

Slavery in the United States

Since the 17th century, African American slavery had existed in the colonies, later named the United States of America. Laws were made to keep slaves from being free. Slaves were treated differently. In South Carolina, "slaves were treated barbarically; where in Puritan states, like Quaker Pennsylvania, slaves were treated mildly" (Wagner, Gallagher, & Finkelman, Eds, p. 78). Slaves were property in all the colonies. It was legal to have slaves in all thirteen colonies.

By the time of the American Revolution, slaves were not needed for work and production in the northern colonies. In the south, slaves were essential to all types of work and hard labor. After the Revolutionary War, slavery was dying out in the north, but still well alive in the south.



With its invention in 1793, the cotton gin further changed the need for many slaves in the south. Southern plantation owners grew very wealthy with cotton and slaves to work their fields. Southern people who did not own slaves hoped one day to own their own like owning more property for a house. Slaves were also rented from slave owners to do jobs in the south. Slaves were the most important property to own in the south.

Slaves were traded in the south like cattle and pigs at a market. Scars of lashings meant a bad or unruly slave that should not be taken lightly if purchased at market. Slaves were property and not considered to be treated as whites were, as human beings.

However, this was not true in the north. Soon to come was the Abolitionist Movement (1810-1860), which meant there were people who were against slavery and wanted to end, or abolish it. Many Quakers joined this fight. It was a huge struggle since many southern slave owners were

also involved in politics and held seats in the national government. The southern politicians would not end slavery, because they felt slaves were needed in their states.

In 1831, William Lloyd Garrison, a white man, started the abolitionist paper, *The Liberator*. This helped form the America Anti-Slavery Society, which spread their movement "across the nation in mail, lectures, and petitions to Congress"* (p. 321.). In 1841, Frederick Douglass, an escaped and well-read slave, spoke at one of the Anti-Slavery Meetings. In 1845, he released the first of his two auto-biographies, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*. Meanwhile, Harriet Tubman, an escaped slave, and Sojourner Truth, also a former slave, helped many slaves find their way north to freedom.

During this time, *Cotton was King*, and by 1850 the southern states produced nearly three-fourths of the world's cotton. This made slaves necessary for production of cotton in the south. This increased profits for the southern slave owners, who owned more slaves than ever in the past; and the northern textile industry also profited from the cotton that the north turned into garments. Overproduction of cotton eventually destroyed soil in the southern states, so eyes starting looking to the new states forming in western territories, west, beyond Louisiana. (*America: The Story of Us: Division*, 2010). In this same year, another Fugitive Slave Law was enacted; northerners were again to return slaves to their owners. Slaves had no rights to plea their case in court, free or not. Often free slaves were even taken to the south. This law, and the Compromise of 1850, which opened debates about new western territories use as free or slave states, further enraged the anti-slavery movement. Abolitionists grew in numbers and the Underground Railroad was used more now than ever.

In 1854, Harriet Beecher Stowe published a book, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. This best-selling book told of a slave, Tom, and his painful life as a slave in the south. Read by over a million, this book rallied more Northerners against slavery; while southerners saw the book as an insult to their way of life.

Fights in the western territories raged of if slavery should be allowed in the new states. The election of 1860 was coming and the political parties involved took different stands on slavery. A big question of the time: should the new states be free or slave? Slavery was still alive in the southern states, but it was different in the north. Slavery became the biggest concern for many by 1860.

References:

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Title: "Auction & Negro Sales," Whitehall Street

URL: <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/cwp2003000884/PP/>

Creator: Barnard, George N., 1819-1902, photographer

Date: 1864