



## No more driver's lash for me

By Stephanie McCurry

▲ **'Slavery**  
chain done  
broke at last'  
—*Spiritual,*  
circa 1865

**A**t the very birth of the republic, Thomas Jefferson expressed his fear that slavery destroyed slaves' love of country, turned them into enemies and nurtured traitors at the American breast. Eighty years later, during the birth pangs of another republic, one group of Confederates—planters—was the first among their countrymen to see the bitter wisdom of Jefferson's point. Even as military planners boasted heedlessly about slavery "as an element of strength in war," slaves on Confederate plantations communicated an entirely different message to their owners.

"The people," as Charles Manigault called his slaves, "have very generally got the idea of being emancipated when 'lincon' comes in." "If not rigidly watched," his son Gabriel said, they were "likely to be talking sedition to the others." From the very beginning of the war, slaves were in rebellion against the masters' state, and the masters knew it.

On Gowrie, Manigault's Savannah River plantation, the trouble started in January 1861—mere days after Georgia seceded. By November, with Union fleets in Savannah and Hilton Head, S.C., his son Louis was involved in an outright war with his slaves as they tried to make it downriver to Union lines, and he tried desperately to remove, quarantine or sell away those he identified as "the rebels and ring-leaders." In January, again in November and repeatedly until his plantation fell to Union troops at Christmas 1864, Louis tried to identify

and remove the rebels, making and revising lists of names. There is a great deal of historical interest in those lists. But by far the most surprising thing about them is the prominence of women among those identified as rebels and leaders on the plantations.

The 10 slaves he originally targeted included one named Jenny. Among the next 18, 10 were women, including two (Bess and Betty) who had infant children. Like a lot of planters, Louis Manigault believed that women house servants were the chief conduits of political intelligence on the plantations. None of the Manigaults ever made the mistake of underestimating the Gowrie women. Nor did they show any reluctance to deal with them roughly. In 1863, the overseer engaged in a brutal fight with Rose, the slave nurse of a Manigault child, who not only resisted a whipping but also fought him "until she had not a rag of clothes on."


The pattern wasn't peculiar to Gowrie. When 80 slaves on John B. Grimball's South Carolina plantation disappeared overnight onto a Union gunboat, half the plantation's women slaves hazarded the escape. Grimball became convinced (quite rightly, as Union sources confirm) that the boat had been guided up the river by specific information from his slaves. As he obsessed, his attention focused particularly on Kit, the cook, who he noted was the first to go off. A year later, when slaves on his father-in-law's plantation pulled off a similar escape ("a stampede," he called it), it was Diana whose decision to leave her husband behind seemed to hold the key to the whole affair.

To these planters, and the Federal authorities who received the escapees, it was obvious that women were at the center of the slaves' political networks and resistance strategies. And like their male counterparts, the enslaved women were not spared the retribution of planters, Confederate guerrillas and the military. Planters all over the South developed a distinct view of slave women's capacity for resistance, and struggled throughout the war with evidence of their "betrayal" and leadership in revolt.

Their rebellion was not limited to

■ ■ **Women were at the center of the slaves' political networks and resistance strategies**

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When Received.	Coveyance.	No. of bush. Rough Rice.	No. of bush. Clean Rice.	No. of bush. to the bbl.	Price.	Date of Sales.	Gross Amount of Sales.	Nett Amount of Sales.
<p><u>\$ 50.00 Reward !!</u></p>  <p> <i>Ran away from the yard corner of Jackson &amp; Broad Streets, Augusta Ga. on the evening of Tuesday 7<sup>th</sup> April 1863 a Woman "Dolly", whose likeness is here seen. — She is thirty years of age, light complexion — hesitates somewhat when spoken to, and is not a very healthy woman — but rather good looking, with a fine set of teeth. Never changed her owner, and has been a house servant always. — It is thought she has been enticed off by some White Man, being herself a stranger to this City, and belonging to a Charleston family. — For further particulars apply to Antoine Poullain Esq. — Augusta Ga. —</i> </p> <p style="text-align: center;"> <i>Augusta Police Station</i>  <i>Louis Manigault, owner of Dolly</i> </p>								

■ Louis Manigault's plantation record book included this 1863 notice for Dolly, a runaway slave described as "rather good looking, with a fine set of teeth." Dolly was thought to have been "enticed off by some White Man."

The idea of slaves as rebels and traitors opens a window onto the history of the Civil War, and especially to the war slaves fought against slavery itself. In that history, women were equal and active participants in the whole array of activities calculated to destroy slavery, the power of the masters and the prospects of the CSA as a permanently pro-slavery country.

But the women's role has mostly been lost to history. For obvious reasons, both armies were focused on "able bodied men of military age." It was male slaves' capacity for treason that mattered. And it was male slaves' resistance to their masters, and service to the Union, that entered the record books. But the situation on the plantations and in Union Army and contraband camps within the occupied South tells a different story, in which the crucial role of women is clear. Women like Rosa, widely recognized in Pineville, S.C., as the leader of a slave "rebel band." At the very end of the war, after Confederate scouts killed Rosa's sons Harry and Pringle, they dragged Rosa to an open field and killed her, leaving her body unburied.

Slaves may have been merely three-fifths of a citizen for purposes of representation under the U.S. Constitution, but they were categorically defined as property—and not citizens—in the new Confederate one. Yet as Charles Manigault and other planters knew—and the Confederate military was forced to admit—slave men and women could be "rebels" and "traitors" nevertheless. □

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plantations, nor to resisting the government of their masters. As slaves flooded into Union lines, they carried crucial military intelligence; male slaves became a valuable source of military manpower/labor that soon prompted Union officials into new emancipatory directions. Yet the "contraband," as they were initially called, included as many women as men.

The shock to the Confederacy soon blunted any talk of slavery as an element of strength and gave rise to talk of slaves mounting what Maj. Gen. Patrick Cleburne called "an insurrection in the rear." By 1862, planters in Georgia's Liberty County were begging local Confederate commanders to recognize the military damage runaways represented. Bluntly declaring "the absconding Negroes...Traitors," they demanded slaves be subject to capital punishment under martial law.

The idea of slaves as "traitors" was

an impossible one in the Confederacy, whose constitution defined slaves explicitly as property. So an officer stationed in Florida's Pensacola Harbor opened Pandora's box when, past patience with the constant relaying of information about his troop position to the enemy across the bay on Santa Rosa Island, he initiated a court-martial of a group of runaway slaves, charging them with treason under Article 57 of the Articles of War: "holding correspondence with or giving intelligence to the enemy." A traitor, after all, was one who would "overthrow the government or impair the well being of a state to which one owed allegiance." Did slaves owe allegiance to the Confederate government? Could slaves be traitors? Were they subject to military law? After their incredulous master complained, those questions went all the way up the chain of command to the Confederate secretary of war.