"A Loathsome Prison:" Slave Trading in Antebellum Alexandria

Introduction

Located on the outskirts of the nation's capital during the nineteenth century, a three-story brick building served as the epicenter of the domestic slave trade in the United States from 1828 until 1841. Serving as a slave trading firm during the height of the domestic slave trade and well up to the Civil War, it was during the house's occupation by the firm of Franklin and Armfield that the site had its greatest success in the selling of humans as commodities, morally placing Franklin and Armfield on the fringes of society. Although only the main building of a sprawling complex that once supported the daily operations of an effective and successful slave pen remains, tell tale signs in the basement of this structure hint at the probable use of this area as sleeping quarters for the enslaved who were temporarily housed here en route to market in the southwestern states.

Courtesy of the Library of Congress Prints & Photograph Division.

Photograph by Caridad de la Vega.

Given the subsequent transformation of the block, one would be hard pressed to imagine that this unassuming three-story building was once the center of the biggest slave trading firm in the South; however, one can imagine that this building was not a welcome site to the thousands of enslaved persons brought here to await their eventual fate hundreds of miles away in Natchez and New Orleans. The firm of Franklin and Armfield consisted of three yards; the west yard held the men while the east yard contained the women; a kitchen, tailor's shop and stable were also present at that time. High, white-washed walls described by a contemporary visitor to the site as resembling a penitentiary speak to the cleanliness and order that dominated the daily rhythm of life within a slave pen.

Serving as John Armfield's residence, as well as the headquarters for the firm, from 1828 until 1836, the complex witnessed the increased success of the firm through the annual sale of thousands of enslaved persons, the purchase of various slave ships, and an extensive network of dealers in the major slave trading centers of the South. Few slave traders ever experienced the rate of success enjoyed by Franklin and Armfield, with estimated profits of nearly a million dollars calculated for Isaac Franklin and half a million for John Armfield by the time of their retirement from the slave trading business in 1841. The building represented prosperity for Franklin and Armfield while for the enslaved it represented something entirely different; the separation of families and the degradation endured by being bought and sold to the highest bidder.

About This Lesson

This lesson is based on the National Historic Landmark Nomination, "Franklin and Armfield Office," as well as newspaper advertisements, personal narratives, and other primary sources. *"A Loathsome Prison:" Slave Trading in Antebellum Alexandria* was written by Caridad de la Vega, Historian for the National Park Service, National Historic Landmarks Survey. This lesson is one in a series that brings the important stories of historic places into the classrooms across the country.

This lesson plan is made possible by the Virginia Foundation for the Humanities and Public Policy (VFH) as part of its African-American Heritage Program, which includes the African-American History in Virginia Grant Program, the African-American Heritage Database Project, and the African-American Heritage Trails Program, a partnership between VFH and the Virginia Tourism Corporation. Through these programs, VFH seeks to increase understanding of African-American history in Virginia; to promote research and documentation of existing African-American historic sites; to strengthen the institutions that that interpret African-American history in the state; and to encourage Virginians as well as people from all parts of the nation and the world to visit these sites. For more information, contact VFH, 145 Ednam Drive, Charlottesville, VA 22903-4629 or visit VFH's website.

Where it fits into the curriculum
Topics: This lesson could be used in teaching units about the South, labor, reform movements, and the history of slavery and the inter-state slave trade in the United States. This lesson could also be used to enhance the study of African-American history in the United States. Time period: 1828-1861.

Objectives

1. To evaluate the role of the inter-state slave trade in the overall history of slavery in the South.
2. To compare and contrast the institution of slavery as experienced by enslaved people, slave traders, and the abolitionist movement.
3. To research their own community's labor history, whether slave-based or not, and develop a presentation - using one primary source document and one image - of a local historic site significant to the community's labor history.
4. To evaluate how Franklin and Armfield as the leading slave trading firm in the South, was unique in the success it enjoyed within the inter-state slave system.

Materials for students
The materials listed below either can be used directly on the computer or can be printed out, photocopied, and distributed to students. The maps and images appear twice: in a smaller, low-resolution version with associated questions and alone in a larger version.

1. an 1835 map of the United States;
2. three readings on the history of the Franklin and Armfield Office, first-hand accounts of the Alexandria slave pen, advertisements appearing in the *National Intelligencer*, and newspaper accounts of the slave pen and sales;
3. Three photographs of: the Franklin and Armfield slave pen, an anti-slavery broadside depicting the port of Alexandria and the firm's slavers, and a site plan of the slave complex

Visiting the sites
The Franklin and Armfield Office is currently known as "Freedom House" and utilized as office space for the Northern Virginia Urban League. The Urban League has plans to install a permanent exhibit in the basement of the building, an area formerly part of the slave complex, recounting the history of the Franklin and Armfield Office.

Freedom House is located within the south-west quadrant of Old Town Alexandria, midway between Washington, D.C. and Mount Vernon. From I-95/I-495 take the US Route 1 North exit (first exit on the Virginia side of the Woodrow Wilson Bridge). Follow Route 1 (Patrick Street) to Duke Street, turn left onto Duke Street two blocks north. From US Route 1 South after crossing King Street, make a right on Duke Street. The Urban League is located approximately one block north of the Alexandria National Cemetery. The offices of the league are open from 9 a.m.–5 p.m. For additional information visit the league's website.

Getting Started

Inquiry Question

Taking note of the woman in the picture, what do you think might have been the use of this building?

Setting the Stage

Even before the arrival of the famed Mayflower at the shores of the North American colonies in 1620, in the year 1619 the first blacks imported into the British colonies made their way into Virginia on a Dutch man-of-war that unloaded "20 Negars."[2] From here on after, the importation of enslaved people from primarily the western coast of Africa, served to meet the labor demands of the North American colonies and later the United State of America. Europeans established the colonies primarily to provide raw materials and staples to the mother country, in this case England. The extensive labor carried out in the fields and the homes of the colonists, and later the American Republic, was primarily provided by the enslaved. However, in 1808, following the lead of European nations, the United States officially banned the importation of enslaved people. This law precipitated the out migration of planters and the enslaved from the upper southern states, to the lower and southwestern (mainly Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama and part of eastern Texas) states were the production of cotton increased precipitously through an ingenious but very practical machine called the cotton gin. The invention of the cotton gin in 1792 solved the labor intensive problem of removing the seeds from the lint which previously limited the production of cotton.

For nearly two centuries the colonists, and later the Americans, farmed the lands located in the upper South and the eastern seaboard, which by the beginning of the nineteenth century were showing signs of exhaustion. Around this time as well Eli Whitney developed the cotton gin, a machine that removed the cotton seed from its lint. The increased farming of the southwestern states for the production of cotton, the official ban on the importation of enslaved people caused through the passing of the 1808 law, and the weakening seaboard economy of the 1820s and 1830s, precipitated the inter-state slave trade, or the movement of enslaved people between states, in this case from the Upper South to the Lower or Deep South. In addition, large farm families found it increasingly difficult to provide each of their children with "sufficient land and resources to sustain and maintain the family legacy." [3] The sons of the planter elite were eager to become self-made men who were financially self sufficient, and migration to the Southwest afforded them the opportunity to realize this goal. The out migration from the Upper South, mainly the District of Columbia, Delaware, Maryland, and Virginia, to the Deep South which includes those states and territories west of the Georgia border; Alabama, Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, and frontier areas in Tennessee, Kentucky and Florida, was accomplished either through overland coffles, which consisted of a train of enslaved persons fastened together, or aboard slavers, ships primarily tasked with the transport of enslaved persons to the southern slave markets of Natchez and New Orleans.[4] The men involved in the buying and selling of enslaved persons were also known as slavers. .

The 1820s and 1830s were the boon years for individuals like Franklin and Armfield, who decided to make a living through the sale of the enslaved. Isaac Franklin was a native of Tennessee, and John Armfield was a relative by marriage. Between 1820 and 1860, the Deep South experienced an explosive rise in its slave population, all as a result of the increased cultivation of cotton which required large amounts of slave labor. It is estimated that between sixty and seventy percent of the enslaved relocated to the Deep South did so as a result of the interstate slave trade. The remainder of the migration occurred through planters relocating to the Southwest with their enslaved in tow. Ultimately, the firm of Franklin and Armfield was responsible for at least one-third of the enslaved sold South during the 1820s and 30s.

The site saw continuous use for slave trading under multiple ownerships until 1861 when Union troops entered the city of Alexandria and converted the building into a military prison for the remainder of the War. During the 1870s the slave pens were demolished to make room for adjacent row houses while under the ownership of Thomas Swann, a prominent railroad builder and politician. He also added a third story to the building. Throughout the years, the Franklin and Armfield building transferred ownership multiple times with its primary use as rooming and apartment housing. In 1996 the Northern Virginia Urban League moved its headquarters into the building.

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[2] George Brown Tindall and David E. Shi, America: A Narrative History, 4th ed. (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1996), 59.
[3] George Brown Tindall and David E. Shi, America: A Narrative History, 6th ed., vol. 1 (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2004), 599.
[4] The definition of "Southwest" can be found in Tindall and Shi, America: A Narrative History, 598.

Locating the Site: Map

Question

1. Identify those states that form part of the upper South. Identify those states that are located in the Deep South. If you were an enslaved person during that time, taking note of the distance between the Upper and Deep South, would you prefer to travel by land or by sea? Why or why not?
2. Identify Washington, D.C. on the map. Taking note of the geography, why do you think that DC was a strategic location to have the headquarters for a slave trading firm?

Reading 1: Determining the Facts

The Trade in Human Chattels

Between 1828 and 1836, the building located at 1315 Duke Street in Alexandria, Virginia, with its adjacent slave yards, served as headquarters for the largest and most profitable slave trading operation in the South, the firm of Franklin and Armfield, but it was during the 1820s and 30s when under occupation by Franklin and Armfield that this building served as the administrative center for the most "eminent slave-trading firm in the South." Isaac Franklin, a native of Tennessee, and John Armfield, a relative by marriage, took advantage of the burgeoning market for enslaved persons in the southwestern states created as a result of the ban imposed on the importation of the enslaved into the United States in 1808. Whereas most slave traders operated on a relatively small scale, Franklin and Armfield were one of the few who became millionaires as a result of their dealing in enslaved people. "Few who exploited slave labor, rather than trading in it, profited that much." [5]

Franklin and Armfield had a network of offices throughout the South to facilitate the movement and selling of the enslaved. These offices were located in strategic locations for the purchasing and selling of the enslaved in accordance to the demand of the market; Alexandria was adjacent to an area with a surplus of enslaved people, including the states of Maryland, Virginia, and Delaware, whereas New Orleans and Mississippi where known as large centers for the purchase of enslaved people for nearby cotton plantations and throughout the rest of the southwestern states. Armfield was the agent at the Alexandria office who dealt with acquiring and readying them for transportation to the Deep South, whether by overland coffle or by sea. Franklin was in charge of the Natchez and New Orleans offices, the two main selling centers of the Deep South, where the enslaved would eventually be sold to area plantations.

Southern traders maintained private depots in the main trading centers of Baltimore, Richmond, Alexandria, Louisville, Lexington, and St. Louis. The firm of Franklin and Armfield was no exception. They maintained firm representatives in Richmond, Virginia with Rice C. Ballard acting as agent, and in Warrenton, Virginia where they were represented by J. M. Saunders and Company. In Frederick, Maryland, George Kephart and Company acted as their agent. In Baltimore, Maryland, James F. Purvis and Company was their representative while at Easton, Maryland, Thomas M. Jones was agent. Franklin and Armfield maintained agents at these various locations to survey the area for re-saleable enslaved persons at such places as estate and execution sales. From there, the enslaved were housed at the Alexandria slave pen to await transport to major trading centers in the Deep South, mainly New Orleans and Natchez. This transport normally took place between late summer and early fall.

The size and amenities located at the complex at the 1300 block of Duke Street spoke to the scale of success enjoyed by Franklin and Armfield. At the core was Armfield's house and office. The Alexandria complex contained a kitchen for the enslaved persons, and a tailor shop to ready them for market. While at the pens, the enslaved were fed relatively better food and clothed well enough to make them attractive "commodities." To maintain the health of those enslaved that might become ill while housed at the pens, a hospital/infirmary was located on the premises. Besides these "amenities" for the enslaved, they had an outdoor open courtyard where the male and female slaves could enjoy some fresh air and exercise; however, these areas were enclosed by tall brick walls. Also located at the complex was an enclosed courtyard, which is believed to have been the dining area for the enslaved. A business of this magnitude would also surely have maintained its own livery, an area where horses were kept. Another area in the complex housed the equipment necessary for the overland transport of enslaved persons, such as wagons and tents. As described by a visitor to the complex in 1835: "Passing out at a back gate, we entered another spacious yard, in which four or five tents were spread, and the large wagons, which were to accompany the next expedition, were stationed." [6]

According to a personal account retold in the Alexandria Gazette in the late 1820s, the nature of Franklin and Armfield's business was such that:

> *Scarcely a week passes without some of these wretched creatures being driven through our streets. After having been confined, and sometimes manacled in a loathsome prison, they are turned out in public view to take their departure for the South. They children and some of the women are generally crowded into a cart or wagon, while others follow on foot, not unfrequently handcuffed and chained together. Here you may behold fathers and brothers leaving behind them the dearest objects of affection, and moving slowly along in the mute agony of despair – there the young mothers sobbing over the infants…* [7]

Armfield was the partner responsible for leading overland coffles of several hundred enslaved persons to the Deep South from Alexandria to Natchez during the summer months. The overland trek allowed the firm to move enslaved people west earlier than the shipping season, which occurred between October and April. Overland coffles were the preferred mode of transportation during the summer months because "of the lack of demand and fear that the drastic climate change would prove deadly to their property."[8] Moreover, with the coffles departing between mid- and late summer, the enslaved would arrive at market precisely when the selling season was about to start. The large "holding-facilities" at Duke Street combined with the overland slave coffles gave Franklin and Armfield the advantage of being able to purchase enslaved persons even during the "off-season."

Franklin and Armfield operated on such a large scale that they owned their own "slavers" to transport the enslaved by sea. Although other sorts of "goods" were transported on these such as sugar, molasses, whiskey, and cotton, the primary use was for the transport of the enslaved. The firm annually exported between a thousand and twelve hundred enslaved persons to the southwest, necessitating an efficient way to transport many. The firm at one point owned three slavers. One of the slavers was aptly named the *Isaac Franklin* and as the firm grew, they acquired two other slavers, the *Uncas* and the *Tribune*. This is not to say that the firm did not use other slavers, which newspaper advertisements of the time attest to. However, owning a fleet of ships for business purposes was certainly not commonplace among many slave traders of the time.

According to an observer named Leavitt who visited the Alexandria slave pen in 1834, he wrote the following account of his experience aboard the Tribune:

> *Her name is the TRIBUNE. The Captain very obligingly took us to all parts of the vessel. The hold is appropriated to the slaves, and is divided into two apartments. The after-hold will carry about eighty-women, and the other about one hundred men. On either side were two platforms running the whole length; one raised a few inches, and the other half way up to the deck. They were about five or six feet deep. On these the slaves lie, as close as they can stow away.*[9]

"Franklin and Armfield's most important business innovation, however, involved purchasing and operating its own vessels in the coastal trade." [10] This was instrumental to the success of the business since by cutting out the middleman, they saved on shipping costs. It also offered them "an advantage in the buying market." [11] "The money that was saved on transportation allowed Franklin and Armfield to offer more for its purchases than did its competitors and still make a profit." [12] They also compensated for losses by having a reliable shipping schedule that allowed them to attract more business, although their ships might

not always sail at full capacity. This was a business innovation for the time. Whereas the ships initially sailed once a month, Franklin and Armfield increased embarkation from the port of Alexandria to twice a month, a clear indication of the success of the firm.

The business possessed a large amount of equipment for the maintenance and transport of enslaved persons, all of which speaks to the uniqueness of the trading firm. One that outwardly displayed its profitability and rank amidst other slave trading firms through the physical manifestation of its ships and the ownership of a sprawling complex at the 1300 block of Duke Street. This success did bear a non-monetary price since "along with wealth had come a modicum of stigma resulting from participation in a business that was tolerated only because it was regarded as a necessity." [13]

By 1836 Franklin had made his fortune as a slaver and "retired" leaving Armfield with the responsibility of settling the firm's affairs. [14] Armfield continued to be active in the slave trading business until the 1850s, and was still settling the firm's accounts even after Franklin passed away. After Franklin's retirement from the slave trading business, the house continued to serve as a slave trading firm and was sold to George Kephart in 1836. Kephart maintained ownership for several years until it was once again transferred to the firm of Price, Birch and Company. The house was used as a slave trading firm until 1861 when Alexandria surrendered to Union troops. The slave pens were torn down in 1870 when the house once again transferred ownership. Armfield passed away in 1871.

Reading 1 was compiled from "Franklin and Armfield Office" (Alexandria, Virginia) National Historic Landmarks Program, 1976; James W. Loewen, Lies Across America: What Our Historic Sites Get Wrong (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1999); Kenneth M. Stampp, The Peculiar Institution: Slavery in the Ante-Bellum South (New York: Vintage Books,1956); Walter Johnson, Soul by Soul: Life Inside the Antebellum Slave Market (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999); Prof. E. A. Andrews, Slavery and the Domestic Slave-Trade in the United States: In A Series of Letters Addressed to the Executive Committee of the American Union for the Relief and Improvement of the Colored Race (Boston: Light & Stearns, 1836); and Janice G. Artemel, The Alexandria Slave Pen: The Archeology of Urban Captivity (Washington, DC: Engineering Science, 1987); Steven Deyle, Carry Me Back: The Domestic Slave Trade in American Life (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

Questions for Reading 1

1. What are some of the reasons for the development of an inter-state slave trade? How did the law affect the creation of an inter-state slave trade in the United States?
2. What are some of the reasons for the success enjoyed by the slave trading firm of Franklin and Armfield? Was this typical of other slave trading firms?
3. In what ways were the enslaved transported to the slave markets of New Orleans and Natchez? What determined the mode of transportation chosen? How do you think the enslaved persons felt during the journey? Explain your answer.
4. Do you think that the business of trading enslaved persons was well accepted in society? Why or why not?

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[5] Kenneth M. Stampp, The Peculiar Institution: Slavery in the Ante-Bellum South (New York: Vintage Books, 1956), 265.
[6] Prof. E. A. Andrews, Slavery and the Domestic Slave-Trade in the United States: In A Series of Letters Addressed to the Executive Committee of the American Union for the Relief and Improvement of the Colored Race (Boston: Light & Stearns, 1836), 140.
[7] Quoted in James W. Loewen, Lies Across America: What Our Historic Sites Get Wrong (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1999), 293.
[8] Steven Deyle, Carry Me Back: The Domestic Slave Trade in American Life (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 100.
[9] Quoted in Isaac Franklin, 38.
[10] Deyle, Carry Me Back, 100.
[11] Ibid.
[12] Ibid.
[13] Stephenson, Isaac Franklin, 93.
[14] Franklin retired to live the existence of a "wealthy planter" at Fairvue Plantation, located on the Cumberland River in Tennessee. He resided at Fairvue until his death in 1846.

Reading 2: An Abolitionist's Perspective on the Alexandria Slave Pen

Known by the term of abolitionist, E. A. Andrews is one of many critics of slavery who was an active participant in the anti-slavery movement during the 1830s, a period marked by many other types of reform movements that aimed to uplift and improve America's moral fiber. Reformers believed this was achievable by eradicating those evils and vices they perceived as rampant throughout society. The following excerpt is from a letter written by Professor Andrews recounting his visit to the Franklin and Armfield office and slave pen to witness first hand the conditions endured by the enslaved.

Alexandria, July 24, 1835. [15]

…My principle object in coming to this city was, to visit the establishment of Franklin and Armfield, who have for some years been actively engaged in purchasing slaves for the southern market. From the gentleman to whom I brought the letters from friends in Washington, I have received every attention, and such directions as enabled me to accomplish the purpose of my visit.

The establishment to which I have alluded is situated in a retired quarter in the southern part of the city. It is easily distinguished as you approach it, by the high, white-washed wall surrounding the yards, and giving to it the appearance of a penitentiary. The dwelling-house is of brick, three stories high, and opening directly upon the street. Over the front door is the name of the firm, FRANKLIN & ARMFIELD. It was mid-day when I arrived. The day was excessively warm, and the doors and windows were thrown wide open to admit the air. On inquiring at the door for Mr. Armfield, he came forward in a few minutes from the yard in the rear of the building, and invited me into his parlor.

…I explained to him frankly my object in visiting him, accompanying my statement with a request that I might be allowed to see his establishment. It was an important object in my journey to gain access to such an establishment, to see the slaves collected for transportation, and to ascertain the details of the traffic. I was not wholly without fears, that, after all my labor, I should meet with a refusal; but these apprehensions were soon dispelled, for he immediately, and apparently with great readiness, complied with my request.

Calling an assistant or clerk, he directed him to accompany me to every part of the establishment. We passed out at the back door of the dwelling-house, and entered a spacious yard nearly surrounded with neatly white-washed two story buildings, devoted to the use of the slaves. Turning to the left, we came to a strong grated door of iron, opening into a spacious yard, surrounded by a high, white-washed wall. One side of this yard was roofed, but the principal part was open. Along the covered side extended a table, at which the slaves had recently taken their dinner, which, judging from what remained, had been wholesome and abundant. In this yard, only men and boys were confined. The gate was secured by strong padlocks and bolts; but before entering we had a full view of the yard, and everything in it, through the grated door. The slaves, fifty or sixty in number, were standing or moving about in groups, some amusing themselves with rude sports, and others engaged in conversation, which was often interrupted by loud laughter, in all the varied tones peculiar to the negroes.

While opening the gate, my conductor directed the slaves to form themselves into a line, and they accordingly arranged themselves, in single file, upon three sides of the yard. They were in general young men, apparently from eighteen to thirty years old, but among them were a few boys whose age did not exceed ten or fifteen years. They were all-except one or two, who had just been admitted, and whose purchase was not yet completed—neatly and comfortably dressed, and, in general they looked cheerful and contented. As my conductor, however, was expatiating on their happy condition, when compared with that in which they had lived before they came to this place—a discourse apparently intended for the joint benefit of the slaves and their northern visiter [sic]—I observed a young man, of an interesting and intelligent countenance, who looked earnestly at me, and as often as the keeper turned away his face, he shook his head, and seemed desirous of having me understand, that he did not feel any such happiness as was described, and that he dissented from the representation made of his condition. I would have

given much to hear his tale, but in my situation that was impossible. Still, in imagination, I see his countenance, anxiously and fearfully turning from the keeper to me, with an expression which seemed to say, like the ghost in Hamlet, "I could a tale unfold."

After a short time, spent in walking around this yard, and examining the appearance of the slaves, we "passed out by the iron gate," and crossing over to the right, we came to a similar one, which admitted us into a yard that like that which we had just left. Here we found the female slaves, amounting to thirty or forty. These, too, were well dressed, and everything about them had a neat and comfortable appearance, for a prison. The inmates of this apartment were of about the same ages as those who occupied the yard which I had left. There was but one mother with an infant; and my guide informed me, that they did not like to purchase women with young children, as they were less saleable than others, in the market to which they sent their slaves. In answer to my inquiries respecting the separation of families, he assured me that they were at great pains to prevent such separations in all cases, in which it was practicable, and to obtain, if possible, whole families. Married slaves, he said, were generally preferred by purchasers to those who were single, because their owners felt more sure that they would be contented, and stay at home. In one instance, he remarked, they had purchased, from one estate, more than fifty, in order to prevent the separation of family connections; and in selling them, they had been equally scrupulous to have them continue together. In this case, however, they had sacrificed not less than one or two thousand dollars, which they might have obtained by separating them, as they would have sold much better in smaller lots. The women, in general, looked contented and happy, but I observed a few who seemed to have been weeping.

Near the yard in which the women were confined, was the kitchen, where the food of the slaves was prepared. Here everything appeared neat and clean, and the arrangements for cooking resembled those which we usually see in penitentiaries. From the kitchen we went to the tailor's shop, where were stored great quantities of new clothing, ready for the negroes when they set off upon their long journey to the south. These clothes appeared to be well made and of good materials; and in the female wardrobe considerable taste was displayed. Each negro, at his departure, is furnished with two entire suits from the shop. These he does not wear upon the road, but puts them on when he arrives at the market. In the rear of the yard, is a long building, two stories high, in which the slaves pass the night. Their blankets were then lying in the sun at the doors and windows, which were grated like those of ordinary prisons. In a corner of the yard, a building was pointed out to me as the hospital; but such was the health of the slaves at this time, that the building was unoccupied.

Passing out at a back gate, we entered another spacious yard, in which four or five tents were spread, and the large wagons, which were to accompany the next expedition, were stationed.

Having examined everything, so far as the excessive heat would permit, we returned to the parlor. Everywhere, as I passed along, I observed the most studied attention paid to cleanliness, continually reminding me of the penitentiary, which I visited yesterday at Washington. The fences and walls of the houses, both internally and externally, were neatly white-washed, and there was also the same apparatus of high walls, and bolts, and bars, to secure the prisoners. In most respects, however, the situation of the convicts at the penitentiary was far less deplorable than that of these slaves, confined for the crime of being descended from ancestors who were forcibly reduced to bandage. Most of the former are confined for a few years only, and then go forth as free as the judge by whose sentence they had been imprisoned …Far different is the condition of the slave. He is a prisoner for life…

In the parlor I again met Mr. Armfield, who, during my absence, had been negotiating for the purchase of a slave, and had just concluded a bargain. Here I was once again treated with great politeness, and refreshments of various kinds were offered to me.

The number of slaves, now in the establishment, is about one hundred. They are commonly sent by water from this city to New Orleans. Brigs of the first class, built expressly for this trade, are employed to transport them. The average number, sent at each shipment, does not much exceed one hundred and fifty, and they ship a cargo once in two months. Besides these, they send a considerable number over

land, and those which I saw were to set off in this way in a few days. A train of wagons, with the provisions, tents, and other necessaries, accompanies the expedition, and at night they all encamp. Their place of destination is Natchez, where Mr. Franklin resides, for the purpose of disposing of them on their arrival. Those which are sent by water, after landing at New Orleans, are sent up the rivers by steamboats to the general depot at Natchez, where they are exposed for sale.

As it is an object of the first importance, that the slaves should arrive at their place of destination "in good order and well-conditioned," every indulgence is shown to them, which is consistent with their security, and their good appearance in the market. It is true that they are often chained at night, while at the depot at Alexandria, lest they should overpower their masters, and not more than three or four white men frequently have charge of a hundred a fifty slaves. Upon their march, also, they are usually chained together in pairs, to prevent their escape; and sometimes, when greater precaution is judged necessary, they are all attached to a long chain passing between them. Their guards and conductors are, of course, well armed.

After resting myself a few minutes, I took leave of Mr. Armfield and of his establishment, and returned to my lodgings in the city, ruminating, as I went, upon the countless evils, which "man's inhumanity to man," has occasioned in this world of sin and misery.

Questions for Reading 2

1. What do you believe was the purpose of Professor Andrew's visit to the slave pen? Why was he given "every attention?"
2. What is your impression of the conditions of the enslaved in the pens? Do you think this is typical of all slave pens/trading firms? What would be the trader's motives for treating the enslaved moderately well and providing better accommodations than those that would normally be given to the enslaved? Refer to Reading 1 if necessary.
3. Why do you think Andrew's companion would make specific mention of trying to keep enslaved families together within the trade? How would this benefit the firm and the image of the trade?
4. Do you think his account of the slave pen is objective? Why or why not?

Reading 2 is from Prof. E. A. Andrews, Slavery and the Domestic Slave-Trade in the United States: In A Series of Letters Addressed to the Executive Committee of the American Union for the Relief and Improvement of the Colored Race (Boston: Light & Stearns, 1836), 135-143.

Reading 3: Advertisements for the Sale of "Negroes"

The following advertisements for the firm of Franklin and Armfield are examples of the numerous advertisements placed in local newspapers between 1828 and 1836. Unlike small slave purchasing operations that usually consisted of itinerant buyers, the firm expected those interested in selling enslaved persons to directly solicit the firm for business. This fact speaks to the success enjoyed by the firm; however, the firm also had numerous agents spread throughout the South, as noted in the second newspaper advertisement. In addition, the firm was large enough that it operated its own fleet of ships. "Unlike most of its competitors, from the very beginning, Franklin & Armfield ran newspaper advertisements year round." [16]

CASH FOR NEGROES.

WE wish to purchase One Hundred and Fifty likely Negroes of both Sexes, from 12 to 25 years of age, field hands, also Mechanics of every description.

Persons wishing to sell would do well to give us a call, as we are determined to give higher prices for Slaves than any purchasers who are now, or may hereafter be, in this market.

Communications promptly attended to. We can at all times be found at our residence west end of Duke street, Alexandria, D. C.

May 23—d6m FRANKLIN & ARMFIELD.

National Intelligencer, August 6, 1831. Courtesy of the Alexandria Library Special Collections.

CASH IN MARKET.

WE will pay Cash for any number of likely Negroes, of both sexes, from 12 to 25 years of age, Field Hands. Also, Mechanics of every description. Apply to

R. C. Ballard & Co. Richmond, Va.
J. M. Saunders & Co. Warrenton, Va.
George Kepheart & Co. Fredericktown, Md.
James F. Purveis & Co. Baltimore.
Thomas M. Jones, Easton, Eastern Shore of Md.

Or, to the subscribers, at their residence in Alexandria.

Persons having likely servants to dispose of, will do well to give us a call, as we at all times will pay higher prices in cash than any other purchaser who is now or may hereafter come into market.

All communications promptly attended to.

may 9—dtf FRANKLIN & ARMFIELD.

National Intelligencer, May 9, 1833. Courtesy of the Alexandria Library Special Collections.

ALEXANDRIA AND NEW ORLEANS PACKETS.

Brig TRIBUNE, Samuel C. Boush, Master, will sail as above on the 15th inst., (Nov.); brig ISAAC FRANKLIN, William Smith master, on the 1st December; brig UNCAS, Nathaniel Boush, master, on the 15th December.

They will continue to leave this port on the 1st and 15th of each month throughout the shipping season. They are all vessels of the first class, commanded by experienced and accommodating officers, will at all times go up the Mississippi by steam, and every exertion used to promote the interest of shippers and comfort of passengers.

Shippers may prevent a disappointment by having their bills of lading ready the day previous to sailing, as they will go promptly at the time.

Servants that are intended to be shipped, will at any time be received for safe keeping at 25 cents per day.

JOHN ARMFIELD,
Alexandria.

Nov 6--tf

National Intelligencer, November 6, 1835. Courtesy of the Alexandria Library Special Collections.

Questions for Reading 3

1. Looking at the last advertisement, what particular facts point to the success of the firm?
2. Do you think that the firm's claim that they were willing to pay higher prices for enslaved persons is accurate? Justify your answer. Refer to Reading 1 if necessary.
3. Looking at all three advertisements and noting their dates, what pattern do you notice? Do you believe that the firm is more prosperous in the later than earlier years? Why or why not?
4. The last advertisement notes "…every exertion used to promote the interest of shippers and comfort of passengers." Do you believe the statement regarding the comfort of the passengers is accurate? Justify your answer. Refer to Reading 2 if necessary.

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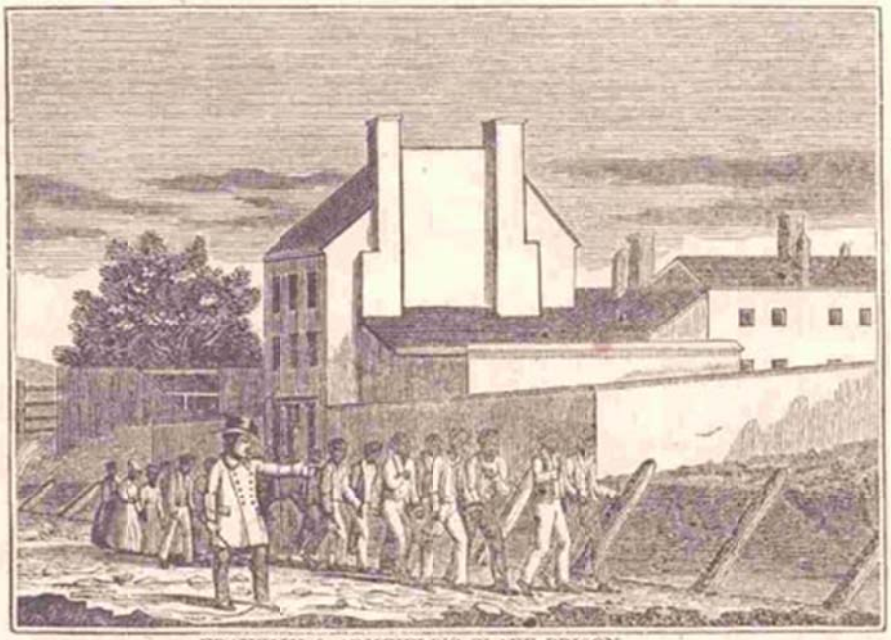
[16] Steven Deyle, Carry Me Back: The Domestic Slave Trade In American Life (New York: Oxford University Pres, 2005), 104.

Visual Evidence

Photo 1: The Firm of Franklin and Armfield as Featured in an American Anti-Slavery Broadside, 1836



FRANKLIN & ARMFIELD'S SLAVE PRISON.

This establishment is in Alexandria. It is a handsome three story brick house, neatly painted, with green blinds, and the sign, FRANKLIN & ARMFIELD over the door. It has attached to it a large yard, perhaps 300 feet square, enclosed by a high close board fence neatly white-washed, and filled with various small buildings. Mr. Leavitt visited it in 1834. One of the partners lives in New-Orleans, and the other in Alexandria. The latter, says Mr. L. "politely invited us to go and see the Slaves. We were first taken out into a paved yard, 40 or 50 feet square, with a very high brick wall and about half of it covered with a roof. This yard is appropriated to the men. He ordered the men to be called out from the cellar where they sleep, and they soon came up, to the number of 50 or 60, and ranged themselves irregularly before us. While they were standing, he ordered the girls to be called out, when the door opened, and about 50 women and small children came in. They were all clothed decently in coarse bet apparently comfortable garments. Some three or four had children, so young that they brought them in their arms; and I thought I saw in the faces of *these mothers* some indications of irrepressible feeling. It seemed to me that they hugged their little ones more closely, and that a cold perspiration stood on their foreheads, and I thought I saw tears too. There were in all about 28 children under 10 years of age."

The standing advertisement of this house in the Washington papers is as follows:—

"CASH FOR 400 NEGROES."

"Including both sexes, from 12 to 25 years of age. Persons having likely servants to dispose of, will find it to their interest to give us a call, as we will give higher prices in cash than any other purchaser who is now, or may hereafter come into this market."

"FRANKLIN & ARMFIELD."

VIEW OF A SECTION OF ALEXANDRIA, WITH A SLAVE SHIP RECEIVING HER CARGO OF SLAVES.

Franklin and Armfield alone shipped to New-Orleans in the year 1834, according to their own statement, not less than 1000 Slaves. They own brigs of about 160 to 200 tons burthen, running regularly every thirty days, during the trading season to New-Orleans, and carrying about one Slave to the ton. They thus advertise them :

"ALEXANDRIA AND NEW-ORLEANS PACKETS."

"Brig TRIBUNE, Captain Smith, and Brig UNCAS, Captain Boush, will resume their *regular* trips on the 20th October, one of which will leave this port *every thirty days throughout the shipping season.* They are vessels of the first class, commanded by experienced officers, and will at all times go up the Mississippi by steam, and every exertion used to promote the *interests of shippers* and *comfort of passengers.* Apply to the Captains on board, or to "FRANKLIN & ARMFIELD."

"Alexandria, September 1, 1834."

In January 1834, J. Leavitt, Editor of the New-York Evangelist, visited the "Tribune," then in port and preparing to sail with a cargo of human beings the next week. He thus describes it : "The hold is appropriated to the Slaves and is divided into two apartments. The after hold will carry about 80 women, and the other about 100 men. On eitherside were two platforms running the whole length, one raised a few inches, and the other about half way up to the deck. They were about 5 1-2 or 6 feet deep. On them they lie, as close as they can stow away."

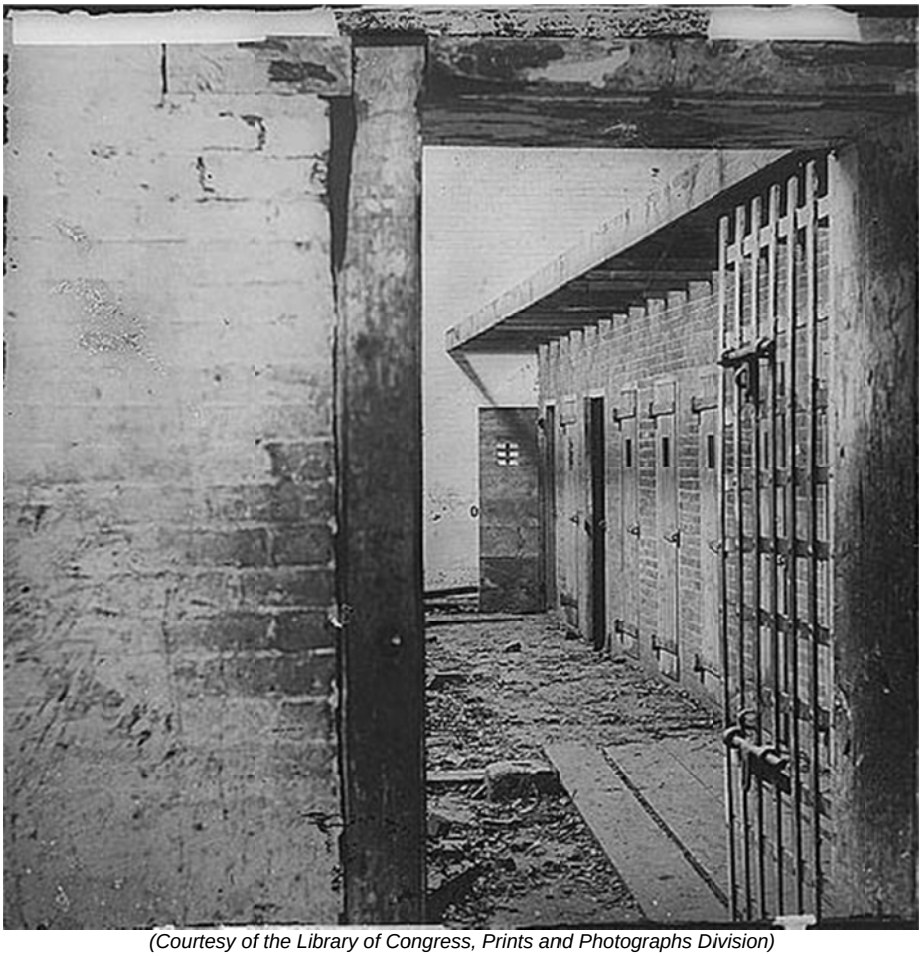
(Courtesy of the Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division)

The Anti-Slavery Society printed an anti-slavery broadside in 1836 condemning the institution of slavery, and in particular, the sale of enslaved persons in the capital of the United States. The broadside pictures those places and activities that were central to the trading of enslaved persons; slave pens, harbors; and overland coffles. Two of the featured pictures include images of the firm of Franklin and Armfield. The port city of Alexandria, which at that time belonged to the District of Columbia, is also pictured in the broadside. Two of those three are pictured above.

1. Why do you believe that the Franklin and Armfield firm is featured prominently in the broadside?
2. Why do you think that the broadside highlights images of buildings and activities related to the slave trade in the nation's capitol in particular? What message are they trying to convey? (Refer to Reading 2 if necessary.)
3. Was it common for slave trading firms to own their own slavers (ships for the transport of enslaved persons) as pictured above. Why or why not? Refer to Reading 1 if necessary.

Visual Evidence

Photo 2: Interior View of Alexandria Slave Pen



(Courtesy of the Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division)

1. Slave traders boasted of providing enslaved persons with fairly better conditions than they were accustomed to since they wanted to maintain the value of their merchandise. What do you think of the accommodations at the slave pen? Are the traders' assertions correct? Why or why not?
2. Approximately one hundred enslaved persons were usually housed in the slave pens awaiting transport to the South. Do you think that the slave pen can accommodate one hundred enslaved persons adequately? What do you think this does for the daily living conditions of the enslaved?

Visual Evidence

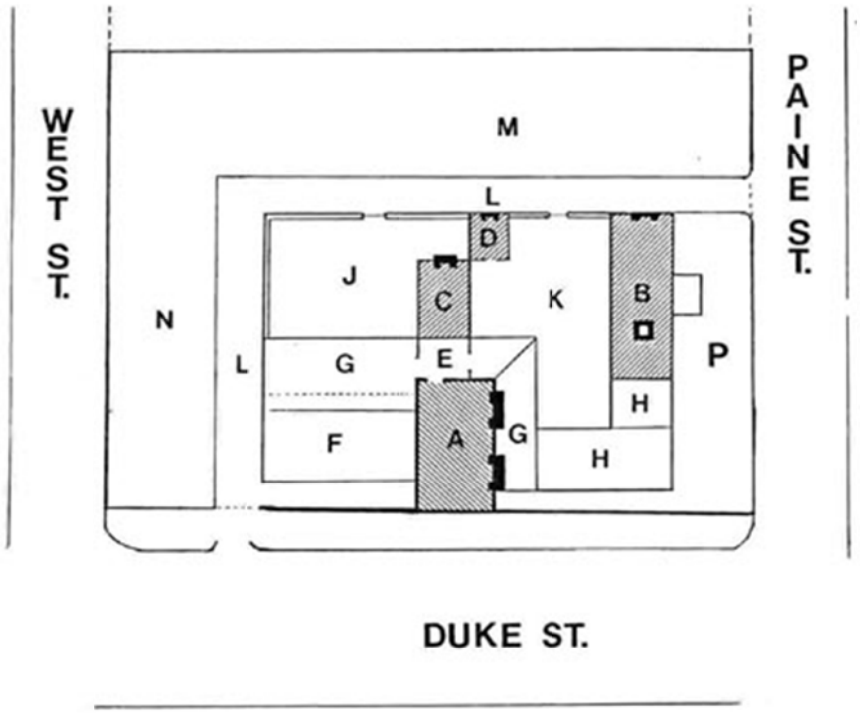
Photo 3: Exterior view of the Alexandria Slave Pen

(Courtesy of the Library of Congress Prints and Photograph Division)

1. What is your impression of the enslaved woman posing outside of the slave pen?
2. Why do you believe that the slave pens had outdoor courtyards as pictured above? In what way would it benefit the enslaved and traders alike?
3. Notice the height of the exterior walls. Why do you think this is so?

Visual Evidence

Site Plan 1: Site Plan of Franklin and Armfield Slave Complex



KEY:

A. Main building built ca. 1812.
B. Kitchen and tailor shop.
C. Outbuilding now part of "ell" to main building; built in 1812 by Gen. Young, probably as a kitchen.
D. Hospital/infirmary.
E. Passageway from main office building. On left is iron gate to men's section. On right is iron gate to women's section.
F. Open yard area for men, enclosed by brick wall.
G. Roofed yard area, separated by iron gates for men and women's sections. Probably dining area.
H. Shed roofed structure, unknown use.
J. Men's open air yard.
K. Women's open air yard.
L. Alley between enclosed pen and storage/livery.
M. Livery.
N. Storage.

Source: Janice G Artemel. *The Alexandria Slave Pen: The Archeology of Urban Captivity* (Washington, D.C.: Engineering Science, Inc., 1987), 29.

The site plan represents what is believed to have been the layout of the Franklin and Armfield complex based on first-person accounts and an archeological survey conducted at the site.

1. The site plan reveals that at one point the slave complex consisted of an entire city block. What does this say about the profitability of Franklin and Armfield's firm? Refer to Reading 1 if necessary.
2. Do you believe that this layout represents a typical slave pen? Explain your answer.

Visual Evidence

Photo 4: Exterior view of Alexandria Slave Pen, 1864

(Courtesy of the Alexandria Library, Special Collections)

1. Notice that the firm's office is nestled between two courtyards. Why do you think this is so?
2. Why do you believe the walls of the slave courtyards are white washed?
3. Was the complex still used for holding enslaved persons at this time? Why or why not? Refer to Reading 1 if necessary.

Putting it All Together

Activity 1: Timeline of Developments in the African and Inter-State Slave Trade
Create a timeline marking important dates in the development of the African slave trade into the colonies, and later the inter-state slave trade within the United States, starting with the settlement of Jamestown in 1607 on through the Emancipation Proclamation. Discuss with students what trends and factors occurring during that time period precipitated the use of African labor in the colonies. Have the students conduct research on the other types of laborers used to work the fields and as house servants. Have the students investigate the reasons why Africans became the preferred choice as laborers. Finally, have the students develop a short synopsis of other trends in American history that directly contributed to the development of the international, and later, the domestic slave trade.

Activity 2: My Community's Labor History
Have the class research the history of their community's local industries and those local historic sites in particular that reflect that part of the community's history. It is preferred that the students focus on slave-based labor, but if slave labor was not a large part of the community's workforce historically, then focus on those laborers that do historically represent the local workforce. Write an account of those businesses/enterprises that historically fueled the local economy. What was the composition of the local workforce? Was it slave based? If not, which groups formed the basis of the local workforce? Were they brought in from elsewhere in the United States or abroad? Were these workers from specific immigrant groups? What were working conditions like for them?

Once the general history of the community's free or enslaved labor history has been gathered by the class, assign each student a specific historic building/site that reflects the community's labor history. The student should visit their local library, historical society or the site itself, and collect one visual and one primary source document that they will use in providing the class with a short presentation on that site's history. The teacher should explain to the students the difference between a primary and a secondary source document for this project. In their presentation, students should address how their site fits overall into the community's labor history.

Activity 3: Slavery through the Eyes of the Enslaved
Teachers should provide students with a working definition of an oral history and a personal narrative. Then have students conduct an internet search to access an oral history of a former enslaved person or a slave narrative, or through their local library. Whether choosing one of the internet sites from the list provided below, or one of their own choosing, have them pick one former enslaved person's oral history or slave narrative. Once they have read and studied that person's story, have each student create a short script from the interview or narrative. Once this is done, the students should get into character and perform, by memory, the enslaved person's story they have chosen. Once all the students in the class have completed this activity, the teacher should lead a discussion regarding the differences and similarities between all the oral histories/narratives presented.

Two suggested online collections for this activity include the Library of Congress's American Memory collection, Slave Narratives from the Federal Writers' Project, 1936-1938, and the University of North Carolina's North American Slave Narratives collection found in its "Documenting the American South: The Southern Experience in 19th Century America" website. Students may also choose to consult *African American Frontiers: Slave Narratives and Oral Histories* by Alan Govenar and published by ABC-CLIO. In the case of the enslaved person narratives, it is recommended that the students choose an individual whose story/experience dates from between 1820 on through Emancipation.

Supplementary Materials

The National Underground Freedom Center
The National Underground Freedom Center's web-site features an online virtual tour and exhibit of a slave pen from Mason County, Kentucky and highlights the story of an inter-state slave trader from Natchez, Mississippi, one of the locations where the Franklin and Armfield firm maintained an office.

Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture Visit In Motion: The African-American Migration Experience by the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, for an interactive look into The Domestic Slave Trade (1760s-1865) in the United States.

Mississippi Historical Society
Visit the Mississippi Historical Society's online publication titled Mississippi History Now for a look at the Franklin and Armfield firm's dealings in the interstate slave trade in Natchez, Mississippi, one of the centers for sales of enslaved persons in the South and home to one of several offices/slave pens belonging to the firm of Franklin and Armfield.

Public Broadcasting Service
Slavery and the Making of America is an online interactive website presented by PBS with such features as interactive timelines, audio recordings, and documentary resources that address the cultural, social and political experience of the enslaved. This website serves as an online companion to the PBS produced television series of the same name.

Slavery in America The Melrose Interactive Slavery Environment is accessible through the Slavery in America web-site, and it interactively allows students to experience the daily routine of enslaved women, men and children as lived on the ante-bellum slave estate of Melrose, located in Natchez, Mississippi.

Cornell University
To learn about the history of abolitionism, visit Cornell University's online exhibit "I will be heard! Abolitionism in America," featuring primary source documents that form part of the library's collection. The exhibit includes such source materials as photographs, letters and manuscripts, which enhance the telling of the story of slavery and abolitionism in the United States.

The Eli Whitney Museum
The Eli Whitney Museum web-site offers insight into the history of the man that is the inventor of the cotton gin, the machine responsible for the development of the Cotton South, and the creation of a domestic market for enslaved labor in the states of the Deep South.