5

LEGEND

"Just in time to be too late"

The Garners arrived at Gaines Landing at cotton-sowing time. A horn summoned them to dawn roll call with Gaines's eighty or ninety other slaves, then the overseer drove them off to the fields. Men broke clods of freshly plowed ground with picks and hoes and shaped soil into rows. Women stooped over the rows, pulling weeds and tossing them into baskets. Other women and children like Tom and Sam followed, sprinkling the seed and pressing it into the soil with their toes. Mornings, field slaves worked in cold fogs rising off the river; afternoons, temperatures pushed into the seventies, a mere foretaste of summer's suffocating heat and humidity. The tedious routines of King Cotton.[1]

Then one day Clinton Butts rematerialized. Two weeks after the Garners' arrival at Arkansas he rode up in a carriage (one supposes) and stepped down with the latest: Archibald Gaines wanted Margaret back, and Margaret alone. He had instructed Butts to bring her upriver to Covington on the first available steamboat and lodge her in the county jail. As for the other Garner adults and children, for now they should stay at Gaines Landing. Archibald had no intention of sending all four

adults back to Ohio on a governor's warrant he regarded as a pretense for "negro-stealing."[2]

He had nonetheless relented under intense pressure. Newspapers throughout the North had been lashing him for dishonoring his pledge to hold the adult Garners in northern Kentucky until Governor Chase's agents arrived with a requisition. "Is this the boasted honor of a chivalrous Kentuckian?" wondered the *Gazette*, in what became a typical criticism. A widely reprinted *New York Tribune* editorial bluntly called Gaines a liar. No one should have been surprised at Gaines's shell game, said Horace Greeley's paper, because this man had already broken his promise to Lucy Stone (to sell abolitionists the children), and now his dealing the Garners to a Deep South cotton lord who would "administer the patriarchal system after the Simon Legree fashion" only completed the stereotype. Just like Squire Shelby in Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, this Squire Gaines was also a rank hypocrite, "a member of the Presbyterian church" who "hesitates at no lie" to deal in human "property."[3]

Everything we know about Archibald Gaines tells us that even if these jabs drew blood, at first they only stiffened the man's resistance. Finally, though, he was forced to redeem his honor. As he later told it:

> Soon after she was sent from Kentucky it suited the purposes of the Abolition newspapers of Cincinnati to clamor most vociferously against me for having, as they charged, been guilty of running off and concealing a fugitive from justice from the State of Ohio. After much hesitation and consultation with friends of intelligence and integrity, I concluded that, in order to satisfy even the clamors of fanaticism, I would have her brought back to Kentucky. This I accordingly did, and at heavy expenses had the woman repurchased in New Orleans and brought back to Kentucky, by a special messenger and there held a reasonable length of time, subject again to the demand of Governor Chase.[4]

This from a letter dated 14 April that Gaines published in area newspapers, important evidence of the man's deceit. We know, for example, that he returned Margaret from Arkansas, not New Orleans—probably a deliberate bit of misinformation—for other accounts have Clinton

Butts bringing Margaret upriver from Gaines Landing, and they had no reason to lie.[5]

Moreover, Gaines finally relented not only to redeem his honor but, more important, to obey Governor Morehead. Within days after the *Henry Lewis* disaster, Morehead telegraphed Chase "his extreme regret and indignation at the course taken by Mr. Gaines." In the published version of this message he also promised "that measures have already been taken to cause [Margaret's] return from Arkansas."[6] But Morehead set aside Chase's request for Simon, Mary, and Robert Garner as accessories, which tells us that his resistance had also stiffened.

Clinton Butts arrived at Gaines Landing in the last week of March and soon arranged passage north aboard the *Queen City*. Once again the marshal secured Margaret in leg irons and left her in the boat's nursery among barrels of sugar, molasses, codfish, turpentine, and tar. The journey upriver would have taken five or six days and sometime during the night of 31 March or early the next morning Margaret passed the spot where the *Henry Lewis* crashed and Cilla drowned.

Wednesday, 2 April 1856. At ten in the morning, in a steady rain, Kentucky-bound passengers disembarked at Covington. By afternoon the weather had turned "mild and clear," and Margaret was back in the same jail where Butts had lodged her and her family after Marshal Robinson returned them all to slavery.[7] Nothing in the record indicates that Gaines was present to receive Margaret at Covington, and it's possible that spring plowing and planting kept him at Maplewood throughout this period. In late March his wife, Elizabeth, had given birth to their third child, Jane, another reason for Archibald to stay at home.

Aside from Gaines and Butts, who else knew Margaret was jailed in northern Kentucky? In his public letter to the *Enquirer*, Gaines wrote that his sending for Margaret "was printed in several of the papers of Cincinnati some time before the arrival of the woman." Probably he meant the *Gazette*'s 14 March quote from Morehead's telegram to Chase, the only such reference (itself quite oblique) that a thorough search of surviving newspapers has discovered. But then Gaines also claimed that after her arrival the fact of his lodging Margaret in the Covington jail "was generally announced in the daily papers of Cincinnati." If so, this awaits proof. The *Enquirer* and the *Gazette* were Cincinnati's principal dailies and the only two for which we have nearly

complete volumes. Neither of them "announced" the fact, and if any other papers (such as the *Commercial*) had "generally" remarked this crucial news, then the *Gazette*, at least, would certainly have commented. Hardly a day passed when "The Late Fugitive Case" didn't still command space on its pages—the *Enquirer*'s too, for that matter.

By early April the newspapers' attention focused on two disputes. One was Marshal Robinson's $24,000 bill for payment of his special deputies. The *Gazette*, in a story printed the day after Margaret's return to Covington, had charged that Robinson sent agents into local taverns—including "a doggery within four doors of the Court"—with cash to buy deputies' pay certificates at a 50 percent discount. These he planned to redeem at full value in Washington, a lucrative scam, if the papers got it right.[8]

Throughout late March and early April the *Gazette* was also reporting new skirmishes in the habeas corpus battle. On Tuesday, 18 March, evidently after reading the United States Constitution for himself (as promised), Probate Court Judge John Burgoyne announced that he considered the marshals' taking of the Garners from Sheriff Brashears "a bold attempt to usurp the powers of this Court and a wanton disobedience of its process." He gave Robinson two days to "show cause why he should not be attached for contempt." On Thursday, Burgoyne found the marshal's reply "insufficient, and adjudged him guilty." He leveled a stiff $300 fine and ordered Robinson directly to the county jail. That evening Robinson's attorney (Headington, again) applied to federal Circuit Court Judge Humphrey Leavitt for a habeas corpus writ directing Sheriff Brashears to release the U.S. marshal.[9] Several days later Leavitt ordered Robinson released and slated a hearing for mid-April. Until then the marshal wouldn't be hand-carrying those deputies' certificates to Attorney General Caleb Cushing in Washington.

But again, who *knew* Margaret was in Covington? Probably very few people, at least among those who mattered. On Wednesday, 9 April 1856, Chase wrote to Hamilton County prosecuting attorney Joseph Cox. In language clearly indicating it was fresh news to him, Chase told Cox that on Tuesday (8 April) an aide had passed him a telegram ("a despatch") conveying information "that Margaret Garner was awaiting my requisition at Covington, and would remain there until tomorrow [10th April]." If Chase did not know until Tuesday, the 8th, then no

one else who mattered (such as Joseph Cox or John Jolliffe) can have known either, and we therefore have to ask about Gaines's game. Again, from his mid-April letter:

> Now, while I have no special interest in the administration of the criminal laws of Ohio, and no special motive for forwardness in bringing the murderess to justice, yet a desire to preserve my reputation as a law-abiding man, and to prevent and forever stop even the clamor of the Underground Railroad Abolitionists, induced me, after the woman had been in Covington for several days, to send a telegraphic dispatch, in my own name, to Governor Chase at Columbus, announcing the fact that she was there, and subject to his requisition. Day after day, however, elapsed, and yet no requisition came.

Obviously, for six days Gaines had been smugly twiddling his thumbs while Margaret languished in a Covington jail cell and Ohio officers (who could not know Margaret was back in Kentucky) *did not* come to requisition her, all part of a ruse to justify Gaines in sending "the woman" back to Arkansas. The shell game, all over again.[10]

The likeliest explanation for this latest foul-up is that Archibald Gaines obeyed the letter of Governor Morehead's order: he returned Margaret Garner to Covington, but did nothing more. In this scenario Gaines never bothered to notify (or ordered Clinton Butts to notify) Brashears or Cox. Perhaps Gaines even had Governor Morehead's tacit approval for this passive resistance. When Gaines finally sent his "telegraphic dispatch" with its impossible demand on Chase's agents to arrest Margaret just forty-eight hours later, on Thursday, and to do it (as he'd be sure to have Butts insist) by a legal process, he already knew that he'd beaten Ohio again.

Through Morehead or Butts, Gaines probably knew something about Chase and Cox's predicament. As Chase relates it in his 9 April letter to Cox, the awful fact was that before Deputy Clinton Butts could surrender custody of Margaret, Ohio officers were technically required to present the marshal an arrest warrant and extradition order from Kentucky's governor. But a month earlier Cox, Cooper, and Hamlin had left these documents, issued in response to Chase's belated requisition

of March, in the hands of Louisville deputies, who presumably still had them.

As in early March, it was all coming down to timing and technicalities. On Wednesday, 9 April, Chase telegraphed Cox his opinion that "it is competent for any officer to go over into Kentucky and receive Margaret. She sustains in Kentucky the double relation of a slave and a fugitive from justice. In the former relation Gaines has the control of her, and may surrender her to whom he will. In the latter, the officer may receive her and restore her to the custody from which she was taken."[11] Perhaps this stated the common sense of matters in concise phrases; but it also scanted what the law obliged Cox to do when extraditing a fugitive. He needed those documents; otherwise Gaines might well scoff at their request.

Just as he did in March, once again Chase consumed crucial hours thinking things through. The more he ruminated on Gaines's moves in the context of events of February and March, the more riled he became over the Kentuckian's latest gambit. His message to Cox clearly stated his exasperation:

> Under the circumstances I feel but little inclination to take any further steps in the matter. . . . I felt keenly the humiliation of being obliged by a federal proceeding in the form of a habeas corpus, to resort to the process of requisition for the purpose of restoring criminals to the precise custody from which they were taken by the writ. . . . Now Margaret alone of the four, is brought back. And I am telegraphed that she will await my requisition forty-eight hours! You will readily imagine with what sentiments I regard this course of action. And yet you as prosecuting attorney have a duty to perform in the process, and I am forced to aid you, so far as my position enables me to do so, in recovering the custody of all fugitives from justice. I therefore inclose to you the [Ohio] warrant [for murder] heretofore issued, and leave it to your discretion to make such use of it as you may see fit.

When Cox received this message and the Hamilton County murder warrant he understood two bitter facts: first, that Ohio's chief executive no longer stood behind their fight to save the Garners; second, that

Chase's hesitation had wasted at least twenty-four of the forty-eight hours Gaines had stipulated.[12]

Meantime the object in this battle of wits and honor between the governors of Ohio and Kentucky lay in a Covington jail cell, now four or five months into her fifth pregnancy, very much alone and bewildered. When Joseph Cox or John Jolliffe had previously spoken to Margaret about returning to Ohio for trial on the murder warrant, it had certainly sounded better to her than slavery. The lawyers' thinking was that after considering her circumstances leading up to the infanticide, no jury in Ohio would return a verdict against Margaret for capital murder. Especially if Jolliffe brought before jurors testimony about Gaines's cruelties to her and evidence about her "nearly white" daughter's true paternity, the worst Margaret might expect would be a conviction and sentencing on some lesser homicide charge. She might spend a few years in the penitentiary, after which, if Gaines tried to remand Margaret back to Kentucky, Ohio abolitionists would purchase her freedom. Jolliffe and others had explained this strategy to her. They had also told the Garners that Simon, Mary, and Robert, if tried as accessories, should expect even shorter sentences and soon rejoin her children, whom abolitionists were planning to purchase in any event. For that, Edward Hamlin had already raised $800 by early March.[13] Despite all their talk, however, by Wednesday, 9 April, Margaret had languished in a Kenton County jail cell for a week and heard nothing except perhaps an earful of Clinton Butts's taunts, to the effect that this only showed how the "damned abolitionists" cared more about spreading disunion than saving slaves like her.

To Margaret's way of seeing, none of this had worked out the way they promised. The Gaines brothers had sent her north alone. Now the likelihood was that Margaret would never again see her husband and children. Massa Archibald and Massa Benjamin might do anything at all with the family: split them up, auction some off, work her boys to death in the mosquito-infested muck of an Arkansas plantation. These doubts and fears kept Margaret company in her Covington jail cell for eight days, a stretch of waiting and unknowing that has to have been one of the more agonizing periods in her extraordinary ordeal.

Wednesday, 9 April 1856. In the afternoon, Chase's letter with its enclosed warrant arrived in Cincinnati by express train and Joseph Cox decided that despite the governor's withdrawal he at least would try to

extradite Margaret. That evening Sheriff Brashears supplied him two deputies. Cox instructed the men to do their best; if Clinton Butts refused to release Margaret without Morehead's warrant, then one of them should shadow Margaret while the other returned to Cincinnati for further instructions. Taking Gaines at his word, Cox thought he had until Thursday to claim Margaret and he therefore ordered the officers to get a night's sleep and take a morning ferry over to Covington.[14]

At practically the same moment a man showed up at the Kenton County jail "with a written order" from Archibald Gaines, who wanted Margaret immediately released to this agent's custody. Had one of his friends or sympathizers warned Gaines that Ohio deputies would soon arrive? A fair question, for Gaines had promised to hold Margaret in Covington until Thursday. Now his agent appeared under cover of darkness and acted with a haste that typified events of the next thirty-six hours. Within minutes, Clinton Butts's deputy had Margaret back in leg irons and in the custody of Gaines's man (whose identity passed unrecorded). His carriage took Margaret south on the Turnpike, in "mild and breezy" weather.[15] In what would otherwise have been a beautiful spring night for a drive—starry skies and air scented with forsythia and cherry blossoms—Margaret Garner rode south in an exact reverse of her family's January sleigh ride to free soil.

Thursday, 10 April 1856. Probably she was back at Maplewood before midnight and if sleep came at all, Margaret was awakened early. The first train for Lexington passed through Richwood Station around eight-fifteen and Gaines wanted Margaret aboard it with his man. It had dawned "bright and mild." The neighborhood's oaks and sycamores wouldn't have leafed out yet, but we can otherwise imagine the rolling landscape ablaze in color and redolent with the scents of spring blossoms and grasses. Massa Gaines's two dozen sheep and his three dozen cattle would already be at his pond or grazing his fields; the two male slaves left behind after the winter's calamitous escapes might well have been plowing.

As Gaines drove his man and Peggy through the Maplewood gate and down the gentle slope toward Richwood Presbyterian Church, she took in for the last time in her life Mud Lick Creek and Forrest Home; Richwood Church Road, where the Garners made their rendezvous in the snow seven weeks ago, then James Marshall's plantation, where Robert and her in-laws had passed most of their days in slavery. White folks

claiming ownership to it might give their plantations nostalgic names recalling the former wilderness. But Margaret's people had made the land into landscape. In clearing and plowing these fields, running fences and building barns, *slaves* were the ones who *plotted* it.

Her neighborhood passed out of view as Massa Gaines drove them around the bend just behind and east of the church, near the entrance to Marshall's farm. The last Margaret ever saw of Archibald K. Gaines was at Richwood Station. By early afternoon she was in Lexington, and at two-thirty she departed on the westbound train to Frankfort and Louisville. By early evening Gaines's agent had lodged her once again in the Jefferson County jail at Louisville.[16]

Thursday morning the two Cincinnati sheriff's deputies arrived at the Covington jail and (according to the *Gazette*) learned from the jailor that "he had given her [Margaret] up on Wednesday night, to a man who came there with a written order from her master Gaines, but could not tell them where she had been taken." One of the Ohio deputies reportedly inscribed the words "not found" on the warrant's back side and returned it to Joseph Cox.[17]

Friday, 11 April 1856. Events soon told Cox that Gaines had sent Margaret south. Around midday, Sheriff Brashears "received information which induced him to believe that [Margaret] had been sent on the railroad to Lexington, thence via Frankfort to Louisville, there to be shipped off to the New Orleans slave market." With Cox's approval, remarked the *Gazette*, Brashears "telegraphed the Sheriff at Louisville (who holds the original warrant from Governor Morehead, granted to Governor Chase) to arrest her there, and had a deputy in readiness to go down for her."[18]

Incredibly, all of this unfolded an hour, or no more than two hours, too late. Gaines's agent had booked passage for himself and Margaret aboard the *Eclipse*, perhaps the grandest and swiftest of the "floating palaces" then plying the Cincinnati–New Orleans route. Shackled once more in a steamboat's nursery, Margaret settled in with other white and black steerage passengers amidst a cargo of barreled pork, kegged whiskey, and baled hemp. At five o'clock Friday afternoon the *Eclipse*'s master, a Mr. Sturgeon, ordered his crew to cast off and his pilot to steer her downriver. By "early evening" Cox's agents arrived and learned from deputies in Louisville that Gaines had already shipped Margaret south. By noon the next day she had once more journeyed past the spot where

little Cilla had drowned. Several days later the *Eclipse* was steaming between Tennessee and Missouri shores and Margaret Garner had forever bid goodbye to *her* old Kentucky home.[19]

At the same time Margaret was steaming south on the Mississippi River, her former master's letter explaining these latest moves appeared in the *Cincinnati Enquirer*. Gaines claimed that when Ohio's "Abolition avengers" never showed up to extradite Margaret, they left him with no option but to "send her back with her husband and children." As for Cox's too late arrival at Covington and Louisville, Gaines again laid blame for that failure with abolitionists and especially with Governor Chase:

> How singular it is that after the lapse of eight days before the woman was first sent to the South, and not until then, Governor Chase sent his requisition to Governor Morehead, and that it should arrive just in time to be too late. And how passing strange it is that, after a lapse of nine days, during which the woman was in Covington, subject to the requisition, no step was taken to enforce it until it was ascertained that she had been taken to her home and family in the South!
>
> I am morally sure that the Abolitionists care nothing for Peggy, either through regard for the offended majesty of the laws of Ohio or for any sympathy with her as an oppressed, down-trodden, persecuted, heart-broken, desperate woman; and I am equally sure that the atrocious scoundrels have a wider and meaner object in view—that they care nothing for negroes or their owners, and only wish to use both as material for the promotion of political ends, for the furtherance of objects of treason to the Constitution and the laws of the Union.
>
> It may turn out that the publication of a letter from Governor Chase to Governor Morehead, which accompanied the requisition, will explain why the Abolitionists have managed to be *just in time to be too late* to get Peggy.[20]

The letter was yet another attempt to blame everything on abolitionist "scoundrels."

Chase never did publish the letter to which Gaines referred (that of 4 March 1856). Even if he had released a copy to the papers it would

have demonstrated nothing more than this: Ohio's old-line abolitionist governor was guilty of excessive prudence and of naiveté in believing a slave master's promises. More recently, Chase had also been guilty of an understandable impatience; and then, for reasons harder to understand, guilty of losing focus on the real "objects." These were, at a minimum, achieving for the Garners a life on free soil (even if that meant years in the penitentiary) and battling to limit or even to nullify federal power over free states through its exercise of the 1850 Fugitive Slave Act. Archived letters tell us that some Ohioans like Cox and George Hoadley agreed on these objectives. The letters also say that others failed to see through the Kentuckians' deceit.

Gaines's charges were absurd on their face because he produced nothing, except a vaguely imagined abolitionist conspiracy, as a motive for Chase, Cooper, Cox, Hamlin, and the various deputies to arrive in Kentucky just exactly one or two hours too late, two times. Instead it was Gaines who had powerful reasons to be cunning, and those reasons involved more than simple economics. For Gaines had indeed spent large sums, but neighbors had introduced a bill in the Kentucky legislature whose sole purpose was to reimburse him for monetary losses, and before little Cilla died abolitionist Edward Hamlin had already raised $800 to buy all three children, a figure at or above prevailing market value. Even then Gaines could still have applied to federal courts for relief under the 1850 fugitive law.[21]

Honor, not money, explains the man's actions. Archibald Gaines understood that if Ohio put Margaret Garner on trial for infanticide, defense testimony would scarcely touch on her crime. Mary Garner had already testified to the main facts before Coroner Menzies's jury, and Margaret had admitted her deeds before newsmen and others. Gaines could be certain that John Jolliffe would grant those facts and bore in on the extenuating circumstances behind Margaret's child-murder, and this meant putting her master himself on trial. To Gaines that was unthinkable. Cincinnati's antislavery newspapers had already spotlighted Margaret's remarks about her facial scars—the palpable marks, she said, of maltreatment by a "white man," whom most presumed to be Gaines. At trial Jolliffe would surely reprise those themes, with worse to follow. Both Jolliffe and Lucy Stone had all but named Gaines as the father of Margaret's "almost white" children, thus painting him in people's minds as a miscegenator as well as a rapist, for Margaret's deeds signified that

she would never have willingly submitted to that man's lust. Unlike fugitive slave processes that barred slaves from the witness stand, this murder trial would turn absolutely on Margaret's testimony. Jolliffe could subpoena Robert Garner, Gaines's neighbors, finally even Gaines himself. Thus a murder trial threatened to open up untold horrors, which the penny papers would blazon across their pages. Gaines therefore had to ship Margaret south, as far away from Chase's requisitions as possible. The short-term damage he might face, for obstructing justice, was minuscule compared with the shame of a trial.

A cardinal rule of Southern Honor required a "gentleman" who indulged himself with a slave woman to do so with utmost discretion and by all means to avoid scandal arising directly or indirectly out of his liaison, scandal that could threaten the entire fabric of genteel relations that was a planter's life. Neighboring planters would generally share the man's permissive attitudes about such miscegenetic relations, and some Southerners (like essayist William Harper) even hinted at practical benefits to their "casual" intercourse. But that code demanded discreet silence, or else ostracism. Gaines knew that his whole claim to power and prestige, to property and even his children's patrimony, hung in the balance.[22]

Archibald Gaines therefore had the most powerful motive for evading Chase's requisition. He also had the most obvious means to *make* Chase's agents arrive too late. For it was not Chase or Cox or even Governor Morehead who had custody of Margaret, and held her on Southern soil, with friends and sympathizers everywhere about. After obeying Morehead's order in only the most literal sense, by holding Margaret at Covington but doing nothing more until he could ensure that Ohio deputies would arrive "just in time to be too late," Gaines got Margaret out of Louisville barely ahead of them. Several days later, on the theory that the best defense is a slashing offense, he wrote his letter to the *Enquirer*, laying off blame on abolitionists and Chase.

Thursday, 17 April 1856. Margaret Garner would have disembarked from the *Eclipse* by this day and rejoined her family. She soon learned that Benjamin Gaines had decided (in brother Archibald's phrasing) not to permanently "take so dangerous an inmate as [Margaret] was into his family of slaves."[23] Following Archibald's directions, Benjamin made plans to have his younger brother Abner transport the Garners to New Orleans. Abner LeGrand Gaines was a former New Orleans cotton bro-

ker with a residence over the river and further south at Natchez. Through his wife, Sally Watson Gaines, he also owned a cotton plantation on the river in Issaquena County, Mississippi, some thirty-five miles south of Gaines Landing.[24] Until Abner arrived, probably about five days later, the Garners sat tight at Gaines Landing.

On Saturday, 26 April 1856, Abner L. Gaines checked into the St. Charles Hotel in New Orleans and by month's end he had temporarily resettled the Garners.[25] Fourteen years later Robert Garner would recall that in New Orleans "the brother of one of their old masters, LeGrand Gaines" (as Abner sometimes signed himself), hired them out. In 1870 Robert also recalled that there in the Crescent City his family survived through "hard work and destitution" in several homes, a familiar curse for Robert (who had now known four different masters in six years), but not to Margaret or the children, or his parents, Simon and Mary. Who hired the Garners' time in New Orleans, and how long did their indenture last? Robert didn't supply dates and no other records appear to have survived, though such terms typically concluded in late December.

From Archibald Gaines's vantage point, this temporary arrangement made excellent sense. New Orleans put Margaret well beyond the reach of requisitions and subpoenas, should Cox decide to serve papers for the slaves. Also, should word of Cox's departure from Cincinnati once more reach Boone County, as it apparently did in March and April, Archibald could easily telegraph Abner or Richard (another New Orleans–based brother) and direct either one to hide the Garners. He could do it long before the officers completed their seven- or eight-day steamboat trip. In New Orleans, then, the Garners were quite secure. Hamilton County prosecutor Joseph Cox soon conceded Gaines's victory. On 15 May 1856, Cox wrote Governor Chase one more time and asked "that a requisition be made by you upon the Governor of Louisiana if you deem it proper under all the circumstances." Chase was then swept up in the whirl of Republican Party politics leading toward summer campaigns, and either did not reply or simply declined. No requisition was ever issued, and seven years later Cox lamented the Garners' sale to Louisiana: "What was their fate after this I know not."[26] They had disappeared into "the seething Hell" of Deep South slavery.

History's archive yields up only a few more traces of Margaret and her family. When the Garners' indenture concluded, Abner Gaines sold them all to his Issaquena County neighbor Judge DeWitt Clinton Bonham. At Bonham's Willow Grove plantation, at Tennessee Landing, six miles northwest of the present-day town of Eagle Bend, the Garners made their last home in Southern slavery.

Bonham, born in Pennsylvania, was a thirty-six-year-old Probate Court judge and the county's eleventh-wealthiest planter. He and his wife, Mary, employed a governess for their six-year-old daughter Belle (an only child), and an overseer named R. G. Maxwell had command of the sixty to sixty-five slaves who worked Bonham's more than six hundred acres of cotton.

DeWitt Bonham knew Abner Gaines as a neighbor who managed his plantation after the fashion of other Deep South absentee landlords, spending much of his time in Natchez and New Orleans. Throughout the period 1850–60, however, Bonham periodically saw Abner Gaines in his capacity as Probate Court judge, for he had the duty to decide a hopelessly contested will probated back in August 1846, following the death of Abner Gaines's wife's grandfather, Homer Ledbetter. When he died at age eighty-two Ledbetter left behind a recently witnessed, handwritten will providing that his mulatto mistress, Violet, and her three "infant" children, Daniel Boon [sic], Elizabeth, and Laura, be the sole legal heirs of his estate. Ledbetter's will directed the executor, his granddaughter's husband, William Deeson, to "take Violet and her three children to some free state," purchase them a home, and arrange for the children's education. Apparently Deeson was sympathetic to the deceased man's purposes. He swiftly transported Violet and her children North and vigorously began to execute Ledbetter's will. By 1850 he had even liquidated some of Ledbetter's movable goods and had the man's "negroes" appraised for sale or hiring-out. From then on the four surviving Ledbetter heirs, including Sally Watson Gaines, tied up the will in Bonham's court. Abner and Sally fought tooth and nail to prevent Deeson from executing the will, persistently demanding $27,252 as their one-eighth share of Ledbetter's real estate. They also demanded a proportionate share of his slaves. In 1859 Bonham finally awarded Abner and Sally Gaines $3,406 in legal expenses, apparently the only settlement ever reached in this case before—and evidently even after—the Civil War erupted.[27] Abner Gaines's dealing the Garners to DeWitt Bonham, no doubt at a bargain price given their reputation, may have been a consideration for the judge's friendship and diligent service in blocking the Ledbetter will.

Willow Grove plantation sat on a rise not far from the river. Groves of scrub pine, willows, a few live oaks and cypress trees studded the mostly flat landscape. Slaves worked his cotton on the rich, sienna-colored soil and, on Saturday afternoons, scratched at vegetable patches surrounding their cabins.[28] Here in 1857 the record almost entirely gives out and we are compelled, for a while, to leave them.

"The romance of our history"

The same day that federal marshals returned the Garners to slavery, on 29 February, William Lloyd Garrison's abolitionist paper, *The Liberator*, published two more poems about Margaret. "Carrie" from Barre, Massachusetts, submitted "Plea for the Fallen"; the second, "LINES, Suggested by Reading the Late Slave Tragedy in Cincinnati," appeared over an "Anonymous" byline. Solemn, earnest writers wanting to understand the Garner infanticide and to make its power of horror do antislavery work, both condemned slavery for destroying Margaret's family and causing her child-murder. Yet both also claimed for Margaret's deed a transcending, sacrificial passion with enough symbolic power to transform American society.[29]

Both poets knew that Americans typically recoiled in horror at the Garners' tragedy ("Ye deem them heartless," writes Carrie), but still blamed the masters for keeping their slaves under a morally and spiritually blighting oppression. But not totally blighting: for even slavery cannot turn a mother's love "to gall and wormwood." Mother love outvies the master's depravity and rises to righteous sacrifice, when godlike love saves her child from death on earth. As "Anonymous" phrased it: "The very love she bears her child/ Has nerved her arm to deal the fatal blow"—Americans' commonest way of explaining slave infanticide.

The author of "LINES" called at last "for VENGEANCE" on slaveholders, but Carrie ends her poem with images of Margaret's sacrificial passion as itself only the shadow (lesser *and* darker) of a divine father's love, thus concluding with a call not for vengeance but for mercy. On the very day when marshals took the Garners back to Kentucky, she implored readers to "lead them gently home!/ Sure in our Father's house there is yet room!" While not the Southerner's noblesse oblige, requiring that he assume the patriarch's responsibility to feed, clothe, and protect his extended slave "family," Carrie's was nonetheless a profoundly white patriarchal burden—to reach down and (as she says) "lead a lost one" back to "our Father's house." By April 1856 the Garners had heard enough such talk, which still hadn't rescued them from the shadow of Massa's house.

These poetic pictures of Margaret Garner illustrate how antebellum Americans saw her infanticide as a cultural icon, whose power to figure political and social agendas and tensions did not require being true to specific, complex facts. Instead, like all icons the poems convey simple, coherent meanings within a generalized system of values and beliefs. Such icons of the all-loving parent—a type of female Abraham, knife upraised over her sacrificial child, in "LINES"—were intended to strike the familiar chord of a transcending and even a healing horror. That way Northern readers might lay claim to her tragedy's power—not because the poems imagined Margaret's child-murder as a singular and almost unspeakable deed—but precisely because they would always already *know it*. It was part of their cultural hardwiring.

But the Margaret Garner case was unique in the annals of American slavery. Of the few documented slave mother's infanticides, none even remotely compared to hers; for the others (as we shall see) involved newborns of mothers still held in bondage, and were committed almost literally under cover of darkness—never, as in Margaret's case, in the master's face. But despite her absolute singularity, antebellum Americans persisted in seeing Margaret as a figure they thought they already knew, through the infanticidal slave mothers in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, or others in tracts and gift books, in antislavery songs and poems. Far more imaginary than she was ever real, until Margaret Garner's case, the infanticidal slave mother had by January 1856 become a potent icon signifying everything unnatural and unholy about "the peculiar institution." It was almost as if the icon had always awaited or demanded a Margaret Garner.

Her child-murder put the name and face of a real black woman to what had mainly been a fantasied image circulated for decades among genteel white abolitionists. Earnest reformers like Carrie thought they could know and memorialize her "Tragedy" in terms of that icon. Instead, for almost a hundred thirty years the Garner case nearly disappeared from American cultural memory, just as the Garners themselves practically disappeared into Deep South slavery. Had the icon eclipsed

the reality? Is it possible that these processes were not merely coincidental, but consequential? It is always crucial for us to ask how culture sponsors such results.

This last problem in the Margaret Garner case forces us to ask some new and different questions. In what terms did Margaret's child-murder become the stuff of stories? Who produced them? Why? Answering such questions requires us to leave aside for now the tools of conventional history and to open a brief inquiry into literary history. Except for instances like Stowe's novel and Browning's poem, the texts for study have never been regarded as important art. Here are poems and stories long shelved and largely forgotten in Special Collections libraries, but whose authors thought they had made lasting literature.

They thought so because abolitionists commonly believed, with Thomas Wentworth Higginson, that "the romance of American history" would draw great literary material from "the lives of fugitive slaves." In fact, this idea was a widely circulated cliché by 1856, when poet James Freeman Clarke advised writers:

> *Go ye, who seek in Plutarch's page romantic acts*
> *and lives sublime,*
> *Go to these martyr slaves and learn the Romance*
> *of our Land and Time.*

In 1842, antislavery activist and fiction writer Lydia Maria Child had speculated that slaves' stories would provide the stuff of "tragic romance," and essayist Edmund Quincy thought writers should find models in white reformers as well. In a piece that appeared along with Child's in *The Liberty Bell* (an annual antislavery gift book), he countered English philosopher Edmund Burke's claim that "the age of chivalry is dead." Just read the penny papers, Quincy argued, and see antislavery reformers enacting chivalric heroism every day.[30] In a key document, "The Philosophy of the Abolition Movement," first delivered as an 1853 speech, Wendell Phillips traced this idea back to its probable source: antislavery writer Fredrika Bremer's 1836 comment that "the fate of the negro is the romance of our history." At the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society's annual meeting of 1853, Phillips devoted a portion of his keynote address to the role of reform literature:

> Again and again, from my earliest knowledge of the cause, have I heard the opinion, that in the debatable land between Freedom and Slavery, in the thrilling incidents of the escape and sufferings of the fugitive, and the perils of his friends, the future Walter Scott of America would find the "border-land" of his romance . . . and that the literature of America would gather its freshest laurels from that field.

When Phillips made this prediction at Boston's Melodeon Hall on the evening of 27 January 1853, three years to the day before the Garners fled the "border-land" village of Richwood Station, American abolitionism was still riding the groundswell of enthusiasm for *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. That night Phillips praised Stowe's novel ("rather an event than a book," he said) and predicted that still more and better novels would soon appear. More did, but the antislavery movement never produced a more significant work of fiction.[31]

Dead children haunt *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Two years before she wrote the book Stowe's youngest son, Charley, fell victim to a cholera epidemic that swept through Cincinnati during July and August 1849. Stowe biographer Joan Hedrick writes that the infant's death devastated her, but also had the effect of confirming Stowe's commitment to abolitionism. Northern activists had long complained that masters wielded tyrannical power when they sold slave children away from their mothers, and abolitionist texts commonly called up such auction-block tableaux to grab doubters' hearts. In the summer of 1849 Stowe felt for herself those scenes' power: "It was at his dying bed, and at *his* grave," Stowe later recalled of little Charley's dying and the writing of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, "that I learnt what a poor slave mother may feel when her child is taken away from her."[32]

Her novel begins with Squire Shelby (a northern Kentucky planter) dealing Tom away to a slave trader along with Eliza Harris's son Henry. Eliza soon flees with her boy over ice floes choking the Ohio River (in the novel's most dramatized scene), and even when she reaches free soil Eliza's ill fortune puts her at the house of a Doughface Ohio politician, Senator Byrd. Will the senator's wife remand them to slavery? "Ma'am," Eliza pleads, "have you ever lost a child?" With that she strikes a nerve: "The question," Stowe's narrator explains, "was unexpected, and it was thrust on a new wound; for it was only a month since a darling child

of the [Byrd] family had been laid in the grave."[33] Eliza herself lost two infants to untimely deaths, she tells Mrs. Byrd, and that's why she fled rather than let slave traders take little Henry, "a baby that had never been away from his mother in his life!" On the spot Mrs. Byrd takes up the fugitives' cause and soon converts the senator, scenes that miniaturize Stowe's own conversion and that she hoped *Uncle Tom's Cabin* would spur nationwide.

Such early scenes only prepare readers for the novel's moral and spiritual keystone: the sublime death of little Eva St. Clare, daughter of Tom's ill-fated, next-to-last master, and a sickly but preternaturally moral child. Eva's dying pleas for the common humanity of blacks and whites convert her father, Augustine, who then determines to emancipate his slaves—but too late, as it turns out, for St. Clare himself dies. Still more important, Eva models Christ-like dying when, haunted by cries of black children who "lost their mothers" at slave sales, she tells Tom, "I would be glad to die, if my dying could stop all this misery. I *would* die for them, Tom, if I could." Overhearing those earnest exclamations, the St. Clare "mammy" rightly calls Eva a "little, blessed lamb" (401), and in thus symbolizing potentials for Christian sacrifice Eva prefigures Uncle Tom's all-important role as "The Martyr" in Stowe's plot.

Joan Hedrick locates Eva's symbolic power in mid-nineteenth-century idealizations of the "special child," a powerful icon Americans had wrought during an important historical role shift for middle-class children.[34] No longer regarded as junior-sized adults expected to contribute their labor power to a family's economy, children were increasingly understood as unformed individuals whose nurturing to the practical, moral, and spiritual responsibilities of bourgeois domesticity was a vital result for parents—especially mothers—to ensure. One sign of this change was that Americans extended the term "infant" to include children whom we would call "toddlers" and even "primary grade" schoolchildren—any child up to age six or even seven.[35] That new role also required middle-class parents to become more emotionally invested in their "infant" than ever before, even in the face of infant mortality rates that had only just begun their long decline to significantly lower modern numbers. In 1850 the early death of a child remained a universal experience, and middle-class Americans dealt with such a loss, as of the actual Charley Stowe or the fictional Eva St. Clare, by enshrining his or her memory in family tradition. Typically the infant's presumed

dearness to God made it a kind of divine intercessor, and in that role the "special child" had great power in American popular culture. A scan through penny papers from any region of antebellum America will turn up quantities of sentimental verses, essays, and homilies on dead children, a fair amount of it reprinted from religious tracts and periodicals, and a surprising portion of it authored by men. During the 1850s, for example, northern Kentucky's poetastering brickmaker, Hiram Martin, contributed to the *Covington Journal* his fair share of verses on the sublime death of children.[36]

But it was a far leap from these bourgeois ideals to the grim facts of slave children's lives. They *were* required to add their labor power to the master's domestic economy, as seven-year-old Margaret's nursing of Major Gaines's children illustrates. Moreover, infant mortality rates among slaves ran almost twice as high as those for whites, a consequence of poor hygiene and diet.[37] Added to those burdens was the ever present danger that a master might suddenly sell off a healthy slave child, as many plantation owners reckoned on a 5 or 6 percent return on their slave "property" deriving from just that potential for the "natural increase" of slave populations.[38] On these terms middle-class white ideals had practically nothing in common with Southern black realities. Nevertheless abolitionists found in themes of child mortality and mothers' losses a way to make that leap. Summoning white middle-class readers to scenes of their own past bereavements as a means of enlisting soldiers against "the peculiar institution" and its devastation of black families, Garrisonian abolitionists made the "special child" into a potent political tool. Stowe knew its effectiveness and in little Eva she beatified that stereotype.[39]

But it was a still further leap from white America's "special child" to black mothers "saving" their babes from slavery by child-murder. Stowe, however, thought it a natural step because abolitionist sources also claimed infanticide was a regular fact of plantation life. Speaking in her novel's "Conclusion" about the slave trade's "heart-break and its horrors" as a motive for child-murder, Stowe claimed: "There are those living who know the mothers whom this accursed traffic has driven to the murder of their children; and themselves seeking in death a shelter from woes more dreaded than death" (623). Though she provides no further detail Stowe thought these secondhand stories warranted her own pictures of infanticidal slave mothers, for example in the anecdote of Haley

the slave catcher, who tells how a slave mother he had in transit leapt from a steamboat, "young un and all, into the river,—went down plump, and never ris" (125). In a late chapter titled "The Quadroon's Story," a mulatto woman, Cassy, tells of being held for years as the concubine of one white master; he sold away their two children, then auctioned her to another, who fathered Cassy's third and last infant:

> But I had made up my mind,—yes I had. I would never again let a child live to grow up! I took the little fellow in my arms, when he was two weeks old, and kissed him, and cried over him; and then I gave him laudanum, and held him close to my bosom, while he slept to death. How I mourned and cried over it! and whoever dreamed it was anything but a mistake, that had made me give it the laudanum? but it's one of the few things that I'm glad of now. I am not sorry, to this day; he, at least, is out of pain. What better than death could I give him, poor child! (521)

What were those "woes more dreaded than death," in Northerners' iconic images? For young male slaves, the burdens of gang labor on mosquito-infested sugar plantations. For young female slaves, such as Cassy and others like her in abolitionist literature, the dread was sexual.

Antislavery texts represent child-murder as a slave mother's last, desperate, loving way to end generations of sexual bondage. In *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861), Harriet Jacobs relates Linda's genealogy as a tale of miscegenation. Then at age fifteen she herself fends off the advances of one white man (her owner) by taking up with another (Mr. Sands) and bearing his children, thus to realize her ancestors' awful predicament: in slavery children are not a blessing but a curse. When Linda's son takes ill she feels "what a mockery it is for a slave mother to pray her dying child back to life! Death is better than slavery." But with the birth of her second child, a girl, Linda feels a still deeper burden: "my heart was heavier than it had ever been before. Slavery is terrible for men; but it is more terrible for women."[40] Jacobs's narrative stops short of infanticide, but other antislavery texts push the slave mother's infanticidal logic to its conclusion. "The Slave and Her Babe," a poem published in *The Liberator* (in 1845) and set to music for communal singing at antislavery conventions, opens on a dreary graveyard

scene and a weeping slave mother bending over her mattock. Pondering the grave she's just dug and the outstretched body of an infant girl whose life she's obviously just taken, the woman thinks "that its safety in death was far better/ Than the joy she had felt when she breathed on her cheek." Burying the infant girl will finally shield her from that "tyrant" who was evidently also its father. The first edition of Lunsford Lane's *Narrative* (1842) included on its frontispiece another white-authored poem whose verses develop the same infanticidal logic.[41]

It was not in the least unusual for whites to sing that way, in blackface. Elizabeth Barrett Browning would do it, for example, in "The Runaway Slave at Pilgrim's Point" (1848). What's always striking in such instances is the slave mother begging an advance pardon, and begging it of the same child she's about to kill. Such a scenario makes the slave mother's child her sole earthly judge, a still more powerful judgment since the child is bound "home," to God, source of all liberty. Returning to that source, these works give readers a set of absolute equations: Death is Liberty is Divine. They apotheosize Patrick Henry's appeal, offering it as the only ethical formula for judging the infanticidal slave mother. Still, one has to have made an extraordinary leap of faith to accept it, because such a verdict is only handed down from Heaven, a wholly abstract and transcendent place way beyond the traumas and memories of slavery. It is handed down without experience, without precedent and history, and as such it can always only be a judgment without real judging.

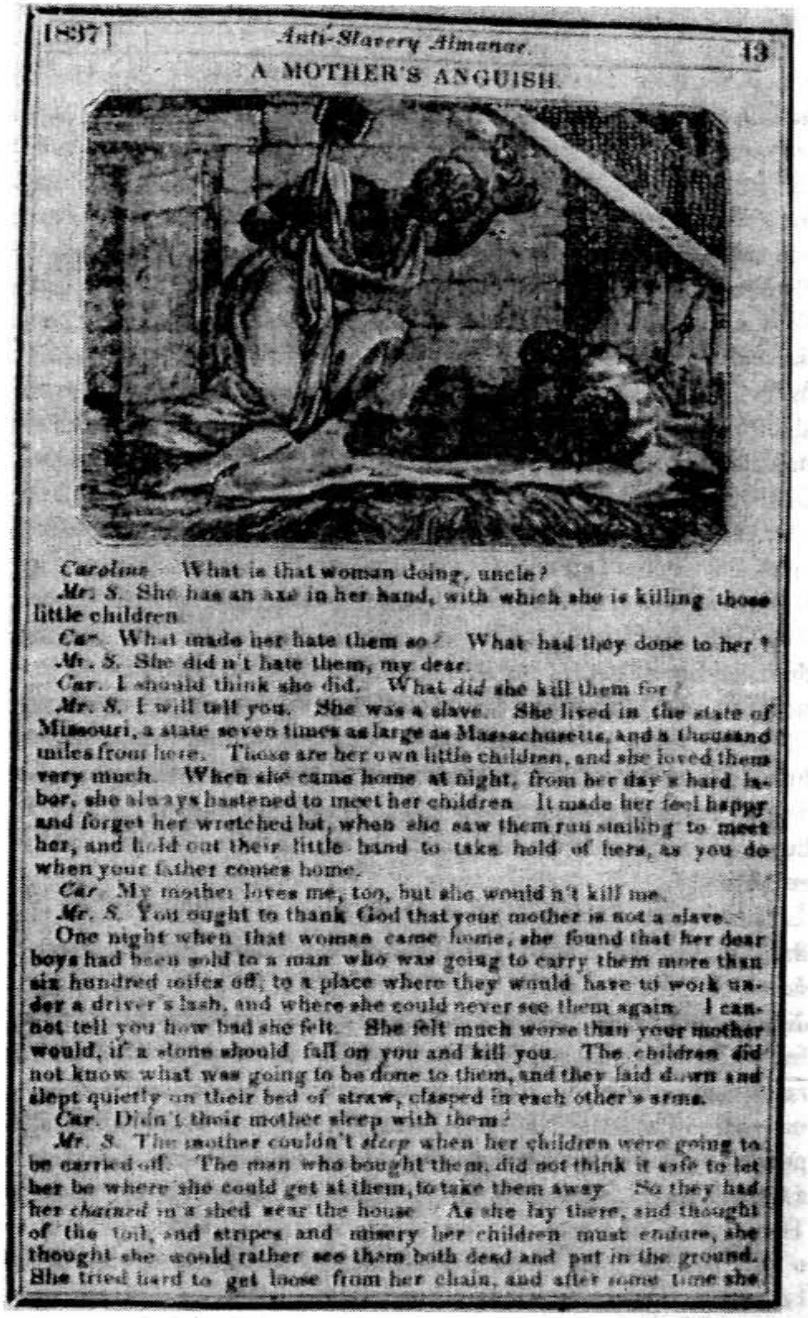
Among abolitionism's earliest and most remarkable imaginary scenes of infanticide that I have found is an illustrated dialogue, "A Mother's Anguish," printed in "The Children's Department" of the 1837 *American Anti-Slavery Almanac*. Under a crude lithograph depicting a slave mother raising an ax over her sleeping children, the dialogue opens with a little girl, Caroline, asking, "What is that woman doing, uncle?" The uncle, a Mr. S., matter-of-factly answers, "She has an axe in her hand, with which she is killing her little children." He explains that the woman was a Missouri slave who loved her children "very much" and always thrilled as she returned from the fields to find their hands outstretched "to take hold of hers, as you do when your father comes home." Still his niece can't fathom the picture: "My mother loves me, too," Caroline replies, "but she wouldn't kill me." The uncle explains further:

> You ought to thank God your mother is not a slave. One night when that woman came home, she found that her dear boys had been sold to a man who was going to carry them six hundred miles off, to a place where they would have to work under a driver's lash, and where she could never see them again. I cannot tell you how bad she felt. She felt much worse than your mother would, if a stone should fall on you and kill you. The children did not know what was going to be done to them, and they laid down and slept quietly on their bed of straw, clasped in each other's arms.

There, he says, the mother found them and after anguishing over the "stripes and misery her children must endure, she thought she would rather see them both dead and put in the ground." She killed them, he says, and then fearing her master's retribution "killed herself. I cannot tell you how much torment a mother must suffer, before she would kill her own children. You can judge from this what slavery is." Still Caroline asks, is it still not "wicked to kill"? Her uncle can only answer in conclusion, "She did what she thought was best for her children."[42]

One remarkable aspect of this vignette, along with and even because of its intended audience of genteel Northern children, is how it stages a racial difference nervously verging on a similarity. Caroline's father returns home from his bourgeois employment, while the slave boys' mother returns to the quarters from a "hard day's labor" in the fields; yet both parents yearn to clasp their children's hands. Like the slave mother, Caroline's mother loves her child but still wouldn't commit infanticide, would she? Perhaps she would, Mr. S. suggests, if it meant saving Caroline from an overseer's cruel "stripes." By these comparisons the dialogue attempts to erase the color line and transfer to the black children Caroline's transcendent values in her possible role as the "special child"—a role she would fulfill, Mr. S. points out, if she were killed under a falling stone. The whole ensemble—lithograph and dialogue—is organized to stage that transference as an empathic response of privileged whites, Caroline and her uncle, interpreting a provocative artwork. Precisely what the *Almanac*'s youthful Northerners must do in their turn. And precisely the idea behind abolitionist cultural practice in general and Stowe's in particular.

"You can judge from this what slavery is," concludes Mr. S. But from what, exactly, *should* one judge? After all, Caroline's uncle twice con-



Infanticidal slave mother: "A Mother's Anguish," selection from the "Children's Department" of the 1837 Anti-Slavery Almanac

cedes the inadequacy of speech to express *this* "mother's anguish," so he fails to extenuate what Caroline thought a "wicked" deed. "I cannot tell you . . . ," he simply says. Since words fail, one might try to "judge from this" *picture*. Yet excepting its vague Missouri origin, the image that Caroline and her uncle ponder lacks any historical context of names and dates and events. Therefore it really does function in a condition of innocence, "The Children's Department," without real-world depth. So this icon also fails to capture the actualities of a human subject, and the color line marking a seemingly absolute difference now reasserts itself. The slave mother's anguish and her infanticide remain unknowable phenomena. One can only observe how this woman did "what *she* thought was best." Yet that involves a moral relativism that bedrock Christians would ordinarily reject.

In abolitionist literature these texts imagined slave mothers' infanticides as scenes in "the romance of America." Their ethical purpose was to confer on slave children the idealized, iconic power of the bourgeois "special child." Most typically, but especially when a slave mother takes the life of her infant girl amid coded hints of sexual oppression, these texts formulate a set of absolute equivalences: Death = Liberty = Divine. Thus they attempt to spirit ethical judgment away from the contingent, historical realities of enslaved people and into a domain of absolutes. Try as they may, however, these icons are still freighted with contradictions and tend to treat slave mothers' actions and motives as being wholly enigmatic.

The one exceptional instance I have found is Elizabeth Barrett Browning's poem. In 1845 the Boston Anti-Slavery Bazaar commissioned her to write a work on abolitionist themes, but Barrett Browning didn't respond until 1847, when she sent a long narrative poem in thirty-five ballad stanzas. In 1848 "The Runaway Slave at Pilgrim's Point" finally appeared in the Bazaar's annual gift book, *The Liberty Bell*, an important Christmas season fund-raiser for Boston abolitionists. The poem's speaker is a young black woman who tells of falling in love with a field hand at a Southern sugar plantation where they both were slaves. Their tyrannical master kills the young man and rapes her. The child of that violent union she suffocates because he is too white, like his father, and because the grave restores the infant to blackness. After the infanticide she runs North and reaches Plymouth Rock before pursuing slave catchers surround her, and there the young woman falls to her

knees and at poem's end she dies—of an exhaustion that literally breaks her heart. Before dying she not only renounces the whites' view of her as a frenzied, brainsick mother; she also forces the surrounding slave catchers to gaze upon her body, seen both as object of their awful oppression and as human subject that their own violence has transformed into a murderer, a mirror of themselves. In the poem's last lines she also puts a new twist on the typical martyr's role, saying of herself and all slaves, "We are too heavy for our cross,/ And fall and crush your seed."[43]

"The Runaway Slave at Pilgrim's Point" provides an alternative, English view that overthrows every significant aspect of the infanticidal slave mother in antebellum American fantasy. In Barrett Browning's understanding, Liberty is not an unquestionable, abstract term equal to others like Death and God. Instead Liberty is a contested value one must fight to claim, in a contingent history that stretches (in the poem) from the rock where *Mayflower* pilgrims kneeled in 1620 to bless their God to the same point where she now kneels ("I bend my knee down on this mark") and curses those pilgrims' seed. Concisely situated in space and time, and laying claim to a very problematic past, Barrett Browning's slave mother rejects any abstract ethics and insists that the good and the wicked may only be known through experience and memory, through history. She demands that the slave catchers acknowledge her relative moral superiority, a claim Barrett Browning's authorial voice never intrudes upon. Still more interesting, this slave mother denounces the "special child" as a repressive bourgeois fantasy. She laughs it away ("Ha, ha!") as a silly cartoon of child-souls "gathered" like "fruit" around the godhead's feet, in some cheap homiletic picture hanging on middle-class parlor walls; in fact, she charges that such images are a calculated "trick of the angels white." Finally, Barrett Browning lets her slave mother speak a motive for infanticide that I have found nowhere else in the literature. Partly the mother says she killed her infant boy to "save it" from the "curse" of slavery, a familiar motif. But then she claims a deeper motive in vengeful resistance: her infant's white face recalls the master's, and looking on him the mother knew that "he [the infant] wanted his master's right" to dominate and violate others. She therefore kills his "right." Certainly that is one of the most bitterly ironic words in a poem that appears to have passed without comment over the American horizon.

Had Americans been more able to take its outlook, Margaret Garner

might not have practically disappeared from written history. People would have realized in Margaret's deeds a tangled skein of motives: despairing desires to "save" her children, urges for violent backlash against the master who had probably made her his concubine and who might in turn victimize little Mary, and a destructive spite for her children's whiteness that was in every sense Massa's "property," his "right." People might thus have reckoned with the singularity of Margaret Garner's child-murder instead of transforming it into iconic clichés or imposing on it a bourgeois ideology that required martyred slaves to evaporate in some abstract spirit kingdom. People would have had to deal with her unique and deeply problematic ethical and historical being.

Also they would have had to substantiate their assumptions about infanticidal slave mothers, and from surviving evidence that would have been difficult. It may well be true, as historian Deborah Gray White remarks, that slave masters always "suspected that midwives conspired with female patients to bring about abortions and infanticides."[44] But White provides no further documentation, a tendency notable in much writing on this topic right back to Stowe's remarks on infanticide in her "Conclusion" to *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. In any case, why should masters' suspicions count for much? What one wants, instead, are testimonies: slaves' testimonies if possible, and preferably court records. Where is that kind of support?

What we have for the entire antebellum period are two problematic cases of child-murder. Legal historian Helen Tunnicliff Catterall records the first, an 1831 case that tried a Missouri grand jury indictment brought against a nineteen-year-old household slave who allegedly administered poison to her infant girl and then smothered the baby "in its bedclothes." A jury convicted Jane but she was later released again into slavery after an Appellate Court overturned the verdict because of a defective indictment. Afterward the Circuit Court apparently never retried Jane, so the question of her guilt remains undecided.

From a slave owner's letters we also know of a second case. In November 1859 on the Georgia plantation of Charles Colcock Jones, a slave named Lucy came under suspicion for giving birth to and then smothering her newborn with assistance from a black midwife. For twelve days Lucy denied even bearing a child, until a physician's examination confirmed that she had. Farmhands then recovered the infant's decomposing body, and Lucy and her midwife were brought to a hearing before three local magistrates. Both women insisted the infant was stillborn and hours of interrogation failed to shake their story. Because Lucy admitted the birth and her deceit, the magistrates summarily convicted her of "concealment" and ordered eight days' imprisonment accompanied by "corporeal punishment to the amount of ninety stripes, inflicted at intervals of two and three days, one third at a time"—a brutally severe penalty.[45]

Neither of these cases produced definitive evidence for infanticide. Scholars may yet turn up evidence in a third, recorded in Lydia Maria Child's 1860 volume, *The Patriarchal Institution as Described by Members of Its Own Family*. Child's anthology reprinted stories that originated from penny papers published below the Mason-Dixon line, a canny way of indicting Southerners with their own news. Among the texts she gathered was a story that "went the rounds of Southern papers in 1853," about a slave woman belonging to a George M. Garrison of a "Polk County" who cut her children's throats as all four of them slept, allegedly because she heard the master intended to sell her south.[46] But did this case ever go to trial? Where? Child doesn't tell us the state; my own efforts to verify the story have uncovered nothing.

American historians have only recently conceded the likelihood that slave mothers' infanticides never were a serious problem. They have long tried to puzzle out mortality statistics revealing that slave infants were twenty-eight times more likely than white babies to die from "smothering," as mothers allegedly lay over them by accident while sleeping. Their studies long assumed that reports of overlaying came from masters who were only trying to hide embarrassing facts about slave infanticide on their plantations. By 1985 the historians' new view was that the higher rates of infants dying while asleep coincided with a sharply higher rate of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) that modern medicine would predict as a consequence of slaves' poorer diet and hygiene. This theory mostly releases slave mothers from suspicion. Indeed one scholar who sifted the mortality schedules and local marshals' reports of slave infant deaths concluded that these data never "produced even a hint of infanticide."[47]

Perhaps it is time we put the Infanticidal Slave Mother on the shelf with other myths about the Old South, for slave infanticides probably occurred with the same (or even less) frequency than among whites. Yet

Southern polemicists must have credited abolitionist stories about child-murdering slaves because they were quick, not to test the stories' bases in fact, but to countercharge that things were far worse in free-labor states. Thus in his *Southern Institutes* (1858), billed as an analysis of slavery's legal and institutional history, Louisiana attorney George S. Sawyer made the bizarre claim that *partus sequitur ventrem* (the doctrine according to which a slave mother's children inherited her condition) actually prevented blacks from abandoning or killing their infants, as whites supposedly often did. Sawyer believed abolition would push emancipated slaves to child-murder because in a wage-labor economy —Europe, he offered for example—parents collapsed under the financial burden of child care. In contrast, Sawyer argued, slavery imposed that burden on masters, who never destroy their own "property." Ebenezer Starnes puts several episodes based on Sawyer's argument into his proslavery novel *The Slaveholder Abroad* (1860). Composed as the narrative of a Georgia plantation master's trip to England for the 1852 World's Fair, just as "Mistress Stowe's book is causing such a row," this novel's strategy is to contrast British "wage-slavery" with the American "patriarchal institution." Along the way Starnes lets Master Jones's black servant, Billy Buck, get his fill of free soil. By novel's end no fewer than five infanticidal episodes have opened Billy's eyes to the horrors of life outside the slave South. Among the worst are a gin-soaked working mother who heaves her son to his death from an apartment window and another downtrodden mother who tosses her infant into a pig pen where a bony sow devours it. Reflecting on these scenes, Billy tells "Marster Jones" that if these mothers lived under slavery's protective arm in Georgia they'd have never been driven to child-murder: "in Georgy, Marster, us slaves has got a plenty, an to spar. An then our marsters has to tote all our cares an troubles, an the troubles o' our families."[48]

These representations probably had a certain force among proslavery advocates because, in contrast with the lack of printed evidence about slave infanticides, newspapers in the North headlined the news of white child-murders. In Cincinnati during the years leading up to Margaret Garner's case, the *Gazette* and *Enquirer* covered numerous murders of infants who were suffocated, abandoned in Cincinnati snowdrifts, dropped down hotel privies, killed by all manner of means. Just two days before Margaret cut little Mary Garner's throat, Coroner Menzies held an inquest over the body of an infant found in a culvert off Western

Infanticidal white mother: In this pro-slavery version, the impoverished, inebriated English mother throws her child from a tenement window
FROM STARNES, *THE SLAVEHOLDER ABROAD: OR, BILLY BUCK'S VISIT, WITH HIS MASTER, TO ENGLAND* (1860)

Row. In another Cincinnati case that unfolded some months earlier it had turned out that a newborn dropped down a hotel privy was delivered by an eighteen-year-old Irish servant girl who had hidden her pregnancy. Then, as now and perhaps always, infanticide happened as a consequence of immaturity, poverty, shame, despair, mental disease, drunkenness, careless neglect . . . a whole host of conditions about which we cannot generalize.[49]

As for that, even if new evidence were to arise and reveal slave infanticide as a statistically significant problem in the Old South, on what basis (again) could we generalize about *its* causes? Certainly we should have to set aside what abolitionist rhetoric always presumed to be a universal type: the slave mother's divinely inspired sacrifice of her child to spare it from a life worse than death. Presuming it so made an otherwise unthinkable and seemingly unnatural act into a "natural" love offering; like God's sacrifice of Christ. Such was the commonplace that Stowe and numerous other writers accepted, and it shaped Northerners' popular understanding of Margaret Garner's case. As "Anonymous"

> scored and initialed, that I can visit, or you can visit, in Charleston, or Savannah, or New York, or Providence, or the Ohio River, or better still on the banks of the Mississippi.

Because such a place did not exist, Morrison realized, her novel *Beloved* "had to."[53]

But how should Margaret Garner's infanticide be committed to public memory? In 1856, proslavery writers were quick to respond. In what became a familiar refrain, Clarkson laid blame at abolitionists' feet.[54] Writing under the byline of "Justice," Benjamin Franklin Bedinger also blamed abolitionists, the "disorganizing, law-breaking, meddling abolitionist fanatics" who (he said) tempted Margaret away from Maplewood *intending* to make of her a public sacrifice. That claim was bizarre enough, but then came another as Justice let loose his racism: "Peggy is a very common, cross-tempered, flat-nosed, thick-lipped negro woman whose father was a very bad character. She was cruel to her children at home . . . [and] the murder of the child was the result of vexation and disappointment, arousing to a pitch of phrenzy a revengeful and devilish temper, inherited from her father." By his fourth installment, of 5 April 1856 (when Margaret was languishing in a Covington jail cell, unbeknownst to Cox and Jolliffe), Justice was calling on his fellow Southron ideologues to gird themselves for a bloodletting, if they wanted to heal the Union's diseased body.[55]

It was becoming a commonplace refrain. Asking why "alienation . . . between North and South had become so *bitter* that civil war is ready to burst forth," Kentuckian Henry Field James traced "these *immense evils* to the fanatical spirit of abolitionism." After the Garner case he set about writing a kind of fiction arguing that thesis. His *Abolitionism Unveiled; or, Its Origin, Progress, and Pernicious Tendency Fully Developed* appeared in mid-July 1856 and contains perhaps the first fictionalized version of Margaret Garner's child-murder.[56] Organized as a travelogue, Henry James's chapters take a Boone County squire and his nephew on a journey to Canada and back. In Sandusky and Detroit, Squire Gray and young David interview jailed fugitive slaves lamenting their errors and pleading for a return to their kind "Marster"; in Canada the two Kentuckians narrowly escape a mob of unemployed, starving free blacks who were deluded into running North after listening to abolitionist "fancies"; at Oberlin College the Squire trounces an abolitionist professor

in a debate over "the peculiar institution"; and while returning to Squire Gray's Boone County plantation via Cincinnati they patiently withstand the verbal harangue of a "Higher Law fanatic" who very much resembles John Jolliffe.

Tedious polemic veiled as fiction, *Abolitionism Unveiled* concludes with a version of Margaret's child-murder. The scene opens at the tranquil slave cabin of "Peggy" and "Sam" (Margaret and Robert, whom witnesses variously called "young Simon" or "young Sammy" during the fugitive trial). The novel imagines for young Sam "a warm, comfortable room, good bedding, a wife, and four pretty children," and therefore hardly a care—until an evil white abolitionist (oddly named "Jim Crow") sneaks onto Gray's plantation. Crow persuades Sam to run for his freedom and gives the young slave a revolver. In turn, Sam commences to work on a doubting Peggy, who ominously confesses (in James's awful imitations of black dialect): "I'm so easily frightened, an' den I don't know what I might do. To be sent to de Souf, de berry notion nearly kills me. All dese t'ings, dear husband, if we should be taken, will rush upon me at once; I shall become de'perate, and what I may be tem'ted to do, God only knows." Finally she agrees to run, young Sam steals "the master's horses and sleigh," and that night the family crosses over the frozen Ohio River to Cincinnati. There, Squire Gray recalls, "they arrived at old Joe Kite's about the dawn of day, too late, as luck would have it, for underground railroad operations." The marshal's posse soon surrounds Kite's cabin and as the men batter their way inside Sam fires wildly while Peggy, "in a fit of desperation" that she had foretold, is seen to have "cut the throat of one of her children, and wounded two others." All of this only sketched key facts in the Garner case that any newspaper reader recognized. But it also required a view of slaves (especially Margaret) as simpleminded children lacking even the free agency to plot escape, much less conceptualize freedom. Squire Gray brushes guilt away from slaves and slaveholders alike and demonizes the abolitionist, "the serpent that crept into the garden of Eden and by his subtlety tempted Adam and Eve to depart from their holy estate."[57]

Ugly as it is, Henry Field James's racism never attains the virulence of *Negroes and Negro Slavery* (1861).[58] The author, Dr. J. H. Van Evrie, was a New York physician who flirted with polygenesis, a theory of mankind's multiple origins that challenged the Judeo-Christian narrative

of humanity's common descent from Adam. He could easily have been the model for Toni Morrison's character, Schoolteacher, in *Beloved*. In that novel Schoolteacher orders his northern Kentucky pupils to count and gauge the "characteristics" of whites and blacks, then list them under "human" and "animal" headings in a two-column format. Van Evrie similarly categorizes "the Caucasian" and "the Negro" according to differences such as "Color," "Figure," "Hair," and facial "Features." Later chapters extend this analysis from physiological into psychological characteristics, and in a discussion of "The Domestic Affections" Van Evrie portrays black mothers as more animalistic and instinctual, solely concerned with securing "the mere bodily preservation" of their offspring. In contrast he depicts white mothers as more given to sentimental affections because of "the elevated intellectualism of the race." Like other thinkers associated with polygenesis, such as Louisiana professor Josiah Nott, Van Evrie understood whites and blacks not as alternate varieties of man but as wholly different *species*. Hence Van Evrie's worst nightmare—miscegenation. He believed any crossbreeding of whites and blacks would produce "mongrel" hybrids prone to mental disease and finally, as with mules, sterility. On his view, prohibiting relations between whites and blacks was simply a matter of rational, benevolent "science"; a matter, as Van Evrie phrased it in the book's "Preface," of confining slaves to their side of the color line and so preventing them from committing "treason to themselves, to their posterity, to the country, and to American civilization."[59]

In the Garner infanticide Van Evrie thought he saw an important test case for his theory. Revising his book for 1861 rerelease, he erred in recalling a few factual details (he has Margaret killing her daughter while *returning* to Kentucky) but clearly recollected newspapers' depictions of Margaret's child-murder as an act of "Roman sternness and French exaltation." Here was the old challenge to proslavery thought: Could a slave mother enact Patrick Henry's heroic passions? Had she the "higher sensibility" to elect death over slavery? For Van Evrie this was an especially telling question because his theory claimed that only whites exercised that superior intellectual faculty. Moreover, his theory claimed for black mothers an absolute, instinctual protectiveness over their children. If so, what explains Margaret Garner's infanticide? Van Evrie thought he found the answer right in front of American readers, in the penny papers' accounts. Witnesses had described this woman, he

recalled, as "a mulatto or mongrel." To him that explained all: Margaret's "unnatural crime was quite possible, as indeed any unnatural vice or crime is always possible in the mixed element, [but] it is scarcely possible to the [pure] negress, whose imperative maternal instinct, as has been observed, shields her from such atrocity."[60] Case closed.

Wholesale exercises in denial, proslavery versions of the Garner infanticide pardoned the slave master and his "peculiar institution," indicted and demonized "fanatical" abolitionists, and rested the matter on principles of divinely authored "Nature." Few such texts appeared, however, and excepting Van Evrie's (New York) treatise all cropped up in the Cincinnati area, as Southrons seemed content to let Margaret fade from public memory. In contrast, the literary response of Northern abolitionists was broadly broadcast and sustained, as the Garner case remained a vital cause célèbre.

In early April 1856 a Cleveland minister named Henry Bushnell preached a widely reprinted sermon on a scripture from Judges 19, the story of a sojourning old Levite taken in at a stranger's house.[61] In the Old Testament narrative, a band of rioting Benjaminites surrounds them in the night and demands that the host give up his guest to satisfy their lust. Instead the Levite sends out his concubine, the Benjaminites rape the woman until she dies, and the outraged Levite divides her body into twelve portions and sends them throughout Israel's tribes as an exhortation for them to "take counsel" over the horror. They do: Judges 20 narrates the outbreak of civil war as Israel's other eleven tribes rise up and nearly exterminate the Benjaminites. Aligning the Garner story with this Old Testament allegory of righteous civil war required several revisions of historical fact. For instance, Bushnell ignores Margaret's relation to the Kites and pictures the Garners as wandering Cincinnati's snowbound streets, unwelcome and unhoused until "a poor laboring man," quite a stranger, "gave them the shelter of his humble cabin." Then, nodding to the subtext of miscegenetic rape that has always haunted the Garner case, he makes Margaret the "concubine" demanded to slake Southern lusts and Margaret's daughter Mary the innocent lamb sacrificed on freedom's altar—a motif that recurs in the literature, though Bushnell wasn't the first to use it.

Probably the first writer to develop that motif at any length was Harvard professor and poet William Wallace Hebbard. On the evening of Tuesday, 18 March 1856, he recited 798 lines of verse (heroic couplets,

mostly) in a "rotund and musical" voice before a disappointingly thin but apparently enthusiastic audience gathered for an abolitionist fund-raiser at Boston's Tremont Temple. Hebbard titled his opus *The Night of Freedom: An Appeal in Verse, against the Great Crime of our Country, Human Bondage!* and after slight revision published it as a chapbook in 1857. Hebbard's invective style scored its best hits against prominent figures like President Pierce, Doughface Northern senators like Daniel Webster, and those marshals and judges who remanded fugitive slaves Anthony Burns and Thomas Sims to slavery.[62]

By all accounts, though, Hebbard's audience was most deeply moved when he narrated Margaret Garner's escape to Cincinnati ("the Rome of the West") and her search in vain for sanctuary there. At last the "Powers of Darkness" surround her and, no hero coming to her aid, a cornered Margaret raises up a knife as the slave catchers stop in horror:

> *All hope of Liberty on earth has fled—*
> *"But shall they not be free in heaven?" she plead;*
> *And from that heart by man's oppression riven,*
> *Up went the dread appeal of woe to Heaven:—*
> *"Forgive, O righteous God, if sin it be,*
> *I give these treasures back, unstained, to Thee!"*
> *The blade flashed in the light!—*one *babe was free!*

Margaret's sacrificing her babe on "Freedom's Altar" ushers in the poem's uttermost darkness and a world turned on its head: Tyranny has made "Infanticide a virtue in our land." By Hebbard's closing stanzas, descendants of the Pilgrims and the heroes of 1776 can no longer await God's judgment, "in awful ire,/ And vialed wrath, outpouring from above." Charging "forth to the field, as Freedom's living men," they're armed for "Civil War."

Meantime abolitionist critics and editors sustained a running critique of peripheral issues. In mid-February, Archibald Gaines had evidently professed (to Lucy Stone, during the impromptu meeting in Pendery's court) his staunch membership in "the Old School Presbyterian Church" of the Richwood neighborhood, and Northern clergymen and journalists were quick to capture the irony. The *National Anti-Slavery Standard* hooted that it was certainly comforting to understand how the same squire who hounded "his chattels" over the brink to child-murder

was also "a strictly 'evangelical' man and a firm supporter of the gospel!" In April, Judge Leavitt came in for similar treatment after local newspapers broadcast his election to Cincinnati's Presbyterian synod. From Boston, *The Liberator* editorialized that Leavitt had turned the bar of justice into "the altar of the great American Moloch," at which he then assisted Gaines at Margaret's child-murder.[63]

More followed in this vein. "Dear Garrison," wrote Cleveland's Henry C. Wright in a public letter to *The Liberator*'s famous editor on 28 March 1856. "The end of the Cincinnati tragedy is not yet. Margaret Garner is a name that will long be preserved and consecrated in the hearts of the people of Ohio. That heroic mother, in the deep, holy love of her maternal heart, cut the throat of one child and tried to kill her three others to save them from the lash and the lust of a leading member of the Presbyterian Church of Kentucky." Summarizing Margaret's shipment to the South and little Cilla's drowning, Wright pointed (again) to the underlying theme of sexual violence, remarking that she "saved two of her babes from the pollutions and horrors" of Master Gaines. Next Wright turned his ire against Governor Chase, who "saw the tragedy proceeding . . . and opened not his mouth till the deed was finished, and the victim beyond his reach." When Wright sent this letter he had no way of knowing that Clinton Butts was steaming upriver with Margaret Garner for a second round of Gaines's deceitful game.[64]

In early May, Boston abolitionist Theodore Parker seconded Henry Wright's indictment during his keynote speech at the American Anti-Slavery Society meetings in New York. Parker argued that in standing by while federal marshals returned the Garners to Kentucky, Chase had virtually caved in to the Slave Power. Why? Answering, Parker went even further than Wright. The Ohio governor failed to rescue the Garners not only for reasons of political expediency, Parker thought, but also for reasons of *race*. If she had been a white woman and not "a black African," Parker believed, then Chase would have called on his "four hundred thousand able-bodied men" and their "half a million firelocks" to protect the Garners, for if he had not done so the governor's "head would not have been on his shoulders" the next day. These remarks were generally reported in Northern papers and wounded Chase, who wrote Parker for the full text of his speech. A week after receiving a newly bound volume of it Chase responded, in a letter marked "Private," complaining that whether inside or outside federally recognized slave

states he hated "the peculiar institution": "There is no spot on earth in which I would sanction slavery." As to Parker's "intimation" that his actions were guided by an unacknowledged racism, Chase replied: "God forbid!"[65]

Though she herself was in New Orleans, Margaret Garner haunted the City Assembly Rooms on Broadway, during the New York antislavery meeting of 7 May 1856. Before Parker took the podium that Wednesday evening Lucy Stone addressed the membership for over an hour and had even more to say about "the recent Cincinnati Tragedy." Her main point: that abolitionism had entered a new stage. She claimed that by spring 1856 the objective of containment—summarized in abolitionism's early rallying cry, "No slavery outside the slave states!"—lacked any further credibility. And why? Because the Garner case demolished the motto's meaning: "What, to that mother, that father at her side, and those children clustered around them, are those words?" Squire Gaines's slaves had "the love of liberty which God had implanted in their souls," and so "they started to make their way to Canada" over the "bridge of ice." In vivid detail Stone sketched how slave catchers surrounded Kite's cabin, how Margaret drew "a dagger she had concealed" and, "knowing too well from her own experience the life that awaited," took the life of little Mary, "a child of surprising beauty." The audience heard again the story they already knew from Northern newspapers, of the trial, the failed habeas corpus battle, the Garners' shipment to the South, little Cilla Garner's drowning (Margaret's second infanticide, according to Stone), then Margaret's last return to Covington and Archibald Gaines's final victory. Gaines's agents had stretched forth the hated arm of federal authority outside the slave states and into Ohio, Stone argued, and so obliterated any difference between free and slave states.

Quoting from John Jolliffe's summation as well as from Mary Livermore's *New York Tribune* poem, Lucy Stone understood the Garner case as a popularly circulated story, already told in familiar texts. In short, she understood it as *a legend*. Stone thought it spoke especially to women, "disenfranchised" but willing to "make a common cause," as mothers, to "root out the system of slavery."[66] Her speech was a powerful appeal for solidarity and action that brought a standing ovation and loud hurrahs. When he followed her to the podium, Theodore Parker said Stone's speech had been "more eloquent than the philosophy of noblest men."

Margaret Garner was fast becoming a story and a byword. Remembered in the speeches of Frederick Douglass and Charles Remond, summoned before Republicans at their nominating convention, the image of her child-murder symbolized for some that the time for words had passed. Douglass was telling audiences: "Every thing connected with the struggle portends the rapid coming of the final crisis. And I for one welcome it. Almost any thing is better than a suspense."[67] Time to gird oneself for civil war, Douglass thought.

Summer 1856 also brought publication of a work that is, if not the first fictional treatment of the Garner infanticide (with Henry Field James's despicable book), at least the first full-length novel based upon it—a rare book titled *Liberty or Death!; or, Heaven's Infraction of the Fugitive Slave Law*. Of its author, Hattia M'Keehan, we know little beyond representations in her 1859 autobiography, *The Life and Trials of a Hoosier Girl*. She was raised in Madison, Indiana, and married a "heartless" New Orleans slave owner. Months later the man was mortally wounded in a duel and left his new wife an estate mortgaged to the hilt. In 1854, at age twenty-five, she moved to Cincinnati and made her living as a "colporteur," an itinerant peddler of Bibles, concordances, and religious tracts.[68] To her wares she also added antislavery novels.

When the Garner case broke, winter weather was confining M'Keehan to Cincinnati, where she must have followed the case intensely, for *Liberty or Death!* novelizes practically every significant detail of the Garner case that was available from newspaper accounts. M'Keehan simplifies some things: her Robert Garner character, for example, has already been sold South as the novel opens. M'Keehan also changes characters' names: Archibald and Elizabeth Gaines become "Mr. and Mrs. Nero," Clinton Butts a "marshal Bullethead," and Pendery a "Commissioner Leadhead." Even Hiram H. Robinson makes an appearance, as "a certain proslavery, prowhiskey editor of Cincinnati." But the most significant change comes with the Margaret character, the bizarrely named Gazella: "In form fragile, but stately; her complexion almost fair—for in her veins ran but a tincture of African blood." This revision, a whitening of Margaret's mulatto identity, becomes crucial because *Liberty or Death!* plays out themes of rape and miscegenation that few, excepting Lucy Stone, had been willing to name. In fact, M'Keehan's novel not only identifies Gazella as her mas-

ter's half sister (through Squire Nero's father); it also remarks that Gazella's child Rosetta—fated to die, in little Mary Garner's role—is in turn Mr. Nero's daughter, thus adding incest to this book's indictment.[69]

Approaching "the late tragedy at Cincinnati" as "a romance of the most exciting character," M'Keehan also plots *Liberty or Death!* as a ghost story. After Gazella's infanticide, staged exactly as newspapers reported Margaret's, little Rosetta's specter twice haunts the Kentuckians. She first appears to Bullethead and Nero at the "Broadhorn" (Magnolia House) hotel, where they have stopped for whiskey before riding on to Nero's with the child's body. "Vile assassins!" the spirit warns them, "accuse not my mother; ye are the murderers." At Nero's Boone County plantation she appears again, begins stalking the halls and in Mrs. Nero's outraged presence calling to Nero as her "Father!" before damning them all to Hell.[70]

With its allusion to Patrick Henry's famous declaration, *Liberty or Death!* suggests much about popular perceptions of the Garner case. M'Keehan's desire to indict Southern slaveholders as well as Northern Doughfaces (including Governor Chase, for his "tardiness"), her treatment of sexual themes, analogies to heroic infanticidal mothers in classical legend, and obvious fascination with the Garners as romantic spectacle: all are consistent with themes and tendencies evident in newspaper coverage since day one. Certainly M'Keehan felt she'd struck a nerve. Traveling the upper Ohio Valley with trunks full of copies, as well as the plates needed to print off more on demand, she claimed a $500 profit in the first several months—even after paying for initial typesetting costs at a Cincinnati print shop. By 1863 the book had gone through at least seven printings from the original plates, including one 1862 printing under a new title page: *Liberty or Death!: or, The Mother's Sacrifice*, by Mrs. J. P. Hardwick. (Apparently the Hoosier girl had remarried.)[71]

Hattia M'Keehan wasn't the only novelist before Toni Morrison to write the Garner infanticide as a ghost story. In 1858 John Jolliffe published his second novel, *Chattanooga*, a rambling, uneven narrative that also uses the murdered child's ghost to indict her slave master. But where M'Keehan works close to actual events, Jolliffe treats them with far greater license. Significantly, he sets his story twenty years in the past and frames it with the narrative of a Connecticut Yankee, Hezekiah Strong, who has traveled to Tennessee in search of witnesses to the

"strange tragedy" he recalls from New England penny papers. In Chattanooga, Strong begins unraveling that story, now become a local legend ("an old time story") that treats a fugitive slave mother, her child, and a haunted cave "that you wouldn't dare to go into."[72]

An awkward device whenever the novel reverts back to it, this frame story becomes so disruptive that one finally wonders why Jolliffe kept it. I think the answer is that he needed some way of expressing his dismayed realization that events had swept past Margaret Garner. By 1858 she was fading from memory, except as a curious episode in the region's legendary battles over slavery, and this not twenty but just two years after her "tragedy." Jolliffe knew how the memory of Margaret had become a popular icon. But the efforts of Jolliffe's well-meaning researcher Hezekiah Strong illustrate the near-impossibility not only of finding reliable documents but also of piercing through witnesses' petty bigotries and monstrous hatreds to get at anything resembling historical "truth" behind the icon.

The story Strong recovers, despite its too numerous and complex digressions, tells of a slave master's purchase in Charleston of a beautiful sixteen-year-old slave girl named Huldah, a quick-witted, literate, and "nearly white" girl torn from her crying mother's arms. Her new master, Norton, transports Huldah to his Chattanooga plantation, intending to "breed the wench" with another slave, a rather crude and illiterate black man. Before Norton can impose marriage, however, Huldah meets a local Cherokee chieftain, Grey Eagle. He's literate, eloquent, "born to command." The two elope and Huldah lives for a while at the Cherokee Nation, but just when she gives birth to a son, Norton learns of her hideout. He mounts a posse to recapture his fugitive slave and her infant, but Huldah eludes the slave catchers by taking refuge in a cave known only to local Cherokees, and eventually Grey Eagle takes her North, then to Europe. When the family returns to Chattanooga after a four-year absence Norton mounts another slave hunt, assisted by local Presbyterian preacher Jabez Clitters. They trail the fugitives to the secret cave, a cathedral-like room with "Corinthian" stalactites forming arches and buttresses, and, at its center, an altar-like stone. From there Huldah and Grey Eagle hold them off at gunpoint and send out word to nearby tribespeople "that at midday she would offer a sacrifice in the great hall." There, with Indians and slave catchers looking on, Huldah embraces her son Willie, proclaims, "No child of mine shall ever be a slave!" and

plunges a dagger into his heart: "He fell upon the altar, and Huldah threw upon his bleeding wound the flag of her country." Months after the infanticide Willie's ghost begins haunting the Reverend Clitters, who insists "I—I—I did not kill that child. Oh no—I did not kill that child. Its own mother murdered it."[73]

Jolliffe's gothic adventure story tells us much about how he understood the Garner case. Huldah's cool deliberateness in planning the child-murder and her staging the scene as both sublime sacrifice (the altar) and political resistance (in draping Willie with the flag) suggest how Jolliffe rejected any view of Margaret as an ignorant woman driven by "phrenzy," and that he fully accepted her deed's symbolic power for abolitionism. Imagining the Garner case as a ghost story, Jolliffe tacitly accepts and puts to use the popular perceptions of Margaret as a figure out of tragic romance, perceptions that surfaced within days of little Mary Garner's death. But he also realizes how those cultural processes eclipse facts behind the stuff of legends, and this explains why Jolliffe had to intrude the otherwise awkward frame story, with its central figure of Hezekiah Strong questing for the true story behind those hazy myths—one way of characterizing my own commitment to understanding the Margaret Garner case.

Finally, it is interesting that, like other writers, Jolliffe not only imagines a much more "whitened" tragic slave mother than Margaret ever was; he also writes Robert Garner out of the story. M'Keehan's novel simply deleted his character; Jolliffe's move is still more troubling. Having imagined with horror this "nearly white" woman's forced mating to a rather ordinary black plantation slave, on the very next page Jolliffe solves his problem by bringing in the noble, literate, and all but white Cherokee chief, a man welcomed among monarchs when he takes Huldah to Europe. Thus *Chattanooga* keeps the color line solidly fixed. For John Jolliffe, the man who among all others in Cincinnati best knew and sympathized with the Garners' hopes and designs, still does not (or cannot) represent them as fleeing slavery in order to preserve the integrity of their *black family*.

At the end of *Chattanooga*, he quickly sends his Huldah/Margaret character off alone to a Louisiana plantation, where after several "sad and cheerless years" of grieving to herself and avoiding other slaves, she dies under the overseer's lash. When the novel was published in mid-

summer 1858, no one had heard anything of Margaret for over two years. It probably seemed a likely fate.

"Live in hope of freedom!"

Late summer–early autumn 1858. It would have begun as a drowsiness she could not shake. Nights, she craved sleep but tossed and turned in a cold sweat. Days, Margaret had no appetite, and even when she gave in to family telling her she must eat, nausea soon followed. Despite her low-grade fever Margaret probably continued to answer work calls, at least for the first week or so. Then her illness would have been severe enough for Mr. Maxwell, the overseer, to order Margaret quarantined with any other slaves showing similar symptoms of typhoid—for it soon enough became clear that this was Margaret's latest trouble. Whether or not she beat the disease would depend on a range of factors, but women in her age group were for some reason particularly liable to die from typhoid.

Initially, typhoid fever presents a range of symptoms that nineteenth-century doctors and laymen often misdiagnosed—as yellow fever, cholera, or a cold. An infectious bacterial disease usually caused when typhus bacilli seep from infected cesspools into the water supply, it spreads in epidemic fashion even while it remains localized among users of particular springs or cisterns. July through September were always the months of greatest incidence. By late summer 1858 yellow fever began working its way up the Mississippi River from New Orleans, and with it came outbreaks of typhoid. By September *The Mississippian* reported "yellow jack" and typhoid as far north as Memphis. Taken altogether, it was a bad season. The usually fatal black tongue disease was devastating herds of Mississippi cattle; "rust" and boll weevils were wrecking the cotton crop. It was a season of omens: in late September a comet cut a swath across the night skies.[74]

The Garners had been laboring a year and a half at Willow Grove plantation and had come to know cotton's seasonal rhythms. This was their second crop for Master Bonham and by now Tom and Sam, ages eight and six, would be in the fields with their parents. As for Margaret's baby, the one she was carrying in 1856, Robert omitted any mention of

it in his interview published years later, in 1870. A stillbirth, perhaps? Or did Robert avoid speaking of it to the Cincinnati reporter because the child was not his? Maybe the reporter's questions simply didn't lead Robert to speak of the child (though he does mention Tom and Sam). In June 1860, however, Deputy Marshal Thomas A. Sellers recorded in the census rolls the presence at Willow Grove of a single four-year-old slave—the age of Margaret's child if it survived. This child was listed as a mulatto female, one of only two mulatto children at Willow Grove, the other a boy whose age in 1860 corresponds to that for Samuel Garner. The same census data also indicate that the Garners now lived in a neighborhood where blacks outnumbered whites by a ratio of 12.4 to 1, an extraordinary change for Margaret and her family.[75]

In 1858 the Garners had acclimated themselves to a slave culture with more autonomy, solidarity, and continuity than they had known in Richwood Station. Bonham's plantation fit a Deep South pattern in which a predominantly black population included seven times fewer mulatto slaves than in the Border South, indicating that miscegenation and concubinage and rape were relatively less significant factors in slaves' lives. The census also indicates that Issaquena masters did not usually hire out their bondsmen, bringing more stability to the slave community than anything the Garners had known at Maplewood.[76]

By 1858 the Garners had found their place in Willow Grove's slave quarter. They had learned to negotiate their way in a more complex internal hierarchy with more rigidly assigned roles. At Maplewood, for example, a nursemaid and house servant like Margaret would have been trained to a range of tasks such as spinning and sewing, and during seasons of peak demand for agricultural labor she was probably sent to labor in the fields alongside her master's other slaves, at times even with white family members and Master Gaines himself. At Willow Grove she was initiated into a slave culture in which those holding superior positions—as domestics, artisans, and drivers—might be keenly protective of precisely defined responsibilities and privileges.[77] At the same time, old hands probably schooled the Garners in new ways (at the same time learning old Kentucky tricks) to outwit Bonham and overseer Maxwell. These modes of covert resistance were vital items of knowledge for slaves laboring on Deep South plantations. In *Roll, Jordan, Roll*, Eugene Genovese describes the seasonal rhythms of plantation labor, during which masters and overseers accepted slaves' minor resistances during off-peak

periods, but in exchange demanded extraordinary exertion from them during seasons when they planted corn and cotton (in late March and April) and harvested it (in late summer and autumn). How and to what extent slaves might exploit and resist these concessions and demands, all the while avoiding the overseer's lash, were matters the Garners had to learn during their first year at Willow Grove.[78]

At the same time they would have encountered a more variable and rich culture. In Boone County, Margaret Garner had been raised among slaves who, like their masters, had all either immigrated or descended from those who immigrated out of Virginia. Now at Willow Grove she and her family had come to know a more heterogeneous slave population. Like other Mississippi slaves, residents in Bonham's slave quarters might trace their origins to southern Virginia and North Carolina tobacco farms, to the rice fields of South Carolina and Georgia, and to southern Louisiana's sugar plantations. These people sustained a richly creolized, polyglot culture of folktales, slave songs, proverbs, jokes, and aphorisms, as well as medicinal and spiritual practices. Less assimilated to the dominant white culture than their Border State counterparts, they preserved many cultural practices and beliefs surviving from the African diaspora. Their Christianity blended African rites and myths and involved a more covert, resisting outlook than anything Margaret had known from Richwood Presbyterian Church and neighborhood "hush harbors."[79]

This was Margaret's world in 1858; for all she knew it was her future. In some ways it was worse than Maplewood, in other ways it was better. If Margaret was freer from the kinds of white sexual oppression that once drove her to despair about her daughters' futures, nevertheless she still despaired over her sons' prospects in Bonham's cotton fields. At all events the Garners were still together, their lives had taken on regular rhythms in a large community, and at times these things seemed like real blessings. Then came her fevers and night sweats.

After the disease's merely uncomfortable one- or two-week incubation period, Margaret's gastric disorders and night sweats gave way to full-blown typhoid. Her fever began a steady, stepwise march up to the 105–106-degree range, especially at night; and if her case followed the general pattern she was also wracked by chills and body ache, intense stomach cramps, headaches, and a roaring in her ears. If DeWitt Bonham or his overseer, Maxwell, brought in a physician to treat Margaret,

it would have been during this stage, although a doctor's remedies—from doses of castor oil and "Glauber salts" (sodium sulfate) to bleedings and blisterings (usually of the chest)—cannot have provided any relief and probably only tortured Margaret all the more. Perhaps a physician's use of steam inhalation relieved her dry throat and mucous membranes, but the help was only temporary.[80]

About three weeks into the disease Margaret's condition turned critical. Soaring fevers brought on delirium and dried her lips and tongue so terribly that they began to split and hemorrhage. She suffered from a dry cough. Roseolate spots that appeared on her chest and abdomen during the onset of fever turned to open pustules. At the end, as delirium brought on tremors and paralysis, Margaret could no longer speak and probably became comatose. Before she lapsed into silence, her last words to Robert "were, never to marry again in slavery, but to live in hope of freedom, which she believed would come in some way."[81]

Liberty thus came to Margaret Garner in the way it came to her daughters, Mary and Cilla, whom she had claimed were better dead than slaves. But her dying was prolonged and excruciatingly painful. Certainly it must have seemed to her family that, after all she endured at the hands of masters, slave catchers, all degrees of racists, even some well-meaning abolitionists who could not or would not make good on their promises, inscrutable Providence should have devised a kinder ending to Margaret Garner's story. They buried her at Willow Grove. We may imagine them singing about crossing "over Jordan."

Margaret Garner's last words to Robert, among the few bits of her reported speech that we have, spoke volumes about her view of black women's lives in the Old South. For Margaret did not enjoin Robert from remarrying; she enjoined him from taking another wife *in slavery*, a promise consistent with all her twenty-five years under the patriarchal institution. For it was slavery that made marriage some kind of hell to her parents, enough that when she was first coming into womanhood at thirteen, Margaret's master, John Gaines—by all accounts a relatively gentle slave owner—became so persuaded Cilla would bolt North with Peggy that he used threats of selling the girl away as a means to coerce the family's obedience. Some time afterward, Duke, the slave who may or may not have been Margaret's actual father, either ran away from Maplewood or was sold or died. Despite this legacy she married Robert and by him bore Thomas. For the next five years James Marshall hired

her husband away to masters all over northern Kentucky. She saw Robert only on Sundays if he could get a pass and if old Eliza Gaines or Master Archibald's new wife, Elizabeth, with her nursing children would allow Peggy to join him. Then came the worst: Archibald Gaines made Margaret Garner's life into some kind of hell that neither she nor Robert ever cared to talk about with white people. Her children's faces told part of that story.

When the Garners finally bolted for Cincinnati on 27 January 1856 they did it as a family. After reaching free soil their fatal mistake was to seek shelter with family. At the house of her cousin Elijah Kite, Margaret Garner picked up a butcher knife because—as she later explained to abolitionists—she had to put as many of her children as possible in a place where slave catchers could never reach them. That Robert's parents did not block Margaret's strokes of the knife says that they, too, understood and tacitly accepted her motive for infanticide. Later, Robert told John Jolliffe that as a family they would all "go singing to the gallows" rather than return to slavery.

The day after her arrest, a *Cincinnati Gazette* headline put Margaret Garner's story in spare words that expressed the dreadful logic at its heart: "A Slave Mother Murders her Child Rather than See it Returned to Slavery." This phrasing said it straight out, but time swiftly translated Margaret Garner's infanticide into different terms. A case study in the conflict of laws, a drama of disunion, a prelude to fratricidal war, thus a chapter in the tragic romance of this republic—for nineteenth-century Americans the Garner case lit up all of these complex themes. And more: her story was used in support of the most poisonous racist theory, or it was a tableau of the most divine mother love. Then it was all but forgotten.

"Never marry again in slavery!" Margaret Garner's final testament claimed for her life story an essential understanding about black families and the awful wreckage that slavery spread through them. The damage involved domestic, intimate matters that were always "unspeakable things unspoken," in Toni Morrison's phrasing. For historians these "things" tend to resist anything beyond suppositions and inferences—a good enough reason (if we need it) to have historical novels like *Beloved*.

Margaret Garner's child-murder electrified a range of other themes it was always also about. Working back through them, however, we come at last to recognize how core facts in her life form a pattern that reveals

a meaning. For her, slavery made child rearing an awful counterpart of child-murder, yet this oppression never froze her soul in despair. With her family she sought freedom, fought for it, and determined when all was lost that they should find freedom in death, and claim it in plain sight of Massa Gaines himself. Then, indomitable and inscrutable, she endured jail, her trial, Gaines's shell game, and her family's sale to the Cotton South. The story of Margaret Garner is all about slavery and child-murder, family and freedom.

On her deathbed Margaret implored Robert, "Never marry again in slavery!" But then Margaret Garner added, "Live in hope of freedom!"

5. Legend

1. Patterns of Arkansas, Louisiana, and Mississippi agricultural practice are available from a number of sources; for example, Willard B. Gatewood, "Sunnyside: The Evolution of an Arkansas Plantation," *Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 50.1 (1991): 1–

12; and Chapter 3, "Of Water, Land, and Work," in Winthrop D. Jordan, *Tumult and Silence at Second Creek: An Inquiry into a Civil War Slave Conspiracy* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1993), 29–45; J. Carlyle Sitterson, "The William J. Minor Plantations: A Study in Ante-Bellum Absentee Ownership," *Journal of Southern History* 9 (1943): 59–74. I have also consulted William J. Minor's diary for 1856, containing a wealth of information about climate, agriculture, and slave life at his northern Louisiana plantation; see the microfilm edition of the William J. Minor Family Papers, available at the Louisiana State University library.

2. This was Gaines's characterization in his 14 April 1856 public letter to the *Cincinnati Enquirer*, printed in the next day's edition (and reprinted in the *Covington Journal*, 19 April 1856).
3. See the *Cincinnati Gazette*, 12 March 1856; and the *New York Tribune*, 24 March 1856.
4. Gaines's letter to the *Enquirer*, 14 April 1856.
5. Other sources include: Kentucky governor Charles Morehead's telegram to Chase, quoted below (see note 6); a story in the *Cincinnati Gazette* for Tuesday, 11 March 1856 (titled "The Fugitives—The Requisition," it concludes by wondering whether Chase will "demand her [Margaret's] return from Arkansas"); and a story in the *Covington Journal* for Saturday, 15 March 1856, whose informant was Clinton Butts (he telegraphed Covington after the *Henry Lewis* accident).
6. As reported in the *Cincinnati Gazette*, 14 March 1856.
7. The *Covington Journal* of 19 April and Gaines's 14 April letter both state that Margaret arrived in Covington on Wednesday, 2 April. We know from the *Cincinnati Enquirer*'s "Steamboat Register" that the *Queen City* was the only steamboat arriving that day from southern Mississippi River ports (having departed New Orleans on 25 March); details on the boat's cargo and the day's weather are drawn (respectively) from the "Imports by River" column in the *Enquirer* and the "River Intelligence" section of the *Cincinnati Gazette*.
8. See stories in the *Cincinnati Enquirer* of 23 March 1856 and 1 April 1856; and the 3 April 1856 story in the *Cincinnati Gazette* titled "More About the Fugitive Slave Case—The Special Marshals and the Secret Service Fund."
9. An excellent summary of these events is available in Leavitt's decision on the habeas corpus: *Ex parte Robinson*, 20 Federal Cases (1856), especially 965–66.
10. Gaines's remarks are once again from his 14 April 1856 letter. For Chase's remarks see Salmon Portland Chase to Joseph Cox, 9 April 1856, in *The Salmon Portland Chase Papers* (microfilm edition), ed. John Niven (Frederick, MD: University Publications, 1987), Reel 11, 0166–0167.
11. This is Chase, reiterating the contents of his "despatch" in his 9 April 1856 letter to Cox.
12. After he, Cox, and Hamlin failed to arrest the Garners before Gaines shipped them south from Louisville, Joseph Cooper reported on the group's actions in a letter to Chase dated 11 March 1856. In it he indicated that Ohio's warrant charging the Garners with murder had been returned to Columbus. This is the document Chase then enclosed with his 9 April 1856 letter to Cox. A month later, after failing yet again to take custody of Margaret, Cox once more returned it to Columbus with a 15 May 1856 letter to Chase. See *Salmon Portland Chase Papers*, Reel 11, 0231. Evidently the warrant has not survived.
13. This was the strategy that Edward Hamlin described to Chase in 1856, and that George Hoadley and Governor Chase both recollected eight years later. See Hamlin to Chase, 11 March 1856; Hoadley to Chase, 6 January 1864; as well as Chase to Edward Pierce, 14 January 1864; in *Salmon Portland Chase Papers*, Reel 11, 0127–0128; Reel 31, 0799–0803; and Reel 31, 1008–1011, respectively.
14. See the *Cincinnati Gazette*, Friday, 11 April 1856.
15. Ibid.; weather information is drawn once again from the *Gazette*'s daily "River Intelligence" column.
16. See the *Cincinnati Gazette* for Monday, 14 April 1856; as well as Archibald Gaines's 14 April letter printed in the *Cincinnati Enquirer* of 15 April 1856.
17. *Cincinnati Gazette*, 14 April 1856.
18. Ibid.; for similar reports, see also the *Cincinnati Enquirer* of 14 April 1856.
19. According to the *Louisville Courier*, 11 April 1856, the *Eclipse* was the only New Orleans-bound steamboat departing on that day. Information on the boat's "master" and her cargo are drawn from the *Courier*'s advertisements and shipping news sections.
20. Gaines to the *Cincinnati Enquirer*, in its edition of 15 April 1856.
21. On 1850s slave prices, see Michael Tadman, *Speculators and Slaves: Masters, Traders, and Slaves in the Old South* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), passim. Section 7 of the 1850 Fugitive Slave Law entitled masters to file claims for money damages against anyone allegedly aiding or abetting a fugitive or fugitives in flight, and, after a favorable judgment, to receive compensation ranging up to $1,000 per slave. For a transcript of the 1850 Fugitive Slave Law, see Marion Gleason McDougall, *Fugitive Slaves (1619–1865)*, Fay House Monograph No. 3 (Boston, Ginn, 1891), Appendix B, especially 113–14.
22. See Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Honor and Violence in the Old South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986); and on rules governing sexual permissiveness, particularly between masters and their slave women, see 94–113. In his "Memoir on Slavery," William Harper admits that "licentious intercourse" occurred between masters and slave women but argues for its benefits as a kind of safety valve on sexual passions, especially for younger members of the planter class. Harper thinks that as young gentlemen inevitably turn from their more "degraded" passions with "enslaved females" to white women with their "greater allurements," they do so without the baggage—such as bastard children—"with which worthless women sometimes entangle their victims." As for the mulatto children of their relations, he says that under slavery "such offspring" are never destined to burden either the mother or the society. See William Harper, "Memoir on Slavery," in *The Ideology of Slavery: Proslavery Thought in the Antebellum South, 1830–1860*, ed. Drew Gilpin Faust (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1981), 106–9.
23. See A. K. Gaines's letter printed in the *Cincinnati Enquirer*, 15 March 1856.
24. Details on Abner Gaines and his wife Sally's Issaquena County holdings are available in summaries of a legal dispute over the will of Sally's maternal grandfather, Homer V. Ledbetter, in Katherine Branton and Alice Wade, *Early Records of Mississippi: Issaquena County/Washington County, 1827–1900*, Vol. 2 (Leland, MS: Bound xerographic copy of original MS, 1985), 24.
25. His name was listed in the "Arrivals at the Principal Hotels" column of the *New Orleans Times-Picayune* on Monday, 28 April 1856.
26. See Joseph Cox to Salmon Portland Chase, *Salmon Portland Chase Papers*, Reel 11, 0231; and Cox to Chase, 28 November 1863, ibid., Reel 30, 0073.

27. William Deeson, an attorney, was married to another of Ledbetter's grandchildren, a cousin of Abner Gaines's wife, Sally, and the long battle over Ledbetter's estate appears to have become a grand family squabble. Evidently, aside from the moral satisfaction of freeing Violet Ledbetter and her three children, the Deesons never realized a cent from Ledbetter's will. See Branton and Wade, *Early Records of Mississippi*, Vol. 1, 1–2; and Vol. 2, 24–25; having examined court records, these compilers conclude: "No part of the will of Homer V. Ledbetter was ever executed."
28. Robert Garner, as reported by the *Cincinnati Chronicle* of March 1870; reprinted in *The Press* (Philadelphia), 18 March 1870.
29. *The Liberator*, 29 February 1856, 36.
30. These remarks are all from volumes of *The Liberty Bell*, edited and published in Boston by the Anti-Slavery Bazaar. For Thomas Wentworth Higginson's remark, see his essay on the fugitives William and Ellen Craft, "The Romance of History," in Vol. 15 (1858), 119; James Freeman Clarke's comment is from the last stanza of his poem "The Ballad of Edward Davis," in Vol. 15 (1856), 32; Lydia Maria Child's comment is from her short story "The Quadroons," in Vol. 3 (1842), 141; and Edmund Quincy's remark can be found in his essay "American Chivalry," also published in Vol. 3 (1842), 73–95.
31. Wendell Phillips, "The Philosophy of the Abolition Movement," *Speeches, Lectures, and Letters* (Boston: Lee and Shepard, 1892). For his comment on Bremer and "the romance of our history," see 132; for his discussion of Stowe, see 131.
32. A December 1852 letter from Harriet Beecher Stowe to Eliza Lee Cabot Follen, quoted in Joan Hedrick, *Harriet Beecher Stowe: A Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 193.
33. Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin; or, Life Among the Lowly* (1852; New York: Penguin, 1981), 149.
34. Hedrick, *Harriet Beecher Stowe*, 191–92.
35. Some examples from the Cincinnati press: a 4 August 1854 story in the *Cincinnati Gazette* provided a tally of the dead from a recent cholera epidemic; the category "infant" included all children through age five. In popular usage that range could go higher, however. On 22 November 1852 the *Gazette* announced an upcoming appearance by "The Prodigy of Our Age!," an "Infant Violinist" described as "only 7 years old!"
36. Typical of Hiram Martin's output on this theme: a poem entitled "Lines Suggestive of the Thoughts of the Rev. W. McD. Abbott and Wife, on the Death of their Little Daughter, Lizzie Reed," published in the *Covington Journal* of 21 March 1857. Martin's last stanza:

> *Farewell, sweetest angel, but O!, not forever;*
> *The gray in our locks says, time cannot long sever*
> *Thy angelic spirit, from kindred so dear;*
> *Resigned we will wait for a call to thy sphere.*

Poems, homilies, and essays on the "special child" were commonplaces of the age, as any scan through newspapers will demonstrate. Cincinnati and Covington were no exceptions to this rule. The 19 February 1853 issue of the *Covington Journal* published a homily entitled "The Death of Infants," wherein the "capaciousness of an infant's tomb" is extensive enough to heal all, including mourners who send their prayers within it.

37. See Jacqueline Jones, *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow: Black Women, Work, and the Family from Slavery to the Present* (New York: Basic Books, 1985). Jones notes that from 1850 to 1860, "fewer than two out of three black children survived to the age of ten" (35). See also Kenneth Stampp, *The Peculiar Institution: Slavery in the Antebellum South* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1956), 319–20; and Robert William Fogel, *Without Consent or Contract: The Rise and Fall of American Slavery* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1989), 142–47.
38. See Deborah Gray White, *Ar'n't I a Woman?: Female Slaves in the Plantation South* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1985), 98; and Tadman, *Speculators and Slaves*, 112.
39. For an incisive example, see Charlotte H. L. Coues, "An Appeal to Mothers," in *The Liberty Bell*, Vol. 6 (1845), 3–8. This short story is set in Kingston, Jamaica, and tells the story of a slave owner who sells all the children of one of his female slaves; the woman then goes mad with grief, and at story's end the narrator steps in for the "Appeal": "Christian mother! has a child ever been removed from you by death? Have you, with the strong sight of faith, watched the sweet spirit ascending, after her departure from the body, led by shining angels, cheered by heavenly music—her new-formed wings tiring not until she reached the footstool of the eternal, where, bathed in bliss, she was to enjoy his presence evermore; where her infant powers were to expand; where she was to go on from glory to glory?" If so, says the narrator, then the slave mother's mad grief will be understandable.
40. See Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861), ed. Henry Louis Gates (New York: Mentor, 1987), 392 and 404, respectively.
41. See *The Liberator*, 15 August 1845, 132. The poem is also included in Vicki L. Eaklor, *American Antislavery Songs: A Collection and Analysis* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1988), 331–32; in a note Eaklor comments that it was written by the Rev. J. Blanchard, who set his lyric to the tune of "Araby's Daughter." For "The Slave Mother's Address to her Infant Child," an "Original" poem for the edition, see Lunsford Lane, *The Narrative of Lunsford Lane, formerly of Raleigh, N.C., Published by Himself* (Boston: J. G. Torrey, 1842). In its most salient moment the poem's slave mother exclaims: "And gladly would I lay thee down/ To sleep beneath the sod,/ And give thy gentle spirit back,/ Unmarr'd with grief, to God:/ The tears I shed upon that turf/ Should whisper peace to me,/ And tell me in the spirit land/ My lovely babe was free." In helping me think through these ideological equations of Liberty and Death, I am especially indebted to Russ Castronovo for sharing with me the longer draft of his paper "Disembodying the Body Politic," delivered at the International Conference on Narrative at the University of Florida, April 1997.
42. *The American Anti-Slavery Almanac*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (1837), 43–44.
43. Elizabeth Barrett Browning, "The Runaway Slave at Pilgrim's Point," in *The Liberty Bell*, Vol. 9 (1848), 29–44. On Barrett Browning's poem, see Dorothy Mermin, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning: The Origins of a New Poetry* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 156–59; Angela Leighton, *Victorian Women Poets: Writing Against the Heart* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1992), 97–102; Ann Parry, "Sexual Exploitation and Freedom: Religion, Race, and Gender in Elizabeth Barrett Browning's 'The Runaway Slave at Pilgrim's Point,'" *Studies in Browning and His Circle* 16 (1988), 114–27; and Ralph Thompson, "*The Liberty Bell* and Other Antislavery Gift Books," *New England Quarterly* 7 (1934), 154–68. Thomp-

son notes that Barrett Browning's poem was "the only original contribution of a notable foreign writer" to any of the antislavery gift books. Thanks to Joseph Gardner for showing me Barrett Browning's poem.

44. Deborah Gray White, "The Lives of Slave Women," in *Black Women in United States History*, ed. Diane Clark Hine (Brooklyn: Carlson, 1990), 4.
45. On the Missouri instance, see Helen Tunicliff Catterall, *Judicial Cases Concerning American Slavery and the Negro* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Institution, 1937), Vol. 5, 139; also *State v. Jane (a mulatto woman, slave)* in 3 Missouri Cases 61, April 1831. On the Georgia instance see Robert Anson Myers, ed., *The Children of Pride: A True Story of Georgia and the Civil War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972), 527–47.
46. Lydia Maria Child, *The Patriarchal Institution as Described by Members of its Own Family* (New York: American Anti-Slavery Society, 1860), 20. Many thanks to Karen Sanchez-Eppler for calling my attention to this instance.
47. See White, *Ar'n't I a Woman?* 87–88. The idea that slave mothers were smothering their infants and blaming the deaths on accidental overlaying was developed from mortality schedules that puzzled even antebellum Southrons like J. D. B. DeBow. The recent historical research on slave infant mortality rates is fairly extensive, but see especially Kenneth F. Kiple and Virginia H. Kiple, "Slave Child Mortality: Some Nutritional Answers to a Perennial Puzzle," *Journal of Social History* 10 (1977), 284–309; Todd L. Savitt, *Medicine and Slavery: The Diseases and Health Care of Blacks in Antebellum Virginia* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1978), 124–27; and Michael P. Johnson, "Smothered Slave Infants: Were Slave Mothers at Fault?" *Journal of Southern History* 47 (1981), 494–520. The quote is from Johnson (495).
48. See George S. Sawyer, *Southern Institutes: or, An Inquiry into the Origin and Early Prevalence of Slavery and the Slave-Trade* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1858), 330–31; and Ebenezer Starnes, *The Slaveholder Abroad; or, Billy Buck's Visit, with his Master, to England* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1860), 334.
49. On the child abandoned in a culvert, see the *Cincinnati Gazette* of Saturday, 26 January 1856; the story of the Irish servant girl who dropped her newborn down a privy appeared in the *Cincinnati Enquirer* of 5 September 1855.
50. See Nancy Scheper-Hughes, *Death without Weeping: The Violence of Everyday Life in Brazil* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 400. A moving and extraordinary book, I have drawn especially from its eighth chapter, "(M)Other Love: Culture, Scarcity, and Maternal Thinking."
51. See Scheper-Hughes, *Death without Weeping*, 274–76. This process involves what anthropologist Pierre Bourdieu defines as *méconnaissance* or "misrecognition": the generally unconscious or unrationalized recognition or practice of what is otherwise unspeakable, especially when that recognition or practice involves social relations (for example, in relations of dominance and submission) that must be dissimulated or concealed (rendered misrecognizable again) in order to ensure people's complicity with the system. A kind of collective bad faith, it is one (crucial) way that cultures maintain inequality. See Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 172–83.
52. See the *Cincinnati Commercial* of Thursday, 31 January 1856; and the *Cincinnati Gazette* of Friday, 1 February 1856.
53. Morrison made these remarks during her 12 October 1988 acceptance speech for the Frederick G. Melcher Book Award, Unitarian Universalist Association (Cambridge, MA: The Cambridge Forum), WVTF, Roanoke, VA, 5 April 1991.

54. Dr. Elijah Smith Clarkson, "Messrs. Editors," *Cincinnati Enquirer*, 14 February 1856.
55. The editorials Justice submitted first appeared in the *Covington Journal* on 15 March 1856 and ran steadily in issues of the following five weeks. Each editorial runs well over 2,000 words—an extraordinary output. By his fifth installment, on 12 April, Justice was countered by Truth, who identified himself as a former Whig and supporter of Cassius Clay's schemes for recolonizing slaves in Africa. Truth submitted three more installments (19 April, 26 April, and 17 May). The ninth and last installment from Justice appeared in the *Journal*'s issue of Saturday, 7 June 1856. How may we surmise that Justice was really Benjamin Franklin Bedinger? In his first installment Justice relates details about the Gaines slaves at Maplewood—for example, about Margaret's putative father, Duke—that only a near-neighbor could have known. Moreover, Bedinger was a former co-editor (in 1849–51) and in 1856 still a co-owner of the *Covington Journal*, therefore able to command the great deal of space set aside for his nine epistles—probably the surest evidence for identifying him as the face behind the nom de plume.
56. Henry Field James, "Preface," *Abolitionism Unveiled; or, Its Origin, Progress, and Pernicious Tendency Fully Developed* (Cincinnati: E. Morgan & Sons, 1856), iii. From newspaper advertisements in the *Cincinnati Enquirer* and the *Covington Journal* it appears the novel was released in mid-July but nothing further is known of its author, who appears in neither the 1850 nor the 1860 census records, nor any of the directories for Cincinnati-Covington. From descriptive detail in the novel it is apparent that he knew Boone County's land and people fairly well; Squire Gray's plantation, for example, very much resembles those of Gaines and Bedinger in Richwood Station. Indeed it is quite possible that "Henry Field James" was the pseudonym of a northern Kentuckian like Bedinger, a man used to employing noms de plume for his editorials.
57. See James, *Abolitionism Unveiled*, 240–45.
58. Dr. J. H. Van Evrie, *Negroes and Negro Slavery: The First an Inferior Race; the Latter its Normal Condition* (New York: Van Evrie, Horton, 1861). This edition, containing near its close Van Evrie's thoughts on the Garner infanticide, is a revised version of his first, 1853 edition (Baltimore: J. D. Toy). From 1861 to 1863 the revised book went through three editions. Then in 1868 Van Evrie revised it yet again under a Reconstruction-era title that perhaps best expressed the book's true racist spirit: *White Supremacy and Negro Subordination; or, Negroes a Subordinate Race, and (So-Called) Slavery its Normal Condition* (New York: Van Evrie, Horton). Between 1868 and 1870 this edition also went through three editions.
59. For Toni Morrison's representation of Schoolteacher's categorizing exercise, see *Beloved* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1987), 193. For Van Evrie's comments on mothers and "The Domestic Affections" see Chapter 18 of *Negroes and Negro Slavery* (1860), especially 224–25. For his comments on saving America from the "treason" of race mixing, see his "Preface," vi. Samuel George Morton (1799–1851) of Pennsylvania and Josiah Clark Nott (1804–73) were the professors whose arguments for polygenesis probably had the strongest influence over Van Evrie. Nott's 1846 volume, *Types of Mankind; or, Ethnological Researches, Based upon the Ancient Monuments, Paintings, Sculptures and Crania of Races, and upon their Natural,*

Geographical, Philological and Biblical History (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott), was in its eighth edition by 1860. Nott's work built on that of Morton, whose two best-known works were *Crania Americana* (1839) and *Crania Aegyptica* (1844), works that argued from evidence of cranial capacity that the "Ancient Caucasian" and the "Ancient Negroid" were originators of different "races." See also Nott's *Two Lectures on the Connection between the Biblical and Physical History of Man* (1848; New York: Negro Universities Press, 1969). Supporters of polygenesis always had to soft-pedal their theory because it so clearly contradicted the biblical creation story, and Nott's *Two Lectures* well represents both the problem and their attempted solution. For further discussion, see William R. Stanton, *The Leopard's Spots: Scientific Attitudes toward Race in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), and Dana D. Nelson, " 'Our Castle Still Remains Unshaken,' " Chapter 3 of her forthcoming book *National Manhood* (Durham: Duke University Press).

60. Van Evrie, *Negroes and Negro Slavery* (1861), 225–26.
61. For the full text of Bushnell's sermon, see *The Liberator*, 16 May 1856, itself a reprint from the (Yellow Springs, Ohio) *Free Presbyterian* of mid-April. Partial versions of the sermon had also appeared in the *Cincinnati Gazette* as well as the *New York Tribune*.
62. Reports of Hebbard's recitation appeared in the *Boston Transcript* of 19 March 1856 and *The Liberator* of 21 March 1856. For the poem's full text, see William Wallace Hebbard, *The Night of Freedom: An Appeal, in Verse, against the Great Crime of our Country, Human Bondage!* (Boston: Samuel Chism, 1857; repr. Atlanta: Fisk University Library Negro Collection, 1971).
63. See the *National Anti-Slavery Standard* of Saturday, 23 February 1856. Interestingly, the Richwood Presbyterian Church Session Books, kept continuously after the church's founding in 1833, mention Archibald K. Gaines but once; that was on the occasion of his marriage to Margaret Ann Dudley in 1843. Until 1849, when she died, Margaret Dudley Gaines and her parents were enrolled as Richwood Presbyterian members. Archibald never was, and his affiliation with the church must have been casual, at best. For the newspapers' invective editorials on Judge Harold Leavitt's membership in the Presbyterian synod, see *The Liberator* of 23 May 1856, 81.
64. "Letter from Henry C. Wright," *The Liberator*, 11 April 1856, 59.
65. Parker's speech to the American Anti-Slavery Society was reported, for example, in *The Liberator*, 16 May 1856; the *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, 16 May 1856; and the *Cincinnati Gazette*, 19 May 1856. For the full text see Theodore Parker, *The Great Battle between Slavery and Freedom; Considered in Two Speeches, Delivered before the American Anti-Slavery Society at New York, May 7, 1856* (Boston: Benjamin H. Greene, 1856). For Chase's response, see Chase to Parker, 17 July 1856, Reel 3, Vol. 9 of *The Theodore Parker Papers, 1826–1862* (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms, 1979), filmed from the original in the possession of the Massachusetts Historical Society. There is, incidentally, a remarkable hypocrisy in Parker's charge that Chase mishandled the Garner case because of racism. Leading into his remarks on the Garner case, Parker himself displayed a mean streak of racism when he commented that if blacks had the mettle "of Anglo-Saxons" they would have already thrown off the slaveholder's yoke. Northern whites had heard the call to fight slavery and responded because "the slaves themselves were Africans—men not very good with the sword. If the case had been otherwise—if it had been three and a half millions of Anglo-Saxons—the chief antislavery appeal would not have been to the oppressor to leave off oppressing"; instead, he implied, it would have been necessary to appeal for mercy, lest warlike white slaves rise up and exterminate their masters. See *The Great Battle* (7).
66. From the full text of Lucy Stone's speech quoted in the *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, 16 May 1856.
67. From an address Douglass gave in Rochester on 22 May 1856 (the day Preston Brooks attacked Charles Sumner), an address he apparently adapted and used into the summer. See *The Frederick Douglass Papers*, Series One: *Speeches, Debates, and Interviews*, Vol. 3, ed. John W. Blassingame (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 127–28. For a representative instance of Charles L. Remond's remarks during this period, see his Mozart Hall (New York) speech of 13 May 1858, in *The Black Abolitionist Papers*, Vol. 4, ed. C. Peter Ripley (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992), 387.
68. The term derives from the French *colporteur*: a peddler or newsmonger. Nineteenth-century colporteurs working on contract for Baptist, Methodist, and Presbyterian publishers combed the Ohio Valley, as elsewhere in the United States. Early on, abolitionist societies adapted colportage as a principal means to distribute antislavery tracts, gift books, and fictions. See Ronald G. Walters, *The Antislavery Appeal: American Abolitionism After 1830* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), 22–23; as well as Richard D. Sears, *The Day of Small Things: Abolitionism in the Midst of Slavery—Berea, Kentucky, 1854–1864* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1986), 38–41. Hattia M'Keehan's autobiographical narrative, *The Life and Trials of a Hoosier Girl* (New York: Printed for the Author, 1860), is our main source of information about her: for example, that she published two other fictions, *The Lover's Revenge* and *The Philosophy of Love*, between 1856 and 1860. About these two books nothing more is known. It remains unclear which work of fiction appeared first, M'Keehan's or Henry Field James's *Abolitionism Unveiled*. Advertisements for both books began appearing in Cincinnati-area newspapers, the *Cincinnati Gazette* and the *Covington Journal*, respectively, during the third week in July.
69. *Liberty or Death!; or, Heaven's Infraction of the Fugitive Slave Law* (Cincinnati: By the Author, 1856), 7, 37, 41.
70. See M'Keehan's "Preface" to *Liberty or Death!*, iii; and for appearances of the ghost, 59–60, 73–74.
71. Details about the book's printing history are available in *The Life and Trials of a Hoosier Girl*. A number of special collections libraries have copies of the book, all printed on cheap paper and bound in rough cardboard. I am grateful to Joan Higbee at the Library of Congress Rare Book Room for helping me to find another copy: Mrs. J. P. Hardwick, *Liberty or Death!; or, The Mother's Sacrifice* (Harrisburg: For the Authoress, 1862), identical with all others except for its title page.
72. *Chattanooga* (Cincinnati: Anderson, Gates, and Wright, 1858), 8–9. The copy housed in Special Collections at the Margaret I. King Library, University of Kentucky, contains someone's penciled inscription of "Wm. Gilmore Simms" as a supposed author, for none was ever indicated on the book's title page. We know Jolliffe as the author because of summer 1858 notices in the *Cincinnati Gazette* referring to him; moreover, his sister Elizabeth acknowledged his authorship in a biographical

essay about him. See "John Jolliffe," in *Historical, Genealogical, and Biographical Account of the Jolliffe Family of Virginia, 1652 to 1893* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1893), 229.

73. The quotes are from *Chattanooga*, 356–61, 387.
74. My representation of typhoid's progress in Margaret's case is adapted from H. Curschmann, *Typhoid Fever and Typhus Fever*, trans. Alfred Stengel (Philadelphia: W. B. Saunders, 1905), 79–85. For information on yellow fever and typhus epidemics in western Mississippi, see the Jackson, Mississippi, *Semi-Weekly Mississippian*, in particular the issues of 31 August, 10 September, and 14 September 1858. Stories on black tongue disease and boll weevil devastation appear in the issue of Tuesday, 14 September 1858; the comet made its first appearance in the issue of Friday, 24 September 1858.
75. For data on the DeWitt Clinton Bonham family, see *Eighth Census of the United States, 1860: Mississippi. Issaquena County*, 863 (entry 2525). Other data are from the marshal's own summations, noted on the ledger book's final pages. In 1860, Bonham listed none of his slaves as hired out.
76. On these differences between Deep South and Border South plantations and the effects on mating and families, based on analyses of census schedules, see Richard Steckel, "Miscegenation and the American Slave Schedules," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 11 (1980): 251–63. For a summary of other studies indicating that miscegenation was far more likely on small (and typically Border South) rather than large (Deep South) plantations, see Fogel, *Without Consent or Contract*, 181–82.
77. See Stampp, *The Peculiar Institution*; and John W. Blassingame, *The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Antebellum South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972).
78. Eugene D. Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York: Pantheon, 1974), 292–95.
79. See Lawrence W. Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought from Slavery to Freedom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978); and Thomas L. Webber, *Deep Like the Rivers* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1978).
80. See K. David Patterson, "Disease Environments of the Antebellum South," in Ronald L. Numbers and Todd Savitt, eds. *Science and Medicine in the Old South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1983), 152–65; and Isaac Wright, *Wright's Family Medicine; or, System of Domestic Practice* (Madisonville, TN: Henderson, Johnston, 1833), 158–59; according to Patterson, *Wright's* was widely used in the Old South, and medicating steam was Wright's best prescription for typhoid's symptoms.
81. Interview with Robert Garner; *The Press* (Philadelphia), 18 March 1870.

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