

TWO AMERICAS • PERSECUTION • ERA III • ENTRY 10

Sold South

The Domestic Slave Trade (1790–1860)

Prepared for the Two Americas Archive

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Persecution Track • ERA III • Fayetteville, North Carolina

The Second Migration

When Congress outlawed the international slave trade in 1808, it did not slow the growth of American slavery — it redirected it. The cotton boom sweeping Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana after the invention of the cotton gin created ferocious demand for labor in the Deep South, and the Chesapeake and Carolina states, where soil exhaustion and tobacco's decline had left planters with what they openly called a surplus of enslaved people, became suppliers. Historians estimate that roughly one million enslaved people were forcibly relocated from the Upper South to the Deep South between 1790 and 1860, the large majority of them sold away from their families rather than moved alongside them. This was not the residue of the transatlantic trade. It was a new, wholly domestic commercial system, built and run by American traders, American banks, and American courts.

The Business of Separation

Professional slave traders operated trading houses and holding pens in cities across the Upper South, marching or shipping coffles of enslaved people south to auction markets in Natchez, New Orleans, and Charleston. Traders and buyers openly recognized that breaking apart marriages and separating children from parents was standard practice, not an occasional cruelty — auction records and traders' own correspondence describe pricing individuals for sale without regard for keeping families intact, and some scholarship estimates that roughly one in five enslaved marriages in the Upper South was broken by sale.

"The trade did not simply move enslaved people from one place to another. It moved them apart."

North Carolina as a Selling State

North Carolina was consistently counted among the trade's net "exporting" states — a source of enslaved people sold south rather than a destination for purchase. Fayetteville's own Market House, still standing at the center of downtown, functioned through the antebellum period as a commercial hub where enslaved people were bought, sold, and hired out alongside other goods, part of a documented pattern of slave trading activity in the town.

NC Local Lens • Cumberland County

Fayetteville's Market House, built in 1832 on the site of the colonial State House, operated through the antebellum period as a site where enslaved people were bought, sold, and hired out as part of routine town commerce, consistent with North Carolina's documented role as a net exporter in the domestic slave trade. Cumberland County estate records, deed books, and traders' correspondence from the period document individual sales; the North Carolina State Archives and the Cumberland County Register of Deeds hold primary-source records that remain a direct genealogical resource for descendant families researching ancestors who were sold south.

Citations

Chicago Notes-Bibliography style.

1. Johnson, Walter. *Soul by Soul: Life Inside the Antebellum Slave Market*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999.
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3. Tadman, Michael. *Speculators and Slaves: Masters, Traders, and Slaves in the Old South*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989.
4. Rothman, Adam. *Slave Country: American Expansion and the Origins of the Deep South*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005.

Paired contribution entry: They Kept The Names — how families preserved kinship and identity across forced dispersal.