Introduction

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

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

Questions for Discussion

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

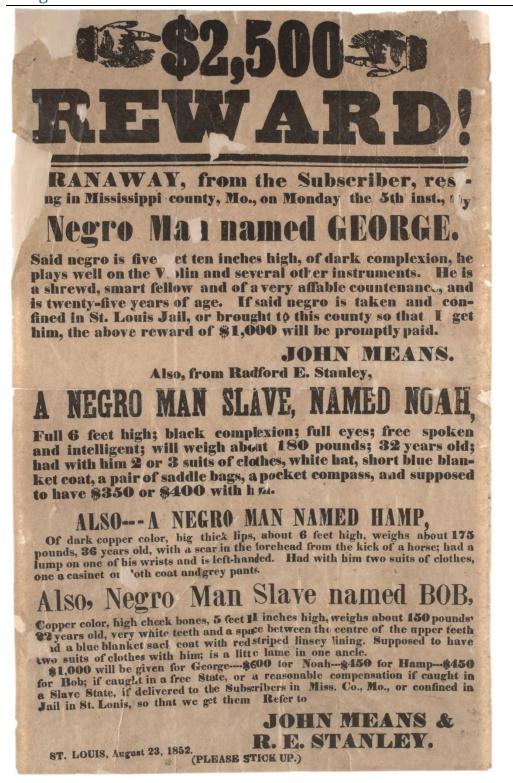
- 1. Frequently slaveholders claimed that enslaved people were ignorant and uneducable. What information provided by the owners of George and Noah actually destroy the claim?
- 2. How can we explain the \$1,000 offered for the return of George, as compared to the lower rewards offered for the other runaways?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

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Runaway slave ad, 1852

Image



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

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