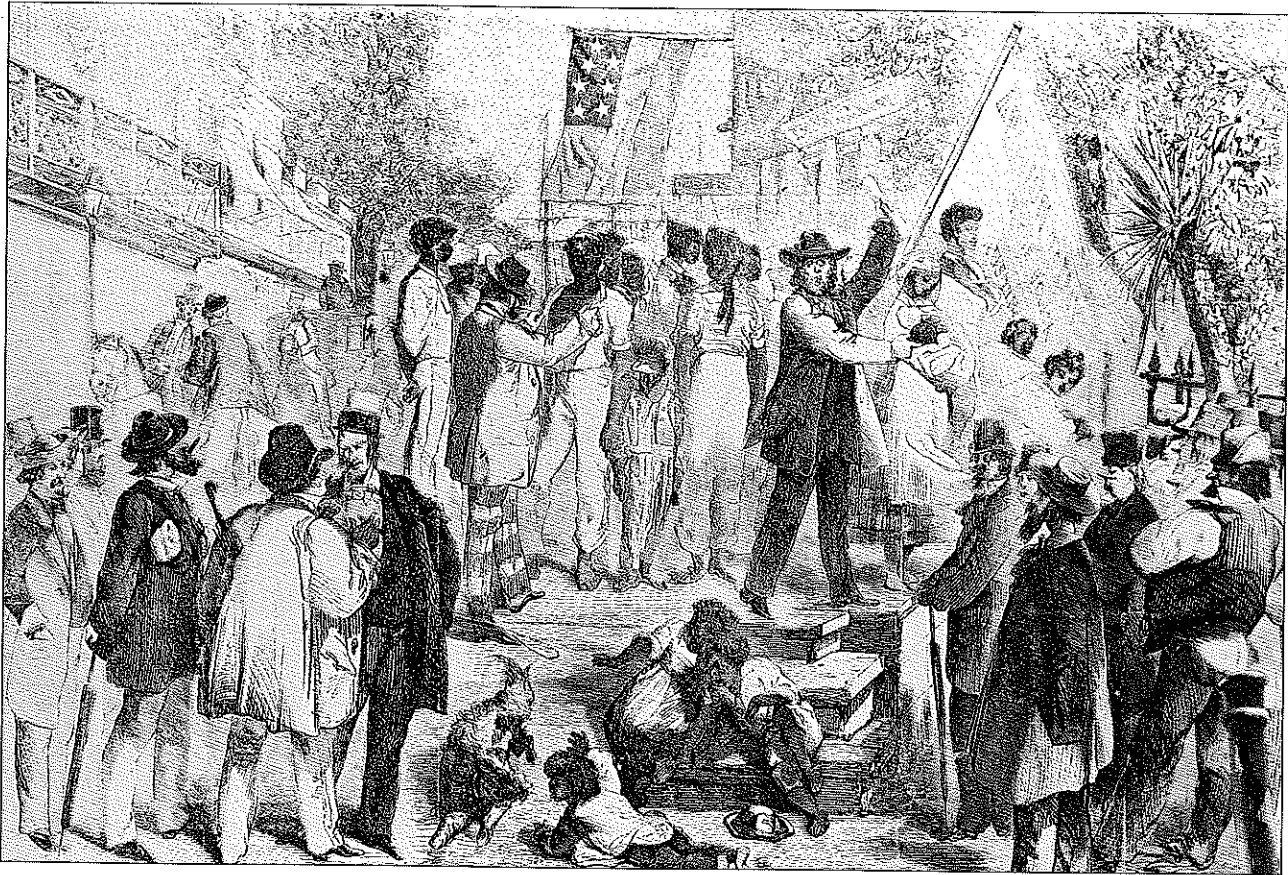


Slavery



Slave auction in America 1861.

The history of African Americans in North America began in August 1619 when a small Dutch warship sailed to the 12-year-old English colony of Jamestown in Virginia with 20 slaves from West Africa on board.

The colonists were short of everything so they welcomed the blacks as a source of free labor. In 1619 the English did not practice slavery, but convicts arrived from England who had to work to make up for some crime they had committed. After a certain time, three to five years, they would be free and in some colonies they could become citizens. When the 20 black Africans landed in Jamestown, they were

treated like the white workers and they worked side by side.

Gradually, however, the status of the black servants started to change. Between 1640 and 1680 the southern colonies established a system of slave labor. Most of the whites had a contract stating when they would be free. The blacks did not have such contracts. They were brought to America by ships' captains who sold them to the highest bidder. At first they were only supposed to work for a certain amount of time, but gradually they became slaves for life. It also became the custom that their children were born to be slaves all their lives.

Worksheet 6B

As the demand for slave labor on the large plantations grew, special ships were built to transport captive Africans from the west coast of Africa to the slave markets in North America. The captured people were members of various tribes. They were either kidnapped or captured in wars between the tribes, and then sold to European traders who had established posts along the African coastline. Beads, guns and whiskey were exchanged for people. The captured ones chained two by two were branded with the stamp of the trading company.

The voyage lasted from eight to ten weeks. As conditions were appalling, many tried to jump overboard. Others refused to eat. When this happened, a crew member broke the teeth of the hunger strikers and force fed them. The

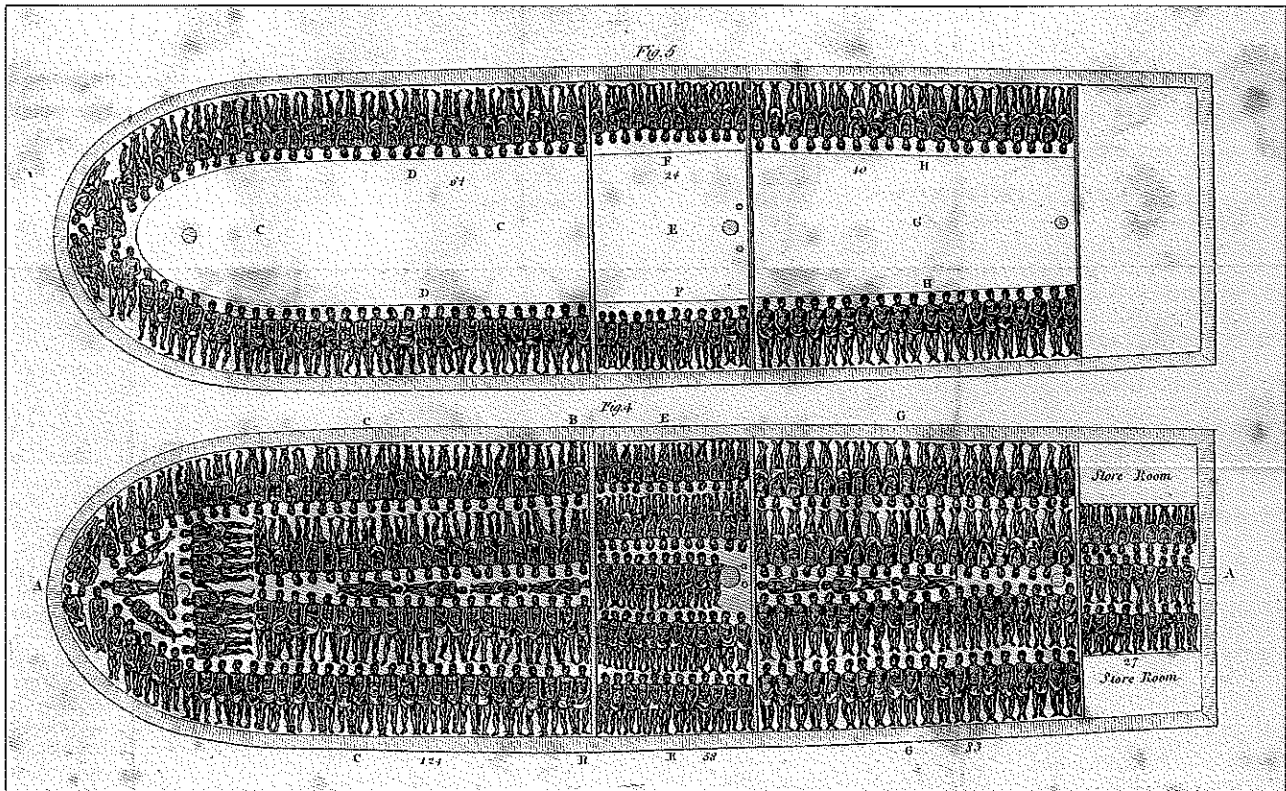
prisoners did not speak the same language. Some went mad in the narrow, claustrophobic quarters, others murdered those lying next to them to get more space. Only three out of ten survived.

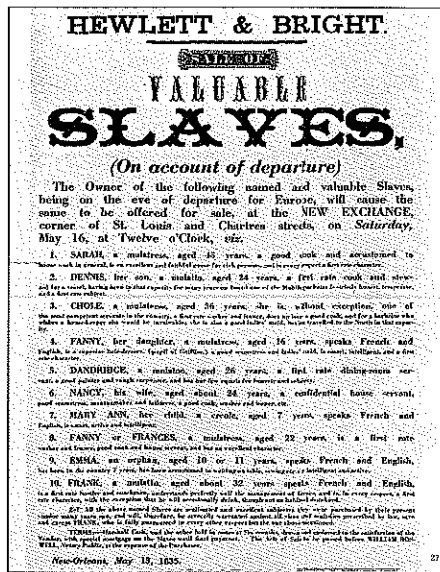
After arriving in America the slaves had to be seasoned, meaning their spirits had to be broken, and they had to be changed from free Africans to American slaves. The plantation owners let other slaves or white overseers train the slaves, and this was done with incredible brutality.

In the 16th century 887,500 slaves were imported; in the 17th 2,750,000; in the 18th 7,000,000 and in the 19th 3,250,000. Due to the high number of blacks they far outnumbered the whites, and so strict slave rules were introduced.

Some of the rules were:

Slave ship, drawing 1808.





Poster from New Orleans 1835.

- If a slave owner beats his slaves to death or kills one by mistake there shall be no legal repercussions.
- All slaves must carry a pass at all times.
- Slaves shall be whipped or branded on the face if they strike a 'Christian'.

The more slaves in the area, the stricter the codes. These outrageous conditions led to a number of slave risings.

All slaves were baptized, and not least in the south, the slaves found hope in their faith. In spirituals like *Swing Low, Sweet Chariot* and *Go Down, Moses* they expressed their sorrow. To them death and afterlife would be a release.

From the beginning, slavery wasn't confined to the southern colonies, but the number of slaves in the northern colonies was much lower, only 3-10% of the population. In the North the slaves worked as house servants, unskilled laborers, and skilled painters, carpenters, smiths and potters, and some worked on the farms. New England was the best

place to be a slave. Here they were allowed education, guaranteed a fair trial, were allowed to testify against whites and could sue.

In 1780 Pennsylvania became the first state to abolish slavery, but even after the American Revolution in 1786 congress continued passing laws stating that the slaves were property, that states must return fugitive slaves to their owners. The majority of the blacks in the North were free, but 89% of the black population in the South were still slaves.

The more liberal the attitude in the North was, the stricter the slave codes in the South became. Slaves were not allowed to assemble in groups of more than five. They were not allowed to own property or testify in court, to learn to read and write, to buy and sell goods, to own firearms, beat drums and many more things. This led to more than 250 slave rebellions. One of the famous leaders was Nat Turner. In 1831 between six and eight hundred slaves took part in a rebellion led by him, but soon it was crushed, and Nat Turner and sixteen men with him were executed.

In the North more and more people were against slavery, and in 1833 the American Anti-Slavery society was formed in Philadelphia. In the end this opposition to slavery led to the Civil War in 1861-1865 where the victory over the South resulted in the abolition of slavery all over the United States.

A Finding Facts

Workbook page 14.