

THE BLACK SLAVE OWNERS

By Joseph E. Holloway

The majority of black slave owners were members of the mulatto class, and in some cases were the sons and daughters of white slave masters. Many of the mulatto slave owners separated themselves from the masses of black people and attempted to establish a caste system based on color, wealth, and free status. According to Martin Delany, the colored community of Charleston City clung to the assumptions of the superiority of white blood and brown skin complexion.

These mulattoes of the old free Black elite did not attend church with the dark-skinned blacks of Charleston City. They not only formed congregations which excluded freedmen of dark complexion, but they only married among other mulattoes to “keep the color in the family.”

Large numbers of free Blacks owned black slaves in numbers disproportionate to their representation in society. According to the federal census of 1830, free blacks owned more than 10,000 slaves in Louisiana, Maryland, South Carolina, and Virginia. The majority of black slave-owners lived in Louisiana and planted sugar cane.

Slave holding among the mulatto class in South Carolina was widespread according to the first census of 1790, which revealed that 36 out of 102, or 35.2 percent of the free Black heads of family held slaves in Charleston City. By 1800 one out of every three free black recorded owning slave property. Between 1820 and 1840 the percentage of slaveholding heads of family ranged from 72.1 to 77.7 percent, however, by 1850 the percentage fell to 42.3 percent.

According to the U.S. Census report in 1860 only a small minority of whites owned slaves. Out of a population of 27 million whites only eight million lived in the South, and out of this population fewer than 385,000 owned slaves. In short, the total white population own about 1.4, while the southern white population own about 4.8 enslaved Africans.

On the other hand the black population in 1860 was 4.5 million, with about 500,000 living in the South. Of the blacks residing in the South,

261,988 were not slaves. Of this number, 10,689 lived in New Orleans. In New Orleans over 3,000 free blacks owned slaves, about 28 percent of the free Black population in the city.

Year	Owners	Slaves
1790	49	277
1800	36	315
1810	17	143
1820	206	1,030
1830	407	2,195
1840	402	2,001
1850	266	1,087
1860	137	544

The following chart shows the free Black slave owners and their slaves in Charleston, 1790-1860. In 1860 there were at least six African Americans in Louisiana who owned 65 or more slaves. The largest number, 152

slaves, were owned by the widow C. Richards and her son P.C. Richards, who owned a large sugar cane plantation. Another Black slave magnate in Louisiana with over 100 slaves was Antoine Dubuclet, a sugar planter whose estate was valued at \$264, 000. In North Carolina 69 free Blacks were slave owners.

The majority of urban black slave owners were women. In 1820, free black women represented 68 percent of heads of households in the North and 70 percent of slaveholding heads of colored households in the South. The large percentage of black women slave owners is explained by manumission by their white fathers, or inheritance from their white fathers or husbands. Black women were the majority of slaves emancipated by white slave owning men with whom they had sexual relations. Thirty-three percent of all the recorded colonial manumissions were mulatto children and 75 percent of all adult manumissions were females.

THE FIRST BLACK SLAVE OWNER--AND THE ORIGINS OF SLAVERY

Euro-Americans arrived in Jamestown Virginia in 1607, and the first large group of Africans arrived in 1619. However, House of Burgess records show that Africans were already in the colony before 1619. John Rolfe provides us with an eyewitness account of this first group. "About the last of August [1619] came a Dutch man of Warre that sold us twenty negars." Among them was one called Antonio from Angola. Later, we find that Antonio becomes Anthony Johnson. Other

listed was Angelo, a negro woman," and John Pedro, a neger aged 30." The census of 1624-25 showed that there were twenty-three Africans living in Jamestown, Virginia listed as servants and not slaves.

Africans coming to Jamestown between 1630 and 1640 could expect to be freed after serving their indented period of time about seven to ten years for Africans and Indians. At this time there was no system of perpetual servitude or slave for life, but the system was rapidly evolving. Between 1640 and 1660 slavery was becoming a customary reality. In 1640 three servants of Hugh Gwyn, "a Dutchman called Victor, a Scotchman named James Gregory, and John Punch, a negro," having run away from their master were overtaken in Maryland and brought back to stand trial for the misbehavior. The verdict of the court would change the system of indentured servitude and set the system in transition to plantation slavery. The court ruled that the three servants shall received punishment by whipping and have "thirty stripes apiece." The court ordered that the Dutchman and the Scotchman should "first serve out their times with their master according to their Indentures and one whole year apiece after the time of their service is expired" and that they shall served the colony for three years. "The third being a negro. . .shall serve his said master or his assigns for the time of his natural life." This marks the first time that race and color becomes a factor in the status of both black and white indentured servants. In other words, the system is rapidly evolving to meet the new demand for cheap labor, and race is slowing being used as the justification for the enslavement of peoples of African origins. Between 1640 and 1660 Africans were going to court and suing for their freedom.

In 1644 Thomas Bushrod, assignee of Colonel William Smith, sold a mulatto boy named Manuel "as a slave for-Ever, but in September, 1644 the said servant was by the Assembly adjudged no Slave and but to as other Christian servants do and was freed in September, 1665." A similar ruling is found in the case Robinson.

In 1649, there were about three hundred Africans in the colony and an increasing mulatto population. African and European indentured servants off springs were increasing and considered alarming in regard to the status of the mulatto. That is a system was evolving based on being either black or white.

Africans who entered Jamestown between 1620 to 1650 could expect to be freed after serving their indentured time and given 50 to 250 acres of land, hogs, cows and seeds and the right to import both white and black indentured servants. For a brief period in American history between 1630 to 1670, a number of Africans had become freedmen and owned indentured white servants. The act of 1670 forbidden free Negroes to own Christian servants but conceded the right to own servants of their own race. By 1670, it was becoming customary to hold African servants as "slaves for life," and by 1681 what was customary became law.

The first laws regarding the status of Africans recognized the free blacks. The first status was passed in 1662 provided that the status of offspring should follow that status of the mother. What this law did was to allow white fathers to enslave their own children, and free women of color to perpetuate the free black population. In other words, it also guaranteed freed black females the right to extend their free status to their children. Black women who have served their indentured period would not provide foundation for the free black community. Many of those African who were grandfathered in the new system not only became the free black community, but this is the origins of Black slave owners.

The act of 1668 dealing with the condition of the colored population related solely to the tax obligations of a free black woman, and two years later an act guaranteed to "negroes manumitted or otherwise free" the right to own servants of their own race and expressly denied to them the right to purchase or to own white or "Christian servants." This law recognized and sanctioned slavery, but also guaranteed the continuity of the free black class, who were now largely mulatto.

ANTHONY JOHNSON

Black slave owners have not been studied as a part of American history, rather as a datum to American history, and yet slavery as a perpetual institution is legalized based on a case brought before the House of Burgess by an African, who had been indentured in Jamestown, Virginia 1621 and was known as Antonio the Negro according to the earliest records. He later Anglicized his name to Anthony. Anthony Johnson was believed to be the first Black to set foot on Virginia soil. He was the first black indentured servant, the first free black, and the first to establish

the first black community, first black landowner, first black slave owner, and the first person based on his court case to establish slavery legally in North America. One could argue that he was the founder of slavery in Virginia.

Anthony Johnson arrived in Jamestown, Virginia in 1621. In 1623, Antoney[sic] and Isabella married. The next year they were the proud parents of William. William is believed to be the first African American born in British America. During his first years in North America, he escaped death in an Indian attack on Jamestown. During the following year Africans and people of color were a small minority in the Virginia colony. The census of 1625 reported only twenty-three Africans living in the colony out of a total of 1,275 white people and indigenous Africans. By 1649 the total black population was only 300 out of a total of 18,500 whites.

In 1635 Johnson's master, Nathaniel Littleton finally released him. As the custom was he received a 250 acre plantation in 1651 under the "head right system" by which the colonial government encouraged population growth by awarding fifty acres of land for every new servant a settler brought to Virginia. He became the master of both black and white servants.

Anthony Johnson's plantation was located on the neck of land between two creeks that flowed into the Pungoteague River in Northampton County. A few years later, his relatives, John and Richard Johnson, also acquired land in this area. John brought eleven servants to the colony and received 550 acres, and Richard brought two and received 100 acres.

In 1654 Anthony Johnson went to court and sued his white neighbor for keeping his black servant John Casor. Casor claimed that Johnson "had kept him his serv [an] t seven years longer than hee should or ought. Johnson who the courts described as an "old Negro," claimed that he was entitled to "ye Negro [Casor] for his life." Johnson realized that if he continued and persisted in his suit, Casor could win damages against him. So, Johnson brought suit against his white neighbor Robert Parker, whom Johnson charged had detained Casor "under pretense [that] the s[ai]d John Casor is a freeman." The courts now ruled in his

favor and John Casor was returned to him and Parker had to pay the court costs.

This case establishes perpetual servitude in North America, and it is ironic that the case was brought to the court by an African who had arrived from Angola in 1621. Slavery was established in 1654 when Anthony Johnson, Northampton County, convinced the court that he was entitled to the lifetime service of John Casor; this was the first judicial approval of life servitude, except as punishment for a crime.

Anthony Johnson lived on his plantation surrounded by his white neighbors. He had entered a system not based on slavery, but indentured servitude. There were many Anthony Johnson's in America, who never spent a day in slavery but were owners of slaves.

MARIE THERESE METOYER

In 1767, a Frenchman named Claude Thomas Pierre Metoyer met Marie Therese Coin-Coin from the Kongo and promptly fell in love. They became immediate occupants in Natchitoches, Louisiana where Marie and Claude lived together as man and wife. They had their first children together in January 1768, a set of twins. Things were rough going for the couple; the church would not have anything to do with the relationship and at this time Marie and her infant son Augustine were still enslaved. Early in 1776 Metoyer purchased his child and shortly after that in a private document he freed Marie and the child. Years later Marie and Metoyer broke up but, not before fathering six children. Marie stayed in Natchitoches and worked the Melrose plantation Claude Metoyer left for her; he then moved to New Orleans, left for France and married a proper French woman.

In 1778 free nonwhites were a very small minority in Natchitoches, Louisiana. By 1785, that had not changed. Marie, Augustine, and two additional sons born to her after manumission were half of the free nonwhite population. By 1786, she had eight children Augustine, Pierre, Joseph, Dominique, Francois, Toussaint, Louis, Marie Suzanne, four of whom were still enslaved.

From the money and land that Metoyer gave her, she started a plantation. The first crop was tobacco, and in 1792 she was shipping

9,900 rolls to Cuba for cigars (Mills, 30). She also produced indigo, manufactured medicine and the major source of her income came from hunting bears and fowl. All this was done with the help of her older sons, because she had no slaves at this time. She tried for nine years to free her other children from slavery and in 1815 when Metoyer died all her children were freed. In 1816 written Church documents show that she had twelve slaves, but local tradition credits her with many more. Marie Theresa now had three plots of land estimated at 11,000 acres. She was now in her late sixties and completely turned over the plantation to her children. She died sometime in the spring of 1816.

Augustine was now married and on his own since 1795. He was the first of Marie and Claude's children to acquire a plantation, and become a slave owner. Within two years he purchased his first slave, a male between the age of eighteen and twenty to help him clear the fields. Most of the slaves he bought were for labor, but he did purchase some for family devotion. In 1798, he bought his second slave, an eight-year-old named Marguerite who was his wife's sister. In 1800, \$300 was paid for his third slave; this was a child of his still enslaved brother. The next year a slave named Marie was purchased and became Pierre's wife. His second labor slave was purchased in 1806, a female to be the wife of the male he already owned. In June of 1809, Augustine purchased eight "African Negroes" for \$3,500 cash: a male, five boys and two girls aged eleven to thirteen, and then three of the males were sold to his brother for \$1,350. In 1810, he purchased two more slaves from a planter in the next county. Similar purchases and manumissions are recorded for of the Metoyer children. In 1810, Marie Suzanne purchased a slave costing \$600; the peculiar thing was that she was still a slave herself. By the 1810 census Augustine had seventeen slaves; Louise, fifteen; Pierre, twelve; Dominique, eight; Francois, three; Joseph, two; and Toussaint, one. A total of fifty-eight slaves were acquired in just twelve years. The fifty-eight slaves had increased to 287 by the end of 1830. The Metoyer surname owned an average of 2.3 slaves per person, and the whites in the county only owned an average of .9 slaves per person. No other family group came close to matching the holdings of the Metoyer name.

The affluent period was between 1830 and 1840 for the Metoyer family. Pierre, one of the less prosperous brothers died in 1834 leaving

a plantation of 677 acres, after giving his seven children land for their marriages. Augustine divided the land between six children and kept two plantations for himself, which contained 2,134 acres (Mills, 109). Early in 1850 the Metoyer family had improved their land by 5,667 acres and had a total of 436 slaves. In the treatment of Metoyer family slaves there are some contradictory statements.

When it came to the treatment of slaves black owners were “in a bind”. If they were nice to their slaves, they were considered by the whites to be overly tolerant. On the other hand, if they treated their slaves harshly the blacks would say they were abusive of “their people”. Legend has it that one of the original Metoyer brothers was a hard taskmaster, but not to his own slaves. He would try-out the slaves and makes them do the worst work on his plantation, things that he didn’t want his own slaves doing. After the work was done he would return the slave and claim poor working habits. That same tradition holds for one of the sisters also; there are also many written advertisements about runaway slaves that the Metoyer family put in the local newspaper. They occasionally hired a slave catcher to retrieve a slave. There is no real proof that the Metoyer family was any different from other slave owner’s black or white. Not all of the black slave owners worked and owned plantations. There were many black masters who were artisans and used slaves as workers. One of the most prominent of these owners was William Ellison.

WILLIAM ELLISON (APRIL)

On June 20, 1820 April Ellison appeared in the Sumter District courthouse in Summerville, South Carolina, to change his slave name. Since, he was a free man he wanted his name changed to his former master’s William.

After his emancipation William moved to Stateburg, South Carolina (see figure 2) and became an apprentice for Mr. William McCreight. After four years of hard labor and William Ellison was ready to start his own business as a gin maker. The first few years he primarily repaired gins, but each year his customers and reputation grew. Between June 8, 1816 and January 1817, William (then April) purchased and freed his wife Matilda and his daughter Eliza Ann and brought them to Stateburg. His

son Henry was born in or near Stateburg in January 1817, followed two years later by William Jr. and in another two years by Reuben.

By 1820 Ellison had managed to buy his first two slaves, two males, ages twenty-six and forty-five respectively. With the purchase of the two slaves he demonstrated to the local whites that he was not afraid to own, use and exploit slave labor. In just four short years he was a master gin maker, had changed his name and was now a slave owner.

William purchased a valuable location for his shop right at the cross road of town. The going rate at the time was \$3.00 to \$7.00 an acre, but he knew what prime land was worth and paid \$375.00 for the land to his shop. The gin business flourished, and his reputation among the whites grew. Now that he was a prominent figure in the community he purchased more land, but this land was for a plantation.

To William Ellison slaves were a source of labor. This ideology helps to explain why there was a ratio male to female of 4 to 1 in the 1860s. The male slaves were a direct source of income, the females were future benefits. Assuming that the women produced children at a ratio of one boy to one girl the best explanation for a shortage of girls is that they were sold as slaves. The average price for a slave girl was \$400 and selling twenty girls would add additional \$8,000 cash, which could contribute to land and slave purchases. This silent tradition around Stateburg was not questioned, but his reputation as a harsh master was talked about. His slaves were said to be the district's worst fed and clothed. Ellison and his family lived frugally; he was even more tightfisted about providing food, clothes, and housing for his slaves. His harsh treatment may have come from the fact that his slaves were very bitter, because the men and women had seen their daughters sold away into slavery. Also, the harsh treatment could have been from Ellison's need to prove to the whites that he was not soft on slaves, because of his color. Sometimes his slaves ran away, and on at least one occasion he hired a slave catcher. He never skipped on medical care for his slaves, but he did not care to help their spiritual needs. Through all the years William Ellison may have been harsh on his slaves, but the money they produced helped keep his family well-to-do up until the Civil war.

In 1829 he purchased two more male slaves between the ages twelve and twenty-four. Early in the 1830s Ellison started using his sons as gin

makers, but there was still more work than the men could handle. At the end of the decade, Ellison now owned thirty-six slaves thirty were male, and six female who mostly worked the fields and produced children. The census at this time had Ellison with fourteen slaves. As his ownership of slaves grew so did his land, buying over 350 acres in that ten-year span. By his fiftieth birthday, in 1840, William had reached a plateau that few whites let alone blacks had ever reached. In the early 1840s his sons and daughters married mulattos from Charleston and came to live on the Ellison Plantation. His sons became slave owners with the help of their father. The slaves were from the Ellison family and were just passed down to the next generation. These slaves were not income producing slaves, but rather house servants. By 1860, Ellison increased his slave population from thirty-six in 1850 to sixty-three, an increase of seventy-five percent.

That year, in the census he reported that his total worth was just over \$61,000, which was very low for the property and personal slaves that he owned. The man who started out life as a slave achieved financial success. His wealth was 90 percent greater than his white neighbors in Sumter district. In the entire state, only five percent owned as much real estate as Ellison. His wealth was fifteen times greater than that of the state's average for whites, and Ellison owned more than 99 percent of the South's slaveholders. He never achieved a monopoly in Stateburg, but was the highest producing slave owner in the county. Without slaves Ellison could never gotten past the income of a tradesman; with the slaves he accomplished the security of no other.

Although, a successful slave owner and cotton farmer, Ellison major source of income came from "slave breeding." Throughout the South slave breeding was looked down on with disgust. He began slave breeding in 1840. Females were not productive workers in his factor or cotton fields, so he only kept a few women for breeders, and sold most of his females. He had the reputation of being a harsh master. His slaves were the worst fed and clothed. He maintained on his property a windowless building where he chained his problem slaves.

His slaves were listed among the runaways because of his harsh treatment. Having started life out as a slave did not make him sensitive to their needs because he saw his slaves as no more than property.

On one occasion Ellison hired the services of a slave catcher. According to an account by Robert N. Andrews, a white man who had purchased a small hotel in Stateburg in the 1820s hunted down one of his valuable slave in Belleville, Virginia. He stated: "I was paid \$77.50 returning the slave, and \$74.00 for expenses."

William Ellison died on December 5, 1861. According to his last will and testament his estate should be divided jointly by his free daughter and two surviving sons; he also bequeathed \$500 to a daughter he had sold into slavery.

During the Civil War the Ellison family actively participated and supported the Confederacy throughout the war. They converted nearly their entire plantation to the production of corn, fodder, bacon, corn shucks and cotton for the Confederate armies. They paid \$5,000 in taxes during the war, and they also invested more than \$9,000 in Confederate bonds, treasury notes and certificates in addition to the Confederate currency. At the end of the war all this was worthless and cost the family a great deal of wealth.

On March 27, 1863 John Wilson Buckner, William Ellison's oldest grandson, enlisted in the 1st South Carolina Artillery. Buckner served in the company of Captains P. P. Galliard and A. H. Boykin, local whites who knew that Buckner was Black but overlooked this factor because of the Ellison family's prestige and money his race status was changed to "honorary" white. Buckner was wounded in action on July 12, 1863. At his funeral in Stateburg in August, 1895, he was praised by his former Confederate officers as being a "faithful soldier."

WHITE SKIN BLACK MASK

The majority of the colored masters were mulattoes and their slaves were overwhelmingly of black skin. There was strong division between the two classes based on color, class, status and a culture of whiteness. There was a color and cultural clash between the two groups. The mulatto community in Charleston separated themselves from the dark skinned people, and they banned dark skinned people from their social clubs and seldom married unmixed blacks.

They created exclusionary societies such as the Brown Fellowship society. Membership was based on brown skin meaning the sons and daughters of slave masters. They formed schools and benevolent groups to provide mutual aid and operated a burial ground and society. Among its members were John W. Gordon, William T. Oliver, Edward P. and Lafayette F. Wall, Richard Dereef and Robert Houston.

Richard Edward Dereef was one of the richest black men in Charleston. He had a Wharf at the end of Chapel Street, was in the wood business, and owned slaves and rental properties, most of which were located on the east side of Charleston. Richard Dereef would never have been accepted into Charleston's elite mulatto society, but he claimed to be an Indian- and had money. For the most part the mulatto slave owner aligned themselves with the white ruling class and helped to preserve the system of slavery.

Among black slave holders the free mulattoes owners were over represented, being the offspring of white planters and merchants. Many of their white fathers provided for them. Thomas Hanscome, a white planter of St. James and Goose Creek, provided for the mulatto children of Nancy Randale, a free black woman, with six slaves as well as stocks and bonds valued at \$150,000. In 1823, the mulatto children of Henry Glencamp, the superintendent of the Sante Canal, and Jenny Wilson, a free black woman, inherited eighteen slaves as well as the plantation called Pine Hill in Stephens of Charleston District.

Many white fathers accepted their black children as legitimate heirs. For example, the children of Michael Fowler, a white planter of Christ church Parish, and his black slave/wife named Sibb lived as man and wife and raised a family on his plantation. According to Calvin D. Wilson "there was a rich planter in Charleston named Fowler who took a woman of African descent and established her in his home...There was a daughter born, who was called Isabella; the planter insisted that she be called as miss Fowler. He expected his slaves to treat his mulatto children if though they were white. His children were so acculturated into the white elite slave holding class that they only associated with whites. In 1810, the estate of Michael Fowler was divided among his mulatto children: John Fowler, Jacob Fowler, Stanhope Fowler, Nelly

Fowler Collins, Becky Fowler and Isabell Fowler Dereef. The Fowler failed to emancipate any of their slaves and regarded them as investment property. They held their slaves until the end of the Civil War.

Many enslaved mulattoes like William Ellison started out as a slave. Another case is Anthony Weston, a *de facto* free black of Charleston City, was trained as a millwright. As the slave of Plowder Weston, he was able to hire himself out to several white planters as well as work for his master. In 1826, his master declared him freed. His skill as a millwright allowed him to accumulate a great deal of wealth and he began to invest in slaves. Technically being a slave himself, he purchased a large number of slaves in his wife name between 1834 and 1835, to purchase a total of 20 slaves, investing \$8,950. He trained some of his slaves as mill wrights and they worked in his business. He became one of the wealthiest black persons in the city. By 1860, his estate was valued at \$48,075 by city officials

In 1822, Moses Brown, a colored barber, purchased an African American boy named Moses from Mary Warhaim for \$300. He trained the boy in the art of barbering. By 1823, the boy was working in his shop on 5 Tradd Street as a barber. In 1829, Camilla Johnson, a colored pastry cook, purchased a mulatto woman named Charleston Todd from Joseph and Ann Wilkie for \$375. According to a Charleston socialite, Camilla Johnson used her mulatto servant to work at several of the parties she was hired to cater.

RICHARD HOLLOWAY SR.

Richard Holloway Sr., a free person of color bought a slave named Charles Benford in order that the slave might enjoy his freedom. Yet at the same time he owned other slaves who were not treated so kindly. In 1834, he purchased a slave woman named Sarah and her two children, Annett and Edward, from Susan B. Robertson for \$575. Within three years after the purchase, he apparently became dissatisfied with the slave family and sold them for \$945. Even though Richard Holloway, Sr., allowed a trusted servant to enjoy-his freedom, he was still a slave owner for profit. He sold and purchased slaves as an investment.

In 1851, Elizabeth Collinis Holloway, a woman of color, placed her servant Celia in the city jail after her slave had run away. In 1852, Holloway's servant Peggy was confined in the workhouse for disciplinary reasons.

In the Palmetto (rice areas) there were only seven large rice planters of African descent, and they were primarily related to white kin. One example of this is the Pendarvis family, which was one of the largest slave owning "colored" families to plant rice in the state during the 1730s. The mulatto children of Joseph Pendarvis, a white planter of Colleton County, and his African mistress Parthena, were given 1,009 acres of land near the Green Savanna as well as a plantation in Charleston Neck. Joseph Pendarvis gave to his children James, Brand, William, John, Thomas, Mary, and Elizabeth, land, money and slaves. They became one of the wealthiest and most prominent slaveholding families in South Carolina. James the first born received most of the property of his deceased father, and owned more than 100 slaves. By 1786, he owned 113 slaves and 3,250 acres of land. The 1790 census informs us that he owned 123 slaves. Many of the mulatto offspring of white planters became large plantation owners in their own right.

For example, Margaret Mitchell Harris and her half brother Robert Michael Collins inherit money, plantation and slaves from their white father. In 1844, she bought Santee Plantation for 4,050, but made \$7,635 from the harvest in 1849. She ran a profitable enterprise.

SUMMARY

The notion of a homogenous African American group united by a common African ethnicity and culture is a myth. Many scholars failed to recognize the diversity in language, culture, class and color among African Americans, and how those differences provided one group of African Americans with extraordinary opportunities for higher educational and trade skills when compared to the black population. Historically, there has always been great tension between the "mulatto" and black classes because of the association of "yellow" skin with high status and class within the black social apex. Slave masters exploited these tensions for their obvious benefits, keeping their mulatto children elevated over the African field worker, and

African Americans have continue to perpetuated this system of privilege and discrimination based on light skin long after whites stop make any distinction between light and dark skinned blacks. The root to this disparity is the American plantation during the 17th and 18th century.

The majority of black slave owners were members of the mulatto class, and in most cases were the sons and daughters of white slave masters. Many of the mulatto slave owners separated themselves from the masses of black people and attempted to establish a caste system based on color, wealth, and free status. According to Martin Delany, the colored community of Charleston City clung to the assumptions of the superiority of white blood and brown skin complexion.

After slavery it was the children of the mulato class that was more willing to cross the color line and to bridge the gap between light-skinned and dark-skinned blacks. Also, a large number of the “new” black leaders in the South came from this class/caste group. The sons and daughters of black slave masters were educated and resourceful. In the late 1860s, Frances Rollins, the daughter of William Rollins, a black slave owner of Charleston City, worked as a school teacher in Beaufort County. She was educated at the Institution for Colored Youth in Philadelphia and was one of four sisters who worked to uplift the newly freed in South Carolina. Later, she married William James Whipper, a state representative of South Carolina. Thaddeus Sasportas, the son of Joseph A. Sasportas, a mulatto slave owner, went to Orangeburg County to aid the ex-slaves and to work as a teacher, where he taught ex-slaves to read and write.

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