The masters' education in slaves' politics was painful, and Grimball detailed his in a series of compulsive lists. In 1862 and again in 1863 when his father-in-law's slaves also managed a mass escape, Grimball struggled with financial and cognitive collapse. Like a man picking through the ruins of a house after a bomb blast, he made and annotated lists of "those that remain," the sixty or so slaves who had not hazarded the run to the steamer. On March 8 he made a list "of the Negroes belonging to J. B. Grimball who left the Grove and Pineberry Plantation on the night of the 2nd March 1862 and deserted [an appropriately military term] to the Yankees at Edisto Island." Again on March 12 he made a list "of my absconding negroes." Grimball was worried that the slaves had ruined him financially. But his distress went beyond the financial. "This is a terrible blow," he admitted. But it was his wife who took the proper measure of it all: "Mr. Grimball is quite unstrung by it," she said.[68]

There was little comforting to Grimball in the patterns discerned in those lists, but much of interest to those attempting to grasp the extent and nature of slave insurrection in the American Civil War. On the Pon Pon a whole people got up and left. On the Grove, the youngest to depart was a baby, just two months old, carried in her mother's arms, the oldest a slave of 62. Eighteen were children under 15 years of age. Indeed, the group included virtually every family formation imaginable. The families in the exodus were mostly two-generational, including grown children and their parents. There were mothers and children: Daphne, a 45-year-old woman, and her children, one son aged 13 and a daughter aged 18; Affy, who was 40 years old, and her three sons, one touchingly called "hard times." There were fathers and their children: Poyas John, who was 38, and his daughter Julia, who was only 10. Siblings stuck together, Isaac who was 35 leading his younger brother and two sisters; Rose who left with her son and younger sister, who were her whole family. Sons took their aged mothers, as did Richard who took Old Tyrah. In Grimball's lists virtually every family group could be seen, except,

strangely enough, husband and wife. Meta Morris Grimball noticed the pattern: "Wives leave their husbands, the men their wives, but they all seem to cling to their children."[69]

In the first big exodus from the Grove, many of the slaves braved Confederate pickets to make the dangerous run to the gunboat and the unknown existence that awaited down the Edisto River. Women were just as likely to take that risk as men. When morning came, more than half of the women on the Grove had gone. Grimball was especially distressed by the disappearance of Kit, the cook, who was, he noted scathingly, the first to go off: she absconded from town on November 11, 1861, just days after the federal fleet arrived. And the whole family obsessed over Diana, one of his father-in-law's slaves, whose decision to leave her husband behind in another mass escape a year later seemed somehow to hold the key to the whole affair.[70]

Whatever the particulars, it is the pattern that speaks most powerfully. For it directs attention to the central role slave women played in the destruction of slavery on Confederate plantations during the Civil War, a part rarely registered by the military authorities or the historians who rely on their records. It was obvious to all on the Grove on the morning of March 3, 1862, and to the federal authorities who received them on the boat, that women were at the very center of slaves' political networks and strategies of resistance, as much a part of the destruction of slavery as men were. That was as true of the Civil War South as it was of every other slave rebellion or liberation struggle in the slave zone in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In Saint-Domingue, Guadeloupe, Jamaica, Cuba, and elsewhere, women were "equal and active participants in . . . insurrectionary conspiracies," party to all of the tactics used by slaves, not excluding membership in armed maroon bands. Nor were women spared the violence that everywhere attended resistance. In Saint-Domingue, women regularly showed up on lists of rebels and leaders, including those targeted for execution, just as the women on Gowrie, the Grove, and other Civil War plantations were not spared the retributive violence of planters, Confederate guerillas, and the military.[71]

That dimension of slave emancipation would be lost as state authorities' competition for the military labor of slave men came to dominate events. Even as contraband policy was formulated during the war, Union

authorities began to construct the "contraband"—and thus "the slaves in rebellion"—as male, a process that masculinized the emancipation struggle and conceived of women as dependent parties or political minors in it. The view from plantations like Gowrie or the Grove is thus significant, not least because it affords a strikingly different perspective from the statist one.[72]

In 1863 John Berkley Grimball had his real moment of truth. Faced with another mass escape of slaves, this time from his father-in-law's plantation, Grimball's desperate attempts to insist that they had "been taken off" by the Yankees collapsed. Meta Morris Grimball stopped talking about slaves being forced off and finally admitted what they all now knew: the slaves wanted freedom. "The poor creatures have all gone wild with the idea of being free." Slaves on the Pon Pon River had left their putative owners no illusions about their intention to adhere to the nation's enemies and destroy slavery in the process.[73] Grimball's investment in the Confederate project of perpetuating slavery for future generations was destroyed. In 1863 he sold his remaining slaves. His, at least, would not count as an element of strength in war. So even as Confederate military officials went on demanding slaves, executing orders of impressment, planters like Grimball struggled to contend with the forces secession and war had unleashed, not least of which was the new salience of their slaves' politics and adherence to their enemies.

In 1862 and 1863, especially after the Emancipation Proclamation, slaves struggled to harness, and masters to contain, the volatile new possibilities of political life in the war zone. Sometimes the rhythms of ordinary life gave way within seconds to moments of world-historical significance. There was one such moment on a farm near Berryville, Virginia, in February 1863. The owner was Sigismunda Stribling Kimball, the slaveholding woman whose family owned two farms in the vicinity. With her husband deployed nearby in the valley in Stonewall Jackson's army, she and her elderly relatives were left to run the farms and control the slaves on them. That was no easy task, for Berryville was only about eight miles from Winchester, and in 1862 and 1863 Kimball's farm was occupied alternately by two armies. In early November 1862, Confederate troops were quartered on her farm; in late November, Yankees were. Turnovers were quick: "We are again in Dixie," she wrote ecstatically on December 6; "Yankees in Berryville," gloomily on December 27.[75]

The slaves in Kimball's household understandably proceeded with caution. Their very household was a militarized zone, and even Union soldiers when encamped there were hardly predictable allies. Indeed, in April 1862, during a period of Union occupation, their mistress was one of the women who had succeeded in getting orders of protection from the local Union commander, Colonel McDowell, who posted a five-man guard at her gate "to protect us" from a marauding unit of Michigan cavalry. The men and women enslaved on Kimball's farm surely learned, as did

she, that the soldiers posted were "no abolitionist[s]" and had no stomach for a war of emancipation. But they would also have learned that the troops had recently been read an order from the U.S. secretary of war instructing all of them "that fugitives should not be returned to their masters." Mixed but promising messages. Unsure about the reception they would receive, slaves on Kimball's farm appear to have bided their time through at least three different periods when the locality changed hands. The first ones to claim a tenuous freedom in attachment to the Union army made their move only when General Banks, Colonel McDowell, and their men were forced to retreat from Berryville to Winchester in April 1862 and then from Winchester after two months of Union occupation. Perhaps thinking it was their last chance, some felt they had to make a choice, and three of Kimball's slaves, all men, took off, one stealing a wagon and two horses, which he used to gather up family members from two other farms in the neighborhood before he "put off to Winchester." It seemed to be a family exodus, but given the marital and family patterns of Upper South slaves, it was imperfectly accomplished before the window of opportunity closed and they were "again in Dixie," as Kimball crowed.[76]

But the real drama of emancipation on Sigismunda Kimball's farm came six months later when Kimball's slaves or their relatives returned, fully possessed of the awesome power of the Union state: the Emancipation Proclamation and troops to enforce it. Then, in what can only be called a moment of truth, Kimball was instructed in the new terms on which the struggle with her slaves was henceforth to be conducted. High drama it was, too, in late January 1863 when the Yankees rode back in and white Union soldiers "piloted by negro men" appeared at local plantations with official orders to remove the men's wives and children. Rumors flew around the neighborhood of slaves seized by orders of General Milroy. Kimball noted one such set of orders sent to her neighbor to "release to Mr. John Washington his wife and six children . . . persons once slaves but now free by the president's proclamation of January 1st." The strategy was not confined to Virginia. In other places where slaves could reach the Union army, they tried to enlist white soldiers in their project of liberating family members. One slave in Florida wrote a Union general providing directions to the plantation on which three generations of his family were held, asking him the "small favor" of detouring his troops by there. "Sir it

isent mor then three or four Hours trubel . . . Sir, my Farthers Name Adam Harris he will Call them all to gether & tel him to take Cousan janes childarn with hime."[77] In Berryville it was rare to find three generations on one plantation. But in Berryville, unlike some other parts of the Confederacy, the Emancipation Proclamation had immediate local meaning.

Two weeks after her neighbor, it was Kimball's turn. On February 24, 1863, two Yankees piloted by two enslaved men she knew appeared in her yard with a wagon, "dashed up to the Negro house," and began to load other slaves onto the wagon. Kimball's mother went to the door because Kimball was, she said, "too mad to speak." "Mother said, I would like to ask what you came for. He replied, pointing to William [a slave who belonged to a neighbor] I came to take that man's brother's wife away," pointing now to Farinda, Kimball's slave, whose husband Phill had run to the Yankees the previous week and sent his brother back with troops to get her. "By what authority," Kimball said, asking the million-dollar question. "The authority of the Commanding General, Gen. Milroy," the officer answered. Milroy "has no right to take them," Kimball stormed, "they do not belong to him." "O," he replied, a historical transformation condensed in a second, "they do not belong to any one, the government has fixed that." And with that he hitched up four horses to a wagon, put Farinda and her child in, and prepared to go. Asked by the white soldiers what she wanted to take of plantation property, Farinda—in her one appearance in the historical record as the teller of her own tale—replied memorably that "she did not want anything but herself."[78]

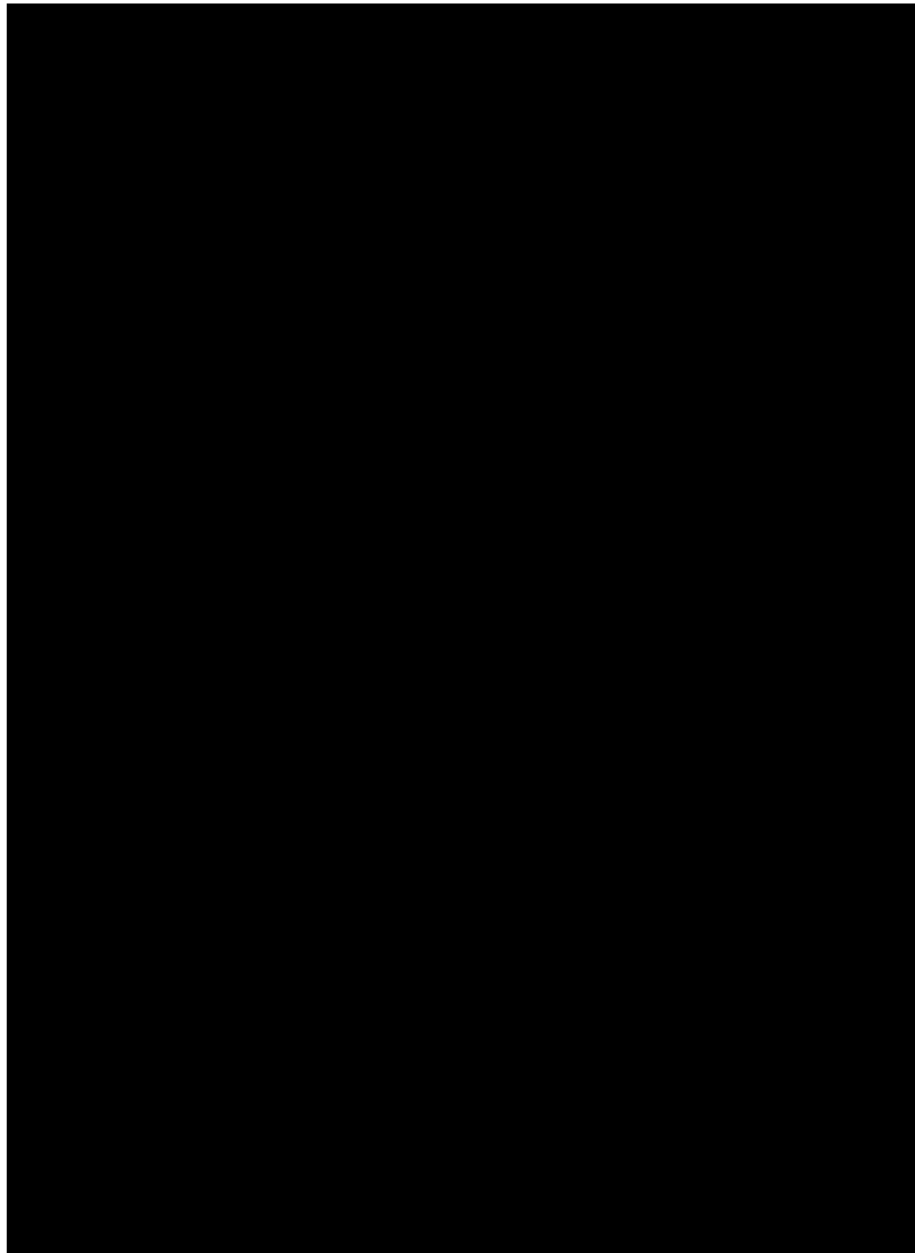
Some slaves would continue to bide their time, lacking confidence in Union motives or anticipating reversals that could turn deadly. Kimball smugly recounted the interview between the Yankees and her elderly slave man George, who when asked why he did not go North reportedly said, "There are more people north now than ought to be there." Folks had plenty of reasons to stay put. One South Carolina woman explained that she could not leave because her master had her teenage son hidden away in the swamp. On many farms and plantations, as on Kimball's, some slaves stayed put while others went off. Of Virginia planter William Wickham's 268 slaves, 56 went off to the Yankees in 1863. As usual about 40 percent of the fugitives were women. But in Virginia, as in the coastal areas of other Atlantic states, many planters lost all their slaves to the enemy.[79]

Seizing the opportunities of war, Virginia slaves, like those on Kimball's farm, established themselves as allies of the enemy army, always and everywhere in clear pursuit of their own war aims, not least emancipation and family reconstitution.

In the seat of war such moments as those on Kimball's farm could be anything but definitive. Slaves, including Phill and Farinda, struggled desperately to stick close to the federal army, the only basis yet of any real claim to status as free persons. Theirs was a highly precarious freedom, easily revoked in the exigencies of war and, in places like the Shenandoah Valley, the constant turnover of territory. Winchester-area slaves were regularly recaptured when Confederates seized Union units and supply wagons and faced the summary justice that went with that reversal of fortune. When one Confederate soldier asked for instructions on what to do with runaways caught by his scouts, his commanding officer told him to proceed at once to hold a drumhead court-martial and if guilty to hang them on the spot. It was especially difficult for women and children whose presence in the rear of moving columns of troops or in ramshackle camps around the outskirts of encamped armies was entirely unwanted.[80]

All over the C.S.A. enslaved men and women worked toward the destruction of slavery tactically and in stages, emboldened by the post-1862 turn in Union policy that brought Union war aims more closely in line with their own. Planters, whether in Union-occupied territory, in contested territory, or in areas solidly under Confederate control, all struggled with the consequences of the diminishment of their authority and what they perceived to be the expansion of their slaves' arena of choice. To John Houston Bills, a Tennessee planter caught in the river war of 1862 and 1863, plantation life and labor went on, but he felt entirely at the mercy of his slaves' decisions: "I have got possession to day of all my servants," he wrote in September 1862. "How long they will stay out of the federal lines no one knows." "I have no confidence when all our authority is gone," he concluded. Bills tried to resign himself to a situation, common in the Mississippi Valley by mid-1862, in which planters could not rely on the state or Confederate government to back up their authority as masters. Without the means of state violence at their control, planters could hardly operate. Bills just called it a mutiny. Of the slaves he said, "Many of them I think do all they can to have us destroyed and delight in

seeing the work of destruction done."[81] The mutiny played out in a multitude of ways, but few Confederate masters would have doubted the truth of Bills's observation.



It certainly made for high drama that among those Mississippi and