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SLAVEHOLDING IN HARRISON COUNTY, 1850-1860

A STATISTICAL PROFILE

by Randolph Campbell

Harrison County, located in northeastern Texas on the Louisiana border, was a major center of slaveholding during the antebellum period. The first United States census taken in the County in 1850 reported 599 slaveholders and 6,190 slaves. Ten years later there were 650 slaveholders who owned 8726 bondsmen.¹ Although increases in the number of slaveholders (8.4 percent) and slaves (40.9 percent) in the County did not match the rapid growth rate of slaveholding for the State as a whole in the 1850's, Harrison had a larger slave population than any other county in Texas in both 1850 and 1860. Slaves made up 52 percent of the County's total population of 11,822 in 1850 and 58 percent of the 15,001 people living there in 1860.² In both census years, approximately 60 percent of Harrison's white families owned at least one slave. This statistic is especially impressive when compared to the figures for Texas and other slave states. Only 29 percent of families in the Lone Star State and 25 percent of all southern families owned slaves in 1860.³

The "Peculiar Institution" was so woven into the everyday social and economic life of Harrison's people that it was certainly one of the central facts in the County's existence in the 1850's. And because Harrison had a major town, Marshall, with an outspoken ultrasouthern newspaper, the *Texas Republican*, and important proslavery political figures such as Louis T. Wigfall, the influence of slavery there probably extended over a large area of East Texas.⁴ Harrison County may not have been typical of either Texas or the South, but it had large number of slaves and slaveholders in a limited area and a leading position in antebellum Texas. Thus it provides a convenient and important setting for a study in microcosm of Negro slavery in the Lone Star State.

The full economic and social impact of slavery in Harrison County cannot be dealt with in a brief space. There are too many questions concerning the economics of slave labor, the relationship between slaveholders and non-slaveholders and the intellectual difficulties inherent in holding human beings as property to be answered in a single article. Thus in seeking a logical place to begin a study of the institution, this paper offers a statistical profile of slaveholding in the County in 1850 and 1860. It will deal primarily with the occupations of slaveholders, the size of slaveholdings and the distribution of slave property among slaveholders. What size slaveholding was most common in Harrison County? What were the trends from 1850 to 1860 in the size of slaveholdings? What was the degree of concentration of slave property in the hands of large owners? Answers to these questions are very important in defining and explaining the nature of antebellum slave society in East Texas.

Information for this statistical profile is drawn from Schedule 1 - Free Population, Schedule 2 - Slave Population and Schedule 4 - Agriculture of the United States census returns for 1850 and 1860. The approach was to begin with Schedule 2 and identify every slaveholder in Harrison County and then to locate these individuals in Schedules 1 and 4 to determine their occupations and whether or not they were actually engaged in farming. Tables One and Two present the resulting statistical information.⁵

As would be expected, farmers were predominant among slaveholders, representing 81.8 percent of the total in 1850 and 80.2 percent in 1860.⁶ The

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TABLE 1. NUMBER OF SLAVEHOLDERS ACCORDING TO SIZE OF SLAVEHOLDING

1850

Category	1-4	5-9	10-19	20-29	30-39	40-49	50-99	100+	Totals
Farmers	146	125	129	56	18	7	8	1	490
Non-Farmers	86	19	3	1	0	0	0	0	109
Totals	232	144	132	57	18	7	8	1	599
% of Total Owners	38.7	24.0	22.0	9.5	3.0	1.2	1.3	0.2	99.9

1860

Category	1-4	5-9	10-19	20-29	30-39	40-49	50-99	100+	Totals
Farmers	131	115	127	71	27	21	27	1	521
Non-Farmers	80	35	12	2	1	0	0	0	129
Totals	211	150	139	73	28	21	27	1	650
% of Total Owners	32.5	23.1	21.4	11.2	4.3	3.2	4.2	0.2	100.

TABLE 2. NUMBER OF SLAVES ACCORDING TO SIZE OF SLAVEHOLDING

1850

Category	1-4	5-9	10-19	20-29	30-39	40-49	50-99	100+	Totals
Farmers	355	831	1807	1319	614	298	499	103	5826
Non-Farmers	178	117	44	27	0	0	0	0	364
Totals	531	948	1851	1346	614	298	499	103	6190
% of Total Slaves	8.6	15.3	29.9	21.7	9.9	4.8	8.1	1.7	100.

1860

Category	1-4	5-9	10-19	20-29	30-39	40-49	50-99	100+	Totals
Farmers	330	788	1718	1683	944	920	1657	104	8142
Non-Farmers	166	225	148	45	0	0	0	0	584
Totals	496	1011	1866	1728	944	920	1657	104	8726
% of Total Slaves	5.7	11.6	21.4	19.8	10.8	10.5	19.0	1.2	100.

remaining slaveholders worked at a wide variety of non-agricultural occupations. This group included merchants, lawyers, doctors, teachers, ministers, public officials, manufacturers (gin maker, for example), tradesmen and those providing services such as livery stable operators. Most of these non-farming slaveholders lived in the town of Marshall, although a few were scattered throughout the County. Some apparently used their slaves as assistants in their work while others held slaves as personal servants only and a few probably hired out their bondsmen for agricultural labor.⁷

Slaveholdings in 1850 ranged in size from a single bondsman to 103 Negroes on the plantation of William T. Scott. There were 81 owners who held only one slave; Scott was the only owner of more than 100 bondsmen. The average size holding that year was 10.3 slaves, but this mean was biased upward by a relatively few large holders. Farmers averaged 11.9 slaves per owner while non-farmers averaged 3.3 bondsmen. Among farmers, truly large holdings were limited to the 90 (18.4 percent) who owned more than twenty slaves and thereby qualified as plantation operators according to the usually accepted standard. Only nine planters owned fifty or more slaves. Non-farming slaveholders were almost without exception small, only four of 109 held more than ten bondsmen.⁸

The range of slaveholdings remained almost exactly the same in 1860. There were 67 individuals who held one slave each while William T. Scott, with 104 bondsmen, maintained his position as Harrison County's largest slaveholder. The average size holding, however, increased to 15.6 slaves per farmer and 4.5 slaves per non-farmer. For the County as a whole the average size holding increased by 29.9 percent to 13.4 slaves per owner. This rise in the mean size slaveholding is explained primarily by an increase in the number of plantation-size holders from 90 to 148 so that they constituted 28.4 percent of all agricultural slaveholders. Non-farming slaveowners also appreciably increased the size of their holdings.⁹

Trends in the size of slaveholding in Harrison County during the 1850's are illustrated by the percentage change figures in Table Three.¹⁰ The number and percent of large holders increased sharply while there was a slight reduction in small holders. Percentages of slaveowners in the three smallest categories, those owning from 1 to 4, 5 to 9 and 10 to 19 slaves, declined, and the portion of the County's slaves held by owners in these categories declined even more rapidly. Beginning with the plantation-size slaveholders, there were appreciable increases in all categories except 100+ which remained unchanged with only William T. Scott at that level. The percentage of slaves held in each category, however, did not increase until the 30-39 level was reached, and really sharp rises came only in the 40-49 and 50-99 slave categories. Increases in the number and percentage of big slaveholders were, of course, most important among farmers, but non-farmers also experienced a decline among small slaveowners and an increase in larger categories.

Table Four demonstrates another important fact about Harrison County's slaveholders in the 1850's. There was a high degree of concentration of slave property in the hands of a few men with large numbers of Negroes. That there were 232 slaveholders owning from one to four bondsmen and only nine holding more than fifty in 1850 proves only that there were many small slaveholders. It sheds no light on the relative positions of the small and large holders in terms of the wealth, power and prestige that accompanied the ownership of large numbers of bondsmen. The important question concerning the distribution of slave property is how many slaves and what percent of all slaves were held by the owners in each category. In 1850, for example, the 232 individuals holding from one to four slaves constituted 38.7 percent of all slaveowners and yet they held only 531 bondsmen or 8.6 percent of the total. At the other extreme, the 91 planters holding twenty or more slaves represented 15.2

TABLE 3. PERCENTAGE CHANGE FROM 1850 TO 1860
CHANGE IN PERCENTAGE OF SLAVEHOLDERS ACCORDING TO SIZE OF SLAVEHOLDING

Category	1-4	5-9	10-19	20-29	30-39	40-49	50-99	100+	
Farmers	-15.8	-13.3	-7.2	+19.3	+40.5	+185.7	+225.0	0.0	
Non-Farmers	-21.4	+55.7	+232.1	+77.8					
All Slaveholders	-16.0	-3.8	-2.7	+17.9	+43.3	+166.7	+223.1	0.0	

CHANGE IN PERCENTAGE OF SLAVES ACCORDING TO SIZE OF SLAVEHOLDING

Category	1-4	5-9	10-19	20-29	30-39	40-49	50-99	100+	
Farmers	-32.8	-32.2	-31.9	-8.4	+10.5	+121.6	+137.2	-27.8	
Non-Farmers	-41.3	+19.9	+109.1	+4.1					
All Slaves	-33.7	-24.3	-28.4	-8.9	+9.0	+119.1	+135.4	-28.3	

TABLE 4. CONCENTRATION OF SLAVE OWNERSHIP IN HARRISON COUNTY

1850					1860				
Category	No. of Owners	% of all Owners	No. of Slaves	% of all Slaves	Category	No. of Owners	% of all Owners	No. of Slaves	% of all Slaves
1-4	232	38.7	531	8.6	1-4	211	32.5	496	5.7
5-9	144	24.0	948	15.3	5-9	150	23.1	1011	11.6
10-19	132	22.0	1851	29.9	10-19	139	21.4	1866	21.4
20-29	67	8.5	1346	21.7	20-29	73	11.2	1728	19.8
30-39	18	3.0	514	9.0	30-39	28	4.3	944	10.8
40-49	7	1.2	298	4.8	40-49	21	3.2	820	10.5
50-99	8	1.3	499	8.1	50-99	27	4.1	1657	19.0
100+	1	0.2	103	1.7	100+	1	0.2	104	1.2
Totals	599	99.9	6190	100.0	Totals	650	100.0	8728	100.0

percent of all owners, but they controlled 2760 bondsmen constituting 46.2 percent of all slave property. Concentration was slightly more pronounced in 1860. The 211 owners in the one to four slave category representing 32.5 percent of the total held 5.7 percent of the slaves while 27 farmers in the 50 to 99 category, constituting only 4.2 percent of all farmers, held 19 percent of all bondsmen.

The degree of concentration may be demonstrated graphically and reduced to an index by the use of a Lorenz Curve as in Figure One.¹¹ Percentages of slaveholders are plotted along the vertical (Y) axis while percentages of slaves are plotted along the horizontal (X) axis. Under conditions of perfect equality in the distribution of slave property each one percent of slaveholders would own a corresponding one percent of the slaves and the result would be a straight line (Z) at 45 degrees. However, when the actual percentages are plotted, the result is a curved line well above the straight line of perfect equality. The general rule for visually interpreting this Lorenz Curve is that the bow of the curve becomes greater as concentration increases. In Figure One, the curves for 1850 and 1860 are very similar indicating a fairly high and stable degree of concentration of slave ownership in 1850 and 1860.¹²

The situation represented by the Lorenz Curves may also be reduced to a Gini Index of Concentration through a formula that measures the area enclosed by the curve and the diagonal line (Z) as a percentage of the total area above the diagonal.¹³ As would be expected, the indices are almost identical - .496 in 1850 and a slightly higher .519 in 1860. These indices are of little use here except to provide specific measurement of the degree of concentration shown graphically in Figure One, but they should be of great value for purpose of comparisons with distributions of slave property in other areas, concentration in the holdings of other forms of productive property and wealth, and so on. Lee Soltow, for example, in a study of economic inequality in the antebellum United States calculated the Gini Index of slave property concentration among all slaveholders in the South at .595 for 1850 and .603 for 1860.¹⁴ Thus concentration of slave property in Harrison County, which seems high, does not match the level of concentration for the South as a whole in the 1850's. Harrison County was much like the rest of the slaveholding United States, however, in showing no basic change in the degree of inequality among slaveholders in the decade before the Civil War.

What does this statistical profile reveal about slavery in antebellum Harrison County? In the first place, the "Peculiar Institution" had a very broad base of support there. Although by far the greatest number of slaveholders owned only a few slaves, each, more than half of the County's families owned bondsmen. And slave ownership was by no means limited to farmers; individuals in virtually all occupations owned Negroes. Small holders and non-farmers may not have reaped large benefits from the institution, but they nevertheless had a direct stake in slave society. Secondly, there was little "economic democracy" among Harrison's slaveholders in that there was a strong tendency during the 1850's toward more large slaveholdings and that throughout the decade a high percentage of slave property was concentrated in the hands of a relatively small number of wealthy men. It is quite probable, although the proof is not the subject of this article, that this concentration of slave property was one key to a whole society run essentially by large slaveholders.¹⁵

Many aspects of slavery in Harrison County remain to be studied. What, for example, was the relationship of slave ownership to agricultural production? How did slavery affect the economic development of the County? Answers to questions such as these may put slavery in a different light, but nothing in this statistical profile indicates that it was anything but a broad-based, thriving institution in Harrison County during the 1850's.

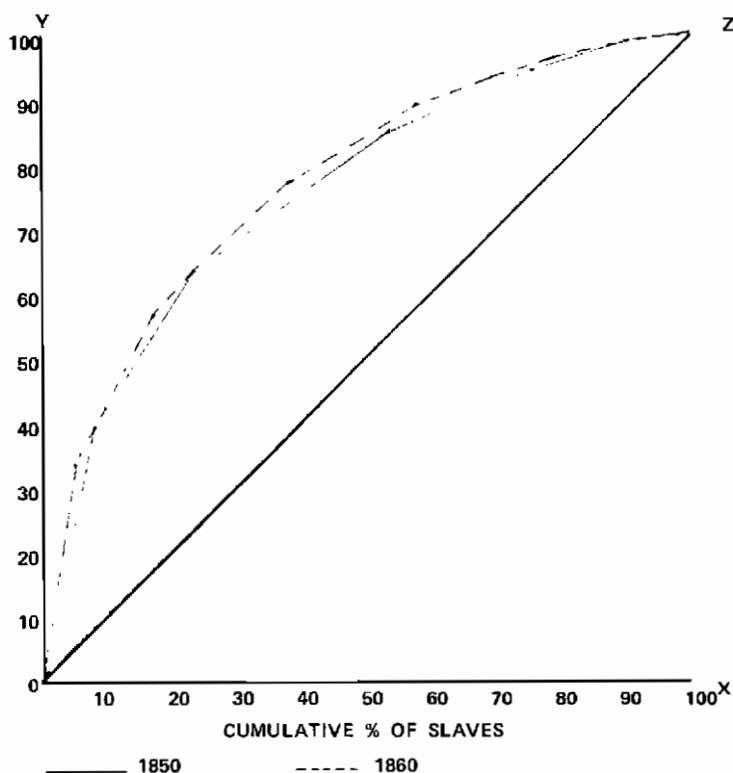
FIGURE 1. LORENZ CURVE

1850	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Cumulative % of Owners	38.73	62.77	84.51	94.32	97.32	98.48	99.81	99.97
Cumulative % of Slaves	8.57	23.88	53.78	75.72	85.43	90.24	98.30	99.99

Gini Index =
.4958

1860	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Cumulative % of Owners	32.46	55.53	76.91	88.14	92.44	95.67	99.82	99.97
Cumulative % of Slaves	5.68	17.26	38.64	58.44	69.25	79.79	98.87	99.96

Gini Index =
.5194



NOTES

¹Statistics on slaveholders and slaves were compiled from microfilmed manuscript returns of the *Seventh Census of the United States, 1850*, Schedule 1 - Free Inhabitants and Schedule 2 - Slave Inhabitants and the *Eighth Census of the United States, 1860*, Schedules 1 and 2. Hereinafter these manuscript returns on microfilm will be cited as *Seventh Census, 1850*, and *Eighth Census, 1860* with appropriate schedule numbers.

²The slave population of Texas increased 214% between 1850 and 1860 - From 58,161 to 182,566. The number of slaveholders increased 182% - from 7,747 to 21,878. See United States, Bureau of the Census, *Statistical View of the United States: A Compendium of the Seventh Census, 1850* (Washington, 1854), 82,308-319; United States, Bureau of the Census, *Eighth Census of the United States, 1860* (Washington, 1864) *Population*, 484-486 and *Agriculture*, 247-248. In most cases, these published figures differ slightly from those I have compiled from the microfilm returns, but such discrepancies are to be expected when dealing with large amounts of quantitative historical data.

³Figures on the approximate percentages of Harrison County families holding slaves are drawn from *Seventh Census, 1850*, Schedules 1 and 2, and *Eighth Census, 1860*, Schedules 1 and 2. There were 76,781 families and 21,878 slaveholders in Texas in 1860. Bureau of the Census, *Eighth Census, 1860, Population*, 348-349; *Agriculture*, 247. Some families had more than one slaveholder, but the use of these figures to determine an approximate percentage should be acceptable. The fact that only 25% of all southern families held slaves is widely accepted. For a recent critical comment on this subject see Otto H. Olsen, "Historians and the Extent of Slave Ownership in the Southern United States," *Civil War History*, XVIII (June, 1972), 101-116.

⁴Marshall had a population of 1,189 in 1850 which made it one of the few sizeable towns in the state. Galveston, with 4,177 people, was Texas' largest city that year. Bureau of the Census, *Statistical View of the U.S., 1850*, 355, 367. For evidence on the ultrasouthern views of the *Texas Republican* see Randolph Campbell, "Texas and the Nashville Convention of 1850," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, LXXVI (July, 1972), 4-5. See also Alvy L. King, *Louis T. Wigfall, Southern Fireeater* (Baton Rouge, 1970).

⁵These tables were compiled from *Seventh Census, 1850*, Schedules 1 and 2 and *Eighth Census, 1860*, Schedules 1 and 2.

⁶In 1850, 92 (15.4%) of these slaveholding farmers could not be identified with a farm in *Seventh Census, 1850*, Schedule 4 - Agriculture. It is not possible to determine their situation exactly, but it appears that they were renters or tenant farmers. By 1860, the number of slaveholding farmers in this category had declined to 33 (5.1%), *Eighth Census, 1860*, Schedule 4. For the purpose of this profile, it was assumed that these slaveholders and their slaves were engaged in agriculture although apparently they did not own land.

⁷*Seventh Census, 1850*, Schedules 1 and 2; *Eighth Census, 1860*, Schedules 1 and 2.

⁸*Seventh Census, 1850*, Schedule 2. The idea, that holders of twenty or more slaves qualified as planters is found in Ulrich B. Phillips, *Life and Labor in the Old South* (Boston, 1929), 481 and Kenneth Stamp, *The Peculiar Institution: Slavery in the Antebellum South* (New York, 1956), 30. Lewis C. Gray, *History of Agriculture in the Southern United States to 1860* (Washington, D.C., 1933), I, 481-483, defines the middle planter class as those holding ten to fifty slaves.

⁹*Eighth Census, 1860*, Schedule 2. The mean size slaveholdings in the South in 1860 was 10.3 bondsmen, so Harrison County holdings were on the average large for the 'lave South. See Lee Soltow, "Economic Inequality in the United States in the Period from 1790-1860," *Journal of Economic History*, XXXI (December, 1971), 824-825.

¹⁰This table is derived by subtracting the smaller from the larger percentage in corresponding (1850 and 1860) cells of each row and then dividing the difference by the 1850 percentage figure. The percentage change is positive if the 1860 figure is greater than the 1850 figure; negative if it is less than the figure for 1850.

¹¹For an explanation of the Lorenz Curve see M.O. Lorenz, "Methods of Measuring the Concentration of Wealth," *Publications of the American Statistical Association*, IX (June, 1905), 209-219.

¹²The bow of the curve would be much more pronounced, of course, if the graph represented the slaveholding situation for the entire population rather than for slaveholders as a special class. Some historians and economists feel that the degree of concentration of slave property for the population as a whole is a better measure of the concentrated wealth than that presented by a study of slaveholders only. See for example, Gavin Wright, "'Economic Democracy' and the Concentration of Agricultural Wealth in the Cotton South, 1850-1860," *Agricultural History*, XLIV (January, 1970). 63-85.

¹³For a concise explanation of the Gini Index see Charles M. Dollar and Richard J. Jensen, *Historian's Guide to Statistics, Quantitative Analysis and Historical Research* (New York, 1971), 123-125.

¹⁴Soltow, "Economic Inequality in the U.S.," 824-825. Gavin Wright calculated the Gini Index of concentration of agricultural slaveholdings for all areas of the South, but he based it on non-slaveholders as well as slaveholders thus arriving at much higher indices of concentration. Wright, "'Economic Democracy' and Concentration of Wealth," 79.

¹⁵This suggestion brings up the middle class democracy thesis associated with Frank L. Owsley, *Plain Folk of the Old South* (Baton Rouge, 1949). Owsley's thesis has many critics. See the summary in Wright, "'Economic Democracy' and Concentration of Wealth." It seems possible, however, that Owsley may have been no more incorrect about economic democracy in the South than those who have seen the rest of the United States as a land of equality during the antebellum period. Concentration of wealth and conditions of economic and social oligarchy were probably the fact then as well as in more recent times. See for example, Edward Pessen, "The Egalitarian Myth and the American Social Reality: Wealth, Mobility and Equality in the 'Era of the Common Man'," *American Historical Review*, LXXVI (October, 1971), 989-1031.