a very sensible fellow, and a good market-man, good butcher, good plougher and mower. The wench is fit for any use in the plantation, they are both young, if any person is willing to purchase the above negroes they may apply to the above subscriber who is willing to dispose of them.”¹

A planter rarely declared in his “For Sale” advertisement as one did that “his slave was so unwieldy and requires a master that can be constantly with him, he is sold for no other fault than having been brought up to act too much on his own accord, he is warranted, honest, and of good disposition by no means can he be trusted to act alone. . . .” “For Sale” advertisements described slaves in glowing terms: “A Negro woman with two children, the mother a quiet disposed wench, a washer, cook, ironer, seamstress and she is honest and no runaway.”² A runaway ad, on the other hand, warned the province of a menace.

Unlike the “For Sale” advertisements, the runaway ads were supported with an elaborate set of “Negro laws.” These laws, meting out punishment for black slaves who ran away, were harsh:

Every slave of above sixteen that shall run away from his master, mistress or overseer, and shall continue for the space of twenty days at one time, shall by his master, mistress, overseer or head of the family’s procurement, for the first offense, be publicly and severely whipped not exceeding 40 lashes; and in case the master, mistress, overseer, or head of the family shall neglect to inflict such punishment of whipping, upon any negro or slave that shall so run away, for the space of ten days upon the complaint made thereof, within one month, by any person what so ever, to any justice of the peace and said justice of the peace shall by his warrant directed to the constable, order the said negro or slave to be publicly severely whipped, charges not exceeding twenty shillings, to be born by the person as directed.³

If the slave ran away the second time, he was branded with the letter “R” on the right cheek. The third time, forty lashes and one ear cut off, and the fourth time, he would be taken away from the master.

Runaway ads for indentured servants (the majority of whom were white) were also supported with laws. These laws were seldom as harsh as the “Negro Laws.” On February 12, 1737, the *South*

¹*South Carolina Gazette*, September 17, 1763. Hereafter cited as *SCG*.

²*City Gazette and Daily Advertiser*, September 20, 1787, September 24, 1795. Hereafter cited as *CGDA*.

³*SCG*, April 4, 1737. Henry Howell, *Police Control of the Slaves in South Carolina* (Tennessee 1914), p. 34; George Washington Williams, *The History of the Negro Race in America*, (2 Vols., New York, 1885), 78 I, 294-296.

Carolina Gazette published "The Act for Regulating White Servants" stating that "whoever entertains or harbors a runaway servant not having a certificate of freedom directed by the Act shall pay to the master or mistress, two pounds for every 24 hours he shall so be harbored or entertained by him—for which delinquents may expect certainly to be prosecuted with utmost rigor, and by the same Act it is lawful for any person to take up any suspected person and carry him or her to any Justice of the Peace to be examined."⁴

In addition to the runaway ads and the "For Sale" ads, there were the "Brought to the Gaol" or "pickup notices". They were issued by the warden or jailer in the workhouse at Charlestown, South Carolina, for slaves who had been picked up for moving about town without a pass and locked up until their masters reclaimed them. As the South Carolina population increased, other parishes such as Camden, Orangeburg, and Beaufort built workhouses of their own to confine their fugitives in the 1760's; but for the most part all fugitives were sent to Charlestown.

In 1734, Charlestown's warden, Christopher Holsom, was the first jailer to issue pickup notices. His notices listed the fugitive's name, dress, country and master. The typical notice read as follows: "A Negro wench named Mary said her master's name is Robert Doux. She is of the Mandingo country."

While the warden usually did not mention the fugitive's occupation or personality traits, he occasionally noted, in a businesslike manner, the existence of a peculiar physical trait, even blindness. One warden, for example, reported that "Jack a Negro man, Sarah a wench; and Adam a child who says they belong to the John Williams that lives on the road of ninety-six, but is gone into the country. Jack formerly belonging to Samuel Bowman Esq. of Charlestown is blind. . . ."⁵

The runaway notices, totaling 1,863 and covering some 2,002 black slaves, were complemented by 862 pickups. The situation was quite different for the runaway white indentured servants. The white servants—two hundred and one men and eleven women—were covered by one hundred forty runaway notices. It is worth noting that research only uncovered one pickup notice that referred to these white runaways.

While the black fugitive had little hope for manumission, the indentured servant could be discharged from service after seven years and, therefore, chose not to sacrifice seventeen months in a workhouse.

The precise number of fugitives will never be known because, al-

⁴SCG, February 12, 1737.

⁵*South Carolina Gazette and American Country Journal*, March 3, 1766. Hereafter cited as SCGJ; SCG, March 17, 1764; October 4, 1764.

though slaves had been fleeing since 1688, the first local colonial paper, *The South Carolina Gazette*, only began publishing in 1732. Of the nine newspapers that came into existence during the eighteenth century, the *South Carolina Gazette* contained seventy-five percent of the advertisements. It should be kept in mind that although this paper remained in existence from 1732 to 1775, there were at least ten years of missed issues, because of labor problems, poor equipment, deaths and fires, and the Revolutionary War.

From 1775 to 1801, the *South Carolina* and the *American General* gazettes and the *City Gazette* and the *Daily Advertiser* did little to fill this twenty-six year interval, the total output of these gazettes only amounting to two and a half years of erratic publication. In other words, all the gazettes together reflect no more than forty years of the entire eighteenth century. It is logical, therefore, to conclude that the total number of advertisements was in all probability at least double the number extant.

Another reason for the lack of total documentation of these ads is the fact that many planters refused to pay the newspaper advertisement fees. Not only did they have to worry about paying Peter Timothy of the *Gazette* or the other publishers for the space, but they also had to pay the informer, (black or white), the warden, and the person who initially delivered the fugitive to the warden. That was because of the fact that delivery was expensive. For example, delivery of a runaway from Beaufort, which was seventy miles from Charlestown, entailed a set amount of shillings for every mile. (Thus it was no wonder that the Beaufort Grand Jurors presented a Grievance that "there is no place of confinement for fugitive Slaves in the District and that the Gaoler in this District will not take into confinement any such Slaves brought to him, and that for want of such a Place many Slaves are suffered to keep out and do much mischief to the great injury of their owners and others as the Distance to Charlestown's Workhouse is so great that when they are taken the captors choose to let them go rather than bear the Trouble of delivering them at so great a Distance.")⁶

Still other fugitives did not require advertisements for their return; they had either gone back willingly or had been captured or killed before they left the immediate vicinity of the plantation. One planter issued a notice stating that, "a new Negro man, in company with another, was pursued in the subscriber's cornfield and endeavoring to escape was shot by the watchman, and unfortunately received a wound in the back, of which the said slave notwithstanding the best medical assistance was pronounced dead the third day following."⁷

⁶SCG, December 17, 1772.

⁷SCG, September 3, 1772.

Lastly, to account for still another major segment of missing ads, one must remember that the wardens issued their pickup or "Brought to the Gaol" list in an erratic manner. Sometimes the lists were published as frequently as once every two weeks, sometimes only once a year. The Grand Jurors of Charlestown responded to this unreliable procedure by stating "We present a very great Grievance, that the Keepers of every gaol in the province do not publish these names and full description of every fugitive slave confined in their respective gaols together with the names to whom they belong at least once every month."⁸

The average runaway slave was male, single, between the ages of eighteen and thirty and had usually belonged to no less than two owners. The number of males was 1,500 whereas there were 502 women fugitives. It is not unusual that the number of women fugitives is less than that of the males. Not only were there four male slaves for every female, but before a woman went away alone, she usually had to concern herself about her children's safety. For example, the *Gazette* issue of June 3, 1760 contained an advertisement as follows: "Runaway with her child about twelve months old a Negro wench named Martilla about twenty-three years of age, bought at the sale of Mrs. Mary Baker's Estate and well known in Charlestown where she is supposed to be harboured. Whoever delivers her to my plantation on John's Island or to the warden of the workhouse shall have four pounds."⁹

Fugitive couples frequently ran off carrying their children. On July 13, 1775: "A Negro fellow named July, a wench named Kate (wife of July) with the children. July is a slim male fellow pitted with pox. Kate is a stout black wench, with remarkably large breasts. Sophia a slim small girl about eighteen months old." According to the planter who had "recently purchased the fugitives from a Reverend Mr. Tonge," they had been out "eighteen months and pass for free Negroes in the back parts of the province." He also "suspected that they will go toward North Carolina. If the said fellow July should be caught and carried to any of the country Gaols he must be put in irons as he will strive to make his escape."¹⁰

Some male slaves also managed to escape with their children. In 1772 Mrs. Dellahow reported "that two sensible Negro fellows" Ramspute and his son George had run away, probably "harbored with his wife in Charleston." And there was "Bristol and his thirteen year

⁸SCG, October 10, 1772. The "Brought to Gaol" list began on May 25, 1734. By the Order of the Honorable Common Assembly Advertisements of what Negroes and Slaves that are Brought to the Gaol in Charlestown will be continued weekly.

⁹SCG, June 3, 1760.

¹⁰SCG, July 13, 1775.

old son who ran away from John Rawn in April 1767.”¹¹

Slaves with similar ties often united to run away—Angolans, Gambians, Mandingoes, Callabers, Coromentees, Guineans, Gold Coast and Iboes. Within these runaway groups, Guineans are listed as artisans, and “Quacco, Quaimino and Quamino” were described as “Angolan sawyers” in 1733. Three fugitive Angolans were advertised as tailors on November 11, 1776. While group escapees often consisted of members of similar tribes, some groups were composed of fugitives with similar occupations. In these cases, wherever possible, their occupations were listed but not their countries. For example, the fourteen slaves who ran away from one Andrew Lord on November 18, 1780:¹²

1. Cuffe—no occupation listed
2. George—no occupation listed
3. Sam—no occupation listed
4. Ned—sawyer
5. Jim—carpenter
6. Wiley—no occupation listed
7. July—sawyer
8. Julberg—carpenter
9. Sampson—plowman, waggoner
10. Rentry—no occupation listed
11. Rechilles—sawyer
12. China—no occupation listed
13. Serva—no occupation listed
14. Ben—no occupation listed

Like the Africans, the indentured white servants often ran away in tribal groups. Two Irish servants, William Welsh and James Machine, shoemakers, took guns as well as their shoemaker tools before they left Daniel Cartwright’s plantation in 1732. In 1737 two Swiss indentured servants with smallpox were reported going to a Swiss village in South Carolina.¹³

The notices reveal that there were some white servants who ran away with the Blacks. On May 4, 1772 Monday, a Barbadian fugitive, twenty years old, five feet, “has a defect in his left eye occasioned by a blow, left the Island in a boat with some whites who went off for debt. . . .”¹⁴

But that was uncommon. The major difference between the two

¹¹ *SCGJ*, April 1, 1767, July 8, 1772.

¹² *SCG*, May 28, 1733; *SCAGG*, December 6, 1780, *South Carolina American General Gazette*, November 18, 1780. Hereafter cited as *SCAGG*.

¹³ *SCG*, June 3-11, 1732.

¹⁴ *SCG*, May 4, 1772.

groups—black and white—is that the white servants rarely ran in large groups, or in couples, or of mixed nationalities, while the Blacks did. Furthermore, the runaway notices failed to reveal one single case of an indentured white servant assaulting, poisoning, or killing his master. Moreover, no evidence exists of white servants being burned, shot, or hanged.

Group runaways posed a grave threat to the South Carolina citizens, for runaways had the potential to wreak havoc in a community. Therefore, white citizens resorted to extreme deterrent tactics against the black residents. When a white captured a black fugitive leader, he was quickly tried by a vengeful jury (made up of white men) whose interest was not only to procure the harshest penalty possible but also to extract a tearful confession to teach the Blacks “a lesson.” After the trial the Grand Jurors paraded the fugitive, even before an execution, through the middle of town so all the Blacks as well as the whites could see him. In the case of Sampson and Harry who were tried in 1743, for having “endeavored to delude several other slaves to leave the Province,” Sampson was sentenced to be hanged but “made his escape.” Harry, however, was “whipped and pickled for three consecutive days around the Square of Charlestown.”¹⁵

It should be noted here that the runaway notices used the term “pickling” to describe a process that entailed rubbing salt or vinegar in the wounds of the victims—after they had been whipped. “Gibbeting” was another term used to depict the hanging of a fugitive on an upright post with a projecting arm until he “expired.”

Despite the threat of execution, Blacks concentrated all their efforts to be free, both singly and in groups, in America as well as in Africa. The African born leaders not only organized and encouraged slaves in South Carolina to run away, but they also operated on the slave ships enroute to South Carolina. In 1734 the *South Carolina Gazette* published the following account:

Arrived a sloop from Guinea, C. Perkins—late Commander who on the 7th of April last was killed by Negroes who rose on the Sloop’s Company—they killed several of the Negroes and obliged some to jump down the hold, and the rest to quit the sloop—13 of them got away into the boat and nine into two canoes with four Negro traders on board who are thought to have assisted and encouraged them to ride. A considerable number of Negroes came off afterwards in canoes and endeavored to get on board but were beat off—and the mate afterwards recovered the slaves which had escaped. About the same time the slaves on board a Guinea ship be-

¹⁵SCG, January 17, 1743.

longing to Bristol rose and destroyed the whole crew cutting off the Captain's head, arms and legs.¹⁶

In America other groups besides slaves were attacking the white slave owners. For instance, on August 1, 1754, James Glen issued a Proclamation describing "a most barbarous and inhuman murder committed upon the body of Charles Purry of Beaufort who was forced violently from his house and strangled and stabbed in the breast with a knife and thrown into a creek." He concluded that he suspected that "several persons had been concerned in the perpetration of this barbarity."¹⁷

A week later the *Gazette* reported that "the murderers of Mr. Charles Purry are at last discovered and proved to be some of his Negroes." Two weeks later another report stated that "three of the late Charles Purry's negroes concerned in the murder of their master" were a "wench and two fellows (her brothers). The wench impeached the fellows; and one of them called Robin was hanged on a gibbet last Thursday. The other called Jemny was to be executed in the same manner." It was learned on August 29th that the fugitive leader and eight others had taken the life of two other whites, "on the night after Mr. Purry's death which only the finding of his body had prevented them from taking a schooner to St. Augustine."¹⁸

These bold attacks against the white population, whether by groups or individuals, kept the whites in a state of perpetual fear and resulted in still harsher reprisals when the runaways were apprehended. The *South Carolina Gazette* issue of January 8, 1732 stated that "one day last week, Mr. Charlie Jones pursuing a runaway Negro, who had robbed him, and coming up with the Negro fought him, and struck the lock of his musket into the Negro's skull and killed him. He told a justice what he had done, who ordered him to cut his head off, fix it on a pole, set it up on the crossroad which was done accordingly near Ashley Ferry." In 1736, "A Negro fellow belonging to Thomas Butler named Abraham received the sentence to be hanged" for "feloniously assaulting and robbing Mr. Statler on the High Road."¹⁹

In 1744 "An old Negro man belonging to Honorable Blake was hanged in chains on a gibbet near Dorchester for having attempted to poison his master."²⁰ On December 4, 1800, two fugitives, named Ben and Smart, were accused of "murdering" William Maxwell, a ship carpenter. Unanimously declared guilty by the freeholders and magis-

¹⁶SCG, December 12, 1732.

¹⁷SCG, August 1, 1754.

¹⁸SCG, August 14, 29, 1732.

¹⁹SCG, January 8, 1732, October 9, 1736.

²⁰SCG, July 7, 1747.

trates "they were accordingly sentenced,"—Ben "to suffer death by being burnt alive" and Smart "to be carried to the place of the murder and there to suffer the like punishment."²¹

But fear of the runaways was not the only problem that plagued the planters. The runaway notices reveal that many masters were totally unaware of the needs and desires of their own slaves. Too often these owners were astonished when their slaves ran away. On June 6, 1734, for instance, a planter reported that a "ten-year-old boy named Jacob who spoke no other tongue but English, was believed to be taken away by two white men." The master ended by saying that "Jacob had no manner of provocation to run away. He never did before."²²

Twenty-nine slaveholders in an apparent state of despair made known their willingness to forgive their slaves. On April 23, 1754, James Micher said he would "forgive if they came back on their own Boston, his wife Sue, and his child." Thomas Lloyd had an idea that Tom was harbored by Negroes and he would forgive him—if he "voluntarily returned, his absence would be overlooked." Even a woman slaveholder named Sarah Wright on October 6, 1758, was forced to offer to "forgive" Titus and Cato if they would turn themselves in before three months. And there was Thomas Whiteside who, on October 31, 1762, begged James and a woman named Albo to return and be "forgiven" as well as be given "tickets to look for new masters."²³

Of course "forgiveness" could be viewed as a fleeting emotion which could later easily become vengeance. For example, Master Thomas Stone declared that he had sufficient amount of information to prove that "Wye" had been "harbored by white persons." He was determined "not to sell him for any sum of money," and "he was willing to overlook and pardon the offense" but if Wye did not return in a week, Stone offered fifty pounds for Wye's head.²⁴

Some masters unabashedly went beyond the severe Negro Act to curb runaways. In 1763, the *Charleston Warden* published this ad: "A Negro fellow who calls himself Titus was born in Jamaica, said his master's name is Joseph Dobbins and lives at the Round O, and that his master castrated him and another, but the other dying he ran away, he has on his neck an iron collar with this master's name on it, also an iron on each leg."²⁵

According to the runaway notices fugitives were shot, whipped and axed. A jailer issued a notice for a runaway named "Belstrast," as a

²¹*CDGA*, December 1, 1800.

²²*SCG*, June 6, 1734.

²³*SCG*, April 23, 1754; October 6, 1758, October 31, 1762.

²⁴*SCGJ*, October 22, 1768.

²⁵*SCGJ*, February 17, 1768.

“ ‘New Negro’ who has the mark of a gunshot wound on his left thigh which he says was done by his master.” Two fugitives, Luke and Mark, “lately brought from a cargo of Brailsford Chapman’s,” in 1765, were described in this matter-of-fact manner: “One of them has a wound not quite well on his temples and another occasioned by a shot in the buttocks.” Master Blake White said Paul had “a fresh mark on his back lately done with an ax.” It should be noted here that many slaveholders used the term “old offender” or “many marks of correction” as a euphemism for whipping. One notice in the *South Carolina Gazette* described “a mulatto fellow named John” as having “a strutting walk, well set, plausible in speech (tho’ the many visible marks of correction [sic] upon his body proved himself to be an old offender). . . .”²⁶

It was common practice for masters to punish fugitives by putting them in irons. Rawlin Lowndes put out a notice for “a Negro fellow named Christopher” with “an iron with three prongs on one of his legs.” One planter was searching for a fugitive named “Sandy, an artful fellow,” who “formerly wore an iron which makes him rather lame.” Putting irons on a fugitive did not always stop a determined slave. In 1766, James “who could read and write” ran away with an “iron boot on his leg” but “as he took two files with him he may perhaps get it off.”²⁷

Planters also sought extreme penalties for fugitives by issuing notices containing an ultimatum for delivery “dead or alive.” Tony was described as “an obstreperous, saucy fellow,” by his master. He added, “and if he be killed in his taking I am willing to reward any man who brings me his head.”²⁸

Some advertisements contained explicit instructions for the type of punishment a white citizen should mete out for any slave without a pass. One woman slaveholder, Rebecca Marsey, stated that “whoever picks up Ruth give her fifty good lashes.” Francis LeMasseur said “if Parris is caught without a ticket (which he never shall have). . . take him up as a runaway and if he refuses to surrender knock him down or shoot him with small shot about the breech to make him stand.”²⁹

One warden believed that a dead or alive notice was not lenient enough for a “notorious villain” named Jacob who was wanted by several people. “Whoever shall meet with him,” stated the warden, “it is not the desires to take his life as I intend to bring him to justice.”³⁰

²⁶SCGJ, August 4, 1765; SCG, July 6, 1765; July 7, 1770.

²⁷SCGJ, August 28, 1766.

²⁸SCG, June 1, 1743.

²⁹SCG, March 2, 1734; January 1, 1739.

³⁰SCAGG, December 30, 1778.

“Dead or Alive” notices did not always yield the success desired by the slave owner. For instance, on June 6, 1756, Master Thomas Tucker declared in his ad that the reward lately offered for the Head of my Negro has failed the end supposed that of driving him home. “I thereby promise another offer of twenty pounds to any person that will deliver him alive.”³¹

Why did the slaves run away? Sometimes the reasons were minor. One master said his slave George, “a very sensible and artful villain,” ran away “for no other account than bidding his overseer defiance for which I offer one hundred pounds for his head and twenty pounds if delivered alive.” In 1756, one slave went away from a plantation in Stono because of “ill usage from a Negro driver called Peter.” Another slave, of obviously delicate sensibilities, “named Peter by trade a cooper and lately worked with the scavenger of the city and used to attend one of the City carts for the purpose of taking dirt off the streets, which employment disliking very much he pleads for an excuse for absenting himself. . . .”³²

But runaway ads reveal that the major grievances of the fugitives were far more serious. At least seventy percent of them had had two to three owners before they ran away. One must remember that with each sale, a slave was uprooted from his home and family and while it is true that fugitives were often sold because their masters had died, many were sold purely for profit. One notice sought: “the following Negroes Scipio, Philander, Camos, Moscow, Jack and Bella belonging to Mr. Tacituras which were sometime ago advertised for sale in order to discharge a balance still due on Mr. Stouerburgh’s mortgage in which the said Negroes were included.”³³

The plight of the indentured servant was quite different. When an indentured servant was sold, it was his remaining “time,” not his entire future being sold.³⁴ It is perhaps easier to understand, then, why some fugitives sought to preserve their tenuous union with “wives” and family by not only running away but also, when necessary, by taking the master’s life. There is the case in April 1775, for example, when “A woman fugitive named Tena” formerly the property of James King, left and “took a variety of clothes” with her to Charles-town where she was suspected of being harbored by her relatives. William Roberts, the subscriber, offered to forgive Tena if she was captured and locked up in a workhouse to prevent her from escaping again.³⁵

³¹SCG, June 19, 1756.

³²SCAGG, July 25, 1774; SCGJ, November 11, 1756; CDGA, September 20, 1800.

³³SCG, March 1, 1749; August 15, 1761.

³⁴SCG, November 6, 1736.

³⁵SCG, August 3, 1775; SCGJ, July 18, 1775.

On July 18, 1775, there appeared another notice by William Roberts:

Whereas on Thursday night, the 10th, one of the subscriber's outhouses at his plantation on James Island was broke open, and one of his Negro wenches named Tena, late property of James King, was carried off by a Negro fellow named Toby, the property of William Maxwell, Esq. both of whom are well known about Charlestown but are supposed to have gone to Edisto or Athepou; the wench was found about a fortnight ago in the possession of the fellow and in consequence of a warrant he absconded and came armed to his place Thursday with intention (with exceeding good grounds) to take away the life of the subscriber. This therefore to offer a reward of fifty pounds currency to any person who will deliver the said fellow to me or to the warden. I will offer fifty pounds currency, seventy pounds for the delivery of the wench. If they are harbored by a white person, I will give one hundred pounds currency upon confiscation and twenty if by a Negro.

Three years passed and the fugitive Toby tried once more to rescue his mate. In still another ad, Messrs. John and James Smyth accused Toby of "taking Tena away with a young child from their plantation on a Wednesday night in August 1778." The fellow "formerly the property of William Maxwell" was suspected of "carrying her to town where she has a mother."³⁶

Overwork was still another grievance of slaves. Peter Villpontoux, who was later to issue three runaway advertisements in the various major gazettes, complained publicly that "the planters of this Province by the excessive hard labor that is required to pound the said rice have killed a large number of Negroes. . . ." He suggested that these planters "replace the slaves with machines."⁴⁸ Overwork, according to a publisher, was the cause of one white servant's death in 1733. "A servant who belonged to Mr. Robert Sinclair drowned himself in Black River. He had been in the province but two weeks and it is imagined that he was put to work which was what it seems he was not used to. . . ."³⁷

The South Carolina runaway ads are not without their shortcomings in describing other major grievances of the slaves, such as lack of good food and proper medical care. This is one reason why the notices must not be read independent of the planter's "family papers." In other words, if one examines the papers of a distinguished South Carolina family, the Colletons—who owned no less than 12,000 acres of land as well as 150 to 200 slaves in South Carolina until the American Rev-

³⁶SCAGG, August 13, 1778.

³⁷SCG, July 15, 1733.

olutionaries confiscated their property because they were English subjects—it will be obvious that the advertisements failed to give a clear picture of all the grievances of the fugitives. While it is true that the *South Carolina Gazette* on April 18, 1763, contained a notice describing three fugitives: Billie, Kent and Winter as fleeing one of John Colleton's plantations, the notice didn't explain why they ran away. Only once between 1732 and 1778, did Colleton even imply that his slaves had legitimate grievances. This took place in 1763, when he noted in a "for sale" advertisement that "smallpox is becoming so general" that "the sale of his 160 negroes will be put off till further notice."³⁸

John Colleton Esq. died in 1766, and his widow, the former Margaret Swainston, with the help of agents in Charlestown, subsequently took charge of the two plantations, Watboo and Mepshoo, for the next thirteen years. One year before her death, on July 13, 1778, Margaret Colleton wrote a letter from her home in London to her lawyer, Robert Raper, protesting the fact that her plantations stood in danger of being confiscated, insisting that Raper draw up a case for her since she was "a helpless woman," of "76 years," and "unable to travel to Charlestown" to protect her property.³⁹ John Colleton's widow eventually died, not knowing that her property had indeed been confiscated by the American Revolutionaries. It was only after her relatives made a vigorous attempt to regain the property that they discovered the slaves suffered from smallpox, were extremely short of food and clothing, and that this was the real reason they had fled the plantations. Margaret Colleton also complained in 1778, that she had not received the "smallest remittance from [her] plantation since 1775." In 1780, Robert Murry, a merchant, assured her that "your Negroes were well about eight weeks ago." He conceded that provisions had been "exceedingly scarce in the country and particularly about Watboo; we were obliged to buy and send thirty miles for rice for the Negroes owing to the dryness of the season last year."⁴⁰

In July 1780, James Colleton, an heir of his grandmother's estate, received a letter from William Ancrum, an agent for Colleton's plantation, indicating that he was sorry to inform Colleton that "the plantation was distressed for provisions," and that the Negroes were deserting "because of the smallpox among them." He added that he "needs money for the slaves' winter clothing before the coming of winter" and that since the provisions were short he would "order the Overseers to

³⁸J.H. Easterby Colleton, *Waboo Barony Its Fate as Told in Colleton's Papers 1773-1793* (Columbia, 1952) VIII; *SCG*, April 18, 1761, January 1, 1763.

³⁹*Waboo Barony*, pp. 2, 3.

⁴⁰*Ibid.*, p. 8.

be sparing and as frugal as possible in regard to the distribution thereof.”

Since the Colleton’s plantations failed to provide even the minimum requirements for a slave to survive, it is no surprise to find that “forty-seven of the Mepshoo Negroes and upwards of sixty of those belonging to Watboo” fled to Charlestown and went aboard a transport in order to proceed to Saint Augustine. Unfortunately, an American Privateer caught the forty-seven fugitives and sold them in North Carolina. Incidentally, it is important to note that, although the family papers show that sixty-four slaves ran away from the Colleton plantations during the Revolutionary War, not one notice existed in any gazette describing these runaways.⁴¹

Since the funeral rite was an important part of the slave’s culture, it would seem that even the most merciless planter would allow his slaves to bury their dead. But on June 6, 1769, Governor Montague issued a proclamation in the *South Carolina Gazette* informing planters:

Whereas it has been requested to me that a large number of dead negroes whose bodies have been thrown into the river are drove upon the marsh opposite to Charlestown and the noisome smell arising from their putrefaction may become dangerous to the health of the inhabitants in the province. In order to prevent such an inhuman and unchristian practice I think fit by the Majesty’s Council to issue this my advice of it. Proclamation strictly forbidden the same. And so hereby offer a reward of one hundred pounds currency money to be paid on conviction of the offender to any person that will inform against any person who shall be guilty of such practice.⁴²

According to a pickup notice, some planters ordered slaves to commit extreme acts against other slaves who committed suicide. For example, in 1759, a young Mandingo slave told a warden that “his master had a Negro who killed himself and he being ordered to cut the dead Negro’s head off was an occasion of his running away.”⁴³

Whatever their grievances, many slaves continued to escape even after being captured and locked up in the workhouse. One warden in Charlestown put out a pickup notice that read as follows:

Broke out of the workhouse in Charlestown on the night between the 13th and the 14th instant, two Negroes one named Anthony, a fisherman, the property of John Rawn

⁴¹*Ibid.*, pp. 4, 12, 13, 17

⁴²*SCG*, June 6, 1749.

⁴³*SCG*, May 25, 1759.

very well known in Charlestown, the other a mustee fellow, sent to the workhouse by Mr. Copeland Stykes. As they tore up their dress cannot be described.⁴⁴

Another notice was for a fugitive who was so desperate for freedom that he jumped out of a window:

A Negro man named Quath belonging to Roger Moore, was apprehended at the plantation of Charlestown. He had been runaway between six and seven years. When he was surrounded he went upstairs over the kitchen—a white man and one of his excellery Negroes followed him each with a loaded musket with a swan-shot and he jumping out of the window received the fire in the small of his back, notwithstanding to run a quarter of a mile but growing faint he fell down, was taken and brought to prison in a cart where he now lies in order to be tried in a few days.⁴⁵

Once a fugitive escaped from a plantation, workhouse, or ship, it was virtually impossible for the master to know where he was going. Would he go to see his mother, father, brother or sister? Would he try to be with his son, daughter, or “wife”? Would he seek employment or set up his own business? It was because the planter did not know that he issued runaway advertisements listing the fugitive’s previous owners, to help track the man down. One fugitive’s owner said that “Tom was sometimes brought from Wilmington in Virginia, to Salisbury in North Carolina, then sent to Charlestown, there sold to William Glenn, then to Francis Rose and afterwards sold to Georgetown.”⁴⁶

Slaves were frequently sold in South Carolina; therefore, masters also listed the names of members of the fugitive’s family and where they were located. One master suspected that “Dick, a carpenter,” would go back to Wondo where he has “a father who is free.” In another ad, a fugitive named Sancho, “rude, sly, talkative” who was “bought nine years ago at a public Vendue” was supposed to be going to “see his children at Wappoo.” In still another ad, one was thought to be “harboured at Mr. Boine’s plantation at Christ Church where his mother and father reside.”⁴⁷

Once he had succeeded in escaping, survival became a grave problem for the slave at large. Some fugitives set up camps in the woods or “maroons”. On February 23, 1765, the warden noted that an “elderly Negro fellow of the Suffolk Country named Caesar, says he belongs to Mr. Wilton Jamelson at Georgetown, Wingan, and has been in the

⁴⁴SCG, September 18, 1762.

⁴⁵SCG, March 9, 1734.

⁴⁶SCG, August 17, 1762.

⁴⁷CDGA, January 30, 1797; SCG, February 23, 1765.

woods these two years. He says there were two more fellows, ran away with him Pompey and Cork." Two fugitives, Pompey and Sambo of the Guiney Country, told a planter who captured them that their master, James Butler, "lives by the side of the river, and that their old master lives on the other side." The master added that "by which I can learn from my Guinea fellow of mine they ran away the spring before but they are entirely naked and their feet and legs swelled very much by lying on the cold. . . ."48

Bold fugitives who "appropriated" planters' goods as well as attacked white communities, lived in maroons and posed a grave threat to the province. In October 1771, "a notorious villain" named Winsleer Diggers who had "escaped out of the Savannah gaol about thirteen months ago," was "under sentence of death," and according to the *Gazette* had "at last met with his deserts." Before he was tried under the Negro Act and hanged, this remarkable fugitive had "collected a gang of desperate villains in number near fifty who committed all manners of predation upon the settlement." Diggers had obviously fought the militia for every second of his freedom, for "when Captain Pledger appeared, the villains fired and Diggers wounded Captain Pledger in one of his arms so that he has since lost it. Captain Pledger returned the fire and wounded Diggers in the arm and back. He, nevertheless, escaped but was afterwards taken."49

Three years later the *South Carolina American General Gazette* reported another incident involving a maroon:

On Tuesday last week was tried and convicted and executed at Ashley Ferry, that notorious offender Cafar, a Negro man slave the property of Mr. Daniel Dross of Dorchester who with sundry other Negroes as their captain or chief, went from a camp of runaway slaves in or about June of last year with horses, firearms, cutlasses and other dangerous weapons with intent to and in the night did break open the dwelling of and stores of the Honorable John Drayton Esq. at Drayton Hall and state and carry away thence, sugar, rum, bacon, soap, wine, a bale of cloth, and sundry other articles to a very great amount which Cafar carried to the Camp at Beach Hill and divided the spoil. The fellow while others were taking the goods stood sentry with guns loaded with smallshot at the dwelling house and in that case it appeared as if Mr. Drayton or any other person had appeared or offered to foil the thieves

⁴⁸SCG, September 12, 1770, August 5, 1776.

⁴⁹SCG, October 10, 1771. Herbert Aptheker "Maroons Within the Present Limits of the United States," *Journal of Negro History*. XXIV (April 1939) 167-184; John Blasingame, *The Slave Community*, New York, 1972), p. 119.

they were to have been shot, providentially this horrid intention was not perpetuated. . . .⁵⁰

In addition to those fugitives who fled into the forests or swamps to set up camps, there were those African-born fugitives who yearned to go back home whether on foot, by canoe, or by schooner. Five Angolans—Nero, Gamm, Periphy, Futrul and Caesar—were suspected of “going on East Course as long as they could think to return to their own country that way.”⁵¹

A group of Havana-born slaves managed to seize a schooner and was thought to have sailed to Cuba:

A Negro man named Tom born in Havana speaks Spanish and French, a very likely fellow, and somewhat used to the house carpenter trade. Peter remarkable for rolling eyes, Pompey downlooking ill founded fellow, he can write and read and talk good English. Also Arabella with her child Castilla—took schooner or fishing boat—some other fellows are missing French or Spanish fellow a fisherman, it is strongly suspected that they are going to Southward on their way to Havana.”⁵²

A considerable number of slaves stowed away on outgoing vessels. In 1758, “a tall slim Negro boy named Harry who speaks good English made an attempt to go off on a vessel and was brought from on board here when going over the bar, and it is very probable he may attempt to get off in the same manner; all commanders of ships are cautioned against harbouring him.” “A Negro man named Caesar, thirty years old, about five feet six inches, well set, full beard which he never shaves close. He plays a remarkable French horn . . . as he is a native of Jamaica he may ship himself for the West Indies.”⁵³ Women slaves were often ingenious in their attempts to run away. Molly, for example, was described as “a sturdy Negro wench who will not scruple to disguise herself as a man in order to go on a vessel.”⁵⁴

Some fugitives tried to make it to the Spanish settlements in Florida. In 1761, Master Rawlin Lowndes sent out an ad for a fugitive named Christopher of the Guinell country, who ran away with a three prong iron on his leg. Lowndes added that “this fellow has got it into his head to go to the Spaniards and always takes the same route.”⁵⁵

Ninety percent of the runaway ads offered a reward for those who

⁵⁰*SCAGG*, May 6, 1774.

⁵¹*SCGJ*, December 12, 1769.

⁵²*SCG*, June 27, 1768.

⁵³*SCG*, August 25, 1758, April 19, 1770.

⁵⁴*SCG*, December 22, 1768.

⁵⁵*SCG*, June 27, 1761.

gave information concerning the whereabouts of slaves. Despite the fact that harboring was a criminal offense, the fugitives had devised an underground network, with the tacit approval of many whites as well as free Blacks.

The white planters' motives were far from unselfish. By harboring fugitive slaves, they bypassed the cost of buying them at Public Vendues. On January 22, 1763, Robert Dearington sent a notice for four runaways: Lymus, Abraham, Mark and Arrow. He added that:

It has lately become a pernicious practice or custom for back settlers, when they meet with runaway Negroes and for some of the magistrates and others in the back parts of the country, when such Negroes are brought to them to publish purposely blind advertisements for a short time and afterwards keep them at work for themselves instead of bringing them to the warden of the workhouse who would properly advertise them and the population would have an opportunity to find them.⁵⁶

The Spaniards in Florida and the Indians were also part of the network of harborers. On October 30, 1749, the *South Carolina Gazette* accused the Spanish of "encouraging desertion" by declaring fugitives "free on their arrival" and "protecting them as Spanish subjects." According to the report, twenty-one Negroes left South Carolina on a boat they stole.⁵⁷ Despite the fact that runaway ads show no evidence that fugitive slaves were harbored by the Creek Indians, South Carolina authorities made a treaty with the Creeks in 1774, "that all Negroes harbored in the Creek County shall be given up."⁵⁸

The white harborer seldom had to coerce a dissatisfied slave into leaving his master. In one ad, Samuel Jenkins described Hannah as a Negro woman who had "passed as a free woman" for five years in Charlestown with her sister. He believed that "she went with Joseph Johnson toward Georgia as he was found in her cabin the evening before and then tracks were seen some miles together." A second ad involved a master, Joseph Austin, who explained that Crack had left in

⁵⁶SCG, January 22, 1763.

⁵⁷SCG, October 30, 1749.

⁵⁸SCAGG, September 30, 1774.

1762, with his mother, "a mulatto about fifty years of age, and a mulatto boy named Harry," and that "the Negroes carry with them a free Indian wench wife to the fellow Crack who had a child about two years of age, a white man who also was seen in the canoe with them." In still another ad, one John Ward describes Mary as a woman slave who could "speak English and French, who probably was wearing men's clothes, going to Mississippi on horseback with a Negro fellow and white man."⁵⁹

Free white women also harbored fugitives. On August 10, 1765, an ad read "Caesar formerly the property of Malachio Glaze was suspected of passing for a free man by the name of Brightwell has been harbored at Goose Creek by a Dutch woman." And there was Manuel who played the violin and "who formerly ran up into Orangeburg or Camden district and formed a connection with a white woman."⁶⁰

One master was convinced that his slave was being sheltered by prostitutes:

Runaway from the subscriber the 12 October last without any reason for provocation, a short well made fellow named Quamino, well known in town, is intimate with a sundry of black prostitutes and roguish fellow by whom it is supposed to be entertained as he had been seen often and about town, particularly at Mrs. Frest's yard which is contiguous—and has a thoroughfare throughout both the gates of Charlestown. Whoever will be kind enough to put him into the workhouse will be of service to the community and greatly acknowledged and rewarded by the owner.⁶¹

Fugitives themselves were also harborers. For instance, there were fugitives who hid on the outskirts of a Doctor Striving's plantation and were accused of "providing a sanctuary for a runaway named Diane," and Master John Champney wanted her back, "dead or alive."⁶² Free blacks also played a major role in harboring slaves. To understand their function, however, we must consider the character of the Charlestown business community. Charlestown was the center of commerce in the South. It acted as a magnet for fugitives and harborers—black and white. According to the runaway ads, there were certain businessmen who harbored fugitives and paid them low wages so that they could compete in the marketplace against other businessmen. Ironically, if a free Black wanted to compete, he also had to undercut the wages of the black slaves. Free Blacks were discriminated against

⁵⁹SCG, February 20, 1762, December 6, 1773.

⁶⁰SCG, August 10, 1765; CDGA.

⁶¹SCG, November 14, 1761.

⁶²SCG, November 3, 1758.

by many white businessmen who wanted them to wear badges so that they could be distinguished from runaway slaves. Surely this was an example of the commonality among fugitives and black freemen.

One ad sought "a Negro man named Lemster who works in Charlestown especially among the Negroes has been employed by them as a Doctor." His master wanted him back "dead or alive." Elizabeth Timothy wanted to recover "an artful Negro wench named Amy" who ran away on the 11th of April. "She has been seen mending stockings at one Brown's. She had a mother at the house of William Scott and many acquaintances about town as well as some in the country and supposed to be in or near town. When she ran away formerly she had been harbored by free Negroes. . ."⁶³

Planters were infuriated by Blacks who renounced slave labor for wage labor. In 1766, Provost Marshal Rawlin Lowndes reported that a fugitive named Tom who had been recently purchased from Dr. Martin, absconded and secreted himself from me without so much as giving me an opportunity of speaking to him since he became my property." He added, "whereas the said Negro fellow has heretofore been employed and has undertaken jobs in the way of his business without control I do hereby give notice that I will never allow him such liberties." Planters had few kind words for their competitors. In one ad, in which Bonaba was described as a woman who "stutters much," and with an "iron on one of her legs," her master had "a suspicion that she was being harbored by a real evil white person, being that she was a remarkable seamstress and easily kept at her work without discovery."⁶⁴

The fugitives managed to survive not only by working, but also by selling milk, firewood, oysters, fish, rice, rum, clothes, and corn. So bitter were some planters that they called upon the Commissioner of the Markets to "put an end to this abominable practice." Faithfully discharging his duty, the Commissioner put out a notice in 1763, accusing the fugitives of "combinating together to raise all prices in the market beyond anything heretofore known unless when some contagious disease hits the town." The Commissioner added that this competition caused "idleness, drunkenness, and dishonesty" and set a pernicious example not only to other slaves but also added to "the manifest injury and oppression of the inhabitants in the town particularly those in low and indigent circumstances."⁶⁵

Apparently the Commissioner's plea fell on deaf ears because four

⁶³SCG, January 30, 1771, April 11, 1771, October 18, 1773.

⁶⁴SCG, November 14, 1761.

⁶⁵SCG, October 10, 1763.

years later, irate planters called upon the Charlestown grand jurors to carry out "the Negro Acts in execution". The businessmen once again demanded a law to "prevent slaves interfering with poor honest white people supporting themselves and families among us which we apprehend is in some measure owing to such slaves being suffered to cook, bake, sell fruits, dry goods, and other ways in traffic in the public market and streets."⁶⁶

Newspapers eagerly published any efforts to crush this network: "Several Negroes hawking dry goods about the streets of this town will by the order of the magistrate be apprehended and the goods seized. . . . Hence we may flatter ourselves that at last this crying evil will effectually be put a stop to . . .".⁶⁷ Three months later a grievance was registered by the grand jurors in Charlestown: "We present as a Grievance that the Huckstering and selling dry goods, cooked rice, and other victuals is still practiced about the markets and streets of Charlestown by Negroes—whose supply for carrying on their traffic is from theft or unfair purchases, and both this great evil arising from it, is that runaway slaves of Charlestown are subscribed daily thereby."⁶⁸

Runaway ads illuminated more leaks in the slave society of South Carolina: the conflict between wage and slave labor. Since many white laborers could never hope to compete against runaway slaves, they became vagrants. In 1773, the grand jurors presented still another grievance. "We present as a Grievance the want of a vagrant law some familiar act for want of the great number of disorderly and idle persons going from place to place and becoming a pest and nuisance to the cohabitants."⁶⁹

How could a free population compete against a fugitive population congregating in one area and possessing such a large variety of skills? The fugitive class consisted of ploughmen, bricklayers, bookmakers, cabinet makers, ship carpenters, carpenters, plasterers, coopers, sawyers, cooks, porters, shoemakers, blacksmiths, butchers, sailmakers, drivers, seamstresses, waiters, musicians, dancing teachers, tailors, weavers, barbers, doctors, silversmiths, gardeners, jewelers, drummers, chimney-sweeps, church bell ringers, sailors, fishermen, caulkers, tanners, and painters. Of approximately thirty-five occupations listed, three occupations were predominant: coopers, sawyers, and carpenters, while bricklayers and shoemakers came second. The gazettes were filled with incidents of poor whites committing every

⁶⁶SCG, January 25, 1770.

⁶⁷SCGJ, March 3, 1773.

⁶⁸SCGJ, June 1, 1773.

⁶⁹SCG, June 1, 1773.

crime from horse stealing and slave stealing to counterfeiting and larceny.

Since these occupations offered higher wages, “unskilled” white servants attempted to pass as free men by posing as artisans. For instance, George Michal, a Dutch servant, “pretends to be a butcher,” said his master, “but he works best at the plow.” Another planter put out a notice that described Roger Cornell, “who can read and write, and suspected that he will pretend to understand spinning and knitting.”⁷⁰

Runaway notices provide still another beam of light on the contradiction within Charleston’s anachronistic system. That contradiction was not the free Black who had been born free or manumitted but the one who managed to become free by devious means, such as passing for white, forging a ticket, changing his name, or appropriating someone else’s freeman’s certificate. Incidentally, these freemen were an example and an inspiration to many potential fugitives, living proof that all a fugitive needed was a little luck, a little courage, a little ingenuity and the right connections, and he too could be free, if only for a brief period.

One master suspected that “Delia a remarkable mulatto wench,” who could “speak proper” might attempt to “pass for white.” Another master wrote that “Scipio, a shoemaker by trade who can read and write may write a ticket for himself.” And there was “Abraham” who escaped with “a clog in his leg,” and according to his master “was working in the brick business for the last three months while passing for a freeman.”⁷¹

“Passing for free” required a slave to be a shrewd psychologist. Not only did the fugitive have to know the personalities of the planter, the overseer, the driver, and the patrolers but also that of his informers. The slaveholders were acutely worried by the fugitive’s multi-faceted personality.

The masters used three flexible categories in describing the personality of the fugitives. The first included the intelligent slave, who, according to the slaveholder, was described as “cunning,” “artful,” “plausible,” “sensible,” and “sly.” Slaves who appeared frightened or sheepish were called “downlook” slaves. In the third category were all the slaves who openly exhibited disdain toward the master. These were categorized, for example, as “roguish, inhuman, sour countenance, grumbler, angry voice, impudent, bold, and saucy.” All three groups spoke English, and many spoke two or three languages.

In a 1751 notice, Andrew’s master described him as having “a most

⁷⁰SCG, March 11, 1756, June 22, 1765.

⁷¹SCAGG, January 1, 1778; SCAGG, March 12, 1778.

artful knack of framing and delivering a story so much that he may be easily mistaken for a religious and very upright creature." Jenny, who had once passed for free and supported herself by doing washing, needlework, and ironing was characterized as "very plausible and artful." One master called his slave a "great rogue, with a smooth tongue, and can tell a plausible story." Said another master, "Peter pretends to be dumb and can perform several hand tricks." Other ads stated, "Cato speaks fast endeavoring to be very facetious when conversed with, and generally has a smile on his countenance, but when in close questioning puts on a more serious countenance," and "Mingo when interrogated or about to be detected in any crime, shows great agitation, always keeps his fingers in motion and frequently picking his clothes."⁷²

On the other hand, there were fugitives who found it difficult to offer the planter a "pleasant countenance." Dublin, who could mold bricks, had "a grumbling voice and bold countenance." Another, a bricklayer, was described as "a talkative and grumbling well set fellow." And last there was a former freeman and carpenter, who was noted for his "bad and deceitful behavior" and for being "the greatest liar in the province."⁷³

The typical master demanded complete obedience from his slave, physically as well as psychologically. The grumbler, the saucy, and the impudent slave represented not only a form of resistance but also set the tone for other slaves' behavior at the expense of the master's self-assurance. In the case of Limus, his master described him as having "a saucy and impudent tongue." Because Master Joshua Eden had "many complaints" about Limus' behavior he was willing "to give free liberty" to any person to "flog him (so as not to take his life) in such manner as they choose to think." He concluded by saying, "for though he is my property, he has the audacity to tell me he will be free, that he will serve no man and that he will be conquered or governed by no man."⁷⁴

A "downlook" slave usually managed to throw off his aura of servitude to remain at large. Yet twenty-three planters were apparently convinced that the runaway would never throw off this trait for they continued to advertise for certain fugitives with a "downlook." A runaway named Linden, for example, who was shot by his master and "ran away for no cause" was described as having "a downlook when

⁷²SCG, November 8, 1751; GSSG, June 30, 1760; July 17, 1781; CDGA, August 1, 1795; November 10, 1795.

⁷³SCG, August 24, 1767, April 4, 1771; Blassingame, *Slave*, pp. 213-216, 135-136.

⁷⁴SCG, November 21, 1775.

spoken to.” But by no means did all slaves look down; some looked up. “Ibo Jack” was described as a fugitive being “remarkable for carrying his head high and looking up.”⁷⁵

“Stuttering” was another means of identifying a runaway slave. Master Archibald Menial attributed Jack’s speech impediment to “missing teeth.” Still another slaveholder said Dorchester’s “large tongue” was the cause of his stuttering. While dental care was below par in the slave society of Charlestown, one must take into account Stephen Hartly’s description of Billy who was apt to “stutter when spoken smartly to.” Although Hartly apparently could intimidate Billy, it was quite another case with Billy’s mother, Kate. Described as having “a pouting look” and “all her upper teeth gone,” seven months pregnant, Kate fled Hartly’s house with her stuttering son. In a state of rage Hartly called Kate an “inhuman creature” for leaving him “extremely ill in bed, her mistress in another, and two of my children not able to help each other she must be conscious of some crime.”⁷⁶

Needless to say the fact that he stuttered did little to stop a runaway. Whether the speech defect was more psychological than physical, many a “stutterer” ran away. For example, a “Negro fellow named Fortune,” who was “notoriously known for his villainy in many parts of the Province, and remarkable for stuttering and stammering in his speech as he scarcely uttered a word properly.”⁷⁷ Indentured servants were also depicted as having speech impediments, and “downlooks,” as well as “surly, grumbling, and impertinent” countenances. On June 6, 1766, a white servant named Samuel Kennerly was described as “remarkable for seldom or ever looking in the face of the person when spoken to.” Mary Gordon was characterized in one planter’s notice in June of 1777, as having not only “a downlook” but as “taking snuff, very addicted to alcohol and a great liar.”⁷⁸

Passing for free required both indentured servants and black slaves to change their names. Master Henry Talbird suspected a servant named Samuel Davis “whose indentures he lately purchased” of changing his name to Samuel Burkhurst. One fugitive carpenter, who was harbored by his wife had gone by the names of Nantz, Lante, and Anson.⁷⁹

Runaway ads yield a variety of names that planters gave to their slaves: Roman names such as Pompey, Cato, Caesar, Marcus, Nergo,

⁷⁵SCAGG, February 20, 1775.

⁷⁶SCG, May 21, 1750; Gerald Mullins, *Flight and Rebellion Slave Resistance in Eighteenth Century Virginia* (New York 1972) pp. 62, 80, 141.

⁷⁷SCG, April 19, 1770.

⁷⁸*Ibid.*, May 21, 1763, June 6, 1766; SCAGG, June 10, 1777.

⁷⁹SCG, April 25, 1761.

and Scipio. Names from the months of the year were also chosen: January, March, April, May, June, July, August, October, December; and Biblical names such as Adam, Daniel, Cain, Peter, Abraham, and Mary were used. Names of countries, states, and cities were used: Bermuda, England, Ireland, Durham, Kent, London, Carolina, Virginia, Dublin, Glasgow and Norfolk. There were Anglo-Saxon names such as Rom, Bess, Sarah, Kate, Bob, George, Molly, Betty, and Phyllis, and African names: Quaimo, Quaco, Quash, Massey, Mussu Cush, Hagar, Sappho Feebee, Monbee, Cuffee, Teebee, Cujoe, Aqua, and Banabar.⁸⁰

Planters relied upon fugitives' names more than any other identification. Now and then the warden would list the plantation or the river where the slave was picked up and the total number of miles it took to deliver a fugitive back to Charlestown. For instance, one workhouse advertisement on November 28, 1775, read as follows: "A new negro man of the Guiney Country but cannot tell his master's name . . . Taken up at Amelia township ninety miles from town." Along with Smart were four other African born fugitives locked up in the workhouse whose delivery miles numbered 75, 55, 52, 52, and 15 respectively. Since, as we have pointed out, it cost the master a set amount of shillings for every mile it took to deliver a fugitive to Charlestown, the planter had to be sure it was *his* slave being advertised by the warden.⁸¹

In an attempt to give as much information as possible to the would-be capturers and the warden as well, many planters listed the fugitive's African name as well as his English name. Master Henry Laurens stated that a "new Negro of the Mandingo country" who "cannot speak no English will readily answer to the name of Footabea which he goes by in his own country."⁸²

It was the policy of the warden, not the planter, to publish the fugitive's African name. None of the wardens, however, seemed capable of grasping the African languages. For over a decade Warden Holsum of Charlestown relied upon a slave named Frank (who himself ultimately ran away in 1757) to translate the African languages into English. An illustration of this relationship was apparent in one workhouse advertisement in 1759. The warden stated that, "a new Negro girl who 'speaks no English,' whose 'name as far as I can understand by my Negro fellow,' is Windy."⁸³

⁸⁰Peter Wood, *Black Majority Negroes in Colonial South Carolina from 1670-Through the Stono Rebellion* (New York, 1974) pp. 181-185.

⁸¹SCG, November 28, 1775.

⁸²*Ibid.*, September 3, 1753.

⁸³*Ibid.*, January 21, 1757, SCG, October 17, 1759.

While it is true that many slaves “played dumb,” in order to conceal their identity, there were other fugitives, whom even the master admitted could not “remember” their English names. “A new Negro at my last sale,” wrote Master Guerard, “was named Pompey but suppose he won’t remember his name.” This was perhaps one reason that masters allowed some fugitives to retain their African names. For it was one thing to forget one’s English name but there was no excuse for forgetting an African name. Allowing a slave to retain his real name created a condition where even South Carolinian born slaves could be given names such as Quaimo and Quash.⁸⁴

Highly significant was the case in 1755 of a Mathew Quash in Charlestown who put a notice demanding that “John the Baptist” whom he characterized as “a wandering vagabond, an imposter and a deceiver” stop pretending to be his son. He accused Baptist of adding the name “Quash” to his name thus making it “John Baptist Quash” in order to gain money “to set up a trade at Samuel Wragg’s plantation.” So we can see how many African names survived in either exact or altered form within the English language.⁸⁵

Many runaway slaves changed their clothes, as well as their names, or took an extra set of clothes. On July 18, 1762, a notice placed in one gazette stated that “a mulatto fellow named John formerly the property of Doctor Chalmers, had taken a variety of clothes” thus it was “impossible to describe his dress with certainty.” It added that “it is probable he will shave his head, wear a Scotch Bonnet and pretend to be free.” And there was a “sly, artful, sensible Guinea fugitive” who spoke good English and “who carried off all his clothes (some of which are too good for his color).”⁸⁶

The notices depicted the average fugitive as wearing “Negro cloth” made in England, or wearing coarse cloth called “Osnabrug” manufactured in Osnabrunk, Germany. While the notices themselves never gave any indication that blacks were unhappy about their imported apparel, apparently some blacks compensated for this deficiency by taking their masters’ clothes. However, the Charleston Grand Jurors retaliated by presenting “a Grievance that Negro women in particular do not restrain their clothing, as the law requires, but dress in apparel quite gay and beyond their condition to purchase which they must steal from their masters and mistresses or gain from practices equally vicious.”⁸⁷

The fugitives whose ears were cropped or whose faces were branded

⁸⁴*Ibid.*, September 23, 1756.

⁸⁵*Ibid.*, February 26, 1775.

⁸⁶*Ibid.*, July 18, 1762.

⁸⁷*Ibid.*, November 4, 1744.

were at a great disadvantage. But Peter Holmes, a free Black, who was indentured to Lawrence Magine, overcame this handicap in this manner: "Branded on the cheek with letter, Holmes remained at large by covering it with whiskers."⁸⁸

Planters often attempted to identify the fugitive by his "country born" language. According to the runaway notices, fugitives—black and white—could speak very little English. The reason for this is that the typical servant or slave received no formal education, not only because it was against the law but also because a slave or servant could easily perform his duties without acquiring the English language. For instance, two German carpenters in 1771 were described as "speaking little English" and "the eldest hardly speaks English at all." In other words, South Carolina had not reached a technological level where the African, German, or Dutch would be incapable of comprehending their tasks.⁸⁹

Of course, there were exceptions such as the black newspaper carrier in Charleston named Peter who spoke three languages: "English, French, and Dutch."⁹⁰ Since his job no doubt called for an ability to communicate with people in all walks of life, Peter was allowed to hold it despite the risk it represented to his owner. Slave owners often lost such slaves because they worked alone. For example, Peter was exposed to all the apparent contradictions of Charlestown: freemen and slaves, free whites and indentured servants, the most glaring contradiction being the fact that he was more educated than the average white.

The runaway ads revealed thirteen fugitives who could read or write. One has to wonder who taught a fugitive such as Luke to speak "English, French, Spanish and Dutch." While it is true that some masters may have taught some of their slaves to read and write, it is also important to take into account the fugitives who came to America already literate. For instance, the celebrated Ayuba Sulieman Diallo of Senegal better known as Job ben Salomon, could recite the Koran word for word. Like thousands of other slaves he was also sold into slavery and forced to work on a tobacco plantation in Maryland. He eventually ran away and was able to recount that he was educated in Africa.⁹¹

The runaway ads revealed the existence of literate African born fugitives who were accused of enticing other Africans to run away. For instance, "three new Negroes of the Guinea country named Boston,

⁸⁸*Ibid.*, September 19, 1791.

⁸⁹Ali A. Mazrui, *World Culture and the Black Experience* (Seattle 1974), *SCGJ*, June 23, 1771; *SCG*, June 6, 1744.

⁹⁰*SCG*, June 6, 1740.

⁹¹*SCG*, July 16, 1763; Philip Curtin, ed., *Africa Remembered* (Milwaukee, 1967), p. 116.

Tony, and Marcellus, were led by a fugitive named Boston who spoke English, French, and Portuguese."⁹²

The typical fugitive ad reveals that the planters were not satisfied with simply describing the slave's or servant's personality, language, dress and name, or his suspected destination or harbinger. They demanded to know such things as: Was he addicted to liquor? Did he chew tobacco? Did he play the fiddle, horn, or drums? Did he have thick legs or thin legs? Did she have small breasts or large breasts? Did he stoop or walk upright? How many toes or fingers were missing? Were there any teeth missing? Did he have any bruises or scars? Did he go to dances? Was he religious? Did he have "country marks"? The planters went into great detail and effort in their quest to capture their slaves.

Because the free Blacks were constantly being mistaken for fugitive slaves, they were frequently stopped and searched by the patrolers or even thrown into jail. Hence, if a slave was given his freedom by a "kind" master, it was difficult for the slave to put behind past grievances. These free Blacks encouraged slaves to set upon the white planters. On August 3, 1769, the following account was published in the *South Carolina Gazette*:

On Friday last two Negroes viz Dolly belonging to Mr. James Sands, and Liverpoole belonging to William Price were burnt on the Workhouse Green, pursuant to the sentences that had been passed on them a fortnight ago for which they died sometime ago since and attempting to put his master out of the world the same way and the latter (a Negro doctor) for furnishing the means. The wench made a free confession, acknowledging the justice of her punishment, but the fellow did neither. A mulatto named Dick, formerly a slave of Mr. D. Harrell but afterwards manumitted who stands accused as the instigator of these horrid crimes, has disappeared.

Fourteen days later Dick was captured and tried under the Negro Act and ordered to "receive 200 lashes and the loss of his right ear."⁹³

On November 22, 1797, another incident occurred showing the unity of freemen and fugitives. The *South Carolina State Daily Advertiser* reported the following information:

On Tuesday the intendant received certain information of a conspiracy of several French Negroes to fire the City and to act here as they formerly done at St. Domingo as the discovery did not implicate more than ten or fifteen persons and as

⁹²SCG, July 18, 1767.

⁹³SCG, August 3, 1769.

the information first given was not so complete as to charge all the ringleaders the intendent delayed taking any measures for their guilt more closely ascertained, but the plot having been communicated to persons on whose secrecy the city magistrates could not discern they found themselves obliged on Saturday last to apprehend a number of Negroes and among others the following charged (another not taken) as the ring leaders, Figaro the property of Mr. Robino, Jean Louis the property of Mr. Langstaff, Figaro the Younger the property of Mr. Delaire and Capell the property of. . .

On examination they all at first positively denied their knowledge or concern in the plot but the younger Figaro after some time made a partial confession and was admitted under evidence on part of the state. The others were on Monday brought to trial in the City Hall before a respectable court as ever we remember to been convened. A number of witnesses were examined and fully proved the guilt of the prisoners and the court on mature consideration unanimously condemned Figaro the elder, and Jean Louis to be hanged and Capella and Figaro to be transported. The rest are under confinement for further examination.

After the men were condemned, the editor pointed out that, "After the condemnation of Jean Louis he turned to Figaro and said, "I do not blame the whites, tho' I suffer they have done right but it is you who have brought me this trouble."

Seven days later, "Mercredi, a French Negro, formerly the property of the deceased Bonfielde and emancipated by his will was tried by a court of justice and freeholders upon a charge of being a principal in the late conspiracy with Jean Louis and Figaro, two French Negroes who were executed on Tuesday last. His guilt being fully proven was sent to be hanged yesterday at 12 o'clock, his sentence was accordingly executed and he died an example of hardened villainy."⁹⁴

The runaway ad has as its most important function the fact that it may be used as documentary evidence to illuminate the complexity of slavery in the United States. For instance, whether it was one lone blind man taking a chance with two of his friends: "Dan, Tom and Weaver Dan speaks reads and writes good English—Tom is a stout tall black man, and Weaver is blind"—all accused of "drifting from the Island of St. George in a large yawl,"—or whether a whole boatload of slaves coming to America met with disaster two years before the Revolutionary War broke out, as reported in the *South Carolina Gazette*:

⁹⁴CGDA, November 29, 1797.

“Captain Stephen Deane arrived here in sloop Swift from Gambia,” further stating that his ship, the Snow New Britannia, was “blown up in the river with 236 slaves and 96 free Negroes, all his crew and Captain Thomas Davis” and Captain Deane escaping injury by “having providentially got into the boat but a few minutes later, to take up some slaves who had thrown themselves overboard,”⁹⁵—no matter what the case, the black slave continued his fight.

Whether lame or blind, alone or in groups, young or old, pregnant, wounded by gunshot, in irons or free, black slaves during the period of 1732 to 1801 were not passive, but they resisted the institution of slavery with a determination to be free that defies description.

⁹⁵SCG, January 18, 1768, December 20, 1773.

TABLE I
Advertisements, Runaways and Recaptures

No. of ads	Black Slaves	White Servants	Total
	1,806	140	1,946
No. of runaways	Males 1,500	201	1,701
	Females 501	11	212
No. captured	862	1	863

TABLE II

Black Fugitives	White Servants
1. Cooper—33	1. Cooper—1
2. Carpenter—33	2. Carpenter—33
3. Shoemaker—18	3. Shoemaker—7
4. Tailor—12	4. Tailor—1
5. Blacksmith—7	5. Blacksmith—1
6. Cabinetmaker—3	6. Cabinetmaker—2
7. Butcher—3	7. Butcher—1
8. Newspaper carrier—2	8. Newspaper carrier—2
9. Ploughmen—2	9. Ploughmen—1
10. Sailmaker—1	10. Sailmaker—1
11. Painter—1	11. Painter—1
12. Sawyer—14	
13. Bricklayer—13	
14. Boatmen—8	
15. Fishermen—6	
16. Housewomen—5	
17. Wheelwright—4	
18. Cook—4	
19. Doctor—3	
20. Seamstress—3	
21. Washwomen—3	
22. Barber—3	
23. Porter—2	
24. Waitingmen—2	
25. Glassmaker—1	
26. Netmaker—1	
27. Printer—1	
28. Dancing Master—1	
29. Cordelier—1	
30. Caulker—1	
31. Stocking weaver—2	
32. Carter—1	
33. Shipwright—1	

TABLE III
Mode of Treatment and Escape

	Fugitive Slaves	Indentured Servants	Total
Took child	73	0	73
Couples	55	2	57
Whipped	40	0	40
Forgiven	29	4	33
Irons	25	0	25
Dead or Alive	25	0	25
Took horse	19	4	23
Took guns	18	4	22
Took canoe	13	2	15
Took clothes	13	5	18
Shot	7	0	7
Castrated	2	0	2
Blind	2	0	2

TABLE IV

Indentured Tribes	African Tribes
Irish—13	Angolans—61
Scots—8	Guineans—25
Welsh—8	Gambians—20
German—7	Mandingo—19
Dutch—5	Iboes—15
French—2	Calabrars—5
	Coromontee—5