

# Digital History

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## Slavery Fact Sheets

### Geography

1. Enslaved Africans came primarily from a region stretching from the Senegal River in northern Africa to Angola in the South.
2. Europeans divided this stretch of land into five coasts:
  - Upper Guinea Coast: The area delineated by the Senegal and Gambia Rivers
  - Ivory (or Kwa Kwa or Windward) Coast: Central Liberia
  - Lower Guinea Coast: Divided into the Gold Coast on the west (Cote d'Ivoire and Ghana), the Slave Coast (Togo, Benin, and western Nigeria), and the Bight of Benin (Nigeria and Cameroon)
  - Gabon
  - Angola
3. The Angolan coast supplied nearly half the slaves sent to the Americas.

### Religion

1. Unlike European religions, most African religions were not based on sacred texts or scriptures, but rather on continuous revelation.
2. Most areas did not create a religious orthodoxy or have an entrenched priesthood.
3. Most African religions recognized a variety of supernatural beings.
4. Religious practice focused on contact between this world and the other world, typically through augury, divination, prophecy, and spirit mediumship.

### Organization

1. The notion of tribes, combining a common language and customs with a political structure is mistaken. Atlantic Africa was divided into states (political units) and nations (cultural units).
2. While some states were quite large, others were quite modest in size and many were tiny, consisting of a capital town of a few thousand people and a dozen villages under its control.
3. In the 17th century, 70 percent of the people lived in states with fewer than

10,000 inhabitants.

4. Unlike the rich and powerful of Europe and Asia, those in Africa were not landowners, since African law did not recognize the right to own, sell, or rent land as property.

5. Private wealth usually derived from control of dependents--clients, pawns, wives in polygynous households, and slaves.

### **African Slavery**

1. African law recognized slavery and the right of owners to alienate slaves.

2. A relatively low population density and an absence of the concept of property in land encouraged the development of slavery in West and Central Africa.

3. Slavery had been important in the medieval empires of Ghana, Mali, and Songhai, and slave exports had supplemented the export of gold.

4. Although African slavery was not a benign institution, slaves in Africa were used in a wider variety of ways than in the New World: they were employed as agricultural workers, soldiers, servants, and officials.

5. The great majority of slaves sold to Europeans were not slaves in Africa; they were usually recent war captives or victims of banditry and judicial proceedings.

6. Even under harsh chattel slavery, manumission was possible for a significant number of slaves and slaves usually had a right to keep any monetary earnings and buy their freedom.

7. Multi-generational slavery was uncommon; in part this reflected the fact that most African slaves were women.

8. During the early years of enslavement, African slaves usually worked under supervision. Then many became "allotment slaves," who worked five or six days until about 2 p.m. on the master's lands, and in the evenings and on their days off, worked their own plots. In the third stage settled slaves spent most of their time working their land in exchange for a fixed obligation, usually what it took to feed an adult male for a year.

### **Slave Trade**

1. During the era of the Atlantic slave trade, many of those enslaved, perhaps a majority, were kept in Africa.

2. The Atlantic slave trade carried about two to three men for every woman.

3. The slave trade reduced the adult male population by about 20 percent, dramatically altering the ratio of working adults to dependents and of adult men to adult women.

4. One result of unbalanced sex ratios was to encourage polygyny.
  5. Another result was to reduce traditional male forms of work, such as hunting, fishing, livestock rearing, the clearing of fields, the chopping down of trees, and the digging up of roots. The result was a less protein rich diet and a reduction in agricultural productivity.
  6. About 14 percent of slaves sent to the New World were children under 14; 56 percent were male adults; and 30 percent were female adults.
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## **Myths and Misconceptions and the Slave Trade and Slavery**

### **Slavery and World History**

**Myth:** Slavery is a product of capitalism.

**Fact:** Slavery is older than the first human records.

**Myth:** Slavery is a product of Western Civilization.

**Fact:** Slavery is virtually a universal institution.

**Myth:** Slavery in the non-western world was a mild, benign, and non-economic institution.

**Fact:** Slaves were always subject to torture, sexual exploitation, and arbitrary death.

**Myth:** Slavery was an economically backward and inefficient institution.

**Fact:** Many of the most progressive societies in the world had slaves.

**Myth:** Slavery was always based on race.

**Fact:** Not until the 15th century was slavery associated primarily with people of African descent.

### **Enslavement and the Slave Trade**

**Myth:** New World slaves came exclusively from West Africa.

**Fact:** Half of all New World slaves came from central Africa.

**Myth:** Europeans physically enslaved Africans or hired mercenaries who captured people for export or that African rulers were "Holocaust abettors" who were themselves to blame for the slave trade.

**Fact:** Europeans did engage in some slave raiding; the majority of people who were transported to the Americas were enslaved by Africans in Africa.

**Myth:** Many slaves were captured with nets.

**Fact:** There is no evidence that slaves were captured with nets; war was the most important source of enslavement.

**Myth:** Kidnapping was the usual means of enslavement.

**Fact:** War was the most important source of enslavement; it would be incorrect to reduce all of these wars to slave raids.

**Myth:** The Middle Passage stripped enslaved Africans of their cultural heritage and transformed them into docile, passive figures wholly receptive to the cultural inputs of their masters.

**Fact:** Slaves engaged in at least 250 shipboard rebellions.

## **Slavery in the Americas**

**Myth:** Most slaves were imported into what is now the United States

**Fact:** Well over 90 percent of slaves from Africa were imported into the Caribbean and South America

**Myth:** Slavery played a marginal role in the history of the Americas

**Fact:** African slaves were the only remedy for the labor shortages that plagued Europe's New World dominions.

**Fact:** Slave labor made it profitable to mine for precious metal and to harvest sugar, indigo, and tobacco; slaves taught whites how to raise such crops as rice and indigo.

**Myth:** Europeans arrived in the New World in far larger numbers than did Africans.

**Fact:** Before 1820, the number of Africans outstripped the combined total of European immigrants by a ratio of 3, 4, or 5 to 1.

**Myth:** The first slaves arrived in what is now the U.S. in 1619

**Fact:** Slaves arrived in Spanish Florida at least a century before 1619 and a recently uncovered census shows that blacks were present in Virginia before 1619.

## **Slave Culture**

**Myth:** The slave trade permanently broke slaves' bonds with Africa.

**Fact:** Slaves were able to draw upon their African cultural background and experiences and use them as a basis for life in the New World.

**Myth:** Plantation life with its harsh labor, unstable families, and high mortality, made it difficult for Africans to construct social ties

**Fact:** African nations persisted in America well into the 18th century and even the early 19th century.

**Myth:** Masters assigned names to slaves or slaves imitated masters' systems of naming.

**Fact:** In fact, slaves were rarely named for owners. Naming patterns appear to have reflected African practices, such as the custom of giving children "day names" (after the day they were born) and "name-saking," such as naming children after grandparents.

**Myth:** Slaveholders sought to deculturate slaves by forbidding African names and languages and obliterating African culture.

**Fact:** While deculturation was part of the "project" of slavery, in fact African music, dance, decoration, design, cuisine, and religion exerted a profound, ongoing influence on American culture.

**Fact:** Slaves adapted religious rites and perpetuated a rich tradition of folklore.

### **Economics of Slavery**

**Myth:** Slavesholders lost money and were more interested in status than moneymaking; slaves did little productive work

**Fact:** Slaves worked longer days, more days, and more of their life

**Myth:** Slavery was incompatible with urban life and factory technology

**Fact:** Sugar mills were the first true factories in the world; slaves were widely used in cities and in various kinds of manufacturing and crafts.

**Myth:** Slaves engaged almost exclusively in unskilled brutish field labor.

**Fact:** Much of the labor performed by slaves required high skill levels and careful, painstaking effort.

**Fact:** Masters relied on slaves for skilled craftsmanship.

### **Religion**

**Myth:** West and Central Africans received their first exposure to Christianity in the New World.

**Fact:** Catholic missionary activities began in the central African kingdom of Kongo half a century before Columbus's voyages of discovery and Kongo converted to Catholicism in 1491. A sizeable community of African Christians developed around Portuguese settlement.

**Myth:** Priests and missionaries were primarily responsible for converting slaves to Christianity.

**Fact:** In Latin America, slaves were instructed not by European clergy but by African Christians, who spread a specifically African interpretation of Christianity.

**Myth:** Upon arrival in Latin America, slaves were given hasty instruction in a complex foreign religion in a language they could barely understand.

**Fact:** A certain number of slaves were baptized Christians and others were familiar with Christianity.

**Myth:** The Catholic Church did not tolerate the mixture of Catholicism with traditional African religions.

**Fact:** In Kongo and in Latin America, the Church did tolerate the mixture of Catholicism with African religions, allowing Africans to retain their old cosmology, understanding of the universe, and the place of gods and other divine beings in the universe.

**Myth:** Before the Civil War, the Southern churches were highly segregated.

**Fact:** In 1860, slave constituted about 26 percent of the Southern Baptist church membership.

**Myth:** Slave Christianity was essentially a "religion of docility."

**Fact:** Christianity was dual edged and marked by millennialist possibilities; whites could not prevent black preachers from turning Christianity into a source of self-respect and faith in deliverance.

## **Resistance**

**Myth:** Slaves were brainwashed and stunned into submission and rarely resisted slavery.

**Fact:** Resistance took a variety of forms ranging from day-to-day resistance, economic bargaining, running away and maroonage, and outright rebellions

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## **Slavery and World History**

1. The most ancient civilizations--ancient Mesopotamia, Old Kingdom Egypt, and the budding civilization that formed in the Indus and Yangtze river valleys--all had some form of slavery present in their earliest years.
  2. In none of these cultures did slaves constitute a large proportion of the population.
  3. It was in classical Greece and Rome that the first true slave societies came into existence. From the 5th to the 3rd centuries b.c., perhaps a third to a half of Athens's population consisted of slaves. Slaves constituted as much as 30 percent of Rome's population.
  4. England's Domesday book of 1086 indicated that 10 percent of the population was enslaved.
  5. Although slavery is often stigmatized as archaic and backward, slavery has been found in many of the most progressive societies.
  6. Contrary to what many think, slavery never disappeared from medieval Europe. Slavery persisted in Sicily, southern Italy, Russia, southern France, Spain, and elsewhere.
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## **Glossary**

### **Curse of Ham**

The claim that Noah, the biblical father of all subsequent humanity, cursed his son Ham with both blackness and the condition of slavery for looking at him drunk and naked and exposing him to his other sons, Shem and Japheth. In fact Ham was not cursed and his association with black slavery does not appear in the Hebrew Bible.

Noah cursed Canaan--the ancestor of the Semitic Canaanites, who occupied

Israel before the Hebrews--to be the "servant of servants." Why Noah was upset with Canaan we are never told. Ham's African sons were Cush (Ethiopia), Put (Libya), and Misraim (Egypt)--and they were not cursed.

### **Maroons**

Independent communities of fugitive slaves.

### **Task System**

One of two plantation labor systems. Under the task system, slaves were assigned several specific tasks within a day. When those tasks were finished, slaves could have time to themselves to spend however they wished. Slaves who worked in rice and long staple cotton plantations, in the naval stores industry, or in skilled labor positions worked under the task system. The benefits of this system for slaves included less supervision, more autonomy and more free time.

### **Gang System**

Wherever tobacco, sugar or short staple cotton grew, slaves worked in large groups or gangs under the strict supervision of white overseers or black drivers from dawn to dusk. Close supervision meant less autonomy and less free time.

### **Trash Gangs**

Many boys and girls performed light agricultural labor, sweeping yards, clearing dried cornstalks from fields, chopping cotton, carrying water to field hands, weeding, picking cotton at a slower pace, feeding work animals, and driving cows to pasture.

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### **Slavery and the Law in Virginia**

1662	Negro women's children to serve accounting to the condition of the mother.
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	that such Negroe, mulatto, Indian slave, or servants for life doe dye of any wound in such their resistance received the master or owner of such shall receive satisfaction from the public....
1680	An act for preventing Negroes' Insurrections. Whereas the frequent meeting of considerable numbers of Negroe slaves under pretence of feasts and burials is judged of dangerous consequence...it shall not be lawful for any Negroe or other slave to carry or arm himself with any club, staff, gun, sword, or any other weapon of defense or offense, not to goe or depart from his master's ground without a certificate from his master...and such permission not to be granted but upon particular and necessary operations; and every Negroe or slave so offending not having a certificate...[will receive] twenty lashes on his bare back well laid....If any Negroe or other slave shall absent himself from his master's service and lie hid and lurking in obscure places...it shall be lawful...to kill the said Negroe or slave....
1682	An additional act for the better preventing insurrections by Negroes....No master or overseer knowingly permit or suffer...any Negroe or slave not properly belonging to him or them, to remain or be upon his or their plantation above the space of four hours at any one time....
1691	Virginia voted to banish any white man or woman who married a black, mulatto, or Indian. Any white woman who gave birth to a mulatto child was required to pay a heavy fine or be sold for a five year term of servitude.

## **Historiography**

### **African Historiography**

#### **Walter Rodney**

The slave trade contributed to Africa's depopulation, to the increased use of slaves within Africa, to the development of more predatory political systems, and to a greater gap between rich and poor.

#### **John Fage**

Rejected the argument that slave exports led to serious depopulation and contended that the slavetrade contributed to political centralization and economic growth.

Mier and Kopytoff Argue that African slavery was one of a series of relationships, like marriage and parentage, that involve rights in persons; argued that African slaves gradually ceased to be aliens and eventually were incorporated within the kinship system.

John Thornton Africans were co-architects of the Atlantic world.

### **New World Historiography**

#### **Eric Williams**

Racism was the result and not the cause of slavery; slave economies were a major source of capital for the industrial revolution; abolition came when slave economies were declining in profitability; abolition was driven more by economic interests than by philanthropy.

### **Frank Tannenbaum**

Compared to British colonists, Latin Americans were less tainted by racial prejudice, were more lenient in their treatment of slaves, and extended religious and legal protections involving families and physical cruelty.

### **Carl Degler**

Demographic necessity led the Portuguese in Brazil to promote freedmen and mulattoes into positions of social respectability; in the U.S., poor white yeomanry supported racism to protect their position in society.

### **U.S. Historiography**

#### **U.B. Phillips**

The slave was the beneficiary of a patriarchal but unprofitable institution.

#### **Kenneth Stamp**

Slavery was a dehumanizing, exploitative, but highly profitable labor system. Slaveowners maintained discipline by instilling "a sense of complete dependence," employing whipping to make slaves "stand in fear." They also provided more positive incentives, including patches of land for gardens, passes to visit other farms and plantations, and cash payments. Slaves resisted masters by working indifferently, breaking tools, running away, and rebelling.

#### **Stanley Elkins**

The slave trade was so disruptive and U.S. slavery so severe that it shattered cultural ties with Africa; the slave was a psychic casualty of an all-embracing, repressive system.

#### **Lawrence Levine**

In music, dance, song, religion, and folk belief, slaves created a separate, independent life which fostered a strong sense of community.

#### **Eugene Genovese**

Slavery was an economically inefficient institution that impeded the growth of industry, retarded the growth of cities, and inhibited technological innovation; relations between masters and slaves were characterized by paternalism; compared to Brazil and the Caribbean, what stands out in the U.S. is the infrequency of slave revolts.

## **Fogel & Engerman**

Slave-based agriculture was efficient and profitable and slaves benefited in many ways because considerate treatment of a valuable capital asset was to the financial advantage of profit-seeking slaveowners.

## **Daniel Patrick Moynihan**

The roots of contemporary black poverty lie in the disorganization of black family life under slavery; the slave family did not exist beyond the mother-child dyad.

## **Herbert Gutman**

Children were frequently named for fathers; Slaves had different norms than whites, including the acceptance of women who bore a child before permanently settling down with a male partner and a hostility toward cousin marriages.

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## **Quotations**

**U.B. Phillips:** "Every plantation of the standard southern type was, in fact, a school constantly training and controlling pupils who were in a backward state of civilization" (1918)

**W.E. Woodward:** "The slave system...did incalculable harm to the white people of the South, and benefited nobody but the Negro, in that it served as a vast training school for African savages. Though the regime of the slave plantations was strict it was, on the whole, a kindly one by comparison with what the imported slave had experienced in his own land. It taught him discipline, cleanliness and a conception of moral standards. (New American History (1936) the most prestigious textbook of its time)

**Kenneth Stamp:** "I have assumed that slaves were merely ordinary human beings, that innately Negroes are, after all, only white men with black skins, nothing more, nothing less." (1956)

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## **Key Controversies**

### **Jews, the Slave Trade, and Slavery**

1. The vast majority of New World slaves were captured, bought, traded, and employed by non-Jews.
2. Some Jews participated in the slave trade, owned slaves, and even helped formulate and disseminate the pro-slavery ideology. Other Jews, including the Cincinnati abolitionist Max Lillianthal, Isaac Wise, and Rabbi David Einhor of Baltimore attacked slavery.

3. The Jewish expulsion from Spain coincided with establishment of trading links between Africa, Europe, and the Americas. As a result, the Sephardim found themselves dispersed over critical nodes of the new system, transferring assets and information.

4. The only place where Jews came close to dominating a New World plantation system was the Dutch colonies of Curacao and Surinam.

5. In the antebellum South, about 5,000 Jews (out of 20,000) owned one or more slaves, making up 1.25 percent of Southern slaveowners.

6. The largest Jewish slaveholders were Judah P. Benjamin owned 140 slaves near New Orleans; and Major Raphael J. Moses owned 50 slaves near Columbus, Georgia.

7. No southern Jewish intellectual questioned the injustice of slavery.

### **The Arab and Islamic Slave Trade**

1. Arabs were involved in the capture and transport of slaves northward across the Sahara desert and the Indian Ocean region into the Middle East, Persia, and the Indian subcontinent.

2. The trans-Saharan and Indian Ocean slave trade was much older than the transatlantic slave trade and continued into the 19th century.

3. As many African slaves may have crossed the Sahara Desert, the Red Sea, and the Indian Ocean as crossed the Atlantic.

4. An estimated 11,612,000 slaves crossed the Red Sea, Indian Ocean, and Sahara Desert from 650 to 1900, compared to 11,656,000 across the Atlantic from 1500 to 1900.

### **Black Slaveholders**

1. In 1830, approximately 3,775 owned 12,760 slaves. One in ten free black household heads owned at least one slave.

2. Some were relatives or family members, who could not legally be emancipated.

3. During the 1840s and 1850s, the number of black slaveholders decreased substantially. In South Carolina, the number fell from 450 in 1830 to 171 in 1860.

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### **Major Rebellions**

#### **New York City, 1712**

Like many later revolts, this one occurred during a period of social dissension among whites following Leisler's Rebellion. The rebels espoused traditional African religion.

### **Stono Rebellion, 1739**

The Spanish empire enticed slaves of English colonies to escape to Spanish territory. In 1733 Spain issued an edict to free all runaway slaves from British territory who made their way into Spanish possessions. On September 9, 1739, about 20 slaves, mostly from Angola, gathered under the leadership of a slave called Jemmy near the Stono River, 20 miles from Charleson. 44 blacks and 21 whites lost their lives. South Carolina responded by placing import duties on slaves from abroad, strengthening patrol duties and militia training, and recommending more benign treatment of slaves.

### **Gabriel's Rebellion, 1800**

This attempted insurrection near Richmond was organized during the Haitian Revolution and the undeclared naval war between the U.S. and France.

### **Denmark Vesey's Conspiracy, 1822**

This failed insurrection was organized soon after the contentious debate over the admission of Missouri as a slave state. Like Gabriel, Vesey consciously looked to Haiti for inspiration and support.

### **Nat Turner, 1832**

This insurrection took place at a time when slaves in Jamaica had staged one of the largest revolts in history, when radical abolition had arisen in the North, and Britain was debating slave emancipation.

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## **Facts about the Slave Trade and Slavery**

### **Slave Trade**

The level of slave exports grew from about 36,000 a year during the early 18th century to almost 80,000 a year during the 1780s.

The Angolan region of west-central Africa made up slightly more than half of all Africans sent to the Americas and a quarter of imports to British North America.

Approximately 11,863,000 Africans were shipped across the Atlantic, with a death rate during the Middle Passage reducing this number by 10-20 percent.

As a result between 9.6 and 10.8 million Africans arrived in the Americas.

About 500,000 Africans were imported into what is now the U.S. between 1619

and 1807--or about 6 percent of all Africans forcibly imported into the Americas. About 70 percent arrived directly from Africa.

Well over 90 percent of African slaves were imported into the Caribbean and South America. Only about 6 percent of imports went directly to British North America. Yet by 1825, the U.S. had a quarter of blacks in the New World.

The majority of African slaves were brought to British North America between 1720 and 1780. (Average date of arrival for whites is 1890)

### **Comparisons**

American plantations were dwarfed by those in the West Indies. About a quarter of U.S. slaves lived on farms with 15 or fewer slaves. In 1850, just 125 plantations had over 250 slaves.

In the Caribbean, Dutch Guiana and Brazil, the slave death rate was so high and the birth rate so low that they could not sustain their population without importations from Africa. Rates of natural decrease ran as high as 5 percent a year. While the death rate of U.S. slaves was about the same as that of Jamaican slaves, the fertility rate was more than 80 percent higher.

U.S. slaves were further removed from Africa than those in the Caribbean. In the 19th century, the majority of slaves in the British Caribbean and Brazil were born in Africa. In contrast, by 1850, most U.S. slaves were third-, fourth-, or fifth generation Americans.

### **Demography**

Slavery in the U.S. was distinctive in the near-balance of the sexes and the ability of the slave population to increase its numbers by natural reproduction.

Unlike any other slave society, the U.S. had a high and sustained natural increase in the slave population for a more than a century and a half.

In 1860, 89 percent of the nation's African Americans were slaves; blacks formed 13 percent of the country's population and 33 percent of the South's population.

In 1860, less than 10 percent of the slave population was over 50 and only 3.5 percent was over 60.

The average age of first birth for slave women was around 20. Child spacing averaged about 2 years.

The average number of children born to a slave woman was 9.2--twice as many in the West Indies.

Most slaves lived in nuclear households consisting of two parents and children: 64 percent nuclear; 21 percent single parents; 15 percent non-family.

Mother-headed families were 50 percent more frequent on plantations with 15 or fewer slaves than on large ones. Smaller units also had a disproportionately large share of families in which the father and mother lived on different plantations for most of the week.

Average number of persons per household was 6.

Average age of women at birth of their first child was about 21.

Few slaves lived into old age. Between 1830 and 1860, only 10 percent of slaves in North America were over 50 years old.

### **Children**

Most infants were weaned within three or four months

There were few instances in which slave women were released from field work for extended periods during slavery. Even during the last week before childbirth, pregnant women on average picked three-quarters or more of the amount normal for women.

Half of all slave babies died in the first year of life--twice the rate for white babies.

The average birth weight of slave infants was less than 5.5 pounds.

Slave children were tiny; their average height did not reach three feet until they were 4; they were 5.5 inches shorter than modern children and comparable to children in Bangladesh and the slums of Lagos.

At 17, slave men were shorter than 96 percent of men today and slave women shorter than 80 percent of contemporary women.

Slaves did not reach their full stature--67 inches for men and 62.5 inches for women--until their mid-20s.

Children entered the labor force as early as 3 or 4. Some were taken into the master's house to be servants while others were assigned to special children's gangs called "trash gangs," which swept yards, cleared drying cornstalks from fields, chopped cotton, carried water to field hands, weeded, picked cotton, fed work animals, and drove cows to pasture.

By age 7, over 40 percent of the boys and half the girls had entered the work force. At about 11, boys began to transfer to adult field jobs.

### **Labor**

At the beginning of the 18th century, it was common for small groups of slaves to live and work by themselves on properties remote from their masters' homes.

Sugar field workers in Jamaica worked about 4,000 hours a year--three times that of a modern factory worker. Cotton workers toiled about 3,000 hours a year.

The median size of slaveholdings ranged from approximately 25 slaves in the tobacco regions of Maryland, Virginia, and North Carolina, to 30-50 slaves in upland cotton regions. Plantations in the Sea Islands of South Carolina and Georgia and the sugar parishes of Louisiana averaged 60-80 slaves. In small areas of Louisiana, Mississippi, and South Carolina, slaves lived on 125-175 person units.

In 1790, 44 percent of enslaved Africans lived on units of 20 or more slaves. In 1860, the figure was 53 percent (and approximately a third lived on units with 50 or more slaves).

Half of all masters owned five or fewer slaves. While most small slaveholders were farmers, a disproportionate share were artisans, shopkeepers, and public officials.

Prices of slaves varied widely over time. During the 18th century, slave prices generally rose. Though they fell somewhat before the start of the revolution, by the early 1790s, even before the onset of cotton expansion, prices had returned to earlier levels. Prices rose to a high of about \$1,250 during the cotton boom of the late 1830s, fell to below half that level in the 1840s, and rose to about \$1,450 in the late 1850s. Males were valued 10-20 percent more than females; at age ten, children's prices were about half that of a prime male field hand.

By 1850, about 64 percent of slaves lived on cotton plantations; 12 percent raised tobacco, 5 percent sugar, 4 percent rice.

Among slaves 16-20, about 83 percent of the males and 89 percent of the females were field hands. The remainder were managers, artisans, or domestic servants.

Growing cotton required about 38 percent of the labor time of slaves; growing corn and caring for livestock 31 percent; and 31 percent improving land, constructing fences and buildings, raising other crops, and manufacturing products such as clothes.

Slaves constructed more than 9,500 miles of railroad track by 1860, a third of the nation's total and more than the mileage of Britain, France, and Germany.

About 2/3s of slaves were in the labor force, twice the proportion among free persons. Nearly a third of slave laborers were children and an eighth were elderly or crippled.

### **Disease**

Slaves suffered a variety of maladies--such as blindness, abdominal swelling, bowed legs, skin lesions, and convulsions--that may have been caused by beriberi (caused by a deficiency of thiamine), pellagra (caused by a niacin

deficiency), tetany (caused by deficiencies of calcium, magnesium, and Vitamin D), rickets (also caused by a deficiency of Vitamin D), and kwashiorkor (caused by severe protein deficiency).

Diarrhea, dysentery, whooping cough, and respiratory diseases as well as worms pushed the infant and early childhood death rate of slaves to twice that experienced by white infants and children.

### **Domestic Slave Trade**

Between 1790 and 1860, 835,000 slaves were moved from Maryland, Virginia, and the Carolinas to Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, and Texas.

Between 16 and 60 percent of slaves were shipped west by traders.

### **Profitability**

Slaveholding became more concentrated over time. The fraction of households owning slaves fell from 36 percent in 1830 to 25 percent in 1860.

The distribution of wealth in the South was much more unequal than that of the North.

Nearly 2 of 3 males with estates of \$100,000 or more lived in the South in 1860.

If the North and South are treated as separate nations, the South was the fourth most prosperous nation in the world in 1860. Italy did not achieve the southern level of per capita income until the eve of World War II.

Civil War During the Civil War, 140,500 freed slaves and 38,500 free blacks served in the Union Army.

### **WPA Interviews**

Between 1936 and 1938, some 300 interviewers employed by the Federal Writers Project, a federally-financed jobs program, questioned 2200 former slaves in 17 states about life under slavery. This amounted to about 2 percent of all former slaves surviving at the time the interviews were taken. Most were born during the last years of slavery or during the Civil War.

Because the interviews were conducted seventy years after the end of slavery, most of the people interviewed were in their 80s or older. Most had only been children during slavery.

The overwhelming majority of interviewers were whites, who used dialect to represent the way that the interviewees spoke. Many readers may find this use of dialect patronizing, as well as a little hard to read.

You can find a selection of the narratives on-line at <http://xroads.virginia.edu/~HYPER/wpa/wpahome.html>

