Resource #11. A Slave Escape

This excerpt of a letter from a South Carolina planter and slave owner, William Elliot, to his son, tells the story of an attempted slave escape and what happened to the enslaved people once they were caught.

Adams Run 25th Aug 1862

Dear William

… We have had an anxious time of it last week. Last Thursday night — after we were in bed — Ralph came from the plantation to tell us that all the prime hands at Oak lawn had gone off to the Yankees! Ralph had been very sick all day hardly able to hold up his head, but put himself to intercept them if possible. We went over to the Rebel camp to ask their assistance in getting down to Wilton Bluff, but they were under orders to go to Summerville. We then woke up Genl [Haywood?] and asked for a body of horses — for which, getting an order, he went to camp and got a lieut[enant]'s guard and proceeded to Pinebury, Wilton and Geddes' plantation — by which move we had the good fortune to get ahead of the absconding negroes, and put an end to their purpose.

When they found they were anticipated they returned privately to the plantation while it was yet night — thinking to prevent exposure — but Ralph had sent to warn […]'s overseer, who finding the assemblage pursued and captured one of my negroes — Monday — and thus betrayed the whole plan and parties involved. Walley's whole family (except old Walley) Law Israel David Monday Jeoffry in all nearly twenty — including you will be indignant to hear — Master Bob, with his wife and her brother!

Next day we went to the plantation and having proofs conclusive of their guilt proceeded to punish them by whips and handcuffing. Sam and Thomas Ralph has been sent to the Work House in Charleston to be sold. The rest are being watched and chained at night until the police of the river can be secured as to leave us at liberty to release them. …

Resource #11. A Slave Escape (cont'd)

> *You will perceive by this that our negroes are utterly demoralised — the emissaries of the Yankees have doubtless been among them preaching the delights of freedom — which the poor dupes believe they will obtain by putting themselves under their control.*
>
> *I am dear William*
>
> *your aff[ectiona]te Father*
>
> *Wm Elliott*

Questions for Students:

- How had these enslaved people decided to resist slavery?
- What does Elliot think motivated them?
- What do you think other slaves on Elliot's plantation might have thought about escaping, after seeing what happened to this group?