

NJS Presents**The 2018 NJ History and Historic Preservation Conference****Poster Session Winner, Professional Category*****Regional Variations in Manumission of Slaves in New Jersey,******1790-1860*****By Guy Weston and Eric Rhodes****DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.14713/njs.v4i2.141>**

This poster on “Regional Variations in Manumission of Slaves in New Jersey, 1790-1860” by Guy Weston and Eric Rhodes won in the Graduate and Professional Category at the 2018 New Jersey History and Historic Preservation Conference. The conference was held June 7-8 at Passaic County Community College in Paterson, NJ.

As the last northern state to abolish slavery, NJ is frequently described as resistant to emancipation. “Gradual Manumission” declared blacks born after July 4, 1804 to be “free” but bound as servants to their mothers’ owners for up to 25 years. Moreover, NJ was the only northern state that did not carry Lincoln in the 1860 election. While these phenomena were representative of NJ overall, they obscure the strong influence of abolitionist movements in southern region of the state: while only 10.9% of blacks living in northern counties were free in 1790, nearly 2/3 living in the southern counties were free. By 1820, the number of enslaved blacks in the southern counties accounted for <5% of blacks. Using data from each decennial census between 1790 and 1860, this poster illustrates manumission trends overtime, using GIS maps and charts. Accompanying detail illustrates some distinguishing characteristics of the two regions.

Recognition of a substantial population of free black people in New Jersey decades before the Civil War is important. Such acknowledgement can challenge the dominant narrative of antebellum black people, which typically focuses very limited attention to blacks who owned property, established autochthonous institutions, and developed leadership skills. Future research projects with these perspectives in mind can broaden our understanding of the lives of black people during this era.

Although new to the field of history, Guy Weston has been engaged in genealogy research for 25 years, focusing primarily on his maternal ancestors in Timbuctoo, NJ, where his fourth great-grandfather bought his family's plot in 1829 for \$30. He describes this fascinating story in an article entitled "Finding Free African Americans during the Antebellum Period," which appeared in the Magazine of the National Genealogical Society in 2015. More recently, in January 2018, the Journal of the Afro-American Historical and Genealogical Society published his paper entitled "New Jersey: A State Divided on Freedom," which focuses on Timbuctoo from a historical perspective. His current activities include research to complete the nomination package to list Timbuctoo on the New Jersey and National Registers of Historic Places, and various research and public history initiatives to raise the profile of antebellum free African Americans in New Jersey history. He maintains a website on Timbuctoo, New Jersey which can be found at www.timbuctoonj.com. Guy has a Master's Degree in Bilingual-Bicultural Studies from LaSalle University in Philadelphia, is a Visiting Scholar in the History Department of Rutgers University in New Brunswick, and is currently studying for the Professional Genealogist certification exam.

Eric Rhodes is a second-year MA candidate in American History in the Department of History at Miami University of Ohio, and, Associate Editor at Origins: Current Events in Historical Perspective. Eric's research interests include racial and economic segregation in the

20th century cities, documentary film, political thought, the history of capitalism, and literary history. He is also an accomplished cartographer. He attended Antioch College where he earned a BA in History and French and undertook coursework in the media arts.

Regional Variations in Manumission of Slaves in New Jersey, 1790-1860

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Background

As the last northern state to abolish slavery in 1804, New Jersey is frequently described as being slow to embrace emancipation. “Gradual Manumission” declared males born after July 4, 1804 to be “free” but bound as servants to their mothers’ owners until age 25. Similarly, women were bound to their mother’s masters until they were 21. Moreover, New Jersey was the only northern state that initially failed to ratify the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments, and was the only northern state that did not carry Lincoln in the 1860 election. While these phenomena were clearly representative of New Jersey overall, they obscure the strong influence of abolitionist movements in southern New Jersey.

Most notably, while only 10.9% of Blacks living in northern counties were free in 1790, nearly two-thirds living in the southern counties in 1790 were free. By 1820, the number of enslaved blacks in the southern counties was negligible. Less than 5% of southern county blacks were still enslaved, while nearly half (47%) in the northern counties remained in slavery. The marked difference in attitudes towards slavery can be attributed to Quaker influence. Quakers were also leaders of advocacy to end slavery in New Jersey, petitioning the legislature to enact laws to abolish slavery in 1785.¹ These efforts eventually led to An Act for the Gradual Abolition of Slavery, passed by the New Jersey legislature in 1804.² The influence of Quakers in Southern New Jersey is further understood by recognizing its proximity to Philadelphia, a virtual headquarters of US Quakerdom, both then and today. Moreover, John Woolman, arguably, the most prominent abolitionist of the 18th century, was from Mount Holly, in Burlington County.³

By contrast, Quaker influence was all but absent in the northern counties of New Jersey. In addition, during much of the slavery period, about 75% of bondsmen were found in Bergen, Essex, Middlesex, Hunterdon, Somerset, and Monmouth counties.⁴ These counties tended to be more economically developed and have labor scarcities,⁵ thereby having economies that relied more on slave labor. In these areas, slavery endured the longest and, as the immigrant population grew, white workers increasingly viewed free blacks as a threat to their occupational security.⁶ In the southern counties, a number of antebellum free black settlements were established,⁷ furthering the early development of black communities there. Schools, churches, and mutual aid societies were established, and the communities played an active role in the Underground Railroad. Some of these communities, such as Timbuctoo, Springtown, and Snowhill (now Lawnside) still exist today.

Methods

Historical census data were obtained from the US Census Bureau for each New Jersey county for each census between 1790 and 1860.⁸ Geographic boundary files were obtained from The National Historical Geographic Information System (NHGIS).⁹ Population totals for each county were tabulated by race and “free” status for each decennial census, generating an Excel spreadsheet for each decade. In addition, tabulated data were uploaded into ArcGIS to create a series of maps to illustrate manumission trends over time. Three decades are highlighted here, due to space limitations.

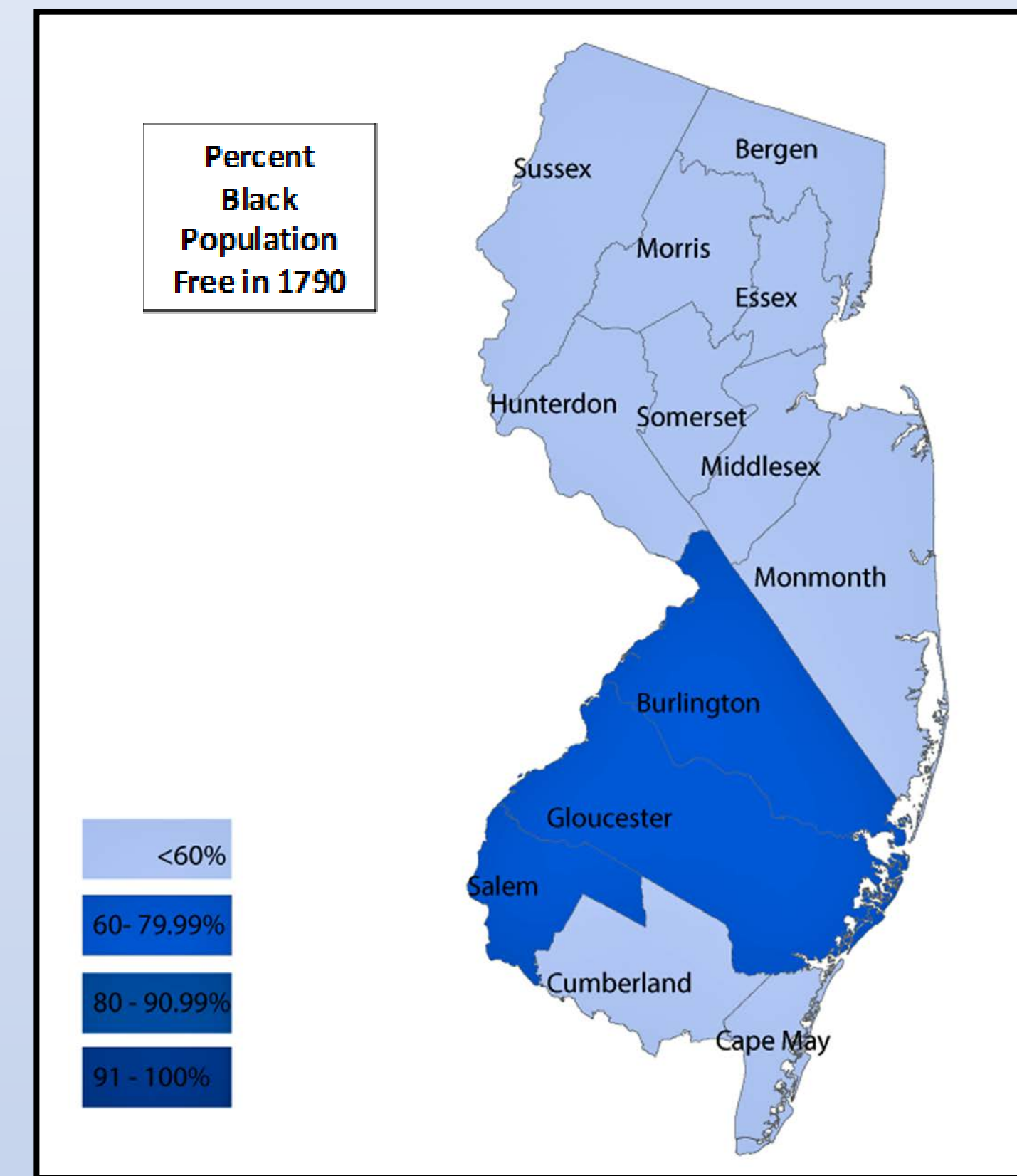
Findings

As indicated in Table 4 on the left, the proportion of free blacks in 1790 in the southern counties was 63.3%, compared to 10.9% in the northern counties. Twenty years later, in 1810, the proportion of free blacks in the southern counties was 91.5%, compared to only 29.1% in the northern counties. By 1820, 95.8% of blacks in the southern counties were free, while the proportion in the northern region was slightly more than half (53.0%). After 1830, the proportion of enslaved blacks was negligible in the southern counties. The northern counties did not “catch up” to that level until 30 years later in the era of the Civil War. Wright points out that there were still a handful of slaves in New Jersey in that era that were not freed until the Thirteenth Amendment.¹⁰ Census data indicate that these were all located in the northern region.

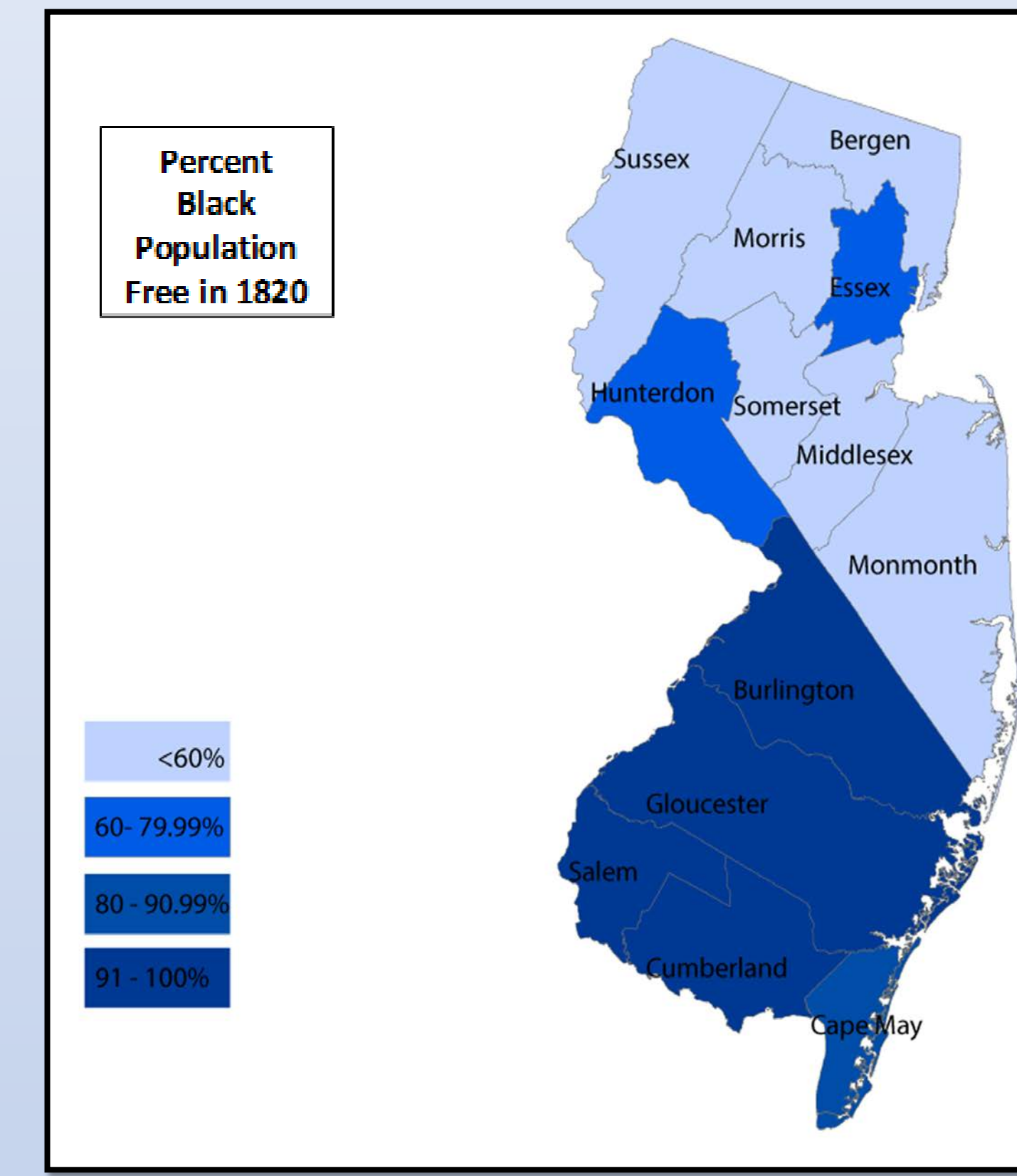
Footnotes:

1. Henry Scofield Cooley A Study of Slavery in New Jersey (Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1896) 17-19
2. Giles R. Wright, Afro-Americans in New Jersey: a short history. (Trenton, New Jersey Historical Commission, 1989), 25
3. David Sox, John Woolman: Quintessential Quaker, 1720-1772 (York: Sessions Book Trust, 1999) 6
4. Ibid, Wright, 23
5. Ibid, Wright, 23
6. Ibid, Wright, 23
7. Christopher Barton “Antebellum African American Settlements in Southern New Jersey,” African Diaspora Archeology Newsletter: Vol. 12: Iss.4, Article 4. Available at <http://scholarworks.umass.edu/adan/vol12/iss4/4>
8. US Census Bureau US Census of Population and Housing, https://www.census.gov/history/www/through_the_decades/overview/ Accessed on May 20, 2015
9. National Historical Geographic Information System (NHGIS). Available at <https://www.nhgis.org/>
10. Ibid, Wright, 27

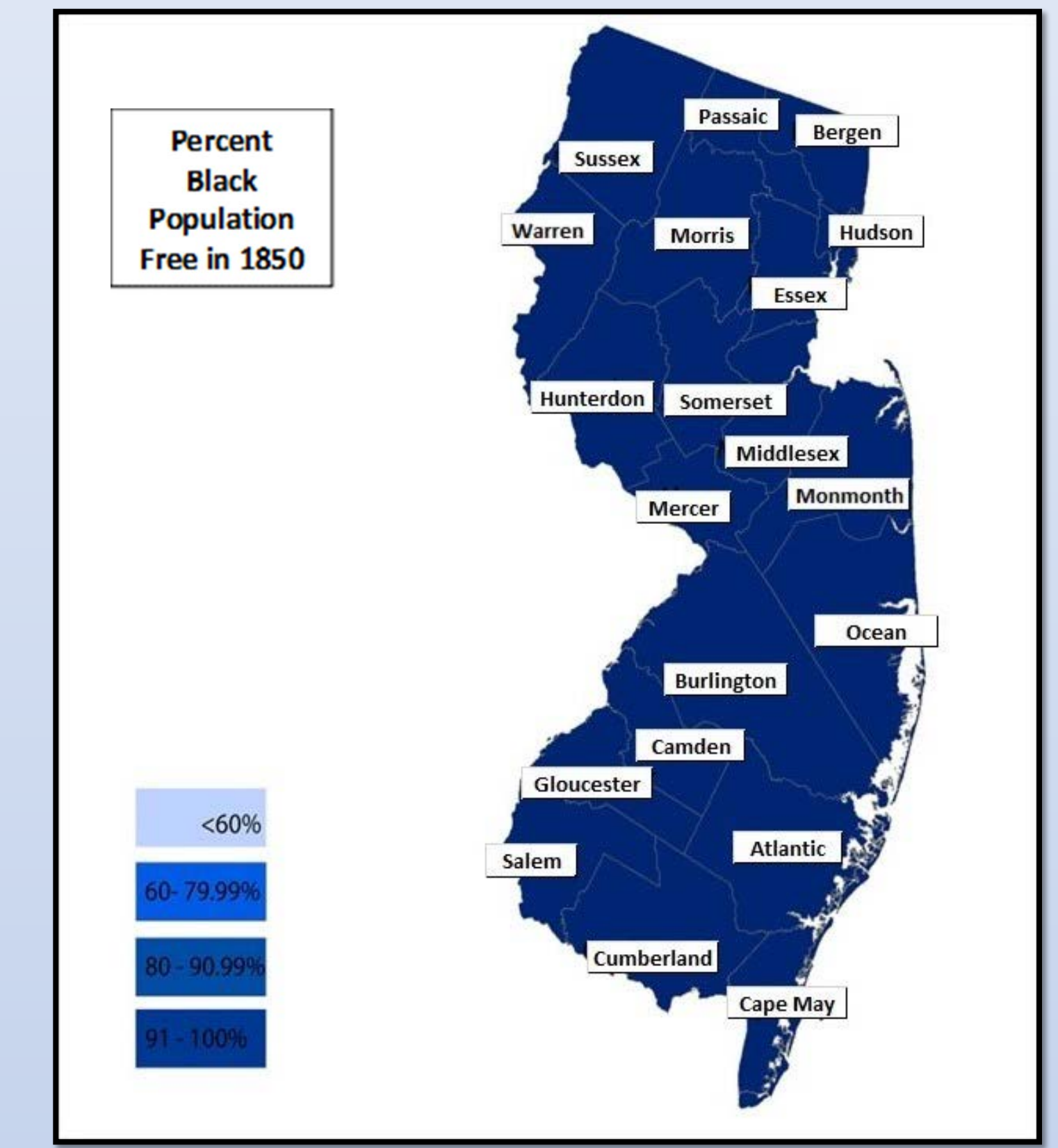
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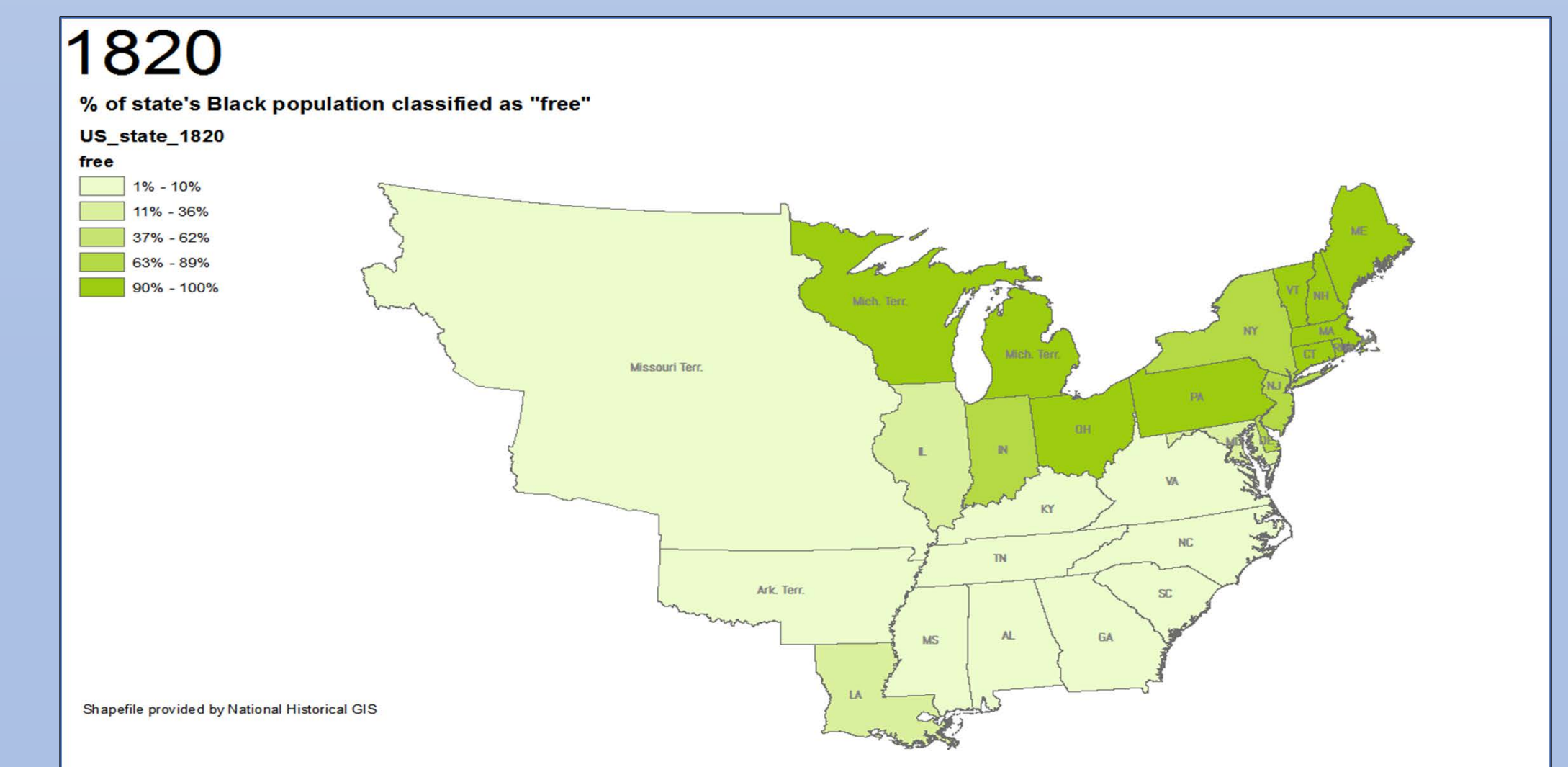
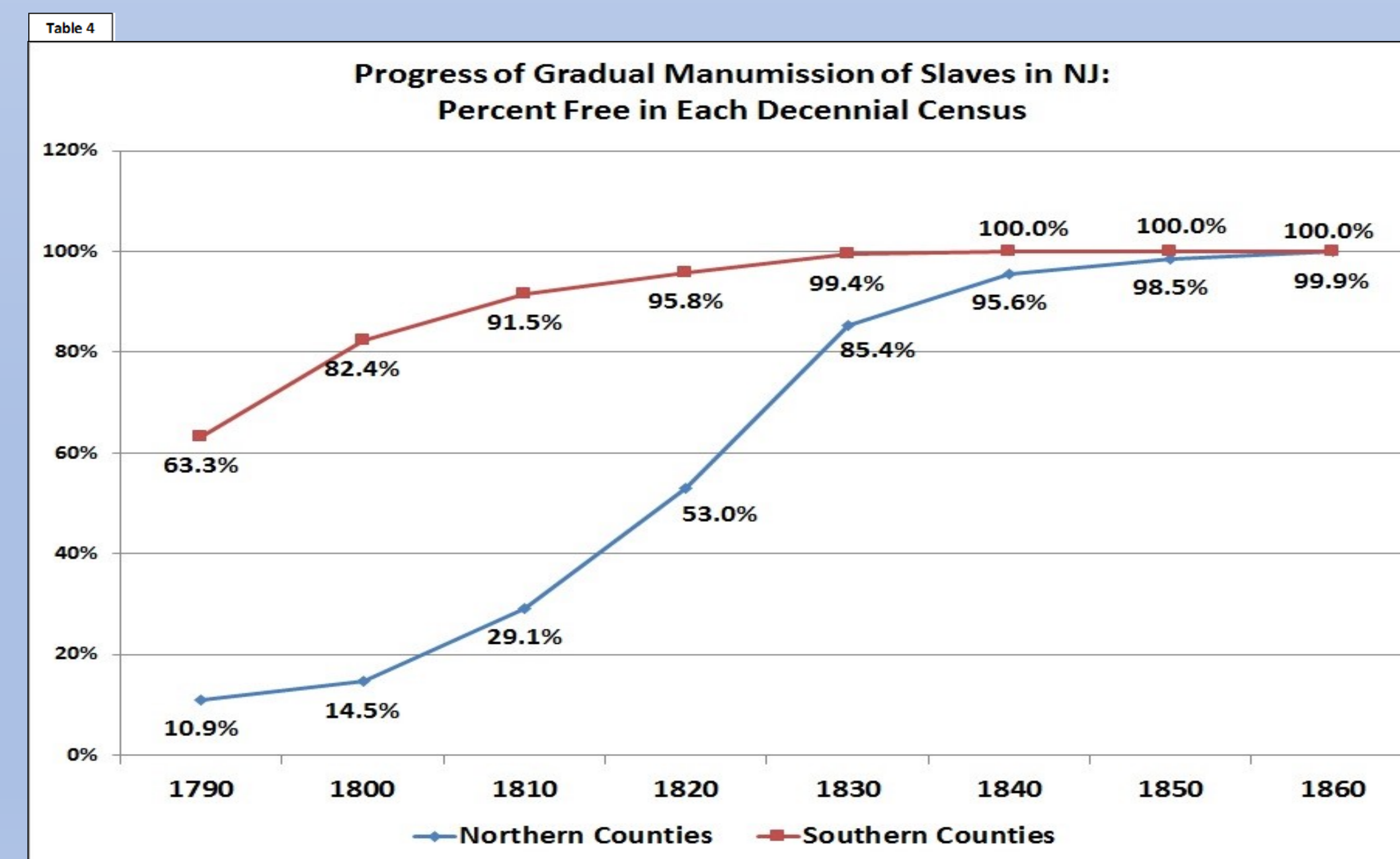
	TOTAL POPULATION		TOTAL BLACK POPULATION			
	#	%	Total	Slave	Free	Free %
1790						
Bergen	12,061	6.8%	2,483	2,001	192	7.7%
Essex	17,785	9.7%	1,331	1,171	160	12.0%
Hunterdon	20,253	11.0%	1,492	1,301	191	12.8%
Middlesex	15,959	8.7%	1,458	1,318	140	9.6%
Monmouth	18,918	9.2%	1,369	1,206	163	11.9%
Morris	18,216	8.5%	684	636	48	7.0%
Somerset	12,296	6.7%	1,957	1,810	147	7.5%
Sussex	15,500	8.0%	504	439	65	12.9%
TOTAL NORTHERN	131,525	71.4%	11,868	10,572	1,296	10.9%
Burlington	18,095	9.8%	825	227	598	72.5%
Cape May	2,571	1.4%	125	141	14	9.0%
Cumberland	8,348	4.5%	258	120	138	53.5%
Gloucester	13,383	7.3%	593	191	342	64.5%
Salem	10,427	5.7%	549	172	377	68.5%
TOTAL SOUTHERN	52,714	28.6%	2,117	851	1,466	63.3%
TOTAL NEW JERSEY	184,239	100%	14,185	11,423	2,762	



	TOTAL POPULATION		TOTAL BLACK POPULATION			
	#	%	Total	Slave	Free	Free %
1820						
Bergen	161,178	6.3%	2,742	1,683	1,059	38.6%
Essex	35,793	11.1%	2,689	859	1,830	67.8%
Hunterdon	28,604	10.3%	2,059	816	1,443	70.1%
Middlesex	21,470	7.7%	2,545	1,012	1,033	50.5%
Monmouth	25,038	9.0%	2,200	1,048	1,152	44.0%
Morris	21,368	7.7%	1,114	657	457	41.0%
Somerset	16,506	5.9%	2,669	1,122	1,487	57.0%
Sussex	12,752	11.8%	851	178	473	55.6%
TOTAL NORTHERN	194,709	70.1%	15,669	7,175	8,124	53.0%
Burlington	28,822	10.4%	1,343	82	1,261	93.9%
Cape May	4,265	1.5%	231	28	203	88.0%
Cumberland	12,668	4.6%	623	18	605	97.1%
Gloucester	23,089	8.3%	1,103	39	1,064	96.5%
Salem	14,022	5.1%	1,056	15	1,001	98.5%
TOTAL SOUTHERN	82,866	29.9%	4,118	182	4,136	95.8%
TOTAL NEW JERSEY	277,575	100%	20,017	7,357	12,460	



	TOTAL POPULATION		TOTAL BLACK POPULATION			
	#	%	Total	Slave	Free	Free %
1850						
Bergen	14,715	3.0%	1,665	41	1,624	97.5%
Essex	21,822	4.5%	2,134	6	2,128	99.7%
Hudson	28,990	5.1%	817	8	809	98.9%
Hunterdon	27,992	5.7%	2,042	6	2,036	99.7%
Middlesex	28,615	3.8%	1,380	11	1,369	99.2%
Monmouth	30,313	6.2%	2,198	75	2,123	96.6%
Morris	30,158	6.2%	1,027	19	1,008	98.1%
Passaic	22,569	4.8%	646	31	615	95.2%
Somerset	19,692	4.0%	1,742	14	1,711	98.2%
Sussex	22,989	4.7%	341	1	340	99.7%
Warren	22,558	4.8%	382	2	380	99.5%
TOTAL NORTHERN	344,931	79.3%	15,277	235	15,042	98.5%
Atlantic	6,960	1.8%	218	1	217	99.5%
Burlington	43,293	8.8%	2,109	-	2,109	100.0%
Camden	25,412	5.2%	2,191	-	2,191	100.0%
Cape May	6,433	1.3%	247	-	247	100.0%
Cumberland	17,189	3.5%	1,130	-	1,130	100.0%
Gloucester	14,605	3.0%	600	-	600	100.0%
Ocean	10,032	2.0%	140	-	140	100.0%
Salem	19,467	4.0%	2,075	-	2,075	100.0%
TOTAL SOUTHERN	145,361	29.7%	8,199	1	8,208	99.99%
TOTAL NEW JERSEY	490,554	100%	24,046	236	23,810	



This map shows New Jersey in a national context in 1820, illustrating that substantial proportions of free blacks existed in most of the northern states and territories, four decades before the Civil War. By number, the majority of the free northern black population in 1820 was concentrated in New York, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Connecticut, Massachusetts, Ohio, and Rhode Island. Vermont was a leader in anti-slavery efforts, banning slavery in its 1777 Constitution.

This table illustrates the disparity in the manumission of slaves between the northern and southern counties of New Jersey between 1790 and 1860. It is noteworthy that a substantial proportion (63.3%) of blacks living in the southern region of the state were free in 1790, long before the gradual manumission act was passed by the New Jersey legislature in 1804.