

## Slavery as It Is, 1839

*The most impressive antislavery indictment was compiled by Theodore Dwight Weld, his wife, Angelina, and her sister, Sarah Grimké. The two women spent six months going through thousands upon thousands of southern newspapers, looking for items in which slaveholders effectively condemned themselves. Weld then assembled the clippings into a book, Slavery as It Is: The Testimony of a Thousand Witnesses, which was published in 1839 and quickly sold 22,000 copies. Here is an excerpt from that book.*

The slaves are often branded with hot irons, pursued with firearms and shot, hunted with dogs and torn by them, shockingly maimed with knives, dirks, &c.; have their ears cut off, their eyes knocked out, their bones dislocated

and broken with bludgeons, their fingers disfigured with scars and gashes, besides those made with the lash.

We shall adopt, under this head, the same course as that pursued under previous ones,—first give the testimony of the slaveholders themselves, to the mutilations, &c. by copying their own graphic descriptions of them, in advertisements published under their own names, and in newspapers published in the slave states, and, generally, in their own immediate vicinity. We shall, as heretofore, insert only so much of each advertisement as will be necessary to make the point intelligible.

### Testimony

“Ranaway, a Negro woman and two children; a few days before she went off, I burnt her with a hot iron, on the left side of her face, I tried to make the letter M.”

“Ranaway a Negro man named Henry, his left eye out, some scars from a dirk on and under his left arm, and much scarred from the whip.”

“One hundred dollars reward for a Negro fellow Pompey, 40 years old, he is branded on the left jaw.”

“Ranaway a Negro named Arthur, has a considerable scar across his breast and each arm, made by a knife; loves to talk much of the goodness of God.”

“Ranaway a Negro named Mary, has a small scar over her eye, a good many teeth missing, the letter A. is branded on her cheek and forehead.”

“Ranaway a Negro named Hambleton, limps on his left foot where he was shot a few weeks ago, while runaway.”

“Ranaway a Negro boy name Mose, he has a wound in the right shoulder near the backbone, which was occasioned by a rifle shot.”

“Was committed to jail a Negro man, says his name is Josiah, his back very much scarred by the whip, and branded on the thigh and hips, in three or four places, thus (J.M.) the rim of his right ear has been bit or cut off.”

“Ranaway from the plantation of James Surgette, the following Negroes, Randal, has one ear cropped; Bob, has lost one eye; Kentucky Tom, has

one arm, hand, &c.”

“Ranaway, the mulatto wench Mary—has a cut on the left arm, a scar on the shoulder, and two upper teeth missing.”

“Ranaway, my man Fountain—has holes in his ears, a scar on the right side of his forehead—has been shot in the hind parts of his legs—is marked on the back with the whip.”

## THE BIG PICTURE

Antislavery was just one of the many reform movements that sprang up in Jacksonian America, but it was easily the most divisive. Why did it arise when it did? Was it a success—a limited success—or largely a failure? Were the abolitionists truly radical, or were they really conservatives?

From Theodore Dwight Weld, *Slavery as It Is*, American Anti-Slavery Society, New York, 1839, pp. 79–81.

To read more about the American Anti-Slavery Society and its efforts to end slavery as well as other groups involved in the anti-slavery movement, see the abolition section of the “African American Odyssey” at <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/ammem/aaohtml/exhibit/aopart3.html>, the website for the Library of Congress.

To read *Slavery as It Is* in its entirety, visit the “Documenting the American South” website of the University of North Carolina Library at <http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/weld/menu.html>.