

Looking at American Slavery from a Comparative Global Perspective

A 3 Day Curriculum Unit for TAH: A More Perfect Union – Year 2

South Shore Collaborative, with Peter Gibbon

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Context

Students often view slavery, and the first half of American history courses, through a very restrictive lens. I hope through this three day mini-unit to give my students a better sense of the issue of slavery as a global phenomenon, and thus a more well-rounded view of American slavery in the larger historical narrative. The first lesson compares the experience of chattel slavery in different parts of the new world, including America, the Caribbean and Brazil. The second day students will focus on the abolitionist movements in America and Britain, and analyze the differing methods of each. On the third day, students will look at the trans-Atlantic slave trade from an economic standpoint in an exercise focusing on historiography of the new trans-Atlantic economy of the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries. Lessons are designed with 90 minute blocks in mind.

Day 1

For homework students will have read and taken Cornell notes on the following excerpts from David Brion Davis' *Inhuman Bondage: The Rise and Fall of Slavery in the New World* (Oxford University Press: 2006)

- Chapter 5: "The Atlantic Slave System: Brazil and the Caribbean"
- Chapter 6: "Slavery in Colonial North America"

In class, students will be split into teams of 4-5 and travel through series of stations. Each station will be a block of desks with a folder – as students go through the stations, they are to keep two lists in a group journal – one of similarities and one of differences between North American slavery and Brazilian/Caribbean slavery. They will be instructed to identify specific areas where slavery in Brazil and the Caribbean differed substantively.

Station #1 Folder: -- Map on p. 105 of Davis: "Origins and Destinations of African Slaves"

-- Map of p. 106 of Davis: "Slave Origins and Destinations: Another Estimate"

Station #2 Folder: -- Primary source slave narratives from the Caribbean – excerpts from Nicole N. Aljoe's *Caribbean Slave Narratives: Creole in Form and Genre* found at <http://scholar.library.miami.edu/anthurium/volume_2/issue_1/aljoe-slave.htm>

-- Excerpts from *Born in Slavery: Slave Narratives from the Federal Writers Project, 1936-1938* at <<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/ammem/snhtml/snhome.html>>

- Station #3 Folder:** -- Excerpt from Daniel Walker Howe's *What Hath God Wrought* (Oxford University Press, 2007) pp. 129-132, regarding cotton cultivation
- Excerpt from *Colonial Lives: Documents on Latin American History, 1550-1850* (Oxford University Press, 2000) pp. 249-257, regarding Felipe Edimboro's suit for Manumission in Spanish Florida, 1794
- Station #4 Folder:** -- 5-7 Images selected from the Online Gallery of the British Library from <<http://www.bl.uk/onlinegallery/onlineex/carviews/index.html>> (images of slave life in former British colonies)
- 5-7 images selected from the *Slavery Image Database* at <<http://hitchcock.itc.virginia.edu/Slavery/return.php?categorynum=8&categoryName=Plantation Scenes, Slave Settlements and Houses>> (images of slave conditions and slave homes in the southern North American colonies)
- Station #5 – Music:** -- students will listen to a number of slave songs from *Afro American Spirituals, Work Songs, and Ballads* – 1998, and *Negro Work Songs and Calls* –1999, both from the Library of Congress Archive of Folk Culture. The folder will contain the lyrics.

Students should work together as a team to extend their lists using their notes taken from the homework. A class discussion of their results follows, concluding with assigning the next night's homework – a journal free-write responding to the following prompt: "Taking into account the various conditions New World slaves lived under, what might be some possible strategies of resistance?"

Day 2

Brainstorm on board: ideas for strategies for resistance from homework.

Students will be shown short excerpts from a variety of films dealing with the abolitionist movements in America and Britain, including *Amistad*, *Amazing Grace*, and *Frederick Douglass: When the Lion Wrote History*.

Finally, students will examine the following documents, either in small groups one at a time (via station exercise from previous day) or as a class (preferred, using LCD or document projector):

Document 1 -- Excerpt from Davis, Chapter 12, "Explanations of British Abolitionism" (pp. 234 – 238, Davis' chronology of British emancipation)

Document 2 -- Excerpt from Davis, Chapter 13, "Abolitionism in America" (pp. 251-257, Davis' chronicling of American abolitionism from the Second Great Awakening through the first colonization proposals)

Document 3 -- Excerpt from "Our Mind is Made Up," *The North Star*, Frederick Douglass, December 3, 1847

It is neither a reflection on the fidelity, or a disparagement of the ability of our friends and fellow laborers to assert what "common sense affirms and only folly denies," that the man who has suffered the wrong is the man to demand redress—that the man struck is the man to cry out—and that he who has endured the cruel pangs of slavery is the man to advocate liberty. It is evident we must be our own representatives and advocates, not exclusively, but peculiarly—not distant from but in connection with our white friends. In the grand struggle for liberty and equality now waging, it is meet, right, and essential that there should arise in our ranks authors and editors, as well as orators, for it is in these capacities that the most permanent good can be rendered to our cause.

Hitherto the immediate victims of slavery and prejudice, owing to various causes, have had little share in this department of effort: they have frequently undertaken and almost frequently failed. This latter fact has often been urged by our friends against our engaging in the present enterprise; but, so far from convincing us of the impolicy of our course, it serves to confirm us in the necessity, if not the wisdom of our undertaking. Our race must be vindicated from the embarrassing imputations resulting from former nonsuccess. We believe that what ought to be done can be done. We say this in no self-confident or boastful spirit, but with a full sense of our weakness and unworthiness, relying upon the Most High for wisdom and strength to support us in our righteous undertaking. We are not wholly unaware of the duties, hardships, and responsibilities of our position. We have easily imagined some, and friends have not hesitated to inform us of others. Many doubtless are yet to be revealed by that infallible teacher, experience. A

view of them solemnize but do not appall us. We have counted the cost. Our mind is made up, and we are resolved to go forward.

Document 4 -- Excerpt from *The Liberator*, July 23, 1847

Of one thing, we and his friends are certain: as a lecturer, his power over a public assembly is very great, and it is manifestly his gift to address the people en masse. With such powers of oratory, and so few lecturers in the field where so many are needed, it seems to us as clear as the noon-day sun, that it would be no gain, but rather a loss, to the anti-slavery cause, to have him withdrawn to any considerable extent from the work of popular agitation, by assuming the cares, drudgery and perplexities of a publishing life. It is quite impracticable to combine the editor with the lecturer, without either causing the paper to be more or less neglected, or the sphere of lecturing to be severely circumscribed.

(Douglas, Frederick. *The Frederick Douglass Papers. Series One: speeches, debates, and interviews*, vol.1: 1841-46. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979.)

Document 5 – From “One Hundred Conventions,” Chapter V in *The Life and Times of Frederick Douglass*, 1881

The year 1843 was one of remarkable anti slavery activity. The New England Anti-Slavery Society at its annual meeting, held in the spring of that year, resolved under the auspices of Mr. Garrison and his friends, to hold a series of one hundred conventions. The territory embraced in this plan for creating an anti-slavery sentiment included New Hampshire, Vermont, New York, Ohio, Indiana, and Pennsylvania. I had the honour to be chosen one of the agents to assist in these proposed conventions, and I never entered upon any work with more heart and hope. All that the American people needed, I

thought, was light. Could they know slavery as I knew it, they would hasten to the work of its extinction ... It would be easy to silence anti-slavery agitation if refusing its agents the use of halls and churches could effect such result. The house of our friend Smith stood on the south west corner of the park, which was well covered with young trees, too small to furnish shade or shelter, but better than none. Taking my stand under a small tree, in the south east corner of this park, I began to speak in the morning to the audience of five persons, and before the close of the afternoon meeting I had before me not less than five hundred. In the evening I was waited upon by the officers of the Congregational Church, who tendered us the use of an old wooden building, which they had deserted for a better, but still owned; and here our convention was continued during three days. I believe there has been no trouble to find places in Syracuse in which to hold anti-slavery meetings since. I never go up there without endeavouring to see that tree, which, like the cause it sheltered, has grown large and strong and imposing.

I believe my first offence against our Anti-Slavery Israel, was committed during these Syracuse meetings. It was on this wise: Our general agent, John A. Collins, had recently returned from England full of communistic ideas, which ideas would do away with individual property, and have all things in common. He had arranged a corps of speakers of his communistic persuasion, consisting of John O. Wattles, Nathaniel Whiting and John Orvis to follow our anti-slavery conventions, and while our meeting was in progress in Syracuse, a meeting, as the reader will observe, obtained under much difficulty, Mr. Collins came in with his new friends and doctrines, and proposed to adjourn our antislavery discussions and take up the subject of communism. To this I ventured to object. I held that it was imposing an additional burden of unpopularity on our cause, and an act of bad faith with the people, who paid the salary of Mr. Collins, and were responsible for

these Hundred Conventions. Strange to say, my course in this matter did not meet the approval of Mrs. W.H. Chapman, an influential member of the board of managers of the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society, and called out a sharp reprimand from her, for my insubordination to my superiors. This was a strange and distressing revelation to me, and one of which I was not soon relieved. I thought I had only done my duty, and I think so still. The chief reason for the reprimand was the use which the liberty party papers would make of my seeming rebellion against the commanders for our Anti-Slavery Army.

(Douglass, Frederick. *The Life and Times of Frederick Douglass*. Great Britain: Wordsworth Editions Limited, 1996.)

Document 6 -- Excerpt from *Pendleton Republic* signed by "Old Settler," March 5, 1896

In 1843 there were a few abolishinists [sic] in the town and community who were consciencious [sic] in their opposition to slavery. Among them were some of our best citizens. Dr. Edwin Fussell was among the number. He lived near where the east end of commercial block now stands. At that time Frederick Douglas [sic] was attracting attention as an eloquent advocate of the freedom of his race. Dr. Fussell and others secured him to speak in Pendleton, and the announcement of his coming created some stir in the community. The day came and preparations were made for him to speak in the grove across the creek, north of town. Dr. Fussell entertained Mr. Douglas and took considerable interest in the occasion.

Both Whigs and Democrats were pro-slavery; but there were many who were disposed to see fair dealing in the case. There was a good turnout, it being an auspicious day. Threats of disturbance had been made, but immediate citizens of the community were interested in maintaining a peaceful meeting.

After Mr. Douglas began speaking, a mob from the country, southeast of town a few miles, came and attacked Mr. Douglas and the crowd. They knocked Mr. Douglas down with a stone, striking him on the back of the head, cutting quite a gash and making him insensible. Then attacking the crowd, the melle [sic] was an exciting and dangerous one for a time, but no one was seriously hurt but Mr. Douglas. The mob was soon dispersed with a struggle.

Mr. M.G. Walker, Theodore Walker, Neal Hardy and many others took part in the fray. There was a man named Robert Graham here at the time, visiting his sister, Mrs. David Bowsman. He was from New Paris, Ohio. A man of large build and herculean strength. A number of the mob attacked him, and in quick succession he knocked down six men, piling them across a slab seat until their combined weight [sic] broke the slab into two pieces. He came away with but a little scratch on the chin.

Mr. Douglas was brought over to the residence of Dr. Fussell, and after dark was taken east of town in a wagon to the residence of Neal Hardy, where he was kindly cared for. Mr. Hardy was the father of our banker, Morris Hardy, and will be remembered as one of the very best citizens of the community. That night fearing the return of the mob, according to threats, an armed squad was placed about the house of Dr. Fussell, and they would have met with a warm reception had they come. Dr. Fussell had come from Philadelphia about five years previous, but soon after the time of this occurrence, and to escape the prejudices and threats of the day, he returned to his old eastern home. No doubt he had no hope that in twenty years from that time a proclamation for the freedom of all slaves would be made by the president of the United States.

Mr. Douglas was born and raised a slave, purchased his freedom, secured an education, became a great orator of reputation in both Europe and America. About sixteen years later he came back to Pendleton again and addressed a large assemblage in the Baptist church on West Street. Prejudice was not all gone, and the writer got into some difficulty in the effort to secure him a place in which to speak. Mr. Douglas died in Washington City a year or two ago at an old age and highly honored.

Old Settler

(Docs 3-6 courtesy of Primary Source, Inc.)

Finally, in a computer lab students will peruse the BBC's online gallery, "The Tools of the Abolitionists", at http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/abolition/abolition_tools_gallery.shtml >. If time, they should also view the other online galleries regarding British abolitionism and the slave trade in general.

Essay prompt for open response homework, to be handed in after a graded Socratic Seminar on the same topic on day 3: What methods were common to both American and British abolitionism? What methods were unique to each? How might the differences between the two national economies account for these differences?

Day 3

The first 20 minutes of class is a graded inside-outside circle Socratic seminar on the essay students wrote for homework. The focus then shifts to economics. This lesson focuses on the economy of the trans-Atlantic slave trade and the historiography of the subject. Together as a class the students will read "America, the Atlantic and Global Consumer Demand, 1500-1800" by Carole Shammas from the January 2005 issue of *OAH Magazine of History*. The class should have a firm understanding of the 3 paradigms she discusses regarding historians' views of the trans-Atlantic economy: the Mercantilist paradigm, the Atlantic world paradigm, and the globalism paradigm. Using the following resources, students will attempt to answer the central question:

How do the statistics and the realities of the trans-Atlantic slave trade support or contradict each of the three paradigms discussed in Shammas' article? Discuss each paradigm in light of 3 specific sources of evidence.

The end product can be a graded essay, an oral persuasive argument exercise, a debate, or another Socratic seminar, this time reversing the inside and outside circles.

Resources

1 -- <http://hitchcock.itc.virginia.edu/Slavery/search.html>

This is an online collection of resources including maps and images devoted to the trans-Atlantic slave trade from the University of Virginia.

2 -- <http://www.slavevoyages.org/tast/database/index.faces>

From the *Transatlantic Slave Trade Voyages Database* – “The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database comprises nearly 35,000 individual slaving expeditions between 1514 and 1866. Records of the voyages have been found in archives and libraries throughout the Atlantic world. They provide information about vessels, enslaved peoples, slave traders and owners, and trading routes. A variable (Source) cites the records for each voyage in the database. Other variables enable users to search for information about a particular voyage or group of voyages. The website provides full interactive capability to analyze the data and report results in the form of statistical tables, graphs, maps, or on a timeline.”

3 – The following maps from Davis’ *Inhuman Bondage* reproduced for students:

- Map 3 – Sugar Plantations on the Atlantic Islands (p. 85)
- Map 7 – The Caribbean Center of New World Slavery (p. 113)
- Map 8 – America’s Internal Slave Trade, by Land and Sea, 1790-1860 (p. 182)

4 -- <http://www.nps.gov/ethnography/aah/aaheritage/histContextsD.htm>

This is from the US National Park Service ethnography program. Consider the numbers for each of the countries involved, what those countries primarily exported from the new world, and where their colonies were – what can we learn from this regarding the economic nature of new world slavery?