

SLAVERY IN THE UNITED STATES



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- ✘ It may seem extraordinary today but just less than 2000 years ago, many people throughout Europe, Africa and the Americas saw nothing wrong in slavery.

This term refers to a condition in which individuals are owned by others and for them are forced to work; it is also called “chattel slavery”, so named because people are treated as the chattel (personal property) of the owner and are bought or sold as commodities.

Slavery had previously existed throughout history in many cultures, for example with the Ancient Greeks, the Romans, the Incas and the Aztecs.

Many Europeans thought that African history was not important and that Africans were inferior to them. This is what they used to justify slavery. However, the reality was very different because they were by no means inferior to Europeans and the people who suffered the most from the **Transatlantic Slave Trade** were civilized, organized and technologically advanced people long before their arrival.

THE BEGINNING OF SLAVERY IN THE U.S.

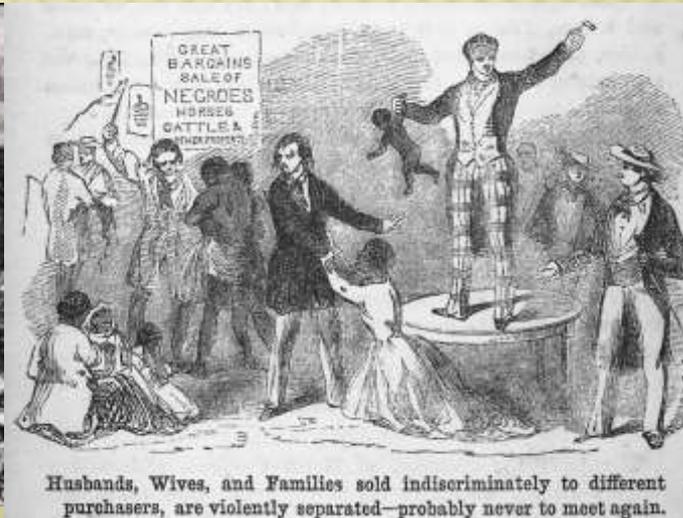
- ✘ In the early 17th century, European settlers in North America turned to African slaves as a cheaper and more plentiful labor source than their servants who were mostly poor Europeans. Slavery in America began when a Dutch ship brought 20 African slaves ashore to the North American colony of Jamestown, Virginia, in 1617, to aid in the production of such lucrative crops of tobacco. Afterwards slavery spread throughout the other colonies. A considerable number of slaves had their origins on the so-called Gold Coast (or Slave Coast) in west Africa like Senegambia (Senegal and the Gambia river, which was the key waterway for the slave trade because it runs from the Atlantic Ocean to Africa), Guinea Bissau and Mali; also from west-central Africa such as Angola, Congo, Gabon etc.



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- × By the time of the American Revolution (1775-1783) the status of slave had been institutionalized as a racial caste associated with African ancestry; slavery was practiced and legalized throughout the 13 American colonies in the 17th and 18th centuries, and African-American slaves helped build the economic foundation of the new nation. Historians have estimated that **6 to 7** million slaves were imported to the New World during the 18th century alone, depriving the African continent of some of its healthiest and ablest men and women. In fact, slaves constituted about 1/3 of the southern population.

LIVING AND WORKING CONDITIONS

- ✘ Black slaves worked mainly on the tobacco, rice and indigo plantations of the southern coasts. Most of them lived in large farms or small plantations and a master could have about 50 slaves. They were prohibited from learning to read or write and their behavior and movement was restricted. Many masters took sexual liberties on slave women and rewarded obedient slaves with favors while the rebellious ones were brutally



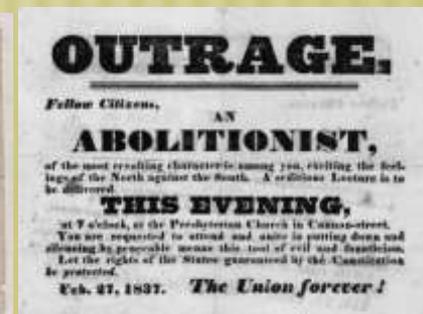
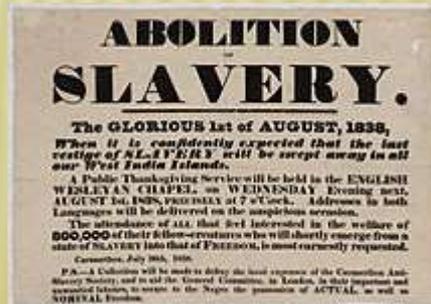
Husbands, Wives, and Families sold indiscriminately to different purchasers, are violently separated—probably never to meet again.



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- × In the late 18th century, with the lands used to grow tobacco nearly exhausted, the South faced an economic crisis and the continued growth of slavery in America seemed in doubt. Around the same time, the mechanization of the textile industry in England demanded American cotton, whose production was limited by the difficulty of removing the seeds from raw cotton fibers by hand. The invention of the **cotton gin** (which was a simple device that efficiently removed the seeds) in 1793 solidified the central importance of slavery to the South's economy. Slavery itself was not spread to the North, though many of the region's businessmen grew rich on the slave trade and investments in southern plantations.

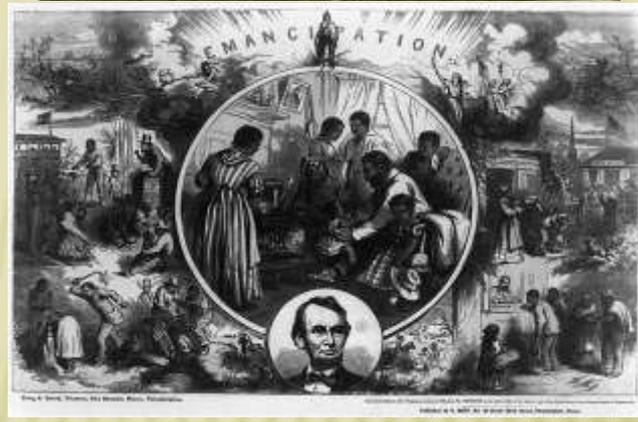
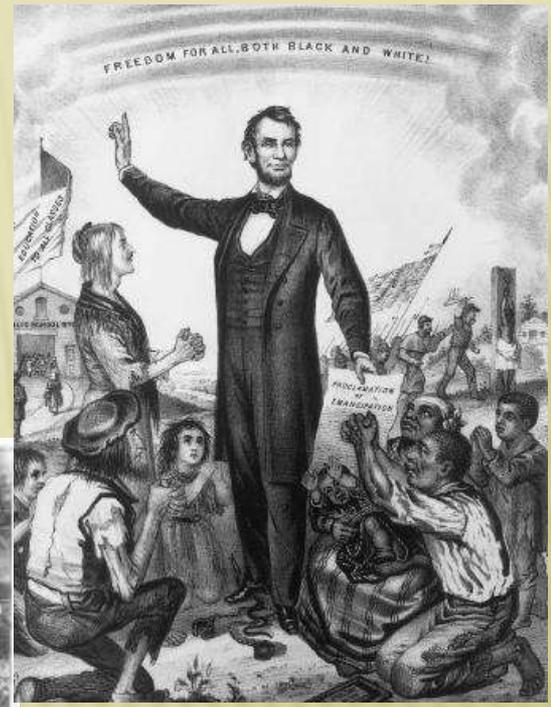
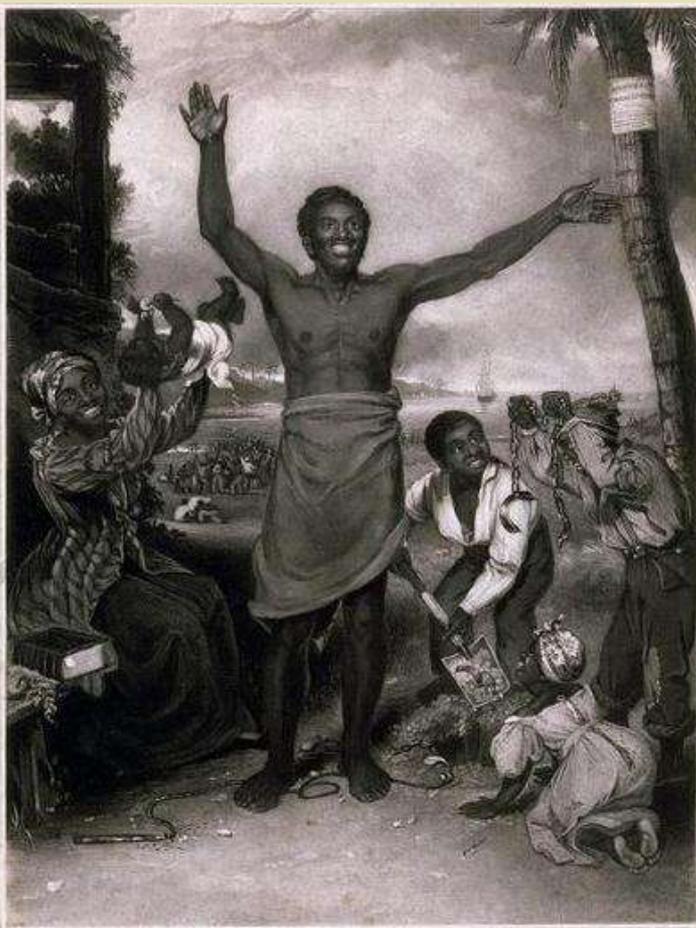
THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE ABOLITIONIST MOVEMENT

- ✘ After the American Revolution many colonists, particularly in the North, began to link the oppression of black slaves by the British and to call for its abolition. Many debates and conflicts over slavery were opened; the division became fully exposed with the presidential election in 1860 where the Republican candidate Abraham Lincoln became president. Within 3 months, 7 southern states had seceded to form the Confederate States of America; 4 more after the Civil War (1861-1865) began, which led to the end of chattel slavery in America.



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- ✘ Though Lincoln's anti-slavery views were well established, the abolition became a war aim only later, due to military necessity, growing anti-slavery sentiment in the North and the self emancipation of many African-Americans who fled enslavement as union troops swept through the South; others instead had not waited for Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation and tried to escape and seek freedom behind Union lines. Some of them would join the Union Army and by the time the war ended in 1865, 38.000 of them lost their lives.

During the same year with the 13th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, slavery was officially abolished.



We the People
Article I

Amendment XIII -

1. Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction.
2. Congress shall have power to enforce this article by appropriate legislation

"If I could save the Union without freeing any slave I would do it; and if I could save it by freeing all the slaves I would do it; and if I could save it by freeing some and leaving others alone I would also do that.... I have here stated my purpose according to my view of official duty; and I intend no modification of my oft-expressed personal wish that all men everywhere could be free."

Abraham Lincoln
August 22, 1862



UNCLE TOM'S CABIN

Someone who contributed to the abolitionist movement was Harriet Beecher Stowe, who grew up in the Northeast of America; that enabled her to see both sides of the slavery debate without losing her abolitionist's perspective.

She wrote "**Uncle Tom's cabin**", the most widely read and deeply penetrating book of her time; Stowe's main goal was to convince people of the necessity of ending slavery. With the book, she created a sort of exposé that revealed the horrors of southern slavery to people in the North. Her radical position was emphasized by her religiosity (the importance of Christian love) and her feminist beliefs.

Lincoln after meeting her said that "a so little lady made a so big war".

The novel's plot starts with the Shelby family being pushed to sell two of their slaves because of economic troubles: Uncle Tom and Harry. Neither Mr. or Mrs. Shelby want to sell the slaves for different reasons. Afterwards they are sold and the novel follows their journey and the characters they meet.

It was the best-selling novel of the 19th century.

