

CHAPTER FIVE



READING BODIES AND MARKING RACE

IF YOU TAKE UP a copy of Joseph Holt Ingraham's *The Southwest by a Yankee* (1835), you can follow the logic of a visit to the slave pens along the headings at the top of the book's pages: "The Slave Market," "Demeanor of the Slaves," "A Purchase," "African Inferiority." Ingraham was a self-described Yankee, and his account ostensibly resisted the white-supremacist logic it revealed: he followed an observation that "there was no expression indicative of intellect" in the slaves he examined in the market with the suggestion that no final "sentence" should be pronounced upon the mental capacity of slaves until they had been given the chance to develop themselves as free people.¹ Ingraham's flirtation with the slave market, however, was extensive. He made repeated visits to slave pens during his travels through the South, following buyers through their business, observing their gaze—"that singular look, peculiar to the buyer of slaves"—and recording their questions. And he looked for himself. He estimated slaves' "physiognomy," "looks," and "capacity for rapid movement" as a coffin passed him on a southern road, and "conversed with a great number" of the slaves he saw in the market. He was mistaken for a buyer by traders and for a slaveholder by slaves.² And when he sat down to record his experiences, he arrayed them in the order reflected by the headings: the market, the slaves he met there, the character of the race—that is, underlying system, daily practice, justifying ideology.

There is no more important question in American history than the

one posed by Ingraham's account: the relation of slavery to race, of the process of economic exploitation to the ideology of racial domination. Historians have riddled that relation into various shapes. Some have argued that slavery was built out of race, that culturally based bias against "blackness" and a religiously determined desire to dominate "heathen" Africans underwrote the economic exploitation of the Atlantic slave trade and American slavery. Others have argued that slavery was first and foremost an economic system, that exploitation preceded racialization, and that racism—presumed inferiority—became important only when an existing system of social relations faced novel assertions of human equality. As the historian Barbara Jeanne Fields puts it, race was a particularly toxic "byproduct" of the southern mode of production in the "Age of Revolution." Recently, it has been suggested that both of these descriptions of the relation between economic exploitation and racial domination might be sharpened by attention to everyday life, to the specific historical sites where race was daily given shape.³

There were many such sites in the antebellum South, sites which, taken together, provide an outline of the region's white (male) public sphere. Church pulpits where ministers preached Biblical justifications of the enslavement of the "Sons of Ham" were such a site. So were medical and agricultural journals that argued questions about the ultimate unity of the races (monogenesis or polygenesis), the relative strength of the "pure" races and their hybrids, and the specific racial etiology of various diseases and behaviors; Louisiana physician Samuel Cartwright's designations of the physiological causes of running away, *Drapetomania*, and resisting, *Dysthesia Ethiopica*, were unsurpassed in this regard. So were the courtrooms, where cases concerning racial identity were argued in terms of blood quantum and behavior, and disputes concerning slaveholders' economic responsibility for the people they owned or sold were argued in terms of racial character and racist physiology. And then there were the countless visual stereotypes, racist jokes, and staged performances of hierarchy that punctuated daily life in the antebellum South.⁴ But at no site was race more readily given daily shape than in the slave market.

MARKING RACE

When Richard Winfield went to the slave market to buy Elvira and Samuel Brown, he took James Calvitt along to help him see. As a

witness remembered it, Calvitt had more experience in the slave market than did Winfield, and the sale went something like this: "The Negroes were called in and the girl was examined by Mr. Calvitt in the presence of Winfield. Winfield looked at the slaves. Calvitt asked the slaves some questions." Calvitt remembered the sale similarly. Winfield "looked" at Elvira and then Calvitt "put his hand where her breast ought to be and found nothing but rags." If he had been purchasing on his own behalf, Calvitt added "he would have made her pull her dress off." Soon after Winfield bought her, it became apparent that Elvira was mortally ill—the rags filled out a chest ravaged by consumption—and she died within a few weeks of the sale. Another witness to the sale drew a slaveholder's moral from the story: "Thinks Winfield a poor judge of slaves or he would not have purchased said girl. She is the first girl Winfield ever owned."⁵ The observers described the nonslaveholder's inexperience as a matter of insight: Winfield was a poor judge of slaves. Indeed, comparisons of the depth of the slaveholder's insight with that of the nonslaveholder run through all of the descriptions of the sale: Calvitt "examined" while Winfield "looked"; Calvitt touched while Winfield stood by. Calvitt, by all accounts, could see things that Winfield could not.

Being able to see that way was a talent, and inexperienced buyers often took someone along with them when they went to the slave market. Friends, physicians, even slave dealers went to the slave market "at the request" of uncertain buyers.⁶ These more experienced men examined the lots of slaves for sale in the market, reading their bodies aloud and helping buyers select the "likely" and the healthy from among them. The presence of these slave-pen guides hints at a masculine social world in which being a "good judge of slaves" was a noteworthy public identity, a world of manly one-upsmanship in which knowledge of slaves' bodies was bandied back and forth as white men cemented social ties and articulated a hierarchy among themselves through shared participation in the inspection and evaluation of black slaves. And as these white men watched one another examine and choose slaves, and as the slave-pen mentors helped inexpert buyers choose slaves, they daily reproduced and passed on the racial "knowledge" by which southern slavery was justified and defended.

A savvy slave buyer knew enough to try to look past the fancy clothes, bright faces, and promising futures lined up against the walls of the

slave pens. Mississippi planter John Knight was presumably passing on the opinion of the "old planters" upon whom he regularly relied for advice when he sent his slave-market wisdom to his father-in-law. "The fact is," Knight wrote, "as to the character and disposition of all of the slaves sold by the traders, we know nothing whatever, the traders themselves being generally such liars. Buyers therefore can only judge the *looks* of the Negroes." The effects of the traders' practice—the invisibility of slaves' origins and the obscurity of their histories—and their reputation for dishonesty limited buyers' options as they tried to see through to slaves' pasts and prospects. In the absence of reliable information the buyers began with the physical coordinates of the people who stood before them in the pens.⁷

The axes of physical comparison used by the buyers were prefigured in the traders' practice. Slaves in the market were advertised by their sex, racial designation, age, and skill, and they were lined out for sale according to height. They were arrayed as physical specimens even as their origins, attitudes, and infirmities were covered over by the traders' arts. Buyers preferred darker to lighter people for work in their fields and lighter to darker people for skilled and domestic labor; they generally preferred slaves of "prime age" (between fifteen and twenty-five for laborers), although skilled slaves reached their prime at a later age (around thirty-five). Buyers favored men for work outdoors and women for domestic service; and they apparently paid higher prices for taller slaves.⁸ As telling as they are, however, these broad correlations tell us very little about what buyers saw when they looked at slaves, about what was behind the "singular look" that so impressed Joseph Ingraham. What did skin color or sex or size mean to slaveholders?

Asked to explain what they looked for in a slave, most slave buyers would have responded with the word "likely." Today the word means probable, but as slave buyers used it was as much a description as it was a prediction. As they singled out the "likely" from among the many they saw in the pens, slave buyers made detailed inspections of people's bodies which went well beyond the traders' advertisements and the age, sex, and racial designation that were commonly recorded on an Act of Sale. The standard slave inspection, as one buyer described it, went like this: "my inspection was made in the usual manner: their coats being taken off and the breast, arms, teeth, and general form and appearance looked at." The whole process, according to another buyer, might take

anywhere from fifteen minutes to half an hour, and bargaining might be stretched over three or four days. The inspections, at least at the outset, were public. The white male buyers in the yard mingled as they walked the rows of slaves; they observed the inspections made by one another and shared their own reckonings of particular slaves; they talked about and joked about the slaves standing before them.⁹ All the while they invoked ever more elaborate notions of physiological meaning to make ever finer distinctions among the people they evaluated.

As the slaves were paraded before them, slave buyers began by reading the slaves' skin color, groping their way from visible sign to invisible essence. No doubt buyers were seeing skin color when they described a slave as "a Negro or griff boy," "a griff colored boy," "dark Griff color," or "not black nor Mulatto, but what I believe is usually called a griff color, that is a Brownish Black, or a bright Mulatto."¹⁰ But in describing the blurred spectrum they saw before them, buyers used descriptive language that was infused with the reassuring certitudes of race. The words they used attempted to stabilize the restless hybridity, the infinite variety of mixture that was visible all over the South, into measurable degrees of black and white. They suggested that slaves' skin color could be read as a sign of a deeper set of racial qualities.

In the antebellum slave market, the buyers of field slaves boiled blackness down to a question of physical vitality. Slaveholders' broadest concern was with what they called "acclimation," and they endlessly expressed their preference for slaves who had survived the transition to the harsh conditions of lower-South slavery. When John Knight bought slaves, he looked for men and women from the swampy eastern shore of the Chesapeake Bay, which he thought would better prepare slaves for Louisiana slavery than the "more healthy" regions elsewhere in the upper South. Others would only buy slaves from Louisiana or Mississippi, the "Creole" slaves whom one slaveholder estimated were worth a full quarter more than slaves born elsewhere.¹¹ In the absence of reliable information about origins, however, skin color often served as a stand-in for acclimation. There are a litany of statements to the effect that the "blackest" slaves were the healthiest. From the published writings of Samuel Cartwright ("All Negroes are not equally black—the blacker the stronger") to the slave-market wish list sent by John Knight to his father-in-law ("I must have if possible the *jet black* Negroes, [they] stand this climate the best"), white men in the antebellum South talked

to one another as if they could see slaves' constitutions by looking at their complexions.¹²

So far did slaveholders go in associating blackness and healthfulness that they believed that slaves changed color when they got sick. "Cannot tell her color because she did not look sharp," remembered Maria Pajja of the dying Mary Louise. According to Dr. G. E. Barton, dark-skinned slaves got whiter when they were ill. Barton bolstered his testimony that Elvira was consumptive at the time she was sold by referring to the observation that had led him to judge her unsound: "Her skin was a of a whiter color than was natural from the ordinary complexion of the girl . . . a decided whiteness about the lips and lightness and paleness about the face . . . gums and eyes pale pearly white." This slave-market commonplace was built into a law of nature by Dr. Cartwright: "Deviation from the black color, in the pure race is a mark of feebleness or ill health."¹³ Blackness, then, was much more than a question of lineage. Indeed, blackness was much more than a question of color.

As they passed along the line of slaves, buyers evaluated field slaves on the basis of their growth and stature. Tracking age against size was particularly important to those who bought children and young adults. When he was thinking about buying the four children from whom one of his women had been separated, Alonzo Snyder asked about their ages and heights. At a distance, without actually seeing the slaves, Snyder was attempting to do what J. B. Poindexter did in a Louisiana courtroom: estimate a slave's age and value on sight: "On looking at the Boy pointed out to him . . . in Court says that if this boy is 14 years old he is worth Eleven Hundred Dollars, but if he is seventeen years old witness thinks he would not be worth as much."¹⁴ For Poindexter, who was a slave trader, putting a body in time was a way to measure the price a buyer would pay. In their efforts to tailor their slaves to the gaze of their customers, some traders selected young slaves according to tables that tracked size against price. William Chambers, a northern visitor to the Richmond market, remembered being handed a price-current which listed the prices for children according to height. On the back of a Dickinson and Hill price circular that priced slaves by market categories, slave trader William Finney sketched his own price list of the prices he would pay for "boys" five feet tall and under: three-inch increments matched by hundred-dollar increases. Slave trader Tyre

Glen literally paid for young men by the pound: "\$600 for plow Boys, five to six dollars per pound, if the boy is very likely and ways 60 to 90 or 100, seven may be given, if you can get Ker's boy at seven, take him." John Brown remembered being measured that way, balanced against a saddle by a slave trader, priced, and sold.¹⁵

Fully grown, the slaves at the top of the traders' buyer-tracking tables would look like Edward, a man whom slave dealer Louis Caretta called "One of the best slaves in the state." Edward was, according to a man who saw him sold, "Stout and low statured. He was black and looked fat . . ." And, according to one who worked with him, "a big, strong, athletic fellow." Similarly, "the likeliest girl" slave trader A. J. McElveen "ever saw" was "Black, 18 years old, very near as tall as I am, no Surplus flesh, fine form." McElveen, indeed, seems to have weighed and measured every slave he bought. "She weighs 173 lbs, 5 feet 10 and three quarters inches high," he proudly reported of the woman.¹⁶ The value of these slaves was outlined by their full physical presence, their size and their strength.

Buyers ran their hands over the bodies of the slaves, rubbing their muscles, fingering their joints, and kneading their flesh. Nathan Brown described a fifteen-year-old boy as "very interesting" after he had seen the slave placed on a table and walked back-and-forth so that those present could examine him "by feeling his joints." Similarly, Solomon Northup remembered that Theophilus Freeman "would make us hold up our head, walk briskly back and forth while customers would feel of our hands and arms and bodies, turn us about." The buyers were searching for taut muscles and hidden problems—broken bones, ossified sprains, severed tendons, internal injuries and illnesses. Listen to Joseph Copes apologizing to a friend for a slave he wanted the other slaveholder to hire: "small of stature, but wiry, strong, and tough."¹⁷ Copes realized that the man's size was against him, and he tried to answer the objection he had imagined with a list of compensatory adjectives describing how the man would feel beneath a buyer's fingers.

The buyers took slaves' fingers in their hands, working them back-and-forth to insure they were, as Charles Ball remembered, "capable of the quick motions necessary in picking cotton." In his slave-market primer, "What Constitutes Unsoundness in the Negro?" Georgia slave doctor Juriah Harriss spent paragraphs on hands, advising slaveholders to look out for slaves who had lost "portions" of their hands or had

manual "deformities arising from burns," both of which prevented "the dexterous handling of implements of labor." Asked in court to recall what their slaves' "hands" were like, slaveholders sometimes remembered missing digits: three different witnesses testified that Tom was missing his right forefinger, although they differed about which joint had been severed, the first or the second. Asked to remember William, both his seller and his overseer mentioned his hands. "Short arms and hands," said one. "His arms were short, hands small, and short fingers," said the other.¹⁸ Quite literally, these men remembered William as a hand too small to pick cotton.

In a gesture that many observers connected with the practice of the horse trade, buyers thumbed their way into slaves' mouths to look at their gums and teeth. The whiteness of sick slaves first appeared in their mouths, according to Southern medical science. Samuel Cartwright saw the signs of "Negro Consumption" in the whiteness "of the mucous surfaces lining the gums and the inside of the mouth, lips and cheeks: so white are the mucous surfaces that some overseers call it the paper-gum disease." Cartwright's description suggests that he thought it routine for a slaveholder to pull back slaves' cheeks and finger their lips. And indeed slave trader A. J. McElveen referred to teeth again and again in the letters he wrote to his boss: "Very badly whipped but good teeth"; "Likely except bad teeth"; "very likely, has good sense, fine teeth."¹⁹ McElveen may have been choosing slaves in the same way he would have chosen a horse: judging their age by the condition of their teeth. Or, more simply, McElveen may have been looking at teeth and gums because he knew that his buyers would. The rote practice of the market could produce its own standards of comparison: teeth did not need to be a practical sign of anything in particular to be compared to one another.

When they were described at all, field slaves' faces were evaluated as signs of physical vitality. For Samuel Cartwright, for instance, visage and complexion were interchangeable outward signs of blackness and inward health. "The blackest Negroes were always the healthiest, and the thicker the lips and the flatter the nose, the sounder the constitution," he wrote. John Knight sounded almost gleeful when he prefaced the list of body parts he wanted his father-in-law to buy him in the slave market with the phrase "no matter how ugly the faces."²⁰ It was the instrumental value of these bodies that mattered to the buyer, their size

and shape, the color and the ages, the comparability of parts and durability of attributes—not the faces.

The spectrum of slaves ran in two directions along the walls of the slave pen: men on one side, women on the other. The bodies of those bought to work in the fields were comparable but not entirely fungible. W. H. Yos, comparing the men and women he found in the market, found the men “more likely” and put off buying women for another year—in the short run he could compare men to women, but in the long run he would have to have both. A similar perspective shows through John Knight’s plantation plans, which stipulated that his slaves be “half men and half women . . . young say from 16 to 25, stout limbs, large deep chests, wide shoulders and hips, etc.” Knight’s list of body parts ran male and female attributes together, describing a body that was to be, like his slave force, half and half: men and women bought to work in the fields were comparable in any instance but they had to be sexed and balanced in the aggregate.²¹ Having, like Knight, broken people down into parts, slaveholders could rebalance their attributes in the quest for slaves like those trader Samuel Browning called the “right sort” for the lower South. “Likely young fellows, stout girls the same and Black,” was how Browning described the slaves who would sell best in Mississippi. Virginia trader Hector Davis similarly headed his slave-market tables with “Best young men” and “Best black girls.” Likely young women were not the same as likely young men, but likely young black women might be. If she was destined to be a field hand, being “black” was better; it made an enslaved woman look more like the men alongside whom she would work in the fields. In evaluating female slaves, the traders were imagining composite slaves, matching the vitality they attributed to blackness with the vulnerability they expected from femaleness to make a better slave.

As well as comparing women to men, buyers compared women to one another. They palpated breasts and abdomens, searching for hernias and prolapsed organs and trying to massage bodies into revealing their reproductive history and capacity. Women passed through their “prime” interest to the slave traders at an earlier age than men. Males predominated in the slave trade among slaves over the age of nineteen; below that age, females did. Behind the aggregates lie the assumptions that slaveholders inscribed upon the bodies they bought. When Hector Davis set up his parallel categories of “Best” for young

men and young women, the “best” men were those aged nineteen to twenty-four, the “best” black women were those aged sixteen to nineteen. A. J. McElveen made the terms of comparison explicit in a letter describing two slaves he had bought. “A boy large enough to plow,” he wrote, outlining the labor against which a boy’s body was to be judged, and “a Girl large Enough to nurse.”²² These sex-specific age categories reflected different evaluations of which capacities of the human body made a slave useful: production in the case of males and reproduction in the case of females. Putting it scientifically, one might say that slaveholders emphasized full physical growth for males and menarche for females.

But putting it as a slaveholder would, one might say that buyers were concerned that their female slaves be “breeders.” Even without the eugenic implications it has taken on in the twentieth century, the word is an ugly one. It contains within it a history of crass incentives to reproduction and occasional unwanted matings to which many slaveholders subjected their female slaves.²³ The apparent absence of evidence that a large number of slaveholders focused solely on breeding slaves for the market should not obscure the fact that in their evaluations of the women they bought to work in their fields, slaveholders reduced consideration of gender difference to the medical consideration of generative capacity. The reduction of femininity into reproduction was ultimately embodied in the figure of the enslaved nurse and midwife—the woman who cared for and often suckled not just her mistress’s offspring but those of other slave women who had to return to the fields shortly after giving birth. As described by John Knight, such a woman would be “a good, sound, intelligent, middle-aged woman of experience, not only for midwifery purposes, but as a constant nurse for [the children on] my plantation. That they may be properly taken care of and attended to regularly especially in absence of their mothers at work in the fields.”²⁴ As he built his plantation, Knight was building a composite Mother: one midwife and nurse evaluated according to age and experience who would take care of the children produced by many women whose own bodies would be evaluated solely according to their physical and reproductive capacity.

Repeatedly, in the parlance of the slave market, slaveholders “stripped” the slaves to the waist so that they might have a closer look: “stripped the girl and made a careful examination”; “examined the boy

very particularly . . . stripped the boy and examined him . . . stripped all the boys . . . and this boy appeared to be the finest of the lot." Buyers and traders alike used the word "stripped" as if they had done it themselves—literally unbuttoned their slaves' clothes and pulled them off: "I stripped the boy and examined him several times."²⁵ Slave buyers began undressing their slaves by asking them to roll up the legs of their pants or lift up their skirts so that their legs might be examined for ulcers and varicose veins produced by incipient illness. As the slaves removed their coats and frocks and shirts, buyers inspected their naked bodies minutely, looking for what they called "clear" or "smooth" skin, skin unmarked by signs of illness or injury. Buyers avoided those whose bodies showed signs of diseases like scrofula—"the narrow chest, prominent shoulders . . . and relaxed muscular tissue"—or evidence of the cupping and blistering used to cure a recent illness, like the "blister mark" discovered on the breast of a Virginia woman by a slave trader, or the marks on Dempsey's arm, "three scars of deep cuts which . . . had injured the arm and much weakened him."²⁶

More than anything, however, they were looking for scars from whipping. As Solomon Northup explained, "scars upon a slave's back were considered evidence of a rebellious or unruly spirit, and hurt his sale." As they worked their way from inflicted scars to essential character, buyers fixed slaves in a typology of character according to the frequency, intensity, and chronology of the whipping apparent on their backs: "not whiped"; "a little whipt"; "some scars upon her shoulders . . . produced by the whip"; "considerably scarred by the whip"; "the back of the girl had been cut pretty severely"; "he had many old stripes and scars on his body and head"; "she is very Badely whipped [but] the whipping has been done long since"; "she had marks of the whip not perfectly healed but did not appear to have been severely whipped."²⁷ Looking at the scars, slave buyers created whole stories for the people who stood stripped in front of them: perhaps if the scarring was very light the offense had been minor, perhaps if it was very old the vice had been whipped out of the slave. The buyers thought they could read slaves' backs as encodings of their history.

In 1828 the state of Louisiana had experimented with another method of making the slaves' history visible: they required traders who brought slaves over twelve years of age into the state to bring with them a certificate of good character signed in the slave's place of origin by two

or more freeholders. Ultimately, these certificates assured slave buyers of little more than the fact that at least three people might be lying to them, and the law was repealed in favor of the total prohibition of importations following Nat Turner's rebellion in 1831.²⁸ Made early in the history of the interstate slave trade, the law requiring certificates of good character marks a first attempt to do the work that later slaveholders did through stripping and examining slaves' bodies. Confronted by slaves distant in time and place from their origins and reputations, the Louisiana legislators tried to trace their way backward through the trade along a chain of reputable white men. By the time the trade was reopened in 1834, however, such an effort had been abandoned. Buyers for the rest of the antebellum period sought information about slaves' pasts in the pattern of scars that were traced across their backs.

In so doing they reproduced in the slave market a set of ideas about slave character that was central to the medical and racial philosophy of the antebellum South. In southern courtrooms and medical journals, slaves' misbehavior was often attributed to an inward disposition of character, which meant that there was something invariably, inevitably, perhaps biologically "bad" about the slave. Jim, for instance, was said to have "the habit" and "the character" of "taking his master's horses out at night and riding them without leave."²⁹ This line of thinking was reflected in redhibition law, which defined the commission of murder, rape, theft, or "the habit of running away" as evidence of a "vice of character." Slave "character" was likewise treated as an immutable fact by physician Samuel Cartwright, who held that running away and "rascality" were the misidentified symptoms of mental diseases with physiological cures—the most notable of which was getting slaves to work harder so that they would breathe harder so that their brains would get more oxygen.³⁰ As they traced their fingers across the scars on the slaves' naked backs, buyers were looking for the causes rather than the consequences of bad behavior; they were looking for, as North Carolina planter William Pettigrew put it, "deformity" of character.³¹ Cartwright's famously bizarre views were simply a dressed-up version of a slave-market commonplace: slaves' bad behavior was a matter of nature.

And sometimes contagion. Slaveholders like William Weaver of Virginia worried that their slaves' moral failings might be infectious. Weaver was dissuaded from purchasing a slave accused of incest by the

following advice: "you should not have such a slave about you. He would not only trouble you—but would pollute your other Negroes." Even more threatening than contagious moral failings, however, were disciplinary problems. Upon finding out that his recently bought slave, James Allen, had once been free, John Knight began to worry not so much about the legality of holding such a slave, still less about the morality, but about the consequences for his other slaves. "I fear he will be troublesome and will infect the rest with discontent and insubordination." "Indeed," he added ominously, "I think he has already sown some of the seeds of both." Knight's first impulse was to sell Allen to a trader, the very solution adopted by Louisiana slaveholder John Bisland. Writing to the agent who had brokered the sale of an unruly slave for him, Bisland expressed his disappointment at the low price but was relieved that the sale was completed at all when he thought about "what the consequences might have been to the rest of my Negroes." Similarly, in a letter South Carolina slaveholder Thomas Fleming wrote from Charleston, he explained that January had been sold for running away and because his owner "fears the influence he may have on the rest of his slaves in encouraging some to do the same." In a social order based on intimidation, nothing was more fearful than a fearless slave.³²

All the buyers had to do to protect themselves was ask to look at the slaves' naked bodies. As slave dealer Maurice Barnett put it: "whenever a purchaser at auction or private sale wishes to have the Negro examined they are always allowed to do so." And yet asking was not as easy as it looked, for an incongruous modesty bordered the slave market, especially in the case of women. One slave buyer, explaining in court why he did not make a full examination of a woman he bought, said that "the room was somewhat unfavorable to make a very close inspection." Lining the slave pens and auction houses were screens and dressing rooms that isolated the stripping and examining from the rest of the buyers' activities. Solomon Northup remembered that "sometimes a man or woman was taken back to the small house in the yard, stripped, and inspected more minutely."³³ These set-apart rooms were at once protective and suggestive. They hinted that there was something shameful about stripping slaves even as they invited the buyers to do so. And the modesty being protected was certainly not that of the slaves.

As they went about their slave-market business, slaveholders mapped their own forbidden desires onto slaves' bodies—particularly when the

buyers were, as they invariably were, male and the slaves being examined were female. In Richmond, where buyers crowded behind the screen to undress and examine male slaves, "the women were more tenderly dealt with. Personal examination was confined to the hands, arms, legs, bust and teeth," according to Charles Weld.³⁴ When Fanny's buyer found that she had gonorrhea, he returned her, loftily declaring that the disease "was not discoverable by simple inspection." Referring to a buyer who had bought a herniated woman and then sought to return her, a justice of the Louisiana Supreme Court declared for the record that the discovery of such a malady in the slave market would have required "a peculiar kind of examination which is not generally resorted to in relation to Female slaves unless some suspicion is raised by their looks and appearance."³⁵ Buyers had to ask to look below a woman's skirt, and to ask they had to have a reason. Fernando Lemos might have wished to examine Seraphine, but he did not ask to do it. When he noticed the swelling beneath her skirts, Lemos had presumably been told the same thing that the auctioneer who was selling her had been told: Seraphine was pregnant. It was not until after he bought her that he discovered a large tumor "which appeared cicatriced, which indicated that the same swelling had taken place before and had been operated on, it was about two inches from the groin." Those were the words of a doctor testifying on Lemos's behalf. Trying to prove that her "defect" was not an apparent one, he located it in a place that Lemos could not be expected to have found it: beneath her skirt.³⁶ A similar boundary between ordinary and extraordinary inspections was apparent in the testimony that Dr. James Clarke, a slave dealer's doctor under cross examination, gave about the venereal disease for which Cynthia was returned: "The disease . . . is such a one as would escape observation without a special examination was made for it and generally any venereal disease would escape the eye of anyone but a physician."³⁷

Once they had found a way to ask, however, buyers gave free reign to their curiosity. James Redpath described the "inner room" at Dickinson, Hill & Co. (also in Richmond): "The slaves—the males—were there . . . stripped naked, and carefully examined." As he described it, however, only one of the women sold that day was stripped: "She was 'warranted sound and healthy,' with the exception of a female complaint, to which mothers are occasionally subject, the name and nature

of which was unblushingly stated. She was taken into the inner room, after the bidding commenced, and there indecently '*examined*' in the presence of a dozen or fifteen brutal men." Redpath highlighted the public accounting of the medical concerns which got the woman into the room, but he went on to detail the "brutal remarks and licentious looks" that accompanied her return. The stated concern about the woman's capacity for reproduction served as public cover for a much more general interest in her naked body.³⁸ The careful stories buyers used to explain their actions were revealing denials of something everybody knew: that for white men, examining slaves, searching out hidden body parts, running hands over limbs, massaging abdomens and articulating pelvic joints, probing wounds and scars with fingers, was erotic. The buyers were getting closer to the bodies of slaves than any practical consideration could justify.

The rituals of the slave pens taught the inexperienced how to read black bodies for their suitability for slavery, how to imagine blackness into meaning, how to see solutions to their own problems in the bodies of the slaves they saw in the market. Gazing, touching, stripping, and analyzing aloud, the buyers read slaves' bodies as if they were coded versions of their own imagined needs—age was longevity, dark skin immunity, a stout trunk stamina, firm muscles production, long fingers rapid motion, firm breasts fecundity, clear skin good character. The purposes that slaveholders projected for slaves' bodies were thus translated into natural properties of those bodies—a dark complexion became a sign of an innate capacity for cutting cane, for example. Daily in the slave market, buyers "discovered" associations they had themselves projected, treating the effects of their own examinations as if they were the essences of the bodies they examined. Passed on from the experienced to the inexperienced, from the examiners to the on-lookers, the ritual practice of the slave pens animated the physical coordinates of black bodies with the purposes of slavery.

Slave-pen blackness held another meaning for slaveholders: it brought the outlines of slaveholding whiteness into sharper relief. The gross physical capacity of the slave was a rough background for the graceful motion of the slaveholder; all the talk about black "breeders" set off the elaborate rituals of white courtship; and the violation of black bodies emphasized the inviolability of white ones. Through shared communion in the rites of the slave market—the looking, stripping,

touching, bantering, and evaluating—white men confirmed their commonality with the other men with whom they inspected the slaves.

And yet, through the same gaze and beneath the same probing fingers, slaveholders were looking for a different set of (projected) qualities—qualities that were not, like those they attributed to their black field hands, opposite of the qualities they ascribed to themselves but, rather, were proximate to their own whiteness. The traders' efforts to codify that strain of proximate whiteness produced the antebellum South's most detailed racial taxonomy. Whereas the categories of the United States census were limited to "black" and "mulatto," the traders' detailed categories—"Negro," "Griffe," "Mulatto," "Quadroon," and so on—attempted much more precise measurement of imagined portions of "black" and "white" blood. And whereas the courts limited their own detailed investigations of blood quantum and behavior to drawing a legal line between "black" and "white," the traders' categories preserved a constant shifting tension between blackness and whiteness—a tension that was daily measured, packaged, and sold in the slave market.³⁹

As with blackness, slave-market whiteness was not simply a matter of skin color. To begin with, like blackness, it looked different on male bodies than on female ones. Over nine tenths of those advertised by a skill that was nondomestic—coopers, carpenters, draymen—were male. And light-skinned men were three times more likely to be assigned those jobs than were dark-skinned men.⁴⁰ Like Monday, who was labeled "mulatto" and sent to be trained as a cooper at the age of twelve, these men had been assigned a skill on the basis of their skin color. Indeed, slaveholders often "naturalized" the association of skill with skin color by attributing a particular mechanical or technological aptitude to successive generations of men from a single family, then training those men in this trade, and finally concluding from the success of the successive generations in learning that trade that the family had a natural predisposition to being, say, iron workers.⁴¹

No less than the field hands with whom they were sold in the market, the bodies of skilled slaves were interpreted as physical maps of their own commercial potential. Jacob, for instance, was a carpenter, who was described by his overseer as "six feet two inches high" and having "a scar below his left eye and the little finger of his hand (right) is off."⁴² Jacob's body, much like the dark-skinned and unskilled people driven by

the same overseer, was intelligible in terms of labor (the right hand that could hold a tool only loosely) and brutality (the left-eyed scar across from the overseer's own right hand). Like the supposed predisposition of "black" slaves for field work, the natural propensity of skilled slaves for their work was treated as if it were physically manifest in the outward appearance of their bodies. These bodies, however, aged differently than bodies set to work in the fields. The most expensive skilled slaves were men of about forty-five years old, well-past their full physical prime as a laborer but old enough to have mastered the intricate skills of their trade.⁴³ Their development was measured along the axis of their skill and intellectual development rather than their physical vitality.

Indeed, these men's presumed capacity for development sometimes made them seem threatening to slaveholders. Henry Bibb, whose skin was by his own account very light, remembered that he spent months in the New Orleans slave market before being sold. "No one would buy me for fear I would run away," he later wrote. Anticipating an examination by a prospective buyer, Bibb projected the evaluation previous buyers had made: "he would have doubtless brought up the same objection that others had brought up—that I was too white; and that they were afraid I could read and write; and would never serve as a slave but run away." Bibb, in fact, was ultimately able to keep his family together in the slave market, because the presence of his wife seemed to a buyer to diminish his high risk of running away. The association of masculinity with resistance and of whiteness with intelligence made light-skinned men like Henry Bibb as threatening to some slaveholders as their skills made them valuable to others. This worry tended to reduce their value overall. Whereas light-skinned women commanded a premium price in the market, light-skinned men did not.⁴⁴

It was on those light-skinned women that the eyes of buyers looking for domestic servants usually lingered. Over three quarters of the people advertised for sale as domestic servants were female,⁴⁵ and a disproportionate number of light-skinned women were chosen for these roles—an association typified by a slave trader's 1859 letter that put color before even qualification: "the girls are Brownskin and good house girls."⁴⁶ Sex, color, and domestic service were powerfully associated in minds of slave buyers. This is not to say that all domestic slaves were women or that all female domestic slaves were light-skinned—nei-

ther was the case. But taken altogether, the statistics show that just as those seeking field slaves associated darkness with masculine productivity, those buying household slaves associated lightness with feminine domesticity.

A word that comes up again and again in slaveholders' descriptions of the bodies of the light-skinned women they bought to work in their houses is "delicate." Alexina Morrison, for example, was described as "rather slender and delicate" by her former owner. Jane's in-between body seems to have been visually tailored to her in-between color: "a Griffe woman of medium size of delicate appearance." And Mary Ellen Brooks, who was sold as a house servant, was said to be light-skinned and "delicate." The descriptions of Jane and Mary Ellen Brooks come from court cases in which their health at the time of sale was at stake, and the witnesses who gave these descriptions had a stake in telling a story that emphasized infirmity. The repetition of the word "delicate," however, rather than, say, "sickly" or "puny," hints at a world of positive meaning made explicit by slave dealer Theophilus Freeman as he contemplated Eliza's stolen daughter Emily. "There were heaps and piles of money to be made for such an extra fancy piece as Emily would be," Freeman enthused, "She was a beauty—a picture—a doll—one of your regular bloods—none of your thick-lipped, bullet-headed, cotton [pickers]."⁴⁷ Freeman made explicit the assumption behind all these descriptions: these bodies were useless for production.

All of their race science and all of their superstition made slaveholders suspect that the whiteness in their female slaves made them ill-suited for the daily rigors they demanded of dark-skinned women. Indeed, in southern medical science, light skin ("mulattoism," slaveholders would have said) was associated with infertility; arguing from analogy, and putting all empirical evidence aside, writers often argued that "mulattoes," like the mules from whom they took their name, were unable to reproduce themselves.⁴⁸ Unproductive in the field and unprolific in the quarter, these women were the embodied opposites of the laborer/breeders slaveholders sought as field hands.

Those searching for domestic slaves paid attention to different body parts than did those looking for field slaves. Maria Donald, in reference to a thirty-year-old woman whom she had seen advertised, wrote "that age would suit us very well as we would like to have a cook with good eyesight." For Maria Donald, age was a diagnostic of fine motor skills

rather than general vitality or reproductive history: cleaning vegetables and boning fish did not require good health but they did require acute eyesight. A different set of concerns fixed Clarissa's body with meaning. The slave dealer who sold her remembered her as "very far from being a good looking woman, disfigured by the loss of her front teeth."⁴⁹ Clarissa's missing teeth were visually rather than medically problematic: hers was a body that was to be bought (or not) for appearances, and in the case of domestic servants, faces mattered.

The bodies of men bought to work in slaveholders' households were described according to the same set of race and gender conventions. Writing about a man who had been sent from the fields to work in her household, Virginia slaveholder Elizabeth Powell described his body as if it were in the midst of a material transformation: "Henry is right awkward as you might imagine but I think he will do very well. He seems to be very willing to learn and if his limbs were about half their present length I think he would be much more graceful—but he seems very much at a loss to know what to do with his hands." The long arms that had served Henry well in the field were a nuisance in the house; and whatever use his hands had been in tending tobacco, they were not much account without the animating spirit of service that Elizabeth Powell expected from her household servants. Indeed, as the historian Brenda Stevenson has shown, Powell was taking it upon herself to discipline Henry's body to fit his new job.⁵⁰ A similar set of concerns shows through a Louisiana slaveholder's description of his runaway slave Sam: "a bright mulatto, tolerably well grown for his age, with very long arms, rather disproportioned to his height and large feet, rather modest when spoken to; voice somewhat effeminate, his upper teeth a little projecting and slightly decayed which will be readily seen when he laughs."⁵¹ Sam's body was remarkable because of its ill proportion rather than its incapacity; his tooth decay, like Clarissa's missing teeth, was a matter of disfigurement rather than disability. Indeed, his mouth was of singular interest to his owner. His modest effeminacy was, perhaps, an outward marker of his innate suitability for domestic work, and his laughter a sign of the interiority that set him apart from other slaves.

As slaveholders looked over the people they bought to cook their meals, wash their clothes, and wait on their tables, they elaborated fantasies about their slaves' interior lives and intellectual capacity. John

Knight's new "errand boy," for instance, was "smart" and "intelligent." A man who had thought of buying Agnes remembered her as "a girl of unusual good sense." And Celestine was remembered in her owner's household for her mood: "she was always gay and singing." But the inner life slaveholders imagined for their domestic slaves went well beyond their mental acuity or their actions. Mary Ellen Brooks, who was variously described by the men who sold her as "delicate," "intelligent," "well-suited for a house servant," "fancy," and "a mulatto," was provided with a mattress on which to sleep in the slave market. The practice, one of the traders later recalled, was "usual with house servants." Similarly, Madison, "mulatto" by designation, was put to work as a cabin boy on the steamboat that carried him to the New Orleans market. The captain of the ship described Madison as "genteel" and explained that the slave "did not like to associate with the others, and it was on this account that he was kept about the cabin." The ship captain, like the slave trader who provided Mary Ellen Brooks with a mattress, attributed sensibilities and preferences to Madison that matched his own. He imagined that Madison desired a social proximity to whites commensurate with his imagined racial proximity—in other words, he saw Madison as a shadowed version of himself. And all of this in spite of the fact that Madison's presence in the cabin was, literally, on the captain's account: he had paid Madison's owner a dollar a day for the slave's service.⁵²

Like the association of light-skinned men with skilled work, the association of light-skinned women with domestic service was sometimes framed as a matter of biological descent. The young woman whom John Knight hoped would complement his "intelligent" errand boy was to be, like his own wife and daughters, "well-bred." He would perhaps have jumped at the chance to have a woman like the one Kitty Hamilton hoped to obtain: "I should very much like to own Frank," she wrote to her father, "her mother is a most excellent character & she is of a good breed."⁵³ The breeding that buyers talked about in relation to female household slaves was different from the rough talk about "breeders" that occurred elsewhere in the slave market. Buyers' descriptions of house slaves, like their descriptions of their slaveholding friends and neighbors, used phrases like "well-bred" and "good breeding" in a way that combined family heritage, reputed good character, and socialized physical bearing into a single stream of analysis.

In addition to outward delicacy and inward gentility, the racial gaze of the slaveholder projected sexual meaning onto the bodies of light-skinned women. Phillip Thomas simply described a woman he had seen in Richmond as "13 years old, Bright Color, nearly a fancy for \$1135." An age, a sex, a color, a price, and a fantasy. A longer description of Mildred Ann Jackson ran along the same lines: "She was about thirty years old. Her color was that of a quadroon; very good figure, she was rather tall and slim. Her general appearance was very good. She wore false teeth and had a mole on her upper lip. Her hair was straight." Jackson's body was admired for its form, for its delicacy and detail. Slave dealer James Blakeny made the density of the traffic between phenotype and fantasy explicit when he described Mary Ellen Brooks: "A very pretty girl, a bright mulatto with long curly hair and fine features . . . Ellen Brooks was a fancy girl: witness means by that a young handsome yellow girl of fourteen or fifteen with long curly hair." For slave buyers, the bodies of light-skinned women and little girls embodied sexual desire and the luxury of being able to pay for its fulfillment—they were projections of slaveholders' own imagined identities as white men and slave masters.⁵⁴

And so, at a very high price, whiteness was doubly sold in the slave market. In the first instance the hybrid whiteness of the slaves was being packaged and measured by the traders and imagined into meaning by the buyers: into delicacy and modesty, interiority and intelligence, beauty, bearing, and vulnerability. These descriptions of light-skinned slaves were projections of slaveholders' own dreamy interpretations of the meaningfulness of their skin color. Indeed, in the second instance, it was the buyers' own whiteness that was being bought. In buying these imagined slaves, they were buying for themselves ever more detailed fantasies about mastery and race. The qualities they projected onto their slaves' bodies served them as public reflections of their own discernment: they were the arbiters of bearing and beauty; their slaves were the show pieces of their pretensions; their own whiteness was made apparent in the proximate whiteness of the people they bought.

Ironically, these expensive flirtations with racial proximity, these commodifications of projected and imagined whiteness, were underwritten by the slaveholders' ideology of absolute racial difference. The saving abstraction "black blood"—later codified in law as the "one-drop rule"—held the power to distinguish nearly white people from really white people. Hence, perhaps, the attention to imperfection: Sam's lisp

and the decayed teeth you could see when he laughed; the mole over Mildred Ann Jackson's lip or the false teeth she had in front; the length and awkwardness of Henry's arms. These physical details were sallied forth to mark the boundary of difference between the authentic whiteness of the slaveholders and the almost-whiteness of their slaves. Visible on the face of things, these tiny imperfections preserved the tension between the underlying blackness and the asymptotic approximation to whiteness which made these slaves salable. As long as enslaved whiteness was legible as imitation, money could be made from the synergetic whiteness of slaveholder and slave.

Some slaves, however, were "too white to keep." That was how Edmund was described by the man who had sold him from Tennessee. The man's hope was that such a sale would make it more difficult for Edmund to escape from slavery, but, as it was, New Orleans suited the slave well: within a day of arriving in the city, Edmund had slipped unnoticed onto a steamboat and disappeared. So, too, Robert, who boarded the steamboat that carried him away from slavery and New Orleans as a white man. "I should have thought he was of Spanish origin," remembered one of his fellow passengers, "he was a man of clear skin and dark complexion." But more than the way Robert looked, the other passengers remembered the way he acted: "he was very genteely dressed and of a very genteel deportment"; "he had more the appearance of a gentleman than a plebeian"; and, almost every witness noted, "usually seated himself at the first table, high up, and near the ladies." Robert, it turned out, had once been a waiter, and he used the skills he had learned as a slave, the gentility and sociable palate of the server, to make his way into the confines reserved for the served. Alexina Morrison was likewise "too white." That is how she was described by the man who sold her in New Orleans, and indeed she proved so to be: blue-eyed and flaxen-haired, she escaped from her buyer and sued him for her freedom in the courts of Louisiana. One after another, her supporters came into court to testify that she was white in "her conduct and her actions."⁵⁵

Robert made it as far as Memphis before being arrested and sent to the slave market in New Orleans, where he very shortly died. Morrison was luckier: she was judged white by three Louisiana juries and lived as free while her case made its way through the courts, until the Civil War made the point moot. Edmund seems also to have made it to freedom.

No one who testified in the case brought to assign responsibility for his loss could even tell what boat he had used to escape. More than the escapes, which were few, however, it is the performances that are telling. At the margin, where enforced mimicry shaded into subversive performance, it was clear that the racialized salability of the slave market—whether it was blackness or proximate whiteness that was being sold—had to be acted out by the slaves.

The effect of these performances is evident at a century and a half's distance in slaveholders' descriptions of the slaves they bought, descriptions that lurched through a range of incompatibles as they tried to pack the infinite variety of physical bodies into the standardized racial categories of the slave market. William was "very black" if you asked his overseer, "not perfectly black, but dark brownish" if you asked his owner. Clarissa seemed "mulatto or copper colored" to the doctor who made a postmortem examination of her body; a neighboring slaveholder, however, had thought her "a Griff colored woman." Major was "dark brown" according to a man who had supervised him in a factory, but "black" according to a man who had supervised him on a farm. Polly was "whiter than quarteroon" according to one man who had owned her, and "a bright mulatto" according to another. Hubbard was "a tolerably dark Negro of a Sugar Bread complexion" if you asked one of the men who witnessed his sale, but he was "a kind of dark Griff, or copper colored" if you asked the dealer who sold him. Madison, finally, was "a genteel, good looking boy . . . permitted to wait on the passengers" aboard the steamboat, but in the slave market he was "free from any blemish, he was a muscular, strong looking boy and very heavily set."⁵⁶ The range of difference between these descriptions suggest that the racialized bodies these buyers thought they had discovered in the slave market were, in fact, being produced by their examinations—not in the sense that there was no physical body standing there until a buyer described it but in the sense that the racialized meaning of that body, the color assigned to it and the weight given to its various physical features in describing it, depended upon the examiner rather than the examined.

Indeed, these differing descriptions seem to reflect in miniature the presumptions of the broader economy in black and white: William seemed darker to the man who worked him in the field everyday than to the man who owned him but did not supervise his work; Clarissa

seemed lighter to a man who saw her dead than she did to a man who had judged her healthy; Major seemed darker when he worked with slaves in the field than he did when he worked with white men in the factory; Polly seemed whiter to the man who discovered that she was a free woman kidnapped from Alabama than to the man who had traded her as a slave; Hubbard seemed lighter to the man who had talked to him every day in the slave pens than he did to the witness who had only seen him sold; Madison was judged according to aesthetics and attitude by the man who put him to work as a waiter, but according to size and strength by the man who sold him as a cooper. Employment, health, countenance, clothes, conversation, desire, any number of things might have guided slaveholders' imaginations as they looked at slaves' bodies. Which is to say that slaves' bodies were shaped and shaded by what the traders were selling and what potential buyers were seeking.

So powerful, indeed, was the acquisitive gaze of the slaveholder that slave-market "blackness" or "whiteness" could occasionally be produced in opposition to the phenotype of the body to which they were applied. Many a person with light skin was nevertheless set to work in the fields, described perhaps like Andy Foster as "a mulatto boy with coarse features, large bone, stout made and rather awkward appearance," or like Bob as "a dark mulatto, raw-boned and muscular" and "a dark rough looking Negro." These men might have been instructed in the market, as was light-skinned, literate Henry Bibb, "to act very stupid in language and thought" but to "be spry" when told to move about—to perform slave-market blackness in order to make themselves more salable.⁵⁷ Many dark-skinned women, likewise, were bought to be sex workers or house servants. Indeed, although most dark-skinned women in the slave trade did not become domestic slaves, the majority of domestic slaves were dark-skinned, since light-skinned women were comparatively rare in the market and very expensive. The "blackness" or "whiteness" associated with particular types of slavery could be mapped onto slaves' bodies according to coordinates other than color—gender, size, shape, visage, and conversation, for instance. And then those bodies could, like young Henry's awkward arms, be disciplined to yield the meaning they had been assigned. As they compared the people in the market to one another, slaveholders broke physical bodies into pieces and traded them back and forth. The vitality associated with blackness might cancel out the vulnerability associated with

femininity in the search for a field hand, while a "bright disposition" might lighten a dark-skinned woman in the search for a domestic servant; a "rough" face might darken a light-skinned man, while "effeminacy" might lighten a dark-skinned one; an outwardly dull demeanor and the presence of wife and child might make a light-skinned man seem less likely to run away; and so on. In the slave market, buyers produced "whiteness" and "blackness" by disaggregating human bodies and recomposing them as racialized slaves.

The racism of the slave pens, however, was less an intended effect than a tool of the trade. To paraphrase the historian Barbara Jeanne Fields, the business of the slave pens was the buying and selling of slaves, not the production of wide-ranging ideas about racial proximity and inferiority. The buyer's most immediate interest in detailing an account of a slave's racial characteristics was getting a lower price. And the more accomplished he was at using the verities of antebellum racism to detail "faults and failings" of the slaves in the market, the less he could expect to pay for the slave he wanted to take home. When Virginia slaveholder Virginia Shelton wanted to reduce the value of the slaves in her uncle's estate so that she could afford to buy them for herself, for example, she did so through a detailed account of their inherited disabilities: "Lucy has been the mother of thirteen living children, of whom four only are living now; four others died with decided consumption between the ages of fifteen and twenty-five, and some of the others had something like it. John, Lucy's husband and the father of her two youngest children, died of consumption and all of his family go the same way. Jefferson . . . when he was growing up strained himself so much in lifting logs that he was diseased for a number of years and I presume is so now. Besides he drinks. Charley, of course, is scrofulous, though his mother's family were healthy, he takes it from his father's family. Margaret's weak arm ought to be considered and the present state of Frances' health."⁵⁸ Shelton, of course, had precisely the type of information that had been hidden from slave-market buyers by the process of the trade: a detailed biographical account of the slaves' health and history. In the absence of such information, buyers critiqued the slaves according to the physical details they uncovered through examination. Describing a man he had seen in the market but not bought, William Dickson remembered that "his underlip fell down too low—he appeared to keep his mouth open—his lips was thick and his

fingers too short to be a good cotton picker which were objections if witness had been going to purchase.”⁵⁹ Dickson used the conditional: these were not objections *to* purchasing, they were instead objections *if* he had purchased—they were part of the process of purchasing. Defect by defect, buyers could run slaves down until they could afford them. So it was that slave traders had to be so concerned with parts, that trader J. E. Carson demanded a price reduction when he bought the woman with the scar blistered onto her breast; that trader A. J. McElveen would worry that a slave’s missing toe would be “an objection to his Selling,” or that that slave trader David Wise could unflinchingly value a missing eye at twenty-five dollars.⁶⁰

Whether they bought slaves at public auctions or in private bargains made in the traders’ pens, by vocalizing their objectifying examinations, by reading slaves’ bodies aloud, buyers gained market leverage. Perhaps as importantly, they also gained respect in the slave market. “Marks were criticized with the knowing air assumed by horse dealers, and pronounced to be the results of flogging, vermin, or scrofula,” remembered Charles Weld of the Richmond slave market.⁶¹ By showing off what they saw, buyers established their authority as good judges of property, their “knowing air” warned the traders of their discernment and underwrote their offers with their body-reading ability. Charles Ball remembered watching a buyer make such a play on a country road. The trader who was carrying Ball south began by offering to sell at a price that was dressed up as a sacrifice: “as they were not able to keep up with the gang he would take twelve hundred dollars for the two.” The purchaser, Ball remembered, offered nine hundred, and when his offer was rejected “many faults and failing were pointed out in the merchandise. After much bargaining, and many gross jests on the part of the stranger, he offered a thousand dollars for the two, and said he would give no more.”⁶² In the buyer’s effort to get a lower price, the dirty jokes and detailed criticism were of a piece: they demonstrated the buyer’s familiarity with the slave business and lent credibility to his offer. His ability to read slaves’ bodies and make dirty jokes, his facility with the terms of slave-market racism, underwrote the hard bargain he drove with the trader.

And it was through hard bargains like the one that Ball described—through detailed physical examinations and publicized accounts of racial knowledge—that white men in the slave market cemented attach-

ments to one another and sorted themselves into a hierarchy of ability. By sharing out their knowledge of the mysteries of blackness, they made their claim for respect among their white peers. Indeed, in their public performance of their expertise—for example, in the passing on of the sly confidence relayed to Joseph Ingraham by a Natchez slave buyer that there was a peculiarly soft spot at the base of a slave's "angle"—slave buyers expressed their own barely concealed desire for the attention and admiration of the white men with whom they bought slaves.⁶³

If necromancy was the slave market's magic, race was its technology. Just as the magic of alchemy based its claims on the scientific techniques of chemistry and mineralogy, the necromancy of the slave pens was founded on the technology of biological racism. Without any reliable knowledge about the histories or identities of the people they met in the market, buyers turned to physical examination as the best method of comparison. In the slave market, the physical coordinates of human bodies—size, skin color, scars, physical carriage, and so on—were made meaningful through the application of slave buyers' medical, managerial, aesthetic, and sexual concerns. In the slave market, the racial ideologies by which slaveholders organized their society were put to work doing the hard work of differentiating commodities and negotiating prices.

As the experienced guided the eyes of the inexperienced, slaves' bodies were made racially legible. The buyers' inspections, the parts they fingered, the details they fetishized, and the homosocial connections they made with one another gave material substance to antebellum notions of "blackness" and "whiteness" and outlined for observers the lineaments of a racial gaze. Out of the daily practice of slavery, they reproduced the notions of race that underwrote the system as a whole.

Many of the observers in the pens, however, were not white, and the conclusions they drew from watching the buyers' inspections were quite different from those drawn by a man like Joseph Ingraham. For the slaves in the market, the examinations were revealing accounts of the buyers themselves, accounts that allowed them to guess what a buyer was looking for and, sometimes, to shape a sale to suit themselves.

Southern Culture in the Courtroom,” unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Stanford University, 1996, 245; John White, *Slave Record*, 1851, UMC; *Stewart v. Sowles*, #725, 3 La. Ann. 464 (1848), testimony of Theophilus Freeman, UNO.

47. *Kock v. Slatter*, #1748, 5 La. Ann. 734 (1850), testimony of James Blakeny, UNO.

48. For returned slaves resold see *Stewart v. Sowles*, #725, 3 La. Ann. 464 (1848); *Peterson v. Burn*, #912, 3 La. Ann. 655 (1848); *Kock v. Slatter*, #1748, 5 La. Ann. 734 (1850); *Romer v. Woods*, #1846, 6 La. Ann. 29 (1851); *Person v. Rutherford*, #3585, 11 La. Ann. 527 (1856); *Gatlin v. Kendig*, #6894, 18 La. Ann. 118 (1866). For higher prices and sale in different states see John White, *Slave Record*, 1851, *passim*, UMC. The other thing the traders did was return slaves themselves. Their legal rights were the same as any other slaveholders, and they could sue when they were dissatisfied or call previous owners “in warranty” when they were sued.

49. John White, *Slave Record*, *passim*.

50. John White, *Slave Record*, 1846 (David Overton, Megan Wells, Esther Taylor, Runel Causey, Berry), 1851 (Mary Ellette and her five children), 1852 (Abram Godwin, Kate King, and her three children), UMC.

5. Reading Bodies and Marking Race

1. Joseph Holt Ingraham, *The Southwest by a Yankee* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1835), I, 192–198. I have elided the following headings, the subjects of which are treated in other chapters, between “Demeanor of the Slaves” and “African Inferiority”; “Anxiety to be Sold” and “Buying a Wife.” For racial “environmentalism” of the type Ingraham eventually espoused see George Fredrickson, *The Black Image in the White Mind: The Debate on Afro-American Character and Destiny, 1817–1914* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), 12–16, 35–42, 126–129.

2. Ingraham, *The Southwest by a Yankee*, II, 194, 201, 239–240.

3. Winthrop D. Jordan, *White Over Black: American Attitudes to the Negro, 1550–1812* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1968); Barbara Jeanne Fields, “Ideology and Race in American History,” in J. Morgan Kousser and James M. McPherson, eds., *Region, Race, and Reconstruction: Essays in Honor of C. Vann Woodward* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 143–177; Barbara Jeanne Fields, “Slavery, Race, and Ideology in the United States of America,” *New Left Review*, 181 (1990), 95–118, quotation on 109; Thomas C. Holt, “Marking Race: Race-making, and the Writing of History,” *American Historical Review*, 50 (1995), 1–20. My approach embarks from the premises outlined by Fields and Holt. I am also indebted to Henry Louis Gates, Jr., ed., *Race, Writing, and “Difference”* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986); David Theo Goldberg, ed., *Anatomy of Racism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990); Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, “African-American Women’s History and the Metalanguage of Race,” *Signs*, 17 (1992), 251–274; Michael O’Malley, “Specie and Species: Race and the Money Question in the Nineteenth Century,” Nell Irvin Painter, “Response to Michael O’Malley,” *American Historical Review*, 99 (1994), 369–408; Colette Guil-

laumin, *Racism, Sexism, Power, and Ideology* (London: Routledge, 1995); and Mia Bay, *The White Image in the Black Mind: African-American Ideas about White People, 1835-1925* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

4. For religion and science see William Stanton, *The Leopard's Spots: Scientific Attitudes to Race in America, 1815-1859* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960); Thomas Gossett, *Race: The History of an Idea in America* (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1963); Fredrickson, *The Black Image in the White Mind*; Stephen Jay Gould, *The Mismeasure of Man* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1981); Reginald Horsman, *Josiah Nott of Mobile* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1987). For law, see William Fisher III, "Ideology and Imagery in the Law of Slavery," *Chicago-Kent Law Review*, 68 (1993), 1051-1086; Ariela Gross, "Pandora's Box: Slave Character on Trial in the Antebellum Deep South," *Yale Journal of Law and Humanities*, 7 (1995), 267-316; Thomas Morris, *Southern Slavery and the Law, 1619-1860* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996); Martha Hodes, *White Women, Black Men: Illicit Sex in the Nineteenth-Century South* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997); Walter Johnson, "Slavery, Whiteness, and the Market: The Strange Story of Alexina Morrison," *Journal of American History* (forthcoming March 2000); for jokes, stereotypes, minstrel shows, and literary culture (mostly in the North) see Ronald T. Takaki, *Iron Cages: Race and Culture in Nineteenth-Century America* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1979); Alexander Saxton, *The Rise and Fall of the White Republic: Class, Politics, and Mass Culture in Nineteenth-Century America* (London: Verso, 1990); David Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (London: Verso, 1991); Eric Lott, *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class* (New York: Oxford, 1993); and Holt, "Race Marking." For brutality as the staging of racial difference see Kirsten Fischer, "Embodiments of Power: Slavery and Sexualized Violence in Colonial North Carolina," paper delivered at the Tenth Berkshire Conference of the History of Women, University of North Carolina, June 7, 1996.

5. *Winfield v. Little*, #170, 7 La. Ann. 536 (1852) (Alexandria), testimony of Frazier Miller, James Calvitt, and G. E. Barton, UNO. I have substituted "Winfield" where the trial record reads "plaintiff."

6. See, for example, *Hepp v. Parker*, #1788, 8 Mart (N.S.) 473 (1830), testimony of L. A. Gaiennie, UNO; *Lemos v. Daubert*, #4198, 8 Rob. 224 (La. 1844), testimony of Dr. Duprerris, UNO; *Slater v. Rutherford*, #1021, 4 La. Ann. 382 (1849), testimony of R. P. Wilmoth, UNO; *Bloodgood v. Wilson*, #3272, 10 La. Ann. 302 (1855), testimony of Capt. Rowley and Dr. B. H. Moss, UNO; *Blum v. Beebe*, #5921, 15 La. Ann. 65 (1860), testimony of Severin Klopman, UNO; *Girault v. Zuntz*, #6445, 15 La. Ann. 684 (1860), testimony of J. J. McCormack, UNO.

7. John Knight to William Beall, March 18, 1844, John Knight Papers, RASP. These inspections, it should be stated explicitly, were performed both in the cases of slaves sold at "private" sales in the traders' pens and those sold at public auction. Auction houses had the same sort of lay-out and made the same sort of provisions for buyers to inspect slaves as did traders. This meant that the same daily reproduction of

racial knowledge on the part of slaveholders and the same possibility for slippery misrepresentation on the part of the slaves (see Chapter 6) characterized auction sales as other sales even though the mechanism of sale—especially in its presentation of buying a slave as a competition between white men—was more exaggerated.

8. Laurence Kotlikoff, "The Structure of Slave Prices in New Orleans, 1804–1862," *Economic Inquiry*, 17 (1979), 496–517; Judith Kelleher Schafer, "New Orleans Slavery in 1850 as Seen in Advertisements," *Journal of Southern History*, 47 (1981), 33–56; Michael Tadman, *Speculators and Slaves: Masters, Traders, and Slaves, in the Old South* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), 25–31; Jonathan Pritchett and Herman Freudenberger, "A Peculiar Sample: The Selection of Slaves for the New Orleans Market," *Journal of Economic History*, 52 (1992) 109–128; Robert Fogel and Stanley Engerman, eds., *The New Orleans Slave Sample, 1804–1862*, database available from the Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research.

9. *Lyons v. Kenner and Taylor*, #4770, Z Rob. 50 (1842), testimony of S. Bennett, UNO; *White v. Slatter*, #943, 5 La. Ann. 27 (1849), testimony of S. F. Slatter, UNO; *Huntington v. Brown*, #15, 7 La. Ann. 48 (1865), testimony of D. Donovan, UNO.

10. *Landry v. Peterson & Stuart*, #1025, 4 La. Ann. 96 (1849), testimony of Pascal Lebesque and Dr. Joseph Ford, UNO; *Bloodgood v. Wilson*, #3272, 10 La. Ann. 302 (1855), testimony of Richard Lee Fern, UNO; *Frierson v. Irvin*, #1050, 4 La. Ann. 277 (1849), plaintiff's petition, UNO. "Griff" or "griffe" is a slave trade word. In the era of the Atlantic slave trade it designated the child of an African and a Creole slave, but by the nineteenth century it had come to mean the offspring of a "Negro" and a "mulatto." The history of the word mirrors in miniature the historical evolution of the categories of the slave business from those based on nation to those based on race. See Guillaumin, *Racism, Sexism, Power, and Ideology*, 29–152.

11. John Knight to William Beall, January 27, 1844, John Knight Papers, RASP; William Hamilton to Kitty Hamilton, November 27, 1856, William Hamilton Papers, LSU; William Connor to Lemuel Connor, October 23, 1849, Lemuel Connor Papers, LSU; *Folse v. Kittredge*, #6580, 15 La. Ann. 222 (1860), testimony of F. A. Williamson, UNO.

12. Samuel Cartwright, *Southern Medical Reports*, 2 (1850), 427; see also Samuel Cartwright, "Report on the Diseases and Physical Peculiarities of the Negro Race," *New Orleans Medical and Surgical Journal*, 7 (1851), 697; John Knight to William Beall, February 7, 1844, John Knight Papers, RASP.

13. *Roquest v. Boutin*, #5446, 12 La. Ann. 44 (1858), testimony of Maria Pajaja, UNO; *Winfield v. Little*, #170 Alexandria, 7 La. Ann. 536 (1852), testimony of G. E. Barton, UNO; Cartwright, "Diseases and Physical Peculiarities of the Negro," 697.

14. Joseph Queen to Alonzo Snyder, October 4, 1847, Alonzo Snyder Papers, LSU. *Girault v. Zuntz*, #6445, 15 La. Ann. 684 (1860), testimony of J. B. Poindexter, UNO.

15. William Chambers, "Journal," reproduced in Frederick Olmsted, *Cotton Kingdom: A Traveler's Observations on Cotton and Slavery in the American South* (New York, 1862), II, 374; price list on the back of Dickinson and Hill slave price circular, June 26, 1860, William A. J. Finney Papers, RASP; Tyre to Thomas Glen, January

9, 1836, Tyre Glen Papers, RASP; John Brown, *Slave Life in Georgia: A Narrative of the Life, Sufferings, and Escapes of John Brown, a Fugitive Slave Now in England*, L. A. Chamerovzow, ed. (London, 1855; Savannah, GA: The Beehive Press, 1991), 16; see also Phillip Thomas to William Finney, July 26, 1859, William A. J. Finney Papers, RASP. On height and slave travelers' preferences see Pritchett and Freudenberg, "A Peculiar Sample," 109-128.

16. A. J. McElveen to Z. B. Oakes, August 25, 1853 in Edmund L. Drago, ed., *Broke by the War: Letters of a Slave Trader* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1991), 53, *passim*. See also *Fox v. Walsh*, #4733, 5 Rob. 222 (1843), testimony of Dr. Warren Stone and Edgar Montegut, UNO.

17. Nathan Brown to M. H., January 13, 1838; Solomon Northup, *Twelve Years a Slave*, Joseph Logsdon and Sue Eakin, eds. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1968), 52; Joseph Copes to Thomas J. Alsworth, March 16, 1859 and Joseph Copes to Jas. M. Grafton, April 2, 1859, Joseph Copes Papers, TU.

18. Charles Ball, *Fifty Years in Chains, or the Life of an American Slave* (1859; Detroit: Negro History Press, 1969), 68; *Stackhouse v. Kendall*, #1851, 7 La. Ann. 670 (1851), testimony of William S. Clark, A. Settle, and H. Stackhouse, UNO; *Banks v. Botts*, #2905, 10 La. 42 (1836), testimony of Oscar Kibbe and David B. Morgan, UNO.

19. *Marin v. Michel*, unreported Louisiana Supreme Court case #5298 (1858), testimony of Jacob Capan, Louis Caretta, and David Keane, UNO; Fredrika Bremer, *Homes of the New World*, 2 vols., Mary Howitt, trans. (New York: Harper Brothers, 1853), II, 203; Charles Richard Weld, *A Vacation Tour in the United States and Canada* (London: Longman, Brown, Green, and Longman, 1855), 300; James Redpath, *The Roving Editor, or Talks with Slaves in the Southern States* (New York: A. B. Burdick, 1859), 249-250; Henry Bibb, *Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb, An American Slave, Written by Himself* (1845), in Gilbert Osofsky, ed., *Puttin' on Ole Massa* (New York: Harper & Row, 1969), 114; Peter Randolph, *Sketches of Slave Life: Or Illustrations of the Peculiar Institution* (Boston: Published for the Author, 1855), 52; A. J. McElveen to Z. B. Oakes, July 10, 1853, July 29, 1852, May 10, 1854, in Drago, ed., *Broke by the War*, 43-51, 80; Cartwright, "Diseases and Physical Peculiarities of the Negro," 212.

20. Cartwright, *Southern Medical Reports*, 2 (1850), 427; John Knight to William Beall, February 7, 1844, John Knight Papers, RASP.

21. W. H. Yos to Owen Cox, May 7, 1849, Owen Cox Papers, LSU; John Knight to William Beall, January 27, 1844, John Knight Papers, RASP; Samuel Browning to Archibald Boyd, August 28, 1849, Archibald Boyd papers, RASP; Hector Davis price list, January 31, 1860, quoted in Tadman, *Speculators and Slaves*, 126.

22. Tadman, *Speculators and Slaves*, 29-31; Hector Davis price list, January 31, 1860, quoted in Tadman, *Speculators and Slaves*, 126. A. J. McElveen to Z. B. Oakes, January 6, 1852, in Drago, ed., *Broke by the War*, 43.

23. See White, 69-70, 95-103; Tadman, *Speculators and Slaves*, 121-132; Charles B. Dew, *Bond of Iron: Master and Slave at Buffalo Forge* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1994), 24.

24. John Knight to William Beall, May 22, 1845, John Knight Papers, RASP. See Brenda Stevenson, *Life in Black and White: Family and Community in the Slave South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 161.

25. *Person v. Rutherford*, #3585, 11 La. Ann. 527 (1856), testimony of Alfred A. Robards; *Slater v. Rutherford*, #1021, 4 La. Ann. 382 (1849), testimony of R. P. Wimoth; *McDermott v. Cannon*, #5706, 14 La. Ann. 313 (1859), testimony of J. W. Boazman; *Lynch and Wiesman v. McRae*, unreported Louisiana Supreme Court Case #270 (1859), testimony of Calvin Rutherford, UNO.

26. Juriah Harriss, "What Constitutes Unsoundness in the Negro," *Savannah Journal of Medicine*, 2 (1858), 220; Weld, *A Vacation Tour*, 300-301; Redpath, *The Roving Editor*, 10; W. H. Yos to Owen Cox, May 7, 1847, Owen Cox Papers, LSU; Phillip Thomas to William Finney, December 24, 1859, William A. J. Finney papers, RASP; *Lemos v. Daubert*, #4198, 8 Rob. 224 (La. 1844), testimony of Dr. Allarsi, UNO; *Matthews v. Pascal's Executors*, #3287, 13 La. 53 (1839), testimony of Andrew Collins, UNO; *Roca v. Slawson*, #1781, 5 La. Ann. 708 (1850), testimony of Dr. John F. Hayes, UNO; Dew, *Bond of Iron*, 255; *Rist v. Hagan*, #4503, 8 Rob. 106 (La. 1844), testimony of Dr. R. H. Lewis and Johns Collins, UNO. One Louisiana doctor maintained that treatments like cupping and blistering left a more distinct impression on black bodies than on white ones: "I mean to say the boy had scars on his stomach which looked new as a Negro's skin will for ten days after a mustard plaster has been applied and has a much more distinct appearance on them than when applied to white persons." *Alexander v. Hundley*, #5276, 13 La. Ann. 327 (1858), testimony of Dr. James S. Sandige, UNO.

27. Northup, *Twelve Years a Slave*, 53; A. J. McElveen to Ziba Oakes July 10, 1853, August 4, 1853, July 10, 1856, in Drago, ed., *Broke by the War*, 43, 46, 123, *passim*; Weld, *A Vacation Tour*, 301; W. H. Yos to Owen Cox, May 7, 1841, Owen Cox Papers, LSU; *Lemos v. Daubert*, #4198, 8 Rob. 224 (La. 1844), testimony of Dr. Allarsi, UNO; *Rist v. Hagan*, #4503, 8 Rob. 106 (La. 1844), testimony of John Collins, UNO; *White v. Guyot*, #5086, 4 Rob. 108 (1843), testimony of Dr. Dancreau, UNO.

28. Herman Freudenberger and Jonathan Pritchett, "The Domestic United States Slave Trade: New Evidence," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 21 (1991), 447-449; Judith Kelleher Schafer, "The Immediate Impact of Nat Turner's Insurrection on New Orleans," *Louisiana History*, 21 (1980), 361-376.

29. *Smith v. Taylor*, #5755, 10 Rob. 133 (La. 1845), testimony of Joseph Pulliam and John Bartel, UNO.

30. Judith Kelleher Schafer, *Slavery, the Civil Law, and the Supreme Court of Louisiana* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1994), 130-131, 136-148; Gross, "Pandora's Box: Slave Character on Trial in the Antebellum Deep South," 283-295; Cartwright, "Diseases and Physical Peculiarities of the Negro," 707-715. Cartwright thought that "the hebetude of mind and obtuse sensibility of body . . . called by overseers 'Rascality'" could be detected in physiological signs: lesions on the skin; dry skin; spongy, dark, recessive gums.

31. William Pettigrew, document giving account of his reasons for selling Jim (in

New Orleans), written sometime after March 4, 1853, William Pettigrew Papers, UNC. Louisiana planter John Palfrey invoked an earlier (Calvinist) formulation of the same idea when he referred to the “natural depravity” of one of his slaves, John Palfrey to Palfrey and Taylor, January 5, 1820, John Palfrey Papers, LSU.

32. James D. Davidson to William Weaver, December 21, 1854, quoted in Dew, *Bond of Iron*, 105; John Knight to William Beall, July 7, 1844, John Knight Papers, RASP; John Bisland to D & H, n.d., John Bisland Papers, LSU; *Donnet v. Ramsay*, #1468, 6 Mart. (N.S.) 129 (1827), letter from Thomas Fleming to James Ramsay included in evidence, UNO. See also Kenneth S. Greenberg, *Honor and Slavery: Lies, Duels, Noses, Masks, Dressing as a Woman, Gifts, Strangers, Humanitarianism, Death, Slave Rebellions, The Proslavery Argument, Baseball, Hunting, and Gambling in the Old South* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 24–50.

33. *Lemos v. Daubert*, #4198, 8 Rob. 224 (La. 1844), testimony of Maurice Barnett, UNO; *Peterson v. Burn*, #912, La. Ann. 655 (1848), testimony of Dr. Slade; Northup, *Twelve Years a Slave*, 52–53.

34. Weld, *A Vacation Tour*, 300.

35. *White v. Guyot*, #5086, 4 Rob. 108 (1843), testimony of Walter McEvers, UNO. *Herries v. Botts*, #3635, 14 La. Ann. 432 (1840), decision of the Supreme Court, UNO.

36. *Lemos v. Daubert*, #4198, 8 Rob. 224 (La. 1844), testimony of Maurice Barnett and Dr. Allarsi, UNO. The fraud alleged in this case was on the part of the seller, Daubert, not the broker/auctioneer, Barnett; the law under which the suit was brought required that the malady sued for be one that was not readily apparent at the time of the sale. The same sensibility may be reflected in a Louisiana slaveholder's clearly bounded account of his search for the “dark marks on the back bone” which he believed proved African descent: “examined the girl down to the waist;” see *Morrison v. White*, #442, 16 La. Ann. 100 (1861), testimony of G. H. Lyons, UNO.

37. *Person v. Rutherford*, #5383, 11 La. Ann. 527 (1856), testimony of Dr. James Clarke, UNO. For suits in which the plaintiff claimed to have missed existing syphilis when buying a slave see *Compton v. Woolfolk*, #2583, 6 La. 272 (1834); *Peterson v. Burn*, #912, La. Ann. 655 (1848); *Jourdan v. Virgil*, #1098, 5 La. Ann. 40 (1850); and *Roquest v. Boutin*, #5446, 14 La. Ann. 44 (1858). For a case in which a woman's syphilis was acknowledged at the time of her sale see *Virgil v. Dawson*, #854 (Monroe), 15 La. Ann. 532 (1860). For a case of a woman's varicose veins allegedly missed at the time of purchase see *Palms v. Kendig*, #6279, 15 La. Ann. 264 (1860). And for a case in which a man's undiscovered syphilis is mentioned, although not sued for, see *Matthews v. Pascal's Executors*, #3287, 13 La. 53 (1839), UNO.

38. Redpath, *The Roving Editor*, 246–252. None of this is to say that all of the shame in the slave market was of the heterosexual variety, or that the only reason that buyers did not strip slaves was the discomfort symbolized by the screens. Time and trouble may have kept some buyers from looking as closely as they would have liked, and there may have been a distinction attached to buying without looking too

closely. As slave dealer C. F. Hatcher put it about a slave he had sold without stripping: "I looked at the boy talked to him, he seemed perfectly sound & healthy. If the boy had been diseased at the time I should have persevered it." With a gaze as acute as his own, Hatcher thought he did not need to look any closer. *Lynch and Wiesman v McRae*, unreported Louisiana Supreme Court Case #270 (1859), testimony of C. F. Hatcher, UNO.

39. On race in the antebellum courts see Morris, *Southern Slavery and the Law*; Schafer, *Slavery, the Civil Law, and the Supreme Court of Louisiana*; Hodes, *White Women, Black Men*; Ariela J. Gross, "Litigating Whiteness: Trials of Racial Determination in the Nineteenth-Century South," *Yale Law Journal*, 108 (1998), 107-188; Walter Johnson, "Slavery, Whiteness, and the Market."

40. Schafer, "New Orleans Slavery in 1850," 53-54; Fogel and Engerman, eds., *The New Orleans Slave Sample, 1804-1862*, databaes available from the Inter-University Consortium for Social and Political Research.

41. Dew, *Bond of Iron*, 174, 193.

42. *George v. Greenwood*, #3687, 11 La. Ann. 299 (1856), testimony of John M. Crawford, UNO.

43. Kotlikoff, "The Structure of Slave Prices in New Orleans," 504.

44. Bibb, *Narrative*, in Osofsky, ed., *Puttin' on Ole Massa*, 114-117, 137; on the gendering of slaveholders' fears of slaves' resistance see Gross, "Pandora's Box: Slave Character on Trial in the Antebellum Deep South," 283-300. Kotlikoff, "The Structure of Slave Prices in New Orleans," 515. See also Stevenson, *Life in Black and White*, 181.

45. Fogel and Engerman, *New Orleans Slave Sample*; Schafer, "New Orleans Slavery in 1850," 53-54. See also Kotlikoff, "The Structure of Slave Prices in New Orleans," 502-506, and Stevenson, *Life in Black and White*, 196.

46. Phillip Thomas to William Finney, January 24, 1859, William A. J. Finney Papers, RASP.

47. *Morrison v. White*, #442, 16 La. Ann. 100 (1861), testimony of Moses Morrison, UNO. *Perkins v. Shelton*, unreported Louisiana Supreme Court Case #5654 (1859), testimony of Dr. Stephen T. Rushing, UNO; *White v. Slatter*, 943, 5 La. Ann. 27 (1849), testimony of Francis Jump, UNO; Northup, 58.

48. Fredrickson, *The Black Image in the White Mind*, 75-80; Joel Williamson, *New People: Miscegenation and Mulattoes in the United States* (New York: Free Press, 1980), 94-96; Stephen Jay Gould, *The Mismeasure of Man* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1981), 39-52. [illegible] to Lemuel Connor, September 9, 1853, Lemuel Connor Papers, LSU.

49. Maria Donald to Ben, January 20, 1851, Campbell Papers, DU; *Coulter v. Cresswell*, #2734, 7 La. Ann. 367 (1852), testimony of David Wise, UNO.

50. Elizabeth Powell Conrad to Burr Powell, December 25, 1829 (?), quoted and analyzed in Stevenson, *Life in Black and White*, 197-198.

51. *Frierson v. Irvin*, #1050, 4 La. Ann. 277 (1849), Document B, UNO.

52. John Knight to William Beall, February 16, 1835, John Knight Papers, RASP; *Walker v. Haynes*, #6606 (Monroe), 15 La. Ann. 640 (1860), testimony of

J. D. Hair, UNO; *Cohn v. Costa*, 6252, 15 La. Ann. 612 (1860), testimony of Celeste DeRosemon, UNO; *White v. Slatter*, 943, 5 La. Ann. 27 (1849), testimony of Francis H. Jump and Hope H. Slatter, UNO; *Slater v. Rutherford*, #1021, 4 La. Ann. 382 (1849), testimony and re-examination of Hiram Goodrich, UNO. In *Life in Black and White*, 241, Brenda Stevenson has pointed out that light-skinned slaves may have been "socialized" from a very early age to hold the sensibilities that slaveholders attributed to their skin color.

53. John Knight to William Beall, February 16, 1835, John Knight Papers, RASP; Kitty Hamilton to William Hamilton, July 21, 1856, Hamilton Papers, LSU.

54. Phillip Thomas to William Finney, July 26, 1859, William A. J. Finney Papers, RASP; *Fisk V. Bergerot*, #6814, 21 La. Ann. 111 (1869), testimony of Charles Goddard, UNO; *White v. Slatter*, 943, 5 La. Ann. 27 (1849), testimony of James Blakeny, UNO.

55. *Hill v. White*, #4489, 11 La. Ann. 170 (1856), testimony of Lewis Bowers, UNO; *Williamson v. Norton (Western World)*, #2427, 8 La. Ann. 393 (1852), testimony of Rufus Blanchard on direct and cross examination, UNO; *Morrison v. White*, #442, 16 La. Ann. 100 (1861), testimony of W. J. Martin, Clawson, Cannon, and Kemper, UNO. For the whole Morrison story see Johnson, "Slavery, Whiteness, and the Market."

56. *Banks v. Botts*, #2905, 10 La. 42 (1836), testimony of Oscar Kibbe and David B. Morgan, UNO; *Coulter v. Cresswell*, #2734, 7 La. Ann. 367 (1852), testimony of David C. Ross and Mrs. Jacques Conrad, UNO; *Stackhouse v. Kendall*, #1851, 7 La. Ann. 670 (1851), testimony of James W. Field and William Clark, UNO; *Gottshalk v. DeLaRosa*, #2550, 6 La. 219 (1834), defendant's answer and testimony of John Hand, UNO; *Stewart v. Sowles and Hite*, #725, 3 La. Ann. 464 (1848), testimony of William Morgan and H. B. Kenner, UNO; *Slater v. Rutherford*, #1021, 4 La. Ann. 382 (1849), testimony of Hiram Goodrich and R. P. Wimoth, UNO.

57. *Foster v. Mish*, #6344, 15 La. Ann. 199 (1860), testimony of A. G. Collins, UNO; *Smith v. McDowell*, #4431, 3 Rob. 430 (1843), testimony of Richard Lands and John Hurkette, UNO; Bibb, *Narrative*, in Osofsky, ed., *Puttin' on Ole Massa*, 139.

58. Virginia Shelton to her brother, December 3, 1859, Campbell Papers, DU.

59. *Palmer v. Taylor*, #4755, 1 Rob. 412 (1842), testimony of William Dickson, UNO. See also *Freret v. Stackhouse*, unreported Louisiana Supreme Court case #5200 (1855), and W. H. Yos to Owen Cox, May 7, 1847, Owen Cox Papers, LSU.

60. Dew, *Bond of Iron*, 255; A. J. McElveen to Ziba Oakes, July 13, 1853, reproduced in Drago, ed., *Broke by the War*, 44; *Coulter v. Cresswell*, #2734, 7 La. Ann. 367 (1852), testimony of David Wise, UNO.

61. Weld, *A Vacation Tour*, 299.

62. Charles Ball, *Fifty Years a Slave, Or the Life of an American Slave* (New York, 1859), 35-36.

63. Ingraham, *The Southweest by a Yankee*, II, 135. See Lott, *Love and Theft*, and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985).