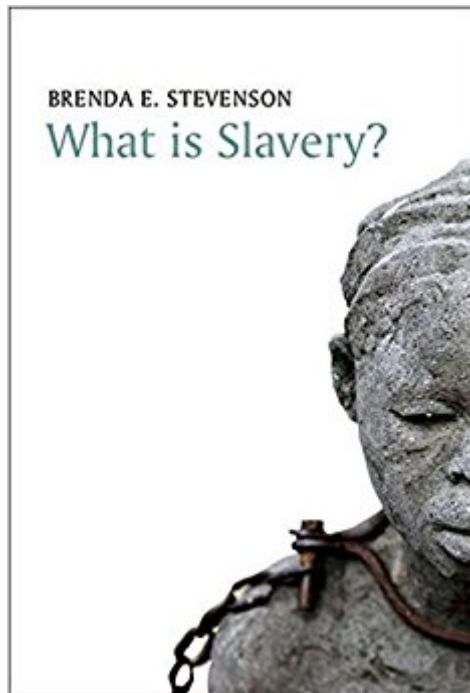


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# What Is Slavery? (What Is History?)



## Synopsis

What is slavery? It seems a simple enough question. Despite the long history of the institution and its widespread use around the globe, many people still largely associate slavery, outside of the biblical references in the Old Testament, to the enslavement of Africans in America, particularly the United States. Slavery proved to be essential to the creation of the young nation's agricultural and industrial economies and profoundly shaped its political and cultural landscapes, even until today. *What Is Slavery?* focuses on the experience of enslaved black people in the United States from its early colonial period to the dawn of that destructive war that was as much about slavery as anything else. The book begins with a survey of slavery across time and place, from the ancient world to the beginning of the Atlantic slave trade and then describes the commerce in black laborers that ushered in market globalization and brought more than 12 million Africans to the Americas, before finally examining slavery in law and practice. For those who are looking for a concise and comprehensive treatment of such topics as slave labor, culture, resistance, family and gender relations, the domestic slave trade, the regionalization of the institution in the expanding southern and southwestern frontiers, and escalating abolitionist and proslavery advocacies, this book will be essential reading.

## Book Information

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"This small book is something of a miracle, telling a story of global importance and ancient lineage in ways both evocative and efficient. No other single volume better explains the origins and

evolution of slavery in American history."Edward L. Ayers, University of Richmond"Brenda Stevenson's *What is Slavery?* fills a huge gap in our knowledge of humans behaving badly and reveals the violence, abuse, and exploitation that accompanied this inhumane practice. This is a welcome and much-needed addition to the scholarship on slavery in the ancient and modern world."V. P. Franklin, University of California

Brenda E. Stevenson is Professor of History at University of California, Los Angeles

*What is Slavery?* is a collegiate-level historical survey that follows the widespread phenomenon of slavery from ancient civilizations to its existence in the United States. Stevenson addresses not only the question of "what is slavery" as a historical concept but also touches upon the current relevance in today's society. The book is broken down by chronology and topics, on both macro- and micro levels, to build a synthetic narrative on slave life and the institution of slavery. These pages trace the notion that slavery took on a new form in the US, as a race-based phenomenon that was perpetuated by notions of racial inferiority, through social custom and law, in order to maintain the political and economic benefits from enslaved labor. *What is Slavery?* intertwines the evolutionary changes of slavery and the slave experience with respect to time and place. The first chapter provides examples of different manifestations of slavery over five continents from the ancient world to the sixteenth century. The second chapter shows the geographic, demographic, and industrial expansion of slavery and the impact it had on Africa, the Americas, and the modern world through the Transatlantic Slave Trade. The last two chapters focus on the colonial and antebellum United States. Initially, Africans held an uncertain status in early European settlements and within indigenous groups, but shifting laws and cultural beliefs soon solidified the notion of African slavery, and with it, changes to African identity, family, culture, life, and labor. Most notably, Stevenson details the slave experience of daily living and labor, the struggle for survival, and gender differences, as well as the formation of a free black society and, ultimately, their fight for, and contribution to, emancipation. *What is Slavery?* is a comprehensive, well-researched, and concise narrative that draws from the most recent historiography on slavery studies. This is a must read for introductory American history courses and anyone who wants a general overview of American slavery.

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