

Slavery

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Slavery did not begin in America.

Slavery prior to the 1800's was an accepted part of WORLD culture.

People have been enslaving others since the dawn of man. Every race, country and culture participated in the slave trade.

According to the University of Houston's "Digital History," slavery dates to the earliest periods of recorded history and "could be found in the world's most "advanced" regions." In Classical Athens up to 50% of the population consisted of slaves. Mintz, S., & McNeil, S. (2018). *Digital History*. Retrieved (insert the date your retrieved the information here without parentheses) from <http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu>

The ARAB Slave Trade

The history of slavery in the American education system and popular media is highly distorted and myopic. One subject that is practically unknown to American students is the Arab slave trade. The slave trade in Africa and Arabia was well-established. It predated the founding of America by some 800 years. The Muslim Arab and Swahili Traders entered the African interior largely in Tanzania, Mozambique and Kenya where they captured the local people or Zanj whom they would transport to Slave Markets on the East African Coast.

As early as 513, we find reference to the slave trade and slaves being sold to the Arab world, nearly 100 years before the advent of Islam.

As early as 593, Gregory I had protested the sale of Christian slaves to Jewish merchants.²⁶⁰ In a letter to Libertinus, *praetor* of Sicily, Gregory I specifically stated his opposition to a Jewish slave merchant named Nasas who was purchasing Christians. But his letter did not target non-Christian slaves, which explains why eastern Europe (especially the Slavic regions) was before its Christianization the principal source of slaves in Europe.²⁶¹ Christians also needed these Jewish merchants as intermediaries, which allowed them to take advantage of the high demand from the Arab markets in Spain. That commercial front, however, was outside the Byzantine influence. I return, therefore, to the eastern Mediterranean, to consider from the Byzantine point of view the map of international slave trade in the first third of the ninth century.

The starting point for the north-south slave traffic was between the Dnieper River and the Adriatic Sea. Byzantium, which extended from these regions to the Mediterranean, in fact blocked maritime traffic between the Balkans and the Arab world from Spain to Iraq, at least where the slave trade was concerned. Byzantium was the principal consumer market for Slavic slaves outside the Arab world. The Byzantines were therefore in competition with the Arabs for that type of merchandise.

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Medieval Slavery in a New Geopolitical Space from Byzantine Slavery and the Mediterranean World by Youval Rotman, 2009

As early as 614 AD, over 800 years before the Transatlantic Slave Trade, Arab slave traders were enslaving East Africans -the Zanj, Bantu peoples. As early as 696 there are records of Zanj slave revolts in Iraq.

The massive Zanj Rebellion took place between 869 and 883 AD where the slaves were used as primarily as agricultural labor on sugar plantations and in salt mines.

In addition to African slaves, many “white” slaves were traded in the Arab Slave market. Slavic slaves such as Circassians from the Caucasus represented a sizeable slave group. Many Western Europeans slaves were also taken in raid by the Barbary pirates.



1886 Circassian slave (left)

Ghanaian professor and minister John Azumah in his book, *The Legacy of Arab-Islam in Africa*.

Cites the following interesting facts:

- *While two out of every three slaves shipped across the Atlantic were men, the proportions were reversed in the Islamic slave trade. Two women for every man were enslaved by the Arabs.*
- *While the mortality rate of the slaves being transported across the Atlantic was as high as 10%, the percentage of the slaves dying in transit in the Tran-Saharan and East African slave market was a staggering 80 to 90%.*
- *While almost all the slaves shipped across the Atlantic were for agricultural work, most of the slaves destined for the Arab Middle East were for sexual exploitation as concubines in harems and for military service.*
- *While many children were born to the slaves in the Americas, the millions of their descendants are citizens in Brazil and the United States today. Very few descendants of the slaves who ended up in the Middle East survived.*

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- *While most slaves who went to the Americas could marry and have families, most of the male slaves destined for the Middle East were castrated, and most of the children born to the women were killed at birth.*
- *It is estimated that possibly as many as 11 million Africans were transported across the Atlantic, 95% of which went to South and Central America, mainly to Portuguese, Spanish and French possessions; only 5% of the slaves ended up in what we call the United States today.*
- *However, a minimum of 28 million Africans were enslaved in the Arab Middle East. Since at least 80% of those captured by the Arab slave traders were calculated to have died before reaching the slave markets, it is believed that the death toll from 1,400 years of Arab and Muslim slave raids into Africa could have been as high as 112 million.*

Progression and America

Most slaves throughout medieval Europe were "white," coming from areas in Eastern Europe or near the Black Sea. As time progressed more Africans were introduced until the slave trade became highly Afro-centric. By the 1800's early as 1300, Europeans were using black and Russian slaves to raise sugar on Italian plantations. During the 1400s, decades before Columbus's "discovery" of the New World, Europeans also exploited African labor on slave plantations built on sugar producing islands off the coast of West Africa.

Only after the abolition movement was started under the influence of Christians like William Wilberforce did world opinion begin to change. Quakers played a pivotal role in America with the establishment of the Underground Railroad. While there were those who used distorted Biblical texts to justify slavery, the Christian message of abolition coupled with the Constitution became a powerful tool to undo the trade that had persisted for millennia.

Being an accepted worldwide reality, slavery was an accepted facet of general commerce. So much so that individual sold THEMSELVES into slavery in return for passage to the New World.

Slaves were also imported from the African slave market. The first 20 African slaves arrived in 1619. They were transported by ship through the Transatlantic Slave Route to Jamestown, in the colony of Virginia.

While slavery became increasingly Afro-centric in the Americas, it began with a mix of indentured slaves of multiple races specifically Irish and African.

While there are broad attacks on early founders like James Madison and George Washington for supporting, the truth is that many of these same founders held abolitionist views. The challenge for many of them was trying to find a legal way to end slavery which had been an accepted reality for thousands of years, while avoiding the destruction of very Republic they worked so hard to establish.

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George Washington who inherited slaves at 11 years old wrote, "there is not a man living who wishes more sincerely than I do, to see a plan adopted for the abolition of it." —Letter to Morris, April 12, 1786, in *George Washington, A Collection*, ed. W.B. Allen (Indianapolis: Liberty Classics, 1989), 319.

James Madison said at the convention, "We have seen the mere distinction of colour made in the most enlightened period of time, a ground of the most oppressive dominion ever exercised by man over man." —Speech at Constitutional Convention, June 6, 1787, in Max Farrand, ed., *Records of the Federal Convention of 1787* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1937), 1:135.

For more on this see LFU's Slavery and the Founders presentation

Several colonies outlawed slavery and America made repeated attempts to end the traffic which had been forced upon the colonies by the crown and various powerful merchants. In 1774, Rhode Island had already passed legislation providing that all slaves imported thereafter should be freed. In 1776, Delaware prohibited the slave trade and removed restraints on emancipation, as did Virginia in 1778. In 1779, Pennsylvania passed legislation providing for gradual emancipation, as did New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Connecticut in the early 1780s, and New York and New Jersey in 1799 and 1804. In 1780, the Massachusetts Supreme Court ruled that the state's bill of rights made slavery unconstitutional. By the time of the U.S. Constitution, every state (except Georgia) had at least proscribed or suspended the importation of slaves. Thomas Jefferson's 1784 draft plan of government for the western territories prohibited slavery and involuntary servitude after the year 1800. The final Northwest Ordinance of 1787, passed by the Confederation Congress (and passed again two years later by the First Congress and signed into law by President George Washington), prohibited slavery in the future states of Ohio, Indiana, Michigan, Illinois, and Wisconsin.

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Effects of the Constitution

Col. George Mason describes this source and its problem during the Federal Convention (22 Aug. 1787):

“This infernal traffic originated in the avarice of British Merchants. The British Govt. constantly checked the attempts of Virginia to put a stop to it.”

This created an addiction to this labor in many States. Judge Pendleton observed during the Debate in South Carolina House of Representatives (1788) *“that only three States, Georgia, South Carolina, and North Carolina, allowed the importation of negroes. Virginia had a clause in her Constitution for this purpose, and Maryland, he believed, even before the war, prohibited them.”*

However, James Madison also pointed out during the Debate in the Virginia Ratifying Convention (15 June 1788) that there were even *“a few slaves in New York, New Jersey, and Connecticut: these states would, probably, oppose any attempts to annihilate”* slavery.

How could the States overcome their differences on this subject and agree on enough to form a Union? The drafters of the Constitution had an advantage, they knew a few things to be absolutely true and these things would provide the solution to their dilemma.

The drafters of the Constitution knew their history, they had studied governments and how people interact in society throughout history and they knew the principles of Liberty. They KNEW that they could not plow new fields overnight; they understood that they could not reform society with one move. But they KNEW they were forming a REPUBLIC and NOT a democracy.

A democracy is mob rule; it is tyranny in public form. Jefferson said, *“173 despots would surely be as oppressive as one.”* With a democracy, the majority of the people would always oppress the minority. Liberty would never prosper and grow. The force of the majority would always keep the minority in servitude. By creating a *republican government*, they were able to provide minorities with a society-changing voice. This voice would ensure not only the survival of Liberty but also its expansion.

In order for a Republic to function properly, there must be proper representation. If there is a way to manipulate the number of representatives allotted to a State, then that would be another avenue for one party to seize the power of another. Representation was to be established through population and controlled through the popular vote. Incorporating the slave population in order to determine the number of representatives was causing some states to cry foul.

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Three-fifths

The slave owners wanted to classify slaves as “property” to avoid the application of rights to them as “persons,” but wanted to also classify them as “persons” for establishing representative power in Congress. The objection was, the States with greater slave populations would get greater representation, but since only “freemen” could vote, greater representation would be consolidated into fewer people. The large slave owners would almost assuredly control the vote in the State and have greater representation and control in Congress. This skewed representation could delay the desired end to slavery significantly.

The drafters’ solution to this dilemma was the 3/5th Compromise which, along with article 1 section 9, would help to further the of end slavery. The 3/5th Compromise did not, as popular education teaches, count each slave as 3/5th of a person, it deprived Slave States 2/5th of their representation in Congress! This created a powerful incentive to end of slavery legislatively. Slave States would have a reduced representative power in Congress and the Free States would have an increased representative power. This would not only ensure that the Slave States could not over power the Free States in Congress, but also would act as an incentive for the people of the Slave States to demand their government free the slaves to obtain the full potential of their representative power. The 3/5th Compromise did not make "black men 3/5th of person," but ensured that the true power to end slavery would come through the will of the people over their government. Former slave and famous abolitionist Frederick Douglass made this very point in 1860 in a speech in Glasgow, Scotland:

"I answer — It is a downright disability laid upon the slaveholding States; one which deprives those States of two-fifths of their natural basis of representation. A black man in a free State is worth just two-fifths more than a black man in a slave State, as a basis of political power under the Constitution. Therefore, instead of encouraging slavery, the Constitution encourages freedom by giving an increase of "two-fifths" of political power to free over slave States. So much for the three-fifths clause; taking it at is worst, it still leans to freedom, not slavery; for, be it remembered that the Constitution nowhere forbids a coloured man to vote."

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Sunset Provision

The second constitutional mechanism to end slavery was the sunset provision incorporated into the Constitution, Article 1 Section 9, a provision that would provide the means to end slavery in 1808 by putting an end to the importation of slaves once and for all.

"The migration or importation of such persons as any of the States now existing shall think fit to admit, shall not be prohibited by the Congress prior to the year one thousand eight hundred and eight, but a tax or duty may be imposed on such importation, not exceeding ten dollars for each person;"

The framers understood that the end of the slave trade would bring about the end of slavery. Stop the flow of slaves and the trade that George Mason called "diabolical" and "disgraceful" and Patrick Henry called "a lamentable evil" would be extirpated. They believed the abolition of the slave trade equaled the abolition of slavery as a whole.

"Men, at that time, both in England and in America, looked upon the slave trade as the life of slavery. The abolition of the slave trade was supposed to be the certain death of slavery. Cut off the stream, and the pond will dry up, was the common notion at the time." – Frederick Douglass

The Republic

The final guarantee to the end of slavery our drafters secured came through the ratification of the Constitution. If these Slave States refused to join the Union, the trade of slaves on the American Continent, and by the very neighbors of the Union could go on forever. However, if the Slave States wanted to be part of the Union, if they wanted to participate in the benefits of the Union, they would have to agree to all the provisions that would disadvantage the use of slaves and ultimately destroy the trade altogether.

Justice James Iredell stated during the Debate in North Carolina Ratifying Convention (26 July 1788):

"It was the wish of a great majority of the Convention to put an end [to slavery] immediately; but the states of South Carolina and Georgia would not agree to it. Consider, then, what would be the difference between our present situation in this respect, if we do not agree to the Constitution, and what it will be if we do agree to it. If we do not agree to it, do we remedy the evil? No, sir, we do not. For if the Constitution be not adopted, it will be in the power of every state to continue it forever. They may or may not abolish it, at their discretion. But if we adopt the Constitution, the trade must cease after twenty years, if Congress declare so, whether particular states please so or not; surely, then, we can gain by it. This was the utmost that could be obtained. I heartily wish more could have been done. But as it is, this government is nobly distinguished above others by that very provision. Where is there another country in which such a restriction prevails? We, therefore, sir, set an example of humanity, by providing for the abolition of this inhuman traffic, though at a distant period."

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The framers knew that by creating the union they would ensure the survival of Liberty, without the Union establishing a government on the principles that “all men are created equal and endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Right” would likely fail. James Madison spoke of this fear during the 1788 Ratifying Convention:

“Great as the evil is, a dismemberment of the Union would be worse. If those States should disunite from the other States for not indulging them in the temporary continuance of this traffic, they might solicit and obtain aid from foreign powers.”

The drafters of the Constitution also understood through the establishment of the Republic they would guarantee the minority populations a society changing voice. They believed through compromise they had done everything that they could have possibly done end the institution of slavery and the power of slave owners and still create a union. They were also persuaded through a study of their own history that if Liberty is given the proper fertile ground, it always prospers and grows. They were convinced that Liberty was contagious!

Roger Sherman, a delegate from Connecticut to the Federal Convention (22 Aug. 1787) observed

“that the abolition of slavery seemed to be going on in the U.S. & that the good sense of the several States would probably by degrees compleat (sic) it.”

Oliver Ellsworth, also a representative from Connecticut very confidently stated, *“Slavery in time will not be a speck on our country. Provision is already made in Connecticut for abolishing it. And the abolition has already taken place in Massachusetts.”*

An additional insurance for the cultivation of Liberty was established through the Amendment process. The framers believed that as society matured in Liberty, the people would be more capable of self-governance and need less government. They wanted to ensure that as Liberty grew, it could also be protected through peaceful modification of the Constitution. By offering the Amendment process, the expansions of Liberty could become permanent. The Amendment process prevents the Constitution’s interpretation to be based upon the whim of the current culture. Without the process of permanently amending the Constitution, the people of this nation would be subject to temporary interpretations. The prevailing party or culture would beget a conservative interpretation today, a liberal interpretation tomorrow, a socialist interpretation the next... subjecting the people to an ever-vacillating standard and leaving the people never really knowing the security of their rights.

It is unquestionable that slavery was detested by many at the formation of our Constitution; only revisionists are served by denying this truth. But the formation of the union was essential to the preservation of Liberty and the end of slavery. Without the union these independent, sovereign States would be able to continue the practice of slavery without any national consequence. The Constitution did not preserve slavery, it was crafted to be a weapon wielded for slavery’s demise.

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It is to be hoped, that by expressing a national disapprobation of this trade, we may destroy it, and save ourselves from reproaches, and our posterity the imbecility ever attendant on a country filled with slaves. James Madison, Import Duty on Slaves, House of Representatives 13 May 1789

It is true that members of Congress, Presidents, and Supreme Court Justices have all failed to meet the standards established by the drafters of the Constitution. But the failings of America are because of the failings of people, and not because the standard set by the Constitution failed America. As Frederick Douglass asked in his defense of the Constitution, *“Shall we condemn the righteous law because wicked men twist it to the support of wickedness?”*

Frederick Douglass gives a most conclusive summary to the argument. Only by twisting the document’s words and ignoring the truth can we assign a pro-slavery character to the Constitution and miss its role in setting the stage for the abolition of slavery.

“This, I undertake to say, as the conclusion of the whole matter, that the constitutionality of slavery can be made out only by disregarding the plain and common-sense reading of the Constitution itself; by discrediting and casting away as worthless the most beneficent rules of legal interpretation; by ruling the Negro outside of these beneficent rules; by claiming that the Constitution does not mean what it says, and that it says what it does not mean; by disregarding the written Constitution, and interpreting it in the light of a secret understanding. It is in this mean, contemptible, and underhand method that the American Constitution is pressed into the service of slavery. They go everywhere else for proof that the Constitution declares that no person shall be deprived of life, liberty, or property without due process of law; it secures to every man the right of trial by jury, the privilege of the writ of habeas corpus — the great writ that put an end to slavery and slave-hunting in England — and it secures to every State a republican form of government. Anyone of these provisions in the hands of abolition statesmen, and backed up by a right moral sentiment, would put an end to slavery in America.”

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Black Slave Owners



The first person legally declared a slave for life, John Casor was owned by a black man, Anthony Johnson. In 1635, Johnson was freed and given a 250-acre plantation where he was master over both black and white servants. In 1654, Johnson sued his neighbor over a contract dispute. Johnson's servant, John Casor, claimed he was an indentured servant who had worked several years past the terms and was now working for Johnson's neighbor, Parker. Johnson sued Parker, stated that Casor was his servant "in perpetuity," and the courts ruled in his favor. Casor had to return to Johnson, and the case established the principle in America that one person can own another person for the rest of their life.

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There were other black slave owners that would follow Johnson (it should be noted that many free blacks purchased family and spouses in order to free them:

- William April Ellison – one of the largest slave owners in South Carolina in 1862.
- Antoine Dubuclet, considered the wealthiest black slave owner in Louisiana.
- Marie Therese Metoyer, owned 287 slaves (plus seasonal slaves) in Louisiana.
- The Pendarvis Family, Slaves who “accidentally” inherited a plantation and continued it with at least 123 slaves.
- C. & P.C. Richards (Mother and Son), owned 152 slaves in Louisiana. In New Orleans in 1860 28 percent of the free black population owned slaves (at least 6 owned 65 or more).
- Justus Angel and Mistress L. Horry, in 1830 owned 168 slaves combined in Charleston Co, South Carolina.
- Andrew Durnford(mixed), owned 80 slaves on the St. Rosalie Plantation, Louisiana.
- John Carruthers Stanly, owned 163 slaves in New Bern, North Carolina.
- Nat Butler, in Hartford Co, Maryland bought and sold runaway slaves by tricking them to runaway.
- Jacob Gasken, bought his father’s slave contract and later sold him in Louisiana.
- Dilsey Pope, bought her husband’s freedom then after a marital spat, sold him to a neighbor who later refused to sell him back.

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