

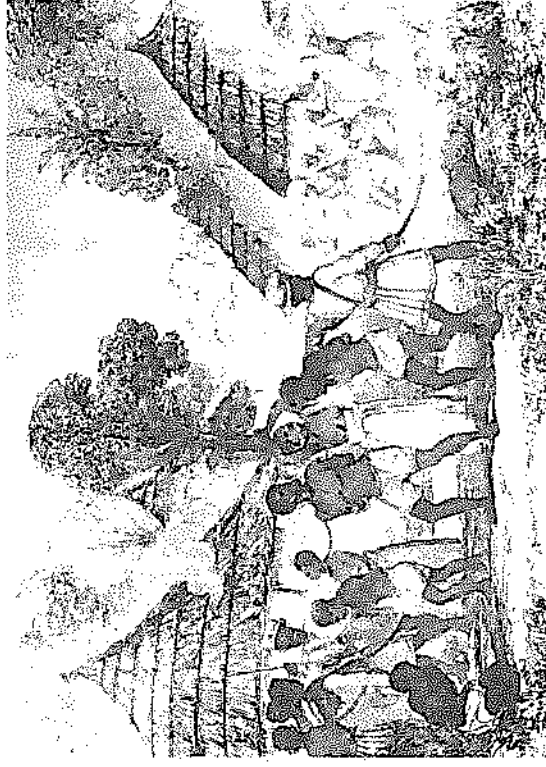
# \$150 REWARD



**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 1 1/2 months. I expect he is now in Kentucky trying to make his escape to a free state, (in all probability to Cincinnati, Ohio.) Two traps 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 cassinet coat, and dark striped cassinet pantaloons, now 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 \$50 dollars if taken out of this State, and delivered to me, or secured in any jail so that I can get him again.

*Bardotown, Ky., September 3d, 1838.*

**WILLIAM BERRY**



## Songs of Slavery

TRUTH  
MAY  
PREVAIL  
OVER  
FALSHOOD

Wilberforce  
2007 | Hull



The  
Historical Association

Hull and East Riding Branch



Hull Community  
Investment Fund

This booklet and the accompanying CD were put together as a community-based project, hosted by the Hull and East Riding branch of the Historical Association, with grant funding from the Hull Community Investment Fund. We are very grateful for their support.

The project is part of the celebrations for Wilberforce 2007, marking the bicentenary of the passing of the Abolition of the Slave Trade Act.

**Slavery: The ownership of one person by another.**

**"Never ever will we desist till we extinguish every trace of this bloody traffic."**

**William Wilberforce**



William Wilberforce  
Photography Ashley Howard

## Songs of Slavery

Enslaved peoples were often claimed to be happy because they sang as they worked, but former slave Frederick Douglass (1) said:

"They would make the dense old woods, for miles around, reverberate with their wild songs, revealing at once the highest joy and the deepest sadness. They would compose and sing as they went along, consulting neither time nor tune. The thought that came up, came out--if not in the word, in the sound--and as frequently in the one as in the other.

They would sometimes sing the most pathetic sentiment in the most rapturous tone, and the most rapturous sentiment in the most pathetic tone. I have sometimes thought that the mere hearing of those songs would do more to impress some minds with the horrible character of slavery, than the reading of whole volumes of philosophy on the subject could do.

I have frequently found myself in tears while hearing them. To those songs I trace my first glimmering conception of the dehumanizing character of slavery. I can never get rid of that conception. Those songs still follow me, to deepen my hatred of slavery, and quicken my sympathies for my brethren in bonds."

| Date      | England  | The 13 Colonies                    |
|-----------|--|------------------------------------|
| 1672      | King Charles II chartered the Royal African Company, promoting expansion of the slave trade.   |                                    |
| 1698      | The English Parliament ruled that any British subject could trade in slaves.   |                                    |
| 1772      | Lord Chief Justice Mansfield ruled that "No master was ever allowed here to take a slave by force to be sold abroad for any reason." |                                    |
| 1774      | The Society of Friends voted for the expulsion of any member engaged in the slave trade.   |                                    |
| 1775 / 83 | American War of Independence   | American War of Independence       |
| 1776      |  | Declaration of Independence July 4 |
| 1787      | The Society for the Abolition of the Slave Trade was set up.   |                                    |
| 1789      | Wilberforce made his first anti-slavery speech in Parliament.  |                                    |

| Date     | England   | U.S.A   |
|----------|---|---|
| 1807     | The Abolition of the Slave Trade Act became law on March 25th   | 1808 Importing African slaves was banned, but smuggling continued.  |
| 1820     | Britain began to use its naval power to suppress the slave trade.   |   |
| 1822     |   | Freed slave Denmark Vesey attempted a rebellion in S Carolina. 35 participants were hanged.                         |
| 1823     | The Anti-Slavery Society was formed.  |   |
| 1831     |   | The Nat Turner Rebellion in Virginia. 60 whites were killed. Turner was hanged.                                     |
| 1833     | The Abolition of Slavery Act was passed.  |   |
| 1838     | Slave owners were compensated   |   |
| 1841     | The Quintuple Treaty was signed; England, France, Russia, Prussia and Austria agreed to search vessels on the high seas in order to suppress the slave trade. |   |
| 1850     |   | The Fugitive Slave Law was enacted.   |
| 1859     |   | John Brown's party attacked Harper's Ferry. Brown was hanged.   |
| 1861 / 5 |   | American Civil War  |
| 1863     |   | Abraham Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation was enacted.  |
| 1865     |   | Slavery was abolished in the U.S. as a result of the 13th amendment to the Constitution & the end of the Civil War. |

## Slavery

Slavery, the complete ownership of one person by another is ages old. A slave has no personal rights. In many cultures soldiers defeated in battles were enslaved.

In ancient Egypt all prisoners became slaves and were the property of the Pharaoh.

The Romans used field slaves in the first and second century BC, as landowners built up great estates, which needed gangs of labourers to maintain them.

In most slave-owning societies slaves were treated well despite their status as possessions.

The Portuguese began exploring West Africa in the fifteenth century. The coastal kingdoms had well-developed systems of government, trade and culture, and settled, agricultural lifestyles. The Portuguese traded their goods for gold, ivory and slaves. Many of those captured had special skills and were sold for high prices at auction. The Dutch, French and English also played a large part in the slave trade.

As the demand for slaves grew the traders set up forts along the coast to house them and raiding parties moved further inland.

In 1562 John Hawkins, an Englishman, made a huge profit from his first voyage carrying African slaves and the trade grew rapidly, making huge fortunes for the ship owners.

Although slavery is now illegal, the trade continues to flourish. It is estimated that at least twenty seven million people still live in slavery throughout the world.



## The English Triangle of Trade

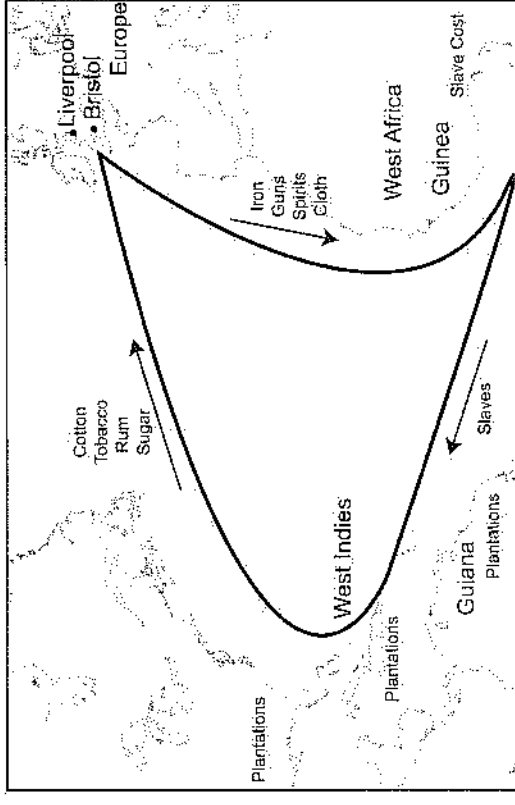
Between the 17<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries the increasing demand for labour to work on the plantations of the Caribbean and the Americas saw an estimated twelve million Africans shipped from the coastal areas of West Africa to the Caribbean and the Americas under the most dreadful conditions and sold into slavery. The journey took two months and many died on the way. Many more died in the first few years after landing.

William Wilberforce, born in Kingston-Upon-Hull, England in 1759, devoted his life to the abolition of the slave trade.

Granville Sharp, a government clerk, campaigned on behalf of runaway slaves in England and his work brought the slavery issue to the attention of the public. The Quakers formed a committee to campaign for the abolition of the trade and of slavery itself and worked with Sharp, becoming known as the Abolitionists.

In 1787 Wilberforce was asked to be their voice in Parliament. He made his first speech for abolition of the slave trade in 1789 and continued to press for abolition for almost twenty years. Several bills were defeated but the bill for the abolition of the slave trade was finally passed and came into effect on March 25<sup>th</sup> 1807.

Wilberforce continued to work for the abolition of slavery itself. He died in 1833, a month before Parliament passed the Slavery Abolition Act that gave all enslaved people in the British Empire their freedom.



A ship sailing from Liverpool, Bristol or London as part of the slave trade made a three-stage journey.

- Ships loaded with goods such as alcohol, guns, cloth and iron bars sailed to the coast of West Africa. The goods were traded for slaves and gold.
- The ships crossed the Atlantic to the Caribbean and the Americas. There the captives were sold to work in the tobacco, sugar, rice, and cotton plantations or as house servants.
- Plantation goods bought with the gold and the money raised by sales of the Africans were taken back to England.

The Liverpool ships were more efficient than those of the other main ports and Liverpool soon had a growing part of the trade, but by 1730 Bristol had become the main centre for the slave trade.

## Capture



Ottobah Cugoana (2) lived a few days' journey from the coast of Africa. He told of being captured by a group of his countrymen when playing in a field with about twenty other children. When they tried to run away they were threatened with pistols and cutlasses. Their kidnappers led them to the coast, where he was sold and imprisoned in a fort for several days before being shipped to Grenada.

Other Africans were tempted on board. When a ship arrived offshore the crew would leave trinkets on the shore to attract the local inhabitants. When the people were finally persuaded on board with promises of more such goods, the crew would haul in the gangplank and set sail, giving their captives no chance to escape or to say goodbye to their families.

Venture Smith (3) was born in Guinea and named Broteer by his father, Prince of the tribe of Dukandarra, but captured when he was about eight years old. He and his family were retreating from enemies who had promised to leave the Prince and his people in peace in exchange for money and goods. Though the Prince gave in to their demands, they went back on their word and planned a surprise attack. The family were trying to escape, but were caught. Broteer was clubbed with a gun and had a rope put round his neck. He saw his father tortured and beaten to death.

'The shocking scene is to this day fresh in my memory, and I have often been overcome while thinking on it. He was a man of remarkable stature. I should judge as much as six feet and six or seven inches high -- a man of remarkable strength and resolution, affable, kind and gentle, ruling with equity and moderation.'

Venture's extraordinary life story was told in his narrative, published in 1798. He died at the age of seventy seven in 1805 and was buried in Connecticut.

## Cargo

The captives were shipped in the most inhumane conditions, packed tightly together below deck. The voyage could take from 6 weeks to three months. They were treated as cargo, rather than as human beings. Slaves were valuable cargo, so a good captain would try to keep as many alive as possible, but many slave ship captains were known for their cruelty.

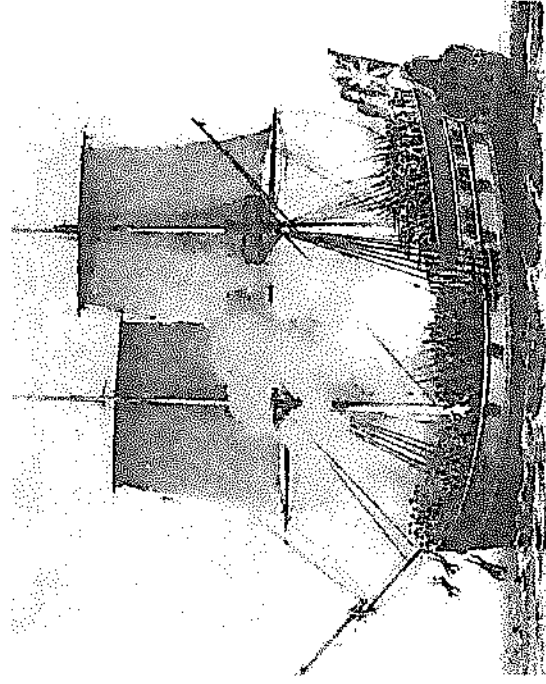
Thousands of people who had been collected from all parts of West Africa by raiding parties were often offered for sale. Some had travelled for several months before they reached the places where they were bought by the black traders. These traders bought from forty to two hundred people at a time, of all ages from a month old, and then sold them onto the European traders, who examined them closely before buying them and rejected any who were sick or injured.

Aboard ship the men were chained together in pairs by handcuffs on their wrists and by irons on their legs, and sent to a partitioned-off space below decks. The women and the boys were each sent to separate areas, but not shackled.

The slaves were packed together on platforms, like wide shelves. There was not room to stand, and sometimes they were so close together that they could only lie on their sides

In the morning, weather permitting, the captives would be brought on deck and remain there until the afternoon. A long chain run through the shackles would fasten fifty or sixty men together so that they could not get up or try to escape.

The food was mainly beans, boiled yams and rice, with about half a pint of water at each meal. It was served in small tubs or buckets and eaten with wooden spoons or with bare hands. If the journey took longer than usual the rations would be cut and many quarrels took place over food, so that the weak often went hungry. Some slaves refused food, and tried to starve themselves to death, but they were beaten and forcibly fed.



Insurrection on board a Slave Ship

Alexander Falconbridge (4) was a surgeon aboard slave ships and told of the conditions that he saw.

'Upon their refusing to take sustenance, I have seen coals of fire, glowing hot, put on a shovel and placed so near their lips as to scorch and burn them --- with threats of forcing them to swallow the coals if they any longer persisted in refusing to eat. These means have generally had the desired effect. I have also been credibly informed that a certain captain in the slave- trade poured melted lead on such of them as obstinately refused their food.'

He added, 'Exercise being deemed 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 hands for the purpose. Their music, upon these occasions, consists of a drum, sometimes with only one head; and when that is worn out they make use of the bottom of one of the tubs before described. The poor wretches are frequently compelled to sing also: but when they do so, their songs are generally, as may naturally be expected, melancholy lamentations of their exile from their native country.'



## The Ship

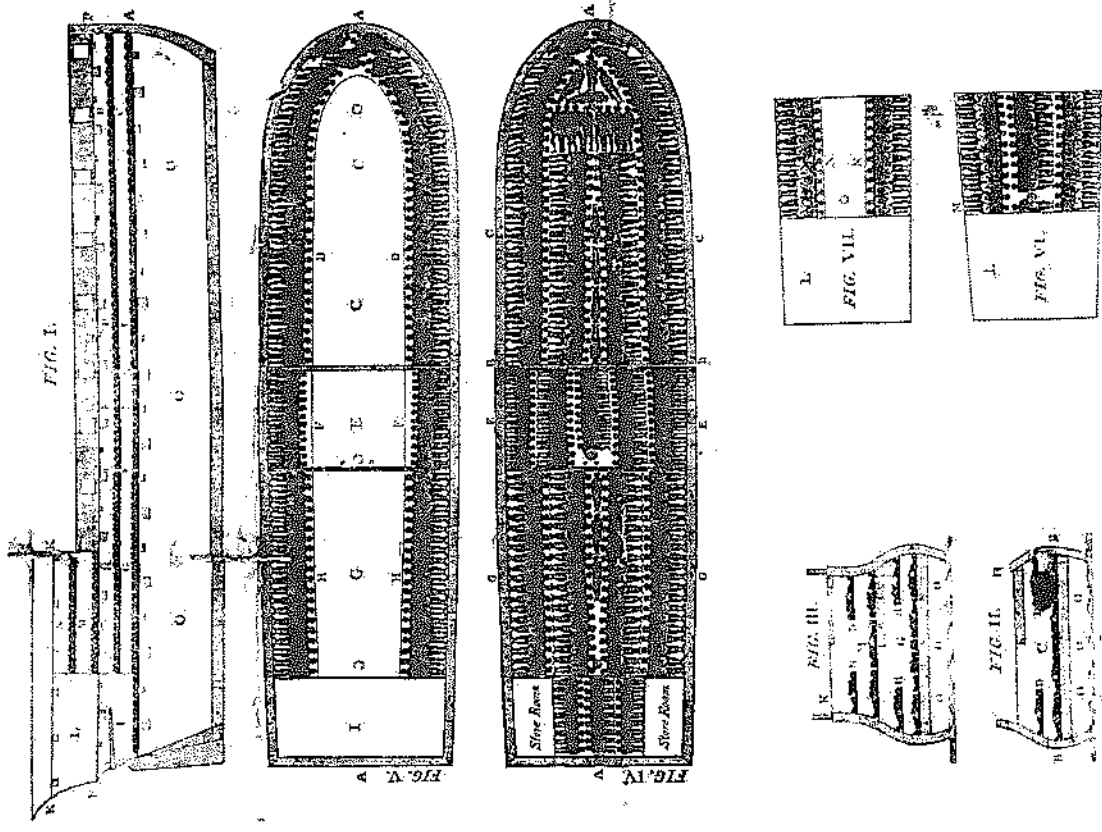
An account of a slave ship printed in London in 1789 (5) gave the dimensions of the ship, together with details of the number of people carried on one journey.

The ship carried 351 men, 127 women, 90 boys and 41 girls, a total of 609.

The men were stowed in the space meant for 190, so that they had only 9 inches (23cm) each, and were placed, 'as is usual on full ships, not on their backs, but on their sides or on top of each other, in which last situation they are not infrequently found dead in the morning.' They could not sit up, as there was only about 2 feet (60cm) between the platforms.

The account continued: 'The slaves are never allowed the least bedding---, but are stowed on the bare boards, from the friction of which they are much bruised; and in some cases the flesh is rubbed off their shoulders, elbows and hips.'

The Abolition of the Slave Trade Act became law in 1807, but illegal trading carried on. British captains caught carrying slaves were fined £100 for each one on board. If they were in danger of being captured by the British navy, captains often ordered slaves to be thrown overboard.



## The Auction

Captives arriving in the Americas or the Caribbean were auctioned like cattle. They were displayed on a platform or chair. Bidders would examine them closely, check their teeth like horses and perhaps brand them to show ownership. The same brand marks were used on cattle and other possessions. Any too sick to be of use were left to die.

No account was taken of family ties, so parents were separated from their children, husbands from wives, usually without the chance to say goodbye.

When a slave owner died, the 'chattels, slaves and other cattle' would be valued and divided between family members or sold at auction to pay off debts.

A poster advertising 'Slaves at Sale - without reserve' gave details of:

- Rosin, 13 years, good house boy, fine temper, fully guaranteed and speaks German and English.
- Henry, about 26 years, a field hand, and sold as having run away from the plantations.
- Patrick, aged 28 years, a likely man, good barber, body and house servant. Sold under a good character.
- Sam, aged 28 years, a field hand; title only guaranteed.

# TO BE SOLD & LET

BY PUBLIC AUCTION,

On *MONDAY the 18th of MAY, 1829,*  
UNDER THE TREE,

FOR SALE,

THE THREE FOLLOWING

# SLAVES,

viz.

JANUAI, about 30 Years old, an excellent House Servant, of Good Character.

WILLIAM, about 35 Years old, a Labourer.

NANCY, an excellent House Servant and Nurse.

The next belonging to "LAWSON'S Estate, and the WIDOW of Mrs. G. MARY

TO BE LET,

On the usual conditions of the *Act* finding them in *Point, City & Land* and *Madras* *West*  
THE FOLLOWING

MALE and FEMALE

# SLAVES,

as follows

ROBERT BAGLEY, about 20 Years old, a good House Servant.

WILLIAM BAGLEY, about 18 Years old, a Labourer.

JOHN ARNOLD, about 15 Years old, a Labourer.

JAMES ANTON, about 12 Years old, a Labourer.

JAMES ANTON, about 10 Years old, a Labourer.

HARRY, about 27 Years old, a good House Servant.

ELIZA, a Young Woman of good Character, used to House Work and the Nursery.

ELIZA, an excellent Washerwoman.

FANNY, about 18 Years old, House Servant.

SABAH, about 11 Years old, House Servant.

Also for Sale, at Eleven o'Clock,

Fine Rice, Gram, Paddy, Books, Muslins,  
Needles, Pins, Ribbons &c. &c.

AT ONE O'CLOCK, THAT CELEBRATED ENGLISH HORSE

**BLUCHER,**

as above

Valuation

In 1787 an 'inventory and appraisal' taken on the Valley Plantation St Johns in 1787 included the following details of slaves:

| Name        | Employment and character  | Price |
|-------------|---|-------|
| Francisco   | A good fine man. Has been given to run away.                          | £69   |
| Billy Grant | Tolerable good mill carpenter. Well inclined. Sometimes sickly.       | £70   |
| Jackie      | An indifferent cooper, elderly or sickly                              | £46   |
| Portray     | Elderly domestic  | £94   |
| Plymouth    | A good boiler or field hand. Has care of the cane mules.              | £116  |
| Captain     | Has been three years at the mason's trade. Promises to be a good one. | £140  |
| Hatty       | Domestic. Stout and healthy and well inclined                         | £131  |
| George      | Learning the smith business, well inclined                            | £80   |
| Dick        | Wheelwright   | £182  |
| Begnalt     |   |       |
| Luan        | Domestic  | £144  |
| Phillip     | A good field hand.  | £103  |

An Inventory and Appraisal of all the Negroes, Black Antients, Plantation St. Johns's used Land belonging to the Valley Plantation of St. John's Leeward on the 17th day of September 1787 and taken this day.

Negroes, New-Engaged, and Exposed.

Francisco, a good fine man, has been given to run away. £69

Billy Grant, tolerable good mill carpenter, well inclined, sometimes sickly. £70

Jackie, an indifferent cooper, elderly or sickly. £46

Portray, elderly domestic. £94

Plymouth, a good boiler or field hand, has care of the cane mules. £116

Captain, has been three years at the mason's trade, promises to be a good one. £140

Hatty, domestic, stout and healthy and well inclined. £131

George, learning the smith business, well inclined. £80

Dick, wheelwright. £182

Begnalt

Luan, domestic. £144

Phillip, a good field hand. £103

INVENTORY OF SLAVES

## The Price of Freedom

Some enslaved people, particularly those with special skills, were allowed to hire themselves out to work. They were still obliged to hand over most or all of their earnings from contracted work to their owners, but were able to earn some money for themselves by doing 'over work'. In this way they could hope to buy their freedom and perhaps even that of other family members. One problem was, of course, that the harder they worked, the more valuable they became, and so the price demanded for their freedom became higher.

Moses Grandy (6) saved the cost of his freedom twice and paid it over to his masters; each time they kept the money but refused to sign the necessary papers and sold him on. Despite these setbacks he did eventually buy his freedom and later that of his wife and one son. Two of Moses' daughters each bought their freedom for twelve hundred dollars by working as stewardesses on Mississippi steamboats, but he lost contact with four other children who were sold away from him.

Venture Smith was sold several times before he bought his freedom for seventy one pounds in 1765, when he was thirty six. He later bought the freedom of his wife and some of his children.

In 2006 a team of scientists from the Universities of Hull and Connecticut began a project to trace his origins using DNA extracted from his remains or those of his son.

Olaudah Equiano (7), enslaved at the age of ten, worked on a plantation and later on ships trading between England and the Caribbean. He bought his freedom in 1766. A narrative of his life was published in 1789 and he travelled through England making anti-slavery speeches, visiting Hull in 1792.



Olaudah Equiano

## Plantation Life

The working day on a plantation was usually 16 hours long, six days a week. It would be even longer during harvest times. Men and women shared the work, with the older children organised to do weeding.

Children were often taken from their mothers at about a year old and cared for in the woods by old women unable to do field work any longer. Sometimes their mothers were sold or hired to new masters a long way away. The children began to work at about six years old.

Workers were allowed only two brief breaks for food, which they took with them to the fields, and were often not allowed to drink water whilst they worked.

When their day's work in the field was ended they had other jobs to do before they could rest. They slept on bare mud floors in huts, often all together.

A typical weekly food ration was a peck of corn meal and three pounds of salt pork, bacon or salted herrings per person. The diet was monotonous and hardly enough to satisfy their hunger. Stealing an apple from the master's orchard was likely to earn a severe beating.

A large plantation was like a village, with all the jobs, including shoemaking, blacksmithing and weaving carried out by slaves. The owner might own a sloop to carry his goods to market and this would be crewed by slaves.

Some men on rice plantations were used to dig canals; this was a particularly hard job as they worked in thick mud up to their waists or deeper all the time.

House servants such as cooks or washerwomen had a slightly easier time than others, but were at the family's beck and call all the time and frequently whipped or beaten for the slightest reason.

Men were usually given two shirts, two pairs of thick trousers and a jacket in the winter, two shirts and two pairs of cotton trousers in the summer. The women made their own clothes from cheap cloth they were given. Children had two long shirts a year. When clothes wore out or were torn they had to be patched and made to last until the next allowance.

Laws were passed making it illegal for slaves to learn to read or write, and many of them never left their plantations, so had almost no contact with the outside world.

Punishments were frequent and severe. Slaves were often flogged or beaten if they could not finish their tasks in time, and some plantation owners hired 'slave breakers' to break the spirits of those who tried to run away or were not submissive. Husbands, wives and children were sold without warning and would never see one another again. A new master would sometimes rename a slave, and that made finding lost members of the family even more difficult.

## Protest and Rebellion

Those taken captive sometimes tried to rebel once on board the slave ships, but their chains and fetters made their actions almost certain to fail.

Some felt that death was better than slavery. Ibo (Igbo) captives landed in the Georgia Sea Islands in 1802 held hands and drowned themselves by wading into the Dunbar River, singing a song in their own language, 'The water spirit brought us, The water spirit will take us away' (8).

Ottobah Cuguano, in his narrative, told how he and his fellows planned to 'burn and blow up the ship, and to perish all together in the flames'. The women and boys, who were not chained, were to burn the ship, but the plan was betrayed by one of the women.

Harriet Tubman (9) said, 'I had reasoned this out in my mind; --I had a right to liberty or death. If I could not have one, I would have the other.'

On the plantations, enslaved people protested in many small ways, even though this was likely to lead to whipping or flogging. Tools might be lost or broken and crops damaged. A worker might pretend to be too sick to work or flee to the woods for a few days to avoid work. Plantation buildings were burned and cattle killed.

Many rebellions took place; they were put down with great severity.

In 1831 Nat Turner, a young man born into slavery in Virginia, and six of his men set out to the home of John Travis, his master, and killed the whole family as they slept. They moved on from house to house, killing any white people they met. Turner by then had a party of about forty slaves, most of them on horseback.

Several rebels were captured in a first meeting with troops as they marched towards the nearest town. The rest were met by further troops; many of the men, including Turner, escaped. The rebels had stabbed, shot and clubbed almost sixty white people to death. Turner went into hiding but was captured a few months later, tried and hanged.

Afterwards many slaves were accused of having a connection with Turner and were tried and hanged; white mobs killed many more.

On 16 October 1859 John Brown led eighteen men into Harper's Ferry, Virginia. Three other men remained at a nearby Maryland farm. Brown meant to begin a general uprising that would lead to a war against slavery, and had raised some funds from Northern abolitionists.

The party seized the local arsenal. Within a few days federal troops stormed the position and captured or killed most of the group. John Brown stood trial for treason, for murder, and for conspiring with slaves to rebel. He was hanged.

## A New Religion: New Songs

The Africans came from many different countries, with different languages, religions and customs. They were discouraged from practising their own religions, and encouraged to become Christians.

In many African cultures, major events were marked with song and dance, and rituals such as burials were carried out beside or in the local rivers. Songs accompanied fieldwork, fishing, rowing, logging; the rhythm helped the job along. The African drum was their main instrument, but owners banned the drums in case they were used to send messages.

Many songs were 'call and response' and were impromptu - the lead singer would call out a line and the group sing it back. Sometimes no words were used, just sounds. Frederick Douglass, a former slave, said in his narrative, 'They would compose and sing as they went along, consulting neither time nor tune. The thought that came up, came out-if not in the word, in the sound-and as frequently in the one as in the other.'

The slaves, hearing the Old Testament stories of the Hebrews taken from their lands in captivity, could relate to the stories through their own experiences. They wove their own traditions and beliefs in with Christian beliefs.

They composed and sang songs which became known as 'spirituals', with different tones and rhythms from the hymns their owners sang.

These songs, in addition to their genuine religious meanings, were sometimes coded songs, with hidden meanings.

The River Jordan meant the River Ohio or any river that had to be crossed to escape; 'angels' were the helpers on the Underground Railroad and 'chariots' were the wagons escaping slaves would hide in. 'Milk and honey on the other side' meant that liberty would bring a happy life. Harriet Tubman was sometimes referred to as the Moses of her people.

Owners sent trackers with dogs to hunt down runaways.

'Wade in the Water' was a reminder that this was a way to cause the hounds to lose the scent.

'Follow the Drinking Gourd' was a coded song, giving directions on how to escape from Mississippi or Alabama to Canada by heading north and following the river bank. It is one of the few escape songs to survive. Since slaves were not allowed to learn to read or write, the message was passed on as a song. The 'Drinking Gourd' is called the Plough in England; it can be used to find the North Star.

'Steal Away' is thought to have been sung as a signal to those who were waiting for conductors to lead them north that it was time to go.

A song called 'My Father How Long' included the words, 'We'll soon be free' and some of those who sang it were jailed at the beginning of the Civil War.

## The Underground Railroad

Slaves did try to escape, but the decision to do so was difficult. Whatever their circumstances, to leave meant leaving behind all those they knew. Their families were often severely punished; they were in constant fear of being betrayed or caught and sold again, and they usually faced a long and very difficult journey to safety. Some did make it to safety on their own, but others were helped by the members of an organisation opposed to slavery.

The Underground Railroad was the name given to a network involving many people, which gave help to those on the run.

In 1787 Isaac Hopper, a Quaker, began to organise safe houses, or stations, where runaways could shelter and be helped on their way to freedom in Canada. Stations were usually about twenty miles apart.

By 1850 several thousand people worked on the railroad, including people known as conductors who went to the South and guided runaways. There were many different routes but many thousands of people did succeed in escaping.

Those on the run hid by day and travelled by night, on foot or in covered wagons fitted with false bottoms.

In 1850 the Fugitive Slave Act was passed, making assisting a runaway a punishable offence, but that did not stop those working on the railroad.

Harriet Tubman, a former slave, returned to the South many times, leading several hundred people to freedom. Harriet worked hard and saved her money. As soon as she had enough she left her home in the North and travelled South to the plantations, to bring a waiting party of runaways to safety. She sometimes used songs to signal to those waiting for her whether or not it was safe to make contact. They crossed rivers, forests and mountains on their journey. The babies were drugged and carried in baskets to that they would not betray the party by crying. Harriet carried a gun and made it clear that those who travelled with her, once committed to the journey, must 'Go on or die.'

Thomas Garrett, who worked for the Railroad for forty years, was fined so heavily for helping slaves that he became bankrupt. His friends helped him to set up his business again.

Calvin Fairbank, a white minister, served many years in prison for his activities but was believed to have saved almost fifty people.

Levi Coffin and his wife Catharine, who were Quakers, helped many runaways to escape to the North or to Canada; their house became known as 'Grand Central Station.'



## The Abolitionists

Many people spoke out against slavery. In England John Wesley, founder of the Methodist church, published anti-slavery pamphlets in the 1770s and the Quakers worked with Granville Sharp to fight against the slave trade and later against slavery itself. They met with much opposition, particularly from those who profited from the trade, who were wealthy and powerful.

Sharp and his friend Thomas Clarkson set up the Society for the Abolition of the Slave Trade in 1787. Clarkson had interviewed thousands of sailors and collected evidence of the methods used on board slave ships. In 1787 he published a pamphlet describing his findings:

Those who opposed the slave trade and slavery became known as 'The Abolitionists'. Sharp and the Quakers asked William Wilberforce to be their voice in Parliament and he presented his first bill for the abolition of the slave trade in 1789, but despite his persistence it was not until 1807 that the Abolition of the Slave Trade Act came into effect.

A new Anti-Slavery Society was set up in England in 1820 to work for the end of slavery itself. In 1831 the Society petitioned parliament calling for the "immediate freeing of newborn children of slaves". Slavery was abolished in the British Empire in 1834

In the U.S.A William Lloyd Garrison began publication of an anti-slavery newspaper, 'The Liberator', in 1831. In 1833 he and Arthur Tappan founded the American Anti-Slavery Society and two years later it had a hundred and fifty thousand members.

The number of anti-slavery organisations in America grew rapidly in the years before the Civil War. Abolitionists disagreed amongst themselves; some wanted to use moral arguments to state their case whilst others were in favour of more violent methods; some called for the immediate ending of slavery and others wished for a more gradual process. The topic of abolition was constantly brought to public attention.

Poetry was one way of stirring public opinion; William Cowper in 1788 and Robert Burns in 1792 had written about slavery. Thousands of copies were printed and were sometimes sung as ballads. Some writers put new words expressing anti-slavery views to popular hymns.

Many slave narratives were published, reaching a wide audience, and children's books were written telling true stories of slave children taken from their mothers, never to see them again.

## Emancipation

The slavery issue was just one of the factors that brought about the American Civil War (1861 - 1865). Its main purpose had been to keep the Union together.

In 1862 Abraham Lincoln, the first Republican President, issued a proclamation (The Emancipation Proclamation) stating that 'On the 1st day of January, A.D. 1863, all persons held as slaves within any State or designated part of a State the people whereof shall then be in rebellion against the United States shall be then, thenceforward, and forever free.'

The Proclamation did not immediately free all slaves; it did announce that black men would be accepted into the Union forces, and by the end of the war almost two hundred thousand blacks had fought for the Union army or navy.

**The Thirteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution abolished slavery in the United States in 1865, declaring that:**

**'Section 1. Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction.**

**Section 2. Congress shall have power to enforce this article by appropriate legislation.'**

## References

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9. Harriet Tubman the Moses of her people Sarah Bradford 1869

This booklet and the accompanying CD were put together as a community-based project, hosted by the Hull and East Riding branch of the Historical Association, with grant funding from the Hull Community Investment Fund. We are very grateful for their support.

The project is part of the celebrations for Wilberforce 2007, marking the bicentenary of the passing of the Abolition of the Slave Trade Act.

The project has involved the participation of about 150 singers and musicians aged from 10+ to 70+. My thanks to all of them for sharing their talents in order to produce the accompanying CD.

Most of the songs are from the mid-1800s; some are new. The older songs have changed over time and our accents are not those of the original singers, but we hope that our versions capture something of the spirit of those who fought long and hard against slavery and those who endured it, yet still sang.

Ann Berriman August 2006

## Notes on the Songs and Narratives: (Trad/anon except where noted.)

The Abolitionist Hymn 1800s. Tune: 'Old Hundred'  
Abolitionists often wrote new words to be sung to well-known hymn tunes.

Follow the Drinking Gourd pre. 1865  
The Drinking Gourd (Big Dipper or Plough) points the way to the North Star. The song gave coded directions for an escape route from Mississippi on Alabama, starting in the winter or spring when the migrating quail returned. The route followed the bank of the Tombigbee River; dead trees along the bank were marked. The next stage lay between two hills to the meeting with the Tennessee River, then North until it joined the Ohio and across the Ohio, sometimes when it was frozen. Runaways were to be met by conductors from the Underground Railroad (UR) and led to safety.

### Free at Last

A spiritual. Martin Luther King, in his 'I have a Dream' speech, made reference to this song.

### Harriet Tubman Walter Robinson 1950

A song in tribute to Harriet, who returned to the South many times and led several hundred slaves to freedom using the UR network.

### I'm On My Way to Canada pre. 1865. Tune 'Oh, Susannah' Stephen Foster 1848

A song known to many runaway slaves, and in 'Harriet, the Moses of Her People', by Sarah Bradford (1886) said to be one sung by Harriet herself. To 'shake the lion's paw' means to find safety in Canada under English law.

### John Brown's Body ca 1860

There are several versions of the song, which refers to the raid led by John Brown in 1859. He captured the arsenal and had hoped to begin a general slave uprising, but was caught, tried and hanged.

### Kumbaya pre. 1860

Believed to have its origins in the Georgia Sea Islands. Slaves brought there from many different West African countries to work on the rice plantations developed a creole language called Gullah, including words from

many of their original African languages. Kumbaya translates as 'Come by here'.

### The Liberty Bell Jesse Hutchinson 1845

The Hutchinsons were a large family and often sang at abolitionist gatherings. Jesse later wrote 'Lincoln and Liberty' which became Lincoln's campaign song.

### Light The Way for Freedom

A new song composed for the project and performed by Nick Stubbs.

### Many Thousand Gone ca 1860

The peck of corn and pint of salt refer to slaves' rations. Sung secretly by slaves and openly by those who had escaped to Canada.

### Michael Row the Boat Ashore pre 1863

Sung on the Georgia Sea Islands. Plantations often had their own boats to transport their products to and from the islands. Each crew would have its own song.

### My Father How Long? 1800s

A spiritual. During the Civil War slaves had been put in prison for singing this, with its references to freedom.

### North, South, East & West (Nobody Knows My Name)

A new song, composed and sung by Stephen Parkes.

### Oh Freedom

A spiritual. Death was seen as the final freedom.

### Shallow Brown

One of many versions of this shanty. Slaves were sold or hired as whaler crews. The voyages lasted for several years and loved ones might well be sold during that time, with no chance of tracing them.

### The Slave's Song 1800s

Thought to have an abolitionist author. 'Free beneath the lion's claw' means freedom in Canada under English law; 'paid me my last forty-four' may refer to a flogging.

Sometimes I Feel Like a Motherless Child

A spiritual. Slave traders found children easy targets. Those born in captivity were often separated from their mothers before they were a year old and cared for by old women unfit for fieldwork.

The Slave's Lament Robert Burns 1792

A powerful story of a slave taken by enemies; perhaps some of his own people.

Steal Away

Some suggest that this was used by Nat Turner to call slaves together to plan for rebellion. At other times it would be a message that members of the UR were near and waiting for runaways to join them.

Swing Low

A spiritual and coded song. Chariots refer to the UR; angels were the conductors; the Jordan was the Ohio or Mississippi River. The song is also linked with Ripley, Ohio, a station on the UR and the home of John Parker, a former slave and conductor for the UR.

Wade in the Water

Owners used hounds to track runaways; the song reminded them to take to the water to put the hounds off the scent.

Narrative extracts

- 1 from 'Thoughts Upon Slavery' John Wesley 1774
- 2 from 'The History of Mary Prince, a West Indian Slave' 1831
- 3 from 'Narrative of the Life of Moses Grandy, a Slave' 1843
- 4 from 'The Narrative of Bethany Veney, a Slave Woman' 1889
- 5 from 'The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave' 1845
- 6 from William Lloyd Garrison's preface to 'The Life of Frederick Douglass' 1845

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