

Slavery ^[1]

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Slavery

by Jeffrey J. Crow, 2006

Additional research provided by Amelia Dees-Killette and Diane Huff.

See also: [Ad Valorem Taxation of Slaves](#) ^[2]; [Colonization Societies](#) ^[3]; [Manumission Societies](#) ^[4]; [Slave Clandestine Economy](#) ^[5]; [Slave Codes](#) ^[6]; [Slave Names](#) ^[7]; [Slave Narratives](#) ^[8]; [Slave Patrols](#) ^[9]; [Slave Rebellions](#) ^[10]; [State v. John Mann](#) ^[11]; [State v. Negro Will](#) ^[12]; [Underground Railroad](#) ^[13].



Slave population, 1860,
showing percentage by county.
Map by Mark Anderson Moore,
courtesy North Carolina Office
of Archives and History,

Although sRaleigh. (Click to view map.) ^[14]laves had come straight from Guinea to the Carolina colony in the late 1600s, direct importation was not as extensive as in other southern colonies. With the increased demand for cash crops in European markets and the need for fertile land, the British [Lords Proprietors](#) ^[15] in 1663 offered additional acreage for every male and female slave brought into Carolina during the first five years of white settlement. The labor-intensive cash crops of tobacco, rice, and indigo made the use of slaves a "necessary" solution to the inadequate labor supply in the early eighteenth century. Most of this need was met through the natural increase of slave populations, which outpaced slave imports by 1720. After the Carolinas officially split in 1729, North Carolina had 6,000 slaves compared to South Carolina's 32,000.

**LAND AND NEGROES
FOR SALE!**

Under an order of the late Court of Equity, held for the county of Stokes, I will sell on the first day of December next, at
FRONT'S BROWNSPORES
the following Tracts of Land, be-
longing to the heirs of James H.
Frost, dec'd, to wit:

One called the **HOMESTEAD TRACT**, on Nectum's Creek, including the
Dwelling House, Two Barns, Great Mill and Forge, containing
183 Acres, more or less.

Also a Tract adjoining, containing 20 acres; another Tract of 75 acres.
Also a Tract on Nectum's Creek, containing
100 Acres.

Also two Tracts on the north side of Dan river, one containing 25 and the other 70 acres, called the
IRON ORE BANK TRACTS.

At the same time and place, I will sell, as Executor of James B. Frost,
A QUANTITY OF
Corn, Wheat, Rye and Oats.

The LANDS will be sold on a credit of one and two years, on bond and security with interest from the date. The terms of the Executor's sale will be made known on the day of sale.

Under the same decree, I will sell, at the
Court-House door in Germantown, on the 26th day of November (instant,)
SEVEN NEGROES,
consisting of Men, Women and Children. A credit of six months will be given,
with note and security with interest from the date.

John H. Winston,
Commissioner.

Stokes County, N. C., Oct. 21, 1836.

A broadside circulated in the Stokes County area in 1836 advertising the sale of land and slaves. North Carolina Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Library. (Click to view larger.)

^[16]While geographic barriers made slave trading difficult in North Carolina, they did not totally prevent it. The port at [Wilmington](#) ^[17] was used extensively in the delivery of slaves to the Lower Cape Fear region. However, the barrier islands along the northern coast did not permit access to the natural harbors from the Atlantic Ocean, making the direct importation of slaves into the northern part of the Carolina colony virtually impossible. Many owners in North Carolina purchased their slaves via overland routes from South Carolina, Georgia, and the Chesapeake region.

Agricultural patterns determined the distribution of slaves in North Carolina. Settled in the 1720s by South Carolina planters, the Lower Cape Fear produced rice and naval stores ^[18] with slave labor. Slavery also prospered along a tier of counties bordering Virginia that concentrated on the cultivation of tobacco. By 1860, 19 counties in the Coastal Plain ^[19] and Piedmont ^[20] counted black majorities, and 12 of the 19 produced at least 1,000 400-pound bales of cotton. Commercial crops thus depended heavily on slave labor. Even in the North Carolina Mountains, where it was impossible to grow staple crops, slaves engaged in a variety of economic activities, including manufacturing, mining, construction, and livestock management.

At the time of the French and Indian War ^[21] (1754-63), a slave cost approximately £60 to £80. During the 1780s the price escalated to as much as £180. An African slave in Charles Towne (Charleston, S.C.), bound for North Carolina, brought \$300 in 1804. By 1840 a prime field hand cost about \$800. Twenty years later field hands sold for \$1,500 to \$1,700, women \$1,300 to \$1,500, and artisans as much as \$2,000.

As the American Revolution produced a temporary lull in slave importation, the natural increase of the slave population allowed southern states to sell their human property at a profit. North Carolina attempted to reduce slave imports as early as August 1774, when the Provincial Congress ^[22] meeting in New Bern resolved "that we will not import any slave or slaves, or purchase any slave or slaves, imported or brought into this Province by others, from any part of the world, after the first day of November next." This prohibition of the slave trade is repeated several times in North Carolina records.

By the end of the Revolutionary War ^[23], the nation sought to regain economic stability by reopening the African and West Indian trade, especially in the Carolinas and Georgia. This action met with increased resistance in the Upper South states of the Chesapeake area and in North Carolina, partly because it would cut into profits of interregional trade and partly because of the mainly imagined fear that slave rebellions would spread from the West Indies.

In 1786 North Carolina again banned slave importation; it increased the prohibitive duty on imported Africans, which was later repealed in 1790. Prohibitive laws became more specific in 1794, barring the importation not only of slaves but also of indentured servants by "land or water routes." One year later, legislators passed the "Act against West Indian Slaves," which expressly prevented the importation of slaves by individuals emigrating from the West Indies. White slaveholders in North Carolina made up 31 percent of the population in 1790 and 27.7 percent in 1860. Only 2 percent of these slaveholders owned more than 50 slaves, and only 3 percent attained the rank of planter (owning 20 or more slaves). In 1860 the vast majority of slaveholders (70.8 percent) owned fewer than 10 slaves.

In 1800 and 1807 Congress barred U.S. ci



Illustration of slaves in chains, from the August 1838 edition of the American Antislavery Almanac.

and as of 1 Jan. 1808 it prohibited any engagement in the international slave trade. The disposition of confiscated slaves was left up to individual states. In 1816 North Carolina and several other states passed the Act to Dispose of Illegally Imported Slaves, opting to sell all slaves who had been imported after 1808 with the proceeds benefiting the state treasury. ^[24]tizens from exporting slaves, and

Although federal and state laws banned the importation of slaves nationwide, these same laws kept the prices high for slaves in the Lower South. The "need" for slaves in the Cotton Belt, the natural increase of slave populations, and the stagnant economy of the Upper South in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries all bolstered the interregional sale of slaves. Between 1810 and 1820, 137,000 slaves were sent from the Chesapeake states and North Carolina to Alabama, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Texas. The sluggish economy of the 1820s-30s led to the sale of thousands more North Carolina slaves to the Cotton Belt.

By any measure, most slaves were ill-fed, ill-housed, and ill-clothed. In the 1780s a traveler observed: "The keep of a negro here does not come to a great figure, since the daily ration is but a quart of maize, and rarely a little meat or salted fish." Each year male slaves received "a suit of coarse woolen cloth, two rough shirts, and a pair of shoes." Conditions had scarcely improved during the antebellum period. Slaves supplemented their owner-supplied diet of cornmeal and fat pork

by hunting, fishing, and raising vegetable gardens. Dark, smoky, and crowded, slave cabins were insubstantial structures with dirt floors, unglazed windows, and wattle-and-daub chimneys.



Slaves under the overseer's whip, illustration from the American Antislavery Almanac, 1838.

[25]

Despite their abhorrent conditions, slaves tried to preserve families and develop cultural defenses against white oppression. Conversion to Christianity before the Revolution came slowly; slaves continued to worship African spirits and to practice African rituals such as the "ring shout." A nineteenth-century observer, who witnessed a Jonkonnu celebration at Somerset Place [26] plantation in Washington County [27], compared the celebration to a Muslim festival that he had attended in Egypt. Nevertheless, by the nineteenth century Christianity had swept through the state's slave quarters. Baptists and Methodists proved especially effective in converting slaves, who then adapted Christian practices and teachings to their own purposes. Blacks founded separate churches in Fayetteville [28], Wilmington [17], New Bern, and Edenton [29]. Some slaves conducted prayer meetings in secret. One former slave recalled a practice that probably derived from West African ceremonies: "We turned down pots on the inside of the house at the door to keep master and missus from hearing the singing and praying."

In the eighteenth century slaves continued to use an extensive pool of African names for their children, but by the nineteenth century their naming patterns showed strong family ties. Slaves were named for fathers, grandfathers, aunts, and uncles. African crafts, medicine, conjury, dance, music, song, and folklore [30] endured. Such cultural persistence allowed slaves to construct their own value system, which their owners never could entirely suppress.

After the Civil War ended in 1865, North Carolina's more than 360,000 newly emancipated African Americans [31] continued these traditions in various forms. In the immediate aftermath of war, African Americans sought precisely those rights and freedoms that had been denied them under slavery: normalization of marriage, equal political and civil rights, education, and the right to own property. With freedom came new opportunities but also numerous new hardships, rooted in whites' deep and brutal acrimony toward blacks' social, economic, and political pursuits. While African Americans moved forward through this markedly hostile environment, remnants of both their African and slave experiences continued to inform their lives and serve as the core of a unique and lasting African American culture.

Educator Resources:

Grade 8: Voices from the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade. North Carolina Civic Education Consortium. <http://civics.sites.unc.edu/files/2012/04/VoicesTransAtlanticSlaveTrade.pdf> [32]

Grade 8: United States Constitution of 1787 & Slavery. North Carolina Civic Education Consortium. <http://database.civics.unc.edu/files/2012/05/USConstitutionandSlavery1.pdf> [33]

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Everett Jenkins Jr., *Pan-African Chronology: A Comprehensive Reference to the Black Quest for Freedom in Africa, the Americas, Europe, and Asia, 1400-1865* (1953).

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Image Credit:

Illustration of slaves in chains. From Southern, N., *American Antislavery Almanac* (August 1838). Boston: Isaac Knapp, Publisher. <https://archive.org/details/americanantislav1838chil/page/20/mode/2up> ^[24]

Illustration of slaves under the overseer's whip. From Southern, N., *American Antislavery Almanac* (August 1838). Boston: Isaac Knapp, Publisher. <https://archive.org/details/americanantislav1838chil/page/20/mode/2up> ^[24]

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Authors:

[Crow, Jeffrey J.](#) ^[37]

[Dees-Killette, Amelia](#) ^[38]

[Huff, Diane](#) ^[39]

From:

[Encyclopedia of North Carolina, University of North Carolina Press.](#)^[40]

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