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, if he wanted to move up, he needed to acquire 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

¹The author is a doctoral student at Mississippi State University.


perform domestic duties for the family. The purchase of one slave proved disadvantageous, because the initial payment of $400 was not enough to keep up with the rising market prices of slaves. As a result, Jackson was forced to sell one of his slaves to clear the debt. This transaction, however, opened the door for more business opportunities, as Jackson began to purchase land and slaves, expanding his wealth and influence.

Within 10 years of his marriage, Jackson had purchased a plantation in the Tennessee wilderness. By 1803, he owned 1,000 acres on the Tennessee River. By 1798, Jackson owned over 1,000 acres. The percentage of land owned by men of his age was much lower than that of Jackson's fellow planters. This expansion of land and property was a key factor in Jackson's political success.

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.
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 Merro 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. By 1798, Jackson owned 15 slaves and, as required, paid taxes on those between the ages of 12 and 50. 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. 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. 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 Hayes, 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.” However, Jackson’s preferences for pay-

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4 “List of Taxable Property,” in Smith, The Papers of Andrew Jackson, 1770-1803, I:34.


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, I:26-27.

8 See “To Robert Hays,” in ibid., I: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—or 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 [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.

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


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.
on the 10th of June, 1805, he sent a belligerent and disdainful letter to his friend, stating him for trying to pay for Hunter's horse on terms that would not suit him. Jackson's behavior varied when it came to dealing with slaves. Whenever purchasing a slave, Jackson was more concerned with the slave's appearance, demeanor, and personal habits. If a slave sought to secure a slave's position, he examined their teeth, their tongues, and the telltale scars of the lash. Some people have attributed Jackson's treatment of slaves to his reluctance to be associated with disobedience, but it seems clear that he was far more lenient toward his slaves than for those he bought or received as a gift.

In a letter to his friend, Jackson advised the purchase of slaves in a manner that was cost-efficient. He frequently advised friends about the benefits of owning slaves. In 1799, Jackson wrote to his friend, 'the slave trade is such that I could recommend to you to make a little less.' Apparently, he did not think much of it. On November 30, 1799, Jackson sent a letter to his son, John, stating, 'if you please, which they cannot take the two men and wife of Carter.'

Jackson appeared to understand the market was clearly gaining confidence in his successful 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 sale. He planned to open a 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 Negro Boy which I want for a Servant." 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." Most Northern states had enacted legislation to regulate slavery, but these laws were often ignored by slave traders.

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11 "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.

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 rebuff 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. 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.⁴⁹

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, "Negros sent to the Market . . . never averaged more from here than fifteen dollars[a]s a head except one wench and three children, who had been subject to the fits . . . she costs with her child-


between respectable slavery or debt or death of the slaves or the claimed Jackson "wantonesses."²² While making Andrew Jackson condemned when a fellow lawyer Charles not participated in the slave trade from this categorization is best represented by the Historian of the Impartial Review, "saw the" Maryland" to sell slaves, a slave trade on human lib-
...ance and proceeded to buy and trade apparently attached his own set of Slaves and a passion for adventure. Slavery, however, had become a vital element in the American economy and was coming under attack from various quarters.

The sentiments of the early antislavery movements and the end of the African slave trade in the 19th century were not enough to prevent the importation of slaves. The Southern states, and in fact slaveholding areas, continued to rely on imported slaves from Africa. Although many slave traders faced economic problems, they often took just as many steps back as a step forward.

The trade was sometimes profitable, but just as the autumn of 1810, for example, Jackson's Green and former Nashville mayor Thomas Morgan, purchased slaves from Nashville slave traders. The three men purchased slaves from one Richard Apperson. In essence, the total agreed price of $10,500 in cash was split into two six-month installments. However, a number of the slaves, left the partnership and subsequently were entirely responsible for the slaves back to Davidson County. Jackson's involvement helped to finance the purchase and transportation of the slaves to his estate in North Carolina. From there, the slaves were sold or exchanged for financial success in slave trading. Jackson recognized the importance of supervision, time, and risks. Whether the poor health of the slaves proved to be a significant factor, in 1812, Jackson sent twenty-five adults and thirty-four children to Nashville to bring in more than $44.66 a head, excluding expenses. In a letter to his wife Rachel, Jackson wrote, "Negroes sent to market for $150.00 each except one for $10.00. She costs her children twenty-five dollars." 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 effort 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.

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 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." 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. 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 chastises 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 speculate on human flesh." Jackson closed by calling Dickinson's behavior nothing...
less than “human traffic.” 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. 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 unpredictable. The very fact that he often separated families indicates that he viewed slaves as subhuman, devoid of feelings.

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. Nor did

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26 Burstein, The Passions of Andrew Jackson, 143.


29 See, "Smith v. Ferguson.

30 Moser, The Papers of Andrew Jackson.

31 Roger D. Abrahams, Sex, Gender and the Family (New York, 1992), 49.
Jackson arbitrarily condemned 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 Susannah Vaughn. 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. 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. While many owners manipulated

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30 Moses, The Papers of Andrew Jackson, 1804-1813. 2:22A.
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." Simultaneously, a master attempted to be both "tough autocrat" and "benevolent despot." 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." 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.” 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.” Jackson, for one, never 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. 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. Oftentimes, he awarded certain slaves with tasks which required their traveling to town. For example, one slave to Pittsburgh, wrote to Rachel Jackson that by staying in town, he would be more obedient and even gain his freedom.

As Jackson’s career progressed, he increasingly depended on others. By 1804, Jackson only hired overseers because his own expectations were not being met. Overseers sometimes also needed at least some slaves to help them. On Jackson; he had little regard for whites and most of whom had runaways.

While admittedly a strong owner, having slaves changed him. Having slaves changed him. He learned to tolerate the humiliation in Jackson’s case, and on runaways. Outsiders, slaves with a whip without fear of retribution, had to make an example of the slaves. But if Jackson found slaves, he did not lose his wrath. Like all slave owners, Jackson was the authority of the owner in the eyes of the slaves. When an escape was discovered, Jackson was the owner of the Mulatto Man Slave, as the injured party. In a letter, Jackson advertised the runaway slave, "Mulatto Man Slave. To be found in the State, the above reward, for every hundred lashes that he has received." Evidently, Jackson ordered that runaway slaves show that escape attempts were futile.

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, 177; and Talman, Speculators and Slaves, 217.
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 dependent 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 Genovese, Roll, 15; Franklin, Runaway Slaves, 9; Huggins, Black Odyssey, 134; Parson, 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 Pamions of Andrew Jackson, 50.


42 Ibid.
institution that enslaved the figures. One ideological weapon of the South was desire, reason he preferred to use in argument.

Of course, the idealism that was growing in the country was not apparent to most slave owners. It was necessary to the uninterested to property in any form. The desire to own property could never be the whole of the American identity, and the sentiment that is present in a statement made by Jackson in 1812 in a speech to the Tennessee legislature, may serve as an example of the sentiment that has persisted.

Such a mindset and sense of personal responsibility for the plight of others, in the desire to accumulate property, is seen in the plan to do something, of a means by which he could make the world a better place.

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44 “To Mary Caffey,” in Moses, The Papers of Andrew Jackson, 1804-1813, 2:341.

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


47 Ibid.
institution that enslaved others. He recognized that the British could use slavery as an ideological weapon to attract both free men 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.

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49 Burstein, The Passions of Andrew Jackson, 23.