

Eastman Johnson's *Negro Life at the South* and Urban Slavery in Washington, D.C.

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In October 1938, as the culmination of a year-long campaign to bring reproductions of the world's finest paintings to a popular audience, *Life* magazine ran an elaborate, twelve-page feature under the optimistic headline, "American Art Comes of Age." The article, a celebration of the varied achievements of the "native school," presented a montage of twenty-eight small black-and-white reproductions and eleven larger "masterpieces" printed in full color. Included in this more selective group were such stalwart American images as George Caleb Bingham's *Verdict of the People*, Thomas Eakins's *Max Schmitt in a Single Scull* (*The Champion Single Sculls*), and Eastman Johnson's *Negro Life at the South* (identified in this case by its more popular title, *Old Kentucky Home*; Fig. 1). Of the latter, the *Life* readership was informed in a short caption that Johnson's work was "an idealization of slavery" and a representative illustration of the "romantic painting" of the 1850s.

Twenty-eight pages earlier, in a seemingly unrelated story, a very different image was reproduced. In a section devoted to the general news of the week, a photograph depicted a well-dressed white woman looking up in surprise at a weather-beaten frame row house with a crumbling stoop. As she gazes openmouthed at the unkempt dwelling, the woman walks by a frowning African American schoolgirl who has withdrawn to let her pass. Refuse litters the ground at their feet. The caption explains, "Mary Pickford walked into a back alley in Washington, D.C. The camera registers her look of amazement and the wondering expression of a Negro tenement girl. 'I don't know how human beings can exist in places like these,' said America's onetime sweetheart."¹

Although certainly unintentional, the juxtaposition of these two images within the pages of a single issue of *Life* functions as an ironic commentary on the changing attitudes toward a major icon of American slavery. The texts of the accompanying pair of magazine captions, despite the fact that they appeared eighty years after Johnson painted *Negro Life at the South*, nicely encapsulate two opposing poles of interpretation of the famous painting, two possibilities for understanding the way in which it might have found meaning for a national audience on the eve of the Civil War. The first view, which has largely governed the historiographic afterlife of the work, sees it as a generic, romantic image of "life in the South," a broad national stereotype of plantation culture. The second approach, however, the one proposed in the present essay, argues for greater attention to the geographic specificity of the painting. Like Mary Pickford, the beautifully gowned white woman hesitating on the threshold at the right of *Negro Life at the South* has entered an unusual and particular space. She has crossed into the "secret city" of black life in the interior of a Washington city block.² It is this urban setting in

the antebellum era, along with Johnson's experience of it, that bears examination.

Negro Life at the South has not suffered from a want of attention by scholars. It was in the nineteenth century, and remains today, probably the best-known painted image of American slaves, and it is widely acknowledged as the most significant work of Eastman Johnson, one that effectively launched his career when it was first exhibited at the National Academy of Design in 1859. The great success of the painting at the time of its debut in New York has usually been ascribed to its ability to be all things to all people. For abolitionists, the decrepit, tumbledown living conditions pictured by Johnson matched the moral degeneracy of the institution of slavery, while for slavery's defenders, the careless leisure-time activities of several generations of slaves provided visual proof that forced servitude was neither physically onerous nor destructive of family life. This ambiguity of viewpoint—along with undertones of the theme of miscegenation, focused in particular on the light-skinned young woman standing at left in the painting—has been the primary concern of most recent scholars.³ The main question, at least indirectly, has centered on intentionality: Did Eastman Johnson create *Negro Life at the South* as an indictment of Southern slavery, or was it intended as a sop to apologists of the peculiar institution? Or, perhaps was it simply a shrewdly constructed document of judicious neutrality?

My purpose here is not to pronounce definitively on the question of Johnson's attitudes toward slavery in 1859 (although I will, nonetheless, have a good deal to say on the subject), nor will I focus exclusively on the issue of whether *Negro Life at the South* was designed to, or did in fact, support or condemn slavery. The record is clear that it was seen, at least, to do both.⁴ What I would like to do is amplify considerably the nature and evidence of this debate and, in the process, increase our understanding and appreciation of the multivalent resonance of this single, iconic image. This will involve resituating the painting in the specific urban context of Washington, D.C., examining closely the neighborhood and house in which Johnson and his family lived, tracing the explosive national debate on slavery and the slave trade in the District of Columbia, considering the nature of the urban slave community in the light of recent scholarship on the subject, surveying the critical reaction to the image in 1859 and the several following decades, and analyzing the subsequent private ownership of *Negro Life at the South*. I will argue, in the end, that the draining of its site-specific content, the nostalgic blunting of the image into a generalized "Old Kentucky Home," is closely tied to Johnson's unusual engagement with the volatile issue of slavery in the nation's capital.



1 Eastman Johnson, *Negro Life at the South (Old Kentucky Home)*, oil on canvas, 36 x 45 1/4 in., 1859. New York, © Collection of The New-York Historical Society

Johnson in Washington

Although the exact dates are difficult to pinpoint, it appears that during the course of his early career, Eastman Johnson lived in the District of Columbia for a combined period of at least four years, with his several interrupted Washington sojourns spanning a decade and a half, from 1844 to 1858. Even when he lived elsewhere—he spent the early 1850s studying abroad, and two subsequent summers were devoted to researching possible Native American subjects in Wisconsin—Washington usually remained his primary residence in the United States until his definitive move to New York in 1858.⁵ Johnson was first drawn to the city as a young “black-and-white” artist; following lithographic training in Boston, he moved to the District of Columbia at about the age of twenty. There, he made a living for two years executing highly finished crayon portraits of local and visiting luminaries. Johnson enjoyed privileged access to a number of important political figures in Washington. For a time, he was even permitted to set up a studio in a committee room of the United States Congress, allowing him easy access to such legislators as Daniel Webster and John Quincy Adams.

That the inexperienced Eastman Johnson would be granted such opportunities is likely the result of family connections. The artist’s father, Philip C. Johnson, was a functionary of the Democratic Party in Maine; he had served for two years as Maine’s secretary of state under Governor John Fairfield, his political patron. Fairfield subsequently began a term as a United States senator in 1843, and through his efforts several years later, Philip Johnson was appointed by President James Polk to the office of chief clerk in the Bureau of Construction, Equipment, and Repair of the Navy Department, a midlevel management position (he supervised nine employees), which he held for the rest of his life. Thereafter, the Johnson family resided in Washington, first in a series of boardinghouses and rented spaces and then, as of 1853, in a newly built brick row house at 266 F Street, between Thirteenth and Fourteenth Streets and just a few blocks from the White House and Philip’s Navy Department offices.⁶ The purchase of number 266 by Eastman Johnson’s parents meant that the artist would have a spacious home to use as a base of operations throughout the 1850s. Johnson, however, had already left Washington in 1846, moving to Boston for three years before embarking

on a lengthy campaign of European study, first in Düsseldorf, and then in The Hague and Paris. His student years on the Continent were among the most extensive of any American artist of his generation. In autumn 1855, however, the death of his mother finally brought him home again to Washington. The local *National Intelligencer* announced shortly thereafter, "It affords us pleasure to announce the return from Europe of the well-known Washington artist, Mr. E. Johnson."⁷

The Washington that greeted Johnson in 1855 had changed significantly from the small town he had first left in 1846. James Renwick's Smithsonian Institution building now graced the Mall, and Clark Mills's bronze equestrian sculpture of Andrew Jackson had recently been installed in Lafayette Square. Among many other architectural works-in-progress, huge new wings were under construction at the Capitol; Robert Mills's Washington Monument stood half erected at 170 feet; and Thomas U. Walter had recently begun a campaign to complete Mills's Treasury Building, just a block and a half from the Johnson home. Washington historians remember these years as the first visible maturity of the city; even if its cosmopolitan potential had yet to be fully realized, it was no longer an embarrassingly undeveloped backwater. Accordingly, Johnson seems to have decided to cast his lot, at least for a time, in the capital. Soon he began mining his father's Democratic and naval contacts for portrait commissions, and when the Washington Art Association was founded in 1857, he sent ten works (mainly genre paintings and character studies) to its first exhibition.⁸ Simultaneously, he saw to it that his most important oil paintings were shown in New York and Boston.

The first indication that Johnson was looking about locally for subjects came in 1857, when he crossed the Potomac River to make several studies at Mount Vernon, the home of George Washington, which was in a state of notorious disrepair at the time. That August, his father remarried, taking a widow named Mary Washington James as his second wife. James, fifty-five years old with children of her own, ran a boarding-house in the District of Columbia, where Philip Johnson had lodged in 1850. More to the point, she was a Virginia native and one of George Washington's nearest living relatives.⁹ Such in-house inspiration may have led to works such as *Old Mount Vernon* (1857, Fraunces Tavern Museum, New York), a careful architectural study, and *Kitchen at Mount Vernon* (1857, private collection), a dim interior showing a black woman seated by a hearth, with several young children, presumably slaves, around her. In a later letter, Johnson remembered that these and other sketches were preliminary efforts for a work never completed, "a larger version of *Washington* himself at *Mount Vernon*, with his people around him and Lafayette his guest."¹⁰ In the end, the artist appears to have lost interest in such a historical reconstruction; within a year he was at work on a more contemporary subject.

Negro Life at the South

His new project, *Negro Life at the South*, shares with *Kitchen at Mount Vernon* an interest in the associations of a specific place and a conviction that the built environment is more than just an unassuming backdrop in a painting. *Negro Life at the South* is infinitely more complex, however: it is larger, with three times

the number of figures, more sophisticated lighting effects, and a multiple-pronged narrative. For Johnson, the ambitious subject and setting of his new work were readily at hand. The painting depicts some of the black inhabitants of his father's block on F Street. Specifically, it shows a gathering in an interior yard behind a dilapidated frame structure, a sometime tavern located on a lot just to the east of the Johnson home.¹¹

As though arranged behind a theater proscenium, discrete clusters of figures are grouped on two levels and spread laterally in a pulsed, asymmetrical manner. At left, a man with his back to the viewer appears to be courting a young woman as she prepares vegetables. Above them, a woman leans out an open window, holding a seated baby on the moss-covered shed roof. Toward the right is a much denser concentration of figures: a banjo player with an attentive boy looking on; a seated woman with a dancing boy and reclining girl; and an additional pair of girls—one on a ladder holding what seems to be a cup and dish and one, in a blue dress, turning to meet the gaze of the entering white woman. The latter figure leads the way for the last, mostly obscured, member of the cast: a black woman wearing a head scarf who has not yet crossed the rude wooden threshold.¹² An intricate network of glances weaves the figures together, and the scene is further punctuated by a number of animals: a dog in the foreground reacting to either the dancing or the white woman's appearance, a white cat slinking through a broken upstairs window, and a rooster and hen in and around the canopy of the tree. Overall, the space is characterized by its picturesque ruin: peeling plaster, loose plank siding, dangerously projecting roof beams, and refuse seemingly strewn indiscriminately.

Johnson opened a studio in New York in late spring, 1858, but he likely spent much of the latter half of that year back in Washington working up this large canvas. Perhaps because of the unusual ambition of *Negro Life at the South*, or perhaps because of the difficulties associated with the subject of slavery in the District of Columbia (see below), he decided not to exhibit it locally and instead sent it directly to the spring exhibition of the National Academy of Design in April 1859.¹³ This decision, along with the unprecedented (for Johnson) size and scale of the picture, suggests that the painter saw his work as a bid for the national spotlight and a place in the front ranks of American artists. Thus, following a long-standing tradition of self-promotion among his New York colleagues, Johnson allowed reporters early access to his painting prior to its submission to the academy. One such writer reported in the *Crayon* that month,

Of figure subjects for our forthcoming exhibition, Eastman Johnson contributes an example at once original and remarkable. The picture represents several groups of negroes enjoying the air, according to negro fashion, *in the rear of one of those dilapidated houses common to Washington City*. Each group has special interest for the spectator, but all are harmonized by the power of music, as we readily see by looking at the banjo-player in the centre of the picture.¹⁴

The account goes on to describe the image in greater detail, but the most important passage here is the public identifica-

tion of the site of *Negro Life at the South* as Washington. The information could only have come from the artist, an indication that Johnson at this point represented his painting not as a generic Southern plantation view but rather as a specific scene in the nation's capital.

Yet in the wake of the sensation caused by the debut of the painting, the reviews, whether by design or ignorance, almost completely neglected to mention its urban context. Only *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* included the fact that "the scene is in a city." Most others were simply struck by the novelty and skill of Johnson's complex representation of slaves. While the National Academy exhibition of 1859 had over eight hundred works, the largest number in its history, the critics universally singled out *Negro Life at the South* and elevated it above its more run-of-the-mill neighbors. For the *New York Evening Post*, it was "the figure-picture, *par excellence*, of the exhibition," for the *Home Journal*, "the most individual and original picture of the collection." The *New York Herald* termed it an exceptional "gem," one that was "sufficient in itself to redeem a whole catalogue of mediocrity."¹⁵

Above all, *Negro Life at the South* was commended for the characteristic *types* it catalogued visually, for its seeming "truthfulness of expression," "reality of character," and "honesty of painting," in the words of the *Evening Post*. To identify these types, critics resorted to the language of minstrelsy and popular literature, particularly Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1851). Thus, Uncle Neds, Topsy, and Cuffys were confidently picked out in the scene, and much was made of the stereotypical banjo playing and dancing. The most enduring popular association, however, was with Stephen Foster's sentimental minstrel song "My Old Kentucky Home, Good Night!" (1853), a mournful tune with overtones of impending death and longing for an earlier, uncomplicated time when slaves supposedly lived untroubled existences in idyllic rural landscapes. In the past, historians have assumed that the alternate title *Old Kentucky Home* became attached to the painting sometime during the Reconstruction era, around the time of its exhibition in the Paris Exposition Universelle of 1867.¹⁶ In fact, the academy's exhibition had hardly closed before the *Home Journal* ran a short feature entitled "The Old Kentucky Home":

All of our readers who visited the National Academy exhibition, will remember Eastman Johnson's picture of a characteristic Southern scene. The tumble down house, with broken windows and mossy roof; the negro lovers on the right [*sic*]; the old darkey playing the banjo, and "mammy" teaching the little picanniny to dance to the music in the centre; the "white folks" peering through the gate on the left [*sic*], and "aunt Dinah" herself, with the baby gazing from an upper window of the house. Well, this picture has been admirably photographed by Rintoul and Rockwood, of No. 839 Broadway, and is published by George W. Nichols of this city. Since every one cannot possess the original painting, it is a consolation to be able to obtain so excellent a photographic copy.

By the time this notice appeared in August 1859, the painting had already left New York for an exhibition at the Boston Athenaeum. Although it again appeared in the catalogue as

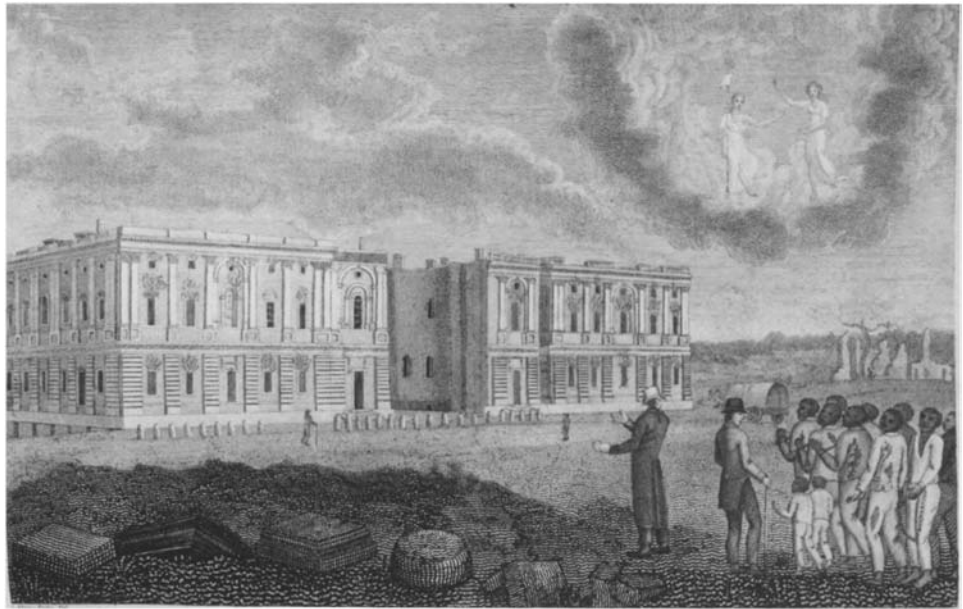
Negro Life at the South, *Dwight's Journal of Music* wrote about it as " 'The Kentucky Home,' a most characteristic picture of the domestic life of the Kentucky plantation," adding that "an excellent photograph from this picture is for sale at the door, which has doubtless already become familiar to many of our readers in the windows of the print shops."¹⁷

Here began, in these accounts, both the geographic amnesia that characterized most subsequent discussions of the painting and the popular dissemination of the image through mass reproduction that would lead to S.G.W. Benjamin's claim in 1882 that lithographed versions of *Negro Life at the South* "soon decorated cottage walls all over the country." The more popular the painting, apparently, the more protean the nature of the "facts" surrounding its subject. This becomes almost humorous at times, as when the *Evening Post* indignantly objected to the "misnomer" of "Old Kentucky Home" in 1867 and instead proposed the equally inventive "Old Virginia Home," explaining, "The subject is Virginian, and the original studies, if we are correctly informed, were made in the Old Dominion."¹⁸ Throughout this dehistoricizing process, only a few lonely voices registered a protest, yet it will prove significant that these voices were usually abolitionist in sympathy. Thus, when the painting was shown as *Kentucky Home* at the Brooklyn and Long Island Sanitary Fair in 1864, the staunchly Republican and antislavery *New York Daily Tribune* ended a rare negative review with the tart comment, "Besides, it never was a Kentucky Home. 'Tis merely a bit out of the purlieu of Washington."¹⁹

Slavery in Washington

Why might the Washington locale of *Negro Life at the South* have been problematic, and why might the success of the painting have been dependent on a public process of forgetting its original urban setting—or, just as likely, of refusing to see, or being unable to see that setting from the outset? Slavers were never a major part of the population of the District of Columbia (census records, for example, indicate 3,185 resident slaves in 1860, or only 4.25 percent of the city's residents).²⁰ Yet on the national political scene, no single patch of ground was more consistently and more controversially thrust into public light during some four decades of abolitionist and proslavery campaigning. Even when they could make no headway in the rest of the South, Northern activists tried repeatedly throughout the antebellum years to erase the blot of slavery in the nation's capital. Washington also provided a public stage for a fierce Congressional debate on slavery that, because of political compromises and setbacks, could not be aired with the same intensity on a more general national level. The symbolic importance of the District of Columbia, of course, was apparent to both factions. Legislatively, however, it was no less crucial. Many Northerners who abhorred slavery were nevertheless of the opinion that the federal government had no constitutional power to interfere with the institution of slavery within the sovereign states of the South. The District of Columbia was another matter. Here, in a few highly visible square miles "shared" by the entire nation and governed exclusively by its representatives in Congress, Northerners could claim that they were being forced to support an institution that they found

2 Alexander Lawson, after Alexander Rider, *View of the Capitol of the United States after the Conflagration in 1814*, from Torrey, *A Portraiture of Domestic Slavery*. Worcester, Mass., American Antiquarian Society (photo: courtesy American Antiquarian Society)



immoral. In the words of Joshua Giddings of Ohio, the most ardent opponent of Washington slavery in the House of Representatives, such citizens “can never consent to continue the seat of government in the midst of a magnificent slave market. . . . Northern men will not consent to the continuance of our National councils where their ears are assailed, while coming to the capitol, by the voice of the auctioneer publicly proclaiming the sale of human, of intelligent beings.”²¹

From the time of the organization of the republic, the compromises around the issue of slavery had resulted in its relative invisibility in the public discourse. The same Constitution that gave Congress the power “to exercise exclusive Legislation in all Cases whatsoever” over the federal district failed to mention the words “slave” or “slavery,” couching references to them in the euphemistic term *property*.²² Initially in Washington, slavery and the slave trade likewise flourished out of the public eye. This changed, however, when a Northern physician and educational reformer named Jesse Torrey made a fateful trip to the capital in December 1815. On his way to view the opening of a new session of the houses of Congress, he was shocked to confront a slave coffle in the neighborhood of Capitol Hill. Nothing in his life had prepared him for the sight of men, women, and children being herded in chains through the streets of Washington. Shaken and unable to enter the Capitol, Torrey later related that he experienced at that moment “a new era in my sensations.” Returning to his room, he commenced writing his impressions of the event, a task that occupied several days.²³

The result was his book *A Portraiture of Domestic Slavery in the United States*, a powerful early antislavery tract. Torrey raised the issue of slavery in general—and in the District of Columbia in particular—to a national level. His account was filled with stories of cruelty and injustice, and he brought to his readers’ attention the notorious Washington practice of the kidnapping of free blacks and undocumented slaves (those without papers of ownership) for quick sales to the ready markets of the Deep South. His slim volume also included

engravings, such as *View of the Capitol of the United States after the Conflagration in 1814* (Fig. 2), to buttress and expand on his verbal rhetoric. In this image, the scene witnessed by Torrey of chained, whip-scarred slaves in the shadow of the Capitol is recreated, here taking place under the reproof eyes of the cloud-borne “geniuses of *Liberty and humanity*,” whom Torrey imagined seeing through his tears of sorrow. The Washington landscape, with its dead trees and ruins, appears appropriately desolate, and the wreck of the Capitol is shown still smoldering from the fire set by invading British troops in August 1814. Of this terrible military setback during the War of 1812, Torrey wrote,

Would it be superstitious to presume, that the Sovereign Father of all nations, permitted the *perpetration* of this apparently execrable transaction, as a *fiery*, though salutary signal of his displeasure at the conduct of his Columbia children, in erecting and idolizing this splendid fabric as the temple of freedom, and at the same time oppressing with the yoke of captivity and toilsome bondage, twelve or fifteen hundred thousand of their African *brethren*?²⁴

In the engraving, a well-dressed man gestures imploringly to the ruinous structure while turning his head back toward the coffle. He seems to be weighing the import of both sights and might easily be understood to be Torrey himself, in the act of apostrophizing “poor Africa”: “*Thy cup is the essence of bitterness!—This solitary magnificent temple, dedicated to liberty,—opens its portals to all other nations but thee, and bids their sons drink freely of the cup of freedom and happiness:—but when thy offending, enslaved sons, clank their blood-smearred chains under its towers, it sneers at their calamity, and mocks their lamentations with the echo of contempt!*”²⁵ With these lines, and with what would have been perceived at the time as a shocking engraving, Torrey inaugurated an abolitionist tradition of turning the patriotic symbol of the Capitol on its head. Henceforth, the easily recognizable dome, with Stars and Stripes waving above, would serve as a visual indictment



3 *American Anti-Slavery Almanac for 1844*, cover. Washington, D.C., Library of Congress

of slavery in the District of Columbia. Often, the American eagle was similarly coopted, as in the cover illustration of the *American Antislavery Almanac*, where a raptor attack reminiscent of the Prometheus myth is perpetrated on a slave mother and infant lying before the halls of Congress (Fig. 3).²⁶

The Capitol building was an appropriate symbol of slavery-related strife, for throughout the antebellum years, the most rancorous debates on the issue of involuntary servitude in Washington took place under its dome. Only a few months after Torrey's visit, for example, John Randolph, the fiery Virginia slave owner, called the attention of the House of Representatives to "a practice . . . not surpassed for abomination in any part of the earth; for in no part of it, not even excepting the rivers on the coast of Africa was there so great and so infamous a slave market as in the metropolis, in the very Seat of Government of this nation, which prided itself on freedom."²⁷ Randolph would appear an unlikely candidate to agitate against the Washington slave trade, but there were actually quite a few citizens, particularly in the earlier decades

of the century, who, while supporting the buying and selling of African slaves in the abstract, were reluctant to witness it in the nation's capital.

Throughout the first half of the century, but beginning especially in 1828, such citizens began expressing their views through the First Amendment right of petition. In a concerted campaign organized by abolitionist Benjamin Lundy, a Quaker activist who published the antislavery newspaper *Genius of Universal Emancipation* in Washington, petitions by the thousands began to flood the House of Representatives (and, to a lesser degree, the Senate). These petitions varied in scale and scope from the so-called monster petition of 1,100 citizens of the District of Columbia of 1828 to a single letter from one Jabez C. Woodman, of Portland, Me., in 1850. The former, a scroll composed of over eight yards of signature pages carefully waxed together at top and bottom, called the attention of members of Congress to "an evil of serious magnitude, which greatly impairs the prosperity and happiness of this District, and casts the reproach of inconsistency upon the free institutions established among us." The latter began more colorfully,

The undersigned humbly represents that it is commonly reported in this part of the country, that the city of Washington is so much like the ancient city of Jericho, that many persons in the former city, some white, some black, and some yellow, but all members of the human family, have fallen among thieves, who strip them of all their earnings, wound them by scourging, and not only rob them of their property, but frequently steal from them their wives and children and sell them for slaves and thereby deprive them of half their humanity or leave them half dead.²⁸

In what one historian has described as "the greatest project in propaganda that had ever been conceived in our history," citizens from every Northern state buried the Capitol in a mountain of petitions against slavery and the slave trade in the District of Columbia. In the 1835–36 congressional session, some one hundred thousand signatures arrived favoring abolition in the district. In the following years, with a renewed campaign from the American Anti-Slavery Society, the numbers increased fivefold; one petition alone from Massachusetts women was forwarded in the 1836–37 session with 21,000 names condemning slavery in the district, and a total of half a million such signatures are estimated to have arrived on the Capitol steps in the 1838–39 session. Although records in succeeding decades were kept less carefully, petitions against Washington slavery continued unabated through the 1850s, up to the time of the unveiling of *Negro Life at the South* and, subsequently, the outbreak of the Civil War.²⁹ Abolitionist newspapers helped by fanning the flames of public outrage: William Lloyd Garrison's Boston *Liberator* lamented, for example, "The District is rotten with the plague, and stinks in the nostrils of the world."³⁰ Broad sides, such as *Slave Market of America* (Fig. 4), with maps, illustrations, and descriptions of district slave prisons in what it termed "The Home of the Oppressed," were also distributed as part of the campaign. In addition, state legislatures, such as

SLAVE MARKET OF AMERICA.

THE WORD OF GOD.

"ALL THINGS WHATSOEVER YE SHALL DO, THESE SHALL YE DO TO YOUR NEIGHBOUR, FOR THIS IS THE LAW AND THE PROPHETS."
 "AND THEY SHOULD BE ABANDONED BY THE BONDAGE, AND THEY SAID, AND THEY CRYED UP TO GOD BY REASON OF THEIR BONDAGE, AND GOD HEARD THEIR CRYING."
 "THEY SAID, THE LORD HEARD THE CRYING OF THE BONDAGE, AND HE SAID, I WILL SEND AN ANGEL, AND HE SHALL STAND BY THE SIDE OF THE WAY, AND HE SHALL SAY, BLESS YE THAT HAVE THIS BOOK, AND BLESS YE THAT SHALL HEAR THE VOICE OF THE LORD."

THE DECLARATION OF AMERICAN INDEPENDENCE.

"WE HOLD THESE TRUTHS TO BE SELF-EVIDENT, THAT ALL MEN ARE CREATED EQUAL, AND THAT THEY ARE ENDOUED BY THEIR CREATOR WITH CERTAIN UNALIENABLE RIGHTS, THAT AMONG THESE ARE LIFE, LIBERTY, AND THE PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS."

THE CONSTITUTION OF THE UNITED STATES.

"WE, THE PEOPLE OF THE UNITED STATES, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquillity, provide for the common defence, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do hereby declare in Congress assembled, these our fundamental Principles, which shall be the Basis of the Constitution hereafter to be formed, in Ratification of which we have united our Hearts and Hands, that the same shall be the supreme Law of the Land; that we do hereby give our assent to the said Constitution, and ratify the same."


CONSTITUTIONS OF THE STATES.

"THE CONSTITUTION OF THE STATE OF NEW YORK, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquillity, provide for the common defence, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do hereby declare in Congress assembled, these our fundamental Principles, which shall be the Basis of the Constitution hereafter to be formed, in Ratification of which we have united our Hearts and Hands, that the same shall be the supreme Law of the Land; that we do hereby give our assent to the said Constitution, and ratify the same."

DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA.


"THE RESIDENCE OF 700 SLAVES."

"THE LAND OF THE FREE."



SCENE OF THE TRIAL OF DRED SCOTT.

"THE HOME OF THE OPPRESSED."



SCENE OF THE TRIAL OF DRED SCOTT.

RIGHT TO INTERFERE.


"THE CONSTITUTION OF THE UNITED STATES, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquillity, provide for the common defence, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do hereby declare in Congress assembled, these our fundamental Principles, which shall be the Basis of the Constitution hereafter to be formed, in Ratification of which we have united our Hearts and Hands, that the same shall be the supreme Law of the Land; that we do hereby give our assent to the said Constitution, and ratify the same."

PUBLIC PRISONS IN THE DISTRICT.


"THE CONSTITUTION OF THE UNITED STATES, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquillity, provide for the common defence, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do hereby declare in Congress assembled, these our fundamental Principles, which shall be the Basis of the Constitution hereafter to be formed, in Ratification of which we have united our Hearts and Hands, that the same shall be the supreme Law of the Land; that we do hereby give our assent to the said Constitution, and ratify the same."

PRIVATE PRISONS IN THE DISTRICT, LICENSED AS SOURCES OF PUBLIC REVENUE.


"THE CONSTITUTION OF THE UNITED STATES, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquillity, provide for the common defence, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do hereby declare in Congress assembled, these our fundamental Principles, which shall be the Basis of the Constitution hereafter to be formed, in Ratification of which we have united our Hearts and Hands, that the same shall be the supreme Law of the Land; that we do hereby give our assent to the said Constitution, and ratify the same."



SCENE OF THE TRIAL OF DRED SCOTT.



SCENE OF THE TRIAL OF DRED SCOTT.



SCENE OF THE TRIAL OF DRED SCOTT.

State	Year	Population	Slaves	Free	Total
Alabama	1830	1,000,000	1,000,000	0	1,000,000
Arkansas	1830	1,000,000	1,000,000	0	1,000,000
California	1830	1,000,000	1,000,000	0	1,000,000
Florida	1830	1,000,000	1,000,000	0	1,000,000
Georgia	1830	1,000,000	1,000,000	0	1,000,000
Illinois	1830	1,000,000	1,000,000	0	1,000,000
Indiana	1830	1,000,000	1,000,000	0	1,000,000
Iowa	1830	1,000,000	1,000,000	0	1,000,000
Kentucky	1830	1,000,000	1,000,000	0	1,000,000
Louisiana	1830	1,000,000	1,000,000	0	1,000,000
Maine	1830	1,000,000	0	1,000,000	1,000,000
Massachusetts	1830	1,000,000	0	1,000,000	1,000,000
Michigan	1830	1,000,000	0	1,000,000	1,000,000
Minnesota	1830	1,000,000	0	1,000,000	1,000,000
Mississippi	1830	1,000,000	1,000,000	0	1,000,000
Missouri	1830	1,000,000	1,000,000	0	1,000,000
Montana	1830	1,000,000	0	1,000,000	1,000,000
Nebraska	1830	1,000,000	0	1,000,000	1,000,000
Nevada	1830	1,000,000	0	1,000,000	1,000,000
New Hampshire	1830	1,000,000	0	1,000,000	1,000,000
New Jersey	1830	1,000,000	0	1,000,000	1,000,000
New Mexico	1830	1,000,000	0	1,000,000	1,000,000
New York	1830	1,000,000	0	1,000,000	1,000,000
North Carolina	1830	1,000,000	1,000,000	0	1,000,000
North Dakota	1830	1,000,000	0	1,000,000	1,000,000
Ohio	1830	1,000,000	0	1,000,000	1,000,000
Oklahoma	1830	1,000,000	0	1,000,000	1,000,000
Oregon	1830	1,000,000	0	1,000,000	1,000,000
Pennsylvania	1830	1,000,000	0	1,000,000	1,000,000
Rhode Island	1830	1,000,000	0	1,000,000	1,000,000
South Carolina	1830	1,000,000	1,000,000	0	1,000,000
South Dakota	1830	1,000,000	0	1,000,000	1,000,000
Tennessee	1830	1,000,000	1,000,000	0	1,000,000
Texas	1830	1,000,000	1,000,000	0	1,000,000
Utah	1830	1,000,000	0	1,000,000	1,000,000
Vermont	1830	1,000,000	0	1,000,000	1,000,000
Virginia	1830	1,000,000	1,000,000	0	1,000,000
Washington	1830	1,000,000	0	1,000,000	1,000,000
West Virginia	1830	1,000,000	0	1,000,000	1,000,000
Wisconsin	1830	1,000,000	0	1,000,000	1,000,000
Wyoming	1830	1,000,000	0	1,000,000	1,000,000

Published by the American Anti-Slavery Society, 144 Nassau Street, New York, 1836.

4 Slave Market of America, broadside, 1836. Historical Society of Washington, D.C.

those of Maine, Massachusetts, and Michigan, passed resolutions condemning slavery in the capital.

This decades-long grass-roots movement was bound to have an effect on the members of Congress; indeed, the petitions and the issue of slavery in the district gave rise to some of the most heated, furious debate ever recorded in either house. Emboldened by the support of the populace, Northern representatives broached the subject of Washington slavery for the first time in open session. On February 2, 1835, referring to the practice of imprisoning African Americans and selling them to collect jail fees, Representative John Dickson of New York declared while presenting citizen petitions, "There are man traps set at the seat of Government of this Republic to seize and drag into perpetual bondage a freeman, entitled to all the rights and privileges of an American citizen. Does such a statute blot the page or tarnish the annals of any other Republic on earth?" Months later, his

fellow representative William Slade of Vermont asked of the Speaker of the House, "Sir, shall this trade in human flesh be permitted to continue in the very heart of this Republic? . . . Is merchandise to be made of men, within sight of the Capitol in which their Representatives are assembled, and on whose summit wave the stripes and the stars of freedom?"³¹ When Slade attempted to give a similar speech against Washington slavery on December 20, 1837, he was shouted down and sixty Southern members walked out in protest.

Speeches such as these provoked an uproar among defenders of slavery. Throughout the succeeding decades, Southerners described the issue of slavery in the district again and again as a dangerous "entering wedge." If the South gave way even a little here, so they thought, it would mean the loss of their cause in the end. South Carolina representative James Hammond's blustery threats were typical: "The moment this House undertakes to legislate upon this subject, it dissolves

the Union. Should it be my fortune to have a seat upon this floor, I will abandon it the instant the first decisive step is taken looking towards legislation of this subject. I will go home to preach, and if I can, to practice, disunion, and civil war, if needs be. A revolution must ensue, and this republic sink in blood." The Richmond *Inquirer* similarly admonished Northerners, "We warn you in the most ingenuous but respectful terms, touch not the District. . . . Beware, then, we beseech you! You are kindling a flame which must consume the sacred temple of the Union itself. The South has taken her stand on this subject, from which she will not depart. . . . She will consider the abolition of slavery in the District of Columbia as forbidden ground in debate."³²

These last words should be understood literally, for so unbearable to Southern politicians was the public presentation of petitions on slavery in the District of Columbia that the House instituted its infamous "gag rule" on May 26, 1836, refusing to receive any communications addressing the institution of slavery and largely forbidding the discussion of the issue on the floor.³³ For eight more years, until the gag rule was voted down in 1844, a few heroic members of the House fought to uphold the right of petition (for the existence of the rule only served to increase the number of memorials sent to Congress) and attempted, through a variety of parliamentary maneuvers, to force Southerners and proslave Northern Democrats to confront the issue of slavery in the district. No one was more assiduous in this duty than the aged ex-president John Quincy Adams, who was nearly censured and expelled from the House in 1837 for asking leave to introduce a petition calling for abolition of slavery in Washington *from slaves*, an action that nearly caused spontaneous combustion in the apoplectic Southern ranks. It will be remembered that Eastman Johnson arrived for his first two-year sojourn in Washington just as the gag rule was rescinded; he was to execute a portrait of Adams a little over a year later, in 1846. It would be only one of many connections, direct and indirect, between the artist and the major political players of the slavery controversy.

Debate on slavery in the district continued through Johnson's first residence in Washington, but the issue became greatly inflamed in April 1848, after he had moved to Boston. No doubt his family kept him informed of the exciting events of that month. On April 15, the private schooner *Pearl* left Washington and sailed down the Potomac with over seventy-five escaping slaves in its hold. A few days later, the becalmed ship was apprehended and the captured slaves, along with the organizer of the attempt, Daniel Drayton, were brought back to Washington and paraded through the streets in chains. There ensued several nights of riots, in which a proslavery mob attacked the offices of the abolitionist newspaper *National Era* and threatened the lives of prominent antislavery crusaders, such as Joshua Giddings. When Northern legislators introduced resolutions to investigate the mob's activities, they were also taunted with death threats from their Southern colleagues. Meanwhile, the slave-owning President Polk called on all government clerks (including Philip Johnson, one must assume) to help preserve order in the streets. In the end, Drayton was tried and imprisoned, most of the slaves were

sold to Southern markets, and municipal calm was eventually restored.³⁴

The *Pearl* incident had national ramifications in that many Northern citizens were appalled and angered by the mob violence in the nation's capital. A new series of abolition rallies, for example, was held in Boston, where Johnson then lived, demanding an end to federal support of slavery in the district. Abolitionists found that although they had lost the Drayton case and the *Pearl* slaves had not been freed, the furor surrounding the affair enabled them to fight Washington slavery in a public way that had never before been possible. Northern Whigs and Free-Soilers struggled anew to bring accounts of cruelty to slaves and free blacks in the district into the national press, just as Southerners and Democrats tried to render them invisible. This came to a head in the congressional session of 1849–50, in the debate that led ultimately to the compromise measures of 1850, one of which ostensibly ended the slave trade (but not slavery itself) in the District of Columbia. In a particularly vulgar explosion during House debate on this issue, William Sawyer, a Democrat from Ohio, complained that a saturation point had been reached:

It is negro in the morning—the poor negro at noon—and at night again this same negro is thrust upon us. Sir, I am heartily tired of this nigger business. I want a change. I beg gentlemen to remember there are some white people in this country, and that these white people are entitled to some consideration—rather more I think than blacks. . . . I ask gentlemen to look seriously into this matter; to withdraw their eyes for a few moments from the beautiful niggers, if they can—if their sympathies and affections are not too deeply involved in the fortunes of Sambo and Dinah.³⁵

Sawyer's sarcasm, as well as his descent into minstrel argot, is unsuccessful at masking a genuine fear of confronting the growing national crisis surrounding slavery. Indeed, the unusual coarseness of his language reflects a certain degree of desperation at being forced to address the unpleasant topic. Likewise, images such as *Negro Life at the South* did not permit viewers to "withdraw their eyes" from the realities of district slavery, and it is here, as we will see, that a key to the "objectionable" character of Johnson's painting can be found.

For those who focused their attentions on ending the slave trade in the district, the presence of slave dealers' private jails within sight of Congress had always been particularly galling. Yet slavery's apologists came close to refusing to acknowledge the existence of the slave trade, let alone the slave prisons. The remarks of Senator Joseph Underwood of Kentucky are characteristic:

Now, I have been a member of Congress, first and last, for about fifteen years, and during all that time . . . I never witnessed a bargain here which involved the sale of a slave, nor have I ever seen one put in jail. . . . If this traffic in human beings be so great an outrage to the feelings of members who represent the North, I do not know how it has been their fortune to come more frequently in contact with it than I have. Can it be that gentlemen run about in

search of these spectacles which give them so much horror? I have heard, to be sure, that there are some pens, as they are called . . . where slaves are confined, but I have never gone there to see who was in or out of them, or how they were kept. And really, sir, it seems to me that no one of proper feeling would be disposed to look upon such places, unless it was his duty to do it.

Another politician (and future president of the Confederate States), Senator Jefferson Davis of Mississippi, did not feign ignorance but, rather, painted a pleasant picture of life in the jails:

The depôt is a comfortable looking house, in which, I understand, a trader keeps his slaves before going to some market. Rather a boarding-house in its aspect than a prison. . . . I finally discovered, by accident, what this slave-pen was, so often spoken of in Congress, by having my attention drawn to a dwelling-house, by the spacious yard and growth of poplar trees around it. That, I was told, was the "slave-pen." It is a house by which all must go in order to reach the building of the Smithsonian Institution, and looking as little like a jail as any residence in the city of Washington.³⁶

This, for abolitionists, was the crux of the matter. Slavery's hideous face had been hidden for too long behind the benign facades of Washington's domestic architecture. If Southerners needed directions to the prisons, they would receive them from representatives such as Horace Mann of Massachusetts:

Sir, from the western front of this Capitol, from the piazza that opens out from your congressional library, as you cast your eye along the horizon and over the conspicuous objects of the landscape,—the President's Mansion, the Smithsonian Institution, and the site of the Washington Monument, you cannot fail to see the horrid and black receptacles where human beings are penned like cattle, and kept like cattle, that they may be sold like cattle,—as strictly and literally so as oxen and swine are kept and sold at Smithfield shambles in London, or at the cattle fair in Brighton.

Joshua Giddings responded even more directly to the assertions of representatives who had "no personal knowledge" of the Washington slave pens:

But the gentleman denies that there are slave prisons in this city. If he will go to either of these front windows, and cast his eye down Maryland avenue as far as Seventh street, he will see a large brick building, standing back from both streets, its out-buildings surrounded by a high brick wall. Sir, I hesitate not to say, that if he will ask any colored person in the city of ten years of age, they will tell him "*That is a slave pen.*" . . . The Gentleman from Indiana said that he had seen nothing of this slave-trade, and sneeringly remarked that "gentlemen who *had looked for it may have seen it.*" Sir, I receive his taunts with humility. I am one of those who feel it my duty to look around me, and learn the effect of the laws which we enact. . . . There is no doubt that great pains are taken to prevent the promulgation of



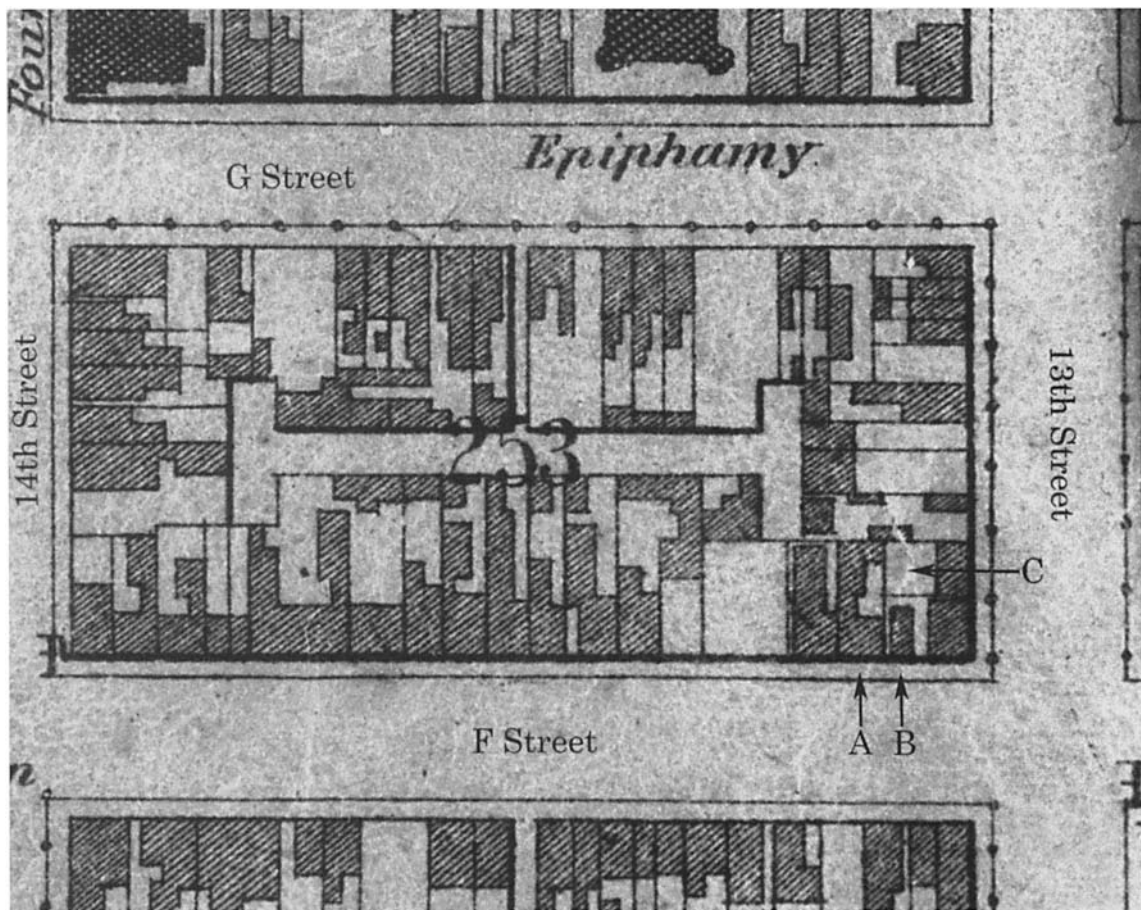
5 *Slave Prison, G St., between 4 1/2 and 6 Sts., Washington, photograph, ca. 1895. Washington, D.C., Library of Congress, Bryan Collection*

facts which illustrate the barbarous character of this traffic. This caution has increased as the public attention has been turned to the subject, until now but few of its enormities are witnessed by the public.³⁷

Local Politics on F Street

The stimulating language of these quotations, still only a fraction of the general public rhetoric on the subject, gives an adequate sense of the high stakes surrounding the representation of slavery in the District of Columbia. As Giddings describes it, a concerted campaign of suppression was succeeding in rendering Washington's slaves invisible, a political strategy aided by the peculiar topography of the city, whereby the large blocks designed by Pierre L'Enfant at the end of the eighteenth century permitted the development of significant interior alley spaces, invisible to the street. These nonpublic zones had always been the spaces assigned to slaves, and many antislavery writers over the years had bemoaned the fact that exterior walls kept them from contact with the daily lives of slaves, without, however, muffling their telltale cries and moans. Indeed, it is largely the forgotten privacy of the interior of a block that kept the last Washington slave jail standing unmolested until the end of the nineteenth century (Fig. 5).

Particularly among the Washington populace, silence on the issue of slavery prevailed in the 1850s. As historian Constance Green describes it, the local policy was: "Abide by the law, but say nothing, do nothing, that might upset the precarious sectional balance. The fiercer the storm blew roundabout, the greater the quiet at the center. It was like the stillness at the eye of a hurricane."³⁸ How surprising, then, that amid this willful muteness and blindness, Eastman Johnson would have chosen to tear down the wall, to expose to view the inner spaces of Washington slavery in *Negro Life at the South*. Indeed, close inspection of the exposed roof beams, the remnants of a perimeter foundation at the feet of the banjo player, and the plaster-coated walls, once obviously



6 A. Boschke, *Map of Washington City, 1857*, detail of square 253 (F, G, Thirteenth, and Fourteenth Streets). Washington, D.C., Library of Congress

belonging to a protected interior space, leaves the impression that an entire architectural facade has been ripped away, sheared off so as better to display the activities and squalid living conditions of those who inhabit this hovel. Southern legislators wanted most to hide the face of slavery from view in the capital; in light of the extremely sensitive feelings on the subject, Johnson's painting almost takes on the air of muckraking journalism. This gives rise to several questions. What were the conditions of the 1850s, the decade in which Johnson made his return to Washington from extended study abroad? And what can we learn about the site of the painting, the specific neighborhood of F Street, where the Johnson family was surrounded on all sides with the physical evidence of slavery?

Despite the relative silence on racial matters among white Washingtonians, the rest of the nation had not forgotten the slaves of the district. Petitions continued to arrive in Congress, and stalwarts such as Giddings periodically introduced the subject into debates. Increasing agitation on other slavery matters also had the effect of turning the spotlight on the district.³⁹ Eighteen-fifty-five, the year of Johnson's return to Washington, marked the beginning of a new wave of published books critical of the plight of blacks in the District of Columbia. That same year saw the sensational trial of a Washington slave trader for the kidnapping of a free black, Solomon Northrup. In a book that sold over thirty thousand copies, Northrup detailed his abduction in the District of Columbia, his twelve years as a slave in Louisiana, and his miraculous rescue in 1853. His description of the Washington

slave prison, in particular, bears a remarkable resemblance to the scene depicted in *Negro Life at the South*: "Surrounded by a brick wall of ten or twelve feet high . . . the yard extended rearward from the house about thirty feet. . . . The top of the wall supported one end of a roof, which ascended inwards, forming a kind of open shed. . . . It was like a farmer's barnyard in most respects, save it was so constructed that the outside world could never see the human cattle that were herded there."⁴⁰

The yard in question in Johnson's painting was definitively identified in the nineteenth century by John Coyle, a friend and patron of the artist. Coyle described the background and setting as "an old frame building . . . with its gable end to the street." The structure was located next to Philip Johnson's house on F Street: "It was, ever since I can remember, an old rattletrap and the rear of it was so picturesque in its ruin that Eastman Johnson made it the background of his 'Old Kentucky Home.'"⁴¹ This description corresponds exactly to a map of the block published in 1857 (Fig. 6), which gives the footprint of the Johnson home on F Street (A) and shows a long, smaller building (presumably the "rattletrap" with gables at the short ends) immediately to the right (B), near the corner of F and Thirteenth. The close proximity of the Johnson house to the frame structure shown on the map is reproduced in the painting, which depicts a well-kept three-story brick structure immediately on the other side of the wall. The yard, the scene of activity in the painting, would seem to be the squarish open area on the map (C), largely invisible to foot traffic on either F or Thirteenth Streets.⁴²



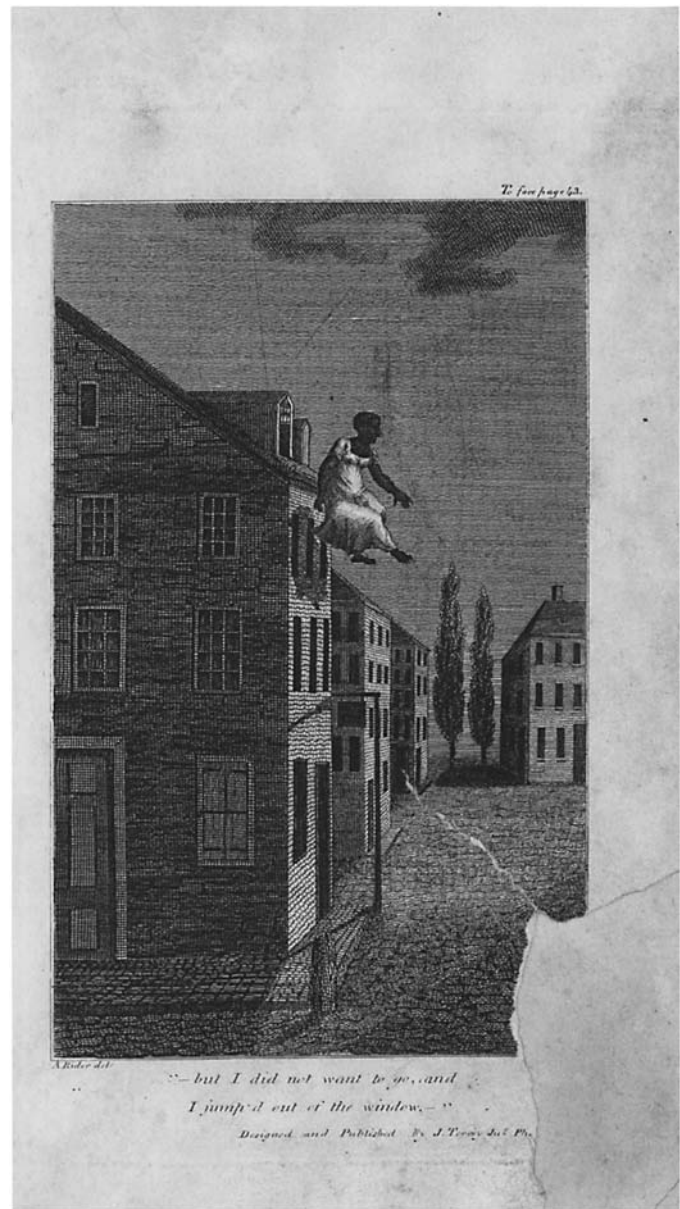
7 View looking east on F St. (with 14th St. crossing in foreground), photograph, ca. 1857. Historical Society of Washington, D.C. The Johnson house is slightly visible at the end of the block

During the first half of the nineteenth century, the stretch of F Street where the Johnsons lived was known as the Ridge and was considered a particularly fashionable section of town, one of the first to be developed extensively (Fig. 7). The history of this neighborhood, which is extraordinarily well-documented, reveals a number of fascinating connections to the long-standing controversies of Washington slavery.⁴³ One of the most poignant dates back to Jesse Torrey's initial trip to Washington. After recovering from the shock of viewing the coffle at the Capitol, Torrey was told of a slave who, in desperation after having learned that she was to be separated from her husband and sold to Georgia, jumped from a third-floor garret window in the tavern where she was being held on F Street. The woman, named Anna, broke her back and several of her limbs, yet she somehow survived, albeit crippled for life. Torrey visited her on the third floor of the tavern-prison in her invalid's bed and learned that her two children had been sold South, while she, now worthless as a field worker, had been given to the tavern keeper as a fee for lodgings. Torrey's book discussed her plight at length and included an arresting engraving of this tragic incident on F Street (Fig. 8), an illustration that one historian has cited as the earliest graphic representation of a nongovernmental building in Washington. In subsequent years, as other antislavery crusaders retold this sad tale, the tavern developed a national notoriety, and even after it was torn down its location, on the southwest corner of F and Thirteenth—almost directly across the street from the Johnsons—became, in the words of the same historian, "one of the historic places in this city."⁴⁴

We cannot say for certain that this early incident was known to Johnson when he arrived in Washington in 1855, but his neighborhood of the late 1850s in no way lacked other reminders of the local debate on slavery. Halfway down his block, at number 246, for example, lived the aged Anna Thornton, widow of the architect William Thornton. In 1835, Thornton had been attacked by one of her slaves with an axe in her F Street home, an act that precipitated the Snow Riots in Washington and resulted in considerable mob violence and destruction of black schools, churches, and businesses. While Eastman Johnson was living with his father in 1857, the Thomas Miller family joined Thornton in her home. Miller,

born in Virginia, was unabashedly pro-South; his daughter later remembered, "Our home was regarded as headquarters for Southern people during the war, and at one time it was placed under strict surveillance. . . . In spite of all this guarding, a good deal of aid and comfort was conveyed to our suffering friends in the South." Even before the war, however, this part of F Street was known as Southern territory. Indeed, Southern politicians completely dominated Washington society; they tended to bring their families to the capital, while Northern legislators, for the most part, "kept bachelor hall." Virginia Clay, wife of the senator from Alabama, lived on the block in 1857 and described the atmosphere to a correspondent: "We keep Free-Soilers, Black Republicans, and Bloomers on the other side of the street. They are afraid even to inquire for board at this house."⁴⁵

The neighborhood, in fact, was a hotbed of the most radical Southern antagonists during Johnson's last years in Washing-



8 Alexander Rider, "But I did not want to go," from Torrey, *A Portrait of Domestic Slavery*. Washington, D.C., Library of Congress

ton, from 1855 to 1858. At 258 F Street, four lots down from his father's house, lived Senator Judah P. Benjamin of Louisiana, who would become secretary of war for the Confederate States and an exile in Europe after the Civil War. Next to Benjamin was Mary Schoolcraft, author of *The Black Gauntlet: A Tale of Plantation Life in South Carolina* (1861), a wildly biased novel written as a proslavery attack on Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. A few more doors to the east, at number 248, was the household of Senator Robert Toombs of Georgia, one of the South's most combative and imperious brawlers in Congress. Toombs gained notoriety when he stood by choosing not to interfere while Preston Brooks of South Carolina brutally caned Senator Charles Sumner of Massachusetts in the Senate in 1856. Toombs further infuriated the North by publicly condoning the attack. Virginia Miller remembered that he made a point of bringing his Georgia slaves with him to his F Street home; he enjoyed flaunting them before Northern visitors, particularly after an abolitionist attempt to liberate his Washington servants. Like Benjamin, he later became a cabinet officer (secretary of state) for the Confederate States and fled to Europe in 1865. If these personalities were not enough, the Johnsons were in close proximity to the household of the future leading Confederate, Jefferson Davis, who occupied a property on the northeast corner of F and Fourteenth Streets until about 1859. Both Toombs and Davis had been among the most vigorous opponents of abolition of Washington slavery in the Senate. Amid this solid Southern phalanx, only one antislavery politician is known to have resided in the neighborhood. The caning victim, Charles Sumner, whose portrait Johnson had executed a decade earlier in Boston, lived on the northeast corner of F and Thirteenth; that he was not particularly welcome there is indicated by a gruesome "gift" sent to his residence as a warning: the severed finger of a slave.⁴⁶

There is evidence to suggest that similar partisan lines were drawn in the Johnson household, although certainly not to this extreme degree. As a transplanted Yankee family, the Johnsons can be expected to have been predisposed against slavery. It is clear, at least, that after the Civil War began, Eastman Johnson and his siblings were unabashedly pro-Union. His sister Harriet, moreover, later married Joseph May, a minister and son of noted abolitionist Samuel J. May, and Johnson's own work after *Negro Life at the South*, especially paintings such as *Freedom Ring* (1860, Hallmark Cards, Kansas City, Mo.), which depicts a young slave liberated by the Brooklyn congregation of Henry Ward Beecher, is not ambiguous in its antislavery sympathies.⁴⁷

Still, it must be remembered that Philip Johnson's entire career was based on loyalty to the Democratic Party, with its accommodating policy of supporting slaveholder rights and fighting abolitionists in the name of national unity. His most important political patron, John Fairfield, for example, despised John Quincy Adams, defied the wishes of his Maine state legislature by voting to admit the slave territory of Florida as a state, and voted consistently to uphold the gag rule and prevent abolition in the District of Columbia.⁴⁸ And then there was Eastman Johnson's stepmother, Mary Washington James Johnson. As mentioned earlier, Philip Johnson had boarded with the Virginia-born widow in 1850, marrying her

seven years later after the death of his first wife. At the time that he initially lived with her, according to census records, Mary James owned three slaves in her household, a twenty-one-year-old woman and a boy and girl aged one and two. Her name change after her marriage makes it difficult to learn whether she still owned slaves at the time of the next census in 1860, but records show that the Johnson household had two live-in free black servants: John Beckler, twenty-eight, and Josephine Allen, eighteen. If slaves owned by Mary Johnson were in the house when her stepson lived there, it did not necessarily signal approval by other members of the family; an "antenuptial agreement" that she and Philip signed makes it clear that even after their marriage, she and her children retained control of her property, without his interference.⁴⁹ One is left with the impression of a household of factions, necessarily cohabiting in much the same manner as Northern and Southern Democrats.

Whether or not slaves were present in the Johnson household, there was no dearth of African Americans on F Street who might have posed for the artist.⁵⁰ Census records indicate a substantial population of slaves and free blacks owned or employed on the block by various neighbors. A likely candidate is William Stone, who in 1860 owned eight slaves, ages eight to forty-five, the largest concentration on the block. Stone was a wealthy engraver and sculptor who had studied with Asher B. Durand under Peter Maverick and who almost certainly would have known the only other artist on the block, particularly one active in the Washington Art Association.⁵¹ For Johnson, given his training in Düsseldorf and Paris, and given the unusual scale and complexity of *Negro Life at the South*, it would have been unthinkable for him not to have secured models for the pencil studies he typically executed when planning his paintings. It is safe to assume, then, that through contact with the free blacks who lived in his own home, with the many slaves in the neighborhood, and especially with those whom he asked to pose, Johnson was exposed, even if only in a limited way, to the complexities of daily life for African Americans in the city of Washington.

Urban Slave Life

Research on the slave community in the United States has undergone a revolution of sorts in recent years. Rejecting a model of slave life as necessarily passive—with lives completely shaped and largely devastated by the abuses of white power—scholars in history, folklore, musicology, and linguistics have gradually moved toward a more complex and nuanced picture of individual and group identity within the slave community. Without denying the searing injustice and brutality of the institution of slavery, they have sought to find the slave's voice, to show how "black men and women were able to find the means to sustain a far greater degree of self-pride and group cohesion than the system they lived under ever intended for them to be able to do," as Lawrence W. Levine writes. It is not that this system is now seen to be less cruel, but rather that "human beings are more resilient, less malleable, and less able to live without some sense of cultural cohesion, individual autonomy, and self-worth."⁵² Two concepts, in particular, have dominated this revisionist history: the centrality and hitherto unrealized strength of the family

and its extended ties, and the development of daily slave “resistance” to an oppressive regime—through behavior, language, music, and other cultural forms.

Negro Life at the South would appear to support the possibility of slaves finding rewarding human interactions within a dehumanizing system: all generations are represented here, children are nurtured by adults of both sexes, and time has been found for communal cultural activities (apart from work) that serve to bind and fortify members of an extended group—for only in the group could slaves find a measure of protection from the master. Several authors, in fact, have commented on Johnson’s apparent sensitivity to, and rare willingness to depict, the inner strengths present in the antebellum African American community.⁵³ Even if the realities of slavery in the city make it unlikely that this large assembly could constitute a single extended family (urban owners with more than three slaves were rare—the average number of slaves owned in Washington in 1860 was 1.89), the individuals depicted have still, according to the picture’s logic, been able to find a way to assemble and engage in pleasurable pursuits for their own benefit.⁵⁴ Yet with these remarks a paradox is encountered: the same argument used here to support the notion of black resilience in the face of overwhelmingly oppressive odds was invoked by slavery’s apologists—some writing specifically about *Negro Life at the South*—to characterize the institution as benign and to acquit slave owners of cruelty and wrongdoing.

This is also true of the music that sets the narrative of the painting in motion. Slave musical culture is now seen as a



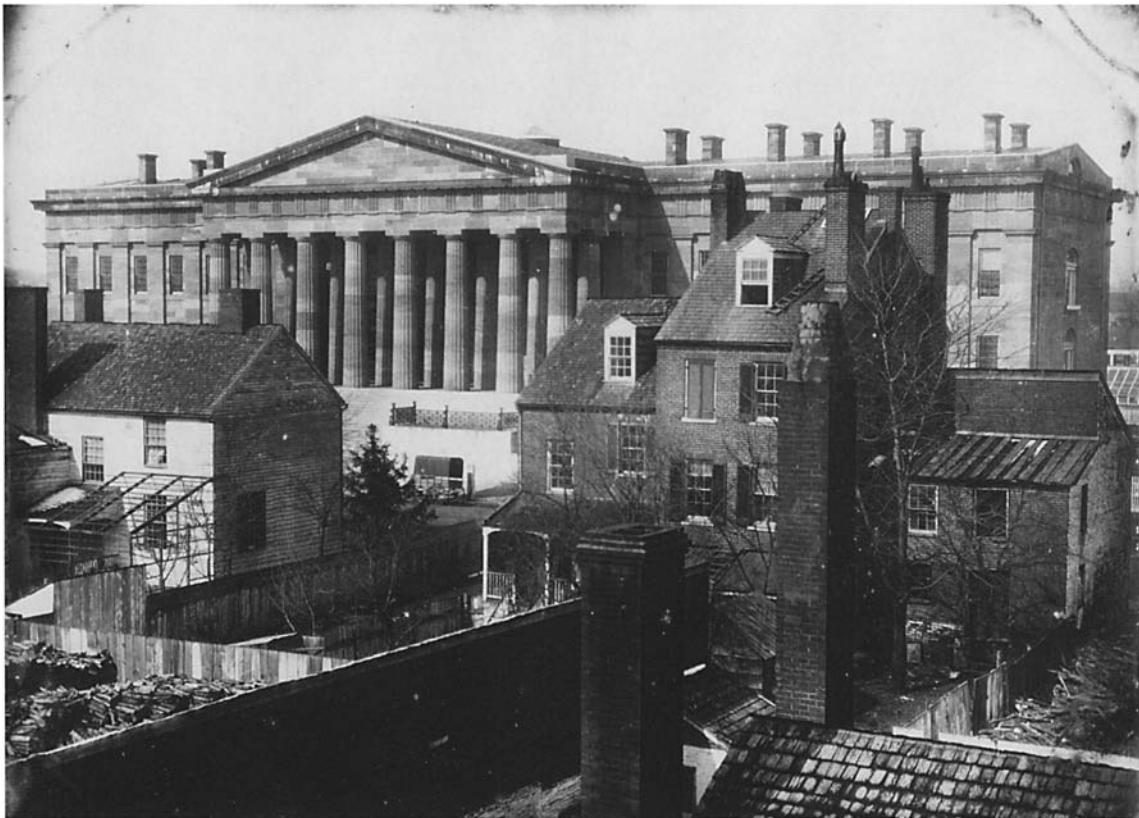
9 Johnson, *Confidence and Admiration*, oil on canvas, ca. 1859. Amherst, Mass., Mead Art Museum



10 Henry Ossawa Tanner, *Banjo Lesson*, oil on canvas, 1893. Hampton, Va., Hampton University Museum

primary means of maintaining an African identity, separate from the master’s. Religious spirituals, communal “shouts,” celebratory dances, and secular songs (sometimes composed as veiled mockeries of white owners) were used to preserve African patterns of movement and speech, as well as to take control of the few moments in a given week, month, or year when slaves had time to themselves. The banjo, in particular, was one of the first and most enduring instrumental adaptations from an African source (the *banza*, or *mbanza*) on the American continent.⁵⁵ In Johnson’s painting, the banjo is given central prominence. The huge, powerful hand of the player makes for an arresting silhouette against the cream-colored skin of the instrument’s drum; from this pictorial node is generated most of the rest of the painting’s activity. So important was this portion of the image that Johnson isolated and copied it twice, painting smaller works depicting the banjo player and young boy. He entitled this reduced vignette *Confidence and Admiration* (Fig. 9), stressing the positive qualities of an older role model and a generational transfer of knowledge in much the same way that African American painter Henry O. Tanner would several decades later in his similar *Banjo Lesson* (Fig. 10).

Here as well, though, we find double-edged iconography. The strumming banjo player—and his inevitable partner, the shuffling, grinning dancer—is also the most widely disseminated trope of minstrelsy, used for over one hundred fifty



11 John Plumbe, Jr.,
Patent Office Building,
Washington, D.C.,
daguerreotype, ca.
1846. Washington,
D.C., Library of
Congress

years to ridicule blacks and rob them of any semblance of intellect and sobriety. These associations colored much of the early writing on *Negro Life at the South*: “Uncle Ned plays the banjo, and old ‘Morner’ teaches a little darkie his steps,” as one review formulated the cliché in 1859. Eight years later, when European audiences saw the painting for the first time at the Paris exhibition, the London *Art Journal* made the same derogatory connection to minstrel performances: “Nigger life is a new element in painting, as Nigger melodies were novelties in song. A black man, if not a subject for Phidias, is eminently picturesque; his colour can be turned to good account in picture making.”⁵⁶

Johnson’s depiction of slave society and music making can generate these seemingly contradictory readings because it largely operates within the broad realm of stereotype. As in many situations where ideologically inflected artistic products gain widespread popular resonance, stereotype here becomes the bedfellow of paradox, with the former serving as the tool of the uneasy dominant culture, intent on reshaping, reversing, and making more palatable the existing truths within a minority community. Thus, the realities of familial interactions and musical entertainment among blacks can come to mean very different things to slave participants and to the slave-owning onlookers who must find a nonthreatening way to account for them. Still, there are other aspects of *Negro Life at the South* that seem less bound up in this apologetic Old South mythmaking. In his treatment of the setting of his painting—however picturesque it might seem at first glance—Johnson moves decidedly away from such stereotype and undertakes an exploration of the distinct spatial politics of urban slavery. It is in his setting, then, that a nugget of raw

historical data surfaces amid the otherwise fluctuating and unstable iconography.

Negro Life at the South offers visual confirmation of what has come to be seen as the typical arrangement for the housing of urban slaves: a constricted “yard” or “area” (to use the slave owners’ terms), surrounded by high walls and invisible to the street, with a two-story structure along one side. The first floor was usually given over to work spaces, such as kitchens, laundries, and stables, and the second devoted to cramped sleeping chambers. (Specific details of Washington’s yard arrangement, in a block not far from the Johnsons, are visible in Fig. 11.) In the painting, the sense of an isolated, highly restricted space is dramatically conveyed by the almost complete lack of visible sky, as well as the severely foreshortened wall at left, a reminder of the narrow, controlled passages that were the only connections between yard and street. These yards—necessarily adjacent to the owner’s home to assure twenty-four-hour availability of servants, but also spatially distinct in a way that the hierarchical distance between master and slave was clear—were the primary means of exerting social control, particularly in a city like Washington, where the possibility of slaves mingling with the significant free black population posed a constant threat to patriarchal order. Washington’s notorious black code, a document that particularly infuriated abolitionists even if it was irregularly enforced, prescribed brutal penalties for slaves discovered away from their compound without a written pass granting them leave: whipping, having one or both ears cut off, or branding on the cheek with the letter R.⁵⁷ Any black on the streets, free or slave, was subject to immediate challenge by municipal patrols; if not satisfied with the papers carried by individuals,

these patrols would deliver them to the nearest prison, the first step toward sale to the Southern market. Behind all such efforts lay some of the slave owners' greatest fears: social fraternization of blacks, feelings of personal independence among slaves, and the development of any kind of organized community life.

These fears were well-founded, for numerous contemporary accounts attest to the greater freedoms available to the urban slave, as opposed to the typical rural worker. Perhaps the most famous such observation comes from Frederick Douglass's autobiographical writings. Douglass attributed his practical education and his successful escape from slavery to his early transfer from a plantation setting to urban Baltimore: "A city slave is almost a freeman, compared with a slave on the plantation. He is much better fed and clothed, and enjoys privileges altogether unknown to the slave on the plantation." Indeed, it was through reading a Baltimore newspaper article on the Northern petition drive to end slavery in the District of Columbia that he learned the meaning of the word *abolition*. Douglass also tasted freedom through the practice of "hiring his own time," whereby he worked away from his home and turned over his wages to his master. This urban practice was condemned by many slave owners as too liberal; one report from South Carolina in 1858 complained that the hired-out slave "avoids the discipline and surveillance of his master and is separated from his observation and superintendance."⁵⁸

Even in the most cramped urban conditions, then, slaves found ways to claim a modicum of personal space and escape the master's scrutiny, if only for a few precious moments. This possibility, too, is given visual shape through one of the painting's most significant narrative devices: the introduction of the white woman at the far right of the enclosure, the sole intruder in an otherwise undisturbed gathering of blacks. Studies of the slave landscape, in both the United States and the Caribbean, have found the yard to be perhaps the most important communal gathering space for slaves. Similar to the courtyard living common to many of the slaves' west African traditions, the culture of the yard permitted collective child care, communal cooking and eating, and, above all, the establishment of "defensible social boundaries," in the words of folklorist John Michael Vlach. In one of the many turnabouts of slave life, the very nature of the restricted space allocated to them permitted an easy visual "policing" of the yard; unwelcome visitors were immediately apparent, and visual surveillance became a tool of the servant as well as of the master. Essentially, slaves reclaimed and redefined their work and living spaces, engaging in "territorial appropriation" as a means of resistance to the master's control.⁵⁹

In *Negro Life at the South*, the white woman (the model has traditionally been identified as Johnson's sister Mary) peers across the threshold passage connecting the slave yard and the more substantial brick row house at right. In many ways, she can be seen as a stand-in for Johnson's presumably all-white audience, a self-conscious reminder of their alterity in this slave space and an embodiment of the shared vicarious titillation of peering into a forbidden area. Her visual intrusion into the yard, like that experienced by Johnson's spectators before his canvas, is both privileged and unexpected. Her

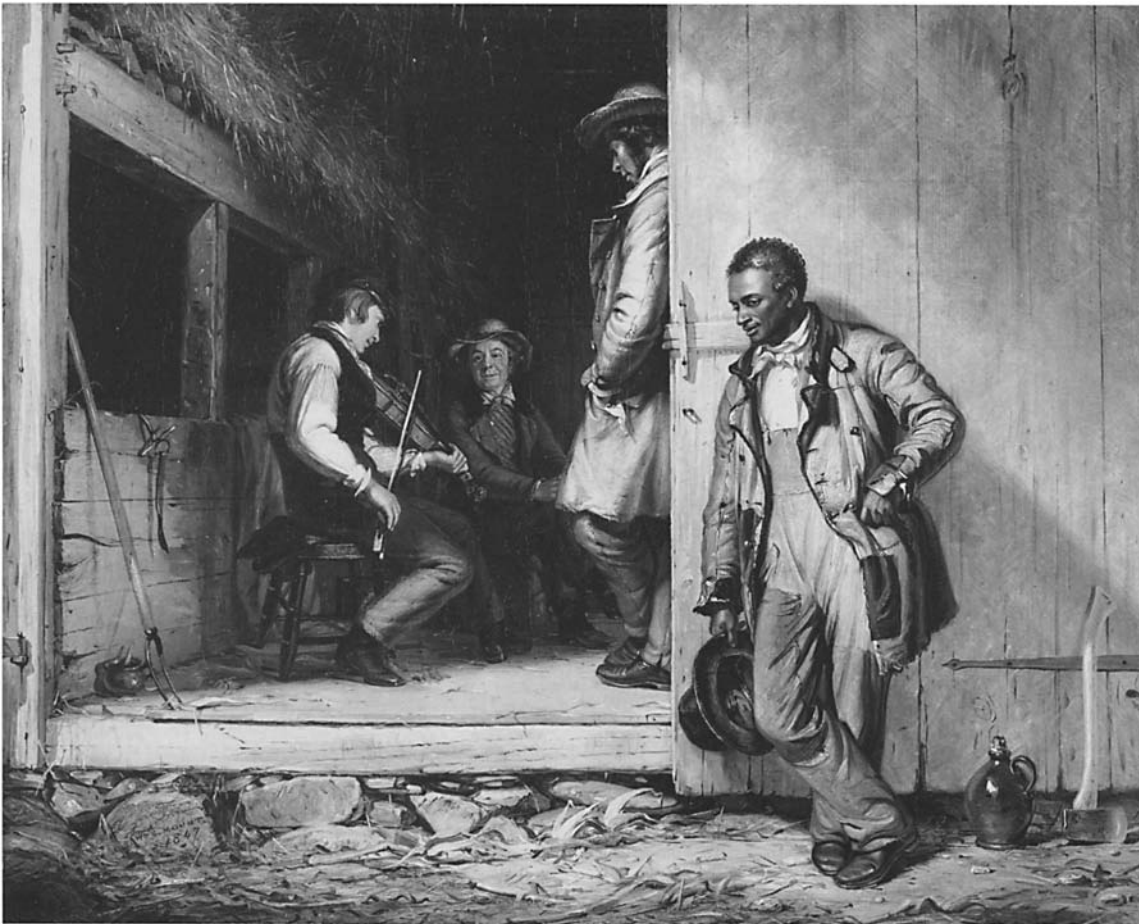
presence gives rise immediately to questions of interpretation: How is this singular scene, with its deceptively familiar "negro types," to be understood? How does the banjo/dance narrative shift in tone when it is removed from the public space of whiteness to a more private, "black" space, less subject to comic manipulation? Is control of the stereotype forfeited in such a case? (The answer to the last question, as we have seen, would seem to be yes, judging from the insistent efforts of later writers to reinscribe *Negro Life at the South* within the confining language of minstrelsy.)

Johnson's painting, in any event, insists that viewers confront the white woman's presence, as well as the issues it prompts. Within the picture, she appears, literally, in the best light. Her bare shoulders are softly illuminated, and the brighter sunlight visible outside the enclosure seems to follow her into the shadowy alley space just as the crimson flowers growing in the garden on the better-kept side of the wall form a canopy over her head. Contemporary reviews also noticed the starkly contrasting zones between which she moves. "The well-to-do neighboring house catches a gleam from the declining sun; but the wretched tenement looks dank, more mouldy and repulsive, from the almost twilight contrast," observed the *Home Journal*. Elsewhere, formal cues direct the viewer's attention to this curious trespasser: the pointed roof beams and the banjo neck point to her head, and two of the young girls turn toward her.⁶⁰ One girl in particular matches the woman's pose exactly; turning to lean around the partition, she locks eyes with the intruder, functioning visually as her mirror image—a spatial "stop" that arrests her further progress.

In relegating the white woman to the periphery and making it clear that she is a stranger to this social space, Johnson overturns one of the most prevalent compositional clichés of American genre painting, that of the black interloper who must be excluded from the central field of action reserved for whites. It is almost as if he were consciously seeking to reverse the most famous example of this schema: William Sidney Mount's *Power of Music* (Fig. 12), which shows a lone African American listening silently to music-making whites inside a barn.⁶¹ What is clear is that Johnson is remarkably sensitive to the tensions inherent in these overlapping racial spheres—an enforced private space surrounded by and existing beneath the surface of the public face of slavery. The detail of the troubled expression on the face of the girl closest to the white woman suggests the artist's awareness of the early age at which slave children assimilated the defensive behavior necessary to maintain some independence of life despite near constant scrutiny, and the general scenario of *Negro Life at the South* hints at the resentment felt by slaves whenever whites attempted to participate in their music making and dancing. Overall, American painting would not see such a forceful visual evocation of the strained relationship between master and slave until the blunt confrontation of Winslow Homer's *Visit from the Old Mistress* (Fig. 13).⁶²

Critical Reception and Partisan Responses

Johnson's inclusion of a glimpse of the white world beyond the yard destroys the illusion of happy, carefree slave life and thus proved troubling to some viewers. A writer in the *Albion*,



12 William Sidney Mount, *The Power of Music*, oil on canvas, 1847. Cleveland Museum of Art, Leonard C. Hanna, Jr., Fund

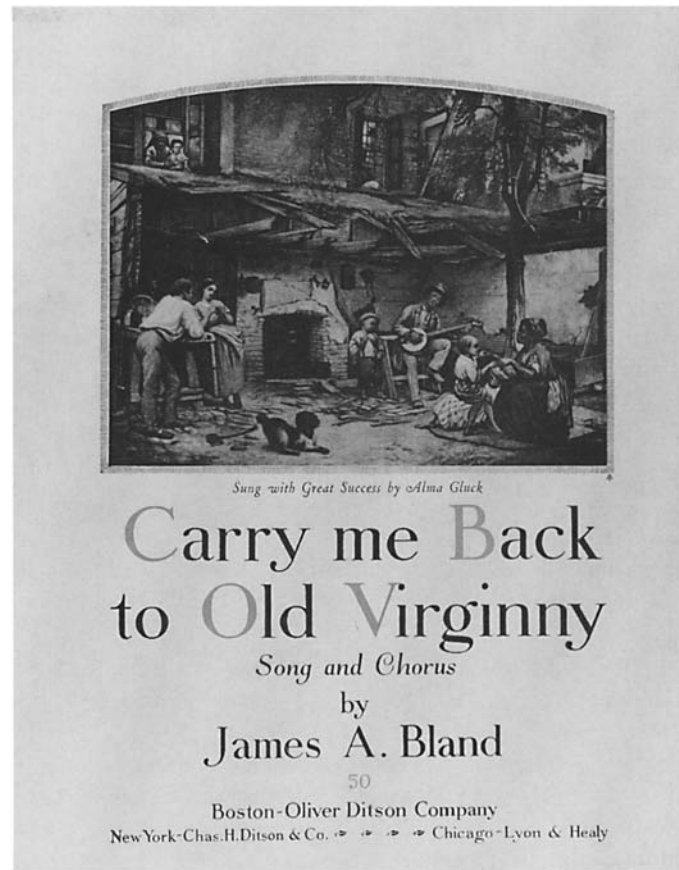


13 Winslow Homer, *Visit from the Old Mistress*, oil on canvas, 1876. Washington, D.C., National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Gift of William T. Evans

whose “Uncle Ned and Mormer” narrative was quoted above, observed of this portion of the canvas, “The only contrast is a bit of the adjoining house, trim and spruce, and a young lady emerging from the back-door thereof and peeping at the scene—and both, we think, might well have been omitted, the completeness being slightly marred by this superfluity.” The superfluous “contrast” to which the critic objects is almost certainly the conflict inherent in the visual exchange between the white woman and the nearby girl—a conflict that calls into question the easy strumming of “Uncle Ned.” Striking confirmation of this hypothesis is found in a later use of the Johnson image. *Negro Life at the South* was the source for the cover of several editions of the minstrel song “Carry Me Back to Old Virginny,” composed by James A. Bland in 1875 (Fig. 14). In this otherwise faithful reproduction of the painting, the white woman at the gate, as well as the two black girls who turn to confront her, are erased from the scene. This deft deletion strips the image of any internal friction and rids it of the strife perceived by some viewers of the painting. It also reframes the composition into a seamlessly “minstrelized” vignette more in keeping with the lyrics of the song, which celebrate a freed slave’s loyal attachment to “massa” despite his emancipation. With no external viewers to interrupt the apparent harmony and leisure, the antebellum myth of “old Virginny” remains intact.⁶³

Others, though, were less willing to put on the sentimental blinders necessary to maintain this myth. Foremost among this group was the critic of the *New York Daily Tribune*, the newspaper that was one of the most ardent abolitionist organs of the New York press (it was the *Tribune* that reminded the public in 1864 that the painting was located in Washington, not Kentucky). The writer began a lengthy review in 1859 with the remark that *Negro Life at the South* “is a sort of ‘Uncle Tom’s Cabin’ of pictures, and gives rise, therefore, to quite as many painful as pleasant reflections.” Where some papers, such as the proslavery *Herald*—the ideological enemy of the *Tribune*—saw “all the spirit of negro life, with its eccentricities, its enjoyments and its poetry,” the *Tribune* reviewer instead found a story “as telling as a chapter from ‘Slavery As It Is,’ or a stirring speech from the Antislavery platform.” The living quarters, especially, were described as “neglected, ruinous, and desolate.” But the critic also looked beyond the immediate setting to consider additional ramifications of Johnson’s narrative. The white woman, for example, was “looking in upon what clearly . . . is not a daily scene”; the black “maid” behind her was “better fed, better clothed, much more of a woman, much less of a slave in her outward life, than her fellow servants, all presenting a sad picture of Southern slavery”; and these more unfortunate bond servants were lamentably ignorant of “how soon may come the rupture of all those natural ties in which lie the only happiness that life can give them.”⁶⁴

Equipped with a predisposition against slavery and some knowledge of the realities of slave life, the *Tribune* critic succeeded in teasing from Johnson’s image allusions to the inequalities among various categories of slaves and to the fragility of the social fabric pictured. Even more important, the critic concludes that this happy, musical gathering, free of the cares of hard labor, is exceptional—“not a daily scene”—



14 “Carry Me Back to Old Virginny,” sheet music cover. Richmond, Virginia Historical Society

thus putting the lie to the timeless “idylls of slavery” interpretation. In effect, the objection to the “typicality” of the painting removes it from the realm of the sentimental and the ahistorical. Finally, the review invokes perhaps the two most influential abolitionist texts ever published, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, and *American Slavery As It Is: The Testimony of a Thousand Witnesses* (1839) compiled by Theodore Weld, one of the principal crusaders for the American Antislavery Society.

Today, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* is by far the better-known book, but the connection to Weld’s *Slavery As It Is* is perhaps the more revealing of the two. The publication of this massively documented volume marked a departure in abolitionist tactics. Moving away from a strategy based on moral suasion and general principles of equality, *Slavery As It Is* presented an overwhelming accumulation of facts and incidents of slavery culled from thousands of Northern and Southern newspaper clippings. It was what Teresa Goddu has termed a “representational model,” offering specific examples of injustice and documenting them with authentic and accurate provenances. The hope (which was largely fulfilled by the great influence of the volume) was that the sheer accumulation of shocking evidence of slave abuse would arouse an apathetic public.⁶⁵ Compared with most of the tracts of the day, *Slavery As It Is* adopted a relatively measured and unimpassioned tone. It relied on concrete, verifiable testimony to persuade. Included in the text were straightforward descriptions of the food, clothes, shelter, and work habits of slaves. Readers were essentially presented with the facts and asked to draw their

own conclusions. How similar this is to the method and inflection of Johnson's *Negro Life at the South*, which, as so many critics pointed out, impresses for its fidelity of detail ("the exceeding care with which each fact and circumstance has been wrought").⁶⁶ The clothes, tools, and foodstuffs, the architectural elements down to individual nails and planks—even the refuse on the ground—all are marshaled as data for the artist's eyewitness testimony of the specific conditions of slavery in Washington, D.C. In his quiet way, Johnson was adding his own report to the national debate on the subject.

The *Tribune's* pointed political response to *Negro Life at the South*, it should be stated, was the exception rather than the rule. As the record of published reviews demonstrates, the critical metamorphosis of the painting from a scene of closely observed urban slave life to a minstrelized plantation tableau—an "Old Kentucky Home"—began immediately after its first exhibition in 1859. A series of events that year no doubt contributed to the tendency to overlook in the image specific references to controversies at the nation's capital in favor of a more generalized picture of carefree "darkies." A new series of articles on slave abuse in the District of Columbia began appearing in the abolitionist and mainstream press in February, and one Washington incident in particular, the jailing of a free black man, Emanuel Mason, for harboring his young slave son, especially inflamed the public. Even more shocking, on a national scale, was John Brown's bloody raid at Harpers Ferry in October 1859, a momentous event that made it much more difficult to continue to express abolitionist sentiments of the polemical sort seen in the *Tribune* review. As the *Crayon* put it that year, it was time for "the cunning hand of the artist" to confront the "strife of races" and "strip [it] of all [its] bitterness."⁶⁷

The *Crayon's* wish, of course, was not to be granted. The shattering events of the crisis surrounding slavery would largely preoccupy the nation for the next two decades, through the Civil War and Reconstruction periods. During this era, however, the image of *Negro Life at the South* remained before the public in its many reproductions and in an unusually active schedule of exhibitions: New York and Boston (1859), Troy, N.Y. (1860), Weehawken, N.J. (1863), Brooklyn (1864), Paris and New York (1867), New Haven (1874), and Philadelphia (1876). Throughout these years, as is often the case for images with the staying power of *Negro Life at the South*, the reception of the painting changed with the needs of the times. Interpretations still varied, but overall, it now seems clear, it went through a process of dehistoricizing that rendered it symbolic in a more general way—drained of its specific topical, geographic, and temporal significance.⁶⁸ This tendency can also be observed in other works by Johnson executed shortly after *Negro Life at the South*. His *Corn Husking* (1860, Everson Museum of Art, Syracuse, N.Y.), for example, a quiet rural New England scene that originally included a pro-Lincoln graffito on the barn door, was reissued a year later in a popular Currier and Ives lithograph, this time with the message changed to the less partisan "The Union Forever." And Johnson's *A Ride for Liberty—The Fugitive Slaves* (Fig. 15), although, like *Negro Life at the South*, based on specific "real life" observations, is a much more generic image than his complex Washington scene, completely lacking its detailed,

individualized characterizations.⁶⁹ Having witnessed the response to *Negro Life at the South*, Johnson perhaps elected to essay a more restrained, tonal, and iconic painting. The narrative of *A Ride for Liberty*, in any event, is direct and unmistakable. Unlike the frozen tableau of the earlier painting, *A Ride for Liberty* derives its power from the split-second immediacy of its blurred evocation of a speedy escape. The fused silhouettes of this intact African American family, looking both forward and backward as they risk their lives in flight, are affecting and unambiguous; his economy of means ensured that the work would not be subject to the varied possibilities of interpretation of *Negro Life at the South*.

Picture Buying and the Slave Economy

If one concept can be said to characterize interpretations of Johnson's image, it is that of ambiguity. The remarkable mutability of meaning of *Negro Life at the South* almost leaves the impression of the painting as a shapeless entity, endlessly shifting and adapting in reaction to changed social and political conditions. Despite a bewildering number of attempts to define it, *Negro Life at the South* has retained a certain elasticity, refusing to be harnessed to a single political agenda or to the particular needs of specific viewers. Moreover, these "viewers" are, at least in the nineteenth century, largely anonymous figures, their opinions historically constructed from unsigned periodical reviews and by inference from knowledge of the slavery debates of the day. To conclude with some measure of concreteness, however, we can examine a more selective audience: the pair of private collectors who owned the painting before it passed into the public realm. Here, at least, it is possible to consider historical evidence pertaining to specific individuals and posit reasons for their attraction to the work. Here, we presumably see the painting "at work," responding to the particular aesthetic or political tastes and preferences of its owner.

Two men, William P. Wright and Robert Stuart, owned *Negro Life at the South* between 1859 and 1882. Wright bought it from the National Academy exhibition for \$1,200, kept it until 1867, and then offered it at auction with the rest of his substantial collection. The painting, which apparently failed to reach its reserve at this auction, was purchased by the selling agent and was sold in March 1868 to Robert Stuart for \$6,000, remaining in his possession until his death in 1882.⁷⁰ These two owners of *Negro Life at the South* were surprisingly similar individuals. Both wealthy New York merchants, both of recent British extraction (Wright was an immigrant, Stuart the son of an immigrant), and both lacking heirs, they devoted a large part of their vast fortunes to assembling substantial collections of American and European paintings. Most significant, however, is the nature of those fortunes. Wright made his wealth as a cotton broker, and Stuart was the largest sugar refiner in New York City. Both fortunes, it cannot be emphasized too much, were entirely dependent on an economy based on the backbreaking toil of African American men and women on cotton and sugarcane plantations.

Certainly these facts must color our understanding of the appeal of Johnson's painting, as well as the evolution of its public reception. Why did collectors buy works like *Negro Life at the South*, and how were these purchases manifested in the



15 Johnson, *A Ride for Liberty—The Fugitive Slaves*, oil on board, ca. 1862. Brooklyn Museum of Art, New York, Gift of Gwendolyn O. L. Conkling

public self-image of their owners? Lesley Carol Wright, in a probing study of the collecting of American genre paintings during the second half of the nineteenth century, sees a pattern of self-representation and identification in the buying habits of the patrons—wealthy New York businessmen for the most part—whom she considers. “The religious, familial, commercial, historical and patriotic values of an individual could all be codified by the evolving complex that was the collector’s art collection,” she writes. The paintings, individually and in the aggregate, form “a cumulative portrait of the man—a studied projection of how he wants to appear to the world.”⁷¹

In an era when the social history of art has more or less become common academic currency, such intuitive assertions about art collectors and their connection to their works might almost be taken as a given, at least in the abstract. Yet it could also be argued that New York merchants bought pictures for a variety of reasons, that not every purchase—particularly when it came to collectors who amassed as many works as Wright

and Stuart—need be tied inescapably to their personal, social, and political philosophies. In the case-by-case examination of selected collectors and paintings, however, these otherwise broad statements concerning patron motivation can indeed take on meaning; the nuances of the process of acquisition emerge and the patterns linking buyers of the same temperament become apparent. I would argue that in this instance, during the contentious years surrounding the Civil War, we find a charged subject, African American slave imagery, and a picture, the most famous genre painting of its day, that would have necessarily demanded a positioned response from nearly every viewer. And when the viewer becomes the owner of the work, and when the owner happens to owe his success to his extremely active commercial involvement with the slave power, the stakes of interpretation, both public and private, are raised very high indeed.

Lesley Wright takes as one of her patron subjects Robert Stuart, the second owner of *Negro Life at the South*, and outlines a long-standing fascination on his part with African American



16 Thomas Waterman Wood, *Moses, Baltimore News Vendor*, oil on canvas, 1858. Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, Mildred Anna Williams Collection

imagery of a particular type. As early as 1858, Stuart had demonstrated his interest in black subjects by attempting to purchase Thomas Waterman Wood's *Moses, the Baltimore News Vendor* (Fig. 16), exhibited that year at the National Academy. Through a misunderstanding, however, the painting had been promised to another collector as well—John Brune, of Baltimore, a sugar refiner like Stuart who also made a specialty of African American genre subjects. Incredibly, the ensuing conflict over this seventy-five-dollar painting escalated to a lawsuit between the two collectors, a battle that Stuart lost, leaving him, nonetheless, with a copy of the Wood painting by James Cafferty (1860, New-York Historical Society) as recompense.

The painting desired by these unusually tenacious sugar magnates was actually a portrait of a well-known Baltimore personage, Moses Small, but in a revealing parallel with *Negro Life at the South*, this newspaper salesman's specific identity was soon dropped from the title and the several press reviews of the work. What was left was a nondescript, deferential, "feel-good" African American *type*, that of a successful but

nonthreatening free black entrepreneur who was eager to serve. When grouped with Stuart's other paintings of African Americans (the most important of which was *Negro Life at the South*), a racial group portrait emerges, in Lesley Wright's words, of "well-mannered and thoughtful African Americans, who depended on white society for their livelihood, their home, or their dreams of a future but who nevertheless managed to establish a bit of independence and dignity." We see Stuart, then, going significantly out of his way and spending large amounts of money (at \$6,000, *Negro Life at the South* was over twice as expensive as any of his previous purchases) to associate himself with an image of blacks who are comfortable and do not suffer but who also do not challenge the authority of whites. Yet, as Wright notes, his interest in African Americans did not extend so far as supporting the cause of abolition during the years leading up to the Civil War (although, like most New York businessmen, he became an ardent unionist once the conflict had begun). In all respects, then, Stuart remained in territory that was not only safe but that also reflected well on someone whose fortunes were so closely tied to the hard labor of African Americans. His purchases, especially when exhibited and made available to the public, became a kind of policy statement on the "natural" state of the races and the desirability of maintaining the status quo.⁷²

Stuart's financial dependence on sugarcane, when considered alongside his repeated purchases of works like *Negro Life at the South*, allows the discussion of patron motivation to begin to move beyond the realm of mere speculation and circumstantial evidence. Still, the initial owner, William P. Wright, as a cotton broker—perhaps the leading cotton broker in New York—presents an even better opportunity to examine the nature of the collector's self-interest.⁷³ In the years leading up to the Civil War, no Northern constituency was more identified with slaveholders' interests than New York merchants, particularly cotton brokers. In the latter half of the 1850s, American cotton exports to Great Britain skyrocketed. With most of the stock passing through the port of New York, Wright and his colleagues enjoyed a period of unprecedented financial boon with a near monopoly of the overseas trade. In the South, the cotton industry, convinced that profits were limited only by the ability of slaves to increase their numbers naturally, actually began agitating for a reopening of the Atlantic slave trade. In the North, a pamphlet published in defense of the powerful New York cotton brokers declared, "We regard African slavery, as now existing in the South, as justifiable upon sound, social, humane, and Christian considerations."⁷⁴ Aware that their Southern clients expected unwavering fealty to slave interests, wealthy New York businessmen organized massive rallies in support of the Democratic Party and its proslavery policies. In a particularly significant and revealing instance, Wright himself was a signatory to a manifesto published in the *New York Times* condemning abolitionists, defending the Dred Scott decision, and arguing for an end to sectional strife and discord.⁷⁵ In the ultimate irony, he directed in 1867 that proceeds from the exhibition and the sale of catalogues of his collection (which included, of course, *Negro Life at the South*) be given to the Southern Famine Relief Commission, an organization set up

by New York merchants to send aid to white Southerners made destitute by the Civil War.⁷⁶ This charitable effort to “save” the South had the additional benefit of strengthening the overall market for cotton, particularly for a middleman like Wright, who had opened a branch office in New Orleans in 1865 and whose livelihood was dependent on the availability of large quantities of the raw product to sell. Thus, thanks to the Southern sympathies and business entanglements of its owner, the public exhibition of Johnson’s painting during the Reconstruction period provided direct material support for the rehabilitation of former slaveholders, something it had actually been doing on an ideological level ever since the first critics began writing about it.

Merchants such as Wright, however, did not wish to be pariahs in their own region. While condemning the “incendiary” ideas of abolitionists, they also repudiated the extreme Southern intransigence manifested, for example, in Congress’s refusal to receive petitions against slavery in the District of Columbia. Until the outbreak of war, they attempted to forge a middle path, representing slavery as benign so long as adequate restraints were in place to prevent individual cases of abuse.⁷⁷ This is exactly the interpretive stance adopted by so many of the initial reviews of *Negro Life at the South*, making the painting an extremely attractive acquisition for a collector of Wright’s political and economic perspective. His willingness to loan the painting frequently during his years of ownership can perhaps be interpreted as an attempt to use it as a visual “advocate” of the New York mercantile policy of tolerating slavery. Even after the outbreak of war, when arguments on behalf of slavery were more difficult to make, the same sentiments could easily be diverted to the channels of nostalgia that have already been described. Images such as *Negro Life at the South* could be coopted as evidence that even if the plantation’s demise was inevitable, its social landscape had actually been quite pleasant, thus absolving of guilt anyone, like Wright, who had formerly sustained, or at least profited from, the system. In this climate of settlement and compromise immediately following the war, the prevailing “something for everyone” interpretation of the painting was established, with Johnson’s canvas seen as a middle-of-the-road statement offering ammunition to both sides of the debate on slavery.

This mediating, retrospective view was most forcefully articulated in an article published at the time of the Wright auction in 1867, perhaps the most famous statement ever made on the painting:

Here we see the “good old times” before the “peculiar institution” was overturned, times that will never again return. The very details of the subject are prophetic. How fitly do the dilapidated and decaying negro quarters typify the approaching destruction of the “system” that they serve to illustrate! And, in the picture before us, we have an illustration also of the “rose-water” side of the institution. Here all is fun and freedom. We behold the very reality that the enthusiastic devotees of slavery have so often painted with high-sounding words. And yet this dilapidation, unheeded and unchecked, tells us that the end is near.⁷⁸

Both sides of the debate are given here, but they are somewhat defused by being placed in a distant historical context, a common rhetorical strategy during Reconstruction designed to separate postbellum survivors from the recent horrors of the war and temper their formerly partisan views to a less threatening pitch. Seemingly bowing to the unavoidable workings of fate, the critic stresses the inevitability of slavery’s decline; it is described almost as a natural process of disintegration rather than a wrenching bloodbath that nearly destroyed the Union. *Negro Life at the South* is seen, in the end, as unusually prescient, encapsulating in paint both the principal arguments and the final outcome of the country’s battle over slavery.⁷⁹

Interpretations such as these underwent a considerable evolution in the years following the work’s first exhibition in 1859, but in one way or another, the painting owned by Wright and Stuart always remained at the center of the struggle to make sense of the sectional conflict. Even when critics differed in their view of the picture’s message, its cultural centrality and its power to effect political change were emphasized. Thus, later in 1867, still another author weighed in on the national significance of the painting:

The “Kentucky Home” was as unique among our pictures as “Uncle Tom’s Cabin” among our stories. Here was the great tragedy of our national life, with countless passionate and poetic aspects, teeming with every kind of inspiring subject, and our moral pusillanimity was such that Literature and Art avoided it, and “society” made it impolite to allude to it. . . . Mrs. *Stowe* broke the spell in literature. *Eastman Johnson* broke it in art. He and the war have shown us the throbbing life and passion and romance among ourselves. We do not mean that Mr. *Johnson* is a preacher, nor an antislavery lecturer, nor a man with a conscious “mission.” But “The Old Kentucky Home,” a scene of Slave State life, not of the whipping-post nor of the auction-block, but of a quiet interior, of a slipshod household, of a pair of young negro lovers, not caricatured, but of a kind familiar to common experience, admitted the prescribed race to the common sympathies of humanity.⁸⁰

Here, as well, the singularity of *Negro Life at the South* is insisted on, and with the benefit of hindsight, Johnson’s work comes to be seen as a covert persuader whose unassuming rhetoric spurred a sea change in the public attitude toward slavery. Implied in these comments is the recognition that at the time of its initial exhibition, much of the mildly antislavery “message” of the painting, now so apparent to later viewers, was lost to a somnambulant public.

Indeed, there were others, less willing to forgive the work’s stereotyping, who were never able to see this message. Abolitionist and social activist Ednah Dow Cheney, writing in the same crucial year of 1867, had no patience for the gentle, accommodating approach of Johnson and his fellow genre painters. Criticizing their general sentiment as “feudal,” she added by way of parodic explanation, “The slave holder, if a tolerably decent man, loved to stand in his veranda and watch the dancing of his slaves, and with self-satisfied complacency felt the warm Southern sun upon them all, and flattered himself on the beauty of the Patriarchal relation.”⁸¹ With

knowledge of the lives of William P. Wright and Robert Stuart, we might add to Cheney's image of the slaveholder standing on his veranda that of the art collector gazing with satisfaction at the genre paintings in his picture gallery. While we may never establish with certainty the intentions of patrons like Wright and Stuart, the preponderance of historical evidence clearly argues for a strong motivation on their part to connect themselves to the nostalgic view of slavery that came to be associated with *Negro Life at the South*. It is difficult, in fact, to imagine anyone in New York City who would be more disposed than these wealthy merchants to give the "peculiar institution" the benefit of the doubt.

The Politics of Memory

Assessments of Johnson's painting during the first decade of its life obviously varied widely, and the pendulum continues to sway today, as any survey of the recent literature on *Negro Life at the South* makes clear. What is lost in most such attempts to essentialize the meaning of the work, however, is an understanding of the original context of the painting: the Washington scene of urban slavery experienced firsthand by the artist and conveyed with understanding and sympathy in his view of the interior of his family's F Street block. There is every indication that he was profoundly affected by the specifics of daily urban life for African Americans in the city. The *mise-en-scène* of his painting displays a marked awareness of the politics of spatial control, the particular architectural makeup of urban slave quarters, and the complex negotiations of slave life under the constant eye of white masters. His residence near F and Thirteenth Streets, moreover, placed him at an astounding geographic convergence of four decades of controversy relating to Washington slavery. By formulating his representation of slavery in the District of Columbia, by exposing its "secret city," Eastman Johnson unavoidably entered into the heated public debate surrounding slavery in the United States. The political rhetoric that attached itself to the image in 1859, however, would not allow for an argument based on the disquieting specifics catalogued in *Negro Life at the South*. While a deliberate conspiracy to retitle, reshape, and reinterpret *Negro Life at the South* in the years following its first exhibition can almost certainly be discounted, the end result was very much as if it had existed. With its topical references forgotten, the image became softened and blurred, more easily shaped and prodded by its eager interpreters. Particularly in the hands of proslavery viewers, it lost its potential to instruct the public on the nature of urban slavery in the nation's capital.

American history, it is becoming increasingly clear, has suffered no small number of such losses of memory, particularly when the issue of race is a determining factor. In a recent example that has sparked some controversy in academic circles, a distinguished historian of black-white relations in the postbellum American South, Joel Williamson, has published an anguished and confessional essay outlining the historiographic blindness of his field—and of himself, a white Southerner growing up during the Depression—to the widespread scourge of the lynching of black men at the turn of the century. "Whites did lose conscious recall of ritualistic racial lynching," he writes. "At the same time, we lost the memory

of slavery as an exceedingly cruel institution. Instead, we regenerated slavery in popular myth and scholarship as essentially a paternalistic endeavor that did its necessary work and faded away." In a spirited and contested roundtable of responses to the essay, white academics largely applauded Williamson for his candor, while African American historians pointed out that the facts of lynching had never been forgotten in Southern black communities and, indeed, were amply documented in the writings of African American historians, of which any white scholar might have availed himself during the years in which the canonical published history texts were ignoring this campaign of violence.⁸²

Historical blindness, then, is not always a universal affliction. Certain cultural groups (particularly those struggling to maintain a hold on power in a shifting political landscape) can, consciously or not, simply stop remembering unpleasant specifics, even while those specifics remain the defining events of a minority group's experience. A silence descends, and a climate of erasure and avoidance prevails until a later date when it again becomes "possible" for the dominant society to uncover that shadowed portion of memory's complex topography. When measured by the lives of those affected, the historical fallout stemming from the failure to remember the Washington locale of *Negro Life at the South* differs from the striking absence of Southern lynching from the standard American history books in degree, but not in kind. In both cases, the needs of a society at a particular point in time essentially prevented certain highly divisive issues and events from being represented or seen. The life-altering truths, as well as the psychological scars, of a minority population became obscured, and the resolution that often comes from historical debate and awareness was delayed. When, if ever, should we expect such a resolution? In the case of Johnson's painting, unlike the lynching controversy, the enduring physicality of the work, coupled with the inevitability of changes in perception over time, ensure that future scholars will also have the opportunity to test and retest the assumptions of their era against the materiality of its painted surface. Art historians, faced with an image as universally popular, as politically contentious, and as densely accreted with layers of meaning as *Negro Life at the South*, will no doubt continue to labor to provide the tools for seeing that begin this process of excavating and confronting the past in all its complexity.

For Eastman Johnson, at least, there is evidence that the complexity of *Negro Life at the South*, and in particular, its setting in Washington, remained important to him throughout his subsequent career, despite his abandonment of genre painting for a lucrative (and less controversial) career in portraiture.⁸³ A photograph of his New York studio, posthumously published, shows an interior, its walls and floor covered with a jumble of rough oil sketches and preliminary versions of his famous genre paintings.⁸⁴ One large work, though, stands out for its size, central placement, and careful framing—distinctions not accorded any other painting on the wall. This painting is a detailed study of the background of *Negro Life at the South*, but without the addition of the many figures. A stage setting lacking its players, it underscores the importance of the specific sense of place in the final work.

Until the end of his life, it seems, Johnson chose to keep that Washington back lot before his eyes, a reminder of his unique and complicated life in the nation's capital before the Civil War.

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Notes

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1. *Life* 5 (October 31, 1938): 4, 32.
2. The African American community of the District of Columbia, because of its comparative invisibility to white Washington, became known as the "secret city" by the late 19th century. See, generally, Green, 1962; idem, *The Secret City: A History of Race Relations in the Nation's Capital* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1967); James Oliver Horton, "The Genesis of Washington's African American Community," in *Urban Odyssey: A Multicultural History of Washington, D.C.*, ed. Francine Curro Cary (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1996), 20–41; and James Borchert, *Alley Life in Washington: Family, Community, Religion, and Folklife in the City, 1850–1970* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1980), 15.
3. These issues, among others, have been taken up in most of the significant contributions to the literature on *Negro Life at the South*: Hills, 55–60; Ellwood Parry, *The Image of the Indian and the Black Man in American Art, 1590–1900* (New York: Braziller, 1974), 101–2; Sue Bridwell Beckham, "By 'n By Hard Times . . . Eastman Johnson's 'Life at the South' and American Minstrelsy," *Journal of American Culture* 6 (Fall 1983): 19–25; Honour, 217–20; Albert Boime, *The Art of Exclusion: Representing Blacks in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1990), 109–14; Kirsten Pai Buick, "Eastman Johnson's 'Old Kentucky Home, Negro Life at the South': From Idealization to Nostalgia, 1859–1867," M.A. thesis, University of Michigan, 1990; Elizabeth Johns, *American Genre Painting: The Politics of Everyday Life* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), 127–31; Frances K. Pohl, "Black and White in America," in *Nineteenth Century Art: A Critical History*, by Stephen F. Eisenman et al. (London: Thames and Hudson, 1994), 168; and Martin. Prior to the work of Hills, 20th-century critical writing had not usually been kind to *Negro Life at the South*. Oliver W. Larkin, *Art and Life in America* (New York: Rinehart, 1949), 222, was dismissive of the painting's "aimless anecdote" and Virgil Barker, *American Art: History and Interpretation* (New York: Bonanza Books, 1950), 610, criticized it for its "gross sentimentality." Such comments were recycled by Barbara Rose in 1972, when she complained of its "cornball academicism." For Rose, "Family Entertainment," *New York* 5 (May 8, 1972): 723, the painting was "a great *Gone with the Wind* costume extravaganza with vignettes of the charm of plantation life"; it "reeks of cheap popular

sentiment," she concluded. Her shortsighted remarks confirm the staying power of the plantation myth associated with the painting and acknowledge, albeit deprecatingly, its wide popular reception.

4. This record, as reconstructed in 20th-century scholarship, has relied repeatedly and exclusively on the same two or three period reviews first quoted by Hills. Thus, much of our received wisdom on this important painting derives from a relatively narrow selection of contemporary press notices. Martin, for example, goes so far as to claim that reviews were "limited in number and content" (13). In contrast, I have located over twenty discussions of the painting in the literature of the period, a variety of responses that expands in many ways our knowledge of the reception of Johnson's image.

5. The best published sources on Johnson's years in Washington are Hills, 24–25, 45–56; Hildegard Cummings, "Eastman Johnson and Horatio Bridge," *Bulletin of the William Benton Museum of Art* 1 (1975–76): 17–32; Arthur S. Marks, "Eastman Johnson's Portrait of James Cochran Dobbin," *SECAC Review* 10, no. 3 (1983): 138–43; and especially, Andrew J. Cosentino and Henry H. Glassie, *The Capital Image: Painters in Washington, 1800–1915* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1983), 94–97.

6. Washington city directories published sporadically between 1846 and 1860 give information on the addresses of Philip Johnson, as well as the staff roster of his office and his starting annual salary of \$1,400. The archives of the District of Columbia Recorder of Deeds office indicate that Philip Johnson purchased the east portion of lot 2, square 253 (266 F Street) for \$1,279.75 on Oct. 11, 1852 (*Liber* 48, p. 23). District tax records show that a house valued at \$4,200 was erected on the lot sometime in 1853 (Washington, D.C., National Archives, Record Group 351, entry 47, District of Columbia Tax Books).

7. *National Intelligencer*, Nov. 30, 1855 (typescript in E. P. Richardson files, National Museum of American Art Library, Washington, D.C.).

8. On his portraits during this period, see Cummings (as in n. 5); and Marks (as in n. 5). For his works exhibited with the Washington Art Association, see James L. Yarnall and William H. Gerdtts, comps., *The National Museum of American Art's Index to American Art Exhibition Catalogues* (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1986), 1942–46. In 1858 he was chosen a director of the association.

9. Mary Washington James was first identified in William Walton, "Eastman Johnson, Painter," *Scribner's Magazine* 40 (Sept. 1906): 264. Genealogical information on her family line is given in "Family Records: From the Bible of Mrs. Sarah Washington," *William and Mary College Quarterly* 10 (Oct. 1901): 113.

10. Johnson to Mrs. Doud, Dec. 12, 1895, quoted in *American 18th, 19th and 20th Century Paintings, Drawings, Watercolors and Sculpture*, sale cat., Sotheby Parke Bernet, New York, Dec. 12, 1975, 23A. Interestingly, a later painting that fits Johnson's description, *Washington and Lafayette at Mount Vernon, 1784* (1859, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York) was jointly executed by Louis Rémy Mignot and Thomas Rossiter; it is insightfully discussed by Katherine E. Manthorne in *The Landscapes of Louis Rémy Mignot: A Southern Painter Abroad*, exh. cat., North Carolina Museum of Art, Raleigh, 1996, 112–17. In particular, Manthorne examines the motives of the Southern-sympathizing Mignot in creating a canvas that, unlike *Negro Life at the South*, presents an unambiguously positive depiction of the master–slave relationship.

11. The setting was specifically identified by John F. Coyle, a friend and patron of Johnson, in two articles in the *Washington Star*: "Historic Houses," Sept. 6, 1890; and "Some Old Hotels," Apr. 9, 1892.

12. The literature of both the 19th and 20th centuries is divided on the question of the race of this final, shadowy figure. Close examination of the painting has convinced me that she is *not* intended to be read as Caucasian, a conclusion borne out by what little can be made of her servantlike attire.

13. Previously, Johnson had "tested" paintings at the Washington Art Association before sending them on to the more discriminating National Academy.

14. "Domestic Art Gossip," *Crayon* 6 (Apr. 1859): 125, emphasis added.

15. "Editor's Easy Chair," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* 19 (June 1859): 126; "The Thirty-Fourth Exhibition of the Academy of Design," *New York Evening Post*, Apr. 25, 1859; "Fine Arts: National Academy of Design," *Home Journal*, June 18, 1859; and "National Academy of Design," *New York Herald*, May 8, 1859.

16. Despite their otherwise valuable discussions of the sentimental overtones of *Negro Life at the South*, Honour, 218; Martin, 15; and Lee Glazer and Susan Key, "Carry Me Back: Nostalgia for the Old South in Nineteenth-Century Popular Culture," *Journal of American Studies* 30, no. 1 (1996): 11, have each made this erroneous assumption.

17. "The Old Kentucky Home," *Home Journal*, Aug. 27, 1859; "Athenaeum Exhibition," *Dwight's Journal of Music* 15 (Sept. 3, 1859), 181. According to Patricia Hills, author of the forthcoming Eastman Johnson catalogue raisonné, no example of this early photographic reproduction has yet been located; personal communication, July 21, 1997.

18. S. G. W. Benjamin, "A Representative American," *Magazine of Art* 5 (Nov. 1882): 487; and "Fine Arts: The Wright-Derby Collection," *New York Evening Post*, Jan. 30, 1867. To be fair to the *Evening Post*, it must be acknowledged that in 1863, the painting was exhibited by its first owner, William P. Wright, as "Old Virginia Home" in Weehawken, N.J.; see Yarnall and Gerdtts (as in n. 8), 1948. Other publications made the same mistake: see "Fine Arts," *New York Times*, Feb. 21, 1867; and M. D. Conway, "The Great Show at Paris," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* 35 (July 1867): 248.

19. "Artists' Reception for the Benefit of the Brooklyn and Long Island Fair," *New York Daily Tribune*, Feb. 19, 1864. Ignorance of the true setting of the painting prevailed through the early 20th century. However, the majority of recent scholars are at least aware of the Washington setting, even if only a few have considered any of the ramifications of the urban environment (these exceptions are Cosentino and Glassie [as in n. 5], Johns [as in n. 3], and Martin). A small group has also identified the setting incorrectly as Georgetown (Hermann Warner Williams, Jr., *Mirror to the American Past: A Survey of American Genre Painting: 1750-1900* [Greenwich, Conn.: New York Graphic Society, 1973], 143; and James Edward Fox, "Iconography of the Black in American Art [1710-1910]," Ph.D. diss., University of North Carolina, 1979, 199). Still others continue to see it as a rural farm scene. See, most recently, Katherine Hoffman, *Concepts of Identity: Historical and Contemporary Images and Portraits of Self and Family* (New York: HarperCollins, 1996), 61.

20. The figure is given in Green, 21. The numbers in 1860, however, had declined from previous decades; during the 1820s and 1830s, there were over six thousand slaves in the district. Earlier, and especially useful, sources on slavery in Washington are Mary Tremain, *Slavery in the District of Columbia: The Policy of Congress and the Struggle for Abolition* (1892; repr., New York: Negro Universities Press, 1969); and Walter C. Clephane, "The Local Aspect of Slavery in the District of Columbia," *Records of the Columbia Historical Society* 3 (1900): 224-56. On urban slavery in general, see the important book, Richard C. Wade, *Slavery in the Cities: The South, 1820-1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964); and also Claudia Dale Goldin, *Urban Slavery in the American South, 1820-1860: A Quantitative History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976).

21. Giddings's speech (of Dec. 12, 1839) was not reported in the *Congressional Globe*, but it did appear in a number of independent publications (major congressional speeches on slavery were usually reprinted in local newspapers throughout the nation). It is quoted at length in Miller, 346-48. Giddings's remarks provoked a tumultuous response from Southern representatives; it required an hour to restore calm to the House.

22. US Const., Art. I, §9. For a clear discussion of these issues, see, most recently, Miller, pt. 1.

23. Jesse Torrey, *A Portraiture of Domestic Slavery in the United States* (Philadelphia: John Bioren, 1817), 40.

24. *Ibid.*, 37, 32-33. For recently discovered evidence of the incarceration of "runaway" slaves in the fifteen years prior to the Civil War, see Linda Wheeler, "D.C. Jail Log Unlocks History of Slave Era," *Washington Post*, Jan. 10, 1991.

25. Torrey (as in n. 23), 37.

26. For a similar use of the image of the Capitol, see the anonymous engraving *United States Slave Trade*, ca. 1830, reproduced in Bernard F. Reilly, Jr., *American Political Prints: 1766-1876* (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1991), 39. Even the normally timid and consensus-seeking *American Scenery* volumes included a William H. Bartlett engraving, *View of the Capitol in Washington*, with a group of slaves in the immediate foreground on Pennsylvania Avenue; Nathaniel Parker Willis, *American Scenery; or, Land, Lake, and River Illustrations of Transatlantic Nature* (London: James S. Virtue, 1840), 36. The text, however, failed to comment on the group.

27. *Annals of the Congress of the United States*, Fourteenth Cong., 1st sess., Washington, D.C., 1816, 1115.

28. Although many have been lost, hundreds of original petitions remain in the National Archives, mainly filed under the records of the House Committee on the District of Columbia. The two quoted here are stored in files HR30A-G5.1 and HR31A-G4.1.

29. The historian quoted is Gilbert Barnes, in Miller, 309. Miller, chap. 25, is the best source on the Washington petition drives. See also Edward Magdol, *The Antislavery Rank and File: A Social Profile of the Abolitionists' Constituency* (New York: Greenwood, 1986), which gives estimates of the petition numbers and correlates selective signatories with census data to arrive at a "group portrait" of petitioners.

30. "District of Columbia," *Liberator*, Jan. 1, 1831.

31. *Remarks of Mr. Dickson, of New York, on the Presentation of Several Petitions for the Abolition of Slavery and the Slave Trade in the District of Columbia* (Washington, D.C.: Gales and Seaton, 1835), n.p.; *Speech of Mr. Slade, of Vermont, on the Subject of Abolition of Slavery and the Slave Trade within the District of Columbia* (Washington, D.C.: National Intelligencer, 1836), 4-5.

32. *Remarks of Mr. Hammond, of South Carolina, on the Question of Receiving Petitions for the Abolition of Slavery in the District of Columbia* (Washington, D.C.: Duff Green, 1836), 17; and Richmond *Inquirer*, n.d., quoted in *The South Vindicated from the Treason and Fanaticism of the Northern Abolitionists* (1836; repr., New York: Negro Universities Press, 1969), 224. The same threats were made in later years. On Sept. 10, 1850, for example, Senator Henry Foote of Mississippi announced, "No man in the world can doubt that any attempt now, on the part of the Congress of the United States, to abolish slavery in the District of Columbia, if successful, would dissolve the Union"; *Congressional Globe*, 31st Cong., 1st sess., 1850, app., 1644.

33. The gag rule was largely a punitive and antagonistic gesture on the part of Southern legislators, for the abolitionist petitions were in no danger of being acted on, thanks to the skewed majority of proslavery votes in the House. Northern Democrats largely voted proslave, and Southern states at the time were permitted to count their nonvoting slaves when calculating population figures for the purposes of apportionment of representatives in the House; every five slaves counted as three additional "constituents," ensuring a

Southern voting bloc disproportionately powerful to the numbers of actual voting citizens.

34. On the *Pearl* controversy, see Stanley C. Harrold, Jr., "The Pearl Affair: The Washington Riot of 1848," *Records of the Columbia Historical Society* 50 (1980): 140-60; and Richard C. Rohrs, "Antislavery Politics and the Pearl Incident of 1848," *Historian* 56 (Summer 1994): 711-24.

35. *Congressional Globe*, 30th Cong., 2d sess., 1849, app., 80. The Compromise of 1850 allowed the addition of one slave state (Texas) and one free state (California). It also appeased Southerners by strengthening the fugitive slave laws. The final measure, abolition of the slave trade in the District of Columbia, did no such thing in reality. It did not forbid the sale of slaves resident in the district; it only prevented dealers from bringing them in from elsewhere for sale.

36. *Congressional Globe*, 31st Cong., 1st sess., 1850, app., 529, 1642.

37. Horace Mann, *Slavery Letters and Speeches* (1851; repr., New York: Burt Franklin, 1969), 122; and *Congressional Globe*, 30th Cong., 2d sess., 1849, app., 127.

38. Green, 180.

39. Some of the most significant political events impacting the slavery debate of the 1850s were the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854, which nullified the Missouri Compromise of 1820 and made possible the introduction of slavery in new western states; the Dred Scott decision of the Supreme Court in 1857, which essentially ruled that blacks could not be citizens; and the Lecompton crisis of 1858, which led to significant bloodshed in Kansas.

40. Solomon Northrup, *Twelve Years a Slave* (1853), ed. Sue Eakin and Joseph Logsdon (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1968), 22. Books of this period condemning racial conditions in Washington include William Goodell, *Slavery and Antislavery; A History of the Great Struggle in Both Hemispheres* (New York: William Goodell, 1855), 243-45; Frederick Law Olmsted, *A Journey in the Seaboard Slave States in the Years 1853-1854, with Remarks on Their Economy*, vol. 1 (1856; repr., New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1904), 12-17; and Philo Tower, *Slavery Unmasked* (1856; repr., New York: Negro Universities Press, 1969), 47-48.

41. Coyle, 1890, and 1892 (as in n. 11).

42. Although unlabeled on the map, the identification of the footprint (A) as the Johnson home is certain—based on Coyle's description, on corroborating evidence in the Surveyor's Office, District of Columbia, and on tax and deed records (see n. 6 above). An appraisal commissioned after Philip Johnson's death indicates that the house was, in fact, three stories, with an attic. In addition, there was a rear kitchen ell on the first floor, as indicated on the map. The appraisal is dated Aug. 18, 1859, and is located in Philip Johnson's Probate Case File (no. 4152, old series) in the District of Columbia Archives and Records Center.

43. Some useful sources include Virginia Miller, "Dr. Thomas Miller and His Times," *Records of the Columbia Historical Society* 3 (1900): 303-23; W. B. Bryan, "A Fire in an Old Time F Street Tavern and What It Revealed," *Records of the Columbia Historical Society* 9 (1906): 198-215; Sarah E. Vedder, *Reminiscences of the District of Columbia; or, Washington City Seventy Years Ago, 1830-1909* (St. Louis: A. R. Fleming, 1909); "Rambler Writes of Residents of F Street during the Year 1860," *Washington Sunday Star*, Mar. 24, 1918; Charles Noble, "Memories of Washington before the Civil War," *Washington Post*, Jan. 31, 1926; idem, "F Street Seventy Years Ago," *Washington Post*, Apr. 11, 1926; and John Claggett Proctor, "Retracing Lost Footsteps at Fourteenth and F Streets," *Washington Star*, Nov. 1, 1942.

44. Bryan (as in n. 43), 200-201. Later discussions of the "Anna" incident are found in E. S. Abdy, *Journal of a Residence and Tour in the United States of North America* (London: John Murray, 1835), 92-93; and E. A. Andrews, *Slavery and the Domestic Slave-Trade in the United States* (Boston: Licht and Stearns, 1836), 125.

45. On the riots, see Green 1967 (as in n. 2), 36-37. For the Miller household and considerable information on other neighbors and society in general, see Miller (as in n. 43), 313-17; and Kathryn Allamong Jacob, *Capital Elites: High Society in Washington, D.C., after the Civil War* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1995), chap. 2. Clay's letter is given in Virginia Clay-Clopton, *A Belle of the Fifties: Memoirs of Mrs. Clay of Alabama* (New York: Doubleday, Page, 1904), 43.

46. This neighborhood roster is compiled with data from Washington directories and from Miller (as in n. 43); Noble, Apr. 1926 (as in n. 43); and Mark J. Stegmaier, "The Case of the Coachman's Family: An Incident of President Fillmore's Administration," *Civil War History* 32 (1986): 318. For information on the three Southern senators and their Washington lives, see Robert Douhat Meade, *Judah P. Benjamin, Confederate Statesman* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1943); William Y. Thompson, *Robert Toombs of Georgia* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1966); and Varina Howell Davis, *Jefferson Davis, Ex-President of the Confederate States of America: A Memoir* (New York: Bedford, 1890).

47. On Harriet's marriage, see William Lloyd Garrison, *The Letters of William Lloyd Garrison*, vol. 5, ed. Walter M. Merrill (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1975), 313. For the pro-Union sentiments of Johnson's brother Reuben, who continued to live in the F Street house with his stepmother after the death of Philip Johnson, see the letter quoted in John I. H. Baur, *Eastman Johnson, 1824-1906: An American Genre Painter*, exh. cat., Brooklyn Museum, New York, 1940, 18-19. On *Freedom Ring*, see Walton (as in n. 9), 272-32; and Hills, 62.

48. See *Congressional Globe*, 24th Cong., 1st sess., 1835, 24, 406; 25th Cong., 2d sess., 1837, 45; 25th Cong., 3d sess., 1838, 27; 28th Cong., 2d sess., 1845, 14, 378; and John Fairfield, *The Letters of John Fairfield*, ed. Arthur G. Staples (Lewiston, Me.: Lewiston Journal, 1922), 38, 169, 173, 411.

49. National Archives, Census of 1850, District of Columbia, slave schedule, 2d ward, and Census of 1860, District of Columbia, 2d ward. The antenuptial agreement is found in the District of Columbia Recorder of Deeds office (Liber 155, p. 413).

50. It has often been asserted that the slaves depicted in the painting belonged to Philip Johnson; see, for example, Honour, 217; Boime (as in n. 3), 109; and Pohl (as in n. 3), 168. This cannot be true, if only for the fact that according to tax and estate records (see n. 6, 42 above), his net worth in personal property (separate from his house) never exceeded one thousand dollars, a sum far below the contemporary market value of the twelve slaves in *Negro Life at the South*. Martin, 10, concurs in this assessment.

51. National Archives, Census of 1860, District of Columbia, slave schedule; *Eminent and Representative Men of Virginia and the District of Columbia* (Madison, Wis.: Brant and Fuller, 1893), 294. Stone kept his eight slaves until 1862, when the federal government emancipated them and paid him \$3,394.50 as compensation. See "Emancipation of the District of Columbia," U.S. Congress, 38th Cong., 1st sess., H.R. Ex. Doc. No. 42.

52. Lawrence W. Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought from Slavery to Freedom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), xi. For a good summary of the recent historiography on the subject, see Drew Gilpin Faust, "Slavery in the American Experience," in *Before Freedom Came: African American Life in the Antebellum South*, ed. Edward D.C. Campbell, Jr., with Kym S. Rice (Richmond, Va.: Museum of the Confederacy, 1991), 7–19. Other important sources include Eugene D. Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York: Pantheon, 1974); Herbert G. Gutman, *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom, 1750–1925* (New York: Pantheon, 1976); John W. Blassingame, *The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Antebellum South*, rev. ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979); and Sterling Stuckey, *Slave Culture: Nationalist Theory and the Foundations of Black America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989).

53. Fox (as in n. 19), 201–2; David C. Driskell, "Aspects of Black Imagery in American Art, 1700–1900," in *Images of Blacks in American Culture: A Reference Guide to Information Sources*, ed. Jessie Carnie Smith (New York: Greenwood, 1988), 12; and Martin, 2.

54. The figure of 1.89 comes from Goldin (as in n. 20), 20. There is no evidence that Johnson intended this gathering to be understood as either a single family or as a group of slaves belonging to a single owner. It was still possible for slaves from several households to meet and interact within the sheltered alley spaces of the block.

55. See, generally, Harold Courlander, *Negro Folk Music, U.S.A.* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1963); Christopher Small, *Music of the Common Tongue: Survival and Celebration in Afro-American Music* (London: John Calder, 1987); and Eileen Southern, *The Music of Black Americans: A History*, 2d ed. (New York: W. W. Norton, 1983); and more specifically, Levine (as in n. 52), 193–94; and Blassingame (as in n. 52), 22–24, 106–8.

56. "Fine Arts. National Academy of Design: First Notice," *Albion* 37 (May 17, 1859): 225; and "Pictures from America," *Art Journal* 6 (Nov. 1867): 248. On the banjo image, see Eric Lott, *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 7, 138–39. Even before the theatrical era of minstrelsy, Southern paintings had established the black banjo player surrounded by energetic dancers as recognizable American iconography. See the anonymous watercolor *The Old Plantation*, ca. 1800, Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Folk Art Collection, Colonial Williamsburg.

57. *Slavery Code of the District of Columbia* (Washington, D.C.: L. Towers, 1862), 27–28. For details on urban slavery and Washington housing, see Wade (as in n. 20), chap. 3; Letitia W. Brown, "Residence Patterns of Negroes in the District of Columbia, 1800–1860," *Records of the Columbia Historical Society* 47 (1969–70): 66–79; and John Michael Vlach, "Evidence of Slave Housing in Washington," *Washington History* 5 (Fall–Winter 1993–94): 64–74. One woman who lived in Johnson's neighborhood in the early 1850s remembered that many area houses "had high brick walls, the tops finished with broken glass"; Vedder (as in n. 43), 23. The decade of the 1850s was a particularly difficult one for urban free blacks. Slave owners, cognizant of the "example" free blacks set for their slave neighbors, launched new campaigns to restrict the freedoms of nonslave African Americans. The black codes of most cities were made more severe (Washington's code was rewritten in 1850 to increase powers of white surveillance), and the differences between the lives of slaves and free blacks became less obvious—all were subject to the same repressive laws against assembly, mobility, and employment. Nevertheless, we can easily imagine one or more of Johnson's figures, such as the courting man at left, as free blacks who might either live on the block or visit it socially. Such contact with slaves was still a daily possibility for free blacks in Southern cities. See Green, 181; Ira Berlin, *Slaves without Masters: The Free Negro in the Antebellum South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), 344–49; and David R. Goldfield, "Black Life in Old South Cities," in *Before Freedom Came* (as in n. 52), 125–48.

58. Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave* (1845; repr., New York: Library of America, 1994), 38, 43. The report, made by the South Carolina Committee on Colored People, is quoted in Wade (as in n. 20), 52.

59. John Michael Vlach, *Back of the Big House: The Architecture of Plantation Slavery* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993), 235. See also William Chapman, "Irreconcilable Differences: Urban Residences in the Danish West Indies, 1700–1900," *Winterthur Portfolio* 30 (Summer–Autumn 1995): 136–65. Perhaps the best discussion of the phenomenon of visually defensible space is Borchert (as in n. 2), chap. 3, who traces its use among Washington alley communities through the late 19th and early 20th centuries. As late as 1929, one sociologist bemoaned the fact that "the white man's interests do not penetrate the alley," and that as a result, "a certain class of people prefer the alley life because . . . they want to be free from public control"; William Henry Jones, *The Housing of Negroes in Washington, D.C.: A Study in Human Ecology* (Washington, D.C.: Howard University Press, 1929), 41. See also *In the Alleys: Kids in the Shadow of the Capitol* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1995).

60. "Fine Arts," *Home Journal* (as in n. 15). For similar formal observations on the white woman at right, see Beckham (as in n. 3), 22.

61. See Bruce Robertson, "The Power of Music: A Painting by William Sidney Mount," *Bulletin of the Cleveland Museum of Art* 79 (Feb. 1992), 38–62; and Johns (as in n. 3), 119–22.

62. See Genovese (as in n. 52), 569–71, for a discussion of the politics of slave amusements. On *Visit from the Old Mistress*, see Peter H. Wood and Karen C. C. Dalton, *Winslow Homer's Images of Blacks: The Civil War and Reconstruction Years* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1988), 92–95.

63. "Fine Arts," *Albion* (as in n. 56). The sheet music was first discussed in Glazer and Key (as in n. 16), 17. Until Feb. 1997, "Carry Me Back" remained the official state song of Virginia.

64. "The National Academy Exhibition," *New-York Semi-Weekly Tribune*, May 24, 1859; "National Academy," *New York Herald* (as in n. 15).

65. Teresa A. Goddu, "Authenticating Slavery: The Production of Fact in Antislavery Tracts," paper presented at the annual conference of the American Studies Association, Kansas City, Mo., Oct. 31, 1996. On *Slavery As It Is*, see also Miller, 325–36.

66. "Fine Arts," *Home Journal* (as in n. 15).

67. "Hints to American Artists," *Crayon* 6 (May 1859): 145. The author was almost certainly referring to *Negro Life at the South* in this passage. On Washington events in 1859, see "Our Washington Correspondence," *National Antislavery Standard*, Feb. 26, 1859; "A Father Incarcerated for Harboring His Own Child—Justice at Washington," *Liberator*, Mar. 4, 1859; "Diabolism in Washington," *Liberator*, June 10, 1859; and "A Change in the Barbarous Laws of the District of Columbia," *Liberator*, July 15, 1859.

68. See Glazer and Key (as in n. 16), 4, for a good discussion of this general cultural process and the changing image of the South during the industrialized late 19th century.

69. On *Corn Husking*, see William David Barry, "The Rembrandt of Sugaring Off," *Down East* 38 (Apr. 1992): 50. On *A Ride for Liberty*, see Hills, 50; Honour, 223; and Pohl (as in n. 3), 170. For another Currier and Ives reuse of a Johnson image, see the print *Low Water in the Mississippi* after Frances Palmer, a scene of plantation revelry that includes a banjo player and dancing baby dandled by an older woman obviously derived from *Negro Life at the South*.

70. For information on the sales history of *Negro Life at the South*, see "Editor's Easy Chair," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* (as in n. 15); Paul Spencer Sternberger, "Portrait of a Collector and Patron: Robert Leighton Stuart," ms., curatorial files, New-York Historical Society, 14; and the annotated copy of *Catalogue of the Valuable Collection of Oil Paintings, Formerly the Private Collection of W. P. Wright*, sale cat., New York, Leeds and Miner, Mar. 18, 1867, 19, in the Brooklyn Museum, New York. Stuart's widow, Mary, inherited the painting at his death and kept it until her own demise in 1891, whereupon it went with the rest of the collection to the Lenox Library (later, the New York Public Library, now on loan to the New-York Historical Society).

71. Lesley Carol Wright, "Men Making Meaning in Nineteenth-Century American Genre Painting, 1860–1900," Ph.D. diss., Stanford University, 1993, 137, 162.

72. *Ibid.*, 165–66. Wright discusses Stuart and the *Moses* picture at some length, 138–45, 163–67. For a comprehensive study of Stuart and his collecting habits, see Sternberger (as in n. 70).

73. On Wright, see "William P. Wright," *New York Times*, July 8, 1880; and Sally Mills, "'Right Feeling and Sound Technique': French Art and the Development of Eastman Johnson's Outdoor Genre Paintings," in *Eastman Johnson: The Cranberry Harvest, Island of Nantucket*, exh. cat., by Marc Simpson et al., Timken Art Gallery, San Diego, 1990, 67, 74 n. 74. Wright's leadership within New York's cotton community is evident from his weekly *Cotton Circular*, a trade journal he published for nearly thirty years. The *Circular* was based on information supplied to him by Southern informants; it gave regularly updated information on prices, sales, and crop conditions. A comprehensive (but not complete) collection of Wright's *Cotton Circular* is located in the Library Company of Philadelphia.

74. The proslavery defense of the New York mercantile establishment comes from [Stephen Colwell], *The Five Cotton States and New York; or, Remarks upon the Social and Economical Aspects of the Southern Political Crisis* (New York: privately printed, 1861), 50–51. The need for more slaves is discussed in David Christy, "Cotton Is King; or, Slavery in the Light of Political Economy," in *Cotton Is King and Proslavery Arguments*, ed. E. N. Elliott (Augusta, Ga.: Pritchard, Abbott, and Lewis, 1860), 102–6. Christy writes triumphantly, "His Majesty, King Cotton, therefore, is forced to continue the employment of his slaves; and, by their toil,

is riding on, conquering and to conquer! He receives no check from the cries of the oppressed, while the citizens of the world are dragging forward his chariot, and shouting aloud his praise!" (216). See also George McHenry, *The Cotton Trade: Its Bearing upon the Prosperity of Great Britain and Commerce of the American Republics* (1863; repr., New York, Negro Universities Press, 1969), 13–16.

75. "The North and the South: Justice and Fraternity," *New York Times*, Dec. 16, 1859. For more on these efforts, see Philip S. Foner, *Business and Slavery: The New York Merchants and the Irrepressible Conflict* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1941), 146–63. Boime (as in n. 3), although unaware of Wright and his involvement in the cotton trade, briefly discusses *Negro Life at the South* in relation to Northern textile and Southern cotton interests. I differ with Boime, however, in that I impute proslavery sentiments to the *owner* of the painting, whereas he sees Johnson as also "bend[ing] over backwards . . . to give the Southern slave owners the benefit of the doubt" (114). It has been my hope here to show that the artist's motivation in constructing his image was a good deal more complex.

76. The papers of the Southern Famine Relief Commission are in the New-York Historical Society. See Robert H. Bremner, *The Public Good: Philanthropy and Welfare in the Civil War Era* (New York: Knopf, 1980), 122–24; and Daniel E. Sutherland, *The Confederate Carpetbaggers* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1988), 167–68.

77. Colwell (as in n. 74), 52–57.

78. "Fine Arts," *New York Evening Post* (as in n. 18). This review has had enormous influence on later writing on *Negro Life at the South* because of its

(unattributed) reprinting by Henry T. Tuckerman in his *Book of the Artists* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1867), 468. Most recent scholars have cited it as well, although its original source in the *Evening Post* has not been established until now.

79. This emerging postbellum interpretation of the painting, without too much of a stretch, could almost be seen as flattering to the picture's owner, ascribing to him, through his purchase, the very same foresight in anticipating the end of slavery.

80. "American Artists," *Harper's Weekly* 11 (May 4, 1867): 274.

81. Ednah Dow Cheney, "Jean-François Millet: A Sketch," *Radical* 2 (1867): 668, quoted in Laura L. Meixner, *French Realist Painting and the Critique of American Society, 1865–1900* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 40. Although Cheney was discussing American genre painting in general, Meixner argues for the specific relevance of her remarks to *Negro Life at the South*.

82. Joel Williamson, "Wounds Not Scars: Lynching, the National Conscience, and the American Historian," *Journal of American History* 83 (Mar. 1997): 1238. The entire roundtable is published as "What We See and Can't See in the Past," 1217–72.

83. For a discussion of some of the issues resulting from this transition from genre to portraiture, see John Davis, "Children in the Parlor: Eastman Johnson's *Brown Family* and the Post-Civil War Luxury Interior," *American Art* 10 (Summer 1996): 50–77.

84. The photograph was published in Edgar French, "An American Portrait Painter of Three Historical Epochs," *World's Work* 13 (1906): 8317, and reproduced in Patricia Hills, *Eastman Johnson* (New York: Potter, 1972), 123.