

## **African American Slavery in Texas and Louisiana**

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### **INTRODUCTION**

This unit is designed for my seventh grade Texas History class at Fondren Middle School. Our student population at Fondren consists of approximately 58% blacks, 38% Hispanic and 4% other.

My unit will be taught over a twelve-week period, especially when my students are studying James Mayfield and the Constitutional Convention of 1845. The main purpose of this unit is to present facts about slavery to my students as opposed to what they might have previously heard regarding the trials of the enslaved blacks.

In addition, this unit will entail researching their genealogy. I have researched my own and found that my great, great grandfather was a slave. This information will be shared with my students prior to having them investigate their own family histories. This activity is planned in order to make the study more meaningful for each of them. I have chosen to focus on Texas and Louisiana slaves because these are areas they know best.

### **The Slave Trade**

West Africa was a part of a major trading network long before the arrival of Europeans. From ancient times there were trade routes across the Sahara linking the North and West of the continent. Camel caravans took salt, copper, horses and other goods south to West Africa, and brought gold, ivory, kola nuts, hides, grain and slaves back to the North. Empires rose and fell, but by the 15<sup>th</sup> century, when Europeans first arrived in West Africa, the wealthy empires of Songhai and Benin dominated the area. Like the Americas, Africa was transformed by the arrival of Europeans in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. North America was home to many Native American people, each with its own culture. The Spanish took Florida in 1565, while the French settled part of Canada and in 1682 claimed a vast region to the west of the River Mississippi, which they called Louisiana. Somewhat common was the use of indentured servants who were poor Europeans that received passage to America in return for years of unpaid work. The first Africans were brought to North America in 1619, and from about 1680 the use of black laborers increased significantly. The majority of the enslaved Africans brought to the Americas ended up working on farms and plantations. At first, farmers and plantation owners gave them relatively easy work to do, but that was short lived (Hatt 22).

In the American North, most farms were small, employing only an average of three or four slaves. It was not uncommon for white masters to till the ground alongside their slaves. In the tobacco and wheat-growing states of the Upper South, most farms were not

much larger than those in the North. However, slaves made up a greater proportion of the population in the northern urban areas. In the Deep South, large rice plantations were cultivated only along the South Louisiana and Georgia coasts. By 1720, there were so many enslaved blacks in South Carolina, which was an entry point, that they outnumbered the white population two to one. The rice farmers operated a task system, in which slaves were given a job to complete each day. Only when their task was finished were they allowed to stop work. Masters rarely harvested their fields, leaving slave drivers to supervise the slaves at work.

In many African societies, temporary enslavement as a household or farm laborer was a common consequence for crime or debt. These slaves were usually treated well and retained certain rights, for example the right to marry or own property. Africans had also provided slaves for the Muslim world for hundreds of years by selling prisoners of war into slavery. The pattern of African slavery changed beyond recognition from the 15<sup>th</sup> century onwards. The first European adventurers kidnapped slaves by raiding villages along the coast. Naturally, such raids made Africans very unwilling to trade with the Europeans. Gradually, a more organized system was established. Europeans traded guns, alcohol and metal goods for criminals and prisoners of war with the African chiefs and kings. Later rulers devised new crimes for which the punishment was slavery, and others organized kidnapping raids for inland. After one of these raids, the march from inland to the coast was the second stage of a terrible nightmare for captured Africans. As trade grew, holding pens called barracoons were built, where Africans awaited the arrival of the slaving ships. European traders did not buy all the people who were brought from the inner areas. They preferred healthy men and women up to the age of twenty-five and would not take the injured, old, weak and sick (Katz 31).

According to present-day historians, approximately 24 million Africans were captured to appease the European demand for slaves. Millions of them died from hunger and disease even before they reached the coast, but millions more had to endure the horrendous crossing to the Americas.

### **Different Types of Passages of Slave Trade**

The slave trade between Africa and the Americas was often a triangular trade, because most slave voyages were made up of three separate stages: first was the Outward Passage in which goods such as guns, alcohol and iron bars were taken by ship from European ports to the coast of West Africa. The second was the Middle Passage in which enslaved Africans were exchanged for European goods and were shipped across the Atlantic Ocean to the Americas. The third was the Inward Passage, the journey back to Europe with cargos of sugar, rum, tobacco, and other produce bought with the proceeds of slave sales (Katz 6).

The Middle Passage was the most unbearable ordeal for the African prisoners. Men, women, and children were crammed below decks with handcuffs on their wrists and leg

irons were around their ankles. This crossing normally lasted about seven weeks, but could take longer in bad weather. Two times a day, in good weather, slaves were taken up on deck for a short period for exercise. Many suffered from seasickness as well as much more serious illnesses such as dysentery and smallpox. Often they had no option but to vomit or relieve themselves where they lay, so that the holds became filthy and foul-smelling. These physical hardships resulted in terrible mental distress (Katz 9).

As early as 1440, European traders began to single out Africans for slavery. Many of these traders even tried to justify slavery by claiming that somehow black people were inherently inferior to whites, because of their dark skin and different customs. Ironically, during these inferiority claims, many African people were rising to great heights in status among European kings, queens, and nobility (Stevenson 10).

In Europe during the 11<sup>th</sup> through the 13<sup>th</sup> centuries, under the banner of Christianity, rulers sent thousands of their top soldiers to the Middle East. Their aim was to recover the *holy land* from the Muslims. The Christians aimed to conquer those lands and suppress the heathens – anyone who practiced another religion.

Through interchanges such as this, as well as caravans through the African deserts, Europeans were exposed to all sorts of exotic new things like silk, spices and gold. These only served to entice their monarchs to find out more about those *lands out there*. The inland desert routes were extremely dangerous; therefore, a few explorers began to think about sea routes (Stevenson 12).

By 1420, Portugal's Prince Henry became so obsessed with the riches of distant lands that he set up a school for sea captains to encourage exploration. So determined was he, that he became known as "Henry the Navigator." Finally, after more than fifteen years, Prince Henry convinced a few of his seamen to overcome their fear that if they sailed past a certain point, they would fall off the edge of the world. Cautiously, the seamen began to sail south. They didn't know where they were going, but they knew they wanted to find a water route to exotic foreign lands. They were actually hoping for the lucrative trade with Africa along the way.

At first, the Portuguese only traded goods with a few local rulers. But, eventually, someone decided to bring back a few of the Africans for the European kings to see. By the time Prince Henry died in 1460, the Portuguese were bringing back almost 1,000 African captives each year to work on their farms. At the same time, local African rulers were getting involved. They frequently traded their local war prisoners to Europeans. In exchange, they received small household goods such as silk, cotton cloth or liquor (*Ibid* 15).

In Europe, meanwhile, news spread after 1492 of Christopher Columbus's voyage to the New World. From then on, competition really started to flourish as European nations sought get-rich-quick opportunities. So much so, that the Pope, who was a powerful

religious and political figure in those days, intervened. Unfortunately, he did not use his powers in the best interest of the Africans. He did not condemn slavery, but organized slavery in his infamous decree, called the *asiento*.

It wasn't until the end of the 1500s that Holland, England, and France began to get involved in the slave trade vigorously. Spain, who was not allowed to build trading forts in Africa under the *asiento*, finally made side deals with the other countries to establish slave trade routes to and from Africa. By 1600, there would be no stopping the wholesale free for all of traders from all over Europe. Much like some real estate developers today, they did not see how they were destroying lives in the process. They saw only the quick profits to be made by quickly creating settlements in the New World to be worked by the Africans they captured.

Horribly, from 1500 to 1808, as many as 50 million African people were dragged from their homes and families and forced onto slave ships. This was a dismal situation because only 15 to 20 million of those 50 million captured actually survived the Middle Passage, which was a devastating trip across the ocean.

One survivor, Olaudah Equiano, who was only eleven years old related that when he and his sister were left behind to mind the house, two men and a woman came over the walls and seized them both. They stuffed their mouths and ran to the nearest woods. Later they were separated. He thought he was going to be eaten by white men. He wished to die, and wanted to jump overboard, but was watched carefully by the ship's crew. The African prisoners were severely cut or whipped for not eating. He had not seen such cruelty and brutality toward the slaves and some whites also. They were sold in Barbados (*Ibid* 12).

Many of the slaves were brought across the Atlantic to work the farms and plantations of Spain's new colonies. These included the countries now known as Mexico, Chile, Peru, Ecuador, and Columbia. At first, the Spaniard invaders tried to force the native Indians to work for them, but they could not endure the brutal treatment and died in large numbers. Further, there were simply not enough Spaniards who wanted to live in the new outposts and do the tortuous labor of clearing and settling the land. The Spanish found that only Africans were strong enough to do the work. In addition, most of the Africans were skilled farmers and craft workers whose talents were recognized and appreciated in the Americas. Black slaves were vital in enabling the Spanish to explore and conquer their new frontiers.

In 1618 the British settlement of North America was just beginning. The small community of Jamestown, Virginia had only existed for eleven years. Explorer John Rolfe, who married the famous Indian maiden Pocahontas, was in town when two vessels entered the harbor. On board were African captives. The ships did not actually land their captives in Virginia; however. The acting governor, a Captain Argall, had just gone back to England and the ships sailed on with their cargo to The Earl of Warwick's Caribbean

plantation. A year later, a Dutch slave ship came to Jamestown. There are contradictory accounts, but some reports say the crew sold fourteen Africans as slaves. Others say there were twenty Africans who were sold as servants, but then freed shortly after their arrival. The Dutch ship was in dire need of provisions and traded its human cargo for food. However, they arrived and by 1776 the African slaves increased to about 10 percent of the entire American population. In some areas, Africans outnumbered Europeans. Most of them lived and worked in the South from Maryland to the Carolinas, where planters grew tobacco, rice, and sugarcane to be exported back to Europe (*Ibid* 19).

By 1661, the colonial legislature in Virginia voted to have African servitude last a lifetime. In fact, it later added provisions to ensure that a slave's children would remain slaves as well. For one price, slave owners had free labor for generations. Similar slave laws soon spread to many colonies. Georgia, which was not founded until 1732, originally did not permit slavery. Its founder, James Oglethorpe, wanted no alcohol or slaves to disturb the hardworking thrift of the debtors and prisoners, which he hoped would start a new life in Georgia. Oglethorpe envisioned fathers, mothers, and children working together to grow crops needed in England as well as developing silkworms for lavish fabrics. But by 1750, the influence of Georgia's neighbors was too great. Georgian colonists demanded their own liquor and slaves. They began smuggling whiskey from across the border in South Carolina and leasing black labor for a hundred years at a time. Ten years later, one-third of the 9,000 Georgia residents were African Americans (Stevenson 25).

The greatest influx of Africans into Europe came as a result of the Europe-Africa slave trade, which was described earlier. In fact, in 1474 Spain's King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella named a well-known black man, Juan de Valladolid, as mayor of the Negroes of the city of Seville. The Africans from South of the Sahara, darker skinned than the North African Moors, soon became popular in fashionable Europe. Every court had to have one. Within a few years, there was a smattering of Europeanized Africans throughout Europe. This happened at the same time that slave ships were beginning to take Africans throughout Europe. Also, at the time slave ships were beginning to take African captives to the Americas to work on plantations.

Initially, America had only a small number of slaves, both in the North and South. The smallest number of slaves, by far, was found in New England. In 1700 there were only about 1,000 slaves in New England. But by 1708, Virginia alone was importing 1,000 slaves each year. By 1765 the black population of South Carolina was more than twice that of whites, 90,000 slaves compared to 40,000 whites. There were such an abundance of slaves in the South because of the planters in the region who were working fertile soil, made their money largely by selling their crops back to England. Among other goods, they sold tobacco, rice, cotton and a popular blue-black dye called indigo. As the demand for their crops grew, planters hurried to buy more land. They then looked for more slaves to work the land and harvest the crops. It became a vicious cycle (Stevenson 27).

By March 5, 1770, tensions were high in Boston. On that day a group of men defied the British soldiers with nothing more than sticks and stones. The redcoats opened fire, killing five Americans. The first to die in the Boston Massacre was one of the leaders of the early revolutionary groups, Crispus Attucks. Attucks was a forty-seven year black who had escaped from slavery twenty years earlier. He had managed to gain an education and had a keen grasp on the political conditions of the day. He wrote a defiant letter to the British appointed governor of the colony, Thomas Hutchinson in which he proclaimed,

Sir, you are chargeable . . . with our blood. You acted, coolly, deliberately, with all that premeditated malice, not against us in particular, but against the people in general, which, in the sight of the law, is an ingredient in the composition of murder. You will hear further from us hereafter (*Ibid* 28).

Some conservative colonists viewed Attucks and his band as rabbles.

Slave auctions were common. The nation's capital, the District of Columbia, was the site of one of the country's most notorious slave auctions. Practically in view of the capital were slave pens for selling men and women alike who were stripped naked and locked up so that could be inspected in public. Although many slave traders denied it publicly, African American families were routinely separated for sale, despite the terrible consequences to the slave families. Some especially cruel traders actually specialized in selling little children who were helpless and alone.

### **Classes of Slaves**

There were four classes of slaves. All classes faced hard labor, but the most difficult class was the *field hand*. Field hands, men and women alike, did backbreaking work. They hauled, plowed, sowed seeds, and reaped the harvest from about 5:00 in the morning until 8:00 at night – with only a short 15-20 minute break. They did this six days a week, all year long, with a few days off for Christmas. Even in winter, many had no shoes and one or two thin cotton apparels to wear. Their food consisted of a small bag of corn meal, a tiny heap of meat scraps, and what few vegetables they might have grown in the backyards of their quarters. They slept on straw like the livestock. Essentially, they were treated on par with the cattle and pigs. An excerpt from the autobiography of an escaped slave, Henry Bibb, points out that African Americans were considered to be sub-human and had no feelings. On the plantation he saw his wife and child being beaten and scourged by the master and the mistress, and he could do nothing to help them.

The second class of slaves was the *industrial* slave. These were usually males who were sent to work in factories that sprang up after the Industrial Revolution. They processed the crops and dug in mines where noxious fumes and cave-ins made it too dangerous for whites to want to work. These slaves labored on railroads or other

construction gangs or unloaded ship cargos. In the 1850s there were fifty-two tobacco factories in Richmond, Virginia alone – employing a total of 3400 slaves. The work was gruesome and difficult. Slaves were stripped to the waist, tugging and heaving at long iron arms that turned screws. Accompanying each push and pull were deep drawn groans. In 1850 a brick plant in Biloxi, Mississippi, owned 116 male and 37 female slaves who produced ten million bricks each year. In New Orleans in 1833, the Pontchartrain Railroad bought thirty black workers. The owners calculated that, over the next five years, they would save \$50,000 in wages they would have had to pay white workers to do the same work.

The third class worked in the plantation house itself. Among slaves, it was often referred to as the “big house,” or “Pharaoh’s house,” making a biblical reference to the slaveholder. In some respects, life there was often less taxing. Still, it entailed long hours of cooking, cleaning, sewing and other house duties. Slaves’ mothers sang sorrowful songs as they had to leave their own children to take care of the slaveholder’s children.

Even slave children were not spared hard work. While still little children, they were forced into the fields to help pick up odds and ends, or run errands. In the cotton mills, unsympathetic owners forced children to work for long hours at the looms and spindles. In the plantation houses, children ran errands, helped clean, or were companions, the social class of pets, to the white owner’s children.

The last class of slaves, which was much smaller, consisted of men and women, often as young as 13 or 14, who became *breeders*. They were forced, not unlike some prostitutes, to have sex with whomever the master wanted. They were forced to do this year after year and the rarely got to keep their children. Their babies were roughly snatched away and sold, never to be seen again. In New Orleans, this class was given a different twist. The most beautiful young slave girls, usually part white and part black, were sold privately at lavish balls called cotillions to become the permanent mistresses of wealthy white men. No matter how lenient the situation of some slaves seemed to be, they had one thing in common with their brothers and sisters in the fields – they had no control over their lives. It was this human desire that prompted slaves to decide their own destiny and escape from slavery (40).

Southerners justified this evil system through religion. From the beginning, slave traders used and abused Christianity to justify their brutal schemes. They claimed that since Africans were not Christians, they were somehow less than human. These whites went as far as to suggest that slavery, with all its horrors, was good because it gave black people a chance to find out about God. So in 1444, when the Portuguese captured their first victims in Africa, they promptly baptized them, even as they enslaved them. Once African captives were sold, their owners often tried to brainwash them into believing that it was their fate and God’s will to be in bondage. Frederick Douglas, who later became famous for speaking out against slavery, recalled in 1838 as a young man was taught to recite a “Slave Catechism” (Moody 11).

## Texas Slavery

Texas was the last frontier of slavery in the United States. In fewer than fifty years from 1821 to 1865, the *Peculiar Institution*, as southerners called it, spread over the eastern two-fifths of the state. The rate of growth accelerated rapidly during the 1840's and 1850's. The rich soil of Texas held much of the future of slavery, and Texans knew it. James S. Mayfield undoubtedly spoke for many when he told the Constitutional Convention of 1845 that the true policy and prosperity of this country depended upon the maintenance of slavery. Slavery was as an institution of significance in Texas begun in Stephen F. Austin's colony. The original impresario commission given Moses Austin by Spanish authorities in 1821 did not mention slaves, but when Stephen Austin was recognized as heir to his father's contract later that year, it was agreed that settlers could receive eighty acres of land for each bondsman brought to Texas. Enough of Austin's three hundred families brought slaves with them that a census of his colony in 1825 showed 443 in a total population of 1,800. In 1836, Texas has an estimated population of 38,470, only 5,000 of whom were slaves. The Texas Revolution assured slaveholders of the future of their institution. By 1845, when Texas joined the United States, the state was home to at least 30,000 bondsmen. After statehood, in antebellum Texas, slavery grew spectacularly. The census of 1850 reported 58,161 slaves, 27.4 percent of the 212,592 people in Texas, and the census of 1860 enumerated 182,566 bondsmen, 30.2 percent of the total population. Slaves were increasing more rapidly than the population as a whole (Barr 13).

The vast majority in Texas came with their owners from the older slave states. Sizeable numbers, however, came through the domestic slave trade. New Orleans was the center of this trade in the Deep South, but there were slave dealers in Galveston and Houston too. A few slaves, perhaps as many as 2,000 between 1835 and 1865, came through the illegal African trade (15).

Slave prices inflated rapidly as the institution grew in Texas. The average price of a bondsman, regardless of age, sex, or condition rose from approximately \$400 in 1850 to nearly \$800 by 1860. During the late 1850s, prime male field hands aged eighteen to thirty cost on the average of \$1200, and skilled slaves such as blacksmiths often were valued at more than \$2000. In comparison, good Texas cotton land could be bought for as little as six dollars an acre. Slavery spread over the eastern two-fifths of Texas by 1860, but flourished most vigorously along the lower Brazos and Colorado rivers in Brazoria, Matagorda, Fort Bend and Wharton counties. The giant slaveholders such as Robert and D. G. Mills, who owned more than 300 bondsmen in 1860 (the largest holding in Texas), had plantations in this area, and the population resembled that of the Old South's famed Black Belt (20).

American slavery was initially an economic institution, a system of unfair labor used to produce cash crops for profit. Seemingly, Texas slaves were generally profitable as a business investment for individual slaveholders. Slave labor produced cotton and sugar



on the lower Brazos River, for profit and also cultivated the foodstuffs necessary for self-sufficiency. Slavery was also important socially because it reflected basic racial views. Most whites thought blacks were inferior and wanted to be sure that they remained in an inferior social position. Slavery guaranteed this station in life for blacks (Barr 30).

A recent visit to the Jordan Plantation revealed the plantation house still standing. There were no assigned rooms for persons living in the house as today. Upon touring the grounds there was evidence of sugar production. Two large pots still existed on the property. An extensive tour of the land disclosed indications of slave quarters, praise house and conjurer's cabin. The importance of each of the dwellings was explained. Africans were not only responsible for building their homes, praise houses and conjurer's cabins, but the master's house as well. There seem to have been no empathy for the slaves.

Negro slavery existed rather weakly in Spanish Texas and never developed into a basic institution of the society. Three Frenchmen with two black slaves settled on the Trinity River to trade with Indians in 1751, but Spanish officials arrested them and ended their venture. In 1783 the Spanish census of Texas listed thirty-six bondsmen in the entire territory. Slaves accompanied Philip Nolan on his horse hunting expeditions in the 1790s into where Spanish troops killed him and captured his followers in 1801. When Spain returned Louisiana to France who then sold the territory to the United States in 1804, some French and Spanish inhabitants moved with their slaves to Texas. Other bondsmen escaped from Louisiana into the sparsely settled region seeking freedom among Mexicans or Indians. Between 1816 and 1820, first Louis de Aury and later Jean Lafitte, brought slaves to Galveston Island and sold them at an average price of \$140 each to Jim Bowie and other Louisiana traders who smuggled them into the South for resale at \$500 to \$1,000. The operation came to an end when the United States Navy drove Lafitte off the island. Kiamatia Long, a slave girl, accompanied Mrs. Jane Long in 1819 and again in 1820 into Texas where they joined Mrs. Long's husband, James, who organized and led abortive filibustering expeditions against Spanish rule. An 1819 census recorded only seven slaves in the area around San Antonio with probably a few more in the Nacogdoches and Goliad regions as Spanish rule neared its end (41).

About 40 percent of Texas slaves lived along the coast and in the East Texas river valleys where they labored in groups of from twenty up to 313 primarily as field hands on plantations to produce cotton, corn, and a limited amount of sugar in coastal counties below Houston. Arising early for breakfast they worked generally from 7:00 in the morning until 6:00 in the evening or sundown, with an hour off for lunch, Monday through Friday and Saturday mornings. Field hands, both men and women, cultivated and harvested crops, cut wood, built fences, shucked corn, killed hogs and cattle, constructed roads, cleared land, and dug wells. An exceptional cotton picker might bring in 600 pounds of cotton in a single day, though the average fell much lower. On plantations they labored in large gangs under the watchful eye of the planter, an overseer, or a slave foreman. Some planters preferred slave carpenters and blacksmiths over free labor

because they could be more easily controlled. Other planters often employed white craftsmen to relieve most slaves for work in the fields.

Slaves suffered from the same diseases and health problems that attacked white Texas such as pneumonia, rheumatism, whooping cough, measles, smallpox, yellow fever, cholera, venereal diseases, and colds. Infants died at a high rate. Field hands collapsed from heat strokes. Some planters brought their slaves out of the river bottoms during the summer or in from the fields when the weather turned cold or rainy (43).

Half the slaves in Texas labored singly or in groups of less than twenty on smaller farms scattered from the Naches River to the Louisiana border to the edge of settlement west of San Antonio, Austin, Waco, and Fort Worth. Their lives generally resembled those of plantation slaves. They probably faced a greater variety of tasks, but few acquired skills of any particular craft or the status of domestic servants and slave foremen (Tyler 20).

### **Slave Status**

If white Texans reluctantly accepted the end of slavery, they generally did not change their view of black people as inferior. Newspapers used the term “nigger,” and compared freedmen to apes as well as publishing articles emphasizing white as a synonym for purity and innocence and black as a substitute for wickedness and death (Miller 16).

### **Social Life**

In rural areas black social life simply expanded upon patterns that existed before emancipation. Men hunted and fished at night and on weekends. Freedmen held dances and church services on weekends, except in cases of revivals which lasted up to two weeks. Separate Negro towns or villages were developed in some rural areas, especially where land became available for several black families. Kendleton in Fort Bend and Board House in Blanco County had been established by 1870. Black people created at least thirty-nine separate communities in fifteen Texas counties at different times – to allow themselves greater control of local political, economic, and social life away from constant white domination (Barr 17).

Slaveholders droned on quoting passages from the Bible that stressed meekness and a heavenly reward for obedience. They walked a thin line with Christianity, however. They did not want their slaves to learn too much about the Bible, because many of its passages concerned slavery and freedom. How could they explain the Hebrews fleeing from oppression when black people were to be content with their bondage? In addition, slaveholders were outnumbered by their slaves. They were reluctant to let them gather in large groups, even for prayer meetings. Uneasy and fearful, they could never be sure if their slaves were using the time to plan revolts. Despite restrictions, slaves did get

together and sing hymns with hidden messages such as “One o’ dese mornings it won’t be long, you’ll look for me and I’ll be gone (Stevenson 49).

Slavery in Texas continued through the Civil War in much the same form it had existed prior to the conflict. Slave prices remained high until the last months when defeat became inevitable for the Confederacy. A few personal servants went to war with their owners. To construct earthworks for defense of the Texas coast and to drive military supply wagons, Confederate officers called on slaveholders for slave labor.

As the population of Texas grew between 1970 and 1995, African Americans remained at twelve percent of the total. Thus in 1990, the black population of Texas stood slightly more than two million, third behind New York and California. African American churches continued to support strong family roles and provided summer youth programs and childcare for working mothers. Social life for the African Americans included several major events in the period 1970-95. The Juneteenth celebration of emancipation in Texas, which became a state holiday in 1979 under legislation by representative Al Edwards, grew to include parades, picnics, and entertainment. Yet despite those successes, racial slurs and discrimination still occur. Texas continues to struggle with discrimination while making some progress (Barr 50).

### **Louisiana Slavery**

The first African slaves in Louisiana were half a dozen lost souls captured as plunder by the French army in the Spanish war of Succession in 1710. The years 1717-1721 saw the first importation of African slaves to Louisiana, when eight boatloads brought some two thousand Africans to the colony. The death rate among the Africans was nearly as high as it had been for Indians facing the perils of European diseases. Scurvy, dysentery, respiratory, and intestinal flues claimed about half of them within a few years of their abduction. These first Africans in Louisiana were predominantly Malinke speaking Bambaras from the western interior of the continent, who provided a cohesive group, especially in New Orleans. They were joined by smaller numbers of people from coastal African groups including Wolofs and Sereers. African slaves realized early that one of their best chances for gaining freedom was banding together with fellow Indian slaves.

By the 1720s, the French had added considerable numbers to Taensa and Alabamon slaves to their already sizeable collection of Chitimachas. Natchez and Chickasaw slaves would soon join them, along with smaller numbers of Indians from other nations. Incidents of Indians and African collaboration occurred often enough and with sufficient mayhem inflicted on the colonists’ plantations that colonial officials quickly grew alarmed. Prior to the arrival of Africans, runaway slaves usually just returned to their hometowns to resume their normal life. But as the slave population increased and became more diverse, groups of runaway Indians and Africans often stayed together in makeshift villages (Tyler 12).

The French had been annoyed with the Natchez since 1722, when they refused to turn over an African runaway whom Governor Bienville accused of making sedition speeches against the French nation. Several Africans joined the Natchez warriors in their attack on the morning of November 18, 1729. They killed more than 200 French and liberated nearly 300 African slaves and about 50 women and children.

In the aftermath of the Natchez-African victory, one colonist wrote that among the several Negroes who joined the Natchez were two plantation foremen, who gave other Negroes the understanding they would be free with the Indians. The French inaugurated divide and conquer tactics in an effort to forestall further collaboration of Indian and Africans, and to generate animosity between the two racial groups. The Chaouacha had nothing to do with the uprising of allied Natchez-African forces. The French took their revenge on the Natchez-African alliance by enlisting allied Choctaw men to besiege their towns. They killed 100 Natchez warriors and returned about as many African slaves to their rightful owners. In his report on the excursion, Governor Perier noted that this defeat would have been complete if it had not been for the Negroes who, of course, fought valiantly alongside their Natchez hosts.

Most of the slaves brought from Africa to Louisiana were males. Most Indian slaves were female, sought largely by French men for cooking, cleaning, farming, translating, and sex. Because of the many African male slaves and female Indian slaves, many slave families in the first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century comprised African husbands and Indian wives. Therefore, the slave communities on plantations and in cities like New Orleans developed as the respective Indian and African cultures combined and evolved into one common fabric. Children of African-Indian parentage were called “colored.” By the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, “colored” was used to describe people of either African or Indian heritage (15).

In New Orleans, both Africans and Indians could be seen on Sundays in Congo Square, the Sacred Ground. The singing, drumming, dancing, and storytelling of West African traditions melded nicely with their counterparts in Indian traditions. Congo Square was the only place in America where slaves were allowed to congregate on their own and do as they pleased. Out of these gatherings, the heritage of western African and Gulf Shore Indians became the root of the blues, jazz, swing, rhythm and blues, and other types of music that exist today.

The black code provided that slaves should not be required to do work on Sundays or feast days, although this prohibition did not apply to those sent to the market to sell produce. Masters were not to evade the responsibility for feeding and clothing their human property. This had sometimes been done by giving Negroes one day a week to work for themselves, then requiring them to support themselves with their earnings. No doubt the prohibition of this practice resulted in better food and clothing for the bondsmen, but it also buttressed the institution of slavery by discouraging the development of Negro initiative (16).

This regulation was not always enforced, when the first legislature of the Territory of New Orleans met in 1806, the slave owner was given an option of clothing his slaves or giving them a plot of land to work in their own right. Feeding his charges was still the responsibility of the master. Feast days had no legal status under the new regime, but the Negro was still entitled to freedom from Sunday work. If it was necessary that work be done on that supposed day of rest, the black was to receive fifty cents in wages.

During the half-century preceding 1860, slaves were engaged in so many kinds of work that a general description is impossible. The tasks performed on sugar plantations were not the same as those discharged on cotton plantations; the chores on smaller farms were different than those on larger ones. Slaves worked on steamboats and as draymen, as house servants, and as skilled craftsmen. Levees, roads, and railroads were built by Negroes. The State of Louisiana owned a group of men who served as an internal improvement corps.

Cotton was Louisiana's most widely cultivated cash crop. Cotton and sugar fields met about the latitude of Baton Rouge, with cotton being the chief staple north of that line. The northern Florida Parishes afforded considerable land fertile enough for cotton fields, and the valleys of the Red River and its tributaries, as well as the northern parishes bordering on the Mississippi River, were among the best cotton lands in the South. Moreover, cotton farming was not confined to the plantation. It does not follow that cotton was an easy crop to grow. On the contrary, the staple's successful cultivation required much work, favorable weather, and more the necessity of knowledge about growing the staple. The great advantage of cotton was that it could be grown on a small, medium or large scale without prohibitive investment in equipment.

Most of the slaves who worked the cotton fields did work on plantations. In 1860 almost 75 percent of all slaves in four northeastern cotton-growing parishes were to be found on plantations which employed more than fifty Negroes. In the same parishes slightly more than 5 percent of all slaves were owned in groups of five or less. Frederick Law Olmstead left an impressive description of the workforce of a Louisiana cotton plantation on his way to the fields when he saw an old driver carrying a whip and forty of the largest and strongest women he had ever seen together; they were all in a simple uniform dress with the skirts reaching little below the knees; their legs and feet were bare, they carried themselves well, each having a hoe over her shoulder. Behind them he saw a cavalry of about thirty men and a few women. There was a lean vigilant white overseer on a horse (Taylor 21).

Cotton cultivation involved a great variety of operations, which no doubt served to prevent monotony. On a settled plantation, activities during January and February often varied from day to day. In 1857, on the Comite Plantation near Clinton, a general cleaning up followed the beginning of the new year. Rails were hauled and fences were repaired, stables were cleaned out and repaired if necessary. During a January "cold snap,

sometime as many as twenty-five hogs were killed and salted down, and about a month later the pork was smoked. A new field was usually cleared, an operation that necessitated rolling many logs and burning brush. Slaves were constantly being sent on errands as plantations readied themselves for the real business of the year. Plowing began before the end of February. Small grains were planted in February or early March, and seed for the first corn crop was in the ground before the end of the third month. Usually the strongest men cut trees and plowed, while women and children burned brush and stalks from the previous year's crop. But, records show that many women wielded axes and wrestled with plows. On one plantation, at least, women rolled logs while men plowed, but that was not a common occurrence. Plowing with the tools of the Old South was not an easy task. Breaking up new ground demanded great strength and greater endurance (25).

The accidents which occurred so frequently during the grinding were testimonials to the industrial nature of the process. Farming accidents such as cutting oneself with a knife or being kicked by a mule are only a few of the numerous accidents that occurred on a farm. However, there were different kinds of mishaps that occurred in the sugar house. An example is when, in 1846, a slave was caught by the cane and carried to the mill, into the drum as far as his shoulders and fortunately sustained only a dislocated shoulder and some bruises. Many slaves died in accidents on the plantations (McGowan 8-9).

All Louisiana farming was not concerned with the staple production, some farms worked by slaves were on a subsistence level. These farms provided only enough for the needs of the families who owned them.

## **Conclusion**

The slave trade began with the Europeans prior to it becoming an economic institution in the New World. It was assisted by African rulers who betrayed their own people by trading them for goods. Slavery occurred in the United States almost accidentally, but once it began, it grew rapidly. Southern states were utilized slave labor more in many areas, from field hands to industrial laborers.

Slavery in Texas was especially important because of the rich soil. Planters needed manpower to plant and harvest their crops. Generations of slaves were used on the farms and plantations.

Louisiana seemed to adopt the idea of slavery at a slower pace than Texas. Slaves in Louisiana quickly banded with the Indians and were victorious in the rebellion of 1729. In addition, they were afforded certain freedoms that did not exist elsewhere. This unit is intended to make American History more realistic to my students.

## LESSON PLANS

### Lesson Plan 1

**Objectives:** Students will define key vocabulary terms.  
Students will complete a family tree.  
Students will research their genealogy.

#### **Materials**

Encyclopedias  
Dictionaries  
Paper, pencils, & pens  
Access to computer lab

#### **Beginning Activity**

Ask the following questions

1. What is slavery?
2. What does genealogy mean?

#### **Second Activity**

Students will brainstorm what they think slavery means. Students will brainstorm what they think genealogy means. Then students will have access to use classroom library to confirm.

#### **Third Activity**

Teacher discusses her genealogy and shows the class her family tree, which extends back to slavery. Teacher explains steps taken to complete a family tree. Students will begin their family tree from what they already know about their families

#### **Ending Activity**

Review the meaning of slavery and genealogy. Each student will be asked to complete his or her family tree as homework. This assignment will continue over more than one class period.

### Lesson Plan 2

**Objectives:** Students will write an essay on slavery  
Students will view video on slavery

#### **Materials**

Paper, pens  
Dictionary, Thesaurus

***Beginning Activity***

After a brief discussion of what the video is about, the students will view a video on slavery. After watching the video teacher and students will discuss the film

***Second Activity***

The students will assume a role of one of the classes of slaves and write an essay from that point of view, about slavery.

***Ending Activity***

Students will read their essays.

**Lesson Plan 3**

***Objective:*** Students will understand key vocabulary.  
Students will write a compare/contrast on slavery in Texas and Louisiana.

***Materials***

Access to the school library  
Paper, pens & pencils  
Graphic Organizers

***Beginning Activity***

Teacher briefly reviews the meaning of compare/contrast and guide students through a practice with a graphic organizer using a sneaker and a sandal comparing and contrasting both

***Second Activity***

Teacher briefly discusses slavery in Texas and Louisiana. Students take notes. Teacher provides each student with a graphic organizer.

***Third Activity***

Students are taken to the school library to research slavery in Texas and Louisiana, and complete graphic organizer.

***Ending Activity***

Teacher and students return to classroom and discuss their findings. This lesson will continue over more than one class



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