

Antebellum Social Classes



Ways of Living in the Young State

In Antebellum South Carolina, there were some very rich people and some very poor people. There were also people who made enough to get by. Sometimes we call these groups "classes." People in a class share a certain lifestyle.

The Elite

People who were part of the elite owned at least 20 slaves and at least 500 acres of land. Some people who were part of the elite class were born into wealthy families. Others worked hard to be wealthy. They started out by clearing trees off the land. They lived in log cabins. As they made more money, they bought more land and more slaves. After a while, they became part of the elite. Although the elite had lived only along the coast in colonial times, by the antebellum period they lived in the Midlands and the Upstate.



Free Time

Running a plantation could be hard work, but the elite also had time to relax and enjoy social events. They read books, went to plays, and hosted big parties. Men enjoyed hunting, fishing, and horse racing. The elite had the finest things of the time. They had nice furniture and fancy clothes. They also had the finest foods.

Many of the elite had more than one home. They had a plantation home, a home in town, and a summer home. They had summer homes on Edisto Island, Pawley's Island, Sullivan's Island, or in Beaufort or Pendleton. They relaxed at their summer homes with friends and family. They took some of their slaves with them to cook meals and clean the house.



Leadership and Education

Most of the government leaders in our state were part of the elite. They were governors or senators. They worked to make laws that served their interests. They wanted laws that protected slavery and helped them sell cotton to other places.

The elite were also well-educated. They had money to send their children to the best schools. Children learned other languages, like Latin and French. They took music and drawing classes. Young elite men were able to go to college. Sometimes they went to universities in Europe.

1. Who were the "ELITE" class? wealthy, upper class plantation owners (planters), aristocrats (government)

What did you have to own in order to be part of this class? have lots of money, own 500 acres of land, and own 20 or more slaves

2. How did the elite gain their riches? from the harvesting and sales of cashe crops such as cotton and rice

3. Where did most of the elite class live? Low Country (Coastal Zone)
Eventually they started to live in the Midlands and the Up Country as well.

4. What privilege did the children of the elite have? they were educated by private tutors or went to private schools abroad

5. TRUE or FALSE: The elite had political power and influence in our state.

6. For instance, in the legislative branch, they were able to make laws that would protect things such as slavery.

7. Many of the ELITE class served in the government as governors and/or senators.

The Middle Class

Some people made a good living, but they were not rich like the elite. They were part of the middle class. The Middle-class were tradesmen, merchants, shopkeepers, physicians and attorneys, and could easily earn a living during prosperous economic times. They were most likely to live in cities and towns and had some political power and social influence in their neighborhoods. They had enough money to live in comfort. They had nice homes and enough food to eat. Some middle-class people owned a few slaves to do household chores. Children of the middle class taught to read and write and might pursue a profession like their fathers.

With the spread of cotton, many new towns were built. Middle-class people ran stores in the new towns. As new towns grew, the middle class grew. Some of them worked at the county courthouse.



1. Who were the people that made up the middle class? tradesmen, merchants, shopkeepers, physicians (doctors), attorneys (lawyers)
2. What areas did most of the people live who made up the middle class? cities & towns
3. Did they have political power in their communities like the elite class? they had some in their neighborhoods (local areas)
4. What was life like for a child who was a part of the middle class? they were taught to read & write and young men often pursued the same jobs as their fathers
5. How did the middle class feel about slavery? Did they use it to gain wealth? they supported slavery because they also wanted to be elite

The Lower Class

People who were part of the lower class had very little. They were unskilled and uneducated and often landless. If they owned land, it was a small amount. Often lower class people squatted on a piece of land and engaged in subsistence farming. They were sometimes called poor whites. Most poor whites lived on poor land that was not suited for cotton or rice.

People in the lower class worked with their hands. Some helped build canals and railroads. Some of them worked in factories or textile mills.



Some poor whites did work that was usually given to slaves, like making clothes for slaves. Sometimes elite planters chose to pay the poor white women to do these things since the poor whites needed the money. Most times those who could afford to hire them preferred to use slave labor.

Children of lower class were uneducated as there were no public schools and their parents were also uneducated and needed the children to work. They had little social or political influence.

1. Who were the people that made up the lower class? unskilled and uneducated people who did not own any land of their own
2. What areas did most of the people of live who made up the lower class? they squatted (living on people's land w/o paying for it) and participated in substinance farming
3. Did they have political power in their communities like the elite class or middle class? very little to NO power at all
4. What was life like for a child who was part of the lower class? uneducated because there were no public schools and kids were usually made to work for money
5. What caused the lower class to have limited job prospects? uneducated, poor, had no land
6. How did the lower class feel about slavery? Did they use it to gain wealth? it was accepted and they defended it (agreed with it)
7. Why was slavery defended in the lower class? it made them feel superior (better than or higher) to African Americans

Independent Farmers

Many white people in S.C. were independent farmers. The majority of the farming especially in the Upstate was done by independent farmers. They worked the land themselves with the aid of their families. Some independent farmers owned a few slaves but worked side by side with them in the fields. As independent farmers were more successful in growing cash crops and became more prosperous, they bought more slaves and increased their social and political standing. Some even became members of the elite. At the time of the Civil War, not all white South Carolinians owned slaves.



Children

Most white children (of the middle and lower classes and the independent farmers) were not able to go to school. There were few public schools, and most parents didn't have the money to send their children to private schools. But the children could be educated at home.

Children spent most of their time helping at home. They did chores on the farm. Young boys learned how to plant and harvest crops. Young girls learned how to sew, cook, and clean. They planted small gardens. They helped their mothers make soap, butter, and candles.

1. Who were the independent farmers? they owned small farms and harvested crops with the help of family
2. How did the independent farmers feel about slavery? Why? agreed with it, some owned very few slaves if any and would work side by side with them in the fields
3. What was the life like for children of independent farmers? some were educated at home if their parents knew how to read and write, young boys worked the land and young girls learned to take care of the home
4. In what area or areas did most independent farmers live? in the Upstate of SC (Midlands & backcountry)
5. Since independent farmer became more successful, what happened as a result?
 - bought more slaves
 - increase his own social and political standing in society
5. If an independent farmer became extremely successful and wealthy, what would they become? part of ELITE class
7. TRUE or FALSE: At the time of the Civil War, not all white South Carolinians owned slaves

Enslaved African Americans

Most black people living in our state were enslaved. Most of them lived on plantations. On large plantations, slaves and masters didn't work closely together. Enslaved African Americans were an unpaid labor source who were bought and sold and considered the property of their white masters. Slaves were allowed few personal freedoms and had to carry a pass issued by their master to travel from one plantation to another. Many Enslaved African Americans were born and died on the same plantation where they lived in one-slave cabins with dirt floors under the strict supervision of their masters. Others were sold upon the death of their masters, when they were disobedient or when the master needed extra cash. Families were divided by such sales. Slaves, including women and children worked from sun-up to sun-down in



the fields or in the master's house. They were not paid but were given a few clothes and limited amounts of food by the master. It was illegal for slaves and their children to learn to read and write because such knowledge might allow them to escape their masters. Slaves who disobeyed the rules or tried to escape were punished, sometimes severely.

Cruel Treatment

Sometimes slaves were treated very badly. They were given difficult tasks to complete, and they were beaten if they didn't finish the tasks. Slaves lived a hard life.

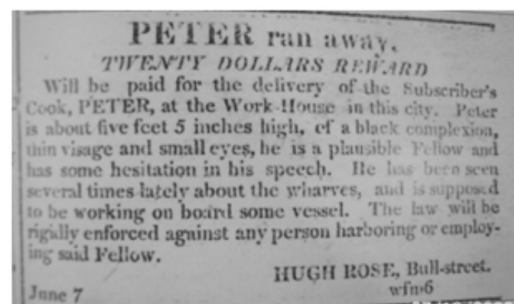
Slaves didn't always choose to follow a master's rules. Some chose to rebel. Slaves who broke the rules were often punished. They were whipped or sold away.

Enslaved people were not allowed to leave their master's plantations without a special "slave pass". If a slave was caught without a pass, he was punished. White men formed slave patrols to watch for slaves who were away from the plantations where they lived. If slave patrols caught a slave without a pass, they put him in jail.

In Charleston, and on some large plantations, slaves wore tags. The tags had a number and a description of what jobs the slaves did. The tag was a way to identify a slave. If a slave didn't wear a tag, he could be punished.

Running Away

Some slaves ran away. They wanted freedom. Often, slaves would run away if they learned they were going to be sold. When a slave ran away, his owner placed a notice in the newspaper.



1. Who were the people that made up the enslaved population? unpaid black workers who were bought and sold
2. In order to travel, what did the slaves have to carry? carry a pass
3. What was a slave's living conditions like? few personal freedoms, lived in one-room slave cabins under strict supervision
4. Most slaves lived and died on the same plantation. What were some reasons a slave could be sold from their original plantation?
 - death of their master
 - disobedient (refusing to obey)
 - master needed extra money
5. What were working conditions like for slaves? men, women and children worked from sun up to sun down; 6-7 days/week; 14-15 hr day
6. Slaves did not receive pay. What compensations did they receive?
 - few clothes
 - very limited amount of food
6. What happened to slaves that disobeyed or tried to escape? punished severely (whipped, beaten, unfeed, separated from family, sold)
8. What was illegal for slaves to learn? to read and write
9. Why was this so dangerous? allows them to escape

Free African Americans



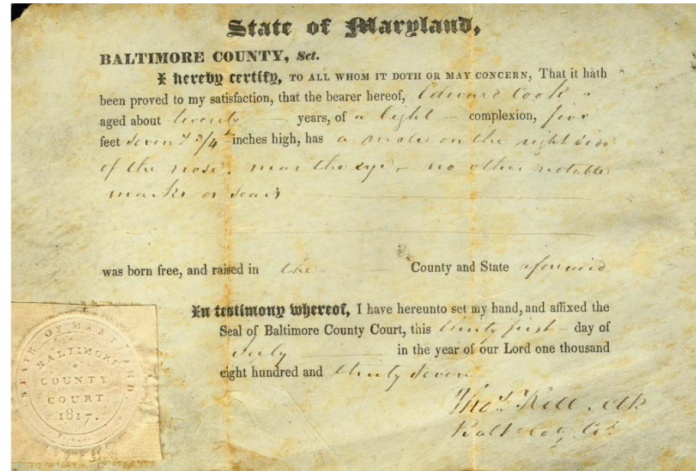
Free African Americans usually had a particular skill, such as carpentry, or a talent, such as music making. This skill led them to be hired out by their masters. Some were allowed to keep a portion of the money they earned from being hired out which they saved to buy their freedom. Others had been given their freedom by a master for some special deed or service, although this became much less likely (and illegal) after the slave revolt of the early

1830's. Their skill or talent allowed them to earn a living in the towns or cities of the South. Others were independent farmers. Many stayed in the region because they had family members who were still enslaved. They worked to earn money to buy the freedom of wives and children. The children of freed African Americans might be taught to read and write at home but there were no public schools provided for them. Although Free African Americans in the South had more economic opportunity than Free African Americans who lived in the North because of their special skills, they did not have political or social equality with other Southerners. They had to pay a special tax and carry their freedom papers wherever they went. They lived in fear of being returned to slavery.

Special Tax

Free African Americans had to pay a special tax each year to remain free. If they didn't pay the tax, they could be taken back into slavery. They had to carry special papers to show they were free. They could get in trouble if they didn't have their papers with them.

Free blacks always lived in fear of being made slaves again. Because of this, many free blacks left our state.



You have read a lot about different classes of people during the Antebellum Period. For each class of people, fill in as much information as you can using what you've read.

1. Who were the free African Americans? had a particular skill (ex. Carpentry) or a talent like making music
2. How could a slave gain their freedom?
 - a) hired out for work by their masters
 - b) bought their freedom
 - c) given freedom from master for special actions or deeds
3. If a slave had a special skill, this helped them... earn a living in towns/cities in the South
4. Where did the free African Americans live? in the same region (near enslaved people)
5. Why did they work so hard to earn money? to buy the freedom of family members
6. What was life like for the free African American kids? they may be taught to read and write at home but no public schools
7. What was one positive thing about being a free African American in the South? more economic opportunity because of skills (could find jobs)
What was one con (negative) about being a free African American in the South? no political or social equality

8. What was one positive thing about being a free African American in the North?

they DID have political and social equality

What was one con (negative) about being a free African American in the North?

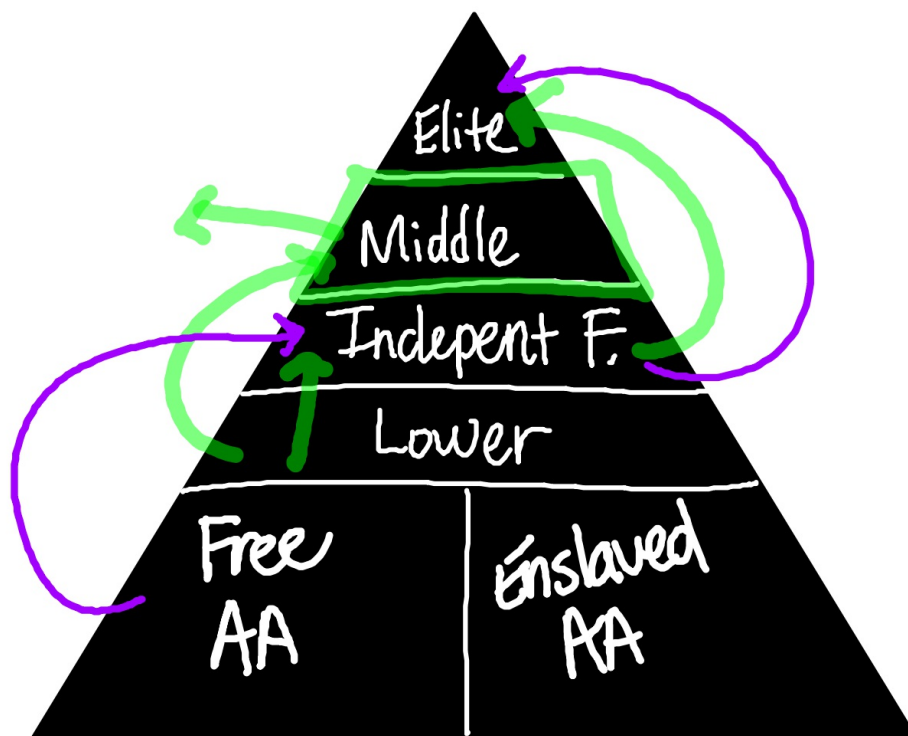
less economic opportunity (harder to find work)

9. What did they have to do in the South to maintain their freedom?

• pay a special tax

• ALWAYS had to carry "freedom papers"

10. What was their biggest fear? returning to slavery



Elite

Middle

Indepent Farmer

LOWER

FREE | Enslaved