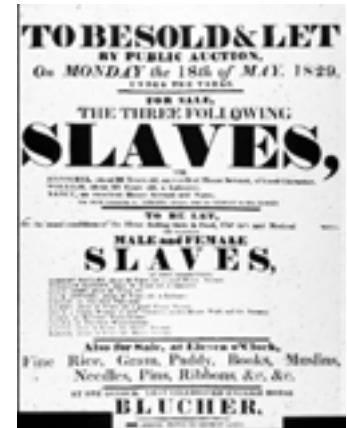


# Slavery: No Freedom, No Rights

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

## For Sale: Human Beings!

It's too awful to seem real, but it was. From the earliest days of the American colonies through the mid-1860's—nearly 250 years—many American families owned slaves. A **slave**, or an **enslaved person**, is a person who is held as the property of another person. Slaves in America were human beings taken from Africa. They were bought and sold the same way horses and wagons were bought and sold. Enslaved people were given no legal rights. They had to do whatever their owners told them to do, and many suffered at the hands of brutal owners. All slaves, no matter how they were treated, suffered because they had no freedom. States could choose to outlaw slavery if they wanted to, but it wasn't until 1808 that Congress made it illegal to bring more people from Africa to be slaves. However, that didn't mean that slavery ended. For those already here and their children, slavery continued in many states, especially in the South.



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*A family of slaves in Virginia 1862*



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## Why Would Anyone Own Someone Else?

That's easy—there was hard work to be done, and lots of it. Enslaved people received no pay for their work, so they were a form of cheap labor. A slave owner only had to invest whatever money it took to keep the people he enslaved alive. **Slavery** was the practice of owning human beings. Slavery existed in all of the American colonies, but it developed even more in the South, where huge plantations of tobacco, cotton, and rice required lots of workers. Plantation owners used enslaved people for farm labor and household help. In Southern cities, enslaved Africans did all kinds of jobs that involved physical labor. In the northern colonies, slavery did not become as widespread because people made a living on smaller farms or by trading or manufacturing goods. Even so, plenty of smaller households in both the north and south had one or two enslaved people that they used as servants.



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*Slave sales*

*Slave with scars*

Library Company of Philadelphia

## How Was Slavery Defended?

People defended slavery in one of two ways. Some people thought slavery was a **necessary evil**—something we needed even though we didn't like it. Others thought slavery was actually a good thing that helped everyone involved. Here are four ways people justified slavery:

Examples of Pro-Slavery Thinking	
<p><b>Don't Make Me Do That</b> We have to have slavery so there's someone to do the yucky work nobody else wants to do.</p>	<p><b>No Pain, No Gain</b> We believe slavery in America is teaching Africans to be better people, which will be good for them in the long run.</p>
<p><b>Tiger By the Tail</b> We want to let the enslaved people go but we're afraid of what will happen if we do, so we won't.</p>	<p><b>For Their Own Good</b> We think black people are so inferior that keeping them enslaved actually helps them.</p>

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## Freedom and Equality (But Not for All)

The United States was founded on liberty and equality. But to early Americans, these principles had to do with establishing a government ruled by citizens instead of a king. The first Americans didn't even believe all *citizens* should have a say in government—just those who were white, male, and owned land. The U.S. Constitution was written to ensure liberty and equality, yet it also allowed slavery. Even though many early Americans thought slavery was wrong, the South relied on the labor of enslaved people for a very long time. Those states would never have voted to approve the Constitution if slavery was outlawed.

*"We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness." — U.S. Declaration of Independence (1776)*

## Constitutional Compromises

- When the Constitution was adopted, it said this:
- Congress had to wait until 1808 (20 years) before passing a law to make it illegal to import enslaved people into the United States.
- Enslaved people who escaped to a state where slavery was illegal did not become free. If their owners claimed them, they had to be returned.
- To calculate a state's population, enslaved people counted as 3/5 of a person. Population determined how many Representatives a state had in Congress.



New York Public Library

Boston abolitionist Wendell Phillips in 1851

## Friends of Freedom

Many people in the United States opposed slavery. **Abolitionists** were people who wanted slavery ended permanently, or abolished. Most abolitionists lived in the northern states, where slavery wasn't as popular, but some Southerners were abolitionists too. These people put pressure on politicians to end slavery, and they worked to convince society that slavery was morally wrong. They did this by forming groups, holding conventions, giving speeches and sermons, handing out pamphlets, and even publishing newspapers and songs.

## A Deadly Revolt

One Virginia night in 1831, **Nat Turner** and several other who were enslaved crept into the house where their owners slept and murdered the entire family. Then they went to other houses and killed even more white people. More enslaved people joined Turner, and they killed at least 55 people before they were stopped. Turner and many others were executed for these murders, and angry white mobs murdered nearly 200 black people afterward. People blamed Turner's rebellion partly on his education. Virginia responded by passing a law making it illegal to teach black people to read and write.



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## Don't Like it? Sue Me!

Another enslaved man, **Dred Scott**, took a different approach. Scott's owner moved often and took Scott with him to each new residence. Because of that, Scott had lived in both free and slave states. In 1846, he sued for his freedom. He argued that because his owner had taken him to live where slavery was illegal, he should be free. Scott's case went all the way to the United States Supreme Court—but he didn't win. In the Dred Scott decision, the Supreme Court ruled black people were not citizens and had no right to sue in the first place.



Missouri Historical Society

Dred Scott