

Slave Diet in the Antebellum South

Slaves during the antebellum period had what could be called a varied diet depending on their location in the U.S. and the plantation owners. The main part of the slaves' diet consisted of portions of food given by plantation owners. These rations nearing the end of the antebellum period had, for the most part, become the main source of food for most slaves. Many slaves were encouraged indirectly to seek other ways to get food for their daily life. The slaves would get food from hunting wild game, fishing, even foraging for plants and fruit. They would when able to grow in their gardens and take care of their animals. Of course, there was always one way for a slave to get more food from their masters and that was to "steal" from their masters. At times slave owners themselves would give their slaves more food and other rations during special events. Slave owners understood the cost of feeding the slaves and at times had it down to almost a science as feeding their slaves affected their bottom line. Therefore, many slave owners encouraged slaves to seek other means of getting food such as farming themselves on small garden plots or hunting. Slave owners for the most part also understood that slaves would steal food supplies at times from their owners. However, as long as they were not caught, or the food item taken was not worth too much the slave owners paid it a little less mind.