

# New Orleans Slavery in 1850 as Seen in Advertisements

By JUDITH KELLEHER SCHAFFER

THE TYPICAL SLAVE IN ANTEBELLUM NEW ORLEANS DID NOT, AS an old adage has it, get his name in the paper on two occasions, birth and death. Thousands of slaves did make the newspapers, but in the classified section. Slaves were listed for sale and for hire by owners; owners advertised for the return of runaway slaves and described them in detail; and jailers placed notices of captured runaways in the public prints. This article represents a detailed analysis of the several thousand advertisements for bondsmen in the New Orleans newspapers for the year 1850. The resulting picture of labor practices in the Crescent City indicates a booming slave trade in which the equivalent of one in five of the bondsmen in New Orleans were sold annually. Most of the sales were auctions occasioned by a legal procedure, and most sales were of broken lots rather than complete slave families. There were substantial numbers of runaways too. Most slaves ran away to join family members, although most bondsmen chose to run alone. Lighter-skinned slaves tended to be the most likely fugitives, whereas black slaves tended to be more often sold. Women were sold and also became fugitives at an earlier age than men, although there was no seasonal variation for running away among either sex. Rural owners valued their slaves more than did owners in urban areas if the size of the reward can be taken as an indication.

The fragility of the slaves' lives is exemplified over and over by the volume of the slave trade. The fact that a slave could be sold at all was a forceful reminder of his status. The auction block was a compelling symbol of his servitude; it transformed the slave from a person to mere property. As long as any slave sales occurred no normal life was really possible for the bondsman. The chance that an urban black would be sold several times during his life was very great<sup>1</sup> and was dictated by the white family's fluctuating need for

<sup>1</sup> Richard C. Wade, *Slavery in the Cities: The South 1820-1860* (New York, 1964), 197.

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domestic labor. For example, an urban slave who was a child's nurse might be sold when the white children were grown, whereas a rural field hand would always remain useful.

New Orleans was second only to Charleston in the size of its slave trade in 1850; it was unsurpassed in the lower South. In New Orleans the markets and buyers were numerous, money was plentiful, and the profits large. Seven professional slave dealers placed thirteen different classified advertisements in the New Orleans newspapers in 1850. Most of these dealers advertised for sale slaves from Virginia and Maryland.<sup>2</sup> A typical notice stated that a slave dealer had just received "ONE HUNDRED AND THIRTY Negroes, direct from Baltimore" which included "a choice lot of field hands, waiters, cooks . . . blacksmiths, carpenters and a fine engineer . . ." To encourage prospective buyers, the vendor stated "I am determined to sell low . . ."<sup>3</sup>

One slave dealer, Elihu Creswell, specialized in "acclimated SLAVES . . . less subject to diseases of the climate . . . than those recently imported into the State."<sup>4</sup> Carman and Ricardo, who owned a slave depot at 15 Perdido Street (which had accommodations for three hundred slaves), claimed theirs was "one of the most commodious and well-ventilated establishments for the purpose in the United States."<sup>5</sup> Since these advertisements rarely give exact numbers of slaves handled by slave dealers, it is impossible to ascertain how many slaves were sold in this way, but the persistence with which these notices appeared in the New Orleans newspapers indicates a large volume and a high profit for the slave traders. Nevertheless, since numbers for these slave sales are unavailable, individual slave sales as indicated in the newspaper advertisements of New Orleans' nine newspapers in 1850 have been analyzed. All subse-

<sup>2</sup> Vernon A. Wegener, "Negro Slavery in New Orleans" (unpublished M.A. thesis, Tulane University, 1935), 28. Often one advertisement was repeated daily for months. By the late 1840s probably three hundred New Orleans residents were engaged in slave trading. Herman C. Woessner III, "New Orleans, 1840-1860: A Study in Urban Slavery" (unpublished M.A. thesis, Louisiana State University, 1967), 34. One historian thinks that New Orleans was the greatest slave-trading center in the entire South by 1850. Robert C. Reinders, "Slavery in New Orleans in the Decade Before the Civil War," *Mid-America*, XLIV (October 1962), 211.

<sup>3</sup> New Orleans *Bee*, October 29, 1850; the French edition is *L'Abeille*. All citations to New Orleans papers will hereinafter omit the city.

<sup>4</sup> *Daily Picayune*, January 26, 1850.

<sup>5</sup> *Daily Delta*, December 19, 1850. A New Orleans ordinance required slave "traders to keep their merchandise in clean, well ventilated buildings at least two stories high . . ." Kenneth M. Stamp, *The Peculiar Institution: Slavery in the Ante-Bellum South* (New York, 1956), 252. At least twenty-five slave depots were located within one-half mile of the St. Charles Hotel in 1850. Reinders, "Slavery in New Orleans," 212. Quite a few slave depots had facilities for as many as one hundred slaves. Woessner, "New Orleans, 1840-1860," 34.

TABLE 1  
NEW ORLEANS POPULATION BY CATEGORY AND SEX IN 1850

Category	Male		Female	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
White	51,792	57.89	37,667	42.12
Free black	3,999	40.37	5,906	59.63
Slave	6,818	40.08	10,193	59.92

SOURCE: Richard C. Wade, *Slavery in the Cities: The South 1820-1860*, pp. 328-30.

TABLE 2  
SLAVE AGES AT THE TIME OF SALE

Age	Male		Female	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
0-4	42	9.4	39	7.6
5-9	53	11.9	46	8.9
10-14	49	11.0	46	8.9
15-19	37	8.3	69	13.4
20-24	52	11.7	69	13.4
25-29	69	15.5	59	11.5
30-34	43	9.7	62	12.1
35-39	26	5.8	49	9.5
40-44	29	6.5	32	6.2
45-49	19	4.3	16	3.1
50-54	20	4.5	9	1.8
55-59	4	0.9	6	1.2
60 and over	2	0.4	12	2.3
Total	445	99.9	514	99.9

quent figures are computed on the basis of the published sale notices.<sup>6</sup>

New Orleans newspaper advertisements in 1850 indicate that total slave sales were 3,501, of which at least 523 were male and 604 female (sex was not specified in 2,374). These figures indicate that the equivalent of 20.6 percent of the New Orleans slave population

<sup>6</sup> Of the nine New Orleans newspapers of 1850 (*Commercial Bulletin*, *Daily Crescent*, *Daily Delta*, *Daily Orleanian*, *Daily Picayune*, *Daily True Delta*, *L'Abeille*, *Le Courier*, and *Weekly Delta*), seven published daily (except Sunday), and the *Daily Picayune* published twice daily except Sunday and Monday, when it appeared once a day. The *Picayune* classified sections were identical in the morning and evening editions when it published twice a day. As indicated, one paper was a weekly. Nearly complete editions were available for 1850 for eight papers; the *Daily Delta* was available only from October 15 to December 15.

was sold in 1850, or approximately one in five<sup>7</sup> (see Table 1). Of these, there were 919 whose age was specified (56 percent female, 44 percent male). From the figures in Table 2 one can see that peak sale ages for women were between 15 and 24 (26.8 percent) whereas the most frequent ages for male sales were between the ages of 20 and 29 (27.2 percent). Perhaps the younger ages of women sold were swelled by the "fancy girl" market<sup>8</sup> and also by the fact that domestic skills could be learned at an earlier age. Also, girls reached puberty about the age of fifteen and therefore became more valuable as they could bear children. The later peak age of male sales may reflect the fact that slave men were more valuable once they had acquired a skill.

Approximately 21 percent of the male and 17 percent of the female slaves sold were children under ten years of age. Perhaps this sex differential resulted because the slave sellers kept the younger girls at home to perform simple domestic chores, because females of all ages were worth less than males, or because excess males were less useful in domestic employment. Most of these children were sold in a lot with their mothers, as it was against the Louisiana law to sell either the mother of a child under ten away from that child or the child away from its mother.<sup>9</sup> One historian believes that this law was strictly obeyed, but in the classified advertisements of 1850 there appear notices for the sale of twenty-eight children under ten years of age, sixteen males and twelve females. Of these children, three of each sex were orphans, and their sale would not have been a violation of the law.<sup>10</sup> Two of the orphans were brother and sister and

<sup>7</sup> Since some of these slaves were rural, one cannot say that one in five slaves in New Orleans was sold but that the *equivalent* of one in five was sold. Every possible effort was expended to eliminate duplicate advertisements.

<sup>8</sup> There was a great demand in New Orleans for "fancy girls." Eugene D. Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York, 1974), 416.

<sup>9</sup> *Acts Passed at the First Session of the Ninth Legislature of the State of Louisiana* (New Orleans, 1829), 48; Bennett H. Wall, "An Epitaph for Slavery," *Louisiana History*, XVI (Summer 1975), 251; Stanley M. Elkins, *Slavery: A Problem in American Institutional and Intellectual Life* (Chicago and London, 1976), 54n. Two young children were listed with their fathers, *Daily Picayune*, February 6, 1850.

<sup>10</sup> Joe G. Taylor, *Negro Slavery in Louisiana* (Baton Rouge, 1963), 41. For example see *L'Abeille*, July 17, 1850; *Le Courrier de la Louisiane* (hereinafter *Le Courrier*), April 29, 1850 (Succession of Mrs. J. B. Colle). Two historians state that many sales of children under ten years of age can be explained by the fact that they were orphans. Robert W. Fogel and Stanley L. Engerman, *Time on the Cross: The Economics of American Negro Slavery* (Boston and Toronto, 1974), 50. Five other historians think that Fogel and Engerman wildly exaggerated the number of orphans in the sales of children under ten. Paul A. David *et al.*, *Reckoning with Slavery: A Critical Study in the Quantitative History of American Negro Slavery* (New York, 1976), 131.

were listed to be sold together,<sup>11</sup> although they may or may not have been separated.

Although older children between the ages of ten and sixteen were sometimes listed to be sold with their mothers, most often they were listed to be sold separately. Approximately 83 percent were listed to be sold away from their mothers; the remainder were listed to be sold together.<sup>12</sup> A typical advertisement stated that Liza, a thirty-five-year-old cook, washer, and ironer, was to be sold with three of her children, ages six years, four years, and fifteen months; her other two children, ages fourteen and sixteen were to be sold separately.<sup>13</sup>

Further fragmentation of the slave family can be seen in the newspaper advertisements of 1850. The very use of the term “family” usually meant a mother and her children, not a husband, wife, and children. This fact can be partially explained by considering that the woman could be a widow, or her husband could belong to a different owner, which would be quite possible in an urban setting. However, another factor to take into account is that full families sold poorly in an urban setting unless they were purchased by a slave dealer to be resold separately. Rural slave families may have remained intact more often, as a family of strong field hands was always in demand.<sup>14</sup>

In the New Orleans newspapers of 1850 there appeared only two classified advertisements which stated that a full family (husband, wife, children) would be sold together; one additional notice stated that the family would be sold either separately or together but that the owner preferred the latter.<sup>15</sup> In another instance, an owner attempted to mitigate the effect of selling a woman and her three children away from her husband and their father. He stated in the advertisement that he would not sell the wife and children to anyone but a resident of New Orleans since her husband remained in his

<sup>11</sup> *Daily Picayune*, June 30, 1850.

<sup>12</sup> For example see *Le Courier*, April 18, 1850 (Succession of William Carter). The sale of teen-age slaves away from their families cannot be rationalized by saying that at this age many children would choose to leave home. The sale forced an involuntary separation on the young slave and his family. David *et al.*, *Reckoning with Slavery*, 132.

<sup>13</sup> *L’Abeille*, March 28, 1850.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, October 25, 1850; Wegener, “Negro Slavery in New Orleans,” 47.

<sup>15</sup> *L’Abeille*, February 21, 1850; *Commercial Bulletin*, August 8, 1850. In his survey of four New Orleans newspapers between 1850 and 1860, one historian found 120 instances of families being sold together. He defined a family as did the New Orleans newspapers of the time—as a mother and her children. Lawrence D. Reddick, “The Negro in the New Orleans Press, 1850–1860: A Study in Attitudes and Propaganda” (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Chicago, 1939), 160. *Daily Picayune*, March 9, 1850.

possession.<sup>16</sup> Whether such a limit to the sale was the result of attempting to avoid guilt over splitting the family or to avoid the disapprobation of others, or a combination of both, the sources do not reveal. They do indicate some repugnance to the breaking up of slave families.

In only two other advertisements, however, was there evidence of an effort by an owner to keep family members together. In one auction notice a sister and brother (ages twelve and nine) were required to be sold as a lot,<sup>17</sup> and in one private sale an elderly slave woman (age fifty) was to be sold with her eighteen-year-old daughter. Her son, age twenty-six, was to be sold separately. This last advertisement also stipulated that these three slaves were only to be sold to persons purchasing them for their own use,<sup>18</sup> probably to keep them out of the hands of slave dealers.

Usually when full slave families were listed for sale they were not listed as one lot, nor was it stipulated that they would be sold together. A typical notice of this type was for the sale of slaves in the succession of Phineas Solomon, which listed separately Robert, age fifty, Betsy Streck, "his woman," age fifty-two, and his child, a two-year-old girl.<sup>19</sup>

Of the advertisements of slaves for sale in the New Orleans newspapers, approximately 13 percent of all sales were private (as opposed to auctions). These notices usually were scattered throughout the "For Sale" columns of the publications, often sandwiched in between advertisements for such diverse items as leeches and sardines. Almost all notices for private slave sales stated that the slave or slaves to be sold would be "guaranteed against the vices and maladies prescribed by law" or simply "guaranteed."<sup>20</sup> Often the

<sup>16</sup> *Daily Picayune*, January 29, 1850.

<sup>17</sup> *Le Courrier*, December 18, 1850.

<sup>18</sup> *Daily Picayune*, January 16, 1850.

<sup>19</sup> *Le Courrier*, November 21, 1850. Fogel and Engerman claim that 84 percent of all sales of slaves over fourteen years of age were of unmarried individuals, that New Orleans sales records show owners were averse to breaking up slave families, and that only 13 percent of slave sales actually separated families. Fogel and Engerman, *Time on the Cross*, 49-52. Several other historians disagree. They state that families were often split, that 71 percent of the married slave women between the ages of twenty and twenty-four (with children) were separated from their husbands if they were sold. They further assert that of all slave marriages in New Orleans, three of every ten were broken by sale. David *et al.*, *Reckoning with Slavery*, 119-27. My evidence is consistent with Reddick's contention that most slaves were sold in broken lots. Reddick, "The Negro in the New Orleans Press," 160.

<sup>20</sup> *Daily Picayune*, January 10, 1850 (quotation). The guarantee usually meant that the slave had a clear title, was physically sound, and possessed a "good character." Stampp, *The Peculiar Institution*, 252. Occasionally, one may find the statement "not guaranteed except in title," which indicated a serious physical defect. Woessner, "New Orleans, 1840-1860," 38.

prospective vendor would describe the slaves for sale as “splendid” or a “choice lot” or “excellent” and would occasionally make complimentary comments about their character such as “strictly temperate”<sup>21</sup> or “honest, humble”<sup>22</sup> or “a man of good character and habits.”<sup>23</sup> One slaveholder praised the female slave he was selling for her “honesty and sobriety and a faithful attendance in sickness.”<sup>24</sup> Many private sale advertisements (as well as auction notices) stated that the slave was being “sold for no fault but for want of money”<sup>25</sup> or “sold on account of departure (owner leaving New Orleans)” to assure the prospective purchaser that the seller was not unloading a “bad” slave. The slave’s acclimation to the city was also frequently mentioned as a virtue. Many private sale notices stated that the slave for sale had lived “since childhood in the city,”<sup>26</sup> or more simply that he or she was “acclimated.”<sup>27</sup> Obviously, a vendor would stress a slave’s favorable attributes and be silent about defects such as insolence, laziness, or lack of physical soundness.

Private sale advertisements were usually much more descriptive than auction notices. In these advertisements one can find a nine-year-old girl named Dolly who could speak French and English,<sup>28</sup> a Negro woman of thirty-five who could speak Dutch as well as French and English,<sup>29</sup> and an eighteen-year-old slave who “has commanded the highest wages as a cabin boy on steamboats.”<sup>30</sup>

Occasionally, slaveowners who placed private sale advertisements evidenced concern for the future of the slaves being sold. Three masters stated that their slaves would be sold for less than their value if the seller could be assured that they were being purchased by a good master;<sup>31</sup> another owner stated that he would not sell the slave in question “at any price unless I am satisfied that the girl is getting a good home.” Two owners were worried about where their slaves would live after the sale. One stated that his slave would not be sold to a city owner, “as it is her wish to live in the country”;

<sup>21</sup> *Daily Picayune*, January 4, 1850; October 30, 1850; January 10, 1850.

<sup>22</sup> *Commercial Bulletin*, August 17, 1850.

<sup>23</sup> *L’Abeille*, July 22, 1850.

<sup>24</sup> *Daily Picayune*, April 6, 1850.

<sup>25</sup> For example see *L’Abeille*, November 22, 1850.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, July 10, 1850 (first quotation); *Daily Picayune*, March 8, 1850; *L’Abeille*, October 11, 1850 (second quotation).

<sup>27</sup> *Daily Orleanian*, December 28, 1850.

<sup>28</sup> *L’Abeille*, March 1, 1850.

<sup>29</sup> *Daily Picayune*, September 13, 1850.

<sup>30</sup> *Commercial Bulletin*, July 25, 1850.

<sup>31</sup> *Bee*, January 19, 1850; *Commercial Bulletin*, October 12, December 24, 1850.

another stated that the slaves he was selling were “mostly raised on the coast and prefer returning to it again.”<sup>32</sup>

Although many advertisements of Negroes for hire appeared in the New Orleans newspapers, it is usually impossible to ascertain whether the notices were placed by a slaveowner or by a free black, unless the advertisement is “for sale or for hire.” Of these, there are only twenty-four for men and ten for women, only a small fraction of the total sale advertisements for slaves in New Orleans in 1850. In only one advertisement was a hired slave’s wages mentioned: a thirty-eight-year-old cook and waiter (male) on a steamboat received wages of thirty dollars per month.<sup>33</sup>

Since only seven advertisements (for ten slaves) in the New Orleans newspapers mentioned the price of slaves, it is impossible to make a generalization about the cost of bondsmen and bondswomen in 1850. The following is a composite of these notices:<sup>34</sup>

#### Women

Cook, washer and ironer, age 25	\$ 700
House servant, child’s nurse, bilingual, age 17	\$ 600
House servant, washer and ironer, age 25, and her daughter, age 7	\$1,000

#### Men

House servant, carriage driver, bricklayer, age 28	\$ 850
Coachman and house servant, age 35	\$ 600
Coachman, age 30	\$ 600
Cook, dining room servant, carriage driver, age 19	\$ 900
Dining room servant, carriage driver (no age given)	\$ 750
Barber, age 24           insured for	\$1,000

#### Husband and Wife

Man, house servant, carriage driver and barber, age 25	
Woman, chambermaid, age 22, both for	\$1,650

<sup>32</sup> *Daily Picayune*, December 7, March 30, May 18, 1850; quotations appear in order in the cited issues.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, February 15, 1850.

<sup>34</sup> During the decade 1850–1860 individual slave prices seldom appeared in the New Orleans newspapers. Reddick, “The Negro in the New Orleans Press,” 183. Slaves were usually insured for two-thirds or three-fourths of their value; insurance companies thought that if the slaves were insured for their full value, they might be more valuable dead than alive to their masters. Todd L. Savitt, “Slave Life Insurance in Virginia and North Carolina,” *Journal of Southern History*, XLIII (November 1977), 587–88. The quoted prices appeared in *Daily Picayune*, January 15, March 8, 14, 1850; *Commercial Bulletin*, August 8, September 20, 30, November 8, 1850.



The overwhelming majority of slaves sold in New Orleans in 1850 were sold at public auction: 3,037 of 3,501 or 86.7 percent. Unlike the private sale, the auction sale implied no mitigating circumstances: the owner could not specify conditions or choose buyers he believed to be kind. Slave auctions were regularly held in New Orleans's two great hotels (the St. Charles and the St. Louis) and in other public places around the city. Slaves sold at public auction were examined by prospective purchasers as though they were livestock—they were poked, prodded, and stripped if the interested party so desired.<sup>35</sup> Auction notices for the sale of slaves in the city's newspapers appeared in a general auction column, along with and often in the same notice as auctions for real estate, furniture, and other items.

Sixty-eight percent of all slave sales reported in the New Orleans newspapers were the result of some legal action, and 78 percent of all auctions were occasioned by some legal procedure. The majority of these judicial auctions were either to settle a succession or an estate or for partition of a succession or an estate. Under Louisiana law no one could be forced to hold property (including slaves) in common with other heirs. If a division of the property could not be agreed upon by the heirs the property was sold at public auction and the proceeds divided among the heirs. Other legally caused auctions were for liquidation of partnership, divorce, settlement of a lawsuit of any type, settlement of debt, or bankruptcy.<sup>36</sup> In many of these auctions, the slave was seized and imprisoned until the date of auction. The high proportion of auction sales for legal reasons shows either that New Orleanians had so much capital invested in slaves that they could not produce the necessary cash to meet their obligations and therefore had to sell some of their slaves or that they chose to sell slaves rather than selling other possessions or parting with their cash. Certainly their slave investments were easily liquidated.

New Orleans was not only a great center for the slave trade; it was a mecca for fugitives. The conditions of slavery in the city both encouraged urban slaves to run away and attracted rural fugitives attempting to lose themselves in the congestion and confusion of the city. Robert Everest, an English visitor to New Orleans in 1853, estimated that 1 percent of all the city's slaves were absent at all

<sup>35</sup> Reddick, "The Negro in the New Orleans Press," 174–75; Wegener, "Negro Slavery in New Orleans," 47–49.

<sup>36</sup> The frequency of estate sales in Louisiana meant that no slave family was secure. Bondsmen could not predict when their owners would die and how the estates would be divided. Herbert G. Gutman, *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom, 1750–1925* (New York, 1976), 153; Stamp, *The Peculiar Institution*, 199–201. Family ties were generally ignored in judicial sales. *Ibid.*, 200.

times.<sup>37</sup>

It is a rare occurrence to examine any daily New Orleans newspaper on a given date in 1850 and not find at least one runaway advertisement. A total of 475 different notices for fugitive slaves appeared in 1850.<sup>38</sup> These notices were usually scattered throughout the classified advertisements, often near notices for lost dogs or horses. Generally, the notice had a silhouette of either a running man carrying a bundle on a stick over his shoulder or of a woman running and carrying a small bundle in front of her, depending on which was appropriate.

There were two types of advertisements: one was placed by the fugitive's master, and the other by one of the city jailers. The former were generally quite detailed, and the fact that they were placed by the owner shows that the runaway had possibly succeeded in his or her escape. Owners normally did not advertise until the runaway had been gone for several weeks.<sup>39</sup> A fugitive who had been absent for that long a period may be assumed to have had some chance of making good his escape. Sometimes these owner-placed notices appeared daily or weekly for several weeks or even months.

Advertisements placed by the jailer obviously related to an unsuccessful fugitive being detained in one of the city jails until claimed by his or her owner. The law required that detained slaves had to be advertised once a week for three months unless claimed by the master, who had to pay the jailer for keeping the slave. Unclaimed runaways were sold for jail costs after two years. "Detained" notices were usually quite brief, giving only the name, sex, height, color, estimated age of the slave, and the owner's name, which the slave supplied. Seven percent of the incarcerated slaves refused to state the names of their owners, claiming that they were free. In these cases the jailer stated "says he [or she] is free, but supposed to be a slave."<sup>40</sup>

<sup>37</sup> Taylor, *Negro Slavery in Louisiana*, 173; Wade, *Slavery in the Cities*, 215; Henry E. Sterkx, *The Free Negro in Ante-Bellum Louisiana* (Rutherford, N. J., and other cities, 1972), 151; Ira Berlin, *Slaves Without Masters: The Free Negro in the Antebellum South* (New York, 1976), 158-59. Everest, quoted in John W. Blassingame, *Black New Orleans, 1860-1880* (Chicago, 1973), 9.

<sup>38</sup> Lawrence Reddick, who used only four New Orleans newspapers, found fewer than six hundred such advertisements between 1850 and 1860. Reddick, "The Negro in the New Orleans Press," 135, 159.

<sup>39</sup> Such notices were detailed, and they were likewise the most objective advertisements concerning slaves. The owner had nothing to sell; he wanted to furnish an accurate description of the fugitive so that he or she could be easily identified and returned. *Ibid.*, 162; Stampf, *The Peculiar Institution*, 110.

<sup>40</sup> Taylor, *Negro Slavery in Louisiana*, 173, 31, 170. It was not unusual for a "detained"

TABLE 3  
RUNAWAY SLAVES

Type	Male		Female	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
All	324	68.2	151	31.7
Rural	83	25.6	14	9.3
Urban	241	74.4	137	90.7
Possibly successful	160	49.4	84	55.6
Detained	164	50.6	67	44.4
Rural detained	32	19.5	2	3.0
Urban detained	132	80.5	65	97.0

TABLE 4  
RUNAWAY SLAVES BY AGE, SEX, NUMBERS, AND PERCENTAGES

Age	Male		Female	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
0-4	1	0.3	1	0.7
5-9	2	0.7	4	2.9
10-14	28	9.7	7	5.1
15-19	36	12.5	23	16.9
20-24	53	18.4	29	21.3
25-29	61	21.2	20	14.7
30-34	42	14.6	18	13.2
35-39	23	8.0	16	11.7
40-44	10	3.5	11	8.1
45-49	14	4.9	3	2.2
50-54	11	3.8	2	1.5
55-59	5	1.7	0	0.0
60 and over	2	0.7	2	1.5
Total	288	100.0	136	99.8

NOTE: The totals in this table differ from those in Table 3 because no age was specified in thirty-six advertisements for runaway males and fifteen for runaway females.

The combined totals of possibly successful runaways (owner-placed advertisements) and detained fugitives (jailer-placed notices) are analyzed in Table 3. From these figures one can see that the majority of runaways were urban males but that urban women were possibly more successful in making good their escape than male fugitives.

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slave to try to pass as a free black. Sterkx, *The Free Negro*, 152. Sometimes a "detained" Negro was a free black without proper identification or a slave without a pass (but not a runaway). Morris K. Hepler, "Negroes and Crime in New Orleans, 1850-1861" (unpublished M.A. thesis, Tulane University, 1939), 88; *Le Courrier*, May 30, 1850 (quotation).

TABLE 5  
MONTHLY NUMBERS AND PERCENTAGES OF RUNAWAY SLAVES

<i>Month</i>	<i>Male</i>		<i>Female</i>	
	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percent</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percent</i>
January	25	7.7	13	8.7
February	19	6.9	12	8.0
March	27	8.4	13	8.7
April	38	11.8	13	8.7
May	25	7.7	14	9.3
June	19	5.9	11	7.3
July	31	9.6	13	8.7
August	33	10.2	15	10.0
September	28	8.7	11	7.3
October	20	6.2	12	8.0
November	28	8.7	17	11.3
December	30	9.2	6	4.0
Total	323	100.0	150	100.0

NOTE: The totals in this table differ from Table 3 because one fugitive advertisement for a man and one for a woman did not specify when they ran away.

Although slaves tried to escape their bondage at every age, certain ages for each sex were the most common. The ages with the highest percentages of runaways correlates roughly with the most common ages of slaves being sold, suggesting that being sold often prompted a slave to run away (see Tables 2 and 4). The figures in Table 4 were not divided into rural and rural detained categories because both types were so evenly distributed among all age groups.

The preponderance of urban slaves among all runaways is reflected in the times of the year during which they chose to leave their owners. As one would expect, there is little seasonal variation; the labor of urban slaves would be rather steady and not affected by planting season or harvest season (see Table 5).

Nearly all owner-placed runaway advertisements promised a reward for the return of the fugitive. Sometimes the owner was content with offering a "liberal" reward, but usually the amount of money was specifically stated. John Bradford, who advertised for his runaway mulatto barber, Shelly Carter, offered the unusual reward of "FIVE CENTS AND AN OLD RAZOR,"<sup>41</sup> but most owners promised a cash reward. Although it is impossible to correlate the skills of the fugitives with the amount of the reward (after all, the amount depended on the financial condition of the master as

<sup>41</sup> *Daily Picayune*, August 10, 1850.

TABLE 6  
COMPARATIVE REWARDS FOR RUNAWAY URBAN AND RURAL SLAVES

Reward (in dollars)	Urban		Rural	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
5	14	9.8	0	0.0
10	58	40.6	8	17.8
20	22	15.4	4	8.9
25	24	16.8	12	26.7
50	22	15.4	14	31.1
100	3	2.1	7	15.6
Total	143	100.1	45	100.1

well as the value of the slave), rural masters apparently prized their slaves much more highly than did their urban counterparts, probably because rural slaves were a factor of production. The loss of even one would affect the master's crop yield; the owner would also lose the monetary value of the slave.<sup>42</sup> The loss of an urban slave meant losing only the cash value of the slave. Replacement by purchase or hire was not difficult in the city (see Table 6).<sup>43</sup>

Some owners were unable to believe that their slaves would run away voluntarily. Several advertisements of 1850 stated that their slaves were "Missing, supposed to have been stolen . . . ."<sup>44</sup> Another stated that since his slave had "always enjoyed a good [apparently docile] character, it is feared that he has met with some accident."<sup>45</sup> Several owners believed that their slaves were persuaded to run away by persons promising to take them to a free state.<sup>46</sup> One slaveholder was certain that his two slaves had been "enticed" off in this manner. In his notice he stated that he believed his two "boys" had been "decoyed off by a man who ran a trading boat up and down the Coast . . . ." The owner stated that this man "offered to run these Negroes to a free State for \$150 each . . . ." Since the fugitives had stolen "a considerable amount of money"

<sup>42</sup> One historian has stated that slaves on sugar plantations died off faster than their offspring could mature, necessitating constant replenishment of the slave labor supply. John S. Kendall, "New Orleans' 'Peculiar Institution,'" *Louisiana Historical Quarterly*, XXIII (July 1940), 876. If this statement is true, it is not surprising that slaves should be more valuable to rural owners than to urban.

<sup>43</sup> These figures do not support Reddick's contention that twenty-five dollars and fifty dollars were the most common reward for a runaway. Reddick, "The Negro in the New Orleans Press," 159. Although each of these two amounts were advertised in thirty-six notices, ten dollars was by far the most common, appearing in sixty-six notices.

<sup>44</sup> For example see *Daily Picayune*, July 9, 1850.

<sup>45</sup> *Le Courier*, January 9, 1850.

<sup>46</sup> *Weekly Delta*, January 14, 1850.

and the trading boat captain had vanished, the slaveowner surmised that the captain had his runaways “in charge.”<sup>47</sup> Two owners directed their fury towards the men who “stole” their slaves and described one of the thieves as “a foreigner, stooped shouldered . . . loves brandy, and resembles the ourang-outang.”<sup>48</sup> The other owner, bristling with righteous indignation, said in his advertisement that his slave “had been either led astray or kidnapped by one of those rascals that is prowling about the city for the purpose of stealing Southern property.”<sup>49</sup>

Some fugitive slaves advertised for by owners and jailers were reported to have run from areas far from New Orleans. One Thornton, a fourteen-year-old house servant, was advertised as the property of Jefferson Davis of Mississippi.<sup>50</sup> Others reportedly came from Memphis, Tennessee; Madison, Georgia; St. Louis, Missouri; Mobile, Alabama; Hinds County, Mississippi; Wilcox County, Alabama; and Sumptner [Sumner] County, Tennessee.<sup>51</sup>

Despite the strain placed on the slave family by bondage, it is clear slaves often ran away to join family members, most often a husband to join his wife. One owner stated that his mulatto “boy” John would probably be in the vicinity of “St. Patrick’s Church as he has a wife in that part of the city.”<sup>52</sup> Edward H. Pomroy’s advertisement for his “intelligent” house servant Henry concluded that he “is probably in the back of the city [Negro district] as he has a wife there.”<sup>53</sup> Other fugitive slaves were believed to have traveled longer distances to be united with their families. A slaveholder from St. James Parish said that his “bold look[ing]” slave Etienne ran from the steamboat *Latona* in St. John the Baptist Parish and would probably go to New Orleans “where he has his family.”<sup>54</sup> In a similar advertisement, William Dalton’s slave Sam ran from Lafayette to be near his wife, whose mistress lived on Bourbon Street.<sup>55</sup> Another slave, Solomon, who was owned by a paint shop operator in Memphis, was believed to have made his way to New Orleans, probably to rejoin family or friends, “as he lived there several

<sup>47</sup> *Daily Picayune*, December 5, 1850.

<sup>48</sup> *Commercial Bulletin*, April 9, 1850.

<sup>49</sup> *Daily True Delta*, May 28, 1850.

<sup>50</sup> *Daily Delta*, October 31, 1850.

<sup>51</sup> *Bee*, April 23, 1850; *Daily Picayune*, May 19, 1850; *Le Courier*, January 29, March 26, May 13, 31, September 7, 14, 1850.

<sup>52</sup> *Daily Picayune*, April 18, 1850.

<sup>53</sup> *Daily Delta*, November 14, 1850.

<sup>54</sup> *Le Courier*, June 13, 1850.

<sup>55</sup> *Daily Picayune*, December 12, 1850.

years.”<sup>56</sup>

Although most fugitives ran away alone, 6 percent of all runaways reported ran off with one or more other persons. Of these 6 percent, 78 percent were rural. Urban slaves were much more likely to try to escape alone. This fact is not surprising. City slaves were often skilled and acculturated persons accustomed to a great degree of mobility. One historian has found that these bondsmen almost always ran off alone and attempted to pass themselves as free; rural slaves, however, tended to run away in groups and often were merely truants.<sup>57</sup>

Four women were reported as having run away with their children, including one bilingual slave woman named “Indian Fanny,” who fled with her five-year-old child.<sup>58</sup> Of all advertisements for fugitive women, none are listed as having run away without their children. Two siblings, Lewis and Elizabeth, ages eight and seven, respectively, were also listed as having fled together.<sup>59</sup> Women with children and children running away together were not very successful. Two of the four women who ran off with their children, and both Lewis and Elizabeth were listed as “detained.”

Several male slaves ran off in groups of two or more. Two ingenious slaves, a mulatto named Dennis and a Negro named Cornelius, boarded the steamboat *Shamrock*; once on board Dennis passed for a free man and claimed Cornelius as his slave.<sup>60</sup> Two runaway groups of two men each had been recently purchased from Decatur County, Georgia, and Maryland, respectively, and were believed to be trying to return to their former homes.<sup>61</sup>

In some instances, one slave who ran away seemed to encourage other bondsmen owned by the same slaveholder to follow his example. One New Orleans slaveowner advertised for three male fugitives: Charles, age forty, a mason, who had run away in May 1850; James, age thirty, a seller of beer, who left on June 7, 1850; and Louis, age thirty, also a seller of beer, who ran away on June 14, 1850.<sup>62</sup> The owner of the New Orleans Levee Steam Cotton Press advertised for two of his slaves, Michael Evans and James Williams,

<sup>56</sup> *Daily Delta*, December 3, 1850.

<sup>57</sup> Gerald W. Mullin, *Flight and Rebellion: Slave Resistance in Eighteenth-Century Virginia* (New York, 1972), 36, 56, 106.

<sup>58</sup> *Daily True Delta*, August 29, 1850.

<sup>59</sup> *Daily Orleanian*, November 5, 1850.

<sup>60</sup> *Daily Picayune*, June 16, 1850.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, December 12, 1850; *Weekly Delta*, February 11, 1850.

<sup>62</sup> *Bee*, June 17, 1850.

who ran away on December 29, 1849, and January 21, 1850, respectively.<sup>63</sup> This same owner placed another notice in April 1850 for his runaway slave Louis Johnson, a mason; he stated that since "two of the best boys belonging to the Company have been enticed away, and got on boats bound for England it is feared that the above named boy, Louis Johnson, is secreted on board of some vessel cleared on Saturday or about leaving port."<sup>64</sup> Before the middle of August 1850 Robert A. Wilkinson placed an advertisement for four slaves who had left his plantation and were believed to be heading for New Orleans; by the end of August he was advertising for one more.<sup>65</sup> According to the advertisements in the New Orleans newspapers a mulatto named Amos ran away from Hewitt and Heran's plantation near Donaldsonville in August 1850; in September he was followed by two slave men from the same plantation, one of whom was Giles, age twenty-two and of "high, copper color." Giles's owner stated that his slave would "perhaps deny his master and change his name."<sup>66</sup> One slave woman, Julia, of "genteel appearance," apparently ran away to join her fugitive husband. Her owner stated that she "will probably try to make her way to Cincinnati, to which place her husband lately escaped."<sup>67</sup>

The survey of 1850 advertisements shows one and possibly two slave husbands and wives ran away together. The more unusual of the two notices stated that two slaves, a "boy," July, and a "small woman," Rhoda, had escaped in a small boat. Their owner, J. A. Kelly of Bayou Sara, declared that they would "pass for man and wife but may change their names, as well as misrepresent who is their owner." If caught in New Orleans, Kelly wanted July and Rhoda to be "put in the chain gang."<sup>68</sup>

One whole slave family ran away, "induced to leave by a hope of escape to a free State where they have been lately preceded by a valuable seamstress Julia, the property of the same gentleman." This family consisted of Kitty, age thirty, a "delicately formed black woman . . . of intelligent, pleasant quiet look and manners"; Papsons, her husband, age thirty-five, of "demure sensible look; a

<sup>63</sup> *Daily Picayune*, January 27, 1850.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, April 4, 1850.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, August 10, 31, 1850.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, August 7, September 11, 1850.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, May 18, 1850.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, June 30, 1850. July and Rhoda may have been husband and wife, mother and son, father and daughter, sister and brother, or merely friends. It is impossible to determine whether the term "boy" should be taken literally; often "boy" was used in newspaper advertisements to describe any black man, even one who was quite elderly.



cook”; their son Henry, age ten, who had a “shrewd, active cunning look”; and Georgiana, their daughter, age six or seven, a “handsome black child, not otherwise remarkable.”<sup>69</sup>

Several owners knew or believed that their runaway slaves were “lurking” in New Orleans. (Fugitive slaves were generally not “in” the city, but “lurking” about it.) Thom, a cooper, who ran away from a plantation on Grand Isle, was said by his owner to be “no doubt lurking in the rear of the city, where he has been seen several times.”<sup>70</sup> Several newspaper advertisements for slave women stated that bondswomen were “harbored” in New Orleans, one by a free Negro who planned to accompany her to the West, another by a white man who gave the slave woman a forged pass.<sup>71</sup> Eliza, a bilingual fugitive, was “supposed to be harbored by some members of the negro church . . .”; Ellen or Edy, a domestic who spoke French and understood German, was believed by her owner to be “concealed by some black people.”<sup>72</sup> Probably the most interesting instance of a “harbored” female is that of Frances, who was bought from E. Creswell, a slave dealer, seven weeks before the runaway advertisement appeared in the newspapers. The new owner believed that a “certain individual” (possibly Creswell himself) was harboring her and would send her up the river or across the lake.<sup>73</sup>

Eight percent of all the fugitive slave advertisements that appeared in the New Orleans newspapers in 1850 show special planning on the part of the runaways. As has already been indicated above, several planned to escape to a free state.<sup>74</sup> One runaway took

<sup>69</sup> *Bee*, August 8, 1850.

<sup>70</sup> Many fugitives had no firm destination in mind when they absented themselves and often never left the city. Hepler, “Negroes and Crime,” 71; *Daily Picayune*, April 13, 1850.

<sup>71</sup> Harboring a fugitive or even allowing a slave to sleep in the home of a free person of color was strictly forbidden by law. Donald E. Everett, “Legislation Concerning Free Persons of Color in Orleans Parish” (unpublished M.A. thesis, Tulane University, 1950), 127. Laws against harboring slaves were rarely enforced. Hepler, “Negroes and Crime,” 73; *Daily Picayune*, April 7, May 22, 1850. It was not uncommon for free blacks to give aid to runaway slaves. Sterkx, *The Free Negro*, 280; *Daily Picayune*, May 22, 1850. White southerners often aided fugitives by hiding them. Reddick, “The Negro in the New Orleans Press,” 138.

<sup>72</sup> *Daily Delta*, November 5, 13, 1850.

<sup>73</sup> *Daily Picayune*, July 7, 1850. This type of fraud was not uncommon in the South. Reddick, “The Negro in the New Orleans Press,” 134. Several large slave traders had farms north of New Orleans. If the stock of slaves was not sold by the beginning of the summer, the traders sent the remaining slaves out of the city to avoid the hazards of the summer illnesses common to New Orleans. John S. Kendall, “Shadow over the City,” *Louisiana Historical Quarterly*, XXII (January 1939), 153.

<sup>74</sup> For example see *Daily Picayune*, December 5, 1850; *Weekly Delta*, January 15, 1850; *L’Abeille*, August 8, 1850.

with him a fine “bay American horse.”<sup>75</sup> Several slaves had false passes with them when they departed.<sup>76</sup> A fugitive named Pierre, who was trilingual and “fond of circus and theater,” left with both a false pass and banknotes.<sup>77</sup> A few slave women took clothing with them, the most enterprising of whom was Martha, who left with five “frocks and a Leghorn bonnet, trimmed with red, and blue ostrich feathers.”<sup>78</sup> Another fugitive, Mary, took a large quantity of wearing apparel and bedding as well.<sup>79</sup> A few owners thought that their runaway slaves would change their names and that of their masters.<sup>80</sup> Some owners stated that their slaves would attempt to pass themselves as free;<sup>81</sup> and one owner thought his slave would attempt to pass herself for white and free.<sup>82</sup> In a city like New Orleans with a substantial free black population and a white population of varying shades of complexion, such hunches could very well have been true.

A few advertisements for fugitive slaves inadvertently revealed their owners’ cruelty. Two men ran away with iron rings or chains on their legs.<sup>83</sup> Another slave ran with a gunshot wound,<sup>84</sup> and several were reported to be “badly marked from [an] old whipping.”<sup>85</sup>

Of all of the advertisements for runaway slaves in the New Orleans newspapers in 1850, over 11.5 percent of the fugitives were reported by their owners or jailers as having some type of speech problem. Of these, 32 percent were rural runaways. More than one in four of all country runaways were listed as having some difficulty in oral communication. Nearly all of these were males. The percentage of fugitives with verbal difficulties was probably much higher since “detained” advertisements rarely describe the speech of those

<sup>75</sup> *Daily Picayune*, January 4, 1850.

<sup>76</sup> For example see *Daily Picayune*, May 19, December 5, 1850. Forged passes were a common deception used by fugitive slaves. Sterkx, *The Free Negro*, 153. Slaves were prohibited by law from carrying forged passes but were often not punished if caught. Hepler, “Negroes and Crime,” 69.

<sup>77</sup> *Daily Picayune*, May 7, 1850.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, March 22, 1850.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, July 2, 1850.

<sup>80</sup> *Weekly Delta*, July 15, 1850; *Bee*, June 1, 1850.

<sup>81</sup> For example see *Daily Picayune*, January 5, April 26, August 3, 1850. Attempting to pass as free was a common ploy of fugitive slaves. Sterkx, *The Free Negro*, 150–51.

<sup>82</sup> *Daily Picayune*, October 22, 1850. Passing for white in New Orleans, with its olive-skinned whites of French and Spanish ancestry, would be easier than in most southern cities. Berlin, *Slaves Without Masters*, 161, 164.

<sup>83</sup> *Bee*, January 14, 1850; *Daily Orleanian*, July 18, 1850.

<sup>84</sup> *Daily Picayune*, August 20, 1850. Louisiana law permitted shooting any runaway slave who refused to stop when ordered to do so. Stamp, *The Peculiar Institution*, 213.

<sup>85</sup> *Daily Delta*, October 15, 1850.

jailed. These findings conflict with those of Gerald Mullin. He found that the slave in eighteenth-century Virginia most likely to have speech difficulties was the acculturated, skilled slave.<sup>86</sup>

The most common problems were that the fugitive was “confused when addressed sharply.”<sup>87</sup> This description was often coupled with “has a downcast look” or speaks “in a low tone,” or “speaks slow,” or “speaks little.”<sup>88</sup> Several slaves, all males, were described as stuttering or stammering when spoken to or when excited.<sup>89</sup> Shedrick, who ran from St. James Parish, had such acute anxiety that he was described as “stammering a little” but giving “neither his name not his master’s name.”<sup>90</sup>

Thirteen percent of all runaway slaves advertised for in the New Orleans newspapers of 1850 were either bilingual or spoke three or four languages (the percentage was probably much higher as “detained” notices were not detailed). These fugitive slaves who spoke more than one language were nearly evenly divided between men and women. For example, a mulatto woman named Suzan spoke English, French, and German;<sup>91</sup> Henry, a “bright mulatto” who had been employed at the New Orleans *Bee*, spoke English, French, and Choctaw.<sup>92</sup>

A few advertisements for runaway slave women were so unique that they defy quantification. Elizabeth, a trilingual slave who formerly belonged to a “free man of color,”<sup>93</sup> was described by her new owner as having a “bad look.”<sup>94</sup> Another woman fugitive was described as “ugly” and “pregnant.”<sup>95</sup> Aimee, a quadroon, was described by her owner as having “beautiful teeth, fine auburn hair, white eyelids, and has the appearance of a German girl.” Her owner offered the exceptionally high reward of two hundred dollars for her.<sup>96</sup> Perhaps the most extraordinary 1850 runaway advertisement

<sup>86</sup> Mullin, *Flight and Rebellion*, 98.

<sup>87</sup> For example see *Daily True Delta*, May 10, 1850; *Daily Picayune*, May 11, 1850.

<sup>88</sup> For example see *Daily Picayune*, September 27 (first quotation), June 6 (fourth quotation), March 7, 1850 (third quotation); *Bee*, August 14, 1850 (second quotation).

<sup>89</sup> *Bee*, May 14, 1850; *Daily Picayune*, January 18, February 15, 1850. Stuttering shows fear, but also anger, resentment, and hostility, emotions one could expect to find in a runaway slave. Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll*, 647.

<sup>90</sup> *Le Courier*, July 13, 1850.

<sup>91</sup> *Bee*, February 14, 1850.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, December 9, 1850.

<sup>93</sup> *L’Abeille*, June 7, 1850. Free persons of color who were slaveowners were often cruel. Everett, “Legislation Concerning Free Persons of Color,” 129. See also Sterkx, *The Free Negro*, 281.

<sup>94</sup> *Bee*, June 7, 1850.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, April 22, 1850.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, May 31, 1850.

for a runaway slave woman was for Marie Amelie, a mulatto with "a prepossessing appearance," "wild looks," "and the scar of a wound inflicted with a whip near the left eye." This slave woman was elegantly dressed in a flowered gown, "a silk shawl with red trimmings, and a small garnet ring mounted with gold."<sup>97</sup> Aimee and Marie Amelie were most probably "fancy girls" or were mistresses of their owners.

Several unusual notices for fugitive men also appeared in the New Orleans newspapers in 1850. One eighteen-year-old slave, whose back was "scarred from flogging," was caught when he secreted himself between the cylinder timbers of a steamboat.<sup>98</sup> Another "intelligent" slave who could read, write, and "understands figures" ran away, his master supposed, to California. This slave showed no signs of physical abuse and his apparently bewildered and uncomprehending owner stated that he ran away "without provocation."<sup>99</sup> Tim, age twenty-eight, was well dressed, had bored ears, and wore "a silver watch and a five dollar gold piece for a breastpin."<sup>100</sup> Another interesting runaway slave named Robert had an "impudent look" and a light complexion, "but he blackens his face to disguise himself."<sup>101</sup> Another owner stated that his fugitive slave Austin Fox had been a stevedore but also played the fiddle and was to be found about cabarets.<sup>102</sup> And finally, at least one owner had a slave who often became a fugitive. This slaveholder stated that his slave's usual occupation as a runaway was that of a chimney sweep.<sup>103</sup>

A survey of both sale and runaway advertisements of the New Orleans newspapers of 1850 shows that the overwhelming majority of all fugitive slaves and slaves for sale had ordinary American or French first names, such as Tom or Etienne, Sally or Marie.<sup>104</sup> A tiny proportion had stereotypical slave names such as Sukey or Sambo; a few had pretentious names such as Cato, Moliere, Voltaire, Othello, and Ophelia; one can find a few ironic names such as

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, February 1, 1850.

<sup>98</sup> *Commercial Bulletin*, March 7, 1850.

<sup>99</sup> *Daily Picayune*, July 7, 1850. This complaint was common in advertisements by slaveowners. Stamp, *The Peculiar Institution*, 111.

<sup>100</sup> *Daily Picayune*, April 14, 1850.

<sup>101</sup> *Le Courier*, January 4, 1850.

<sup>102</sup> *Daily Picayune*, September 22, 1850.

<sup>103</sup> *Bee*, July 11, 1850.

<sup>104</sup> Classical or whimsical names appeared much less frequently than has been formerly believed. Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll*, 448. By the middle of the nineteenth century nearly all slaves had common Anglo-Saxon names. Gutman, *The Black Family*, 186.

White, Prince, and Queen. A small number were named for months of the year, days of the week, or a feast day, such as Janvier (January), Monday, and Easter, perhaps a conscious (or unconscious) survival of African day names.<sup>105</sup> A few slaves were named for political figures or national heroes such as Henry Clay (a child of five years),<sup>106</sup> and one owner named his slave Profit, a revealing admission.<sup>107</sup> Five percent of all runaways and a few for sale had an alias or alternate first name (mostly men).<sup>108</sup> Seven percent of all runaways and a few slaves for sale were stated to have last names. The most notable of these were Jacques Congo and John American.<sup>109</sup> Probably there were many other slaves who used last names, which either were not mentioned or were not known to their owners. In only one instance was the last name taken by the slave that of his owner.<sup>110</sup>

The color of the slave for sale or the fugitive was often mentioned in the newspaper notices. The figures (in approximate percentages) are analyzed in Tables 7 and 8 (a griff was a term which meant the offspring of a mulatto and a Negro). One can see that those slaves who ran away tended to be lighter in color, and those who were sold tended to be blacker. The lighter colored slaves were probably more skilled and had a better chance to pass as free or white.<sup>111</sup>

Fifteen percent of all fugitive slave notices stated that the runaway possessed a nondomestic skill. The overwhelming majority of these were men. Probably many more were skilled, but the advertisements were often not descriptive enough to mention a skill. The

<sup>105</sup> For example see *Le Courier*, April 17, October 5, December 18, 1850; *Daily Orleanian*, September 26, 1850. Although Genovese states that slaves were often named for days of the week or months of the year (Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll*, 448), Gutman contends that only a few bondsmen had West African day names. Gutman, *The Black Family*, 186.

<sup>106</sup> *Le Courier*, January 11, 1850.

<sup>107</sup> *Daily Orleanian*, September 22, 1850.

<sup>108</sup> For example see *Le Courier*, April 23, 1850 (two instances).

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, March 12, December 28, 1850.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, July 12, 1850. Sometimes masters gave their slaves surnames, but more often slaves chose their own last names without their owners' permission and often without their knowledge. Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll*, 445.

<sup>111</sup> Sterkx has found that most fugitive slaves were mulattoes or lighter colors. Sterkx, *The Free Negro*, 150–51. However, Stampp finds that most runaways under thirty (in New Orleans the majority of the fugitives) were not of predominantly white ancestry. Stampp, *The Peculiar Institution*, 110. Unfortunately, it is not possible to compare these data with the overall black-mulatto composition of the New Orleans population in 1850, as these categories are not listed in the census of 1850. U. S. Bureau of the Census, *Negro Population, 1790–1915* (Washington, 1918), 211. However, one historian states that in the decade before the Civil War blacks outnumbered mulattoes in the New Orleans slave population, while mulattoes were more prevalent in the free black population. Reinders, "Slavery in New Orleans," 213.

TABLE 7  
RUNAWAYS BY COLOR AND SEX

Color	Male		Female	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Mulatto	56	20.9	40	30.3
Griff	126	47.0	54	40.9
Black	86	32.1	38	28.8
Total	268	100.0	132	100.0

TABLE 8  
SALES OF SLAVES BY COLOR AND SEX

Color	Male		Female	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Mulatto	32	19.8	46	17.8
Griff	24	14.8	27	10.4
Black	106	65.4	186	71.8
Total	162	100.0	259	100.0

TABLE 9  
SALES OF SLAVES BY SKILL

Skill	Total	Male		Female	
		Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Domestic	302	66	21.9	236	78.1
Nondomestic	157	149	94.9	8	5.1

existence of a large number of acculturated skilled males concurs with the findings of Gerald Mullin, who concluded that such slaves were most likely to run away.<sup>112</sup> This pattern is striking in the sale advertisements that mention a skill (see Table 9). Skilled slaves were often mechanics, crate layers, pastry cooks, draymen, shoemakers, shirt makers, printing office rollers, carters, blacksmiths, coopers, engineers, masons, clerks (in stores), carpenters, mattress makers, cotton weighers, locksmiths, waiters, cigar makers, railroad laborers, plasterers, barbers, tailors, firemen, boilermakers, house painters, and brass molders as well as those with the usual domestic skills.<sup>113</sup>

<sup>112</sup> This preponderance of skilled males is not surprising. After all, southern cities offered few opportunities for lucrative employment for women of any color. Berlin, *Slaves Without Masters*, 220; Mullin, *Flight and Rebellion*, 36. Another historian states that the most intelligent and accomplished slaves were most likely to attempt to escape. Woessner, "New Orleans, 1840-1860," 47.

<sup>113</sup> For example see *L'Abeille*, November 2, 7, 1850; *Le Courier*, January 19, May 31, 1850.

Nearly 15 percent of all male runaway notices and 32 percent of all female fugitive advertisements indicate that the slave had a health problem of one type or another.<sup>114</sup> The most common problems for both sexes were missing or decayed teeth, lameness, or some other difficulty in walking, although fugitive health problems included drunkenness, insanity, hernias, and tumors.<sup>115</sup> The physical and mental condition of slaves for sale is much more difficult to assess because vendors naturally tended to stress good features of their slaves, such as intelligence or good disposition, rather than any aspects which would make the slave less salable. Despite this fact, several slaves for sale were advertised as having a variety of diseases and conditions, including drunkenness, mental derangement, fistulas, chlorosis (liver dysfunction), scrofula (tuberculosis of the lymph glands), epilepsy, or asthma, or they are simply described as “sickly.”<sup>116</sup>

Slaves for sale were never described as being scarred or burned, but 12 percent of all fugitive men and nearly 14 percent of all fugitive women were described by their owners as bearing these marks. Although occupational accidents were common among slaves, the owners’ seeming compulsion to explain away the scars<sup>117</sup> must mean that some of these marks were not accidentally inflicted, or at least a newspaper reader might be expected to believe otherwise because such signs of mistreatment were common. A comment such as “scar on the forehead . . . caused by a kick from a mule . . .”<sup>118</sup> was common.

An examination of the classified notices in New Orleans’s nine daily newspapers of 1850 revealed only two evidences of slave emancipation.<sup>119</sup> The first, published under “City Intelligence,” listed

<sup>114</sup> One historian claimed that in 1855 only 7 to 8 percent of all slaves were physically impaired or chronically ill according to succession records. William D. Postell, *The Health of Slaves on Southern Plantations* (Baton Rouge, 1951), 160.

<sup>115</sup> For example see *Daily Picayune*, June 6, 7, 1850. Mental and nervous disorders were not uncommon among slaves. Dietary deficiencies often caused diseases such as pellagra, which resulted in lameness. Postell, *The Health of Slaves*, 85, 87. See also Kenneth F. and Virginia H. Kiple, “Black Tongue and Black Men: Pellagra and Slavery in the Antebellum South,” *Journal of Southern History*, XLIII (August 1977), 411–28.

<sup>116</sup> For example see *L’Abeille*, November 27, 1850; *Le Courier*, January 15, February 5, 14, December 18, 1850. Tuberculosis was more common among slaves than has been formerly believed. Postell, *The Health of Slaves*, 79–80.

<sup>117</sup> After abolitionists became outraged by references in southern newspapers to obvious abuses of the slaves allusions to whip marks decreased, and notices referring to scars and burns increased. Stamp, *The Peculiar Institution*, 187; Mullin, *Flight and Rebellion*, 98, 25.

<sup>118</sup> *Daily Picayune*, March 7, 1850.

<sup>119</sup> For a complete discussion of New Orleans emancipation laws and manumission in New Orleans see Donald E. Everett, “Free Persons of Color in New Orleans, 1803–1865” (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Tulane University, 1953), 132–66.

thirty owners emancipating thirty-nine slaves. Since many of those freed were by admission children or wives of the slaveholder, it is presumed that these owners were free blacks who had purchased their wives, husbands, or children and then manumitted them.<sup>120</sup> The second instance appeared in an auction notice for the sale of two slave girls, ages fourteen and twelve, and two slave boys, ages fourteen and eight. This auction was held to settle a succession and stipulated that the slaves were to be freed at twenty-one under the terms of the will of the deceased. They were being sold for their service only until they reached that age.<sup>121</sup>

New Orleans newspaper advertisements of 1850 reflect almost every conceivable abuse of the slave and few mitigating circumstances,<sup>122</sup> yet they also confirm that a few remarkable slave men and women managed to have a viable family life, acquire literacy, and plan ingenious escapes. Most of all, this study revealed that while slaves in New Orleans in 1850 might have been declining in numbers, the peculiar institution was nevertheless firmly entrenched in the city's society and economy.

<sup>120</sup> *Le Courier*, January 14, 1850. Sixty-four slaves were manumitted in New Orleans between January 7, 1850, and August 28, 1851. Hepler, "Negroes and Crime," 104. Of the 1,353 petitions for emancipation submitted to the New Orleans courts between 1827 and 1851, 501 were made by free blacks. Blassingame, *Black New Orleans*, 11.

<sup>121</sup> *Le Courier*, May 3, 1850 (Succession of Roch Salles). It was illegal to emancipate a slave under the age of thirty. Obviously, this law was at least occasionally ignored. Everett, "Free Persons of Color," 132.

<sup>122</sup> One historian contends that, despite claims in earlier historical writings, "Louisiana's Latin heritage failed to soften slavery, encourage manumission, and foster egalitarian race relations." David C. Rankin, "The Tannenbaum Thesis Reconsidered: Slavery and Race Relations in Antebellum Louisiana," *Southern Studies*, XVIII (Spring 1979), 31.