CHAPTER 2

Shaping Bodies in Print

Labor and Health

In any given year, hundreds of colonial Americans escaped their homes in a bid for freedom. Newspaper advertisements narrated many of these self-liberations. With just a few lines of text, an advertiser attempted to describe a runaway servant's or slave's appearance so that readers could envision a three-dimensional person. A runaway laborer's size and shape, age and health, general looks, and specific idiosyncrasies might all be potential identifying factors. Advertisements were filled with lusty and likely bodies; down looks and surly affects; well-set and straight-limbed frames; long visages and full faces.

Descriptions of missing persons turned observation, belief, and imagination into corporeal characteristics. The many features noted in advertisements reveal as much about the appearance of runaways as about colonial understandings of bodies. Never islands unto themselves, bodies were always in relation: in relation to perceptions of an individual's laboring abilities; in relation to beliefs about sex and race; and in relation to how external appearance reflected internal health and character.[1] While Chapter 1 focused on broad understandings of bodies within early modern European expansion, this chapter moves squarely across the Atlantic to explore how colonists connected humoral beliefs to appearance and labor capabilities. The range of descriptive choices in advertisements—whether to list a given characteristic, whether to describe measurable features quantitatively or qualitatively, or how many details to include—all contributed to colonial understandings of how particular kinds of laboring bodies were expected to look and behave.

Determining the relationship between visible variations and the influence of racial ideologies is no simple task. Even though advertisements reflected the describer's worldview, some descriptions related to material variations in bodies. Yet advertisements were not textual replicas of bodies: they were cultural transformations of individual lives into print. Masters may have lived and looked more closely at people of European descent. Gender and sartorial practices left some bodies more visually accessible than others. To analyze the culturally specific ways that different groups of laborers were described does not deny the physicalities undergirding descriptions. Rather, it notes which features, out of the hundreds that could be usefully described, were naturalized as innate features on which bodies in this specific historic context.

In lieu of observable, measurable details, African-descended bodies were transformed into chattel through their owners' evaluative descriptions. This served both to commodify enslaved human beings and create racial difference with criteria beyond ethnicity, nationality, and skin color. Labeling of Negro or European heritage may have been a prerequisite for identification, but its assertion was accompanied by a wide array of features that reified categorization into physical reality. For instance, health, illness, well-being, disability, and ability served as markers to define race in the colonial eighteenth century even without explicit recourse to ideas of racial difference. By more often specifying the age and height of European-descended runaways, advertisers focused on self-represented details for these free laborers, while regularly classifying enslaved laborers with evaluations made by the people who owned them. Likewise, advertisers emphasized free laborers' specific ailments but more generically described enslaved people's ill health.

By making such subjective distinctions, colonial advertisers reified racial ideologies. When they relied on humorally based interpretations more for European-descended than for African-descended laborers, they were transforming opinions into physiological realities and cementing race as a category of difference. A wide expanse of laborers' physiological and psychological features were transformed into material capital by constituting what it meant to be identified as a person of European or African or (less frequently) Native American heritage. This process, labeled "racecraft" by historian Barbara Fields and sociologist Karen Fields, did not require that European and African bodies be set in opposition to one another.[2] Instead, incompatible standards for evaluation of appearance reaffirmed colonists' social, economic, and ideological divisions on a daily basis.

A Frame for Laboring: Age and Height

Colonial advertisers emphasized age and height in their searches for runaways. In my topic modeling study of the eighteenth-century *Pennsylvania Gazette*, for instance, some of the most likely descriptive words to appear in reference to runaways were "years old," "feet," and "inches."[3] Whether the person was old or young, tall or short: these were presumably visible features that provided a literal framework for identification. Age and height simultaneously conveyed information about health. When colonists chose to describe someone by a qualitative term such as "young," "middle aged," or "elderly," they were conveying an evaluation of appearance in lieu of a specific age with the expectation that readers would share their perspective on what an "old" or "young" person would look like. Likewise, descriptions of "short," "tall," or "middling" spoke to an implicit set of shared beliefs. Even numerical representations of height conveyed more than numbers on a measuring stick. Height could serve as a proxy for strength, health, and the effect of life history on bodies. In the contexts of servitude and enslavement, age and size provided a way to mark differentiated life experiences and reinforce racialized expectations of laboring bodies.

Even though runaways largely clustered into a youthful subset of colonists' life span, age was a common descriptive criterion. One historical study of an early American newspaper found that two-thirds of advertisements listed the runaway's age.[4] In the thousands of advertisements analyzed here, slightly less than two-thirds of runaways had their numerical age listed in advertisements. Unsurprisingly, runaways were usually on the young side of the adult population, with half of all missing persons identified as being between twenty and thirty years old. New England runaways with specific ages listed in advertisements were slightly younger: the age of the middle 50 percent fell between eighteen and twenty-eight years old, likely reflecting the traditional New England system of apprenticing out teenaged children. Conversely, criminals who had escaped from jail were older than other runaways, averaging thirty years old. Beyond these variations, there was little deviation among the average numerical ages for runaways, with most subgroups averaging twenty-four or twenty-five years of age.[5]

Age might seem like one of the most objective features in bodily descriptions, but it was not necessarily an exact count of the person's years on earth.[6] In a phenomenon known as age heaping, runaways were much

more likely to be listed at an age that was a multiple of five: for example, twice as many runaways were identified as being twenty-five years old as twenty-four or twenty-six years old.[7] This may be partly why Barnaby, the recidivist runaway discussed in the Introduction, aged from twenty to twenty-five years old in only three years.

Whether owners knew their laborers' exact ages was less important than their ability to decide the public age of missing persons in their absence. In many cases, owners and masters knew the specific age of their laborers. Indentured servants and apprentices often had ages entered into legal documents that their masters could have consulted. Many slave owners recorded their property's age at times of sale or as regular bookkeeping practices. But the nearest half decade often seemed accurate enough for identification purposes. An exact numerical age was probably an unnecessarily specific descriptor for a visual identification—someone being twenty-two rather than twenty-six years old, for example, would not make a consistent difference in their appearance. In 1758, one owner said that missing slave Hercules was "about 27 years of Age." When Hercules ran away again two years later, his new owner referenced that advertisement but estimated that Hercules was now "about 26 years of age."[8] Even a factual characteristic like numerical age reflected advertisers' views of how old their property seemed to be.

Colonists emphasized the numeric age of some runaways but the qualitative age range of others. Advertisers' age categorizations of African-descended people used old and young as labor divisions under slavery, while European-descended servants were most likely to have specific, enumerable details of their age noted in advertisements. Almost seven in ten European-descended runaways were described by a numerical age, as compared to only about one in two African-descended runaways.[9] Some scholars theorize that the absence of a known numerical age could reflect an individual's lack of quantitative literacy. Economists suggest that recording numerical age can reflect levels of societal numeracy, and they use that numeracy to trace the rise of "human capital."[10] But the term has an entirely different meaning when applied to enslaved people, who were, literally, capital themselves.[11] Recordings of age in runaway advertisements were not self-presentations by those who had become missing persons. Rather than a lack of self-knowledge, age categories more likely reflected a slave owner's comparatively lower interest in the precise age of his chattel.

African-descended people were far more likely to have their age described with a qualitative judgment—about five times as often as people

of European descent. There were undoubtedly more "elderly" enslaved people than servants in colonial America because enslavement was in perpetuity. And indeed, almost every runaway identified as elderly was of African descent. A man identified only as an Angola slave was described as elderly and Fortune was called "an elder fellow" when they were each imprisoned in a South Carolina workhouse.[12] Youthful status—referring to someone as a young adult—was also far more employed as a descriptor for African-descended people. Sam, Sue, Sylvia, Starry, Sill, Syphax, and Simon were all described as young in advertisements for their capture.[13] New England, with its preponderance of Anglo-American servants, offers a reminder that colonists were choosing whether to use categorical or numerical terms: New England advertisements averaged the numerically youngest population of runaways but did not qualitatively emphasize their runaways as "young."

Again, *quantitative* ages listed for runaways were largely similar, with less than a year separating the average African-descended and European-descended runaways' ages. And given the harsh treatment of individuals who were slaves, African-descended people may have looked older than how European-descended colonists expected a particular age to appear. Medical anthropologists have described the "structural violence" of poverty, oppression, and violence that leads to physical decline and illness.[14] The qualitative evaluation of age thus served as a marker of a body's life experiences as much as any number of years and days lived.

Advertisers disproportionately chose to describe the age of their African-descended runaways in general categories rather than as reflections of specific, individual lives lived. Disproportionately focusing on the qualitative age status of enslaved people emphasized external evaluations of African-descended bodies. An exact age reproduced a person's features as a form of identity: it allowed individuals to track their own life history. Choosing categorizations over exact ages effectively linked a non-racialized feature of physical appearance to a racial categorization.[15]

The exclusion of exact ages from advertisements was a decision by the slave owners and copywriters, not an indication of a lack of numerical self-knowledge by people of African descent. Enslaved people knew their own numerical ages and those of their family and their community members. Olaudah Equiano recalled that he had "turned the age of eleven" when he was first captured into slavery and "was near twelve years of age" when he arrived in England.[16] Harriet Jacobs noted when she was "fifteen years old"; wrote that an "old black man" who joined a Baptist church was "fifty-three

years old"; and commented on the ages of numerous children.[17] Another ex-slave narrative noted that a man named Ebenezer Hills had become "free when twenty-eight years of age" and died in 1849 at 110 years old.[18] These former enslaved people recalled specific ages as a significant marker of their personal life experiences.

Owner-determined age categorization emphasized an externally commodified value for enslaved people. As chattel, enslaved people's ages were tied to their long-term labor capability rather than short-term expectations of changes in servitude or service. Owners who identified their missing property as "young" were implicitly noting the lengthy timeline for which they might be deprived of their enslaved runaways' labor. Age specificity mattered far less in reference to a lifetime laborer than to a servant with limited years of obligation. Rather than just being an approximated descriptor of appearance, enslaved people's age conveyed their bodies' economic value through their description.

From the day of their first capture and sale, enslaved people were commodified into productivity and reproductivity groupings that were heavily reliant on their apparent age. This lack of a self-produced numerical age meant that the judgment of the enslaved person's owner—was their slave young, old, or somewhere in between—substituted for what could have been a concrete descriptive marker. Thus Virginian John Thornton wrote unhappily about the human cargo of the ship *Othello* in 1773: "those left on hand you may believe must be of less value than the others, being 9 old women 4 Men, 3 of them old, 4 small girls & 4 very small boys which are very unsaleable."[19] Combined with sex divisions, too old or too young conveyed a reduced economic value. Slave merchant Henry Laurens was more specific about the age range of the "young People" he thought would sell best: "males from 14 to 20 or 25 years of age, & the females from 14 to 20."[20] A South Carolina advertisement more generally described the "choice Cargo of young healthy Negroes" that had just been imported from Angola.[21] The age-range designation of youth—which, as Laurens's request shows, was quantitatively younger for enslaved women than men—may suggest why more African-descended women were marked with a status of agedness: enslaved women were seen to reach old age half a decade before enslaved men. Oldness was a relative judgment: more women have been prematurely perceived as elderly because women's value was more directly tied to the ability to reproduce.[22]

This emphasis on age as a proxy for labor capabilities continued past the slave market and into daily life under enslavement. Documentation

from George Washington's plantation offers some useful examples. A 1762 list of enslaved people included the ages of only the children: Belinda was recorded as five years old, Milly as four, and Boson as just a year old.[23] Adult laborers' ages went unmentioned; instead a monetary value substituted for mention of their ages. A 1780s list of Mount Vernon slaves again noted the ages of children, while implying the advanced age of others in direct relation to their labor capabilities: Doll was "almost past service," "Alce [*sic*]" was "old and almost blind," and Schomberg was "past labour." The list also included a notation of "Women old[:] 10."[24] Age categorizations were a determinant of enslaved people's labor value. As John Adams noted of debates over the counting of enslaved people for tax and representation purposes in the Articles of Confederation, "the young and old Negroes are a Burthen to their owners."[25] Substituting owners' judgments for African-descended people's self-identified markers of their own life spans reproduced the values of a race-based slave system onto physical bodies.

Height was the other common quantifiable description of runaways. Overall, about three-quarters of advertisements for men and close to half for women mentioned the height of the runaway. Much like age, stature was described in both quantitative and qualitative terms.[26] Using economic, demographic, and archaeological data, anthropometric historians have tried to reconstruct the heights of people who lived before the modern era. One study of skeletal remains puts the average height for eighteenth-century colonists at five feet seven and a half inches tall for men and five feet two and one-quarter for women. A study of the stature of men (race unspecified) in the United States in the first decades of the nineteenth century found their average height to be about five feet eight inches. An evaluation of slave ship manifests found that African adult men averaged about five feet seven inches and African adult women almost five feet three inches. Native American historic heights have been less systematically analyzed; one of the few studies, of late nineteenth-century Plains Indians, found their average height to be just shy of five feet eight inches.[27]

The heights of people described in my own collection of advertisements for missing persons are in line with these anthropometric findings: heights of European-descended men averaged five feet seven inches tall and women five feet two inches tall. The middle 50 percent of European-descended men ranged from five feet five to five feet nine inches, and for European-descended women, these two middle quarters ranged from five feet to five

feet four. Men identified as African descended averaged five feet seven as well, while men identified as having Native American heritage, though relatively few in number, averaged about an inch taller. African-descended women were reported as averaging two inches taller than European-descended women (five feet four versus five feet two inches).

In many descriptions, however, evaluative judgments of height substituted for a specific number of feet and inches. An enslaved woman was "above the middle stature," a Dutch woman was "middling tall," and an Irish runaway was a "short Woman."[28] A numerical height was an absolute descriptor: two people who were five feet five inches tall would be the same height in any circumstance. But descriptors like short, tall, and middling size were relative criteria that only made sense in comparison to a shared norm and, as such, particularly reflect the writer's viewpoint.

As with age, precise physical stature was used most frequently for European runaways. More than half of European-descended people had their height described numerically, compared to only about four in ten African-descended runaways, and, although the numbers are too small for definitive conclusions, less than two-fifths of runaways who were identified as being of Native American descent. In an era of growing emphasis on rationality and empirical observation, advertisers paid more attention to the physical details of European-descended runaways' bodies. The decreased attention to the exact size of African-descended bodies would be repeated in numerous areas of physical description, where advertisers replaced specific details with evaluation.

The perception of tallness added value to human chattel. South Carolina planter and merchant Henry Laurens claimed that the "finest slaves" were "tall able young People." He further noted that "People like tall Slaves best . . . & strong withall" because "such as are small, meagre, or other ways ordinary" would not sell well.[29] In an era where adequate nutrition was not a given, especially for enslaved people who did not have the liberty to procure their own food, height could be a proxy for health.[30] As such, it substituted an owner's assessment of his property for factual details of height.

A list created upon Lawrence Washington's death in 1754 shows the commodified meanings of age and height together. In a "Division of the Negros," adults were listed by their sale value, children were identified by height, and only infants, whose height could presumably not be reliably measured, had their ages listed. Adults named Abram, Barbara, and Tomboy were listed as worth £40 each, and Bell, Will, and Anteno were worth

£10 each. Sue was two feet eleven and one-half inches, and both George and Prince were recorded as three feet seven and a half inches tall, while Farrow and Tobey were listed as one month old; no infants and children had an explicit valuation assigned.[31] On this list, height and size substituted for a child's age in terms of labor value. Moreover, the detailed half-inch heights suggest that owners did carefully track the size of at least some of their human chattel, even if they did not necessarily include that information in advertisements.

The height of Native Americans also captured colonists' attention. While relatively few Native American–identified runaways appeared in advertisements, travel narratives and diarists repeatedly commented that Indians were, on average, a tall people. William Byrd asserted that "Indians are generally tall," as did William Smith and John Lawson.[32] Other travel writers described Native Americans as "of a good stature" or claimed that "many of tham [*sic*] [are] about six feet high."[33] Although Native American–descended runaway men's average numerical height was no more than one inch greater than that of other runaways, writers embraced an image of Indians as generally tall. This likely reflected views of Native Americans as unencumbered by the diseases that visibly affected European bodies and served to mark the overall healthy environment of North America.

The ways that advertisers chose to describe the age and stature of their runaways reinscribed both cultural beliefs and economic practices. European-descended people were most represented as individuals with specific and absolute features. African-descended people, on the other hand, were more likely to be described through terms adjudged by their owners. The measurable facts of their bodies and persons were subsumed under owners' reformulations of the importance of those characteristics to their performance of the labor of enslavement. Relationships of enslavement were textually re-created in descriptions of physical appearance. This would become even more marked in the many descriptions of bodily shape that emphasized strength and fitness.

Shaping Labor and Health

How well a body functioned was an essential characteristic in British colonies where labor was in particularly high demand. Advertisers regularly conveyed their sense of a runaway's strength and health through

descriptions of their general appearance. Many runaway advertisements implicitly referenced an individual's health without pointing specifically to an illness, disease, or bodily failing. Overall body shape, individual body parts, and even behaviors were notable signs of an individual's well-being. Advertisers were more likely to label people of African descent by their perceived labor capabilities. Just as Henry Laurens's request for "able" and "strong" young slaves reflected an imaginary ideal for his toiling property, so too did owners of enslaved runaways seek to emphasize the labor value of their missing chattel through the shape of bodies. In contrast, descriptions of European-descended laborers were more likely to acknowledge the impact of disease on their bodies. These descriptions reified racial and gender divisions, naturalizing evaluations of strength and health.

Descriptors of bodily shape were fairly common, appearing in more than 40 percent of missing persons advertisements. These included phrases such as "well made" and "well limbed" or less physiologically specific terms, such as "likely" and "lusty," that suggested a constitutional robustness rather than a particular shape, size, or form. "Well made" was a common descriptor, signifying a strong or admirable physique. Like many terms used to describe the shape of bodies, it was disproportionately applied to particular groups. Overall, men were more than twice as likely to be identified as "well made" as were women. John Skelton, from Scarborough, England, was said to be "strong and well made," and Benjamin Parrot from Buckinghamshire was described as "pretty well made."[34] Dick, Boston, and Peter were all described as "strong, well made," and Ned was "remarkably well made for strength."[35] Yet this was not a simple gender distinction that incorporated the assumption that men's bodies were generally stronger than women's: it was a reflection of the raced labor expectations of particular bodies. European-descended women were almost never referred to as "well made," but African-descended women regularly were. In fact, both African-descended men and women were more often described as "well made" than were their European-descended counterparts. Two South Carolina enslaved women were labeled "Well made," as was a woman named Tabb. "Well made" was not linked to a specific body size: Hannah was five feet five and Doll was described as short, and both were said to be "well made," suggesting that the term was a judgment of a person's capabilities, as much as a description of specific bodily features.[36]

By making "well made" an evaluation disproportionately applied to enslaved people of African descent, colonists wrote the realities of race-based

slavery onto appearance. One enslaved woman's description explicitly emphasized the labor implications of being well made: Venus was "well made for labour."[37] Mapping aptitude for physical work onto a description of appearance emphasized the purpose that African-descended bodies—both male and female—were meant to fulfill in settler colonialism. "Well made" was a description of potential physical labor capabilities.

It could be that enslaved people, forced to undertake more physically challenging labor, had more developed musculature than servants and that this might contribute to the disproportionate use of "well made" in reference to African-descended bodies. It may have been that fewer layers of clothing left enslaved people's musculature more visible to owners or that slave owners enriched their own self-image by emphasizing the strength of the people under their power. But advertisers had many descriptive options to note physical prowess: they could have talked about people being strong or about bodies being fit or muscular. Even if enslaved and indentured laborers' work led to average differences in strength and robustness, advertisers chose to capture such differences with the disproportionate application of "well made" to African-descended bodies, verbally turning the results of labor and circumstance into innate bodily differences. This translated enslaved people's lived experiences into how their bodies were said to appear.

An emphasis on men's strength and labor capabilities, in particular, would be emphasized in other bodily descriptors: almost every person described as "straight bodied" or "straight limbed" in advertisements was male. Both African- and European-descended men were classified with such terms. Jonathan, a runaway slave, was described as "straight made," and a German man was described simply as "strait." Daniel and Portsmouth were described as straight limbed.[38] Having a straight body or limbs suggested a lifetime without major structural illness or deformity. A morality tale aimed at children told of the unpleasant child who insulted the looks of "people that happen'd not to be so strait and well shap'd."[39] Straightness was a desirable attribute for both labor and admiration, and as such, it could offer masters a language with which to discuss the desirable appearance of their economic subservients.

Although Native American–descended people appear only in small numbers in advertisements, many travel narratives commented on the straight-bodied appearance of New World residents. Europeans described Native Americans as straight, well made, or well-set as a way to complimentarily indicate healthy lives of vigor and abundance. William Byrd noted of

the Cheroenhaka that their "Shapes are very Strait and well porportion'd [*sic*]." Other travelers described Indians as "well limbed," a "well-made people," "well shaped," "generally streight-body'd," and "generally speaking, well made, of a good stature, and neatly limbed." William Wood complimented the "strait bodies" of the "Aberginians," calling them "healthful and lusty," without deformities or birth defects.[40] Indeed, settler colonial projects around the world had a long history of describing indigenous people as strong and healthy. One of the first descriptions of Native Americans, published in English in 1511, had called the indigenous people of America "well shaped in body." An eighteenth-century travel narrative referred to the indigenous people of Guam as a "well-limbed people." A scientific writer on Captain Cook's second voyage complimented people of the South Seas for being "well limbed, athletic."[41] With these kinds of commentaries, European-descended writers used indigenous bodies to signal the bounty and health of worlds new to them.

Native Americans were not the only people who were described with such terms. Men identified as being of African descent were almost twice as likely as European-descended men to be described by the strength and form of their limbs in runaway advertisements. African-descended men were described as "strong limbed," "well limbed," "clean limbed," and "stout limbed."[42] This embodied language of strength and labor potential was not just for human chattel; it was also terminology applied to workhorses. A 1771 husbandry manual recommended draft horses for farmers because they are "strong, well limbed." John Jay complimented the "very active and well limbed" mules who pulled carts in Madrid, having had "no Idea of there being animals of this Kind in the World so fine."[43] "Well limbed" was a marker of strength, of suitability for strenuous labor. Hence it seemed an appropriate term for European-descended owners to apply to their enslaved, largely African-descended laborers.

European-descended women's fitness for strenuous labor may have escaped regular commentary, but their body shape did not go unnoticed: they were the runaways most likely to be described as "fat." While African-descended women might occasionally be described as "fat" (such as Ibbe, who was "very fat and clumsy"), the term was used about five times as often in reference to European-descended women. Eleanor Kinney, an Irish runaway, was "a very fat thick Woman," and Jane Jackson was "a stout fat woman."[44] We might assume this was a reflection of European-descended people having opportunity to eat enough to gain weight, but adult men

were rarely described as fat. Male fatness was instead limited to European-descended boys. John Wyer was thirteen years old when he was described as "fat," and a nine-year-old German runaway was described as "a fat boy."[45] Colonists' designation of fatness suggested its association with softness and a lack of masculine strength that was not as easily applied to adult men or laboring chattel.

Fatness was used to imply health and a non-muscularized robustness beyond runaway advertisements as well. Elizabeth Drinker wrote in astonishment that her two-year-old son had been "fat, fresh and hearty" just a week before his death. In a 1778 letter, Deborah Norris noted that she had been "in the best height of my plumpness." Philip Vickers Fithian complimented a Miss Corbin as looking "*fresh* & plump as ever."[46] Women of European descent and children were described as desirably "fat" or "plump" because they were not expected to show muscular strength. Such evaluations relied on raced and gendered assumptions about whose bodies would show the effects of physical labor.

There were other terms that could refer to the healthiness of adequate weight. "Stoutness"—referring to a powerful, strong, healthy build, not to corpulence—was disproportionately applied to African-descended men's bodies. They were described as "stout" more than twice as often as were African-descended women or European-descended runaways. London was a "pretty stout fellow" and Cesar was "uncommonly stout," while James, Jemmy, Jupiter, and two men named Jack were each described just as "stout."[47] Stoutness was often paired with a commentary on well-made bodies, suggesting a reference to a solid muscularity rather than excess fleshiness.[48] It was a sign of strength and labor capability—which was why it also repeatedly appeared in sale advertisements for male slaves.[49]

Other terms used to describe health and labor potential were more divorced from specific bodily shape. "Lusty" was one of the terms frequently used to describe the state of runaways' bodies. Through the early 1600s, "lusty" connoted a pleasing appearance. This meaning appeared to have faded by the eighteenth century, when the word was employed to more explicitly convey health, strength, and vigor for both people and animals.[50] In advertisements, "lusty" referred to the constitution of bodies. Beck, a runaway slave, was described as "thin in her person when she went off, but naturally lusty," implying that lustiness signaled an innate health. Harry Cooke was "lusty and very well made," as was a "Negroe Man, named Sam." Hannah Galley was described as "strong, lusty." Lustiness was not

necessarily tied to a particular body shape: a pregnant runaway was described as "a lusty hearty woman." Other runaways were "lusty and fat," "lusty big boned," or, more commonly, "lusty and well made" or "lusty well set."[51]

Other writings confirm the eighteenth-century use of "lusty" in reference to health: when William Wood referred to "lusty" Englishmen, he was commenting on their naturally healthy and hearty disposition. William Fleming recalled his Native American captors saying "as I looked young and lusty they would not hurt me," because his youthful wellbeing could be put to better uses. An eighteenth-century account of a slave uprising referred to a "lusty slave" who struck his captor hard enough to break bones.[52] In these contexts, lustiness conveyed an image of a healthy and hearty physique.

European-descended women were labeled "lusty" about twice as often as any other group. Mary David Philips, Rebecca Wooley, and Magdalen Hakaliver were all said to be "lusty."[53] Numerous women of European descent were described as "lusty" alongside a body-size or strength reference, suggesting it served akin to the male-focused appellation of being "well made." Mary Lee was "lusty and strong," Mary Dugan was "a tall lusty woman," and Frances Yetts was "of a lusty size." Some female runaways of European descent were described specifically as lusty and of a larger than average size. Rose Flanagin was "stout and lusty" and Catherine Smith was "thick and lusty." Mary Parker, Nelly English, and Alice McCarty were all described as both "fat" and "lusty."[54] Such descriptors offered a way to convey a healthy build without recourse to the implication of a specific muscularity inherent to other laborers' bodily classifications.

Lusty seemed to have different meanings when used in reference to women of African descent, when it was repeatedly accompanied by an additional focus on sexuality, breeding, and reproduction. "Lusty" was a common descriptor in advertisements for the sale of slaves, usually conveying generic positive value. But when runaway advertisements applied the term to women of African descent, they were also remarking on women's reproductive value. A "lusty black wench" ran away with her "child of a brick colour," raising the specter of her having engaged in sexual relations with someone of non-African descent. A Virginia enslaved woman was "very lusty" and "supposed to be pretty far gone with Child." And in the most overt advertisement, a "Mulattoe" woman was described as a "very lusty Indian looking hussy."[55] For women of non-European descent, lustiness

seemed to have a closer relation to its more modern sexual connotations. This tied African-descended women's value to their reproductive capacity, labeling the appearance of their body through their owners' implicit judgment of their laborers' generative potential.

The association of lustiness with sexual availability and procreative possibilities was even more explicit in advertisements for the sale of enslaved women. One woman offered for purchase was a "lusty Negro Wench, without a Character." Another advertisement offered a "lusty able breeding Wench" for sale. Notably, that advertisement offered her husband for sale as well and mentioned her (presumably their?) child, but did not call the "able Negro man" lusty.[56] That designation was reserved for women who could be imagined as using their healthy, sturdy bodies to breed more laborers for those who owned them. In the context of enslaved women's bodies, lustiness signaled a capacity to breed. Unlike indentured servants, enslaved women's reproductive, not just productive, capacity was a noteworthy sign of their value.

A second common descriptor of overall appearance was "likely." Likeliness appeared in about 6 percent of all advertisements. James Hammond, a runaway "mulatto man servant," was described as "likely" and "well built," while James Hamilton, a deserter, was described simply as "likely." Jane Pain, an English runaway servant, was described as "pretty likely," and Kate, a runaway slave, was described as "very likely."[57] The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines early modern European uses of "likely" as being of a "seemly or comely appearance."[58] Occasionally runaways were described as having a "likely face," suggesting this meaning of attractiveness.[59] "Likely" could also convey a person's suitability or promising nature for a given purpose—and in advertisements that purpose seemed to generally be laboring capacity.

The likelihood of likeliness as a descriptor for runaways varied markedly: almost one in eleven African-descended runaways was labeled "likely," as compared to about one in fifty European-descended runaways. The word had a long history in the European trade in African bodies. It was one of the terms regularly appearing in slave sale advertisements—someone offering a "likely Negro wench" for sale was common. One slave merchant specifically requested "very likely healthy People" for sale, tying likeliness to the labor value of his future property. A broadside boasted "A CARGO Of 170 prime young likely" slaves for sale.[60] In the context of African-descended bodies, likeliness was meant to convey a fitness for enslaved productivity. The

frequency of the use of the term in advertisements for the sale of enslaved people suggests its widely understood economic value. As Stephanie Smallwood summarizes, terms such as "likely" offered "a special lexicon" for merchants "to cast their human wares in the mold of the qualities buyers desired in the people they purchased . . . the image of the ideal slave."[61] Smallwood rightly identifies the imposition of commodified terms as a means to transform African people into enslaved bodies. Likeliness was a measurement of labor potential wrapped in economic value for enslaved people.

Associating enslaved runaways' likeliness with their youth further signaled the term's relation to labor potential. Multiple advertisements substituted a descriptor of "likely young" status for specific ages of slaves. Cuffee was described as a "likely young Eboe" man. Scotland was described as "a likely young Negro Fellow."[62] The phrase was not simply a replacement for an unknown age: other advertisements supplemented a specific age with the phrase "likely young." Daniel was "a likely young negro fellow . . . about 18 Years of Age." Lot was "a likely young Negroe fellow . . . about 24 years of age." An unnamed "likely young mulattoe woman" was "about 22 years of age." The sheriff of Augusta, Georgia, described Poll and George as "likely young slaves" who "seem to be about 20 years of age."[63] In all of these cases, the combination of youthfulness and likeliness offered an evaluation of productive (and for women, also reproductive) capabilities.

"Likely" was not just used to describe human chattel: as they did with "lusty," colonists used the word to describe draft animals. Advertisements repeatedly mentioned a "likely horse" for sale.[64] Horses that were described as "likely" even appeared alongside descriptions of runaways. A tradesman took with him a "well-set, likely" horse, and a twenty-three-year-old servant took a "likely Bay Horse" when he ran (or more accurately, rode) from his Virginia home. In a 1764 advertisement, William Ball first described his missing servant, William McCreary, then noted his sale of "two likely young Negroes," as well as "a likely young Saddle Horse."[65] Even in the same advertisements, colonists might overlap the language of domestic husbandry with that used for enslaved human beings, describing both through their relative productive value.

"Likely" was not only more frequently used to describe African-descended runaways; it was more often used as a totalizing term. Mentions of African-descended likeliness repeatedly occurred without other bodily descriptors. Of eighty-six individuals whose body was described by the

word "likely" with no other detail, only six were of European descent. The rest of the "likely" runaways were identified as mulatto or Negro. Milly, Robin, Sue, Tarresman, Sarah, Rank, and many more people who had escaped slavery had their bodily appearance described only as "likely."[66] In contrast, for European-descended runaways, likeliness infrequently appeared alone without other specific descriptors of body shape. John Hutchinson, an English servant, was described as both "likely" and "stout"; deserter John Greenwood was "likely well built"; and Daniel Hooseman was "well set, appears a likely fellow." Other European-descended runaways were "likely well made," "likely well set," "likely built," "likely slim clean limb'd," or "likely" and "thick set."[67] "Likely" was a totalizing description predominantly for African-descended people.

Thus descriptors of bodily shape, health, and strength marked the social and economic status of bodies, coding the work that people were expected to do into textual portrayals of their appearance. Descriptions marked the slave status of African-descended people by turning physical appearance into a commodified value through a disproportionate emphasis on corporeal strength. By applying terms that codified physical features into a master's evaluation of his human property's relationship to enslavement, African-descended bodies became reflections of their slave status. In contrast, European-descended runaways often had more multifaceted descriptions that represented their appearance beyond the singular axis of strength and labor capability.

Signs of Sickness

While many runaways were noted for their well-made, likely, or lusty bodies, others appeared to suffer from an array of observable health problems, long-term injuries, or chronic conditions. Because ill health was believed to be readable on the body, it could be worth mentioning as an identifying feature.[68] Advertisements commented both on the overall ill health of individuals and on specific features that they believed signaled a medical problem. European-descended runaways were more likely to be described by specific ailments, while African-descended runaways were described more directly by physical signs of illness. The ideas of humoralism that connected interior bodily processes to external features was more often applied to European-descended runaways' descriptions. There seemed to be little

effort to explicitly relate health implications to the bodily features of slaves of African descent: the appearance of their bodies took precedence over the internal workings that appearance might humorally represent. Thus African-descended runaways were marked by the external state of their bodies more than the internal processes that led to changeable appearances.

Thinness was often a generic sign of unwellness. Mary Conolly was "very slim, and looks sickly." Jessath Rainbord "looks thin, having been lately sick with Fevers," while a runaway convict servant "looks thin at this Time, occasioned by a venereal Disorder."[69] In all of these cases, being underweight was associated with ill health. An advertisement for a family missing from a German ship explicitly opposed sickness to fatness. The mother was "a sickly woman with a sore leg, age about 45 years," her son was "a fat boy about 9 years old," and her infant was "a sickly child aged about 5 months."[70] These descriptions contained parallel information on age and health, and contrasted fatness to sickness when conveying the runaways' overall well-being. In a society where an array of illnesses affected appetite and digestion, extra weight could be a sign that people were healthy.

The shape of someone's face was mentioned in close to 10 percent of descriptions, and here, too, thinness could be a sign of internal sickness. An eighteenth-century British serial contained a description of an ill man that noted his "thin, pale, sickly Visage."[71] Runaways were described as having a "thin visage" or a "long visage" as opposed to being "round faced" or "full faced."[72] A thin face could be read as a sign of a body operating at less than peak efficiency. Chelter was said to be "rather thin visaged for so sturdy a young fellow," conveying the expectation that a full face was a sign of strength and well-being. William was so "ill looking" that his "cheek bones [were] sticking out." Other advertisements noted the thinness or roundness of a runaway's face without explicit recourse to the health significance. Deserter Joseph Blinn was "thin visag'd" while his fellow runaway Edward Price was "full fac'd." An escaped servant named Mary Halls was described as having a "round Vissage, and fresh Complexion," while James Gordon had a "thin visage" and was "pale faced."[73]

Overall, only a handful of advertisements noted a runaway's specific illness in lieu of the features that signified a disease, and usually these were catastrophic ailments. Runaways who were liable to suffer from seizures might have their being "subject to convulsion Fits" noted.[74] In one of the most detailed descriptions, James Lee, a runaway British convict servant,

was described as "until reduced by sickness, remarkably strong and brawney; but having been long afflicted with a cachexical complaint, he still has a dropsical appearance, his belly and legs being swollen, and his face sallow and bloated." Clearly James had been chronically ill over an extended period, and his master combined a listing of his body's physical changes along with interpretations of their medical causes. Likewise, John Stanton was usually a "likely well looking lad when well, but has now the ague every third day." [75] When advertisers described African-descended appearances, however, they were less likely to emphasize a specific illness as a cause of their bodily abnormalities. For instance, a slave named Ned was described in a Virginia advertisement in 1775 as being five feet tall and having a "flat face and long head, which is remarkably sharp on the top"; in addition, "some of his fingers grow together."[76] The advertiser claimed that Ned's syndactyl fingers were caused by a childhood injury. Modern medicine might suggest that Ned suffered from Saethre-Chotzen syndrome, a chromosomal defect that causes short stature, a flat face with a cone-shaped head, and webbed fingers.[77] While we would not expect eighteenth-century colonists to make that diagnosis, the advertisement offered no medical or humoral explanation for Ned's obviously atypical appearance; it referred only to an acquired injury.

Ned's description underlies that advertisers decided which health or medical issues were relevant to a public description of their laborers' bodies. For instance, bloodshot eyes were an easily identifiable feature and had long had a humoral association to choleric excess as well as multiple health problems.[78] Thomas Peters, a self-described London botanist, advertised in a Pennsylvania paper that he could cure "sore eyes" with plants and herbs "according to the constitution" of his patients. A turn-of-the-century newspaper listed "turgid red eyes" as a symptom of smallpox. Proverbs 23:29, on the other hand, linked bloodshot eyes to drinking alcohol. Some historians of medicine have suggested that red eyes may have been a result of vitamin deficiency—lack of Vitamin A and riboflavin could lead to dry eyes that might appear red. Red eyes could also be perceived as a reflection of strong emotions, tying physical symptoms to emotional affect: Thomas Shepard ascribed Native Americans' red eyes during conversion to "the mighty power of the Lord."[79]

Most of the commentaries on European-descended servants' eye redness focused on a specific cause, an additional explanation, or its unusual nature. The red eyes of John Stuart, Dennis Daley, and Joseph Byard were

all described as "remarkable."[80] Other European-descended servants' red eyes were more explicitly connected to particular medical issues. Joseph Wright "has a blemish in one of his eyes, which looks very red." James Harn was "fond of spirituous liquors, by which means his eyes are generally very red." Lawrence Reddy had "very weak eyes, looks red."[81] Connecting red eyes to a humoral effect, Elizabeth Prugelin was characterized by her "melancholy temper, red eyes."[82] Some servants' eyes were described just in terms of the appearance of soreness, presumably relying on readers to understand that sore eyes would look red or inflamed. Mary Chambers "looks as if she had sore eyes." George Sharswood, David Fitzgerald, John Hughes, and Thomas Jones each had "sore eyes." Jane Shepherd had "one of her eyes always watering."[83] Such descriptions emphasized the relationship between a medical problem and appearance and suggested an individualized interpretation of the causes and meanings of reddened eyes.

In contrast, more people of African descent were described simply as having red eyes, without additional qualifications or specifications. In over one hundred mentions of runaways with "red eyes" in the *Pennsylvania Gazette*, *Virginia Gazette*, and *South-Carolina Gazette* from 1750 to 1775, only a handful of people of European descent were described just as having "red eyes," without the kind of additional details mentioned above. In contrast, Coco, Decipher, Dick, Jack, Lucy, Moses, Ritty, Scipie, and at least two men named Tom, for instance, all were described as having red eyes without additional explanation.[84] Hannah's owner went to the trouble to spell out that "the Whites of her Eyes [are] remarkably red" but did not provide any further information about the cause.[85]

The standardization of commentary on African-descended red eyes contrasted to the specificity of causes of red eyes for runaways of European descent. Enslaved people of African descent were categorized as red-eyed, as opposed to the myriad contributory explanations offered for runaways of European descent. Perhaps this was a cultural carryover of medieval beliefs that the curse of Ham or association with the Devil resulted in Africans having red or inflamed eyes.[86] Regardless of its origins, advertisers chose to offer details about specific effects on European-descended runaways (soreness, watering eyes, remarkableness) but summarized their conclusions about African-descended runaways (red eyes).

Slave owners were accepted as the public experts on determining, rather than explaining, other unusual features of African-descended bodies as well.

Advertisements repeatedly mentioned the unusual size or shape of African-descended runaways' legs. African-descended people were more likely than European-descended people to be described with less than desirable limb form.[87] Cook was "a little bow-legged," an unnamed enslaved boy was "knock kneed," and Caesar was described as "bandy legged."[88] In contrast, descriptions of European-descended runaways were more likely to offer an explanation, such as that James Penticost had "remarkable bandy shins, occasioned by having both legs broke."[89] Enslaved people may have suffered higher rates of rickets and childhood malnutrition that could lead to bow-shaped legs. But as discussed earlier, African-descended people were also more likely to be described as "straight limbed." Rather than a direct representation of the level of malformation, the state of African-descended slaves' limbs seemed to reflect particular concerns of owners who expected people of African descent to conduct decades of back-breaking labor. Commentaries on the shape of limbs reflected an ability to work, not inner workings, making this a term more commonly applied to people of African descent.

Similarly, the many references to the large legs of people of African descent seem to have been a commentary on their health as reflected through the shape of their body. Cyrus, a "Negro Man Servant," was "well built" with "Legs and Feet somewhat large." Frederick had remarkably large feet, and Ned had "large limbs."[90] Many of these oversized legs and feet can likely be traced to edema, described by one contemporary medical manual as "a puffy swelling of the feet, legs, and thighs."[91] Swollen limbs could result from medical conditions as diverse as congestive heart failure, kidney disease, lymphatic system damage, thiamine deficiency, and liver dysfunction. They could also result from the leg irons placed around enslaved people's ankles to prevent escape or as a punishment.[92] Sickle-cell anemia could also cause a swelling of hands and feet, due to sickle-shaped blood cells blocking the blood vessels that supplied them.

European-descended people were not immune from health problems that caused edema. But when European-descended runaways' leg size was mentioned, advertisers more often included additional information explaining the illness behind the runaway's swollen limbs. Thomas Painter's legs were "a good deal swelled, owing (he says) to his being confined on shipboard." John Farrell was "a sickly looking Man . . . his Legs seem to be swelled." Thomas Agnew "has exceeding bad sore legs, ulcerated and

swelled."[93] Confinement, sickness, soreness—these were representations of an individual's experiences, not just observations of the appearance of a body part.

It is worth noting that regardless of the disability, runaways still used those infirm legs to leave their masters. There is a certain irony in the repeated notations of runaways' damaged legs and consequential irregular gaits: slaves and servants made bids for freedom even if they had to hobble away to do so. An enslaved man named Peter was crippled yet escaped from his Virginia home in 1771, and the elderly Jemmy's "clumsy Legs" (likely nerve damage) did not deter his escape in 1770.[94] Many runaways were missing toes, and several had lost a leg, emphasizing the toll that colonial life took on bodies.[95] A venereal disease apparently caused one convict servant's limp, and a boyhood knee injury caused another to drag his leg. Hugh McCarnon "has had his Right Leg broke, which is crooked, and bends inward from his Ancle to his Knee."[96] An unusual walking gait not only offered a means to identify individuals, it reflected some of the ways that advertisers interpreted how ill health and permanent injury manifested in appearance.

Despite undoubtedly harsher living conditions under slavery, we should not assume that African-descended runaways were necessarily described as being more infirm than were European-descended runaways. Within my collection of almost 4,000 advertisements for runaways, almost three times as many runaways of European descent were described as stooping as were people of African descent. For instance, Maria Kummersfield "has a hobling walk, and stoops pretty much." James Clark "stoops in his Shoulders, and walks with his Knees close."[97] A search in multiple online collections of newspapers confirms this. *Accessible Archives* contains upwards of 4,500 advertisements for runaway servants and a roughly equal number for runaways identified as "Negro" or "Mulatto" from 1750 to 1775. Yet only 1 percent of those identified as being of African descent by those terms were said to stoop. In contrast, 4 percent of runaways identified as non-African descended servants were described as stooping.[98] Through aggregated differences like these, people of European descent were portrayed in terms of what they did, while people of African descent were described by their bodily appearance. These were daily enactments of racial divisions: people of African descent were presented through others' evaluation of their external features, not by detailing the individual underlying causes or experiences.[99] For people of African descent, physical appearance was the end

point in and of itself, rather than a means to understand an individual's internal character and constitution.

One final set of illness-related commentaries again shows the emphasis on the inner workings of European-descended bodies. The notation of smallpox scars—"much marked with the Small-Pox," "pock fretten," "pitted with the Small-Pox"—appeared in about one in ten advertisements.[100] Smallpox did not yet seem to be associated with lower-class and non-white communities as it would be in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, when the wealthy could take advantage of inoculations: in the colonial period, smallpox could and did strike anyone.[101] Commentary on smallpox was common in slave sale ads. Slave merchants regularly noted whether the offered chattel had already survived the deadly disease as a way to assure potential buyers that they would not be bringing an infectious or potentially short-lived laborer to their home. When describing runaways of African descent, however, colonists did not generally reference that history of illness.

In fact, mentions of smallpox scars were far more common for runaways of European descent, accounting for about three-quarters of its appearance in advertisements. This was consistent whether individuals were described as very pockmarked, only slightly pockmarked, or just pockmarked with no degree of scarring mentioned. One twentieth-century study found that upwards of 80 percent of unvaccinated adults under forty years old displayed at least five visible facial pockmarks.[102] Given the endemic nature of smallpox in the eighteenth century, it seems that colonists were choosing to notice and comment on smallpox scars primarily on European-descended laborers. It might have been that colonists paid more attention to European-descended faces generally. But even if that were the case, it reflected the notion that it was important to mention the effects of illness on European-descended laborers in a way that it was not for African-descended laborers. Smallpox scars were not relevant to advertisers' description of enslaved people's work capabilities. Individual physical markings seemed less relevant to African-descended bodies unless they could be made into a sign of their labor value.

In commentary on an array of seemingly observable health concerns, advertisers formulated descriptions out of their expectations for particular groups of laboring bodies. We might imagine it unlikely that runaway slaves, who were subject to literally backbreaking labor, would stoop less than European servants, who often labored for others for a limited number

of years in markedly better living conditions. Likewise, it may be that stooping was less worth noting about African-descended people because it was a default result of slavery. Every descriptive choice reflected a belief in the relevance of that feature to that body. Regardless of individual advertisers' rationales, the aggregation of such details served to construct a naturalized version of race through accounts of individual bodies' shape, size, and functions.

* * *

During the American Revolution, George Washington instructed his plantation manager to make sure his latest purchases for Mount Vernon would be "tall and strait bodyed."[103] Washington's instruction used common descriptors of the ideal body shape of valuable slaves. But in this case, he was actually describing the locust trees he wanted his manager to acquire. Both trees and enslaved humans would be more valuable for their straight and tall status. The overlap of terms for inanimate and human property reiterates how descriptive language created a textual picture out of expectations and assumptions. More than offering a replica of objectively observed physical features, textual constructions of physical bodies were powerful because they appeared to be reasonable reflections of sight and observation. In reality, however, descriptions of missing persons naturalized race, status, and gender divisions by differentially emphasizing specific aspects of physical form. Missing laborers were described with terms that prioritized their strength, health, and potential value, signaling their value as laborers.

Most striking are the ways that the demands of enslavement were physically written onto African-descended bodies, turning supposedly objective descriptions into commodified evaluations. Slaveowners reformulated self-reported life history or self-determined age into an evaluation of work capability and economic worth. Whether a decision about describing a missing person's age with quantitative or qualitative terms, determining whether someone counted as old or young, or whether age even mattered: these were not just decisions to convey information about a person's appearance. Whether a focus on leg formation versus gait or notation of a symptom versus a cause of a disease: advertisers created, enforced, and reified cultural beliefs into materiality through bodily portrayals. Advertisement writers reiterated race ideologies in every runaway's description. Enslaved people

were marked as chattel by transforming owners' evaluations into seemingly objective corporeal features. Racial differentiation could be accomplished by making bodies seem naturally different in their purpose, form and function, even without recourse to complexion, color, or black and white binaries.