



‘THE STARS FOUGHT FROM HEAVEN’: RACE AND SLAVERY IN THE SHENANDOAH VALLEY FROM EARLY SETTLEMENT TO JIM CROW

DR. JAMES J. BROOMALL



HISTORIC RESOURCE STUDY

PRESENTED TO CEDAR CREEK & BELLE GROVE NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK
IN PARTNERSHIP WITH THE ORGANIZATION OF AMERICAN HISTORIANS/
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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NORTHEAST REGION HISTORY PROGRAM

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

SEPTEMBER 2020

Cover Illustration: Eastman Johnson (American, 1824-1906).

A Ride for Liberty — The Fugitive Slaves (recto), ca. 1862.

Oil on paperboard, 21 15/16 x 26 1/8 in. (55.8 x 66.4 cm).

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HISTORIC RESOURCE STUDY

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Presented to Cedar Creek and Belle Grove National Historical Park

In Partnership with

the Organization of American Historians/National Park Service

Northeast Region History Program

September 2020

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02/16/21

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The author wishes to thank Eric Campbell, Kristen Laise, Shannon Moeck, and Kyle Rothemich for their constructive criticism and trenchant commentary. The historic resource study has improved greatly because of their generous help and guidance. Kyle, in particular, read and reread the project draft and has been a model colleague throughout the process. Matthew Greer's archaeological investigation proved invaluable during the writing of this work. I deeply appreciate Matt's generosity in sharing his findings and research, which advanced my own project in manifold ways. I also wish to acknowledge and thank John McMillan and Richard Condon. John and Rich served as research assistants during critical periods of work and helped advance the project in significant ways. This project started under Aidan Smith, the Organization of American Historian's public history manager. Aidan was a generous and gracious colleague whose untimely passing deeply shook everyone who knew and admired him. Paul Zwirecki now serves as Director of Public History Programs for the OAH and has been a model of efficiency and advocated for my work in important ways—thank you. My wife, Tish Wiggs, has, as always, proven to be an invaluable partner in my professional life and has helped advance this project and been a pillar of strength.

INTRODUCTION

Virginia's Great Valley lies between the Appalachian and Blue Ridge mountain ranges. The Shenandoah River stands among the Valley's most significant waterways. It flows south to north, thus making Virginia's northwestern region the lower Valley. Native Americans first occupied the area during the Pliestecene era.¹ The same resources that attracted the region's first inhabitants—rich soil, water access, and vast forests—drew European settlers in the 1730s. They came primarily from Pennsylvania but also through gaps in the Blue Ridge Mountains. Although Virginia was a British colony, the English were a minority in the backcountry. Scots-Irish and German peoples predominated.² They settled along the Opequon River. Slavery was infrequent before the mid-1700s. Yet, Africans and African Americans were soon a fixture in the Valley. On small farms they worked beside white settlers and on big plantations they labored in work gangs. Others toiled in burgeoning industries or inside white households. They resisted bondage and found means of accommodation. They made the Valley their home, however terrible the circumstances.

By 1800, the seemingly limitless lands of the Shenandoah Valley had mostly been divided and privatized.³ In the ensuing decades plantations, farms, mills, distilleries, and industries spread across the landscape. It was an incredibly productive region that brought great wealth to some. "The limestone beneath the Valley's soil," notes historian Edward L. Ayers, "kept the land sweet and bountiful."⁴ Annual rainfalls of around forty inches ensured plant growth. Endless mountain springs and falling waters secured farmers' independence.⁵ The region's inhabitants primarily, though not exclusively, practiced mixed agriculture. Many grew corn, hemp, oats, and flax. Wheat remained the staple crop of the Valley throughout the nineteenth century. Some cultivated tobacco, a valuable cash crop.

¹ Matthew C. Greer, "Archaeological Investigations of Two Possible 19th Century Quarters Sites at Belle Grove Plantation, Frederick County, Virginia: 44FK520 and 44FK521," Unpublished paper prepared for Belle Grove, Inc., February 2016, 3.

² The term "Scotch-Irish," notes historian David Hackett Fischer, is "an Americanism, rarely used in Britain and much resented by the people to whom it was attached." It and Scots-Irish are nonetheless used herein because scholars commonly employ it and because readers will immediately understand it. David Hackett Fischer, *Albion's Seed: Four British Folkways in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 618.

³ Warren R. Hofstra, *The Planting of New Virginia: Settlement and Landscape in the Shenandoah Valley* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), 1.

⁴ Edward L. Ayers, *In The Presence of Mine Enemies: War in the Heart of America, 1859-1863* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2003), 3. See also, Wm. Gilham, "The Soils of the Valley of Virginia," *The Southern Planter*, XVI, no. 1 (January 1856): 22, 26-28.

⁵ Kenneth E. Koons and Jonathan Noyalas, "Historic Resource Study: Cedar Creek and Belle Grove National Historical Park," Unpublished report Commissioned by the United States National Park Service under the Auspices of the Organization of American Historians, December 2010, 13 and Fischer, *Albion's Seed*, 638.

Most raised cattle, pigs, and sheep. Oxen and horses were essential draft animals.⁶ A small but powerful slice of the Valley's planters found slavery indispensable to agricultural production.

Plantations such as Belle Grove had, by the standards of the Valley, large populations of enslaved Africans and African Americans. By 1785, if not earlier, seventeen black men, women, and children lived and labored there. The plantation's enslaved population continued to expand through family inheritances, slave purchases, and natural reproduction—a pattern typical across the South. By the 1820s, over one hundred individuals were spread across four tracts operated by the Hite family. Slaves such as Primus developed reputations for being rebellious. Others faced their greatest fears through sale, as the Hites auctioned off “sixty slaves, of various ages,” in the fall of 1824.⁷ Like most masters, the Hites styled themselves as paternalistic and benevolent masters.⁸ Evidence of the Hite's worldview is found in the family's commonplace book, which includes a lengthy transcription from John Locke's *Second Treatise on Civil Government*: “As it is the duty of servants to perform their work with diligence and fidelity, regarding God as their common master; so it is the duty of masters to exact no more from their servants than what they have a right to.”⁹ In important ways, though, such rhetorical devices or justifications did not matter. As historian Walter Johnson reminds us, slavery in its purest form was “a person with a price.”¹⁰ Under the best of circumstances it remained an inhumane, cruel institution.

The ethnicity of the Valley's settlers has produced a long-standing belief among popular audiences that slavery was unimportant to the region's history or development. An early chronicler of the region—Staunton, Virginia, newspaperman and diarist Joseph Waddell—contended, “The institution of slavery never had a strong hold upon the people of Augusta [County]. The Scotch-Irish race had no love for it, and the German people were generally averse to it.”¹¹ Although the hold of Waddell's pernicious idea has weakened over

⁶ Greer, “Archaeological Investigations of Two Possible 19th Century Quarters Sites at Belle Grove Plantation, Frederick County, Virginia,” 6.

⁷ The information in this paragraph is derived from Greer, “Archaeological Investigations of Two Possible 19th Century Quarters Sites at Belle Grove Plantation, 7-8.

⁸ Kristen Laise, “Were the Hites ‘Nice’ or ‘Kind’ to the People They Enslaved?” Unpublished paper for Volunteer Training, February 2017.

⁹ “Letters from Belle Grove: An Edited Collection of Hite Family Papers,” N/D, vol. I, Private Papers of Major Isaac Hite, Jr.

¹⁰ Walter Johnson, *Soul by Soul: Life Inside the Antebellum Slave Market* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 2.

¹¹ Joseph A. Waddell, *Annals of Augusta County, Virginia, From 1762 to 1871* (Staunton, VA: C. Russell Caldwell, Publisher, 1902), 414-15.

time, it has not entirely disappeared.¹² The claim endures because the Valley *was* different. As a highly productive grain-growing region, wheat made the Shenandoah and marked it dissimilar from the plantation South.¹³ Mixed agriculture and free labor were typically paired in the Nineteenth Century. Nevertheless, by 1800, significant slave populations existed in the Shenandoah Valley counties.¹⁴

Slavery was anything but a moribund institution in the antebellum Valley. Its growth illustrates its adaptability. By the end of the eighteenth century, according to Robert D. Mitchell's research, "the increase of slaves was responsible for most of the population growth in Frederick and Augusta counties."¹⁵ By the 1850s slavery was central to Augusta County's economy. Approximately a fifth of the county's white families "owned fifty-five hundred enslaved people" who were "worth over six million dollars."¹⁶ The Valley was a diverse region, however, and enslaved populations varied from county to county. The 1850 census documents that enslaved African Americans composed only 6.6 percent of Shenandoah County's population, yet that number more than doubled immediately north in Frederick County. For the Valley as a whole, the enslaved population stood near 20 percent, while slaves accounted for 33 percent of Virginia's total population.¹⁷ Across the South, approximately 25 percent of the white households owned at least one enslaved African American.¹⁸

It is easy to get lost in a number's game regarding slavery, but demographic quantification should never distract from necessary qualifications. The enslaved afforded white men political power and economic wealth, while slavery became a divisive political issue on the national stage. "Although slaveholding was less prevalent in the lower valley

¹² Although it is outside the scope of this study, anecdotal evidence suggests some public audiences still maintain Waddell's views over a century later. With that said, scholarship over the past several decades has offered a more complete and complex of slavery in the Valley. See especially, Robert D. Mitchell, *Commercialism and Frontier: Perspectives on the Early Shenandoah Valley* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1977); Hofstra, *The Planting of New Virginia*; Ayers, *In The Presence of Mine Enemies*; Edward L. Ayers, *The Thin Light of Freedom: The Civil War and Emancipation in the Heart of America* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2017).

¹³ *After the Backcountry: Rural Life in the Great Valley of Virginia, 1800-1900*, Kenneth E. Koons and Warren R. Hofstra, eds., (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2001), xiii.

¹⁴ J. Susanne Simmons and Nancy T. Sorrells, "Slave Hire and the Development of Slavery in Augusta County, Virginia," in *After the Backcountry*, ed., Koons and Hofstra, 169 and Hofstra, *The Planting of New Virginia*, 5.

¹⁵ Mitchell, *Commercialism and Frontier*, 100.

¹⁶ Ayers, *In The Presence of Mine Enemies*, 18.

¹⁷ This information is derived from United States of America, Bureau of the Census, *Seventh Census of the United States, 1850*. Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1850. M432, 1,009 rolls; Koons and Noylas, "Historic Resource Study," 33; and John T. Schlebecker, "Farmers in the Lower Shenandoah Valley, 1850," *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, 79, no. 4 (October 1971): 463. Slavery in Virginia had declined since the Eighteenth Century because of changing agricultural systems. Enslaved blacks left Virginia by the "tens of thousands every year into the market by foot, rail, and boat" for the Deep South's cotton plantations. Ayers, *In The Presence of Mine Enemies*, 22.

¹⁸ Ayers, *In The Presence of Mine Enemies*, 33.

and Frederick County than elsewhere in the South,” historian Michael J. Gorman posits, “Frederick County slaveholders nevertheless held economic, social, and political power disproportionate to their numbers.” While composing just 12 percent of household heads, wealthy white men occupied nearly half of the county’s political positions.¹⁹ The numbers for Augusta County are even more dramatic, as the wealthiest 10 percent owned “70 percent of all personal wealth.”²⁰ These men wielded incredible power and directed their region’s future. By the antebellum era, the Mason Dixon line had come to define societies and peoples. “There slavery began and slavery ended,” writes Edward L. Ayers. “And slavery shaped everything it touched. . . . people understood themselves differently across that border too, calculating their interests and imagining their futures in ways their neighbors across the border could not understand or accept.”²¹ Thus, although the Shenandoah Valley was a unique region of the South, it was also part of the South.

Slavery’s grip on white Southerners is powerfully demonstrated by the civil war fought for its preservation. Although white Valley residents joined Confederate armies for many reasons, the government they represented intended to protect and to preserve the institution. It was their *raison d’être*.²² As Confederate Vice President Alexander Stephens famously contended, the “CORNERSTONE,” of the Confederate government “rests upon the great truth that the negro is not equal to the white man, that Slavery subordination to the superior race, is his natural and moral condition.”²³ Stephens’ words echoed across western Virginia’s newspapers as they rallied citizens to the Confederate cause. The *Winchester Republican* proclaimed the “contempt we feel for those who would thus humbly bow the knee of servitude to the Baal of Northern Abolitionism.”²⁴ Despite many resident’s entrenched hostility to eastern Virginia elites, white men of military age enlisted in extraordinarily high numbers.²⁵

¹⁹ Michael J. Gorman, “‘Our Politicians Have Enslaved Us’: Power and Politics in Frederick County, Virginia,” in *After the Backcountry*, eds., Koons and Hofstra, 276.

²⁰ Ayers, *In The Presence of Mine Enemies*, 32.

²¹ Ayers, *In The Presence of Mine Enemies*, 3-4.

²² See especially, Charles B. Dew, *Apostles of Disunion: Southern Secession Commissioners and the Causes of the Civil War* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2002) and Alexander H. Stephens, “Corner Stone” Speech, 21 March 1861.

²³ “The Corner-Stone of the New Republic,” *Leesburg Democratic Mirror*, 17 April 1861.

²⁴ “Our Position,” *Winchester Republican and Daily Advertiser*, 27 September 1861.

²⁵ See, respectively, William A. Link, “‘This Bastard New Virginia’: Slavery, West Virginia Exceptionalism, and the Secession Crisis,” *West Virginia History* 3, no. 1 (Spring 2009): 35 and Aaron Sheehan-Dean, *Why Confederates Fought: Family and Nation in Civil War Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 23-4.

When war came Confederate leadership quickly sounded the Valley's strategic importance. The region formed a corridor for the transportation of men and materiel, and it served as a natural route for invasion. The Valley's agricultural production was indispensable to feeding hungry Confederate troops. And southwestern Virginia's lead mines and the Shenandoah Valley's ironworks were essential to the making of bullets and the production of railroads, armaments, and implements.²⁶ In some cases enslaved labor fueled these industries. The Valley's military significance resulted in unrelenting conflict. Unlike discrete targets such as Richmond, Virginia, war threatened from every direction. Large armies clashed in 1862 and 1864, while partisans, spies, and guerrillas created dangerous and unpredictable landscapes throughout the conflict.²⁷

Black and white Southerners experienced war in the Valley differently. The ruthless restrictions on black's movements and the effective prevention of runaway slaves had been hallmarks of American slavery.²⁸ War put that orthodoxy in to question. When Union soldiers approached the area of Middletown, Virginia, according to one African American woman, "A great many of the slaves run off North, and a great many others were taken up the country by their masters out of the war of the army."²⁹ Union troops had an important effect on the resistance of the enslaved since the war's earliest days in the Valley. In the spring of 1862, a large number of the enslaved, "with identical surnames and belonging to the same master," arrived in Winchester to find Federal troops. Later in June, 300 slaves fled that same city en masse.³⁰ These cases were not unusual. The "upheaval of war opened the way for slaves to assume control over their bodies and to flee into the camps of the Union army."³¹

Although most Federal soldiers believed primarily in a war for the preservation of Union not the abolition of slavery, many were affected after seeing the institution first-hand.³² A soldier from the 60th New York State Volunteers observed a plantation mistress

²⁶ Robert C. Whisonant, "Geology and the Civil War in Southwestern Virginia: Union Raiders in the New River Valley, May 1864," *Virginia Minerals*, 43, no. 4 (November 1997): 29-40.

²⁷ Ayers., *The Thin Light of Freedom*, 184.

²⁸ Yael A. Sternhell, *Routes of War: The World of Movement in the Confederate South* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012), 94.

²⁹ "The Colored Woman at Headquarters," in Clifton Johnson, *Battleground Adventures: The Stories of Dwellers on the Scenes of Conflict in Some of the Most Notable Battles of the Civil War* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1915), 393. David Strother testified in Staunton, Virginia, "we saw a great deal of smoke in the mountains eastward and were told it came from the camps of the refugees who were hiding from us with their Negroes and cattle." Quoted in Ayers, *The Thin Light of Freedom*, 181.

³⁰ Jonathan M. Berkey, "War in the Borderland: The Civilians' Civil War in Virginia's Lower Shenandoah Valley," Ph.D. dissertation, Penn State University, 2003, 203.

³¹ Sternhell, *Routes of War*, 95.

³² For this argument see, Gary Gallagher, *The Union War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012). For a work stressing the importance of emancipation see, Chandra Manning, *What This Cruel War Was Over: Soldiers, Slavery, and the Civil War* (New York: Vintage Books, 2008).

in Middletown who frequently beat an enslaved woman whose child bore “a near resemblance to the white woman’s baby.” A Union general admonished the family and warned that a “general skinning would follow if he should learn that they continued the practice of their barbarities.”³³ War artist James Taylor’s encounter with “contraband” in August 1864 likewise elicited paternalistic sympathy.³⁴ Taylor wrote, “We were impressed by the earnest manner of the contraband, for such he was, though formerly a plantation slave of the vicinity who seemed to possess more than the average intelligence of his class.”³⁵ Slavery was often an abstraction in the antebellum North. Military service in the Shenandoah Valley guaranteed that Union soldiers encountered it as a brutal reality. These experiences had important consequences, especially for those whose service extended into the postbellum era.

The Confederacy’s military collapse came spectacularly quickly in the spring of 1865 but its ideological death was agonizingly slow. Complicated questions immediately arose about the future of freedpeoples. When emancipation came white citizens watched in amazed disbelief. At the beginning of May 1865, Joseph Waddell wrote in his diary that Union soldiers passed through Staunton. He “hurried up to see the negro exodus. There were negroes of all ages, and some who, I thought, had too much family pride or attachment to go off with the Yankees. A. H. H. Stuart’s Peyton was among them, who was identified with the family, and was really as free as his master, and who leaves a comfortable home and the kindest treatment for the uncertainties of freedom among Northern *friends*—freedom to starve and die, but hardly freedom to labor.”³⁶ Waddell’s reaction is hardly surprising, for he had been reared in a culture of white supremacy. The Valley’s white residents truly wondered how blacks could survive without their masters’ protection.³⁷ Whites’ hateful reactions to black freedom adumbrated the painful road of Reconstruction.

³³ Richard Eddy, *History of the Sixtieth Regiment New York State Volunteers* (n.p., Philadelphia, 1864), 116.

³⁴ The term “contraband” is deserving of explanation. Maj. Gen. Benjamin F. Butler commanded Fort Monroe, Virginia, in 1861 when three slaves, Frank Baker, Shephard Mallory, and James Townsend, fled Confederate earthworks to offer military intelligence to Union forces. Butler deemed the men “contraband of war” and allowed the African Americans to stay desperate the ambiguity of their position. Historian Glenn David Brasher succinctly relates the logic behind Butler’s decision: “Since Southerners held slaves as a form of property and were using that property to build their fortifications, Butler concluded that slaves were subject to confiscation under rules of war that allowed the seizure of property that aided an enemy’s war effort.” Glenn David Brasher, *The Peninsula Campaign and the Necessity of Emancipation: African Americans and the Fight for Freedom* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 35. See also, Adam Goodheart, 1861: *The Civil War Awakening* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2011), 313-315.

³⁵ James E. Taylor, *The James E. Taylor Sketchbook, With Sheridan Up the Shenandoah Valley in 1864: Leaves From a Special Artist’s Sketchbook and Diary* (Dayton, OH: Morningside House, Inc., 1989), 88.

³⁶ Joseph Waddell Diary, 2 May 1865, “Valley of the Shadow,” UVA.

³⁷ Ayers, *The Thin Light of Freedom*, 346.

The Federal government played a vital role in attempting to equalize postwar race relations. General Oliver O. Howard served as the head of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands (hereafter referred to simply as the Freedmen's Bureau), an organization central to reuniting black families, establishing labor contracts, promoting economic stability, registering marriages, and supporting education. Winchester, among other Valley cities, supported an office of the Freedmen's Bureau. Hundreds upon hundreds of reports flowed in and out of these offices. In January 1868, Captain E. H. Ripley reported fairly typically: "During this month the freedmen have been making contracts for the coming year. . . . They are all ambitious to get homes for their families so their children can tend school."³⁸ Agents' reports summarized affairs on the ground and updated authorities about the Bureau's successes and failures. Agents also actively compiled reports of "outrages" committed by whites against freedpeople. Acts of intimidation and outright violence presaged the tumult of the Jim Crow era.

African Americans actively shaped their destinies yet confronted considerable obstacles during the postbellum years. Many blacks fled the Valley's farms and established neighborhoods in turnpike towns. Yet, as historian Ann E. McCleary charges, "The segregation of the Jim Crow era restricted their residential options, so they created their own communities on the edge of the town."³⁹ Jim Crow was not the inevitable culmination of civil war and emancipation but rather the product of whites' campaign to circumscribe African American power.⁴⁰ African Americans nonetheless persisted. Schools or churches, sites critical to black identity, anchored many of the new communities in the Valley. African Americans drew strength from familial and social networks and exercised newly accorded political rights. Whites deemed the political mobilization of African Americans, "Negro rule." "It captured in the most direct way," charges historian Steven Hahn, "their view that the dreaded revolution of the middle period came neither with the military defeat of the Confederacy nor with the abolition of slavery but with the enfranchisement of the freedmen and their participation in state and local government."⁴¹ Despite whites' anger, blacks became a significant political force, especially by their membership in the Republican Party. By the 1880s, Republicans seldom elected legislators or congressmen east of the mountains, yet residents of the Valley continued to successfully seat them in Congress.

³⁸ Monthly Report of Captain E. H. Ripley, 31 January 1868, quoted in Jonathan A. Noyalas, "After the Civil War in the Shenandoah Valley: Excerpts from the Freedmen's Bureau Papers," *Journal of the Shenandoah Valley During the Civil War Era*, vol. 1 (2018): 71-2.

³⁹ Ann E. McCleary, "The Turnpike Towns," *The Great Valley Road of Virginia: Shenandoah Landscapes from Prehistory to the Present*, eds., Warren R. Hofstra and Karl Raitz (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2010), 229.

⁴⁰ *Jumpin' Jim Crow: Southern Politics From Civil War to Civil Rights*, eds. Jane Dailey, Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore, and Bryant Simon, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 4.

⁴¹ Steven Hahn, *A Nation Under Our Feet: Black Political Struggles in the Rural South from Slavery to the Great Migration* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003), 237.

By the late nineteenth century, Jim Crow laws had systematically dismantled black political rights. Virginia's 1902 Constitution disfranchised African Americans.⁴² In reaction to similar abuses across the country, famed black intellectual W. E. B. Du Bois and other prominent African American leaders created the Niagara Movement. In 1906, they held their second conference at Storer College, Harpers Ferry, West Virginia. Storer had long been central to the black freedom struggle. Indeed, in 1881, Frederick Douglass spoke at the institution extolling John Brown who "began the war that ended American slavery and made this a free Republic."⁴³ Although the civil rights movement is often remembered as a burst of black activism beginning in the 1950s, it is rooted in the nineteenth century.⁴⁴ African Americans, both enslaved and free, gave that future struggle life and meaning through their acts of resistance, their refusals to accommodate, and their vocal opposition to injustice.

African Americans lived, worked, built, and died in the Valley. Their imprint upon the region's history, although indelibly etched, has only recently garnered historians' attention. This historic resource study, conducted for the Organization of American Historians in conjunction with Cedar Creek and Belle Grove National Historical Park, will engage that burgeoning scholarship but also chart a new line of inquiry by holistically considering African American life in the Shenandoah Valley across three centuries. The story is centered in what is today Cedar Creek and Belle Grove National Historical Park but spreads across the Valley encompassing the lives of many. Without the perspectives and experiences of enslaved and free blacks, the Great Valley's narrative remains incomplete.

⁴² Nevertheless, the Republican Party remained successful in the Shenandoah Valley.

⁴³ Frederick Douglass, *On Slavery and the Civil War: Selections from his Writings* (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, Inc., 2003), 20.

⁴⁴ Although beginning the civil rights movement in the 1930s, Jacquelyn Dowd Hall is nonetheless central to this expansive chronology. See, Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, "The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past," *The Journal of American History* 91 (March 2005): 1233-63.

CHAPTER ONE

PEOPLING

The sherds of earthenware are unassuming. One piece, 44FK520-54 AI, recovered from an archaeological investigation led by Matthew Greer, is under an inch in length, whereas another, 44FK520-55 AA, is about an inch and a half long. Shades of earthen brown, the earthenware looks hardy despite being broken. The exterior has a gentle shine produced from the lead glazing that made the body impermeable.⁴⁵ Greer recovered these artifacts from the site of Belle Grove Plantation's slave quarters. The sherds tell the story of cultural exchange and placemaking, and poignantly introduce the peopling of Virginia's Great Valley. The sherds are, moreover, a powerful metaphor illustrating how new ethnic groups, striving for personal independence, entered a colony that had been defined by slavery since its earliest days.

The English had made earthenware for centuries. Utilitarian and plain, ceramics played a central role in foodways. Earthenware was most often linked to the dairy among English yeoman. Easy to clean and sturdy, glazed vessels were essential to the use and production of milk products. The English transmitted their foodways to North America and began the production of earthenware in the 1620s.⁴⁶ "The dairying function of ceramics continued beyond 1660," notes archaeologist James Deetz, "and lasts well into the eighteenth century."⁴⁷ With time, though, practices shifted. Pottery utensils became important, mass-produced creamware was introduced after 1760, and modes of ceramic use expanded.

German potters were the most important influence on ceramics in the Shenandoah Valley during the early-to-mid eighteenth century.⁴⁸ Ceramics were a staple in Valley households. At first German-trained potters in Hagerstown, Maryland, and then later Virginia-based craftsmen supplied the region's settlers with lead-glazed earthenware.⁴⁹ Makers multiplied with time and by the early nineteenth century more than a dozen

⁴⁵ James Deetz, *In Small Things Forgotten: An Archaeology of Early American Life* (1977; repr., New York: Anchor Books, 1996), 69.

⁴⁶ Deetz, *In Small Things Forgotten*, 70.

⁴⁷ Deetz, *In Small Things Forgotten*, 80.

⁴⁸ H. E. Comstock, *The Pottery of the Shenandoah Valley Region* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994), 11.

⁴⁹ Comstock, *The Pottery of the Shenandoah Valley Region*, 83-6 and Matthew C. Greer, "Poaching Pots and Making Places: Slavery and Ceramic Consumption in the Shenandoah Valley," unpublished paper, 4.

practiced their trade within 15 miles of Belle Grove.⁵⁰ Greer posits that the two sherds of earthenware reveal the “intermingling of diasporas, as Germans and enslaved Virginians interacted, pulling each other’s materialities into new assemblages through acts of placemaking.”⁵¹ Using data from the Digital Archaeological Archive of Comparative Slavery and the Montpelier Archaeology Department, Greer calculated a comparison of recovered earthenware from sites in eastern Virginia to those at Belle Grove. He writes, “In eastern Virginia, coarse earthenwares make up an average of 3% of the recovered ceramics, with the highest percentage coming from Wingos Quarter with 12%. At Belle Grove, earthenwares comprise 36% of the recovered ceramics – 12 times more than the average site in eastern Virginia, and three times more than Wingos Quarter.”⁵² Thus, despite the English tradition of ceramic use and production in the Tidewater, these objects were notably absent at slave sites in the region, whereas at least some enslaved African Americans in the Valley readily adopted earthenware in the domestic arena.

Material culture promises a more democratic and less self-conscious entry into the past than archival records.⁵³ Artifacts are especially important when trying to understand the everyday lives of the enslaved. The frequency of earthenware sherds at Belle Grove Plantation demonstrates that enslaved Shenandoahans used Valley-made products in their domestic households. This, in turn, reflects material conditions unique to the region’s enslaved populations and demonstrates foodways and domestic practices distinct from the Tidewater and the Piedmont. Slaves’ material world and cultural practices evolved over time as they adopted elements from and adapted to the Valley’s polyglot population. The sherds clearly illustrate, in the words of Greer, “the interactions between enslaved people and one of the most iconic things associated with diasporic Germans in the Shenandoah Valley—locally produced ceramics.”⁵⁴ This chapter establishes the pieces that enabled slaves’ *bricolage*.⁵⁵ Chronologically driven and beginning in the early eighteenth century, the chapter addresses how African Americans, Scots-Irish, German, and English settlers made the Valley home. By so doing, it details regional variations in race relations, rates of slaveownership, and the evolution of lifeways.

The most significant body of scholarship on the Great Valley pertains to its eighteenth-century history. Scholars such as Robert D. Mitchell, Warren E. Hofstra, and David Hackett Fischer have effectively explored the peopling of the backcountry. Despite

⁵⁰ Greer, “Poaching Pots and Making Places,” 4.

⁵¹ Greer, “Poaching Pots and Making Places,” 1-2.

⁵² Greer, “Poaching Pots and Making Places,” 7.

⁵³ Deetz, *In Small Things Forgotten*, 212.

⁵⁴ Greer, “Poaching Pots and Making Places,” 2.

⁵⁵ Claude Levi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind* (1962; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), 16-33.

the robust historiography, the Valley's African and African American populations have received short shrift. Most prominently, according to early histories, the region's ethnic diversity precluded slave ownership to any real extent. Early chroniclers contended that the Valley's ethnic groups "had no love" for slavery.⁵⁶ Although recent histories have offered a more realistic assessment, a pervasive public sentiment still holds that slavery was unimportant to the Valley. Virginia's regional variation of slaveholding, however, was not *sui generis*. As historian Philip D. Morgan reminds us, "although slavery was a hemispheric and continental institution, it varied greatly across space."⁵⁷ Race and slavery in the Valley need to be placed in the proper historical context.

Maroons

Virginia slave laws had evolved over the course of the seventeenth century as the colony transformed from a society with slaves into a slave society—that is a society in which the enslavement of others was deemed crucial to maintaining an established white power structure.⁵⁸ A number of key statutes aimed at reducing the number of runaways or punishing fugitive slaves. In 1660 and 1662, for example, laws were introduced that fostered distinctions between white servants and black slaves, and outlined punishments in cases of flight.⁵⁹ Bacon's Rebellion of 1676-7, in which armed blacks and whites fought alongside one another, proved a watershed event in the evolution of Virginia's statutes controlling servants and slaves. The elite feared the comingling of lower classes, who could potential unite in numbers larger than that of the upper classes. Therefore, the Rebellion lead to the codification of legal definitions of slavery—most importantly blackness—which effectively dispersed class unity in favor of racial unity. By the early eighteenth century, observes historian Edmund Morgan, Virginians had created a "new social order" determined "as much by race as by slavery."⁶⁰

⁵⁶ Waddell, *Annals of Augusta County, Virginia, From 1762 to 1871*, 414-15.

⁵⁷ Philip D. Morgan, *Slave Counterpoint: Black Culture in the Eighteenth-Century Chesapeake and Lowcountry* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), xvi.

⁵⁸ Ira Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1998).

⁵⁹ "English running away with negroes," Act XXII and "Run-aways," Act CII, in William Waller Hening, ed., *The Statutes at Large: Being a Collection of all the Laws of Virginia*, 13 vols. (Richmond, 1809-23), vol. II, 26 and 116-7, respectively. See also, Anthony S. Parent, Jr., *Foul Means: The Formation of a Slave Society in Virginia, 1660-1740* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 123.

⁶⁰ Edmund S. Morgan, *American Slavery, American Freedom: The Ordeal of Colonial Virginia* (1975; repr., New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1995), 315.

The colony's borderlands and frontiers became destinations for runaways. In French, "the term *marronnage* includes all forms of absenteeism, from running away to rebellion; the English cognate 'maroon' refers only to people who have run away permanently."⁶¹ Slaves fleeing Tidewater plantations mostly traveled south to the Dismal Swamp, which held large maroon populations. As white settlement spread into the Piedmont, though, the enslaved looked west toward the Blue Ridge Mountains and beyond. As the Virginia planter William Byrd II wrote in 1736, "We have mountains in Virginia too, to which they may retire as safely, and do as much mischief as they do in Jamaica."⁶² Despite the importance of the black freedom struggle, historian Anthony S. Parent, Jr., charges, "more often than not, historians of Virginia have regarded black insurgency during the colonial period as inconsequential."⁶³ It is therefore essential that a narrative of the Valley's beginnings consider how Africans and African Americans shaped British policy in the region.



Figure 1. Although executed circa 1864, Thomas Moran's *Slave Hunt* depicts the often-secluded areas to which the enslaved fled to escape slavery throughout the eighteenth- and nineteenth- century.

⁶¹ John Thornton, *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 273.

⁶² William Byrd II quoted in, Parent, Jr., *Foul Means*, 170.

⁶³ Parent, Jr., *Foul Means*, 135.

Virginia's maroon communities are part of a larger Atlantic World narrative. "During the era of slavery," Barbara Klamon Kopytoff explains, "communities of maroons, or escaped slaves, sprang up throughout the New World. Wherever there were slave plantations, there was resistance in the form of runaways and slave revolts; and wherever mountains, swamps, or forests permitted the escaped slaves to gather, they formed communities."⁶⁴ Maroons joined together for a host of reasons and, by so doing, created social enclaves; such communities were culturally significant in their own right.⁶⁵ Archaeological investigations of the Dismal Swamp, for example, have proven how "Diasporans ushered in a new age for themselves by forming communities of a particular kind" and "by socializing their labor."⁶⁶ Although a similar material record for the maroons of western Virginia has not been recovered, their impact on politics is apparent through archival records. The colony's planters and government officials responded to what they perceived as enemies on the border: Native Americans and runaway slaves. The former posed the threat of attack whereas the latter undermined plantations and could foment rebellion. Whites' greatest fears had already been confirmed by Bacon's Rebellion (1676-7) and were later heightened by South Carolina's Stono Rebellion (1739).

Virginia's Piedmont extends from the fall line to the Blue Ridge Mountains. Composed of rolling valleys, the region offered good land and splendid prospects for white settlers. Planters such as William Byrd II encouraged "the settlement of foreign Protestants in the valleys as a buffer between the blacks and the mountains."⁶⁷ "Settling the valley lands with Europeans bearing capital to purchase land or working off an indenture," Anthony S. Parent, Jr., maintains, "served both security and speculative purposes."⁶⁸ Military preparedness increased, tobacco farms started to dot the region, and Indian allies were employed to hunt maroons in the woods and mountains.⁶⁹ The Piedmont's evolution informed the Valley's settlement.

British officials looked to secure the wealth being generated on tobacco farms in the Tidewater and the Piedmont through the development of the backcountry. They also hoped to staunch the tide of runaway slaves, for the Mountains to the west and the Great Valley beyond offered enticing prospects for seclusion and protection. In the first decades of the eighteenth century maroon communities had developed between the area of

⁶⁴ Barbara Klamon Kopytoff, "The Early Political Development of Jamaican Maroon Societies," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 35, no. 2 (April 1978): 287.

⁶⁵ Daniel O. Sayers, *A Desolate Place for a Defiant People: The Archaeology of Maroons, Indigenous Americans, and Enslaved Laborers in the Great Dismal Swamp* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2014), 80.

⁶⁶ Sayers, *A Desolate Place for a Defiant People*, 114.

⁶⁷ Parent, Jr., *Foul Means*, 170.

⁶⁸ Parent, Jr., *Foul Means*, 170.

⁶⁹ Parent, Jr., *Foul Means*, 162-63.

Lexington, Virginia, north to Maryland. Although never as extensive as Jamaica's maroon colonies, fugitives on the frontier nonetheless troubled white authorities.⁷⁰ Early records indicate that some runaway slaves took refuge among Indians. The 1722 proceedings of Maryland looked to the "evil Consequences of the Shuanuo Indians entertaining our Runaway Negro Slaves." In order to "prevent those evil Consequences for the future," the Council recommended "to invite the said Shuanuo Indians into a treaty of Friendship and Amity with this Government and to the Intent that these Resolutions be put in practice as soon as possible."⁷¹ The Council hoped such an agreement would result in the deliverance of enslaved fugitives.



Figure 2: Portion of "A general map of the middle British colonies, in America; viz. Virginia, Mariland, Delaware, Pensilvania, New-Jersey, New-York, Connecticut, and Rhode Island" showing the Shenandoah Valley and beyond circa 1755. Image courtesy of the Library of Congress.

⁷⁰ Allan Kulikoff, *Tobacco and Slaves: The Development of Southern Cultures in the Chesapeake, 1680-1800* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1986), 328-29.

⁷¹ *Archives of Maryland: Proceedings of the Council of Maryland, 1698-1731*, ed., William Hand Browne (Baltimore: Maryland Historical Society, 1905), 394.

Farther south, enslaved runaways fled west to the Blue Ridge Mountains and the Shenandoah Valley. Traveling from plantations or farms in the Piedmont, possibly the Tidewater, Gov. Alexander Spotswood reported to the Virginia Council in 1721: “diverse Negro’s . . . have lately run away & suspected to be gone towards ye Great Mountains.” The governor’s experiences with fugitives told. He charged “it may be hard to apprehd ’em, & if they shou’d encrease there, it might prove of ill consequence to ye Peace of this Colony, and of great detriment to the Frontier Inhabitants.”⁷² Spotswood’s fears were realized in 1729, for instance, when a small group of runaways clashed with whites before capture near present-day Lexington, which was not officially established as a town until 1777.⁷³ Spotswood looked to nearby colonies for help. He had written “to the Governors of Maryland, Pennsylvania and New York to give orders to their Indians to hunt for the said Runaways among the Mountains and had proposed a reward for bringing them in dead or alive, they being already out law’d and may by the Act of Assembly be killed if they dont Surrender.”⁷⁴ The unrelenting toil of slave labor continued to push African Americans to flee. By 1729, Virginia’s Lt. Gov. Gooch complained to the Lords of Trade that: “some runaway Negroes beginning a settlement in the Mountains & of their being reclaimed by their Master.” Militia was being trained to “prevent this for the future.”⁷⁵ Whites’ responses reflect their desire to control the enslaved and maintain the colony’s burgeoning social order.

Politicians’ reactions to maroon communities align with the broader regulatory measures that reshaped colonial Virginia. It is unclear from the historical record the number or permanency of Virginia’s western maroon communities. That did not matter to government officials. The presence of fugitive slaves in the Virginia backcountry influenced policy, especially to ensure the protection of the Piedmont’s and Tidewater’s wealthy plantations. Indeed, as the preeminent historian of the Shenandoah Valley Warren Hofstra charges, “The call in the report of 1721 for the immigration of more white servants was designed to check the emergence of black majorities in the plantation colonies.”⁷⁶ White settlers, in other words, would create a bulwark against the threat of French and Indians on the frontier as well as enslaved Virginians who were perceived as an “internal enemy.”⁷⁷

⁷² H. R. McIlwaine, 10 August 1721, *Executive Journals of the Council of Colonial Virginia*, vol. III (Richmond: Virginia State Library, 1925), 549-50.

⁷³ Kulikoff, *Tobacco and Slaves*, 328.

⁷⁴ McIlwaine, 10 August 1721, *Executive Journals of the Council of Colonial Virginia*, vol. III, 549-50.

⁷⁵ Quoted in Herbert Aptheker, “Maroons Within the Present Limits of the United States,” in *Maroon Societies: Rebel Slave Communities in the Americas*, ed. Richard Price (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979), 152-53.

⁷⁶ Hofstra, *The Planting of New Virginia*, 83.

⁷⁷ On Virginians’ fears of the enslaved, see Alan Taylor, *The Internal Enemy: Slavery and War in Virginia, 1772-1832* (New York: Norton, 2013).

If maroons represented a distant threat to the colony's security, the tumultuous decade of the 1730s demonstrated the very real potential for slave revolt. Both within the colonies of Maryland and Virginia but also across the Atlantic World dozens of rebellions erupted shaking planters' confidence and confirmed whites' deepest fears.⁷⁸ Significantly, the Valley's settlement by colonists occurred in the midst of this tumultuous decade. Although officials did not draw a direct correlation between slave revolt and the Valley's settlement, the unrest of the 1730s coupled with western Virginia's maroons offer important historical context. Earlier in the century, in 1710, Africans had participated in conspiracies in several Virginia counties including Surry, James City, and Isle of Wight.⁷⁹ Later, in 1730, the largest slave uprising of the colonial period shook the Chesapeake when more than "three hundred of the rebels escaped en masse into the Dismal Swamp."⁸⁰ Prince George's County, Maryland, witnessed revolts in 1739 and 1740.⁸¹ And, most famously, South Carolina experienced the Stono Revolt in 1739.

How, then, do maroons and revolts inform interpretations of the Valley's settlement? Unsettled lands were not only anathema to an Anglo-Virginian worldview that emphasized private possession but also fostered covert activities. In Virginia's mountains and valleys Africans and African Americans created fugitive landscapes.⁸² As historian Warren Hofstra posits, "the settlement and social construction of the Virginia backcountry was connected to the establishment of maroon colonies."⁸³ Beginning interpretations of the Valley's peopling with western Virginia's maroon communities recasts a narrative that more often than not starts with the region's first white settlers. Maroons and their impact on policy not only highlights western Virginia's earliest African American history but also re-centers the traditional narrative by stressing the importance of the black freedom struggle. Although white settlers composed a majority of the Valley's first inhabitants between the 1730s and the 1760s, African Americans were always present on the land and driving the region's history.

⁷⁸ Edward A. Pearson, "Rebelling as Men," in *Stono: Documenting and Interpreting a Southern Slave Revolt*, ed. Mark M. Smith (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2005), 94.

⁷⁹ Kulikoff, *Tobacco and Slaves*, 329.

⁸⁰ Parent, Jr., *Foul Means*, 161.

⁸¹ Kulikoff, *Tobacco and Slaves*, 329.

⁸² Rhys Isaac, *The Transformation of Virginia, 1740-1790* (1982; repr., Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 53 and Samuel Truett, *Fugitive Landscapes: The Forgotten History of the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2006).

⁸³ Hofstra, *The Planting of New Virginia*, 67.

Settlement

White explorers had seen the Valley before. But the most important expedition for the region's future came in the late summer and early fall of 1716, when Virginia's Gov. Spotswood led a group to the "great mountains to the westward."⁸⁴ Spotswood's party consisted of several dozen men, mostly gentlemen and the enslaved, hardened Virginia rangers, and Indian guides.⁸⁵ The rigorous journey took its toll on the party but they successfully reached the Shenandoah River. One among their party, John Fontaine, remarked upon the region's beauty and its "fine prospects."⁸⁶ To claim the Valley, Spotswood "buried a bottle with a paper inclosed, on which he writ that he took possession of this place in the name and for King George the First of England."⁸⁷ At night the men enjoyed the comforts of camps built by enslaved labor. They feasted on venison and bear. They drank red and white Virginia wines, brandy, rum, shrubs, cider, and punch.⁸⁸ Spotswood's party became immortalized as the Knights of the Golden Horseshoe—the name derived from the memento given to each member of the trek.

Spotswood's expedition is a clear projection of white Virginians' worldview. Seeking to "civilize" and tame the wilderness, the party named the Shenandoah River *Euphrates*.⁸⁹ Because of slave labor, the gentlemen enjoyed considerable comfort and lived well during their expedition. And by claiming the Valley, Spotswood began the process of organizing and privatizing the landscape. A region that had been a threat because of Native Americans and fugitive slaves would now contribute to the colony's largesse. Although Virginia officials intended for white settlers "working the land in patterns of diversified grain-livestock agriculture that did not depend heavily on slavery or produce black majorities" to occupy the region, they had also resurrected a highly stratified society that held sway over the colony because of its social, racial, and economic dimensions.⁹⁰ By 1750, if not earlier, Virginia's social hierarchy was clearly defined, which historian Richard S. Dunn succinctly describes as: "slave laborers at the base, convict and indentured servants

⁸⁴ Quoted in David Hackett Fischer and James C. Kelly, *Bound Away: Virginia and the Westward Movement* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2000), 101. On the expedition's route see, Delma R. Carpenter, "The Route Followed by Governor Spotswood in 1716 across the Blue Ridge Mountains," *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 73, no. 4 (October 1965): 405-12.

⁸⁵ Fischer and Kelly, *Bound Away*, 101.

⁸⁶ John Fontaine. *Journal of John Fontaine; An Irish Huguenot Son in Spain and Virginia, 1710-1719*, ed. Edward Porter Alexander (Williamsburg, Va.: Colonial Williamsburg Foundation; distributed by University of Virginia Press, 1972), 287.

⁸⁷ *Journal of John Fontaine*, 288.

⁸⁸ *Journal of John Fontaine*, 289.

⁸⁹ Hofstra, *The Planting of New Virginia*, 61.

⁹⁰ Hofstra, *The Planting of New Virginia*, 92-3.

ranked next, then tenant farmers, then small landholders, then middling planters, and a handful of large planters.”⁹¹ Significantly, the Shenandoah Valley possessed every strata of Virginia society yet the depth of each class is what distinguished the piedmont from the tidewater. Nevertheless, although the Shenandoah Valley never had large numbers of enslaved African Americans or indentured servants across the region, social and racial hierarchies defined colonial Virginia.

Virginia’s Great Valley had been altered well before white settlement in the 1730s. Native Americans had occupied the area since the Pliestecene era.⁹² In 1608, Captain John Smith captured a Native American during an exploration of the colony’s western reaches. The Indian claimed the “woods were not burnt” beyond the Blue Ridge. Indian warfare soon transformed the landscape and its ecology. The League of the Iroquois started the practice of setting fire to the woods and grasses each fall after they conquered Valley Indians in the 1670s.⁹³ Indians’ fires changed the “composition and density of the forest and grass cover.”⁹⁴ Oaks and chestnuts soon covered large swaths of land; pines, hickories, maples, and poplars were also present to a lesser extent.⁹⁵ Deeply involved with the British and French fur trade, the Iroquois forced the depopulation of the Valley to maximize hunting and trapping.⁹⁶ The region’s environment directly shaped settlement and labor. Densely wooded areas needed to be cleared. Riving timber for fencing, shingles, and boards demanded hard labor. And building structures from the ground up necessitated skilled and semi-skilled workers. Although the region’s settlers did much of the work themselves, they also employed different combinations of unfree labor.

Resting between two formidable mountain ranges, the Great Valley’s undulating terrain and natural corridor shaped patterns of settlement and land use. Abundant rainfall and a plentitude of water from the Shenandoah River, as well as numerous mountain springs and waterfalls, secured farmers’ independence.⁹⁷ Thus, as white settlers moved west from “Old Virginia” to “New Virginia,” or came down from Pennsylvania along the Great

⁹¹ Richard S. Dunn, “Servants and Slaves: The Recruitment and Employment of Labor,” in *Colonial British America: Essays in the New History of the Early Modern Era*, eds. Jack P. Greene and J. R. Pole (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984), 176.

⁹² Greer, “Archaeological Investigations of Two Possible 19th Century Quarters Sites at Belle Grove Plantation,” 3.

⁹³ Charles E. Kemper, “The Settlement of the Valley,” *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, 30, no. 2 (April 1922): 170.

⁹⁴ Mitchell, *Commercialism and Frontier*, 22.

⁹⁵ Mitchell, *Commercialism and Frontier*, 22.

⁹⁶ Koons and Noyalas, “Historic Resource Study,” 17.

⁹⁷ Koons and Noyalas, “Historic Resource Study,” 13 and Fischer, *Albion’s Seed*, 638.

Wagon Road, they entered a region primed for agriculture.⁹⁸ The Valley soon became unparalleled in wheat production and populated with farmers practicing mixed agriculture, thereby directing the region's relationship to race and slavery.



Figure 3. The famous Joshua Fry and Peter Jefferson Map of 1755 illustrates well the extent of eighteenth-century Virginia. Moreover, the map portrays the natural corridor of the Valley.

The same resources that attracted the region's first inhabitants—rich soil, water access, and vast forests—drew European settlers in the 1730s. In the fall of 1731, “the petition of Robt McKay Joost Heyd of the Province of Pensilvania,” proposed that they and “divers others Families to the number of one hundred are desirous to remove thence & seat themselves on the back of the great Mountains within this Colony.” The petitioners asked for “one hundred thousand Acres of Land,” which the government granted.⁹⁹ Families had to occupy new lands to receive patents—one family per every thousand acres.¹⁰⁰ Authorities intended for the Valley to develop differently than the Tidewater. By 1750, most counties in eastern Virginia had black majorities.¹⁰¹ White Protestant yeoman farmers—primarily from central Germany and north of Ireland—were the ideal settlers according to imperial officials.¹⁰² Farmsteads were intended to be small and slaveholders, who formed only a small percentage of white settlers, typically held in bondage fewer than five slaves.

⁹⁸ Hofstra, *The Planting of New Virginia*, 5.

⁹⁹ “At a Council held at the Capitol,” 21 October 1731, H.R. McIlwaine, ed. *Executive Journals of the Council of Colonial Virginia*, vol. IV (Richmond: Virginia State Library, 1925), 253.

¹⁰⁰ Hofstra, *The Planting of New Virginia*, 90.

¹⁰¹ Kathleen M. Brown, *Good Wives, Nasty Wenches, and Anxious Patriarchs: Gender, Race, and Power in Colonial Virginia* (Chapel Hill: Published for the Institute of Early American History and Culture by University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 251.

¹⁰² Hofstra, *The Planting of New Virginia*, 81.

The Valley enticed emigrants because of its prospects for independence. White settlers could establish farmsteads, achieve self-sufficiency, and enjoy a degree of freedom unavailable farther east. Yet, these same settlers were entering a colony with a long history of slavery. Planters had secured their independence through the enslavement and subjugation of Africans. These same planters not only held prominent positions of power in Virginia but also speculated in large tracts of land in Frederick County. Competing interests thus defined the Valley's earliest settlement. Moreover, projecting the region as unparalleled in opportunity belies a deeper truth. Turk McCleskey's case study of freeholders in Augusta County reveals that "frontier opportunities were far more restrictive than previously suspected. . . . Although not entirely bleak, the situation was far from democratic."¹⁰³ Augusta is particularly significant because "two-thirds of a million acres" were in private hands "before the county's first subdivision in 1770."¹⁰⁴ Not surprisingly, only one free black owned land and the prospects for former convicts and indentured servants were not much better.¹⁰⁵ Free white Virginians directly oversaw the "conversion of crown lands to private title," and in the "quest for land patents, people who already owned property clearly held an advantage over landless immigrants."¹⁰⁶ The example of Augusta County is significant to the Valley's broader narrative if only to serve as a reminder of the stratified nature of colonial Virginia.

Pennsylvania's topography funneled settlers into the valleys of Maryland and Virginia.¹⁰⁷ Although Virginia was a British colony, the English were a numerical minority in the backcountry despite the considerable power they did and would wield. Scots-Irish and German peoples followed the Great Wagon Road down from Pennsylvania and soon predominated the Virginia valley. Ethnic identity marked itself upon the land. At least 82 town and village names in the Valley were Germanic.¹⁰⁸ So, too, did ethnicity impact rates of slaveownership. Cultural geographer Robert D. Mitchell observes: "Although the Germans had little aversion to hiring indentured servants if they needed them, of the clearly identifiable German names in colonial inventories, fewer than 5% owned any slaves." Similarly, he continues, "references to Germans as slaveowners are rare, and the most heavily settled German county, Shenandoah, consistently had the fewest number of slaves, the lowest proportion of slaveowners, and the highest proportion of owners with only one

¹⁰³ Turk McCleskey, "Rich Land, Poor Prospects: Real Estate and the Formation of a Social Elite in Augusta County, Virginia, 1738-1770," *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 98, no. 3 (July 1990): 450-51.

¹⁰⁴ McCleskey, "Rich Land, Poor Prospects," 449.

¹⁰⁵ McCleskey, "Rich Land, Poor Prospects," 452.

¹⁰⁶ McCleskey, "Rich Land, Poor Prospects," 461 and 462-3, respectively.

¹⁰⁷ Wayland Fuller Dunaway, "Pennsylvania as an Early Distribution Center of Population," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 55, no. 2 (1931): 135.

¹⁰⁸ Dunaway, "Pennsylvania as an Early Distribution Center of Population," 140.

or two slaves (90% by 1800).¹⁰⁹ Exceptions, of course, existed as Mitchell himself notes. Henry Miller, a German ironmaster, employed up to 35 slaves and died owning 42 African Americans thus representing one end of the spectrum, whereas William Stroops more typically held in bondage a black man, Samuel, and a child.¹¹⁰ Mitchell ultimately concludes that an aversion to slave ownership in the Valley was based on cost rather than ethics.¹¹¹

The lands filled up quickly as settlers planted roots along the Opequon River. Settlers moved as immediate and extended families as well as with groups of other familial units.¹¹² James D. Rice estimates that 10,000 individuals lived in the Valley by 1745, 17,000 in 1750, and nearly 21,000 by 1755.¹¹³ By 1754, according to Frederick County's list of tithables, "about six hundred eighty slaves resided among a white population of approximately eighty-seven hundred."¹¹⁴ Although the French and Indian War temporarily stemmed the tide of settlement, white pioneers poured into the region thereafter. By 1775, 35,000 inhabitants occupied the Valley, two-thirds of whom lived the Lower Valley.¹¹⁵ Counties were soon established: Frederick in 1738, Augusta in 1745, and Botetourt in 1769. During this same period, "the African-based population in Virginia grew from 12,000 in 1708 to 120,156 in 1756, while the white population increased from 18,000 to 173,316 during the same interval."¹¹⁶ For white settlers, the Valley offered the prospects of landownership and self-sufficiency. White people's independence was sustained because of or flourished in proximity to black people's enslavement; accordingly, the Valley embodied the paradox of American slavery, American freedom.¹¹⁷

During the 1730s pioneer households "were located one-half to three-quarters of a mile from each other." Thus, the landscape oscillated between unoccupied stretches and clustered neighborhoods.¹¹⁸ The nature of settlement demonstrated the importance of

¹⁰⁹ Mitchell, *Commercialism and Frontier*, 130.

¹¹⁰ See, respectively, Mitchell, *Commercialism and Frontier*, 131 and Inventory of William Stroops, 17 February 1767, Frederick County Will Book 3 1761-1770, pages 391.

¹¹¹ Mitchell, *Commercialism and Frontier*, 129.

¹¹² Mitchell, *Commercialism and Frontier*, 53.

¹¹³ James D. Rice, *Nature and History in the Potomac Country: From Hunter-Gatherers to the age of Jefferson* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009), 213.

¹¹⁴ Hofstra, *The Planting of New Virginia*, 221-22.

¹¹⁵ Robert D. Mitchell, "Agricultural Change and the American Revolution: A Virginia Case Study," *Agricultural History Society*, 47, no. 2 (April 1973): 120. According to Mitchell, "The period from 1750 to 1776 was one of major settlement expansion and infilling within the valley." Mitchell, *Commercialism and Frontier*, 37.

¹¹⁶ Michael A. Gomez, *Exchanging Our Country Marks: The Transformation of African Identities in the Colonial and Antebellum South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 21.

¹¹⁷ For a full discussion of this paradox, see Morgan, *American Slavery, American Freedom*.

¹¹⁸ Robert Mitchell, "The Southern Backcountry: A Geographical House Divided," in *The Southern Colonial Backcountry: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Frontier Communities*, ed., David Colin Crass et al. (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1998), 10.

interconnectivity, for neighbors exchanged goods and services to ensure success.¹¹⁹ Close proximity also facilitated the hiring of servants and the exchange of the enslaved.¹²⁰ A rare letter from 1738 gives voice to the lives of many whites in the Shenandoah Valley. Robert and Elizabeth Scarbrough had moved from Bucks County, Pennsylvania, and settled north of Winchester. They lived on 300 acres of land with “good meadows & good water.” They had access to a mill and prospered. Although they missed their old friends and wrote to family still living in Bucks County, they flourished in the Valley.¹²¹ The region’s isolation ensured great liberty in shaping the landscape. Authorities did not shrink from settlers’ independence because, as Warren Hofstra summarizes, “the program of induced settlement accomplished just what Virginia and English authorities wanted: two frontiers, one on the edge of a plantation world expanding through the Piedmont and the other as an island of western settlement serving to buffer both the internal security of a slave society and the external threat posed by Indian and French marauders.”¹²² Governmental policy thus dovetailed with colonists’ ambitions.

Although the majority of freeholders labored with the help of family and friends only, unfree labor remained a feature of Valley life. Early settlers dedicated themselves to clearing the land, building structures, and household production—laborious and consuming work. James Wood played a significant role in the Valley’s early history by establishing “Frederick Town,” later called Winchester. Wood surveyed the land and created twenty-six town lots.¹²³ Despite Wood’s influential positions, Warren Hofstra nonetheless posits him, his family and their servants and slaves, as representative figures throughout the Opequon settlement.¹²⁴ Hofstra’s observations therefore make Wood a useful case study. Wood served as clerk of court but also farmed. The former gave him considerable added income, whereas the latter required demanding work. Although he preferred hired servants for farm work, he relied on enslaved labor within the household.¹²⁵ In the spring of 1742, he purchased for forty pounds, five shillings, a “Negro Woman & Child.”¹²⁶ As Wood accumulated more wealth he continued to buy more slaves. In August 1747, for the sum of eighty pounds, he purchased from James Gardner “One Negro Woman Named Sal” and her “Mulatto

¹¹⁹ Hofstra, *The Planting of New Virginia*, 197.

¹²⁰ Robert Green, 29 June 1739, Folder 17, Box 2, Wood Family Papers, Stewart Bell Jr. Archives, Handley Regional Library, Winchester, Virginia; hereinafter Handley. See also, [Thomas] Rutherford, 30 April 1742, Folder 17, Box 2, Wood Family Papers, Handley and McCleskey, “Rich Land, Poor Prospects,” 458.

¹²¹ Robert Scarborough and Elizabeth Scarborough, 5 September 1738, “A Letter Written by Shenandoah County Virginia, Pioneers in 1738,” *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 5, no. 4 (October 1925): 276.

¹²² Hofstra, *The Planting of New Virginia*, 116.

¹²³ Hofstra, *The Planting of New Virginia*, 180-81.

¹²⁴ Hofstra, *The Planting of New Virginia*, 204.

¹²⁵ Hofstra, *The Planting of New Virginia*, 200-1

¹²⁶ [Thomas] Rutherford, 30 April 1742, Folder 17, Box 2, Wood Family Papers, Handley.

Children.”¹²⁷ Finally, on 12 September 1753, Isabella Hooper indicated: “Received of James Wood the Sum of Forty two pounds Ten Shillings Current money in full for a Nagrea Wench named Hannah purchased from my husband Thomas Hooper by Mesd Wood”¹²⁸

Wood’s purchase of enslaved women is intriguing and may be explained by several factors. First, the Wood family used black women in the domestic arena. The family expanded their household throughout the 1740s buying a variety of textiles and dry goods.¹²⁹ Enslaved women may have been involved in household production, though the Woods also purchased essential items such as clothing. Eighteenth-century observers nonetheless noted the importance of home production in the Valley because of its relative isolation from distance markets. “In the valley of Shenandoah are many home-manufactories,” French social reformer François-Alexandre-Frédéric, duc de La Rochefoucauld-Liancourt remarked after his 1795 tour of the United States, “which is rarely the case in any other part of Virginia.”¹³⁰

The Wood’s enslaved women likely prepared foodstuff, engaged in spinning and sewing, and maintained the household. Second, Wood, who had already proven himself to be entrepreneurial, may have been looking to expand his slave holdings or secure later slave sales. “A creole woman who conceived her first child in her late teens and completed a full reproductive cycle could expect to bear eight or nine children,” notes historian Philip D. Morgan.¹³¹ Finally, European gender norms did not apply to African and African American women, thus suggesting a considerable degree of latitude for “appropriate” work. Although the Wood family apparently used their female slaves for domestic work, black women, “unlike white women, routinely worked in the fields.”¹³² Buying an enslaved woman, in other words, guaranteed versatility in work.

Frederick County wills of the 1760s demonstrate similar patterns of slave-ownership. The estate of Thomas Redmon, for instance, was inventoried in September 1762. Six slaves—Dick, Pegg, Baker, Sly, Bess, and Geffree—were valued at £315.¹³³ James Crum held one unnamed man, a woman, a child, and a girl. It is possible, but unknown, if

¹²⁷ James Gardner, 5 August 1747, Folder 17, Box 2, Wood Family Papers, Handley.

¹²⁸ Isabella Hooper [her + mark], 12 Sept 1753, Folder 17, Box 2, Wood Family Papers, Handley. When a document is signed with a person’s “mark,” it can generally be assumed the signer was illiterate and unlettered. Isabella Hooper likely had the document read aloud to her before affixing her mark.

¹²⁹ Hofstra, *The Planting of New Virginia*, 201.

¹³⁰ François-Alexandre-Frédéric, duc de La Rochefoucauld-Liancourt, *Travels through the United States of North America, the Country of the Iroquois, and Upper Canada, in the Years 1795, 1796, and 1797*, vol. III, (London: D. Gillet, 1800), 217-18.

¹³¹ Morgan, *Slave Counterpoint*, 89.

¹³² Parent, Jr., *Foul Means*, 61.

¹³³ Inventory of Thomas Redmon, 17 September 1762, Frederick County Will Book 3 1761-1770, pages 88-90.

they represented a family unit.¹³⁴ Although an incomplete portrait, Frederick County Will Books indicate that five percent of owned “items” in the 1750s were enslaved people, a number that rose to nine percent in the 1760s.¹³⁵ Small slaveholders like the Woods were present throughout the Valley and minimizing their place in the region’s story to elevate the triumphal narrative of independent freeholders undermines the lives and experiences of enslaved Africans and African Americans who were thrust into an alien place and forced to work for others.

The Woods also reveal the varied labor combinations employed throughout the Valley. The use of unfree labor prevailed among Germans, Scots-Irish, and English settlers.¹³⁶ For the Woods, indentured servants were hired during periods of intensive work. In the summer of 1739, James Woods paid Robert Green six pounds for a “Servant Woman.”¹³⁷ Years later, on December 15, 1747, he bought the rights of use of William Tapp.¹³⁸ The Wood family was not unusual. Frederick County Will Books from the mid-to-late 1700s reveal that small slaveholders often employed hired servants. George Bouman’s estate included, for example, “One Servant Man £15 1 [and] Negro fellow £40.”¹³⁹ Similarly, William Ashby’s estate had three “Negro” slaves as well as “1 Servant Boy Named James McEvoy.”¹⁴⁰ The use of hired labor created flexibility in a diversified agricultural economy with low profit margins.¹⁴¹

It is highly likely that slaves, servants, and whites labored together, especially on the smaller farmsteads typical of the Shenandoah Valley. This domestic pattern had been prevalent in the late seventeenth-century Chesapeake society where gentleman planters worked, lived, and ate with servants and slaves. Frontier conditions, economic uncertainty, and impermanent architecture shaped an organic conception of society.¹⁴² The rise of a planter class coupled with the construction of grand mansions eventually created literal and figurative barriers between the races. Frontier conditions in the 1730s-1750s Valley suggest patterns not dissimilar from the early Chesapeake. Although the primary sources

¹³⁴ Estate of James Crum, 1 September 1764, Frederick County Will Book 3 1761-1770, page 231.

¹³⁵ Mitchell, *Commercialism and Frontier*, 115.

¹³⁶ Mitchell, *Commercialism and Frontier*, 125.

¹³⁷ Robert Green, 29 June 1739, Folder 17, Box 2, Wood Family Papers, Handley.

¹³⁸ William Tapp, 15 December 1747, Folder 17, Box 2, Wood Family Papers, Handley.

¹³⁹ Appraisement of Estate of George Bouman, 7 August 1771, Frederick County Will Book 4 1770-1783, page 120.

¹⁴⁰ William Ashby, 3 July 1773, Frederick County Will Book 4 1770-1783, pages 266-68

¹⁴¹ Sarah S. Hughes, “Slaves for Hire: The Allocation of Black Labor in Elizabeth City County, Virginia, 1782 to 1810,” *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 35, no. 2 (Apr., 1978): 261.

¹⁴² Fraser D. Neiman, “Domestic Architecture at the Clifts Plantation: The Social Context of Early Virginia Building,” in *Common Places: Readings in American Vernacular Architecture*, eds. Dell Upton and John Michael Vlach (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1986), 307-8.

are largely silent on early race relations, two observations are compelling. Augusta County resident Joseph Tess worked with three slaves preparing the land according to one account, thereby demonstrating a degree of familiarity, if not intimacy, between black and white workers.¹⁴³ Familiarity between freeholders and slaves demonstrates a degree of social and racial fluidity that had all but disappeared in Tidewater Virginia. But it also reveals patterns of labor not atypical across the South among small slaveholders who themselves had to work in order to ensure the farm's success, if not very survival. Farmers adapted to local conditions, which drove patterns of free and unfree labor. Thus, across the Valley, farmers variously hired laborers, contracted indentured servants, or enslaved African Americans to ensure productivity while minimizing economic risk.

The influx of German and Scots-Irish families shaped the Valley's first three decades of settlement. They composed a majority of the settlers. They established the region's first farmsteads. And they generally practiced subsistence farming without slave labor. Although pioneer conditions prevailed until the mid-eighteenth century, thereby allowing for social mobility, increased stratification came with time.¹⁴⁴ Virginia was and would remain a stratified society. Moreover, no matter how significant yeoman farmers were to the Valley's early development, unfree labor remained a feature of Valley life. The presence of white indentured servants and enslaved African Americans was a harbinger, for by the 1770s eastern Virginians and tobacco culture came across the gaps of the Blue Ridge Mountains.

Planters

Early Virginia found its economic salvation in tobacco. Although a volatile market, great planters and middling farmers continued to plant, harvest, and sell the addictive weed with incredible vigor in the hopes of substantial profits. It was upon tobacco that Virginia's elite planters derived their power, and unfree labor went hand-in-hand with the Chesapeake's tobacco culture.¹⁴⁵ So, too, did tobacco farming demand aggressive land acquisition, for the crop is notoriously hard on soil. Virginians looked west moving first into the Piedmont and later into the backcountry. The colony's great planters soon imprinted themselves on the Shenandoah Valley. Eastern Virginians were among the region's first land prospectors.¹⁴⁶ Planters Robert Carter and William Beverley, although living east of the Blue Ridge, bought significant tracts of lands. Landon and George Carter

¹⁴³ Mitchell, *Commercialism and Frontier*, 130.

¹⁴⁴ Mitchell, *Commercialism and Frontier*, 132.

¹⁴⁵ Brown, *Good Wives, Nasty Wenches, and Anxious Patriarchs*, 370.

¹⁴⁶ Kemper, "Settlement of the Valley," 174.

were granted 50,112 acres in the present-day counties of Frederick, Clarke, and Warren.¹⁴⁷ With Virginia elites Carter and Beverley at the fore and the Burwell, Washington, Lee, and Page families soon joining them, 470,000 acres of the Valley were acquired by 1740.¹⁴⁸

The great planters ensured that the Shenandoah Valley was not simply “Greater Pennsylvania” despite the economic ties and social linkages to that colony.¹⁴⁹ They envisioned the region in entirely different terms than either Scots-Irish or German settlers; in fact, their views ran counter to those of royally appointed officials. Robert “King” Carter, acting as Thomas, Lord Fairfax’s resident land agent, “knew that Tidewater men wanted large quantities of land for long-term speculation or development either as insurance against soil exhaustion caused by heavy tobacco planting or as assurance of position and place in Virginia society for future generations.”¹⁵⁰ It will be recalled that officials induced settlement in western Virginia to use white yeoman farmers as a buffer between the slave society to the east and French and Indians to the west.¹⁵¹ Yet, Carter’s heirs, as well as those planters connected to the Fairfax family either throughout kinship or friendship, had no settlement requirements to fulfill, thereby allowing them to use the land as speculative ventures.¹⁵²

The planters of eastern Frederick County were men set apart. Although small landowners with few or no slaves still composed the majority of the population, they were “removed from the circle of the large planters, the aristocratic element, who held the favored position in economic, social, and political life.”¹⁵³ Planters brought to the Valley old sensibilities and rigid social structures. Figures such as Robert Carter Burwell, Philip Nelson, Thomas T. Byrd, and Richard Kidder Meade each held more than one thousand acres. John and Matthew Page each possessed almost twenty-three hundred acres. Nathaniel Burwell had more than two hundred slaves working sections of his eight thousand acre plantation. John Page owned fifty-three slaves and Matthew held forty-three. Philip Nelson’s estate included twenty-eight enslaved blacks. The Valley’s planters built high-style houses that employed Georgian and neo-classical design.¹⁵⁴ Architectural form expressed social position. Figures such as Nelson and Burwell held great power. And power

¹⁴⁷ Kemper, “Settlement of the Valley,” 174.

¹⁴⁸ Willard F. Bliss, “The Tuckahoe in New Virginia,” *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, 59, no. 4 (October 1951): 387-88.

¹⁴⁹ Koons and Noyalas, 26-7.

¹⁵⁰ Warren R. Hofstra, *A Separate Place: The Formation of Clarke County, Virginia* (1986; repr., Madison, Wisc.: Madison House Publishers, 1999), 5.

¹⁵¹ Hofstra, *The Planting of New Virginia*, 116.

¹⁵² Mitchell, *Commercialism and Frontier*, 30-1.

¹⁵³ Bliss, “The Tuckahoe in New Virginia,” 390.

¹⁵⁴ The information in this paragraph is derived from Hofstra, *A Separate Place*, 11-12.

in Virginia, as scholar Rhys Isaac configures it, meant “the capability of determining the actions, even the destinies, of fellow members of society” and institutionalizing “the control of valued resources and the distribution of the products of labor.”¹⁵⁵

Planters’ settlement in the Valley during the post-Revolutionary era not only marked a significant stage of late eighteenth-century migration but also signaled a shift in the region’s culture. Eastern Virginians transmitted tobacco culture and further entrenched plantation slavery. They divided the land up into quarters, which consisted of “about ten slaves, an overseer, and anywhere between five hundred and one thousand acres of land.” Either the planter or his agent directed the overseer to manage the enslaved, grow commercial crops such as wheat or tobacco, and vital foodstuffs such as corn or pork. The quarter’s products, in turn, were sent back east for use on the plantation or exportation. “Robert Carter, John Page, Nathaniel Burwell, and Hugh Nelson,” Warren Hofstra writes, “all operated quarters in the Valley during the 1770s and 1780s. Through them they introduced to the Valley, and specifically to east Frederick, such Tidewater characteristics as tobacco, slavery, overseers, and large-scale commercial agriculture.”¹⁵⁶ Hofstra’s observations highlight how planters dramatically increased the number of large commercial plantations and enslaved laborers in the lower Valley.

Frederick County Will Books reveal that other planters, though perhaps less famous than the Tidewater gentry, were likewise large slaveholders, thereby demonstrating the changing nature of Valley life during the Revolutionary era and beyond. The 1770s included a significant rise in the number of slaves recorded in the County’s Will Books: twenty-three percent of all “items” listed were enslaved people.¹⁵⁷ An Inventory of Taliaferro Stribling’s estate in the summer of 1775, for example, included the names and values of thirty slaves.¹⁵⁸ Charles Smith’s estate, appraised in May of 1776, included seventeen slaves and two servants.¹⁵⁹ Simply names and numbers, white Virginians’ wills and estate inventories reduced slavery to its brutal essence.¹⁶⁰ They also implicitly conveyed that African Americans continued to shape the Valley’s landscape, directed the region’s households, and contributed to the colony’s history.

¹⁵⁵ Isaac, *The Transformation of Virginia*, 132.

¹⁵⁶ Hofstra, *A Separate Place*, 11. See also, Mitchell, “Agricultural Change and the American Revolution,” 121.

¹⁵⁷ Mitchell, *Commercialism and Frontier*, 115.

¹⁵⁸ Inventory of Taliaferro Stribling, 1 Aug 1775, Frederick County Will Book 4 1770-1783, pages 306-09.

¹⁵⁹ Appraisal of Charles Smith’s estate, 29 May 1776, Frederick County Will Book 4 1770-1783, 331-32.

¹⁶⁰ On this interpretive point see, Johnson, *Soul by Soul*.

The eastern Virginians who lived on or owned farms in the Valley were long accustomed to plantation slavery. Africans first appeared in Virginia in 1619. The following decade a small number of “Negroes,” without surnames, were listed in the censuses.¹⁶¹ A minority of these Africans and African Americans escaped enslavement. Anthony Johnson, for example, gained freedom and had both a thriving family and farm on Virginia’s eastern shore. He demonstrates the fluidity of race and slavery in the early colonial era.¹⁶² “Only by the turn of the eighteenth century,” charges historian Philip D. Morgan, “did slaves come to play a central role in the society’s productive activities and form a sizable, though still small, proportion of its population. In 1700, blacks formed just a sixth of the Chesapeake’s colonial population.”¹⁶³ Between the 1660s and 1705, Virginia officials created a system of race-based slavery. Laws, economics, and racism made black slaves a better investment than white indentured servants.¹⁶⁴ Further, “most Africans arrived with extensive knowledge of hoe agriculture, mound cultivation, replanting techniques, fallow or rotational planting, crop processing, and tobacco culture.”¹⁶⁵ Africans’ experience in tobacco production partially explains why planters were disposed to buy slaves from the forested regions of the Congo and the Bight of Biafra.¹⁶⁶

The Atlantic slave trade spanned four centuries and brought between 9.6 and 10.8 million Africans to the Americas.¹⁶⁷ One of the most vivid accounts of the Middle Passage comes through the experiences of a Virginia slave, Olaudah Equiano. Captured from his Nigerian village in 1756, he was bought and sold several times before a slave merchant purchased him. Equiano endured a terrible journey across the Atlantic writing, “When I was carried on board . . . I was now persuaded that I had got into a world of bad spirits, and that they were going to kill me.”¹⁶⁸ According to David Hackett Fischer and James C. Kelly, “Virginia’s slaves were mixed in their African origins. They came from every part of West and Central Africa, and a few even from Madagascar and Mozambique in East Africa.” A great many captives, like Equiano, were Ibo or Ibibio.¹⁶⁹ Robert Carter preferred

¹⁶¹ Parent, Jr., *Foul Means*, 43.

¹⁶² On Anthony Johnson see, T. H. Breen and Stephen Innes, “Myne Owne Ground”: *Race and Freedom on Virginia’s Eastern Shore, 1640-1676* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

¹⁶³ Morgan, *Slave Counterpoint*, 1.

¹⁶⁴ Parent, Jr., *Foul Means*, 60.

¹⁶⁵ Parent, Jr., *Foul Means*, 61.

¹⁶⁶ Parent, Jr., *Foul Means*, 64-5.

¹⁶⁷ Gomez, *Exchanging Our Country Marks*, 18.

¹⁶⁸ Equiano, Quoted in Fischer and Kelly, *Bound Away*, 58. Equiano’s full narrative can be found online via Documenting the American South: Olaudah Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African. Written by Himself, Vol 1* (<https://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/equiano1/menu.html>) and Vol. 2 (<https://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/equiano2/menu.html>)

¹⁶⁹ Fischer and Kelly, *Bound Away*, 60.

“Gambians.”¹⁷⁰ Significantly, though, by 1765, nine-tenths of the state’s slaves had been born in Virginia.¹⁷¹ The vast majority of the Valley’s enslaved population had been born in the colony.

African names had disappeared early in Virginia’s history. It is possible that the enslaved continued to use their “country names,” scholars speculate, after “masters had christened them.”¹⁷² But such names are rare in the historical record. Instead, inventories and wills employ lists of first names only. Surnames, which conferred power and identity in the colonial world, were denied to the enslaved; tellingly, free blacks in Virginia always held surnames. Shenandoah Valley inventories included common names such as Amy, Billy, Nancy, and James.¹⁷³ But planters also used biblical and classical allusions such as Sampson and Venus.¹⁷⁴ In these instances, naming practices reflected planters’ cruel humor, for they gave the subjugated the names of powerful figures. At least one slave was named after a Virginia city, “Richmond,” though that particular practice was not unusual.¹⁷⁵ Hugh Ferguson’s estate included an enslaved “boy” named “Cuffe.”¹⁷⁶ Cuffee is probably an African name, thereby signifying at least one notable instance of African naming practices continuing in the Valley.¹⁷⁷

Planters’ entry into eastern Frederick County marked a transformative shift in the Valley’s growth and development. They not only brought with them tobacco and slavery but also cultural patterns that differed from the lifeways of German and Scots-Irish settlers. It is unclear from the historical record if the Valley’s settled communities bristled at the influx of eastern planters in the post-Revolutionary period. It is apparent that the Valley’s grandees went to great lengths to distinguish themselves from the Valley’s other inhabitants. Andrew Burnaby, an English clergyman who traveled through the American colonies in 1759-60, maintained that Virginia’s elite were “extremely fond of society, and much given to convivial pleasures.”¹⁷⁸ Tutor and diarist Philip Vickers Fithian bolstered this view by his observation of a militia muster that featured, instead of military exercises,

¹⁷⁰ Morgan, *Slave Counterpoint*, 65.

¹⁷¹ Taylor, *The Internal Enemy*, 20.

¹⁷² Morgan, *Slave Counterpoint*, 455.

¹⁷³ Inventory of John Marquis, 3 January 1795, Frederick County Will Book 6 1793-1802, page 24.

¹⁷⁴ See, respectively, Inventory of Taliaferro Stribling, 1 Aug 1775, Frederick County Will Book 4 1770-1783, pages 306-09 and Inventory of John Marquis, 3 January 1795, Frederick County Will Book 6 1793-1802, page 24.

¹⁷⁵ Majr Morgan Alexander, [Spring 1783], Frederick County Will Book 4 1770-1783, pages 658.

¹⁷⁶ Estate of Hugh Ferguson, 5 November 1782, Frederick County Will Book 4 1770-1783, pages 629-31.

¹⁷⁷ Hennig Cohen, “Slave Names in Colonial South Carolina,” *American Speech*, 27, no. 2 (May 1952): 103.

¹⁷⁸ Andrew Burnaby, *Travels through the Middle Settlements in North America, in the Years 1759 and 1760; with Observations Upon the State of the Colonies* (London: T. Payne, 1798), 25.

“Drinking, and Horse-Racing—Hollowing, carousing.”¹⁷⁹ Although militias provided colonial Virginians “an important means of formalizing authority in society,” they also offered assemblies “at which the male fraternity of warriors might get drunk together.”¹⁸⁰ A specific style of horse racing had developed in the seventeenth-century Chesapeake that featured strong self-assertion and aggressive contests between riders. Militia musters, drinking occasions, and horse racing carried great meaning not only for the participants but also for the spectators.¹⁸¹ Planters’ performative behavior ultimately projected to the outside world their rank and station. Not everyone, though, was impressed. Andrew Burnaby concluded that slavery had undermined planters’ character. “Their authority over their slaves,” he charged, “renders them vain and imperious.” He further maintained, “Their ignorance of mankind and of learning, exposes them to many errors and prejudices, especially in regard to Indians and Negroes, whom they scarcely consider as of the human species.”¹⁸²

By the final decades of the eighteenth century, sizable numbers of the enslaved inhabited portions of the Shenandoah Valley, especially eastern Frederick County (the area that would become Clarke). The region’s first African Americans came as part of a freedom struggle, whereas the later emigrants arrived from the east in chains. Travelers to the region increasingly commented on the visible presence of slaves. La Rochefoucault Liancourt maintained that “Negroes are very numerous in Winchester; but white labourers are not easily procured, and receive higher wages than in most places of the neighbouring counties.” “The population of the county,” he estimated in the late eighteenth century, “amounts to above twenty-one thousand souls, four thousand five hundred of whom are negro slaves.”¹⁸³ His observations held farther north in Charlestown: “The number of negroes is consequently considerable; and white labourers are scarce in proportion.”¹⁸⁴ Slavery had started to change the lower Valley. And African American slaves populated the region in greater and greater numbers.

In discussing the Scots-Irish, German, and Virginia settlers, Warren Hofstra observes: “Although administratively bound together, these two groups represented different, but not necessarily incompatible, ways of ordering life, creating landscapes, making a living, arranging relations among social, ethnic, and religious groups, and pursuing aspirations for the

¹⁷⁹ Philip Vickers Fithian, *Journal and Letters of Philip Vickers Fithian, 1773-1774: A Plantation Tutor of the Old Dominion*, ed. Hunter Dickinson Farish (Charlottesville, Va. Dominion Books, 1968), 1 January 1776, 158.

¹⁸⁰ Isaac, *The Transformation of Virginia*, 107.

¹⁸¹ Isaac, *The Transformation of Virginia*, 98-99.

¹⁸² Burnaby, *Travels through the Middle Settlements in North America*, 25.

¹⁸³ La Rochefoucauld-Liancourt, *Travels through the United States of North America*, vol. III, 208-9.

¹⁸⁴ La Rochefoucauld-Liancourt, *Travels through the United States of North America*, vol. III, 210.

good life.”¹⁸⁵ Although Hofstra rightfully acknowledges the interconnectivity of these peoples, the entry of Virginia’s planter class irrevocably transformed the region. Whereas independence and self-sufficiency ensured the success of German and Scots-Irish farmers, slavery was at the root of planters’ “domestic authority and political success.”¹⁸⁶ The enslaved African Americans who journeyed across the Appalachian Mountains and labored on farms and plantations serve as critical reminders that Virginia’s story of first families and independence is rooted in slavery. Edmund Morgan’s *American Slavery, American Freedom* isolated black slavery and white freedom as the central paradox of colonial Virginia—in-deed, of early America.¹⁸⁷ The Shenandoah Valley did not escape this dilemma.

Conclusion

Unfree labor—in the form of servitude and slavery—was present in the Valley’s from its earliest settlement by colonists. And white “notions of liberty,” Peter Carmichael reminds us, “were grounded in the institution of slavery.” When German and Scots-Irish immigrants came into the Shenandoah Valley, they entered a colony in which men’s freedom “depended upon the enslavement of African Americans.”¹⁸⁸ The colony’s legal systems reified that central idea and the society’s belief systems perpetuated it. In a sense, individual’s disinclination to owe slaves, just like an economic inability to buy slaves, did not and could not change the world in which they lived. No county in the Shenandoah Valley ever had or even approached a black majority as was true in the 1750s Tidewater. Moreover, the region’s ethnic diversity marked it different from eastern Virginia because immigrants from Pennsylvania comprised the majority of settlers in the lower Valley. Together Germans, Scots-Irish, and Irish settlers created a society composed of planters, farmers, servants, and slaves. Only by emphasizing each social strata of the Shenandoah Valley, can the region’s full history be revealed and discussed. It is therefore imperative that interpretive models reflect how the variegated threads of black and white life created a social fabric that was at once different from but still connected to the larger colony of Virginia.

¹⁸⁵ Hofstra, *A Separate Place*, 25.

¹⁸⁶ Brown, *Good Wives, Nasty Wenches, and Anxious Patriarchs*, 321.

¹⁸⁷ Morgan, *American Slavery, American Freedom*.

¹⁸⁸ Peter S. Carmichael, “The Bonds of a Valley Community,” 3-4, unpublished paper in the Cedar Creek archives, 12.

CHAPTER TWO

LABOR

In 1783, Isaac Hite, Jr., received 483 acres from his father. The transfer of land marked the beginnings of Belle Grove Plantation. Although a typical transition, it nonetheless remained symbolic. Grandson of one of the region's earliest settlers, Jost Hite, Isaac Hite's plantation community illustrates how the Shenandoah Valley had changed over time. Eleanor Madison Hite—daughter of Virginia scion and owner of Montpelier plantation in Orange County, Virginia, James Madison—was given as dowry 15 enslaved African Americans: Jerry, Jemmy, Sally, Milly, Eliza and her five children, and Truelove and her four children.¹⁸⁹ Whereas the Valley's first white settlers were seeking to establish self-sufficiency, their ancestors had become dependent upon the labor and subjugation of other human beings.

Over time Belle Grove grew and with it the enslaved population. At its height in the 1810s, 103 enslaved African Americans labored for the Hite family. When Isaac Hite died in 1836, his estate included two enslaved blacksmiths: Jim, thirty-five-years-of-age and Carter, thirty. Jim was likely a master at his craft for he had been valued at \$1,000.00. Carter, less skilled, perhaps an apprentice or a journeyman, had been assigned a value of \$350.00.¹⁹⁰ Jim and Carter created objects essential to Belle Grove's day-to-day operations. They made and mended farm tools. They also produced a variety of items essential to the household. When Hite's needs grew too great he looked beyond Belle Grove for metalwork. On one occasion he paid African American blacksmith, William Johnston, for the mending of scythes.¹⁹¹ And in another instance he had tools for carpentry fixed by an unnamed blacksmith.¹⁹²

The work of Jim and Carter at Belle Grove reveal the diversified nature of slavery and work on large plantations in the lower Valley such as Belle Grove. Rather than strictly forced agricultural laborers, throughout the Valley the enslaved worked within the household and as semi-skilled and skilled craftsmen. Although a region rich in farmland, the Shenandoah Valley also featured some of the most important iron furnaces in the Upper South. And the plantation, although often envisioned as a bucolic place of quietude, was a sprawling complex that buzzed with the labor of black and white families. It is often difficult today for visitors to see the plantation for its reality. In their mind's eye, perhaps,

¹⁸⁹ Greer, "Archaeological Investigations," 7.

¹⁹⁰ Isaac Hite Inventory, Frederick County Clerk's Office, Will Book 19.

¹⁹¹ June 1800, Blacksmith Bill, Document 77, Hite Family Papers, vol. IV.

¹⁹² Undated, Blacksmith Bill, Document 79, Hite Family Papers, vol. IV.

are old paintings they once observed. Images that showed, as scholar John Michael Vlach observes, “surprisingly few black figures” and often omitted “indications of agricultural labor.”¹⁹³ Or, an awareness of working plantations has been tainted by popular culture, especially scenes drawn from *Gone with the Wind*. Whatever the case, it is hard for public historians today to interpret the realities of both plantations and enslaved labor given the preconceptions and perceptions of average visitors.



Figure 4. Edward Savage’s “*The East Front of Mount Vernon*” envisions the plantation as an idealized, pastoral space.

Black labor, whether enslaved or hired, nevertheless proved central to both large plantations and middling farms in the lower Valley. Forced labor, many whites believed, could potentially bolster profits. Witness the cold calculations Jeremiah Simple offered to the readers of *The American Farmer* in 1821: “In Virginia, a peck of corn meal per week is considered an allowance for a negro. A well fed horse will eat a peck of corn a day, besides hay to an equal amount. A horse then eats as much in one day as will supply a negro two weeks: then the expense of feeding one horse is equal to the expense of feeding fourteen negroes—consequently the expense of feeding the fine extra horses on neighbour Simpleton’s farm, is fully equal to the expense of feeding seventy negroes.”¹⁹⁴ Simple’s

¹⁹³ John Michael Vlach, *The Planter’s Prospect: Privilege and Slavery in Plantation Paintings* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 2.

¹⁹⁴ Jeremiah Simple, “To the Editor of the American Farmer,” *The American Farmer*, vol. III, (June 1821): 293.

observations not only reflect the economic arguments white Virginians made to justify slavery but also reveal how easily they entwined discussions of slavery and husbandry. Both animals and the enslaved, in whites' cruel view, were property to be used for relentless labor.

Cash crops played a central role in shaping southern history and defining the region's labor systems. Valley residents' preference for mixed agriculture and small-scale farming marked the area as different from the eighteenth-century tobacco plantations of the Chesapeake or the nineteenth-century cotton plantations of the Deep South; yet, Valley farms were entirely similar to yeoman farms across the South. Valley farmsteads typically ranged from 100-to-300 acres, though sizable plantations also existed. This the second chapter will be comparative in nature. Belle Grove will stand as an example of large-scale, mixed farming. As a nineteenth-century visitor observed, "The general system pursued by Major H., is a mixed one – under which the cultivation of the staple grains, wheat, rye, oats and corn are combined with the manufacture of some of these into spirit."¹⁹⁵ Although the plantation's enslaved populations varied over time, the Hite family owned 276 enslaved persons between 1783 and 1851.¹⁹⁶ The Hite family's operation will be compared to more typical slaveholding households that held five or fewer enslaved African Americans. Above all else, this chapter stresses that the experiences of the enslaved greatly depended on the scale of farming operations. Daily life for enslaved individuals or families varied and this chapter seeks to explore black communities on larger plantations, such as Belle Grove, and the enslaved who labored with whites on smaller farms isolated from kinship networks. This chapter will pay particular attention to cycles of work, daily material conditions, and the construction and maintenance of African-American culture.

Farming

Tobacco is notoriously difficult on the soil. Although Virginia planters had enjoyed great profits in the early-to-mid seventeenth century, the halcyon days were over before the eighteenth century dawned. Tobacco certainly continued to be integral to the Upper South's plantations but wheat "became the principal market crop."¹⁹⁷ The Tidewater gentry who crossed the Appalachian Mountains brought with them tobacco culture but also diversified agriculture. Thus, as travelers journeyed through the Shenandoah Valley around the late 1700s and into the early nineteenth century they encountered a variegated

¹⁹⁵ John Stuart Skinner, "Notes on Virginia Husbandry," *The American Farmer*, III, no. 14 (June 1821): 105-6.

¹⁹⁶ "Belle Grove History," <https://bellegrove.org/about/history> [accessed 27 December 2017] and Michelle G. Proulx, Reagan A. Cronin, and R Shane McGary, "A Ground Penetrating Radar Survey of Belle Grove Cemetery," Unpublished paper, N/D.

¹⁹⁷ Morgan, *Slave Counterpoint*, 47.

landscape with fields of grain crops and flax.¹⁹⁸ Horses, cattle, sheep, chickens, and pigs populated farmyards and grazing pastures, while outbuildings and barns supported the main house.¹⁹⁹ On middling farms and large plantations, the enslaved labored in the fields and supported the household.

Within the lower Valley farm sizes and enslaved populations varied greatly. By 1850, according to Kenneth E. Koons, “almost 25,000 slaves (20 percent of the total population) resided in the valley, and for 1860 the corresponding figure stands at nearly 24,000 (18 percent).²⁰⁰ Yet, the disparate farm sizes meant that slave populations differed across place. Clarke County’s enslaved population stood at nearly 50 percent, whereas Shenandoah County held at 7 percent.²⁰¹ A traveler who visited Woodstock in the late eighteenth century noticed, “Negroes are not numerous, and only to be found in large families.”²⁰² The same held for Newtown where only the “Great planters . . . as in every other part of the valley,” had “a considerable number of negroes.”²⁰³ The eastern counties of the lower Valley, by contrast, had larger, more valuable farming operations. “Clarke County farmers possessed an average of 288 improved acres,” historian Jonathan Berkey reveals, “almost twice the amount of Frederick County farms.”²⁰⁴ Larger farms meant more slaves but never in the number witnessed across the Deep South. “Most lower Valley slaveholders owned fewer than ten slaves,” observes Berkey. “In 1860,” he goes on, “the average slaveholding in the region ranged from a high of 9.52 in Clarke to 4.95 in Berkeley County. Seventy-eight of the region’s slaveholders (4.7 percent) could be considered ‘planters,’ as they possessed more than twenty slaves. The largest plantation, located in Clarke County, had less than 200 slaves. In Berkeley and Frederick counties, slaveowners made up 16 percent of household heads in 1860. In Jefferson County 33 percent of household heads owned slaves, and in Clarke, 51 percent of the county’s household heads were slaveholders.”²⁰⁵ Berkey’s research not only demonstrates the variegated nature of slavery in the lower Valley but also

¹⁹⁸ Mitchell, *Commercialism and Frontier*, 140.

¹⁹⁹ In 1850, farms in the lower Valley averaged 250 acres. A family of twelve used this land for crops and livestock. “Perhaps they used eight acres for wheat, maybe five in corn, a half acre for potatoes, and less for the garden. But they needed rather more to feed their livestock and poultry.” Schlebecker, “Farmers in the Lower Shenandoah Valley, 1850:” 464.

²⁰⁰ Kenneth E. Koons, “‘The Colored Laborers Work as Well as When Slaves’: African Americans in the Breadbasket of the Confederacy, 1850-1880,” in *Archaeological Perspectives on the American Civil War*, ed., Clarence R. Geier and Stephen R. Potter (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2000), 231-2.

²⁰¹ Koons, “‘The Colored Laborers Work as Well as When Slaves,’” 233.

²⁰² La Rochefoucauld-Liancourt, *Travels through the United States of North America*, vol. III, 196.

²⁰³ La Rochefoucauld-Liancourt, *Travels through the United States of North America*, vol. III, 200.

²⁰⁴ Berkey, “War in the Borderland,” 37.

²⁰⁵ Berkey, “War in the Borderland,” 41.

spotlights the high concentrations of slaveholders in Jefferson and Clarke counties. The latter two counties, in particular, expose the old shibboleth of the Shenandoah Valley as a region devoid of slavery.

Belle Grove's size, especially at its height in the early nineteenth century, deserves context for most farms in the lower Valley were much smaller. An 1810 advertisement for lands and buildings in the *Farmers' Repository* offers an excellent description of a small to middling level farmstead. According to the article, ninety to one hundred acres were to be sold along Bab's Marsh, five-miles from Winchester. "On the premises are a good dwelling house, kitchen, a smoke house, barn, stable, &c. a valuable orchard of apples and pears in full bearing, an excellent distillery which has been in constant work for some years – the country around abounding in fruit and grain." The land also held essential resources: "There are two never failing spring within twenty yards of the house, and two good merchant mills within one mile."²⁰⁶ Although white families generally worked smaller farms themselves, during especially busy times they might have relied on hired slave labor. Freeholders, moreover, were linked to slaveholders by economic, familial, and political ties. And perhaps most critically, white notions of liberty, Peter S. Carmichael charges, "were grounded in the institution of slavery. Virtually every white man, regardless of his station, believed that his freedom depended upon the enslavement of African Americans."²⁰⁷ White Americans' independence and self-identification were fundamentally tied to racial hierarchies.

Although the enslaved population decreased at Belle Grove over the first half of the nineteenth century, the institution continued to thrive in Virginia. In fact, Edward Ayers charges, "slavery was expanding in Virginia, especially in the mountains of the southwest." In Augusta County, which anchored his study, the "proportion of the county's population constituted by slaves had remained constant for the last forty years" and "Virginia remained the largest slave state in the Union."²⁰⁸ By the late antebellum period, slaves composed one in five inhabitants of the Valley.²⁰⁹

Belle Grove served as an example of the sophistication of farming operations in the lower Valley. A spirit of industry and innovation had allowed the Hites "to engage in commercial farming while creating a virtually self-sufficient household economy."²¹⁰ In 1821, John Stuart Skinner published an article for *The American Farmer* highlighting Belle Grove. Skinner first applauded Hite's use of "Plaster of Paris, in connexion with the *field* culture of clover in the Valley of Shenandoah—and was well satisfied after more than

²⁰⁶ "Lands & Houses for Sale," 22 June 1810, *Farmers' Repository* (Charles Town, Virginia [W.V.]).

²⁰⁷ Carmichael, "The Bonds of a Valley Community," 12.

²⁰⁸ Ayers, *In the Presence of Mine Enemies*, 22

²⁰⁹ Koons, "'The Colored Laborers Work as Well as When Slaves,'" 232.

²¹⁰ Carmichael, "The Bonds of a Valley Community," 7.

twenty-five years experience, that its effect on clover and other crops, had greatly diminished.” Skinner went on to describe the agricultural diversification practiced by Hite, which he described as a “*mixed one*.” Fields were planted with “staple grains, wheat, rye, oats and corn,” which were used to sustain the family, manufacture spirits, and fodder the livestock.²¹¹ Belle Grove achieved success, in Skinner’s eyes, because the “operation was a sophisticated one. Like a number of elite farmers and progressive agriculturalists of his day, Hite was an agricultural pioneer who followed the most current developments in farming.”²¹² Farmers and planters in the Valley continued to see yields from the land because of their inventive approaches. By at least the eighteenth century, white Virginians had started to experiment with fertilizers and crop rotation. Such practices had achieved more perfection in the early nineteenth century. And, by 1850, “the evidence shows beyond much dispute that in 1850 farmers in the lower Valley fertilized their lands on a considerable scale.”²¹³ Moreover, writes John Schlebecker, “Farmers in the Valley also knew about the nitrate-fixing powers of legumes such as clover.”²¹⁴

Planters’ and farmers’ interest in agricultural improvement entwined with their use of enslaved labor. A revealing account from the *American Farmer* offers insight into the use of enslaved labor on a middling level farm. According to the anonymous author, his “policy, and humanity dictate the propriety of elevating the nature and condition of those *people*, as much, at least as they will consistently bear. My creed, as an agriculturalist, is to make the greatest possible product, from the least possible labour, &c.”²¹⁵ Although the author’s words must be weighed carefully and viewed with a degree of skepticism, they align with a set of beliefs dating back to the eighteenth century. Masters believed it their obligation to care for and protect their dependents. A traveler to the region maintained, “These slaves, who are in general well treated in Virginia, are upon the whole much more so by these poor farmers, who share with them toils of the fields, and who, although they do not clothe and feed them well, yet treat them, in this respect, as well as they do themselves.”²¹⁶ Unwritten in all of these accounts, of course, was the belief that slaves “owed” their masters deference,

²¹¹ John Stuart Skinner, “Notes on Virginia Husbandry,” *The American Farmer*, vol. III, no. 14 (June 1821): 105.

²¹² Gabrielle M. Lanier and Phoebe G. Harding, “Belle Grove Plantation Overseer’s House: Historic Architectural Assessment (March 2006), 52-3.

²¹³ Schlebecker, “Farmers in the Lower Shenandoah Valley, 1850,” 469.

²¹⁴ Schlebecker, “Farmers in the Lower Shenandoah Valley, 1850,” 471.

²¹⁵ W***** S*****, “The Editor’s Notes on the Husbandry of Some Counties in Virginia—view of Mr. S*****’s farm in Shenandoah County,” *The American Farmer*, vol. III, no. 18 (July 1821): 141.

²¹⁶ La Rochefoucault Liancourt, *Travels Through the United States of North America, the Country of the Iroquois, and Upper Canada*, vol. II, 69.

obedience, and service.²¹⁷ Moreover, claims that the enslaved were “well treated” or “elevated” by servitude are highly subjective assessments that reveal as much as about privileged whites’ perceptions and ideas than any potential insights into the material realities of slavery.

By the time of Skinner’s 1821 article, Belle Grove had grown to over 7,000 acres, which 101 enslaved African Americans worked. The enslaved were nonetheless rendered silent actors in his account. American loyalist and social commentator John Ferdinand Smyth Stuart’s words are more revealing. As he traveled through Virginia, part of a longer North American journey which resulted in a 1784 published account, he reflected, “The poor negroe slaves alone work hard, and fare still harder. It is astonishing,” he continued, “and unaccountable to conceive what an amazing degree of fatigue these poor, but happy, wretches do undergo, and can support.”²¹⁸ Work began at the break of day and allowed little time for breakfast. The enslaved labored until noon when they quickly consumed food before returning to the fields. Planters believed fully in the institution. In his travels through the South, the famed landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted conversed with one white Virginian who proclaimed, “our slaves are better off, as they are, than the majority of your free laboring classes at the North.”²¹⁹ The Virginian’s pronouncement was part of a social theory that had developed during the early-to-mid nineteenth century proclaiming the natural order of an agricultural society that relied on, or allowed for, slave labor as opposed to the “unnatural” order of a wage-based economy.

Whites held prejudicial views that assigned blacks innate “qualities” perfect for hard, physical labor. Furthermore, they loudly announced that the “institution of domestic slavery exists over far the greater portion of the inhabited earth.”²²⁰ In 1820, the *Farmers’ Repository* reprinted an article from *The American Farmer* on “the Health of the Negroes.” In it the author contended: “It is a well known fact to Physicians of the southern states” that slaves “will escape the bilious affections of the hot season, while the white inhabitants are falling victims.”²²¹ Whites had long pronounced intrinsic differences between Africans and Europeans. By the second quarter of the nineteenth century, leading figures posited “scientific” studies to support cultural racism. Josiah C. Nott stood as the most famous practitioner of ethnology. In his lectures on the “natural history” of the “Caucasian and Negro Races” he suggested the “skin of the African . . . is known to generate less heat;”

²¹⁷ Rhys Isaac, *Landon Carter’s Uneasy Kingdom: Revolution and Rebellion on a Virginia Plantation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 72.

²¹⁸ John Ferdinand Smyth Stuart, *A Tour in the United States of America*, vol. 1 (Dublin: G. Perrin, 1784), 26-7.

²¹⁹ Frederick Law Olmsted, *A Journey in the Seaboard Slave States in the Years 1853-1854* (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1904), 48.

²²⁰ William Harper, “Memoir on Slavery,” in *The Ideology of Slavery: Proslavery Thought in the Antebellum South, 1830-1860*, ed. Drew Gilpin Faust (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press), 1981, 79.

²²¹ “From the American Farmer,” 1 November 1820, *Farmers’ Repository*.

therefore, he “stands a hot climate better.”²²² These and other ideas gained increased currency in the 1830s concurrent with the publication of numerous articles defending slavery on the grounds of scientific “evidence” and historical precedent.



Figure 5. Benjamin Henry Latrobe’s famous images, “*An Overseer Doing His Duty near Fredericksburg, Virginia*,” ca. 1798, portrays enslaved women conducting hard labor under the watch of a haughty white overseer. Maryland Historical Society.

A system of gang labor had developed on the tobacco plantations of the Chesapeake in which the enslaved worked in large groups under the supervision of an overseer. It is likely that planters in the Valley, especially those drawn from the ranks of the Tidewater gentry, continued to use this organizational system in some form. But it is also clear that because of the Valley’s smaller dispersed farmsteads, the social boundaries between African Americans and whites were sometimes ambiguous. Rural areas, such as the Shenandoah Valley, depended on a variety of free and unfree labor. Laborers, according to Max Grivno in his study of work along the Mason-Dixon Line, “forged economic partnerships, friendships, and romances at workplaces and at the fairgrounds, taverns, and rural crossroads where they gathered to dance, drink, gamble, and peddle their wares.”²²³

²²² Josiah C. Nott, “Two Lectures on the Natural History of the Caucasian and Negro Races,” in Faust, *The Ideology of Slavery*, 226.

²²³ Max Grivno, *Gleanings of Freedom: Free and Slave Labor along the Mason-Dixon Line, 1790-1860* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2011), 4.

The nature of race relations in the nineteenth century had developed across time and space. Beginning in the eighteenth century, “Chesapeake whites always interacted more closely and openly with blacks than their Lowcountry counterparts.”²²⁴ The small farms and plantations of the Valley accelerated this trend. Unlike their counterparts in eastern Virginia, according to J. Susanne Simmons and Nancy T. Sorrells, “Shenandoah Valley farmers often worked side by side with their slaves, both at harvest time and throughout the year.”²²⁵ In the late eighteenth century, La Rochefoucauld-Liancourt observed, “But here, where the white people work themselves with the negroes, and where a great number of husbandmen arrive from countries where the sickle is made use of, they find no difficulty in mowing with the sickle.”²²⁶ He also recorded this arrangement at Newtown where “small farmers keep only one or two [slaves], and work along with them.”²²⁷ Rochefoucauld-Liancourt’s accounts reflect the prevailing practice of close interaction between whites and blacks on small farmsteads.

In 1803, Isaac Hite wrote to James Madison. In beginning the letter he cited an aphorism, they “that repose under grass is the very soul of husbandry.” Hite went on to discuss various systems of farming and means of agricultural improvement. His ultimate goal was “to invigorate, enrich, and cement every quarter of our vast empire.”²²⁸ Farming defined life in Virginia’s great Shenandoah Valley and enslaved labor enabled middling farmers and great planters to generate substantial profits and expand their personal kingdoms. Planters such as Isaac Hite infused the enterprise with scientific study that attempted to secure the longevity and fertility of the soil. They believed themselves to be magnanimous masters who cared for those they deemed dependents.

For black Virginians slavery was, in the powerful word used by African American Henry Brant of Millwood, Virginia, “abominable.” He went on to charge, “I think slaveholders know it is wrong: they are an intelligent people and they know it. They ought to have done their duty,—given me my freedom and something to live on for what myself and forefathers had earned. I don’t see how a man can obtain heaven, and continue to do as the slaveholders do.”²²⁹ Farming meant endless work and difficult days. As the nineteenth-century American abolitionist Benjamin Drew summarized: “You hear people say to the negro, ‘Why don’t you accomplish something?’ You see the colored men, their faces scarred and wrinkled, and almost deprived of intelligence in some cases,—their

²²⁴ Morgan, *Slave Counterpoint*, 296.

²²⁵ Simmons and Sorrells, “Slave Hire and the Development of Slavery in Augusta County, Virginia,” 174.

²²⁶ *Travels through the United States of North America*, vol. III, 194

²²⁷ *Travels through the United States of North America*, vol. III, 200.

²²⁸ Isaac Hite to James Madison, 12 August 1803, Hite Family Papers, vol. I.

²²⁹ Benjamin Drew, *The Refugee: or the Narratives of Fugitive Slaves in Canada* (Boston: John P. Jewett and Company, 1856), 345-6.

manliness crushed out; stooping, awkward in gait,—kept in entire ignorance.” Continuing, the author charged, “Now, to ask them why they do n’t do some great thing, is like tying a man or weakening him by medicine, and then saying, ‘Why don’t you go and do that piece of work, or plant that field with wheat and corn?’” Drew concluded by simply stating: “Slavery is mean. The slaveholders want their slaves for pocket-money. The slaves are their right hand to do their work.”²³⁰

Sales

On September 8, 1824, Isaac Hite posted an advertisement in which he intended to sell “a large number of HORSES and CATTLE,” “a great variety of PLANTATION IMPLEMENTS,” and “sixty SLAVES.”²³¹ For whites in the region the event represented a ubiquitous economic transaction—the type of event that occurred regularly throughout the agrarian South. For blacks word must have traveled through the Belle Grove community and beyond like an electrical current. Slave sales reduced a person to a price. As historian Walter Johnson maintains, “slaves’ communities, their families, and their own bodies were suffused with the threat of sale, whether they were in the pens or not. And every slaveholder lived through the stolen body of a slave.”²³² Both masters and the state assigned these stolen bodies a value. John Quincy Adams of Frederick County recalled how his masters would “put their hands on one of the little negroes, and say, ‘here is \$1,000, or \$1,500 or \$2,000.’”²³³ A slave’s “value” was nowhere more clearly demonstrated than when they became “valueless” in the eyes of the state. In June 1827, Issac Hite successfully petitioned tax exemption for his elderly slaves “Harry, Fred, Liza, Diana, Abba, Frank, Priscilla, Truelove, Sukey, and Anna.”²³⁴ However shocking to modern audiences inured by lost cause mythology, the commodification and exploitation of human beings was part and parcel of antebellum southern culture.

The number of slave sales in the lower Valley accelerated by the end of the antebellum era. In some cases, the sold slaves were moved to plantations and farms outside the Valley. Accordingly, as Jonathan Berkey notes, “slavery declined by almost eight percent

²³⁰ Benjamin Drew, *A North-Side View of Slavery. The Refugee: or the Narratives of Fugitive Slaves in Canada. Related by Themselves, with an Account of the History and Condition of the Colored Population of Upper Canada, found at Documenting the American South*, <https://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/drew/drew.html> [accessed 3 January 2020], 78.

²³¹ “Sixty Slaves for Sale,” *Daily National Intelligencer* (Washington, D.C.), 8 September 1824.

²³² Johnson, *Soul by Soul*, 214.

²³³ John Quincy Adams, *Narrative of the Life of John Quincy Adams, When in Slavery, and Now as a Freeman* (Harrisburg, PA: Sieg, Printer and Stationer, 1872), 9.

²³⁴ Tax Exemption on Slaves, June 1827, Document 35, Hite Family Papers, vol. III.

in the lower Valley.” Berkey’s findings mark a point of contrast for, as noted earlier, the number of enslaved remained steady in the upper Valley and in Virginia more broadly. Nonetheless, by 1860, “the number of slaves had declined to 11,244” in the lower Valley as compared to 12,205 in 1850. He goes on to note, “If the crude growth rates derived from the census figures are correct, lower Valley slaveholders moved about 2,000 of their chattel out of the region during the antebellum decade.”²³⁵ Significantly, then, the end of the antebellum era marked a notable shift in the Valley’s geography of slavery.

Sale advertisements conveyed the most important “qualities” to bolster sales and promise labor. Slaves’ occupation and skillsets were often listed and key factors, such as age or injuries, were noted. Names were almost always absent in advertisement, thereby laying bare the brutal reality of forced labor. Instead, people became defined by their potential for work. The Upper Valley’s *Staunton Censor*, for example, held an ad for “Nine Likely Negroes, None of which is past the prime of life.”²³⁶ Likewise, Jefferson County’s *Farmers’ Repository* promised for sale “several likely young Virginia born slaves.”²³⁷ Thomas Briscoe offered for hire in the *Farmers’ Repository* “a valuable negro man, who is well acquainted with farming work; he is a first rate ploughman, an excellent cradler or reaper, a very good shoemaker, and a tolerable rough carpenter—in short he is a very handy fellow.”²³⁸ The studied use of language advanced the economics of slavery by directing buyers or hirers to those enslaved advertised as the most “likely.”

Early nineteenth-century advertisements went to length to note if the enslaved were Virginia-born because of increased fears over rebellious or suicidal foreign-born slaves. Indeed, white Southerners’ fears of African-born slaves contributed to their abolition of the trans-Atlantic slave trade. Two examples from Jefferson County are illustrative: “Twenty-two valuable Virginia born Negroes” were to be sold in the summer of 1810, whereas “thirteen most valuable Virginia Born Slaves” were advertised in the spring of 1820.²³⁹ By the second quarter of the eighteenth century whites had attached particular characteristics to Africans. People from Angola and Gambia were supposed to be good workers, while the Ibo were deemed highly emotional.²⁴⁰ At least in the Deep South, buyers likewise used skin color to determine a slave’s role. As Walter Johnson explains, “Buyers

²³⁵ Berkey, “War in the Borderland,” 51.

²³⁶ “Public Sale,” 10 August 1808, *Staunton Censor*.

²³⁷ “Negroes for Sale,” 29 April 1808, *Farmers’ Repository* (Charles Town, Virginia [W.V.]).

²³⁸ “A Valuable Negro Man for Hire,” 19 January 1820, *Farmers’ Repository*.

²³⁹ “Negroes for Sale,” 29 June 1810, *Farmers’ Repository* and “Administrator’s Sale,” 3 May 1820, *Farmers’ Repository*.

²⁴⁰ Betty Wood, *Slavery in Colonial America, 1619-1776* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005), 19.

preferred darker to lighter people for work in their fields and lighter to darker people for skilled and domestic labor.”²⁴¹ With that said and inexplicably, references to skin color appear infrequently in sale advertisements in the Valley.

In late eighteenth- and early nineteenth- century Jefferson County, planters and trustees used taverns for slave sales. “A young Negro Fellow, and a Negro Boy,” *The Virginia Journal and Alexandria Advertiser* noted, were to be sold with the personal effects of James Nourse, Esq., at Captain Cherry’s tavern.²⁴² Thomas Flagg’s tavern had a sale of “several likely young Virginia born slaves” while “Two or three Negro Women” were to be sold “before the door of John Anderson’s tavern.”²⁴³ Tavern owners opened up their businesses to prospective buyers or leasers so that they might view slaves. On Christmas Day 1809, “two Negro women, and a negro girl about 15 years of age” could be “seen at Anderson’s tavern.”²⁴⁴ Charlestown’s Fulton’s tavern was also employed for slave sales.²⁴⁵ In the fall of 1813, for example, “a valuable negro man, who is sober, honest and industrious, and understands plantation work” was to be sold there.²⁴⁶ The practice extended to Harpers Ferry where “Grayham’s tavern” was used for slave sales.²⁴⁷

The use of taverns, courthouses, and public spaces for slave sales is significant, for it illustrates how normalized slavery had become in the lower Valley. Non-slaveholders drank at taverns, attended court days and served on juries, and walked along public streets. By so doing they came in contact with a trade in human beings. It was an especially common occurrence in larger lower Valley communities such as Winchester, Harpers Ferry, and Charlestown. These local transactions, moreover, connected the lower Valley to a broader economic system in which, during the antebellum era, over two million slaves were sold “in inter-state, local, and state-ordered sales.”²⁴⁸

Some slaves were deemed domestic servants and labored primarily within the household. A “very likely Negro Woman, between twenty-four and five years of age, with two children” was described as “a tolerable good cook, an excellent washer and ironer, and a very good spinner.”²⁴⁹ Another “Young Negro Woman” had been “accustomed mostly to

²⁴¹ Johnson, *Soul by Soul*, 138.

²⁴² “Whereas the bonds,” 29 September 1785, *The Virginia Journal and Alexandria Advertiser*.

²⁴³ “Negroes for Sale,” 22 April 1808, *Farmers’ Repository* and “Public Sale,” 3 February 1809, *Farmers’ Repository*.

²⁴⁴ “Negroes for hire,” 15 December 1809, *Farmers’ Repository*.

²⁴⁵ “Trustee’s Sale,” 28 December 1810, *Farmers’ Repository*; “Trustee’s Sale,” 27 December 1811, *Farmers’ Repository*; “Trustee’s Sale,” 24 December 1817, *Farmers’ Repository*, and “Trustee’s Sale,” 15 March 1820, *Farmers’ Repository*.

²⁴⁶ “Negro Man for Sale,” 21 October 1813, *Farmers’ Repository*.

²⁴⁷ “Trustee’s Sale,” 18 August 1819, *Farmers’ Repository*.

²⁴⁸ Johnson, *Soul by Soul*, 7.

²⁴⁹ “Negroes for Sale,” 26 May 1809, *Farmers’ Repository*.

housework.”²⁵⁰ The *Sentinel of the Valley* advertised “2 Valuable Slaves,” Patty and Nelson. The former was a “good cook, washer and ironer,” and the latter had “considerable knowledge of the Cabinet and Carpenter’s trade.”²⁵¹ Finally, *The Staunton Spy* advertised the sale of “A Valuable Negro Wench, about eighteen years of age – accustomed to spinning, sewing . . . and house work; she is a good hand in the field, and perfectly healthy, stout.”²⁵² Domestic slaves were employed in large plantations, such as Belle Grove, but also on middling farms and were, therefore, actively sought by white Virginians.

Slaves proficient at trades were highly desired by buyers because they were essential to the plantation economy. An enslaved man, between 25- and 30-years-old, for instance, served as a shoemaker as indicated in the *Farmers’ Repository*.²⁵³ Another enslaved man, in the same periodical, was described as a “complete blacksmith, healthy, and not over 23 years of age. He is so valuable that had I not detected him in an act of dishonesty, I would not have taken 1500 dollars for him.”²⁵⁴ Among the twenty-two slaves to be sold in Charlestown in the early summer of 1810 were two carpenters and a blacksmith.²⁵⁵ And finally, an enslaved man from Jefferson County had presumably worked at a tavern, for he was a “good distiller and an excellent hostler.”²⁵⁶ Slaves who had learned skill trades were often assigned higher values than field hands because crafts such as shoemaking, carpentry, and blacksmithing were necessary to day-to-day farming operations. In rural areas, such as the lower Valley, skilled labor would have been scarcer, thus making craftsmen highly sought after.

Because planters in the Valley tended to have fewer slaves as compared to tidewater Virginia, African Americans were often proficient at different types of work. A series of advertisements for sales or hiring are illustrative of the work performed by men. Jefferson County’s John Downey requested for hire “A Stout, healthy negro man . . . who is well acquainted with farming, and is also an excellent house carpenter.”²⁵⁷ And a young man who was “well acquainted with farming and waggoning, and is also an excellent waiter” was being sold.²⁵⁸ “A likely Negro Man, about 28 years old, well acquainted with farming, and is also a good waiter.”²⁵⁹ Another advertisement offered “A stout healthy negro man, about 28 years of age – he is a pretty good shoemaker, and understands every part of labor necessary

²⁵⁰ “For Sale,” 7 July 1801, *Political Mirror*.

²⁵¹ “Trust Sale,” 11 March 1841, *Sentinel of the Valley*.

²⁵² “For Sale,” 9 November 1793, *The Staunton Spy*.

²⁵³ “A Negro Man For Sale,” 28 February 1812, *Farmers’ Repository*.

²⁵⁴ “A Valuable Blacksmith For Sale,” 27 March 1812, *Farmers’ Repository*.

²⁵⁵ “Negroes for Sale,” 29 June 1810, *Farmers’ Repository*.

²⁵⁶ “For Sale,” 20 October 1809, *Farmers’ Repository*.

²⁵⁷ “To Hire,” 2 February 1810, *Farmers’ Repository*.

²⁵⁸ “For Sale,” 21 September 1810, *Farmers’ Repository*.

²⁵⁹ “For Sale,” 28 August 1812, *Farmers’ Repository*.

on a plantation. – He is offered for sale because he absconded from his master.”²⁶⁰ The above advertisements give voice to the fluidity of slavery and further demonstrate its firm entrenchment in the Valley.

Virginians had long treated women of African descent differently than they did those from Europe. As historian Kathleen M. Brown writes of early colonial laws, “By including African women in the category of male tithables, Virginia lawmakers classified them as field laborers with a productive capacity equivalent to that of men.”²⁶¹ Thus, by the nineteenth century, enslaved women had been used for centuries as both field and domestic workers. Ben R. Saunders desired to hire out an enslaved woman who was “sufficiently qualified to perform any kind of house work, and a good hand on a farm.”²⁶² “A Stout Healthy Negro Woman,” who was “well qualified for a house servant, or plantation work,” was being sold in Jefferson County.²⁶³ One enslaved woman was deemed proficient at both house and field work, for she could sew and spin, perform house work, and was “a good hand in the field.”²⁶⁴ *The Farmers’ Repository* likewise advertised the sale of a woman who understood housework and would be “an excellent hand in the field.”²⁶⁵

“The market in slaves,” Walter Johnson writes, “held the promise that nonslaveholders could buy their way into the master class.”²⁶⁶ Sellers therefore deployed a variety of techniques to cater to both cash-poor slaveholders and non-slaveholders. Credit was frequently extended. “A Valuable Negro Man” in Jefferson County, for instance, was offered for “A credit” for “part of the purchase money.”²⁶⁷ Similarly, an enslaved man was offered for sale in April 1816 with the promise of “12 months credit,” and a “stout and healthy” enslaved woman was offered for one-third cash and “the rest on a credit of nine to twelve months.”²⁶⁸ In Shenandoah County, “sundry Slaves” were being sold “on a credit of nine months,” while the heirs of William Kemp proposed “to sell to the highest bidder, on credit of nine months, the interest of said heirs in two thirds of the Slaves in said decree mentioned.”²⁶⁹

²⁶⁰ “For Sale,” 31 July 1812, *Farmers’ Repository*.

²⁶¹ Brown, *Good Wives, Nasty Wenches, and Anxious Patriarchs*, 118.

²⁶² “For Hire,” 16 February 1810, *Farmers’ Repository*.

²⁶³ “For Sale,” 20 July 1810, *Farmers’ Repository*.

²⁶⁴ “For Sale,” 9 November 1793, *The Staunton Spy*.

²⁶⁵ “For Sale,” 10 June 1808, *Farmers’ Repository*.

²⁶⁶ Johnson, *Soul by Soul*, 80.

²⁶⁷ “A Valuable Negro Man For Sale,” 22 April 1808, *Farmers’ Repository*.

²⁶⁸ “Negro Man for Sale,” 17 April 1816, *Farmers’ Repository* and “For Sale,” 30 August 1820, *Farmers’ Repository*.

²⁶⁹ “Pursuant to a decree,” 18 March 1826, *Sentinel of the Valley* and “Will be hired,” 29 December 1825, *Sentinel of the Valley*.

To allay their guilt or keep public face, some masters went to great lengths to maintain enslaved families and find “good” masters. Masters’ actions give voice to historian Eugene D. Genovese’s perceptive argument that “Paternalism’s insistence upon mutual obligations—duties, responsibilities, and ultimately even rights—implicitly recognized the slaves’ humanity.”²⁷⁰ In Jefferson County, for example, George W. Humphreys advertised for sale “two negro women, four children, and a man – one of the women is an excellent cook, has three children, two boys and one girl, all must be sold together.” He maintained “These negroes are not to be sold for any fault, and the purchaser must be reputed a good master or mistress – none other need apply.”²⁷¹ The widow Elizabeth Jollife of Frederick County desired in her will that Crispon be treated in a “Christian like manner during his Life.”²⁷² Family members at Belle Grove followed suit. Isaac Hite Sr. asked in his 1794 will that “such of my negro women who have husbands belonging to me shall be sold with their husbands and where any of the women have young children, that the child be sold with its mother.”²⁷³ In a similar vein, Ann Hite’s will included the request that her “Negro man John may have the privilege of choosing a master.”²⁷⁴

No matter how a sale was framed, it laid bare an exploitive system of forced labor. Siram P. Henkel, writing from New Market in 1835, described a horrifying scene: “The day that I left Augusta I met the largest drove of slaves that has passed up the valley for many years, or perhaps that has ever passed the road: there were eighty-four chained together to one long chain; there were also a great many women and children that were also in company; the whole number of men, women and children was two-hundred and forty.”²⁷⁵ No matter how paternalistic a master considered him or herself, every slave was susceptible to sale. And because of these economic transactions lives were irreparably altered, communities sundered, and, in the worst instances, families shattered.

²⁷⁰ Eugene D. Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York: Vintage, 1976), 5.

²⁷¹ “Negroes for Sale,” 11 November 1811, *Farmers’ Repository*.

²⁷² Elizabeth Jollife, 3 May 1779, Frederick County Will Book, 1770-1783.

²⁷³ Estate of Isaac Hite, Frederick County Will Book 6, page 61.

²⁷⁴ Last Will and Testament Ann Hite, 5 January 1851, Hite Family Papers, Vol. III.

²⁷⁵ Siram P. Henkel to Margaret, 13 August 1835, Shenandoah County Historical Society (found in Cedar Creek and Belle Grove HRS Sources).



Figure 6. Lewis Miller, "Slave trader, Sold to Tennessee."

Hiring

Slave hiring illustrates how both non-slaveholders became enmeshed with slavery and the institution's adaptability in diversified and industrial economies. Hiring, moreover, "normalized" slavery as a form of labor, which, in turn, bolstered public acceptance.²⁷⁶ Scholars have traditionally studied slave hiring in urban or industrial settings.²⁷⁷ Accordingly, most historians have estimated that by the late antebellum era only about 5 to 10 percent of slaves across the American South were hired out.²⁷⁸ By so doing, scholars have

²⁷⁶ Simmons and Sorrells, "Slave Hire and the Development of Slavery in Augusta County, Virginia," 169.

²⁷⁷ For a concise and smart historiographical overview see, Simmons and Sorrells, "Slave Hire and the Development of Slavery in Augusta County, Virginia," 170.

²⁷⁸ Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll*, 390 and Peter Kolchin, *American Slavery, 1619-1877* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1993), 110. See also, Robert W. Fogel and Stanley L. Engerman, *Time on the Cross: The Economics of American Negro Slavery* (1974; repr., New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1989), 56. Interestingly, Fogel and Engerman were very early in asserting hiring's importance. As they wrote, "Hiring was not a minor or inconsequential feature of slavery," Fogel and Engerman, *Time on the Cross*, 56.

missed the critical role slave hiring played in mixed agricultural regions. Several case studies of Virginia counties have placed the number of the enslaved hired out as much higher than previously suggested. Sarah S. Hughes' study of Elizabeth County, Virginia, for example, reveals how hiring served as "key to the survival of slavery in the county." Hiring, she continues, "introduced flexibility in allocating workers in a diversified rural economy with low profit margins."²⁷⁹ Brenda Stevenson estimates that in Loudoun County at least 34 percent of the slaves were rented out in 1860.²⁸⁰ Although J. Susanne Simmons and Nancy T. Sorrells do not cite an exact number for Augusta County, they maintain the number sat higher than 6 percent, though it was difficult to determine the exact number hired out or in.²⁸¹

Although farmers in the lower Valley were different from those found in Hughes' and Stevenson's studies in key ways—cash crops were never grown in the same quantities, for example—their respective findings resonate and are bolstered by the work of Simmons and Sorrells in Augusta County. Farmers and planters in the lower Valley practiced mixed agriculture and many did so with low profit margins. Newspaper accounts from the lower Valley from the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth- century are replete with references to slave hiring, which demonstrated slaveholders' flexibility and the institution's potential for profit. With that said, Jonathan Berkey sets the numbers for slave hiring in the lower Valley as low. "In 1860," he notes, "hired slaves made up 2.8 percent of the slave population in Berkeley County, 2.3 percent of the slave population in Clarke, 1.9 percent in Frederick County, and 9.6 in Jefferson County." His research further demonstrates that slave hiring occurred more regularly in towns. "In Charles Town, Harpers Ferry, and Bolivar, hired slaves made up about 29 percent of the slave population; in Shepherdstown, the only other major town in the county, hired slaves made up 18.1 percent of the slave population."²⁸² Thus, interpreters must be very specific when discussing the practice slave hiring and offer a spectrum of statistics to fully reveal how practices varied across the Shenandoah Valley.

For the enslaved, being hired out meant working for a stranger for a protracted period of time, suffering separation from kin, and being susceptible to exploitation and abuse. Hirers assumed the rights of master, which included physical punishment.²⁸³ "Slaves were the only reliable laborers," in the words of Frederick Law Olmsted, "you could command them and *make* them do what was right."²⁸⁴ Hiring contracts and bonds discouraged poor treatment but could not, of course, promise good use. In fact, although

²⁷⁹ Hughes, "Slaves for Hire," 260-61.

²⁸⁰ Brenda L. Stevenson, *Life in Black and White: Family and Community in the Slave South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 184.

²⁸¹ Simmons and Sorrells, "Slave Hire and the Development of Slavery in Augusta County, Virginia," 170.

²⁸² Berkey, "War in the Borderland," 43.

²⁸³ Jonathan D. Martin, *Divided Mastery: Slave Hiring in the American South* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 138.

²⁸⁴ Olmsted, *A Journey in the Seaboard Slave States in the Years 1853-1854*, 93.

the enslaved were hired for a variety of tasks, the enslaved were often rented for difficult, mundane, or undesirable work. Olmsted's words are once again revealing, for he charged, "no white man would ever do certain kinds of work (such as taking care of cattle, or getting water or wood to be used in the house), and if you should ask a white man you had hired, to do such things, he would get mad and tell you he was n't a nigger."²⁸⁵ Olmsted's remarks reflected the strict racial hierarchy that existed in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Virginia. Slaves were pronounced biologically inferior to whites and fitted for sordid work.

There was a higher probability of a slave being hired out at least once over the course of his or her lifetime than of being sold to a new master.²⁸⁶ Henry Brant of Millwood, Virginia, for example, had been enslaved until he was twenty-three when he ran north for freedom. During that time he got "hired out at different places." Although, he claimed, "Usage was, compared with farming usage, good," he finally "saw that my case was pretty bad." He concluded to runaway rather than "live all my lifetime subject to be driven about at the will of another."²⁸⁷ Although rates varied, Frederick Law Olmsted's observation is a useful benchmark when he learned that "able-bodied field-hands were hired out . . . at the rate of one hundred dollars a year, and their board and clothing."²⁸⁸ A diarist in Clarke County confirmed Olmsted's numbers noting that men were hired out at between \$100 and \$120 dollars per year.²⁸⁹ Masters attempted to reduce slaves such as Henry Brant to hireable price but he actively resisted slavery until he secured his freedom.

Slave hiring commonly assumed a yearly cycle and slaveowners used economics and workload to make their decision about whether or not to pursue hiring out or in. The record further demonstrates that slaves held in trust were often more susceptible to being rented. Contracts "made around Christmas for fifty-one weeks began on New Year's Day and ended at the following Christmas, when slaves returned home."²⁹⁰ Lucy Washington, the executrix of G. S. Washington, took out an advertisement on December 8, 1809, to hire out "for the ensuing year, a number of Negroes, consisting of men, women, boys, and girls."²⁹¹ J. B. Henry, an agent for Lucy Washington, proclaimed on December 7, 1810, that "a number of very valuable slaves, consisting of men, women, boys and girls," would be hired out for the ensuing year "at the house of Mr. Thomas James, in Shepherd's-Town."²⁹² And the trustee for the children of Mrs. Harriet Christin promised in December to offer

²⁸⁵ Olmsted, *A Journey in the Seaboard Slave States in the Years 1853-1854*, 92.

²⁸⁶ Martin, *Divided Mastery*, 2.

²⁸⁷ Drew, *The Refugee*, 345.

²⁸⁸ Olmsted, *A Journey in the Seaboard Slave States in the Years 1853-1854*, 50.

²⁸⁹ Quoted in Koons and Noyalas, "Historic Resource Study," 35.

²⁹⁰ Simmons and Sorrells, "Slave Hire and the Development of Slavery in Augusta County, Virginia," 172.

²⁹¹ "Public Sale," 8 December 1809, *Farmers' Repository*.

²⁹² "Negroes to Hire," 7 December 1810, *Farmers' Repository*.

“for hire on the first day of January next.”²⁹³ Richard Baylor placed an ad in May, perhaps because he had fallen on hard times or workloads had shifted, and proposed to hire out “until next Christmas, one negro man and a boy.”²⁹⁴ Sometimes slaves were hired out in large groups as seen at Leetown when in the winter of 1808, when “about thirty Negroes, consisting of men, women, boys” were to be hired out along with “four or five negro women” who were to be sold.²⁹⁵ And in the winter of 1851, “A number of likely negroes male and female” were advertised for public hire two miles south of Woodstock.²⁹⁶

Work in the Valley also meant that slaves were hired out for the day or during periods of intense labor. A former slave from Northern Virginia, Frank Bell, described the crisis of harvest time that “Put everybody in de field . . . even de women. Growed mostly wheat on de plantation, an’ de men would scythe and cradle while de women folks would rake and bind.”²⁹⁷ A French traveler to the region echoed Bell’s description, albeit in slightly different form. As he wrote, “During the harvest of grain and tobacco, the Virginia and Maryland farmers offer money to their Negroes, and to others, to work on Sunday. . . . It is possible that the planter who hires laborers, not working himself, thinks that his salvation is not compromised, and that the salvation of the Negroes isn’t worth sacrificing a few sheaves of oats.”²⁹⁸ Accordingly, the geography of slavery shifted during harvest time as the enslaved worked across a wide of variety of farms for both non-slaveholders and the plantation aristocracy, thereby demonstrating the institution’s adaptability and viability in a mixed agricultural economy.

Labor demands varied greatly in the Valley, and those seeking slaves for hire asked for specific skillsets. Moreover, as Kenneth E. Koons and Warren Hofstra contend, “the world of wheat was not at odds with the world of slavery.”²⁹⁹ It is clear in the descriptions cited above that slaveholders had learned to vary labor based on work routines. This habit aligns with what planters in the Valley had long practiced. “General mixed farming” had become the predominate means of planting, which entailed the production of different types of crops and the raising of livestock.³⁰⁰ Although the majority of Valley farms were family-run enterprises, farmers looked without during particularly busy times such as

²⁹³ “Negroes for Hire,” 11 December 1812, *Farmers’ Repository*.

²⁹⁴ “Negroes for Sale,” 11 May 1810, *Farmers’ Repository*.

²⁹⁵ “Negroes to Hire,” 2 December 1808, *Farmers’ Repository*.

²⁹⁶ Quoted in *Glimpses of the Past in Shenandoah County*, Joseph B. Clower, Jr., ed., (The Woodstock Museum, Inc., 1984), 23.

²⁹⁷ Quoted in Simmons and Sorrells, “Slave Hire and the Development of Slavery in Augusta County, Virginia,” 174.

²⁹⁸ Ferdinand-M. Bayard, *Travels of a Frenchman in Maryland and Virginia*, trans., Ben C. McCary (1797; repr., Ann Arbor, Mich.: Edwards Brothers, Inc. 1950, 88.

²⁹⁹ Koons and Hofstra, “Introduction: The World Wheat Made,” in *After the Backcountry*, xxvi.

³⁰⁰ Koons and Noyalas, “Historic Resource Study,” 39.

harvest.³⁰¹ A number of the advertisements hoped to file this niche when they advertised for slaves proficient at numerous tasks that would be of great service to small farms. One trustee, for instance, offered for hire “a negro woman aged about 26, and a boy aged about 11; the woman is well known in this place, and has the character of being as valuable a slave as any in the valley, she is an excellent cook, washer, and table servant; the boy although of tender years, is remarkable for his activity & usefulness.”³⁰² John Downey placed an advertisement that sought to hire “A Stout, healthy negro man, Who is well acquainted with farming, and is also an excellent house carpenter.”³⁰³ Ben R. Saunders offered for hire “a Negro Woman, About 25 years of age, sufficiently qualified to perform any kind of house work, and a good hand on a farm.”³⁰⁴ Planters proved themselves both adaptive and flexible.³⁰⁵

In rare instances slaves hired themselves out for personal gain. Once again, the varied needs of farmers and planters in the Valley gave rise to this arrangement, which was far more typical in urban areas such as Baltimore and Richmond. Nonetheless, James H. Foster, a slave of Isaac S. Bowman, testified that he made shoes at night for his own benefit. He often performed work for Charles J. Hite of Strasburg and his slaves.³⁰⁶ William H. Woodward corroborated Foster’s testimony noting, “He used to work at his trade of nights and was very saving and in this way accumulated his property.”³⁰⁷ Although Foster’s story may be an aberration, it nevertheless demonstrates the resourcefulness of an enslaved man and his ability to astutely navigate labor systems for personal gain.

Slaveholders in the Valley used ironmaking to diversify their operations and slave hiring was integral to these operations. In fact, observes historian Peter S. Carmichael, “many of the slaves who labored at these iron mills were frequently rented from slaveholders throughout the state. The renting of slaves was on the rise during the antebellum period, as blacks worked in mines, railroads, and industries across the state, a development that counters the claim that slavery, since it was supposedly restricted to

³⁰¹ Koons and Noyalas, “Historic Resource Study,” 45.

³⁰² “Negroes for Hire,” 11 December 1812, *Farmers’ Repository*.

³⁰³ “To Hire,” 2 February 1810, *Farmers’ Repository*.

³⁰⁴ “For Hire,” 16 February 1810, *Farmers’ Repository*.

³⁰⁵ Indeed, as Koons argues, “farmers in the Shenandoah Valley demonstrated that the institution of slavery could readily be adapted to a system of agriculture that did not feature the production of a labor-intensive monocultural staple crop.” Koons and Noyalas, “Historic Resource Study,” 32.

³⁰⁶ James H. Foster, Deposition of Claimant, National Archives, M-2094, roll 40, as compiled and transcribed by Nancy B. Stewart, “African Americans in Shenandoah County, Virginia,” Notebooks, vol. V, book B.

³⁰⁷ William H. Woodward, Deposition, in Stewart, “African Americans in Shenandoah County, Virginia,” Notebooks, vol. V, book B.

agriculture, would [die] a slow death.”³⁰⁸ Although in *Bond of Iron* Charles Dew systematically studied ironmaking in the Valley’s Rockbridge County, it is worth closing this section on hiring by briefly discussing iron operations and slavery.

Industrial slavery existed in small pockets of the South during the late antebellum era. The Valley, quite unusually, had extensive mining operations. Western Virginia’s industrial sectors immediately struck Frederick Law Olmsted. Upon visiting a coal pit he observed: “the majority of the mining laborers are slaves, and uncommonly athletic and fine-looking negroes; but a considerable number of white hands are also employed, and they occupy all the responsible posts.” Olmsted went on to note that the mining company owned some of the slaves but “most are hired of their owners, at from \$120 to \$200 a year, the company boarding and clothing them.”³⁰⁹ Slaveholders were enticed by the large cash sums offered by iron operations, which exceeded typical rates. Yet, slave hiring also presented a problem for owners who sought to control and guide behavior. Olmsted laid bare these tensions in his description of hiring at the iron furnaces: “Some of his best hands he now rented out, to work in a furnace, and for the best of these he had been offered, for next year, two hundred dollars.” The slaveholder, though, grew concerned. “He did not know whether he ought to let them go . . . They were worked hard, and had too much liberty, and were acquiring bad habits. They earned money, by overwork, and spent it for whiskey, and got a habit of roaming about and *taking care of themselves*; because, when they were not at work in the furnace, nobody looked out for them.”³¹⁰

Charles Dew’s subject, William Weaver, was one of the wealthiest men in the Valley. In 1858, he owned over 20,000 acres and an enslaved work force of almost seventy men, women, and children.³¹¹ Benjamin Pennybacker, though never as successful as Weaver, followed a similar trajectory. Like the Weavers, the Pennybackers were a Pennsylvania family. They journeyed down the great wagon road arriving in the Valley in the eighteenth century. The family quickly met success through iron. As Sarah Elaine Thomas notes, the Pennybacker’s furnace was a “pioneering ironworks in an industry that rapidly expanded in nineteenth-century Virginia.”³¹² Slaves came with financial success. By 1799, Benjamin Pennybacker owned five slaves, and by 1810 the number had increased to nineteen.³¹³ He owned as many as thirty-one in 1820.³¹⁴

³⁰⁸ Carmichael, “The Bonds of a Valley Community,” 7-8.

³⁰⁹ Olmsted, *A Journey in the Seaboard Slave States in the Years 1853-1854*, 51.

³¹⁰ Olmsted, *A Journey in the Seaboard Slave States in the Years 1853-1854*, 64.

³¹¹ Charles Dew, *Bond of Iron: Master and Slave at Buffalo Forge* (New York: Norton, 1995), 3-4.

³¹² Sarah Elaine Thomas, “Down the Great Wagon Road: The Ironworking Pennybackers of Shenandoah County, Virginia,” M.A., thesis, College of William and Mary, 2012, 9.

³¹³ Thomas, “Down the Great Wagon Road,” 58-9.

³¹⁴ Thomas, “Down the Great Wagon Road,” 72.

Benjamin Pennybacker kept a daybook between June 1818 and May 1821. Included in his ledger were lists of slaves hired and the associated costs. For example, he owed Catharine C. Brock \$120 “for the hire of negro Matt & Harris this year” and William A. Winston \$70 “for the hire of negro Pharo this year.”³¹⁵ Pennybacker typically hired slaves at the beginning of the year as on January 5, 1819, when he noted the hire of enslaved men, Midd, Anthony, Ja, Ben, and Frederick at the rate of \$85 per man.³¹⁶ The Pennybackers met economic success through enslaved labor. Perhaps more significantly, though, they easily adapted the institution to an industrialized setting, which further highlights how entrenched slavery had become in Virginia by the antebellum era.

Conclusion

Virginia law guarded African American slavery. Masters’ inhumane institution used forced labor, sudden sales, and frequent hiring to subjugate the enslaved but they never fully succeeded. African Americans in the lower Valley maintained cohesive communities grounded in family and in place. It is a difficult balance for public historians to strike: conveying the horrors of slavery while also maintaining the slave’s humanity. In the most skillful interpretation discussions of slavery can dramatize how the enslaved, in David Brion Davis’s words, “succeeded in asserting their humanity and reinventing their diverse cultures, despite being torn away from their natal African families and societies, despite being continuously humiliated, bought and sold, and often subjected to torture and the threat of death.”³¹⁷ Historic sites such as Belle Grove can, moreover, powerfully illustrate how planters used enslaved labor in a mixed agricultural economy that, as is sometimes publically maintained, supposedly precluded slavery. More broadly, the history of slavery in the Shenandoah Valley illustrates an adaptable institution that shaped social relations, structured the economy, and had become firmly entrenched by the antebellum era.

³¹⁵ Benjamin Pennybacker, 5 January 1819, Benjamin Pennybacker Daybook, William and Mary Special Collections, Williamsburg, Virginia.

³¹⁶ Pennybacker, 5 January 1819, Benjamin Pennybacker Daybook, William and Mary Special Collections, Williamsburg, Virginia.

³¹⁷ David Brion Davis, *Inhuman Bondage: The Rise and Fall of Slavery in the New World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 3.

CHAPTER THREE

HOUSEHOLDS

Belle Grove projected power. Virginia planters like the Hite family used buildings and improvements to the land to shape, partition, and refine the landscape.³¹⁸ Physical projections shaped social relations. “In almost every respect,” historian Camille Wells observes, “the texture and pace of life in eighteenth-century Virginia was determined by the impulse of landowning planters to achieve, maintain, and demonstrate their authority over others.”³¹⁹ Planters’ authority over those they deemed social “others” dovetailed with the plantation houses that dominated Virginia’s eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century landscape.

Organized by a symmetrical façade and composed of tidy grey stones, Belle Grove made a visual statement.³²⁰ One nineteenth-century observer described the “spacious mansion” as attracting “the notice and admiration of the traveller soon after passing Middletown.”³²¹ Belle Grove and similar plantations were manifestations of the planter class’s power in the lower Valley. Structures of brick and stone were worthy of comment because they were aberrations on the land.³²² Today it is often difficult for visitors to envision larger homes of brick and stone as unusual because they, unlike the more commonplace wooden structures, survive in large numbers and have often been designated historic sites. Historically, though, plantation houses made a tremendous visual impact within a landscape of wooden buildings. Indeed, as Frederick Law Olmsted observed during his trip through Virginia, “The more common set of habitations of the white people are either of logs or loosely-boarded frames, a brick chimney running up outside, at one end: everything very slovenly and dirty about them.”³²³

³¹⁸ On this observation see, Camille Wells, “The Planter’s Prospect: Houses, Outbuildings, and Rural Landscapes in Eighteenth-Century Virginia,” *Winterthur Portfolio*, vol. 28, no. 1 (1993): 28.

³¹⁹ Wells, “The Planter’s Prospect,” 28.

³²⁰ Wells, “The Planter’s Prospect” and Vlach, *The Planter’s Prospect*.

³²¹ Skinner, “Virginia Husbandry,” 105.

³²² Wells, “The Planter’s Prospect,” 7.

³²³ Olmsted, *A Journey in the Seaboard Slave States in the Years 1853-1854* 19.



Figure 7. Belle Grove plantation's long, horizontal front and stone construction made a strong visual statement to visitors and a distinct upon the landscape of the Valley. Image courtesy of the Library of Congress.

Historians have traditionally defined a plantation based on the number of enslaved laborers: twenty or more. In 1860, accordingly, there were 46,274 plantations across the South.³²⁴ Belle Grove thus aligns with broader trends but also marks a deviation because only since the entry of the Tidewater gentry in the Valley had large plantations appeared. The number of enslaved at Belle Grove, moreover, varied over time making it both a farm and a plantation in its long history. Belle Grove's beginnings signaled a shift in the grandiosity of the Valley's show of wealth: "Col. Warner Washington led the vanguard of the aristocratic planters' invasion of the Valley, and by 1782 there were 134 slaves at his Frederick County properties."³²⁵ Nathaniel Burwell soon followed and built near Millwood. Grand homes of stone, such as Saratoga, Traveller's Rest, and Harewood, became manifestations of planters' new power and influence in the Valley.³²⁶ By the antebellum era in Shenandoah County men such as John W. Rice of New Market, George F. Hupp of Strasburg, and John W. Meem of Mount Jackson were counted among the region's

³²⁴ Vlach, *The Planter's Prospect*, 5.

³²⁵ National Trust for Historic Preservation in the United States, *Belle Grove* (Washington, D.C.: National Trust for Historic Preservation, Preservation Press, 1981) 14.

³²⁶ *Belle Grove*, 14.

planters, though each of the aforementioned men had fewer slaves in 1860 than in 1850.³²⁷ Even still, Valley plantations were never seen in the same numbers as witnessed in eastern or central Virginia.

For wealthy white Virginians, plantations such as Belle Grove, nearby Long Meadow and more distant Harewood, became connected through familial relations and social visits. Nancy A. Carr joyfully described to Elizabeth Coalter her visit to Belle Grove. “Our trip was as usual very agreeable, Mrs. Hite was always a great favorite of mine.” Their journey included “a most pleasant walk to the cave of glorious memory,” fishing at the nearby creek, and great “feats” in the equestrian line.³²⁸ To people like Ann Hite and Nancy Carr, plantations defined life in the lower Valley. Moreover, the Shenandoah Valley’s planter class held immense power and garnered the attention of outside observers. In John Ferdinand Smyth Stuart’s *A Tour in the United States*, for example, he described this class of Virginians as “the best families and fortunes in the colony.” These families, he continued, “have had a liberal education, possess enlightened understandings, and a thorough knowledge of the world, that furnishes them with an ease and freedom of manners and conversation, highly to their advantage in exterior, which no vicissitude of fortune or place can divest them of.” For men such as Stuart, they were “the most agreeable and best companions, friends, and neighbours, that need be desired.”³²⁹ The enslaved upon whom they depended were largely unseen in the descriptions of Nancy Carr and John Stuart. Indeed, as historian Peter S. Carmichael observes, “misleading and one-dimensional image[s] of the Old South” are constructed conveying the idea of the plantation “as a harmonious pastoral landscape. There are neither slaves nor poor whites.”³³⁰ To critical outsiders looking in or those caught within the folds of the social structure, the landscape looked much differently.

A year or more after Nancy Carr’s visit Isaac Hite advertised the sale of sixty slaves (referenced earlier in this study).³³¹ The uncertain fates and shattered lives of those sixty African Americans illustrate the brutal realities of the plantation. The African Americans who inhabited Belle Grove ensured the comfort of the Hite family and their visitors like Nancy Carr. Upon Isaac Hite Jr.’s death and years after Carr’s visit, D. Stickley, George Bragg, and George Brinker took an inventory of Belle Grove in early 1837. They tabulated \$16,150.00 dollars in human property. Individuals such as Hannah, a 63-year-old-slave who had been born in 1773 in the early phases of an American war fought, ironically, for

³²⁷ “Largest slaveholders of 9 or more slaves in 1850 and 1860,” found in Stewart, “African Americans in Shenandoah Valley, Virginia,” vol. III, book B.

³²⁸ Nancy A. Carr to Elizabeth Coalter, circa 1823, Document 9, Hite Family Papers, vol. II.

³²⁹ Stuart, *A Tour in the United States of America*, 40.

³³⁰ Carmichael, “The Bonds of a Valley Community,” 1.

³³¹ “Sixty Slaves for Sale,” 8 September 1824, *Daily Intelligencer*.

independence, underpinned the plantation.³³² “Negro Jim” the blacksmith, Sally, a cook, and her daughter Martha, were skilled at their crafts and integral to the plantation’s day-to-day operations.³³³ This the third chapter will consider the material realities of and lived experiences at Belle Grove and similar plantations in Virginia through the lens of the household. White Southern women, writes historian Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, “normally viewed the household from within rather than from without, as a web of relations and responsibilities, and especially as the social networks that anchored their daily lives.” And the “material embodiment of the slave community,” she continues, “consisted primarily in the quarters.”³³⁴ During the eighteenth- and nineteenth- centuries the household defined social, race, and gender relations.

Back of the Big House and Beyond

Virginia plantations were meant to be experienced dynamically.³³⁵ Plantation houses, outbuildings, formal gardens, and slave quarters were deliberately placed upon the land to project power and evoke reaction. A “highly rational formalism,” historian John Michael Vlach explains, guided the estates. “The world was, in their view, suitably improved only after it was transformed from its chaotic natural condition into a scene marked by a strict, hierarchical order. The planters’ landscapes were laid out with straight lines, right-angle corners, and axes of symmetry, their mathematical precision being considered as a proof of individual superiority.”³³⁶ The lengths to which grandees went to refine their spaces is demonstrated by the materials Isaac Hite Jr. ordered for the construction of Belle Grove. The thousands of feet of wood planking were not to be quarter sawn; Hite instead expressly asked for “good clean stuff free from knots.”³³⁷ He purchased a variety of ingredients for paints including “Venetian Red,” “Spanish Brown,” and “Rose pink.”³³⁸ Fourteen boxes of window glass completed the outside at a cost of sixty-three pounds.³³⁹ The well-proportioned exterior of Belle Grove aligns with high Federalist style. As the National

³³² “Names of My Negroes,” 1776-1859, Hite Family Commonplace Book, Hite Family Papers, vol. I and Isaac Hite Inventory, Frederick County’s Clerk’s Office, Will Book 19.

³³³ Isaac Hite Inventory, Frederick County’s Clerk’s Office, Will Book 19.

³³⁴ Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household: Black and White Women of the Old South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 100 and 149, respectively.

³³⁵ Dell Upton, “White and Black Landscapes in Eighteenth-Century Virginia,” in *Material Life in America, 1600-1860*, ed., Robert Blair St. George (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1988), 358.

³³⁶ John Michael Vlach, *Back of the Big House: The Architecture of Plantation Slavery* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993), 5.

³³⁷ Isaac Hite to Samuel Lothal, 17 December 1794, Hite Family Papers, vol. IV.

³³⁸ Bill Samuel Weatherill and Sons to Isaac Hite, 14 May 1796, Hite Family Papers, vol. IV.

³³⁹ Bill Daniel and Vincent Thuun to Isaac Hite, 14 May 1796, Hite Family Papers, vol. IV.

Trust explains, the entrance door “is emphasized with architectural trim which is found on some of the finer houses of the Valley of Virginia. Derived from the Roman arch order, this consists of a pilaster on each side of the door, supporting an entablature.”³⁴⁰ Choice wood, stylish paints, and modern design each contributed to Belle Grove’s imposing vision.



Figure 8. Interior view of Belle Grove plantation illustrating the richly detailed interior. Library of Congress.

³⁴⁰ *Belle Grove*, 9.

Within Belle Grove, the Hite family enjoyed considerable comfort. The 1851 inventory, taken after the death of Ann Hite (Isaac Hite had died in 1836), indicated that the main house was partitioned into an entry, dining room, parlor, chamber, nursery, store room, bed room, and “yellow room.” The latter room was so named because of the faux tiger maple grain design on the woodwork—an elaborate and highly fashionable painting scheme. The laundry and kitchen were located in the basement. Outbuildings included a smoke house, dairy, and outhouses.³⁴¹ The extensive inventory of real and movable property listed everything from a valuable mantle clock to breakfast plates to a high poplar bedstead. The estate’s four remaining slaves, “Negro Jim” (a blacksmith), Elijah, Sally the cook, and her daughter Martha were included in the inventory and valued at \$1,675.³⁴²

In southern slave states the household “was a spatial unit,” argues historian Stephanie McCurry, “defined by the property to which the owner held legal title and over which he exercised exclusive rights.”³⁴³ The extent to which white Southerners policed their households and ordered their landscape is illustrated by a fence dispute between Isaac Bowman and Isaac Hite. In March 1817, Bowman wrote Hite to inform him “that the division fence” they had made and agreed upon “is entirely removed” and had resulted in damages.³⁴⁴ The quarrel started in 1813 when Hite’s overseer “Dabill” informed him that the “fence was so defective that cattle, horses, and hogs were frequently depredating upon me.” Bowman had offered no attention to the matter. Hite’s other overseers, “McMullin and Finnell,” were “equally clamorous.” The situation escalated in the fall of 1816 when Bowman’s cattle “destroyed the greater part of upwards of forty acres of oats, and afterwards were so frequently in the adjoining pasture of upwards of 100 acres” that Hite’s cattle “were thereby included on account of the time and trouble it would give to separate them when mixed together.”³⁴⁵ Bowman gave suit against Hite for expenses. Hite, in turn, promised to “prove by every overseer that has lived with me since we agreed to join fences that [Bowman’s] fence has been kept in such repair that stock of every description: viz: horses, cattle, & hogs have depredated upon” him “every summer for at least six years.”³⁴⁶

³⁴¹ Ann T. Hite Inventory, 24-25 February 1851, Will Book 23, County Clerk’s Office, Frederick Co., Winchester, VA and National Trust for Historic Preservation, *Belle Grove* (Washington, D.C., N/D), 8.

³⁴² Hite Inventory, 24-25 February 1851.

³⁴³ Stephanie McCurry, *Masters of Small Worlds: Yeoman Households, Gender Relations, and the Political Culture of the Antebellum South Carolina Low Country* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 6.

³⁴⁴ Isaac Bowman to Isaac Hite, 26 March 1817, document 48, Hite Family Papers, vol. I.

³⁴⁵ Isaac Hite and Isaac Bowman, 27 March 1817, document 49, Hite Family Papers, vol. I.

³⁴⁶ Isaac Hite and Isaac Bowman, March 1817, document 50, Hite Family Papers, vol. I.

The Hite-Bowman fence dispute illuminates an entire world of social relations. Land ensured subsistence in nineteenth-century rural America. And “title to land historically incorporated claims over the persons and the labor of those dependent on it.”³⁴⁷ Power and authority thus had a spatial dimension. Hite needed to control the land and its use for economic gain, his family’s survival, and to maintain his position both within and without the household. Hite’s “subordinates,” in this case white overseers, dutifully advanced their patron’s interests by reporting the trespasses of Bowman and his livestock—trespasses that undermined Hite’s authority. When a visitor came upon a site such as Belle Grove, the manor house, outbuildings, and planned landscape should be directly connected to the planter family’s power and worldview.

The living quarters of the enslaved stood in stark contrast to the great homes of Virginia’s planters. Historian Peter S. Carmichael reminds us, “Slaves, poor whites, and travelers could very well have been impressed by the fine architecture of the stately plantations and in awe of its aristocratic inhabitants, but they also saw in Belle Grove tangible proof of society in which tremendous inequities of wealth and authority existed.”³⁴⁸ African Americans nonetheless created a “slave landscape” that made “slavery survivable.”³⁴⁹ An on-going archaeological investigation is just beginning to reveal slaves’ material and domestic world at Belle Grove. Matthew Greer has focused his efforts at site “44FK520.” The site lies slightly northwest of the main house on the other side of an early roadbed that remains in use into the present-day. Two distinct buildings appear at the location on Confederate cartographer Jedediah Hotchkiss’s “Sketch of the battle of Belle Grove or Cedar Creek, Wednesday, Oct’r 19th, 1864.”³⁵⁰ Several oral accounts from the twentieth century, moreover, further corroborate the existence of slave quarters in this area.³⁵¹

³⁴⁷ McCurry, *Masters of Small Worlds*, 6.

³⁴⁸ Carmichael, “The Bonds of a Valley Community,” 2.

³⁴⁹ Vlach, *Back of the Big House*, 1.

³⁵⁰ The image can be found at Jedediah Hotchkiss, “Sketch of the battle of Belle Grove or Cedar Creek, Wednesday, Oct’r 19th, 1864,” Library of Congress, <https://www.loc.gov/item/2005625102/> (accessed 9 May 2019). For additional evidence see, Lanier and Harding, “Belle Grove Plantation Overseer’s House,” 58-9.

³⁵¹ Lanier and Harding, “Belle Grove Plantation Overseer’s House,” 58-9.



Figure 9. Close-up view of Jedediah Hotchkiss' "Sketch of the battle of Belle Grove or Cedar Creek, Wednesday, Oct'r 19th, 1864," which shows Belle Grove plantation and what are most likely a group of slave quarters. Library of Congress.

The quarters' close proximity to both the big house and the Plantation Office and Store (also referred to as the "Overseer's House") are part of the planter's broader vision. As John Michael Vlach explains, "Big House slave quarters were generally set behind or to the side of the planter's residence, where they would not contend with it visually."³⁵² The placement of the slave quarters at Belle Grove clearly marked the structures as "dependencies;" yet, the proximity to a nearby country road also suggests the Hite's desire to impress visitors and passing audiences with their wealth and power. Perception was central to how the Hite family organized and maintained Belle Grove.

Greer charges that the slave quarters at site "44FK520" were deliberately arranged in order to create a direct sight line with the Plantation Office and Store. In the early 19th century Isaac Hite (who worked in the office), employees in the store, and any overseers who took up residence in the office would have had a clear view of the slave quarters.³⁵³ By "taking all of these parts together," Greer maintains, "we can posit that when they operated as an assemblage, the Plantation Office and Store emerged as a panopticon, leading the women, children, and men who lived and worked under its gaze to police their actions, ensuring they did not act in a way that resulted in punishments from unseen agents."³⁵⁴

³⁵² Vlach, *Back of the Big House*, 21. Conversely, as historian Philip D. Morgan explains, "slave settlements grew more autonomous over time ... and became more remote from white oversight." Morgan, *Slave Counterpoint*, 104.

³⁵³ Matthew C. Greer, "Panopticism and the Practical Politics of Slavery in the Shenandoah Valley," unpublished paper, Cedar Creek archives, 6-7.

³⁵⁴ Greer, "Panopticism and the Practical Politics of Slavery in the Shenandoah Valley," 8.

Although slave quarters were a partial refuge from whites, both the main house and the Plantation Office and Store cast a shadow across Belle Grove's African American community. Slave quarters were, after all, "extensions of the big house."³⁵⁵

The Plantation Office and Store was situated in the middle of the working farm and essential to the plantation.³⁵⁶ Belle Grove's one-and-a-half story stone building likely dates to the late eighteenth or early nineteenth century when the plantation was at its peak encompassing 7,500 acres and 103 slaves.³⁵⁷ The building's stone construction projected formality but also ensured security as money, papers, and goods were held there. Similar buildings were seen throughout the Valley, though materials varied. Just north of Belle Grove in the area of Winchester, for example, Ferdinand-M. Bayard observed an "Overseer supervising, near a barn, some Negroes shelling corn. He showed me into a log-house whose walls were covered by a few coats of whitewash. Rough chairs, tables and clothes-presses of walnut constituted all the furniture of the parloir, (parlor) where I was without any other company."³⁵⁸ The utilitarian structures occupied by overseers reinforced their liminal position. Unlike plantation owners who infrequently interfaced with field slaves, white overseers spent their days among the enslaved. Their work was entirely necessary for the successful functioning of the plantation but also considered sordid by Virginia grandees.

While the Hite family secured the longevity of the Plantation Office and Store by constructing it of stone, slave quarters were wooden. In the hierarchy of Virginia buildings slave cabins held the lowest position illustrating the subordinated place of the enslaved.³⁵⁹ The impermanence of slave quarters is demonstrated today by the absence of any surviving structures at Belle Grove. Throughout Virginia by the late eighteenth century, single cabins had slowly supplanted dormitories, thus affording enslaved families more privacy.³⁶⁰ From the archaeological evidence discovered thus far as well as the Hotchkiss map, the Hite family built independent cabins. "During the course of the 2015 investigations," Matthew Greer notes, "82 pieces of early 19th century architectural material, or likely architectural material, were recovered from 44FK520. This includes 46 whole or fragmented nails, 11

³⁵⁵ Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household*, 151. As Dell Upton argues, "slave quarters were parts of two intersecting landscapes. They fit into a white landscape centered on the main house in one way and into a black landscape centered on the quarters in another." Upton, "White and Black Landscapes in Eighteenth-Century Virginia," 361.

³⁵⁶ Lanier and Harding, "Belle Grove Plantation Overseer's House," 52.

³⁵⁷ Lanier and Harding, "Belle Grove Plantation Overseer's House," 55.

³⁵⁸ Bayard, *Travels of a Frenchman in Maryland and Virginia*, 70.

³⁵⁹ Isaac, *The Transformation of Virginia*, 66-7.

³⁶⁰ Morgan, *Slave Counterpoint*, 104.

shards of window glass, 18 brick fragments, and seven other architectural elements.”³⁶¹ The nails are particularly important in determining what types of buildings may have been present. Over half of the nails recovered by Greer were either two inches or two and half inches in length.³⁶² Greer speculates that the nails suggest log cabins, rather than framed timber structures, were present. He further supports this assertion with the presence of daub, which may have been used for chinking. Greer notes that the nails recovered are consistent with those found at the nearby Stickley Quarter.³⁶³

It is worth pausing, though, to consider the evidence of building type in several different lights. On the one hand, as Greer himself notes, smaller nails are also found at sites associated with timber-framed structures. Smaller nails affixed clapboard to the substantial upright posts. A series of hand-cut joints, moreover, were used to join timber posts and beams—this technique did not require nails but instead the use of wooden pegs. Although Greer is right to locate the daub as evidence of chinking, it may have been used for the chimney, not the structure, because waddle and daub chimneys were extremely common in slaves’ housing. On the other hand, log cabins were frequent in the lower Valley and may have indeed been present at Belle Grove plantation. An oral history from an elderly African American woman who been enslaved by the Cooley family related that “Me and my father and four of his chil’en who were small lived right at the yard in a two-story log cabin.”³⁶⁴ A wide variety of construction techniques were used in log cabins—techniques, once again, not requiring large nails because of hand-joinery. Scholars Fred B. Kniffen and Henry Glassie document the presence of saddle notched, v-notched, and dovetailed corner timbering in the lower Valley, techniques German and Scotch-Irish settlers transmitted to the area.³⁶⁵ Ultimately, neither the limited presence of nails nor the daub fragments definitively point to the Belle Grove slave quarters as being either log cabins or timber-frame structures.

³⁶¹ Matthew C. Greer, “Archaeological Investigations of Two Possible 19th Century Quarters Sites at Belle Grove Plantation, Frederick County, Virginia: 44FK520 and 44FK521,” unpublished paper prepared for Belle Grove, Inc., 45.

³⁶² Greer, “Archaeological Investigations,” 45-6.

³⁶³ Greer, “Archaeological Investigations,” 45-6.

³⁶⁴ Johnson, *Battleground Adventures*, 392.

³⁶⁵ Fred B. Kniffen and Henry Glassie, “Building in Wood in the Eastern United States: A Time-Place Perspective,” in *Common Places: Readings in American Vernacular Architecture*, eds. Dell Upton and John Michael Vlach (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1986), 173.



Figure 10. An image of nineteenth-century slave quarters demonstrating one potential style used at Belle Grove. In this instance, the cabin is created by hand-joined horizontal timbers—daub is used as filler. Library of Congress.



Figure 11. An image of nineteenth-century slave quarters demonstrating another potential style used at Belle Grove. In this instance, vertical and horizontal hand-joined timbers create the primary structure to which clapboard is affixed. Library of Congress.

Archaeology conducted at Manassas National Battlefield Park and contemporaneous accounts offer further perspectives on slave housing in Virginia. Portici, a middling plantation on present-day Manassas Battlefield, included an enslaved community of around a dozen individuals. The excavation revealed a 12-foot square frame building, which rested on four stone piers and featured a stone end chimney.³⁶⁶ Nearby Brownsville Plantation, which had an enslaved population of 22 people during the Civil War, included three mid-nineteenth-century outbuildings, two of which were used by and perhaps housed slaves. Like Belle Grove, the buildings were in close proximity to the main house. One structure measured 16 feet by 26 feet and included 6-foot deep cellar hole. The archaeological and historical research informed the rendering of conjectural drawing that shows a framed building with clapboard.³⁶⁷ Travelers through Virginia encountered a variety of housing types. Frederick Law Olmsted described the houses of slaves as

³⁶⁶ Laura J. Galke, “‘Free within Ourselves’: African American Landscapes at Manassas National Battlefield Park,” in *Archaeological Perspectives on the American Civil War*, eds. Clarence R. Geier and Stephen R. Potter (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2000), 261.

³⁶⁷ Galke, “‘Free within Ourselves,’” 263.

“log-cabins, of various degrees of comfort and commodiousness. At one end there is a great open fire-place, which is exterior to the wall of the house, being made of clay in an inclosure, about eight feet square and high, of logs. The chimney is sometimes of brick, but more commonly of lath or split sticks, laid up like log-work and plastered with mud.”³⁶⁸

The enslaved made their homes from cramped, modest wooden structures

Extant slave quarters in central Virginia give additional context for what types of slave houses may have been present at Belle Grove. Dating to the second half of the eighteenth century, the structures from architectural historian Dell Upton’s study are “one-story frame buildings with two rooms, each with an exterior door, and separated by a central chimney.” Slave houses could be quite cramped. Upton writes, “A single room and possibly a loft above, shared by six to twenty-four people, was the standard slave dwelling in eighteenth-century Virginia.”³⁶⁹ Sheds were sometimes added to the rear of cabins and interiors were often whitewashed. “The smallest recorded eighteenth-century structure designed for slaves was a seven-by-eight-foot cabin,” according to one scholar, “whereas the largest was a twenty-two-by-fifty-four-foot quarter.”³⁷⁰ It was also common practice, as revealed by a study of the Bowman-Hite farm, to house the enslaved in kitchen outbuildings. Archival evidence suggests that in the late antebellum era eight enslaved African Americans resided in a post-in-ground kitchen, which stood near the main farmhouse.³⁷¹ Slaves quarters were, at best, plain, utilitarian structures that adequately, if not comfortably, housed the enslaved.

Although white masters wielded immense power, slave quarters were a semi-private refuge partially removed from the master’s shadow. In their homes and adjoining yards, writes historian Dylan C. Penningroth, slaves “created institutions and practices—families, religion, and, in some places, an informal economy—that helped them resist their oppression and carve out ‘a measure of autonomy.’ Masters tolerated, even encouraged, these things because it suited their interests.”³⁷² Slave quarters featured an assemblage of domestically made items, castaways or hand-me-downs from the master, and goods acquired through barter, trade, or purchase. “During the course of the archaeological testing” at site “44FK520,” according to Matthew Greer, “148 artifacts dating to between 1790 and 1830 were recovered. This included 112 sherds of pearlware, one sherd of soft glaze porcelain, three copper alloy buttons, 22 whole or fragmented early machine cut nails . . . and nine shards of 1.02mm to 1.39mm thick aqua and light aqua window glass.” The

³⁶⁸ Olmsted, *A Journey in the Seaboard Slave States in the Years 1853-1854*, 123.

³⁶⁹ Upton, “White and Black Landscapes in Eighteenth-Century Virginia,” 359.

³⁷⁰ Morgan, *Slave Counterpoint*, 111.

³⁷¹ Michael Spencer, “Bowman-Hite Farmhouse, Historic Structures Report,” unpublished document prepared for the National Park Service, Cedar Creek and Belle Grove National Historical Park, 15, 193, and 349.

³⁷² Dylan C. Penningroth, *The Claims of Kinfolk: African American Property and Community in the Nineteenth-Century South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 7.

pearlware was plain, while those decorated sherds consisted of “edge wares and handpainted tea/hollow wares.”³⁷³ The high presence of dishware suggests that slaves at Belle Grove, like those across Virginia, cooked and ate in or around their homes.³⁷⁴

Slaves’ lives were defined by strict work routines that allotted little time for meal preparation. According to historian Alan Taylor, “Masters sought to feed their slaves the minimum necessary to keep them healthy and working. George Washington explained, ‘It is not my wish or desire that my Negroes should have an ounce of meal more, nor less, than is sufficient to feed them plentifully.’”³⁷⁵ The necessary minimum for each week generally consisted of a peck of corn and a pound of salted meat.³⁷⁶ John F. S. Stuart, who took a tour of and published an account about the post-Revolutionary United States, noted in his travels through the Upper South that slaves ate dinner (today referred to as lunch) around noon. The meal, he wrote, “consists of homminy and salt, and, if his master be a man of humanity, he has a little fat, skimmed milk, rusty bacon, or salt herring to relish his homminy, or hoeecake, which kind masters allow their slaves twice a week: but the number of those, it is much to be lamented, are very few.”³⁷⁷ Ferdinand-M. Bayard, too, described the meal of the enslaved as consisting of hominy cooked in an old pot.³⁷⁸ Jeremiah Simple, in a letter “To the Editor of the American Farmer,” offered an assessment similar to those described above: “In Virginia, a peck of corn meal per week is considered an allowance for a negro.”³⁷⁹ Contemporary evidence thus demonstrates that the primary meal for the enslaved consisted primarily of corn, often consumed as hominy.

Slaves supplemented their meager diet by “keeping poultry and raising vegetables, potatoes, and melons.”³⁸⁰ The enslaved also used excess or stolen produce in economic exchanges. “The slaves’ economy made for a new sociability that transformed relations between master and slave and among slaves.”³⁸¹ In this regard, Belle Grove’s plantation landscape looked like other Virginia plantation. On May 10, 1835, for example, Old Frank, Shadrack, Nancy, Sam, Sally, and Fanny sold 37 chickens to the Hites.³⁸² In nearby Charlestown, William Lee complained of the enslaved who had been surreptitiously taking

³⁷³ Greer, “Archaeological Investigations,” 32.

³⁷⁴ Morgan, *Slave Counterpoint*, 112.

³⁷⁵ Taylor, *The Internal Enemy*, 69-70.

³⁷⁶ Taylor, *The Internal Enemy*, 69.

³⁷⁷ Stuart, *A Tour in the United States of America*, 27.

³⁷⁸ Bayard, *Travels of a Frenchman in Maryland and Virginia*, 13.

³⁷⁹ Simple, “To the Editor of the American Farmer,” 293.

³⁸⁰ Taylor, *The Internal Enemy*, 69-70.

³⁸¹ Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone*, 138.

³⁸² “1835 Poultry Records,” 10 May 1835, 1785-1847, Hite Family Commonplace Book, Hite Family Papers, vol. I.

fruit and vegetables from his gardens to sell at market.³⁸³ A similar case appeared in the fall of 1809. Nathaniel Craghill's slave, Joshua, had sold potatoes and a "string of fish" "without leave from his master." The *Farmers' Repository* dedicated sustained attention to the issue and the ensuing trial. The article cited a section of law regarding economic transactions between blacks and whites, which is worth citing at length: "No person whatsoever shall buy, sell, or receive, to or from a slave, any commodity whatsoever, without the leave of consent of the master, owner or overseer of such slave." Thus, the law conceded to the informal economy that did exist among the enslaved. Yet, as it continued, "if any person shall presume to deal with any slave without such leave or consent, he or she so offending shall forfeit and pay the master or owner of such slave, four times the value of the thing so bought, sold, or received, to be recovered with costs, by action upon the case, in any court of record within this commonwealth, and shall also forfeit and pay the further sum of twenty dollars to any person who will sue for the same, to be recovered with costs, by summons and petition, in the same manner as other debts not under five dollars, in any court of record, or receive on his or her bare back, thirty-nine lashes, well laid on, at the public whipping post – but shall never the less be liable to pay the costs of such summons and petition."³⁸⁴ Virginia law made slight concessions to the economic enterprises of the enslaved but also recommended harsh prohibitory measures if the enslaved demonstrated a modicum of self-direction.

The diet of the enslaved dramatically contrasted with wealthy white Virginians' fare. While traveling through the region one visitor enjoyed a fairly typical meal: "An old negro woman also frequently came in from the kitchen, with hot biscuit and corn-cake. There was fried fowl, and fried bacon and eggs, and cold ham; there were preserved peaches, and preserved quinces and grapes; there was hot wheaten biscuit, and hot short-cake, and hot corn-cake, and hot griddle cakes, soaked in butter; there was coffee, and there was milk, sour or sweet, whichever I preferred to drink."³⁸⁵ On another occasion he had hot corn-bread "and but one vegetable served—sweet potato, roasted in ashes, and this, I thought, was the best sweet potato, also, that I ever had eaten; but there were four preparations of swine's flesh, besides fried fowls, fried eggs, cold roast turkey, and opossum, cooked, I know not how, but it somewhat resembled baked sucking-pig. The only beverages on the table were milk and whiskey."³⁸⁶ In each instance domestic slaves prepared the food, served the dining parties, and cleaned up afterwards. As South Carolina physician James Stuart commented during his trip to Virginia in 1814: "It was very amusing to observe the change of the number of servants as soon as you enter'd Virginia— When our

³⁸³ "Notice," 21 May 1813, *Farmers' Repository*.

³⁸⁴ "George North," 10 November 1809, *Farmers' Repository*.

³⁸⁵ Olmsted, *A Journey in the Seaboard Slave States in the Years 1853-1854*, 88.

³⁸⁶ Olmsted, *A Journey in the Seaboard Slave States in the Years 1853-1854*, 103.

breakfast or supper was order'd, there appeared to be a cook to every dish, and when it was to be placed upon the table half a dozen girls and boys half cloathed came each with a dish in indian file, and after the fried chicken, the hoe cake and tough biscuit was arranged in order the line of blacks were thrown into disorder and retreated except one who remained centinal behind the chair."³⁸⁷ Virginia's social and racial stratification was not only etched upon the landscape but readily apparent at every meal.

A few personal items were included among the possessions of the enslaved. One late eighteenth-century traveler took an inventory of slave quarters and found an "old pipe, very short, and a knife blade, which were sticking in the wall."³⁸⁸ Matthew Greer found in his archaeology at the Belle Grove slave quarters "three copper alloy buttons, one of which has an anchor motif stamped on its face." Additionally, "a kaolin pipe stem fragment and a spall from a French gun flint."³⁸⁹ Although the archaeological investigation at Belle Grove is still discovering the site's secrets, other excavations in Virginia have revealed that quarters had storage spaces in which the enslaved kept their valued possessions. "Archaeologists have unearthed ceramics, coins, tools, and buttons" at other sites, thereby demonstrating that the items found at Belle Grove were common.³⁹⁰

Very few pieces of furniture would have been present in slaves' quarters. Ferdinand-M. Bayard's account of a journey through Maryland and Virginia described a slave's bed and bedding as consisting of "A box-like frame made of boards hardly roughed down, upheld by stakes." Wheat straw and cornstalks served as a mattress and "a very short-napped woolen blanket that was burned in several places, completed the wretched pallet of the enslaved couple."³⁹¹ John F. S. Stuart found similar conditions during his trip in Virginia. "When he sleeps," Stuart wrote, "his comforts are equally miserable and limited; for he lies on a bench, or on the ground, with only an old scanty single blanket, and not always even that, to serve both for his bed and his covering."³⁹² However spartan the interiors, slave quarters were nonetheless essential to the shape of African American domestic life. Whites viewed these spaces with a strange mixture of disdain and sympathy leaving unnoticed the cultural practices that made these places home for the enslaved.

³⁸⁷ James Stuart, [25] October 1814, James Stuart Journal, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

³⁸⁸ Bayard, *Travels of a Frenchman in Maryland and Virginia*, 13.

³⁸⁹ Greer, "Archaeological Investigations," 56.

³⁹⁰ Morgan, *Slave Counterpoint*, 116.

³⁹¹ Bayard, *Travels of a Frenchman in Maryland and Virginia*, 13.

³⁹² Stuart, *A Tour in the United States of America*, 28.



Figure 12. Artist Edwin Forbes illustrated the interior of a slave cabin at Spotsylvania Court House, Virginia, in 1864, though the scene can stand as representative for much of the early-to-mid-nineteenth century. Library of Congress.

Life within and beyond the slave quarters at Belle Grove is largely unknown. One white traveler's account is suggestive of slaves' social life. At night, John Stuart wrote, slaves set out from their homes to visit. Some times traveling "six or seven miles in the night, be the weather ever so sultry," slaves went to dances. Stuart continued by noting "he performs with astonishing agility, and the most vigorous exertions, keeping time and cadence, most exactly, with the music of a banjor, (a large hollow instrument with three strings), and a quaqua (somewhat resembling a drum), until he exhausts himself, and scarcely has time, or strength, to return home before the hour he is called forth to toil next morning."³⁹³ Frederick Law Olmsted likewise observed in Virginia slaves' inclination to enjoy nighttime activities. He maintained, "This is just what I have thought when I have seen slaves at work—they seem to go through the motions of labor without putting strength into them.

³⁹³ Stuart, *A Tour in the United States of America*, 27-8.

They keep their powers in reserve for their own use at night, perhaps.”³⁹⁴ Closer to Belle Grove, Sally, a freed black who lived in Middletown, entertained slaves from nearby plantations on a regular basis.³⁹⁵

Slaves’ ability to move across the Virginia countryside at night demonstrates their skillful disregard of slave code. It may also suggest that enforcement of slave codes was irregular. “Visiting neighboring slaves on weekends, at night, even during workdays,” writes Philip D. Morgan, “was much more common than the stereotypical picture of isolated plantations allows. If slaves were remarkably *immobile* in the sense of internal migration, they seem to have been remarkably *mobile* in the sense of short-distance, local movements.”³⁹⁶ Just as white Virginians maintained extensive kinship and friendship networks, so too did the enslaved. Complex ties of family and kinship, observes historian Steven Hahn, not only allowed for the “rapid circulation of news and rumor” but also underpinned slaves’ politics. Indeed, slaves’ networks, illustrated by nocturnal visits, formed “the materials of day-to-day ‘resistance,’ lent wider field and consequence by civil war.”³⁹⁷

Whites nonetheless policed enslaved and free African Americans in the Valley through strict codes. The trustees of New Market demanded that slaveholders give their slaves “suitable passes when they send them to town on business at night and on Sabbath days.”³⁹⁸ Winchester’s codes forbade “Slaves going at large within the Corporation.” City law further imposed curfews for “Any slave, free negro, or mulatto who shall be found off the premises of his or her master, or mistress, or employer, or absent from his or her usual place of abode or business at any time after ten o’clock at night.” Any African American caught after curfew “shall be apprehended by the Superintendent of Police or any Constable of the Corporation, and lodged in jail until the succeeding day, when the person so apprehended shall be taken before the Mayor, Recorder, or some Alderman of the Corporation, who may order him or her to receive in his discretion any number of lashes not to exceed thirty-nine, and direct the jailor to retain the offender in custody until the jail fee and a fee of one dollar to the officer who made the arrest shall have been paid.”³⁹⁹ As with prohibitions against the sale of foodstuff without the master’s consent, Virginia law regulated the movements of free and enslaved African Americans in order to maintain social and racial hierarchies.

³⁹⁴ Olmsted, *A Journey in the Seaboard Slave States in the Years 1853-1854*, 101.

³⁹⁵ “Commonwealth vs. Harriette Slave Property,” in Belle Grove Collection, Box 12, Handley Library.

³⁹⁶ Morgan, *Slave Counterpoint*, 524.

³⁹⁷ Hahn, *A Nation Under our Feet*, 15.

³⁹⁸ “Ordinances for the Town of New Market,” 19 December 1853, found in Stewart, “African Americans in Shenandoah County, Virginia,” vol. III, book B.

³⁹⁹ Order of the Common Council, *Revised Ordinances of the Corporation of Winchester with the Act of Incorporation and Certain Other Acts of the General Assembly Concerning the Town of Winchester and the Constitution of Virginia* (Winchester, VA: The Republican Job Office, 1856), 83-4.

The lower Valley's proximity to the free state of Pennsylvania, envelopment by large mountain ranges, and low population densities encouraged local slaves to runaway and drew slaves from eastern Virginia to the Valley. In the winter of 1769, John Bowyer, the sheriff of Augusta, caught Poll and George who belonged to John Rice of North Carolina.⁴⁰⁰ Joshua had been jailed in Shenandoah County in late April 1825. He stated that he was the "property [of] Mrs. Elizabeth Earby of Fredericksburg, who had hired him to Mr. George Ellis, or the same place from whom he absconded."⁴⁰¹ In the lower Valley, a group of militiamen from Middleway, Virginia, were dispatched in late summer of 1808 to pursue a group of runaway slaves. According to an article in *Farmers' Repository*, the party of whites pursued the "two fugitive negroes" for several hours until they escape "into a thick and almost impenetrable underwood." Once in hiding near the mansion house of Rich Willis and the mill of Mr. Strider, the article continued, the slaves "committed midnight depredations on the property of the inhabitants, and violent assaults on the persons of those who happened to approach their lurking places, and excited considerable terror and alarm in the minds of the solitary females who ventured out into the neighborhood." The article congratulated the "public spirit" of the "gentlemen" who pursued the slaves to support "good order in their neighborhood, by punishing the idle and dissolute, and protecting the peaceable and industrious, and above all in dislodging and dispersing this daring banditti, by compelling the said desperadoes to a due obedience of the law of the land, and industrious submission to the will of their masters."⁴⁰²

Clothing

Daily dress projected social status. Throughout the eighteenth and into the early nineteenth century, as textile historian and curator Linda Baumgarten explains, "the style of the garment, the fabric and color selection, the amount of clothing required to be 'properly dressed,' even the subtlety of posture, achieved both through training and force of tight stays" transmitted complex messages to onlookers about the class, even the job, of the wearer.⁴⁰³ The clothing worn by enslaved African Americans in the Shenandoah Valley aligns with practices throughout the Upper South in which slave populations were adequately, if not always comfortably, clothed; further, the occupation of the wearer determined the cloth, style, and quality of garments.

⁴⁰⁰ "A negro wench," 2 February 1769, *Virginia Gazette* (Rind), Williamsburg.

⁴⁰¹ "Was Committed," 30 April 1825, *The Shenandoah Herald*.

⁴⁰² "Communication, Leetown, Jefferson county, Aug. 16," 19 August 1808, *Farmers' Repository*.

⁴⁰³ Linda Baumgarten, "'Clothes for the People': Slave Clothing in Early Virginia," *Journal of Early Southern Decorative Arts* (November, 1988): 27.

Enslaved African Americans were most often clothed in inexpensive but durable materials. Moreover, as Elizabeth Fox-Genovese contends, the “quality of slave clothing varied widely in accordance with the conscience and affluence of the master.”⁴⁰⁴ At first blush, observers might contend that the cloth was woven on plantations, perhaps even by slaves. But historians have questioned the persistent mythology of “the age of homespun” and reveal that cloth was often purchased, not made at home.⁴⁰⁵ Indeed, throughout the eighteenth century, barring the period during the American Revolution’s emphasis on home production, textiles were imported at high rates. In early America “two types of textiles became very important as slave goods: coarse linens from Germany and Scotland such as Osnaburg and rolls; and inexpensive woolens from England, Wales, and Scotland.”⁴⁰⁶ By the nineteenth century—after the invention of the cotton gin and the power loom—cheap cottons, such as calico and muslin, dominated the market. Although enslaved women did spin, weave, and dye cloth, by the nineteenth century many masters purchased cheap cloth from mills in New England and overseas.⁴⁰⁷ “From the 1820s through the 1860s,” one scholar observes, “household manufactures declined overall in the South as they did in the North, albeit at a significantly slower rate.”⁴⁰⁸ Thus, the textiles used on Upper South plantations were largely imported from either domestic or international manufacturers.

In the Shenandoah Valley, traditional home production mixed with a market economy. Early European settlers to the region had had a long history of textile production. Germans were among the first to initiate flax production in western Virginia.⁴⁰⁹ Nonetheless, according to Kenneth W. Keller, “Even in the Valley, storekeepers in Winchester, Shepherd’s Town, Charles Town, Gerrardstown, Martinsburg, Staunton, Lexington, and Fincastle sold imported ticklenburg and osnaburg linen, coarse cloth named for north German towns, coarse dowlas linens named for a town in Brittany, and cambrics, fine linen from Flanders.”⁴¹⁰ Winchester served as an economic hub for the lower Valley. By the mid-1790s, the town boasted over two-dozen well-stocked stores. La Rouchefoucauld-Liancourt observed that merchants bought their goods from

⁴⁰⁴ Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household*, 182.

⁴⁰⁵ See especially, Adrienne D. Hood, “The Material World of Cloth: Production and Use in Eighteenth-Century Rural Pennsylvania,” *William and Mary Quarterly*, vol. 53, no. 1 (Jan., 1996): 43-66.

⁴⁰⁶ Baumgarten, “‘Clothes for the People,’” 40.

⁴⁰⁷ Charles Joyner, “The World of the Plantation Slaves,” in *Before Freedom Came: African-American Life in the Antebellum South*, eds Edward D. C. Campbell, Jr., and Kym S. Rice (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1991), 55-6. See also, Alden O’Brien, “After the Revolution: Aspirations and Ambivalence,” in *An Agreeable Tyrant: Fashion After the Revolution* (Washington, DC: DAR Museum, 2016), 14-5.

⁴⁰⁸ Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household*, 121.

⁴⁰⁹ Kenneth W. Keller, “From the Rhineland to the Virginia Frontier: Flax Production as a Commercial Enterprise,” *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 98, No. 3 (July 1990): 487-511, 503.

⁴¹⁰ Keller, “From the Rhineland to the Virginia Frontier,” 508.

Philadelphians who, in turn, imported from England.⁴¹¹ Even in rural Jefferson County, merchants of the early nineteenth century proudly announced their imported goods through organs such as the *Farmers' Repository*. One such advertisement, appearing on December 14, 1815, alerted the inhabitants of Charlestown and the surrounding area of "Cheap Woolen Goods," including "Superfine and common Cloths, Double and single mill'd Cassimers, Stockinnetts, Imperial Cords and Cassinettes, Fancy and common Vesting, Coating, Blaizes, Flannel and Kerseys, Rose, Point and strip'd Blankets." Additionally, the purveyor R. Worthington called upon "Persons who have to furnish Negroes that they have hired with blankets, will find it to their interest to call on the subscriber for them."⁴¹² Planters purchased inexpensive woolen goods to be made into winter clothing for enslaved African Americans.

Despite the Upper South's reliance on imported textiles, there is ample evidence to suggest that Belle Grove used locally produced materials. The Hite family papers include an extensive inventory of cloth and yarn. Local weavers, it appears from the records, had been contracted to produce "twilled cloth," "shirting," "linsey," and "kersey."⁴¹³ Coarse linsey-woolsey and kersey, though not designated as such, were likely used for slaves' clothing. In an intriguing letter from Ann T. Hite to Ann M. Williams written in the winter of 1826, Hite related that she had "been engaged all day in cutting out the servant's clothes."⁴¹⁴ Hite's reference indicates that slaves' clothing was being sewn at Belle Grove or in the neighborhood. The Hite's decision to manufacture cloth aligned with proponents of home production who emphasized both the quality and economy of homemade yard goods. In the *Farmers Repository*, for example, Lawrence A. Washington (nephew of George Washington and son of Samuel Washington) argued for the economic sensibilities of "household manufacture" and strenuously objected to the "flimsy cobweb catch penny fabrics of Europe."⁴¹⁵ In the fall of 1809, Washington advertised for a weaver in the *Farmers' Repository*. He planned on using two looms and desired "some industrious man, who understands the different branches of that trade." Washington promised to "furnish him with a large house to live in, a garden and his fire wood, free from expense, and will also pay him the customary prices for all the work he does for him; provided he will instruct one of his Negro Boys in the trade, as far as his capacity will admit of." Of the slave Washington wrote, "The boy who will be put to the trade, is about sixteen years of age, is smart, active and intelligent, and the subscriber will warrant, that he shall conduct himself

⁴¹¹ La Rochefoucauld-Liancourt, *Travels Through the United States of North America*, vol. III, 202-4.

⁴¹² Advertisement, 14 December 1815, *Farmers' Repository*.

⁴¹³ See, for example, "1821 Cloth List" and "1823 Cloth List," Hite Family Papers, volume I.

⁴¹⁴ Ann T. Hite to Ann M. Williams, 21 December 1826, Hite Family Papers, volume II.

⁴¹⁵ "Domestic Manufactures," 9 March 1810, *Farmers' Repository*.

with propriety and submission to the weaver who shall undertake his instruction.”⁴¹⁶ Washington’s plan for domestic manufacturing, a call echoed across the early decades of the nineteenth century, demonstrated white Southerners’ desire for self-sufficiency through enslaved labor—a plan never fully implemented or realized.

It is worth noting as an aside that despite the Hite’s home production, they also imported textiles from Pennsylvania and beyond for sale at the Plantation Store. As early as 1795, William Wister billed Isaac Hite for an extensive list of items that included “grey coating,” “brown linen,” “fancy nankeen,” “mixt cloth,” “drab cloth,” black and blue “kerseymere,” “printed kersymere,” and red, yellow, and white flannels.⁴¹⁷ The following year massive quantities of cloth were purchased including 90 yards of tan muslin, 448 yards of “fancy cotton,” and 152 yards of Irish sheeting. Significant yardage of “coarse linen” was likewise bought and, although this cloth *may* have been used for slaves’ clothing, it had various applications in a typical eighteenth-century household.⁴¹⁸ Importantly, during the years in which the Hite’s store was successfully selling yard goods and sundries the family also increased the number of slaves on the plantation, which reached 103 individuals by 1810. The sale of cloth went back into the expansion of the plantation.

Clothing distinctions were apparent within enslaved communities. In the eighteenth century enslaved male farmers or craftsmen typically wore a jacket (a shorter garment) or a coat (a longer, more formal garment), possibly a waistcoat, a shirt, trousers or breeches, and a hat. According to the observations of John F. S. Stuart, slaves were “niggardly” clothed in “nothing but a shirt and trousers, made of coarse thin hard hempen stuff in the summer, with the addition of a sordid woollen jacket, breeches, and shoes, in the winter.”⁴¹⁹ Male slaves likely looked like white tradesmen by wearing practical, durable garments. Women wore “a coarse shift and a petticoat” but fashionable stays were often absent.⁴²⁰ African Americans with highly visible jobs might be attired in livery uniforms. Colors were based on the master’s coat of arms and elaborate trim embellished the garment.⁴²¹ George Washington, for example, had scarlet and off-white livery suits made for some of his slaves in the second half of the eighteenth century and during Thomas

⁴¹⁶ “A Weaver Wanted,” 10 November 1809, *Farmers’ Repository*.

⁴¹⁷ William Wister to Isaac Hite, 10 May 1795, Document 37, Hite Family Papers, vol. IV.

⁴¹⁸ Bill Edward Fox to Isaac Hite, 11 May 1796, Document 38, Hite Family Papers, vol. IV.

⁴¹⁹ Stuart, *A Tour in the United States of America*, 28.

⁴²⁰ Linda Baumgarten, *What Clothes Reveal: The Language of Clothing in Colonial and Federal America* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002), 134

⁴²¹ Baumgarten, *What Clothes Reveal*, 128.

Jefferson's tenure as president his servants wore liveried suits.⁴²² Female servants within the household might have had gowns made from, in the case of Martha Washington's maids, "relatively fine fabrics such as calico and linen."⁴²³

Slaves' occupations continued to define their dress well into the nineteenth century; moreover, during that century, historian Eugene Genovese observes, demands for the improvement of slave clothing "sounded on all sides" to some positive ends.⁴²⁴ An article from *The American Farmer* reprinted in the *Farmers' Repository* went to great lengths to inform readers as to how they could improve the health of the enslaved through clothing. The article suggested that during cold or wet weather slaves should "wear woollens next to their skin, instead of linen and cotton. Long woolen shirts would retain their heat, equalize the excitement, and secure them against the effects of wet work and rainy weather."⁴²⁵ Frederick Law Olmsted noted in the antebellum era, "The house-servants were neatly dressed, but the field-hands wore very coarse and ragged garments."⁴²⁶ Further, runaway advertisements from the nineteenth century demonstrate a variety of dress, though the quality and age of garments is impossible to assess. Jacob, for example, had been caught with "sundry clothing, amongst which is a homemade drab cloth coat, and white hat."⁴²⁷ George was similarly reported wearing a suit of "drab homemade cloth," which was noted as being new.⁴²⁸ A runaway slave, Dabney, was reported as wearing a white frock coat, two pairs of "summer pantaloons made of cotton and wool" one of which was striped.⁴²⁹ Despite proposals for increased quantities of slave clothing, the quality remained poor because of inexpensive textiles. A runaway slave named Bob, for instance, wore a coat of "Kentucky Jeans," while Sam wore a "dark jeans frock coat" (jean cloth was an inferior fabric of the nineteenth century woven from cotton and wool typically in a twill pattern).⁴³⁰ All of the aforementioned advertisements came from the Valley and give voice to the varied appearances of the enslaved.

⁴²² Baumgarten, *What Clothes Reveal*, 130-31.

⁴²³ Baumgarten, *What Clothes Reveal*, 134.

⁴²⁴ Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll*, 550.

⁴²⁵ "From the American Farmer," 1 November 1820, *Farmers' Repository*.

⁴²⁶ Olmsted, *A Journey in the Seaboard Slave States in the Years 1853-1854*, 47.

⁴²⁷ "Was Committed," 28 May 1825, *The Shenandoah Herald*.

⁴²⁸ "Runaway," 16 July 1825, *The Shenandoah Herald*.

⁴²⁹ "Twenty-five Dollars Reward," 5 August 1841, *Sentinel of the Valley*.

⁴³⁰ "\$100 Reward," 9 October 1845, *Sentinel of the Valley* and "50 Dollars Reward," 4 October 1849, *The Tenth Legion* both found in Stewart, "African Americans in Shenandoah County, Virginia," vol. III, book B.



Figure 13. “Life of George Washington, The Farmer,” by Junius B. Stearns offers a study in contrasts between the clothing of the enslaved and the free. Library of Congress.

Despite being plain, slaves’ clothing held value and could be manipulated by the wearer. Elizabeth Brooks’ 1761 Will noted “the Negroes Bed & Clothes” valued at 7 pence, 6 shillings, and the estate of Joseph Langdon included “A Parcel of Negroes Bed Clothes” valued at one pound.⁴³¹ Such references draw attention to the importance of clothing for early Americans. Even the humblest garments deserved mention and were assigned a value. Moreover, despite master’s dictates, the enslaved asserted a degree of control over their appearance. Fashionable brass buttons, for instance, have been recovered from the slave quarters at Belle Grove. In another example, runaway slaves Philip and Winny were accused of murdering John Knox in Stafford County and had fled to Frederick and Loudoun counties. Well aware of how clothing could be used as markers of identity, they had a “variety of cloaths” so that their “dress cannot be described.”⁴³²

⁴³¹ See respectively, Inventory of Elizabeth Brooks, 1 December 1761, Frederick County Will Book 3, 1761-1770 and Estate of Joseph Langdon, 1 May 1770, Frederick County Will Book 4, 1770-1783.

⁴³² “June 1, 1769,” 15 June 1769, *Virginia Gazette* (Rind), Williamsburg.

More broadly, newspaper advertisements from the second half of the eighteenth century and early nineteenth century shed light on the appearance of enslaved African Americans in the Valley. Tailors and seamstresses used osnaburg, or oznabrig as it was often spelled, linen for shirts, shifts, trousers, and petticoats, as was common practice throughout the South. Will and Romy, for example, ran away from Staunton wearing “shirts and trousers of oznabrigs.”⁴³³ So, too, do references abound for tow, another coarse linen cloth. Runaway slave Daniel Bethwik was arrested in Shenandoah County wearing “tow linen pantaloons and shirt.” Maria ran away with Daniel wearing a “tow linen frock.”⁴³⁴ Similarly, Sam ran away in the winter of 1778 wearing “a tow linen shirt, petticoat trousers of the same.”⁴³⁵ References also appear for “country cloth.” Phillis, who fled with her husband Tony and was suspected of running to the Valley, wore “blue cotton and country cloth.”⁴³⁶ Coarse, natural materials, however durable, stood in marked contrast by color and quality to the refined, bleached linens and fine wools and silks worn by plantation masters or middling level slave owners. Visual distinctions reinforced racial hierarchies.

Beyond cloth, advertisements provide insights about the color of cloth and the types of garments worn. In the spring of 1766, Daniel fled Augusta County likely for his original home on the Northern Neck. He wore “a brown home made coat, blue jacket, brown breeches, and blue stockings.”⁴³⁷ One enslaved man, George, ran away from John C. Frame wearing “a new suit of drab homemade cloth.”⁴³⁸ Daniel Bethwik was caught wearing “a coloured yarn coat, tow linen pantaloons and shirt, and an old wool hat.”⁴³⁹ An African American man Ben, who lived in Shenandoah County, was identified as wearing “a coat of drab linsey, and striped or checked pantaloons.”⁴⁴⁰ Minor, who lived in Jefferson County, had on “a blue cloth coat, olive colored pantaloons, [and] white vest” when he was arrested.⁴⁴¹ As these advertisements demonstrate, blues and browns predominate the slave advertisements because common dyestuffs easily achieved the colors.

It is important, historian Jonathan Prude posits, for historians to pay attention “to the vital visual dimension of eighteenth-century culture.” Will Books and newspaper advertisement for runaways further underscore the fact that Americans “consistently

⁴³³ 13 July 1769, *Virginia Gazette* (Rind), Williamsburg. See also 18 July 1766, *Virginia Gazette* (Rind), Williamsburg and 29 July 1795, *Virginia Gazette and General Advertiser* (Davis), Richmond.

⁴³⁴ 30 July 1825, *The Shenandoah Herald*.

⁴³⁵ 27 January 1778, *Maryland Journal and Baltimore Advertiser* (Goddard), Baltimore.

⁴³⁶ 8 November 1770, *Virginia Gazette* (Rind), Williamsburg.

⁴³⁷ 2 May 1766, *Virginia Gazette* (Purdie & Co.), Williamsburg.

⁴³⁸ “Runaway,” 16 July 1825, *The Shenandoah Herald*.

⁴³⁹ “Was Committed,” 30 July 1825, *The Shenandoah Herald*.

⁴⁴⁰ “Absconded,” 7 May 1825, *The Shenandoah Herald*.

⁴⁴¹ “Was Committed,” 24 March 1824, *The Shenandoah Herald*.

observed themselves and their world, and that the ‘look’ of what they saw was deeply consequential.”⁴⁴² Although brief, this survey of African American clothing demonstrates: first, material culture reinforced racial hierarchies in the Shenandoah Valley; second, the enslaved at Belle Grove and beyond were adequately clothed in durable cloth made into utilitarian garments; and third, slaveholders in the Valley both imported and manufactured a variety of plain, coarse textiles.

Paternalism

Lost Cause mythology continues to influence public understandings of the antebellum South. Most interpreters at historic sites have encountered the pernicious idea of the contented slave and the kind master. By extension, people have contended, since at least the nineteenth century, that masters’ paternalism ensured both protection and welfare for the enslaved. Kristen Laise, executive director of Belle Grove Plantation, notes the challenging question visitors often pose at her historic site: were the Hites kind to their slaves? The issues of white paternalism and “benevolent” slavery are even more difficult when discussing Virginia, which is often portrayed as different than the rest of the South. White Virginians’ “desire for the modern trappings of nineteenth-century progress,” historian Peter S. Carmichael maintains, “contributes to a mislabeling of the Shenandoah as more Northern than Southern or more committed to free labor than slavery. These categories reveal more about the thinking of historians today than how white people interpreted the world around them in the nineteenth century.”⁴⁴³ Public historians have had difficulty dispelling long-held beliefs that are misinformed at best and dangerous at worst. Despite some audiences’ attempt to downplay slavery’s atrocities, the enslaved were susceptible to sale and the abuse of masters or overseers. Moreover, paternalism, rather than a reflection of “underlying social relations,” was instead “a way of imagining, describing, and justifying slavery.”⁴⁴⁴

White Southerners envisioned their social and racial order as natural and bolstered by historical precedent. In sixteenth- and seventeenth- century Europe, servants, wives, and children were deemed “subservient members of the family.” By the late seventeenth century, Americans came to equate slavery with race—a gradual, if sinister transformation. Early Africans had a “legal status” that “remained somewhat ambiguous until the late

⁴⁴² Jonathan Prude, “To Look upon the ‘Lower Sort’: Runaway Ads and the Appearance of Unfree Laborers in America, 1750-1800,” *The Journal of American History*, vol. 78, no. 1 (June 1991): 126.

⁴⁴³ Carmichael, “The Bonds of a Valley Community,” 9.

⁴⁴⁴ Johnson, *Soul by Soul*, 111.

seventeenth century.”⁴⁴⁵ Yet, by 1705 the institution of slavery had been fully codified. The Virginia House of Burgesses’ 1705 code—the last key statute in a long line of laws enacted beginning in the 1630s—did three main things: “to confirm the perpetual and inherited bondage of people of African descent; to establish an entirely separate penal code and judicial system for enslaved people; and, finally, through such devices as compulsory service in slave patrols, to compel nonslaveholders to protect the property rights of those who did.”⁴⁴⁶ By the time the Hite family occupied Belle Grove, slavery and race were tied together firmly.

Fierce defenses of slavery emerged in Virginia with renewed vigor during the 1830s. “Although proslavery thought demonstrated remarkable consistency from the seventeenth century on,” historian Drew Faust writes, “it became in the South of the 1830s, forties, and fifties more systematic and self-conscious; it took on the characteristics of a formal ideology with its resulting social movement.”⁴⁴⁷ South Carolinian James Henry Hammond’s famous proclamation before the Senate is the apotheosis of proslavery ideology. “In all social systems,” Hammond proclaimed, “there must be a class to do the menial duties, to perform the drudgery of life.” Hammond, like countless white Southerners, believed that the South had “found a race adapted to that purpose to her hand. A race inferior to her own, but eminently qualified in temper, in vigor, in docility, in capacity to stand the climate, to answer all her purposes. We use them for our purpose, and call them slaves.”⁴⁴⁸ In Hammond’s view, the “speech was extremely successful in the Senate and in the country.”⁴⁴⁹ Indeed, Hammond clearly articulated a long-held belief among white Southerners about the inferiority of Africans and African Americans.

What we know about the Hite family’s treatment of the enslaved is limited and only from the white point of view. But it is key to remind all audiences visiting Belle Grove that they sold slaves out of economic necessity or for financial gain; that they controlled the physical movements, material comfort, and daily routines of the enslaved; and that the enslaved were susceptible to whites’ physical, verbal, and sexual abuse. Paternalism could not, did not, cancel out those realities. The Hite family considered themselves Christian masters who, at least in their own eyes, governed their slaves with moderation. Students of the Hites have oft-remarked that Isaac assiduously copied sections of eighteenth-century

⁴⁴⁵ Wood, *Slavery in Colonial America*, 8.

⁴⁴⁶ Wood, *Slavery in Colonial America*, 11.

⁴⁴⁷ Faust, ed., *The Ideology of Slavery*, 4.

⁴⁴⁸ James Henry Hammond, “Speech of Hon. James H. Hammond, of South Carolina, on the Admission of Kansas, Under the Lecompton Constitution: Delivered in the Senate of the United States, March 4, 1858,” as found at *American Antiquarian Society*, <https://www.americanantiquarian.org/Freedmen/Manuscripts/cottonisk-ing.html> [accessed 22 May 2019].

⁴⁴⁹ *Secret and Sacred: The Diaries of James Henry Hammond, a Southern Slaveholder*, ed. Carol Bleser (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 273.

Enlightenment writings in his Commonplace book. One particular passage includes a hint at the master's humanity: "If it be a known custom that the heads of families assume a kind of civil power over their domestics, the servant is deemed to have consented to this also, as far as it is managed consistently with humanity."⁴⁵⁰ Whether or not Hite embodied these ideals is difficult to determine and is, in a sense, irrelevant given the magnitude of power he held in the master-slave relationship.

Slavery created an array of contradictions. Whites became entirely dependent upon a people they deemed inferior, and often spent great lengths of time in the company of a race that they claimed to be repugnant. "Public sentiment condemned the man who treated his slaves with cruelty," remarked Frederick Law Olmsted. "The owners were mainly men of some cultivation," he continued, "and felt a family attachment to their slaves, many of whom had been the playmates of their boyhood. Nevertheless, they were frequently punished severely, under the impulse of temporary passion, often without deliberation, and on unfounded suspicion."⁴⁵¹ Masters had complete control over the enslaved and could subject them to the most dehumanizing tasks. Indeed, as one enslaved woman, Bethany Veney, recalled, in her youth, "My old master, who at times was inclined to be jolly, had a way of entertaining his friends by my singing and dancing" and "giving me to understand what he wanted of me, I would, with all manner of grotesque grimaces, gestures, and positions, dance and sing."⁴⁵² Despite the humiliations Veney endured, she drew incredible strength from religion and her postbellum account, *The Narrative of Bethany Veney: A Slave Woman*, exposed the abuses of slavery.

In the early nineteenth century, Belle Grove's size suggests that the enslaved interacted more frequently with overseers than members of the Hite family, barring domestic servants. Overseers advanced the agricultural interests, maintained productivity on the farm, and regulated the behavior of the enslaved. The Hite family employed men such as Dabill, McMullin, Finnell, and Tobin between the 1810s and the 1820s to serve as overseers.⁴⁵³ In 1837, overseer John Tipton was paid \$101.17 for his services, whereas decades earlier, in 1785, overseer Benjamin Little was compensated in produce and meat.⁴⁵⁴ We know very little about the Hite's overseers. Yet, as Gabrielle M. Lanier and Phoebe G. Harding rightly note, overseers "occupied a position in the plantation system that was

⁴⁵⁰ "Of Masters and Servants," 1785-1847, Hite Family Commonplace Book, Hite Family Papers, vol I, N/P. Although the transcription attributes the text to John Locke, the passage in question is derived from Francis Hutcheson, *A Short Introduction to Moral Philosophy, in Three Books; Containing the Elements of Ethics and the Law of Nature*, vol. II (Glasgow: Robert and Andrew Foulis, 1772), 292.

⁴⁵¹ Olmsted, *A Journey in the Seaboard Slave States in the Years 1853-1854*, 108.

⁴⁵² Bethany Veney, *The Narrative of Bethany Veney, A Slave Woman* (Worcester, Mass., 1889), 8.

⁴⁵³ Isaac Hite to Isaac Bowman, 27 March 1817, Document 49, Hite Family Papers, vol. I and Ann T. Hite to Isaac F. Hite, 24 June 1827, Document 28, Hite Family Papers, vol. II.

⁴⁵⁴ Estate of Isaac Hite, 12 January 1837, Document 40, Hite Family Papers, vol. III and Articles of Agreement between Isaac Hite and Benjamin Little, 14 October 1785, Document 3, Hite Family Papers, vol. III.

tenuous at best.”⁴⁵⁵ One white planter described overseers as “the curse of this country” and “the worst men in the community.”⁴⁵⁶ Olmstead proclaimed that overseers “who, though sometimes men of intelligence and piety, were most often coarse, brutal, and licentious; drinking men, wholly unfitted for the responsibility imposed on them.”⁴⁵⁷ Overseers paradoxically drew the disdain of upper-class whites who also depended upon them entirely.

By the late eighteenth century, most planters had removed themselves from day-to-day operations on the ground using instead overseers. One diarist from Clarke County noted in 1827, for example, “I see from my window fifteen negroes, men, women, and children harvesting wheat. A white man is with them looking on, but does not put his hand to the work. This is slavery, but in the most inviting form—etc.”⁴⁵⁸ With that said, large plantations were indeed unusual in Valley. Accordingly, labor arrangements were quite different. As historian Eugene Genovese explains for the South more broadly: “A large majority of plantation slaves lived with resident owners, and a large additional minority with part-time resident owners. If the approximate half of all rural slaves who lived on units smaller than plantations are included, then the overwhelming majority of the slaves of the South lived with their masters and worked under their supervision.”⁴⁵⁹

Race relations within the Belle Grove are largely shrouded in mystery. Elizabeth Fox-Genovese observes that plantation mistresses “were generally God-fearing women who interpreted everyday relations and responsibilities as manifestations of social and divine order.”⁴⁶⁰ A revealing letter from Ann Hite to Elizabeth Steenbergen is illustrative of Fox-Genovese’s broader claims. In it she discussed the death of Belle Grove’s enslaved cook, Judah, who took “dangerously ill with a complaint one of great suffering a violent pleurisy in the first instance terminating in an inflammation of the heart which was most distressing.” Ann further related, “She finally went under the disease on Saturday morning leaving 12 children more than my own inconvenience which is very considerable — but it is the will of him that can not err of course ‘it is wisest best.’” Ann clearly understood Judah’s death as an act of Providence; moreover, she is shaken by the loss. But, the letter only refers to Judah by her station, as a cook, and never referenced her name. The loss, furthermore, meant more inconveniences and work for Ann about which she was little pleased.⁴⁶¹

⁴⁵⁵ Lanier and Harding, “Belle Grove Plantation Overseer’s House,” 55.

⁴⁵⁶ Olmsted, *A Journey in the Seaboard Slave States in the Years 1853-1854*, 49.

⁴⁵⁷ Olmsted, *A Journey in the Seaboard Slave States in the Years 1853-1854*, 108.

⁴⁵⁸ “Diary of Rev. Frederick D. Goodwin,” 18 June 1826, *Proceedings of the Clarke County Historical Association*, vol. IV (1944): 31.

⁴⁵⁹ Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll*, 12.

⁴⁶⁰ Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household*, 100.

⁴⁶¹ Ann T. Hite to Elizabeth Steenbergen, 5 April 1836, Hite Family Papers.

Conclusion

The daily experiences of the enslaved are best recovered through their material lives. Precluded from literacy by law, documentary records from free or enslaved African Americans in the lower Valley are extraordinarily rare. We have instead artifacts, architecture, and accounts. Public historians at historic sites can use these tools to create vibrant conversations about the complicated nature of race and slavery in the lower Valley and push audiences to think more critically about how they interface with the material past. How, for example, did neighboring poor whites, Virginia planters, and the enslaved each understand and portray the main house Belle Grove? What does a sample of coarse linen cloth tell us about clothing, ethnicity, slavery, placemaking, and material culture in the lower Valley? By creatively using artifacts, architecture, and historical reproductions public historians have ample opportunities to illuminate the often-lost world of the enslaved.

CHAPTER FOUR

WAR

Artist James E. Taylor accompanied Union General Philip H. Sheridan during the 1864 Shenandoah Valley campaign. A studious observer, Taylor rendered hundreds of sketches of military and civilian life. The “historic conference between General Sheridan and Thomas Laws” on September 12, 1864, is included among these images—it is a striking tableaux. Thomas Laws, enslaved by attorney Richard E. Byrd, served as a Union spy. Taylor’s image is a study in contrasts. Laws wears a soft hat, patched pants, and a shirt with a gaping hole at the shoulder. Sheridan embodies the beau ideal of the soldier in a jaunty kepi and a tightly fitted double-breasted frock coat. Yet, the two men were connected by a cause, the death of the Confederacy; and, remarkably, Laws’ and Sheridan’s hands appear to be touching in the image.⁴⁶²

Thomas Laws was one of the hundreds of African American men and women who served as spies and scouts for Union forces. Military reports from the lower Valley demonstrate the incalculable value of intelligence gathered from local slaves and freedpeoples who had acted at great personal risk to advance the causes of emancipation and Union.⁴⁶³ Black Virginians were well-suited to act as spies and scouts because of their familiarity with local terrain, their ability to move among African Americans communities, and their conditioning to act with guile and secrecy.⁴⁶⁴ Black women were particularly well suited to contribute to the war effort, charges historian Thavolia Glymph, because they “brought knowledge and organizational skills and strengths informed by gender and their unique access to the planters’ world.”⁴⁶⁵

Confederates were entirely unprepared for the activism of the enslaved. Indeed, charges historian Stephanie McCurry, “In their judgment of what war would involve, Confederate founders and ordinary citizens counted slaves out.”⁴⁶⁶ Ironically, the same slaves once deemed an “element of strength” had unquestionably become “the enemy within the Confederacy, as they fled readily to Union lines and provided Union soldiers

⁴⁶² Taylor, *The James E. Taylor Sketchbook*, 350.

⁴⁶³ Carly S. Mayer, ““Spies All Their Lives”: African Americans and Military Intelligence During the Civil War,” *Penn History Review*, vol. 23, issue 1 (Spring 2016): 12.

⁴⁶⁴ Mayer, ““Spies All Their Lives,”” 21.

⁴⁶⁵ Thavolia Glymph, “Rose’s War and the Gendered Politics of a Slave Insurgency in the Civil War,” *The Journal of the Civil War Era*, vol. 3, no. 4 (Dec. 2013): 501-2.

⁴⁶⁶ Stephanie McCurry, *Confederate Reckoning: Power and Politics in the Civil War South* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2012), 222.

with pertinent information.”⁴⁶⁷ African Americans exhibited unparalleled levels of resistance throughout the American South. By mid-1864, one scholar calculates, approximately 400,000 slaves had gone into Union lines.⁴⁶⁸ Within the lower Valley’s Clarke County, more than 23 percent of the enslaved population left between 1861 and 1862.⁴⁶⁹

Although African American resistance initiated and continued the freedom struggle, the presence of Union soldiers in the Valley greatly advanced black activism. Yet, as this chapter will discuss, Federal troops expressed a variety of opinions both on slavery as an institution and the enslaved with whom they interacted. In fact, upon entering the Valley Federal soldiers were first struck by the region’s beauty, not the brutality of slavery. Pennsylvanian James Longstaff Dunn, for example, wrote of the land near Winchester: “It is the finest country I was ever in large fields of Wheat of 50 to 100 acres each.”⁴⁷⁰ Charles Tenney of the 7th Ohio Infantry found the Valley “the prettiest country I ever passed through,” as peaches and plums were in full bloom.⁴⁷¹ Nonetheless, for the ideological or politically minded the lower Valley evoked memories of the raid on Harpers Ferry and a broader struggle over freedom and equality. “John Brown’s memory is still the centre of attraction,” wrote Chaplain Alonzo Quint of the 2nd Massachusetts. “Our men came in singing the ‘Glory, Hallelujah,’ and our soldiers sing it everywhere. Strange as that medley is, ‘his soul’s marching on’ does have a marvellous fascination to our army. The daring and manliness of that old man eclipses his fault, and he has become a hero.”⁴⁷² Soldiers clamored for souvenirs like “handbills, ballots, and such like papers,” which were treated as “treasured” mementoes.⁴⁷³

The linkages between John Brown’s war on slavery and the Civil War’s potential to end the institution became more apparent to Union soldiers over time. This the fourth chapter will first detail why the lower Valley played such a critical role in military operations. By so doing, it will assess the region’s divided loyalties, the key role of slavery in political debates, and early black activism. The chapter will then reveal the ways in which Union troops interacted with African Americans and how their views on slavery changed over time. Finally, it will conclude with a discussion of the slaves’ war. For public historians

⁴⁶⁷ Mayer, “‘Spies All Their Lives,’” 31.

⁴⁶⁸ Steven Hahn, *The Political Worlds of Slavery and Freedom* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), 61.

⁴⁶⁹ Kyle Allen Ainsworth, “Restoration, Resistance, and Reconstruction: Liberty at Last in Clarke County, Virginia, 1865-1879,” (University of Southern Mississippi, M.A. thesis, 2010), 78.

⁴⁷⁰ James L. Dunn to “Dear Wife,” 5 June 1862, Folder 1862, Box 1, Dunn Papers, UVa.

⁴⁷¹ Charles Tenney, 23 and 24 April [1862], Box 1, Folder “Journal of Charles Tenney,” Charles Tenney Letters, UVA.

⁴⁷² Alonzo H. Quint, *Potomac and the Rapidan* (Boston: Crosby and Nichols, 1864), 101.

⁴⁷³ Quint, *Potomac and the Rapidan*, 101.

working at Civil War-era battlefields in the lower Valley, ample opportunities exist to entwine military and social history in order to create conversations about the conflict's varied meanings to citizens, slaves, and soldiers and its transformative impact upon the region. In other words, how the homefront and the battlefield were inextricably linked.

War Comes to the Valley

Geographic location and strategic importance promised that the lower Valley would play a key role in the Civil War. The region formed a natural corridor for invasion and transportation networks allowed efficient travel. The Valley Pike (roughly the site of modern Route 11) featured prominently during military operations and became a crucial artery “for moving troops, maintaining military supply and communications, and fighting battles.”⁴⁷⁴ “In effect,” note Clarence R. Geier and Kimberly Tinkham, “the network of towns, roads, bridges, fords, farms, plantations, mills, and quarries that shaped the mid-19th century landscape, in conjunction with the natural terrain features over which those features were draped, defined the area and setting of military action.”⁴⁷⁵ Wheat production and other crops, moreover, enshrined the region as “the Breadbasket of the Confederacy.”⁴⁷⁶ The Valley’s great importance was not lost on Southern leadership. Thomas Jonathan “Stonewall” Jackson maintained, “if this valley is lost, Virginia is lost.”⁴⁷⁷ Fierce contests over control of the region followed. According to an early history of the Shenandoah Valley’s Civil War, the town of Winchester alone “was occupied or abandoned sixty-eight times by the troops of both armies.”⁴⁷⁸

⁴⁷⁴ Geraldine Wojno Kiefer and James K. Bryant II, “Strategy and Sublimity: A Gallery of Valley Pike Images during the Civil War,” in *The Great Valley Road: Shenandoah Landscapes from Prehistory to the Present*, eds. Warren R. Hofstra and Karl Raitz (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2010), 135.

⁴⁷⁵ Clarence R. Geier and Kimberly Tinkham, “An Overview and Assessment of Archaeological Resources and Landscapes within Lands Managed by Cedar Creek and Belle Grove National Historical Park,” vol. I (JMU, 2006), 149.

⁴⁷⁶ Koons and Noyalas, 71.

⁴⁷⁷ Quoted in Richard R. Duncan, *Beleaguered Winchester: A Virginia Community at War, 1861-1865* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2007), 18-9.

⁴⁷⁸ Sanford C. Kellogg, *The Shenandoah Valley and Virginia, 1861 to 1865* (New York: The Neale Publishing Company, 1903), “Preface,” n/p.



Figure 14. Alfred R. Waud's sketch, "Shenandoah Valley from Maryland Heights," gives a nice perspective on the region's wartime appearance. Library of Congress.

Despite Virginia's centrality to the Confederate project, its attachment to the South remained tenuous in the war's earliest days. Most famously, the state's western counties broke away to form West Virginia which achieved statehood in 1863.⁴⁷⁹ More broadly, the lower Valley symbolized how Virginia both adhered to and departed from the character of the Deep South. Historian Jonathan Berkey has characterized the region as a "borderland between the free labor society of the North and the slave society of the South."⁴⁸⁰ Berkey envisions borders not only as dividing lines but also as a mechanism that draws people together. He contends "residents tend to develop a distinct local identity that values cooperation and pragmatic problem solving."⁴⁸¹ Once war loomed on the horizon, however, the lower Valley's population became divided and life incredibly uncertain.⁴⁸² David Hunter Strother—a prolific journalist and writer who used the pseudonyms "Porte Crayon" and "Virginian Unionist"—charged that the area was "debatable ground between the contending opinions of the age."⁴⁸³

⁴⁷⁹ Western Virginians had long been pitted against those east of the Appalachian Mountains over issues surrounding taxation, internal improvements, and political apportionment. Simmering tensions came to a boil in the late winter and early spring of 1861 during the secession crisis. In late May, "Unionist delegates from twenty-four northwestern Virginia counties and three Shenandoah Valley counties met in Wheeling, Western Virginia's largest city, from May 13 to 15 to confer and deliberate the secession crisis." Soon thereafter, a Secession Referendum laid the groundwork for the future state of West Virginia. Mark A. Snell, *West Virginia and the Civil War: Mountaineers Are Always Free* (Charleston: History Press, 2011), 21-3.

⁴⁸⁰ Berkey, "War in the Borderland," 1. For a similar characterization of the Lower Valley as a borderland see, Carmichael, "The Bonds of a Valley Community," 3-4.

⁴⁸¹ Berkey, "War in the Borderland," 3.

⁴⁸² Berkey, "War in the Borderland," 72.

⁴⁸³ A Virginian [David Hunter Strother], "Personal Recollections of the War," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, vol. XXXIII (June 1866): 1.

“No state meant more to the secessionist cause than Virginia,” writes historian Charles Dew. “If the state’s manpower, wealth, industrial and agricultural resources, and prestige . . . could be placed at the service of the Confederacy, the new government organizing in Montgomery would be dramatically strengthened.”⁴⁸⁴ Slavery figured centrally in the momentous political debates of 1860-1861, and the secessionist commissioners, whom Dew calls the apostles of disunion, used radical propaganda to advance their cause. Georgian Henry L. Benning told white Virginians that “the Black Republican party of the North” had a “hatred of slavery” and intended to abolish it.⁴⁸⁵ John Smith Preston assured Virginians that they were “a calm, grave, deliberate and religious people, the holders of the most majestic civilization and the inheritors, by right, of the fairest estate of liberty.”⁴⁸⁶ The words of Benning and Preston did not fall on deaf ears. White Virginians were still reeling from events in Harpers Ferry. As the *Shepherdstown Register* had reported in the late fall of 1859, “The late insurrection at Harper’s Ferry should teach the Southern people, in future, to be watchful for the protection of their interests. Verily, it seems as if the ‘irrepressible conflict,’ spoken of by Northern fanatics, has already begun.”⁴⁸⁷ As 1860 dawned slaveholders and non-slaveholders carefully monitored political developments nationally as they anxiously watched the enslaved population within Virginia’s borders.

As white Virginians hotly discussed the political future of their state, African Americans waited to act. Counties such as Jefferson and Berkeley registered some Unionist sentiment, while Frederick and Clarke held more homogenous pro-secession populations.⁴⁸⁸ Even in the case of the latter, if Unionists were present they were suppressed. Charles Wesley Andrews wrote of Shepherdstown, “The Union men here[,] or most of them[,] did not vote at all.”⁴⁸⁹ Slaves paid careful attention to the unfolding political contests of the day. Many had likely heard of the “Black Republican” Abraham Lincoln and believed freedom was at hand.⁴⁹⁰ In Charles Town, days after Fort Sumter, large crowds gathered in the streets to watch the local militia. David Hunter Strother observed, “Even the negroes were jubilant in view of the parade and unusual excitement among their masters and mistresses. Yet I thought I could discern in the eyes of some of the older and wiser woolly-heads a gleam of anxious speculation—a silent and tremulous questioning of the future.”⁴⁹¹ Strother’s

⁴⁸⁴ Dew, *Apostles of Disunion*, 59.

⁴⁸⁵ Henry L. Benning quoted in Dew, *Apostles of Disunion*, 65.

⁴⁸⁶ John Smith Preston quoted in Dew, *Apostles of Disunion*, 71.

⁴⁸⁷ “The Insurrection at Harper’s Ferry,” 2 November 1859, *Shepherdstown Register*.

⁴⁸⁸ Berkey, “War in the Borderland,” 70.

⁴⁸⁹ C. W. Andrews to “My Dr. Wife,” 24 May 1861, Andrews Papers, DU.

⁴⁹⁰ Hahn, *A Nation Under Our Feet*, 13.

⁴⁹¹ A Virginian [Strother], “Personal Recollections of the War,” 9.

remarks capture a key point that most whites missed: enslaved populations were astute observers and deeply aware of political affairs. Indeed, when one elderly black woman, who described herself not as enslaved by but bound out to the Cooley family, began her narrative of the Civil War she started with five fateful words: “When John Brown broke out.”⁴⁹²

It was not until late April, after Fort Sumter and Lincoln’s call for 75,000 volunteers, that Virginia left the Union. By joining the Confederacy, white Virginians became part of a conflict to secure slavery’s future. Robert Thomas Barton—Winchester native and Virginia lawyer and politician—recalled his father’s shifting political beliefs which stand as representative for many white Virginians in the lower Valley. “He was an old line Whig, very much opposed to Democracy,” Barton wrote, “But the birth and growth of the Free Soil and Abolition parties and their radical tendency towards a centralized government had a profound effect upon the old line Whigs and way before the pernicious course of the Republican party precipitated the country into the war.” His father then “threw himself zealously into the cause of the South” and joined the secessionist.⁴⁹³ Barton minced words by equating the “Free Soil and Abolition” with centralized government. It was the party’s drive to halt slavery’s expansion that engendered real fear among white Virginians. When Virginia joined the Confederacy, the state’s white citizens became part of a national project that intended to maintain slavery and uphold racial hierarchies.

Even the lower Valley’s Unionists desired to maintain slavery. The political events of 1861, for example, had left Anna B. Cadwallader torn. Cadwallader lived in Newtown, Virginia, (later renamed Stephens City) during the war and her letters reveal how the conflicted impacted both free and enslaved civilians in Frederick County. For Cadwallader, her cause was Union but not abolition. She bitterly complained after the Union had been dissolved but carefully parsed out her political ideology. She noted, “I am for Union always not that I advocate Old Lincolns preceedings or Abolitionism either.” Loyalty to the Union did not mean a belief in racial equality. Continuing, Cadwallader snarled, “I cant bear the thought of our Once Glorious Union the home of Our Washington the land that the stars and stripes have floated over so long to be desolved and for the sake of a few wooly headed Negroes although I suppose that as all the rest of the Southern States have seceeded it was well for Virginia to seceed as not.”⁴⁹⁴ The spring of 1861 likewise left Unionist David Hunter Strother reeling. “Yesterday I was a citizen of the great American republic . . . To-day, what am I? A citizen of Virginia. Virginia, a petty commonwealth with scarcely a million of white inhabitants.”⁴⁹⁵ That summer, upon encountering a slave, Strother advised

⁴⁹² “The Colored Woman at Headquarters,” in Johnson, *Battleground Adventures*, 392.

⁴⁹³ Robert Thomas Barton Memoir, Barton Family Papers, Virginia Historical Society; hereinafter, VHS.

⁴⁹⁴ [Anna B. Cadwallader] to “Dear John,” 24 May 1861, Cadwallader Papers, VHS.

⁴⁹⁵ A Virginian [Strother], “Personal Recollections of the War,” 14 and 16, respectively.

the man “go now & mind your work and talk no more to these men or others about freedom.”⁴⁹⁶ Both Cadwallader and Strother sought not only to uphold the Union but also to ensure the preservation of slavery.

Once secession had been declared Virginia’s political establishment made the call to arms. Most white Virginians understood, as historian Aaron Sheehan-Dean argues, that they “benefited from living in a slave society” and thus enlisted at rates that exceeded any other Confederate state.⁴⁹⁷ Men from the Valley filled out the ranks of units such as the 5th and 52nd Virginia Infantry, while the male citizens of Jefferson and Berkeley counties joined the 2nd Virginia Infantry and 12th Virginia Cavalry. Sixty-five percent of eligible white men in the Shenandoah Valley ultimately enlisted.⁴⁹⁸ Importantly, slavery had “shaped the relationships Virginians established among themselves and with outsiders; hence, defending Virginia in 1860 was defending slavery.”⁴⁹⁹ Although the lower Valley’s white sons served in Confederate units for a variety of personal reasons, their nation’s *raison d’être* was clear.

The onus of military service fell hard on farmers in the Valley. Painfully aware of how military service had drained the region of its manpower, the white citizens complained through an unusual letter the Attorney General of Virginia, J. R. Tucker, issued to L. P. Walker, Confederate Secretary of War, in late August 1861. Written on behalf of the “Citizens of the Valley,” Tucker began by noting the centrality of wheat and corn to the region. The call for militia was burdensome for these people as the harvest was not yet over. The “farmer left his crop standing in the field unhoused. No plow has been put into the ground for the fall seeding of wheat.” Tucker pleaded that white Virginians had sacrificed too much and imperiled “the crop of the past year” and prevented “the raising a crop for the coming year.” Then, remarkably, Tucker invoked slavery and demographics as an argument against further enlistment. As he wrote, “In Shenandoah County there is a white population of 12,800 and a total population of 13,800, showing only 1,000 blacks, free and slave. Ten per cent. of the whites makes a call of 1,280 for militia service drafted from the laborers, the tillers of the soil, and not leaving sufficient slaves at home to work while the master is abroad to fight.” As a counter-point he charged: “Nansemond County, near Norfolk, has a total population of 13,700, (nearly the same as Shenandoah), of which 5,700

⁴⁹⁶ David Hunter Strother, 18 July 1861, Strother Collection, Journals, WVU.

⁴⁹⁷ Sheehan-Dean, *Why Confederates Fought*, 13.

⁴⁹⁸ Aaron Sheehan-Dean, “Everyman’s War: Confederate Enlistment in Civil War Virginia,” *Civil War History*, vol. 50, no. 1 (March 2004): 12.

⁴⁹⁹ Sheehan-Dean, “Everyman’s War,” 21.

are white and 8,000 black, free and slave. The draft of 10 per cent. draws 570 whites, but leaves the negro to the farm labor.”⁵⁰⁰ The Valley’s white citizens charged, in essence, that it had become a rich man’s war and a poor man’s fight.

Tucker’s letter proved prescient. A modern study summarizes the damage created by war: “Invading and occupying armies stripped the Valley of its agricultural products, resources, and infrastructure, burned barns and grist mills, ruined crops, and confiscated livestock.”⁵⁰¹ Slavery’s destruction was even more damning to Virginia agriculture. The disruption of war, the presence of Union soldiers, and possibility of freedom resulted in the flight of slaves beginning in the conflict’s earliest days. The same roads that had transported slave coffles in the antebellum era became pathways to freedom for slaves in wartime Virginia. And black Virginians’ war began early. In early May 1861, in Harpers Ferry, Virginia, the *Springfield Republican* (Springfield, Massachusetts) reported, with a degree of hyperbole, that a “corps of free negroes in camp . . . intended for a raid into Virginia.” The newspaper went on noting, “There are many evidences of the fear of insurrections at the South.”⁵⁰² By July, slaves had fled by the score to Gen. Robert Patterson’s army as it passed through Berkeley and Jefferson counties.⁵⁰³ Black Virginians immediately envisioned the Civil War as a war for liberation. In mid-July 1861, David Strother encountered a “large negro man.” When asked about John Brown the African American maintained that he was a good man who came to “give liberty to the oppressed and do justice on Earth.” Shortly after this conversation Strother encountered the man’s master: “I found he had been a secessionist” and “asked him if he had observed any peculiar restiveness among his slaves since the Federal army had enter Virginia. He assured me, somewhat boastfully, that he had never seen them more quiet & obedient.”⁵⁰⁴ Moments later the slave quietly asked Union troops if the army had come to set them free. Although rebuked, the anonymous slave already understood the Civil War’s true meaning and associated the Union army’s presence with freedom.

⁵⁰⁰ J R Tucker to Leroy P. Walker, 27 August 1861, *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, series 1, vol. 5, p. 819.

⁵⁰¹ Koons and Noyalas, “Historic Resource Study,” 71.

⁵⁰² “Fear of the Slaves,” *Springfield Republican* (Springfield, MA), 4 May 1861, 8.

⁵⁰³ Edward H. Phillips, *The Lower Shenandoah Valley in the Civil War: The Impact of War Upon the Civilian Population and Upon Civil Institutions* (Lynchburg, VA: H. E. Howard, Inc., 1993), 110.

⁵⁰⁴ David Hunter Strother, 18 July 1861, David Hunter Strother Collection, Journals, West Virginia and Regional History Center, Morgantown, WV.

The War on Slavery

The Civil War began as a war to save the Union and ended with the abolishment of slavery. Enslaved and free African Americans, northern politicians, and Union military forces each contributed to the struggle over black freedom. Scholars have actively debated which groups asserted more pressure to bring about slavery's end; moreover, historians remain deeply divided about what the North's fighting men thought about slavery and the war for liberation. On the one hand, African Americans' actions hastened their liberation in countless ways and shaped northern political and military policies. "Unlike Lincoln," historian Barbara J. Fields charges, "the slaves harbored no illusion that a war to defeat secession could be anything but a war to end slavery."⁵⁰⁵ On the other hand, as scholars such as Glenn David Brasher have asserted, evolving governmental policy contributed mightily to slavery's destruction and many slaves were freed only because of the presence of Union military forces.⁵⁰⁶

Even though the Civil War abolished slavery, Federal soldiers' opinions about race and slavery varied greatly. The diversity of wartime sentiment has, in turn, engendered fierce debate among scholars. Chandra Manning contends, while still conceding to anti-black prejudice, "the shock of war itself and soldiers' interactions with slaves, who in many cases were the first black people northern men had ever met, changed Union troops' minds fast."⁵⁰⁷ Historian Gary Gallagher is less convinced. He finds that "Eventually, most loyal citizens, though profoundly prejudiced by twenty-first century standards and largely indifferent toward enslaved black people, embraced emancipation as a tool to punish slaveholders, weaken the Confederacy, and protect the Union from future internal strife." Significantly, in Gallagher's view, "A minority of the white populace invoked moral grounds to attack slavery, though their arguments carried less weight than those presenting emancipation as a military measure necessary to defeat the Rebels and restore the Union."⁵⁰⁸ Although historians' arguments overlap, the debate centers on the question of abolition as a moral cause versus a military necessity. An examination of source materials from the Valley gives voice to both views.

⁵⁰⁵ Barbara Jeanne Fields, "Who Freed the Slaves?" in Geoffrey C. Ward, Ric Burns, and Ken Burns, *The Civil War: An Illustrated History* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1990), 179. Fields' argument has been characterized as the "self-emancipation" thesis. See also, Vincent Harding, *There Is a River: The Black Struggle for Freedom in America* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1981).

⁵⁰⁶ For an interpretive emphasis on the role of military and political policy and leadership in bringing out the liberation of slaves see especially, Brasher, *The Peninsula Campaign and the Necessity of Emancipation*. Gary Gallagher, without discounting either the enslaved or politicians, argues the military largely determined when and where freedom arrived. Gallagher, *The Union War*, 141-50. For how this played out in the spring and summer of 1865 see, Gregory P. Downs, *After Appomattox: Military Occupation and the Ends of War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015).

⁵⁰⁷ Manning, *What This Cruel War Was Over*, 12.

⁵⁰⁸ Gallagher, *The Union War*, 2-3.

In 1861 and early 1862, the first interactions between slaves and soldiers unfolded in manifold days. In the war's earliest days, Federal officers were often constrained if they tried to assist runaway slaves. In Shepherdstown, for example, minister Charles Wesley Andrews was surprised to learn in the summer of 1861 that Federal soldiers jailed slaves until their masters picked them up.⁵⁰⁹ Occupying Union troops nevertheless created disruptions, at least according to whites. For blacks, the presence of blue uniforms signaled an opportunity to escape their masters. Historian Edward H. Phillips observes, "When the northern invaders first entered the Valley in July, Negroes by the dozens seized the opportunity to escape from bondage as Patterson's army passed through Berkeley and Jefferson counties."⁵¹⁰ The trend continued into the fall. In October of 1861, a resident of Jefferson County complained to Confederate President Jefferson Davis that after the "enemy crossed the Potomac at Harper's Ferry" the farmers were "being robbed of slaves, horses, and everything the enemy can use."⁵¹¹ Although hearsay, and possibly hyperbolic, this complaint demonstrates the powerful presence, and symbolic importance, of Union troops in the lower Valley. Nonetheless, non-interference continued to be the policy of the day for most Northerners. In the late winter of 1862, Chaplain Alonzo Quint of the 2nd Massachusetts contended, while stationed near Winchester, "As an army, we have nothing to do with slavery. We neither entice, nor drive back."⁵¹² Despite Union soldiers' indifference to or inability to act on the behalf of the enslaved, African Americans in the lower Valley continued to use the tumult of war to gain freedom and disrupt the plantation complex.

The accounts of white Southerners and Northerners do little to spotlight slaves' actions and sentiments. It is therefore worth pausing the local narrative for a moment to explain the broader freedom struggle initiated by the enslaved. In May 1861, three enslaved African Americans—Frank Baker, Shephard Mallory, and James Townsend—fled to Fort Monroe, Virginia. The men, who had been building Confederate earthworks, offered invaluable military intelligence. If turned away from the Federal garrison they would be returned to forced labor, thereby continuing to involuntarily advance the Confederate war effort.⁵¹³ Maj. Gen. Benjamin F. Butler, a successful Massachusetts lawyer before the war, commanded the Fort. In a deft maneuver, he deemed the three slaves "contraband of war." Historian Glenn David Brasher explains Butler's decision: "Since Southerners held slaves as a form of property and were using that property to build their fortifications, Butler concluded that slaves were subject to confiscation under rules of war that allowed the

⁵⁰⁹ Charles Wesley Andrews to "My Dr. Wife," 10 July 1861, Andrews Papers, DU.

⁵¹⁰ Phillips, *The Lower Shenandoah Valley in the Civil War*, 110.

⁵¹¹ James L. Ranson to Jefferson Davis, 15 October 1861, *The War of the Rebellion: Official Records of the Civil War*, series 1, vol. 5, p. 898-899. Hereinafter, OR.

⁵¹² Quint, *The Potomac and the Rapidan*, 114.

⁵¹³ Goodheart, 1861, 300.

seizure of property that aided an enemy's war effort."⁵¹⁴ In other words, Butler's focus on labor, rather than the men's status as individuals, avoided a number of thorny legal questions.⁵¹⁵ Butler's political masterstroke became deeply influential as Secretary of War Simon Cameron, and countless Union officers, confirmed Butler's decision. Three months later Congress issued the First Confiscation Act, which "formalized the presumption that slaves employed in the Confederate war effort could rightly be seized from their owners."⁵¹⁶

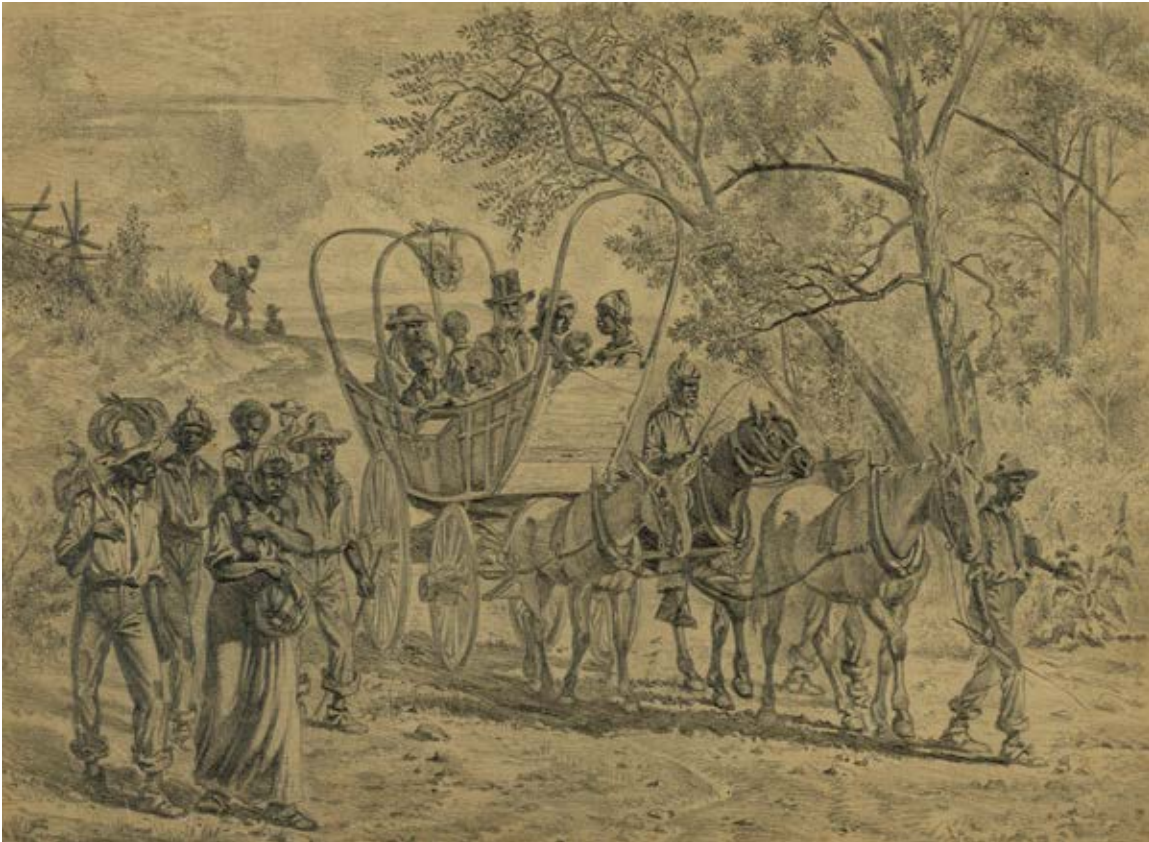


Figure 15. Edwin Forbes' "African American refugees coming into the Union lines near Culpeper Court House," powerfully depicts the wartime flight of the enslaved. Library of Congress.

⁵¹⁴ Brasher, *The Peninsula Campaign and the Necessity of Emancipation*, 35. See also, Goodheart, 1861, 313-315.

⁵¹⁵ Chandra Manning, *Troubled Refuge: Struggling for Freedom in the Civil War* (New York: Vintage Books, 2017), 173.

⁵¹⁶ Robert Harrison, *Washington during Civil War and Reconstruction* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 29.

Although the majority of slaves found liberation by running away from their masters, in rare cases white Southerners freed their slaves. Manumission had deep roots in Virginia history. Inspired by religious devotion or revolutionary-era ideals, white Virginians such as Richard Randolph and George Washington liberated their slaves after their deaths. In Civil War-era Virginia, Hugh Nelson Pendleton, owner of Westwood plantation in Jefferson County, “told his slaves” at the outbreak of the conflict “that they were free to go where they pleased” according to a family descendent.⁵¹⁷ A postwar regimental history corroborates this claim. The history of the 118th Pennsylvania claimed that Pendleton set free ninety slaves. The related numbers were much inflated as indicated by the 1860 slave schedule.⁵¹⁸ Nonetheless, Pendleton’s act—whether pragmatic or moralistic—set his former slaves on a path to freedom. One of them, George Slow, “was the body-servant of one of the officers” in the Pennsylvania regiment “and was quite a noted character.”⁵¹⁹

If Pendleton had freed his slaves out of fear, early Union policy in Virginia would have mollified his concerns for moderation took precedent. Union Gen. Nathaniel P. Banks had won praise in Baltimore for his judicious policies at least so far as white Marylanders were concerned. On March 13, 1862, his general orders in Winchester made no direct mention of slavery. In fact, he decreed, “The troops are cautioned against any injury to private or public property or any interference with the rights of citizens.”⁵²⁰ Banks’ policies reflected a prevailing sentiment within the Union army: there was little appetite among many Federal soldiers to interfere with slavery. Alonzo Quint went so far as to argue, “if ‘general emancipation’ were now made the object of this war, I fully believe that our armies would melt away. Our men are fighting for the flag, not for the abolition of slavery. So far as the army feels, slavery is not a prominent theme or thought.”⁵²¹ In a similar vein, David Hunter Strother recounted the following incident: “He [a slave] asked a soldier of the Massachusetts regiment ‘if this was not the army that was come to set them free?’ The soldier replied, ‘No, my man, we have come here solely to execute the laws. To set you free, or to do any thing contrary to the law of the land, is not our mission. Go, therefore, serve your master faithfully, and be content to know that you are in all probability better off under his protection than if you were free.’”⁵²² Quint and Strother give voice to Gary Gallagher’s charge that most Northerners remained focused on the preservation of Union.

⁵¹⁷ Helen B. Pendleton, “Westwood,” *Magazine of the Jefferson County Historical Society*, XII (Dec., 1946), 23.

⁵¹⁸ Hugh Nelson Pendleton, 7 August 1860, Jefferson County, Virginia, 1860 Slave Schedule.

⁵¹⁹ Survivors’ Association, *History of the Corn Exchange Regiment, 118th Pennsylvania Volunteers* (Philadelphia, PA: J. L. Smith, Publisher, 1888), 102.

⁵²⁰ N.P. Banks, 13 March 1862, General Orders No. 26, *OR*, series I, vol. 5, 747.

⁵²¹ Quint, *The Potomac and the Rapidan*, 48.

⁵²² A Virginian [Strother], “Personal Recollections of the War,” 156.

The year 1862 saw significant changes in northern opinion over and policy about slavery. Importantly, as historian Chandra Manning explains, “Military emancipation was a process consisting of many, often contradicting elements, and it came in many variants.”⁵²³ Congress approved a Second Confiscation Act on July 17, 1862. It proclaimed that any person committed of the crime of treason would have his slaves “declared and made free.” It further stipulated: “all slaves captured from such persons [engaged in rebellion against the government of the United States] or deserted by them and coming under the control of the government of the United States; and all slaves of such person found on [or] being within any place occupied by rebel forces and afterwards occupied by the forces of the United States, shall be deemed captives of war, and shall be forever free of their servitude, and not again held as slaves.”⁵²⁴ Lincoln himself opposed the measure as unconstitutional. He issued a veto message despite the fact that he had signed the statute after last-minute negotiations. The President then presented his Cabinet with his own emancipation policy days later. Then in late August, Lincoln wrote his now famous response to Horace Greeley who had been critical of Lincoln’s policies on slavery. Lincoln charged, “My paramount object in this struggle *is* to save the Union, and is *not* either to save or to destroy slavery. If I could save the Union without freeing *any* slave I would do it, and if I could save it by freeing *all* the slaves I would do it; and if I could save it by freeing some and leaving others alone I would also do that.”⁵²⁵

How did the political wrangling of Congress and the President impact life in the Valley? Historian Edward H. Phillips maintains that from “the time Banks’ army invaded the Valley in February and March, 1862, the change became pronounced. At first military police again rounded up fugitives and hustled them off to local jails, but no longer was this done so that their masters might recover them.”⁵²⁶ Slaves continued to respond to the presence of Federal troops by fleeing into their lines. In response, Banks issued Special Orders No. 50 in March 1862, which requested that all contraband be sent to headquarters for questions. Thereafter, contrabands were supposed to be to the Division Quartermaster for employment.⁵²⁷ The contraband were then registered, provided with temporary housing, and assigned to work. “Contrabands who refused to work for wages,” Berkey notes, “were denied food and lodging.”⁵²⁸ Similar policies were followed throughout the South as Chandra Manning has recently documented in her excellent book, *Troubled Refuge*.

⁵²³ Manning, *Troubled Refuge*, 161.

⁵²⁴ “The Second Confiscation Act,” 17 July 1862, found at Freedmen’s & Southern Society Project, <http://www.freedmen.umd.edu/conact2.htm> [accessed 17 December 2018].

⁵²⁵ Abraham Lincoln to Horace Greeley, 22 August 1862, found at “Annenberg Learner: Teacher Resources and Professional Development Across the Curriculum,” Workshop 4, Concerning Emancipation, http://www.learner.org/workshops/primarysources/emancipation/docs/lin_greeley.html [accessed 17 December 2018].

⁵²⁶ Phillips, *The Lower Shenandoah Valley in the Civil War*, 112.

⁵²⁷ Berkey, “War in the Borderland,” 189.

⁵²⁸ Berkey, “War in the Borderland,” 189.

It is undeniable that blacks' bids for freedom were often tied to the presence of Union troops. As Glenn David Brasher observes in his study of the 1862 Peninsula Campaign, "the Union army's attitude toward slaves was crucial in encouraging, or at least not slowing, the surge of fugitives into Union lines on the Peninsula."⁵²⁹ Farther west a similar trend followed. Slavery gradually collapsed in the lower Valley because of Union occupation. In historian Jonathan Berkey's estimation, "Slaves became more inclined to resist, and their resistance [*sic*] enjoyed a greater chance of success in such an environment."⁵³⁰ Union occupation proved fleeting, though, and runaways faced perilous journeys.

Although the number of fleeing slaves is extraordinarily difficult to quantify, the observations of soldiers and civilians are revealing. By mid-April 1862, "a horrified Laura Lee observed that the streets were filled with runaways from all over the country who found temporary shelter in empty houses and warehouses."⁵³¹ Union soldier James Dunn claimed at the end of June 1862, "In this valley you can hardly see a negro."⁵³² A member of the Cadwallader family wrote to a brother serving in the Confederate army, "all the darkeys here all left nearly except Carters they are still at home yet they all say they are going to [ink stain] Freedom."⁵³³ And a soldier in the 3rd Wisconsin encountered a farmer in Charlestown who "was doing his own chores, milking with his own hands his last cow, and as woe-begone a secessionist as could be found anywhere. His slaves had left him; and his stock and poultry had joined the Union side, too."⁵³⁴ Once the disparate accounts are woven together it becomes apparent that in 1862 an extraordinarily large number of the enslaved fled the lower Valley.

Slavery's destruction in the Valley belies the notion that emancipation unfolded as a linear process.⁵³⁵ The enslaved fled the region entirely in fits and starts or sought refugee among Union forces when nearby. Although the enslaved acted on their own accord, the presence of Federal forces had an important impact on where and when they fled. The Valley was not *sui generis*. Historian Yael A. Sternhell notes, "The departure of the male masters from the army and the arrival of Union forces opened possibilities hitherto unimaginable. Slaves enthusiastically grasped the opportunity to flee their bondage; by the end of the war at least 500,000 would end up under Union rule, and in areas close to Union

⁵²⁹ Brasher, *The Peninsula Campaign and the Necessity of Emancipation*, 145-6.

⁵³⁰ Berkey, "War in the Borderland," 192.

⁵³¹ Duncan, *Beleaguered Winchester*, 66.

⁵³² J L Dunn to "My Dear Wife," 30 June 1862, Folder 1862, Box 1, Dunn Papers, UVA.

⁵³³ Bettie Cadwallader to "Dear John," 9 Feb 1863, Cadwallader Papers, VHS.

⁵³⁴ Edwin E. Bryant, *History of the Third Regiment of Wisconsin Veteran Volunteer Infantry, 1861-1865* (Madison, Wisc.: Democrat Printing, 1891), 41.

⁵³⁵ Berkey, "War in the Borderland," 174.

military presence entire slave populations would leave their masters behind.”⁵³⁶ The enslaved demonstrated an unparalleled degree of activism during the war years that clearly illustrates political acumen and personal bravery.

The Valley’s strategic importance guaranteed the continual movement of troops and, inevitably, military clashes. The presence of occupying and invading armies directly impacted the actions and reactions of African Americans. In June 1862, Winchester resident Cornelia McDonald observed, “On the approach of [Confederate General Thomas “Stonewall”] Jackson the negroes, who had, many of them left their homes and were living in the town, began a flight that was equalled in speed and madness by the Yankees themselves. . . . They had been told by the Yankees that Jackson’s men would have no mercy on them but that they would be put to the most cruel death.”⁵³⁷ Then, in the winter of 1863, she observed, “There is a great exodus of negroes; every day some government wagons depart laden with them and their effects; on their way to the land of Promise; where that happy country may be we know not, though some say it is Central America that they are turning their eyes to.”⁵³⁸ McDonald’s remarks, however condescending, reveal a core truth: there was continual movement of people in the Valley throughout the war years. For whites such as McDonald, the loss of slaves proved both frustrating and shocking. She complained of her “increased anxiety and responsibility, with the burden to bear alone,” for “there are unaccustomed tasks to be performed. . . . Such tasks as formerly fell to the lot of the servants; but they are gone, and we have to make the best of a very unpleasant state of affairs.”⁵³⁹ The Civil War awakened whites to their complete dependence on the enslaved and presaged the profound changes that would come with Reconstruction.

Wartime conditions radically changed life in the lower Valley for white populations who reacted with anger and disgust. Anna B. Cadwallader complained to her brother John in March 1863 that the family remained in “Yankeydon” and that they had “not seen a Southern Soldier for an age.” Federal troops occupied Winchester and the war had irrevocably changed the plantation. Continuing she noted, “well you wrote that you supposed the sight of a darkey was good for sore eyes, but we still have a good many left although they have been flocking to Yankeedon by hundreds.” She continued by listing the losses, “Chamberlains, Rusts Barton Magills, and numbers of others have gone Mrs Carters are all still at home and I do not think they will go although there was some talk of it sometime ago the fact is the Yankees do not take any but what wishes to go, they send them word that

⁵³⁶ Sternhell, *Routes of War*, 95.

⁵³⁷ Cornelia McDonald, 20 June [1862], *A Diary with Reminiscences of the War and Refugee Life in the Shenandoah Valley, 1860-1865* (Nashville, TN: Cullom & Ghertner Co., 1934), 79-80.

⁵³⁸ McDonald, 2 February 1863, *A Diary with Reminiscences of the War and Refugee Life in the Shenandoah Valley, 1860-1865*, 134.

⁵³⁹ McDonald, 21 October 1862, *A Diary with Reminiscences of the War and Refugee Life in the Shenandoah Valley, 1860-1865*, 99.

they wish to go to freedom and you know they are very accommodating and so they come out and move them.”⁵⁴⁰ When white Virginians heard that their former slaves now worked for Union forces they scoffed. Joseph A. Waddell gathered from one soldier “that the Yankees are using the negroes very hardly down the Valley — working them severely during the day and hand cuffing them at night to prevent their escaping.”⁵⁴¹

It is easy from the perspective of the twentieth-first century to ask why more slaves did not run away. It is, in fact, a question frequently posited by visitors to cultural and historical sites throughout the country. The decision to run away was fraught with issues. As historian Barbara Jeanne Fields explains, it “came at heavy costs, dispersing families, interrupting friendships, scattering belongings, and throwing vulnerable fugitives upon the uncertain mercy and inscrutable intentions of a busy army.”⁵⁴² Runaway slaves were entering a world of unknowns. How would Union soldiers receive them? To where would they flee? How would they fare in a new home? It is therefore essential to assess Union soldiers’ opinions about slavery.

Union Soldiers’ Views on Slavery

Despite most white Northerners’ indifference toward African Americans, soldiers did hold a variety of opinions that changed over time. A brief sampling from troops in the Valley is illustrative. Although James Longstaff Dunn, a surgeon with the 109th and 111th Pennsylvania Infantry, freely used racist language throughout his letters home, his opinion on slavery shifted. One letter, written in early July 1862 from a planter’s house where he was stationed, maintained the “more I see of the effects of Slavery the more I detest it. Every Slaveholder is a fudal Lord who tyrannizes over both the Slave & the poor white people alike.” For Dunn, though, the issue was as much about class as race. He condemned the “fudal Arristocracy” as being “at war with Democracy,” and feared that the planter class sought to “extend their power under the sacred name of Democracy over the free untrameled and educated free man of the north.”⁵⁴³ Scholar Neil Voss Greenwood found similar views among Union soldiers in Sheridan’s 1864 army. Federal troops, he maintains, “saw the slave-holding leadership of the South as aristocratic, anti-republican, and even monarchical.” A New York soldier, for example, condemned slaveholders for “threatening the foundation of the greatest government that ever existed. And what makes it double

⁵⁴⁰ A. B. Cadwallader to “Dear John,” 30 March 1863, Cadwallader Papers, VHS.

⁵⁴¹ 8 April 1862, found at “Valley of the Shadow,” <http://valley.lib.virginia.edu/papers/AD1500> [accessed, 27 July 2019].

⁵⁴² Barbara Jeanne Fields, *Slavery and Freedom on the Middle Ground: Maryland During the Nineteenth Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 118.

⁵⁴³ J L Dunn to “Dear Wife,” 12 July 1862, Box 1, Folder 1862, Dunn Papers, UVa.

distressing is the fact of its being brought about by an aristocratic class of men who prefer slave labor to free.”⁵⁴⁴ Charles Tenney, a soldier in the 7th Ohio Infantry, more explicitly condemned slavery. In his journal he conceded that battles had been fought “to reinstate” the Union. “But in my opinion,” he continued, “Slavery must be abolished before this difficulty can be peaceably adjusted [and] Peace may be declared.” The war had assumed a higher cause for Tenney. He solemnly declared, “Abolition of Slavery must be the final work, then our nation will rise and, assume her place in advance of the nations of Earth. Our Union and our laws we must maintain, And drive foul treason from our land.”⁵⁴⁵ Tenney’s view on the war had become deeply ideological as he envisioned the conflict’s revolutionary potential.

Other soldiers melded pragmatism with moralism in their attitudes toward slavery. Alonzo Quint contended “if you confiscate the property of rebels, you have the means to pour in a new population. . . . Slavery itself would vanish before such a resistless power as free labor, enlightened by a free conscience; and the blacks, thus freed, would become supporters to a system of national industry.”⁵⁴⁶ He was equally certain that slavery’s destruction would be necessary for peace. “And I tell you again, until slavery is broken, and until a new race is introduced, to a very great extent, there will be no true peace. Senator Sumner never uttered truer words than those in his speech—‘The Barbarism of Slavery.’”⁵⁴⁷ Union soldiers increasingly saw themselves as agents of change and committed to continue the war until the abolition of slavery.

Many Federal troops who entered the Valley encountered slavery for the first time. They observed African American populations with a mixture of curiosity and condescension. In some instances, they tried to normalize interactions with African Americans by objectifying Southern blacks. Charles E. Davis, a soldier from the 13th Massachusetts stationed in Winchester, described one such incident. While posted at the courthouse, members of the regiment conducted a series of performances. He explained, “As the hall was provided with a platform, an opportunity was afforded of having some singing and dancing by Southern darkies whom we corralled each day, for the purpose, and to which the whole regiment was invited. The dancing was vigorous, and the singing,—well, it was not what we hoped it would be.”⁵⁴⁸ In other cases, Union soldiers viewed African Americans with a detached curiosity that could elicit sympathy. A group of soldiers from the 60th New

⁵⁴⁴ Neil Voss Greenwood, “Opponents in the Valley: A Study of the Attitudes and Views of Union and Confederate Soldiers Who Participated in the 1864 Shenandoah Valley Campaign,” Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Los Angeles, 1992, 67.

⁵⁴⁵ 2 Feb. [1862], Journal of Charles Tenney, Box 1, UVa.

⁵⁴⁶ Quint, *The Potomac and the Rapidan*, 49.

⁵⁴⁷ Quint, *Potomac and the Rapidan*, 161.

⁵⁴⁸ Charles E. Davis, *Three Years in the Army: The Story of the Thirteenth Massachusetts Volunteers from July 16, 1861 to August 1, 1864* (1894; repr., Salem, Mass.: Higginson Book Co., 2000), 31.

York encountered a slave whom they questioned. The enslaved man said his treatment had been “very hard at times, and that he had been very badly whipped.” The soldiers then asked the man to remove his shirt. “Simultaneously we exclaimed, on looking at his back, ‘My God!’ We had all read of scarred backs, but this surpassed all description. It was one continuous sear, and the ridges, thick as our fingers, which the whip had made, crossed it in all directions!”⁵⁴⁹ Union soldiers thus understood African Americans as social “others.”

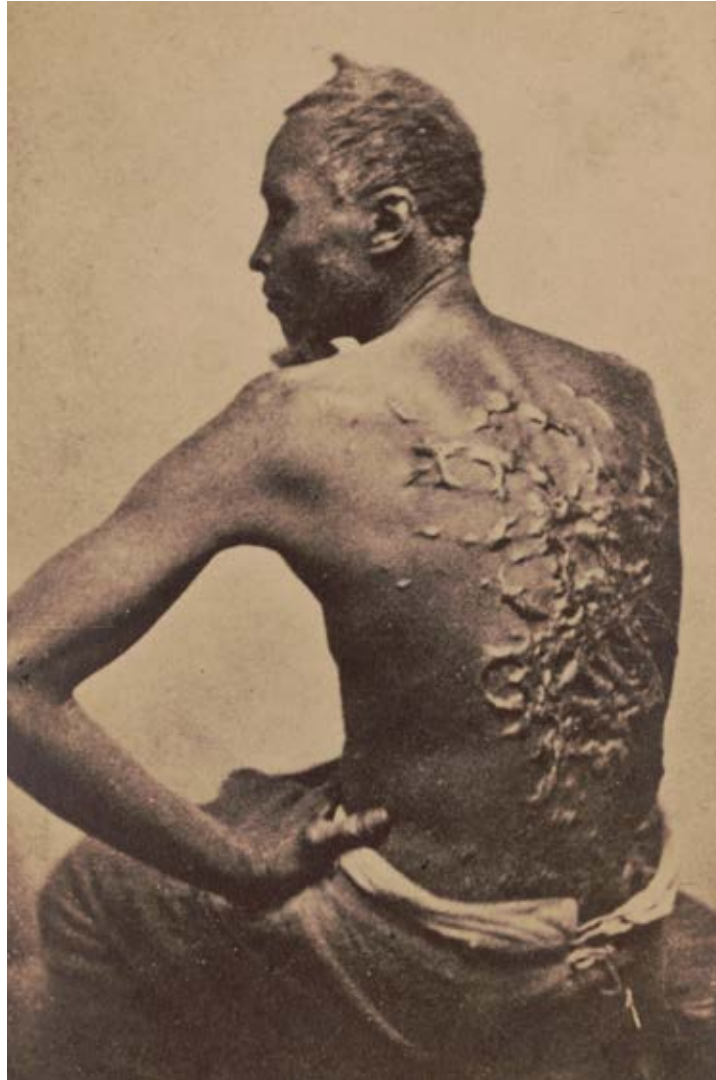


Figure 16. A wartime image of an enslaved man who bore the terrible marks of his torture. Known as “Whipped Peter,” this widely circulated photograph, reproduced in *Harper’s Weekly*, is illustrative of slavery’s brutality.
Library of Congress.

⁵⁴⁹ Eddy, *History of the Sixtieth Regiment New York State Volunteers*, 120.

The show described by soldier Charles Davis, though performed by African Americans, recalls the minstrel tradition popular among white Northerners. According to Alice Fahs, minstrel culture served as “a strategy of containment,” which “reassured white northerners that even in freedom African Americans remained no more than property.”⁵⁵⁰ Moreover, as historian Peter Luebke charges, “Minstrel culture provided soldiers an idiom on which to base their expectations for black behavior.”⁵⁵¹ In Davis’ vignette, black Virginians are gathered on a stage and made to perform for the amusement of Union soldiers. Rather than individuals with whom to interact, they are positioned as spectacles to be watched. Peter Luebke’s research has demonstrated the pervasive nature of minstrel culture in the Union armies going so far as to argue that “the lessons soldiers drew from the minstrel show call into question how invested soldiers became during the war in the project of emancipation.”⁵⁵² While stationed in towns, encamped in winter quarters, or waiting for the campaign season Union soldiers enjoyed performances and shows with racialized overtones. Given the frequency of minstrel shows in the antebellum era, it comes as no surprise. After emancipation, Northerners had shows that not only included “black-face” performers but also African Americans. Union artilleryman John D. Billings remembered: “The usual medley of comic songs and negro melodies comprised the greater part of the entertainment, and, if the space admitted, a jig or clog dance was stepped out on a hard-tack box or other crude platform. Sometimes a real negro was brought in to enliven the occasion by patting and dancing ‘Juba,’ or singing his quaint music. There were always plenty of them in or near camp ready to fill any gap, for they asked nothing better than to be with ‘Massa Linkum’s Sojers.’”⁵⁵³ Despite being part of an army of deliverance, Union soldiers held deeply racist views and often asked African Americans to perform in ways that both humiliated and demeaned them.

Despite the prevailing culture of racism, accounts from the Valley clearly indicate that Northerners abhorred slavery and its affects both on white and black populations. The author of the 60th New York’s regimental history—a unit stationed in the Valley during the spring and summer of 1862—was quick to observe the number of mixed-race children and the forced instability of slave marriages. He wrote, “The husband and wife, so-called—for marriage, among the blacks, in a slaveholding, especially in a slave-breeding, State, is only matter of form, convenience, and temporary interest to the master or owner—were generally black; but the children were of all shades of complexion.” He

⁵⁵⁰ Alice Fahs, *The Imagined Civil War: Popular Literature of the North and South, 1861-1865* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 152.

⁵⁵¹ Peter C. Luebke, “‘Equal to Any Minstrel Concert I Ever Attended at Home’: Union Soldiers and Blackface Performance in the Civil War South,” *The Journal of the Civil War Era*, vol. 4, no. 4 (Dec., 2014): 517.

⁵⁵² Luebke, “‘Equal to Any Minstrel Concert I Ever Attended at Home,’” 526.

⁵⁵³ John D. Billings, *Hardtack & Coffee: The Unwritten Story of Army Life* (1887; Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1993), 70.

continued by nothing with some disgust “Frequently in a family of six or eight children—the uniform number in most of the families I noticed—the illegitimate children very evidently outnumbered those of whom the black husband is the father.”⁵⁵⁴ For Alonzo Quint, slavery’s perniciousness affected both slave and master. “The passage through Winchester illustrates again the infernal influence of Southern education. Women had accumulated pistols and hand grenades, and used them on *helpless* men. What causes this? The education of *slavery*. *That* brutalizes the people it curses.”⁵⁵⁵ Ultimately, as Neil Voss Greenwood explains, by 1864 “members of the Army of the Shenandoah expressed unqualified support for emancipation as a separate war aim, at least in what they wrote during Sheridan’s operations in the valley.”⁵⁵⁶ Condemnation of slavery did not mean support of racial equality, however. And Union soldiers’ interactions with African Americans reflected the prevailing racism of the period.

In the Service of the Army

Union troops were most likely to have continued contact with African Americans in military camps. Northerners employed former slaves as camp servants, laborers, and teamsters. Labor continued to be a key component of life for African Americans. According to historian Glenn David Brasher, the 1862 Peninsula Campaign saw the first wide-scale employment of African Americans by Union armies.⁵⁵⁷ Federal soldiers in the lower Valley embraced this practice and actively employed African Americans throughout their time in the region. The accumulated impact of black labor within Federal forces was great for it both undermined plantations and advanced the Union cause. Michael Graham of Mount Jackson, sensing the possibilities, proposed a radical scheme to Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton writing: “Take all the negroes in the Valley from the loyal as well as disloyal, organize them into companies to tend horses, do duty, or act as guides.” Continuing he proffered: “Put the negroes at work making hay, preparing roads, and at other laborious occupations. What cannot be employed in this manner, organize into regiments and let them take the field.”⁵⁵⁸ Although never realized, African Americans decisively shaped military operations in the Valley.

⁵⁵⁴ Eddy, *History of the Sixtieth Regiment New York State Volunteers*, 137.

⁵⁵⁵ Quint, *Potomac and the Rapidan*, 155.

⁵⁵⁶ Greenwood, “Opponents in the Valley,” 80.

⁵⁵⁷ Brasher, *The Peninsula Campaign and the Necessity of Emancipation*, 141.

⁵⁵⁸ Michael Graham to E. M. Stanton, 26 May 1863, *OR*, series 1, vol. 25, part II, 526.

Many Federal troops took African Americans as camp servants. While at Harpers Ferry a member of the 60th New York, for example, took in his service “a runaway negro from Jackson’s army.” The soldier proclaimed, “He was not remarkably neat, but was very faithful, and remained with me about six months.”⁵⁵⁹ David Strother recounted a similar incident: “At the Virginia landing I met Adam with his banjo . . . Adam is a mulatto servant, a native Virginian, and is about expatriating himself for fear of the rebs. He desires to enter my service; and as he is a townsman and old acquaintance, an accomplished cook as well as a minstrel, I have agreed to take him with me.”⁵⁶⁰ Word quickly traveled through the lower Valley that service with Union soldiers promised a degree of security. Indeed, a soldier in the 13th Massachusetts stationed in Maryland reported that three slaves “from Martinsburg named respectively, Wash, Clay, and Thomas Jefferson” came to offer their services.⁵⁶¹ By 1864, a “number of Sheridan’s troops had black servants before this campaign or acquired them during it.”⁵⁶² Throughout the war as Union soldiers marched through or camped in the Valley, African Americans fled to their lines and soon commenced working for the troops.

Large numbers of African Americans were used in the creation of fortifications. The commanding general of the garrison at Harpers Ferry “determined to fortify Maryland Heights.” He thus “requested the General-in-Chief to send contrabands to Harper’s Ferry to perform the labor required, if there are any disposable in Washington.”⁵⁶³ Although it is unclear if the specific request was fulfilled, the expectation of using black labor signals a broader worldview. The precedent for black laborers had been established that summer, for, as a Federal soldier claimed, “they are most all up at Harpers Ferry building entrenchments and doing the hard labor that our poor soldiers would have to do if they were not there, Our Army can find employment for evry able bodied negro in Va_ as teamsters workmen &c which saves – each one of them- a white soldier for the ranks.”⁵⁶⁴ David Strother came across a party of “fugitive servants” who had been in the service of federal officers in Winchester. He directed the men to Harpers Ferry to “deliver up their horses, and report to the commandant there.”⁵⁶⁵ Many African Americans soon found that they had to earn “their bread and beans in Uncle Sam’s service.”⁵⁶⁶ Indeed, as one Union soldier

⁵⁵⁹ Eddy, *History of the Sixtieth Regiment New York State Volunteers*, 118.

⁵⁶⁰ A Virginian [Strother], “Personal Recollections of the War,” 424.

⁵⁶¹ Austin C. Stearns, *Three Years with Company K*, ed., Kent (Rutherford, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1976), 52.

⁵⁶² Greenwood, “Opponents in the Valley,” 82.

⁵⁶³ R.B. Marcy to Edwin Sumner, 26 September 1862, OR, series I, vol. 51, 863.

⁵⁶⁴ J L Dunn to “My Dear Wife,” 30 June 1862, Dunn Papers, UVA.

⁵⁶⁵ A Virginian [Strother], “Personal Recollections of the War,” 186-7.

⁵⁶⁶ A Virginian [Strother], “Personal Recollections of the War,” 180.

wrote, “Our Army can find employment for evry able bodied negro in Va_ as teamsters workmen &c which saves – each one of them- a white soldier for the ranks.”⁵⁶⁷ Wage labor thus marked African Americans transition into freedom and demonstrated the viability of compensated work. Indeed, free black labor demanded that racist whites recognize African Americans’ ability to assume social and economic roles.

From the earliest days of the Civil War, African Americans played a vital role in shaping military affairs because of the military intelligence they offered. Despite the persistence of racism in Union armies, African Americans’ reports reached the highest levels of command. On November 2, 1862, for example, Franz Sigel reported to George McClellan, “I have received information from a contraband, who came in this morning, and who will be sent to your headquarters, that General Longstreet passed through Front Royal, toward Culpeper.”⁵⁶⁸ So, too, did a Union officer stationed in Harpers Ferry rely upon a local African American for information. As the man related, “A negro from Shepherdstown states that the rebels attempted to cross the river last night, but, water being too deep, many were drowned.”⁵⁶⁹ In an example of using coerced information, Confederate general D. H. Hill reported that a “negro has been captured by our scouts, who reports that the enemy has a large force concentrated behind Harpers Ferry, and that they are talking of crossing there.”⁵⁷⁰ In each of the cases the warring parties employed African Americans to discover enemy incursions and make necessary adjustments to their own lines and movements. Indeed, as Union soldier James Dunn astutely noted, “all hands are spies, while the only friends the Government has here is the poor old Darkey whose condition the Government has been so careful not to improve.”⁵⁷¹

African Americans proved themselves effective scouts because of their own resourcefulness but also due to white prejudice. David Hunter Strother surmised that white Southerners trusted blacks “with a persistence that amounted to fatuity.” Accordingly, “While every white man’s motions and actions were watched with a most jealous scrutiny, the negroes were permitted to run hither and thither.”⁵⁷² In late December 1862, for example, a detachment of the 22nd Pennsylvania Cavalry was sent to the area of Winchester and dispatched throughout the town. “A colored servant of Miss Lucie, a Unionist, gave information about the hiding place of a Rebel officer. Sergeant Donaldson of Work’s Company, got orders to take a squad and search Mrs. Meridith’s house.” There they

⁵⁶⁷ J. L. Dunn to “My Dear Wife,” 30 June 1862, Dunn Papers, UVa.

⁵⁶⁸ Franz Sigel to George McClellan, 2 November 1862, *OR*, series 1, vol. 19, part II, 534.

⁵⁶⁹ Wm A. Hall to Captain Eckert, 18 September 1862, *OR*, series I, vol. XIX, part II, 325.

⁵⁷⁰ D. H. Hill to Gen. G. T. Beauregard, 17 January 1862, *OR*, series I, vol. V, 1035.

⁵⁷¹ J. L. Dunn to “Dear Wife,” 26 July 1862, James Dunn Papers, UVa.

⁵⁷² A Virginian [Strother], “Personal Recollections of the War,” 176.

found Captain Murray of Ashby's Cavalry.⁵⁷³ Because white Southerners underestimated African Americans' intelligence and abilities, enslaved and free blacks in the lower Valley consistently held the advantage in the collection and distribution of military intelligence, thereby advancing the Union war effort in manifold ways.

In significant ways white Southerners living in the lower Valley faced two foes: Federal military forces and local African Americans. Local slaves, moreover, aided the Union war effort in a multitude of ways. The case of James and Mary Foster of Shenandoah County is revealing. According to Mary, James "would go of nights and show them [Union soldiers] the way where they were lost or got astray and would take horses and go with them and take them across rivers and through the woods to their camps." With inadequate maps or incomplete information, James offered invaluable assistance to infantry and cavalry by leading them in the correct direction and preventing them from being captured if they strayed too far in the wrong direction. For Mary's part, she "many times left" her own work and "washed and cooked and mended" for federal troops and "was glad to do it."⁵⁷⁴ Nancy Stewart has painstakingly researched the Foster family charging that James' and Mary's wartime activities demonstrate a spectacular instance of resistance to slavery and the advancement of freedom in Shenandoah County during 1864.⁵⁷⁵

The roadways of the lower Valley buzzed as African Americans moved between locations and among the armies. In mid-October 1862, Alfred Pleasonton brought to his headquarters a man who had just runaway. Coming from Winchester, he reported Confederates "talked about falling back toward the Rappahannock. Heard his young master say there would be a move of the rebel army soon. The soldiers had a hard time at Winchester; did not get anything to eat sometimes for several days; getting tired of the war."⁵⁷⁶ Such real-time intelligence provided incalculable assistance in the assessment of conditions on the ground. In another instance from the same month Randolph Marcy told William Franklin that "General Couch telegraphs that a contraband, who left the Fifth Virginia Cavalry yesterday, says that regiment is just beyond Charlestown; that on Sunday Hill's division returned, passing near Leetown, and that cavalry said that Jackson was coming with whole force to retake Harper's Ferry. Contraband is confident that infantry is back of Charlestown, as he heard drums."⁵⁷⁷ David Strother recounted the story a black informant who had "walked to Winchester, twenty-two miles, made all these intelligent

⁵⁷³ Samuel Clarke Farrar, *Twenty Second Pennsylvania Cavalry and Ringgold Battalion, 1861-1865* (Pittsburgh, PA: S. C. Farrar, 1911), 86.

⁵⁷⁴ Mary E. Foster, Deposition of Claimant's wife, in Stewart, "African Americans in Shenandoah County, Virginia," Notebooks, vol. V, book B, Cedar Creek archives.

⁵⁷⁵ Nancy B. Stewart, "James H. Foster, African American Freedom Fighter," (Feb., 2012), unpublished papers, Cedar Creek archives, 4.

⁵⁷⁶ Alfred Pleasonton to Randolph Marcy, 19 October 1862, *OR*, series 1, vol. 19, part II, 108.

⁵⁷⁷ Randolph Marcy to William Franklin, 28 October 1862, *OR*, series 1, vol. 19, part II, 501.

observations, procured a pass from Jackson's Provost-Marshal to carry some clothes to his young master in the rebel cavalry, on observation at Berryville, twelve miles distant; delivered the aforesaid clothes; told a variety of monstrous stories about the Yankee armies, suitable to the occasion; and then returned to Charlestown, twelve miles further—all in little more than twenty-four hours. In home phraseology, 'This was pretty well for a nigger.'⁵⁷⁸ Finally, in mid-November of 1862, an African American boy of twelve-years-of-age had been living near Berryville. "He left Berryville last night. Says Stuart's and Munford's cavalry were there, and were cooking three days' rations. He heard an officer say they were going into Loudoun Valley, to make a raid in rear of McClellan's army, and that an infantry and artillery force was to move against this place, to hold it in check. He reports that Jackson was at Winchester, and a portion of Hill's command at Berryville. This report is corroborated by two negroes, who came in to-day. I have no cavalry here."⁵⁷⁹ African Americans' ability to freely and easily move between the lines of warring armies placed them a highly unique position. The military intelligence they provided informed military commanders' decisions and actions.

African Americans could have a significant impact on larger military campaigns as exhibited during the early stages of the Gettysburg campaign. Alfred Pleasonton related to Stanton and Hooker, "A negro just in states that he left Gaines' Cross-Roads last night, and the enemy's column passed there for Harper's Ferry on Friday morning [June 12] . . . States that Lee was in command; that the whole army was in the column. Saw Ewell in his carriage; also Longstreet and Early. . . . Few troops were left at Fredericksburg, and few, excepting cavalry, at Culpeper, as a blind. The whole army was destined for Harper's Ferry, and thence across into Maryland." By way of conclusion Pleasonton noted, "I believe this man's report."⁵⁸⁰ That same day it was reported: "The operators at Chambersburg and Hagerstown say contrabands who now are coming in say rebels were coming into Martinsburg as they left at 12 o'clock to-day. From many who are coming—all tell nearly [the] same tale. . . . Another dispatch says some contrabands arrived report McReynolds to have been driven by a large force from Berryville to Bunker Hill and that public stores have been removed from Martinsburg."⁵⁸¹ The reports are worth quoting at length because of the extent and accuracy of the African Americans' information. These men were offering invaluable information about the disposition of Lee's army—information that would, in turn, direct troop movements and the pursuit by Federal forces.

⁵⁷⁸ A Virginian [Strother], "Personal Recollections of the War," 176.

⁵⁷⁹ Henry Slocum correspondence to Burnside, 14 November 1862, *OR*, series 1, vol. 19, part II, 585.

⁵⁸⁰ Alfred Pleasonton correspondence to Stanton and Hooker, 14 June 1863, *OR*, series 1, vol. 27, part III, 101.

⁵⁸¹ A.G. Curtin correspondence to E.M. Stanton, 14 June 1863, *OR*, series 1, vol. 27, part III, 112.

By August 1864, Philip H. Sheridan was positioned to strike at Jubal Early's command. Seeking an advantage, he collected "an efficient body of scouts to collect information regarding the enemy."⁵⁸² Men from his command informed Sheridan of "an old colored man, who had a permit from the Confederate commander to go into Winchester and return three times a week, for the purpose of selling vegetables to the inhabitants."⁵⁸³ "The scouts had sounded this man," the report noted, "and, finding him both loyal and shrewd, suggested that he might be made useful to us within the enemy's lines."⁵⁸⁴ Sheridan became reliant on African Americans. In one instance his command staged a complicated espionage operation. They employed Rebecca Wright, a young Quaker in Winchester who had remained "faithful and loyal to the Government" and an African American man, Thomas Laws, referenced at the beginning of this chapter.⁵⁸⁵ Laws agreed to carry a letter to her from Sheridan. The General ultimately hoped to ascertain from Wright the strength and condition of Early's army. "Miss Wright's answer proved of more value to me than she anticipated, for it not only quieted the conflicting reports concerning Anderson's corps, but was most important in showing positively that Kershaw was gone, and this circumstance led, three days later, to the battle of the Opequon, or Winchester as it has been unofficially called."⁵⁸⁶ Although Sheridan rightfully showers Wright with praise, Laws was the essential carrier. And, remarkably, remains largely anonymous like the countless others who advanced the Union war effort in the lower Valley between 1861 and 1864.

Conclusion

The Emancipation Proclamation, secured and codified by the 13th Amendment, was integral to slavery's destruction. Yet, the actions of the enslaved and the force of military arms were just as necessary. Although challenging to relate, slaves, citizens, and soldiers were each necessary in realizing freedom in the lower Valley. Moreover, rather than a linear narrative, freedom unfolded unevenly as armies fought across the farms and towns of western Virginia. The ferocity of that contest and the prejudicial views of many Federal soldiers demonstrates that the abolition of slavery was far from assured well into 1864. How freedom became secured and the struggles that followed will be the subjects of the next chapter.

⁵⁸² Philip H. Sheridan, *Personal Memoirs of Philip H. Sheridan*, vol. II (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1902), 1.

⁵⁸³ Sheridan, *Personal Memoirs of Philip H. Sheridan*, vol. II, 2-3.

⁵⁸⁴ Sheridan, *Personal Memoirs of Philip H. Sheridan*, vol. II, 3.

⁵⁸⁵ Sheridan, *Personal Memoirs of Philip H. Sheridan*, vol. II, 3.

⁵⁸⁶ Sheridan, *Personal Memoirs of Philip H. Sheridan*, vol. II, 5. This incident is repeated in *The Twenty-second Pennsylvania Cavalry and the Ringgold Battalion*, 363-4.

CHAPTER FIVE

RECONSTRUCTIONS

Storer College stood on Camp Hill, only a short distance from downtown Harpers Ferry. Established in 1867 by John Storer, the Freedmen's Bureau, and the Freewill Baptists of New England, the College sought to educate freedpeoples. The Shenandoah Valley had over 25,000 African Americans navigating freedom in the postwar era.⁵⁸⁷ Denied the right of literacy by code and custom during slavery, the majority of freedpeople eagerly flocked to educational institutions of all sizes after the Civil War. Storer College held particular significance. Harpers Ferry had been the site of John Brown's 1859 raid and served as a destination for thousands of African Americans fleeing the plantations of the Shenandoah Valley during the Civil War. None of this was lost on Frederick Douglass who came to the College and Harpers Ferry in 1881.

David Hunter Strother had encountered the great man in 1864 and described him as "eminently distinguished." Strother had heard him speak on that occasion, which he said "was one of the most striking pieces or oratory I ever heard. The voice was rich and sonorous _ The manner imposing & effective _ The logic complete & conclusive."⁵⁸⁸ Audiences at Storer received an equally impressed performance on May 30, 1881. In a beautiful turn of rhetorical device Douglass asked his audience, "Did John Brown fail?" The great abolitionist then gave his audience a powerful series of answers: "He certainly did fail to get out of Harper's Ferry before being beaten down by United States soldiers; he did fail to save his own life, and to lead a liberating army into the mountains of Virginia. But he did not go to Harper's Ferry to save his life. The true question is, Did John Brown draw his sword against slavery and thereby lose his life in vain? and to this I answer ten thousand times. No! No man fails, or can fail who so grandly gives himself and all he has to a righteous cause."⁵⁸⁹

⁵⁸⁷ In 1860, there were 27,671 African Americans in the Valley. By 1870, that number stood at 23,965. Koons and Noyalas, "Historic Resource Study," 79.

⁵⁸⁸ David Hunter Strother, 22 November 1864, West Virginia and Regional History Collection, WVU.

⁵⁸⁹ Frederick Douglass, *John Brown* (Dover, N.H.: Morning Star Job Printing House, 1881).

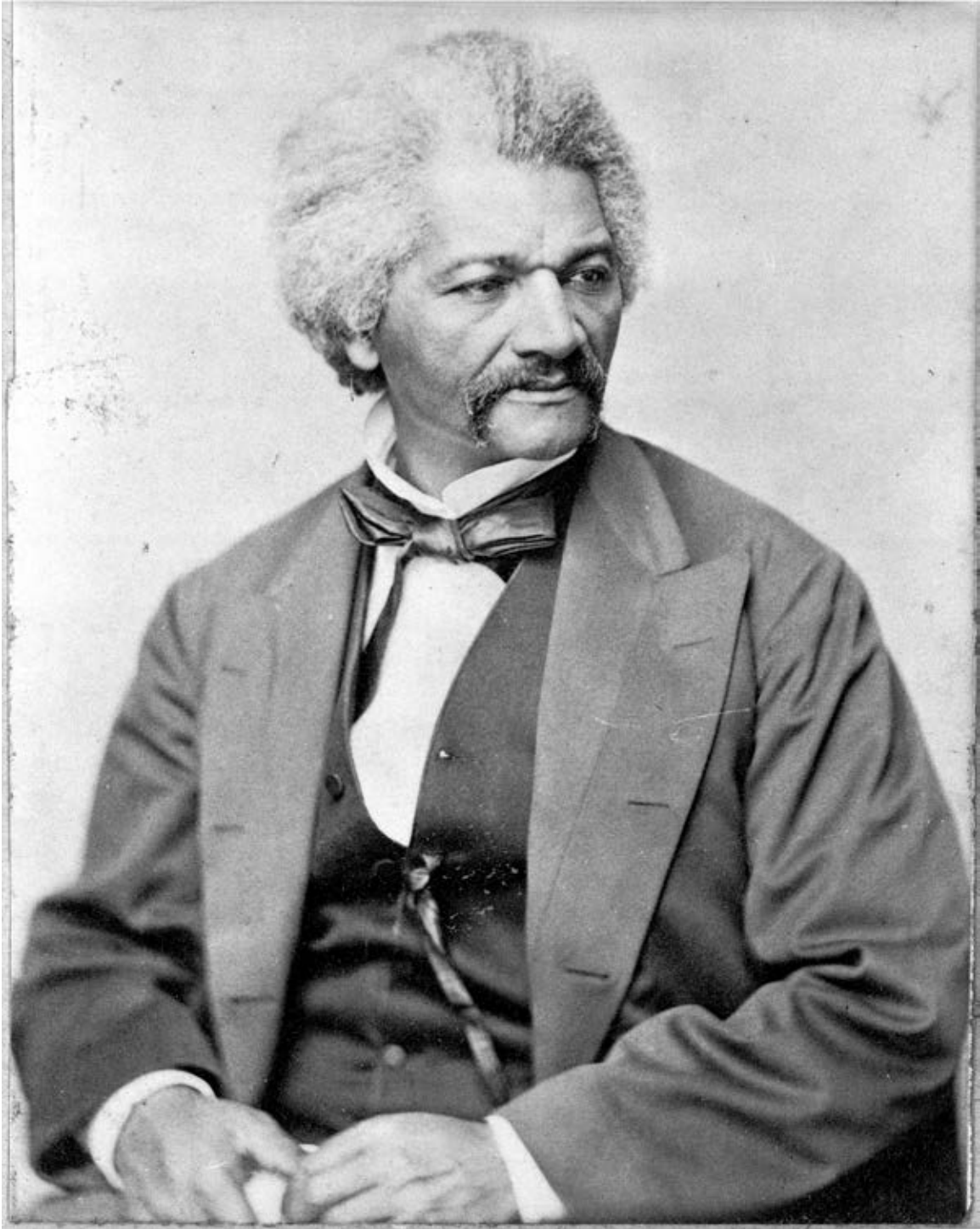


Figure 17. Frederick Douglass pictured in 1870. He had powerfully advocated for slavery's abolition during the antebellum era and addressed the profundity of freedom and the uncertainty of the future in his postbellum addresses. George Francis Schreiber, 1870, Library of Congress.

Virginia's Reconstruction has received sustained attention by scholars; yet, these histories typically focus on the Piedmont and the Tidewater.⁵⁹⁰ Little has been written on the Shenandoah Valley during the Reconstruction era. This chapter intends to correct this lacuna and will consider the period through three lenses. First, it expansively defines Reconstruction, pace Eric Foner, by beginning with the full realization of emancipation in the Valley. Federal armies' occupation of the region in 1864 forever changed the trajectory of the freedom struggle. Yet, even with the war's end, white Virginians proved unwilling to accept the changes secured by Federal forces and promised by the Confederacy's surrender. This chapter will therefore focus on the activities of the Freedmen's Bureau in its second part as military officers and soldiers helped African Americans negotiate the world of freedom. White southerners' reactionary stance influenced every facet of postwar life as witnessed in the creation of black codes or the issuance of unfair labor contracts. The political behavior and public rhetoric of white conservatives forms the final section of the chapter. As Edward L. Ayers nicely summarizes their worldview, "*They would no longer fight, they would give up slavery, and they would rejoin the Union, but they refused to admit moral guilt for secession, for fighting, or for slaveholding*" (emphasis in original).⁵⁹¹ Significantly, Virginia's Reconstruction was markedly different from that experienced in the rest of the Upper South and especially the Deep South. Although social and political upheaval existed, it was nothing on the scale witnessed elsewhere—the Ku Klux Klan, for example, never had a real presence in Virginia.⁵⁹²

Political Reconstruction in Virginia ended in 1870 with the resumption of white rule. We nevertheless know that black Virginians founded business, started churches, and created benevolent organizations, thereby carving out public spaces that carried great personal meaning. African Americans also entered political life for the first time. In 1867, because of Congress' Reconstruction Acts, Virginia adopted a new state constitution that granted black suffrage and secured political participation. Between 1867 and 1895, according to historian Brent Tarter, "nearly 100 black Virginians served in the two houses."⁵⁹³ Yet, black political life came to a halt by the close of the nineteenth century, as Jim Crow cast a pall across the land.

⁵⁹⁰ See, for example, Jack E. Maddex, Jr., *The Virginia Conservatives, 1867-1879* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1970); William D. Henderson, *The Unredeemed City: Reconstruction in Petersburg, Virginia, 1865-1874* (Washington: University Press of America, 1977); Richard G. Lowe, *Republicans and Reconstruction in Virginia, 1856-70* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1991); and Catherine A. Jones, *Intimate Reconstructions: Children in Postemancipation Virginia* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2015).

⁵⁹¹ Ayers, *The Thin Light of Freedom*, 371.

⁵⁹² For a concise overview of Reconstruction in Virginia see, Richard Lowe, *Another Look at Reconstruction in Virginia, Civil War History*, vol. 32, no. 1 (March 1986): 56-76.

⁵⁹³ Brent Tarter, "African Americans and Politics in Virginia (1865-1902)," *Encyclopedia Virginia* [accessed 28 December 2017].

This chronologically driven chapter will go into the late nineteenth- and early twentieth- century to consider the beginnings of the Jim Crow era. It was, on the one hand, the New South, a period marked by hopes and aspirations. On the other hand, terrors and tensions often defined black rural life.⁵⁹⁴ Once again the Valley proved itself unique. Unlike eastern Virginia or the Piedmont, the Shenandoah did not witness widespread mob violence, for example. Only “in exceptional circumstances,” historian W. Fitzhugh Brundage observes, “did racial prejudice erupt in violent and unprovoked attacks on vulnerable blacks.”⁵⁹⁵ He attributes this to lower rates of sharecropping and the maintenance of independent black communities. African Americans nonetheless confronted considerable obstacles. Jim Crow laws segregated the landscape, disenfranchised black Virginians, and ended the era of hope seen in the years of Radical Reconstruction.⁵⁹⁶

Freedom and Destruction

The command of Union General Robert H. Milroy arrived in the Shenandoah Valley during a snowstorm. Milroy’s 8,000-man division, part of Gen. Robert Schenck’s Middle Department, had crossed over the Alleghany Mountains and then halted on the last day of December 1862.⁵⁹⁷ Milroy excitedly rode along the lines on the morning of January 1, 1863, announcing it was Emancipation Day. An important date, he charged, “the most important event in the history of the world since Christ was born.” Fervent in his beliefs, he proclaimed that calling the United States a “land of liberty” had been a “flaunting lie;” henceforth, “it will be a veritable reality.”⁵⁹⁸ Days later he established headquarters in Winchester. He immediately decreed: I “hereby notify the citizens of the city of Winchester, and of said County of said Proclamation, and of my intention to maintain and enforce” it.⁵⁹⁹ Joseph Warren Keiefer remembered the effect being electric: “Though the slaves could not read, not one failed during the succeeding night to hear that liberty had

⁵⁹⁴ Leon F. Litwack, *Trouble in Mind: Black Southerners in the Age of Jim Crow* (New York: Vintage Books, 1998), 7.

⁵⁹⁵ W. Fitzhugh Brundage, *Lynching in the New South: Georgia and Virginia, 1880-1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 157.

⁵⁹⁶ “Jim Crow’s success,” notes Glenda E. Gilmore, “offered a persuasive final solution to what whites commonly called the race problem.” Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore, *Defying Dixie: The Radical Roots of Civil Rights, 1919-1950* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2008), 16.

⁵⁹⁷ Koons and Noyalas, “Historic Resource Study,” 136.

⁵⁹⁸ Robert Milroy quoted in, Joseph Warren Keifer, *Slavery and Four Years of War: A Political History of Slavery in the United States Together with a Narrative of the Campaigns and Battles of the Civil War in Which the Author Took Part, 1861-1865, vol. 1, 1861-1863* (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1900), 316.

⁵⁹⁹ Milroy quoted in Koons and Noyalas, “Historic Resource Study,” 136.

been proclaimed, and all, even to the most trusted and faithful personal or house servants, regardless of age, sex, or previous kind treatment, so far as known, asserted their freedom.”⁶⁰⁰ The Emancipation Proclamation transformed the meaning of the Civil War and gave political voice to African Americans’ quest for freedom.

The mass flight of enslaved African Americans from the Shenandoah Valley showed the white populace how utterly they had come to depend upon slaves. “The slow bleeding of the institution of slavery and the more rapid bleeding of the white population demonstrated how much Augusta County, like the entire Confederacy,” writes historian Edward Ayers, “depended on the black people in their midst, black people who might use the first opportunity to go to the enemy and their own freedom should that enemy be allowed any closer.”⁶⁰¹ White citizens in the lower Valley angrily watched as their war to protect slavery continued to ensure its destruction. In Winchester, Cornelia McDonald observed that “Lincoln’s proclamation flames at all the street corners.” To reassure herself, she continued, “They say the population interested are jubilant, but I have seen no indication of such a state of feeling among them.”⁶⁰² McDonald’s projection of slaves’ indifference proved imaginary only. On February 2, 1863, as quoted earlier in Chapter 4, she wrote of a “great exodus of negroes; every day some government wagons depart laden with them and their effects; on their way to the land of Promise; where that happy country may be we know not.”⁶⁰³ Whites increasingly confronted the reality that enslaved populations were “loyal” only because of coerced force and when opportunities to flee arose, they readily left.

⁶⁰⁰ Keifer, *Slavery and Four Years of War*, 318.

⁶⁰¹ Ayers, *The Thin Light of Freedom*, 112.

⁶⁰² McDonald, 12 January 1863, *A Diary with Reminiscences of the War and Refugee Life in the Shenandoah Valley, 1860-1865*, 130.

⁶⁰³ McDonald, 2 February 1863, *A Diary with Reminiscences of the War and Refugee Life in the Shenandoah Valley, 1860-1865*, 134.



Figure 18. A wartime sketch, “In search of freedom,” illustrates what had become an increasingly familiar scene across Virginia as the enslaved left plantations in groups looking for Union armies or free soil. Edwin Forbes, Sept. 25, 1863, Library of Congress.

Even still, the Emancipation Proclamation did not secure slavery’s destruction in the lower Valley or elsewhere in the Confederacy. It was both a military and a political problem. Devoid of lofty rhetoric, the document invoked Lincoln’s powers as “President of the United States of America, and Commander-in-chief of the Army and Navy thereof” as well as the provisions of the First and Second Confiscation Acts to abolish slavery.⁶⁰⁴ Rather than the strong moralistic language audiences in the twenty-first century would hope for, Lincoln instead posited the measure as a means of “restoring the constitutional relation between the United States, and each of the states, and the people thereof.”⁶⁰⁵ Lincoln’s act was without precedent. Indeed, notes historian Paul Escott, “Interference with slavery in the states had been unthinkable at the beginning of the war. Republicans had denied that the government could do so.”⁶⁰⁶ The President remained doubtful of the Emancipation Proclamation’s expediency and success. Historian Paul Escott nicely summarizes the situation in the fall 1862 and the winter of 1862-63: “For slaves held within the

⁶⁰⁴ Donald, *Lincoln*, 375.

⁶⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰⁶ Paul D. Escott, *Lincoln’s Dilemma: Blair, Sumner, and the Republican Struggle Over Racism and Equality in the Civil War Era* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2017), 138.

Confederacy, real freedom could not arrive until federal armies conquered. Others noted that the legal validity of a war measure would be questionable once the war ended. In addition to parts of the Confederacy excluded from the proclamation, slavery still existed in Missouri, Kentucky, Maryland, and Delaware. Thus the Union was not rid of human bondage and had not won the war. What would be the next steps?"⁶⁰⁷ Continued military action was the answer.

Milroy remained in control of Winchester for months but his hold was tenuous. By the springtime his reputation of hard policies against civilians had made him notorious. It was not until mid-June, during Confederate general Robert E. Lee's invasion of the North, did white populations get succor from Federal occupation. Yet, both armies had inflicted sustained damage to the region. Confederates who had served in Virginia were shocked during the Gettysburg Campaign to encounter, in the words of Louis Wise, the "abundant wheat crop" of Maryland and Pennsylvania.⁶⁰⁸ They invaded lands virtually untouched by war.

Despite the already significant damage to the farms and plantations in the Valley, the events of 1864 were without precedent. As historian Edward Ayers summarizes: "Armies of ten thousand men, even friendly armies, consumed the areas through which they passed, with fields, fences, livestock, and stores of food laboriously gathered over decades stripped away overnight."⁶⁰⁹ Andrew Jackson Dawson, encamped near New Market, wrote of a "devastated" Valley in which there was "no corn, and but little wheat seeded." Most of the fencing had been destroyed and he encountered few inhabitants.⁶¹⁰ J. Kelly Bennette of the 8th Virginia Cavalry reported on July 1, 1864: "The fencing around & about S.burg [Strasburg] is all destroyed even the stone fencing has in a great measure been carried away to assist in building bridges & corn fields & the most luxuriant meadows are turned out as commons."⁶¹¹ And perhaps most poignantly, Joseph Warren Keifer wrote, "Pen cannot adequately describe the hell of agony, desolation, and despair witnessed in this fertile region in the four years of war; and long before the conflict ended not a human slave was held therein."⁶¹² The Shenandoah Valley's physical destruction in 1864 seemed complete and any hopes of rebuilding a distant dream.

⁶⁰⁷ Escott, *Lincoln's Dilemma*, 140-1.

⁶⁰⁸ To "My own dear Cousin," 18 July 1863, Louis Wise Letters, UVa.

⁶⁰⁹ Ayer, *The Thin Light of Freedom*, 143.

⁶¹⁰ A. Dawson to "Dear Wife," 14 November 1864, The Civil War Letters of Private Andrew Jackson Dawson [typescript], UVa.

⁶¹¹ J. Kelly Bennette Diary, 1 July 1864, J. Kelly Bennette Papers, SHC.

⁶¹² Keifer, *Slavery and Four Years of War*, 317-8.

The presence of black Union soldiers likely shocked residents of the Valley, though attempts to recruit the locally enslaved were uneven. David Strother wrote of “A Negro regiment [that] was stationed in Winchester to recruit and conscript all the Negroes about there.”⁶¹³ Such recruiting drives, suggests historian Jonathan Berkey, did not prove very successful in the lower Valley. Only about “6 percent of military-age black men in Virginia,” he notes, “joined the Union forces,” thereby demonstrating that low numbers of recruits in the 1864 Valley were typical.⁶¹⁴ Thousands of the enslaved, as shown in the last chapter, had already left the region for Harpers Ferry, Washington, D.C., and elsewhere. By 1864, those slaves who remained in the region were likely waiting to see what the future held and were unwilling to immediately leave family and home. Slaves’ comportment, at least in the eyes of Unionists David Strother, was admirable. As he wrote in the fall of 1864, “In this great war even the nigger has justified himself – He has exhibited himself above the barbarism of a servile insurrection & as a soldier had deported himself with a decency & discretion not inferior to the best class of whites, while in the field he has proved himself a man.” Although hardly a ringing endorsement Strother nevertheless seemed sincere. Concluding he wrote, “Poor nigger let him have a chance in the world.”⁶¹⁵

Despite Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation and the presence of Union soldiers in the lower Valley, slavery died slowly. It was, in significant ways, the “central paradox of military emancipation.” As historian James Oakes explains, “The slaves, Lincoln told [Frederick] Douglass, were not coming to Union lines as quickly as he hoped. Yet at the same time, the Union army in the South was physically overwhelmed by the number of contrabands who did come within Union lines.”⁶¹⁶ By the autumn of 1864, Union Gen. Philip H. Sheridan’s Army of the Shenandoah brought stability to the lower Valley and hope for both the enslaved and freedpeople. Yet, even with the surrender of Confederate military forces in the spring and summer of 1865, slavery did not simply stop. Both Federal officers and Freedmen’s Bureau agents reported finding it “everywhere.” “Of the nearly 4 million slaves in the United States in 1860, the vast majority – perhaps 2.75 million – were still held in bondage,” writes historian Gregory P. Downs, “as the Confederate armies surrendered.”⁶¹⁷ Only with the passage of the 13th amendment was slavery’s destruction finally secured.

⁶¹³ David Strother, *A Virginia Yankee in the Civil War*, 219.

⁶¹⁴ Berkey, “The Civilians War in the Lower Shenandoah Valley,” 215.

⁶¹⁵ David Hunter Strother Journals, 10 November 1864, David Hunter Strother Collection, WVU.

⁶¹⁶ James Oakes, “Reluctant to Emancipate?: Another Look at the First Confiscation Act,” *The Journal of the Civil War Era*, 3, no. 4 (December, 2013): 465.

⁶¹⁷ Gregory P. Downs, “Force Freedom, and the Making of Emancipation,” in *Rethinking American Emancipation: Legacies of Slavery and the Quest for Black Freedom*, eds. William A. Link and James J. Broomall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 59.

Whites expressed disbelief at the death of the Confederacy, the destruction of their region, and the abolition of slavery. In early August 1865, Amanda M. F. Morgan Moore wrote to her brother Maurice Morgan: "I shall not attempt to tell you on paper what sights we have seen and what we have suffered people living here in the Valley are very much discouraged." Moore continued, "Help is very scarce, although there is a crowd of negros coming back every day, they are idle and good for nothing, no one seems to want them, We still have Margaret, Ferrel & Caroline they never left us, we are going to move to the country this fall."⁶¹⁸ It was, simply stated, a world turned upside down. Robert Barton opined: "the fences and woods were wholly destroyed, the stock and farming implements all gone, no crops in the ground, many of the houses and barns destroyed or decrepit from long want of repairs, and as camps were still in all parts of the country, the fields and yards were as common and as much used by the public as the highways." He continued by writing, "The presence of near ten thousand troops in the neighborhood of Winchester put in circulation some currency and, as now peace was restored, they needed many things which now this exhausted county could begin to supply."⁶¹⁹

⁶¹⁸ Amanda M. F. Morgan Moore to "My Dear Brother [Maurice Morgan]," 4 August 1865, Mt. Jackson, in Stewart, "African Americans in Shenandoah County, Virginia," vol. IV, book A.

⁶¹⁹ Robert Thomas Barton Memoir, Robert Thomas Barton Papers, VHS.



Figure 19. The destruction of the Shenandoah Valley, as illustrated above in an image from the fall of 1864, left an enduring legacy of hatred for the North among many white Southerners. Alfred R. Waud, *The 3rd Custer div. on the 7th of Octr. retiring and burning the forage Etc. Somewhere near Mt. Jackson, 1864*, Library of Congress.

In adjusting to postwar life white Southerners announced their own righteousness and attempted to order society according to a patriarchal ethos that recalled the antebellum era.⁶²⁰ Many white Virginians juxtaposed their honor and “superiority” with the supposed shamelessness and shiftlessness of freedpeople.⁶²¹ Ultimately, as historian George Fredrickson writes, “emancipation could not be carried to completion because it exceeded the capacity of white Americans [...] to think of blacks as genuine equals.”⁶²² As a former Union officer and agent for the Freedmen’s Bureau in Virginia contended, “it will be some time yet before the demoralizing effects and tendencies of slavery can be

⁶²⁰ W. Scott Poole, *Never Surrender: Confederate Memory and Conservatism in the South Carolina Upcountry* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2004), 1-5.

⁶²¹ Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *The Shaping of Southern Culture: Honor, Grace, and War, 1760s-1880s* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 233.

⁶²² George M. Fredrickson, *Racism: a Short History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015), 81.

eradicated in Va. and the people *en masse* brought up to that standpoint of morality and civilization presented so gloriously in old New England.”⁶²³ Hatred and racism continued to guide whites’ behavior and attitudes. In the antebellum era slavery had bolstered whites’ belief in their own superiority and, according to historian Lacy K. Ford, Jr., “denied the viability of a biracial republic.”⁶²⁴ Now, in the postbellum era, the framework of southern society had collapsed and the possibility of a multi-racial society emerged.

For former slaves, such as James H. Foster, the mood was quite different in the immediate aftermath of war. Having lived near Strasburg during the conflict, he had “wanted to be free and was confident if the Union cause was successful” he would be.⁶²⁵ Foster had advanced the Union effort by serving as a scout. For freedpeople like Foster, the summer of 1865 marked a period of jubilation. African Americans had long recognized the Civil War’s true meaning. A war that had begun, in the words of historian Steven Hahn, “as rebellions against the authority of slave masters became not only a revolutionary assault against the institution of slavery and a revolutionary challenge to prevailing notions of civil and political society, but also a moment of political redefinition and transformation for people of African descent in the South.”⁶²⁶ The rapid changes enacted by the Civil War resulted in a prolonged and tumultuous era of negotiation that ultimately required the intervention and oversight of Federal military forces.

Freedmen’s Bureau

In Virginia, writes historian Dan Thorp, “the Freedmen’s Bureau began operating in June 1865 under the direction of Assistant Commissioner Orlando Brown, a physician and recently colonel in command of the Twenty-Fourth US Colored Infantry.”⁶²⁷ Established by Congress in March 1865, the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands (Freedmen’s Bureau for short) was charged with “control of all subjects relating to refugees and freedom from rebel states.”⁶²⁸ Originally chartered for the war’s duration and one year thereafter, Congress reauthorized the Freedmen’s Bureau twice; it

⁶²³ Marcus Sterling Hopkins, 3 January [1868], “The Freedmen’s Bureau and Reconstruction in Virginia: The Diary of Marcus Sterling Hopkins, a Union Officer, ed., William F. Mugleston, *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, vol. 86, no. 1 (Jan., 1978): 51.

⁶²⁴ Lacy K. Ford, Jr., “Making the ‘White Man’s Country’ White: Race, Slavery, and State-Building in the Jacksonian South,” *Journal of the Early Republic*, vol. 19, no. 4 (Winter 1999): 713-737, quote on 715.

⁶²⁵ James H. Foster, Deposition of Claimant, quoted in Stewart, “African Americans in Shenandoah County, Virginia,” vol. V, Book B.

⁶²⁶ Hahn, *A Nation Under our Feet*, 114.

⁶²⁷ Daniel B. Thorp, *Facing Freedom: An African American Community in Virginia from Reconstruction to Jim Crow* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2017), 15.

⁶²⁸ Act of Congress establishing the Freedmen’s Bureau, quoted in Thorp, *Facing Freedom*, 14.

operated until the summer of 1872.⁶²⁹ Virginia had ten districts and a series of sub-districts. The Shenandoah Valley was part of Virginia's Sixth District but later incorporated into the state's Ninth District.⁶³⁰ Agents of the Bureau regularly submitted reports to Richmond.⁶³¹

Bureau agents, once coupled with Federal troops, proved effective but the combination was necessary for success. In the upper Valley, for example, Captain W. Storer How maintained that freedpeople were "generally at work and willing to work, though not treated very kindly by their former masters and others." Yet, whites only recognized black freedom because of the military presence. They related to African Americans that they "are not yet free as they will discover when the troops are withdrawn."⁶³² It was apparent to How and the "unanimous belief of the officers that an agent of this Bureau cannot remain unmolested in these places if unsupported by the presence of troops."⁶³³ The power of a military presence immediately dawned on many African Americans who sought redress; accordingly, the Bureau's reach could be quite wide when necessary. In early August 1865, John A. McDonnell in the Winchester office encountered a "Freedman" who had journeyed from Fauquier County. "I consider it my duty," McDonnell charged, "to attend to all cases brought to my notice from whatever county so long as there is no agent in the Bureau in that county."⁶³⁴ The Freedmen's Bureau, and its reach, proved to be powerful weapons for African Americans who sought redress in the immediate aftermath of war.

Agents tried to assist freedpeople in reuniting shattered families and provided support for the destitute. Gabriel Brown applied for assistance in locating his two sons, Samuel and Cyrus, who had been sold before the war.⁶³⁵ J. A. McDonnell requested transportation for Henry Lewis (freedman) "who is fifteen years of age." He had been sold from Petersburg during the early part of the war yet his mother remained in that city. She was "anxious to to [*sic*] see him and vice versa."⁶³⁶ McDonnell also wrote to a fellow officer stationed in Staunton asking for information on Edward Mitchell. If found, McDonnell asked that he be informed that "his wife's sister Patsey Watson," having traveled from

⁶²⁹ Thorp, *Facing Freedom*, 14.

⁶³⁰ Noyalas, "After the Civil War in the Shenandoah Valley," 53.

⁶³¹ Ayers, *The Thin Light of Freedom*, 358.

⁶³² Quoted in Ayers, *The Thin Light of Freedom*, 358.

⁶³³ W. S. H., 11 January 1866, found at "The Valley of the Shadow," <http://valley.lib.virginia.edu/papers/B0553> [accessed 20 July 2019].

⁶³⁴ John A. McDonnell, 3 August 1865, Roll 187, Records of the Field Offices for the State of Virginia, Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1865-1872, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, D.C.; hereinafter FB.

⁶³⁵ John A. McDonnell, 4 March 1868, Roll 187, FB.

⁶³⁶ J. A. McDonnell, 26 September 1865, Roll 187, FB.

Cincinnati, was in Winchester “sick and without the means of proceeding further.”⁶³⁷ The Freedmen’s Bureau’s humanitarian efforts helped black families as they tried to recover from the traumas of slavery and war.



Figure 20. Artist James E. Taylor created this image signaling the important work of the Freedmen’s Bureau. It was titled, “Glimpses at the Freedmen’s Bureau. Issuing rations to the old and sick / from a sketch by our special artist, Jas. E. Taylor,” 1866, Library of Congress.

White Virginians were often outraged by the Freedmen’s Bureau and the changes the organization enacted. Robert T. Barton charged that the agency was “officered by the very worst element of who had drifted in the wake of the armies, under the guise of feeding, clothing and educating the darkies.” Continuing, he maintained that the Bureau sustained African Americans’ “arrogant pretensions” and supposedly encouraged “them to make issues with the whites, all of which were sustained in favor of the negroes by the powers that were: no courts whatever were in existence at which even the form of justice could be secured to a white southerner.”⁶³⁸ Whites were unwilling to concede the destruction of slavery and the supremacy of free labor. E. C. Parkhurst reported that “the Planters have held meetings and determined now to hire any negro formerly owned by

⁶³⁷ John A. McDonnell, May 1868, Roll 187, FB.

⁶³⁸ Robert Thomas Barton Memoir, Robert Thomas Barton Papers, VHS.

them who leaves, or applies for work elsewhere. In other words, they are determined to hold them, without remuneration, as formerly.”⁶³⁹ As agents quickly discovered, enforcing the law proved difficult among recalcitrant whites.

Despite the Confederacy’s destruction, symbols of and references to the fallen nation quickly appeared in the postwar period. Lt. J. H. Hall complained to the magistrates of Woodstock, for example, of “singing at all hours of the night, the discharge of fire arms, ringing of bells, cheers for prominent rebels &c, be immediately stopped as they are not only disloyal, but emphatically nuisances.”⁶⁴⁰ Troubles continued for Hall reported in mid-August 1866, “ten men dressed in Rebel uniforms have used insulting language towards him and his officers.”⁶⁴¹ Importantly, white militancy eventually morphed into paramilitary activities and extralegal violence—often replete with Confederate imagery. The Ku Klux Klan represented the apotheosis of white resistance. In early May 1868, a bureau agent complained of “certain demonstrations made by an organization here known as the ‘Ku Klux Klan,’” which “caused a vast deal of dangerous excitement” and “deplorable disturbances of the public peace.”⁶⁴² Paramilitary organizations, citizens in Confederate uniforms, and riotous demonstrators signaled white Southerners continued allegiance to the Lost Cause and refusal to concede military defeat.

Episodes of violence demonstrated whites’ racism and their desire to subordinate freedpeoples. Although the lower Valley never experienced violence on the scale seen in other sections of the upper South, such as the piedmont of North Carolina and eastern Tennessee, incidents were nonetheless frequent. John Smith, constable of Winchester, was present at the trial for S. A. Latham who had whipped Lucy Forge’s child. According to Smith, Forge, “a colored woman,” had a child who had been beaten “with a stick” and then shaken by the hair.⁶⁴³ John Ross, a white man, attacked Sarah Brown, an African American, in Frederick County. A drunken Ross attacked Brown kicking her in the breast and abdomen.⁶⁴⁴ During that same period a white man named Andrew Syford had verbally abused Philander Gearing during her husband’s absence. Upon his return Gearing demanded an

⁶³⁹ E. C. Parkhurst, 8 August 1863 [1865], Roll 187, FB.

⁶⁴⁰ J. H. Hall, 21 July 1866, quoted in Noyalas, “After the Civil War in the Shenandoah Valley,” 56.

⁶⁴¹ J. H. Hall, 16 August 1866, quoted in Noyalas, “After the Civil War in the Shenandoah Valley,” 57.

⁶⁴² Jno. W. Jordan, 4 May 1868, found at “Valley of the Shadow,” <http://valley.lib.virginia.edu/papers/B1147> [accessed 20 July 2019].

⁶⁴³ John A. McDonnell, 12 June 1868, Roll 187, Unregistered Letters Received, June 1865-December 1868, Records of the Field Offices for the State of Virginia, Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1865-1872, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, D.C.; hereinafter, FB.

⁶⁴⁴ John A. McDonnell, 30 June 1868, found at “The Freedmen’s Bureau Online,” <http://www.freedmensbureau.com/virginia/registeroutrages2.htm> [accessed 18 July 2019].

explanation from Syford who, in turn, threw a rock at him and tore his coat.⁶⁴⁵ Most terribly, agents sought the arrest of a “party accused of the murder of the freedman Burnett McCord in Clarke County.”⁶⁴⁶

White Virginians attempted to resurrect the racial boundaries they had maintained during the antebellum era. This often meant harassment and intimidation. John Moore and Augustus Mathew were jailed for one day’s time after “charged with interrupting a freedmens prayer meeting.”⁶⁴⁷ In another instance a bureau agent reported that a Pennsylvanian desired to start a “Colored school” but feared that “white citizens” would “molest him.”⁶⁴⁸ The man’s fears were not unfounded. G. H. Harrison, “teacher of freedmen’s school at Massanutten,” complained in the winter of 1866 that “10 or 15 men, armed and disguised,” immersed him twice in the Shenandoah River and threatened his life unless he left.⁶⁴⁹ J. H. McKenzie reported from Berkeley County “at three different times, a mob of from thirty to forty men” came to the house of a young lady who had opened up a night school for “colored children.” The men were intimidating the teacher and were part of “the spirit of Mobism,” or mob violence, that existed in the county.⁶⁵⁰ Moreover, for a period well after the war’s end, former slaveholders “patrolled, checked passes, and asserted power over” freedpeoples.⁶⁵¹

Despite whites’ backlash, freedpeople carved out their futures in the postwar South. Education, many knew, was necessary. In the words of one Bureau agent, “Education must be the stepping stone to intelligence and a better life.”⁶⁵² The scale of illiteracy had been exceedingly high among the enslaved in the lower Valley because laws prohibited them from learning to read or write. As a point of reference, a November 1865 census for African Americans in Fairfax County indicated that 2,813 were unable to read, while only 128 could.⁶⁵³ In Newtown, an African American man ran a school unassisted. A

⁶⁴⁵ John A. McDonnell, 30 June 1868, found at “The Freedmen’s Bureau Online,” <http://www.freedmensbureau.com/virginia/registeroutrages2.htm> [accessed 18 July 2019].

⁶⁴⁶ W. Storer How, 14 April 1866, <http://valley.lib.virginia.edu/papers/B1181> [accessed 20 July 2019].

⁶⁴⁷ J. H. McKenzie, 31 January 1866, Roll 187, FB.

⁶⁴⁸ John A. McDonnell, 3 August 1865, Roll 187, FB.

⁶⁴⁹ J. H. Hall, 27 February 1866, quoted in Noyalas, “After the Civil War in the Shenandoah Valley,” 58.

⁶⁵⁰ J. H. McKenzie, 31 January 1866, in John E. Stealey, III, ed., “Report of Freedmen’s Bureau Operations in West Virginia: Agents in the Eastern Panhandle,” *West Virginia History*, vol. XLII, nos. 1 and 2 (Fall 1980-Winter 1981), 100.

⁶⁵¹ Downs, “Force, Freedom, and the Making of Emancipation,” in *Rethinking American Emancipation*, ed., Link and Broomall, 50.

⁶⁵² A. F. Higgs, 31 July 1866, in Stealey, III, ed., “Report of Freedmen’s Bureau Operations in West Virginia, 105.

⁶⁵³ “Summary of Census Returns of Colored People, Fairfax County,” 15 November 1865, found at “The Freedmen’s Bureau Online,” <http://www.freedmensbureau.com/washingtondc/fairfaxcensus.htm> [accessed 18 July 2019].

Bureau agent requested help by asking to secure a building for rent without cost.⁶⁵⁴ Similarly, small schools proliferated throughout the Valley. The Freedmen's Bureau conducted a survey of schools in the beginning of 1866. Religious institutions supported many. The American Missionary Association had 355 pupils in Lexington, 419 in Staunton, 44 in Woodstock, and 30 in Massanutten; Freewill Baptists housed 110 students in Harpers Ferry; and the Home Missionary Society catered to the lower Valley with schools in Martinsburg, Charlestown, and Shepherdstown.⁶⁵⁵

The impressive results recorded by Bureau agents demonstrated the importance of education. Both Federal officers and freedpeople had sought to create schools since the summer of 1865. Albany, New York's American Missionary Association was particularly successful. White men and women journeyed south, often at great personal risk, to teach with energy and devotion.⁶⁵⁶ Although ages varied greatly, the majority of students were often children and young adults. And, although the American Missionary Association and other organizations attempted to fully support the schools, supplies could not match demands.⁶⁵⁷ Eager students often made for quick progress despite at-times inadequate facilities and support. Considerable advancements were quickly made in the cause of black education, but missionaries alone could not solve the insurmountable scale of the problem.

Despite the important efforts of missionaries and the Freedmen's Bureau, African Americans' best hope would ultimately be found "in the free public schools called for in the new constitution."⁶⁵⁸ Whites unhappily denounced the measure. The law meant that "the children of the property owners who will support these schools can never enjoy the benefits of them, because it is clear that under the proposed government they would be forced to be associated in the schools with the children of the negroes."⁶⁵⁹ White Virginians resisted the revolutions enacted by their war of secession. Many began to actively recast the past. As the "conservative" members of the state constitutional convention charged: "The negroes behaved well during the war; and we can trace all of the disorder and criminal misconduct into which they have fallen since to the pernicious teachings of those white adventurers who are using this ignorant and credulous race for their own selfish and rapacious purposes."⁶⁶⁰ Despite whites' angry reactions, African Americans nonetheless continued to seek education and opportunities that promised uplift.

⁶⁵⁴ John A. McDonnell, 6 June 1868, Roll 187, FB.

⁶⁵⁵ W. Storer How, "Property Freedmen's Schools," January 1868, Roll 187, FB.

⁶⁵⁶ Ayers, *The Thin Light of Freedom*, 406-7.

⁶⁵⁷ Ayers, *The Thin Light of Freedom*, 408.

⁶⁵⁸ Ayers, *The Thin Light of Freedom*, 464.

⁶⁵⁹ "Address of the Conservative Members of the Late State Convention to the People of Va." 28 April 1868, *Staunton Spectator*.

⁶⁶⁰ "Address of the Conservative Members of the Late State Convention to the People of Va." 28 April 1868, *Staunton Spectator*.

Uncertain Futures

Historian Chandra Manning reminds us, “Wartime had created new possibilities for inclusion and rights protection, but there was no guarantee that inclusion would continue or rights would be protected once the war ended.”⁶⁶¹ In fact, neither the constitutional conventions nor state legislatures of the former Confederate states made “any substantial moves to include freedpeople in the arenas of civil and political society customarily occupied by whites.” Instead, the states ignored President Andrew Johnson’s recommendation for black suffrage qualified by literacy and property holding requirements and “went on both to fashion ‘Black Codes’ that effectively inscribed a separate legal and social status for free and freed blacks and to send newly selected delegations to take seats in the Thirty-ninth Congress.”⁶⁶² An unreconstructed Virginia General Assembly rejected the Fourteenth Amendment, enacted prejudicial laws, and proposed that Robert E. Lee replaced Governor Francis H. Pierpont.⁶⁶³ Change, it seemed, would be slow to come.

When the General Assembly of Virginia convened their first full session after the Civil War, they immediately sought to restrict the rights and movements of African Americans. On January 15, 1866, Virginia passed a “Vagrancy Law.” It was enacted because of a supposedly “great increase of idle and disorderly persons in some parts” of the state and “unless some stringent laws are passed to restrain and prevent such vagrancy and idleness, the state will be overrun with dissolute and abandoned characters.” The law’s coded language noted that if the “overseers of the poor, or other officers having charge of the poor” discovered “vagrant or vagrants within their respective counties or corporations,” that said persons should be brought before justices of the peace. Thereafter, if found guilty of vacancy, they could be “employed in labor for any term not exceeding three months.”⁶⁶⁴

General Alfred Terry, headquartered in Richmond, ordered its non-enforcement. He immediately saw the law for what it was: “slavery in all but its name.”⁶⁶⁵ He reported in late January 1866: “In many counties of this State meetings of employers have been held, and unjust and wrongful combinations have been entered into for the purpose of depressing the wages of the freedmen below the real value of their labor, far below the

⁶⁶¹ Manning, *Troubled Refuge*, 231.

⁶⁶² Hahn, *A Nation Under Our Feet*, 127.

⁶⁶³ Jane Dailey, *Before Jim Crow: The Politics of Race in Postemancipation Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 17.

⁶⁶⁴ “Virginia Vagrancy Law,” 15 January 1866, *Acts of the General Assembly of the State of Virginia, Passed in 1865-66* (Richmond, VA: Allegre and Goode, 1866), 91.

⁶⁶⁵ 24 January 1866, *United States Congressional Serial Set*, vol. 1565, 42nd Congress, House of Representatives, 3rd Session, 203.

prices formerly paid to masters for labor performed by the slaves.” Whites were taking advantage of African Americans through unfair labor contracts—contracts that many were unable to read. Yet, white Virginians pushed the issue further. For, as Terry stated, “The effect of the statute in question will be, therefore, to compel the freedmen, under penalty of punishment as criminals, to accept and labor for the wages established by these combinations of employers.”⁶⁶⁶ Terry’s denunciation engendered a backlash. Richmond’s *Daily Dispatch* proclaimed that parties who “have no place to stay at, no homes, no businesses, and are preying on the purses and houses of our citizens daily and nightly.” The article then stressed that the vagrancy laws did not target African Americans. “As to the negroes,” it claimed, “they are above this law, and will have to be dealt with by our people as they think best, always remembering that ‘every man’s house is his castle, and that ‘self-preservation is the first law of nature.’”⁶⁶⁷ Although amended several times, the Vagrancy Act remained on the books until 1904.

Not until 1867, with the beginnings of Congressional Reconstruction, could the South be remade. Radical Republicans gained more power and enacted real change. The Civil Rights Bill they had spearheaded earlier, which gave “meaning to the Thirteenth Amendment,” was a harbinger.⁶⁶⁸ Throughout the late winter of 1867 and early spring of 1868, Virginians deliberated over a new state constitution in Richmond. Radical Republican federal judge and abolitionist John C. Underwood presided over the convention. Twenty-four African Americans were among the delegates. Emergent black political leaders, writes historian Luis-Alejandro Dinnella-Borrego, “shared with their newly freed constituents a deeply rooted desire for education and a strong awareness of the injustices and racism faced by freedmen and women throughout the South.”⁶⁶⁹ The new state constitution was necessary for Virginia’s senators and representatives to take seats in Congress. The Reconstruction Act of 1867 had not only divided up the former Confederacy (barring Tennessee) into five military districts but also convened the Fortieth Congress. Congressional Reconstruction surpassed President Andrew Johnson’s modest measures and created an antagonistic relationship between the legislative and executive branches. Black suffrage proved to be, in historian Eric Foner’s words, the “most radical element of Congressional Reconstruction.”⁶⁷⁰ African Americans would help shape Virginia’s political future.

⁶⁶⁶ Ed. W. Smith, 24 January 1866, *United States Congressional Serial Set*, vol. 1565, 42nd Congress, House of Representatives, 3rd Session, 203.

⁶⁶⁷ “The Released Convicts and the Vagrant Law,” 27 July 1866, *Daily Dispatch* (Richmond, VA).

⁶⁶⁸ Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America’s Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877* (New York: HarpPeren, 1989), 244.

⁶⁶⁹ Luis-Alejandro Dinnella-Borrego, *The Risen Phoenix: Black Politics in the Post-Civil War South* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2016), 42.

⁶⁷⁰ Foner, *Reconstruction*, 278.

The Reconstruction Acts enacted sweeping changes to which white Virginians viciously reacted. “It will,” whites decried, “disfranchise all the existing white citizens of Virginia, who are excluded from voting under the acts of Congress, commonly styled ‘The Reconstruction Acts.’”⁶⁷¹ Whites watched as their world turned upside down. “The Reconstruction Acts,” scholar Steven Hahn maintains, “radically altered the traditions and presumptions both because they enfranchised large numbers of former slaves against the wishes of their former owners, and because they disfranchised some white southerners for their participation in the rebellion.”⁶⁷² In protest to Congressional Reconstruction and its associated changes, white Virginia delegates to the constitutional convention wrote a dissenting report on both the franchise and officeholders. In a sweeping rebuke members angrily charged: “It would seem superfluous to all minds cognizant of the relative mental, moral and social status of the white and of the negro populations in Virginia, to set forth in grave detail the reasons for objecting to so flagrant a political revolution as this, which confronts and does despite to all the wisdom acquired by mankind in their endeavors to maintain Republican Government during the last thirty centuries.” Continuing, the men wrote, “But inasmuch as a few white people in Virginia, moved and sustained by a powerful political party now controlling the Federal Government, not only propose to effectuate this revolution by the aid of the negroes, but to challenge for it the approval of the civilized world, we are constrained to put on record the fact that as members of this Committee, we have protested against the measure.”⁶⁷³

The conservative delegates were quite candid in their language. Drawing upon the same racialized arguments that supported slavery in the antebellum era, they attacked African American intelligence and ability. The delegates savagely wrote, “They have not the *intelligence* adequate to vote discreetly for the good of any class.” They then sought historical precedent to bolster their views: “They are descended, in direct line, from progenitors in Africa, who, since the flood, have held undisputed control of one of the most fertile continents of the globe, but have remained in such changeless and gross barbarism as to rank now, in the concurring judgment of mankind, lower in the scale of intellect and every moral attribute than the lowest type of the Caucasian race known to history.”⁶⁷⁴ The delegates channeled the views of many white Virginians. As Robert Thomas Barton succinctly

⁶⁷¹ “Minority Report of the Committee on Elective Franchise and Qualifications for Office,” Document 37, *Documents of the Constitutional Convention of the State of Virginia* (Richmond: Printed at the Office of the New Nation, 1867), 193.

⁶⁷² Hahn, *A Nation Under Our Feet*, 191.

⁶⁷³ “Minority Report of the Committee on Elective Franchise and Qualifications for Office,” Document 37, *Documents of the Constitutional Convention of the State of Virginia*, 193-4.

⁶⁷⁴ “Minority Report of the Committee on Elective Franchise and Qualifications for Office,” Document 37, *Documents of the Constitutional Convention of the State of Virginia*, 196.

described life for white Virginians during Reconstruction, “Woe is me that ever such degraded and humiliating conditions shall ever be put upon any of the Anglo-Saxon race again – and this too in a so-called free and self governing country.” He contended whites suffered under “radicalism, fanaticism and paternalism,” anathema to “the theory of government by the people of themselves within the limits of a constitution carefully heeded and strictly construed.”⁶⁷⁵ White Virginians had long claimed only through their “guidance and “care” did African Americans “thrive” under slavery. The delegates echoed this belief: “A candid review of their history in Virginia leaves it in painful doubt, whether, if left alone to their own resources, they could long sustain their existence as a race, with the lower forms of civilization maintained.”⁶⁷⁶ With their cause lost, white Virginians actively created narratives that justified the Confederacy as the best protection for an idealized version of antebellum southern society.

Despite white vitriol, over 105,000 black Virginians had registered to vote in 1867 and over 93,000 participated in the fall elections.⁶⁷⁷ African Americans not only had a stake in Virginia’s future but also now had a political voice. Throughout the South, African Americans, in the words of one observer, displayed “remarkable interest in all political information” and were “becoming thoroughly informed upon their civil and political rights.”⁶⁷⁸ African American voters had been mobilized through both grassroots and regional mobilization. Union Leagues, in particular, were profoundly important. Richmond’s *Daily Dispatch* angrily noted that “thousands” of black Virginians had joined the organization.⁶⁷⁹ Another article charged that “freedmen have been organized in Loyal Union Leagues, through the influence of the preachers in their churches, the northern teachers in their schools, and the officers of the Freedmen’s Bureau,” thereby demonstrating the range of actors.⁶⁸⁰ Local Union Leagues sprung up in the Valley from Staunton to Winchester.⁶⁸¹ According to Eric Foner, usually “a Bible, a copy of the Declaration of Independence, and an anvil or some other emblem of labor lay on a table, a minister opened the meeting with a prayer, new members took an initiation oath, and pledges

⁶⁷⁵ Robert Thomas Barton Memoir, Robert Thomas Barton Papers, VHS.

⁶⁷⁶ “Minority Report of the Committee on Elective Franchise and Qualifications for Office,” Document 37, *Documents of the Constitutional Convention of the State of Virginia*, 196.

⁶⁷⁷ “Minority Report of the Committee on Elective Franchise and Qualifications for Office,” Document 37, *Documents of the Constitutional Convention of the State of Virginia*, 195 and “Shaping the Constitution,” *Education @ Library of Virginia*, http://edu.lva.virginia.gov/online_classroom/shaping_the_constitution/doc/voting [accessed 20 July 2019].

⁶⁷⁸ Eric Foner, *Forever Free: The Story of Emancipation and Reconstruction* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005), 129.

⁶⁷⁹ “U.L.A.,” 25 June 1869, *Daily Dispatch* (Richmond, Va).

⁶⁸⁰ “How the Negroes Will Vote,” 19 March 1867, *Daily Dispatch* (Richmond, Va).

⁶⁸¹ “From the Shenandoah Valley,” 24 August 1869, *Staunton Spectator*.

followed to uphold the Republican party and the principle of equal rights, and ‘to stick to one another.’”⁶⁸² Black political mobilization in the Valley continued to escalate. In the summer of 1869, historian Richard G. Lowe notes, seventy-eight percent of registered African Americans in Rockbridge County voted.⁶⁸³

Whites reacted with a mixture of horror and indignation at black political mobilization. Once again, the conservative delegates recorded their descent. “It is plain to every mind conversant with the forces which operate in popular elections,” they contended, “that a negro vote so large as to be almost numerically equal to one-half of the entire vote, will soon acquire power which may be wielded so as to control the State Government; and that the very facility, for attaining this result will give powerful inducement to political combinations contrived for the accomplishment of it. The scheme, therefore, puts the control of the Government within the easy and certain reach of the negroes.”⁶⁸⁴ It was, of course, the legal right of African Americans to have a presence in the state government and to voice their views through the electoral process. Nevertheless, whites refused to quietly concede a future in which “this revolution, which will invest the negro population with actual control of the political power of the State . . . despite the known remonstrances of the white population.”⁶⁸⁵ White Virginians mounted a counterrevolution that ultimately sought to undermine, if not overthrow, the political changes enacted by Congressional Reconstruction.

Whites in the lower Valley and beyond reeled at the humiliation of the black franchise and their own disfranchisement. The conservative element charged, “While *universal suffrage* is granted to the negroes, a *sweeping disfranchisement* is enforced against *many thousands of the white people* of Virginia, embracing all of those who heretofore have been called to public trusts, because of their eminent intellect, probity, and capacity to serve the State.” They continued by noting, “A double humiliation and wrong is thus deliberately inflicted.”⁶⁸⁶ African Americans, for their part, wanted “peace and repose,” according to Aaron Crane, editor of the Republican *Winchester Journal*. Further, they desired “a clear field for industry and enterprise;” they sought “the protections of their government, and necessary thereto, participation in it.”⁶⁸⁷

⁶⁸² Foner, *Reconstruction*, 283.

⁶⁸³ Lowe, *Republicans and Reconstruction in Virginia*, 176.

⁶⁸⁴ “Minority Report of the Committee on Elective Franchise and Qualifications for Office,” Document 37, *Documents of the Constitutional Convention of the State of Virginia*, 195.

⁶⁸⁵ “Minority Report of the Committee on Elective Franchise and Qualifications for Office,” Document 37, *Documents of the Constitutional Convention of the State of Virginia*, 194.

⁶⁸⁶ “Minority Report of the Committee on Elective Franchise and Qualifications for Office,” Document 37, *Documents of the Constitutional Convention of the State of Virginia*, 200.

⁶⁸⁷ Quoted in Donna Camille Dodenhoff, “Oh Shenandoah! The Northern Shenandoah Valley’s Black Borderlands Make Freedom Work during Virginia’s Reconstruction, 1865-1870,” Ph.D., dissertation, College of William and Mary, 2016, 1.

Significantly, notes historian Steven Hahn, “During Reconstruction, black men held political office in every state of the former Confederacy.”⁶⁸⁸ Yet, times changed with great rapidity. And the “years 1869-1878 belonged to the Conservatives,” writes Charles E. Wynes. “In power from the beginning, they constantly tightened their hold on the state and successfully worked for the destruction of the Republican party and the removal of the Negro as an important political factor.”⁶⁸⁹ Despite the tide of conservatism, black Virginians still had a political voice; and, in turn, *some* whites actively solicited African Americans. Virginia conservatives had slashed state services to fund the significant public debt. The “Conservatives’ fiscal assault on the public schools,” observes historian Jane Dailey, “split wide Virginia politics and made possible a critique of Conservative rule that linked the debt, the schools, and suffrage.”⁶⁹⁰ Rebellious white farmers from the piedmont and western counties demanded tax cuts and, in historian James T. Moore’s words, “a downward ‘readjustment’ of the burdensome state debt.”⁶⁹¹ Thereafter, the Readjusters became a powerful political voice in parts of Virginia. Counties in the Shenandoah Valley, which featured “the widest distribution of land ownership and the most rapid rate of population growth,” featured thousands of Readjusters.⁶⁹² These counties were also enthusiastic supporters of public schools and little feared black political influence because African American voters were comparatively few in number.

African Americans were among Virginia’s most disaffected voters. The state’s Republicans increasingly paid them little attention and “the average rural freedman eked out only \$6 to \$10 a month from the soil.”⁶⁹³ Countless black Virginians were landless and caught in cycles of poverty and debt. In this atmosphere the Conservative party began stripping African Americans of rights. Everything came to a head in the 1877 gubernatorial election of William Mahone. The native Virginian had been a slaveholder and served as a Confederate officer who played a key role at the Battle of the Crater. Mahone created a political strategy that sought to readjust the state debt, which gained widespread support. The Readjusters appealed to black voters because of their support of public schools and the Conservatives’ imposition of poll taxes. In the winter of 1879, a state convention founded the Readjuster Party. That same year the Readjusters won majorities in both sections of Virginia’s General Assembly, and Mahone was elected to the senate. The *Shenandoah Herald* announced the Readjusters popularity in the Valley: “The Mahone party are trying

⁶⁸⁸ Hahn, *A Nation Under Our Feet*, 219.

⁶⁸⁹ Charles E. Wynes, *Race Relation in Virginia, 1870-1902* (Totowa, NJ: Rowman and Littlefield, 1971), 14.

⁶⁹⁰ Dailey, *Before Jim Crow*, 29.

⁶⁹¹ James T. Moore, “Black Militancy in Readjuster Virginia, 1879-1883,” *The Journal of Southern History*, vol. 41, no. 2 (May, 1975), 167.

⁶⁹² Dailey, *Before Jim Crow*, 32.

⁶⁹³ Moore, “Black Militancy in Readjuster Virginia, 1879-1883,” 168.

to get the Democrats of the Valley to furnish the capital by which they can secure 40,000 negro votes.”⁶⁹⁴ Virginia conservatives grew restive. One article described the shifting political landscape, “Now as to the negro vote. The negroes constitute 10-26ths of the voters of Virginia. The whole vote, as above stated, was 145,317. Ten-twenty-sixths of it would be about 56,000. This would show the negro vote to have been about 56,000 as against a white vote of about 89,000. Now, the Republican candidates received only 23,397 votes. For whom did the other thirty-odd thousand negroes vote? Certainly most of them voted the Readjusters’ ticket.”⁶⁹⁵

White Virginians refused to be cowed by either the Readjusters or black voters. Woodstock’s *Shenandoah Herald* proclaimed: “Democrats stick to your colors. It is musing to hear the store box politicians who support the mongrel ticket, fixed up by a lot of negroes, republicans and others for democrats to vote, proclaiming themselves democrats.”⁶⁹⁶ The political tide was turning. White conservatives in the Valley had started to reclaim key political positions. The *Shenandoah Herald* proclaimed in the late summer of 1880, “Encouraging news from every portion of Shenandoah gives evidence that the people will not be led away from the Democratic party by a few ambitious men . . . They will be true to their party and will never prostrate themselves before the political calf erected by 64 republicans of whom forty were negroes.”⁶⁹⁷ By 1885, the Democratic Party had swept Virginia. And then, in 1902, a new state constitution deprived African Americans of the rights to hold public office and vote.

The proliferation of Confederate monuments and statues in the late nineteenth- and early twentieth- century symbolized white Virginians’ power and control. Bronze and stone soldiers soon populated town squares across the Commonwealth defiantly signaling the continued strength of Confederate sentiment. The Civil War had, moreover, never remained far from life at Belle Grove. In 1884, for example, “a gentleman who had been a Confederate soldier during the entire war, turned up two skulls” at the plantation. Upon “making an examination nine bodies were found in a trench. They proved to be U.S. soldiers, as was evidenced by pieces of their coats with Federal buttons upon them.”⁶⁹⁸ Belle Grove had also been the place where Confederate Gen. Stephen D. Ramseur received his mortal wound. In 1919, “Col. Bennehan Cameron of Hillsboro, N.C., and R. Powel Page of Boyce, Va.,” visited the old plantation to make “arrangements for the dedication of two memorial markers, to be placed at the spot where Gen. Ramseur died at Belle Grove farm,

⁶⁹⁴ “A Big Purchase,” 8 September 1880, *Shenandoah Herald* (Woodstock, Va).

⁶⁹⁵ “The Majority or the Minority?”, 21 July 1880, *Shenandoah Herald* (Woodstock, Va).

⁶⁹⁶ “Democrats,” 8 September 1880, *Shenandoah Herald* (Woodstock, Va).

⁶⁹⁷ “Encouraging news,” 13 October 1880, *Shenandoah Herald* (Woodstock, Va).

⁶⁹⁸ “The Plow Reveals the Horrors of War,” 8 April 1884, *Staunton Spectator*.

near here, and where Gen. Pettigrew died near Bunker Hill, W. Va.”⁶⁹⁹ The *Richmond-Times Dispatch* soon announced the dedication of a memorial marker “to be placed at the spot where General Ramseur died at Belle Grove farm.” An undertaking of the United Daughters of the Confederacy, and consisting of native limestone and a bronze tablet, the marker stands at Belle Grove’s entrance.⁷⁰⁰

Conclusion

In the winter of 1932, the *Page News and Courier* ran an article remembering the antebellum era. “The colored people all had good masters and they were treated just as well as if they were their own children,” it claimed. The writer had “never heard of any of these slaves being whipped and mistreated, and never heard of any of them being in need of anything.”⁷⁰¹ Such Lost Cause mythology proliferated in the decades after the Civil War. It gained widespread acceptance across both North and South becoming the dominant national narrative. The hold of Lost Cause mythology is often most apparent to public historians working at historic sites linked to the Civil War era. Belle Grove is uniquely positioned for its historical significance connects to multiple periods of time across the Shenandoah Valley’s history. Interpreters at that site, therefore, have ample opportunities to crack open questions about the Civil War’s conflicting meanings and legacies, the connections between slave labor and the Confederate cause, and the ascendancy of Lost Cause mythology during an era of black subjugation and segregation. Only with inclusive narratives can the site’s whole history be reclaimed.

⁶⁹⁹ “Winchester,” 31 August 1919, *The Sunday Star* (Washington, D.C.).

⁷⁰⁰ “To Dedicate Markers,” 31 August 1919, *Richmond Times-Dispatch*.

⁷⁰¹ “Too Long Forgotten,” 9 February 1932, *Page News and Courier*.

IN CONCLUSION

Cedar Creek and Belle Grove National Historical Park is uniquely suited to interpret the histories of African Americans in the lower Shenandoah Valley during the eighteenth- and nineteenth- centuries because of the historic structures and cultural landscapes within the Park's boundaries. Further, with a guiding mission of relating the story of the region "From Backcountry to Breadbasket to Battlefield – and Beyond" there is a particular onus to include the experiences of enslaved and free African Americans.

This historic resource study examines African American social, cultural, and political life across two centuries through a variety of methodological approaches and with a diverse range of source materials. I have tried to maintain a narrative voice throughout the work to create a broad history driven forward by a compelling series of stories and events. Throughout the study I quote at length both primary and secondary sources that I found particularly illustrative and maintained would be helpful to National Park Service staff, volunteers, and partners.

As with any historical study, this document is imperfect and does not discuss at length particular subjects. The experiences of free blacks, for example, could underpin a future study, especially one that went deep into the twentieth century. Although this population is of great importance, I chose to focus primarily on the experiences of the enslaved for two reasons. First, Belle Grove was a slave plantation and one of, if not the, most important resources at Cedar Creek to convey the complicated story of race and slavery to visitors. I was thus always mindful of how this historic resource study could interface with the extant slave plantation and be used a resource to relate the experiences of the enslaved. By extension, given the persistent belief, at least among popular audiences, that the Valley white's residents did not hold slaves, I felt it historiographically important to systematically document slavery in the lower Valley across a broad arc of time. Second, I generally followed the source materials. Although there are some records—especially those produced by governing bodies—documenting free black populations in the lower Valley, the primary source base is scant. Simply stated, I did not uncover enough material to warrant a chapter-length treatment of free blacks as I initially had envisioned. I therefore leave that task to future researchers.

Although this study discusses at length white populations, it gives little attention to the perspectives of Confederate soldiers, especially regarding black populations. I felt it was unnecessary to take up this subject. Aaron Sheehan-Dean has written a definitive account of Virginia's Confederate soldiers' reasons for fighting, views on race, and evolving attitudes toward slavery. His book, *Why Confederates Fought: Family and Nation in Civil War Virginia*, should therefore serve as a guide to these vital issues. I chose instead to focus on Union soldiers because scholars remain deeply divided about their attitudes toward

race and slavery. A case-study approach underpinned by a range of soldiers who served in the Valley during the Civil War years guides my discussion and should give interpreters ample evidence to discuss this complex topic through a variety of different perspectives.

This historic resource study was the most difficult project I have undertaken to date; it was also the most rewarding. Writing an at-times elusive history across a broad arc of time proved deeply challenging. It required many different types of evidence, a wide range of secondary source materials, and the input and perspectives of numerous scholars. The study thus reinforced in my mind the significance of an interdisciplinary approach and the profound importance of historical interpretation and education at our National Park Service sites. I remain extremely grateful to have been chosen for this project and deeply hopeful that the work proves useful.

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*Special thanks to the staff of
Cedar Creek and Belle Grove National Historical Park
(US National Park Service)
for access to their collection of
unpublished research, special collections, and exhibits.*