



Fig. 1. Alexander Rider, "But I did not want to go..." from Torrey, *A Portraiture of Domestic Slavery* (43). Stanford Special Collections.

What Happened When Anna Jumped from the Window:

The Domestic Slave Trade in Antebellum Washington, D.C.

The woman known as Anna awakened at daybreak in November 1815 and jumped from a third floor window of a Washington, D.C. tavern. Anna's facial features in this inexperienced yet arresting engraving are shadowy, yet her dark, tightly curled hair and the contrast of her skin against the simple white cotton muslin dress make her racial identity unmistakable (Fig. 1). Her anguished leap put Anna's picture and story in one of the earliest anti-slavery writings of the new United States. Indirectly, she launched court cases, started the American Colonization Society, inspired congressional speeches, permitted her tavern-prison to burn to the ground, and put her jailer out of business. No one ever knew if Anna had wanted to take her own life or to escape; her only explanation was that she "did not want to go" (see caption, Fig. 1).

Anna was born into slavery in Maryland. She married an enslaved man at a nearby plantation, had two daughters, and was subsequently sold (with her children) by her "old master" to her husband's master as a payment for debts. Anna was "treated unkindly" in this setting, and her new owner was a profligate spender. After arranging for Anna's husband to work at a distant point in the plantation, the master sold Anna and her daughters to "men from Georgia," who took them to Washington, D.C. to await further transportation (Andrews 129). It was here, warehoused in the garret of George Miller's tavern on F Street, that Anna jumped from the window. Miraculously, she survived, although she broke both her arms and shattered her spine.

Within days, Anna's story came to the attention of Jesse Torrey, a young Pennsylvania doctor on a young man's tour of Washington, D.C. As he stood in front of the Capitol a few days earlier, Torrey observed a slow and sorrowful slave coffle making its way to southern markets. The irony of humans in bondage being paraded in full view of the proudest structures of the new

republic was not lost on Torrey. Having experienced a road-to-Damascus epiphany, he canceled his Congressional visit and determined instead to create a “faithful copy of the impressions... which involuntarily pervaded my full heart and agitated my mind” (40). Anna’s story is the first of several accounts of Torrey’s interviews with enslaved persons, slaveholders, slave traders, and kidnapped free African-Americans in *A Portraiture of Domestic Slavery*, a slim, 84-page leather-bound volume Torrey published within two years of Anna’s leap from the window (Figs. 2a, 2b, 2c).

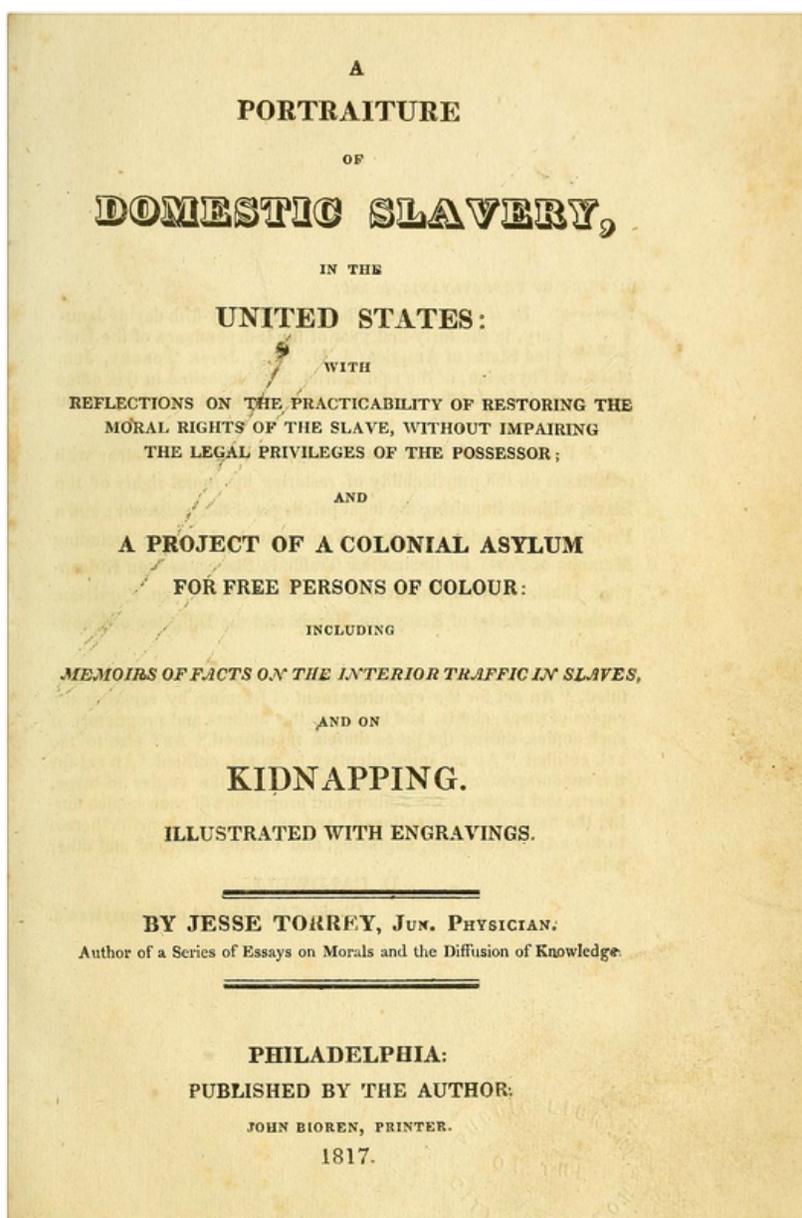
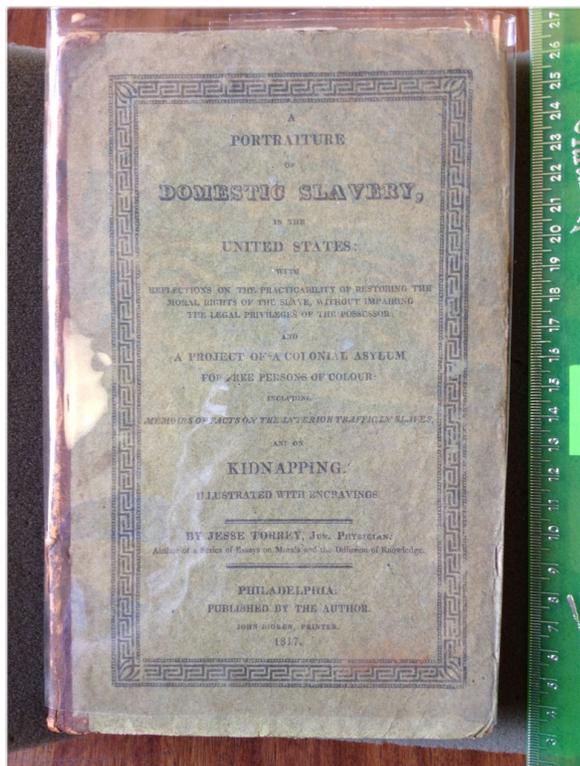


Fig. 2a. Frontispiece, *A Portraiture of Domestic Slavery in the United States* (Torrey). Author’s photo. Stanford University Special Collections.



Figs. 2b and 2c. *A Portraiture of Domestic Slavery in the United States* (Torrey), book cover and pages. Author's photos. Stanford University Special Collections.

Neither Torrey nor his artist Alexander Rider, however, witnessed Anna jumping to the street in front of the tavern. The illustration is instead based on details Torrey noted of the tavern structure—a “three-story brick tavern in F Street”—when he interviewed Anna in the same room from which she had jumped days before. She was lucid but bedridden. The reason that Anna “did not want to go” echoes through slave narratives and literature even today: the domestic slave trade and the casual dissolution of the families of enslaved people. Anna was one of thousands of American slaves—perhaps, historian Sven Beckert estimates, even more than a million (109)—who were forcibly separated from their families to be sold “down the river” as the new republic

stretched its borders to the south and the west. The narrative accompanying the illustration quotes Anna directly: “They brought me away with two of my children, and wouldn’t let me see my husband—they didn’t sell my husband, and I didn’t want to go. I was so confused and ‘istracted that I didn’t know hardly what I was about—but I didn’t want to go, and I jumped out of the window...they have carried my children with ‘em to Carolina” (46). Torrey commented, “Thus her family was dispersed from north to south, and herself nearly torn in pieces, without the shadow of a hope of ever seeing or hearing from her children again” (47).

Anna appears once more in another illustration in the book which reveals how she unintentionally led Torrey to uncover another dark practice within the walls of Miller’s Tavern and in Washington D.C.’s slave trade. When Torrey interviewed Anna, he met three more prisoners being held in the same room. The image of his next conversation, which appears several pages later, shows Torrey interviewing these cellmates as Anna lies under the dormer (Fig. 3). Rider’s stippled illustration includes precise details from the text: the room is in a “brick” tavern; Anna’s blanket is “white woolen” (41-43). One of the companions is a 21-year-old “mulatto” man who is “thoroughly secured in irons...with strong loops round his wrists...connected by a strong iron bolt. On the shelf, over the fireplace, lay a pair of heavy rough hopples [hobbles] with which he said his legs had been fettered...but were then secured by a pair of polished gripes [grips]...connected by a new tug chain” (46). The other two people in the room are a “widow woman with an infant at her breast” (unrelated to the mulatto man) who had been “seized and dragged” out of bed in her home (48). A subsequent illustration depicts the woman’s kidnapping. Torrey is outraged to learn that—unlike Anna, who was a “legal” slave (42)—the man, woman, and child are all free-born citizens taken from their Delaware homes by “man stealers.” As Torrey discovered, slave traders and jailers in Washington, D.C. were not

particular about the status of the men, women, and children in captivity. Regardless of status, any person of color was vulnerable.

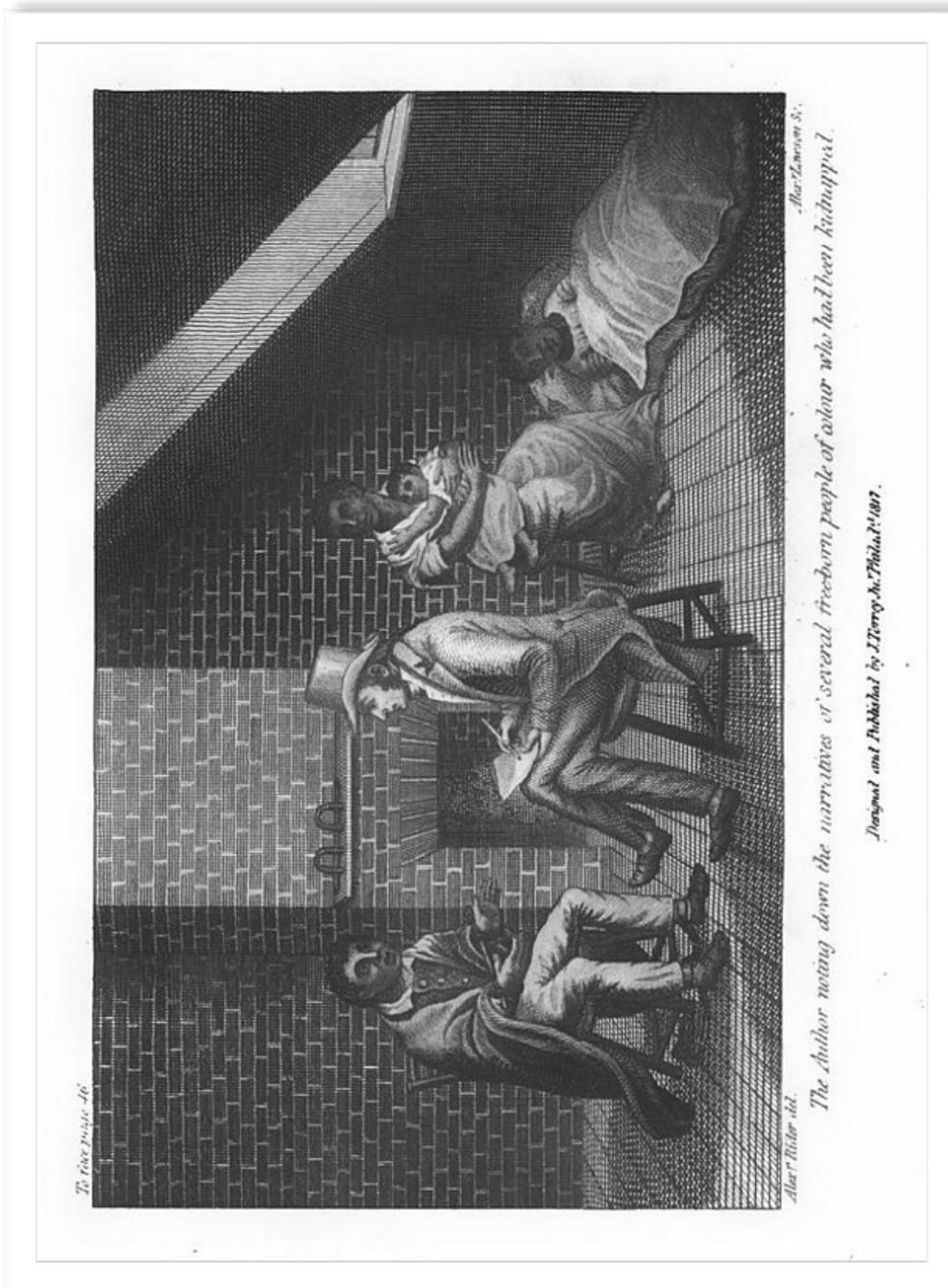


Fig. 3. Alexander Rider, “The author noting down the narratives...” from Torrey, *A Portraiture of Domestic Slavery* (46). Stanford Special Collections. Anna lies under the dormer window.

Anna's story and that of her fellow prisoners formed the basis for unusual alliances. With the help of "Star Spangled Banner" lyricist (and attorney) Francis Scott Key, Torrey was able to get a court injunction to forestall the enslavement of the man and the woman and her infant who were being held with Anna. They were all subsequently returned to their free status in Delaware (Holland 83). In later years, other free people of color were less fortunate, as the trafficking of free African-Americans continued in Washington, D.C. Perhaps the most well-publicized incident occurred over twenty years later when Solomon Northup, who wrote of his enslavement in *Twelve Years a Slave*, was kidnapped and held in Washington D.C. in 1841. He was transported from there to Louisiana. Like the free people of color held captive with Anna, Northup was successful in regaining his freedom, but hundreds if not thousands of other free African-Americans lacked the resources to successfully challenge their enslavement. Because of its geographic location and the large number of free African-Americans in Washington, D.C. and nearby mid-Atlantic states, the capital city was a common site for what Torrey referred to as "man-stealing" (Corrigan 10-11).

When Anna's plight became known, Torrey gained another unlikely ally in John Randolph, a slave owner himself, who realized that the image of a desperate woman jumping out of a building made a mockery of his earlier public claims that slave holders were benevolent. The congressman tried in vain to convince colleagues to honor the "federal" nature of the District of Columbia by banning the slave trade within the capital's jurisdiction. Although unsuccessful in that effort, Randolph joined Torrey as one of the earliest proponents of what eventually became the American Colonization Society. As historian Nicholas Wood explains in his biographical study of the congressman, Torrey's book—and Anna's act in particular—exposed the depravity

of the slave trade in the capital city in ways that even a slavery apologist like Randolph could not ignore (119).

Nevertheless, the selling, trading, kidnapping, and forced movement of enslaved or kidnapped African-Americans continued in Washington, D.C. until the Emancipation Proclamation. Half of the 750,000 people in bondage in America in the late 18th and early 19th centuries lived in the Potomac region. Sandwiched in between Maryland and Virginia with ready access to seaports and rivers, Washington, D.C. was the ideal depot for holding slaves en route to other plantations to the south and west. Washington, D.C. citizens like the tavern owner George Miller profited from holding enslaved people captive; they also served as brokers for slave traders, as intermediaries for owners looking for escaped slaves, and as bankers for anyone wishing to purchase slaves. Slave labor was also essential to the construction of the Capitol, the White House, and other federal buildings, especially in the most intensive development between 1795 and 1801. By hiring out workers, nearby plantation owners thus were able to profit from their slaves' labors in the capital city. Perhaps the most ironic of these contributions is that of Philip Reid, the enslaved man who cast the Statue of Freedom that sits on top of the Capitol building to this day (Holland 7).

Other interrelated factors in the larger context of the ambitious yet debt-ridden new republic fueled the rapid growth of the domestic slave trade in the first half of the nineteenth century. The overseas slave trade had been ended in 1808. This did not affect the actual number of enslaved people significantly, because their numbers by this time were beginning to grow at a natural rate of increase. The Louisiana purchase of 1803 had, however, opened up vast areas to the south and west for cultivation and diversification of crops--cotton, cane, and indigo, in particular. Cotton cultivation in these new regions suddenly became a profitable enterprise

with the invention of the cotton gin. Indeed, cotton gave America a foothold in the global marketplace. The financial value of enslaved people also escalated the domestic slave trade. A plantation's slaves were often its greatest financial asset, allowing planters to use them as collateral for expanding holdings and paying debts. Anna is, of course, an example of the view of slaves as property, as both of Anna's masters sold her and her children to settle their financial accounts. Finally, the fear of being separated from family members or sold into harsher conditions was a form of silent social control. Historians speculate that the relatively low number of slave revolts in the United States—in comparison to other areas in the Americas such as Haiti and Brazil—is due to the constant threat of being sold “down the river.” Anna was a victim of all of these factors.

Although Washington, D.C. continued as an active hub for the domestic slave trade, the stories of Anna and her jailer, George Miller, provide a satisfying conclusion to a tragic story. Torrey's book and the unsettling illustration of her jumping from the garret window secured Anna's place in neighborhood lore, and in this way, the illiterate and now-disabled African-American woman became a local legend. Local historian Bryan describes what happened when, two years after the publication of Torrey's book, a fire engulfed the stables and outbuildings of Miller's Tavern. As the tavern burned, nearby residents obliged to serve in local fire brigades arrived with buckets to douse the blaze; as they assembled, they talked about Anna and other involuntary “guests” held at the tavern. Many, like post office clerk William Gardner, announced loudly that they would do nothing to help the “Slave Bastile.” They turned their attention to nearby properties and allowed the tavern to burn to the ground (198-201).

Miller did not prosper after the fire. Articles in Washington D.C. newspapers from 1819 on carry frequent notices of property seizures for payment of his debts and back taxes. By 1824, a

front page *National Intelligencer* notice announces that a new owner has restored and re-named the tavern as Lafayette House; nevertheless, the building continued as a place for holding slaves (Holland 28). An article in the May 30, 1829 issue of the *National Intelligencer* identifies Miller as one of three individuals indicted by the Grand Jury of Savannah for false imprisonment of Rowland Stephenson (3). Stephenson was, interestingly, not enslaved nor was he even an American. He was a slippery English banker on the lam whom Miller and a fellow slave trader William Williams (the owner of the infamous “Yellow House” slave prison) abducted in hopes of receiving reward money for his return to angry investors. Miller and Williams both pled guilty and were fined and imprisoned for six and three months respectively.

We learn more about Anna’s life after she jumped from the window in an 1836 study entitled *Slavery and the Domestic Slave Trade in the United States* by Professor E. A. Andrews of Boston. Referring to her as “old Anna,” Andrews’s account of Anna’s tragic life is far more complete; he also fills in what had happened to Anna in the intervening years. He reports that Miller claimed Anna as a slave, so she remained in Washington. Eventually, her husband was able to join her; although he “[continued] as a slave, [he was] allowed one dollar and fifty cents a week from his wages for the support of his family” (132). Anna and her husband had four more children, two of whom were still alive when Andrews interviewed her. Perhaps because of Miller’s legal and financial troubles, Anna lived “at liberty” in Washington, D.C. Court documents as well as Andrews’s account show that in 1828, Miller and his son George Miller, Jr., attempted to claim Anna’s surviving children as slaves. Once again, Francis Scott Key appears as an attorney for an enslaved plaintiff, as Anna petitioned for manumission of both herself and her children. The court found in their favor, and Anna and her children were free.

Anna's story and the unsettling engraving of her "frantic act" unknowingly set many wheels in motion. Her leap from the window turned Washington D.C.'s slave taverns and prisons inside out. Her actions challenged the beliefs of slavery's defenders, like John Randolph, and galvanized a young Philadelphia doctor to expose the domestic slave trade in print. Her white neighbors remembered and avenged her when they let George Miller's tavern burn to the ground. From *Uncle Tom's Cabin* to *Huck Finn* to *Beloved*, American authors, both white and African-American, draw on Anna's story, making the family separation trope a common thread in American literature. Like the oversized silhouette on the wall of the tavern in the engraving, Anna continues to cast a long shadow.

Works Cited/Works Consulted

- Andrews, E. A. "Story of Old Anna and Her Children." *Slavery and the Domestic Slave-Trade in the United States*. Boston: Light and Stearns, 1836. Web. 14 March 2015.
- Arader, Graham. "Study for Plate 22: Condor from Charles Lucien Bonaparte's *American Ornithology* (Philadelphia, 1825-1833), Volume 4 by Alexander Rider." New York City: Graham Arader. Web. 13 Feb. 2015.
- Beckert, Sven. *Empire of Cotton: A Global History*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2014. Print.
- Bryan, Wilhelmus B. "A Fire in an Old Time F Street Tavern and What It Revealed." *Records of the Columbia Historical Society*. 9 (1906): 198-215. Web. 31 Jan. 2015.
- Collins, Winfield H. *The Domestic Slave Trade of the Southern States*. 2nd ed. Port Washington, NY: Kennikat Press, Inc., 1904. Print.
- Davis, John. "Eastman Johnson's *Negro Life at the South* and Urban Slavery in Washington, D.C." *Art Bulletin* (College Art Association). 80.1 (March 1998) 67-92. Web. 28 Feb. 2015.
- Corrigan, Mary Beth. "Imaginary Cruelties? A History of the Slave Trade in Washington D.C." *Washington History* 13.2 (Fall/Winter 2001/2002): 4-27. Web. 25 Feb. 2015.
- Dodson, Howard Dodson, and Sylviane A. Diouf, eds. *In Motion: The African-American Migration Experience*. New York City: Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library, 2005. Web. 8 Feb. 2015.
- Edwards, E. A. *Slavery and the Domestic Slave Trade in the United States*. Boston: Light and Stearns, 1836. Web. 1 April 2015.
- Finkelman, Paul, and Donald R. Kennon, eds. *In the Shadow of Freedom: The Politics of Slavery in the National Capital*. Athens, OH: Ohio University Press (for United States Capitol Historical Society), 2006. Print.
- Gardner, William. "To the Public." *City of Washington Gazette* IV.449 (1819): 5. Web. 3 March 2015.
- Gudmestad, Robert H. *A Troublesome Commerce: The Transformation of the Interstate Slave Trade*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2003. Print.
- "Grand Jury, Savannah." *Daily National Intelligencer*. XVII.5095 (30 May, 1829): 3. Web. 3 March 2015.
- Holland, Jesse J. *Black Men Built the Capitol: Discovering African-American History in and Around Washington, D.C.* Guilford, CT.: Globe Pequot Press, 2007. Print.
- "Lafayette House." *Daily National Intelligencer* XII.3669 (October 22, 1824): 1. Web. 3 March 2015.

- Miller, George. "To the Public." *City of Washington Gazette* IV.458 (May 11, 1819): 3. Web. 3 March 2015.
- Mustain, John E. Personal Interview. Special Collections. Stanford University, Stanford, CA:10 Feb. 2015. In-person Interview.
- "Rider, Alexander." *Philadelphia on Stone Biographical Dictionary of Lithographers*. Philadelphia: The Library Company of Philadelphia Digital Collections. Web. 10 March 2015.
- Thomas, William and Kaci Nash. "Ann Williams v. George Miller and George Miller cases on "Oh Say Can You See?" website." Message to author. 28-30 March 2015. E-mail.
- Torrey, Jesse. *A Portraiture of Domestic Slavery, in the United States: With Reflections on the Practicability of Restoring the Moral Rights of the Slave, without Impairing the Legal Privileges of the Possessor; and a Project of a Colonial Asylum for Free Persons of Colour: Including Memoirs of Facts on the Interior Traffic in Slaves, and on Kidnapping*. Philadelphia: Jesse Torrey (John Bioren, Printer), 1817. Print. (also Web, accessed 30 Jan.-10 March, 2015).
- Twain, Mark. *The Annotated Huckleberry Finn*. Ed. Michael Patrick Hearn. 2nd ed. New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 2001. Print.
- U.S. Congress. House. "Committee Appointment: Inquire into the Existence of ...traffick in Slaves, Carried on in, and through the District of Columbia." *Journal of the House of Representatives of the United States at the First Session of the Fourteenth Congress, in the Fortieth Year of the Independence of the United States*. 1815. 424. Web. 1 March 2015.
- Williams, Ann et al. v. Miller, George and Miller, George, Jr. Circuit Court of the District of Columbia for the County of Washington. 1828. Petition for Freedom. *Oh Say Can You See? Early Washington D.C. Law & Family Project* by William G. Thomas, distributed by Center for Digital Research in the Humanities. Web. 5 March 2015.
- Wood, Nicholas. "John Randolph of Roanoke and the Politics of Slavery in the Early Republic." *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 120.2 (Summer 2012): 106-43. Web. 28 Feb. 2015.