

NIGHT RUNNER

Origin Story

| Issue 1



Night Runner: Origin Story | Issue 1

A dramaturgical graphic novel series based on Ike Holter's *Night Runner* and compiled by Rachel Perzynski.

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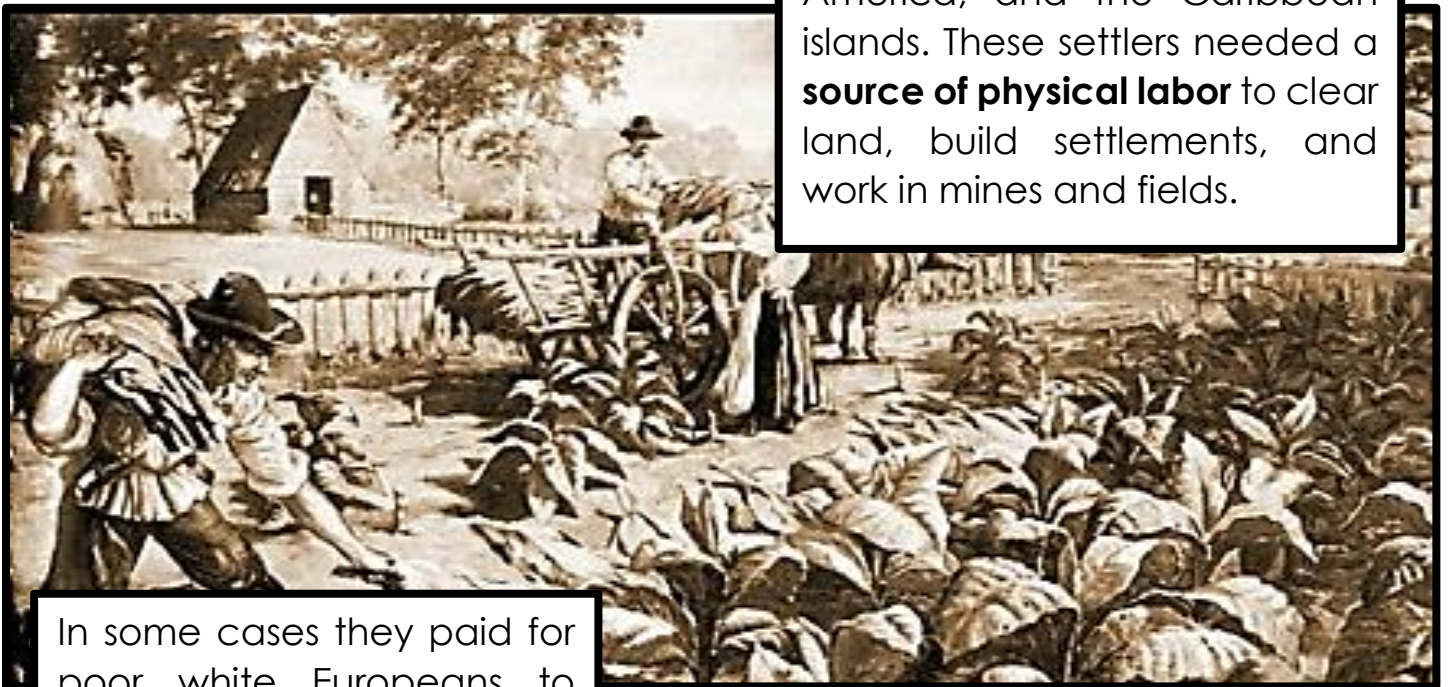
The Atlantic Slave Trade



Slavery is entrenched in the history of many nations and cultures across the world. With its roots in ancient times, this system labels human beings as property and enforces them to live and work under the will of another. Until the advent of the **Atlantic Slave Trade**, slavery ultimately lacked the racist notion that whites were masters and blacks were slaves. For the first time, race became a defining factor in determining who is a slave and who is free on a massive scale. In the process of radically transforming slavery, the African slave trade in the Americas redefined the **meaning of race**.



The enslavement of Africans expanded rapidly in the **1500s**, when European explorers reached what became known as the “New World” on the other side of the Atlantic Ocean. Europe sent settlers to establish colonies throughout the Americas—North America, South America, Central America, and the Caribbean islands. These settlers needed a **source of physical labor** to clear land, build settlements, and work in mines and fields.

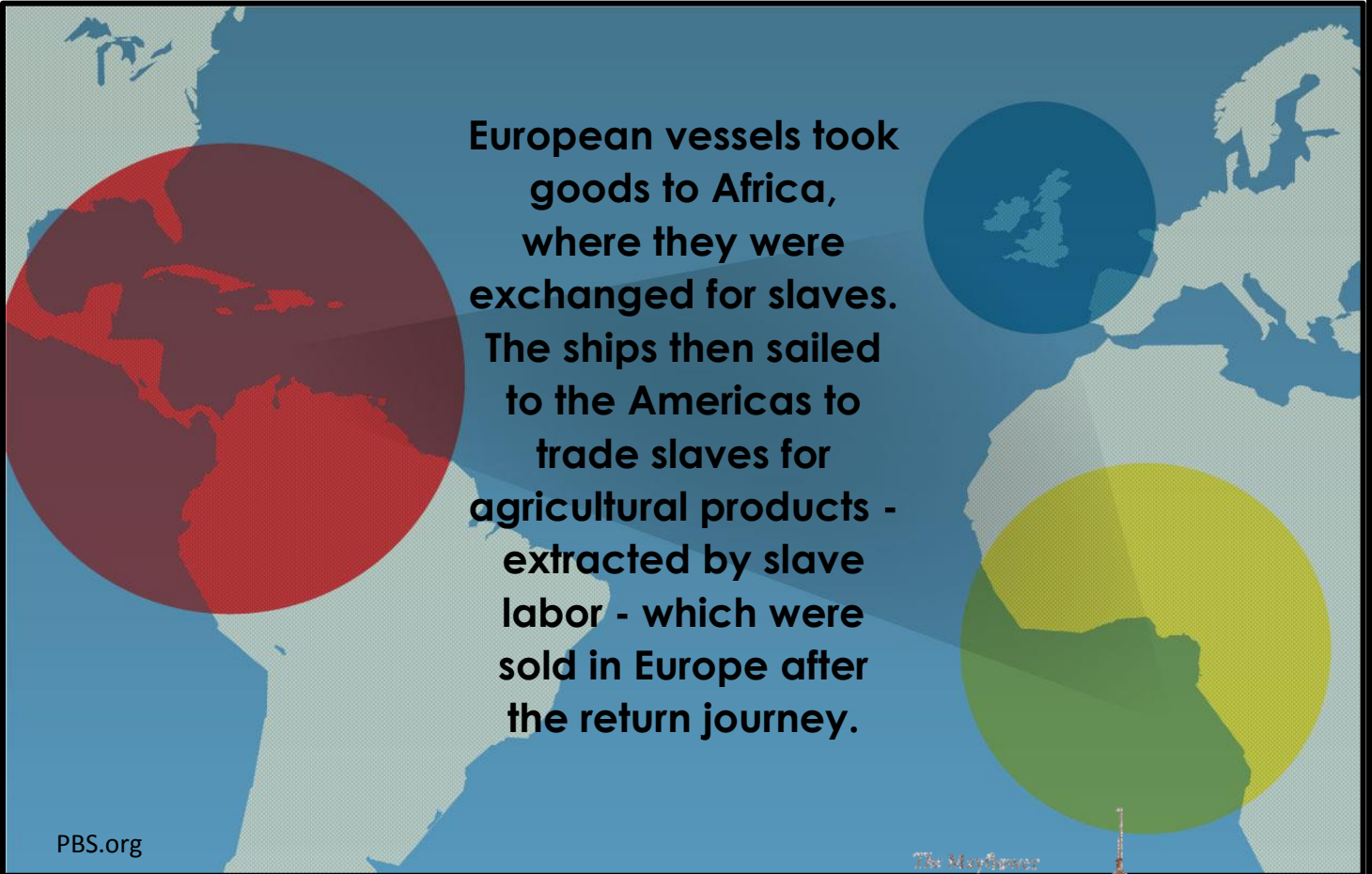


In some cases they paid for poor white Europeans to make the journey to the Americas as **indentured servants**, who worked for a specified term to pay off the debt of the voyage. Settlers also tried to enslave **indigenous people**, but the Native American population quickly declined due to warfare and diseases brought by the Europeans.





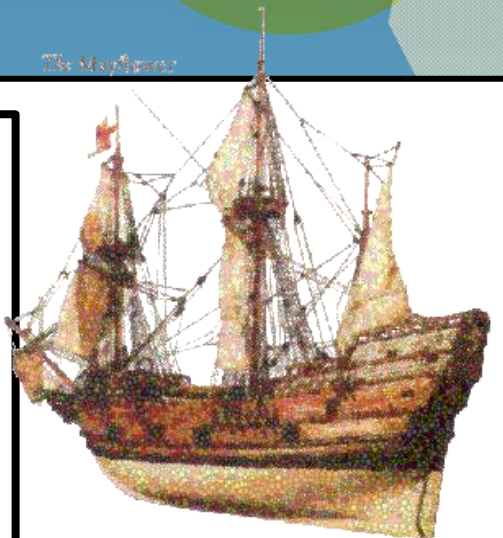
In 1510, **King Ferdinand** of Spain authorized his subjects to begin importing people from Africa to serve as slaves in the Americas. From 1500 to 1800, over **10 million Africans** were enslaved and brought across the Atlantic Ocean to the Americas—known as the **transatlantic slave trade**.



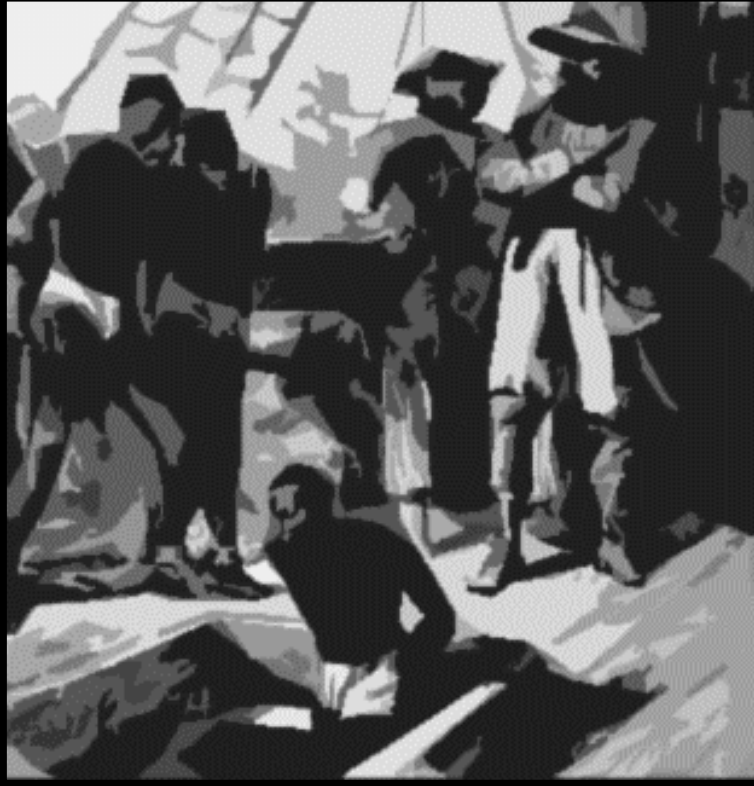
PBS.org

The Mayflower

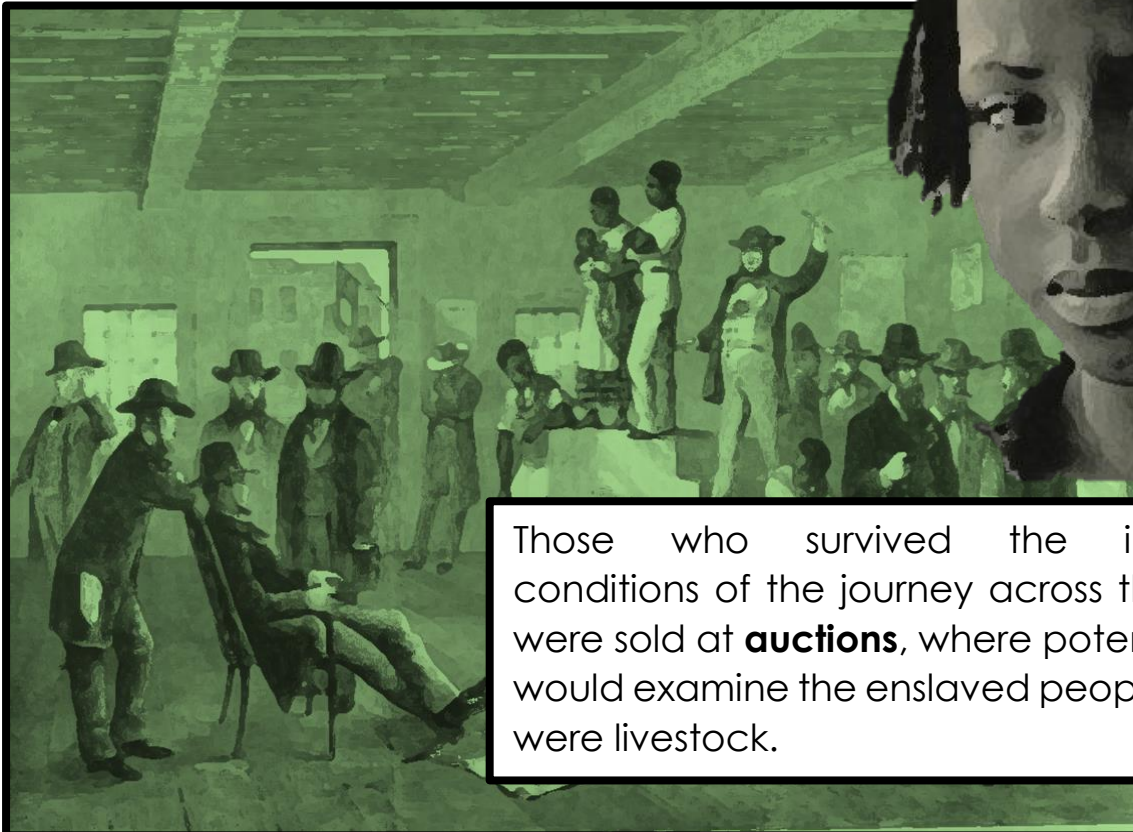
Almost half of the enslaved Africans were sent to sugar-producing colonies in Brazil, and a large amount went to islands in the Caribbean. Around **4% of the total**—about 389,000 enslaved Africans—were transported to the British colonies in North America that would become the U.S.



According to historical legend, the first Africans arrived at the British settlement of Jamestown, Virginia aboard a Dutch ship in 1619.



"I was soon surrounded by strange men, who examined and handled me in the same manner that a butcher would a calf or a lamb he was about to purchase, and who talked about my shape and size in like words—as if I could no more understand their meaning than the dumb beasts. I was then put up for sale." —Mary Prince, sold into slavery at age 10



Those who survived the insufferable conditions of the journey across the Atlantic were sold at **auctions**, where potential buyers would examine the enslaved people as if they were livestock.



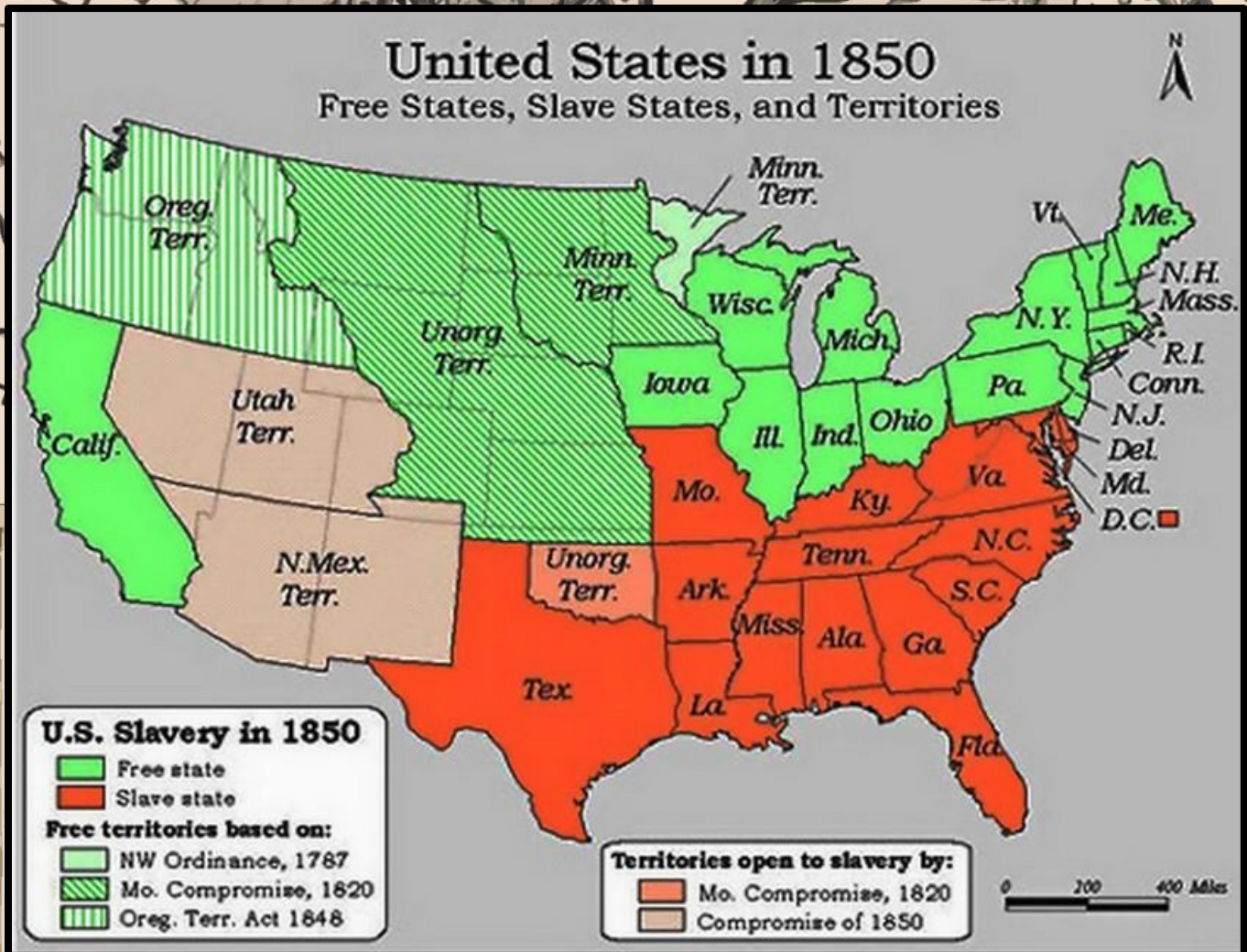
The American Revolution and Gradual Abolition



By the 1760s, many Americans resented the taxes, trade policies, and other restrictions placed upon them by the British government. Colonial leaders issued the **Declaration of Independence** in 1776, which asserted that “all men are created equal” and have fundamental rights to “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.” At the time of the American Revolution, however, there were an estimated **700,000 enslaved people** living in the colonies—about 20% of the population.



During the development of the new country, slavery became a major point of contention between the North and the South. While many people in the northern states wanted to ban slavery, most people in the South fiercely supported the institution.



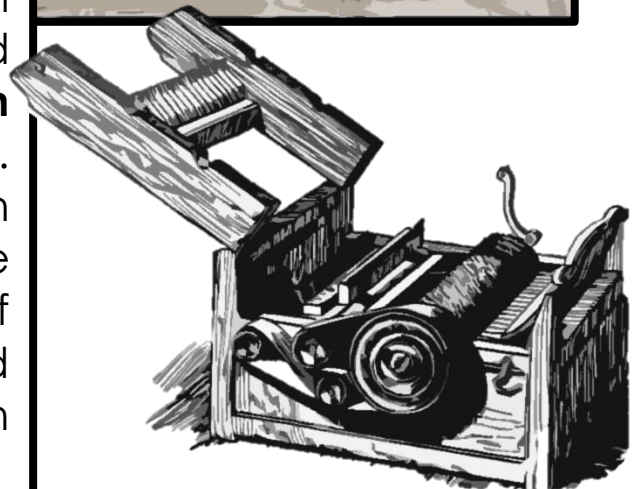
Pennsylvania became the first state to provide for the abolition of slavery in 1780 when the state legislature passed the **Gradual Abolition Act**. In 1787, the first national Congress passed the **Northwest Ordinance**, which prohibited slavery in the territories west of the Ohio River (Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, and Wisconsin). By **1804**, all northern states had either abolished slavery or set measures in place to gradually reduce it.

Slavery Expands in the South

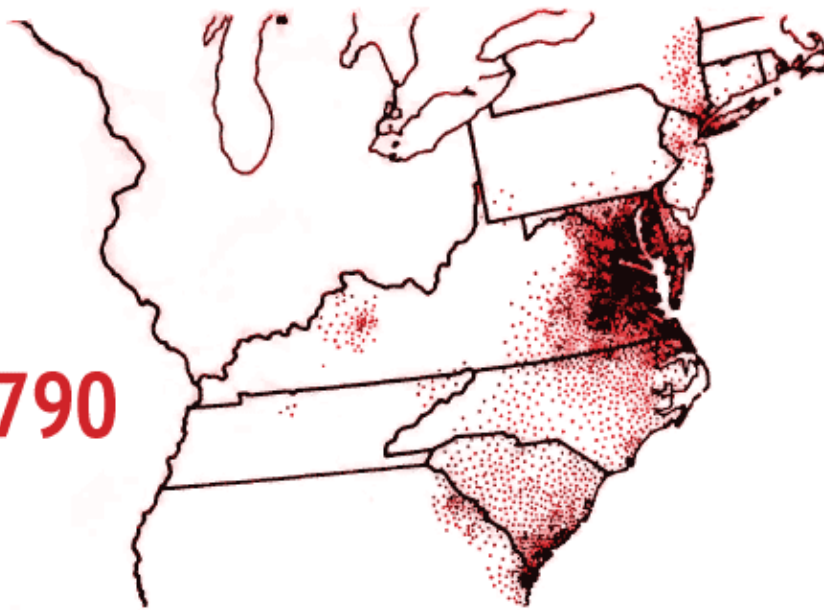
Instead of gradually fading away as it had in the North, slavery rapidly expanded in the South around the turn of the nineteenth century. The central factor driving this expansion was the invention of the **cotton gin** (short for engine) in **1793**. Invented by Eli Whitney, this machine accelerated the process of separating the valuable white cotton fibers from the seeds.



Enslaved workers who were responsible for planting, growing, and picking most of the cotton harvested in the South could process **fifty times more cotton** per day by using a cotton gin. Within a few years the South transitioned from the large-scale production of tobacco to that of cotton, a switch that reinforced the region's dependence on slave labor.



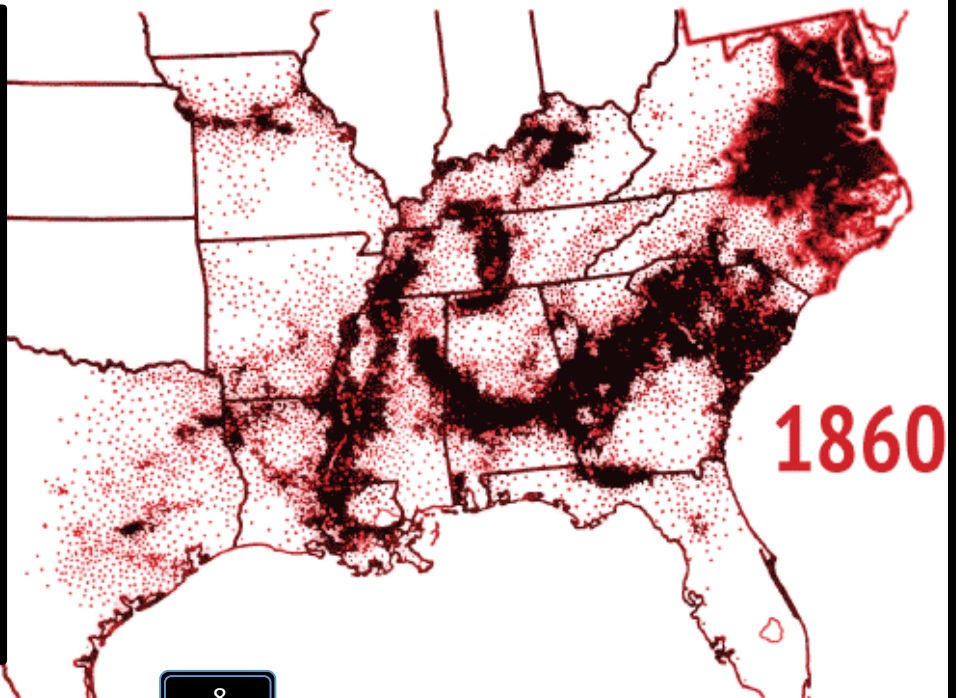
1790



Each dot represents 200 slaves

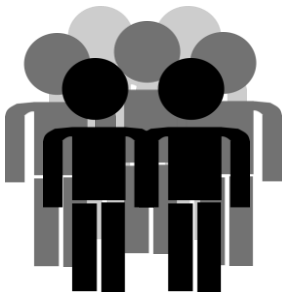
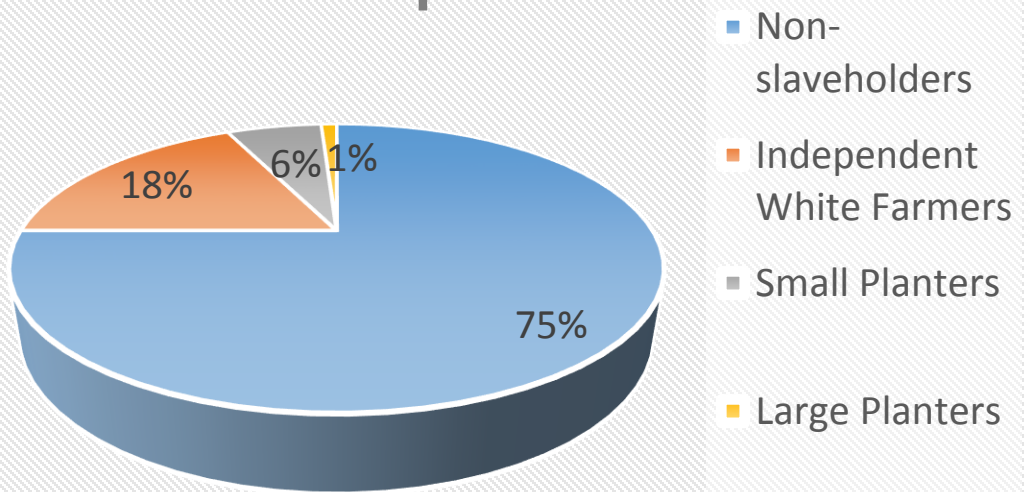
By 1860 the enslaved population had reached **3.2 million**, with more than half living in the cotton-producing states of the South.

The first federal census of 1790 counted 697,897 slaves. By 1810, there were 1.2 million slaves, a 70 % increase. Though the United States Congress outlawed the African slave trade in 1808, the domestic trade flourished, and the slave population in the U.S. nearly tripled over the next 50 years.



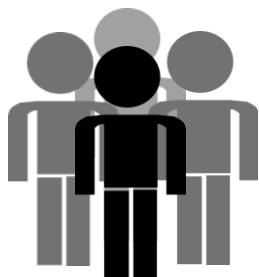
Even with the expansion of slavery, most of Southerners did not enslave Africans. Of those who did, the vast majority owned **no more than 20**. The bulk of the enormous wealth produced by slave-grown cotton rested in the hands of a few planters. Nevertheless, the nation's economy relied on the cotton industry, which was supported by millions of enslaved people.

Percentage of South's Free Population



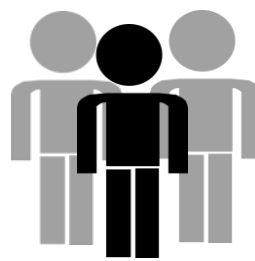
Large Planters:

10,000 families
enslaved 50-100
Africans



Small Planters:

102,000 families
enslaved 10-50
Africans



Independent Farmers:

270,000 families
enslaved <10
Africans

Non- slaveholders:

1,131,000
families

Slave Codes

Because slavery was so profitable to white plantation owners, they went to great lengths to keep the system in place. Many southern states and cities passed race-based legal codes that severely limited the activities of blacks and left the enslaved no legal redress for actions committed against them in violation of the law. Most of these laws were designed to prevent enslaved people from running away or revolting against white owners.

The Louisiana slave code was typical of other state and city codes. This code defined slaves as property that was "subject to be mortgaged" and that could be "seized and sold as real estate."



Many of the codes prohibited the enslaved from:

- Reading or writing
- Assembling in groups
- Traveling without a pass
- Buying and selling goods of any kind
- Carrying arms without permission
- Riding horses without permission



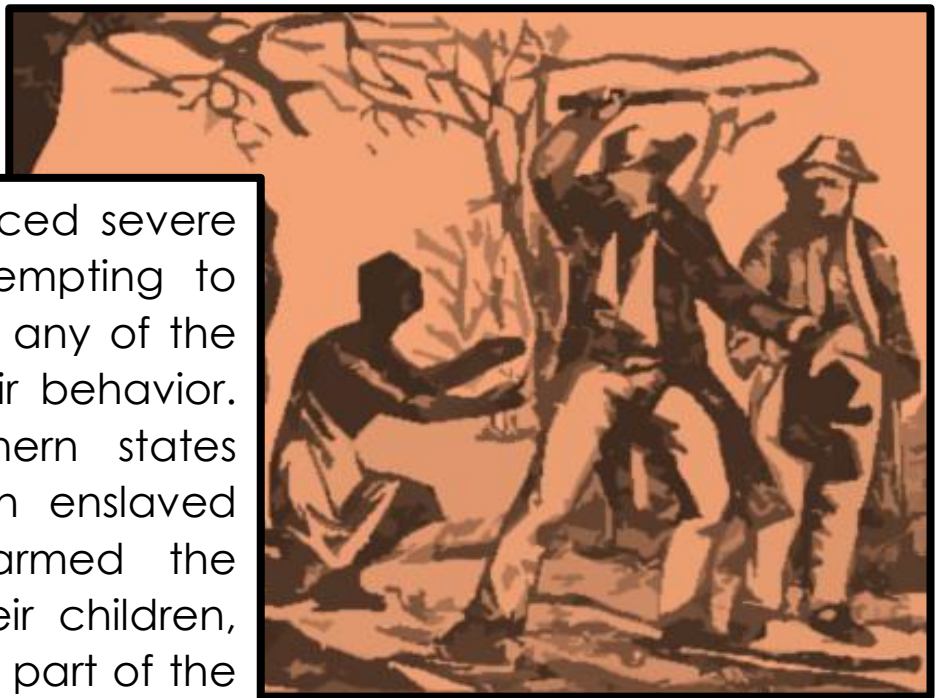
Besides prohibiting the behavior of enslaved people, the codes also restricted the actions of enslavers and free blacks. For example, Georgia passed a law in 1818 that imposed a \$1,000 fine upon any owner who freed a slave. Some states required free blacks to register with the government, pay a fee, or carry identification papers at all times. A Virginia law required enslaved men who received their freedom to leave the state within 30 days or else they could be sold back into slavery.



Both enslaved and free blacks were expected to be subservient to whites. A Louisiana law declared that any slave "owes to his master, and to all his family, a respect without bounds, and an absolute obedience, and he is consequently to execute all the orders which he receives."

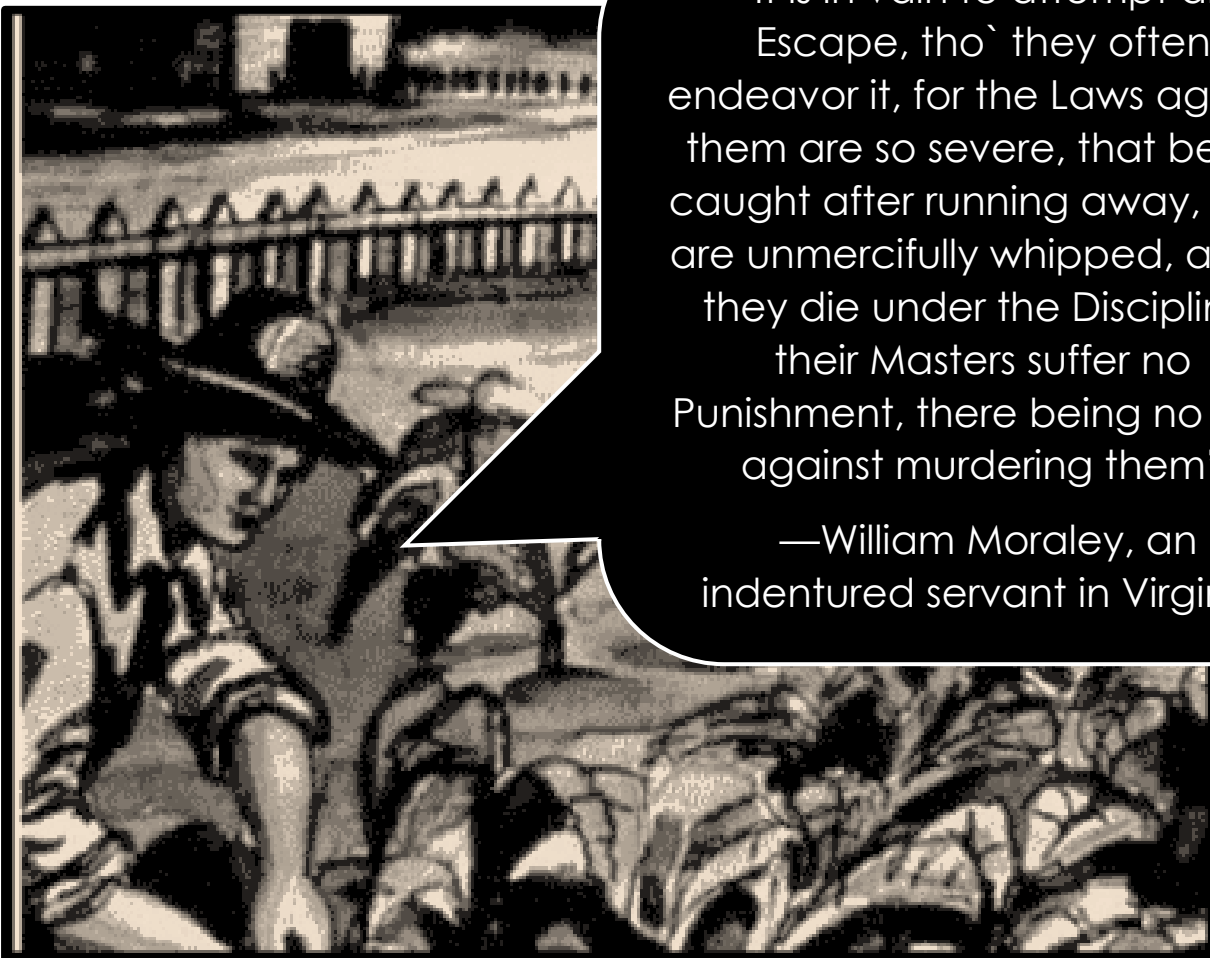
I John Herttoll of the City of
Certify that a certain female Child named Hannah
was born on the twenty eighth day of November last past
of my Mulatto Woman ~~Slave~~ named Jane
New York Aug 12. 1802
John Herttoll

Enslaved people faced severe punishment for attempting to escape or breaking any of the rules controlling their behavior. The laws of Southern states declared that if an enslaved person willingly harmed the master, mistress, their children, the overseer, or any part of the owner's property, the penalty was death.

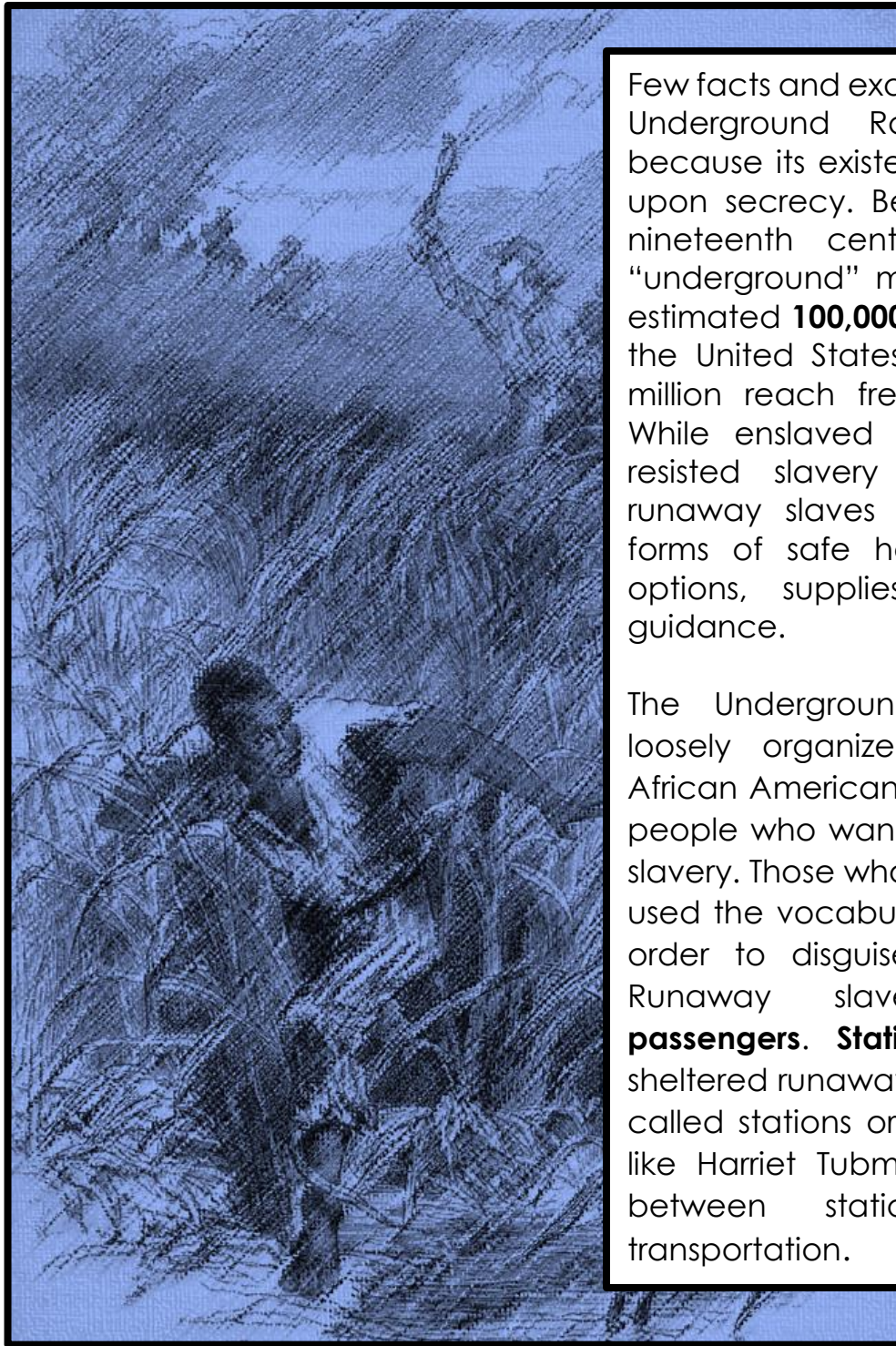


"It is in vain to attempt an Escape, tho` they often endeavor it, for the Laws against them are so severe, that being caught after running away, they are unmercifully whipped, and if they die under the Discipline, their Masters suffer no Punishment, there being no Law against murdering them"

—William Moraley, an indentured servant in Virginia

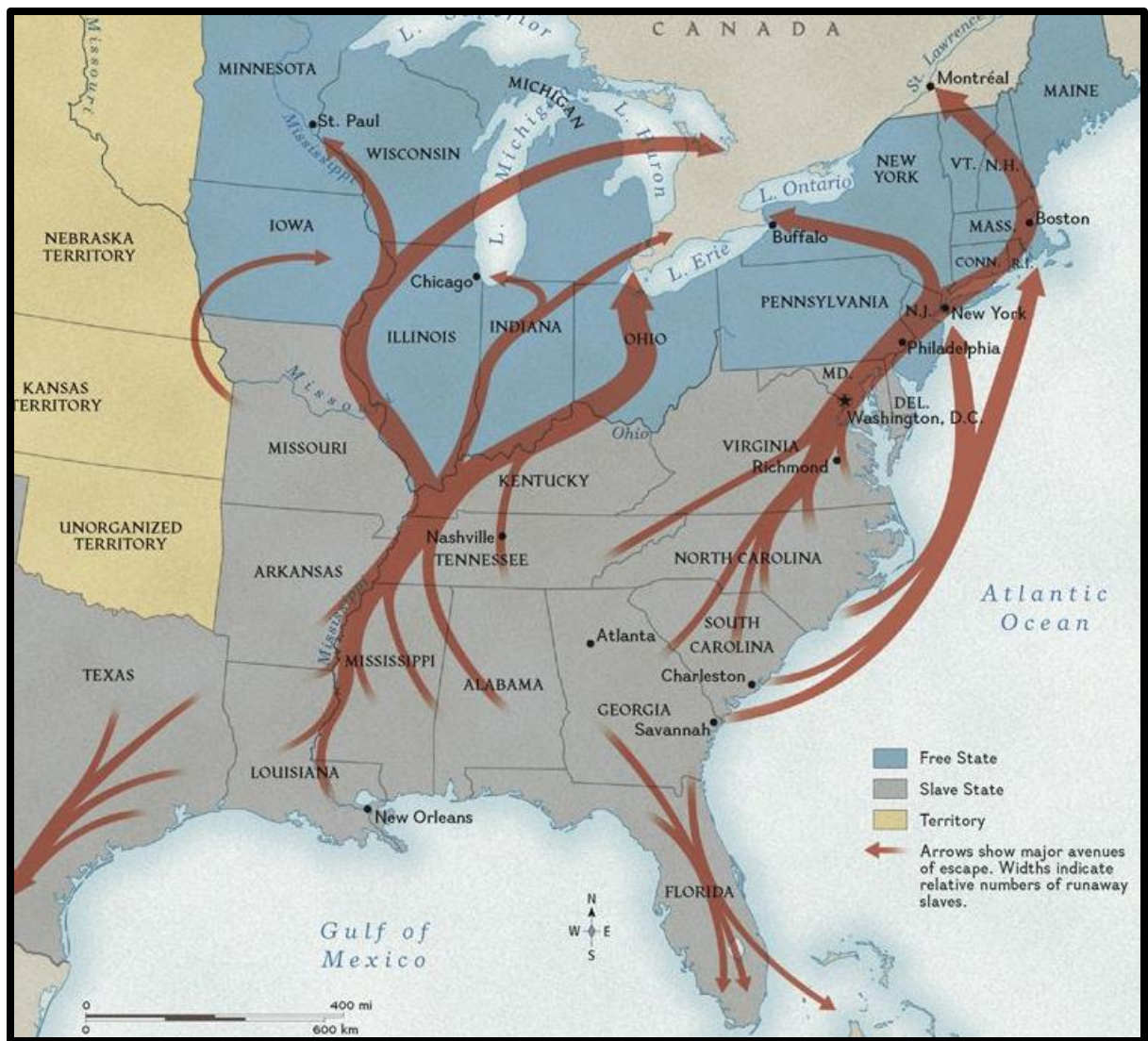


Underground Railroad Introduction



Few facts and exact statistics about the Underground Railroad are known because its existence was dependent upon secrecy. Beginning in the early nineteenth century, this secret or “underground” movement helped an estimated **100,000 enslaved Africans** in the United States out of around four million reach freedom in the North. While enslaved people had always resisted slavery by running away, runaway slaves gained help in the forms of safe houses, transportation options, supplies, and sources of guidance.

The Underground Railroad was a loosely organized network of free African Americans and **abolitionists**, or people who wanted to put an end to slavery. Those who operated the routes used the vocabulary of the railroad in order to disguise its illegal activity. Runaway slaves were called **passengers**. **Stationmasters** fed and sheltered runaways in their homes, also called stations or **depots**. **Conductors**, like Harriet Tubman, guided fugitives between stations or provided transportation.



The first goal of a runaway was to reach a state where slavery was abolished. Many of the escape routes led northward along the **Mississippi River** to the Ohio River, which formed the border between slave and free territory. Once a fugitive crossed to the free states of the North, however, he or she did not necessarily escape danger. To protect the property rights of slaveholders, Congress passed the **Fugitive Slave Law** in 1793, which required all citizens to assist in the recapture of a runaway slave or face fines or imprisonment. Widespread resistance to the law later led to the passage of the Fugitive Slave Act of **1850**, which added further provisions regarding runaways and levied even harsher punishments for interfering in their capture. As a result, some fugitives traveled as far as **Canada**, where slavery was outlawed and where officials refused U.S. requests for their return. Although Canada offered enslaved people the promise of freedom, reaching it from Southern United States was a long and dangerous process.

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