Servitude & Slavery in Antebellum VA (1800-1860)
Voluntary Servitude in Virginia

From the beginning, people came to the Virginia colony by paying for their passage and/or subsistence through voluntary servitude for from 5 to 7 years. After which, these "indentured servants", usually received severance pay and/or grants to land (from 50 to 100 ac) on the frontier in the colony.

Sometimes, they didn’t fulfill their service contracts and “ran away” (See George Washington’s Newspaper Ad from 1775).

During the 17th century, most of the white laborers in Maryland and Virginia came from England this way. Their masters were bound to feed, clothe, and house them. At the end of the allotted time, an indentured servant was to be given a new suit of clothes, tools, or money, and then freed.
FORTY DOLLARS REWARD.

Ran away from the subscriber, on the 19th instant, at night, two servant men, viz. THOMAS SPEARS, a joiner, born in Bristol, about 20 years of age, 5 feet 6 inches and an half high, slender made. He has light grey or blueish coloured eyes, a little pock marked, and freckled, with sandy coloured hair, cut short; his voice is coarse, and somewhat draulling. He took with him a coat, waistcoat, and breeches, of light brown duffil, with black horn buttons, a light coloured cloth waistcoat, old leather breeches, check and osnabrig shirts, a pair of new milled yarn stockings, a pair of old ribbed ditto, new osnabrig trowsers, and a felt hat, not much the worse for wear. WILLIAM WEBSTER, a brickmaker, born in Scotland, and talks pretty broad. He is about 5 feet 6 inches high, and well made, rather turned of 30, with light brown hair, and roundish face. He had an olive coloured coat, pretty much worn, with black horn buttons, duffil waistcoat and breeches (same as Spears's) osnabrig trowsers, and check and osnabrig shirts. They went off in a small yaul, with turpentine sides and bottom, the inside painted with a mixture of tar and red lead. Masters of vessels are cautioned against receiving of them; and the above reward is offered to any person who will deliver them at my dwellinghouse, in this county, or TWENTY DOLLARS for each, from GEORGE WASHINGTON.

Fairfax county, April 23, 1775.
White Involuntary Servitude

Some indentured servants came to the Colony by force of a COURT ORDER with expulsion from England as punishment for their crimes. This turned out to be VERY UNDESIREABLE and was prohibited in Gloucester and Middlesex counties after 1671. Unfortunately, the process continued until the Revolutionary War and was finally prohibited throughout the United States in 1788.

Other indentured servants of the laboring classes came to the Colony because they were KIDNAPPED. They had been “spirited” away from England (usually from Bristol or London); and, were called “spirits”.

All white, indentured servants, regardless of originally coming to voluntary or involuntary service, had about the same poor social status/treatment in the Colony.
Slaves 1st Introduced into Virginia in 1619

Twenty Africans were purchased from a passing Portuguese slave ship that stopped & traded slaves for supplies in Jamestown, VA.

These slaves may not have been the first, since 32 Africans were noted as being in Virginia five months earlier in a census taken at Jamestown.

By 1649, there were 300 black “bondsmen” in Virginia.
Most Africans in Virginia came from the **Bight of Biafra, the Gold Coast, and Angola**.

Illustration of the introduction of slaves into Virginia. Virginia colonists made up rules for the institution of slavery as they imported more and more slaves from Africa.
Slave Labor in Virginia

In the 1700s, the workforce in Virginia shifted from indentured servants to slave laborers. This shift was due to a decline in immigrants from Great Britain & Europe and the need for a more stable workforce in the tobacco farming industry.

[Indentured servants weren’t considered a stable workforce as they left employment at the end of their period of indenture.]

Slave imports increased after 1697 when the British Royal African Co.’s monopoly ended.
Triangular Trade

- Slaves to the Americas
- Sugar, tobacco, and cotton to Europe
- Textiles, rum, and manufactured goods to Africa
Abolishing the British Slave Trade

The triangular trade was very profitable for British merchants and most British politicians favored its continuation despite the inhumane “middle passage” where many captive Africans suffered and died horrific deaths and where voyage survivors became slaves in the Americas.
Through the tireless efforts of William Wilberforce in England over many years, the British Parliament finally abolished their slave trade in 1807; and, in 1833, they abolished slavery itself everywhere in the British Empire.
Slave Trade in Virginia

The infamous Franklin & Armfield Slave Prison, still standing on Duke Street in Alexandria, Virginia, was opened in 1828. This center, with its harbor at Alexandria, soon gained control of nearly half the sea trade in slaves between Virginia, Maryland and New Orleans. Most area slaves "sold South" were held there before being shipped to a dreaded future on a rice, cotton or indigo plantation.
Port of Alexandria with a Slave Ship in the Harbor
Another major slave trading center was located at Bermuda Hundred near City Point on the James River just below Richmond, Virginia
City Point. A deep water, sea port below the falls on the James River near Bermuda Hundred where slaves were transported from West Africa for sale at auction in Richmond, Virginia.
After 1800, servitude in Virginia was primarily performed by slaves who were imported from West Africa or by persons born into slavery as a result of the status of their parents as slaves.

A few slaves were able to obtain their freedom through the kindness of their masters who voluntarily freed them in a process known as “manumission” or by purchasing their freedom with money earned through individual enterprises outside their normal working conditions. These free slaves were known as “freed men”.

Other slaves won their freedom by “running-a-way” to free states in the North.
“Manumission” means the voluntary freeing of slaves by their owner.

An early case of this was that of George Wythe, a Virginia signer of the Declaration of Independence and the mentor of Thomas Jefferson.

In his will, Wythe elected to free his slave Lydia Broadnax and her son Michael Brown (who were rumored to be his concubine and son)

His heir, George Wythe Sweney tried to negate this will by poisoning the slaves with arsenic and accidentally poisoned his uncle George in 1806.

Sweney was tried for murder; but, he was set free because the slaves could not give testimony against him in Virginia’s courts.
The largest personal act of manumission in US history was that of Robert “Councilor” Carter III of Nomini Hall (grandson of Robert “King” Carter – the wealthiest man in America.)

He freed 452 of his slaves over a period of time before and after his death. He also provided for their survival by renting them land to farm and live on.

Carter moved to his wife’s home in Baltimore, MD to avoid criticism from his neighbors for these acts.
At “Israel Hill” on the Appomattox River in Prince Edward Co., another experiment in manumission took place. In his 1796 will, **Richard Randolph** (who had inherited a plantation on the James River at “Jordan’s Point” and was a nephew of Richard Bland) freed 90 of his slaves. By 1810, they were freed by his heirs; and, thereafter, successfully lived among whites, established farms, plied skilled trades, and carried freight on the Appomattox River in flat-bottom “bateaux” down to Petersburg.
John Randolph of Roanoke was a wealthy planter and US Senator from VA (1825-1827). After his death in 1833, he willed “that all his slaves be freed” and provided money for their transport to another State as required by VA Law since 1806. Over 380 “Randolph slaves” were settled in Rumley, Ohio.
In 1820, the US Congress passed “The Missouri Compromise” which prohibited slavery in the Unorganized Missouri Territory of the Great Plains (dark green); but, permitted it in the state of Missouri (yellow) and in the Arkansas Territory (lower blue area).
Liberia (West African, Black-separatist State)

In 1822, the *American Colonization Society*, which favored gradual freedom for slaves and separation of blacks and whites, identified Liberia on the coast of West-Africa as a place to send freed African-American slaves.

On July 26, 1847, the “Americo-Liberian” settlers declared the independence of the Republic of Liberia.

These settlers regarded Africa as a “Promised Land”, but they did not integrate well into an African society.
Local Africans and British colonial authorities in neighboring Sierra Leone considered Liberia’s new settlers as “Americans”. The symbols of their state — its flag, motto, and seal — and the form of government that they chose reflected their American background and experience.
Lott Cary (1780-Nov.10, 1828) was an African American slave, born in Charles City Co., VA.

He became a free man, a Baptist minister, and a physician in Richmond, VA; and, he was instrumental in founding the Colony of Liberia in West Africa.

He also was the first American Baptist missionary to Africa.
Joseph Jenkins Roberts

In 1829, Joseph’s family moved from Norfolk, VA to Liberia and established a trading store in Monrovia (which became the capitol city of Liberia named after US President Monroe).

Roberts became Liberia's Lieutenant Governor in 1839; and afterwards, he served as its first Governor (1841-1847). He helped Liberia win its independence in 1847.

In 1848, he became the 1st President of Liberia.
In 1799, the slaves of Saint-Domingue (now the country of Haiti) rose up against their French masters and through a bloody revolution gained their freedom. This had three major impacts: (1) the French left the Americas and sold their Louisiana Territory to the United States for $15 million; (2) the Haitian uprising scared southern slave masters who sought and got tougher laws further restricting the activities of their slaves; and, (3) it inspired revolts of slaves in South Carolina and Virginia.
Slave Revolution in Saint-Domingue
Slave Revolts in Virginia

Slaves throughout the United States were treated as property, they suffered physical abuse, and their activities were controlled by many restrictions intended to keep them in bondage (e.g., no education, no freedom of movement or assembly, etc.)

In the antebellum South, major slave revolts resulted in even tougher restrictions on the activities of slaves. In Virginia, these revolts included “Gabriel’s Uprising” and “Nat Turner’s Rebellion.”
“Gabriel’s Uprising”

Gabriel was born a slave in Henrico Co. and grew up to be a blacksmith. As a large, intelligent man, he was a natural leader among the slaves in the Richmond area. He was influenced by the successful slave uprising in Saint-Domingue and by the “freedom rhetoric” of the American Revolution.

In 1799, he stole a pig and bit off the ear of a white overseer. He was branded, spent a month in jail, and, for revenge, he developed a plan to take the VA governor hostage and seize Capitol Square in Richmond.
Gabriel’s plot thickened as he and others recruited many followers among the slaves, free blacks and poor whites in the Richmond and Petersburg area. A rain storm delayed their planned uprising; and, a few slaves told their masters about the plot which then Governor Monroe put down by arresting most of the conspirators.

Without benefit of a jury, the plot’s leaders and 65 slaves in all were tried. **Gabriel and 26 other plotters were executed by hanging**, some of the conspirators were transported to other states, some were pardoned, and a few were found not-guilty.
“Nat Turner’s Rebellion”

Nat Turner was a slave of Southampton Co. He often conducted Baptist services and preached the Bible to his fellow slaves, who dubbed him as "The Prophet". He “taught rebellion” in secret, outlawed religious meetings with slaves.

In 1831, he led a violent slave rebellion killing about 60 whites.
Nat Turner was captured by Benjamin Phipps (1831)

He was tried and hanged for his crimes.
Mason-Dixon Line*

Slaves in the South learned that their freedom could be found among people living North of the “Mason-Dixon” line (i.e., in Ohio, Pennsylvania, Delaware, and other northern states.)

*The Mason–Dixon Line is a surveyed line between four states, forming part of the borders of PA, MD, DE, and WV (then part of VA). It was surveyed between 1763 and 1767 by Charles Mason and Jeremiah Dixon in the resolution of a border dispute between British colonies in Colonial America.
“Running-a-Way” to Freedom

It was very hard or almost impossible for slaves to get away. In the first place, they didn’t know much about the country except for their place of bondage. Through word of mouth (i.e., in stories and songs) they learned how to get to freedom in the northern states.

To go North by night, run-a-ways followed the North Star that was up about 5x on a line from stars in the cup of the “big dipper.”
Follow “The Drinking Gourd” (i.e., the “Big Dipper”)  
Folk Song Lyrics

When the sun goes back  
and the first quail calls  
Follow the drinking gourd  
The old man is a-waitin' for  
to carry you to freedom  
Follow the drinking gourd

Chorus  
Follow the drinking gourd,  
follow the drinking gourd  
For the old man is a-waitin'  
to carry you to freedom  
Follow the drinking gourd

The river bed makes a mighty fine road,  
Dead trees to show you the way  
And it's left foot, peg foot, traveling on  
Follow the drinking gourd

The river ends between two hills  
Follow the drinking gourd  
There's another river on the other side  
Follow the drinking gourd

I thought I heard the angels say  
Follow the drinking gourd  
The stars in the heavens  
gonna show you the way  
Follow the drinking gourd
Abolitionist Movement

The Society for the Relief of Free Negroes Unlawfully Held in Bondage was the first American abolition society, formed in 1775 in Philadelphia, primarily by Quakers who had strong religious objections to slavery. The society ceased to operate during the Revolution and the British occupation of Philadelphia; it was reorganized in 1784, with Benjamin Franklin as its first president.
Abolitionist Societies

Early abolitionist groups included: the Society of Friends (i.e., Quakers), the Pennsylvania Antislavery Society, and the New York Manumission Society (NYMS). Thanks to the NYMS, NY abolished slavery in 1799. In terms of numbers of slaves, this was the largest emancipation in American history (before 1863).

At the Constitutional Convention of 1787, agreement was reached that allowed the Federal government to abolish the international slave trade after 20 years. By that time, all the states had passed individual laws abolishing or severely limiting the trade, all but Georgia outlawed the slave trade by 1798. And, in 1804, New Jersey was the last northern state to abolish slavery.

The importation of slaves into the United States was officially banned by Congress on January 1, 1808.
Abolitionist Leaders

In the 1830s, William Lloyd Garrison demanded that slave-owners repent immediately, and set up a system of immediate emancipation. Together with Theodore Weld, an evangelical minister, Garrison formed the American Anti-Slavery Society in 1833.

William Lloyd Garrison edited “The Liberator”
Frederick Douglass was born a slave in Talbot Co., MD, near Hillsboro.

He was an African-American abolitionist, editor, orator, author, statesman and reformer.

He escaped from slavery in 1838.

In 1841, he attended one of Garrison’s antislavery meetings in Boston and gave a powerful impromptu speech which began his career as an abolitionist.
Other leaders in the abolitionist movement took a more active role in helping slaves run a way to freedom in the North. Most slaves ran from Southern states to freedom through the border states of Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Delaware.

Metaphorically, these escape routes were like the new railroads of the period, with stops along the way called “stations”, and helpers called “conductors”. And, the whole effort was conducted in secret (i.e., “underground”).

Underground Railroad Monument (1977) by Cameron Armstrong located at Oberlin College in Ohio
Underground RR Routes to Freedom in the Northern States and Canada
William Still, often called "The Father of the Underground Railroad", helped many hundreds of slaves to escape (as many as 60 a month), sometimes hiding them in his Philadelphia home. He kept careful records, including short biographies of the people he helped. He published accounts of his work in the book *The Underground Railroad* in 1872.
Thomas Garrett (1789-1871) lived in Delaware and worked tirelessly with his “Dear Friend” William Still to help runaway slaves find freedom in the Northern states and Canada. This activity was against the law and he was punished by the courts in Delaware for his activities.
Harriet Tubman was the most active “conductor” on the underground railroad. She made many trips into the South and escorted runaway slaves to freedom in the Northern states and Canada. She worked with Garrett and Still on routes through Delaware, NJ, and Pennsylvania.
Ohio was a state that gave sanctuary to many slaves who crossed over the river from Virginia and Kentucky. On this route, several of the important “stations” were in Ripley, Ohio.

Rankin was a Presbyterian minister, educator and abolitionist. Upon moving to Ripley in 1822, he became known as one of Ohio's first and most active "conductors" on the Underground Railroad. Other abolitionists were influenced by Rankin's writings and work in the anti-slavery movement.
John P. Parker (1827 - 1900) was an African American inventor, industrialist and abolitionist who secretly helped many slaves cross the Ohio river to freedom in the North. His house in Ripley, Ohio is now a National Historic Landmark.

Parker was born a slave in Virginia, the son of a white father and slave mother. As an adult, he earned and saved enough money to buy his own freedom for $1,800.
In 1852, Harriet Beecher Stowe authored the famous abolitionist book “Uncle Tom’s Cabin” which became a stage play and later was made into a motion picture.

In the dramatic ending, Eliza and her baby escape to freedom across the Ohio river in Winter like many slaves did in their real life dramas.
The Stage Play was a very popular “Musical” of the day
Amistad’s African Passengers Mutiny & are Tried for Murder (1839)

The Slave-ship Amistad in the Caribbean
The Africans Mutiny at Sea
The Trial in Boston
After the famous trial in which former President John Quincy Adams served as their legal counsel, black prisoners from the Amistad “mutiny” were found to have been illegally kidnapped from their homes in Africa. They were set free and transported back to Africa.

John Quincy Adams (1848)
Freed Prisoners Return to their home in Mendeland (i.e., on the West Coast of Africa)
Henry “Box” Brown was a slave in Louisa County where he lived for 33 years. On the death of his master in 1849, he was sent to work in a tobacco factory; but, he was NOT content to be a slave. He had himself sealed in a small wooden box and shipped from Richmond by railroad train and stage coach to friends and freedom in Philadelphia, PA.

He later settled in Massachusetts and traveled around the Northern states speaking against slavery. Eventually, he was forced to seek asylum in Great Britain, because of the Fugitive Slave Act.
Fugitive Slave Act of 1850

The Fugitive Slave Act was passed by the US Congress on Sept. 18, 1850 as part of another “Compromise”. By this Act, any freed blacks living in the North had to be returned to their masters in the South.

The severity of this measure led to gross abuses and defeated its purpose: the number of abolitionists increased, the operations of the Underground Railroad became more efficient, and new Personal Liberty Laws were enacted in several Northern states.

In 1854, runaway slave *Anthony Burns* was returned to VA from Boston under provisions of the Fugitive Slave Act. There was a very public court trial and the publicity around it sparked protests from abolitionist groups throughout the North.
Opponents of slavery, such as African American leader Harriet Tubman, treated the Fugitive Slave Act as just another complication to their underground RR activities.

After 1850, an important impact of the Act was to make the neighboring country of Canada the main destination of choice for runaway slaves.
Dred Scott Case in the Supreme Court

Dred Scott

Chief Justice Taney
The plaintiff [Dred Scott]... with his wife and children, were held as slaves by the defendant [Sanford], in the State of Missouri; and Scott brought this action in the Circuit Court of the United States for [Missouri] to assert the entitlement of he and his family to freedom. The declaration was simply that he and the defendant Sanford were citizens of different States; and, that neither was entitled to hold the other as “property”.

The Court held that Dred Scott, his wife and children were “not citizens” and that they were the same as any other “property”.
After the Supreme Court’s ruling in the Dred-Scott case, most abolitionists lost hope that slavery could be ended by any peaceful process. John Brown was among those abolitionists who wanted “freedom now”. His raid on the armory was intended to spark a violent uprising against slavery in the South.
John Brown was captured, tried, and executed for “Treason” against the state of Virginia.
By 1860, slavery in Virginia had undergone dramatic change from its early plantation model in which slaves traded their labor for the support of all their basic needs (i.e., “institutional support”).

The early plantation model has been portrayed as a benign, even peaceful arrangement between a faithful servant and a benevolent master. At worst, it was the punishing imprisonment of slaves by masters who were in constant fear of rebellion or retribution from their slaves.
With the building of better roads and turnpikes, canals, and railroads in the mid-1800s, Virginia developed a less rural and more industrial economy. In this economy, many slaves were hired out by their masters and sent to work on building projects, in the salt and coal mines, and in other urban business activities.
By 1860 and unlike other states in the “deep South” (e.g., Georgia) where cotton economies depended on many plantation slave laborers for their survival, Virginia’s plantation activities were still focused on growing tobacco in the Eastern part of the state (i.e., Piedmont and Tidewater counties). In western Virginia (i.e., now the state of West Virginia), agriculture was mostly pastoral and in grain crops supported by modern farm machinery (e.g., the McCormick reaper) which required less laborers and therefore fewer slaves.

The failure of slavery to become as vital and profitable to the western Virginia economy led many to conclude that slavery actually harmed the economy and discouraged immigrants from settling in the region.
Distribution of White Slave Holders in Virginia by 1860

Percentage of white families owning slaves:
- over 60
- 40-59
- 20-39
- 10-19
- 1-9
Slave ownership in Virginia was unevenly distributed throughout the State.

By 1860, there were 490,308 slaves (approximately 30% of the total population) in Eastern Virginia belonging to 38,308 slaveholders, averaging over 10 slaves per owner. In Western Virginia (including the Eastern Panhandle counties), 18,451 slaves (only 4% of the population) belonged to 3,820 slaveholders, or less than 6 slaves per owner.

In both regions of the state of Virginia, most slaveholders owned fewer than five slaves and many whites owned no slaves at all.
Emancipation Proclamation of September 22, 1862 (i.e., Abraham Lincoln’s executive order freeing all slaves living in states, like Virginia, who were in “rebellion” from the Union of the United States of America.)

The Proclamation didn’t free slaves living in the North or in the border states of KY, MO, MD, DE, or WV.

The Proclamation’s first effect was for slaves that had already escaped to the Union side, but as the Union Army conquered the Confederacy, thousands of slaves were freed each day until nearly 4 million slaves in the South were freed by July of 1865.
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