

Chapter 2 On Becoming Mississippi

Critical events affecting the region's culture of slavery took place well before the state of Mississippi was ever formed: French settlers in the lower Mississippi Valley actually introduced enslavement into the Mississippi territory in the early 1700s. The introduction of black slaves into the Natchez wilderness was directly related to the plans of "the infamous John Law," Ronald L. F. Davis wrote for a special historical study of the Natchez National Historical Park.

[Law's] Company of the West had been given the task, in 1717, of developing the lower Mississippi River Valley into a profitable component of the French empire in the new World. It was the company's intent to bring some 2000 African slaves to Louisiana to cultivate a system of plantations stretching along the Mississippi River from New Orleans to as far north as the Arkansas. According to Law's plan, black slaves would plant and cultivate tobacco, grow and ferment indigo, cut timber, build forts, and work a thriving river traffic in upcountry furs, deerskins, corn, and salted meats (and possibly silver) in a trading network from Quebec to New Orleans. In times of war, moreover, the slaves would provide the Company with an army of enslaved soldiers to be used against opposing Indians and European competitors.... Estimates of the non-Indian population in the Natchez settlement at the fort range from around 400 settlers in the mid-1720s to approximately 750 by 1729.ⁱ

French slaves were regulated by Roman law meaning they could earn money by working evenings and weekends, and could purchase their own freedom. The English, who later settled into the territory, were eager purchasers of slaves.ⁱⁱ

Thousand of miles away on the East coast in 1774, a group of influential planters, merchants and lawyers, all from the East, met in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania and formed the first Continental Congress, presumably trying to figure out how to get along better with the British. Representatives ended by declaring Parliamentary acts "unconstitutional" in the colonies and so a new government was inevitable.

In drafting the resulting Declaration of Independence, Thomas Jefferson was influenced by English philosopher John Locke, who proposed that government ought to be a contract between the governed and those governing, with the government protecting every man's inherent right to life, liberty and property.

Jefferson borrowed heavily from Locke's philosophy, and despite being a slave owner himself, Jefferson advocated that the government, as Locke proposed, ought to protect man's inherent right to life, liberty and *the pursuit of happiness*, rather than property.

Jefferson was not alone in thought. In the same year that he was advocating Locke's theories of government, a group of African Americans held in bondage in the Massachusetts colony appealed to the governor and council of Massachusetts, also using Locke's viewpoint as their basis:

The petition of a Grate Number of Blackes of this Province who by divine permission are held in a state of Slavery within the bowels of a free and christian Country Humbly Shewing That your Petitioners apprehend we have in common with all other men a naturel right to our freedoms without Being depriv'd of them by our fellow men as we are a freeborn Pepel and have never forfeited this Blessing by aney compact or agreement whatever...

But we were unjustly dragged by the cruel hand of power from our dearest frinds and sum of us stolen from the bosoms of our tender Parents and from a Populous Pleasant and plentiful country and Brought hither to be made slaves for Life in a Christian land...

We therefore Bage your Excellency and Honours will give this its deer weight and consideration and that you will accordingly cause an act of the legislative to be passed that we may obtain our natural right our freedoms and our children be set lebetly at the yeare of twenty one... .”ⁱⁱⁱ

Historian Ray Raphael observed these slaves had “articulated and personalized John Locke's ‘social contract’ theory of government that would serve as the foundation for the Declaration of Independence.” Although the legislature moved to let the matter raised by the petitioning slaves subside, the patriots’ and slaves’ dual application for republican theories of government would gain speed in an

emancipation movement in those areas where the “local economy and social structure did not depend heavily on slavery.”^{iv}

No doubt moved by the enveloping cries for ‘liberty,’ which defined the era, some of the Northern states moved slowly toward abolition. The state of Vermont would take the first swing against the slaveholding caste by declaring in its inaugural constitution that, “All men are born equally free and independent, and have certain natural, inherent, and inalienable rights; among which are enjoying and defending liberty.”^v

IN THE SOUTHERN COLONIES greater restrictions were placed on blacks serving in the military, but in time of emergency blacks were permitted and sometimes forced to serve in military units. In 1730 blacks fought the Natchez Indians for the French. And in 1736, a Spanish force was assembled in Mobile to again fight the Natchez. Accompanying them was a separate company of blacks with those who were freed serving as officers. This represents the first occasion Blacks served as officers in a colonial military unit.^{vi}

Despite this earlier history of black participation, the growing fear of armed slave revolts during the Revolutionary War (1775-1783) at first influenced General George Washington to turn down initial requests by blacks to fight in the Revolutionary army. Some enslaved escaped, moving over to help the British, but the larger number of Africans, both free and enslaved, still tried to “further their interests by siding with the patriots.”^{vii}

Lord Dunmore, the British governor of [Virginia](#), quickly saw the vulnerability of the South's slaveholders and cynically issued a proclamation in November of 1775 promising freedom to any slave of a rebel who could make it to the British lines. Dunmore organized an "Ethiopian" brigade of about 300 [slaves](#), who saw action at the [Battle of Great Bridge](#) (December 9, 1775). While Virginia soon expelled Dunmore and the British, any notion of armed former slaves fighting alongside the British must have struck panic into the minds of plantation masters across the entire South.^{viii}

Those 3,000 to 4,000 African Americans who fought with the British (about 5,000 fought on the Patriot side)^{ix} achieved freedom by escaping to Canada, Britain, or the British colonies in the West Indies; some of the black soldiers who fled to the West Indies ended up being re-enslaved, while those who went to Canada were

mistreated yet went on to establish the colony of Sierra Leone in Africa (later becoming Sri Lanka).

Washington finally allowed the enlistment of free blacks into the Continental Army in January 1776 when it was to his benefit and if they had “prior experience.” He later extended enlistment to all free and enslaved blacks the following year to help fill the depleted ranks as the states constantly failed to meet their quotas.

Maryland was the only Southern state permitting slaves to enlist; in 1779 Congress offered slave masters in South Carolina and Georgia \$1,000 for each slave they provided to the army, the legislatures of both states refused the offer and so the greatest number of African American soldiers in the American army came from the North:

African Americans in New England rallied to the patriot cause and were part of the militia forces that were organized into the new Continental Army. Approximately 5 percent of the American soldiers at the Battle of Bunker Hill (June 17, 1775) were black. New England blacks mostly served in integrated units and received the same pay as whites, although no African American is known to have held a rank higher than corporal.... Comparisons among muster rolls and church, census, and other records have recently helped identify many black soldiers. Additionally, various eyewitness accounts provide some indication of the level of African Americans' participation during the war. Baron von Closen, a member of Rochambeau's French army at Yorktown, wrote in July 1781 that "A quarter of them [the American army] are Negroes, merry, confident and sturdy."

After Spain declared war against Great Britain in June of 1779, Count Bernardo de Gálvez, the governor of Louisiana, seized three British Mississippi River outposts: Manchac, Baton Rouge, and Natchez. Were any southern black soldiers involved? As researchers continue to look over these records, perhaps they will discover evidence of so. Regardless, one irony of the Revolutionary War is that it changed the attitudes of some white Americans who were uncomfortable with enslaving others – while complaining about the British who were trying to “enslave” them.

Some black leaders tried to benefit from this ideological shift and soon petitioned state legislatures in an effort to end slavery. (*How is it that we hear the loudest yelps for liberty among the drivers of Negroes?* Samuel Johnson, English writer and dictionary maker questioned.) Many individual slave owners in both the North and

South freed their slaves; an estimated 100,000 blacks or about 20 percent of the entire black population became free.^x

White pursuit of happiness

“Money problems” birthed this nation. At the end of the Revolutionary War and faced with about \$70 million in domestic and foreign debts, the confederated states came together to draft the United States Constitution. The “pursuit of happiness” language that Jefferson crafted for the Declaration of Independence did not carry over. The United States instead adopted a structure that denied blacks the right to citizenship and counted slaves as three-fifths of a person for Congressional representation.

The commercial value of slaves^{xi} to Southern planters of sugar cane, cotton, rice, and tobacco *and to Northern and European shippers, manufacturers and merchants* was too great to lose. This factor, blinding many in both the North and South to the immorality of slavery, helped stir up political jealousy and sectional fears of the power white Southerners might acquire in control of the Union; the Civil War would be an end result.

All along, cotton production grew significantly and required constant labor. To fulfill this demand, the first Fugitive Slave Act was passed in 1793, outlawing any efforts to hinder capture of runaway slaves.”^{xii}

One year later, Eli Whitney patented a resourceful device for pulling seeds from cotton and turning cotton into the cash crop of the American South, the cotton gin. More laws followed restricting mobility and education of blacks and were adopted by Southern legislatures, while the rights of slaveholders were continuously reinforced. Yet some leaders including Benjamin Franklin and John Jay still called for an end to slavery.

What if?

What if more people had listened to John Wesley, the celebrated preacher and founder of the Methodist Church? Throughout his life, Wesley opposed slavery and the slave trade long before the issue was popular. In his journal, Wesley recorded meeting with people involved in the slave trade – including the slave-ship captain John Newton (who later wrote “Amazing Grace” after converting to Christianity and becoming opposed to slavery).

In 1774, Wesley wrote a short pamphlet about African society, how its citizens were captured and transferred, and about the brutality of plantation life, called “Thoughts Upon Slavery.” Wesley’s work concluded with a direct address to the slave-trader and slave-owner, and finally with a prayer. His attack was made with passion:

Are you a man? Then you should have a human heart. But have you indeed? What is your heart made of? Is there no such principle as Compassion there? Do you never feel another's pain? Have you no Sympathy? No sense of human woe? No pity for the miserable? When you saw the flowing eyes, the heaving breasts, or the bleeding sides and tortured limbs of your fellow-creatures, were you a stone, or a brute? Did you look upon them with the eyes of a tiger? When you squeezed the agonizing creatures down in the ship, or when you threw their poor mangled remains into the sea, had you no relenting? Did not one tear drop from your eye, one sigh escape from your breast? Do you feel no relenting now? If you do not, you must go on, till the measure of your iniquities is full. Then will the Great GOD deal with You, as you have dealt with them, and require all their blood at your hands.^{xiii}

The law that created the Mississippi Territory in 1798 specifically allowed for slavery – at a price: Mississippi planters by the summer of 1812 were extremely frightened over possible insurrections. Requesting arms for the local militia, Territorial Governor David Holmes advised the region’s military commander of possible attack by the Choctaw if they learned of the war with Britain.

Slaves would be another matter he believed, as he anticipated a conspiracy was afoot: “Scarcely a day passes without my receiving some information relative to the designs of those people to insurrect. It is true that no clear or positive evidence of their intentions has been communicated; but certain facts and expressions of their views have justly excited considerable alarm amongst the citizens.”^{xiv}

Just as Holmes issued his warning, he learned that a slave from the Second Creek area, to the southeast of Natchez, was jailed on suspicion of planning a rebellion. An interrogation of all slaves involved was conducted the next day. While little was learned of the rebellion plan, it clearly angered planters who conducted hearings and requested arms for their militia, “which often functioned as a slave patrol.”

By this time, Native Americans were again at war with Britain and the location of the Natchez district along a major river, far removed from the rest of the country, must have caused its residents to feel vulnerable and exposed. The presence of nearby Creeks, Choctaw and Chickasaw Indians added to their fears as white planters began to assume the increasing likelihood of open conflict with rebellious slaves.^{xv}

Planters toughened the slave codes to expedite trials and executions of slaves charged with capital offenses. Even with threats of harsher penalties, “some slaves seized on the opportunity created by the instabilities and planned to abscond,” perhaps hearing rumors out of New Orleans of slaves’ plots of a general escape to the British and Indians. As plans were discovered threatening to overthrow planters or join the enemy, some Mississippi planters actually tried to treat slaves less harshly, coming to understand that coercion alone would not keep their slaves under control. But most attempts were weak.

In 1814 a new law limited the number of lashes administered to slaves to thirty-nine, which could be extended to one hundred if two “respectable slave holders” concurred with the ruling.

Further, courts could choose not to execute slaves found guilty of capital offenses, by substituting “stripes or burning as the case requires.” There would still be executions for slaves who were charged with raping white women and the crime of arson was added to the list of capital crimes.

While such “reforms” were limited, they did replace such earlier practices as nailing the ears of lying slaves to a pillory. Some planters were beginning to listen to their slaves, occasionally trying to accommodate them and these efforts “served to quiet many antislavery critics who emphasized the brutality of their masters.”^{xvi}

To limit or reduce cruelty to slaves was an effort to halt future slave rebellions, and “did not constitute any planter paternalism.... Planters who empathized with ill or tired or lonely slaves could expect future loyalty. Masters who made appeals to sentiment among the slaves developed a new tool in the subjugation of slaves.”

The appearance of fewer newspaper advertisements seeking return of runaway slaves or describing jailed runaways so their masters could locate them suggested, “planters were less likely to acknowledge their slaves’ discontent publicly,” stated historian Winthrop Jordan.^{xvii}

ONCE THE LOUISIANA Purchase opened the Mississippi River for commerce in 1803, Mississippi became the twentieth state in 1817 with a population of about 40,000 whites and 30,000 African Americans. Only the southern quarter and a narrow strip up the Mississippi to the Yazoo River were open to legal settlement at the time of the state's admission.^{xviii} The rest of Mississippi was held by the Chickasaw and Choctaw nations and it would take three treaties, from 1820 to 1832, for whites to seize this valuable asset.

Over the next years, antebellum or pre-civil war slavery was developing throughout the South (from 1820 to 1860) as thousands of enslaved people, including hundreds still coming directly from Africa, were taken into Mississippi, Alabama, Louisiana and Tennessee. In Mississippi, the first counties were organizing in 1820 with Delta counties created later; the last two Delta counties, Issaquena and Sunflower, were not carved out of the others until well after the Civil War, in 1884.^{xix} Mississippi's plantation system that began in the southern river counties of the Natchez area would spread north and east, ultimately turning it into one of the major plantation states.

Early travelers into this new state saw the inherent problems in clearing and settling the swampy Delta and often wrote off the region's long-term potential for development, failing to recognize the extraordinary fertility of its alluvial soil.

"Those who doubted the Delta could ever be cleared, tamed, and farmed efficiently failed to take into account the determination, rapacity, and cruelty that humans could exhibit if the proper incentives were in place. Scarcely three decades after Mississippi joined the Union, though still a largely un-cleared wilderness,^{xx} the Yazoo Basin had already emerged as the most attractive new planting region in the Cotton South," observed historian James C. Cobb in his classic Mississippi Delta book, *The Most Southern Place on Earth*.

There is no doubt that African American slaves built Mississippi. Mississippi historian Bradley G. Bond gathered many first-hand accounts of their early lives, all supporting Cobb:

[Some of those enslaved] maintained roads, constructed levees, drained swamplands, washed, cooked, cleaned, tended livestock, and worked at various jobs that required skilled labor. The vast majority of slaves, however, cultivated cotton and other raw crops on plantations and farms. Whether they lived on a vast plantation or a small farm, the lives

of slaves consisted largely of work, short rations, and dread – the dread of arbitrary violence, cruel taskmasters, and forced separation from their families. Yet, despite the fears with which slaves daily lived, they constructed worlds of their own, worlds often invisible to whites. Slaves built not only the wealth of Mississippi through their labor, but they also built a dynamic culture that celebrated family and religion.^{xxi}

The Delta, with its nearly tropical climate, slowly attracted farmers, but was too overwhelming for small-scale operations to develop. To clear the land, drain it, and protect it required enormous outlays of capital and labor, and organization. The hard labor provided by slaves made the critical difference; it could not have been farmed without them – a solid argument for reparation payments (and not so difficult to trace). And yet their conditions were horrid; a scorching hot and humid, swampy hell with slavery was destined to be a large part of the Delta's rich economy; there would be no thanks to the black people forced to do this work – ever.

Around 1822 the first non-native Delta settlement was created when pioneer Ben Smith bought 30,000 acres four miles north of Lake Washington in Washington County, a massive plantation by any standards. By 1826, Frederick Turnbull and Junius Ward also set up plantations on the banks of Lake Washington and five years later, the Anderson Plantation in Coahoma County started taking shape.^{xxii}

Ward moved into the Delta from Kentucky by traveling down the Natchez Trace, an old Indian route that winds through parts of Tennessee and Mississippi. When told of a beautiful lake in the Delta wilderness, he talked some Choctaw Indians into taking him there. The following year, Ward returned – this time bringing his slaves down the Mississippi by flatboat and then building a raft to carry his possessions up a bayou to his new lakeside home.^{xxiii}

Ward's neighbor, Frederick Turnbull, constructed a flatboat and floated up a bayou to the lake. Turnbull, a Princeton engineering graduate, surveyed his land, built a cabin, and left, returning the following year with his family, his remaining slaves, and other possessions. Both chose locations that gave them access to water routes to the Mississippi River where they could connect with steamboats, since there were no roads.

Once Delta settlers began moving in, the region grew as friends and relatives followed closely behind. These were not typical settlers of a new region. Cohn described Ward, Turnbull and others as “pioneers with means” since they possessed financial resources and large numbers of enslaved Africans to clear and drain the land, and could immediately take full advantage of farming the fertile lands.

From the beginning, “the Delta was destined to be the province of wealthy planters and not the typical hardworking, upwardly mobile yeoman farmers usually associated with conquest of the frontier.”^{xxiv}

Farm business activities increased and still more people moved into the Delta. By 1830, Washington County’s population numbered 1,976 of whom 1,184 were enslaved. Within the next ten years, there were more than ten enslaved persons for every white in Washington County with this ratio growing to 14.5 to 1 by 1850. Turnbull alone, in the five years from 1830 to 1835, increased the number he enslaved from 26 to 96.^{xxv} Across the entire Delta, by 1850 those enslaved outnumbered whites by 5 to 1 while the average family in Washington County enslaved 81.7 people of African heritage in that same year.^{xxvi}

Booming black population

Cotton production boomed in the 1830s, and by 1860, slaves made up 55 percent of the state's population, numbering 437,303, compared with 353,901 whites. Some 30,943 slaveholders possessed an average of 14.1 slaves each. Most enslaved of working age were field hands while relatively few Africans had received special training as artisans or house servants (as sometimes portrayed).^{xxvii}

Strong police measures were used to control the enslaved population. Slaves were not allowed to be taught to read and write, to swear at whites, to testify against whites in court or to buy and sell items without permission from their master.

There were few free blacks in antebellum Mississippi, their number never exceeding 1,400 since Mississippi law gave the legislature authority to approve or reject all slave emancipations in the state. Before this law went into effect, Mississippi slaves could purchase their freedom or their slaveholders could free them. But with both forms of emancipation blocked, only children born to free mothers and successful petitioners to the Mississippi legislature could be freed.^{xxviii}

Most free blacks or *freedmen* lived in cities rather than rural areas like the Delta. Some owned slaves themselves, since white slave owners occasionally admitted fathering mulatto offspring in their wills, and left these children money and

property. “As a group, free blacks shared a recurring plight. They existed in a state and a region where African-descended people were almost all slaves. Laws in Mississippi regarding free blacks were established to reduce their number, if not to eliminate their presence entirely.”^{xxxix} In 1831, new laws encouraged free blacks to leave the state.^{xxx}

IN JANUARY OF 1842, Charles Dickens sailed from Liverpool on the steamship *Britannia* bound for America. At the height of his popularity in both countries, Dickens had taken a year off from writing, determined to visit the young nation “to see for himself this haven for the oppressed which had righted all the wrongs of the Old World.”^{xxxi}

Twenty-nine-year-old Dickens was disenchanted as he traveled down the Mississippi River and in *American Notes*, the book written after he returned to England describing his American visit, he wrote “scathingly about the institution of slavery, citing newspaper accounts of runaway slaves horribly disfigured by their cruel masters.” Dickens would later observe: “This is not the Republic I came to see.... This is not the Republic of my imagination.... The more I think of its youth and strength, the poorer and more trifling in a thousand respects, it appears in my eyes. In everything of which it has made a boast ... it sinks immeasurably below the level I had placed it upon.”^{xxxii}

What this writer could easily see from the steam-wheeler’s deck, and he was observing this from a distance, was that slavery was horrid. But many black people were very good at retaliation one way or another, especially Nat Turner who is still honored for putting the best scare into plantation owners throughout the entire country, even into those planters in the Delta who lived thousands of miles away from Turner’s Virginia home.

As the number of slaves kept growing, more slave revolt conspiracies took place,^{xxxiii} yet not one really incited and frightened white Southerners – including Mississippi planters – until Turner’s rebellion in 1831.^{xxxiv}

Claiming religious visions, Turner organized a group of about seventy slaves who went from plantation to plantation in far away Southampton County, Virginia murdering at least fifty-five white men, women and children, stopping only when they ran out of ammunition.^{xxxv} Once caught, Turner was executed, but stories of the Nat Turner rebellion threw the slaveholding caste into panic.

Mississippi planters responded by pushing legislation for a new and tougher law forcing free blacks between the ages of sixteen and fifty to leave Mississippi or risk being sold into slavery; exceptions were those persons of “good character” and who were able to acquire and hold secured bonds.

FOR THOSE ENSLAVED in Mississippi, most days were spent performing agricultural labor while a few others worked as domestic servants in their owners' homes. A few men practiced skilled trades such as blacksmithing, carpentry, or shoemaking.

Children typically worked at least part-time by the age of eight, and by their early teens toiled as full-grown adults. Only severe illness and disability kept slaves from year-round labor until they grew old; often slaves were forced to work until they died.

Slaves could be angry and resentful, and owners were often irritated with slave resistance to what the owners saw as the natural and correct order of things, according to John Hope Franklin and Loren Schweninger, authors of “Runaway Slaves: Rebels on the Plantation.” These authors observed:

Slaves sometimes confronted overseers with verbal assaults and physical force; they also attempted to intimidate their white managers. While such defiance was more common in some regions than in others, there were few plantations where slaves worked diligently and willingly under the direction of an experienced, discerning, and sagacious overseer. Far more common was an undercurrent of distrust, hostility, anger, confrontation, and periodic eruptions of violence.^{xxxvi}

Some parts of Mississippi and Louisiana were particularly vulnerable to more violence related to slavery than other slave-holding territories. Although violent reactions against overseers occurred in every region of the South, they were widespread in the Lower Mississippi River Valley where “The endless toil of clearing land, planting grains, cotton, and sugar, coupled with the unhealthy climate and the stifling heat during the summer months, made life at best a continuous, grinding routine of work.”^{xxxvii}

Brutal mistreatment of those enslaved often occurred even though it made little sense from a business sense (let alone moral), since planters often used slaves

as “collateral to secure loans.” Slaves were often the most valuable properties on the frontier and planters “risked their credit and even their honor in investments in slaves.”^{xxxviii}

Some planters, attempting to avoid falling dangerously into debt, liquidated their slaveholdings. “While liquidation preserved the master’s reputation, it destroyed slave families and communities,” declared historian David J. Libby: “Such was the case of a friend of John Willis, who wrote, ‘I must now beg you to dispose of the Boys Tom and George...for the best price you can, for cash, as the Gentleman I ow[e] it to is now awaiting for it.’ He added that if he could not ‘make up the balance other ways,’ he would be \$190 short.”^{xxxix}

Generally in Mississippi, the ongoing need was for more slaves, as “anyone with slaves and some land could within a few months have enough cash to cover his debts.” Some planters laid out large sums for combinations of slaves and land. The partnership of Barclay and Sackeld purchased the Bayou Pierre plantation of Abijah Hunt [the present day Claiborne County] for sixty thousand dollars in 1808. In addition to “one thousand to twelve hundred arpens of land,” a cotton gin and press, and livestock, the transaction included “the Negroes on the said plantation amounting in number from sixty-one to sixty-five.” Such exchanges indicate the kind of cash available on hand for such investments.^{xl}

Paradoxically, poor health was a serious reality and kept many enslaved blacks from reaching old age. Enslaved people were often driven to dirt eating, or *Caehixia Africana*, a specific dietary-deficiency disease relating to a lack of minerals. Further, many adult slaves suffered from mental and nervous disorders, and most had tooth decay.^{xli} Too often, their white owners and others used the words “lazy” and “shiftless” to describe slaves who were physically and sometimes mentally ill due to horrid treatment and living conditions.

Childbearing resulted in high incidences of infant mortality from spontaneous abortions, stillbirths, and womb diseases. Death in childbirth occurred two to three times as frequently among enslaved women as among white women. Pregnant slave women were not allowed to see a physician, and depended upon a slave midwife during the birthing. Almost always, new mothers were sent out to work in the fields the next day; there are accounts of new mothers going back to the fields even on the same day or giving birth in the fields and continuing to work.^{xlii}

While the Delta clearly was an unhealthy place to live and work with its jungle-like vegetation and mosquito-hosting climate, this did not slow the region’s growth

and development. In Mississippi's other counties and states to the east, worn out plantation lands required that planters and yeoman farmers move to the richer lands of the alluvial Delta: Benjamin G. Humphreys transferred his plantation into the Delta in the 1840s from Claiborne County, since he was in debt and his land was failing fast. The Delta offered Humphreys and other planters hope of retaining their high standards of living.

Many Tallahatchie County settlers at the eastern edge of the Delta came from South Carolina for the same reasons as Humphreys and by 1850, a large number of settlers were coming into Tunica, Coahoma and Bolivar counties of the Delta, due to easy Mississippi River access for immigrants from Kentucky and Tennessee.^{xliii}

From 1831 to 1841, few if any black labor insurrections were formally reported in the South. Then in 1841, the crew of the slave ship *Creole* was overpowered off the coast of Alabama by its cargo of slaves and the ship diverted to the British West Indies. England refused to return the slaves, having abolished slavery in 1833; the issue of slavery in America was contentious between the two countries leaving Secretary of State Daniel Webster to encourage war against England.

Recalling the Revolutionary War and the War of 1812, *The Colored Peoples Press* denounced Webster's "bullying position," its editor asserting, "If war be declared... Will we fight in defense of a government which denies us the most precious right of citizenship? The States in which we dwell have twice availed themselves of our voluntary services, and have repaid us with chains and slavery. Shall we a third time kiss the foot that crushes us? If so, we deserve our chains."^{xliv}

Mississippi's affluent whites deny education

From the start, few white Mississippians supported public education. Natchez, located on the Mississippi River and close to New Orleans, was the first major Mississippi city. Its planters kept ties to French culture and imagined themselves to be aristocratic slave owners and intellectuals; many were educated in eastern colleges and abroad, and private tutors and out-of-state educations were provided for their children.

In the eastern part of the state, where land was less productive, farmers typically did not own slaves and most were poor. Before the Civil War, the self-absorbed, wealthy Natchez planters dominated state government and used state funds to take care of their own needs, unwilling to support public schools they did not use for their own families.^{xlv}

Reportedly, the first state attempt to support education of black children in the Delta's Sunflower County came in 1821 with establishment of the Literary Fund, according to the county's late historian Marie M. Hemphill. Laws provided for commissioners to employ teachers, set salaries, and supervise schools but the fund was not successful, as the required tax levy depended on favorable votes in each township, causing it to be rejected, according to Hemphill.

Many of the county's planters hired overseers to do their work in the swamplands while they and their families lived in the healthier hill sections. Those planters who kept homes in the Delta often sent their children away to school or employed tutors or governesses for them; occasionally other white children were invited to share in the instruction given by the resident teacher in a neighbor's home, according to Hemphill.^{xlvi}

When families of limited means could not afford imported governesses, education became a home business with a family member or relative assuming the responsibility. There could not have been many students as the 1850 census reported only 166 white children in the entire county of Sunflower.

Slaves were not even considered in the matter of education. They were forbidden to learn how to read and write, and any white person who taught them could be severely punished. Many kidnapped Africans hungered for education, and ultimately numerous schools were set up behind Union lines for runaways.

During Reconstruction years following the Civil War, the Constitution of 1868 would finally make provision for free public education for both races and set up a levy.^{xlvii} But these new educational opportunities quickly disappeared – as did most other gains for blacks – when Reconstruction ended.^{xlviii}

ⁱ Ronald L. F. Davis, "The Black Experience in Natchez, 1720-1880," (Eastern National, 1999), 1. Davis cites John G. Clark, "New Orleans – 1718-1812: An Economic History," (Baton Rouge, La., 1970), 3-158. Fort Rosalie, named in honor of the wife of a French minister, was one of several garrisons erected by the company to protect the plantation district in the making.

ⁱⁱ Gloria J. McCallum, "African Ancestry in Mississippi," *Genealogical Resources on the Internet Guide to African Ancestored Research*, updated January 8, 2003.

ⁱⁱⁱ Ray Raphael, "A People's History of the American Revolution: How Common People Shaped the Fight for Independence," Howard Zinn, series editor, (New York: Perennial, 2001), 369-370.

^{iv} *Ibid.*, 370.

v Ibid., 371.

vi Benjamin Quarles, *The Negro in the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1961).

vii Ibid., 355.

viii Sources: Sylvia R. Frey, *Water from the Rock: Black Resistance in a Revolutionary Age* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), Quarles, (1961).

ix The exact number will never be known because eighteenth century muster rolls usually did not indicate race.

x Ira Berlin and Ronald Hoffman, eds., "Slavery and Freedom in the Era of the American Revolution," (Charlottesville, Virginia: University Press of Virginia for the United States Capitol Historical Society, 1983); John W. Pulsis, ed. "Moving on: Black Loyalists in the Afro-Atlantic World," (New York: Garland Pub., 1999).

xi The law that created the Mississippi Territory in 1798 specifically allowed for slavery.

xii This Act enforced Article IV, Section 2, of the Constitution: "The citizens of each state shall be entitled to all privileges and immunities of citizens in the several states. A person charged in any state with treason, felony, or other crime, who shall flee from justice, and be found in another state, shall on demand of the executive authority of the state from which he fled, be delivered up, to be removed to the state having jurisdiction of the crime. No person held to service or labor in one state, under the laws thereof, escaping into another, shall, in consequence of any law or regulation therein, be discharged from such service or labor, but shall be delivered up on claim of the party to whom such service or labor may be due."

xiii Brycchan Carey, "John Wesley," (1703-1791)," 2002, (online).

xiv Libby, 56, cites David Holmes to David Pannell, July 23, 1812, in Carter, ed., "Territorial Papers, Vol VI," (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1937), 299.

xv Ibid., 57.

xvi Ibid. 58. Cites Winthrop Jordan, "White Over Black," reissue edition, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 403-406.

xvii Ibid.

xviii McCallum.

xix Cobb, 7.

xx In its un-cleared form, the Delta land was bountiful. It contained trees yielding papaw fruit, wild plums ... black haws, red haws, summer grapes, fox grapes, blackberries, hickory nuts, pecans, black walnuts, and "beautiful moss which would completely cover the ground and old rotten logs." This description comes from an article by Wilbur T. Gibson on "Wild Fruits in Coahoma County, Mississippi" available in a Mississippi Room clippings file at the Clarksdale Public Library.

xxi Bradley G. Bond, "Mississippi, A Documentary History," (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2003), 67.

xxii Noel Workman, "Staplcotn: The First 75 Years," (online), Chapter 1.

xxiii Ibid.

xxiv Cobb, 8.

xxv Ibid.

^{xxvi} Ibid. Cobb cites the Seventh Census of the United States; Charles Sackett Sydnor, "Slavery in Mississippi," (Gloucester, MA.: Peter Smith Publishing, 1933), 188.

^{xxvii} McCallum.

^{xxviii} Ibid.

^{xxix} Cobb.

^{xxx} Dale Krane and Stephen D. Shaffer, "Mississippi Government and Politics: Modernizers versus Traditionalists," (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1992), Chapter 2, *The Origins and Evolution of a Traditionalistic Society*.

^{xxxi} David Perdue, "Charles Dickens Home Page," *Dickens in America*, (online).

^{xxxii} Ibid.

^{xxxiii} By 1790, the South was producing a thousand tons of cotton every year; by 1860, a million tons. In those seventy years, a half million kidnapped and enslaved people of African descent grew in number to 4 million as their rebellions and conspiracies against whites also increased.

^{xxxiv} Frederic Bancroft, "Slave Trading in the Old South," (Ungar: New York, 1959), 18.

^{xxxv} Raphael, 170.

^{xxxvi} John Hope Franklin and Loren Schweninger, "Runaway Slaves: Rebels on the Plantation," (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 11.

^{xxxvii} Ibid., 10.

^{xxxviii} David J. Libby, "Slavery and Frontier Mississippi, 1720-1835," (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2004), 55.

^{xxxix} Ibid., 51.

^{xl} Libby, 52.

^{xli} Kenneth Stampp, "The Peculiar Institution," (New York: Vintage Books, 1956).

^{xlii} Ibid. (Mississippi's infant mortality rate remains the highest in the country. Figures from the Mississippi State Department of Health for 1997, for instance, indicated that for every 1,000 live births, 7.4 white infants under age 1 died while the number of black infants dying under age 1 was 18.6. In parts of the impoverished Delta region, these numbers ranged up to 19.4 and 28.8 (Washington County). The national infant mortality rate, by comparison, was 6.8 that year while Mississippi's rate was 12.7. (Public Health Statistics, online).

^{xliii} Cobb, 9. Inland counties like Carroll, Holmes, Tallahatchie and Panola, with their overland routes, drew more from the Carolinas and Georgia, Cobb states. He cites Vernon L. Walters, "Migration into Mississippi, 1798-1837" (M.A. thesis, Mississippi State College, 1969), 161.

^{xliv} Raphael, 179.

^{xlv} Krane and Shaffer, Chapter Two.

^{xlvi} Marie M. Hemphill, "Fevers, floods and faith," (Indianola: private press), 1980, 514.

^{xlvii} Ibid., 515.

^{xlviii} In some ways, little has changed in modern times: During the school year of 2003-2004, the National Education Association ranked Mississippi 48th "Smartest State" for having nearly the lowest salaries in the 50 states for public school teachers. As for public education spending per pupil, Mississippi's ranking was even lower, at 49th. By mid April of 2005 Mississippi school districts were left in the dark as to how many teachers they could contract for the following school year. Officials

were forced to consider program cuts to balance their budgets, as well, after state lawmakers' unprecedented decision to end the 2005 regular session without approving a state budget. (Source: John Fuquay, "Districts Remain in Dark," *The Clarion-Ledger*, April 16, 2005.)