

## White Trash <sup>[1]</sup>

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## White Trash

by Wiley J. Williams, 2006

"White trash," or "poor white trash," was a term designating the lowest social class among whites in [antebellum](#) <sup>[2]</sup> North Carolina. Other derogatory names for this group included "rednecks," "crackers," "pecker-woods," and "clay-eaters." These landless tenants and laborers often lived in shacks on the outskirts of towns or in mountain hovels. Although most North Carolina whites were poor, they did not belong to the white trash category, held in contempt even by some black slaves. The term "white trash" connoted many negative characteristics, most notably poverty, ignorance, laziness, and perhaps even criminality. Beginning especially in the 1920s, sociologists, anthropologists, social workers, and economists drew a clear distinction between whites who are poor (a nondisparaging designation) and white trash (a disparaging or offensive term). By the end of the twentieth century "white trash" had become, especially when used for comic purposes, a designation that described a people, mostly in the South, whose tastes, values, and culture were remarkably lowbrow.

### References:

Charles C. Bolton, *Poor Whites of the Antebellum South: Tenants and Laborers in Central North Carolina and Northeast Mississippi* (1994).

John Shelton Reed, *Southern Folk, Plain and Fancy: Native White Social Types* (1986).

### Subjects:

[Antebellum \(1820-1861\)](#) <sup>[3]</sup>

[Discrimination](#) <sup>[4]</sup>

[Slogans, slang, and sayings](#) <sup>[5]</sup>

[UNC Press](#) <sup>[6]</sup>

### Authors:

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### From:

[Encyclopedia of North Carolina, University of North Carolina Press.](#) <sup>[8]</sup>

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