

Wanted: Runaway Slaves

Angry masters advertised for runaway slaves just as they did for runaway indentured servants. The following notices, published in southern newspapers between 1767 and 1808, contain some of our most detailed descriptions and accounts of slaves. They also reveal much of the masters' attitudes toward their "property" and their general insensitivity toward pain and brutality. What do these advertisements mean, really? Do they suggest that slaves were, on the whole, so broken by their experience that they became submissive? Can you generalize about the kinds of backgrounds the runaways had? Is John Brown interested only in getting his property back, or does he want punishment, too? Notice that the last document in the set is signed with a famous name—Andrew Jackson, who was soon to become one of the nation's most popular presidents. Notice the reward offered and the additional payment Jackson offered to anyone who could whip this slave. Do these documents throw any additional light on the slave community? How do you think the owners could guess where the slaves might run to?

Advertisement from the *Virginia Gazette* (Williamsburg), March 26, 1767.

Run away about the 15th of December last, a small yellow Negro wench named Hannah, about 35 years of age; had on when she went away a green plains petticoat, and sundry other clothes, but what sort I do not know, as she stole many from the other Negroes. She has remarkable long hair, or wool, is much scarified under the throat from one ear to the other, and has many scars on her back, occasioned by whipping. She pretends much to the religion the Negroes of late have practised, and may probably endeavour to pass for a free woman, as I understand she intended when she went away, by the Negroes in the neighbourhood. She is supposed to have made for Carolina. Whoever takes up the said slave, and secures her so that I get her again, shall be rewarded according to their trouble, by

Stephen Dence
Advertisement from the *Virginia Gazette* (Williamsburg), April 23, 1767.
Bounty on the head of an outlawed slave.

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

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I bought[t] 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
Advertisement from the *Virginia Gazette* (Williamsburg), Nov. 5, 1767.

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 feet 4 inches high, of a thin visage, clear 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
Advertisement from the *Virginia Gazette* (Williamsburg), Jan. 13, 1774.

TWENTY POUNDS REWARD. Run away from Subscriber, a Mullatto Man named Abel, about forty Years old, near six Feet high, has lost several of his Teeth, large Eyebrows, a Scar or two on some Part of his Face, occasioned by a Brick thrown at him by a Negro, is very apt to stroke his Hand over his Chin, and plays on the Violin. He is well known as a Pilot for York River and the Bay. As I have whipped him twice for his bad Behaviour, I believe Scars may be seen upon his Body. He can write so as to be understood, and once wrote a Pass for a Negro belonging to the Honourable Colonel Corbin, wherein he said the Fellow had served his Time honestly and truly. He has been to England, but the Captain he went with took Care to bring him back, and since his Return from that Country is very fond of Liquor. He is gone off in a Boat with two Masts, Schooner rigged, once a Pilot Boat, but now the Property of the Magdalen Schooner of War, and was seen, I am told, fifty or sixty Leagues to the southward of Cape Henry, from which it is expected he intends for one of the Carolinas. He is a very great Rogue, and

*"Country marks" were the scars, tattooings, boring of ears, filing of teeth, etc., by which the Africans of certain tribes were accustomed to mark their persons.—Ed.

is so instructed by several Persons not far from Wormeley's Creek, York River; one of whom, he told me, said I was not worthy to be his Master. He had some Cash of my Son's, and an Order drawn by Captain Punderson on Richard Corbin, Esq; payable to Ralph G. Meredith or myself. A White Lad went off with him, whom I cannot describe, never having seen him to my Knowledge. Whoever secures said Servant, so that I might get him again, shall have the above Reward.

King and Queen, November 16, 1773
 Samuel Meredith, Senior
 Advertisement from the *Virginia Gazette*, April 21, 1774.
 A talented and wily mulatto.

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 Honourable 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 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 Fearnought 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. From his Ingenuity, he is capable of doing almost any Sort of Business, and for some Years past has been chiefly employed as a Founder, a Stone Mason, and a Miller, as Occasion required; one of which Trades, I imagine, he will, in the Character of a Freeman, profess. I have some Reason to suspect his travelling towards James River, under the Pretence of being sent by me on Business. Whoever apprehends the said Mulatto Slave, and brings him to me, or his Master, the Honourable John Taylor of Mount Airy, or secures him so as to be had again, shall have double what the Law allows, and all reasonable Charges paid by

Thomas Lawson
 Neabsco Furnace, April 1, 1774
 Advertisement from the *Georgia Express* (Athens), Dec. 17, 1808.

Runaway from the subscriber living in Jackson county, on the Oconee river near Clarksborough, on Sunday night the 13th of November last a mulatto man of the name of Joe. He is a very bright mulatto, almost white,

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about six feet high, tolerably well made, yellow gray eyes and yellow hair. He is branded on each cheek 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
 Advertisement from the *Tennessee Gazette & Mero District Advertiser* (Nashville), Nov. 7, 1804.

Andrew Jackson's way.

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

THE BIG PICTURE

Indentured servitude was the most common form of forced labor in the seventeenth century, African slavery in the eighteenth century. Why the change? What role did race and racism play? The masters' desire for cheap labor? In what respects were the lives of indentured servants and slaves the same? How were they different? Of the differences, which was most important?