

Inventory and Valuation of the Estate of Dr John Channing

How much can an inventory tell us about the practice of slavery, including the lives of enslaved people, in the United States in the early 19th century?

Content warning

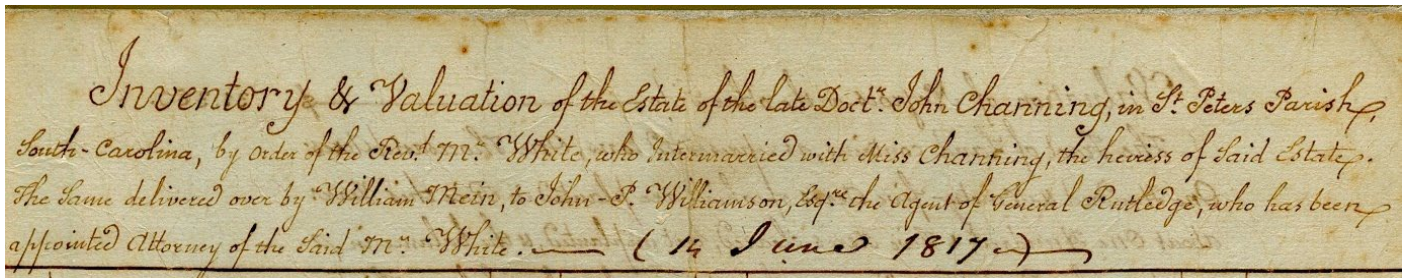
The document you will be looking at dates from 1817, and because of this it contains language which is unacceptable today and which you may find shocking. This includes racist, sexist and ableist terms. This language is never appropriate to use but has been kept because it is part of the original document.

Section One: *What is the document all about?*

Activity 1: Look at handout 1 for **2 minutes**. Write down at least **5** things you notice about it – this can be anything at all. Think about the layout, the writing, the title...If you find more than 5 that's great!

Activity 2: Let's look a bit more closely at the beginning of the document. Working in pairs, look at the opening section below and pick out any words or phrases you don't understand.

Now join with another pair and compare answers. Read through the opening section together as a group and try to guess what you think the words mean. Then use the glossary to check which ones you got right.



Now answer the following questions:

- Which words describe the type of document this is?
- When was the document made?
- Who owned the estate at the time of writing the document?
- Who arranged for the document to be produced? Is there anything you notice about this?
- Why do you think this document was written? What was it for?

Section Two: *What kind of jobs did enslaved people do and what can we learn from this?*

Now let's look more closely at the rest of the document. Start by finding out what different jobs or occupations enslaved people had on this plantation. Use the glossary to help you make sense of words that you don't understand. Complete the table below by filling in the names of the enslaved people who had the jobs or occupations listed below. Some points to remember over the page:

- Some people are listed as having more than one job – write both of these down.
- Sometimes when a person’s job was the same as the one on the line above, the valuer would just write ‘ditto’ rather than writing the job out in full again. Where you see ‘ditto’ written, look at the line above as this may tell you a person’s occupation.
- Be careful as many of the people on the inventory are not listed as having any job, so don’t include these names on the table.

Job / Occupation	Who had this job?
Carpenter	
Cook	
Cooper	
Driver	
Field Hand	
Nurse	
Ploughman	
Sawyer	
Trunkminder	

Look at your completed table and answer the following questions:

- Which of the jobs/occupations listed is the most common?
- What do you think was the main aim of this plantation? Justify your answer
- What do you notice about the different roles men and women had on this plantation?
- A very large number (over 60) of the people on the inventory are not listed as having any particular job or occupation. Do you find this surprising? What do you think is significant about this?
- What does the document not tell you about what work was like for enslaved people on this plantation?
- What other sources might you use to find out more about what work was like for enslaved people on plantations?

Section Three: How were enslaved people valued?

One of the many shocking aspects of the history of enslaved people during this period is that they were bought and sold and valued as a commodity rather than as people. How much can this inventory reveal to us about how enslaved people were valued by plantation owners?

Activity 1:

In the last section, we looked at some of the jobs or occupations carried out by enslaved people on the plantation. Now let’s look at some of the other information about these people which is listed on the inventory. Using the transcript to help you, complete the table below with the details given for each individual named:

Name	Details (including job/occupation)	Age	Value
Bess			
Hector			
Scipio			
Rose			
Happy			
Young Pitt			
Betty			

<i>Clarissa</i>			
<i>Old Pitt</i>			
<i>Alick</i>			
<i>Winter</i>			
<i>Pender</i>			
<i>Boatswain</i>			

Activity 2:

Read the following statements and decide if you think they are true or false. Make sure that you use details from the inventory, including the information you gathered in Activity 1, to justify your answer. Consider if you could improve the statement to make it better. There are rows in the table so you can include your own statements to test

Statement	T or F	Evidence	Improved statement
All enslaved people on this plantation were valued the same.			
All enslaved males on this plantation were valued more highly than females.			
Enslaved children were valued less than enslaved adults.			
Enslaved people who were injured or ill were valued less highly than others, even if they performed the same jobs			

Section Four: *The significance of money in enslaved people*

Activity:

In the last section, you found out some of the values given to enslaved people on the plantation in 1817 – but what would this mean in today’s money? Now you are going to work out what the equivalent value would be today, in

British pounds. Complete the table below for each sum of money listed. First use the inflation calculator (A) to work out the amount in dollars, then use the dollar/pound converter (B) to convert this to British pounds.

(A) [U.S. Inflation Calculator: 1635→2022, Department of Labor data \(in2013dollars.com\)](#)

(B) [Convert Dollars to Pounds | USD to GBP Currency Converter](#)

Value in 1817	Equivalent value today in US dollars	Equivalent value today in British pounds
\$700		
\$150		
\$400		
\$50		

- Think about what you would be able to purchase now for this amount of money. Note down your ideas.

c) Look at the second page of the document carefully. This lists the value of land, animals, and other items on the estate, as well as the total value of the estate. Fill in the correct amount of money below:

The total value of the enslaved people on the estate is \$ _____

The total value of the whole estate is \$ _____

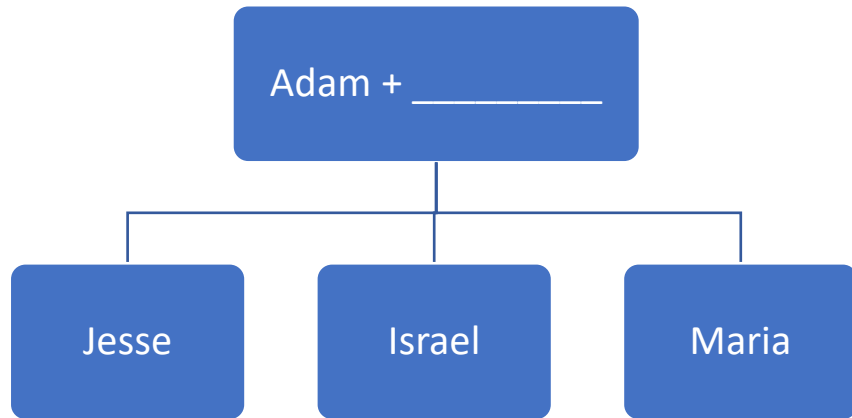
The value of the enslaved people is equal to (circle or highlight the correct answer):

- A a quarter of the value of the whole estate
- B just under half of the value of the whole estate
- C just over half of the value of the whole estate

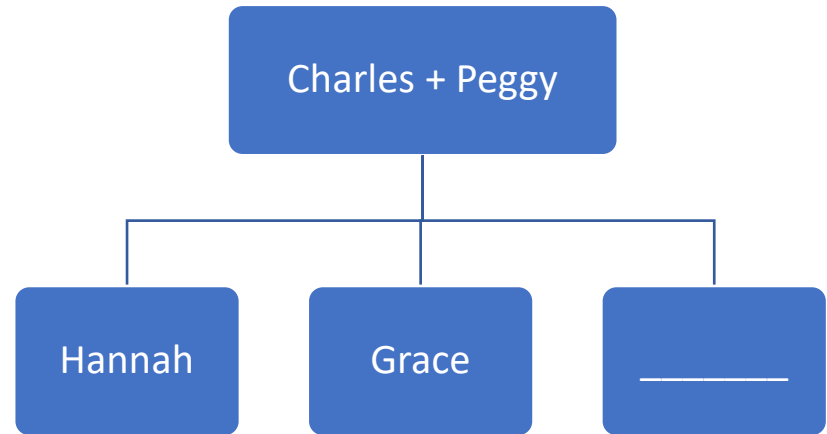
Section Five: Families

As well as giving information about the jobs, ages and given ‘value’ of the enslaved people on the plantation, you will also notice that the inventory describes family relationships between these people. Using the inventory and transcript, complete the chart on the following page with the name of the missing family member:

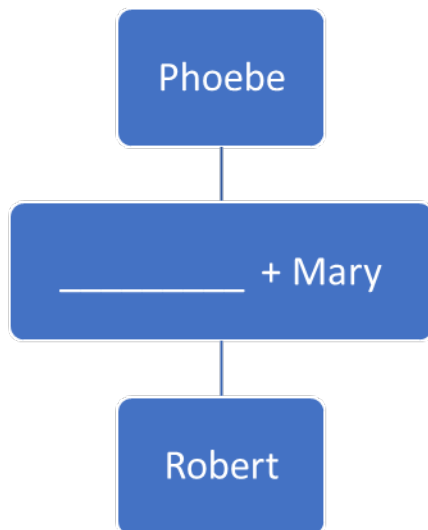
1.



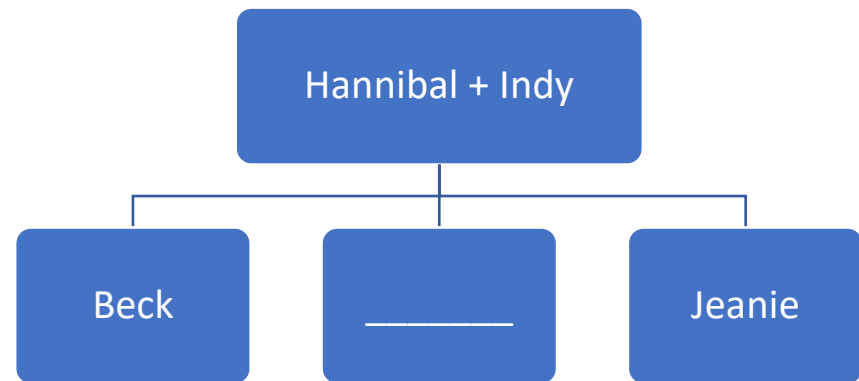
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3.



4.



Section Five (continued)

From what we see on the inventory, almost all of the enslaved people have some sort of family relationship to one or more of the other people on the plantation. Think about the following questions:

What does the inventory suggest about the rules around relationships and family life on the plantation?

What information does the inventory not tell us about the family lives of enslaved people?

Section Six: Names and identity

Activity 1:

a) The naming of enslaved people is a complicated subject. Work in pairs or a group and use the inventory transcript to see what patterns/groupings you notice. While you are doing this think about who you think chose these names and why they might have chosen these ones.

b) Now look at the 'Name Origins' handout in your groups or pairs. Do you notice any more patterns in the types of names the enslaved people have been given? Had you already guessed some of these patterns?

As a class: What statements can we make about the naming of enslaved people?

Activity 2:

a) Who do you think might have chosen these names? Why?

b) Do any of the people on the list have surnames?

As a class: Do you think names matter? How would it feel to have your name changed?

Activity 3: Extension exercise/Further study

Look into the origins of some of the other unusual names on the list of enslaved people. Pick 3-5 names to find out about.

Section Seven: Enquiry Question

Now it is time to answer the enquiry question: How much can an inventory tell us about the practice of slavery, especially the lives of enslaved people, in the United States in the early 19th century?

In your answer, make sure you include:

- How much the inventory tells us about the purpose of plantations and why people were kept enslaved.
- How much the inventory tells us about the jobs enslaved people performed on this plantation.
- How much the inventory tells us about the monetary value of enslaved people on this plantation.
- How much the inventory tells us about relationships and family life on this plantation.
- How much the inventory tells us about the identity of enslaved people on this plantation.
- What this inventory doesn't tell us about the lives of enslaved people on plantations.