



Slavery in America

For Grades 3-5

Britannica Note:

This LaunchPack is one of a series that considers different aspects of the African American experience. The resources here refer specifically to people and events in the United States, but the issues affect people throughout the world. As you study the resources in this LaunchPack, think about how your own life experiences connect to the topics and issues. Consider how those connections help you understand the experiences of others in your community and around the world.

This Pack contains:

10 ARTICLES
1 PRIMARY SOURCE
5 IMAGES
1 VIDEO
1 WEBSITE

ARTICLE

American Civil War

Britannica Note:

Read the section "Buildup to War" to learn about how the issue of slavery divided the nation and helped lead to war.

In the 1860s the northern and southern parts of the United States fought the American Civil War. The war started after 11 Southern states separated themselves from the United States and formed their own government. Their army fought the forces of the U.S. government. The Civil War threatened to break up the United States. It is also called the War Between the States.



The Confederate flag flies over Fort Sumter on April 15, 1861.

Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. (reproduction no. LC-DIG-ppmsca-32284)

Buildup to War

The North and the South had been divided for many years over the issue of slavery. The Southern economy was based largely on cotton, which was grown on large farms called plantations. Enslaved African Americans did most of the work on the plantations. The Northern economy relied more on manufacturing. The North had small farms that used paid workers.

Neither side wanted the other's ideas to spread to new states being created in the West. Northerners wanted to stop the spread of slavery. But Southerners believed that the U.S. government did not have the right to decide whether or not slavery should be allowed in a state. They feared that the government's next step would be to stop slavery altogether.

Missouri Compromise

In 1819 the U.S. Congress had to decide whether to allow Missouri to become a state. Missouri wanted to join as a state that would allow slavery. Some Northerners in Congress were not happy with this. Congress therefore could not agree about what to do. Finally, Maine asked to join the country as a free state, or a state that would not allow slavery. Congress then agreed to let Missouri join as a slave state and Maine join as a free state. This became known as the Missouri Compromise of 1820. The Compromise also banned slavery north of Missouri's southern border.

Kansas-Nebraska Act

The Missouri Compromise lasted until Congress passed the Kansas-Nebraska Act in 1854. The act created Kansas and Nebraska as new territories in the area where slavery was supposed to be forbidden. Yet the act allowed the people of the territories to choose whether or not to allow slavery. In Kansas the act led to armed conflict. On one side were Southerners who supported slavery. On the other side were Northern abolitionists, who wanted to end slavery.

The Confederacy and the Union

Southerners became more upset when Abraham Lincoln was elected U.S. president in 1860. Lincoln belonged to the Republican Party, which opposed slavery. Southern states decided to secede (withdraw) from the United States to protect their right to keep slaves. South Carolina, Mississippi, Florida, Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, Texas, Virginia, Arkansas, North Carolina, and Tennessee seceded. They formed a government called the Confederate States of America, or the Confederacy. Jefferson Davis was the Confederate president.

The Northern states that stayed loyal to the United States were called the Union. Four states—Kentucky, Missouri, Maryland, and Delaware—stayed in the Union even though they allowed slavery. They were called border states. In addition, the western counties of Virginia refused to join the Confederacy. They later joined the Union as the state of West Virginia.

Going into the war the Union had several advantages over the Confederacy. It had more people, more industries, and more railroads. But the Confederacy had better military leaders.

Events of the War



Most of the major battles of the American Civil War took place in the southern states.

Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc.

Fighting broke out in 1861 and lasted until 1865. By the end of 1861 two major battlefronts had developed. One was in the East, where Virginia, Maryland, and Pennsylvania suffered most of the fighting. The other front was in the West. That front started along the Mississippi River and then spread.

1861



A mural depicts African American troops in an 1863 battle in South Carolina.

The George F. Landegger Collection of District of Columbia Photographs in Carol M. Highsmith's America, Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division (LC-DIG-highsm-09903)

The American Civil War began on April 12, 1861, in Charleston, South Carolina. Confederate troops captured Fort Sumter from the Union Army. Afterward both sides quickly raised armies.

The first major battle of the war was fought on July 21. About 30,000 Union troops marched toward the Confederate capital of Richmond, Virginia. The Confederates stopped them at a stream named Bull Run, near the town of Manassas. The Union troops were forced back to Washington, D.C. The defeat shocked the Union.

1862

Union forces had some success in the West in 1862. In February Union troops under General Ulysses S. Grant captured Confederate forts in western Tennessee. These included Fort Henry and Fort Donelson. In April Grant led the Union to victory in the Battle of Shiloh, near Pittsburg Landing, Tennessee. Then the Union navy took the city of New Orleans.

The war's most notable battle at sea was fought in Virginia in March 1862. It was the first battle ever fought between ships that were covered with iron. Neither the Confederacy's *Merrimack* nor the Union's *Monitor* could win a clear victory.

General Robert E. Lee led the Confederacy to important victories in the East. In August 1862 his forces won a second battle at Bull Run. Then Lee invaded the North. Union troops stopped the Confederates at Antietam Creek, Maryland, in September. But in December Lee's troops defeated a Union army at Fredericksburg, Virginia.

1863

At the start of the war President Lincoln wanted mainly to keep the United States together. Ending slavery was not his main goal. This changed after the Battle of Antietam. The Union victory encouraged Lincoln to issue a statement called the Emancipation Proclamation. The proclamation freed all enslaved people in Confederate states. As a result of the proclamation, many Blacks joined the Union army.



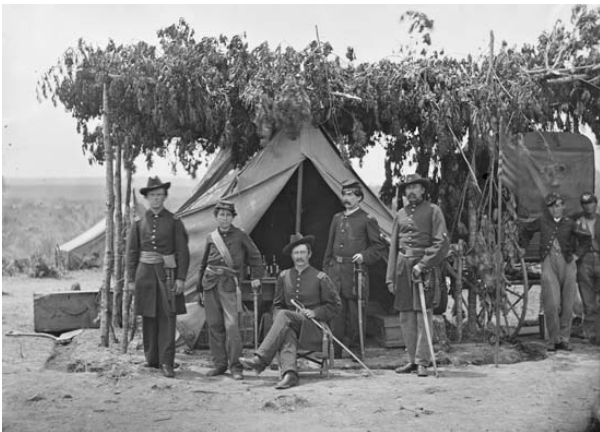
Confederate Generals Stonewall Jackson (left) and Robert E. Lee are pictured together in 1863...

Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. (digital file no. LC-DIG-pga-02907)

In May 1863 Lee defeated Union forces near Chancellorsville, Virginia. Then he again invaded the North. Lee suffered his first big defeat in July at Gettysburg, Pennsylvania.

The Battle of Gettysburg turned the war in favor of the Union. A day later Grant captured the city of Vicksburg, Mississippi, for the Union. Then the Union controlled the entire Mississippi River. In November 1863 Grant and General William Tecumseh Sherman drove the Confederates out of Chattanooga, Tennessee.

1864–65



Union Army officers are photographed in Virginia in August 1865.

Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

In March 1864 Lincoln rewarded Grant by giving him command of all the Union armies. While Grant fought in Virginia, Sherman went to Georgia. He captured Atlanta in September. Then he led his troops on a march to Savannah, a port on the Atlantic Ocean. Along the way they destroyed railroads and supplies. Sherman captured Savannah in December.



A painting shows General Robert E. Lee signing the surrender of his troops at Appomattox, Virginia,...

© North Wind Picture Archives

By March 1865 Lee was very short of men and supplies. On April 3 Grant captured Richmond, the Confederate capital. He accepted Lee's surrender in Appomattox, Virginia, on April 9. By the end of May all Confederate armies had surrendered.

Reconstruction

After the war the defeated states were gradually allowed back into the United States. The South rebuilt damaged property and changed its economy so it no longer depended on the labor of enslaved people. This period was known as Reconstruction. It lasted until the last U.S. troops left the South in April 1877.

Citation (MLA style):

"American Civil War." *Britannica LaunchPacks: Slavery in America*, Encyclopædia Britannica, 8 Aug. 2020. packs.eb.com. Accessed 14 Oct. 2020.

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ARTICLE

Denmark Vesey

Denmark Vesey was a former enslaved person in Charleston, South Carolina, in the early 1800s. He is known for planning a major slave revolt. It would have been the most extensive slave revolt in U.S. history. However, it was stopped before it could be carried out. It is likely that thousands of enslaved people were involved in the plot.



Learn about the life of Denmark Vesey in this short video.

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The man who became Denmark Vesey was most likely born about 1767, probably on the island of Saint Thomas in the Dutch West Indies. He was sold in 1781 to Joseph Vesey, who was the captain of a trade ship that carried rice, wine, and slaves. It is not known what the child's name was at the time, but Joseph Vesey named him Telemaque. They sailed together on a number of journeys before they settled in Charleston in 1783.

On December 31, 1799, Telemaque bought his freedom with the money he won from a street lottery. He changed his name to Denmark Vesey and worked as a carpenter for many years. Vesey knew about a slave revolt that took place in Haiti in the 1790s. He read anti-slavery literature. He began to plan and organize an uprising of city and plantation slaves.

Vesey and others planned to gain control of the weapon supplies around the city, kill all the whites, burn and destroy the city, free the enslaved people, and sail to Haiti. In 1822, before the revolt could take place, several nervous enslaved people warned their masters. The authorities in Charleston arrested the leaders of the planned revolt. Some 130 Blacks, including Vesey, were arrested. Vesey never confessed. On July 2 he and five others were hanged.

Citation (MLA style):

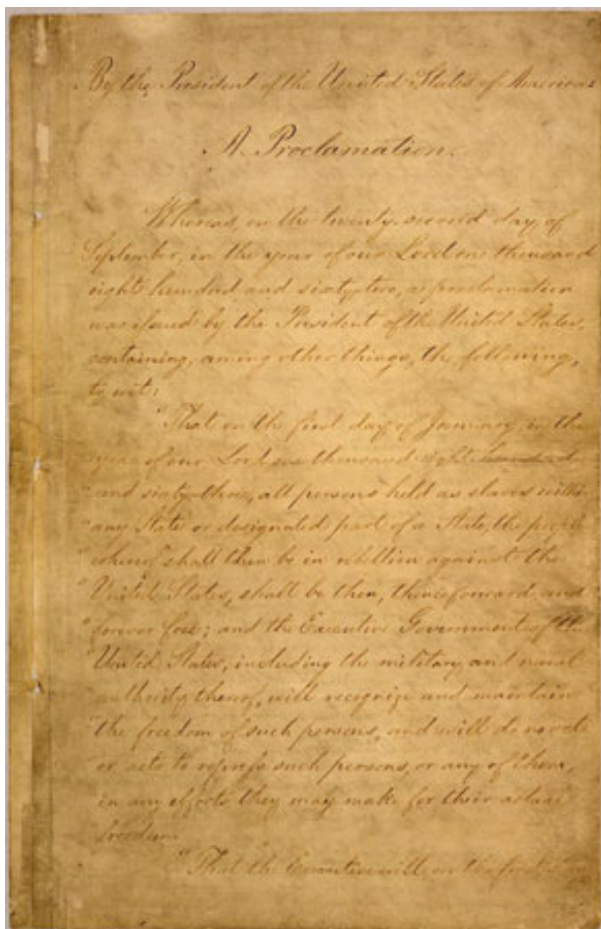
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ARTICLE

Emancipation Proclamation

The American Civil War pitted Southern states against Northern states. One of the major issues was whether the Southern states should be allowed to continue owning enslaved people. During the war, President Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation. This document, issued on January 1, 1863, declared that the enslaved people in the Southern states were free.



President Abraham Lincoln called the Emancipation Proclamation "the greatest event of the 19th...
National Archives, Washington, D.C.

The president could not really enforce the proclamation in places that were still controlled by Southern troops. Even so, the proclamation was important because it made the Civil War a fight about slavery.

The proclamation also opened the U.S. Army to freed African Americans. As soon as the Northern armies captured a region, the enslaved people there were given their freedom. Nearly 180,000 of them joined the Northern forces. They were very helpful in bringing about the final surrender of the Southern forces in 1865. After the war, the 13th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution ended slavery throughout the United States.

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Juneteenth

Juneteenth is a holiday that celebrates the end of slavery in the United States. Other names for the holiday include Emancipation Day and Juneteenth Independence Day.

During the American Civil War, President Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation. The proclamation made slavery illegal in the states of the Confederacy. The Confederate states did not follow that law; however, as soon as Northern troops captured a region, the people who were slaves in that region were freed. The last area to fall to the Northern troops was Texas. When Northern soldiers arrived in Galveston, Texas, on June 19, 1865, they brought the news that slavery had been abolished. Many slave owners tried to keep this news a secret, but the news spread. The people who were freed from slavery celebrated with prayer, feasting, song, and dance.



Marchers celebrate Juneteenth in a parade in Pennsylvania.

© Tippman98x/Shutterstock.com

One year later, in 1866, the first official Juneteenth celebration took place in Texas. The first observances included prayer meetings and the singing of spirituals. Celebrants wore new clothes as a way to represent their newfound freedom. Within a few years, many people in other states were celebrating the holiday as well, making it an annual tradition. In addition to celebrating the end of slavery, Juneteenth also honors African American contributions and achievements. Celebrations often include prayer and religious services, speeches, educational events, family gatherings and picnics, and festivals with music, food, and dancing.

Juneteenth became a state holiday in Texas in 1980. As of 2020 almost every state—except Hawaii, North Dakota, South Dakota, and Montana—had declared Juneteenth a holiday.

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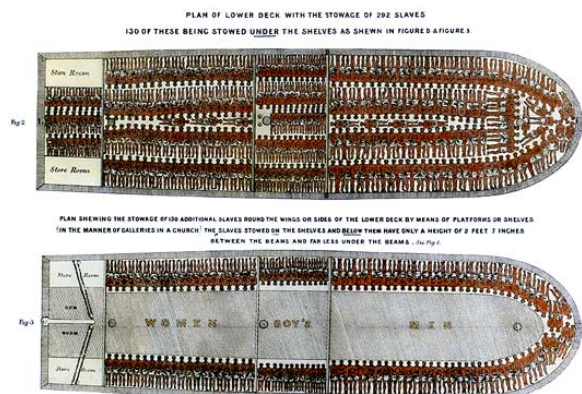
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ARTICLE

Middle Passage

The Middle Passage was the forced voyage of captive Africans across the Atlantic Ocean to the Americas. It was the second stage of the triangular trade, or the route of the Atlantic slave trade. This route traded goods from Europe for African captives who were then traded for goods from the Americas. From about 1518 to the mid-1800s, millions of African men, women, and children were forced to travel the Middle Passage.



Enslaved Africans were forced to stay in a very small space during the Middle Passage.

© Everett Historical/Shutterstock.com

In Africa

Once the European ships arrived in Africa, the captains would anchor off the coast of Guinea (also called the Slave Coast) for a month to a year. During that time they would trade their European cargo (such as guns, cotton cloth, and tools) for enslaved Africans. Most of the enslaved people had been kidnapped from the interior of Africa and forced to march to the coast under horrid conditions. Once on the slave ship, captives were constantly exposed to danger. Raids at port, attacks by pirates or enemy ships, bad weather, epidemics (outbreaks of diseases), and various forms of abuse were some of the horrors Africans faced once they were on the slave ship.

The Middle Passage

The captain tried to force as many Africans as possible onto the ship. Most ships carried from 150 to 600 captives. They were crowded belowdecks and chained to low-lying platforms. On average, an individual's space was 6 feet long, 16 inches wide, and about 3 feet high (183 by 41 by 91 centimeters). This made it impossible for any adult to stand up or turn over, and many people died in this position.

Belowdecks there was no ventilation, or any way for the Africans to get fresh air. In the daytime, if the weather allowed it, captives were brought on deck for exercise. At this time some captains insisted that the captives' area be scrubbed. However, if bad weather kept the captives below, the heat and harmful fumes caused fevers, sickness, and death.

The journey from Africa to the Americas could take from 21 to 90 days. Twice a day the captives were given water and boiled rice, millet, cornmeal, or stewed yams. If bad weather or other factors made the journey longer, the rations were greatly reduced. This resulted in near starvation and sickness.

Some Africans revolted. There are 55 detailed accounts of African revolts (or mutinies) between 1699 and 1845. One of those was on a ship called the *Amistad*. To prevent a mutiny, male captives were kept constantly chained to each other or to the deck.

It is estimated that about 13 percent of Africans died during the Middle Passage. Deaths were usually caused by epidemics, suicide, and mutiny. So many bodies of dead or dying Africans were thrown into the ocean that sharks regularly followed the slave ships. For more than 300 years the Middle Passage caused extreme physical, mental, and emotional pain for the uprooted Africans. The conditions faced by the enslaved people highlighted the cruel disregard for human suffering on the part of the slave traders. They treated the Africans like property rather than human beings.

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ARTICLE

Robert Smalls

Robert Smalls was an enslaved man who became a hero for the Union, or North, in the American Civil War. He later served in the U.S. Congress.



Robert Smalls

Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

Early Life

Robert Smalls was born on April 5, 1839, in Beaufort, South Carolina. Robert's mother was enslaved, and so he was born into slavery. When he was about 12 years old, he was sent to work in Charleston, South Carolina. His many jobs included waiter and driver. He also worked on ships. Almost all of the money he earned, however, went to his master.

While in Charleston, Smalls married Hannah Jones, also enslaved. Eventually, Smalls saved enough money to buy the freedom of his wife and daughter. He remained enslaved, however.

Civil War

The Civil War began in 1861. South Carolina was on the side of the Confederacy, or South. Smalls was assigned to work aboard a ship called the *Planter*. The *Planter* carried guns and ammunition for the Confederate army.

On May 13, 1862, Smalls, his family, and several other African Americans were aboard the *Planter* in Charleston Harbor. Smalls and the other men boldly took control of the ship. They steered it safely past Confederate checkpoints. Finally, Smalls surrendered the *Planter* and its cargo to a Union ship. For their courageous actions, Smalls and the other enslaved people onboard won their freedom. The U.S. government also awarded them prize money.

Smalls gained a place in the Union navy. In April 1863, during an attack on Fort Sumter, he was pilot of the *Keokuk*, an ironclad (a ship covered by iron armor). Confederate fire caused the *Keokuk* to sink, but Smalls acted bravely during the battle. He was rewarded with command of the *Planter*, now a Union ship, later that year. He was the first African American captain of a U.S. military ship.

Later Career

After the war, Smalls returned to Beaufort. He became active in politics and promoted education for all. From 1868 to 1874 he served in the South Carolina House of Representatives and Senate. In 1874 Smalls was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives, where he served five terms. He left Congress in 1887.

Smalls spent his last years as a customs collector in his hometown. He owned and lived in the house in which he and his mother had been enslaved. Smalls died on February 23, 1915, in Beaufort. In 2004 the U.S. Army named a ship after him.

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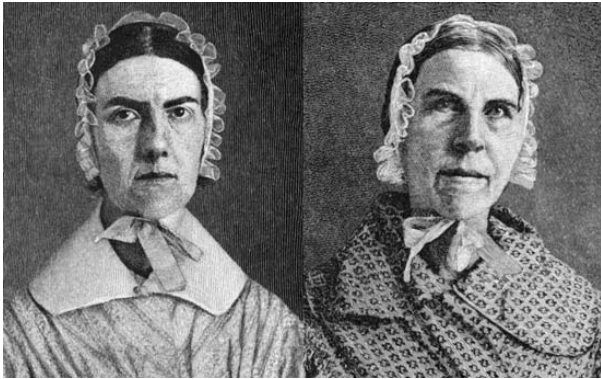
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ARTICLE

Sarah and Angelina Grimké

The sisters Sarah and Angelina Grimké were born to slaveholders in the southern United States. But they became leaders of the abolitionist movement, which worked to end slavery. They also supported women's rights.



Angelina Grimké (left) and Sarah Grimké

Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

The Grimké sisters were born in Charleston, South Carolina. Sarah was born on November 26, 1792. Angelina was born on February 20, 1805. As children they came to hate slavery. In the 1820s both sisters moved to the North.

Both Sarah and Angelina wrote powerful letters and articles. They asked Southern women and Southern churches to turn against slavery. This made them unpopular in the South. In the North, though, they spoke to large audiences. Some people said that it was not proper for women to speak in public. The Grimkés then began to speak out for women's rights.

Angelina married Theodore Dwight Weld, a fellow abolitionist, in 1838. Together the Grimkés and Weld wrote an important book called *Slavery As It Is*.

The Grimké sisters lived to see the end of slavery in the 1860s. Sarah died on December 23, 1873, in Hyde Park, Massachusetts. Angelina died in Hyde Park on October 26, 1879.

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ARTICLE

slavery

The practice of people owning other people is called slavery. Enslaved people have to work for the owners, doing whatever the owners ask them to do. In the past many societies had slavery. Now almost all societies consider slavery to be wrong. They consider personal freedom to be a basic human right.



A monument honors enslaved Africans who died in 1830. Their ship sank off the coast of Martinique,...

© Fabien R.C./Fotolia

The Lives of Slaves

People became enslaved in many ways. Some became slaves after being captured in wars or raids. Others became slaves because they had committed crimes or could not pay their debts. Some people were sold into slavery by their relatives. Others were children of slaves.

Different societies had different rules for slavery. Many slaves of the Muslims, for example, had to be freed after six years. Slaves in the United States, however, stayed enslaved forever. They could not own any property. Their marriages were not legal, and their families could be broken up at any time.

Slaves got no pay, had no choice of jobs, and were not allowed to quit. Other kinds of workers had limits on their freedom but were still freer than slaves. Serfs were farm workers who were legally tied to the land on which they worked. They received no pay and were not free to move away, but they could not be bought or sold like slaves. Indentured servants were people who agreed to work for a master for a certain period of time. People became indentured servants to pay their debts.

Slaves did a variety of jobs. Most slaves worked on farms. Many did cooking, cleaning, child care, and other household services for the families that owned them. Others worked to make money for their owners. Some slaves worked in mines.

Early Slavery

Slavery existed throughout the ancient world. It was practiced in China before 1200 bc. There were laws about slaves in the Middle East from about 1750 bc and in India from about 100 bc.

In Athens, a city of ancient Greece, about one third of the people were slaves. In ancient Rome slaves worked on farms, rowed warships, did construction work, or copied out books. In the later days of the Roman Empire slaves on farms eventually became serfs.

In the early Middle Ages, after about ad 500, Europeans took many Slavs (a people of eastern Europe) as slaves. The word *slave* comes from Slav. Serfs slowly replaced slaves in all of Europe. There were serfs in parts of Europe into the 1800s.

Enslaved Africans

Slave Trade

Slavery also existed in Africa in ancient times. But the African slave trade across the Atlantic Ocean began in the early 1500s. European ship captains bought slaves from African traders. The African traders captured people from many parts of Africa and forced them into slavery. Many slaves were taken from what are now the countries of Togo, Benin, Nigeria, and Angola. Ships then carried the enslaved people to Brazil or a Caribbean island. Conditions on slave ships were terrible, and many people died. The trip across the Atlantic Ocean was known as the Middle Passage.

Those who survived were sold to owners in many parts of the Americas. Owners put Africans to work in mines or on large farms that grew tobacco or sugar. In many places the farm and mine owners had first used Native American workers. European diseases had nearly wiped out these Native Americans, though. Therefore the owners wanted African slaves to replace the Native Americans.

Conditions



Learn about the arrival of the first enslaved people in North America in this short video.

Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc.

In North America the first enslaved people from Africa arrived in the English colony of Virginia in 1619. All the British colonies permitted slavery, but the large farms that used the most slaves were in the South. At first tobacco was the most important crop. Then in 1793 Eli Whitney invented a machine called the cotton gin. His invention made cotton easier to process. This led to a huge demand for African slaves to work on large cotton farms called plantations.

Some enslaved Africans worked in cities in people's homes or as tradespeople, such as bakers or blacksmiths. Most, however, lived on plantations. They were divided into those who worked in the house and those who worked out in the fields. The house servants took care of the house and the family. They cleaned, cooked, did laundry, and sewed for the family and for the other slaves. The slaves who worked in the fields planted and harvested crops, built and repaired structures, and managed livestock.

For enslaved Africans on plantations the work was always hard. They were punished with beatings or other forms of torture for many different reasons. They did not have enough to eat, decent places to live, or good clothes to wear. They were not allowed to learn to read or write. They could also be sold at any time and separated from their family. Some tried to rebel against their owners, but they would be punished or killed for doing so.

Ending Slavery

During the 1700s some people in Great Britain came to think that slavery was wrong. They began the abolitionist movement, an effort to end slavery. Both Britain and the United States banned the slave trade in the early 1800s. Starting with Vermont in 1777, the northern parts of the United States banned slavery entirely.



Small houses on the grounds of a Southern plantation were once the homes of enslaved people.

© Daniel Meunier/Fotolia

However, slavery continued throughout the new country of the United States. The large Southern plantations in particular continued to rely on slave labor. Some slaves sought freedom through a secret organization called the Underground Railroad, but the system of slavery survived. In some states more than half the people were slaves.

The United States was still growing in the early 1800s. The big issue that divided the United States was whether slavery would be allowed in the new territories and states. The Missouri Compromise of 1820 settled the problem for a time. It allowed slavery in some new territories but not others. However, the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854 allowed the people in new territories to choose whether to have slavery. In the Dred Scott case of 1857 the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that the government did not have the power to ban slavery in the territories. In 1861 the American Civil War began, partly over the issue of slavery.

During the war President Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation. The document said that all enslaved people in the Southern states were free as of January 1, 1863. The Southern states did not actually free the slaves, however. That did not happen until northern troops captured each state. The last state to be captured was Texas. When that happened, the last slaves were freed. Today the date of that event is celebrated as Juneteenth. At the end of the war the Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution finally put an official end to slavery throughout the United States.

In Central and South America, as soon as colonies gained independence they often banned slavery. The last country in the Western Hemisphere to end slavery was Brazil, in 1888.

By the late 1800s the British abolished slavery in India and in the parts of Africa that they controlled. Slavery ended in China in 1910.

Some parts of Africa and the Islamic world practiced slavery well into the 1900s. Although all countries had officially outlawed slavery by the end of the 1900s, the practice continued in some parts of Africa and Asia.

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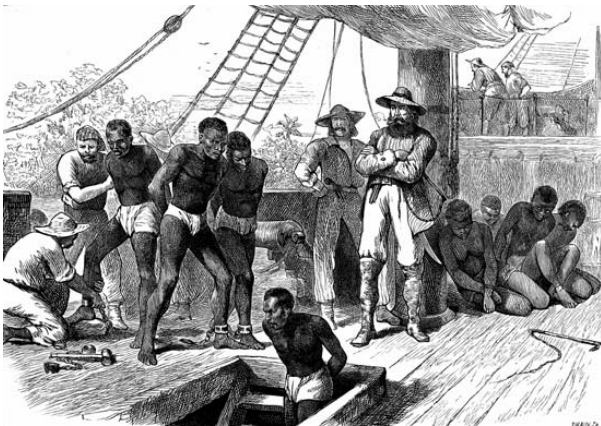
ARTICLE

triangular trade

The triangular trade was the three-legged route that made up the Atlantic slave trade. The trade traffic flowed to and from three general areas on either side of the Atlantic Ocean. These areas form a rough triangle when viewed on a map. They were in Europe, Africa, and the Americas.

The Atlantic slave trade began in the early 1500s. It was made illegal in England in 1807 and in the United States in 1808. However, the slave trade continued illegally until the late 1800s, after nearly 400 years.

First Stage

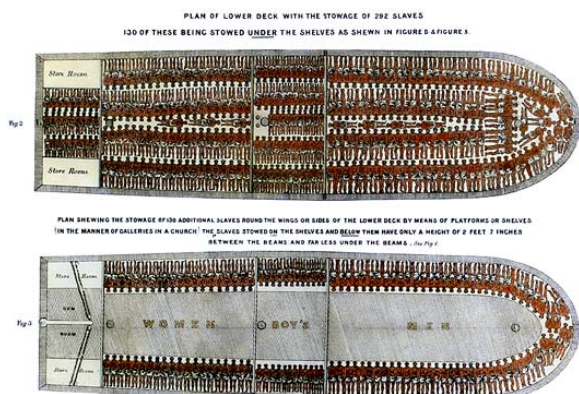


For many years Africans were captured from the interior of the continent and sold to European slave...

Photos.com/Getty Images

The first stage of the triangular trade started in Europe. A typical trade route began in Liverpool, England. A ship would leave Liverpool with a cargo of manufactured goods such as textiles, metals, firearms, linen, and alcoholic beverages. The ship would sail to the west coast of Africa. People from the interior of Africa were often captured and taken to the coast bordering the Gulf of Guinea. This area was called the Slave Coast. There the goods from the European ship would be traded for Africans who were enslaved.

Second Stage



A drawing from about 1790 shows how enslaved Africans had no room to move on a slave ship.

© Everett Historical/Shutterstock.com

The next stage of the triangular trade was the voyage from Africa to either Brazil or a Caribbean island. This trip was known as the Middle Passage. The ships were overcrowded, with enslaved men, women, and children chained to each other or to platforms. They were unable to stand or turn over, and many enslaved people died in this position. Captives faced constant danger, including disease, starvation, and abuse. It has been estimated that between 10 and 20 percent of the slaves on the ships died during the Middle Passage. After the journey across the Atlantic Ocean, the enslaved Africans were sold at auction and taken to work in fields and homes throughout the New World.

Third Stage

The captain of the ship would take the money made from the sale of the enslaved people and buy goods such as sugar, tobacco, molasses, or other produce. He would fill the ship with the goods and sail back to Europe. There the cycle would begin again. The third side of the triangle also included trade between the North American colonies and Europe. The colonies provided the raw materials that the Europeans needed to make the goods that they would then ship to Africa. Also, in return for sugar, tobacco, molasses, and other items from North America, Europe would send manufactured goods and luxury items to the colonies.

Other North American Trade

The 13 colonies would also export items such as rum, gunpowder, iron, tools, and cloth to Africa. The colonies sent fish, meat, flour, and lumber to the Caribbean islands in exchange for sugar and molasses.

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ARTICLE

Underground Railroad

The Underground Railroad was not an actual railway. Instead, it was a secret organization that existed in the United States before the Civil War. The people of the Underground Railroad helped escaped enslaved people from the South to reach places of safety in the North or in Canada.



A painting shows how the Underground Railroad in the United States moved enslaved Africans to...

North Wind Picture Archives



Learn about the abolitionist movement and the Underground Railroad.

Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc.

The Underground Railroad used railway terms as code words. The routes to freedom were called “lines.” The hiding places on the lines were called “stations.” The people who moved or hid the enslaved people were called “conductors.” The enslaved people themselves were sometimes called “freight.”



Harriet Tubman (far left) stands with a group of enslaved people she helped escape.

MPI/Hulton Archive/Getty Images

The Underground Railroad had to be secret because it was against the law. Laws called the Fugitive Slave Acts protected slaveholders' rights even in states that did not allow slavery. The people who ran the Underground Railroad were abolitionists—they wanted to abolish, or end, slavery in all states.



An escaped enslaved woman poses with two soldiers who helped her reach an Underground Railroad...

Gladstone Collection/Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. (reproduction no. LC-DIG-ppmsca-10940)

Many Underground Railroad conductors were followers of the Quaker religion. The Quaker leader Thomas Garrett is believed to have helped about 2,700 enslaved people escape. Other conductors were Northern Blacks. Harriet Tubman, a former enslaved woman, led hundreds of enslaved people to freedom.

The heaviest activities of the Underground Railroad were in Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana, New York, and the New England states. Most routes ended in Canada. Estimates of the number of enslaved people who "rode" the Underground Railroad range from 40,000 to 100,000. The Railroad's activities ended with the beginning of the Civil War in 1861.

Citation (MLA style):

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PRIMARY SOURCE

The Narrative of Sojourner Truth



[Sojourner Truth](#)

Sojourner Truth

Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. (LC-DIG-ppmsca-08978)

*Sojourner Truth was a slave in the United States until 1827, when she was about 30 years old. After she was freed, she became a popular speaker. She traveled all over the northern states and spoke against slavery and for women's rights. Since she could not read or write, Truth dictated her life story to a friend. It was published in 1850 as *The Narrative of Sojourner Truth*. The following are parts of that story.*

Her Birth and Parentage

The subject of this biography, Sojourner Truth, as she now calls herself—but whose name, originally, was Isabella—was born, as near as she can now calculate, between the years 1797 and 1800. She was the daughter of James and Betsey, slaves of one Colonel Ardinburgh, Hurley, Ulster County, New York.

Colonel Ardinburgh belonged to that class of people called Low Dutch.

Of her first master, she can give no account, as she must have been a mere infant when he died; and she, with her parents and some ten or twelve other fellow human chattels, became the legal property of his son, Charles Ardinburgh. She distinctly remembers hearing her father and mother say, that their lot was a fortunate one, as Master Charles was the best of the family,—being, comparatively speaking, a kind master to his slaves.

James and Betsey having, by their faithfulness, docility, and respectful behavior, won his particular regard, received from him particular favors—among which was a lot of land, lying back on the slope of a mountain, where, by improving the pleasant evenings and Sundays, they managed to raise a little tobacco, corn, or flax; which they exchanged for extras, in the articles of food or clothing for themselves and children. She has no remembrance that Saturday afternoon was ever added to their own time, as it is by some masters in the Southern States.

.....

Her Brothers and Sisters

Isabella's father was very tall and straight, when young, which gave him the name of 'Bomefree'—low Dutch for tree—at least, this is Sojourner's pronunciation of it—and by this name he usually went. The most familiar appellation of her mother was 'Mau-mau Bett.' She was the mother of some ten or twelve children; though Sojourner is far from knowing the exact number of her brothers and sisters; she being the youngest, save one, and all older than herself having been sold before her remembrance. She was privileged to behold six of them while she remained a slave.

Of the two that immediately preceded her in age, a boy of five years, and a girl of three, who were sold when she was an infant, she heard much; and she wishes that all who would fain believe that slave parents have not natural affection for their offspring could have listened as she did, while Bomefree and Mau-mau Bett,—their dark cellar lighted by a blazing pine-knot,—would sit for hours, recalling and recounting every endearing, as well as harrowing circumstance that taxed memory could supply, from the histories of those dear departed ones, of whom they had been robbed, and for whom their hearts still bled. Among the rest, they would relate how the little boy, on the last morning he was with them, arose with the birds, kindled a fire, calling for his Mau-mau to 'come, for all was now ready for her'—little dreaming of the dreadful separation which was so near at hand, but of which his parents had an uncertain, but all the more cruel foreboding. There was snow on the ground, at the time of which we are speaking; and a large old-fashioned sleigh was seen to drive up to the door of the late Col. Ardinburgh. This event was noticed with childish pleasure by the unsuspecting boy; but when he was taken and put into the sleigh, and saw his little sister actually shut and locked into the sleigh box, his eyes were at once opened to their intentions; and, like a frightened deer he sprang from the sleigh, and running into the house, concealed himself under a bed. But this availed him little. He was re-conveyed to the sleigh, and separated for ever from those whom God had constituted his natural guardians and protectors, and who should have found him, in return, a stay and a staff to them in their declining years. But I make no comments on facts like these, knowing that the heart of every slave parent will make its own comments, involuntarily and correctly, as soon as each heart shall make the case its own. Those who are not parents will draw their conclusions from the promptings of humanity and philanthropy:—these, enlightened by reason and revelation, are also unerring.

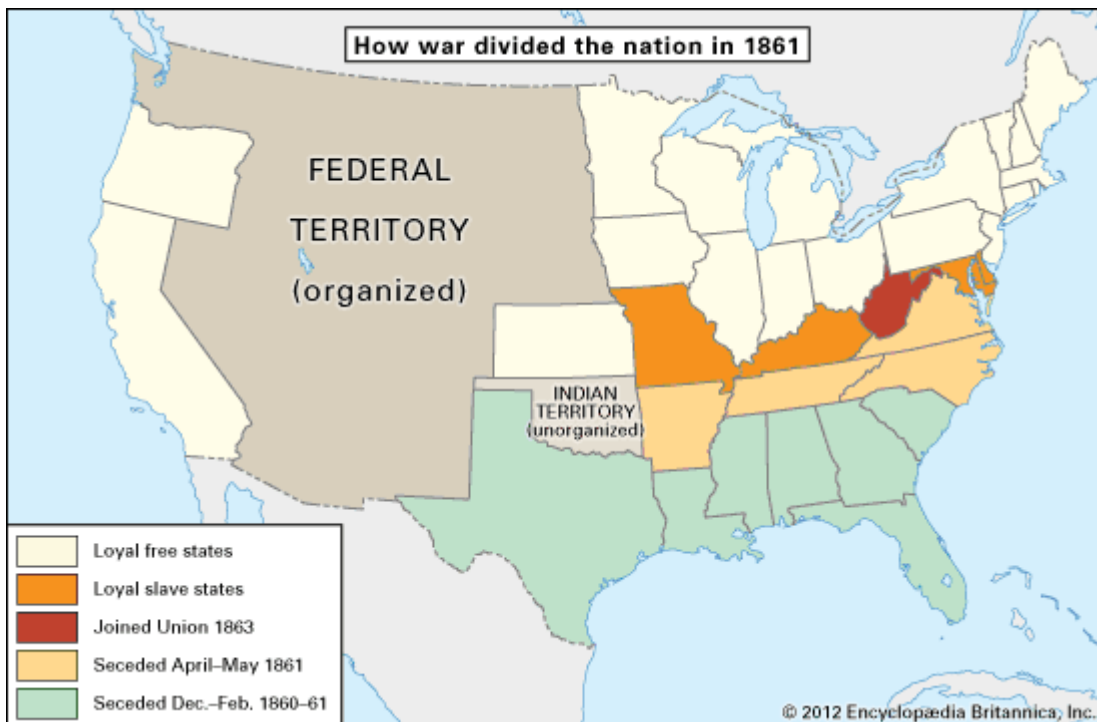
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 IMAGE

Confederate States of America

Britannica Note:

Although all states allowed slavery at some time, by 1861 only the Southern states wanted to maintain the practice. The Southern states relied on the labor of the enslaved people to run their large farms called plantations. They seceded from, or left, the rest of the country when they thought they might be forced to give up slavery. That led to the American Civil War.



A map shows how the issue of slavery divided the United States.

Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc.

Citation (MLA style):

Confederate States of America. Image. *Britannica LaunchPacks: Slavery in America*, Encyclopædia Britannica, 8 Aug. 2020. packs.eb.com. Accessed 14 Oct. 2020.

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IMAGE

Fugitive Slave Acts

Britannica Note:

When enslaved people ran away to seek freedom they were called fugitives.

\$150 REWARD



RANAWAY from the subscriber, on the night of the 2d instant, a negro man, who calls himself *Henry May*, about 22 years old, 5 feet 6 or 8 inches high, ordinary color, rather chunky built, bushy head, and has it divided mostly on one side, and keeps it very nicely combed; has been raised in the house, and is a first rate dining-room servant, and was in a tavern in Louisville for 18 months. I expect he is now in Louisville trying to make his escape to a free state, (in all probability to Cincinnati, Ohio.) Perhaps he may try to get employment on a steamboat. He is a good cook, and is handy in any capacity as a house servant. Had on when he left, a dark cassinett coatee, and dark striped cassinett pantaloons, new--he had other clothing. I will give \$50 reward if taken in Louisville; 100 dollars if taken one hundred miles from Louisville in this State, and 150 dollars if taken out of this State, and delivered to me, or secured in any jail so that I can get him again.

WILLIAM BURKE.
Bardstown, Ky., September 3d, 1838.

An advertisement from 1838 offers a reward for a freedom seeker.

Printed Ephemera Collection/Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. (call no. Portfolio 22, Folder 12b)

Citation (MLA style):

Fugitive Slave Acts. Image. Britannica LaunchPacks: Slavery in America, Encyclopædia Britannica, 8 Aug. 2020. packs.eb.com. Accessed 14 Oct. 2020.

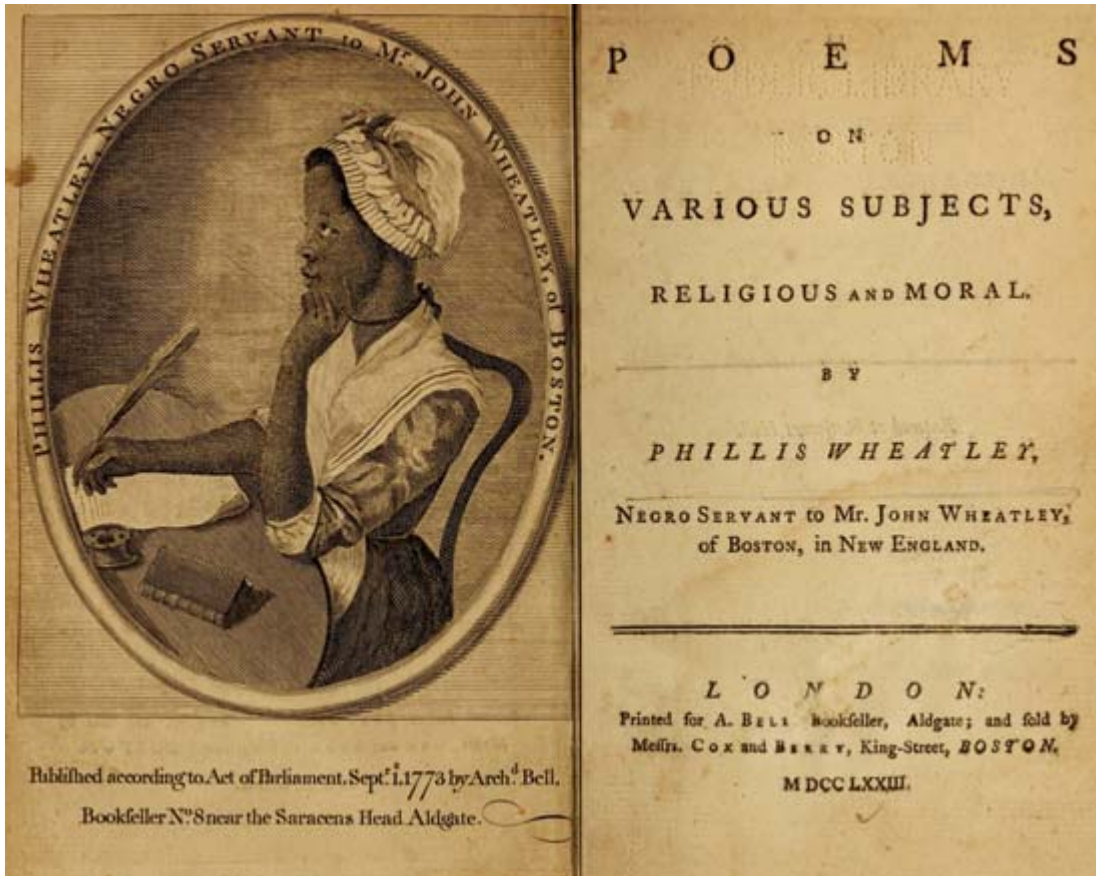
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 IMAGE

Phillis Wheatley

Britannica Note:

Phillis Wheatley was born in Africa, where she was kidnapped and enslaved as a young girl. Her owners taught her to read and write and encouraged her as she began writing poetry. She later became the first African American and the first enslaved person to publish a book of poems.



Phillis Wheatley's book of poetry was published in 1773.

Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral by Phillis Wheatley, London, 1773

Citation (MLA style):

Phillis Wheatley. Image. *Britannica LaunchPacks: Slavery in America*, Encyclopædia Britannica, 8 Aug. 2020. packs.eb.com. Accessed 14 Oct. 2020.

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IMAGE

African American music



A wooden drum (made of wood, leather hide, and metal) was used on the Sea Islands off of South Carolina in the 1800s. Instruments like this allowed Africans to keep alive their traditions from Africa.

Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture, Washington, D.C. (object no. 2014.122.2)

Citation (MLA style):

African American music. Image. *Britannica LaunchPacks: Slavery in America*, Encyclopædia Britannica, 8 Aug. 2020. packs.eb.com. Accessed 14 Oct. 2020.

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slave trade



A painting shows slave traders taking men from Africa to be enslaved.

Courtesy of the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam (RP-P-1969-83)

Citation (MLA style):

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VIDEO

Second Fugitive Slave Act



Video Transcript

Before the Civil War, Congress passed two laws called the Fugitive Slave Acts. The first was passed in 1793. It stated that escaped, or fugitive, slaves had to be returned to their owners. The second Fugitive Slave Act was passed in 1850. It was much harsher than the first one. It did not allow fugitives to testify in court or to have a trial by jury. It also said that anyone who helped fugitives would be punished. This act strengthened the abolitionist movement.

Learn about the second Fugitive Slave Act and its effects in this short video.

Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc.

Citation (MLA style):

Second Fugitive Slave Act. Video. *Britannica LaunchPacks: Slavery in America*, Encyclopædia Britannica, 8 Aug. 2020. packs.eb.com. Accessed 14 Oct. 2020.

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WEBSITE

Whitney Plantation - Slavery in Louisiana

<https://www.whitneyplantation.org/history/slavery-in-louisiana/>

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