



RUN away from the *Subscriber*

Runaway Slave Advertisements 1745-1775: A Selection

Runaway ads typically included four elements — a description of the runaway, information to hasten the runaway’s capture, the reward offered, and the name of the person placing the ad (“subscriber”):

RUN away from the Subscriber, on the 24th Ult. a likely NEGRO GIRL about 16 Years of Age, named ESTHER, formerly the Property of Mr. Miles King of Hampton. She has lost a Joint of one of her Fingers of her right Hand, had on a blue Plains Jacket, and a Negro Cotton Coat. I will give 20 s. if she is taken up within 20 Miles of this City, and if at a greater Distance 40 s. and delivered to me in Williamsburg. JOHN SHIPHARD.

Virginia Gazette (Williamsburg), 8 June 1776

The advertisements often revealed, directly or indirectly, slaves’ resistance to enslavement beyond the overt act of running away, evident in these excerpted advertisements from the *Virginia Gazette (VG)* and the *Maryland Gazette (MG)*.

1745—Jack, “the other”

. . . two new Negro Men, imported from Gambia, in the Brig. *Ranger*, and sold at Newcastle the 5th of September last; they understand no English, and are near 6 Feet high, each; one of them is named JACK, a right Black, with a Scar over the Right Eyebrow; the other a yellow Fellow, with 3 small Strokes on each Side of his Face, like this Mark (∩). . . They stole a fine Damask Table-Cloth, 10 qrs. square, 5 Yards and a Half of fine Scot Linen, 3 Yards and a Half of Scots 3 qr. Check, a white Holland Shirt, and a Silk Handkerchief. . .

Margaret Arbuthnott. *VG*, 3-10 Oct. 1745

1752—Dick

. . . DICK, a Negro Man Slave, belonging to Tunstall Hack, of the County of Northumberland, in the Night of the third of July last past, entered the Dwelling House of his said Master, and grievously wounding him with a Broad-Ax, In the left Shoulder and Arm, with an Intent to murder his said Master, and hath since fled from Justice: The said DICK is a well-set, artful, and cunning Fellow, about forty Years of Age, five Feet seven or eight Inches high, broad Shoulders, large Hips, a small Waist, Bow Legs, and flat Feet, his Teeth very open before, has some grey Hairs in his Head and Beard, and several Scars on his Head; he understands going by Water, Shoemaking, Carpenter’s Work, and Sawing. . .

Robert Dinwiddie, *VG*, 15 Sept. 1752

1746—Stephen

. . . a Negro Boy, named STEPHEN; he is a brisk, sensible lad, about 16 Years of Age, is very artful and cunning, has been much whipped, which his Back will show, and has several Scars in his Face. He stole, when he went away, sundry Clothes, and about 3 Pounds Cash. He was seen on the 12th Instant, in King William County, on a grey Horse, and was going towards Matopony River; but being met by one of his Acquaintance, he may perhaps change his Course from the Northward to the Southward, for fear of Discovery. . .

Aaron Trueheart. *VG*, 8 & 15 May 1746

1767—Jack

. . . a likely [good-looking] Virginia born Negro fellow named JACK, about 5 feet 9 inches high, about 28 years old, of a very black complexion, broad faced, very broad teeth, of a very agreeable countenance, and when he smiles has a dimple in each cheek; his hair trimmed to a roll and by frequent combing has grown to a prodigious length; his feet are remarkably large, and has by accident had a small piece taken out of one ear, but which I cannot recollect. . . He is a very ingenious fellow, can do cooper’s work [make wooden barrels], and is supposed to have a pass from some villainous person or other, and will endeavour to pass as a freeman; and as he is a sensible arch [crafty] fellow, probably he will attempt to make his escape from off this continent. . .

Charles Mason, *VG*, 19 March 1767

1767—Bob

. . . a Negro fellow named BOB, about 5 feet 7 inches high, about 26 years of age, was burned when young, by which he has a scar on the wrist of his right hand, the thumb of his left hand burned off, and the hand turns in. . . He was lately brought home from Hartford County in North Carolina, where he has been harbored for three years past by one Van Pelt, who lives on Chinkopin creek; he passed for a freeman, by the name of Edward or Edmund Tamar, and has got a wife there. He is an extraordinary sawer, a tolerable good carpenter and currier [leatherworker], pretends to make shoes, and is a very good sailor. He has been gone for eight years, a part of which time he lived in Charleston, South Carolina. He can read and write; and, as he is a very artful fellow, will probably forge a pass. . .

William Trebell, VG, 16 April 1767

1767—Jupiter, Robin, Dinah

. . . JUPITER, alias GIBB, a Negro fellow, about 35 years of age, about 6 feet high, knock-kneed, flat-footed, the right knee bent in more than the left, has several scars on his back from a severe whipping he lately had at Sussex court-house, having been tried there for stirring up the Negroes to an insurrection, being a great Newlight preacher [evangelical Christian sect of the mid 1700s]. ROBIN, about 25 years of age, a stout fellow, about 6 feet high, has a film over one of his eyes, a sore on one of his shins, and is brother to GIBB. DINAH, an old wench, very large, near 6 feet high; she has a remarkable stump of a thumb, occasioned by a whitlow [finger herpes], by which the bones of the first joint came out, and is mother to the two fellows. . .

George Noble, VG, 1 Oct. 1767

1768—“a new Negro fellow”

. . . a likely new Negro fellow, of the Mungingo country [West Africa], about 5 feet 7 inches high, and appears to be about 25 years of age. As he was only landed in the country three days before his elopement [escape], he could therefore have no particular route to prosecute, nor can he speak English sufficient to give any account of himself. . .

Gibson & Granberry, VG, 23 June 1768

1768—Jude

. . . a bright mulatto wench named JUDE, about 30 years old, is very remarkable, has lost one eye, but which I have forgot, has long black hair, a large scar on one of her elbows, and several other scars in her face, and has been subject to running away ever since she was ten years old. I have great reason to think she will pass for a free woman, and endeavour to make into South Carolina. She is very knowing about house business, can spin, weave, sew, and iron, well. . .

Mary Clay, VG, 20 Oct. 1768



1768—Peter Deadfoot

. . . a Mulatto slave . . . named PETER DEADFOOT, though it is supposed he has changed his name, as he the day before attempted to pass for a freeman, and had got as far as Noland's ferry, on his way to Philadelphia, by a forged pass, in which he was called William Swann. He is a tall, slim, clean-limbed, active, genteel, handsome fellow, with broad shoulders; about 22 years of age, a dark Mulatto, with a nose rather flat than otherwise, very sensible, and smooth-tongued; but is apt to speak quick, swear, and with dreadful curses upon himself, in defense of his innocence, if taxed with a fault, even when guilty; . . . He is an indifferent shoemaker, a good butcher, plowman, and carter [cart driver]; an excellent sawyer [of wood], and waterman, understands breaking oxen well, and is one of the best scythemen, either with or without a cradle, in America; in short, he is so ingenious a fellow, that he can turn his hand to anything; he has a great share of pride, though he is very obliging, is extremely fond of dress; and though his holiday clothes were taken from him, when he first attempted to get off, yet, as he has probably passed for a freeman, I make no doubt he has supplied himself with others, as such a fellow would readily get employment. . .

Thomson Mason, VG, 22 Sept. 1768

1769—Scotland

. . . young Negro Fellow, named SCOTLAND . . . has a Scar under his left Eye — It's probable he may proceed towards Philadelphia, as he frequently talked of that City; but, as he is a subtle Fellow, it is uncertain which Way he may go — He lay sometime ago in Dumfries Jail, and declared himself free, 'til one Marpole took him out, [from] whom I purchased him, about Ten Days ago. . .

James Freeman, MG, 4 May 1769

1769—Peter

. . . a Virginia-born Negro fellow named PETER, about 44 years of age, of a black complexion, a slim fellow, his teeth out before as if broke off, and is a sly artful rogue if not watched; he carried with him sundry [assorted] clothes, such as crop Negroes usually wear, also a white Virginia cloth waistcoat and petticoat, a Tarlton plaid gown, and sundry other of his wife's clothes. He also carried away a gun of an uncommon large size, and a fiddle, which he is much delighted in when he gets any strong drink, which he is remarkably fond of, and then very talkative and impudent. I suspect he is gone to Amelia county, to Mr. Tanner's, as Mrs. Tanner, alias Mrs. Johnson, sold him to Mr. Richard Hayles, and by him sold to the subscriber, as he often told the other Negroes that if ever I used him ill he would go to his old mistress, as she never sold him to Mr. Hayles, but only lent him during pleasure, and that he would go to her and be protected. . .

William Gregory, VG, 4 May 1769

1770—"three Negro fellows"

. . . three negro fellows, imported this last summer from Africa in the ship *Yanimarew*. One is about 28 years of age, 5 feet 9 or 10 inches high, slim made, long visaged [faced], and of a very dark complexion; another of about the same age and complexion; the third about 26 years of age, 5 feet 6 or 7 inches high, well made. They are all a little pitted with the small-pox, and cannot speak so as to be understood in English. . . It is imagined that they were seen some time ago (along with three others of the same cargo) on Chichominy, and it is supposed that they are still lurking about the skirts of that swamp. . .

James Buchanan, VG, 13 Dec. 1770

1771—Peter

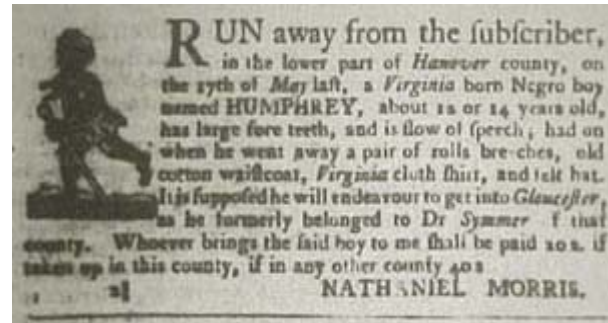
. . . a mulatto fellow named PETER: he is about 5 feet 6 inches high, well set, and about 25 years old. The said slave run away once before, and was out [about one year], he was brought home the 14th, on which day I branded him S on the cheek, and R on the other, though very probably he will endeavour to take them out, or deface them. I likewise had his hair cut off, which is long, when grown out, and very black. His greatest resort [hiding area], during the time he was out before, was Petersburg, Chesterfield, Prince George, and as far as Roanoke, near Mush Island, and James river, passing as a free man, and working on board of vessels: . . . He has a brother belonging to Mr. Dunlop, near Cabin Point, who I suspect harbor him; he has also several brothers and sisters in North Carolina. . .

Samuel Sherwin, VG, 9 May 1771

1769—Humphrey

. . . a Virginia born Negro boy named HUMPHREY, about 12 or 14 years old, has large fore teeth, and is slow of speech; had on when he went away a pair of rolls breeches, old cotton waistcoat, Virginia cloth shirt, and felt hat. It is supposed he will endeavour to get into Gloucester, as he formerly belonged to Dr. Symmer of that county. . .

Nathaniel Morris, VG, 29 June 1769



1771—Aaron

. . . a Mulatto Man Slave named AARON, who brought suit against my Father (Henry Randolph) in the General Court, for his Freedom, in the name of Aaron Griffin. The Suit was determined last October . . . in my Father's Favor, though probably the said Fellow may change his Name and endeavour to pass for a Freeman, as many of his Color got their Freedom [from] that Court. He is two and twenty Years of Age, about five Feet nine or ten Inches high, and marked on each Cheek IR, the Letters very dull; he has straight Hair, and a very remarkable Set of Teeth, which ride one above another. . .

John Randolph, VG, 3 Jan. 1771

1771—Step, Lucy

. . . two new Negroes, namely, a Fellow named STEP, about six Feet high, has his Country Marks [tribal scars], and has lost some of his fore Teeth. He appears to have a very honest Countenance [facial expression], and is supposed to be about twenty Years of Age . . . The other a Girl named LUCY, supposed to be about twelve Years of Age . . . Neither of them can speak good English, as they have not been long in the Country. They went off with several others, being persuaded that they could find the Way back to their own Country. They were discovered, about six Weeks after their going off, near Blanton's Ferry, in Mecklenburg County, where the Gang was dispersed, and three of them taken, one of whom belonged to me. The said negroes are outlawed. . .

George Robertson, VG, 12 Sept. 1771

1772—Jack

Run away, or Stolen, from the Subscriber, a Negro Fellow named JACK, about five Feet seven or eight Inches high. I am afraid a certain Peter Goffigon, formerly a Skipper from this Shore, but lately served on Board a Man of War's Tender, may have carried him to the Western Shore; the following are my Reasons for suspecting him: My Slaves inform me he has been endeavouring to persuade them to go with him and he will free them; that the said Fellow went off with him; that he requested them to advise him how to rob me, and even told them he would make away with me if they should be detected. . . . I do hereby caution the Public to be aware of buying any Slaves of this Man; and I do hereby promise to repay the Purchase Money to any Person who shall convict him of selling this, or any other Slave he may have carried away clandestinely. . . . John Stratton, VG, 23 Jan. 1772

1772—David

. . . a very likely young Virginia born Negro Man named DAVID, of a yellowish Complexion, and about five Feet five Inches high . . . Though his Hair is of the Negro Kind, he keeps it very high and well-combed; but, as he wants to be free, I imagine he will cut it off, and get a Wig to alter and disguise himself. He had with him thirty or forty Shillings in Silver Money, and a Brass Medal with the Image of our present King and Queen on it, which he will endeavour to pass for Gold. He can read pretty well, and I make no Doubt will endeavour to pass for a Freeman and get himself a forged Pass, and endeavour for some foreign Part, either by getting on Board of some Vessel or stealing some Gentleman's Horse and make for Carolina. He has always been my Waiting Man when I went from home, and is a good Waiter, Driver, and Hostler [stableman], understands something of Gardening, of combing and dressing Wigs and Hair, can plow, work at the Hoe and Axe very well, and is, on the Whole, a very clever active brisk Fellow. . . .

Thomas Gaskins, VG, 5 November 1772

1772—Phill

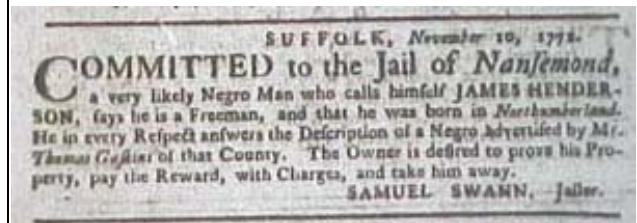
. . . a very likely Negro Man named PHILL, about twenty Years of Age, of a yellow Complexion, and about five Feet nine Inches high, proportionately made. He is a Native of Africa, but speaks broken English, having been some Years in the West Indies, and has lost two Joints off two of his Fingers on his right Hand. Had on, when he went away, an Osnabrug [coarse linen] Shirt, an old Virginia Cloth Waistcoat, with a new Negro Cotton Jacket over it, and a Pair of old Check Trousers. As he has been used to the Sea, he will probably endeavour to get on Board some Ship and make his Escape out of the Colony . . .

Thomas Gordon, VG, 10 Dec. 1772

1772—Dick

. . . a likely [good-looking] Virginia-born Mulatto Fellow named DICK, about thirty Years of Age, a thick well-made Fellow, five Feet seven or eight Inches high, with gray Eyes, short Hair curled close to his Head, a very large black Beard, and a Sore on his right Leg; he is a Shoemaker by Trade, and very handy about any other Business. He may probably attempt to pass for a Freeman, as he can read and write . . . He ran away about three or four Years ago, and then harbored about Mr. Harwood's, at Wyanoke; he has a Brother belonging to Mr. David Scott of Prince George, who has been run away for a Year or two, and was several Times brought from among the Indians on Pamunkey River; they probably may make that Way together, or to Urbanna as they are both acquainted with Mr. Mills's Negroes. . .

James Walker, VG, 5 March 1772



SUFFOLK, November 10, 1772. COMMITTED to the Jail of Nansemond, a very likely Negro Man who calls himself JAMES HENDERSON, says he is a Freeman, and that he was born in Northumberland. He in every Respect answers the Description of a Negro advertised by Mr. Thomas Gaskins of that County. The Owner is desired to prove his Property, pay the Reward, with Charges, and take him away. SAMUEL SWANN, Jailer.

1772—Bonnaund (Bonna)

. . . a New Negro fellow who calls himself BONNAUND,* and says he came from a place of that name, in the Ibo country, in Africa; he is of small stature, and pitted with the smallpox; had on a new felt hat, new cotton waistcoat and breeches, new shoes, and black knit stockings. . .

Richard Booker, VG, 24 Dec. 1772

*spelled "Bonna" in a similar advertisement in another edition of that day's *Virginia Gazette*

1773–Amy, Bacchus

. . . two Negroes. One is a Wench [enslaved woman], named AMY, of a very black Complexion, about 27 Years old, middle sized, well made, and has a mild soft Way of speaking. I have heard that she has been Part of the Time since her Elopement [escape] at Portsmouth, where she hired herself, and passed for a free Woman, by the Name of Sukey Jones. The other is a Fellow, African born, named BACCHUS about 19 Years of Age, and speaks somewhat broken; he escaped from my Overseer, as he was conveying him down from Chesterfield Jail. He has been branded in his Hand; but the Brand, as I am informed, is scarcely perceivable. During his former Elopement [escape] he passed as a free Negro . . . As I have some Reason to believe they will endeavour to get out of the Colony, particularly to Britain, where they imagine they will be free (a Notion now too prevalent among the Negroes, greatly to the Vexation and Prejudice of their Masters) . . .

John Austin Finnie, *VG*, 30 Sept. 1773

1773– Jem

. . . a Negro Fellow called JEM . . . of the Island of Antigua [West Indies]. He is a well made likely Fellow, about 27 years old, 5 feet 8 or 9 inches, walks very erect, and has a Scar on one of his Hands; he talks French, can read and write and dresses and shaves tolerably well. . . He is an artful cunning Fellow, and may probably forge a Pass; and as he was with his Master, about three years ago, at Charlestown [Charleston], he may perhaps endeavour to get there through North Carolina. . .

Gilchrist & Taylor, *VG*, 12 Aug. 1773

1774–Billy, or Will

. . . a light-colored Mulatto Man named BILLY or WILL . . . he is the same Boy, who, for many Years, used to wait on me in my Travels through this and the neighbouring Province, and, by his Pertness, or rather Impudence, was well known to almost all my Acquaintances . . . [A]s he is now grown to the size of a Man . . . he is a very likely young Fellow, about twenty Years old, five Feet nine Inches high, stout and strong made, has a remarkable Swing in his Walk, but is much more so by a surprising Knack he has of gaining the good Graces of almost every Body who will listen to his bewitching and deceitful Tongue which seldom if ever speaks the Truth . . . From his Ingenuity, he is capable of doing almost any sort of Business, and for some Years past has been chiefly employed as a Founder, a Stone Mason, and a Miller, as Occasion required; one of which Trades, I imagine, he will, in the Character of a Freeman, profess. . .

Thomas Lawson, *VG*, 14 April 1774

1774-75–Sharper/Harry Perfume

. . . a Negro Man named SHARPER, about five Feet seven Inches high, pitted with the Smallpox, one of his fore Teeth is much decayed, and he has a down Look. As he can write he may have forged himself a Pass, and I imagine will endeavour to get to Philadelphia. . .

John Edloe, *VG*, 6 Jan. 1774

COMMITTED to the jail of Gloucester county, the 8th of February, a Negro man who says he has no master, and calls himself HARRY PERFUME; he is a short thick fellow, of a yellowish complexion, much pockpitted [from smallpox], and is clothed in brown colored plains. His chief residence has been at Philadelphia, in Pennsylvania, and at Norfolk; he has been several voyages to London. Also committed, A NEGRO MAN who at first denied he had any master, but has since confessed that he has, and that he lives in Lancaster county. But on the night of the 1st of this instant [month], both of the above mentioned Negroes broke the jail afore-said, and have made their escape. . .

William Smith, *VG*, 17 March 1774

RUN away from the subscriber, some time in November last, a negro fellow named HENRY PERFUME, alias SHARPER, about four feet eight inches high, pitted with the smallpox, one of his fore teeth much decayed, and one of his little fingers is crooked. He was tried last March in Gloucester county for felony, and found guilty, but a pardon was obtained for him by Mr. Lewis Burwell; after which he was set at liberty, and lived near the courthouse many months, and I suppose is lurking about there now, as he has a wife in the neighbourhood. . .

John Edloe, *VG*, 10 March 1775

1774–Cornelius and his Wife

. . . a Mulatto Fellow named CORNELIUS, who is well known in York, Gloucester, and most Counties of Virginia, having travelled with me for several Years through different Parts of the Colony. When he first eloped [escaped] it was imagined he would have gone to Carolina, but within these ten Days he was met about three Miles from Gloucester Town, in company with a Mulatto Woman of Mr. Dedman's of York, who is said to be his Wife. . .

John N. Norton, *VG*, 30 June 1774

. . . My Mulatto Fellow CORNELIUS ran away from this Town about five Weeks ago; he was apprehended at Fredericksburg, brought here and imprisoned, and last Night broke Jail. While he continued at Fredericksburg unmolested, he passed for a Freeman. His Wife, a Mulatto, was in Company with him; both were considered as free People, and hired in the Harvest by some Planters. Their scheme was to get Money, and to proceed back upon the Frontiers of Virginia.

John N. Norton, *VG*, 28 July 1774

1774–Isaac Bee

... a likely Mulatto Lad named ISAAC BEE, formerly the Property of the late President Blair, and is well known about Williamsburg, where I am informed he has been several Times seen since his Elopement [escape]. He is between eighteen and nineteen Years of Age, low of Stature [short], and thinks he has a Right to his Freedom, because his Father was a Freeman; and I suppose will endeavour to pass for one. He can read, but I do not know that he can write; however, he may easily get some One to forge a Pass for him. . .

Lewis Burwell, VG, 8 Sept. 1774

1774–Nick

... a clear Mulatto Fellow named NICK, by Trade a Millwright, is about 25 Years of Age, about 5 Feet 5 Inches high, well set, speaks and walks very quick, has a Scar over one of his Eyes, and his Fingers much marked, by being often cut. . . Some little Time since he was whipped, and has many fresh Marks on his Back. . . He is so very artful that he will escape from anyone who is not extremely careful. He ran away some Time ago, and hired himself as a Freeman at a Saw Mill, either in Isle of Wight or Nansemond, and it is supposed may take the same Route.

Benjamin Harrison, VG, 14 Jan. 1775

1775–Harry

... a young negro man named HARRY, who can read and write, and carried with him several suits of clothing. I purchased him of Mr. James Donald, who brought him from Scotland, where he had been many years. He has had the smallpox, can speak Scotch, and sings Scotch songs. . .

John Aylett, VG, 3 Nov. 1775

JAMES CITY county, November 1, 1775.
RUN away from Drummond's neck, the 27th of last month, a young negro man named HARRY, who can read and write, and carried with him several suits of clothing. I purchased him of Mr. James Donald, who brought him from Scotland, where he had been many years. He has had the smallpox, can speak Scotch, and sings Scotch songs. Whoever brings him to me shall have 20s. reward, besides what the law allows.
JOHN AYLETT.

1775–Peg

... a likely mulatto girl named PEG, about 15 or 16 years of age, and of a middle size . . . She was brought up as a house servant, and understands that business well. When she is taxed [accused] for committing any fault, she appears to be greatly surprised, and is apt to cry. The same evening she went away she was seen to go on board a sloop at Layton's warehouses; when she hailed the sloop, she told the skipper, who was a white man, that her name was Dinah, and that she wanted to go to Norfolk or to be set ashore on the other side of the river. The skipper sent his flat and two negroes and carried her on board, about sun-set. This information I had from the sailors on board captain Martin's ship, who saw all that passed. I am inclined to believe she was prevailed on to go off, as she went away without the least provocation, and never was guilty of the like before. She was born where I live, and never was 5 miles from home.

Richard Hipkins, VG, 12 Jan. 1775

1775–Sam

... a negro fellow named SAM, 5 feet 5 or 6 inches high, has a broad face, and is a well looking fellow. As to his clothing, I cannot be certain, he having carried several things with him. He also took with him an old bay horse very gray about the head, an iron pot, a narrow axe, a handsaw, and an old smooth bore gun. About three years ago he purchased his freedom of his old master, Mr. Francis Slaughter, and continued in that state till this spring, when it was discovered he was attempting to inveigle [entice] away a number of negroes to the new or Indian country (where he had been most of the last summer) upon which the neighbours insisted on his being reduced to slavery again, and I purchased him. I imagine he will endeavour to pass as a freeman, he having a discharge from his old master, as well as one from Lord Dunmore, having served in the expedition against the Indians last fall. . .

Gabriel Jones, VG, 16 June 1775

1775–Dick

... a very remarkable light mulatto slave, named DICK, the property of Mr. Anthony Lamb of Amelia, about 20 years old, 5 feet 5 or 6 inches high, has a down look, a scar on his upper lip, short dark hair, and dark eyes . . . He has been run away for 18 months past, and went by water as a freeman, till last summer, when he enlisted as a soldier, in Princess Anne county, under Capt. Davis, by the name of Will Thompson, and came to this city, where he was taken up, and committed to jail. I imagine he will again try to pass for a freeman, and endeavour to get on board some vessel, or return to Nansemond, where I hear he left a crop of corn. . .

John Lamb, VG, 17 Nov. 1775