

## Timeline of Slavery and the Underground Railroad

- 1501** African slaves first arrive in the New World as the result of Spanish settlement in Santo Domingo (current capital of Dominican Republic).
- 1522** The first large-scale revolt of African slaves is on the plantation of Christopher Columbus' son, Diego, on the island of Hispaniola.
- 1546–1556** Significant slave revolts occur in the Caribbean, Mexico and Central and South America.
- 1565** African slaves arrive on North American mainland at the Spanish colony of St. Augustine.
- 1619** Twenty Africans are brought to Jamestown. They are the first imported slaves in Britain's North American colonies. They are likely to have been indentured servants and freed after a specified number of years.
- 1638** Slave uprising occurs in colonial Boston.
- 1641** Massachusetts is the first colony to legalize slavery.
- 1660s** Slavery is legally recognized as an institution in British America.
- 1662** Virginia law decrees that children of black mothers "shall be bond or free," depending on the status of the mother.
- 1663** First serious slave conspiracy in colonial America takes place on September 13. An indentured servant betrays the plot of white servants and negro slaves working together in Gloucester County, Virginia.
- First known maroon society develops in the New World in Dutch and French Guyana, South America, when slave holders send the slaves to the forest to hide and escape taxes. The slaves refuse to return to their masters and set up their own nations.
- 1705** Slaves begin to be described as real estate. Virginia lawmakers allow owners to bequeath their slaves in their wills. This law allows masters to kill runaways.
- 1712** Slave revolt takes place in New York on April 7. Nine whites are killed, 21 slaves are executed.
- 1723** Slaves are accused of setting fires in Boston.

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- 1725** Cudjoe, an African-born slave of the Akan people of Ghana, leads a band of freedom seekers into the Jamaican mountains where they establish their own state.
- 1730** Slave conspiracy discovered in Norfolk and Princess Anne counties, Virginia.
- 1734** A rebellion plot is uncovered in Burlington, Pennsylvania.
- 1738** Cudjoe signs treaty with British governor, agreeing to return freedom seekers in exchange for his autonomy.
- 1739** Slave revolt takes place in Stono, South Carolina, on September 9. Led by Angolan slave named Cato who uses his knowledge of drums to speak to other Africans and assembles an army of 100. When he stops to celebrate, he is captured and killed, along with 14 other slaves and seven whites.
- 1741** Series of suspicious fires and reports of slave conspiracy leads to general hysteria in New York City in March and April. Thirty-one slaves and five whites are executed.
- 1773** Massachusetts slaves petition the legislature for freedom on January 6. Eight such petitions are recorded during the Revolutionary War period.
- 1775** American Revolution begins.
- Anthony Benezet of Philadelphia founds the first abolitionist society in April. Benjamin Franklin becomes its president in 1787.
- On November 7, Lord Dunmore, deposed royal governor of Virginia, promises freedom to all blacks who fight for the crown. Some blacks desert their plantations and join the British.
- 1776** Declaration of Independence is signed. Congress asserts that the colonies are free and independent states.
- 1777** Vermont becomes the first state to abolish slavery.
- 1783** American Revolution ends with Britain and the United States signing the Peace of Paris treaty.
- 1784** Congress barely defeats Thomas Jefferson's proposal to forbid slavery in the new territories after 1800.
- 1787** Northwest Ordinance bans slavery in the Northwest Territory (what later becomes Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Michigan and Wisconsin). The Northwest Ordinance combines with state-initiated emancipation laws to produce a free North.
- 1790** United States census reveals almost 700,000 slaves in a nation of 3.9 million people.

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- 1791** Haitian slave rebellion results in 900 plantations, buildings, fields and crops being reduced to ashes.
- 1793** The Fugitive Slave Act of the United States outlaws any efforts to obstruct the capture of runaway slaves.
- Eli Whitney invents the cotton gin, a device that pulls seeds from cotton. This invention makes cotton a cash crop of the South and demands slave labor.
- 1800** Gabriel Prosser plots a slave rebellion and is betrayed. A storm forces suspension of an attack on Richmond, Virginia, by Prosser and approximately 1,000 slaves on August 30. The conspiracy is betrayed by two slaves. Prosser and 15 of his followers are hung on October 7.
- Nat Turner and John Brown are born.
- Denmark Vesey purchases his freedom.
- 1808** In 1807, Congress bans the importation of slaves. It is effective January 1, 1808 (the earliest date allowed by the Constitution). Smuggling continues as well as the internal slave trade in states where slavery is legal.
- 1811** Louisiana slaves revolt in two parishes about 35 miles from New Orleans on January 8–10. Revolts are suppressed by U.S. troops. One revolt, which is the largest slave revolt in U.S. history, is led by free black Charles Deslondes.
- 1812** The War of 1812 begins and lasts until 1814.
- During the War of 1812, African Americans make up one-sixth of the seamen in the Navy.
- 1815** In Maryland, abolitionist Henry Highland Garnet is born.
- 1817** Frederick Douglass is born into slavery in Tuckahoe, Maryland.
- Abolitionist Samuel Ringgold Ward is born in Maryland.
- 1820** The first former United States slaves arrive in Liberia.
- 1820–1821** The Missouri Compromise admits the slave state of Missouri and the free state of Maine into the Union and also bans slavery north of the 36° 30' line of latitude in the Louisiana Territory.
- 1822** Denmark Vesey plots a rebellion and is betrayed by a house slave on May 30. The conspiracy is one of the most elaborate slave plots on record and involved thousands of blacks in Charleston, South Carolina, and the surrounding vicinity. Authorities arrest 131 blacks and four whites. Thirty-seven people are hung. Vesey and five others are hung on July 2 in Charleston.

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**1825** Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, poet and novelist, is born in Baltimore to free parents.

Free blacks are prohibited to sell tobacco unless they secure a licensed certificate from a justice of the peace, witnessed by two white citizens.

Josiah Henson leads a group of runaway slaves from Kentucky to freedom.

**1826** Seventy-seven slaves mutiny on a Mississippi River steamer and escape into Indiana.

**1829** There is a race riot in Cincinnati, Ohio, on August 10. One thousand African Americans leave the city for Canada.

The first boarding school for black girls, The St. Frances Academy, opens in Baltimore.

David Walker publishes *Walker's Appeal*, encouraging slaves to revolt and free blacks to fight against racism and discrimination.

**1830** David Walker dies and is believed to have been poisoned.

**1831** William Lloyd Garrison founds the abolitionist newspaper *The Liberator* in Boston.

Nat Turner, a literate slave, instigates a slave revolt in Virginia. Fifty-seven whites are killed but the revolt is unsuccessful and 200 slaves are killed.

The Virginia legislature barely rejects a bill to emancipate Virginia's slaves, and antislavery sentiment is suppressed throughout the South by state and private censorship.

**1834** Slavery is abolished in the British Empire.

**1836** The "gag rule" is passed by Congress, prohibiting all antislavery bills or petitions from being introduced, read or discussed.

**1838** Frederick Douglass escapes from slavery in Baltimore on September 3.

**1839** *Amistad* slave rebellion is led by Joseph Cinquez. The ship is captured. After a trial in Connecticut, the slaves are returned to Africa in 1841.

**1840** There is a slave revolt on the slave trader *Creole*, which is en route from Hampton, Virginia, to New Orleans, Louisiana, on November 7. Slaves overpower the crew and sail the vessel to the Bahamas, where they are granted asylum and freedom.

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**1845** Seventy-five slaves from three Maryland counties arm themselves and march toward Pennsylvania. Many are killed and 31 are captured.

**1846** Mexican-American War concludes. Americans debate whether slavery is permitted in the new lands.

**1847** Frederick Douglass, an escaped slave, begins publishing the *North Star* in Rochester, New York.

**1848** Ellen Craft impersonates a slave holder, and her husband, William Craft, acts as her servant in one of the most dramatic slave escapes in Georgia on December 26.

Henry Highland Garnet reissues *David Walker's Appeal* and adds his own address to it.

**1849** Harriet Tubman escapes to Pennsylvania and later returns south 19 times to rescue more than 300 people.

Escaped slave James W.C. Pennington writes his story in a book, *The Fugitive Blacksmith*.

**1850** Compromise of 1850 is signed. In exchange for California's entering the Union as a free state, northern congressmen accept a harsher Fugitive Slave Act different from the previous one of 1793. It allows slave catchers and owners to pursue fugitives into free territory. Blacks flee to Canada and Mexico, where slavery is illegal.

**1851** A black abolitionist crashes into a courtroom in Boston, Massachusetts, to rescue a fugitive slave on February 15.

Blacks disperse a group of slave catchers on September 11 in Christiana, Pennsylvania. One white man is killed and one wounded.

A fugitive slave is rescued from conviction when black and white abolitionists smash into a courtroom in Syracuse, New York, on October 1.

**1852** *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is published by Harriet Beecher Stowe. This book becomes banned in the South, while northerners turn it into a bestseller.

Frederick Douglass delivers what would become one of his most famous speeches, "The Meaning of the Fourth of July to the Negro."

**1854** Kansas-Nebraska Act is signed. Congress allows these two new territories to choose whether they will allow slavery, and violence erupts in the territories.

Republican Party is organized.

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- 1856** Pro-slavery forces burn parts of Lawrence, Kansas. John Brown and antislavery forces kill five proslavery sympathizers at Pottawatomie Creek.
- 1857** Dred Scott Decision delivered. The United States Supreme Court decides, 7 to 2, that blacks (slaves or free) can never be citizens, thereby denying them the right to sue along with other civil rights protected by the Constitution, and that Congress cannot outlaw slavery in any federal territory, thereby making the Northwest Ordinance and the Missouri Compromise bans unconstitutional.
- 1858** Illinois Republicans nominate Abraham Lincoln for the U.S. Senate.
- 1859** John Brown, a radical abolitionist, raids Harper's Ferry to secure weapons to use in slave rebellions. He, along with 21 accomplices, is hung when caught by the U.S. Marines.
- 1860** Abraham Lincoln is elected, becoming the first Republican to win the United States Presidency.
- South Carolina secedes from the Union on December 18 and more states follow.
- 1861–1865** United States Civil War begins and eventually claims 623,000 lives.
- 1862** The Militia Act permits slaves and free blacks to enlist in the Union Army. The Confiscation Act declares that if a slave owner helped the Confederacy his slaves would go free.
- 1863** President Abraham Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation becomes effective on January 1, 1863. It frees the slaves in the Rebel territory only, and states nothing about the slaves in states that never seceded from the Union, leaving slavery intact in those border states.
- 1864** Slavery is abolished in Maryland.
- 1865** Slavery is abolished in all states by the 13th Amendment to the United States Constitution.

### Timeline Resources

<http://www.freedomcenter.org/>  
<http://Blackhistory.harpweek.com/2Slavery/SlaveryTimeline.htm>  
<http://www.nationalgeographic.com/>  
<http://library.thinkquest.org/>

McKissack, Patricia and Frederick. *Rebels Against Slavery: American Slave Revolts*. New York: 1996.