Advertisements for Runaway Slaves (1767–1839)

VARIOUS NEWSPAPERS

The advertisements placed in Southern newspapers offering rewards for the capture of runaway slaves indicate a great deal about the nature of slavery. On such occasions, slave owners made no effort to disguise their common practices. When Theodore Weld and the Grimke sisters wanted to give a sense of the actual workings of slavery, they simply published several hundred of these ads as American Slavery as It Is (1839).

Questions to Consider

• What do these advertisements tell you about the treatment of slaves?
• Judging from his ad, what kind of slave owner was President Andrew Jackson?

1. Run Away from the subscriber in Norfolk, about the 20th of October last, two young Negro fellows, viz. Will, about 5 feet 8 inches high, middling black, well made, is an outlandish fellow, and when he is surprised the white of his eye turns red; I bought him of Mr. Moss, about 8 miles below York, and imagine he is gone that way, or some where between York and Williamsburg. Peter, about 5 feet 9 inches high, a very black slim fellow, has a wife at Little Town, and a father at Mr. Philip Burt’s quarter, near the half-way house between Williamsburg and York, he formerly belonged to Parson Fontaine and I bought him of Doctor James Carter. They are both outlawed; and Ten Pounds a piece offered to any person that will kill the said Negroes, and bring me their heads, or Thirty Shillings for each if brought home alive.

   JOHN BROWN
   Virginia Gazette (Williamsburg), April 23, 1767.

2. Taken up on the 26th of July last, and now in Newbern gaol, North Carolina, Two New Negro Men, the one named Joe, about 45 years of age, about 5 feet 6 inches high, much wrinkled in the face, and speaks bad English. The other is a young fellow, about 5 feet 10 inches high, speaks English better than Joe, who he says is his father, has a large scar on the fleshy part of his left arm, and says they belong to Joseph Morse, but can give no account where he lives. They have nothing with them but an old Negro cloth jacket, and an old blue sailors jacket without sleeves. Also on the 21st of September was committed to the said gaol a Negro man named Jack, about 23 years of age, about 5 foot 4 inches high, of a thin visage, blear eyed, his teeth and mouth stand very much out, has six rings of his country marks round his neck, his ears full of holes, and cannot tell his master’s name. And on the 27th of September two other Negro men, one named Sampson, about 5 feet 10 inches high, about 25 years of age, well made, very black, and
is much marked on his body and arms with his country marks. The other named Will, about 5 feet 4 inches high, about 22 years of age and marked on the chin with his country marks; they speak bad English, and cannot tell their masters names. Whoever own the said Negroes are desired to come and pay the fees and take them away.

RICHARD BLACKLEDGE, SHERIFF.

Virginia Gazette, November 5, 1767.

3. Run away from the Neabsco Furnace, on the 16th of last Month, a light coloured Mulatto Man named Billy or Will, the Property of the Honorable John Taylor. Esquire. When I tell the Publick that he is the same Boy who, for many Years, used to wait on me in my Travels through this and the neighbouring province, and, by his Pertness, or rather Impudence, was well known to almost all my Acquaintances, there is the less Occasion for a particular Description of him. However, as he is now grown to the Size of a Man, and has not attended me for some Time past, I think it is not amiss to say that he is a very likely young Fellow, about twenty Years old, five feet nine Inches high, stout and strong made, has a remarkable Swing in his Walk, but is much more so by a surprising Knack he has of gaining the good Graces of almost every Body who will listen to his bewitching and deceitful Tongue, which seldom or ever speaks the Truth; has a small Scar on the right Side of his Forehead, and the little Finger of his right Hand is quite straight by a Hurt he got when a Child. He had on when he went away a blue Fearnaught and an under Jacket of green Baize, Cotton Breeches, Osnabrug Shirt, a mixed Blue Pair of Stockings, a pair of Country made Shoes, and yellow Buckles. He likewise took away with him a smooth bored gun. I suspect he will attempt to pass for a free man, and no doubt will aim northwardly or for the Indian Nation. Any person who will apprehend the above described negro, deliver him to me or confine him in jail shall be handsomely compensated.

RICHARD THURMOND.

Georgia Express (Athens), December 17, 1808.

4. Runaway from the subscriber living in Jackson county, on the Oconce river near Clarkeborough, on Sunday night the 13th of November last a mulatto man of the name of Joe. He is a very bright mulatto, almost white, about six feet high, tolerably well made, yellow gray eyes and yellow hair. He is branded on each check with the letter R. one of his upper fore teeth out, and, on examining under one of his arms there will be found a scar. He carried off with him clothes of different kinds, among them is a blue regimental coat turned up with red. He likewise took away with him a smooth bored gun. I suspect he will attempt to pass for a free man, and no doubt will aim northwardly or for the Indian Nation. Any person who will apprehend the above described negro, deliver him to me or confine him in jail shall be handsomely compensated.

RICHARD THURMOND.

Georgia Express (Athens), December 17, 1808.

5. STOP THE RUNAWAY. FIFTY DOLLARS REWARD. Eloped from the subscriber, living near Nashville on the 25th of June last, a Mulatto Man Slave, about thirty years old, five feet and an inch high, stout made and active, talks sensible, stoops in his walk, and has a remarkably large foot, broad across the root of the toes—will pass for a free man, as I am informed he has obtained by some means, certificates as such—took with him a drab great-coat, dark mixed body coat, a ruffled shirt, cotton home spun shirts and overalls. He will make for Detroit, through the states of Kentucky and Ohio, or the upper part of Louisiana. The above reward will be given any person that will take him and deliver him to me or secure him in jail so that I can get him. If taken out of the state, the above reward, and all reasonable expenses paid—and ten dollars extra for every hundred lashes any person will give him to the amount of three hundred.

ANDREW JACKSON, NEAR NASHVILLE,
STATE OF TENNESSEE.

Tennessee Gazette (Nashville), November 7, 1804.

6. Runaway — my negro man, Frederick, about 20 years of age. He is no doubt near the plantation of G.W. Corprew, Esq. of Noxubbe county, Mississippi, as his
wife belongs to that gentleman, and he followed her from my residence. The above reward will be paid to any one who will confine him in jail and inform me of it at Athens, Ala.

Kerkman Lewis.
Southern Argus, October 31, 1837.

7. $10 Reward for a negro woman, named Sally, 40 years old. We have just reason to believe the said negro to be now lurking on the James River Canal, or in the Green Spring neighborhood, where we are informed, her husband resides. The above reward will be given to any person securing her.

Polly C. Shields.
Richmond Enquirer, February 20, 1838.

8. $50 Reward. — Ran away from the subscriber, his negro man Pauladore, commonly called Paul. I understand Gen. R.Y. Hayne has purchased his wife and children from H.L. Pinckney, Esq. and has them now on his plantation at Goosecreek, where, no doubt, the fellow is frequently lurking.

T. Davis.
Richmond Enquirer, February 20, 1838.

9. The subscriber will give $20 for the apprehension of his negro woman, Maria, who ran away about twelve months since. She is known to be lurking in or about Chuckatuch, in the county of Nansemond, where she has a husband, and formerly belonged.

Peter O’Neill.
Norfolk Beacon, March 31, 1838.

10. Ranaway from the subscriber, two negroes, Davis, a man about 45 year old; also Peggy, his wife, near the same age. Said negroes will probably make their way to Columbia county, as they have children, living in that county. I will liberally reward any person who may deliver them to me.

Nehemiah King.
Macon Messenger, January 16, 1839.