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Monticello May 6. 10

SLAVE OWNER, SLAVE TRADER, GENTLEMAN: *Slavery and the Rise of Andrew Jackson*

By Whitney Adrienne Snow *

A many faceted individual, the young Andrew Jackson developed attitudes of class, honor, and ambition in the chaotic years of his adolescence and determined at a young age to improve his lot in life. Seeking land, wealth, respect, and power, Jackson became a lawyer, merchant, and soldier. Just as important was his involvement in the "peculiar institution" of slavery. As both master and trader, Jackson embraced slavery as an accepted means of achieving that which he sought most—the lifestyle of a gentleman.

Embarrassed by his modest background, Jackson sought ways in which to gain not only money but respect. For Jackson, or any other young man on the rise on the Southern frontier, this meant acquiring land and slaves as inexpensively and quickly as possible. Jackson longed to become a gentleman and deemed slaves the fastest way to accumulate the wealth needed. Far from the exception, he associated high status with the ownership of slaves.¹

Practicing law in North Carolina, after a brief teaching stint in Waxhaw Creek, South Carolina, provided few funds. But in 1788 Jackson moved across the mountains to Jonesboro, in what would later become Tennessee but was then still part of North Carolina. There, he finally earned enough money to buy a slave.² Papers reveal that in Washington County on November 17, 1788, Jackson purchased a "Negro Woman named Nancy about Eighteen or Twenty-Years of Age" from Micajah Crews of North Carolina.³ This initial transaction was more than likely based on the need for someone to

*The author is a doctoral student at Mississippi State University.

¹On honor and upward mobility, see Clement Eaton, *The Mind of the Old South* (Baton Rouge, 1967), 290-291; Hendrik Boordaem, *Young Hickory: The Making of Andrew Jackson* (Dallas, 2001), 41-127; James Oakes, *The Ruling Race: A History of American Slaveholders* (New York, 1982), 145; and Bruce Levine, *Half Slave and Half Free: The Roots of Civil War* (New York, 1992), 26. Jackson's first major purchase, however, was neither land nor slaves, but a horse. This was almost certainly a decision based on necessity, and given Jackson's later fascination with horses, was not altogether surprising. In any event, it proved only a temporary delay on his quest to become a slave owner.

²On teaching, see Boordaem, 136. On his Carolina law license, see "Law License in North Carolina," in Sam Smith and Harriet Chappell Owsley, eds., *The Papers of Andrew Jackson, 1770-1803* (Knoxville, 1984), 1:10. While in Salisbury, Jackson clerked for lawyer Spruce McCay and then Colonel John Stokes. He became authorized to practice law in North Carolina on September 26, 1787. On this period of his life, see Christopher Marquis, "Andrew Jackson: Lawyer, Judge, and Legislator," <http://www.historynet.com/andrew-jackson-lawyer-judge-and-legislator.htm>.

³"Record of a Slave Sale," in Smith, *The Papers of Andrew Jackson, 1770-1803*, 1:15. On his law license in Western Carolina, see "Law License in Tennessee," in *ibid.*, 1:13.



*Engraved by Geo. Phillips from a Painting by Jarvis, taken from life 1815;
now in the Possession of Jonathan Hunt Esq.*

Andrew Jackson

Engraved for the U.S. Magazine & Democratic Review.

Andrew Jackson, shown here around 1815 when he was established as a successful lawyer, military figure, and businessman. Courtesy of the University of Tennessee Special Collections.

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⁴ "List of Taxable Property,"

⁵ "Tax Assessment," in *ibid*.

⁶ Michael Tadman, *Speculat*

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⁸ See "To Robert Hays," in



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perform domestic duties such as cooking and cleaning. Yet Nancy was in fact only the first of many slaves that Jackson purchased in his quest for wealth and status.

Additional purchases, however, required more funds, and working as an attorney proved disadvantageous for Jackson because too many lawyers vied for too few cases in which payment all too often proved unpredictable. For this reason, he began dabbling in mercantilism, land speculation, and the interstate slave trade. Of the three, Jackson seemed to perceive the last as the quickest means to alleviate himself from immense debt. Indeed, his frequent gambling and horse racing in the 1780s and early 1790s contributed greatly to his economic plight. In time, however, slave trading not only relieved Jackson of debt but also allowed him to accumulate a larger-than-average work force of slave labor, a sure sign of status at the time.

Within 10 years of purchasing Nancy, Jackson managed to acquire a total of 14 slaves. His fortunes improved dramatically after moving to Nashville, where he became district attorney for the Mero District of the Southwest Territory in 1791 and Judge Advocate of the Davidson County Court in the following year. In that year he reported his taxable property as 336 acres at James Bend, 640 acres on Harpeth, 640 acres on Spring Creek, and eight slaves, one of which belonged to Samuel Donelson.⁴ By 1798, Jackson owned 15 slaves and, as required, paid taxes on those between the ages of 12 and 50.⁵ Only ten of his slaves were thus taxed, which means that the remaining five were either very young or very old. Given Jackson's relatively recent entry into the business of slavery, the five untaxed slaves were almost certainly children.

Whatever their age, slaves meant money and Jackson was anxious to acquire them either through purchase or as payment for debts. As was common on the cash-poor frontier, Jackson's business transactions often resulted in the bartering of land, livestock, and slaves when hard currency was not readily available. As a general rule, Jackson, like other businessmen with whom he worked, preferred cash, despite the value and status associated with slaves.⁶ At the same time he was often willing to accept slaves as loan payments. For instance, on February 26, 1791, he received a note from his future brother-in-law Stockley Donelson stating an intent to repay a loan with a young slave.⁷ In addition, at times Jackson was willing to accept payment partly in cash and the rest in slaves. One such case took place on December 16, 1796, when he wrote Robert Hays, the husband of his sister-in-law Jane, asking him not to sell a tract of land unless he could "get one [dollar] pr. acre and that in Cash or one half [that price] and a good Negro fellow."⁸ However, Jackson's preferences for pay-

⁴ "List of Taxable Property," in Smith, *The Papers of Andrew Jackson, 1770-1803*, 1:34.

⁵ "Tax Assessment," in *ibid.*, 1:210.

⁶ Michael Tadman, *Speculators and Slaves: Masters, Traders, and Slaves in the Old South* (Madison, 1996), 47.

⁷ See "Promissory Note from Stockley Donelson," in Smith, *The Papers of Andrew Jackson, 1770-1803*, 1:26-27.

⁸ See "To Robert Hays," in *ibid.*, 1:103.

ment wavered from case to case. For example, on June 10, 1805, he sent a belligerent demand for payment to Edward Ward, berating him for trying to pay for Hunter's Hill plantation with slaves.⁹ Obviously, Jackson's behavior varied when it came to personal business contracts.

All slave exchanges made by Jackson proved selective. Whenever purchasing a slave himself, he demanded a guarantee of health and docility.¹⁰ Physique, demeanor, and scars also determined price. At slave markets, appearance mattered because prospective buyers "looked the slaves over closely, examining their teeth, their tongues, and their hands and checking their bodies for the telltale scars of the lash."¹¹ Some potential buyers deemed lash marks indicative of disobedience. Jackson, like all slave buyers, probably made similar assessments; but it seems clear that he was far more concerned for those slaves he intended to keep than for those he bought or received with the intent to sell.

When purchasing slaves he hoped to resell, Jackson looked at cost not quality. In one sad case, Jackson, along with John Hutchings with whom he jointly owned a store in Gallatin, knowingly bought a young slave boy with an injured leg hoping to make a fast resell. Unable to do so, they left the child in the care of a physician where he soon died. Feigning ignorance of the boy's injury, Jackson and Hutchings brought a fraud suit against the original owner but lost.¹²

Jackson may have tried to sell substandard slaves to strangers, but when it came to his friends and family, he sought only the best. He frequently advised friends about what slaves to purchase. On November 25, 1799, Jackson wrote friend Mary Caffery of his available slaves insisting "neither of them is such that I could recommend to you—nor could I think of selling such to you."¹³ Apparently, he did not think much of the slaves he intended to sell. However, on November 30, 1799, Jackson sent a letter to John Overton, his close friend and occasional partner in land speculation, inviting him to "come up and see my family if they Please you, which they cannot otherwise do . . . I will let you have them and Take the two [man and wife] of Carter . . . They will [serve] my Purpose to Sell again."¹⁴ Jackson appeared to understand the risks of the slave trade but at the same time he was clearly gaining confidence in his own ability to navigate those risks and be successful.

⁹ See "To Edward Ward," in Harold D. Moser, Sharon MacPherson, and Charles F. Bryan, Jr., eds., *The Papers of Andrew Jackson, 1804-1813* (Knoxville, 1984), 2:59.

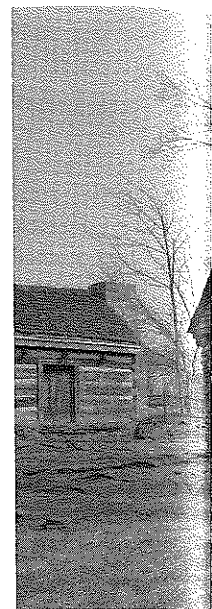
¹⁰ On standards, see Frederic Bancroft, *Slave Trading in the Old South* (New York, 1931), 83.

¹¹ James Oliver Horton and Lois E. Horton, *Slavery and the Making of America* (New York, 2005), 105.

¹² James Parton, *The Life of Andrew Jackson* (New York, 1861), 1:248.

¹³ "To Mary Caffery," Moser, *The Papers of Andrew Jackson, 1804-1813*, 2:281.

¹⁴ "To John Overton," Smith, *The Papers of Andrew Jackson, 1770-1803*, 1:224-225. In this letter, Jackson communicated to Overton that Carter desired his two slaves not be separated, but whether Jackson would have honored this wish is unknown.



Slave cabins at the Hermitage. Rachel Jackson lived here until the plantation was completed, then she moved to the White House.

Jackson quickly changed the center of the entire region for the more surprising results. Jackson's involvement in the slave trade more and more encouraged for a Nashville gentleman, Samuel Donelson, in acquiring slaves: "Wanted a Boy which I wanted for Negroes in any of yourself to the perils of legislation to regulate."

¹⁵ "From John Overton to Andrew Jackson," in Tadman, *Speculators and Speculation*, 1:100. "Thought," in Edward P. Taylor, *The Life of Andrew Jackson*, 1:100.

¹⁶ "From John Overton to Andrew Jackson," in New Hampshire, Connecticut, and Massachusetts, within their respective geographical areas.

¹⁷ On free states, see W. E. B. Dubois, *The Negro Race* (New York, 1899), 1:100.

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Slave cabins at the Hermitage. The building in the foreground was the first home in which Andrew and Rachel Jackson lived when they moved to the Hermitage. After an elegant and larger manor house was completed, these buildings were used as slave quarters. *From the Library of Congress.*

Jackson quickly made his mark in the interstate slave trade, an extensive exchange that centered on the export of slave from the upper South and covered the entire region from the Chesapeake to New Orleans. His success proved all the more surprising because the market was generally dominated by professionals. Jackson's involvement in slave trading, comparatively limited at first, became more and more entangled after his first trip to Philadelphia in 1795 to buy goods for a Nashville general store which he planned to open with another brother-in-law, Samuel Donelson. While there he received a letter from Overton about acquiring slaves: "We may want for Rice" wrote Overton, "and also a likely Negroe Boy which I want for a Servant."¹⁵ Overton went on to warn, "If you purchase Negroes in any of the northern States, be careful in so doing not to subject yourself to the penal Laws of the State."¹⁶ Most Northern states had enacted legislation to regulate slavery, but these laws were often ignored by slave traders.¹⁷

¹⁵ "From John Overton," in Smith, *The Papers of Andrew Jackson, 1770-1803*, 1:54. On professionals, see Tadman, *Speculators and Slaves*, 7. On expansion, see Major L. Wilson, "Dissimilarities in Major Party Thought," in Edward Pessen, ed., *New Perspectives on Jacksonian Parties and Politics* (Boston, 1969), 167.

¹⁶ "From John Overton," in Smith, *The Papers of Andrew Jackson, 1770-1803*, 1:54. Vermont, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Connecticut, Rhode Island, New York, and New Jersey had taken steps to end slavery within their respective governments since 1779.

¹⁷ On free states, see W. E. Burghardt DuBois, *Black Folk Then and Now: An Essay in the History and Sociology of the Negro Race* (New York, 1939), 200.

Jackson, for one, resented Northern interference and proceeded to buy and trade as he liked. Intent on financial security, he apparently attached his own set of ethical and moral characteristics to his business endeavors. Slavery, however, had long appeared anything but moral to many Americans and was coming under attack by a growing number of anti-slavery advocates in the North.

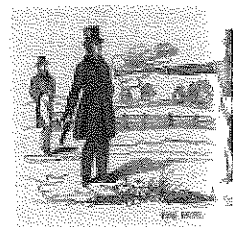
Slave owners like Jackson could dismiss or rebut the sentiments of the early anti-slavery movement, but they were not able to prevent the end of the African slave trade on January 1, 1808. This event marked the fulfillment of an agreement reached 20 years earlier at the Constitutional Convention. Weary of the fierce debate that had divided the convention on the issue of slavery and unwilling to alienate Southern states, northern delegates had accepted a compromise that included, among other things, the provision that the African slave trade would end in 1808. But this agreement did not require the end of slavery itself in the Southern states, and in fact slave traders could expect that, without the regular arrival of imported slaves from Africa, the price of domestic slaves was certain to rise.¹⁸ Although many slave traders thus stood to profit, Jackson found himself plagued with economic problems. With every step taken toward financial independence, he often took just as many steps back as a result of ongoing problems with debt.

The forays Jackson made into slave trading were sometimes profitable, but just as often they resulted in a financial loss. In the autumn of 1810, for example, Jackson partnered with probable Natchez native Horace Green and former Nashville mayor Joseph Coleman in a plan to transport commodities, including slaves, from Nashville to Natchez. One year prior to the partnership, the three men purchased slaves from a Mecklenburg County, Virginia, tavern owner, Richard Apperson. In essence, the men only paid a down payment of \$2,500 on a total agreed price of \$10,500 in cash. The rest of the principal was to be paid in two six-month installments. However, when Green, disgusted with the low price of slaves, left the partnership and subsequently abandoned the slaves in Natchez, Jackson became entirely responsible for both the debt and the costs of transporting the slaves back to Davidson County. As Jackson discovered, fluctuating costs associated with the purchase and transportation of slaves meant there was no guarantee for financial success in slave trading.¹⁹

Shipping slaves to market meant taxes, records, supervision, time, and risks. Whether sending slaves overland or by water, managing such problems proved to be a significant factor for Jackson the slave trader. On February 29, 1812, sending twenty-five adults and two children to New Orleans cost Jackson slightly more than \$44.66 a head, excluding breast-fed infants. In reference to the Apperson affair, Jackson wrote, "Negroes sent to the Market . . . never averaged more from here than fifteen dollar[s] a head except one wench and three children, who had been subject to the fits . . . she costs with her chil-

¹⁸ "Congress Debates the Issues, 1787," in Richard D. Brown, ed., *Major Problems in the Era of the American Revolution, 1760-1791* (Boston, 2000), 409-410. See also Donald L. Robinson, *Slavery in the Structure of American Politics, 1765-1820* (New York, 1971), 297.

¹⁹ See Robert H. Gudmestad, *A Troublesome Commerce: The Transformation of the Interstate Slave Trade* (Baton Rouge, 2003), 148; and Moser, *The Papers of Andrew Jackson, 1804-1813*, 2:261-262.



Andrew Jackson met Dickinson in a duel, in which he was wounded and Dickinson was killed. Although the duel was largely because of Dickinson's regarding Jackson's marriage, it is also true that Jackson had been Dickinson of engaging in "traffic" of slavery. From the Congress.

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²⁴ For the quotation, see *ibid.* 103. On the subject of Rachel's Criticism and insults of her son Robards in 1791 before divorce, Jackson and Ra-

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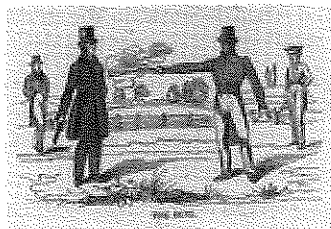
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Andrew Jackson met Charles Dickinson in a duel, in which Jackson was wounded and Dickinson was killed. Although the duel originated largely because of Dickinson's remarks regarding Jackson's marriage, it was also true that Jackson had accused Dickinson of engaging in "human traffic" of slavery. From *The Library of Congress*.

between respectable and immoral trading. Frankly, he deemed buying or selling slaves out of necessity—which to him meant the disobedience of the slave, or the debt or death of the owner—as perfectly acceptable. Indeed, at least one of his peers claimed Jackson "was selling the slaves from personal rather than speculative motives."²² While making no apologies for his own involvement in the slave trade, Jackson condemned those who bought and sold out of greed. Apparently, Jackson, who participated in the slave trade even when not in debt, excluded his own behavior from this categorization.²³ His zealous condemnation of other slave traders, however, is best represented by a June 1806 letter addressed to Thomas Eastin, the editor of the *Impartial Review and Cumberland Repository*. In the letter, Jackson chastised fellow lawyer Charles Dickinson, whom he later killed in a duel for having insulted his wife Rachel, for engaging "in the human pursuit of purchasing Negroes in Maryland" to sell in Natchez and Louisiana and "thus make a fortune of speculating on human flesh."²⁴ Jackson closed by calling Dickinson's behavior nothing

dren twenty-five dollars."²⁰ For that particular trip, he paid \$50 for the keelboat, \$60 for clothing, and \$160 for doctors' bills and provisions. In addition to these expenses, Jackson always faced the risk of losing a slave either to death or because of a successful sprint toward freedom. More often than not, however, slaves found themselves chained together, a limitation which greatly reduced chances of escape. The greater chances of loss came from disease, which proved prevalent due to the changes in climate on the journey and the close proximity of the slaves to each other.²¹

Problems and expenses aside, Jackson possessed no scruples about slave trading but, oddly enough, tended to condemn fellow traders. In the mind of Jackson, a fine line existed

²⁰ "To An Arbitrator," in Moser, *The Papers of Andrew Jackson, 1804-1813*, 2:289.

²¹ On the perils of transporting slaves to market, see Walter Johnson, *Soul By Soul: Life Inside the Antebellum Slave Market* (Cambridge, 1999), 117.

²² Gudmestad, *A Troublesome Commerce*, 152.

²³ On Jackson's unapologetic stance, see Andrew Burstein, *The Passions of Andrew Jackson* (New York, 2003), 23.

²⁴ For the quotation, see "To Thomas Eastin," in Moser, *The Papers of Andrew Jackson, 1804-1813*, 2:106. On the subject of Rachel, see "Marriage License," in Smith, *The Papers of Andrew Jackson, 1770-1803*, 1:44. Criticism and insults often arose from personal and political foes because Jackson had married Rachel Donelson Robards in 1791 before her divorce from her first husband, Lewis Robards, had been finalized. After her divorce, Jackson and Rachel married again in 1794.

less than "human traffic."²⁵ Another instance occurred when Jackson, in the midst of a land speculation argument, called his rival, Andrew Erwin, a slave smuggler. Evidence certainly existed to support this accusation for Erwin had indeed smuggled 47 slaves from Amelia Island on the northern coast of Spanish Florida (where Erwin's family firm had illegally transported them) to Alabama.²⁶ In any case, few insults rivaled the label of "slave trader" which brought shame and dishonor to the bearer. Without a doubt, this incident demonstrates that while Jackson found ways in which to rationalize and justify his own involvement, he condemned others who engaged in slave trading.

While Jackson did seem to accept slavery as a means of achieving economic success, he left no letter or document indicating whether he believed the institution to have been morally right or wrong. His behavior certainly indicates that he felt slavery was socially, and perhaps even morally, acceptable and he justified this attitude using not only the Bible but by describing skin color as a mark of inferiority. It seems clear that Jackson, like most of his neighbors, saw slavery as a "necessary evil" because slaves were deemed unintelligent, indolent, and oftentimes undependable. The very fact that he often separated families indicates that he viewed slaves as subhuman, devoid of feelings.²⁷ As a judge and lawyer, however, his court cases pertaining to slavery were not always consistent with this view.

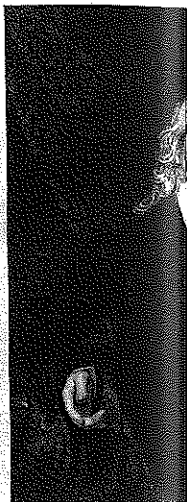
Jackson encountered many court cases that involved slaves, and his actions fail to reveal a pattern. Even though most slave cases revolved around taxes or ownership disputes, violence was a factor in some instances. On July 15, 1791, for example, Jackson represented a man named John Williams who was accused of being the slave of William Gilmore. Eventually, Jackson persuaded the jury to declare Williams a free man. Years later, in 1802, Jackson, along with Hugh Lawson White and David Campbell, presided over a case involving a slave who allegedly committed murder. The case originated when Jeremiah Watson bought a slave from William Dennis, after which another slave named Peter beat Dennis to death. The prosecution argued that Watson had urged Peter to the deed. The court, however, acquitted Watson, and Peter likely met his death. In addition, in April 1709, Jackson represented two men accused of attacking and killing a slave, Caesar. In time, the plaintiff, Thomas Hampton, received \$200 and, after an unsuccessful appeal, Jackson dropped his clients.²⁸ Nor did

²⁵ "To Thomas Eastin," in Moser, *The Papers of Andrew Jackson, 1804-1813*, 2:106.

²⁶ Burstein, *The Passions of Andrew Jackson*, 143.

²⁷ Parton, *Andrew Jackson*, 1:218; Larry E. Tise, *Pro-Slavery: A History of the Defense of Slavery in America, 1701-1840* (Athens, 1987), 249; Burstein, *The Passions of Andrew Jackson*, 226; and Boordaem, *Young Hickory*, 41.

²⁸ See, "Gilmore v. Williams," in James W. Ely and Theodore Brown, Jr., eds., *Legal Papers of Andrew Jackson* (Knoxville, 1987), 32; "State v. Watson," in *ibid.*, 250-253; and "Hampton v. Boyd and Foster," in *ibid.*, 28.



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²⁹ See, "Smith v. Fitzgerald"

³⁰ Moser, *The Papers of Andrew Jackson*

³¹ Roger D. Abrahams, *Slavery and the American Mind* (New York, 1992), 49.

occurred when Jackson, in the midst of the trial of Andrew Erwin, a slave smuggler. The prosecution for Erwin had indeed smuggled slaves to the coast of Spanish Florida (where Erwin's trial took place) to Alabama.²⁶ In any case, few insults could be brought to light shame and dishonor to the bearer. That while Jackson found ways in which to condemn others who engaged

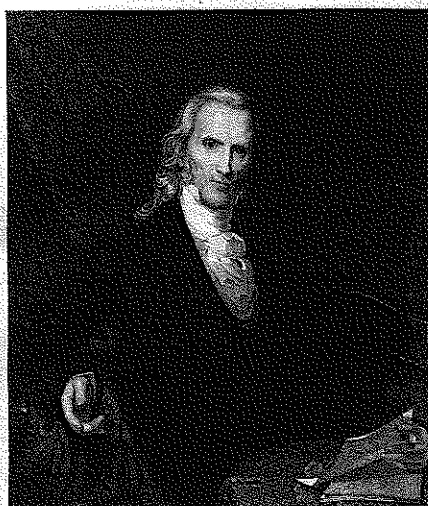
in slavery as a means of achieving economic success, whether he believed the institution to be morally right or not, certainly indicates that he felt slavery was acceptable and he justified this attitude by viewing skin color as a mark of inferiority. His neighbors, saw slavery as a "necessary evil" and not a sin, and dolent, and oftentimes undependable. This indicates that he viewed slaves as subhuman. However, his court cases pertaining to slavery were

that involved slaves, and his actions fail to indicate that he was not involved in cases revolving around taxes or ownership of land. On July 15, 1791, for example, Jackson persuaded the jury to decide in favor of John Williams who was accused of beating a slave. In 1802, Jackson, along with Hugh Lawson White, ruled on a case involving a slave who alleged that when Jeremiah Watson bought a slave named Peter beat Den- Watson had urged Peter to the deed. Jackson and Peter likely met his death. Jackson presented two men accused of attacking a slave, the plaintiff, Thomas Hampton, and Jackson dropped his clients.²⁸ Nor did

Jackson, 1804-1813, 2:106.

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re Brown, Jr., eds., *Legal Papers of Andrew Jackson*, and "Hampton v. Boyd and Foster," in *ibid.*, 28.



HUGH LAWSON WHITE

Hugh Lawson White

Hugh Lawson White, who sat with Jackson on the Supreme Court of Tennessee and ruled on several cases involving slaves and slaveowners. Courtesy of the University of Tennessee Special Collections.

Jackson arbitrarily condemn those accused of secreting or even stealing slaves. For instance, on March 26, 1800, Jackson, Campbell, and Archibald Roane presided and found for Garret Fitzgerald, a man accused of harboring a slave named Neptune. Two years later, on March 23, 1802, Jackson, Campbell, and Roane overruled the jury and found Joseph Barnes innocent of harboring eight slaves belonging to David and Susanah Vaughn.²⁹

Jackson's legal activities thus provide little indication of his personal feelings toward slavery, nor are there any surviving documents that provide solid evidence of his true feelings. There was, however, one persistent rumor that Jackson had murdered a slave not his own. In the years between 1806 and 1810 Jackson's tendency to gamble on horseracing kept him enmeshed in both debt and trouble. In one particular case, a quarrel with Dr. William Purnell may have turned deadly. Evidently, misunderstandings between the two stemmed from gossip accusing Jackson of killing two horses, one being Purnell's Dean Swift, and a slave. Nothing whatsoever appears in Jackson's papers about this series of events.³⁰ Whether Jackson could have caused or contributed to the death is anyone's guess, but this depiction of Jackson as a slave murderer was a stark contradiction to his own image of himself as a paternalistic master.

The vast majority of slave holders, Jackson included, used paternalism to reinforce their right to own slaves. Paternalism, more than likely, evolved from an inherent belief in patriarchy. This patriarchy placed slaves in the same category as children and presumed they were incapable of independence.³¹ While many owners manipulated

²⁹ See, "Smith v. Fitzgerald," in *ibid.*, 142-144; and "Vaughn v. Barnes," in *ibid.*, 238-241.

³⁰ Moser, *The Papers of Andrew Jackson*, 1804-1813, 2:224.

³¹ Roger D. Abrahams, *Singing The Master: The Emergence of African Culture in the Plantation South* (New York, 1992), 49.

the ideology, Jackson, among others, seemed genuinely to believe in paternalism and the mutual obligation between master and slave, protection in exchange for labor. They did, however, use paternalism as a means "to discipline and morally justify a system of exploitation."³² Simultaneously, a master attempted to be both "tough autocrat" and "benevolent despot."³³ Such rationalization allowed slave owners like Jackson to justify, without guilt, extreme measures when they deemed it necessary, including the separation of family members.

Splitting up slave families, while undesirable, seemed perfectly natural to Jackson, an "unapologetic slaveholder."³⁴ Recognizing kin networks and family units among slaves, he believed, would have threatened property rights and undermined slavery. In Jackson's case, failure to acknowledge slave emotion and familial connections stemmed from either an incapability or a refusal to see any way contrary to his own interests. Indeed, he apparently believed that, aside from the profit that resulted from selling a family member, separations were beneficial in that they instilled order among slaves. Slaves probably knew that the consequences for disobedience included being sold.

At the same time, Jackson's disdain for slave families did not prevent him from frequently implying that he deemed slaves as "family."³⁵ In fact, referring to slaves as "family" was common among slave owners such as Jackson. In letters and in conversations, they often, and with a certain degree of sincerity, referred to their slaves as their "black family."³⁶ Jackson, for one, no doubt thought of himself as a beneficent and just owner who did right by his "family," even though his callous attitude so evident in the business of slave trading was to a large extent maintained with his own slaves.³⁷ Even so, he seemed intent on presenting himself as a compassionate master, perhaps in the belief that he could increase productivity by giving slaves the impression that he cared. Indeed, Jackson often distributed trust to slaves in order to get their best work, a practice that was not universally accepted. Although some observers believed that incentives undermined "the absolute submission required of slaves," Jackson knew the value of both trust and incentives and found them effective.³⁸ Oftentimes, he awarded certain slaves with tasks which required their traveling

³² Eugene D. Genovese, *Roll Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York, 1972), 4.

³³ Nathan Irvin Huggins, *Black Odyssey: The Afro-American Ordeal in Slavery* (New York, 1977), 130.

³⁴ Burstein, *The Passions of Andrew Jackson*, 23.

³⁵ See, "To John Overton," in Smith, *The Papers of Andrew Jackson, 1770-1803*, 1:225; Bancroft, *Slave Trading*, 197; and Tadman, *Speculators and Slaves*, 217.

³⁶ Eugene D. Genovese, *The World the Slaveholders Made* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1969), 200.

³⁷ See John Hope Franklin and Loren Schweninger, *Runaway Slaves: Rebels on the Plantation* (London: Oxford University Press, 1999), 98.

³⁸ Levine, Levine, *Half Slave and Half Free*, 30.

to town. For example, on Pittsburgh, wrote to Rachel Jackson believed that by slaves more obedient and even g

As Jackson's career progressed, he persisted in treating himself increasingly dependant. In 1804, Jackson only his son's expectations was not discipline. Overseers some also needed at least some lost on Jackson; he had lit whites and most of whom

While admittedly a strict master, Jackson was not without slaves. Having slaves chain of humiliation in Jackson's treatment and on runaways. Sent a slave with a whip without to make an example of the. But if Jackson found slaves his wrath. Like all slave owners, the authority of the owner in slavery. When an escapee Proud and paternalistic, as the injured party. In an enraged Jackson advertised the "Mulatto Man Slave." state, the above reward, a for every hundred lashes dred."⁴³ Evidently, Jackson he ordered that runaway slaves show that escape attempts

³⁹ See Huggins, *Black Odyssey*, 11; Rachel Jackson," in Smith, *The Papers of Andrew Jackson*, 1:225.

⁴⁰ See Genovese, *Roll*, 15; Franklin, 249; and especially "From Mark Hermitage had been built by slaves

⁴¹ On punishment, see William L. *Antebellum South* (Westport, CT: American Empire, 1767-1821 (New

⁴² "Advertisement for Runaway Slaves

⁴³ Ibid.

to believe in paternalism and protection in exchange for labor. discipline and morally justify attempted to be both "tough" and "kind." This attitude allowed slave owners like Jackson to see when they deemed it necessary,

seemed perfectly natural to Jackson. His kin networks and family units reinforced his property rights and undermined his emotional and familial connections. To see any way contrary to his interests would be to detract from the profit that resulted from the plantation. In that they instilled order and discipline, the consequences for disobedience included

which did not prevent him from using force. ³⁵ In fact, referring to slaves as property, Jackson. In letters and in conversation, he referred to their slaves as property, referred to their slaves as property, referred to their slaves as property. Jackson thought of himself as a beneficent master, though his callous attitude so often contrasted with his own self-image as a compassionate master. He justified his property by giving slaves the impression of trust to slaves in order to get their submission. Although some observant visitors found them effective. ³⁸ The discipline which required their traveling

New York, 1972), 4.

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1770-1803, 1:225; Bancroft, *Slave Trad-*

Pantheon Books, 1969), 200.

Rebels on the Plantation (London: Ox-

to town. For example, on May 26, 1803, Jackson, while at Redstone Fort above Pittsburgh, wrote to Rachel asking her to send either Charles or Johnny on an errand. Jackson believed that by showing trust in these slaves, they would, in turn, be all the more obedient and even grateful. ³⁹

As Jackson's career progressed, affairs of state frequently made him an absentee master. He persisted in trying to maintain order among his slaves but found himself increasingly dependant on overseers. Following his move to the "Hermitage" in 1804, Jackson only hired overseers on recommendation. Measuring up to Jackson's expectations was not easy; an overseer needed to maintain both a schedule and discipline. Overseers sometimes intentionally incited resentment among slaves but also needed at least some slave support to keep order. ⁴⁰ This subtlety was apparently lost on Jackson; he had little, if any, respect for overseers, many of whom were poor whites and most of whom deemed him too lenient.

While admittedly a strong believer in paternalism, Jackson did resort to punishing slaves. Having slaves chained or whipped, however, often brought about feelings of humiliation in Jackson. As a result, he only inflicted such abuse on the disobedient and on runaways. Sensibly, Jackson knew better than to diminish the value of a slave with a whip without good reason. He probably resorted to the whip in order to make an example of the guilty party and in doing so, ward off further defiance. ⁴¹ But if Jackson found slave insolence offensive, runaways incited the full force of his wrath. Like all slave owners, he was convinced that runaway slaves challenged the authority of the owner and consequently threatened the very foundation of slavery. When an escape took place, Jackson felt utterly bewildered and betrayed. Proud and paternalistic, he regarded the runaway as ungrateful and saw himself as the injured party. In an especially notorious case, on September 26, 1804, an enraged Jackson advertised a runaway in the *Tennessee Gazette* and offered \$50 for the "Mulatto Man Slave." ⁴² He went a step further by stating, "If taken out of the state, the above reward, and all reasonably expenses paid—and ten dollars extra, for every hundred lashes any person will give him, to the amount of three hundred." ⁴³ Evidently, Jackson meant business with regard to slave obedience. Although he ordered that runaway slaves be soundly whipped when recaptured, proof exists to show that escape attempts did not entirely diminish his regard for individual slaves.

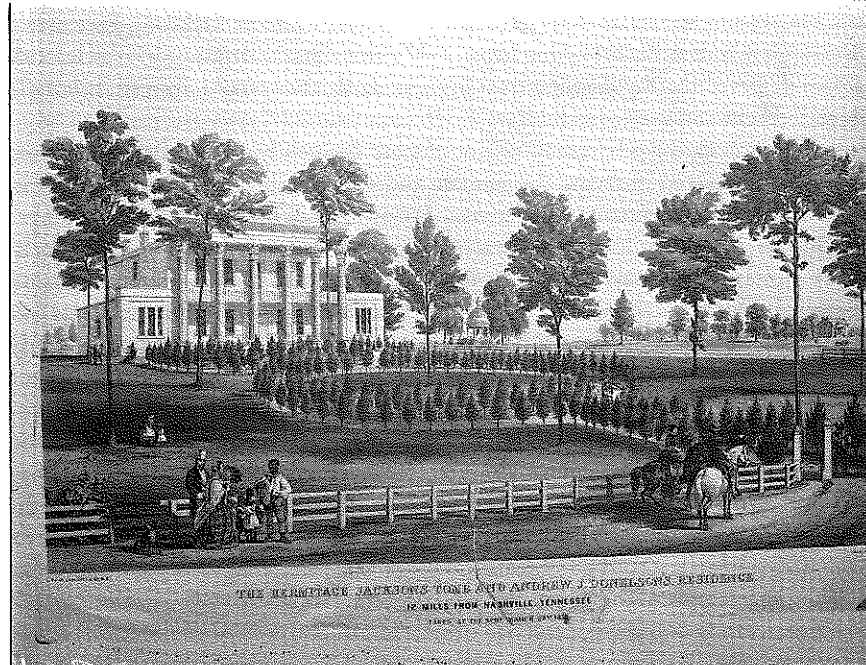
³⁹ See Huggins, *Black Odyssey*, 114; and Genovese, *World*, 197-200. On the letter to Rachel Jackson, see, "To Rachel Jackson," in Smith, *The Papers of Andrew Jackson, 1770-1803*, 1:331.

⁴⁰ See Genovese, *Roll*, 15; Franklin, *Runaway Slaves*, 9; Huggins, *Black Odyssey*, 134; Patton, *Andrew Jackson*, 249; and especially "From Mark Mitchell," in Smith, *The Papers of Andrew Jackson, 1770-1803*, 1:77. The Hermitage had been built by slaves. On this fact, see Burstein, *The Passions of Andrew Jackson*, 50.

⁴¹ On punishment, see William L. Van Deburg, *The Slave Drivers: Black Agricultural Labor Supervisors in the Antebellum South* (Westport, CT, 1979), 45-62. See also, Robert V. Remini, *Andrew Jackson and the Course of American Empire, 1767-1821* (New York, 1977), 134.

⁴² "Advertisement for Runaway Slave," in Moser, *The Papers of Andrew Jackson, 1804-1813*, 2:40-41.

⁴³ Ibid.



The Hermitage, Jackson's plantation outside Nashville. Shown here in the 1850s, after Jackson's death, the estate still reflects his success in achieving the status and respect he so desired. *From the Library of Congress.*

On February 8, 1812, for instance, Jackson wrote Mary Caffery about a runaway from Natchez, Jessee, whom he insisted had cost \$500 and had been a good man.⁴⁴ In the letter, he offered Jessee for sale to Caffery to buy or use until another could be found. Needless to say, runaways lost trust, not all value.⁴⁵

While Jackson had strong convictions about slavery, he possessed equally strong beliefs about freedom. These convictions and beliefs were apparent as war with Great Britain became likely in 1812. Frustrated, unnerved, and outraged, Jackson felt the War of 1812 jeopardized the liberty of Americans or more specifically, white males. Anger over what he called "lawless tyranny" led him to ponder how one group of people, the British, could presume to dominate another.⁴⁶ Vexed by the arrogant attitudes and conduct of the British, on October 15, 1812, he wrote George Washington Campbell and passionately queried, "Are we free men or are we slaves?"⁴⁷ Jackson was a true champion of liberty who feared his own enslavement, but at the same time he had little difficulty in embracing an

⁴⁴ "To Mary Caffery," in Moser, *The Papers of Andrew Jackson, 1804-1813*, 2:281.

⁴⁵ On runaways, see Johnson, *Soul By Soul*, 150; Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll*, 98-99; and DuBois, *Black Folk*, 202.

⁴⁶ "To George Washington Campbell," in Moser, *The Papers of Andrew Jackson, 1804-1813*, 2:334.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

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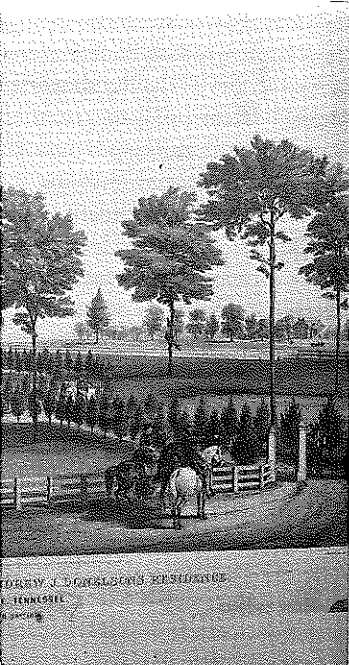
Of course, the issue that was growing apparent to most slaveholders was that it was necessary to the ownership of property in any form that a guarantee could never be an inherent part of American society. In a statement made in 1855, for example, the status, and the sentiment, of the *Washington Globe* was that subject.⁵⁰

Such a mindset is pathetic character, J desire to accumulate a means by which he of a gentleman.

⁴⁸ Burstein, *The Passions*; *Culture* (Ithaca, NY, 1990); and *The American Revolution*; *Age of Revolution, 1770-*

⁴⁹ Burstein, *The Passion*.

⁵⁰ Robert V. Remini, *The Presidency of Andrew Jackson* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1987), 16; (hereafter cited parenthetically as *TPJ*).
Rouge, 1988), 88.



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institution that enslaved others. He recognized that the British could use slavery as an ideological weapon to attract both freemen and runaway slaves to their ranks, and for this reason he preferred to mute the issue.⁴⁸

Of course, the issue of slavery could not be muted. It was a national controversy that was growing into a crisis, although the enormity of the crisis was not yet apparent to most slave owners. The right to own and sell slaves seemed essential and necessary to the unapologetic Jackson, since liberty struck him as including the right to property in any form. The Constitution recognized slavery and he felt that such a guarantee could never be undermined. Quite simply, Jackson deemed slavery an inherent part of American life.⁴⁹ His final position on slavery is perhaps best expressed in a statement made in 1833; he had by that time achieved his dreams of wealth and status, and the sentiments of President Andrew Jackson were boldly reflected in *The Washington Globe* with the declaration that "There is no debatable ground left upon that subject."⁵⁰

Such a mindset remained with Jackson until his death. An enigmatic, if unsympathetic character, Jackson was a pragmatist in every aspect of his life. Driven by the desire to accumulate wealth, he embraced slavery as an avenue for self advancement, a means by which he could achieve his desire for social status and attain the lifestyle of a gentleman.

⁴⁸ Burstein, *The Passions of Andrew Jackson*, 232-238; David Brown Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture* (Ithaca, NY, 1966), 31; Robinson, *Slavery*, 68; Simon Schama, *Rough Crossings: Britain, The Slaves and the American Revolution* (New York, 2006), 11; and David Brown Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution, 1770-1823* (Ithaca, NY, 1975), 274.

⁴⁹ Burstein, *The Passions of Andrew Jackson*, 23.

⁵⁰ Robert V. Remini, *The Legacy of Andrew Jackson: Essays on Democracy, Indian Removal, and Slavery* (Baton Rouge, 1988), 88.