

The impact of Transatlantic slave trade on slaves

Name:

What it was like to be a plantation slave in the American South

The life of a slave in the American South was extremely tough as they experienced harsh living conditions. They were sold at auctions as chattel slaves and branded with estate marks to show who they belonged to. The same marks were used on cattle and other livestock.

Many died from dysentery and pneumonia due to poor living conditions. Homes were badly built and did not offer much protection from the cold winters.

Slaves worked long hours – normally up to 18 hours a day. During harvesting, it was not uncommon for slaves to work two consecutive days without any sleep. There were no weekends or days allowed off, and only children under the age of six, the physically disabled and the elderly were exempt from working.

Roles were assigned according to the gender, age, strength, skill, birthplace and colour of the individual slaves. Children were given work based on their physical abilities, often including cleaning, carrying water, collecting stones and livestock feed. Female slaves had to perform many duties beyond their field work such as child minding, house cleaning and sewing.

Slave owners used force to control their slaves. Whippings or lashings were commonplace for any minor indiscretion, but this did not prevent the slaves from trying to resist the slave owners' control. However,

"There were no beds given to the slaves, unless one coarse blanket be considered such, and none but the men and women had these...They find less difficulty from the want of beds, than from the want of time to sleep; for when their day's work in the field is done, the most of them having their washing, mending, and cooking to do, and having few or none of the ordinary facilities for doing either of these, much of their sleeping hours are consumed in preparing for the field the coming day; and when this is done, old and young, male and female, married and single, drop down side by side, on one common bed, the cold, damp floor, each covering himself or herself with their miserable blankets; and here they sleep till they are summoned to the field by the driver's horn."

Frederick Douglass, from The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, 1845



Figure 1 : taken from <http://www.dualmoments.com/Svenson%20Web/ImusPlantation/images/experience.jpg>

any defiant uprising resulted in severe punishment and the use of leg irons and neck collars.

ANSWER THE QUESTIONS BELOW:

1.1 What were the main causes of death of the slaves? (2)

1.2 Explain how these deaths could have been prevented? (3)

2. Explain how age, gender and work roles could change the life of a slave. (4)

3. Were slaves respected and treated fairly? Explain your answer. (2)

4. Why do you think slave owners were afraid of the slaves rising up against them? (2)

5. What punishments would slaves receive? (2)

Total: 15

Slave Culture in songs and stories

The slaves created their own songs called Sorrow Songs. They revealed an awe-inspiring story of hope, collaboration, ingenuity and an unstoppable hunger for freedom.

Most slaves could not read or write; in fact, it was against the law to teach slaves to read or write. The songs provided a means of verbal, coded communication understood only by those in the Underground Railroad. Outsiders generally interpreted these songs on a literal level, while slaves knew the meaning of the messages hidden within the words and phrases.

These Sorrow Songs were not the songs played by slave musicians at an owner's social gathering, and were not the hymns sung during formal church services. Instead, they were created collaboratively by the slaves for themselves, sung while toiling away in the fields. They were a method of passing on information to other slaves about the current events happening around them. They told of how many escaped slaves were crossing into the Union by singing "Many Thousands Gone". They shared information about how to avoid being detected by dogs when trying to escape, and so they sang "Wade in the Water". Another song they sang was "Steal Away to Jesus". This song was to get the word out about a secret meeting. Some of their songs were sung to help ease the harshness of their labour by poking fun at the masters.

In other words, in a depraved world where humans were allowed to own humans, the slaves created beauty and meaning that they alone owned.

WATCH THIS YOUTUBE CLIP ABOUT THE SONG "WADE IN THE WATER": <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZXqMQfpNSes>



ACTIVITY:

Write a song similar to those mentioned above, used to spread hope and to provide a secret coded form of communication understood only by those in the Underground Railroad. It may help to listen to "Many Thousands Gone", "Wade in the Water" and "Steal Away to Jesus".

(10)

Resistance to slavery: individual responses

African Slaves resisted, or rebelled, against being a slave in many different ways. Resistance to slavery was either as an individual response or as a group, acting out against the system of slavery. This resistance from the slaves showed their strength and determination in fighting for their freedom.

Individual slaves rebelled against slavery by stealing from their owner, robbing him of property and profit. They would often damage machinery so that it was put out

of action and thus needed lengthy repairs or costly replacements. They would often avoid working, by working slowly, or by pretending to be ill.

Sometimes, slaves resisted by terminating their own pregnancies or killing their newborn babies. These traumatic deeds were done because a child born to a slave woman was born a slave, automatically belonged to the owner. Therefore by doing this, the women rebelled against the system by depriving their owners of gaining another slave.

Many of the African slave women had a good knowledge of medicinal plants and would use their skills against their owners. The slave women were often used in the owners' homes to cook and clean. This gave the slave women an opportunity to poison their food while preparing it.

Other ways that slaves would resist slavery was to run away from their owners. Although some slaves were hunted down with dogs, and then severely punished, others managed to remain free. Arson and murder were a great worry for the owners, as slaves would often attack at night, when least expected. The slaves kept their African cultures and traditions as a form of resistance, but the owners forbade the slaves to take part in any religious activity that was not Christianity.

Rebellion against slavery

From the time slaves were captured and journeyed across the Atlantic Ocean to the plantations, they rebelled. Slave revolts happened when slaves outnumbered whites, when masters were absent from the plantations, during times of economic distress, and when there was a split within the ruling elite.

ACTIVITY:

1. List six different ways slaves could rebel against their owners (6)

2. When slaves rebelled against their owners, what were they displaying? (3)

3. Why do you think slaves went to such extremes as terminating a pregnancy as a way of rebelling against their owners? (2)

4. Explain why you think slave owners would refuse to allow their slaves to partake in any religious activity other than Christianity. (4)

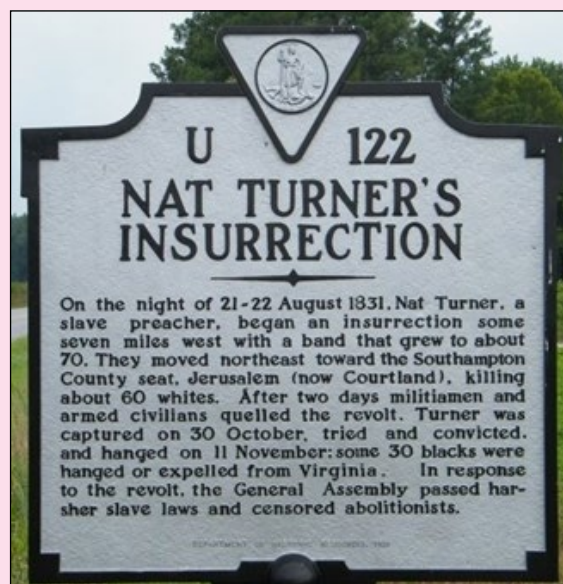
(15)

Nat Turner's revolt 1831

On August 13, there was an atmospheric disturbance in which the sun appeared bluish-green. This was the final sign, and a week later, on August 21, Turner and six of his men met in the woods to eat a dinner and make their plans. At 2:00 that morning, they set out to the Travis household, where they killed the entire family as they lay sleeping. They continued on, from house to house, killing all of the white people they encountered. Turner's force eventually consisted of more than 40 slaves, most on horseback.

By about mid-day on August 22, Turner decided to march toward Jerusalem, the closest town. By then, word of the rebellion had reached the whites; confronted by a group of militia, the rebels scattered and Turner's force became disorganised. After spending the night near some slave cabins, Turner and his men attempted to attack another house, but were repulsed. Several of the rebels were captured. The remaining force then met the state and federal troops in final skirmish, in which one slave was killed and many escaped, including Turner. In the end, the rebels had stabbed, shot and clubbed at least 55 white people to death.

Nat Turner hid in several different places near the Travis farm, but on October 30 was discovered and captured. His "Confession," dictated to physician Thomas R. Gray, was taken while he was imprisoned in the County Jail. On November 5, Nat Turner was tried in the Southampton County Court and sentenced to execution. He was hanged, on November 11.



Passage taken from <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/part3/3p1518.html>

ACTIVITY:

Using the information given, summarise the events that led up to the execution of Nat Turner in a mind map.

(10)

Joseph Cinque and the Amistad Mutiny 1839

Read the Biography of Cinque. Either read the passage below or on the website:

http://law2.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/amistad/AMI_BCIN.HTM

Cinque was born the son of a Mendi village leader in the village of Mani in West Africa. He was trained to assume his father's leadership role from childhood, learning the Mendi way of life and laws of the Mendi people. But Cinque was never to lead his people.

Cinque's fate took a different path when he was taken captive by African tribesmen of the Ley people, due to impatience of a creditor for payment of a debt owed by Cinque. Cinque was taken to a "slave factory" in Gallinas where he was sold to a Spanish slave trader. He was subsequently resold and placed on the Tecora, a slave trade ship.

The Tecora sailed to Havana, Cuba, where Cinque was briefly held. He was subsequently sold to Pedro Ruiz, along with 49 other men and four children. The 53 Africans were placed aboard the Spanish coasting vessel La Amistad (The Friendship) to be taken to Porta Prince.

The Amistad sailed on June 27, 1839 with a crew consisting of the Captain, two Spanish crewmen, a Creole slave, and a mulatto slave (cook). The two new "owners" of the slaves, Montes and Ruiz, were also aboard. The journey was expected to take two and a half to three days, however, storms slowed the progress of the Amistad and, recognising the journey would be longer than anticipated, the Captain had provision rationing begin on the third day. The crewmen also became abusive to slaves who asked for more food and began flogging several of them. On the fourth day the cook told some of the Africans that they would be killed and eaten on arrival at Porta Prince. Cinque and the others already feared such an act and, on receiving this information, Cinque resolved to take the ship, if an opportunity arose.

Cinque spoke with several of his comrades and, although all were not of the same tribal heritage and could not completely understand one another, the entire group of men agreed the ship must be taken. Cinque located a loose nail in the decking of the Amistad when he was taken on deck to eat. He concealed this nail and later used it to unlock the shackles which bound him below deck. He freed the others from their chains and they proceeded to the cargo hold where they found sugarcane knives in crates. The Africans armed themselves and under Cinque's leadership

moved against the Captain and cook, who slept on deck. The Captain awoke and briefly fought the Africans before being killed by Cinque. The cook was also killed. The two Spanish crewmen fled the ship aboard a skiff.

Cinque took command and managed to convey to Montes that he wished the ship steered east to Africa. Montes steered east during the day and northwest, toward the United States, at night. Cinque maintained command of the vessel, sometimes through use of force, until it and all survivors were taken captive by the crew of the U.S. Washington on August 26, 1839. Cinque had been ashore foraging with others when the Washington approached and was taken captive as he returned to the Amistad.

Cinque was identified as the leader by Ruiz and Montes. He was subsequently taken aboard the Washington, as he attempted to arouse the Africans to rebel against these new captors while on board the Amistad. An arraignment was held before then Circuit Judge Judson and the Africans were ordered held for trial without bond based on the testimony of Ruiz that they were slaves who, during mutiny, had murdered the captain and cook.

The Africans were taken to New Haven where they were held in jail with Cinque being separated from them to prevent him from stirring them to rebel. Cinque continued to be recognized as the group's leader throughout the court proceedings associated with the Amistad Africans. He learned a great deal of English while in the U.S. as well as learning about Christianity.

Cinque returned to Africa with missionaries and the remaining Amistad survivors. After his return he discovered that his family could not be found and his entire village had been destroyed. It is suspected that his family was taken and sold into slavery. He became frustrated with the missionaries and eventually left the mission. He later returned, shortly before his death in 1879, instructing the missionaries to provide him with a Christian burial.

The Underground Railroad

The Underground Railroad was neither underground nor a railroad. It was in fact a secret system of people, meeting place, secret routes, passageways and safe houses used by slaves to escape being caught.

Being part of the Underground Railroad was dangerous for the slaves trying to flee as well as for those trying to help. To ensure information was kept secret, code names or words were used instead. Places that harboured runaway slaves were known as "stations" or "depots" and were controlled by "stationmasters". "Conductors" ensured that these runaways moved safely from one station to the next. "Stockholders" were people who secretly donated or contributed money, food, goods and even clothing

Read through the information on this website:

http://teacher.scholastic.com/activities/bhistory/underground_railroad/secret_letter.htm

Then follow the link "Write a letter" and follow the instructions.

to the runaways. Once the runaways had made it to a safe haven or safer area, they would still receive assistance with finding lodgings and work.

Slaves often made their escape at night. Remembering the slave song “Keep your eye on the North Star”, they would keep the North Star in front of them, leading them in a northerly direction.



Figure 3: taken from <http://www.harriet-tubman.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/What-was-the-Underground-Railroad.jpg>

Watch this clip:

<http://www.biography.com/people/harriet-tubman-9511430/videos/harriet-tubman-statue-in-harlem-15039043585>



Harriet Tubman

Read the following passage taken from http://www.americaslibrary.gov/aa/tubman/aa_tubman_subj.html

Harriet Tubman’s name at birth was Araminta Ross. She was one of 11 children of Harriet and Benjamin Ross born into slavery in Dorchester County, Maryland. As a child, Ross was “hired out” by her master as a nursemaid for a small baby. Ross had to stay awake all night so that the baby wouldn’t cry and wake the mother. If Ross fell asleep, the baby’s mother whipped her. From a very young age, Ross was determined to gain her freedom.

As a slave, Araminta Ross was scarred for life when she refused to help in the punishment of another young slave. A young man had gone to the store without permission, and when he returned, the overseer wanted to whip him. He asked Ross to help but she refused. When the young man started to run away, the overseer picked up a heavy iron weight and threw it at him. He missed the young man and hit Ross instead. The weight nearly crushed her skull and left a deep scar. She was unconscious for days and suffered from seizures for the rest of her life.

In 1844, Ross married a free black named John Tubman and took his last name. She also changed her first name, taking her mother’s name, Harriet. In 1849, worried that she and the other slaves on the plantation were going to be sold, Tubman decided to run away. Her husband refused to go with her, so she set out with her two

brothers, and followed the North Star in the sky to guide her north to freedom. Her brothers became frightened and turned back, but she continued on and reached Philadelphia. There she found work as a household servant and saved her money so she could return to help others escape.

After Harriet Tubman escaped from slavery, she returned to slave-holding states many times to help other slaves escape. She led them safely to the northern free states and to Canada. It was very dangerous to be a runaway slave. There were rewards for their capture, and adverts that described slaves in detail. Whenever Tubman led a group of slaves to freedom, she placed herself in great danger. There was a bounty offered for her capture because she was a fugitive slave herself, and she was breaking the law in slave states by helping other slaves escape.

If anyone ever wanted to change his or her mind during the journey to freedom and return, Tubman pulled out a gun and said, "You'll be free or die a slave!" Tubman knew that if anyone turned back, it would put her and the other escaping slaves in danger of discovery, capture or even death. She became so well known for leading slaves to freedom that Tubman became known as the "Moses of Her People." Many slaves dreaming of freedom sang the spiritual "Go Down Moses." Slaves hoped a saviour would deliver them from slavery just as Moses had delivered the Israelites from slavery.

Tubman made 19 trips to Maryland and helped 300 people to freedom. During these dangerous journeys she helped rescue members of her own family, including her 70-year-old parents. At one point, rewards for Tubman's capture totalled \$40,000. Yet, she was never captured and never failed to deliver her "passengers" to safety. As Tubman herself said, "On my Underground Railroad I [never] run my train off [the] track [and] I never [lost] a passenger."

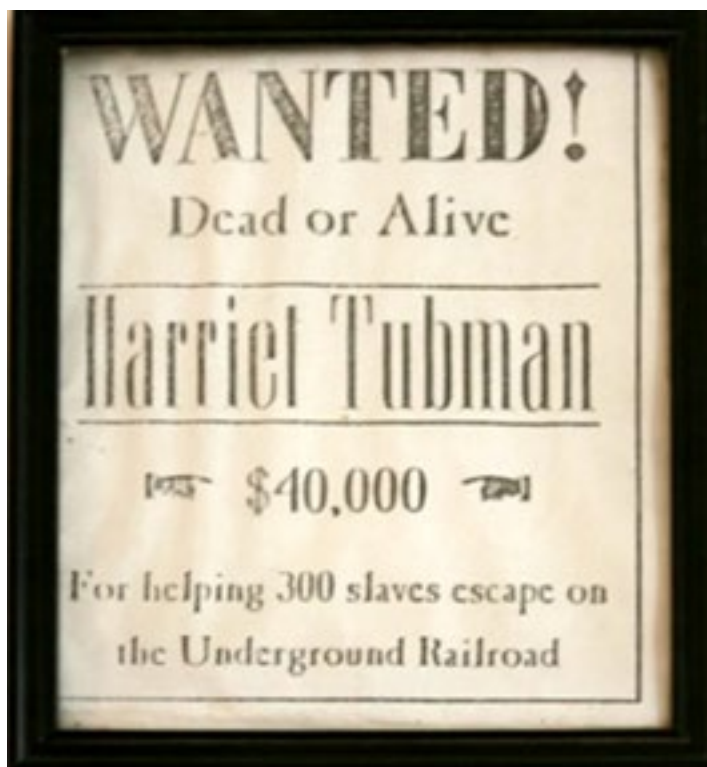
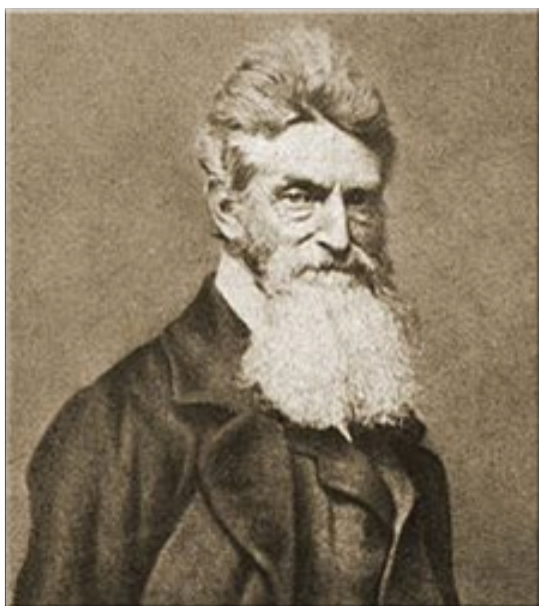


Figure : taken from http://tjkinstitute.tripod.com/images/harriet_tubman_wanted-1.jpg

Listen to the song "Go down Moses" by clicking on this link:

<https://goo.gl/axpcAZ>





The story of John Brown and his mission to abolish slavery

Read the passage about John Brown below (taken from <http://www.ducksters.com/history/civil-war/john-brown-and-the-harpers-ferry-raid.php>)

In 1859, around a year and a half before the start of the Civil War, abolitionist John Brown tried to lead a slave uprising in Virginia. His efforts cost him his life, but his cause lived on when the slaves were set free six years later.

John Brown was an abolitionist. This means that he wanted to abolish slavery. John tried to help black people who had escaped from slavery in the South. He became passionate about ending slavery once and for all. He also became frustrated with the peaceful nature of the abolitionist movement. John felt that slavery was a horrible crime and that he should use any means necessary to put an end to it, including violence.

After many years of protesting slavery, John Brown came up with a radical plan to put an end to slavery in the South once and for all. He believed that if he could organize and arm the slaves in the South, they would revolt and gain their freedom. After all, there were around 4 million slaves in the South. If all the slaves revolted at once, they could easily gain their freedom.

In 1859, Brown began to plan his slave rebellion. He would first take over the federal weapons arsenal at Harpers Ferry, Virginia. There were thousands and thousands of muskets and other weapons being stored at Harpers Ferry. If Brown could get control of these weapons, he could arm the slaves and they could begin to fight back.

On October 16, 1859 Brown gathered his small force together for the initial raid. There were 21 men who participated in the raid: 16 white men, three free black men, one freed slave, and one fugitive slave.

The initial part of the raid was successful. Brown and his men captured the arsenal that night. However, Brown had planned on the local slaves coming to his aid. He expected that, once he had control of the weapons, hundreds of local slaves would join in the fight. This never happened.

Brown and his men were soon surrounded by the local townspeople and militia. Some of Brown's men were killed and they moved to a small engine house that is today known as John Brown's Fort.

On October 18, two days after the start of the raid, a group of marines led by Colonel Robert E. Lee arrived. They offered Brown and his men the opportunity to

surrender, but Brown refused. Then they attacked. They quickly broke down the door and subdued the men inside the building. Many of Brown's men were killed, but Brown survived and was taken prisoner.

Brown and four of his men were convicted of treason and were hanged to death on December 2, 1859.

Despite the quick failure of Brown's planned slave revolt, Brown became a martyr for the abolitionists' cause. His story became famous throughout the United States. Although many in the North didn't agree with his violent actions, they did agree with his belief that slavery should be abolished. It would be less than a year later that the Civil War would begin.

ACTIVITY:

Create a timeline, starting from 1830 to 1870. Your timeline must show the birth and death of Nat Turner, Joseph Cinque, Harriet Tubman and John Brown. As well as the significant acts that these four accomplished in helping the slaves. Include as much detail as possible and any other interesting information that you may have researched.

Answer sheet

(What it was like to be a plantation slave in the American South)

1.1 What were the main causes of death of the slaves? (2)

Dysentery and pneumonia

1.2 Explain how these deaths could have been prevented. (3)

They could have been given better housing, blankets, nutrition and working conditions.

2. Explain how age, gender and work roles could change the life of a slave. (5)

From the age of six, children were given jobs according to their physical abilities. As they grew older, they were given positions on plantations based on their gender, age, strength, skills, birthplace and colour. Female slaves often worked in field gangs and performed other domestic duties, and male slaves worked in trades. As they got older they were able to progress and become promoted into senior roles.

3. Were slaves respected and treated fairly? Explain your answer. (2)

No, they were expected to work long hours and lived in poor conditions and were lashed if defiant.

4. Why do you think slave owners were afraid of the slaves rising up against them? (2)

Learner's answer: e.g. Slave owners did not treat slaves well and knew they could have an uprising and overpower them at any given moment. Slave owners had to therefore keep the slaves in constant fear of punishment.

5. What punishments could slaves receive? (2)

Slaves could be put to death for trying to start or planning an uprising. They were also whipped for being insubordinate or not following instructions and for more minor indiscretions, they would be given leg irons and collars.

(Activity: Rebellion against savery)

1. List 6 different ways slaves could rebel against their owners? (6)

Learners may give any 6 of these answers: Stealing from their owners; running away; damaging machinery; working slowly and being unproductive; pretending to be sick; terminating a pregnancy; killing their new born baby; place poison in food; arson; murder

2. When slaves rebelled against their owners, what were they displaying? (3)

The slaves were showing their determination and strength to attain their freedom.

3. Why do you think slaves went to such extremes as terminating a pregnancy as a way of rebelling against their owners? (2)

Any reasonable and logical answer – answers may vary

4. Explain why you think slave owners would refuse to allow their slaves to part take in any religious activity except for Christianity. (4)

Any reasonable and logical answer –answers may vary