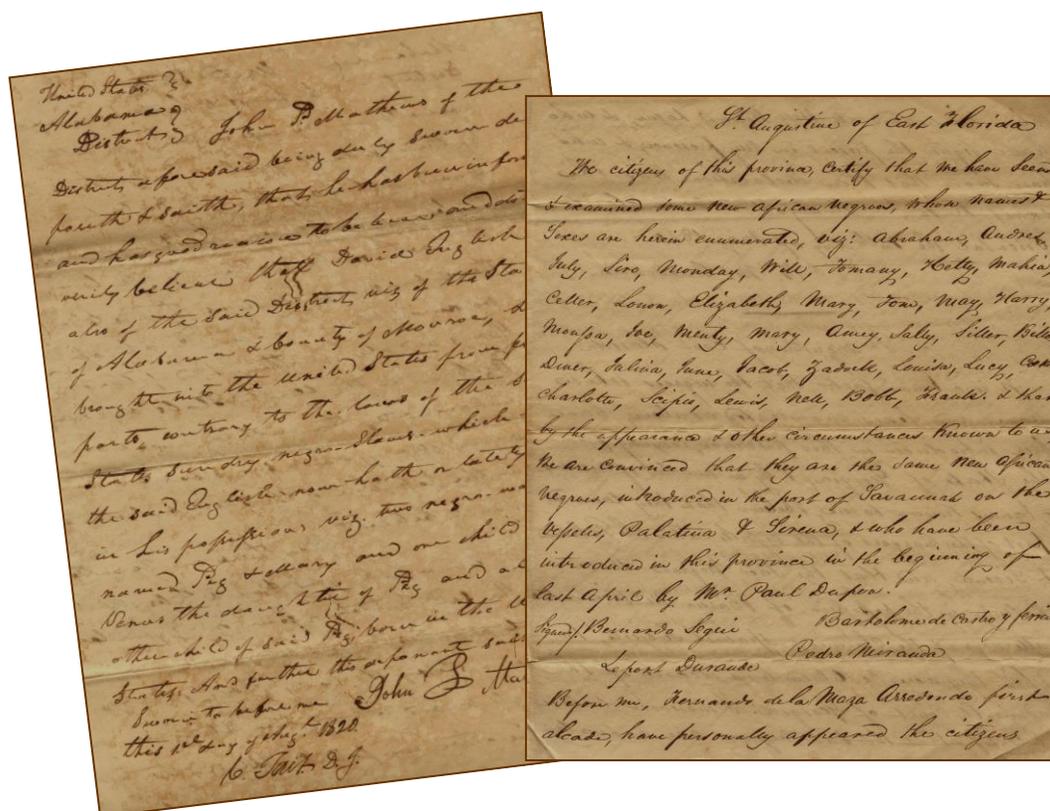




## National Archives and Records Administration National Archives at Atlanta

# The African Slave Trade

*A selection of cases from the Records of the U.S.  
District Courts in the states of Alabama, Georgia,  
North Carolina, and South Carolina*



5780 Jonesboro Road  
Morrow, Georgia 30260  
(770) 968-2100  
atlanta.archives@nara.gov

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# Introduction

## *Federal Laws and the Slave Trade*

The United States government has had a complicated, and often troubling, relationship with the institution of slavery. Though allowed to survive and even thrive long after the nation was established, federal laws were enacted to prevent the importation of new slaves from Africa and inflict stiff penalties on those who attempted to do so. Many early federal statutes regarding slavery focused mainly on the issue of new slaves brought into the country.

In March of 1794, Congress passed an act prohibiting American citizens from outfitting a ship for the purpose of importing slaves. The act did not, however, prevent foreign nations from importing slaves. In addition, the penalties for Americans convicted under this law were fines and did not include incarceration.

An act passed in 1800 expanded on the 1794 law by increasing the fines for importation of slaves, as well as making it illegal for American citizens to engage in the slave trade between any nations, regardless of originating port or ownership of the vessel. It also gave authorities the right to seize ships which were caught transporting slaves and confiscate their cargo. Laws like these were not unheard of even in the Colonial period. The Continental Congress passed a resolution in 1774 to ban slave importation and prohibit Americans from engaging in the trade. It was not until after the turn of the century, however, that the United States Congress began to increase the penalties for violating these laws.

An 1803 act established a penalty of one thousand dollars for each person brought to the U.S. on a ship with the intention of selling them as a slave. This act also placed responsibility on the captain of any vessel caught transporting slaves. It charged customs and revenue officials in the government with enforcing the law, an indirect warning to those who might be in the best position for aiding illegal slave traders.

The Constitution established a way which Congress could ban the importation of slaves, but it did not go into effect until 1808. Congress exercised this power at its earliest opportunity, and after January 1, 1808, the importation of slaves into the U.S. or its territories was banned. Penalties now included a fine, ranging from five to twenty-thousand dollars, forfeiture of ship and equipment, and imprisonment from five to ten years. The act specifically excluded transportation of slaves within the U.S., since the interstate sale of slaves remained legal.

Over a decade later, Congress passed legislation in 1819 which considered intercontinental slave trading as piracy, punishable by death. Previously, U.S. ships only held a mandate to patrol the eastern seaboard of North America. They now extended their activities as far as the West African coast in order to enforce the law. This enforcement was given an additional boost by the Webster-Ashburton Treaty signed with

Great Britain in 1842. The treaty established a permanent fleet on the West African coast in the hopes of completely suppressing slave trafficking. Ironically, this coincided with the height of the illegal slave trade, 1840 to 1860.

In 1861 President Lincoln signed an executive order turning over all responsibility for enforcing slave trade laws to the Secretary of the Interior. By stringently enforcing existing laws, Lincoln's order spelled the end for the slave trade. The Secretary's office believed that by 1865 it had effectively ended any attempt to outfit a slave ship in all U.S. ports. The Emancipation Proclamation of 1862 and the 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment passed in 1865 effectively ended any reason for transporting slaves to the U.S. No longer could any ship use the defense of originating in the U.S. while bound for a U.S. port.

It is estimated that the total number of slaves brought into the U.S. illegally during the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was approximately 1.2 million. Given this figure, it is hard to determine the effect of laws banning importation after 1808. As laws were strengthened and enforcement increased, so did attempts to subvert them.

### **For More Information**

All cases in this document are available for public review in the research room of the National Archives at Atlanta. Please call 770-968-2100 for more information. All users must apply for a researcher's card, which requires a photo identification card.

### **Directions**

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**From I-85 (coming from the South)**

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## U.S. District Court for the Southern District of Georgia (Savannah)

- *Juan Madraso v. Slaves & cargo of Isabellita*, 1821

Madraso, a Spanish subject, was charged with transporting slaves aboard his ship, the *Isabellita*, originating in Havana. Slaves held in custody of Baldwin Co. Sheriff. Case was appealed. Some documents are in Spanish.

- *Slaves of the Syrena*, 1820

The case involved libel for salvage. The *Syrena* was owned by a Spanish subject. The slaves were split up, with several claims to ownership. File contains some Spanish documents.

- *Eugene Kearney v. Ship Elizabeth*, 1798

Sailing to Barbados from Africa with slaves, the *Elizabeth's* captain dies. The crew proceeds to Savannah to sell their cargo.

- *Papers concerning Prohibition of Slavery – Bahama Islands*, 1810

These papers concern an act passed to prohibit buying and selling of slaves.

- *U.S. v. Planters Adventure*, 1801

The *Planters Adventure*, a schooner, was commanded by William Wyatt. The ship was used to transport slaves. The case mentions violations of the 1800 law.

- *U.S. v. Brig Lady Nelson*, 1803

The *Lady Nelson* was discovered to have slaves on board. It originated from Cuba or Africa.

- *U.S. v. Schooner Amelia*, 1803

Seven slaves were brought aboard the *Amelia*, intended for sale. The sale may not have been illegal at the time if sold from within the U.S.

- *U.S. v. Brig Ida*, 1802

The case states: "Libel for carrying slaves to a foreign port." The *Ida* carried slaves from Africa to Florida.

- *O'Hara v. Brig Chance*, 1804
 

The *Chance* was seized by a French privateer off the U.S. coast. Slaves were found on board.
- *U.S. v. Schooner Paragon*, 1803
 

Eighteen slaves were aboard the *Paragon*, brought for sale.
- *U.S. v. Brig Mary*, 1804
 

Approximately 100 slaves were on board, meant for sale.
- *U.S. v. Ship Rosmond*, 1804
 

A female slave from Jamaica was taken aboard the *Rosmond* from the *Brig Chance*.
- *U.S. v. Ship Flora*, 1807
 

The *Flora* was transporting slaves from Africa. Approximately 280 were left at the Campbell plantation. The case involves the crew suing for wages.
- *U.S. v. Brig Columbia*, 1808
 

The case involves the importation of 80 or more slaves at Little Cumberland. The ship was owned by Nathaniel Wardswell, from Rhode Island.
- *U.S. v. Schooner P.D. or Fauna*, 1811
 

The *P.D.* transported 97 slaves from Africa. The case mentions violation of the importation act.
- *Yankee v. Andalusia*, 1813
 

The ship *Yankee* captured the cargo of the *Andalusia*, among which were 90 negroes.
- *U.S. v. Sloop John*, 1813
 

The sloop *John* carried two slaves with intent of selling them. The case mentions violation of the 1808 law.

- *U.S. v. Schooner Nancy & Cargo*, 1815  
The case mentions violation of the 1808 law. Three slaves, including two females, were taken on board in Havana. Ownership was claimed by Francis Telsien. The ship and its material cargo were seized.
- *U.S. v. Schooner Hal & Cargo*, 1815  
Two slaves, an adult and a boy, were brought aboard the ship in Havana. The boy was recently from Africa. The file contains an unusual document musing on the horrors of the slave trade by W. Stephens, District Judge.
- *Slaves of the Tentativa/Elton for U.S. v. Tentativa*, 1816  
One hundred thirty-one slaves were aboard the *Tentativa*, which was owned by a Spaniard. It was captured by a privateer ship, the *Brutus*, and brought to port claimed as a prize.
- *John H. Elton v. Slaves of Politina*, 1817  
One hundred and nine slaves were aboard the *Politina*. The case mentions violation of 1808 importation law. At some point, the slaves were ordered to return to the libellant.
- *U.S. v. Sloop Fire Fly*, 1817  
The case mentions violation of 1808 law. Case involves “11 negroes and one Mulatto.” The mulatto was allegedly stolen.
- *U.S. v. The Patty and Sally*, 1817  
The case mentions violation of the 1808 law. Three slaves were on board the ships from Baltimore. The documents mention a problem with the manifest.
- *U.S. v. Brig Montserat*, 1817  
The *Montserat* was captured by a privateer ship with 235 slaves on board.
- *Miguel de Castro v. African Slaves*, 1819  
De Castro claims he is the lawful owner of the 95 slaves which were imported to Havana from Africa. Some or all were sold to the Creek Nation in Florida.

- *U.S. v. Brig Neustra Sen. P.P. Thomason commercial*, 1818  
The case states: “Libel for illegal importation of slaves.” Seven to eight were perhaps legal slaves. One slave on board was illegal.
- *U.S. v. Slaves Politena*, 1820  
Ninety-two slaves were brought aboard the schooner *Politena*. The slaves were split up and there were multiple claims to ownership.
- *C. Muberg Sp. V.C. v. Slaves of the Antelope (or General Ramirez)*, 1823  
The case concerns court fees & expenses for the caring of the slaves from the *Antelope*.
- *U.S. v. Schooner Anna Maria*, 1820  
Two slaves were intended for sale. The case mentions violation of the 1818 & the 1808 laws.
- *John Jackson & others v. The Hampton John Low Claimant*, 1820  
The case involves libel for importing slaves aboard schooner *Hampton* & outfitting the ship for such purposes.
- *A.S. Bulloch, Collector v. Schooner Freedom*, 1820  
The case mentions violation of the 1818 law.
- *U.S. v. The General Ramirez*, 1823  
This case is related to the *Antelope* case. The slaves were claimed by Spanish subjects.
- *James Johnson v. General Ramirez*, 1829  
This case is related to the *Antelope* case. It involves libel for salvage and bounty.
- *U.S. v. McCann*, 1803  
Eighteen “negroes or people of color” were brought aboard the schooner *Paragon* from the Bahama Islands. McCann forfeited \$1000 for each.

- *U.S. (Love) v. Ashley*, 1818  
Lodowick Ashley brought three slaves illegally into Georgia and forfeited \$1000 for each.
- *U.S. v. Joachim Selvas, Charles Mares, & Geronimo Cassameras*, 1859  
Geronimo and others attempted to outfit a ship, the *Angelita*, for transporting slaves.
- *U.S. v. David Martin*, 1861  
David Martin was charged with “feloniously running away with a vessel,” the *Wanderer*.

### U.S. District Court for the Southern District of Alabama (Mobile)

- *U.S. v. Peter Rivirero*, 1837  
Case No. 85  
  
Six slaves were transported from Havana by a U.S. citizen aboard the schooner *Louisa*.
- *U.S. v. Henry Veckham & Daniel T. Walden*, 1818  
Case No. 86  
  
Veckham, from Connecticut, and Walden, from New York, received aboard the schooner *Constitution* 84 slaves in Havana, then transported them to Pensacola.
- *U.S. v. William Robertson*, 1818  
Case No. 87  
  
The U.S. owned schooner *Alerina* or *Merino*, took 19 slaves aboard in Havana, then brought them into port of Mobile.
- *Marshal’s audit of negro sales accounts city of Mobile & U.S. v. Sales of negro man, Dick, Woman, Nancy, & 2 children*, 1818  
Case No. 89  
  
These documents detail the sale of slaves. Court documents are also in the file.
- *U.S. v. Negro Slave*, 1818  
Case No. 97  
  
A single slave was brought to port of Mobile in violation of the 1808 law.

- *Rafael Jonathans (Two Negro Slaves)*, 1819  
Case No. 106

The case involves the armed slave ship, *Sanford & William*. Two slaves, named Caesar and Pompey, were brought from Africa.

- *U. S. v. John D. Chanford*, 1838  
Case No. 197

John Sanford, a U.S. citizen, was accused of bringing 10 negroes from Liverpool, England aboard the *Napier*.

- *U.S. v. Sloop Brothers*, 1822  
Case No. 205

A British registered vessel, *Brothers*, was seized by the U.S. ship, *Alabama*. Six slaves were on board. The ship was commanded by William Gibson, Englishman. The ship was forfeited and condemned to be sold.

- *U.S. v. the Sloop Friends*, 1822  
Case No. 207

A British registered ship, *Friends*, had seven slaves aboard. The ship was forfeited and sold.

- *U.S. v. Negro Slave Ben*, 1816  
Case No. 59

The case was heard in Territory court. Ben was captured by authorities and his ownership was disputed.

- *U.S. v. Schooners Constitution, Merino, Louisa and 84 slaves*, 1818  
Case No. 230

This case contains a wide variety of documents.

- *U.S. v. J. Martinez*, 1837  
Case No. 294

Joseph Martinez brought a slave named Francisco from Havana aboard the *Montezu* to the U.S.

- *U.S. v. Four Negroes*, 1822  
Case No. 300  
  
Two slaves, Mary, Peggy, and her three children were imported (at least one was a daughter, named Venus). They were taken into custody of the marshall. David English claimed they belonged to him in South Carolina.
- *U.S. v. Schooner Orion*, 1823  
Case No. 318  
  
The U.S. registered and owned *Orion* imported a slave from Jamaica.
- *U.S. v. W. Culler*, 1821  
Case No. 320  
  
Three vessels were seized in 1818 for illegal transportation of slaves. The case appears to involve the salvage of these vessels and their cargo.
- *U.S. v. Negro Slave (Molly)*, 1818  
Case No. 330  
  
Elijah Lloyd claimed lawful purchase of Molly in Washington County, Mississippi Territory. The marshall was commanded to seize all his slave property.
- *U.S. v. 3 negroes – Mary, Peggy, & Venus*, 1824  
Case No. 330  
  
This case is related to case #300. All of the slaves were designated to be sold at public auction.
- *U.S. v. Brig Fox*, 1822  
Case No. 402  
  
The case involves transporting a male slave from New York aboard the *Fox*. Violation of the 1808 law is mentioned. The ship and its tackle were seized.
- *U.S. v. Winifred & Robert Coller*, 1821  
Case No. 522  
  
The file contains an interrogation about the slaves in Coller's possession.
- *Argate, Spanish Consul v. La Perla y Dolores & Cargo*, 1828  
Case No. 401  
  
The case involves piracy and may involve the illegal slave trade. The private vessel *Anna* attacked the *Delores*.

- *John Hagan v. William Byrnum & Alexander McDade*  
Case No. 687 & 754  
  
The case involved restitution payments. The case mentions three slaves, with names and ages given.
- *Lewis Waugh v. William Lewis*, 1834  
Case No. 1331  
  
The case involves slaves used in lieu of money as payment.
- *S.B. Dehart v. William Hadnot*, 1835  
Case No. 1360  
  
Slave names and ages included. Case involves them being removed from the district of the court.
- *George L. McGehee v. Thomas Williams*, 1835  
Case No. 1405  
  
The case involves a transaction of three slaves, who are named. It may not relate to the illegal slave trade.
- *Parish & Co. v. George Stone*, 1835  
Case No. 1468  
  
Four slaves were purchased. Their names are given. They may have been used as payment of a debt.
- *U.S. v. Mrs. Jack*, 1836  
Case No. 1694-5  
  
A young negro boy was brought to Mobile from Texas aboard the schooner *Columbus*.
- *U.S. v. steamboat Merchant*, 1836  
Case No. 1736  
  
At least two slaves were brought to Mobile from the Florida territory.
- *U.S. v. ship Tuskina*, 1836  
Case No. 1745  
  
The case involves a female slave, claimed as property, without proper documents.

- *U.S. v. steamboat South Alabama*, 1836  
Case No. 1778  
  
A single female slave was aboard ship with no proper documentation. Ownership was claimed by Joseph Moore of Montgomery Co., AL.
- *A.V. Winans & Co. v. McCullough & Stringfellow*, 1836  
Case No. 1779  
  
Two female slaves, named Matilda and Sarah, who were the property of David McCullough, were surrendered in lieu of debt.
- *U.S. v. Brig Motion*, 1836  
Case No. 1820  
  
Three slaves were aboard the *Motion*; Caroline and her two children; Robert (age 5) and Ambrose (age 1). They did not have proper documentation. The ship sailed from Virginia.
- *U.S. v. steamboat Champion*, 1837  
Case No. 1964  
  
A female slave named Mary was brought aboard the *Champion*, in Pensacola, without proper documents.
- *U.S. v. steamer Mobile*, 1837  
Case No. 2028  
  
A Single male slave was aboard the *Mobile* without the proper documents. The owner is named.
- *U.S. v. James Green, Master of Brig Constitution*, 1838  
Case No. 2167  
  
The case, involves the ships *Marino* and *Louisa*, 198 and 46 slaves respectively, in addition to the *Constitution*.
- *U.S. v. J. D. Jarvis*, 1843  
Case No. 2320  
  
Five slaves were transported from Pensacola to Mobile aboard the ship *Davy Crockett*, commanded by J.D. Jarvis. A \$4,000 fine was imposed.

- *U.S. v. John M. Dabney*, 1860  
Case No. 2619  
  
One hundred and three slaves were imported by John M. Dabney.
- *John Hagan v. Thomas J. Faison*, 1835  
  
Three slaves were surrendered as payment, a woman and two boys, whose names and ages are given.
- *Alexander Gordon v. James Innerarity*, 1836  
  
A will leaves money to Pamela Leslie, a female slave, and provides money for education of her children, William and Thomas.
- *Appraisal of Estate of Aaron Cates*, 1816  
  
The names and values of 30+ slaves are given in appraisal.

### **U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of North Carolina (Elizabeth City)**

- *The Carolina (Sloop Lucy) v. Slave Sampson*, 1814  
  
A slave named Sergant Sampson was taken aboard the private armed schooner *Carolina* from the British sloop *Lucy*.
- *U.S. v. 2 Boats and Slaves*, 1814  
  
The case involves seven slaves, whose names and combined values are given. They were aboard the private armed schooner *Mary*.
- *U.S. v. St. Jose el Dilegente*, 1817  
  
Five slaves were brought to Elizabeth City from island of Old Providence. They were owned by Samuel Sifson. The case contains several depositions.
- *U.S. v. Schooner Commerce*, 1810  
  
Three slaves were brought to the port of Camden aboard the ship *Commerce* from the West Indies.

## U.S. District Court for the District of South Carolina (Charleston)

- *Thomas Atkins v. Brig Mercury*, 1718  
Admiralty Records, Nov. 1718- Feb. 1732, p. 302  
  
The case deals with piracy. The sloop *Revenge* plundered the sloop *Francis*. Ten slaves are named in a list.
- *Unknown Case Name*, 1718  
Admiralty Records, Nov. 1718- Feb. 1732, p.392  
  
Five Negroes and an Indian are named as cargo aboard the sloop *New Yorks Revenge*.
- *Unknown Case Name*, 1719  
Admiralty Records, Nov. 1718- Feb. 1732, p.446  
  
Approximately nine Negroes and Indians are named as slaves aboard the *Nuestra Lenora de Candelaria*.
- *3 Negro Slaves*, 1737  
Admiralty Records, May 1736- July 1749, p.154  
  
A British ship, sailing from Antigua to Charleston, encountered three male slaves who stated they were runaways from the Isle of Pines.
- *Unknown Case Name*, 1717  
Admiralty Records, 1716- Nov. 1718  
  
The British ship *Ludlow* sailed from Britain to Guinea, Barbados, and Charleston, and sold approximately 100 slaves.
- *Captain Thomas Jordan v. Snow Hardman*, 1759  
Admiralty Records, Sept. 1752 – May 1763, p. 197  
  
The case appears to involve suit for repairs made to a slave ship.
- *Henry Barr Vale v. Six Negroes*, 1813  
Admiralty Journal, Nov. 1806 – Feb. 1814, p. 10  
  
The case involves libel for salvage. The court heard arguments on behalf of libellants.
- *U.S. v. The American Ship Panther, her tackle & lading*, 1846  
Admiralty Minutes, Jan. 1843 – Oct. 1857, p. 72  
  
The document states: “Information for being concerned in the slave trade.”

- *U.S. v. The Schooner Echo & certain goods imported in Schooner Echo*, 1819  
Admiralty Journal, Aug. 1819 – Oct. 1826, p. 11

- *In the case of certain negroes, brought in the Brig Globe, and delivered to the Portuguese Consul, C.P.L. Westendorf*, 1820  
Admiralty Journal, Aug. 1818 – Oct. 1826, p. 66

A note mentions court action against Alexander England for detaining “one of the negroes.”

- *U.S. v. Schooner Esther*, 1824  
Admiralty Journal, Aug. 1819 – Oct. 1826, p. 346

The case says “slave act,” no further information.

- *William Yearby v. 195 slaves*, 1806  
Admiralty Journal, 1795 – 1806, p. 55

The case involves salvage.

- *Joshua Collins Surgeon of the Sloop Claudia of Liverpool v. Sundry Slaves and other property belonging to the owners of said Sloop Claudia*, 1806  
Admiralty Journal, 1795 – 1806, p. 42

A ship was captured off the African coast. The slaves on board were brought to Charleston.

- *John Mills & others v. Sundry Slaves*, 1806  
Admiralty Journal, 1795 – 1806, pp. 39-40

The case concerns libel for wages.