

Key Terms & Dates

To give an accurate representation of history, words must be defined with context and can have a profound impact on our understanding of hidden or erased history. Below, you'll find definitions, dates, people and institutions that support learning related to forced labor in Atlanta and the United States.

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Relevant Terms

Black Codes - A series of laws passed in the South after the Civil War to restrict Black people's right to own property, conduct business and move around freely. The codes usually included vagrancy laws that criminalized loitering or unemployment and thus provided a steady flow of prisoners for the convict leasing system.

Chain Gang - A form of convict labor common in Georgia and the South starting in the early 1900s. Chain gangs were initially seen as a reform after the abuses of convict leasing. But the institution became notorious during the 1930s after exposes like the book *I Was a Fugitive from a Georgia Chain Gang* and a subsequent movie. Chain gangs were used less often after World War II and were completely phased out in Georgia during the early 1960s.

Convict Labor - A term to encompass all practices of requiring those convicted of a crime to hard labor – including convict leasing, chain gangs, prison farms, prison plantations, etc. – most notably and characteristically in unlawful and unsafe conditions. This term was first used as an alternative to convict leasing after its abolition in the early 1900s but is still used to describe its evolution to present-day practices.

Convict Leasing - The practice of a government entity --renting out prisoners to work in private businesses. Those businesses sometimes leased prisoners to other enterprises, essentially buying and selling human beings on a secondary market. Georgia used convict leasing extensively until the abuse of prisoners became a scandal and the system was outlawed in 1908.

Disfranchisement - A concerted effort to prevent Black people from voting by law, poll taxes, literacy and citizenship tests, and other means.

Enslavement – In the context of trafficking and trading humans as commodities through the 19th century, the term 'enslaved African(s)' refers to people of African descent who were kidnapped, purchased, traded, or coerced from their countries or regions of origin in Africa and transported to the United States or other countries specifically for the purpose of chattel slavery. They are referred to as "enslaved" and not "slaves" because enslavement was clearly the action that occurred. The term 'slave(s)' alone does not define clearly the act of enslavement. The term 'owner(s)' should be used when referring to individuals who owned enslaved Africans and held them legally as property via

purchase, sale, rent, or trade for the purpose of chattel slavery. The terms ‘slaveowner,’ ‘plantation owner,’ ‘slaveholder,’ and ‘master’ should not be used so that the action of enslavement and the continent of origin of those who were enslaved remains clear. [[Sourced Below](#)] (Bell, 2009).

Exemption Clause - A provision in the 13th amendment, which bans slavery and involuntary servitude, making an exception for people convicted of crimes. It left a loophole allowing convict leasing.

Forced Labor - A catch-all term for involuntary work, including convict leasing, forced labor camps and convict labor such as chain gangs or prison industries. Unfree Labor is another term for forced labor.

Neo-Slavery - A contemporary term used to describe the modern phenomenon of mass incarceration, the prison industrial complex and its evolution from and iterations of previous enslavement practices.

Peonage - A system in which employers or plantation owners compel workers to pay off a debt with work. Also known as debt slavery or servitude.

Prison Farms - A form of convict labor in which enslaved prisoners work and maintain farms owned by state and federal governments to produce food for the larger prison population or generate economic gains from local establishments. Prison farms, originally modeled after plantations of the Antebellum South, regained popularity in the mid-1900s as a source of food for a growing prison population.

Prison Industries - Involuntary work in prisons in which inmates are paid little or nothing to manufacture products such as highway signs or license plates. Prison industries became the most common form of inmate labor during the second half of the 20th century, after the era of chain gangs.

Prison Plantation – A form of convict leasing post-reconstruction in which those convicted under the black codes would be leased back to plantation owners to continue re-enslavement post-emancipation. In later years after convict leasing was banned in the early 1900s, some plantations were converted to prisons that would be used to enact the same system – such as using prison guards as overseers.

Prohibition - Georgia became the first state to ban the sale and distribution of alcoholic beverages in 1907, 12 years before national Prohibition. Lawmakers passed the measure after the 1906 Atlanta Race Massacre, which many leaders blamed on drunkenness in Black “dives.”

Reconstruction - From the end of the Civil War in 1865 until the last federal occupying troops left the South in 1877. Historians see Reconstruction as an era of progress when African Americans secured more rights and were elected to public office for the first time. But it ended in a white backlash that saw those officeholders dwindle in number and those rights stripped away.

Redemption - The term some white people used to refer to the end of Reconstruction, the departure of occupying troops from the South, and the return of local government control to white politicians.

Re-Enslavement - Slavery by another name, especially through convict leasing, sharecropping and other means that arose after the Civil War to control and profit off the formerly enslaved.

Second Slavery - The systemic redeployment of slavery as a historic departure from colonial slavery distinguished by new commodities, unprecedented production quantities, in regions formerly marginal to the Atlantic economy, and reconfigured polities. After 1790, slavery expanded onto new ground, slaves tended new crops and new machinery, and the planter classes gained dominance in rising world markets and acquired new powers as profits soared from burgeoning industrialization, (which would lay the groundwork for industrialized forced labor in the late 19th century. [\[Sourced Below\]](#) (Kaye, 2009)

Sharecropping - System where the landlord or planter requires a tenant to use the land in exchange for a share of the crop. This encouraged tenants to work to produce the biggest harvest that they could, and ensured they would remain tied to the land and unlikely to leave for other opportunities. Although not necessarily forced labor, it was close to it as a system that kept the sharecropper impoverished and in debt to landowners.

Vagrancy Laws - A common feature of the Black Codes that criminalized loitering, gathering, unemployment or lack of proof of employment and thus provided a steady flow of prisoners for the convict leasing system.

13th Amendment - The first of the Reconstruction amendments, ratified in late 1865, banning slavery and involuntary servitude — except in the case of persons convicted of a crime.

14th Amendment - The second Reconstruction amendment, ratified in 1868, guarantees citizenship and equal protection under the law.

15th Amendment - The third Reconstruction amendment, ratified in 1870, prohibiting states from restricting the right to vote based on race. For many decades, Southern states found ways to circumvent the spirit of the amendment, and its intent wasn't truly realized until passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

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People

W.E.B. DuBois - Early civil rights activist who helped organize the NAACP. The first Black man to earn a doctorate from Harvard University, he came to Atlanta in 1897 to start a sociology department at Atlanta University and published his landmark essay collection, *The Souls of Black Folk* - while living here in 1903 – as well as *The Litany of Atlanta*, in direct response to the 1906 Atlanta Race Massacre. DuBois also held an annual Atlanta Conference of Negro Problems from 1896-1914 at Atlanta University to discuss obstacles oppressing African Americans at the time and find solutions.

James English - A prominent leader in Atlanta after the Civil War who served as the city's mayor during the 1880s and later as police commissioner during the 1906 Atlanta Race Massacre. He was president and founder of the Fourth National Bank in 1896, founder of the Chattahoochee Brick Company in 1878 and other enterprises that relied on convict leasing. He controlled 1,206 of the state's 2,881 convict labors in 1897. English also orchestrated the sale of millions of bricks to the Atlanta City Council for the use of sidewalks, homes and other city entities. (Blackmon 343).

Thomas Felder – Georgia state senator who launched a commission in July 1908 to investigate the “corruption of management of Georgia’s extensive system of buying and selling prisoners” (Blackmon 338). This investigation led to the abolition of convict leasing in Georgia in October 1908.

Henry Grady - One of the most prominent journalists of the 1870s and '80s, he was managing editor of *The Atlanta Constitution*, where he popularized the term of “The New South” that bolstered the ideas of progressive industrialization in Atlanta after the Civil War, not including race. The Henry Grady Statue in Downtown Atlanta, GA was used as a site for placing remains of African Americans during the 1906 Atlanta Massacre.

Alonzo Herndon - Born into slavery in rural Georgia, Herndon moved to Atlanta after the Civil War and became the city's most successful Black entrepreneur, first as a barber, then as owner of barber shops, then as founder of the Atlanta Life Insurance Co. Herndon was involved in the Niagara Movement, the forerunner of the NAACP.

Adrienne McNeil Herndon - Actress, professor and wife of Alonzo Herndon. She taught drama and elocution at Atlanta University and was an early civil rights activist who pushed her husband to support the Niagara Movement.

John Hope - The first African American president of Atlanta Baptist College (later renamed Morehouse) in 1906 and of Atlanta University in 1929. Hope played a key role in establishing Atlanta as a center of Black higher education. He was also a civil rights activist and leader in the Niagara Movement, the forerunner of the NAACP.

Lugenia Burns Hope – Social activist, reformer and co-founder of the Neighborhood Union, a community organization improving the conditions of Atlanta’s black communities. Hope developed a model for community activism used throughout the United States and in future civil rights organizations. She married John Hope in 1897.

Joel Hurt - Atlanta businessman and real estate developer of the late 1800s who was a major leaser of convicts at his Georgia Iron and Coal Company. Hurt developed Atlanta’s first suburbs of Grant Park, Inman Park and Druid Hills, using bricks from the Chattahoochee Brick Company and asset gained from his mines using forced labor [[Sourced Below](#)] (Blackmon 387).

Hoke Smith - Georgia governor and later U.S. senator who helped the end the convict leasing system in the state, along with the Georgia General Assembly in 1908 (however not fully abolished until 1941 decree by President Franklin Roosevelt). Before entering politics, he was a trial lawyer and publisher of The Atlanta Journal. Historians have cited his push to disfranchise Black voters during the 1906 gubernatorial campaign as a contributing factor to the Atlanta Race Massacre.

Tom Watson - A Georgia congressman and U.S. senator who published an influential publication, The Jeffersonian. Watson started his career in the 1890s as a populist espousing policy across racial lines, such as rural free delivery. But he grew more reactionary over the years and later became associated with racist and antisemitic writings.

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Institutions

Atlanta University - Established in 1865 by the American Missionary Association, was the nation's first institution to award graduate degrees to African Americans. Atlanta University and Clark College merged to become Clark Atlanta University.

Clark College – Established in 1869, was the nation's first four-year liberal arts college to serve a primarily African American student population. Atlanta University and Clark College merged to become Clark Atlanta University. Both institutions established a standard of upward mobility and excellence in the black community, which threatened the racial social order at the time.

Coca-Cola Company - In its current form, Coca-Cola was purchased for \$25 million in 1919 by Chairman Ernest Woodruff of Atlanta's Trust Company Bank leveraging his predecessors' interests in real estate and slave mines. Trust Company Bank was previously chaired by Joel Hurt. [\[Sourced Below\]](#) (Blackmon, 2008)

Gammon Theological Seminary (Clark Seminary) - Beginning as the Department of Religion and Philosophy at Clark University in 1873, Clark Theological Seminary was opened with 26 students. Gammon Theological Seminary was founded in 1883 by the Methodist Episcopal Church. Gammon is The United Methodist component of a consortium of six historically African American theological schools, The Interdenominational Theological Center.

Georgia Power Company - One of the largest electric utilities in the United States, Georgia Power began as a streetcar company and was purchased in 1902 by Joel Hurts by leveraging his assets from his real estate ventures and coal mines fueled by forced labor. [\[Sourced Below\]](#) (Blackmon, 2008)

Morehouse College - The prestigious private men's college was founded in Augusta in 1867 and moved to Atlanta in 1879 under the name Atlanta Baptist College. It was rechristened Morehouse in 1913 and became a cornerstone of Black higher education in the city.

Morris Brown College – Founded by Reverend Wesley John Gaines and the African Methodist Episcopal Church, it was first educational institution in Georgia with solely African American funding.

Spelman College - The nation's oldest private historically Black liberal arts college for women. Founded in 1881 as the Atlanta Baptist Female Seminary, it was renamed for John Rockefeller's wife's family, who were abolitionists.

SunTrust Bank (Truist) - The modern version of Trust Company Bank, chaired first by Joel Hurt, then by Ernest Woodruff in 1919. [[Sourced Below](#)] (Blackmon, 2008)

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Locations

Auburn Avenue (Sweet Auburn) - Coined “The Richest Negro Street in the World”, was a direct result of the 1906 Atlanta Massacre, after African Americans in Atlanta were segregated to only conducting and owning businesses on Auburn Avenue in downtown Atlanta.

Bellwood Quarry - A rock quarry in northwest Atlanta that operated for more than 100 years, using convict leasing and chain gang labor well into the 20th century. Bellwood also served as a Fulton County camp to disperse prison labor to rock quarries elsewhere.

Chattahoochee Brick Company - Private business in northwest Atlanta that manufactured bricks widely used in the rebuilding of the city in the decades after the Civil War. It was one of the largest and most horrific users of convict leasing in the late 1800s and early 1900s and continued in business using other forms of labor until the late 20th century.

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Significant Dates

June 19, 1865 – Juneteenth

December 6, 1865 – Ratification of the 13th Amendment

July 9, 1868 - Ratification of the 14th Amendment. Maryland and California did not ratify until 1959.

February 3, 1870 - Ratification of the 15th Amendment. Oregon would not ratify until 1959 and California in 1962.

1878 – Creation of Chattahoochee Brick Company

September 1906 – Atlanta Race Massacre

July 1908 - Commission for investigation of convict leasing system by Georgia legislature

October 1908 - Outlaw of convict leasing system in Georgia

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