

Letter describing new cotton lands

Fredrick Norcom to James C. Johnston, January 24, 1836
From Vicksburg, Mississippi to Edenton, North Carolina

I have met with I suppose from 50 to 100 men who (many of them are entirely destitute of a common education) five years since could not get credit for a pair of shoes, now worth 100,000 to a million of dollars -- I have seen a great number who came here rich, and now immensely rich; I have not seen but one single soul, nor have I heard of 3, who have failed -- and these were all merchants, who without much Capital went to speculating in Cotton --. It is in truth the only country I ever read or heard of, where a poor man could in 2 or 3 years without any aid, become wealthy -- A few days of labour & lying out in the woods enabled them to find out a good body of land, & not having the money to enter it for themselves, they would sell their information to those who were too idle, or too rich to undergo the fatigue of hunting for it; by this means they would obtain money enough to enter one section, then two, & so on; soon sell that for ten or twenty times as much as they gave for it, and sometimes would absolutely make what is considered in the old States a fortune in 5 or 6 months....

At Pontotoc in the Chickasaw Nation, there was 4 to 5 millions of dollars lying last summer to be employed in land; at the sales in December at Columbus, there was more than 5 millions, how much at the other land offices I have not heard.

All the lands obtained from the Choctaw Indians in 1832 have now been offered for sale; the greater part of the choice land of course was taken up the 1st year or two, and that now sells from \$50 - 75 to 100 per acre, according to location -- the 2d rate is selling from 20 to 40 per acre, and the 3d rate of which there is much yet remaining, is selling from 8 to 20 per acre -- you can thus see how easy it was to get rich here -- a little labour would raise \$800 -- that will enter a section of land, to sell that for 10, to \$20,000, and lay that out again and get in return 10 or 20 for one, is an easy & rapid mode of getting rich.... The demand for all species of property here is great, constant and increasing -- I cannot ascertain what amount of property has been sold in any one county. More than 6,000 Negroes and 10,000 horses & mules have been sold in Yazoo County alone, and from 1st Sept. up to this time (and I am told it so continues until April) there are Negroes by the hundred in every little Log-Village for sale....

I know of no point in the world with 4 times its population which sells so many goods, Negroes & provisions &c and if things go on at this rate long, we must soon have 20,000 population; goods are lying here in store in quantities, waiting for stores to be built, and all species of houses are going up as if by Magic weekly: property bought in the edge of Town twelve months since for \$200 per acre sold for \$4,000 per acre last week --. All species of labour here cost 3 times as much as at Edenton, and as a general rule most every thing costs about 4 times as much as in the old States, except Negroes -- prime man & woman together sell for \$2,000 -- the ordinary mode of selling here is man & wife --.

Frederick Norcom to James C. Johnston, Jan. 24, 1836
Hayes Collection, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/part4/4h3136t.html>

