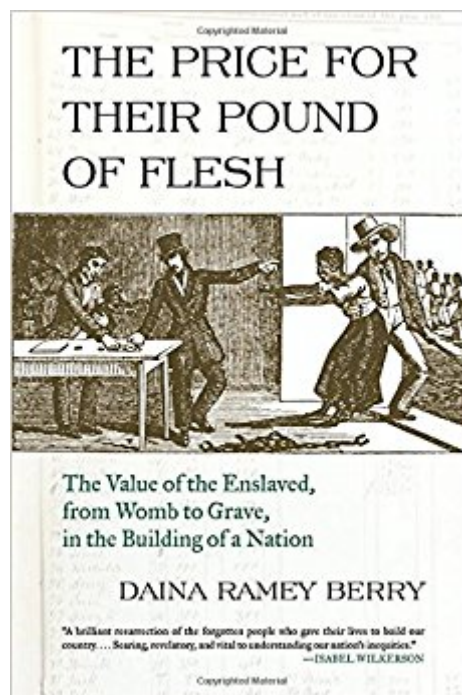




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# The Price For Their Pound Of Flesh: The Value Of The Enslaved, From Womb To Grave, In The Building Of A Nation



## Synopsis

Groundbreaking look at slaves as commodities through every phase of life, from birth to death and beyond, in early America. In life and in death, slaves were commodities, their monetary value assigned based on their age, gender, health, and the demands of the market. *The Price for Their Pound of Flesh* is the first book to explore the economic value of enslaved people through every phase of their lives—including preconception, infancy, childhood, adolescence, adulthood, the senior years, and death—in the early American domestic slave trade. Covering the full “life cycle,” historian Daina Ramey Berry shows the lengths to which enslavers would go to maximize profits and protect their investments. Illuminating “ghost values” or the prices placed on dead enslaved people, Berry explores the little-known domestic cadaver trade and traces the illicit sales of dead bodies to medical schools. This book is the culmination of more than ten years of Berry’s exhaustive research on enslaved values, drawing on data unearthed from sources such as slave-trading records, insurance policies, cemetery records, and life insurance policies. Writing with sensitivity and depth, she resurrects the voices of the enslaved and provides a rare window into enslaved people’s experiences and thoughts, revealing how enslaved people recalled and responded to being appraised, bartered, and sold throughout the course of their lives. Reaching out from these pages, they compel the reader to bear witness to their stories, to see them as human beings, not merely commodities. A profoundly humane look at an inhumane institution, *The Price for Their Pound of Flesh* will have a major impact on how we think about slavery, reparations, capitalism, nineteenth-century medical education, and the value of life and death.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

“Berry’s groundbreaking work in the historiography of American slavery deserves a wide readership beyond academia.” — Publishers Weekly, Starred Review “In this sharp, affecting study, Berry reminds us of the cold calculus at the intersection of slavery and capitalism...A well-researched, effectively presented piece of scholarship that forthrightly confronts slavery’s brute essence.” — Kirkus Reviews “...highly readable and addressing the most heartbreaking and starkly gruesome aspects of slavery.” — Library Journal “With *The Price for Their Pound of Flesh*, Berry is now seen as a breakthrough writer who completed the herculean task of filling in the blanks of one of the darkest episodes in American history.” — Essence Magazine “A brilliant resurrection of the forgotten people who gave their lives to build our country. Rigorously researched and powerfully told, this book tallies the human price paid for the nation we now live in and restores these unrecognized Americans — their hopes, loves, and disregarded dreams — to their rightful place in history. Searing, revelatory, and vital to understanding our nation’s inequities.” — Isabel Wilkerson, author of *The Warmth of Other Suns: The Epic Story of America’s Great Migration* “Daina Ramey Berry’s harrowing account of how slaveholders turned every aspect of a slave’s life into a commodity to be sold on markets — from the reproductive possibilities of enslaved women to the corpses of deceased slaves — is a must-read for anyone interested in understanding American history, or our contemporary dilemmas. Reading *The Price for Their Pound of Flesh* will leave you with an overwhelming sense of sadness, but also with great anger that we are still failing to fully overcome this history’s legacy.” — Sven Beckert, author of *Empire of Cotton: A Global History* “Daina Berry has written the richest account of the many ways in which an enslaved African American’s body was bought and sold throughout her or his lifetime. From the cradle to the grave and beyond, enslavers priced black bodies based on their imagined fitness for labor, sexual exploitation, use as collateral, and even their value after death as dissection cadavers. In horrific detail, Berry shows that there was a price tag placed on every pound of flesh. She also shows the efforts of enslaved people to assert that their lives had values beyond the money that could be rendered from their muscles and extracted from their bones. Out of the certainty that their souls were pearls beyond price, black people fought to make room for their own system of human values.” — Edward E. Baptist, author of *The Half Has Never Been Told: Slavery and*

## the Making of American Capitalism

Daina Ramey Berry is an associate professor of history and African and African diaspora studies, and the Oliver H. Radkey Regents Fellow in History, at the University of Texas at Austin. An award-winning historian, she is also a Distinguished Lecturer for the Organization of American Historians. She lives in Austin, Texas.

Daina Berry has written a book that brings the tragedy of slavery to life. While emphasizing the monetary values of slaves at different stages in life, she explains the person story of a variety of people subjected to this evil. It is well researched and well written.

Professor Berry has provided an important study of both the way in which slaves were valued at sale and the impact on the slaves of being sold as property. Little information has been available in either area, in part because of the difficulty in finding records and in part because of an apparent aversion by historians to the subject matter. The book is an important addition to pre-Civil War American History. Understanding more about that period helps in understanding of Jim Crow America, as well.

Great premise and hypothesis on slavery from the slaves perspective. Gives African Americans hope and better understanding of their own history and plight.

Such tragedy, such sorrow. This work should be taught in schools to help whites understand the horrors American blacks faced under slavery

Hard read, a little disturbing but was a great read very informative.

The best book I've ever read about the price of enslavement. Full of data and facts. Very well researched.

Excellent book!

First, the great positives: This is a timely book, meticulously researched, one that focuses on the economic value of slaves of different circumstances and ages. What was a 5-yr. old boy worth in the

open market? A 12-yr. old girl? A women proven able to bear children? A hard-working middle-aged man? An old woman with bad teeth? A dead slave? (Yes, slaves had a market value, even when they were dead. The body could be sold to a medical school.) Anyone still in the gauzy nostalgia of "Gone With the Wind" may be amazed to read of young children sold away from their parents (neither an isolated occurrence nor a rare one). And yet, the text is not well written and is heavily padded--many points are made over and over and over. It struck me as a fascinating and riveting 50-70 page article that was stretched and padded to make it into a book. And Dr. Berry's focus on the human dignity of the slaves causes her to mislabel their owners as "enslavers" (on every page), but an "enslaver" is the person who makes you a slave. Under the circumstances of the time, the people Dr. Berry references were "owners" and the slaves were, in every sense, their property. Well worth reading, but be prepared to skim and skip.

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