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A Brief History of the African Slave Trade in the United States South

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A Brief History of the African Slave Trade in the United States South

By

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Project submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for

The Bachelor of Integrated Studies Degree

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Abstract

The African slave trade in the Antebellum South will be the focus of this paper. First the Colonial time period and the shift from indentured servitude to slavery will be discussed. Next the slave trade practices, including where these people came from, what people were targeted when they were taking them to become slaves, what the journey from Africa to the United States was like, and what the slave sales were like will be examined. There will be information on the various jobs slaves did and what daily life was like as a slave. The paternalistic view on slavery will be explored as well as the different views on slavery at the time. Lastly, the paper will look at the events leading up to slavery abolishment and will touch on what happened after slavery was abolished.

Several resources will be utilized in analyzing this topic. Some examples of resources include journal entries, letters, advertisements, websites, online libraries and referenced resources from the Murray State University library.

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Introduction

The formation of civilizations, where there were groups of people gathered together to form communities, slavery has existed in some form, on some level. In fact, there are records of slavery all the way back to 700 BC in Greece. We also see accounts of slavery in ancient Rome and throughout the Bible. In fact, in most, if not all civilizations throughout history, slavery has been present at some time. This is true also in the United States history.

To be a slave. To be owned by another person, as a car, house, or table is owned. To live as a piece of property that could be sold—a child sold from its mother, a wife from her husband. To be considered not human, but a “thing” that plowed the fields, cut the wood, cooked the food, nursed another’s child; a “thing” whose sole function was determined by the one who owned you.

To be a slave. To know, despite the suffering and deprivation, that you were human, more human than he said you were not human. To know joy, laughter, sorrow, and tears and yet be considered only the equal of a table.

To be a slave was to be a human being under conditions in which that humanity was denied. They were not slaves. They were people. Their condition was slavery. They who were held as slaves looked upon themselves and the servitude in which they found themselves with the eyes and minds of human beings, conscious of everything that happened to them, conscious of all that went on around them. Yet slaves are often pictured as little more than dumb, brute animals, whose sole attributes were found in working, singing and dancing. They were like children and slavery was actually a benefit

to them—this was the view of those who were not slaves. Those who were slaves tell a different story.¹

Chapter 1

Colonial Period

While there were certainly other nationalities settling what is now the United States during the Colonial period, like the French, Spanish and Dutch, when looking at the history of the African Slaves in the United States, it began with the English colonies; specifically in present day Virginia. In 1587 Sir Walter Raleigh of England, favored by Queen Elizabeth I charted an expedition to the New World. He did not actually journey to the new world but instead sent Governor John White along with about 120 men, women and children across the Atlantic Ocean to claim part of the New World for England. The voyagers landed on Roanoke Island, off the coast of present-day South Carolina. The island was extremely inhospitable. It was hot, humid, sandy and had very little drinkable water. Shortly after their arrival in 1587, Governor White sent a smaller expedition back to England to gather more supplies and bring them back to Roanoke island. The expedition did not return to the island until 1590 only to find a vacant island and the word “Croatoan” carved into a tree. Croatoan was a name of a near by Indian tribe. While it is not known what actually happened to the settlers from Roanoke Island, some

¹ Julius Lester. (1968). *To Be a Slave*. The Dial Press, Inc, New York, 28-29.

historians think they were captured by that Indian tribe, killing some and enslaving others. Not long after this failed expedition, in 1607 King James I authorized the Virginia Land Company to lead another expedition to the New World. This time they would settle in an area that would become present day Jamestown, Virginia. The first years in Jamestown were brutal. The new settlers were plagued with constructing shelters, finding enough food to survive, new relations with the different Indian tribes, and new diseases. The voyage started out with some 105 people and quickly dwindled to 38.² Another problem these early settlers realized was that most of them were unfamiliar with doing hard labor, the kind of work required to start a new colony. They were not necessarily skilled laborers; but they were tasked with the backbreaking work of clearing it and building it up to a settlement. Much of the areas that were settled were just that, an area. They often picked spots with access to a water source like on the seacoast or maybe alongside a river. The land was rough and primitive. It had to be cleared and shelters had to be constructed. Food sources had to be located and gathered. The local Indian tribes posed a risk to the new settlers; they were unsure if they would be friend or foe. Eventually, the colonists turn out to be devastating to the Indians; killing many of them and eventually forcing them off of their native lands so the white settlers could expand. In fact, the period from 1607-1609 in this area is known as the *Starving Time* because many people did in fact starve to death, the outlook for the area was quite grim.

Things took a turn though, however, in 1610 when Lord Delaware arrives with new supplies. Jamestown finally starts to grow and expand; it becomes the first permanent British colony in the New World. In 1611 a settler named John Rolfe, who in 1614 would marry

² Cooper Jr., W. J. & Terrill, T. E. (2009). *The American South: A History*. Rowan & Littlefield Publishers, Inc. New York, 11.

Pocahontas, introduced a new kind of tobacco to Jamestown. This was a huge asset to Virginia and to England.³ It was much less bitter than the tobacco seen in England at the time and grew very well in this area of Virginia. Also, in 1619 the House of Burgesses meets for the first time in Jamestown, establishing the beginning of self-governing, modeled after their mother country, England. The head-right system was established, giving 50 acres of land to each person that settled there from the England. This system prompted many people who dreamed of a better life to come to the New World. It also was a refuge for people who had more menacing ideas as shown in the story of William Tucker who “came to Virginia to sell goods entrusted to him by a group back in England. Although he evidently sold what he brought, he delivered neither cash nor accounts to the people in England whom he represented.”⁴ Still, with the exploding of tobacco growing, more and more people migrated to the New World from England. By 1644 the population had rose to 8000 and by 1662 the population had risen to 32000.⁵

The land grants with the head-right system and the success with growing and shipping tobacco lead to the development of wealthy landowners and the start of plantations. These huge farms were very labor intensive and required a lot of skilled laborers. This need was often filled by the free labor of indentured servants. Indentured servitude was a practice that came from England; in a way it was a form of slavery. The system worked by “enslaving” both men and women, or the “indentured/servant” who would work for a “master” for a period of time in exchange for the cost to move to the New World, shelter, clothing and food while serving out their contract. Once the contract was fulfilled the indentured servant was to be released from this

³ Cooper Jr., W. J. & Terrill, T. E. (2009). *The American South: A History*. Rowan & Littlefield Publishers, Inc. New York, 12.

⁴ Cooper Jr., W. J. & Terrill, T. E. (2009). *The American South: A History*. Rowan & Littlefield Publishers, Inc. New York , 12.

⁵ Cooper Jr., W. J. & Terrill, T. E. (2009). *The American South: A History*. Rowan & Littlefield Publishers, Inc. New York, 14.

labor system and was to be free. Often part of the terms of the contract was, upon fulfillment the indentured servant would acquire some land to start their new life in the New World. When this system worked as it was intended to, it benefitted both the master and the servant. The master would have free labor for a contracted amount of time and the servant would have a means of starting a new life in the New World. If the master was not fulfilling the contract the servant could take him/her to court. This is seen in the story of John Cage. “John Cage was an illiterate indentured servant in Maryland in the 1640s. The owner of Cage’s service evidently tried to keep him in servitude past his legal term, but Cage won a court judgment against his master. The records indicate that in 1650 Cage held title to 150 acres of land and served as the county juror.”⁶ However, in some cases, the master did not treat the servant as promised. Some masters were downright cruel to their servants. In the book *The American South* authors Cooper and Terrell recount the story of two indentured servants; Elizabeth Abbott and Elias Hinton;

Abbott and Hinton labored for the Proctors, husband and wife, who had at least four other servants. Hinton toiled chiefly in the tobacco fields; Abbott apparently worked mostly in or around the Proctor home. Both Proctors inflicted corporal punishment on their servants and they certainly did not discriminate between the sexes. Both of them beat Abbott and Hinton unmercifully. Abbott claimed that on one occasion she was beaten with fishhooks. Hinton’s final beating seems to have been with a rake. Neither Abbott or Hinton survived their common ordeal; in October 1624 the Proctors were arrested and charges with beating both servants to death.⁷

⁶ Cooper Jr., W. J. & Terrill, T. E. (2009). *The American South: A History*. Rowan & Littlefield Publishers, Inc. New York, 27.

⁷ Cooper Jr., W. J. & Terrill, T. E. (2009). *The American South: A History*. Rowan & Littlefield Publishers, Inc. New York, 27.

Being an indentured servant, they did not yet own land. Under Governor William Berkley's policies, that meant they were not allowed to vote. This had not always been the case, but Governor Berkley was increasingly taking rights away from what had been a fairly self-governing people of Jamestown. The frontiers people were fed up with Berkley and chose Nathaniel Bacon to lead a rebellion against Governor Berkley. In *Bacon's Rebellion* author Kiera Stevenson discusses how after Governor Berkley refused to stand up for the frontiersmen against the Indians, a group of backwoods farmers banded together, and demand elections be held. The election ends with many changes, including the "return of suffrage" to men who didn't own land. Tension continued to rise between Berkley and Bacon and in 1677 Bacon and his men set Jamestown on fire. Governor Berkley fled the city and Bacon and his men fled to a mansion in Gloucester, where Bacon died, presumably of complications from syphilis. Governor Berkley returns to Jamestown after Bacon's death and punished the men associated with the rebellion.⁸

One of the main effects of this rebellion was that "the new colonial aristocracy grew to fear men who did not own land. The elite found it safer to turn to slave labor and, avoided dealing with indentured servants."⁹ Bacon's Rebellion is seen as the turning point from Indentured Servitude to the start of large-scale black African slavery in the United States. And at the time of Bacon's Rebellion, there was a large number of indentured servants who were at the end of their contracts, meaning there were a lot of plantation owners that were now without the labor force they relied on and also it meant that there were newly free landowners that would be in need of a labor force, especially with the big tobacco boom. In the book, *American Slavery 1619-1877*, author Peter Kolchin wrote that "white immigration into the Chesapeake colonies-most of it

⁸ Stevenson, Kiera (2009). *Bacon's Rebellion 1676*. Great Neck Publishing, 1.

⁹ Stevenson, Kiera (2009). *Bacon's Rebellion 1676*. Great Neck Publishing, 1.

indentured-peaked between 1650-1680 and then declined sharply.”¹⁰ He said that “by 1690-94 indentured servants had almost totally disappeared. But that the flow of servants did not entirely end: during the first half of the eighteenth century, transportation of convicts to Maryland increased substantially.”¹¹

Chapter 2

Why African People?

In 1619 a Dutch ship carrying about 20 enslaved people arrived at “Comfort Port” in Jamestown. It is the first known arrival of enslaved people in the New World, other than indentured servants. The colonists did enslave Indians, with South Carolina being the colony with the largest population of enslaved Indians. However, enslaving Indians did not become wide spread for three reasons; their population was not large enough to meet the labor demand, Indians were more vulnerable to the whites’ diseases and Indian slaves knew the land well and could escape and disappear back into the Indian population of the interior.¹²

“British naval superiority brought with it dominance of the African slave trade, a dominance symbolized by the establishment of the slave-trading Royal African Company in 1672.¹³ Between 1674 and 1691, the colonists saw a steady fall in the “ratio of slave prices to

¹⁰ Kolchin, P. (2003). *American Slavery: 1619-1877*. Hill and Wang, New York, 11.

¹¹ Kolchin, P. (2003). *American Slavery: 1619-1877*. Hill and Wang, New York, 11.

¹² Cooper Jr., W. J. & Terrill, T. E. (2009). *The American South: A History*. Rowan & Littlefield Publishers, Inc. New York, 27.

¹³ Kolchin, P. (2003). *American Slavery: 1619-1877*. Hill and Wang, New York, 12.

servant prices. It fell from 2.88 to 1.83 measured in British pounds.¹⁴ This meant that it was much more economically easy for the colonists to buy these African slaves than it had previously been. The colonists' investment in these men, women and children as slaves was a lasting one. They would make their initial purchase and that slave was considered theirs forever. Even the children that the slave may bear would be the property of the master, thus this labor force replenished itself, with only having to make the initial investment. They also found that these men, women and children from Africa were not as vulnerable to the whites' diseases; particularly to malaria from the bite of an infected mosquito. Malaria in the white colonists often caused high fevers and even death. In the southern coastal colonies, especially, malaria was a major concern because mosquitos like the hot and humid environment found there.

“Eighteenth century planters observed that Africans were least likely to succumb to these fevers.

Twentieth century anthropological research has since verified their observations. West African adults living in environments where mosquitoes transmit malaria throughout most of the year will almost never have the fever and chills and other symptoms of malaria and rarely die from the disease. The opposite of this is true for West African children, especially those under 5 years of age. Survivors have a high immunity to malaria that they pass on genetically as a sickle cell (red blood cell) trait that increased their descendants' resistance to malaria.”¹⁵

¹⁴ Kolchin, P. (2003). *American Slavery: 1619-1877*. Hill and Wang, New York, 12.

¹⁵ African Nation Founders: Learning Resources Center. (n.d.) *African American Heritage and Ethnography*. National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior. Retrieved February 6, 2020. https://www.nps.gov/enthrography.aah.aaheritage/lowcountry_furthRdg5.htm

This sickle-cell, however, could cause health problems when they got older, especially in the hot humid coastal climates. The Park Ethnography Program in the U. S. Department of the Interior said this “sickle-cell trait could later cause symptoms of fatigue, joint pain, fevers and in children, delayed growth.”¹⁶ They go on to say that they could have “episodes” of “sickle-cell crisis.” These people with this sickle-cell trait could also be more prone to bouts of pleurisy and pneumonia, particularly if overexerted in the humid environment. This article also talks about yellow fever; if a person contracts it and survives, they develop immunity to it that can also be passed from mother to unborn children. West Africa once had an epidemic of yellow fever, therefore, a lot of the slaves from this region would have immunities to yellow fever. Smallpox was also a major concern and it affected African peoples just as much as the colonists.

“Some Africans had experienced smallpox before and some of them knew about inoculation.

Inoculation was practiced in Senegal and other parts of Africa by the negroes. Cotton Mather learned about inoculation from his African servant. The man showed Mather his smallpox scar and told him that you: “take the Juice of the Small Pox, and Cut the Skin and put in a drop: then by ‘nd by a little Sick, then a few Small Pox; and no body dye of it; no body have smallpox anymore.”¹⁷ Inoculation was in a sense a form of an immunization shot. In the article “The Rise and Fall of Smallpox; Take a Look Back at the Pernicious Disease,” author, Jesse Greenspan talks about how doctors and nurses would extract a small amount of liquid from the lesion of someone with a minor smallpox

¹⁶ African Nation Founders: Learning Resources Center. (n.d.) *African American Heritage and Ethnography*. National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior. Retrieved February 6, 2020. https://www.nps.gov/enthrography.aah.aaheritage/lowcountry_furthRdg5.htm

¹⁷ African Nation Founders: Learning Resources Center. (n.d.) *African American Heritage and Ethnography*. National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior. Retrieved February 6, 2020. https://www.nps.gov/enthrography.aah.aaheritage/lowcountry_furthRdg5.htm

infection and insert it in to a healthy person. That person would then, in theory contract only a minor case of smallpox and build immunity to it. The article notes that people did die from this method, but at a much slower rate than the people who became ill with it naturally.¹⁸



“This advertisement in Charleston newspaper announcing forthcoming sale of Africans from the Windward Coast; stresses their knowledge of rice culture and freedom from smallpox. It also notes that half of the Africans have had smallpox in their own country, indicating awareness that people who had survived the disease had acquired immunity to it.”¹⁹

Another reason Africans became the target of slavery was because when they were brought to the New World, it was a foreign land to them. Unlike how when the Indians would escape and disappear back into the woods and eventually assimilate back into their Indian tribes, Africans had no knowledge of the land. They had no idea where to go if they escaped, so generally speaking, they did not try to escape. Another thing that some historians say made Africans a target for slavery was their skin color. Some historians argue that because their skin

¹⁸ Greenspan, Jesse. (2018, August 22). *The rise and fall of smallpox: take a look back at the pernicious disease.* <https://www.history.com/news/the-rise-and-fall-of-smallpox>

¹⁹ Greenspan, Jesse. (2018, August 22). *The rise and fall of smallpox: take a look back at the pernicious disease.* <https://www.history.com/news/the-rise-and-fall-of-smallpox>

color was darker than the colonists' they could easily identify who was and was not a slave. Finally, African slaves were easy to purchase. Africa's government would participate in rounding up these men, women and children to be sold into bondage and would sell them to these big slave traders. The big ships would make their journey to the African port and the African slave traders would have the people ready for purchase and to load them onto the ships. With so many people easily accessible, Africans became an easy target for those who were interested in owning a slave or slaves.

Large scale importation of enslaved Africans became a staple to the English colonies, especially in the south where it was an agrarian society. The northern colonies did allow slavery up until about 1804 when, in some form, all of the northern colonies had passed legislation abolishing slavery in the north. However, before that, "more than 40,000 slaves toiled in bondage in the port cities and on the small farms of the North. In 1740, one-fifth of New York City's population was enslaved."²⁰ By the early nineteenth century, slavery grew in the south and fizzled in the north because the southern colonies were economically agrarian and the northern colonies were economically industrial. The large tracts of land and huge plantations are seen mostly in the south where tobacco was booming, rice was growing and eventually cotton was flourishing. All of these products are very labor intensive to produce and required many skilled hands. The northern colonies started out with smaller farms but as time went on, they switched to predominantly an industrialized society, thus they required less laborers.

²⁰ Klein, Christopher. (2019, February 2). *Deeper roots of northern slavery unearthed*. <https://www.history.com/news/deeper-roots-of-northern-slavery-unearthed>

Chapter 3

The Capture and The Journey

Africans were not strangers to the slave trade, or to the keeping of slaves. There had been considerable trading of Africans as slaves by Islamic Arab merchants in North Africa since the year 900. When Leo Africanus travelled to West Africa in the 1500s, he recorded in his *The Description of Africa and of the Notable Things Therein Contained* that, "slaves are the next highest commodity in the marketplace. There is a place where they sell countless slaves on market days." Criminals and prisoners of war, as well as political prisoners were often sold in the marketplaces in Gao, Jenne and Timbuktu.²¹

Before the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade began, slavery among African people was a fairly common practice, but not the type of slavery that became prominent in the Americas. In the article *African Societies and the Beginning of the Atlantic Slave Trade*, the author talks about slavery in Africa being "similar to the European serf system" where people who were seeking some form of protection or relief from something like starvation, would agree to "become the servant of the person who could provide that protection or relief." The author goes on to say that it was also a popular way to pay off debts, by serving the person, the person in debt was indebted to. Lastly the author says that oftentimes "prisoners of war between different African societies

²¹ South African History Online: towards a Peoples History. (2019, August 20). *The Atlantic slave trade*. <https://www.sahistory.org.za/article/atlantic-slave-trade>

oftentimes became enslaved.”²² They would become captives of the opposing army and sold into slavery. The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade brought a different, some may say a harsher form of slavery to the African peoples. This new form of slavery is called *chattel slavery*. This type of slavery involved large ships called *slavers* that would travel across the ocean back and forth from the New World to Africa to transport African people who became enslaved. This form of slavery deemed slaves to be property of their masters; they could be owned forever.²³ The masters of the large slaving ships often traded goods for African slaves. The goods the captain of the slave ship brought to Africa to trade for the people enslaved might have included “a large cargo of mixed goods, such as cotton, brass pans and guns.”²⁴ The captains did not go out and kidnap these people himself. African people who had a hand in the slave trade would go inland and either capture these unfortunate people or acquire them from another person or persons that previously captured them. From the time these people were kidnapped they often were “sold” many times by the time they boarded the large slave ships to take the permanent journey to the New World; torn from their family, friends and their whole life. Once the transaction was made between the African slave captor and the slave captor of the large slaver heading to the New World and the “goods” were traded, their ocean journey began. This journey could last anywhere from one to three months.

²² Khan Academy. (2016). *African societies and the beginning of the Atlantic slave trade*. <https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/us-history/precontact-and-early-colonial-era/before-contact/a/african-societies-and-the-beginning-of-the-atlantic-slave-trade>

²³ Modern Abolition. (n.d.) *Learn about five forms of slavery*. National Underground Railroad Freedom Center. Retrieved February 12, 2020. <https://www.freedomcenter.org/enabling-freedom/five-forms-of-slavery>

²⁴ Bristol And Trans-Atlantic Slavery. (n.d.) *Trade goods for the slave trade*. Retrieved February 13, 2020. <https://www.discoveringbristol.org.uk/slavery/routes/bristol-to-africa/trade-goods/slave-trade-goods>

While the transatlantic slave trade enslaved about 12.5 million Africans; of those peoples, about 3.6 percent were brought to the new world. These people were kidnapped from different parts of Africa.

Of those Africans who arrived in the United States, nearly half came from two regions:

Senegambia, the area comprising the Senegal and Gambia Rivers and the land between them, or today's Senegal, Gambia, Guinea-Bissau and Mali; and west-central Africa, including what is now Angola, Congo, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Gabon. The Gambia River, running from the Atlantic into Africa, was a key waterway for the slave trade; at its height, about one out of every six West African slaves came from this area.²⁵

In the article *What part of Africa did most slaves come from? (2019)*, the author also says that there were a lot of Africans taken from West African Ghana, what is termed as the "Slave Coast" and from the Windward Coast or what is now called the Ivory Coast. The article also says that others came from Bight of Biafra which is present day Nigeria and Cameroon.²⁶ Where the Africans originated from in Africa was emphasized because it sometimes indicated what skills they may have. For example, an African coming from a region where rice cultivation was prevalent may be highly sought after by a slave master on the rice coast in South Carolina. In fact, the rice trade in South Carolina became a very profitable and large operation because of the

²⁵ Pruitt, Sarah. (2019, June 19). *What part of Africa did most slaves come from?*. History.com <https://www.history.com/news/what-part-of-africa-did-most-slaves-come-from>

²⁶ Pruitt, Sarah. (2019, June 19). *What part of Africa did most slaves come from?*. History.com <https://www.history.com/news/what-part-of-africa-did-most-slaves-come-from>

knowledge and skills these African people brought with them from their home country. Much of the growing and cultivating practices in the rice low country in South Carolina and Georgia are mirrored after the rice growing and cultivating practices in Africa. Even the particular type of rice that was once a major cash crop in South Carolina called *Carolina Gold* was a type of seed called *Oryza Glaberrima* that came from Africa. Some historians think the rice seed made its way to the New World on board one of the slave ships and was planted and flourished in the New World. This rice may not have become so popular and so large of a cash crop in South Carolina if not for the knowledge and particular skills these men and women brought with them from their home country.

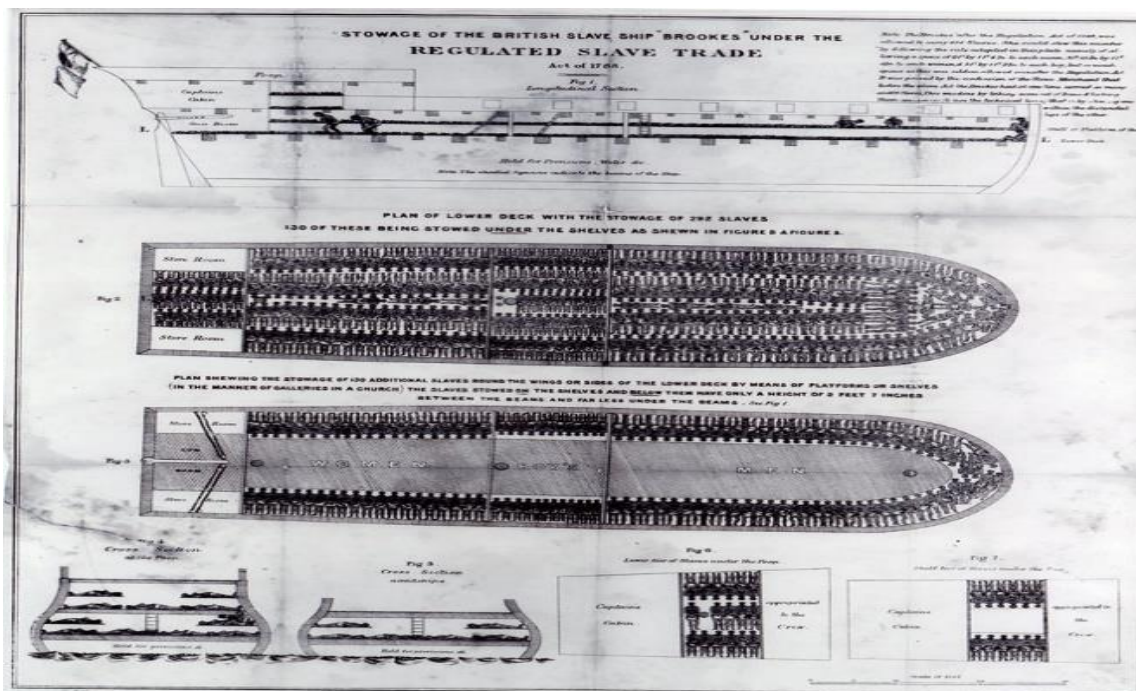
“Crossing the Atlantic in the hold of a slave ship or slaver, was a horrific ordeal. Perhaps one third of the captives perished on this journey, known as the Middle Passage—the middle leg of a three-part trade in slaves and goods between Europe, Africa, and the Americas.”²⁷ Another source describes the Middle Passage like this; “the term Middle Passage arose from the fact that each slaving voyage was made up of three passages—the passage from the home port to the slave coast, the passage from the slave coast to the market, and the passage from that market back to the home port.”²⁸ Conditions on the slave ships were dreadful. The captains would try and pack as many enslaved people into the relatively small quarters as possible. The more slaves that made it back to the New World, the more money they could get

²⁷ On the Water Exhibition; Living in the Atlantic World. (n.d.) *Forced crossings*. Smithsonian National Museum of American History: Kenneth E Behring Center. Retrieved February 12, 2020. <https://www.americanhistory.si.edu/onthewater/exhibition/1-4.html>

²⁸ Spears, J. R. (1967). *The American Slave Trade; an Account of Its Origin, Growth and Supression*. Kennikat Press, Inc. Port Washington, New York.

at the slave sale. “Sailors packed people together below decks. Standing was impossible, and even rolling over was often difficult. Poor ventilation, dampness, heat, cold, seasickness, rats, poor food, and a lack of sanitation left the conditions squalid, suffocating, and deadly.

Outbreaks of disease spread quickly among captives and crews.”²⁹ The conditions on the slavers lead to the death of many of the slaves and some crew members. Eventually some, certainly not



all, captains of the slave ships chose to pack the slaves in less tightly in hopes that the living conditions onboard would improve and the death rates on board would decrease. The diagram “The slave decks of the *Brooks*, 1788” posted below is a “famous plan which has appeared in almost every study of the Middle Passage published since 1788. Working from measurements of a Liverpool slave ship, a British parliamentary committee filled the drawing’s decks with figures

²⁹ On the Water Exhibition; Living in the Atlantic World. (n.d.) *Forced crossings*. Smithsonian National Museum of American History: Kenneth E Behring Center. Retrieved February 12, 2020. <https://www.americanhistory.si.edu/onthewater/exhibition/1-4.html>

representing men, women, and children. The drawing shows about 450 people; the *Brooks* carried 609 on a voyage in 1786.”³⁰

This drawing shows how tightly packed the slaves were on these journeys. The close proximity to each other made it virtually impossible for diseases not to spread; there was no where to go when someone got sick. And there was little to no place to use the restroom, so there was often sewage and vomit in the living quarters; it was a very dangerous place to be. In fact, “on most ships, between 5 and 20 percent of the slaves (and crew) died in transit.”³¹ These voyages were so dangerous that the captains of these slave ships often took out insurance policies on their goods; this included insurance policies on the slaves they were transporting, as slaves were considered property.

During the eighteenth century (insurance) covered an increasing proportion of traders against unforeseen losses, provided uncertain protection; in 1781, running short on water, the captain of the *Zong* ordered 132 Africans thrown overboard, because his insurance covered death from downing but not from starvation.³²

The ships did have doctors on board to try and keep the slaves alive. This is an account from a doctor named Alexander Falconbridge who was onboard a slave ship, hired to tend to the slaves.

Some wet and blowing weather having occasioned the port-holes to be shut and the grating to be covered, fluxes and fevers among the negroes ensued. While they were in this situation, I

³⁰ On the Water Exhibition; Living in the Atlantic World. (n.d.) *Forced crossings*. Smithsonian National Museum of American History: Kenneth E Behring Center. Retrieved February 12, 2020.

<https://www.americanhistory.si.edu/onthewater/exhibition/1-4.html>

³¹ Kolchin, P. (2003). *American Slavery: 1619-1877*. Hill and Wang, New York, 18.

³² Kolchin, P. (2003). *American Slavery: 1619-1877*. Hill and Wang, New York, 19.

frequently went down among them till at length their rooms became so extremely hot as to be only bearable for a very short time...The floor of their rooms, was so covered in blood and mucous which had proceeded from them in consequence of the flux, that it resembled a slaughter-house...Numbers of the slaves having fainted they were carried upon deck where several of them died and the rest with great difficulty were restored.³³

The ceilings were very low, often not tall enough for people to stand up and often there would be upwards of 600 slaves or more packed into the area so there was no room to stretch and turn. And most of the slave ships, especially the larger ones had multiple levels.

The lower deck generally was divided into separate compartments for men and women, with the males shackled together in pairs. Most women were left unchained but confined below, while children had the run of the ship. African men and women used the children as means to communicate with one another and, in some cases, to plan insurrection.³⁴

Beside the dangerous living conditions of the ships, the slaves had very basic nutrition. The captains did, however, want them to eat because they were considered property and were of monetary value if they were delivered alive and as healthy as possible. Some of the enslaved African people, however, saw no hope. They were unsure of what was waiting for them. Some of them thought the white man was capturing them to eat them. Some were told they were going to be working in the fields but didn't know anything else. Many of them lost hope and some of them, while on the middle passage journey tried to commit suicide, thinking that was a better fate

³³ Kolchin, P. (2003). *American Slavery: 1619-1877*. Hill and Wang, New York, 21.

³⁴ Wolfe, Brendan. (2018, July 9). *Slave ships and the Middle Passage*. Encyclopedia Virginia; Virginia Humanities. https://www.encyclopedia.virginia.org/slave_ships_and_the_middle_passage

than the unknown of what was lying ahead. One of the ways they tried this was by not eating. The captains of the ship caught on to this and would force feed them in order to keep them alive. This was done, in most cases to protect their investment, not necessarily to protect the person. Some slaves would also try to commit suicide by jumping overboard; but this was often prevented by lining the slaves' quarters with netting which prevented them from being able to jump overboard.

Sometimes enslaved Africans aboard some ships managed to get hold of knives, swords and even guns and gunpowder. Those who did not turn these weapons on the crew sometimes used them to commit suicide. There are even documented cases of enslaved Africans blowing themselves up along with their captors, as occurred after an uprising aboard the *New Britannia* in 1773. This remains one of the most dramatic forms of mass suicide on the transatlantic slave trade.³⁵

The captains of these slave ships would go to great lengths to try to prevent slaves from committing suicide; simply because they wanted to protect their investment. The voyage from Africa to the New World usually took between one to three months.

Chapter 4

The Sale

³⁵ Royal Museums Greenwich. (2017, August 16). *Dying on their own terms: suicides aboard slave ships*. <https://www.rmg.co.uk/discover/behind-the-scenes/blog/dying-their-own-terms-suicides-aboard-slave-ships>

The middle passage journey to the New World ended at one of the ports usually along the eastern coast of what is now the United States. At that time, a slave auction would be held. People interested in purchasing a slave would gather at a certain location and bid on the new slaves. Before the bidding started however, the potential buyers were given time to inspect the “goods”; much like someone in the market for a new vehicle would inspect the vehicle before making a purchase. Some slave auctions would force the slaves to be on display for up to a week before the auction would take place; potential buyers would be allowed to make visits to the slave action and view the slaves to be sold, in order to choose who they wanted to bid on during the auction. In this newspaper article printed in the New York Daily Tribune in 1859 a description the preparation of the slave sale that was held at a race-course in Savannah, Georgia was given by the author, who was a staunch abolitionist.

“The slaves remained at the race-course, some of them for more than a week and all of them for four days before the sale. They were brought in thus early that buyers who desired to inspect them might enjoy that privilege, although none of them were sold at private sale. For these preliminary days their shed was constantly visited by speculators. The negroes were examined with as little consideration as if they had been brutes indeed; the buyers pulling their mouths open to see their teeth, pinching their limbs to find how muscular they were, walking them up and down to detect any signs of lameness, making them stoop and bend in different ways that they might be certain there was no concealed rupture or wound; and in addition to all this treatment, asking them scores of questions relative to their qualifications and accomplishments.³⁶

³⁶ Eye Witness to History. (2005). *Slave auction, 1859*. <https://www.eyewitnesstohistory.com>

These slave auctions not only took place when the slaves newly arrived in the United States but also when a plantation no longer needed the slave and wished to sell them or perhaps the plantation fell apart and the plantation itself had to be sold. When slaves were auctioned from existing plantations sometimes there would be stipulations put on the sale by the masters that were selling them that slave families must be kept intact; a husband, wife and any young offspring must be sold together. And sometimes the slaves would see potential masters looking to buy slaves and, if they thought they might be a kind master, the slaves might try to entice them into choosing them to purchase. This is an account of Elisha, chattel #5 in the slave auction at the race-course in Savannah, Georgia in 1859.

‘Look at me, Mas’r; am prime rice planter; sho’ you won’t find a better man den me; no better on de whole plantation; not a bit old yet; do mo’ work den ever; do carpenter work, too, little; better buy me, Mas’r; I’s be good sarvant, Mas’r. Molly, too, my wife, Sa, fus rate rice hand; mos as good as me. Stan’ out yer, Molly, and let the gen’lm’n see.’

Molly advances, with her hands crossed on her bosom, and makes a quick short curtsy, and stands mute, looking appealingly in the benevolent man’s face. But Elisha talks all the faster.

‘Show mas’r yer arm Molly – good arm dat mas’r – she do a heap of work mo’ with dat arm yet. Let good mas’r see yer teeth Molly – see dat mas’r. teeth all reg’lar, all good – she’m young gal yet. Come out yer Israel, walk aroun’ an’ let the gen’lm’n see how spry you be.’

Then, pointing to the three-year-old girl who stood with her chubby hand to her mouth, holding on to her mother’s dress, and uncertain what to make of the strange scene.

‘Little Vardy’s on’y a chile yet; make prime gal by-and-by. Better buy us mas’r, we’m fus’ rate bargain’ – and so on. But the benevolent gentleman found where he could drive a closer bargain, and so bought somebody else.³⁷

When it was time for the auction to start, the slaves would be taken up, family by family, and stood on what was sort of a stage. While they were being auctioned, they were instructed to do all sorts of things that would demonstrate their physical abilities. They would usually also be asked many questions about their particular skills so that the potential buyers could decide who they wanted to purchase. When the sale was taking place, the potential masters would bid on the person or persons they wished to purchase and whoever was the highest bidder would be allowed to purchase the slave or slaves, the sale would be recorded and the master would receive paperwork showing that they owned the person or persons; and they would take them home that day. These enslaved African people had no choice in who purchased them and who they had to serve. They usually knew nothing about their new masters. If they were slaves that had just arrived from the Middle Passage journey, they were completely unsure what to expect, yet they were expected and forced to go with their new masters. They could only hope that their new masters would be kind to them.

Chapter 5

Slave Quarters

³⁷ Eye Witness to History. (2005). *Slave auction, 1859*. <https://www.eyewitnesstohistory.com>

The slave sale finished, and the master bought a new slave and the slave was forced to obey a new master; at the sale, the master received papers that said the slave was his/her new property. The slaves were brought back to the master's property and shown where they would now be living, called their *slave quarters*. "It refers to an individual structure or dwelling in which slaves lived, or to a group of slave dwellings. And on plantations most masters preferred that the dwelling places of their slaves be grouped together."³⁸ In *The American South; a History*, authors Cooper and Terrill discuss the different materials that were used to construct the slave quarters, they said that if the master was very wealthy, they would use brick to construct the slave houses; however, if they were not, they might use a mixture of "sand, oyster shells and water" called *tabby*. This was a very strong material, and some are still standing today. Slave quarters had a chimney; some were made of brick while others were made of "sticks and clay." Cooper and Terrill go on to say, if the cabins had floors, they were made of wooden planks laid next to each other, however, most did not have floors, just the earth beneath. Some had windows lined with wooden shutters, but some quarters had no windows. Some of the cabins would be whitewashed one or two times a year to try to help seal them so they were so drafty or to help with pests. The slave quarters were small in size, "commonly twelve by ten feet."³⁹ They were hot in the summers and cold in the winters. Some were single family cabins, and some were built for multiply families. If the master "owned only one or two slaves, or perhaps a single slave family, they might provide quarters for them in their own house, or in a shed attached to the house or to a bam, or in a small cabin close to the house."⁴⁰ Some masters, on large

³⁸ Cooper Jr., W. J. & Terrill, T. E. (2009). *The American South: A History*. Rowan & Littlefield Publishers, Inc. New York, p 24.

³⁹ Cooper Jr., W. J. & Terrill, T. E. (2009). *The American South: A History*. Rowan & Littlefield Publishers, Inc. New York , p 240.

⁴⁰ Cooper Jr., W. J. & Terrill, T. E. (2009). *The American South: A History*. Rowan & Littlefield Publishers, Inc. New York , p 240.

plantations tried to provide their slaves more comfortable living conditions than others. Here is an account from a master of a large plantation, talking about the slave quarters he provided.

There being upward of 150 negroes on the plantation, I provide for them 24 houses made of hewn post oak, covered with cypress, 16 by 18, with close plank floors and good chimneys, and elevated two feet from the ground. The ground under and around the houses is swept every month, and the houses, both inside and out, white-washed twice a year. The houses are situated in a double row from north to south, about 200 feet apart, the doors facing inwards, and the houses being in line, about 50 feet apart. At one end of the street stands the overseer's house, workshops, tool house, and wagon sheds; at the other, the grist and saw-mill, with good cisterns at each end, providing an ample supply of pure water.⁴¹

Some of the slave quarters in the United States are still standing and visitors can walk inside some of them to get a small glimpse at where these enslaved people lived.



⁴² Slave quarters on the Whitney Plantation in Louisiana.

⁴¹ Cooper Jr., W. J. & Terrill, T. E. (2009). *The American South: A History*. Rowan & Littlefield Publishers, Inc. New York, p 242.

⁴² Whitney Plantation. (n.d.) *The slave quarters; Louisiana slave cabin*. Retrieved February 27, 2020. <https://www.whitneyplantation.org/education/louisiana-history/the-big-house-and-the-outbuildings/the-slave-quarters>

Notice the slave quarters on the Whitney Plantation in Louisiana were made of vertical pieces of timber. They appear to stand up off the ground on pillars, so they would have had a floor, probably made of wood. They do appear to have a window towards the top, by the roof.

The cabins at President Andrew Jackson's Hermitage were made of thick horizontal wooden ties that connected together, kind of like Lincoln logs; and then mortared in the middle.

Most of the slave dwellings on the property were very similar, two room structures with two 20 feet square, single-story rooms. They featured a small loft (most likely for children to sleep), one door, one window and a fireplace. Excavations of (the dwellings) have uncovered root cellars, which would have been underneath the floorboards and accessed by a hatch door. What makes these root cellars unique are the variability of their location, size, and construction among the cabins. This indicates that the slaves, not the Jacksons, built them.⁴³

This is a picture of the original home of President Andrew Jackson and his family that was turned into a slave dwelling. These structures as well as other slave dwellings at the Hermitage are open to the public.

⁴³ Andrew Jackson's Hermitage: Home of the People's President. (n.d.) *Slave Sites*. Retrieved February 27, 2020. <https://www.thehermitage.com/learn/mansion-grounds/garden-grounds/slave-sites>



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The slave quarters were very small and sometimes housed multiple families. Some of the structures were built better than others depending on the size of the plantation or farm, the nature of the slave work (field work versus housework) and also depending on the proximity to the master's dwelling. The slave houses closest to the master's dwelling, in general, were made visually and structurally superior to those that were perhaps farther away and out of sight of the master and his/her family.

The inside of the slave quarters were usually very small and basic. Sometimes with beds and sometimes with only pallets on the floor to sleep. They had chimneys to heat the cabin and to cook.

⁴⁴ Andrew Jackson's Hermitage: Home of the People's President. (n.d.) *Slave Sites*. Retrieved February 27, 2020. <https://www.thehermitage.com/learn/mansion-grounds/garden-grounds/slave-sites>

This picture is a recreation of the inside of a slave quarter in Williamsburg, Virginia. It shows a mother trying to get her son to perhaps take a nap alongside another sleeping person, perhaps an older sibling. Notice the lack of beds, small interior and the open chimney with the cast iron kettle used to cook.



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A former slave named Josiah Henson said that “wooden floors were an unknown luxury. In a single room were huddled, like cattle, ten or a dozen persons, men, women, and children. We had neither bedsteads, nor furniture of any description. Our beds were collections of straw and

⁴⁵ Molineux, Will. (n.d.) *In mind and heart with the enslaved of yesteryear*. Colonial Williamsburg: that the Future May Learn from the Past. Retrieved February 27, 2020.
<https://www.history.org/Foundation/journal/summer03/enslaved.cfm>

old rags, thrown down in the corners and boxed in with boards; a single blanket the only covering.”⁴⁶ Slaves often had to make due with very little; they often had to make something useful with things that the masters and their family were throwing away. This is one slave’s point of view,

The softest couches in the world are not to be found in the log mansion of the slaves. The one whereon I reclined year after year was a plank twelve inches wide and ten feet long. My pillow was a stick of wood. The bedding was a coarse blanket and not a rag or shred beside. Moss might be used, were it not that it directly breeds a swarm of fleas. The cabin is constructed of logs, without floor or window. The latter is altogether unnecessary, the crevices between the logs admitting sufficient light. In stormy weather the rain drives through them, rendering it comfortless and extremely disagreeable. The rude door hangs on wooden hinges. In one end is constructed an awkward fireplace.⁴⁷

Chapter 6

Slave Life

Slaves were often given two sets of clothing throughout the year: one set for the warmer summer months and one set for the colder winter months. Often the summer set was a lighter weight outfit and the winter set was a heavier weight outfit. The issued clothing was often very plain, without embellishments. The men received a hat and the women received a kerchief. “A

⁴⁶ Simpkin, John. (n.d.) *Slave housing*. Spartacus Educational. Retrieved March 2, 2020.

<https://www.spartacus-educational.com/USAShousing.htm>

⁴⁷ Julius Lester. (1968). *To Be a Slave*. The Dial Press, Inc, New York, 63-64.

slave usually had only one pair of shoes, brogans, for in warm weather no one wore shoes, and young children usually went naked. The paucity of clothes along with the absence of socks could bring suffering in cold weather.”⁴⁸ To spruce up their clothing and to try to make it more of their own, slaves often used scraps of clothing or hand me downs to embellish their outfits. Sometimes things were sewn onto the garments and sometimes they were dyed using natural dyes from plants. And some slaves purchased supplemental clothing pieces or things to embellish their clothes with what little earnings they made. Slaves were very creative with making their clothing their own. “Travelers constantly commented on the incredible variety in slaves’ clothing. Masters also testified to their slaves’ determination to individualize their dress. Notices of runaway slaves printed in newspapers often carried careful descriptions of the clothing the runaways were wearing when they were last seen.”⁴⁹



⁴⁸ Cooper Jr., W. J. & Terrill, T. E. (2009). *The American South: A History*. Rowan & Littlefield Publishers, Inc. New York, 239.

⁴⁹ Cooper Jr., W. J. & Terrill, T. E. (2009). *The American South: A History*. Rowan & Littlefield Publishers, Inc. New York, 239.

This is an image of a group of slaves. Notice the similar clothing everyone is wearing. Men are wearing pants and women are wearing dresses. Most of them are wearing some sort of head covering, whether it be a bonnet on the women or a hat on the men.

These people were kidnapped from their homes in Africa and brought to the New World to be put to work as slaves and slaves did a lot of work. Heavy labor required proper nutrition to fuel their bodies and slave masters knew this. The slave masters would give slaves an allotment of food each week. The food that the slaves, in general, received every week included: three to four pounds of bacon and fat back, a peck of cornmeal (or in some areas rice) and molasses. Slaves would supplement this menu with fresh fruits and vegetables when they could. Some of the fresh vegetables they grew were seeds they brought with them from Africa, like black eyed peas. Sometimes they also had fresh chicken, fish and tough cuts of meat like pork butts. Slaves became very good with cooking the foods they received and making it delicious. The food they ate and the amount they received in their rations was definitely inferior than the way their masters ate however as authors Cooper Jr. and Terrill point out in the book *The American South: a History*, the diet of the slave was almost identical to the average white person in the New world. They also point out that while, this description is what the majority of slaves experienced, with such a large number of slaves, most likely there were some slaves that did not receive this amount of allotted food and starved. However, that was not the norm because slave masters wanted the most work out of the slaves they could get, and they knew they had to be nutritionally fueled for the long hours of back breaking work.⁵⁰

Although slaves were forced to work usually six days a week, Sundays usually was their

⁵⁰ Cooper Jr., W. J. & Terrill, T. E. (2009). *The American South: A History*. Rowan & Littlefield Publishers, Inc. New York, 238-239.

day off. This time was spent doing a variety of things. Some slaves were allowed to grow their own garden and would use this time to sell their goods at market in order to earn some money. Some slaves used this time to go visiting their friends and families, if they had some close. Some used their off time to relax.

When they could, slaves spend their limited free time visiting friends or family nearby, telling stories and making music. Some of these activities combined African traditions with traditions of the Virginia colonists. Several musician instruments used by slaves are believed to be similar to instruments that were used in Africa. The banjo, made from a hollow gourd, and the drum were two instruments that slaves made and used to create music.⁵¹

When the slaves got together on Sundays sometimes they would have parties where the men would husk corn or shell peas and the women would quilt. They would use this time to catch up and work. The quilts were very important because they used them in their houses. This is what one slave had to say about the corn-husking party's.

I've seen many a corn huskin' at ole Major's farm when the corn would be piled as high as the house. Two sets of men would start huskin' from opposite sides of the heap. It would keep one many busy just getting the husks out of the way, and the corn would be thrown over the husker's head and filling the air like birds. The women usually had a quilting at those times, so they were pert and happy.⁵²

⁵¹ Jamestown-Yorktown Foundation. (n.d.) *What was life like for enslaved people on an 18th century Virginia farm?*. Jamestown Settlement and American Revolution Museum at Yorktown. Retrieved March 6, 2020. [https://www.historyisfun.org/pdf/colonial-life/What was life like for slaves on a virginia farm.pdf](https://www.historyisfun.org/pdf/colonial-life/What%20was%20life%20like%20for%20slaves%20on%20a%20virginia%20farm.pdf)

⁵² African American History for 8th Grade Scholars of Milwaukee College Prep-LHC. (n.d.) *Leisure Time Activities*. Retrieved March 6, 2020. <https://www.afrohistorywithmsnichols.weebly.com/leisure-time-activites.html>

Slaves also used Sunday as a day to practice religion. When these enslaved African people came to the New World, they brought with them their African beliefs including their religion. Some of these people held onto their African religion and beliefs and those beliefs got passed down generation to generation. One example of African religion that got passed down would be voodoo, which was largely practiced in Haiti by the African slaves and their descendants, but it was also introduced in the United States in and around New Orleans. Most slave masters did not want the slaves to practice their African religion, but still some slaves were able to hold on to their beliefs.

Though African religions were largely frowned upon by colonial authorities, they nonetheless survived and adapted, enabling enslaved practitioners to enjoy a degree of freedom in the way they conducted their social and private lives. For people whose lives were controlled by intrusive owners, it is hard to overestimate the importance of these religious practices.⁵³

When slavery first began and all the slaves were people brought to the New World directly from Africa, very few, if any were Christians in faith. But over the years that changed. During the period from 1735 to 1745 called the First Great Awakening, waves of religious revivals swept throughout the colonies. Revivals were held where Calvinist messages of salvation through grace, through a recognition of sinfulness and an accepting of saving grace could lead to salvation. These revivals challenged the messages of what the Church of England (an Anglican church) had been preaching. At these revivals all people were welcome, including black people;

⁵³ The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation. (2020). *Religion and Slavery*. Slavery and Remembrance: a guide to sites, museums and memory. <https://www.slaveryandremembrance.org/articles/?id=A0059>

both free and enslaved. The Calvinist preachers preached messages of real conversion and of soul saving for everyone who believed. They stressed the idea that Jesus was coming back, so earthly stuff did not matter. In the beginning of this movement they were in a sense anti-family as well as anti-slave, because earthly things did not matter. Eventually they dropped these ideals and became more mainstream and out of this movement Methodists and Baptists were born. People of all social standings were encouraged to join, including enslaved peoples, which was fairly opposite to that of the Anglican Church of England. In fact, the Baptists' rules tended to apply to all of the members of its church; white and black, free and enslaved. Some of those rules included restrictions on slaves and slave holders including how slave holders could or rather could not treat slaves. Eventually millions of slaves would join the Christian faith.

Throughout the Caribbean and in North America, slaves were drawn in ever greater numbers to dissenting churches and chapels, converted by evangelical, peripatetic preachers, sometimes by their own masters. Among these expanding armies of Christian slaves, the Bible, but especially the message, imagery, and the stories of the Old Testament, spoke to their enslaved condition, and nurtured their growing demands for freedom and equality.⁵⁴

However, at first slave holders did not want to expose their slaves to the Christian message of all people are God's people, they wanted to keep them separate for fear of an uprising. This idea did fade however, and most Christian slave holders came to the conclusion that it was their "Christian duty" to convert their slaves to Christianity.⁵⁵ That did not mean however, that upon conversion to Christianity slaves would be free, they would still be slaves but their souls would

⁵⁴ The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation. (2020). *Religion and Slavery*. Slavery and Remembrance: a guide to sites, museums and memory. <https://www.slaveryandremembrance.org/articles/?id=A0059>

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be saved. To the early evangelicals, this was acceptable because of their beliefs that nothing earthly mattered; including one's place in their earthly life.

Slaves had their own traditions for celebrating holidays, especially Christmas. For some, this time of the year was special. Masters often gave their slaves extra time off or at the very least more relaxed working conditions. Usually they also gave their slaves a gift or gifts. "They customarily received material goods from their masters: perhaps the slave's yearly allotment of clothing, an edible delicacy, or a present above and beyond what he or she needed to survive and work on the plantation."⁵⁶ It was also seemed to be a prime time for slaves to get married.

Slaves frequently married during the Christmas season. When Dice, a female slave in Nina Hill

Robinson's *Aunt Dice*, came to her master "one Christmas eve, and asked his consent to her marriage with Caesar," her master allowed the ceremony, and a "great feast was spread" Dice and Caesar were married in "the mistress's own parlor...before the white minister." More than any other time of year, Christmas provided slaves with the latitude and prosperity that made a formal wedding possible.⁵⁷

Still some slaves did not think this time of the year was this great and wonderful celebration. Frederick Douglas, a former slave and abolitionist said this about the Christmas season and slavery:

From what I know of the effect of these holidays upon the slave, I believe them to be among the most effective means in the hands of the slaveholder in keeping down the spirit of

⁵⁶ Doc South Staff. (n.d.) *The slave experience of the holidays*. Documenting the American South. Retrieved March 7, 2020. <https://www.docsouth.unc.edu/highlights/holidays.html>

⁵⁷ Doc South Staff. (n.d.) *The slave experience of the holidays*. Documenting the American South. Retrieved March 7, 2020. <https://www.docsouth.unc.edu/highlights/holidays.html>

insurrection. Were the slaveholders to abandon this practice, I have not the slightest doubt it would lead to an immediate insurrection among the slaves. These holidays serve as conductors, or safety-valves, to carry off the rebellious spirit of enslaved humanity.⁵⁸

What Douglas is talking about in this quote is the idea that slave holders used the holidays simply as another means of controlling their slaves. Douglas says that one way the slave holders controlled their slaves during the holidays was to encourage binge drinking of hard alcohol.

One plan is, to make bets on the slaves, as to who can drink the most whiskey without getting drunk; and in this way they succeed in getting whole multitudes to drink to excess.” Binge drinking not only asserted the dominance of the slave owner, but according to Douglass, it also made working in the fields more attractive: “We felt, and very properly too, that we had almost as well be slaves to man as to rum. So, when the holidays ended, we staggered up from the filth of our wallowing, took a long breath, and marched to the field, feeling on the whole, rather glad to go.⁵⁹

Some slaves did take this more relaxed environment as an opportunity to try and escape, though not many did.

Chapter 7

Slave Jobs

⁵⁸ McLean, Michael. (2014, December 24). *Christmas on a slave plantation*. We're History: America then for Americans Now. <https://www.werehistory.org/christmas-on-plantation>

⁵⁹ McLean, Michael. (2014, December 24). *Christmas on a slave plantation*. We're History: America then for Americans Now. <https://www.werehistory.org/christmas-on-plantation>

The reason slavery started in the United States was because the colonists were looking for a free labor source to work their farms and large plantations when Indentured Servitude had become less than appealing to many. The slaves worked very hard, from “can see to can’t see” as the slaves put it. Their individual duties differed depending on various things like their age, gender, physical strength, personality and skills. In general, no slave was exempt from work, unless they were “very young or very old or the infirm. On plantations children generally started out as one-quarter hands, progressed as young teenagers to one-half hands, and finally became full hands. When age at last showed their work, they moved back down the slope from full to one-quarter hands. This labor system was applied to both men and women.”⁶⁰ Whatever their master or masters told them to do, is what work they did. Slave jobs sometimes varied by the physical location of the farms and plantations and by the number of slaves the slaveholder owned. Plantations on the eastern coastal regions of South Carolina and Georgia grew a lot of rice, so the slaves became experts (some already were) on growing and cultivating rice, while others worked on cotton plantations and became experts on growing, picking and cleaning cotton. A variety of tasks that slaves performed existed throughout the United States and thus a variety of skills among the enslaved population existed. William Byrd II, a slaveholder wrote in 1727, “I have my Flocks and my Herds, my Bond-men and Bond-women, and every sort of Trade amongst my own Servants.”⁶¹ James Grant another slaveholder said “the Planter has Tradesmen of all kinds in his Gang of Slaves, and ‘tis a Rule with them, never to pay Money for

⁶⁰ Cooper Jr., W. J. & Terrill, T. E. (2009). *The American South: A History*. Rowan & Littlefield Publishers, Inc. New York, 233-234.

⁶¹ Littlefield, Daniel C. (n.d.) *The varieties of slave labor*. Carolina Professor of History-University of South Carolina Natural Humanities Center Fellow. Retrieved March 13, 2020.
<https://www.nationalhumanitiescenter.org/tserve/freedom/1609-1865/slavelabor.htm>

what can be made upon their Estates, not a Lock a Hing [sic] or a Nail if they can avoid it.”⁶²

What these two slaveholders are saying is that their slaves performed a multitude of duties. They may have had a main job like being a cook, but they were more than likely skilled in other areas too, perhaps as a gardener, for example.

Different laboring methods existed within the slave labor system. When a small farm was just starting out, it was common for the slaveholder to do some of the labor with their slaves. For example, they might saw logs with the slave. “Some scholars have called this *sawbuck equality*, evoked by the image of a master and a slave in early South Carolina who worked several days sawing logs, each facing the other on opposite ends of a whip saw.”⁶³ This seemed to work fairly well for both the enslaved and the slaveholder because the enslaved had a feeling of accomplishment and often it helped the slaveholder see the enormous value of the slave.

On the large plantations there were two different labor systems that were used, depending on the physical location of the plantation and what was grown on the plantation. Those two labor systems are called the task system and the gang system. The rice plantations of the South Carolina lowlands and perhaps the Georgia coastal areas often used the task system. In this system, slaves were divided into small work groups and each slave had their own tasks to complete. The “managers” of the task system would have been an appointed slave, one given the job of “overseer” and one given the job of “driver.” On Robert F. W. Allston’s plantation in South Carolina he “expected an able-bodied man with a spade to break 1500 square feet (one-

⁶² Littlefield, Daniel C. (n.d.) *The varieties of slave labor*. Carolina Professor of History-University of South Carolina Natural Humanities Center Fellow. Retrieved March 13, 2020.

<https://www.nationalhumanitiescenter.org/tserve/freedom/1609-1865/slavelabor.htm>

⁶³ Littlefield, Daniel C. (n.d.) *The varieties of slave labor*. Carolina Professor of History-University of South Carolina Natural Humanities Center Fellow. Retrieved March 13, 2020.

<https://www.nationalhumanitiescenter.org/tserve/freedom/1609-1865/slavelabor.htm>

thirteenth of an acre) of rice land in a day, after it had been turned by a plow. On Allston's plantations the overseer's set the daily tasks and the drivers saw to their completion."⁶⁴ In the task system the slave's day ended when they completed their task.

The *gang system* was used as the main type of work system in the south. This type of system consisted of an "overseer" and sometimes a "driver" that was in charge of a group of people that would all complete on task together, before they would all move on to the next task.

A traveler in Mississippi in the 1850s saw the gang system in action. He 'found in the field thirty ploughs, moving together, turning the earth from the cotton plants, and from thirty to forty hoers, the latter mainly women, with a black driver walking among them with a whip, which he often cracked at them...All worked very steadily.' The gangs usually worked from sun-up to sun-down. An overseer reported he rarely started his gangs 'fore daylight' and a field hand in South Carolina spoke of long hours. 'I was always obliged to be in the field by sunrise,' he remembered 'and I labored till dark.'⁶⁵

These two types of labor systems were mainly used by the slaves that were put to work in the fields, working with the crops. However, this was not the only work to be done. The slaves also had to tend to the day-to-day operations of the plantation. These jobs might have included: "care for livestock, they built new fences and buildings, maintained and repaired old ones, cleaned ditches, cleared new ground, and engaged in a multitude of other activities so that the

⁶⁴ Cooper Jr., W. J. & Terrill, T. E. (2009). *The American South: A History*. Rowan & Littlefield Publishers, Inc. New York, 234.

⁶⁵ Cooper Jr., W. J. & Terrill, T. E. (2009). *The American South: A History*. Rowan & Littlefield Publishers, Inc. New York, 234.

chief enterprise—the production of a staple crop—could succeed.”⁶⁶ There were of course, also jobs that included: housekeeping, maids, butlers, tending to the children, tending to the garden, and serving meals. There were also jobs done by slaves who became “specialists.” These jobs had to have a very specialized skillset and not everyone knew how to do these jobs. In the book *The American South: a History*, on page 235, authors Cooper and Terrill say these jobs might have included: blacksmith, carpentry, wheelwright, teamster, stable-keeper, hog tender, cattle tender, seamstress, midwife, nurse, and cook. This list is not exhaustive, a specialist in the slave world would include any of job which required specialized knowledge to perform. Slaves performed any and all duties to keep the plantations, farms and households running smoothly.

Slave masters mainly used either rewards or force to ensure their slaves were doing what they wanted them to. Rewards could be broad or very specific. Broad rewards were those rewards given to show the slaves that the master cared about them. This type of incentive might be something as simple as praise from the master to the slave or maybe the master making sure slave families were kept together.

An owner who made clear to the slaves that their welfare was important to him won their loyalty, occasionally even praise. Solomon Northup described his master, William Ford, as a ‘kind, noble, candid, Christian man.’ As long as he belonged to Ford, Northup did his very best. Northup acted upon his conviction that ‘fortunate was the slave who came to [Ford’s] possession.’⁶⁷

Specific rewards were given for specific acts. These might include rewards for

⁶⁶Cooper Jr., W. J. & Terrill, T. E. (2009). *The American South: A History*. Rowan & Littlefield Publishers, Inc. New York, 234.

⁶⁷ Cooper Jr., W. J. & Terrill, T. E. (2009). *The American South: A History*. Rowan & Littlefield Publishers, Inc. New York, 235.

faithful and superior service.

A Tennessee planter noted in his diary that he had ‘given the servants a Dinner on Saturday in commemoration of their faithful working.’ Thomas Dabney of Hinds County, Mississippi, provided small cash prizes, just a few cents, for his best cotton pickers. Hugh Davis of Alabama was one of many planters who divided slaves into rival teams that competed for prizes, which ranged from cash to food supplements to extra time off.⁶⁸

Some masters saw the benefit of rewarding their slaves often in order to keep them loyal.

Force was another strategy used by the slave master in order to make sure their slaves were doing what they wanted them to do. “Almost all well-run plantations had rules that stipulated specific punishments for violations: extra work, cancellation of a scheduled Saturday-night dance, solitary confinement or the stocks, and a multiplicity of other deprivations and restrictions.”⁶⁹ One of the most common and one of the most physical forms of punishment used was whippings. Some masters were fonder of this type of punishment than others; but whippings were widely known throughout all of the south master-slave relations.

It was rarely that a day passed by without one or more whippings. This occurred at the time the cotton was weighed. The delinquent, whose weight had fallen short, was taken out, stripped, made to lie upon the ground, face downwards, when he received a punishment proportioned to his offense. It is the literal, unvarnished truth that the crack of the lash

⁶⁸ Cooper Jr., W. J. & Terrill, T. E. (2009). *The American South: A History*. Rowan & Littlefield Publishers, Inc. New York, 235.

⁶⁹ Cooper Jr., W. J. & Terrill, T. E. (2009). *The American South: A History*. Rowan & Littlefield Publishers, Inc. New York, 236.

and the shrieking of the slaves can be heard from dark till bedtime on Epps' plantation, any day almost during the entire period of the cotton-picking season.

The number of lashes is graduated according to the nature of the case. Twenty-five are deemed a mere brush, inflicted, for instance, when a dry leaf or a piece of boll is found in the cotton, or when a branch is broken in the field. Fifty is ordinary penalty following all delinquencies of the next higher grade. One hundred is called severe; it is the punishment inflicted for the serious offense of standing idle in the field.⁷⁰

The universal application of physical force by white upon black had a profound impact on both.

Its meaning has never been more acutely discerned than by a conscientious North Carolina slaveholder: 'It is a pity that agreeable to the nature of things slavery and tyranny must go together and that there is no such thing as having an obedient and useful slave, without the painful exercise of undue and tyrannical authority.'⁷¹

Of course, whippings were not the only form of physical punishment that masters used on slaves. Some masters went considerably farther with corporal punishment; some cut off fingers or toes or other parts of the slave's body. This extreme form of punishment was not widespread, but it did happen. Some slaves were even punished to death. However, in general, the slave holders wanted to keep their slaves as healthy as possible so that they were able to perform the work they needed them to perform.

⁷⁰ Julius Lester. (1968). *To Be a Slave*. The Dial Press, Inc, New York, 72.

⁷¹ Cooper Jr., W. J. & Terrill, T. E. (2009). *The American South: A History*. Rowan & Littlefield Publishers, Inc. New York, 236.

Chapter 8

Views on Slavery and Slave Codes

“A Negro has got no name. My father was a Ransom and he had a uncle named Hankin. If you belong to Mr. Jones and he sell you to Mr. Johnson, consequently you go by the name of your owner. Now where you get a name? We are wearing the name of our master. I was first a Hale; then my father was sold and then I was named Reed.”⁷² Slave holders wanted the slave to see himself only as the slave of the master, not as a free man. Masters that operated under the paternalistic view of slavery wanted their slaves to rely on them for everything. In a sense it was almost like a parent-child kind of mind set, where the parent takes care of the child and all the child’s needs. With this type of reasoning, the master felt it was his job to discipline the slave when they were acting out or not following the rules, just as a parent would to a child.

The distinctive way in which Southern slave owners looked upon and dealt with their slaves has recently been characterized by the term “paternalism.” This concept is useful, but it is important to specify what it does and does not mean, for it has generated wide-spread confusion. Slave -owner paternalism involved not a good, painless, or benign slavery—all contradictions in terms—but a slavery in which masters took personal interest in the lives of their slaves. The typical Southern slave owner knew his or her slaves by name and interacted with them on a frequent basis, not only directing their labor but also looking after their welfare and interfering in their lives. Masters saw their slaves not just as their laborers but also as their “people,” inferior members of their extended households

⁷² Julius Lester. (1968). *To Be a Slave*. The Dial Press, Inc, New York, 77.

from whom they expected work and obedience but to whom they owed guidance and protection.⁷³

Many slaveholders saw slavery as a means to “save” the slave from otherwise destitute and barbaric lives in Africa. They had images of African people more akin to monsters than to human beings, thus by the slaveholder taking on a slave or a whole family, they were saving them from such a life. Furthermore, slavery had a long-time history in Africa. The slaveholders in the United States justified enslaving African peoples in the United States as a means from saving them from the horrible African slave system.

Of the fifty millions of inhabitants of the continent of Africa, it is estimated that forty million were slaves. The master had the power of life and death over the slave; and, in fact, his slaves were often fed, and killed, and eaten, just as we do with oxen and sheep in this country. Nay, the hind and fore-quarters of men, women and children, might be seen hung on the shambles and exposed for sale! Their women were beasts of burden; and, when young, they were regarded as a great delicacy by the palate of their pampered masters. A warrior would sometimes take a score of young females along with him, in order to enrich his feasts and regale his appetite. He delighted in such delicacies. As to his religion, it was even worse than his morals; or rather, his religion was a mass of the most disgusting immoralities. His notion of a God, and the obscene acts by which that notion was worshipped, are too shocking to be mentioned.⁷⁴

⁷³ Kolchin, P. (2003). *American Slavery: 1619-1877*. Hill and Wang, New York, 111-112.

⁷⁴ Woestemeyer Van Noppen, Ina. *The South: A Documentary History*. D. Van Nostrand Company Inc., Princeton, New Jersey, 1958.

Slaveholders in the United States saw having slaves as a means to rescue them from servitude and ultimately death by cannibalism in Africa. Some slaveholders, who held this paternalistic view, also saw it as their duty to Christianize the slave; bring them from their immoral, Godless lives in Africa to their new, Christian life in the United States. The slaveholder saw it as taking care of the slave. The idea of paternalism was a means of justifying slavery by the slaveholder, regardless if the slaveholder believed it or not.

Although the practice of paternalism made for a somewhat more pleasant experience for the slave (if that was even possible), not all slaveholders held this notion. Some slaveholders saw slaves as merely property, not as human. As a whole, slaveholders saw slaves as inferior to the white man, but those that did not agree with the paternalistic model of slavery saw slaves as inferior to the white man in an animal to human type of inferiority. They didn't necessarily see slaves as human but like an animal to use; much like you would purchase a horse and use it to pull things. This made it easier for slaveholders that were particularly ruthless to be much more aggressive with their slaves. Some would punish their slaves in unspeakable ways like using mutilation for punishment. In the book *The American South: A History* authors Cooper and Terrill give two gruesome examples of the terrible punishment some slaveholders showed to their slaves; "one angry mistress brutally pressed a recalcitrant slave girl's head under a rocking chair; another, in a fit of exasperation brought on by a poorly cooked potato, put out a slave's eye with a fork."⁷⁵ These are just two examples of the torment that some of the slaves faced when they had masters who saw them as merely property.

⁷⁵ Cooper Jr., W. J. & Terrill, T. E. (2009). *The American South: A History*. Rowan & Littlefield Publishers, Inc. New York, 303.

There were many codes or laws enacted that protected the slaveholder's property—the slave. Slave codes existed everywhere there was slaves. The laws prohibited the slaves from doing what most would see as normal day-to-day things. The slave codes were a way to try and keep control over the slaves and to try and prevent any slave revolts from happening. In fact, in 1740 the South Carolina Slave Code was enacted following The Stono Revolt. This set of slave laws prohibited blacks from wearing fancy clothes, limited what they could sell at the market, prohibited them from having offensive weapons and prohibited slaves from having any weapons from sundown Saturday night to sunrise Monday morning. The white people were particularly worried about a slave revolt happening at church on Sundays; so on September 29, 1739 a law was enacted that stipulated men should carry a firearm with them at church on Sundays. Other laws were enacted throughout the south and some reached the north as well.

The codes specified restrictions on slave's activities. Slaves were forbidden to play drums or horns. They had no legal standing in court: no court accepted their testimony. Laws directed slaves to step aside when whites passed. Other statutes forbade the teaching of reading or writing to slaves, even by their masters. Slave marriages were not recognized by the law. Slaves were forbidden to gamble or trade with whites, free blacks, or other slaves. They were not permitted to possess guns. Limitations on the sale of slaves, even the taking away of children from mothers, barely existed. The slave was property, or chattel, and so could be freely bought or sold. In 1861 the Alabama Supreme Court cogently described the inevitable effect of slavery as 'a complete annihilation of the will.' The slave 'ha[d] no legal mind, no will which the law [could] recognize.'⁷⁶

⁷⁶ Cooper Jr., W. J. & Terrill, T. E. (2009). *The American South: A History*. Rowan & Littlefield Publishers, Inc. New York, 219.

Some of the codes stipulated that slaves were prohibited to leave their master's plantation or farm without a pass or letter from him/her giving permission and saying where they were going. These laws were intended to protect the master from the slave from either running away or revolting. "Solomon Northup reported that fear of the omnipresent whites served as a deterrent to unauthorized movement. Northup, a free black from New York who had been kidnapped and sold into slavery, confessed that apprehension about scrutiny by whites along the roads helped keep in check his great desire to escape his bonds."⁷⁷ "Any white could halt and demand identification from any black. Blacks out on the road had to be prepared to prove either that they were free persons or that they had permission to be away from their home plantation."⁷⁸

The Slave Patrol were a group of men in charge of enforcing these slave codes. They were backed with judicial power and executive power. They were fairly inactive until they got word of a slave not abiding by the codes. "A patrol was like a group of sheriffs on call. When the white community felt the need for its services, the patrol could respond quickly."⁷⁹ These men were allowed to use force to "control" the slave or slaves they found to be in violation of any of the slave codes.

Chapter 9

Slave Resistance

⁷⁷ Cooper Jr., W. J. & Terrill, T. E. (2009). *The American South: A History*. Rowan & Littlefield Publishers, Inc. New York, 219.

⁷⁸ Cooper Jr., W. J. & Terrill, T. E. (2009). *The American South: A History*. Rowan & Littlefield Publishers, Inc. New York, 219.

⁷⁹ Cooper Jr., W. J. & Terrill, T. E. (2009). *The American South: A History*. Rowan & Littlefield Publishers, Inc. New York, 220.

Slaves in the United States found ways to revolt or resist against slavery. The ways they did this were done in a multitude of ways, though rarely in large scale violent actions. Even though there are few large-scale violent slave revolts in the United States south, there were some.

The Stono Rebellion was the largest slave revolt ever staged in the 13 colonies. On Sunday, Sept. 9, 1739, a day free of labor, about 20 slaves under the leadership of a man named Jemmy provided whites with a painful lesson on the African desire for liberty. Many members of the group were seasoned soldiers, either from the Yamasee War or from their experience in their homes in Angola, where they were captured and sold, and had been trained in the use of weapons.

They gathered at the Stono River and raided a warehouse-like store, Hutchenson's, executing the white owners and placing their victim's heads on the store's front steps for all to see. They moved on to other houses in the area, killing the occupants and burning the structures, marching through the colony toward St. Augustine, Fla., where under Spanish law, they would be free.

As the march proceeded, not all slaves joined the insurrection; in fact, some hung back and actually helped hide their masters. But many were drawn to it, and the insurrectionists soon numbered about 100. They paraded down King's Highway, according to sources, carrying banners and shouting, "Liberty!" – lukango in their native Kikongo, a word that would have expressed the English ideals embodied in liberty and, perhaps, salvation. The slaves fought off the English for more than a week before the colonists rallied and killed most of the rebels, although some very likely reached Fort

Mose.⁸⁰ Following the Stono Rebellion, colonists feared even more major and violent slave uprisings. Fear led to the slave laws and codes previously discussed in this paper.

Following the Stono Rebellion, there were two slave uprisings that are widely known but that did not actually happen. In 1800 Gabriel Prosser, a slave on the Prosser plantation sends word to slaves from adjoining plantations of plans to march to Richmond, Va with 1000 likeminded slaves who are all in search of their freedom and plan to protest.

Spurred on by two liberty-minded French soldiers he met in a tavern, Gabriel began to formulate a plan, enlisting his brother Solomon and another servant on the Prosser plantation in his fight for freedom. Word quickly spread to Richmond, other nearby towns and plantations and well beyond to Petersburg and Norfolk, via free and enslaved blacks who worked the waterways. Gabriel took tremendous risk in letting so many black people learn of his plans: It was necessary as a means of attracting supporters, but it also exposed him to the possibility of betrayal.⁸¹

Unfortunately for Gabriel Prosser and his followers, the uprising never took place. Severe storms on the day the march was planned made it impossible and the roads impassable. In addition to the weather, a slave named Pharoah, fearing that he would get into trouble, alerted authorities to Gabriel's plan. Gabriel Prosser was captured and

⁸⁰ Gates Jr, Henry Louis. (n.d.) *Did African American slaves rebel?*. The Root. Retrieved April 3, 2020. <https://www.pbs.org/wnet/african-americans-man-rivers-to-cross/history/did-african-american-slaves-rebel>

⁸¹ Gates Jr, Henry Louis. (n.d.) *Did African American slaves rebel?*. The Root. Retrieved April 3, 2020. <https://www.pbs.org/wnet/african-americans-man-rivers-to-cross/history/did-african-american-slaves-rebel>

hanged. Following Gabriel's hanging about twenty-five of his followers were also captured and hanged.

Another would have been revolt took place in Charleston in the summer of 1822 led by a former slave named Denmark Vesey. Vesey purchased his freedom but had family members who were still enslaved.

Vesey enlisted other artisans, both slave and free. In his preparations he was influenced by the Bible, by antislavery speeches made in Congress during the Missouri Compromise debates, and, through his most important lieutenant, Gullah Jack, by African religion. Vesey's scheme involved at least 80 conspirators organized into teams with specific targets. Vesey assigned the key points of the municipal guardhouse and the arsenal to his own team. With those posts captured and weapons secured, the rebels hoped to command the city. What they planned to do then is uncertain, but Vesey seems to have contemplated sailing to Haiti.⁸²

The uprising was squashed by authorities and ended in the death of Vesey and several of his followers.

The bloodiest slave revolt that took place in the American Antebellum south is called Nat Turner's Revolt. It was short lived lasting only about 3 days in August of 1831. A slave named Nat Turner. Turner was a field hand and acted swiftly in his attempts to arise other slaves in revolt. Some historians say his quickness in organizing the uprising is what made it possible because there was not sufficient time for word of the

⁸² Cooper Jr., W. J. & Terrill, T. E. (2009). *The American South: A History*. Rowan & Littlefield Publishers, Inc. New York, 255-256.

planned uprising to get back to authorities. The revolt took place in Southampton County, Virginia, which is a rural area.

Although Turner's revolt began in his own neighborhood, his immediate goal lay some ten miles distant: the county seat and the arms stored there. The name of the village was, ironically, Jerusalem (now Courtland). Beyond that initial goal it is not at all clear precisely what Turner intended to do. Turner never reached Jerusalem. Late in the afternoon of August 22, whites engaged Turner's forces in a pitched battle and dispersed them. The next morning another group of whites, aided by slaves, broke up the remnants of Turner's party. Most of the rebels were killed or captured, but Turner escaped and remained at large for nine weeks. While the search for him continued, his followers were tried and 20 were executed; 10 others were transported out of the state. Finally, on October 30, Turner was captured. He was tried at the Southampton County Court on November 5 and hanged six days later.⁸³

These revolts, especially Nat Turner's revolt showed the whites that the slaves, in large numbers were not happy to be slaves, as they previously had assumed. After these revolts, whites were in constant fear of subsequent uprisings and therefore they tightened the slave codes and laws on the slaves.

The organized slave revolts were not widespread ways for slaves to resist. On large scales, slaves resisted in much more passive, everyday kind of ways. One of the ways they resisted was speaking in Gullah or Geechee language. This is a mix of both

⁸³ Cooper Jr., W. J. & Terrill, T. E. (2009). *The American South: A History*. Rowan & Littlefield Publishers, Inc. New York, 256.

African and English languages. Many of the white people could not understand this language, thus it was a very easy way for the slaves to communicate amongst them without the white folk understanding what they were talking about. Sometimes they also did things like spit in the food of the white man before serving it to them, intentionally break tools or other items or perhaps talk badly about their master and his family when they weren't there and then be nice to them when they were.

Sometimes the slaves would resist by running away. Some slaves were able to make their way to freedom in the northern states and start a new life there. To help slaves escape slavery there was a secret network called the Underground Railroad.

The Underground Railroad, a vast network of people who helped fugitive slaves escape to the North and to Canada, was not run by any single organization or person.

Rather, it consisted of many individuals – many whites but predominantly black – who knew only of the local efforts to aid fugitives and not of the overall operation. Still, it effectively moved hundreds of slaves northward each year – according to one estimate, the South lost 100,000 slaves between 1810 and 1850.

In 1786 George Washington complained about how one of his runaway slaves was helped by a “society of Quakers, formed for such purposes.” The system grew, and around 1831 it was dubbed “The Underground Railroad,” after the then emerging steam railroads. The system even used terms used in railroading: the homes and businesses where fugitives would rest and eat were called “stations” and “depots” and were run by “stationmasters,” those who contributed money or

goods were “stockholders,” and the “conductor” was responsible for moving fugitives from one station to the next.⁸⁴

Even though there are estimates of around 100,000 slaves who successfully escaped slavery via the Underground Railroad, most slaves did not try to escape. This could be for several different reasons. One reason might have been that if they did escape and did not have access to the Underground Railroad network, they had no place to go. This is especially true for the slaves that came directly from Africa. These men, women and children were brought here by ship to a place that was completely unknown to them. They did not know the land and if they escaped, they had no place to go. Another reason, especially for the slaves that were born in the United States could be the paternalistic idea of slavery. It is perhaps true that slaves learned to rely on their slave masters. If they were to leave, they wondered how would support themselves and their families? And finally, some slaves did in fact form bonds with their slave masters and thus did not want to betray them.

Chapter 10

The End of Slavery

Throughout the two hundred and forty-four years that slavery existed in the United States, there were people who strongly opposed it. Those people were called *abolitionists*.

⁸⁴ PBS: Africans in America-Resource Bank. (n.d.) *People and events: the underground railroad c. 1780-1862*. Public Broadcast System. Retrieved April 9, 2020. <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/part4/4p2944.html>

Abolitionists opposed slavery and wanted to abolish it for many different reasons. The Quakers or the "Society of Friends" who "believe that all people are created equal in the eyes of God. If this is the case, then how can one person own another?"⁸⁵

The beginnings of the Quakers' opposition came in 1657, when their founder, George Fox, wrote

'To Friends beyond sea, that have Blacks and Indian slaves' to remind them of Quaker belief in equality. He later visited Barbados and his preaching, which urged for better treatment of enslaved people, was published in London in 1676 under the title *Gospel Family-Order*. He said: '...now I say, if this should be the condition of you and yours, you would think it hard measure, yea, and very great Bondage and Cruelty. And therefore consider seriously of this, and do you for and to them, as you would willingly have them or any other to do unto you...were you in the like slavish condition.'⁸⁶

Of course, not all abolitionists were driven by religion. Some people believed that slavery went against the basic principle that the United States is founded on, "all men are created equal."

Some abolitionists asked how this principle and slavery could co-exist; their answer was that it could not.

Some whites in the U.S. contended that slave owners violated the principles that the Founding Fathers and the Declaration of Independence had established in 1776. They argued that whites were hypocrites for fighting for their own freedom from Great Britain during the American Revolution while keeping African Americans enslaved. Whites in the U.S.

⁸⁵ The Abolitionist Project. (2009). *Quakers (Society of Friends)*. East of England Broadband Network and MLA East of England. Retrieved April 10, 2020. https://www.abolition.e2bn.org/people_21.html

⁸⁶ The Abolitionist Project. (2009). *Quakers (Society of Friends)*. East of England Broadband Network and MLA East of England. Retrieved April 10, 2020. https://www.abolition.e2bn.org/people_21.html

were not creating a country where all people had the right to “life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.” Many of these people believed that the young republic would fail if basic liberties were not guaranteed.⁸⁷

Still other abolitionists saw that slavery was losing the main driving force it once had; economic gain.

...other whites, including some slave owners, began to believe that slavery was no longer cost effective. Many farmers in the South used slave labor to grow tobacco. By the 1770s, the tobacco market had become glutted due to over-production. In some cases, it began to cost the slave owners more money to grow the crop than they received when they sold it. Some farmers switched to grain crops, which did not require the same number of workers as the tobacco crop did. As a result of these factors, some whites began to believe that slavery would soon come to an end.⁸⁸

On that same note, the economy was very different in the northern part of the United States versus the southern part of the United States. Abolitionists mostly came from the north where slavery was outlawed and where most of their economy laid in manufacturing and shipping. They were less likely to economically benefit from slavery, unlike the southern big farmers and crop producing plantations. The arguments between the abolitionists and pro-slavery people sometimes turned into bloody fights. One example of this was lead by an abolitionist named

⁸⁷ Ohio History Central. (n.d.) *Abolitionists*. Retrieved April 10, 2020. <https://www.ohiohistorycentral.org/w/Abolitionists>

⁸⁸ Ohio History Central. (n.d.) *Abolitionists*. Retrieved April 10, 2020. <https://www.ohiohistorycentral.org/w/Abolitionists>

John Brown and a civil war in Kansas known as “Bleeding Kansas.” John Brown and his followers lead a bloody battle against their pro-slavery opponents between 1854-1861. They murdered many pro-slavery men and women, dragging them from their homes and displaying their murdered bodies. This was a bloody display of the abolitionists opposition to slavery. It ended with Kansas being admitted to the United States as a free state.

Abraham Lincoln became the sixteenth President of the United States on March 4, 1861. Part of his campaign was that he was opposed to the spread of slavery in the United States. Upon his election seven southern states immediately seceded from the union for fear that Lincoln would ban slavery. Shortly more southern states followed, forming the Confederate States of America. This led to the Civil War.

The war began when the Confederates bombarded Union soldiers at Fort Sumter, South Carolina on April 12, 1861. The war ended in Spring, 1865. Robert E. Lee surrendered the last major Confederate army to Ulysses S. Grant at Appomattox Courthouse on April 9, 1865. The last battle was fought at Palmito Ranch, Texas, on May 13, 1865.

While many still debate the ultimate causes of the Civil War, Pulitzer Prize-winning author James McPherson writes that “the Civil War Started because of uncompromising differences between the free and slave states over the power of the national government to prohibit slavery in the territories that had not yet become states.”⁸⁹

During the third year of the Civil War, on January 1, 1863, President Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation. This proclamation ended slavery in the states that seceded from the

⁸⁹ American Battlefield Trust. (n.d.) *Civil War Facts*. Retrieved April 10, 2020. <https://www.battlefields.org/learn/articles/civil-war-facts>

Union. This proclamation gave hope to the enslaved and made it clear that the war was a war to ensure freedom. Slavery officially ended in the United States on December 18, 1865 when the 13th Amendment was adapted in the United States Constitution. The amendment says: “Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction.”⁹⁰ Following the Civil War slaves became free citizens of the United States. Even though slaves gained their freedom, they experienced large scale and sometimes deadly segregation and racism in the United States for many years after the 13th Amendment adapted. It wasn’t until well into the 1960s that African Americans gained complete freedom in the United States.

The African culture that those first slaves brought with them from Africa can still be seen here in the United States. It can be seen in some food that has become so popular in the United States, like watermelon, rice and okra. There are museums dedicated to sharing the stories of the men, women and children that were forced here in servitude. And groups of people still speak Gullah and Geechee.

⁹⁰ 13th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution: Abolition of Slavery (1865).

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