

Title: Exploring the Language of Slavery

Objective: Students will analyze the language used in historical documents, literature, and contemporary discourse related to slavery to understand its impact on perceptions and attitudes towards enslaved people.

Materials Needed:

1. Copies of primary source documents related to slavery (e.g., slave narratives, advertisements for runaway slaves, plantation records)
2. Excerpts from literary works addressing slavery (e.g., "Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass," "Beloved" by Toni Morrison, "Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl" by Harriet Jacobs)
3. Whiteboard or chalkboard
4. Markers or chalk
5. Multimedia resources (optional)

Duration: 1 class period – Approximately 60 minutes

Procedure:**Introduction (10 minutes):**

1. Begin by discussing the power of language and its ability to shape perceptions and attitudes.
2. Introduce the topic of slavery and explain that the lesson will focus on analyzing the language used to describe and discuss slavery throughout history.
3. Ask students to brainstorm words or phrases associated with slavery. Write their responses on the board.

Activity 1: Analyzing Primary Source Documents (20 minutes):

1. Divide students into small groups and provide each group with a primary source document related to slavery.
2. Instruct students to read the document carefully, paying attention to the language used to describe enslaved people, their living conditions, and their treatment.

3. After reading, facilitate a group discussion where students share their observations about the language used in the document. Encourage them to consider the tone, vocabulary, and implications of the language.
4. Reconvene as a class and have each group present their findings. Discuss common themes and patterns in the language of slavery that emerge from the documents.

Activity 3: Contemporary Discourse (20 minutes):

1. Introduce examples of contemporary discourse related to slavery, such as discussions about reparations, racial justice, or the legacy of slavery in the United States.
2. Engage students in a discussion about the language used in these contemporary discussions. Encourage them to consider how historical language and narratives continue to influence contemporary discourse on slavery.
3. Ask students to reflect on how the language used in contemporary discourse either perpetuates or challenges stereotypes and misconceptions about slavery and enslaved people.

Conclusion (10 minutes):

1. Summarize the key points discussed during the lesson, emphasizing the role of language in shaping perceptions of slavery.
2. Encourage students to continue critically examining language in historical and contemporary contexts, particularly when discussing sensitive or controversial topics like slavery.

Assessment: Evaluate students based on their participation in group discussions, their ability to analyze the language of slavery in primary source documents and literature, and their reflections on contemporary discourse. Additionally, assess any written assignments or projects completed as part of the lesson.

A Name Is Not Just A Name

MIHV

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Race

"the fact of dividing people, or of people being divided, into such groups"



Ethnic

*"of or relating to large groups of people
classed*

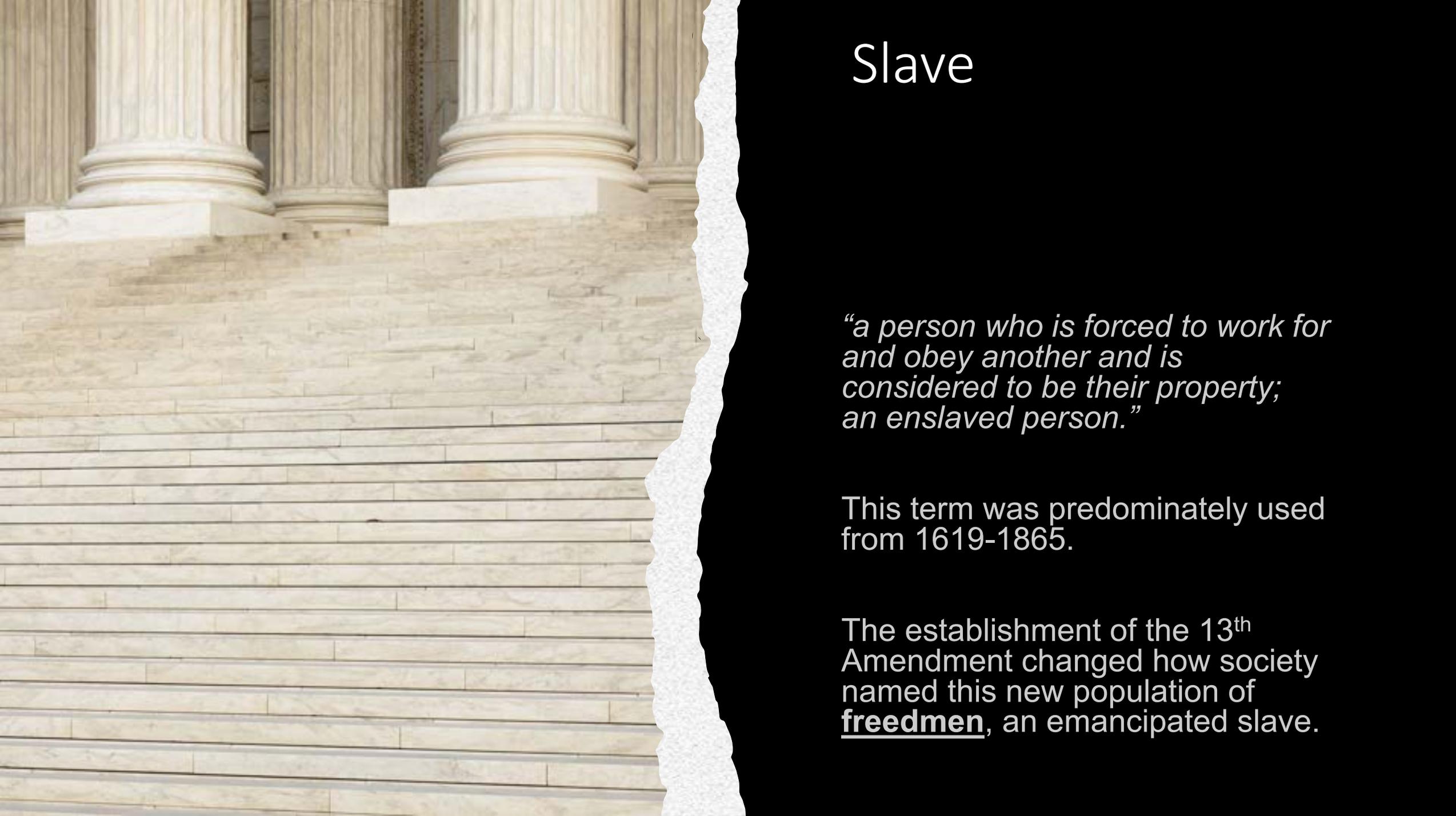
*according to common racial, national, tribal,
religious, linguistic, or cultural origin or
background"*

Interactive Sites:

- Measuring Race and Ethnicity Across the Decades: 1790-2010

https://www.census.gov/data-tools/demo/race/MREAD_1790_2010.html





Slave

“a person who is forced to work for and obey another and is considered to be their property; an enslaved person.”

This term was predominately used from 1619-1865.

The establishment of the 13th Amendment changed how society named this new population of freedmen, an emancipated slave.



Negro -

- **dated, often offensive** : a person of Black African ancestry
- **dated, often offensive** : a member of a group of people formerly considered to constitute a race of humans having African ancestry and classified according to physical traits (such as dark skin pigmentation)

*Notice the note mentioning that this term and definition are coined as being “dated, often offensive”



Negro -

"The terms Negro and, to a lesser extent, Negress were formerly in common use, but began to fall out of favor in the 1960s, and by the 1980s had largely been replaced in nonhistorical contexts by Black and African American."





Colored

"The adjective meanings of colored relating to race were formerly in common and widespread use well into the 20th century, although attitudes toward them had changed by the 1960s. In most nonhistorical contexts, these uses of colored are now considered unacceptable; the terms Black and African American are preferred."



Exceptions for the terms “Negro” and “Colored”

- “A few organizations continue to use *Negro* in their names, reflecting the historical preference for the term: the full name of the UNCF, a philanthropic education organization founded in the mid-20th century, is the United Negro College Fund, also called the United Fund; and the Negro League Baseball Museum, which documents the Black baseball leagues active largely between 1920 and the late 1940s, continues to carry the name used by those leagues. The use of *Negro* in these contexts and others like them is not regarded as offensive.”

Exceptions for
the terms
“Negro” and
“Colored”

- “The adjective *colored* remains in the full name of the NAACP (the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People), a civil rights organization founded in the early 20th century. The use of *colored* in this name is not regarded as offensive. The adjective *colored* is also occasionally still used in self-reference by Black people, but its use by others is offensive.”



Black

“of or relating to any of various population groups of especially African ancestry often considered as having dark pigmentation of the skin but in fact having a wide range of skin colors”

“a racialized classification of people, usually a political and skin color-based category for specific populations with a mid to dark brown complexion.”

Black

- “Young Black activists in the United States started using "Black" in the 1960s when referring to descendants of slaves as a way to leave the term "Negro" and the Jim Crow era behind, says Keith Mayes, associate professor of African American and African Studies at the University of Minnesota.”

African American

"African American" caught on in the US in the 1980s as a more "particular and historical" term than the generic "Black," Keith Mayes says.

Said to be coined term by Rev. Jesse Jackson

People of Color

"People of color" was originally meant to be a synonym of "Black," but its meaning has expanded to accommodate Latinos, Asians, Native Americans and other non-white groups, says Efren Perez, a professor of political science and psychology at the University of California Los Angeles."

Sources

- <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2020/02/25/the-changing-categories-the-u-s-has-used-to-measure-race/>
- <https://www.merriam-webster.com>
- <https://www.uah.edu/diversity/news/15567-which-is-the-correct-terminology-black-african-american-or-people-of-color#:~:text=Young%20Black%20activists%20in%20the,at%20the%20University%20of%20Minnesota>

Language of Slavery from the National Park Service

Introduction

While different meanings have been attached to the term Underground Railroad in different times and places, when the National Park Service's National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom uses the term, it to references escape from slavery in the United States through flight and/or assistance in that escape. These escapes lasted from the beginning until the end of legal slavery here, and happened in the north, south, east, and west. The Underground Railroad represents one of the earliest grass roots movements in the United States in which people united across racial, gender, religious, and class lines in hopes of promoting social change. While allies assisted in journeys to freedom, those who sought freedom are at the center of this story, because there is no Underground Railroad without freedom seekers.

Many labels for escaping African Americans were constructs of enslaving society or by paternalistic abolitionists. As such, terms discussing slavery and freedom from the period tend to reflect how the dominant society viewed African Americans and their efforts toward freedom. Instead, the National Park Service and its partners strive to use language that more accurately reflects both the inherent humanity of enslaved people and historical accuracy.

There is not universal consensus on what words are most appropriate to use when talking about slavery. In one example, some historians prefer to use words like “fugitive” to emphasize that when freedom seekers liberated themselves, they simultaneously broke state and/or federal laws. Others object to the criminal sound of the term, feeling that it unfairly maligns those seeking freedom through escape, or argue that it legitimizes the perspective of the society that upheld the legality of slavery.

As another National Park Service document, [“Terminology and the Mass Incarceration of Japanese Americans during World War II”](#) points out, words that a person uses reflect their personal experience, their depth of knowledge, and their worldview. The selection of particular words by an individual or by consensus within an organization may also serve ideological or political purposes. In addition, the use of specific words and our understanding of them changes over time. It is for this reason that the Network to Freedom has taken an interpretive approach to addressing terminology, one in which the topic is used as an educational tool in appropriate contexts.

Terminology

Abolitionist

A person opposed to slavery. Abolitionists were typically politically active and worked to eradicate the legal framework of slavery. They may or may not have acted on their antislavery principles by helping individuals escape from slavery.

Chattel

Portable personal property. Chattel slavery equated human beings with livestock, furniture, and any other portable personal property. Chattel could be inherited, sold, or transferred without permission, in the case of the enslaved person.

Conductor

This refers to an individual who escorted or directed freedom seekers between stations or safe houses. A conductor need not have been a member of an organized section of the Underground Railroad, only someone who provided an element of guidance to the freedom seeker.

Emancipation

This term is often used to refer to either individual or group freedom. For example, those enslaved in the District of Columbia were freed by an act of Congress in 1862, the [Compensated Emancipation Act](#). The word is familiar because of Abraham Lincoln's [Emancipation Proclamation](#) issued in January 1863 which declared an end to slavery in states that were in rebellion against the United States. Individuals also attempted to emancipate themselves through escape or legal decisions.

Enslaved Person

This term is used in place of slave. It more accurately describes someone who was forced to perform labor or services against their will under threat of physical mistreatment, separation from family or loved ones, or death. For the general purposes of this website, the term refers to one of the tens of millions of kidnapped Africans transported to the Americas and their descendants held in bondage through the American Civil War.

Enslaved person emphasizes the humanity of an individual within a slaveholding society over their condition of involuntary servitude. While slavery was a defining aspect of this individual's life experience, this term, in which enslaved describes but person is central, clarifies that humanity was at the center of identity while also recognizing that this person was forcibly placed into the condition of slavery by another person or group.

Enslaver versus Master, Owner, or Slaveholder

An enslaver exerted power over those they kept in bondage. They referred to themselves as a master or owner - hierarchical language which reinforced a sense of natural authority. Today, the terms "master" or "owner" can continue to suggest a naturalness to the system while also distancing us from the fact that enslavers actively enslaved other human beings who were entitled to the same natural rights as themselves.

The terms slave master and slave owner refer to those individuals who enslaved others when slavery was part of American culture. These terms can imply that enslaved people were less capable or worthy than those who enslaved them. Using the word master or owner can limit understanding of enslaved people to property. These terms also support a social construct that there are people who should naturally hold power (i.e. slave owners, slave masters) and those who should naturally not (enslaved individuals).

Freedom Seeker versus Fugitive

Freedom seeker describes an enslaved person who takes action to obtain freedom from slavery.

The labels fugitive, runaway, and escapee were constructs of slave-holding society and patronizing abolitionists. These terms reflect how slave-holding society viewed African American efforts toward freedom and ultimately take away their individual agency.

The term fugitive is linked to the various Fugitive Slave Laws (1793, 1850) passed by the U.S. Congress, and emphasizes that the fugitive was acting criminally to escape from bondage. This language was key in attempts to preserve the view that the law was on the side of the slaveholding society—which it was—while reinforcing the view that the fugitive was incapable of acting responsibly in a society governed by the rule of law.

Manumission

The freeing of an individual or group of enslaved African Americans by will, purchase, legal petition, or legislation. Some enslaved African Americans saved up from jobs for hire or sale of goods to purchase their own manumission. Slaveowners sometimes freed individuals as a favor or picked favored enslaved people to free at the slaveholder's death. Some enslaved people were willing to take the risk of going to court to seek their freedom. Some people distinguish manumission from emancipation, using manumission to refer to only one individual at a time.

Maroon

Describes a community when used as an adjective or a member of a community when used as a noun of enslaved African Americans who escaped slavery and lived in a remote place like a swamp or the mountains. These settlements often actively assisted other freedom seekers. The Everglades and the Great Dismal Swamp were sites of maroon communities.

Operative or Station Master

An accomplice to escape by a freedom seeker. They might help arrange an escape, serve as a conductor, or otherwise help those escaping. If the freedom seeker was caught, the operative might provide a lawyer or money for fines and bail and/or arrange purchase from the slaveholder.

A stationmaster provided shelter or a hiding place to freedom seekers. They often served as a clearinghouse for information regarding safe routes and nearby pursuit of freedom seekers and coordinated with conductors and other stationmasters to provide safe passage for freedom seekers upon departure from that station.

Personal Liberty Laws

These laws for rights like habeas corpus, trial by jury, and protections from seizure defended those escaping, in direct opposition to the Fugitive Slave Acts of 1793 and 1850. Northern states like Indiana enacted laws providing these rights to freedom seekers starting as early as 1824. Such laws show the growing resistance to slavery in the North. Due to the cases of [Ableman v. Booth](#) and the [United States v. Booth](#), the state of Wisconsin acted to nullify the decision of the Supreme Court whose southern justices found personal liberty laws unconstitutional.

Slave

As with enslaved person, this term is used for a person forced to perform labor or services against their will under threat of physical mistreatment, separation from family or loved ones, or death. For the general purposes of this website, the term refers to one of the tens of millions of kidnapped Africans transported to the Americas and their descendants held in bondage through the American Civil War.

Slave is a commonly used term to describe an enslaved African American, but one that suggests that the individual's identity was more fundamentally as property than as a human. It can also suggest that the person accepted their enslavement as a definition of their own identity. Additionally, it leaves out the presence of an enslaving individual or group whose ability of enforcement through violence backed the system of slavery. The National Park Service uses slave only when necessary in a historical context as part of a quote, preferring enslaved person as a more descriptive, complete choice.

Slave Patrol

Formed by state militias and county courts or by plantation owners themselves, these groups were responsible for preventing crime by Blacks and for keeping enslaved African Americans in the place prescribed for them by slave-holding society. Members might be poor whites or wealthier property owners. Mounted on horses, they were often armed with guns, whips, and clubs, and were not afraid to be brutal. They stopped

Black individuals and demanded identification to demonstrate that Black individuals were not freedom seekers. Slave patrols had the right to search slave quarters.

Station

The station provided a haven for traveling freedom seekers, was secured by the stationmaster, and took many forms. Stations might be basements, cabins, homes, barns or caves, or any other site that provided an element of security while giving the freedom seeker an opportunity for rest and provisions.

Underground Railroad

The National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom Program defines the Underground Railroad as the resistance to slavery through escape and flight.

Ho! FOR FREEDOM!— On Thursday night three females of ebony complexion, one cripple ditto dark, and two boys, with ivory teeth and impish faces came to the sage conclusion that they preferred nakedness and starvation in Canada to rice puddings, and jell cakes, and slap jacks in the comfortable and luxurious mansion of our worthy citizen and townsman Alexander Majors. We can hardly believe that our city is infested with such misguided philanthropists as n & @ # % thieves and Abolitionists—the worst possible enemy a good negro can have. This dirty work is doubtless left for the nasty Abolitionists of Civil Bend and Tabor. Such there are over the river who delight in work of this kind.— They would rather see a negro starve in a land of icebergs and British freedom, than live in luxury, ease and affluence in Nebraska, held nominally as servants.

Such is practical Abolitionism. We don't believe there is a man in this city or county but what thinks it would have been to the interest of these persons to have remained with Mr. Majors.

But they have shed their linen and departed. They had sense enough to put on a bran new suit throughout; and this is about the only sense they have displayed. But "freedom" is a ge-lorious thing, even to a hobbling and crippled old wench. So think Abolitionists.

A reward of \$1,000 is offered for the apprehension and recovery of the fugitives.