

Free Blacks

According to the 1830 census, there were only 519 free blacks in Mississippi. Their position was insecure. Whites worried especially about them and felt they might influence slaves to try to win their freedom. Therefore free blacks were not really free, but were increasingly restricted.

Free blacks could not act as ministers or work under printers. They could be arrested at any time unless they carried with them their certificate of freedom. They were severely punished for any act or word of aggression toward whites. They could not buy or sell whiskey or own firearms or grocery stores. Free blacks could never testify in court against whites; if found guilty of minor offenses, they were whipped as slaves would have been.

The Barber of Natchez

William Johnson, a free black in Natchez, was an exceptional man. The son of a black woman and a white man, Johnson regularly did business with whites and became quite wealthy. He owned over 1,000 acres of land and eight slaves and operated three barber shops. In 1851 Johnson was murdered by a white man. His murderer was never convicted because the only witnesses—blacks—could not testify in court against a white.

In 1831, whites founded the Mississippi Colonization Society to remove free blacks to Africa. Some members of the society felt that blacks would be happier there, while others wanted to get rid of the "threat" of free blacks in Mississippi.

In 1842, it was made illegal for a master to free a slave within Mississippi. Free blacks were also forbidden to enter the state. Many free blacks found conditions increasingly rigid and moved to Tennessee, New Orleans, or the Northern states. In the North, however, they discovered that although blacks were not enslaved, they were restricted. In much of the North, blacks were barred from jury service, attended segregated schools, and could not vote or make contracts.

Woman's Place

The rights of white women in the Old South were also limited. Especially in the upper class, girls were taught to be gentle, graceful, and submissive. A Mississippi wife, after criticizing her husband, had second thoughts: "I have

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