VIRGINIANS MOVING WEST: THE EARLY EVOLUTION OF SLAVERY IN THE BLUEGRASS

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In the spring of 1785, William and Annie Christian began a journey that many young Virginians were contemplating during the early national era. William, who wrote a friend in late 1784 that he was "longing to hear how your Pulse beats yet towards Kentuckey," had packed up his family and belongings, including twenty slaves, to seek the reputedly greater opportunities in the west.[1] Leaving Botetourt County, Virginia, they settled in the Bluegrass region of Kentucky and during the summer of 1785 built "three tolerable Cabbins" and also raised wheat and rye, and corn at thirty bushels an acre.[2] During the winter, William purchased an additional eighteen slaves to staff a saltworks operation on the frontier at Saltsburg.[3] Unfortunately, however, the works were in "the most dangerous and exposed place in the Country," and William's near-constant presence there led to his death in an attack by Wabash Indians on 9 April 1786.[4]

Annie Christian was thus left to deal not only with her husband's death but also with the execution of the estate, including their

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1 William Christian to Thomas Madison, 6 August 1784, Lyman S. Draper Collection (hereafter DC), 5 ZZ 78, State Historical Society of Wisconsin. Annie Christian was Patrick Henry's sister; the deaths of her and her husband are noted briefly in Henry Mayer, *A Son of Thunder: Patrick Henry and the American Republic* (New York: Franklin Watts, 1986), 367-68, 465-66. See also John Kleber, ed., *The Kentucky Encyclopedia* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1992), 184-85.

2 William Christian to William Fleming, 4 November 1785, Hugh Blair Grigsby Collection, Virginia Historical Society (VHS), Mss 1 98782 b 5754-5829.

3 William Christian to William Fleming, 12 December 1785, Grigsby Collection, VHS. Also, on Christian's plans to build the saltworks, see "A proposal for saltworks," Nicholas Meriwether to William Christian, Nicholas Meriwether of Kentucky Papers, Department of Special Collections, The Filson Club Historical Society, Louisville, Kentucky (hereafter DSC, FCHS).

4 William Christian to William Fleming, 30 March 1786; Annie Christian to Elizabeth Starke Christian, 18 September 1786, Grigsby Collection, VHS; William Christian to Thomas Madison, 30 March 1786, DC, 5 ZZ 82.

thirty-eight slaves. Her family in Virginia urged her to return, but she persevered in Kentucky, writing that she "hope[d] to live independant."[5] She thus began to hire out her slaves to men whom she knew in Fayette County. Her relatives in Botetourt County then persuaded her to send some of the slaves back east, particularly ones whom they had known from their earlier residence in Virginia. She then tried to convince her slave Dawson, among others, to return or "go in" to Virginia, but she found it difficult to make him or the others obey her:

> I then sent to Dawson who lives at Mr. Rices, & desired he & Kate & Bill shou'd prepare to go in, but he refuses . . . he says Kate shall not go, but Bill may. I suppose bill & Hannah must be the two that goes in, I spoke to Mr. Wallace to come & order matters, as Dawson wou'd mind him more than me, but I dont expect him till June, & then the Genl. Court will Sett. If Dawson will agree to let Kate go in, I intend to send Hannah to Mr. Wallace.[6]

One doubts whether William Christian would have been so pliable in negotiating with his slaves to go one place or another or that he would have reported his troubles to another in a letter. Perhaps because she was new to the role of head of the household, Annie Christian, however, did not have the requisite determination to make her slaves fall in line and journey back to Virginia. Meanwhile, Dawson sensed his power to affect his own destiny as a slave and to protect the interests of both Kate and Bill.

A year later, in March 1788, Annie was more successful in persuading the slaves to return to Virginia; she wrote her mother-in-law: "I hear of a company goin in by whom I intend to send in Isaac & Dawson." Meanwhile, she managed to persuade Sarah, and perhaps herself, that despite her separation from Isaac, it would be in Sarah's best interest to remain in Kentucky:

> Sarah (at first) insisted to go in with Isaac, but has at length gave it out, & is to go to live with Mr. Wallace, she has all along gone from

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5 Annie Christian to Elizabeth Starke Christian, 18 September 1786, Grigsby Collection, VHS.

6 Annie Christian to Elizabeth Starke Christian, 12 April 1787, Grigsby Collection, VHS.

> place to place just as she thought proper, & workd for her cloaths & victuals, but it is best now for her to settle herself, & be with Hannah, as I dont think she could stand the journey in.[7]

Annie Christian's letters dealing with slave management make for fascinating reading because of the unusually candid descriptions of her negotiations with slaves such as Dawson and Sarah. She seems to have been reluctant to command her bondsmen to return to Virginia, and with respect for their wishes, she tried to persuade them into a certain course of action. Meanwhile, the letters also show that Dawson and Sarah and other slaves recognized their power in these changed circumstances and that they were ready to actively defend their interests. However, one has to be careful in judging whether these interactions were typical of other early Kentucky slaveholders and slaves. One might argue, for example, that Annie Christian was an inexperienced female master, that she was lonely and continuing to grieve over her lost husband, and that her actions were peculiar and clearly affected by her adverse and unusual circumstances. Yet, it is also clear that she had shared in her husband's enthusiasm and ambition in moving to Kentucky originally, and even though she could have easily returned to Virginia immediately after her husband's death, she stayed in Kentucky for five years as a committed slaveholder, intent on satisfying her husband's debts and on maintaining her property until her death there in 1790.

Given the changed economic, political, and social circumstances of Virginia's migrants and settlers and slaveholders in Kentucky in the early national period, Annie Christian's approach to slave management, in fact, is not particularly atypical. The changing character of society as early slaveholders from Virginia traveled across the mountains to the west indicates that frontier slavery in the early national period *was* different both from the tobacco-oriented version that dominated the Chesapeake region during the colonial era and from the institution as it would evolve afterwards with the profitability of cotton and the growth of the southwest. Among early

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7 Annie Christian to Elizabeth Starke Christian, 22 March 1788, Grigsby Collection, VHS.

migrants like William and Annie Christian, the institution of slavery was becoming increasingly paternalistic, moderate, and marginal to the frontier economy. The experiences of settlers to Kentucky reveal that these borderland southerners were interested in maintaining slavery, their wealth, their peculiar households, and their status as slaveholders, but without the pressing labor requirements of a staple crop, slavery was, for a time at least, becoming more vulnerable.

Virginians had been moving further west from almost the beginning of the seventeenth century, ever in pursuit of more distant frontiers of opportunity. After the Revolutionary War, many went southwest to the backcountry of the Carolinas or Georgia to cash in on war-pension land grants. They were simply taking advantage of the available rich land there, but many eventually became among the first upland cotton planters, thus starting an agricultural movement that would eventually dominate the economy of the south. Leaving behind land they perceived as overpriced and exhausted, young men in search of opportunity in the west later went to Kentucky and Tennessee. Later still, migrants from Virginia and other border frontier areas went further west to Missouri or less often directly to the southwest.[8]

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8 There is no general study of early national southern frontier migration patterns, although many of the separate strands have been investigated. The closest to a general study is Joan Cashin, *A Family Venture: Men and Women on the Southern Frontier* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), but see also Malcolm J. Rohrbough, *The Transappalachian Frontier: People, Societies, and Institutions, 1775-1850* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978). See also Avery O. Craven, *Soil Exhaustion as a Factor in the Agricultural History of Virginia and Maryland, 1606-1860* (Gloucester, Massachusetts, 1965), 118-21; Allan Kulikoff, *The Agrarian Origins of American Capitalism* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1992), 237-55; Sam Bowers Hilliard, *Atlas of Antebellum Southern Agriculture* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1984), 20-31; James Etheridge Callaway, *The Early Settlement of Georgia* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1998), 88-97; Todd H. Barnett, "The Evolution of 'North' and 'South': Settlement and Slavery on America's Sectional Border, 1650-1810" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 1993), 212-23, 261-69; Thomas Perkins Abernathy, *The Formative Period in Alabama, 1815-1828* (University, Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 1965), 34-43; Michael O'Brien, *Grassland, Forest, and Historical Settlement: An Analysis of Dynamics in Northeast Missouri* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1984), 73-74, 80-81; and R. Douglas Hurt, *Agriculture and Slavery in Missouri's Little Dixie* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1992), 24-79.

Those Virginia migrants who went to Kentucky in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries established an economy characterized by diversity rather than by reliance on a traditional, commercial-oriented, labor-intensive slave crop. The most important farm product in the early state was corn, but all its regions were also characterized by a variety of occupations, including the cultivation of grains, food crops, staples, and thread fibers, attention to livestock, and the production of textiles, butter, and maple sugar. Some of the farmers were producing tobacco and hemp in quantity, but there were very few of these "planters" in early Kentucky. In fact, none of the areas of early Kentucky were particularly geared to the production of traditional slave crops.[9] The failure to plant these crops was not due to a scarcity of markets—tobacco-inspection warehouses, for example, had been in place in the state from the time of early settlement.[10] Instead, the price for these staples, considering the expense of transport, was so discouraging that most found it more sensible to plant other crops on their fertile western land.[11] In addition, they were also discouraged from planting tobacco by their experience with exhausted soils in the east.[12] Instead, slaveholders concentrated their efforts on corn, livestock, and a wide variety of food

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9 On hemp, see James F. Hopkins, *A History of the Hemp Industry in Kentucky* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1951); Lewis C. Gray, *Agriculture in the Southern United States* to 1860 (2 vols.; Gloucester, Massachusetts, 1958), 2: 821-22; Georges Henri Victor Collot, *Voyages Dans l'Amerique Septentrionale* (2 vols. and atlas; Paris, 1924), 1: 105-107; Stephen Anthony Aron, "How the West Was Lost: The Transformation of Kentucky from Daniel Boone to Henry Clay" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of California at Berkeley, 1991), 359-61 and *How the West Was Lost: The Transformation of Kentucky from Daniel Boone to Henry Clay* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 128-29. On tobacco, see Leland Smith, "A History of the Tobacco Industry in Kentucky from 1783 to 1860" (M.A. Thesis, University of Kentucky, 1950), chapter 4. On one farmer's attempt to plant cotton, see Stephen Holladay to his father, 21 July 1788, Holladay Family Papers, VHS, Mss 1 H 7185 b 23-24.

10 Smith, "History of the Tobacco Industry in Kentucky," 61.

11 On the problems of transporting goods down the Mississippi and the price of freight for crops, see Mary Verhoeff, *The Kentucky River Navigation* (first publication series, no. 28; Louisville: The Filson Club Historical Society, 1917), 45-95.

12 See the notes on the discussion of this issue in Thomas Speed, *The Political Club, Danville, Kentucky, 1786-1790* (first publication series, no. 9; Louisville: The Filson Club Historical Society, 1894), 129-30 and Craven, *Soil Exhaustion*, 72-121.

and fiber crops, while most of the households were headed by small-scale farmers who produced a range of crops and raised livestock, sometimes with the assistance of one or two slaves but more often with family hands only.

This agricultural diversity becomes clear in a close analysis of two particular early Kentucky counties—Fayette and Shelby. Situated along the Kentucky River, Fayette County and its principal town of Lexington represented the center of early Kentucky settlement, while Shelby was located further west astride the Bluegrass and the "beargrass" region to the west along the Ohio River.

Located in the famously fertile Bluegrass region, Fayette County had been settled intensively in its early years, and it represented the most heavily populated county in the state in 1792. Slavery was relatively common in Fayette, and only the more sparsely settled Woodford County, located north of Fayette in the Bluegrass, had a higher percentage of slaves in its population at the time of statehood. The number of plantation-sized slaveholdings in Fayette was high. Those households with five or more slaves represented thirty-six percent of all slaveholders in 1792 and increased to forty-five percent or nearly half by 1802, while those households with ten or more slaves increased from thirteen percent in 1792 to sixteen percent in 1802 (See Table 1).[13] These Fayette slaveholders employed their bondsmen in two primary pursuits, represented by the town and the countryside. In Lexington in 1797, seventy-nine household heads owned slaves primarily in small groups and worked them as craftsmen, as domestics, and in the town's few emergent industries, such as the rope-walks and a cotton-bagging factory.

The slaveholders of Fayette County used their bondsmen primarily as agricultural laborers; their crops were diverse. County agriculturists concentrated primarily on corn, but they also harvested grains, hay, and flax, and virtually all tended large herds of livestock (see tables 2 and 3). Some farmers also grew tobacco and hemp as commercial staples but on relatively few farms. Perhaps

13 Fayette County Clerk, Tax Records, Kentucky State Library, Frankfort, Kentucky.

typical of these early Fayette farmers was Stephen Holladay, a small-scale slaveholder who came to Kentucky in 1787. Claiming that he had never seen "aney land to come up with this kentuck," he cleared eight acres and quickly planted corn. In each of the successive years, he worried most about his corn crop, since it provided food for his family, slaves, and livestock, but he also cultivated hemp and flax and raised livestock. Holladay gave some thought to the production of staples, even unsuccessfully trying to plant cotton in his first year, but he was ultimately most concerned with the success of his corn.[14]

The cultivation of corn might have arguably constituted a traditional and efficient use of slave labor in Kentucky generally because of its demanding work regimen. Cornfields were cleared and plowed before seeds were sown, usually in April or early May. Then the fields were cultivated several times prior to the beginning of July. Afterwards, however, labor requirements were light until the cutting in the fall. The harvesting of corn, however, was unlike wheat or tobacco and could be spread out over many months. Because the tasks of reaping, shucking, and shelling the corn could be distributed throughout the winter months, the only time during which labor was dear were the late spring and early summer months devoted to plowing and cultivation. Thus, in its material character, corn was different from tobacco, which required year-round intensive labor, and more like wheat, which required intensive attention only during the few weeks of harvest. Though corn required intensive labor, such efforts were limited to a short period of time during the agricultural year. This does not suggest that corn was not a profitable enterprise to the slaveholders of Kentucky. Rather, it shows that in the production of corn, slaveholders derived no particular advantage over other farmers by the possession of bondsmen and that corn was

14 Stephen Holladay to his father, 18 December 1787, 21 July 1788, 13 March 1789, 6 March 1792, and 25 May 1794, Holladay Family Papers, VHS. Discussions of farm economies are common among the correspondence of early settlers. See also Samuel Ayres to William Ayres, 7 June 1786, 22 February 1790, Ayres Family Papers, VHS; William Christian to Thomas Madison, 30 March 1786, DC, 5 ZZ 82; Elliott Rucker to Edmund Gaines, 6 March 1808, Twyman Family Papers, 38-153, University of Virginia.

therefore not a "slave" crop like tobacco, hemp, or cotton. Corn represented the primary occupation of Kentucky farmers because of its varied uses, feeding people and livestock and perhaps providing a surplus for sale.[15]

Shelby County's landowning, slaveholding, and agricultural patterns were similar to those in Fayette County, although the county was settled somewhat later by generally less wealthy migrants. The county slave population was small relative to Fayette, constituting an average of about one slave a household. The only major occupation in early Shelby was agriculture, so the county's limited slave forces were used primarily in the fields. As with other areas of early Kentucky, the major crop was corn, followed by wheat and flax with smaller amounts of rye, hay, oats, hemp, and tobacco (see table 4). Even as late as 1805, then, the staples of hemp and tobacco were less important in Shelby than crops primarily intended for household use. Livestock was important in Shelby as well; three-quarters of the inventoried farms had cattle and horses and almost two-thirds included sheep and swine. The tools necessary for household productions were also important in the county. Two-thirds of the probated farms included spinning wheels, while one-fifth contained butter-churns and stills. Since agriculture was the only major occupation in early Shelby, slaves supplemented the labor on the generally small family farms, performing odd jobs in the fields and the homes.

The agricultural patterns which characterized these counties and the state generally are reflected in the diverse farm occupations of two of the state's early large slaveholders from these counties: John Breckinridge of Fayette and John Hornsby of Shelby. A planter and a lawyer, Breckinridge came to Kentucky from Albemarle County, Virginia, in 1793 with his family and twenty-five slaves, including sixteen adults.[16] He claimed to have come to Kentucky for two

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15 Carville Earle, "A Staple Interpretation of Slavery and Free Labor," *Geographical Review* 68 (1978): 61.

16 Fayette County Clerk, Tax Records, 1793. On Breckinridge generally, see Lowell H. Harrison, "John Breckinridge of Kentucky: Planter, Speculator, and Businessman" *Filson Club History Quarterly* (hereafter *Quarterly*) 34 (1960): 205-27, and James C.

"substantial reasons: 1. Because my profession is more profitable; and 2ndly Because I can provide *good* lands here for my children, & insure them from want, which I was not certain of in the old Country."[17] Breckinridge, one of the county's largest slaveholders in the 1790s, started in Kentucky by producing hay and corn in order to feed his livestock and slaves.[18] Over the following years, he also harvested wheat, rye, and potatoes but gave his primary attention to raising and breeding livestock.[19] In 1796, he owned twenty-three horses and twelve head of cattle, but during the next decade, he added significantly to his stock so that in 1806 he counted 128 horses and sixty-two cattle on his plantation.[20]

At this time Breckinridge also owned fifty-seven slaves, whom he either hired out or worked in his fields cultivating crops and tending livestock.[21] Beginning in 1805, Breckinridge had begun to harvest a small crop of hemp, an increasingly important slave staple crop in Kentucky.[22] But interestingly, Breckinridge never raised tobacco on his Kentucky farm, although he had been a planter in Virginia.[23] He shared an opinion of tobacco which had become common among many Kentuckians. He believed that the crop would exhaust his lands, and he was, therefore, determined not to raise any on his fertile

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Klotter, *The Breckinridges of Kentucky, 1760-1981* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1986), 5-35.

17 John Breckinridge to unknown correspondent, 23 July 1793, Breckinridge Family Papers, # S 79-13698, Library of Congress (hereafter LC), Washington, DC.

18 Ibid.

19 George McDonald to John Breckinridge, 20 June 1801; Instructions to Overseer, Mr. Rust, 6 November 1805; John Breckinridge to Lettice Breckinridge, 18 January 1806 and John Breckinridge to Lettice Breckinridge, 20 February 1806, Breckinridge Papers, LC.

20 Stock List, 1 September 1796; Instructions to Overseer John Payne, 18 October 1806, Breckinridge Papers, LC and Harrison, "Breckinridge," 213. On livestock in Kentucky generally, see Paul C. Heinlein, *Cattle Kingdom in the Ohio Valley, 1783-1860* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1959), chapter 1 and Lee Soltow, "Horse Owners in Kentucky in 1800," *Register of the Kentucky Historical Society* (hereafter *Register*) 79 (1981): 203-210.

21 Fayette County Clerk, Tax Records, 1806.

22 Instructions to Overseer Mr. Rust, 6 November 1805, Breckinridge Papers, LC; Harrison, "Breckinridge," 207.

23 John Breckinridge to James Breckinridge, 2 December 1788, Breckinridge Papers, LC; Harrison, "Breckinridge," 206.

Fayette soil. When one of his tenants inquired about planting tobacco in 1806, Breckinridge wrote that he was "totally opposed to it."[24] Despite the size of his slave force, then, Breckinridge was not a staple planter, maximizing the utility of his bondsmen in pursuit of profits. The primary reason for his large slave force was not the demand of his livestock-oriented agricultural regimen but simply that he had come to Kentucky with so many bondsmen. He was likely typical of the many large Fayette slaveholders because he had migrated to the frontier with a large force but then used it in the operation of a diverse corn- and grain-oriented crop mix, in his case emphasizing stock-raising. The value of his slaves' labor was not being fully used, but the bondsmen were equally important to him as symbols of his own wealth and property and as inheritances for his children.

In 1800 the largest slaveholder in Shelby County was Joseph Hornsby who had migrated to Kentucky from Williamsburg, Virginia, in 1798 and settled about five miles west of Shelbyville.[25] In 1800 Hornsby had forty-one slaves including sixteen adults—a slave force large enough to carry on a variety of staple operations, emphasizing, perhaps, hemp or tobacco. Instead, his plantation was characterized by the same diversity as on the small farms that surrounded his land. In 1803, the twelve working slaves present during the year produced about 160 barrels of corn, twenty-seven bushels of wheat, twenty-six bushels of oats, as well as smaller amounts of hemp, flax, hay, turnips, and potatoes. He also had herds of livestock. He cultivated orchards of chestnut, walnut, cherry, peach, and apple trees, and he had a garden in which the slaves grew peas, asparagus, onions, artichokes, cucumbers, beans, cabbage, beets, cauliflower, lettuce,

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24 John Breckinridge to Lettice Breckinridge, 18 January 1806 and John Breckinridge to Lettice Breckinridge, 20 February 1806, Breckinridge Papers, LC. On the negative image of tobacco culture, see Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on Virginia* (New York: Harper, 1964; originally published in 1861), 159 and Thomas Speed, *The Political Club, Danville Kentucky, 1786-1790*, pp. 129-30.

25 The Hornsby Papers include a garden book from 1798 to 1800, an account of "occurences" for late 1799, and a general diary of farm occupations and social visits for 1803 and 1804. See Joseph Hornsby Papers, DSC, FCHS. A similar though less detailed farm diary from Logan County, Kentucky, for 1802 and 1803 is the William S. Dallam Diary, Catherine and Howard Evans Papers, University of Kentucky Library.

radishes, tomatoes, raspberries, strawberries, watermelons, and herbs.

Without a primary staple crop to keep his slave force occupied, Hornsby kept himself busy managing his bondsmen. During the year 1803, he spent very little time away from home; instead he concentrated on the operation of his farm, making detailed notes on the daily tasks performed by his "people." Beginning in January, the tasks were relatively limited. The slaves generally spent their days cutting and hauling firewood, building fences, shelling the previous year's corn crop, and bedding stables, but on better days, they cleared and burned trees and brush from fields. In late February and early March, Davey, Billy, Dicey, and Rachel tapped the sugar maple trees and stored up a supply of syrup. Then in mid March, the slaves began to work in the vegetable garden, a task which would occupy them intermittently until the fall.

In early April, Davey, Billy, and John began plowing for seeding of oats and flax, and then they continued to turn over the soil through mid July in preparation for their crops of corn, hemp, turnips, and potatoes, and again for three weeks in early September for wheat. The others spent these months working in Hornsby's home, garden, orchard, corn house, and fields. On 2 July, the slaves began to harvest the winter wheat, sowed the previous fall, and finished the task two days later. They then reaped the flax in mid June, followed by the hemp and oat crops in mid August.

Because of an early May frost in 1803, which killed the first crop, the corn was late and was not harvested until a three-week period at the end of October, after which the slaves also dug up the turnips and potatoes. In addition, the slaves spent many days during the summer sowing, cutting, and curing their several crops of hay. With so many available hands, Hornsby had no trouble harvesting any of his fields, and in general, he only borrowed a hand as repayment after he had lent one of his own out. The winter months, then, were much like those of the previous year as the slaves worked gathering wood, shelling corn, building and repairing barns, homes, and fences, and engaging in a variety of crafts, including shoemaking and spinning. Although Hornsby managed to keep his slaves occupied during most

of the year, their duties seem to have been relatively relaxed. Only the three adult men on the plantation had detailed tasks assigned each day, while the others usually worked as a team in the fields or the home. The failure of Hornsby's corn crop, in fact, gives some indication of the general under-employment of his slaves. The fatal frost came one month after the original planting, forcing the slaves to take time out to pick and burn the dead plants and then to re-plow and re-seed the fields. Though these duties occupied his slave force for an extra month during the early summer, it had virtually no effect on the productivity of his farm.

Hornsby quite obviously had not amassed his slaves in order to create greater surpluses of wheat, hemp, and corn on his frontier farm, and although he was a busy and efficient manager during 1803, he was clearly not motivated by the rewards of commercial agriculture as the Chesapeake tobacco planters of previous generations had been. Instead, Hornsby seems to have built up his slaveholdings and moved to Kentucky primarily in order to provide comfortable inheritances for his children. In 1799, several years after he had moved to Kentucky, he owned forty-one taxable slaves and maintained this number during 1800. During the following year, however, he gave six slaves to each of his sons Thomas and Joseph, Jr., and likely distributed a few more to his daughters Hannah and Mildred, leaving him with a total of twenty-four slaves. Before moving to Kentucky, he had already given two slaves to Mildred and her husband Nicholas Meriwether Lewis of Albemarle County, Virginia, and judging by the will he wrote in 1799, he planned to give the remainder to his other two sons and two daughters. After 1800, his slave force declined as he continued to distribute his bondsmen to the adjacent plantations of his children. At the end of 1803, he seems to have decided to retire from farming after hiring out or distributing all but two of his slaves to his children.

Thus, on Joseph Hornsby and John Breckinridge's plantations and in the state of Kentucky generally, bondsmen were present and used in the fields, but there is little evidence to suggest that slavery was a crucial form of labor to the economy of early Kentucky. Ironically, Kentucky's agricultural character more closely

approximated that of the early mid-Atlantic region rather than that of the early Chesapeake. Although the majority of the state's settlers had come from the upper south, the agriculturists in this new frontier were raising a variety of crops rather than concentrating exclusively on commercial staples as had been the common pattern in the Chesapeake. Slaveholders had brought bondsmen into the state from Virginia and elsewhere, but without specific labor designs in mind. For them, slavery was a traditional, inherited facet of their families' lives and their culture generally. Though they had no particular plans for their slaves, they brought them anyway because they were parts of their extended households, because of their value as investments or symbols of wealth, and because they could perform whatever odd jobs that were necessary in creating new farms and plantations in the frontier wilderness.[26] Slaves were useful to small farmers to minimize the burdens of the farm and to large-scale owners as general agricultural laborers, as symbols of wealth and independence, and as forms of investment. These farmers' entrepreneurial decisions certainly may not have been strictly sensible from an economic perspective. Perhaps it would have been more rational for them to have employed these slaves more intensively or to have sold them farther south. However, slave ownership was intrinsically valued among the people of this region, and though they may not have been using their capital or laborers efficiently, they were content with their incomes and their conspicuous symbols of status. In Kentucky, therefore, slavery had matured, and it represented a quite different, less crucial labor system and was no longer the institution it had been in its infancy in North America.

The economic forces which were making slavery a less important labor institution in Kentucky generally were also working to modify its character in other ways. These included legal and political changes, represented by the slavery debate of 1792 and a moderation in the slave code, religious transformations that made slaves more

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26 On the value of slaves as property, see Gavin Wright, *The Political Economy of the Cotton South: Households, Markets and Wealth in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1978), 129-30.

important parts of the growing frontier evangelical congregations, and social changes that were altering their day-to-day lives. During the era of Kentucky's early settlement, slaveholders acknowledged these new circumstances and subtly modified their behavior toward a more paternalistic posture with their slaves.[27]

Perhaps the clearest evidence of the changing attitude toward slavery is represented by the slavery debate that took place in connection with the Kentucky Constitutional Convention in 1792. Before this, slavery had never been a political issue in the slave states of the evolving south.[28] It was generally taken for granted among both Americans and Europeans that slavery was a natural aspect of civilization, and the people of Maryland, Virginia, Delaware, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia had long relied on slaves without publicly giving much thought to the morality of the institution.

The debate began within Kentucky, particularly among leaders of the Baptist, Presbyterian, and Methodist churches. Men such as Baptist minister James Garrard, Presbyterian minister and constitutional convention delegate David Rice, and others began to urge the people in sermons and in newspaper articles to consider abolition as a plank of the new government. They made a variety of religious, moral, and republican-oriented political arguments attacking the institution, and they generally proposed moderate, gradual methods of emancipation.[29] Proponents of slavery,

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27 On slavery in Kentucky, see J. Winston Coleman, Jr., *Slavery Times in Kentucky* (Chapel Hill, 1940). On slavery in early Kentucky and on slave migration, the internal slave trade, and relations with native Americans in particular, see Ellen Eslinger, "The Shape of Slavery on the Kentucky Frontier, 1775-1800," *Register* (Winter 1994): 1-23.

28 This statement does not mean to include the peculiar nonslavery experiment in early Georgia, detailed by Betty Wood in *Slavery in Colonial Georgia, 1730-1775* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1984). Also, Quakers, Methodists, and others in Maryland, Virginia, and North Carolina had formed abolition societies which regularly petitioned legislative assemblies for anti-slavery in the revolutionary era, but their efforts represent marginal initiatives which never became important in the common political arena in these states. See Winthrop Jordan, *White Over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro, 1550-1812* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1968), 343-44.

29 Philip Philips, "Whether Slavery for Life is Consistent with Justice and Good Policy . . . ," *Kentucky Gazette*, 31 December 1791; Brutus, Sr., *Kentucky Gazette*, 10

meanwhile, went on the defensive, generally by responding to the abolitionist allegations and by appealing to the injustice of emancipation for slaveholders. Led in the convention by George Nicholas, a lawyer who had only recently moved to Kentucky from Virginia, their arguments stressed property rights and the impractical circumstances associated with emancipation.[30]

In the end, the prevailing conservative attitudes among the convention delegates triumphed, and slavery was protected in Article IX of the constitution: "[t]he legislature shall have no power to pass laws for the emancipation of slaves without the consent of their owners." In the only roll-call vote during the convention, abolitionists and moderates failed to have Article IX eliminated from the

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March 1792; H.S.B.M., *Kentucky Gazette*, 25 February 1792; David Rice, "Memoirs," in Robert H. Bishop, *Outline of the History of the Church in the State of Kentucky During a Period of Forty Years* (Lexington, 1824); David Rice, *Slavery Inconsistent with Justice and Good Policy* (New York: Arno Press, 1969; originally published in 1792); Vernon P. Martin, "Father Rice, The Preacher Who Followed the Frontier," *Quarterly* 29 (1955): 324-30; Jeffrey Brooke Allen, "The Debate over Slavery and Race in Ante-bellum Kentucky: 1792-1850" (Ph.D. dissertation, Northwestern University, 1973), 5-6; Joan Wells Coward, *Kentucky in the New Republic: The Process of Constitution Making* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1979), 38-39; Barnett, "Evolution of 'North' and 'South'", 226-47; East Hickman Baptist Church Minutes, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Kentucky; W.W. Sweet, *Religion on the American Frontier: The Baptists, 1783-1830* (New York, 1931), 440-44; David Benedict, *A General History of the Baptist Denomination in America* (2 vols.; Boston, 1813), 2: 229-39. The arguments and activities of the abolition and proslavery camps of the antebellum period are summarized in Larry Tise, *Proslavery: A History of the Defense of Slavery in America, 1701-1840* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1987) and James Brewer Stewart, *Holy Warriors: The Abolitionists and American Slavery* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1976). See also Jordan, *White Over Black*, 342-74; Asa Martin, *The Anti-Slavery Movement in Kentucky Prior to 1850* (first publication series, no. 29; Louisville: Filson Club Historical Society, 1918); David B. Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution, 1770-1823* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1975), 84-89.

30 Little Brutus, *Kentucky Gazette*, 24 December 1791; The Disinterested Citizen, *Kentucky Gazette*, 11 December 1790, 31 December 1791, 25 February 1792; George Nicholas, "Slaves," George Nicholas Papers, Box 1, Folder 27, Durrett Collection, University of Chicago Library; Richard H. Caldemeyer, "The Career of George Nicholas" (Ph.D. dissertation, Indiana University, 1951), 77-89; Victor Dennis Golladay, "The Nicholas Family of Virginia, 1722-1820" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Virginia, 1973), 254-94; Coward, *Kentucky in the New Republic*, 14, 24-25; Allen, "Debate Over Slavery," 3-4.

constitution by a vote of twenty-six to sixteen.[31] Though the abolitionists had failed, the split vote suggests that Kentucky was somewhat progressive in its early years. With an economy that was not so demanding of slave labor, with migrants who were still affected by the glow of the Revolution, and with the leadership of the state's evangelical ministers, Kentuckians considered ending one path to the westward advance of slavery, and they nearly forced slaveholders migrating from Virginia to move further to the south.

This changing attitude toward slavery is also reflected to some degree in slave codes. Although the broad history of the passage of laws governing slaves underscores the complete control and cruelty of the institution, the two decades after the revolution represented a brief period of amelioration. In general, slave crimes were more lightly penalized in this era, and the law made it easier for masters to manumit their bondsmen. In 1782, Virginia adopted laws which made manumission a simple process for the first time in the state's history, and lawmakers also passed measures reducing sentences for various slave crimes during this period. Kentucky originally adopted the slave code of Virginia; in the years after the first constitution, legislators began to piece together their own similar set of statutes. Though the state's code was generally restrictive, it provided relatively light punishment of slave crimes. It also made manumission an easy process for owners, and its provisions were generally interpreted and enforced liberally.[32]

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31 Kentucky Constitution (1792), article XII, section 1 and article IX, section 1; *Journal of the First Constitutional Convention of Kentucky, Held in Danville, April 2 to 19, 1792* (Lexington, 1942), 10.

32 Martin, *Anti-Slavery*, 18; Philip J. Schwarz, *Twice Condemned: Slaves and the Criminal Laws of Virginia, 1705-1865* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1988), 21-26; Jordan, *White Over Black*, 403; Jeffrey R. Brackett, *The Negro in Maryland: A Study of the Institution of Slavery* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Studies in Historical and Political Science, Extra Vol. 6, 1889); John Henderson Russell, *The Free Negro in Virginia, 1619-1865* (Baltimore, 1913), chapter 3; William Littell and Jacob Swigert, ed., *A Digest of the Statute Law of Kentucky* (5 vols.; Frankfort, 1822), 2: 149-64; Virgil Maxcy, ed., *The Laws of Maryland* (3 vols.; Baltimore, 1811), 2: 352-61; W.W. Hening, *The Statutes at Large; Being a Collection of all the Laws of Virginia* (13 vols.; Richmond, 1823), 11: 39-40. On the legal constraints placed on free blacks in Kentucky, see Juliet E.K. Walker, "The Legal Status of Free Blacks in Early Kentucky, 1792-1825," *Quarterly* 57 (1983): 382-95.

As suggested in the studies of counties, one of the most obvious examples of the different character of Kentucky slavery was the relatively small sizes of holdings. Slaves did not live on large plantations generally but on small farms. The average holding size in Kentucky in 1800 was 4.4 slaves, much lower than in other areas of the early Chesapeake generally.[33] Thus, a given Kentucky slave lived on a farm with three or four others, perhaps making up one family of two adults and children, while most of the slaveholders of the state clearly owned a smaller group. Plantation-sized holdings were beneficial to the welfare of slaves in some respects, while the small sizes made Kentucky's slaves more familiar to their owners and generally responsible for a wider variety of domestic and agricultural duties.

Because Kentucky was not narrowly devoted to one type of commercial agriculture, slaves learned a greater variety of skills and crafts. On John Hornsby's farm, for example, each adult slave had learned at least one craft, and each was familiar with the agriculture of at least five field crops as well as a variety of garden products. For example, "Molatto John" made shoes, constructed and repaired the various farm improvements, sowed all Hornsby's seeds, and served in the great variety of roles that characterized his slave force generally.[34] In addition to such farm work, slaves were also used as the primary laborers in most of the state's emergent industries. While William Christian's younger slaves raised corn in 1785, for example, he took the able adults to his salt manufactory "in order to carry on the works."[35] In addition, slaves toiled in other industries, including iron works, rope walks, lead mines, and a cotton-bagging factory, and they also worked as assistants to the many craftsmen in the state's small

33 Coward, *Kentucky in the Early Republic*, 63. See also Kulikoff, *Tobacco and Slaves*, 137, 154, and 338 for plantation sizes in the Chesapeake.

34 Hornsby Papers, DSC, FCHS.

35 William Christian to William Fleming, 13 September 1785, Grigsby Collection, VHS.

towns.[36] Thus, the slaves of Kentucky were not so singularly devoted to the cultivation of tobacco and corn as their forebears had been but were instead employed in a wide variety of jobs.

Such diverse skills and adaptability generally made slaves an attractive labor source for those who needed short-term workers. Although no thorough record of the practice was kept by the state, qualitative sources suggest that slave hiring was unusually widespread in early Kentucky. In fact, discussions of hiring slaves are almost as common as the topic of slavery itself in the early correspondence of migrants. For the many capital-starved Kentucky slaveholders who could not use their slaves efficiently, hiring-out became a source of income and a convenient solution to the issue of keeping bondsmen occupied. Slaves were leased as farmhands, manufacturing laborers, and domestics; their terms of service varied by each lease. Some of the owners sent their bondsmen west and hired them out prior to their own move in order to facilitate the household's transition from east to west. John Breckinridge, for example, sent some of his slaves, along with an overseer, to Kentucky in 1792, one year before his move, in order to establish a western household.[37] Richard Terrell also hired out his slaves when he arrived in Kentucky in the spring of 1793, thinking that he would not be able to sow a crop and hoping to recoup some of the expenses of his move.[38] Breckinridge continued the lucrative practice, hiring out a few of his slaves during most of his years in Kentucky. Owning more

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36 Fredrika Johanna Teute, "Land, Liberty and Labor in the Post-Revolutionary Era: Kentucky as the Promised Land" (Ph.D. dissertation, Johns Hopkins University, 1988), 209. See also Thomas Perkins to General Joseph Palmer, 27 February 1785, in James R. Bentley, ed., "Letter of Thomas Perkins to Gen. Joseph Palmer, Lincoln County, Kentucky, 1785," *Quarterly* 49 (1975): 145; Leland Smith, "A History of the Tobacco Industry in Kentucky from 1783 to 1860" (MA thesis, University of Kentucky, 1950), 77; Caldemeyer, "Career of George Nicholas," 36; James A. Ramage, "The Hunts and Morgans: A Study of a Prominent Kentucky Family" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Kentucky, 1972), 94-103; J. Winston Coleman, Jr.,"John W. Coleman: Early Kentucky Hemp Manufacturer," *Quarterly* 24 (1950): 34-48.

37 J. Russell to John Breckinridge, 29 August 1792, Breckinridge Papers, LC.

38 Richard Terrell to Lucy Terrell, 27 April 1793, Carr-Terrell Papers, Alderman Library, University of Virginia. See also Elliott Rucker to Edmund Gaines, 6 March 1808, Twyman Family Papers, University of Virginia (hereafter UVA).

laborers than he could occupy on his farm, he hired his slaves to local farmers as well as to the owners of a paper factory, a rope walk, a sawmill, and also to a tombstone maker.[39] In 1801, Breckinridge made nineteen of his slaves available to farmers and others in Kentucky while he served in Congress.[40] Those who leased the slaves also came in all varieties, including large manufacturers as well as poorer farmers needing only day laborers.[41]

Even those who professed anti-slavery principles saw no harm in hiring slaves. Abraham Drake of Mason County, for example, was "so opposed to slavery that he would not have accepted the best negro in Kentucky, as a gift," but "[n]ow & then, he hired [a slave], male or female, by the day from some neighbouring master," since white "hirelings" were so scarce.[42] Although the slaves did not get to keep their wages, the practice did represent a measure of autonomy for them within the system generally.

These economic and political transformations also had a significant effect on the relations of slaveholders with their slaves. Masters in Kentucky were clearly beginning to take more interest in their slaves as persons, and they talked frequently about their welfare in their correspondence during the era of the state's settlement. Relative to the slaveholders of the colonial Chesapeake, for example, the Kentuckians clearly expressed greater interest in their slaves, particularly in their correspondence just after migrating. In one of his letters home to Richmond in 1793, Richard Terrell of Lexington wrote that his slave Judy "is a most admirable Servant in whom I place unbounded confidence." He also told his wife that Judy's "children

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39 William Lyth to John Breckinridge, 20 January 1799; Archibald Harris to John Breckinridge, 14 September 1799; J. Marcarrou to John Breckinridge, 6 January 1800; Slave hire agreement between John Breckinridge and Peter January, 16 May 1801; James Morrison to John Breckinridge, 27 February 1802; Directions by John Breckinridge to be read to slaves George and Jim, 4 November 1804, Breckinridge Papers, LC; Harrison, "Breckinridge," 211.

40 The hiring rates, ranging from six to twelve pounds, are written on the back of a letter from John Fowler to John Breckinridge, 5 March 1801, Breckinridge Papers, LC; Harrison, "Breckinridge," 211.

41 See, for example, Samuel Ayres to William Ayres, 7 June 1786 and 22 February 1790, Ayres Family Papers, VHS.

42 Daniel Drake, *Pioneer Life in Kentucky* (Cincinnati, 1870), 93.

are well & much improved, her youngest walks and talks very well, & have brought Ben to speak much better than he did."[43] After traveling to Woodford County, Kentucky, in 1808, Elliott Rucker wrote to his family in Madison County, Virginia, to report that "the Negroes look well indeed; and appear very much pleased" with the new country. Rucker further reported that the slave Ben wanted his mother to know that he had "got at last to the country he has ever been in pursuit of, and begs that we may leave him behind, if we should ever think of returning."[44] Slaveholders also commonly spoke of the white and black members of their households as the "family." Stephen Holladay of Fayette County, for example, wrote to his father in Spotsylvania County, Virginia, in 1794 that he had a "verey greate charge a coming on 13 in family, which of them six [are] blacks."[45] And later, Amos Kendall wrote Henry Clay, claiming that he did not want to be forced to sell his negroes because it "would be almost like selling my children."[46] By this late date, 1826, such terms might have represented only empty euphemisms, but their usage at the turn of the century, before the formulation of a Southern proslavery defense, suggests that slaveholders were taking some genuine interest in their slaves.[47]

Perhaps a better example of the changing attitude was the subtle negotiations that often took place between master and servant, such as those between Annie Christian and her slaves. In a wide variety of circumstances, slaves seemed to more actively assert their authority while increasingly paternalistic masters assented to their demands. Though the slaves ultimately had little control over their destiny, slaveholders were inclined to persuade them rather than to command them, as was often the case with the removal to the frontier of

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43 Richard Terrell to Lucy Terrell, 31 May 1793, Carr-Terrell Papers, UVA.

44 Elliott Rucker to Edmund Gaines, 6 March 1808, Twyman Family Papers, UVA.

45 Stephen Holladay to his father, 25 May 1794, Holladay Family Papers, VHS. See also Nicholas Meriwether to William Meriwether, 7 August 1784, DSC, FCHC; William Christian to Thomas Madison, 30 March 1786, Grigsby Collection, VHS; DC, 5 ZZ 82.

46 Amos Kendall to Henry Clay, 8 July 1826, James F. Hopkins and Mary W. Hargreaves, eds., *Secretary of State, 1826*, vol. 5 of *The Papers of Henry Clay* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1973), 534.

47 Aron, "Lost," 405-406.

Kentucky. Samuel Ayres, for example, wrote to his father in 1790 about his well-stocked Kentucky farm where he had established his slave Godfree. Perhaps anticipating moving more slaves from Essex County, Virginia, to Kentucky, he also wrote that Godfree had asked him to "[i]nform his Fellow servants that he is much pleas'd with the Countrey and thinks this is a much better part than Wheir he came from for the black people, provided thay have Good Masters, and if not they are no worse off than they were there"[48] Rather than demanding that they move, he clearly wanted Godfree's words to persuade the others of the attractiveness of the new state and thus build their interest in Kentucky. In Green County, Kentucky, in 1826, Burton Carr wrote of his struggles to get his slave Frank to remain at home. Carr had hired Frank out in the previous year but ended up losing money on the venture because Frank continually ran away. He wrote to his mother in Virginia:

> Frank has acted so badly this year that he has been & expense to me of more than he earnt. I hired him out Last spring for tin dolars a Month for Six months on condition that he lost no time more than usual. he Staide one Month & run away & gone for Some time I then took him back again but he staide but a short time before he was out again & again so that he has not made quite two month in all the six Months.[49]

Tired of trying to keep his slave at home, Carr eventually hired him out again, although he clearly would have preferred to have had Frank by his side:

> I have again hired him out to Mr. Blaydes for one year as he wont stay with me & live a lone not Seeing nor hearing from A human mortal at times for A Week or two together.[50]

Meanwhile, Gideon Fitz wrote to his mother in Virginia in 1808 from Natchez, Mississippi, to say that although business kept him occupied at the moment, he soon intended "looking for a perminent home for [him]self, perhaps in Tennessee or the state of Ohio." Although the

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48 Samuel Ayres to William Ayres, 22 February 1790, Ayres Family Papers, VHS.
49 Burton Carr to Elizabeth Carr, 22 August 1826, George Carr Papers, UVA.
50 Ibid.

southwest was "rich & beautiful & healthy enough," he claimed that he could "never feel happy where slavery is carried to such lengths."[51] His mother had designated Davy and Moses for him from her "black people," but Gideon cautioned her on sending them to him at the time:

> I do not wish you to send any of the negroes to me unless they are willing to Come, and I would not wish to force them— They all know me and Can chuse for themselves, and I can have my portion of the property in something else in case they wish to stay where they are.[52]

Such examples indicate that the migrating Virginia slaveholders of late-eighteenth-century Kentucky did have some real concern for the lives of their slaves and that the relationships between masters and slaves were genuinely changing as a result of economic transformations.

With the rise of evangelicalism in the early west, slaves were also given unprecedented attention in Kentucky's churches. The Methodists and Baptists had been the first denominations in the upper south to preach to slaves generally in the 1760s. As early as 1786 in Kentucky, the Elkhorn Baptists declared that slaves could be "proper gospel members."[53] Although these churches generally accommodated slaveholding, they did make some efforts to ameliorate the effects of the institution by accepting slaves into their congregations. Most of the churches that accepted slaves as members in Kentucky were Baptist and Methodist, and the bondsmen generally co-existed with white parishioners, abiding by the same rules, behavioral standards, and religious expectations. Though the churches were segregated, with the blacks normally seated in the back or in a balcony, services were combined and slaves participated as freely as whites. In addition, bondsmen were regularly baptized in the appropriate churches and at times they became involved in votes on

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51 Gideon Fitz to Elizabeth Fitz, 22 September 1808, University of Virginia. The same opinion is expressed in the Kentucky letters of William Taylor Barry to John Barry, 14 August 1801 and especially 23 February 1804, William Taylor Barry Letters, University of Virginia, #2569.

52 Gideon Fitz to Elizabeth Fitz, 22 September 1808, UVA.

53 Sweet, *Religion on the American Frontier*, 421.

ministers. Though the law did not recognize slave marriages, the churches did, for example, by disciplining slaves for adultery. Though these congregations generally condoned slavery and a distinction between races, the churches gave the slaves and their social institutions an important legitimacy among both blacks and whites.[54]

Though these changes, in the law, in hiring out, in techniques of control, and in the church represented a genuine change, at least for a time, in the character of the institution and white attitudes about slavery generally, they reveal relatively little from the perspective of the slaves themselves. Some of the slaves clearly benefited from the altered circumstances, but despite these advances, slavery was still the fundamentally oppressive institution it had always been to the majority of Kentucky's slaves. Perhaps most devastating, all bondsmen were always vulnerable to the auction block. From the perspective of the slaves, the worst scenario was to be sold "down river," to the burgeoning cotton plantations of the southwest. Such organized sales began on a limited scale in Lexington in 1800, but they increased, particularly after the state's economic slowdown and Lexington's decline after the War of 1812.[55] Though they were surely reluctant, the slaveholders cashed in on their human investments whenever forced to pay debts.[56] The cruel irony of the history of slavery in Kentucky is that although the institution had perhaps improved from the perspective of the bondsmen during the early national period, slaves were still movable commodities, and in time many were sold to the southwest where their work habits and acculturated and adaptable qualities were so highly valued. Though slaveholders were becoming more paternalistic in Kentucky, their

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54 John B. Boles, *Religion in Antebellum Kentucky* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1976), 80-100.

55 James A. Ramage, *John Wesley Hunt: Pioneer Merchant, Manufacturer and Financier* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1974), 37-38 and "The Hunts and Morgans," 53-54. See also J. Winston Coleman, Jr., *Slavery Times in Kentucky*, Chapter 6.

56 Aron, "Lost," 412.

benevolence perhaps remained in minor contrast with the cruelties of the institution of slavery generally.

In the end, Kentucky may have been little different from other areas of the growing south. Though its early politicians had discussed abolition and though slavery had been a very different institution in this new frontier, Kentucky ultimately condoned the perpetuation of bondage, continued to rely on the work of slaves, and then became a key source of more slaves for the cotton plantations of the southwest. For several decades, however, Kentucky had reflected the character of the early national, expanding Chesapeake region, and it did not particularly resemble the same "Old South" society which would eventually establish itself during the antebellum era. The contrasts between this period in Kentucky and developments in the southwest—in the economic and social investment in slaves of slaveholders of the deep south, in their reliance on a staple crop which demanded the full attention of their labor force and which cemented the logic of their social system, and in their refusal to publicly discuss the morality of the institution—reveal the distinctiveness of slavery along this early national, upper south border. Kentucky's early history demonstrates that slavery was beginning to change in the early national era. Had cotton not been such a viable, lucrative staple, then slavery might have continued in the south generally, as in Kentucky, as a traditional but not indispensable labor system and as an increasingly marginal and vulnerable institution. Kentucky's history indicates that slaveholders were beginning to bring a quite different institution to the frontiers of the upper south after the Revolution and before the rise of cotton and sectionalism, factors so often associated with contrasts between colonial southern slavery and everything after.

Table 1
Plantation Size in Fayette and Shelby Counties, 1792-1802

	Percentage of Slaves					
	Size of Unit of Slaves					Percentage of Slave
Place and Time	1	2	3	4	5+	Households
Fayette County:						
1792 (n=848)	27	18	11	8	36	27.4
1797 (n=892)	24	17	12	8	40	39.3
1802 (n=720)	22	14	11	9	45	41.5
Shelby County:						
1792 (n=22)	55	23	0	9	14	12.7
1797 (n=148)	42	17	11	9	21	15.1
1801 (n=347)	29	18	15	8	30	25.3
Kentucky:						
1792	—	—	—	—	—	23.2
1800	—	—	—	—	—	25.2

Note: 1802 data for Shelby County is incomplete, so I have substituted with 1801 information here.

Sources: Mason County Clerk, Tax Records; Fayette County Clerk, Tax Records; Shelby County Clerk, Tax Records; Kentucky State Library, Frankfort, Kentucky; Coward, *Kentucky in the Early Republic*, 63.

Table 2
Size of Landholdings of Fayette and Shelby County

Householders, 1792-1802

Fayette County

	1792		1797		1802	
Acres	Households	Percentage	Households	Percentage	Households	Percentage
0	2123	68.5	1160	51.1	960	55.3
1-99	239	7.7	325	14.3	236	13.6
100-199	380	12.2	377	16.6	285	16.4
200-499	273	8.8	279	12.3	185	10.7
500+	83	2.7	131	5.8	71	4.1
	3098	99.9	2272	100.1	1737	100.1

Shelby County

	1792		1797		1802	
Acres	Households	Percentage	Households	Percentage	Households	Percentage
0	135	78.0	757	60.2	808	58.8
1-99	0	0.0	102	8.1	116	8.4
100-199	9	5.2	169	13.5	242	17.6
200-499	20	11.6	160	12.7	145	10.6
500+	9	5.2	68	5.4	62	4.5
	173	100.0	1256	99.9	565	99.9

Note: 1802 data for Shelby County is incomplete, so I have substituted with 1801 information here.

Sources: Mason County Clerk, Tax Records; Fayette County Clerk, Tax Records; Shelby County Clerk, Tax Records, 1792-1802, Kentucky State Library.

Table 3
Fayette County Inventories, 1800-1809

	Percentage of Farms Where Present	Total Number	Average Holding
Livestock:			
Horses	82	637	7.6
Cattle	82	1071	12.9
Sheep	53	1214	22.5
Pigs	66	2005	29.9
Geese	23	512	22.3
Oxen	12	34	2.8
Laborers:			
Slaves	53	514	9.5
Other:			
Spinning Wheels	67	167	2.5
Butter Churns or Pots	33		
Stills	6		
Plows	63	130	2.0

	Percentage of Farms Where Present	Total Value (Pounds)	Average Known Value (Pounds)
Crops:			
Corn	42	1083.3	25.8
Wheat	26	221.0	8.5
Hay	21	190.3	9.1
Hemp	13	155.4	12.0
Rye	22	123.7	5.6
Flax	19	52.8	2.8
Oats	19	47.4	2.5
Tobacco	3	33.3	11.1
Barley	1	2.3	2.3
Potatoes	2	1.4	0.7
Other:			
Wagons:	30	639.9	21.3

Note: (n=101)
Source: Fayette County Clerk, Wills, 1800-1809, Kentucky State Library.

Table 4
Shelby County Inventories, 1793-1805

	Percentage of Farms Where Present	Total Number	Average Holding
Livestock:			
Horses	84	245	3.7
Cattle	75	734	11.0
Sheep	62	581	11.9
Pigs	63	1151	23.0
Geese	11	178	22.3
Oxen	1	2	2.0
Laborers:			
Slaves	16	70	5.4
Other:			
Spinning Wheels	81	88	1.7
Butter Churns or Pots	23		
Stills	63		
Plows	20	73	1.5

	Percentage of Farms Where Present	Total Value (Pounds)	Average Known Value (Pounds)
Crops:			
Corn	19	221.7	14.8
Wheat	15	46.6	4.2
Hay	9	8.5	7.2
Rye	9	27.8	4.6
Oats	6	16.2	3.2
Flax	13	6.0	0.8
Tobacco	3	2.4	1.2
Hemp	15	1.3	1.3
Other:			
Wagons:	16	217.8	16.8

Note: (n=79)

Source: Shelby County Clerk, Wills, 1793-1805, Kentucky State Library.