



Lesson Title: Slavery: Colonial America's and the World's

Recommended Grade Level: 8-11

Recommended Pacing: 90 minutes

FAIR Standards and Objectives:

HM.9-12.1, US.9-12.11, US.9-12.12, US.9-12.13, FR.9-12.20

Theme: Key Debates in American History

Era: Colonial

Areas of Focus: Slavery, African American Experience

Lesson Objectives:

1. Students will increase their understanding of the Atlantic slave trading system in relationship to the other forms of slavery in world history.
2. Students will increase proficiency in debating alternative interpretations of historical events.

Teacher Instructions:

1. Give students time (in class or as homework) to read the Background Essay and the six sources for the lesson. If the reading is done in class, this may extend the time needed in class to complete the lesson.
2. Hand out copies of the Student Worksheet Assignment.
3. Ask students to read the two conflicting "Point of View" paragraphs and take brief notes on them in the spaces provided.
4. Have students use these notes in a guided discussion in which they are encouraged to defend their own views, while listening carefully to and considering the views of others.

Slavery: Colonial America's and the World's: Background Essay

Starting in the early 1600s, England began to establish several colonies on the coast of North America. Virginia was founded in 1607. Thirteen of these colonies in time formed the United States of America. It was a land full of promise. Yet from the start, it had two deep and tragic flaws -- the seizing of lands from indigenous tribes and the heavy reliance on systems of slavery. The first African slaves likely arrived in 1619, also in Virginia. Soon slavery would exist in all the colonies. It would not be abolished throughout the United States until 1865.

Until then, some Americans could own other Americans as slaves. Slaves were property, to be bought, sold and put to work for their owners for life. Treated well or treated harshly, they were totally unfree. They lived their entire lives under someone else's control. Today, many ask how such obvious evil and injustice could be tolerated by anyone., especially by so many in a nation claiming to be based on the liberty and equality of every individual.

To better understand this phenomenon, it may help to realize that slavery was long seen to be a normal part of social life. It existed for thousands of years in most major societies – ancient Babylon, China, Egypt, Greece, Rome, India, the Muslim lands of the Middle East, and many African societies. People knew that being a slave was a terrible fate. No one wanted that fate for themselves. However, for most of human history, life was hard for nearly everyone. Famine, disease, warfare and other calamities ensured a short and brutal life for many people. Moreover, many other groups in society besides slaves lived their lives under the control of others. Being a serf, a servant, or a client dependent on a more powerful person was the common fate of most people. Few people thought of themselves as free individuals. As a result, slavery may have simply seemed like the worst of many harsh and limiting ways of life. Before 1700, few people anywhere seemed to have questioned its morality.

Slavery has taken many forms, and many different groups of people have been forced into slavery. Slaves were usually taken as captives in war. Some people deeply in debt could be enslaved – and some sold themselves as a way to pay off debts. People suffering dire poverty even sold their own children into slavery. Others abandoned newborns they could not support so that others might find them and sell them as slaves.

Societies often enslaved some of their own people. However, more often they took them from far-off lands, or they enslaved groups who could be looked down on because of their cultural or religious differences. Almost always, the enslaved people were treated as inferior -- even when they did not look different from those enslaving them.

Systems of slavery also varied in the kinds of work slaves were forced to do. The late Roman Republic and the Roman Empire used war captives in huge numbers on large farms, in mines, as domestic servants, and as gladiators who fought to the death in the arena. They used educated or skilled slaves as artisans, government accountants, doctors, teachers, entertainers. Racial differences were not that important to the

Romans. They enslaved people from all the regions around them – from Britain, Germany, Syria, North Africa, the Balkans, etc.

In the Middle Ages, the use of slaves in Europe declined. Serfs replaced them as the main class of poor peasants. Serfs were bound to the land and had to work for the lord who owned that land, but they could not be bought and sold as slaves were. However, Europeans did enslave some people and Europeans continued to capture people and sell them into slavery to others. For example, Europeans took part in the capture and sale of East European Slavs to both Christian and Muslim societies. The word “slave” comes from the name for this ethnic group.

Meanwhile, many Muslim societies sent raiders to the southern shores of Europe to capture and enslave Europeans. Slaves in Arab and other Muslim lands were used as domestic servants, eunuchs guarding harems, officials in governments and even as soldiers in slave armies. Muslim lands also enslaved millions of Sub-Saharan Africans over the course of many centuries. African slaves were often forced to work under harsh conditions on plantations, in mines, or draining salt marshes. Like most other societies, many African societies practiced slavery, and they cooperated with Arab traders. Those traders established long-lasting slave trade routes along the coast of East Africa and up across the Sahara Desert.

Starting in the 1400s, this system may have helped Europeans to develop their own much larger Atlantic slave trading system. It is this system Americans usually know best.

From the mid-1400s to the late 1800s, some 12 million Africans were seized and taken to the Americas. The Atlantic system linked African societies, Europe and the Americas in a vast trading network. Because so much is known about it, its horrors have been described in vivid and appalling detail. Some African nations warred constantly to capture other Africans and march them in chains to the coast. There they were sold to European merchants who packed them into slave ships for the long voyage to the Americas. We know from later abolitionist reports about the frightening conditions on board such ships. In the Caribbean, South and Central America, and in the southern United States, enslaved Africans were chattel slaves. That is, they were treated as property in every way, just as tools, saleable goods or domesticated animals were. They mainly produced cash crops on large plantations -- rice, tobacco, cotton and, above all, sugar. Sugar plantations and mills were run with factory-like discipline under a scorching sun. In the Caribbean and Brazil, many slaves died within less than five years of their arrival. As this plantation system spread, the gap widened between large numbers of enslaved Africans and small groups of wealthy whites. As this happened, racism against Africans also deepened. The growing divide between slave and slave owner made the system all the crueler.

For these reasons, some say this Atlantic slave trading system was the worst of all. Was it? This question is not easy to answer. After all, many varieties of slavery have existed

all over the world. Hopefully, the materials for this lesson will help you think about, discuss and debate this question.

Sources for this Lesson

Source 1. Hammurabi's Code.

Hammurabi was an ancient Babylonian king who ruled in the 1700s BCE. The law code he enacted contains 282 laws providing punishments for many specific crimes. Several laws describe relationships among enslaved people, free born men, freed men, royal and priestly officials, and others. Hammurabi's Code is available online at: [The Avalon Project : Code of Hammurabi \(yale.edu\)](#)

175. If a State slave or the slave of a freed man marry the daughter of a free man, and children are born, the master of the slave shall have no right to enslave the children of the free.

196. If a man put out the eye of another man, his eye shall be put out.

199. If he put out the eye of a man's slave, or break the bone of a man's slave, he shall pay one-half of its value.

204. If a freed man strike the body of another freed man, he shall pay ten shekels in money.

205. If the slave of a freed man strike the body of a freed man, his ear shall be cut off.

229. If a builder build a house for some one, and does not construct it properly, and the house which he built fall in and kill its owner, then that builder shall be put to death.

230. If it kill the son of the owner the son of that builder shall be put to death.

231. If it kill a slave of the owner, then he shall pay slave for slave to the owner of the house.

Source 2. Aristotle on Slavery

Ancient Greece and Rome were major slave-owning societies. As in most other parts of the world, slavery was accepted as a normal part of society. Few regarded it as needing any defense. Greek philosopher Aristotle believed some men were "slaves by nature." His comparison of such natural slaves to animals was common in many cultures as an explanation for why some human beings could be enslaved. This passage is from Aristotle's "Treatise on Government." Available online at: [A Treatise on Government by Aristotle: Part 1 Chapter 5 - The Literature Page](#)

Tame animals are naturally better than wild ones, and it is advantageous that both should be under subjection to man; for this is productive of their common safety: so is it naturally with the male and the female; the one is superior, the other inferior; the one governs, the other is governed; and the same rule must necessarily hold good with respect to all mankind. Those men therefore who are as much inferior to others as the body is to the soul, are to be thus disposed of, as the proper use of them is their bodies, in which their excellence consists; and if what I have said be true, they are slaves by nature, and it is advantageous to them to be always under government.

Source 3. Diodorus Siculus on Slave Miners in Egypt

Diodorus Siculus was an ancient Greek writer in the 1st Century BCE. This is a passage in his *Bibliotheca Historica*, which means “Library of History.” In this huge multi volume history, Diodorus often used the writings of others. This passage is from Book Three, Chapter 13. It describes the condition of enslaved gold miners in Egypt.

Available online at: [LacusCurtius • Diodorus Siculus — Book III Chapters 1-14](http://LacusCurtius.com/Diodorus_Siculus_Book_III_Chapters_1-14) (uchicago.edu)

The boys there who have not yet come to maturity, entering through the tunnels into the galleries formed by the removal of the rock, laboriously gather up the rock as it is cast down piece by piece and carry it out into the open to the place outside the entrance. Then those who are above thirty years of age take this quarried stone from them and with iron pestles pound a specified amount of it in stone mortars, until they have worked it down to the size of a vetch [pea size]. Thereupon the women and older men receive from them the rock of this size and cast it into mills of which a number stand there in a row, and taking their places in groups of two or three at the spoke or handle of each mill they grind it until they have worked down the amount given them to the consistency of the finest flour. And since no opportunity is afforded any of them to care for his body and they have no garment to cover their shame, no man can look upon unfortunate wretches without feeling pity for them because of the exceeding hardships they suffer. For no leniency or respite of any kind is given to any man who is sick, or maimed, or aged, or in the case of a woman for her weakness, but all without exception are compelled by blows to persevere in their labours, until through ill-treatment they die in the midst of their tortures. Consequently the poor unfortunates believe, because their punishment is so excessively severe, that the future will always be more terrible than the present and therefore look forward to death as more to be desired than life.

Source 4. Ibn Khaldun on Africa South of the Sahara

Slavery was also common in ancient Muslim and Arab societies. Muslims enslaved many groups of people, including Europeans. They often gave enslaved Africans the hardest forms of labor in mines, draining marshes, etc. This passage about Africans south of the Sahara Desert is by Ibn Khaldun, an Arab historian of the 14th century. From Ibn Khaldun, *The Muqaddimah*, Vol. 1 (New York, 1958) as translated by Franz Rosenthal, pp 118-119.

Beyond them [several known West African nations] to the south, there is no civilization in the proper sense. There are only humans who are closer to dumb animals than to rational beings. They live in thickets and caves and eat herbs and unprepared grain. They frequently eat each other. They cannot be considered human beings.

Source 5. The Atlantic Slave Trade

This passage is part of eyewitness testimony to a committee of the British House of Commons in 1790 and 1791 on conditions aboard ships carrying enslaved people from Africa to the Americas. From *The History of Slavery and The Slave Trade, Ancient and Modern*, Blake, W. O. H. Miller, Columbus, Ohio, 1860, pp. 127-128. Available online at: <http://library.si.edu/digital-library/book/historyofslaver00blak>

Captain Hall says, after the first eight or ten of them come on board, the men are put into irons. They are linked two and two together by the hands and feet, in which situation they continue till they arrive in the West Indies, except such as may be sick, whose irons are taken off. The women, however, he says, are not ironed. On being brought up in a morning, says Surgeon Wilson, an additional mode of securing them takes place, for to the shackles of each pair of them there is a ring, through which is reeved a large chain, which locks them all in a body to ring-bolts fastened to the deck. The time of their coming up in the morning, if fair, is described by Mr. Towne to be between eight and nine, and the time of their remaining there to be till four in the afternoon, when they are again put below till the next morning. In the interval of being upon deck they are fed twice. . . . After meals they are made to jump in their irons. This is called dancing by the slave-dealers.

On the subject of the stowage and its consequences, Dr. Trotter says that the slaves in the passage are so crowded below, that it is impossible to walk through them, without treading on them. Those who are out of irons are locked spoonways (in the technical phrase) to one another. It is the first mate's duty to see them stowed in this way every morning; those who do not get quickly into their places, are compelled by a cat-of-nine-tails. When the scuttles are obliged to be shut, the gratings are not sufficient for airing the rooms. He never himself could breath freely, unless immediately under the hatchway. He has seen the slaves drawing their breath with all those laborious and anxious efforts for life, which are observed in expiring animals, subjected by experiment to foul air, or in the exhausted receive of an air pump.

Source 6. Frederick Douglass: The Agony of an American Slave

Frederick Douglass escaped slavery and became one of America's greatest abolitionist leaders. This passage is from his *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave*, Written by Himself, ed. Benjamin Quarles (Cambridge, Mass., 1960), pp. 94–95. Available online at: [The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, by Frederick Douglass; Chapter X Page 3 \(pagebypagebooks.com\)](http://www.pagebypagebooks.com)

If at any one time of my life more than another, I was made to drink the bitterest dregs of slavery, that time was during the first six months of my stay with Mr. Covey. We were worked in all weathers. It was never too hot or too cold; it could never rain, blow, hail, or snow, too hard for us to work in the field. Work, work, work, was scarcely more the order of the day than of the night. The longest days were too short for him, and the shortest nights too long for him. I was somewhat unmanageable when I first went there, but a few months of this discipline tamed me. Mr. Covey succeeded in breaking me. I was broken in body, soul, and spirit. My natural elasticity was crushed, my intellect languished, the disposition to read departed, the cheerful spark that lingered about my eye died; the dark night of slavery closed in upon me; and behold a man transformed into a brute!

Student Assignment

Student Instructions

Please read the Background Essay for this lesson. Also read the entire set of six source documents provided. Finally, read the two “Point of View” paragraphs below. Then write out brief answers to the questions asked about these paragraphs. Use your answers to help you take part in a class discussion about the nature of slavery, America’s and the world’s. In the discussion, share varying responses to the following question.

Essential Question: Were all slave systems equally terrible, or was the Atlantic slave system that the United States was part of worse than the others?

Point of View I: “Yes, the Atlantic Slave Trading System Was the Worst Ever.”

Every form of human bondage is a terrible evil, but what happened to black Africans during the Atlantic slave trade was uniquely horrible. First, consider the sheer size of the disruption. In four centuries, twelve million people were torn from Africa. They were transported thousands of miles across the sea. Their suffering was enormous. But think also of the disruption to the societies they were taken from: intensified warfare; political disruption; long-term loss of productive manpower. Many more men than women were taken, which added to the distortion of life for those left behind. Also, the passage across the sea was unique in its miseries: packed beneath deck in chains; dying by the scores on each voyage; allowed on deck during the day but made to “dance” or jump up and down to keep in some kind of shape. Many had no idea where they were going. Some knew a bit about the cultures and language of their captors. Most knew very little. This, too, was an extreme form of disruption compared to the experience of many enslaved peoples in other slave systems. Then there was the rigid discipline of plantation slavery. It was brutal in comparison to the kinds of work enslaved people elsewhere in the past had to do. Finally, this slave system was justified by a racist depiction of black Africans as inferior beings. This added profound wounds to slaves and their descendants. The legacy of this racism has long outlasted slavery itself in its destructive effects. Does it make it worse that America is the land of the free, while other nations were founded on the assumption that life is a huge power grab?

Point of View II: “No, all form of slavery were all horrible, each in its own way.”

Nothing is more disruptive to a culture than war. The thousands captured and enslaved during any war were ripped from their families and communities every bit as much as the Africans sent across the sea to the Americas. For example, Slavic peoples torn from homes in Eastern Europe were transported to Muslim Spain, North Africa and many parts of the Middle East. As for the horrors of plantation slave labor, what about the black African slaves (called the “Zanj”) draining swamps in what is now southern Iraq? In 869 CE, thousands of them rose up in a vast thirteen-year long revolt. Racist depictions of such Africans long pre-date the racism that arose during the Atlantic system. The war captives who labored on vast Roman estates often rebelled. Spartacus was a slave from Thrace who led a vast slave revolt, 71-73 BCE. His skin color was no different than that of his enslavers. Some 6,000 of his followers were punished horribly for their uprising; they were all crucified. Even slaves with comfortable jobs as domestic servants, teachers, etc., were all still looked down on and deprived totally of

their liberty. Dishonoring and mocking slaves took many forms. Physical appearance, religious beliefs, cultural or ethnic backgrounds, all could be a basis for such dishonoring. Every form of slavery was a terrible social reality. Thankfully, slavery is no longer acceptable or legal anywhere – even though forms of it still do exist.

In-Class Discussion: Clarify Your Views and Discuss Them with Others

Take a few brief notes in response to each of the following questions. Use your notes to help you take part in an all-class discussion about slavery, America's and the world's.

1. Of the six sources provided, list two that best support Point of View I.

2. Why did you choose those two sources?

3. Of the six sources provided, list two that best support Point of View II.

4. Why did you choose those two sources?

5. Which of the two points of view do you agree with more? Why?

Extension Activities:

Slavery Today

Tragically, some forms of slavery exist today. People are often surprised to hear about this. Slavery in the past was practiced openly and under protection of law. This makes learning about it and studying it easier. The fact that slavery is outlawed almost everywhere now makes it harder to investigate. Accurate numbers are not easy to come by. Some estimate that more than 40 million people are trapped in forms of forced labor that are like slavery or are in fact a form of slavery in every way. Many sources on modern slavery exist. Below is a brief video presentation and a report by the UN's

International Labor Organization. Together these are one way to start learning more about this problem.

“What Does Slavery Look Like Today?” A brief video presentation by the anti-slavery organization Free the Slaves.

[What Does Slavery Look Like Today? - YouTube](#)

Global Estimates of Modern Slavery, a report of the International Labor Organization, Geneva, September 19, 2017. A pdf of the report is available online at: [Report: Global Estimates of Modern Slavery: Forced Labour and Forced Marriage \(ilo.org\)](#)

Recommended Activity: Show the video presentation to the entire class. For students interested in pursuing the topic further, ask them to form a group, read and discuss the UN report and summarize its findings in a presentation to the entire class. The group can suggest ways for students to learn more about and become more involved in efforts to deal with this problem.