

**Ashley Briggs**

**Subject: U.S. History**

**Grade Level: 8**

**Joel P. Jensen Middle School**

[ashley.briggs@jordandistrict.org](mailto:ashley.briggs@jordandistrict.org)

### **Lesson Plan: Slavery in the Americas**

**Lesson Overview:** In this lesson, students will learn about slavery in the colonies, including slave life and culture, the impact of slavery, and the reasons for slavery.

#### **Main Curriculum Tie:**

Social Studies - U.S. History I

Standard 3 Objective 3

Assess the impact of European exploration on African slaves and American Indian nations.

#### **Enduring Understanding/Essential Questions:**

- a) What were the main reasons for slavery in the New World?
- b) Where did the slave trade begin in the Americas?
- c) How were slaves transported to America? What was this route like?

**Suggested Time Allowance:** Three 45-minute classes

#### **Resources Needed:**

7 Posters

Poster Making Kits: Gluesticks, Markers, Rulers, etc.

7 Page Article on Slavery from the following website: <http://www.ushistory.org/us/27.asp> (included at end of lesson plan)

AUTHOR: ushistory.org

TITLE: The Peculiar Institution

PROGRAM: U.S. History Online Textbook

Important Note: You will need to print off a copy of the topics beforehand unless you have internet access. If you have computer access, have students access the topics from the internet at the following website (<http://www.ushistory.org/us/27.asp>). Each topic has a different URL, but that's the main URL for the section on slavery. Students can access the different topics from a dropdown bar on that main page.

Audio CD: **Stories Under African Skies: Stories in the African-American Tradition** narrated by Alex Haley. There are a few free stories you can use in your classroom from the Colonial Williamsburg website:

<http://www.williamsburgmarketplace.com/wcsstore/wmarket/html/cdsampler/>

Presentation Notesheet (Included at end of lesson plan)

#### **Activities/ Procedures:**

##### **Day 1:**

- Break the class up into 7 different groups (about 3-4 students per group)
- Assign each group a topic on slavery (Included at the end of the lesson)

1. The Peculiar Institution (Labeled 27 on website) <http://www.ushistory.org/us/27.asp>
  2. The Crowning of King Cotton (27a on website) <http://www.ushistory.org/us/27a.asp>
  3. Slave Life and Slave Codes (27b on website) <http://www.ushistory.org/us/27b.asp>
  4. The Plantation and Chivalry (27c on website) <http://www.ushistory.org/us/27c.asp>
  5. Free(?) African-Americans (27d on website) <http://www.ushistory.org/us/27d.asp>
  6. Rebellions on and off the Plantation (27e on website) <http://www.ushistory.org/us/27e.asp>
  7. The Southern Argument for Slavery (27f on website) <http://www.ushistory.org/us/27f.asp>
- Have students read their sections individually, and pull out 6 important facts to include on their posters that summarize their topic. After everybody has read their section, and written 6 important facts, have the groups get together to discuss what they've written. Then have each group select the 6 facts that they are going to use on their poster. Next, have each student focus on one thing from their section to write a one-minute presentation on. They will share these with the class the following day.
  - Once students have selected their 6 facts, and have written their one minute presentations, allow them to work on their posters. Also, hand out a "Poster Requirement" sheet to each group. (Included at end of lesson plan)

### **Poster Requirements:**

Title of Section

6 Interesting Facts on the topic

3 Graphics that relate to the topic

### **Day 2:**

- Get the students back into their groups. You will use the second day to present the posters to the class. Each presentation should take 3-5 minutes as the students present their poster. To make the presentations more effective, have each student write down a one-minute write up about an interesting fact from their selected reading.
- While students are presenting their posters, have the rest of the class fill out the box for each section. They should include key words, interesting facts, things they have questions about, etc. (Included at end of lesson plan)
- If presentations finish early, you may play a story from the Audio CD on Day 3's Lesson or have a discussion from the presentations. You may also use the Quiz from the Peculiar Institution readings from the website: <http://www.ushistory.org/us/27f.asp>

### **Day 3:**

- Using the Audio CD - **Stories Under African Skies: Stories in the African-American Tradition**, select one or two stories to share with students. After listening to the story, have your students use the story to write how it relates to their life by answering the following questions: What similarities can they find between their life and that from a character(s) in the story? What are differences? How can the moral of the story be applied to their life? What connections can they make about slave life in colonial times to life in present day America?

## 27. The Peculiar Institution

"The Peculiar Institution" is slavery. Its history in America begins with the earliest European settlements and ends with the Civil War. Yet its echo continues to reverberate loudly. Slavery existed both in the north and in the South, at times in equal measure. The industrialization of the north and the expansion of demand for cotton in the south shifted the balance so that it became a regional issue, as the southern economy grew increasingly reliant on cheap labor. As is always true in history, cultures grow and thrive in all conditions. Two interdependent cultures emerged in the American south before the Civil War — the world the slaveholders created for themselves and the world of their slaves. Even though slaves were not permitted to express themselves freely, they were able to fight back even though enchained.

Slaves worked long hours in the hot sun picking cotton for their owners. Overseers watched the slaves progress and disciplined those that were deemed to be working too slow.

Although African-Americans had been brought to British America since the time of Jamestown colony, American slavery adopted many of its defining characteristics in the 19th century. The cotton gin had not been invented until the last decade of the 1700s. This new invention led the American south to emerge as the world's leading producer of cotton. As the south prospered, southerners became more and more nervous about their future. Plantation life became the goal of all the south, as poor yeoman farmers aspired to one day become planters themselves. Rebellions and abolitionists led southerners to establish an even tighter grip on the enslaved.

Even amidst the bondage in the south, there was a significant population of free African-Americans who were creating and inventing and being productive.

The Peculiar Institution refused to die. Great Britain had outlawed the slave trade long before its former American colonies.

New nations in the Western Hemisphere, such as Mexico, often banned slavery upon achieving independence.

But in America, political, religious, economic and social arguments in favor of the continuation of slavery emerged. Slavery became a completely sectional issue, as few states above the Mason-Dixon Line still permitted human bondage. These arguments also revealed the growing separation in the needs and priorities of the northern industrial interests versus the southern planting society, all of which culminated in the Civil War.

## 27a. The Crowning of King Cotton

Removing seeds from newly picked cotton is not as simple as it sounds. Cotton is sticky when removed from the plant, and pulling the seeds from its grasp is difficult. Throughout the 1700s, cotton production was expensive because of the huge amount of labor necessary to remove the seeds. All was changed with the invention of the cotton gin. What once was painstakingly slow was now relatively fast. By the end of the 18th century, demand for cotton was increasing as power looms were able to turn out great quantities of cloth. With the cotton gin, southern cotton plantations could now supply the world's demand.

Ironically, the man who would make cotton king was born to a Massachusetts farmer. Almost immediately after graduating from Yale University, Eli Whitney traveled south. While staying at the Savannah plantation of Mrs. Nathanael Green in 1792, the widow of the Revolutionary War general, Whitney created the device that changed the world. Whitney built a machine that moved stiff, brushlike teeth through the raw cotton. To his delight, the teeth removed a very high percentage of the nettlesome seeds. Up to this point, it took up to 10 hours to produce a pound of cotton, with very little profit. The cotton gin ultimately grew to produce a thousand pounds of cotton per day with relatively little expense.

As cotton production spread throughout the South, the density of the slave population increased.

As an indication of the impact of this invention, the total amount of cotton being exported was about 138,000 pounds in the year the cotton gin was invented. Two years later, the amount of cotton being exported rose ten-fold, to 1,600,000 pounds. Before the gin, the prevailing thinking of the leaders of the country was that slavery would gradually disappear. This all changed when slaves could be used to cultivate millions of pounds of cotton for markets all over the world. Eli Whitney never made a cent on his invention because it was widely reproduced before it could be patented. Determined to duplicate his inventive success, he developed the milling machine, which led to the development of interchangeable parts and the northern factory system. This one individual played a great part in creating the industrial north, as well as the plantation south.

Eli Whitney's invention made the production of cotton more profitable, and increased the concentration of slaves in the cotton-producing Deep South.

## 27b. Slave Life and Slave Codes

Slave life varied greatly depending on many factors.

Life on the fields meant working sunup to sundown six days a week and having food sometimes not suitable for an animal to eat. Plantation slaves lived in small shacks with a dirt floor and little or no furniture. Life on large plantations with a cruel overseer was oftentimes the worst. However, work for a small farm owner who was not doing well could mean not being fed.

The stories about cruel overseers were certainly true in some cases. The overseer was paid to get the most work out of the slaves; therefore, overseers often resorted to whatever means was necessary. Sometimes the slaves would drive the overseer off the plantation in desperation. When slaves complained that they were being unfairly treated, slaveholders would most often be very protective of their "property" and would release the overseer.

Slaves who worked inside the plantation homes often had better living and working conditions than slaves who worked in the fields.

In some cases, a driver was used rather than an overseer. The difference between the overseer and the driver was simple: drivers were slaves themselves. A driver might be convinced by a master to manage the slaves for better privileges. Drivers were usually hated by the rest of the slaves. These feelings often led to violence.

Large plantations often required some slaves to work in the plantation home. These slaves enjoyed far better circumstances. Domestic slaves lived in better quarters and received better food. They sometimes were able to travel with the owner's family. In many cases, a class system developed within the slave community. Domestic slaves did not often associate themselves with plantation slaves. They often aspired to arrange courtships for their children with other domestic slaves.

As the Peculiar Institution spread across the South, many states passed "slave codes," which outlined the rights of slaves and the acceptable treatment and rules regarding slaves. Slave codes varied from state to state, but there were many common threads. One could not do business with a slave without the prior consent of the owner. Slaves could be awarded as prizes in raffles, wagered in gambling, offered as security for loans, and transferred as gifts from one person to another.

A slave was not permitted to keep a gun. If caught carrying a gun, the slave received 39 lashes and forfeited the gun. Blacks were held incompetent as witnesses in legal cases involving whites. The education of slaves was prohibited. Anyone operating a school or teaching reading and writing to any African-American in Missouri could be punished by a fine of not less than \$500 and up to six months in jail. Slaves could not assemble without a white person present. Marriages between slaves were not considered legally binding. Therefore, owners were free to split up families through sale.

Any slave found guilty of arson, rape of a white woman, or conspiracy to rebel was put to death. However, since the slave woman was chattel, a white man who raped her was guilty only of a trespass on the master's property. Rape was common on the plantation, and very few cases were ever reported.

## 27c. The Plantation & Chivalry

During the 1600s, patterns of life were borrowed from the English countryside and transplanted onto America's southern shores. These included a glorification of riding, hunting, and etiquette.

Tobacco played the central role in defining social class, local politics, the labor system; in fact, it shaped the entire life of the region. The planter was essentially a country gentleman, looking to England for political and economic guidance as well as for its literature, manner of dress, and etiquette. In the 1700s the Virginia gentry established a code of behavior that can still be seen in parts of the south today. Aristocrats had certain rights and privileges, and, in return, had certain responsibilities for their "inferiors." By around 1825, the dominance of Virginia was fading and the emergence of King Cotton shifted the center of Southern influence to South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama and Mississippi.

Southern cavaliers would sometimes engage in duel to defend their honor.

The southern code addressed the behaviors of both men and women. Gentlemen must be courteous, truthful and honorable. Sins of the flesh were forgiven. He should have a broad understanding of the humanities, including the Greek and Roman classics. Hospitality and generosity were of utmost importance. The ideal man respected his family and treated women with high regard. Strength and courage were glorified. A man was to defend the family name, with his life if necessary. A personal insult to an individual or his family would necessitate a fight, if not a duel.

The manners befitting a proper southern belle were as detailed as those befitting her male counterpart.

The southern woman was genteel and gracious. She knew how to entertain guests and tenaciously defended her husband and children. She was not outspoken and was pure of mind and body.

A proper gentleman, it was believed, should be a lawyer, politician, planter, or military man, rather than be a businessman or other occupation. Because plantation owners had their money tied up in property and slaves, many of the generation could not afford to send their children to prestigious colleges, but were able to send them to the esteemed military schools. This created a generation of very able and talented military officers. Many were trained at West Point and Virginia Military Institute. They held to old-fashioned ideals of what honorable warfare meant. When the Civil War arrived, most of the military leadership talent was southern.

## 27d. Free(?) African-Americans

When Americans think of African-Americans in the Deep South before the Civil War, the first image that invariably comes to mind is one of slavery. However, many African-Americans were able to secure their freedom and live in a state of semi-freedom even before slavery was abolished by war. Free blacks lived in all parts of the United States, but the majority lived amid slavery in the American South. It is estimated that by 1860 there were about 1.5 million free blacks in the southern states.

How did African-Americans become free? Some slaves bought their own freedom from their owners, but this process became more and more rare as the 1800s progressed. Many slaves became free through manumission, the voluntary emancipation of a slave by a slaveowner. Manumission was sometimes offered because slaves had outlived their usefulness or were held in special favor by their masters. The offspring of interracial relations were often set free. Some slaves were set free by their masters as the abolitionist movement grew. Occasionally slaves were freed during the master's lifetime, and more often through the master's will. Many African-Americans freed themselves through escape. A few Americans of African descent came to the United States as immigrants, especially common in the New Orleans area.

Slaves found many ways to escape to freedom. Henry Box Brown had himself mailed to an abolitionist in Pennsylvania. He went on to become a famous anti-slavery speaker.

Were free blacks offered the same rights as free whites? The answer is quite simply no. For example, a Virginia law, passed in the early 1830s, prohibited the teaching of all blacks to read or write. Free blacks throughout the South were banned from possessing firearms, or preaching the Bible. Later laws even prohibited Negroes who went out of state to get an education from returning. In many states, the slave codes that were designed to keep African-Americans in bondage were also applied to free persons of color. Most horrifically, free blacks could not testify in court. If a slave catcher claimed that a free African-American was a slave, the accused could not defend himself in court.

The African Methodist Episcopal Church was founded despite protests from the white church from which its congregation came.

The church often played a central role in the community of free blacks. The establishment of the African Methodist Episcopal Church represents an important shift. It was established with black leadership and spread from Philadelphia to Charleston and to many other areas in the South, despite laws which forbade blacks from preaching. The church suffered brutalities and massive arrests of its membership, clearly an indication of the fear of black solidarity. Many of these leaders became diehard abolitionists.

Free blacks were highly skilled as artisans, business people, educators, writers, planters, musicians, tailors, hairdressers, and cooks. African-American inventors like Thomas L. Jennings, who invented a method for the dry cleaning of clothes, and Henry Blair Glenn Ross, who patented a seed planter, contributed to the advancement of science. Some owned property and kept boarding houses, and some even owned slaves themselves. Prominent among free persons of color of the period are Frederick Douglass, Richard Allen, Absalom Jones, and Harriet Tubman.

## 27e. Rebellions on and off the Plantation

Starting as early as 1663, slaves were organizing revolts to regain their freedom. Hundreds of minor uprisings occurred on American plantations during the two and a half centuries of slavery. Most of the uprisings were small in scope and were put down easily. Some were larger in ambition and sent a chill down the spines of countless Southern planters. Two of the most famous revolts were in the early nineteenth century. One was led by Denmark Vesey and the other was led by Nat Turner.

Denmark Vesey earned his freedom by winning a lottery and purchasing his freedom. He worked as a carpenter in South Carolina as a respected artisan for years and was quite satisfied with his life. He was an educated man, fluent in several languages, which he learned while he was enslaved to a widely traveled slave trader. But a profound repulsion to slavery, plus encouragement from the successful slave revolt in Haiti led him to plan to murder every white in the South, with the help of thousands of slaves and supporters. The date was set for Sunday, July 24, 1822. Before the uprising began, his plan was revealed and he was captured, tried, and hanged. Forty-seven African-Americans were condemned to death for alleged involvement in the plot. An estimated 9,000 individuals were involved.

The success of Nat Turner's slave revolt led to fear among slaveholders. Slave codes became more strict with concerns that other slaves might rebel.

Nat Turner was somewhat of a mystic. He frequently was said to have religious visions, and he claimed at times to have spoken with God. In 1831, Turner claimed to be responding to one of these visions and organized about 70 slaves who went from plantation to plantation and murdered about 75 men, women and children. As they continued on their rampage they gathered additional supporters but when their ammunition was exhausted, they were captured. Turner and about 18 of his supporters were hanged. This was even more shocking than any previous uprising. Turner had done what others had not. He actually succeeded in killing a large number of white Southerners. The South responded by increasing slave patrols and tightening their ever more repressive slave codes.

Rebellion would often find voice in less dramatic ways and more personal ways. The slave codes bear witness to the growing fear of slave insurrection and revolt. Slaves ran away in droves, following the Underground Railroad to freedom in Canada and the Northern states. They fled to the Indians and joined them in their wars against the white settlers. Some accounts tell of slaves poisoning their masters and mistresses. Some slaves banded together and stopped working, while others deliberately slowed down their pace. The history of slave resistance and revolts is the story of the desperate and sometimes successful attempt of people to gain their liberty in the face of systematic repression and bondage.

## 27f. The Southern Argument for Slavery

Southern slaveholders often used biblical passages to justify slavery.

Those who defended slavery rose to the challenge set forth by the Abolitionists. The defenders of slavery included economics, history, religion, legality, social good, and even humanitarianism, to further their arguments.

Defenders of slavery argued that the sudden end to the slave economy would have had a profound and killing economic impact in the South where reliance on slave labor was the foundation of their economy. The cotton economy would collapse. The tobacco crop would dry in the fields. Rice would cease being profitable.

Defenders of slavery argued that if all the slaves were freed, there would be widespread unemployment and chaos. This would lead to uprisings, bloodshed, and anarchy. They pointed to the mob's "rule of terror" during the French Revolution and argued for the continuation of the status quo, which was providing for affluence and stability for the slaveholding class and for all free people who enjoyed the bounty of the slave society.

Some slaveholders believed that African Americans were biologically inferior to their masters. During the 1800s, this argument was taken quite seriously, even in scientific circles.

Defenders of slavery argued that slavery had existed throughout history and was the natural state of mankind. The Greeks had slaves, the Romans had slaves, and the English had slavery until very recently.

Defenders of slavery noted that in the Bible, Abraham had slaves. They point to the Ten Commandments, noting that "Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's house, ... nor his manservant, nor his maidservant." In the New Testament, Paul returned a runaway slave, Philemon, to his master, and, although slavery was widespread throughout the Roman world, Jesus never spoke out against it.

Defenders of slavery turned to the courts, who had ruled, with the Dred Scott Decision, that all blacks — not just slaves — had no legal standing as persons in our courts — they were property, and the Constitution protected slave-holders' rights to their property.

Defenders of slavery argued that the institution was divine, and that it brought Christianity to the heathen from across the ocean. Slavery was, according to this argument, a good thing for the enslaved. John C. Calhoun said, "Never before has the black race of Central Africa, from the dawn of history to the present day, attained a condition so civilized and so improved, not only physically, but morally and intellectually."

Defenders of slavery argued that by comparison with the poor of Europe and the workers in the Northern states, that slaves were better cared for. They said that their owners would protect and assist them when they were sick and aged, unlike those who, once fired from their work, were left to fend helplessly for themselves.

James Thornwell, a minister, wrote in 1860, "The parties in this conflict are not merely Abolitionists and slaveholders, they are Atheists, Socialists, Communists, Red Republicans, Jacobins on the one side and the friends of order and regulated freedom on the other."

The violence of Nat Turner's 1831 slave revolt frightened many southern slaveholders. Such unrest was used by many as a reason to continue slavery.

When a society forms around any institution, as the South did around slavery, it will formulate a set of arguments to support it. The Southerners held ever firmer to their arguments as the political tensions in the country drew us ever closer to the Civil War.

## **QUIZ from the Peculiar Institution**

**What invention led to the increased concentration of slavery in the South?**

- Cotton gin
- Tractor
- Rifle
- Clock

**Which of the following was *not* included in the Slave Codes?**

- Rules for educating slaves
- Rules for punishing slaves
- Rules for feeding slaves
- Rules for slave marriages

**Which of the following was valued by men in the Southern aristocracy?**

- Greed
- Beauty
- Honor
- Piety

**What is the term for a master setting a slave free?**

- Emancipation
- Manumission
- Release
- Abolition

**Which two men led slave revolts during the 1800s?**

- Frederick Douglass and Denmark Vessey
- Gabriel Prosser and Frederick Douglass
- Nat Turner and Eli Whitney
- Denmark Vessey and Nat Turner

**Which of the following was *not* a Southern argument in favor of slavery?**

- Religion
- Economy
- Legality
- Climate

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

PERIOD: \_\_\_\_\_

DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

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## SLAVERY HANDOUT

### 6 Facts from your reading:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.

### Your One-Minute Presentation:

### Poster Requirements:

Title of Section

6 Interesting Facts on the topic (Chosen by group)

3 Graphics that relate to the topic

### Your Groups 6 Chosen Facts:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.

**Presentation Notes On THE PECULIAR  
INSTITUTION - SLAVERY**

1. THE PECULIAR INSTITUTION

2. THE CROWNING OF KING COTTON

3. SLAVE LIFE AND SLAVE CODES

4. THE PLANTATION AND CHIVALRY

5. FREE(?) AFRICAN-AMERICANS

6. REBELLIONS ON AND OFF THE  
PLANTATION

7. THE SOUTHERN ARGUMENT FOR  
SLAVERY

