An analysis of three editions of the Blackstone legal commentaries using computational text analysis, by:
Dr. John Blanton (jnblanton@gmail.com),
Micki Kaufman (mickikaufman@gmail.com), and Nora Slonimsky (nslonimsky@gmail.com)

These concordance sets illustrate each usage of the words “slave” and “negro” in both Blackstone’s original 1765 edition of Commentaries and St. George Tucker’s 1803 version of the Commentaries published for an American, and specifically Virginian, readership. Note how much more common the usage of both terms is in Tucker, and the prevalence of the general (“slaves”/“negroes”) over the particular (“slave”/“negro”), reinforcing the tendency to see enslaved persons as part of a general category of property rather than as autonomous individuals.

These images illustrate the difficulty in using existing OCR technology on older texts, where the ‘long S’ can be problematic for digital textual analysis. The right hand column shows the difficulty – the ‘long S’ being rendered as an ‘T’, as well as the general difficulty of rendering older texts in OCR – while the column on the left shows the same text corrected for the ‘long S’.


Concordance graphs produced using AntConc software by Laurence Anthony
http://www.laurenceanthony.net/software/antconc/