Slavery and the Law

Slavery and the Law features petitions that vividly portray the contrasts, contradictions, ironies and ambiguities of Southern history. Testimonies by a wide range of Southerners – black and white, slave and free, male and female – reveal not just what people were saying, but what they were doing. Evidence of complex political, economic, legal and social conditions provide a research framework for exploring the topical, geographical and chronological breadth and penetrating depth of this subject matter.

Drawing on the remarkable candor of the petitioners’ statements, testimonies in this collection offer valuable biographical and genealogical details – how slaves, as chattel, found themselves sold, conveyed, or distributed as part of their master’s estates; and the impact of market forces on the slave family. The guardianship and emancipation petitions present an unusually clear view of the association between whites and free Blacks; and the divorce petitions provide a unique picture of slaveholding white women.

- Series I: Petitions to State Legislatures presents important but virtually unused primary source materials that were scattered in state archives of Alabama, Delaware, Florida, Mississippi, Missouri, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas and Virginia. The collection includes virtually all extant legislative petitions on the subject of race and slavery.

- Series II: Petitions to Southern County Courts were collected from local courthouses and candidly document the realities of slavery at the grassroots level. It was at county courthouses where the vast majority of disputes over the institution of slavery were referred. The petitions provide revealing documentation on the functioning of the slave system.

Southern Life and African American History, 1775-1915, Plantation Records

Inspiring both romantic imagery and moral outrage, the Southern plantation was at once a farm, business, home, prison, cornerstone of Southern culture, political power base and crucible of African American tradition. The Southern Plantation Records in History Vault document the impact of plantations on the American South and on the nation as a whole. Many planters kept journals, crop books, overseers’ journals and account books in remarkable detail. Family members kept personal diaries and exchanged correspondence with relatives and friends.

Southern Plantation Records illuminate business operations and labor routines, family affairs, roles of women, racial attitudes, relations between masters and slaves, social and cultural life, shared values, and tensions and anxieties that were inseparable from a slave society. All are revealed with a fullness and candor unmatched by any of the other available sources.

Part 1

The extensive papers of James Henry Hammond and his family members are a highlight of Part 1. Sourced from the holdings of the South Caroliniana Library at the University of South Carolina, the Hammond Papers document the life of the firebrand proslavery senator from South Carolina. Hammond’s meticulous business records and sizable correspondence constitute one of the most comprehensive plantation collections in existence.

- The Hollyday Family Papers offers material from the Revolutionary War era. Other collections from the Maryland Historical Society include the Susanna Warfield Diaries and the Martha Forman Diaries.

- Substantial collections from the holdings of the Louisiana State University Libraries document cotton and sugar plantations in Louisiana and the lower Mississippi Valley. One highlight is the David Weeks and Family Collection, which documents the daily rhythms of a sugar plantation.

A visionary digital archive for today’s researcher

ProQuest® History Vault gives researchers access to millions of primary source, cross-searchable, full-text/full-image documents, the vast majority of which are not available anywhere else. This invaluable content is perfect for researchers in history, African American studies, women’s studies, political science, sociology and international studies.

Currently comprising over 17 million pages of primary source material, History Vault will continue to build over time, covering the full sweep of U.S. History from the American Revolution to the last years of the 20th century.
• The Virginia Historical Society provides important collections. The Tayloe Family collection documents vast land and slave holdings. Many prominent Virginia families are documented in the Northern Neck collections. The Tidewater collections come from families in circumstances ranging from vast wealth and influence to a more hardscrabble existence.

• Rounding out Part 1 are collections from the Louisiana State Museum and Tulane University, such as the Valcour Aime Slave Records, the John McDonogh Papers, and records of the Jones and Colcock families.

Part 2

The records presented in Part 2 come from the holdings of the University of Virginia and Duke University. Researchers will find many major collections presented in this module from the holdings of the University of Virginia.

• The papers of General John Hartwell Cocke, a protégé of Thomas Jefferson, illuminates the paradox of Enlightenment intellectual energies and slaveholding economic interests. Cocke, who owned three large plantations along the James River, was involved in educational reform for women and tried to extend the benefits of education to his slaves. In 1833, Cocke freed his slave Peyton Skipwith and his family to start a new life in Liberia; and in 1840, Cocke sent 49 slaves to work on two plantations in Alabama – both events resulting in remarkable correspondence from the people involved.

• The papers of the Berkeley family are exceptional on land and crop sales, slave and medical accounts, and family and overseers’ correspondence. The diary and letterbooks of Robert "King" Carter, one of the richest Virginians of the early 18th century, enable the study of plantation practices prior to the closing of the transatlantic slave trade.

• The John Ambler Papers include correspondence from overseers as well as documents on slave sales, runaway slaves, diet, health, and the workloads of adults and children. The papers of John Jacquelin Ambler and his father-in-law, Philip Pendleton Barbour, reveal details on slave discipline and the punishment of runaways.

• Rounding out the Duke holdings are records from plantations in South Carolina, Georgia, North Carolina, and Virginia. The South Carolina and Georgia plantation records document the low-country plantations of absentee “rice barons” and upland cotton estates. Topics in the collections on North Carolina and Virginia include the culture and marketing of tobacco over the course of many decades, slave life and labor in the Upper South, and the social life and travel of the planter class.

• Major collections from the Duke University holdings document plantation life in Alabama, as well as South Carolina, Georgia, North Carolina, Virginia, and Maryland.

• The Watson collection provides insight into the responsiveness of planters to the cotton market following the Civil War. The Clay papers reveal the experience of women on postbellum plantations. Following the Civil War, Clement Claiborne Clay was imprisoned for his alleged involvement in the assassination of Abraham Lincoln. The collection contains letters from Virginia Clay to Andrew Johnson attempting to secure her husband’s release.

• Another of the major collections from the Duke holdings is the William Patterson Smith Collection, which documents the grain trade in the Chesapeake region and includes data on prices of slaves, staple crops, farm implements, and consumer products.
Confederate Military Manuscripts and Records of Union Generals and the Union Army

CHOICE Outstanding Academic Title, 2017

More than 150 years after the end of the Civil War, research interest continues to thrive. The collections in this module are being published digitally for the first time in ProQuest History Vault to deliver one-of-a-kind coverage.

• The Confederate Army records consist of Confederate Military Manuscripts sourced by ProQuest from the holdings of Virginia Historical Society; the Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collections, Louisiana State University; the Center for American History, University of Texas at Austin; and the University of Virginia.

• The collections provide insights into virtually every facet of life in the Confederacy, from records and papers of high command to evidence of Johnny Reb and his family—the fuel for “new” military history, which studies the social and cultural aspects of the military.

The Confederate Military Manuscripts are highlighted by significant collections of Robert E. Lee Papers from the Virginia Historical Society. Researchers will also find papers of other Confederate officers: Thomas “Stonewall” Jackson, Ambrose Powell Hill, J.E.B. Stuart, Jubal A. Early, and John Walter Fairfax, P. G. T. Beauregard, Launcelot Minor Blackford and several more.

This module has other standout collections:

• The William Pitt Ballinger Papers from the University of Texas chronicle the life of a man who initially opposed secession, but once it came, embraced it with passion.

• Materials from Louisiana State University document wartime Louisiana and Mississippi in the army, at home and under Union occupation.

• The collections from University of Virginia in this module document virtually every aspect of the war in Eastern Theater.

Unique and several previously unpublished collections of records of the Union Army are also integral to this module. Highlights include papers of spies, scouts, guides and detectives, including a series on Allan Pinkerton; records on military discipline from courts-martial, courts of inquiry and investigations by military commissions; and records of the U.S. Colored Troops.

• The records on spies and scouts cover troop movements, Indian activity in the West and Midwest, bushwhacking in Missouri; military concerns, such as pay, rations, appointments and commission trials; smuggling of contraband goods; and daily activities of the government officer doing the reporting.

• The records on military discipline cover desertion, discipline, robbery and theft, absence without leave, and violation of Articles of War. Excellent documentation spotlights the daily experiences of soldiers in the Civil War army, the relationship between officers and enlisted men, and interactions between civilians and military personnel.

• The records on Union Generals consist of the papers of Ambrose Burnside, Henry W. Halleck, Don Carlos Buell, and Benjamin F. Butler.
Reconstruction and Military Government after the Civil War

On August 8, 1867, Henry Collum and other Black citizens of Bainbridge, Georgia, wrote to U.S. Army General John Pope requesting information on how to "run a colored man for the pending convention." Three weeks later, Jacob R. Davis of Augusta, Georgia wrote to General Pope asking him to issue an order prohibiting the requirement of a poll tax for freedmen because it prevented them from voting. During the 1868 elections in Covington County, Mississippi, Lieutenant William Atwood reported that black voters had been beaten after leaving the polls because they had voted "the Radical Ticket." In Holly Springs, Mississippi, in May 1868, Benjamin Ford and his wife Matilda reported on an encounter with the KKK at their home during which Benjamin was beaten with a stick.

These anecdotes are just a few examples of the type of detail found in Reconstruction and Military Government after the Civil War. As these anecdotes indicate, this module offers remarkable insight into the early Reconstruction period in the American South. The largest portion of the documents in this module consist of Records of the U.S. Army’s Office of Civil Affairs. Attempts to replace any civil officers who had served the Confederacy with loyal Union men are at the heart of the materials in this module. In addition, this module contains letters from citizens to the military government on topics such as intimidation and violence, crime, voter registration, law enforcement, corruption, and fair administration of the election process.

Also included in this module are Letters Received by the Attorney General pertaining to law and order in southern states from 1871-1884 and records of the Freedmen’s Hospital and the Freedman’s Savings and Trust Company.

This module makes an excellent companion to the Southern Plantation Records, Slavery Petitions, and Confederate Military Manuscript and Union Army Records in History Vault.
Unlock Key Primary Source Materials

Since its debut in 2011, ProQuest® History Vault is an unparalleled collection that continues to build over time, covering the full sweep of U.S. History from the American Revolution to the last years of the 20th century. Major content areas covered include not only Southern Life and Slavery, but also Civil Rights and the Black Freedom Struggle in the 20th Century, Women’s Studies, Native American History, American Politics and Society, Military and Diplomatic History, and Workers and Labor Unions.

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- NAACP Papers: The NAACP’s Major Campaigns—Legal Department Files

Women’s Studies
- Women’s Studies Manuscript Collections from the Schlesinger Library: Voting Rights, National Politics, Reproductive Rights
- Margaret Sanger Papers
- Struggle for Women’s Rights, 1880-1990: Organizational Records
- Women at Work during World War II: Rosie the Riveter and the Women’s Army Corps

Workers and Labor Unions
- Labor Unions in the U.S., 1862-1974: Knights of Labor, AFL, CIO, and AFL-CIO
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