

Runaway slave ad, 1852

Introduction

Broadsides and notices posted by slave owners or their agents offer dramatic and concrete evidence of the inhumanity of slavery. Defined as both property and responsible persons by law, slaves were sold with cows, sheep, and furniture. Denied the power to control their own lives or work, slaves ran away. The odds against escape were overwhelming; capture meant harsh punishment.

This runaway slave advertisement, printed as a broadside on August 23, 1852, announces rewards for the return of four Mississippi County, Missouri, slaves. Such an ad would be posted in public places. The notice offers descriptions of the men to aid slave catchers in identifying them. One of the runaways, named George, is called a “shrewd, smart fellow” who “plays well on the Violin.” The youngest of the four men mentioned in this ad, George, if recaptured, was worth more than any of the others at \$1000. The rewards for the return of the four runaways ranged from \$450 to \$1000—great sums of money that highlight the value of forced labor to slaveholders.

Questions for Discussion

Carefully examine the entire text of the ad as well as the information in the description. Then apply your knowledge of American history in order to answer the following questions.

1. Frequently slaveholders claimed that their slaves were ignorant and uneducable. What information provided by the owners of George and Noah actually destroy the claim?
2. How can we explain the \$1,000 offered for the return of George, as compared to the lower rewards offered for the other runaways?
3. The rewards differ if a runaway is captured and returned from a free or from a slave state. How can the difference be explained?
4. Relate the date on the bottom of the ad to laws justifying the actions of slaveholders.

Runaway slave ad, 1852

Image

\$2,500

REWARD!

RANAWAY, from the Subscriber, residing in Mississippi county, Mo., on Monday the 5th inst., by
Negro Man named GEORGE.

Said negro is five feet ten inches high, of dark complexion, he plays well on the Violin and several other instruments. He is a shrewd, smart fellow and of a very affable countenance, and is twenty-five years of age. If said negro is taken and confined in St. Louis Jail, or brought to this county so that I get him, the above reward of \$1,000 will be promptly paid.

JOHN MEANS.

Also, from Radford E. Stanley,

A NEGRO MAN SLAVE, NAMED NOAH,

Full 6 feet high; black complexion; full eyes; free spoken and intelligent; will weigh about 180 pounds; 32 years old; had with him 2 or 3 suits of clothes, white hat, short blue blanket coat, a pair of saddle bags, a pocket compass, and supposed to have \$350 or \$400 with him.

ALSO---A NEGRO MAN NAMED HAMP,

Of dark copper color, big thick lips, about 6 feet high, weighs about 175 pounds, 36 years old, with a scar in the forehead from the kick of a horse; had a lump on one of his wrists and is left-handed. Had with him two suits of clothes, one a casinet or froth coat and grey pants.

Also, Negro Man Slave named BOB,

Copper color, high cheek bones, 5 feet 11 inches high, weighs about 150 pounds; 32 years old, very white teeth and a space between the centre of the upper teeth and a blue blanket sacl coat with red striped linsey lining. Supposed to have two suits of clothes with him; is a little lame in one ankle.

\$1,000 will be given for George---\$600 for Noah---\$450 for Hamp---\$450 for Bob; if caught in a free State, or a reasonable compensation if caught in a Slave State, if delivered to the Subscribers in Miss. Co., Mo., or confined in Jail in St. Louis, so that we get them Refer to

**JOHN MEANS &
R. E. STANLEY.**

ST. LOUIS, August 23, 1852. (PLEASE STICK UP.)

“\$2,500 Reward!,” Mississippi Co., Missouri, broadside, August 23, 1852. (Gilder Lehrman Collection, GLC07238)