Selling Souls From A Distance:

Market Revolution Transformations in the United States Domestic Slave Trade and

Slave Traders

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Preface

When I began this project in the spring of 2013, the eventual scope and focus of it were unclear. Rather fortuitously, an alumnus of Washington and Lee approached Washington and Lee professors of history Theodore DeLaney and Holt Merchant about possible research into a Pittsylvania County, Virginia, slave owner. For a variety of reasons, neither man chose to pursue the research. Professor DeLaney knew I was interested in writing an honors thesis and suggested the Pittsylvania project. After receiving a grant from Washington and Lee, I embarked on the research in the summer of 2013. Travelling to Pittsylvania and Campbell Counties, Virginia, and the Davis Library at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, I conducted extensive research into the lives of several prominent men from these counties. I learned much about Southern society, culture, and honor. The results were not what I hoped, but the process did spur my interests. Professor DeLaney, the original director of this project, pushed me past this initial stumbling block and encouraged my interests. He suggested I read a variety of secondary sources on American slavery and the slave trade, which generated numerous questions and ultimately changed the project. Narrowing the focus of the project to the domestic slave trade and slave traders, I carried out further research in the fall of 2013 into slave traders operating in Pittsylvania County, Virginia. Washington and Lee history professor Barton Myers directed the project and has been an invaluable resource throughout. Special thanks go to Professors Theodore DeLaney and Barton Myers for the enormous help and guidance they have provided in this time-consuming and difficult undertaking. As well, I am forever grateful to my parents for allowing me to pursue my interests in such an intense and largely carefree manner.
In 1857, George Fitzhugh, the southern pro-slavery sociologist, published his famous critique of northern “wage-slavery,” *Cannibals All!, or Slaves Without Masters*. Fitzhugh argued that the exploitation of one party by the other was natural and widespread throughout the country. In the North, factory owners exploited their workers. In the South, white slave owners exploited their black slaves. The Southern version of exploitation fundamentally denied slaves’ freedom, but Fitzhugh proclaimed that slaves were better cared for than their Northern counterparts. In addition to his critique of northern industrial practices, Fitzhugh also commented on social relations between slaveholders, overseers, and slave traders in the South. These men all exploited slaves in one manner or another, yet were viewed differently in Southern society. He wrote, “It is clear, then, that there is no difference between profit-making in its mildest form, speculation in its opprobrious sense as the middle term, and gambling as the ultimate, except in degree. There is simply the bad gradation of rank which there is between the slaveholder, the driver on the slave plantation, and the slave dealer, or between the man of pleasure, the harlot, and the pimp…The slaveholder will be found, therefore, upon a scientific analysis, to hold the same relation to the trader which the freebooter holds to the blackleg. It is a question of taste which to admire most, the dare-devil boldness of the one, or the oily and intriguing propensities and performances of the other.”¹ Fitzhugh’s insightful comments on the stature of each man in Southern society have particular importance. He noted that there was a gap between the respectability of the slaveholder and the slave trader, but that gap was not fixed. Whether one man or another was admired depends on individual taste, judgment, and business ability.

¹ George Fitzhugh, *Cannibals All!, or Slaves Without Masters* (Richmond: A. Morris Publisher, 1857)72-74.
Fitzhugh suggested that because slaveholders, overseers, and traders all focused on the same end, making profits, one’s profession mattered less than how he presented and carried himself. If a slave trader could separate himself from “the oily and intriguing propensities and performances” of his job, his character would not be nearly as distasteful to his acquaintances. He needed to exploit his business savvy and not sacrifice his morals in the pursuit of profits. He needed to harness the “dare-devil boldness of the one” and toe the line between maintaining his honor and acquiring the enormous profits of the domestic slave trade.

The domestic slave trade in the United States grew tremendously in size and infamy in the years between the country’s birth and the Civil War. The closing of the external slave trade combined with the explosion of the production of short-staple cotton increased the demand for slaves across the South. Slave traders, often referred to as “speculators,” “soul drivers,” or “Georgia traders,” facilitated the movement of slaves across the region. These men were a visible feature of Southern society and engaged in a business practice that attracted wide criticism. Northerners criticized the immorality of these men because they separated slave families and perpetuated chattel slavery. Many Southerners criticized and spread a stereotyped version of the disreputable trader to distance themselves from the harsher sides of slavery. Responding to upper class Southerners claims that slave traders were universally despised, New England abolitionist Theodore D. Weld published an article in 1839 titled “Highborn ‘Soul Drivers.’” Weld argued that these claims were false, noting that many prominent Southerners including President Andrew Jackson before his presidential election engaged in the trade. Aristocratic Southerners did not despise the slave trader for selling and speculating on slaves, but they did despise the status of some of the traders. Weld contended:
As to the estimation in which ‘speculators,’ ‘soul drivers,’ &c. are held, we remark, that they are not despised because they trade in slaves but because they are working men, all such are despised by slaveholders...if negro-traders excite more contempt than drovers, peddlars, and day-laborers, it is because they are, as a class, more ignorant, vulgar, men from low families and boors in their manners...That they are not despised because it is their business to trade in human beings and bring them to market is plan from the fact that when some “gentlemen of property and standing” and of “good family” embarks in negro speculation, and employs a dozen “soul drivers” to traverse the upper country, and drive to the south coffles of slaves, expending hundreds of thousands in his wholesale purchases, he does not lose caste.²

Weld’s comments are a striking analysis of the trader’s disreputable reputation. The despised trader is held in contempt because of his low birth: he has poor manners, he is from a lower class family, and he is uneducated. Yet, the respectable Southerner could trade slaves and retain his respectability by physically separating himself from the trade. As long as a gentleman did not directly associate himself with the trade, either by using agents or hiding his involvement, he could remain apart from its vulgarity. The separation from vulgarity was crucial in becoming a gentleman. Bertram Wyatt-Brown argues in Honor and Violence in the Old South that, “‘High-mindedness,’ magnanimity, and a sense of self-worth continued to be the adjuncts of manly gentility, however imperfect their realization in practice.”³ If a man accompanied the grueling march of the coffle south, the daily toil would erase these ideals. Weld’s statements also indicate a deeper, underlying feature of Southern society. There were lowly despised traders, but there were respectable Southern traders as well. Historians have generally recognized the existence of both, but they have proposed different explanations for the existence of each category. Weld suggests that before the 1850s, the only way a trader could reach the higher category was through the use of agents who traded slaves for him. The separation of trader from trade was vital.

³ Bertram Wyatt-Brown, Honor and Violence in the Old South (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 51.
Slave traders constantly strove to separate themselves from the trade and reach the higher category in order to gain respectability and, more importantly, honor. For traders and men in the antebellum South, honor was at the foundation of their beliefs. It guided the men’s daily lives and interactions, but was not easily attainable. Bertram Wyatt-Brown describes honor in *Yankee Saints and Southern Sinners* as a fickle mistress consisting of three main tenets. First, the man of honor must have a sense of individual worth that extends to not only himself, but also to his family, friends, community, and state. He must have pride in himself and those around him and be prepared to defend his honor. Second, the man of honor must make a public stake for honor. More than residing in the individual, honor was a quality outside the individual and granted by the public. As a result, third, the man of honor must have his public claim accepted and approved. Public acceptance and approval constantly changed and the man of honor was required to adapt and change with the circumstances. Appearance was far more important than reality to a Southern man’s honor. As Wyatt-Brown writes, “Shifting fortunes, personal rivalries, worrisome doubts that one has been properly assessed make the ethical scheme an elusive, tense, and ultimately insecure method of self-acceptance…On the one hand, moderation, prudence, coolness under duress, and self-restraint are admired and even idealized…On the other hand, the man of honor feels that defense of reputation and virility must come before all else.”

For the slave trader, these tensions on the path toward honor presented themselves daily. The vulgarity of the trade often forced the trader to make decisions between profits and respectability. By separating himself from the trade through intermediaries, the higher category of trader was not forced to make this decision. Yet the men in this category, like the men below them, were still connected to the trade and needed to display their honor in practice.

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The slave trade’s foul reputation made respectability difficult, but the trader could retain his status by displaying paternalism in his business practices. Paternalism was important for the trader because it was used to depict his interest in more than profits. By caring for one’s slaves, a trader displayed concern for the overall well-being of the slave. Eugene Genovese describes paternalism’s unique master-slave relationship in *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made*. Genovese argues, “For the slaveholders paternalism represented an attempt to overcome the fundamental contradiction inherent in slavery: the impossibility of the slaves’ ever becoming the things they were supposed to be.”¹⁵ By denying slaves life, liberty, and happiness, slave owners were treating slaves as inhuman. Southerners argued that the master and the slave had mutual obligations toward each other: the slave would perform work and the master would provide protection and sustenance. “Paternalism defined the involuntary labor of the slaves as a legitimate return to their masters for protection and direction. But, the masters’ need to see their slaves as acquiescent human beings constituted a moral victory for the slaves themselves. Paternalism’s insistence upon mutual obligations – duties, responsibilities, and ultimately even rights – implicitly recognized the slaves’ humanity.”¹⁶ Through this emphasis on reciprocal duties, slaveholders inherently recognized the slave as a human, not just a thing. An owner has no duty to his property,⁷ but slave traders attempted to demonstrate honor through paternalistic business practices that conveyed their care for their slaves as more than simply commodities. By providing adequate food, clothing, and shelter, medical care when sick, and avoiding the separation of families, traders recognized the physical and, to a degree, psychological needs of their slaves.

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Although the trader and the slave owner boasted about how well they treated their slaves, masters still treated slaves as products that could be bought and sold. Paternalistic practices could provide adequate clothing and food; yet, they could not make up for holding men and women in bondage. In *Roll, Jordan, Roll*, Genovese argues that both the master and the slave felt tension from these reciprocal duties. Each was attempting to carve out his place in the antebellum social structure. The slave struggled to survive while the master struggled to maintain social status. Paternalism colored both of their efforts. Yet paternalism was not the only form of social interaction, Bertram Wyatt-Brown’s argument for the importance of honor in the Old South is overwhelming. In *Honor and Violence in the Old South*, he argues that honor served as a “way out of chaos” and “gave meaning to lives.” It was the Southern gentleman’s vital code. Genovese and Wyatt-Brown together galvanized historians’ thoughts about the interaction of honor and paternalism in chattel slavery. Lacy K. Ford’s *Deliver Us From Evil: The Slavery Question in the Old South* connected these themes in the domestic slave trade. Ford discusses the ideological differences between the upper and lower South, the expansion of the slave trade, and the rise of paternalism. These authors discussed the slave trade and notions of honor and paternalism, but gave the slave trader and the slave trade’s place in the system of slavery little attention. Addressing this void, this project focused on the domestic slave trade and traders between 1850 and the start of the Civil War in 1861. It focuses on the Virginia trade and Virginia traders. Richmond was the second largest trading center behind New Orleans, and the trader’s and trade’s reputation was particularly important. In addition, the project investigates the slave trader’s depiction of honor and paternalism. The trader and trade were necessary for the perpetuation of slavery, but their reputation did not reflect their importance. Virginia’s supply fell short of the demand in the blooming cotton fields of the Deep South; Virginians did not

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8 Wyatt-Brown, *Honor and Violence in the Old South*, 62.
necessarily think more was better. Consequently, the trader and trade held a complicated position in society, shifting between scapegoat and gentleman.

My investigation of the slave trade and trader in Virginia dominated the project. This project confronts four main arguments about the trader and his trade. Robert H. Gudmestad’s *A Troublesome Commerce: The Transformation of the Interstate Slave Trade* argues that Southerners believed that there were different classes of slave traders with varying degrees of respectability. The lowly, ill-bred trader was criticized by Southerners to separate themselves from the trade, but they accepted and even encouraged the well-mannered, prosperous, honorable traders. Gudmestad notes the creation of distinct classes of slave traders, but he chooses to focus on the contrast between the large interstate trader and the lowly, itinerant trader. He notices distinct levels but fails to investigate them. Both Stephen Deyle’s *Carry Me Back: The Domestic Slave Trade in American Life* and Walter Johnson’s *Soul by Soul: Life Inside the Antebellum Slave Market* focus primarily on the differences between the most prosperous, respected traders and the dishonorable, disdained traders. Deyle demonstrates the pervasiveness of the trade in Southern life and the trader’s complicated position in it. Johnson’s focus is slightly different; he focuses on the New Orleans market to expose the intricacies of the trade and differences in traders. The slave trader was not differentiated only by class as Deyle and Johnson argue; Michael Tadman shows in *Speculators and Slaves: Masters, Traders, and Slaves in the Old South* that region also played a role in determining whether a trader was a “good” or “bad” in southern society. Utilizing a wide variety of statistics, Tadman shows that regional tension arose from conflicts of interest within the South itself. Older slaveholding regions were often wary of

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exporting slaves into less developed regions for fear that overproduction of staple crops would occur. Tadman portrays the slave trader as an actor in a black and white world: the “good” trader versus the “bad” trader. Before the 1850s a two-fold view of the trader was common, but technological improvements in the late antebellum South altered this rigid distinction. The Market Revolution improved transportation and communication in the 1850s and allowed traders to disassociate themselves from the product in which they dealt and achieve respectability.

Chapter One of this project explores the dual stereotype of the trader created in the antebellum South. Northerners and Southerners criticized the ignorant, lowly itinerant trader but not the large-scale, wealthy trader who appeared to enjoy respectability and honor. The chapter investigates each stereotype and the role each one played in Southern society. The chapter then argues that time played a crucial role in the trader’s attainment of honor. Before the 1850s, the trader was usually physically associated with his slaves, but the passage of time solved this problem. The dissociation of trader from trade made possible by the railroad and telegraph allowed the trader to distance himself from the image of the “working” man Weld described and to achieve respectability. The chapter concludes by arguing that medium sized traders could more easily gain honor in the late 1850s than previously before because of the Market Revolution and changing notions of respectability.

Chapter Two focuses on the lives of a slave trading partnership operated by William A.J. Finney and Philip Thomas of Pittsylvania County, Virginia. Finney was born in the early 1820s and his partner Thomas in the early 1830s in Pittsylvania County. For these men, honor, and accordingly, sociability played an important role in shaping their business partnership. Finney controlled the partnership financially and Thomas performed much of the work. By his mid-20s

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Finney had made significant steps to establishing himself within the Southern community. His real estate holding was valued at $3,054 in 1850 and he owned 14 slaves. With these slaves, Finney pursued farming hoping to get rich off grain and tobacco markets. In the northern district of Pittsylvania County in 1850, Finney’s wealth paled in comparison with bigger planters. In Pittsylvania County, Finney and Thomas lived in the shadow of the Southern planter aristocracy. By 1850, there were more than fifteen residents of the county who held at least $10,000 in personal estate and six with more than $20,000. William L. Pannill, a local planter, dominated this group with a personal estate valued at $43,000. The highest ranks of Southern gentility were close by and the two men turned to the most readily available means to join that illustrious crowd: slave trading. With no land, Thomas naturally needed to acquire wealth. Throughout the upper, lower, and Deep South men like him were fighting for a more prosperous future and honor in a society in which wealth and respectability were vital to success. The South’s complex conception of honor guided the two men’s ambitions and shaped their decisions and actions. The men utilized changes of the Market Revolution to their advantage in the difficult Southern social landscape. Chapter Two argues that the men exploited the changes in transportation and communication noted in Chapter One to achieve respectability and wealth in Southern society. Finney increased his land and wealth, while simultaneously increasing his social stature. His election as Pittsylvania County Justice of Peace in the early 1860s cemented his success. Likewise, Thomas rose from clerk to planter in a little under ten years. His close association with Finney placed him close to Southern gentility. By physically separating themselves from the trade to varying degrees, Finney and Thomas were able navigate the

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13 Walter Johnson, Soul By Soul, 46.
treacherous antebellum Southern social landscape. When separation was not possible, both men strove to display paternalistic business practices by buying quality slaves and refusing to split up families. Ten years earlier traders like Hopkins Nowlin had been unable to achieve this honorable ideal. Forced to physically accompany his slaves south, Nowlin was tied up in the negative stereotypes of the trade. He failed to display paternalism in his business when he sold sick slaves and split up families. He failed even to garner deference from his slaves.

In the end, slave traders’ ability to achieve respectability in the difficult southern social landscape was determined by their ability to separate themselves from the trade. When they were unable to separate themselves, these men had to act paternalistically and choose the path least offensive to their peers. That path was often unclear and demanded unwavering dedication from its adherents. For those who were successful, honor and profits were possible. For those who failed, the disgust and hatred of a country awaited. Respectability was just a sale away.
Chapter One

The Domestic Slave Trade’s Market Revolution

“Slaves usually got scared when it became known that Negro-trader White was in the community. The owners used White's name as a threat to scare the Negroes when they had violated some rule. "I'll sell you to the Negro trader, if you don't do better" was often as good or better punishment than the lash, for the slave dreaded being sold South, worse than the Russians do banishment to Siberia.”

-- Henry Clay Bruce, Former Slave (1832-1902)
As the sun broke on a new day in 1844 near the village of Scottsville, Virginia, twelve-year-old slave Louis Hughes awoke as chattel property under the command of local merchant Washington Fitzpatrick. Hughes was the product of a white father and black mother, yet the status of his mother placed him inside the inhuman institution of chattel slavery. He had already had three masters in twelve short years of his life: sold for the first time at age six and later at age eleven to settle his masters’ debts. Under Washington’s ownership, Hughes believed he had temporarily found a stable location to call home. He was unfortunately wrong.

After only several months under Fitzpatrick’s ownership, the merchant informed the naïve Hughes that he had hired out the young slave to work on a canal-boat running to Richmond. Packing his clothes and bidding his mother goodbye, Hughes quickly boarded the boat to hide his tears from his mother and drifted down the river in a state of oblivion. “Of the boat and the trip and the scenes along the route I remember little – I only thought of my mother and my leaving her,” Hughes painfully recalls. The trip may not have been memorable, but emotion could hide the next part of Hughes’ adventure.

Upon his arrival in Richmond, Hughes soon discovered that his master had lied to him, and he would not be remaining upon the canal-boat. Instead, Hughes would face one of the four sales he experienced in his life. Unlike his prior sales, Hughes’ owner outsourced his current sale to another man. This simple act allowed Fitzpatrick to distance himself from the most disreputable part of the trade, separating child from parent through sale. Before even stepping off

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14 Hughes followed the status of his mother because while his father was black, he was not Hughes’ master. Thus, Hughes was his mother’s son and her master’s property.
16 Hughes four sales represent the four typical forms of slave sale. First, he was sold at the age of six when his master sold him directly off his plantation in a private sale. Next, at the age of eleven he was sold in the settling of master’s estate at his death at a public sale on his estate. Hughes sale above ultimately ended in Pullan, the slave trader, selling him privately out of the jail he was held in. Finally, Hughes was sold several years in a Richmond slave trading firm’s auction.
the boat, local slave trader George Pullan questioned Hughes extensively trying to discover the important details of his life: what sicknesses had he had, what special skills did he have, and was he a flight risk. Pullan obtained this information to create back-story for Hughes, which would add humanity to the slave and aid in his sale.

From the docks, Pullan took the young slave to one of the large slave trading firms for which antebellum Richmond was famous. The firm’s facilities consisted of an office, a large showroom for sales, and an open yard enclosed by a fifteen-foot high wall in the rear. In this open space, Hughes joined other newly arrived slaves waiting for sale. Within the yard, there was a large whipping post placed in the center. Traders and slave owners alike could bring slaves here for punishment, regardless of ownership. Rather than performing punishment themselves, slave owners near Richmond instead sent their slaves to these jails. Hughes noted, “Owners who affected culture and refinement preferred to send a servant to the yard for punishment to inflicting it themselves. It saved them trouble, they said, and possibly a slight wear and tear of feeling.”

Yet slave owners were not the only Southerners utilizing physical separation as a means of preserving distance from the darker sides of slavery, Hughes’ experiences reveal slave traders did as well.

Three snapshots of Hughes path toward sale highlight traders and slave owners’ ability to detach and distance themselves from the trade. First, Hughes’ prior owner Fitzpatrick chose to let another man sell and gain commission from his trade. Instead of making the trip himself, Fitzpatrick sacrificed potentially higher profit to let another perform the unpleasant work. Second, Pullan did not go straight to the market to sell Hughes. Rather, he chose to store Hughes

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17 Hughes, *Thirty Years a Slave*, 9.
at another firm thereby separating himself visibly from his product while he searched for a buyer. Finally, Hughes’ observations of the whipping post reveal the process of separation to the highest degree. Other than sale, punishment was one of the harshest experiences a slave faced. Hughes remembered sadly, “I saw many cases of whipping while I was in the yard. Sometimes I was so frightened that I trembled violently, for I had never seen anything like it before.”\(^{18}\) Slave owners could thus avoid this tragic occurrence and shift the blame toward others. Similarly, slave traders physically and psychologically distanced themselves from the inhumanity inherent in the slave trade.

At the forefront of the expanding trade was the most controversial figure in Southern society: the slave trader. Southerners argued that the master and slave had mutual obligations toward each other: the slave would perform work and the master would provide protection and sustenance. Through this emphasis on reciprocal duties, slaveholders inherently recognized the slave as a human and simultaneously protected his investment.\(^{19}\) However, the slave trader eroded all concepts of paternalism in his business practices. By treating the slave as a commodity to be bought and sold purely for profit, traders ignored slaves’ humanity and any duty they had toward them. Southerners’ defense of slavery on paternalistic was problematic. The continuation of the slave trade was necessary for the preservation and expansion of the southern economy, but it represented a denial of paternalism. In response, southerners developed a complicated, dual stereotype of slave traders. Robert H. Gudmestad argues in *A Troublesome Commerce: The Transformation of the Interstate Slave Trade* that there existed different social classes of slave traders in Southern society. The lucrative, high-class, genteel interstate trader was lauded and even encouraged, while the southern community criticized the ill mannered, low-class, small

\(^{18}\) Hughes, *Thirty Years a Slave*, 9.

\(^{19}\) Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll*, 4-7.
slave trader to distance itself from the trade.\textsuperscript{20} Gudmestad comments on the creation of classes of slave traders other than these two, yet he chooses to largely focus on the differences between the small, itinerant trader and the large-scale trading firms.. In addition to Gudmestad, Stephen Deyle in \textit{Carry Me Back: The Domestic Slave Trade in American Life} and Walter Johnson in \textit{Soul by Soul: Life Inside the Antebellum Slave Market} detail the differences between these two well known and visible classes of traders.\textsuperscript{21} Again though, both authors focus on the two extreme images of the trader separated by class. Yet the slave trader was not just differentiated by class, Michael Tadman shows in \textit{Speculators and Slaves: Masters, Traders, and Slaves in the Old South} that region also played a role in determining whether a trader was either a “good” or “bad” in southern society. The regional tension in respectability arose from conflicts of interest within the South itself. Older slaveholding areas worried that importing slaves into less developed regions would result in overproduction and soil depletion.\textsuperscript{22} Following the trend in historiography, Tadman again decided to portray the slave trader as an actor either “good” or “bad.”

Although these two stereotypes dominated both southern and Northern opinions of the slave trader, the evolution of the slave trade and its processes allowed a new slave trader to emerge in the last twenty years of the antebellum South. The new trader had neither the capital nor resources of the large, urban firms, nor the disrepute of the lowly, itinerant trader. The market revolution brought new technology, new transportation, and new ways of business that transformed the slave trade. The telegraph, railroad, and new accessibility to capital allowed the trader advantages previously unknown. The new trader who I term, the Middle-merchant trader, utilized these advances and bridged the social and wealth barriers previously set in his way to

\textsuperscript{20} Gudmestad, \textit{A Troublesome Commerce}, 4.
\textsuperscript{21} Deyle, \textit{Carry Me Back}; Johnson, \textit{Soul By Soul}.
\textsuperscript{22} Tadman, \textit{Speculators and Slaves}, 209-210.
become or at least attempt to become a respected and honorable gentleman of southern aristocratic society.

Slavery and the United States domestic slave trade pervaded all aspects of antebellum Southern life and left little room for resistance. Yet slave resistance was unremitting as basic human nature leads to a desire for freedom. Slave resistance was complex and ranged in nature. Active forms included running away, murdering one’s master, and refusing punishment, while passive acts came in the form of theft, feigning illness, and slowing down work. Slaves recognized the economic investment they were to their masters and used it against them.23 While resistance was common, slaves could only push their masters so far before their insolence was met with punishment. Punishment came in a variety of forms and levels of intensity. Slave owners, overseers, and traders could either choose to psychologically or physically punish their slaves. Psychologically, these men could reduce family visiting time, threaten sale, and in the most extreme, separate slave families and send the members to different parts of the South. While physical punishment was more often met with resistance than psychological punishment, it still remained an effective form of discipline. Physical punishment commonly came in the form of whipping, branding, and the removal of extremities.24 Walter Johnson in River of Dark Dreams: Slavery and Empire in the Cotton Kingdom describes several horrific incidents of punishment slave Charles Ball underwent. He writes:

When he was suspected of kidnapping a white girl, Charles Ball was directed to go down to the cellar. There, “I was ordered to pull of my clothes, and lie down on my back. I was then bound by the hands and feet, with strong cords, and extended full length between two beams that supported the timbers of the building…The doctor…opened a small case of surgeon’s instruments and told me he was going to skin me alive.” On another occasion, when he had been caught cooking a stolen sheep,

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Ball was hung from a post and beaten. He described the flensing sensation of his skin being cut away by the lash: “I felt my flesh quiver like that of animals that have been slaughtered by the butcher and are flayed whilst yet half alive. My face was bruised and my nose bled profusely, for in the madness of agony, I had not been able to refrain from beating my head violently against the post.”

While Ball’s experiences display the horrors of punishment under slavery, milder forms of physical punishment were sometimes more effective. For example, slave owners and overseers could demote slaves from one position on a plantation to another. The move from house servant to field hand could be detrimental to a slave’s well being. For slave owners, resistance was unacceptable and had to be met harshly to retain order. Slavery and the slave trade played too crucial a role in the Southern economy to be challenged.

Yet the components and actors that participated and upheld this regime differed significantly. While Southern aristocratic planters sat atop the system, dominating slaves, who resided at the bottom, the real machine of slavery’s hegemonic dominance came in the form of the domestic slave trade. The United States of America’s closing of the international slave trade in 1808 fueled the expansion of the domestic slave trade. Newly acquired lands from the Louisiana Purchase and the War of 1812 combined with the rise of short-staple cotton production and sugar cultivation caused the demand for slaves to boom. The system of chattel slavery present in the Southern states could not continue without fresh reserves of labor. Between 1820 and 1860, the United States domestic slave trade exploded in order to respond to the increased demand. Yet not all southerners saw this growth as beneficial and some believed it was unsustainable. Many Southerners were worried about the increasingly extreme amount of racial

imbalance found in these regions. Yet other concerns arose as well. Agriculturalists were especially concerned that increased amounts of slaves would increase cotton production too much and deplete the soil. Although these concerns were legitimate, the solutions these men provided for this growing problem though are shocking and embarrassing. More and more Southerners continued to comment on the problem, yet too many Southerners and Northerners were making huge profits with the rapid growth of the trade. Northern industrialists benefitted from the increasing amounts of cotton exported to Great Britain and France, which was subsequently used in Northern textiles and Southerners benefitted from the increase of profits from all the cotton. Slavery was too integral to the Southern economy to abolish.

Wide swaths of society benefitted from the enlargement of the trade as a result of its need for personnel not necessarily directly connected with the trade, but integral to its enormous infrastructure. Railroads, doctors, lawyers, and many other companies and professionals were needed and profited from its continuation. The trade combined with these external actors to generate nearly $12.3 million worth of business annually in the forty years prior to the Civil War. The domestic slave trade was no longer a small, marginal part of the economy. In one form or another, every Southerner experienced the effects of slavery and the slave trade daily.

The system became ingrained in white Southern consciousness and culture because it promised

28 “Mississippi planter and agricultural reformer M.W. Phillips, a regular contributor to the American Cotton Planter…was arguing that the slaveholding South needed to slow the rate at which it was converting human beings into cotton plants. He wanted to adjust the metabolism of social anthropology. Stop and think for a minute about what Phillips – this ‘benevolent planter,’(according the Frederick Law Olmstead, an observer and opponent of slavery) this advice-dispensing oxymoron – was saying. A third of enslaved pregnancies were never carried to term. Child mortality was at 75 percent. The fact that he was claiming other people’s children as his own, tallying them alongside his cattle and cotton, seems almost unremarkable in the light of these extraordinary figures. Perhaps he exaggerated; his essay was a philippic, designed to spur his society to change. Perhaps the real figure for child mortality was a mere 60 percent, or 55, or 50. It is hard to find any solace in estimating downward by a third, or even a half. Count them out one by one: tens of thousands, hundreds of thousands of dead babies.” Walter Johnson, River of Dark Dreams, 192-193.

29 Between 1820 and 1860, American production of cotton rose from 334,378 bales a year to 3,837,402 a year respectively. William H. Phillips, University of South Carolina, Cotton Gin, Table 2, http://eh.net/encyclopedia/cotton-gin/.

30 Deyle, Carry Me Back, 139.
current slave owners continued profits, while giving hope to poor, slave-less whites for future prosperity. All classes of Southern society were thus committed to slavery and in turn the slave trade as the, “the path of social duty emerged as the path of self-interest.”

As noted earlier, in the antebellum South the slave trader occupied a complicated and shifting position within society. He could at the same time appear uncouth and unrespectable to one individual, while another would consider him an honorable businessman. Writing in 1836 as domestic slave prices peaked before the trade’s unpredictable crash in 1837, Ethan Allen Andrews documented the careful path slave traders trod within Southern society. In the letters that make up his book, Andrews pays special attention to the character and respectability of Southern slave traders. He switches from condemnation in some cases to a cautious absolution from guilt in others. A letter written in July of 1835 typifies this contradiction, illustrating both sides of a slave trader’s ability to appear respectable. Andrews writes, “He (the slave trader) can hold no rank in society, nor can he, by any means, push his family into favorable notice with persons of respectability.” Thus, Andrews posed the American slave trader as a Southern social outcast unable to acquire standing in society. Yet several paragraphs later he claims, “If slaves are property, and are to continue such, they must, like other property, change owners; and the slave-trader is but the merchant by whose intervention the article changes hands, and no more deserves our censure than the drover, who takes the hogs and horses to market.” Further adding, “traders exhibit more proofs of humanity in their dealings, than a large portion of those from whom they purchase.” Within a page, Andrews presented two contrasting views of the

32 Ethan A. Andrews, Slavery and the Domestic-Slave trade ... In a Series of Letters Addressed to the Executive Committee of the American Union for the Relief and Improvement of the Colored Race (Boston: Light & Stearns, 1836), 150.
33 Andrews, Slavery and the Domestic-Slave Trade in the United States, 152.
34 Andrews, Slavery and the Domestic-Slave Trade in the United States, 152.
slave trader and his ability to participate in Southern society. If for example the trader visibly drove his slaves to market as Andrews observed, he would be immediately associated with a direct pursuit of capital. Yet if the trader could distance himself from this visible stain upon his reputation, respectability for him and his family was possible. Andrews’ mention of the traders’ affect on his family’s position within Southern society is interesting to note. Like the Southern merchant in general, how the trader conducted himself and his business reflected on his family’s reputation as well as his own. A merchant critical to his community’s economic prosperity could achieve influence for himself and his family. If for example the trader visibly drove his slaves to market as Andrews observed, he would be immediately associated with a direct pursuit of capital. Yet if the trader could distance himself from this visible stain upon his reputation, respectability for him and his family was possible. Andrews’ mention of the traders’ affect on his family’s position within Southern society is interesting to note. Like the Southern merchant in general, how the trader conducted himself and his business reflected on his family’s reputation as well as his own. A merchant critical to his community’s economic prosperity could achieve influence for himself and his family. Fortunately for the slave trader, slaves were crucial to almost every Southern community’s economic success. Yet the trader, as Andrews’ displayed, was not well received in each community. Andrews ultimately struggled with what view would dominate; yet he was not the only one who struggled with this perpetual dilemma.

On the eve of the Civil War in early 1860, Daniel Hundley published his Social Relations in Our the Southern States after travelling throughout the South detailing his observations of all aspects of social interactions. In his writing, he pays special attention to a figure he terms the “Southern Yankee.” The “Southern Yankee” is a Southerner concerned solely with making profits with no thought to morality or how he conducts himself. Of all the “Southern Yankees,” Hundley particularly notes the slave trader:

The miserly Negro Trader…is, outwardly, a coarse ill-bred person, provincial in speech and manners, with a cross-looking phiz, a whiskey-tinctured nose, cold hard-looking eyes, a dirty tobacco-stained mouth, and shabby dress…He is not troubled evidently with a conscience, for, although he habitually separates parent from child, brother from sister, and husband from wife, he is yet one of the jolliest dogs alive, and never evinces the least sign of remorse. Neither has he any religion; for almost every sentence he utters is accompanied by an oath… His heart, indeed, is full of all villainies and corruptions. It is never warmed by a single generous impulse, but is all blackness and barrenness-- black with guilty thoughts and wicked machinations how he

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36 Daniel R. Hundley, Social Relations In Our Southern States (New York: Henry B. Price, 1860), 130.
may increase his gains, and barren of all good deeds or virtuous resolves.  

The figure Hundley describes sounds very familiar to the social outcast of Andrews’ first comment on slave traders. Andrews simply poses him as an outsider, but Hundley enumerates the specific qualities. The slave trader holds no education, no conscience, and no religion. Likewise, Hinton Rowan Helper, a North Carolina abolitionist in the late 1850s, held similar negative views of the trader. In his work, he collected abolitionist thought from a variety of sources including southern churches. In his chapter of Episcopal testimony on the trade, Helper quotes a Bishop Porteus saying, “The Bible classes men-stealers or slave-traders among the murderers of fathers and mothers, and the most profane criminals on earth.” Utilizing clerical testimony, Helper intensely indicts the trader for his despicable practices. Yet even though Hundley and Helper aggressively criticize the trader, similar to Andrews, they were not ready for full condemnation. Hundley notes, “Of course… they are not all corrupt, or ignorant, or ill-bred. Some of them, we doubt not, are conscientious men.” Although Hundley grants that a respectable trader or two exists, Helper interestingly, whether he realizes it or not, subtly shifts blame away from the trader. While “the trader receives the slave, a stranger in language, aspect, and manners,” the master is intimately connected with his slaves through paternalism and cannot be absolved from blame for their sale. In the owner’s case, “individuals whom the master has known from infancy, whom he has seen sporting in the innocent gambols of childhood, who have been accustomed to look to him for protection, he tears from the mother's arms and sells into a strange country among strange people, subject to cruel taskmasters.” Helper recognizes the trader’s inhumanity, but appears to condemn the owner for his intimate relationship and

37 Hundley, *Social Relations In Our Southern States*, 140-141.
39 Hundley, *Social Relations In Our Southern States*, 140.
40 Helper, *Impending Crisis of the South*, 203.
subsequent destruction. Yet the trader still received these slaves and chose to profit from their sale. The trader was visibly responsible for separating families, but he was also fulfilling an economic need. Hundley, Andrews, and Helper thus pose the interesting dilemma of how slave traders operating in the American South could both be considered a social outcasts worthy of disrespect, while concurrently seen as no more than businessmen operating within an entrenched system.

Many Southerners commonly held Hundley, Andrews, and Helper’s conflicting opinions on the slave trader in Southern society, outcast vs. respect businessmen, during the height of the slave trade’s profitability between 1820-1860. As Northern criticism of the trade grew with the trade’s growth, Southerners necessarily developed colorful, albeit narrowly focused stereotypes of the slave trader to distance themselves from the more clearly negative aspects of the trade. Northerners attacked the trade and trader as the heart of the immoral institution; without their services slavery would collapse. In a Suffolk Democrat article published in The Liberator, a Northern abolitionist newspaper founded by William Lloyd Garrison, the paper depicted Northern views of the trader on February 16, 1849:

They are the terror of the black race; and when they appear on a plantation, the negroes flee in alarm, and the planter's little children, shuddering, seek shelter at the mother's side. Although the planters may sometimes deal with them, they cordially despise them; and no matter how wealthy they may become, they are never respected nor admitted to the society of gentlemen.

When characterizing the trader, Northern critics focused on the emotion and dread he evoked. The trader was despised because not even the thought of separating families could quench his thirst for profits. The Frederick Douglass’ Paper, a Northern abolitionist paper run by famous escaped slave Frederick Douglass and based out of Rochester, New York, observed on January 13, 1854, “Who has ever seen one of these monsters in the streets of Charleston or New Orleans,
driving before him a sobbing young girl, or a child, or a broken hearted mother or father, from the house of the master where the purchase had been made it on the slave pen, there to be exhibited till some Legree, or other slaveholding wretch would appear and pay a profit on one of the victims.\[^{41}\] In response to these intense Northern criticisms of both the trade and the institution of slavery, Southerners promoted the idea of paternalism and a variety of other defenses to the institution. While no single defense dominated the slavery discussion, paternalism was the most well known and widespread.\[^{42}\] Paternalism espoused mutual obligations for both sides; the slave would work productively for the master and the master would protect and provide for the slave.\[^{43}\] Yet as Hinton Rowan Helper unknowingly displayed, the system of paternalism Southerners consistently reiterated fell apart upon closer inspection. In many cases, slave owners did treat their slaves in a humane manner: to do differently would depreciate an owners’ investment. This humanity only went so far though; signs of even slight resistance were often met with force. Southerners viewed punishment as a necessary evil for slaves violating the “mutual” obligations in place under paternalism, yet human’s base desire for freedom overrode these obligations.\[^{44}\] By holding a slave in bondage, owners fundamentally denied slaves’ human nature and in turn humanity. Further, slave owners encouraged marriage and reproduction among their slaves. Slaves’ humanity were also denied in these life experiences though. Owners did not allow Christian marriages with the promise of “till death do us part,” but instead a marriage tinged with the idea “till sale do us part.” Owners also claimed the children as their own, and they frequently sold them away destroying all vestiges of paternalism.\[^{45}\]

\[^{42}\] Wyatt- Brown, Yankee Saints and Southern Sinners, 161-162.
\[^{43}\] Genovese, Roll, Jordan, Roll, 5.
\[^{44}\] Blassingame, The Slave Community, 104.
\[^{45}\] “This forcible joining of family histories in which the fortunes of the white line depended on the furtherance of the black was, as Phillips suggested, a very particular notion of economy, one that his italics invited his readers to
slave, stuck in the perpetual depths of chattel slavery, had little of his own. William J. Anderson, a black slave born in Virginia who resided throughout the South and was sold eight times, expressed slavery’s horrible effects on the slave. He wrote, “To be a slave—a human one of God's creatures – reduced to chattelism – bought and sold like goods or merchandise, oxen or horses! He has nothing he can call his own—not even his wife, or children, or his own body. If the master could take the soul, he would take it.”

Denying slaves’ fundamental desire for freedom was the first erosion of the idea of paternalism, yet paternalism fell apart on another level as well. As Helper argued, the slave trader may be the one making immense profits from slave sales, but he is simply a necessary part of the system. Slave owners, and not traders, were often the ones responsible for ripping families apart.

While death sometimes could account for separation, it was often an owner’s actions that caused families to separate. Debt, the need for quick cash, and relocation resulted in slave owners selling individual or groups of slaves. By breaking up a family, slave owners were again denying the implicit humanity of the slave. Genovese, in fact, argues that previous studies showing slavery emasculated males and subsequently weakened the slave families is false; next to the threat of punishment, family separation motivated slaves to runaway more than any other factor.

By selling a slave away from his family, an owner was depriving the slave the basis of his identity. Slaves created close-knit communities based on family relationships and the

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linger upon: an economy in which human semen and ovum were turned into capital. For this was what Phillips was emphasizing – the capital formation that followed from the cultivation of a crop of slaves, the long-term view that has somehow been allowed for so long to trade through the historiography under an assumed name: ‘paternalism.’ The word seems a patent fraud, a counterfeit worn threadbare by repeated gullible acceptances. Unless, of course, we see this unfathering, unmothering, misnaming – this father-ist imposture by which the children born of one man and one woman came to be understood as the property of others, by which paternity was replaced with ‘paternalism,’ by which the child of one line was bequeathed to the benefit of another – as precisely the point.”

Johnson, River of Dark Dreams, 194.

destruction of these ties was devastating. The slave trader was disregarding the slave’s humanity and treating the slave as nothing more than a commodity. On a pure ideological basis, the slave trade and paternalism were incompatible and many were not afraid to point it out.

In order to reconcile Northerners’ harsh views of the slave trader with the Southern economy’s need for the slave trade’s continuation, Southerners developed two distinct stereotypes of the slave trader. One mirrors the decrepit character Hundley illustrated, that of the trader as a “coarse ill-bred person, provincial in speech and manners.” In essence, the Southern slave trader was of low birth, vulgar in demeanor, and not one to be respected. Southern society attached itself to the stereotype of the crass and disrespectful trader to support slavery while criticizing its most inhumane parts; the lowly trader became a scapegoat for the evils of chattel slavery. The stereotyped marginal trader was a small, itinerant trader who traveled the countryside dealing in small numbers of slaves, dozens instead of hundreds. He travelled the South marching his slaves in coffles, a chained group of slaves travelling by foot, living from one sale to the next. The small-scale trader was seen as the main perpetrator of the slave trade’s evils. He separated wife from child with no thought; he raped slaves as he marched them South; and most notoriously, he took criminal, diseased, and unwanted slaves from the upper South and sold them in the Deep South. The small trader was not just despised for his business practices, but for his personal life as well. With constant sources of capital at hand, these traders were free to engage in a variety of other illicit activities. They drank excessively, gambled to the point of bankruptcy, and frequently engaged in immoral sexual practices. These sexual practices ranged from the largely innocuous practice of hiring prostitutes to the despicable raping of slaves under

49 Hundley, *Social Relations In Our Southern States*, 141.
50 Deyle, *Carry Me Back*, 106.
their protection.52 While prosperous, respected traders also engaged in many of these practices, their ability to keep these practices out of the public eye afforded some flexibility. The small time trader visibly drank, gambled, and was sexually promiscuous; the large trader kept these practices in the back room and thus preserved his appearance of gentility. The stereotype of the lowly trader was hated by all and considered inhumane. In Peter Randolph’s slave autobiography Sketches of Slave Life, the former slave proclaimed, “O! is there a heart not all brutish, that can witness such a scene without falling to the earth with shame, that the rights of his fellow-creatures are so basely trampled upon? The seller of a human being, for the purposes of slavery, is not human, and has no right to the name.”53 Randolph’s comments are revealing. Like white Southerners, he criticized the slave trader for his immorality. Yet while Randolph saw the entire process of a slave sale, sale and purchase, as immoral and heartless, Southerners bemoaned the lowly slave trader for degrading the morality of the South with their actions. They thus created this exaggeratedly negative stereotype of the slave trader to provide a moral defensive of the peculiar institution.

As much as the immoral trader could debase himself and cast a grimy shadow on those surrounding him, the slave trade and thus traders were a necessary part of the system. Slavery and the movement of slaves throughout the South was a necessity for the Southern economy. Enter the large interstate trade. The change in scale of business between small and large trader allowed for different and, in the eyes of many Southerners, a more acceptable form of trading slaves. While the small-scale trader dealt in dozens of slaves at the most, the large-scale trader flooded the slave markets of Richmond and New Orleans with hundreds of slaves. Firms like Austin Woolfolk’s Baltimore firm in the 1820s, Franklin & Armfield’s Alexandria Firm in the

52 Deyle, Carry Me Back, 126-127.
53 Peter Randolph, Sketches of Slave Life: or, Illustrations of the ‘Peculiar Institution’ (Boston: Published for the Author, 1855), 8.
1830s, and Nathan Bedford Forest’s Memphis firm in the 1850s typified the model of large-scale trading firms. With a permanent geographic base, these traders utilized the labor of their employees to extend their reach throughout the South. They could acquire slaves from throughout the South without physically being present at the sale and then group the purchased lot at their large slave depots. These traders physically distanced themselves from the trade and as a result much of the criticism that accompanied it. In Hundley’s observation of the Southern trader, he also noted the large-scale trader in his depiction of Southern social relations. He writes:

Although it is true the Negro Trader proper sometimes presents the disgusting figure we have represented, there is yet another and a very different class of negro-traders, confined mostly to the cities of the South…These are the respectable well-to-do Southern Yankees, who have a position in society to maintain, and who would as soon be considered guilty of highway robbery as of participating in the vulgar traffic of buying and selling slaves. Still they do not scruple to sell a man from his wife, provided they can do so on any plausible pretext.

While the small-scale, itinerant trader was disreputable and low class in Southern eyes, the “large-scale, urban-based interregional dealers in slaves” could escape the stereotype. Using intermediaries and innovative business practices, the large-scale trader could socially and physically distance himself from the harsher sides of the trade. He could become a gentleman and honorable in his communities eyes.

Southern economy and society was a delicate agrarian society based on personal virtue. By profiting not off one’s own labor but from the sale of another, violated traditional community standards. Yet the trade was inseparable from the Southern economy and traders consequently were required to perpetuate the system. Thus, a trader’s respectability was largely based on what category he fell in. The trader could either appear as the “Southern Yankee” who devoted all his

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54 Deyle, *Carry Me Back*, 98-104.
55 Hundley, *Social Relations In Our Southern States*, 145-146.
56 Deyle, *Carry Me Back*, 106-123.
time to “the mere acquisition of dollars and dimes, regardless of family ties, or the duties one owes to society”\textsuperscript{57} or he could appear as honorable, gentlemen simply solving the problems of supply and demand.\textsuperscript{58} Ultimately, the expansion and transformation of the Southern slave trade influenced by market revolution developments in technology and thought allowed for the development of a new class of slave trader neither lowly nor aristocratic in nature. Although the new trader developed into his own unique character, it is necessary to further characterize the effects of transportation on slave trading in order to highlight the new trader’s distinctiveness.

Lacking the financial resources of bigger, urban firms, small traders were by necessity forced to associate themselves with the visible and negative parts of the trade: mainly the transportation of slaves. While the gradual expansion and then explosion of railroads across the South in the 1840s and 1850s developed a transportation infrastructure that by 1861 boasted over 10,000 miles of track, prior to this period slave traders were forced to transport their slaves in other ways.\textsuperscript{59} Most often traders either marched their slaves in coffles, a group of slaves often chained together led overland, or took them by water along the coast or down the Mississippi. By land or water, small slave traders were publicly attached to their slaves. They could not distance themselves from the chained chattel property they accompanied, and thus, publicly destroyed all vestiges of paternalism. The small trader could not remain “out of sight, out of mind,” but instead accompanied the horrors of the slave coffle or the crowded decks of a slave ship.\textsuperscript{60} Even if a trader separated himself from the transportation of his slaves through trading partners or for the larger firms employees, transportation was a vital component of the trade to be considered. It often determined either success or failure for a trader or firm.

\textsuperscript{57} Hundley, \textit{Social Relations In Our Southern States}, 130-131.
\textsuperscript{58} Byrne, \textit{Becoming Bourgeois}, 41-43.
\textsuperscript{60} Gudmestad, \textit{A Troublesome Commerce}, 153.
In antebellum Southern culture, the image of the slave trader marching chained coffles of slaves south dominated the slave transportation narrative. The image of the slave coffle accompanied most stories and descriptions of slave traders in Northern and Southern press. Northerners, Southerners, and slaves alike all noted the easily observable slave coffle in Southern society. While water and rail provided more economic avenues for transportation than the coffle, the scale needed for these modes of transportation was not available to all. Small-scale traders, dealing in dozens rather than hundreds of slaves, did not have the capital necessary to take advantage of these innovations. These traders were forced to lead coffles ranging from several slaves to upwards of a hundred overland from the Upper South into the markets of the lower South. While the pace of travel varied with the distance to market, it was to the slave trader’s advantage to move quickly. Faster travel meant lower operating costs and additional time to buy and sell slaves. Travelling at a rate of close to twenty miles a day, a trader could travel between the two largest slave markets, New Orleans and Richmond, in seven to eight weeks.\textsuperscript{61} Charles Ball, a slave residing in Maryland in the early 1800s, was traded for the fourth time at age twenty and experienced the hardship and horrors the long trek south induced. He recollected:

\begin{quote}
My new master, whose name I did not hear, took me that same day across the Patuxent, where I joined fifty-one other slaves, whom he had bought in Maryland… A strong iron collar was closely fitted by means of a padlock round each of our necks. A chain of iron, about a hundred feet in length, was passed through the hasp of each padlock, except at the two ends, where the hasps of the padlock passed through a link of the chain…We continued our course up the country westward for a few days and then turned South, crossed James river above Richmond, as I heard at the time. After more than four weeks of travel we entered South Carolina near Camden, and for the first time I saw a field of cotton in bloom.\textsuperscript{62}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{61} Johnson, \textit{Soul by Soul}, 50.
\textsuperscript{62} Charles Ball, \textit{Fifty Years in Chains: or, The Life of An American Slave} (New York: H. Dayton Publisher, 1859), 28-35.
While the size of the average coffle and travel time varied from trip to trip, the inescapable sight of the coffle did not. Its image dominated Northern and Southern memory and the experiences of its horrors pervaded slave narratives. Northern observer Ethan Allen Andrews commented, “On another occasion…I met a company of six or eight negroes, who were upon their way to Alabama or Mississippi…Most of them were young females…My attention was particularly drawn to one of the company, a young man five and twenty or thirty years of age, whose arms were confined in chains.” Andrews’ observations seem to lack emotion. Yet he follows this bland observation by remarking on the amount of suffering similar events generated. He pointed out that while six to eight slaves was a small group, there are hundreds if not thousands of coffles of equal or larger size simultaneously present throughout the South. Andrews recognizes the immediate pain slaves felt, but focuses on the sum of the slaves suffering.

Conversely, slave narratives focus almost exclusively on the slave’s individual pain travelling in a coffle and filled these accounts with emotion. Traveling from Richmond to Natchez in a coffle, William Anderson, a black slave born in Hanover County, Virginia marching to the market for sale, described the pain that overland journeys wrought on the slave. He writes:

Myself and several men, say twenty or more, were chained together, two and two, with a chain between… We traveled a few days, and scenes of sadness occurred; the snow and rain came down in torrents, but we had to rest out in the open air every night…In that awful situation the reader may imagine how we gained any relief from the suffering consequent upon the cruel infliction we had to endure. We were driven with whip and curses through the cold and rain.

The recollection of the coffle from Anderson’s point of view is particularly interesting as it encompasses both the intense hardship he suffered through and the difficulties of slave

transportation. Some slaves even considered the miserable trip south by land worse than work on a plantation. On his way to the slave market, Charles Ball remarked, “As we passed along the road, I saw the slaves at work in the corn and tobacco fields. I knew they toiled hard and lacked food; but they were not, like me, dragged in chains from their wives, children and friends. Compared with me, they were the happiest of mortals. I almost envied them their blessed lot.”65 While Ball’s comments should be taken with a grain of salt, as work on the sugar and cotton plantations of the Deep South was far more intensive than upper South plantations, the coffle nonetheless was a one of the worst experiences for a slave. Chained together for weeks on end, slaves had to endure terrible conditions in the form of bad weather, inadequate food, and exhaustion for marching miles on end. The combination of these stressful factors could push slaves to extremes ranging from rebellion to thoughts of suicide. Charles Ball after a long march south from Virginia to South Carolina commented, “I had at times serious thoughts of suicide so great was my anguish.”66 Although Ball’s thoughts were by no means unusual, aggressive acts of defiance were still more common. Slave traders were often outnumbered by the slaves they transported ten to one or even twenty to one. This could provide troublesome and slaves sometimes forced traders to defend themselves against rebellion during the journey. Yet the common practice of chaining together male slaves reduced the probability of rebellion. Still, slaves in the coffle did not always cooperate because they realized their irreconcilable fate. To enforce discipline, traders resorted to ample use of the whip. Yet these enforcement mechanisms only served to publicize the horrors of the slave trade further. In response, traders tried to further hide their practices. Small traders who could not avoid using the coffle resorted to travelling through towns at night to reduce visibility, while others distanced themselves from the coffle

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65 Ball, *Fifty Years in Chains*, 32.
66 Ball, *Fifty Years in Chains*, 35.
completely. Ultimately, traders utilized more discrete modes of transportation to separate themselves from the visibly negative aspects of the trade.

Throughout the history of the domestic slave trade the slave coffle was the most commonly seen form of slave transportation. Yet many traders found this method less than desirable due to both its visibility and the required time for transportation. Traders thus turned to less visible means of transportation on water by boat, which simultaneously removed much of the slave trade from the public eye and cut down on travel time considerably. Shipping provided a way around the outright visibility of the coffle. Although shipping slaves by boat averaged $2 more per head than the cost of transportation by coffle, the advantages were too numerous to ignore. Shipping slaves by water cut down transportation time by several weeks. The reduction and mode of travel meant lower maintenance costs for slaves and safer due to the difficulty of escape while on water. The transportation of slaves by water can be broken down primarily into two categories: shipment by flatboat on interior rivers or by ocean-going vessel along the coast. Flatboats were primarily used by traders operating along or near cities on the major rivers of the South. Traders’ used these for both for the convenience and improved travel time. A trip from St. Louis to New Orleans down the Mississippi only took a couple of days. Flatboats allowed traders to ship large amounts of slaves, often over a hundred, from city to city in the interior of the country. Cities like St. Louis, Cincinnati, and Louisville exploded in population due to their location on rivers leading to the large slave markets of the Deep South.

Yet for all the advantages water transportation provided, it failed in several respects. Shipment of slaves on water did remove much of the more visible parts of the slave trade from the rural roads of the South, but much of this traffic was simply shifted to boats on rivers and

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69 Johnson, *Soul By Soul*, 50.
along the coast. White Southerners and Northerners may not have been exposed to the brutal reality of a chained coffle of slaves as often, but the number of slaves transported did not decline. In fact, observers viewing slaves shipped south by water expressed similar horror, as did viewers of slave coffles. Travelling from Louisville to Saint Louis in 1841, future president Abraham Lincoln was intensely affected by the sight of slaves on board a ship. In a letter written in August of 1855, Lincoln remembered, “from Louisville to the mouth of the Ohio there were, on board, ten or a dozen slaves, shackled together with irons. That sight was a continual torment to me; and I see something like it every time I touch the Ohio, or any other slave-border.”

Water transportation did not erase visibility; it simply reduced it. Southern rivers, like roads, were major public thoroughfares and exposed the details of slave trader’s practices.

Another potential failure of water transportation, like using the coffle, was the danger of transporting large numbers of slaves under the control of a few whites. While the shortening of travel time reduced the risk considerably, the threat of rebellion and violence was a constant in slave traders’ lives. Slaves’ thoughts of anguish, rebellion, and ultimately freedom were often time intensified on the water because it forced slaves to confront his or her imminent fate: sale and continued bondage. Travel by foot in the coffle allowed the lengthy personal contemplation of one’s fate. Yet condensing travel time to days instead of weeks led some slaves to confront their fate almost immediately, and sometimes this confrontation led to violence. William Anderson, a Southern slave for over twenty-four years, related one story of rebellion. Anderson described a slave trader named Ned Stone who operated along the Ohio River and his gruesome demise:

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This Ned Stone, after trading in slaves some fifteen years, making himself rich from the income, undertook to make a large trade in slaves. He bought a lot… then proceeded down the river, on two flat boats, with his prizes—men, women and children—amounting to the number of one hundred and seventy-five… On down he went, treating his slaves in a very cruel manner, until he got opposite Rome, Indiana. Now I will give the statement of the colored men themselves, for I lived with them five years in slavery and hard servitude. Those colored men said they concocted a plan to murder all the whites, and then leave the boats and pass for free men in Indiana. There were about seventy-five colored men and only five whites, to wit: Ned Stone, a Mr. Davis, a Mr. Cobb, and two others. They murdered all the white men about nine o'clock. The colored men then cut their chains off, put them on the white men and sunk them in the river, and landed in Indiana that same night.  

Stone with the aid of four of whites attempted to transport an immense lot of slaves South. Their cargo had other ideas. Outnumbered nearly eighty to one slave to trader and fifteen to one white male to black male, Mr. Stone and his associates were in an extremely precarious position from the start and ultimately suffered from their miscalculation. Although five of the slaves most active in the plot were eventually executed and the rest sold into the Deep South as punishment, the determination of these slaves is telling. Slaves’ desire for freedom and the lengths taken to acquire it have been written on extensively, but the position of the slave trader commands our attention.

The experience of traveling hundreds of miles with deadly cargo must have been harrowing and required unwavering attention. Ethan Allen Andrews’ observations of a coffle reveal these fears. Andrews spoke to the young male slave in chains he had seen and asked him about his condition:

He replied promptly, but respectfully, that he had done nothing. "Why then are you chained?" "I don't know," he replied, "— may be they thought I would run away." "But why should they suspect that you would wish to run away?" "I don't know, — maybe it was because they thought I should want to get back to my wife and children." "Have you then a wife and children?" "Yes, I have a wife and four children in H. county, and may be they thought I would not like to leave them!"… Well might the owner of such

a slave suspect, that he would long to escape and return once more to those who were
dearer to him than the whole world beside.\textsuperscript{72}

Constantly separating spouses from each other and parents from children developed antagonisms
between trader and slave and endangered him on his travels. While in Andrews’ experience the
trader is trying to prevent the loss of profit, chains served the dual purpose of complicating
escape and dissuading uprisings. Yet even with precautions taken, rebellion and general
resistance continued to be a problem. Consequently, traders shifted away from the insecure decks
of flatboats and rural isolation of coffles and began shipping by ocean-going vessel and rail as it
became available.

Slave traders’ use of ocean-going vessels to transport slaves from the exporting Upper
South states into the booming Deep South markets transformed the domestic slave trade in
several crucial ways. One of the most important changes in operating procedures that ocean-
going vessels produced was the almost complete separation of trader from slave in the shipment
process. Although previously larger traders could employ intermediaries to transport their slaves
by flatboat or coffle, ocean-going vessels allowed traders to extricate themselves from the
shipping process completely. Traders could ship slaves on ships and then meet them at the
market several weeks later without visibly participating in transportation. This change served
two purposes: it distanced the trader from some of the disreputable parts of the trade and allowed
the trader to purchase more slaves for sale.\textsuperscript{73}

Combined with the anonymity ocean-going vessels provided the trader, they also
expanded firms’ ability to generate profits. Large coffles and flatboat shipments could include
over a hundred slaves, but ocean-going ships could transport over two hundred slaves at a time.

\textsuperscript{72} Andrews, \textit{Slavery and the Domestic-Slave Trade}, 104.
\textsuperscript{73} Deyle, \textit{Carry Me Home}, 99.
Similar to shipping practices in the Atlantic slave trade, domestic traders packed immense numbers of slaves in the hull along with other products to be taken to market. In February 1835, the slave ship *Enterprise* travelling from Alexandria, Virginia was forced to divert its destination from Charleston and land in British Bermuda during a storm. Due to the British abolitionism of the slave trade in August 1834, all slaves aboard the *Enterprise* were immediately free upon arrival in Bermuda. This rare occurrence provided an intimate look at a slave ship, “there were children without a single connexion with them, who had no doubt been torn from the very arms of their parents to gratify man, who is ever inventing means to gain filthy lucre, there were women too, with infants at the breast; and altogether, they presented a scene most degrading and revolting to Christianity.” Traders packed slaves tightly onto ships because more bodies meant more profits. Some firms even expanded enough to own and operate their own ships. During his travels through the South, Ethan Allen Andrews’ recounted a conversation with a southerner who described this practice. He pointed out to Andrews, “Did you notice the brig that was hauling in as we came out from Alexandria, this morning? She was one of Armfield’s… He has a first rate brig building in Baltimore expressly for this trade.” With the ship’s expanded transport capacity, traders could now ship twice the amount of slaves to market and make twice the profits. Slave traders used ocean-going vessels to both reduce their visibility and expand their business. These developments worked together to distance traders from the stereotypical image of the trade and transformed him into a respectable businessman. By not physically accompanying one’s slaves, the trader was not paired in the public’s eye with the more inhumane parts of the trade.

Continuing the trend that ocean-going vessels started, the laying of new railroad lines

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throughout the South in the 1840s and 1850s galvanized the slave trade. The South’s railroad fever led to the most developed infrastructure found throughout the country; per capita Southerners had more access to railroads than Northerners. By 1860, over 60% of the Southern population from Virginia to Georgia lived within a day’s journey of a railroad depot.\(^{76}\) While total track laid was less than in the North, Southerners’ accessibility to the railroad opened up opportunities for all classes. This massive development of transportation infrastructure further linked the geographically insulated South and brought the distant slave markets of New Orleans and Richmond that much closer. Shipping slaves by train served to advance the trade in three main respects. First, it considerably cut travel time down: by 1857 traders could travel or ship slaves to any location in the South in under a week.\(^{77}\) Slaves could be moved between markets faster than ever before. Second, railroads cut shipping costs to levels most traders, whether big or small, could afford in two ways. Not only did slaves travel for half the cost on Southern railroads, but also the maintenance of slaves due to wear from travel was reduced.\(^{78}\) Travelling by land or water required the purchase of substantial provisions and lodging for both the trader and his slaves. Faster travel time meant less spent on these expenses. Finally, railroads provided the trader security previously unknown while transporting slaves.

Whether transporting by foot or water, traders’ always risked the loss of their slaves. Slaves could runaway or revolt in a coffle or ships could get lost at sea, regardless traders’ risked losing money. For the first time, railroads rose past this problem. Alfred Chandler describes this advance well, “The railroad’s fundamental advantage was not in the speed it carried passengers and mail but its ability to provide a shipper with dependable, precisely scheduled, all-weather

\(^{78}\) Deyle, *Carry Me Back*, 111.
transportation of goods.”79 Shipments of slaves were no longer lost, and as an added bonus, slaves were largely protected from bodily degradation during the trip. The harsh conditions and punishment associated with the coffle largely disappeared. Although slaves were packed tightly in rail cars like ships, the length of journey tended to be shorter and slaves were not completely exposed to the elements. Just as ships had allowed, trains also increased traders’ capacity to ship large amounts of slaves without accompanying them. A trader could buy slaves in Richmond and ship them to his partner in New Orleans guaranteed within the week. The physical separation from slave trading trains provided traders ultimately transformed the trader into a new class of small businessman who commanded the respect of his peers.

After a brief preface and pleading prayer, Peter Randolph began his slave autobiography with this disturbing description of a slave sale:

THE auctioneer is crying the slave to the highest bidder. ‘Gentlemen, here is a very fine boy for sale. He is worth twelve hundred dollars. His name is Emanuel. He belongs to Dea. William Harrison, who wants to sell him because his overseer don't like him. How much, gentlemen--how much for this boy? He's a fine, hearty nigger. Bid up, bid up, gentlemen; he must be sold.’ Some come up to look at him, pull open his mouth to examine his teeth, and see if they are good. Poor fellow! he is handled and examined like any piece of merchandize; but he must bear it. Neither tongue nor hand, nor any other member, is his own,--why should he attempt to use another's property?80

Randolph’s recollection of the sale is telling in its ability to reveal intricacies of the trade not readily viewable: the depiction of the slave during sale, buyer’s focus on slaves’ physical characteristics, and slaves’ helpless position in the process. On a deeper level, Randolph’s decision to begin with a slave sale reveals a more intense and important truth about slavery and the slave trade.

For Southern planters, there existed an inherent contradiction in the ideology and system of “paternalistic” slavery that evolved: enslavement was the implicit denial of humanity. John Blassingame writes in his work *The Slave Community*, “He (the slave) only had to feel the scars on his back, recall the anguished cry of his wife and child as they were torn away from him, or to look at the leisure time, delicious and abundant food, and dry house of his master to know, and to know concretely, what liberty meant.”

Slaves were fundamentally denied liberty and thus their humanity. Slave owners and traders alike treated slaves as nothing more than a source of income. If slaves simply existed for profit, how could slaves also be part of the Southern “family” paternalism suggests? While Southerner intellectuals constantly struggled with this contradiction, the slave sale depicted this ultimate contradiction from the reverse viewpoint, the slaves’. In the slave sale, slaves were simultaneously treated as people and products by buyers and sellers. Randolph exposes this inconsistency throughout the sale. The slave “is worth twelve hundred dollars,” and is a commodity to be exchanged for livestock. Meanwhile, “his name is Emanuel” and he is very much human. Both slaves and slave owners understood the importance of names and the humanity they implied. Yet the overarching theme of the sale was commodification, the slave was “examined like any piece of merchandize.” The auctioneer, or in most cases the trader, created a temporary dual identity for the slave during the process of the sale. The ability to successfully create a slave’s identity during sale was crucial as it often, along with preparation, largely determined profitability for a firm. During a slave sale, slaves and traders struggled to perform and create identities.

Prior to taking his or her position on the auction block, the slave participated in one of the most important parts of the whole sale, that of the preparation process. Slaves often entered

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81 Blassingame, *The Slave Community*, 106.
82 Johnson, *Soul by Soul*, 164.
markets throughout the South exhausted and grimy from their travels, especially if the slave had traveled by coffle. To present the best product possible, traders would clean up and prepare slaves before sale. The process of preparation varied from trader to trader and involved multiple steps. These steps could range from using grease to make slaves’ skins shine (shiny skin gave the appearance of excellent health regardless of actual health) to providing slaves with a new set of clothes. Slaves’ new clothes not only gave a clean, good first impression to potential buyers, but also served to mask “differences among the slaves; individual pasts and potential problems were covered over in uniform cloth. The sick and the well, those from far away and those from nearby, the eager, the unattached, and the angry – all looked alike in the trader’s window-dressed version of slavery.”

William Anderson, a black slave, described the preparation process in the Natchez, Mississippi slave market. He observed, “The slaves are made to shave and wash in greasy pot liquor, to make them look sleek and nice; their heads must be combed, and their best clothes put on.” These practices were mainly used to make slaves appear younger, as the younger the slave the longer the working time and the higher the profits from sale. However, traders provided slaves waiting for sale with new clothes for a slightly different reason. Although new clothes could make slaves appear younger, more importantly they helped disguise any unruly aspects of a slave that could be seen in his or her clothes or bare flesh. Missing toes, scars from whipping, and other physical defects could be hidden in clothing. If a slave appeared unruly or

84 Johnson, *Soul By Soul*, 119-121.
85 “‘When I was a boy,’ recalled Lunsford Lane, ‘the pot-liquor, in which the meat was boiled for the ‘great house’ together with some little corn-meal balls that had been thrown in just before the meat was done, was poured into a tray in the middle of the yard, and a clam shell or pewter spoon given to each of the children, who would fall upon the delicious fare as greedily as pigs.’ These nauseating command performances provided slaveholders with a set of images structured by their control of the food supply – images that identified whiteness with refinement and taste, over and against the elemental economy of flesh and feed. And they provided (ex)slaves with an image to mark the unnatural character of slavery: human beings treated like animals.” Johnson, *River of Dark Dreams*, 187. Translating Johnson’s analysis to the slave trader’s use of pot-liquor in the slave market only emphasizes the trader’s perpetual and shockingly psychological treatment of the slave purely as a commodity.
87 Slave children received new clothes to look more presentable to potential buyers, not to look younger.
uncooperative, buyers’ interest in the slave would plummet. Louis Hughes, a black, Virginian slave born in 1832, described this decline in interest. He wrote, “If it was suspected that a slave had been beaten a good deal he would be required to step into another room and undress. If the person desiring to buy found the slave badly scarred by the common usage of whipping, he would say at once: ‘Why! this slave is not worth much, he is all scared up. No, I don’t want him.’”89 Potential buyers had little interest in slaves they believed were stubborn or even rebellious. Many Southerners strongly believed traders commonly brought large amounts of these slaves south. This belief was held widely because white Southerners rightly could not understand why a slaveholder would sell a well-behaved slave. While selling slaves to pay off debts was common, there were not nearly enough upper South residents in debt to explain the enormous amount of slaves moving south. Some of these slaves must have been sold for other reasons, more nefarious reasons. And it appears as if Deep South critics may have been correct. Steven Deyle argues in *Carry Me Back* that between 1785 and 1865, Virginia, instead of executing or imprisoning, exported nearly 1,000 convicted slaves outside its borders.90 Thus, many Southerners believed traders’ practice of prepping slaves was a means to hide these inferiorities and sell unwanted slaves to unsuspecting customers further south. While not all traders were intending to use the preparation process dishonestly, the act of covering up defects and presenting the best product involved deception. Yet traders also used other processes to shape the identity of slaves and make them attractive for sale.

While traders could hide some physical defects in their preparation process, the buyer’s ability to physically inspect and handle the slaves helped to remove any misconceptions. Buyers could examine all parts of the body including the arms, teeth, and feet to discover any indication

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89 Hughes, *Thirty Years a Slave*, 8.
90 Deyle, *Carry Me Home*, 49-51.
of trickery and potentially spot a purchase-worthy slave.\textsuperscript{91} William Anderson, awaiting sale in the Natchez, Mississippi market, commented on the brutal inspection process. He lamented, “See a large, rough slaveholder, take a poor female slave into a room, make her strip, then feel of and examine her, as though she were a pig, or a hen, or merchandise. O, how can a poor slave husband or father stand and see his wife, daughters and sons thus treated.”\textsuperscript{92} Slave traders in response wove narratives about the slave’s life prior to sale to prove to buyers their value. Traders needed to demonstrate to buyers that the slave they were selling was not defective; in other words, the slave posed no risk to the buyer interested in him or her. After Randolph observed his fellow slave Emanuel being sold, he saw an even more colorful display of a trader’s ability to construct a slave’s identity. The trader was attempting to sell an older woman who had just seen her five children sold away from her. This required the slave trader to be particularly convincing in his salesmanship because a distressed mother could cause problems for a buyer. The trader announced, “Gentlemen, here is Jenny,--how much for her? She can do good work. Now, gentlemen, her master says he believes her to be a Christian, a very pious old woman; and she will keep every thing straight around her. You may depend on her. She will neither lie nor steal: what she says may be believed. Just let her pray, and she will keep right.”\textsuperscript{93} These comments reveal several aspects of the trader’s storytelling process. First, the trader focused on Jenny’s religion, piety, and age to convey her passivity to the buyer. Jenny supposedly was not one who exhibited signs of insolence or rebellion, and thus, a buyer should not hesitate in purchasing her. Next, the trader highlighted Jenny’s positive work and moral attributes to display her worthiness. Not only would she not be a threat for escape, but also she would, in fact, be a hardworking asset to a slave owner. By emphasizing her honesty and dependability, the trader

\textsuperscript{91} Johnson, \textit{Soul By Soul}, 138-139.
\textsuperscript{92} Anderson, \textit{Life and Narrative of William J. Anderson}, 14.
\textsuperscript{93} Randolph, \textit{Sketches of Slave Life}, 9.
was relying on Southern planters’ fears of slave rebellion. Jenny would not deceive a planter, and if any suspicions of rebellion arose on the plantation, she could be counted on to inform the master. In the trader’s own words, “she will keep every thing straight around her.” The trader’s comment meant both in regards to the household and the plantation as a whole. Finally, the trader finished the sale with a subtle suggestion of why Jenny was for sale at all. Jenny would be a reliable and hard working slave as long as she was allowed to pray. This subtle statement suggests Jenny’s past insubordination. It seems as if in the past Jenny’s previous owner restricted her ability to pray and she became insubordinate. Thus, slave traders used a variety of methods to disguise the true nature of the slaves they were selling and made it difficult for buyers to discern desirable from undesirable slaves. These deceptive practices ultimately combined with the negative stereotype generated from the slave coffle to produce an image of the slave trader as anything but virtuous and respectable. Yet the inescapable necessity of the slave trader in Southern society and the trader’s ability to make massive profits led many Southerners to engage in the slave trade.

In slave markets throughout the South, slave traders utilized both the preparation and storytelling process to maximize the slave’s potential and profits. While small slave traders could use personal information about slaves on the auction block to learn more about the slaves they were purchasing, larger buyers, usually plantation owners and slave trading firms, often did not have this luxury. Larger buyers frequently sent others to buy slaves to not only distance themselves from the actual process, but also to enable them to continue on with other business. Larger slave trading firms needed to know the overall quality of slaves at other markets to be able to respond to changes in specific markets. As a result, a system evolved in which slaves were grouped into easily recognizable categories so buyers could recognize and make wide-
ranging business decisions. These categories slightly varied from market to market and firm-to-firm, but were mainly numerically based classifications starting with No. 1 males and females.  

Joseph Meeks, a trader operating in Tennessee in the 1830s, described a male in this top category as “near 6 feet high full round fair worth but little beard and long arms and good health…”. While Meeks description of a “number one” slave suggests a strong, hard working male field hand, not all “number one” slaves were of this peak physical condition or profession. “Number one” slaves could be of all ages, sexes, and occupations. Regardless of the differences in similarly classified slaves, traders utilized these categories to communicate to partners and firms throughout the region. The instantaneous communication the telegraph provided combined with these categories allowed traders to know the conditions of slave markets throughout the South and reply to demand. Large firms or small trading partnerships could relay specific market conditions to their employees or partners at other markets and ship slaves accordingly.

Speculation, the purchase of a slave with sole intent to resell, was streamlined through this process and caused the trade to explode. As early as 1803, a slave worth $600 in South Carolina would be worth $400 in Virginia, a profit enticing to sellers in Virginia and buyers in South Carolina. Slave traders could reap immense profits in relatively short amounts of time, and as a result, many respectable Southerners turned to the trade as their main profession or simply to augment other business practices. On 13, 1854, a New York merchant published an article in the *Frederick Douglass Paper* describing one of these more offensive men. He wrote disgustedly:

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96 Deyle, *Carry Me Back*, 112.
98 Jack Trammell, *The Richmond Slave Trade: The Economic Backbone of the Old Dominion* (Charleston: History, 2012), 80. Trammell here is citing the statistical data compiled by Robert Fogel and Stanley Engerman in their 1974 book *Time on the Cross*, which argued the economic viability of slavery regardless of its harmful effects. Fogel and Engerman’s work has since been confirmed by a multitude of authors including Eugene Genovese and others.
Again, this vile clergyman administers a moral chloroform to the consciousness of his parishioners, and thus guises them in dealing and selling to the slave trader. What a wretch, and how steeped in villainy must be such a clergyman, who sees daily before his eyes, and in the public streets hearts thus crushed by these infernal monsters, and to only himself moved by the sight but probably stops and tells the slave trader if he will call at the parsonage, he will give him a bargain in a good mother, with or without three children - one at the breast, and the other clinging to her side, two and four years old, and they all screaming while the slave trader enters to view the mother - feel of her limbs and teeth, over the bargain what the holy divine, while they both assist in chaining her to prevent her self destruction.

Even a Southern clergyman, the heart and soul of Southern morality, could be enticed into slave trading by the easy and numerous profits available. These profits were not solely confined to the large slave trading firms anymore, but became accessible to smaller firms now taking advantage of technological innovations that the market revolution provided. Yet for all the discussion of profits in the slave trade, both the scale of the trade and direction slaves and profits moved remains unclear.

The slave trade and traders permeated Southern society and were a visible fixture throughout the South. By the eve of the Civil War, the slave trade was an enormous part of the Southern economy. Between 1820 and 1860, the slave trade generated average sales of $10.8 million a year and peaked above $15 million in the waning years of the antebellum South. Without the trade the Southern economy would have been a shell of itself. The harsh conditions of sugar and cotton plantations in the Deep South and Old Southwest resulted in an unsustainable

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99 The New York merchant writing in January of 1854 in the Frederick Douglass Paper added in his comments about the clergyman’s position in the Church: “Servants obey your maters!” but not own word against masters buying and selling, and separating husbands, wives and children and robbing them, not only of all their earnings, but of each other, and all their posterity. What name shall be given to such a clergyman who avails of his sacred position, to sustain from the pulpit such villainy as this? Drag him before the gaze of the whole civilized world, and order him to hold up his head and meet his charge! Remind him in tone that he will rent his heart, if hear he has, that the is not only co-equal in villainy with the slave dealer, but a thousand times more to be despised, as he sustains the dearer in public opinion, who openly pursues his infernal trade.” While not directly pursuing the trade, the merchant argues that the clergyman is both deforming moral high ground and perpetuating the trade by providing the trader with slaves. These actions, in fact, make him more despised than the trader because the clergyman helps the trader continue his abominable business.

100 Deyle, Carry Me Back, 124.
slave population. Large amount of fresh slave reserves were needed for these plantations to continue running and the slave trade provided them. For example, at the end of December 1859, there were over 3,000 slaves for sale in the Mobile, Alabama market.\textsuperscript{101} The large numbers of slaves found in the Deep South markets came from all over the South, but the majority traveled south from the slave exporting states of the upper South. As the agricultural productivity of the upper South waned beginning in the 1820s, demand for slave traders’ services inversely increased. In the upper South states of Maryland and especially Virginia, resistance to slavery and, in turn, the slave trade had been present since the American Revolution.\textsuperscript{102} As it became less and less a part of the states’ economies, support continued to lessen and many prominent citizens looked for ways to decrease the large racial imbalance present in these states.\textsuperscript{103} After continually failing to abolish slavery, these states instead looked to send slaves further south to the growing cotton fields of the Old Southwest, mainly Mississippi, Alabama, and Louisiana.\textsuperscript{104} Prior to 1831, the pace of this migration proceeded gradually but soon picked up considerably. Nat Turner’s slave rebellion in the summer of 1831 caused widespread fear of further rebellion, and as a result, the pace of slave exportation from the upper South to states further south accelerated considerably.\textsuperscript{105} The breakneck pace of slave movement from the upper South into the Deep South continued largely unabated other than a slight downturn during the Panic of 1837. Between 1820 and 1860, over 875,000 slaves were sent from the upper South states south to the cotton plantations of the Deep South and American Southwest.

\textsuperscript{102} Taylor, \textit{The Internal Enemy}, 37-40.
\textsuperscript{103} “In 1790, 45 percent of all southern slaves lived in Virginia. By 1820 this figure dropped to 28 percent, and by 1860 it had sunk to 12 percent... While Virginia continued to have the largest total number of slaves, between 1820, when its slave population was more than 425,000, and 1860, it had increased by only 66,000, or 15 percent. In contrast, the slave population of the states in the Deep South soared. Between the same years, the slave population of Alabama grew by more than 393,000.” Deyle, \textit{Carry Me Back}, 42-43.
\textsuperscript{105} Gudmestad, \textit{A Troublesome Commerce}, 173.
While the slave trade was regional in nature linking the cotton producing states of the lower South with the slave exporting states of the upper South, two main markets dominated the trade: the markets of Richmond and New Orleans. Each market was geared slightly differently. Richmond was more focused on the sale of slaves to traders moving south, while New Orleans specialized in providing slaves to the expanding cotton plantations of the Old Southwest. In essence, Richmond was an exporter and New Orleans was an importer. Although New Orleans undoubtedly was the slave-trading center of the Deep South and its sales far exceeded that of any other market, Virginia’s unique political and economic clout in the South placed it slightly above New Orleans in sustaining the ideological basis of slavery and the slave trade. Virginia was by far the largest slave exporting state and any political decision regarding slavery or the slave trade “Old Dominion” made affected the entire South tremendously. Without Virginian slaves, cotton plantations would eventually shutdown due to an unavailable, unwilling labor force. These plantations would struggle to maintain economic profitability and the entire institution of slavery could potentially falter. Thus, the Virginia slave trade and traders played an integral part in sustaining the Southern economy and the institution as of slavery as a whole. These Virginia slave traders focused their business almost entirely around Richmond’s “Wall Street” located between 14th and 18th streets in present-day Richmond, which over seventy slave dealers and auction houses were located along.

Before the trade’s abolition post-Civil War, historians have estimated that nearly 500,000 slaves were sold between 1820-1860 on the streets and auction houses of Richmond. Wiliam Anderson, a slave handcuffed and chained in the middle of night for sale, experienced the

106 Trammell, The Richmond Slave Trade, 87-88
108 Trammell, The Richmond Slave Trade, 13, 46.
immense scale of Richmond’s slave trade. He wrote, “We arrived early next day in the city of
Richmond, the capital of the State. The slave-market space was very much crowded; so he sold
me privately, for three hundred and seventy-five dollars. A Southern trader bought me…he put
me in jail, there to remain until he made up his drove of slaves…In a few days he made up his
drove, to the number of some sixty-five or seventy. Myself and several men, say twenty or more,
were chained together, two and two, with a chain between.” Anderson’s statements are
interesting because they suggest there were two distinct spheres of sale in the Richmond slave
markets. One is the public, visible sphere that is “very much crowded.” This is the image of the
slave market that existed in antebellum popular culture: that of the auctioneer loudly proclaiming
a slave’s virtues on the auction block. Yet there also existed another sphere, a private sphere that
Anderson experienced. This sphere allowed the slave trader to acquire large amounts of slaves,
nearly seventy in this case, out of the public eye. By doing this, traders could physically separate
themselves from the trade.

The trader who bought Anderson also physically separated himself from the trade in another way. Anderson was stored “in jail, there to remain until he (the trader) made his drove of
slaves.” Within Richmond’s slave district, there existed numerous “jails” that slave traders used
to store their slaves before sale or hiring. These jails were not confined to Richmond solely, but
were present in many Southern cities. The larger, residential traders in Southern slave markets
set up slave jails for itinerant traders to store or punish their slaves before moving on to another
city. The most infamous in Richmond, Lumpkin’s slave jail, was nearly half an acre in size
and surrounded by a tall, spiked fence. These jails varied in size and composition, but all

110 Deyle, Carry Me Home, 114-116.
111 Trammell, The Richmond Slave Trade, 50-52.
allowed the trader to physically separate himself from the slaves he was trading. When he had accumulated enough slaves for his liking, the trader could then ship the slaves south by rail and avoid placing himself in the public eye. The trader would wait for his purchased slaves to accumulate and then quietly move his lot to ships either early in the morning or in the dead of night to reduce visibility.\textsuperscript{112} For Virginian traders more so than other Southern traders, the ability to take oneself out of the public eye was valuable. Virginia debate over the future of slavery had existed since the American Revolution and anything but consensus existed within the state.\textsuperscript{113} The lack of consensus found in Virginia as opposed to many other Southern states, naturally brought the trade and trader to the forefront. Although the slave trade was accepted as a necessity, Virginians were divided upon the acceptance of the trader in Southern society. He could be praised and ostracized within the same community.\textsuperscript{114} Where one stood within the community was extremely complex and dependent on innumerable contingencies. While it was largely self-constructed in the sense that it depended on how one viewed and carried himself, it was at the same time entirely community-based.\textsuperscript{115} To appear respectable, one needed to choose the “right” option in social situations and personal interactions with others. Yet, in the convoluted and constantly shifting social landscape of the South, this could be extremely difficult. Bertram Wyatt-Brown adroitly described this problem:

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{112} Deyle, \textit{Carry Me Home}, 227-228.
\item \textsuperscript{113} “The whole commerce between master and slave is a perpetual exercise of the most boisterous passions, the most unremitting despotism on the one part, and degrading submissions on the other. Our children see this, and learn to imitate it; for man is an imitative animal. This quality is the germ of all education in him. From his cradle to his grave he is learning to do what he sees others do…. And can the liberties of a nation be thought secure when we have removed their only firm basis, a conviction in the minds of the people that these liberties are of the gift of God? That they are not to be violated but with his wrath? Indeed I tremble for my country when reflect that God is just: that his justice cannot sleep for ever: that considering numbers, nature and natural means only, a revolution of the wheel of fortune, an exchange of situation, is among possible events: that it may become probable by supernatural interference! The Almighty has no attribute which can take side with us in such a contest.” Thomas Jefferson, \textit{Notes on the State of Virginia} (New York: Library of America, Literary Classics of the United States, 1984, 1781-1782), 288-289.
\item \textsuperscript{114} Gudmestad, \textit{A Troublesome Commerce}, 67.
\item \textsuperscript{115} Wyatt-Brown, \textit{Honor and Violence in the Old South}, 61-62.
\end{itemize}
The strategies and the priorities were more like trails across a field. In the South the “rule” was, in fact, simply the unplanned, customary path that in most instances enabled the antebellum sojourner to avoid rough terrain and dangerous cliffs in the course of moving over the social landscape…Misjudgments were frequent, and community evaluations were sometimes ambiguous, perhaps wrongheaded. One had to improvise.  

For the slave trader, the idea of improvisation was at the heart of his conception of honor. By entering the profession, one immediately became a debated figure in Southern society and in Virginia this division was clearly highlighted even more. Thus, Virginian traders improvised and forged their own path to honor. Because honor was interpreted differently in each situation, these paths to honor varied considerably. Some traders adeptly navigated the treacherous path and gained acclaim like Francis Everod Rives who served in the Virginia House of Delegates, Virginia Senate, and U.S. House of Representatives. And others did not and were cast into historical anonymity. While the respectable Virginian trader was often times a partner in a large firm or someone who used trading to supplement other business ventures, a special class of trader arose in the late antebellum years of Virginia who was neither. This new trader bridged the gap between the two stereotypes of a Southern trader: the large firm and the small, itinerant trader. Arriving as slave demand skyrocketed with the cotton boom of the Old Southwest, the new trader utilized improved technology and communication to physically separate himself from the trade and gain social respectability. Although sectional tensions and challenges to slavery continued to rise in the 1850s, the new Virginian trader continued to speculate with the potential for immense profits always on the horizon.

116 Wyatt-Brown, *Honor and Violence in the Old South*, 62.
Chapter Two

The Gentlemen of Richmond’s “Wall Street”

“Now this high born, wholesale soul-seller doubtless despises the retail ‘soul-drivers’ who give him their custom, and so does the wholesale grocer, the drizzling tapster who sneaks up to his counter for a keg of whiskey to dole out under a shanty in two cent glasses; and both for the same reason.”

–Theodore D. Weld, 1839
In mid-January 1859, an epidemic swept through the Richmond, Virginia slave market. Slaves were dying daily and the sickness spread quickly. Slave trader Philip Thomas wrote to his partner, William A.J. Finney, on the 24th, “It is very sickly here among negroes. One or two dies every day.” Similarly, less than a week later Thomas followed with an even more ominous depiction of the situation, “I have had all my brains at work now for a week thinking whether to buy any more or not. You know we have money enough to buy a good lot but I tell you that you cannot conceive the amount of sickness here unless you were present…They (slaves) die daily and I suppose there are at least 60 or 100 sick at this time. Some has actually died on the cars going south. Five or six has died out of Lumpkin’s jail, and the worst of it is they die in some 24 hours of being taken…and I understand it is just as bad south.”

For Thomas and all slave traders, widespread illness among slaves was a serious fear: a sick slave, let alone a dead slave, was not profitable. For a trader with a large lot of slaves, an epidemic could decimate his profits and future livelihood. This fear was especially prominent in the urban cities of the South. In Southern cities, slaves were often stored in slave jails prior to sale or shipment further south for sale. The close confines and unsanitary conditions of these jails made susceptibility to disease very high and the possibility of a fast spreading disease likely. William Grimes, a Virginian born slave, characterized his stay in a Savannah prison as an intensely revolting experience that was further tainted by disease-prone conditions. Although he was confined alone, his nauseating depiction of the lice-infested cell sufficiently depicts the terrible experience of slave confinement.

To counteract the potential for profit loss, slave traders and owners often insured

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120 Deyle, *Carry Me Home*, 114-116.
121 “After that I was compelled to lie there in my solitary cell for the space of three weeks, before any person appeared to buy me. The room in which I was placed, was so foul and full of vermin, it was almost insupportable. The lice were so thick and large, that I was obliged to spread a blanket (which I had procured myself) on the floor, and as they crawled up on it, take a junk or porter bottle which I found in the jail, and rolled it over the blanket.
their slaves as Thomas did in Richmond. He guaranteed Finney, “One of our children is very sick this morning. I have sent for the Doctor, but all the grown ones I have had insured as soon as I bought them.” Finney feared a loss of profit and responded in kind. As Sharon Ann Murphy argues in *Investing in Life: Insurance in Antebellum America*, “Southern Capitalists” in the upper South insured slaves that were hired out for urban, industrial jobs, insured slaves as a vehicle of emancipation, and most importantly insured slaves to protect capital investments. While it is unclear who insured the two men’s slaves, numerous large upper South insurance companies specialized in slave insurance in the waning years of the antebellum South. Murphy further argues that the “slaveholders who embraced insurance were probably the same people at the core of Jonathan Daniel Wells’s *The Origins of the Southern Middle Class* – people who envisioned a modern, industrialized, *slaveholding* South to compete with the mills, mines, and factories of the North.” Similarly, Peter S. Carmichael argues in *The Last Generation: Young Virginians in Peace, War, and Reunion*, these men “craved bourgeois respectability, hungered for professional success, followed personal ambition, and desired the material trappings of a middle-class lifestyle—all of which they believed could only come from a diversified state economy rather

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123 Sharon Ann Murphy, *Investing in Life: Insurance in Antebellum America* (The John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore: 2010), 184-206; “It is nearly impossible to determine the full extent to which slaveholders sought to insure their slaves, but the extant evidence indicates that Baltimore Life (1830-67), North Carolina Mutual Life (1849-64), Mutual Benefit Life and Fire of Louisiana (1849-53), Greensboro Mutual Life (1853-65), and Virginia Life of Richmond (1860-63) all underwrote significant number of slave risks.” Murphy, *Investing in Life*, 195.
124 Murphy, *Investing in Life*, 186.
than from slavery alone.”125 These men were a new breed of Southerner attempting to transform their society as the rest of the country transformed independently. In the case of Thomas and Finney’s partnership, Well’s and Carmichael’s arguments seem to hold true.

Finney and Thomas’ use of slave insurance combined with the fears expressed in their discussions depicts a new set of concerns unique in time, place, and intent. The two men’s concerns not only arose from the potential for profit loss, but also arose from a need to maintain their intricately linked professional and social reputation.126 A person’s professional and social reputation depended on one’s physical location (upper South versus lower South versus Deep South), location in time (lifespan between the American Revolution and Civil War), and occupational location (one’s occupation and reputation of occupation). These characteristics made maintaining one’s reputation in the antebellum South a difficult task. As Bertram Wyatt-Brown argues, one needed “to avoid rough terrain and dangerous cliffs in the course of moving over the social landscape.”127 For Thomas, the path to Southern dishonor never seemed as close. Richmond’s deteriorating situation left him unsure what to do. He ended his letter with a defining statement: “I never was at as much loss what to do in my life.” Although Thomas and Finney had profits to purchase slaves, the spreading sickness made this course of action potentially unsound. The partners could gamble on more slaves and hope they remained healthy. If this occurred, they could sell the slaves further south for a profit. Yet if the gamble failed and the purchased slaves became sick, Finney and Thomas would have several problems. Regardless of insurance, death would mean a loss of profits because slave insurance failed to cover the

126 Byrne, Becoming Bourgeois, 15.
127 Wyatt-Brown, Honor and Violence in the Old South, 62.
entire purchase cost of a slave. As well, purchase and resale of a sick slave could mean a loss of honor. Even the constant resale of below average slaves could reduce one’s standing in the community. For the slave trader, like the Southern merchant, selling one’s merchandize was critical to one’s social identity. If a person’s merchandize was inferior, their reputation fell accordingly. And it is clear that maintaining quality slaves and thus a good reputation was crucial to the pair. In November of the same year, Thomas displayed the pair’s desire to only sell higher quality slaves in a letter to Finney:

You say in your letter go to all the sales you can, that I have done and will give you the result. First was Mrs. Hamilton’s. Woman and child very common brought $1,602. Another with fallen womb $1,050. Man 55 years old yellow and pale colour $900…a girl size of Gilmer’s girl but rough faced $300. Others in proportion and I have not bought a single one.

Even though Finney encouraged Thomas to purchase as many slaves as he could, the quality was not worth it. As a result of the pair’s careful consideration of quality, Thomas was especially troubled by the January epidemic: if the whole slave trade was depressed, what future lay in the men’s profession? Thomas ultimately failed to answer this question as he finished with a surprising declaration, “It is my opinion the sooner we get out of it (the slave trade) the better.” Although the partnership’s continuation shows that Finney chose to ignore his partner’s suggestions, the statement remains significant. Thomas felt the pair could no longer maintain either the quality of slaves they sold or their reputation tied to it. Even if the profits were present, a loss of honor was obviously not worth it.

Yet for the slave trader, quality of product was not the only determinant of respectability. A slave trader’s ability to physically separate himself from the trade also played a large part in

128 Murphy, Investing in Life, 201-202.
129 Byrne, Becoming Bourgeois, 41-42.
130 Thomas to Finney, William A.J. Finney Papers, 1849-1876, November 26, 1859.
his formation and attainment of honor. The negative stereotype of the Southern slave trader was intimately linked with a physical closeness to the slaves one sold (i.e. the image of the slave coffle and the auctioneer on the slave block), and as a result, distance resulted in disassociation. If one could sell slaves without publicly displaying the destruction of paternalism inherent in slave trading, a trader could maintain the appearance of honor and garner respectability. In the antebellum South, truth was less important than appearance and community-opinion was everything. If one could successfully construct a public mask of respectability, however transparent it may be, one would in all regards achieve respectability.\textsuperscript{132} Thus, Finney and Thomas’ concern over their reputation was unsurprising and led them to attempt to bring honor to all aspects of their trade. The two utilized the improved transportation and communication infrastructures arising out of the Southern market revolution to physically distance themselves from the trade, reap large profits, and attempt to gain Southern respectability in the late 1850s.

Operating in Pittsylvania County, Virginia in the late 1850s, Finney and Thomas were historically positioned at the most profitable time and place to engage in the United States domestic slave trade. In relation to time, more slaves were traded in the South in the 1850s than any other decade. The expansion of cotton production southwest to Mississippi, Alabama, Louisiana, and parts of Texas during this period drew large amounts of slaves south, increased slave prices, and rapidly expanded the Southern economy.\textsuperscript{133} Located in the upper South during this period, Finney and Thomas were uniquely situated to respond to the increasing demand. The upper South states were exporting states, as their net exports exceeded imports, and planters from


all states visited the upper South to purchase slaves for their plantations. Finney and Thomas as a result were in a profitable region to sell slaves, but even more importantly, their home base of Pittsylvania County provided an almost unparalleled avenue to wealth and respectability. Located in the Piedmont region of Virginia, Pittsylvania County was ideally suited for tobacco growing; soil depletion from tobacco growth that had affected the Tidewater had not yet ruined the Piedmont. Thus, slavery flourished in the county as slaves were used both in tobacco’s production and growth. In 1840, the county ranked first in Virginia in tobacco production and had numerous tobacco factories operating with slave labor. As well, Danville, the largest town in antebellum Pittsylvania County, owed its growth and expanded populace to tobacco farming and production. With slavery entrenched in the tobacco producing county, Finney and Thomas operated in a county with pervasive slavery and a state that exported enormous amounts of slaves. In the 1850s, an estimated 200,000 slaves were sold from the exporting states further south. Slave demand was not the county’s only advantage though. It, along with Virginia as a whole, had a well-developed transportation infrastructure as well. In the 1840s and 1850s, Pittsylvania County transportation improved considerably and opened up the county to increased trade. The Franklin Turnpike built in 1842 and the Danville and Richmond Railroad built in 1856 connected the county’s markets to the western and eastern part of the states respectively. Slaves, like the textiles and tobacco Pittsylvania was known for, could now move out of the county and into the larger market with ease. Finney and Thomas capitalized on this increased

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134 Tadman, *Speculators and Slaves*, 57-70.
140 Aaron, *Pittsylvania County, Virginia*, 104.
connectivity to efficiently move slaves in and out of the county and amass substantial profits from their sales. Ultimately, their ability to acquire honor through paternalistic business practices and physically separate themselves from the trade differentiated the two men from previous traders of the same size.

In the profession of slave trading, physical separation of trader from slave provided a path towards respectability. Yet complete separation was an unachievable ideal; a slave trader publicly associated himself with his slaves at some point. To protect one’s reputation while publicly dealing in slaves, traders needed to maintain a façade of paternalism. The paternalism they professed though was, in fact, contradictory. Contradictory in that treating a slave as a commodity inherently denied his or her humanity; yet, treating a slave for sale in a humane manner recognized some form of humanity. The slave may be traded like an animal, but the trader needed to provide slaves with some physical comfort. A trader could recognize the slave’s humanity by providing adequate sustenance to his slaves, preparing slaves well for market, and keeping punishment to a minimum. How a trader treated his slaves reflected how he treated himself; self-discipline and self-control were staples of respectability. Inherent in the two men’s aspirations for a more honorable future is Bertram Wyatt Brown’s conception of honor. Wyatt-Brown argues that the public display of honor separated the low-class Southerner from the genteel Southerner, and more importantly, it separated the Southerner from his socially inferior Northern relation. Conceptions of honor were instrumental in a person’s life:

It (honor) established signposts of appropriate conduct. It staved off the danger of self-love and vainglory and in the circles of the genteel, it elevated moderation and learnedness to virtues of self-disciplined community service. Since honor gave meaning to lives, it existed not as a myth but as a vital code.

141 Wyatt-Brown, *Honor and Violence in the Old South*, 40-41.
142 Wyatt-Brown, *Honor and Violence in the Old South*, 62.
Honor was thus an ideal to live up to that varied enormously from person to person due to the effects of both perceptions of self-worth and public opinion.

Yet in the construction of a trader’s public reputation, the appropriate treatment of slaves was a bare minimum: a complicated and ever-changing bare minimum. The proper treatment of slaves, as well as white Southerners, was a complex process in the South. Every interaction had the possibility to escalate to violent proportions and much depended on the social standing of the actors involved. In the slave trader/slave relationship, the giving and withholding of gifts colored the “proper” interaction between trader and slave. Since slaves owned nothing under chattel slavery, slave owners considered everything they gave slaves a gift including all forms of sustenance.143 In the letters between Finney and Thomas, the presence of gift giving can be seen in their slave trading partnership. While Finney and Thomas’s partnership’s gift giving towards their chattel merchandize exhibited varying degrees of paternalism, their relationships with fellow traders, buyers, and businessmen was colored by different forms of Southern gift giving. These interactions differed in form, yet were deeply interconnected. A trader’s treatment of his slaves could largely affect his interactions with peers; his public actions toward slaves and his slaves’ physical health affected how others perceived him. Performed correctly, these actions could raise the price of one’s slaves, represent one’s generosity, and be the difference between a failing and profitable business.144 While talking about the master/slave relationship more generally, Alan Greenberg’s observations about the capitalistic influences of proper slave treatment are applicable to the trader as well. He writes, “Clearly, market and other motives

143 Greenberg, *Honor and Slavery*, 53-66. “One of the central characteristics of the condition of enslavement, as seen through the eyes of the masters, involved the inability to give gifts. Similarly, since a slave could make no contractual or other demands on a master, everything he or she received came as a gift... All transactions involved the giving of gifts; food, clothing, and shelter were supplied as gifts by the master.” Greenberg, *Honor and Slavery*, 65.

frequently played a role in master’s decision to supply the necessities of life to slaves. Masters would make no money if slaves died of malnutrition or exposure. The neighbors might gossip about a master who dressed his slaves in tattered rags. The slaves would not work if they were not properly supplied.” Slave traders, like slave owners, were encouraged to treat their slaves humanely by both white Southerners and slaves. To be clear though, humane treatment often ranged widely in form and was often not very humane. The respect and profitability of one’s slaves still dominated the slave trader’s mentality. Yet a healthy slave was a more profitable slave and thus paternalism was encouraged as a means to further one’s wealth. If one strayed too far from acceptable treatment, criticism often occurred. White Southerners could damage a trader’s reputation by publicizing his inhumanity and thus influence others to curtail transactions with the trader. Likewise, slaves could also damage a trader’s reputation if mistreated. In the market, slaves could affect their sale and their trader’s profitability by answering personal questions falsely and appearing ill. These actions could prevent sale further south and the harsher treatment most likely waiting. Hoping to avoid damaging their reputations, societal pressure influenced slave traders to treat slaves appropriately in public. This concept enacted toward people considered chattel property is confusing because their place in society demanded no respect, but when considering the joint aspirations of traders for both honor and profits it becomes clearer. The proper treatment of slaves for honor’s sake arose from a desire to represent one’s self-respectability to others. A trader needed to display a degree of consideration for the well being of his slaves by maintaining their physical appearance, health, and family ties to the extent possible. The care a trader showed toward his slaves represented his consideration for all classes; the lowly slave could act honorably just like the aristocratic planter. As James Henry

145 Greenberg, Honor and Slavery, 65.
146 Johnson, Soul by Soul, 178-180.
Hammond, a South Carolina College student, reflected in 1828, “Honor is that principle of nature which teaches us to respect ourselves, in order that we may gain the respect of others. No man desires the respect of one class of Society exclusively and therefore the law of honor will influence our conduct towards persons of every quality.” Thus traders had incentives to treating their slaves with a degree of respect; they could generate their own self-worth while simultaneously representing it to others. Yet slave traders’ self-worth was not only determined by how they treated the slaves they purchased, but also which slaves they chose to buy and resell. Higher quality slaves usually meant higher profits, but it also said something about the trader as well.

Finney and Thomas’ letters to each other in the late 1850s and early 1860s display a high degree of awareness of the importance of the quality of one’s slaves in determining both a trader’s profitability and the opinion of others towards him. In early 1859, Thomas travelled to Richmond, Virginia, the primary slave market of the upper South, to acquire more slaves in preparation for the height of the trading season in early spring. Thomas wrote to Finney that “he can buy good second rate men 30 years at $1000 to 1100 and some families at fair prices but No 1 men are worth $1500, no 1 women $1300 and girls size of Margaret $1025,” and if Finney sent more money, they “(could) buy another small lot” of quality slaves. Thomas’ reaction to the quality of slaves available in Richmond and his potential actions are telling in regards to the conception of honor and profitability. On the first hand, Thomas is primarily focused on quality in order to gain the most profit out of the trade; higher quality slaves were worth higher prices. Yet Thomas was also concerned with the honor of himself and his firm. He could buy lower quality slaves and families and most likely make money off of them, but the sacrifice may not

148 Wyatt-Brown, *Honor and Violence in the Old South*, 53.
have been worth it. Lower quality slaves reflected poorly on the traders selling them, and thus, Thomas was not interested. He wanted his buyers to have the best product available, which would shed positive light on his business practices.

Thomas and Finney were not only concerned with the quality of slaves they bought, but also were focused on purchasing and treating their slaves in the “proper” way. Like the pair’s preoccupation with quality, how they bought and treated slaves was an important determinant of honor. All courses of action in the South were associated with a certain degree of respectability. If one course was blocked, or in the case of slave trading publicly criticized, the Southern gentleman was required to find the most honorable alternative. In the profession of slave trading, purchasing slaves for resale was a necessity. Yet how one navigated this process was crucial. Much of the Northern and Southern criticism arising over the slave trade was in regards to the constant separation of slave families and the selling of sick slaves further south. While masters’ use of separating families as a means of social control was less offensive, traders’ profit-driven separation of families was denounced. Masters were simply maintaining status quo: in their minds, the slave had violated his or her reciprocal duty of paternalism and sale was an appropriate response. Trader’s breaking of families represented the opposite. A trader who separated husband from wife and parent from child was destroying the ideal of paternalism. He was denying the slave’s humanity by separating family members solely for profits. Thus Finney and Thomas commonly preserved family ties among the slaves they bought. Nonetheless, profits were still the focus of the men’s practices. Throughout the two men’s communication, Thomas repeatedly emphasizes buying pregnant women and women with children. In early January 1859,

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150 If for some reason the road was blocked, less desirable detours could be taken. To stray too far from the familiar way, however, was to confuse the order of nature. The paths were not always well marked… One had to improvise.” Wyatt-Brown, Honor and Violence in the Old South, 62.
Thomas detailed his recent purchases to Finney stating, “I have only bought two women and child a piece and both in the family way again. I am buying slow and I think I have nailed Christ to the cross on them.”\textsuperscript{152} These comments, and similar ones in other letters, represent a concern with both profits and reputation. A woman “in the family way,” a pregnant woman, would bring more profits because of the future profits to be reaped off her offspring. Yet Thomas also notes that the two men kept the women with the children they already had as well. Similarly, Thomas wrote of selling families together in a letter to Finney on New Years Eve of 1859 from the Mobile, Alabama market. He wrote, “I sold today Cormelia and two children to the same man for $3,500.”\textsuperscript{153} Instead of potentially splitting up the three family members and getting higher profits, Thomas chose to keep the family together and portray paternalistic practices in the marketplace. Thomas’ letters indicate he was not actively separating child from parent in his purchases. The men sought profits and the preservation of honor simultaneously.

In the preservation of this honor, the men also focused on the health of their slaves. One main Southern criticism of the trade was that traders frequently sold sick slaves south. This criticism was even harsher than charges of constantly separating families. Selling a sick slave in the South without notifying the purchaser was considered extremely dishonorable. It represented an extreme form of dishonesty and traders were commonly sued in court over the issue. Although some traders did sell sick slaves, Thomas and Finney appeared aware and concerned with their slaves’ health. The two attempted to treat their slaves well in sickness and in health, instead of selling them away in sickness. On February 1\textsuperscript{st}, 1859, Thomas wrote Finney from the Richmond market detailing his recent purchases and giving him an update on their slaves. Thomas informed Finney that one of the women he had bought had fallen sick. In response, he

had called a doctor, but things could get worse. He states, “she is a very sick negro and I am of
the opinion she is threatened with pneumonia and if so the chances are against her.”

Comments like these are frequently present in Thomas and Finney’s communications. Rather
than seeking quick profit through sale, the men attempted to care for the slaves they bought and
welcomed the unknown. They could risk a loss of honor if they sold sick slaves, so instead they
tried to keep the slaves they bought healthy. While the men may have lost some profits from
these practices, they reflected positively in the larger community.

Yet even with Thomas’ emphasis on the humanity of his purchases, his colorful profit-
driven descriptions are more revealing of the men’s pursuit of honor. Thomas boasted that he
thought he had “nailed Christ to the cross on them.” In other words, he believed his slow buying
practices were getting the best of those selling to him. Leaving aside the religious implications,
Thomas’ bold statement indicates a desire to dominate the financial transaction and gain honor.
In the process of a slave sale, each side of the transaction needed to demonstrate his honor and
respectability. The buyer needed to be able discern quality slaves and appropriate purchasing
prices; the seller needed to present the best product available and make large profits. In this
complicated process, both buyer and seller were trying to best the other man. Kenneth S.
Greenberg argues this process occurred during honor related duels of the Antebellum South, but
its relation to slave sales is applicable as well. The sale was an active conversation “between two
men in which each tried to remain a master and to avoid becoming a slave…Moreover, just as it
was not possible to be a partial slave, it was not possible to be slightly insulted. Honor and
dishonor, like mastery and slavery, were total conditions. A man was usually in one state or the

154 Thomas to Finney, William A.J. Finney Papers, 1849-1876, February 1, 1859.
155 Johnson, Soul by Soul, 162-176.
other and only spent a brief moment in transition.”\textsuperscript{156} By telling Finney that he had crucified the sellers, Thomas was arguing that he had reinforced his and, in turn, the firm’s honor. Since “all insults were equal in the sense that they implied that someone had been reduced to slavish condition,” Thomas’ insult related his superiority.\textsuperscript{157} Twice Thomas had successfully exhibited the firm’s honor in the public sphere. He depicted the firm’s paternalistic practices in purchasing families, while simultaneously asserting his dominance over his peers though a display of business acumen.

Accordingly, a quick glimpse at an itinerant trader’s business practices serve to contrast and emphasize Finney and Thomas’ firm. Hopkins Nowlin, a small scale trader operating in adjacent Campbell County, Virginia in the late 1840s, failed to display paternalism in his slave trading business. Already in his early fifties at the time he wrote his brother, Nowlin was a failing trader with dreams of respectability fading fast. He traveled the South for months at time with coffle in tow and substantial debt close behind. Hopkins fulfilled the stereotype of the lowly, Southern slave trader in image and practice. By 1850, he had just over 150 acres of land (77 acres improved, 75 unimproved) valued at $1,000 to his name. Struggling to make large profits, Nowlin attempted to squeeze profits from all available avenues. He was not concerned with the quality of his slaves like Thomas and Finney, but instead traded freely with a sole focus on profits. In late March 1848, Nowlin bragged to his brother that he “conditionally sold Hagar that was sick.” A month later, he followed by confirming the sale and his receipt of $300. Unlike the Finney/Thomas partnership, Nowlin was willing to deal in inferior slaves as long as profits continued. Regardless of the current condition of the slave, Nowlin’s willingness to sell him represents a departure from Finney and Thomas’ practices.

\textsuperscript{156} Greenberg, Honor and Slavery, 62.  
\textsuperscript{157} Greenberg, Honor and Slavery, 62.
Likewise, Nowlin also departed from Finney and Thomas’ paternalistic practices. Finney and Thomas reaffirmed slaves’ humanity by purchasing families together and recognizing the sanctity of the family. Conversely, Nowlin strongly denied slaves’ humanity in the harshest way possible: he traded slaves for animals. To trade a human for an animal was to fundamentally place the human on the same level as an animal. It is the complete commodification of a human being, and it is the most plain depiction of the slave trade’s evils. Hopkins arbitrarily commented in an early 1848 letter, I “have sold three horses that I traded Fanny and children for.” The implications of his statement speak clearly to his character. While unsure of how many slaves were involved, Hopkins traded at least three humans for three horses. That is, he deemed three horses more valuable than three people. Most likely there were more children involved. Yet Hopkins failed to place any significance on this aspect and instead focused on the profit he had already turned. The lives of the slaves meant little, but cash from the sale of three horses meant a lot. In contrast to Finney and Thomas, Nowlin failed to embody aspects of paternalism and honor in his business practices. He displayed the most despised practices in the slave trade: selling sick slaves and completely ignoring paternalism. Yet a trader’s business practices did not fully determine his attainment of honor. Paternalistic slave buying practices were not dependent on the trader’s place in history.

Whether trading in the early 1800s or late 1850s, a trader could choose to keep families together and deal only in quality slaves. But in the early 1800s, only wealthy traders and large firms could physically separate themselves from the slaves they dealt in; small traders could not. Unfortunately for small traders, the physical separation of a trader from the slaves in which he dealt was vital to the maintenance of honor. For the typical trader in the 1800s, the path to Southern respectability was never-ending uphill battle defined by long, exhausting days on the
road with the constant clinking of slaves’ chains in the background. Yet in time, these practices and physical separation became more widely available with Market Revolution changes in the South. Time played a crucial role in these men’s ability to rise to a level of respectability in Southern society. The Old South was a rapidly changing region and one’s life experiences could vary widely from decade to decade. As Mark M. Smith argues in *Mastered by the Clock: Time, Slavery, and Freedom in the American South*, Southerners approach and opinion of slavery and the slave trade was not constant. It continually evolved during the antebellum period as Southerners responded to Northern criticism and internal dissent. As a result, time played a vital role in determining one’s success or failure within the system.\(^{158}\) And for Finney and Thomas in the late 1850s, the time was now.

While physical separation from slaves was crucial for the trader’s reputation, the trader was visibly attached to his slaves for much of the 19th century. In the late 1840s and 1850s, the Market Revolution swept across the southern United States. Railroad and telegraph lines sprang up throughout the region and connected the rural landscape. A wide variety of new business practices emerged as well. Before the rapid expansion of railroads across the South in the 1840s and 1850s, travel by foot over land or by boat over water were the only ways to transport slaves. The slave coffle attached negatively stereotyped attitudes to the trader. Similarly, the interior rivers of the South still provided an open sight of slaves with trader. The only way for traders to physically separate themselves in this period was through increasing the scale of their business. If a trader could achieve success, he could hire another to sell slaves for him and therefore remove himself by one more degree of association from the trade. The most successful traders could even further remove himself. By building one’s own ocean-going transport ships, some

extremely profitable traders removed themselves almost completely from the public eye. This trader shipped his slaves on his own ships, and thus he did not reveal his shipments to outsiders, even shipping companies that could profit from his business. As well, his agents on the ship were shielded from the public eye by the ocean-route the ships took. Yet the use of agents entailed its own difficulties. Prior to the mid-1840s, communication between different parts of the South was difficult and slow. Communication by postal mail would take weeks and was often unreliable. Traders using agents could not keep track of the day-to-day changes in markets. If a trader wished to change his instructions or focus his agents on a certain type of slave available, communication was often too slow to allow the changes to make a difference. The telegraph considerably reduced these problems. Traders operating in the 1850s could now communicate almost instantaneously to their partners, regardless of location. This improved communication infrastructure allowed for traders to better keep track of slave markets and respond to demand as it arose. Previously, the profits and degree of physical separation afforded to large-scale firms were not available for smaller traders. Small traders were forced to embody the lowly, negative stereotype of the slave trader on a daily basis. However, the spread of railroad and telegraph lines throughout the South in the 1840s and 1850s provided smaller traders with previously unavailable opportunities. William A.J. Finney and Philip Thomas boldly pursued these new opportunities.

While the growth of railroads significantly improved transportation across the South, the advent of the telegraph revolutionized the slave trade and business in general. In May 1844, Samuel Morse sent four simple words from Washington, D.C. to Baltimore Maryland beginning a communication revolution that would inextricably link the United States’ national economy
together.\textsuperscript{159} Although Morris’ invention was groundbreaking, the spread of the telegraph was not immediate. Like the unorganized construction of railroads in the 1840s, early telegraph lines were laid quickly by men more focused on being the first than constructing a stable communication infrastructure. Again mirroring the growth of railroads, telegraph lines consolidated and expanded tremendously in the 1850s.\textsuperscript{160} This consolidation allowed businessmen across the country to communicate almost instantaneously. The effects of the telegraph were seen clearly in the slave trade. The previously distant slave markets of Richmond and New Orleans were now intimately connected and could share changes in prices daily. More importantly, slave traders could now keep updated on these daily changes in the market and utilize them to their advantage. Previously, traders were forced to rely on inconsistent letters from bigger firms detailing price changes. Steven Deyle argues in \textit{Carry Me Back: The Domestic Slave Trade in American Life}, “slave traders jumped at the opportunity to use this invention to confirm the receipt of letters or money, to inform their partners of their whereabouts, and to decide whether or not to buy another lot and at what price. It even allowed them to assess the profitability of specific purchases.”\textsuperscript{161} In short, the telegraph revolutionized the slave trade. Entering into the slave trade late in the 1850s, Finney and Thomas “jumped at the opportunity” to use the telegraph in the many of the ways Deyle details. The two men’s letters are scattered with mention of the device and its use. In early January 1859, Thomas was on a trip to Richmond

\textsuperscript{159}“Dot, dash— dash— space— dot, dot dot, dot— space— dot, dash— space— dash…” Along the forty odd miles of wire that separated him from his partner, Vail, in Baltimore, sped that famous message: ‘What hath God wrought!’ No longer was the telegraph a theory; it was a fact. No less important than the profound change which was even then being wrought in the field of transportation by the railroad was the far-reaching effect which the introduction and rapid extension of the telegraph was to have upon the economic and social development of the United States.” Robert Luther Thompson, \textit{Wiring a Continent: The History of The Telegraph Industry in the United States, 1832-1866} (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1947), 24.

\textsuperscript{160}“As great railway trunk lines and extended telegraphic systems began to absorb the haphazard pioneer lines which sprawled over the countryside, and order and efficiency began to appear, the attitude of the public began one of approbation and support.” Thompson, \textit{Wiring a Continent}, 203-204.

\textsuperscript{161}Deyle, \textit{Carry Me Back}, 112.
to purchase more slaves for the upcoming season. Unsure whether to purchase or wait for the results of Finney’s sales, he wrote Finney saying, “telegraph immediately and send all the money you can get…or say that I can use the money we have here and you can get $5,000 more.” Working with the financial backing of Finney, Thomas wanted to agree on a course of action before he pursued it and the increased speed of the telegraph allowed this. Similarly, Thomas mentioned use of the telegraph two weeks later as the confusion piled up. In the depths of the Richmond slave sickness mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, Thomas was unsure what to do and needed advice. He desperately wrote, “Now if you want me to come whether I sell out here or not telegraph me and if you do not want me to come do not telegraph and I will know what to do.” Yet realizing the importance of his letter and the Richmond proceedings, Finney ended the letter with a postscript remarking, “You had better telegraph me any way for by so doing I will know you have received this letter.” Thomas was surrounded with dying slaves, saw profits disappearing, and needed guidance or even just reassurance from his partner. Thus, Finney and Thomas utilized the telegraph to rapidly communicate business and personal information. They used the new degree of connectivity to communicate and respond to changes in the slave market, ultimately providing them with advantages unseen just ten years earlier.

The developing transportation and communication infrastructure of Pittsylvania County and the South was vital to the two men’s quest for profits; it linked the men and their product to the larger Southern market. During the 1840s and 1850s, railroad and telegraph building flourished in the South and spread slavery and profits in its wake. William G. Thomas argues in _The Iron Way_ that the South invested over $252 million in its rail network prior to the Civil War and transformed slavery with the expansion of its rails. The simultaneous expansion of cotton

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production and rail lines in the 1850s allowed for slavery to expand both feverishly into the Southwest and more slowly in the older slaveholding areas of the South. Railroads broke the historic geographic barriers that plagued Southern trade and nowhere was this effort seen more clearly than in Virginia. In 1857, Virginia completed the Blue Ridge Tunnel, the longest tunnel in the United States and much of it was built with slave labor. In close contact with the new and improved Southern transportation infrastructure, Finney and Thomas used all its advantages to their financial boon.

Yet even more noteworthy, improved transportation allowed the men to physically separate themselves from the slaves they sold. In the two men’s partnership, Finney and Thomas utilized the reliability and speed the spread of railroads provided to ship slaves speedily throughout the South. Writing from his home in Pittsylvania in October 1859, Thomas first updated Finney on the state of both men’s homes; the joint nature of their speculative nature tied together more than just business interests. If the two men were unsuccessful financially, the material and physical well being of their families could suffer. To know all was well at home was a way for Thomas to reaffirm the stability of their business life as well. More importantly, Thomas quickly moved on from family matters to the more pressing nature of their joint business venture. Speculating that the pair could “borrow money at 7 ½ percent in Virginia and carry negroes South and make money on them,” Thomas informed Finney that he would “start immediately to Richmond and in 8 days after (he) leaves home (he) will be in Montgomery with a fresh lot of negroes.” A trip of this magnitude in previous decades would have taken traders at least six weeks by overland coffle or between two and three by coastal trade. The added time these methods of transportation provided diminished the trader’s profits in a two-fold

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167 Deyle, *Carry Me Home*, 111.
manner. Not only did they increase the supplies needed to sustain the health of one’s slaves, but also cut into the time a trader could use buying more slaves. Yet more important than the increased travel time railroads provided, their ability to physically separate trader from trade was critical. Thomas and Finney could ship their slaves reliably with little to no contact from Richmond to Montgomery in under a week. Enmeshed in railroad’s dependability was their lack of requirement for transshipment. This policy in effect meant shippers could ship their product without ever unloading it and reloading it at each individual station.\footnote{Chandler, \textit{The Visible Hand}, 86.} Thus, Finney and Thomas could ship slaves from the upper South to the Deep South without their slaves existing in the public eye for more than a fraction of a second. The pair could almost entirely physically separate themselves from their slaves from purchase to resale and thus preserve and reinforce their honor. The process of physical separation both preserved their honor in the public eye and reduced the ability for slaves’ to affect this same honor. By not travelling on foot or over water with their slaves, Finney and Thomas removed the opportunity for their merchandize to revolt or even resist in much form. Unable to overtly challenge the trader’s decisions, the slaves Finney and Thomas dealt in could not publicly dishonor them. Conversely, the vagrant, small-time trader Hopkins Nowlin did not have these same advantages. He was forced to physically associate himself with his slaves and suffered the consequences.

Operating out of the geographically and agriculturally similar Campbell County in the late 1840s, Hopkins Nowlin should have been afforded the same advantages as his counterparts Finney and Thomas. Yet in the waning years of the antebellum South, ten years produced too many developments in transportation and communication to overcome. While railroads were present in the South during the 1840s, the rate of railroad growth expanded tremendously in the 1850s. Of all the track laid in the South before the Civil War, seventy-five percent of it was built
in the 1850s. In the late 1840s, Campbell County was still largely geographically isolated and rural. If a merchant needed to transport his goods to market, foot or horse were the main options available. Hopkins Nowlin, as a result, was forced to transport his slaves by coffle like so many itinerant traders before him. He directly associated himself with the negative stereotype of the trader and its entailed connotations. To travel by foot with one’s own slave not only brought the stain of the trade directly into the public eye, but also indicated a lack of prosperity. If a trader physically accompanied his slaves, he obviously was not successful enough to hire another to do it for him. For Nowlin, both of these analyses appear to be true.

Between October 2nd and November 6th 1850, Nowlin travelled from his home in Campbell County south with a coffle of slaves to sell. During this period, Nowlin travelled between twenty to twenty-five miles a day in the constant presence of fifteen to thirty slaves. Unlike Finney and Thomas who concentrated on the larger Southern markets, Nowlin moved from town to town buying and selling slaves as he went. He had no real direction, but was only focused on profits. Naturally, the extended time on the road took its toll. Nowlin’s letters to his brother during this period are filled with constant complaints of sickness. While Finny and Thomas were worried about sickness in the large markets, Nowlin was struggling to maintain his own health on the road. In a business in which presentation was key, sickness was not a marketable quality, let alone an honorable one. Nowlin was daily struggling over the ill-maintained, rural roads of the South with slaves in tow, while battling back physical maladies and struggling to generate profits. Although the image of Nowlin presented depicts his

171 Writing to his brother in early 1848, Nowlin urged him to direct a relative toward slave trading. He wrote, “set him to buying for now is the time to buy and everyday you lose is time lost.” While talking about a relative, Nowlin clearly was expressing his own thoughts. He was determined to make profits and assumed others could do the same. Hopkins Nowlin to Matthew Bates Nowlin, *Matthew Bates Nowlin Papers, 1836-1857*, February 28th, 1849.
172 Wyatt-Brown, *Honor and Violence in the Old South*, 33.
fulfillment of the stereotype of the lowly, itinerant Southern slave trader and his associated low level of respectability, the attitude his slaves took toward him are more telling of his reputation. For slave owners and slave traders alike, slave resistance was a natural, never-ending aspect of the master/slave relationship. During antebellum slavery, slaves would commonly resist in one form or another and masters would respond in kind with discipline. Yet masters saw constant resistance as a sign of disrespect. Unfortunately for Hopkins, these signs of disrespect were common. In his travels, slaves consistently resisted Hopkins directions and displayed their low opinion of him. Commenting on forms of slave disrespect, Bertram Wyatt-Brown writes, “In its most fundamental form, honor was a state of grace linking mind, body, blood, hand, voice, head, eyes, and even genitalia…The eyes witnessed honor and looked down in deference or shame. Thus the steady gaze from a slave signaled impudence.” While direct and extended eye contact is not detailed in Nowlin’s letters, the slaves he transported obviously did not respect Nowlin. In early April 1848, Nowlin provided a clear description of the problem he was facing. He wrote, “I have written home for them to send Jefree on to you for I can’t bear the idea for to have a Negro about me that won’t obey orders and said to my wife to give him his course to come on down to Campbell or go to Richmond or run as soon as he pleases for such a course as that I would not put up with.” Although Jefree’s resistance could have been an isolated incident, slaves’ common opposition to Nowlin’s orders cannot be ignored. Three times in the next year Nowlin wrote of resistance from slaves he was transporting. These slaves resisted in passive methods like grunting at Nowlin’s instructions and in active methods like disobeying

174 Wyatt-Brown, *Honor and Violence in the Old South*, 33.
him and refusing to be sold.176 The constant resistance slaves showed toward Nowlin was obviously not an accident, but instead a direct result Nowlin’s lack of honor. The itinerant trader was not only stereotyped and despised by white Southerners, but by slaves as well. Harriet Ann Jacobs, an antebellum North Carolinian slave, recalled horridly the fear slave trader’s struck in slaves’ hearts. She wrote, “slaveholders have been cunning enough to enact that ‘the child shall follow the condition of the mother,’ not of the father; thus taking care that licentiousness shall not interfere with avarice. This reflection made me clasp my innocent babe all the more firmly to my heart. Horrid visions passed through my mind when I thought of his liability to fall into the slave trader's hands. I wept over him, and said, "O my child! perhaps they will leave you in some cold cabin to die, and then throw you into a hole, as if you were a dog."177 Reflecting on the possibility that her child could be given to the slave trader, Jacobs instead depressingly wished a slow, malnourished death for the child. An early death appeared to be a better decision than to subject a child to the horrors of the slave trader. All levels of Southern society, white and black, hated the stereotyped trader, and Nowlin adequately served as a scapegoat for the system. Even four years later in 1852, Nowlin continued to have problems with his slaves. In April of 1852, Nowlin depressingly commented, “I have a Negro that I expect to have to confine and looking to for her to run at every moment.” Travelling the road for four long years in constant search of profits, Hopkins Nowlin suffered through sickness, disrespect, and ultimately dishonor.

Thus while Nowlin struggled to maintain order among his slaves and find his next sale in the 1840s, Finney and Thomas used the improved communication and transportation networks of the 1850s as a path to prosperity; a prosperity they well publicized. In the two men’s letters,

177 Harriet Ann Jacobs, Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl. Written By Herself (Boston: Published for the Author: 1861); 118.
Finney and Thomas often brag about their success and ability to buy slaves. The propensity for pride was common among slave traders. They needed self-confidence and determination to navigate the difficulties of Southern society and the slave trade. As a result, when they were successful, they wanted to vocalize their triumphs. Thomas and Finney were not unusual in expressing their prosperity. Yet similar to how Thomas boasted of his purchasing practices and the low prices he received, these boasts served to reinforce the men’s honor to each other and to themselves. Writing from Pittsylvania in October of 1859, Thomas commented on the current state of the slave trade to Finney and then tried to convince him of his extensive knowledge in the category. He arrogantly stated, “I would give $30 this day if I could make you understand these things as I do. Pay no attention to what any body may say you to in Montgomery…I know just as much about it as they do and more besides.” Thomas was trying to reinforce his knowledge and thus his honor to Finney. If Finney believed what people said in Montgomery over Thomas, he would be rejecting Thomas’ claim and thus downgrading his honor. As a result, Thomas went into detail about the current market conditions and the pairs’ possible courses of action. Thomas thought himself to be honorable and wanted Finney to know it. Nearly two months later, Thomas made similar comments in another letter to Finney. Remarking on his dismal expectations for the firm’s future, Thomas wrote in late November, “You will read this and say probably Phil is scared like he always is, but I tell you send me money if possible. I know I can make any moneyed arrangement that any other man can.” While noting his partner’s expected reaction to his fears, Thomas proudly boasted of his own skills. The market may be depressed, but if Thomas had money he could still make a profit. Evidently feeling his

180 Greenberg, *Honor and Slavery*, 8-9.; Wyatt-Brown, *Honor and Violence In the Old South*, 27.
honor threatened by his earlier expression of fear, Thomas concluded the letter with a rambling observation on sectional tensions:

Nearly every body has turned red, good deal of talk about Harpers Ferry and no body gives a dam if the union is dissolved every body nearly wants to Volunteer to go to fight...Oh we are ready for Hell, death, and destruction if they want it at the North...Tell the Southern people not to fear Old Virginia any more for I never saw people so candid and determined; Virginia can whip the North her self... I shall elect Wise President and I Vice President if he will call me and my company out. The reason Wise has not ordered out my company is he is afraid I might be in his way in getting the nomination.182

Thomas’ comments are revealing in their boastful display of Virginian pride and self-pride. Not only can the war-prepared Virginian men dominate the North by themselves, but if they ever get out there Thomas may just take the Presidency. While Thomas’ boasts are obviously exaggerated, their extended nature nonetheless indicates an underlying, strong sense of pride. Finney may think, “Phil is scared like he always he is,” but Thomas wants Finney to know that he’s, “ready for Hell, death, and destruction.” Thomas again felt his honor threatened by Finney’s doubts and in response boasted of his unwavering bravery and war-readiness. A Southern man’s personal bravery was an integral part of honor and Finney was questioning his. Thomas thus responded by presenting his courage in the most Southern way possible: as courage and valor against an outside threatening force, the North.183 Additionally, he reinforced his respectability by, albeit jokingly, comparing himself to Virginia’s Governor Henry A. Wise and even suggesting he could best him in the political arena. Thomas again reinforced his sense of self worth to Finney in a boastful nature. Ultimately, slave traders’ felt pride about their success in the difficult and mercurial business of the slave trade and desired to share it with others.

For all the talk of Finney and Thomas’ success, actual details of their success have yet to

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183 Wyatt-Brown, Honor and Violence in the Old South, 27-29.
appear. While the two men’s exact incomes from the slave trade cannot be ascertained with the limited data they left behind, their success is evident. As mentioned earlier, William A.J. Finney and Philip Thomas were marginal figures in Pittsylvania County, Virginia in 1850. Finney was on his way to economic prosperity with a little over $3,000 in real estate and fourteen slaves. Thomas conversely was a twenty-year-old kid still listed under another’s household and working as a clerk. Neither had distinguished themselves, but the partnership they entered into profited both men immensely. By 1860, the slave trade had transformed their lives. Just ten years later, Finney’s real estate was valued at $13,000 and his personal estate at $21,500. The original investor in the partnership, he was using his large land holdings and eighteen slaves for tobacco and grain farming, while trading on the side. The additional separation provided by mainly financing the trade and leaving Thomas to do most of the trading appears to have benefitted him. Not only did his personal holdings increase substantially, but also he gained public respectability. Finney was influential in public affairs serving as Justice of Peace for the county and other citizens consistently wrote him for advice. G.C. Cabell, a U.S. Congressional Representative and Finney’s neighbor, even wrote to him asking him to use his influence to get a good delegate from their county for the state convention. Although Finney’s second degree of separation may have gained him positions of power and influence, Thomas nonetheless found success in the slave trade as well. Thomas, the legs of the operation, rose from rags to riches. By the age of thirty, Thomas had amassed $9,000 in real estate and $25,000 in personal estate. He owned 375 acres and 178 acres of improved and unimproved land respectively. While he focused primarily on the slave trade and travelled frequently, Thomas still had thirty-four slaves working

his land that produced 15,000 pounds of tobacco 415 bushels of wheat in 1860.\textsuperscript{185} Yet most of Thomas’ wealth was tied to the slaves he traded, while Finney’s economic portfolio was slightly more diverse including trade in several staple crops. To say the least though, the slave trade proved to be the avenue to success for both men. Ultimately, they used the South’s improved communication and transportation infrastructures to physically distance themselves from the trade. When unable to separate themselves from slaves, the men applied the tenets of paternalism to their trade and found the least offensive rout possible. Operating within a despicable profession, Finney and Thomas successfully navigated the treacherous path to honor and found large profits along the way.

On November 26, 1859, Philip Thomas wrote to his slave-trading partner William A.J. Finney describing the regional tensions exposed by John Brown’s insurrection. His letter boasted that Virginians were ready to defend their state from any outside enemy: “you would be surprised if you were home to see how little excitement there is in the Country about the insurrection. I do not believe the people care one cent. They all seem determined and fixed ready and anxious to go at a moments warning…but it all will blow over and Brown and his comrades will be hung.” Thomas doubted the importance of those momentous events, but the beginning of the Civil War a year and a half later left him no room for doubt. The lives and livelihood of Thomas and Finney would drastically change in the death and destruction that would ensue. Their divergent paths indicate how important physically distancing himself from the trade was to a man’s honor and financial success.

Philip Thomas enlisted in Company C of the Confederate 5th Virginia Cavalry in early March 1862. His position in the community made him its First Sergeant. His substantial land and slave holdings placed him above the ordinary men that enlisted. Confederate First Sergeants held significant responsibility and ensured orders were carried out among the common soldiers. His company saw action at Second Manassas, Fredericksburg, and Gettysburg. Thomas’ actions during and immediately after the war went unrecorded, but he did emerge from the chaos alive. He survived the bloody years of the Civil War, but his prosperity and livelihood did not. The destruction of slavery directly resulted in Thomas’s professional downfall. By 1870, he had lost the land and capital that had been so intricately connected to his business ventures. He left

186 Philip Thomas to William A.J. Finney, November 26, 1859, Pittsylvania County, Virginia
187 National Parks Services, Soldiers and Sailors Database, Philip Thomas, http://www.nps.gov/civilwar/search-soldiers-detail.htm?soldier_id=a3b5d5d8-dc7a-df11-bf36-b8ac6f5d926a
Virginia, and went to Atlanta’s 3rd Ward with his three children, a single father employed as a carpenter supporting his three children.\textsuperscript{188} Lacking real estate and capital, times had changed considerably since the dizzying profits of the late 1850s. Thomas’ intimate connection with the slave trade caused his financial ruin with its demise after the Civil War. He could not claim exemption from the war and ensure his economic success because his place in the community was not significant enough. His economic well being was intimately tied up with the domestic slave trade and it eventually resulted in his downfall.

Although the Civil War years meant hardship and eventual defeat for Thomas, Finney emerged from these tumultuous years relatively unscathed. While Finney was called several times to serve, his unique standing in the community allowed his exemption from military service. Acting as Justice of the Peace for Pittsylvania County, Finney was continually exempted from serving as every new draft law implemented and expanded the net of those to be enlisted. He did contribute both capital and livestock to the Confederate war effort, but remained bodily apart from the bloodshed. Finney’s ability to remain home during the war was crucial to his continued financial success after the war. Due to a lack of maintenance, Thomas lost both his slaves and land during the war. Yet Finney only lost his slaves. He continued to cultivate his land and owned real estate valued at $2,000 in 1870. By continuing to farm his land, Finney maintained a livelihood even with the reduction of a significant part of his income. The destruction of the slave trade may have been the end of Thomas’ plantation dream, but Finney managed to maintain his honor and standing in the community. Unlike so many others in the Reconstruction South, he managed to weather the drastic changes that took place. His additional

step of separation allowed his ascension in the community. He was not physically connecting himself with the darker sides of slavery, but instead was a slave owner and trader acting paternalistically with his property.

Regardless of the relative social standing and occupations of Finney and Thomas in the post war South, their pre-war profession and financial success cannot be ignored. Both men bought and sold human beings for profits. They observed, evaluated, and placed a monetary value on men, women, and children. They then weighed and calculated the potential profits to be made from selling these people and acted accordingly. Undoubtedly, Philip Thomas and William A.J. Finney speculated on antebellum slaves in the same manner merchants speculated on livestock.

In 1853, Scottish writer and publicist William Chambers travelled through the United States and Canada and recounted his observations. In Richmond, he observed the city’s slave markets. He recalled, “So strange was the spectacle, that I could hardly dispel the notion that it was all a kind of dream; and now I look back upon the affair as by far the most curious I ever witnessed.” Viewing a sale for the first time, Chamber’s comments are simultaneously analytical and emotional. And in this conflicted tone, the true impact of Thomas and Finney’s actions emerge. Chambers writes, “Two men are standing on an elevated bench, one white and the other black. The white man is auctioning the black man. What a contrast in look and position! The white is a most respectable-looking person…There he stands – can I believe my eyes…sawing the air with his hand, as if addressing a missionary or any other philanthropic meeting from a platform. Surely that gentlemanly personage cannot imagine that he is engaged in any mortal sin! Beside him is a man with a black skin, and clothed in rough garments. His looks are downcast and submissive. He is being sold, just like a horse… I must be under some

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189 Conrad, *In the Hands of Strangers*, 172.
illusion. The dark object whom I have been taught to consider a man, is not a man. True, he may be called a man in advertisements and by the mouth of auctioneers. But it is only a figure of speech – a term of convenience. He is a man in one sense, and not in another. He is a kind of man – stands upright on two legs, has hands to work, wears clothes, can cook his food (a point not reached by monkeys), has the command of speech, and, in a way, can think and act like a rational creature – can even be taught to read. But nature has thought fit to give him black skin, and that tells very badly against him….Being, at all events, so much of a man – genus homo—is it quite fair to master him, and sell him, exactly as suits your convenience—you being, from a variety of fortunate circumstances, his superior?” Chambers was not under an illusion. Finney and Thomas, like the auctioneer depicted, did not view their business as immoral and neither did the Southern public. These men rose to community prominence and respectability from the profits off the sale of other humans; humans that had all the faculties of Finney and Thomas. These men exploited their racial superiority and the technological innovations available in the late Antebellum South to succeed financially and gain community recognition.

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190 Conrad, *In the Hands of Strangers*, 172.
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