

*Making Freedom*  
*African Americans in U.S. History*

SOURCEBOOK 1



*True to Our Native Land*  
*Beginnings to 1770*



COMPILED AND EDITED BY  
THE CURRICULUM SPECIALISTS AT  
PRIMARY SOURCE, INC.

FOREWORD BY  
JAMES OLIVER HORTON



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## The Slave Labor System — Where and Why?

Most often we think of slavery as a rural phenomena found mainly in the South on tobacco, rice, and cotton plantations. Although there is some truth to that picture, historians such as Ira Berlin now describe American slavery as a continually changing institution that differed from town to country, from region to region, and over time. Michael Guasco, in his review of Ira Berlin's book, *Many Thousand Gone*, wrote that slavery was “not simply a saga of labor and physical domination [but] a thoroughly human tale of the emergence of an African-American people and culture characterized by self-assertion, social consciousness, and political activism.”

Slavery in this country was not strictly synonymous with race until the late 1600s. Before that time, some blacks and many whites came to British North America as indentured servants, earned their freedom, and became landowners. Perhaps one of the most well-known examples of this is Anthony Johnson, an African who arrived in Virginia in 1621 and who, by the end of his life, owned and farmed more than two hundred acres. For a short time, there was fluidity in social and economic relationships between black and white people, but by the 1660s, the ideal of Africans being confined to lifelong unpaid labor had become established in the minds of white colonists. Succeeding economically in this environment required cheap or unpaid labor. Land produced wealth, but only with labor force to improve and cultivate it. White colonists looked to the models of social organization in the nearby slave colonies of the West Indies.

As the historian William Pierson remarked, “the unexamined price for adopting a slave labor system without first developing a political rationalization was [by the 18th century] an insidious incompatibility between the new economic and social realities of colonial slavery and the basic political ideology of British North America.”

The stereotype of slaves as ignorant, lazy, and content is challenged dramatically by primary sources that reveal people demonstrating “self assertion and political activism” and possessing a wide range of skills that was crucial to the economic success of an emerging nation. This lesson offers students an opportunity to read and consider these ideas and issues for themselves.

## Organizing Idea

Africans in early America were much more than field hands. In the early colonial period, some Africans and African Americans lived as free people, owning and farming land. As servitude hardened into racial slavery, the skills and labor of enslaved peoples provided the means by which colonial families functioned, communities developed, and the economic foundation for a new nation was built. In discovering evidence for this history, students look at primary documents that reveal who these Africans were, what kinds of work they were doing, and what skills they brought with them and/or developed as they labored.

## Student Objectives

Students will:

- ❖ use primary sources to investigate the range of work performed and skills possessed by black people in early America
- ❖ consider the implications of the use of enslaved labor in the development of this country
- ❖ consider the individuality and agency of enslaved people in the eighteenth century
- ❖ understand that the institution of slavery changed over time and had regional variations

## Key Questions

- ❖ What do we know about the skills and work accomplishments of enslaved Africans in early America?
- ❖ How can we use primary documents to discover the kinds of work that was done by men and by women?
- ❖ What do we learn from reading ads for runaways and ads for sales of businesses and estates?
- ❖ Why is it so important to study the lives and work of African Americans in early America?

## Primary Source Materials

DOCUMENT 1.9.1: “Tasks Identified by Age and Gender,” based upon information from George Washington’s diary, 1786–1787

DOCUMENT 1.9.2: *Virginia Gazette* newspaper advertisements for the sale or hire of slaves

DOCUMENT 1.9.3: “A Scheme of a Lottery” published in the *Virginia Gazette*, 14 April, 1768

DOCUMENT 1.9.4: Hunter Iron Works described by Ebenezer Hazard in *The Journal of Ebenezer Hazard*, June 1777

DOCUMENT 1.9.5: Runaway slave advertisement from the *Boston Gazette*, April 2, 1765

DOCUMENT 1.9.6: Broadside advertising a cargo of slaves for sale, Charleston, North Carolina, July 24, 1769

DOCUMENT 1.9.7: Newspaper advertisements from the 1700s for runaways, from the *Pennsylvania Gazette* and the *Virginia Gazette* (on the CD-ROM only)

## Supplies

Large sheets of butcher or chart paper

## Vocabulary

chaferyman	finery	hostler	Poythress
collier	Flowerdew	lottery	
finer	Hundred	pig iron	

## Student Activities

### Activity 1

#### Analysis of Washington's Diary

Students each receive and read a copy of “Tasks Identified by Age and Gender,” based upon information from George Washington’s diary, 1786–1787 (1.9.1), copies of the advertisements for sale or hire of slaves (1.9.2), and a copy of “A Scheme of a Lottery” (1.9.3). What kinds of information can we learn from these documents? Reading carefully, students identify and list particular skills possessed by black people in the eighteenth century. Why was skilled work important to colonial families and communities?

**Note:** In the eighteenth century, a lottery was a method by which some members of the gentry tried to raise money to pay off their debts. Individuals bought chances for various “lots” of another individual’s personal property, sometimes including the slaves they owned.

### Activity 2

#### Creative Extensions: An Eighteenth-Century Industrial Village

Students receive the one-page description of the Hunter Iron Works (1.9.4) by Ebenezer Hazard, an early historian and postmaster general. The second line of this document reads: “A little above Falmouth are Mr. Hunter’s Works which, with the Dwelling houses for the Workmen, form a small village.” After reading the document

carefully, students work in small groups to recreate this small village on large chart paper, carefully including all the industries, the terrain, the canal, and the houses. One historical source tells us that the Hunter Iron Works contributed to the war effort. What war would this have been? How would these workers, many of whom were slaves, have helped to win the war?

### Writing to Extend: A Poem for Two Voices

#### Activity 3

In a lesson plan centered around poems for two voices on the American Memory website of the Library of Congress ([www.memory.loc.gov/ammem/](http://www.memory.loc.gov/ammem/)), Gail Desler, a teacher in Elk Grove, California, describes a poem for two voices: a “two-column format allows writers to juxtapose two contrasting ideas, concepts, or perspectives. Alternating lines indicate opposing viewpoints and are read by an individual voice. Adjacent lines represent agreement or compromise and are therefore read in unison.” Before beginning this activity, teachers and/or students find examples of poems for two voices online or in books. Poems should be read aloud.

Students receive copies of newspaper advertisements for runaways and slaves for sale from Massachusetts, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, and Virginia (1.9.5, 1.9.6, 1.9.7). Drawing from these ads and remembering previous readings describing slaves’ work and skills, students take on the persona of a runaway, either one particular person or a composite. What were these people like? What skills did they have? What were they running away from? What did they hope for? Students should also imagine a slaveholder, highly dependent on enslaved people to support his or her way of life. What would that person be doing and thinking after losing skilled, valuable “property”? Using the style of a poem for two voices, students write a poem through which we can hear these two voices, with their very different dreams and goals.

### Research and Storywriting

#### Activity 4

Students research information on Anthony Johnson from the PBS website *Africans in America* ([www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/)) and write a story about his life, contrasting it with the life of black people after the 1660s.

### Writing to Extend—What If?

#### Activity 5

Incorporating what they have learned from these lessons, students write an essay on how this country might be different today if the labor of black people in the eighteenth century had been paid labor instead of forced labor under the institution of slavery.

### Further Student and Teacher Resources

Berlin, Ira. *Many Thousand Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000.

Piersen, William. *From Africa to America*. New York: Twayne Publishers, 1996.

## Contemporary Connection



that currently there are more than twenty-seven million slaves in the world. Throughout Asia, Africa, and even Latin America, men, women, and children are being enslaved. This modern slave trade includes such practices as forced labor, servile marriage, debt bondage, child labor, and forced prostitution. In his article “Slavery: Worldwide Evil,” Charles Jacobs writes: “Modern slaves can be

## Anti-Slavery International

Anti-Slavery International (ASI) estimates

concubines, camel jockeys, or cane cutters. They might weave carpets, build roads, or clear forests.” Although slaves in the twenty-first century are no longer sold at public auction and put in shackles, the lives they lead are just as dangerous and tragic as those of people who were enslaved in the past. Research the current status of slavery and efforts to abolish it on [www.abolish.com](http://www.abolish.com).

Charles Jacobs is president of the American Anti-Slavery Group, based in Boston, Massachusetts. His article initially appeared in the April 1996 edition of *World & I*.

## Websites

<http://gwpapers.virginia.edu/diaries/list/index.html>

*Additional diary entries made by George Washington, including a list of slaves with their jobs on various parts of his plantation*

[www.afrigeneas.com/slavedata](http://www.afrigeneas.com/slavedata)

[www.artmetal.com/project/Features/Africa/page1.htm](http://www.artmetal.com/project/Features/Africa/page1.htm)

*Information about enslaved West African ironworkers who brought their skills across the Atlantic*



# Primary Source Materials for Lesson 9

## 1.9.1

“Tasks Identified by Age and Gender,” based upon information from  
George Washington’s Diary, 1786–1787

### *Men’s Skills*

Overseer	Miller	House servant
Shoemaker	Cooper	Ferryman
Sawyer	Blacksmith	Carter/wagonner
Carpentry	Gardener	Bake and lay brick

A complete list of tasks done by Washington’s slaves (1.9.1) is available on the CD-ROM.

## 1.9.2

*Virginia Gazette* newspaper advertisements  
for the sale or hire of slaves

### **April 1769**

To be sold on Wednesday the 3rd of May, before Mr. Anthony Hay’s door, in Williamsburg, for ready money. Twenty likely Virginia born Slaves, . . . among them a good shoemaker, gardener, and hostler, several men used to the house and field business, and several boys and girls fit for service.

### **November 1773**

To be SOLD . . . Share in the Town Point Company . . . , likewise a very valuable Negro Fellow, who has worked at the Smith’s Business some time, and still continues at the

principal shop in Town, sundry Smith's tools, several exceeding good house wenches with their children, and some very fine Negro girls, all to be sold at private sale.

### June 1777

For sale, for ready money, or 12 months credit, an exceeding good plantation BLACKSMITH, who is very well acquainted with many other kinds of work in that branch of business, such as nail making, tiring wheels, etc. The terms may be known by applying to Joshua Poythress, sen. At Flower de Hundred, in Prince George county, or to William Poythress at York garrison.

The full list of ads (Document 1.9.2) is available on the CD-ROM.

### 1.9.3

“A Scheme of a Lottery” published in the  
*Virginia Gazette*, 14 April 1768

#### A SCHEME of a LOTTERY

**For disposing of certain LANDS, SLAVES, and STOCKS,  
belonging to the subscriber.**

[—excerpts—]

#### VALUE. CONTENTS of PRIZES.

- |      |  |
|------|--|
| 1750 | To consist of a forge and geared grist-mill, both well fixed, and situate on a plentiful and constant stream, with 1800 acres of good land, in <i>King</i> and <i>Queen</i> county, near <i>Todd's Bridge</i> ; which cost 6000 £.   |
| 1375 | To consist of 550 acres of very good land, adjoining and below the said tract lying on the <i>Pamunkey</i> river, called <i>Gooch's</i> , part of 1686 acres, purchased of <i>William Claiborne</i> , deceased; the line to extend from said river to the back line across towards <i>Mattapony</i> .  |
| 1925 | To consist of 550 acres of very good land, adjoining and below the said tract lying on <i>Pamunkey</i> river, whereon is a good dwelling-house, 70 feet long and 20 feet wide, with three rooms below and three above; also all other good and convenient out-houses; 1000 fine peach trees thereon, with many apple trees and other sorts of fruit, a fine high and pleasant situation, and the plantation in exceeding good order for cropping; the line to extend from said river to the back line towards <i>Mattapony</i> . |

- 1750 To consist of 586 acres, below the aforesaid two tracts; whereon is a fine peach orchard, and many fine apples trees; the plantation is in exceeding good order for cropping, and very fine for corn and tobacco, and abounds with a great quantity of white oak, which will afford, it's thought, a thousand pounds worth of plank and staves.
- 3250 To consist of 6500 acres of good land, in *Caroline* county; to be laid off in lots of 100 acres each.
- 280 A Negro man named *Billy*, about 22 years old, an exceeding trusty good forgerman, as well at the finery as under the hammer, and understands putting up his fire: Also his wife named *Lucy*, a young wench, who works exceeding well both in the house and field.
- 200 A Negro man named *Mingo*, about 24 years old, a very trusty good finer, and hammerman, and understands putting up his fire.
- 250 A Negro man named *Sam*, about 26 years old, a fine chaseryman; also his wife *Daphne*, a very good hand at the hoe, or in the house.
- 200 A Negro man named *Abraham*, about 26 years old, an exceeding good forge carpenter, cooper, and clapboard carpenter.
- 120 A Negro man named *Peter*, about 18 years old, an exceeding trusty good waggoner.
- 110 A Negro woman named *Rachel*, about 32 years old, and her children *Daniel* and *Thompson*, both very fine.
- 70 A Negro woman named *Hannah*, about 16 years old.
- 75 A Negro man named *Ben*, about 25 years old, a good house servant, and a good carter, &c.
- 120 A Negro man, *Robin*, a good sawyer, and *Bella*, his wife.
- 70 A Negro girl named *Sukey*, about 12 years old, and another named *Betty*, about 7 years old; children of *Robin* and *Bella*.
- 80 A Negro woman named *Kate*, and a young child, *Judy*.
- 60 A Negro girl, *Aggy*, and boy, *Nat*; children of *Kate*.
- 110 A fine breeding woman named *Pat*, lame of one side, with child, and her three children, *Laet*, *Milley*, and *Charlotte*.
- 60 A fine boy, *Phill*, son of *Patty*, about 14 years old.
- 280 A Negro man named *Caesar* about 30 years old, a very good blacksmith, and his wife named *Nanny*, with two children, *Tab* and *Jane*.
- 100 A team of exceeding fine horses, consisting of four, and their gear; also a good waggon.
- 80 A team of four horses, and their gear, with two coal waggons.
- 200 To consist of 100 head of cattle, to be laid off in 10 lots.

The complete original of Document 1.9.3 is available on the CD-ROM.

1.9.4


The Hunter Iron Works, described by Ebenezer Hazard in  
*The Journal of Ebenezer Hazard*, June 1777

At present he makes (from Pig Iron) Bar Iron, Anchors, all kinds of common Blacksmith's Work, Small Arms, Pistols, Swords, Files, Fuller's Shears, & Nails. He has a Grist Mill & Saw Mill, a Cooper's Shop, a Saddler's Shop, a Shoemaker's Shop's, a Brass Founder's Shop, & a Wheel-Wright's Shop. All these, except the Grist Mill are constantly employed in his own Business, & not to supply Wants of other people. Besides all these Mr. Hunter has erected Works for making Steel, (this Business he is just beginning upon) & raises large quantities of Wheat, Corn, Oats, Hay, &c: in short he is a great Farmer. He informs me that his different Works, & the Negroes he employs cost him £40,000 Virginia Currency.

The full text of Document 1.9.4 is available on the CD-ROM.

1.9.5

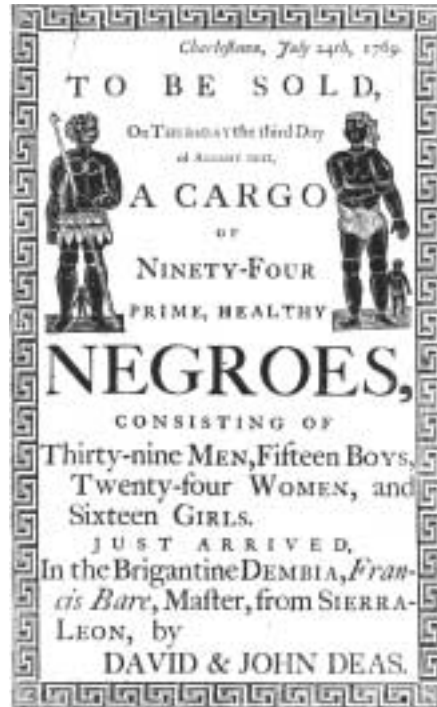
Runaway slave advertisement from the *Boston Gazette*,  
April 2, 1765



**R**UN away from *Jacob Fowle*, Esq; the Twenty-ninth ult. a Negro Boy, about Eighteen Years old, was born in *Hopkinton*, and brought up by the Rev. Mr. *Barret*; his Name is *Ishmael*, he has been a Soldier at the Lake, is thick sett, has thick Lips, and goes limping by Reason of the great Toe of his right Foot being froze and not quite well. He had on when he went away, a striped Jacket, leather Breeches, chequered woollen Shirt, blue under Jacket, light coloured Stockings, brass Buckles in his Shoes, and an old mill'd Cap. He is an artful Fellow, and is supposed will endeavour to pass for a Soldier, as he carried off with him a Firelock and Blanket.—Whoever shall take up the said Negro and bring him to his Master, or confine him in any of his Majesty's Goals so that his Master may have him again, shall have FOUR DOLLARS Reward, and all Charges paid.  
*Marblehead, April 2. 1765. JACOB FOWLE.*

1.9.6

Broadside advertising a cargo of slaves for sale, Charleston, North Carolina, July 24, 1769



American Antiquarian Society