

CHAPTER 3

Colonial America's Most Wanted

Runaway Advertisements in Colonial Newspapers

Between 1759 and 1766, a man named Bood appeared three times in runaway advertisements placed by his master in the *New-York Gazette*, a colonial newspaper. The first advertisement, from June 21, 1759, described Bood as a "Mulatto" who ran away with "three Negroe Men." The four fugitives took with them extra shirts, breeches, shoes and stockings, two guns, two or three hatchets, and several blankets. William Hunt, who claimed Bood and one of the other runaways as his property, believed that the four men had planned their escape together and would likely head for "the Indian Towns upon the Sasquehannah [Susquehanna River]" in frontier Pennsylvania, because Bood had lived among the Indians there for "several months, some years ago."

Bood showed up next in a runaway advertisement on May 26, 1763. His owner Wilson Hunt (the same William Hunt as before, or perhaps a relative?) described Bood as "of a yellowish Complexion," and this time he ran away without accomplices or goods other than the clothes on his back. Hunt warned anyone who apprehended Bood that he was a "smooth Tongued Fellow" who would surely try to escape again "if not well secured."

On December 25, 1766, Bood made his last appearance in the *New-York Gazette* (see Figure 3.1 on p. 46). This time Wilson Hunt added to his physical description of Bood, noting that the runaway "has had the Small Pox" and "his great Toes have been froze, and have only little Pieces of Nails on them." Hunt repeated his warning about Bood's penchant for evading capture, "as he is a remarkable stout, cunning, artful Fellow."

THIRTY DOLLARS REWARD:

RUN-AWAY from the Subscriber, the
 16th of September last, a Negro Man named BOOD,
 about 38 Years old, 5 Feet 10 Inches high, yellow Com-
 plexion, thin Visage, has had the Small Pox; his great
 Toes have been froze, and have only little Pieces of Nails
 on them: He is much addicted to strong Liquor, and
 when drunk very noisy and troublesome. Whoever takes
 up said Slave, and brings him home, or secures him in
 Gaol, so that his Master may get him again, shall be
 intitled to the above Reward of **THIRTY DOLLARS**, paid
 by **WILSON HUNT.**

Any Person who takes up said Negro, is cautioned to
 be particularly careful that he does not make his Escape,
 as he is a remarkable stout, cunning, artful Fellow.

Hunterdon-County, }
 Maidenhead, December 20, 1766. }

Figure 3.1 Runaway Advertisement from the New-York Gazette This runaway advertisement appeared in the New-York Gazette on December 25, 1766. It is the last one in which Bood, a runaway from New Jersey, appeared. We do not know if he was recaptured or remained free. Source: Graham Russell Hodges and Alan Edward Brown, editors, "Pretends to Be Free": Runaway Slave Advertisements from Colonial and Revolutionary New York and New Jersey (New York: Garland, 1994).

The historical record is silent as to whether Bood was caught again, and we do not know if he lived the rest of his life in bondage or freedom. These three advertisements, however, paint a fascinating portrait of a man who constantly resisted another person's effort to claim him as property. When read in conjunction with similar runaway advertisements, they tell us about the material circumstances of slavery and servitude in colonial America as well as about the physical and psychological tensions between masters and their human property. In Bood's record, we can glimpse instances of collective and individual resistance to a master's authority. The advertisements also tell us something about how masters viewed their human property, what physical characteristics and personality traits they attributed to them, and the techniques they relied upon to recapture runaways and keep them in line.

Most important, Bood's story challenges the typical image of runaway slaves in American history, which depicts them as fugitives from cotton plantations in the Deep South running north to freedom. Nineteenth-century slave

narratives and novels such as Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* have indelibly printed this image in the American mind, associating fugitive slaves with the coming of the Civil War. The Underground Railroad, with its secret network of "conductors" and "stations" that ferried runaway slaves to freedom, played an important role in the sectional crisis, but its story belongs to the nineteenth century. Before the American Revolution, slavery and servitude were legal throughout the colonies, and no clear geographic line or barrier separated freedom from bondage. When slaves such as Bood stole themselves, they were just as likely to run east, west, or south as north.

Bood's story also raises questions about the intersection of race, slavery, and servitude in eighteenth-century America. In each of the three advertisements placed for Bood, his master claimed him as property, sometimes referring to him as a slave, other times not. Many people lived and worked in eighteenth-century America in a state of bondage; some were African slaves, but others were white indentured servants, apprentices, or convicted felons transported from the British Isles. The institutions of slavery and servitude were universal, and unfree laborers, whether servants or slaves, dominated the workforce. Black slaves and white servants toiled in the swamps of lowland Georgia, the tobacco fields of Virginia, in workshops and iron forges in Pennsylvania, and in the homes and on the docks of Boston. Both called their bosses "master" and endured whipping as the most common form of discipline.

On the other hand, a clear racial barrier separated black slaves and white servants and made the conditions of their bondage different. Slavery was a hereditary, lifetime status that passed from mother to child. Servitude was contractual, and people entered into it voluntarily, even convicts who chose it over the noose, for a fixed number of years. It was much harder for a runaway slave to pass unmolested into free society, and a suspected runaway slave faced much more severe punishment and fewer legal protections when apprehended. A master could "outlaw" a runaway slave, giving license to others to kill the fugitive, but no such legal sanction existed for the murder of a runaway servant. While the working lives of servants and slaves could be similar in many ways, race made the experience of running away much different for an African slave than for a white servant.

Advertisements for runaway servants and slaves were a common feature of colonial newspapers published from Boston, Massachusetts, to Savannah, Georgia. These advertisements numbered in the thousands. Individually, they provide snapshots of men, women, and children who sought at least temporary respite from a life of working for others. Collectively, these advertisements provide scholars with a database that they can use to quantify the age, sex, place of origin, occupation, and destination of thousands of discontented workers who otherwise left no discernable trace in the historical record. By sampling runaway advertisements from a number of regions, you can recover the dynamics of unfree labor in colonial America: the living and working conditions of the slaves and servants, their relations with each other and their masters, and their masters' efforts to control their lives.

Using Runaway Advertisements as a Source

Few sources offer a more comprehensive or interesting look inside colonial American society than its newspapers. The first colonial newspaper appeared in 1690 in Boston, but it folded after one issue; a successful newspaper did not appear until the *Boston News-Letter* in 1704. Boston sustained its preeminence in newspaper publication throughout the colonial era, but during the 1720s newspapers appeared in New York and Philadelphia as well. The most significant growth in colonial newspapers occurred in the 1760s and 1770s. In 1764, there were twenty-three colonial newspapers; on the eve of the American Revolution, that figure had increased to thirty-eight.

Colonial newspapers were typically published once a week, on long sheets of paper that when folded in half, divided into columns, and printed on both sides, made for four pages stuffed with information. Their publishers included local and international news they copied from other papers or that they received from private correspondents. As with modern newspapers, an important source of the newspaper's revenues was advertising. In columns of notices similar to the modern classifieds section, readers found announcements for the arrival and departure of ships, the importation and sale of goods, public auctions, and the like. Seaports such as Boston, New York, Philadelphia, and Charleston were the nerve centers of colonial trade, and merchants and other business folk relied heavily on newspapers for this information. The smudged and tattered state of surviving editions of colonial newspapers testifies to their wide circulation and readership.

Runaway advertisements in colonial newspapers were found among other advertisements for lost or stolen goods, for debt collections and foreclosures, or for the sale of real estate, servants, slaves, or livestock. One of the great advantages to reading these advertisements in their original context is to comprehend how casually colonial Americans bought and sold human laborers, subjecting them to public inspections and sales in the same way that they traded livestock or any other goods. No one in colonial America thought it out of the ordinary to read an advertisement for a runaway servant or slave alongside one for a stray horse, or to see a monetary reward offered for both.

A review of even a small sample of runaway advertisements reveals a consistent pattern in their composition. This advertisement placed by Virginia slave owner Archibald Cary for three runaways in the *Virginia Gazette* on March 7, 1766, is typical of the style used in such ads. A close reading reveals important clues about the runaways' background, their relationship to each other, and their relationship with their master.

These runaways
worked at an
iron forge

A skilled slave

RUN away from the subscriber's forge, on the 22d instant, at night, three Negro men; one of them named STEPHEN, by trade a carpenter, Virginia born, a black fellow, about 5 feet 8 or 9 inches high, very brisk and active, speaks quick, has a

Born into slavery
in North America
and therefore
assimilated into
colonial society

Born in coastal West Africa and therefore less familiar with colonial society

The physical hazards these slaves faced in their work may have motivated their flight

Cary believes these slaves may have intended to run far from home

pleasant countenance, and walks very nimbly. Also NED, a fellow fire-man, a black fellow, remarkably well made for strength, about 5 feet 7 or 8 inches high, generally laughs when he speaks, has a large mouth, which is seldom shut, Virginia born, inclinable to be fat, has a sluggish walk, and broad shoulders. Also BRUMALL, a Gold Coast Negro, about the size and height of Ned; he is a fire-man, has remarkable broad shoulders, a roll in his walk, and had a hurt on his knee lately, from which he was lame a day or two before he went off; but whether any scar on it, I know not. Both the last mentioned fellows, have scars on their arms, from burns which they got by melted cinders flying on them when at work. Brumall is a yellow Negro, and has a very pleasant countenance. I can give no particular description of their clothes; I do not know of their carrying any more than their suits of cotton and osnaburghs. I will give £5 reward for each slave, if taken up in Virginia, and delivered to me; if in Carolina, £10 for each.

Runaway advertisements often included details about the speech patterns of runaways, such as their proficiency with English or foreign languages, accents, or speech impediments

Suggests biracial parentage

Suggests that someone other than Cary supervised these slaves

ARCHIBALD CARY

Details commonly found in runaway advertisements included the name, age, sex, ethnicity, and race of the fugitive, along with a description of his or her physical appearance and disposition followed by a description of the clothing he or she was wearing when last seen. Advertisements typically concluded with the offer of a reward for the return of the fugitive and a warning against assisting the person in flight. More detailed advertisements provided a wealth of other information: occupations and skills; aliases, disguises, motivations for running away; potential destinations or plans; distinctive habits or vices.

Advantages and Disadvantages of Working with Runaway Advertisements

There are many advantages to working with runaway advertisements when studying slaves and servants in colonial America. First, the detailed descriptions of the runaways' physical appearance offer important clues about the day-to-day lives and material circumstances of the "lower sort" in colonial society: slaves and servants who lived and worked under the authority of someone else. The coarseness of the clothing these runaways wore serves as a metaphor for the hand-to-mouth existence so many of them endured. Likewise, descriptions of scars and physical disabilities are evidence of the dangers they endured from the elements, disease, malnutrition, hazardous working conditions, and brutal discipline meted out by their masters.

Runaway advertisements also offer a glimpse into the runaways' strategies and motives for resisting their masters. In many such advertisements, the master speculates as to why the slave or servant ran away. Was the fugitive seeking a reunion with family members or perhaps trying to preserve a family that was about to be driven apart by the sale of a spouse or child? Labor was very scarce in colonial America. Many runaway advertisements hint that a servant or slave with a marketable skill—such as blacksmithing, woodworking, or seafaring—left to find more satisfactory work, perhaps at the instigation of another potential employer. Some advertisements, such as the one for Bood from the June 21, 1759, edition of the *New-York Gazette*, also indicate that runaways found living among neighboring Indians or backcountry settlements more appealing; others suggest that runaways headed for seaports where they hoped to find work in shops or on ships.

One of the disadvantages of working with runaway advertisements derives in part from the medium in which they appeared. Relatively few colonial newspapers existed before 1760, and those that did tended to be in northern seaports, such as Boston, New York, and Philadelphia. Southern newspapers lagged behind northern ones in their founding and readership because the southern colonies lacked the urban centers and printshops necessary to sustain newspapers. New England had few servants and slaves but many newspapers; the colonies of the Chesapeake and Lower South had many slaves but few newspapers. The middle colonies had many servants and slaves as well as an active printing industry. Thus, historians interested in runaway advertisements have often focused their attention on New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania. While this geographic bias shortchanges the southern colonies, especially before 1760, it does help shed light on the experience of northern and urban slaves and servants.

Another disadvantage is that runaway advertisements accounted for only a small portion of slaves and servants who ran away. Placing a newspaper advertisement cost money and required a master to post a reward and pay the charges of anyone who apprehended the runaway. Capturing a fugitive slave or servant was an expensive proposition, and many masters chose to wait a considerable period before placing a runaway advertisement in hopes that they would recover their property by some other means. Some slaves and servants used running away for short periods of time as a way of protesting their treatment or negotiating better working and living conditions. Such fugitives were less likely to be documented in runaway advertisements than those who absconded with stolen goods or left evidence that they were seeking permanent freedom. Masters were also less likely to post advertisements for runaways that they did not consider worthy of the expense of retrieving. Therefore, runaway advertisements were more likely to describe valuable, skilled slaves and servants than old, sick, or unskilled ones.

Finally, in considering the disadvantages of this source, the historian must bear in mind that the advertisements' descriptions of the runaways came from the masters rather than the fugitives themselves. In composing advertisements, masters were anxious to dismiss any suggestion that a runaway's actions re-

flected mistreatment or abuse on their part. They were also inclined to attribute negative personality traits to the runaways in question. In the master's eyes, any servant or slave who ran away was by definition a person of questionable moral character. The standard words and phrases that masters used to describe runaways' personalities sound like a roll call of seven dwarfs Snow White would not want to meet: Surly, Insolent, Cunning, Lusty, Sour, Impudent, and Artful. In this respect, the advertisements do not tell us about the runaways themselves so much as they tell us about what their masters thought of them.

Working with the Source

The table on page 52 will help you organize your notes on the advertisements as you read them. It includes information drawn from the first two advertisements as examples.

	Number of Runaways	Runaway's Name	Servant or Slave	Ethnicity or Race	Sex	Age	Physical Features, Personality Traits, Occupational Skills, or Other Significant Information	Notes
Source 1	1	Quomino	servant	African	M	21	head half-shaved; speaks good English; carried away clothes and a scythe	carrying scythe as a weapon?
Source 2	1	Cuff	?	African	M	45	facial scars in "Negro Fashion"; could be carrying a forged pass	born in Africa?
Source 3								
Source 4								
Source 5								
Source 6								
Source 7								
Source 8								
Source 9								
Source 10								
Source 11								
Source 12								
Source 13								
Source 14								
Source 15								
Source 16								

The Source: Runaway Advertisements from Colonial Newspapers, 1747–1770

These runaway advertisements are reprinted in their entirety. They are arranged by region: New England, the Middle Colonies, the Chesapeake, and the Lower South.

As you will see, all runaway advertisements promised rewards, but it is hard to convert eighteenth-century values into their modern equivalents. The colonies used a bewildering combination of monetary units they borrowed from British and Spanish precedents, not to mention their own paper currencies. Exchange rates varied substantially over time and between regions. The table below offers a roughly estimated conversion guide to help you get a sense of the modern equivalent of the reward amount most commonly cited in the advertisements you will read.

In 1766	1 pound (£) = in 1991 Dollars	£5 Reward = in 1991 Dollars
New England	\$ 43.25	\$216.25
Middle Colonies	\$ 28.38	\$141.90
Chesapeake	\$ 48.54	\$242.70
Lower South	\$153.52	\$767.60

Table based on values of local currency in 1766–1772 for Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, Virginia, and South Carolina listed in Table A-3 in John J. McCusker, *How Much Is That in Real Money? A Historical Price Index for Use as a Deflator of Money Values in the Economy of the United States* (Worcester, Mass.: American Antiquarian Society, 1992).

NEW ENGLAND



Boston Evening-Post, August 1, 1748

RAN away from his Master, John Allen, Merchant of Newton, a Negro Man named Quomino, about 21 Years of Age, a likely Fellow, of middling Stature, his Head shav'd half over, and speaks good English. Carried away with him, an Olive coloured Cloth Coat with Buttons of the same Colour, a new Jacket and Breeches, dark Cloth Colour, homespun, with Pewter Buttons on, two pair of Trousers, two Tow¹ Shirts, two Linnen Shirts, an old Bever Hat, and large Brass Buckles in his Shoes, &c. He also carried with him a Scythe.

Whoever shall take him up and return him to his said Master, shall receive of him the Sum of Five Pounds, and all necessary Charges, in Old Tenor

¹ Fabric made from flax or hemp fibers.

Money;² and all Masters of Vessels are upon their Peril forbid concealing or carrying off said Servant.

NEWTON, JULY 26, 1748.

² Paper currency used in Massachusetts.



Boston Evening-Post, May 19, 1755

RAN away from his Master William Bucknam, a Negro Man named Cuff, about 45 Years old, and pretty tall and slender, and has Scars on each Side of his Face, Negro Fashion,¹ and had on a streaked blue and white woollen Shirt, an under Jacket and Breeches, homespun woollen Cloth, streaked black and white about an Inch wide, mill'd Cloth; outside Jacket, homespun Kersey² grey colour'd, and grey yarn-Stockings, thick [illegible], worsted Cap, Felt Hat, and is suspected to have a forged Pass or Freedom for his Protection with him. Any Person that shall take up said Negro, and commit him to Gaol,³ and secure the Papers, if any, and send me Tidings of the same, or to Messieurs Samuel Hewes and Son, Merchants in Boston, shall have Five Dollars Reward, and all necessary Charges paid. This likewise is to forbid all Masters of Vessels from carrying said Negro away.

FALMOUTH, APRIL 22. 1755

WILLIAM BUCKNAM

¹ A reference to ritual scarification found on slaves born in West Africa (also described as "country marks" in Source 14 on p. 60).

² Coarse woollen cloth from Yorkshire, England.

³ Jail.



Boston Evening-Post, March 29, 1762

SIXTY DOLLARS Reward

RUN-away from Messi'rs Bodkin & Ferrall, of the Island of St. Croix,¹ on the 1st Day of July, 1760, a Negro Man named Norton Minors, is by Trade a Caulker and Ship-Carpenter, was born & bred up at Capt. Marquand's at Newbury,² who sold him to Mr. Craddock of Nevis,³ from whom the above Gentleman

¹ A Caribbean island.

² A Massachusetts port town.

³ A Caribbean island.

bought him, is about 5 Feet 10 Inches high, about 30 Years of Age, speaks good English, can read and write, is a very sensible, smart, spry Fellow, has a remarkable bright Eye, he has been seen at and about Newbury sundry Times since his Elopement. Whoever takes up and secures the said Negro Man, so that he may be delivered to the Subscriber,⁴ shall receive SIXTY DOLLARS Reward, and all necessary Charges paid by

BOSTON, MARCH 29, 1762

HENRY LLOYD

N.B. All Persons whatever are cautioned against harbouring or concealing said Negro, or carrying him off, as they may depend on being prosecuted with the utmost Rigour of the Law.

⁴ The person placing the advertisement.

MIDDLE COLONIES

4

Pennsylvania Gazette, November 26, 1747

RUN away the 22d instant, from James Greenfield, of Newlin township, Chester county, an Irish servant man named Robert Clinton, a weaver by trade. He is of middle stature, with black curled hair, swarthy complexion, and about twenty years of age. Had on when he went away, a new felt hat, a dark brown coat, green jacket, flaxen shirt, and fine stock, tow trowsers, black stockings, footed with brown worsted,¹ old brass shoes, with large brass buckles. He was enticed away by one Sylvester Eagon, an Irishman, by trade a weaver, and speaks very brogueish, but no servant. Whoever secures said servant, and sends word to his master, so as he may have him again, shall have Five Pounds reward, and reasonable charges, paid by

JAMES GREENFIELD

¹ Woolen fabric made in Worstead, England.

5

Pennsylvania Gazette, July 8, 1756

RUN away on the 23rd of June last, from the subscriber, living in Vincent township, Chester county two Dutch¹ servants, husband and wife; the man named Jacob Hakaliver, about 24 years of age, 5 feet 4 inches high, has a pale complexion, and a down look: Had on and took with him, a coarse shirt and

¹ When used in runaway advertisements from the eighteenth century, this ethnic designation usually refers to German-speaking servants from the Rhine River Valley.

trowsers, a black coat, with white metal buttons on it, the fore skirts lined with red, an old blue jacket, old felt hat, and has no shoes; he has brown bushy hair. His wife is named Magdalen, a lusty woman, about 30 years of age, has fair hair and a sour look: Had on and took with her, an orange coloured linsey² bedgown, three petticoats, one of linsey, striped red and brown, another of brown cloth, bound about the tail with black, and the third of black linen, a coarse shirt and apron, three black Dutch laced caps. She has with her a male child, named Michael, five months old, little of his age. They carried with them some bed clothes, and some Dutch books. Whoever takes up and secures said servants, so as their master may have them again, shall have Forty Shillings reward, and reasonable charges, paid by

ABRAHAM SMITH

² A wool-flax blend.



Pennsylvania Gazette, July 22, 1756

RUN away from the subscriber, living in Kent County, Maryland, two convict servant men; the one named Benjamin Shotton, a shoemaker by trade, about 5 feet 8 or 9 inches high, of a tawney complexion, large black beard, and curled hair; he is a talkative, pert, well-made fellow: Had on when he went away, An ozenbrigs¹ shirt, coarse country made trowsers, old brown cloth coat, with a cuff and slash sleeve, and broad metal buttons, old swanskin jacket, with red stripes, and an old beaver hat. He also got with him a pair of old fine blue broadcloth breeches, and probably has other clothes with him. He is a notorious villain, and this is the third time he has run away without the least reason. The other one is a young fellow, named Edward Phelps, about 22 years of age, a smooth faced fellow, about 5 feet ten inches high, slim made and thin faced, has light colour'd short hair, and a down look: Had on when he went away, An old white linen shirt, a country kersey jacket, a half-worn, dark colour'd, and almost black coat, trimmed with brass buttons with wood bottoms, ozenbrigs trowsers, and a pair of old pumps² much too big for him. He also took with him two new shirts, made of country linen. They have forged two passes; probably will change their names and cut their hair. Whoever takes up and secures abovesaid fellows, shall have Four Pistoles³ reward, or two for each, paid by

THOMAS SMYTH.

¹ Cheap linen made in Osnaburg, Germany.

² Thin-soled shoes.

³ A Spanish coin commonly used in colonial North America.

7***Pennsylvania Gazette*, August 11, 1757**

Middletown, Monmouth County, East New Jersey, Aug. 1. 1757.

RUN away from the Subscriber the First of January, twelve Months past, a Negroe Man, named Cato, who has since his Elopement changed his Name several times: Had on when he went away, a Pair of Buckskin Breeches, fine brown Linen Shirt, a plain made whitish Camblet¹ Coat, dark Yarn Stockings, new Shoes, and a Wool Hat. He is a stout well set Fellow, understands Husbandry in all its Parts, an excellent Hand with a Scythe in Grass or Grain, speaks English as well as if Country born, and pretends to be free. Underneath his right-shoulder Blade he was branded in Jamaica when a Boy with the Letters BC, which are plain to be seen. He plays poorly on the Fiddle, and pretends to tell Fortunes. It is supposed he has a forged Pass. Whoever secures the said Negroe, so that his Master may have him again, shall receive a Reward of FIVE POUNDS and reasonable Charges, paid by

RICHARD STILLWELL.

¹ A fabric made from different materials, including wool and silk.

8***Pennsylvania Gazette*, November 29, 1764**

RUN away from the Subscriber, in King and Queen, Virginia, two white indentured Servants, a Man and his Wife. The Man is English, about 5 Feet 5 Inches high, of a red Complexion, wears his Hair, is much Sun-burnt, steps short and quick in his Walk, is a Brickmaker by Trade, and has a sett of Shoemaker's Tools; had a short red Coat, red Breeches with Metal Buttons, an old green lapelled Jacket, a Flannel Jacket with red Stripes, new Osenbrigs Trowsers, with other Clothes, as he stole Part of mine; his Name is James Marrington. His Wife is about 30 Years of Age, about 5 Feet high, very thick, looks well, and has got good Clothes; she is an Irish Woman, and her Name is Mary Marrington.

Run away likewise 4 Negroes, viz. Jack, a black thick Fellow, about 30 Years old, about 5 Feet 6 Inches high, speaks broken English, has been used to go by Water, but of late to Plantation Business; had on a blue Cotton Jacket and Breeches, Petticoat Trowsers, Stockings, Shoes with Buckles, and has a Whitemetal Button in his Hat. Dick, a dark Mulattoe, very lusty, about 25 Years old, about 5 Feet 8 Inches high, a Carpenter and Painter by Trade; had on Cotton Clothes, with Petticoat Trowsers, and he has got a red Jacket and Breeches, a good Felt Hat, and Buckles in his Shoes. Daniel, a well set black Fellow, about 5 Feet 10 Inches high, has been used to Plantation Business, and had on Cotton Clothes. Dorcas, a small Wench, about 5 Feet high, has been used to House Business, has got a new brown Linen Jacket and Petticoat, and sundry other Things that she stole. They have all large Bundles, as they stole several

Sheets and Blankets, with other Things. They are supposed to be seen crossing from Point Comfort to Little River, in a small Boat, with a Blanket Sail, Last Saturday Morning, and I imagine will make for North-Carolina. Whoever apprehends the above Servants and Slaves, and delivers them to me, shall have Ten Pounds Reward, if taken in Virginia, if out thereof Twenty Pounds.

EDWARD VOSS.

If the above Runaways are taken in Pennsylvania, and conveyed to Philadelphia, the above Reward will be paid by RITCHIE and CLYMER.

CHESAPEAKE



Virginia Gazette, April 11, 1766

WARWICK county,
April 8, 1766.

RUN away from the subscriber, on or about the 10th of February last, a Virginia born Negro man named GEORGE AMERICA, about 5 feet 8 or 9 inches high, about 30 years old, of a yellow complexion, is a tolerable good shoemaker, and can do something of the house carpenters work, walks quick and upright, and has a scar on the back of his left hand; had on a cotton waistcoat and breeches osnbrugs shirt, and yarn stockings. As the said slave is outlawed,¹ I do hereby offer a reward of £5 to any person that will kill and destroy him, and 40s.² if taken alive.

THOMAS WATKINS

¹ An "outlawed" runaway slave was considered a threat to public safety, and he or she could be killed by another person without fear of legal prosecution.

² 20 shillings (s.) equaled 1 pound (£). Thus, in this advertisement, the reward for returning the runaway slave alive is £2, but the reward for killing him is £5.



Virginia Gazette, April 25, 1766

RUN away from the subscriber in Louisa county, the 24th of February last, 2 Negroes viz. POMPEY, a short thick fellow, 36 years old, Virginia born, very apt to wink his eyes quick, contract one corner of his mouth, and stammer in his speech when under any apprehension of fear; had on when he went away a cotton waistcoat and breeches, died of 2 brown colour, Virginia shoes and stockings; he carried with him some other clothes, but of what sort is not known; he pretends to something of the tailor's business, and sews well. ALICE, a tall slim wench, about 20

years old, and clothed in Negro cotton when she went away. Whoever secures them, or either of them, shall have 20s. reward, besides what the law allows, if taken in the colony and if out thereof 40s. They are both outlawed.

R. ARMISTEAD

11 *Virginia Gazette*, August 10, 1769

RUN away from the subscriber, in King & Queen county, a Negro man named BEN about six feet high, a very black fellow, his right knee so much bent in, that when he walks it knocks much against the other. Also, a Negro woman named ALICE, about five feet eight inches high, of a yellow complexion; and has remarkable large eyes. A few years ago she made an elopement, and passed for a free woman, in Williamsburg, and I suspect she may now do the like, or both of them attempt to get on board some vessel; if [this] should be the case, I beg of all persons they may apply to, to forward them (or either of them) to the most convenient gaol, and the gaoler is also begged to send an express immediately to the subscriber, which he will defray. As neither of those slaves have been ill used at my hands, I have had them outlawed in this county, and for their bodies without hurt, or a proper certificate of their death, a proper reward will be given; the fellow I suppose (for many reasons) will not be taken easily, as he has formerly made several overseers fear him.

EDWARD CARY

12 *Virginia Gazette*, May 31, 1770

RUN away from the subscriber, the first day of November last, (under pretence of suing for his freedom) a likely young fellow, named Bob, of a yellow complexion, slim made, near six feet high, has a remarkable down look, is a very good blacksmith, and, as supposed, is harboured by some white man of that trade. Whoever will bring the said fellow to my house in Dinwiddie county, near the court-house, shall receive a reward of FIVE POUNDS.

JOHN HARDAWAY

LOWER SOUTH

13 *Georgia Gazette*, May 26, 1763

Run away in January last, from my plantation near Savannah, A NEGROE called Primus, belonging to James Skirving, Esq; of Ponpon. As he has not been heard of since, I am apprehensive he might have gone away with

a gang of Creek Indians which were down at that time, or that he may be taken up by some of the back settlers, who, I am informed, frequently conceal run-away Negroes, and work them in their own fields, or change them in some of the northern colonies for horses; whoever delivers the said negroe to me, or gives information of his being concealed, shall be well rewarded; and whoever conceals him may expect to be prosecuted by

JOSEPH GIBBONS.

N.B. He is a slim fellow, speaks tolerable good English, and had when he went away a new blanket, jacket and breeches.

14 *Georgia Gazette, March 7, 1765*

RUN AWAY FROM THE SUBSCRIBER

A YOUNG NEW NEGROE WENCH, named SIDNEY, has her country marks¹ on her breast and arms, and a mole under her left eye, talks no English, wore a blue negroe cloth gown and coat, a new oznaburg shirt, a cheque handkerchief on her head and another about her neck. A reward of TEN SHILLINGS will be given to any person who takes her up and delivers her in Savannah to

ELIZABETH ANDERSON

¹ See note 1 with Source 2, p. 54.

15 *Georgia Gazette, January 14, 1767*

RUN AWAY from the subscriber's brick-yard, the 19th August last, ONE NEW NEGROE MAN, named DAVID, of the Gambia country, about 5 feet nine inches high, can speak no English, has a large hole in each ear, had on when he went away a blanket, a hat, a pair of broad, cheque trowsers, and an old cheque shirt. Whoever takes up said negroe, and delivers him to me, or to the warden of the work-house, shall receive 40s. reward.

THOMAS LEE

16 *Georgia Gazette, August 31, 1768*

RUN AWAY from Mr. Robert Bradley's plantation at Pansacola, THREE NEW NEGROE MEN, called NEPTUNE, BACCHUS, and APOLLO, that can speak no

English, and one STOUT SEASONED FELLOW called LIMERICK, speaks good English, and is very much marked on the back, &c. by severe whipping. It is imagined he has taken the conduct of the rest, and that they may have found their way through the Creek nation. Whoever takes up and will deliver the said Negroes, or any of them, to the Warden of the Work-House in Savannah, shall receive TWENTY SHILLINGS STERLING REWARD for each over and above all reasonable charges for bringing them any considerable distance from Savannah.

11TH AUGUST, 1768

T. NETHERCLIFT

Analyzing the Source

REFLECTING ON THE SOURCE

1. One striking feature of these advertisements is the detail they devoted to the physical appearance and dress of the runaways. Describe the composite portraits these advertisements paint of slaves and servants. What were the typical visual or spoken clues that indicated a person's status (slave, servant, or free)?
2. What evidence do these advertisements present of the techniques and strategies runaways used to make their way into free society? What skills or traits were helpful for doing so? Judging from the information conveyed in Sources 4, 12, and 13, who was likely to assist a runaway slave or servant, and why?
3. What types of racial and ethnic diversity are evident in the slaves and servants described in these advertisements? How does information about a runaway's place of origin (that is, born in America or elsewhere?) contribute to your understanding of his or her motive and method for running away?

MAKING CONNECTIONS

4. Are there any significant differences in the structure and content of runaway advertisements from one region to another? If so, what do these differences tell you about regional variations in slavery and servitude in colonial America?
5. Where in these advertisements do you see evidence of different methods used to apprehend runaway slaves versus runaway servants? How was a runaway's race likely to affect the punishment he or she faced if caught?
6. Compare the servants and slaves in these advertisements to the servants you studied in Chapter 2, "Coming to America: Passenger Lists from the 1635 London Port Register." How did the experience of labor in colonial America change from the seventeenth to the eighteenth centuries? What role did race and ethnicity play in those changes?

Beyond the Source

The American Revolution changed the nature of unfree labor in North America. Indentured servitude gradually fell out of use in all regions after independence from Britain, in part because it was considered contrary to the democratic values of the new nation. Also, after 1790 the economy of the northern states began to industrialize, and wage labor gradually replaced other forms of labor in urban areas. Apprentices and journeymen, who in the colonial era typically received room, board, and clothing from their masters, now received cash payments instead. These wages allowed apprentices and journeymen to live outside of their masters' homes and independently of their authority when not at work, but the wage economy also led to greater social and geographic segregation between employers and workers in the cities of nineteenth-century America.

The nature of slavery in the new nation also changed dramatically. Between 1780 and 1830, every state north of the Mason-Dixon Line, which divided Maryland and Pennsylvania, prohibited slavery within its borders. New York and New Jersey were the slowest in this regard, passing gradual emancipation laws that freed only slaves born after a certain date. As late as 1840, advertisements appeared in New Jersey newspapers for runaway slaves. Nevertheless, in the wake of the Revolution, slavery receded along with indentured servitude in the North.

Labor relations took a different course in the South. Southern states experienced a hemorrhaging of runaway slaves during the Revolution, but the invention of the cotton gin and expansion into new western territories after the war reinvigorated the plantation system. Rather than melting away as it had in the North, unfree labor in the South became the cornerstone of the economy. Runaway slaves remained a problem for their masters, who continued to place runaway advertisements in southern newspapers through the era of the Civil War.

During the 1840s and 1850s, runaway slaves became a political wedge between North and South. Free blacks and abolitionists encouraged Southern slaves to seek their freedom by fleeing north, and slave owners insisted that the federal government help them recover such human contraband. The Constitution included a fugitive slave clause (Article IV, Section 2) that prohibited states from passing laws that would confer freedom upon runaways from other states. In 1850, the federal Fugitive Slave Law strengthened the hand of slaveholders by denying accused runaways the right to trial by jury and by requiring U.S. citizens to assist federal marshals in apprehending runaways. Abolitionists and free blacks decried this law as a blatant violation of civil liberties, and even people unsympathetic to the plight of slaves found the law's extension of federal power repugnant. Yet, so long as there was slavery in America, slaves continued to challenge the institution by stealing themselves. While the decision to run away was as singular as the person making it, the collective impact of runaways on the slave system is undeniable. Runaways made slavery less efficient and more costly, and their masters' efforts to recover them caused political repercussions that were not resolved until the Civil War.

Finding and Supplementing the Source

Students wishing to conduct research in colonial newspapers should begin with Clarence Brigham, *History and Bibliography of American Newspapers, 1690–1820*, two volumes (Worcester, Mass.: American Antiquarian Society, 1947), a reference work that can help identify a newspaper appropriate to the region and period you wish to study. Original copies of colonial newspapers are very rare and fragile, making it hard for researchers to access them unless they live near a rare books library, but several colonial newspapers are available on microfilm, which can be accessed at university libraries or via interlibrary loan. The online database Accessible Archives (accessible.com) provides full-text articles from eighteenth- and nineteenth-century American newspapers, including the *Pennsylvania Gazette*. This database is available by subscription only, so you will want to check with a reference librarian to see if you can gain access to it.

If you cannot access a colonial newspaper but still want to research runaway advertisements, there are several published collections. For the Middle Colonies, see Graham Russell Hodges and Alan Edward Brown, editors, *"Pretends to Be Free": Runaway Slave Advertisements from Colonial and Revolutionary New York and New Jersey* (New York: Garland, 1994), and Billy G. Smith and Richard Wojtowicz, editors, *Blacks Who Stole Themselves: Advertisements for Runaways in the Pennsylvania Gazette, 1728–1790* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1989). For the southern colonies, see Lathan A. Windley, editor, *Runaway Slave Advertisements: A Documentary History from the 1730s to 1790*, four volumes (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 1983). As their titles indicate, these collections focus on runaway advertisements for slaves, but *Blacks Who Stole Themselves* contains a small selection of runaway advertisements for servants.

Noteworthy studies of colonial slavery that make use of runaway advertisements include Edgar J. McManus, *Black Bondage in the North* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1973); Gerald W. Mullin, *Flight and Rebellion: Slave Resistance in Eighteenth-Century Virginia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972); and Michael A. Gomez, *Exchanging Our Country Marks: The Transformation of African Identities in the Colonial and Antebellum South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998). For a study of runaway advertisements that focuses on their production and significance as part of colonial print culture, see David Waldstreicher, "Reading the Runaways: Self-Fashioning, Print Culture, and Confidence in Slavery in the Eighteenth-Century Mid-Atlantic," *William and Mary Quarterly*, third series, 56 (April 1999): 243–72. For studies that focus on the experience of servants, see Sharon V. Salinger, *To Serve Well and Faithfully: Labor and Indentured Servants in Pennsylvania, 1682–1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), and Jonathan Prude, "To Look upon the 'Lower Sort': Runaway Ads and the Appearance of Unfree Laborers in America, 1750–1800," *Journal of American History* 78, no. 1 (1991): 124–59.

Sylvia Frey discusses the impact of runaways on the southern states during the American Revolution in *Water from the Rock: Black Resistance in a Revolution-*

ary Age (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1991). For studies that look at runaway advertisements from the American South in the nineteenth century, see Daniel Meaders, editor, *Advertisements for Runaway Slaves in Virginia, 1801–1820* (New York: Garland, 1997), and John Hope Franklin and Loren Schweninger, *Runaway Slaves: Rebels on the Plantation, 1790–1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).