

“The Slave Trade” Text from *Freedom: A History of US*, Webisode 5  
<http://www.pbs.org/wnet/historyofus/web05/segment2.html>

1. Slavery first came to America with some of the earliest settlers. But they weren't the first people to own human beings. Slavery was an evil found around the world. There were jobs no one wanted to do, and, in the days before machinery, slaves seemed an answer. If you were on the losing side of a war, or were kidnapped by a rival tribe or a thief, you might end up a slave. Some Native Americans owned slaves. It was an ancient practice in Africa. But slavery in Africa was a **domestic institution**. In America it would go way beyond that, developing into a system of enforced labor on vast plantations. And while in Africa blacks were owned by other blacks, in America blacks were always owned by whites. In America it would always be racial slavery.
2. By the eighteenth century there had developed a special pattern to the American slave trade. New England Yankees often started it by taking their salted cod to the Caribbean island of Barbados—just north of Venezuela. There they traded the fish for cane sugar. Then they headed back north to Virginia where they loaded tobacco before sailing east across the Atlantic to England. In England the cargo was exchanged for guns and cloth and trinkets—all of which could be used to buy human beings in Africa. Then the slave ships sailed south from England to Africa to fill their holds with African men, women, and children—who were the most valuable cargo of all. Those people sailed west—against their wishes—and were usually taken to a Caribbean island or a southern port where the sea captains sold them for cash or more sugar. Finally, the crisscrossed triangular journey ended in Massachusetts or New York or Annapolis. Robert Walsh was an **eyewitness** of a slave ship in action. He wrote: “The slaves were all enclosed under grated hatchways, between decks. The space was so low they sat between each other's legs ... [and] there was no possibility of lying down, or at all changing their position, by night or day. Over the hatchway stood a ferocious-looking fellow with a scourge of many twisted thongs in his hand, who was the slavedriver of the ship.... The last parting sounds we heard from the unhallowed ship were the cries and shrieks of the slaves, suffering under some bodily **affliction**.”

**Definitions:**

Domestic: related to or based in the household

Institution: a system for organizing society that has existed for a long time

Eyewitness: someone who saw something themselves

Scourge: whip

Affliction: something that causes pain or suffering



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3. In Colonial times, there was slavery in both North and South. But slavery didn't make much sense in the North; farms were small and the farmer could often handle the work himself. The situation was different in the South. The crops that grew well there—tobacco, cotton, rice, and sugar—demanded large numbers of field workers. But there were few workers to be had—until the advent of African slavery.
4. By 1700 tens of thousands of African-born blacks are living in the American South, and the numbers are fast increasing. In 1705, in Virginia laws are passed that attempt to take away slaves' humanity. The Virginia Black Code says slaves are property, not people. But property that can think means trouble. So laws are passed to try and prevent thinking. One North Carolina law read this way: “The teaching of slaves has a tendency to **excite** dissatisfaction in their minds. Therefore, any free person who shall teach any slave to read and write shall be **liable to indictment**. If any slave shall teach, or attempt to teach, any other slave, he or she shall receive thirty-nine lashes on his or her bare back.”
5. When you do something you know is wrong, you usually try to convince yourself that it really is all right. Southerners begin to say that God created some people to be slaves and some to be masters. They say black people aren't as smart as white people. Then, to make that true, they pass laws that say it is a crime to teach blacks to read and write. One white woman in Norfolk, Virginia, who teaches free blacks in her home, is arrested and put in jail. Whites are losing their freedom too.

**Definitions:**

Excite: create or stir up

Liable to indictment: able to be charged with a crime

“Abolition” Text from *Freedom: A History of US*, Webisode 5

<http://www.pbs.org/wnet/historyofus/web05/segment3.html>

1. Abolition! Back in 1765 Americans had shouted the word. Before the Revolution it was the hated British stamp tax the colonists wanted to **abolish**. Then the word began to be used with a new meaning. It was the slave trade some wanted to abolish, and then slavery itself. In 1775 Benjamin Franklin helped found the American Abolition Society. The Constitution said the slave trade could be officially ended in 1808. When Thomas Jefferson becomes president, he reminds everyone of that, and a law is passed ending the slave trade. Now, no additional people can be enslaved—at least not legally. An elated Jefferson said this: “I congratulate you, fellow citizens, on the approach of the period at which you may **interpose** your authority **constitutionally** to withdraw the citizens of the United States from all further participation in those violations of human rights which have been so long continued on the unoffending inhabitants of Africa.”
2. But ending the international slave trade doesn't put an end to slavery itself, which continues to grow by **natural increase**. And within the South a major internal slave trade develops. Many thinking people—both Northerners and Southerners—believe slavery is morally wrong. Yet few are willing to do anything about it. Slavery is a profitable way of life. Those who do speak out—the abolitionists—aren't very popular. Many people argue that if slavery is abolished it will wreck the Southern economy. James Henry Hammond was one of them. He said, “Do you imagine you could prevail on us to give up a thousand million dollars in the value of our slaves, and a thousand million more in the value of our lands?”
3. The Southern leaders don't seem to understand. Immigrants and ideas and inventions are beginning to change the North. The South will be left out of much of that excitement. The Frenchman Alexis de Tocqueville visits the United States and observes a free state and a slave state. He writes about what he sees: “On the north bank of the Ohio, everything is activity, industry; labor is honored; there are no slaves. Pass to the south bank and the scene changes so suddenly that you think yourself on the other side of the world; the **enterprising** spirit is gone.”

**Definitions:**

Abolish: to officially end a law or system

Interpose: to put yourself between two things

Constitutionally: in agreement with the Constitution

Natural increase: when a population grows because more people are born

Enterprising: able to think of and carry out new ideas

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4. And yet still, because of the huge importance of cotton, the South remains the wealthiest part of the nation. Both North and South are jealous of political power. Each wants to dominate the government in Washington. But as long as Congress is evenly divided between slave states and free states, there is some stability. Then, in 1820, Missouri asks to enter the Union as a slave state. Northerners are alarmed. If Missouri becomes a state, the North will be outvoted in Congress. What can be done? Finally, a solution is found. Maine is carved from Massachusetts and made into a state, a free state. That keeps the balance of free and slave states. At the same time, the territories north of Missouri's southern border are to remain free. That action is called the Missouri Compromise. It keeps North and South talking to each other, but just barely. In 1845 slaveowner James Hammond writes this to an abolitionist. He says: “I **repudiate**, as ridiculously absurd, that much lauded dogma of Mr. Jefferson that ‘all men are born equal.’ No society has ever yet existed without a natural variety of classes. Slavery is truly the cornerstone and foundation of every well-designed and durable republican **edifice**.”
5. Meanwhile, Mr. Hammond and his planter friends are falling out of step with the European world. There, in the first half of the nineteenth century, most nations outlaw slavery. The Europeans begin to criticize the United States for allowing it. There are also white Northerners who are increasingly speaking out against slavery. By 1840 there are said to be about 2,000 abolitionist societies in the North. While some talk of gradually freeing the slaves and even paying the owners the cash value of their slaves, most abolitionists don't think anyone should be paid for owning anyone else. They want to end slavery—bam—just like that—and too bad for the slave owners. William Lloyd Garrison, a white man from Massachusetts, is the founder of the American Anti-Slavery Society and the publisher of the leading abolitionist newspaper, *The Liberator*. He says, “I do not wish to think, or speak, or write with **moderation**. No! Tell a man whose house is on fire, to give a moderate alarm, but urge me not to use moderation in a cause like the present. I am in earnest—I will not retreat a single inch—and I WILL BE HEARD.”

**Definitions:**

Repudiate: deny, reject

Edifice: building

Moderation: within reasonable limits, not calling for extreme action

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