

INVISIBLE HANDS: SLAVES, BOUND  
LABORERS, AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF  
WESTERN PENNSYLVANIA, 1780-1820

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*TO BE SOLD,  
To any Person residing in the Country,  
A Negro Wench.*

*She is an excellent cook, and can do any kind of work in or out of doors.  
She has been registered in Westmoreland county. Produce will be taken, or  
cattle of any kind. Enquire of col. John Gibson, Fort-Pitt.<sup>1</sup>*

*T*hough advertisements like the above were not uncommon in late eighteenth-century editions of the *Pittsburgh Gazette*, public knowledge of the role and extent of slavery in early western Pennsylvania is noticeably limited.<sup>2</sup> Histories of western Pennsylvania's formative decades have always stated that slavery existed, yet the institution has never been considered of any real importance to the region's development. Early western Pennsylvania is usually envisioned as entirely free and white, built by small farmers, commercial and industrial entrepreneurs, and perhaps some land speculators. At first glance, the demographic data strongly support the dominant interpretation that relegates western Pennsylvania slavery to curiosity status. Compared to other mid-Atlantic urban and rural areas during similar stages of rapid progress, where slave density could be 10 percent or above, western Pennsylvania's slave population strikes one as insignificant.

Influenced by such data, as well as by prevailing attitudes on slavery and race, the author of the most influential work on

Pennsylvania slavery for much of the twentieth century, Edward Turner, stressed the institution's "mildness" and extremely limited economic importance.<sup>3</sup> In a 1931 article, local historian Edwin N. Schenkel agreed with this interpretation: "On the whole, the negro servant or 'slave' had a rather easy time . . . [since] life in this western country was peaceful and that servant or 'slave' and the household of the master lived . . . in a comparative state of friendliness and helpfulness."<sup>4</sup> In essence, since slavery was so limited and the few slaves did not work on plantations, the institution must not have been "real" slavery, as in the South. Not surprisingly, modern historians reject most of this interpretation, and certainly none would now refer to slavery anywhere in America as "mild." But, due to the demographics, relative scarcity of sources, and possibly the lingering sense that Pennsylvania slavery was a dead letter after 1780, there has been little interest regarding the institution in the state's western half. Gary Nash and Jean Soderlund, in *Freedom by Degrees*, focus almost exclusively on Philadelphia and environs, which naturally had a longer history of slavery and far more evidence of its role in the economic and social spheres. To explore the rural experience, these authors focus on Chester County, which is much closer to Philadelphia than the mountains. The period of western development comes too late to merit much consideration, since the steep decline in slavery had already begun in the east.<sup>5</sup> While works on Pennsylvania slavery focus on the east, studies of early western Pennsylvania tend to pay little attention to slavery, even when considering the region's rapid progress beyond backcountry status. For example, R. Eugene Harper, in his insightful examination of western Pennsylvania's economic development up to 1800, covers the pattern of slave ownership only insofar as it is a sign of wealth, determining that slaves were primarily status symbols for elites and therefore not a labor force of any real magnitude.<sup>6</sup>

This essay addresses the existing historiographic gap concerning slavery in western Pennsylvania. The accepted interpretation must be challenged for two major reasons. First, the census data are not as straightforward as initially appears. Beyond the expected counting inaccuracies, the census ignores substantial groups of African-American unfree laborers who straddled the hazy barrier between slave and servant, many of whom were likely slaves in all but legal status. Second, though the number of slaves in western Pennsylvania was fairly small even with these revisions, this does not necessitate the conclusion that slave labor was of equivalently limited importance. As Joanne Pope Melish effectively argues in her study of New England, relatively few slaves could, based on placement and functions, play a role in economic

TABLE 1. Slave Population in Western Pennsylvania, 1783-1820

|      | Allegheny | Fayette | Greene | Washington | Westmoreland | Total | % of Total Population |
|------|-----------|---------|--------|------------|--------------|-------|-----------------------|
| 1783 | X         | X       | X      | 443        | 695          | 1138  | 3.3                   |
| 1790 | 159       | 282     | X      | 263        | 128          | 832   | 1.3                   |
| 1800 | 79        | 92      | 22     | 84         | 136          | 413   | 0.4                   |
| 1810 | 24        | 58      | 10     | 36         | 20           | 148   | 0.1                   |
| 1820 | 1         | 41      | 7      | 5          | 5            | 59    | <0.1                  |

Sources: 1783: R. Eugene Harper, *The Transformation of Western Pennsylvania, 1770-1800* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1991), 13; Edward M. Burns, "Slavery in Western Pennsylvania," *Western Pennsylvania Historical Magazine* 8 (1925): 206-7; 1790-1820: *Return of the Whole Number of Persons Within the Selected Districts of the United States, According to "An Act Providing for the Enumeration of the Inhabitants of the United States," Passed March 1, 1791* [1st Census] (Philadelphia: Childs & Swaine, 1791; reprint, New York: Luther M. Cornwall Co., n.d.); *Return of the Whole Number of Persons Within the Several Districts of the United States* [2nd Census] (Washington: Wm. Duane & Son, 1802; reprint, New York: Arno Press, 1976); *Aggregate Amount of Each Description of Persons Within the United States of America* [3rd Census] (Washington, 1811; reprint, New York: Luther M. Cornwall Co., n.d.); *Census for 1820* [4th Census] (Washington: Gales & Seaton, 1821; reprint, New York: Norman Ross, 1990).

development far beyond what the numbers would indicate.<sup>7</sup> The enslaved population in western Pennsylvania, particularly when one includes black bound laborers who were practically indistinguishable from legal slaves in treatment and status, was in fact significantly greater than the census data indicate. Further, despite its small size in numbers, the slave population provided a needed supply of labor, including skilled labor, for a region in desperate need of workers. The distribution of slaves among persons in key positions supported individual economic development and diversification, and thereby did the same for the region as a whole. Slavery, then, was much more than a curiosity, aberration, or status symbol in early western Pennsylvania; it was an important cog in the region's rapid transformation from struggling backcountry to burgeoning industrial and commercial power.

In 1780, as western Pennsylvania suffered through brutal frontier warfare with Great Britain's Indian allies, politicians in Philadelphia made two decisions that had major implications for western growth. The first was the resolution of the boundary dispute between Virginia and Pennsylvania. Since the 1760s, when settlers began to migrate in substantial numbers over the mountains, both

states had laid claim—and sold land titles—to the present-day southwest corner of Pennsylvania.<sup>8</sup> In 1780, a joint commission at last determined the boundary. The second major political event was the passage of Pennsylvania's gradual abolition act, the first of its kind. It dictated that persons who were slaves as of March 1, 1780, would be slaves for life, so long as their masters registered them in their county of residence. Also, all children born to slave mothers after March 1, 1780, would be bound to their mother's master until age twenty-eight.<sup>9</sup> All indications are that western Pennsylvania as a whole was against the abolition measure and that the conclusion of these two contentious issues led to an exodus of people with Virginia ties, including substantial slaveowners.<sup>10</sup>

Despite the outflow of slaveholders after the 1780 decisions, the census records demonstrate that slavery remained stronger in the five southwestern counties than in the state as a whole (Table 2). The census does not reveal the true extent of slavery in western Pennsylvania, however, as indicated by the 1830 census, which showed an increase in the state's slave population to 403 from 211 in 1820. The increase occurred primarily in seven counties, including Allegheny and Fayette, where the slave counts rose from 1 to 27, and 41 to 99, respectively. Considering the steady decline since 1780, and especially that the law held that no one younger than fifty years old in 1830 should be classified as a slave, a doubling of the slave population seems as implausible today as it did then to officials, many of whom were proud that Pennsylvania had passed the first abolition law. Thus, a state Senate committee investigated the matter; and its findings help bring into question the definition of slavery used in the census counts.<sup>11</sup>

TABLE 2. Percentage of State Population and Slave Population in Western Pennsylvania, 1790–1820

|      | % of State Population | % of Slave Population |
|------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| 1790 | 14.6                  | 22.3                  |
| 1800 | 15.8                  | 24.2                  |
| 1810 | 15.5                  | 18.6                  |
| 1820 | 14.1                  | 28.0                  |

*Source:* Calculations based on data in First through Fourth Census.

The Senate committee concluded that the apparent doubling of slaves in 1830 was caused by a handful of census takers who mistakenly counted

both indentured blacks and the children of slave mothers as slaves themselves.<sup>12</sup> By law, these people were not slaves, yet the fact that several census takers assumed that they were held in perpetual bondage reveals something about their condition. True, a racially based belief that all blacks were slaves could explain the census takers' conclusions, but there is other evidence that Pennsylvania's legal definition of "slave" was not entirely adequate. Judging by existing documents, the children of slave mothers were treated as slaves by their masters, albeit with a definite termination point, but one that granted the master many if not all of the person's most productive years. They were bought and sold as slaves, with the only difference that advertisements listed the number of years of bondage remaining. Pittsburgh merchant James Berthoud, for example, put up for sale in 1801 his "smart and very active Mulatto girl, 21 years old and who has about 7 years to serve."<sup>13</sup>

A 1788 amendment to the abolition act required these children of slaves to be registered in the county of residence by their mother's master; the resulting lists supply information about this group hidden in the census count. The wording of the county registration list entries reveals that, like slaves, these black and mulatto children were given only a first name. Many owners, like Margaret Hutton, a Fayette County widow who registered sixteen children between 1788 and 1796, labeled the children as property. Some indicated that they were the grandchildren of slaves; "John Neal Esquire of the Borough of Washington enters of record a negro child named 'Charles' born on the 29th day of July 1817 of the body of *Rose a slave until the age of twenty eight years*" (author's emphasis).<sup>14</sup> John Neal's entry and others echo the Senate committee's finding that, particularly in Washington and Fayette counties, some masters retained as servants the children of women born after 1780. By law these children were clearly born free, as the grandchildren, not children, of pre-1780 slaves. Even an aged Albert Gallatin, living in Springhill Township, Fayette County, "without following any particular profession or occupation," took part in this illegal practice, registering in 1825 the "bastard child of a mulatto female . . . whose time of service was assigned" to him in 1823.<sup>15</sup> Extrapolating from the existing registries of three of the five counties, one can estimate that at least one thousand western Pennsylvania children were born into twenty-eight years of bondage between 1788 and the mid-1820s (Table 3).

TABLE 3. Children of Slaves Registered According to 1788 Amendment

|            | Year      | No. of Owners | Children Registered |
|------------|-----------|---------------|---------------------|
| Allegheny  | 1789–1813 | 65            | 189                 |
| Fayette    | 1788–1826 | 124           | 346                 |
| Washington | 1788–1819 | 109           | 211                 |
| Total      |           | 298           | 746                 |

*Sources:* Fayette County, Office of the Prothonotary, "Birth Returns for Negroes and Mulattoes, 1788–1826" (Harrisburg: Division of Archives and Manuscripts, Bureau of Archives and History, Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, 1979), microfilm; Washington County List of Negroes, Library and Archives Division, Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania, Pittsburgh; Edwin N. Schenkel, "The Negro in Allegheny County, Pennsylvania from 1789–1813" (1931), Library and Archives Division, Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania, Pittsburgh, 91.

The state Senate report on the census miscount also uncovered another means of identifying additional black bound laborers in western Pennsylvania. In the counties along the Virginia—Pennsylvania border, Pennsylvanians, who were forbidden to import slaves and keep them in lifetime bondage, instead bought Virginia slaves for about half the usual price, then emancipated them on condition of service for a term of years. Like the children of slaves, it seems plausible that these persons were viewed and treated as slaves during their terms of service. They had, after all, been born and raised in lifetime slavery. The Senate report gave no more specific count than that "Negroes of all ages are brought in considerable numbers," so there is no means of determining the accurate size of this group.<sup>16</sup> Estimates of slaves imported from Virginia and number of children and grandchildren of slaves present an interesting alternative to the picture of slavery provided by the census, particularly after 1800 as the number of legal slaves became nearly insignificant (Table 4).

Of course, such calculations are meaningless without a reconciliation of where these additional groups fitted into the slave—bound servant—free labor continuum. Even if they were treated like slaves for up to twenty-eight years, is it justified to consider persons who were not explicitly enslaved for life in an examination of the role of slave labor? A rather obvious solution would be to expand beyond slavery toward a more inclusive field of unfree or bound labor. Not only would a study of unfree labor in western Pennsylvania clearly include the children and grandchildren of pre-1780 slaves and African Americans imported from Virginia, but also

TABLE 4. Estimated Population of African Americans in Slavery and Limited Bondage, 1790-1820

|      | Slaves<br>(% of pop.) | + Children and<br>Grandch. Est.<br>(% of pop.)* | + Imported at<br>50%<br>(% of pop.)** | + Imported at<br>100%<br>(% of pop.) |
|------|-----------------------|---|---------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 1790 | 832(1.3)              | 1010(1.6)                                       | 1099(1.7)                             | 1188(1.9)                            |
| 1800 | 413(0.4)              | 709(0.7)  | 857(0.9)                              | 1005(1.1)                            |
| 1810 | 148(0.1)              | 378(0.3)  | 493(0.4)                              | 608(0.5)                             |
| 1820 | 59(<0.1)              | 201(0.1)  | 272(0.2)                              | 343(0.2)                             |

Sources: First through Fourth Census; Fayette County, "Birth Returns"; Washington County List of Negroes; Schenkel, "Negro in Allegheny County," 91. \*Figures derived by adding all children registered in Fayette, Washington, and Allegheny Counties during each decade, then estimating additions for Westmoreland and Greene (from 1800) counties based on their share of population. These totals were then reduced by 20% to account for deaths, moves, sales, etc. \*\*Figures based on estimates equal to 50% and 100% of the readjusted slave children totals for each decade.

white indentured servants, who may have outnumbered the entirety of unfree laborers of color in the region. In addition, the large number of run-away advertisements for white indentured servants in the *Pittsburgh Gazette*, often worded almost exactly like notices for slaves (but replacing "Irish" or "German" for "Negro"), would only bolster the argument that large numbers of the region's unfree laborers had specific and needed skills, thus demonstrating their importance in a labor-hungry society.<sup>17</sup> Nash and Soderlund, among other historians, have shown the economic interchangeability of indentured servants, apprentices, slaves, and free laborers in Pennsylvania, demonstrating the desirability of studying unfree rather than solely enslaved labor.<sup>18</sup> Despite all these potential advantages, however, something of value is lost by broadening the scope of the study to include unfree labor in general. In a region where the stain of slavery is almost completely forgotten, it is important to show that actual *slaves* existed, were exploited effectively, and were a factor in regional development. While it is true that the children of slaves and people imported from Virginia were not cradle-to-grave, chattel slaves, they were African Americans born into bondage and were evidently treated like slaves during their terms. They are a nebulous group, without even a good label to describe their status, which racial ideology in western Pennsylvania interpreted as *de facto* slavery. When combined with the number of legally enslaved

workers, African Americans in limited bondage comprised a key component of the labor force. This essay examines their importance in the development of western Pennsylvania and their experience as distinct from that of white workers.

The economic climate of early western Pennsylvania was the major factor that caused the rather limited number of African Americans in bondage to be of disproportionate importance. Emerging from the Revolutionary War as a war-weathered collection of mostly meager farms and a handful of small scattered towns, economic progress had many barriers. Indian attacks continued to be a real threat until Anthony Wayne's victory over Native forces at Fallen Timbers in 1794. Currency was always in short supply, and a postwar contraction of state currency made paying taxes and buying goods with cash nearly impossible for most. In addition, Spanish control of the Mississippi and New Orleans hampered profitable commerce down the region's natural export route.<sup>19</sup> Within a short period of time, however, a rapid economic transformation took place. National events slowly but fully removed the threat from Native Americans and Spanish interference to Mississippi commerce. The population increased almost fivefold between 1780 and 1820, and the fertile river valley soils, rich coal and mineral deposits, and abundant timber fostered nascent industries. By the time of the War of 1812, western Pennsylvania had attained a profitable Pittsburgh—New Orleans—Philadelphia triangular trade and an impressive collection of mills, factories, and other enterprises.<sup>20</sup>

R. Eugene Harper studies the early period of this economic and social turnaround in his 1991 work *The Transformation of Western Pennsylvania, 1770–1800*. His research points to commercialization and economic diversification, as well as social stratification and wealth concentration, directly contradicting the myth of the “classless” frontier society. He shows that a large proportion of the region's taxpayers were not the idealized independent yeomanry, but rather members of a dependent class—tenant farmers, common laborers, and the non-specified “poor.”<sup>21</sup> Thus, it would appear that a large number of people were available for work. Yet, lack of labor remained a constant threat to economic advancement.

Newspaper advertisements and articles demonstrate that labor was regularly short in supply, resulting in high wages but also hampering large-scale economic development. In some of the earliest numbers of the *Pittsburgh Gazette* in 1786, Hugh Henry Brackenridge's multi-issue promotion of Pittsburgh and its environs observed that there was a “great want” of



"mechanics and laborers," particularly masons and carpenters.<sup>22</sup> A 1789 "Invitation to Emigrants" tried to lure shoemakers, carpenters, tailors, smiths, "hatters, button makers, rope makers, weavers, etc." from Europe with the promise of ample wages and opportunity for advancement.<sup>23</sup> In the following years, "help wanted" advertisements were commonplace, with employers looking for blacksmiths, boat builders, joiners, millers, sawyers, wagoners, axe-men, quarry-men, and so on, and "generous wages" were the norm.<sup>24</sup> A reader even favored the proposed construction of a state penitentiary on the grounds that it would provide a steady supply of laborers.<sup>25</sup> The newspaper advertisements provide critical information about the labor needs of western Pennsylvania: skilled and semi-skilled labor was most in demand. Despite the large dependent class Harper finds, many of these laborers did not have the requisite skills. The majority of the poor landless freemen had been born and raised as farmers, not typically trained at a skilled craft, so they were suitable primarily as tenant farmers. The region's glassworks owners, for example, had to depend upon immigrant glassblowers from Germany and elsewhere in Europe because few local residents had such training.<sup>26</sup> There was, however, an indigenous skilled labor force at hand, one that provided the additional advantage to their employers of not drawing high wages: the slaves and bound black laborers.

Although there is no way of knowing what percentage of western Pennsylvania's slaves had special skills and were employed at skilled labor, numerous studies have demonstrated that skilled slave labor was far more common than once thought, when slaves were assumed only to be farm laborers and house servants.<sup>27</sup> Runaway advertisements reveal that at least some of the region's slaves were skilled laborers. John McCune's "negro man named Levi" was "a Miller by trade," and other runaways included a blacksmith, ferryman, carpenter, sawyer, and shoemaker.<sup>28</sup> When the late Conrad Winbiddle's estate went up for sale, his property included 113 acres, horses, cattle, hogs, sheep, farm and tanning tools, a female slave and her child, and "a Negro man, a slave for life, by trade a tanner, and understands farming."<sup>29</sup> Some number of western Pennsylvania farmers and artisans depended upon skilled slave labor; they were joined by emerging manufacturers and industrialists as well.

A particular area that made significant use of skilled and unskilled slave labor in colonial and early national America was the iron industry.<sup>30</sup> Early ironworks, based primarily in eastern Pennsylvania and New Jersey, tidewater Maryland and Virginia, and western Pennsylvania and Virginia, were essentially self-sufficient plantations, with woodlands for fuel, farmland, gristmills

and sawmills, blacksmith shops, and other such necessities.<sup>31</sup> Keeping the furnaces burning and the forges pounding required a significant number of workers; in 1811, at the exceptionally large Oxford iron plantation in Virginia, 117 slaves performed various tasks, including 31 in the furnaces and forges, 24 at the coaling ground, and 23 as wagoners, carpenters, and smiths.<sup>32</sup> While northern ironworks owners, like most northern employers, were making the transfer to free labor by the late eighteenth century, western Pennsylvania still had distinctive Virginia influences and the free labor shortage with which to contend.<sup>33</sup> The region had the low slave populations of the North, but not necessarily the same view of the comparative value of free versus unfree labor.<sup>34</sup> Fayette County, the iron-making center of western Pennsylvania, had the largest proportion of the region's slaves and bound children of slaves; the county also bordered Virginia, making slave imports all the more likely.<sup>35</sup> In addition, within the county, the major iron center in townships surrounding Connellsville and New Haven held a disproportionate number of slaves (Table 5). While slaves and black bound laborers were too few in Fayette County to staff iron plantations fully, they were a proven source of labor in iron manufacture and therefore likely to have helped fill the nascent industry's demand for workers, both skilled and unskilled.<sup>36</sup>

TABLE 5. Ironworks and Slavery, 1810

|  | Population | Slaves | Forges | Furnaces |
|--|------------|--------|--------|----------|
| A) Dunbar, Tyrone, Saltlick Townships, Connellsville | 4,547      | 16     | 3*     | 3*       |
| % of County (A/B)                                    | 18%        | 28%    | 38%    | 27%      |
| B) Fayette Co.                                       | 24,714     | 58     | 8      | 11       |
| % of Region (B/C)                                    | 20%        | 39%    | 89%    | 55%      |
| C) Western Pennsylvania                              | 125,256    | 148    | 9      | 20       |
| % of State (C/D)                                     | 16%        | 19%    | 12%    | 40%      |
| D) Pennsylvania                                      | 810,091    | 795    | 78     | 50       |

Sources: Third Census; Forges and Furnaces: Tench Coxe, *A Statement of the Arts and Manufactures of the United States of America for the Year 1810* (Philadelphia: A. Cornman, Jr., 1814; reprint, New York: Norman Ross, 1990); \*Data gathered from descriptions in Zadok Cramer, *The Navigator*, 8<sup>th</sup> ed. (Pittsburgh: Cramer, Spear and Eichbaum, 1814), 16–17.

Ironmasters, blacksmiths, mill-wrights, distillers, and other artisans employed slave labor in western Pennsylvania. So too did doctors, lawyers, ministers, judges, merchants, farmers, and many others. According to the county registries of slave children, bound black laborers were distributed among a wide variety of owners, thus increasing the likelihood that they were engaged in a variety of skilled and unskilled jobs (Table 6).<sup>37</sup> The registries also indicate that

TABLE 6. Children of Slaves Registered, by Occupation of Owners, Allegheny, Fayette, and Washington Counties, 1788–1820

|            |                 | Farmer | Skilled Labor | Merchant | Professional/<br>Government | Other/<br>N/A |
|------------|-----------------|--------|---------------|----------|-----------------------------|---------------|
| Allegheny  | Number          | 15     | 6             | 4        | 10                          | 30            |
|            | <i>Children</i> | 47     | 16            | 17       | 56                          | 53            |
| Fayette    | Number          | 51     | 21            | 20       | 22                          | 22            |
|            | <i>Children</i> | 138    | 42            | 30       | 72                          | 64            |
| Washington | Number          | 45     | 13            | 8        | 26                          | 26            |
|            | <i>Children</i> | 97     | 22            | 15       | 39                          | 38            |
| Total      | Number          | 111    | 40            | 32       | 58                          | 78            |
|            | <i>Children</i> | 282    | 80            | 62       | 167                         | 155           |
| Percent    | Occupation      | 34.8%  | 12.5%         | 10.0%    | 18.2%                       | 24.5%         |
| of Total   | <i>Children</i> | 37.8%  | 10.7%         | 8.7%     | 22.4%                       | 20.8%         |

*Sources:* Calculations based on Fayette County, "Birth Returns"; Washington County List of Negroes; Schenkel, "Negro in Allegheny County," 91. "Farmer" includes persons listed as farmer or yeoman; "Skilled Labor" includes millers, blacksmiths, ironmasters, hatters, etc.; "Merchant" includes merchants, innkeepers, and tavern keepers; "Professional/Government" includes doctors, attorneys, ministers, persons identified by military or public office title, and those listed as "Esquire" (which generally denoted service in a public office, particularly as a judge or justice in some capacity); "Other/N/A" includes widows, single women, and those with no listed occupation or title. The number of occupations exceeds the actual number of owners by about twenty because some people listed different occupations over the years or multiple occupations at once.

there were few large slaveholders, with an average of 2.5 children registered per owner, a ratio that is consistent among the various occupational groups. Similarly, in 1790, there were 2.4 slaves per slaveholding family, with almost 50 percent holding but one slave and only 14 percent holding more than five.<sup>38</sup> In addition, slaveowners were not, as a group, exceptionally large

landholders, demonstrating further that large-scale agricultural labor was not the norm for western Pennsylvania slaves.<sup>39</sup> An examination of slaveholders in three randomly selected townships in Allegheny and Washington counties buttresses Harper's evidence that slaveowners were not primarily defined by larger landholdings (Table 7). His analysis of Fayette (1785) and Washington (1793) counties shows that less than one-third of slaveholders were among the top 10 percent of landowners in their respective townships.<sup>40</sup> Pitt and Cecil Townships' percentages were even lower, at 20 and 27 percent, respectively. If slaveowners were not defined by land, however, they were defined by wealth. In Harper's calculations as well as those for Pittsburgh and two of the three examined townships, roughly two-thirds of slaveholders were among the top 10 percent in assessed property value.

TABLE 7. Acreage and Assessed Value of Slaveowners, Selected Townships and Pittsburgh

|                              | % of<br>Taxables | % of<br>Land% | % of<br>Value | % in Top<br>10% of<br>Acreage | % in Top<br>10%<br>Value |
|------------------------------|------------------|---------------|---------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Cecil Twp., Wash. Co., 1783  | 3.1              | 6.9           | 11.1          | 27.2                          | 63.6                     |
| Amwell Twp., Wash. Co., 1783 | 1.9              | 4.0           | 7.2           | 50.0                          | 75.0                     |
| Pitt Twp., All. Co., 1798    | 11.2             | 16.7          | 20.1          | 20.0                          | 20.0                     |
| Pittsburgh, All. Co., 1798   | 3.2              | X             | 8.3           | X                             | 57.1                     |

*Sources:* Calculations based on figures in Katherine K. Zinsser and Raymond M. Bell, comps., *The 1783 Tax Lists and 1790 Federal Census for Washington County, Pennsylvania* (Bowie, MD: Heritage Books, 1988), 13–17, 27–34; National Archives Microfilm Publications, Microcopy No. 372, "United States Direct Tax of 1798: Tax Lists for the State of Pennsylvania," Roll 24, Vols. 714–16 (Washington: National Archives and Records Service, 1962). The Pittsburgh figures are based upon the assessed value of dwelling houses (occupied dwellings only) and are categorized by occupant, not owner.

That slaveholders tended to have more wealth than their non-slaveholding neighbors is admittedly not a surprise. Slaves, after all, required an expensive initial investment (notably so in western Pennsylvania) and continual outlays for food, clothing, and shelter.<sup>41</sup> While the tax records show that a fair number of slaveholders were relatively poor, persons for whom a slave or two perhaps helped a farm or small shop to keep afloat, most owners likely could have survived without them. Despite the previous evidence that western Pennsylvania slaves almost certainly provided skilled labor in the iron and other industries, the fact that many

slaveowners had wealth plays into the "status symbol" argument that slaves were of negligible economic importance, non-essential laborers and domestics who served as symbols of their owners' elite status and enabled masters to avoid dirtying their own hands.<sup>42</sup> Basically, this argument assumes that if slaves had vanished from western Pennsylvania, the economy would have proceeded unscathed.

Yet, there is another way to interpret the role of slavery in the case of western Pennsylvania. Slaves did a wide range of jobs for a wide range of owners, and at least some slaves had special skills. It is fairly easy to see how a slave blacksmith or mason could provide a tangible economic benefit to both his owner and the regional economy, especially considering the skilled labor shortage. But farm laborers and domestics also performed work of real economic value, as explained by Joanne Pope Melish in *Disowning Slavery*. Building upon studies of Northern slavery that reveal the institution's economic importance as well as those that explore the "hidden" labor of women's domestic work, this interpretation argues that labor does not have to earn wages or create market surpluses to be valuable or even essential to an emerging capitalist system.<sup>43</sup> Beyond its inherent value, the slave's labor produced a second value, even more important to economic development. "I suggest," Melish writes "not only that slaves' household labor had economic value per se but also that their performance of it released white males to engage in new professional, artisan, and entrepreneurial activities, thus increasing productivity and easing the transition from a household-based to a market-based economy."<sup>44</sup> In essence, slaves did the subsistence production, which granted their owners the time and security to branch out economically and socially.

Melish's interpretation regarding the importance of slave labor seems as well suited to the western Pennsylvania case as for New England. In both regions, slave percentages were equally low in comparison to other areas, but slaves were similarly concentrated among wealthy persons who were in crucial positions to further economic progress (Table 8). As indicated by the child registries, more than 40 percent of western Pennsylvania slaveowners were engaged in commercial, industrial, professional, or governmental activities; undoubtedly, many were involved in several of these activities simultaneously. Harper details thirty-six "primary political leaders" and sixty-one "secondary leaders" who dominated the numerous state, county, and local offices, including judgeships, in late eighteenth century Fayette and Washington counties.<sup>45</sup> In addition to political power, most of these men had wealth, and many had slaves; almost 50 percent of primary

TABLE 8. Comparison of Rural and Urban Areas during Periods of Rapid Economic Growth

|  |               | Slave<br>Pop.         | Details on slave ownership and wealth   |
|--|---------------|-----------------------|---|
| Philadelphia, PA<br>(urban)            | 1720<br>1770  | 12.4%<br>8.2%         | Over 50% of wealthiest decedents owned slaves.<br>About 25% of wealthiest decedents owned slaves.                     |
| Chester Co., PA (rural)                | 1765          | 1.9%                  | Slaveowners averaged 60% more land, more likely to invest in industry/manufacture.                                    |
| Monmouth Co., NJ<br>(rural)            | 1784          | 12.4%                 | Slaveowners averaged 5x more land and horses, 4x more cattle.   |
| Baltimore, MD (urban)                  | 1800          | 21.0%                 | 59% of top wealth decile owned slaves (34% overall for taxable wealth holders).                                       |
| Lunenburg Co., VA<br>(rural)           | 1795          | 50.6%                 | Top 20 economic elites held 15–32 taxable slaves (avg. for all slaveowning families 4.5).                             |
| Connecticut /<br>Massachusetts (mixed) | 1763/<br>1774 | c. 1%<br>(MA<br>1763) | 2/3 of persons with highest valued estates owned slaves, as did 1/2 of ministers, lawyers, public officers (CT 1774). |
| Western Penn. (rural)                  | 1790          | 1.3%                  | 2/3 of slaveowners in top 10% of wealth, near 50% of primary political leaders owned slaves.                          |

Sources: Gary B. Nash and Jean R. Soderlund, *Freedom by Degrees: Emancipation in Pennsylvania and Its Aftermath* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 15, 18, 36; Graham Russell Hodges, *Slavery and Freedom in the Rural North: African-Americans in Monmouth County, New Jersey, 1665–1865* (Madison, WI: Madison House, 1997), 118, 120; T. Stephen Whitman, *The Price of Freedom: Slavery and Manumission in Baltimore and Early National Maryland* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1997), 10, 17; Richard R. Beeman, *The Evolution of the Southern Backcountry: A Case Study of Lunenburg County, Virginia, 1746–1832* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1984), 165, 233; Joanne Pope Melish, *Disowning Slavery: Gradual Emancipation and “Race” in New England, 1780–1860* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), 16–17. Western Pennsylvania: see tables 7, 9.

political leaders were slaveowners (Table 9). These men typically achieved the wealth and status that allowed them to attain political power through economic diversification, particularly entry into commercial and industrial activity.

TABLE 9. Wealth and Slaveholding of Primary and Secondary Political Leaders, Fayette and Washington Counties

|           | Number | % Holding<br>Slaves | % in Top 10% of<br>Taxable Wealth in<br>Township | % in Top 20% of<br>Taxable Wealth in<br>Township |
|-----------|--------|---------------------|--|--|
| Primary   | 36     | 47.2                | 72.2   | 94.4   |
| Secondary | 61     | 26.2                | 55.7   | 78.7   |

Source: Harper, *Transformation*, 145–55.

The rise of one of the region's elites demonstrates this process. Isaac Meason (1743–1818), sometimes listed as Mason, was the first iron magnate of western Pennsylvania. Arriving from Virginia around 1770, he settled on 323 acres in what would become Fayette County and quickly involved himself in several economic activities, though it was iron that made his fortune. In 1791 he opened Union Furnace in Dunbar Township, one of the first iron furnaces in the region, and sold kettles, pots, stoves, and other iron goods to a local population hungry for such products. Over the next twenty-five years he created an iron empire of sorts, owning at his death Union, Dunbar, and Mt. Vernon furnaces, Union and Maria forges, and Middleton Iron Works. He also owned a salt works, toll ferries and bridges, and grist and rolling mills; he was proprietor of the town of New Haven and held over 20,000 acres of land. Meason's wealth was fabulous, as he paid five times as much in taxes as the next highest person in Fayette County in 1797. His economic power was coupled with political power: Meason served in the state Assembly (where he voted against the gradual abolition act of 1780), the state Supreme Executive Council, and as an associate judge in Fayette County from 1791 onward.<sup>46</sup> Meason's enterprises obviously required many laborers, both skilled and unskilled, and he filled part of this demand with slaves. Meason registered eight slaves in accordance with the 1780 act, and eleven children of slave mothers in the following years. After his death, his heir and successor, Isaac Meason, Jr., registered six more children.<sup>47</sup> While no evidence has been found to indicate what functions they performed, surely Meason's slaves were a valuable workforce for his iron and other interests. Whether they served as ironworkers, other types of skilled laborers, farm hands, or even domestics, they must have contributed to Meason's economic success by providing him with a steady labor force that allowed him to diversify and expand his iron empire—which in turn helped drive the region's rapid economic progress.

Meason and other slaveholders, many of whom were engaged in a variety of commercial and industrial enterprises, worked their way into positions of political, social, and economic power, and in the process forwarded the maturation of western Pennsylvania (Table 10).<sup>48</sup> These men were obviously wealthier than other local slaveholders. But there is evidence that slaves played a similarly important function for less prominent men who were also crucial to regional development. Though a small fraction of the population, professionals—including attorneys, physicians, ministers, and others—were essential, as always, to the growth of towns and communities, and many of them relied upon slave labor. Dr. John McDowell, for example, settled on

TABLE 10. Selection of Key Slaveholders

| Name, County             | Slaves,<br>Children<br>Registered | Public<br>Office<br>(a) | Top<br>10%<br>Tax (b) | Detail   |
|--------------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------|--|
| Isaac Meason, Fay.       | 8, 11                             | L, S                    | X                     | See text   |
| Edward Cook, Fay.        | 8, 15                             | L, S                    | X                     | 2 mills, still, mercantile, tavern, land<br>speculator               |
| Nathaniel Breading, Fay. | 2, 10                             | L, S                    | X                     | Mills, still, iron, flour, whiskey trades,<br>steamboat investor     |
| Ephraim Douglas, Fay.    | 3, 4                              | L                       | X                     | Merchant   |
| James Hammond, Fay.      | 2, 5                              | L                       | X                     | Still  |
| Daniel Leet, Wash.       | 2, ?                              | L, S                    | X                     | 2 stills, bank investor, surveyor                                    |
| Alex. McClean, Fay.      | 3, 5                              | L, S                    | X                     | Surveyor   |
| John Minor, Wash.        | 1, ?                              | L, S                    | X                     | Miller, 2 mills, still   |
| Dorsey Pentecost, Wash.  | 15, ?                             | L, S                    | X                     | Land speculator  |
| Thomas Scott, Wash.      | 2, 3                              | L, S, N                 | X                     | Lawyer, U.S. Rep   |
| John Neville, All.       | 18, 17                            | S                       | Z                     | (Whiskey) Excise Collector, plantation<br>owner                      |
| Presley Neville, All.    | 9, 12                             | L, S                    | Z                     | Merchant, land speculator, political<br>organizer                    |
| Isaac Craig, All.        | 8, ?                              | L                       | Z                     | Ft. Pitt Quartermaster, glassworks<br>founder, real estate, merchant |
| John Gibson, All.        | 1*, 3                             | L                       | X                     | Merchant, tavern, military figure, land<br>agent                     |
| Dunning McNair, All.     | 2*, 10                            | S                       | X                     | Land speculator, political organizer                                 |
| John McKee, All.         | ?, 2                              |                         | Z                     | Town founder, land speculator, ferry<br>owner                        |

(a) L=local, S=state, N=national; (b) X=top 10% of taxable value in township of residence, Z=no hard data but highly likely from accounts; \* taxable slaves only, 1798.

Sources: Harper, *Transformation*, 199–203 (Fayette and Washington elites), 17–18, 50 (Cook), 111–12 (Breading); Fayette County, “Birth Returns” (Cook, Breading, Douglas, Hammond, McClean); Washington County List of Negroes (Scott); Schenkel, “Negro in Allegheny County,” 92–4 (Nevilles, Gibson, McNair, McKee); 1798 Direct Tax for Pennsylvania, Roll 24, Vol. 714–6 (Gibson, McNair). For other sources on individuals, see note 48.

187.5 acres in Westmoreland County after his service in the Revolution. From his log house, McDowell “tended the sick of the entire district and operated his farm with the help of two slaves,” later augmented by an indentured boy acquired from the county Overseer of the Poor. While his unfree laborers tended to his home and fields, providing the basics for McDowell and his family, the good doctor was able to ply his trade, serve as a Lay Judge of the Courts of Common Pleas and Oyer and Terminer, and eventually acquire considerable amounts of land and wealth.<sup>49</sup> Several clergymen also made use of slave labor. Rev. James Finley, the first minister to visit the



region, married the daughter of a Maryland slaveowner and brought slaves with him to his 400 acres in Westmoreland County. Finley registered eight slaves, ages five through forty, in 1781 and 1782. Reverends James Wright and Samuel Irwin likewise registered one and five slaves respectively in 1781.<sup>50</sup> Ministers commonly held slaves; at least six of the earliest clergymen were slaveowners. As in the case of Dr. McDowell, Finley's slaves tended to the basic but essential needs of home and farm while the Reverend tended to his flocks.<sup>51</sup>

In these examples, slave labor provided a dependable base from which men who held key positions in the community could build. More ministers, doctors, lawyers, and industrialists like Isaac Meason could flourish in the region because of the safety net of cost-effective slave labor, which helped to provide the necessities of life. Thus, even if all the slaves owned by Meason, Edward Cook, Isaac Craig, Presley Neville, and other members of the elite were unskilled farmhands or domestics, they contributed to the rapid economic expansion of western Pennsylvania. The likelihood that many were in fact skilled only multiplies the importance of slavery.

Slavery would not have existed for long—if at all—in western Pennsylvania or anywhere else if it did not provide some benefit to its owners. While using a slave as a symbol of wealth and prestige could be considered a benefit, it seems an unlikely explanation for the continuation of slavery for half a century after the passage of the abolition act, as well as the augmentation of the bound black population by whatever means possible, including means that stretched or broke the law. Though historians have begun to consider the true value of slavery in the North in some rural areas and regions with small slave populations, like Melish's New England, it is time to show that backcountry regions like western Pennsylvania were not excluded. Slavery, when defined in broader but legitimate terms, existed to a greater degree and disappeared more slowly in western Pennsylvania than the census figures indicate. Many slaves were skilled laborers, while others contributed to the labor force as domestics or farm workers. In a region where labor was often at a premium, slaves, especially those who were skilled, provided an important labor option. While slaves were distributed among the population, they were also more concentrated among key social, political, and economic leaders, including certain professionals, industrialists, merchants, and politicians. Both outside of but particularly within this key group, slaves contributed to a base of labor that supported economic diversification and development by their owners, and thus contributed to the rapid diversification and economic development of western Pennsylvania as a whole. While

the findings here may not definitively prove that slavery was essential to the progress of early western Pennsylvania, they should at least encourage more complex examinations of the census records and lead to reconsiderations of the subject through additional research and broader conceptualizations. Perhaps then western Pennsylvanians will be less surprised to find out that their predecessors owned slaves.

## NOTES

1. *Pittsburgh Gazette*, May 26, 1787.
2. For the purposes of this study, "western Pennsylvania" refers to the region now enclosed within the counties of Westmoreland (erected 1773), Washington (from Westmoreland, 1781), Fayette (from Westmoreland, 1783), Allegheny (from Washington and Westmoreland, 1788), and Greene (from Washington, 1796). While this covers only the southwest quadrant of the state, the lands to the north were barely inhabited by whites before 1800 and still sparsely settled in 1820.
3. Edward Raymond Turner, *The Negro in Pennsylvania: Slavery—Servitude—Freedom, 1639–1861* (Washington: American Historical Association, 1911), 38, 52.
4. Edwin N. Schenkel, "The Negro in Allegheny County, Pennsylvania from 1789–1813" (1931), unpublished manuscript in Library and Archives Division, Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania, Pittsburgh (hereafter HSWP).
5. Gary B. Nash and Jean R. Soderlund, *Freedom by Degrees: Emancipation in Pennsylvania and Its Aftermath* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991). They state that the height of rural Pennsylvania slavery was from roughly 1765 to 1783 (p. 35).
6. R. Eugene Harper, *The Transformation of Western Pennsylvania, 1770–1800* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1991), 55.
7. Joanne Pope Melish, *Disowning Slavery: Gradual Emancipation and "Race" in New England, 1780–1860* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998).
8. Franklin Ellis, ed., *History of Fayette County, Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia: L.H. Everts, 1882; reprint, Evansville, IN: Unigraphic, 1978), 120–5; George Dallas Albert, ed., *History of the County of Westmoreland, Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia: L.H. Everts, 1882), 101.
9. Nash and Soderlund, *Freedom by Degrees*, 100–10. Western Pennsylvania slaveowners were given an extension until 1783 to register their slaves because of the uncertainties of land titles and the like due to the boundary controversy.
10. Albert, *History of County of Westmoreland*, 150; Ellis, *History of Fayette County*, 127.
11. Samuel Hazard, ed., *Hazard's Register of Pennsylvania*, vol. 11 (Philadelphia: Wm. F. Geddes, 1833), 158–59.
12. *Ibid.*
13. *Pittsburgh Gazette*, Sept. 25, 1801.
14. Fayette County, Office of the Prothonotary, "Birth Returns for Negroes and Mulattoes, 1788–1826" (Harrisburg: Division of Archives and Manuscripts, Bureau of Archives and History, Pennsylvania

- Historical and Museum Commission, 1979), microfilm; Washington County List of Negroes, HSWP.
15. Fayette County, "Birth Returns"; Hazard, *Hazard's Register*, 11: 159.
  16. Hazard, *Hazard's Register*, 11: 159; Turner, *Negro in Pennsylvania*, 93. The 1780 law prohibited the importation of slaves into the state by Pennsylvania citizens.
  17. For examples of the similarities, note the following runaway notices in the *Pittsburgh Gazette*, Aug. 26, 1786 and Nov. 30, 1793: 1) "Fifteen Dollars Reward. Ran away on the sixth instant from the subscriber an Irish servant, named Charles Jordan, 20 years of age, five feet six or eight inches high, short black hair, round face, knock-kneed, large flat feet, has an old sore on the sole of one foot; took with him a straw hat, an old blue coat, linen hunting shirt, three coarse shirts, pair coarse trousers, pair [illegible] plush breeches, pair worsted stockings, a pair of coarse shoes; whoever secures said servant so that the owner near the forks of Cheat may get him, shall be paid the above reward and reasonable expenses, by John Wilson."; 2) "Eight Dollars Reward. Ranaway from the subscriber on the 14<sup>th</sup> of October last, a Negro Man named Dick, 24 or 25 years of age, about 5 feet 9 or 10 inches high, strait and well made, he has lost one of his little toes, and one of his fore fingers is strait, so that he has but little use of it. He will probably endeavour to pass for a free man. He has taken sundry good cloths with him, and may procure a pass by some means, being an artful fellow. I will give the above reward to any person who will secure him in any jail in this state, and have him advertised so that I may get him again. Thomas Clare."
  18. Nash and Soderlund, *Freedom by Degrees*, 8; Darold D. Wax, "The Demand for Slave Labor in Colonial Pennsylvania," *Pennsylvania History* 34 (1967): 341; Graham Russell Hodges, *Slavery and Freedom in the Rural North: African-Americans in Monmouth County, New Jersey, 1665-1865* (Madison, WI: Madison House, 1997), 49. Hodges finds a similar interchangeability of labor in rural New Jersey.
  19. For accounts of western Pennsylvania in the Revolutionary era and the continuing problems with Indian attacks, see James Patrick McClure, "The Ends of the American Earth: Pittsburgh and the Upper Ohio Valley to 1795" (Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 1983); Daniel P. Barr, "Contested Land: Competition and Conflict along the Upper Ohio Frontier, 1744-1784" (Ph.D. diss., Kent State University, 2001); Thomas P. Slaughter, *The Whiskey Rebellion: Frontier Epilogue to the American Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986). Both Slaughter and Dorothy Elaine Fennell, "From Rebelliousness to Insurrection: A Social History of the Whiskey Rebellion, 1765-1802" (Ph.D. diss., University of Pittsburgh, 1981), see the dire economic conditions as important factors in the Whiskey Rebellion. For more on the lack of money and markets, see Terry Bouton, "A Road Closed: Rural Insurgency in Post-Independence Pennsylvania," *Journal of American History* 87 (2000): 855-87; Bouton, "Tying Up the Revolution: Money, Power, and the Regulation in Pennsylvania, 1765-1800" (Ph.D. diss., Duke University, 1996).
  20. Diary of John Melish, Aug. 1810, in *Pen Pictures of Early Western Pennsylvania*, ed. John W. Harpster (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1938), 251; John Swauger, "Pittsburgh's Residential Pattern in 1815," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 68 (1978): 267; Amos Kendall, *Autobiography of Amos Kendall*, ed. William Stickney (Boston: Lee & Shepherd, 1872; reprint, New York: Peter Smith, 1949), 99-100. According to Swauger, the value of

- Pittsburgh manufactures jumped from \$360,000 in 1803 to over \$2.6 million in 1815. For more on the rapid growth of industry and manufacturing, see Solon Buck and Elizabeth Hawthorn Buck, *The Planting of Civilization in Western Pennsylvania* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1939), 304-9.
21. Harper, *Transformation*, 122-25.
22. *Pittsburgh Gazette*, Aug. 26, 1786.
23. *Ibid.*, April 25, 1789.
24. *Ibid.*, Sept. 30, 1786, March 3, 1787, Sept. 29, 1787, Nov. 10, 1787, July 11, 1789, June 8, 1793, April 29, 1797, June 16, 1798, Aug. 12, 1806, Dec. 8, 1807. For an additional discussion of wages, see Harper, *Transformation*, 126; Buck and Buck, *Planting of Civilization*, 312-13; Swauger, "Pittsburgh's Residential Pattern," 267.
25. *Pittsburgh Gazette*, Dec. 29, 1807.
26. William Bining, "The Glass Industry of Western Pennsylvania, 1797-1857," *Western Pennsylvania Historical Magazine* 19 (1936): 258-59. The same skilled labor shortage plagued the emerging iron industry. See Arthur Cecil Bining, "The Rise of Iron Manufacture in Western Pennsylvania," *Western Pennsylvania Historical Magazine* 16 (1933): 238; George Hughes, "The Pioneer Iron Industry of Western Pennsylvania," *Western Pennsylvania Historical Magazine* 14 (1931): 224. This study obviously does not mean to insinuate that farming did not require skills. The terms "skilled" and "unskilled," rather, refer to whether an individual had training in a specialized trade that the majority of the population did not have.
27. For a sampling of works that reveal skilled slave labor, see Darold D. Wax, "Demand for Slave Labor," 341; Edgar J. McManus, *Black Bondage in the North* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1973), 42-43; Nash and Soderlund, *Freedom by Degrees*, 37; T. Stephen Whitman, *The Price of Freedom: Slavery and Manumission in Baltimore and Early National Maryland* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1997), 162-63; Arthur Zilversmit, *The First Emancipation: The Abolition of Slavery in the North* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), 34-35; Ronald L. Lewis, *Coal, Iron, and Slaves: Industrial Slavery in Maryland and Virginia, 1715-1865* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1979); Arthur Cecil Bining, *Pennsylvania Iron Manufacture in the Eighteenth Century*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Harrisburg: Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, 1973), 99.
28. *Pittsburgh Gazette*, Nov. 8, 1788, Oct. 15, 1793, Dec. 7, 1793, Aug. 13, 1802, June 9, 1807.
29. *Pittsburgh Gazette*, c. Oct. 1795 (This advertisement, dated 6 Oct. 1795, is one of many clipped and indexed articles from early newspapers compiled by a local historian in the mid-nineteenth century. See James Veech Papers, HSWP).
30. A. Bining, *Pennsylvania Iron*, 99; Lewis, *Coal, Iron, and Slaves*, 20, 24. John Bezis-Selfa has found that colonial Mid-Atlantic and Chesapeake ironmasters used slaves for a wide range of skilled tasks, often as forgemen. See John Bezis-Selfa, "A Tale of Two Ironworks: Slavery, Free Labor, Work, and Resistance in the Early Republic," *William & Mary Quarterly* 56 (1999): 678, 683-84; Bezis-Selfa, "Slavery and the Disciplining of Free Labor in the Colonial Mid-Atlantic Iron Industry," *Pennsylvania History* 64, special issue (1997): 271-72, 277. See also Joseph Walker, "Negro Labor in the Charcoal Iron Industry of Southeastern Pennsylvania," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 93 (1969): 467-70.
31. A. Bining, "Rise of Iron Manufacture," 238; Bezis-Selfa, "Tale of Two Ironworks," 680-82.

32. Lewis, *Coal, Iron, and Slaves*, 28 (Table 1). Oxford iron works was owned by David Ross of Bedford County, who was among the wealthiest planters in Virginia (p. 27).
33. For the transition away from unfree labor in the Philadelphia region, see Nash and Soderlund, *Freedom by Degrees*; Sharon V. Salinger, "*To Serve Well and Faithfully*": *Labor and Indentured Servants in Pennsylvania, 1682–1800* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987), chap. 6. For the continued Virginia influence, see Russell J. Ferguson, *Early Western Pennsylvania Politics* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1938), 15.
34. Several scholars have attempted to determine the relative value of slave, term-bound, and free labor. Usually, slave labor is calculated as the most cost-effective per week or year, but, most scholars add, the *belief* that slave labor was more or less cost-effective than free was as important as any calculation. See Zilversmit, *First Emancipation*, 44–45; Lewis, *Coal, Iron, and Slaves*, 181, 194, 227; Whitman, *Price of Freedom*, 55.
35. *Return of the Whole Number of Persons Within the Selected Districts of the United States, According to "An Act Providing for the Enumeration of the Inhabitants of the United States," Passed March 1, 1791* [1st Census] (Philadelphia: Childs & Swaine, 1791; reprint, New York: Luther M. Cornwall Co., n.d.); *Return of the Whole Number of Persons Within the Several Districts of the United States* [2nd Census] (Washington: Wm. Duane & Son, 1802; reprint, New York: Arno Press, 1976); *Aggregate Amount of Each Description of Persons Within the United States of America* [3rd Census] (Washington, 1811; reprint, New York: Luther M. Cornwall Co., n.d.); *Census for 1820* [4th Census] (Washington: Gales & Seaton, 1821; reprint, New York: Norman Ross, 1990); Fayette County, "Birth Returns"; Washington County List of Negroes; Schenkel, "Negro in Allegheny County," 91. Calculations for the number of slaves per household in 1790 were determined through use of University of Virginia Geospatial and Statistical Data Center, "United States Historical Census Data Browser," 1998, <http://fisher.lib.virginia.edu/census/> (accessed August 21, 2004). The data are as follows:

|   | Fayette | Allegheny | Greene | Washington | Westmoreland |
|---|---------|-----------|--------|------------|--------------|
| Persons Per Slave, 1790                 | 47      | 65        | X      | 91         | 125          |
| 1800                                    | 219     | 191       | 391    | 337        | 167          |
| 1810                                    | 426     | 1055      | 1254   | 1008       | 1320         |
| 1820                                    | 665     | 34921     | 2222   | 8008       | 6108         |
| Slave Children Registered<br>to 1790    | 58      | 45        | n/a    | 62         | n/a          |
| 1791–1800                               | 104     | 73        | n/a    | 71         | n/a          |
| 1801–1810                               | 80      | 61        | n/a    | 54         | n/a          |
| 1811–1820                               | 85      | 9         | n/a    | 24         | n/a          |
|   |         | (to 1813) |        | (to 1819)  |              |
| Slaves Per Slaveholding<br>Family, 1790 | 2.8     | 2.4       | X      | 2.1        | 2.4          |

36. A comparison of major iron-producing counties in 1810 shows that Fayette County had rapidly become one of the most significant and fruitful producers. While the slave data reveal no clear pattern, it is perhaps worthwhile to note that Fayette County was the only one considered here in which the percentage of slaves exceeded that of the state. Sources: 1810 Census; Tench Coxe, *A Statement of the Arts and Manufactures of the United States of America for the Year 1810* (Philadelphia: A. Cornman, Jr., 1814; reprint, New York: Norman Ross, 1990). Counties were chosen based on the number of furnaces and forges (having at least one of each) and persons per forge and furnace.

| 1810                             | Fayette,<br>PA | Berks,<br>PA | Burlington,<br>NJ | Cecil,<br>MD | Botetourt,<br>VA |
|----------------------------------|----------------|--------------|-------------------|--------------|------------------|
| Slave %, County / State          | 0.2 / 0.1      | <0.1 / 0.1   | 0.4 / 4           | 19 / 29      | 17 / 40          |
| Furnaces                         | 11             | 10           | 6                 | 3            | 6                |
| Tons Produced                    | 3130           | 4142         | 2525              | 1400         | 1404             |
| Forges                           | 8              | 22           | 9                 | 5            | 4                |
| Tons Produced                    | 765            | 2430         | 885               | 804          | 415              |
| Persons Per Forge and<br>Furnace | 1301           | 1348         | 1665              | 1633         | 1330             |
| Tons Produced<br>Per 100 Persons | 15.8           | 15.2         | 13.6              | 16.8         | 13.7             |

37. Shane White makes this argument in the case of New York City slavery. See White, *Somewhat More Independent: The End of Slavery in New York City, 1770-1810* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1991), 10.
38. 1790 Census data calculated with Univ. of Va. "Historical Census Data Browser."
39. Harper, *Transformation*, 55; Buck and Buck, *Planting of Civilization*, 280-81; Turner, *Negro in Pennsylvania*, 40.
40. Harper, *Transformation*, 54.
41. *Ibid.*, 55.
42. *Ibid.*; Wood, "Negro in Pennsylvania," 448; Burns, "Slavery in Western Pennsylvania," 208; Schenkel, "Negro in Allegheny County," 96.
43. Melish, *Disowning Slavery*, 18-20. Melish cites Nancy Folbre, "The Unproductive Housewife: Her Evolution in Nineteenth Century Economic Thought," *Signs* 16 (1991): 463-84; Marilyn Waring, *If Women Counted: Towards a Feminist Economics* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988); Nancy Folbre, "Counting Housework: New Estimates of Real Product in the United States, 1800-1860" (unpublished paper).
44. Melish, *Disowning Slavery*, 8.
45. Harper, *Transformation*, 145-61.
46. Carmel Callar, *Isaac Meason: The Man, Ironmaster and Businessman, His Mansion* (Connellsville, PA: Connellsville Historical Society, 1975), 3-13; Evelyn Abraham, "Isaac Meason, the First Ironmaster West of the Alleghenies," *Western Pennsylvania Historical Magazine* 20 (1937): 41-49; Harper, *Transformation*, 40, 51.
47. Ellis, *History of Fayette County*, 128; Fayette County, "Birth Returns."

48. Sources on individuals from Table 10: Buck & Buck, *Planting of Civilization*, 280 (Nevilles, Craig), 464 (P. Neville); Ellis, *History of Fayette County*, 641, 650 (Breeding), 151 (McClean); Ferguson, *Early Politics*, 101-31 (Nevilles); Boyd Crumrine, *History of Washington County, Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia: L.H. Everts, 1882), 193, 525 (Leet), 228-29 (Pentecost); Elizabeth M. Davison and Ellen B. McKee, eds., *Annals of Old Wilkesburg and Vicinity: The Village, 1788-1888* (Wilkesburg, PA: Group for Historical Research, 1940), 35-52 (McNair); Erasmus Wilson, ed., *Standard History of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania* (Chicago: H.R. Cornell, 1898), 144, 198, 664 (Gibson), 682 (Craig); Walter S. Abbott and William E. Harrison, eds., *The First 100 Years of McKeesport* (McKeesport, PA: McKeesport Times Press, 1894), 11-16 (McKee).
49. Davison and McKee, *Annals of Old Wilkesburg*, 103-6.
50. John Newton Boucher, *Old and New Westmoreland*, vols. 1, 4 (New York: American Historical Society, 1918), 202, 1243-4.
51. Joseph Smith, *Old Redstone; or, Historical Sketches of Western Presbyterianism, Its Early Ministers, Its Perilous Times, and Its First Records* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, Grambo, & Co., 1854), 274. For an example of a famous (albeit not western Pennsylvania) minister's understanding of slavery and his employment of slaves to free his own time for other concerns, see George M. Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 20, 255-58.

