

ENSLAVEMENT IN THE U.S. SOUTH

SECTION ONE

SOURCE:

<http://www.blackpast.org/primary/declaration-independence-and-debate-over-slavery>

The Declaration of Independence and the Debate over Slavery

When Thomas Jefferson included a passage attacking slavery in his draft of the Declaration of Independence it initiated the most intense debate among the delegates gathered at Philadelphia in the spring and early summer of 1776. Jefferson's passage on slavery was the most important section removed from the final document. It was replaced with a more ambiguous passage about King George's incitement of "domestic insurrections among us." Decades later Jefferson blamed the removal of the passage on delegates from South Carolina and Georgia and Northern delegates who represented merchants who were at the time actively involved in the Trans-Atlantic slave trade. Jefferson's original passage on slavery appears below.

He has waged cruel war against human nature itself, violating its most sacred rights of life and liberty in the persons of a distant people who never offended him, captivating & carrying them into slavery in another hemisphere or to incur miserable death in their transportation thither. This piratical warfare, the opprobrium of infidel powers, is the warfare of the Christian King of Great Britain. Determined to keep open a market where Men should be bought & sold, he has prostituted his negative for suppressing every legislative attempt to prohibit or restrain this execrable commerce. And that this assemblage of horrors might want no fact of distinguished die, he is now exciting those very people to rise in arms among us, and to purchase that liberty of which he has deprived them, by murdering the people on whom he has obtruded them: thus paying off former crimes committed against the Liberties of one people, with crimes which he urges them to commit against the lives of another.

Sources:

Thomas Jefferson, *The Writings of Thomas Jefferson: Being His Autobiography, Correspondence, Reports, Messages, Addresses, and other Writings, Official and Private* (Washington, D.C.: Taylor & Maury, 1853-1854).

SECTION ONE-A

SOURCE: <http://www.blackpast.org/aah/dred-scott-v-sandford-1857>

The Dred Scott Decision

The *Dred Scott v. Sandford* case (1857) was the most important slavery-related decision in the United States Supreme Court's history. Coming on the eve of the Civil War, and seven years after the Missouri Compromise of 1850, the decision affected the national political scene, impacted the rights of free blacks, and reinforced the institution of slavery.

The *Missouri Compromise* was an agreement passed in 1820 between the pro- and anti-slavery factions in Congress, primarily addressing the regulation of slavery in the Western Territories. The compromise prohibited slavery in the former Louisiana Territory north of the parallel 36°30' north, except within the boundaries of the proposed state of Missouri. The purpose was to balance the Congressional strength of the two factions by making sure an equal number of slave and free states were admitted to the Union.



Dred Scott was [an enslaved black person] who sued for his freedom in Missouri. Scott had accompanied his late master to army postings in the free states of Illinois, Wisconsin and to the Minnesota Territory, areas where slavery was forbidden by state law governed by the Northwest Ordinance (1787) and the Missouri Compromise. Following decades of Missouri precedents holding that residence in a free jurisdiction led to the emancipation of a slave, the trial court freed Scott.

The Missouri Supreme Court, however, reversed the decision, and overturned earlier precedents. Scott then unsuccessfully brought claim in federal court, and appealed to the United States Supreme Court.

Chief Justice Roger Taney, writing for a 7-2 majority, articulated three major conclusions: 1) the decision held that free blacks in the North could never be considered citizens of the United States, and thus were barred from the federal courts; 2) the decision declared that the ban in slavery in territories considered part of the Louisiana Purchase was unconstitutional; and 3) the decision held that neither the Congress nor territorial governments had the power to ban slavery. Thus, the concept of popular sovereignty, that is, the right of the citizens of the territory to decide whether to be a free or slave territory, was rendered inoperative.

The decision further polarized the American public on the question of slavery. Northern reaction led to the formation of the Republican Party and the nomination of Abraham Lincoln in 1860. Southern secession and the

Civil War followed. The *Dred Scott* decision, intended to settle the questions of slavery, instead played a role in accelerating the Civil War and events to come, and had the ironic effect of accelerating the emancipation of all blacks.

Sources:

Dred Scott v. Sandford, 19 Howard (U.S.) 393 (1857); Leonard W. Levy, Kenneth Karst, and Adam Winkler, *Encyclopedia of the American Constitution* (Detroit: MacMillan Reference USA, 2000), 818-820.

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SECTION ONE-B

SOURCE: <http://www.blackpast.org/1857-abraham-lincoln-dred-scott-decision-and-slavery>

President Abraham Lincoln on the Dred Scott Decision and Slavery

The Dred Scott Decision handed down by the U.S. Supreme Court on March 6, 1857 was supposed to end the decades-long debate about slavery in the United States. It did just the opposite, inflaming passions particularly in the North. In the follow speech, Abraham Lincoln, then a private citizen, presented his critique of the decision in a speech in Springfield, Illinois on June 26, 1857.

FELLOW CITIZENS: I am here to-night, partly by the invitation of some of you, and partly by my own inclination. Two weeks ago Judge Douglas spoke here on the several subjects of Kansas, the Dred Scott decision, and Utah. I listened to the speech at the time, and have read the report of it since. It was intended to controvert opinions which I think just, and to assail (politically, not personally,) those men who, in common with me, entertain those opinions. For this reason I wished then, and still wish, to make some answer to it, which I now take the opportunity of doing.

[...]

And now as to the Dred Scott decision. That decision declares two propositions—first, that a negro cannot sue in the U.S. Courts; and secondly, that Congress cannot prohibit slavery in the Territories. It was made by a divided court—dividing differently on the different points. Judge Douglas does not discuss the merits of the decision; and, in that respect, I shall follow his example, believing I could no more improve on McLean and Curtis, than he could on Taney.

[...]

We believe, as much as Judge Douglas, (perhaps more) in obedience to, and respect for the judicial department of government. We think its decisions on Constitutional questions, when fully settled, should control, not only the particular cases decided, but the general policy of the country, subject to be disturbed only by amendments of the

Constitution as provided in that instrument itself. More than this would be revolution. But we think the Dred Scott decision is erroneous. We know the court that made it, has often over-ruled its own decisions, and we shall do what we can to have it to over-rule this. We offer no resistance to it.

Judicial decisions are of greater or less authority as precedents, according to circumstances. That this should be so,

accords both with common sense, and the customary understanding of the legal profession.

If this important decision had been made by the unanimous concurrence of the judges, and without any apparent partisan bias, and in accordance with legal public expectation, and with the steady practice of the departments throughout our history, and had been in no part, based on assumed historical facts which are not really true; or, if wanting in some of these, it had been before the court more than once, and had there been affirmed and re-affirmed through a course of years, it then might be, perhaps would be, factious, nay, even revolutionary, to not acquiesce in it as a precedent.

But when, as it is true we find it wanting in all these claims to the public confidence, it is not resistance, it is not factious, it is not even disrespectful, to treat it as not having yet quite established a settled doctrine for the country-But Judge Douglas considers this view awful.

[...]

I have said, in substance, that the Dred Scott decision was, in part, based on assumed historical facts which were not really true; and I ought not to leave the subject without giving some reasons for saying this; I therefore give an instance or two, which I think fully sustain me. Chief Justice Taney, in delivering the opinion of the majority of the Court, insists at great length



that negroes were no part of the people who made, or for whom was made, the Declaration of Independence, or the Constitution of the United States.

On the contrary, Judge Curtis, in his dissenting opinion, shows that in five of the then thirteen states, to wit, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, New York, New Jersey and North Carolina, free negroes were voters, and, in proportion to their numbers, had the same part in making the Constitution that the white people had. He shows this with so much particularity as to leave no doubt of its truth; and, as a sort of conclusion on that point, holds the following language:

"The Constitution was ordained and established by the people of the United States, through the action, in each State, of those persons who were qualified by its laws to act thereon in behalf of themselves and all other citizens of the State. In some of the States, as we have seen, colored persons were among those qualified by law to act on the subject. These colored persons were not only included in the body of `the people of the United States,- by whom the Constitution was ordained and established; but in at least five of the States they had the power to act, and, doubtless, did act, by their suffrages, upon the question of its adoption."

[...]

There is a natural disgust in the minds of nearly all white people, to the idea of an indiscriminate amalgamation of the white and black races; and Judge Douglas evidently is basing his chief hope, upon the chances of being able to appropriate the benefit of this disgust to himself. If he can, by much drumming and repeating, fasten the odium of that idea upon his adversaries, he thinks he can struggle through the storm. He therefore clings to this hope, as a drowning man to the last plank. He makes an occasion for lugging it in from the opposition to the Dred Scott decision. He finds the Republicans insisting that the Declaration of Independence includes ALL men, black as well as white; and forth-with he boldly denies that it includes negroes at all, and proceeds to argue gravely that all who contend it does, do so only because they want to vote, and eat, and sleep, and marry with negroes! He will have it that they cannot be consistent else. Now I protest against that counterfeit logic which concludes that, because I do not want a black woman for a slave I must necessarily want her for a wife. I need not have her for either, I can just leave her alone. In some respects she certainly is not my equal; but in her natural right to eat the bread she earns with her own hands without asking leave of any one else, she is my equal, and the equal of all others.

Chief Justice Taney, in his opinion in the Dred Scott case, admits that the language of the Declaration is broad enough to include the whole human family, but he and Judge Douglas argue that the authors of that instrument did not intend to include negroes, by the fact that they did not at once, actually place them on an equality with the whites. Now this grave argument comes to just nothing at all, by the other fact, that they did not at once, or ever afterwards, actually place all white people on an equality with one or another. And this is the staple argument of both the Chief Justice and the Senator, for doing this obvious violence to the plain unmistakable language of the Declaration. I think the authors of that notable instrument intended to include all men, but they did not intend to declare all men equal in all respects. They did not mean to say all were equal in color, size, intellect, moral developments, or social capacity. They defined with tolerable distinctness, in what respects they did consider all men created equal-equal in "certain inalienable rights, among which are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." This they said, and this meant. They did not mean to assert the obvious untruth, that all were then actually enjoying that equality, nor yet, that they were about to confer it immediately upon them. In fact they had no power to confer such a boon. They meant simply to declare the right, so that the enforcement of it might follow as fast as circumstances should permit. They meant to set up a standard maxim for free society, which should be familiar to all, and revered by all; constantly looked to, constantly labored for, and even though never perfectly attained, constantly approximated, and thereby constantly spreading and deepening its influence, and augmenting the happiness and value of life to all people of all colors everywhere. The assertion that "all men are created equal" was of no practical

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I have now briefly expressed my view of the meaning and objects of that part of the Declaration of Independence which declares that "all men are created equal."

[...]

But Judge Douglas is especially horrified at the thought of the mixing blood by the white and black races: agreed for once-a thousand times agreed. There are white men enough to marry all

the white women, and black men enough to marry all the black women; and so let them be married. On this point we fully agree with the Judge; and when he shall show that his policy is better adapted to prevent amalgamation than ours we shall drop ours, and adopt his. Let us see.

[...]

This very Dred Scott case affords a strong test as to which party most favors amalgamation, the Republicans or the dear Union-saving Democracy. Dred Scott, his wife and two daughters were all involved in the suit. We desired the court to have held that they were citizens so far at least as to entitle them to a hearing as to whether they were free or not; and then, also, that they were in fact and in law really free. Could we have had our way, the chances of these black girls, ever mixing their blood with that of white people, would have been diminished at least to the extent that it could not have been without their consent. But Judge Douglas is delighted to have them decided to be slaves, and

not human enough to have a hearing, even if they were free, and thus left subject to the forced concubinage of their masters, and liable to become the mothers of mulattoes in spite of themselves-the very state of case that produces nine tenths of all the mulattoes-all the mixing of blood in the nation.

Of course, I state this case as an illustration only, not meaning to say or intimate that the master of Dred Scott and his family, or any more than a percentage of masters generally, are inclined to exercise this particular power which they hold over their female slaves.

I have said that the separation of the races is the only perfect preventive of amalgamation. I have no right to say all the members of the Republican party are in favor of this, nor to say that as a party they are in favor of it. There is nothing in their platform directly on the subject. But I can say a very large proportion of its members are for it, and that the chief plank in their platform-opposition to the spread of slavery-is most favorable to that separation.

Such separation, if ever effected at all, must be effected by colonization; and no political party, as such, is now doing anything directly for colonization. Party operations at present only favor or retard colonization incidentally. The enterprise is a difficult one; but "when there is a will there is a way;" and what colonization needs most is a hearty will. Will springs from the two elements of moral sense and self-interest. Let us be brought to believe it is morally right, and, at the same time, favorable to, or, at least, not against, our interest, to transfer the African to his native clime, and we shall find a way to do it, however great the task may be. The children of Israel, to such numbers as to include four hundred thousand fighting men, went out of Egyptian bondage in a body.

How differently the respective courses of the Democratic and Republican parties incidentally bear on the question of forming a will-a public sentiment-for colonization, is easy to see. The Republicans inculcate, with whatever of ability they can, that the negro is a man; that his bondage is cruelly wrong, and that the field of his oppression ought not to be enlarged. The Democrats deny his manhood; deny, or dwarf to insignificance, the wrong of his bondage; so far as possible, crush all sympathy for him, and cultivate and excite hatred and disgust against him; compliment themselves as Union-savers for doing so; and call the indefinite outspreading of his bondage "a sacred right of self-government."

[...]

Source of Speech:

TeachingAmericanHistory.org, <http://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/index.asp?document=52>

SECTION ONE-C

Texas Declares Secession, 1861

We hold as undeniable truths that the governments of the various States, and of the confederacy itself, were established exclusively by the white race, for themselves and their posterity; that the African race had no agency in their establishment; that they were rightfully held and regarded as an inferior and dependent race, and in that condition only could their existence in this country be rendered beneficial or tolerable.

That in this free government all white men are and of right ought to be entitled to equal civil and political rights; that the servitude of the African race, as existing in these States, is mutually beneficial to both bond and free, and is abundantly authorized and justified by the experience of mankind, and the revealed will of the Almighty Creator, as

recognized by all Christian nations . . . (“A Declaration of the Causes Which Impel the State of Texas to Secede from the Federal Union,” February 2, 1861.)

SECTION ONE-D

SOURCE:

Americans at War. Ed. John P. Resch. Vol. 2: 1816-1900. Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2005. p159-162.
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Slavery

Understanding the origins, justification, and economy of slavery is crucial to understanding American society, the coming of the Civil War, and the effect of that war on American culture and identity. Chattel slavery has existed throughout world history, and U.S. slavery grew out of older European and African forms of enslavement. Yet slavery in the United States was distinctive for two important reasons. First, there have been relatively few true slave societies (as opposed to societies with slaves) in world history: ancient Greece, ancient Rome, Brazil, the Caribbean and the United States. Second, among these only the last three were based on race. Thus the slave system in place in the United States from about the mid-seventeenth century until the war's end was one of only three societies in world history to be a race-based slave society.

HOW SLAVERY WAS JUSTIFIED

Slavery began in what would become the United States with the importation of twenty enslaved Africans into Virginia in 1619. Given the universality of slavery, its legitimacy was rarely questioned or explained. By the 1660s,

English settlers clearly believed that enslavement was a normal, if unfortunate, position in society for which Africans and their descendants were perfectly and naturally suited. However, racism—far from being the original justification for American slavery—emerged over time. In the early seventeenth century, English colonists used a longstanding rationale for enslavement: Africans were not Christian. Because enslaved Africans sometimes converted to Christianity in order to be freed, this definition created a good deal of fluidity in early Virginia. Some Africans were enslaved, but others were not. Some slaves were freed for



exemplary service, whereas others were enslaved for life. Some even enjoyed social mobility, becoming not only free but landowners and slaveholders.

In the mid-seventeenth century, Virginia's lawmakers passed laws that shifted the reason for enslavement from heathenism to Africanness, and they made enslavement lifelong. These laws connecting enslavement with place of origin provided the legal foundation for ideas about race that persist today by associating a degraded status (enslavement) with descent. By the end of the seventeenth century the linkage of Africanness or blackness with deserved enslavement was solid. Racism gained more weight over the eighteenth century as the growing trend toward rationalism sought to catalogue the world and its people.

The spread of Enlightenment thought during the eighteenth century changed this view of slavery. The

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Enlightenment's insistence on human rights and equality inspired an age of revolution in the late eighteenth century; the American Revolution, the French Revolution and the Haitian Revolution were all inspired in part by these ideals. In the 1740s, a spiritual movement swept the American colonies. The Great Awakening preached the importance of a direct experience of God's love, the value of expressing spiritual rapture, and the equal worth of all souls before God. In addition, the slow rise of industrial capitalism in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries in the North caused some to

question slavery's devaluation of competition, its degradation of work, and the absence of wages as incentive.

For all these reasons, a small minority of Americans began to question the validity of slavery; and by the late eighteenth century, a group of Philadelphians had formed the world's first antislavery society. Upon its heels followed organizations in New York, Boston, Baltimore and other cities throughout the North. Among this first generation of abolitionists it was commonplace for elite white men to form organizations that excluded white women and all black persons. Women's and black organizations were formed in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and by about 1830, these groups came together in a second-generation abolitionist movement. The first generation had fought (successfully) for an end to the African slave trade, which ceased in 1808, and for the gradual abolition of slavery in the North. The second generation distinguished itself by working interracially in societies that included both women and men, and demanding immediate abolition; the most radical also promoted rights for black Americans.

Though abolitionists remained few in number, they were a vocal group that made it difficult for slaveholders (and to a certain extent, non-slaveholders) to unthinkingly accept the legitimacy of slavery. Increasingly, slave-holders had to explain what before had scarcely been questioned. Slowly the idea that slavery was a natural but unfortunate status died out, and the idea of paternalism took its place.

Paternalism idealized slavery as a family-like institution, which had a protective (if demanding) father-figure at the head of the household and many dependents (a wife, children, and slaves) below him. In exchange for care, protection and support, paternalists expected obedience and deference; some even hoped for love. They preferred to think of themselves as kind custodians of a childlike and dependent race rather than as cruel oppressors of their fellow men. Paternalism was also a method of control: It was the kid glove over the iron fist of violence that enforced the Old South's social order. For when slaveholders' provision of food and clothing, medical care, time off for holidays and the occasional frolic failed to garner the submission they expected, most used the lash without hesitation.

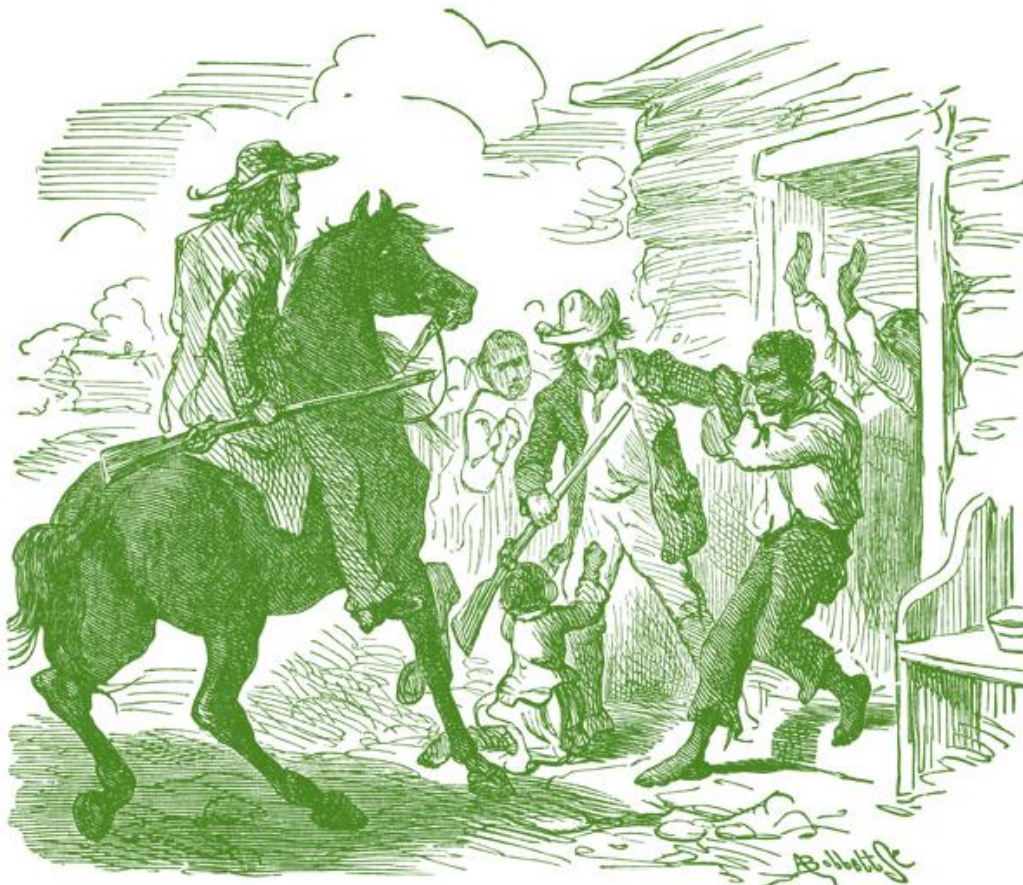
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WHY MOST WHITE SOUTHERNERS EMBRACED SLAVERY

Most southern whites did not own slaves. In some places as few as one-quarter of all landowners owned slaves, in others no more than half did; and in mountainous areas, where plantations could not thrive, hardly any were slaveholders. In spite of this, many supported slavery. By the antebellum period, feelings of contempt and hatred for blacks were widespread among white southerners. Underlying the belief in white supremacy was the assumed existence of a common white identity, an identity that gained much of its essence from the existence of black slavery. The nineteenth century exhibited the full development of racist thought in everything from limericks, ephemera, and minstrel shows to politics and the law. Common whites, though subjugated to and held in contempt by slaveholding whites, nonetheless overwhelmingly supported slavery, for though they may have resented elite whites, they despised enslaved blacks more.

Black slavery also provided an economic and social "mudsill," as slaveholder, Governor and Senator James Henry Hammond put it in a famous speech he made in 1858—a drudge class at the bottom of society that elevated whites

and freed them from the worst work. By the antebellum period, few white southerners could imagine any method of farming that would approach the level of agricultural production possible through forced labor. Ambitious whites sought to improve their financial situation by climbing through the ranks of slaveownership. In this way, slavery provided the most basic tool for social and economic mobility in the South as well as opportunities for whites in the supporting trades of slave trader, overseer, preacher, and doctor. Only in the mountainous regions of the South did support for slavery and slaveholding flag.



LAWS REGULATING SLAVE BEHAVIOR AND THE TREATMENT OF SLAVES



Southern law enshrined racist beliefs; indeed, even before racist beliefs were widespread and consistent in southern society, the law led the way in giving slavery a racial basis and then separating enslaved blacks from the rest of society. The behavior of slaves was strictly controlled: They were barred from learning to read and

write, working in printing offices, drinking, gathering after dark, bearing arms, gathering in large numbers, traveling without a pass, or running away (whether permanently or temporarily). Slaves lacked legal personhood; consequently, they could not testify against whites (but only against blacks), and crimes against their persons were treated as trespasses against their owners. The law also restricted the actions of whites in regard to slaves: It did not permit them to help slaves run away, sell them alcohol, teach them to read or write, or intermarry with them. Laws also limited and governed the conditions of manumission and taxation.

[...]

SLAVERY AND THE CIVIL WAR

In writing the U.S. Constitution, slavery was one topic among many that delegates to the Constitutional Congress had to address. After some debate, they decided to count each slave as three-fifths of a person in determining population for apportionment of state representation in Congress, to eliminate the external slave trade in 1808, and to impose a fugitive slave law that required that runaway slaves be returned to their owners. Thus, slavery was included in the Constitution. However, many northern states passed laws to begin the process of gradually emancipating slaves. Many northern slaveholders sold their slaves to the South where slavery was extremely profitable.

Because of the extra representation their states gained from counting three-fifths of slaveholders' human property, slavery gave southern elites disproportionate power in Congress. This power extended into other branches of government: Until the Civil War, southern slaveholders dominated the presidency and the Supreme Court, and most northerners who occupied those offices were pro-slavery as well.

During the 1850s, as the question of the expansion of slavery into new western territories was debated in Congress and on the streets, the perspective of many formerly neutral northerners began to shift. Increasingly, they came to see slaveholders as a "slave power" whose influence was spreading—not only within the traditional realm of the nation's political sphere, but into the West and even into the North, to the great consternation of growing numbers of northerners. Not to be mistaken for a conflict over the morality of slavery itself, the Civil War was the culmination of mounting tensions between southerners who believed each new state had the right to decide

whether or not it would allow slavery and northerners who were increasingly resentful of the extending reach of the slave power.

During the years of the Civil War, the institution of slavery slowly fell apart. As the Union army advanced into parts

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of the Confederacy, many slaveholders fled into the Confederate interior. In coastal South Carolina, the land abandoned by planters was quickly claimed by those who had worked it for generations. After the war's end, landowners and Union officials found the task of prying the land away from the freedpeople difficult.

From the beginning of war onward, slaves ran away by the thousands. After a few years of war and flight, the Union army desperately needed a uniform policy for either sending the "contrabands of war" back to their

owners (a policy objected to by many as aiding the enemy) or keeping them and using them in the army. A reluctant Abraham Lincoln was increasingly convinced of the need to arm these fugitives as well as the free blacks of the North clamoring for inclusion, and in 1863 he announced the Emancipation Proclamation, in part to satisfy the military need for men. The Proclamation freed enslaved people in the Confederacy, and paved the way for a general emancipation at the end of the war in 1865.

Slavery was at the heart of the issues that led to the outbreak of Civil War in April 1861. Whereas a probable majority of Americans accepted the existence of slavery in southern states, many opposed its expansion into new states and territories. And among slaveholding societies, the United States was unique in going to war to resolve the question of slavery and of how the nation would define itself. The end of the Civil War and the passage of the Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution in 1865 resolved that question forever.

By Stephanie M. H. Camp

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SECTION TWO

SOURCE:

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African Americans [as Freed People]

Although the vast majority of African Americans were slaves until 1865, the relatively small free black community that began to form during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries played a very important role in African American history. The free black community established institutions such as independent black churches, schools, fraternal organizations, and mutual aid societies. Free blacks were also extremely important in the abolitionist movement. African Americans' post-emancipation hopes for full and equal citizenship were ultimately dashed; nonetheless, the freed people developed their own distinct culture and institutions that would shape black American life in the decades that followed.

BACKGROUND: SEVENTEENTH AND EIGHTEENTH CENTURIES

The first African Americans were transported to the Chesapeake colonies of Virginia and Maryland in the early 1600s in order to work as indentured servants on tobacco farms, similar to many European emigrants. However, throughout the 1600s, the practice gradually developed where blacks were presumed to be slaves for life rather than bound for a term of years. By the early 1700s, African slavery was established in all of the British North American colonies, north and south.

While some free blacks, such as the poet Phillis Wheatley and Boston Massacre victim Crispus Attucks, achieved some renown in colonial America, a distinct black community did not emerge until the American Revolution (1775–1783). A number of blacks received their freedom as a result of their fighting in the American Army. Other blacks, particularly in the South, received their freedom by fighting for the British against their patriot masters. Thousands of blacks took advantage of the dislocations caused by the war to run away from their owners. Further, the democratic and egalitarian sentiments spawned by the Revolution led northern states to begin the gradual emancipation of slaves within their borders. While southern states did not abolish slavery as a result of the revolution, some individual slave-owners, such as George Washington, voluntarily emancipated their slaves. By the late 1700s, sufficient numbers of free blacks were present in cities such as New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore, and Charleston, and in rural areas in upper South states such as Maryland, as to permit the emergence of a black community with its own distinct culture and institutions.

After the Revolutionary War, free northern blacks formed institutions that have continued to influence African American life to the present day. The first independent black churches date from this period; the most well known example is the Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church founded by Richard Allen in Philadelphia in the mid-1790s. Free blacks also founded independent black schools, fraternal organizations such as the Prince Hall Masons, and mutual aid societies such as the Free African Society founded by Absalom Jones and Richard Allen in Philadelphia in the late 1780s. These institutions provided a foundation from which many black community leaders emerged in the first half of the 1800s. Black northerners, however, faced pervasive social discrimination: most states did not permit blacks to vote and they were informally barred from many jobs and public accommodations.

AFRICAN AMERICANS IN ANTEBELLUM AMERICA

There were also free blacks in the slaveholding South during the nineteenth century. Most free blacks in the upper South states of Virginia, Maryland, and Delaware lived in rural areas, although significant numbers of free blacks lived in cities such as Baltimore, Richmond, and Norfolk. A smaller number of free blacks lived in Deep South

states such as Georgia, South Carolina, and Louisiana, particularly in cities such as Charleston, Savannah, and New Orleans. Free blacks in the Deep South, unlike those in the North and in the Upper South, often had close ties to the white elite: free blacks in major Deep South cities were often skilled tradesmen, and a small number of Deep South free blacks were slave owners themselves. Free blacks in the South lived under even more restrictive conditions than black northerners because white southerners feared that free blacks would conspire with slaves to harm whites. For instance, some states passed laws to restrict their freedom of movement and ownership of guns.

Free blacks played an important role in the abolitionist movement, which became increasingly prominent after 1830, and helped to cause the Civil War. Frederick Douglass, an escaped slave, was the most well-known free black abolitionist of the period, but free blacks such as Henry Highland Garnet and Martin Delany were also prominent leaders. Free blacks helped slaves escape on the Underground Railroad. Northern free blacks also agitated, with only occasional success, to obtain the right to vote and gain equal employment and housing opportunities.

THE CIVIL WAR AND ITS AFTERMATH

The Civil War was a turning point for the African-American community. Although initially reluctant to use black soldiers, the Union Army enlisted over 180,000 free blacks and escaped slaves who served in all-black units under white officers. Black soldiers faced unequal pay in the Union Army and were frequently executed by Confederate forces that were unwilling to treat black soldiers as prisoners of war. However, blacks served valiantly in the Union cause that began with preserving the nation and ended with the goal of abolishing slavery. Those who survived lived to see both slavery and the Confederacy finally destroyed at the war's end.

In the years following 1877, southern states adopted a number of devices, including poll taxes and literacy tests, which effectively prevented nearly all southern blacks from voting. Further, all southern states adopted "Jim Crow" laws which required the segregation of blacks from whites in nearly all aspects of southern life, including housing, schools, and transportation, in order to establish a racial hierarchy in which blacks were clearly subordinated.

The passage of the Thirteenth Amendment in 1865 ended [chattel] slavery in this country forever. Freedom, however, did not mean equality or economic opportunity. Freed slaves lacked land, education, and employment. As a result, many former slaves continued to work the same land they had worked as slaves, only now as sharecroppers or tenant farmers rather than chattel slaves. Other freed blacks took to the road in order to leave the area in which they had been

slaves, to seek opportunities in cities and towns, or to attempt to find relatives who had been sold away during slavery. Now that slavery was ended, it remained to be seen what status free blacks would hold in postbellum America.

After Abraham Lincoln's assassination in April 1865, Reconstruction policy was initially dominated by President Andrew Johnson, a Tennessee Unionist who had little sympathy for blacks. Johnson acquiesced in southern states' passage of "Black Codes" intended to reduce the freed people to a condition much like slavery by preventing them from owning land or traveling freely. Freed blacks were also the target of much violence from angry white southerners in the first several months after the war ended. A particularly heinous incident occurred in Memphis in May 1866 [*Memphis Riot of 1866*] when forty-six black people were killed by a mob led by local policemen. Northern outrage at widespread southern violation of blacks' rights and the return of former Confederate leaders to political power in the South led to a rejection of Johnson's lenient Reconstruction policies in the 1866 elections and to congressional-led Radical Reconstruction (1867–1877).

The Republican-dominated Congress sent federal troops to the South to protect blacks' rights and to establish more democratic governments. The Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments to the Constitution were ratified in 1868 and 1870, respectively, with the intent of requiring southern states to give blacks equal citizenship rights and the right to vote. In response, white southerners formed terrorist groups such as the Ku Klux Klan, which instituted a violent campaign against blacks and their white sympathizers. Nonetheless, during Radical Reconstruction, over 1,000 blacks were elected to various offices in southern states, including two U.S. Senators and fourteen members of Congress.

However, this period of black political influence was brief. Unrelenting white terrorist violence in the 1870s led to the recapture of political control in many southern states by white supremacist Democratic regimes. Further, white northerners gradually lost interest in protecting black southern rights throughout the 1870s. By 1876, only Louisiana, Florida, and South Carolina remained under Republican rule.

THE POST-RECONSTRUCTION PERIOD

Radical Reconstruction came to an end after the 1876 presidential election between Democrat Samuel J. Tilden and Republican Rutherford B. Hayes. Although Tilden won the popular vote, Hayes claimed that he had carried Louisiana, Florida, and South Carolina, and therefore had won the election by one vote in the Electoral College. After much dispute, an agreement was reached by which Democrats would accept Hayes's victory in exchange for his promise to remove federal troops from Louisiana, Florida, and South Carolina. Once the troops were removed, white supremacist Democrats immediately seized power in those southern states and Reconstruction was finished.

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Despite the disappointment of Reconstruction, black southerners, in the last third of the nineteenth century, managed to build communities with institutions that would play an important role in black culture and in the civil rights movement of the twentieth century. Black southerners established their own independent churches and Sunday schools in the mid- to late-nineteenth century. Black southerners, often aided by white northern philanthropists, established schools and colleges that trained the next generation of black leaders, such as Fisk University in Tennessee and Hampton Institute in Virginia.

Although frustrated in their search for equality, free blacks in the North and freed slaves in the South established their own distinct culture and institutions that helped them survive difficult times and that would eventually provide the foundation for future gains. The greatest outcome of the Civil War was the freedom of nearly four million slaves. What freedom meant and what this nation would do to ensure freedom and equality to African Americans and all minorities were issues that remained unresolved for decades.

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By Daniel W. Aldridge, III

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SECTION THREE

SOURCE: <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/part4/4p2956.html>

Conditions of Antebellum Slavery

By 1830 slavery was primarily located in the South, where it existed in many different forms. African Americans were enslaved on small farms, large plantations, in cities and towns, inside homes, out in the fields, and in industry and transportation.

Though slavery had such a wide variety of faces, the underlying concepts were always the same. Slaves were considered property, and they were property because they were black. Their status as property was enforced by violence -- actual or threatened. People, black and white, lived together within these parameters, and their lives together took many forms.

Enslaved African Americans could never forget their status as property, no matter how well their owners treated them. But it would be too simplistic to say that all masters and slaves hated each other. Human beings who live and work together are bound to form relationships of some kind, and some masters and slaves genuinely cared for each other. But the caring was tempered and limited by the power imbalance under which it grew. Within the narrow confines of slavery, human relationships ran the gamut from compassionate to contemptuous. But the masters and slaves never approached equality.

The standard image of Southern slavery is that of a large plantation with hundreds of slaves. In fact, such situations were rare. Fully 3/4 of Southern whites did not even own slaves; of those who did, 88% owned twenty or fewer. Whites who did not own slaves were primarily yeoman farmers. Practically speaking, the institution of slavery did not help these people. And yet most non-slaveholding white Southerners identified with and defended the institution of slavery. Though many resented the wealth and power of the large slaveholders, they aspired to own slaves themselves and to join the privileged ranks. In addition, slavery gave the farmers a group of people to feel superior to. They may have been poor, but they were not slaves, and they were not black. They gained a sense of power simply by being white.

In the lower South the majority of slaves lived and worked on cotton plantations. Most of these plantations had fifty or fewer slaves, although the largest plantations have several hundred. Cotton was by far the leading cash crop, but slaves also raised rice, corn, sugarcane, and tobacco. Many plantations raised several different kinds of crops.

Besides planting and harvesting, there were numerous other types of labor required on plantations and farms. Enslaved people had to clear new land, dig ditches, cut and haul wood, slaughter livestock, and make repairs to buildings and tools. In many instances, they worked as mechanics, blacksmiths, drivers, carpenters, and in other

skilled trades. Black women carried the additional burden of caring for their families by cooking and taking care of the children, as well as spinning, weaving, and sewing.

Some slaves worked as domestics, providing services for the master's or overseer's families. These people were designated as "house servants," and though their work appeared to be easier than that of the "field slaves," in some ways it was not. They were constantly under the scrutiny of their masters and mistresses, and could be called on for service at any time. They had far less privacy than those who worked the fields.

[...]

One of the worst conditions that enslaved people had to live under was the constant threat of sale. Even if their master was "benevolent," slaves knew that a financial loss or another personal crisis could lead them to the auction block. Also, slaves were sometimes sold as a form of punishment. And although popular sentiment (as well as the economic self-interest on the part of the owners) encouraged keeping mothers and children and sometimes fathers together, these norms were not always followed. Immediate families were often separated. If they were kept together, they were almost always sold away from their extended families. Grandparents, sisters, brothers, and

The standard image of Southern slavery is that of a large plantation with hundreds of slaves. In fact, such situations were rare. Fully 3/4 of Southern whites did not even own slaves; of those who did, 88% owned twenty or fewer. Whites who did not own slaves were primarily yeoman farmers. Practically speaking, the institution of slavery did not help these people. And yet most non-slaveholding white Southerners identified with and defended the institution of slavery. Though many resented the wealth and power of the large slaveholders, they aspired to own slaves themselves and to join the privileged ranks. In addition, slavery gave the farmers a group of people to feel superior to. They may have been poor, but they were not slaves, and they were not black. They gained a sense of power simply by being white.

cousins could all find themselves forcibly scattered, never to see each other again. Even if they or their loved ones were never sold, slaves had to live with the constant threat that they could be.

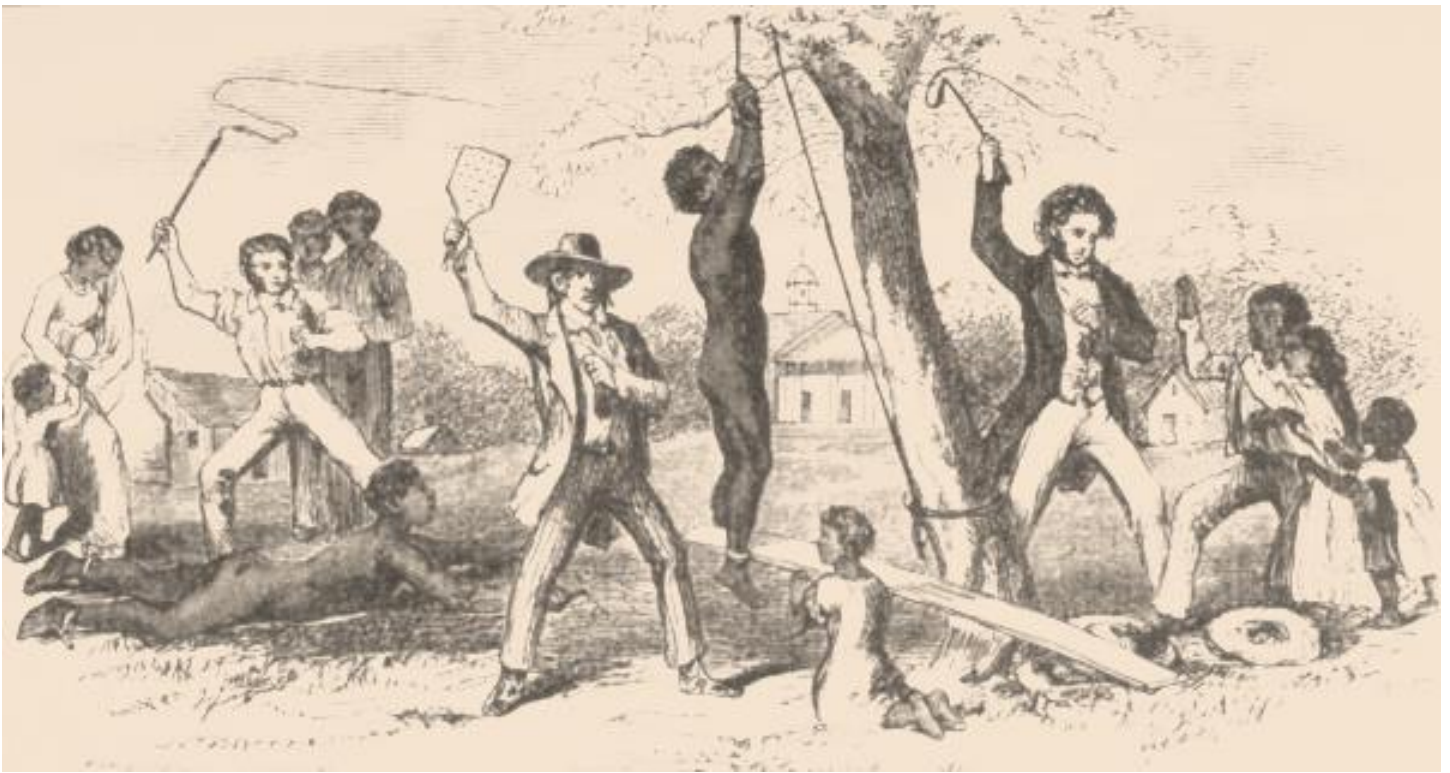
African American women had to endure the threat and the practice of sexual exploitation. There were no safeguards to protect them from being sexually stalked, harassed, or raped, or to be used as long-term concubines by masters and overseers. The abuse was widespread, as the men with authority took

advantage of their situation. Even if a woman seemed agreeable to the situation, in reality she had no choice. Slave men, for their part, were often powerless to protect the women they loved.

The drivers, overseers, and masters were responsible for plantation discipline. Slaves were punished for not working fast enough, for being late getting to the fields, for defying authority, for running away, and for a number of other reasons. The punishments took many forms, including whippings, torture, mutilation, imprisonment, and being sold away from the plantation. Slaves were even sometimes murdered. Some masters were more "benevolent" than others, and punished less often or severely. But with rare exceptions, the authoritarian relationship remained firm even in those circumstances.

In addition to the authority practiced on individual plantations, slaves throughout the South had to live under a set of laws called the Slave Codes. The codes varied slightly from state to state, but the basic idea was the same: the slaves were considered property, not people, and were treated as such. Slaves could not testify in court against a white, make contracts, leave the plantation without permission, strike a white (even in self-defense), buy and sell goods, own firearms, gather without a white present, possess any anti-slavery literature, or visit the homes of whites or free blacks. The killing of a slave was almost never regarded as murder, and the rape of slave women was treated as a form of trespassing.

Whenever there was a slave insurrection, or even the rumor of one, the laws became even tighter. At all times, patrols were set up to enforce the codes. These patrols were similar to militias and were made up of white men who were obligated to serve for a set period. The patrols apprehended slaves outside of plantations, and they raided homes and any type of gathering, searching for anything that might lead to insurrection. During times of insurrection -- either real or rumored -- enraged whites formed vigilance committees that terrorized, tortured, and killed blacks.



While most slaves were concentrated on the plantations, there were many slaves living in urban areas or working in rural industry. Although over 90% of American slaves lived in rural areas, slaves made up at least 20% of the populations of most Southern cities. In Charleston, South Carolina, slaves and free blacks outnumbered whites. Many slaves living in cities worked as domestics, but others worked as blacksmiths, carpenters, shoemakers, bakers, or other tradespeople. Often, slaves were hired out by their masters, for a day or up to several years. Sometimes slaves were allowed to hire themselves out. Urban slaves had more freedom of movement than plantation slaves and generally had greater opportunities for learning. They also had increased contact with free black people, who often expanded their ways of thinking about slavery.

Slaves resisted their treatment in innumerable ways. They slowed down their work pace, disabled machinery, feigned sickness, destroyed crops. They argued and fought with their masters and overseers. Many stole livestock, other food, or valuables. Some learned to read and write, a practice forbidden by law. Some burned forests and buildings.

Others killed their masters outright -- some by using weapons, others by putting poison in their food. Some slaves committed suicide or mutilated themselves to ruin their property value. Subtly or overtly, enslaved African Americans found ways to sabotage the system in which they lived.

Thousands of slaves ran away. Some left the plantation for days or weeks at a time and lived in hiding. Others formed maroon communities in mountains, forests or swamps. Many escaped to the North. There were also numerous instances of slave revolts throughout the history of the institution. (For one white interpretation of slave resistance, see Diseases and Peculiarities of the Negro Race) Even when slaves acted in a subservient manner, they were often practicing a type of resistance. By fooling the master or overseer with their behavior, they resisted additional ill treatment.

[...]

Many slaves turned to religion for inspiration and solace. Some practiced African religions, including Islam, others practiced Christianity. Many practiced a brand of Christianity which included strong African elements. Most rejected the Christianity of their masters, which justified slavery. The slaves held their own meetings in secret, where they spoke of the New Testament promises of the day of reckoning and of justice and a better life after death, as well as the Old Testament story of Moses leading his people out of slavery in Egypt. The religion of enslaved African Americans helped them resist the degradation of bondage.

SECTION FOUR

African Slave Owners

SOURCE

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/africa/features/storyofafrica/9chapter2.shtml>

Many societies in Africa with kings and hierarchical forms of government traditionally kept slaves. But these were mostly used for domestic purposes. They were an indication of power and wealth and not used for commercial gain. However, with the appearance of Europeans desperate to buy slaves for use in the Americas, the character of African slave ownership changed.

GROWING RICH WITH SLAVERY

ROYALTY

In the early 18th century, Kings of Dahomey (known today as Benin) became big players in the slave trade, waging a bitter war on their neighbours, resulting in the capture of 10,000, including another important slave trader, the King of Whydah. King Tegbesu made £250,000 a year selling people into slavery in 1750. King Gezo said in the 1840's he would do anything the British wanted him to do apart from giving up slave trade:

"The slave trade is the ruling principle of my people. It is the source and the glory of their wealth...the mother lulls the child to sleep with notes of triumph over an enemy reduced to slavery..."

LIVING WITNESS

Some of the descendants of African traders are alive today. Mohammed Ibrahim Babatu is the great great grandson of Baba-ato (also known as Babatu), the famous Muslim slave trader, who was born in Niger and conducted his slave raids in Northern Ghana in the 1880's. Mohammed Ibrahim Babatu, the deputy head teacher of a Junior secondary school in Yendi, lives in Ghana.

"In our curriculum, we teach a little part of the history of our land. Because some of the children ask questions about the past history of our grandfather Babatu.



Babatu, and others, didn't see anything wrong with slavery. They didn't have any knowledge of what the people were used for. They were only aware that some of the slaves would serve others of the royal families within the sub-region.

He has done a great deal of harm to the people of Africa. I have studied history and I know the effect of slavery.

I have seen that the slave raids did harm to Africa, but some members of our family feel he was ignorant...we feel that what he did was fine, because it has given the family a great fame within the Dagomba society.

He gave some of the slaves to the Dagombas and then he sent the rest of the slaves to the Salaga market. He didn't know they were going to plantations...he was ignorant..."

SONGHAY

The young Moroccan traveler and commentator, Leo Africanus, was amazed at the wealth and quantity of slaves to be found in Gao, the capital of Songhay, which he visited in 1510 and 1513 when the empire was at the height of its power under Askiya Mohammed.

"...here there is a certain place where slaves are sold, especially on those days when the merchants are assembled. And a young slave of fifteen years of age is sold for six ducats, and children are also sold. The king of this region has a certain private palace where he maintains a great number of concubines and slaves."

SWAHILI

The ruling class of coastal Swahili society - Sultans, government officials and wealthy merchants - used non-Muslim slaves as domestic servants and to work on farms and estates. The craftsmen, artisans and clerks tended to be Muslim and freed men. But the divisions between the different classes were often very flexible. The powerful slave and ivory trader Tippu Tip was the grandson of a slave.

The Omani Sultan, Seyyid Said, became immensely rich when he started up cloves plantations in 1820 with slave labour - so successful was he that he moved the Omani capital to Zanzibar in 1840.

[Find out more about the Swahilis](#)

PUNISHED FOR KEEPING SLAVES

The Asanti (the capital, Kumasi, is in modern Ghana) had a long tradition of domestic slavery. But gold was the main commodity for selling. With the arrival of Europeans the slaves displaced gold as the main commodity for trade. As late as 1895 the British Colonial Office was not concerned by this.

"It would be a mistake to frighten the King of Kumasi and the Ashantis generally on the question of slavery. We cannot sweep away their customs and institutions all at once. Domestic slavery should not be troubled at present."

British attitudes changed when the King of the Asanti (the Asantehene) resisted British colonial authority. The suppression of the slave trade became a justification for the extension of European power. With the humiliation and exile of King Prempeh I in 1896, the Asanti were placed under the authority of the Governor of the Gold Coast and forced therefore to conform to British law and abolish the slave trade.

SLAVERY DECREED BY THE GODS

In 1807, Britain declared all slave trading illegal. The king of Bonny (in what is now the Nigerian delta) was dismayed at the conclusion of the practice.

"We think this trade must go on. That is the verdict of our oracle and the priests. They say that your country, however great, can never stop a trade ordained by God himself."

SECTION FIVE

SOURCE: Boles, John B. *Black Southerners, 1619–1869*. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1983.

Black Slaveholders

Black slave ownership was uncommon in the colonial era. With emancipations resulting from the American Revolution, however, a minority of free blacks in the Lower South came to be [slaveholders](#). Both Louisiana and South Carolina had significant free black populations, and some of them chose to purchase slaves. Some free blacks purchased their own relatives and loved ones in order to later emancipate them. Other black slaveholders, however, purchased slaves, as their white colleagues did, for economic gain. While the Lower South had arguably the harshest slave regime in the United States, it also had a higher number of African American slaveholders. The number of black slaveholders declined during the 1840s and 1850s. This was due in part to white restrictions placed on free blacks throughout the Lower South, as their legal status was increasingly circumscribed and prejudice against their status increased. The decline was also due to decisions made by free blacks to turn to other economic enterprises other than farming, perhaps for moral reasons. Even so, at the onset of the Civil War there were black slaveholders in Louisiana and South Carolina who would lose significant property with the war's conclusion.



Portrait of Nicolas Augustin Metoyer of Louisiana, he owned 13 slaves in 1830. He and his 12 family members collectively owned 215 slaves.

Did Black People Own Slaves?

SOURCE: <https://www.theroot.com/did-black-people-own-slaves-1790895436>

By Henry Louis Gates Jr.

One of the most vexing questions in African-American history is whether free African Americans themselves owned slaves. The short answer to this question, as you might suspect, is yes, of course; some free black people in this country bought and sold other black people, and did so at least since 1654, continuing to do so right through the Civil War. For me, the really fascinating questions about black slave-owning are how many black "masters" were involved, how many slaves did they own and *why* did they own slaves?

The answers to these questions are complex, and historians have been arguing for some time over whether free blacks purchased family members as slaves in order to protect them — motivated, on the one hand, by benevolence and philanthropy, as historian Carter G. Woodson put it, or whether, on the other hand, they purchased other black people "as an act of exploitation," primarily to exploit their free labor for profit, just as white slave owners did. The evidence shows that, unfortunately, both things are true. The great African-American historian, John Hope Franklin, [states this clearly](#): "The majority of Negro owners of slaves had some personal interest in their property." But, he admits, "There were instances, however, in which free Negroes had a real economic interest in the institution of slavery and held slaves in order to improve their economic status."

In [a fascinating essay](#) reviewing this controversy, R. Halliburton shows that free black people have owned slaves "in each of the thirteen original states and later in every state that countenanced slavery," at least since Anthony Johnson and his wife Mary went to court in Virginia in 1654 to obtain the services of their indentured servant, a black man, John Castor, for life.

And for a time, free black people could even "own" the services of white indentured servants in Virginia as well. Free blacks owned slaves in Boston by 1724 and in Connecticut by 1783; by 1790, 48 black people in Maryland owned 143 slaves. One particularly notorious black Maryland farmer named Nat Butler "regularly purchased and sold Negroes for the Southern trade," Halliburton wrote.

Perhaps the most insidious or desperate attempt to defend the right of black people to own slaves was the statement made on the eve of the Civil War by a group of free people of color in New Orleans, offering their services to the Confederacy, in part because they were fearful for their own enslavement: "The free colored population [native] of Louisiana ... own slaves, and they are dearly attached to their native land ... and they are ready to shed their blood for her defense. They have no sympathy for abolitionism; no love for the North, but they have plenty for Louisiana ... They will fight for her in 1861 as they fought [to defend New Orleans from the British] in 1814-1815."

These guys were, to put it bluntly, opportunists par excellence: As [Noah Andre Trudeau](#) and [James G. Hollandsworth Jr.](#) explain, once the war broke out, some of these same black men formed 14 companies of a militia composed of 440 men and were organized by the governor in May 1861 into "the Native Guards, Louisiana," swearing to fight to defend the Confederacy. Although given no combat role, the Guards — reaching a peak of 1,000 volunteers — became the first Civil War unit to appoint black officers.

When New Orleans fell in late April 1862 to the Union, about 10 percent of these men, not missing a beat, now formed the Native Guard/Corps d'Afrique to defend the Union. Joel A. Rogers noted this phenomenon in his *100 Amazing Facts*: "The Negro slave-holders, like the white ones, fought to keep their chattels in the Civil War." Rogers

also notes that some black men, including those in New Orleans at the outbreak of the War, "fought to perpetuate slavery."

How Many Slaves Did Blacks Own?

So what do the actual numbers of black slave owners and their slaves tell us? In 1830, the year most carefully studied by Carter G. Woodson, about 13.7 percent (319,599) of the black population was free. Of these, 3,776 free Negroes owned 12,907 slaves, out of a total of 2,009,043 slaves owned in the entire United States, so the numbers of slaves owned by black people over all was quite small by comparison with the number owned by white people. In his essay, "['The Known World' of Free Black Slaveholders](#)," Thomas J. Pressly, using Woodson's statistics, calculated that 54 (or about 1 percent) of these black slave owners in 1830 owned between 20 and 84 slaves; 172 (about 4 percent) owned between 10 to 19 slaves; and 3,550 (about 94 percent) each owned between 1 and 9 slaves. Crucially, 42 percent owned just one slave.

Pressly also shows that the percentage of free black slave owners as the total number of free black heads of families was quite high in several states, namely 43 percent in South Carolina, 40 percent in Louisiana, 26 percent in Mississippi, 25 percent in Alabama and 20 percent in Georgia. So why did these free black people own these slaves?

It is reasonable to assume that the 42 percent of the free black slave owners who owned just one slave probably owned a family member to protect that person, as did many of the other black slave owners who owned only slightly larger numbers of slaves. As Woodson put it in 1924's *Free Negro Owners of Slaves in the United States in 1830*, "The census records show that the majority of the Negro owners of slaves were such from the point of view of philanthropy. In many instances the husband purchased the wife or vice versa ... Slaves of Negroes were in some cases the children of a free father who had purchased his wife. If he did not thereafter emancipate the mother, as so many such husbands failed to do, his own children were born his slaves and were thus reported to the numerators."

Moreover, Woodson explains, "Benevolent Negroes often purchased slaves to make their lot easier by granting them their freedom for a nominal sum, or by permitting them to work it out on liberal terms." In other words, these black slave-owners, the clear majority, cleverly used the system of slavery to protect their loved ones. That's the good news.

But not all did, and that is the bad news. Halliburton concludes, after examining the evidence, that "it would be a serious mistake to automatically assume that free blacks owned their spouse or children only for benevolent purposes." Woodson himself notes that a "small number of slaves, however, does not always signify benevolence on the part of the owner." And [John Hope Franklin notes](#) that in North Carolina, "Without doubt, there were those who possessed slaves for the purpose of advancing their [own] well-being ... these Negro slaveholders were more interested in making their farms or carpenter-shops 'pay' than they were in treating their slaves humanely." For these black slaveholders, he concludes, "there was some effort to conform to the pattern established by the dominant slaveholding group within the State in the effort to elevate themselves to a position of respect and privilege." In other words, most black slave owners probably owned family members to protect them, but far too many turned to slavery to exploit the labor of other black people for profit.

Who Were These Black Slave Owners?

If we were compiling a "Rogues Gallery of Black History," the following free black slaveholders would be in it:

John Carruthers Stanly — born a slave in Craven County, N.C., the son of an Igbo mother and her master, John Wright Stanly — became an extraordinarily successful barber and speculator in real estate in New Bern. As Loren Schwenger points out in [Black Property Owners in the South, 1790-1915](#), by the early 1820s, Stanly owned three plantations and 163 slaves, and even hired three *white* overseers to manage his property! He fathered six children with a slave woman named Kitty, and he eventually freed them. Stanly lost his estate when a loan for \$14,962 he

Halliburton concludes, after examining the evidence, that "it would be a serious mistake to automatically assume that free blacks owned their spouse or children only for benevolent purposes." Woodson himself notes that a "small number of slaves, however, does not always signify benevolence on the part of the owner." And John Hope Franklin notes that in North Carolina, "Without doubt, there were those who possessed slaves for the purpose of advancing their [own] well-being ... these Negro slaveholders were more interested in making their farms or carpenter-shops 'pay' than they were in treating their slaves humanely." For these black slaveholders, he concludes, "there was some effort to conform to the pattern established by the dominant slaveholding group within the State in the effort to elevate themselves to a position of respect and privilege." In other words, most black slave owners probably owned family members to protect them, but far too many turned to slavery to exploit the labor of other black people for profit.

had co-signed with his white half brother, John, came due. After his brother's stroke, the loan was Stanly's sole responsibility, and he was unable to pay it.

William Ellison's fascinating story is told by Michael Johnson and James L. Roark in their book, [*Black Masters: A Free Family of Color in the Old South*](#). At his death on the eve of the Civil War, Ellison was wealthier than nine out of 10 white people in South Carolina. He was born in 1790 as a slave on a plantation in the Fairfield District of the state, far up country from Charleston. In

1816, at the age of 26, he bought his own freedom, and soon bought his wife and their child. In 1822, he opened his own cotton gin, and soon became quite wealthy. By his death in 1860, he owned 900 acres of land and 63 slaves. Not one of his slaves was allowed to purchase his or her own freedom.

Louisiana, as we have seen, was its own bizarre world of color, class, caste and slavery. By 1830, in Louisiana, several black people there owned a large number of slaves, including the following: In Pointe Coupee Parish alone, Sophie Delhonde owned 38 slaves; Lefroix Decuire owned 59 slaves; Antoine Decuire owned 70 slaves; Leandre Severin owned 60 slaves; and Victor Duperon owned 10. In St. John the Baptist Parish, Victoire Deslondes owned 52 slaves; in Plaquemine Brule, Martin Donatto owned 75 slaves; in Bayou Teche, Jean B. Muillion owned 52 slaves; Martin Lenormand in St. Martin Parish owned 44 slaves; Verret Polen in West Baton Rouge Parish owned 69 slaves; Francis Jerod in Washita Parish owned 33 slaves; and Cecee McCarty in the Upper Suburbs of New Orleans owned 32 slaves. Incredibly, the 13 members of the Metoyer family in Natchitoches Parish — including Nicolas Augustin Metoyer, pictured — collectively owned 215 slaves.

Antoine Dubuclet and his wife Claire Pollard owned more than 70 slaves in Iberville Parish when they married. According to Thomas Clarkin, by 1864, in the midst of the Civil War, they owned 100 slaves, worth \$94,700. During Reconstruction, he became the state's first black treasurer, serving between 1868 and 1878.

Andrew Durnford was a sugar planter and a physician who owned the St. Rosalie plantation, 33 miles south of New Orleans. In the late 1820s, [David O. Whitten tells us](#), he paid \$7,000 for seven male slaves, five females and two children. He traveled all the way to Virginia in the 1830s and purchased 24 more. Eventually, he would own 77 slaves. When a fellow Creole slave owner liberated 85 of his slaves and shipped them off to Liberia, Durnford commented that he couldn't do that, because "self interest is too strongly rooted in the bosom of all that breathes the American atmosphere."

It would be a mistake to think that large black slaveholders were only men. In 1830, in Louisiana, the aforementioned Madame Antoine Dublucet owned 44 slaves, and Madame Ciprien Ricard owned 35 slaves, Louise Divivier owned 17 slaves, Genevieve Rigobert owned 16 slaves and Rose Lanoix and Caroline Miller both owned 13 slaves, while over in Georgia, Betsey Perry owned 25 slaves. According to Johnson and Roark, the wealthiest black person in Charleston, S.C., in 1860 was Maria Weston, who owned 14 slaves and property valued at more than \$40,000, at a time when the average white man earned about \$100 a year. (The city's largest black slaveholders, though, were Justus Angel and Mistress L. Horry, both of whom owned 84 slaves.)

In Savannah, Ga., between 1823 and 1828, according to [Betty Wood's](#) *Gender, Race, and Rank in a Revolutionary Age*, Hannah Leion owned nine slaves, while the largest slaveholder in 1860 was Ciprien Ricard, who had a sugarcane plantation in Louisiana and owned 152 slaves with her son, Pierre — many more than the 35 she owned in 1830. According to economic historian Stanley Engerman, "In Charleston, South Carolina about 42 percent of free blacks owned slaves in 1850, and about 64 percent of these slaveholders were women." Greed, in other words, was gender-blind.

Why They Owned Slaves

These men and women, from William Stanly to Madame Ciprien Ricard, were among the largest free Negro slaveholders, and their motivations were neither benevolent nor philanthropic. One would be hard-pressed to account for their ownership of such large numbers of slaves except as avaricious, rapacious, acquisitive and predatory.

But lest we romanticize all of those small black slave owners who ostensibly purchased family members only for humanitarian reasons, even in these cases the evidence can be problematic. Halliburton, citing examples from an essay in the *North American Review* by Calvin Wilson in 1905, presents some hair-raising challenges to the idea that black people who owned their own family members always treated them well:

A free black in Trimble County, Kentucky, " ... sold his own son and daughter South, one for \$1,000, the other for \$1,200." ... A Maryland father sold his slave children in order to purchase his wife. A Columbus, Georgia, black woman — Dilsey Pope — owned her husband. "He offended her in some way and she sold him ... " Fanny Canady of Louisville, Kentucky, owned her husband Jim — a drunken cobbler — whom she threatened to "sell down the river." At New Bern, North Carolina, a free black wife and son purchased their slave husband-father. When the newly bought father criticized his son, the son sold him to a slave trader. The son boasted afterward that "the old man had gone to the corn fields about New Orleans where they might learn him some manners."

Carter Woodson, too, tells us that some of the husbands who purchased their spouses "were not anxious to liberate their wives immediately. They considered it advisable to put them on probation for a few years, and if they did not find them satisfactory they would sell their wives as other slave holders disposed of Negroes." He then relates the example of a black man, a shoemaker in Charleston, S.C., who purchased his wife for \$700. But "on finding her hard to please, he sold her a few months thereafter for \$750, gaining \$50 by the transaction."

Most of us will find the news that some black people bought and sold other black people for profit quite distressing, as well we should. But given the long history of class divisions in the black community, which [Martin R. Delany](#) as early as the 1850s described as "a nation within a nation," and given [the role of African elites in the long history of the Trans-Atlantic slave trade](#), perhaps we should not be surprised that we can find examples throughout black history of just about every sort of human behavior, from the most noble to the most heinous, that we find in any other people's history.

The good news, scholars agree, is that by 1860 the number of free blacks owning slaves had markedly decreased from 1830. In fact, Loren Schweninger concludes that by the eve of the Civil War, "the phenomenon of free blacks owning slaves had nearly disappeared" in the Upper South, even if it had not in places such as Louisiana in the

Lower South. Nevertheless, it is a very sad aspect of African-American history that slavery sometimes could be a colorblind affair, and that the evil business of owning another human being could manifest itself in both males and females, and in black as well as white.

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SECTION FIVE-A

SOURCE: <http://www.blackpast.org/aah/johnson-anthony-1670>

Anthony Johnson One the First Black Slave Owners?

Anthony Johnson was the first prominent black landholder in the [English](#) colonies. Johnson arrived in [Virginia](#) in 1621 aboard the *James*. It is uncertain if Johnson arrived as an indentured servant or as a [slave](#), early records list him as “Antonio, a Negro.” Regardless of his status, Johnson was bound labor and was put to work on Edward Bennett’s tobacco plantation near Warresquioake, Virginia. In March of 1622 local Tidewater Indians attacked Bennett’s plantation, killing fifty-two people. Johnson was one of only five on the plantation who survived the attack.

In 1622 “Mary, a Negro Woman” arrived aboard the *Margrett and John* and like Anthony, she ended up on Bennett’s plantation. At some point Anthony and Mary were married; a 1653 Northampton County court document lists Mary as Anthony’s wife. It was a prosperous and enduring union that lasted over forty years and produced at least four children including two sons and two daughters. The couple was respected in their community for their “hard labor and known service,” according to court documents.

At some point between 1625 and 1640 Anthony and Mary gained their freedom and moved to Virginia’s Eastern Shore where they purchased a modest estate. They began raising cattle and hogs and by 1651, Johnson claimed 250 acres of land along Pungoteague Creek. He claimed the land by virtue of five headrights, one of which was in the name of his son, Richard Johnson. It is impossible to know if Anthony imported the other men whose names appear on the headright land claims, but it is possible that he did. It is also possible that he purchased headright certificates from other planters. Either way, 250 acres was a sizeable plantation by the standards of the day. By 1654 Johnson’s two sons, Richard and John, both owned acreage adjoining their father’s land.

In addition to being a landowner, Anthony Johnson was also a slaveholder. Court records reveal that Johnson won a 1655 case against white planter, Robert Parker, to retain ownership of Johnson’s slave, John Casor. Casor, with the help of Robert Parker, tried to claim that he was an indentured servant, not a slave. Although the courts initially found in Parker’s favor, temporarily freeing Casor, they subsequently reversed the decision, returning Casor to the service of his master, Anthony Johnson.

A fire in 1653 destroyed much of the Johnson’s plantation. As a result of the fire, Anthony and Mary petitioned the

court for tax relief, which was granted on the grounds that they would have difficulty obtaining a livelihood. Sometime in the 1660s Anthony and Mary Johnson, their dependent children, and their married sons, John and Richard, all moved north into [Maryland](#). In Maryland, Anthony leased a 300-acre farm, Tonies Vineyard, where he lived until his death in 1670. Mary survived her husband, and in her 1672 will she bequeathed a cow to each of her grandsons. Five years later, in 1677, Anthony and Mary's grandson, John Jr., purchased a 44-acre farm which he named Angola. John Jr. later died without leaving an heir, however, and by 1730, the Johnson family had vanished from the historical records.

Sources:

T.H. Breen, Stephen Innes, *"Myne Owne Ground": Race and Freedom on Virginia's Eastern Shore, 1640-1676* (New York: Oxford U Press, 2004); Peter Wood, *Strange New Land, Africans in Colonial America* (New York: Oxford U Press, 2003).

By [McNally, Deborah](#) *University of Washington, Seattle*

SECTION SIX

SOURCE:

<https://www.scalawagmagazine.org/2016/10/review-what-does-it-look-like-to-overcome-race-in-the-south/>

[What Does it Look Like to Overcome Race in the South?]

Film Review:

Class war and the Confederacy in "*Free State of Jones*"

By [Cedric Johnson](#) October 6, 2016

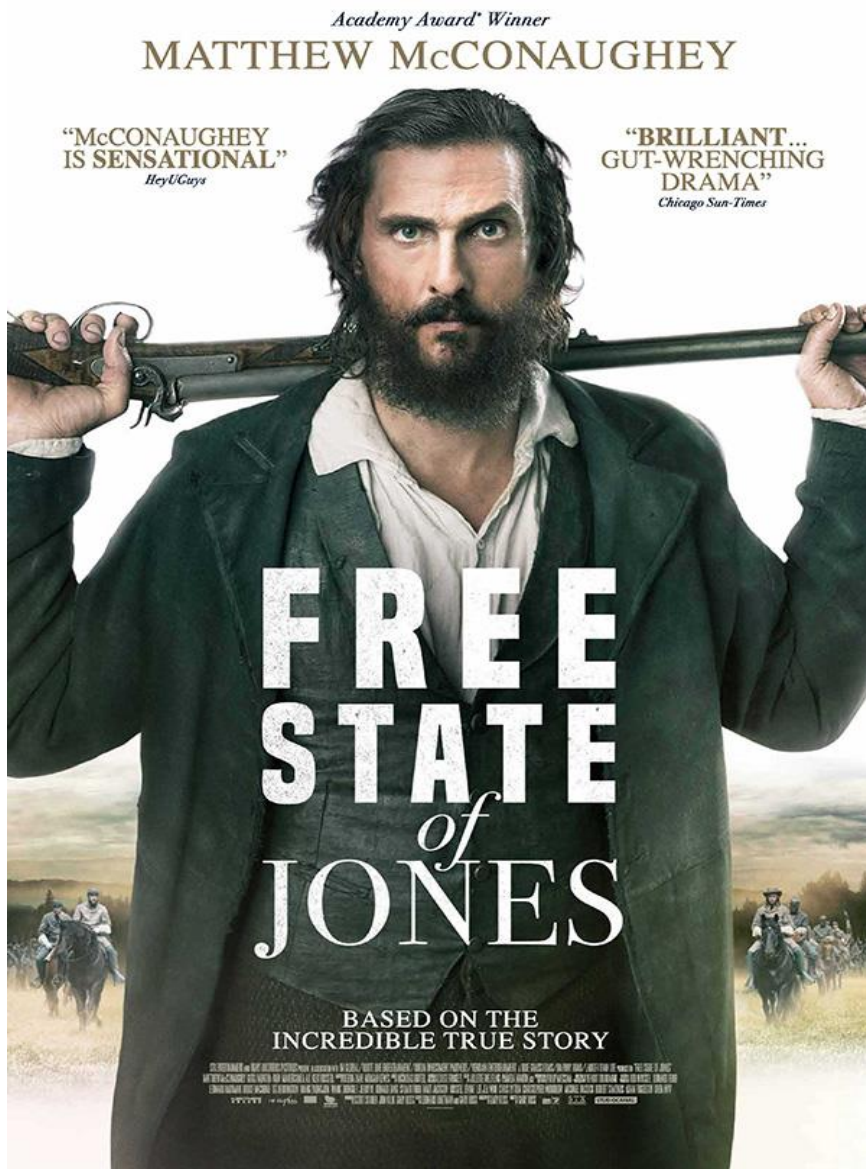
Free State of Jones may be the most politically important film about the Civil War and its aftermath to appear in a quarter century. Produced by Gary Ross, *Free State of Jones* stars Mathew McConaughey as Newton Knight, a Confederate deserter who leads a rebellion against the planter class in Southeastern Mississippi, momentarily uniting yeoman farmers and runaway slaves in an autonomous republic, the Free State of Jones County. This film does for Southern white small farmers what the 1989 film *Glory* did for enslaved and free blacks – it provides a textured portrait of their political lives that avoids the crude caricatures we have come to expect.

The film distills Victoria Bynum's superb history of the legendary Knight Company, Newton Knight's marriage to former slave and co-conspirator, Rachel, and the interracial community they created, the "White Negroes" of the Piney Woods. The film's narrative oscillates between the Knight Company's exploits during the Civil War and the tragedy of post-war Reconstruction and, on the other hand, the 1948 criminal trial of Davis Knight, the great-grandson of Rachel and Newton, who was charged with violating Mississippi's ban on miscegenation after he married a white woman, Lee Spradley. In dramatic detail, the film reveals the class war underneath the Civil War, a dimension largely erased by the dominant lore of the Confederate "Lost Cause" that continues to shape Southern

and national politics. In contrast to the prevailing view among so many nowadays that racism has always been and continues to be the main barrier to any progressive left politics, *Free State of Jones* reminds us of a more complex history, where anti-slavery politics, Radical Republicanism and mass action created the short-lived progress of Reconstruction.

In his classic 1935 book, *Black Reconstruction*, W.E.B. DuBois characterizes the work stoppages and eventual mass exodus of enslaved blacks from plantations after the signing of the Emancipation Proclamation as a general strike. Against the conservative Dunning school of Reconstruction historiography, DuBois illuminates the role that blacks played in winning the war and creating the conditions for federal Reconstruction. *Free State of Jones* renders part of this history, and conveys a sense of an even broader strike in the process. As slaves put down the hoe and scythe,

filling the Union camps as contraband, increasing numbers of Confederate deserters fled into the hollows and swamps, and some switched sides, further weakening the capacity of the landlords to defend their interests.



In his excellent [review](#) of the film, historian Mark Lause reminds us that such desertions were not so much exceptions but the rule. The general fact of Confederate desertion, together with the Piney Woods rebellion depicted in the film, challenges the myth of the pro-slavery "Solid South." It should also trouble those who still cling to the Confederate Battle Flag and racist nostalgia for a mythical antebellum life that benefited all whites equally. This film depicts the saga of war and Reconstruction, the personal dalliance and political communion of slaves and yeoman, freedpersons, and reformers during this auspicious period with an adroit touch that few commercial American films have attempted.

Not Another “White Savior” Movie

The reaction to *Free State of Jones* was in some corners harsh and unforgiving – but as we shall see most of these critiques not only miss the point but actively undermine the real importance of the film. We can draw out that real importance by considering some of their arguments, starting with New

York Times columnist Charles Blow, who [concludes](#) that “there are also tired flashes of the Tarzan narrative: a white man who, dropped into a jungle, masters it better than the natives.” Blow is disappointed that “there is little space in the film for righteous black rage and vengeance, but plenty for black humor and conciliation.” He charges “the movie reduced slavery to an ancillary ephemerality and purges it of too much of its barbarism.” However, Blow’s characterization does not accurately reflect the events depicted in the film, nor the history examined by Bynum, whom he cites.

When I first saw the film's trailer, I momentarily worried about this being a white savior film. Would this be another *Dances with Wolves* or *The Last Samurai*, where some broken white character places himself in service of the native people, and their suffering serves as catalyst for his self-actualization and redemption? But this film does not belong in that genre.

For starters, Knight's transformation begins before his contact with rebel slaves. He and other characters in the film are politicized by the wider class contradictions of the Civil War, with the conflict over slavery as one dimension of this milieu. Working as a Confederate nurse, Knight is disturbed by the hypocrisy of the so-called "Twenty Negro Law," which exempts large slaveholders from military duty, and he is outraged by the daily predation on small farmers by Confederate tax collectors, who seize their corn, hogs, and handicrafts to furnish the battlefield.

The film contrasts the fictional planter James Eakins and the opulence enjoyed by his family with the austere conditions of the Piney Woods yeomanry, the majority of Jones County. Most of the small farmers who populated Southeastern Mississippi did not own slaves, not so much because of some affinity for blacks and their condition, but because of the republican belief of the period that too much wealth and commercial success would lead to moral decay. In the film, Knight briefly refers to the wide gulf in prosperity between Jones County's small farmers and the patricians of the Delta when he tells soldiers about a house in Natchez rumored to have a golden doorknob. He eventually rebels once he can no longer stand the dissonance between this war waged by wealthy planters and the tremendous hardship, sacrifice, and death of the poor it requires.

But more importantly, there is something more insidious about the "white savior" criticism of the film. By honing in on Knight, the criticism diminishes the role of other characters, particularly the slaves and maroons who reflect a wider working class culture of mutuality and resistance. The film portrays well-documented instances of the frequent and extensive cooperation between slaves, deserters, refugees, and Union sympathizers. For example, we first meet Rachel when she is summoned to save Knight's ill son. After Knight is mauled by a search party's dog, maroons offer him herbal medicine, and perhaps more importantly, they provide his first contact with blacks outside the hierarchy and social norms of the town.

The white savior criticism derives from the broader preoccupation with black agency in contemporary academic and popular discourses. This concern with valorizing black self-assertion originated in response to the long-standing tendency in fictional and scholarly representations to neglect or impugn black self-activity. Few contemporary films on black subject matter escape these debates. Critics panned Stephen Spielberg's 2012 film *Lincoln* because the plot focused too much on the machinations of Washington politicians, and the president's attempts to secure the Congressional votes needed to pass the Thirteenth Amendment. An insistence on highlighting black agency during the civil rights movement seemed to guide Ava Duvernay's 2014 film, *Selma*, which dramatizes the 1965 Selma to Montgomery marches led by the Southern Christian Leadership Conference and the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee. When the film was released, however, veterans of the Lyndon B. Johnson administration and some period historians criticized it for downplaying and distorting the president's role in the passage of landmark voting rights legislation.

Perhaps this is an intractable problem. All cinematic depictions of history are abbreviations of multifaceted, conjunctural phenomena, and getting to the truth of the matter requires more than two hours or so of passive entertainment. Filmmakers who emphasize black agency seek to inspire pride and similar feats of heroism in their audiences, but they may also obscure the more complex motives of various historical events, actors, and processes. The abolition of slavery was not merely a story of Congressional legislation, nor was the civil rights movement the result of black political assertion and direct-action alone. That said, some films like *Free State of Jones* provide us with more politically useful representations of history, illuminating the interplay of different forces, individual choices, and material interests.

The Limits of the Yeoman's Freedom

Importantly, *Free State of Jones* underscores how struggles for freedom are themselves complexes of many stories, and cannot be reduced to individual assertions of agency or independence.

The Knight Company was born out of the weakened power of the Confederacy and the merchant-landlord class. In



the wake of devastating defeats by Union forces at the Battle of Corinth in the fall of 1862 and the Siege of Vicksburg the following spring, thousands deserted the Confederate army. Robert E. Lee's surrender at Appomattox Courthouse in 1865, however, would bring an end to this period of tremendous social upheaval and fluidity, and the conditions that allowed the Free State of Jones County to emerge.

The film climaxes after the company repels Confederate troops at Ellisville, and Knight says to them, "From this

day forward we declare the land north of Pascagoula Swamp, south of Enterprise and east to the Pearl River to the Alabama border, to be a Free State of Jones." He outlines the radically egalitarian principles of the new republic: "No man ought to stay poor so another man can get rich . . . no man ought to tell another man what you got to live for or what he's got to die for . . . what you put in the ground is yours to tend and harvest and there ain't no man ought to be able to take that away from you." Finally: "Every man is a man. If you walk on two legs, you're a man. It's as simple as that."

We are denied any catharsis in this film, however. There is no tidy narrative closure. Instead, we are presented with the lingering consequences of powerful interests aligned against the very kind of egalitarian vision embodied in the republic of Jones County, military Reconstruction, and the marital union of Newton and Rachel Knight. We might relish the heroic gunfight in the cemetery which pits farmers and slaves against Confederate authorities, perhaps the film's most Hollywood scene, but almost as soon as Knight declares the Free State of Jones County, things begin to unravel. Union support for the pro-Unionist insurrection is tepid, and the end of the war and abolition of slavery give way to a downward spiral of racist reaction.

Southern states enact Black Codes, which regulate the movement of freedpersons, restricting their access to cities and towns, and by default, public life and commerce. The erection of apprenticeship laws, which circumvented the Thirteenth Amendment's qualified prohibition of slavery and involuntary servitude, also shored up the renascent power of the planter class and their control over black labor.

In the film, when Washington finds out his son has been kidnapped and forced into servitude through apprenticeship, he grabs his gun in an unsuccessful rescue attempt. The courtroom scene that follows is one of the more understated moments in the film, but it is important and contradicts the view of Blow and others who judge cinematic treatments of slavery by how graphically they depict the plantocracy's depravity and violence. When Washington and Knight lose the court case against Eakins, who is protected by property laws, a furious Knight pays Eakins to secure the boy's release – perhaps the only instance of him being a true "white savior." Eakins concedes without a fuss and releases the boy, having maintained his economic advantage. This scene underscores that brutality and torture, like Christianity and the legal system, were methods of maintaining the plantation order, but the essential motive of that system was always profit.

Ironically, the yeomen's relative freedom as small landowners serves as the impetus for both their rebellion against taxation and conscription, and their capitulation to racist Redemption after the war. Small farmers and hired hands were slowly won over to the Democratic Party slogan of white supremacy, with some joining terrorist groups like the Ku Klux Klan, the Red Shirts, and the Knights of the White Camelia, which were dedicated to breaking black

The very meaning of class has been lost in our times, too often equated with gradations of education, income, and wealth. These categories serve as rough indicators of class, but none fully reflects its social character under late capitalism. In American public debate as well, race is used as a rough proxy for class, with white and black sometimes serving as synonyms for rich and poor, middle class and welfare dependent. *Free State of Jones* reminds us of a core truth of class relations – the shared material interests of those who are compelled by force or necessity to work. In today's economy, where job security and living wages are scarce, many people know what it means to be overworked, underpaid, and disposable – what it is like to be “somebody else's nigger” – even if they resent being associated with those who have long symbolized hyper-exploitation.

Republican support. The racism of some small farmers is clear in the film, but those sentiments only partially explain their retreat from the utopian promise of the Free State of Jones County, and their turn to reactionary politics.

Their motivations were as much economic, an attempt to maintain their relative status as small landholders amid the uncertainty of a war-torn and defeated South. In the film, some members of the Knight Company disband after the victory at Ellisville, fearful that they might lose their farms.

Even more decisively, such

unease about property, the basis of the yeomanry's nominal independence, heightens after the war as the power of the merchant-landlord class over the Southern economy and public affairs is gradually restored, foreclosing popular, working class hopes of greater self-assertion. Without federal support for Reconstruction, and a land reform program that would have redistributed parcels to the freedmen to insure them some measure of economic



independence, hopes of political freedom were dashed.

Assertions of independence, however bold, mean little without the power to defend the political community and its values. In the story of the Jones County insurrection, we are reminded of the limits of marronage and secession, carving out some small-scale

form of political community, outside the authority of large and powerful nations. Slaves throughout the hemisphere created autonomous maroon communities in the wilderness, settlements that often helped to spark rebellion in neighboring plantations. And the Knight Company tried to create its own yeoman's republic against the plantation

class. Others would do the same after the war, forging beyond the Mississippi River, into the plains states, and towards the Sierra Nevada, creating independent towns that were momentarily beyond the reach of federal authorities. None of these social experiments, however, could elude American capitalist expansion, the geographic enclosure of the continent through railroads and political annexation, and the economic integration of backwaters and rural counties into the emerging industrial and imperial power.

“Somebody Else’s Nigger”?

This practice of characterizing white workers as perennially racist and reactionary has reached the level of blood sport during the 2016 presidential primary elections, as all manner of talking heads lined up to write-off the political challenge represented by democratic socialist Senator Bernie Sanders, and to explain the rise of Donald Trump as the Republican Party’s presidential nominee. Many saw both campaigns as fueled by white male working class rage. White working class voters, of course, supported various candidates across the Democratic and GOP fields. And while Trump’s calls for protectionist policy and his scapegoating of immigrants appealed to large sections of the Republican base, the majority of his supporters during the primary season were in fact middle class and affluent whites, not blue-collar voters. Connor Kilpatrick’s “Burying the white Working Class” offers an indispensable, critical review of this conservative tendency among the corporate commentariat. Blow and Newkirk were part of this chorus, and their reviews of *Free State of Jones* read like an encore performance.

In [his review](#) for The Atlantic, Vann Newkirk II is offended by a moment when Knight, preaching at the graveside of comrades hanged by Confederates, says, “Somehow, someday and sometime, everybody is just somebody else’s nigger.” “The notion that white people can be ‘niggers,’” Newkirk writes, “is about as offensive as they come when considering the history of the epithet and how it’s long been utilized by poor whites as a demarcation between whiteness – even its lowest rungs – and blackness. There’s a reason why black people were lynched for voting during Reconstruction and are shot for standing on corners today – one that Knight’s political revolution completely fails to comprehend.” Sadly, Newkirk fails to comprehend so much of the history he glosses over in this passage.

Oddly, Newkirk’s review ignores what happens next in Newt Knight’s eulogy when he turns to Moses Washington, a runaway slave who later serves as a Union League leader. Knight asks Washington, “Mr. Moses, Are you a nigger?”

“No. I’m not,” says Washington.

“Well, what are you?” ask Knight.

“I’m a free man, captain.”

“Why is that?” Knight continues.

“Because you cannot own a child of God!” Washington says emphatically.

Newkirk neglects this critical dimension of the graveside eulogy, and how their exchange unmasks the mythology of race, the belief that there are in fact “races” of human beings, divided in some essential way by nature, culture, and capacity. It is also worth noting, as Barbara Fields pointed out some time ago in her 1982 essay, “Ideology and Race in American History,” that what we have come to understand as race is a relatively late-breaking development in history. Contrary to popular mythology, race did not solidify at the moment of first contact between Africans and Europeans. Race and racism achieved dominance much later, at the precise moment when the planter class’s control over black labor and the moral legitimacy of slavery were being widely contested.

Newkirk assumes that whiteness and blackness are essential and static categories, totally ignoring how long it took for these markers to become firmly associated with the hierarchies we abide today. The actual history of European immigration and acculturation, and the use of the term “nigger” in public rhetoric are much more complex and surprising than his superficial reading assumes.

Theodore Allen's *The Invention of the White Race*, Noel Ignatiev's *How the Irish Became White*, and David Roediger's *The Wages of Whiteness* – among numerous other scholarly works – examine the ways each successive wave of “white” immigrants to the U.S. were unwelcomed, met by all manner of xenophobia and ethnic prejudice, which often associated them with enslaved blacks. At the start of the Civil War, phrases like “nigger work,” “working like a nigger,” and “white nigger” were used by some to describe unskilled, subservient, and difficult work undertaken by the whites, and often Irish immigrants. Newkirk obviously feels the historical weight of the epithet, but clearly misses its highly contextual, varying social meanings. He and Blow seem to view “race” as a settled matter during the Civil War, and presume that racial identity was the primary and perhaps sole affinity shaping the concerns and actions of slaves, free blacks, small farmers, journeyman, merchants, industrialists, and planters in the middle nineteenth century.

In a sense, these dismissals of *Free State of Jones* share a strange lineage with Ethel Knight's *The Echo of the Black Horn*. She was Newton Knight's great-grandniece, and her 1951 book was an attempt to silence rumors of her family's miscegenated heritage. Believing that renewed interest in her uncle was due to “communistic elements,” Ethel Knight portrayed Newton as a race traitor rather than some southern Robin Hood. Leaving no doubt about her allegiances, she dedicated the book to the “Noble Confederates who lived and died for Jones County.” Ethel Knight also sought to bury the memory and reputation of Rachel Knight, characterizing her as a disloyal slave, a “strumpet” and a “jezebel,” but her attempt at character assassination had the effect of piquing later interest in Rachel and her role in the Jones County insurrection.

Although Ethel Knight's screed against Newt and Rachel Knight was inspired by her segregationist politics, I am afraid these contemporary critics represent a consonant political sensibility, a dogged commitment to identity politics and the view that interracial solidarity is ludicrous and unlikely. If there is a common thread in both Ethel Knight's revisionist history and those who see *Free State of Jones* as a white savior film, it is that American politics has always been and should be about staying in one's ethnic and racial lane. And this is precisely the reason why this film and Bynum's *Free State of Jones* need to be appreciated and discussed widely. What is missing from these incessant evasions and put-downs of interracial left progressivism is any serious appreciation of the rich, powerful history of interracial left progressivism itself.

The Freedperson's Choice

I find it interesting that few of the film's critics ever mention the significance of its core black characters, Rachel Knight and Moses Washington, nor the deft performances of Mugu Mbatha-Raw and Mahershala Ali who portray Rachel and Washington respectively. In public interviews, Ali has been clear about the political virtues of the film, and his own motivations for taking on the role, but his artistic choices and politics do not figure into the [broadsides](#) of critics. Why did Rachel Knight, or figures like the fictional Moses Washington, make the historical choices that they did? Why did they find common cause with white farmers, carpetbaggers, and scalawags?

The kind of race-talk offered by Blow, Newkirk and others, silences the actual historical choices made by thousands of blacks who took up arms against the Confederacy and worked to advance Reconstruction. For instance, this may be the first film I have seen that spends more than a couple frames depicting the Union League, or Loyal League, men's clubs that were created to strengthen popular commitments to the Union and the Republican Party. As historian Michael W. Fitzgerald details in his book, *The Union League Movement in the Deep South*, these secret societies were crucial in politicizing freedmen and building black political power after the war, with thousands joining the League in states like Mississippi and Alabama. In *Free State of Jones*, we witness more than one League meeting. We glimpse the work of the Freedmen's schools and the intergenerational students who crowded its schoolhouses. We see freedmen marching to the polls singing “John Brown's Body” and are reminded of the dangerous work of securing the franchise as we watch Washington, going from field to field to register voters. These are stirring and sobering moments, glimpses of a heroic but often forgotten chapter in black political history.

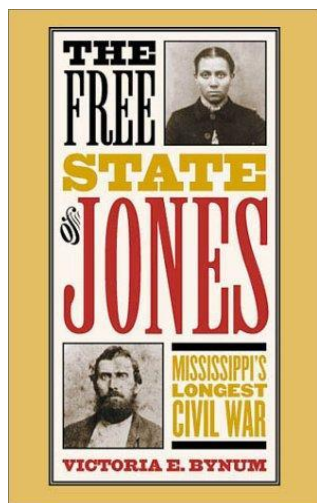
If I have a criticism of this film, it may well be that its extended, brutal denouement will inspire pessimism, inadvertently underwriting the dismal view of history and politics that the film's broader storyline challenges. As my son said when we walked out of the theatre, "That was difficult to watch." We know, however, that even after the fall of Reconstruction, freedpersons, small farmers, radical Republicans, and industrial workers strove to build political alternatives, such as the agrarian Populist Movement, the Comité des Citoyens, and the Knights of Labor. Again, why did freedpersons pursue such a politics – progressive, leftist and interracial – given the expanding and constrictive edifice of Jim Crow law?

For those who think that racism is an obstinate barrier to popular left politics, how do we explain the actions of black scalesmen, teamsters, and packers in New Orleans, who joined the 1892 general strike in that city? And how were the dozens of unions involved able to maintain solidarity despite anti-black racism in some of the locals? How did they prevail, winning the ten-hour day and overtime pay for workers throughout the city?

During the age of Obama, hyperbolic racialism has obscured actual political alignments operating within society. In a moment of economic recession, anxiety, and political disillusionment, Obama emerged as an object of white racist contempt and the personification of black striving. The torrent of right-wing, racist attacks against the president, from the astro-turf protests of the Birthers and the Tea Party to the obstructionism of the Republican-led Congress, and all manner of lesser insults, have been perceived as an affront to all blacks, and as evidence of the futility of an alternative politics rooted in the lived experiences and felt needs of working people broadly. Despite his expressed commitment to neoliberal politics, which is antagonistic to the civil rights and social progressivism that defined black political life throughout the Cold War, Obama's ascendancy was viewed by legions as a continuation of earlier black political struggles. American liberal thinking has long elided class, but the resurgent racialism of the Obama years has made it even more difficult to discuss class interests in a meaningful way.

The very meaning of class has been lost in our times, too often equated with gradations of education, income, and wealth. These categories serve as rough indicators of class, but none fully reflects its social character under late capitalism. In American public debate as well, race is used as a rough proxy for class, with white and black sometimes serving as synonyms for rich and poor, middle class and welfare dependent. *Free State of Jones* reminds us of a core truth of class relations – the shared material interests of those who are compelled by force or necessity to work. In today's economy, where job security and living wages are scarce, many people know what it means to be overworked, underpaid, and disposable – what it is like to be "somebody else's nigger" – even if they resent being associated with those who have long symbolized hyper-exploitation.

In the end, this film is valuable for how well it reveals historical complexities of race, class, and power in America, and for what it says about political life and democratic possibility. *Free State of Jones* should unsettle us and the racial thinking that dominates our times. If the prevailing view is that racism is America's "original sin," thwarting every attempt to abolish inequality and exploitation, *Free State of Jones* challenges such thinking. The film does not diminish the dehumanizing character of slavery, nor the vulnerability endured by freedpersons during Reconstruction. It captures those realities in disturbing detail, but it also provides us with an insightful parable of progressive left politics.



For further reading:

- Victoria Bynum, *The Free State of Jones: Mississippi's Longest Civil War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2016).
- Barbara Fields, "Ideology and Race in American History," <http://history.berkeley.edu/sites/default/files/slides/ideology.pdf>
- Connor Kilpatrick, "Burying the White Working Class," Jacobin 13 May 2016 <https://www.jacobinmag.com/2016/05/white-workers-bernie-sanders-clinton-primary-racism/>

SECTION SEVEN

SOURCE: *Journal of American Studies*, Volume 48, Issue 2, May 2014, pp. 357-392

Divided Loyalties in a “Predatory War” Plantation Overseers and Slavery during the American Revolution

Abstract

Drawing primarily on archival material such as plantation records, this article places the figure of the plantation overseer at the centre of the drama of the American Revolution [War of Independence] in the southern colonies. Occupying a contested liminal space within colonial society, between rich and poor, and between the free and the unfree, the overseer was not necessarily the ne'er-do-well of conventional stereotype. This “Predatory War,” however, tested the overseer's loyalties and sense of duty to the fullest extent. Understanding his role in the conflict offers a significant insight into the experience of a plantation society at war. In particular the overseer was caught in the tension between elite and yeomanry, between the conflicting calls of loyalism and the cause of the Patriots. Perhaps most significantly of all he stood at the forefront of the defence of race slavery during the tumult of civil conflict.

[...]

In particular, this work examines the actions and allegiances of overseers (black and white) during the conflict and how their behaviour was perceived by the planter elite, their peers, and the enslaved they attempted to supervise during the tumult of warfare.

[...]

Finally, some planters selected slaves from within the plantation to act as overseers.⁴⁹ The conventional historiography about plantation culture has minimized the opportunities that were presented to some slaves in order to improve their fortunes. It has been acknowledged that slaves received material rewards and praise, and curried favour with their employers, but even recent studies have claimed that “black men served as ‘drivers’ over slaves, but they never served as overseers.”⁵⁰ In fact, it was not uncommon for skilled or trustworthy slaves to be promoted to the position of overseer as a reward for their hard work and dedication. Furthermore, the infrequency with which planters and attorneys noted down job titles with regard to slaves suggests that many slaves may have performed the duties of overseers without carrying that title. Though the law clearly stated that white overseers were to be employed to assist planters in controlling slaves, slaves who had taken on the role in a temporary capacity often remained in the post permanently. The most obvious advantage of black overseers for planters was that they were unfree and could be subjected to long and uninterrupted periods of service and encouraged to remain dutiful through the offer of exceptional rewards. Eighteenth-century planters had serious problems with retaining white overseers for more than a couple of years, and during the Revolution the problem worsened as overseers enlisted, fled or found it increasingly difficult to maintain control over slaves. Black overseers, however, could be subjected to long and uninterrupted periods of service, and as property, if they proved satisfactory, could be retained as

overseers for life. Black overseers were still subject to the will of their master and could be demoted or punished if they did not follow instructions and work hard; hence slaves, especially those with privileges and a high status on the plantation, were far less likely to run away or shirk their duties. Indeed, this was of great advantage to some planters during the Revolution. Many planters, such as George Washington, who resorted to the use of slaves as overseers had more confidence in their slaves' abilities to manage their interests than in the white men they used as overseers, and valued them “for their ability to take decisive and independent action.”⁵¹ Black overseers, therefore, had the potential to provide plantations and labour forces with the consistency they often lacked under white overseers and the stability they needed during wartime. The value and importance tied to some black overseers was reflected in their market price, which could reach as much as five times that of an average slave labourer or field hand.⁵² Incorporating the experiences of black as well as white overseers during the Revolution adds a new dynamic to the history of slavery and plantation management during the conflict.

[...]

In view of the threat to white supremacy posed by the war, it is interesting to note that a number of planters continued to use slaves as overseers on their plantations and effectively promoted others to the position of overseer during the conflict. It is possible to speculate that, in some cases at least, it was the authority of trusted slaves that maintained the slave system at isolated plantations which had been abandoned by white overseers and planters alike. Personal bonds of duty and obligation often proved stronger than the disruptive forces unleashed by the war. A desire for managerial stability encouraged George Washington to search within the plantation for hard-working and loyal overseers, to assess his slaves' capabilities and to redistribute roles regardless of race. Like many planters in both Virginia and South Carolina, George Washington used faithful and diligent black slaves as overseers as well as free white men after many of his overseers left their posts swiftly.⁹⁶ The reasons for the short tenure of white overseers varied: misconduct, mismanagement and ambition.⁹⁷ The problems and inconsistency Washington encountered with his white overseers encouraged him to promote slaves to the position (see Appendix, [Table 3](#)). From the beginning of 1766, three black overseers were used on Washington's plantations.⁹⁸ Morris, Davy and Will were all skilled slaves who were promoted to the position of overseer as a reward for their hard work. These black overseers were entrusted with the care and maintenance of Washington's plantations and slaves before, during and after the Revolutionary conflict. Two of the three enslaved overseers remained in post through the entire conflict.⁹⁹ Washington, impressed by the conduct of one of his black overseers during and after the Revolutionary conflict, wrote, “Davy carries on his business as well as the white Overseers, and with more quietness than any of them, with proper directions he will do very well and probably give you less trouble than any of them.”¹⁰⁰ Black overseers were praised for their skill and diligence in the job. Another Virginia planter described his black overseer as an “Excellent Leader and indeed a Good Overseer,” while others claimed that black overseers were among the best overseers they ever had.¹⁰¹

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In South Carolina planters also placed slaves in leadership roles on the plantation during the Revolution. In 1782, at the height of the conflict, John Lewis Gervais reported to Henry Laurens that there was “no [white] overseer” at one plantation, and that his slave, Montezuma, a black driver, was “Commander in Chief” there and under his supervision Gervais reported that “upon the whole I think they [the slaves] have behaved very well.”¹⁰² Charles Cotesworth Pinckney remarked that on a plantation where you make the “most to the hand” and a “really good Crop, there

is no overseer, but only a Black Driver.”¹⁰³ However, on Low Country plantations where there was no white overseer the “black driver,” by proxy, became the overseer and some planters actually referred to their black “head-men” and promoted drivers as overseers and placed other drivers and foremen under their direction. The loyalty of such slaves was attested to both in public and in private. Laurens referred to slave “Watchmen,” drivers and overseers as “friends,” and, during the Revolution, on the death of a black steward who visited his plantations and sent him written reports he lamented the “very great loss,” and noted in his papers “Alas poor fellow! What shall I do without you?” a reflection of the bond that sometimes developed between planters and favoured slaves.¹⁰⁴ Following the war, a newspaper advertisement described one black overseer as a particularly valuable and loyal slave, because “during the invasion of the country, [he] never went with the British, and had the address to prevent any [slaves] going who were under his care.”¹⁰⁵ Other planters attributed the retention of slaves and maintenance of order on the plantation to loyal slaves who had sole charge of their plantations. Under the exigencies of war, some planters learned to empower trusted slaves and in some cases succumb to the demands of their bondsmen, thereby undercutting the authority of the white overseer, and, perhaps, contributing to his declining status in the early republic: all too often, in the selective memory of the planter, the overseer had proved faithless in war, unlike the loyal slave. Certainly, the role of some slaves in securing the trust of their owners and of their fellow slaves, who often had much “respect and love” for them, and thus gaining the status and responsibility that went with such trust, may hint again at why slavery proved flexible enough to withstand the shock of war in the South.¹⁰⁶ We should, thus, note the important part of the trusted slave and the black overseer too in this story. The conventional historiography has focussed on black agency as a disruptive element within slavery and during the American Revolution. Indeed the phrase has become almost synonymous with slave resistance.¹⁰⁷ Yet that agency is manifested here in an altogether different way, as loyalty to the master and support of the plantation hierarchy.¹⁰⁸

[...]

By LAURA SANDY

SECTION EIGHT

SOURCE: *Social Philosophy and Policy*, Volume 34, Issue 1, Summer 2017, pp. 144-163

Reconstructing Racism

Transforming Racial Hierarchy from “Necessary Evil” Into “Positive Good”

Abstract

Our theoretical claim is that racism was consciously (though perhaps not intentionally) devised, and later evolved, to serve two conflicting purposes. First, racism served a legal-economic purpose, legitimating ownership and savage treatment of slaves by southern whites, preserving the value of property rights in labor. Second, racism allowed slave owners to justify, to themselves and to outsiders, how a morally "good" person could own slaves. Racism portrayed African slaves as being less than human (and therefore requiring care, as a positive duty of the slave owner, as a man cares for his children, who cannot care for themselves), or else as being other than human (and therefore being spiritually no different from cattle or horses, and therefore requiring only the same considerations for maintenance and husbandry). The interest of the historical narrative presented here is the emergence of racial chattel slavery as a coherent and fiercely defended ideal, rather than the "necessary evil" that had been the perspective of the Founders. The reason that this is important is that the ideology of racism persisted far beyond the destruction of the institution of slavery, through Reconstruction, Jim Crow, and in some ways persisting even today. This work is an example of the problems of assuming that there is a "feedback" mechanism by which moral intuitions are updated and perfected; to the contrary, as suggested by Douglass North, even socially inferior ideologies can prove extremely persistent.

We hold as undeniable truths that the governments of the various States, and of the confederacy itself, were established exclusively by the white race, for themselves and their posterity; that the African race had no agency in their establishment; that they were rightfully held and regarded as an inferior and dependent race, and in that condition only could their existence in this country be rendered beneficial or tolerable.

That in this free government all white men are and of right ought to be entitled to equal civil and political rights; that the servitude of the African race, as existing in these States, is mutually beneficial to both bond and free, and is abundantly authorized and justified by the experience of mankind, and the revealed will of the Almighty Creator, as recognized by all Christian nations . . . (“A Declaration of the Causes Which Impel the State of Texas to Secede from the Federal Union,” February 2, 1861.)¹

I. Introduction: Racism as a Constructed Ideology

There are many notions of racism, which might be defined simply as bigotry or prejudice toward “other” races.² The sense in which we intend the term is closer to the notion of “institutional racism” coined by Stokely Carmichael

and Charles Hamilton.³ That is, bigotry justifies, but is also nurtured by, the separation and degradation of the “inferior” race. This means, of course, that the inferiority is a consequence of the institutions that reify bigotry, because — in the United States, at least — blacks were forced into servitude, denied education, and prevented from using the social and cultural capital of the family. Belief in the objective truth of the bigotry that justified the institutions of racism was partly fostered by alleged “facts”: blacks were lazy, stupid, morally dissolute, and so on. But beliefs were also kept in line by the fierce, and sometimes violent, ostracism that was used to punish dissenters. And sometimes even worse tactics were used.

Our theoretical claim is that racism is a specialized ideology, which was first consciously (though perhaps not intentionally) devised, and later evolved, to serve two conflicting purposes.⁴ First, the ideology of racism served a *legal-economic* purpose. Racism legitimated the then-existing treatment of slaves among Southern whites, thereby taking moral debates about the maintenance of the “peculiar institution” off the region’s domestic political agenda. It therefore helped preserve the value of property rights in the permanent labor services of African slaves on plantations and in the related activities to which they were assigned in the “slave” states and territories.⁵ This value, which has been estimated as ranging from 1.5 to 2 billion dollars, was a significant part of the equity value of the Southern economy.⁶ The loss of this value would have bankrupted the Southern elite of planters and lenders overnight.

Second, racism allowed slave owners to resolve a knotty spiritual problem: How could a morally good person own slaves? Nearly all slave owners considered themselves, and by appearances were, Christians. Many were devout, and studied the Bible for guidelines on how to live their lives. Even those who had few personal religious commitments depended on the esteem and good will of others in the Christian community to validate their membership in the elite.

The ideology of racism allowed slave owners to live with the contradiction between owning slaves and seeing themselves as Christian.⁷ Racism portrayed African slaves as being less than human (and therefore *requiring care, as a positive duty* of the slave owner, as a man cares for his children, who cannot care for themselves), or else as being other than human (and therefore being *spiritually no different from cattle or horses*, and therefore requiring only the same considerations for maintenance and husbandry).

The ideology of racism allowed slave owners to live with the contradiction between owning slaves and seeing themselves as Christian. 7 Racism portrayed African slaves as being less than human (and therefore requiring care, as a positive duty of the slave owner, as a man cares for his children, who cannot care for themselves), or else as being other than human (and therefore being spiritually no different from cattle or horses, and therefore requiring only the same considerations for maintenance and husbandry).

The notion that slaves were less than, or other than, human protected the property interests of slave owners, and preserved the ability of slave owners to be perceived — and to perceive themselves — as moral beings. The development of the Southern states' civil law, combined with elites' pre-existing conception of the nature of their black labor force, justified the ideology of racism, in which slavery was viewed as a positive good.

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Presumably, it need not be said, but must be said nonetheless, that this process of justification through the construction of an ideology with moral

implications is evil. By explaining the process of its creation and describing the economic forces that made the justification of slavery imperative, we are in no way excusing the actions, or thoughts, of slave owners and Southern elites who were complicit in the oppression, rape, torture, and killing of millions of Africans. Even those who escaped the worst treatment were torn violently from their homelands and families. Rather, it is precisely this moral evil, justified as a positive moral good, that gives rise to the research question of how prevalent this kind of constructed moral system might be. To put it starkly, if the reader (or the authors) had been born to a wealthy slave-owning white family in 1820, would that person have had the independent moral strength to reject slavery? We would all like to think so. But after reading documents, letters, and other accounts of the actions and statements of those involved, we are not so sure.

[...]

By Jeffrey D. Grynviski / Michael C. Munger