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NO MORE PECK O' CORN

Slavery and Its Discontents

UNLIKE INDIANS, blacks were not outside white society's "borders"; rather they were within what James Madison called the "bosom" of the republic, living in northern ghettos and on southern plantations. David Walker lived in both of these worlds. Born in North Carolina in 1785, he was the son of a slave father and a free mother. Walker himself was free: according to southern law, children inherited the status of their mothers. Living below the Mason-Dixon Line was a painful contradiction for him: he saw people who shared his color defined as property. Somehow, Walker learned to read and write; he studied history and pondered why blacks in America were in such a wretched condition.¹

Walker continued to reflect on this question after he moved to Boston, where he sold old clothes. Freedom in northern society, he realized, was only a facade for the reality of caste. Blacks were allowed to have only menial jobs. "Here we are — reduced to degradation," Walker observed. "Here we are cleaning the white man's shoes." Resentful of stereotypes of blacks as savages, Walker countered that whites were the true barbarians: the enslavement of blacks, the selling and whipping of slaves — such practices were signs of savagery, not civilization. Slavery, he believed, could be destroyed only through violence. "Masters want us for their slaves and think nothing of murdering us in order to subject us to that wretched condition — therefore, if there is an *attempt* made by us, kill or be killed."²

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In 1829, Walker published his revolutionary thoughts in an *Appeal to the Colored Citizens of the World*. Southern legislators denounced the pamphlet as "seditious" and restricted its circulation; even northern white abolitionists like Benjamin Lundy and William Lloyd Garrison criticized it as "inflammatory" and "injudicious." A year later, Walker died, mysteriously. What he had presented was a candid, disturbing assessment of the condition of blacks: they had been reduced to slaves in the South and pariahs in the North.³

Racial Borders in the Free States

Very few blacks lived in the North. They were "free," for the northern states had abolished slavery after the American Revolution. In 1860, they represented 225,000, or a hardly noticeable one percent, of the total population. Their presence was far from pervasive, and blacks certainly did not threaten the racial homogeneity of white society. Yet they were the target of virulent racism. "The same schools do not receive the children of the black and European," Alexis de Tocqueville observed in the 1830s.

In the theaters gold cannot procure a seat for the servile race beside their former masters; in the hospitals they lie apart; and although they are allowed to invoke the same God as the whites, it must be at a different altar and in their own churches, with their own clergy. The gates of heaven are not closed against them, but their inferiority is continued to the confines of the other world. When the Negro dies, his bones are caste aside, and the distinction of condition prevails even in the equality of death.⁴

Indeed, everywhere in the North, blacks experienced discrimination and segregation. "The colored people are . . . charged with want of desire for education and improvement," a black protested, "yet, if a colored man comes to the door of our institutions of learning, with desires ever so strong, the lords of these institutions rise up and shut the door; and then you say we have not the desire nor the ability to acquire education. Thus, while the white youths enjoy all these advantages, we are excluded and shut out, and must remain ignorant." Transportation facilities were often segregated. In Philadelphia, blacks were allowed to ride only on the front platforms of streetcars, and New York City had separate buses — one exclusively for blacks. Told their presence in white

residential districts would depreciate property values, blacks found themselves trapped in squalid slums.⁵

Although they were free, blacks were restricted in their right to vote. Ironically, the political proscription of blacks often accompanied the advance of democracy for whites. In 1821, for example, the New York constitutional convention expanded suffrage for free "white" male citizens: they had to own property, or they could qualify in other ways such as paying taxes, serving in the militia, and working on the highways. On the other hand, blacks were required to be property owners in order to vote. The Pennsylvania constitutional convention of 1838 was more direct: it simply established universal "white" manhood suffrage and thus disfranchised blacks completely.

Blacks also suffered from attacks by white workers. Time and again in northern cities, white mobs invaded black communities, killing black people and destroying their homes and churches. Philadelphia, the "city of brotherly love," was the scene of several bloody antiblack riots. In 1834, rampaging whites forced blacks to flee the city. Seven years later, in Cincinnati, white workers used a cannon against blacks, who armed themselves to defend their families. The mayor then persuaded about three hundred black men to be jailed for their own security, assuring them that their wives and children would be protected. But the white rioters attacked again, and order was not restored until the governor sent troops.

Victims of discrimination, segregation, and violence, blacks in the North encountered a powerful cluster of negative racial images. These stereotypes contributed to the conditions of racial degradation and poverty, which, in turn, reinforced prejudice.

Blacks were denounced as "immature," "indolent," and "good-for-nothing." As one white Pennsylvanian charged, they were "simply unfit," "naturally lazy, childlike." Stereotypes of blacks as children were linked to notions of black intellectual inferiority. In his research on racial differences in intelligence, Dr. Samuel Morton of Philadelphia measured the cranial capacities of the skulls of whites and blacks. Finding that those of whites were larger, Dr. Morton concluded that whites were more intelligent. But the skulls of the whites that Morton examined belonged to men who had been hanged as criminals. Thus, as historian Thomas F. Gossett has remarked, it "would have been just as logical to conclude that a large head indicated criminal tendencies." This presumably "scientific evidence" of black mental inferiority, however, was used to support the notion of white supremacy and to justify racial segre-

gation. An Indiana senator, for example, declared in 1850: "The same power that has given him a black skin, with less weight or volume of brain has given us a white skin, with greater volume of brain and intellect; and that we can never live together upon an equality is as certain as that no two antagonistic principles can exist together at the same time."⁶

While northern whites generally viewed blacks as childlike and mentally deficient, they also feared them as criminals. During the 1820s, Pennsylvania's governor expressed apprehension about the rising crime rate among blacks, and newspapers repeatedly reported Negro burglaries, Negro robberies, and Negro assaults against whites. The image of the black criminal led whites to restrict black migration into certain states. Ohio and Indiana required entering blacks to post a \$500 bond as a guarantee against becoming a public charge and as a pledge of good behavior. The editor of an Indiana newspaper demanded the law be enforced in order to "drive away a gang of pilferers."⁷

Moreover, blacks were seen as threats to racial purity — what Benjamin Franklin had described as "the lovely White." In Pennsylvania, whites petitioned the legislature to enact an antimiscegenation law, and Indiana and Illinois prohibited interracial marriages. Everywhere, white social sentiment abhorred white and black relationships. "It is true," observed Tocqueville, "that in the North . . . marriages may be contracted between Negroes and whites; but public opinion would stigmatize as infamous a man who should connect himself with a Negress, and it would be difficult to cite a single instance of such a union." Fears of miscegenation triggered demands for exclusion and political proscription. In a petition to the Indiana legislature, whites called for the exclusion of blacks, warning that their wives and daughters would be "insulted and abused by those Africans." At the 1847 Illinois constitutional convention, a delegate explained that the failure to restrict black migration was tantamount to allowing blacks "to make proposals to marry our daughters." Efforts to disfranchise blacks were often accompanied by denunciations of interracial sex. A delegate to the 1821 New York constitutional convention advocated the denial of suffrage to blacks in order to avoid the time "when the colors shall intermarry." In Wisconsin, opponents of black suffrage warned that political rights granted to blacks would encourage them to "marry our sisters and daughters."⁸

Fears of interracial unions stirred demands for segregated schools. Whites petitioned the Indiana Senate to establish segregated schools. The committee on education agreed that the Negro race was inferior and

that the admission of Negro children "into our public schools would ultimately tend to bring about that feeling which favour their amalgamation with our own people." When Massachusetts prohibited racial discrimination in the public schools, a northern newspaper cried: "Now the blood of the Winthrops, the Otises, the Lymans, the Endicotts, and the Eliots, is in a fair way to be amalgamated with the Sambos, the Catos, and the Pompeys. The North is to be Africanized."⁹

The North for blacks was not the promised land. Although they were not slaves, they were hardly free. Under slavery, they were forced to work; as wage-earners, they were excluded from many jobs. In New York, white dock workers attacked blacks seeking employment. In Cincinnati, white mechanics opposed the training of young blacks, and white cabinet shop workers demanded the dismissal of a recently hired black worker. Unable to find skilled jobs, many blacks were pushed into menial labor. In the 1850s, 87 percent of New York's gainfully employed blacks held menial jobs. Blacks were painfully aware of their grim prospects. "Why should I strive hard and acquire all the constituents of a man," a young man complained bitterly, "if the prevailing genius of the land admit me not as such, or but in an inferior degree! Pardon me if I feel insignificant and weak. . . . What are my prospects? To what shall I turn my hand? Shall I be a mechanic? No one will employ me; white boys won't work with me. . . . Drudgery and servitude, then, are my prospective portion."¹⁰

Was Sambo Real?

Meanwhile, in the South, four million blacks were slaves, representing 35 percent of the total population in 1860. Like Caliban, they served the Prosperos of the master class. They constituted the essential labor force in southern agriculture for tobacco, hemp, rice, sugar, and especially cotton cultivation. The majority of the slaves worked on plantations, agricultural production units with more than twenty slaves.

Work on the plantations, according to historian Kenneth Stampp, began early in the morning when a horn awakened the slaves an hour before daylight. "All work-hands are [then] required to rise and prepare their cooking, etc. for the day," a plantation manual stated. "The second horn is blown just at good day-light, when it is the duty of the driver to visit every house and see that all have left for the field." Work was highly regimented. A glimpse of plantation labor was captured by a traveler in Mississippi:

First came, led by an old driver carrying a whip, forty of the largest and strongest women I ever saw together; they were all in a simple uniform dress of a bluish check stuff, the skirts reaching little below the knee; their legs and feet were bare; they carried themselves loftily, each having a hoe over the shoulder, and walking with a free, powerful swing, like *chasseurs* on the march. Behind came the cavalry, thirty strong, mostly men, but a few of them women, two of whom rode astride on the plow mules. A lean and vigilant white overseer, on a brisk pony, brought up the rear.¹¹

A slave described the routine of a workday: "The hands are required to be in the cotton field as soon as it is light in the morning, and, with the exception of ten or fifteen minutes, which is given to them at noon to swallow their allowance of cold bacon, they are not permitted to be a moment idle until it is too dark to see, and when the moon is full, they often times labor till the middle of the night." After they left the fields, they had more work to do. "Each one must attend to his respective chores. One feeds the mules, another the swine — another cuts the wood, and so forth; besides the packing [of cotton] is all done by candle light. Finally, at a late hour, they reach the quarters, sleepy and overcome with the long day's toil."¹²

To manage this enslaved labor force, masters used various methods of discipline and control. They sometimes used kindness. "Now I contend that the surest and best method of managing negroes, is to love them," a Georgia planter explained. "We know . . . that if we love our horse, we will treat him well, and if we treat him well, he will become gentle, docile and obedient . . . and if this treatment has this effect upon all the animal creation . . . why will it not have the same effect upon slaves?" But masters also believed that strict discipline was essential and that power had to be based on fear. South Carolina's Senator James Hammond, owner of more than three hundred slaves, fully understood the need for the absolute submission of a slave to his master: "We have to rely more and more on the power of fear. We are determined to continue masters, and to do so we have to draw the reign [*sic*] tighter and tighter day by day to be assured that we hold them in complete check." Employing psychological reins, masters tried to brainwash their slaves into believing they were racially inferior and racially suited for bondage. Kept illiterate and ignorant, they were told they were incapable of caring for themselves.¹³

To many white southerners, slaves were childlike, irresponsible, lazy,

affectionate, and happy. Altogether, these alleged qualities represented a type of personality — the Sambo.

"Slaves never become men or women," a traveler in the South commented. Slavemasters frequently referred to adult blacks as "grown up children," or "boys" and "girls." Regarding themselves as guardians, they claimed their slaves had to be "governed as children." Unable to plan for their future, slaves would not "lay up in summer for the wants of winter" and "accumulate in youth for the exigencies of age."¹⁴

Slavemasters repeatedly complained about the problem of laziness, saying their black laborers had to be supervised or they would not work. If slaves were freed, they would become "an insufferable burden to society." Slavemasters insisted that blacks had to be kept in slavery; otherwise they would surely become "indolent lazy thievish drunken," working only when they could not steal.¹⁵

But slavemasters also cherished the bonds of affection they claimed existed between themselves and their childlike slaves. In his *Black Diamonds Gathered in the Darkey Homes of the South*, Edward Pollard exclaimed: "I love to study his affectionate heart; I love to mark that peculiarity in him, which beneath all his buffoonery exhibits him as a creature of the tenderest sensibilities, mingling his joys and his sorrows with those of his master's home." Slaveholders described their slaves as the happiest people in the world, working little and spending the rest of their time "singing, dancing, laughing, chattering, and bringing up pigs and chickens." "At present we have in South Carolina," one slaveholder boasted, "two hundred and fifty thousand civilized and peaceable slaves, happy and contented. . . ." In their private journals, masters recorded moments of closeness with their slaves. One of them scribbled into his diary on January 1, 1859: "The hands as usual came in to greet the New Year with their good wishes — the scene is well calculated to excite sympathies; notwithstanding bondage, affections find roots in the heart of the slave for the master."¹⁶

But the boast betrayed nervousness. The image of the slave as Sambo had special significance: the whole Western world was ideologically opposed to southern slavery, and therefore masters felt compelled to justify their peculiar institution as a "positive good." If they could show that their slaves were happy and satisfied with their condition, then perhaps they could defend themselves against their moral critics. They insisted that "ours is a patriarchal institution now, founded in pity and protection on the one side, and dependence and gratitude on the other."¹⁷

The planter class also had to persuade the white nonslaveholders of

the South that slavery was right. In 1860, only 5.5 percent of the southern white population were slaveholders. In fact, the vast majority of whites had no vested economic interest in slavery. One of them, an Alabama farmer, was asked by a northern visitor what he thought about emancipating the slaves, and he replied:

Well, I'll tell you what I think on it; I'd like it if we could get rid on 'em to youst. I wouldn't like to hev 'em freed, if they was gwine to hang 'round. They ought to get some country and put 'em war they could be by themselves. It wouldn't do no good to free 'em, and let 'em hang 'round, because they is so monstrous lazy; if they hadn't got nobody to take keer on 'em, you see they wouldn't do nothin' but juss nat'rally laze 'round, and steal, and pilfer, and no man couldn't live, you see, war they was — if they was free, no man couldn't live — and this ere's the other. Now suppose they was free, you see they'd all think themselves just as good as we, of course they would, if they was free. Now, just suppose you had a family of children, how would you like to hev a niggas steppin' up to your darter? Of course you wouldn't, and that's the reason I wouldn't like to hev 'em free; but I tell you, I don't think it's right to hev 'em slaves so; that's the fac — taant right to keep 'em as they is.¹⁸

Thus, there were moral misgivings among white southerners themselves. "We must satisfy them that slavery is of itself right," the defenders of the institution declared, "that it is not a sin against God." Time and again they insisted that the slavemaster was "enlightened," "humane," and "Christian," and that the slave was "submissive," "docile," "happy," "conscious of his own inferiority and proud of being owned & governed by a superior."¹⁹

Many masters had doubts about the morality of the peculiar institution. "Slavery," admitted the governor of Mississippi, "is an evil at best." Similarly, a white Virginian anxiously confessed: "This, sir, is a Christian community. Southerners read in their Bibles, 'Do unto all men as you would have them do unto you'; and this golden rule and slavery are hard to reconcile." One slaveholder jotted in his diary: "Oh what trouble, — running sore, constant pressing weight, perpetual wearing, dripping, is this patriarchal institution! What miserable folly for men to cling to it as something heaven-descended. And here we and our children after us must groan under the burden — our hands tied from freeing ourselves." Few slaveholders could "openly and honestly look the thing

[slavery] in the face," a European traveler in the South observed. "They wind and turn about in all sorts of ways, and make use of every argument . . . to convince me that the slaves are the happiest people in the world."²⁰

While claims that slaves were Sambos helped to comfort anguished consciences, they also offered the masters psychological assurances that their slaves were under control. Surely happy slaves would not come at night and slit the throats of their masters. In reality, slaveholders were terrified by the specter of slave rebellion. Aware of the bloody slave revolts in Santo Domingo in the 1790s, they were warned by an American official in Haiti: "Negroes only cease to be *children* when they degenerate into *savages*." After the brutal suppression of the 1822 Denmark Vesey slave conspiracy in Charleston, a worried South Carolina slaveholder warned that blacks were "barbarians who would, IF THEY COULD, become the DESTROYERS of our race."²¹

Holding what Thomas Jefferson had called the "wolf by the ears," masters lived in constant dread of slave insurrection. Southern newspapers frequently reported news of slave unrest and "evidences of a very unsettled state of mind among the servile population." Married to a Georgia planter, Frances A. Kemble reported that slaves were "a threatening source of constant insecurity" and that "every southern *woman*" lived in terror of her slaves. A Louisiana slaveholder recalled tense times "when there was not a single planter who had a calm night's rest," and when every master went to bed with a gun at his side.²²

Here was a society almost hysterically afraid of a black "giddy multitude." The master-slave relationship was dynamic, contradictory, and above all uncertain. Sambo existed and did not exist. What was the reality? How did the slaves themselves view their own behavior?

There were slaves who appeared to be Sambos. Asked about whether he desired freedom, a slave replied to a curious visitor: "No, massa, me no want to be free, have good massa, take care of me when I sick, never 'buse nigger; no, me no want to be free." In a letter to his master who was away on a trip, a slave ended his report on plantation operations: "The respects of your affec. Svt. unto D[eath] in hopes ever to merit your esteem. Your most dutiful servant. Harford."²³

But slaves who behaved like Sambos might not have actually been Sambos: they might have been playing the role of loyal and congenial slaves in order to get favors or to survive, while keeping their inner selves hidden. Masters themselves sometimes had difficulty determining a slave's true personality. "So deceitful is the Negro," a master explained,

"that as far as my own experience extends I could never in a single instance decipher his character. . . . We planters could never get at the truth." For many slaves, illusion protected them from their masters. "The only weapon of self defence that I could use successfully, was that of deception," explained fugitive slave Henry Bibb. Another former slave explained that one had to "know the *heart* of the poor slave — learn his secret thoughts — thoughts he dare not utter in the hearing of the white man."²⁴

Indeed, many slaves wore masks of docility and deference in order to shroud subversive plans. Every year thousands of slaves became fugitives, making their way north to freedom, and many of these runaways had seemed passive and cheerful before they escaped.

*No more peck o' corn for me,
No more, no more;
No more peck o' corn for me,
Many tousand go.*

*No more driver's lash for me.
No more pint o' salt for me.
No more hundred lash for me.
No more mistress call for me.²⁵*

After his flight north, fugitive J. W. Loguen received a letter from his former owner. "You know that we reared you as we reared our own children," wrote Mrs. Sarah Logue; "that you was never abused, and that shortly before you ran away, when your master asked you if you would like to be sold, you said you would not leave him to go with any body." In his reply, Loguen caustically remarked: "Woman, did you raise your *own children* for the market? Did you raise them for the whipping-post?" The ex-slave boldly proclaimed his love for liberty: "Wretched woman! Be it known to you that I value my freedom . . . more, indeed, than my own life; more than all the lives of all the slaveholders and tyrants under heaven."²⁶

Sometimes a slave would play the role of Sambo and then strike directly at his tyrant. Slavemaster William Pearce told one of his erring slaves that he would be whipped after supper. When the slave was called out, he approached Pearce submissively. As soon as he was within striking distance, the slave pulled out a concealed ax and split his master's head. Nat Turner, according to historian Stamp, was "apparently as

humble and docile as a slave was expected to be." In Virginia on August 22, 1831, he led seventy fellow slaves in a violent insurrection that lasted two days and left nearly sixty whites dead. After his arrest, Turner made a statement to the authorities. His master, he acknowledged, was "kind": "in fact, I had no cause to complain of his treatment to me." But Turner had had a religious experience: "I had a vision — and I saw white spirits and black spirits engaged in battle . . . and blood flowed in streams. . . ." A voice told him to wait for a sign from heaven: "And on the appearance of the sign, (the eclipse of the sun last February) I should arise and prepare myself, and slay my enemies with their own weapons." Turner carried out his mission, and a white Virginian nervously observed: "It will long be remembered in the annals of our country, and many a mother as she presses her infant darling to her bosom, will shudder at the recollection of Nat Turner." The slave rebel's action was a frightening revelation to white southerners: smiling and holding his hat in hand, Sambo could be planning their destruction.²⁷

The reality for many slaves may have been even more complex and subtle than a duality of roles. Some Sambo-like behavior may have been not so much a veil to hide inner emotions of rage and discontent as a means of expressing them. Lying, stealing, laziness, immaturity, and ignorance all contained within them an aggressive quality: they constituted, in effect, resistance to efficiency, discipline, work, and productivity.

"Hands won't work unless I am in sight," a Virginia planter scribbled angrily in his diary. "I left the Field at 12 [with] all going on well, but very little done after [that]." Slaves occasionally destroyed tools and machinery and treated farm work animals so brutally that they frequently crippled them. "They can neither hoe, nor ditch, chop wood, nor perform any kind of labor with a white man's skill," complained a master. "They break and destroy more farming utensils, ruin more carts, break more gates, spoil more cattle and horses, and commit more waste than five times the number of white laborers do." A continual problem for masters was the stealing of chickens and pigs. But slaves often viewed the matter differently: they were simply "taking" property (pigs) for use by other property (themselves). In other words, the master's "meat" was taken out of "one tub" and put in "another." "When I tuk the turkey and eat it," a slave said, "it got to be a part of me." This appropriation seemed justified because their weekly food allowance was so meager, and their masters were profiting from their labor. Slaves saw themselves as exploited workers. Even as they shucked corn, they sang:

*Massa in the great house, counting out his money,
Oh, shuck that corn and throw it in the barn.
Missis in the parlor, eating bread and honey,
Oh, shuck that corn and throw it in the barn.*

Resenting the unfair appropriation of their labor, many slaves feigned illness and lied in order to avoid work. One planter complained that slaves were sick on workdays but not on Sundays. One slave managed to avoid work for many years by claiming he was nearly blind; after the Civil War, he was suddenly able to see again and became a successful farmer. Where masters perceived the destructiveness, lying, and laziness of their slaves as mischievous, childish, and irresponsible behavior, many slaves saw refusal to be exploited.²⁸

Unlike slaves on the plantation, many slaves in the cities did not have to engage in such ambiguity. In 1860, there were 70,000 urban slaves. They labored in textile mills, iron furnaces, and tobacco factories. Many of them had been "hired out" and were working as wage-earners. The hiring-out system generally involved a contract that specified the wage, the length of service, some assurances concerning treatment, and the type of work to be performed. In a contract signed on January 1, 1832, for example, C. W. Thruston and his brother promised "to pay James Brown Ninety Dollars for the hire of Negro Phill until 25 Dec. next. And we agree to pay taxes & doctor bills. Clothe him during said time & return him . . . with good substantial cloth . . . shoes and socks and a blanket."²⁹

In this case it appears that the master found the job for his slave, but this was not always the practice. Slavemasters would often simply let their slaves find their own jobs and require them to make weekly payments. In effect, slaves were renting their own labor from their masters. One Savannah slave used the hiring-out system imaginatively. First, he purchased his own time from his master at \$250 a year, paying in monthly installments. Then he hired about seven or eight slaves to work for him.³⁰

The hiring-out system ruptured the border between slavery and freedom because it gave slaves a certain amount of bargaining power. While traveling through Richmond, Virginia, an English visitor overheard a conversation between a slave and a prospective employer:

I was rather amused at the efforts of a market gardener to hire a young woman as a domestic servant. The price her owner put upon her services was not objected to by him, but they could not agree about other terms. The grand obstacle was that she would not consent

to work in the garden, even when she had nothing else to do. After taking an hour's walk in another part of town I again met the two at the old bargain. Stepping towards them, I now learned that she was pleading for other privileges — her friends and favourites must be allowed to visit her. At length she agreed to go and visit her proposed home and see how things looked.

Unlike a plantation slave, this woman could negotiate her terms, insisting on certain work conditions almost as if she were a free laborer.³¹

Hiring out weakened the slave system. No longer directly under the supervision of their masters, slaves could feel the loosening of reins. They took care of themselves and had many of the privileges of free persons. In fact, they were sometimes called "free slaves." Many of them were even permitted to "live out" — to make their own housing arrangements by renting a room or a house. Living away from their masters' watchful eyes, they enjoyed a degree of independence. Though they were slaves, they were in contact with free laborers, black and white, and saw what it meant to be free. "Hundreds of slaves in New Orleans," Frederick Law Olmsted noted as he traveled in Louisiana, "must be constantly reflecting and saying to one another, 'I am as capable of taking care of myself as this Irish hod-carrier, or this German market-gardener; why can't I have the enjoyment of my labor as well as they? I am as capable of taking care of my own family as much as they of theirs; why should I be subject to have them taken from me by those men who call themselves our owners?'"³²

No wonder one white southerner complained: "The cities is no place for niggers! They get strange notions into their heads and grow discontented. They ought, every one of them, be sent onto the plantations." A Louisville editor claimed that "negroes scarcely realize[d] the fact that they [were] slaves" in the city. They became "insolent, intractable, and in many cases wholly worthless." They made "free negroes their associates," "imbibing" their feelings and imitating their conduct. Another white southerner anxiously described the behavior of slaves in New Orleans: "It was not unusual for slaves to gather on street corners at night . . . where they challenged whites to attempt to pass, hurled taunts at white women, and kept whole neighborhoods disturbed by shouts and curses. Nor was it safe to accost them, as many went armed with knives and pistols in flagrant defiance of all the precautions of the Black Code." Urban slaves did not behave like Sambos.³³

How did plantation slaves behave during the Civil War as federal

troops destroyed the authority of the slave system? The war, as historian Eugene Genovese observed, was "the moment of truth." Everyone — white and black — understood the meaning of the conflict. "There is a war commenced between the North and the South," a planter told his slaves. "If the North whups, you will be as free a man as I is. If the South whups, you will be slaves all your days." Information about the war circulated through the slave quarters. Pretending indifference, house servants listened intently as their masters talked among themselves about the military and political events of the conflict. "We'se can't read, but we'se can listen," a South Carolina slave told Union soldiers.³⁴

When slave Abram Harris heard that his master had been killed in the war, he felt loss and sorrow. "Us wus boys togedder, me en Marse Hampton, en wus jist er bout de same size," he said. "Hit so did hurt me when Marse Hampton got kilt kase I lubed dat white man." There were other instances of slave affection. "I shall never forget the feeling of sickness which swept over me," recalled a former slave. "I saw no reason for rejoicing as others were doing. It was my opinion that we were being driven from our homes and set adrift to wander, I knew not where. I did not relish the idea of parting with my young master who was as true a friend as I ever had." Occasionally, expressions of loyalty were accompanied by demands for respect. One slave told his master: "When you'all had de power you was good to me, and I'll protect you now. No nigger, nor Yankee, shall touch you. If you want anything, call for Sambo. I mean, call for Mr. Samuel — that's my name now."³⁵

Slave Dora Franks felt very differently as she overheard her master and mistress discussing the war: "He say he feared all de slaves 'ud be took away. She say if dat was true she feel lak jumpin' in de well. I hate to hear her say dat, but from dat minute I started prayin' for freedom." What was most striking was the way the presence of federal troops in an area stimulated noticeable changes in slave behavior. A few days after Union soldiers camped near her plantation, a slaveholder wrote in her diary: "The Negroes are going off in great numbers and are beginning to be very independent and impudent." In *The War Time Journal of a Georgia Girl*, Eliza Andrews described the strange behavior of one of her slaves. Alfred, "one of the most peaceful and humble negroes on the plantation," was charged with attacking a white man. "I hope there is some mistake," she commented fearfully, "though the negroes are getting unruly since the Yankees are so near." Mrs. Mary Jones recorded similar disillusionment in her diary. "The people are all idle on the plantations, most of them seeking their own pleasure," she wrote on January 6, 1865.

"Susan, a Virginia Negro and nurse to my little Mary Ruth, went off with Mac, her husband, to Arcadia the night after the first day the Yankees appeared. . . . She has acted a faithless part as soon as she could." On January 21, she reported that her "faithful" cook, Kate, had suddenly left the plantation. Disappointed and angry, Jones concluded: "Their condition is one of perfect anarchy and rebellion."³⁶

Indeed, during the war, plantation discipline generally disintegrated. "The wretches [are] trying all they can," complained a slaveholder in Texas, "it seems to me, to aggravate me, taking no interest, having no care about the future, neglecting their duty." Many slaves engaged in work slowdowns; others refused to work. Masters had difficulty extracting obedience. With the coercive power of the government focused on the battlefronts, many slaves became assertive, redefining their relationships with their masters.³⁷

Slaves were impatient, ready to break for freedom. An old slave who had fled to the Union lines told the Yankees: "Ise eighty-eight year old. Too ole for come? Mas'r joking. Neber too ole for leave de land o' bondage." During the war, some half million slaves ran off to the federal lines. In 1863, a northern clergyman asked a Virginia slave whether she had heard of the Emancipation Proclamation. "Oh, yes, massa!" she responded, "we all knows about it; only we darsn't let on. We pretends not to know. I said to my ole massa, 'What's this Massa Lincoln is going to do to the poor nigger? I hear he is going to cut 'em up awful bad. How is it, massa?' I just pretended foolish, sort of." Shortly after this conversation, she ran off to the Union lines. Another slave remembered the day the Union troops arrived at his master's plantation located on the coast of South Carolina: "De people was all a hoein'. . . . Dey was a hoein' in de rice-field, when de gunboats come. Den ebry man drap dem hoe, and leff de rice. De mas'r he stand and call, 'Run to de wood for hide. Yankee come, sell you to Cuba! run for hide!' Ebry man he run, and my God! run all toder way! Mas'r stand in de wood. . . . He say 'Run to de wood!' an ebry man run by him, straight to de boat."³⁸

Watching their once loyal slaves suddenly bolt for the Union lines, many white southerners jettisoned their opinions about their slaves as Sambos. Emily C. Douglas was shocked that her trusted slaves had deserted her: "They left without even a good-bye." Notions of slave docility were nullified. "You can form no idea of my situation and anxiety of mind," an overseer wrote to his employer in 1863. "All is anarchy and confusion here — everything going to destruction — and the negroes on the plantation insubordinate — My life has been several times

in danger." In the minds of many whites, blacks had changed from children into savages. "The 'faithful slave' is about played out," a slaveholder observed bitterly. "They are the most treacherous, brutal, and ungrateful race on the globe." Similarly, a Georgia planter condemned the "ingratitude evinced by the African character." "This war has taught us the perfect impossibility of placing the least confidence in any Negro," he observed. "In too numerous instances, those we esteemed the most have been the first to desert us."³⁹

Many of the deserters were women. For them, freedom had a particular meaning, for they had experienced bondage in different ways than the men. Like the men, they worked in the fields and the factories. But, as women, they were also important for the reproduction of the slave population. The federal government had prohibited the African slave trade in 1808, and the South had depended on natural increase for its supply of bonded labor. Slave women were viewed as "breeders," and the laws allowed masters to separate slave children from their mothers and sell them. A South Carolina court, for example, ruled that "the young of slaves . . . stand on the same footing as animals." As mothers, enslaved women bore a peculiarly heavy burden under slavery. They knew their children were not even legally theirs and could be taken away from them. Mothers were especially distressed over the future of their daughters. One mother, Margaret Garner, tried to escape with her daughter: as she was about to be apprehended near Cincinnati, she killed her own child. "Now she would never know," Garner exclaimed, "what a woman suffers as a slave." Hers were the anguish and rage of a slave mother — tormented feelings explored by novelist Toni Morrison in *Beloved*.⁴⁰

As slaves, many women found that more than their labor and their children were appropriated: their bodies were regarded as property to be used to satisfy the erotic pleasures of their masters. "The punishment inflicted on women exceeded in intensity the punishment suffered by their men," Angela Davis argued, "for women were not only whipped and mutilated, they were also *raped*." A former female slave, Harriet Jacobs, had made a similar observation: "Slavery is terrible for men; but it is far more terrible for women. Superadded to the burden common to all, *they* have wrongs, and sufferings, and mortifications peculiarly their own." As a fifteen-year-old slave, Jacobs herself had been victimized by her master. "He peopled my young mind with unclean images, such as only a vile monster could think of," she recalled. "He told me I was his property; that I must be subject to his will in all things. . . . I

shuddered to think of being the mother of children that should be owned by my . . . tyrant. I knew that as soon as a new fancy took him, his victims were sold far off to get rid of them; especially if they had children. I had seen several women sold, with his babies at the breast. He never allowed his offspring by slaves to remain long in sight of himself and his wife." Sexual exploitation of enslaved women was widespread in the South. The presence of a large mulatto population stood as vivid proof and a constant reminder of such sexual abuse. "Like the patriarchs of old," a southern white woman bitterly complained, "our men live all in one house with their wives and their concubines; and the mulattoes one sees in every family partly resemble the white children. Any lady is ready to tell you who is the father of all the mulatto children in everybody's household but her own. These, she seems to think, drop from the clouds."⁴¹

Slave Son, White Father

One of these mulatto slave children was Frederick Douglass. As a young slave child on a Maryland plantation, he had been sent by his master, Thomas Auld, to live with his grandparents, Betsey and Isaac Bailey. Grandmother Bailey was in charge of the children of the younger slave women. Her cabin was isolated, located twelve miles from the plantation and far away psychologically from the reality of slavery. "I had always lived with my grandmother on the outskirts of the plantation," Douglass later recalled. "I had therefore been . . . out of the way of the bloody scenes that often occurred on the plantation."⁴²

Douglass's childhood years at Grandmother Bailey's home were happy and secure. Frederick was never hungry, for his grandmother was skillful at fishing and farming. "Living here, with my dear old grandmother and grandfather," he noted later, "it was a long time before I knew myself to be a *slave*. . . . Grandmother and grandfather were the greatest people in the world to me; and being with them so snugly in their own little cabin — I supposed it to be their own — knowing no higher authority over me . . . than the authority of grandmamma, for a time there was nothing to disturb me."⁴³

But this period turned out to be somewhat short. As a young boy, Douglass was placed in the home of Hugh Auld, his master's brother who lived in Baltimore. Sophia Auld had not owned slaves before, and she initially regarded him as "a child, like any other." Her own son, Tommy, and Frederick "got on swimmingly together." She was like a

mother to him, the slave thought. Under her care, he was "well-off": he had a straw bed with a cover, plenty of food, and clean clothes. "Why should I hang down my head, and speak with bated breath, when there was no pride to scorn me, no coldness to repel me, and no hatred to inspire me with fear?" Sophia seemed to say to him: "Look up, child; don't be afraid."⁴⁴

But the slave system soon came down on both of them. Shortly after Frederick joined the Auld household, he developed a strong desire to learn to read, and Sophia gladly agreed to teach him. The boy was precocious and learned quickly. Sophia seemed almost as proud of his progress as if he had been "her own child" and told her husband about her new pupil. Hugh Auld scolded her severely, forbidding her to give the young slave any further lessons. "If you give a nigger an inch he will take an ell," he angrily lectured her. "Learning will spoil the best nigger in the world." Master Auld's fury had a damaging effect on Sophia. Her husband's "iron sentences, cold and harsh," disciplined her, and like "an obedient wife," she set herself like a "flint" against Frederick's education. "In ceasing to instruct me," he later wrote, "my mistress had to seek to justify herself to herself. . . . She finally became even more violent in her opposition to my learning to read than Mr. Auld himself." She spied on him and even interrogated him about his activities. Whenever she caught him reading a book, she would snatch it away.⁴⁵

But Douglass's sense of selfhood had already been formed, and his experiences in Baltimore reinforced his inner urge for freedom. Urban slavery was not as closed and coercive as plantation slavery. Indeed, in Baltimore, which had a large population of free blacks, Douglass saw that not all blacks were slaves. "I was living among freemen, and was in all respects equal to them by nature and attainments. Why should I be a slave?" On the wharves, the young slave met two Irishmen who told him about the free society of the North, and he went home with thoughts of escape and freedom pounding in his head. The city also offered Douglass educational opportunities. Once he understood that knowledge could be a path to freedom, he was determined to educate himself. He carried a copy of *Webster's Spelling Book* in his pocket when he went outside to play and took spelling lessons from his white playmates. He bought an antislavery book, *The Columbian Orator*, with money he had earned from blackening boots. In the urban environment, he had greater freedom of movement and contact with a wider variety of people and ideas than slaves on the plantation. "It is quite probable," Douglass speculated, "that but for the mere circumstance of being thus

removed [to Baltimore], before the rigors of slavery had been fully fastened upon me, before my young spirit had been crushed under the iron control of the slave driver, I might have continued in slavery until emancipated by the war."⁴⁶

Master Thomas Auld realized he had made a mistake. He complained that "city life" had influenced Frederick "perniciously" and made him restless. Consequently, Auld placed the sixteen-year-old slave under the supervision of slave-breaker Edward Covey. His instructions were simple and clear: Frederick was "to be broken," transformed psychologically into an obedient slave. "To make a contented slave," Douglass later explained, "you must make a thoughtless one. . . . He must be able to detect no inconsistencies in slavery. The man who takes his earnings must be able to convince him that he has a perfect right to do so. It must not depend on mere force — the slave must know no higher law than his master's will. The whole relationship must not only demonstrate to his mind its necessity, but its absolute rightfulness."⁴⁷

Reduced to a field hand for the first time in his life, Douglass was so cruelly whipped and overworked that he felt Covey had indeed succeeded in breaking his spirit. "My natural elasticity was crushed; my intellect languished; the disposition to read departed; the cheerful spark that lingered about my eye died out; the dark night of slavery closed in upon me, and behold a man transformed to a brute!" But the young man did not realize how greatly Grandmother Bailey, Sophia Auld, and Baltimore had unfitted him for slavery. Thus, though he found himself in a "sort of beast-like stupor between sleeping and waking," he still gazed at the sailboats skimming across Chesapeake Bay and exclaimed: "You are loosed from your moorings, and free. I am fast in my chains, and am a slave! . . . O, that I were free! . . . I will run away. . . . I had as well be killed running as die standing."⁴⁸

Covey sensed the slave's discontent and was determined to stamp out any thoughts of freedom. While working in the treading yard one hot August day, Douglass collapsed from heat and exhaustion. Too ill to respond to Covey's order to get up and work, he was savagely kicked. Bleeding profusely, he crawled to Master Auld, pleading for protection from the inhuman slave-breaker. Instead, he was scolded and ordered to return to Covey. Douglass had not expected Auld to protect him "as a man," but he had hoped his master would at least protect him "as his property."⁴⁹

Douglass knew he had to defend himself. Back at Covey's farm, he violently resisted the slave-breaker's efforts to tie and whip him. "The

fighting madness had come upon me, and I found my strong fingers firmly attached to the throat of the tyrant, as heedless of consequences, at the moment, as if we stood as equals before the law. The very color of the man was forgotten. . . . I held him so firmly by the throat that his blood followed my nails." In this supreme moment of physical confrontation, Douglass felt something profound. "I was a changed being after that fight. I was nothing before — I was a man now. . . . I had reached the point at which I was *not afraid to die*. This spirit made me a freeman in *fact*, though I still remained a slave in form."⁵⁰

The fight with Covey taught him a lesson he would always remember: "A man without force is without the essential dignity of humanity." Years later, after Douglass escaped from slavery and was active in the abolitionist movement in the North, he broke from the moral suasion approach of William Lloyd Garrison and moved toward the violent strategy of radical abolitionist John Brown. After his meeting with Brown in 1847, Douglass became less confident in the peaceful abolition of slavery. "My utterances became more and more tinged by the color of this man's strong impressions." Two years later, Douglass announced that he would welcome the news that the slaves had rebelled and were spreading "death and devastation" in the South. In 1859, he justified Brown's attack on Harpers Ferry — a bold attempt to seize arms from an arsenal and lead slaves in armed insurrection. "Capt. Brown has initiated a new mode of carrying on the crusade of freedom," Douglass declared, "and his blow has sent dread and terror throughout the entire ranks of the piratical army of slavery."⁵¹

Yet violence against the oppressor was not easy for Douglass to embrace. Slavery, as he had experienced it, was too complicated and too contradictory for him to have a single and clear set of attitudes toward white southerners. The raised knife of revolt would be aimed not only at people tragically ensnared in a vicious system, but also at people he cared about — Sophia Auld and perhaps even his own father.

Douglass was never certain about his paternity. "In regard to the *time* of my birth, I cannot be definite as I have been respecting the *place*. Nor, indeed, can I impart much knowledge concerning my parents." But he thought that his father might have been Master Thomas Auld. "I was given away by my father [Thomas Auld], or the man who was called my father, to his own brother [Hugh Auld]." Told his father was a white man and possibly his owner, Douglass bitterly condemned slavery as a system that cruelly forced slavemasters to reject their slave children. Years later, after the Civil War and emancipation, Douglass visited Thomas

Auld, and as he stood at the old man's bedside, he crossed a significant border separating them. Douglass insisted that Auld call him "Frederick," "as formerly," and asked his former master to satisfy an old, lingering, and anxious curiosity — his birthdate. The date of his birth and his paternity were puzzling questions Douglass had linked in his mind. Reminiscing about his escape, Douglass assured Auld that he had not run away from him but from slavery. The two men had a warm reunion. "He was to me no longer a slaveholder either in fact or in spirit, and I regarded him as I did myself, a victim of the circumstances of birth, education, and custom."⁵²

Douglass was intensely aware of his biracial ancestry. Time and again in his antislavery lectures he described himself as "the child of a white man" and "the son of a slaveholder." During an antislavery tour abroad, Douglass described England as "the land of my paternal ancestors." After the death of his wife Anna, he married Helen Pits, a white woman. In defense of this marriage, he remarked that his first wife "was the color of my mother and the second, the color of my father," and that "no one ever complained of my marriage to my former wife, though contrast of color was more decided and pronounced than in the present instance. . . ." Angry over the racial exclusion of his daughter from a private school, Douglass told one of the parents responsible for the injustice: "We differ in color, it is true, (and not much in that respect). . . ."⁵³

Descended from both white and black parents, Douglass hoped for an integrated and interracial America, a society without racial borders. In his opposition to black emigration and separatism, Douglass argued that blacks were Americans and did not wish to return to Africa or form "a separate union" in America. In his essay on "The Future of the Colored Race," Douglass predicted that blacks would be "absorbed, assimilated," and would "only appear as the Phoenicians now appear on the shores of the Shannon in the features of a blended race."⁵⁴

Black Nationalism: Nostalgia in the Niger

Douglass viewed the future of blacks in America very differently than did Martin Delany, the leading black nationalist of the nineteenth century. "I thank God for making me a man simply," Douglass observed, "but Delany always thanks him for making him a *black* man." Delany's pride in his blackness was reflected in his passionate interest in Africa. "Africa for the African race," he declared, "and black men to rule them.

By black men, I mean, men of African descent who claim an identity with the race."⁵⁵

Delany's African identity was inspired by his parentage. He was born in 1812 in Charles Town, (West) Virginia, the son of a slave father and a free mother — Samuel and Pati Delany. Samuel Delany, the son of a Golah chieftain, managed to purchase his freedom when Martin was about ten years old. Pati Delany's father was a Mandingo prince, Shango, who had been captured as a youth during intertribal hostilities and brought to America with his betrothed, Graci. Shango was given his freedom because of his noble birth and returned to Africa; Graci was also freed but remained in America with their daughter, Pati. During his childhood, Martin had an intimate source of contact with Africa — his Mandingo grandmother (who died at the age of 107).⁵⁶

As a child, Martin learned that his membership in the black race made him the object of white scorn. Pati Delany's efforts to teach her children to read and write aroused angry opposition from white neighbors who were anxious to preserve their belief in black intellectual inferiority and were afraid of educated black rebels like Denmark Vesey. White resentment was so intense that she felt compelled to move her family across the border to Pennsylvania.

But even north of slavery, racism was prevalent. As a young man studying in Pittsburgh during the 1830s, Delany experienced the brutality of antiblack riots led by mobs composed of white workers.

As a journalist and as an antislavery lecturer during the 1840s, Delany traveled widely throughout the North and often encountered racial hostility and violence. On one occasion, a white mob in Marseilles, Ohio, threatened to tar and feather him and burn him alive. Delany found that white children, even while involved in play, were never too busy to notice a black passing by and scream "nigger." "As the deportment of individuals is a characteristic evidence of their breeding," he noted, "so is the conduct of children generally observed as an evidence of the character of their parents." Delany found the racial epithets not only "an abuse of the feelings," but also "a blasting outrage on humanity."⁵⁷

His bitterness toward northern society was sharpened by an admissions controversy at Harvard Medical School. In 1850, Delany along with two other blacks had been admitted to the school. Their admission, however, was conditional: upon graduation, they would have to emigrate and practice medicine in Africa. Even so, their presence at Harvard provoked protests from white students. Demanding the dismissal of the blacks, they argued that integration would lower the "reputation" of

Harvard and "lessen the value" of their diploma. The whites refused to attend classes with the blacks. Racial integration at Harvard, they warned, was "but the beginning of an Evil, which, if not checked will increase, and that the number of respectable *white* students will, in future, be in an inverse ratio, to that of *blacks*." Finally, the angry students attached a threat to their protest: if the faculty did not heed their demand, they would transfer to another school.⁵⁸

The faculty quickly capitulated, ignoring a student counterpetition favoring the admission of the blacks. Deeming it "inexpedient" to allow blacks to attend lectures, the faculty defended their decision based on their commitment to teaching and academic excellence. They explained that the presence of blacks was a "source of irritation and distraction," which interfered with the "success of their teaching." Furthermore, the "intermixing" of the white and black races was "distasteful" to a large portion of the class and therefore "injurious" to the interests of the school.⁵⁹

The incident filled Delany with rage. He was fully qualified for admission to Harvard Medical School. His letters of recommendation from his private instructors, Dr. Joseph Gazzam and Dr. Julius Le Moynes, provided evidence of his competence to study medicine. Two years later, Delany issued his manifesto for black emigration — *The Condition, Elevation, Emigration and Destiny of the Colored People of the United States*. Emerging as a leading theoretician of black nationalism, he organized the National Emigration Convention; in 1859, Delany visited Africa to secure a land grant for the settlement of American blacks in the Niger Valley.

In his call for black emigration to Africa, Delany presented a detailed analysis of the degradation and despair blacks were experiencing in northern society. The inferior and dependent economic and social position blacks occupied in the North not only reinforced white prejudice, but also inculcated feelings of inferiority and self-hatred among blacks. "Caste our eyes about us and reflect for a moment," Delany sadly declared, "and what do we behold! every thing that presents to view gives evidence of the skill of the white man. Should we purchase a pound of groceries, a yard of linen, a vessel of crockeryware, a piece of furniture, the very provisions that we eat, — all, all are the products of the white man." Delany argued that this condition of dependency with its constant reminders of their subordinate status had an insidious influence on black self-esteem. Black children, born under oppression, could not "be raised in this country, without being stooped shouldered." Black men and

women, moreover, appeared to be satisfied as menial workers, "accustomed" to being maids and cooks. They seemed to lack a sense of "self-respect." In Delany's judgment, blacks had been so broken by white oppression that they were actually helping to perpetuate their tragic condition.⁶⁰

Blacks would never achieve acceptance and equality in America, Delany contended, unless they changed their condition and became self-reliant like whites — "a business, money-making people," educated for "the Store and Counting House." Black liberation, he believed, depended upon entrepreneurial success. They must strive to acquire what had enabled whites to succeed — "a knowledge of all the various business enterprises, trades, professions, and sciences," a "practical Education" in business rather than a "Classical" education. "What did John Jacob Astor, Stephen Girard, or do the millionaires and the greater part of the merchant princes, and mariners, know of Latin and Greek, and the Classics?"⁶¹

But Delany had no confidence that blacks would be able to change their condition in America. In his judgment, the oppression of blacks was essentially based on caste, not class. Although white laborers shared many class interests with blacks, the two groups would never join in common efforts to elevate themselves. The problem for blacks was "not a question of the rich against the poor" but of "white against black." Aware of antiblack hatred among white workers, Delany ruled out class struggle as a strategy for black liberation.⁶²

Even if slavery were abolished, Delany believed, racism would persist as long as there were both whites and blacks living in America. The only way to rid society of race would be through amalgamation — for Americans to become a blended people. Delany believed this would never happen; moreover, he did not view racial mixture as desirable. Unlike Frederick Douglass, Delany did not want blacks to lose their "identity as a distinct race." "The truth is," he declared, "we are not identical with the Anglo-Saxon . . . and the sooner we know and acknowledge this truth, the better for ourselves and posterity." Blacks should be proud of themselves, for they possessed "the highest traits of civilization" and would someday instruct the world in the true principles of morals, religion, and law.⁶³

To be redeemed, blacks had to emigrate to Africa in order to separate themselves from their white oppressors. "Were we content to remain as we are," Delany warned, "sparsely interspersed among our white fellow-countrymen, we might never be expected to equal them in any

honorable or respectable competition for a livelihood." Therefore, the struggle had to focus on Africa. "No people can be free who themselves do not constitute an essential part of the *ruling element* of the country in which they live." If blacks were able to establish a proud and powerful black African nation, they would be able to win respect for blacks everywhere in the world and hasten the emancipation of slaves in America. "The claims of no people, according to established policy and usage," Delany insisted, "are respected by any nation, until they are presented in a national capacity."⁶⁴

At the same time as Delany was celebrating Africa, he was also identifying with America. His book on emigration reflected this tension. It was "sincerely dedicated to the American people, North and South. By their most devout, and patriotic fellow-citizen, the author." Delany presented a strong case for black American citizenship by pointing to the immense contributions blacks had made to the American economy. Reminding readers about the black patriots of the American Revolution, he also argued: "Among the highest claims that an individual has upon his country, is that of serving in its cause, and assisting to fight its battles." America, for Delany, was home. "Here is our nativity," he observed, "and here have we the natural right to abide and be elevated through the measure of our own efforts. . . . Our common country is the United States. Here were we born, here raised and educated, here are the scenes of childhood . . . the sacred graves of our departed fathers and mothers." But here, too, Delany had experienced the abuse of white children, the violence of white mobs, and the scorn of the white students at Harvard. "We love our country, dearly love her," Delany cried, "but she [doesn't] love us — she despises us."⁶⁵

This sense of agonizing ambivalence evoked complex and contradictory feelings within Delany during his visit to the Niger Valley in 1859. "The first sight and impressions of the coast of Africa are always inspiring, producing the most pleasant emotions," he scribbled in his diary. He was finally in the homeland described in his grandmother's Mandingo chants. During the first several days, Delany felt an "almost intense excitement," "a hilarity of feeling" approaching "intoxication." But then followed fatigue. This second "stage" of feeling, Delany thought, was "acclimation," often accompanied by nausea, chills, and violent headaches. During this period, he became homesick — "*a feeling of regret that you [had] left your native country for a strange one; an almost frantic desire to see friends and nativity; a despondency and loss of the hope of ever seeing those you [loved] at home again.*" Then Delany

added in his diary: "These feelings, of course, must be resisted, and regarded as a mere morbid affection of the mind at the time, arising from an approaching disease." When he recovered from his malady, Delany felt an "ardent and abiding" love for Africa. After he completed his negotiations for a land grant in the Niger Valley, Delany sailed for America, vowing he would return to Africa.⁶⁶

"Tell Linkum Dat We Wants Land"

Deliverance from slavery, for both Douglass and Delany, was to come from the barrel of a gun. Black men in blue, Douglass pointed out, were "on the battlefield mingling their blood with that of white men in one common effort to save the country." Through their participation in the war to save the Union, they were earning their right to claim full citizenship. Abandoning his dreams of emigrating to Africa, Delany volunteered for the Union Army and received an appointment as a major in the 104th Regiment of United States Colored Troops. "It is the duty of every colored man to vindicate his manhood by becoming a soldier," Delany declared, "and with his own stout arm to battle for the emancipation of his race." Indeed, the federal occupation of the South as well as the Emancipation Proclamation and the Thirteenth Amendment liberated some four million blacks. But what were the hopes and dreams of these newly freed people?⁶⁷

Blacks knew precisely what they needed to raise themselves from freedom to equality. Initially, many of them felt they needed to withdraw from their ex-masters and move their cabins away from the big house in order to separate themselves from white proximity and supervision. In 1865, General William Sherman asked twenty black leaders whether they preferred to live scattered among whites or in colonies by themselves. They replied that they would prefer to have their own separate communities because racial prejudice would take years to overcome. When the agents of the Freedmen's Aid Commission arrived in the South, they found blacks asking: "When will you open school?" In addition to education, blacks wanted political power through suffrage.⁶⁸

What blacks wanted most of all, more than education and voting rights, was economic power:

*Don't you see the lightning flashing in the cane
brakes,
Looks like we gonna have a storm*

*Although you're mistaken it's the Yankee soldiers
Going to fight for Uncle Sam.
Old master was a colonel in the Rebel army
Just before he had to run away —
Look out the battle is a-falling
The darkies gonna occupy the land.*⁶⁹

Blacks viewed landownership as the basis of economic power. Their demand for land, they argued, was reasonable and just. For one thing, they had paid for it through their military participation in the war: 186,000 blacks, most of them recruited or conscripted in the slave states, had served in the Union Army, and one-third of them were listed as missing or dead. Black soldiers had fought bravely against their masters. "Now we sogers are men — men de first time in our lives," one of them stated proudly. "Now we can look our old masters in de face. They used to sell and whip us, and we did not dare say one word. Now we ain't afraid, if they meet us, to run the bayonet through them." Blacks as soldiers had helped to bring the war to an end, and they felt they were entitled to some land.⁷⁰

Moreover, blacks had already paid for the land "through a life of tears and groans, under the lash and yoke of tyranny." When a freedman named Cyrus was questioned by his former owner about his absence from the fields, he explained the new situation: "Seems lak we'uns do all the wuck and gits a part. Der ain't goin' ter be no more Master and Mistress, Miss Emma. All is equal. I done hear it from de cotehouse steps. . . . All de land belongs to de Yankees now, and dey gwine to divide it out 'mong de colored people. Besides, de kitchen of de big house is my share. I help built hit." Another freedman, Uncle Smart, told a northern teacher: "Do, my missus, tell Linkum dat we wants land — dis bery land dat is rich wid de sweat ob we face and de blood ob we back."⁷¹

Some Radical Republicans including Charles Sumner, Thaddeus Stevens, and George W. Julian understood the need to grant land to the freed slaves. They argued that emancipation had to be accompanied by land confiscation from the planter class and land distribution to the newly freed blacks. The perpetuation of the large estates would mean the development of a semifeudal system based on the cheap labor of exploited and powerless blacks. But Congress was only willing to grant them civil and political rights through the Fourteenth and Fifteenth amendments. The lawmakers rejected legislation for land distribution —

known as the "40 acres and a mule" bill. Land should not be given to the freedmen, the *New York Times* argued, because they had to be taught the lessons of hard work, patience, and frugality. *The Nation* protested that land confiscation and distribution would violate the principle of property rights.⁷²

During the war, however, forty thousand blacks had been granted land by military order. In 1864, after General Sherman completed his march to the sea, black leaders told him: "The way we can best take care of ourselves is to have land, and turn it and till it by our own labor." In response, General Sherman issued Special Field Order Number 15, which set aside large sections of South Carolina and Georgia for distribution to black people. They were given "possessory titles" to forty-acre lots until Congress could decide their final disposition. The blacks believed that they owned the lands. But after the planters were pardoned by President Andrew Johnson, they began to reclaim the lands and force their former slaves to work for them. The black landowners resisted: "To turn us off from the land that the Government has allowed us to occupy, is nothing less than returning us to involuntary servitude." "We own the land now. Put it out of your head that it will ever be yours again." In their protest to President Johnson, they pointed out how they had joined the Union Army and had fought to put down the southern rebellion: "Man that have stud upon the feal of battle & have shot there master and sons now going to ask ether one for bread or for shelter or comfortable for his wife & children sunch a thing the U S should not ought to expect a man [to do]." Some of them declared they were prepared to defend their property with guns. Federal troops quickly crushed the resistance: seizing the lands, they tore up the freedmen's title papers and restored the lands to the planter class.⁷³

Thus ended the possibility of real freedom. A Union general explained to Congress: "I believe it is the policy of the majority of the farm owners to prevent negroes from becoming landholders. They desire to keep the negroes landless, and as nearly in a condition of slavery as it is possible for them to do." The newly freed blacks made this same point more directly and frankly: "Gib us our own land and we take care ourselves, but widout land, de ole massas can hire us or starve us, as dey please." Frederick Douglass explained the failure of Reconstruction: "Could the nation have been induced to listen to those Stalwart Republicans, Thaddeus Stevens and Charles Sumner, some of the evils which we now suffer would have been averted. The Negro would not today be on his knees, as he is, supplicating the old master class to give him leave to toil."⁷⁴

Though the Civil War had led to the destruction of slavery, blacks in the South found themselves transformed from "property" to "freedmen," not "free" people. No longer slaves, they became wage-earners or sharecroppers, working the land of their former master in exchange for a part of the crop. Forced to buy goods from the planter's store, they were trapped in a vicious economic cycle, making barely enough to pay off their debts. For example, according to an account book, the following transactions occurred between Polly and landowner Presley George:

Due Presley George by Polly:	
For 4¾ cuts wool @ 75 cents/cut	\$ 3.50
22 yds. cloth @ 50 cents/yd.	\$11.00
5 yds. thread @ 50 cents/yd.	2.50
Boarding one child (who didn't work) for 5 months	12.00
10 bushels corn @ \$1.00/bushel	10.00
30 bushels corn @ \$1.00/bushel	30.00
TOTAL	\$69.00

Due Polly by Presley George:	
For 3 months' work "by self" @ \$4.00/month	\$12.00
For 4 months' work by son Peter @ \$8.00/month	32.00
For 4 months' work by son Burrel @ \$4.00/month	16.00
For 4 months' work by daughter Siller @ \$2.25/month	9.00
TOTAL	\$69.00

Thus, the earnings of Polly and her family amounted to zero. All they had been able to do was to reimburse planter George for the debts they had incurred from their purchases.⁷⁵

A black laborer described his condition of debt peonage: "I signed a contract — that is, I made my mark for one year. The Captain was to give me \$3.50 a week, and furnish me a little house on the plantation. . . ." A year later, he found himself in debt to the planter, and so he signed another contract, this one for ten years. During this time, he was "compelled" to buy his food, clothing, and other supplies from the plantation store. "We never used any money in our dealings with the commissary, only tickets or orders, and we had a general settlement once each year, in October. In this store we were charged all sorts of high

prices for goods, because we seldom had more than \$5 or \$10 coming to us — and that for a whole year's work." At the end of his contract, he tried to leave the plantation but was told he owed \$165 and consequently found himself reduced to a "lifetime slave." A black folk song lamented:

*Slavery an' freedom.
Dey's mos' de same
No difference habdly
Cep' in de name.⁷⁶*

Meanwhile, the era known as the "New South" was emerging. Four years after the withdrawal of federal troops from the South in 1877, the editor of the *New Orleans Times-Democrat* reported that a "magic transformation" had occurred below the Mason-Dixon Line. The "stagnation of despair" had given way to the "buoyance" of hope and courage, and the "silence of inertia" to the "thrilling uproar of action." Southerners were a "new people," and the region was experiencing a "new birth." The vision of the "New South" was the industrialization of the old Cotton Kingdom.⁷⁷

The signs of "progress" were especially evident in the rise of cities and the proliferation of factories. Atlanta, which had only 14,000 residents when General Sherman marched his army to the sea, had a population close to 40,000 in 1880 and 90,000 two decades later. The pride of the New South's manufacturing was centered on its textile and iron production. The number of spindles had jumped from 600,000 in 1860 to 175,000,000 in 1890; the number of textile mills from 161 in 1880 to 400 in 1900. By the late 1880s, southern pig-iron production had surpassed the total output of the entire country in 1860. Jefferson County, the home of Birmingham, had only twenty-two factories in 1870; thirty years later it had five hundred plants.

During this economic boom, blacks were drawn into the factories and mills of the "New South." Although they were systematically excluded from certain industries such as textiles and continued to be employed primarily in agriculture, blacks became an important source of industrial labor. In 1890, 6 percent of the total black work force was employed in manufacturing, compared with 19 percent of the total native white work force. Between 1890 and 1910, the number of black male workers in nonagricultural occupations increased by two-thirds, or to 400,000, due mainly to the expansion in sawmills, coal mining, and

railroad construction. in 1880, 41 percent of Birmingham's industrial workers were black; thirty years later, blacks made up 39 percent of all steelworkers in the South.

Southern industrialists were eager to employ blacks. Richard H. Edmunds, editor of the *Manufacturers' Record*, regarded blacks as "the most important working factor in the development of the great and varied resources of our country." The manager of Shelby Iron Works insisted he would not exchange his black workers "for any other people on earth." After white workers struck at Chattanooga and Knoxville iron companies in 1883, management turned to black laborers and found them to be "fully as good as" white labor. Praising his black workers, the superintendent of the Saluda Cotton Factory stated that they not only worked as well as whites, but were also less expensive and could be "easily controlled."⁷⁸

One prominent symbol of the "New South" was the 1895 Atlanta Exposition. Thousands of visitors crowded into Atlanta to marvel at the industrial achievements of the postwar South. Included among the exhibits were the latest advances in technology, such as a battery of eight boilers and fourteen engines with a capacity of 2,250 horsepower. There was also a "Negro Building" designed and erected wholly by black mechanics and devoted to "showing the progress of the Negro since freedom." The main entrance of this building had relief work that depicted a "slave mammy" and a portrait of Frederick Douglass; inside was a steam engine built by students from the Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute.⁷⁹

The most noted speaker at the opening of the exposition was Booker T. Washington, the thirty-nine-year-old principal of Tuskegee Institute. The invitation to give the address had greatly moved him. From slave to honored guest, he had been given the opportunity to speak to an audience composed of the wealth and culture of the South, the representatives of his former masters. The event was momentous: it was the first time in southern history that a black had been asked to speak at such an important occasion.

As Washington stood on the platform in Atlanta, he told his black and white listeners in the segregated auditorium to "cast down their buckets" where they were. To blacks, he declared: "It is at the bottom of life we must begin, and not at the top." The agitation for "social equality" was the "extremest folly." "The opportunity to earn a dollar in a factory just now is worth infinitely more than the opportunity to spend a dollar in an opera-house." To whites, Washington recom-

mended: cast down your bucket "among eight millions of Negroes whose habits you know, whose fidelity and love you have tested in days when to have proved treacherous meant the ruin of your firesides. Cast down your bucket among these people who have, without strikes and labour wars, tilled your fields, cleared your forests, built your railroads and cities." To both races, Washington dramatically advised: "In all things that are purely social we can be as separate as the fingers, yet one as the hand in all things essential to mutual progress." Washington's speech "electrified" the audience, drawing a "delirium of applause." After his address, known as the "Atlanta Compromise," Washington suddenly found himself elevated by whites in power as the leader of his race.⁸⁰

Although Washington had publicly offered black cooperation to the southern elite, he was actually not an accommodationist. In Chicago five years later, he gave a speech condemning racism in American society. Congratulating the country for its recent victory in the Spanish-American War, he declared that Americans had won every conflict in history, "except the effort to conquer ourselves in blotting out racial prejudice. . . . Until we thus conquer ourselves I make no empty statement when I say that we shall have a cancer gnawing at the heart of this republic that shall some day prove to be as dangerous as an attack from an army without or within." When Washington arrived to speak at a hall in Tampa, Florida, and found that the audience had been divided into blacks and whites with a line of sheets separating the two groups, he refused to speak until the sheets were taken down. Behind the scenes, Washington strenuously fought against discrimination and disfranchisement, covertly funding lawsuits against railroad segregation in Virginia and disfranchisement legislation in Louisiana and Alabama.⁸¹

Moreover, Washington had always felt a sense of race pride. "From any point of view," he acknowledged in his autobiography, "I had rather be what I am, a member of the Negro race, than be able to claim membership with the most favoured of any other race." Blacks, in Washington's view, should pursue a strategy of self-help, directing their own destiny, uplifting themselves, and establishing black institutions like Tuskegee and the Negro Business League. Like Delany, Washington urged blacks to pursue economic success. Before he sailed to Europe on a vacation in 1910, he resolved not to enter a single palace, gallery, cathedral, or museum. "I find markets more instructive than museums," he explained. As an educator, Washington had little respect for what he called "mere book education." He wanted his students to study "actual things," to acquire a practical education. For blacks, industrial training

would be the path to economic independence and racial equality. "Let there be in a community," Washington predicted, "a Negro who by virtue of his superior knowledge of the chemistry of the soil, his acquaintance with the most improved tools and best breeds of stock, can raise fifty bushels of corn to the acre while his white neighbor only raises thirty, and the white man will come to the black man to learn. Further, they will sit down on the same train, in the same coach and on the same seat to talk about it."⁸²

By the end of the nineteenth century, however, the possibility of progress for blacks was distressingly remote. Racial borders had been reinforced by class and caste. Most black farmers were sharecroppers or tenants, working a white man's land with a white man's plow and a white man's mule. "Every colored man will be a slave, & feel himself a slave," a black soldier had warned during the Civil War, "until he can raise him own bale of cotton & put him own mark upon it & say dis is mine!" By this measure of freedom, blacks were still "slaves." During the 1890s, new laws buttressed segregation by defining more precisely the "Negro's place" on trains and streetcars and in schools, parks, theaters, hotels, and hospitals. Proclaiming the doctrine of separate but equal in the 1896 ruling of *Plessy v. Ferguson*, the Supreme Court upheld the constitutionality of segregation. Poll taxes and literacy requirements for suffrage were effectively disfranchising blacks, and hundreds of blacks were annually being lynched. This era was brutally repressive — what historian Rayford Logan described as "the nadir."⁸³

6



EMIGRANTS FROM ERIN

Ethnicity and Class within White America

THE AGE OF Jackson witnessed not only Indian removal and the expansion of slavery, but also the massive influx of a new group of immigrants. Suddenly, blacks in the North were competing with Irish workers. "Every hour sees us elbowed out of some employment to make room perhaps for some newly arrived immigrants, whose hunger and color are thought to give them a title to special favor," Frederick Douglass complained. "White men are becoming house servants, cooks, stewards, common laborers and flunkeys to our gentry." Then he warned that Irish immigrants would soon find that in taking "our vocation" they had also assumed "our degradation." But Douglass also found himself empathizing with the Irish. During a visit to Ireland in the 1840s, he witnessed the terrible suffering inflicted by the potato famine and was "much affected" upon hearing the "wailing notes" of Irish ballads that reminded him of the "wild notes" of slave songs.¹

Smaller
Irish
Blacks
2 groups.

The Irish Exodus

The Irish described their migration to America in Gaelic terms: *deorai* or "exiles," *dithreabhach* or "homeless," and *dibeartach* or "banished people." "*Dob eigean dom imeacht go Meirice*," they explained, "I had to go to America," or "going to America was a necessity for me." As historian Kerby Miller pointed out, many did not want to leave Ireland.