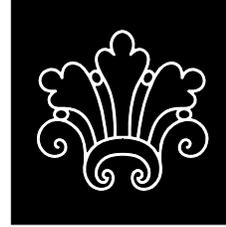


# THE CABILDO

A LOUISIANA STATE MUSEUM



## The Slave Trade in New Orleans

### Grade-Level Expectations:

- History
  - Standard 1 – 8.1.1 & 8.1.2
  - Standard 2 – 8.2.6
- Economics
  - Standard 10 – 8.10.2 & 8.10.3

### Objectives:

- Students will examine multiple primary documents (a record of sales, a memoir, a map, and an image) that describe, in some way, the slave trade in New Orleans.
- Students will evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of each type of document.
- Students will then use the documents in tandem to develop a better understanding of the slave trade in New Orleans.

### Materials

- Copy of documents for each student or group of students.

### Background:

The Constitution of the United States included a provision that abolished the international slave trade after 1808. After this time, the sale and transport of slaves took place domestically and relied on the forced relocation of American-born slaves. In response to demand for slaves in Louisiana, Alabama, and Georgia for the cultivation of cotton and sugar, slave traders traveled through the upper South purchasing slaves to bring for auction in the lower South. John White, whose *Slave Record* for the years 1851-52 is reproduced here, brought slaves south along the Mississippi river to be sold in New Orleans. Slaves for the upper South feared being sold into the lower South because of the hard labor and the hot climate of the region. Slave owners in the lower South rarely sold their own slaves who were adjusted to the climate and had developed immunities to local diseases.

New Orleans was the site of the largest slave market in North America during the 1850s. Slave-selling firms kept “slave pens” in which they held slaves for sale or until auction. Each pen, which was generally the size of a house lot, could hold between 50 and 100 slaves. Slave auctions were held at the St. Louis and St. Charles Hotels, the exchange on Esplanade Avenue, and the Masonic Temple.

**Bibliography:** Johnson, Walter. *Soul by Soul: Life Inside the Antebellum Slave Market*. Harvard University Press: Cambridge, 1999.

**Procedure:**

Students will be learning about the slave trade in New Orleans by drawing conclusions from diverse primary documents. It may be useful to divide students into pairs or small groups so the can discuss the information conveyed by the documents.

Have students answer the following questions about the documents:

1. *Slave Record*
  - a. What was the primary purpose for keeping this record?
  - b. What information is recorded?
  - c. What information is missing?
  - d. Why do you think this information is missing?
  - e. Which terms or categories are unexplained?
  - f. Can you draw any conclusions about the slaves' relations to each other? How?
  - g. Were any of the slaves sold to the same person? To the same city or parish?
  - h. Who is the youngest slave that White was selling and how old was s/he? Who was the oldest slave that White was selling and how was s/he? What is the average age of the slaves that White was selling?
  
2. Excerpt from *Twelves Years a Slave*
  - a. Who is Freeman?
  - b. Why were Northup and the other slaves given new clothes?
  - c. What does Northup mean when he writes that he and the other slaves were "to be properly trained before the admission of customers"?
  - d. How do you think David and Caroline are related? Lethe? Why?
  - e. How do you think Randall, Eliza, and Emily are related? Why?
  - f. What information is conveyed by this document that is not conveyed by the *Slave Record*?
  
3. Photograph of the interior of a slave pen
  - a. This photograph is undated. Do you think the photo was taken while the pen was in use? Why or why not?
  - b. Describe the materials that were used to construct the slave pen. Give a detailed physical description of the interior.
  - c. Look at the diagram of the slave pen again. What information is conveyed by the diagram that is not conveyed by the photograph? What information is conveyed by the photograph that is not conveyed by the diagram?
  
4. Slave auction block
  - a. This slave block was used during auctions. What purpose do you think it served?
  - b. The photograph is of an exhibit in the Louisiana State Museum during the 1930s. The slave block is displayed inside of a slave pen, although it was used in an auction house. Do you think the slave block should have been displayed in this manner? Why or why not?

- c. Estimate how tall the block is (it may be helpful to judge based on the window behind it).
5. Sale of Estates, Pictures, and Slaves
    - a. Why do you think estates, pictures, and slaves would have been sold during the same auction?
    - b. What are the ages and genders of the slaves that are standing on the block?
    - c. What are the ages and genders of the people attending the auction?

### **Closure and Assessment**

Ask students to write about their personal reactions to the documents. Responses should include intellectual, emotional, and visual reactions.

### **Additional Activities**

Students can choose a research project that expands upon any of the primary documents.

Examples from the *Slave Record* include:

- researching slavery in Donaldsonville, Lafourche Parish, Howard City, and New Orleans
- researching sugar production in Lafourche
- researching any of the families that bought slave from or sold slaves to John White

Examples from *Twelve Years a Slave* include:

- reading *Twelve Years a Slave* in its entirety
- reading other slave narratives
- researching the influence of Northern abolitionists on slave narratives
- researching the life of Solomon Northup

Examples from the photograph of the interior of the slave pen include:

- researching other areas in which slaves were kept, including transport and housing
- researching other historic photographs that document slavery
- creating an accurate historic map of New Orleans in the 1850s highlighting locations at which slaves were bought or sold

Examples from the slave block include:

- researching and reprinting ads for slave auctions
- researching the design of museum exhibits

Examples from the *Sale of Estates, Pictures, and Slaves* include:

- researching and comparing historic representations of slave auctions
- researching the slave trade in the St. Louis Hotel
- researching the history of the St. Louis Hotel

*The Louisiana State Museum's website is an excellent source for research, and includes historic map database, online exhibits, photo collection, and links to other historic collections.*

**Documents**  
**The Slave Trade in New Orleans**

**1. *Slave Record* kept by slave trader John White, 1851-1852**

*John White was a slave trader who brought slaves from the upper South down the Mississippi River to sell in the lower South. Many of the slaves were sold at markets in New Orleans.*

Cynthia Branham, 23, \$515.00	Sold to McRae through Coffman, \$687.75
Isabel Evans, 17, \$600	Sold to Mr. Herne, cash \$750.00
Eliza McAfee, 16, \$725	Sold to Richard McCall, <i>Returned</i>
McGwine Wilson, 30, \$600.00	Sold to Thos. Pugh, Lafourche Parish, account to 1 <sup>st</sup> Decr. next, \$1000
William Robards, 25, \$750.00	Sold to C.H. Harriss, N. Orleans, \$875.00
Charlotte Robards, 21, \$650.00	Sold to Richard Jordan, cash \$915.00
Laura Robards, 16, \$700.00	Sold to Dr. L.D. Couden, cash \$400, dft. 30 days \$315
Isabel Robards, 14, \$575	Sold to Col. Hale, cash \$750.00
Frances Robards, 12, \$650.00	Sold to Mr. Cv. Krell, dft. Cashed \$584.00
Jane Young, 19, \$649.75	Sold by R. A. Layton in Mississippi, \$750
Emily Carroll, 14, \$500.00	Sold to Mr. Brand Donaldsonville, notes \$1000.00
Joe Fields, 22, \$715.00	Sold to Etienne Landry, Lafourche, cash \$800.00
Lydia Howard, 20, \$575.00	Died in Texas
Jane Chilpley, 20, \$500.00	Sold in Texas by R.A. Layton, \$700.00
Matilda Selby, 9, \$400.00	Sold to Mr. Covington, St. Louis, \$425.00
Brooks Selby, 19, \$750.00	Left at Home – Crazy
Fred McAfee, 22, \$800.00	Sold to Pepidal, Donaldsonville, \$1200.00
George Adams, 15, \$675.00	Sold to E.R. Patterson, Howard Cty., \$750.00
Howard Barnett, 25, \$750.00	Ranaway. Sold out of Jail, \$540.00
Harriet Barnett, 17, \$550.00	Sold to Davenport and Jones, Lafourche, \$900.00
Jack Barnett, 20, \$750.00	Sold to Madame Burke, Lafourche, sugar \$1200.00
Martha Peacher, 25, \$500.00	Sold to A Hodges, N. Orleans, \$825.00

This *Slave Record* was reprinted by Walter Johnson in *Soul by Soul: Life Inside the Antebellum Slave Market*. Harvard University Press: Cambridge (1999). Original in the collection of the University of Missouri, Western Historical Collection, Elmer Ellis Memorial Library.

**2. Excerpt of Solomon Northup's *Twelve Years a Slave*, describing his experiences in a slave pen in New Orleans. Solomon Northup was a free man of color who was kidnapped from New York in 1841 and sold into slavery in Louisiana.**

...Mr. Theophilus Freeman bustled about in a very industrious manner, getting his property ready for the sales-room, intending, no doubt, to do that day a rousing business.

In the first place we were required to wash thoroughly, and those with beards, to shave. We were then furnished with a new suit each, cheap, but clean. The men had hat, coat, shirt, pants and shoes; the women frocks of calico, and handkerchiefs to bind about their heads. We were now conducted into a large room in the front part of the building to which the yard was attached, in order to be properly trained, before the admission of customers. The men were arranged on one side of the room, the women on the other...Freeman charged us to remember our places; exhorted us to appear smart and lively...

...Next day many customers called to examine Freeman's "new lot."...He would make us hold up our heads, walk briskly back and forth, while customers would feel of our hands and arms and bodies, turn us about, ask us what we could do, make us open our mouths and show our teeth, precisely as a jockey examines a horse which he is about to barter for or purchase. Sometimes a man or woman was taken back to the small house in the yard, stripped, and inspected more minutely. Scars upon a slave's back were considered evidence of a rebellious or unruly spirit, and hurt his sale.

...David and Caroline were purchased together by a Natchez planter. They left us, grinning broadly, and in the most happy state of mind, caused by the fact of their not being separated. Lethe was sold to a planter of Baton Rouge, her eyes flashing with anger as she was led away.

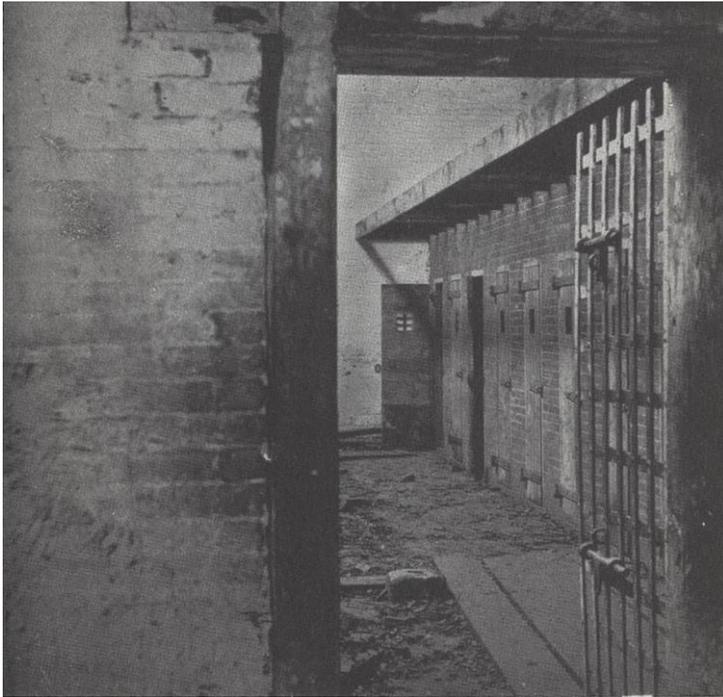
The same man also purchased Randall. The little fellow was made to jump, and run across the floor, and perform many other feats, exhibiting his activity and condition. All the time the trade was going on, Eliza was crying aloud, and wringing her hands. She besought the man not to buy him, unless he also bought herself and Emily. She promised, in that case, to be the most faithful slave that ever lived. The man answered that he could not afford it, and then Eliza burst into a paroxysm of grief, weeping plaintively. Freeman turned round to her, savagely, with his whip in his uplifted hand, ordering her to stop her noise, or he would flog her...

...The planter from Baton Rouge, with his new purchases, was ready to depart.

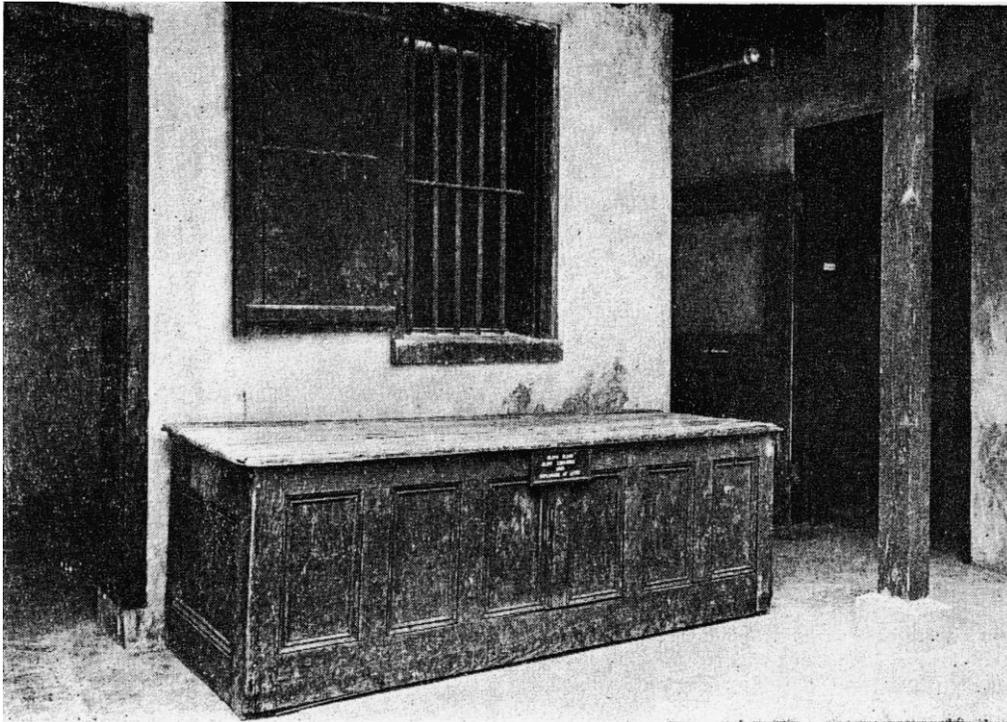
"Don't cry mama, I will be a good boy. Don't cry," said Randall, looking back, as they passed out of the door.

Excerpted from Solomon Northup, *Twelve Years a Slave*. Louisiana State University Press: Baton Rouge (1968; first published 1853). Pages 51-54.

**3. Photograph of the interior of a slave pen.** *Photograph from the Library of Congress.*



4. **Slave auction block used at slave market at Esplanade and the river, New Orleans, c. 1850.** *From the Louisiana State Museum.*



A photographic view of the old slave auction block, now exhibited in the Slave Cell, No. 11, which was in use at a slave market at Esplanade avenue and the river for many years when Negro slaves were sold to black as well as white masters.

**5. Sale of Estates, Pictures, and Slaves in the Rotunda, New Orleans. W.H. Brooke and J.M. Starling, c. 1860. From the Louisiana State Museum. Gift of J.B. Harter.**



**Teacher's Guide**  
**The Slave Trade in New Orleans**

1. *Slave Record*

- a) John White needed to record the prices that he paid for slaves and how much he was able to sell his slaves for. He also needed information about the buyers to collect payment.
- b) The slaves' names, ages, purchase price, price they were sold for, to whom they were sold. Occasionally the location and industry of their owners were recorded as well. White also recorded which slaves were returned to him, which died, which ran away, and which were not sold.
- c) How the slaves were related to each other, what skills they had, why they were sold, any physical description of the slaves, the slaves' place of origin, etc.
- d) The slave record is a record of transactions. White kept information about the slaves as one would keep information on livestock or other property.
- e) "Returned" and "Left at home." People who purchased slaves at auction could return their slaves to the trader if they believed that the slaves' skills and dispositions had been falsely represented. While this process often required that the buyer go through a court, some traders who worked the Mississippi River circuit often would accept returned slaves as a good business practice.
- f) The slaves with the same last names came from the same plantations. Based on the ages of the slaves, there do not seem to be any parent/child relationships, although there are some possible husband/wife relationships.
- g) None of the slaves were sold to the same person. McGwine Wilson, Joe Fields, Harriet Barnett, and Jack Barnett were sold to Lafourche Parish. William Robards and Martha Peacher were sold to New Orleans. Emily Carroll and Fred McAfee were sold to Donaldsonville.
- h) The youngest was Matilda Selby, 9. The oldest was McGwine Wilson, 30. The average age was 19.14.

2. Excerpt from *Twelve Years a Slave*

- a) The slave trader.
- b) To prepare them to be sold. Slaves were presented in as good a light as possible to increase the amount that they could be sold for.
- c) Slaves were expected to display their skills and virtues to perspective buyers. Slave traders told slaves how they were to act, how they were to answer questions about their past and their skills, and were threatened with punishment if they did not act in accord with these instructions.
- d) The three of them seem to know each other and to have come from the same plantation as they are concerned with staying together. David and Caroline may have been husband and wife or brother and sister.
- e) Eliza was Emily and Randall's mother. Randall refers to his mother as "Mama" and Eliza pleads to be bought as a family.

- f) Northup writes about the experiences of the slaves. His memoir is a personal account that is not conveyed by White, who is concerned with the business of slave trading rather than the humanity of his property.
3. Photograph of the interior of a slave pen
    - a) The slave pen was probably no longer in use when the photograph was taken. Reasons for this conclusion will vary, but may include: the clarity of the photograph makes it seem like a more recent document; the door to one of the cells is open; there aren't any marks that people have been in the pen recently, etc.
    - b) Brick walls, dirt floor, metal bars. Divided into cells with one opening onto the street. Some portions of the floor are covered with wood.
    - c) The map/diagram and the photograph are related in a similar manner as the slave record and Northup's memoir. The map shows the location of the pen, the floorplan, and the divisions within the pen. The photograph shows how the slave pens looked from the perspective of someone standing outside the door.
  4. Slave auction block
    - a) Slaves were displayed on the block to be inspected by potential buyers.
    - b) Answers will vary.
    - c) Approximately 2.5 feet.
  5. Sale of Estates, Pictures, and Slaves
    - a) This sale may have followed the death of a slave-owner whose estate and possessions were being sold at auction.
    - b) There is a man, woman, and child.
    - c) There are men, women, and children.