

**Chasing Freedom and Hunting Power:
A Multispecies History of Emancipation and Control in the American Civil War Era**

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	3
SHORT ABSTRACT	4
LONG ABSTRACT	5
LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS	8
INTRODUCTION	10
Research Questions	15
Historiography, Sources, and Methodology	20
Chapter Outline	54
CHAPTER 1: ‘REAP THE WHIRLWIND’: NONHUMAN ANIMALS IN THE GEOGRAPHY OF CONTAINMENT AND RESISTANCE	57
Containment and Control in the Plantationocene	61
Rival Empiricism	76
Oppositional Modes of Interaction	82
Counter-Legislation and Counterintelligence	93
CHAPTER 2: ‘OUT OF THE SNARES’: THE MULTISPECIES BORDERLANDS OF SELF-EMANCIPATION	97
Tethered Affections and Domesticated Animals	101
Rewilding Escape	119
Weaponizing the Natural World	136
CHAPTER 3: ‘TO THE ENDS OF THE EARTH’: SCARRED BODIES AND FRACTURED NATIONS DURING THE NATIONAL AND TRANSNATIONAL CRISIS OF SLAVERY	156
Recapture, Retaliations, and Rituals of Animal Violence	161
Surveillance, Sovereignty, and the Entanglements of Disunion	188
Personal Liberty and Federal Power on Trial	210
CHAPTER 4: ‘THE SWORD TO SLAY AND THE DOGS TO TEAR’: THE AMERICAN CIVIL WAR AND RECONSTRUCTION ERA	215
Self-Emancipators, Nonhuman Animals, and the Civil War	218
Dogs, Horses, and Historical Memory	240
Reconstruction and the Reimposition of Control	253
Memorials, Reunions, and the Sentimentalization of the Civil War	263
CONCLUSION	269
BIBLIOGRAPHY	279

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Short Abstract

This thesis places nonhuman animals and the natural world at the center of the history of the plantation system, self-emancipation, the American Civil War, and the Era of Reconstruction. It argues that animals ranging from alligators and dogs to snakes and insects acted within and upon historical events. Drawing on multiple types of sources interpreted through various methodological frameworks, this thesis reconstructs the interspecies spatial geography of the plantation system and the multidirectional landscapes of escape. It then follows the sectional and international disputes that followed emancipation attempts. Efforts by enslavers and their allies to reclaim formerly enslaved persons, and the animals with whom they sought freedom, forced courts and governments to address questions of jurisdiction and sovereignty. During the Civil War, animals that had been long associated with plantation discipline were absorbed into the Confederate military. Wartime disruptions destabilized the Southern animal regime of control, and in many cases, accelerated emancipation attempts, even as these flights continued to expose escapees to dangerous encounters with wild animals. In the postwar years and Reconstruction era, paramilitary groups continued to weaponize horses and dogs even as Black families relied on the same animals for protection and survival. The thesis concludes with an examination of the latter decades of the nineteenth century, during which embalmed animals as well as animal memorials and tributes became central to struggles over memory and silences that helped the process of reconciliation.

Long Abstract

Plantation slavery, the Civil War, and Reconstruction are inseparable from animals and the natural world. Animals strengthened the capacity of the planter-class to control movement, conduct war, and impose and reimpose social order. Yet animal behavior and actions were not fixed or predictable. Enslaved persons, and later Black soldiers and freed persons, developed empirical knowledge and counter-intelligence regarding the animals with whom they shared quarters and work spaces as well as those inhabiting the woods and swamps beyond the plantation. They formed bonds and relationships with animals and depended on them within and beyond enslavement. But it is important not to reduce animal behavior to human intention. Animals complied with commands of enslavers and the enslaved. They also undermined and resisted these commands, instead, acting and reacting through their own assessments of risk and stimuli. This thesis interprets animal behavior and actions within both historical and ethological frameworks. It demonstrates the way in which slavery, self-emancipation, wartime strategy, and postwar assertions of autonomy and authority unfolded through interspecies interactions.

Recovering the histories of nonhuman animals and the natural world within the context of slavery, war, and Reconstruction depends on assembling evidence across different types of records and moving across multiple types of archives. Therefore, this thesis draws on multilingual and multinational institutional sources such as court records, military reports, diplomatic correspondence, and Congressional investigations. It looks at newspapers and runaway advertisements from throughout the United States as well as some from Canada and Mexico. Travel accounts are especially useful to trace patterns and continuities across regions. Diaries and plantation accounts are analyzed to provide the perspective of enslavers, Confederate soldiers, and Southern civilians. WPA interviews, slave narratives, and abolitionist texts provide the perspective from the enslaved, Union soldiers, and freed persons. Read in isolation, animals appear as passing mentions. But when read together, these sources reveal patterns and continuities that demonstrate the significance of nonhuman animals.

Examining these histories over several decades across a vast region with hemispheric ramifications poses challenges for chronology and narrative structure. This thesis, therefore, adopts a thematic approach structured around four chapters looking at plantation slavery, the process of self-emancipation, the national and transnational implications of flight, and the Civil War era. The first chapter begins with an examination of the plantation complex as an interspecies system of containment and resistance. It analyzes how enslavers bred and trained animals in an effort to extend surveillance, deter self-emancipation attempts, and facilitate capture.

The presence of these trained dogs and horses, along with the intentionally-designed architectural layout of kennels, stables, and patrols, further impacted the spatial geography of the plantation. Sights and sounds of wild animals further reinforced the sense of containment. Against this, enslaved persons worked with domesticated animals and studied the behavior of wild animals, developing a counter-archive of empirical knowledge. They also established relationships with plantation animals and gained familiarity and confidence through interactions with wild animals outside the plantation.

Moving from the plantation complex to the act of self-emancipation, the second chapter focuses on freedom-seekers who escaped with dogs that provided companionship and protection as well as horses that created opportunities for increased mobility and long-distance travel. Enslavers and slave patrols, in turn, incorporated horses and dogs into their pursuit of self-emancipators. Wild animals forced freedom-seekers, their pursuers, and their animals to adjust routes and delay movements. Snakes and insects made concealment difficult and stillness hard to sustain, while large predatory animals forced rapid decisions when they drew precariously close. In all of these cases, animals remained unpredictable with their actions, often making the difference between freedom and capture.

Chapter Three expands the thesis's geography to include the wider North American context as it follows self-emancipation into law, politics, and diplomacy. Animals made certain self-emancipation attempts possible. But their recognition across the continent as recoverable assets made it increasingly difficult to disentangle human freedom from the retrieval of animal property. Across the United States and into Canada and Mexico, enslavers and their allies attempted to retrieve freedom-seekers along with their horses and dogs through cross-border raids and legal machinations. Their actions created an entry point into debates over sovereignty, federal power, and, most importantly, the meaning and enforceability of freedom across different states and nations. In also acknowledging that many self-emancipation attempts ended in capture, this chapter examines animal-aided pursuit and the circumstances during which dogs, horses, insects, rodents, and snakes became part of enslaver punishments.

With every self-emancipation attempt and accompanying pursuit exacerbating the antebellum sectional crisis, the thesis turns to the American Civil War, when animals long-embedded within the plantation system were absorbed into the Confederate military. With military leaders, including Robert E. Lee, bringing attention to the importance of equine animals to the Confederate war effort, the task of caring for these animals fell to enslaved persons. Their access to the animals provided mobility and created openings for wartime escape. With enslaved persons reaching Union lines on horseback, these emancipation efforts chipped away at the Confederacy's dwindling supply of horses and coerced laborers.

Formerly enslaved persons who sought freedom behind Union lines brought with them stories of the South's weaponized dogs and scars as corroborating evidence. In some cases, these formerly enslaved persons seemed to have directly impacted Union military strategy regarding its treatment of Southern animals, especially dogs, who began to be indiscriminately targeted by the latter years of the war. These brutal tactics weakened the Confederate military and crippled local networks of animal-enforced control that had deterred self-emancipation attempts for decades. The chapter continues to the postwar years and Reconstruction era when Southern vigilantes and parastate organizations weaponized dogs and horses to regulate mobility, labor demands, and political participation. Still, these years also reveal instances of Black families relying on these same types of animals for autonomy, mobility, and protection.

The thesis concludes with an examination of the incorporation of animals and animal representations into the politics of remembrance. National expositions and curated monuments turned animals into mediators and representations of national memory. However, other memories endured in Black testimony. In WPA interviews, formerly enslaved persons repeatedly returned

to weaponized animals whose recurring presence factored into how they described the limits of emancipation.

This work approaches the plantation system, self-emancipation, the Civil War era, and Reconstruction as multispecies histories. It accompanies the human experience and asks how human narratives change once animals and the natural world are recognized as historical determinants. Slavery, freedom, and warfare moved through kennels, stables, pens, and the natural world. The animals that occupied these spaces and the humans who encountered them shaped what happened and how these histories were remembered. Attending to these interconnected shared histories deepens existing narratives and creates new ones, while also demonstrating the reciprocity of bridging the fields of slavery studies and Civil War history with animal studies and environmental history.

List of Illustrations

Figure 1.1. Fairfax Fox hunting with Washington. Custis, George Washington Parke. *Recollections and Private Memoirs of Washington*. New York: Derby & Jackson, 1860.

Figure 2.1. Four Arrivals. William Still, *Still's Underground Rail Road Records. Revised Edition. With a Life of the Author. Narrating the Hardships, Hairbreadth Escapes, and Death Struggles of the Slaves in Their Efforts for Freedom. Together with Sketches of Some of the Eminent Friends of Freedom, and Most Liberal Aiders and Advisers of the Road* (Philadelphia: William Still, Publisher, 1886), 220.

Figure 2.2. Ran Away. *North Carolina Journal*, 24 October 1792.

Figure 2.3. The Fugitive Slave. *Facts for the People of the Free States*, Liberty Tract no. 2 (New York: Published by William Harned for the American and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society, 1846).

Figure 2.4. Henry Bibb and Wolves. Henry Bibb, *Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb, an American Slave, Written by Himself* (New York: Published by the Author, 1849), 125.

Figure 3.1. Williams Sprang and Caught him by the Throat. Austin Steward, *Twenty-Two Years a Slave, and Forty Years a Freeman: Embracing a Correspondence of Several Years, While President of Wilberforce Colony, London, Canada West* (Rochester: William Alling, 1857), 58.

Figure 3.2. The Author Hanging by his Hands Tied to a Cotton Screw. Moses Roper, *Narrative of the Adventures and Escape of Moses Roper* (London: Darton and Harvey, 1837), 47.

Figure 3.3. Our Peculiar Domestic Institutions. *Illustrations of the American Anti-Slavery Almanac for 1840*. New York, 1840. Printed Ephemera Collection, Portfolio 248, Folder 1, Library of Congress.

Figure 3.4. T. C. Bell, 'Found Near My Plantation,' *The Texas Advertiser*, 1 August 1854.

Figure 4.1. Eastman Johnson, *A Ride for Liberty—The Fugitive Slaves* (recto), ca. 1862. Oil on paperboard, 21 15/16 × 26 1/8 in. Brooklyn Museum, Gift of Gwendolyn O. L. Conkling, 40.59 a–b.

Figure 4.2. 'Terrible Fight with Bloodhounds.' *Leslie's Illustrated Magazine*, March 1864.

Figure 4.3. William T. Crane, 'General Sherman's Troops Shooting Bloodhounds'. Drawing, graphite on paper, 6 7/16 × 4 11/16 in. New York Historical Society Library & Museum, Civil War drawings collection, 1861–1865.

Figure 4.4. J. W. Turner, 'Spot, Cuban Bloodhound, Used for Capturing Escaped Union Prisoners at Andersonville Prison, Andersonville, Georgia'. Photograph. Boston, 1869. Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, LOT 14043-2, no. 609.

Figure 4.5. J. W. Turner, 'Hero, Russian Bloodhound, Used for Guarding Union Prisoners at Libby Prison and Castle Thunder, Richmond, Virginia'. Photograph. Boston, 1869. Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, Liljenquist Family Collection.

Figure 4.6. A. H. Plecker, 'General Robert Edward Lee in Uniform on His Horse, Traveller'. Photograph. Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, Liljenquist Family Collection.

Figure 4.7. Centennial Photographic Co., photographer. 'Variation 'Old Abe,' Wisconsin Eagle'. Photograph. Philadelphia, 1876. Library Company of Philadelphia, Catalogue of the Centennial Photographic Co.'s Views of the International Exhibition, 1876, no. 1381.

Figure 4.8. 'An Incident of Battle—A Faithful Dog Watching the Dead Body of His Master'. Mottelay and Campbell-Copeland, eds., *The Soldier in Our Civil War: A Pictorial History of the Conflict, 1861–1865, Illustrating the Valor of the Soldier as Displayed on the Battle-Field*. Vol. 2. New York: Stanley Bradley Publishing Company, 1890.

Introduction

He called the dogs by name as they began to corner him. Pursued into the Virginia swamps by three bloodhounds ‘kept for the purpose’ of hunting freedom-seekers, Francis Fedric did not turn away from the animals he had cared for, and quietly studied, during years of enforced interspecies familiarity. Having ‘been in the habit of feeding them’, Fedric recognized that the dogs’ memories and expectations of him could override their commands to pursue him. As the dogs closed in, Fedric spoke to the animals in the same measured voice he had long used as he skillfully utilized the surrounding environment and its nonhuman inhabitants by directing the dogs toward grazing cattle ‘as if in pursuit of something else’. Slowing down, the dogs turned toward the familiar voice and followed the freedom-seeker’s cues to attack the cattle with the same trained fervor that had just a few moments before been aimed at him.¹ Realizing the futility of continuing the pursuit with ‘dogs which knew’ Fedric so well, the enslaver called them off.² These types of relationships and interactions between enslaved persons and the plantation’s animals revealed how enslaver control over these animals was never absolute, while the dogs’ responses showed how animals’ memories and decisions could determine the outcomes of pursuits.³

Even though Fedric evaded the plantation dogs, this encounter altered his planned escape route, leaving him wearied, exhausted, and surrounded by nonhuman animals in a swamp called

¹ Francis Fedric, *Slave Life in Virginia and Kentucky; or, Fifty Years of Slavery in the Southern States of America* (*Slave Life in Virginia and Kentucky*), (London: Wertheim, Macintosh, and Hunt, 1863), 76. Studies conducted by animal behaviorists have shown that dogs do not ‘discriminate between’ their owner and familiar persons in tests that are ‘based on obedient behaviour’. Andrea Kerepesi, ‘Dogs and their human companions: The effect of familiarity on dog–human interactions’, *Behavioural Processes*, vol. 110 (2015): 27–30.

² Fedric, *Slave Life in Virginia and Kentucky*, 76.

³ In *Dog Behaviour, Evolution, and Cognition*, Ádám Miklósi explores how dogs form attachments to humans during various types of cross–species interactions. Ádám Miklósi, *Dog Behaviour, Evolution, and Cognition*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 12–15, 21–23.

Bear's Wallow. Speaking to the multilayered, multispecies project of containment that spanned across the plantation system, Fedric worried that 'the whole country would be put on alert to catch [him]' as enslavers 'for self-protection, take almost as much interest in capturing another man's slaves, as they do their own'. With the thought of 'strange dogs' tearing him 'to pieces', Fedric transformed the swamp's nonhuman animals into a system of alarms as he listened for the 'slightest sound, made by the flapping of the wings of a bird, or the rustling of the wild animals among the underwood'.⁴ Fedric relied on empirical knowledge and information obtained through intra- and inter-plantation networks as he continued through the swamp, making sure to avoid the snakes on his path, 'for it was autumn time, when, it is said they are surcharged with their deadly poison'. Finding refuge in a nearby cavern, Fedric rested while listening to a discordant symphony of sounds including the barking of dogs, 'the growling of the bears', and the 'sounds of wild animals, of various kinds' as he contemplated how his survival and freedom depended as much on these animals as it did on evading the humans who claimed mastery over them and him.⁵

Fedric 'vomited very much' after consuming unfamiliar berries, became physically ill from the stench of nearby polecats, and, all the while, felt sure pursuing dogs would 'scent him out'.⁶ But he eventually made it to Michigan, where the ink of the Compromise of 1850 darkened the pages of American law and cast a shadow over every pathway to freedom, even in Northern states. Yet, he encountered many willing to act 'contrary to the Fugitive Slave Law', doing so

⁴ Fedric, *Slave Life in Virginia and Kentucky*, 77. On the sentinel characteristics and flight patterns of avian species, see John M. Marzluff and Tony Angell, *In the Company of Crows and Ravens*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 149, 179.

⁵ Fedric, *Slave Life in Virginia and Kentucky*, 77. Aurality, especially within the context of slavery, often goes unexamined in sources. Mark M. Smith's work remains the corrective in this regard. In particular, see Mark M. Smith, *Sensing the Past: Seeing, Hearing, Smelling, Tasting, and Touching in History*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 50–51.

⁶ Fedric, *Slave Life in Virginia and Kentucky*, 78.

‘with pleasure’ as they ‘willingly trampled it under [their] feet’. Fedric soon crossed the border into Canada, where he worked for the Anti-Slavery Society, looking ‘after the fugitive slaves’ who sometimes arrived on horseback with dogs by their sides.⁷

Fedric then relocated to England, where he recorded his ‘sufferings in slavery’ as well as his experiences with the natural world, and its nonhuman animals, in his autobiographical narrative *Slave Life in Virginia and Kentucky*. Published in 1863, soon after the promulgation of the Emancipation Proclamation, Fedric wrote proudly of the barriers between the races ‘now breaking down, amidst the horrors of civil war’.⁸ With the end of the American Civil War and the abolition of slavery, Fedric returned to his ‘native shores’ hoping to make himself ‘useful among [his] race’ during the postwar years and Reconstruction era. Changing the spelling of his name and adopting the title ‘Reverend’, Francis Frederick worked as a colporter in a Southern state, giving Bibles to former enslavers and the formerly enslaved.⁹ Though ‘paralyzed in his hands by exposure in the swamps’ while escaping enslavement, Reverend Francis Frederick published a final version of his narrative in 1869, writing to an audience and a nation attempting to reconcile and deal with the interminable issues of Reconstruction.¹⁰

The conclusion of his 1869 narrative read like a swan song, looking back on a transnational and transatlantic life that spanned six decades of enslavement, self-emancipation, freedom, and reconstruction. In microcosm, Fedric’s life covers the timespan, geography, and themes of this thesis. His story, with its pursuing dogs, venomous snakes, and growling bears, carried within it the nonhuman animal forces that shaped the history of enslavement and also its

⁷ Fedric, *Slave Life in Virginia and Kentucky*, 109, 111.

⁸ Fedric, *Slave Life in Virginia and Kentucky*, 111.

⁹ Francis Frederick, *Autobiography of Rev. Francis Frederick, of Virginia*, (Baltimore: J.W. Woods, Printer, 1869), 40.

¹⁰ Fedric, *Slave Life in Virginia and Kentucky*, iv.

eventual unraveling. The freedom-seeker knew the containment of the plantation system stretched beyond fences and fields, as horse-mounted planters worked together with their dogs to extend their vast system of control. His ability to circumvent the pursuing dogs as well as his reliance on birds to detect other predatory animals showed that self-emancipation could not be separated from encounters with domesticated and wild animals.

Making his way through Northern states, Fedric's narrative also showed how self-emancipation pressed upon the increasingly polarized politics of the United States, while his arrival in Canada and England showed how personal freedom turned into a transatlantic story that fueled sectionalism. And when he published his autobiographical narrative in 1863, at the height of the Civil War, and then again in 1869 during Reconstruction, he folded his memories of slavery, animals, and freedom into the battle and debates over slavery's ultimate destruction and the meaning of freedom in the post-emancipatory United States.

Fedric's story demonstrates that the history of slavery and its destruction and aftermath cannot be told apart from environmental factors and nonhuman animals. However, his awareness of the behaviors of nonhuman animals, as well as his deliberate affective relationship with the plantation dogs, invites an examination into the memories, behaviors, and, more broadly, the lives of the thousands of animals that populated the narratives of slavery, war, and Reconstruction. While Fedric's experiences were remarkable, documentary evidence suggests they were not altogether unique. Rather, it stands to reason that enslavement, self-emancipation, antebellum politics, the Civil War, and the way all of these were remembered, seldom unfolded as exclusively human endeavors. William J. Anderson recalled plantations surrounded by panthers, bears, and alligators, while Frederick Douglass described self-emancipators contending

with bloodhounds, scorpions, snakes, and other wild beasts.¹¹ During the Civil War, self-emancipators sought freedom on horseback while Black soldiers fought against Confederate dog-companies.¹² And after the Civil War, freed persons relied on animals for protection, while vigilante groups weaponized dogs and horses to deny Black Americans civil and political rights.

Taking as its starting point the recognition that the history of slavery, self-emancipation, the Civil War, and Reconstruction unfolded within a more-than-human world entangled with nonhuman animals, this thesis provides an account that is both environmental and historical.¹³ Its focus will span the early decades of the nineteenth century to the American Civil War and through the end of Reconstruction. It centers on the American South, where slavery and its legacies were most entrenched, while also examining the impact on, and the transnational and transatlantic significance of, Canada, Mexico, and the United Kingdom. By tracing animals from local plantations across state and international borders, this work situates animals within local environments of enslavement as well as larger political geographies of the nineteenth century. Examining this historical context shows the determinative roles of nonhuman animals, while also demonstrating the viability of incorporating themes from within animal studies and environmental history, such as animal agency, intentionality, and self-willed action, into this time period.

¹¹ William J. Anderson, *The Life and Narrative of William J. Anderson, Twenty-Four Years a Slave; Sold Eight Times! In Jail Sixty Times!! Whipped Three Hundred Times!!!*, (Chicago: Daily Tribune Book and Job Printing Office, 1857), 26. Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave. Written by Himself*, (Boston: Published by the Anti-Slavery Office, 1845), 85.

¹² Thomas Wentworth Higginson, the commander of the 1st South Carolina, described a ‘dog-company’ in *Army Life in a Black Regiment*. Thomas Wentworth Higginson, *Army Life in a Black Regiment*, (Boston: Fields, Osgood, & Co., 1870), 230–231.

¹³ The ‘more-than-human’ concept as a methodological framework and theoretical approach dates to Sarah Whatmore’s work *Hybrid Geographies*. Sarah Whatmore, *Hybrid Geographies: Natures, Cultures, Spaces*, (London: Sage Publications, 2002), 146–157.

Research Questions

Enslavers relied on animals to make their authority tangible and create a feeling of containment. This immediately brings attention to the nature of human power and animal behavior. Dogs reacted to external stimuli and lost scent trails. They remembered interactions and formed relationships with humans that defied plantation hierarchies. Horses resisted commands and bolted at sudden noises. Wild animals and insects followed often unpredictable patterns of behavior. These characteristics and abilities point to the difference between enslavers' attempting to manipulate the natural world and control it.

Further questions emerge from the perspective of the enslaved. To feed, care for, hunt, and form relationships with nonhuman animals was to learn their habits, temperaments, and behaviors. Enslaved persons fed dogs and observed how the animals responded to commands. They tended to horses, learning their reactions to handling and tones of voice. And they observed hunting patterns of alligators and wild cats, studied the heat-seeking movements of snakes, and even interpreted the flight patterns of birds as signals of approaching danger. How did this empirical knowledge and these types of alternative modes of interaction defy enslavers' imagined nature of predation, containment, and animal complicity, as enslaved persons created rival and oppositional geographies that challenged containment and the colonial order of species?¹⁴ Moreover, how did these modes of interaction and rival geographies figure into self-emancipation attempts?

Dogs and horses figured particularly prominently into acts of self-emancipation. Enslaved persons often sought freedom on horseback or alongside a bonded dog. At the same

¹⁴ Marcy Norton uses the term 'modes of interaction' to describe the varied ways humans and animals relate to, and understand one another. Marcy Norton, *The Tame and the Wild: People and Animals After 1492*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2024), 3–5, 252–255.

time, enslavers and their allies relied on the olfactory acuity and conditioned aggression of dogs as well as the mobility and herd behaviors of horses to pursue and recapture freedom-seekers. After capturing self-emancipators, enslavers continued to weaponize animals through dog attacks, cat-hauling, insect-induced torture, and other types of ritualized violence. However, these punishments were often as unstable as they were grotesque. Animals defied human expectations during moments of pursuit and punishment, with horses rearing up when commanded to trample humans, cats refusing to draw their claws, and dogs refusing to attack a familiar person, and, in some cases, attacking enslavers or other animals. How did these acts of aggression or refusals of action reflect intentional species-specific behavior? And how do these incidents of decision-making impact the ways historians view animals in the past?

Central to this interpretation is recognizing that animals operated according to their own behaviors and needs. Looking into these questions from the field of animal studies opens further lines of inquiry into subjectivity and animals as historical subjects. How can historians approach the concepts of animal agency, intentionality, and self-willed motivation without collapsing them into anthropocentric categories? How can ethology and research from the fields of veterinary studies and animal biology help to make sense of dogs' actions on the scent trail, horses' responses to physical and mental stress, the ectothermic movements of snakes, the nocturnal patterns of wolves, or the predatory ambushes of alligators in the historical record?

Whether acting outside or within human command structures, animals left their marks on the historical records of slavery, self-emancipation, sectional tensions, and transnational diplomacy. Animals literally left their marks on enslaved bodies, with scars from animal violence becoming identifying markers in runaway advertisements. How did these animal-inflicted wounds and injuries become biometric identifiers central to the surveillance of enslaved persons

across the South? Those same runaway advertisements and their accompanying descriptions of animal violence written into enslaved bodies circulated beyond the control of enslavers into politics and public opinion. In what ways did abolitionists reframe and reappropriate enslavers' language of biometric identifiers into evidence of the cruelty, meant to mobilize outrage in audiences at home in the United States and abroad in Britain and British Canada?

Animals within the context of slavery, self-emancipation, capture, and punishment forced enslavers and legislatures to deal with an unstable legal and political foundation that sought to regulate both animals and enslaved persons as commodities. When dogs injured or killed freedom-seekers, or when horses or dogs died during pursuit, questions over compensation and liability revealed legal and political contradictions within the planter-class's property regime. How can perspectives from political science show how both private citizens and lawmakers negotiated coercive power in ways that make clear that the state's monopoly on violence was distributed across species lines?¹⁵ And how did these multispecies entanglements press against the capacity of order and value when animals resisted or destroyed other living property?

Animals exposed the porous boundaries separating private violence from public enforcement and the equally unstable divide between state and national authority. Animal-aided self-emancipation attempts that crossed into Mexico and Canada turned freedom and capture into transnational issues of sovereignty, jurisdiction, and state enforcement power. How did the mounted enslavers, accompanied by dogs, act as parastate actors when they traveled into Mexico during informal and illegal cross-border raids? When subnational authorities, including

¹⁵ Max Weber's assertion that states must successfully claim 'the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory' remains foundational in the field of political science. Charles Wright Mills, Hans Gerth, Hans Heinrich Gerth, eds., *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, (New York: Routledge, 1991), 78. For an overview of the way Weber's concept has been applied in political science, especially regarding a state's legitimacy, see Philipp Lottholz and Nicolas Lemay-Hébert, 'Re-reading Weber, Re-conceptualizing State-Building: From Neo-Weberian to Post-Weberian Approaches to State, Legitimacy, and State-Building', *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, vol. 29, no. 4 (2016): 1467-1485.

governors and other political leaders of slave states, petitioned and sued Canada and Mexico for the extradition of freedom-seekers, were these officials seeking to mobilize foreign policy by nationalizing and internationalizing Southern slavery? As Canada and Mexico refused to extradite fugitive slaves, they couched their justifications in sovereign noninterference, humanitarianism, and competing legal orders. In the process, they exposed the limits of American hegemonic reach in the hemisphere.

Similar disputes over sovereignty, property, and freedom emerged within the legal and political systems of the United States. Facing Northern personal liberty laws, enslavers attempted to use the same kinds of legal loopholes that they had exploited in Canada, accusing freedom-seekers of horse theft to compel their extradition. How did diplomatic failures abroad and the limited success of these thinly-veiled ruses at home intensify Southern accusations that the national government lacked the political will and strength to preserve the slave system? Pulled between fragmenting legal authority within a divided federalist system and the threat of sectional disunion, the passage of the Compromise of 1850 and its strengthened Fugitive Slave Act effectively nationalized the animal-aided coercive apparatus of slavery by granting enslavers federal authority to capture freedom-seekers across state lines. How did the enforcement of the Fugitive Slave Act incorporate dogs and horses into the formal mechanisms of recapture? Furthermore, how did the presence of these weaponized animals as visible instruments of federalized slave power contribute to a growing crisis of political consent and noncompliance as Northerners reacted with terror and outrage to reports of dog attacks and horses dragging self-emancipators through their towns back to slavery?

Within a decade, the same types of dogs and horses that led slave patrols through Northern cities and towns were deployed in the Civil War, shifting familiar interspecies

hierarchies into new patterns of military dependence. How did the Union and Confederate militaries, along with the thousands of civilians caught up in the war, attempt to manage nonhuman animal energy, perception, and behavior? How did formerly enslaved persons turn to Southern animals for wartime emancipation? Combatants and enslaved persons captured and killed nonhuman animals on an unprecedented scale, revealing how deeply the Confederacy's fate was tied to its animals. How did the loss of those nonhuman animals through capture, slaughter, disease, and abandonment catalyze the undoing of the Confederacy? And how did the slaughter of Southern dogs, in particular, reveal how animal lives became entangled in the symbolism of the moral reckoning of war and emancipation?

In the postwar years, Southerners attempted to reestablish control over newly emancipated freed persons through animal-enforced repression. Did the reappearance of dogs and horses alongside vigilante groups signal the continuity of the plantation order? Conversely, how did freed people resist the reassertion of animal-enforced control by acquiring their own dogs and horses? The postwar years and Reconstruction era wrought animal-induced political violence on an unprecedented scale. How did reports of mounted vigilante groups with weaponized dogs terrorizing freed persons, along with Republican political leaders and voters, undermine support for Reconstruction? With Northern support of Reconstruction waning, in what ways did the sentimentalization of animals, at fairs and reunions, in literature, and in Southern Lost Cause mythology, promote national reconciliation? These questions make up the central inquiries of this thesis. The chapters that follow address these questions through close readings of historical sources that are informed by interdisciplinary methodological approaches and ongoing historiographical debates.

Historiography, Sources, and Methodology

These research questions challenge anthropocentric histories by tracing interspecies relationships and interactions from plantations to the halls of government and into battlefields and Civil War memorials. In doing so, this thesis foregrounds animal studies and its environmental context to ask what new interpretive possibilities emerge from reframing history as a multispecies process. It finds resonance in myriad historiographical strands, including, but not limited to, slavery studies, antebellum politics, animal studies, and environmental history.

The historiography of slavery is perhaps one of the largest and most dynamic bodies of scholarship in any subject, with generations of historians exploring aspects of enslavement ranging from gender and family to labor and capitalism to religion and politics.¹⁶ This thesis will concentrate on works focusing on plantation containment and the corresponding rival and oppositional geographies through which enslaved persons redefined boundaries. In doing so, this study engages with prominent subfields in slavery studies that provide the theoretical vocabulary to describe concepts such as mastery, spatial containment, and resistance. It takes the work of Michel Foucault and Edward Said as starting points, whose conceptualizations of spatial regulation and geographies of control formed the theoretical backbone of this subfield.

¹⁶ With full recognition that this list of scholarship within slavery studies is far from exhaustive, important works on gender and family include Deborah Gray White, *Ar'n't I a Woman? Female Slaves in the Plantation South*, (New York: W. W. Norton, 1999); and Jennifer L. Morgan, *Laboring Women: Reproduction and Gender in New World Slavery*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011). In an Atlantic context, see Emily West, Diana Paton, et al., eds., *Motherhood, Childlessness and the Care of Children in Atlantic Slave Societies*, (London: Routledge, 2019). On labor systems and capitalism, see Edward E. Baptist, *The Half Has Never Been Told: Slavery and the Making of American Capitalism*, (New York: Basic Books, 2014); Sven Beckert and Seth Rockman, eds., *Slavery's Capitalism: A New History of American Economic Development*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016); and Walter Johnson, *Soul by Soul: Life Inside the Antebellum Slave Market*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1999). Classic works on religion, the politics of slavery, and other major themes include Sylvia R. Frey and Betty Wood, *Come Shouting to Zion: African American Protestantism in the American South and British Caribbean*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998); Ira Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1998); and David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Emancipation*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2014).

Foucault introduced the concept of the panopticon within prisons and penitentiaries as a model of surveillance in which watchtowers allowed authorities to observe and monitor inmates, creating an impression of constant observation that led inmates to self-regulate their behavior.¹⁷ Archaeologists have used Foucault's model to inform interpretations of plantation landscapes in the Caribbean, in that the homes of enslavers and overseers functioned as vantage points for observation similar to the watchtower of a prison.¹⁸ The first chapter of this thesis will extend these observations, arguing that dog kennels and horse stables functioned in comparable ways. Foucault's influence can also be seen in studies of the American South, including Walter Johnson's seminal *River of Dark Dreams*, where he argued that it was 'spatial order upon which the Cotton Kingdom was founded'. In Johnson's interpretation, labor was central to spatial order and plantation surveillance, providing an arrangement that demanded enslaved persons be at a certain space at a certain time.¹⁹

Finding both resonance and dissonance with Foucault's theories, Edward Said reoriented the spatial dimensions of power from discipline and deliberately-placed architecture to the drawing of boundaries and the control of movement and space. Said introduced these concepts in his post-colonial critique, *Culture and Imperialism*, in which he ultimately concluded that colonized populations challenged imperial hegemony through the assertion of their own spaces.²⁰

¹⁷ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, translated by Alan Sheridan, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1977).

¹⁸ Lynsey A. Bates, "'The Landscape Cannot Be Said to Be Really Perfect': A Comparative Investigation of Plantation Spatial Organization on Two British Colonial Sugar Estates", in Lydia Wilson Marshall, ed., *The Archaeology of Slavery: A Comparative Approach to Captivity and Coercion*, (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2015); James A. Delle, 'The Habitus of Jamaican Plantation Landscapes', in James A. Delle, et al., eds., *Out of Many, One People: The Historical Archaeology of Colonial Jamaica*, (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2011); and Theresa Singleton, 'Slavery and Spatial Dialectics on Cuban Coffee Plantations', *World Archaeology*, vol. 33 (2001).

¹⁹ Walter Johnson, *River of Dark Dreams: Slavery and Empire in the Cotton Kingdom* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2013), 50, 169.

²⁰ Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, (New York: Knopf, 1993), xx.

In applying Said's framework to the plantation complex, Stephanie Camp demonstrated that spatial restriction and the control of physical space were fundamental to rural slavery and the planter-class regime. Most significantly, Camp's reconceptualization of 'rival geographies' demonstrated how enslaved women developed counter-spaces where they defied surveillance and asserted autonomy.²¹

Since the publication of *Closer to Freedom*, scholars have incorporated and built upon Camp's work. Historians, such as Rashauna Johnson, have extended rival geographies beyond rural plantations to urban areas and Atlantic networks.²² Archeologists excavated plantations and employed GIS to conceive of rival geographies as archaeologically traceable, extending these spaces into built environments.²³ Moving even further beyond what might be visible in maps and archives, Katherine McKittrick expanded black women's spatial lives to include material and imagined geographies, arguing that resistance took place in both physical spaces and intellectual spaces.²⁴ These frameworks of surveillance, containment, and rival geographies provide the spatial context within which self-liberation took place, and connect this study to the vast literature on self-emancipation and fugitivity. Over the past two-plus decades, these topics have been getting an amount of scholarly interest commensurate with their importance. John Hope Franklin's pioneering study, *Rebels on the Plantation*, which he co-authored with Loren Schweninger, marked a seminal moment in the historiography of self-emancipation.²⁵ While

²¹ On the concept of 'rival geographies' see Stephanie M.H. Camp, *Closer to Freedom: Enslaved Women and Everyday Resistance in the Plantation South*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 7.

²² Rashauna Johnson, *Slavery's Metropolis: Unfree Labor in New Orleans during the Age of Revolutions*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 4–6.

²³ Lindsey E. Cochran, 'Rival landscapes of Georgia's coastal plantations', *Journal of Anthropological Archaeology*, vol. 61 (2021): 2–3.

²⁴ Katherine McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds: Black Women and the Cartographies of Struggle*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), x.

²⁵ John Hope Franklin and Loren Schweninger, *Runaway Slaves: Rebels on the Plantation*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

preeminent scholars such as Larry Gara, Eugene Genovese, Ira Berlin, and Gary Nash made key contributions to our understanding of self-emancipation, Franklin and Schweninger's 1999 work was unique in both its extensive research on and its prominence given to self-emancipators.²⁶

Operating under the premise that at that point, there had been 'no full-length study of runaway slaves', Franklin and Schweninger set out to fill this gap by combing through archives spanning across the entire antebellum South.²⁷ Relying heavily on runaway advertisements, newspaper articles, and legal records, the authors made useful generalizations regarding who was most likely to self-emancipate, to and from where, and under what conditions. The true gift of *Runaway Slaves* is its pages of meticulously researched notes and the scholarly response provoked by the authors' interpretation of these notes. In the words of historian Larry E. Rivers, *Runaway Slaves* built 'the foundation' upon which he and many other scholars could build.²⁸ Despite structural strains, that foundation has held firm over the past twenty years as this field has attracted incredibly talented historians who have produced sophisticated, nuanced, and significant works that have greatly added to our understanding of the experiences of enslaved persons who attempted to escape enslavement.

Coinciding with the transnational turn in history and American Studies, as well as a surge in popular and academic interest in the Underground Railroad, many early twenty-first-century scholars couched their studies of self-emancipation within these mutually non-exclusive approaches.²⁹ David Blight's edited volume, *The Underground Railroad in History and Memory*,

²⁶ Larry Gara, *The Liberty Line: The Legend of the Underground Railroad*, (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1967); Eugene D. Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1976); Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone*; and Gary B. Nash, *Race and Revolution*, (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1990).

²⁷ Franklin and Schweninger, *Runaway Slaves*, xiv.

²⁸ Larry Eugene Rivers, *Rebels and Runaways: Slave Resistance in Nineteenth-Century Florida*, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2012), 2.

²⁹ For further elaboration on the transnational turn see, Akira Iriye, 'The Transnational Turn', *Diplomatic History*, vol. 31, no. 3 (2007); Ian Tyrrell, 'Reflections on the transnational turn in United States history: theory and

appeared ‘at a time when both academic and popular interest in the history and legend of the Underground Railroad’ was ‘perhaps at an all-time high’.³⁰ Consisting of a series of essays from a veritable dream team of historians including, Blight, Ira Berlin, Deborah Gray White, Catherine Clinton, Bruce Levine, and R.J.M. Blackett, the volume made an effort to recenter the importance of ‘African American voices and viewpoints’.³¹ Essays such as John Michael Vlach’s ‘Places of Flight and Refuge’, John Landers’s ‘The Forgotten Route to Freedom in Florida’, and David Blight’s ‘The Story Endures in History and Legend’, helped to demonstrate that ‘the Underground Railroad was the process—sometimes organized into a network but more often not—by which slaves escaped northward to the free states, to Canada, or to points south, west, and out to sea’.³²

The emphasis on the multiracial, multi-directional elements of self-emancipation has continued unabated with historians looking north, south, east, and west while also emphasizing the crucial role that self-emancipated enslaved persons, free blacks, and maroons played in self-liberation. Answering Rachel Adams’s call for historians to ‘reroute the geography of North American slavery’, Larry Eugene Rivers showed that many freedom-seekers fled southward to Florida from other parts of the Deep South and used Florida’s coastlines as a means to escape to the Caribbean, especially the Bahamas and St. Domingue.³³ Jeffrey R. Kerr-Ritchie further

practice’, *Journal of Global History*, vol. 4, no. 3 (2009); and Shelley Fisher Fishkin, ‘Crossroads of Cultures: The Transnational Turn in American Studies: Presidential Address to the American Studies Association, November 12, 2004’, *American Quarterly*, vol. 57, no. 1 (2005).

³⁰ Galin Berrier, ‘Passages to Freedom: the Underground Railroad in History and Memory/Frontline of Freedom: African Americans and the Forging of the Underground Railroad in the Ohio Valley’, *State Historical Society of Iowa*, vol. 64, no. 1 (2005). David W. Blight, *The Underground Railroad in History and Memory*, (Washington DC: Smithsonian Books, 2006).

³¹ Blight, *The Underground Railroad*, p. xiv.

³² Keith Griffler’s ‘Frontline of Freedom’, John Michael Vlach’s ‘Places of Flight and Refuge’, and John Landers’s ‘The Forgotten Route to Freedom in Florida’, all appear in Blight, *The Underground Railroad in History and Memory*.

³³ Rachel Adams, *Continental Divides Remapping the Cultures of North America*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009). Quotation is the title of Chapter Two. Rivers, *Rebels and Runaways*, 2.

explored the maritime escapes of those who sought freedom in the British Caribbean and Saint Domingue.³⁴ With so much contemporary focus on the sociopolitical and economic importance of the border between the United States and Mexico, there has been a recent surge in studies looking at southwestern self-emancipation in the Texas-Mexico borderland. The research of Alice Baumgartner and Mekala Audain, in particular, has brought attention to the freedom-seekers who navigated the southern border and settled in Mexico.³⁵ This thesis takes inspiration from these multi-directional histories and approaches self-emancipation through a continental framework, tracing attempts to secure freedom across the span of North American geographies.

Research within slavery studies and spatial geography provides this work with a historiographical foundation for understanding plantations as carceral systems, while the historiography of self-emancipation provides the basis for understanding such acts in the context of multi-directional political and spatial mobility. Both historiographical strands offer a source base and analytic rationale for engaging with nonhuman animals within enslavement and self-emancipation, but with the notable exceptions of Mekala Audain, Walter Johnson, and especially David Silkenat, most works overlook animals' significance altogether.³⁶ Dogs, horses, wolves, bears, wildcats, alligators, snakes, and insects populate runaway advertisements, slave narratives, plantation records, court documents, and legislation, but these animals are rarely analyzed as historical determinants. Furthermore, a full engagement with animal agency, behavior, and their sensory capabilities remains largely unwritten.

³⁴ Jeffrey R. Kerr-Ritchie, 'The U.S. Coastal Passage and Caribbean Spaces of Freedom', in Damian Alan Pargas, ed., *Fugitive Slaves and Spaces of Freedom in North America*, (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2018).

³⁵ Alice L. Baumgartner, *South to Freedom: Runaway Slaves to Mexico and the Road to the Civil War*, (New York: Basic Books, 2020); Mekala Audain, 'Mexican Canaan: fugitive slaves and free blacks on the American frontier, 1804–1867', (Ph.D. Dissertation, Rutgers University, 2014).

³⁶ David Silkenat, *Scars on the Land: An Environmental History of Slavery in the American South*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022). Walter Johnson's *River of Dark Dreams* is especially impressive in its examination of dogs and horses within the plantation system. Johnson, *River of Dark Dreams*, 222–246.

This gap in the historiography aligns with debates within environmental history that help to ground this thesis within its ecological foundations. David Silkenat's *Scars on the Land* is the most comprehensive and important study linking slavery and Southern history with environmental history, with other contributions coming from Eugene Genovese, Steven Stoll, Sharla M. Fett, Andrew J. Torget, Walter Johnson, and S. Max Edelson.³⁷ The number of works bringing environmental studies into Southern history has certainly grown since Christopher Morris's lament that 'environmental history has yet to catch the full attention of southern historians', yet much of the scholarship still centers on soil and agriculture.³⁸ This thesis is more interested in the manipulation of environmental features as part of the plantation project to enforce containment of enslaved persons, developments best understood through the framework of the Plantationocene.

Over the past decade, scholars from across multiple disciplines have advanced the Plantationocene as a framework to counter the broad-brush Anthropocene framework.³⁹ They argue that human-caused climate and planetary change are best explained through historically specific regimes of plantation economies. Donna Haraway, in particular, explicitly argued that these select groups and societies deserved more of the blame as a result of their economic systems being predicated on environmental exploitation.⁴⁰ Moving from an argument about the

³⁷ Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll*; Steven Stoll, *Larding the Lean Earth: Soil and Society in Nineteenth-Century America*, (New York: Hill and Wang, 2002); Sharla Fett, *Working Cures: Healing, Health and Power on Southern Slave Plantations*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002); Andrew J. Torget, *Seeds of Empire: Cotton, Slavery, and the Transformation of the Texas Borderlands, 1800–1850*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015); and S. Max Edelson, *Plantation Enterprise in Colonial South Carolina*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2006).

³⁸ Christopher Morris, 'A More Southern Environmental History', *The Journal of Southern History*, vol. 75, no. 3 (2009).

³⁹ Academics and scientists often use the term 'Anthropocene' to describe the current geological epoch as a period marked by significant human-caused climate change. Will Steffen, Paul J. Crutzen, and John R. McNeill, 'The Anthropocene: Are Humans Now Overwhelming the Great Forces of Nature?' *Ambio*, vol. 36, no. 8 (2007): 614–621.

⁴⁰ Donna Haraway, 'Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Plantationocene, Chthulucene: Making Kin', *Environmental Humanities*, vol. 6, no. 1 (2015).

generalized human impact on environmental change to specific ways humans caused these long-term issues, Anna Tsing pointed to practices common to European colonial plantations such as land clearing, swamp drainage, gridding, and monocropping. By creating and then recreating scalable plantations, the later planter classes across the Americas simplified diverse ecologies by using coerced laborers to make the environment legible to power and profit.⁴¹

The concept of the Plantationocene as a response to the Anthropocene has gained popularity within the last decade, but it remains a recent and developing framework.⁴² Despite its expanding influence in environmental humanities, historical applications have tended to be macro in scope, focusing on systems of large-scale production, global capitalism, and monoculturalism.⁴³ Very few studies have examined how the Plantationocene might be used to examine the experience of containment and how the plantation's engineered environments shaped the sensory and spatial worlds of enslavers, the enslaved, and nonhuman animals. Along with looking at these lived experiences, this thesis will focus on the intentionally designed animal landscape of the plantation, including the positioning of dogs, horses, kennels, stables, and trails as part of the political economy of the Plantationocene.

There is a tendency in environmental histories of the American South to treat nonhuman animals as resources or hazards rather than historical forces whose decisions and behaviors

⁴¹ Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, 'On Nonscalability: The Living World Is Not Amenable to Precision–Nested Scales', *Common Knowledge*, vol. 18, no. 3 (2012): 506–508; Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, Andrew S. Mathews, and Nils Bubandt, 'Patchy Anthropocene: Landscape Structure, Multispecies History, and the Retooling of Anthropology: An Introduction to Supplement 20', *Current Anthropology*, vol. 60, no. S20 (2019): 186–187.

⁴² Still a framework in its infancy, important works on the Plantationocene also include: Janae Davis, et al., 'Anthropocene, Capitalocene, ... Plantationocene?: A Manifesto for Ecological Justice in an Age of Global Crises', *Geography Compass*, vol. 13, no. 5 (2019); Michael Warren Murphy, 'Refiguring the Plantationocene: Racial Capitalism, World–Systems Analysis, and Global Socioecological Transformation', *Journal of World Systems Research*, vol. 26, no. 2 (2020); and Donna J. Haraway, *Staying With the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016).

⁴³ On monoculturalism as part of the Plantationocene, see Justin D. Edwards, Rune Graulund, and Johan Höglund, eds., *Dark Scenes from Damaged Earth: The Gothic Anthropocene*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2022), 105–107, 112–115.

shaped the more-than-human world. The interdisciplinary field of animal studies provides a means to address this interpretive gap and offers a framework for taking animal presence seriously as cohabitants in human histories. Coming a long way from earlier anthropocentric histories of animals, such as Keith Thomas's classic work *Man and the Natural World*, scholars writing in the past two decades 'routinely incorporate approaches from different academic disciplines into the work'.⁴⁴ This animal turn and its multi-disciplinary inclusion and 'mainstream acceptance of the animal as subject, object, and even perhaps agent', has created a unique intellectual field of study that 'is not founded on any one method or approach', but instead, 'remains diverse in terms of its methodology and raison d'être, mirroring the multiplicity of its object of study'.⁴⁵

Looking back at the growth of the field in the two decades that followed the publication of her groundbreaking book, *The Animal Estate*, preeminent historian of animals Harriet Ritvo was pleased to have seen the historians' attitudes shifting significantly, as 'animals have been edging toward the mainstream'.⁴⁶ Even though a growing number of historians 'challenge the absence of the nonhuman from history', it is not enough to insert the animal into historical narratives as, in Virginia DeJohn Anderson's words, 'part of the scenery', or as metaphors upon which we ascribe symbolic meaning.⁴⁷ Instead, it is the scholarship that treats nonhuman animals as historical participants that, according to Erica Fudge, 'broaden and deepen what we might

⁴⁴ Hilda Kean, 'Challenges for Historians Writing Animal Human History: What is Really Enough?', *Anthrozoos*, vol. 25, no. 1 (2012).

⁴⁵ For further elaboration on the 'animal turn', see W. Wheeler and L. Williams, 'The Animal Turn', *New Frontiers*, no. 76 (2012); and Sandra Swart, "'But Where's the Bloody Horse?": Textuality and Corporeality in the 'Animal Turn'", *Journal of Literary Studies*, vol. 23, no. 3 (2007): 2

⁴⁶ Harriet Ritvo, *The Animal Estate: The English and other Creatures in the Victorian Age*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1987). Harriet Ritvo, 'Animal Planet', *Environmental History*, vol. 9, no. 2 (2004): 205.

⁴⁷ Virginia DeJohn Anderson, *Creatures of Empire: How Domestic Animals Transformed Early America*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 1–2.

know about the past’, while also challenging ‘some assumptions as to what the focus of our discipline might be’.⁴⁸

An interspecies and multispecies history, this thesis engages with animal studies perhaps more than any other historiographical strand, and scholarship focusing on agency, action, motivation, intentionality, and noncompliance provides the theoretical vocabulary to ask important foundational questions in my research. Did the panther ‘creeping along the path’ in the shadows show agency as it stalked Charles Ball and his dog?⁴⁹ Did the wolves that surrounded Henry Bibb and his family ‘as their prey’, act with instinct or intentionality?⁵⁰ What can be made of the peripatetic enslaved woman named Celeste, ‘whose tracks the hounds absolutely refused to follow’?⁵¹ Or the canines who, in pursuit of enslaved persons, turned and attacked the slave-hunter whose commands they were supposed to be following? Furthermore, can the ‘small flies, gnats and mosquitoes’, who ‘swarmed the air’ around Solomon Northup, penetrating the ‘porches of the ear, the nose, the eyes, the mouth’, be considered historical actors or agents?⁵²

Though it is almost universally accepted within animal studies that nonhuman animals ranging from chimpanzees to insects possess varying degrees of agency, motivation, and intentionality, scholars in the field continue to debate the meanings of these notoriously elusive words.⁵³ Often defined with other associated words such as ‘self-hood, motivation, will,

⁴⁸ Erica Fudge, ‘A left-handed blow: writing the history of animals’, in Nigel Rothfels, ed., *Representing Animals*, (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press: 2003), 6. Erica Fudge, ‘Milking Other Men’s Beasts’, *History and Theory*, vol. 52, no. 4 (2013). Among many other works, see Mike Michael, ‘Roadkill: Between humans, nonhumans, and technologies’, in *Society & Animals*, vol. 12, no. 4; and Ann Norton Greene, *Horses at Work: Harnessing Power in Industrial America*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2008), for works that reveal nonhuman animals as active participants throughout history.

⁴⁹ Ball, *Slavery in the United States*, 355.

⁵⁰ Henry Bibb, *Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb, An American Slave, Written by Himself*, (New York: Published by the Author, 1849), 124.

⁵¹ Solomon Northup, *Twelve Years a Slave: Narrative of Solomon Northup, a Citizen of New-York, Kidnapped in Washington City in 1841, and Rescued in 1853*, (Auburn: Derby and Miller, 1853), 246.

⁵² Northup, *Twelve Years a Slave*, 155.

⁵³ Josep Call and Michael Tomasello, ‘Does the chimpanzee have a theory of mind? 30 years later’, *Trends in Cognitive Science*, vol. 12, no. 5 (2008). Rohan Deb Roy, *Malarial Subjects: Empire, Medicine and Nonhumans in*

purposiveness, intentionality, choice, initiative, freedom and creativity’, researchers have conceptualized agency and the concomitant question of whether animals possess agency in myriad ways.⁵⁴ Does agency require rationalized ‘self-directed action’, as Walter Johnson once suggested?⁵⁵ If so, does Johnson’s reading preclude nonhuman animals from possessing agency, as is alluded to by Chris Pearson in his 2014 chapter ‘History and Animal Agencies’?⁵⁶ Or, do certain animals, such as dogs, who Leslie Irvine describes as ‘agentic beings’, still possess agency even if the defined concept is circumscribed to ‘self-willed action’?⁵⁷

From the symbolic interactional perspective, nonhuman animals act with self-willed action, confronting humans ‘whose immediate presence is compelling—with conscious intentionality’.⁵⁸ However, to ascribe intentionality to nonhuman animals requires a reconceptualization of the way animal action has been described throughout history. From an animal rights perspective, Jason Hribal argues that animals act with both intentionality and resistance.⁵⁹ And while Hribal focuses on contemporary anecdotal evidence of animal attacks and escapes, his line of thinking could prove valuable while analyzing historical evidence. Sociologists Bob Carter and Nickie Charles present a way to approach animal action while also providing a clear and persuasive understanding of animal agency.⁶⁰ Arguing against the more

British India, 1820–1909, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017). For an overview of the debates surrounding what is meant by animal agency, see Chris Pearson, ‘History and Animal Agencies’, in Linda Kalof, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Animal Studies*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

⁵⁴ Mustafa Emirbayer and Ann Mische, ‘What is Agency?’, *American Journal of Sociology*, vol. 103, no. 4 (1998): 962.

⁵⁵ Walter Johnson, ‘On Agency’, *Journal of Social History*, vol. 37, no. 1 (2003).

⁵⁶ Pearson, ‘History and Animal Agencies’, 241.

⁵⁷ Leslie Irvine, *If you tame me: Understanding our connection with Animals*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2004), 6.

⁵⁸ Gene Myers, *The Significance of Children and Animals: Social Development and Our Connections to Other Species*, (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 2007).

⁵⁹ Jason Hribal, *Fear of the Animal Planet: The Hidden History of Animal Resistance*, (Chicago: AK Press, 2010), 32–35.

⁶⁰ Bob Carter and Nickie Charles, ‘Animals, Agency and Resistance’, *Journal for the Theory of Social Behavior*, vol. 42, no. 3 (2013).

inclusive claim espoused by Actor Network Theorists that ‘animal agency and animal being are much the same thing’, Carter and Charles use three accounts to better understand differences between animal action, agency, intervention, and resistance.⁶¹ The authors first explored the story of two pigs that escaped from a slaughterhouse to ask whether their escape serves as an example ‘of resistance to the power relations within which they are enmeshed’. The authors then analyzed the work of scientist Simone Dennis, who used kindness to coax lab rats, prompting the question of whether the rats could be ‘seen as engaging in a form of resistance to human power’. Lastly, the authors looked at the case of a Welsh Terrier, who, when upset with her human companions quarreling, barked and growled until the couple stopped fighting.⁶²

These important contributions provide methods for identifying and reconstructing animal agency and decision-making without anthropomorphism, allowing this thesis to apply methods from animal studies to slavery’s archives and read interspecies events as contingent outcomes impacted by animal behavior. However, wading too deep in theoretical waters can leave historians gasping for the air needed to tell a historical narrative. Nonhuman animals, and their importance to the historical narrative, cannot always be reduced to intra-academic debates over theory. Indeed, many historians, ‘working on the past in the broad Animal Studies field’, focus ‘not around agency or representation as such, but attempt to show in the present the importance of animals in the past’.⁶³ This literature has examined, among other topics, how pets, working animals, and livestock shaped labor, mobility, and power relations. It has also demonstrated

⁶¹ Riche Nimmo, ‘Bovine mobilities and vital movements: flows of milk, mediation and animal agency’, in J. Bull, ed., *Animal movements, moving animals: Essays on direction, velocity and agency in humanimal encounters*, (Uppsala: Uppsala University Press), 72.

⁶² Carter and Charles, ‘Animals, Agency and Resistance’, 325–327.

⁶³ Kean, ‘Challenges for Historians Writing Animal Human History’, 64.

animals' importance to economic systems, social hierarchies, colonialism, war, and state formation.⁶⁴

While many works centering animals in the historical narrative will be considered in the following chapters, a historiography most relevant to this project is the small, yet expanding body of literature that examines animals within the structures and practices of slavery and self-emancipation. Studies examining the role of nonhuman animals in enslaved persons' lives have traditionally focused on fishing, hunting, and the tending of livestock.⁶⁵ However, as this thesis specifically focuses on containment and self-emancipation, capture and its aftermath, and the Civil War and Reconstruction era, more attention is to be given to dogs, equine animals, as well as wild non-domesticated animals.

The paucity of scholarship analyzing the impact of wild animals within these historical contexts belies the voices of enslavers, the enslaved, abolitionists, lawmakers, and military commanders who often spoke at length about encounters with alligators, snakes, panthers, scorpions, wolves, bears, and insects.⁶⁶ Helen Cowie has observed that wild animals rarely

⁶⁴ On animals as historical actors that shaped historical events, see Sandra Swart, *Riding High: Horses, Humans and History in South Africa*, (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2010), 1–2; and Erica Fudge, 'Milking Other Men's Beasts'. For further elaboration on working animals, including dogs and horses in particular, see Chris Pearson, *Dogopolis: The Social Life of Dogs in Paris, New York, and London, 1860–1940*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2021), 123; and James A. Serpell, 'The Human–Animal Bond', in *The Oxford Handbook of Animal Studies*, 81–82. Nicole Shukin provides an incredible analysis of laboring animals and their symbolic as well as material value in her work *Animal Capital*. See Nicole Shukin, *Animal Capital: Rendering Life in Biopolitical Times*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009).

⁶⁵ Nicholas W. Proctor, *Bathed in Blood: Hunting and Mastery in the Old South*, (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2002); Abraham Gibson, *Feral Animals in the American South: An Evolutionary History*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016); Amy T. Young, et al., 'The Role of Hunting to Cope with Risk at Saragossa Plantation, Natchez, Mississippi', *American Anthropologist*, vol. 103 (2001); Scott Giltner, 'Slave Hunting and Fishing in the Antebellum South', in Dianne Glave and Mark Stoll, eds., *To Love the Wind and the Rain: African Americans and Environmental History*, (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2006). David Silkenat's *Scars on the Land*, is again an outlier here, providing both an examination of livestock, agriculture, and hunting, while also discussing the importance of other domesticated and non-domesticated animals to slavery.

⁶⁶ The terms 'domesticated animal' and 'wild animal' are problematic and context specific. In this thesis, canines and equine animals will be treated differently from other nonhuman animals when differential treatment was afforded to these animals by historical actors. Wild animals will refer to animals that typically lived outside of the plantation complex, with whom enslaved persons and enslavers made far fewer efforts to form relationships.

appear in human sources equally with domesticated animals, and that they are typically referenced only when they intersect with humans in significant or unusual ways. According to Cowie, this creates challenges for historians, resulting in far less scholarship on these animals.⁶⁷ Earl Hess, editor of the volume, *Animal Histories of the Civil War Era*, echoes this point, noting that scholarship on the Civil War Era tends to focus mostly on horses, and in some cases, dogs.⁶⁸

This imbalance between animals considered domestic and wild is most evident in the historiography of dogs, where there is a growing, albeit uneven, body of scholarship that situates the species across a range of historical contexts, from hunting and herding to warfare and empire to domesticity and pet-keeping.⁶⁹ Dogs are also of growing historical interest within the study of slavery. Regarded as ‘constant companions’ or ‘bloodhounds unflashing bones’, historians, literary scholars, and archeologists have made contributions to our appreciation of the complex and multifaceted impacts that canines had in the lives of enslavers and the enslaved.⁷⁰ While touched upon in classic works on slavery by preeminent historians such as Eugene Genovese and Peter Kolchin, the role of canines in American slavery went mostly unexplored until the last three decades.⁷¹ Building upon Genovese’s claim that dogs served as enslaved persons’ ‘great

⁶⁷ See Helen Cowie, *Animals in World History*, (London: Routledge, 2014), in particular the introductory section on sources and methodology. For further information on writing the histories of wild animals, see Mahesh Rangarajan, ‘Animals with Rich Histories: The Case of the Lions of Gir Forest, Gujarat, India’, *History and Theory*, vol. 52, no. 4 (2013): 127.

⁶⁸ Earl J. Hess, ed., *Animal Histories of the Civil War Era*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2022).

⁶⁹ Some of the most important works on dogs in history include: Chris Pearson, ‘Dogs, History, and Agency’, *History and Theory*, vol. 52, no. 4 (2013); Aaron Herald Skabelund, *Empire of Dogs: Canines, Japan, and the Making of the Modern Imperial World*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011); Chris Pearson, ‘Between Instinct and Intelligence: Harnessing Police Dog Agency in Early Twentieth-Century Paris and London’, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, vol. 60, no. 4 (2018): 982–1007; Donna J. Haraway, *The Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, People, and Significant Otherness* (Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press, 2003); and Philip Howell, *At Home and Astray: The Domestic Dog in Victorian Britain* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2015).

⁷⁰ Charles Ball, *Slavery in the United States: A Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Charles Ball, a Black Man, Who Lived Forty Years in Maryland, South Carolina and Georgia, as a Slave Under Various Masters, and was One Year in the Navy with Commodore Barney, During the Late War*, (New York: Published by John S. Taylor, 1837), p. 389. Theodore D. Weld, *American Slavery As It Is: Testimony of a Thousand Witnesses*, (New York: Published by the American Anti-Slavery Society Office, 1839), 160.

⁷¹ Genovese, *Roll, Jordan Roll*, 143, 159, 172. Peter Kolchin, *American Slavery: 1619–1877*, (New York: Hill & Wang, 2003), 121–122, 159.

allies in hunting’, historian John Campbell examined Charles Ball’s relationship with his ‘faithful hunting dog’, Trueman.⁷² Using Ball’s narrative to form conclusions about the relationships between enslaved persons in South Carolina and their canines, Campbell posited that dogs could help enslaved persons by providing companionship and assistance during hunts.⁷³ However, having been written in 1994, Campbell’s work shows signs of its age. A forerunner in animal history, Campbell’s work would have benefited from later developments in ecocriticism, environmental history, and animal studies. Moreover, Campbell’s interpretations of Ball’s relationships with canines could have been enriched by an examination of the many adversarial encounters that he had with other canines.

These adversarial encounters become especially evident during self-emancipation attempts. In just one example of many, Charles Ball unsheathed his former enslaver’s sword, and with a ‘single cut, laid open the head of the largest and fiercest of the dogs, from his neck to his nose’.⁷⁴ Franklin and Schweninger’s *Runaway Slaves* also demonstrated the importance of slave-hunting canines, including uncovering the widespread usage, and robust network of trade, of dogs such as the Cuban Bloodhound.⁷⁵ Discussing the barbaric practice of slave-hunting, Franklin and Schweninger’s book served as the impetus for John Campbell to revisit his previous work on slavery and canines. Rightly claiming that ‘little attention has been paid to the bloodhound image as an abolitionist device for condemning bondage’, Campbell placed the genesis of slave-hunting canines at the end of the Second Seminole War in 1842.⁷⁶ However,

⁷² John Campbell, ‘My Constant Companion’: Slaves and Their Dogs in the Antebellum South’, in Larry E. Hudson Jr., ed., *Working toward Freedom: Slave Society and Domestic Economy in the American South* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 1994).

⁷³ Campbell, ‘My Constant Companion’.

⁷⁴ Ball, *Slavery in the United States*, 331, 409–410, 412.

⁷⁵ Franklin and Schweninger, *Runaway Slaves*, 161.

⁷⁶ John Campbell, ‘The Seminoles, the ‘Bloodhound War’, and Abolitionism, 1796–1865’, *The Journal of Southern History*, vol. 72, no. 2 (2006): 260.

testimonies from formerly enslaved persons such as Solomon Bayley and William Grimes date the usage of canines to track and hunt enslaved persons to the first two decades of the nineteenth century, with abolitionists such as William Lloyd Garrison, Theodore Dwight Weld, and the Grimké sisters speaking out against the practice as early as the 1830s.⁷⁷

Tracing the weaponization of slave-hunting dogs to its Atlantic context, Sara E. Johnson revisited the ‘use of dogs specially bred to track down and feed upon black flesh’ during the Haitian Revolution and the Jamaican Second Maroon War.⁷⁸ Noting the limits of national historiographies, she persuasively demonstrates how an inter-American focus shows the way ‘trans-colonial cooperation facilitated such atrocities as part of a regional proslavery agenda’. Johnson is at her most daring when she explores connections between historical practices and present events, arguing that ‘transnational networks of canine torture have been state-sanctioned during half a millennia of Western warfare against peoples of color’.⁷⁹

Historian Larry H. Spruill has also used the weaponization of canines in the past to inform interpretations of present developments, providing a concise overview of the practice dating back to the antebellum era, though his links to events in the twenty-first century seem a bit tenuous. Moreover, Spruill sometimes contextualizes his nineteenth-century sources within dated mid-twentieth-century secondary literature.⁸⁰ Sally Hadden’s *Slave Patrols* offers a far more extensive and definitive account of slave patrols. Hadden traced the evolution of slave patrols as formalized and semi-formalized entities that combined statutory authority, armed white patrols,

⁷⁷ Bill L. Smith, ‘“Open Jaws of This Monster–Tyranny’: Abolitionism, Resistance, and Slave–Hunting Canines’, *American Nineteenth Century History*, vol. 23, no. 1 (2022): 64.

⁷⁸ Sara Johnson, ‘“You Should Give Them Blacks to Eat’: Waging Inter–American Wars of Torture and Terror’, *American Quarterly*, vol. 61, no. 1 (2009): 3.

⁷⁹ Johnson, ‘“You Should Give Them Blacks to Eat’,’ 67, 88.

⁸⁰ Larry H. Spruill, ‘Slave Patrols, “Packs of Negro Dogs” and Policing Black Communities’, *Phylon*, vol. 53 (2016).

and the coercive force of dogs and horses.⁸¹ Together, dogs as well as horses made these types of patrols faster, more effective, and more menacing.

Since domestication, horses have been integral to human history. The animals enabled states to spread their territorial reach, merchants to expand networks of exchange, and elites to project authority.⁸² Sandra Swart, a leading scholar of the history of horses, has gone so far as to note that horses have been linked with the projection of human power since the earliest days of domestication. Most notably, in her equation of power, Swart sees humans dominating horses before using horses to dominate other humans.⁸³ While Swart focuses on horse-powered coercion and authority within a colonial context, historians such as Rhys Isaac and Walter Johnson have focused on horses within a plantation context, with Johnson observing the way in which horses provided enslavers and overseers with a ‘geometric advantage’ over enslaved persons.⁸⁴ According to Trevor Burnard, this advantage of physical height reinforced a symbolic social order in which the white ‘men on horseback and the values they espoused’ were quite literally raised higher on the backs of their horses.⁸⁵ Christopher Michael Blakley demonstrates that such projections of power were not unique to plantations in the American South and that horses reinforced projects of masculine identity and power within the entire British Atlantic World.⁸⁶

⁸¹ Sally Hadden, *Slave Patrols: Law and Violence in Virginia and the Carolinas*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2001), 206.

⁸² Pablo Librado, ‘The origins and spread of domestic horses from the Western Eurasian steppes’, *Nature*, vol. 598 (2021): 634. Swart, *Riding High*, 2.

⁸³ Sandra Swart, ‘Shared Skin: The Slow Intimacy of Horse and Rider’, *Feminist Encounters: A Journal of Critical Studies in Culture and Politics*, vol. 8, no. 1 (2024): 13.

⁸⁴ Rhys Isaac, *Transformation of Virginia, 1740–1790*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982), 52–57. Johnson, *River of Dark Dreams*, 222.

⁸⁵ For further elaboration on the ways in which horses reinforced the social order of racialized plantation power, see Trevor Burnard, *Creole gentlemen: The Maryland elite, 1691–1776*, (New York: Routledge, 2002).

⁸⁶ Christopher Michael Blakley, *Empire of Brutality: Enslaved People and Animals in the British Atlantic World*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2023).

It is beyond dispute that enslavers in the American South and the British Caribbean relied on horses as sentient tools of oppression.⁸⁷ However, until recently, historians have largely downplayed the immense importance of horses and other equine animals in enslaved resistance. As noted by Philip Howell and Ilanah Taves, horses could be adjuncts of authority but also partners in resistance.⁸⁸ To this end, Sylviane A. Diouf emphasized the role of horses in maroon communities, while Kyle Ainsworth provided a data-driven analysis of the *Texas Runaway Slave Project* to argue for the importance of horses to liberation attempts.⁸⁹ Studies examining runaway advertisements in the British Caribbean also note the prevalence of horse-aided escapes.⁹⁰ This thesis builds on these works by demonstrating the prevalence of horses during self-emancipation attempts that spanned the entire North American continent.

Sandra Swart's research on horses in South Africa makes clear that equine animals could both project colonial and imperial state power while also enabling alternative, and at times subversive, resistance to authority. Swart is unique in that she takes animal intentionality and noncompliance seriously, separating her work as an animal history, rather than a history that discusses animals.⁹¹ Much of the scholarship on animals in the context of plantation slavery

⁸⁷ David Lambert, 'Master–Horse–Slave: Mobility, Race and Power in the British West Indies, c. 1780–1838', *Slavery & Abolition*, vol. 36, no. 4 (2015): 636–653.

⁸⁸ Philip Howell and Ilanah Taves, 'Black Protest and the Man on Horseback: Race, Animality, and Equestrian Counter–Conduct', *GeoHumanities*, vol. 7, no. 2 (2021): 494.

⁸⁹ Sylviane A. Diouf, *Slavery's Exiles: The Story of the American Maroons*, (New York: New York University Press, 2014), 233–234. Kyle Ainsworth, 'Advertising Maranda: Runaway Slaves in Texas, 1835–1865,' in Damian Alan Pargas, ed., *Fugitive Slaves and Spaces of Freedom in North America*, (University of Florida Press, 2018).

⁹⁰ For examples, see Verene Shepherd, *Livestock, Sugar and Slavery: Contested Terrain in Colonial Jamaica*, (Kingston, Jamaica: Ian Randle, 2009), 155; and Lambert, 'Master–Horse–Slave', 635.

⁹¹ In her article, 'The World the Horses Made', Sandra Swart observed the subversive power of horses and the ways they resist human actions. Sandra Swart, 'The World the Horses Made: A South African Case Study of Writing Animals into Social History', *International Review of Social History*, vol. 55, no. 2 (2010): 251–252. Ann Norton Greene provides another example of a work that specifically engages with nonhuman agency, in particular, horses' agency in the context of their abilities to shape 'material and social arrangements'. Greene, *Horses at Work*, xi, 7–8.

lacks engagement with the ‘most radical implications of the animal turn’, namely, treating animals as historical actors with intentionality and agency.⁹²

Within slavery studies, there has long been a hesitation, or outright rejection, to fully engage with attributing agency and intentionality to nonhuman animals. This gap in the historiography is not altogether surprising. Uncovering and including nonhuman animals in the narratives of enslaved persons risks stifling voices that have already been strangled and silenced by the archive. Furthermore, the dehumanizing and animalizing impact of slavery has made the ‘dreaded comparison’ between enslaved persons and domesticated animals politically fraught.⁹³ Focusing on enslavement in the British Caribbean, Lucile Desblach observed that ‘because enslaved Black Caribbeans were treated as ‘not quite human’, there was a desire to establish strong boundaries between human and non-human animals’.⁹⁴ David Lambert, also studying the British Caribbean, agrees that the sensitivity to this boundary has ‘militated against the adoption of more-than-human perspectives’ in slavery studies.⁹⁵

Such boundary-keeping is not neutral. The most forceful pushback to this practice comes from Steven Best, who argued that maintaining such an uncompromising boundary is to deny ‘that all beings have rights’.⁹⁶ Marjorie Spiegel has similarly argued that denying similarities to animals is to ‘continue actively struggling to prove to our masters, past or present, that we are similar to those who have abused us, rather than to our fellow victims, those whom our masters

⁹² Lambert, ‘Master–Horse–Slave: Mobility, Race and Power in the British West Indies’, 637.

⁹³ Marjorie Spiegel, *The Dreaded Comparison: Human and Animal Slavery*, (New York: Mirror Books, 1996). On animal metaphors and racial oppression, see Mia Bay, *The White Image in the Black Mind: African–American Ideas about White People, 1830–1925*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), especially pages 127–132.

⁹⁴ Lucile Desblache, ‘Writing Relations: The Crab, the Lobster, the Orchid, the Primrose, You, Me, Chaos and Literature’, in Charlie Blake, Claire Molloy, and Steven Shakespeare, eds., *Beyond Human: From Animality to Transhumanism*, (London: Continuum, 2012), 125.

⁹⁵ David Lambert, ‘Runaways and strays: rethinking (non) human agency in Caribbean slave societies’, in Sarah Wilcox and Stephanie Rutherford, eds., *Historical Animal Geographies*, (New York: Routledge, 2018), 197–199.

⁹⁶ Steven Best, *The politics of total liberation: Revolution for the 21st century*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 32.

have also victimized'.⁹⁷ Bearing both sides of the argument over these boundaries in mind, the point of this thesis is not to adjudicate or collapse the distinction between humans and nonhuman animals, but rather to bring the conceptual tools of animal studies, including examinations of situated intentionality and a multifaceted understanding of agency, to examine the ways animals acted, intervened, and shaped the realities of enslavement, self-emancipation, and war.⁹⁸ To leave these topics unexamined leaves the history of enslavement stripped of many of the forces that made its violence, reach, and undoing possible.

This approach will not diminish the lived experiences of enslaved persons. Rather, it amplifies and clarifies their voices. As primary sources will demonstrate throughout this thesis, many enslaved persons studied the behaviors of wild animals and recognized the temperaments and individual personalities of dogs and horses. However anachronistic the vocabulary, enslaved persons seemed to have recognized the agency and intentionality of animals. Though it may seem counterintuitive, denying the very capacities that enslaved persons themselves ascribed to animals is to narrow the scope of enslaved agency and overlook an important aspect of their experiential lives.

Recognizing and applying concepts from animal studies allows for new readings of the legal and political histories as well as analyses of how animal-aided escape and pursuit intersected with debates over property, diplomacy, and sectionalism during the first half of the nineteenth century. The historiography on these topics is particularly well-established though

⁹⁷ Spiegel, *The Dreaded Comparison*, 30.

⁹⁸ David Lambert and Chris Pearson have added much-needed nuance to Walter Johnson's formulation of agency as resistance and voice, two uniquely human capacities. According to Pearson, and then elaborated on by Lambert, resistance can certainly make up a form of human agency, though they believe resistance should not stand in for agency. In addition to the discussion of nonhuman agency mentioned before, agency can also mean the capacity to perceive a situation, make a choice, and act with situated intentionality. Particularly regarding slavery, Lambert concludes his article by noting that nonhuman animals demonstrated their agency by 'working with or against humans to maintain or undermine slavery'. Pearson, 'History and Animals Agencies', 244–250. Lambert, 'Runaways and strays', 11–15.

most do not focus on nonhuman animals specifically. Providing a type of scaffolding, scholarship in these areas helps to show the ways in which governmental power and transnational diplomacy converged with animal-aided mobility and pursuit, turning abstractions such as sovereignty into physically enforceable realities.

For decades, historians have examined how Southern jurisprudence evolved to address questions of who could possess property and who could legally be possessed.⁹⁹ More recently, Roy W. Copeland has shown how Southern legislatures put laws into place that institutionalized dispossession as a racial condition by enacting statutes prohibiting enslaved persons and free Blacks from purchasing ‘real property’.¹⁰⁰ Tracing these developments in antebellum Southern courtrooms, Ariela J. Gross found enslaved persons reduced to property in some circumstances, while being assigned personhood worthy of responsibility and culpability in other cases.¹⁰¹ This ‘double character’ of the law observed by Gross becomes even more unstable if nonhuman animals are introduced into the court cases. Animals were considered material property in the eyes of the law, though their behaviors and actions could sometimes fall outside existing legal bounds. When enslavers and their allies accused self-emancipators of stealing horses, they were attempting to compel extradition from Northern states, Canada, and Mexico. But in the process, they collapsed categories of human escape and animal property offenses by fusing the language of possession and restitution into multispecies legalese.

Recent scholarship in transnational history and politics has shown how self-emancipation extended into Canada and Mexico, and shaped diplomatic relations between the United States, its

⁹⁹ Winthrop Jordan, *White Over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro, 1550–1812*, (Williamsburg: Omohundro Institute of Early American History & Culture, 1968).

¹⁰⁰ Roy W. Copeland, ‘In the Beginning: Origins of African American Real Property Ownership in the United States’, *Journal of Black Studies*, vol. 44, no. 6 (2013).

¹⁰¹ Ariela J. Gross, *Double Character: Slavery and Mastery in the Antebellum Southern Courtroom*, (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 2006), 3.

neighbors, as well as the United Kingdom. Enslavers, aided by Southern states' political apparatus, pursued freedom-seekers north into Canada, setting up legal collisions with British-Canadian antislavery jurisprudence that, according to Elena K. Abbott, dated back to the Somerset decision of 1772 and Upper Canada's 1793 Act to Limit Slavery.¹⁰² The promise of freedom attracted thousands of self-liberators north. Historians have explored how that promise unfolded across Canada's legal and social landscapes, and in other instances, in direct opposition to the diplomatic overtures of enslavers.

Robin W. Winks's foundational study, *Blacks in Canada*, followed migration patterns and black community formation across Canada, while also plotting differences between opportunities and outcomes for those freedom-seekers who came to Ontario and those who went to Montreal.¹⁰³ Focusing on Ontario specifically, Gordon S. Barker expanded this work to show that, despite antislavery rhetoric, dynamics on the ground were far more complicated in Upper Canada for self-emancipated enslaved persons working their ways through restrictions, segregation, and discrimination.¹⁰⁴ Frank Mackay's study of Montreal presents a similar story of the tensions between legal freedom and social marginalization in Lower Canada.¹⁰⁵ Despite these issues, Canadian political officials remained dedicated to defending British antislavery precedents and principles against increasingly intense diplomatic pressure from enslavers attempting to capture and return freedom-seekers from Canada. As demonstrated by several

¹⁰² Elena K. Abbott, *Beacons of Liberty: International Free Soil and the Fight for Racial Justice in Antebellum America*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 66.

¹⁰³ Robin W. Winks, *Blacks in Canada: a History*, (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997), 170-171.

¹⁰⁴ Gordon S. Barker, 'Revisiting "British Principle Talk": Antebellum Black Expectations and Racism in Early Ontario', in Pargas, ed., *Fugitive Slaves and Spaces of Freedom*.

¹⁰⁵ Frank Mackay, *Done with Slavery: The Black Fact in Montreal, 1760-1840*, (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2010).

historians, these extradition disputes showed that British Canada's position was rhetorically significant and actively upheld.¹⁰⁶

A growing body of scholarship on the borderlands of the United States and Mexico has identified a similar dynamic in Mexico, where antislavery principles and politics created a refuge for self-emancipators and an accompanying transnational conflict. Tracing clashes over the extradition of self-emancipators to before Mexican independence, Sarah Cornell finds both continuities and changes between the governmental responses of New Spain and Mexico in the decades leading up to the American Civil War.¹⁰⁷ As Gerardo Gurza-Lavalle pointed out in a thematic issue of *Estudios Mexicanos*, the key moment for the creation of Mexico as a free state occurred when Texas won its independence during the Texas Revolution.¹⁰⁸ Despite numerous regime changes after the Texas Revolution, Mexico remained mostly steadfast in its refusal to extradite freedom-seekers who crossed into northern Mexican provinces such as Coahuila and Nuevo León.

Disputes over the status of freedom-seekers undoubtedly contributed to the tensions that eventually resulted in the Mexican-American War, but, as noted by Thomas J. Henderson in his book *A Glorious Defeat*, even open conflict and the subsequent Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo did little to resolve the issue.¹⁰⁹ Alice Baumgartner's *South to Freedom* provides the most detailed

¹⁰⁶ J. H. Silverman, 'Kentucky, Canada, and Extradition: the Jesse Happy case', *The Filson Club History Quarterly*, vol. 54 (1980): 54; David Murray, 'Hands Across the Border: The Abortive Extradition of Solomon Moseby', *Canadian Review of American Studies*, vol. 30 no. 2 (2000); R.J.M. Blackett, *The Captive's Quest for Freedom: Fugitive Slaves, the 1850 Fugitive Slave Law, and the Politics of Slavery* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 288–300.

¹⁰⁷ Sarah E. Cornell, 'Citizens of Nowhere: Fugitive Slaves and Free African Americans in Mexico, 1833–1857', *The Journal of American History*, September 2013, vol. 100, no. 2 (2013): 351.

¹⁰⁸ Gerardo Gurza-Lavalle, 'Against Slave Power? Slavery and Runaway Slaves in Mexico–United States Relations, 1821–1857', *Mexican Studies/Estudios Mexicanos, Thematic Issue: Número Temático: Vecindad, asimetría y vínculos polémicos: tráfico, flujos e intercambios en la relación México–Estados Unidos, 1821–1940*, vol. 35, no. 2 (2019).

¹⁰⁹ Timothy J. Henderson, *A Glorious Defeat: Mexico and Its War with the United States*, (New York: Hill & Wang, 2008).

analysis of the diplomatic tensions resulting from self-emancipators and the Mexican-American War, going so far as to link the issue directly to the coming of the American Civil War.¹¹⁰ Examining multilingual official records, petitions, decrees, and diplomatic correspondence, Baumgartner shows how and why local and national leaders in Mexico rejected American demands for extradition. This body of multinational scholarship remains predominantly anthropocentric in its framework, treating the multispecies realities of escape and extradition as incidental rather than constitutive. This project, however, will reveal how boundaries of nations, property, and personhood were negotiated through diplomacy and law, along with human-animal entanglements on the ground.

Reports of animal-aided captures circulated beyond courtrooms and statehouses. Canada's legal precedents, Mexico's refusals to extradite freedom-seekers, and the violence of enslaver recaptures circulated widely in the American press and abolitionist circles. Though he does not focus on animal violence, Dan McKanan has shown that abolitionists such as Theodore Dwight Weld and the Grimké sisters relied on 'self-subverting quotations' from Southern runaway advertisements to reveal the cruelty of the plantation system.¹¹¹ Margaret Abruzzo likewise demonstrates how abolitionists used examples of violence and the concept of physical pain to mobilize public outrage against slavery.¹¹² These types of rhetorical strategies, as shown by Manisha Sinha in *The Slave's Cause*, linked individual instances of cruelty to larger condemnations of enslavement.¹¹³ Aside from important research on the slave-hunting bloodhound motif by John Campbell, Tyler D. Parry, and Charlton Yingling, the existing body of

¹¹⁰ Baumgartner, *South to Freedom*.

¹¹¹ Dan McKanan, *Identifying the Image of God: Radical Christians and Nonviolent Power in the Antebellum United States*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 134–136.

¹¹² Margaret Abruzzo, *Polemical Pain: Slavery, Cruelty, and the Rise of Humanitarianism*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 2011).

¹¹³ Manisha Sinha, *The Slave's Cause: A History of Abolition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016), 279–284.

scholarship on abolitionism largely ignores how abolitionists such as Theodore Dwight Weld, William Garrison, and Frederick Douglass, among others, mobilized imagery of animal-inflicted punishments such as canine attacks and cat-hauling to deepen antislavery sentiment.¹¹⁴

By mid-century, abolitionist campaigns and the ongoing crises of property and sovereignty, forced state governments, the United States federal government, and the governments of its neighbors to confront the issue of fugitivity. These mounting pressures culminated in Congress strengthening the Fugitive Slave Act as part of the Compromise of 1850. The enforcement of this Act, which extended the reach of enslavers into every part of the country, redefined sectional debates and tested Northern commitments to conservatism, the law, and the Union.¹¹⁵ Historians have increasingly recognized how these dynamics stood at the very center of the tensions that brought the United States to the brink of war.¹¹⁶ What remains to be examined, however, is the determinative role of animals in shaping the outcomes of self-

¹¹⁴ Campbell, 'The Seminoles, the 'Bloodhound War', and Abolitionism'. Tyler D. Parry and Charlton W. Yingling, 'Slave Hounds and Abolition in the Americas', *Past & Present*, vol. 246, no. 1 (2020). This is not to discount the importance of animals in popular abolitionist fictional literature such as Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Richard Hildreth's *The White Slave*, and William Wells Brown's *Clotel*. Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin; or, Life Among the Lowly*, (Boston: John P. Jewett, 1852), 196–197. Richard Hildreth, *The White Slave; or, Negro Life in the Slave States of America*, (London: Clarke, Beeton, 1852), 222–223. William Wells Brown, *Clotel; or, The President's Daughter: A Narrative of Slave Life in the United States. By William Wells Brown, A Fugitive Slave, Author of 'Three Years in Europe.' With a Sketch of the Author's Life*, (London: Partridge & Oakley, 1853), 136–137. Brigitte Fielder provides excellent analyses of animals within popular nineteenth century literature in her works 'Black Dogs, Bloodhounds, and Best Friends' and "Animal Humanism". Brigitte Fielder, 'Black Dogs, Bloodhounds, and Best Friends: African Americans and Dogs in Nineteenth-Century Abolitionist Literature,' in Dominik Ohrem, ed., *American Beasts: Perspectives on Animals, Animality, and U.S. Culture, 1776–1920*, (Berlin: Neofelis Verlag, 2017); and Brigitte Fielder, 'Animal Humanism: Race, Species, and Affective Kinship in Nineteenth-Century Abolitionism,' *American Quarterly* Vol. 65, No. 3 (2013). Also see Smith, 'Open Jaws of this Monster-Tyranny', 75–79.

¹¹⁵ On the impact of the Fugitive Slave Act on Northern politics, see Adam I.P. Smith, *The Stormy Present: Conservatism and the Problem of Slavery in Northern Politics, 1846–1865*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017), 43–46.

¹¹⁶ Blackett, *The Captive's Quest for Freedom*; Manisha Sinha, *The Slave's Cause*; and Andrew Delbanco, *The War Before the War: Fugitive Slaves and the Struggle for America's Soul from the Revolution to the Civil War*, (New York: Penguin Press, 2018).

emancipation and recapture, and how portrayals of their roles intensified the political crises over fugitivity.

The outbreak of the Civil War in 1861 remade these long-standing ideological, diplomatic, and legal tensions into questions of mobilization, military strategy, and memorialization. With well over 60,000 books about the Civil War era, and counting, the scale and complexity of this historiography demand separate consideration.¹¹⁷ Drawing on approaches from across disciplines and subfields, historians have approached the Civil War era from almost every angle imaginable, creating a body of scholarship that ranges from grand sweeping narratives and syntheses to biographies and microhistories. Interpretations abound regarding the causes of the conflict, soldier motivation, the timing and impact of emancipation, the homefront, gendered politics, the meanings of Reconstruction, and a multitude of other topics.¹¹⁸

Among the myriad historiographical debates that define the study of the Civil War era, this work engages most directly with those concerning total war and the scale of the war's destruction, wartime emancipation and the impact of Black soldiers, Confederate strategy and collapse, symbolism and memory, Reconstruction era violence and the struggles for Black autonomy, and more recent examinations of the environmental impact of the war. Historians have long debated the Civil War as a modern or total war, while also looking at the impact of the

¹¹⁷ At the time of the original publication of *Causes Won, Lost, and Forgotten*, in 2008, Gary Gallagher estimated that over 60,000 books had been published about the Civil War since 1865. Gary W. Gallagher, *Causes Won, Lost, and Forgotten: How Hollywood and Popular Art Shape What We Know about the Civil War*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008).

¹¹⁸ With dozens upon dozens of other possible additions to this list, leading works on the causes of the Civil War include James M. McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988); and Elizabeth R. Varon, *Disunion!: The Coming of the American Civil War, 1789–1859*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008). On soldier motivation, see Chandra Manning, *What This Cruel War Was Over: Soldiers, Slavery, and the Civil War*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2007); and Earl J. Hess, *The Union Soldier in Battle: Enduring the Ordeal of Combat*, (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1997). On the home front and gendered politics, see Thavolia Glymph, *The Women's Fight: The Civil War's Battles for Home, Freedom, and Nation*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2019); and Judith Giesberg, *Army at Home: Women and the Civil War on the Northern Home Front* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009).

conflict on civilian spaces.¹¹⁹ This study adds to these works in arguing that the Civil War's evolution into a total war involved the integration of animals into military systems. It also included the strategic mass slaughter of horses, mules, and dogs, which marked the conflict as a multispecies catastrophe that reshaped entire ecosystems.

Studies of wartime emancipation emphasize the uneven emergence of freedom shaped by self-liberators and political decisions. At the same time, research on Black soldiers has demonstrated how their service in the Union military transformed the war, destabilized the Confederacy, and expanded definitions of citizenship.¹²⁰ Building on these interpretations, this thesis argues for the military significance of formerly enslaved persons who self-emancipated to Union lines on horseback, while also looking at how soldiers serving in regiments including the 1st South Carolina and Wild's African Brigade impacted the war, inverted the prewar logic of weaponized animals, and accelerated the Confederacy's collapse. In focusing on the growing fragility of the Confederate war effort, this work enters into dialogue with historians including Gary Gallagher, Stephanie McCurry, and Drew Gilpin Faust, who have debated the causes of Southern defeat.¹²¹

¹¹⁹ For debates over the scale of destruction and total war, see Lisa M. Brady, *War Upon the Land: Military Strategy and the Transformation of Southern Landscapes during the American Civil War*, (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2012); Brian Holden Reid, *The Scourge of War: The Life of William Tecumseh Sherman*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020); and Basil Henry Liddell Hart, *Sherman: Soldier, Realist, American*, (New York: Da Capo Press, 1993).

¹²⁰ Works on wartime emancipation include James Oakes, *Freedom National: The Destruction of Slavery in the United States, 1861–1865*, (New York: W.W. Norton, 2013); and Eric Foner, *The Fiery Trial: Abraham Lincoln and American Slavery*, (New York: W. W. Norton, 2010). Important works on the impact of Black soldiers in the Civil War include Silkenat, *Scars on the Land*, especially Chapter Seven; Douglas R. Egerton, *Thunder at the Gates: The Black Civil War Regiments that Redeemed America*, (Philadelphia: Basic Books, 2016); and John David Smith, ed., *Black Soldiers in Blue: African American Troops in the Civil War Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002).

¹²¹ Gary W. Gallagher, *The Confederate War*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1997); Stephanie McCurry, *Confederate Reckoning: Power and Politics in the Civil War South*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2010); and Drew Gilpin Faust, *Mothers of Invention: Women of the Slaveholding South in the American Civil War*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996).

The fight over freedom, autonomy, and the war's meaning continued well beyond Appomattox. Important works on Reconstruction by historians including Eric Foner, Gregory Downs, and Heather Cox Richardson show how constitutional emancipation unfolded through ongoing contests over labor, land, citizenship, and state power in the postwar South.¹²² Joining historians who have focused on the unprecedented level of political violence during this period, this thesis will reveal how the continued weaponization of animals by state and parastate forces reinforced social control and undermined the fragile foundations of postwar freedom.¹²³ Extending this research into the Gilded Age, this work also incorporates the symbolic and material significance of nonhuman animals to the memory of the Civil War, national reconciliation, and the narrative success of the Lost Cause myth.¹²⁴

Because this project, at its core, offers a multispecies interpretation of the Civil War and Reconstruction, it enters dialogue with historians who have approached this era through environmental and animal history. Edited volumes by Earl J. Hess, Timothy Silver, and Judkin Browning have shown how the Civil War transformed landscapes, destroyed ecosystems, and relied on the vast mobilization of animal labor and resources.¹²⁵ However, Earl Hess, in his

¹²² For key works on Reconstruction, see Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863–1877* (Harper & Row, 1988); Gregory P. Downs, *After Appomattox: Military Occupation and the Ends of War*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2015); and Heather Cox Richardson, *West from Appomattox: The Reconstruction of America after the Civil War*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007).

¹²³ See Kidada E. Williams, *I Saw Death Coming: A History of Terror and Survival in the War Against Reconstruction*, (New York: Bloomsburg Publishing, 2023); Douglas R. Egerton, *The Wars of Reconstruction: The Brief, Violent History of America's Most Progressive Era*, (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2014); and Hannah Rosen, *Terror in the Heart of Freedom: Citizenship, Sexual Violence, and the Meaning of Race in the Post-emancipation South*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009).

¹²⁴ Foundational works on these topics include David W. Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2001); Caroline E. Janney, *Remembering the Civil War: Reunion and the Limits of Reconciliation*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013); Gary W. Gallagher, ed., *The Myth of the Lost Cause and Civil War History*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000); John R. Neff, *Honoring the Civil War Dead: Commemoration and the Problem of Reconciliation*, (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2005); and Drew Gilpin Faust, *This Republic of Suffering: Death and the American Civil War*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2008).

¹²⁵ Earl J. Hess, ed., *Animal Histories of the Civil War Era*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2022); Judkin Browning and Timothy Silver, eds., *An Environmental History of the Civil War*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2020). Erin Stewart Mauldin's *Unredeemed Land* is another important contribution to this

edited volume, *Animal Histories of the Civil War Era*, points out that historians who incorporate animals into the Civil War tend to focus on horses and occasionally dogs, though Joan E. Cashin has argued that scholars of this time period have ‘neglected dogs as historical actors’.¹²⁶

Despite these contributions, along with notable additions from Lorien Foote, Gene C. Armistead, Jason Phillips, among others, the study of animals and the environment as a subfield within Civil War historiography is still developing with limited attention paid to animal agency and intentionality, interspecies interactions and animal-human relationships, the impact of wild animals within wartime contexts, along with the near-total absence of scholarship addressing animals during Reconstruction.¹²⁷ Moving beyond accounts of animals as laborers and sustenance, this study reveals a wider multispecies world that redefined military strategy, wartime emancipation, and the violent reassertion of animal-enforced control in the postwar South. Adding to works focusing on Civil War memory, this work will also engage animals in Southern postwar literature and memorialization practices to demonstrate that animals were key to the creation of the Lost Cause narrative, and that their recontextualization legitimized the continued use of animals in policing Black Southerners.¹²⁸

subfield. Erin Stewart Mauldin, *Unredeemed Land: An Environmental History of the Civil War and Emancipation in the Cotton South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018).

¹²⁶ Many of the works that center horses into the Civil War focus on military strategy and tactics. See Edward G. Longacre, *Lincoln’s Cavalrymen: A History of the Mounted Forces of the Army of the Potomac*, (Mechanicsburg: Stackpole Books, 2000). For a notable exception that offers a far more comprehensive examination of horses, see Gervase Phillips, ‘Writing Horses into American Civil War History’, *War in History*, vol. 20, no. 2 (2013). For Cashin’s quotation and an excellent work on dogs in the Civil War, see Joan Cashin, ‘The Dogs of War: Canine Exploitation in the American Civil War’, in Hess, ed., *Animal Histories of the Civil War Era*, 239.

¹²⁷ Lorien Foote, ‘The Dogs Ought to Be Exterminated’: Dogs, Slavery, and the Consequences of Emancipation’, and Jason Phillips, ‘Root Hog or Die: Southern Pigs and Confederate Independence’, both in Earl J. Hess, ed., *Animal Histories of the Civil War Era*. Gene C. Armistead, *Horses and Mules in the Civil War: Contributions to the Union and Confederate War Efforts* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, 2013).

¹²⁸ Douglas Blackmon’s work, *Slavery by Another Name*, remains one of the key works on the concept of the ‘re-enslavement’ of Black Americans in the South after the Civil War. Douglas A. Blackmon, *Slavery by Another Name: The Re-enslavement of Black Americans from the Civil War to World War Two*, (London: Icon Books Ltd., 2008).

In reconceptualizing the history of slavery, self-emancipation, mid-nineteenth-century diplomacy, and the Civil War Era through an environmental and interspecies perspective, this project incorporates multiple historiographical strands with a deliberately varied and heterogeneous source base. Sources include enslaver diaries, legal documents, plantation journals, natural histories, newspapers, government correspondence, military records, and Congressional testimonies. These are read alongside accounts recorded by Black and white authors in slave narratives and WPA interviews. The epistemic asymmetry in these records is obvious and undoubtedly determined who could speak, how they were heard, and what kinds of multispecies experiences entered the archive.¹²⁹ To make sense of this source base and the diverse historiography it engages, this project requires multiple interpretative methodological approaches from across the humanities and the social sciences to address archival silences, competing perspectives, and the complex forms of multispecies knowledge embedded within these materials.¹³⁰

Borrowing from the theories and vocabulary of political science, this study applies concepts such as state formation and reconstruction, power and authority, legitimacy and sovereignty, and state and parastate violence.¹³¹ Diplomatic correspondence from Mexico's national ministries, Canada's Executive Council, Britain's Foreign Office, and American state

¹²⁹ On historical silences and archival asymmetries, see Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995), especially Chapter One; Ann Laura Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 44–48; and Saidiya Hartman, 'Venus in Two Acts', *Small Axe*, vol. 12, no. 2 (2008): 2–4.

¹³⁰ Some of the most important works on counter-reading the archives and reading against the grain include Marisa J. Fuentes, *Dispossessed Lives: Enslaved Women, Violence, and the Archive*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016); Saidiya Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997); and Stephanie E. Smallwood, 'The Politics of the Archive and History's Accountability to the Enslaved', *History of the Present*, vol. 6, no. 2 (2016).

¹³¹ The classic political science text on state formation is Charles Tilly, *Coercion, Capital, and European States, AD 990–1990*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Blackwell, 1990). On legitimacy and state sovereignty, see Max Weber, 'Politics as a Vocation', in Gerth and Mills, eds., *From Max Weber*; and David Beetham, *The Legitimation of Power*, (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1991).

governors are read with a focus on how shifting sovereignties and competing claims to jurisdiction impacted national and international relations. This thesis will also use state-formation theory and the framework of parastate violence to explain the way coercive force oscillated between private and public institutions.¹³² Additionally, this study turns to geography to map out the spatial dynamics necessary for interpreting the way in which control, mobility, and resistance functioned on, and around, plantations.¹³³ Adding archaeological sources, including the burial of a dog or the excavation of the homes of overseers, adds material evidence to reveal how spatial hierarchies and systems of surveillance functioned.¹³⁴

Looking at travel accounts and planter diaries through the Plantationocene methodological framework helps explain the ways that the planter class created engineered ecological regimes where humans and nonhuman animals became extensions of their power. This study additionally uses information from botanical and entomological science to contextualize enslaved persons' practices of resistance and survival. These included their use of scent-masking plants, natural insect repellents, and local flora with antiseptic or anti-inflammatory properties.¹³⁵

As these environmental approaches shape interpretations of ecologies and landscapes, this project extends into animal studies to analyze multispecies interactions in the more-than-

¹³² See Rita Abrahamsen and Michael C. Williams, *Security Beyond the State: Private Security in International Politics*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010). Rebecca Tapscott, 'Vigilantes and the State: Understanding Violence through a Security Assemblages Approach', *Perspectives on Politics*, vol. 21, no. 1 (2021).

¹³³ The seminal works arguing for the concept of human constructed space are Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991); and Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, (New York: Knopf, 1993).

¹³⁴ Using 'a single hole, dug to bury a dog' near the slave quarters of James Madison's Montpelier Plantation, archeologist Matthew C. Greer explored 'dogs in the African diaspora' while contextualizing 'the roles the animal may have played in the daily life' of the enslaved. Matthew C. Greer, 'Contextualizing Canines, a Dog Burial, and Enslaved Life on a Virginia Plantation', *Journal of African Diaspora Archaeology and Heritage*, vol. 5, no. 3 (2016): 223, 228. Bates, "'The Landscape Cannot Be Said to Be Really Perfect'.'

¹³⁵ John R. McNeill provides an example of the ways botany can be applied to entomology in his work *Mosquito Empires*. John R. McNeill, *Mosquito Empires: Ecology and War in the Greater Caribbean, 1620–1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 85.

human world. Finding strength in its methodological diversity, this approach does not adhere to a single interpretive method, instead drawing from ecological approaches, sensory studies, and textual analyses.¹³⁶ Engaging with these methodological approaches enables me to approach animal history at multiple scales, ranging from tracing evolutionary traits to biographical approaches of individual animals, as well as close readings of specific actions or encounters.¹³⁷ With each discipline and interpretive model informing one another, this extends the archive and enables new readings of familiar sources. However, this also entails the need to remain grounded in historical evidence and language that does not romanticize, metaphorize, or anthropomorphize nonhuman animals.

This project situates animals within key historical events, but more importantly, it takes their experiences seriously and attempts to explain why animals acted the way they did in particular circumstances when other options were available. This creates obvious interpretive and methodological challenges that I address by engaging with ethology, biology, and veterinary studies to find explanatory power that is absent from the archive.¹³⁸ Studies on animal cognition and biomechanics explain how dogs track scents and the ways horses respond to fatigue. Wildlife biology provides documentary evidence of the predatory and territorial behavior of wolves, bears, alligators, feral hogs, and other animals. In this way, we can interpret a horse's unwillingness to carry a self-emancipator any further as evidence of Exhausted Horse Syndrome,

¹³⁶ For further elaboration on the multidisciplinary nature of animal studies, see Swart, "But Where's the Bloody Horse?," 2–4.

¹³⁷ Helena Pycior's examination of the lives of 'Laddie Boy' Harding and 'Fala' Roosevelt provides an excellent example of an animal biography while also demonstrating the importance of that genre within animal studies. Helena Pycior, 'The Public and Private Lives of "First Dogs": Warren G. Harding's Laddie Boy and Franklin D. Roosevelt's Fala', in Dorothee Brantz, ed., *Beastly Natures: Animals, Humans, and the Study of History*, (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2010).

¹³⁸ Erica Fudge has recently argued for the potential of using modern scientific research without risking anachronism so long as the science fits the evidence. Fudge, 'What Was It Like to Be a Cow?', 262–267. Fudge, 'Milking Other Men's Beasts', 23–24.

or the way a pack of wolves encircled an enslaved person as coursing predation. Likewise, a dog protecting a family of freed persons from paramilitary violence can be understood through the animal's attunement to human emotion and scent.¹³⁹ Combining this scientific evidence with historical interpretation allows this study to ground animal-human encounters in research-backed, empirically supported patterns of animal behavior. This approach is a methodological necessity since it reveals the limits of human control while also demonstrating the dynamics that made the difference between life and death, as well as between freedom and capture.

Such an approach makes it possible to recover the practical knowledge, understandings, and perceptual strategies of those who left few written accounts, but whose interactions with their environments and its nonhuman animals were essential. However, due to the fragmentary and often hostile nature of the archives, these approaches must be used in combination with other interpretive methods.¹⁴⁰ Enslavers, military officers, government officials, or other observers who wrote for purposes of control, surveillance, legal justification, or military expedience created many of the archival sources used in this study. There are times, therefore, when interactions, experiences, and conclusions appear through implication, archival silences, as well as intentional and unintentional omissions.¹⁴¹ Reading these sources against their original intentions allows me to recover traces of resistance as well as the environmental knowledge and nonhuman animal encounters embedded within them.

¹³⁹ See Jonathan H. Foreman, 'The Exhausted Horse Syndrome', *Veterinary Clinics of North America: Equine Practice*, vol. 14, no. 1 (1998): 205–210. L. David Mech and Luigi Boitani, eds., *Wolves: Behavior, Ecology, and Conservation*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 66–77. Deborah Custance and Jennifer Mayer, 'Empathic-like responding by domestic dogs (*Canis familiaris*) to distress in humans: an exploratory study', *Animal Cognition*, vol. 15 (2021): 851.

¹⁴⁰ On the unevenness of power in the archives and strategies to address them, see Fuentes, *Dispossessed Lives*, 5–6; and Trouillot, *Silencing the Past*, 27.

¹⁴¹ Hartman, 'Venus in Two Acts', 2–3, 11–12; Trouillot, *Silencing the Past*, 26–27.

Other types of sources offer correctives. But these come with limitations.

Autobiographical slave narratives were mediated by editors and printers.¹⁴² Black soldiers' testimony and writings were handled and recorded by white officers. Freedmen's Bureau and Congressional records entailed bureaucratic handling typical of institutional sources. And WPA interviews relied on memories while also being impacted by the historical context in which they were conducted.¹⁴³ Acknowledging these challenges does not take away from the value of the sources. They give voice and lived experience to enslavement, self-emancipation, warfare, and Reconstruction. But like historians do with any source base, it is important to read these accounts critically and to corroborate them through a triangulation of sources. When done so, they reveal patterns that are impossible to ignore.

Read in isolation accounts of punitive cat-hauling, weaponized rodents and insects, or dogs and horses sensing and responding to human stress and trauma, seem improbable. But they appear with undeniable consistency across multiple types of sources. Taken together and situated within the historiography of enslavement, diplomacy, war, and postwar violence and recovery, these sources reveal the centrality of the environment and its nonhuman animals that becomes unmistakable when the archive is approached with attentive questions and methodological approaches.

¹⁴² William L. Andrews provides an overview on the historiographical debates regarding slave narratives, but ultimately argues that most narratives can be verified by other independent sources, and that 'no serious student of slave narratives' should dispute with the veracity of most accounts. William L. Andrews, *To Tell a Free Story: The First Century of Afro-American Autobiography, 1760-1865*, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 16-17. Chandra Manning provides an excellent overview of sources from both Black soldiers and white officers in her 2016 book *Troubled Refuge*. Chandra Manning, *Troubled Refuge: Struggling for Freedom in the Civil War*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2016), 20-21.

¹⁴³ On the context of WPA sources and their use in historical scholarship, see Catherine A. Stewart, *Long Past Slavery: Representing Race in the Federal Writers' Project*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2016); and Leslie M. Harris and Daina Ramey Berry, 'Researching Nineteenth-Century African American History', *The Journal of the Civil War Era*, vol. 12, no. 4 (2022): 445.

Chapter Outline

Exploring these topics over the course of several decades within a continental perspective presents challenges in terms of chronology, geographic space, and narrative structure, lending this thesis to a thematic approach structured around slavery, self-emancipation, the intrastate and international consequences of pursuit and recapture, and the Civil War era. Chapter One uses the concept of the Plantationocene to examine the plantation complex during the antebellum period. It examines how enslavers manipulated the environment, including nonhuman animals, to maintain authority over those they enslaved.¹⁴⁴ Incorporating concepts such as the panopticon, spatial containment, and rival geographies to the plantation, it focuses on how meticulously trained domesticated animals and the looming threat of wild animals beyond the plantation boundaries functioned as living extensions of enslaver power.¹⁴⁵ However, the system of animal-enforced enslaver control proved to be neither static nor uncontested.¹⁴⁶ Enslaved persons learned animal behavior, fostered alternative modes of interaction, and created rival geographies that transformed animals from tools of oppression into allies in resistance.

Chapter two zones in on the process of self-emancipation, examining how enslaved persons used empirical knowledge and networks of animal counter-intelligence as they sought freedom. Though each self-emancipation attempt was unique, many documented cases involved nonhuman animals. Some enslaved persons formed bonds with plantation dogs and horses. They established affiliative relationships that allowed them to escape alongside animals that became sources of protection, mobility, and companionship. In other cases, enslaved persons used their understanding of the behavior of horses, the limitations of scent-tracking dogs, and the predatory

¹⁴⁴ Haraway, 'Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Plantationocene, Chthulucene: Making Kin'.

¹⁴⁵ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 201–205. Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, xx.

¹⁴⁶ Camp, *Closer to Freedom*, 6–7. Norton, *The Tame and the Wild*, 11–12.

patterns of wild animals to their advantage as they traversed through woods, swamps, and deserts to spaces of freedom. An interspecies borderland, the landscape of self-emancipation offers a glimpse into the ultimate contested site of control between enslavers, the enslaved, and nonhuman animals.

The third chapter moves to the aftermath of self-emancipation attempts, examining enslavers' weaponization of dogs and horses to capture freedom-seekers and how they subsequently used the same animals, as well as insects and rodents, in punishments of enslaved persons in order to deter recidivism and warn other potential self-emancipators. Conversely, formerly enslaved persons who reached freedom almost immediately faced decisions regarding their dogs and horses. Many kept the animal because of an emotional bond. Others kept them in an effort to integrate into new economic markets. In other instances, they sold the animal for liquid capital. Faced with the loss of a self-emancipator, enslavers extended their reach through legal maneuvering to extradite enslaved persons across state and national borders as they attempted to circumvent personal liberty laws and the sovereign authority of foreign governments. Playing out on plantations as well as in courtrooms and halls of government across the United States, Canada, and Mexico, the conflicts and debates regarding nonhuman animals that took place after emancipation attempts exposed enslaved persons to retributive violence, exposed enslavers and their allies to national and international legal battles, and exposed the public to the cruelty and brutality of the slave system.

With each self-emancipation attempt and subsequent pursuit of the freedom-seeker bringing the United States closer to disunion, this thesis views the Civil War as the culmination of the fugitivity question and therefore concludes with a chapter on internecine conflict and the succeeding period of Reconstruction. This fourth and final chapter explores how the exigencies

of conflict altered the South's nonhuman animal apparatus of control during the Civil War, with animals previously used to hunt self-emancipators, now powering the Confederate war machine. It concludes by focusing on how the disputed history of animals became a microcosm of the debates over historical memory during the Reconstruction Era as the Lost Cause myth recontextualized animals to obscure the history of animal violence and legitimize the continued use of animals in the policing of Black Southerners.

Spatial containment relied on animal labor, perception, and intimidation. Self-emancipation attempts often depended on knowledge of local ecologies and relationships with nonhuman animals. Enslavers and their allies used animals to pursue and capture self-emancipators, fueling sectional divisions at home and impacting foreign relations abroad. Armies and soldiers on both sides of the Civil War moved on, fought with and against, suffered alongside, and survived through the labor and capacities, of nonhuman animals. And during the postwar years and Reconstruction era, violence and authority as well as freedom and autonomy continued to depend on the ability to direct animals for coercion and the need to rely on the same animals for protection, mobility, and survival. This thesis follows these topics across disciplines, methodologies, and historiographies. It provides an interconnected, multispecies history of how enslavement functioned, how freedom was pursued, how war was conducted, and how a reconstructed nation remembered these events while it attempted to define its future.

Chapter One: ‘Reap the Whirlwind’: Nonhuman Animals in the Geography of Containment and Resistance

For they have sown the wind, and they shall reap the whirlwind: it hath no stalk: the bud shall yield no meal: if so be it yield, the strangers shall swallow it up.
- Hosea 8:7

Across the American South, the sprawling monocultural fields of plantation spaces, along with their wooded, swampy margins, formed an environment in which the presence of animals was crucial to the methods of control utilized by enslavers and the strategies of defiance developed by the enslaved.¹ The thesis opens by focusing on this interplay during enslavement and the time leading up to self-emancipation attempts, and frames it as an interspecies dialectic during which nonhuman animals enforced and unsettled the physical and symbolic boundaries of the plantation space.² The first half of the chapter begins by describing the way enslavers weaponized the threat of wild animals in creating a geography of confinement while also using domesticated animals, especially dogs and horses, as living barricades, embodiments of recapture, and tools of terror in a deliberate and carefully calculated process. Combining perspectives from geography, archaeology, and environmental studies, this chapter demonstrates how enslavers relied on these nonhuman animals through targeted zoopolitical strategies.³

By drawing on the theory of containment developed by Edward Said and then utilized by Stephanie Camp, this chapter also adds to the established historiography of enslavement, in part,

¹ Monoculturalism refers to the replacement of diverse ecosystems with the managed, extractive cultivation of a single cash crop. Edwards, *Dark Scenes from Damaged Earth*, 105–107, 112–115.

² On interspecies histories as scholarship pushing against anthropocentric narratives, see Saha, *Colonizing Animals*, especially pages 7–8.

³ Applying Nicole Shukin’s concept of zoopolitics to the plantation system demonstrates that animals’ bodies and symbolic representations became enmeshed in biopolitical regimes of power and value as enslavers bred, trained, and managed animals as labor commodities and cultural signifiers that stabilized hierarchies and control. In her words, ‘there is an inescapable contiguity or bleed between’ the politics of humans being ascribed to other species. Shukin, *Animal Capital*, 5–10.

by focusing on the overlooked role of nonhuman animals in sustaining planter-class power.⁴ In additionally employing Michel Foucault's concept of the panopticon, meaning a model of surveillance where individuals believe they are being watched by authorities even when they are not, it additionally argues for the centrality of nonhuman animals in creating an environment that suggested the possibility of omnipresent surveillance.⁵ To this end, enslavers conditioned dogs and horses to perform specific tasks while also positioning the animals as well as their pens, stables, and patrol routes to create an environment where the threat of recapture was all-pervading.⁶

The geography of containment was also defined by the threat of wild animals such as snakes, alligators, bears, and large cats that lived on the plantation's edges. From this perspective, the plantation and its margins became a carceral landscape that linked the exploitation of humans and nonhuman animals to labor extraction, capitalism, and power. As such, this chapter contributes to the growing literature on the 'Plantationocene', viewing the use of animals as part of an expansive effort in which enslavers attempted to manipulate and reshape the environment into a regulated, monocultural, hierarchical ecosystem.⁷

These practices reveal the extent to which mastery over animals became synonymous with the mastery of the environment and humans. But even with the reliance on, and manipulation of, animals as a means of control, the geography of containment was never entirely secure. The second half of this chapter demonstrates how animals' perceptual world, as well as

⁴ Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, xx. Camp, *Closer to Freedom*, 6–7.

⁵ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 203–204.

⁶ Lyudmila Trut defines domestication as 'an evolutionary process by which animals are artificially selected and undergo huge phenotypic behavioral and physiological alterations'. See Lyudmila Trut, et al., 'Animal evolution during domestication: the domesticated fox as a model', *Bioessays*, vol. 31 (2009); and Hafiz Ishfaq Ahmad, et al., 'The Domestication Makeup: Evolution, Survival, and Challenges', *Frontiers in Ecology and Evolution*, vol. 8 (2020).

⁷ Haraway, 'Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Plantationocene, Chthulucene: Making Kin'.

their motivations, intentionality, agency, and self-directed decisions, shaped the structures of surveillance and the shifting opportunities for subversion.⁸ Enslaved persons developed understandings of these qualities in animals from everyday experiences, allowing them to reconceptualize the plantation as an oppositional geography.⁹ Central to this theme are the frameworks of ‘modes of interaction’ and ‘animal subjectivities’, introduced by Marcy Norton and Donna Haraway, respectively.¹⁰ This chapter applies these concepts to the American South and argues that enslaved persons created alternative, oppositional frameworks of understanding and interacting with animals, revealing an important and understudied method of enslaved resistance.

Enslaved persons learned about nonhuman animals and turned plantation spaces such as horse stables, dog kennels, and even the homes of enslavers into sites of counterintelligence. Their empirical observations helped them to establish relationships with animals that, whether through acts of resistance or routine, opposed prescribed hierarchies.¹¹ Farther away from the plantation, some enslaved persons expanded their geographic footprint through travel, hunting,

⁸ Chris Pearson’s chapter, ‘History and Animals Agencies’, in *The Oxford Handbook of Animal Studies*, is most important to the debates on, and interpretations of, animal agency.

⁹ Here, I rely on the geographic interpretation of Katherine McKittrick, who has worked on geographic subjecthood and ‘oppositional geographies’. McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds*, x. McKittrick focused on enslaved women and the way in which they resisted spatial and social orders. Importantly, McKittrick argued that this resistance took place in physical spaces as well as intellectual spaces where alternative ways of thinking and understanding took place.

¹⁰ Haraway, a titan in the field of animal studies, shows how human–animal encounters take place within specific non–neutral contexts, shaped by the experiences and partial perspectives that guide how both parties perceive and interpret one another. Donna J. Haraway, *When Species Meet*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 5, 233, 289. In her 2024 work, Norton uses ‘modes of interaction’ as a framework to describe the different ways Europeans and Indigenous populations perceived nonhuman animals after the Columbian encounter of 1492, and how these encounters were transformative on both human and nonhuman populations. Norton, *The Tame and the Wild*, 3–18.

¹¹ On the formation of human–canine relationships, see Miklósi, *Dog Behaviour*, 13–14, 21. According to Marthe Kiley–Worthington, horses form attachments and dependency to people who care for, and frequently interact, with them. See Marthe Kiley–Worthington, *Human–Animal Relationships in Equestrian Sport and Leisure*, (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016), in particular, pages 1996–2000.

and being ‘rented out’, where they encountered wild animals and different configurations of power with domesticated animals.¹²

Those who managed animals learned how dogs tracked by scent and communicated through barking. They also learned about the physiological and cardiovascular efficiency of horses in action.¹³ Hunting turned predatory animals such as alligators, snakes, and large cats, into prey, partially inverting the familiar hierarchy of threat. Although these types of oppositional modes of interaction did not, by any means, eliminate the danger of these predators, they did allow enslaved persons to approach these animals as sentient beings whose behaviors could be read and responded to with informed intention.

By expanding the focus of enslavement to include the accumulation of information about, and the formation of oppositional modes of interaction with, nonhuman animals, this work reveals how enslaved persons built an ecological record of knowledge and experience that was practical and defiant. These understandings enabled enslaved persons to predict and better react to animal encounters and transform enforced proximity into a resource for imagining a pathway to freedom.

¹² On the concept of ‘renting out’, meaning the temporary leasing of enslaved persons by their enslavers, see Baptist, *The Half Has Never Been Told*. Baptist links the leasing out of enslaved persons to the ‘financialization’ of slavery in the American South while also pointing out the exploitation inherent in this concept.

¹³ For further elaboration on hunting in the American South, see Proctor, *Bathed in Blood*; and Silkenat, *Scars on the Land*, especially Chapter Two. While dogs often growl during antagonistic interactions and whine as an ‘indicator of stressful arousal’, the most common canine vocalization is the bark. The bark is also the loudest of the canine vocalizations, measuring as loud as 2630 Hz. For further elaboration on dog vocalizations, see Marcello Siniscalchi, et al., ‘Communication in Dogs’, *Animals*, National Library of Medicine, vol. 8, no. 131 (2018): 8–11. While mostly discussing the impact of human riders on horses during equestrian sports, the article ‘Riders’ Effects on Horses’, provides details on equine animals’ physical capabilities while riding. See Hilary M. Clayton and Sarah Jane Hobbs, ‘The Role of Biomechanics in Understanding the Horse–Rider Interaction’, *Animals*, vol 13, no. 22 (2023).

Containment and Control in the Plantationocene

Nine years after self-emancipating from Maryland, Frederick Douglass vicariously brought readers of his best-selling autobiography to the haunting spatial reality of his enslavement, where at ‘every gate through which we were to pass, we saw a watchman—at every ferry a guard—on every bridge a sentinel’. Envisioning the world beyond the plantation boundaries, Douglass imagined himself being ‘torn to pieces by the fangs of the terrible bloodhound’, ‘stung by scorpions’, ‘chased by wild beasts’, and ‘bitten by snakes’. Continuing with the litany of ‘difficulties, real and imagined’, Douglass described the desperate feeling of being physically and psychologically ‘hemmed in upon every side’ as he pictured the plantation surrounded by a living perimeter of nonhuman animal threats.¹⁴

To contemplate self-emancipation was to weigh the known brutalities of bondage against the unknowable perils of the natural world. Douglass drew on literary allusions to describe this paralysis of containment by noting how he and his companions felt resigned to ‘bear those ills we had, than to fly to others, that we knew not of’.¹⁵ Incorporating an understanding of geography as ‘a space, place, and location’ in both ‘physical materiality and imaginative configurations’, Douglass’s consideration of American slavery and self-emancipation points to the more-than-human geography of containment and domination that enslavers attempted to create, in part, through the use of nonhuman animals.¹⁶

¹⁴ Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, 85. Historian David Blight interprets Douglass’s portrayal of the difficulties faced by self-emancipators as an attempt to ‘tear apart the romance of the Underground Railroad’. For more on this topic as well as on the popularity of Douglass’s narrative, see David Blight, *Frederick Douglass: Prophet of Freedom*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2018), 70–72.

¹⁵ Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, 85. For an excellent analysis of Douglass’s use of Shakespeare, in this case his allusion to *Hamlet*, as well as other contexts, see Blight, *Frederick Douglass*, 72, 465–467.

¹⁶ For this quotation as well as further elaboration on the concepts of geographic subjecthood and ‘oppositional geographies’, see McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds*, x.

The presence of wild animals beyond the plantation in addition to the weaponized domesticated animals within it, created an incredibly powerful deterrent to self-emancipation. William J. Anderson, a formerly enslaved person, reflected on the impossibility of escaping because of the ‘panthers, bears, snakes, alligators, white and black men, and bloodhounds’.¹⁷ In creating this entanglement of trained vigilance and non-domesticated danger, enslavers tried to control nonhuman animals and also the fear these animals prompted, creating a grim irony for enslaved persons like Andrew Jackson, who described feeling as if he was ‘watched and guarded like [a] caged animal’ by the very nonhuman animals enlisted to enforce his confinement.¹⁸

These narratives, along with countless others, speak to the strategy through which ecological manipulation and human subjugation were combined to make the idea of self-emancipation seem like an unnatural trespass against the natural order and the natural world. Enslavers changed the environment by moving dog pens and horse stables, and also by creating patrol routes, clearing forests, draining swamps, and deliberately spreading monoculture in a dynamic best analyzed through the framework of the Plantationocene.¹⁹ The plantation system became an incubator for destructive environmental and social changes. It expanded capitalism and production through the intertwining exploitation of plant, nonhuman animal, and human life.

Capitalizing on the 30,000 years of shared evolutionary history during which dogs were ‘woven into human society as partners’, enslavers across the Atlantic World from Cuba to Haiti and into the American South used dogs to control and intimidate enslaved persons and other

¹⁷ Anderson, *Life and Narrative of William J. Anderson*, 26.

¹⁸ Andrew Jackson, *Narrative and Writings of Andrew Jackson, of Kentucky; Containing an Account of His Birth, and Twenty-Six Years of His Life While a Slave; His Escape; Five Years of Freedom, Together with Anecdotes Relating to Slavery; Journal of One Year's Travels; Sketches, etc. Narrated by Himself; Written by a Friend*, (Syracuse: Daily and Weekly Star Office, 1847), 15.

¹⁹ Haraway, ‘Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Plantationocene’. For a critique of Haraway’s conception of the Plantationocene, see Arun Saldanha, ‘A Date with Destiny: Racial Capitalism and the Beginnings of the Anthropocene’, *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, vol. 38, no. 1 (2019).

groups of marginalized people.²⁰ The use of canines as instruments of terror and intimidation is well-established in the historiography, but the number of historical accounts that include these powerful animals might surprise even the most well-researched historians.²¹ Abolitionist accounts, slave narratives, enslaver diaries, court records, and runaway advertisements, make it clear that the practice was so common that it verges on unquantifiable. In fact, dogs as part of planter-class power and authority were so ordinary that their deployment slipped into the undocumented background of routine. Speaking to the pervasiveness and importance of dogs to enforcing control on Southern plantations, Solomon Northup believed the ‘presence of the dogs’ was absolutely ‘necessary to overhaul a fugitive who may take to his heels’ and to assure enslaved persons maintained their work pace.²²

Selectively bred and rigorously trained, these animals that were highly regarded for their strong senses of smell and hearing, transformed the landscape into a surveilled space, leading abolitionists to conclude that the ‘fear of the dogs restrains multitudes from running off’.²³ Dog breeds such as the Cuban and Siberian Bloodhounds, were the most sought after, their importation reflecting an economic class distinction since only the most affluent enslavers were

²⁰ According to Chris Pearson, a leading historian on human–canine history, dogs were domesticated through ‘unconscious selection’ as ‘both people and wolves took actions for their own short–term gain’. In particular, calmer wolves often lived in proximity to human camps because of the availability of food, leading to humans recognizing that wolves could perform certain valuable tasks. Pearson, ‘Dogs, History, and Agency’, 132. In her seminal article on the topic, Sara Johnson examined the use of dogs as instruments of terror against enslaved persons and indigenous communities in Haiti and Cuba. See Johnson, ‘You Should Give Them Blacks to Eat’.

²¹ John Hope Franklin and Loren Schweninger first examined slave–hunting canines in their 1999 work, *Runaway Slaves*, 160–165. Other recent works include Campbell, ‘The Seminoles, the ‘Bloodhound War’; Parry and Yingling, ‘Slave Hounds and Abolition in the Americas’.

²² Northup, *Twelve Years a Slave*, 224.

²³ Theodore Dwight Weld, *American Slavery As It Is: Testimony of a Thousand Witnesses*, (New York: Published by the American Anti–Slavery Society, 1839), 21. As Chris Pearson notes, dogs ‘mainly know and experience through smell’, a point agreed upon by biologists and ethologists. For the above quotation and further elaboration on the olfactory abilities of canines, see Chris Pearson, ‘A Walk in the Park with Timmy: History and the Possibilities of Companion Species Research’, *Wild*, no. 1 (2009): 87–92; as well as Clare Browne, et al., ‘The Use of Scent–Detecting Dogs’, *Irish Veterinary Journal*, vol. 59, no. 2 (2006). On dogs’ hearing abilities, see HE Heffner, ‘Hearing in large and small dogs: Absolute thresholds and size of the tympanic membrane’, *Behavioral Neuroscience*, vol. 97, no. 310–318 (1983).

able to afford such breeds. More commonly, enslavers relied on whatever dogs could track and pursue effectively, as evidenced by travelers to the South who noted that ‘bloodhounds, foxhounds, bull-dogs, and curs’ were all requisitioned by enslavers.²⁴ Newspaper advertisements, including that of John Long, who boasted of his dogs that were ‘in prime training and ready to attend to all calls of catching and hunting runaways’, spoke to the network of buying and procuring the services of such animals throughout the South.²⁵

Enslavers typically trained these dogs by simulating an escape attempt, during which, according to Isaac Williams, ‘dogs were let loose, and put on the track of’ an enslaved person, ‘who was made to climb a tree’.²⁶ When the dogs ‘could trace him unerringly to his place of concealment, they were considered trained’.²⁷ Commissioned by the *New York Daily Times* to travel through the South, journalist Frederick Law Olmsted sent dispatches from Virginia detailing the same types of training methods. According to the journalist, enslavers forced dogs to chase an enslaved person up a tree, and then rewarded the animals with meat.²⁸ According to

²⁴ Olmsted, *A Journey in the Seaboard Slave States*, 160–161. It seems Cuban and Siberian Bloodhounds quickly became conflated with other types of slave-hunting dogs that had been used in the South dating back to at least 1799. To this point, an article published in 1870 in *Oliver Optic’s Magazine* asserted that, ‘The bloodhound of the south, and perhaps known best as the Cuban bloodhound, is not of the genuine breed, but is descended from the Biscayne Mastiff, and is trained to fight as well as to hunt’. Oliver Optic, ed., ‘Our Boys and Girls’, *Oliver Optic’s Magazine*, vol. 9, (Boston: Lee and Shepard, 1870), 169. To this point, Lorien Foote, among others, has suggested that ‘bloodhound’ could, at times, be a catch-all term for dogs as wide-ranging as English Foxhounds and Irish Deerhounds. Lorien Foote, ‘The Dogs Ought to Be Exterminated’: Dogs, Slavery, and the Consequences of Emancipation’, in Hess, ed., *Animal Histories of the Civil War Era*, 258.

²⁵ John Long, *Lexington (MO) Democratic Advocate*, 14 February 1855, in W.J. Carlton, *The Suppressed Book About Slavery! Prepared for Publication in 1857—Never Published Until the Present Time*, (New York: Carleton, Publisher, 1864), 326–327. Also in Campbell, ‘The Seminoles, the ‘Bloodhound War, and Abolitionism’, 259.

²⁶ Historians trace this practice to techniques developed in Cuba. Parry and Yingling, ‘Slave Hounds and Abolition in the Americas’, 94; and Campbell, ‘The Seminoles, the ‘Bloodhound War’, and Abolitionism’, 278.

²⁷ Isaac Williams, *Aunt Sally: or, The Cross the Way of Freedom. A Narrative of the Slave-life and Purchase of the Mother of Rev. Isaac Williams, of Detroit, Michigan*, (Cincinnati: American Reform Tract and Book Society, 1858), 168–169.

²⁸ Frederick Law Olmsted, *A Journey in the Seaboard Slave States; With Remarks on Their Economy*, (London: Sampson Low, Son, & Co., 1856), 161. Providing meat as a positive reinforcement at the end of the hunt reflects the reward system practice of operant conditioning that continues to be an important dog training method. See Ana Catarina Vieira de Castro, et al., ‘Improving Dog Training Methods: Efficacy and Efficiency of Reward and Mixed Training Methods’, *PLOS ONE*, vol. 16, no. 2 (2021).

white Southerners, who described the training methods as if they were a common practice, the dogs were ‘never allowed to see a negro except while training to catch him’.²⁹ Isaac Williams, a formerly enslaved person, also wrote about this enforced race-based isolation when he explained that ‘no colored person was allowed to speak’ to the dogs ‘or to feed them, under the penalty of a severe whipping’.³⁰

Combining awareness of the heightened senses of canines with burgeoning racial pseudoscience, Southerners attempted to train their dogs ‘to follow any particular negro by scent’.³¹ According to historian Mark M. Smith, many Southerners believed that Black bodies had a distinct smell and taste.³² Southern dog trainers conditioned their animals accordingly using ‘a shoe or a piece of clothing’, or in some cases, the blood of enslaved persons. Describing the gruesome training practice that she witnessed while enslaved in South Carolina, Ryer Emmanuel detailed how enslavers ‘would let de dog bite you en taste your blood, so dey could find you better de next time’.³³

Enslavers and overseers sometimes trained dogs in front of enslaved persons as a warning against resistance. James Green planned to escape after being sold and relocated to another state. However, the next day, his new, and seemingly prescient, enslaver brought him and the rest of the enslaved persons ‘to look at de dogs’. The enslaver singled out Green, choosing him ‘to train de dogs with’. His enslaver directed him to act if he were ‘running away and to run five miles’ before climbing a tree and waiting for the dogs to track him. This performative act, which made

²⁹ Olmsted, *A Journey in the Seaboard Slave States*, 161.

³⁰ Williams, *Aunt Sally: or, The Cross the Way of Freedom*, 168.

³¹ Olmsted, *A Journey in the Seaboard Slave States*, 161.

³² Mark M. Smith, *How Race Is Made: Slavery, Segregation, and the Senses*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 37–40.

³³ Works Progress Administration (WPA), ‘Interview of Mom Ryer Emmanuel’, in *Slave Narratives: A Folk History of Slavery in the United States, South Carolina Narratives, Part 2*, (Washington, DC: Library of Congress, 1941), 24–25. [Phonetic spellings in original].

the dogs' power unmistakable and the idea of escape unthinkable, affected all involved, especially Green, who admitted that he 'never got thinkin of runnin away' again.³⁴

James Green's enslaver positioned the kennels where enslaved persons could 'look at de dogs' in an effort to discourage self-emancipation attempts and enforce containment.

Archaeologists studying plantations in the Caribbean have used Foucault's concept of the panopticon to argue that enslavers' and overseers' homes served as vantage points for monitoring enslaved persons and creating the sense of perpetual observation.³⁵ Extending these studies to the Southern plantation system shows that the positioning of animals, pens, stables, and patrol routes was also key to this process.

With uniquely adapted social behaviors along with the ability to communicate through barking and growling, dogs were especially noteworthy in this regard.³⁶ On the banks of the Missouri River, a large dog stood guard over a group of enslaved persons, including Archer Alexander. The dog communicated nonverbally to the enslaved persons through its actions as it walked back and forth, speaking to Archer as he 'looked up at' him, 'kind of winkin', as if the dog was saying, 'No, you don't!'" Archer later wrote that he thought the enslavers had been 'mighty keerless, leavin us up thar without a watch', but after being induced into a state of paralysis by the dog, he conceded that he 'onerstood it all'.³⁷ Harriet Jacobs, likewise, recalled her enslaver having 'a fierce dog, usually kept chained' and visible to the enslaved people on the plantation. Jacobs was even more explicit about the psychological toll of proximity when she

³⁴ WPA, James Green, *Slave Narratives (Texas)*, 88. [Phonetic spellings in original].

³⁵ In particular, see Bates, "The Landscape Cannot Be Said to Be Really Perfect"; Delle, 'The Habitus of Jamaican Plantation Landscapes'; and Singleton, 'Slavery and Spatial Dialectics on Cuban Coffee Plantations'.

³⁶ Siniscalchi, et al., 'Communication in Dogs', 9–11.

³⁷ William G. Eliot, *The Story of Archer Alexander: From Slavery to Freedom, March 30, 1863*, (Boston: Cupples, Upham and Company, 1885), 50. [Phonetic spellings in original].

provided details of a neighboring plantation, observing that the dogs' 'pen was spacious, and a terror to the slaves'.³⁸

Some enslavers kept their dogs chained up or confined in pens, but others gave them free rein, turning the canines into nonhuman sentinels to enforce the tightly controlled plantation space. For example, John Holmes's enslaver kept a 'very large and savage' bloodhound chained up during the day as a visible threat to the enslaved persons. However, at night, the dog was turned loose to patrol the plantation boundaries. Commenting on the perceived success of the race-based training of the animal, Holmes described how the dog 'would not touch white people' but made sure 'no negro could come round the house, nor along the road'.³⁹

Enslavers linked their animals' ability to track black bodies to notions of racial differences, creating a multispecies feedback loop. Tyler D. Parry and Charlton Yingling correctly note that racialized canine training 'instantiated racism, as planters interpreted this as confirmation that even dogs 'knew' the supposed immutable inferiority of blackness'.⁴⁰ However, dogs acted with self-willed intentionality and were seemingly just as likely to expose contradictions and tensions within such thinking when they acted outside the plantation's racial order. Race-based training methods were flawed by their very nature, and while dogs react to their humans' emotional states in front of certain people, the animals in no way replicate racial attitudes.⁴¹ Therefore, dogs tasked with guarding the plantation and the social order sometimes slipped beyond enslaver control when they responded to unfamiliar humans in unpredictable

³⁸ Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, 72.

³⁹ Benjamin Drew, *A North-Side View of Slavery. The Refugee: or the Narratives of Fugitive Slaves in Canada. Related by Themselves, with an Account of the History and Condition of the Colored Population of Upper Canada*, (Boston: Published by John P. Jewett and Company, 1856), 165.

⁴⁰ Parry and Yingling, 'Slave Hounds and Abolition in the Americas', 72–73.

⁴¹ These types of debates find resonance in research focusing on colonial and post-colonial Kenya and Zambia. Josh Doble, 'Can Dogs be Racist? The Colonial Legacies of Racialized Dogs in Kenya and Zambia', *History Workshop Journal*, vol. 89 (2020): 70.

ways. A white man named Nehemiah Caulkins went to a nearby plantation, where he noticed a dog kept on guard. However, when Caulkins went near the animal, the dog ‘sprang up and bit’ him, tearing his ‘pantaloon badly’. The visibly flustered overseer was quick to apologize, also claiming that he had ‘never knew him to bite a *white* man before.’⁴²

Even when enslavers lacked the means to keep these animals on their property, few were without recourse to the animals’ abilities. Those without dogs relied on the threat of patrollers and professional slave-hunters to enforce containment. John Brown’s enslaver ‘wished to scare’ the enslaved persons on his plantation whom he suspected were planning to self-emancipate. Bringing ‘a n——r hunter and his six dogs’ to the plantation, Brown’s enslaver boasted that he had the services of ‘the right kind of dogs now to fetch’ them back.⁴³ In other cases, open threats were unnecessary as knowledge proliferated around enslaved communities about the presence of slave-hunting canines on neighboring plantations. J.H. Banks, whose enslaver ‘had no dogs himself’, knew ‘others had them’ and knew ‘how to hunt with them’. And according to Banks, across the neighboring plantations and property lines, enslavers made it ‘common cause to use’ the animals against self-emancipators.⁴⁴

Interviewed by the WPA in the early twentieth century, formerly enslaved persons described the futility of attempting to self-emancipate in the face of the ever-present threat of nonhuman animals. Melvin Smith explained that if an enslaved person ‘tried to run away, they sent the hounds after them’, while Ryer Emmanuel told her interviewer that it ‘never do no good to run’ as ‘Dem hounds would sho get you’.⁴⁵ And when asked if enslaved persons ever

⁴² Weld, *American Slavery As It Is*, 15. Italics in original.

⁴³ John Brown, *Slave Life in Georgia: A Narrative of the Life, Sufferings, and Escape of John Brown, a Fugitive Slave, Now in England*, (London: British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society, 1855), 134.

⁴⁴ J.W.C. Pennington, *A Narrative of Events of the Life of J. H. Banks, an Escaped Slave, from the Cotton State, Alabama, in America*, (Liverpool: M. Rourke, Printer, 1861), 65.

⁴⁵ WPA, Melvin Smith, *Slave Narratives (Georgia, Part 3)*, 290; and WPA, Ryer Emmanuel, 24. [Phonetic spellings in original].

attempted to self-emancipate, Alice Green rhetorically riposted, how could people ‘run off to the North when dem patterollers and their hounds were waiting?’⁴⁶

The slave patrols described by Alice Green, which relied on both dogs and horses, were feared throughout the slaveholding South and were instrumental to the creation of far-reaching spaces of surveillance. As explained by Solomon Northup, these multispecies ‘organizations of patrollers’ have humans ‘ride on horseback, headed by a captain, armed, and accompanied by dogs’.⁴⁷ Horses were among the most common nonhuman animals within the plantation space, and similarly to dogs, they were manipulated by enslavers and their allies into nonhuman extensions of power and control.⁴⁸ However, due to their much longer history of domestication, inclination towards pack behavior, stronger motivation to rewards, and better understanding of human cues, dogs tended to be less complicated to train than horses.⁴⁹

Horses, with their distinctive cognitive abilities and unique social hierarchies, required an approach that relied as much on sustained familiarity as on coercion.⁵⁰ It may be easier to establish human dominance over horses as a result of their history as herd animals, but overly assertive behavior can also lead to the animal becoming fearful. Enslavers and their allies formed relationships with horses over time, acclimatized them to specific situations, such as patrolling,

⁴⁶ WPA, Alice Green, *Slave Narratives, (Georgia, Part 2)*, 31. [Phonetic spellings in original].

⁴⁷ Northup, *Twelve Years a Slave*, 237.

⁴⁸ According to the seventh census, conducted in 1850, the Southern states had 2,570,319 horses and mules in addition to 820,340 oxen. T.W. MacMahon, *Cause and Contrast: an Essay on the American Crisis*, (Richmond, Virginia: West & Johnston, 1862), 130.

⁴⁹ It is estimated that dogs were domesticated anywhere from 15,000 to 40,000 years ago, while horses have been domesticated for roughly 5,000 to 6,000 years. Trut, ‘Animal evolution during domestication’, 2; and Librado, ‘The origins and spread of domestic horses’, 634.

⁵⁰ On horse cognition and training, see Paul McGreevy and Andrew McLean, ‘The Application of Learning Theory in Horse Training’, *Applied Animal Behaviour Science*, vol. 110, no. 1–2 (2008). Sandra Swart’s outstanding research on horses’ sensory experiences and historical lives has demonstrated that the animals’ ‘time perception, and experience of history differ from ours’. With that in mind, Swart suggests that horses complicate the narrative of human control, and she urges scholars to approach the human–equine relationship as a mutual entanglement. Swart, *Riding High*, 3, 37. On the importance of equine–human familiarity, see Chiara Scopa, et al., ‘Emotional Transfer in Human–Horse Interaction: New Perspectives on Equine Assisted Interventions’, *Animals*, vol. 9, no. 12 (2019): 1.

and taught them skills related to tracking self-emancipators, such as jumping over or running through fences. They also likely desensitized the animals to frightening stimuli that would be encountered while on patrol or in pursuit.⁵¹

Horses increased enslaver mobility, improved surveillance, and symbolically projected dominance and power. Long viewed as ‘fundamental adjuncts of authority’, horses have traditionally represented symbols of both colonial and enslaver power.⁵² This human-equine amalgam enabled enslavers to visually command the landscape while also ensuring the speed, mobility, and endurance needed to overtake an enslaved person attempting self-liberation.⁵³ One of the main tasks of horse-mounted slave patrols was to frequently monitor roads and trails in a way that relied on animals’ sensory acuity and their familiarity with the landscape.⁵⁴ This convergence of animal perception and planter-class ambition created power in motion. Patrols made lines of authority more plainly visible and enforceable by delineating plantation boundaries.⁵⁵ Over time, the widespread utilization of these multispecies patrols changed the Southern landscape by promoting the expansion and demarcation of roads and trails as part of

⁵¹ Those interested in the specifics of equine behavior and horse training should see Carey A. Williams, ‘The Basics of Equine Behavior’, *Rutgers University New Jersey Agricultural Experiment Center: Equine Science Center*.

⁵² On the cultural and social significance of horses within the context of planter-class power, see Burnard, *Creole gentlemen*, 144; and T.H. Breen, ‘Horses and Gentlemen: The Cultural Significance of Gambling among the Gentry of Virginia’, *The William and Mary Quarterly*, vol. 34, no. 2 (1977): 248–249. Sandra Swart argues horses being linked specifically to the power of men has existed since the beginnings of human–equine relations. See Swart, ‘Shared Skin’, 13. On the use of horse–powered authority in other colonial contexts, see Swart, *Riding High*, 27–37, 82–87. For a classic work that examined the role of horses on plantations, see Isaac, *Transformation of Virginia*, especially pages 50–54.

⁵³ On equine mobility and speed, including its ability to maintain these over long distances, see Paul D. McGreevy and Andrew N. McLean, *Equitation Science*, (Oxford: Wiley–Blackwell, 2010), 85, 269.

⁵⁴ Sally Hadden’s work, *Slave Patrols: Law and Violence in Virginia and the Carolinas*, remains the definitive work on the topic of slave patrols. Hadden, *Slave Patrols*, 206.

⁵⁵ Environmental historians have long emphasized the importance of expansion and demarcating boundaries in projects of empire. Richard Grove and John F. Richards, *Environment and Empire*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 2–8, 190. In her work *Creatures of Empire*, Virginia Anderson has observed the importance of nonhuman animals in extending and demarcating boundaries in early America.

the larger initiative to transform the Southern ecosystem through deforestation and swamp drainage.

Patrolled roads and other artificial boundaries combined with manipulated natural features such as rivers, coasts, forests, and swamps created enclosed, contained spaces enforced by landscape and law. According to David Silkenat, forests and swamps helped white Southerners demarcate the border between the cultivated space of the plantation and the ‘wild’.⁵⁶ From the shores of the Mid-Atlantic stretching south through the Low Country to the Gulf Coast, and moving westward through the Cotton Belt and into Texas, the South was a mosaic of ecosystems, each with distinct flora and fauna occupying these wild spaces. Though it is important not to conflate the many ‘Souths’ and their ecosystems at the inchoate periods of the Anthropocene and Plantationocene, it is unnecessary to catalog particular ecoregions or map the historical range of individual nonhuman animals in this study.⁵⁷ Rather, it is more revealing, in the context of containment within the plantation system, to examine the ways enslavers and the enslaved saw and thought about the nonhuman animals that inhabited these spaces.

The threat of alligators, snakes, large cats, bears, and wolves reinforced the perceived dangers of the natural world as documented by the enslaved persons who wrote about the animals living in the dense woods, swamps, and canebrakes that surrounded plantations. In coastal Louisiana, where cotton and sugar plantations lined the shores and extended ‘back to the borders of interminable swamps’, Solomon Northup thought it unsafe to walk near the water banks as it was ‘alive with alligators’.⁵⁸ Similarly, Henry Bibb worried about being ‘devoured by

⁵⁶ David Silkenat provides an in-depth analysis of the impact of swamp drainage and forest clearings in the plantation South. See Silkenat, *Scars on the Land*, 75.

⁵⁷ In *Feral Animals in the American South*, Abraham Gibson provides an overview of the impact of feral animals such as wild horses, hogs, and cattle on the American South. Gibson, *Feral Animals in the American South*, 70–87, 99.

⁵⁸ Northup, *Twelve Years a Slave*, 106.

large alligators’ that were ‘often seen creeping through the cotton fields and going from swamp to swamp seeking their prey’.⁵⁹ Henry Clay Bruce recounted that the ‘most vicious wild animal’ he ever ‘encountered was the hog’, and there were many of these highly intelligent animals known for sudden aggression, ‘around the farm’ in the timbers that surrounded the place of his enslavement in Missouri.⁶⁰ With a similar viewpoint, Harry Smith recalled how ‘slaves were treed and dogs were devoured by these ferocious animals’.⁶¹

In Georgia, Charles Ball recalled that ‘panthers, wolves, and other beasts of prey, were common in the woods’ encircling his plantation.⁶² To Ball, whose attention to nonhuman animals surpassed any other in the slave narrative literary genre, even the ‘flocks of buzzards, and carrion crows’ gave ‘a dismal aspect to the woods’.⁶³ These birds, according to Ball, ‘attack dead bodies by pulling out and consuming the eyes’ before tearing open the bowels to ‘feed upon the intestines’.⁶⁴ With the thought of his body being torn apart by these necrophagous birds that inhabited the woods beyond the plantation haunting his imagination, Ball abandoned the place.⁶⁵ Louis Hughes meticulously described the Mississippi plantation where he was enslaved, both in

⁵⁹ Bibb, *Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb*, 116. On alligators’ physiology and hunting patterns, see Gordon Grigg and David Kirshner, *Biology and Evolution of Crocodylians*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2015), 48, 129. John J. Mayer and I. Lehr Brisbin Jr. detail feral hogs’ aggressiveness in their comprehensive work, *Wild Pigs in the United States*. John J. Mayer and I. Lehr Brisbin Jr., *Wild Pigs in the United States: Their History, Comparative Morphology, and Current Status*, (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2008), 8–9.

⁶⁰ Henry Clay Bruce, *The New Man: Twenty–Nine Years a Slave. Twenty–Nine Years a Free Man*, (York, Pennsylvania: P. Anstadt & Sons, 1895), 19.

⁶¹ Harry Smith, *Fifty Years of Slavery in the United States of America*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: West Michigan Printing Co, 1891), 42. Abraham Gibson uses the feralization of hogs as a case study to gain insights into the process of domestication. He also notes that wild or feral hogs could become a dangerous and disruptive force in Southern ecosystems. Gibson, *Feral Animals in the American South*, 87–92.

⁶² Ball, *Slavery in the United States*, 353.

⁶³ In his article, ‘Beasts of the Southern Wild’, environmental historian Thomas G. Andrews describes Ball’s narrative as the most enigmatic of the literary genre. See Andrews, ‘Beasts of the Southern Wild: Slaveholders, Slaves, and Other Animals in Charles Ball’s *Slavery in the United States*’, in Marguerite S. Shaffer and Phoebe S.K. Young, eds., *Rendering Nature: Animals, Bodies, Places, Politics*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015), 23.

⁶⁴ Likely drawing on personal experience or anecdotal evidence, Ball described the process by which vultures use their powerful beaks to tear through eyes and other soft tissue. Bernd Heinrich, *Life Everlasting: The Animal Way of Death*, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2012), 81–83.

⁶⁵ Ball, *Slavery in the United States*, 257.

terms of its buildings and layout, and also the natural features and nonhuman animals that bordered it. Surrounded by canebrakes that ‘were so heavy that it was common for bears to hide there’, Hughes also noted that ‘wolves were plenty in the woods behind the farm’, and that the animals ‘could be heard at any time’.⁶⁶

Enslaved persons living on plantations throughout the South watched dangerous nonhuman animals and heard their haunting sounds. They also listened to stories shared within enslaved communities that reinforced the pervasive sense of danger. Wayman Williams remembered his grandfather telling him about the time a panther chased him back to the plantation. Recalling a similar incident, Williams described a young enslaved man barely making it back to the plantation as a panther chased down his horse. These large wild cats, known for their speed and ambush attacks, were considered by those living on Williams’s plantation as the ‘most dangerous animal’ since they ‘never know when he goin to strike’.⁶⁷

Enslavers, well aware of the power such experiences held over the enslaved, sometimes exploited and exacerbated these fears through calculated misinformation. John James Geer met an enslaved person who told him that ‘slaves were taught that alligators would destroy only negroes and dogs’ by their enslavers.⁶⁸ These types of fabricated threats of wild animals served

⁶⁶ Louis Hughes, *Thirty Years a Slave: From Bondage to Freedom. The Institution of Slavery as Seen on the Plantation and in the Home of the Planter*, (Milwaukee: South Side Printing Company, 1897), 77. L. David Mech, whose research on wolves spans five decades, and Italian biological conservationist Luigi Boitani compiled a comprehensive examination of wolves in their co-edited work, *Wolves: Behavior, Ecology, and Conservation*. Specifically on wolf vocalizations, including their coordinated howls, see Mech and Boitani, *Wolves: Behavior, Ecology, and Conservation*, 66–77.

⁶⁷ WPA, Wayman Williams, *Slave Narratives (Texas, Part 4)*, 182–183. [Phonetic spellings in original]. Kenneth Logan and Linda Sweanor describe the predatory cat’s specific evolution as designed for ambush hunting. See Kenneth A. Logan and Linda L. Sweanor, *Desert Puma: Evolutionary Ecology and Conservation of an Enduring Carnivore*, (Washington, DC: Island Press, 2001), 21, 311. While pumas are technically in the subfamily Pantherinae, the terms ‘cougars’, ‘panthers’, and ‘catamounts’ were often used interchangeably at this time.

⁶⁸ John James Geer, *Beyond the lines, or, A Yankee prisoner loose in Dixie*, (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: J.W. Daughaday, 1863), 128. It should be noted that according to modern ethological research, alligators often retreat from humans while commonly killing and consuming dogs. Vliet, *Alligators: The Illustrated Guide to Their Biology*, 35.

several purposes. By noting how alligators would only attack dogs and people of African descent, the enslaver animalized enslaved persons, reinforced racial difference, and emphasized the dangers of the surrounding environment. References to animals preferring the flesh from Black bodies also point to the pseudoscientific disinformation that proliferated among the planter class at this time. Josiah Priest's widely-read *Bible Defense of Slavery* claimed that wild animals including, 'the shark, the lion, tiger, and leopard' preferred 'the flesh of the negro to that of the white men'. Rooting his assertions as part of 'nature', Priest told readers that such predatory 'monsters always select blacks as their prey'.⁶⁹

Enslavers sometimes exaggerated perils and relied on pseudoscience to magnify control, but the natural world did not need embellishment. Wild animals could, and did, attack and kill enslaved persons. David L. Ward built high derricks to 'keep the wolves from devouring' the enslaved persons working outside his Kentucky plantation in an architectural concession to the reality that wolves, driven by hunger and the encroachment of settlements on their habitat, were capable of hunting humans.⁷⁰ Meanwhile, the *Literary Souvenir* highlighted an account of an enslaved person belonging to Dr. Deaumont, of West Baton Rouge, who was 'killed by an alligator' while drawing some water from the Mississippi.⁷¹ Alligators rely on stealth by lying motionless on riverbanks to ambush prey, which makes these types of encounters difficult to avoid. Court records from South Carolina detailed the passing of an enslaved person named Abram, who 'came to his death by being bitten twice by a snake'.⁷² Though often buried in

⁶⁹ Josiah Priest, *Bible Defense of Slavery*, (Glasgow, Kentucky: W.S. Brown, 1851), 228. Italics in original. In *How Race Is Made*, Mark M. Smith points to Priest's account to emphasize how the planter-class believed there were innate differences between the taste and smell of white and black bodies. Smith, *How Race Is Made*, 42–43.

⁷⁰ Smith, *Fifty Years of Slavery in the United States of America*, 88. Though rare, there are circumstances during which wolves attack humans. Mech and Boitani, eds., *Wolves: Behavior, Ecology, and Conservation*, 302.

⁷¹ 'Summary of the News', *The Literary Souvenir: a Weekly Journal of Literature, Science, and the Arts, Volume 3*, (Lowell: Published by A.B.F. Hildreth,) 12.

⁷² 'Coroner's Inquest for Abram, 22 August 1863, Union County, South Carolina', *CSI: Dixie, Center for Virtual History*, University of Georgia, <https://csidixie.org/inquests/3589>.

bureaucratic records, these accounts provide archival glimpses of what Mahesh Rangarajan describes as wild animals ‘making their histories’ through entanglements with humans.⁷³

Either through direct encounters or through stories and warnings that spread through the plantations, many enslaved persons grew to fear nonhuman animals and viewed them as another dangerous and potentially fatal barrier to self-emancipation. Speaking to an interviewer about the natural spaces that bordered his enslaver’s plantation, Hiram Mayes recalled his mother tying him to a chair to keep him ‘from runnin’ off to the bayou’ because they were “fraid of alligators’ and scared of the ‘big snakes in de woods’.⁷⁴ These types of warnings and encounters accumulated into a shared memory that shaped the choices and boundaries of many enslaved peoples’ lives. Frances Anne Kemble, whose husband, Pierce Butler, inherited a massive cotton and rice plantation in Georgia, spent the winter of 1838 recording observations of the conditions of the enslaved persons who lived and worked there.⁷⁵ After a young enslaved woman named Louisa attempted to self-emancipate, the girl’s grandmother, Molly, came to see Kemble. When Kemble asked why others did not follow Louisa’s example, Molly described how the surrounding environment and its nonhuman animals precluded self-emancipation, explaining that there was no use in running away because beyond the plantation there was ‘swamp all round’ where ‘de snakes eat em up’.⁷⁶

⁷³ Rangarajan, ‘Animals with Rich Histories: The Case of the Lions of Gir Forest, Gujarat, India’, 127.

⁷⁴ WPA, Hiram Miller, *Slave Narratives (Texas, Part 3)*, 24–25. [Phonetic spellings in original].

⁷⁵ Shortly after spending the winter on the plantation, Frances and her husband separated and later divorced largely because of her husband’s extramarital affairs and his treatment of the people he enslaved. Kemble’s husband threatened to deny her rights to see their children and she therefore waited until the Civil War to publish her accounts of what she witnessed on the plantation in 1838. The most comprehensive biography of Frances Anne Kemble remains Deirdre David, *Fanny Kemble: A Performed Life*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007). Catherine Clinton offers further details on Kemble as an abolitionist in Catherine Clinton, *Fanny Kemble's Civil Wars: The Story of America's Most Unlikely Abolitionist*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000).

⁷⁶ Frances Anne Kemble, *Journal of a Residence on a Georgian Plantation: 1838–1839*, (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1864), 139. [Phonetic spellings in original].

Nonhuman animals were central to the geography of containment as enslavers relied on both domesticated and wild animals in attempts to create a spatially controlled environment that blurred the line between nature and oppression. It is difficult to overstate the impact these threats must have had on enslaved persons as they watched dogs being trained to exclusively hunt Black bodies and heard stories of alligators and wild animals that only consumed people of African descent. Many enslaved persons internalized these dangers, which were manipulated by enslavers to reinforce the notions of racial difference, and concluded that there was no safe refuge beyond the plantation boundaries. Despite these nonhuman dangers, enslaved persons actively resisted and undermined the restrictive geographic spatial order imposed upon them. Many enslaved persons attained familiarity with the behaviors, temperaments, and vulnerabilities of domesticated animals as well as a nuanced understanding of the wild animals living in the spaces outside the plantation. This knowledge that often spread through robust intellectual networks, helped transform the plantation from a space of containment into a dynamic rival geography and oppositional space. In defiance of enslavers' imagined nature of nonhuman animal predation and complicity, enslaved persons developed alternative modes of survival that challenged the colonial order of species.

Rival Empiricism

Enslavers used domesticated and wild animals to manufacture conditions that reminded enslaved persons of their reach. Nevertheless, the contest over space remained contested as enslaved persons gained knowledge about nonhuman animals and how to subvert them.

‘Not allowed books, pen, ink, nor paper to improve their minds’, Henry Bibb and other enslaved persons were ‘apt to retain what came under’ their observations as they turned to the natural

world as a source of instruction. Through a curriculum of observing the movements, behaviors, and patterns of the nonhuman animals, enslaved persons developed a subversive education that provided them with ways to adapt, resist, and envision a path towards freedom. In Henry Bibb's words, they could learn 'the art of running away to perfection'.⁷⁷

These forms of knowledge production as resistance resonate with the works of Donna Haraway and Marcy Norton.⁷⁸ Applied here, these approaches reveal how enslaved persons developed their own ways of understanding and interpreting nonhuman animals that contrasted against the planter-class's intellectual logic that reduced animals to instruments of productivity and control. In the face of a system designed to confine them, enslaved peoples' ability to reinterpret the natural world proved critical for planning self-emancipation attempts and resisting the geography of containment.

As literary scholar Leah M. Thomas has noted in her study of Mary Prince, enslaved persons did not necessarily 'pursue empirical knowledge through scientific exploration'.⁷⁹ Instead, their opportunities to observe the behavior, habits, and conditioned responses of animals came through the rhythms of daily life, and included tending to animals, working in stables, hunting, and even being coerced into participating in slave-hunting patrols. Enslaved persons turned places like horse stables, dog kennels, and patrol routes into spaces of their own making.⁸⁰

⁷⁷ Bibb, *Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb*, 15–16.

⁷⁸ In *When Species Meet*, Haraway notes the fluidity of the ontologies, observing how they vary across different cultures and contexts. Specifically, regarding nonhuman animals, Haraway argues that the way humans understand animals is influenced by unique cultural and personal experiences. Haraway also goes further in showing that such interactions are not one-way streets, so to speak, in that animals also create unique ontologies regarding their interactions with humans. Haraway, *When Species Meet*. Marcy Norton expanded on this by demonstrating how nonhuman animals are perceived and understood within specific cultural and intellectual contexts. Norton, *The Tame and the Wild*, 8–12.

⁷⁹ Leah M. Thomas, 'Knowledge Networks: Contested Geographies in The History of Mary Prince', *Journal for Women in the Arts, 1640–1830*, vol. 9, no. 2 (2019): 4.

⁸⁰ Stephanie Camp describes 'rival geographies', in part, as a space of alternative communication in *Closer to Freedom*. 7

In other cases, movement and dislocation created opportunities for gaining nonhuman animal knowledge when enslaved persons were rented out to another place, sent to deliver something miles away, told to watch over wandering livestock, or given permission to hunt. These types of mobility provided familiarity with local flora, experience with varied terrain, and a working understanding of how animals responded in different environments.

Forced to wait in a horse stable before being relocated, Henry Bibb used this short interlude to learn enough about the horse, with whom he was sequestered, to conclude that the animal ‘appeared to be much frightened at the appearance of things in the city, being young and skittish’. Later, while passing through Arkansas, Bibb’s job was to drive a wagon and ‘attend to horses’, enabling him to better understand the Umwelt and emotional states of horses.⁸¹ These observations gave Bibb a sophisticated recognition of how animals perceived their surroundings, and how their reactions to stimuli might help him self-emancipate.

Observation and experience shaped how enslaved people perceived and interpreted the natural world. Charles Ball learned about insects, studied the behavior of snakes, and observed the spot-and-stalk hunting techniques of panthers while he was away from the plantation.⁸² He observed alligators ‘overtaking young ducks on the water’ and thus, concluded that the reptiles ‘can swim more than twice as fast as a man’.⁸³ Ball also recorded that these animals advanced on their ‘intended prey in the water’ with only their noses exposed, an adaptive stealth behavior that

⁸¹ Bibb, *Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb*, 90, 149.

⁸² Ball, *Slavery in the United States*, 197, 353–356. On the spot-and-stalk method of hunting, as well as elaboration on other types of felid hunting, see Maurice Hornocker and Sharon Negri, eds., *Cougar: Ecology and Conservation*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 43–45.

⁸³ Ball, *Slavery in the United States*, 393. Alligators typically swim at speeds measuring about twenty miles per hour, more than quadrupling the speed of Olympic-level human swimmers who reach speeds rarely exceeding five miles per hour. Matthew A. Shaw, ‘Swimming Kinematics and Energetics of the American Alligator (*Alligator mississippiensis*)’, Master’s Thesis, (University of Manchester, 2023). These nautical predators that inhabited wetlands from Texas through the Gulf Coast and up to North Carolina, weighed over 1,000 pounds and measured over fifteen feet in length. Robert Powell, et al., *Peterson Field Guide to Reptiles and Amphibians of Eastern and Central North America*, (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2016).

herpetologists believe allows the animals to hide the bulk of their head underwater as they assess conditions and adjust their approach.⁸⁴

Similarly to Ball, Solomon Northup's experiences in the Louisiana swamps gave him what environmental biologist Robin Wall Kimmerer would later describe as 'traditional ecological knowledge'.⁸⁵ He found 'paths of wild beasts' such as 'the bear and the American tiger' and also documented that 'wherever there is a basin of stagnant water, it is full of alligators'.⁸⁶ To keep clear of alligators in the water, Solomon Northup made noise, which startled them into retreat.⁸⁷ On land, Northup tried running in zig-zag patterns, under the mistaken assumption that alligators did 'not possess the power of turning'. Perhaps exposing that he had never actually run from an alligator, he commented that 'in a crooked race, there is no difficulty in evading' them.⁸⁸

Traveling through the natural world required watching and interpreting the behavior of wild animals. That same attention carried over to the horses and dogs that went with them beyond the plantation. For enslaved persons, relationships with their canines provided more than protection and companionship. It offered experiential learning, especially while hunting. John Andrew Jackson directly linked the way dogs chased people escaping enslavement to the way the

⁸⁴ Ball, *Slavery in the United States*, 393. Vliet, *Alligators: The Illustrated Guide to Their Biology, Behavior, and Conservation*, 51.

⁸⁵ In her article, 'Searching for Synergy', Kimmerer offers 'traditional ecological knowledge (TEK)' as a counterpoint or complement to 'scientific ecological knowledge (SEK)', and calls for the use of TEK in current environmental policy. Robin Wall Kimmerer, 'Searching for Synergy: Integrating Traditional and Scientific Ecological Knowledge in Environmental Science Education', *Journal of Environmental Study and Sciences*, vol. 2 (2012).

⁸⁶ Northup, *Twelve Years a Slave*, 153.

⁸⁷ This practice aligns ethological research that notes how alligators are highly sensitive to sudden vibrations, which they interpret as a threat rather than prey. Kirshner, *Biology and Evolution of Crocodylians*, 21.

⁸⁸ According to *The Atlanta Journal Constitution*, this is still one of the most widely believed myths about American Alligators. See Debbie Lord, 'Can you outrun an alligator, and other myths explained', *The Atlanta Journal Constitution*, 5 April 2019. In reality, alligators can quickly switch directions while pursuing prey, reaching speeds of up to 35 miles per hour.

animals went after ‘a fox or hare’.⁸⁹ While this comparison was uncomfortable and dehumanizing, it also revealed how hunting with dogs became instructive. Noticing signs of fatigue or the limits of their scent-tracking abilities offered potential ways to exploit the animals’ vulnerabilities.

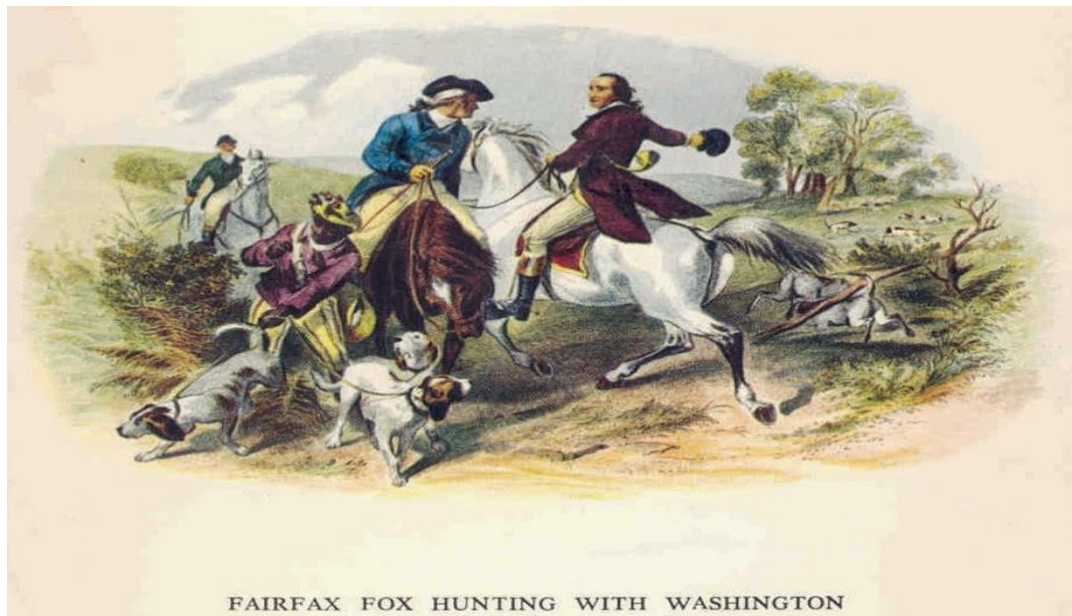


Figure 1.1: Fairfax Fox hunting with Washington.⁹⁰

Enslavers and overseers sometimes pressed enslaved persons into the ranks of a hunt to recapture self-emancipators. Such was the case in Alabama, when a plantation’s overseer forced James Williams to assist in tracking down an escapee named Little John. The dogs ‘were started on his track’, with Williams and the overseer following the animals. Each bark signaled to Williams that Little John was alive and evading the hounds. However, like a silent death knell, Williams ‘knew by their ceasing to bark that they had found him’. Williams and the overseer

⁸⁹ John Andrew Jackson, *The Experience of a Slave in South Carolina*, (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1862), 15.

⁹⁰ This image of George Washington hunting foxes with his enslaved valet, William ‘Billy’ Lee, illustrates the way in which hunting provided opportunities for enslaved persons to gain firsthand experience with animals. Though William Lee never attempted to escape, during these hunts with his enslaver, Lee became a practiced horseman while also being tasked to ‘keep with the hounds’. George Washington Parke Custis, *Recollections and Private Memoirs of Washington*, (New York: Derby & Jackson, 1860), 387.

finally caught up to the dogs whose ‘jaws, heads, and feet’ had turned a shade of crimson, soaked with the self-emancipator’s blood. Determined not to suffer the same fate as Little John, Williams learned as much as he could about the dogs that would apparently be made to ‘follow his track’ if ‘a hot pursuit would be made after’ him during an attempted escape.⁹¹

The ability of enslaved persons to leave the plantation, and under what conditions, varied widely depending on individual circumstances. In closer proximity to the plantations, enslaved persons forced to work in the monocultural fields could also gain an intimate understanding of the local wildlife. While enslaved in North Carolina, William H. Robinson saw ‘a bear come out of a corn field, with his arms full of corn’. Robinson studied the bear’s methodical behavior and was awestruck as he watched the animal throw the corn over the fence, then climb the fence, pick the corn ‘up like a man, and walk off’.⁹² Then and now, bears such as the animal Robinson encountered, display flexible foraging strategies, exploiting predictable food sources and adapting behavior to circumvent human-constructed barriers.⁹³ These types of encounters with wild animals, including bears and ‘reptiles, such as water moccasins and rattle snakes’, provided Robinson with empirical knowledge to anticipate hazards.⁹⁴

Enslaved persons transformed enforced proximity to plantation animals into a form of resistance. While enslaved in Virginia, Dinah ‘dreaded the dogs of which she had heard the negroes tell fearful tales, of their untiring pursuit’. These animals, whose ‘powers of scent’ driven by as many as 300 million olfactory receptors, were ‘so strong as almost to preclude all

⁹¹ James Williams, *Narrative of James Williams, an American Slave, Who Was for Several Years a Driver on a Cotton Plantation in Alabama*, (New York: Published by the American Anti-Slavery Society, 1838), 50–51.

⁹² William H. Robinson, *From Log Cabin to the Pulpit, or, Fifteen Years in Slavery*, (Eau Claire: James H. Tiff, Publishing Printer, 1915), 30.

⁹³ In *Bears Without Fear*, Kevin Van Tighem notes that black bears are highly intelligent and consistently hungry animals, who exploit human sloppiness to acquire calorie-rich food. Kevin Van Tighem, *Bears Without Fear*, (Surrey, BC: Rocky Mountain Books, 2013), 121.

⁹⁴ Robinson, *From Log Cabin to the Pulpit*, 30.

chance of escape’, Dinah concluded.⁹⁵ However, her intimacy with the animals allowed her to uncover a ‘means by which she felt sure she could overcome’ them. One afternoon, Dinah’s young mistress Annie was playing with the plantation dog Carlo, holding ‘up bones, and then snatching them away’ exclaiming, ‘what splendid fun it will be to see Carlo’s grins and sneezes if we put some cayenne pepper onto one of these bones’.⁹⁶

Annie applied the pepper to Carlo’s bone and held it to the unsuspecting dog’s nose. The wheels of emancipation turning in her mind, Dinah watched as ‘Carlo sneezed, and then ran off to bury his nose in the soil’, poking ‘his nose and mouth deeper, deeper, and deeper into the cool ground’. With this newly uncovered knowledge that dogs could be confounded by irritants such as pepper, Dinah thought, ‘there’s a chance for me after all’.⁹⁷ In revealing how domestic labor and spatial constraint could become generative, Dinah’s experiences show the many ways enslaved persons, regardless of circumstance, contributed to a shared body of rival empirical knowledge.

Oppositional Modes of Interaction

Dinah began to view the ‘large woods far beyond the plantation’ as a ‘free country’, but she knew that her enslaver kept dogs and horses to deter self-emancipation attempts and enforce the geography of containment. As a result of her proximity to the animals, Dinah recognized that each of these animals possessed unique subjectivities and the capacity to decide with whom they

⁹⁵ Simpson, *Horrors of the Virginian Slave Trade*, 48. The number of olfactory receptors can vary slightly by dog breed. Sarah C. Beebe, et al., ‘Using Scent Detection Dogs in Conservation Settings: A Review of Scientific Literature Regarding Their Selection’, *Frontiers in Veterinary Science*, vol. 3, no. 96 (2016): 7.

⁹⁶ Simpson, *Horrors of the Virginian Slave Trade*, 48.

⁹⁷ Simpson, *Horrors of the Virginian Slave Trade*, 48. Importantly, there are many limitations to scent-tracking canines aside from disrupting scents, including stressors, previous traumatic experiences while tracking, and their psychophysical state. Pepper’s irritating alkaloids often lead to a sternutatory effect. Even though it is considered controversial, some training methods still include the use of cayenne pepper. See Gary Landsberg, et al., *Behavior Problems of the Dog and Cat*, 3rd ed. (Edinburgh: Saunders Elsevier, 2013), 258.

gave their loyalty and affection. Dinah, therefore, took the preemptive steps of feeding and caring for the dogs and horses in attempts to reshape her relationships with the animals and unsettle the rigid human-animal expectations imposed by the prescribed plantation hierarchy.⁹⁸

Enslavers valued domesticated animals for the same qualities that made them unpredictable and dangerous to the order they were expected to uphold.⁹⁹ Their individual personalities, memories, and bonds created a contested space where both enslavers and the enslaved vied for an advantage prior to self-emancipation attempts. Building on recent scholarship that views the Plantationocene as a period marked by both enslavers' environmental exploitation and also enslaved resistance, this thesis shows the ways human-animal entanglements became potent means of defiance.¹⁰⁰ An understudied aspect of this dynamic is the way in which enslaved persons created oppositional modes of interaction by creating affective or adversarial relationships with nonhuman animals. These modes of interaction, such as bonding and hunting, engaged nonhuman animals through counter-epistemologies that transformed them from predators to prey, and obstacles to assets. Examining interviews, slave narratives, and other historical accounts demonstrates that while enslavers sought to project absolute authority, nonhuman animals laid bare the limits of their power and control.

⁹⁸ Simpson, *Horrors of the Virginian Slave Trade*, 9–10. Dinah believed she could establish a positive relationship with the canines through the act of feeding, a theory now proven by animal behaviorists. On the ways in which positive human–canine relationships are established by feeding, see A.M. Johnston, Holden, and Santos, 'Exploring the evolutionary origins of overimitation: a comparison across domesticated and non-domesticated canids', *Developmental Science*, vol. 20, no. 1 (2017).

⁹⁹ While there was, and sometimes still is, a tendency to think of animals' compliant behavior as mechanistic, scholars such as Vinciane Despret argue that such compliance results from an animal's goodwill and intentions. Vinciane Despret, 'From Secret Agents to Interagency', *History and Theory* 54, vol. 4 (2013): 44.

¹⁰⁰ Judith Carney focuses on enslaved resistance within the Plantationocene context by focusing on alternative foodways and methods of animal husbandry. See Judith Carney, 'Subsistence in the Plantationocene: Dooryard Gardens, Agrobiodiversity, and the Subaltern Economies of Slavery', *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, vol. 48, no. 5 (2020).

In most circumstances, enslavers and the enslaved pursued different agendas regarding nonhuman animals. Enslavers viewed animals as tools of economic and disciplinary power that they attempted to control to maximize profit and enforce the containment of their labor force.¹⁰¹ Enslaved persons approached the same animals from different perspectives, at times, establishing relationships and developing familiarity with dogs and horses that enslavers did not anticipate or understand. Examining this dialectic within the Plantationocene framework shows how enslavers attempted to impose utilitarian and biological control, while enslaved persons resisted this ethos by developing their own approaches for interacting with animals by establishing relationships and developing intimacy. Familiarity and intimacy with domesticated animals became especially evident when enslaved persons worked with the animals directly. Enslaved persons were frequently tasked with caring for horses, traveling by horseback, and incorporating the equine animals into other aspects of the plantation economy. While these responsibilities were intended to extract material value from the animals to serve planter-class interests, they produced unintended forms of mutual recognition and human-animal attachment.

Possessing complex emotions, physical and social cognition, and the propensity to form individual preferences, horses are highly regarded for their ‘socio-emotional competencies’ and ‘evolved sophisticated communicative skills to interrelate with humans’.¹⁰² Those caring for horses recognized their behaviors and nonverbal communications, resulting in the ability to interpret moods and signs of distress such as pricked ears, shifting weight, or a flicking tail. Through these subtle exchanges, enslaved persons learned to respond to these cues with a softer

¹⁰¹ Specifically on the use of nonhuman animals to maximize profit, see Baptist, *The Half Has Never Been Told*. Baptist describes the exploitation of both nonhuman animal labor, especially horses, cattle, and mules, in the development of a capitalist system that served to create power and wealth in the plantation economy.

¹⁰² Scopa, et al., ‘Emotional Transfer in Human–Horse Interaction’, 1.

voice or touch, creating a dialogic exchange that turned the stable into a space for strategic planning and emotional contestation.¹⁰³

Forced to sleep in the horse stables for three years, an enslaved person named Caesar formed a ‘faithful attachment’ to one of the plantation’s horses, who provided him with ‘his greatest comfort’ in life.¹⁰⁴ Well aware of the animal’s emotional and behavioral intelligence, Caesar trained the horse ‘so that he could lie in the stall with him’. Sleeping most nights alongside his human companion, the horse would nudge Caesar ‘with his nose’ if he ‘wished to move’, making sure never to ‘tread on him’ so that ‘soundly he might sleep’. While historians have argued that horses are not ‘governed by prior habits of ‘loyalty’, research in equine behavioral science affirms that the animals form bonds with familiar humans and respond to them with selective affection.¹⁰⁵ Caesar built such a strong bond with the animal that the ‘horse would allow no person, not even Col. Halman, to enter’.¹⁰⁶ Recognizing that horses are ‘capable of remembering previous experiences when working with humans’, Caesar nurtured a relationship with the animal that provided him with companionship, and later, mobility as he planned his self-emancipation attempt.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰³ Horses tend to prick their ears when startled or distressed. See Clare Hole, et al., ‘Equine Behavioural and Physiological Responses to Auditory Stimuli in the Presence and Absence of Noise–Damping Ear Covers’, *Animals* vol. 13 (2023): 6. For further elaboration on interpreting horse posture as well as horses’ responses to human posture, see McGreevy and McLean, *Equitation Science*, 113–119, 143–146.

¹⁰⁴ S.H. Platt, *The Martyrs, and the Fugitive; or a Narrative of the Captivity, Sufferings, and Death of an African Family, and the Slavery and Escape of Their Son*, (New York: Printed by Daniel Fanshaw, 1859), 72.

¹⁰⁵ According to a recent review of the human–horse relationship, horses are capable of multiple types of bonds with humans, with the number of interactions and familiarity with an individual person being a driving force in an individual horse’s behavior and choices. Martine Hausberger, et al., ‘A Review of the Human–Horse Relationship’, *Applied Animal Behaviour Science*, vol. 109, no. 1 (2008): 17–18.

¹⁰⁶ Platt, *The Martyrs, and the Fugitive*, 72.

72. Walter Johnson argues that unlike dogs, horses were ‘subject to promiscuous direction’ rather than emotions such as loyalty. Although this is true in some cases, evidence suggests horses, like dogs, can also be governed by loyalty and affection. See Johnson, *River of Dark Dreams*, 228. For further elaboration on the equine cognitive trait of recognizing and discriminating between humans, see L. Proops and K. McComb, ‘Cross–modal individual recognition in domestic horses (*Equus caballus*) extends to familiar humans’, *Proceedings of the Royal Society B*, vol. 279, no. 1741 (2012).

¹⁰⁷ Katrina Merckles and Olivia Franzin, ‘Enhanced Understanding of Horse–Human Interactions to Optimize Welfare’, *Animals*, vol. 11, no. 5 (2021): 1.

In Virginia, Dinah recalled ‘her master’s beautiful horse’ wearing a ‘white net thrown over his sweating coat to protect it from the bites of flies’ and other disease-inducing arthropods.¹⁰⁸ It was her husband, Browne, who assumed the daily responsibilities of tending to the plantation horses. Working as the plantation’s stable hand, he ‘knew best how to take care of his horses’, developing an understanding that eclipsed that of the enslaver.¹⁰⁹ In the cases of both Caesar and Browne, they transformed coerced labor into equine expertise and then into resistance. Their actions followed a similar pattern observed by David Silkenat in his examination of the German Coast Rebellion, during which over half of those who participated did so on horseback.¹¹⁰

Forming relationships with horses involved cultivating mutual recognition shaped by daily routine. Relationships with plantation dogs, whose training as pursuers conflicted with their capacity for affection, revealed yet another aspect of human-animal connections within enslaved lives. Dinah offered a detailed account of how she formed complicated bonds with the plantation’s dogs. As a wetnurse, Dinah grappled ‘with the physical exertion of simultaneously feeding her own many infants and thirteen of her owners’, at times resulting in her breasts being ‘too sore for children to suck’.¹¹¹ ‘By the doctor’s order, to gain relief’, Dinah nursed ‘Carlo’, an animal being trained to hunt enslaved persons, ‘as a pup on her breast’. The interspecies pair formed an unbreakable bond. Dinah became ‘very fond of Carlo’, even going so far as saying she ‘felt towards him as towards a foster child’.¹¹² The feeling was likely mutual with Carlo, since

¹⁰⁸ Richard Wall and David Shearer, *Veterinary Ectoparasites: Biology, Pathology and Control*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Blackwell Science, 2001), 193–199.

¹⁰⁹ Simpson, *Horrors of the Virginian Slave Trade*, 21, 47.

¹¹⁰ Silkenat, *Scars on the Land*, 45–46.

¹¹¹ For further elaboration on Dinah within the context of wetnursing, see Emily West and R.J. Knight, ‘Mothers’ milk: slavery, wetnursing, and black and white women in the Antebellum South’, *Journal of Southern History*, vol. 83, no. 1 (2017): 55–56.

¹¹² Simpson, *Horrors of the Virginian Slave Trade*, 53.

dogs, like many other animals, form affiliative bonds with caregivers who give them tactile contact and nourishment during their developmental windows.¹¹³

Dinah's emotional dynamics with Carlo, and other dogs, points to the complicated, and sometimes contradictory, ways enslaved persons interacted with the animals kept on plantations. Subject to the vicissitudes of enslavement and complicated human and animal emotional states, these relationships reveal incredible depth and variability. Though her enslaver bred and trained Carlo to hunt enslaved persons, Dinah approached the animal as a caretaker and surrogate mother, and formed an emotional bond while also preemptively neutralizing a potential threat.¹¹⁴ And as she planned for self-emancipation, she masterfully navigated the canine psyche and circumvented the imposed human-animal dynamic of her Virginian plantation, showcasing an ability to maneuver within and against her enslaver's multispecies system of containment.¹¹⁵

Focusing on the role of enslaved women such as Dinah, who engaged with nonhuman animals as part of her efforts toward planning self-emancipation, complicates historiographic generalizations about who self-emancipated and by what means.¹¹⁶ Her experiences were part of an often-overlooked pattern where enslaved women formed relationships and oppositional modes of interactions with nonhuman animals. Like Dinah, an enslaved woman named Celeste developed what she called 'a secret between' her and the plantation dogs, knowing that they would never be 'savage to her'. Celeste had formed such a powerful rapport with the plantation

¹¹³ Allegra Stahl, et al., 'Attachment Style and Social Behavior in Dogs from Commercial Breeding Kennels', *Applied Animal Behaviour Science*, vol. 273 (2024).

¹¹⁴ As a result of their dependency on humans and their child-like cognitive abilities, it is common for dogs to be seen as surrogate children. Laura Gillet, et al., 'The role of dogs is associated with owner management practices and characteristics, but not with perceived canine behaviour problems', *Scientific Reports*, vol. 14, no. 1 (2024): 1–3.

¹¹⁵ Simpson, *Horrors of the Virginian Slave Trade*, 9.

¹¹⁶ In *Runaway Slaves: Rebels on the Plantation*, John Hope Franklin and Loren Schwenger concluded that about eighty percent of self-emancipating enslaved persons were males between the ages of 15–35, with most seeking freedom alone. However, this largely unchallenged number is mostly based on runaway advertisements, in which, self-emancipating women were less likely to appear due to gendered expectations and the duration of the escape.

dogs that the animals would follow her commands, rather than ‘mind the devilish orders of the overseer’. Explaining these circumstances to Solomon Northup, she noted that ‘they have tried to set them on’ me, but the ‘dogs won’t follow’. Puzzling over the complex behavior of canines, Northup concluded, ‘It is a fact, which I have never been able to explain, that there are those whose tracks the hounds will absolutely refuse to follow. Celeste was one of them’.¹¹⁷

Though Northup could only speculate about Celeste’s secret, he certainly recognized the importance of establishing relationships with plantation dogs as part of planning flight. However, Northup chose a different, fear-based method predicated on violence and cruelty. Whenever circumstances permitted, Northup slipped by the overseers’ notice to find time alone with the man’s dogs, including one animal who ‘was a notorious slave-hunter, and the most fierce and savage of his breed’. Taking advantage of a shared evolutionary behavioral moment of human-canine intimacy, Northup engaged in calculated preemptive violence, ‘never allow[ing] an opportunity to escape, when alone, of whipping them severely’. Over time, this deliberate campaign of intimidation ‘succeeded at length in subduing them completely’, reversing the multispecies dynamic.¹¹⁸

Recent studies in evolutionary psychology and biology have proven what Northup and many other enslaved persons recognized almost two hundred years ago: that dogs have powerful episodic memories and possess the ability to ‘recall past events as complex as human actions’.¹¹⁹ The overseer’s dogs remembered Northup’s abusive behavior, and they feared him, obeying his ‘voice at once when others had no control over them whatever’. Altering the dogs’ behaviors by securing their obedience allowed Northup to deprive his enslaver of one of his most effective

¹¹⁷ Northup, *Twelve Years a Slave*, 245–246.

¹¹⁸ Northup, *Twelve Years a Slave*, 240–241.

¹¹⁹ Claudia Fugazza, et al., ‘Recall of Others’ Actions after Incidental Encoding Reveals Episodic-like Memory in Dogs’, *Current Biology*, vol. 26, no. 23 (2016).

means of pursuit. He later reflected that ‘had they followed and overtaken’ him, he had no doubt that ‘they would have shrank from attacking’.¹²⁰ Though their strategies differed, enslaved people challenged the plantation’s human-animal hierarchies in various ways that all had the potential to undermine canine threats. Whether through instilling fear and obedience with aggressively assertive actions or by making ‘friends with them’ until they were ‘good-natured and obedient’, as James Williams had done, these types of interspecies interventions reconfigured the expected balance of power and reoriented what kinds of relationships were possible.

Though these cases have primarily looked at the way enslaved persons recalibrated relationships with the plantocracy’s animals, there are also instances of enslaved persons raising their own animals as companions and pets. Keeping dogs as pets and companion animals empowered certain enslaved persons, according to historians John Campbell and Abraham Gibson.¹²¹ Additionally, dogs allowed enslaved persons to form relationships and modes of interactions that differed vastly from the adversarial relationships frequently depicted by historians.¹²²

Described as an ‘excellent hunting dog’, Charles Ball’s narrative demonstrates that his dog Trueman was so much more. Ball remembered Trueman as a ‘constant companion’ and a sense of comfort in a life full of precarity and uncertainty.¹²³ The dog accompanied Ball through woods and swamps, and even relocated with him to multiple Southern states. Jake Williams raised a dog named Belle who became so attached to him that she refused to leave his side even

¹²⁰ Northup, *Twelve Years a Slave*, 241.

¹²¹ Campbell, ‘My Constant Companion’, 68–69. Abraham H. Gibson, *Feral Animals in the American South*, 55.

¹²² While most research focuses on the adversarial relationship between enslaved persons and dogs, historians John C. Campbell and Thomas Andrews have both used Charles Ball’s relationship with his dog Trueman to offer insights into the importance of bonds that enslaved persons had with dogs.

¹²³ Ball, *Slavery in the United States*, 355, 389.

when he commanded her to do so, resulting in tension between the bonded pair and the plantation overseer.¹²⁴ The relationships of Ball and Trueman as well as Williams and Belle show how these types of bonds could be built on daily contact and maintained through a shared need. Ball and Williams provided food and shelter to their animals. Trueman and Belle returned this care by providing their humans with protection and comfort. Together, their bonds undermined the order enslavers sought to impose on human and animal lives.

Keeping companion animals reoriented enslaved persons' perceptions of the natural world. They came to recognize animals as sentient beings whose behaviors, temperaments, and attachments could be engaged to create shared bonds of care and recognition. These types of companion relationships could even extend to non-domesticated wild animals in a way that defied prevailing attitudes and demonstrated an expansive understanding of animal life. After absconding from the plantation, an enslaved person named Joe remembered 'rattlesnakes that used to keep him company in the woods'. The snakes 'would go off in the day and come back at night' to sleep alongside him under his moss bed. Joe told others that he could have killed the snakes 'if he wanted to, but he was glad to have them for company'.¹²⁵ While these types of bonds, especially with rattlesnakes, defy belief, new research suggests that these serpents form bonds and return to the same communal dens with members of their social groups.¹²⁶

If Joe and his rattlesnakes demonstrate how even some of the most feared reptiles could become sources of companionship, other experiences reveal how bonds with wild animals could

¹²⁴ WPA, Heywood Ford, *Slave Narratives (Alabama)*, 123.

¹²⁵ Octavia Rogers Albert, *The House of Bondage, or, Charlotte Brooks and Other Slaves, Original and Life Like, As They Appeared in Their Old Plantation and City Slave Life; Together with Pen-Pictures of the Peculiar Institution, with Sights and Insights into Their New Relations as Freedmen, Freemen, and Citizens*, (New York: Hunt & Eaton, 1890), 46–47.

¹²⁶ Sasha J. Tetzlaff, et al., 'Fission–fusion dynamics in the social networks of a North American pitviper', *Ecology & Evolution*, vol. 13, no. 8 (2023): 1–3. This research has upended common perceptions of rattlesnakes as uniquely solitary and aggressive.

arise from acts of empathy, enriched by the perception of an animal's 'cuteness'. According to Joshua Paul Dale, humans are biologically predisposed to find baby animals such as infants, puppies, kittens, and cubs, particularly endearing, leading to attachments that form across species lines.¹²⁷ This helps to explain why Tom Baker 'adopted a little orphan bear cub' after another enslaved person killed the animal's mother. With the bear's neotenous facial features and clumsy movements evoking tenderness, Baker called the cub a 'cute little boogar' and remembered wanting to take care of 'dat little bear'.¹²⁸

The keeping of dogs as companion animals mirrored pet-keeping traditions of nineteenth-century America.¹²⁹ But the relationships enslaved persons formed with wild animals suggest a more complex and adaptive interplay. Meanings and possibilities of human-animal connections were reimagined to reveal a relational spectrum where affection might coexist alongside recognition of the potential of harm. Within this wide-ranging spectrum, animals could also be pursued, hunted, and consumed as prey in ways that reframed them from the material and symbolic into game or sustenance. Scott Giltner, among other historians, has studied hunting within enslaved communities, and has shown how enslaved persons hunted to gain a degree of self-sufficiency and mastery.¹³⁰ Beyond this, hunting was an experiential learning process and a means through which additional complexity was added to the already fluid perceptions enslaved persons held about wild animals.

¹²⁷ Joshua Paul Dale's fascinating new work, *Irresistible: How Cuteness Wired Our Brains and Conquered the World*, shows how interacting with babies across species impacts human brains neurologically, creating a structure associating them with empathy and compassion. Joshua Paul Dale, *Irresistible: How Cuteness Wired Our Brains and Conquered the World*, (New York: Princeton University Press, 2023), 22.

¹²⁸ WPA, Tom Baker, *Slave Narratives (Alabama)*, 17–19. On the importance of neotenous features, see Dale, *Irresistible*, 11, 101–102, 143–145.

¹²⁹ Katherine C. Grier, *Pets in America: A History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 26–30, 37–38.

¹³⁰ Giltner, 'Slave Hunting and Fishing in the Antebellum South', 11, 25. In 'The Role of Hunting to Cope with Risk at Saragossa Plantation', Amy T. Young argues that hunting also reinforced social and communal bonds amongst enslaved persons. See Young, 'The Role of Hunting to Cope with Risk at Saragossa Plantation'.

While enslaved near Wild Cat Nob, Arkansas, an area appropriately named since it was ‘thickly populated by wild cats’, Pate Newton recalled group hunts when enslaved men stalked and hunted bears and panthers.¹³¹ These mammalian predators embodied a threat and an opportunity to assert hunting skills and reinforce communal solidarity.¹³² Meanwhile, Allen Parker remembered enslaved persons giving the black bears that lived in the woods bordering his plantation a ‘wide berth’, wary of the circumstances by which a bear might react aggressively.¹³³ However, in the same sentence, Parker noted that ‘bear meat was considered good eating’.¹³⁴ Alligators were also both avoided and hunted. Joseph Le Conte recalled enslaved persons who were ‘extravagantly fond of alligator meat’ and also remembered watching twenty-five enslaved persons hunt a fourteen-foot alligator on his Georgian rice plantation, in what he called ‘a great sport’.¹³⁵ Charles Ball further captured the duality of vulnerability and dominance when he wrote about the venomous snakes near his plantation that could ‘attack and swallow children’ and kill a man with a single bite. However, he also boasted about killing ‘more than twenty rattlesnakes in a day’.¹³⁶

‘Big snakes in de woods’ could enforce a powerful sense of containment, but were just as likely to be regarded as prey by the enslaved.¹³⁷ Snakes abounded in Virginia, but ‘instead of intimidating’ the young girls enslaved there, the serpents became the focus of a gamified hunt,

¹³¹ ‘Pate Newton Early Settlers’ Personal History Questionnaire’, WPA Interview by Lucian F. Petway, Johnson County, Arkansas, April 9, 1941. Transcribed by Andrea E. Cantrell, University of Arkansas Libraries, 2003, 56, 61.

¹³² These wild cats were likely cougars that historically ranged throughout North, Central, and South America. William J. Ripple, ‘Range Contractions of North American Carnivores and Ungulates’, *BioScience*, vol. 54, no. 2 (2004).

¹³³ Mother black bears defending their young is among the most common catalysts of ursine aggression. For an in-depth analysis of bear attacks in recent years, see Stephen Herrero, *Bear Attacks: Their Causes and Avoidance*, (Guilford: Lyons Press, 2018), 96–97.

¹³⁴ Allen Parker, *Recollections of Slavery Times*, (Worcester, Massachusetts: Chas W. Burbank & Co., 1895), 52–53.

¹³⁵ Joseph Le Conte, *The Autobiography of Joseph Le Conte*, (New York: D. Appleton & Company, 1903), 29.

¹³⁶ Ball, *Slavery in the United States*, 353–354.

¹³⁷ WPA, Hiram Miller, 24–25. [Phonetic spellings in original].

during which the girls followed the animals ‘in the same wild pursuit that inspires the huntsman’. With sticks being the preferred ‘weapons of attack’, the ‘reptiles, once seen, seldom escaped alive’.¹³⁸ Enslaved children and women, such as Virginia Newman of Louisiana, described rattlesnakes as ‘fine eatin’ after skinning and cutting them into dices, transforming a symbol of danger into sustenance and recasting the feared reptile as proof of hunting prowess.¹³⁹ Modes of interaction ranging from the keeping of companion animals to pursuing and consuming animals represented a form of physical and intellectual empowerment with enslaved persons redefining the animals’ roles within their own frameworks, which supplanted, or at the very least, modified, planter-class narratives of predation, compliance, and containment.

Counter-Legislation and Counterintelligence

Hunting, interacting, and bonding with animals had the potential to turn predators and obstacles into pets and prey. These alternative modes of interaction were generative in that they reshaped how enslaved persons thought and learned about nonhuman animals.¹⁴⁰ Enslavers interpreted these modes of interaction as subversive, prompting legislative responses. Across Southern states, lawmakers codified statutes that prohibited these types of practices, fearing that the animals enforcing confinement could also help break it.

Legislatures in Maryland, Virginia, and South Carolina criminalized the keeping of dogs as companions by enslaved persons, with Mississippi going so far as to pass a law authorizing ‘patrols and all other persons’ to ‘kill all dogs owned or kept by slaves’.¹⁴¹ Animals became

¹³⁸ Grace Lintner, *Bond and Free: A Tale of the South*, (Indianapolis: Carlton & Hollenbeck, 1882), 73.

¹³⁹ WPA, Virginia Newman, *Slave Narratives (Texas Narratives)*, 149.

¹⁴⁰ Norton, *The Tame and the Wild*, 8.

¹⁴¹ For specific references to laws criminalizing the keeping of dogs by enslaved persons, see *Maryland Herald & Hagerstown Advertiser*, ‘In Council’, 27 March 1807; and George Poindexter, *The Revised Code of the Laws of Mississippi, in which are Comprised All Such Acts of the General Assembly, of a Public Nature, as Were in Force at the End of the Year, 1823; with a General Index*, (Natchez: Printed by Francis Baker, 1824), 97–98.

collateral casualties of a planter class obsessed with preempting resistance. Their logic applied to enslaved-equine relationships as well, with Kentucky promulgating a law that any enslaved person found on horseback was to be ‘punished by whipping, cropping, and branding in the cheek’. In the Deep South, laws were just as prohibitive as Louisiana stipulated that ‘every slave found on horseback, without a written permission from his master received twenty-five lashes’.¹⁴²

Retribution against enslaved people who challenged the animal-human hierarchy took place in government corridors and courtrooms, as well as on individual plantations. John Andrew Jackson developed a relationship with the mule he ‘had to plough with’ and was accused of spoiling the animal, resulting in Jackson receiving fifty lashes as punishment.¹⁴³ Caught in a moment of shared affection during which Jake Williams was ‘pettin’ his ole red-bone hound’, his overseer picked ‘up a rock and slammed de dog in de back’.¹⁴⁴ Legal and extralegal responses from enslavers and the enslaver regime demonstrate the unease they felt about the destabilizing impact that seemingly mundane acts such as hunting and pet-keeping would have on the plantation system.

Despite enslaver efforts to limit and curtail oppositional modes of interaction, enslaved people continued to observe, hunt, and bond with nonhuman animals, consequently sharing this counterintelligence with others. This knowledge was transferred and validated through nonlinear, nonhierarchical, multidirectional, and unpredictable means that could be interpreted using the post-structuralist philosophy of rhizomatic knowledge.¹⁴⁵ Across plantations and generations,

¹⁴² Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society, *Extracts from the American slave code*, (Philadelphia: Female Anti-Slavery Society, 1820), held in the Library of Congress, Call Number/Physical Location: E446 .P48 1820z. Bibb, *Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb*, 35.

¹⁴³ Jackson, *The Experience of a Slave in South Carolina*, 15.

¹⁴⁴ WPA, Heywood Ford, 123.

¹⁴⁵ Rhizomatic knowledge and information is organized in a non-linear, non-hierarchical way. This concept, derived from the work of philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, emphasizes multiple entry points, connections, and

this hidden body of knowledge grew.¹⁴⁶ Parents and grandparents taught children and grandchildren in a way that revealed how experiential lessons became an intellectual inheritance that bound one generation to the next. For example, Florida Clayton's parents 'warned her and her brothers and sisters to go in someone's yard' if they saw wild animals or slave-hunters 'with their dogs'.¹⁴⁷ Following such grapevine transfers of knowledge even more closely, another case documented in the WPA narratives details how an enslaved woman named Rodie came up with a method to keep 'de dogs from followin'.¹⁴⁸ Rodie then taught Walter Rimm's mammy, who passed the information down to him, showing how collective knowledge was preserved and shared within enslaved communities and families.

Knowledge drawn from these fragmented experiences and observations could be highly effective, and as such, the intellectual networks that transmitted them were closely guarded and protected. To use the words of Linda Schiebinger, who examined the protected knowledge of the peacock flower as an abortifacient: 'Along with miraculous cures comes the silence of secrets'.¹⁴⁹ That same protective impulse guided the ways enslaved persons shared intelligence about nonhuman animals. Scattered testimonies speak to the reach of these subaltern networks and their effectiveness. Josiah, a formerly enslaved man, revealed to his editor that 'slaves, especially those in the border states, possessed among themselves the knowledge' and materials

pathways, which allows for the decentralized flow of information. Marie-Dominique Boyce, 'Rhizomic Identity, Performative Identity, In-Becoming Identity of the Characters in Maryse Condé's Narratives', *Journal of Literature and Art Studies*, vol. 7, no. 9 (2017).

¹⁴⁶ Research on the unseen movement of knowledge within enslaved communities has led to some of the most exciting scholarship in the field of intellectual history. For an examination of this concept within political contexts see, Julius Scott, *The Common Wind: Afro-American Currents in the Age of the Haitian Revolution*, (London: Verso, 2018); and Vincent Brown, *Tacky's Revolt: The Story of an Atlantic Slave War*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2020).

¹⁴⁷ WPA, Florida Clayton, *Slave Narratives (Florida)*, 62.

¹⁴⁸ WPA, Walter Rimm, *Slave Narratives (Texas, Part 3)*, 248–249. [Phonetic spellings in original].

¹⁴⁹ Linda Schiebinger, *Plants of Empire: Colonial Bioprospecting in the Atlantic World*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2004), 90. Schiebinger highlights her study of enslaved and Amerindian knowledge of botany and medicine with the measures taken to guard secrets from 'colonial aggressors'.

to assure dogs and slave-hunters on horseback could not follow them.¹⁵⁰ Similarly, the editor of John Brown's narrative informed readers that 'runaways and their friends possess a secret which enables them to deceive even the keen scent' of animals. Many white observers resorted to conjecture and concession, as Matthew J. Graham had done when he admitted that it was an 'unexplained and mysterious system used for spreading information, known only to themselves and which no white man has yet been able to discover'.¹⁵¹

Experiences and the exchange of information allowed enslaved persons to form relationships and develop understandings of animals, exposing the planter-class's reliance on animals as an unsheathed double-edged sword. Animal-enforced control might have been strong enough to enforce enslaver authority. But as a result of enslaved resistance and nonhuman animal agency, it was also capable of cutting back sharply against the system it was meant to uphold. Moreover, the attempted manipulation of nonhuman animals was not a one-sided exercise of power. Nor was it a projection of unilateral power. It was a negotiation. Planter-class containment and enslaved resistance were shaped by one another. And by animals. The next chapter turns to the act of self-emancipation, during which actions of enslavers and the enslaved came together, and sometimes conflicted with, animals' intentionality and self-willed actions.

¹⁵⁰ Henry Bleby, *Josiah: the Maimed Fugitive. A true Tale*, (London: Wesleyan Conference Office, 1873), 143–144.

¹⁵¹ Matthew J. Graham, *The Ninth Regiment, New York Volunteers, Being a History of the Regiment and Veteran Association from 1860 to 1900*, (New York: E.P. Cody & Co. Printers, 1900), 216.

Chapter Two: ‘Out of the Snare’: The Multispecies Borderlands of Self-Emancipation

Who hath not given us as a prey to their teeth. Our soul is escaped as a bird out of the snare of the fowlers: the snare is broken, and we are escaped.

Psalm 124:6-7

For many enslaved persons, the natural world was a dangerous and impenetrable barrier. During the twelve years of Solomon Northup’s enslavement in Louisiana, there was not a day that he did not consider self-emancipation. He made many plans, but he abandoned them all as the real and imagined fears of a ‘thousand obstacles thrown in the way of the flying slave’ tightened the shackles on his mind. ‘Every white man’s hand’ was ‘raised against’ him. However, for Northup, it was the ‘hounds ready to follow on his track’, the ‘dreadful sting of the moccasin’, and the fear of being ‘crushed within the jaws’ of an alligator that, he felt, rendered the Louisiana swamps impossible to pass through with any safety.¹

But Northup continued by noting that ‘notwithstanding the certainty’ of environmental and nonhuman obstacles, woods and swamps were ‘continually filled with runaways’ risking death or grave bodily harm for a chance at succor or freedom.² Indeed, wherever and whenever human beings were kept in bondage, there were efforts to self-liberate, and during the first half of the nineteenth century, enslaved persons attempted to escape in ever-increasing numbers.³ Northup’s observation, in line with countless other documented cases of self-emancipation, invites a rethinking of the Southern wilderness as far more than a monolithic barrier. Pursued by dogs and enslavers on horseback, self-emancipators, sometimes accompanied by their own dogs

¹ Northup, *Twelve Years a Slave*, 240–241.

² Northup, *Twelve Years a Slave*, 241.

³ Franklin and Schweninger, *Runaway Slaves*, 273. Newspaper reports of self-emancipators increased with the expansion of the slave population. For further elaboration on attempts to quantify the number of enslaved persons who sought to self-emancipate, see James W. Fraser, *A History of Hope: When Americans Have Dared to Dream of a Better Future*, (New York: Palgrave, 2002), 75.

and horses, sought freedom through Southern ecosystems and encountered an extensive panoply of nonhuman animals. This chapter focuses on the experiences of freedom-seekers and the enslavers who pursued them, to establish the centrality of nonhuman animals during the act of self-emancipation. While acknowledging the reality that life rarely follows a strict temporal narrative format, this chapter will focus on the pervasive influence of animals from the moment of flight until a freedom-seeker was either captured, willingly returned to the plantation, or reached a space of freedom.

Chapter One detailed the way in which enslavers relied on nonhuman animals to enforce containment and deter self-emancipation. All the while, freedom-seekers learned about animals, engaged in oppositional modes of interaction, participated in clandestine networks of knowledge, and took preemptive steps to foster relationships with plantation dogs and horses. As important as these elements were, training and planning often failed as animals brought their own motivations, memories, and self-directed decisions that could not be fully controlled.⁴ Furthermore, in the wilderness of self-emancipation, unclaimed by enslavers or the enslaved, animals such as alligators, bears, mountain lions, wolves, snakes, and insects presented variables that could make the difference between freedom and capture. This interspecies borderland provides a window into the ultimate contested site of power and vulnerability. Subject to the interpretive and sometimes unpredictable actions of other nonhuman animals, self-emancipation unfolded as an entangled more-than-human process in which animals shaped the struggle over control, movement, and possibility.

⁴ According to Uta Maria Jürgens, animal intentionality is the mental state directing an animal's behavior, while animal motivation refers to the broader 'background in which individual intentions and actions are embedded'. See Uta Maria Jürgens, 'I am Wolf, I Rule!' – Attributing Intentions to Animals in Human–Wildlife Interactions', *Frontiers in Conservation Science*, vol. 3, (2022), 1.

Engaging self-emancipation with nonhuman animals adds to the human-centric dialectic of enslavers against the enslaved. This chapter challenges long-held assumptions about the human exclusivity of struggles for freedom to encompass environmental and ecological factors that shaped self-emancipation attempts.⁵ In doing so, this chapter contributes to conversations within animal studies and environmental history that emphasize the mutual entanglement of humans and nonhuman animals in history. Acknowledging the uniqueness and particularities of every self-emancipation provides a current to steer the scholarly rudder away from the rocky shoals of generalizations, but it stands to reason that innumerable self-emancipation attempts involved, at some point, interactions with nonhuman animals. When examining the speeches, interviews, and autobiographical narratives of formerly enslaved persons, the significance of nonhuman animals becomes increasingly difficult to ignore. Their importance emerges just as vividly in the diaries, runaway advertisements, and court records of the enslavers who used nonhuman animals in attempts to deny freedom.

Scholars such as Sandra Swart and Erica Fudge have pushed historians to look beyond utilitarian or symbolic readings of domesticated animals, to instead, take the lives of animals seriously, given the extent to which animals have influenced historical events.⁶ Chris Pearson makes a similar case for foregrounding animal intentionality and to see animals as responsive actors entangled in human histories, whose actions, are rarely if ever, reducible to simple extensions of human intent.⁷ To do so, Harriet Ritvo and Donna Haraway reveal how human-

⁵ Notable exceptions include David Silkenat's *Scars on the Land*, which includes instances of self-emancipation that he frames within environmental contexts and developments. Additionally, in her fascinating article 'Armed in the Great Swamp', Kathryn Golden presents the Great Dismal Swamp, and its nonhuman occupants, as characters in the story of marronage and insurgency. Kathryn Benjamin Golden, "'Armed in the Great Swamp': Fear, Maroon Insurrection, and the Insurgent Ecology of the Great Dismal Swamp', *Journal of African American History*, vol. 106, no. 1 (2021).

⁶ Swart, *Riding High*, 1–5; and Fudge, 'Milking Other Men's Beasts'.

⁷ Chris Pearson, 'Beyond 'Resistance': Re-thinking Nonhuman Agency in an Era of Climate Change', *European Review of History: Revue européenne d'histoire*, vol. 22, no. 5 (2015): 709–725

animal relationships should be understood as grounded in emotion and shared vulnerabilities.⁸ These perspectives, which are becoming more widely accepted across disciplines, necessitate a reconsideration of self-emancipation as an interspecies story within which historians must listen for the growls, hisses, and hoofbeats that helped or hindered the pursuit of freedom.⁹

This chapter begins by focusing on how freedom-seekers relied on these animals to escape enslavement. Still, seeking freedom alongside dogs and horses carried risks and challenges, and bonds with these animals could lead to emotionally taxing decisions for freedom-seekers. Self-emancipation attempts brought freedom-seekers, enslavers, and domesticated animals deep within natural spaces populated by a multitude of non-domesticated animals. Far beyond the reach of human control, these animals presented obstacles and opportunities for enslaved persons while also demonstrating the vulnerability of enslaver mastery of the nonhuman world. This work, therefore, examines the challenges created by animals ranging from swarming mosquitoes to predatory mountain lions. It will also analyze how self-emancipators defended themselves against wild animals and occasionally relied on their movements and behaviors to disrupt enslavers and their weaponized dogs and horses.

Enslavers and slave-catchers on horseback, accompanied by trained dogs, terrified self-emancipators. However, freedom-seekers recognized these animals' cognitive abilities and

⁸ See Ritvo, *The Animal Estate*, particularly chapters 1–2. 98–100. Haraway, *The Companion Species Manifesto*, 98–100. On shared vulnerability and suffering see Haraway, *When Species Meet*, particularly the chapter 'Shared Suffering'.

⁹ Looking back on years of scholarship during which animals found a place in 'so-called mainstream history', Harriet Ritvo now finds it 'odd that animals were ever considered either a new subject for historians or a peculiar one'. Harriet Ritvo, 'Epilogue: Combinations and Conjunction', in Jennifer Bonnell and Sean Kheraj, eds., *Traces of the Animal Past: Methodological Challenges in Animal History*, (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2022), 399–400. In addition to history, animal studies has also been integrated into many of the social sciences and the humanities. Kenneth Shapiro, 'Human–Animal Studies: Remembering the Past, Celebrating the Present, Troubling the Future', *Society & Animals*, vol. 28 (2020): 797–799.

decision-making processes as opportunities for subversion. The chapter concludes by looking at the counterstrategies employed by self-emancipators to neutralize these nonhuman threats. From linguistic hijackings of command words to manipulating natural features and using plants and animals for scent resistance, self-emancipators relied on an array of tactics to frustrate the animals enlisted to deny them freedom. In doing so, freedom-seekers repeatedly made it evident that the power of enslavers' authority did not safeguard against the erosion of control posed by the concurrent forces of human defiance and nonhuman animal action.

Tethered Affections: Domesticated Animals and Self-emancipation

The presence of domesticated animals changed the logistics, directions, risks, and emotional dimensions of self-emancipation. However, these animals complicated emancipation efforts through noise, hesitation, or self-willed action. For the enslaved, the relationships forged with dogs and horses could become a lifeline or a liability as they attempted to coax advantages by engaging animals' memories to renegotiate their place in the animals' sensory worlds. Perhaps no nonhuman animal shared the emancipatory stage with freedom-seekers and enslavers as much as horses and mules. Horses, each with individual temperaments and preferences, created a critical liminal space that transcended their conventional portrayal as mere instruments of power within the enslaver regime. Freedom-seekers relied on the quotidian nature of enslaved-equine partnerships on plantations as well as planter assumptions about the prescribed appropriate relationships between enslaved persons and nonhuman animals to transform equine intentionality into opportunities.

Enslaved men and women utilized horses and mules to transport those with decreased mobility, carry supplies, overcome geographic obstacles, and throw off scent-tracking canines.

When they did so, these freedom-seekers subverted the Plantationocene's environmental logic, as the same physiological adaptations that made the horse indispensable to commercial agriculture and pursuit also made the animal equally suited for self-emancipation.¹⁰ Featured in runaway advertisements, slave narratives, and WPA interviews, it is evident that horses carried freedom-seekers from Texas and Mexico to Ohio and Canada. Despite their significance in archival sources, historical literature has taken little account of the equine species hiding in plain sight throughout emancipation attempts, while some historians have outright dismissed their importance.¹¹

Providing legs to those who could not walk and speed to those who could not run, horses closed the gap between time and space and rendered the seemingly impossible possible by offering mobility to disabled persons, the elderly, and families with infants and young children. Escaping from South Carolina, Martha, her husband John, and their infant daughter 'rode off on a fine dark chestnut sorrel horse'. If Martha and John were going to 'get to a free state, or back to Baltimore', from where John was purchased, the couple would need to travel upwards of five hundred miles through four states with their infant child.¹² Undoing the manacles of slavery with the parental and spousal hands of affection, the young family's precarious freedom and prospects weighed heavily on the strong back of their newly acquired horse.

Similarly resolved 'to cling to their little child' through 'thick and thin', Jacob Hall and Henrietta 'each bridled a horse' as they escaped from Maryland 'in order that they might not have so far to carry' their son.¹³ 'Their faithful animals proved of incalculable service' as the

¹⁰ On the physical abilities of horses, see Clayton Hobbs, 'The Role of Biomechanics in Understanding the Horse-Rider Interaction'.

¹¹ Diouf, *Slavery's Exiles*, 233–234.

¹² Eli C. Bishop, 'Fifty Dollars Reward', *Weekly Raleigh Register*, 4 September 1850, 3.

¹³ William Still, *Still's Underground Rail Road Records. Revised Edition. With a Life of the Author. Narrating the Hardships, Hairbreadth Escapes, and Death Struggles of the Slaves in their Efforts for Freedom. Together with*

couple made their way to freedom in Pennsylvania, eventually arriving in Philadelphia, where William Still chronicled their story. Still's extensive compilation documented in his *Underground Railroad Records*, differs from the conventional historiographical claim that the majority of self-emancipating enslaved persons were unattached adult males.¹⁴ Roughly two-thirds of those reported by Still escaped in groups, frequently made up of persons whose mobility was constrained by age or physical condition.¹⁵ Records such as this reveal that equine mobility and intergenerational freedom could rarely be separated.

Harriet Shephard, 'the mother of five children, for whom she felt of course a mother's love', was unable 'to bear the thought of having her offspring compelled to wear the miserable yoke of slavery'. She therefore, self-emancipated from her slave-holding neighborhood of Chestertown, Maryland. Harriet's children 'were young, and unable to walk', resulting in the mother of five seizing 'the horses and carriages belonging to her master', which she did 'for the liberation of her children'. William Still belabored the importance of equine mobility to the family's escape, but he did not have to.¹⁶ The logistics of escaping with five young children spoke for themselves. Harriet's self-emancipation attempt was made possible by equine mobility as her children's feet never physically touched the road to freedom.

Self-liberating with her two young children, Angeline Brown joined her brother George in availing 'themselves of their master's horses and wagon'. After joining two other companions, the group of six made it 'nine miles from home' before their carriage broke down. Accosted by

Sketches of Some of the Eminent Friends of Freedom, and Most Liberal Aiders and Advisers of the Road, (Philadelphia: William Still Publisher, 1886), 340–341.

¹⁴ Franklin and Schweninger suggest that 81 percent of those who were advertised as runaways were male, and 78 percent were between the ages of thirteen and twenty-nine. Franklin and Schweninger, *Rebels on the Plantation*, 230–231.

¹⁵ For a recent biography of William Still and an examination of his work for the Underground Railroad, see William C. Kashatus, *The Underground Railroad and the Angel at Philadelphia*, (South Bend, Indiana: Notre Dame Press, 2021).

¹⁶ Still, *The Underground Railroad*, 302–303.

white men who ‘unceremoniously seized the horses by the reins’, the group ‘struck away at them with all their might, with their large clubs’ leaving the men ‘prostrate in the road’. Realizing that ‘the smashed up carriage could be of no further use to them’, the group ‘quickly conceived the idea of unhitching’ the horses from the wagon and continuing their journey on horseback.¹⁷ Still illustrated this encounter which revealed the importance of the horses’ mobility and behavioral plasticity, since the animals did not bolt during the commotion.¹⁸



Figure 2.1. Four Arrivals.¹⁹

With each horse carrying two full-grown adults and an additional child, the group made it to Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, before ‘the poor horses broke down, and had to be abandoned’.²⁰

¹⁷ Still, *The Underground Railroad*, 220–221.

¹⁸ Bolting is an equine counter-predatory response typically employed when the animal feels stressed or threatened by new stimuli. Nicole Romness, et al., ‘Associations between Owners’ Reports of Unwanted Ridden Behaviour and In-Hand Behaviour in Horses’, *Animals*, vol. 10, no. 12 (2020): 2.

¹⁹ Still, *The Underground Railroad*, 220.

²⁰ Still, *The Underground Railroad*, 221

Likely suffering from what would now be diagnosed as Exhausted Horse Syndrome, the animals enacted their refusal through body and gait.²¹ Their lives and freedom riding on the backs of horses, many self-liberating families arrived in Philadelphia with profound gratitude for the ‘faithful horses’ that guided them through the harrowing experiences of self-emancipation.²² Horses held together groups and families with their muscle and sinews, fundamentally changing the possibilities of escape and revealing a profound dependence on the animals.

Within the context of self-emancipation’s geographical dynamics, time was amongst the most valuable of commodities. Horses played a transformative role in recalibrating this spatial equation since their speed and endurance stretched what was reachable and compressed what had seemed impossibly distant. Days, months, and even years in the making, the escape plans of enslaved persons became ‘more feasible’ upon their ‘own pony’ or on a ‘hired horse’.²³ Equine cognition and their capacity for environmental mapping were critical when roads and trails dissolved into dirt, and forests gave way to deserts and plains, allowing self-emancipators to circumvent towns and traverse state and national borders.²⁴

Attuned to small changes in scent, shifts in wind, and vibrations of unseen threats, horses were active participants in the decision-making process during escapes.²⁵ They responded to human movement and tugs on their reins, but also listened to what humans could not hear, and

²¹ According to Veterinarian Jonathan H. Foreman, the exhausted horses would have needed to be moved to a cooler location and provided with fluids. However, the precarious freedom achieved by the group of self-emancipators would have made such treatment virtually impossible. Foreman, ‘The Exhausted Horse Syndrome’, 205–210.

²² Still, *The Underground Railroad*, 121, 183.

²³ William O’Neal, *Life and History of William O’Neal; or, The Man Who Sold His Wife*, (St. Louis, Missouri: A.R. Fleming & Co., 1896), 19.

²⁴ Christine J. Nicol discusses horses’ abilities for spatial awareness and other forms of cognition in her chapter, ‘Learning Abilities in the Horse’. See Christine J. Nicol, ‘Learning Abilities in the Horse’, in D.S. Mills, *The Domestic Horse: The Evolution, Development and Management of Its Behaviour*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005). In ‘Shared Skin: The Slow Intimacy of Horse and Rider’, Sandra Swart points to the shared understanding of the sensory capacity between horses and humans as a critical component of human–equine relationships and actions. Swart, ‘Shared Skin’, 13.

²⁵ On horses’ sensitivity to wind as well as further elaboration on their olfactory prowess of equine animals, see McGreevy and McLean, *Equitation Science*, 46–47, 61.

adjusted their pace accordingly.²⁶ Through snow, ice, and the arid desert heat, the horses that once carried overseers and pulled ploughs now carried enslaved families to freedom.

Reimagining winter weather as an opportunity as they escaped bondage in Kentucky, two men, two women and four children commandeered a ‘sleigh and horse to expedite their flight’.

Turning a frozen river into an unlikely highway, they traveled north, crossing ‘the Ohio on the ice to Cincinnati’ as they made their way to Canada.²⁷ The horse responded to shifts in the ice, allowing the group to maintain forward momentum across a landscape that would be otherwise closed to those traveling by foot.

Hundreds of miles south, on the Gulf Coast of Texas, where rivers did not freeze but instead crawled sluggishly past banks teeming with snakes, mosquitoes, and lurking alligators, an enslaved mother named Lucy ‘stole a large American horse’ to carry her and her young son south to Mexico.²⁸ Lucy and her horse encountered an ecological context far different from the icy Ohio River. Demanding an adaptive resilience from her nonhuman animal companion, the trio navigated through swampy lowlands, unpredictable heat, and disease-carrying insects.²⁹ With her child too young to walk through the Gulf Coast terrain, Lucy’s escape might not have been possible without the horse’s physical capacities, including its adaptability to warm weather as well as its finely tuned responses to environmental hazards and nonhuman animal predators.³⁰

²⁶ Swart, ‘Shared Skin’, 13–14.

²⁷ Richardson & Co., ‘Arrest of Fugitive Slaves’, *Galveston News (Tri-Weekly)*, 14 February 1856, 1.

²⁸ Edward F. Gilbert, ‘\$25 Reward’, *Colorado Tribune*, 10 September 1853, 2.

²⁹ The American South is home to insect vectors of diseases, including, but not limited to, several species of mosquitoes, ticks, midges, and biting flies. Kyndall Dye–Braumuller, et al., ‘Needs Assessment of Southeastern United States Vector Control Agencies: Capacity Improvement Is Greatly Needed to Prevent the Next Vector–Borne Disease Outbreak’, *Tropical Medicine and Infectious Disease*, vol. 7, no. 5 (2022). Climate change and rising temperatures have increased populations of disease-carrying insects in the South and other parts of the United States.

³⁰ Horses have evolved thermoregulatory mechanisms to help cope with heat. See Elisabeth–Lidwien, et al., ‘Thermoregulation during Field Exercise in Horses Using Skin Temperature Monitoring’, *Animals*, vol. 14, no. 1 (2023): 4–5.

During the first half of the nineteenth century, many enslaved persons in Texas, and even Louisiana, recognized Mexico as a viable sanctuary for attaining freedom, as echoed in the words of a formerly enslaved person who noted, ‘In Mexico, you could be free. They didn’t care if you was black, white, yellow, or blue’.³¹ In such westward and southbound self-emancipation attempts, horse energy and endurance collapsed the hundreds of miles that separated bondage from freedom.³² Mounted self-emancipators slipped across jurisdictions, crossed borders, and reached places such as Mexico and the Indian Territory that may have been unattainable on foot. Taking ‘a horse a piece’, a quintet of self-liberators escaped from Freestone County, Texas, a location nearly equidistant from the Choctaw Nation to the north and the sovereign state of Mexico to the south. Riding on sorrel horses with ‘large ugly formed heads’, the men were thought to be ‘aiming for Mexico or the Indian nation’.³³ In either case, their equine companions transformed theoretical distances into reachable destinations.

Tacitly acknowledging the limits of planter-class control in the vast expanse of the American southwest, Colonel Duval concluded a runaway advertisement in which he sought three self-emancipators seen at ‘the Choctaw Agency on horseback’, by warning other enslavers to remain vigilant and ‘be on the lookout for your negroes’.³⁴ Expressing similar anxieties, the editor of the *Austin City Gazette* lamented that a group of six formerly enslaved persons ‘ran away, carrying off along with them six horses’. Speaking for ‘the citizens in all sections of the country’, the editor hoped that ‘commanders and men at various military posts’ would ‘arrest all

³¹ Quoted in Mekala Audain, ‘“Design His Course to Mexico”: The Fugitive Slave Experience in the Texas–Mexico Borderlands, 1850–1853’, in Damian Alan Pargas, ed., *Fugitive Slaves and Spaces of Freedom in North America*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 234.

³² On equine endurance, including its ability to maintain speed over long distances, see McGreevy and McLean, *Equitation Science*, 269.

³³ R.T. Johnson, ‘\$500 Reward’, *The Southern Intelligencer*, 28 July 1858, 3.

³⁴ W.S. Oldham, ‘Runaway Negroes’, *Texas State Gazette*, 28 October 1854, 3.

blacks whom they may find wandering at large’, revealing the perceived inadequacies of local, county, and state governments.³⁵

These frantic and paranoid warnings speak to the crucial role that nonhuman animals played in shaping the dynamics of successful emancipation attempts while also revealing enslavers’ intensifying concerns that the animals upon which they relied on plantations, were conversely critical to facilitating its collapse. Horses became symbols of enslaver control, but also companions in resistance that were crucial in shrinking distances, defying borders, and carrying self-emancipators and their families to spaces of freedom. But if horses carved new opportunities across the continent, dogs lived at the porous boundary between the human and nonhuman world of the plantation. In this way, self-emancipation attempts could hinge on a single bark, a dog’s hesitation, or an unexpected act of canine defiance.

Rather than treating dogs as either tools of the enslaver or symbols of oppression, this thesis interprets canine behavior as a dynamic element in the interspecies entanglements of the plantation world. Occupying an unstable position at the center of the plantation system, dogs trained to track, attack, and intimidate, nevertheless responded to pressures of memory, scent, social bonding, and fear. In addition, their abilities to recognize familiar humans and to sense small changes in voice or body tension could make the difference between detection and safety.³⁶

Enslaved persons gained a sort of canine literacy as they learned to read nonverbal communications in the angle of a dog’s ear, tension in its walk, or the tightening of its jaw before a growl.³⁷ Through tactile bonding and feeding routines, they repurposed the enslavers’

³⁵ George K. Teulon, ‘On Friday Last’, *Austin City Gazette*, 3 June 1840, 2.

³⁶ On canine memory, see Miklósi, *Dog Behaviour, Evolution, and Cognition*, 209, 298. For dogs’ responses to human gestures and voice, see 51–52, 64–67.

³⁷ For an overview on canine body language, see Alexandra Horowitz, *Inside of a Dog: What Dogs See, Smell, and Know* (New York: Scribner, 2009), 109–114.

weaponized animals into partners in self-emancipation. Or, at the very least, into more manageable variables. When enslaved persons self-emancipated alongside canines, their dogs provided them with companionship and protection. But these bonds could be broken under the duress of potential capture, forcing emotional decisions to abandon the animal. Yet, even in parting, dogs sometimes refused to be left behind, and intervened in ways their human companions could neither predict nor command.

Many enslaved persons began self-emancipation attempts alongside a canine. With their astonishing senses of smell and hearing coupled with their empathetically-motivated prosocial proclivity to protect, dogs provided early warnings of danger and, if needed, defended self-emancipators against wild animals, other dogs, or humans.³⁸ Runaway advertisements across the South document the high frequency with which enslaved persons attempted self-emancipation with canines, while also revealing the motivations that shaped decisions to self-emancipate with a dog.³⁹ Described by his enslaver as a tall and slim man who was ‘usually accompanied by a dog’, Willis Revels ‘had with him when he left two dogs, one brindle, the other black’.⁴⁰ The enslaver’s use of the adverb ‘usually’ and the verb ‘accompanied’ reveals the strong attachment between Revels and the dogs, and helps to explain the decision to self-emancipate with the two canines.

³⁸ Researchers at Arizona State University’s Canine Science Laboratory found that most dogs will attempt to rescue and protect people in distress regardless of whether they have previous training. Finding evidence of emotional contagion supported the authors’ theory that ‘rescuing the distressed owner was an empathetically-motivated prosocial behavior’. See J. Van Bourg, ‘Pet dogs (*Canis lupus familiaris*) release their trapped and distressed owners: Individual variation and evidence of emotional contagion’, *PLoS ONE*, vol. 15, no. 4 (2020). Maki Katayama, Takatomi Kubo, et al., ‘The Neurobiology of Human-Animal Bonding: Emotional Contagion From Humans to Dogs Is Facilitated by Duration of Ownership’, *Frontiers in Psychology*, vol. 10, no. 1678 (2019).

³⁹ On the use of runaway advertisements as historical documents, see Blackett, *The Captives Quest for Freedom*; and David Waldstreicher, ‘Reading the Runaways: Self-Fashioning, Print Culture, and Confidence in Slavery in the Eighteenth-Century Mid-Atlantic’, in Philip Mulder, ed., *Colonial America and the Early Republic*, (New York: Routledge, 2016).

⁴⁰ John T. Wright, ‘I will give Twenty Five Dollars’, *North-Carolinian*, 26 November 1857, 3.

In Caldwell County, Texas, a married couple and their two children escaped with ‘a brindle pup with a white face’.⁴¹ Including the puppy, who was likely more liability than asset, in their plans reveals the family’s emotional ties to the young animal. Puppies are noisy. They are vulnerable. And they also lack the training that makes an adult dog useful for protection and tracking.⁴² In North Carolina, an enslaved woman named Tab escaped with her ‘little dog’ described in the runaway advertisement as one who ‘follows her and answers to the name Fan’. Rather than a calculated decision, Tab’s decision to self-emancipate with the small dog signaled an insistence on emotional continuity and a refusal to sever interspecies bonds. Their relationship, formed under enslavement and continued during self-emancipation, reveals the types of human-canine bonds that flew in the face of the Plantationocene’s logic of disposability and extraction.

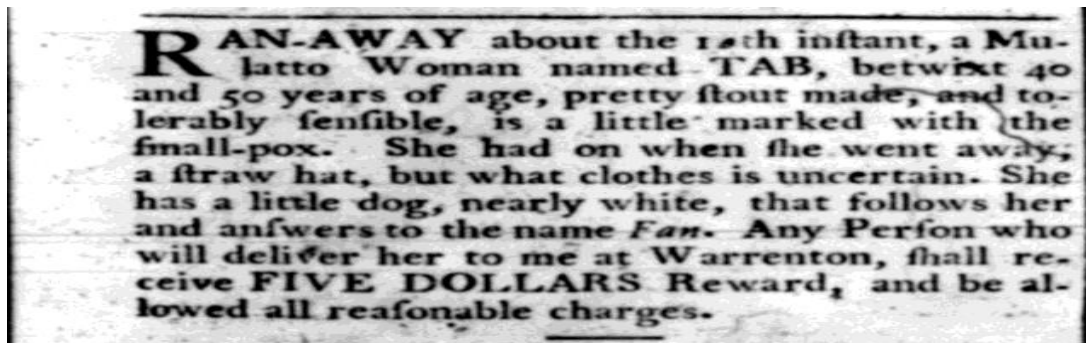


Figure 2.2. Ran Away.⁴³

In other cases, the line between affection and utility was less clear when they involved what historians describe as ‘working dogs’.⁴⁴ This appeared to be the case with an enslaved

⁴¹ E. H. Cushing, ‘\$100 Reward’, *Houston Daily Telegraph*, 27 February 1864, 2.

⁴² In addition to barking, puppies whine at a much higher rate than older dogs, often to get their mother’s, or human caretaker’s attention. Mathilde Massenet, et al., ‘Puppy whines mediate maternal behavior in domestic dogs’, *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America*, vol. 121, no. 22 (2024).

⁴³ ‘Ran Away’, *North Carolina Journal*, 24 October, 1792.

⁴⁴ Chris Pearson examines the role of working dogs, including historical discussions regarding their intelligence, in *Dogopolis: The Social Life of Dogs*. Pearson, *Dogopolis*, 123. It should be noted that affection between humans and working animals with whom they labored was also common. See Serpell, ‘The Human–Animal Bond’, 81–82.

person named Jim. His enslaver noted that he had taken ‘with him a large fierce yellow Dog’.⁴⁵ The deliberate emphasis the animal’s size and ferocity show the enslaver’s anxiety about the animal capable of transforming pursuit into confrontation. In Virginia, patrollers chased Henry Banner, but he ran to his trusted canine companion for protection. Banner knew that ‘there wasn’t no chance’ of the patrollers ‘gettin’ by that dog’.⁴⁶ Banner understood, likely through past experiences, that his dog would defend him against both human and nonhuman threats. In southern Texas, a freedom-seeker and his dog had been eluding capture for two weeks in hopes of getting to Mexico. The hunting party got ‘close to him once’, but just as the dogs from the hunting party ‘got within a yard’, the self-emancipator’s ‘dog turned and bit’ the approaching canine. The dog was injured so severely that the hunting party ‘couldn’t get him to run him again’.⁴⁷

These types of encounters are brought to life in an illustration from *Facts for the People of the Free States*. Even though the freedom-seeker’s body is angled toward escape, his canine companion is standing on her hind legs with her forepaws on her human companion’s waist, while he drapes an arm around the animal in a moment of mutual recognition of the approaching canine pursuers.

⁴⁵ Teske Meacham, ‘Ten Dollars Reward’, *Raleigh Register and North Carolina Weekly Advertiser*, 4 November 1814, 3.

⁴⁶ WPA, Henry Banner’, *Slave Narratives (Arkansas, Part 1)*, 104. [Phonetic spellings in original].

⁴⁷ Franklin Law Olmsted, *A journey through Texas: or, A saddle-trip on the southwestern frontier; with a statistical appendix*, (New York: Dix, Edwards & Co., 1857), 256.



Figure 2.3. The Fugitive Slave.⁴⁸

Placed within the context of other examples, this illustration captures the importance of canine companionship and protection, while also insisting on the foregrounding of dogs within narratives of freedom.

The dangers of the wilderness did not dissipate once the scent-trailing dogs were outpaced or incapacitated. Dense forests, swamp thickets, and arid desert trails brought self-emancipators and their animals into contact with wild animals, including panthers, wolves, and bears. In these spaces, the plantation bond was repurposed in the wild as dogs protected their human companions against predatory animals. Charles Ball and his dog Trueman encountered a ‘huge panther creeping along the path’ apparently stalking them ‘in the manner that a cat creeps when stealing upon her prey’. Ball believed that the dog’s posture, erect ears, and tense musculature acted as a deterrent that discouraged the panther from attacking, admitting that ‘if

⁴⁸ “The Fugitive Slave.” American and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society, *Facts for the People of the Free States, Liberty Tract No. 2*, (New York: Published by William Harned, 1846).

alone’, the panther ‘would not have hesitated to attack’.⁴⁹ Reflecting on his encounter with the animal, Ball wrote fondly of his canine companion, noting that had the panther attacked, his ‘dog would have conquered’ the felid enemy or ‘died in defending’ him.⁵⁰

The dogs accompanying James Williams during his self-emancipation attempt barked at approaching wild animals, forming a perimeter of warning sounds around him. Keeping watch where his eyes could not see with senses attuned to frequencies he could not hear, Williams’s dogs barked and cried whenever they heard ‘the footsteps of wild animals’. Fearing ‘their barking would draw’ his pursuers, Williams was ‘obliged to use’ his ‘utmost exertions to keep them quiet’.⁵¹ When emancipation required silence and secrecy, dogs’ predisposition to protect along with their ability to communicate through barks, growls, whimpers, and whining, could potentially disclose the location of an enslaved person.⁵² Weighing the tension between the dogs’ companionship and protection with the risks of detection as a result of their vocalizations, James Williams’s calculus favored secrecy and he ‘thought it best to get rid of the dogs’. When he saw a deer grazing nearby, Williams used the dogs’ proclivity to track animals against them and started them in pursuit of the deer. The dogs chased the deer, ‘yelling on the track’, and Williams never saw them again.⁵³

The choice was tactical for Williams but it was devastating for the abandoned dogs who had been raised in a world defined by their relations with humans.⁵⁴ Revealing the asymmetry of

⁴⁹ Ball, *Slavery in the United States*, 355–356. Dogs will communicate threat to other animals by attempting to increase their body size and changing their posture, while also tensing their muscles. Siniscalchi, et al., ‘Communication in Dogs’, 2.

⁵⁰ Ball, *Slavery in the United States*, 390.

⁵¹ Williams, *Narrative of James Williams*, 87.

⁵² On canine vocalizations, see Siniscalchi, et al., ‘Communication in Dogs’, 8–11.

⁵³ Williams, *Narrative of James Williams*, 87.

⁵⁴ In *Dog Politics*, Mariam Motamedi Fraser emphasizes the price of the human–canine relationship on dogs, revealing that their subservience makes them uniquely vulnerable. Mariam Motamedi Fraser, *Dog Politics: Species stories and the animal*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2024), 1, 37, 136

a relationship where humans held all the power to decide when the bond ended, and by what means, the dogs were left to confront a world suddenly stripped of meaning and shelter. Dogs develop what ethologists term a ‘secure base effect’, attaching themselves to particular humans whose proximity regulates stress and provides an anchor from which dogs explore the world and make decisions.⁵⁵ As Williams walked away from the relationship, the dogs likely called out to the freedom-seeker, with each one of their barks reflecting the bewilderment and stress of calling for a person who would never again answer.

For some self-emancipators, the tension between companionship, protection, and concealment wrought extremely difficult, emotionally-charged decisions. Charles Ball wanted to bring his ‘faithful dog’, called Trueman with him during his emancipation attempt but pained over whether to abandon the animal. Ball’s relationship with the dog spanned more than four years, during which Trueman proved his courage and loyalty by hunting bears and standing steadfastly by Ball’s side while a panther stalked the pair. Unfortunately for the animal, Ball concluded that the success of his ‘undertaking depended on secrecy and silence’, and he ‘thought it safest to abandon [his] last friend, and engage’ in the ‘perilous enterprise alone’.⁵⁶

Ball tied Trueman to a tree to prevent him from following. However, as is evidenced throughout the catalog of human-nonhuman animal encounters, Trueman refused to be a passive casualty to human strategy, and the dog was determined to have his ‘say’.⁵⁷ Abandoned and desperate, Trueman spoke to his human companion by ‘looking wistfully’ at him in what is

⁵⁵ Lisa Horn, et al., ‘The importance of the secure base effect for domestic dogs – evidence from a manipulative problem-solving task’, *PLoS one*, vol. 8, no. 5 (2013): 1–8. Chiara Mariti, ‘Owners as a secure base for their dogs’, *Behavior*, vol. 150, no. 11 (2013): 1275–1277.

⁵⁶ Ball, *Slavery in the United States*, 389–390. On the importance of silence during self-emancipation attempts, see Smith, *Sensing the Past*, 51.

⁵⁷ Historian Aaron Skabelund famously asked, ‘can the subaltern bark?’ in his work *Empire of Dogs: Canines, Japan, and the Making of the Modern Imperial World*.

called a mutual or an ‘affiliative gaze’, and then ‘licking his hands’ when he approached.⁵⁸ In one final attempt to communicate with his beloved companion, Trueman rose ‘on his hind feet, and [placed] his fore paws on’ Ball’s chest in a contact-seeking behavior commonly seen in dogs experiencing separation distress.⁵⁹

Struggling to understand why the true North of his life’s compass was walking away, Trueman ‘uttered a long howl’ that ‘thrilled through’ Ball’s heart. Human language no longer a barrier to communication, Ball admitted that it was as if the dog ‘had said, ‘My master, do not leave me behind you’.’ Moved by ‘the affection that the poor animal had testified’, Ball ‘talked to him as to a creature that understood language’, leaving the dog with the consolatory departing words: ‘Follow the new master who shall possess my gun, and may he be as kind to thee as thou hast been faithful to me’.⁶⁰ Trueman did not understand property transfer, but he most definitely understood that the person whose scent, voice, and touch had organized his sense of safety was abandoning him. With the loss of his secure base relationship, Trueman likely felt a surge of panic and symptoms of distress including elevated cortisol, rapid heart rate, and disorientation.⁶¹ Retroactively narrativizing his lachrymose farewell with Trueman, the love and affection Ball felt for his dog and the resulting anguish from the decision to leave him are palpable.⁶²

⁵⁸ Dogs communicate with their human companions through vocalizations as well as through their facial expressions. While most mammals can communicate through facial expressions, dogs are far more likely to produce facial movements to communicate with humans, leading scientists to conclude that dogs’ ‘facial expressions are not just inflexible and involuntary displays of emotional states, but rather potentially active attempts to communicate with others’. See Juliane Kaminski, et al., ‘Human attention affects facial expressions in domestic dogs’, *Scientific Reports*, vol. 7, no 12914 (2017). Dogs also gaze in mutual eye contact with humans, an evolved behavior powered by releases of oxytocin. Miho Nagasawa, et al., ‘Oxytocin–gaze positive loop and the coevolution of human–dog bonds’, *Science*, vol. 348, no. 6232 (2015): 333–336.

⁵⁹ Ball, *Slavery in the United States*, 391–392.

⁶⁰ Ball, *Slavery in the United States*, 391–392.

⁶¹ Márta Gácsi, ‘Does the owner provide a secure base? Behavioral and heart rate response to a threatening stranger and to separation in dogs’, *Journal of Veterinary Behavior*, vol. 4, no. 2 (2009): 90–91.

⁶² For a literary analysis of Ball’s departing words to Trueman, see Andrews, ‘Beasts of the Southern Wild’, 41–42. For the emotional dimensions of human–animal separations and the problems with overly rationalist framings of such relationships, see Patricia McConnell, *The Other End of the Leash: Why We Do What We Do Around Dogs* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2003), especially on canine emotional expression and cross–species grief.

Much in the same way, Carlo, the dog with whom Dinah established a lifelong bond, tried to stop her from leaving him behind as she sought freedom. As she made her way out of the plantation, Carlo ‘raised his long ears and looked at her with his thoughtful eyes as she came up to pat his head and tell him to be quiet’. Dinah kissed him and walked toward the door, ‘looking back she saw the dog half out of his kennel, evidently anxious to go with her’. Dinah ‘shook her head gravely and earnestly signed’ to the dog to ‘lie down’. With the dog’s body language saying more than the spoken word, Carlo ‘dropped his nose between his paws’, gazed ‘upwards at her’, and a ‘big tear, as she imagined, was about to burst from his loving eye’.⁶³

In Alabama, Jake Williams grappled with a similar dilemma of whether to attempt emancipation with a dog named Belle. His bond with the dog, made visible through the simple act of petting, provoked a violent response from the overseer, who struck the animal on her back with a rock. Speaking as if Belle was an extension of himself, Williams internalized the assault of the animal and decided that he was not going to ‘put up wid dis treatment no longer’, resolving to ‘run away to a free State’. Rather than bringing the dog with him, Williams left the dog with a trusted friend, whom he believed was the best person he ‘could leave her wid’. He hated to leave Belle behind, but implored his friend to ‘look atter’ her, ‘feed her and keep her de best you kin’. Knowing his friend did not have the same emotional attachment to Belle as he did, Williams attempted to increase the dog’s value, telling his friend that Belle was ‘a mighty good possum an’ coon dog’.⁶⁴

But Belle, like Trueman and Carlo, refused to be quietly left behind. It did not take long for the overseer to ‘find out dat Jake done run away’, and when he did, ‘he got out de bloodhounds an’ started off after him’. Hearing the hounds ‘a-howlin in de distance’, Jake

⁶³ Simpson, *Horrors of the Virginian Slave Trade*, 53.

⁶⁴ WPA, Heywood Ford, 123. [Phonetic spellings in original].

climbed a tree affording him the height to avoid the bone-crushing jaws of his pursuers. However, with his scent trail rising with the heat of his body, the scent-tracking dogs soon led the overseer to the ‘tree Jake was in and dey started barkin’ roun’ it’. Jake refused to come down, compelling the overseer to climb the tree to force Jake’s descent. As the ‘dogs keppa howlin’, Jake ‘kicked de overseer right in de mouf’, sending him ‘tumblin’ to de ground’. In a sudden, and deadly, twist of fate, the dogs turned on the overseer, ‘pouncing on him’ as soon as he hit the ground. Jake ‘lowered hisself to de bottom limbs’ where he ‘saw de dogs tearin at de man’, led not by a bloodhound, but rather, by his beloved canine companion Belle. The rest of the dogs ‘done just [like] she done, tearin’ at de overseer’s throat’ as Jake commanded, ‘Hold ‘em, Belle! Hold ‘em, gal’! Jake continued ‘hollerin’ from de tree for dem dogs to git ‘em’, and it was not long before the ‘dogs tore dat man all to pieces’. The overseer ‘died right under dat maple tree’ he had climbed to capture a man who had, with the help of a dog, escaped his reach forever.⁶⁵

Belle was not one of the prized bloodhounds of the plantation. She was a ‘plain old red-bone possum an’ coon dog’.⁶⁶ And her loyalty belonged unequivocally to Jake, as was evidenced hours before when the overseer violently attacked the dog after becoming frustrated that Belle refused to leave Jake’s side. When Jake self-emancipated, the overseer called for the bloodhounds. However, perhaps sensing her human companion’s peril, Belle refused to be left behind and inserted herself into the hunt, joining the pack of scent-trained bloodhounds. If she was initially unaware of the object of the hunt, Belle soon realized the pack was trailing her human companion as she picked up his scent. Arriving at the maple tree where Jake was hiding, Belle established herself as the leader of the pack, barking excitedly upon discovering her human

⁶⁵ WPA, Heywood Ford, 124. [Phonetic spellings in original].

⁶⁶ It is likely Belle was an American English Coonhound, a medium-sized dog popular in the South. See American Kennel Club, *The New Complete Dog Book: Official Breed Standards and All-New Profiles for 200 Breeds*, (Irvine, California: i-5 Publishing, 2014), 182. WPA, Heywood Ford, 123. [Phonetic spellings in original].

companion. Williams later explained, ‘De leader of dat pack of hounds’ was not a bloodhound, but his companion Belle.⁶⁷ Intent on protecting her human companion, Belle pounced on the overseer as soon as he fell to the ground. And having established herself as pack leader, the rest of the dogs followed Belle’s lead, turning their overseer into the object of aggression.⁶⁸

In an ultimate display of the fragility of enslaver control in the face of resistance and nonhuman animals, the canine weapons of oppression turned the barrel of the gun to the face of the person attempting to fire the weapon, challenging us, in Donna Haraway’s words, to take seriously the constantly evolving human-dog relationship and to see these dogs as responsive, social actors.⁶⁹ Jake’s relationship with Belle saved his life. Hours before, Jake had said his final goodbye to his animal companion when he began his emancipation attempt. However, refusing to accept the farewell, Belle took command of the hunt, killed the overseer, and removed the key obstacle to her companion’s escape. No one commanded her to protect Jake. She chose to. Their bond, dismissed by the overseer as sentimental indulgence, became the basis of survival as the pair ‘struck off through de woods’ together. Belle stayed with Jake all the way to freedom in Kentucky, where he and Belle’s puppy were seen together six years later.⁷⁰ Though it seems Belle had passed on, this sighting marked an interspecies legacy of a dog’s decision changing a man’s life, and her puppy becoming a lineage commemorating freedom.

⁶⁷ WPA, Heywood Ford, 124. [Phonetic spellings in original].

⁶⁸ For an examination of leadership behavior and pack leadership within canine groups, see Roberto Bonanni, et al., ‘Effect of affiliative and agonistic relationships on leadership behaviour in free-ranging dogs’, *Animal Behaviour*, Vol. 79, No. 5, (2010), 981–991. In his narrative, formerly enslaved person Jacob Stroyer provides an interesting insight into pack leadership among slave-hunting canines, noting that slave hunters typically had ‘one or two among the pack called trailers or leaders, which the others’ would follow. Stroyer continued by noting that if the leaders of the pack ‘were hurt or killed’, the other dogs ‘would surround and guard’ the injured pack leader ‘until the hunter reached them’. Jacob Stroyer, *My Life in the South*, (Salem: Salem Observer Book and Job Print, 1885), 72.

⁶⁹ Haraway, *The Companion Species Manifesto*, 3–7, 27, 44

⁷⁰ WPA, Heywood Ford, 124.

Pushing back against the anthropocentric historiography of self-emancipation, this section shows how central domesticated animals were to those seeking freedom and reveals a story of mutual human-nonhuman animal adaptation.⁷¹ As environmental historians and those within the field of animal studies have emphasized, it is important to view animals as social actors whose relationships with humans were formed through routine and emotions.⁷² With that in mind, when horses and dogs cooperated with enslaved persons rather than enslavers, it should be seen as an articulation of memory and affection rather than a breach of training. Enslaved persons understood animal behaviors, and they carried this knowledge into self-emancipation attempts where animals became collaborators that carried families to freedom, guarded against predators, and provided invaluable emotional companionship.

Rewilding Escape

Moving through a wooded area ominously and appropriately named Wolf Valley, James Williams found himself surrounded by red wolves, the wild canine cousins of the domesticated dogs he had so recently abandoned by setting them on a deer's path. Widespread in the southeast of the United States during the nineteenth century, these pack-hunting wolves enveloped Williams in an eerie soundscape of predation as he 'heard on all sides the howling of the wolves, and the quick patter of their feet'.⁷³ Though he ran through the woods, the freedom-seeker was

⁷¹ Although it is difficult to disentangle animals from anthropocentric histories as much of the sources that we rely on have been written by humans, many in the fields of animal studies find that it is still possible to write about animals as historical actors. Fudge, 'What Was It Like to Be a Cow?', 259–262.

⁷² Haraway, *The Companion Species Manifesto*, 3–7. Mariam Fraser reminds readers that 'shared risk' is not shared equally, with domesticated animals bearing much of the brunt. Fraser, *Dog Politics*, 36–38.

⁷³ For further elaboration on the Red Wolf, see Joseph W. Hinton, et al., 'Red Wolf (*Canis rufus*) Recovery: A Review with Suggestions for Future Research', *Animals (Basel)*, vol. 3, no. 3 (2013). After two centuries of aggressive hunting and trapping, only about twenty Red Wolves remain in the Carolinas. Kevin Seabrook, 'Only 20 red wolves remain in the wild in the Carolinas', *Palmetto Report*, 8 May 2021. On the hunting practices of wolves, see C. Muro, et al., 'Wolf-pack (*Canis lupus*) hunting strategies emerge from simple rules in computational simulations', *Behavioural Processes*, vol. 88, no. 3 (2011).

soon confronting the wolves ‘snarling and howling around’ him. Williams somehow evaded the wolves, only to encounter a mother bear and her two cubs later in the day. Williams kept still, remaining undetected as he watched the bear climb a nearby tree. But later that evening, Williams awoke to a shadowy silhouette standing over him, which he mistakenly believed was his enslaver. To his equal dismay, it was the mother bear, ‘down upon its hands and knees’.⁷⁴

From the woods of Wolf Valley to the canebrakes of Louisiana, self-emancipators traversed unfamiliar and hostile landscapes and ecosystems teeming with nonhuman animal life.⁷⁵ To move through these environments meant avoiding pursuing enslavers and their weaponized animals and also entering a multispecies space filled with the buzzing of gallinippers and mosquitoes, the growls of wolves and bears, and the hissing sounds of moccasins and alligators. Within historical narratives, generally, and the historiography of enslavement and self-emancipation, more particularly, wild animals barely register with the occasional mention of a growl, rustling in the leaves, or snake on the footpath. However, for self-emancipators and those who pursued them, these animals were far from peripheral. Wild animals did not appear in sources metaphorically or to amplify suspense. These animals were cohabitants, antagonists, and unexpected companions or lifelines.

Environmental historians and scholars of animal studies, including Helen Cowie, remind us that animals appear unevenly across archival records with sources on domesticated animals such as dogs and horses appearing far more frequently than wild animals.⁷⁶ However, even though they appear sparsely across the historical record, that does not mean their impact was less

⁷⁴ Williams, *Narrative of James Williams*, 88–89.

⁷⁵ The exact location of Wolf Valley is not specified. However, Williams mentions that his enslaver had previously indicated they were in the Creek country near some Indian settlements, suggesting a location in the southeastern United States, likely in or near the border areas of Alabama and Georgia, within territories historically inhabited by the Creek Nation.

⁷⁶ Cowie, *Animals in World History*.

profound. By using traditional historical sources while also drawing on contemporary ethology, this section attempts to reconstruct the wild animal presence in the geography of escape.⁷⁷

When Harriet Jacobs concluded that ‘the venomous snakes were less dreadful than the white men’, she offered a radical reorientation of safety and security.⁷⁸ Trading the containment of plantation spaces for uncertainty beyond, self-emancipators sought freedom through spaces where they found possibilities for reclaiming movement and space in a nonhuman world ungoverned by the plantation. Abstractly described as ‘the wilderness’, these spaces might negate enslaver advantages, but also introduce threats as wide-ranging as the sting of the scorpion to the bone-crushing jaws of the alligator. Freedom-seekers such as Frederick Douglass described these environments in ways that projected their feral, untamed nature to the animals within them, calling such creatures ‘wild beasts’.⁷⁹ Likewise, after describing the ‘whole country’ as ‘wild and forbidding’, James Williams and his dogs listened to the ‘cries or the footsteps’ of what he described as ‘wild animals’.⁸⁰

Self-emancipators recognized the wilderness as such, and in spite of the environmental and nonhuman animal threats, they entered these untamed spaces, preferring the woods, swamps, and deserts to a life in bondage. After being ‘attacked by a wild beast’ while self-emancipating near northern Virginia, James Curry drew a direct comparison between these wild beasts and his previous enslavers. Curry drove the wild animals away, but knew ‘the men, more ferocious than wild beasts’ would present a greater challenge.⁸¹ After escaping enslavement in New Orleans and arriving in Liverpool, England, Tom Wilson told readers that he ‘felt safer among the alligators

⁷⁷ Fudge, ‘What Was It Like to Be a Cow?’, 262–267; and Fudge, ‘Milking Other Men’s Beasts’, 23–24.

⁷⁸ Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, 171–172.

⁷⁹ Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, 85.

⁸⁰ Williams, *Narrative of James Williams*, 39, 87.

⁸¹ James Curry, ‘Narrative of James Curry, A Fugitive Slave’, *The Liberator*, 10 January 1840, 1.

than among the white men'.⁸² Along similar lines, an enslaved person identified as Letita walked through scrub palmettos and forests 'inhabited only by stinging insects, reptiles, and wild beasts', yet described these travails of self-emancipation as 'not so dreadful as remaining in the presence' of her enslaver.⁸³

After three decades of enslavement, Harriet Jacobs sought freedom through the Great Dismal Swamp. This million-acre swampland's isolation, unique geography, and diverse array of nonhuman animals created what historian Kathryn Benjamin Golden describes as an 'insurgent ecology'.⁸⁴ After spending a night among the mosquitoes and snakes, Jacobs recognized she was 'in no situation to choose' and 'gratefully accepted' her fate among the animals in the wilderness as even the 'large, venomous snakes were less dreadful to [her] imagination than the white men' who were 'called civilized'.⁸⁵ These comparisons collapsed the prescribed hierarchy that placed the plantation at the top and the nonhuman animal world below it. In these ecological inversions, alligators, insects, and snakes were dreadful, but enslavers were worse.

Perhaps no nonhuman animal evoked the sensory and symbolic elements of the wilderness as much as wolves, who across time and space have been depicted in folklore, literature, and mythology as sentient representations of the wild. Carnivorous predators occupying the very edges of human civilization, even their haunting howls evoked a sense of the untamed while reinforcing a sonic boundary between the cultivated world and the ecologies beyond. For self-emancipators, leaving the plantation and entering the wilderness meant seeing,

⁸² Elihu Burrett, 'A Fugitive Slave in Liverpool', *Bond of Brotherhood*, No. 42, January 1854, 144.

⁸³ Lintner, *Bond and Free*, 64. Lintner used fictitious names and localities in her work, in an attempt to keep their identities hidden from the public.

⁸⁴ Golden, 'Armed in the Great Swamp', 4–5.

⁸⁵ Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, 171–172.

hearing, and confronting wolves, whom some freedom-seekers described as their ‘enemies’.⁸⁶ When they wrote autobiographical narratives in the mid-nineteenth century, self-emancipated enslaved persons provided descriptions of adversarial encounters with wolves, becoming part and parcel of a larger cultural tradition of vilifying the lupine animal.⁸⁷

Henry Bibb directly identified the wilderness with being ‘among wolves and vipers’, and indeed, every reference to the word ‘wilderness’ in his autobiographical slave narrative occurs during his interactions with wolves.⁸⁸ For instance, while in ‘the dark wilderness’, Bibb awoke to the ‘awful howling of a gang of blood-thirsty wolves’ that had surrounded his family ‘as their prey’. With his child screaming loudly with fear and his wife trembling with the ‘thought of being devoured there in the wilderness’, Bibb, armed with a bowie knife acquired from his enslaver, confronted the wolves. Asserting his claim to ‘resistant manhood’ as a father and protector, Bibb thought that if he must die, he ‘would die striving to protect’ his ‘family from destruction, and die striving to escape from slavery’.⁸⁹ Bibb rushed the wolves with his bowie knife in hand as his wife ‘took a club in one hand, and her child in the other’. Although Bibb describes his wife’s heroic actions in his narrative, the editor curiously provides a far more passive interpretation of her role in the accompanying illustration.

⁸⁶ Levi Coffin, *Reminiscences of Levi Coffin, the Reputed President of the Underground Railroad; Being a Brief History of the Labors of a Lifetime in Behalf of the Slave, with the Stories of Numerous Fugitives, Who Gained Their Freedom Through His Instrumentality, and Many Other Incidents*, (Cincinnati: Robert Clarke & Co., 1880), 62.

⁸⁷ While Jon T. Coleman makes no reference to enslaved persons or the genre of autobiographical slave narratives in his work *Vicious: Wolves and Men in America*, he contends that American storytellers depicted wolves as deadly threats to humans and their property. Adding slave narratives to the collection of those who wrote about wolves adds nuance and deepens the story of wolves and the Americans who encountered them. See Jon T. Coleman, *Vicious: Wolves and Men in America*, (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2008).

⁸⁸ Bibb, *Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb*, 76.

⁸⁹ Bibb, *Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb*, 124. For further elaboration on the concept of ‘resistant manhood’, as well as an examination of masculinity and self-emancipation, see David Dodgington, *Contesting Slave Masculinity in the American South*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 22–23, 40–47.



Figure 2.4. Henry Bibb and Wolves.⁹⁰

Bibb contrasted this experience fighting the ‘gang of savage wolves’ to his life in bondage, and preferred being one step from the grave in the wilderness than having ‘cords wrapped about’ his limbs, ‘denied the consolation of resisting in self defense’. Choosing ‘glaring eyes’ and ‘chattering teeth’ over the ‘loaded rifle’ and ‘torturing lash’, Bibb felt his ‘chance was by far better among the howling wolves in the Red River swamp’ than on the plantation.⁹¹

Ethologists and biologists such as L. David Mech and Luigi Boitani have long shown that wolves are complex, social animals with pack dynamics, long-term bonds, and acute environmental sensitivity.⁹² Their capacities for intraspecies social coordination in particular, made them a formidable presence in any environment. Accordingly, wolves loomed large in the

⁹⁰ Bibb, *Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb*, 125.

⁹¹ Bibb, *Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb*, 131.

⁹² On the sociality of wolves, the impact of environmental factors on wolf behavior, and other information, see Mech and Boitani, eds., *Wolves: Behavior, Ecology, and Conservation*, 25–26, 35–39, 86. The classic work on lupine behavior is L. David Mech, *The Wolf: The Ecology and Behavior of an Endangered Species* (Garden City, New York: Natural History Press, 1970).

collective consciousness of those moving through swamps and woods, with information about these animals transcending racial and social boundaries.

Confronted by a large wolf near the Ogeechee River in Georgia, Caesar remembered advice given to him by white hunters that, ‘if a man fixed his eye steadily upon a wild animal without quailing, the beast would shrink away’. Relying on this advice that echoes recommendations from animal behaviorists today, Caesar ‘fastened his eyes’ upon the wolf, who eventually turned and slowly left the area.⁹³ Beyond the outskirts of Baltimore, Isaac Williams and his fellow self-emancipators met a group of white miners who warned them that wolves were numerous in the woods. Ignoring these words of caution under the mistaken conviction that ‘American wolves were neither very large nor dangerous’, the group continued through the woods. Their mistaken belief that wolves were ‘terrible cowards’ became quickly evident as they ‘heard a most unearthly howl’, saw eyes that ‘twinkled like stars’, and felt ‘the heavy breathing’ and ‘hot breath’ of the animals on their necks.⁹⁴ The men panicked and started to run. With clarity of hindsight, Williams later admitted that turning their backs and running from the animals was ‘worst thing’ they ‘could have done under the circumstances’.⁹⁵

Williams and his companions managed to survive this encounter by serendipitously finding an old cowshed where they took refuge. Sinking in and out of the concealment of the wilderness, self-emancipation attempts tore open the borders between civilization and the wild,

⁹³ Platt, *The Martyrs, and the Fugitive*, 85–86. The Alaska State Department of Fish and Game warns not to run or turn away when encountering wolves, but rather to ‘maintain eye contact if the wolf is looking at you’ and to act aggressively. ‘Living with Wolves’, *Alaska Department of Fish and Game*, <https://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=livewith.wolves>.

⁹⁴ Isaac Williams, *Sunshine and Shadow of Slave Life. Reminiscences As Told by Isaac D. Williams to ‘Tege’*, (East Saginaw: Evening News Printing and Binding House, 1885), 33.

⁹⁵ Williams, *Sunshine and Shadow of Slave Life*, 34. From prior knowledge, warnings, or experiences, Williams seemed to have recognized that running from wolves almost assuredly leads to an attack. Wolves are ‘coursing predators’, meaning they attempt to force their prey to run before attacking. See Mech, et al., *Wolves on the Hunt: The Behavior of Wolves Hunting Wild Prey*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), 142.

as well as the dichotomy between domesticated and non-domesticated. Wolves surrounded Moses Roper near the Flint River in Florida, increasing in number as they howled to one another. Roper intuited that the wolves were ‘calling others to join’ in the attack, ‘having understood that they always assemble in numbers for such a purpose’. Unable to climb the nearby pine trees for refuge, Roper found a lifeline by running toward ‘some cattle, which attracted the wolves’ to the bovine prey and provided the self-emancipator the time he needed to slip away.⁹⁶

Such encounters were neither anomalous nor bound to any single region. As far north as Detroit into the Great Lakes and Canada, ‘wolves, as plenty as sheep’ threatened John Little as he navigated through a region where ‘bears were also numerous’.⁹⁷ J.W. Loguen and his companions met ‘white hunters in the woods’ who told them to look out for wolves as well as panthers and bears whose habitats shadowed these northern routes used for escape. This advice proved prescient as the group ‘often scared up’ the growling of bears and wolves as they made their way through the wilderness near the Great Lakes.⁹⁸ Widespread and occupying similar geographic spaces as wolves, bears presented significant threats for freedom-seekers moving across territory mapped by shifting patterns of animal life.

Omnivores with a high degree of ecological adaptability, black bears were unpredictable cohabitants of the natural world, capable of ignoring, retreating from, or violently engaging with humans depending on the context.⁹⁹ Ethologists draw attention to the propensity of bears’ behavior to shift rapidly based on food availability, reproductive status, and perceived

⁹⁶ Moses Roper, *Narrative of the Adventures and Escape of Moses Roper, from American Slavery. With an Appendix, Containing a List of Places Visited by the Author in Great Britain and Ireland and the British Isles, and Other Matter*, (Berwick-Upon-Tweed: Published for the Author, 1840), 39–40.

⁹⁷ Drew, *A North-Side View of Slavery*, 216.

⁹⁸ Loguen, *The Rev. J. W. Loguen*, 327, 334.

⁹⁹ On this historic range of Black Bears, see Tighem, *Bears Without Fear*, 61–63. The classic work on bear attacks remains Herrero, *Bear Attacks: Their Causes and Avoidance*. For a more recent overview of human–bear encounters, see Marcus Elfström, et al., ‘Ultimate and Proximate Mechanisms Underlying the Occurrence of Bears Close to Human Settlements: Review and Management Implications’, *Mammal Review*, vol. 44, no. 1 (2014).

threats. Their sensitivity to threats is extremely heightened if cubs are present, when maternal aggression becomes its most pronounced.¹⁰⁰ Well aware that ‘bears roamed through the hills and swamps of Mississippi’, Charles Thompson was frozen with fear when the ‘fierce and loud growl’ of two black bears, likely a mating pair or a mother with adolescent young, sounded directly on his path. Thompson admitted he ‘knew scarcely what to do’. Yet, ‘with the presence of mind’, and likely drawing on communal or empirical knowledge of bear behavior, he ‘retreated slowly from the presence of Mr. and Mrs. Bruin’.¹⁰¹ Thompson’s encounter shows how enslaved persons actively responded to wild animal encounters in real time, reading signs, recognizing territorial markings, and knowing when to fight, flee, or freeze.

Unlike wolves and bears, predatory wild cats moved quietly through the landscape unseen and unheard. Known regionally and colloquially as panthers, cougars, mountain lions, or catamounts, large cats were solitary predators whose historic range spanned nearly the entire North American continent.¹⁰² These felids were known for their remarkable night vision and hypersensitive hearing as well as a muscular physiology adapted for ambush.¹⁰³ Though wild cats tend to avoid humans, their unique physical adaptations and methods of attack created feelings of vulnerability amongst those moving through unfamiliar terrain.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁰ Though Stephen Herrero notes that each individual mother bear has a distinct personality, he notes that almost all have maternal protective instincts. See Herrero, *Bear Attacks*, 96–97, 120.

¹⁰¹ Charles Thompson, *Biography of a Slave; Being the Experiences of Rev. Charles Thompson, a Preacher of the United Brethren Church, While a Slave in the South. Together with Startling Occurrences Incidental to Slave Life*, (Dayton, Ohio: United Brethren Publishing House, 1875), 99. Experts recommend slowly retreating when encountering a bear. Herrero, *Bear Attacks*, 72.

¹⁰² From Middle English, the word ‘catamount’ literally means ‘cat of the mountain’ and usually refers to pumas, cougars, and mountain lions. These animals ranged through the Americas. Ripple, ‘Range Contractions of North American Carnivores and Ungulates’.

¹⁰³ Kenneth Logan and Linda Sweanor describe wild cats’ specific evolution designed for ambush hunting in *Desert Puma*. Logan and Sweanor, *Desert Puma*, 21, 311. Maurice Hornocker and Sharon Negri, eds., *Cougar: Ecology and Conservation*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 121.

¹⁰⁴ While human contact with cougars has undoubtedly increased in tandem with human encroachment onto the felid’s territory, Maurice Hornocker and Sharon Negri note that such contact remains limited due to cougars’ avoidance behavior. See Hornocker and Negri, eds., *Cougar: Ecology and Conservation*, 97.

While self-emancipating through Alabama, John Parker armed himself with a large branch, knowing that the ‘forest was full of catamounts’.¹⁰⁵ Since swamplands and pine forests decreased visibility and muffled sounds, large predators moved almost undetected. Knowing he might not hear a catamount until it was too late, Parker’s branch helped provide him with a sense of security and control, while also pointing to the improvisational nature of self-emancipation, where freedom-seekers had to quickly respond to nonhuman threats. In the Blue Ridge Mountains, John Brown adopted a similar vigilance. He cautiously walked through a stone quarry being sure to ‘keep clear of the wild cats, panthers, and cat-amounts’ that he could hear growling and ‘prowling about’.¹⁰⁶ What Brown interpreted as prowling was likely felid territorial patrolling involving scent-marking, low grunts, and repeated pacing.¹⁰⁷ And although these types of feline behavior rarely led to an attack, the cats’ intentionally threatening behavior could nonetheless be terrifying.

Even when wild cats, wolves, or bears did not attack, their presence impacted how and where self-emancipators traveled. In this reactive geography full of potential confrontation, mammalian predators represented only part of the environmental threat. Reptiles, insects, and microbes presented additional challenges that could jeopardize self-emancipation attempts. Recounting his experiences moving through a country ‘infested with bears’, but also ‘reptiles, such as water moccasins and rattle snakes’, William H. Robinson succinctly summed up the multispecies reality of escape when he described having ‘several things to fear’.¹⁰⁸ Larger predatory animals communicated through vocalizations and claimed ground through territorial

¹⁰⁵ John P. Parker, *His Promised Land: The Autobiography of John P. Parker, Former Slave and Conductor on the Underground Railroad*, (New York: W.W. Norton, 1998), 47.

¹⁰⁶ Brown, *Slave Life in Georgia*, 73.

¹⁰⁷ On the territoriality behavior of cougars, see Hornocker and Negri, eds., *Cougar: Ecology and Conservation*, 109–113.

¹⁰⁸ William H. Robinson, *From Log Cabin to the Pulpit*, 30.

movement. Insects and other small-bodied organisms operated by claiming air, water, and skin. Mosquitoes tracked their human hosts by detecting carbon dioxide, lactic acid, and heat.¹⁰⁹ Ticks attached to humans after sensing their vibrations and body warmth.¹¹⁰ In both cases, their bites and stings were catalysts of tactical compromise as the insects' physiological targeting caused freedom-seekers to seek relief, change course, or reveal their location to pursuers.

John Little noted that 'the gallinippers were so bad' as he neared the Ohio River, that he 'had to make smoke to keep them off'.¹¹¹ The *Psorophora Ciliate*, one of the largest mosquitoes in the world that is well-known for its 'legendary aggressiveness', is colloquially termed the Gallinipper, a regional idiom that originated in the African American vernacular around the time of the publication of Little's account.¹¹² The smoke was effective in repelling the biting insects but inadvertently compromised the self-emancipation attempt as men on a nearby boat saw the fire 'and hailed, 'Boat ashore! runaway n——s!' Extinguishing the fire, the self-emancipators retreated away from the shoreline, but 'the mosquitoes were so bad' that the men risked detection yet again by starting another fire to deter the insects. The second fire led to a second detection, this time by 'a man with a gun', resulting in the freedom-seekers putting out the fire and hiding in a thicket, where they 'were almost devoured by mosquitoes for want of a little smoke'.¹¹³ Across diverse environments, freedom-seekers used similar tactics of manipulating

¹⁰⁹ Craig Montell, 'The Sensory Arsenal Mosquitoes Use to Find Us', *Trends in Parasitology*, vol. 41, no. 7 (2025): 593–595.

¹¹⁰ Daniel E. Sonenshine and R. Michael Roe, eds., *Biology of Ticks, Vol 1*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 13.

¹¹¹ Drew, *A North-Side View of Slavery*, 230.

¹¹² Benjamin Drew's publication of John Little's story in 1856 marks one of the earliest references to the 'Gallinipper'. For quotations and further elaboration on Gallinippers, see University of Florida, 'Psorophora ciliata (Fabricius)', *University of Florida Entomology & Nematology*, https://entnemdept.ufl.edu/creatures/AQUATIC/Ps_ciliata.htm; and R.F. Darsie, *Identification and Geographical Distribution of the Mosquitoes of North America, North of Mexico, 1st Edition*, (Gainesville, Florida: University Press of Florida, 2005).

¹¹³ Drew, *A North-Side View of Slavery*, 230.

plants, smoke, and fire to resist the sensory and strategic pressures imposed by biting and stinging insects.

In what appears to have been a widely adopted practice, Octave Johnson also ‘burned cypress leaves to make a smoke and keep away mosquitoes’ while self-emancipating through the swamps of New Orleans.¹¹⁴ Harriet Jacobs and her friend Peter adopted the same approach, using cypress smoke as a natural repellent.¹¹⁵ Later in the self-emancipation attempt, the pair again found themselves ‘covered with hundreds of mosquitoes’ in the Great Dismal Swamp. Without any nearby cypress trees, Peter burned tobacco, which drove away the insects, though the tobacco made Jacobs nauseous and gave her a severe headache.¹¹⁶

Such tactics could not eliminate the threat entirely, and insect bites and stings took a biological toll on freedom-seekers by inflaming skin, transmitting pathogens, and causing febrile illness. Coming ‘in dense swarms’, mosquitoes and sand flies made Letita and her fellow self-emancipators ‘wild with their poisonous stings’.¹¹⁷ Notably, Letita’s attribution of the term ‘poisonous’ to what entomologists now recognize as sensitivity to arthropod salivary proteins and the introduction of disease-causing parasites and flaviviruses, reveals an attempt to explain in vernacular language the physiological aftermath of being bitten.¹¹⁸ After coming down with ‘a burning fever’, Harriet Jacobs applied similar logic by observing a causal nexus between mosquito bites and fever.¹¹⁹ Jacobs attributing her illness to mosquitoes predates the ‘vector-

¹¹⁴ ‘Testimony of Corporal Octave Johnson before the American Freedmen’s Inquiry Commission’, Feb. 1864, filed with O-328 1863, Letters Received, series 12, Adjutant General’s Office, Record Group 94, *National Archives*.

¹¹⁵ Plant-based compounds such as terpenes repel insects such as mosquitoes. Montell, ‘The Sensory Arsenal Mosquitoes Use to Find Us’, 599–600. Mi Young Lee, ‘Essential Oils as Repellents against Arthropods’, *BioMed Research International*, vol. 2018 (2018): 2–3.

¹¹⁶ Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, 172.

¹¹⁷ Lintner, *Bond and Free*, 68.

¹¹⁸ Montell, ‘The Sensory Arsenal Mosquitoes Use to Find Us’, 591.

¹¹⁹ Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, 171.

borne disease theory' by nearly half a century, anticipating later scientific recognition that mosquitoes could serve as carriers of malaria, yellow fever, and other pathogens.¹²⁰

Mosquitoes and sandflies were only part of the entomological landscape capable of inducing maladies and causing illness in self-emancipators. The paths followed by self-emancipators also harbored ectoparasitic threats such as ticks that could embed themselves in clothing, skin, and hairlines. While describing the plague of Gallinippers as 'as tormenting as Pharaoh's', Israel Campbell exhibited particular awareness and anxieties about the pernicious effect of ticks with whom he unwillingly shared a hiding spot near the Ohio River. And while smoke deterred mosquitoes, the mint-like plant called the 'penny-royal [was] the only effectual antidote for' the poison of the seed tick, of which Campbell noted one hundred could be 'found on one stalk of grass'.¹²¹ Campbell's reference to tick-borne illness shows an understanding of the physiological consequences of ticks whose saliva, we now know, contains anticoagulants, immunosuppressants, and pathogens that can indeed function as a kind of poison in the bloodstream.¹²² Meanwhile, his knowledge of the medicinal properties of the pennyroyal points to the extensive network of information within and between plantations while simultaneously highlighting the versatility of the pennyroyal plant, recognized for its protective properties against ticks and also its utilization as an abortifacient by enslaved women.¹²³

¹²⁰ Important figures in the Mosquito-Vector Theory include Charles Laveran, Carlos Finlay, and Walter Reed. Francis E. G. Cox, 'History of the Discovery of the Malaria Parasites and Their Vectors', *Parasites & Vectors*, vol. 3, no. 1 (2010). On diseases, including Yellow Fever, in the South, see Margaret Humphreys, *Yellow Fever and the South*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992).

¹²¹ Israel Campbell, *An Autobiography. Bond and Free: or, Yearnings for Freedom, from My Green Brier House. Being the Story of My Life in Bondage, and My Life in Freedom*, (Philadelphia: C.E.P. Brinckloe & Co., 1861), 190–191. Modern botany demonstrates that American Pennyroyals are effective in repelling insects because of its Pulegone compound. Unfortunately, this compound is now considered carcinogenic and can lead to liver cancer. Steven Foster and James A. Duke, *A Field Guide to Medicinal Plants and Herbs of Eastern and Central North America*, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2000), 243.

¹²² Sonenshine, *Biology of Ticks*, 149–151, 183.

¹²³ For further information on the use of the pennyroyal plant as an abortifacient, see Fett, *Working Cures*, 63–65; and Foster and Duke, *A Field Guide to Medicinal Plants*, 243.

Insects did not stand alone as the only animals whose poisonous bites self-emancipators feared. Perhaps dreaded more than any other nonhuman animal, snakes occupied a vaunted position in the hierarchy of nonhuman animal challenges that self-emancipators faced. Similar to their insights on insects, some self-emancipators recognized snake bites as poisonous and venomous and therefore adopted preventive measures by avoiding the reptiles and preparing remedies to mitigate the physiological repercussions of envenomation. Israel Campbell, who was already wary of ticks, additionally worried about rattlesnakes, which he knew were ‘very thick in that country’. Campbell observed that rattlesnakes ‘always liked a nice dry place to lay in’, demonstrating attentiveness and familiarity with the thermoregulatory behavior of pit vipers.¹²⁴ These types of snakes sought out sun-warmed clearings, thereby inadvertently putting themselves in paths taken by self-emancipators, causing freedom-seekers such as Campbell to adjust plans accordingly.¹²⁵

Such attentiveness to snakes was common. The ubiquity of snakes on and around Southern plantations created an overlapping ecological niche between enslaved persons and snakes, resulting in a sophisticated and adaptive understanding of serpent behavior. Acquiring knowledge about reptiles through careful observation, hunting, and extensive networks of information exchange, self-emancipators encountered snakes with far-reaching familiarity and understanding. Frances Fedric encountered snakes during his self-emancipation attempt, however, the animals ‘crawled sluggishly across the ground, for it was autumn time’. Fedric seemed to have recognized that cooler conditions slowed down the ectothermic reptiles’ speed

¹²⁴ Campbell, *An Autobiography*, 157–158.

¹²⁵ Carl H. Ernst and Evelyn M. Ernst, *Venomous Reptiles of the United States, Canada, and Northern Mexico, Vol. I*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011), 6–7, 16, 21, 33–34, 105, 130.

and strike velocity.¹²⁶ However, Fedric remained vigilant, supposing that snakes were ‘surcharged with their deadly poison’ during the autumn months, a belief that, while inaccurate, points to a recognition of connections between environmental conditions and nonhuman animal risk.¹²⁷

Knowledge of, and attentiveness to, serpents rose commensurately with the danger posed by the animals, with the most frequent references reserved for rattlesnakes and ‘the ugly and dreaded moccasin’.¹²⁸ Rattlesnakes could be heard before they were seen, moccasins preferred slow moving water, and both were particularly aggressive when disturbed during breeding seasons.¹²⁹ While self-emancipating in North Carolina, Harry Grimes encountered what he believed to be a ‘poplar-leaf moccasin, the poisonest kind of a snake we have’.¹³⁰ While his wording suggests a taxonomy of danger created by experience and oral tradition, his action of chopping the snake in two with his axe reveals quick thinking and even faster action. ‘Hundreds of moccasin snakes’ surrounded Solomon Northup during an emancipation attempt, with ‘every log and bog—every trunk of a fallen tree’ seemingly coming alive with the animals. Most of the animals crawled away at his approach in a behavior consistent with the species’ preference for evasion. However, Northup occasionally inadvertently placed his hands and feet on the animals,

¹²⁶ Harry W. Greene, *Snakes: The Evolution of Mystery in Nature*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 29.

¹²⁷ Fedric, *Slave Life in Virginia and Kentucky*, 77.

¹²⁸ Parker, *His Promised Land*, 47.

¹²⁹ Greene, *Snakes: The Evolution of Mystery in Nature*, 225, 255.

¹³⁰ Williams, *Narrative of James Williams*, 75. It is difficult to ascertain whether Grimes is referencing the Copperhead Snake, also known as the ‘Poplar Leaf Snake’ and ‘highland moccasin’, or the Cottonmouth, also known as a Water Moccasin. While the Poplar Leaf Snake is one of the most common venomous snakes in Grimes’s North Carolina, the Water Moccasin, also widespread in North Carolina, is certainly one of the ‘deadliest snakes’ in the world. See R.W. McDiarmid, et al., *Snake Species of the World: A Taxonomic and Geographic Reference, Volume 1*, (Washington DC: Herpetologists’ League, 1999).

whom he described as the most ‘poisonous serpents—their bite more fatal than the rattlesnake’s’.¹³¹

The ability to interpret snake behavior was matched by an equally adaptive pharmacological repertoire. Faced with the daunting and very real possibility of being bitten by a venomous snake, self-emancipators relied on knowledge of traditional remedies and medicines and, if needed, trusted their care to those who ‘doctored among the slaves’.¹³² While hiding in the aptly named Snaky Swamp, a ‘reptile of some kind seized’ Harriet Jacobs’ leg. After freeing herself from the reptile’s bite, Jacobs concluded from the intense pain she soon felt that the animal was likely a snake, and the bite was poisonous.¹³³ Debilitated by the pain, Jacobs asked her friend to ‘prepare a poultice of warm ashes and vinegar’ that she applied to her swollen leg. Jacobs’ ad-hoc remedy was likely influenced by the Native American tradition of ‘applying wet ashes’ to snake bites and remedies used by white settlers, which included eggs and gunpowder poultices.¹³⁴

In spite of these interventions, the swelling around Jacobs’s snakebite persisted. With the ‘dread of being disabled’ by the snakebite, Jacobs and her friend sought the medical expertise of a respected elder within the local enslaved community, recognized for her knowledge of

¹³¹ Northup, *Twelve Years a Slave*, 139. Northup’s claim that the bite of a water moccasin is deadlier than the rattlesnake’s is also a difficult claim to pin down with certainty. Biologists posit that rattlesnake venom is less deadly than water moccasins. However, the volume of rattlesnake venom injected into its victim makes it particularly dangerous. Water Moccasin’s venom also has a lower likelihood of resulting in severe systemic envenomation. See Brandon K. Wills, ‘Water Moccasin Snake Toxicity’, *National Library of Medicine*, (2022).

¹³² Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, 151.

¹³³ Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, 150. In his fascinating literary analysis of *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, Thomas Constantinesco asserts that Jacobs’s frequent references to her physical pain are attempts to reappropriate a selfhood denied to her by a life of enslavement. See Thomas Constantinesco, *Writing Pain in the Nineteenth-Century United States*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022), 58, 67–71.

¹³⁴ Jacobs’s editor, Lydia Marie Child, notes that Native Americans applied wet ashes and plunged the limb into a liquid material to cure snake bites. See Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, 151. In his examination of the treatment of snake bites in frontier Kansas, Eugene D. Fleherty, describes poultices used by settlers that included eggs, gun powder, and ammonia. See Eugene D. Fleherty, ‘Apply salt, gunpowder, and the yellow of an egg: the treatment of rattlesnake bites by the western Kansas settler’, *Kansas History*, vol. 21, no. 1 (1998): 21–22.

remedies. Finding the ‘old woman, who doctored among the slaves’, Jacobs and her friend asked for what ‘was good for the bite of a snake’.¹³⁵ Sharla M. Fett explains that enslaved persons relied on ‘root doctors’ and healers such as this ‘old woman’, who acquired and transmitted their knowledge of envenomation and plant-based pharmacology. This point is corroborated by ‘root doctor’ William Edwards, who explained to an interviewer that enslaved persons had to find ‘remedies fuh our sickness and know how tuh cure snake bite’.¹³⁶ In Jacobs’s case, the woman advised her to ‘steep a dozen coppers in vinegar, overnight’, and to apply ‘cankered vinegar to the inflamed part’.¹³⁷

Jacobs and the many other self-emancipated enslaved persons who documented their experiences in autobiographical narratives after escaping bondage provide stories of survival and freedom. However, it is the exceptional nature of their survival and subsequent freedom that distinguishes them. Alternatively, the testimony of WPA respondents offers glimpses into the experiences of those whose self-emancipation attempts were hindered and thwarted by snakes. Recounting her childhood in Mississippi, Nancy Anderson recalled that ‘some of the slaves that had hard masters run off and stay in the woods’. One such self-emancipator was attacked by a coachwhip snake that ‘wrapped ‘round him, his arms and all’ and was ‘whooping him with its tail that gashes like a knife’. His screams reached the plantation and the self-emancipator was rescued by the overseer who ‘cut the snake’s head off with his big knife’, before carrying the man home covered in blood. While the enslaver ‘said he had no business off in the woods’, he

¹³⁵ Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, 150–151.

¹³⁶ Fett, *Working Cures*, 75–76.

¹³⁷ Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, 151. [Phonetic spellings in original].

‘didn’t whoop him’, instead rubbing ‘salt in the gashes’, which ‘stopped the blood’ and ‘helped kill the pison [poison]’.¹³⁸

Animal behavior existed on a parallel axis to human intention, and snakes and other nonhuman animals made no distinction between enslavers and the enslaved. During a pursuit of a self-emancipator from Texas through New Mexico, ‘a valuable horse belonging to Lieutenant Hardeman was bitten by a rattlesnake’. The snake incapacitated the horse and stopped the pursuit, giving the self-emancipator the time needed to extend the distance between him and his pursuers. Writing about the horse, the enslavers noted that the snakebite ‘does not necessarily cause death’, but the animal was ‘unable to keep up’.¹³⁹ Wild animals revealed the precariousness of flight while also demonstrating a lack of enslaver mastery over an environment animated by forces beyond their control. In addition, freedom-seekers enlisted the natural world and its nonhuman animals in their quests for freedom by countering the weaponized animals deployed against them through the manipulation of terrain, natural features, and nonhuman animals.

Weaponizing the Natural World

Self-emancipation attempts brought enslavers into ecosystems replete with dangerous nonhuman animals. And in a concession to the vulnerability of their power and mastery in such environments, enslavers turned to domesticated animals to aid in their pursuit of self-emancipators. Explaining this phenomenon to an interviewer from the WPA, Lizzie Johnson

¹³⁸ WPA, Nancy Anderson, *Slave Narratives (Arkansas, Part 1)*, 50–51. Coachwhip snakes are non-venomous, however, they are one of the largest snakes in North America and the fastest. Myths still abound in the Southeast regarding the Coachwhip snake, including the belief that they will kill a person and then insert its tail into the victim’s nose to see if the person is still breathing. Savannah River Ecology Lab, ‘Reptile and Amphibian Myths’, University of Georgia: Savannah River Ecology Lab. <https://archive-srel.uga.edu/outreach/factsheet/myths.html>

¹³⁹ Andrew Marschalk, ‘From Our Own Correspondent: Pope’s Expedition’, *The Belton Independent*, 26 June 1858, 3.

described her father's recollection that when 'slaves would go into the woods the masters would be afraid to go hunt them out without dogs'.¹⁴⁰

During these multispecies pursuits, human coordination was combined with the tracking, speed, and intimidation of trained domesticated animals. Lewis and Milton Clarke remembered that when an enslaved person attempted to self-emancipate, 'horses, dogs, overseers, planters, lawyers, doctors, ministers, were all summoned out on a grand n——r hunt'.¹⁴¹ During their respective self-emancipation attempts, John Brown recalled seeing his 'master and a good many strange people, some on horses and some on foot, who were exciting the hounds to follow' him, while Isaac Williams saw 'as many as fifteen men' hunting for him, 'some on horse, some on foot, with four hounds'.¹⁴²

Knowing that horses and 'well trained dogs would be put in requisition', self-emancipators such as Andrew Jackson 'resolved to avoid as much as possible, taking the roads', and instead entered swamps, forests, and thickets, where enslaver power met the unpredictability of terrain and nonhuman life.¹⁴³ These wild spaces disrupted and disabled slave patrols by constraining mobility, obscuring lines of sight, dispersing scent trails, and stopping coordinated movement. In some cases, self-emancipators used the landscape for concealment, relying on its physical inaccessibility to remain hidden from human and nonhuman animal pursuers. Isaac Williams hid from pursuers by digging a 'den in the ground'. And earlier in his self-emancipation attempt, he evaded capture by hiding beneath a 'thick cedar bush', using obstructive geometry to exploit the limited downward visibility of the men on

¹⁴⁰ WPA, Lizzie Johnson, *Slave Narratives (Arkansas, Part 4)*, 102.

¹⁴¹ Lewis and Milton Clarke, *Narratives of the Sufferings of Lewis and Milton Clarke, Sons of a Soldier of the Revolution, During a Captivity of More Than Twenty Years Among the Slaveholders of Kentucky, One of the So Called Christian States of North America*, (Boston: Published by Bela Marsh, 1846), 128–129.

¹⁴² William Craft, *Running a Thousand Miles for Freedom; or, the Escape of William and Ellen Craft from Slavery*, (London: William Tweedie, 1860), 25. Brown, *Slave Life in Georgia*, 64.

¹⁴³ Jackson, *Narrative and Writings of Andrew Jackson*, 15.

horseback.¹⁴⁴ Similarly, as horses and bloodhounds gained upon him in the marshlands of Maryland, another freedom-seeker entered a morass, sinking ‘down to his neck’ and hiding his head ‘beneath some bulrushes’.¹⁴⁵ The pursuing enslavers urged the dogs and horses into the morass, but the horses balked at the unstable footing and refused to ‘enter the bog’.¹⁴⁶ The freedom-seeker concluded that the horses refused to enter because they would not have found it ‘so easy to come out’.¹⁴⁷

These spaces sometimes pushed back with unanticipated risks from wild animals, each with their own territorial routines. Hamp Kennedy recounted a remarkable episode during which a self-emancipator hid in a tree so that the ‘n——r dogs wouldn’t git him’. But when he slid down the tree, he quickly realized he was sharing the hiding spot with three bear cubs. Unable to climb out because the tree ‘was so slick inside an’ so high’, the freedom-seeker sat trapped with the cubs as the mother bear threw ‘in half of a hog’ and later threw ‘in de other half’ of the animal. The bear’s food caching and maternal provisioning gave indication that the animal intended to stay nearby. And as expected, the mother bear returned an hour later. With the bear crawling backward down the tree, the self-emancipator grabbed the three-hundred-pound animal ‘by de tail and pulled hissself out’, scaring the bear so that ‘she ran in one direction’ and the freedom-seeker ran in the other.¹⁴⁸

Mag Johnson of Arkansas told a similar story to her WPA interviewer. Hiding in the woods as the horns sounded and dogs barked, four self-emancipators ‘spotted a hollow cypress

¹⁴⁴ Drew, *A North-Side View of Slavery*, 64–65.

¹⁴⁵ Samuel Ringgold Ward, *Autobiography of a Fugitive Negro: His Anti-slavery Labours in the United States, Canada, & England*, (London: John Snow, 1855), 183.

¹⁴⁶ This type of animal noncompliance is described by some scholars as a type of resistance. See Chris Philo and Chris Wilbert, ‘Animal Spaces, Beastly Places’, in Chris Philo and Chris Wilbert, eds., *Animal Spaces, Beastly Places: New Geographies of Human–Animal Relations*, (London: Routledge, 2000); and Swart, *Riding High* 100–102.

¹⁴⁷ Ward, *Autobiography of a Fugitive Negro*, 183.

¹⁴⁸ WPA, Hamp Kennedy, *Slave Narratives (Mississippi)*, 89. [Phonetic spellings in original].

with a long snag of a limb on it' in the water. With practiced dexterity, the freedom-seekers grabbed 'some vines and fixed up on the snag' to lower themselves into the hollowed tree for concealment. But as the first self-emancipator lowered into the tree, he felt a sudden bite on his foot. Letting out a cry as he extricated himself, the self-emancipator saw that he had 'brought up a cub on his nearly bare foot', firmly clamped with its teeth. Forced to leave the occupied tree, the self-emancipators climbed limb to limb so 'the dogs would lose the trail'. Below, the 'mama bear come and nap her cubs to another place', displaying classic relocation behavior in response to perceived threats.¹⁴⁹

Some encounters with wild animals demanded violent resolution. But even when a nonhuman animal threat was neutralized, its remains could attract avian scavengers whose circling flight patterns might compromise a hidden position. John White 'safely reached the swamp' where he hid until he encountered an eight-foot water snake. White pinned the snake to the ground and cut it in two. However, the snake's carcass attracted turkey buzzards, whose excellent eyesight and broad aerial range made them natural scouts of decay.¹⁵⁰ Recognizing the danger, the freedom-seeker buried the snake, 'lest the spot should be visited' by his pursuers.¹⁵¹

Conversely, with their quickness to flight when in danger, other avian species created a natural early warning detection system for freedom-seekers, alerting them to threats before they became visible or audible to human senses. Freedom-seekers who understood these behavioral cues could listen for what the environment was trying to tell them. In an example of this phenomenon, Frances Fedric had 'hurried into a dismal swamp' after being chased by three

¹⁴⁹ WPA, Mag Johnson, *Slave Narratives (Arkansas, Part 4)*, 108–109. [Phonetic spellings in original]. Herrero, *Bear Attacks*, 207.

¹⁵⁰ Heinrich, *Life Everlasting*, 82–83.

¹⁵¹ Elizabeth Merwin Wickham, 'A Lost Family Found; An Authentic Narrative of Cyrus Branch and His Family, Alias John White', *Manchester Journal*, 12 January 1869, 17–18.

bloodhounds. ‘Afraid that the dogs and men’ were still in pursuit, Frederick ‘listened, and listened again, to the slightest sound, made by the flapping of the wings of a bird’ which would have signaled the proximity of the pursuers, before proceeding further into the swamp.¹⁵² This capacity to read the alarm responses and vigilance behaviors of jays, thrashers, crows, and other sentinel birds became a diagnostic tool to gauge the movement of others nearby.¹⁵³

While terrain and the careful reading of bird movements offered ways to evade pursuers, some self-emancipators relied on ‘nature’s depository’ to injure patrollers and incapacitate their animals.¹⁵⁴ Entangling vines and concealed holes could be arranged to trip, trap, and disable in a way that reshaped the landscape defensively. These tactics frequently drew on intellectual networks within enslaved communities, as described by Minnie Fulkes of Virginia, who remembered ‘one ol’ brudder who studied fer em’. He observed patterns, routes favored by patrols, and the ways in which horses behaved under certain circumstances. Infusing expedience and practicality with a tinge of vengeance, the ‘ol’ brudder’ concluded his research and ‘told all de slaves how to git even with em’.¹⁵⁵

Weaponizing nature, he directed other enslaved persons ‘to tie grape vines an’ other vines across the road’. Calibrated to equine blind spots, these taut vines positioned at chest or leg height became environmental trip lines, capable of causing catastrophic falls. Fulkes recalled self-emancipators putting the idea into practice on multiple occasions as hunting parties would come ‘galantin’ wid their horses runnin’ so fast’ that the ‘vines would tangle ‘em up and cause the horses to stumble and fall’. Frequently breaking their ‘legs and horses’ too’, enslavers and their horses were fortunate to escape the snares with their lives. One ‘poor devil got tangled’,

¹⁵² Fedric, *Slave Life in Virginia and Kentucky*, 76–77.

¹⁵³ Marzluff and Angell, *In the Company of Crows and Ravens*, 149, 179.

¹⁵⁴ WPA, Minnie Fulkes’, *Slave Narratives (Virginia) Narratives*, 11–12.

¹⁵⁵ Works Project Administration, ‘Minnie Fulkes’, 12. [Phonetic spellings in original].

causing the horse to panic and drag the enslaver ‘til he fell off the horse’. The next day, he was ‘found in the road’ with the vines tangled around his neck in an accidental noose that strangled the enslaver to death.¹⁵⁶

Self-emancipators manipulated vertical entanglements and also altered the earth beneath their pursuers’ hooves, paws, and feet, in their efforts to engineer terrain into invisible zones of ambush. Manipulating soil ‘along the route of the patrollers’, enslaved persons in Alabama ‘would dig deep holes’ and camouflage them with foliage or loose cover. These traps exploited the equine tendency to trust stable footing, causing the animal to ‘fall in, sometimes breaking the leg of the horse’ and the ‘arm or leg of the rider’.¹⁵⁷ While disabling enslaver pursuits, these also highlight the vulnerabilities of those who relied so heavily on animal labor for control.

Josephus Brooks, the overseer of Franklin B. Sublett’s plantation, disclosed these vulnerabilities as well as the dangers to enslavers and their nonhuman animals when faced with these types of enslaved resistance. Recording his daily activities in his journal, Brooks described searching for a ‘negro camp’ when his horse detected danger, reared up, and threw him from her back.¹⁵⁸ Startled by vines, indentations in the ground, or an unfamiliar scent, the horse’s sensory perception outpaced her human rider’s as the animal disengaged from the command hierarchy, asserting her own somatic logic over the overseer’s control.¹⁵⁹ Revealing an interesting understanding and relationship with death and mortality, Brooks concluded the entry by noting that as a result of being thrown from his horse, he was ‘killed for some time’.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁶ WPA, Minnie Fulkes, 12. [Phonetic spellings in original].

¹⁵⁷ WPA, Winston Davis, *Slave Narratives (Florida)*, 88–89. McGreevy, *Equine Behavior*, 180–181.

¹⁵⁸ Josephus Brooks, ‘Account of the Farm’, 1859, Box 1, Folder 1, A102. Josephus Brooks Account of Franklin B. Sublett Plantation, Trinity County, Texas, 1859–1891, East Texas Research Center, Stephen F. Austin State University.

¹⁵⁹ In response to perceived danger, horses commonly bolt, rear up, or buck their rider. McGreevy, *Equine Behavior*, 18, 181.

¹⁶⁰ Brooks, ‘Account of the Farm’.

The environment provided ample resources and opportunities for enslaved persons facing hunting parties. Confronting the prospect of draconian punishments under the lash, J.H. Banks preemptively attacked his enslaver and overseer, laying heavy blows ‘on the back of the head, across the back, the ham-strings, and the hips’.¹⁶¹ As he continued the onslaught on his abusers, Banks realized he had ‘made two white men beg’, and that he should leave as he was ‘in the land of cotton and bloodhounds’. Urging himself to ‘fly, for your life and liberty’, Banks made his way to a cane brake swamp, where the ‘extensive tract of land, mostly under water’ and overgrown by reeds, would help to negate his pursuers’ advantages. Speaking as if the elements of nature were weaponized, Banks was confident that the water ‘would be the means of defeating the bloodhounds’.¹⁶²

Freedom-seekers weaponized water and leveraged waterways to thwart pursuing dogs and even drown the animals. With a head start ‘on the dogs that were trailing him’, William Sherman escaped from the Stokes’ plantation and hid among the floating logs of a large pond. The dogs followed him to the banks of the water and then ‘entered the pond to get their victim’. But the animals’ anatomical and behavioral adaptations, optimized for terrestrial speed and tracking, proved to be maladaptive in water.¹⁶³ Likely disoriented without clear visual markers, the dogs disappeared beneath the surface. The next sighting of the dogs ‘was their dead bodies floating upon the water of the pond’, while the ‘slave made his escape and was never seen again’. Writing as if the water possessed agency and motive, the author concluded by noting that

¹⁶¹ Jourden H. Banks, *A Narrative of Events of the Life of J. H. Banks, an Escaped Slave, from the Cotton State, Alabama, in America*, (Liverpool: M. Rourke, Printer, 1861), 63.

¹⁶² Banks, *A Narrative of Events of the Life of J. H. Banks*, 63–64.

¹⁶³ According to a recent study, changes in temperature and surface area can compromise a dog’s pursuit. Katylynn B. Sloan, et al., ‘The Manipulation of Odor Availability of Training Aids Used in Detection Canine Training’, *Frontiers in Allergy*, vol. 5 (2025).

the dogs ‘had been killed by the escape’.¹⁶⁴ Many freedom-seekers, such as Henry Bibb, came to recognize that if his enslaver was in pursuit, the ‘safest place...was in the water’.¹⁶⁵

Aside from its depth and turbidity, these waterways also opened up zoological opportunities for resistance as self-emancipators guided their pursuers into contact with the region’s aquatic resident predators whose patterns, behaviors, and territories were well known to the enslaved. Alligators, with their eighty conical teeth and the strongest bite of any animal, were among the most daunting of these animals.¹⁶⁶ And although enslaved persons such as Henry Bibb were ‘dreadfully frightened at the crocodiles’, many believed their knowledge of the animals would keep them ‘from a watery grave’.¹⁶⁷

In New Orleans, a group of freedom-seekers led eight pursuing dogs to water, knowing that alligators stalked the banks of most southern Louisiana bayous and swamps. Relying on the alligators’ underwater camouflage and attack patterns triggered by erratic splashing, the self-emancipators lured the dogs into the water. Once under water, alligators quickly caught and killed the dogs.¹⁶⁸ The formerly enslaved persons presumably recognized what conditions would provoke an alligator attack and they manipulated the encounter to their advantage. In the same part of southern Louisiana, Octave Johnson encountered a pack of twenty dogs released to capture him. Johnson led the pursuing dogs to Bayou Faupron and quickly jumped in the water.

¹⁶⁴ WPA, ‘William Sherman’, *Slave Narratives (Florida)*, 292.

¹⁶⁵ Bibb, *Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb*, 42. Kevin Dawson’s fascinating study on swimming culture in the Atlantic World details how some enslaved persons used water and swimming to ‘blunt white dominance’. See Kevin Dawson, *Undercurrents of Power: Aquatic Culture in the African Diaspora*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018), 16–18, 22.

¹⁶⁶ Measured at 13,172 Newtons, the bite from an adult American Alligator is regarded as the strongest laboratory-measured bite of any animal. See Gregory M. Erickson, et al., ‘Comparison of bite-force performance between long-term captive and wild American alligators (*Alligator mississippiensis*)’, *Journal of Zoology*, vol. 262, no. 1 (2004).

¹⁶⁷ Bibb, *Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb*, 42.

¹⁶⁸ See Isaac Johnson, *Slavery Days in Old Kentucky*, in Dawson, *Undercurrents of Power*, 21. Grigg and Kirshner, *Biology and Evolution of Crocodylians*, 48, 129.

The dogs followed Johnson into the Bayou, their movements providing stimuli to activate the alligators' lateral line sensitivity and strike reflexes. Johnson recalled that 'the alligators caught six of them', allowing him to escape.¹⁶⁹

Self-emancipators also turned to alligators during encounters with other predatory animals. Relying on what they knew of reptilian and mammalian behavior, some freedom-seekers orchestrated encounters between species that seem almost unbelievable. Escaping through the waterways of Mississippi, Phill Sharp found himself trapped between 'a large panther, on the opposite bank, awaiting his arrival' and 'a large alligator, with his mouth wide open, pursuing him'. Sharp navigated his way through the waters, drawing the pursuing reptile closer to the panther. When he got close to the shore, the panther leapt 'on the back of the alligator', giving Sharp the chance to slip past the fighting animals and escape unharmed. Looking back on the encounter, Sharp recalled that 'the two had an awful fight', though he 'did not wait to see which came off best'.¹⁷⁰

Waterways could also be used tactically, offering quieter forms of resistance. And as enslaved persons strategically engaged with the natural world, including waterways and its aquatic animals, they came to understand that nature could be used to disrupt dogs' sensory thresholds and decision-making processes. An enslaved woman self-emancipating from Mississippi brought pursuing dogs precariously close to the 'deadly moccasin snake and the alligator'. Even though the animals did not attack the dogs, the freedom-seeker managed 'to evade the dogs by wading in pools and streams of water', knowing that 'they would lose the scent and be thrown off her trail' whenever she entered the water.¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁹ 'Testimony of Corporal Octave Johnson'.

¹⁷⁰ Anderson, *Life and Narrative of William J. Anderson*, 27. For alligators' lateral line system, see Grigg, *Biology and Evolution of Crocodylians*, 48.

¹⁷¹ Coffin, *Reminiscences of Levi Coffin*, 254–255.

Dogs thrive with continuous ground-level scents. Water disorients their tracking abilities by stopping the continuity of airborne chemical particles.¹⁷² This point was explained by many, including an unnamed self-emancipator who had ‘been hunted by the hounds a great many times’, but had avoided the animals by going across water to put ‘them off the scent’.¹⁷³ Allen Parker anticipated encountering dogs and strategically planned to ‘give them the slip’ when he ‘came to a stream of water’. Once near water, he ‘would wade or swim across it’ so the ‘dogs would lose the scent’. Skillfully incorporating the natural environment into his strategy of escape, Parker ‘managed to evade his pursuers’.¹⁷⁴ Shifting from confronting animals to confusing them, these modes of resistance undid the sensory grasps of dogs, whose decisions whether to trust a broken trail or follow new stimuli proved decisive.

While the vast geographic landscape of the American South was replete with pools, streams, bayous, bays, estuaries, and other waterways, enslaved persons could not always count on readily available water, particularly in drier climates. In these circumstances, freedom-seekers relied on a large repertoire of chemical countermeasures, both prepared and improvised. Isaac Williams admitted that the canine ‘power of scent was wonderful’. Still, he, like so many others, did not treat their sensory prowess as immutable, as he reminded readers of the ways in which enslaved persons could ‘throw them off’ their track or confound them by putting them ‘on the wrong scent’. Williams specifically recollected that ‘spruce pine and strong onions’ were the best articles to ‘confuse the nose of the most experienced bloodhound’ as these masked or

¹⁷² William G. Syrotuck, *Scent and the Scenting Dog*, (Mechanicsburg, Pennsylvania: Barkleigh, 2000), 99. There are specific dog breeds today that thrive by tracking scents through water. However, I have yet to uncover any documentary evidence from this time period, from either enslavers or the enslaved, that points to a dog’s ability to track across water. On the mechanisms behind a dog being able to track in water, see Tom Osterkamp, ‘K9 Water Searches: Scent and Scent Transport Considerations’, *Journal of Forensic Sciences*, vol. 56, no. 4 (2011): 907–908.

¹⁷³ By a Runaway Slave, ‘Recollections of Slavery by a Runaway Slave, A slave narrative serialized in *The Emancipator* in 1838’, *The Emancipator*, 23 August 1838.

¹⁷⁴ Parker, *Recollections of Slavery Times*, 29.

overwhelmed the more volatile and transient human scent trails and engaged the dogs' sensory judgement.¹⁷⁵

Faced with imminent apprehension, James Watkins turned to the sternutatory effects of pepper against his nonhuman animal captors. Watkins trampled a circle around him and then filled it with a 'good quantity of snuff and ground cayenne pepper', creating a cloud of capsaicin. As the dogs and men on horseback approached, the dogs were temporarily overcome by the pepper's irritant alkaloids and 'began sneezing terribly', causing the animals to lose his scent entirely and reassess whether to continue pursuit.¹⁷⁶ Inducing a similar effect as pepper, enslaved persons in Missouri used the acrid Indian turnip, which they would dry, pulverize, and tie around 'their feet to keep off de trail of bloodhounds'.¹⁷⁷ Gus Smith attested to the plant's efficacy as well as its widespread usage, noting that 'no bloodhound could trail a bit further after smelling it', resulting in 'colored folks running away' using 'it all de time'.¹⁷⁸

While pepper and Indian turnip required preparation and forethought, the environment provided enslaved persons with spontaneous means of scent resistance, including wild onions. As he prepared to 'keep the bloodhounds' and men on horseback from following him, Edward Hicks 'gathered up some wild onions, and knew what to do'. The hunting party chased Hicks throughout the day but could not follow him beyond where he had scattered the onions.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁵ Williams, *Sunshine and Shadow of Slave Life*, 72. On the limitations of scent-tracking, see Kokocińska-Kusiak, et al., 'Canine Olfaction', 15–16.

¹⁷⁶ James Watkins, *Narrative of the Life of James Watkins, Formerly a 'Chattel' in Maryland, U.S.; Containing an Account of His Escape from Slavery, Together with an Appeal on Behalf of Three Millions of Such 'Pieces of Property', Still Held Under the Standard of the Eagle*, (Bolton: Kenyon and Abbatt, 1852), 21.

¹⁷⁷ On the Indian turnip (*Arisaema triphyllum*), see Arthur Haines, *Flora Novae Angliae: A Manual for the Identification of Native and Naturalized Higher Vascular Plants of New England*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), 94–95.

¹⁷⁸ WPA, Gus Smith, *Slave Narratives (Missouri)*, 332. [Phonetic spellings in original].

¹⁷⁹ Drew, *A North-Side View of Slavery*, 263–264.

Knowledge of scent chemistry that drew on plants and household materials circulated through conversation and memory, creating a pharmacology of evasion.

Scent resistance could mean the difference between life and death for self-emancipators. And from the recently deceased, some enslaved persons found the possibility of a new life of freedom. Pursued by a man who hunted enslaved persons in Mississippi, John Warren dug ‘into a grave where a man had been buried’. Removing the dirt and revealing the corpse, Warren got ‘the dust of the man’ and made ‘it into a paste with water’.¹⁸⁰ After taking the cadaverous mixture and applying it to his ‘feet, knees, and elbows’, Warren assured himself that ‘the dogs won’t follow that’.¹⁸¹ While graverobbing as a form of scent resistance may strain credulity, the bacterial volatiles and cadaverine compounds released from decaying soft tissue likely saturated and confused dogs’ olfactory discrimination.¹⁸² Moreover, evidence suggests that the macabre practice took place throughout the slaveholding South. Suggesting the commonplace nature of the tactic, Page Harris of Maryland recalled that ‘it was always said that slaves, when they ran away, would try to go through a graveyard’ or acquire ‘dirt from the grave or someone that had been recently buried’. Sprinkling the dirt or dust from a corpse behind them, ‘the dogs could not follow the fleeing slave, and would howl and return home’.¹⁸³

Using the dead to evade canines combined superstition and spiritualism with observation and evidence-based empiricism. Archaeological studies have demonstrated the significance of the dirt put onto graves in African American culture. In the nineteenth-century American South,

¹⁸⁰ For an archaeological examination of the funeral and burial practices of enslaved persons, see Ross W. Jamieson, ‘Material Culture and Social Death: African–American Burial Practices’, *Historical Archaeology*, vol. 29, no. 4 (1995).

¹⁸¹ Drew, *A North–Side View of Slavery*, 186.

¹⁸² Arpad A. Vass et al., ‘Decomposition Chemistry of Human Remains: A New Method for Determining Postmortem Interval’, *Journal of Forensic Sciences*, vol. 47, no. 3 (2002). A.E. Lasseter, et al., ‘Cadaver Dog and Handler Team Capabilities in the Recovery of Buried Human Remains in the Southeastern United States’, *Journal of Forensic Sciences*, vol. 48 (2003).

¹⁸³ WPA, Page Harris, *Slave Narratives (Maryland)*, 24.

some enslaved mourners continued the West African ritual of tossing dirt into the grave, mirroring transplanted Kongo practices that revered the ‘sacredness of earth from a grave’. Believed ‘to embody the spirit of the deceased’, the dirt from graves was said to serve the owner as a charm.¹⁸⁴ Annie Huff acknowledged that ‘superstition was usually a part of the life of a slave’, and those seeking to self-emancipate typically ‘collected quantities of soil from a graveyard’ sprinkling it ‘in their tracks’. While this practice may have held a spiritual dimension, Huff conceded that they primarily used this precaution ‘to throw the dogs off the scent’.¹⁸⁵ Regardless of the practice’s spiritual element, cadaverous material and grave dirt proved highly effective. Samuel Simeon Andrews, a formerly enslaved person living in Jacksonville, Florida, recalled that self-emancipators commonly smoked ‘graveyard dust’ onto their feet before emancipation attempts, which caused dogs to turn back from their targets.¹⁸⁶ In deploying ancestral material against enslavers’ animals, freedom-seekers folded centuries of ritual knowledge into a manipulation of sensory perception.

And once again, other nonhuman animals proved critical to self-emancipation attempts. Enslaved persons such as Charles Ball believed animals were the most effective means to thwart a pursuing dog. Ball noted that dogs usually find their target ‘if not thrown off the scent by the men, horses, and dogs crossing his course’.¹⁸⁷ Other mammals, in particular large-bodied ones like horses and mules, chemically scrambled scent trails, making it difficult for dogs to isolate the scent of a freedom-seeker.¹⁸⁸ James Curry traveled through Dumfries unmolested by the town’s many bulldogs because he was on horseback.¹⁸⁹ Similarly, Henry Bibb knew enslavers

¹⁸⁴ Jamieson, ‘Material Culture and Social Death’, 49–50.

¹⁸⁵ WPA, Annie Huff, *Slave Narratives (Georgia, Part 2)*, 235–236.

¹⁸⁶ WPA, Samuel Simeon Andrews, *Slave Narratives (Florida)*, 15.

¹⁸⁷ Ball, *Fifty Years In Chains*, 184.

¹⁸⁸ Agata Kokocińska-Kusiak, “Canine Olfaction: Physiology, Behavior, and Possibilities for Practical Applications,” *Animals*, vol. 11, no. 8 (2021), 11.

¹⁸⁹ Curry, *Narrative of James Curry*, 1.

would pursue him ‘with the bloodhounds by their taking’ his track, but to confuse the animals, he decided to ‘ride off on one of the Deacon’s mules’.¹⁹⁰ These observations demonstrate a recognition that dogs interpret overlapping scent signals and decide which scents to prioritize and which to abandon.

Enslaved persons recognized the agency, perceptual judgement, and self-willed intentionality of even the most well-trained animals. Through empiricism, daily interactions, participating in hunts, and forming relationships with dogs, enslaved persons acquired a granular understanding of the animals and used it to self-emancipate. They observed how a multi-layered chemical topography of competing scents could short-circuit the animals’ olfactory abilities, and how the multispecies environmental chaos of escape could overstimulate disciplined animals.

Manipulating the animals’ sensory system, freedom-seekers utilized competing stimuli to fracture the dogs’ primary and unitary focal point. While reductive terms such as ‘prey drive’ oversimplify canine cognition, certain nonhuman animals seemed to provoke a stimulus response in dogs that overrode or negated their previous training.¹⁹¹ Escaping through areas with many nonhuman animals, some enslaved persons recognized how dogs made decisions while in pursuit, weighing the pull of novel movements or scents against the familiar cues of training. Rabbits, raccoons, hogs, and cattle carried the potential to attract the dog’s attention and engage the animal’s curiosity and desire to investigate, pursue, and seize. On the run from men and their dogs, Israel Campbell and his companion traversed the woods until they came to a hog pen. Recognizing the hogs as surrogate targets for pursuing canines, the men jumped the fence into the pen where they provoked the animals and ‘put the dogs to fighting with the hogs’.

¹⁹⁰ Bibb, *Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb*, 121.

¹⁹¹ According to animal behaviorist Karen B. London, ethologists use the words ‘prey drive’ as a linguistic crutch to refer to an ‘unknown and variable internal state’. Karen B. London, ‘Prey Drive in Dogs: Fact or Fiction? Is the term ‘prey drive’ correct terminology or jargon?’, *Kinship*, (2012).

Confronted by the confusion of squealing hogs and scattering bodies, the dogs changed their target salience, and instead, attacked the hogs ‘until the men came up’.¹⁹²

These types of interactions were part of a recurring strategy. Leonard Black was facing imminent capture by pursuing dogs, when unexpectedly, the commotion of the hunt ‘scared up a rabbit’. The rabbit sprinted across the path, and its erratic movements stole away the dogs’ attention. Interested in the fresh scent and new visual stimuli, the dogs veered away from Black, as he was ‘safely delivered out of their hands’.¹⁹³ Whenever dogs’ scent-tracking training collided with the animals’ own interests and the unpredictability of other nonhuman animals, the results could be extremely varied.

After being trailed for over six miles by patrols in Kentucky, Lewis Clarke felt the grip of desperation, thinking himself to be ‘nearer dead’. With the dogs steadily gaining on him, Clarke found a lifeline in the form of certain death for young cattle. Redirecting the dogs’ ‘attention to some calves that were in the road’, the canines moved past their human target and began attacking the defenseless calves, affording Clarke the chance to ‘escape being half torn to pieces by the dogs’. Clarke acknowledged that ‘the dogs are so trained that they will seize a man as quick as anything else’.¹⁹⁴ In this case, the animals seized the immediate stimuli in front of them rather than continuing to track the memory of human scent.

Dogs’ sense of hearing could also draw the animal away from its assigned task with equal force. Archer Alexander had lost hope of escaping the hounds when the ‘barking of a coon’ began ringing out several hundred yards away. Registering sounds from multiple frequencies

¹⁹² Campbell, *An Autobiography. Bond and Free*, 195. On dogs’ abilities to maintain target salience, see Lucrezia Lonardo, et al., ‘Do Dogs Preferentially Encode the Identity of the Target Object or the Location of Others’ Actions?’ *Animal Cognition*, vol. 27, no. 28 (2024): 2, 12–13.

¹⁹³ Leonard Black, *The Life and Sufferings of Leonard Black, a Fugitive from Slavery. Written by Himself*, (New Bedford: Press of Benjamin Lindsey, 1847), 26–27.

¹⁹⁴ Clarke, *Narrative of the Sufferings of Lewis Clarke*, 79.

with outer ear mobility to help pinpoint sounds, the dog heard the raccoon, and ‘off he started as fast as his legs would carry him’.¹⁹⁵ Speaking directly to the subversion of the animal’s training, the editor of Anderson’s volume noted that the raccoon ‘was too much even for his faithfulness’. Years of training could not fully undo the dog’s ‘first and most earnest vocation’ of chasing small animals. Jumping to conclusions faster than their dog jumped to pursue the raccoons, the unsuspecting enslavers assumed the dog was chasing the enslaved persons as the animal’s training intended, never realizing the animal had made a different choice. The enslavers hurriedly followed the dog, allowing Anderson to quietly walk towards freedom, thinking about ‘them men fooled so bad by their own dawg’.¹⁹⁶

Recognizing dogs’ conditioning and the concomitant verbal and gestural cues as the means through which interspecies communication took place, enslaved persons co-opted and hijacked the human-canine command structure.¹⁹⁷ Enslaved persons knew what gestures to use, what sounds to make, what to say, and how and when to say it. While an enslaver’s finger on the trigger of a firearm could unfailingly fire the weapon, and an enslaver’s arm could always bring down the lash of a whip, the enslaver’s hand gripping the leash of a trained canine could never count on the same degree of certainty once he let go of the tether. In those moments, the dog’s capacity for choice and interpretation came into play as the animal weighed conflicting cues and evaluated to which it would respond.

This deep understanding of canine behavior and cognitive abilities developed through long-earned practical experience and by observing enslavers and overseers hunting alongside the

¹⁹⁵ Dogs’ inner and middle ears have evolved in a way that lets them hear at multiple frequencies. This combined with the mobility of their outer ears helps the animals pinpoint sound localization with high degrees of accuracy. Matthew J. Mason and Madaleine A. Lewis, ‘Structure and scaling of the middle ear in domestic dog breeds’, *Journal of Anatomy*, vol. 245 (2024): 324–325.

¹⁹⁶ Eliot, *The Story of Archer Alexander*, 49–52. [Phonetic spellings in original].

¹⁹⁷ On the canine command structure, see Miklósi, *Dog Behaviour, Evolution, and Cognition*, 5–8, 179–185.

animals. John Jackson ‘started off for the swamp’, but was quickly pursued by five dogs. With the enslaver following the dogs, urging them on with commands of ‘suboy! suboy! catch him’, Jackson recognized the parallels to a fox or hare hunt in which he and the dogs had previously participated. Ingeniously recreating the scene of a fox hunt, Jackson clapped his hands as ‘the dogs came level’, mimicking the enslaver’s calls of ‘suboy! suboy! catch him! as if both’ he and his enslaver ‘were in chase of a fox or hare ahead of’ them. The dogs interpreted these cues through the lens of past hunts. By tapping into the dogs’ training and episodic memory, Jackson successfully recreated an alternate reality for the animals, sending them on their way where they ‘were soon out of sight’, allowing Jackson to escape.¹⁹⁸

While escaping along the banks of the Wabash River, Andrew Jackson’s movements were uncovered by a man who took ‘his dog and gun’ and made chase for the self-emancipator. As the dog bounded toward him ‘like a deer’, Jackson surmised that the dog was not ‘perhaps well trained’, and he decided to exploit this by attempting to ‘set him upon the cattle’. Echoing the same tactic used by John Jackson, he attempted to mimic the dog’s handler by clapping his hands as he ‘ran and hallowed at the top of his voice, ‘s’t-aboy! S’t-aboy!’” The plan worked as the dog heard the familiar cue and noticed the sudden movement of the cattle, choosing to reassign its attention. The dog ‘darted like lightning’ past Jackson, ‘through the tall grass in chase of the cattle, who ran with their heads erect snuffling like wild beasts’. Executing Jackson’s commands, the dog attacked the man’s valuable cattle. Powerless to stop Jackson’s control over the dog, the ‘disappointed man-hunter’ attempted to call off the dog but to no avail.¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁸ Jackson, *The Experience of a Slave in South Carolina*, 15. For further elaboration on dogs’ episodic memory, see Miklósi, *Dog Behaviour, Evolution, and Cognition*, 29.

¹⁹⁹ Jackson, *Narrative and Writings of Andrew Jackson*, 16.

Recognizing that dogs were constantly interpreting signals and making decisions in response to stimuli and human communication, enslaved persons subverted the animals' command structure even in proximity to their handlers. As John White made for the woods, his overseer caught up and struck him on the shoulder with a club. Reacting swiftly as another blow came down, 'John caught the strong club away from him and sprang into the woods'. White's act of defiance enraged his pursuer, who 'immediately clapped to his dogs', commanding the animals to 'Catch him! catch him!' White followed suit, mirroring the overseer's commands while clapping his hands, and calling, 'Catch him! Catch him!' while 'pointing ahead'. Hearing the same familiar words and observing the same directional gesture, the dogs interpreted the command as a prompt to continue forward. Both the overseer and White watched as 'the dogs went by him'. White 'turned off the way he wished to go, and safely reached the swamp without further molestation' as the overseer went off to find the dogs.²⁰⁰

As a result of enslavers training their dogs to obey human commands, in addition to the animals' predisposition to demonstrate obedience to even unfamiliar individuals, the line between handlers' commands and that of others could easily dissolve.²⁰¹ Trailed by his enslaver and a 'good many strange people' on horses, John Brown saw the hunting party 'exciting the hounds to follow' him. Though they were gaining on him, Brown observed that the dogs 'minded the strange people, or anyone who urged them on'. Inserting himself into the hunt and assuming the role of a participant rather than the target, Brown 'began to halloo and shout' to the dogs 'as lustily as anybody'. Having established himself as a member of the hunting party by imitating the words and actions of the enslavers, Brown hijacked the animals' command structure, yelling

²⁰⁰ Wickham, 'A Lost Family Found', 17.

²⁰¹ While dogs tested in modern animal behaviorist studies show preference towards their owners and familiar people, the animals still show obedience to unfamiliar persons, especially if they are assertive. See Kerepesi, 'Dogs and their human companions', 27–28.

to the dogs, 'Catch him; hey, fellow, hey, fellow; catch him'. In response to Brown's commands, the animals 'wagged their tails, and, excited by' him, appeared 'quite fooled and jumping and looking about, as though they sought to find out what we were all after'.²⁰²

John Brown, John White, Dinah, Harriet Jacobs, and many others survived imminent capture by being able to identify and disarm nonhuman animal threats. Enslaved persons manipulated environmental features, harnessed the resources of the natural world, including its nonhuman animals, and drew on empirical knowledge to neutralize the domesticated animals trained to track and hunt them. Conscious of the pseudoscientific sensory training used by enslavers to scent and sight track self-emancipators, enslaved persons created inter- and intra-plantation networks of information and methods used to subvert, resist, and even befriend their potential canine captors. Looking at this unique historical moment through the contemporary lenses of scientific research in ethology and veterinary studies reveals the many ways enslaved persons comprehended and engaged with animal agency and intentionality during their escapes.

With so much tilted towards enslavers and their allies, domesticated animals and the ability of the enslaved to exercise some degree of control over them demonstrated that in the geography of self-emancipation, enslaver power was conditional and not absolute. Domesticated animals served as a living manifestation of this nuanced power dynamic. While these animals were trainable, their self-willed agency and intentionality proved their fallibility. Evidence demonstrates that dogs and equine animals traditionally utilized by enslavers to intimidate, guard, and hunt freedom-seekers assumed a more multifaceted role during self-emancipation attempts that has heretofore been understudied by historians. Freedom-seekers and enslavers shared the geography of self-emancipation with dogs and horses, as well as the insects, reptiles,

²⁰² Brown, *Slave Life in Georgia*, 86–87.

and mammals that inhabited these complex ecosystems previously unclaimed, and in many cases unseen, by humans. Symbiotic yet adversarial, this interspecies borderland became a meeting ground where human intent intersected with the agency of nonhuman animals.

The seemingly unassailable grip of enslavers was, in reality, a delicate equilibrium subject to disruptive human and nonhuman forces. Regardless of the strength of enslavers' grip on power, the reins and leashes of control were frayed and torn under the constant dual stress and centrifugal force of enslaved resistance and animal intentionality. The next chapter moves from these acts of self-emancipation to the violence and reprisals that followed, focusing on how enslavers weaponized animals to punish and deter escape. It will also show how self-emancipators continued to rely on animals in familiar, but sometimes newly adapted ways, once they reached sites of freedom. Situating animal agency and intentionality within a wider frame, the next chapter additionally shows how the struggles over self-emancipation, and the animals entangled within them, reverberated across state and national borders, fueling diplomatic disputes and exacerbating sectional tensions within the United States.

Chapter Three: ‘To the Ends of the Earth’: Scarred Bodies and Fractured Nations during the Crisis of Slavery

‘From sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth. They that dwell in the wilderness shall bow before him’.

Psalm 72:8-9

As if he was stretching his arms through the very pages of his autobiographical narrative, William Street seemed to offer to his readers physical forensic proof of the scars he received from weaponized animals, emphatically exclaiming: ‘I have the marks—here they are on my wrist’. Street’s enslaver and a ‘man named T—’ had tracked him across state lines before unleashing three bloodhounds to viciously punish the self-emancipator. Street killed one of the bloodhounds, but the others tore at his flesh as his cries of ‘Oh Lord! Oh Lord!’ echoed through the woods. Eventually, the enslaver ‘made the dogs let go’ of their bone-crushing hold, but replaced fangs with metal as he fastened chains around Street’s wrists.¹

While dragging Street back to Mississippi on horseback, Street’s enslaver and T— argued over what to do with the self-emancipator. T— demanded retribution for his slain bloodhound, refusing an offer of compensation from Street’s enslaver for five hundred dollars. Ultimately, Street’s enslaver proposed a transaction with an unsettling juxtaposition of human and canine value, offering the self-emancipator to T— as remuneration. T— reluctantly accepted the offer but protested that the dog ‘was worth more than him, d—n him’.² The trading in human flesh for dog flesh was all for naught, however, as Street managed to escape north of the border to

¹ Drew, *A North-Side View of Slavery*, 288–289.

² For an excellent study of the monetary value placed upon enslaved persons, see Daina Ramey Berry, *The Price for Their Pound of Flesh: The Value of the Enslaved, from Womb to Grave, in the Building of a Nation*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 2017). Berry points out that enslaved persons were typically appraised at between \$250 and \$1,500, with children and the elderly valued less monetarily. Berry, *The Price for Their Pound of Flesh*, 90–98.

Canada, where Benjamin Drew recorded and published his story in his widely-read *North-Side View of Slavery: or the Narratives of Fugitive Slaves in Canada*.

As established in the previous chapter, self-emancipators sought freedom throughout North America, encountering inhospitable ecologies, hostile populations, and weaponized animals. Freedom-seekers developed an understanding of nonhuman animals, recognizing that each had distinct perceptions and behaviors that could shape the fates of both pursuer and pursued. This recognition reframed emancipation as a contested natural space, in which freedom-seekers could gain strategic advantages by manipulating the actions of nonhuman animals. But as William Street's narrative reveals, nonhuman animals remained prominent after emancipation attempts through apprehensions, animal-induced punishments, vengeance killings, property restitution, and in the enduring influence of self-emancipators' testimonies.

Through a multidisciplinary approach that integrates environmental history and animal studies with legal history and political science, this chapter focuses on the aftermath of self-emancipation attempts as escapes set into motion a cascade of crises across plantations, courtrooms, and the corridors of government in the United States and its neighbors, Canada and Mexico. For enslaved persons, attempting self-emancipation could mean reaching sites of freedom on horseback or alongside a dog, or it could bring the violent animal-induced consequences of capture. But as will be shown, self-emancipation attempts reverberated beyond personal acts of attempted liberation. Each freedom-seeker's footsteps created a rupture in the plantation system. The effects of which rippled outwards as enslavers responded with escalating violence, legal maneuvering, and political entreaties.

Runaway and 'taken up' advertisements coalesced into networks of surveillance. Courtrooms became forums of adjudication with enslavers suing for the return of freedom-

seekers and the animals they rode to freedom. Self-emancipation had become a legal crisis over property and sovereignty. As these issues metastasized into national and transnational disputes, enslavers attempted to shape foreign relations and national politics. Self-emancipation then became a reckoning over the institution of slavery, ultimately determining the laws of the United States and its trajectory towards disunion.³

This chapter firstly focusses on enslavers' first response to self-emancipation, which was one of animal-aided pursuit and recapture. Fast, mobile horses endowed with incredible cardiovascular capacities, and dogs trained to follow the subtle signatures of human scent, became indispensable extensions of enslaver reach.⁴ In response to these nonhuman threats to their freedom, some enslaved persons responded by attacking these animals during the moment of pursuit. Others eliminated these threats before they emerged by preemptively poisoning dogs or incapacitating horses. Killing an enslaver's dog struck at the living heart of the plantation order. Enslavers responded with necropolitical rituals. They blurred boundaries between human and nonhuman bodies by forcing enslaved persons to consume canine flesh, while killing other enslaved persons and feeding their bodies to the very dogs they had attacked. In other cases, enslavers staged elaborate funerals for animals killed by enslaved persons, and then compelled these enslaved persons to attend the event and bear witness to a ceremony that consecrated the animal's role as an enforcer and emblem of planter-class power.

Enslavers weaponized a multitude of nonhuman animals to punish captured self-emancipators. They used horses to trample and drag self-emancipators, while others incorporated

³ Historians have increasingly credited self-emancipation attempts as fundamental to the tensions that eventually brought the United States to war. Some of the most important works on this topic include R.J.M. Blackett's, *The Captive's Quest for Freedom*; and Sinha's work, *The Slave's Cause*.

⁴ Beebe, 'Using Scent Detection Dogs in Conservation Settings', 7. Clayton and Hobbs, 'The Role of Biomechanics in Understanding the Horse-Rider Interaction'.

the vicious practice of cat-hauling into their arsenal of torture. Even rats, birds, and insects were weaponized in slow, torturous punishment designed to prevent recidivism.⁵ This chapter also draws on the concept of animal noncompliance and resistance, as introduced by scholars such as Shelly R. Scott, Sandra Swart, and Jason Hribal, to provide examples of nonhuman animals acting beyond the control of enslavers during acts of punishment.⁶ Horses occasionally broke loose from enslavers' reins, cats refused to cooperate, and dogs turned on and attacked the enslavers who commanded them. Unpredictability undermined punishments in a way that turned displays of dominance into moments of chaos. Punishments were also just as likely to escalate beyond enslavers' intentions, resulting in debilitating injuries or death.

These punishments often failed to achieve their intended purpose of stymying self-emancipation attempts. Enslaved persons continued to seek freedom, resulting in enslavers turning to runaway advertisements, in which they used animals or animal-inflicted biomarkers to identify self-emancipators. Wounded bodies became living records that catalogued dog bites, snake bites, and horse-inflicted injuries. Abolitionists recognized the evidentiary power of these runaway advertisements and repurposed descriptions of self-emancipators' animal-inflicted scars and injuries to reveal the systemic multispecies violence inherent within the plantation system, demonstrate the urgency in ending that system, and elevate the rhetoric of antislavery. For freedom-seekers who reached Northern states, Canada, and Mexico, their scarred bodies transformed into testaments of resistance and corroborating evidence of the horrors of slavery.⁷

⁵ For a brief historiographical overview of the weaponization of insects, see Jeffrey A. Lockwood, 'Insects as Weapons of War, Terror, and Torture', *Annual Review of Entomology*, vol. 57 (2012): 207.

⁶ Shelly R. Scott, 'The Racehorse as Protagonist: Agency, Independence, and Improvisation', in Kathleen McFarland and Ryan Hediger, eds., *Animals and Agency: An Interdisciplinary Exploration* (Leiden: Brill, 2009); Swart, *Riding High*, 198–202; and Jason Hribal, 'Animals, Agency, and Class: Writing the History of Animals from Below', *Human Ecology Review*, vol. 14 (2007).

⁷ While she does not focus on animal-induced scars on formerly enslaved persons, Jennifer Putzi makes the argument that 'marked black bodies' played a significant role in generating antislavery sentiment during this era. See Jennifer Putzi, *Identifying Marks: Race, Gender, and the Marked Body in Nineteenth-Century America*,

Animals that accompanied self-emancipators remained important upon reaching sites of freedom, where they provided companionship, mobility, and protection in new surroundings. In other cases, formerly enslaved persons sold the animals to integrate into new economic markets. The question of property, both human and nonhuman, remained pressing even after escape. Self-emancipators asserted ownership over horses and dogs, and in doing so, made their claims of ownership of animals inseparable from political debates regarding their legal standing as citizens and whether they could be captured along with their animals. Personal liberty laws in Northern states created legal barriers to re-enslavement. Canada and Mexico's refusal to extradite fugitives complicated enslavers' efforts to reclaim the people and nonhuman animals they viewed as their property. In response, enslavers filed lawsuits against Northern states, Canada, and Mexico, within which, they charged self-emancipators with stealing horses in an attempt to circumvent legal protections and justify extradition. When these legal challenges collapsed under legal scrutiny or diplomatic rebuke, American vigilantes crossed borders, especially the porous border with Mexico, and raided Mexican towns to reclaim horses and formerly enslaved persons.

Every escape, recapture, legal battle, and transnational dispute exacerbated tensions and forced political leaders to confront the growing crisis of slavery. Attempting to preserve sectional stability, Congressional leaders agreed to the Compromise of 1850, which reinforced the legal infrastructure by strengthening the Fugitive Slave Act. This sweeping and aggressive federal intervention aimed to nationalize containment. It overrode personal liberty laws, forcing Northern officials into the mechanisms of recapture, and criminalizing any assistance to self-

(Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 2006). For the visual representations of enslaved torture and physical abuse, see Marcus Wood, *Blind Memory: Visual Representations of Slavery in England and America, 1780–1865*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 87.

emancipators.⁸ However, horse-mounted slave-catchers accompanied by canines operating as agents of the federal government worked to galvanize Northern public sentiment against slavery and intensify resistance to recapture.⁹

In situating these dynamics within the interpretive framework of environmental history, most notably the Plantationocene, this chapter traces how enslavers manipulated human bodies, nonhuman animals, and the landscapes of the continent in an effort to sustain their institution. However, these intersections within the natural world reverberated outward after self-emancipation attempts, unsettling legal doctrines, provoking political responses, and fracturing national cohesion. Each capture, punishment, lawsuit, treaty, and debate revealed a volatile multispecies entanglement of law, ecology, property, and freedom that gradually pushed the country towards a reckoning with its peculiar institution.

Recapture, Retaliation, and Rituals of Animal Violence

Horses and dogs extended the reach of enslavers and transformed parts of the American South into a surveilled landscape. Enslavers were determined to pursue self-emancipators through hostile terrain, at times at great risk to themselves and their nonhuman animals, as part of their efforts to reinforce the biopolitical boundaries of enslavement by making emotionally-charged captures a spectacle of deterrence. Dogs scent-trained to track human scent were unleashed to inflict intense physical trauma during apprehensions. Horses, relied upon for their

⁸ Under the strengthened Fugitive Slave Act in the Compromise of 1850, self-emancipators had to be returned to their enslavers, even if they reached a Northern state. For further elaboration on the Fugitive Slave Act and the Compromise of 1850, see Delbanco, *The War Before the War*.

⁹ For a recent work on the Compromise of 1850 and its impact on the growing sectional crisis, see Stephen E. Maizlish, *A Strife of Tongues: The Compromise of 1850 and the Ideological Foundations of the American Civil War*, (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2018).

speed and mobility, dragged self-emancipators back to plantations in agonizing displays of enslaver power.

Long established as symbols of colonial ambition and planter mastery, horses were central to the enslavers' ability to capture self-emancipators.¹⁰ During, and in the immediate aftermath of apprehension, enslavers relied on equine animals as a cruel fusion of mobility and instruments of torture. 'Guilty of no crime save that of preferring *liberty* to *slavery*', Frederick Douglass and four other enslaved persons were 'fastened to three strong horses' and pulled along the route of a public highway after being apprehended during an emancipation attempt.¹¹ Bound together and forced to walk through dust and heat 'bare-footed and bare-headed', the self-emancipators were 'literally dragged... behind horses'. After fifteen miles of following the horses' relentless gallop, Douglass was 'glad to reach the end' at the Easton Jail, where he was held as a fugitive.¹²

Other accounts detail enslavers' use of equine power to make recapture a humiliating and painful ordeal. Enslavers combined the practicality of equine mobility with a desire to viciously punish self-emancipators, making no secret about maliciously mingling the two. Peter Going's enslaver, Master Hargrave, made sure that his punishment began as soon as he was captured, saying to the freedom-seeker: 'Come on, Peter, you knowed what you was doin' and you's goin' to pay for it'. Hargrave then bound Peter and tethered him to the saddle, assuring he was dragged by the horses 'all way back home'. Every step and gallop tugged against Peter's shoulders and wrists that were already inflamed by rope and strain. After this spectacle, the emboldened

¹⁰ Swart, *Riding High*, 27–37, 82–87; Howell & Taves, 'Black Protest and the Man on Horseback', 498.

¹¹ Frederick Douglass, *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass, His Early Life as a Slave, His Escape from Bondage, and His Complete History to the Present Time*, (Hartford: Park Publishing Co., 1881), 168–169. Italics in original. According to Ann Norton Greene, horses were central to pushing and pulling large loads in nineteenth-century America, and roads, such as the public highway described by Douglass, made such tasks much easier for the equine animals. Greene, *Horses at Work*, 45, 216.

¹² Douglass, *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass*, 170–171.

enslaver boasted of the effective deterrent he had exacted through nonhuman animal energy, noting that ‘Peter, nor none of the rest of the n——rs didn’ ever try to run off’ again.¹³ Such displays seemed commonplace as a formerly enslaved woman living in Canada recalled a similar series of events. During her first attempt at emancipation, her enslaver captured her and subsequently ‘got on his horse’ and paraded her back home ‘to let folks see that he had got the runaway’.¹⁴

Capture by horse was drawn out and meant as much to inflict suffering as to return the freedom-seeker. After living in Alabama for five years, Stephen Sewall witnessed many acts of enslaver cruelty, but one incident of excessive cruelty stayed with him for years. Describing the incident in detail, Sewall recalled seeing an enslaver ‘take his runaway slave, tie a rope round him’, then get on his horse, ‘give the slave and horse a cut with the whip, and run the poor creature barefooted, very fast, over rough ground, where small black jack oaks had been cut up, leaving the sharp stumps’. The enslaved person frequently fell onto the sharp stumps, at which point the enslaver would ‘drag him as long as he could himself hold out’, before whipping him up on his feet again, and then proceeding as before. The enslaver kept at this until he passed out of sight, leaving Sewall to wonder about, years later, the fate of the victim.¹⁵

In Louisiana, men on horseback with bloodhounds by their sides tracked an enslaved mother named Hattie after she had escaped to give birth to a child in the woods.¹⁶ Determined to

¹³ WPA, Gill Ruffin’, *Slave Narratives (Texas, Part 3)*, 164. [Phonetic spellings in original].

¹⁴ Drew, *A North-Side View of Slavery*, 31. Punishments as spectacles of terror were not unique to the United States. In his magisterial work on slavery in Jamaica, Vincent Brown notes that the use of such ritualistic violence, exercised in public, was a component of control in most slave societies. Vincent Brown, *The Reaper’s Garden: Death and Power in the World of Atlantic Slavery*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2008), 131–135. Focusing on the nineteenth-century American South, Saidiya Hartman conveys the importance of the ‘spectacle’ of punishment for reinforcing enslaver mastery and the subjugation of enslaved persons. Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*, 7, 27, 57–58.

¹⁵ Weld, *American Slavery As It Is*, 85.

¹⁶ For further elaboration on enslaved motherhood and childbirth throughout the Atlantic World, see Camillia Cowling, Maria Helena Pereira Toledo Machado, Diana Paton, and Emily West, ‘Mothering Slaves: Comparative

punish the postpartum mother dealing with the death of her newborn, while also sending an ominous warning to other enslaved persons, the enslavers forced Hattie to march in a multispecies procession of ‘six men, six horses, and ten bloodhounds with blood oozing from her feet’.¹⁷ Spectacles such as these were meant to make clear that an enslaved person’s capture was not a matter of chance, but rather, a result of the coordinated combination of humans and nonhuman animals brought together to track, overtake, and return.

It is difficult to quantify the number of enslaved persons who attempted to self-emancipate and nearly impossible to extrapolate how many of these attempts resulted in animal-aided recapture.¹⁸ Dogs were indispensable to these apprehensions, and when put to use, their brutality could be swift and devastating. Unlike horses, whose movements and speed were prompted by a tug of a rein or pressure of a rider’s legs, dogs pursued self-emancipators with relentless autonomy, at times seizing, incapacitating, or killing freedom-seekers in the immediate aftermath of capture.¹⁹ According to historian Sara E. Johnson, the historical usage of dogs as instruments of capture had its roots in the Haitian Revolution and the Second Maroon War in Jamaica.²⁰ These examples of state-sanctioned terror are important to the development of the widespread usage of canine violence in the Atlantic World, but it is the sheer ubiquity and open acceptance of the practice that distinguish the slaveholding American South as a unique case study. A triangulation of sources from formerly enslaved persons, abolitionist texts, and Southern

Perspectives on Motherhood, Childlessness, and the Care of Children in Atlantic Slave Societies’, *Slavery & Abolition*, vol. 38, no. 2 (2017).

¹⁷ Octavia Victoria Rogers, *The House of Bondage, or, Charlotte Brooks and Other Slaves, Original and Life Like, As They Appeared in Their Old Plantation and City Slave Life; Together with Pen-Pictures of the Peculiar Institution, with Sights and Insights into Their New Relations as Freedmen, Freemen, and Citizens*, (New York: Hunt & Eaton, 1890), 72–73.

¹⁸ Numbers provided by historians always include the caveat that they are estimates using available data. For an example, see David W. Blight, *Passages to Freedom*, 243, 266.

¹⁹ Reins and leg pressure are typically used to communicate to a horse that a new command is being issued. McGreevy and McLean, *Equitation Science*, 348.

²⁰ Johnson, ‘You Should Give Them Blacks to Eat’, 67.

newspapers reveals the staggering scale of the usage of dogs to capture freedom-seekers, but enslavers themselves left the most damning evidence of the brutality of this practice. Their letters, advertisements, court petitions, and diaries reveal the ways in which dogs were central to the infrastructure of recapture.

Few sources capture firsthand the violent use of canine-aided capture as well as the diary of Bennet H. Barrow, a cotton planter in West Feliciana Parish, Louisiana.²¹ From June until November, Barrow chronicled his use of dogs to capture and punish self-emancipators, revealing the physical violence inflicted and also the psychological toll it took on both the enslaved and the enslaver.²² On June 4, an enslaved person named Ginney Jerry escaped from his plantation, prompting Barrow to set out with ‘negro hunters’ and their dogs to capture the self-emancipator. After trailing him for a mile, Barrow and the dogs found Jerry hiding in a tree, where they ‘treed him’, a rarely used, context-specific verb meaning to use dogs to pull someone down from a tree. Not believing the act of treeing punishment enough, Barrow then ordered the dogs to bite ‘him very badly’, prompting the enslaver to boast that he thought Jerry would ‘stay home for a while’.²³

As Ginney Jerry does not again appear in Barrow’s diary, it seems the punishment had achieved its intended effect of keeping the enslaved person ‘home for a while’. Historians are left to speculate on the psychological impact that the canine-induced punishment had on the enslaved

²¹ Using Jamaican planter Thomas Thistlewood as an example, Trevor Burnard’s, *Mastery, Tyranny & Desire* demonstrates the importance and challenges of using enslavers’ diaries as historical sources. Though there are no mentions of animals, Burnard uses Thistlewood’s diary, along with other sources, to provide an in-depth look at punishments inflicted on the enslaved in Jamaica. Trevor Burnard, *Mastery, Tyranny, and Desire: Thomas Thistlewood and His Slaves in the Anglo-Jamaican World*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 160–161, 178.

²² Bennet H. Barrow’s diary is found on microfilm in the special collections archive at Louisiana State University. Bennet H. Barrow Diary, Mss. 2978, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collections, LSU Libraries, Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

²³ Barrow Diary, ‘June 4’, Mss. 2978.

persons on the Louisiana plantation, but Barrow makes clear the impact the practice had on him, noting that he ‘felt quite unwell for two days past’, an ‘effect of Negro hunting’.²⁴ A few days later, Barrow complained that the ‘Negro dogs’ still resided on his plantation and that he was ‘tired of them’.²⁵ Though Barrow grew weary of the dogs, the enslaver used them frequently, confident the canine-induced punishments would inscribe lessons of submission into the memories of self-emancipators and other enslaved persons on his plantation. Less than two weeks after complaining about the animals, Barrow again employed the dogs to track a self-emancipator to the quarters of a nearby plantation. After allowing the dogs to tear ‘him naked’, Barrow ‘took him home before the other Negroes’. In front of the coerced audience, he ‘made the dogs give him another overhauling’, sending a message written in blood and mauled flesh to other potential self-emancipators.²⁶

Enslaved persons understood the importance of canines in capturing self-emancipators and found ways to resist and retaliate against the animals. Some struck first and preemptively eliminated the threat before it could be unleashed by slaughtering dogs at night or poisoning them in their pens. Others fought back while the dogs attempted to capture them, using fists, knives, or whatever weapons they could find. Enslavers intended power to flow in one direction, but sometimes enslaved persons sent the message written in canine blood that the hunted could become the hunters. Confrontations between self-emancipators and the canines trained to hunt them were charged with enmity and had the propensity for gruesome violence, at times resulting in death. Yet, even in death, the contested space of these animals continued with ritualized

²⁴ Barrow Diary, ‘Oct. 18’, Mss. 2978.

²⁵ Barrow Diary, ‘Oct. 27’, Mss. 2978.

²⁶ Barrow Diary, ‘Nov. 11’, Mss. 2978.

funerals and burials, revenge killings, and the ceremonial consumption of human and canine flesh.

Jacob Stroyer recalled that ‘in general, the slaves hated bloodhounds’, and ‘would kill them at any time they got a chance’.²⁷ Certain individual dogs gained notoriety among enslaved persons, standing out above other members of a slave-hunting pack. Among these was an old English bulldog kept on Jim Breckenridge’s plantation. Described as a ‘great negro catching dog’, the bulldog had a reputation of being terribly ‘savage with the poor slaves’.²⁸ Valued at an incredible two thousand dollars, well in excess of the monetary value of any enslaved person living on the plantation, the bulldog’s reputation and value grew with each self-emancipator he caught.²⁹

Long the object of terror and hatred among the enslaved persons on the plantation, the old English bulldog ‘was found one morning in the yard stabbed to death’. The dog ‘was killed by some person, supposed to be a slave, perhaps for being bitten’.³⁰ Targeting the dog as an act of revenge ‘for being bitten’ speaks to the frustration and anger enslaved persons experienced after being apprehended by a canine, while also pointing to the agency and autonomy enslaved persons assigned to individual animals. It is possible to view this act of revenge through a lens of resistance fashioned decades ago by Eugene Genovese, who noted the frequency with which enslaved persons destroyed equipment and targeted plantation animals. However, the context and statements surrounding the killing of the animal reveal something more profound.³¹ The English

²⁷ Stroyer, *My Life in the South*, 72.

²⁸ Smith, *Fifty Years of Slavery*, 113–114.

²⁹ On the estimated monetary value of enslaved persons over the course of their lifespans, see Berry, *The Price for Their Pound of Flesh*, 90–98.

³⁰ Smith, *Fifty Years of Slavery*, 32–33, 113–114.

³¹ Eugene Genovese’s *Roll, Jordan Roll* is the seminal work on various forms of enslaved resistance in the American South, including intentionally targeting animals. Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll*, 621. For a more recent edited volume of enslaved resistance and enslaved rebellions, see Junius P. Rodriguez, *Encyclopedia of Slave Resistance and Rebellion*, (London: Greenwood Press, 2007).

bulldog, feared and hated more than any other canine, was singled out among the other plantation animals and violently stabbed to death by someone the dog had once apprehended and bitten. The corpse of the slain bulldog opened an inquiry on the plantation with scale and magnitude worthy of a murder investigation. A ‘great deal of money was offered to find the guilty one’, however, enslaved people on the plantation ‘scarcely ever told on each other in any work they undertook’, reflecting a code of silence that sometimes emerged within enslaved communities. Despite a lengthy and expensive investigation into the slaying of the animal, the enslaved person who killed the bulldog was never identified.³²

Enslaved persons defended themselves against dogs and also came to the aid of others when they were attacked, creating moments of collective defiance. During a fight between Williams and his overseer, a ‘ferocious bulldog’ accompanying the overseer sank its teeth into the enslaved person in an attempt to ‘defend his brutal master, but the other slaves came to the rescue’.³³

³² Smith, *Fifty Years of Slavery*, 114.

³³ Austin Steward, *Twenty–Two Years a Slave, and Forty Years a Freeman: Embracing a Correspondence of Several Years, While President of Wilberforce Colony, London, Canada West*, (Rochester: William Alling, 1857), 58. Dogs can become possessive of objects and especially their human companions, leading to defensive behavior and what is termed ‘protective aggression’. James C. Ha and Tracy L. Campion, *Dog Behavior: Modern Science and Our Canine Companions*, (San Diego: Academic Press, 2018), 159–161.

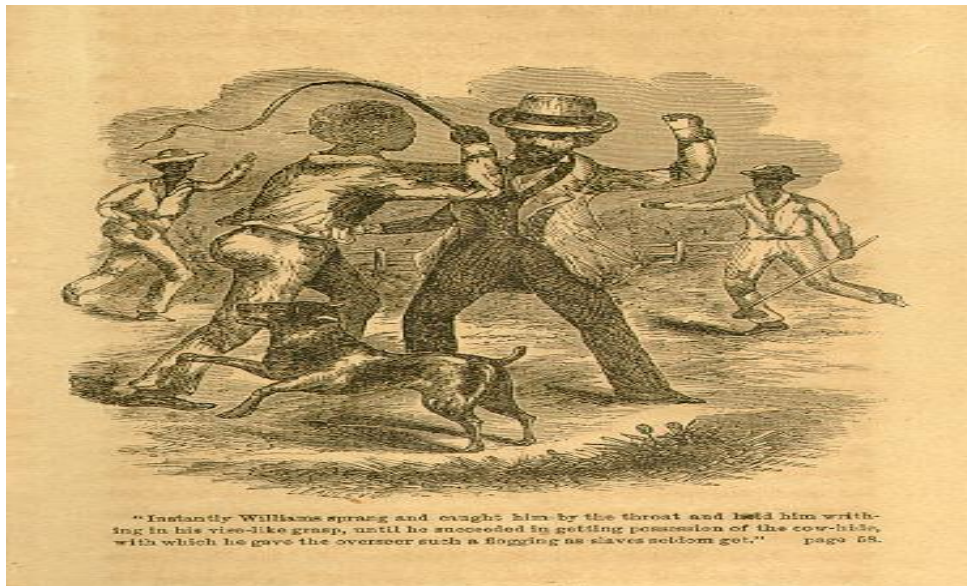


Figure 3.1. Williams Sprang and Caught him by the Throat.³⁴

Together, they seized the dog and then threw the animal into a nearby fire. Though he was badly burned by the fire, the dog extricated himself from the flames, howling and ‘singing, as he ran off’ to vocalize his physical pain.³⁵ Canines were acutely at risk for being attacked while they were attempting to capture a self-emancipator, as explained by Stroyer, who noted that enslaved persons killed dogs in solidarity ‘to keep them from capturing their fellow negroes, the runaways’.³⁶ Solidarity against canine threats extended beyond individual plantations into neighboring farms in remarkable displays of cooperative inter-plantation resistance. As dogs from Colonel Singleton’s plantation chased self-emancipators through neighboring farms, many in the pack of animals ‘were killed and buried in the cotton or corn field by some among the crowd of negroes through whom they passed’.³⁷ Recognizing the pursuing dogs as a threat to the freedom-seeker’s life and liberty, enslaved persons on these neighboring farms destroyed the

³⁴ Steward, *Twenty-Two Years a Slave*, 58.

³⁵ According to Ha and Campion, whimpers and whines are the most common ways dogs indicate pain and fear. Ha and Campion, *Dog Behavior*, 59. Steward, *Twenty-Two Years a Slave*, 58.

³⁶ Stroyer, *My Life in the South*, 72.

³⁷ Stroyer, *My Life in the South*, 71–72.

animals and quickly buried their remains to keep their violent demise hidden from the enslavers and overseers. Their seemingly improvised actions protected the freedom-seeker and also indemnified those who killed and buried the animals.

Individual freedom-seekers, and at times, inter-plantation cabals, fought back against and sought revenge from canine captors, at times killing the animals. However, the killing of an enslaver's hunting dog was met with swift and brutal consequences. Even though most professional slave-catchers attempted to capture self-emancipators without harming the person, so as not to lose their investment in human capital, enslavers and overseers, driven by emotional and tangible motivations, sometimes sought retribution for the loss of their dogs in a perpetuating cycle of violence and vengeance. A farmer from northern Alabama explained to Frederick Olmsted that when slave-catchers apprehended a self-emancipator, the 'hunters called off the dogs as soon as they could' unless the freedom-seeker fought back. According to the farmer, such resistance enraged the slave-catchers, and in these cases, they let the dogs 'tear him a spell'.³⁸ When Olmsted asked the same question to a Methodist preacher, the professed man of God corroborated the farmer's account almost word for word. 'When the hunters come up', the preacher explained, 'they always call them off, unless the n—r fights', in which case they 'let 'em tear him good'.³⁹

At times, enslavers' acts of vengeance veered into spectacles and inversions of so-called justice, during which enslaved persons who killed dogs were then subsequently slaughtered and fed to the very animals they had killed. In South Carolina, a slave-hunter named Mr. Black earned a notorious reputation among the enslaved community for his callous indifference and

³⁸ Frederick Law Olmsted, *The American Question, and How to Solve It*, (London: Samson, Low, Son, and Co., 1863), 218

³⁹ Olmsted, *The American Question, and How to Solve It*, 219. [Phonetic spellings in original].

frequent use of canine violence to apprehend self-emancipators. Jacob Stroyer described Mr. Black as the cruelest of ‘all the slave hunters’, providing details of an account during which this man apprehended two self-emancipators in Barnwell County.⁴⁰ Mr. Black unleashed his dogs to follow one of the enslaved persons. Cornered by the animals, the self-emancipator fought for his life, killing several of the dogs before the pack of canines eventually overwhelmed him. Vengefully lamenting the loss of his dogs, Mr. Black killed the self-emancipator and ‘cut him up’, giving ‘the pieces of his remains to the living dogs’.⁴¹ Upon hearing the dogs, the self-emancipator’s companion returned, where he found the pieces of clothing, spots of blood, and the ‘pieces of the person’ whom he believed to be his friend. The sight so disturbed and frightened the man that he returned to tell his enslaver about the gruesome discovery. However, his word ‘was not to be taken against a white man’s’, and ‘no special notice was taken of what he said’.⁴²

Mr. Black’s actions were consistent with the violent retribution wielded against self-emancipators, where the fusion of human cruelty and canine violence took on a ritualistic quality. Regarded as a ‘monster in human shape’, an enslaver in Mississippi well-known for his cruelty, ‘whipped and drove his poor slaves in a desperate manner’, only to react with ire when they attempted to flee from his wrath. One such individual, ‘who loved liberty better than bondage and the lash’, escaped to the Mississippi swamps but was pursued by the enslaver and his dogs. The enslaver soon ‘caught him with bloodhounds’ and ‘allowed the dogs to kill him’. The enslaver’s ‘vengeful disposition’ not yet satisfied, then unceremoniously ‘cut his body up’ as he

⁴⁰ Stroyer, *My Life in the South*, 75.

⁴¹ According to Doctor of Veterinary Medicine Melinda Merck, it is not wholly uncommon for dogs to consume human flesh, especially during scavenging behavior. Melinda D. Merck, *Veterinary Forensics: Animal Cruelty Investigations*, 2nd ed., (Chichester, UK: John Wiley & Sons, inc., 2013), 61.

⁴² Stroyer, *My Life in the South*, 76.

called his dogs to heel. Turning the self-emancipator's body into food, the enslaver then 'fed the fragments to the hounds' that were waiting alongside the deceased man.⁴³

These macabre rituals were designed to erase the self-emancipator's body as well as the very idea of resistance. In other instances, enslavers shifted from annihilation to degradation by forcing captured self-emancipators to consume the flesh of the animals they had killed, thus transforming acts of defiance into acts of dehumanization. Surrounded by bloodhounds in the swamps, two self-emancipating siblings named Tom and Ike fought back against the animals with one of the brothers grabbing a club and smashing it on the head of 'one of Dr. Neyland's hounds'.⁴⁴ The remaining bloodhounds closed in on Tom and Ike and subdued the siblings, after which the enslavers then dragged Tom and Ike back to the plantation along with the slain animal. Determined to punish the brothers for killing the animal, Dr. Neyland 'took that dog and cooked him' and then forced Tom and Ike to 'eat part of him'. After eating the flesh of their canine adversary, Tom and Ike were then whipped and 'sent back to work'.⁴⁵ This consumption of dog flesh reduced self-emancipation to a cycle during which enslavers forced freedom-seekers to ingest and metabolize their subjugation and literally carry the weight of their capture inside of them.

At times, dogs were interred with pomp and ceremony, their funerals a morbid reassertion of the plantation's human-animal hierarchy. During these performative spectacles of grieving, enslavers and overseers forced enslaved persons to publicly mourn the animals who had been set on self-emancipators. Gabe Emanuel recalled that when 'de big old hound dog what find de run-away N——s done die', the overseer on the plantation informed the enslaved persons of his

⁴³ Anderson, *Life and Narrative of William J. Anderson*, 48.

⁴⁴ WPA, Bill McRay, (*Texas, Part 3*), 38.

⁴⁵ WPA, Bill McRay, 38.

intentions to ‘hold funeral rites over dat dog’ and demanded they ‘better be powerful sad when’ they ‘come to dat funeral’. Threatened with violence if their acts of mourning were not sufficiently effusive in their grief, ‘dem N—s was sad over de death of dat poor old dog what had chased dem all over de country’. Forced to feign sadness, the enslaved persons stood around the interred animal, ‘a-weeping and a-mournin’ in a theatrical display of rehearsed sorrow.⁴⁶ In a scene reminiscent of a state funeral in contemporary North Korea, ‘every now and den, the enslaved persons ‘put water on dey eyes and play like [they] was a-weeping bitter, bitter tears’.⁴⁷

Emanuel responded to the enforced mourning at the dog’s funeral with acerbic sarcasm, ending his account with a contemptuous prayer and sardonic tribute to the animal: ‘Poor old dog, she done died down dead and can’t kotch us no more. Poor old dog. Amen! De Lawd have mercy’.⁴⁸ Emanuel’s wry and ironic commentary shows that even the death of a loathed animal carried the imprint of coercive authority. However, although the ceremony was meant to affirm the hierarchy of the plantation, in the end, it only revealed its absurdity.

After capture, enslavers shifted dogs’ and horses’ functions from pursuit to punishment with terrifying effect. Horses dragged self-emancipators back to plantations, inflicted injuries, and then powered ad-hoc torture devices. Moses Roper made it within three miles of his destination before being discovered by a pack of dogs. An enslaver named Mr. Crockett captured

⁴⁶ WPA, Gabe Emanuel, *Slave Narratives (Mississippi)*, 46. [Phonetic spellings in original].

⁴⁷ For further elaboration and an analysis of enforced mourning during Kim Il–Sung’s 1994 death, see Barbara Demick, *Nothing to Envy: Ordinary Lives in North Korea*, (New York: Spiegel & Grau, 2009), 304. WPA, Gabe Emanuel, 46. [Phonetic spellings in original].

⁴⁸ WPA, Gabe Emmanuel, 46. [Phonetic spellings in original]. While she does not mention this part of his interview, it is worth noting that other parts of Emmanuel’s interview have been analyzed by Ellen Hampton to show heavy-handed editing and coaching on the part of WPA Interviewees in Mississippi. To this point, Emmanuel’s recollection of the funeral for the dog abruptly transitions into his enslaver’s hosting abilities. However, pushing back on Hampton’s analysis, it may have been the case that Emmanuel’s rather thinly veiled sarcasm was an attempt to undermine the plantation structure with wit. Ellen Hampton, ‘‘Lawdy! I was sho’ happy when I was a slave!’’: Manipulative Editing in the WPA Former–Slave Narratives from Mississippi’, *L’Ordinaire des Amériques*, vol. 215 (2013): 24.

Roper and then used a horse to transport and punish him simultaneously. Crockett forced the freedom-seeker on horseback, putting him in ‘extreme pain, from the great weight hanging from his feet’ as he was taken three miles to a Georgian jail.⁴⁹ Roper was jailed for several weeks before his enslaver, Mr. Gooch, learned of his location and transported him back to his plantation, where yet another horse was used to punish and torture the self-emancipator. After flogging Roper and putting extra irons on his neck and feet, Mr. Gooch repurposed a horse-driven cotton packing machine to create an ‘instrument of torture’ that he believed would deter Roper from recidivism.

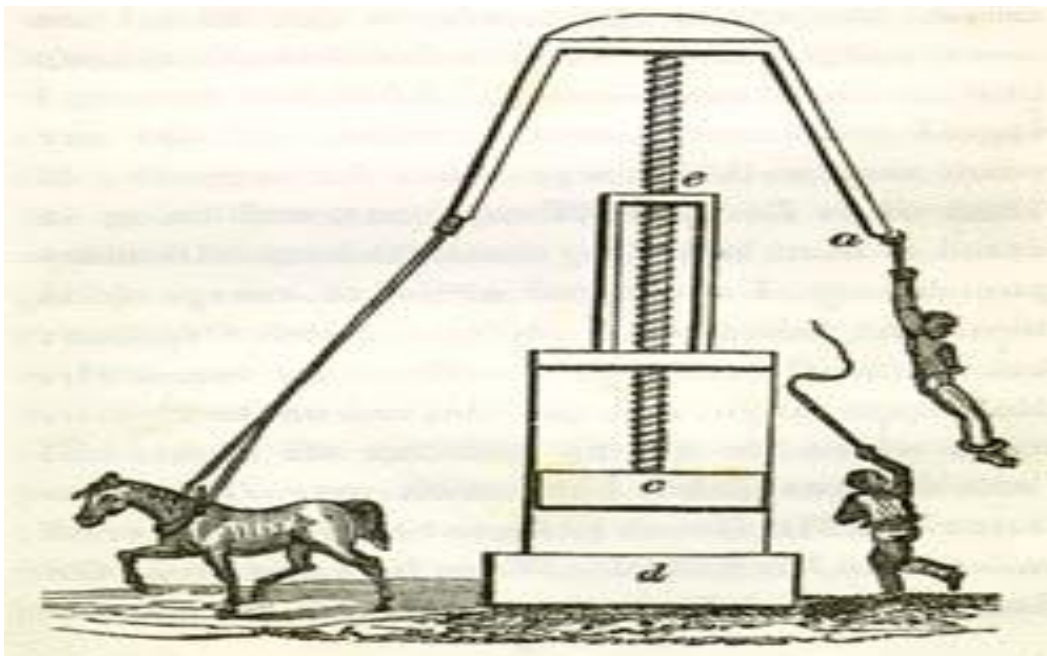


Figure 3.2. The Author Hanging by his Hands Tied to a Cotton Screw.⁵⁰

With the enslaver prodding the tethered horse around the machine, Roper was hoisted by his hands ten feet above the ground, leaving him suspended in midair for a quarter of an hour. After

⁴⁹ Roper, *Narrative of the Adventures and Escape of Moses Roper*, 46.

⁵⁰ Roper, *Narrative of the Adventures and Escape of Moses Roper*, 47.

being lowered ‘to rest for five minutes’, the enslaver once again whipped the horse into motion, lifting Roper by his hands to begin the punishment for a second round of torment.⁵¹

Enslavers did not stop at mechanizing equine strength for punishment. They additionally weaponized cats, rats, birds, insects, and pathogens to punish self-emancipators in ways that ensured the pain of an attempted escape endured long after the body seemed healed. With dogs and horses dominating much of the histories of animals and slavery, cats have remained peripheral despite their near-universal presence. Archaeological findings suggest that cats were invariably present on most plantations, interacting with enslavers and the enslaved.⁵² Cats specifically appear in historical sources in accounts of the punishment known as cat-hauling, during which enslavers weaponized the feline’s fear and desperation to use its claws against enslaved persons.⁵³

During this animal-induced torture, commonly reserved for the most serious of infractions such as self-emancipation attempts, an enslaved person lay prostrate with a feline placed upon their back. Then, according to Leonard Black, who witnessed this form of punishment while enslaved in Maryland, the cat was pulled by its tail down the enslaved person’s back. The sudden pulling movement caused the cat to resist the ‘retrograde movement to the extent of her strength’ by sinking its claws ‘deeply into the flesh’.⁵⁴ Often, this punishment was

⁵¹ Roper, *Narrative of the Adventures and Escape of Moses Roper*, 47–48.

⁵² Sarah Hand Meacham, “Pets, Status, and Slavery in the Late–Eighteenth–Century Chesapeake,” *Journal of Southern History*, vol. 77, no. 3 (2011): 553. Mark S. Warner and Robert A. Genheimer, “Cats Here, Cats There, Cats and Kittens Everywhere’: An Urban Extermination of Cats in Nineteenth–Century Cincinnati”, *Historical Archaeology*, vol. 42, no. 1 (2008).

⁵³ In stressful situations, cats will flatten their ears and arch their back as a warning before scratching or biting. Dennis C. Turner and Patrick Bateson, *The Domestic Cat: The Biology of Its Behaviour*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 52.

⁵⁴ Black, *The Life and Sufferings of Leonard Black*, 20. Black’s explanation of why the cat employs its claws during cat-hauling is corroborated by modern veterinary studies that argue that ‘scruffing’ felines prompts a negative, if not aggressive, response to the retrograde movement. See Carly M. Moody, et al., ‘Getting a grip: cats respond negatively to scruffing and clips’, *Vet Record: British Veterinarian Association*, vol. 186, no. 12 (2020).

done multiple times, in multiple directions, using multiple cats who were stressed and anxious because of the bodily restraint and the scent and movement of human bodies.⁵⁵

On Mr. Brubecker's Kentucky plantation, an enslaved person made repeated attempts at escape, enduring numerous lashings in consequence. Frustrated that the whippings were not having 'the desired effect', Brubecker stripped the enslaved person and tied 'large cats on his naked body'. Placed in uncomfortable and unfamiliar positions, both the enslaved person and the cats struggled to extricate themselves from the situation.⁵⁶ Skeptical that his contrivance was causing enough suffering, Brubecker began to whip the cats in order 'to make them tear his back'. Rather than whipping the enslaved person, Brubecker whipped the cats, creating a living conduit through which the cats transferred their pain to the human on whose back they were tied, ravaging the man's flesh with their claws. When asked why he utilized this horrific torture, the enslaver explained that he had done so to 'break him of his habit'.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Black, *The Life and Sufferings of Leonard Black*, 20.

⁵⁶ Even when handled by familiar persons, cats will react negatively to being restrained. This becomes more pronounced if the feline is stressed or being handled by an unfamiliar person. Sarah E. Lowe & John Bradshaw, 'Responses of pet cats to being held by an unfamiliar person, from weaning to three years of age', *Anthrozoös: A multidisciplinary journal of the interactions between people and other animals*, vol. 15, no. 1 (2002): 69–79.

⁵⁷ Williams, *Narrative of James Williams*, 51–52. Though in a controlled environment, a recent study found that cats are far more likely to react negatively when being restrained. Carly M. Moody, et al., 'Can you handle it? Validating negative responses to restraint in cats', *Applied Animal Behaviour Science*, vol. 204 (2018): 94–98.



Figure 3.3. Our Peculiar Domestic Institutions.⁵⁸

Harry Smith witnessed what he called the ‘inhuman treatment’ on his plantation in Kentucky, during which an enslaver named Jim Brooks took a cat, held it by its tail, and drew the animal ‘down the victim’s back’.⁵⁹ Startled into panic, the cat clawed and twisted its body, convulsing in an attempt to escape the hand that forced it into violence. The scenes of this type of merciless punishment were repeated throughout the South. Charles Ball witnessed several enslaved persons cat-hauled on a Georgian plantation, calling the punishment ‘the most excruciating punishment’ he ‘ever saw inflicted on Black people’. During one incident, Ball recalled a ‘large gray tom-cat’ being placed near the shoulder of an enslaved man and then forcibly dragged by the tail down his back and ‘along the bare thighs of the sufferer’, causing the feline to sink his nails into the man’s flesh while tearing ‘off pieces of the skin with his teeth’.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ “Our Peculiar Domestic Institutions,” *American Anti-Slavery Almanac, Illustrations of the American anti-slavery almanac for 1840*, (New York, 1840). Library of Congress, Printed Ephemera Collection; Portfolio 248, Folder 1. <https://www.loc.gov/item/2007680126/>.

⁵⁹ Smith, *Fifty Years of Slavery*, 152.

⁶⁰ Ball, *Fifty Years in Chains*, 285.

Attesting to the prevalence of cat-hauling and the shared network of animal acumen on Southern plantations, Ball posited that ‘the claws of the cat are poisonous’ and caused inflammation of the wounds, a symptom we now know is caused by the bacteria *Bartonella henselae*.⁶¹ These bacteria, transmitted through feline scratches and bites, cause severe inflammation and infection. The punishment’s microbial element was repeated in texts throughout the era, with Reverend Horace Moulton noting that cat-hauling poisoned ‘the flesh much worse than the whip’ and was ‘most dreaded by the slave’.⁶² Similarly, a Northerner touring Georgia described to readers of *The Liberator* how, during the punishment, enslavers took a cat ‘by the nape of the neck’ and dragged the animal across the backs of the victims, before concluding his account by informing readers how this punishment was ‘not only awfully excruciating’ but also poisonous to the flesh.⁶³ Whether or not they were aware of this biological reality, enslavers transformed cats’ claws into a sort of microbial weapon by harnessing the unseen world of bacteria and turning infection into an extension of the punishment.⁶⁴

Despite these numerous instances in historical records, almost no scholarly attention has been paid to this animal-induced torture. Perhaps historians today, like nineteenth-century readers of Reverend George Bourne’s account of cat-hauling in Virginia, believe the practice to be too ‘incredible’ to believe, resulting in little ‘reflection to the subject’.⁶⁵ Isaac Williams

⁶¹ Ball, *Fifty Years in Chains*, 286. For further information on *Bartonella henselae* infection, popularly known as ‘cat scratch fever’, see Kenneth Zangwill, ‘Cat Scratch Disease and Bartonellaceae: the Known, the Unknown and the Curious’, *The Pediatric Infectious Disease Journal*, vol. 40, no. 5 (2021).

⁶² Weld, *American Slavery As It Is*, 88.

⁶³ Northern Christian Advocate, ‘Slavery as it is in Georgia’, *The Liberator*, 5 October 1855.

⁶⁴ Much of the literature on the weaponization of disease, even within the field of medicine, focuses on biological warfare and the use of pathogens in a military context. See Eleni Thalassinou, et al., ‘Biological Warfare Plan in the 17th Century—the Siege of Candia, 1648–1669’, *Emerging infectious diseases*, vol. 2, no. 12 (2015): 2148–2153; and V. Barrias, et al., ‘History of biological warfare and bioterrorism’, *Clinical Microbiology and Infection*, vol. 20, no. 6 (2014): 497–502. Within the context of North America, particularly regarding the weaponizing of diseases against Native Americans, see Toby Gelfand, *Rationalizing Epidemics: Meanings and Uses of American Indian Mortality since 1600*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2004).

⁶⁵ Weld, *American Slavery As It Is*, 178. Aside from a passing mention in Betty L. Wilson’s recent article, in which she is citing psychologist Gilda Graff, the practice of cat-hauling is almost non-existent in the historiography. See

anticipated readers' skepticism when he revealed he had been cat-hauled, swearing that his testimony was 'gospel truth, as true as I am a living man'. Williams was caught by dogs as he attempted to self-emancipate from his Virginia plantation and was 'torn badly by them'.

However, unconvinced that the canine attack was enough to keep Williams from recidivism, his enslaver warned him that he was going to forever cure him of the 'fever for running away'.⁶⁶

Tying Williams to the whipping post, his enslaver glared at him, grasped 'a large cat that was by', and dragged the animal across his back as its 'claws stuck into the flesh like so many fish-hooks'.⁶⁷

Just as whips could snap and thumbscrews could malfunction, the nonhuman animals used to punish self-emancipators could resist and act unpredictably. Cats, who are notoriously independent and determined animals, are never easy to direct, and proved to be unreliable participants in enslaver machinations.⁶⁸ In Alabama, a young enslaved man 'who had already run away several times', sought freedom yet again. He made it four days before the plantation dogs apprehended him. After being dragged back to the plantation, he was 'fastened down to the ground' by his neck, ankles, and wrists.⁶⁹ The overseer 'sent for two large cats belonging to the house' either as mousers or companions, who were then 'placed upon the naked shoulders' of the

Betty L. Wilson, 'Under the Brutal Watch: A Historical Examination of Slave Patrols in the United States and Brazil During the 18th and 19th Centuries', *Journal of Black Studies*, vol. 53, no. 1 (2021): 3–18. Gilda Graff, 'The intergenerational trauma of slavery and its aftereffects: The question of reparations', *The Journal of Psychohistory*, vol. 44, no. 4 (2017): 181–197.

⁶⁶ Williams, *Sunshine and Shadow of Slave Life*, 13. In 1851, Samuel Cartwright introduced the concept of 'Drapetomania', which was his attempt to medicalize self-emancipation as a mental illness. It is unknown whether Williams's enslaver's description of a 'fever for running away' was used metaphorically or if he truly believed Isaac to have Drapetomania. Importantly, Cartwright and those who echoed his work posited that the way to 'cure' this 'disease' was to whip the enslaved person. Cartwright, reprinted in J.D.B. De Bow, ed., *De Bow's Review of the Southern and Western States*, (New Orleans: Office, 22 Exchange Place, 1851), 331. On Drapetomania as part of the wider medicalization of race, see Deirdre Cooper Owens, *Medicalizing Blackness: Making Racial Difference in the Atlantic World, 1780–1840*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017), 11.

⁶⁷ Williams, *Sunshine and Shadow of Slave Life*, 13.

⁶⁸ On the independent nature of cats, see John Bradshaw, *Cat Sense: How the New Feline Science Can Make You a Better Friend to Your Pet*, (New York: Basic Books, 2013).

⁶⁹ Williams, *Narrative of James Williams*, 52.

victim. After placing the cats on the man's shoulders, the animals were suddenly dragged downward by their tails. 'At first they did not scratch', their claws remaining retracted perhaps because of their familiarity with the enslaved person and the overseer.⁷⁰ James Williams, another enslaved person on the plantation, was then ordered to strike the cats on the back with a stick. As a result, the 'enraged animals extended their claws' and tore the victim's back 'deeply and cruelly as they were dragged' along for a second and a third time.⁷¹

Enslavers also weaponized rats, birds, and insects. These animals did not respond to human commands in the same way as horses, dogs, and cats, yet still carried out their work with efficiency. Without an overseer to direct their violence, these animals infested and consumed with slow and indiscriminate indifference. After his enslaver captured and carried James back to his plantation, he decided that the typical punishment of whipping was not enough to deter another attempt at self-emancipation. The overseer cut James 'with the whip from his head to his foot', washed him with strong brine, and then screwed him down inside the cotton gin. Covered with brine and bearing open wounds, the man's fate was left to something far different than the whip. After four days, the overseer opened the cotton gin, revealing James's dead body 'eaten by rats and vermin' that had 'gnawed him before life was extinct'.⁷²

Weaponizing rats finds historical precedent in Elizabethan England, including the infamous 'Dungeon among the Rats' in the Tower of London.⁷³ Humans have similarly

⁷⁰ Early socialization may have also influenced these cats' behavior. Bradshaw, 'Responses of pet cats to being held', 69–70.

⁷¹ Williams, *Narrative of James Williams*, 52.

⁷² Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, 75–76.

⁷³ For this quotation, as well as further elaboration of the use of rats as a form of torture in Elizabethan England, see George Lillie Craik and Charles MacFarland, *The Pictorial History of England: Being a History of the People, as Well as a History of the Kingdom*, (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1848), 506. Rats, like many other animals, will consume human flesh, especially after death. Antun Ferenčić, et al., 'Selective Behaviour of Rodents when Feeding on a Corpse: A Case Report', *Journal of Forensic Medicine*, vol. 6, no. 5 (2021): 1–3. While rarer, rats have also been known to feed on living humans, especially neglected babies or infirmed, immobile elderly persons. Proceed

weaponized birds and insects, dating back to antiquity and even the prehistoric period. Ancient Persians administered laxatives to prisoners and then stripped and bound them in boats exposed to flies and mosquitoes that ate their flesh.⁷⁴ In Siberia, tribes historically tethered prisoners to trees, allowing biting insects to feed on the individual until they expired from blood loss.⁷⁵ Persons executed by hanging in Germany and the Netherlands were left ‘as prey for the birds’, with at least one recorded incident of a victim left in a human-sized bird cage.⁷⁶

Though the plantation South did not invent such practices, it had a system that made nature complicit and turned birds and insects into accomplices, in often more brutal ways than their predecessors. While gibbeting a corpse had historical precedent in both the United Kingdom and the United States, the last instance occurring in 1810, these heinous acts took place after the victim’s death.⁷⁷ Such was not the case when J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur described ‘something resembling a cage, suspended to the limbs of a tree’ during his tours of the American South. After firing at the ‘large birds of prey’ stooped nearby, Crèvecoeur was horrified to find ‘a negro, suspended in the cage’. The ‘birds had already picked out his eyes’, and ‘the living spectre’ could only utter the words ‘me no die; the birds, the birds’ when Crèvecoeur asked him how long he had been in this condition. Shortly before leaving, Crèvecoeur noticed that swarms of insects covered the man’s whole body, ‘eager to feed on his

with caution while consulting the following article for further details: Konstantinos Skarentzos Sr., et al., ‘Serious Rodent Bites to an 8–Month–Old Infant Due to Child Neglect’, *Cureus*, vol. 13, no. 10 (2021).

⁷⁴ For this specific reference to the infamous Persian scaphism, see Lockwood, ‘Insects as Weapons of War, Terror, and Torture’, 207.

⁷⁵ Jeffrey A. Lockwood, *Six–Legged Soldiers: Using Insects as Weapons of War*, (New York: University of Oxford Press, 2009), 377.

⁷⁶ Richard Ward, ed., *A Global History of Execution and the Criminal Corpse*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 6.

⁷⁷ Rachel E. Bennett, *Capital Punishment and the Criminal Corpse in Scotland, 1740–1834*, (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 228.

mangled flesh and to drink his blood'. The scene left the foreign visitor 'arrested by the power of affright and terror'.⁷⁸

The types of insects described by Crèvecoeur were pervasive in the warm Southern climate. Formerly enslaved persons from Louisiana to Georgia and Virginia wrote about 'buzzing insects', 'clouds of mosquitoes', and 'swarms of gallinippers', with some rhetorically asking readers if they could imagine living 'where you can scarcely breathe without inhaling mosquitoes?'⁷⁹ Insects went from being 'exceedingly annoying' to a source of deterrence and torture when weaponized by enslavers. In another account, Moses Grandy recalled a punishment during which an overseer flogged the offending enslaved persons before dousing them with pork brine, tying them to a tree, and leaving them exposed to the 'yellow flies and mosquitoes' that 'in great numbers would settle on' their bleeding backs.⁸⁰

Abandonment in the deep woods ensured an agonizing death by degrees with the relentless hum of insects and the steady draining of blood. 'In the habit of running away', an enslaved person from Mississippi took to the woods and swamps whenever 'an opportunity was presented'. Increasingly vexed by his inability to make the enslaved person 'fear him and stay at home', the man's enslaver tried every 'stratagem of cruelty' with little effect. Turning the environment and its nonhuman animals into executioners, the enslaver dragged the self-emancipator deep into the woods, where he tied him to a tree and 'left him to die by inches'.

⁷⁸ J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur, *Letters from an American Farmer Describing Certain Provincial Situations, Manners, and Customs, and Conveying Some Idea of the State of the People of North America*, (Philadelphia: From the Press of Matthew Carey, 1793), 179. It is important to note that *Letters from an American Farmer* is a mediated and rhetorically shaped epistolary text.

⁷⁹ Quotations from Bibb, *Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb*, 123; Ball, *Fifty Years in Chains*, 197; and Lintner, *Bond and Free*, 117.

⁸⁰ Moses Grandy, *Narrative of the Life of Moses Grandy: Late a Slave in the United States of America*, (London: C. Gilpin, 1843), 36. Mosquitoes are climate sensitive, and warmer climates, including many in the American South, are conducive to year-long endemic populations of the insect. Timothy C. Winegard, *The Mosquito: A Human History of Our Deadliest Predator*, (New York: Dutton, 2019).

Knowing the Mississippian swamps abounded with mosquitoes, black flies, and midges, the enslaver subjected the self-emancipator to a particularly torturous ordeal that lasted for hours, if not days.⁸¹ The enslaver gave no order nor any direction to the insects as he would have with a domesticated animal. Yet, the insects proved to be reliable in achieving the enslaver's wishes, allowing him to leave the man to die while the 'insects drank his blood' until he 'yielded at last to this horrid death'.⁸²

The unpredictability of animals that caused such fear in enslaved persons simultaneously revealed the fragility of enslaver control over animal-induced captures and punishment. Horses might trample or throw their riders. Dogs could inflict violence that their owners could not predict or control. And rats, birds, and insects followed no one's commands. The plantation world relied on violence. But it also relied on order and the idea that enslavers dictated the terms of suffering. When animals defied the commands of the enslavers, captures and punishments spiraled into mutilations, disfigurements, and chaos. This subsequently forced some enslavers and slave-hunters to confront the financial and legal liability of animals slipping beyond their control.

Time and time again, the fragile line between human design and animal intentionality dissolved with devastating consequences. An eight-year-old enslaved girl in Missouri suffered a fate so appalling that it gripped the American public and drew those responsible into the legal system. After being hired out by Mr. Cordell to Mr. Tanner, the young girl returned with flesh 'beaten to jelly', an indentation of a cord on her neck, and insect bites from head to toe.⁸³ After

⁸¹ For an overview of black flies and other biting insects in Mississippi, see Jerome Goddard, 'Black Flies in Mississippi—Significant Emerging Pest', *Scientific Article*, vol. 62, no. 8 (2022).

⁸² Anderson, *Life and Narrative of William J. Anderson*, 48.

⁸³ From the *St. Louis Republican*, in William Wells Brown, *Narrative of William W. Brown, an American Slave. Written by Himself*, (London: Charles Gilpin, 1849), 141.

succumbing to her injuries, Mr. Cordell filed charges that resulted in the public trial of Mrs. Tanner and an enslaved woman named Cornelia. Reporting from the trial, a correspondent with the *New York Herald* reported that Cornelia admitted her role in the murder, during which the ‘child was tied to a tree from Monday morning till Friday night, exposed’ to the ‘stinging of myriads of mosquitoes’.⁸⁴ The two women attempted to justify their actions in a legal system that rarely questioned enslaver authority, but could not always ignore the consequences of animal-inflicted cruelty.

Perhaps no other animal disrupted the equilibrium between discipline and disorder more than dogs. Self-emancipation attempts hastened the literal unleashing of dogs sent in pursuit of freedom-seekers, resulting in the animals running well in advance of enslavers and slave-catchers. These hunts necessitated spatial distance between dog and human, and the canines that pursued and subsequently caught self-emancipators sometimes acted outside the bounds of human control. When this happened, the animals caused grave bodily injuries to enslaved persons.⁸⁵ Enslavers unleashed the animals with the expectation of obedience. But once set loose, dogs operated on scent, sight, and the excitement of the chase as much as any verbal command.

For an enslaved mother living in Georgia, this collapse of control became a living nightmare. The plantation owner ‘released the bloodhounds too soon’, opening a liminal space within which the dogs acted beyond the voice and commands of the enslaver. Though her son ran as fast as he could, the dogs ‘soon overtook the boy and tore him to pieces’. Upon hearing her

⁸⁴ From the *New York Herald*, in Brown, *Narrative of William W. Brown*, 142.

⁸⁵ It is likely that enslavers used a similar training method to the ‘seek, find, and seize the suspect’ technique used by police departments that rely on K9 officers. The New York Law School completed a study and an accompanying article, concluding that this method leads to multiple bites as the suspect attempts to flee or fight back. My point is not to draw a comparison between the use of slave-hunting canines and K9 police officers, but rather to show the similarity in the training techniques and subsequent risk of injury when the canine operates beyond its training. See Douglas U. Rosenthal, ‘When K–9s Cause Chaos: An Examination of Police Dog Policies and their Liabilities’, *New York Law School Journal of Human Rights*, vol. 11, no. 2 (1994): 279–310.

son's fate, the woman 'burst into tears, which were only silenced by the threats of her owner to set the dogs on her'. Her fear momentarily overcoming her grief, the mother silenced her cries to avoid being punished by the dogs whose fur was still stained by the blood of her son.⁸⁶

Accounts from across the South reveal that when a dog entered the bite phase of its predatory sequence, its capacity for restraint diminished rapidly and its neurological momentum rendered enslavers' authority dangerously tenuous.⁸⁷ Demonstrating this reality, an enslaved person named Andy used the relocation of his enslaver's plantation from Texas to Louisiana as the opportunity to slip away. Unfortunately, the enslaver noticed Andy was missing and sent out for a slave-catcher and his hounds. Andy sought refuge on the bottom limbs of a tree, but the dogs quickly scented him before grabbing him and pulling him down to the ground.⁸⁸ Andy's screams mixed with the dogs' growls in a cacophony of horror, which guided the enslaver and the slave-catcher to the gory scene. By the time they arrived, the dogs 'done tore off all Andy's clothes and bit him all over bad'. Andy held his shirt up around his throat, which likely saved his life, as the dogs unleashed unrestrained violence until the enslaver and the slave-catcher physically pulled the dogs off of him.⁸⁹

Likewise, as James Watkins traversed through Maryland, hoping to arrive in Canada, bloodhounds belonging to slave-hunters overtook him. Disobeying their commands to solely track Watkins, the dogs encircled the enslaved person and launched into an attack. A 'most desperate struggle' ensued as the dogs tore his 'clothes to rags' and bit him 'severely on the breasts'. The dogs moved for the kill as they seized Watkins 'by the throat', however, the slave-

⁸⁶ WPA, Henry Maxwell, *Slave Narratives (Florida)*, 218–219.

⁸⁷ Each individual dog acts differently depending on the situation, but many follow a similar predatory sequence as described in Raymond Coppinger and Lorna Coppinger, *Dogs: A New Understanding of Canine Origin, Behavior and Evolution*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 207–208.

⁸⁸ WPA, Allen V. Manning, *Slave Narratives (Oklahoma)*, 219.

⁸⁹ WPA, Allen V. Manning, 219.

catchers arrived and forcibly ‘made them loose their hold’.⁹⁰ Both of these accounts echo modern forensic scientists who have explained the sequence of events by which a dog attacks and kills a human. Initially, the animal drags the person to the ground before disabling them by biting their limbs. The dog then bites the person’s throat and neck, causing death from asphyxiation or exsanguination.⁹¹

Enslavers seemed to have recognized how easily animal control could collapse into human catastrophe. According to Jacob Stroyer, enslavers hired slave-hunters ‘on the condition that they were to capture and return’ the self-emancipators ‘without being bruised and torn by the dogs’.⁹² This contractual caveat shows that while enslavers needed dogs to track self-emancipators, excessive canine violence risked financial loss and exposed them to legal liability. Dogs trained to track and hunt enslaved persons could be commanded to inflict gruesome pain and suffering on their human targets, and once unleashed, the potential of dogs to cause life-threatening injuries rose exponentially. Court records from the South document the frequency with which enslavers and slave-hunters became embroiled in lawsuits in the aftermath of a canine-induced injury or fatality.

Contractual restraints rarely spared hired slave-hunters from legal disputes with enslavers. During one incident, an enslaved person from Texas, who was already ‘torn and bleedin’ from canine attacks, was further chased through the woods into a gin house where ‘de dog-man’ cornered him. After capturing the freedom-seeker, the dog-man dragged him ‘in de Horse Hole’, and then loosed ‘two dogs to swim in and git him’. The self-emancipator began to

⁹⁰ Watkins, *Narrative of the Life of James Watkins*, 15.

⁹¹ For a comprehensive overview of dog attacks resulting in death, see Gabriel M Fonseca, et al., ‘Forensic studies of dog attacks on humans: a focus on bite mark analysis’, *Research and Reports in Forensic Medical Science*, (2015); and Sirku Sarenbo, ‘Bitten or struck by dog: A rising number of fatalities in Europe, 1995–2016’, *Forensic Science International*, vol. 318 (2021).

⁹² Stroyer, *My Life in the South*, 64.

‘yell and holler’ as the dogs attacked him with their ‘claws and teeth’. The enslaver refused ‘to pay de fee’ to the dog-man, angered at the condition of the ‘all bit up’ man he had expected to reclaim intact.⁹³

In other cases, dog-aided captures did not remain private matters, with disputes ending up before judges in courtrooms. Robert T. Davis sought compensation for the unlawful murder of an enslaved person known as ‘Big Sandy’, who had fled from his Baton Rouge plantation. Davis hired James C. Knox, a professional slave-hunter, who tracked Sandy and unleashed his dogs on him. After fifteen minutes of struggle, Knox and his canines killed Sandy ‘without any legal authority, cause, or provocation’, prompting Davis to file a lawsuit against Knox in the Sixth Judicial District Court of Louisiana.⁹⁴ These legal grievances had less to do with the ethics of the enslaved persons’ death or injuries and more to do with the breach of commercial trust. In a similar legal battle, a self-emancipator named Tranquilin escaped from the plantation of Athanaze De Mezieres before being pursued by Ledger Levasseur and his canines. As recounted by De Mezieres, who filed a lawsuit in the Parish of Natchitoches, Levasseur, ‘without any cause, did set dogs’ upon Tranquilin. Running from ‘the dogs until he came to a bayou’, Tranquilin was trapped between the alligator and snake-filled bayou and Levasseur’s rapidly approaching canines. ‘Having no means of defense’, Tranquilin ‘therein fell and drowned himself’. For Tranquilin’s death, De Mezieres sought to hold Levasseur accountable, hoping the man who set dogs on his enslaved person would ‘be ordered to pay \$1,500, the value of Tranquilin’.⁹⁵

⁹³ WPA, Betty Simmons, *Slave Narratives (Texas, Part 4)*, 22. [Phonetic spellings in original].

⁹⁴ ‘To the Hon. Judge of the Sixth Judicial District Court of the state of Louisiana, in & for the parish of East Baton Rouge’, 14 November, 1856, East Baton Rouge Parish, Clerk of Court Archives, Baton Rouge, Louisiana, *Records of the Sixth Judicial District Court*, Record Group: Document Number 1, 939.

⁹⁵ ‘List of Court Costs, ca. 1825; Court Record, 5 May 1825; Verdict, 10 November 1825; Judgment, November Term 1825’, Natchitoches Parish Courthouse, Natchitoches, Louisiana, *Records of the District Court*, Bundle 30.

Whether in the momentum of a hunt or the high-arousal chaos of capture, canines frequently slipped the reach of human commands, acting with intentionality and self-willed motivation. Evidence of this canine autonomy appeared plainly in the bitten flesh of self-emancipators when enslavers sought financial restitution from other members of the slaveholding regime through legal channels. However, petitions for compensation were frequently denied, partly to preserve the unrestricted use of dogs to target enslaved persons, and perhaps, in tacit recognition that the use of canines to track enslaved persons carried a prerequisite of bloodshed.⁹⁶

Surveillance, Sovereignty, and the Nonhuman Entanglements of Disunion

Animal-inflicted injuries became living histories with past acts of resistance inscribed in flesh on enslaved bodies. Translating what had been bitten, clawed, and torn by dogs and other animals into the printed language of runaway advertisements, these scars became biometric markers that enabled enslavers to track and reclaim enslaved persons across time and space. Through these written descriptions, enslavers extracted textual power from physical pain, and in the process, attempted to extend their reach across county, state, and in some cases, national lines.

George's body revealed a history of defiance, and although his enslaver hoped to avoid history repeating itself, travel in Texas necessitated equine transportation. George's enslaver sent him to gather horses, but he had not been heard of since.⁹⁷ Despite providing the means and

⁹⁶ For instance, both Robert T. Davis and Athanaze De Mezieres had their respective lawsuits dismissed by the judges hearing the case. See 'List of Court Costs, ca. 1825' and 'To the Hon. Judge of the Sixth Judicial District Court of the state of Louisiana'.

⁹⁷ J.W. Scott, 'Lost or Runaway', *The Tri-Weekly Telegraph*, 3 April 1863, 2. Audain, 'Mexican Canaan', 134. Randolph B. Campbell, *An Empire for Slavery: The Peculiar Institution in Texas, 1821-1865*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1987), 124.

opportunity for George to escape, his enslaver was incredulous at the thought that George had self-emancipated. With a ‘scar from the bite of a dog on the calf of one of his legs’ providing evidence of a previous escape attempt, the enslaver admitted that it was possible that George ‘may have run away’.⁹⁸ These types of advertisements that detailed physical injuries and scars inflicted by nonhuman animals appeared throughout the South. One account noted how the ‘legs and arms’ of Hiram were ‘a good deal scarred by the bites of a dog’, while another advertisement described Henry as being ‘badly dog bitten’ when he was ‘caught last fall’ during a previous emancipation attempt.⁹⁹ Other self-emancipating enslaved persons, such as Miles from Montgomery County, Texas, were most readily identifiable by their past encounters with nonhuman animals. The runaway advertisement gave details such as his height and skin complexion, but the most distinguishing biometric descriptor was animal violence visible on his face as ‘one side of his nose’ had ‘been bitten off’ by an animal, which ‘somewhat disfigured him’.¹⁰⁰

Freedom-seekers across the South faced the challenge of being identified by debilitating injuries and permanent scars caused by nonhuman animals. Not all animal-inflicted scars or injuries occurred as a result of self-emancipation attempts, but enslavers used them as biometric markers all the same. It is impossible to ascertain whether the snake bite scar on an unnamed self-emancipator in Texas was from an animal-induced punishment or if he had simply been bitten by a snake. Nevertheless, when his enslaver published a runaway advertisement in the *Austin City Gazette*, he hoped the freedom-seeker would be easily identifiable because of a

⁹⁸ Scott, ‘Lost or Runaway’, 2.

⁹⁹ H.M. Elmer, ‘Notice’, *Houston Daily Telegraph*, 20 April 1864, 2. Dr. Samuel Oliver, ‘One Hundred Dollars Reward’, *The Tri-Weekly Telegraph*, 15 May 1863, 2.

¹⁰⁰ Matthews & Jones, ‘Run Away’, *The Weekly Telegraph*, 25 September 1860, 2.

‘snake bite on the left hand’.¹⁰¹ Enslaved persons encountered snakes and other wild animals, while also taking care of dogs and tending to horses, often leaving them with biometric signatures that appeared in runaway advertisements.

Ubiquitous on plantations, horses would have been a common fixture in many enslaved persons’ lives. Recent research into horse-human relationships suggests that ‘horse-related accidents and incidents’ depend ‘more on the frequency and amount of interactions with horses than on the level of competency’.¹⁰² Accordingly, the more time enslaved persons spent with horses, the more likely they were to be injured. In one such case, an enslaved man who fled to Hampton, Virginia, was identified by a gruesome injury during which ‘his left ear’ had ‘been taken off by the bite of a horse’.¹⁰³ His enslaver believed that the animal-inflicted injury would make him easily recognizable, writing that this disfigurement ‘well appeared very visible’, emphasizing its usefulness in facilitating recapture.¹⁰⁴

Despite documentation of horse bite injuries in archival sources, it was far more common for enslaved persons to be injured by hoof kicks, lending historical credence to current data and evidence that suggests ‘most horse-related injuries are caused by a fall or a traumatic kick’.¹⁰⁵ Delivering over ‘one ton of force with a single hoof’, horses ‘kick with up to 1.8 times their own body weight’, frequently leading to severe injuries because of the ‘transfer of kinetic energy’.¹⁰⁶ As they were commonly tasked with tending to the plantation’s horses and working

¹⁰¹ James Doyle, ‘150 Reward’, *Austin City Gazette*, 1 January 1840, 3.

¹⁰² Hausberger, ‘A review of the human–horse relationship’, 1–2.

¹⁰³ James Jordan, ‘Ten Pounds Reward’, *State Gazette of North Carolina*, 17 December 1789, 3. Though horse bites are rare, they are incredibly painful and often fatal. See S. L. Lathrop, ‘Animal–caused fatalities in New Mexico, 1993–2004’, *Wilderness & Environmental Medicine*, vol. 18, no. 4 (2007): 288–290.

¹⁰⁴ Jordan, ‘Ten Pounds Reward’, 3.

¹⁰⁵ Danny Poon, MD, et al., ‘Gastric ulcerations after a traumatic horse kick’, *Journal of Pediatric Surgery Case Reports*, volume 57 (2020): 1.

¹⁰⁶ D.E. Nelson and D. Bixby–Hammett, ‘Equestrian injuries in children and young adults’, *American Journal of Diseases of Children*, vol. 146, no. 5 (1992). Poon, ‘Gastric ulcerations after a traumatic horse kick’, 1.

as groomsmen, many enslaved persons suffered catastrophic injuries from stressed or agitated horses that were later recorded in runaway advertisements.¹⁰⁷ Abraham of North Carolina was described as having a ‘scar on one side of his nostrils’ that ‘was occasioned by the kick of a horse’, while Ned was described as having a ‘large scar on his forehead occasioned by the kick of a horse’.¹⁰⁸ In much the same way, a horse kick left Peter permanently disabled with a conspicuous ‘knot on one of his shin bones’.¹⁰⁹

Enslavers published their runaway advertisements in a regional dialect of mastery, but the violence embedded within them spoke a universal language of suffering that required minimal translation. Attuned to the rhetorical power of corporeal testimony, abolitionists seized upon thousands of these advertisements and strategically used enslavers’ own descriptions of freedom-seekers’ scarred and bitten bodies in hopes of stirring Northerners’ consciences numbed by distance and dulled by complacency.¹¹⁰ Theodore Dwight Weld, Sarah Grimké, and Angelina Grimké understood that some of the most damning indictments of slavery came from enslavers themselves. Their voices only needed to be amplified.¹¹¹ The trio combed through countless Southern newspapers, compiling thousands of runaway advertisements, which they editorialized

¹⁰⁷ Although no details exist on the causes of these injuries, veterinarian and animal behaviorists theorize that a lack of socialization and ‘excessive conflict’ between horse and human are the most common causes of horse hoof kicks. E. Søndergaard, J. Ladewig, ‘Group housing exerts a positive effect on the behaviour of young horses during training’, *Applied Animal Behavioral Science*, vol. 87 (2004). Historian Eugene Genovese suggested that ‘the animals that slaves seem to have taken the ‘greatest delight in abusing were the horses, oxen and mules’. However, these past three chapters have provided numerous cases of positive, well-socialized relationships between enslaved persons and horses. Eugene D. Genovese, ‘Livestock in the Slave Economy of the Old South’, *Agricultural History* 41, no. 3 (1967): 147.

¹⁰⁸ Levi Borden, ‘Twenty dollars reward’, *Raleigh Register and North Carolina Weekly Advertiser*, 28 January 1820, 3. Figures Lewis, ‘Twenty-five dollars reward’, *North Carolina Journal*, 27 February 1797, 3.

¹⁰⁹ William Turner, ‘Twenty dollars reward’, *Raleigh Star and North Carolina Gazette*, 13 September 1836, 3.

¹¹⁰ Margaret Abruzzo observes that abolitionists used descriptions of cruelty inflicted upon black bodies to counter the Southern plantocracy’s claims of slavery’s benevolence. Abruzzo, *Polemical Pain*, 146–147.

¹¹¹ Abolitionists, including William Lloyd Garrison, Theodore Dwight Weld, Sarah Grimké, and Angelina Grimké, relied on ‘self-subverting quotations’ from Southern newspapers to bring the horrors of enslavement to an American public. On the concept of ‘self-subverting quotations’, see McKanan, *Identifying the Image of God*, 135. Manisha Sinha provides an excellent examination of Weld and the Grimké sisters in *The Slave’s Cause*. Sinha, *The Slave’s Cause*, 279–284.

and published in their best-selling work *Slavery As It Is*. By providing ‘the testimony of slaveholders themselves’ in ‘extracts from their own advertisements, in southern newspapers’, the authors employed a powerful rhetorical strategy that used enslavers’ own words to incriminate themselves in the court of public opinion.¹¹² Almost as if presenting evidence to a jury, the authors of *Slavery As It Is* presented an itemized list of abuses with a column for the enslaver labelled as the ‘witness’ and another column for the ‘witnesses’ testimony’ in the form of the enslaver’s words in a runaway or taken up advertisement.

Dog bites appeared almost as frequently as whippings. Isham, as recorded in an Alabama newspaper, had ‘a scar upon the breast and upon the under lip, *from the bite of a dog*’. Ellic, an enslaved person from Georgia, carried a similar ‘scar on one of his arms *from the bite of a dog*’.¹¹³ Another unnamed enslaved person from Halifax County, Virginia, had a scar ‘on the calf of his leg by the bite of a dog’. Henry from New Orleans had ‘half of one ear bit off’, while George from Alabama ‘had the lower part of one of his ears bit off’, and John of Tennessee had ‘the tip of his nose bit off’. And with age not a barrier to cruelty, enslavers such as James McDonnell of Georgia, described an unnamed self-emancipating twelve-year-old child as having a ‘scar on his left cheek *from the bite of a dog*’.¹¹⁴

Weld and the Grimké sisters also pointed to the frequency of ‘cat-hauling’ alongside ‘other cruel modes of torture’.¹¹⁵ Knowing that this extreme form of violence might seem too horrific to believe, Weld and the Grimkés once again found testimony to be the antidote to incredulity. The editors listed first-hand accounts of the practice, including that of Reverend Horace Moulton, who described the practice of cat-hauling as the punishment ‘most dreaded by

¹¹² Weld, *American Slavery As It Is*, 72.

¹¹³ Weld, *American Slavery As It Is*, 77–82. Italics in original.

¹¹⁴ Weld, *American Slavery As It Is*, 79–80. Italics in original.

¹¹⁵ Weld, *American Slavery As It Is*, 20.

the slave'.¹¹⁶ Drawing from the plantocracy's bureaucratic residue, Weld and the Grimké sisters turned language meant to recover lost human property into a damning archive of suffering and human-animal entanglements. Selling hundreds of thousands of copies, *Slavery As It Is*, and its catalog of animal violence, pushed the emotional and physical suffering of enslaved persons into the national discourse and galvanized antislavery sentiment.¹¹⁷

For all its publication success in the North, *Slavery As It Is* was dismissed by enslavers as abolitionist sensationalism, and the plantocracy continued to rely on runaway advertisements and taken up advertisements to identify self-emancipators and also the animals with whom they escaped. As demonstrated in the previous chapter, horses and dogs provided mobility, protection, and companionship during escape attempts. But by taking flight with an animal, self-emancipators became more conspicuous. Nonhuman animals featured prominently in runaway advertisements with their coats, markings, and gaits turned into identifiable features by which they could be more easily recognized and apprehended.

Enslavers formed pecuniary and emotional attachments to their dogs and horses, and the loss of a valuable or favored animal could provoke as much urgency and monetary incentive as the loss of the enslaved person.¹¹⁸ Willing to 'give a liberal reward for both or either, if delivered', Sam Bernard of Wharton County provided physical descriptions of Jerry, an enslaved person of 'very dark complexion', and the 'fine blooded stallion' on whom he rode off. Providing far more details about the horse, Bernard described the animal as 'six or seven years old, about

¹¹⁶ Weld, *American Slavery As It Is*, 88.

¹¹⁷ For further elaboration on the publication success of *Slavery As It Is*, as well as data collection regarding abolitionist texts in general, see Ellen Garvey, 'Facts and Facts: Abolitionists' Database Innovations', in Lisa Gitelman, ed., *'Raw Data' Is an Oxymoron*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2013).

¹¹⁸ Berry, *The Price for Their Pound of Flesh*, 96–98. In his work, *The Political Economy of Predation: Manhunting and the Economics of Escape*, economic historian Mehrdad Vahabi contends that once the horse was taken during an emancipation attempt, it gained value as a mobile monetary asset. Mehrdad Vahabi, *The Political Economy of Predation: Manhunting and the Economics of Escape*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), XXI.

fifteen hands high, dark chestnut sorrel, with some white on one foot'.¹¹⁹ Similarly, an enslaver in Caldwell County, Texas, described Edmund as being six feet two or three inches high and having a black complexion, alongside a depiction of his 'brindle pup with a white face'.¹²⁰

In a pattern that repeated throughout the South, an enslaved person making his way to Marion, South Carolina, was described as tall and slim, while the two dogs with whom he escaped were described as 'brindle and black'.¹²¹ Additionally, a freedom-seeker named Mack was described with few anthropometric details, while the description of the horse that accompanied him was far more comprehensive. His equine companion, a 'black mare, in good order, about four years old last spring, with saddle marks on each side of the back, and a white spot in her forehead'.¹²²

The value attached to horses, mules, and dogs, as well as the precision with which the animals were described, suggests a determination to fix and code animal bodies for reclamation and circulation within the plantocracy's surveillance economy. Of particular significance are the 'taken up' advertisements for horses and mules, which exceeded the number of runaway advertisements for self-emancipators in states such as Texas.¹²³ Almost as if answering runaway advertisements that had not yet been written, Southern newspapers contained pages upon pages of taken up advertisements attempting to reunite enslavers with missing horses and mules taken by self-emancipators. The written dialogue exchanged in ink between runaway advertisements and taken up advertisements reveals an animal economy in which information and animals were

¹¹⁹ E. George, 'Runaway', *Texas State Gazette*, 16 September 1854, 5.

¹²⁰ The action verb 'carried off' suggests the dog belonged to Edmund's enslaver. Cushing, '\$100 Reward', 2.

¹²¹ Wright, 'I will give twenty five dollars', 3.

¹²² S.R. Perry, 'Ran Away', *Texas Republican*, 11 October 1849, 3.

¹²³ Larry P. Knight found that notices of stray horses and mules far outnumbered runaway advertisements for self-emancipators in Texas. Larry P. Knight, 'Defending the Unnecessary: Slavery in San Antonio in the 1850s', in Bruce A. Glasrud, *African Americans in South Texas History*, (Lubbock, Texas: Texas A&M Press, 2011).

exchanged in a network based on reputation, power, property rights, and nonhuman animal capital.

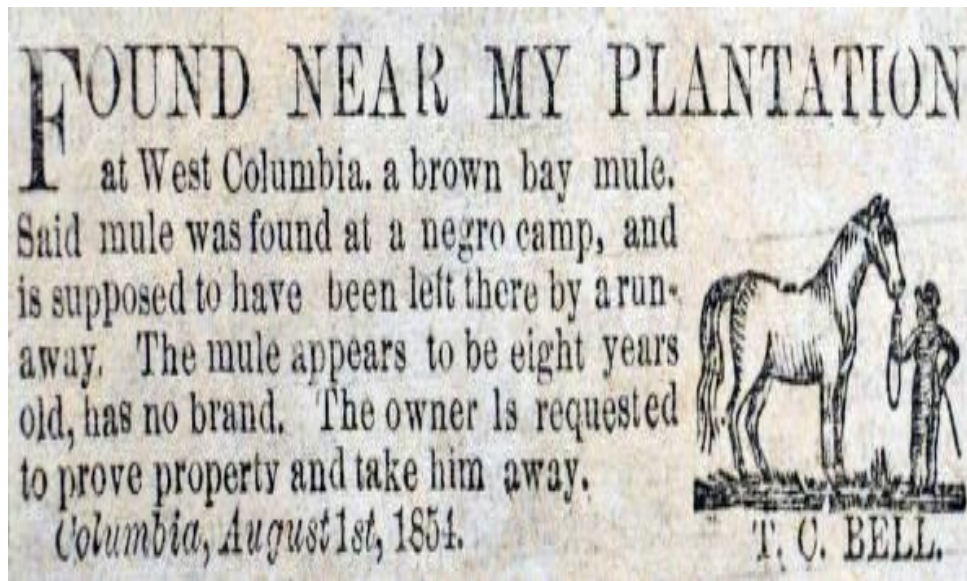


Figure 3.4. Found near my Plantation.¹²⁴

T.C. Bell's discovery of a brown bay mule at a 'negro camp' that had 'been left there by a runaway', serves to illustrate this exchange within the socio-economic context of slavery and self-emancipation. In the advertisement, in which Bell described the animal as eight years old and without a brand, the widely-popular illustration of a runaway is replaced by that of an equine animal. Bell informed readers that they could take the mule if they were able to 'prove property'.¹²⁵ After finding a sorrel mare 'stolen by a runaway negro' and tied 'to a live-oak runner', Henry Terrell informed readers of the *Colorado Citizen* that the animal was '14 hands high, walks well under the saddle' and had 'no brands perceivable'.¹²⁶ The owner could claim the horse by applying to Terrell personally. Likewise, R.N. Perris found a dun horse with a black mane and tail and a Spanish brand taken by a 'runaway Negro'. The owner could 'have him

¹²⁴ T.C. Bell, 'Found Near my Plantation', *The Texas Advertiser*, 1 August 1854, 2.

¹²⁵ Bell, 'Found Near my Plantation', 2.

¹²⁶ Henry Terrell, 'Taken Up', *The Colorado Citizen*, 15 September 1860, 2.

restored upon proving property'.¹²⁷ In all these cases, the promise of recovery depended on the enslaver's ability to reassert a proprietary claim.

These taken up advertisements expose a fundamental logic of the plantation system. Every recovered animal whose owner had to 'apply in person' to prove property was a reminder that slavery was constantly threatened by resistance and demanded constant surveillance, reauthorization, and legal ritual. Taken together, these taken up and runaway advertisements show the tenuous nature of ownership within a plantation system that relied on absolute control. Enslavers depended on legal mechanisms and surveillance networks. But the number and persistence of these advertisements indicate that property ownership was in constant flux in the aftermath of self-emancipation.

Against incredible odds, self-emancipators broke through the confines of the plantation, avoided capture from the wider slave-hunting apparatus, made their way through surveilled ecologies despite their identification in runaway advertisements, and made it to sites of freedom. Upon reaching Northern states, as well as Canada and Mexico, with dogs and equine animals, self-emancipators claimed their freedom, their personhood, and their right to ownership over nonhuman animals. The pseudo-legal adjudication process of proving property found in taken up advertisements, coupled with claims of equine animals being stolen or taken by self-emancipators revealed that enslaved persons did not feature in the legal framework of property claims over nonhuman animals. This proposition, long recognized inside and outside the United States' formal legal system, was nevertheless outright rejected by many self-emancipating enslaved persons.¹²⁸ Couching their legal claims in the language of higher law and natural rights,

¹²⁷ R.N. Perris, 'Taken Up', *The San Antonian Ledger*, 10 October 1857, 3.

¹²⁸ According to Roy W. Copeland, laws forbidding enslaved persons from purchasing 'real property' began swiftly in the slaveholding South. Copeland, 'In the Beginning: Origins of African American Real Property Ownership in the United States', 647–650. For the classic work on the development of race-based laws in the American South,

enslaved persons spurned *de jure* jurisprudence and justified their ownership of equine animals in a rival legal and ethical framework.¹²⁹

In these types of formulations, labor taken under duress and coercion represented a debt that could be repaid to an enslaved person through the ethical repurposing of an animal. David had taken a horse from his enslaver, claiming that since he ‘had been deprived of his just dues for so many years, he had the right to borrow, or take without borrowing’, the animal.¹³⁰ Rather than theft, David believed this was restitution. J.W. Loguen’s argument regarding this issue was not one of restitution, but rather, one embedded in the principle that enslavers disqualified themselves from all property claims by claiming ownership over other humans. Loguen believed that ‘slave-holders forfeit their right to natural truth, as they do a right to their natural lives’. According to Loguen’s rationale of moral absolutism, enslavement was a violation of natural laws. Those who upheld it had no legitimate claim to the animals they relied on to enforce the institution. Consequently, ‘if a poor slave takes his master’s horse to run away from him, he is not therefore a thief’.¹³¹

Using biblical, if not messianic language after taking a horse, Henry Bibb claimed he would crucify ‘horse flesh’ or his ‘own flesh for the sake of redeeming [himself] from perpetual slavery’.¹³² Bibb’s evocation of the crucifix, as well as personal or nonhuman animal sacrifice in hopes of redemption, builds upon what historians have termed a distinctive interpretation of the

including those that restricted and prohibited property ownership, see Jordan, *White Over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro, 1550–1812*.

¹²⁹ Though he mostly focuses on literature, Peter Wirzbicki provides an outstanding analysis of antislavery appeals that were based on ‘higher law’. Peter Wirzbicki, *Fighting for the Higher Law: Black and White Transcendentalists Against Slavery*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2021).

¹³⁰ Still, ‘Four Arrivals’, *Still’s Underground Rail Road Records*, 216.

¹³¹ Loguen, *The Rev. J. W. Loguen, as a Slave and as a Freeman*, 314–315.

¹³² Bibb, *Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb*, 163.

Christian faith developed under bondage slavery.¹³³ Bibb argued that readers should not find issue with him taking the horse, as he ‘did nothing more than nine out of ten would do if they were placed in the same circumstances’.¹³⁴ He continued by urging readers to participate in a mental exercise that inverted racial dynamics in a hypothetical situation. Drawing on the widely popular, centuries-old motif of Native Americans taking white persons as captives, Bibb asked readers to imagine that ‘a white man had been captured by the Cherokee Indians and carried away from his family for a life into slavery’.¹³⁵ If an opportunity to escape arose, Bibb rhetorically inquired, ‘Would it be a crime for the poor fugitive’ to ‘mount any man’s horse’ to escape? Such ‘an act committed by a white man’, Bibb argued, ‘would not only be pronounced proper, but praiseworthy’.¹³⁶

Aside from his moral and religious justification of taking the animal, Bibb also fashioned a physical marker of ownership when he ‘cut a grape vine’ with his knife, making ‘it into a bridle’ to put on the horse.¹³⁷ In much the same way, Phill Sharp determined that it was ‘no sin to take’ a horse as a means to escape and crafted a ‘bridle of bark’ to denote his newfound stewardship of the equine animal.¹³⁸ While these markers of counter-ownership were makeshift, the message in creating them was an unmistakable reconfiguration of property on their own

¹³³ Eric Foner notes that enslaved persons developed a ‘distinctive version of the Christian faith, in which Jesus appeared as a personal redeemer’. See Eric Foner, *Language of Change: Sources of Black Ideology during the Civil War and Reconstruction*, (Columbia University, 1989), 278.

¹³⁴ Bibb, *Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb*, 163.

¹³⁵ For further elaboration on the ‘Indian Captivity Narrative’ literary genre, see Daniel E. Williams, Christina Riley Brown, et al., eds., *Liberty’s Captives: Narratives of Confinement in the Print Culture of the Early Republic*, (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 2006), 34–48, 74–80

¹³⁶ Bibb, *Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb*, 163–164.

¹³⁷ Bibb, *Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb*, 161–162.

¹³⁸ Anderson, *Life and Narrative of William J. Anderson: Containing Scriptural Views of the Origin of the Black and of the White Man. Also, a Simple and Easy Plan to Abolish Slavery in the United States. Together with an Account of the Services of Colored Men in the Revolutionary War—Day and Date, and Interesting Facts*, (Chicago: Daily Tribune Book and Job Printing Office, 1857), 27.

terms. Unable and unwilling to participate in the traditional legal structure of property rights and animal ownership, Sharp and Bibb both created means to identify the animal as their own.¹³⁹

When escape became freedom and symbolic claims became actionable, enslaved persons, in some situations, replicated patterns of animal commodification that sustained the plantation system. In doing so, they reinscribed nonhuman animals into systems of capital and exchange that focused on the utility and market value of animal bodies.¹⁴⁰ Pierce Harper was enslaved near a ‘man who raised bloodhounds to hunt slaves’, but he observed instances during which ‘slaves made friends with the dogs, and the dogs wouldn’t let on if they found them’. With this in mind, Harper proactively established relationships with the animals. And as he began his self-emancipation attempt, Harper’s former enslaver unleashed these dogs to track him, but the animals, now bonded with Harper, faithfully followed him the ‘whole way up north’ as escorts rather than captors.¹⁴¹ The animals’ decision to follow Harper north created a legal, if not a sentimental, attachment once the self-emancipator crossed into Northern states and into Canada.¹⁴² Having won the dogs’ loyalty, Harper believed that the animals became his property, and once established in Canada, he ‘sold them up there’, trading companionship for material wealth.¹⁴³

Freedom-seekers across North America made difficult decisions about the animals who had aided their escape as they navigated the tension between sentiment and necessity. In an

¹³⁹ Anderson, *Life and Narrative of William J. Anderson*, 27. Virginia Anderson discusses the importance of collars as physical signifiers of ownership generally and within the context of colonial America in her work, *Creatures of Empire*, especially the chapter titled, ‘The Deer with the Red Collar’.

¹⁴⁰ On market incentives and the projection of ‘value’ onto animals, living and dead, see Shukin, *Animal Capital*, 65–74.

¹⁴¹ WPA, Pierce Harper, *Slave Narratives, (Texas, Part 2)*, 110–111. In the book, *The Social Dog*, Juliane Kaminski and Sarah Marshall–Pescini show how dogs can form bonds to multiple attachment figures. Juliane Kaminski and Sarah Marshall–Pescini, *The Social Dog: Behavior and Cognition*, (Amsterdam: Academic Press, 2014), 180–184.

¹⁴² For further elaboration on the experiences of self-emancipators in Ontario, see Barker, ‘Revisiting ‘British Principle Talk’.

¹⁴³ WPA, Pierce Harper, 111.

alchemic formula that turned animals into currency, formerly enslaved persons monetized their most valuable asset as interspecies relationships got swept into the gravitational pull of capital. J.W. Loguen ‘found his purse seriously diminished’ and had to find ‘some way to replenish it’. Reaching the ‘northern borders of the wilderness’, Loguen met a Quaker with whom he ‘swapped his noble horse for boot money’ shortly before crossing into Canada. Upon reaching freedom in Canada, Loguen and his companion hoped to sell their last remaining horse, but they were disappointed to find a hostile marketplace fueled by guile and exploitation where their horse ‘was not worth the fifty cents he had in his pocket’.¹⁴⁴

These new markets brought steep learning curves for many formerly enslaved persons. Reaching free soil, yet ‘ignorant of the country’, Lewis Clarke was ‘unwilling to inquire, lest’ he ‘should betray his ignorance’. A newcomer to a free state and a neophyte to the free-market exchange system of a Northern economy, Clarke bided his time before safely plugging into a clandestine network of formerly enslaved persons. Receiving advice ‘from a man who had once been a slave’, Clarke was counseled to ‘sell [his] pony, go up the river’ and then cross into Canada. Assessing the depreciating market value of his horse, Clarke conceded that his horse was ‘pretty well used up’ and sold the animal for a small sum. He parlayed this small sum into passage to Portsmouth, river transport to Cleveland, and a boat ride to Canada.¹⁴⁵

In decisions of whether to sell or abandon domesticated animals, enslaved persons engaged in a type of calculus. They weighed the vicissitudes of the market, the health and vitality of the animal, and, perhaps most importantly, the vigilance of the enslavers determined to reclaim their human and nonhuman animal property. Enslavers saw the theft of a nonhuman

¹⁴⁴ Loguen, *The Rev. J. W. Loguen, as a Slave and as a Freeman*, 333, 337. On racism and the experiences of self-emancipators who escaped to Montreal, see Mackay, *Done with Slavery*.

¹⁴⁵ Clarke, *Narratives of the Sufferings of Lewis and Milton Clarke*, 36–39.

animal as an assault on their personal property, and in some cases, on the entire structure of property itself. Therefore, when they attempted to recover lost property, enslavers and, at times, the broader community attempted to reaffirm control over human and nonhuman bodies.

Owen Taylor and his brothers ‘boldly harnessed’ two of their enslaver’s horses, placed ‘their wives and children in the carriage’, and made a direct line north. The aggrieved enslaver, Mr. Fiery, as well as the entire ‘community in which the Fierys lived’, pursued the family in ‘hot haste’ as the self-emancipators traveled ‘at a rate that allowed no grass to grow under the horses’ feet’. Placing secrecy above the worth of their horses, the family ‘bade their faithful beasts good-bye’ and made their way to Pennsylvania, where shifting laws made recapture uncertain.¹⁴⁶ After a ‘very diligent search’, the enslavers concluded that ‘there was no likelihood of recovering’ the family in Pennsylvania, a state that passed an Act to Protect the Free People of This Commonwealth and Others in 1847, virtually negating the rights of enslavers to recapture freedom-seekers.¹⁴⁷ While the Fiery family and the community abandoned hope of capturing the self-emancipated family, they continued searching for the horses, who were eventually ‘captured at the hotel, where they were left’.¹⁴⁸

Ledgers, newspapers, and legal cases reveal similar encounters across the South with enslavers going through a ‘great deal of trouble’ to recapture enslaved persons and animals.¹⁴⁹ They found that the difficulty of capturing self-emancipators and nonhuman animals

¹⁴⁶ Still, *The Underground Railroad*, 321–322.

¹⁴⁷ Still, *The Underground Railroad*, 322. By 1847, Pennsylvania’s black population had doubled to 60,000, none of whom were enslaved. During that year, Pennsylvania passed its *Act to Prevent Kidnapping, Preserve the Public Peace, Prohibit the Exercise of Certain Powers Heretofore Exercised by Certain Judges, Justices of the Peace, Aldermen and Jailors in This Commonwealth*. See Ira Berlin, *Generations of Captivity: A History of African–American Slaves*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2004), 276. The classic work on the development of antislavery and abolitionism in Pennsylvania remains Gary Nash and Jean R. Soderlund, *Freedom by Degrees: Emancipation in Pennsylvania and Its Aftermath*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).

¹⁴⁸ Still, *The Underground Railroad*, 321–322.

¹⁴⁹ Drew, *A North–Side View of Slavery*, 106.

rose significantly once the formerly enslaved person crossed state and international borders.¹⁵⁰ Turning to court systems and legislative chambers, enslavers became litigants, but in doing so, exposed contradictions within their claims as well as within the entire logic of property in the plantation system.

Denied legal recognition in the South except as property, enslaved persons in free spaces were now paradoxically assigned culpability in stealing themselves, becoming both agent and object in the same legal question.¹⁵¹ Grasping for stable footing as the jurisprudential ground on which they stood eroded under the weight of their legal solecism, antislavery sentiment, and arguments of international sovereignty and states' rights, enslavers and their allies began framing self-emancipation as horse theft, a serious and highly prosecutable offense in the mid-nineteenth century.¹⁵² Creating legal showdowns over the issue, horses became nonhuman animal proxies through which the issues of property, personhood, and sovereignty were contested at the national and international levels.

Captured near the border of the Province of Coahuila in 1820 by Spanish forces, four enslaved persons claimed to have traveled roughly 1,500 miles from Kentucky and South Carolina, respectively, seeking freedom and protection in New Spain.¹⁵³ Expecting better treatment from the Spanish, Juan Pedro, Martin, Ricardo Moran, and Fivi attempted to convince their Spanish interrogators to grant them asylum even though Spain had ended its sanctuary

¹⁵⁰ For a recent work on self-emancipation, borders, and spaces of freedom, see Pargas, *Freedom Seekers*. Especially useful is Pargas's designation of formal and semi-formal spaces of freedom.

¹⁵¹ Framed as the 'double character' legal premise by Ariela Gross, enslaved persons could be considered as both persons and property within jurisprudence. Gross, *Double Character*, 3.

¹⁵² Focusing on Amerindian horse theft in western Nebraska, historian Matthew Lockett argues that the crime was so serious that it could destabilize communities, institutions, and nations. See Matthew S. Lockett, *Never Caught Twice: Horse Stealing in Western Nebraska, 1850–1890*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2020), 65.

¹⁵³ While the four enslaved persons were captured close to the Province of Texas, as stated by Sarah Cornell, Monterrey is actually located south of the city of Santa Rose, which is in the Province of Coahuila. Cornell, 'Citizens of Nowhere', 351.

policy in 1790. Although New Spain did not typically extradite freedom-seekers, the fate of the four hinged on the accusation that they had stolen their enslavers' horses to self-emancipate. When the Spanish interrogators accused Ricardo Moran of stealing his enslaver's horse, the self-emancipator defended himself by claiming his enslaver had stolen a more valuable horse from him in the past. Fielding a similar accusation, Fivi claimed 'she had not done anything harmful to her owner', as it was he who mistreated her.¹⁵⁴ After much deliberation, the Spanish authorities chose not to extradite the self-emancipators to the United States in what can be understood as an implicit recognition that the logic of property in persons and animals did not translate cleanly across national borders.

Mexico gained its independence from Spain and began the process of gradual emancipation the following year. In 1824, Mexico invoked the free-soil legal premise when it passed a law stating any enslaved person brought to Mexico was free by the 'mere act of setting foot' in Mexican territory, a statute that complicated the new regime's relationship with American enslavers settling in Mexican Texas near the Brazos River.¹⁵⁵ Concerned about the increasing influence of American enslavers in the state of Coahuila y Tejas, the Mexican government sent Manuel de Mier y Terán, a former Brigadier General during Mexico's War of Independence, to inspect the area.

Mier y Terán decried illegal settlements and the living conditions of Mexicans, but he was most disturbed by the southwestern extension of American slavery into the new nation of Mexico. In letters sent back to Mexico City, Mier y Terán lamented the 'barbarities' of the enslavers, bringing the Mexican government's attention specifically to canine violence as he

¹⁵⁴ Cornell, 'Citizens of Nowhere', 356.

¹⁵⁵ The original text reads: 'Los esclavos que se introdujeron contra el tenor del artículo anterior, quedan libres con solo el hecho de pisar el territorio'. See Oficina Tip. de la Secretaría de Fomento, Código de colonización y terrenos baldíos de la República Mexicana, (Mexico: Presidente de la Republica, 1893), 188.

described how Texan enslavers ‘set dogs upon’ the enslaved persons ‘to tear them apart’.¹⁵⁶ The emotion with which he wrote conveys the sense of unrest and moral outrage not simply at the illegal migration of American enslavers into Mexico, but at the importation of cross-species violence that they used to keep their enslaved population subjugated.

On the recommendations of Mier y Terán, Mexico enacted policies and laws such as the Law of April 6, 1830, aimed at limiting American migration while curtailing the advance of American slavery. Despite these measures, Americans continued to settle illegally in Texas, many bringing nonhuman animals and enslaved persons, which intensified demographic and political instability and contributed to the Texas Revolution and eventually Texan Independence. Following Texan secession, Mexico’s earlier abolition of slavery and its refusal to extradite freedom-seekers created a *de facto* safe haven for self-emancipators from Texas and neighboring Louisiana.¹⁵⁷ Through numerous regime changes and well over a dozen changes of heads of state, Mexico remained hostile to American enslavers’ overtures for the extradition of fugitive slaves and the ‘stolen horses’ on which they self-emancipated. The Southern plantocracy came to view Mexico as an illegal sanctuary state and a direct threat to the legal and economic foundations of slavery. These tensions, rooted in territorial expansion and contested claims of human and animal property, contributed to the coming of the Mexican-American War that erupted in 1846.

The Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo, which formally ended military hostilities after the Mexican-American War, did not bring resolution to these issues.¹⁵⁸ With the addition of the

¹⁵⁶ Manuel Mier y Terán, ‘Warnings about the Future of Texas’, Nacogdoches, 30 June 1828, in Allaine Howren, ‘Causes and Origin of the Decree of April 6, 1830’, *Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, vol. 16, no. 4 (1913): 397–398.

¹⁵⁷ Mexico changed its extradition policy with the United States shortly after the Mexican American War. Gurza-Lavalle, ‘Against Slave Power? Slavery and Runaway Slaves in Mexico–United States Relations’.

¹⁵⁸ On the Treaty of Guadalupe–Hidalgo and the continuation of tensions between the United States and Mexico after the war, see Henderson, *A Glorious Defeat*, especially Chapter 7.

Mexican Cession exacerbating sectional tensions over slavery and threatening to tear the United States asunder, enslaver incursions into Mexican territory to capture self-emancipators and horses nearly led to a resumption of hostilities between the United States and its southern neighbor. Cloaking their overtures in the language of property recovery, a group of Texan enslavers wrote to Mexican authorities in Chihuahua, threatening to use force to recover their fugitive slaves and stolen horses. In turn, the Mexican Minister of War explained that if enslavers ‘resolve to invade our frontier with the aim of recovering their runaway slaves and their stolen horses’, we will ‘be compelled to repel force with force’.¹⁵⁹

In violation of US law and Mexican sovereignty, the group of enslavers crossed the border into Mexico.¹⁶⁰ The Mexican military stopped the invasion force at Río Escondido, but during the retreat, the Texans looted and burned the town of Piedras Negras, a well-known safe haven for self-emancipators, where, as contemporaries noted, ‘their rights were as fully protected as if they were Mexican born’.¹⁶¹ The cross-border attack known as the Callahan Raids sent shockwaves across both nations. With Texan newspapers such as the *San Antonio Herald* declaring ‘to arms, Texans’, both the United States and Mexican governments sent additional troops to prevent further hostilities.¹⁶² And though war was avoided, recaptured horses and the burned homes in Piedras Negras left a smoldering reminder that the battles over slavery and freedom would be waged in capitals and courtrooms as well as in the transnational borderlands.

¹⁵⁹ Ignacio Galindo to Langberg, Monterrey, 11 September 1855, *El Siglo XIX*, 12 November 1855, in Baumgartner, *South to Freedom*.

¹⁶⁰ While the incursion across the Mexican border was purportedly to follow Native American raiders, most historians agree the intent was to capture self-emancipators and stolen horses. For an overview of the debate regarding the purpose of the Callahan Raids, see Ronnie C. Tyler, ‘The Callahan Expedition of 1855: Indians or Negroes?’, *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, vol. 70, no. 4 (1967).

¹⁶¹ Olmsted, *A Journey Through Texas*, 325.

¹⁶² ‘Return of Capt. Callahan’s Expedition—Piedras Negras Burnt—the Citizens Take up Arms’, *San Antonio Herald*, 16 October 1855.

The prospect of such hostilities had long been a concern for Great Britain.¹⁶³ Writing to London describing the dangers of a hard border between free and slave governments, Her Majesty's Consulate to Galveston predicted a state of 'constant frontier dispute and raid arising out of the escape of slaves'.¹⁶⁴ These transatlantic anxieties over the permeability of North America's international borders speak to Britain's imperial concerns and their attempts to navigate the geopolitical consequences of a continent divided between slavery and freedom. Self-emancipators had long sought freedom by crossing the northern border of the United States into British Canada. And similarly to Mexico, British Canada's refusal to extradite self-emancipators back to the American South inflamed tensions with its neighbor.

The legal precedent set by the Somerset decision, which eventually extended free-soil principles from England to its Canadian provinces, reinforced Britain's policy against any extradition treaty with Canada's slaveholding neighbor.¹⁶⁵ However, unlike Mexico, a country condescendingly described as having 'no government really' in the wake of the Callahan Raids, the legitimacy of the Province of Canada was rarely questioned, and large-scale vigilante incursions were virtually nonexistent.¹⁶⁶ Therefore, enslavers turned to novel legal strategies and jurisprudential fictions to force their northern neighbor's hand. Crossing borders on the backs of horses, enslaved persons inadvertently provided enslavers with the legal pretexts to pursue their

¹⁶³ For further elaboration on the British response to US–Mexican territorial disputes regarding slavery, see Thomas Mareite, *Conditional Freedom: Free Soil and Fugitive Slaves from the U.S. South to Mexico's Northeast, 1803–1861*, (New York: Brill Publishing, 2022), 219–220.

¹⁶⁴ Charles Elliot to the Earl of Aberdeen, K.T., in *British Diplomatic Correspondence Concerning the Republic of Texas, 1838–1846*, (Austin, Texas: Texas State Historical Association, 1917), 521.

¹⁶⁵ The landmark decision of 1772 laid the legal and ideological framework that any enslaved person setting foot on British soil became free. Although the decision only applied to England and Wales, Upper Canada used the precedent as a pretext to promulgate 'The Act to Limit Slavery', passed in 1793. Abbott, *Beacons of Liberty*, 66.

¹⁶⁶ 'Return of Capt. Callahan's Expedition'. The Province of Canada was created in 1840 by uniting Upper Canada and Lower Canada during the Act of Union. Prior to the Act of Union, neither the legitimacy of Upper Canada nor Lower Canada was seriously questioned by American enslavers. For an overview of the Act of Union and the Province of Canada, see Martin Brook Taylor, ed., *Canadian History: Beginnings to Confederation*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994).

extradition back into slavery as horse thieves. Since nonhuman animal property was a more universally-accepted legal concept than claims of property in humans, enslavers used equine animals as a species-based vector through which they attempted to circumvent international extradition policy and, later, Northern personal liberty laws in the United States.

One year after the British Parliament passed the Slavery Abolition Act of 1833, setting up the process through which slavery would be abolished in the British Empire, a series of four court cases involving attempts to extradite self-emancipators as horse thieves defined British-Canadian extradition policy and formally established all provinces of Canada as sanctuaries for the formerly enslaved.¹⁶⁷ The State of Virginia tested the limits of this evolving policy by sending a letter to the Executive Council of Upper Canada in 1834. In the letter, the State of Virginia presumed the guilt of Abraham Johnson, arguing that the self-emancipator had committed a crime under Virginian law when he had ‘feloniously taken away’ the horse of his enslaver.¹⁶⁸ Accusing Johnson of fleeing ‘from the Justice of the State of Virginia’, the petition requested that the self-emancipator be extradited and sent back to the Commonwealth. Despite the promulgation of the Fugitive Offenders Act the previous year standardizing extradition policy across the British Empire, the Council of Upper Canada denied the request and refused to extradite Johnson to Virginia.¹⁶⁹

However, as American enslavers and states sympathetic to slave power pushed international legal boundaries by seeking new ways to use nonhuman animals as a pretext to

¹⁶⁷ Two superb accounts of the Slavery Abolition Act of 1833, as well as British abolitionism and governmental policy, include Richard Huzzey, *Freedom Burning: Anti-Slavery and Empire in Victorian Britain*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2012); and Christopher Leslie Brown, *Moral Capital: Foundations of British Abolitionism*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012).

¹⁶⁸ ‘State submissions to the Executive Council of Upper Canada’, 1196 Identifier RG 1 E 3 205134 lac_reel_c1196 C-1196, Library and Archives Canada / Bibliothèque et Archives Canada, 7. https://heritage.canadiana.ca/view/oocihm.lac_reel_c1196/1. Accessed 18 January 2025.

¹⁶⁹ ‘State submissions to the Executive Council of Upper Canada’, 7.

extradite self-emancipators, they shifted the legal grounds, at least temporarily. Three years after the Abraham Johnson decision, Solomon Moseby escaped enslavement in Kentucky on his enslaver's horse. He rode five hundred miles before arriving in Buffalo. While in Buffalo, he sold the horse, and by converting mobility into capital, crossed the Niagara River into Canada. This last act, however, provided his former enslavers and the Governor of Kentucky with the legal means to pursue his extradition as a horse thief. Moseby's attorneys argued that the extradition case was not about the equine animal but rather a thinly veiled attempt to circumvent British-Canadian law and return the self-emancipator to slavery. Shedding light on the dark machinations of the men from Kentucky who 'traveled 1,500 miles at the expense of at least \$400 to bring to justice a Slave charged with stealing a horse of only the value of \$150', Moseby's attorneys asserted that this case was not a matter of stolen nonhuman animal property, but rather, an attempt to erode British-Canadian legal precedent. The attorneys hoped the executives in Upper Canada would see the ploy for what it was and uphold justice for Moseby.¹⁷⁰

Regrettably, Upper Canada's Attorney General, Executive Council, and Lieutenant Governor agreed that Moseby committed a crime when he sold the horse in Buffalo, and, under the Fugitive Offenders Act of 1833, was ordered to return to Kentucky. Fearing for Moseby's safety and the wide-ranging implications of this 'test case' in Upper Canada, Canadian abolitionists surrounded the Niagara-on-the-Lake Courthouse to block Moseby's extradition. When armed authorities moved Moseby out of the courthouse to return him to Kentucky, the crowd charged the soldiers. Mobs killed two abolitionists, and the authorities arrested dozens more, but Solomon Moseby escaped the violence and departed for the safety of England.¹⁷¹

¹⁷⁰ For this quotation and legal transcripts from this case, see Silverman, 'Kentucky, Canada, and Extradition: the Jesse Happy case', 54.

¹⁷¹ See Murray, 'Hands Across the Border', for further elaboration on the attempt to free Moseby.

The ink on the parchment of the Moseby decision had barely dried before Kentucky brought another case demanding the extradition of a formerly enslaved person named Jesse Happy. Happy sequestered his enslaver's horse and escaped enslavement in 1833. However, Happy seemingly anticipated future legal challenges and, unlike Moseby, left the horse in the United States before crossing the border into Canada. Happy even wrote a letter to his former enslaver, directing him to where he could find the horse. Nevertheless, the Kentucky Governor filed another suit with Upper Canada demanding the extradition of Happy for horse thievery.¹⁷²

In the wake of the Moseby decision, authorities were acutely aware of the potential transnational political stakes. Another diplomatic crisis seemed imminent, which prompted Upper Canada's Attorney General, Executive Council, and Lieutenant Governor to seek guidance from the highest levels of the British government. After consulting with the Secretary of State of the Colonies, the British Foreign Secretary, and the Law Officers of the Crown, a decision was reached to rule against the Kentucky Governor and protect the freedom of Jesse Happy. In a succinct yet decisive decision, the authorities concluded that 'since slavery did not exist in Canada, the crime of escape could not exist there, and the use of the horse in Happy's case had been to effect escape and not for theft'.¹⁷³

While the Happy ruling set a legal precedent limiting enslavers' ability to extradite self-emancipators for taking horses, test cases involving nonhuman animals, including the case of Nelson Hackett, continued as enslavers sought to pry open loopholes within the developing transatlantic jurisprudence. Hackett escaped from Arkansas in 1841, taking a beaver coat, a gold watch, and a 'fine racehorse and saddle' as he traveled over one thousand miles before crossing

¹⁷² Robin W. Winks provides details of Happy's case in the context of the diaspora of formerly enslaved persons arriving in Canada. Winks, *Blacks in Canada: a History*, 170–171.

¹⁷³ Attorney General John Campbell from the Law Offices of the Crown, quoted in Winks, *Blacks in Canada*, 171.

into Canada, where he believed ‘the humanity of the British law made him a free man’.¹⁷⁴ His enslavers tracked him in Canada, demanding his extradition for the theft of the horse and gold watch. While protected from prosecution for taking the horse under the Happy decision, the self-emancipator was arrested for the theft of the gold watch, as the British Diplomat explained to abolitionists: ‘Had he only taken the horse’, he would ‘not probably have been surrendered, for you know the horse was necessary for this escape’.¹⁷⁵ Hackett became the last fugitive slave extradited from Canada. His case sparked a firestorm in Anglo-American abolitionist circles, serving to buttress Canada’s commitment to safeguarding the rights of self-emancipators. Though the ruling was devastating for Hackett, the case clearly upheld that in British Canada, the function of a horse as a sentient vehicle of freedom overruled enslavers’ attempts to twist the animal into legal evidence of theft.

Personal Liberty and Federal Power on Trial

As jurisprudential battles regarding nonhuman animals and self-emancipations helped define international treaties and extradition policies, the issue also exposed deep fault lines within the United States and contributed to the growing sectional crisis threatening to push the nation to the brink of war. Self-emancipators broke the bounds of the plantation system, and through their escapes, and enslavers’ efforts to capture them, turned fugitivity into a question of

¹⁷⁴ Historian Michael Pierce is the foremost expert on Hackett’s case, even creating the ‘Nelson Hackett Project’ at the University of Arkansas. Pierce provides an overview of Hackett’s self-emancipation and the subsequent legal cases involving his freedom in his article ‘Adventures. Escape of a Slave’. See Michael Pierce, ‘Adventures. Escape of a Slave’: An Account of the Flight of Nelson Hackett’, *The Arkansas Historical Quarterly*, vol. 79, no. 2 (2020): 133–141. This particular quote is from ‘Canada: Copies of a Despatch from the Governor-General of Canada to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, of the 20th of January Last, Relative to the Surrender of Nelson Hackett, a Person of Colour, on the Demand of the Authorities of the United States, as a Fugitive from Justice’, (London: Her Majesty’s Stationery Office, 1842). *The Nelson Hackett Project*, University of Arkansas, accessed 20 June 2025, <https://nelsonhackettproject.uark.edu>.

¹⁷⁵ Lewis Tappan, ‘Interview with Lord Ashburton’, *The Liberator*, 16 September 1842, as quoted in Pargas, *Freedom Seekers*, 248.

national, hemispheric, and transatlantic importance. As enslavers raided the Mexican border and filed lawsuits in British Canada, they also pursued freedom-seekers throughout the North. In response, Northern states such as Pennsylvania enacted personal liberty laws throughout the antebellum years to protect self-emancipators from the Fugitive Slave Act of 1793.¹⁷⁶ In the two decades leading up to the Civil War, the fights over the shifting meaning of property and freedom moved to the streets, courtrooms, and legislative chambers of the United States.

A year after the extradition of Nelson Hackett from Upper Canada to Kentucky, the United States Supreme Court issued its decision in *Prigg v. Pennsylvania*, which ruled states' personal liberty laws unconstitutional but left open legal loopholes for state noncompliance.¹⁷⁷ This ruling, like many of the decisions made during these decades, brought no resolution, but rather, emboldened enslavers while also intensifying Northern resistance. As self-emancipators sought freedom in Mexico, Canada, and Northern states, enslavers such as John C. Calhoun entertained 'the gravest question that can ever come under your consideration: How can the Union be preserved?'¹⁷⁸ With this existential question in the political ether, it became obvious that the preservation of the Union was becoming increasingly linked to the preservation of slavery as Congress passed the Compromise of 1850 and strengthened the Fugitive Slave Act. This legislative attempt to assuage tensions, instead, brought about a period marked by the intensification of polarization, sectionalism, nullification, and resistance.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁶ On the development of personal liberty laws, see Sinha, *The Slave's Cause*, 390–393.

¹⁷⁷ Sinha, *The Slave's Cause*, 390. H. Robert Baker, *Prigg v. Pennsylvania: Slavery, the Supreme Court, and the Ambiguous Constitution*, (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2012), 2–3.

¹⁷⁸ John C. Calhoun, *John C. Calhoun's speech to the United States Senate against the Compromise of, 4 March*. 4 March, 1850. John C. Calhoun Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

¹⁷⁹ Under the strengthened Fugitive Slave Act in the Compromise of 1850, self-emancipators had to be returned to their enslavers even if they reached a Northern state. For further elaboration on the Fugitive Slave Act and the Compromise of 1850, see Delbanco, *The War Before the War*, 173, 237–238.

The nation's first major test of the strengthened Fugitive Slave Act occurred in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, even before the Senate finished debating the law's final form.¹⁸⁰ Samuel Wilson and George Brocks escaped to Pennsylvania, but their enslavers, in seeking to recapture them, claimed they had stolen horses, just as other enslavers had done when facing Canadian extradition law. The pair, along with a third enslaved person known as Billy in the court records, were arrested and charged as horse thieves rather than fugitive slaves. Flanked by a team of high-powered attorneys on both sides of the courtroom, it was evident to all in attendance that this was not a simple horse theft case.¹⁸¹

After hearing the facts of the case, including an admission from the plaintiff that the self-emancipators abandoned the horses so that the enslaver could recover the animals, Judge John J. Pearson rendered his decision in favor of the defendants.¹⁸² In a ruling that echoed the British-Canadian justice system, the Pennsylvanian judge summarily dismissed the case, reasoning that using horses to escape slavery did not constitute horse theft. Stripping the veneer off the façade of the enslaver's horse theft suit with jurisprudential acid, Judge Pearson declared that the enslaver used the horse theft charge as 'only a pretext' to return the men to enslavement in Virginia.¹⁸³

But as the case unfolded in Pennsylvania, the Senate and House of Representatives formally adopted the Compromise of 1850, which was signed into law by President Millard Fillmore. Judge Pearson's monumental decision on behalf of freedom and liberty, built upon a foundation of British-Canadian jurisprudence, crumbled to the ground, leaving the two formerly

¹⁸⁰ For details on the case, see Gerald G. Eggert, 'The Impact of the Fugitive Slave Law on Harrisburg: A Case Study', *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, vol. 109, no. 4 (1985): 540–543.

¹⁸¹ Eggert, 'The Impact of the Fugitive Slave Law on Harrisburg', 541.

¹⁸² For the transcript of this ruling and details on the case, see William Pearson, *Decisions of the Honorable John J. Pearson: Judge of the Twelfth Judicial District of Pennsylvania*, (Philadelphia: Rees Welsh & Co., 1880). Blackett, *The Captive's Quest for Freedom*, 278.

¹⁸³ Pearson, *Decisions of the Honorable John J. Pearson*.

enslaved men standing in the rubble and wreckage. With the horse theft ruse no longer necessary, the emboldened enslaver returned to Pennsylvania, dropped the horse theft charges, and swore that the men were his property. Under the strengthened Fugitive Slave Law, the men had no legal recourse and were subsequently returned to enslavement, tied up upon the same horses that had once carried them toward freedom.¹⁸⁴

Enslavers deployed violent systems of animal-assisted capture and punishment to deter self-emancipation attempts, while also using runaway and taken up advertisements to marshal community-wide support in pursuing self-emancipators and nonhuman animals. These descriptive notices inadvertently provided abolitionists with brutal descriptions of animal-induced bite marks and scars, which helped to incite public opinion against slavery in the Northern states. Through their autobiographical narratives and speeches detailing the horrific nonhuman animal-induced violence so common in slavery, the self-emancipated enslaved persons arriving in Northern states, Mexico, and Canada further catalyzed the fast-developing abolitionist movement. Their freedom was seemingly always precarious. Enslavers traveled hundreds of miles and raided neighboring borders. They filed countless lawsuits attempting to capture self-emancipators and nonhuman animals, further exacerbating tensions over slavery at the national and international levels. Southern political brinkmanship, which tied the survival of the Union to national acquiescence on the issue of slavery, brought about the assistance of the federal government to uphold its system through the strengthened Fugitive Slave Law. No longer confined to borderland disputes and transnational extradition cases, the issue of self-emancipation had erupted onto the national stage in a way that could no longer be ignored.

¹⁸⁴ Eggert, 'The Impact of the Fugitive Slave Law on Harrisburg', 543–545. Blackett, *The Captive's Quest for Freedom*, 32–36, 278.

Many Northerners, awakening to enslavers on horseback and slave-catchers accompanied by dogs raiding their neighborhoods, towns, and cities, ended their inaction. Vigilance committees formed throughout the North, urging their neighbors to defy, nullify, and, at times, violently resist the Fugitive Slave Law.¹⁸⁵ Confronted with organized opposition, slave-catchers leaned on familiar schemes, including insisting to locals that they were merely pursuing horse thieves. While searching for self-emancipators in Boston, Asa O. Butman was overheard by Boston Vigilance Committee members telling Bostonians he ‘only came up to look for some horse thieves’.¹⁸⁶ But after witnessing Butman capture Anthony Burns, a self-emancipated enslaved person from Virginia, Amos A. Lawrence spoke for a multitude of Northerners when he declared that we ‘went to bed one night old fashioned, conservative, Compromise Union Whigs & waked up stark mad Abolitionists’.¹⁸⁷ The years after Burns’s arrest brought open violence and the collapse of sectional compromise with horses and dogs remaining entangled in the pursuit of self-emancipators and the policing of the boundaries of slavery. As sectional crisis gave way to secession and civil war, the nonhuman animals once deployed to enforce captivity reappeared on battlefields where formerly enslaved persons now fought as soldiers.

¹⁸⁵ For more on the formation and actions of Northern vigilance committees, see Blackett, *The Captive’s Quest for Freedom*, 16–21, 66–71; and Smith, *The Stormy Present*, 46–47.

¹⁸⁶ Worcester Historical Society, *Proceedings of the Worcester Society of Antiquity, Volume 1*, (Worcester, Massachusetts: Published by the Society, 1877), 89.

¹⁸⁷ Adam I.P. Smith describes the arrest of Anthony Burns as a pivotal event and an emotionally intense moment for self-described conservatives. Smith has found that Amos A. Lawrence initially supported the Compromise of 1850, but soon after Burns’s arrest, offered a large sum of money to defend Burns. Smith, *The Stormy Present*, 43–47. For Lawrence’s quotation, see McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, 120.

Chapter Four: ‘The Sword to Slay and the Dogs to Tear: the American Civil War and Reconstruction Era’

‘Saith the Lord: the sword to slay, and the dogs to tear, and the fowls of the heaven, and the beasts of the earth, to devour and destroy’.
-Jeremiah 15:3

In an act of liberation, military strategy, and retribution, the formerly enslaved persons serving in the 1st South Carolina regiment returned to the locations of their previous enslavement, freeing enslaved people on nearby plantations before being attacked by a Confederate dog-company consisting of riflemen on horseback and ‘half a dozen trained bloodhounds’. Meeting the dogs and horses ‘with their bayonets’, the soldiers ‘killed four or five of their old tormentors with great relish’, impaling the same animals that had previously hunted self-emancipators. After returning with the carcass of one of the dogs, the commander of the regiment ‘had the creature skinned’, stuffed, and mounted, in hopes of showcasing to the world the South’s ‘quadruped allies’ that were ‘originally intended to detect fugitive slaves’ but later became ‘dogs of war’.¹

This macabre animal trophy reveals the pervasiveness of multispecies entanglements within the narratives of war and slavery, while the soldiers’ satisfaction ‘at the confirmation of their tales of dog-companies’ foreshadowed the postwar debates that would develop over how weaponized animals would be remembered and interpreted.² This chapter explores the centrality of animals to sustaining the Confederacy’s war effort and in shaping Reconstruction era violence.³ It also follows the experiences of self-emancipators who sought freedom on horseback, Black soldiers who fought against mounted cavalry and dog companies, and families

¹ Higginson, *Army Life in a Black Regiment*, 230–231.

² Higginson, *Army Life in a Black Regiment*, 231.

³ Hess, ed., *Animal Histories of the Civil War Era*; and Browning and Silver, eds., *An Environmental History of the Civil War*; and Silkenat’s *Scars on the Land*.

who relied on dogs for protection and horses for economic autonomy. Their accounts show that animals in wartime contexts cannot be seen as solely tools or symbols of state power.⁴

While the role of animals as enforcers of the slaveholding regime is undoubtedly important, this interpretation misses the subversive power of animals and overlooks the ways formerly enslaved persons relied on these animals to secure freedom, and later security and self-sufficiency. It also ignores the question of animal agency and whether or not animals can intervene in events through self-motivated intentionality in ways that defy human expectations while also shaping actions.⁵ Through this lens, animals are both tools of oppression and accomplices in resistance.

The chapter begins by showing how, during the Civil War, animals that enforced the boundaries of enslavement were repurposed into the Confederate military. With horses becoming critical to the Confederate war effort, and their upkeep often delegated to enslaved persons, it focuses on the subversive power of these animals as enslaved persons took advantage of wartime conditions to self-emancipate on the backs of Southern horses, at times, resulting in both the freedom-seeker and the horse joining the Union military. As formerly enslaved persons fighting for the Union began capturing Southern equine animals, the Confederacy turned, in some cases, to canines and ad-hoc dog-companies to fight against Black regiments and also stem the tide of self-emancipations.

The Confederacy's reliance on animals had unintended consequences, with the number of canines and horses requisitioned for service in the Confederacy, killed on the battlefield, or

⁴ For works that frame animals within wartime contexts, see John Sorenson, 'Animals as Vehicles of War', in Colin Salter, ed., *Animals and War: Confronting the Military–Animal Industrial Complex*, (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2013); and Gervase Phillips, 'Animals in and at War', in Hilda Kean and Philip Howell, eds., *The Routledge Companion to Animal–Human History*, (London: Routledge, 2018). On the use of weaponized dogs in warfare, see Campbell, 'The Seminoles, the Bloodhound War, and Abolitionism'; and Sara Johnson, 'You Should Give Them Blacks to Eat'.

⁵ On the subversive power of horses in history, see Swart, 'The World the Horses Made', 251–252.

destroyed on plantations contributing to increasing numbers of self-emancipation attempts. Formerly enslaved persons enlisted in Union regiments as soldiers and also as chroniclers of their experiences, influencing Union military policies regarding nonhuman animals with their scars and stories. Historians of the Civil War era have long examined the role formerly enslaved persons played in redefining Union war aims and hastening the Confederacy's collapse.⁶ This chapter expands on that scholarship, positing that freedom-seekers accelerated the Confederacy's collapse by self-emancipating with animals and also confiscating and destroying animals on plantations and battlefields.

The chapter continues to the postwar years and Reconstruction era. During this time, the symbolic and practical power of these animals extended to the themes of reconciliation and continued oppression. Additionally, dogs and horses came to embody debates over the remembrance of slavery and the Civil War. Union soldiers and formerly enslaved persons brought Southern animals to the North as living or embalmed relics of a violent past while Lost Cause writers and artists sought to sanitize and mythologize their histories. Beneath this attempted sanitization, the weaponization of animals continued. Documented cases of 'men on horseback' running 'down freedmen with hounds' across the South soon revealed that local sheriffs and members of the newly formed paramilitary groups employed the same animals used to track self-emancipators and fight in the Confederacy to now hunt Black Americans who asserted their civil rights and political freedoms.⁷

⁶ James McPherson, 'Who Freed the Slaves?' *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, vol. 139, no. 1 (March 1995): 1. For a more recent examination of freedom-seekers and self-emancipation, see David Williams, *I Freed Myself: African American Self-Emancipation in the Civil War Era*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014). On the role of formerly enslaved persons in military service, see Egerton, *Thunder at the Gates*.

⁷ 'Affidavit of Maria Jones', Camilla, Georgia, 1868, *Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands Records*. *National Archives and Records Administration*.

Weaponized animals reminded freed persons of plantation slavery, and their reappearance in the hands of white Southerners signaled a determination to maintain the long entrenched social order. Living in this environment of intimidation and violence, many Black families, in turn, relied on animals for protection and socio-economic autonomy, once again revealing the duality of animals. In analyzing these multifaceted interspecies relationships, this work ultimately reveals how animals came to embody and reinforce the contradictions of terror and resilience, subjugation and freedom, oppression and resistance, as well as memory and erasure. Animals' recurring presence at similar junctures of conflict and remembrance throughout the remainder of the nineteenth century and into the twentieth, reminds us that the histories of slavery, war, and Reconstruction did not unfold solely along human lines. Rather, these events, and the ways people interpreted and reinterpreted them, were shaped by ongoing multispecies entanglements that influenced the political and social developments of the post-emancipation United States.

Self-emancipators, Nonhuman Animals, and the Civil War

As the United States approached the precipice of war and careened over the edge into a cataclysmic conflagration in 1861, the actions of millions of nonhuman animals would both shape and be shaped by the fighting. The South's reliance on nonhuman animals underwent profound changes with domesticated animals conscripted as biotechnological 'living machines' to power the Confederate military.⁸ Their absorption was systematic, logistical, and entwined with the human and nonhuman legacies of the plantation system. Explaining the situation, Dr. Ashby noted how many 'had shipped their most valuable horses' and other animals to

⁸ Ann Norton Greene described horses as 'living machines' in *Horses at Work*. Greene, *Horses at Work*, 4.

Confederate lines as soon as the war began, only keeping at home animals that were necessary for subsistence farming.⁹

Understanding that Confederate cavalry units, artillery units, and supply chains depended heavily on the South's roughly three million equine animals, officers stressed the importance of their upkeep and maintenance.¹⁰ Enslavers supported this effort by providing enslaved laborers who were forced to feed, groom, and maintain these animals. Through the passage of measures such as 'an act to increase the efficiency of the army by the employment of free negroes and slaves in certain capacities', the Confederacy mandated the enlistment of thousands of enslaved persons as teamsters and caretakers.¹¹ As historian Charles W. Ramsdell pointed out in his classic study of the Confederacy's horse supply, the Army of Northern Virginia's entire military operation hinged upon the availability and care of its horses. Accordingly, Lee ordered all officers responsible for the 'energetic and unwearied care of their animals', with much of the care for equine animals consigned to enslaved persons.¹²

The animal-human interdependence that sustained the Confederate military also exposed it to disruption. With enslaved laborers charged with the care and movement of equine animals, a

⁹ Thomas A. Ashby, *The Valley Campaigns: Being the Reminiscences of a Non-Combatant While Between the Lines in the Shenandoah Valley During the War of the States*, (New York: the Neale Publishing Company, 1914), 73.

¹⁰ David J. Gerleman approximates the number of Confederate horses at 1,743,697. David J. Gerleman, 'As Much a Military Supply as a Barrel of Gunpowder: Horses and Mules as Nineteenth Century Engines of War', in Hess, ed., *Animal Histories of the Civil War*, 66. Abraham Gibson has found that as early as 1862, Confederate Quartermasters stressed the need for more animals to continue the war effort. Abraham Gibson, 'War Horses: Equine Perspectives on the Confederacy', in Hess, ed., *Animal Histories of the Civil War*, 123. Earl J. Hess recently wrote about the importance of horses to artillery units in the Civil War. Earl J. Hess, 'The Artillery Horse as Warrior', in Hess, ed., *Animal Histories*, 97.

¹¹ 'An act to increase the efficiency of the army by the employment of free negroes and slaves in certain capacities'. Call number 371 Conf., Rare Book Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

¹² Charles W. Ramsdell, 'General Robert E. Lee's Horse Supply, 1862-1865', *American Historical Review*, vol. 35, no. 4 (1930): 758-777. In his far more recent appraisal of horses in the Civil War, Gervase Phillips notes the significance of Ramsdell's classic work, lamenting historians' undue negligence on the topic. Phillips, 'Writing Horses into American Civil War History', 162. 'Orders — No. 115', 1 October 1862, *Rebellion Records, Series I, Vol. XIX, Part II*, in Jennings Cropper Wise, *The long arm of Lee; or, The history of the artillery of the Army of Northern Virginia; with a brief account of the Confederate bureau of ordnance*, (Lynchburg, Virginia: J.P. Bell Company, 1915), 330.

significant number of enslaved persons exploited the disruptions of wartime conditions to resist the Confederacy through acts of sabotage and self-emancipation. Thousands of freedom-seekers liberated themselves and, in the process, undermined the Confederate military by self-emancipating on the backs of the ever-dwindling Southern equine population.¹³ The quotidian nature with which Union Lieutenant Cornelius C. Platter wrote in his diary that ‘a number of negroes came in today with horses & mules’, emphasizes the frequency with which this must have occurred.¹⁴

These interspecies acts of flight were written into both diaries and into the visual imagination of the war. After awakening to the scene of an enslaved family of four self-emancipating on horseback in Manassas, Virginia, Eastman Johnson later immortalized the episode in his painting *A Ride for Liberty—The Fugitive Slaves*. In the painting, the horse gallops across a darkened landscape, straining forward with taut muscles and flared nostrils, its body attuned to the urgency of its riders.¹⁵ The formerly enslaved parents encapsulate the experiences of many wartime self-emancipators, as the father holds the reins and looks ahead to Union lines while the mother looks back towards their life in bondage.¹⁶

¹³ Secretary of War William Seward believed 200,000 self-emancipators successfully made it to Union lines, but historians put the number closer to 500,000. Colin Edward Woodward, *Marching Masters: Slavery, Race, and the Confederate Army during the Civil War*, (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2014), 105–106.

¹⁴ Cornelius C. Platter *Civil War diary*, MS 967, Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library, University of Georgia Libraries, 36–37.

¹⁵ Horses’ impressive musculature, especially their large outside shoulder muscles, drives the animal’s speed and agility. McGreevy and McLean, *Equitation Science*, 240.

¹⁶ Eleanor Jones Harvey, *The Civil War and American Art*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), 199–202. Vahabi, *The Political Economy of Predation*, xvii–xix.



Figure 4.1. *A Ride for Liberty—The Fugitive Slaves*.¹⁷

While viewers are left to speculate how the enslaved family in Johnson's painting acquired the horse, it is evident that many enslaved persons tasked with caring for the Confederacy's equine animals took advantage of the coerced mobility to self-emancipate.

Elsewhere in Virginia, escape on horseback met uncertain wartime legislation when a group of self-emancipators 'ran away in the night and took with them a wagon and four horses'. The group's enslaver pursued them to Union lines and, in a remarkable series of events, 'made claim to the horses', but did not attempt to reclaim the self-emancipators, leaving them 'to their freedom'.¹⁸ The enslaver's efforts to secure his horses, but not the self-emancipators, show the importance of equine animals, while at the same time, pointing to the ambiguous status of enslaved persons standing foot on the shifting legal grounds of the First and Second Confiscation Acts.¹⁹

¹⁷ Eastman Johnson, *A Ride for Liberty—The Fugitive Slaves* (recto), ca. 1862, oil on paperboard, 21 15/16 × 26 1/8 in., Brooklyn Museum, Gift of Gwendolyn O. L. Conkling, 40.59a–b.

¹⁸ Ashby, *The Valley Campaigns*, 74–75.

¹⁹ The First Confiscation Act, passed in August 1861, stated that all enslaved persons forced to labor by the Confederacy were considered 'contraband' and could be confiscated by the US military. For a comprehensive

As the Civil War evolved to reflect changing socio-military dynamics, the Union strategy regarding self-emancipators and the service of free Blacks in the army changed as well with the passage of the Emancipation Proclamation ushering in the reception of Black Americans into the armed service.²⁰ In an event that showed the intersection of military strategy and animal-aided emancipation, Phoebe Banks recalled her father and uncle's escape from a Creek enslaver sympathetic to the Confederacy to join other self-emancipators who were 'riding ponies stolen from their masters'. Drawing on their relationships with the animals as well as their skills as horse trainers, the self-emancipators tied 'the littlest children to the horses' backs' and navigated through land controlled by the Confederate-allied Creeks. Her father and her Uncle Jacob kept the 'family together somehow', eventually making it to Kansas, where her uncle took the horses and joined 'with the Northern soldiers to fight against the South'.²¹

Many self-emancipators attempting to join the Union military confronted environmental and nonhuman animal obstacles. In Louisiana, enslavers attempted to hide their enslaved persons on Cyprus Island. They believed the natural barriers on the secluded bayou would conceal them from Union soldiers. However, as Union soldiers moved closer, many enslaved persons slipped 'off de island' to 'jine de Yankees'. Unfortunately, according to Peter Ryas, there were 'plenty alligators in dat bayou'. Ryas and other formerly enslaved persons were left to wonder how many freedom-seekers who tried to 'go through the swamp ever git to Yankees'.²² The same war

overview of the First and Second Confiscation Acts, see John Syrett, *The Civil War Confiscation Acts: Failing to Reconstruct the South*, (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005).

²⁰ Abraham Lincoln in G.W. Bacon, *The Life and Administration of Abraham Lincoln*, (London: Sampson Low, Son, and Marston, 1865), 119. On the Emancipation Proclamation and reception of Black soldiers into the Union military, see Harold Holzer, *Emancipating Lincoln: The Proclamation in Text, Context, and Memory*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2012).

²¹ WPA, Phoebe Banks, *Slave Narratives (Oklahoma)*, 9–10.

²² WPA, Peter Ryas, *Slave Narratives (Texas, Part 3)*, 274–276. [Phonetic spellings in original].

that transformed horses into partners in liberation revealed how wild animals, such as alligators, remained barriers to escape.

For those who reached Union lines, their relationships with nonhuman animals did not end with freedom. Just as self-emancipators recognized the importance of nonhuman animals when seeking freedom, so too did the Union military recognize the significance of Southern animals to the Confederacy's war effort. Banks's uncle, the enslaved persons who swam away from the alligator-populated waters of Cyprus Island, along with over 200,000 free Blacks and formerly enslaved persons who volunteered to serve in Union regiments, soon witnessed a major shift in Union military policy regarding the Confederacy's animals. Early in the war, Union forces treated animals as neutral agricultural infrastructure. They compensated Southerners for animals they confiscated or killed, while also making sure to leave enough equine animals for the maintenance of food production in Southern states. However, signaling a change in strategy in 1863, Union commanders directed soldiers to seize Southern horses and mules and to kill equine animals that could not be of use.²³ In this zero-sum game policy within a multispecies war of attrition, each equine animal added to Union forces was, in turn, taken away from the Confederate war effort.

Many newly formed Black Union regiments, including the 1st South Carolina and the 2nd and 3rd North Carolina Colored Volunteers, began raiding Southern towns and plantations to seize animals in an effort to weaken the Confederate military. Made up mostly of self-emancipators who drew on their familiarity with animal behavior and routines, these regiments were remarkably proficient when targeting plantations located near their former places of

²³ Gerleman, 'As Much a Military Supply as a Barrel of Gunpowder', 81.

enslavement.²⁴ As these soldiers led raids, they had not forgotten the Southern ecosystems that had once shaped their lives, nor did they overlook the importance of the nonhuman animals who shaped their flights to freedom.

Members of the 1st South Carolina warned their commander about the dangers of alligators lurking in swamps and marshes. Other soldiers in the regiment apparently believed sharks rather than alligators haunted the waterways of the coastal American Southeast. Plantation lore, firsthand empirical knowledge, and years of enslavers perpetuating fears of wild animals beyond the plantation reinforced these deep-seated anxieties. The white commander of the regiment viewed these remonstrances with patronizing skepticism, noting that ‘imagination peoples the water with many things which do not belong there’.²⁵ These words reflect the gap between the perspectives of white officers and the Black soldiers who previously traversed the Southern environment under duress and extrapolated their knowledge that nonhuman animals could facilitate or hinder escape, just as the same animals could facilitate or hinder military strategy. Within a few days of moving through the Southeastern waterways, the white commander’s skepticism seemed to have disappeared as he felt ‘a little stiffened’ with the ‘occasional chill running up the back of the neck’ as he worried about ‘nips from sharks’ and ‘nudges from alligators’.²⁶

With the white officers and Black soldiers of the 1st South Carolina adjusting to the environmental realities of their mission, they shifted focus from dangerous wild animals to opportunities to buttress the Union military effort by foraging horses and cattle in Jekyll Island,

²⁴ For works that have examined the 1st South Carolina and the 2nd and 3rd North Carolina Colored Regiments, see Richard M. Reid, *Freedom for Themselves: North Carolina's Black Soldiers in the Civil War Era*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008); and Smith, ed., *Black Soldiers in Blue*.

²⁵ Higginson, *Army Life in a Black Regiment*, 156.

²⁶ Higginson, *Army Life in a Black Regiment*, 160.

‘cattle, horses, provisions, and prisoners’ in Jacksonville, and ‘an abundance of horses’ in Halls Island. After the 1st South Carolina’s most successful single-day operation, during which the regiment extracted ‘thirty “contrabands”, eighteen horses, eleven cattle, ten saddles and bridles, and one new army-wagon’, its commander, Thomas Higginson, noted, ‘at this rate, we shall soon be a self-supporting *cavalry*’.²⁷ Wild’s African Brigade stormed through North Carolina. They liberated enslaved persons and captured equine animals. On one occasion, the Brigade freed an astounding two thousand enslaved persons while also capturing 425 equine animals for service.²⁸ These military campaigns weakened the Confederacy’s animal supply and, at the same time, challenged the plantation system’s dependence on enslaved labor to sustain the Confederacy’s biological infrastructure.

Union troops captured horses by the thousands and destroyed countless more in battle, making these raids ever more significant. Every horse became a critical resource. Southerners and the Confederacy increasingly turned to enslaved persons to maintain their dwindling herds, which at times led to confrontations between enslavers, the enslaved, and self-emancipators. Samuel Agnew’s 1863 diary records one such encounter, when the 5th Ohio regiment came to his Mississippi plantation in search of mules. The enslaved persons on the Agnew plantation recognized two formerly enslaved persons armed with pistols who were traveling with the 5th Ohio. With guns pointed at them when they refused to tell them the whereabouts of the plantation’s mules, the enslaved persons on the Agnew plantation negotiated the competing

²⁷ Higginson, *Army Life in a Black Regiment*, 110–111. Italics in original.

²⁸ Edward A. Wild’s brigade consisted of formerly enslaved persons from the 2nd and 3rd North Carolina Colored Volunteers. See Frances Harding Casstevens, *Edward A. Wild and the African Brigade in the Civil War*, (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland and Company, 2003), 114.

demands of their enslaver and the violent threats of newly-liberated formerly enslaved persons with whom they were familiar.²⁹

As Union raiders campaigned further into the Southeast, enslavers ordered enslaved persons to conceal nonhuman animals in forests, swamps, and fields. Enslaved persons on Mary Rhode's South Carolina plantation were forced to ride into swamps and woods with equine animals 'as soon as the Yankees were in sight'.³⁰ In Louisiana, Della Fountain recalled the widespread nature of such efforts. She remembered how Union forces took 'ever' body's horses' while plantation owners scrambled to hide their animals, sending enslaved persons into 'de deep wood' with horses, mules, and cows to keep them out of reach. When Union forces approached their plantation, her enslaver forced her and other enslaved persons to take a young horse and 'hide it in the wheat field'.³¹

When word came that Union soldiers were moving through Missouri, James Goings's enslaver called on 'Old George' to 'take de horses to de woods 'en hide 'em'.³² And in an astonishing attempt to save his prized racehorse from Union soldiers, an enslaver, also in Missouri, forced Aunt Rhody's brother to ride a horse over five hundred miles 'out of de state' to New Orleans.³³ Despite these extraordinary efforts, Union forces intercepted the horse and apprehended the enslaver, whom they then killed for attempting to evade capture. Such attempts to hide animals from Union forces frequently ended violently for enslavers, the enslaved, and the equine animals. Hamp Kennedy recalled Aunt Charity and Winnie McInnis attempting to 'swim some of [the] horses cross de [river] to save em' from de soljers'. The pair of women made it to

²⁹ Samuel A. Agnew, 'Diary of Samuel A. Agnew', Manuscript volume 7B: September 27, 1863—June 30, 1864, Southern Historical Collection at the Wilson Library of the University of North Carolina.

³⁰ Susan R. Jervey, *Two Diaries from Berkeley, South Carolina, February–May 1865, Journals kept by Miss Susan R. Jervey and Miss Charlotte St. J. Ravenel*, (Published by the St. John's Hunting Club, 1921), 47.

³¹ WPA, Della Fountain, *Slave Narratives (Oklahoma)*, 105. [Phonetic spellings in original].

³² WPA, James Goings, *Slave Narratives (Missouri)*, 120. [Phonetic spellings in original].

³³ WPA, Aunt Rhody, *Slave Narratives (Missouri)*, 200. [Phonetic spellings in original].

the ‘middle of de water’ with the horses when a large alligator appeared. With only its eyes and nose visible above water, the alligator then lunged at the party, grabbed one of the horses, and pulled the animal underwater as it began its ‘death roll’, twisting and feeding on its prey.³⁴

As much as equine animals represented the shifting balance of power, dogs remained the Confederacy’s animal enforcers. While moving through the South, Union soldiers encountered enslaved persons seeking freedom, Union prisoners of war fleeing captivity, and Southern Unionists resisting Confederate conscription officers.³⁵ And when encountering these fugitive groups, soldiers all too frequently found enslavers and their weaponized animals in close pursuit. Moving from Tennessee, through Mississippi, and into Louisiana, Union Colonel Benjamin Grierson and the 6th Illinois Cavalry encountered thousands of ‘fugitives from their homes’ hiding ‘in swamps and forests’. Seeking refuge in the same murky, mosquito-filled marshes and bayous as self-emancipating enslaved persons, Southern Unionists ‘were hunted like wild beasts by conscripting officers with bloodhounds’.³⁶

With the baying of the bloodhounds ringing in his ears, Israel Nelson believed ‘death imminent, either from being torn to pieces by the hounds or by being shot by the cavalry’ that followed them. A ‘feeling of deep sympathy arose’ in the Southern Unionist’s heart ‘for the poor slave’ who encountered these same animals and were ‘torn to pieces by them’ as he realized how deeply intertwined their fates had become. Southern Unionists like Nelson heard slave-hunters ‘almost every night for years’.³⁷ They now confronted these weaponized animals whose

³⁴ WPA, Hamp Kennedy, 85. [Phonetic spellings in original]. Colloquially called the ‘death roll’, alligators typically use this tactic when encountering large prey such as horses. Grigg and Kirshner, *Biology and Evolution of Crocodylians*, 68, 221–222.

³⁵ For further elaboration on the plight of Southern Unions, see James Alex Baggett, *The Scalawags: Southern Dissenters in the Civil War and Reconstruction*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2003).

³⁶ ‘Letter from Colonel Benjamin Grierson’, printed in John H. Aughey, *Tupelo*, (Chicago: Rhodes & McClure Publishing Co., 1905), 333–334.

³⁷ Aughey, *Tupelo*, 250–251.

conditioned pursuit collapsed any distinction between Black and white bodies in motion during the Civil War.

Against the backdrop of Confederate pursuit and violence, new alliances of shared knowledge of animal behavior and plant chemistry emerged among fugitive groups. Though he lived in the South on the St. John's River in Florida, Louis Lornette grew up with a disdain for slavery. Lornette had long protected self-emancipators in his home, where he taught them 'how to defend themselves from the terrible Siberian bloodhound'. However, he 'never entertained for a moment the idea' that he would one day 'be the object of pursuit by these same horrible dogs'. Pursued by 'a company of cavalry, with a pack of fierce Siberian bloodhounds', Lornette sought refuge with enslaved persons living on a nearby plantation. In solidarity that transcended racial lines and state boundaries, the enslaved persons from Mississippi shared cayenne pepper and onions with the white Floridian Unionist to ward off pursuing dogs. Lornette repaid the gesture by sharing information about a subtle yet effective dog poison indigenous to the Everglades, probably made from Coral Beans, the Little Apple of Death, or Poisonwood.³⁸

These types of solidarities and environmental improvisations were not unique. Escaping from Macon Prison, Captain John James Geer and his fellow soldiers approached an enslaved person, who informed them that three Confederates had come to his plantation, taking with them his enslaver's 'bloodhound to hunt Yankees'. The thought of a 'possible death by these fierce monsters in the wilderness', trained to tear through underbrush and lock onto human scents, made the Captain's 'blood run cold'. Desperate to avoid the dogs, the Union prisoners of war asked the enslaved person what means 'they should employ to bewilder' the animals.³⁹ Having

³⁸ Aughey, *Tupelo*, 167–168. It is difficult to ascertain the plant compound described by Lornette, but possibilities include Coral Beans (*Erythrina herbacea*), the Little Apple of Death (*Hippomane mancinella*), or Poisonwood (*Metopium toxiferum*). Daniel F. Austin, *Florida Ethnobotany*, (Boca Raton: CRC Press, 2004), 290–291, 438–439.

³⁹ Geer, *Beyond the lines*, 126–127.

attempted to self-emancipate years before, the enslaved person ‘knew their nature’ as well as plans ‘adopted to elude them’. The enslaved person instructed the prisoners of war to use scent resistance by traveling as much as possible ‘in the water’ and by putting pepper on their feet to disrupt the hounds’ olfactory focus. If scent resistance was ineffective, the prisoners of war were to head for the Ocmulgee River since ‘the dogs were fearful of the alligators with which that river abounded’.⁴⁰ These American Alligators, who called the Ocmulgee River home, loomed large in the minds of both humans and canines alike.⁴¹

The Southern ecosystem was indifferent to human freedom, and the alligators that repelled bloodhounds could also consume those fleeing the canines. Geer and the other escapees used the man’s advice, staying close to the Ocmulgee River, but the river that promised protection from canines brought them precariously close to alligators. While resting in the swamp, Geer was startled by the defensive ‘bellowing of an alligator’ that ‘resembled the sound of a heavy steam-whistle’.⁴² Geer attempted to scare the animal by throwing chunks of wood at the alligator, but that only prompted the enormous animal to snap its jaws in a way that terrified the men. Trapped in the swamp, the men were eventually greeted by an enslaved person who recognized them and pointed out the ‘only path of escape’.⁴³ During wartime, as it was during the antebellum era, freedom for escapees meant moving through the Southern wilderness and also trusting an underground ‘organization among the negroes, for the purpose of aiding fugitives

⁴⁰ Geer, *Beyond the lines*, 128.

⁴¹ P. Bartlett, *Guide and Reference to the Crocodilians, Turtles, and Lizards of Eastern and Central North America (North of Mexico)*, (Gainesville, Florida: The University Press of Florida, 2006), 142–143. Alligators still inhabit the Ocmulgee River region in great numbers. See ‘Replies: Ocmulgee Mounds’, National Park Service, (2021). <https://www.nps.gov/ocmu/learn/nature/reptiles.htm#:~:text=Alligators%20come%20to%20the%20park,travel%20south%20to%20warmer%20climates>. Accessed 24 July 2023.

⁴² These types of ‘hissing’ sounds can be heard up to a kilometer away and are used by alligators as a type of defensive communication. Grigg and Kirshner, *Biology and Evolution of Crocodylians*, 6–10, 117.

⁴³ Geer, *Beyond the lines*, 133–134.

in making their escape'. This network functioned to counter the dangers of the natural world and the Confederacy's animal-aided system of capture.⁴⁴

Confederates also stationed dogs at military installations to track and intercept any self-emancipators attempting to reach Union lines. Writing to the Confederate Department of Mississippi and East Louisiana headquarters, a Confederate Cavalry Battalion requested instructions regarding the ever-increasing numbers of 'runaways—caught by scouts'. The previous day, 'a negro was caught armed', having 'killed two dogs in the attempt to catch him'. The self-emancipator, along with several others, assembled with Union officers who armed them and made 'lectures stating they were free'. Faced with enslaved persons becoming armed free soldiers right in front of them, the Confederate Battalion was given orders to execute them at once by immediately hanging any 'Negroes with arms evidently coming out from the enemy's camp'.⁴⁵

Freeing themselves from bondage to fight as Union soldiers, spies, and guides, self-emancipators represented a significant military challenge for the Confederacy, prompting the Confederate military to turn to bloodhounds and other 'negro dogs', the tried-and-true allies of the slaveholding elite. Relied on in an unofficial state capacity throughout the antebellum era, canines became tools of the Confederate state during the Civil War, hunting self-emancipators and also serving in multispecies dog companies alongside horse-mounted riflemen.⁴⁶

The same animals that hunted self-emancipators through canebrakes and pine forests now faced formerly enslaved persons on the battlefields of the Civil War. Marching through the

⁴⁴ Geer, *Beyond the lines*, 129.

⁴⁵ 'Adj't. Pleas. Smith to A.A.G. J. Thompson, 8 Jan. 1863', Gen. J. C. Pemberton Papers, series 131, Collections of Officers' Papers, Records of Military Commands, War Department Collection of Confederate Records, Record Group 109, *National Archives*.

⁴⁶ However incomplete, the Confederacy's incorporation of these animals into the military reflects the state-making process described by political scientists during which state actors relocate instruments of violence and coercion from private to public spheres. Abrahamsen and Williams, *Security Beyond the State*, 6–7

Carolinian swamps, members of the 1st South Carolina were startled when they heard a dog bark as they ‘had certain information that a pack of hounds was kept at a Rebel station’ with the ‘purpose to hunt runaways’. Although the unsettling sound of the dogs unnerved many soldiers, the experiences of some among them who had formerly been enslaved provided valuable insights as they reported ‘accounts of the instinct of these animals’ to the regiment’s leadership. Relying on the information given to him by formerly enslaved soldiers, the commander of the 1st South Carolina knew ‘water baffled their scent’, and in a calculated move, positioned his troops close to water.⁴⁷ In Newport News, Virginia, a Confederate force ‘numbering about 100—having horses and dogs with them’ attacked Wild’s African Brigade. Outnumbered nearly six to one, the members of the Brigade retreated and ‘scattered over the marshes’, again, likely to throw off the dogs’ scent-tracking abilities.⁴⁸

These military encounters were just as likely to end violently. While commanding a regiment on Port Royal Island, Brigadier General Rufus Saxton recalled a Confederate cavalry of one hundred men and five bloodhounds attacking a detachment of thirty Black soldiers. Facing the bloodhounds head on, Sgt. Harry Williams, a formerly enslaved person leading the detachment, allowed the bloodhounds to approach within a few feet before ordering his men to meet fangs with steel, charging at the animals with bayonets.⁴⁹ And in what became the most iconic confrontation between a Black regiment and a Confederate dog-company, *Frank Leslie’s Illustrated Newspaper* illustrated and printed the 1st South Carolina’s encounter with a ‘dog

⁴⁷ Higginson, *Army Life in a Black Regiment*, 158.

⁴⁸ Report by Union General Edward A. Wild [commander of US Colored Troops brigade] regarding an expedition by former slaves to liberate others’, Newport News, WV, Sept. 1, 1864. Brig. Gen. Edwd A. Wild to Brig. Gen. G. F. Shepley, Sept. 1, 1864, Department of VA & NC, Records of Other Military Commands, ser. 731, Records of the War Records Office, Adjutant General’s Office.

⁴⁹ ‘Report of Brig. Gen. Rufus Saxton, U.S. Army, Commanding on Port Royal Island, November 30, 1863’, in *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1890), 745.

company’, revealing the complete subversion of the antebellum Southern enslaver human-canine power dynamic that took place during the Civil War.



Figure 4.2. ‘Terrible Fight with Bloodhounds’.⁵⁰

The Confederacy’s use of weaponized dogs had unintended effects, with the decreasing number of canines on plantations resulting in an increasing number of self-emancipation attempts. When he addressed the American Freedmen’s Inquiry Commission, Charles B. Wilder, Superintendent of Contrabands, reported that enslaved persons previously ‘were afraid to stir’. However, the ‘bloodhounds are not there now to hunt them’, and they ‘are not afraid’, which resulted in a growing number of freedom-seekers seeking refuge behind Union lines.⁵¹ Captain

⁵⁰ This illustration was incorrectly captioned with an inscription noting that the 1st South Carolina was attacked on 23 October 1862. The 1st South Carolina was not formed until 1 November 1862, one week after the Second Battle of Pocotalico Bridge. Larry Spruill, among other historians, have echoed Leslie’s error since its printing in 1864. Spruill, ‘Slave Patrols’, 56. ‘Terrible Fight with Bloodhounds’, *Leslie’s Illustrated Magazine*, March 1864’. *Leslie’s Illustrated Magazine* adds, ‘On October 23, 1862, the 1st South Carolina Regiment (Colored) was attacked by the Confederates at Pocotalico Bridge, South Carolina. The rebels sent bloodhounds after the black troops’. While the meaning of this visual conveys the reversal of racialized human–animal violence, it is impossible to ignore the racial caricature of the soldiers’ faces.

⁵¹ Testimony by Capt. Charles B. Wilder, superintendent of contrabands at Fortress Monroe, Virginia, before the American Freedmen’s Inquiry Commission, Fortress Monroe, Va., May 9, 1863, Letters Received, ser. 12, Adjutant General’s Office, Record Group 94, National Archives.

Wilder likely spoke from memory. But his observations are supported by the research of historians such as Chandra Manning, who noted that around half a million enslaved persons escaped to Union forces.⁵² Many of these self-emancipations took place during the last years of the war, a time that aligned with the precipitous decline in the numbers of dogs and horses across the South. As these animals disappeared, much of the fear they evoked faded as well. This signaled that the Confederacy's increasingly tenuous grip over its enslaved population was both a matter of manpower and also the erosion of the symbolic and material instruments of fear, of which weaponized animals had long been central.

Carrying with them accounts of weaponized slave-hunting canines and bearing bite marks and scars as corroborating evidence, formerly enslaved persons consequently seemed to have influenced the Union's military strategy regarding nonhuman animals. Writing to the *Boston Transcript* from Louisiana, a Union officer explained to the Northern public that more than half of formerly enslaved persons who signed up to serve in the Union military bore scars and disabilities from the 'biting of dogs on their calves and thighs'.⁵³ Pharaoh Jackson Chesney, a formerly enslaved person, directly linked General William Tecumseh Sherman's policy regarding Southern dogs to the accounts shared by the self-emancipators who reached Union lines. Chesney explained to readers that prior to the war, enslavers 'kept a large, fierce species of bloodhounds to hunt down the runaway negroes'. And according to Chesney, 'so many horrible stories had been told' of enslaved persons 'being run down and torn to pieces by these ferocious dogs' that 'General Sherman gave orders to his soldiers to kill every one of these dogs that they

⁵² Chandra Manning, 'Contraband Camps and the African American Refugee Experience during the Civil War', in *Oxford Research Encyclopedia: American History*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

⁵³ Letter printed in Aughey, *Tupelo*, 418.

saw'.⁵⁴ Supporting Chesney's claim, a *New York Times* article reporting on Sherman's March to the Sea claimed that 'soldiers and officers are determined that no more flying fugitives' shall be 'lowed by track hounds' that 'come within reach' of the 'powder and ball' of the Union army.⁵⁵

During the latter years of the Civil War, General Sherman and General Philip Sheridan brought the might of their armies through the South, targeting belligerents and also Southern plantations, farms, and domesticated animals, especially the South's equine animals and canine population.⁵⁶ In letters written months apart, Sheridan gave orders to 'seize all mules, horses, and cattle', while Sherman directed his soldiers to capture horses 'because otherwise they might be used against us'.⁵⁷ Recognizing that the loss of these animals weakened their ability to wage war and maintain control over enslaved laborers, the Confederacy launched a countermeasure, during which Joseph Wheeler and his cavalry of 5,000 men screened Sherman's army, and in the words of Wheeler, 'fought the enemy night and day' to recapture 'animals and negroes they had stolen from our citizens'.⁵⁸ Wheeler's casual pairing of human beings and nonhuman animals reveals the durability of the enslaver worldview that both could be claimed and recaptured as property.

Despite the exhaustive efforts by the Confederate cavalry, Sherman unleashed death and destruction on the remaining animal population in Georgia and South Carolina. The emotional historical memory of Sherman's March often strips the event of its strategic intent, replacing it

⁵⁴ Pharoah Jackson Chesney, *Last of the Pioneers: Or Old Times in East Tenn.; Being the Life and Reminiscences of Pharaoh Jackson Chesney*, (Knoxville, Tennessee: J.C. Webster, 1902), 114.

⁵⁵ 'Description of the Incidents', *Supplement to the New York Times*, 23 December 1864, 3.

⁵⁶ Historian Basil Henry Liddell Hart famously described Sherman as 'the first modern general' because of his use of what became known as 'total war'. Hart, *Sherman: Soldier, Realist, American*, 430. For a recent biography on Sherman, see Reid, *The Scourge of War*.

⁵⁷ 'Letter from P.H. Sheridan, Cedar Creek, Va., August 16, 1864', in *The Personal Memoirs of P.H. Sheridan, General United States Army*, (New York: Charles L. Webster & Co., 1888), 221. 'Letter from William T. Sherman to Maj. R.M. Sawyer, Jan. 31, 1864', in W. Fletcher Johnson, *Life of Wm. Tecumseh Sherman*, (Edgewood Publishing Company, 1891), 283.

⁵⁸ W.C. Dodson, ed., *Campaigns of Wheeler and his cavalry, 1862-1865, from Material Furnished by Gen. Joseph Wheeler*, (Atlanta: Hudgins Publishing Company, 1899), 302.

with images of wanton ruin.⁵⁹ And while such portrayals persist in the region's cultural memory, a more nuanced picture emerges from the accounts of Southerners, formerly enslaved persons, and Sherman's soldiers and officers. But to be fair, even the most dramatic renditions of Sherman's March fail to do justice to the deadly impact of the expedition on the thousands of animals caught in the army's path. One Georgian resident recalled Sherman's forces killing 'about one thousand horses on one of the seven islands in the Ocmulgee River', leaving 'the island covered with bones for years after'.⁶⁰ While another Georgian woman recalled the road leading to her town 'lined with carcasses of horses' she claimed were 'wantonly shot down' by Sherman's troops.⁶¹

The destruction of the Southern equine population had the logic of military calculus, even though Sherman's soldiers sometimes killed serviceable animals that slowed down the march.⁶² No such military logic seemed to have been extended to canines, as there was minimal effort to differentiate between slave-hunting dogs and household pets. If horses were evaluated for utility, dogs were condemned by association. Newspaper articles reporting on Sherman's March claimed that as the Union army moved through the Southeast, 'everything in the shape of a dog has been killed'.⁶³ William T. Crane, artist and illustrator for *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, captured this grim directive in his unpublished sketches. In one of these illustrations, Crane depicted a Union soldier on horseback shooting a dog while two other men bayoneted the animals.

⁵⁹ For an overview of the historical memory of Sherman's campaign through Georgia and South Carolina, see Anne Sarah Rubin, *Through the Heart of Dixie: Sherman's March and American Memory*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014).

⁶⁰ Davidson, *History of Wilkinson County*, 263, in Anne Sarah Rubin, *Through the Heart of Dixie*, 51.

⁶¹ Eliza Frances Andrews, *The War-Time Journal of a Georgia Girl, 1864-1865*, (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1908), 32.

⁶² Hess, 'The Animal-Human Relationship in War', 86.

⁶³ 'Description of the Incidents', 3.



Figure 4.3. 'General Sherman's Troops Shooting Bloodhounds'.⁶⁴

The sketch preserves the violent act, but it does not glorify it. Furthermore, Crane's choice not to publish the image during the war suggests an awareness of the moral ambiguity and ethical complexity of the destruction of the South's nonhuman animals. At its most elemental level, the sketch visually affirms that Sherman's soldiers destroyed dogs indiscriminately. Indeed, Matthew H. Jamison's 10th Illinois regiment received orders to 'kill all bloodhounds and other valuable dogs', an order Jamison followed at least once as he detailed killing a dog a few months later.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ William T. Crane, 'General Sherman's Troops Shooting Bloodhounds'. Drawing: Graphite on paper. 6 7/16 x 4 11/16 in. *New York Historical Society Library & Museum*, Civil War drawings collection, 1861–1865. Complicating the way historians write about 'bloodhounds' in this context, William Crane's sketch, 'General Sherman's Troops Shooting Bloodhounds', presents an interesting depiction of the breed. Rather than portraying the Siberian (Russian) or Cuban Bloodhounds commonly associated with slave-hunting and the Civil War, the sketch depicts the type of scent hound recognized today as the American Bloodhound. Southern Unionist John Aughey provides further insight, describing the Cuban or Siberian Bloodhound as 'a cross between a mastiff and the bull-dog'. However, Aughey also describes the use of a 'bloodhound of the Talbot or southern breed' with 'long, pendulous, drooping ears' whose powers of scenting are extraordinary. Aughey, *Tupelo*, 260. While historians have been quick to note that enslavers and the Confederacy did not weaponize the modern Bloodhound breed, Crane's sketch, along with Aughey's description, suggests that Southerners did indeed rely on the breed to target Union soldiers.

⁶⁵ Matthew H. Jamison, *Recollections of Pioneer and Army Life*, (Kansas City: Hudson Press, 1911), 280, 302. In her excellent case study on the impact of the Civil War on South Carolinian canines, Lorien Foote finds that many stray and wild dogs followed Sherman's army in search of food, perhaps revealing a conscious distinction made between such dogs and those canines that soldiers associated with Southerners and the Confederacy. Foote, 'The Dogs Ought to Be Exterminated', 266.

The phrase ‘other valuable dogs’ seemed to have been interpreted quite liberally in many cases. Writing his memoirs with Mark Twain in the 1880s, Ulysses S. Grant, the commanding general of the US Army, recalled that prior to the Civil War, Southerners ‘kept bloodhounds to pursue runaway slaves’, and during the war, ‘orders were issued to kill all of these animals’. However, Grant also admitted that even pet poodles and other ‘favorite pets’ were not spared. Acknowledging a seemingly well-known anecdote, Grant detailed an occasion when a Union soldier carried a small poodle ‘off to execution’.⁶⁶ The dog’s tearful owner followed the soldier imploring the man ‘to spare it’, but he rejected the pleas for the dog’s life and instead told the woman that his orders were ‘to kill every bloodhound’. The woman quickly pointed out that the dog was not a bloodhound, but the soldier responded, ‘We cannot tell what it will grow into if we leave it behind’ and continued carrying the dog to its place of execution, taking the poodle’s life in short order.⁶⁷

The United States military sanctioned and legitimized the destruction of Southern equine animals and canines as acts of war. By killing horses, the Union sought to impair the Confederacy’s ability to sustain its war. The killing of dogs, even the non-discriminatory slaughter of Southern canines, was purportedly done to protect self-emancipators. Still, the destruction of Southern canines, particularly by formerly enslaved persons, takes on a larger social meaning of retributive violence in reaction to the upended human-canine power dynamic that had for so long been reinforced with fear and terror.⁶⁸ For formerly enslaved persons, confronting their former animal foes represented a form of resistance against the structures of

⁶⁶ Ulysses Simpson Grant, *Personal Memoirs of U.S. Grant, Volume 2*, (New York: C.L. Webster & Company, 1885), 364–365. This story is also featured in the autobiographical narrative of Pharoah Jackson Chesney, a formerly enslaved person. See Chesney, *Last of the Pioneers*, 114.

⁶⁷ Grant, *Personal Memoirs of U.S. Grant*, 364–365.

⁶⁸ The seminal work discussing the killing of animals as a socio-political retributive act is Robert Darnton, *The Great Cat Massacre and Other Episodes in French Cultural History*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1984).

oppression that had governed their lives. Whether in the same swamps and woods where they had been hunted or on their former plantations where they had been tortured by these animals, formerly enslaved persons met ‘their old tormenters’ under circumstances of reprisal, reclaiming power through vengeance from Georgia and South Carolina to Virginia.⁶⁹

Formerly enslaved persons led Union troops to specific animals with an apparent understanding that the war against slavery had to pass through the kennels. Major Henry Hitchcock, one of Sherman’s officers, recorded in his diary that upon approaching plantations, enslaved persons were quick to point out the dogs that ‘hunt runaways’.⁷⁰ Providing an example, Hitchcock noted that after leading Union soldiers to a ‘big red dog’ that had hunted self-emancipators for years on their plantation near Milledgeville, Georgia, the enslaved persons ‘were in great glee’ upon hearing the ‘dog’s dying howls’ when soldiers shot the animal. When he heard the formerly enslaved persons’ reactions to the death of the big red dog and other dogs like it, Major Hitchcock rhetorically quipped, ‘No wonder’.⁷¹ In South Carolina, formerly enslaved persons informed Sherman’s troops of ‘a noted ruffian’ who kept a pack of bloodhounds for hunting self-emancipators and Union prisoners of war. Escorted by formerly enslaved persons, the group quickly ‘disposed of the dogs’.⁷²

For some white women living in the South, these scenes evoked horror and a sense of personal violation. Their diaries offer a glimpse of animal sentimentality while also showing a region in upheaval, where the domestic and martial collapsed into one another.⁷³ Marion Ford

⁶⁹ Higginson, *Army Life in a Black Regiment*, 230.

⁷⁰ Henry Hitchcock, *Marching with Sherman: Passages from the Letters and Campaign Diaries of Henry Hitchcock, Major and Assistant Adjutant General of Volunteers, November 1864–May 1865*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1927), 78.

⁷¹ Hitchcock, *Marching With Sherman*, 78.

⁷² ‘Flogging a Man–hunter’, *Burlington Weekly Hawk–Eye*, 1 Apr 1865, 1.

⁷³ Though she primarily focuses on the urban North, Katherine Grier outlines the development of animal sentimentality and domesticity in the United States in her work *Pets in America*. Grier, *Pets in America*, 163–165.

and her friend Annie witnessed ‘a handsome large dog’ being ‘chased by some negro soldiers, one of whom dashed out its brains with the butt of a rifle’. With the animal’s blood lining the streets, ‘almost onto’ their skirts, the women became much distressed at the thought of Black soldiers killing their family dog, Cora.⁷⁴ In her unpublished diary, Frances Wallace complained of ‘negroes who have possession’ of her Tennessee town before writing a week later of being ‘sick at the sight’ of ‘the dog killer’ in the neighborhood. Wallace described the scene with palpable unease as she watched the ‘dog killer’ pile so many dogs on the back of a horse that ‘the horse that carries the dead dogs gave out’.⁷⁵

The destruction of nonhuman animals left behind physical traces of the war as well as symbolic reminders of the collapse of slavery. In Virginia, formerly enslaved persons ‘armed with sharp axes’ went ‘on expeditions through the woods, under cover of the carbines of the cavalry’, during which ‘everything in the shape of a dog was killed’. With the formal end of hostilities in 1865, the sounds of the nonhuman antebellum slave apparatus, which had for so long ominously indicated ‘the close proximity of pursuers’, were replaced by the sights of scarred landscapes turned red with the blood and bodies of ‘horses and mules dead or dying in the mud’ strewn alongside the ‘lifeless bodies of bloodhounds’.⁷⁶

⁷⁴ Arthur and Marion Ford, *Life in the Confederate Army Being Personal Experiences of a Private Soldier in the Confederate Army; and Some Experiences and Sketches of Southern Life*, (New York: the Neale Publishing Company, 1905), 125.

⁷⁵ Frances Woolfolk Wallace, ‘Diary of Frances Woolfolk Wallace, March 19–August 25, 1864’, Reel M–3063/2 Microfilm, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina.

⁷⁶ James Lindsay Smith, *Autobiography of James L. Smith, Including, Also, Reminiscences of Slave Life, Recollections of the War, Education of Freedmen, Causes of the Exodus*, (Norwich, Connecticut: Press of the Bulletin Company, 1881), 126. Wm. Miller Owen, *In camp and battle with the Washington artillery of New Orleans: a narrative of events during the late civil war from Bull Run to Appomattox and Spanish Fort*, (Boston: Ticknor and Company, 1885), 379.

Dogs, Horses, and Historical Memory

Displaying magnanimity and foresight in the terms of surrender that ended the Civil War, General Ulysses S. Grant allowed Confederate soldiers to keep their horses to bring home for the harvest.⁷⁷ Moreover, as the smoke cleared in the spring of 1865, and the Army of the Potomac and the Army of the James marched north for the final time, they left many of their ‘broken down horses & mules’ for yeoman farmers and freedmen in a modest, yet important step toward rebuilding and reconstructing the South.⁷⁸ Confederate soldiers and officers returned home facing an altogether different reality from the places they left at the beginning of the war. The defeated South saw its economy ruined, its infrastructure destroyed, and its nonhuman animal population devastated.⁷⁹ Soldiers such as Captain Irwin, ‘like thousands of other poor Confederates’, depended on his ‘war horse to carry him through’.⁸⁰

Southern horses symbolized military honor and planter prestige. But not in the immediate postwar period. They were commodities to be sold for liquid capital. Shortly after the war, Confederate General Arnold Elzey attempted to sell ‘his favorite war horse, Nell’. But Elzey ‘found no sale’ for his horse as freed persons bought and sold horses on the market for twenty-five cents.⁸¹ In the new marketplaces of the postwar South, the power once embodied by a mounted Confederate officer had been undercut by the free market of formerly enslaved persons conducting commerce.

⁷⁷ Chris M. Calkins, *The Final Bivouac: The Surrender Parade and the Disbanding of the Armies, April 10–May 20, 1865*, (Lynchburg, Virginia: H.E. Howard, 1988), 150. In ‘War Horses’, Abraham Gibson contends that Grant made this decision to economically stabilize the South. Gibson, ‘War Horses’, 131.

⁷⁸ G. Terry Sharrer, ‘The Great Glanders Epizootic, 1861–1866: A Civil War Legacy’, *Agricultural History*, vol. 62, no. 2 (1988): 92.

⁷⁹ For a quantitative analysis of the Civil War’s impact on the South see Paul F. Paskoff, ‘Measures of War: A Quantitative Examination of the Civil War’s Destructiveness in the Confederacy’, *Civil War History*, vol. 51, no. 1 (2008): 35–62.

⁸⁰ Andrews, *The War–Time Journal of a Georgia Girl*, 229.

⁸¹ Andrews, *The War–Time Journal of a Georgia Girl*, 236, 241.

With horses and mules becoming enmeshed into postwar economies and absorbed into the project of Southern reconstruction, the systematic elimination of canines continued with the same vitriol even after the signing of the terms of surrender. An incident emblematic of this postwar hostility towards canines occurred in Georgia, where three months after the war, a dog named 'Jeff Davis' greeted Wild's African Brigade as the soldiers neared the Chennault family home. The members of the Brigade, many of whom had been previously enslaved just north of Georgia, promptly shot and killed the dog. Mixing historical interspecies animosity with postwar politics, as the dog's namesake had been arrested in Georgia a few weeks earlier, the formerly enslaved persons then repeatedly stabbed the canine corpse with their bayonets while laughing and shouting, 'Kill Jeff Davis! Kill Jeff Davis!'⁸² Sharing its name with the former Confederate President, 'Jeff Davis' had become a nonhuman animal proxy for larger forces, which made its death an act of defiance and catharsis in a postwar South.

The symbolic power of these animals remained potent in the postwar North as well, with Union soldiers and formerly enslaved persons bringing animals that were part of the system to Northern cities eager to define the meaning of victory and the memory of slavery. In death, the debates over the historical memory of animals continued to be written, not with blood or ink, but with formaldehyde in the embalmed bodies of dogs and horses. After soldiers in the 1st South Carolina fought against a Confederate dog-company, they brought one of the slain animals back to camp. The regiment's commander sent the dog's carcass 'to New York to be stuffed and mounted'. After making a taxidermized display of the dead animal, the commander intended to 'exhibit it at the Sanitary Commission Fair in Boston'.⁸³

⁸² Casstevens, *Edward A. Wild and the African Brigade*, 226–227.

⁸³ Higginson, *Army Life in a Black Regiment*, 230–231.

At Andersonville Prison, where prisoners of war were routinely ‘torn all to atoms’ by guard-dogs, eleven Cuban Bloodhounds were ‘killed by Union soldiers’. However, one dog named Spot was brought to the North, where J.W. Turner photographed him alongside another Confederate dog named Hero.



Figure 4.4. ‘Spot, Cuban Bloodhound’.⁸⁴

The postwar life of Hero, a Russian Bloodhound once tasked with guarding Castle Thunder prison, reveals a contested space over the historical memory of weaponized canines as well as the aspirations for a reconstructed United States.⁸⁵ The dog was imported from Russia in 1859 and subsequently ‘seized by the rebel government’ to guard Libby Prison and Castle Thunder in

⁸⁴ J.W. Turner, ‘Spot, Cuban Bloodhound, used for capturing escaped Union prisoners at Andersonville Prison, Andersonville, Georgia, Photographed by J.W. Turner, No. 47 Hanover Street, Boston, 1869’, Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, LOT 14043–2, no. 609.

⁸⁵ Using a single animal, in this case, Hero, as a central point for historical analysis allows for a biographical approach to nonhuman lives, giving historians the ability to demonstrate how specific animals pushed forward cultural and political narratives. Notable works within the field of animal studies that focus on one individual dog or horse as a subject of historical analysis include Shaw, ‘The Torturer’s Horse’; and Pycior, ‘The Public and Private Lives of ‘First Dogs’.

Richmond. ‘Possessed of prodigious strength’, Hero was ‘believed to be the largest dog in the world’, measuring over seven feet long from snout to tail.



Figure 4.5. ‘Hero, Russian Bloodhound.’⁸⁶

Northern newspapers described how, at first, Hero ‘had an intense dislike’ of the Union ‘soldiers’ blue uniforms’, a fact attributed to the dog’s ‘traitorous teachings no doubt’. Nevertheless, Hero was ‘rapidly overcoming this antipathy’, giving daily ‘indication of growing tolerance of Union soldiers and Union sentiment’.⁸⁷ What was likely a straightforward example of the dog forming an attachment through adaptive bonding to his new humans was reimagined by the Northern press as a moral conversion.⁸⁸ This ‘rebel dog’ during ‘all the days of the rebellion’ had ‘taken a fancy to his captors’ during the postwar years and was described as ‘trying to be a good, loyal,

⁸⁶ J.W. Turner, ‘Hero, Russian Bloodhound, used for guarding Union prisoners at Libby Prison and Castle Thunder, Richmond, Va., Photographed by J.W. Turner, No. 47 Hanover Street, Boston, 1869’, *Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington*, Liljenquist Family collection.

⁸⁷ ‘Russian Bloodhound from Castle Thunder’, *Frank Leslie’s Illustrated Newspaper*, 3 June 1865.

⁸⁸ Bonds and feelings of attachment between dogs and humans increase over time even in novel surroundings and situations. James Serpell, ed., *The Domestic Dog: Its Evolution, Behavior and Interactions with People*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 250.

Union dog’.⁸⁹ Anthropomorphizing the dog and then using the animal’s symbolic shift in allegiance as a microcosm of the aspirations of collective national healing, the press presented Hero as a nonhuman example of the capacity to change and reconcile. Hero’s ability to adapt and overcome his so-called Confederate instincts mirrored the hopes that the South, too, could embrace the ideals of a united country.

Hero served two purposes in the postwar years. To some, he showed the capacity to change and heal, but to others, his massive two-hundred-pound frame was a reminder of the South’s brutal structure of control. From city to city, Hero drew massive crowds that marveled over his ‘huge proportions, his massive jaws’, and ‘his bloody eyes’, leading many to wonder how many men the dog had ‘emasculated’.⁹⁰ Hero’s fame caught the attention of famous showman P. T. Barnum, who offered to pay \$2,000 to add him to his circus.⁹¹ The dog’s sudden fame did not sit well with everyone, as some Southerners responded with criticism and rebukes. Reverend J.L. Burrows defended Hero, whom he described tongue-in-cheek as “‘the monstrous savage Russian bloodhound’”, as he was very unjustly stigmatized by the Federal soldiers who took him’. Referring to the animal as a prisoner taken to the North to be displayed ‘as a specimen of the cruel devices of Southern officials’, Burrows believed the actual motive of Northerners was to turn ‘some profitable pennies’. Rather than a dangerous dog, Burrows, who seemed to have known the animal personally, contended that Hero was ‘one of the best-natured hounds whose head’ he had ‘ever patted, and one of the most cowardly’.⁹²

⁸⁹ ‘Hero was a rebel dog’, *Weekly Telegraph*, Pomeroy, Ohio, 8 July 1866.

⁹⁰ ‘Terrible Bloodhound Guardian of Castle Thunder’, 1.

⁹¹ ‘A Dog of Historic Fame’, *Cleveland Leader*, 17 July 1865. Barnum was steadfast in his stance against slavery, and as such, supported Lincoln and disapproved of secession. For Barnum’s politics, especially prior to the Civil War, see Bluford Adams, *E Pluribus Barnum: The Great Showman and the Making of U.S. Popular Culture*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 129–144.

⁹² J.L. Burrows, ‘Recollections of Libby Prison’, *Southern Historical Society Papers*, vol. 11 (1883): 89. According to historian Alan Nolan, the Southern Historical Society was an ahistorical organization dedicated to the ‘Lost Cause Narrative’. Alan T. Nolan, ‘The Anatomy of the Myth’, in Gallagher, ed., *The Myth of the Lost Cause*.

Southern writers even indemnified Spot and the eleven other bloodhounds of Andersonville Prison through rhetorical rehabilitation. Portraying Henry Wirz, commandant of Andersonville and convicted war criminal, as a ‘poor feeble foreigner’, former Confederate General Jubal Early claimed that when Wirz’s self-described ‘hounds of hell’ found an escaped prisoner, the animal only affectionately ‘rubbed its nose against’ the escapee.⁹³ For Early, Burrows, and their fellow apologists, these dogs, much like the defeated Confederacy itself, were unfairly maligned by Northern propaganda.

These efforts to recast the legacy of Confederate dogs were part of the campaign to define the memory of the war itself. Although history is often said to be written by victors, the enduring narrative of the antebellum South and the Civil War that became long embedded into the historical consciousness of the United States was contrived, narrativized, and then memorialized by defeated former enslavers and members of the Confederacy. Their Lost Cause ideology presented a whitewashed and misrepresented history that ennobled slavery and, in the words of Confederate President Jefferson Davis, condemned the North for fighting the Civil War ‘with a ferocity that disregarded all the laws of civilized warfare’.⁹⁴ At the core of the Lost Cause narrative was a selective revision of historical events, including the role of weaponized animals in the antebellum slave system and the Civil War. To this end, the Lost Cause flipped the script from ‘killer dogs’ to ‘dog killers’. Southern writers sought to downplay the existence of slave-hunting canines during the antebellum years and challenged accounts of Confederate dog-companies during the Civil War. While pointing to the good nature of dogs such as Spot and

⁹³ Jubal Anderson Early, *Autobiographical Sketch and Narrative of the War Between the States*, (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippencott and Company, 1912), 296. U.S. War Department, *Trial of Henry Wirz, Late Captain of the Confederate Army, Commandant of the Military Prison at Andersonville, Georgia: Report of the Secretary of War*, (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1865).

⁹⁴ Jefferson Davis, *The Rise and Fall of the Confederate Government, Volume 2*, (New York and London: D. Appleton, 1912), 5.

Hero, Southern authors concurrently depicted Union soldiers and formerly enslaved persons as murderers of dogs and other nonhuman animals.⁹⁵

Proponents of the Lost Cause portrayed Union wartime measures as overtly cruel and barbaric. With animal sentimentality well-developed by the Victorian Era, stories of family dogs slain on the streets or hundreds of horses being rounded up ‘in an enclosure’ to be shot circulated widely in Southern memory and literature.⁹⁶ The American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, founded in 1866, heightened sensitivities towards animal welfare and provided a backdrop against which Americans read these accounts.⁹⁷ With increasing numbers of Americans believing animals deserved empathy and legal protections, such retellings of innocent equine animals and harmless pet dogs slain by Union soldiers and formerly enslaved persons inverted the moral terms of the war by equating Union victory with cruelty, and in historian Anne Sarah Rubin’s words, ‘gave credence to Southern myths of cultural difference’ and moral superiority.⁹⁸

Dogs and horses became versatile symbols within Lost Cause mythology. At times, writers and artists depicted the animals as companions and pets killed by formerly enslaved persons and Union soldiers, symbolizing the animals’, and by proxy, the South’s innocence and victimization. In other instances, they remembered them as partners in war and guardians of

⁹⁵ Burrows, ‘Recollections of Libby Prison’, 89.

⁹⁶ The classic work on the development of animal sentimentality during the Victorian Age remains Harriet Ritvo’s *The Animal Estate*. For a more recent work, see Ivan Krielkamp, ‘The Emotional Extravagance of Victorian Pet-Keeping’, *Victorian Review*, vol. 39, no. 2 (2013): 71–74. Quotation is from United Daughters of the Confederacy, J.E.B. Stuart Chapter, *War Days in Fayetteville, North Carolina: Reminiscences of 1861 to 1865*, (Fayetteville, North Carolina: Judge Printing Company, 1910), 32. On the development of animal sentimentality in the United States, see Diane L. Beers, *For the Prevention of Cruelty: The History and Legacy of Animal Rights Activism in the United States*, (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2006); and Grier, *Pets in America*.

⁹⁷ For further elaboration on the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, see Ernest Freeberg, *A Traitor to His Species: Henry Bergh and the Birth of the Animal Rights Movement*, (New York: Basic Books, 2020). There is debate among historians over the impact on the Civil War on the development of animal sentimentality. While it is difficult to establish causation rather than correlation, it stands to reason that no development within the postwar era, especially related to sentimentality, can be separated from the conflict. For the strongest argument that the Civil War had a profound impact on such developments, see Janet M. Davis, *Gospel of Kindness: Animal Welfare and the Making of Modern America*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 14–15, 27–29.

⁹⁸ Rubin, *Through the Heart of Dixie*, 46.

Southern domestic life. Wartime journals and diaries kept by Southern women depicted dogs as the central defenders of the home front, standing in as surrogates for husbands, brothers, and fathers serving in the Confederacy. Diarists imbued dogs such as ‘Wooly’ who ‘sprang forward’ at a large black snake, with intentionality and an acute responsiveness to nonhuman animal threats.⁹⁹ The ability of Wooly and other dogs to read human and environmental cues made them acutely sensitive to the disruptions and anxieties that defined domestic life during the war. Belle Edmonson’s ‘fears of a raid from the Yankees’ were only soothed by the company of her dog Beulah and her ‘kitty Tippie Dora’. Featured prominently in Edmonson’s diary, the young woman described Beulah as her ‘only protector’ who ‘had so often defended’ her from danger. Yet, the diary also reflects the anguish experienced when Beulah and kitty Tippie Dora chose to wander away from their domestic duties, prompting anthropomorphic reflections and expressions of distress when the animals had ‘forsaken’ their posts.¹⁰⁰

In a wartime journal that she kept during Sherman’s March to the Sea, Eliza Andrews portrayed her dog Toby as a nonhuman paragon of Southern loyalty and perseverance in the face of Northern occupation. When ‘Yankee soldiers crept up behind’ Andrews and her friends, ‘Toby’s bark betrayed them’, alerting the women to the approaching men. Anthropomorphizing Toby in much the same way that the Northern press had done so with Hero, Eliza Andrews projected wartime politics onto her dog. Describing how Toby was ‘too good a Confederate to tolerate the enemies of his country’, Andrews depicted the dog’s species-typical response to

⁹⁹ Sarah Lois Wadley, *Diary, August 8, 1859–May 15, 1865*, Manuscripts Department, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Call number 1258.

¹⁰⁰ Belle Edmonson, *Diary of Belle Edmondson: January–November, 1864*, Manuscripts Department, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Call number 1707.

novel stimuli and potential threats as a nonhuman representation of Southern resistance to postwar policies and perceived threats to Southern autonomy.¹⁰¹

Southerners who lived through the trauma of war and occupation read tensions of the conflict and Reconstruction into the behavior and memory of animals. Former Confederate soldiers and officers infused their battlefield experiences with dogs and horses. They retroactively cast the animals as emblems of Southern loyalty or as traitorous scalawags that aligned with the enemy. While facing Sherman's army in Mississippi, Frank Montgomery recalled the 1st Mississippi Cavalry seeing a dog in front of the Union line, 'gayly trotting along'. According to Montgomery, 'as many shots were fired at this dog as at the enemy, for the boys seemed to take it as a special insult', as they assumed the dog 'was a "scalawag" who had deserted from the loyal dogs of the state'.¹⁰²

With the term scalawag, which described white Southerners who supported Reconstruction policies, first appearing in this context two years after the Civil War, Montgomery's anthropomorphized characterization of this dog reflects the importance of nonhuman animals to the construction of a Lost Cause idolization of Southern loyalty.¹⁰³ The traitorous dog described by Frank Montgomery contrasts with the St. Bernard dog captured by Major General Bryan Grimes. The dog was 'protecting the corpse' of a Union soldier who belonged to the Pennsylvania regiment. However, after taking the dog and renaming him 'General', the St. Bernard served with valor as part of the Confederate regiment. He remained

¹⁰¹ Andrews, *The War-Time Journal of a Georgia Girl*, 284. Dogs use whines, growls, and barks to communicate with humans and other dogs when faced with a perceived threat. Miklósi, *Dog Behaviour, Evolution, and Cognition*, 254–257.

¹⁰² Frank Alexander Montgomery, *Reminiscences of a Mississippian in Peace and War*, (Cincinnati, Ohio: the Robert Clarke Press, 1901), 149–150.

¹⁰³ In his article on the origins of the term 'scalawag', Ted Tunnell notes that the meaning attached to scalawag appeared in newspapers in Georgia and Alabama in as early as 1867. Ted Tunnell, 'Creating 'The Propaganda of History': Southern Editors and the Origins of 'Carpetbagger and Scalawag', *The Journal of Southern History*, vol. 72, no. 4 (2006): 789–822.

with Major General Grimes for over two years. This imaginative contrast of loyalty and betrayal projected onto the biological plasticity of the dog's attachment mechanisms inscribed an allegorical redemptive act onto the animal.¹⁰⁴

Other narratives leaned into the militarized vision of the Confederacy by pairing examples of human and nonhuman bravery on the battlefield. Former Confederate soldiers depicted dogs, including one named 'Boykee, sticking to the guns' when facing enemy soldiers.¹⁰⁵ Likewise, 'Sawbuck', a medium-sized dog who traveled with the Louisiana Brigade, went 'into battle with the brigade, dashing up and down the line barking and making all the racket he could'. Remembered by former Confederate soldier John Casler as loyal and brave, Sawbuck fought alongside the men until he took a bullet in his foreleg.¹⁰⁶ These stories carried the memory of the war beyond soldiers to include the animals that became part of the Confederate mythology of remembrance.

Dogs and horses also appeared as mourners in songs, dirges, poems, and funeral orations, in which the human-animal bond featured as the heart of remembrance.¹⁰⁷ In 'The Soldier's Dream', Caroline Glover commemorated a mortally wounded Confederate soldier slipping away to the sight of his 'faithful dog, mute, watchful', and the sounds of his sister saying: 'Brave men fall, but live in Glory, For the Hero never dies!'¹⁰⁸ Similarly, in 'An Officer's Funeral,' the songwriter utilized the loyal dog and faithful horse as devices to evoke sympathy for a

¹⁰⁴ Bryan Grimes, *Extracts of Letters of Major-Gen'l Bryan Grimes, to His Wife: Written While in Active Service in the Army of Northern Virginia. Together with some Personal Recollections of the War, Written by Him after its Close, etc.*, (Raleigh, North Carolina: E. Broughton & Co., 1883), 17. Recent studies affirm that pet, and free-ranging, dogs display incredible behavioral plasticity, as they remember and subsequently form relationships with humans who reward them, in as few as four days. Srijaya Nandi, et al., 'Free-ranging dogs quickly learn to recognize a rewarding person', *Applied Animal Behaviour Science*, vol. 278 (2024): 1–10.

¹⁰⁵ Ford, *Life in the Confederate Army*, 17.

¹⁰⁶ John O. Casler, *Four Years in the Stonewall Brigade*, (Girard, Kansas: Appeal Publishing Company, 1906), 201.

¹⁰⁷ The most important work on death and remembrance during and in the aftermath of the Civil War, remains Drew Faust's *This Republic of Suffering*.

¹⁰⁸ William G. Shepperson, ed., *War Songs of the South*, (Richmond, Virginia: West & Johnston, 1862), 165.

Confederate soldier killed in battle. The soldier slipped from one world to another, assured that ‘thy dog shall keep watch for another, And thy steed by a stranger be reined’.¹⁰⁹ It seemed even in death, the spirit of the Confederacy lived in human memory and in the devotion of the animals left behind.

Horses, like dogs, emerged as revered animals in Confederate memory, with their strength and suffering mirroring Confederate soldiers, and their loyalty and sacrifice reflecting ideals of the Lost Cause. As such, Southern writers hoped to recall equine animals’ ‘heroic services’ and to pay respect to their deeds.¹¹⁰ Writing his memoirs years after the war, General John Brown Gordon paid tribute to his ‘superb battle-horse’ who encapsulated, in metaphorical form, the ordinary Confederate soldier called to service to defend the South during the Civil War. Remembered as an average horse who he felt was ‘by no means remarkable’ during peacetime, the horse transformed when called to duty during battle with the ‘bones of her legs converted into steel springs’.¹¹¹ Throughout wartime accounts, Confederate veterans often ascribed to their horses the virtues and qualities they had hoped to embody themselves on the battlefields. Randolph McKim, for instance, paid tribute to his ‘beautiful little bay “Charlie”’, whose ‘action was so fine’ and whose ‘spirit so unconquered’ that his dutiful service entitled him ‘to be enrolled in the Legion of Honor of those brave horses who have borne themselves with peculiar distinction on the field of battle’.¹¹²

In a narrative that adroitly threaded the heroic with the lachrymose, the story of Lieutenant Slocomb presented readers with a mirror image of duty and sacrifice reflected in a

¹⁰⁹ “The Officer’s Funeral March,” reprinted in A.A. Berle, ed., *Berle’s Self Culture*, vol. 8 (Chicago: Twentieth Century Self Culture Association, 1920), 165.

¹¹⁰ Ashby, *The Valley Campaigns*, 267.

¹¹¹ John Gordon Brown, *Reminiscences of the Civil War*, (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1904), 101.

¹¹² Randolph Harrison McKim, *A Soldier’s Recollections: Leaves from the Diary of a Young Confederate, with an Oration on the Motives and Aims of the Soldiers of the South*, (New York: Longman’s and Co., 1910), 230.

horse and its rider. After being shot in the chest at the Battle of Shiloh, the mortally wounded Lieutenant Slocumb ‘would not leave the field until his guns were all limbered up’, refusing medical attention until the artillery pieces were in place. Slocumb then got on the back of his horse, who, on the way to the hospital, was ‘pierced by a half dozen bullets’. Though badly wounded, the horse concealed his pain and refused to stop, taking the Lieutenant all the way to the hospital tent.¹¹³ When his human companion ‘was lifted from the saddle, the noble animal’ laid ‘quietly down and breathed his last’ breath.¹¹⁴ Just as the animal had carried its rider to the threshold of death, Southern memorial culture ensured that it, too, would be carried into the pantheon of remembrance.

With Southern writers presenting their counter-narrative in print, postwar commemorative efforts preserved the legacy of animals in physical form as Confederate veterans organizations and military colleges embalmed horses from the Civil War to celebrate and lionize the Confederate war effort and the military leaders of the Confederacy.¹¹⁵ When Robert E. Lee died in 1870, less than five years after Appomattox, the revered General took on, in historian David Ulbrich’s words, a ‘divine mystique’ as he became the ‘icon of the Lost Cause’.¹¹⁶ Part of the creation and preservation of Lee’s memory was the literal preservation of his beloved horse ‘Traveller’, who died, almost poetically, a year to the day after Lee.

¹¹³ Horses have high levels of pain tolerance, often concealing injuries to continue tasks. Pain indicators in horses are typically recognized in physiological changes to heart and respiratory rates. Ulrike Auer, et al., ‘Development, refinement, and validation of an equine musculoskeletal pain scale’, *Frontiers in pain research*, vol. 4, (2024), 2.

¹¹⁴ H.C. Clarke, *Diary of the War for Separation: a Daily Chronicle of the Principal Events and History of the Present Revolution, to Which is Added Notes and Descriptions of All the Great Battles, Including Walker’s Narrative of the Battle of Shiloh*, (Augusta, Georgia: Steam Press of Chronicle & Sentinel, 1862), 154.

¹¹⁵ In her outstanding work, ‘Equine Relics of the Civil War’, Drew Gilpin Faust details the symbolism of horses belonging to Confederate Generals Robert E. Lee and ‘Stonewall’ Jackson, as well as Union Generals George Meade and Philip Sheridan. Drew Gilpin Faust, ‘Equine Relics of the Civil War’, *Southern Culture* vol. 6, no. 1 (2000): 23-49. On the glorification of the Confederate soldier, See Reiko Hillyer, ‘Relics of Reconciliation: The Confederate Museum and Civil War Memory in the New South’, *Public Historian*, vol. 33, no. 4 (2011): 35–62.

¹¹⁶ David Ulbrich, ‘Lost Cause’, in David S. Heidler and Jeanne T. Heidler, eds., *Encyclopedia of the American Civil War: A Political, Social, and Military History*, (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2000), 1222.



Figure 4.6. ‘General Robert Edward Lee in uniform on his horse, Traveller’.¹¹⁷

Even before his death, Traveller was canonized as a living relic with Southerners plucking hairs from his tail to keep and treasure as if they were splinters of the True Cross, causing Traveller to, in Lee’s words, present ‘the appearance of a plucked chicken’.¹¹⁸ After Traveller’s well-attended funeral, the horse was displayed at Washington and Lee University, a few feet from Lee’s tomb, one of many public monuments meant to reinforce Southern pride.¹¹⁹ By recasting these animals in carefully curated postwar memory, this exercise in nostalgia helped shape the ideological future of the South. Through literary mythmaking, commemoration, and the literal preservation of animals, the Lost Cause ensured the legacy of the Confederacy’s nonhuman animals and the cause they were said to have represented. This historical revision downplayed animal violence

¹¹⁷ A.H. Plecker, ‘General Robert Edward Lee in uniform on his horse, Traveller / Photographed by A.H. Plecker’s Travelling Gallery’, Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, Liljenquist Family collection.

¹¹⁸ ‘Robert Lee letter to Mildred Lee, Lexington, October 29, 1865’, in Robert Edward Lee, *Recollections and Letters of General Robert E. Lee*, (New York: Doubleday, Page & Company, 1904), 193.

¹¹⁹ David Blight describes how the creation of Southern monuments helped foster a sense of pride and white unity. Blight, *Race and Reunion*, 266.

during the antebellum era and the Civil War while simultaneously renormalizing the use of animals in exerting parastate authority over Black Southerners.¹²⁰

Reconstruction and the Reimposition of Control

The war for the South's past was inseparable from the war over its future. Animals that preserved the antebellum plantation system and fought for the Confederacy were subsequently used to ensure the perpetuation of the postwar South's social hierarchy. Even as they commemorated, embalmed, and mythologized Confederate animals, Southerners simultaneously and mercilessly killed domesticated animals belonging to Black families while also reimposing animal-enforced control. Frederick Douglass encapsulated the feelings of those who hoped to achieve economic and political freedom when he predicted that the work had not ended with the abolition of slavery, but instead had only just begun.¹²¹ Events on the ground made clear that such hopes would be met by a reality that felt, in many ways, like continuity. Former North Carolina Governor David L. Swain spoke for many when he noted, 'we are at the beginning of the War'.¹²²

Reports abounded of Southern vigilantes 'riding about whipping, maiming and killing all Negroes who do not obey the orders of their former masters, just as if slavery existed'.¹²³ On horseback with dogs by their side, Southern mobs, law enforcement, and groups such as the Ku Klux Klan sought to control the movement of freed persons, enforce labor contracts, and

¹²⁰ Political scientist Rebecca Tapscott observes how states are sometimes characterized by 'non-state' or para-state violence. Tapscott, 'Vigilantes and the State', 209.

¹²¹ Frederick Douglass, 'The Work of the Future', *Douglass' Monthly*, November 1862.

¹²² Capitalizing the word 'War', Swain designates the conflict already beginning in 1865 as a proper noun, signaling a new, undeclared war beginning in the months after Appomattox. Using anthropologist Nancy Scheper-Hughes's concept of 'small wars', Kidada E. Williams, contends in her recent book, *I Saw Death Coming*, that the period of Reconstruction was an undeclared war.

¹²³ Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution*, 121.

suppress civil and political rights. Testifying before Congress in 1871, Scipio Eager told the chairman of the Joint Select Committee that a mob of white men hunted him with the same dogs ‘they had in old slavery times’ kept in the South solely ‘for that business’.¹²⁴

Though the Thirteenth Amendment abolished slavery, the reappearance of the same animals that had once hunted self-emancipators marked the continuation of the logic of the plantation in the postwar regime. In Texas, a man named Isaac ran from a pack of ‘dogs belonging to a Mr. Addison who kept them for the purpose of chasing negroes’ during the days of slavery. ‘During the hunt’, Isaac was apprehended after a struggle and subsequently shot and killed.¹²⁵ In Georgia, John Keller asked permission to visit his ailing wife. When his employer refused his request, he took the man’s horse. The employer tracked Keller, put five bullets into him, and in an equine-induced punishment reminiscent of slavery, ‘tied him on a horse’ and forcefully dragged him back to town.¹²⁶ In Tennessee, Henry Willis swore in an affidavit to the Freedmen’s Bureau that a group of men killed a Black soldier after ‘tying him to a horse and running him for about nine miles’.¹²⁷ These premeditated demonstrations of power sent the message that Black freedom was conditional, and its boundaries would be enforced and policed.

Determined to uphold prewar hierarchies and spatial boundaries, former enslavers targeted those who broke the containment of the plantation, especially those who sought

¹²⁴ ‘Testimony of Scipio Eager’, *Report of the Joint Select Committee Appointed to Inquire in to the Condition of Affairs in the Late Insurrectionary States So Far as Regards the Execution of the Laws, and the Safety of the Lives and Property of the Citizens of the United States and Testimony Taken, Volume 7*, (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1872), 669.

¹²⁵ ‘Miscellaneous Records Relating to Murders and Other Criminal Offenses Committed in Texas, 1865–1868’, *Records of the Assistant Commissioner for the State of Texas Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen and Abandoned Lands, 1865–1869*, (Washington, DC: National Archives Microfilm Publication), M821 Roll 32.

¹²⁶ ‘Miscellaneous Reports and Lists Relating to Murders and Outrages Mar. 1867–Nov. 1868’, *Records of the Assistant Commissioner for the State of Louisiana, Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen and Abandoned Lands, 1865–1869*, National Archives, Microfilm M1027 Roll 34.

¹²⁷ ‘Affidavits Relating to Outrages Mar. 1866–August 1868’, *Records of the Assistant Commissioner for the State of Tennessee, Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1865–1869*, National Archives, Microfilm Publication M999 Roll 34.

assistance from the US military and the Freedmen's Bureau. Contracted to work on a plantation in Arkansas, Edward Smith and nineteen other freed persons lived in a small two-room cabin without adequate food or medical attention. 'Tired of the treatment', Smith and three other men set off for the Freedmen's Bureau before being intercepted by white men on horseback 'all armed and with dogs', who dragged the men back to the plantation 'on a very fast gait'.¹²⁸ Those who made it to the authorities also encountered insurmountable barriers to justice. After a white man raped his wife in postwar Louisiana, Cuff Canara 'had a quarrel' with the rapist before heading to the Agent of the Freedmen's Bureau. A vigilante mob pursued Canara and set their dogs on his trail. Canara killed three out of the four dogs and made it to the authorities, where they insinuated that he 'had committed a greater crime by killing the dogs than the man who shot him' and raped his wife.¹²⁹

In addition to the repression of Black autonomy, freedom, and labor, efforts to intimidate and dismantle Republican political power grew steadily more violent and systematic. During the 1868 Camilla Massacre, political violence fused with animal terror. Law enforcement, white civilians, and members of the Ku Klux Klan deployed dogs and horses to hunt freed persons attempting to engage in the political process. After violence erupted at a political rally, five freedmen 'took refuge in a swamp', where they saw white men 'accompanied by bloodhounds' walking through the woods, 'shouting, cursing, and shooting the freedmen'. The thick Georgia night air cut with 'the cries and shrieks' of freedmen as they were 'pulled down by the dogs'.¹³⁰ Peter Hines escaped through the woods, where he saw 'men on horseback' following

¹²⁸ 'Affidavit of Edward Smith, July 30, 1866', enclosed in 1 Lt. S Hersey to Bv't Major Gen'l J. W. Sprague, August 7, 1866, H-26 1866, Letters Received, series 231, AR Assistant Commissioner, Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, & Abandoned Lands, Record Group 105, National Archives.

¹²⁹ 'Miscellaneous Reports and Lists Relating to Murders and Outrages', M1027, roll 34.

¹³⁰ 'Letter: Freedman's Bureau, Subdistrict Headquarters, Albany, Georgia, to Colonel John Randolph Lewis, Atlanta, Georgia, 1868 Sept. 20', Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands. Records. National Archives and Records Administration, presented in the Digital Library of Georgia.

and shooting freedmen. John Davis ‘fled through fields’ witnessing ‘white men on horseback pursuing and shooting at freedmen’.¹³¹ Maria Jones desperately searched for her missing son as these ominous sounds of ‘firing of guns and the barking of dogs’ echoed throughout the area. Jones’s neighbor, Sucus Pollard, emerged from the woods, telling her that white men ‘were running the freedmen with hounds and shooting them as they overtook them’.¹³² Maria Jones never saw her son or her neighbor again.

During the months leading up to the 1868 election, conflicts fueled by the shifting balance of political power erupted across the region. In Opelousas, Louisiana, members of the Knights of the White Camelia attacked Emerson Bentley while he was teaching at a Freedmen’s Bureau school. With the Black school children screaming, ‘They are killing Mr. Bentley’, local citizens began to mobilize and call for justice. However, those who supported Reconstruction were soon outnumbered and outgunned as members of the Knights, the Ku Klux Klan, and other reactionary groups ‘convened from different parts of the parish’ armed with dogs and mounted on horseback. Coming ‘into town from every direction’, the mounted men disarmed the Black citizens and Republican supporters with chilling efficiency, and then ‘the work of murder seems to have commenced’.¹³³ S.A. Miller, a Union soldier specifically targeted because of his military service hid in the woods for most of the day as he watched men on horses and packs of dogs running down and executing political opponents.¹³⁴

¹³¹ ‘Affidavit of Peter Hines: Albany, Georgia, 1868 Sept. 23’, Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands. Records. National Archives and Records Administration, presented in the Digital Library of Georgia. ‘Affidavit of John Davis: Albany, Georgia, 1868 Sept. 26’, Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands. Records. National Archives and Records Administration.

¹³² ‘Affidavit of Maria Jones: Albany, Georgia, 1868 Oct. 5’, Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands. Records. National Archives and Records Administration.

¹³³ Louisiana Legislature, *Supplemental report of Joint committee of the General assembly of Louisiana on the conduct of the late elections, and the condition of peace and good order in the state*, (New Orleans: A.L. Lee, State Printer, 1869), 32.

¹³⁴ *Supplemental report of Joint committee of the General assembly of Louisiana*, 46.

Freed without freedoms in an environment where state authorities offered little security, many Black American families came to rely on nonhuman animals as they attempted to establish economic and social autonomy. In Sumter County, Mississippi, where local vigilante raids were common, Joshua Morris recounted to Congress that ‘almost every negro had a gun and a dog’.¹³⁵ Dogs and equine animals provided companionship, agricultural and hunting support, as well as a crucial layer of protection and mobility against the seemingly omnipresent threat of violence. With the ability to attend to patterns and remain attuned to familiar humans’ emotional states, dogs in particular, guarded African American households, as they perceived danger, responded to their interpretations of events, and intervened in ways that determined outcomes.¹³⁶

Warren Davis told members of Congress that his dog saved his life from vigilante violence. After Davis refused to sell his crops earlier in the day, a group of men approached his home, intending ‘to straighten him out’. However, the ‘dog found them out before they got to the house’, alerting Davis to the approaching danger. In one of many comparable examples, Davis’s dog showed a deliberate awareness of its environment and the potential harm the men posed, before acting accordingly.¹³⁷ Essic Harris’s dog protected its family after Harris lost his firearm, leaving the household exposed to potential raids. The family dog ‘hardly ever barked at anybody’ but ‘barked every time these men came’, demonstrating an awareness of the group’s violent

¹³⁵ ‘Testimony of Joshua Morris’, *Report of the Joint Select Committee Appointed to Inquire in to the Condition of Affairs in the Late Insurrectionary States*, 308.

¹³⁶ As a macrosomatic species, dogs rely heavily on their sense of smell to gather information about humans and the environment as part of their decision-making process. See Päivi Berg, et al., ‘Olfaction in the canine cognitive and emotional processes: From behavioral and neural viewpoints to measurement possibilities’, *Neuroscience & Biobehavioral Reviews*, vol. 157 (2024): 1; and Kokocińska-Kusiak, et al., ‘Canine Olfaction: Physiology, Behavior, and Possibilities for Practical Applications’, 1. Furthermore, dogs are finely attuned to human actions and emotions, often noticing the smallest details and changes, which allows them to evaluate the intentions of others. See Horowitz, *Inside of a Dog*, 163, 285; and Natalia Albuquerque, et al., ‘Dogs recognize dog and human emotions’, *Biology Letters*, vol. 12 (2015): 1.

¹³⁷ ‘Testimony of Warren Davis, *Reports of Committees of the House of Representatives for the Second Session of the Forty Second Congress*, (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1872), 727. Dogs have species-specific traits that allow them to be acutely sensitive and reactive to environmental cues and stimuli. Miklósi, *Dog Behaviour, Evolution, and Cognition*, 28.

intent.¹³⁸ Emeline Brumfield’s account further attests to the important role of dogs in alerting Black families to threats. Brumfield told a US Circuit Judge that she ‘knew when that dog barked’, danger was looming. Brumfield remembered waking up ‘to the alarm of the dog’ one night and yelling ‘Ku Klux! Ku Klux!’ to her husband, who then ran from the house to the safety of the woods, thanks in part to the dog’s precise timing and perceptive response to an imminent threat.¹³⁹

These canine partners in resistance provided an important form of security with their interventions influencing events and saving innumerable lives. However, their protective actions frequently ended in tragedy. When a group of men began to surround the home of Lucy and Anderson Ferrell, the family dog Flora came to their aid, waking up the couple and barking defiantly at the intruders. Domestic dogs respond to threats against their familiar humans with escalated vocalizations and physical positioning, and Flora’s final moments bore the weight of that decision.¹⁴⁰ After more barking, a gunshot, and then tragic silence, Lucy ran downstairs and found a large puddle of blood, prompting Anderson to cry out in desperation, ‘Where is Flora?’ The couple searched the home but sorrowfully determined that the men ‘killed the dog’ and then

¹³⁸ United States Congress, *Testimony taken by the Joint Select Committee to Inquire into the Condition of Affairs in the Late Insurrectionary States: North Carolina*, (Washington, Government Printing Office, 1872), 89. Though dogs will often protect their homes and families, it is difficult to predict with certainty when a dog will exhibit protective and defensive characteristics. Horowitz, *Inside of a Dog*, 62. Those interested in empathetic protective responses in dogs to human stress, should see Wilson, ‘Dogs Can Discriminate Between Human Baseline and Psychological Stress Condition Odours’; and Custance, ‘Empathic–Like Responding by Domestic Dogs’.

¹³⁹ In his new work, *The Ku Klux Klan: An American History*, Kristofer Allerfeldt describes how the Ku Klux Klan officially disbanded in 1869. While this is two years before the publication of Brumfield’s testimony, it is likely that the Klan continued at the local and county levels after 1869. Furthermore, according to Allerfeldt, the ‘Ku Klux Klan’ became an umbrella term for many instances of racial violence and other organizations similar to the Klan. Kristofer Allerfeldt, *The Ku Klux Klan: An American History*, (Cheltenham: History Press Ltd, 2024). ‘Testimony of Emeline Brumfield’, *The Great Ku Klux Trials: Official Reports of the Proceedings Before U.S. Circuit Judge, Presiding, and Hon. George S. Bryan, District Judge, Associate, Held at Columbia, S.C., November Term*, (Columbia: Columbia Union, 1871), 201.

¹⁴⁰ Animal behaviorists conducted a study in 2021, and determined that barking was the most common canine response to household noises. Emma K. Grigg, et al., ‘Stress–Related Behaviors in Companion Dogs Exposed to Common Household Noises, and Owners’ Interpretations of Their Dogs’ Behaviors’, *Animal Behavior and Welfare*, vol. 8 (2021): 5.

‘dragged her off’.¹⁴¹ Flora’s efforts to protect her household likely saved her family but cost the animal her life. In Alabama, a group of men shot and killed Eliza Lyon’s husband Abe and the family dog as she took the children to hide in the woods.¹⁴² And when members of the Ku Klux Klan entered Smith Watley’s home in Montgomery, Alabama, they struck down the dogs who were attempting to protect their family.¹⁴³ In all of these instances, the animals’ efforts to stand, literally, in between their families and those intent on harming them, reveal the prominent, if perilous, role of dogs in the postwar South.

Flora’s death was one of many. According to W. W. Chisolm’s testimony to Congress, groups of men ‘killed a great many dogs’ belonging to Black citizens.¹⁴⁴ Other evidence confirms that in some locations, vigilante groups indiscriminately targeted all dogs owned by Black families. In York County, South Carolina, Abraham Brumfield described members of the Ku Klux Klan ‘raiding and shooting dogs’ every night for four weeks.¹⁴⁵ Stories spread of assailants breaking into homes and gunning down dogs, such as the account of former Meridian police officer Granville Richards, who described a group of men breaking down his fence, taking his gun, and shooting his dog.¹⁴⁶ In another case, Michael Slamon informed Congress that when a party of white men went into the house of a woman named Ellen, her ‘dog grabbed at him’, resulting in the man shooting the dog as it retreated under the house.¹⁴⁷ There is evidence of

¹⁴¹ ‘Testimony of Anderson Ferrell’, *Reports of Committees of the House of Representatives*, 619.

¹⁴² ‘Testimony of Eliza Lyon’, *Reports of Committees*, 42nd Cong., 2nd sess. (1872), 1262–1263.

¹⁴³ ‘Testimony of Smith Watley’, *Index to the Reports of the Committees of the Senate of the United States for the Forty–Second Congress, in Four Volumes*, (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1872), 1004.

¹⁴⁴ ‘Testimony of W.W. Chisolm’, *Report of the Joint Select Committee Appointed to Inquire in to the Condition of Affairs in the Late Insurrectionary States*, 253.

¹⁴⁵ ‘Testimony of Abraham Brumfield’, *Testimony taken by the Joint Select Committee to Inquire into the Condition of Affairs in the Late Insurrectionary States: South Carolina, Volume 3*, 1947.

¹⁴⁶ ‘Testimony of Granville Richards’, *Report of the Joint Select Committee Appointed to Inquire in to the Condition of Affairs in the Late Insurrectionary States*, 53.

¹⁴⁷ ‘Testimony of Michael Slamon’, *Report of the Joint Select Committee Appointed to Inquire in to the Condition of Affairs in the Late Insurrectionary States*, 45.

deliberate horse killings as well. After fatally shooting Jim Jackson, a group of white men ‘killed the horse the boy was riding’ before disposing of both corpses in a nearby hole of water.¹⁴⁸ These acts of violence against nonhuman symbols of Black autonomy and freedom were part of the larger strategy of controlling labor, while at the same time undermining the protective and empowering roles these animals played in the lives of Black Americans.

With the clarity of hindsight, the complexity of Reconstruction is best thought of as a non-linear event with successes and failures occurring at different times across multiple regions of the South.¹⁴⁹ Yet racial violence emerges as a common denominator.¹⁵⁰ And as was the case during the era of plantation slavery and the Civil War, nonhuman animals were key components to the attempted preservation of the social order. With waves of violence exacerbating differences and tensions within the Republican Party, especially when the financial floor gave out during the Panic of 1873, many Northerners diverted their gaze from the horror unfolding in the South. Some of those who still held their eyes southward looked upon Reconstruction with increasing resentment, with Michigan Republican Thomas Wilson declaring, ‘Hard times and heavy taxes make them wish the N——s were in Hell or in Africa’.¹⁵¹ Responding to the growing feelings of Northern apathy and hostility, a leading Republican newspaper in Washington described how people were becoming tired of ‘abstract questions in which the overwhelming majority of them have no direct interest’. Speaking for many, the newspaper

¹⁴⁸ ‘Letter from Wharton County’, *Miscellaneous Records Relating to Murders and Other Criminal Offenses Committed in Texas 1865–1868*, Freedmen’s Bureau Records—Letter from Wharton County, Texas, *Records of the Assistant Commissioner for the State of Texas, Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen and Abandoned Lands*, 1865–1869, National Archives, Microfilm Publication M821 Roll 32.

¹⁴⁹ Foner, *Reconstruction: America’s Unfinished Revolution*.

¹⁵⁰ Manisha Sinha’s new work, *The Rise and Fall of the Second American Republic*, joins several other scholars in bringing attention to the astonishing level of violence during Reconstruction. Manisha Sinha. *The Rise and Fall of the Second American Republic: Reconstruction, White Supremacy, and the Undoing of Democracy*, (New York: Liveright, 2024).

¹⁵¹ Revealing the absurdity of censored words in the late–nineteenth century, the *Washington National Republican* newspaper printed the word ‘N——r’, but not the word ‘hell’. *Washington National Republican*, 24 January 1874.

continued by concluding that ‘the reconstruction of the Southern States, with all its interminable embroilments, have lost much of the power they once wielded’.¹⁵²

After the Supreme Court’s ruling in *United States v. Cruikshank* limited the federal government’s ability to enforce Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendment protections, rifle clubs and vigilante groups, including the White League and Red Shirts, escalated attacks across states that had not yet been ‘redeemed’.¹⁵³ Operating in cavalry units under the auspices of the Democratic Party, these men on horseback destroyed government buildings, undermined Republican Party infrastructure, and intimidated voters.¹⁵⁴ Republican leaders received succinct yet devastating requests for assistance, including the plea: ‘In God’s name save us if you can’. And when Mississippi Governor Adelbert Ames sent a request for federal intervention after the Clinton Massacre of 1875, President Grant infamously replied, ‘The whole public are tired out with these annual autumnal outbreaks in the South and the great majority are ready now to condemn any interference on the part of the Government’.¹⁵⁵

With another autumnal season approaching, this one bringing the 1876 presidential election, violence erupted once again. In the small river town of Hamburg, South Carolina, members of a Black militia exchanged verbal barbs with Tommy Butler when the South Carolinian attempted to steer his horse into the militia parade. Eleven years earlier, the then ten-year-old Tommy watched as soldiers killed his father’s pack of slave-hunting

¹⁵² *Washington National Republican*, 24 January 1874.

¹⁵³ On the impact of *United States v. Cruikshank* within the context of Reconstruction, see Michael J. Klarman, *From Jim Crow to Civil Rights: The Supreme Court and the Struggle for Racial Equality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 37.

¹⁵⁴ Groups such as the Red Shirts have been described as the ‘terrorist arm’ of the Democratic Party. Daniel Byman, ‘White Supremacy, Terrorism, and the Failure of Reconstruction in the United States’, *International Security*, vol. 46, no. 1 (2021): 53.

¹⁵⁵ ‘Letter from United States Attorney General Edwards Pierrepont to Mississippi Governor Adelbert Ames, September 14, 1875’, Mississippi Department of Archives and History, Collection Ames Series 803, Box/Folder Ames Series 803: Box 997, Folder 6.

bloodhounds.¹⁵⁶ After the incident at the parade, over one hundred men, accompanied by members of the Red Shirts, descended upon Hamburg and opened fire on the Black militia. As the members of the militia slipped away, the mob began indiscriminately rounding up and attacking the Black civilians of Hamburg.

Reminiscent of his not-so-distant past, formerly enslaved person Louis Schiller recalled memories of ‘those old slavehunting dogs’ as he and other members of the community took refuge in the nearby swamp. The mob’s blood lust seemed impossible to satiate, with yells of ‘Good boys! God damn it! Turn your hounds loose, and bring the last one in’, ringing out in the streets of Hamburg throughout the night. Strategically utilizing the environment to evade capture, Schiller sought sanctuary in a part of the woods where ‘they couldn’t come on’ him ‘with their horses’, resulting in the mob putting their pack of dogs on his trail. Schiller survived the night by eluding the dogs and the men on horseback, but many others did not.¹⁵⁷

Less than four months later, Republicans and Democrats claimed victory in the presidential election of 1876, resulting in the Compromise of 1877, which removed federal troops from the South and ended Reconstruction.¹⁵⁸ A worsening economic crisis, the ascendancy of ‘Redemption’ governments across every Southern state, and accompanying violence further eroded much of the remaining support for Reconstruction.¹⁵⁹ In lock step with the waning of Reconstruction, a previously sectional, Southern-driven effort to reframe the Civil War as a

¹⁵⁶ For details on Robert Butler as well as the Iowan regiment that destroyed his pack of dogs, see Cormac Broeg, ‘Killing Butler’s Bloodhounds: An Act of Political Violence by Iowa Soldiers in Reconstruction South Carolina’, *The Annals of Iowa*, vol. 78, no. 2 (2019): 132–133.

¹⁵⁷ ‘Testimony of D.L. Adams’, *Miscellaneous Documents: 30th Congress, 1st Session – 48th Congress, 2d Session and Special Session, Volume 6, Part 1*, (Washington, DC: Governing Printing Office, 1877), 43. ‘Testimony of Louis Schiller’, *Miscellaneous Documents: 30th Congress*, 152–153.

¹⁵⁸ The definitive work on the Compromise of 1877 remains C. Vann Woodward’s, *Reunion and Reaction: The Compromise of 1877 and the End of Reconstruction*, (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 1991).

¹⁵⁹ On the ‘redemption’ of Southern states, see Heather Cox Richardson, *The Death of Reconstruction Race, Labor, and Politics in the Post-Civil War North, 1865–1901*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2009), 156–160.

shared national sacrifice became increasingly popular nationwide as it gained popular acceptance in the North.

Memorials, Reunions, and the Sentimentalization of the Civil War

As the nation's mood turned towards sentimentalizing and glorifying the Civil War, a national reunification process began in earnest. Nonhuman animals, embalmed animals, and animal monuments all helped to create an American identity forged in a collective and convenient forgetting.¹⁶⁰ Robert E. Lee's horse, Traveller, was moved from Virginia to New York. Here in the economic heart of the North, the embalmed Confederate animal joined Union General Philip Sheridan's horse, Winchester, whose embalmed body was donated to the Military Service Organization to promote patriotism.¹⁶¹ The posthumous juxtaposition presented in the pageantry of reconciliation collapsed the distinction between Union and Confederate. This allowed viewers to celebrate military glory without having to confront the causes or consequences of the conflict.

Public events and commemorations also incorporated animals into their efforts to reinforce narratives of healing and reconciliation. The bald eagle mascot of the 8th Wisconsin, 'Old Abe' traveled on a nationwide tour, attending Civil War reunions before becoming the main

¹⁶⁰ While primarily focusing on Victorian England, Rachel Poliquin's *The Breathless Zoo* provides a detailed overview of the cultural and social significance of animal taxidermy during this time period. Rachel Poliquin, *The Breathless Zoo: Taxidermy and the Cultures of Longing*, (State College, Pennsylvania: Penn State University Press, 2012). On natural history museums and the use of preserved animals for educational and social purposes, see Stephen T. Asma, *Stuffed Animals and Pickled Heads: The Culture and Evolution of Natural History Museums*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001). For taxidermy in a specifically American context, see Clifton D. Bryant and Donald J. Shoemaker, 'Dead Zoo Chic: Some Conceptual Notes on Taxidermy in American Social Life', in Clifton D. Bryant, ed., *Handbook of Death and Dying, Volume 2*, (Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Reference, 2003).

¹⁶¹ Faust, 'Equine Relics of the Civil War', 9.

attraction at the 1876 Centennial Exposition. With the motto, ‘No North, No South, No East, No West—The Union One and Indivisible’, the 1876 Centennial Exposition was designed, in historian Jack Noe’s words, ‘to heal the wounds of the Civil War’.¹⁶² The avian species’ longstanding association with the Republic lent Old Abe the credibility to perch as a symbol of American cohesion and solidarity.

Figure 4.7. ‘Old Abe. Wisconsin Eagle.’¹⁶³

While Northerners and Southerners queued for hours to pay tribute to the bald eagle tethered to a shield conspicuously depicting the American flag, they likely heard the ‘medley of



dog voices’ from the Centennial’s dog show. Among the prominently displayed animals stood a large Siberian Bloodhound.¹⁶⁴ For some, the historical association of the Siberian Bloodhound with the pursuit of self-emancipators along with its weaponization during the Civil War was an

¹⁶² Jack Noe, *Contesting Commemoration: The 1876 Centennial, Independence Day, and the Reconstruction–Era South*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2021).

¹⁶³ Centennial Photographic Co., photographer, ‘Variation ‘Old Abe’, Wisconsin Eagle’, (Philadelphia: Centennial Photographic Co., 1876), Library Company of Philadelphia: Catalogue of the Centennial Photographic Co’s Views of the International Exhibition, 1876, no. 1381.

¹⁶⁴ James D. McCabe, *The illustrated history of the Centennial exhibition, held in commemoration of the one hundredth anniversary of American independence*, (Philadelphia: National Publishing Company, 1876), 716–718. The term ‘Siberian Bloodhound’ was used interchangeably with ‘Russian Bloodhound’.

awkward reminder that conflicted with the Centennial Exposition's themes of celebration and reconciliation. That same summer, the dissonance between commemoration and forgetting played out on another stage, as a revival of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, the antislavery novel that depicted two horrific scenes of slave-hunting canines, was performed in New York City. The revival, which was one of many to use live Cuban and Siberian Bloodhounds on stage, was chided by *The New York Tribune*, whose reviewer believed that such scenes were included 'so that, presumably, we may be chastened by the remembrance of things that most people would be glad to forget'.¹⁶⁵

With Americans 'glad to forget' the violent memories associated with Siberian and Cuban bloodhounds, veterans and authors turned to alternate canine narratives to soften the brutality of the Civil War, humanize soldiers, and inspire national reconciliation. Using dogs to elicit emotional responses in Northern children, New England periodicals such as *The Youth's Companion* and *Merry's Museum for Boys and Girls* recounted the poignant story of a loyal dog saving the life of a Confederate soldier. In the story, a Northerner 'discovered a soldier in gray who seemed to be dead' and the soldier's 'noble dog' whose head rested 'upon his master's neck'. Almost as if communicating through nonverbal means, the dog's 'intelligent, joyful expression' convinced the Northern observer of the possibility that the soldier was still alive. On further inspection, the soldier's shallow breaths proved a testament to life amidst the scenes of death on the battlefield. Though a bullet pierced the Confederate soldier's throat, 'his dog had *actually stopped the bleeding from the wound by laying his head across it*'.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁵ 'The Drama: Park Theater', *New York Tribune*, 24 May 1876.

¹⁶⁶ 'Soldier's Dog', *The Youth's Companion*, Vol. XXIV, No. 2, (Boston: Perry Mason & Co. Publishers, 1871), 304. Italics in original.

Prompting further inspection of the soldier through its ‘intelligent and joyful expression’, the dog aided his human companion while also changing the author’s perception of animals. By laying his head over the soldier’s neck wound, the dog demonstrated sophisticated situational awareness, sensitivity to human suffering, and a capacity to respond through self-willed action.¹⁶⁷ While ostensibly published to humanize and evoke sympathy for Confederate soldiers, the narrative caused the author of *Merry’s Museum* to muse over the question of nonhuman animal agency. Titling the story ‘Reason and Instinct,’ the author blurred the line between animal instinct and cognition, ultimately leaving readers to grapple with their own interpretations over an issue that scholars of animal studies continue to contemplate today.¹⁶⁸

Images of animals alongside fallen soldiers emphasized shared sacrifice and unity while promoting the war as a collective struggle. Choosing the inclusive word ‘our’ as its first-person plural possessive determiner in *The Soldier in Our Civil War*, the editors, illustrators, and artists who compiled the massive two-volume pictorial history of the Civil War made no distinction between North and South, Union and Confederate. Edited and ‘assisted by the most notable generals and commanders of both sides’, this widely read book used photographs, images, and sketches to illustrate ‘the valor of the soldier as displayed on the battlefield’. In perhaps the volume’s most poignant image, ‘An Incident of Battle—a Faithful Dog Watching the Dead Body of His Master’, the editors presented readers with a battlefield strewn with Union and

¹⁶⁷ In controlled studies, dogs consistently respond to human pain and distress with licking, nuzzling, and proximity. Researchers debate whether or not such behavior reflects an empathetic response, emotional contagion, or an evolved behavior. Custance and Mayer, ‘Empathic-like responding by domestic dogs’, 851.

¹⁶⁸ ‘Reason and Instinct’, *Merry’s Museum for Boys and Girls, Illustrated, January to June 1871*, (Boston: Horace B. Fuller, 1871), 129. For an overview of these debates within the fields of animal studies and environmental history, see Chris Pearson, ‘History and Animal Agencies’.

Confederate dead.¹⁶⁹ In the foreground, a dog sits by the side of his recently deceased human companion, his left paw on his chest. With an upward glance, the dog draws the viewer's eye beyond the single death to all the slain soldiers. In this vision of reconciliation, the animal is both mourner and mediator of national memory.¹⁷⁰

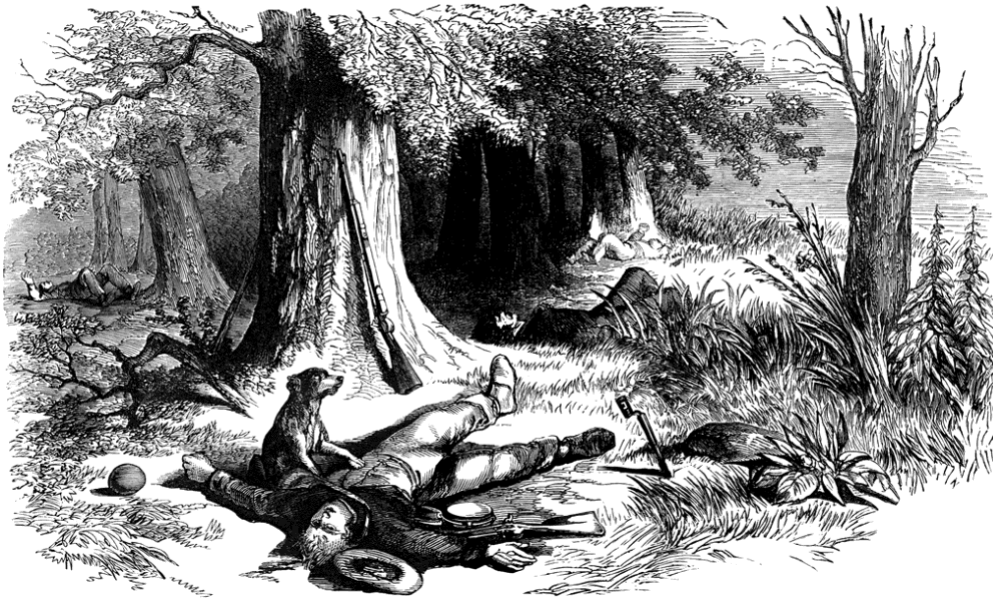


Figure 4.8. 'A Faithful Dog Watching the Dead Body of His Master.'¹⁷¹

Throughout the process of Reconstruction and reunion, authors and illustrators portrayed animals to bridge divides and mirror the nation's ongoing efforts to reconcile while, at the same time, deliberately omitting the slave-hunting animals and dog companies of the past and ignoring the animal-enforced control still pervasive in the South. This kind of selective memory shaped political symbolism as well. When inaugurated president of the United States in 1889, Republican Benjamin Harrison was given an enormous Siberian bloodhound. Harrison, a former

¹⁶⁹ Paul F. Mottelay and Campbell-Copeland, eds., *The Soldier in Our Civil War: A Pictorial History of the Conflict, 1861–1865, Illustrating the Valor of the Soldier as Displayed on the Battle-field, Volume 2*, (New York: Stanley Bradley Publishing Company, 1890), 1.

¹⁷⁰ This image first appeared in *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper* after the Battle of Winchester in 1864. Accompanied by a blurb titled 'Canine Fidelity', the image was re-popularized during the postwar and Reconstruction Era. *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, 15 October 1864, 1, 55.

¹⁷¹ 'An Incident of Battle—A Faithful Dog Watching the Dead Body of His Master'. Mottelay and Campbell-Copeland, eds., *The Soldier in Our Civil War*, 320.

Union general known in Washington as ‘the Soldiers’ Senator’, no doubt understood and remembered the historical weaponization of Siberian bloodhounds. However, reflecting the evolution of the Republican Party and the abandonment of Reconstruction, Harrison did not object to the dog’s violent past. Instead, with a politician’s wit and Gilded Age sensibility, the class-conscious president criticized the slightly overweight dog for looking ‘very much like an overfed monopolist’.¹⁷² Though sanitized and repurposed in memory and symbolism, their use on the ground continued in the South. On the backs of horses with dogs by their sides, Southern police units enforced vagrancy laws and curfews with draconian force, reinstating slave patrols by a different name, now under the full authority of states.

¹⁷² Benjamin Harrison, in Michael R. Beschloss, *American Heritage History of the Presidents*, (New York: American Heritage, 2000).

Conclusion

Neither a clean rupture nor unbroken continuity, the latter decades of the nineteenth century saw nonhuman animals reworked into a postwar social order through vigilante violence, but also into the ways in which Black Southerners experienced freedom and autonomy. Seen from this perspective, the larger arguments of this thesis come more clearly into view.

Nonhuman animals, and the ecologies they inhabited, were historically constitutive and causally important to the Civil War era, providing an understudied through line linking the histories of slavery and enslaved resistance to the Civil War and Reconstruction.

Scholars across disciplines have shown how slavery operated through a spatial order. This work pushes that framework further and argues that the plantation complex was also a multispecies geography.¹ Kennels, stables, and patrol routes were key to the projection of enslaver power, even as enslaved persons encountered these same animals and spaces in terms of knowledge and resistance. Animals complicated the efforts of both enslavers and the enslaved since their behavior could never be fully incorporated into human command. The result is a more unstable and complicated interpretation of the plantation complex, where enslaver power and enslaved resistance relied on animal capacities while also remaining vulnerable to animal perception and behavior.

Multispecies dynamics followed freedom-seekers and their pursuers beyond the plantation. Historians have studied the routes of escape and the social histories of freedom-seekers, revealing self-emancipation to be multidirectional, multiracial, and transnational.² My

¹ Camp, *Closer to Freedom*; Said, *Culture and Imperialism*; Johnson, *Slavery's Metropolis*; McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds*; Cochran, 'Rival Landscapes'; Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*; and Johnson, *River of Dark Dreams*.

² Notable works include Franklin and Schweninger, *Runaway Slaves*; Rivers, *Rebels and Runaways*; Landers, 'Forgotten Route to Freedom' and Vlach, 'Places of Flight and Refuge', in Blight, *Passages to Freedom*; Kerr-Ritchie, 'U.S. Coastal Passage', in Pargas, *Fugitive Slaves and Spaces of Freedom*; Baumgartner, *South to Freedom*; Audain, 'Mexico, "The Hope of the Slave"'; Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone*; and Nash, *Forging Freedom*.

intervention to this body of literature was to “rewild” self-emancipation and to show the significance of the animals and ecologies encountered on the paths to freedom, bringing attention to the practical more-than-human conditions of escape that often made the difference between freedom and capture.

Moving to the aftermath of self-emancipation attempts, this thesis was positioned in, and made contributions to, the historiography on antebellum politics and transnational borderlands and diplomacy.³ Legal historians have shown how slavery and fugitivity unsettled the categorizations of property and personhood, while those studying these topics from a hemispheric perspective have traced how fugitivity impacted diplomacy between the United States, Canada, and Mexico.⁴ Additionally, historians studying abolitionism have demonstrated the way in which testimonies of violence and physical pain moved through Northern print culture and public opinion.⁵ Adding animals reveals the significance of the more-than-human world to each of these histories. Dogs and horses were critical to recapture while also proving essential to the self-emancipated enslaved persons who reached freedom. Animal-induced punishments from domesticated animals, as well as insects and rodents, became identifying biomarkers in runaway advertisements. These wounds and scars were also converted into evidence within abolitionist writings and rhetoric condemning slavery. And horse theft charges, cross-border raids, and the enforcement of the Fugitive Slave Act made animal-aided escape and capture part of sectional and diplomatic crises.

³ Blackett, *Captive's Quest for Freedom*; Gross, *Double Character*; Sinha, *Slave's Cause*; and Delbanco, *War Before the War*.

⁴ On the legal status of enslaved persons, see Copeland, 'In the Beginning'; and Gross, *Double Character*. For the hemispheric consequences of self-emancipation, see Blackett, *Captive's Quest for Freedom*, 288–300; Abbott, *Beacons of Liberty*; Silverman, 'Kentucky, Canada, and Extradition'; Murray, 'Hands Across the Border'; Cornell, 'Citizens of Nowhere'; Gurza-Lavalle, 'Against Slave Power?'; and Henderson, *Glorious Defeat*.

⁵ In particular, see McKanan, *Identifying the Image of God*; Abruzzo, *Polemical Pain*; and Sinha, *The Slave's Cause*.

Lastly, this thesis contributed to the historiography of the Civil War and Reconstruction, most notably within topics such as military logistics, wartime emancipation, postwar violence, and the way the war was remembered.⁶ Chapter Four demonstrated that those who sought freedom on horseback deprived Southern plantations and Confederate militaries of equine animals necessary for labor and warfare. It also showed that the use of Southern dogs to guard prisoners, hunt fugitives, and fight in Confederate dog-companies represented a redeployment of practices already developed on Southern plantations. Their destruction on battlefields at the hands of Union soldiers and formerly enslaved persons coincided with a rise in wartime self-emancipation. Wartime emancipation continued to depend on multispecies knowledge gained during enslavement. Pharmacological expertise and knowledge of local flora helped repel, and in some circumstances, poison animals in pursuit. Waterways also disrupted pursuing animals, but safe navigation through these swamps, rivers, and coastal routes could require knowledge of local ecologies. Alligators, snakes, sharks, and insects added an additional danger to the ecologies through which fugitive groups as well as Union military units moved, making knowledge about these animals' behavior and habits critical.

The literature on Reconstruction violence is as powerful as it is extensive, but the animals that helped enact that violence remain largely absent from these histories.⁷ This thesis responds by showing how animals helped give postwar violence its mobility and visibility. And finally, in conversation with scholarship on Civil War memory and the Lost Cause, this thesis showed how

⁶ Among the vast literature on these topics, important works for this thesis include Brady, *War Upon the Land*; Egerton, *Thunder at the Gates*; Smith, ed., *Black Soldiers in Blue*; Gallagher, *Confederate War*; McCurry, *Confederate Reckoning*; Downs, *After Appomattox*; Blight, *Race and Reunion*; and Janney, *Remembering the Civil War*.

⁷ On Reconstruction violence, see Foner, *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution*; Sinha, *Rise and Fall of the Second American Republic*; Williams, *I Saw Death Coming*; Rosen, *Terror in the Heart of Freedom*; Allerfeldt, *The Ku Klux Klan*.

animal histories were softened in the latter decades of the nineteenth century.⁸ Obscuring animals' weaponization during slavery and the Civil War, as well as their continued usage in Reconstruction violence, narratives of reconciliation turned animals and animal representations into symbols of sacrifice and reunion.

Animals altered how all of these histories unfolded. And arguing that animals were historically determinative is to insist that their actions require an explanatory framework, a key contribution of this project. Existing scholarship on this era that acknowledged animals and the natural world did so largely without developing a method commensurate to their importance for interpreting animal actions as part of historical causation.⁹ This project shares the conviction with historians such as David Silkenat and Walter Johnson that slavery cannot be understood in isolation from the natural world, but it made animals' species-specific behavior central to the argument and framed their actions as historically constitutive.¹⁰

The work of Harriet Ritvo, Sandra Swart, Virginia DeJohn Anderson, Erica Fudge, and Chris Pearson, among others, has made it possible to ask such historical questions about animal agency, intentionality, action, and resistance.¹¹ But in moving from theory to explanation, this project provided a framework that combined research from animal biology and veterinary

⁸ Works on Civil War memory, reconciliation, and the Lost Cause include Blight, *Race and Reunion*; Gallagher, ed., *The Myth of the Lost Cause and Civil War History*; Gallagher, *Causes Won, Lost, and Forgotten*; Janney, *Remembering the Civil War*; and Neff, *Honoring the Civil War Dead*.

⁹ Erica Fudge has suggested the possibility of extrapolating modern scientific research to frame animal action. Historians of slavery, and the Civil War era generally, have seemed hesitant to adopt this methodology. The work of David Lambert, as well as Earl Hess's 'The Animal–Human Relationship in War', are notable exceptions. Lambert, 'Runaways and Strays'; Fudge, 'What Was It Like to Be a Cow?', 262–267; Fudge, 'Milking Other Men's Beasts'.

¹⁰ Silkenat, *Scars on the Land*; Johnson, *River of Dark Dreams*.

On the Plantationocene framework, see Haraway, 'Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Plantationocene, Chthulucene: Making Kin'; Tsing, Mathews, and Nils Bubandt, 'Patchy Anthropocene'; and Murphy, 'Refiguring the Plantationocene'.

¹¹ Swart, *Riding High*; Swart, 'World the Horses Made'; Swart, "'But Where's the Bloody Horse?"; Ritvo, *Animal Estate*; Ritvo, 'Animal Planet'; Anderson, *Creatures of Empire*; Fudge, 'Left-Handed Blow'; Fudge, 'Milking Other Men's Beasts'; Pearson, 'History and Animal Agencies'; Pearson, 'Beyond "Resistance"'; Carter and Charles, 'Animals, Agency and Resistance'; Lambert, 'Runaways and Strays'; Haraway, *When Species Meet*; and Haraway, *Companion Species Manifesto*.

science to interpret animal behavior in a way that remained tightly bound to archival sources. Incorporating research from the sciences could be seen as analytically ambitious. However, these insights disciplined my historical interpretation and shifted the analysis away from romanticizing animals or treating them as extensions of human command.

While this work made contributions across multiple fields and subfields, it did not aim to write a definitive and comprehensive history of all animals within the Civil War era. It followed the animals most consequential to histories of plantation containment, enslaved resistance, the escalation of political and diplomatic crises, the Civil War, and Reconstruction. Horses and dogs remained as near to the narrative arc of this thesis as they were to the humans with whom they interacted on a near-daily basis. Wild animals, ranging from alligators and wolves to snakes and insects, figured into the analysis when their actions affected containment and mobility. And plants, microbes, and other forms of nonhuman life were introduced when they enabled resistance or were incorporated into punishments.

Cattle, sheep, chickens, and other animals commonly associated with husbandry, agriculture, and labor remained mostly outside my argument. The same is true of animals as food, with the exception of instances when hunting created oppositional modes of interaction or when enslavers forced captured freedom-seekers to ritualistically eat slaughtered dogs as punishment. Consumption and animal sustenance were obviously important in all aspects of enslaved life, including during emancipation attempts, but those concerns are not the focus of this thesis. Those histories have been, and continue to be, explored by other historians.¹²

¹² Those interested in these topics should see Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll*; Genovese, 'Livestock in the Slave Economy of the Old South'; Stoll, *Larding the Lean Earth*; Johnson, *River of Dark Dreams*; Baptist, *The Half Has Never Been Told*; Giltner, 'Slave Hunting and Fishing in the Antebellum South'; Young, 'Role of Hunting to Cope with Risk at Saragossa Plantation'; Philips, 'Root Hog or Die', in Browning and Silver eds., *Environmental History of the Civil War*; Proctor, *Bathed in Blood*; and Gibson, *Feral Animals in the American South*.

That framing also helps reveal this thesis's differences from important works on agriculture and environmental transformation. It shares an insistence that enslavement, emancipation, and war took place within ecologies reshaped by the remaking of the land through biodiversity destruction and monocultural agricultural practices.¹³ These developments were addressed in this thesis, particularly in the first chapter, where they formed part of the plantation system's coercive geography. While these developments undoubtedly organized some of the spaces through which humans and nonhuman animals moved, soil exhaustion, agriculture, and farming practices did not drive my argument. This thesis was, therefore, less concerned with livestock and draught animals than it was with the animals most analytically central to my specific argument about containment, resistance, and war.

The evidentiary base of this project revolved around the plantation complex and similar rural areas in the American South. It was here where the archive most consistently and clearly revealed the entanglements of animals with spatial containment and enslaved resistance. This project did not provide a full account of enslaved lives, especially in Southern urban areas and port cities. However, dynamics outlined in this thesis could scale up or down into other slaveholding contexts, even if the plantation complex remains the fullest and most systematized expression of such practices.

The need for geographic precision extended to the temporal as well. This project did not trace a strict linear chronology across the Civil War era. It adopted a thematic approach that began with plantations and spatial containment before following freedom-seekers and their pursuers across the multi-directional and hemispheric routes of self-emancipation populated by

¹³ Important works on environmental transformation include Edelson, *Plantation Enterprise* and Silkenat, *Scars on the Land*. On monoculture within the Plantationocene context, see Edwards, *Dark Scenes from Damaged Earth*, 105–107, 112–115; Haraway, 'Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Plantationocene, Chthulucene: Making Kin'; and Tsing, 'On Nonscalability'.

domesticated and non-domesticated wild animals. The thesis then turned to the geopolitics of fugitivity within the United States and across borders into Canada and Mexico, before moving into Civil War campaigns, wartime and postwar emancipation, and Reconstruction. This structure avoided repetition and also provided a framework to follow change over time.

These concerns regarding scope also help to explain why the thesis ends with memory. This turn was not an attempt to provide a full cultural history of animal representations in postwar America, but it did follow a final implication of my thesis's argument. Animals and the natural world impacted much of the Civil War era. If animals were bound up in the enforcement of plantation slavery, the pursuit of self-emancipators, as well as wartime and postwar violence, then their later representations were historically consequential as well. These representations helped detach and disconnect animals from the ongoing terror taking place in the postwar South as well as the material violence described throughout the thesis.

The success of these efforts, and the seemingly collective national choice to put reunion above all else, marginalized the formerly enslaved persons, former abolitionists, and Union veterans who wrote or spoke out against the prevailing homogeneous American narrative.¹⁴ But this historical amnesia was never all-encompassing. Memories of slavery, the Civil War, and Reconstruction survived through generations in oral histories and traditions long after consensus narratives declared the nation healed. Over fifty years after the Compromise of 1877 removed federal troops from the South, the Federal Writers' Project collected interviews from over 2,300 formerly enslaved persons, hoping to record the experiences of those who lived through slavery before this period of America's history vanished from living memory.¹⁵

¹⁴ Blight, *Race and Reunion*, 2–3.

¹⁵ Stewart, *Long Past Slavery*, 1.

Conscious of the marginalization of Black voices and thus anticipating readers' skepticism when he described members of the Ku Klux Klan riding their horses through his town, W.L. Bost declared to his interviewer: 'I know folks think the books tell the truth, but they shore don't'.¹⁶ Bost, and the other octogenarians, nonagenarians, and centenarians spoke about the use of weaponized animals throughout their lives as they gave the reading public an understanding of the brutality of slavery and the resilience of those who lived through it.

Luke Dixon described the Ku Klux Klan as a 'band of land owners what took the law in hand'. Seeing no difference between the land-owning elite's animal-enforced control before and after the Civil War, Dixon told his interviewer that the Ku Klux Klan 'took the place of pattyrollers before freedom'.¹⁷ Irene Robertson told her interviewer that despite hearing that slavery had ended, she 'never did know jess when the Civil War did close', noting that she 'was as scared of the Ku Klux Klan as of rattlesnakes'.¹⁸ Henry Walker shared her uncertainty about when freedom truly began, remarking that he 'didn't see much difference' between the Ku Klux Klan and the 'paddyrollers' of the antebellum slave system. Collapsing this distinction into a single continuum of pursuit, Walker described how Klan members 'rode all night' on horseback and 'if you wasn't on your master's land', they 'would set the dogs on you'.¹⁹

These recollections were not denials of emancipation. They were evidence of its limits. Recounting eight decades of history, Cal Woods spoke for thousands who shared similar experiences when he provided his WPA interviewer with a vivid recollection of the antebellum slave system, the Civil War, and life during Reconstruction. Born into an oppressive slave system with animal-enforced control embedded within it, Woods observed that 'the slave never been free

¹⁶ WPA, W.L. Bost, *Slave Narratives (North Carolina)*, 144–145. [Phonetic spellings in original].

¹⁷ WPA, Luke D. Dixon, *Slave Narratives (Arkansas)*, 159. [Phonetic spellings in original].

¹⁸ WPA, Irene Robertson, *Slave Narratives (Arkansas)*, 30. [Phonetic spellings in original].

¹⁹ WPA, Henry Walker, *Slave Narratives (Arkansas)*, 80. [Phonetic spellings in original].

since he come to dis world'. And according to Woods, most enslaved persons did not know 'there was freedom till they was fighting and going to war' against the Confederates.²⁰ Many of those who fought against the Confederates escaped mounted slave-hunters and their weaponized canines before enlisting in Union regiments such as the 1st South Carolina and Wild's African Brigade. Black soldiers then killed their old canine 'tormentors with great relish' on the battlefield, with some even returning with dog carcasses that would become part of the fight over the historical memory of weaponized animals.²¹

Despite being resoundingly defeated during the Civil War, white Southerners waged a war on memory through the Lost Cause and a second war on Black freed people as, according to Woods, groups such as the 'Ku Klux sprung up after the war'. Ending his interview by describing the circumstances during which the Klan would 'set the dogs on you', Cal Woods told his interviewer that 'the white folks ain't then nor now havin no black man rulin over him' even if they, in their own words, had to 'kill all the Yankees and N—s in the country'.²² Woods's words, along with those of the many other interviewees speaking in the 1930s, remind us that historical 'endings' are rarely experienced as such. For those who lived through enslavement, its end was felt unevenly. One way freedom, or lack thereof, was measured was in the way space and movement were regulated, with nonhuman animals figuring centrally into these equations.²³

Animals were central to the creation of the Southern social order, bound up in its enforcement, and carried forward in its memory. But with continuity also comes contingency.

²⁰ WPA, Cal Woods, *Slave Narratives, (Arkansas)*, 229. [Phonetic spellings in original].

²¹ Higginson, *Army Life in a Black Regiment*, 231.

²² WPA, Cal Woods, 229. [Phonetic spellings in original].

²³ Important works on the uneven and delayed experience of political emancipation include Leon F. Litwack, *Been in the Storm So Long: The Aftermath of Slavery*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1979); and Steven Hahn, *A Nation under Our Feet: Black Political Struggles in the Rural South from Slavery to the Great Migration*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2003), especially part 2. In *Slavery by Another Name*, Douglas Blackmon explains that those around Cal Woods's age experienced the 'exuberance of freedom and citizenship' but also its devastating end. Blackmon, *Slavery by Another Name*, 119.

Relationships between humans and animals were unstable and often contested. Animals responded to training, but also to external stimuli, other animals, and the people around them. Historicizing these animals and their encounters with humans reveals an overlooked dimension of how power was exercised and resisted across plantation slavery, war, and the postwar order.

Police departments, militaries, and border patrols continue to weaponize animals with an authority that is rarely questioned as illegitimate, prompting further reconsideration of how this type of coercion has been made to appear routine.²⁴ Finding continuities across space and time is an historical exercise. But the more pressing and relevant issue is finding the terms under which this continuity is allowed to proceed. There is a reflexive tendency to draw a direct link between contemporary uses of weaponized animals and the practices described in this thesis. And while this type of conclusion would be politically and morally expedient, it would also be reductive. The weaponization of animals is neither timeless nor inevitable. It is the outcome of decisions made and then made again at specific moments in time. It does not continue by accident or legacy. It continues by design. Recognizing this demands present accountability rather than an insistence on historical analogy.

²⁴ On the historical and modern usage of dogs and horses in police units in the United States and the United Kingdom, see Spruill, ‘Slave Patrols, ‘Packs of Negro Dogs’ and Policing Black Communities’; and Julian Go, *Policing Empires: Militarization, Race, and the Imperial Boomerang in Britain and the US* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2024), 95, 112. In a military context, especially recent wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, see Rebecca Frankel, *War Dogs: Tales of Canine Heroism, History, and Love* (New York: Regan Arts, 2014). For the use of animals, especially horses and dogs in border patrols, see Kelly Lytle Hernández, *Migra!: A History of the U.S. Border Patrol* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010); and U.S. Customs and Border Protection, “Canine Program: Disciplines,” <https://www.cbp.gov/border-security/canine-program/disciplines>.

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Illustrations

A. H. Plecker, ‘General Robert Edward Lee in Uniform on His Horse, Traveller’.
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‘An Incident of Battle—A Faithful Dog Watching the Dead Body of His Master’.
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