DELIVER US FROM EVIL

The Slavery Question in the OLD SOUTH

LACY K. FORD

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from

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INTRODUCTION

Anticipating Thomas Jefferson's personal travail on the subject of slavery, the British literary critic Samuel Johnson taunted the presumed idealism of the American movement for independence by famously asking why the "loudest yelps for liberty" came from the "drivers of negroes."[1] Johnson's caustic comment merely highlighted a tension already present in the minds of many southern slaveholders during the founding era. The existence of slavery posed a number of troubling questions for the South. Could slavery coexist with the new nation's republican ideals? Did the economic benefits of slavery outweigh the costs? Did slavery expand or limit economic and social opportunities for whites? Was there any other way to generate as much wealth in the South as slavery created? Would the wealth held in slaves survive an effort to change labor systems? Could whites ever be safe in a society with large numbers of slaves? Would the spread of evangelical Christianity challenge the dominant slaveholding ethos? Understanding the ideas and interests that shaped the answers to these and other questions about slavery offers a partial answer to Johnson's sarcastic query. More important, these slavery-related questions—or, when viewed collectively, simply "the slavery question"—and the corresponding search for answers chart the evolution of white attitudes toward the South's peculiar institution during the early national and Jacksonian eras.

Most of the questions about slavery were the same across the entire slaveholding South, but the answers provided by whites from various parts of the South often differed sharply. In particular, the ideas and interests surrounding slavery in the upper South and lower South evolved along very different trajectories, and the respective answers these two identifiable southern regions developed to the slavery question

differed significantly—and contradicted each other at times. Nonetheless, taken together, these different and often conflicting answers to the slavery question did much to determine the destiny of the Old South. As a whole, this book explores the white South's twisted and tortured efforts to answer the slavery question from the drafting of the federal constitution in 1787 through the appearance of the abolition mail and petition campaigns in the mid-1830s, and particularly how those answers varied across space and through time. Drawing heavily on primary sources, including newspapers, government documents, legislative records, pamphlets, speeches, and manuscripts, as well as a rich secondary literature, this study attempts to recapture the varied and sometimes contradictory ideas and attitudes held by groups of white southerners as they debated the slavery question among themselves. In particular, it tries to re-create the political, intellectual, economic, and social thought of leading white southerners as they engaged in discussions about the appropriate role and configuration of slavery in southern society.[2]

Across several generations of scholarship, the American Civil War and the reasons for its coming have generated an impressive body of scholarship. The largest share of that vast literature has dealt either with the war itself and how it was fought or with the political developments that led directly to it. Both of these bodies of literature focused on the late antebellum or war years. Even the growing number of studies on the broader social, economic, and ideological dimensions of pre–Civil War southern society and its differences from the North have tended to concentrate on the late antebellum era, helping sustain a popular mythology of the Old South as a timeless society without a creation story.[3] In more recent years, however, a spate of important works on the South of the early republican and Jacksonian eras has signaled that current scholars are rapidly moving beyond their predecessors' preoccupation with analyzing southern society in its late antebellum maturity and attempting to recover the origins of the Old South. Yet despite this evidence of an ongoing shift in the historiography, much of this latest work focuses on communities, subregions, or states, leaving the task of explaining the historical construction of the Old South, with all its rich internal variation, far from complete. By explaining white efforts to answer the slavery question during this era, this study will fill an important portion of that remaining void.[4]

Fleshing out an argument advanced by William Freehling, this examination of the southern search for answers to the slavery question contends that there was not one antebellum South but many, and not one southern white mind-set but several.[5] It maintains that southern white views on the slavery question varied across space and changed over time. The geographic variation of white attitudes was defined chiefly by the correlated variables of racial demography and economic base, though an array of other factors also heightened differences. Foremost among these internal divisions, and the one central to the book's analytical framework, was that between the upper South and the lower South. These two major southern regions differed about many matters related to slavery. These disagreements included, but were not limited to, the desirability of gradual emancipation, the proper role and scope of the slave

trade, the purpose and practicality of African colonization, the appropriate response to both threatened and actual slave revolts, the value of paternalism as a method of slave control, the appropriate ideology for the defense of slavery in national forums, and the ultimate future of slavery in the American republic. This study examines the creative tensions these differences generated and the efforts of white southerners to resolve or accommodate these tensions.

In addition to the variation across space, southern white attitudes toward slavery also evolved over time. Historians have traditionally described this as a shift from an acceptance of slavery as a necessary evil in the early republic to the embrace of the institution as a positive good in the late antebellum period. This description contains enough validity to remain viable as a shorthand summary, but it is nonetheless an oversimplification that obscures as much as it explains. My analysis posits that white attitudes toward southern slavery evolved through three identifiable phases between 1787 and 1840. The first phase ran from the founding era (1780s) through the closing of the foreign slave trade in 1808. This phase was characterized by ambivalence and inaction among upper South whites, whose rhetoric called for a gradual end to slavery but whose actions did little to achieve it, and a growing commitment to slavery among lower South whites scrambling to capture a share of the emerging cotton bonanza.

The second phase ran from the end of the foreign slave trade to Nat Turner's rebellion and the rise of immediate abolitionism in the North in the early 1830s. During this phase, whites in both the upper and lower South sought answers to the slavery question and appeared to find them in ideas or policies that the other questioned. Upper South whites, for example, looked to diffuse slavery further south though the interstate slave trade. Lower South whites often proved willing buyers, but at other times they supported state efforts to restrict the interstate trade in attempts to prevent their states from becoming too black. In the lower South especially, the paternalist movement emerged and gained influence, but it also drew persistent and sometimes bitter criticism from those who insisted that force and intimidation were crucial to slave control. This confrontation attained high visibility during the Denmark Vesey scare and its aftermath in the early 1820s and raged intermittently for more than a decade.

The third and final phase began with the Turner insurrection and the immediate abolitionists' attack on slavery during the 1830s. This phase saw both upper South whites and lower South whites finally settle on answers to the slavery question that they would continue to rely on throughout the rest of the antebellum era—but their answers were still in some ways at odds with each other. Even with the abolitionist chorus rising to full voice and the value of a solid South self-evident, solidarity could be achieved only on the narrowest of grounds: opposition to abolition.

The variation and dynamism of white southern attitudes toward slavery defy succinct summary. But the following outline of my interpretation of those views and

their evolution conveys the essence of a complicated narrative. Between the constitutional convention (1787) and the federal ban on the foreign slave trade (1808), many white southerners, especially those in the upper South, saw slavery as a drag on the region's economy, inimical to the republican values on which the nation was founded, and a threat to the safety of whites in slaveholding areas. Many upper South whites looked for ways to wean their region from slavery, but agreement on practical measures for doing so was hard to conjure. During the same years, however, the cotton revolution of the late 1790s and early 1800s swept through the lower South, drawing staple agriculture and slavery out of its coastal and tidewater enclaves and spreading it across much of the lower South, from the Pee Dee River in South Carolina to the Red River in Louisiana and beyond. This staple boom cemented the lower South's commitment to slavery as a labor system and caused many lower South whites to identify slavery with prosperity and dynamism rather than with stagnation and inefficiency. But the lower South's deepening involvement with slavery brought with it a new set of problems related to the institution's growth and expansion. Among these problems were the need for a large and reliable supply of slaves and a slave trade that could provide them, the rising tensions between whites and slaves as many counties grew much more heavily black, and, perhaps most important, the threat to white security posed by a growing slave population that eventually reached majority status in many lower South counties. The lure of the profits and wealth generated by slave labor, along with the rising value of capital invested in slaves, overwhelmed any concerns about the difficulties of slave control during the region's periodic staple booms. But the cyclical downturns in the staple-driven economy tended to change lower South whites' calculus of consent on these issues, leading to efforts to modulate the region's deepening involvement with slavery.

During the second phase of evolution of white attitudes, beginning around 1808, both the upper and lower South sought answers to the slavery question in their respective regions through an internal reconfiguration of slavery. But, unsurprisingly, the two regions embraced reconfigurations of very different kinds. Upper South whites no longer desired a plan for emancipation, no matter how gradual, but rather aimed for a steady demographic reconfiguration of slavery that involved both diminishing the importance of slave labor to the region's economy and reducing the number and proportion of enslaved and free blacks living in the region. They wanted a "whitening" of the upper South. This whitening would leave the region less burdened by surplus slaves, better poised for economic development through free labor, less vulnerable to slave unrest, and closer to the full realization of still resonant Revolutionary ideals.

But while whites in the upper South agreed on the need to gradually wean the region from its excessive reliance on slave labor and to reduce its free black population, they disagreed sharply among themselves over exactly how this demographic reconfiguration should occur and how dramatic it should be. Ultimately, after much internal wrangling, an uneasy consensus emerged around the ideas of lessening the importance of slavery gradually, primarily through the sale of slaves to other parts of

the South (diffusion) and secondarily through private manumission and colonization. To achieve this desired whitening of their region, upper South whites supported the geographic expansion of slavery accompanied by an active interstate slave trade. Moreover, the colonization of willing free blacks promoted private manumission by assuring upper South slaveholders and other whites that, once freed, blacks would be removed from the region. Together, diffusion and colonization constituted the upper South's tentative program for whitening their region and its equally tentative answer to the slavery question.

To a significant degree, however, the upper South's answer to the slavery question left the future of slavery in the upper South in the hands of both whites and slaves in the lower South. With the foreign slave trade banned and the cotton revolution still on the march across the lower South, that region's demand for slave labor could be legally filled only by the importation of slaves from the upper South. Demand for slaves in the domestic market provided an outlet for surplus slaves from the upper South, reduced the enslaved proportion of the upper South population, returned capital to the upper South, and supplied the desired labor for lower South staple growers. But the internal slave trade also generated its share of tension between the upper and lower South. Whites in the lower South resented the outflow of capital to the upper South and often suspected that upper South masters and traders dumped unhealthy, troublesome, and even incendiary slaves on the lower South market. At times of heightened fear of insurrection, lower South whites ascribed rumored unrest to the influence of slave instigators recently purchased from the upper South. Thus, at times lower South states passed legislation either banning the importation of slaves for sale altogether or restricting it significantly. In doing so, they sought to control racial demography, preserve white security, and slow the drain of capital from the region. Laws restricting the internal slave trade often proved difficult if not impossible to enforce, and they were usually repealed when insurrection fears subsided and rising staple prices spiked demand for additional slave labor. Nonetheless, the periodic efforts of lower South legislatures to restrict the interstate slave trade worried upper South slave sellers and posed problems for the upper South's whitening strategy.

In the lower South, the same growing dependence on slave labor that gave rise to efforts to better control the domestic slave trade also increased the region's interest in its own reconfiguration of slavery. But to achieve greater security and peace of mind, lower South whites sought not a demographic reconfiguration but an ideological one, centered on a better rationale for the holding and managing of slaves: the idea of paternalism. Led by a group of unlikely ideological insurgents (Christian ministers and lay leaders), the paternalist movement began in the early 1800s as a small but vocal group eager to "reform" slavery and moved slowly to a position of respectability and eventually one of dominance by the late 1830s. Over the course of these three decades, the ideology of paternalism gradually gained hard-won acceptance among lower South whites as the preferred social ideal for organizing a slaveholding society.[6] Lower South whites who sought an ideological reconfiguration around the

notion of paternalism were seeking to render slaveholding consistent with existing republican and emerging humanitarian ideals while accepting the inevitability of the region's dependence on slave labor.

Advocates of paternalism likened the plantation (and even the large farm) to an extended family, in which masters governed their slaves with firmness and benevolence, much as they claimed to manage their own wives and children. But with the authority of a family patriarch also came responsibility. Paternalistic masters were expected to attend to their slaves' spiritual welfare as well as their physical needs, most often by devotedly inculcating Christian doctrine and morality, or at least the masters' version of them, among the enslaved. The paternalistic ideal hardly defined the reality of slaveholder practice in the early-nineteenth-century South, but the end of the African slave trade in 1808 made the paternalist project of "domesticating" slavery plausible in a way that had been unthinkable as long as large numbers of Africans continued to flow into the slave population.[7] Thus the movement's influence grew once the federal ban on the foreign trade took effect.

Yet from its inception, the paternalist movement attracted more than its share of critics, and it remained a controversial and much-challenged movement for more than two decades. Indeed, in 1822, the assumptions of paternalism were badly shaken by real or imagined insurrection plots crafted by Denmark Vesey and his lieutenants in Charleston. The Charleston investigators of the alleged plot denounced paternalism's permissiveness and indicted its encouragement of slave literacy and loosely supervised slave worship for facilitating slave unrest. They contended that paternalism both emboldened slaves and enervated masters. These critics of paternalism argued that slavery could be sustained only through reliance on force and intimidation—that is, by maintaining a degree of terror among slaves. This attack on paternalism succeeded in formally curtailing such paternalist projects as the promotion of slave literacy and the use of slave exhorters to win converts. But, while placed on the defensive by the white reaction to the Vesey scare, paternalists compromised and persevered. As a result, they successfully defended their ideology as the only means of rendering slavery acceptable in the eyes of an increasingly skeptical world. Over time, the ideal of paternalism advanced as a trope through which more and more slaveholders understood themselves and their role as masters.

Whether as a method of slave management or an ideology of slaveholders' self-understanding, paternalism gained influence in the upper South as well. In the upper South, paternalism attracted advocates in the more heavily slave counties, such as those in Southside Virginia, where most slaveholders wanted to blunt internal as well as external efforts to end slavery.[8] But in the upper South as a whole, the balance of white opinion pushed primarily for continuing the demographic reconfiguration of slavery and saw the paternalist project as secondarily useful as a means of mollifying critics of the institution's harshness while the broader demographic reconfiguration proceeded apace. In 1831, Nat Turner's slave rebellion abruptly reminded many

upper South whites that the demographic reconfiguration was not occurring rapidly enough, and sparked renewed debate over accelerating the whitening process.

But the demographic reconfiguration desired by upper South whites was itself partially an expression of a South-wide white desire for an even broader type of ideological reconfiguration, one that would make race the chief mark of social distinction in the region. By the early 1830s, a newly coherent ideology of white supremacy arose to replace the elaborate if informal eighteenth-century system of social hierarchy, which tacitly assigned rank using a variety of measures, with a new nineteenth-century dichotomy of white domination and black subordination. By the 1830s, white southerners (and many other white Americans) increasingly defined social difference primarily by race rather than by class, wealth, family, ethnicity, religion, conduct, region, or even property ownership. The ideology of white supremacy replaced an elaborate system of social hierarchy, in which race had been one difference among many, with a simple system centered on race.[9] During the 1830s, this more systematic ideology of white supremacy assigned blacks, free or enslaved, a permanently inferior status and systematically denied them economic and political rights based on skin color.

The triumph of a systematic ideology of white supremacy lent momentum to the embrace of paternalism on the basis of the racial inferiority of the enslaved. But the ideology of white supremacy could justify racial separation or racial exclusion as well as racial slavery, and it could be (and was) used to justify the whitening of the upper South as well as the adoption of paternalism in the lower South. In Tennessee and North Carolina, upper South states where racial lines had not already been firmly drawn in the public sphere, the rise of this ideology generated a fresh determination to reconfigure the boundaries of political and civic life in ways that systematically excluded all blacks, including propertied free blacks, from political rights. In 1834 and 1835, state constitutional conventions in Tennessee and North Carolina, respectively, fully disfranchised free blacks. The flip side of this movement to eliminate blacks from civic and political life was the increasing tendency of white southerners to see their skin color as a source of entitlement to all the rights and privileges of citizenship.

By the mid-1830s, the Old South suddenly faced an unrelenting abolitionist attack given tangible form by the movement's alarming petition and mail campaigns.[10] Under such attack, the ideology of paternalism moved gradually from respectability to hegemony in the lower South. As it did, it figuratively transformed slavery into a "domestic institution," a label Jacksonian-era and late antebellum southerners frequently applied to it. The triumphant paternalist movement in the lower South relied on a mixture of racial, religious, and practical arguments for its explanatory power. Slavery, white defenders of the institution insisted, was particularly well suited to the racial characteristics of blacks, whom white southerners perceived as docile and childlike when properly managed but otherwise savage and degraded. Paternalism, these whites argued, provided the enslaved with the direction, guidance, and

benevolent discipline they otherwise would have lacked and, as many lower South whites saw it, rendered the institution valuable to both slave and master.

Yet the prevailing Christian teachings insisted not only that paternalist masters instruct slaves in church doctrine and values but also practice Christianity in their treatment of slaves as in all their other social relations. This twist in paternalist ideology set a high standard of responsibility for slaveholders, one that masters found difficult to meet even when they tried. Thus lower South Protestantism answered the question of whether a Christian could be a slaveholder in the affirmative, thereby supplying much grist for the emerging proslavery argument. But those same teachings, when taken seriously, also made it clear that it was no easy matter for a slaveholder to practice Christianity. With its triumph in the aftermath of the abolition mail and petition campaigns, paternalism became the dominant ideology of slavery in the lower South, as well as in some slaveholding enclaves in the upper South, and it held that position until slavery itself collapsed during the Civil War a quarter century later.

Over time, lower South proslavery theorists also successfully blended the concepts of race and paternalism to position black slavery as a bulwark of white independence. According to these thinkers, the paternalistic relationship between masters and slaves prevented the development of capitalist-style labor strife in the Old South. Slavery mitigated by paternalism allowed the South to avoid many of the class tensions associated with capitalist society. Presumably free from the fear of falling into dependency and subordination, common whites in the lower South increasingly claimed independence and autonomy on the basis of their whiteness rather than ownership of productive property or the possession of productive skills. By positioning black slavery as the foundation of white independence, the mature proslavery ideology depicted the peculiar institution as a protector of cherished republican values rather than as a threat to them. It both reversed the formulation Jefferson and Madison held at the time of the founding, which believed slavery a threat to republican values, and strengthened the value of black slavery to the white plain folk. In the lower South at least, slavery, through an ideological reconfiguration, had become both a foundation for a republican social order and a promoter of democracy for white men.

The structure and argument of the book are more easily understood if a few parameters and definitions are made explicit up front. This book is a study of white attitudes and policies toward slavery in the early national and Jacksonian South. It makes no systematic effort to examine or depict the experiences of the enslaved themselves. For my understanding of those critical issues, I have relied heavily on a generation of scholarship that has achieved a sweeping reinterpretation of American slavery. This body of literature emphasizes slavery's evolution in North America and its regional variation and employs close analysis of slave demography, work,

religion, family, culture, and resistance. It also examines how masters struggled with the contradictions of maintaining a brutal and oppressive system of human bondage in a republic founded on the principles of freedom and equality and how the enslaved used those contradictions to resist the slaveholders' search for domination and control.

A few of my categories deserve definition and explanation. When referring to the Old South, I include all of the antebellum slaveholding states, including those upper South states (Maryland, Delaware, Kentucky, and Missouri) that later refused to join the Confederacy. However, any slaveholding areas that were thinly settled or had not gained statehood by the late 1830s, such as Florida, Arkansas, and Texas, are generally not treated in the book. Also, for purposes of clarity, I refer to the slaveholding South as a "section." Its two major divisions, the upper and lower South, are referred to as "regions." For purposes of definition, the lower South includes South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana. I define the upper South as Virginia, Maryland, Delaware, Kentucky, Missouri, Tennessee, and North Carolina. As states that constituted the middle ground between upper and lower South, Tennessee and North Carolina are at times referred to as the "middle South," but for most purposes these two states are treated as part of the upper South.

In the lower South, slaves accounted for more than 40 percent of the region's population in 1830, while in the upper South as a whole slaves were less than one-third of the total population. Cotton was the major cash crop in every lower South state, but in the upper South, cotton emerged as a profitable cash crop only in portions of North Carolina and Tennessee and in a few Southside Virginia counties. Neither region was homogenous. The upper South had subregions, such as Virginia's Southside, Maryland's lower peninsula, middle Tennessee's heartland, Kentucky's bluegrass region, and others where lower-South-style slave demography and plantation agriculture flourished. The lower South included areas, such as the Georgia and Alabama hill country, the Alabama wiregrass region, and the Mississippi pine barrens, that resembled the upper South in racial demography. Every lower South state seceded from the Union and joined the Confederacy in the winter of 1860–61 following Lincoln's election. No upper South state seceded from the Union until after the Confederate attack on Fort Sumter and President Lincoln's call for volunteers to put down the rebellion, and even then, only three states, Virginia, North Carolina, and Tennessee, chose the Confederacy over the Union.

The book attempts a comprehensive study of white thought on the slavery question, and in general it treats and analyzes every southern state at some point in the narrative. But not all states appear with equal frequency or emphasis. For the most part, decisions about which states deserved the most attention were based on a judgment of which states were most central to the particular subject at hand. Hence a strong focus on Virginia emerges from the book's treatment of the founders' ambivalence toward slavery and the reaction to the discovery of the Gabriel insurrection plot, and the tight focus on South Carolina and Louisiana emerges in the examination of

territorial expansion and the reopening of the African slave trade. In the same manner, Virginia and Tennessee are highlighted when exploring the upper South's discussion of emancipation following Nat Turner's revolt, and North Carolina and Tennessee emerge as the focus of my examination of the elimination of free black suffrage by the egalitarian constitutional "reform" movement of the 1830s.

Additionally, throughout the book I have paid special attention to white voices from and events in Virginia and South Carolina, using them, in some sense, as indicative of what I came to understand as the dominant views of whites in the upper and lower South, respectively. By far the most heavily populated state in the South, Virginia had the largest number of slaves of any state in the nation, and in 1800 it had more slaves than all other states of the upper South combined. With its large slave population and its relatively stagnant tobacco economy, Virginia embodied the emerging predicament of the upper South regarding slavery. Politicians in the lower South looked to Virginia, with its large population and political clout, to judge the mood and direction of white sentiment in the upper South. South Carolina, with its emerging slave majority, its early and eager embrace of cotton as a cash crop, its active intellectual and cultural center in Charleston, and its precocious proslavery radicalism, often anticipated the course later followed by other states in the lower South. Upper South politicians may not have viewed South Carolina actions as indicative of current lower South sentiment, but they definitely saw South Carolina as the vanguard of lower South opinion and a possible indicator of the future direction of that opinion on matters related to slavery.

South Carolina also becomes the book's focus during the section on the Denmark Vesey insurrection scare and its aftermath.[11] The Vesey scare produced a pivotal moment in the efforts of lower South whites to decide the future of slavery in their region. By mobilizing the previously inchoate opposition to paternalism, the scare put paternalism, still an insurgent ideology, on the defensive and threatened its future influence. As an alternative, Charleston authorities openly advocated harder-edged methods of slave control, and the potency of this freshly cohered opposition raised the stakes of the debate for defenders of paternalism.

Finally, some discussion of the book's chronological coverage seems appropriate. Starting with the federal constitutional convention seemed logical because the compromises and understandings concerning slavery forged at the convention not only created the republic but also revealed lines of division between upper and lower South that remained salient throughout the early national and Jacksonian eras. Deciding exactly when to bring the story to an end for the purposes of the book proved more difficult, but a consideration of the white southern response to the abolition petition and mail campaigns of the 1830s emerged during my research as the appropriate point to conclude the account. The rise of immediate abolition and that movement's involvement in the mail and petition campaigns of the 1830s generated widespread alarm across the South. These campaigns extended abolition's reached deep into slaveholding country and forced national councils of government

to address issues related to slavery on virtually a daily basis. They also convinced many white southerners that radical abolitionists were willing to encourage insurrection and bloodshed to hasten the end of slavery. The white southern reaction to these campaigns brought a hardening of perspectives on the slavery question in both the upper and lower South. Internal differences of opinion about slavery and its future continued to flourish in the South, and debate over the appropriate political strategy for defending slavery remained vigorous down to the coming of Civil War, but after the abolition mail and petition campaigns of the late 1830s, white southerners tacitly agreed that the South should present a united front against the newly militant abolition movement. Thus they began to mute their internal differences on the question of slavery when confronted with outside criticism. Thereafter, internal differences remained, but the public discussion of them centered more on strategic and tactical issues related to the defense of slavery against an increasingly hostile world and less on the viability of plans for reconfiguring slavery internally.

This book is organized both chronologically and topically, moving back and forth from upper to lower South as it moves forward through time. Its argument unfolds gradually through a detailed narrative. Part One, "The Upper South's Travail," examines the changing structure and demography of slavery in the early republican upper South. It explores how the decline of the Chesapeake tobacco economy gave masters an incentive to dispose of surplus slaves, just as the rhetoric of the American Revolution gave upper South masters an ideological motivation to put slavery on a slow journey toward extinction. It also looks at how the expansion of slavery across the Appalachians into Kentucky and Tennessee engendered ambivalence toward the institution among whites in the new states. This part also explores the impact of Gabriel's insurrection plot on the upper South's consideration of slavery's future. White authorities in Virginia brutally suppressed the rumored rebellion in peremptory fashion and enacted strong measures to protect white safety. But the longer-term impact of the Gabriel insurrection scare intensified discussion of ways to facilitate colonization, encourage gradual emancipation (through the presumed success of colonization), and, most of all, stimulate the diffusion of slaves to the new cotton lands of the Southwest through the domestic slave trade.

The book's second part, "The Lower South's Embrace," details how the first short-staple cotton boom linked cotton profits, slavery, and territorial expansion in momentous ways. It examines South Carolina's contested decision to reopen the African slave trade to meet the labor demands of the cotton boom and supply slaves to the nation's new purchase, Louisiana. It also explores the anxieties generated in the region by South Carolina's decision to reopen the foreign slave trade, the rapid expansion of slavery into the Old Southwest, and the German Coast slave insurrection in Louisiana in 1811. Finally, this section briefly examines the resistance fomented by a coalition of the British, enslaved blacks, and native Americans during

the War of 1812, and Andrew Jackson's concomitant rise as the champion of whites who wanted safe access to land, slaves, and cotton profits.

The third part, "Paternalism Rising," chronicles the emergence of the paternalist movement from its humble late-eighteenth-century origins to become a potent insurgency in the lower South. Paternalism's advocates faced twin challenges: they had to both persuade slaves to accept Christianity and convince whites that paternalism was an effective method of slave control. This part first charts paternalism's rise during the Second Great Awakening and its emergence initially in areas such as the Carolina and Georgia Lowcountry, which had a network of well-established churches. Then it examines the actions of those lower South whites who countered that paternalism was not an effective means of slave control.

Part Four, "Paternalism in Crisis," examines the most significant challenge the paternalist movement faced during its insurgent phase: the Denmark Vesey insurrection scare and the white response to the scare. In a series of three chapters, this section describes the scare itself, examines the analysis of the plot by local whites, who laid much of the blame on the softness of paternalism as a method of slave control, and then explores the refusal of the South Carolina legislature to adopt many of the draconian control measures recommended by Charleston-area leaders in response to the Vesey scare. Lowcountry leaders then reacted to the legislature's moderation with the formation of an aggressive voluntary organization, the South Carolina Association, charged with protecting the interests and safety of white Charlestonians. The association quickly emerged as the vanguard of proslavery radicalism in the lower South and a sworn enemy of the paternalist movement.

Part Five, "Words and Deeds," charts the course of the colonization movement in the South during the 1820s. Interest in colonization spiked across much of the region in the aftermath of the Vesey scare, both as a means of removing free blacks from the region and as a method for facilitating gradual emancipation. The part's first chapter presents the southern debate over colonization as three parallel discussions. One discussion centered on the disagreement within the upper South over whether colonization should be used to encourage gradual emancipation or simply as a means for reducing the region's large free black population. A second discussion revolved around the dispute between the upper South and lower South over whether colonization was a legitimate means for eliminating some problems related to slavery or merely an abolitionist wedge designed to undermine slavery. The third was a debate between southern and northern colonizationists over the ultimate purpose and preferred pace of the movement. This part of the book then turns to an examination of the immediate reaction of upper South whites to the publication of David Walker's *Appeal* and Nat Turner's slave revolt in Virginia. The deep fear and persistent anxiety that the Turner insurrection aroused among upper South whites, and white Virginians especially, is discussed as background to a growing popular interest in accelerating the demographic reconfiguration of slavery in the region.

Part Six examines the upper South's political and policy response to the Turner insurrection, including the epic and bitter Virginia legislative debate over gradual emancipation in 1831–32 as well as Tennessee's equally spirited and more decisive debate on the same subject in 1834. The section also analyzes how these post-Turner discussions of slavery and race led the upper South to embrace "whiteness" as both a justification for the demographic reconfiguration of slavery and a guiding principle of civic life. Toward that end, this part analyzes how Tennessee's decision to eliminate free black suffrage in 1834 and North Carolina's bitterly contested decision to disfranchise all free blacks at its 1835 state constitutional convention both reflected and enhanced the upper South's interest in an ideological whitening of the region.

The book's final part concludes the volume with three chapters on the final challenges to paternalism and its eventual triumph as the dominant ideology of slaveholding in the lower South. This section evaluates the spread of alarm and anxiety across the lower South in the aftermath of the publication of Walker's pamphlet and news of Turner's revolt. In the face of such alarming news, the ongoing contest between paternalists and their critics initially intensified. The paternalists maintained that only their approach could render slavery safe for the lower South, but the movement's opponents launched a fierce offensive, seeking to undermine the paternalist argument in light of open slave violence and aggressive abolitionist threats to slavery from outside the region. Initially, critics of paternalism succeeded in shifting the lower South's focus to the need for tighter control of slaves and free blacks. As a result, they won approval for measures banning the education of slaves and limiting the ability of paternalists to continue their mission to the region's slave population.

The section then details the broader southern reaction to the abolition mail and petition campaigns crafted by the American Anti-slavery Society. Spreading alarm and producing a call for unity and action, particularly in the lower South, the abolition mail campaign struck many whites in the South as nothing short of a terrorist attack on the region, and the mail and petition campaigns together left more white southerners than ever convinced that, at least on the point of abolition, the South had to meet its critics with one voice.

Finally, the third chapter of this part describes and analyzes the fleshing out of the ideological reconfiguration of slavery in the lower South and explains the final rise of the paternalist movement from insurgency to orthodoxy in the region. Despite the initial setback paternalism suffered from the concerns aroused by the Turner insurrection and the abolition mail campaign, ultimately the ideology's triumph in the lower South owed much to the perception that it offered the most effective counter to the emerging humanitarian critique of slavery as an evil that required immediate redress—a line of argument that lay at the core of the new abolitionist crusade. With paternalism safely ensconced at the center of its defense of slavery, the lower South's new proslavery argument also embraced a newly coherent defense of slavery as the most appropriate labor system for a republican social order and generated its own stinging critique of the dependency and degradation that it contended was

engendered by free wage labor in the North. In the end, the lower South's ideological reconfiguration of slavery married the virtues of paternalism as a system for managing enslaved blacks to the economic and political imperatives of independence and egalitarianism for white males. The union was sealed with a public vow to make race the central social distinction in southern society.

In sum, by retracing and analyzing the convoluted journey the Old South, in all its internal variation, took to arrive at its mature answers to the slavery question, this study presents white southern views on slavery as the South entered the era of sectional conflict. It was during that era that white southerners offered their most overt political and ideological defense of slavery in national forums. But the road to that position had been long and complicated. The Old South's answers to the slavery question, imperfect and unacceptable as they were, had not been found easily or without conflict. The account that follows will tell that story.

PART ONE

THE UPPER SOUTH'S TRAVAIL

Though deeply indebted to slave labor for no small portion of their wealth, many upper South whites of the founding generation saw slavery as a troublesome legacy from their region's economic past rather than as a key to its future prosperity. Moreover, this generation of whites witnessed the massive flight of upper South slaves toward the British promise of freedom during the Revolutionary War. This experience shattered white confidence in the loyalty and obedience of slaves. In addition to a sluggish economy and heightened concern for white safety, upper South whites of the founding era also had ideological and moral questions about slavery. Their republican ideals, which treasured liberty and despised dependence, raised questions about whether slavery was compatible with the guiding principles of the new nation. During the same era, the spread of evangelical Christianity in the upper South challenged the morality of holding slaves. Hence whites in the upper South revealed degrees of ambiguity about the future of slavery in their region from the republic's founding through the Missouri Compromise and beyond.

Yet despite potent economic and ideological incentives to reduce their reliance on slave labor, continued if diminished profits from staple production, heavy investment in slaves, and the desire to sell surplus slaves to buyers further south combined with the unanswered question of how whites could live peacefully with their former slaves to sustain a powerful if ambivalent attachment to slavery among many upper South whites. Efforts to craft viable plans for gradual emancipation and colonization in the region foundered in the face of this attachment. Only Delaware managed to free most of its slaves by encouraging private manumission, though Virginia and Maryland controlled the size of their slave populations to a degree through the sale

of slaves south and liberal private manumission policies. Across the Appalachians, slaveholders settled pockets of fertile land in the Kentucky bluegrass region and in Tennessee's Nashville basin and sought state constitutional protection for their slave property to fend off political and religious criticism of the institution.

The Gabriel insurrection scare of 1800 lent a renewed sense of urgency to upper South whites' search for answers to the slavery question, given the all too apparent dangers of living in a slave society. The state explored colonization options with new vigor but paltry results. But then the first cotton boom swept across the lower South, creating ready markets for large numbers of upper South slaves after Congress banned the foreign slave trade in 1808; this improved prospects for reducing the size of the upper South's slave population through the internal slave trade. By 1820, the upper South, and even Virginia with its largest-in-the-nation slave population, could conceive of controlling its racial demography through the diffusion of slaves to the lower South and continued experimentation with plans for colonization of free blacks.

CHAPTER ONE

OWNING SLAVES, DISOWNING SLAVERY

Writing in 1786, George Washington outlined a position on slavery that quite possibly reflected the center of gravity of Virginia opinion on the question during the Confederation era. The former general of the Continental Army and future president told a fellow Virginian that it was "among his first wishes" to witness the development of a plan "by which slavery in this country may be abolished by slow, sure and imperceptible degrees."[1] Many Virginia slaveholders would not have shared Washington's vision, especially those who resided south of the James River, but the Mount Vernon planter's view was nonetheless a common—perhaps the most common—opinion of slavery in Virginia during the post-Revolutionary era. Slavery should be phased out, surely but slowly, and at little cost to those who held slaves. In hindsight, of course, historians can see Washington's position for exactly what it was: a wish and not a plan, a preference but not a priority. But for at least two generations, if not longer, many Virginians and other upper South slaveholders strained to find near-perfect policies for doing exactly what Washington suggested: phasing slavery out in ways that created minimal disruption for, minimal sacrifice by, and minimal opposition from the very whites who benefited the most from slavery.

At the Constitutional Convention of 1787, the otherwise influential Virginians and other delegates from the Chesapeake and mid-Atlantic states found themselves outflanked by resolute founders from South Carolina and Georgia on the issue of the international slave trade. South Carolina delegates left little doubt about where they stood on the matter. Charles Cotesworth Pinckney, later a prominent Federalist and American diplomat, insisted that "South Carolina and Georgia must have slaves." A second distinguished South Carolina delegate, Revolutionary governor

John Rutledge, warned his fellow delegates that "if the Convention thinks that North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia will ever agree to the plan, unless their right to import slaves be untouched, the expectation is vain. The people of these states will never be such fools as to give up so important an interest." Rutledge stated directly what Pinckney implied: that without some protection for the right to import slaves, the southernmost states of the Confederation would not join the new Union.[2] Though a critic of such obstinacy, Virginia's James Madison later confirmed in a letter to Thomas Jefferson that "South Carolina and Georgia were inflexible on the point" of the slave trade.[3] To secure a window of opportunity for reopening the foreign slave trade, South Carolina and Georgia delegates formed a temporary but momentous alliance with New England shipping interests. The lower South delegates agreed to allow Congress to approve navigation laws by a simple majority rather than a two-thirds vote, sacrificing the de facto southern veto over national maritime policy. The right to block such legislation, which the South enjoyed as long as a supermajority was required for approval, long had been held as crucial to the region's agricultural export economy, and such a sacrifice by the lower South revealed the depth of its interest in extending the African slave trade. New England delegates reciprocated by accepting a twenty-year constitutional moratorium on any federal prohibition of the slave trade.[4]

Slaveholders in the upper South joined the commercial interests in the mid-Atlantic region to denounce the Convention's willingness to tolerate the international slave trade and the unholy alliance that sustained the compromise measure. "Twenty years will produce all the mischief that can be apprehended from the liberty to import slaves," James Madison complained, and so "long a term will be more dishonorable to the American character than to say nothing in the Constitution."[5] Fellow Virginian George Mason, though less nationalist than Madison, also recognized that giving the slave trade constitutional protection for so long rendered the expansion of slavery inevitable and threatened the new nation with bloody insurrection. "The Western people are already calling out for slaves for their new lands, and will fill that country with slaves if they can be got thro' S. Carolina and Georgia," Mason complained.[6] The following year, as an opponent of ratification at the Virginia convention, Mason declared that by allowing the "nefarious" slave trade to continue for twenty years, the proposed Constitution "adds daily to our weakness" rather than ensuring "our domestic safety." Mason complained that the document gave more protection to the slave trade than to slavery itself, contrasting the proposed Constitution's solicitude for the slave trade with its failure to include a firm guarantee "that will prevent the northern and eastern states from meddling with our whole property of that kind." Mason conceded that slaves were not "a desirable property," but he argued that ending slavery would "involve us in great difficulties."[7]

Yet despite their opposition to the extension of the international slave trade and their comments on the threat slavery presented to the American experiment in republicanism, upper South leaders, and particularly Virginians, were active in the

new republic's earliest efforts to secure slavery, especially in areas where it already existed or might logically expand. In August 1789, the First Congress renewed the Northwest Ordinance, with its ban on slavery in the territory intact and President George Washington signed the bill into law. Later in 1789, when North Carolina agreed to cede its western land (later Tennessee) to the nation, Congress agreed to the state's condition that no law or regulation be placed on the territory that "would tend to emancipate slaves." And in 1790, Congress organized the Southwest Territory along the same general lines as the Northwest Territory, with the exception of the Northwest Territory's ban on slaves.[8] These congressional actions amounted to the informal adoption of the first federal policy toward slavery in the territories. It effectively sectionalized slavery, allowing the institution to flourish south of the Ohio River and east of the Mississippi while banning it in all territory north of the Ohio and allowing all northern states to phase out slavery as they chose. Strikingly, Congress adopted this informal policy with little or no controversy, but its impact was nonetheless dramatic.[9] The sectionalism that ultimately grew out of the policy would generate much controversy in the coming decades.

Upper South whites appeared comfortable with the congressional decisions about the territories, as did lower South whites. But southern whites as a whole showed decidedly less equanimity toward the abolition petitions submitted to the Second Congress by Quaker groups in New York and New Jersey and the Quaker-driven Philadelphia Abolition Society.[10] A petition from the Philadelphia Quakers, signed by the society's president, Benjamin Franklin, labeled slavery as "inconsistent" with "the character of the American people" and urged "the restoration of liberty" to those "groaning in servile subjection."[11] Predictably, lower South congressmen took the lead in demanding the rejection of such petitions on the grounds that they requested unconstitutional actions and that debate might inspire slave insurrection. Charleston's William Loughton Smith, an arch-Federalist, argued that the petitions asked "for a violation of Constitutional rights" and represented an assault on "the virtue and patriotism of the house." South Carolina anti-Federalist Aedanus Burke claimed that the petitioners were trying to "meddle in business with which they had nothing to do." And Thomas Tucker, another South Carolinian, suggested prophetically that while the abolitionists might "expect a general emancipation of slaves by law," the southern states would never submit to such action "without a civil war."[12]

But northern representatives argued that the petitions deserved congressional reception because of citizens' right to seek redress from the government. At least some of these northerners thought slavery was a "monstrous principle" and an "indelible stain" on the American polity.[13] Virginia representatives sought a middle ground between northern defenders of the petitions and lower South opponents. Out of respect for the republican right to petition, James Madison favored receiving the petitions and sending them immediately to a select committee, which he expected to quickly conclude that Congress had no power to interfere with slavery where it existed and no power to ban the slave trade until 1808, though it could

recommend levying the $10 head tax on slave imports allowed by the Constitution. In the end, most upper South representatives joined northern representatives in agreeing to send the petitions to a select committee. Eight of ten representatives from Virginia voted for referral to a select committee, while lower South representatives voted overwhelmingly against referral.[14]

The report of the select committee conformed to Madison's expectations. It found that Congress could not interfere with either slavery or, for a time, the slave trade, but it did lament the plight of the "humane objects" of the petitions, prompting another round of outrage from the lower South. "We took each other with our mutual bad habits and respective evils, for better, for worse," William Loughton Smith observed; "the Northern states adopted us with our slaves; and we adopted them with their Quakers."[15] Madison again sought moderation, arguing for publication of the committee report in order to inform the public that Congress could not end slavery or the slave trade. Madison's proposal won narrowly, but a number of Virginia representatives defected to vote with the lower South. After the House action, Madison learned from friends in Virginia that public opinion there applauded the Senate for refusing to take notice of the petitions but found "great fault" with the House for "wasting so much time and Expense" on the matter. The increasingly apparent gravity of the situation moved Madison to work behind the scenes to dissuade antislavery groups from sending petitions to Congress and to persuade Congress to refuse to accept petitions that asked it to take action the body had already decided it had no power to take.[16] On the latter point, he succeeded reasonably well. After 1790, Congress considered only narrowly framed petitions dealing with issues related to regulating the slave trade. At the level of federal policy, the influential Virginians had taken the lead in turning back, and ultimately damping, a challenge to slavery without appearing to defend slavery. It was a gambit they yearned to perfect.[17]

At the state and local levels, however, the concern George Mason expressed at the Constitutional Convention for the domestic safety of whites in a slave society reflected the long-standing fears and anxieties of large numbers of upper South slaveholders. Many of these slaveholders had experienced what historians now view as the greatest slave revolt in American history: the flight and rebellion of tens of thousands of slaves, many of them from Virginia, during the American Revolution. Lord Dunmore's 1774 offer of freedom to all slaves who remained loyal to the Crown had hardened white resolve to fight for independence, but it also raised black hopes for freedom. Estimates suggest that more than thirty thousand slaves either were freed by the British or escaped in the hope of finding protection from the British military. Many of these African American loyalists were either never returned by the British or never recovered by their owners. A great number of these owners carried large debts from slave purchases for which the slaves were their best or only collateral. This unprecedented black Revolutionary flight for freedom proceeded on

a large enough scale to shatter any white illusions that upper South slaves were content with their lot. It also raised troubling questions about the security of investment in slave property. But the persistent efforts of upper South whites to secure reparations from the British for their "lost" slaves were as much a balm to the wounded pride of the slaveholders as an attempt to recoup financial losses.

No small number of upper South slaveholders observed the enslaved population's Revolutionary-era record of flight and rebellion and decided that it would be wise to rid themselves of slavery entirely if they could, or partially if they could not fully extricate themselves from this peculiar and volatile institution. Other upper South slaveholders thought the Revolutionary erosion of slavery simply meant that the institution's foundation needed immediate strengthening, even if only for temporary stability rather than for perpetual benefit. To a large degree such views defined the poles of debate among slaveholders in the upper South over policies regarding slavery for several decades.[18]

In the post-Revolutionary upper South, practical doubts about the fundamental vulnerability to unrest of a society with a large proportion of slaves merged with triumphant republican ideals and an emerging Christian morality to raise serious reservations about the future of slavery in the United States, or at least in the upper South. Almost all of the upper South founders expressed a desire to end slavery eventually even if they proved reluctant to take bold steps toward that goal. George Washington, who manumitted his own slaves, often privately voiced sentiments in favor of gradual emancipation and clearly stated that it was "his will and desires" that "all the slaves which I own" shall "receive their freedom."[19] Virginia's Richard Henry Lee, a former president of the Continental Congress, thought slavery a "moral blight."[20] Patrick Henry puzzled over why, "at a time when the rights of humanity are defined and understood with precision, In a country, above all others, fond of liberty," citizens would adopt "a principle as repugnant to humanity as it is inconsistent with the bible, and destructive to liberty?"[21] Henry's anti-Federalist ally George Mason labeled slavery an "Evil" and bemoaned its "ill Effect" on the "Morals and Manners of our People," though Mason warned that it was best not "to expose our Weakness by examining this Subject too freely" in public.[22] Later, Henry and Mason's nationalist nemesis, James Madison, privately admitted that slavery was "unrepublican."[23]

But the most memorable expression by a republican slaveholder of the agony induced by extolling liberty while holding slaves came from Thomas Jefferson in his *Notes on the State of Virginia*. Jefferson's ambiguous views on slavery remain compelling to historians more than two centuries later not so much because they are those of the nation's most brilliant founder or because Jefferson left himself so vulnerable to the charge of hypocrisy but because they embodied in a single capacious mind so many of the contradictions and complexities evident in the collective mind of the early republican upper South.[24] His emotional, even passionate critique of slavery rendered in an often-quoted section of his *Notes* revealed many of the early

republican fears about slavery. Jefferson worried about slavery's tendency to corrupt the character of the virtuous (white) republican. "The whole commerce between master and slave is a perpetual exercise of the most boisterous passions, the most unremitting despotism on the one part, and degrading submissions on the other," Jefferson lamented. "The man must be a prodigy who can retain his manners and morals undepraved by such circumstances."[25] Thanks to compelling genetic evidence, informed Americans now know that Jefferson was not such a prodigy. Jefferson fathered at least one child by his slave Sally Hemings, and most historians now concede that Jefferson's reference to the "boisterous passions" encouraged and unleashed by slavery likely includes a measure of first-person confession.[26]

But Jefferson's rather sweeping indictment of slavery as antirepublican contained many of the criticisms that reverberated throughout the upper South for the next fifty years. For Jefferson, slaveholding schooled white Virginians in the most unrepublican character. Not just masters but all whites in a slaveholding society were "daily exercised in tyranny" and transformed into "despots" by the power of mastery and the potential, indeed the inevitability, of its abuse. Nor did slavery promote the spirit of self-sufficiency so admired by republican freeholders. Instead, it destroyed the "industry" of whites. "In a warm climate," Jefferson argued, "no man will labor for himself who can make another labor for him." And Jefferson's observations convinced him that only a "very small proportion" of slaveholders were "ever seen to labor." The Sage of Monticello also worried about white safety. Either "a revolution of the wheel of fortune" or a divine justice that "could not sleep forever" might combine with the "numbers" of slaves in Virginia to unleash a slave rebellion that would ignite a larger civil war between whites and blacks that would end in the slaughter of one race. Jefferson concluded by wishing, "under the auspices of heaven, for a total emancipation" carried out "with the consent of the masters, rather than by their extirpation."[27]

With the exception of his reference to divine justice, however, Jefferson's soliloquy on slavery's incompatibility with republican ideals omitted any reference to the other important moral code that nurtured post-Revolutionary doubts about slavery among whites in the upper South: the growing influence of evangelical Christianity. Arguably, the teachings of evangelical Christianity and the activism of church leaders proved the single most powerful influence spurring upper South whites to question slavery in the late eighteenth century.[28] Beginning with revivals led by the evangelical Presbyterian Samuel Davies in the 1740s, and expanded by the evangelical appeals of Methodists and Baptists to Virginians of both races, evangelical Christianity gained influence in late-eighteenth-century Virginia and in some instances offered serious challenges to the moral and political authority of Virginia's largely Anglican gentry. The new communities of faith created by the evangelical movement included both whites (even prominent and wealthy whites) and blacks

(slave and free). In the state's Tidewater region, slaves often constituted the majority of church members. In 1788, Richard Courtney, pastor at Richmond's First Baptist Church, served a "large congregation of Negroes" there. These evangelical churches, which usually allowed only white males to participate in matters of governance, were hardly models of racial egalitarianism, but the practice of worshiping together, sharing faith, and calling members "brother" and "sister," regardless of race or secular status, offered a less hierarchical manner of racial interaction than was found in any other Virginia institution.[29]

Evangelical Christianity not only provided a key point of contact, and at least to some degree shared cultural values, between the races but also mounted a serious critique of slavery based on the religion's foundational teachings and values. Since the evangelical denominations were actively proselytizing in Virginia, this critique had the potential to reach a larger audience than the antislavery messages emanating from the Quakers. In fact, in 1784, just as American Methodists severed their ties with Britain's Anglican church, the newly independent denomination also denounced slavery, ordering local pastors and circuit riders to free their slaves or face expulsion, and issuing a similar warning to the lay members who bought and sold slaves.[30] But the antislavery message of evangelical pastors often failed to find receptive ears among the laity. British-born Methodist evangelist Thomas Coke, a sharp critic of slavery, encountered violent opposition to Methodist antislavery teachings while preaching in Virginia's southern Piedmont. His message, Coke wrote, once prompted many who heard him to "combine together to flog me." A brave local sponsor of Coke's revival saved him from a beating that particular night, but Coke resumed his travels in Virginia and North Carolina with a keen awareness that criticism of slavery might lead to physical danger.[31] Another Virginia Methodist, Jesse Lee, warned Coke that such preaching would fail to encourage manumission among slaveholders, instead producing a white backlash against both slaves and evangelicals.[32] Coke later admitted that he learned to preach against slavery without giving "much offense"—dubious as that virtue might have seemed to antislavery evangelicals—by first preaching to the slaves "on the Duty of Servants to Masters" and then advising masters on their responsibilities, which included looking for appropriate times and circumstances to manumit slaves.[33]

In 1785, the Methodist Conference in Baltimore dropped its demand that lay members manumit their slaves and refrain from buying and selling slaves. This quick reversal of position, Jesse Lee later explained, came because the original Methodist rules were "offensive to most of our southern friends; and were so much opposed by some of our private members, local preachers, and some of the traveling preachers … that they were never afterwards carried into full force."[34] The Methodists, though hardly becoming proslavery, seemed willing to mute their critique of slavery in the interest of opening more doors to their evangelical efforts. But while the Methodists softened the sections of their Book of Discipline that required specific action against slavery, they continued to preach and teach about the inequities of

slavery. In a sense, the modification of their discipline was not so much an abandonment of their criticism of slavery as an effort to give their pastors and revivals time to move the laity toward the clergy's position. Over time, however, the preponderance of influence seemed to flow in the opposite direction.[35]

As late as 1790, Virginia Baptists debated the "equity" of slavery at the meeting of their General Committee. Unable to reach a conclusion, the body appointed a subcommittee, including David Barrow and William Fristoe, two critics of slavery, to report on the issue. The subcommittee eventually agreed on a resolution prepared by John Leland, a Baptist pastor and champion of religious liberty, and reported back to the assembly as a whole. The resolution called slavery "a violent deprivation of the rights of nature and inconsistent with republican government" and recommended that all Baptist brethren "make use of every legal measure to extirpate the evil from the land." The Baptist General Committee approved.[36] The phrase "every legal measure," however, proved critical for the interpretation of the resolution. The main legal measure available Virginia in 1790 was the private manumission of slaves. Thus the Baptist resolution appeared to encourage the denomination's slaveholders to manumit their slaves where that practice was legal. But the phrase implied tacit disapproval of any evangelical encouragement of rebellion or running away, and it suggested that Baptists could support gradual emancipation measures as long as they worked through the appropriate legislative channels and abided by legislative outcomes. This made the Baptist position no less an ethical challenge to slavery but rendered the denomination's stance less radical and threatening as a practical matter.

Slave unrest, unlike the evangelical challenge, grew more rather than less threatening during the 1780s and 1790s. Upper South slaveholders became especially anxious about security once news of the rebellion in Saint-Domingue reached the Chesapeake's shores in 1791.[37] Even George Washington reacted to the news with shock. "Lamentable!" President Washington gasped after hearing the news, and he decried the appearance of "such a spirit of revolt among the Blacks." As he puzzled over reports, Washington concluded that it was "difficult to say" where such a revolutionary bid for freedom among the New World's enslaved "would stop."[38] The revolt in Saint-Domingue also conjured horrible premonitions in the active mind of Thomas Jefferson. "I am becoming daily more convinced," Jefferson admitted to James Monroe, "that all the West India islands will remain in the hands of people of colour, and a total expulsion of whites…will take place." Jefferson thought his fellow Virginians should be able to "foresee the bloody scenes which our children certainly, and possibly ourselves (South of Patowmac) have to wade through, and try to avert them."[39] Indeed, in 1793, rumors fueled by the "example of the West Indies" swept through Virginia's Tidewater and Eastern Shore counties that an insurrectionary force totaling six thousand slaves was prepared to rise and take "full possession of the hole [*sic*] country in a few weeks."[40] John Randolph of Roanoke even claimed that

he overheard one of his slaves tout the alleged plot's prospects by reference to "how the blacks has kill'd the whites in the French Island…a little while ago."[41] Later in the decade, with Toussaint L'Ouverture in power in Saint-Domingue, Maryland's Robert Goodloe Harper warned that Toussaint's officers were preparing to invade the southern states with "an army of blacks."[42] Such fears of outside interference with upper South slaves reminded the region's slaveholders of the destabilizing impact the British had had on slavery during the Revolution. In the minds of many upper South whites, a system, however profitable, that provided such a source of vulnerability demanded either reform or elimination, though neither appeared easy to accomplish.

Yet ideological and religious doubts about slaveholding, and even deep fears for white safety might have been quieted, as they eventually were in the lower South, by a booming economy sustained by slave labor. Instead, during the late eighteenth century, the troubled tobacco economy of the upper South served only to heighten the region's desire to diminish its reliance on slavery, and perhaps even abandon the increasingly peculiar institution altogether. To a large degree, the original upper South states, Virginia, Maryland, and Delaware, were products of the tobacco and slave production culture that emerged in the Chesapeake region during the colonial era.[43] White indentured servants provided the bulk of the labor at first, but after Bacon's Rebellion in the 1670s, landowners gradually shifted toward enslaved blacks as their preferred form of labor. By the 1720s, slavery was well established in the Chesapeake region and generated much wealth for Chesapeake planters.[44] In a sense, upper South tobacco growers "chose" slavery in a way that rice planters in the Carolina Lowcountry, where the slave and staple culture arrived as a whole from Barbados, did not, perhaps giving the Chesapeake slaveholding society a sense of the institution's contingency that the Lowcountry lacked. Over time, tobacco and slaves penetrated further inland, especially in Virginia, but Maryland and Delaware planters were seldom far away from the bay, and the Chesapeake region remained the center of upper South slave society for many decades.[45]

By the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the tobacco economy of the upper South stagnated, precipitating a gradual, if uneven, shift of land and labor out of tobacco and into the production of foodstuffs. Invigorated demand for foodstuffs from growing cities along the mid-Atlantic seaboard and from Europe triggered the shift, and hence the region's emerging grain-based economy quickly became as deeply enmeshed in the export market as had the area's older tobacco economy. But the labor needs of the new grain-raising economy differed sharply from those of the increasingly ossified tobacco culture due to significant differences in crop culture and production cycles. Grains such as wheat and oats required substantially less labor than tobacco except during harvest. Tobacco production, in which labor-intensive chores dominated the cultivation process throughout the growth cycle, required constant

application of labor. Thus slavery, with its high ratio of fixed costs to marginal cost, suited tobacco well. Grains, with their sharp peaks and valleys in the demand for labor, rendered slavery relatively inefficient and called for a flexible labor force with low fixed costs. Thus even though large portions of the upper South continued to grow tobacco and remained heavily dependent on slave labor, the future prospects for the slave-labor portion of the region's economy appeared problematic.[46]

Waning tobacco profits and the comparative economic decline of slavery differentiated the upper South from the lower South, where staple profits exploded in the 1790s. Within the upper South, however, the economic viability of slavery varied greatly from subregion to subregion. While many white farmers in Piedmont Virginia and southern Maryland shifted to grains and hence needed fewer slaves, many planters and farmers in Virginia's Southside either maintained profitability in tobacco or wedged themselves into the periphery of the emerging cotton boom. Yet even in the heyday of the Chesapeake tobacco culture, the three original upper South states hardly participated in the slave and staple economy to the same degree. In 1790, Delaware had just under nine thousand slaves out of a total population of more than seventy-one thousand. With slaves constituting only 13 percent of its population in 1790, Delaware stood as a middle ground between the more northern Middle Atlantic states of Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and New York, where slaves accounted for less than 2 percent of the population, and the other Chesapeake-region states such as Maryland, where slaves were 32 percent of the population, and Virginia, where slaves were 39 percent of the population.[47]

In Delaware, slavery took its strongest hold in the southern portions of the state and grew generally weaker as one traveled north. Only in Sussex, the southernmost of Delaware's three counties, did slaves constitute more than 15 percent of the population, and even in Sussex slaves accounted for only 19 percent of the total population. Further up the peninsula toward Philadelphia, the counties of Kent, which included the state capital at Dover, and New Castle, which included Wilmington, were both less than 15 percent slave. In Kent, free blacks already outnumbered slaves, a portent of things to come in Delaware.[48] In 1790, Maryland looked much more like a state committed to slavery than Delaware. Maryland placed third among all states in terms of numbers of slaves, as its slave population of 103,000 nearly matched the 107,000 slaves in South Carolina, the new Union's blackest state (43 percent) in 1790, and Maryland's 32 percent proportion of slaves was almost the same as that of Georgia. In Maryland, a large majority of the state's slaves lived in the six or seven counties that lay mostly below the fall line, which ran along a curve from the District of Columbia to the uppermost reaches of Chesapeake Bay. Maryland's three black-majority counties lay near the Eastern Shore, wedged between Chesapeake Bay and the Potomac River.[49]

This static glance at upper South demography in 1790 suggests that Maryland was almost as deeply enmeshed in the slave economy as Virginia and South Carolina. But the underlying dynamics of the staple economy were already working to weaken Maryland's commitment to slavery. In the upland or interior counties of northern

Maryland, where slaves were less than 20 percent of the population, the local economy had already begun to move toward the production of foodstuffs as an export crop and a growing involvement with a craft and protoindustrial economy similar to that of Pennsylvania. The labor demands of the emerging northern Maryland economy favored free workers and family farmers, so the dynamics of the area's political economy were moving the region away from slavery and staple production rather than toward them.[50]

In 1790, Virginia held more than 293,000 slaves, more than 42 percent of all slaves in the United States that year. Virginia masters held nearly a third more slaves than South Carolina and Maryland owners combined, and only South Carolina had a larger proportion of slaves than Virginia. In 1790, the Old Dominion was also home to 12,766 free blacks, more than any other southern state, and more than a third of all free blacks living in the South that year. Slaves, of course, were not evenly distributed throughout Virginia, a state that spanned an area from Chesapeake Bay and the Atlantic Ocean in the east across the Tidewater, the Piedmont, the Blue Ridge Mountains, the great valleys, and the Allegheny Mountains to the banks of the Ohio River. If slavery varied across a north-south axis in Maryland and Delaware, it varied along an east-west axis in Virginia. By 1790, slavery had already crossed the fall line separating the Tidewater from the Piedmont and gained a strong foothold in the latter region, running, albeit with diminishing concentrations, to the foot of the Blue Ridge Mountains. West of the Blue Ridge, in the state's valleys and in its trans-Allegheny section, lived very few slaves and fewer slaveholders. Most whites in these areas expressed reluctance at, and sometimes an aversion toward, seeing slavery spread into their portion of the state on a large-scale basis.[51]

Further west still, across the Appalachians in the territories of Kentucky and Tennessee, slaves initially accounted for very small proportions of the population by southern standards. In 1790, five of every six people in the rather sparsely populated Kentucky territory were white. That same year, nearly eleven of every twelve people in Tennessee, which had roughly half the population of Kentucky, were white. Thus slavery remained a marginal institution in these upper South territories, even though they were both populated mainly by settlers from Virginia and North Carolina. During the 1790s, both Kentucky (1792) and Tennessee (1796) became states, and over the next twenty years both experienced rapid population growth, yet both states remained heavily white. Between 1790 and 1810, Kentucky's white population exploded, increasing from just over 60,000 to almost 325,000 in twenty years. The state's slave population also grew rapidly during these years, but in 1810 Kentucky was still just over 80 percent white.

Tennessee's population growth paralleled that of Kentucky during these years, only on a smaller scale. Tennessee's white population increased sevenfold between 1790 and 1810 (increasing from just over 30,000 to almost 215,000), and the state remained over 80 percent white throughout the period. Even in 1810, after the slave population of the two states had grown to nearly 125,000, Kentucky and Tennessee

together served as home to only three-fourths as many slaves as North Carolina.[52] If judged by demography alone, early Kentucky and Tennessee appeared to be places where a movement to gradually end slavery might succeed.

In the founding era, republican ideals, Christian morality, fear of slave unrest, and troubling questions about the long-term economic viability of the area's slave economy all pushed upper South whites to question a perpetual commitment to slavery as a labor system. Yet post-Revolutionary southern critics of slavery faced entrenched and obstinate resistance from slaveholding interests as they tried to wean upper South society from its dependence on slavery. The value of slave property, the continued (if stagnant) need for slave labor, and the deep-seated white belief that whites and blacks could never live together in freedom made slavery a difficult institution to weaken or phase out in the absence of intricate plans for how emancipation would occur and how postemancipation society would be organized. Broadly acceptable plans proved extraordinarily difficult, if not impossible, to craft. Nevertheless, during the early national era, efforts to restrict or weaken slavery in some manner emerged in all three original upper South states as well as in the two newly formed states in the trans-Appalachian South.

In all three original Chesapeake states, various options for slowly ending slavery, lessening the region's dependence on slave labor, and reducing the number and proportion of slaves and free blacks in the total population received attention. The gradual emancipation of slaves and the colonization or other removal of the resulting free black population emerged as the preferred alternative. But even most advocates of gradual emancipation and colonization recognized that, at best, it offered a complicated, expensive, and slow method of reducing the importance of slavery in the region. Steady manumission of individual slaves by their masters under terms of state laws provided another option, though one less likely to effect dramatic change in a short period of time. But this alternative avoided many of the bewildering complications and public expense involved in even the most plausible general emancipation schemes. If the importation of additional slaves was banned or sharply restricted, private manumissions would slowly limit the growth of the upper South's slave population and possibly even reduce it, depending on the ratio of slaves sold or taken from the region by emigrating owners to the natural increase of the area's slave population. But without accompanying plans for colonization or removal, manumission threatened to create a large caste of free blacks, a "class" almost universally despised by whites in the upper South. Thus even the simplest methods of weakening slavery had drawbacks.

Efforts to dilute slavery's influence faced less opposition in areas where slavery was less central to economic success and less fundamental to the existing social order.

In Delaware, critics of slavery enjoyed a measure of success in limiting the internal slave trade and encouraging private manumission. Late in the eighteenth century, as the once rich soil along southern Delaware's coastal plain grew depleted from persistent tobacco cultivation, the state's tobacco planters were hurt by competition from newer tobacco-growing areas, and thus began the gradual but profitable switch to wheat and other grains. As slavery declined in importance to the state's economy, Christian moralism married economic self-interest among Delaware merchants and landowners to create support for minimizing the use of slave labor in the state.[53]

During the late 1780s, Quakers (who were comparatively large in number in Delaware), Methodists, and others who objected to slavery on both moral as well as economic grounds forged a coalition that persuaded the Delaware legislature to both tighten regulation of the internal slave trade and ease the path for private manumissions.[54] Beginning in 1787, the Delaware legislature passed a series of laws that pressured the state's slaveholders to reduce their surplus slave population by manumission rather than sale. The Delaware legislature banned the importation of slaves for sale in 1787 and declared that any slaves brought into the state illegally would be declared "free to all intents and purposes." Delaware's 1787 slave code also imposed restrictions on masters trying to sell slaves to out-of-state buyers, requiring any person wishing to sell slaves out of state to receive permission from three justices of the peace.[55] Two years later, the legislature, unhappy that its previous action had failed to slow the sale of slaves as much as expected, stiffened the requirement, mandating that potential slave sellers seek and receive permission of five justices of the peace instead of three.[56] To be sure, slaveholders in southern Delaware often evaded these restrictions by traveling to nearby states to sell slaves. But those who did so endured the aggravation of travel and often suffered a financial loss because of their eagerness to sell their merchandise and return home. At the very least, Federalist-era Delaware succeeded in eliminating active slave markets within the state's borders and in making it difficult for Delaware's slave owners to reduce their holdings by sale.[57]

To complement its regulation of the internal slave trade, Delaware also moved aggressively to encourage private manumission. The same 1787 Delaware code that restricted the internal slave trade also gave masters the right to emancipate all healthy slaves between the ages of eighteen and thirty-five without posting a bond.[58] With the state's prohibition of the out-of-state sale or hiring of slaves limiting their options, Delaware slaveholders found creative ways to reduce their slave holdings at minimal financial sacrifice. The method of choice was the delayed emancipation agreement, an innovative contract that deferred manumission until some distant but carefully specified time (such as the death of the master, upon the slave reaching a certain age, or after a specified number of years of service). Under delayed emancipation agreements, masters continued to profit from their slaves' labor even after providing for their eventual manumission. After entering into delayed emancipation agreements, masters often "hired out" their "term" slaves in Delaware's urban labor markets and received income from the slaves' employer.[59]

Popular with masters, these delayed manumission agreements often shifted the financial sacrifice of emancipation to the heirs of slave owners. Disappointed heirs and eager creditors regularly contested delayed manumission agreements, slowing the already tedious pace of probate court activity to a crawl. In fact, legal disputes over delayed manumission became so common in the state during the 1790s that in 1797 the legislature declared written manumission contracts "necessary for the security of…slaves, whose masters may intend to manumit them," since oral contracts could be "misunderstood or forgotten." The requirement of written contracts ensured that slaves who were promised freedom by their masters were protected from petulant heirs and aggressive creditors.[60] In 1810, at the urging of Governor George Truitt, the Delaware legislature passed a comprehensive statute codifying delayed emancipation. It stipulated that under delayed manumission agreements, blacks who worked for masters or were hired out to other employers remained slaves until their specified term of service had expired, and children born to "term" slave women were themselves slaves until they reached adulthood (age twenty-one), when they automatically received their freedom. As a protection for these slaves who enjoyed either a contractual or statutory expectation of freedom, the legislature barred owners from selling a term slave out of state without permission of the court and subjected violators to a $500 fine.[61]

Delaware's act of 1810 clearly defined deferred emancipation and enhanced the legal protection the state offered slaves under such agreements. With its passage, Delaware committed to a course of encouraging private manumission while taking no direct action to promote general emancipation, no matter how gradual. Yet Delaware's informal endorsement of individual manumission, though a course hardly destined for universal effectiveness across the slaveholding states, proved effective in the context of the state's evolving commercial economy. From 1790 to 1820, individual emancipations in the state proceeded at a steady pace. The absolute number of slaves in Delaware declined from nearly 8,900, or 15 percent of the population, in 1790 to about 4,500, or just over 6 percent of the population, in 1820. Partially due to increased manumission, the free black population in Delaware grew from just under 4,000 in 1790 to over 13,000 by 1820. When Delaware formed its first government under the United States Constitution, more than 70 percent of its black population remained shackled by slavery; less than three decades later, as the recession of 1819 settled hard on the Delaware countryside, nearly three-quarters of Delaware's blacks and mulattoes were free.[62]

Individual manumissions eroded slavery with agonizing slowness, but they offered hope for upper South slaves. More than any other staple-growing state, Delaware whites made progress toward gradually eliminating slavery through private manumission. And they did it without "whitening" the state's population through either expulsion or colonization of free blacks and, even more strikingly, while discouraging the sale of slaves to the lower South. Of course, such progress was facilitated in Delaware because its racial demography resembled that of Middle Atlantic states such as Pennsylvania or New York more than that of Maryland or Virginia.

But racial demography was not everything. Delaware could have chosen to rid itself of blacks by selling its slaves off to the cotton South, especially after 1800. Buyers in the lower South's first cotton belts clearly preferred upper South ("domestic" or "country-born") slaves to African imports, and Delaware slaves would have fetched good prices in the lower Piedmont of South Carolina and Georgia. But Delaware residents increasingly recognized that blacks could both provide skilled labor, working not only in tobacco fields but also as artisans, mechanics, and workers in the shops spawned by protoindustrialization in the state's urban areas, and serve as free laborers on the new grain and truck farms in some rural areas at a lower cost than slaves. Delaware sought to reduce the amount of slave labor within its borders, but not necessarily the amount of black labor. Freeing slaves relieved masters of their year-round cradle-to-grave responsibilities and allowed employers to hire healthy black workers as needed. Delaware's gradual shift to free labor eliminated both the capital investment and high fixed costs associated with slave labor.[63] But Delaware's option was not one that the much blacker states of Maryland and Virginia were likely to choose.

In Maryland, where nearly one-third of the population were slaves and where slavery remained central to the early national-era economy, the gradual and voluntary course of private manumission charted by Delaware nevertheless proved strikingly popular. Maryland had long allowed manumission by deed, and in 1790 the legislative also approved manumission by will.[64] With liberal manumission laws firmly in place and the area's rural tobacco economy in comparative decline, thousands of slaves were freed in Maryland during the early national era. Manumission developed a momentum of its own. As one observer later noted, the "history" of manumission in Maryland revealed that "manumission begets manumission" and "that they increase even in a geometrical proportion."[65] Moreover, delayed emancipation agreements similar to those used in Delaware quickly emerged on a widespread basis, as Maryland masters also allowed slaves to buy their freedom through a variable number of years of faithful and productive service.[66]

Ironically, the practice of delayed manumission, which over time helped slow the growth of the slave population in Maryland, actually stimulated the expansion of slavery in the city of Baltimore during the republic's first two decades. As delayed emancipations grew increasingly common in rural Maryland, an entirely new commodity appeared in the Maryland labor market: the so-called term slave. Term slaves were bought and sold in the labor market at prices considerably lower than those of a life slave of similar age, health, and labor skills. These discount prices made term slaves affordable to merchants, master craftsmen, and industrialists as well as "gentlemen" looking for house servants, who usually found the price of life slaves prohibitive. Hence many rural masters granted delayed manumissions to slaves whose labor they no longer needed and then sold these term slaves to Baltimore buyers as a way of minimizing their financial loss.[67] In 1790, only 1,200 slaves lived in Baltimore, but as delayed manumissions grew common in rural areas and the related purchases

of term slaves increased, the city's slave population grew to 2,800 in 1800 and then to 4,700 in 1810. Never again was Baltimore home to as great a number of slaves as it was in 1810, because many term slaves became free blacks over time.[68] Ultimately, growing numbers of manumissions, whether immediate or gradual, fostered the dramatic growth of Maryland's free black population during the republic's early years. In 1790, Maryland's free blacks accounted for 8,000 of the state's overall black population of 111,000 (roughly 7 percent). By 1820, almost 40,000 free blacks called Maryland home (27 percent of the state's total black population).[69]

But the key to Maryland's rapidly changing slave demography was its increasingly active role as an exporter in the emerging domestic slave trade. Maryland had banned the importation of slaves for sale by land or water in 1783, largely because the state had little need for more slaves. A few years later, Maryland considered a Delaware-like ban on the export of slaves for sale. Buoyed by their success in banning the slave trade altogether in Delaware, Quakers urged the 1789 Maryland legislature to prohibit the export of slaves from the state by sale; their efforts failed when a legislative majority insisted that such a ban would not only interfere with the property rights of slaveholders but also prevent the "desirable" exodus of slaves through sale to a "warmer and more congenial climate." Two years later, another Quaker-led effort to block slave exports failed.[70]

Over time, Maryland developed an identity as a slave-exporting state. Indeed, many Maryland planters routinely sold off a portion of their slaves, both to raise ready cash and to eliminate the expense of maintaining unneeded labor. One such planter, Edward Lloyd, the Eastern Shore's largest slaveholder, annually sold off a portion of his workforce, usually teenage males, in an effort to reduce redundant labor on his plantation.[71] Buyers came from all over, but especially from the lower South, to shop for slaves in the active Maryland market. South Carolina planter John Springs, seeking to stock his expanding Upcountry plantation with slaves and looking to resell slaves to other buyers in the lower South market, made frequent trips to Maryland to purchase slaves. Springs later noted that he usually made handsome profits on slaves he resold. On the whole, white Marylanders of the era viewed the slave trade as "an almost universal resource to raise money."[72] And raise money they did. According to Michael Tadman's estimates, Maryland exported more than twenty-two thousand slaves to other states through the domestic slave trade between 1790 and 1800, a number equal to roughly one-fifth of its total slave population.[73]

Together with restrictions on slave imports and an active pace of manumissions, this aggressive exporting strategy dramatically slowed the growth of Maryland's slave population. In absolute terms, the state's slave population increased by only 4,000, from 103,000 to 107,000 in the years from 1790 to 1820. More importantly, as Maryland continued its aggressive program of slave exporting, the proportion of slaves in Maryland's total population shrank from 32 percent in 1790 to only 19 percent in 1820.[74] In just three decades, Maryland had moved from being a state

as dependent on slave labor as Georgia to one whose proportion of slaves more closely resembled that of Kentucky.[75]

White Virginians who yearned for a whiter Virginia envied Maryland's success but were unable to imitate it. In 1790, the proportion of slaves in Virginia's total population, 39 percent, was the highest in the upper South, and the absolute number of slaves was the highest in the nation. Yet many, arguably even most, whites thought slavery an "evil" of some sort, though they often disagreed over its proper remedy or could see no practical remedy at all. But they did not, on the whole, deny the evil. However serious post-Revolutionary Virginians were about phasing slavery out altogether, a fairly broad consensus existed that the state should not become any more deeply immersed in slaves than it already was, and that the state's social and economic future lay in reducing the proportion of slaves in the state while protecting the value of existing slave property. Such an approach required a delicate balancing act, and sharp disagreements existed among white Virginians over questions of how far and how fast the state should move away from its dependence on slavery. Some white Virginians, particularly in the state's Southside region, saw no need to move away from slavery at all.

Led by Thomas Jefferson, a post-Revolutionary chorus of slavery's critics tried to map a course that would lead the Old Dominion away from its reliance on slavery, while cautioning that any such movement should be measured and gradual. During the early 1780s, Jefferson crafted a plan of post-nati emancipation, calling for the granting of freedom to all slaves born after December 31, 1800. Jefferson kept his gradual emancipation proposal under wraps until it was published, initially over his objection, as an appendix to the *Notes on the State of Virginia* three years later.[76] By the time Jefferson wrote *Notes*, he had already developed the views on the slavery question that he would hold, with relatively minor modifications, until his death in 1826. He seldom took actions based on those views, but he articulated them privately (usually only when asked) with considerable consistency. Jefferson was convinced that slavery was an evil that must be eliminated. But he believed that it must be eliminated gradually and in an orderly fashion, guided by the very planter elite whose members would have to sacrifice their wealth and patrimony in the process. He realized that public opinion was not ready for a general emancipation, however gradual, and that the political price for advocating it would be higher than he was willing to pay. A general emancipation in Virginia, where the "disease…is incorporated with the system," Jefferson reasoned, called not only for "time, patience and perseverance" but also for a "revolution in public opinion." Jefferson cautioned advocates of emancipation to allow for the "snail-paced gait" at which the "advance of new ideas" would capture "the public mind."[77] But Jefferson also warned slaveholders reluctant to support any plan of emancipation that they must initiate the process sooner rather than later if they expected to control it. "Nothing is written more certainly in the book of fate than that these people are to be free," Jefferson declared. "The South needs to act soon if it is still in our power to direct the process of emancipation peaceably" and "in slow degree."[78]

Jefferson conceded that any program of emancipation, not matter how gradual, stood no chance of gaining popular acceptance unless it was coupled with a plan for removal. He was convinced that "deep rooted prejudices entertained by whites" coupled with "ten thousand recollections, by the blacks, of the injuries they have sustained" would, in the absence of a colonization program, inevitably "produce convulsions which will probably never end but in the extermination of one or the other race." The place of black freedom, Jefferson contended, could not be the former place of slavery. "[I]f a slave can have a country in this world," Jefferson asserted, "it must be any other in preference to that in which he is born to live and labour for another."[79] In Jefferson's mind, because peaceful coexistence of the races remained impossible, the emancipation of slaves also meant a removal of free blacks to another location; so, as the final element of his program, Jefferson counseled patience to champions of gradual emancipation and colonization.[80]

In 1785, two years after Jefferson had drafted his plan for gradual emancipation and colonization but more than a year before it was published, a group of Virginians with an outlook far different from Jefferson's went public with a call to end slavery. The state's Methodists petitioned the Virginia legislature for a gradual emancipation of slaves, arguing that liberty was the birthright of "every rational creature without exception" and that slavery represented a system of "oppression" even more onerous than the slavery Great Britain had tried to impose on the colonies prior to the Revolution. These Methodist petitions, which included no call for colonization or removal, argued that slavery led to a "deep debasement" that "incapacitates" the human mind for the "Reception of the noble and enlarged principles of the Gospel."[81] In a bold gambit to advance their cause, religious leaders tried to persuade George Washington to sign the petition. Daniel Roberdeau, a former member of the Continental Congress and an evangelical Presbyterian, arranged a meeting in Alexandria between Washington and two leading Methodist evangelists, Thomas Coke and Francis Asbury. According to Coke and Asbury, Washington expressed sympathy for the goal of gradual emancipation but declined to sign the petition, vowing instead to make his sentiments known by letter should the legislature begin serious deliberation of the issue.[82] Washington might follow, the Methodists thought, but he would not lead. In all likelihood, Washington was honest about his general desire for gradual emancipation but dissembled about his willingness to speak publicly on its behalf; the Mount Vernon master almost certainly reasoned that the legislature would table the petition immediately and thus release him from any obligation to comment publicly on the matter.

The Methodist petitions sparked their opponents to generate a number of proslavery petitions from Southside Virginia.[83] These petitions expressed vintage republican concern about dangerous and disorderly banditti (free blacks) whom they deemed unfit for citizenship, and associated criticism of slavery with a British plot to undermine the Americans' newfound independence. One Amelia County petition denounced the "Horrors of all the Rapes, Murders and Outrages" against white

society at large that would result from the emancipation of "a vast Multitude of unprincipled, unpropertied, revengeful, and remorseless Banditti."[84] Another petition from Lunenburg County attacked emancipation as a "wanton" assault on the very property rights that undergirded a republican social order. The Lunenburg petitioners admitted that they had expected such an attack on their rights by the British but expressed shock and dismay that any white Virginian would advocate a measure (emancipation) that would lead the "Country to inevitable ruin."[85] Aware that the evangelicals' petitions seeking emancipation advanced a Christian critique of slavery, the proslavery petitions from Southside countered with biblical arguments of their own. A petition from Brunswick County joined several others in pointing to Old Testament examples of slavery and claiming that Jesus and his apostles "came into the World and past [*sic*] out of it again" leaving ancient slavery as they had found it.[86] Collectively, these petitions expressed candid and unsentimental expectations that slaves were an angry and dissatisfied lot who would strike back at their oppressors with remorseless revenge if given the opportunity.

Although the Virginia House of Delegates rejected the Methodist petitions praying for a general emancipation unanimously, measures short of a full-scale gradual emancipation retained popularity in Revolutionary Virginia. Following the ideals rather than the practices of its leading Revolutionary statesmen, Virginia led the post-Revolutionary rush to establish laws facilitating private manumission, despite intense opposition from Virginia slaveholders who thought the British had already done more than enough to undermine slavery in the state. In 1782, Virginia eliminated all statutory restrictions on voluntary manumission by masters. The new law gave masters full power to emancipate individual slaves by "written instrument," whether by will or manumission agreement, without any legislative or judicial involvement. The next year, the Virginia Assembly also boosted the state's free black population when it rewarded slaves who had served in the Continental Army with freedom in return for their contributions "toward the establishment of American liberty and independence."[87] The liberalization of the state's manumission laws prompted a doubling of the Old Dominion's free black population within two years, a sixfold increase over the next eighteen years, and a tenfold increase over the next twenty-eight years. As the free black population of Virginia rose from a mere twenty-eight hundred in 1780 to more than thirty thousand by 1810, however, conservative slaveholders from Virginia's Southside complained that the increase would bring "final Ruin" to the state. Southside slaveholders insisted that the liberal manumission laws of 1782 had produced a burgeoning free black population "productive of a very great and growing evil," and urged the legislature to reassert direct control over the manumission process rather than leaving the question up to individual masters. But the legislature rejected such appeals by decisive margins throughout the 1780s, and unrestricted private manumission remained the policy of Virginia.[88] Virginia's continued interest in promoting individual manumission promoted the state's larger goal of limiting the growth of its slave population. But as a means of

phasing slavery out in Virginia, private manumission represented the equivalent of emptying Chesapeake Bay with a tin cup.

Virginia authorities had taken decisive measures to end its participation in the African slave trade in 1778, in large part because many Virginia whites felt the state already had more slaves than it needed. Indeed, part of Jefferson's indictment of the British for "forcing" the slave trade on reluctant Americans in his original draft of the Declaration of Independence grew out of colonial Virginia's frustration at its inability to secure imperial approval for ending the importation of slaves before the Revolution. The 1778 ban on the importation of slaves remained in effect with only minor modifications for nearly a quarter century. It not only prohibited the foreign slave trade but also banned the importation of slaves from other states for sale or hire. As an exception to the latter prohibition on domestic imports, the law allowed slaveholders planning to settle permanently in Virginia to bring their slaves with them as long as masters registered their slaves in their county of residence and took an oath pledging that these slaves would not be sold.[89] The Virginia bans on the importation of slaves, both foreign and domestic, arose, as did later ones in other states, as part a calculated effort to keep the state from becoming too black and to protect the market value of existing slave property.

Like their counterparts in Maryland, white Virginians participated actively in the domestic slave trade as sellers of slaves to out-of-state buyers. Between 1790 and 1800, Virginia exported more than twenty-two thousand slaves, a greater number than any other slaveholding state, though a much lower percentage of its total slave population than Maryland exported during the same decade. Together, Virginia's determination to restrict the importation of slaves, its success in making individual manumission a simple process, and its active participation in exporting slaves to other states all worked toward slowing the growth of slavery in the state and perhaps slowly eroding the importance of slavery to the Virginia economy, but they did so without taking any decisive steps toward a general plan of gradual emancipation. At the turn of the eighteenth century, Virginia seemed to embrace choice as its answer to the slavery question. Old Dominion slaveholders could choose to sell, free, or keep their slaves as they saw fit.

In the older slaveholding areas of the Chesapeake region, proponents of a slaveless or less slave-oriented society worked around the institution's margins in an effort to keep open prospects for emancipation, on whatever scale and at whatever pace. At the very least, they attempted to keep slavery from growing stronger until some broadly acceptable and affordable plan for gradual emancipation could be formulated. But in areas west of the Appalachians, where whites were proportionately many and slaves, by any measure, were few, opponents of slavery had an opportunity to attack the institution before it had a chance to consolidate its hold on the region. Indeed, as settlers flowed from Virginia, Maryland, North Carolina, and other

nearby states across the mountains into Kentucky and Tennessee during the 1780s and 1790s, whites took their various attitudes toward slavery (and in some cases their slaves) with them into a new and more fluid environment. Sensing that slavery had a foothold but not a stranglehold on the trans-Appalachian upper South, evangelical Christian leaders voiced sharp criticisms of slavery in these areas in an effort to slow the institution's growth there.[90]

In post-Revolutionary Kentucky, land-hungry planters and farmers from Virginia, and to a lesser extent Maryland and North Carolina, wrested the territory away from Daniel Boone's hunter generation of settlers and their Native American nemeses. As part of this process, a gaggle of Virginia-born planters established a foothold for slavery in the Bluegrass region around Lexington.[91] At virtually the same time, an array of evangelicals, also chiefly migrants from the Old Dominion, mounted an effort to prevent slavery from taking permanent root in Kentucky.[92] Presbyterian minister David Rice, a slaveholder who observed the Kentucky land grab firsthand, took the lead in launching the attack on slavery. As "creatures of God," he insisted, "we are, with respect to liberty, all equal." Slavery, Rice contended, "produces idleness" and destroyed the work ethic by reducing labor from a virtue to a "disgrace." Moreover, slavery tended "to sap the foundations" of moral and political virtue and undermined the very republican character on which the American experiment in self-government depended. The pastor concluded that only if slaveholding states resolved "unconditionally to put an end to slavery" could a collapse of the new republican order be averted.[93]

Neither Rice nor the Baptist and Methodist evangelicals who echoed his sentiments actually expected an immediate emancipation of slaves in Kentucky, where just over one-fifth of all households owned slaves in 1790, but they did want an immediate acknowledgment of the problem and progress toward a remedy. To assist in such an effort, evangelical critics of slavery developed an agenda for the 1792 state constitutional convention. They hoped to slow, if not block altogether, the introduction of new slaves into Kentucky, to protect the right of masters to manumit their own slaves without legislative approval and, most importantly, to prevent the convention from adopting any constitutional provision that would prevent future legislatures from passing a general emancipation law.[94]

Other Kentuckians had other ideas for handling the issue of slavery at the convention. Planters from the Bluegrass region, the chief outpost of staple culture in Kentucky, planned to use the convention to secure property rights in land and slaves and to establish a stable, even conservative, republican government for Kentucky. John Breckinridge, a slaveholding Virginian who migrated to Kentucky in the early 1790s and later emerged as a prominent Bluegrass politician, admitted before the convention began that he was "somewhat afraid of the Kentucky politicians with respect to negroes."[95] Worried that the evangelicals and their supporters might try to strike against slavery, the Bluegrass faction wanted a constitutional provision guaranteeing that the legislature could not free slaves without their masters' consent and without providing direct monetary compensation to slaveholders.[96]

In the larger political context, the Kentucky constitutional convention of 1792 reflected the ongoing contest between farmers and squatters who constituted the "popular" or radical faction in state politics and the emerging Kentucky gentry, patterned on the Virginia model, who sought robust checks on the potential excesses of popular democracy. Pre-convention electioneering centered on a dialogue between the popular and gentry positions on various issues, of which slavery was one. Once delegates were elected, Rice and other antislavery evangelical ministers accounted for seven of the forty-two delegates, and they used the convention as a forum to critique slavery.[97] In his convention speeches, Rice again highlighted the debilitating impact of slavery on white work habits and raised questions about internal security. In a slave society, Rice maintained, promising young men of talent and standing often expected to inherit "an independent fortune consisting in land and slaves" and thus succumbed to the temptations of "pleasure and dissipation." But if slavery led heirs of planters astray, its tendency to undermine the work ethic (and indeed the very definition of work) throughout every class of white society troubled the Presbyterian pastor more profoundly. Where "slavery becomes common, industry sinks into disgrace," Rice argued. "To labour, is to slave: to work, is to work like a Negroe." Expressing concern about the threat of slave insurrection, Rice argued that chattel bondage placed every slave in "a state of war with his master." From the slave's perspective, this "war" was both "unprovoked" and "properly defensive," but it was nonetheless "a perpetual war." Unless plans were laid for ending slavery, this undeclared state of war would one day erupt into open conflict, as it recently had in the West Indies, where insurrection wrote the "melancholy effects of this wretched policy [slavery]" with "the blood of thousands." Rice concluded his unsparing critique of slavery with an appeal to Christian morality. "It is quite evident that Slavery is contrary to the spirit and genius of the Christian religion," Rice declared. "It is contrary to that excellent precept laid down by the divine author of the Christian institution…[that] *Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them*."[98]

Yet even so bold a critic of slavery as Rice argued for a gradual and prudent policy of emancipation. Rice compared the "evil" of slavery to "a tree that has long been planted, it has been growing many years, it has taken deep root, its trunk is large, and its branches extended wide; should it be cut down suddenly, it might crush all that grew near it; should it be violently eradicated, it might tear up the ground on which it grows, and produce fatal effects." While "slaves have a just claim to be freed instantly," Rice reasoned, their treatment as slaves had "rendered them incapable" of "enjoying" or "using" their freedom responsibly. Thus Rice recommended empowering the Kentucky legislature to "prevent the importation of any more slaves" and to adopt an "expedient" a plan of post-nati emancipation combined with a system of "proper education" to train slaves destined for freedom to become "useful citizens."[99] When offering a specific program for emancipation, the pulpit firebrand Rice began to sound more and more like George Washington, that paragon of dignified reserve,

in wanting to eradicate slavery slowly, by "imperceptible degrees." But Rice at least did propose a plan of emancipation at a state constitutional convention.

At a convention where four out of every five delegates (as opposed to just over one in five households in the territory) owned slaves, slavery did not go undefended. Leading the opposition to gradual emancipation was George Nicholas, a member of an old Virginia family and a substantial slaveholder. Nicholas chose to make his case for giving slavery constitutional protection on the grounds of securing property rights. Nicholas claimed that he had never approved of slavery but warned that "the removing of it in a proper manner would be attended with great difficulties." A clause protecting property rights in slaves, the former Virginian argued, would prevent "one part of the community" from being "generous at the expense of the other part." Nicholas played on popular fears of racial amalgamation, predicting that a general emancipation would lead to widespread miscegenation and a general dilution of the white race.[100]

Nicholas, the chief architect of the conservative strategy, and his gentry allies had taken pains to present a series of resolutions at the convention that amounted to an informal draft of a constitution. One of the proposed clauses prohibited legislative emancipation and required that any emancipation plan include monetary compensation for slaveholders. Nicholas had known since well before the convention that protecting slavery depended on attracting the support of the large portion of the community who did not own slaves. To build such a coalition, he proved willing to compromise on questions of primary importance to the state's egalitarians. Long an advocate of freehold suffrage, Nicholas yielded to the democratic faction's insistence that equality meant white manhood suffrage, rationalizing his decision on the grounds that "the wealthy will nineteen times out of twenty be chosen" by the voters anyway. He also knew that such an accommodation with popular democracy would render the egalitarian faction more amenable to the constitutional protection of slavery. The gentry faction's resolutions included other means of checking popular rule, such as life tenure for judges and an indirectly elected state senate, but the conservative concession on a property requirement for voting arguably garnered substantial support for the protection of slavery among some of the convention's more egalitarian delegates, many of whom wanted a democratic constitution but did not share Rice's moral disdain for slavery.[101]

The issue finally came to a head on April 18, 1792, when Sam Taylor, a delegate from Mercer County, moved to deny slavery any constitutional protection and leave all questions related to the institution up to future legislatures by removing Article IX, which included all the draft provisions regarding slavery, from the state constitution. By a vote of twenty-six to sixteen, delegates voted against Taylor's motion. Rice had resigned from the convention before the key vote on slavery, but six of the sixteen votes in favor of removing the clause came from the remaining clergy (three Baptist, two Presbyterian, and one Methodist), and an additional six minority votes came from active Presbyterian laymen. Twelve of the sixteen votes against providing

constitutional safeguards for slavery came from slaveholders, but all of the twenty-six votes in favor of constitutional protection of the master's right to hold slaves came from slaveholders.[102]

The convention's critics of slavery failed to prevent the convention from including a guarantee against legislative emancipation into the state's first constitution, though the constitution allowed private manumission. On the question of the slave trade, however, results were mixed. The 1792 constitution banned the importation of slaves from foreign countries and critics almost secured a ban on the interstate slave trade as well. Hubbard Taylor, a defender of Bluegrass interests, admitted that he and several other delegates who voted to protect slavery would have supported an absolute ban on the importation of slaves and would have been willing to set a date certain for the prohibition had it not been for the influence of George Nicholas, a determined opponent of such a ban.[103] Nicholas believed that slaveholders were precisely the kind of "valuable immigrants" the state needed, and that an absolute ban on the importation of slaves would dissuade them from coming to Kentucky. William Lewis, another member of the Bluegrass gentry, agreed, calling a ban on the importation of domestic slaves a "wretched piece of policy." Slaveholders, Lewis claimed, were the "most desirable emigrants, not only on account of the wealth they introduce" but also for the "character" they brought to the state.[104] In the face of such opposition, the convention decided against a constitutional ban on slave imports, but it did grant the legislature the authority to ban the importation of slaves as merchandise if they chose to do so. In its final form, Kentucky's first constitution shied away from any approach toward gradual emancipation except private manumission, embraced the importation of slaves by settlers, and generally placed the slaveholders in control of the future of slavery in the state without actually endorsing slavery as a "good."[105]

Despite their defeat at the 1792 convention, critics of slavery in Kentucky continued undeterred in their efforts to limit slavery's influence. In 1794, the Transylvania Presbytery, which embraced the entire state of Kentucky, instructed all slaveholders to prepare their slaves for the eventual "enjoyment of freedom." But while this official assemblage of Kentucky Presbyterians viewed "with deepest concern" all "vestiges of slavery which may exist in our country," it declined to exclude slaveholders from communion.[106] Though "fully convinced of the great evil of slavery," the Transylvania Presbytery concluded that "the final remedy" for the evil belonged only to "the civil power." And the presbytery again admitted that it did "not think they have sufficient authority from the word of God to make it [slaveholding] a term of church communion." Thus the presbytery left "it to the conscience of the brethren to act as they think proper, earnestly recommending to the people…to emancipate such of their slaves as they may think fit subjects for liberty." Going further, the Transylvania Presbytery sought to render more and more slaves likely candidates for manumission by urging communicants to "take every possible measure by teaching their young slaves to read" and to "give them such instruction…to prepare them for

the enjoyment of liberty." The presbytery remained hopeful that emancipation "will be accomplished as soon as the nature of things admit."[107]

Animated primarily by the 1792 Kentucky constitution's undemocratic features, including an indirectly elected upper house and the life tenure of judges, a movement emerged to reform the 1792 constitution almost as soon as it took effect. Unsurprisingly, evangelical critics of slavery quickly joined the reform movement.[108] These critics argued that slavery "ought to be abolished as soon as equity and the safety of the state admit."[109] Convinced by continued evangelical rumblings that the issue of slavery might be rejoined when a convention for constitutional reform was called in 1799, Kentucky slaveholders prepared for the election of delegates. John Breckinridge, an expatriate member of the Virginia gentry and an opponent of a second convention, initially offered an emphatic defense of slavery grounded in the idea of property rights. What, Breckinridge demanded to know, "is the difference whether I am robbed of my horse by a highwayman or of my slave by a set of people called Convention"?[110] But George Nicholas, the wily architect of the first Kentucky constitution, advised Breckinridge to take a more conciliatory stance. Nicholas admitted that he opposed a second convention, but he warned Breckinridge that "opposition to it will only increase the fever, and render the opposers personally obnoxious."[111] Conservatives knew that they must again fashion a rationale for the constitutional protection of slavery that appealed to nonslaveholders as well as slaveholders, to reformers as well as conservatives. Seeking to win over all landowners, Breckinridge argued that "if they [opponents of slavery] can by one experiment emancipate our slaves; the same principle…will enable them at a second experiment to extinguish our land titles."[112] In a society where controversy and litigation over the legitimacy of land titles flourished as readily as bluegrass, charges that the critics of slavery had made common cause with those seeking to vacate any number of land titles generated considerable concern among landowners.

One reform candidate not associated with the evangelicals resented the effort to equate criticism of slavery with a threat to property titles generally. Henry Clay, an outspoken supporter of constitutional reform whose early legal career in Lexington revolved around land disputes, replied to Breckinridge's argument. Clay charged that the efforts of conservative slaveholders to link gradual emancipation with the revocation of land titles were either misguided or disingenuous attempts to thwart all reforms by portraying reformers as enemies of property.[113] In an appeal to the voters of Fayette County, the twenty-one-year-old Clay announced his support of removing the constitutional protection from slavery so that a future legislature could pass a plan of gradual emancipation without first amending the state constitution. "All America acknowledges the existence of slavery as an evil," Clay asserted, one that not only deprived the slave of freedom but also "Injures the master" by "laying waste his lands" and "enabling him to live indolently."[114]

Once again, Nicholas, this time assisted by Breckinridge, built a coalition to defend the constitutional protection for slavery by making a concession to

the reform faction. Conservatives agreed to support the direct election of state senators, a measure they had long opposed but a major goal of reformers. In the pre-convention canvass, conservatives organized slates of candidates around the principles of direct election of senators and the preservation of a constitutional prohibition on legislative emancipation. Thus the question of removing the protection of slavery was widely debated during the canvass. The results immediately reassured slaveholders and revealed the underlying weakness of emancipation sentiment in Kentucky. Only four outright emancipationists won election to the second convention. Moreover, representation of the antislavery clergy declined from the 1792 convention. Only three ministers served as delegates in 1799, and one of those invoked the Bible in defense of slavery rather than in criticism. In final form, the 1799 constitution preserved the protection of slave property, again prohibiting the emancipation of slaves without the permission of their owners, but also again leaving masters free to manumit slaves on their own authority.[115]

While the Nicholas-Breckinridge strategy of protecting slavery by making concessions to democratic impulses in Kentucky doubtless strengthened the hand of slavery's defenders at the convention, the weakness of emancipation sentiment at Kentucky's 1799 convention also grew from the increased presence of slavery in the state. The proportion of Kentucky households owning slaves had increased from 22 percent in 1790 to just over 25 percent in 1800 and the absolute number of slaves in the state had increased from under fifteen thousand to more than forty thousand, even though slaves as a proportion of the total Kentucky population remained virtually unchanged. Bluegrass planters were learning that they could grow hemp for export profitably, and in Bourbon County, planters learned that their bountiful corn crops made a fine whisky when distilled. These products quickly became new Kentucky staples and heightened the commonwealth's interest in slavery, if only for a time.[116]

Defeated again at the 1799 convention, critics of slavery in Kentucky retreated, at least temporarily, from the political realm. By 1808, the Methodists had softened their stance against slavery in an effort to evangelize slaves. Presbyterians in Kentucky generally followed suit. Kentucky Baptists split by local association. One Baptist association in Kentucky declared that it was "improper for ministers, churches, or Associations to meddle with emancipation from slavery or any other political subject."[117] But in the congregational setting, some Baptist leaders remained outspoken in their opposition. Baptist pastor David Barrow attacked slavery as "odious to all true republicans." One Kentucky Baptist association then expelled Barrow for "preaching the doctrine of emancipation to the harm of the brotherhood." In 1807, Barrow and other Baptists who agreed with his position on slavery organized a separate association, subtitled "Friends of Humanity," but this association never attracted more than three hundred of Kentucky's seventeen thousand Baptists. Barrow and his supporters organized the Kentucky Abolition Society in 1808, and it served as the loudest voice against slavery in the commonwealth for the next fifteen years, but its practical influence was minimal.[118]

A bit further south, in territorial Tennessee, early criticism of slavery emanated from scattered Quaker and Presbyterian churches and eventually took deep root in the hills and hollows of east Tennessee, where the local economy never depended heavily on slave labor.[119] North Carolina's terms for ceding the Tennessee territory to the Union required that slavery be allowed during the territorial phase. Yet the early settlers of Tennessee migrated not from the Chesapeake hearth but from the much whiter Piedmont regions of North and South Carolina and the Holston Valley in southwestern Virginia, and fewer than four thousand slaves lived in the territory in 1790. Local tradition holds that the state's first constitutional convention in 1796 received but ignored petitions bearing more than two thousand signatures urging that slavery be banned from Tennessee after 1864, though no official record of these petitions or the convention's handling of them has survived.[120] The state constitution produced by the convention made no general statement concerning slavery as a matter of policy but imposed a tax on slaves, suggesting that Tennessee's founders expected the institution to exist there. In 1797, slavery critic Thomas Embree, a Quaker from the Knoxville area, organized antislavery societies in two east Tennessee counties. Embree pledged these societies to the goal of using "legal means" to promote the cause of emancipation. Embree proposed liberal manumission and a program of education for slaves to prepare them for eventual emancipation, but his efforts attracted only limited support.[121]

The practice of private manumission appeared common in early Tennessee, but pleas for the state to adopt liberal manumission laws were not entirely successful. From its admission as a state, Tennessee required legislative approval of private manumissions. Complaining that it annually considered too many petitions for private emancipation, the 1801 legislature turned the question of manumission over to the county courts. The law required masters seeking to manumit slaves to explain their motives and intentions to the court and give a bond adequate to cover any expenses the county might incur for care of the ex-slave. Approval of manumission required agreement of six of the nine county court justices. Arguably, this law did little to make manumission more difficult—appearing before the county court was probably no more cumbersome than petitioning the legislature—but the new law did make manumission decisions dependent on the general tenor of county opinion. Evidence suggests, however, that in early national Tennessee, the chief reservation about manumission was the fear that the newly freed blacks would impose a financial burden on local governments. If that objection could be overcome, approval came readily.[122]

By the early 1800s, even east Tennessee critics of slavery such as Embree agreed that gradual emancipation constituted "the only safe and practical method of abolition."[123] Moreover, the negotiation of successful treaties with the Cherokees in 1805 and 1806 helped facilitate the settlement of the more fertile region of middle Tennessee during the first decade of the nineteenth century. The opening of this area to widespread settlement and Tennessee's essentially unregulated participation in the interstate slave trade introduced more and more slaves into the state, though it

remained overwhelmingly white in 1810. On balance, Tennessee's connections with the lower South were strong enough that its early leaders appeared more concerned about making sure that Tennessee acquired enough slaves than with finding a way to phase out slavery. Thus Tennessee's early opponents of slavery were easily brushed aside by the state's emerging political leaders. Still, criticism of slavery in Tennessee never entirely abated. Retaining a stronghold in the eastern portion of the state, critics of slavery in Tennessee were heard if not heeded throughout the antebellum era.[124]

In the final analysis, the early evangelical campaign against slavery in the trans-Appalachian South made scant headway. It failed to convince political leaders in either Kentucky or Tennessee to adopt a plan for gradual emancipation or ban the importation of more slaves. For the long term, it left in its wake not a thriving anti-slavery movement but rather a scattered handful of manumission or abolition societies that made more noise than difference over the coming decades. Arguably the primary achievement of the evangelical movement against slavery lay in extracting concessions from the area's reluctant defenders of slavery that the institution flourished as an evil that defied remedy rather than as a positive good to society. George Nicholas and John Breckinridge could agree with Henry Clay and even David Rice and David Barrow that slavery was an evil. But such ideological concessions did little to hasten slavery's demise and doubtless proved of little solace to the region's tens of thousands of slaves. And if there was much common ground for identifying the evil, there seemed virtually none on the question of finding a remedy. But the upper South's continued rhetorical adherence to the idea that slavery was a temporary evil made significant impressions on the minds of many northerners, who believed that southern leaders viewed slavery as an unfortunate and impermanent institution and were working patiently to eliminate it.[125]

During the 1790s, relatively unrestricted private manumissions by individual slaveholders remained almost the only active means for advancing the cause of emancipation in the upper South. Yet almost all whites in Virginia, regardless of their position on the future of slavery in the region, recognized that this method eroded slavery at a glacial pace if at all. Some of the Old Dominion's critics of slavery were dissatisfied with this pace and advocated alternative measures. James Madison quietly articulated a clear vision of how a program of gradual emancipation accompanied by colonization might nudge slavery toward ultimate extinction in Virginia. Like his friend Jefferson, Madison thought that blacks could never be fully "incorporated" into the white republic, not because of any innate black limitations but because "the prejudices of the Whites, prejudices proceeding principally from the difference of colour, must be considered permanent and insuperable." Thus, Madison argued, "some proper external receptacle" must be located where freed blacks could enjoy freedom and self-government apart from whites. Madison thought the solu-

tion to this problem lay in the creation of a large colony of free blacks in Africa. In a private memorandum written to a Philadelphia Quaker friend in 1789, Madison proposed the creation of a colony of ex-slaves in Africa as "the best hope yet presented of putting an end to the slavery in which at least 600,000 unhappy negroes are now involved." Madison believed that manumission without colonization was not only doomed to failure but also likely to spawn a searing white backlash against the very idea of emancipation. Virginia's liberal manumission law had helped foster the growth of the Old Dominion's free black population during the 1780s, and based on his observations of that population, Madison concluded that free blacks retained "the vices and habits of slaves." Such perceptions of free black behavior, Madison thought, would only discourage whites from further support of gradual emancipation. Moreover, the inevitable tensions "inspired by their former relation of oppressors and oppressed" prevented free blacks and whites from cooperating in a biracial republic. Such an experiment could only end in dispute and violence. For Madison, as for Jefferson, the integration of free blacks as citizens into a previously white republic seemed impossible.[126]

During the 1790s, another friend of Jefferson, St. George Tucker, a young professor of law at William and Mary, also laid out a plan for gradual emancipation. Tucker shared Jefferson's interest in gradual and timely emancipation, and in 1795 he began preparation of a formal proposal for general emancipation that he planned to submit to the Virginia legislature.[127] "The introduction of slavery into this country," Tucker declared, "is at this day considered among its greatest misfortunes by a very great majority" of Virginians. Though often "reproached for an evil," Virginians, Tucker insisted, could not have "avoided" slavery any more than "hereditary gout or leprosy." But while exonerating the "present generation" of Virginians from any blame for slavery, Tucker also admitted that prospects for general emancipation were doubtful at best, since many whites in early national Virginia conceded that slavery was an evil but were nevertheless reluctant to give it up. "The malady has proceeded so far," Tucker acknowledged, "as to render it doubtful whether any specific plan can be found to eradicate, or even palliate the disease." Tucker saw this reluctance as the poisonous product of generations of slaveholding experience, arguing that the Virginia legislature had little appetite for general emancipation because "every white man felt himself born to tyrannize" while viewing blacks as "of no more importance than…brute cattle." In his heart of hearts, Tucker knew that overcoming such "deep-rooted, and innate prejudices" might lie "beyond the power of human nature to accomplish."[128]

Yet Tucker remained determined to try. He proposed a very gradual emancipation process, calling for the emancipation of all female slaves once they reached the age of thirty. All males born to these women before the age of thirty would remain slaves for life. By most estimates, Tucker's plan would have taken more than a century to free all slaves. But Tucker saw the agonizing slowness of the process as his proposal's greatest strength, since it guaranteed Virginia landholders access to a sizeable force

of male slave labor for generations to come and ensured than emancipation came at a low cost to taxpayers.[129]

Tucker's plan did not mandate the colonization of free blacks. Accepting as fact the common white belief in the "marked physical and intellectual inferiority" of blacks, Tucker hoped free blacks would leave Virginia of their own accord, but he thought that mandatory colonization was incompatible with the spirit of republicanism. In Tucker's proposal, free blacks who chose to remain in Virginia would be forced into a permanent system of forced labor, resembling indentured servitude or apprenticeship, and a permanent status as denizen (which Tucker called "civil slavery"), a status that allowed these recently freed ex-slaves even fewer rights than other free blacks held in Virginia. The avowed purpose of "civil slavery" was to push freed blacks toward leaving the state. Even though he spoke of it as a plan of colonization, Tucker's plan for removal was really one of voluntary migration. Predictably, this idea of dumping free blacks into other states was not well received in the recipient areas, and most Virginians recognized that other states could pass laws to frustrate Tucker's plan of voluntary migration. While Tucker's approach to encouraging migration relieved the state of the financial burden of paying for mandatory colonization, his critics rightly countered that his plan for "removal" failed to guarantee the departure of the blacks freed by his emancipation provisions.[130]

When Tucker finally submitted his detailed plan for general emancipation to the legislature in 1797, his worst fears about Virginia's unwillingness to address the slavery issue were realized. George K. Taylor, a Federalist delegate from Prince George County who had previously agreed to introduce Tucker's letter and plan to the House, reported to his friend that "such is the force of prejudice" against the idea that his efforts on Tucker's behalf would prove futile. Taylor's reckoning of legislative sentiment proved accurate. The lower house of the assembly voted overwhelmingly to table the proposal. In the upper house, a few senators defended Tucker's plan, but the senate as a whole politely ignored it.[131] A chagrined Tucker admitted that he had underestimated the opposition to general emancipation in Virginia. Only "actual suffering" by slaveholders, a concerned Tucker predicted, would open their ears to the "voice of reason."[132]

Just over two years later, white Virginians narrowly missed feeling such "actual suffering" when state and local authorities, acting on tips from slave informants, scotched an alleged insurrection plot of "extensive" proportions in Richmond, one designed to "fight the White People for freedom," in the late summer of 1800.[133]

CHAPTER TWO

REBELLION AND REACTION

Gabriel, a skilled slave blacksmith, possessed both the skills and the opportunity to organize an insurrection.[1] He was literate, and his master, Thomas Prosser, permitted him to travel regularly between Brookfield plantation in southern Henrico County and nearby Richmond, where his master also owned a town home. According to evidence developed by white authorities in the investigation and trials that followed the discovery of an insurrection plot in late summer of 1800, Gabriel's rebellion had been several months in the making, involved a number of skilled slave artisans in Richmond and surrounding areas, and attracted a following estimated by Gabriel himself at between five hundred and six hundred. Gabriel's motives, if any other than a willingness to take a risk in pursuit of freedom, remain a matter of conjecture.[2] A year earlier, in 1799, Gabriel and two other slaves plotted to steal a hog from a white tenant farmer in the Brookfield neighborhood. When the white tenant, a former overseer named Absalom Johnson, caught the three slaves in the act, Gabriel fought him, and bit off a piece of Johnson's ear during the fight. Gabriel's offense, assaulting a white man, was a serious one. It placed him in the hands of white authorities and at risk of hanging. The matter went before the slave court in Henrico County. The court found Gabriel guilty but, through benefit of clergy (which Virginia law allowed slaves as well as whites to claim), his sentence was reduced to thirty-nine lashes. His thumb was then branded, as was the common practice, to indicate to all that he was no longer entitled to invoke benefit of clergy.[3] This severe punishment for hog stealing and assaulting a white man, and the permanent stigma of a branded thumb, doubtless left Gabriel angry, and perhaps gave him special motivation to seek revenge against white authorities.

Over the next year, Gabriel recruited his lieutenants chiefly from the ranks of slave artisans and other skilled slaves he knew in and around southern Henrico County and the city of Richmond. For the most part, the skilled blacksmith showed a reluctance to recruit unskilled plantation slaves, who typically enjoyed less autonomy and freedom of movement than urban slaves and who were also less likely to be able to read and write. Gabriel apparently thought skilled, literate, urban slaves less likely to betray the plan than field slaves or house servants, who often worked more closely with their masters and had less familiarity with the world beyond their local community.[4] Using his ability to travel more or less freely to advance his cause, Gabriel attended church services, community barbecues, and "fish feasts" throughout the Richmond hinterland to recruit potential followers. According to slave trial testimony, after attending church services, Gabriel often invited "Some of the Negroe men to drink grog" with him. Once the men had assembled, he explained his plan to organize a rebellion and throw off the yoke of slavery. He would then ask those gathered who would be willing to fight for their freedom to stand. Gabriel had usually planted one or two committed followers in the crowd to stand first as an inducement for others to join.[5] Gabriel's lieutenants allegedly recruited slaves from as far away as Caroline County and Petersburg using similar techniques.[6]

Though knowledgeable about the Bible and fully aware of the growing influence of Christianity among slaves, Gabriel refrained from making overtly religious appeals for freedom fighters. He recognized the radical potential of Christianity and understood the importance of the exodus story and Old Testament prophecies concerning justice and the fulfillment of the poor. But while aware of the influence these messages had on blacks around Richmond, Gabriel never postured as a religious crusader or a messianic leader. He also refused offers of help from blacks professing expertise in African practices of voodoo and magic. A literate creole himself, Gabriel apparently mistrusted conjurers and healers and thought they encouraged false confidence where sound judgment and thoughtful commitment were needed.[7]

The evidence produced at the trials of the alleged conspirators suggested that the common denominator among slaves who agreed to participate was their hatred of slavery and their desire for freedom. Yet those slaves approached by Gabriel or his lieutenants who either declined to participate in the alleged revolt or who equivocated about their decision also hated slavery and desired freedom. They were less simply willing to take a risk on a plan that was unlikely to succeed and certain to ignite swift and brutal white retribution. Slaves with wives and children often argued that they had too much to lose from joining such a desperate if noble adventure. A few slaves suggested that they had no quarrel with their particular master and no desire to harm the master or his family. A large proportion of slaves contacted by the rebellion's organizers expressed a willingness to join the rebellion if it took place without prior discovery and appeared to have a reasonable chance for success. But they were unwilling to accept a leadership role in the rebellion or participate in the launching of the rebellion out of fear that if the plot failed, they would fall victim to ruthless white reprisals.[8]

Yet the slave artisans and other skilled slaves who loomed large among the alleged conspirators also had a lot to lose. As urban slaves, many of the accused slave rebels had enjoyed a measure of de facto freedom through the privileges granted and autonomy tolerated by their masters in return for their skill or the money their skills earned as well as from the informality of slave management practices in Richmond in 1800. Patrols were on duty irregularly; passes were seldom checked; little effort was made to identify forgeries. Many skilled slaves were hired out by their masters and reported in only irregularly. Traffic between town and countryside was the norm rather than the exception, so the movement of large numbers of slaves throughout the community, especially on a Saturday night, generated little concern among whites.[9]

The later white investigation revealed the alleged details of Gabriel's plot. The rebels would gather in the country, kill whites in the immediate neighborhood with primitive weapons they had forged, then proceed to Richmond, where they would be joined by the urban slave rebels. One group of rebels would start a fire in a warehouse district in the city's southeastern end. When whites hurried to this remote area of the city to put out the fire, another group of rebels would seize weapons from the state arsenal near the capitol and slaughter whites as they returned from the warehouse district. The rebels would then kidnap Governor Monroe and hold him prisoner.[10]

On the point of just how extensive the subsequent slaughter of whites would be, accounts varied. Some reports held that "whites were to be put to death indiscriminately," while others suggested that Gabriel intended to "slay the white males from the cradle upward" but allow the women to live.[11] One account even held that any white might be spared who pledged allegiance to the revolution and was willing to sacrifice one arm as proof of loyalty. Another report insisted that if whites were willing to grant the rebels their freedom and "hoist a white flag," then Gabriel and his fellow rebels would "dine and drink with the merchants of the city." But the most commonly repeated notion of how far the slaughter of whites would go simply held that all whites would be killed except Quakers, Methodists, and Frenchmen, whom Gabriel planned to spare because they had tried to help the slaves win freedom.[12]

The exact nature of Gabriel's plan for the rebellion will never be known. Before the putative rebels could start one fire or shed the first drop of white blood, the rebellion was betrayed by slave informants and thwarted by disruptive summer weather and prompt white intervention.[13] According to the account developed by white authorities through their slave informants, the insurrection was supposed to begin on the night of August 30, 1800, but failed to launch because of what one observer called "the most terrible thunderstorm, accompanied with an enormous rain…ever witnessed in this state."[14] The torrential rains flooded roads and washed out key bridges in the area, making travel and communication between Richmond and the surrounding countryside difficult. Only a few prospective rebels arrived at the proposed meeting place. Gabriel huddled with his closest associates and decided that their numbers were not large enough to proceed. Gabriel reluctantly sent out word

that the action would be postponed until the following evening (Sunday night), and urged would-be insurgents to meet at the tobacco house on Thomas Prosser's plantation. Gabriel's rebellion had been postponed by rain.[15]

As the hard rain fell that night, two slaves, Pharoah and Tom, who worked for Mosby Sheppard, a small farmer in the vicinity of Prosser's Brookfield plantation, quietly visited their master in the small "counting room" of his house. At this meeting, they revealed the insurrection plot to Sheppard. Pharoah, age twenty-seven, was a skilled scythe wielder whose services his master valued greatly during the wheat harvest. Pharoah had agreed to join the insurrection a few weeks earlier, but as the hour of reckoning neared, the husband and father of two apparently had second thoughts. Pharoah confided his information and his newfound doubts to Tom, a thirty-three-year-old slave on the Sheppard farm who often tended Sheppard's house when the master was away. Upon hearing of the plot, Tom suggested they both inform Sheppard. And so Sheppard learned that an insurrection was scheduled to begin that very night, and that "Prosser's Gabriel" was the "principal man" behind the plot.[16]

Skeptical, but knowing he could afford to take no chances with such information, Sheppard immediately braved the storm to report his newly acquired information to a neighbor, William Mosby. An alarmed Mosby quickly rode to the house of the local militia captain, planter William Austin. Austin immediately mobilized his own "troop of horse" and ordered others to do likewise. Despite the inclement weather, Austin and Mosby managed to put several small patrols in the field that evening, riding in and around Brookfield plantation, where Gabriel lived. The patrols found nothing. Mosby now doubted the reliability of Sheppard's slave informants. But when he returned home early the next morning, one of his own female house servants approached him and confirmed that an insurrectionary force of "300 or 400, some from town and some from country," were now set to rise on Sunday evening.[17] Only then did Mosby send word to Governor James Monroe in Richmond. Monroe decided to keep the report "secret" until he learned the "extent of it," in an effort to avoid an unnecessary public scare. But the governor nonetheless moved quickly to set the appropriate security measures in motion. He removed the public arms from the state capitol to the penitentiary, where they could be more easily defended, mobilized several regiments of the state militia for several weeks' duty, made preparations for a military defense of Richmond, and launched a relentless search for insurrectionists.[18]

Once authorities were alerted and the militia mobilized, the slave rebels either dispersed, fled, or went into hiding. Many were rounded up and arrested by patrols or the militia. On the day after Monroe ordered the mobilization, white patrols arrested six slaves, and over the coming days whites arrested so many that one Richmond slave complained, albeit with some exaggeration, that a "man can't go out of his house now but he is taken up to be hanged."[19] By September 9, roughly thirty alleged conspirators had been arrested, but whites still had only a partial

understanding of the nature and extent of the planned rebellion, nor had they captured all of the ringleaders. At this point, Governor Monroe ordered the trials to begin in order to make "further discoveries" about the plot. Doubtless Monroe also sought to both deter future slave unrest and reassure anxious whites through prompt retributive justice. Gabriel, however, had somehow escaped. He had made his way to a flatboat on the James River and floated downriver to Norfolk, where he was not arrested until two weeks later, after the state put a $300 price on his head.[20]

After the so-called trials that followed the arrests, white authorities executed twenty slaves in Richmond during the fall of 1800. Other putative rebels questioned during the investigation and trials gave additional information to white authorities. Even before Gabriel was captured, as the number of slave executions surged past ten and headed toward twenty, Governor Monroe wondered if the spree of executions had served their purpose and should end. He worried that an excessive number of executions might tarnish Virginia's reputation and bring sharp criticism down on his Republican Party at a time when it desperately needed to win pivotal northern support for Jefferson's presidential bid. On September 15, Monroe asked his political mentor, Jefferson, "When to arrest the hand of the Executioner." Given the number of alleged conspirators already in custody and the number of others not yet captured, a number that included Gabriel and at least two of his top lieutenants, Monroe estimated that the death toll could easily run higher than fifty, and perhaps even reach a hundred, if the executions proceeded unabated. Uncertain whether "mercy or severity" represented "the best policy in this case," Monroe was inclined to think that "when there is cause for doubt, it is best to incline toward the former."[21] When Jefferson's response arrived five days later, the Sage of Monticello supported the governor's inclination. Jefferson reported that "there is strong sentiment that there had been hanging enough." The "other states and the world at large," he cautioned Monroe, "will freely condemn us if we indulge a principle of revenge."[22] Privately, no less an intrepid defender of slaveholders' rights than John Randolph of Roanoke quipped with his usual sarcasm that the whole insurrection "had been quieted without any bloodshed, but that which has streamed from the scaffold."[23] Another critic anonymously questioned the use of the testimony offered by slave co-conspirators hoping to save their skin or gain their freedom by providing authorities with new "discoveries." This writer suggested that such a practice made it "impossible" to know where "this dreadful tragedy will terminate."[24]

Other white Virginians thought the swift, severe, and numerous punishments necessary. Once Fredericksburg resident John Minor learned the alleged scope of the plot, he lamented that the "delusion of the poor Blacks has been much more extensive" than was first believed. "My heart bleeds for them," Minor claimed, "and yet this degree of severity [of punishment] is necessary."[25] As arrests began in majority-black Petersburg, local whites there sent Monroe more draconian recommendations. "My opinion is that where there is any reason to believe that any person is concerned," former Petersburg state senator James Jones declared, "they ought immediately to be

hanged, quartered and hung up on trees on every road as a terror for the rest." Jones' parting advice was succinct: "Slay them all."[26]

Neither the trials nor the executions were likely to cease until Gabriel was found. In late September, he was captured in Norfolk and returned to Richmond in irons. On October 10, after his conviction, Gabriel was executed in Richmond in front of a considerable crowd. According to the trial record, Gabriel divulged little about the conspiracy.[27] Of course, that he said little about the planned revolt did not mean that others, who knew far less, were equally reluctant to comment as interrogations persisted. Thus almost all of the white understanding of the scare came from either black testimony given under fear and duress or from preconceived white notions about how and why such plots developed.

The Gabriel insurrection scare, coming during the middle of a heated political campaign, offered politicians a chance to turn the scare to partisan advantage. Monroe and the Republicans in power could do little more than try to handle the insurrection with firmness and dispatch, showing enough severity to convince the community it had deterred other slaves from attempting insurrection but not betraying so much concern about the threat of insurrection that their constituents remained nervous. As Monroe's exchange of letters with Jefferson revealed, this proved a fine calculation. Federalists, on the other hand, enjoyed more latitude with the issue, and, as Republican John Randolph complained, they "endeavoured to make an electioneering engine" of the scare. Federalists had long charged that the Republican affinity for the French and their ideas of "liberty, equality, and fraternity" threatened to spread Jacobinism and Saint-Domingue-style insurrection along the Atlantic coast. Suddenly they had an example to sustain their argument. Federalists in the towns of the Tidewater and along the fall line warned that the French cry of "liberty and equality had been infused into the minds of negroes," encouraging them to revolt. Republican polemicist James Callender countered these charges with even wilder charges of his own, claiming that Alexander Hamilton was the only white man in the United States capable of concocting such a malicious plot. In Philadelphia, the clever Republican press reminded voters that it was the English and not the French who had shown the greatest willingness to tamper with Virginia slaves.[28] But, setting hyperbolic partisan accusations aside, it was perhaps John Randolph of Roanoke who, after attending some of the interrogations of accused slaves, offered the most troubling assessment of Gabriel's rebellion. The aspiring insurrectionists, the Southside planter concluded, "manifested a sense of their rights, and contempt of danger, and a thirst for revenge which portend the most unhappy consequences." The slave rebels, Randolph mused, had "exhibited a spirit, which, if it becomes general, must deluge the Southern country in blood."[29]

The popular and official reactions to the Gabriel scare produced both a drive to make slavery safer and more secure through stricter laws controlling the

upper South's black population and a reexamination of the possibilities of colonizing free blacks outside the United States. By late fall, the elections were over, and the Republicans could claim a narrow win over the Federalists in the so-called Revolution of 1800. After considerable intraparty wrangling with Aaron Burr in the electoral college, Virginia's Jefferson became the first Republican president. With that goal achieved, Governor Monroe and other Virginia leaders looked to the approaching legislative session as a time to explain the scare to the public and to take action to reduce the danger of such plots in the future. Monroe knew that agreement on appropriate measures would come hard, and other Virginians, less prominent but arguably no less eloquent and perceptive than the governor, also hoped to influence the direction of the legislature's coming deliberations. But Monroe had the best pulpit from which to guide Virginia's debate, and as he prepared a report to present to the legislature in December, he had access to more information about the insurrection than any other white Virginian.

Monroe's report narrated the version of the insurrection that he wanted the public to know. It admitted that Gabriel's plot represented a threat of "considerable extent" to whites and conceded that Gabriel and his lieutenants had recruited a "large" number of followers who, if they had managed to catch Richmond off guard, might have left "the town in flames, its inhabitants butchered, and a scene of horror extending through the country." Monroe also worried that plans for an extensive insurrection "may occur again at any time, with more fatal consequences, unless suitable measures be taken to prevent it." Yet Monroe expressed confidence that the slave insurgents' success could not have lasted long. As soon as the militia mustered and counterattacked, Monroe argued, the whites' advantages in "Numbers, in the knowledge of the use of arms, and indeed in every other species of knowledge" would have quashed the insurrection after no more than a "moment" of success. But the resulting loss of white lives and property would have been significant. Given the seriousness of the Gabriel scare, Monroe urged the sitting legislature to consider taking whatever "prudent precautions" it could to prevent future insurrections and to ensure the quick failure of any rebellions that did occur.[30]

Monroe's message made plain what virtually all thinking white southerners knew in 1800, even if they seldom stated it bluntly: it was impossible to prevent insurrection scares or even insurrections from occurring on occasion. As long as slavery existed, Monroe conceded, whites could not "count with certainty" on slaves being docile and submissive. Unrest and rebellions on some scale and with some frequency were inevitable. But, like so many other white southerners, Monroe believed that the proper vigilance and appropriate public policy measures could "Secure the Country from any calamitous consequences" arising from these scares and revolts.[31] Vigilance, appropriate security measures, superior arms, and superior knowledge, whites believed, could quell any insurrection before it had advanced too far. The true danger of insurrection was that some whites would likely lose their lives and others would see their property destroyed (though none did in the case of Gabriel's aborted plot)

before the white militia prevailed. For the loved ones of those whites killed during the early stages of a rebellion, however, there would be little solace in the ultimate success of the white counterattack.

Yet the more fundamental threats to slavery arising from the danger of insurrection, Monroe recognized, were long-term. Too many scares and certainly too many actual rebellions might so frighten the white population that popular pressure would emerge to end slavery. Whites were willing to live with the chronic threat of slave terror, but only as long as it remained just that—a chronic threat that only seldom became an acute event. But white vulnerability to slave terror could ultimately undermine white support for slavery. Most slaveholders believed that such white anxiety represented the most serious internal threat to slavery, and they worked hard to prevent it from building.

Once the legislature met, Monroe's voice was not the only one that lawmakers heard; others offered more specific suggestions about how Virginia should respond to the threat of slave insurrection. Because Monroe and the Virginia Republicans were in office, it was the Federalists and conservatives who advanced alternatives most aggressively. A "Private Citizen" told the *Virginia Gazette* that the motivation of Gabriel and his followers was nothing less than the same desire for freedom and self-government that resided "in the very spirit of our government." Republicanism, with its love of independence and its hatred of despotism, served as a breeder of unrest and insurrection among the enslaved. As such, the writer argued, the state could hardly expect to prevent slaves from wanting freedom; it could sustain slavery only by adopting the tough measures needed to make sure this desire never found successful expression. The writer's list of recommendations included strengthening the executive branch so that it could respond to emergencies without convening the council, strengthening the state's militia, and ending private manumissions. Ending Virginia's policy of virtually unrestricted manumission, the writer felt, would slow the growth of a large class of free blacks that many whites thought contributed to the spread of slave unrest both by word and example. The anonymous citizen even raised the possibility of creating one of the most unrepublican of institutions—a standing army—to better defend the state against slave rebellions.[32]

If "Private Citizen" stopped short of saying that slavery was incompatible with republicanism, a conservative writer in Fredericksburg went the whole way. In a letter to that city's *Virginia Herald*, the anonymous writer declared that only a "fool" would think there could be a "compromise between liberty and slavery." The writer also urged the legislature to take a tougher stance on slave control and enact "those rigorous laws which experience proved necessary" to maintain slavery and protect whites. Slavery, the Fredericksburg writer reasoned, "is a monster—the most horrible of monsters," and hence required tight control. The Fredericksburg conservative also expressed his disdain for egalitarian sentiments in a slaveholding society. The slaveholder, this writer declared, expressing perhaps the worst fear of many upper South whites, "can never be a Democrat."[33]

Taken together, "Private Citizen" and the Federalist writer in Fredericksburg advanced conservative remedies for the problem of slave insurrection. They wanted all the old measures of slave control either reenacted or strengthened and they wanted the state's lenient policy toward private manumission replaced with one that would make manumission far less common. In short, they recommended a crackdown, a get-tough policy, on slaves and free blacks. Yet there was very little evidence that either private manumissions or the presence of free blacks had much to do with the Gabriel scare (since very few, if any, free blacks were involved), though better organization of the patrols and strengthening the state militia, measures also championed by Monroe as well as the conservatives, certainly made sense to Virginia whites of many persuasions. The other implication white Virginians could draw from the Gabriel scare—the notion that the state should hasten its efforts to end slavery, or at least to reduce its dependence upon the institution—also surfaced in the post-scare debate, chiefly in the form of a proposal offered by yet another private citizen, George Tucker of Richmond. A lawyer and a cousin of the better known St. George Tucker, the younger Tucker submitted a recommendation for gradual emancipation and colonization that received considerable attention during the legislative session of 1800–1.[34]

In his proposal, Tucker expressed an Enlightenment confidence that "progress in human affairs" not only was inevitable but also applied to black slaves as well as free whites. As a result, white Virginians would face more attempted insurrections as slaves moved from the "darkest ignorance" into the "dawn of knowledge." Tucker advised the state to embrace its future by slowly extricating itself from slavery through a gradual emancipation and to avoid racial amalgamation by sending the former slaves to a colony designed to receive them. Specifically, Tucker advocated buying land west of the Mississippi for a colony of free blacks, and perhaps unwanted slaves, and he urged the state to use its tax policy to encourage masters to embark on a journey toward voluntary, gradual manumission. As slaves were freed and sent west, Tucker argued, whites would enjoy a whiter and more securely republican Virginia. Virginia could then gradually get out of the business of repression and insurrection prevention and again assume a leading role as an avatar of progress in the young republic.[35] Because of its timing, Tucker's proposal, a "mere skeleton of an argument intended for a thinking few," received more attention than his older cousin's more detailed proposal had a few years earlier, and by March 1801 it was in a second printing.[36]

The 1800–1 legislature, of course, came nowhere close to approving Tucker's recommendation that Virginia commence a program of gradual emancipation, but his idea of a black colony west of the Mississippi caught the fancy of more than a few lawmakers looking for a place to transport free blacks, convicted felons, and unwanted slaves. A committee appointed by the legislature to examine "the subject of the late conspiracy" recommended a set of policy changes that included a mix of the conventional and the bold.[37] Several of its recommendations were aimed at

tightening the state's control of its combined slave and free black populations, control that many conservative Virginians thought had grown increasingly tattered and weak since the Revolution. The committee recommended strengthening both the state militia system, the force most needed to prevent or suppress any attempt at insurrection, and the slave patrols, which served as the eyes and ears of the white community by nightly monitoring slave after-hours activity. John Randolph of Roanoke, visiting Richmond at the time of the scare, had complained that the state "only could muster four or five hundred men of whom not more than thirty had muskets" to turn back an insurrection.[38] In mid-January 1801 the legislature readily approved bills designed to bolster both the militia and the patrols. It also approved the purchase and emancipation of the key slave informants, Pharoah and Tom, for their service to the state, making them the only slaves freed by the plot.[39]

The legislature's response to the committee's other recommendations proved more complicated. One recommendation called for the repeal of the state's 1782 statute giving masters virtually unrestricted power to manumit their slaves without legislative permission. The Gabriel scare gave long-standing opponents of private manumission a new opportunity to identify the state's lenient manumission policy as evidence of its inattention to slave control. Yet this recommendation advocated state interference with the authority of the individual slaveholder, which the Virginia legislature generally had been loath to exercise. Moreover, many Virginia slaveholders opposed the recommendation as an infringement of their "liberty"; still other white Virginians thought a reversal of state policy on private manumission would stand as a repudiation of the informal commitment of the state's founders to tilt state policy toward freedom whenever practical. Together, such objections defeated the committee's recommendations for requiring legislative approval of all private manumissions, though the issue would arise repeatedly over the next several years.[40]

The committee's boldest proposal was its recommendation that the slaves currently jailed for a capital offense should be sold on condition of removal from the United States. The idea of selling convicted slaves and transporting them out of the country had been quietly bruited about for weeks as the Virginia political elite's appetite for executions ebbed and the costs of suppressing the insurrection and keeping the peace mounted. Suppressing the Gabriel scare had become an expensive business in Virginia. It involved the expense of compensating owners for executed slaves, the ongoing cost of keeping convicted slaves and free blacks in jail, and the unexpected military expenses associated with thwarting the insurrection and ensuring public safety during the anxious aftermath. This financial burden strained the state's purposely lean budget. The economy-minded Monroe thought that selling the convicted slaves and sending them out of state would provide a needed boon to state finances and help prevent further executions. The legislature approved the committee's recommendation, and within ten days nine slave prisoners (eight of whom were sentenced to die for participation in the Gabriel revolt) were sold to traders and

transported to the New Orleans market for sale into the Louisiana territory as that region prepared for the shift from Spanish to French control.[41]

Another of the committee's bold recommendations was likely inspired by preliminary knowledge of George Tucker's proposal, namely, that the state, in conjunction with federal authorities, should seek to purchase land "beyond the borders of the state" where "persons obnoxious to the laws or dangerous to the peace of society" might be sent. To an extent, this recommendation flowed logically out of the committee's support for transporting existing slave criminals to foreign territory. In many respects, it amounted to the creation of a British-style penal colony established to receive Virginia criminals, especially those slaves and free blacks deemed dangerous or threatening. As a first step toward state support for colonization, this proposal was a curious one. Unlike George Tucker's proposal, or even Jefferson's earlier musings, it called for the removal of only slave and free black criminals, not a larger program of gradual emancipation and colonization. Still, the measure was suggestive of underlying interest in the idea of colonization in the state, and precisely because the recommendation was cautious and conservative, the legislature approved it in January 1801, instructing Monroe to consult with federal authorities about identifying an appropriate location and acquiring such a colony.[42]

More than five months later, Monroe wrote President Thomas Jefferson beginning what would become an extensive correspondence on the issue. The governor urged Jefferson to use federal authority to locate and procure land for a colony. Monroe speculated that the legislature's phrase, persons "dangerous to the peace of society," might be construed to embrace blacks not charged with capital offenses, and that if such an "enlarged construction" of the resolution were adopted, then the request brought "vast and interesting objects into view." In making his request, Monroe conceded that slavery was an "evil" and an "embarrassment" to the republic, but he complained of "the extreme difficulty in remedying it."[43]

Jefferson welcomed the request. Like Monroe, he recognized that the question of criminal exile raised the larger possibility that colonization might be gaining traction as the means for ultimately ridding Virginia of free blacks and reducing its slave population. The legislature's request appeared very much like one of the first in a series of small steps that Jefferson had long anticipated would characterize Virginia's difficult journey toward emancipation. In November 1801, he replied with a detailed analysis of possible places of exile. A colony within the United States, Jefferson reasoned, would likely prove unacceptable, either to Virginia or to other states due to its proximity. He also doubted that either the British or the "Indians" would sell land to the United States for such a purpose. Jefferson expressed a desire to avoid a racial "Blot or mixture" in any territory that might one day become part of the new republic by establishing a colony of former slaves within the nation's borders. So Jefferson considered Saint-Domingue as a possible destination for Virginia's black colonists, noting coyly that its "present ruler [Toussaint] might be…willing to receive…[those] deemed criminal by us, but meritorious perhaps by him." But lower

South slaveholders objected to Saint-Domingue and other West Indian locations on the grounds that such a colony was likely to emerge as a staging ground for future efforts to incite insurrections in or to plan invasions of the American South. Still, Jefferson expressed optimism about the future of colonization, holding that "Africa would offer a last and undoubted resort" for a black colony.[44] Yet the resolution passed by the Virginia assembly in 1801 left Jefferson confused about exactly what his native state wanted. Whom exactly did the state propose to colonize and where did Virginians want to send them?[45] Jefferson's reply asked the legislature for clarification on these matters. When the Virginia assembly convened again in December 1801, it held a closed-door session to consider its response, and then appointed a committee to handle the matter.[46]

While the committee crafted its report, news of yet another insurrection plot surfaced. In mid-January 1802, Monroe alerted the legislature to "a threatened insurrection among the Slaves" in Nottoway County, two counties away from the state capital. Monroe, and probably many others in Richmond, suspected that this latest scare was somehow a residue of the Gabriel plot, as they assumed that some unapprehended rebel had stirred unrest in another county. The scare, which affected a number of counties along the Appomattox, James, and Roanoke rivers in southeastern Virginia, arose from the discovery of an alleged plan, concocted chiefly by slave boatmen working largely unsupervised on these rivers, designed to take place on Easter weekend.[47] Testimony later extracted from the accused indicated that the putative rebels expected that once the "great Conflagration of houses fodder Stacks, etc" began, "the poor sort that has no blacks" would be "willing to Acknowledge, liberty and Equality" of blacks.[48] As word of the coming uprising spread up and down the rivers of southeastern Virginia, the rebellion plot gained such wide currency that its discovery became almost inevitable.[49] On January 1, 1802, a slave patrol in Nottoway discovered a late-night gathering of slaves. After aggressive interrogation, one of the slaves offered information about a large-scale insurrection in the making. With memories of the Gabriel scare fresh in their minds, white authorities swung into action. The militia and patrols mobilized to prevent any mobilization of black rebels. White investigators uncovered reports and rumors of a geographically extensive plot (though the numbers of slaves involved remained unclear) reaching throughout much of southeastern Virginia and as far as Albemarle Sound in northeastern North Carolina.[50] Trials and punishments began in county courthouses across the area, and the so-called Easter rebellion, like Gabriel's rebellion before it, was quashed before it began. As reports came in from southeast Virginia, Governor Monroe began to doubt the veracity of at least some of the slave testimony given under duress (in some cases, reported torture). Recognizing that there could be no end to the proliferation of charges as accused rebels fingered others in calculated efforts to help themselves, the governor looked to the legislature to find a more comprehensive solution to what appeared to be an increasingly chronic problem of slave unrest.[51]