Journal of Social History Advance Access published March 27, 2014

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Capitalism's Captives: The Maritime United States Slave Trade, 1807–1850

Abstract

The maritime interstate trade in bondspersons illustrates the contours of United States capitalism of the early nineteenth century as it developed between 1807 and midcentury. The saltwater trade between the Chesapeake and New Orleans comprised four stages corresponding to larger economic developments. An incidental slave trade rose in the context of the US ban on imported slaves, embargoes, and the growth of domestic commerce. An essential trade followed, growing in the post-War of 1812 transatlantic market for agricultural staples. It was carried on aboard vessels plying the so-called cotton triangle and also ships carrying regionally-specific goods and commodities between domestic ports. The 1830s witnessed a vertical trade exemplified by one slaving firm that responded to the swift expansion of credit and surging demand. Following the panic of 1837, market fragmentation led to a mechanical trade, which was also dependent on robust exports of slave-produced crops. Financial technologies propelled that development, and the maritime slave trade was nearly seamlessly integrated into the broader coastal trade.

The commercial maritime transport of enslaved people between the Chesapeake and lower Mississippi Valley developed in four stages from the 1810s to 1850s, beginning as an incidental trade. As the market grew for commercial transport of bondspersons following the War of 1812, shipping merchants sought the business of interstate slave traders. As some specialized to accommodate traffic in slaves, consignments of captives became an essential trade, financed in part by merchants and bankers in entrepôt cities. Yet even on slaving passages, captives were transported from port to port alongside of other categories of goods, often on voyages that touched foreign ports. With the rise of interregional slave trading firms in the late 1820s, slave traders became shipping merchants. One firm, Franklin and Armfield, built a small fleet of slaving vessels within its enterprise and innovated in self-finance. Because of that vertical organization, its Alexandria, Virginia, branch siphoned off perhaps the majority of Baltimore's commercial slave transport of the 1830s. During the hard times following the panic of 1837 the benefits of such a business model diminished. The market segmented. Capitalist relations became more mechanistic, and shipping merchants beckoned enslavers to embark captives as cargoes to supplement goods transported from Chesapeake

Journal of Social History (2014), pp. 1–25
doi:10.1093/jsh/shu029

ports to New Orleans. As the coastal slave trade developed, passage by passage and soul by soul, it was nearly seamlessly integrated into a larger commercial network, relying on an international chain of credit and a domestic exchange of debt instruments. The economic geography of slavery's transportation and finance illuminates the contours of capitalism in the early republic.[1]

In some key respects the U.S. maritime slave trade was a continuation of a process of Atlantic capitalist development responsible for the configurations of the eighteenth-century transatlantic slave trade. Using shipping and financial records, this research draws on methods and modes of analysis that historians such as Robert Harms, Joseph C. Miller, and Marcus Rediker have used to illuminate connections between slavery and capitalism. A pernicious and destructive commerce in human beings relied on the most advanced commercial and transportation technologies available, which in turn supported the rise of Great Britain as a world financial and industrial power. That transatlantic context also highlights contrasts with the U.S. domestic slave trade, all of which illustrate the shape of that commerce between 1807 and mid-century, when steam power began to supersede sail and robust expansion changed both the configuration and stakes of interstate slaving.[2]

Slave trading in North America has received much scholarly attention, and historians have productively emphasized market development and captives' mobility. This approach uses particular vessels and firms to explore those broad connections through the business of domestic saltwater slaving. The four stages of that process reflect the changing landscape – or seascape – of American capitalist development. Changes over time in the maritime domestic slave trade have received little focused attention and no categorization. Notable scholarship using shipping records includes Jonathan B. Pritchett and Herman Freudenberger's studies of demographics of captives themselves, Ralph Clayton's survey of the Baltimore-to-New Orleans slave trade, and Richard McMillan's focus on the maritime trade outside of the Chesapeake. Historians of the U.S. domestic slave trade such as Steven Deyle, Robert Gudmestad, and David Lightner have argued that the interstate slave trade was central to the political, social, and economic integration of the American South and that slaving united Americans economically even as it divided them politically. Scholars investigating transatlantic connections between U.S. enslavers and British or European merchants, bankers, and industrialists, such as Edward E. Baptist, Walter Johnson, and Jessica Lepler, have done so via transatlantic cotton markets and credit chains. This research situates the maritime slave trade in those broader discourses with particular attention to context. Commerce in people is generally known as a slave trade, but slaves were made and not merely traded. I follow scholars of maritime slaving elsewhere and designate as captives bondspersons subject to commercial transport at sea. A typical enslaved American had a network of family and neighborhood ties, and many developed "status without rights," as Laura F. Edwards adroitly phrases it. Slaving severed those ties and saltwater slaving isolated or re-isolated captives whom enslavers treated as cargoes.[3]

In the early decades of the nineteenth century, shippers treated individual captives or small consignments of bondspersons as incidental cargoes not unlike specie, which took up little space but required increased security. Such practices had thrived for centuries. Ships plying a trade from the Philippines to New Spain carried captives in that way in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, for instance, and shippers carried captives as ancillary cargoes in the formative years of the Dutch imperial project.[4] The American brigantine *Adventure* sailed from the port of Charleston in March 1807 with a captive aboard identified only as a "New Negro man with a collar round his Neck with Hugh Young writ upon it." The man was a twenty-six year-old Mande speaker from West Africa, sold as an individual.[5] His second middle passage was quite different from his first. Instead of being shackled below deck in a stinking hold of bacteria and bodily excretions with scores or hundreds of others, subjected to summary and brutal violence, the man was likely the sole slave taken for sale (although perhaps not the sole slave aboard). A Charleston agent acting on Young's instructions paid a thirty dollars bill of freight to deliver him to New Orleans. There for $270 Young sold him to a merchant firm that sold books, furniture, slaves, and bills of exchange drawn on New York merchants. The Mande-speaking captive would likely toil in sugar or cotton fields before the year was out. Until the United States banned the landing of foreign captives, the enslaved were listed on bills of lading like any other cargo. But for the Mande captive's humiliation and terror as he was isolated and hauled to the territory of Louisiana, the *Adventure* was not merely a compacter version of the ship that had landed him in Charleston.[6]

Maritime slaving integrated shippers' business models with enslavers' transportation needs, and few shipping merchants could afford to turn away slave cargoes. The *Adventure* was aptly named: the brigantine was a commercial venture on the lower rungs of the American merchant marine. It was a transient or wanderer in search of opportunity. Merchant vessels usually fit into three classes including transients (often called tramps), regular traders, and packets. Regular traders plied a regular route but did not sail at a predetermined time. Packets shipped out on schedule, at least in theory. Transients in maritime culture conjured some of the same meanings as the word does today. Merchants like the *Adventure*'s owner John Lugeol had to sniff commercial breezes for a whiff of revenue. He sponsored voyages in which his brigantine hauled barrels of commodities and trade goods produced in the South and the Caribbean. In February 1807, before taking on its human cargo, the *Adventure* arrived in Charleston from Havana, Cuba, and unloaded a cargo that included West Indian and Louisiana sugar, the products of slave labor. It also carried superfine flour from Baltimore and 150 tons worth of campeachy logwood, a dyestuff, but ran aground in the Mississippi River in 1806 and lost a mast in a storm off the Carolina coast around the time the Embargo Act of 1807 capsized the American merchant marine.[7]

Federal sovereignty was critical in shaping a market in which capital was unbounded yet captives were one of the few commodities for which the nation was constructed as a commercial vessel. The Thomas Jefferson administration's heavy-handed trade policies helped to forge the contours of a national economy of which bondspersons were key components. The Embargo Act, its successors, and the 1808 prohibition on the foreign trade forced Americans to trade with one another. Customhouses became the walls and watchtowers of U.S. national borders, and U.S. shippers received exclusivity when transporting captives between ports. Beginning in 1808, the federal government instituted a regulatory regime on coastwise slaving vessels, limiting the trade to ships over forty tons and requiring owners or shippers and masters of the ships to swear that the human beings they were transporting were American-born or landed in the U.S. before the ban on foreign captives. That regime was strengthened in the 1810s in the face of audacious smuggling schemes. In part because of the risks and costs of smuggling and because of the changing economies of both the Chesapeake and lower Mississippi Valley, slaving became a lucrative stream of legal commerce. By the 1810s merchants transporting slaves from cities like Baltimore were using preprinted slave manifests that closely resembled cargo manifests.[8]

U.S. normalization of trade with Britain in 1815 was a catalyst for the rise of coastwise slaving from Chesapeake ports. Demand for export commodities grown by slave labor stimulated the interstate trade in captives. An important but overlooked component of the process was that the credit network that facilitated transatlantic commerce in bulk commodities such as cotton and flour also financed slaving passages. Following the War of 1812 and an end to U.S. embargoes of foreign trade, trade in bulk commodities grew extensively. The so-called cotton triangle connected the interests of importers of foreign manufactures in cities like New York with exporters of agricultural staples in cities like New Orleans with foreign entrepôts such as Liverpool and Le Havre. Shipping capacity ballooned, and the chain of credit that linked American planters to British and European bankers also linked to chained commodities in the form of enslaved people shipped between U.S. ports.

The Baltimore sailing ship *Franklin* was a link in that chain. The triple-mast *Franklin* could carry the equivalent of four and a half semi-permanent 53' trailers in the age of U.S. commercial trucking.[9] In contrast to the *Adventure*, the *Franklin* was a transatlantic regular trader that made several voyages between Baltimore and Ireland or North West England, delivering bulk commodities and returning with manufactured goods. In advance of the *Franklin*'s winter 1816–1817 voyage from Baltimore to Liverpool, co-owner Luke Tiernan and Company offered "Liberal advances" to consigners of cargo as a way to boost his competitiveness, which was made possible by credit that he drew from his neighbor and fellow Irish immigrant Alexander Brown. Brown was senior partner in Alexander Brown and Sons, which was the managing branch of the House of Brown, an international interlocking partnership of merchant bankers.[10] In early 1817, the *Franklin* landed in Liverpool with 3,370 barrels and 150 half-barrels of flour. The bulk of the *Franklin*'s cargo was consigned to William and James Brown and Company. Owing to climactic aberrations, the harvest of 1816 had been the worst in recent history. The toweringly unpopular British Importation Act of 1815 or Corn Law had not anticipated famine conditions in "the year without a summer," and in 1817 American flour merchants and their Liverpool counterparts grabbed gains as grain prices rose considerably on both sides of the Atlantic.[11]

Winds and currents propelled the *Franklin*, but credit drove trade. The Browns had a strategic interest in the *Franklin*'s voyages since the ship was a communications link between Alexander Brown and Sons in Baltimore and William and James Brown and Company, one of the rising merchant houses in Liverpool. The Browns on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean relied on timely and accurate business information. Their key to success was building a working knowledge of markets and the business reputations of American merchants and advancing (or withholding) credit accordingly.[12] By funneling trade on ships operated by the company and gathering intelligence on market actors, the House of Brown became Baltimore's leading cotton exporter by 1827 and one of the leading Liverpool cotton importers by the 1820s. They competed with merchant banking firms like Baring Brothers and Company of London. By 1825 the House of Brown had branches in Baltimore, Liverpool, London, New York, and Philadelphia.[13] Members of Tiernan's web of business associates in the Chesapeake were drawn into the Liverpool trade through the ships that Tiernan and the Browns – along with merchants like them – owned and operated. The network of credit embodied in connections among Tiernan and the Browns illustrates in miniature the financial technologies at the heart of the North Atlantic market.[14]

Slaving was an essential component in the process, and the *Franklin* became vessel that held nearly every link in the supply chain. In November, 1819, American Colonization Society member Luke Tiernan sold transport to a professional slave trader. Times were hard for merchants and shippers, and the shipmaster sailed the *Franklin* to New Orleans instead of Liverpool. Tiernan put the ship on a route that took advantage of Baltimore's comparative advantage in the slave market and New Orleans's comparative advantage in the commodities market. In late November, slave trader David Anderson of Kentucky paid freight for eleven enslaved people he was shipping to New Orleans for sale. The consignment of captives included twenty-year-old Bob, twenty-eight-year-old Fanny and her four children, including an infant. Also using the *Franklin* as a conveyance for slaves was aspiring planter and Tiernan's son-in-law Henry V. Somerville. He booked passage for himself and twenty-five enslaved people he was transporting to Louisiana. With the human cargo, the *Franklin*'s operators tucked the commercial transport of slaves into their new route.[15]

Bondspeople were lucrative cargo, and the *Franklin* was part of a succession of ships embarking captives in Baltimore in the closing months of 1819. The 324-ton *Triton* of Baltimore embarked twenty-seven captives in December, 1819, including eleven shipped by Anderson. The *Triton* had plied the cotton triangle among New York, New Orleans, and Liverpool for its New York owners before being sold to a Baltimore merchant in 1819. On its December passage, human cargo complemented an assortment of goods hauled from Baltimore including buckwheat, cheese, chairs, dry goods, hats, hops, looking glasses, potatoes, rosin, tobacco, turpentine, whiskey, 120 ploughs and over 400 barrels of flour. That list of items included the produce of the upper South. Glass and dry goods, including textiles, were British or European manufactures transshipped to the Mississippi River Valley for sale. Enslaved people became part of that chain of goods, and ships regularly returned with the products of slave labor. Depending on market conditions, shippers charged between twelve and thirty dollars each for adults. Thirty dollars rivaled what passengers paid packet lines for first-class or cabin passage from Charleston to New York in 1825. After exhaling its goods in New Orleans, both the *Triton* and *Franklin* continued to ply a transatlantic route, and in the 1820s the *Franklin* was incorporated into Alexander Brown and Sons' transatlantic merchant fleet.[16]

The *Franklin*'s slaving passage was part of a growing trade from Baltimore and other Chesapeake ports. Between 1819 and 1820, the Baltimore-to-New-Orleans slave trade comprised at least fifteen vessels completing twenty-one passages that carried an average of 15.6 captives per passage. Six passages included less than five captives each. Eleven vessels, including the *Franklin* and *Triton* made a single slaving passage, but one savvy merchant, John Hathaway of Baltimore, hired out his 116-ton brigantine, the *Emilie*, to serve the commercial trade. It became a regular trader plying an essential trade. The *Emilie*, which had been captured during the War of 1812, condemned, and resold, carried a third of the Baltimore-to-New Orleans slave trade of 1819–20. David Anderson regularly embarked captives aboard the *Emilie*. Its master, Benjamin Godfrey, along with the *Triton*'s Baltimore master Benedict J. Jenkins, apparently gained such a reputation that they were both hired as masters of another Baltimore regular slaver, the *Intelligence*, in the 1820s.

Even in the essential trade, captives were not the dominant category of cargo. The *Adventure*, the *Emilie*, *Franklin*, *Intelligence* and *Triton* were freighted primarily with nonhuman cargoes. The *Emilie* carried typical assortments of cargo that left upper South warehouses for the lower South including books, brandy, wine, whiskey, glass, salmon, shad, crockery ware, furniture, wearing apparel, flour, plaster, paint, varnish, turpentine, rope, tobacco, and even loaf sugar. Some of that cargo was manufactured in the North or across the Atlantic Ocean. On one passage in the late summer of 1819, Godfrey took aboard twenty-eight consignments of goods and thirty-one captives. The goods belonged to twelve consigners, among which was Anderson, who put aboard 550 barrels of flour. The *Emilie* had sailed from New Orleans to Baltimore that June with a cargo that included slave-grown staples including sugar, tobacco, and cotton. Like most shipmasters, Godfrey was a petty merchant as well as a mariner. He regularly consigned cargoes to his ship, including nine barrels of shad on a voyage in 1819 and fifteen kegs of tobacco on one passage in 1820 on his own account.[17]

Slave traders' financial transactions paralleled those of the bulk commodities trade to Liverpool. Anderson consigned his flour and captives to Hector McLean and Company, a shipping and commission merchant house of New Orleans. McLean's firm acted as a factor to cotton planters and was also a slave merchant. After taking delivery of Anderson's captives disembarked from the *Franklin*, Hector McLane sold Bob in early February, 1820. By the time he was sold it had been over three months since Bob had been embarked on the *Franklin* and nearly two and half since he had landed in New Orleans. Captives like him were regularly sold on credit, and after taking his fees, Anderson drew on McLean bills that could be cashed in Maryland and turned into more captives. Anderson needed an agent like McLean lest the tyranny of distance overwhelm the magic of returns. That arrangement enabled Anderson to offer "Cash for Negroes" in Maryland.[18]

Because of such alliances, slave traders' firms grew in scope and sophistication, and unlike the terrestrial trade, enslavers in the maritime trade accessed a ready network of city merchants who acted as their agents. Virginia slave trader John L. Alford groped toward vertical organization, seeking competitive advantages by adding links to his supply chain. Alford diversified and branched into shipping even as he relied on Hector McLean and Company to sell his captives. Alford co-owned the 152-ton *Agent*, which sailed from Alexandria to New Orleans in the fall of 1819 with at least thirty-five bondspersons aboard. Alford shipped twenty-three souls aboard the *Agent* and in New Orleans sold twenty-four slaves to Baton Rouge planter Valérien Allain that December. On that passage he shipped sixty barrels of flour on his own account. Like Anderson, Alford traded in flour and was also the consignee of 250 barrels of Virginia flour shipped by an Alexandria merchant, along with a ton of steel. With the proceeds of the sales of slaves and commodities, Alford became sole owner of the *Agent* in early 1820. If he harbored hopes of a shipping empire, however, they were short-lived. Hector

McLean and Company owned the *Agent* by the fall. Alford continued in the slaving business.[19]

Part of seizing a competitive advantage meant balancing the risks and rewards associated with specialization. Alford was a slave trader and merchant who nosed into the shipping business, if only briefly. Norfolk, Virginia, shipping merchant John C. Saunders delved into the slaving business. As increased demand for export commodities stimulated demand for bondspersons in the lower South, shipping merchants like Saunders focused on captive cargoes while slave traders took hold of the efficiencies of saltwater travel. Saunders's schooner *James Monroe* of Norfolk, Virginia, was a regular trader in the late 1810s, hauling mainly slave-produced commodities between Norfolk and Caribbean ports. In 1817 and 1818, the *James Monroe* sailed for New York City and Aux Cayes, Haiti, as well as regional ports in the Chesapeake, delivering merchandise such as shoes and commodities such as pork, fruit, coffee, rum, and sugar.[20] In 1819, it sailed for New Orleans, returning with raisins and sugar. At that point, the *James Monroe*'s Norfolk operators began to rely upon slave traders to generate revenue.[21]

The ship was laden with irony as well as with captives. While the schooner carried human cargo, President James Monroe articulated an audacious if ineffectual policy that the United States would lead the Americas in opposing Old World colonialism. In a tangential way, the ship embodied the spirit of the Monroe Doctrine while revealing its shortcomings. The transfer of bound laborers within one political nation strengthened commercial ties among citizens. The maritime slave trade gave Virginians and Louisianans complementary interests. Yet the commerce carried by the *James Monroe* was dependent on foreign markets and Old World credit. Americans sang heartily of national independence, but the song carried a European tune and was played using British financial instruments. In most other respects, the schooner *James Monroe* was unremarkable. The 111-ton gaff-rigged vessel with two masts and a triangular jib was sleek and agile, with just about a quarter of the cargo space of the transatlantic packet ships operating between New York and Liverpool, such as the more famous *James Monroe* of the Black Ball Line.[22]

The Virginia schooner *James Monroe* became a combination of coastal trader and floating jail. In early November 1820, its skipper John Hipkins sailed with thirty-five captives belonging to at least one dozen owners including local commission merchant and slave trader Edwin Lee. Unlike the *Franklin*'s human cargo, which included some families, most captives were in their teens and twenties, bought, shipped, and sold as individuals. In addition to captives, Hipkins oversaw the loading of tobacco, cigars, apples, beef, pork, fish, staves and hoops for barrel-making, an assortment of trunks and other baggage, glass, bricks, and a billiard board. Like Godfrey, Hipkins shipped several items on his own account.[23]

Some features of the *James Monroe*'s passages are suggestive of transatlantic navigation, but such comparisons are superficial. A typical passage between Baltimore and New Orleans in 1819–20 took between twenty-eight and thirty days, nearly a week shorter than the middle passage between Luanda and Pernambuco, which took on average thirty-five days (Luanda to Salvador averaged forty; Luanda to Rio de Janeiro, fifty days). Passages from Norfolk to New Orleans took on average nineteen days in 1830, and an index of passages from the 1840s indicates an average of 23 days from Baltimore to New Orleans. Like the transatlantic slave trade, captives spent far longer in dungeons on land than in floating jails. Norfolk slave traders held captives an average of 117 days in 1830, nearly four months. At twenty-five cents per day for incarceration and board, such arrangements cost more than the seaborne passage. Shipboard conditions were typically less obnoxious and foul than those in contemporary jails.[24]

Federal slave manifests embodied the fiction of an intra-national trade, but coastal slaving vessels did not hug the coast. The *James Monroe* and nearly every other coastal trader navigated narrow and hazardous shipping lanes through the Bahamas. Some shipmasters locked down captives near to the islands to prevent rebellions such as that which erupted aboard the *Creole* in 1841. Successful navigation of the Gulf of Mexico and Mississippi River by sail required expert seamanship and considerable experience. Besides perilous winds, tides, and shoals, Caribbean wreckers did a thriving salvage business, some of which they ginned up with false lights. Navigation up the Mississippi River required intricate tacking and before steam tugboats could take a week from the Balize, the customs checkpoint near the river's mouth. Because of the risks, marine insurers in the early to mid-1820s charged as much as 50 percent more to insure a cargo traveling from New York to New Orleans than from New York to Britain and Europe. Shipboard conditions reflected the perils.[25]

American merchant seafaring joined slaving with the authoritarian structure of maritime life. The *James Monroe* and hundreds of other merchant vessels that plied the interstate slave trade offered customers a ready-made structure of maritime mastery. Shipmasters were masters, after all, who enforced discipline on crews. The daily shipboard life of a common sailor was one of servitude and, often, violence, albeit temporary and contractual. W. Jeffrey Bolster argues that "White seamen surrendering personal liberty for the duration of their voyages suffered a situational 'slavery,'" in contrast to African-descended bondspersons who served aboard ships. On slaving passages, even common sailors tasted mastery, if in the degraded form of a seaborne jailor. That culture forms illuminating contrasts with saltwater slaving elsewhere.[26]

The transatlantic slave trade was in Joseph Miller's words a "way of death," while the domestic trade was a way of misery. Transatlantic slavers and their Indian Ocean counterparts enforced discipline with deadly force, which resulted in part from cultures of intensive victimization and devaluation of human life that characterized slaving enterprises from the coasts of Africa and Madagascar. Transatlantic slavers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were often fitted with fortified holds, iron restraints, and a dearth of food and water. Many were staffed by unwilling sailors recruited by crimps. Officers gained demonic reputations for personal, psychological, and sexual violence. The coastwise slave trade visited significant horrors and dislocations on captives, but its businesslike rhythms contrasted with the unremitting terror of its transatlantic counterpart. Unlike transatlantic or trans-Indian Ocean vessels, American ships held captives who were confined in holds at night or when near the coast, and given access, often unfettered, to the main deck by daylight. Captives were usually unshackled once a vessel was clear of land, and sailors were seldom heavily armed. Crews and captives typically spoke a common language, and the routines of transport included such customs as officers granting captives privileges. Some captives traveled with bundles, others as families, and few ships before the 1830s were segregated by gender or age.[27]

But routine discipline and capricious violence existed on a knife-edge. Abolitionists reported rapes of female captives, and shipmasters' authority was rarely brought into question. Episodes of violence punctuated maritime passage that was at best monotonous and disagreeable. Most captives had not been aboard ship and spent the first hours or days seasick. Mothers embarked with children struggled with terrified youngsters and nearly all captives dealt with the psychic and spiritual trauma of enforced separations and the dread of the ordeal to come. Even voluntary passengers disdained shipboard passage. Weeks could pass without sight of land, and meals were typically as insipid as shipboard conversations.[28]

Yet rhythms of life were not suspended aboard slaving vessels. Despite deaths, assaults, abuse, and dislocations, the U.S. maritime slave trade was peculiar in that ships sometimes disembarked more captives than they embarked. In February, 1823, for example, skipper Henry C. Bell sailed the *James Monroe* with at least 121 bondspersons embarked by several slave traders. One, A. E. Jones, consigned at least eighty captives including eleven infants and one woman in the last stages of pregnancy, which must have been apparent to all aboard a ship with the cargo space of one of today's flat-bottom railroad cars. After arriving in New Orleans in late March shipmaster Bell testified "that there has been no change in the description of numbers (except one by birth) since my departure from Norfolk." That note obscured the anguish and peril of the new mother's ordeal and was as much of a birth certificate as the baby would have.[29]

Despite such violence and misery, slaving voyages from the Chesapeake became routine to some owners, operators, and skippers. Regular slavers like the *Emilie* and *James Monroe* became more common, serving a niche from Chesapeake ports. In 1826, the *James Monroe* passed a grim mark, delivering over 1,000 souls held captive on its passages to New Orleans.[30] The Baltimore-to-New Orleans slave trade of the 1820s was dominated by a handful of vessels that plied multiple passages. The 231-ton brigantine *Arctic*, for instance, made eleven passages between 1826 and 1829, embarking at least 259 captives from Chesapeake ports or 7 percent of the decade's trade from Baltimore to New Orleans (for which records survive). Overall, thirty-eight captives, on average, were embarked on each passage from Baltimore to New Orleans between 1821 and 1830, more than twice as many as 1819–20. But each of the sixty-two vessels that carried captives made 1.56 passages, on average, up from 1.4 for 1819–20. Many of those passages were not part of the commercial transport of captives since passengers traveling with personal servants were required to file a manifest. Just as there were passages with one or two enslaved people, there were also passages in which more than 100 captives were embarked at a time. The 327-ton *Hibernia*, for instance, embarked 188 captives from Baltimore in early December, 1826, including 130 captives consigned by Austin Woolfolk, head of the region's largest slaving firm of the 1820s. Like the *Franklin* and *Triton*, the *Hibernia* plied a transatlantic trade. Before embarking captives, its master had sailed from Baltimore to Belfast and delivered salt and textiles to Baltimore, along with over fifty passengers. The following year it sailed to Liverpool. As the volume of captives leaving Chesapeake ports increased, enslavers' enterprises grew in sophistication.[31]

The firm of Franklin and Armfield innovated in transportation and finance, and its business model helped to propel it to the front ranks of the U.S. slave trade of the 1830s. Transportation and finance were inseparable in the maritime slave trade, and the firm developed a financial strategy dedicated to turning capital into captives in the Chesapeake and extending credit to buyers in the lower Mississippi Valley, remitting the proceeds of sales to purchasing directors in the Chesapeake for reinvestment. That made possible Franklin and Armfield's vertical organization, which led to growth and ability to gobble up so much of the Chesapeake's commercial shipping trade in captives. Its Alexandria operations diverted most of Baltimore's saltwater slave trade. Between 1831 and 1840, Baltimore's commercial traffic in slaves dropped by over half compared to its 1821–1830 totals while the interstate slave trade and imports into New Orleans surged. Highlighting the decrease in captives embarked, Baltimore's domestic exports grew by over 13 percent (while foreign exports fell) during the 1830s. Many of the coffles of captives passing by the U.S. Capitol, which scandalized citizens, amazed foreign visitors, and gave abolitionists tableaux of American hypocrisy, were Franklin and Armfield's bondspersons marched from Baltimore to Alexandria. The Capitol was on the main road (now U.S. Route 1) leading to the Potomac River Bridge and the road to the port of Alexandria.[32]

Between its incorporation in 1828 and dissolution in the late 1830s, Franklin and Armfield was to the Chesapeake-to-Louisiana slave trade what the House of Brown was to the Chesapeake-to-Liverpool cotton trade. It was an interregional interlocking partnership with agencies in Baltimore, Alexandria, Richmond, New Orleans, and Natchez, among other locales. The firm was composed of Tennessee native Isaac Franklin, North Carolina native John Armfield, and other partners, including Virginian Rice C. Ballard. Purchasing agents traveled the Chesapeake backcountry exchanging banknotes for captives, who were processed through the firm's jails and transported to the lower Mississippi Valley. Sales agents in Natchez and New Orleans (when Louisiana was not prohibiting out-of-state sales) costumed captives for the market and sold them as slaves. Like the Browns, Franklin and his partners grew to understand that the keys to success included a chain of credit, network of knowledge, and dedicated transportation infrastructure. "I have always held credit above price," Franklin wrote to partner Ballard in 1834. Overcoming obstacles in the economic geography of the slave market required as much of what Franklin called "financiering" as it did enrolling a fleet of slave ships.[33]

There were serious limitations for any firm that bought captives in one region and sold those captives in another. Most paper money in the early U.S. republic held value within the small network in which it circulated. Beginning in 1831, Franklin and Armfield's Natchez agency extended long credit of over ninety days to purchasers of its slaves. As one contemporary reported, "competition [in the slave market] forced the traders to give from twelve to fifteen months' time, adding ten percent interest," even as the price of slaves advanced. "So soon as the planter learned he could purchase on time, by bills on New Orleans, the advanced price ceased to be an objection, and he bought liberally." Franklin and agents of the firm took bonds and bills from buyers and either held them to maturity or discounted them as necessary in order to generate remittances.[34] Isaac Franklin turned paper taken for slaves into bills of exchange or other financial instruments that traveled a credit chain to northern banks, which agents in the Chesapeake could cash for a small discount. In February, 1832, for instance, Franklin sent Ballard a $5,000 check payable at the Philadelphia branch of the Second Bank of the United States. Through Franklin's banking connections in Natchez and New Orleans, the firm was able to attract external financing, giving

New Orleans bankers and, by extension, their domestic and overseas creditors a financial interest in the domestic slave trade.[35]

While Franklin financiered in New Orleans, John Armfield built a shipping enterprise within the firm. Franklin and Armfield marched one coffle of captives overland each summer from Alexandria to Natchez, but from late summer to late spring it shipped them by sea, sometimes hundreds on a single passage. The firm transported between 300 and 1,500 captives per year between 1828 and 1836. Armfield had been in the stagecoach business before turning to commercial slaving. He learned the maritime shipping business and chartered vessels instead of consigning captives to merchant shippers with excess cargo capacity. That strategy turned a transaction cost into a potential revenue stream. Instead of seeking barrels of flour or casks of tobacco to fill ships' empty spaces, Armfield beckoned fellow slave traders to complete cargoes. He chartered the *James Monroe* in the spring of 1830. Armfield traded on its well-established reputation as a slaver, advertising it in Alexandria and Washington, D.C. newspapers as a "packet schooner," which would sail from Alexandria instead of its home port of Norfolk.[36] Advertisements for packets were ubiquitous and nearly always overstated, but shipmaster Walter Bush sailed within a day of the advertised departure.[37] Armfield acted as the Adams Express of the Chesapeake-to-New Orleans slave trade, offering solutions for businessmen who needed to ship their perishable human merchandise quickly. As on many previous voyages, the *James Monroe*'s shipmaster Bush delivered a payload of sugar to Baltimore merchants on its return passage.[38]

Relying on chartered vessels proved inconvenient for a firm that needed flexibility in its supply chain of captives. Armfield had difficulty chartering ships that could accommodate large and regular consignments. He experimented with transients like the 434-ton *Jefferson* of Norfolk, which the firm chartered in 1828. The ship had carried captives the year before and voyaged to Liverpool. But hiring such vessels left too much to chance from fickle or impatient owners. Like the House of Brown, operating others' vessels gave way to ship ownership, and by the summer of 1831, Franklin and Armfield began to build its own fleet. The firm turned to Connecticut shipbuilder Hezekiah Child. Child's shipyard took a financial interest in the interstate slave trade when it built the 161-ton *Tribune* from the keel to the masts on the banks of the Connecticut River near Haddam. As the ship was incorporated into the firm, Isaac Franklin wrote his Richmond partner, "endeavor to get the purchases to ship by Staples only." Franklin referred to a veteran slave shipmaster, Isaac Staples. Staples had hauled scores of Franklin and Armfield's captives in 1829 and had earned the firm's trust.[39]

Staples had good reason to accept charge of the firm's slave ship. Officers and crews of United States slaving vessels were well paid and took part in relatively short passages. "Freight must *always* be considered the mother of wages," an early-nineteenth-century American maritime manual instructed. Shipmasters' customary pay by 1820 was fifty dollars a month. Franklin and Armfield paid captains $110 and $130 on two voyages in 1834. That was about the equivalent of three months' salary for a clerk on land, even though it was a tiny fraction of the revenues from slaving. Ballard paid between seventeen and nineteen dollars per captive for passage on company-chartered ships. Captives brought high fares compared to four dollars for a hogshead of tobacco weighing over 1,000 pounds or half a cent per pound for cotton between New York and New Orleans. If Armfield charged similar rates to other clients then an average passage carrying between seventy-five and 100 captives would generate gross revenues of between $1,275 and $1,900, enough to pay for the ship in two seasons.[40]

As business expanded, Armfield purchased another vessel. In 1833, he again turned to a Haddam, Connecticut shipbuilder for the 155-ton *Uncas*. Both the *Tribune* and *Uncas* were fitted out with maritime architecture redolent of the transatlantic trade. A visitor to the *Tribune* in 1834 remarked that it was segregated and fortified. "The after-hold will carry about 80 women, and the other about 100 men," the visitor chronicled in a widely-circulated report. "On either side were two platforms running the whole length," the visitor reported "one raised a few inches, and the other about half way up to the deck." The platforms were shelf-like bunks. "They were about 5 1–2 or 6 feet deep. On them they lie as close as they can stow away." The ship itself was of the same configurations as vessels designed to haul bulk commodities, which the vessels hauled in summer. John Armfield and Isaac Franklin were shrewd entrepreneurs, but their firm's success owed much to reasons beyond its dynamic capabilities.[41]

In the slaving boom of the 1830s, domestic firms enjoyed profits made possible by an unprecedented expansion of credit. In those flush times Franklin and Armfield bought their third ship, the Baltimore-built *Isaac Franklin*, in 1835. It was narrower and longer than the firm's other vessels and built especially for carrying human cargoes. Unlike Baltimore clippers, it need not have been able to outrun patrols. The coastwise slave trade had been protected for over a quarter century. Franklin and Armfield sailed on a wave of prosperity to fantastic wealth. Like Baring Brothers and the House of Brown, Franklin and Armfield stepped back from speculative enterprises near the peak of the market. The system failed to sustain the confidence of central bankers in Great Britain, and that crisis led to panic in 1837 and financial hard times. By then, Ballard and Franklin were transitioning to a more genteel life as planters. Armfield developed the Beersheba Springs resort in middle Tennessee. By 1839 Franklin was out of the interstate slaving business, although he spent much of his retirement collecting the firm's outstanding debts. The firm formally dissolved in November, 1841.[42]

No slaving firm after Franklin and Armfield replicated its corporate form or shipping capacity because the commercial seascape had changed. The market of the post-panic U.S. became more "mechanistic," argues Jessica Lepler. The vertical organization of the kind Franklin and Armfield achieved in the 1830s was no longer a strategic advantage as merchants specialized, became more risk-averse, and as transportation and credit reports became market commodities. John Armfield remained in the shipping business even as he exited the slave trade. He was the *Isaac Franklin*'s sole owner by 1838, but Franklin and Armfield had spun off many of its assets. By 1838, the *Isaac Franklin* was operated by the slave trading partnership of George Kephart and Thomas Boudar. Only then did it sail to Baltimore to embark captives. Kephart had been director of Franklin and Armfield's Warrenton, Virginia, branch, and with a son moved his operations to Alexandria, where he bought Franklin and Armfield's jail. He formed a strategic alliance with Thomas Boudar, who sold captives from his auction compound on Chartes Street in New Orleans.[43]

Market segmentation widened opportunities for merchants selling transport as a commodity. In Richmond, shipping merchants Richard O. Haskins and Luther Libby ran a fleet of vessels catering to slave traders. Maine native Libby owned a ship chandlery (supply business for ships) and a tobacco warehouse that became the infamous Libby Prison during the Civil War. In the early 1840s, three of Haskins and Libby's ships were regular slavers plying a Richmond-to-New Orleans route. Haskins and Libby put the 196-ton Baltimore-built brigantine *Orleans* into the coastal slave trade immediately after its launch in 1838. By 1843, the *Orleans* was being operated as part of Haskins and Libby's "Line of Packets, between Richmond and New Orleans." Haskins and Libby also operated two other merchant ships along with several steamboats serving Chesapeake Bay travelers. All three sailing vessels carried human cargoes in the fall of 1843, including fifty-three souls shipped on the *Orleans* by the partnership of Henry Davis and Mark Davis, which took over much of the interstate slaving business between Richmond and New Orleans after Ballard retired.[44]

Beginning in the late 1830s Haskins and Libby's line began serving a strategic alliance of slavers centering on slave trader Theophilus Freeman and his partner John Goodin, cotton merchant of New Orleans. Theirs was a looser corporate organization than Franklin and Armfield. Freeman acted like a commission merchant, selling slaves and remitting the proceeds up the supply chain. Freeman's alliance funneled hundreds of captives to the lower Mississippi Valley for sale each year and included slave traders based in Halifax, North Carolina, Maryland's Eastern Shore, Norfolk, and Richmond, Virginia, and Washington, D.C. Each plied a territory and cooperated with one another in shipping and financing. Freeman's network in turn enrolled collateral agents including shipping merchants like Haskins and Libby, besides shipmasters, jailors, sailors, physicians, lawyers, and insurance companies.[45]

Freeman's network was a part of the new mechanical market, and it replaced family ties with strategic business interests. Members of Freeman's network bought or otherwise generated captives in the Chesapeake and coastal Carolina backcountry and processed them through the organization's machinery of transport and sale. In late October, 1839, Halifax, North Carolina trader George Barnes embarked a coffle of eighty-two bondspeople bought by his agents in North Carolina on Haskins and Libby's *Orleans* in Richmond. The consignment was part of a cargo of 140 bondspersons, forty-eight of whom were embarked by Richmond trader William Goodwin and another seven by Norfolk trader George Apperson. All were consigned to Freeman in New Orleans. Haskins and Libby charged twenty dollars per captive for adults and ten dollars each for children. Food and drinking water were extra, and after the brig arrived in New Orleans, Freeman handed shipmaster Hiram Horton $2,300 in cash. Freeman sold the captives and used the financial infrastructure of the cotton chain to remit proceeds to Chesapeake buyers. In at least one instance he used the Girard Bank of Philadelphia, and as a partner in Goodin and Company, he accepted bills of exchange drawn by New York merchants. One captive's journey through Freeman's slaving factory reveals how segmentation worked.[46]

Solomon Northup witnessed the brutality of that process and got an inside view of both Freeman's firm and the *Orleans*. Northup and his fellow captives passed through the hands of agents of several Freeman-allied firms on their way to auction in New Orleans. A free New Yorker of African descent, Northup was lured to Washington, D.C., in the spring of 1841 by the promise of a job in a musical circus. His would-be employers drugged and kidnapped him. Northup awoke to the deceit in a private jail adjacent to the U.S. Capitol. Freeman's partner James H. Birch greeted him as his property. Birch had paid $650 for Northup's body. When his captive failed to comply, Birch and his employees tortured him into playing the role of a slave. With several other captives, Northup was packed aboard a Potomac River steamboat, a stagecoach, and cars of the Richmond, Fredericksburg, and Potomac Railroad, arriving in Richmond. There Northup and scores of others were held in William Goodwin's Richmond jail compound, and there he learned that the fellow captive to whom he was chained was also lured from his northern home and kidnapped.[47]

Customs of commerce hid the crimes and masked the human costs. Goodwin embarked Northup on the *Orleans* in late April, about three weeks after his kidnapping. "She was a vessel of respectable size," Northup recalled, "full rigged, and freighted principally with tobacco." On the slave manifest, thirty-three year-old Northup was listed as a twenty-six year-old male of "yellow" complexion standing five feet seven inches tall. He and twelve others were listed as property of Birch. Northup was listed as "Plat Hamilton," although he did not hear that name until Freeman barked it at him aboard the vessel in New Orleans. Northup was among forty-one captives plunked in the hold among tobacco casks. Twenty-eight of his fellow captives were embarked by Barnes and had been transported to Richmond from North Carolina. The kidnap victim to whom Northup had been manacled in Richmond was not recorded on the manifest signed in Richmond, but shipmaster William Wickham, ship owner Luther Libby, and federal customs collector Thomas Nelson, signed the manifest swearing that all the human cargo was legally enslaved and being transported within the U.S. to serve or be sold. All were consigned to Theophilus Freeman in New Orleans.[48]

Few things sank ships quicker than their cargoes, and slaving passages gave that maxim an ironic twist. Shipmaster Wickham sailed the *Orleans* down the James River and anchored in Hampton Roads, opposite Norfolk, where Freeman's Norfolk partner George Apperson embarked several captives. Among them was a third kidnap victim, Arthur Curtis. Once underway, Northup was made a ship's steward and two male captives were given similar offices. He sniffed that they were "somewhat inflated with their situation as second cooks." Unlike Franklin and Armfield's operation, captives embarked on the *Orleans* were not segregated by gender. They were permitted to congregate on the deck of the ship by day. In the Gulf of Mexico, Northup and Curtis conspired to overthrow the ship and sail to a safe harbor. They enlisted the other kidnap victim, but he succumbed to smallpox before they could carry out the plot.[49]

After the *Orleans* landed (and Curtis was freed after his kidnapping was exposed), Freeman completed the work of making captives into slaves in with violence and abuse. He sold Northup for $1,000 to Avoyelles Parish planter William Ford. Like others gathered on slaving vessels from differing regions of the Chesapeake, Northup's shipmates were dispersed to different regions of the lower Mississippi Valley and beyond. In 1841, Freeman sold captives of the saltwater trade to buyers in the city of New Orleans and parishes of Jefferson, Natchitoches, West Feliciana, and as far away as Louisville, Kentucky. Seventeen year-old Neptune Pittman, for instance, was bought in North Carolina by Barnes, embarked on the *Orleans* in the fall of 1840, and sold to planter St. Anne Prudhomme of Natchitoches Parish. Northup and two of his fellow captives followed Pittman up the Red River. There Northup toiled for twelve years for a succession of owners before a near-miraculous rescue.[50] During that time, Freeman's alliance unraveled.

On Northup's return to New York in 1853, he encountered Freeman who "had become a low, miserable rowdy—a broken-down, disreputable man."[51]

As the interstate slave trade recovered in the mid-1840s, the arrangements Freeman's firm had made with Haskins and Libby were replicated in cities like Baltimore. After Franklin and Armfield folded, Baltimore recovered its share of the region's commercial shipping of bondspeople. Between 1831 and 1840, records survive for eighty-six passages between Baltimore and New Orleans on which enslaved people were embarked. That number grew to 136 between 1841 and 1850, even as overall imports of slaves into New Orleans fell from their peak in the 1830s. The number of captives transported from Baltimore to New Orleans surged more than threefold between the 1830s and 1840s. Vessels that carried captives on the Baltimore-to-New Orleans route also made more repeat passages. In the 1830s vessels that carried slaves made 1.34 passages on which bondspersons were recorded as cargo. In the 1840s that number grew to 2.09 passages. Thirteen vessels made more than two slaving voyages including two that had been active in the 1830s. Cargoes of captives doubled in size in the 1840s. Between 1841 and 1850, vessels embarking a slave or slaves averaged 42 captives per passage up from 21 on average in the previous decade. Vessels that had not carried captives in years or decades returned to the trade. In 1819, the 527-ton *Superb* hauled nine captives embarked by David Anderson and consigned to Hector McLean and Company as part of a cargo of fifteen bondspeople. In 1843, the *Superb*'s master took aboard fifteen captives that were property of Joseph S. Donovan, who operated on Maryland's Eastern Shore, and consigned to Thomas Boudar as part of a cargo of 117 bondspersons. Some shippers embraced slaving as a sustainable revenue stream.[52]

Shipping merchants offered slavers convenience and regular departures from Chesapeake ports to New Orleans. One Baltimore firm, Benjamin Buck and Son (J. M. Buck) owned and operated the 211-ton *Kirkwood*, which sailed from Baltimore to New Orleans at least eleven times between 1843 and 1847 under two masters and carried 1,121 captives. Regular consigners included slave traders Hope H. Slatter in Baltimore and Donovan.[53] Commission merchant John K. Randall operated the 239-ton *Victorine*. Randall dealt mostly in cotton and rice, southern bulk commodities which fit neatly into the coastal slave trade. Over a three-year career as a slaver, consigners embarked 800 captives from Baltimore on the *Victorine*. Like the *Orleans* on its spring 1841 voyage, slave ships like the *Victorine* touched at Norfolk to embark captives before leaving the Chesapeake Bay. It carried just one captive when it sailed from Baltimore in December, 1843. At Norfolk the shipmaster embarked twenty-three more captives, along with their owner. On a voyage in September, 1845, the *Victorine* sailed from Baltimore with 108 captives. It also ferried voluntary passengers, including one woman who died at sea. The ship regularly touched at Charleston on the return and delivered rice and cotton to Baltimore. On the following voyage in December, 1845, the *Victorine* sailed with ninety-six captives belonging to Slatter, Donovan, and slave trader Benjamin M. Campbell. As it loaded for that passage on December 12, a newspaper ad for the *Victorine* appeared next to an ad for the *Kirkwood*, which sailed for New Orleans a month later with seventy-one captives. If slavers missed the boat when the *Victorine* sailed, they could stroll down the wharf from Randall's offices at 104 Smith's Wharf to B. Buck and Son at 93 Smith's Wharf and book passage on the *Kirkwood*. Campbell consigned two captives aboard the *Victorine* on December 17, six to another merchant vessel, the 310-ton barque *Paoli* departing two days after Christmas, and ten on the *Kirkwood*, which departed on January 14, 1846.[54]

The interstate slave trade grew in the booming 1850s, but competition stiffened as railroads offered more pronounced efficiencies. The economic geography of the interstate slave trade changed in the context of an expanding slaving frontier in the trans-Mississippi West. As the market for African-descended bondspersons expanded deep into Texas, New Orleans became a port of embarkation as well as destination for captives in the 1840s. Slaving, meanwhile, continued to be a lucrative trade, and as steam power shortened distances among market centers, bank money became more convenient for slave traders. There were related outcomes. Steven Deyle calculates that slave traders contributed $1.5 million a year to ancillary industries, on average, between 1820 and 1860. Shipping merchants increasingly competed with railroad companies for a share of that revenue. Like so many other Americans, slave traders found railroads increasingly useful as conveyances for captives. A three-week passage from Baltimore to New Orleans aboard ship was less attractive to enslavers who could take their coffles by railroad over the same distance in mere days by the end of the 1850s. Steamships competed for freight that owners needed delivered on schedule, but wooden sailing ships continued to be ready conveyances for enslavers. In the fall of 1850, Baltimore ship chandler John Henderson and Company sponsored a passage of the 708-ton ship *John C. Calhoun* to New Orleans. Donovan consigned ninety-three captives, mostly in their late teens or early twenties and 80 percent male. Before embarking captives, the *John C. Calhoun*'s master had sailed from Newport, Wales, delivering "railroad iron" to the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad. From New Orleans it sailed to Liverpool.[55]

Slaving was intimately linked to the growth and development of the bulk commodities and financial sectors. Despite enslaved people being artifacts of southern regional distinctiveness within the United States, the interstate saltwater slave trade was part of a transatlantic network of exchange and debt. The four stages, incidental, essential, vertical, and mechanical, correspond to developments in the broader capitalist system. The incidental slave trade rose in the context of a stifled export sector, which created or tightened connections among domestic merchants. The essential trade rose in the context of a booming export market for agricultural staples and was carried on aboard vessels serving domestic markets carrying regionally-specific goods and commodities. Vertical organization of one slaving firm was a response to the swift expansion of finance and trade of the 1830s, which depended on a thriving cotton, commodities, and credit chain. Following the crisis of confidence that led to hard times, market segmentation reflected a more mechanical capitalism, which was also dependent on robust exports of slave-produced crops but led to technological and market expansion of 1850s.

That the interstate slave trade could be sustained over generations is evidence of the heterogeneity the South's economic geography, despite the fact that slavery united interests among them. Like bales of cotton or barrels of flour, captives were shipped to points on the economic landscape in which they were in demand, commercial paper traveling in the opposite direction back through the chain of credit. The dreadful banality of the maritime interstate slave trade was the result of the near seamless integration of slaving into exchanges of commodities and goods shipped between U.S. ports. Records obscure the human toll of domestic maritime slaving. Captives listed in neat rows as human merchandise faced shortened lives from harsh working conditions, a punishing disease environment, and diminished family prospects. Those human costs were externalities, which enabled much of the profits seized by slaving firms and shipping merchants serving them.

Endnotes

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