

Southern Society at 1860

Group	Size	Notes
Large planters (1000 or more acres)	Less than 1% of the total number of white families	The wealthiest class in all of America, the large planters exercised social and political power far beyond their percentage of the population. Most owned 50 slaves or more.
Planters (100-1000 acres)	Perhaps 3% of white families	Usually owned 20-49 slaves. Provided many political leaders and controlled much of the wealth of the South
Small slaveholders	About 20% of white families	Owning fewer than 20 slaves, the small slaveholders were primarily farmers, though some were merchants in Southern towns.
Non-slaveholding whites	About 75% of white families	Yeoman farmers. They owned their small pieces of land and produced enough food for the family. 20% did not own either slaves or land and squatted on poor lands where they often grazed livestock or raised corn. Some were day laborers in towns.
Free blacks	3% of all free families	Usually in upper South, such as Virginia, Maryland, and Kentucky. Many were either tenant-farmers or day laborers. Legally and socially restricted in terms of mobility and economic advancement.
Slaves	4 million in 1860. In some Southern states, slaves outnumbered whites	Almost all native born, 75% worked on plantations and medium-sized farms. Another 10% were laborers at hard physical labor considered below whites.