

Educator Resources

Timeline

From The Programming Guide for *Through Darkness to Light: Photographs Along the Underground Railroad*
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Timeline Related to the Underground Railroad

(taken from J. Blaine Hudson's *Encyclopedia of the Underground Railroad*)

- 1619** The first Africans arrived in Jamestown, the British colony in North America, aboard a Dutch ship. They worked as indentured servants.
- 1641** Massachusetts became the first British North American colony to legalize slavery.
- 1642** Virginia made it illegal to help runaway slaves.
- 1661–1700** A series of laws passed institutionalizing American slavery and slave codes were enacted that gave owners the power of life and death over those enslaved.
- 1688** Pennsylvania Quakers signed the "Germantown Mennonite Resolution," the first protest against slavery in the American colonies.
- 1705** Virginia laws allowed slave-masters to kill and destroy runaway slaves.
- 1735** South Carolina law mandated the death penalty for any fugitive slave who resisted capture with a weapon of any kind.
- 1776** Declaration of Independence stated that the United Colonies are free and independent states.
- 1777** First emancipation began. Vermont banned slavery and for the next 25 years other northern states emancipated their slaves.
- 1793** Congress passed the Fugitive Slave Act, allowing slave owners to cross state lines to recapture fugitive slaves.
- 1794** Eli Whitney patented the cotton gin, a machine that separated cotton seeds from cotton fiber. Cotton became a major cash crop and increased the demand for slave labor.
- 1798–1803** Slavery ended in Canada.

- 1818** In response to the Fugitive Slave Act of 1793, abolitionists used the Underground Railroad to assist slaves to escape into Ohio and Canada.
- 1826** Levi Coffin left North Carolina and settled in Newburyport, Indiana, and began his career to help fugitive slaves.
- 1834** Slavery abolished in the British Empire.
- 1845** Frederick Douglass published *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, an account of his slave experience and escape to freedom.
- 1849** Harriet Tubman escaped from bondage and helped rescue others.
- 1850** Fugitive Slave Acts were updated. This Act permitted slaveholders to recapture and return escaped slaves to their masters.
- 1852** *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, written by Harriet Beecher Stowe, was published.
- 1861** The Civil War began.
- 1862** Slavery was abolished in Washington D.C.
- 1863** The Emancipation Proclamation was a statement issued by President Lincoln that "all persons held as slaves" within the rebellious states "are, and hence forward shall be free." Enslaved people in states and territories under Union Army control (West Virginia, Delaware, Kentucky, Maryland, Missouri, and the District of Columbia) were not declared free and they remained in slavery. The Emancipation Proclamation did not actually free any slave, but it did change the course of the Civil War.
- 1864** The Fugitive Slave Act was repealed.
- 1865** The Civil War ended. The Thirteenth Amendment was ratified. The 13th Amendment to the U. S. Constitution abolished slavery throughout the United States and the Civil War ends.
- 1868** The 14th Amendment to the Constitution required states to provide equal protection to protect civil rights of former slaves.
- 1870** The 15th Amendment was ratified—This Amendment to the Constitution granted voting rights to all men regardless of race. African Americans were given the right to vote.

- 1990** United States Congress asked the National Park Service to study the history of the Underground Railroad so monuments could be identified and set aside.
- 1996** Historian Anthony Cohen walked one of the Underground Railroad routes from Maryland to Canada.
- 1998** Anthony Cohen walked from Alabama to Canada.
- 2000** President Bill Clinton signed the National Underground Railroad Freedom Center Act and set aside \$16 million to restore historic sites of the routes and to create educational programs.