

## 2. FROM RESISTANCE TO RECONSTRUCTION, 1776-1877

### a) The word “*slavery*” in the U.S. Constitution



Despite its importance as a political, legal, and ethical issue in American history, the word *slavery* does not appear in the U.S. Constitution of 1787. The first reference, curiously enough, does not occur until the Thirteenth Amendment, adopted in 1865, which abolished it! Despite the delegates' deliberate avoidance of the term, however, the reality of slavery was the dominating factor in the convention which prepared the Constitution as the fundamental law under which the country would be governed. In the telling phrase of the scholar **Cornel West**, slavery was the serpent coiled around the legs of the table on which the Constitution was drafted.

The basic division between the representatives who met in Philadelphia in the hot summer of 1787 was that some came from states that continued to enslave African-Americans, and some from states that no longer did. What united them, besides the hope that they could successfully forge a charter for the new nation, was a deeply conservative belief in the sacredness of private property, and a strongly elitist suspicion of common people, black and white.

The most contested convention question was how to count slaves, who of course could not vote, when representation in the lower house of Congress was to be based on population. At the time, there were some half-million African-Americans. They constituted 20 percent of the national population, and 90 percent of them lived in bondage in the Southern states. The compromise, adopted July 12, 1787, was to count each slave as three-fifths of a person.

This decision was momentous, because it gave the white South an entirely disproportionate strength in the House of Representatives and in the Electoral College, which meant that slaveholders would effectively control the federal government until the Civil War. Early white abolitionists, particularly the ideologically purist Garrisonians, perceived the Constitution as an obviously proslavery document. **William Lloyd Garrison** personally burned a copy in Worcester, Massachusetts, at an antislavery meeting. Integrationist African-Americans, however, struggling for their rights as citizens, tended to look to the Constitution as a great charter of liberty, promising and guaranteeing the rights they were denied, and they held up the Constitution as a promise to be fulfilled. This was clearly the position, for example, of **Frederick Douglass** and **Martin Luther King Jr.**

👉 **For more, see:**

Wiki Answers :

[http://wiki.answers.com/Q/Is\\_the\\_word\\_slavery\\_in\\_the\\_US\\_Constitution](http://wiki.answers.com/Q/Is_the_word_slavery_in_the_US_Constitution)

U.S. Constitution Online :

<http://www.usconstitution.net/constnot.html#slavery>

**"Section 1.** Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime where of the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction.

**Section 2.** Congress shall have the power to enforce this article by appropriate legislation."

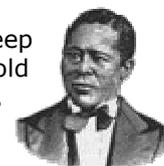
*13th Amendment to the US Constitution*

### b) The Underground Railroad

The *Underground Railroad* was an informal network of secret routes and safe houses used by 19th century Black slaves in the United States to escape to free states and Canada with the aid of abolitionists who were sympathetic to their cause. The term is also applied to the abolitionists who aided the fugitives. Other routes led to Mexico or overseas. The *Underground Railroad* was at its height between 1810 and 1850, with a great number of people escaping enslavement (mainly to Canada) via the network.

The pre-war network of black and white abolitionists and safe houses that provided clandestine escape routes for fugitive Southern slaves on their way to the North and Canada, was secret and illegal. It therefore kept no records. There is no way of knowing, then, just how many African-Americans traveled this road from slavery to freedom, but it is generally thought to be at least one hundred thousand. In addition, a great many slaves from Texas and adjoining areas crossed the border into Mexico, but there is little documentation at all about this route, and many people are still unaware of its having existed.

**William Still**, a prominent black Underground Railroad conductor in Philadelphia, did keep records of those who passed through his station, and his account, first published in 1871, is a gold mine of stories about the men, women, and children who delivered themselves from bondage. One of the most unusual was Henry Brown of Richmond, Virginia, who had himself nailed into a crate and shipped via the Adams Express Company to Philadelphia. Carried by train, ferry, and wagon for twenty-six hours, the large box arrived at the antislavery office at 107 North Fifth Street.



The package was opened, and to an astonished audience, Brown emerged, reached out his hand and said, "How do you do, gentlemen?" He was forever after known as "Box" Brown.

Perhaps the most dramatic of all slave narratives is that of Ellen and William Craft, a slave couple from Georgia. She was fair-skinned enough to pass for white, and she disguised herself in men's clothes as a young Southern gentleman. William Craft pretended to be her faithful black body servant. Claiming to have a toothache, she wore a scarf to hide her beardless face, and pretending to have a broken wrist, she wore her arm in a sling, since she couldn't write. They traveled by train and stayed in hotels in Charleston, Richmond, and Baltimore. After several dangerously close calls and almost being detected, they safely crossed out of slave territory into Philadelphia. The Crafts later told their story in a book published in London in 1860 whose title symbolizes the brave and daring enterprise of the 100,000 who risked every thing in acts of self-liberation: *Running a Thousand Miles for Freedom*.



"There was one of two things I had right to, liberty or death. If I could not have one, I would have the other, for no man should take me alive."  
Harriet Tubman

**For more, see:**

National Geographic : <http://www.nationalgeographic.com/railroad/j1.html>

### c) Harriet Tubman

She became the best-known conductor on the clandestine Underground Railroad, making over a dozen dangerous incursions into the slave South and guiding over three hundred African-Americans from slavery to freedom in the North and Canada. Illiterate but fully knowledgeable of the Bible, she used scriptural images as cover and referred to the slavocracy as Egypt, while slaves throughout the South knew her by the code name Moses. As the result of her effectiveness as a resistance fighter, the white South put a bounty of \$40,000 on her head, but her rescue operations, which sometimes required walking five miles through enemy territory, were so imaginative and so courageously executed that she was never captured.

Tubman knew the secret routes from South to, North, and the safe houses of the antislavery people where runaways could be hidden during her perilous journeys. There were warning signs, like colored lanterns, and passwords, like "*A friend with friends*" as the proper response to "*Who's there?*" when she knocked on the door of an abolitionist. She traveled in various disguises, and communicated with slaves through double meanings, uncomprehended by whites, in Bible verses and slave song lyrics. She never revealed her plans, knowing that some slaves could be tortured into confessing what they knew about escapes.

She traveled by night. She drugged babies to keep them from crying. She hired children to tear down descriptive "Wanted" posters she couldn't read herself. Under suspicion in a Southern town, she once bought a real railroad ticket, one for a train heading further south! She carried a revolver, not to fight off pursuing slavecatchers, but to threaten any of her own passengers who became too exhausted or too fearful to go on. She would press her pistol against a recalcitrant head, and quietly say, "*Live North or die here.*" They always decided to keep going.

As the Civil War broke out, Tubman made her last rescue mission, but in 1861 she went South again, this time to work with the contrabands, that is, the thousands of slaves who ran away to join the Union army. She also served as a federal spy. On June, 2, 1863, Tubman literally exercised her military generalship by helping command a Union campaign in South Carolina. It was an astonishing expedition which destroyed a million dollars worth of rebel stores, cotton, and property, and liberated over eight hundred slaves.

The United States government never recognized Tubman's extraordinary contributions to the war, but Britain's Queen Victoria read of her exploits and sent her a silver medal.



"I never ran my train off the track and I never lost a passenger."  
"Every time I saw a white man I was afraid of being carried away ... Slavery is the next thing to hell."

Harriet Tubman

**For more, see:**

Harriet Tubman : <http://www.nyhistory.com/harriettubman/life.htm>

## d) The slave revolts

What we know primarily about African-American slave revolts is that there were many more of them, and they were much more important, than the conventional history books generally admit. The planter class minimized slave rebellions for two reasons: theoretically, because revolution contradicted their myth of contented and docile slaves; and, pragmatically, because the masters were deeply fearful that news of any one "servile insurrection", as they were called, might inspire others.

As a result of this silence, it was not until Herbert Aptheker's revolutionary 1938 doctoral dissertation at Columbia University, *Negro Slave Revolts in the United States, 1526-1860*, that the astonishing fact was established and documented that there were some 250 substantive rebellions. Historians could thus begin to correct the official view of the happy and tractable slave. Revolts were not limited to the plantation South, but also took place in the North, whose slavery was often viewed as less harsh. There were major "conspiracies" in New York City in 1712 and again in 1741, for which over sixty African-Americans were punished by death.

If nothing else, the historical record makes clear the slaves' detestation of their situation. Of course not every slave was a revolutionary, and some were even brainwashed and broken into accepting the system that dishonored them. But overall, the desire for freedom was not only never extinguished, it existed always just below all the surfaces, and it burst into flame over and over again, including times for which we have no knowledge because there are no records. As Aptheker's inclusive dates indicate, rebellion began as early as 1526 among slaves in a Spanish settlement in what is now South Carolina, and extended until the Civil War some 335 years later.



Born about 1775, **Gabriel Prosser** was a tall, dark-skinned coachman owned by Thomas Prosser, a tavern keeper in Henrico County, Virginia. Influenced by revolt in San Domingo as well as by tensions between the United States and France, Prosser, along with his wife, his two brothers and a friend, planned a large-scale rebellion. At least a thousand slaves, were to advance in three military columns on August 30, 1800, and take the city of Richmond. The first object was to seize arms and ammunition. Their motto was that of San Domingo: "Death or Liberty." The revolt failed. The slaves were betrayed, and a terrific rainstorm, one of the worst ever to bit the area, made the roads impassable. Some forty African-Americans were arrested and killed. Prosser, in hiding, was again betrayed. He was captured and hanged October 7.

An even larger insurrection, in fact the largest of them all, was planned for Bastille Day 1822 in Charleston, South Carolina, by **Denmark Vesey**, an ancient slave who had won \$1,500 in a lottery and purchased his freedom for \$600. With the rest of the money he set himself up a business as a carpenter. Vesey's origins are obscure. He was familiar with Africa and the Caribbean, and may in fact have been born on St. Thomas around 1767.

With a group of slaves, many of them literate and skilled crafts-persons, Vesey now began to plan an armed revolt. Operating with the maximum secrecy, Vesey and the other leaders recruited for revolt some 10,000 slaves in and around Charleston. They avoided sharing their plans with house servants because they were suspicious of their closer ties to their white masters. Not unlike other slave plans, this one was also betrayed, and by a domestic, just as Vesey feared. But all the others kept silence and Vesey advanced the date, from July 15 to June 16. The crisis might have passed, but they were betrayed again. Over 125 blacks were arrested and hanged, including Denmark Vesey.

Prosser's and Vesey's "conspiracies," as history labels them, reveal the little-known breadth and depth of slave uprisings. Revolts ranged in size from one or two isolated slaves in the countryside to literally thousands in urban areas. While some were undoubtedly reacting to cruel personal treatment, most had a grand and international vision of black liberation. A few revolts were quick and spontaneous, but most were the result of careful thought, intelligent planning, and inspired leadership. Behind them was a full knowledge of the American Revolution and its ideals, as well as the successful struggle of Africans in Haiti. The killing of whites was seldom arbitrary, with Quakers, Methodists, and others unsympathetic to slavery or decent to slaves, spared.



☞ **For more, see:**

Slave rebellions :

<http://www.wsu.edu/~dee/DIASPORA/REBEL.HTM>

The Gabriel Prosser slave revolt :

<http://www.hartford-hwp.com/archives/45a/406.html>

"I heard a loud noise in the heavens and the Spirit instantly appeared to me and said the Serpent was loosened, and Christ had laid down the Yoke he had borne for the sins of man, and that I should take it on and fight against the Serpent, for the time was fast approaching when the first should be last and the last should be first."

Nat Turner

## e) The Fugitive Slave Law of 1850



In 1850 Congress passed the Fugitive Slave Law. Only four congressmen voted against the measure. The law stated that in future any federal marshal who did not arrest a suspected runaway slave could be fined \$1,000. People suspected of being a runaway slave could be arrested without warrant and turned over to a claimant on nothing more than his sworn testimony of ownership. A suspected black slave could not ask for a jury trial nor testify on his or her behalf.

Any person aiding a runaway slave by providing shelter, food or any other form of assistance was liable to six months' imprisonment and a \$1,000 fine. Those officers capturing a fugitive slave were entitled to a fee and this encouraged some officers to kidnap free Negroes and sell them to slave-owners. Frederick Douglass, William Lloyd Garrison and others led the fight against the law. Even moderate anti-slavery leaders such as Arthur Tappan declared he was now willing to disobey the law and as result helped finance the Underground Railroad.

 **For more, see:**

Wikipedia – Fugitive Slave Act : [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fugitive\\_Slave\\_Act](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fugitive_Slave_Act)

## f) Christiana, Pennsylvania, 1851

There was widespread opposition in the North to the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850, with dramatic acts of defiance like the rescue from slave catchers in Syracuse, New York, of an escaped slave named Jerry. But the most significant resistance, and the first bloodshed, came from a small community of militant African-Americans on September 11, 1851, in the southeast Pennsylvania village of Christiana, where most of the residents were white Quakers.

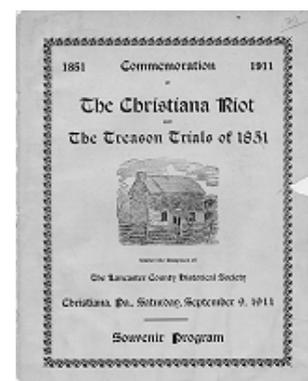
Edward Gorsuch, a Methodist class leader but a slave owner in Baltimore County, Maryland, heard through an informer that four slaves who had escaped from his possession were living in Christiana with William and Eliza Ann Parker, both of whom were runaways themselves. Gorsuch obtained a federal warrant under the Fugitive Slave Act in Philadelphia, and with a group of friends and relatives proceeded to Christiana, accompanied by a U. S. marshal.

A friend of William Still, the Philadelphia Underground Railroad conductor, reported Gorsuch's plans to William Parker, who insisted the group stand their ground rather than flee. At the Parkers' house, a Quaker urged Gorsuch to give up and go home, but Gorsuch swore, *"I will have my property or go to hell."* The confrontation was just a quarrel, until Gorsuch threatened to set fire to the house'. At that point Eliza Parker sounded an alarm by blowing the dinner horn. A group of sympathetic black people appeared, fighting broke out, and Gorsuch was shot. He was then stabbed to death by several of the black women.

The paper of nearby Lancaster, Pennsylvania, headlined, "CIVIL WAR-THE FIRST BLOW STRUCK". The Parkers and Gorsuch's runaways quickly departed for Canada, where African-American abolitionist Frederick Douglass helped them across the border from Rochester to Toronto. President Millard Fillmore sent a company of marines to Christiana, along with a group of 40 Philadelphia policemen. They arrested 38 suspects, 35 of whom were African-American. Canada refused to extradite the fugitives.

The state began its case by charging one of the white Quakers, Castner Hanway, with treason, and bringing him to trial. The defense ridiculed the prosecution by asking just how three pacifist Quakers and a handful of penniless blacks armed with corn cutters could be viewed as conducting war against the United States. The case aroused enormous sympathy among free black people throughout the North, who raised funds for the defense. Hanway was acquitted and the state dropped the charges against everyone else.

In fact, however, "three pacifist Quakers and a handful of penniless blacks" had declared war on the United States through their armed resistance to a law they considered unjust. The "Christiana Riot," as history calls it, enraged the slaveholding South and strengthened its determination to protect slavery at any price. At the same time, the incident at Christiana radicalized some Northern whites. Most important, it showed many African-Americans that only force could guarantee their freedom and safety.



"The fruits of slavery and of the excitement rashly gotten up by those who denominate themselves the 'friends' of the Negroes, are beginning to ripen. The first murder fruit that has fallen in our Country from this tree of civil discord and evil, is one that has thrown the people into a fever heat of indignation."

*"Civil War, First Blow Struck" Saturday Express, Lancaster, Pennsylvania [September 13], 1851*

 **For more, see:**

Christiana, 1851 : <http://www.dickinson.edu/departments/hist/NEHworkshops/NEH/resource/christianaDocs.htm>

## g) Was slavery extended into the new territories?



The Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854 was another unhappy compromise in the constant effort to reconcile a country that was half slave and half free. What precipitated the issue in 1854 was the question of the status of enslaved African-Americans in newly formed territories. The slaveholding South wanted to expand the area where blacks could be held in bondage. The non-slaveholding North wanted to restrict slavery to the states where it was already established.

The act created the territories of Kansas and Nebraska out of a portion of the Louisiana Purchase of 1803, but it left the question of whether they would be slave or free up to the "popular sovereignty" of the areas' white residents. While this sounded democratic, in fact it repealed the Missouri Compromise of 1820, which had prohibited slavery north of Missouri's southern border. The act therefore opened the possibility that these new territories might later enter the union as slave states. Opponents criticized Congress for abandoning both its authority to determine where slavery would exist, and its power to stop slavery's spread.

Antislavery people fought hard but unsuccessfully against ratification. Senator Edward Everett of Massachusetts introduced a motion to Congress signed by three thousand ministers opposed to slavery's extension. The act was passed, however, and Kansas soon became a bloody battlefield. Abolitionists from New England started an Emigrant Aid Society to encourage antislavery colonists, while proslavery "Border Ruffians" from Missouri entered the territory to oppose them. In addition to this frontier conflict, on the national scene the act, helped split the Democratic Party and so contributed to the rise of the Republicans as an antislavery coalition.

👉 **For more, see:**

Kansas-Nebraska Act : [http://library.thinkquest.org/CR0215469/kansas-nebraska\\_act.htm](http://library.thinkquest.org/CR0215469/kansas-nebraska_act.htm)

## h) "Uncle's Tom cabin", a publishing antislavery phenomenon



**Harriet Beecher Stowe's** novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, which appeared in 1852, not only radically altered the world's view of Southern slavery, but made publishing history by becoming the most popular title of the nineteenth century. Stowe (1811 - 1896) was a member of a prominent family of Congregational ministers. Her father, Lyman Beecher, was a firebrand for Calvinism; her brother, **Henry Ward Beecher**, pastor of Brooklyn's fashionable Church of the Pilgrims, was probably the most notable orator of the day; other brothers and sisters were involved in churches, schools, and abolitionism; and her husband, Calvin Stowe, was a well-known biblical researcher.

Clearly, Stowe came from a family and social environment that was responsible, religious, and reformist. The whole family, was somehow able to anticipate popular trends and appear as public leaders.

Motivated by outrage at the Fugitive Slave Law, and in pain over the recent death of her child, Stowe began to write. *Uncle Tom's Cabin* appeared in weekly episodes in the *National Era* from June, 1851, to April, 1852. It was published in book form in two volumes on March, 1852, in an edition of 5,000 copies. They sold out in two days. In the next eight weeks, sales rose to 50,000. Three power presses worked twenty-four hours a day and over a hundred binders labored to try to meet the public demand for books. By September, sales were at .150,000, and by year's end at 300,000.

Overseas, the reception was even more remarkable. In England, close to a million and a half books were sold the first year, more than three times as many copies sold as in the United States. A special Sunday school edition priced at a shilling put copies in the hands of British children. In a few years, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* had been translated into over forty languages, including Armenian, Icelandic, Welsh, and Dutch. There were sixty-seven known editions in Italian alone. There were also *Uncle Tom's Cabin* songs (twenty in 1852) and thirty proslavery novels written in reply.

From a modern perspective, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is a sentimental novel and Uncle Tom himself has become a symbol of Negro servility. Stowe's story, perhaps because of its melodrama, struck a chord about the cruelty of the slave system, even among white people who had no particular sympathy for black people, slave or free. White people began to comprehend that slavery was a moral evil, and not merely a necessary economic system, particularly in a supposedly free and democratic society. Speaking to the dehumanization of chattel slavery, the book's first subtitle was *The Man Who Was a Thing*, which became *Life Among the Lowly*.

The South reacted to *Uncle Tom's Cabin* with indignation, claiming Stowe's portrait of slavery, was untrue. Stowe countered with *A Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin*, a book which



documented the facts of her story. The South responded by publicly burning copies of her novel and arresting anyone caught with a copy.

While slavery still existed, Stowe helped millions of white Americans see its horrors, and she supplied white people with a view of the moral basis which led to slavery's defeat. The international popularity of Uncle Tom's Cabin helped keep foreign nations on the side of the Union during the Civil War. When Stowe visited the White House in 1862 to meet President Abraham Lincoln, his first words reportedly were, "So you're the little woman who wrote the book that started this great war "



"My view of Christianity is such that I think no man can consistently profess it without throwing the whole weight of his being against this monstrous system of injustice that lies at the foundation of all our society."

Harriet Beecher Stowe

 **For more, see:**

Wikipedia : [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Harriet\\_Beecher\\_Stowe](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Harriet_Beecher_Stowe)

## i) Frederick Douglass (1818 - 1895)



As the African-American leader of both the prewar abolitionist movement and of the struggle for black rights following the Civil War, **Frederick Douglass** (born Frederick Augustus Washington Bailey ) was the most famous African-American of the nineteenth century. He was an orator of unrivaled eloquence, his autobiography represents the slave narrative at its best, and he always stayed true to principle despite the cost, including his unqualified support for women's rights and women's suffrage.

Douglass was born a slave, in Tuckahoe, Maryland. His mother was a slave who visited him only infrequently, and apparently died young. His father was an unknown white man, perhaps Anthony Aaron, manager of the ten-thousand-acre Edward Lloyd plantation, or perhaps Lloyd himself "Slavery has no recognition of fathers," Douglass once remarked, "as none of families." Douglass was raised by Betsy Bailey, his strong and resourceful maternal grandmother.

In 1825 Douglass was sent to Baltimore to the household, of Anthony Aaron's daughter, Sophia Auld. She was kind to the child, recognized his intelligence, and taught him-to read, an achievement crucial to his development.

Sent back to the plantation, Douglass endured the pressures and systematic beatings until one day in 1834, when he took on Covey, a notorious "breaker" of recalcitrant slaves, in an epic wrestling match. Defending himself and fighting back was, Douglass said, "the turning point" in his life as a slave: "I was nothing before; I am a man now." Having discovered how to be a man, his next step was to discover how to become a free one.

Disguised as a sailor, Douglass escaped on September 3, 1838, and made his way via New York to New Bedford, Massachusetts. He married Anna Murray, an illiterate free black woman who had provided money to aid his flight. Taking the name Douglass to avoid recognition and possible capture as a runaway, he settled in as a laborer until the crucial day of August 16, 1841, when he attended a meeting on Nantucket of the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society. Douglass was invited to the platform, where his simple speech telling his own personal story and his firsthand accounts fascinated **William Lloyd Garrison** and the other white abolitionist leaders. More important, Douglass s began to find his own voice as one of the great orators of the century as he discovered immediately that his true vocation was to be a spokesperson for the millions of his brothers and sisters still in bondage.

It was a natural extension of Douglass' public speaking as an agent of the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society for him to tell his story in a book. *The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave* was published in 1845. It was the first of his three autobiographies, each written as his thinking developed and as he felt able to reveal more. Some who heard the magnificent-looking and magnificent-sounding Douglass doubted that he could be a product of the slave system, and the book was a response to their doubts. *The Narrative* was an immediate success, selling thirty thousand copies in five years. It was also published in Britain, and translated into French.

The book, however, left Douglass the escaped slave more visible and thus more vulnerable. As soon as it was published, he prudently, set sail away from the United States for the United Kingdom, where he was glorified by reformers and abolitionists, and where he personally experienced the freer air of a less racist society. British friends arranged to buy Douglass' freedom for \$750, and. they also raised money to fulfill his hope to establish his own newspaper.





*The North Star*, founded by Douglass in Rochester, New York, in 1847, with Martin R. Delany, was his declaration of independence both personally and intellectually. He had found a mentor in William Lloyd Garrison, editor of the abolitionist *Liberator*, a publication which had a place in his heart "second only to the Bible." Now, Douglass began to see politics as a viable way to change things, and to perceive the Constitution, if correctly interpreted, as a charter for human justice which slavery had violated. The white abolitionist establishment that first assisted Douglass soon found him not quite humble enough to their taste, and so his move to even greater self-determination was not everywhere appreciated, but he knew the antislavery movement had to be black-led.

Douglass' switch to political activism immediately involved him in a variety of movements. In 1848 he was present at Seneca Falls, New York, for the women's rights conference, where he became one of the few men to support enfranchising women. In 1852 he supported the Free Soil Party, precursor of the antislavery Republicans, and on July 4 that year he made one of his most memorable speeches, asserting the emptiness that America's Fourth of July independence commemoration had for African-Americans. He was active in the Underground Railroad, and at least four hundred escaped slaves passed through his station in Rochester, one of the last American stops before Canada and freedom.

Douglass was enthusiastic in his support of the war, especially for raising black regiments and enlisting colored troops. "Men of color, to arms!" became his familiar battle cry. His own sons enrolled in the Massachusetts 54th, and Douglass hoped for an officer's commission, but none came; the Union army was not yet ready to accept African Americans as officers.

When the war was won and slavery abolished, Garrison disbanded his Anti-Slavery Society, believing its work was done. But Douglass, who had never separated the issues of slavery and civil rights, knew that the freed slaves were powerless without political enfranchisement. He believed, with most Americans, that the democratic power to vote was determinative, and that with it, the freed slaves would be secure in shaping their own destinies.

In 1872 Douglass moved to Washington, where he received several governmental appointments from the Republican Party, which he served faithfully. "The Republican Party is the ship," he said, "all else is the sea." He was Marshal of the District of Columbia, Recorder of Deeds in the District, and then U.S. minister to Haiti. Douglass felt that none of these roles was quite worthy of his ability and distinction, but the higher recognition and honors he looked for never came.

Frederick Douglass died in Washington on February 20, 1895.



### For more, see:

Frederick Douglass :

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/part4/4p1539.html>

<http://www.history.rochester.edu/class/douglass/home.html>

"If there is no struggle, there is no progress."  
"The thing worse than rebellion is the thing that causes rebellion."

*Frederick Douglass*

## j) The causes of the Civil War

The Civil War was a defining moment in African-American history. Although President Abraham Lincoln and most of the white population of the North stated clearly that the single purpose of the war was to preserve the federal union, black people knew that the South's unyielding commitment to chattel slavery was the real reason. They knew, - also, well before the administration and the white public knew, that the two sections of the country could never be reconciled unless the war destroyed the entire slave system.

When Lincoln became president on the Republican ticket in 1860, Southerners, who had essentially controlled the federal government since the nation's inception, simply refused to accept an administration they disagreed with, even though it had been elected to office legally and democratically. As a momentous consequence, the state legislature of South Carolina met on December 20, 1860, and voted unanimously to secede from the United States. On February 4, 1861, in Montgomery, Alabama, representatives of the six cotton-producing states Alabama, Georgia, Florida, Louisiana, Mississippi, and South Carolina agreed to organize themselves into a new nation, the Confederate States of America.

On April 12, 1861, South Carolinians opened fire on Fort Sumter, the United States' installation in Charleston Harbor. Firing on the American flag, troops, and fortifications was an act of open treason, and President Lincoln could only respond accordingly, even though his reaction -cost more defections from the Union.

Southern partisans called it "The War of Northern Aggression." Abolitionists called it "The War of the Slaveholders' Rebellion." However, while the North may have believed it was fighting to preserve the Union, the South, like African-Americans both slave and free, knew that the nation could not exist "half slave and half free."



"Our national sin has found us out."

*Frederick Douglass*

### For more, see:

Top Five Causes of the Civil War : <http://americanhistory.about.com/b/2008/01/19/top-five-causes-of-the-civil-war-2.htm>

## k) African-Americans in the Civil War



At the beginning of the Civil War, African-Americans were not allowed in the U.S. Army at all, even though black men had fought in the American Revolution. By the war's end, however, there were nearly 200,000 black soldiers, and 10,000 black sailors, over 10 percent of the Union's fighting force. And they did fight: 16 African-American enlisted men received the Medal of Honor, and 8 won the Navy Medal of Honor.

Direct black involvement in the military began a month after South Carolinians fired on the federal installation at Fort Sumter. In May 1861, three escaped slaves made their way to the Union encampment and were enlisted by General Butler. By July the gates were open, and over a thousand slaves had found refuge behind Union lines. As the war progressed, however, blacks by the thousands (men, women, and children) fled for freedom towards Yankee lines wherever they could find them. This created problems of housing, rations, health, and sometimes most difficult of all, congested roads.

Each Union army below the Mason-Dixon line had its own attendant army of blacks. The most sympathetic and progressive commanders enlisted the men into military units. Others put men and women to work as laborers, cooks, laundresses, and wagon-drivers. The unsympathetic tried to ignore them all, and sometimes actually abandoned these escaped slaves to Confederate capture or worse.

The earliest African-American unit seems to have been the 1st South Carolina Volunteer Infantry, raised by General David Hunter in May 1862. But these runaway, freed, and confiscated slaves were disbanded by presidential order. From the remaining came the first black regiment, commanded by the remarkable Thomas Wentworth Higginson: Unitarian minister, abolitionist and supporter of John Brown.

The first organized black troops to engage the enemy were apparently the 1st Regiment of Kansas Colored Infantry in October 1862 in Missouri. That autumn, Ben Butler created three battalions of Louisiana Native Guards out of the "Corps d'Afrique". These ' scattered forces were eventually regularized and reorganized into the United States Colored Troops (USCT). They were all segregated units under white officers, although as a rule, the noncommissioned officers were African-American.

It became clear that the war was not going to end quickly or easily, and that its outcome might well depend on a lengthy confrontation between the men and equipment of both sides. If it came to that test, the North could win simply by hanging on long enough: it could afford to sustain more losses of materials because it was more industrialized and of men because it had a larger population, especially if one added the numerous black men who were eager to fight the slavocracy

Under the pressure from abolitionists, Lincoln, as commander-in-chief, issued an Emancipation Proclamation on January 1, 1863. It was in many ways a hollow document, since it claimed to free slaves in the rebellious states, over which the president had no authority! In other words, the proclamation in fact freed nobody, and the many thousands of slaves who left their homes under circumstances of great danger in fact freed themselves in the nation's greatest historical act of self-liberation.

The proclamation did specifically open the U.S. armed forces to black men. The first governor to call for an African-American regiment was John A. Andrew of Massachusetts, and he did so just days after the president's proclamation. Andrew fully understood the symbolic importance of what he was doing, because many white people did not believe black men could or would fight. The first regiment of free blacks organized in the North was the 54th Massachusetts, well-known now because the film *Glory* showed its valiant attack on Fort Wagner in Charleston Harbor (July, 1863). The battle for Fort Wagner proved African-Americans' fighting ability.

Women played roles: Susie King Taylor of South Carolina was a nurse, laundress, and teacher. Elizabeth Bowser of Richmond, a slave in the Confederate White House, was actually a Union spy. The war had its high moments: Martin Delany, physician, novelist, and emigrationist, was promoted to the rank of major, the first black field officer. And there were low moments: Sergeant William Walker of the 3rd South Carolina Colored Troops protested the fact that black soldiers were paid only \$7 a month while white soldiers had \$13. He said he could no longer serve. Walker was court-martialed and shot.

The very existence of black troops created several effects. Free blacks in the North felt pride at their involvement in the war. White Northerners, if not modified in their racism, were grateful for the black contribution. White Southerners were outraged at the black military presence and never forgave the North for what they called an imposition of Negro rule. The African-American soldiers themselves experienced a new sense of dignity in restoring constitutional government, from which they hoped to see changes after the war.

But perhaps most affected were the South's four million slaves. To see government liberators with black faces was a deeply emotional experience for all African Americans whether slave or free. When U.S. Colored Troops marched into Richmond, the Confederate capital, singing "John Brown's Body", they halted at the city's slave pens, where black men, women, and children for sale had been parked like cattle. The soldiers were surrounded by slaves who spontaneously broke into song, a spiritual whose double meaning became actualized at that very moment, "Slavery Chain Done Broke at Last."



👉 **For more, see:**

African-American in the Civil War :

<http://rs6.loc.gov/learn/features/timeline/civilwar/aasoldrs/soldiers.html>

"Boys, the old flag never touched the ground."

*Sergeant William Carney*

## I) The Battle of Fort Pillow (aka the Fort Pillow Massacre)



In 1864, Fort Pillow was held by a small Federal force of some six hundred men about evenly divided between black and white troops. The whites were 13th Tennessee Volunteer Cavalry, the African Americans were mainly 6th U.S. Heavy Artillery. Most had only recently been freed from slavery.

The fort was attacked on April 12 at 5:30 A. m. by a Confederate force of 1,500 men under General James R. Chalmers. The Union soldiers hung on, but it was clear they would have to capitulate to overwhelming numbers. General Forrest himself arrived with the rest of his cavalry at about 10 o'clock, and that afternoon sent the fort a message demanding surrender. Many interpreted his words as a threat: "Should my demand be refused, I cannot be responsible for the fate of your command." The fort's commander replied, "I will not surrender."

What happened next is disputed, but the evidence indicates that as the Confederates stormed Fort Pillow, they literally slaughtered the black soldiers who surrendered. Reports stated that the cursing Southerners shouted "No quarter" and burned some blacks alive by setting fire to the tents of the wounded. Several African-American sergeants were picked out, nailed to logs and set afire. When it was over, 231 Union soldiers had been killed; Confederate deaths numbered only 14. Of the remaining Union prisoners, most of whom were wounded, 168 were white and only 58 black.

The Federal government's joint Committee on the Conduct of the War immediately investigated and determined that what had happened at Fort Pillow was a racial massacre. A deposition by Private William J. Mays described one incident:

*There were also two Negro women and three little children standing within 25 steps of me, when a rebel stepped up to them, and said, "Yes, God damn you, you thought you were free, did you?" and shot them all. They all fell but one child, whom he knocked in the head with the breech of his gun.*

President Abraham Lincoln ordered the Union army to strike back, but nothing was ever done. Word of the murders spread quickly through the Northern army's black troops, and "Remember Fort Pillow" became a rallying battle cry. Confederates denied that anything wrong had taken place at Fort Pillow. The South's official policy, issued in 1862 by President Jefferson Davis, was that captured black soldiers should be considered slaves and returned to the states they came from, and free blacks should be sold into slavery.

The rebel general Nathan Bedford Forrest was undoubtedly a brave soldier; in one engagement, three horses were shot out from under him. But he had once been a slave dealer in Memphis, and after the war he was not only involved in organizing the Ku Klux Klan, but probably served as its first Grand Wizard. His attitude toward blacks was clear, both during and after the war. Today Fort Pillow State Park is located seventeen miles west of Henning, Tennessee, and tourists can visit the remains of the fort.

"I with several of the others tried to stop the butchery and at one time had partially succeeded but Gen. Forrest ordered them shot down like dogs and the carnage continued."

*A Confederate sergeant*

👉 **For more, see:**

The Battle of Fort Pillow : <http://www.civilwarhome.com/ftpillow.htm>

## m) The Reconstruction



The Civil War began with the single purpose of preserving the integrity of the federal union from the withdrawal of eleven Southern states into, the Confederacy. It soon became clear, however, that the "peculiar institution" of chattel slavery on which the South's whole economic, political, and social life was based was the real issue motivating its claim for independence.

Thus, setting free African-Americans became one of the North's war aims. When General Robert E. Lee surrendered in the spring of 1865, the United States had officially won the war, but the complex questions of peace, reunion, and reconciliation had to be faced. Above all, the nation, North and South, had to deal with

Abraham Lincoln's plaintive question, "But what shall we do with the Negroes after they are free?"

Lincoln's policy for Reconstruction was essentially a plan of great tolerance and generosity for the defeated South. His Proclamation of Amnesty and Reconstruction of December 8, 1863, simply required oaths of allegiance to the United States, oaths from which only a few high-level Confederates were excluded. This meant Southern whites could and would soon regain the franchise and local control over the areas subdued by the Union army. African-Americans were to be excluded from voting, although Lincoln tentatively suggested that perhaps a few particularly qualified blacks in Louisiana might be allowed the ballot experimentally.

Congress reacted with the Wade-Davis Bill, in July 1864, calling for much stricter terms for allowing the rebellious states back into the union.

The question of how the course of Reconstruction would go was intensified by the assassination of President Lincoln six days after Lee's surrender at Appomattox. Andrew Johnson, a tailor whose wife had taught him to read, was now president. As a poor white, he hated the aristocratic Southern planter class, but he was perhaps even less sympathetic to the country's nearly four million free African-American men, women, and children than even Lincoln had been.



Many whites in the North were originally inclined to tolerance about Reconstruction, like Lincoln and Johnson. But Johnson began to annoy the public with his wholesale pardon of major Confederates, particularly the wives of former officers, who lined up outside his office. It was said that the working-class Johnson enjoyed the docile begging by his social superiors. Even more aggravating was the deliberate arrogance of the white South in defeat. The South elected to the Thirty-ninth Congress, which met in December 1865, the former vice president of the Confederacy, along with fifty-seven Confederate congressmen, six Confederate cabinet members, and four Confederate generals. The North began to wonder what it had meant to win the war.

Reconstruction is one of the most misrepresented and misunderstood, but determinative, periods in American history. Johnson's bitter conflict with Congress led to his impeachment, the first for an American president, but conviction failed by one vote. The Radical Republicans, led by Charles Sumner of Massachusetts in the Senate and Thaddeus Stevens of Pennsylvania in the House, took control of Reconstruction. They divided the South into military districts and set up democratic criteria for reinstatement into the union, and they passed a bill to protect the freed people. The Freedmen's Bureau, for example, established forty hospitals and in only a few years distributed twenty-one million rations to hungry people.

The fundamental issue of Reconstruction remained the question of local control within the former Confederate states. Would power remain in the hands of white people, where it had exclusively resided before the war, or would political, social, and economic power be extended to include the newly freed African-Americans? If the latter, then it was clear a reconstructed South would have to, be both created and maintained by the federal government.

Led by the Radical Republicans, the national government engineered passage of the 13th, 14th, and 15th amendments to the U. S. Constitution which ended slavery, made African-Americans citizens, and enfranchised black men.

The white Southern reaction was brutal, powerful, and ultimately successful. Day-laboring and metayage came to replace slave labor. Locally enforced "vagrancy" charges sent many blacks literally back to their former masters to work off "public" laws. Unusual taxes kept blacks from many jobs. Grandfather clauses and the white primary first reduced then virtually eliminated black voters. **Jim Crow** laws segregated transportation and other public facilities and social control segregated private life. Most important, extreme and extensive white violence through murder and systematic terrorism by the **Ku Klux Klan** and other racially supremacist secret organizations intimidated many freed-people and their few white allies into inactivity.



The usual date and event given for the end of Reconstruction is the Compromise of 1877. The presidential contest of 1876 between Republican Rutherford B. Hayes and Democrat Samuel J. Tilden was disputed because of rival Democratic and Republican claims to members of the electoral college in three Southern states. In fact, Tilden had won the popular vote.

The Republicans were interested primarily in holding on to the office of the presidency. The Democrats were interested primarily in local autonomy and racial hegemony in the former Confederacy. To satisfy both groups, a deal was struck at a secret meeting in Washington's Wormley Hotel, ironically an African-American-owned establishment. The Democrats traded their claims to electoral college votes to the Republicans in exchange for the withdrawal of federal troops from the South, and, in effect, the government's turning state and regional power over to white racists and racism.

The consequences in the South were predictable and disastrous. African-Americans' last hopes in the federal government were destroyed with the abolition of civil rights legislation by the U. S. Supreme Court.

"Although the freedman is no longer considered the property of the individual master, he is considered the slave of the society."  
Carl Shurtz

 **For more, see:**

The Reconstruction Era : <http://afroamhistory.about.com/cs/reconstruction/a/reconstruction.htm>

## APPENDIX 2

### The minstrel shows



The *minstrel show*, or *minstrelsy*, was an American amusement consisting of comic sketches, variety acts, dancing, and music, performed by white people in blackface make-up or, especially after the American Civil War, blacks in blackface.

Minstrel shows satirized black people in disdainful ways: as ignorant, lazy, buffoonish, superstitious, joyous, and musical. The minstrel show began with brief burlesques and comic entr'actes in the early 1830s and emerged as a matured form in the next decade. As blacks began to score legal and social victories against racism and to successfully assert political power, minstrelsy lost popularity.

Minstrel songs and sketches featured several stock characters, most popularly the slave and the dandy. These were further divided into sub-archetypes such as the mammy, her counterpart the old darky, the provocative mulatto young woman, the black soldier and the preacher, or orator.

Blackface minstrelsy provided the lens through which white America saw black America. On the one hand, it had strong racist aspects; on the other, it afforded white Americans a singular and broad awareness of significant aspects of black-American culture..

 **For more, see:**

The Minstrel Show : <http://chnm.gmu.edu/courses/jackson/minstrel/minstrel.html>

### The best-known African-American woman of the 19<sup>th</sup> century

Her name was **Sojourner Truth**. She was born in slavery, but she reinvented herself, choosing a name which means "*itinerant preacher*" to match the new identity she fashioned. Sojourner was a gospel preacher, a member of a strange religious commune, a reformer, an abolitionist, and a pioneering feminist. Through it all she was herself, a tall, angular, dark-skinned, strong and quiet woman, whose direct honesty and unselfconscious frankness made her an unforgettable speaker, in her plain Quaker clothing, at the religious and reformist meetings she attended through her life.

Freedom came to Truth in 1827 by New York State law. The same year she was converted and joined the Methodist Church in Kingston. In her new-found independence, she also discovered the courage to sue for the return of her son Peter, who had been sold South to avoid New York's emancipation law. In 1828 Truth went to New York City, where she worked as a housekeeper to earn a living, and became involved in evangelical religious circles and activities, including frequent preaching at camp meetings.

Truth spent time at the utopian colony in Northampton, Massachusetts, in the 1840s, and participated in various abolitionist and feminist causes. She could neither read nor write, but in 1850 she dictated her autobiography to Olive Gilbert, who published the *Narrative of Sojourner Truth*, which Truth herself sold to earn an income.

In 1850 in Boston, Frederick Douglass, depressed and disturbed by the recent enactment of -the Fugitive Slave Law, wondered aloud from the platform. if the slaves must now resort to violence in order to free themselves. From the audience, Truth called out, "Frederick, is God dead?"

Her best-known speech, was delivered in Akron, Ohio, in 1851. Hearing a succession of men speak against women's rights because women were considered too delicate for real political life, Truth came to the platform. to describe the struggles and sufferings of her own experience, using the rhythmic refrain, "Ar'n't I a woman?" Her strength and appearance led some to doubt if Truth was in fact a woman, and she was asked to, bare her breast at a meeting in Silver Lake, Indiana, in 1851. She did so with dignity and without embarrassment and said she had nursed white babies who had grown up to be better people than her detractors.



 **For more, see:**

Sojourner Truth biography: <http://www.lkwdpl.org/wihohio/trut-soj.htm>