

# Don't be a Slave to Narrow Narratives on Slavery



By Sidney Secular

February 24, 2024

The book, “Time on the Cross: The Economics of American Negro Slavery” by Nobel Prize winner Robert Fogel, written in 1974, still startles court historians as it courts the radical conclusion that black slaves were commonly better off than free Northern laborers during antebellum times. Beyond being beyond the grasp of African witch doctors, headhunters or slavers (most of whom were themselves black!), American Negro slaves had a surprising amount of freedom and were well taken care of by law. Black enslaved women were allowed maternity leave and received attentive medical care during their pregnancies. They had a one-year maternity leave after the birth of a child. Slaves were not permitted to work by law while they were ill.

In Virginia, an older free black could ask a white to take him or her on as a slave; this was an antebellum version of “Social Security” for elderly blacks who had no other means of subsistence. Of course, the white owner was usually a professional – a doctor, merchant, teacher, lawyer or well off widow/spinster rather than a planter, so the newly enslaved individual did not have to perform any heavy manual labor. As well, slaves were legally allowed to conduct their own business, selling their wares and crafts as well as such personal talents as smithing and carpentry in the marketplace. Their masters were not entitled to their financial gains

though the master had to give permission for the slave to take time out of the duties he owed to his master. Remember, slaves did not work as did the factory, mine and mill worker.

They had duties but once those had been fulfilled, they had the leisure to do other things. Indeed, the system worked so well for many blacks that the man who owned the most slaves at the time of Fort Sumter was a black man who had sold a patent for an improvement on the cotton gin. The money he gained, he used to purchase his and his wife's freedom and a plantation along with more slaves than were owned by any other planter in South Carolina at that time.

Slaves were also given cash bonuses for extraordinary production. There was also an established retirement age after which slaves were well taken care of by their owners. One Florida plantation had a book on their "enslaved people" that indicated the birthday of one woman who was over 100 years old! Obviously, slavery was no automatic death sentence or a consignment to a (short) life of endless suffering! Indeed, many slaves lived better lives than do their present "freed" ghetto descendants who frequently don't make it through childhood! This is not to say that slavery was a "good" thing, but it was not the horror – at least in the New World – as it has been portrayed! And furthermore, at the beginning of the colonization of America, the vast majority of slaves were white and we're not speaking here of indentured servants but of chattel slaves!

Under slavery, black slaves lived in close-knit slave "communities" where they often ran their own affairs though doubtless under the supervision of their owner. Families were rarely split apart, contrary to the usual narrative and where this did happen, it happened as much in the North as the South. They had garden plots to raise food for their families and, where possible, they fished and hunted to support their tables. They had guaranteed housing, food, clothing, medical care, business opportunities and support after retirement.

They were also protected from the criminal activities of the surrounding community and were made more secure than many of today's American senior citizens – white and black.

Post Scriptum: a fairly recently published book, *Dying For Freedom* by Jim Downs addressed the fate of former slaves both during and after the Civil War. The book pointed to the failure of the “Union” States to care for newly freed slaves especially in an impoverished post-war South, causing more death and suffering than had happened when those same people were in fact enslaved. According to the book, “As former slaves left their places of servitude behind, they entered a world of freedom, but also a war zone devastated by disease, poverty and death. More soldiers died of disease than from battle. Slaves became exposed to the same outbreaks of dysentery, smallpox and fever that decimated Union and Confederate ranks, and they died by the thousands: an estimated 60,000 former slaves died from a smallpox epidemic from 1863 to 1865. There were no protections, no refugee programs or public health services in place to help freed slaves ward off the disease that plagued the Confederate South.

As one 19th-century reformer observed, ‘You may see a child well and hearty this morning, and in the evening you will hear of its death.’” Furthermore, blacks were not permitted to “migrate” north to escape the suffering of the South under “reconstruction” until the need for manpower during WWI required their bodies to fill the places once held by those now fighting in Europe! So, the idea that the so-called “Civil War” was fought to end the suffering of black slaves is sheer nonsense.

© 2024 Sidney Secular – All Rights Reserved

E-Mail Sidney Secular: [Success\\_Express@yahoo.com](mailto:Success_Express@yahoo.com)