

Name _____

Date _____

UNIT 7

STUDENT BACKGROUND SHEET

The Rise of Slavery

As you learned in Unit 5, the American colonies needed laborers to work the land. Indentured servants helped, but the demand was much greater than the supply. European shipmasters trading in Africa discovered a rich new source of labor: black slaves. For centuries it had been common practice in Africa to enslave prisoners of war. These enslaved prisoners often became members of their new families and communities. Some Africans also became slaves in order to pay their debts. Others were sentenced to slavery as the penalty for adultery.

The Slave Trade

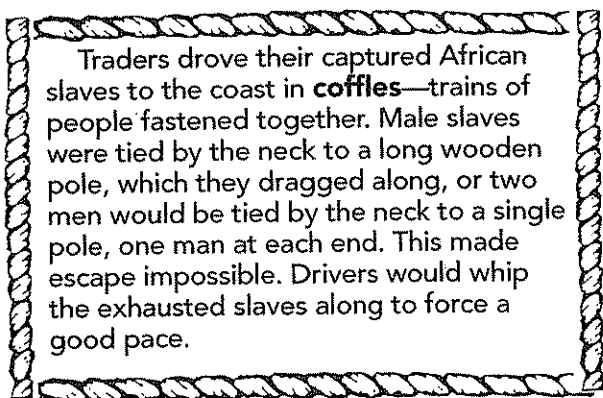
Portuguese traders began buying African slaves in the 1400's. Other European nations soon joined in this profitable commerce. African rulers strictly controlled the trade. Europeans were permitted only to rent land for trading forts at certain sites along the coast. The Africans themselves captured prisoners in the interior areas. The African slavers drove their captives to the coastal forts, where they delivered them to the European slavers in exchange for rum, trade goods, and guns and ammunition. The slave trade badly disrupted life in West Africa, creating constant chaos and violence.

Many captured Africans did not survive their forced relocation. Some died during the initial raid. Others fell during the trek to the coast. Worst of all was the voyage across the Atlantic. Deaths occurred from disease, suffocation, suicide, rebellion, starvation, and brutality. Illegal slavers about to be arrested sometimes practiced mass murder by throwing their captives overboard at sea.

Slavery in the Americas

Some African slaves came to Spanish America in the 1500's. Several were in Virginia with Spaniards in 1526. The first known black Africans in British North America arrived in 1619. A Dutch ship brought these 20 captives to Jamestown, Virginia.

At first, blacks in the British colonies may have been treated as indentured servants. But the demand for labor, especially on southern plantations, increased. Tobacco and rice plantations needed many workers. Sugar plantations in the Caribbean needed many more. Slavery seemed to be the perfect solution (for the slaveholder!). Here's why:



Traders drove their captured African slaves to the coast in **coffles**—trains of people fastened together. Male slaves were tied by the neck to a long wooden pole, which they dragged along, or two men would be tied by the neck to a single pole, one man at each end. This made escape impossible. Drivers would whip the exhausted slaves along to force a good pace.

Indentured Servant	Slave
Bound for set number of years	Bound for life
Children are free—not bound	Children are slaves—bound for life
Escape easy—white skin, blends in	Escape hard—black skin, easily noticed

(continued)



Focus on U.S. History:
The Era of Colonization and Settlement

Name _____

Date _____

UNIT 7

STUDENT BACKGROUND SHEET

European prejudices certainly played a role in the growth of black slavery in the Americas. Europeans thought all “heathens” were inferior. Such people could only benefit from being owned by Christians. Also, Europeans linked blackness with the devil, with dirt, with fearful and threatening darkness. Gradually,

slavery became legally established in the colonies. Virginia declared its African slaves “perpetual servants” in 1662. Maryland enacted a similar law in 1664.

The conditions of slave life varied, by slave owner and by region. Here’s how:

Brazil:	Spanish West Indies:	French West Indies:
Male slaves have many chances to become free. Race mixing common. Social levels open.	Law gives slaves some rights. Male slaves can buy their own freedom and their children’s freedom.	Laws control treatment of slaves, but laws are often ignored.
Dutch West Indies:	British West Indies/British North America:	
Slaves are generally treated harshly.	Few slaves become free. Slaves are chattel—property, objects, not people with rights. Owner’s power over slave is total.	

Black Resistance

Blacks, of course, bitterly objected to being slaves. But they had few ways to resist in the North American colonies. An African suddenly placed in an alien society and an alien culture couldn’t run away. Where would he go? Who would help her? Blacks not on their owner’s plantation would always be spotted because of their skin color. Failure to obey a master’s or overseer’s orders would result in brutal beatings.


Still, some slaves did rebel. Here are some examples:

- About 25 black slaves set a fire in New York City in 1712. Then, as planned, they killed some of the whites who tried to put out the fire.
- About 100 slaves attacked whites and fled toward Florida in South Carolina’s Stono rebellion of 1739. They were defeated in a fierce battle against white militia and Indians.

- Other serious rebellions occurred later in the 1700’s and the 1800’s. (You’ll learn more about them in Book 4 of this series.)

Also, slaves practiced subtler forms of resistance. They performed acts of sabotage—digging up crop seedlings while hoeing weeds, for example, or damaging farm equipment. They pilfered many items, insisting that what belonged to the plantation owner belonged to them as well. They pretended to be too dull-witted to do their tasks correctly. They worked as slowly as possible. They committed many acts of arson.

TO BE SOLD by William Ycomans, (in Charles Town Merchant,) a parcel of good Plantation Slaves. Encouragement will be given by selling Rice in Payment, or any other Commodities, good Treading saddles and Furniture, choice Barbados and BoBou Rum, also Cordial Waters and Limejuice, as well as a parcel of extraordinary Indian trading Goods, and many of other sorts suitable for the Season.



Ad in the *Charlestown Gazette*, mid 1600’s

(continued)



Focus on U.S. History:
The Era of Colonization and Settlement

Name _____

Date _____

UNIT 7

STUDENT BACKGROUND SHEET

African-American Culture

Through all this, enslaved blacks added elements of their African culture to the new slave culture they were forced to evolve. Africans imported into the Americas came from different backgrounds and spoke many different languages. The condition of being black in white America was what created a sense among slaves of being "African." They also shared many broad cultural traditions, which gave them a further feeling of being bonded as Africans.

Religion, with traditional African spirits and gods mixing with the Christianity of the new culture, was part of everyday life. Their prayerful response to a constant spiritual presence was lively—singing, dancing, shouting. African culture also placed high value on the

family and the community. Because of this, black slaves preferred to work together, in groups rather than individually. They made up songs about work and religious beliefs (and rebellious thoughts) that were sung in a call-and-response group style. Ripped from their original families, slaves formed new ones. Many owners tried to avoid breaking up these strong families because the affected slaves would quickly become poor workers in revenge.

African slaves also brought their folk medicines and charms with them to the Americas. These included love potions—and poison, another often-used weapon against white owners. African folk art was kept alive in wood carvings, quilts, baskets, mats, and the like. By holding on to some African traditions, black slaves in America kept part of their African identity.

African-American slaves often sang in a **call-and-response** style. A leader sings a line. The other group members sing a line of response. Then the leader sings the next line, and the group sings its response, and so on. Here's an example from the spiritual "O, Wasn't That a Wide River."

Leader: O, the river of Jordan is so wide,

Response: One more river to cross,

Leader: I don't know how to get on the other side,

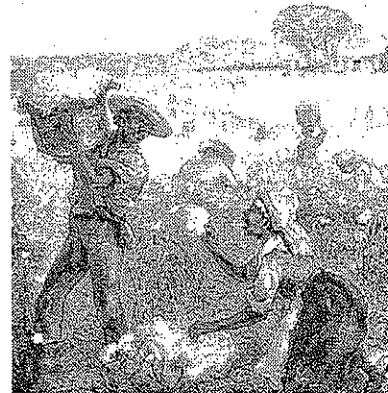
Response: One more river to cross.

Leader: Satan is just a snake in the grass,

Response: One more river to cross,

Leader: If you ain't mighty careful he will hold you fast,

Response: One more river to cross.



Name _____

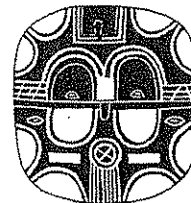
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UNIT 7
WORKSHEET 1

Mapping the Slave Trade

List 1	List 2
African Origins of North American Slaves (listed in order, from source of largest number of slaves down to source of smallest number)	Slaves Imported into the Americas, 1451-1870 (estimated)*
Angola	Region or Country Number
Bight of Biafra	Brazil 4,190,000
Gold Coast	British Caribbean 2,443,000
Senegambia	Spanish America 1,687,000
Windward Coast	French Caribbean 1,655,000
Sierra Leone	British North America and United States 523,000
Bight of Benin	Dutch Caribbean 500,000
Mozambique-Madagascar	Danish Caribbean 50,000

Directions



- On the map of the Atlantic region, locate and label the places in Africa that North American slaves came from. (Use the List 1 information. One of the listed places is off the map. Indicate with an arrow where it would be found.)
- Then, locate the places in North America where those slaves were taken. Use color-coding to show these different regions. (Use the List 2 information.)
- Draw lines from West Africa to each slave-importing region named in List 2. On each line, write the total number of slaves imported to that region.
 - Which region or country imported the most slaves? _____
 - How many slaves were imported to British North America and the United States? _____
 - How many slaves were imported to other parts of the Americas? _____
- Why isn't Brazil included in "Spanish America" in List 2? _____

Extra Challenge: On a piece of graph paper, construct a bar or line graph of the information in List 2.

*Figures from James A. Rawley, *The Transatlantic Slave Trade: A History* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1981).



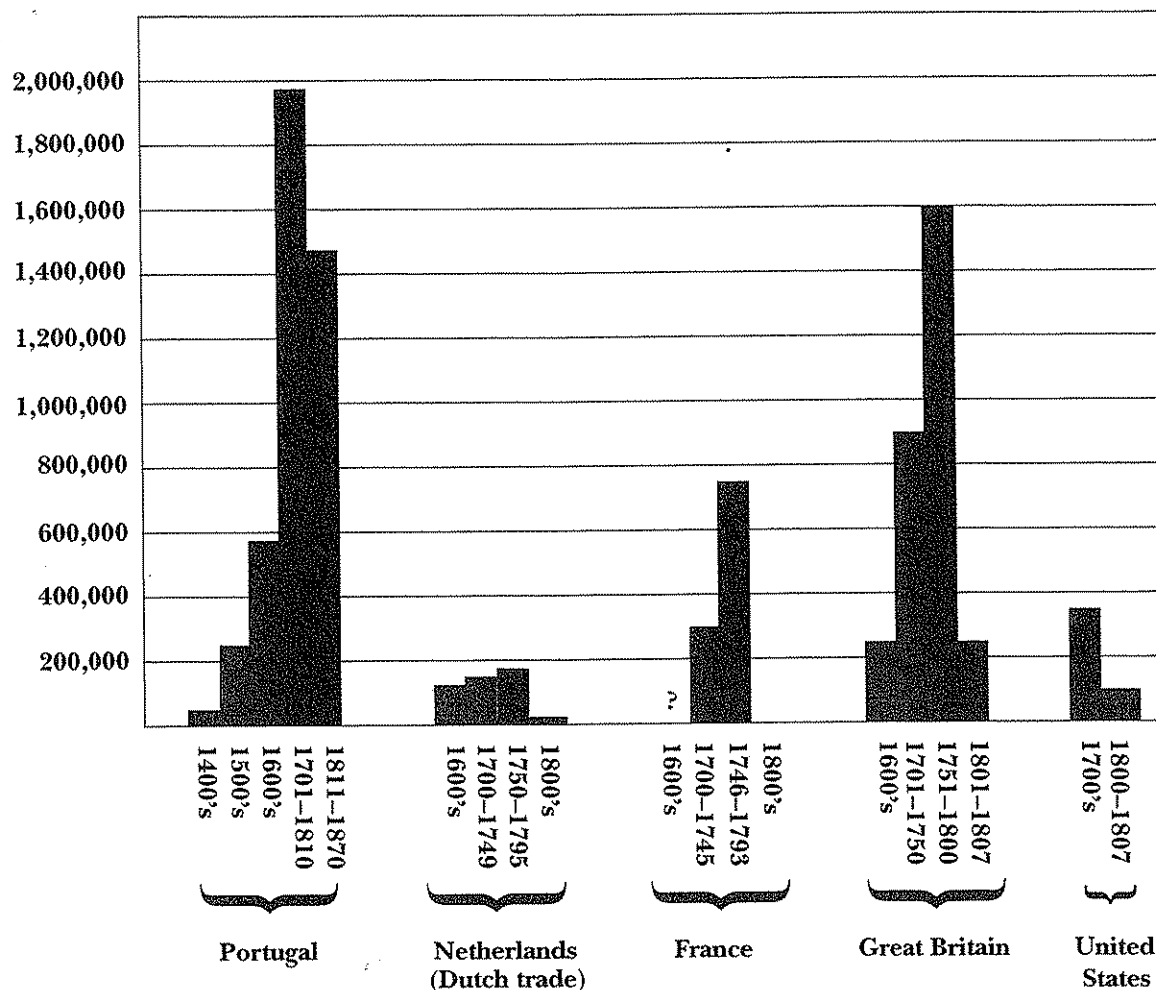
Name _____

Date _____

UNIT 7
WORKSHEET 2

Graphing the Slave Trade

Numbers of Slaves Exported from Africa, by Exporting Country*



Note: Some figures are unknown, so are not shown here. Total numbers of African slaves imported into the Americas probably are around 10 to 11 million.

*Figures from James A. Rawley, *The Transatlantic Slave Trade: A History* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1981).



Name _____

Date _____

UNIT 7
WORKSHEET 3

Reading the Slave Trade Graph

Directions: Use the slave trade graph on page 85 that shows numbers of African slaves imported into the Americas to answer these questions.



Slave auction

1. Which country's ships carried the most slaves to the Americas during the years of the slave trade?

2. Which country's ships carried the second highest number of slaves to the Americas during the years of the slave trade? _____
3. Which two countries' ships carried the fewest slaves to the Americas during the years of the slave trade? _____
4. Approximately how many slaves did ships from the colonies bring to the Americas during the 1700's?
5. During what years did Great Britain's ships bring more than a million slaves to the Americas?
6. According to the bar graph, Portugal's ships imported more than a million slaves to the Americas during two periods. Identify these periods, and give the approximate number of slaves imported during each period.
Time span (years): _____ Number of slaves imported: _____
Time span (years): _____ Number of slaves imported: _____
7. In all, about how many slaves were imported to the Americas from Africa during the 1700's?

8. Which country's ships imported the vast majority of slaves during the 1800's?

Why did the other countries' ships stop importing African slaves during the 1800's?



Name _____

Date _____

UNIT 7

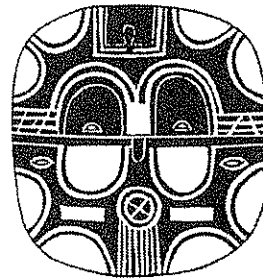
WORKSHEET 4

The Middle Passage

The journey of the slave ships from Africa to the Americas was called the Middle Passage. For African slaves it was a journey of despair and danger. Torn from their homes, chained slaves endured overcrowding, brutality, filth and stench, and life-threatening disease. Their response was often depression, revolt, or suicide. Read these eyewitness accounts.

Olaudah Euqiana (Gustavus Vassa), an Ibo captured as a child:

When I looked round the ship . . . and saw a large furnace or copper boiling, and a multitude of black people of every description chained together, every one of their countenances expressing dejection and sorrow, I no longer doubted of my fate; and, quite overpowered with horror and anguish, I fell motionless on the deck and fainted.



I was soon put down under the decks, and there I received such a salutation in my nostrils as I had never experienced in my life: so that with the loathsomeness of the stench and crying together, I became so sick and low that I was not able to eat, nor had I the least desire to taste anything.

I now wished for the last friend, death, to relieve me; but soon, to my grief, two of the white men offered me eatables; and, on my refusing to eat, one of them held me fast by the hands, and laid me across, I think, the windlass, and tied my feet, while the other flogged me severely.

But still I feared I should be put to death, the white people looked and acted, as I thought, in so savage a manner; for I had never seen among any people such instances of brutal cruelty; and this not only shown towards us blacks, but also to some of the whites themselves.

The closeness of the place, and the heat of the climate, added to the number in the ship, which was so crowded that each had scarcely room to turn himself, almost suffocated us. This produced copious perspirations, so that the air soon became unfit for respiration, from a variety of loathsome smells, and brought on a sickness among the slaves, of which many died. . . .

Many a time we were near suffocation from the want of fresh air, which we were often without for whole days together. This, and the stench of the necessary tubs, carried off many.

(continued)



*Focus on U.S. History:
The Era of Colonization and Settlement*

The Middle Passage *(continued)*



Thomas Phillip, captain of the ship *Hannibal*, 1693 voyage

The Negroes are so loth to leave their own country, that they have often leaped out of the canoes, boat and ship, into the sea, and kept under water till they were drowned, to avoid being taken up and saved by our boats, which pursued them. . . . We had about 12 Negroes did willfully drown themselves, and others starved themselves to death; for tis their belief that when they die they return home to their own country and friends again.

When our slaves are aboard we shackle the men two and two, while we lie in port, and in sight of their own country, for tis then they attempt to make their escape and mutiny. . . . When we come to sea we let them all out of irons, they never then attempting to rebel, considering that should they kill or master us, they could not tell how to manage the ship.

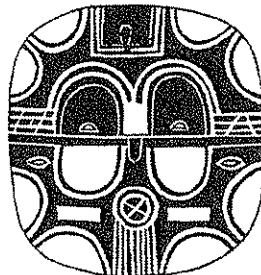
No gold-finders can endure so much noisome slavery as they do who carry Negroes; . . . we endure twice the misery; and yet by their [the slaves'] mortality [dying] our voyages are ruined, and we pine and fret ourselves to death, to think that we should undergo so much misery, and take so much pains to so little purpose [profit].



Surgeon's mate, the *Ruby*, 1790 testimony to Parliament

Not infrequently, after slaves were brought on board, they would refuse to eat and the captain would order them flogged unmercifully until they obeyed, in fact, he usually plied the cat on the naked backs of the blacks and seemed to find a pleasant sensation in the sight of blood and the sound of their moans.

If the sea was rough the slaves were unable to dance and whenever it rained hard they were kept below, and the gratings were covered with tarpaulins which made it very hot below and nearly suffocated the slaves. . . . Dysentery usually followed a spell of bad weather and the mucus and filth among the slaves below made the slave deck a horrible place.



(continued)



Name _____

Date _____

UNIT 7

WORKSHEET 4

The Middle Passage *(continued)*



A ship's doctor's account, published in 1788

The men, on being brought aboard ship, are immediately fastened together, two and two, by handcuffs on their wrists and by irons rivetted on their legs. They are then sent down between the decks. . . . They are frequently stowed so close as to admit of no other position than lying on their sides. Nor will the height between decks . . . allow them to stand. . . . The tubs [for "bathroom" purposes] are much too small for the purpose intended and usually are emptied but once every day. . . . As the necessities of nature are not to be resisted, [slaves who can't reach the tubs] ease themselves as they lie.

Exercise being considered necessary for the preservation of their health they are sometimes obliged to dance when the weather will permit their coming on deck. If they go about it reluctantly or do not move with agility, they are flogged; a person standing by them all the time with a cat-o'-nine-tails in his hand for that purpose.

The fresh air being excluded, the Negroes' rooms very soon grow intolerably hot. The confined air, rendered noxious by the effluvia exhaled from their bodies and by being repeatedly breathed, soon produces fevers and fluxes which generally carry off great numbers of them. . . . The floor of their rooms was so covered with the blood and mucus which had proceeded from them in consequence of the flux, that it resembled a slaughter-house. It is not in the power of the human imagination to picture a situation more dreadful or disgusting.



Slave trader, voyage of 1808

The day before we were to start, the branding was done and a good deal of flogging had to be done also to keep the frightened Negroes quiet. Shakoe's lash and the heavy whips of his assistant Negroes were not idle for a moment. The slaves were fetched up singly, made to lie down on their faces where they are held by a big Negro while another kept the branding irons hot in a fire close by and a third applied them between the shoulders of the shrieking wretches.



Name _____

Date _____

UNIT 7
WORKSHEET 6

African-American Culture

Slave owners didn't want their African slaves to keep their native cultures. A black slave stripped of his or her identity as an African had only one identity left: slave. The captives outwardly adopted the new culture. But they added African elements to it.

Directions: From what you have read, identify elements of African culture in the following.

1. **Religion:** Africans taught about Christianity were told to be meek, obedient, and submissive—it was God's will for them to be slaves.

Africans' response: _____

2. **Music:** Slaves were not encouraged to express themselves with African music.

Africans' response: _____

3. **Family structure:** Owners could ignore family ties, sell a husband, a wife, or children.

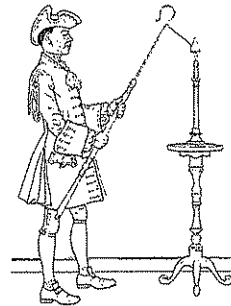
Africans' response: _____

4. **Literacy (reading and writing):** It was against the law to teach a slave how to read and write.

Africans' response: _____

5. **Language:** Slaves were forbidden to speak their native African tongues.

Africans' response: _____



Extra Challenge: Africans introduced some important things to American agriculture, especially in the Carolinas. Identify West African contributions in these areas:

(a) crops: _____

(b) animal raising: _____

(c) fishing: _____



Name _____

Date _____

UNIT 7
WORKSHEET 7

Time Line: Slavery

Directions: With classmates, construct a time line of these important events in the history of slavery in North America or add them to your ongoing time line. (Hint: Events are listed in the order in which they occurred.)

A Dutch ship brings 20 blacks to Jamestown, Virginia

Dutch West Indies Company founded

Dutch take over Portuguese slave trade

Virginia law: children born of a slave woman are slaves; African slaves are "perpetual servants"

Plot to rebel discovered among black slaves and white indentured servants in Virginia

Virginia law: slaves who are baptized as Christians remain slaves

Slave revolt in Jamaica

Virginia law: a master who kills a slave he is punishing for resistance of any kind faces no legal penalty

Virginia slave plot exposed; leaders executed

New York City slave revolt; about 25 blacks, some whites killed

Almost yearly, slave revolts in Jamaica

Guianas revolt (approximately 18 revolts from this date to end of slavery)

Stono, South Carolina, rebellion; about 100 slaves defeated in hard battle with militia, Indians

New York plot foiled; over 100 accused

Slave plot to capture Annapolis, Maryland

South Carolina law: death penalty to slaves who try to poison whites

Tacky's rebellion in Jamaica, about 1,000 slaves

