

# The Source: Runaway Advertisements in Colonial Newspapers, 1747–1770

*These runaway advertisements are reprinted in their entirety. They are arranged by region: New England, the Middle Colonies, the Chesapeake, and the Lower South.*

*As you will see, all runaway advertisements promised rewards, but it is hard to convert eighteenth-century values into their present-day equivalents. The colonies used a bewildering combination of monetary units they borrowed from the British and Spanish, not to mention their own paper currencies. Exchange rates varied substantially over time and between regions. The following table offers a roughly estimated conversion guide to help you understand the present-day equivalent of the reward amount most commonly cited in the advertisements you will read.*

In 1766	1 pound (£) = in 2009 Dollars	£5 Reward = in 2009 Dollars
New England	\$ 68.21	\$ 341.03
Middle Colonies	\$ 44.76	\$ 223.78
Chesapeake	\$ 76.55	\$ 382.74
Lower South	\$242.10	\$1,210.51

Table based on values of local currency in 1766–1772 for Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, Virginia, and South Carolina listed in John J. McCusker, *How Much Is That in Real Money? A Historical Price Index for Use as a Deflator of Money Values in the Economy of the United States* (Worcester, MA: American Antiquarian Society, 1992), Table A-3, adjusted according to 2009 U.S. Consumer Price Index.

## NEW ENGLAND

### 1 *Boston Evening-Post*, August 1, 1748

RAN away from his Master, John Allen, Merchant of Newton, a Negro Man named Quomino, about 21 Years of Age, a likely Fellow, of middling Stature, his Head shav'd half over, and speaks good English. Carried away with him, an Olive coloured Cloth Coat with Buttons of the same Colour, a new Jacket and Breeches, dark Cloth Colour, homespun, with Pewter Buttons on, two pair of Trousers, two Tow<sup>1</sup> Shirts, two Linnen Shirts, an old Bever Hat, and large Brass Buckles in his Shoes, &c. He also carried with him a Scythe.

Whoever shall take him up and return him to his said Master, shall receive of him the Sum of Five Pounds, and all necessary Charges, in Old

<sup>1</sup> Fabric made from flax or hemp fibers.

Tenor Money<sup>2</sup>; and all Masters of Vessels are upon their Peril forbid concealing or carrying off said Servant.

NEWTON, JULY 26, 1748

<sup>2</sup> Paper currency used in Massachusetts.

### 2 *Boston Evening-Post*, May 19, 1755

RAN away from his Master William Bucknam, a Negro Man named Cuff, about 45 Years old, and pretty tall and slender, and has Scars on each Side of his Face, Negro Fashion,<sup>1</sup> and had on a streaked blue and white woollen Shirt, an under Jacket and Breeches, homespun woollen Cloth, streaked black and white about an Inch wide, mill'd Cloth; outside Jacket, homespun Kersey<sup>2</sup> grey colour'd, and grey yarn-Stockings, thick [illegible], worsted Cap, Felt Hat, and is suspected to have a forged Pass or Freedom for his Protection with him. Any Person that shall take up said Negro, and commit him to Gaol,<sup>3</sup> and secure the Papers, if any, and send me Tidings of the same, or to Messieurs Samuel Hewes and Son, Merchants in Boston, shall have Five Dollars Reward, and all necessary Charges paid. This likewise is to forbid all Masters of Vessels from carrying said Negro away.

FALMOUTH, APRIL 22, 1755

WILLIAM BUCKNAM

<sup>1</sup> A reference to ritual scarification found on slaves born in West Africa (also described as "country marks" in Source 14 on p. 61).

<sup>2</sup> Coarse woollen cloth from Yorkshire, England.

<sup>3</sup> Jail.

### 3 *Boston Evening-Post*, March 29, 1762

#### SIXTY DOLLARS Reward

RUN-away from Mess'rs Bodkin & Ferrall, of the Island of St. Croix,<sup>1</sup> on the 1st Day of July, 1760, a Negro Man named Norton Minors, is by Trade a Caulker and Ship-Carpenter, was born & bred up at Capt. Marquand's at Newbury,<sup>2</sup> who sold him to Mr. Craddock of Nevis,<sup>3</sup> from whom the above Gentleman bought him, is about 5 Feet 10 Inches high, about 30 Years of Age, speaks good English, can read and write, is a very sensible, smart, spry Fellow, has a remarkable bright Eye, he has been

<sup>1</sup> A Caribbean island.

<sup>2</sup> A Massachusetts port town.

<sup>3</sup> A Caribbean island.

seen at and about Newbury sundry Times since his Elopement.<sup>4</sup> Whoever takes up and secures the said Negro Man, so that he may be delivered to the Subscriber,<sup>5</sup> shall receive SIXTY DOLLARS Reward, and all necessary Charges paid by

BOSTON, MARCH 29, 1762

HENRY LLOYD

N.B. All Persons whatever are cautioned against harbouring or concealing said Negro, or carrying him off, as they may depend on being prosecuted with the utmost Rigour of the Law.

<sup>4</sup> Disappearance.

<sup>5</sup> The person placing the advertisement.

## MIDDLE COLONIES

### 4 *Pennsylvania Gazette*, November 26, 1747

RUN away the 22d instant, from James Greenfield, of Newlin township, Chester county, an Irish servant man named Robert Clinton, a weaver by trade. He is of middle stature, with black curled hair, swarthy complexion, and about twenty years of age. Had on when he went away, a new felt hat, a dark brown coat, green jacket, flaxen shirt, and fine stock, tow trowsers, black stockings, footed with brown worsted,<sup>1</sup> old brass shoes, with large brass buckles. He was enticed away by one Sylvester Eagon, an Irishman, by trade a weaver, and speaks very brogueish, but no servant. Whoever secures said servant, and sends word to his master, so as he may have him again, shall have Five Pounds reward, and reasonable charges, paid by

JAMES GREENFIELD

<sup>1</sup> Woolen fabric made in Worstead, England.

### 5 *Pennsylvania Gazette*, July 8, 1756

RUN away on the 23rd of June last, from the subscriber, living in Vincent township, Chester county two Dutch<sup>1</sup> servants, husband and wife; the man named Jacob Hakaliver, about 24 years of age, 5 feet 4 inches high, has a pale complexion, and a down look: Had on and took with him, a coarse shirt and trowsers, a black coat, with white metal buttons on it, the fore skirts lined with red, an old

<sup>1</sup> When used in runaway advertisements from the eighteenth century, this ethnic designation usually refers to German-speaking servants from the Rhine River Valley.

blue jacket, old felt hat, and has no shoes; he has brown bushy hair. His wife is named Magdalen, a lusty woman, about 30 years of age, has fair hair and a sour look: Had on and took with her, an orange coloured linsey<sup>2</sup> bed-gown, three petticoats, one of linsey, striped red and brown, another of brown cloth, bound about the tail with black, and the third of black linen, a coarse shirt and apron, three black Dutch laced caps. She has with her a male child, named Michael, five months old, little of his age. They carried with them some bed clothes, and some Dutch books. Whoever takes up and secures said servants, so as their master may have them again, shall have Forty Shillings reward, and reasonable charges, paid by

ABRAHAM SMITH

<sup>2</sup> A wool-flax blend.

### 6 *Pennsylvania Gazette*, July 22, 1756

RUN away from the subscriber, living in Kent County, Maryland, two convict servant men; the one named Benjamin Shotton, a shoemaker by trade, about 5 feet 8 or 9 inches high, of a tawney complexion, large black beard, and curled hair; he is a talkative, pert, well-made fellow: Had on when he went away, An ozenbrigs<sup>1</sup> shirt, coarse country made trowsers, old brown cloth coat, with a cuff and slash sleeve, and broad metal buttons, old swanskin jacket, with red stripes, and an old beaver hat. He also got with him a pair of old fine blue broadcloth breeches, and probably has other clothes with him. He is a notorious villain, and this is the third time he has run away without the least reason. The other one is a young fellow, named Edward Phelps, about 22 years of age, a smooth faced fellow, about 5 feet ten inches high, slim made and thin faced, has light colour'd short hair, and a down look: Had on when he went away, An old white linen shirt, a country kersey jacket, a half-worn, dark colour'd, and almost black coat, trimmed with brass buttons with wood bottoms, ozenbrigs trowsers, and a pair of old pumps<sup>2</sup> much too big for him. He also took with him two new shirts, made of country linen. They have forged two passes; probably will change their names and cut their hair. Whoever takes up and secures abovesaid fellows, shall have Four Pistoles<sup>3</sup> reward, or two for each, paid by

THOMAS SMYTH

<sup>1</sup> Cheap linen made in Osnaburg, Germany.

<sup>2</sup> Thin-soled shoes.

<sup>3</sup> A Spanish coin commonly used in colonial North America.

Middletown, Monmouth County, East New Jersey, Aug. 1. 1757.

RUN away from the Subscriber the First of January, twelve Months past, a Negroe Man, named Cato, who has since his Elopement changed his Name several times: Had on when he went away, a Pair of Buckskin Breeches, fine brown Linen Shirt, a plain made whitish Camblet<sup>1</sup> Coat, dark Yarn Stockings, new Shoes, and a Wool Hat. He is a stout well set Fellow, understands Husbandry in all its Parts, an excellent Hand with a Scythe in Grass or Grain, speaks English as well as if Country born, and pretends to be free. Underneath his right-shoulder Blade he was branded in Jamaica when a Boy with the Letters BC, which are plain to be seen. He plays poorly on the Fiddle, and pretends to tell Fortunes. It is supposed he has a forged Pass. Whoever secures the said Negroe, so that his Master may have him again, shall receive a Reward of FIVE POUNDS and reasonable Charges, paid by

RICHARD STILLWELL

<sup>1</sup> A fabric made from different materials, including wool and silk.

RUN away from the Subscriber, in King and Queen, Virginia, two white indented Servants, a Man and his Wife. The Man is English, about 5 Feet 5 Inches high, of a red Complexion, wears his Hair, is much Sun-burnt, steps short and quick in his Walk, is a Brickmaker by Trade, and has a sett of Shoemaker's Tools; had a short red Coat, red Breeches with Metal Buttons, an old green lapelled Jacket, a Flannel Jacket with red Stripes, new Osenbrigs Trowsers, with other Clothes, as he stole Part of mine; his Name is James Marrington. His Wife is about 30 Years of Age, about 5 Feet high, very thick, looks well, and has got good Clothes; she is an Irish Woman, and her Name is Mary Marrington.

Run away likewise 4 Negroes, viz. Jack, a black thick Fellow, about 30 Years old, about 5 Feet 6 Inches high, speaks broken English, has been used to go by Water, but of late to Plantation Business; had on a blue Cotton Jacket and Breeches, Petticoat Trowsers, Stockings, Shoes with Buckles, and has a White-metal Button in his Hat. Dick, a dark Mulattoe, very lusty, about 25 Years old, about 5 Feet 8 Inches high, a Carpenter and Painter by Trade; had on Cotton Clothes, with Petticoat Trowsers, and he has got a red Jacket and Breeches, a good Felt Hat, and Buckles in his Shoes. Daniel, a well set black Fellow, about 5 Feet 10 Inches high, has been used to Plantation Business, and had on Cotton Clothes. Dorcas, a small Wench, about 5 Feet high, has been used to House Business, has got a new brown Linen Jacket and Petticoat, and sundry other Things

that she stole. They have all large Bundles, as they stole several Sheets and Blankets, with other Things. They are supposed to be seen crossing from Point Comfort to Little River, in a small Boat, with a Blanket Sail, Last Saturday Morning, and I imagine will make for North-Carolina. Whoever apprehends the above Servants and Slaves, and delivers them to me, shall have Ten Pounds Reward, if taken in Virginia, if out thereof Twenty Pounds.

EDWARD VOSS

If the above Runaways are taken in Pennsylvania, and conveyed to Philadelphia, the above Reward will be paid by RITCHIE and CLYMER.

## CHESAPEAKE

WARWICK county,  
April 8, 1766.

RUN away from the subscriber, on or about the 10th of February last, a Virginia born Negro man named GEORGE AMERICA, about 5 feet 8 or 9 inches high, about 30 years old, of a yellow complexion, is a tolerable good shoemaker, and can do something of the house carpenters work, walks quick and upright, and has a scar on the back of his left hand; had on a cotton waistcoat and breeches osnbrugs shirt, and yarn stockings. As the said slave is outlawed,<sup>1</sup> I do hereby offer a reward of £5 to any person that will kill and destroy him, and 40s.<sup>2</sup> if taken alive.

THOMAS WATKINS

<sup>1</sup> An "outlawed" runaway slave was considered a threat to public safety, and he or she could be killed by another person without fear of legal prosecution.

<sup>2</sup> 20 shillings (s.) equaled 1 pound (£). Thus, in this advertisement, the reward for returning the runaway slave alive is £2, but the reward for killing him is £5.

RUN away from the subscriber in Louisa county, the 24th of February last, 2 Negroes viz. POMPEY, a short thick fellow, 36 years old, Virginia born, very apt to wink his eyes quick, contract one corner of his mouth, and stammer in his speech when under any apprehension of fear; had on when he went away a cotton waistcoat and breeches, died of 2 brown colour, Virginia shoes and stockings; he carried with him some other clothes, but of what sort is not known; he pretends to something of the tailor's business, and sews well. ALICE, a tall slim

wench, about 20 years old, and clothed in Negro cotton when she went away. Whoever secures them, or either of them, shall have 20s. reward, besides what the law allows, if taken in the colony and if out thereof 40s. They are both outlawed.

R. ARMISTEAD

## 11 *Virginia Gazette*, August 10, 1769

RUN away from the subscriber, in King & Queen county, a Negro man named BEN about six feet high, a very black fellow, his right knee so much bent in, that when he walks it knocks much against the other. Also, a Negro woman named ALICE, about five feet eight inches high, of a yellow complexion; and has remarkable large eyes. A few years ago she made an elopement, and passed for a free woman, in Williamsburg, and I suspect she may now do the like, or both of them attempt to get on board some vessel; if [this] should be the case, I beg of all persons they may apply to, to forward them (or either of them) to the most convenient gaol, and the gaoler is also begged to send an express immediately to the subscriber, which he will defray. As neither of those slaves have been ill used at my hands, I have had them outlawed in this county, and for their bodies without hurt, or a proper certificate of their death, a proper reward will be given; the fellow I suppose (for many reasons) will not be taken easily, as he has formerly made several overseers fear him.

EDWARD CARY

## 12 *Virginia Gazette*, May 31, 1770

RUN away from the subscriber, the first day of November last, (under pretence of suing for his freedom) a likely young fellow, named Bob, of a yellow complexion, slim made, near six feet high, has a remarkable down look, is a very good blacksmith, and, as supposed, is harboured by some white man of that trade. Whoever will bring the said fellow to my house in Dinwiddie county, near the court-house, shall receive a reward of FIVE POUNDS.

JOHN HARDAWAY

## LOWER SOUTH

## 13 *Georgia Gazette*, May 26, 1763

Run away in January last, from my plantation near Savannah, A NEGROE called Primus, belonging to James Skirving, Esq; of Ponpon. As he has not been heard of since, I am apprehensive he might have gone away with a gang of Creek

Indians which were down at that time, or that he may be taken up by some of the back settlers, who, I am informed, frequently conceal runaway Negroes, and work them in their own fields, or change them in some of the northern colonies for horses; whoever delivers the said negroe to me, or gives information of his being concealed, shall be well rewarded; and whoever conceals him may expect to be prosecuted by

JOSEPH GIBBONS

N.B. He is a slim fellow, speaks tolerable good English, and had when he went away a new blanket, jacket and breeches.

## 14 *Georgia Gazette*, March 7, 1765

RUN AWAY FROM THE SUBSCRIBER

A YOUNG NEW NEGROE WENCH, named SIDNEY, has her country marks<sup>1</sup> on her breast and arms, and a mole under her left eye, talks no English, wore a blue negroe cloth gown and coat, a new oznaburg shirt, a cheque handkerchief on her head and another about her neck. A reward of TEN SHILLINGS will be given to any person who takes her up and delivers her in Savannah to

ELIZABETH ANDERSON

<sup>1</sup> See note 1 with Source 2, p. 55.

## 15 *Georgia Gazette*, January 14, 1767

RUN AWAY from the subscriber's brick-yard, the 19th August last, ONE NEW NEGROE MAN, named DAVID, of the Gambia country, about 5 feet nine inches high, can speak no English, has a large hole in each ear, had on when he went away a blanket, a hat, a pair of broad, cheque trowsers, and an old cheque shirt. Whoever takes up said negroe, and delivers him to me, or to the warden of the work-house, shall receive 40s. reward.

THOMAS LEE

## 16 *Georgia Gazette*, August 31, 1768

RUN AWAY from Mr. Robert Bradley's plantation at Pensacola, THREE NEW NEGROE MEN, called NEPTUNE, BACCCHUS, and APOLLO, that can speak no English, and one STOUT SEASONED FELLOW called LIMERICK, speaks good English, and is very much marked on the back, &c. by severe whipping. It is imagined he has taken the conduct of the rest, and that they may have found

their way through the Creek nation. Whoever takes up and will deliver the said Negroes, or any of them, to the Warden of the Work-House in Savannah, shall receive TWENTY SHILLINGS STERLING REWARD for each over and above all reasonable charges for bringing them any considerable distance from Savannah.

11TH AUGUST, 1768

T. NETHERCLIFT

