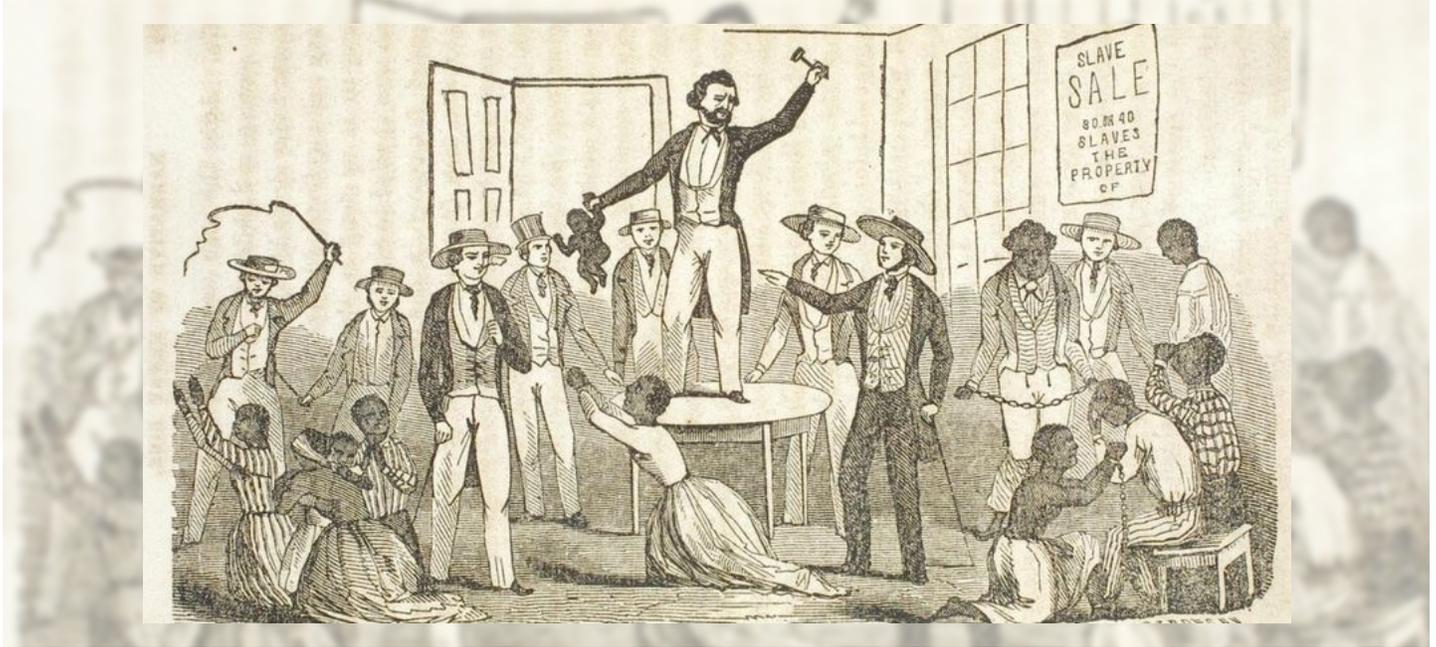


## 9 Facts About Slavery They Don't Want You to Know

A widely circulated list of historical "facts" about slavery dwells on the participation of non-whites as owners and traders of slaves in America.



### CLAIM

A circulating list of nine historical "facts" about slavery accurately details the participation of non-whites in slave ownership and trade in America.

### RATING



### ORIGIN

One of the less well known aspects of the history of slavery is how many and how often non-whites owned and traded slaves in early America. Free black slave holders could be found at one time or another "in each of the thirteen original states and later in every state that countenanced slavery," historian R. Halliburton Jr. observed. That black people bought and sold other black people raises "vexing questions" for 21st-century Americans like African-American writer Henry Louis Gates Jr. <[http://www.theroot.com/articles/history/2013/03/black\\_slave\\_owners\\_did\\_they\\_exist/](http://www.theroot.com/articles/history/2013/03/black_slave_owners_did_they_exist/)>, who writes that it betrays class divisions that have always existed within the black community. For others, it's an excuse to deflect the shared blame for the institution of slavery in America away from white people.

In the latter vein, a "9 Facts About Slavery They Don't Want You to Know" meme lays out a mixture of true, false and misleading historical claims. We'll address each one in turn below:

**9 FACTS about slavery they don't want you to know**  
DailyKerr.com

The first legal slave owner in American history was a black tobacco farmer name Anthony Johnson.

North Carolina's largest slave holder in 1860 was a black plantation owner named William Ellison.

American Indians owned thousands of black slaves.

In 1830 there were 3,775 free black people who owned 12,740 black slaves.

Many black slaves were allowed to hold jobs, own businesses, and own real estate.

Brutal black-on-black slavery was common in Africa for thousands of years.

Most slaves brought to America from Africa were purchased from black slave owners.

Slavery was common for thousands of years.

White people ended legal chattel slavery.

DailyKenn.com

<<https://us-east-1.tchyn.io/snopes-production/uploads/2016/08/SlaveryFacts.jpg>>

**The first legal slave owner in American history was a black tobacco farmer named Anthony Johnson.**

Possibly true. The wording of the statement is important. Anthony Johnson was not the first slave owner in American history, but he was, according to historians, **among** the first to have his lifetime ownership of a servant legally **sanctioned**

<[http://www.encyclopediavirginia.org/Court\\_Ruling\\_on\\_Anthony\\_Johnson\\_and\\_His\\_Servant\\_1655](http://www.encyclopediavirginia.org/Court_Ruling_on_Anthony_Johnson_and_His_Servant_1655)> by a court.

A former indentured servant himself, Anthony Johnson was a “free negro” who owned a 250-acre farm in Virginia during the 1650s, with five indentured servants under contract to him. One of them, a black man named **John Casor** <<https://books.google.com/books?id=QzB2AAAAMAAJ&pg=PA32&lpg=PA32#v=onepage&q&f=false>>, claimed that his term of service had expired years earlier and Johnson was holding him illegally. In 1654, a civil court found that Johnson in fact owned Casor’s services for life, an outcome historian R Halliburton Jr. calls “one of the first known legal sanctions of slavery — other than as a punishment for crime.”

**North Carolina’s largest slave holder in 1860 was a black plantation owner named William Ellison.**

False. **William Ellison** <<http://www.latinamericanstudies.org/african-americans/William-Ellison-bio.htm>> was a very wealthy black plantation owner and cotton gin manufacturer who lived in South Carolina (not North Carolina). According to the 1860 **census** <<http://freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~ajac/nchalifax.htm>> (in which his surname was listed as “Ellerson”), he owned 63 black slaves, making him the largest of the 171 **black** slaveholders in South Carolina, but far from the largest overall slave holder in the state.

**American Indians owned thousands of black slaves.**

True. Historian Tiya Miles provided this **snapshot**

<[http://www.slate.com/articles/news\\_and\\_politics/cover\\_story/2016/01/native\\_american\\_slavery\\_historians\\_uncover\\_a\\_chilling\\_chapter\\_in\\_u\\_s\\_history.html](http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/cover_story/2016/01/native_american_slavery_historians_uncover_a_chilling_chapter_in_u_s_history.html)> of the Native American ownership of black slaves at the turn of the 19th century for *Slate* magazine in January 2016:

Miles places the number of enslaved people held by Cherokees at around 600 at the start of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and around 1,500 at the time of westward removal in 1838-9. (Creeks, Choctaws, and Chickasaws, she said, held around 3,500 slaves, across the three nations, as the 19th century began.) “Slavery inched its way slowly into Cherokee life,” Miles told me. “When a white man moved into a Native location, usually to work as a trader or as an Indian agent, he would own [African] slaves.” If such a person also had a child with a Native woman, as was not uncommon, the half-European, half-Native child would inherit the enslaved people (and their children) under white law, as well as the right to use tribal lands under tribal law. This combination put such people in a position to expand their wealth, eventually operating large farms and plantations.

**In 1830 there were 3,775 free black people who owned 12,740 black slaves.**

Approximately true, according to historian R. Halliburton Jr.:

There were approximately 319,599 free blacks in the United States in 1830. Approximately 13.7 per cent of the total black population was free. A significant number of these free blacks were the owners of slaves. **The census of 1830 lists 3,775 free Negroes who owned a total of 12,760 slaves.**

**Many black slaves were allowed to hold jobs, own businesses, and own real estate.**

Somewhat true. There were exceptions, but generally speaking — especially after 1750, by which time slave codes had been entered into the law books in most of the American colonies — black slaves were not legally permitted to own property or businesses. From the *Oxford Companion to American Law* (2002):

Under these early codes, slaves had virtually no legal rights IN most areas they could be executed for crimes that were not capital offenses for whites. Their testimony was restricted in legal cases and could not be used either for or against whites. Trials of slaves were usually by special courts. **Slaves could not own property, move about without consent of their owners, or legally marry.**

**Brutal black-on-black slavery was common in Africa for thousands of years.**

True in the sense that the phenomenon of human beings enslaving other human beings goes back thousands of years but not just among blacks and not <https://www.snopes.com/facts-about-slavery/>

True, in the sense that the phenomenon of human beings enslaving other human beings goes back thousands of years, but not just among slaves, and not just in Africa.

### Most slaves brought to America from Africa were purchased from black slave owners.

Sort of true. Historian Steven Mintz describes the situation more accurately in the introduction to his book *African-American Voices: A Documentary Reader, 1619-1877*:

Apologists for the African slave trade long argued that European traders did not enslave anyone: they simply purchased Africans who had already been enslaved and who otherwise would have been put to death. Thus, apologists claimed, the slave trade actually saved lives. Such claims represent a gross distortion of the facts. Some independent slave merchants did in fact stage raids on unprotected African villages and kidnap and enslave Africans. Most professional slave traders, however, set up bases along the west African coast where they purchased slaves from Africans in exchange for firearms and other goods. Before the end of the seventeenth century, England, France, Denmark, Holland, and Portugal had all established slave trading posts on the west African coast.

Yet to simply say that Europeans purchased people who had already been enslaved seriously distorts historical reality. While there had been a slave trade within Africa prior to the arrival of Europeans, the massive European demand for slaves and the introduction of firearms radically transformed west and central African society. A growing number of Africans were enslaved for petty debts or minor criminal or religious offenses or following unprovoked raids on unprotected villages. An increasing number of religious wars broke out with the goal of capturing slaves. European weapons made it easier to capture slaves.

### Slavery was common for thousands of years.

True, as noted above — though how “common” slavery has been and what the specific nature of that slavery was has varied according to time and place.

### White people ended legal chattel slavery.

It's rather self-serving to claim that “white people” ended legal chattel slavery in the United States (much less ended chattel slavery, period), given that the overwhelming majority of blacks in the U.S. could not vote, could not run for political office, and, in every other way conceivable, were excluded from institutional power. Moreover, even as some white people were laboring to put an end to slavery, many others were fighting to preserve it.

Slavery was eliminated in America via the [efforts](https://books.google.com/books?id=q9W9CgAAQBAJ&pg=PA95#v=onepage&q&f=false) of people of various ethnicities, including Caucasians, who took up the banner of the [abolitionist](http://abolition.e2bn.org/people.html) movement. The names of the white leaders of that movement tend to be better known than those of the black leaders, among whom were David Walker, Frederick Douglass, Dred Scott, Harriet Tubman, Sojourner Truth, Nat Turner, and many others. When Congress passed (and the states ratified) the [13th Amendment](https://www.loc.gov/rr/program/bib/ourdocs/13thamendment.html) in 1865, it was the culmination of many years of [work](http://www.gilderlehrman.org/history-by-era/african-americans-and-emancipation/essays/allies-for-emancipation-black-abolitionists) by that multi-racial movement.

Got a tip or a rumor? Contact us [here](https://www.snopes.com/contact/).

**Fact Checker:** [David Emery](https://www.snopes.com/author/david-emery/)

**Published:** 17 August 2016

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**FACT CHECK: Did Mexico Sign a Major Trade Deal With Argentina to Retaliate Against Trump's Border Wall Plans?** <[https://redirect.api.boomtrain.com/click/snopes/BNrQfZpuPX8pQa07s5C7VKzb+sjTh4eTRBT4F4Afin/1a+43DVf2y4d8bUSZXAbgJebjL7RhwRJI\(b=8f1a3950f95afc40e038a23d663741e5\\_1518220800&rd=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.snopes.com%2Fmexico-argentina-trade-deal-border-wall%2F&c=More%2520Articles%2520-%2520Post&rsid=87d469de-0eae-11e8-b533-0e8923adf050&x=ZXhwX2Jhc2VsaW5l&n=0&rt=article&re0eae-11e8-b533-0e8923adf050:recs:0&t=421750&g=recs&rc=Recency&r=0a1a728619bddb84b727ec24edb0e875&m=web&p=False&](https://redirect.api.boomtrain.com/click/snopes/BNrQfZpuPX8pQa07s5C7VKzb+sjTh4eTRBT4F4Afin/1a+43DVf2y4d8bUSZXAbgJebjL7RhwRJI(b=8f1a3950f95afc40e038a23d663741e5_1518220800&rd=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.snopes.com%2Fmexico-argentina-trade-deal-border-wall%2F&c=More%2520Articles%2520-%2520Post&rsid=87d469de-0eae-11e8-b533-0e8923adf050&x=ZXhwX2Jhc2VsaW5l&n=0&rt=article&re0eae-11e8-b533-0e8923adf050:recs:0&t=421750&g=recs&rc=Recency&r=0a1a728619bddb84b727ec24edb0e875&m=web&p=False&)>

Mexico is in trade talks with Argentina, but no deal has been finalized; the cost to American farmers would likely be lower than claimed.

**FACT CHECK: Did a Holocaust Museum Display a Poster Listing 'Early Warning Signs of Fascism'?** <[https://redirect.api.boomtrain.com/click/snopes/BNrQfZpuPX8pQa07s5C7VKzb+sjTh4eTRBT4F4Afin/1a+43DVf2y4d8bUSZXAbgJebjL7RhwRJI\(b=8f1a3950f95afc40e038a23d663741e5\\_1518220800&rd=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.snopes.com%2Fholocaust-museum-warning-signs-fascism%2F&c=More%2520Articles%2520-%2520Post&rsid=87d469de-0eae-11e8-b533-0e8923adf050&x=ZXhwX2Jhc2VsaW5l&n=1&rt=article&rid=87d469de-0eae-11e8-b533-0e8923adf050:recs:1&t=421750&g=recs&rc=Recency&r=a8b892a2ef37db7b432d5b87fdb731fd&m=web&p=False&](https://redirect.api.boomtrain.com/click/snopes/BNrQfZpuPX8pQa07s5C7VKzb+sjTh4eTRBT4F4Afin/1a+43DVf2y4d8bUSZXAbgJebjL7RhwRJI(b=8f1a3950f95afc40e038a23d663741e5_1518220800&rd=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.snopes.com%2Fholocaust-museum-warning-signs-fascism%2F&c=More%2520Articles%2520-%2520Post&rsid=87d469de-0eae-11e8-b533-0e8923adf050&x=ZXhwX2Jhc2VsaW5l&n=1&rt=article&rid=87d469de-0eae-11e8-b533-0e8923adf050:recs:1&t=421750&g=recs&rc=Recency&r=a8b892a2ef37db7b432d5b87fdb731fd&m=web&p=False&)>

The poster was not on display, but instead was available in the gift shop.

snop or the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

**Black Like Ike?** [https://redirect.api.boomtrain.com/click/snopes/BNrQfZpuPX8pQa07s5C7VKzb+sjTh4eTRBT4F4Afin/1a+43DVf2y4d8bUSZXAbgJebjL7RhwRb=8f1a3950f95afc40e038a23d663741e5\\_1518220800&rd=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.snopes.com%2Fdwight-eisenhower-racial-background%2F&c=More%2520Articles%2520-%2520Post&rsid=87d469de-0eae-11e8-b533-0e8923adf050&x=ZXhwX2Jhc2VsaW5l&n=2&rt=article&rid=87d469de-0eae-11e8-b533-0e8923adf050:recs:2&t=421750&g=recs&rc=Recency&r=fc9fcb5f6c49e330ca0fb1e60129cb20&m=web&p=False&>](https://redirect.api.boomtrain.com/click/snopes/BNrQfZpuPX8pQa07s5C7VKzb+sjTh4eTRBT4F4Afin/1a+43DVf2y4d8bUSZXAbgJebjL7RhwRb=8f1a3950f95afc40e038a23d663741e5_1518220800&rd=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.snopes.com%2Fdwight-eisenhower-racial-background%2F&c=More%2520Articles%2520-%2520Post&rsid=87d469de-0eae-11e8-b533-0e8923adf050&x=ZXhwX2Jhc2VsaW5l&n=2&rt=article&rid=87d469de-0eae-11e8-b533-0e8923adf050:recs:2&t=421750&g=recs&rc=Recency&r=fc9fcb5f6c49e330ca0fb1e60129cb20&m=web&p=False&>)

President Dwight D. Eisenhower's racial background has sparked a number of long-circulating rumors, but there's no compelling evidence behind such claims.

**FACT CHECK: Did Melania Trump's Parents Arrive in the U.S. Through 'Chain Migration'?** [https://redirect.api.boomtrain.com/click/snopes/BNrQfZpuPX8pQa07s5C7VKzb+sjTh4eTRBT4F4Afin/1a+43DVf2y4d8bUSZXAbgJebjL7RhwRb=8f1a3950f95afc40e038a23d663741e5\\_1518220800&rd=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.snopes.com%2Fmelania-trump-parents-chain-migration-meme%2F&c=More%2520Articles%2520-%2520Post&rsid=87d469de-0eae-11e8-b533-0e8923adf050&x=ZXhwX2Jhc2VsaW5l&n=3&rt=art0eae-11e8-b533-0e8923adf050:recs:3&t=421750&g=recs&rc=Recency&r=9261be8b4baa7994250d39c8c8ee8c55&m=web&p=False&>](https://redirect.api.boomtrain.com/click/snopes/BNrQfZpuPX8pQa07s5C7VKzb+sjTh4eTRBT4F4Afin/1a+43DVf2y4d8bUSZXAbgJebjL7RhwRb=8f1a3950f95afc40e038a23d663741e5_1518220800&rd=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.snopes.com%2Fmelania-trump-parents-chain-migration-meme%2F&c=More%2520Articles%2520-%2520Post&rsid=87d469de-0eae-11e8-b533-0e8923adf050&x=ZXhwX2Jhc2VsaW5l&n=3&rt=art0eae-11e8-b533-0e8923adf050:recs:3&t=421750&g=recs&rc=Recency&r=9261be8b4baa7994250d39c8c8ee8c55&m=web&p=False&>)

A twitter post painted Viktor and Amalija Knavs's immigration status as a symbol of hypocrisy on the part of the Trump administration.

**FACT CHECK: Does the Dow Jones Do Worse Under Republican Presidents?** [https://redirect.api.boomtrain.com/click/snopes/BNrQfZpuPX8pQa07s5C7VKzb+sjTh4eTRBT4F4Afin/1a+43DVf2y4d8bUSZXAbgJebjL7RhwRJb=8f1a3950f95afc40e038a23d663741e5\\_1518220800&rd=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.snopes.com%2Fdow-jones-losses-republicans%2F&c=More%2520Articles%2520-%2520Post&rsid=87d469de-0eae-11e8-b533-0e8923adf050&x=ZXhwX2Jhc2VsaW5l&n=4&rt=article&rid=87d469de-0eae-11e8-b533-0e8923adf050:recs:4&t=421750&g=recs&rc=Recency&r=186f2b7c7b40b72829a1bf5a655a3de3&m=web&p=False&>](https://redirect.api.boomtrain.com/click/snopes/BNrQfZpuPX8pQa07s5C7VKzb+sjTh4eTRBT4F4Afin/1a+43DVf2y4d8bUSZXAbgJebjL7RhwRJb=8f1a3950f95afc40e038a23d663741e5_1518220800&rd=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.snopes.com%2Fdow-jones-losses-republicans%2F&c=More%2520Articles%2520-%2520Post&rsid=87d469de-0eae-11e8-b533-0e8923adf050&x=ZXhwX2Jhc2VsaW5l&n=4&rt=article&rid=87d469de-0eae-11e8-b533-0e8923adf050:recs:4&t=421750&g=recs&rc=Recency&r=186f2b7c7b40b72829a1bf5a655a3de3&m=web&p=False&>)

A Facebook meme purporting to prove that the Dow suffers under Republican presidencies ignores key data.

**Who Is the Naked Man in the Mvsterv** [https://redirect.api.boomtrain.com/click/snopes/BNrQfZpuPX8pQa07s5C7VKzb+sjTh4eTRBT4F4Afin/1a+43DVf2y4d8bUSZXAbgJebjL7RhwRJb=8f1a3950f95afc40e038a23d663741e5\\_1518220800&rd=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.snopes.com%2F2017%2F05%2F12%2Fnaked-man-shark-picture%2F&c=More%2520Articles%2520-%2520Post&rsid=87d469de-0eae-11e8-b533-](https://redirect.api.boomtrain.com/click/snopes/BNrQfZpuPX8pQa07s5C7VKzb+sjTh4eTRBT4F4Afin/1a+43DVf2y4d8bUSZXAbgJebjL7RhwRJb=8f1a3950f95afc40e038a23d663741e5_1518220800&rd=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.snopes.com%2F2017%2F05%2F12%2Fnaked-man-shark-picture%2F&c=More%2520Articles%2520-%2520Post&rsid=87d469de-0eae-11e8-b533-)

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9 Facts About Slavery They Don't Want You to Know

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