

Handout A: Student Document Packet


Prompt:

Analyze the methods of resistance used by enslaved Africans in the United States c. 1780–1865.

Overview:

Conflicting visions of liberty and slavery shaped the American experience from as early as 1619, when the first enslaved Africans arrived at Jamestown in the Virginia colony. Over the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the institution of slavery became entrenched in the American South. Throughout this era, enslaved individuals resisted their condition in various ways. This DBQ asks you to consider six examples of the ways in which men and women fought back against the system of slavery.

TEN DOLLARS REWARD.



RUN AWAY on Friday the 26th of August 1774, from the subscriber, living in Middle-patent, North-Castle, Westchester county, and province of New-York,
A NEGRO MAN,
Named **W I L L**, about 27 years of age, about five feet six inches high, somewhat of a yellow complexion, a spry lively fellow, very talkative; had on when he went away, a butter-nut coloured coat, felt hat, tow cloth trowsers; he has part of his right ear cut off, and a mark on the backside of his right hand.

Whosoever takes up said Negro and brings him to his master, or secures him in gaol, so that his master may have him again, shall have the above reward and all reasonable charges, paid by **JAMES BANKS**

N. B. Masters of vessels are hereby warned not to carry off the above Negro.

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Runaway slave advertisements offer small glimpses of the individuals who, though they rarely succeeded, dared to run away and sought to secure their own freedom.

Documents:

- Document 1: Runaway slave ads, 1780–1782
- Document 2: The Petition of Belinda Sutton to The Commonwealth of Massachusetts, 1783
- Document 3: The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African, 1789.
- Document 4: The Old Plantation, c. 1800
- Document 5: Benjamin Rush to Samuel Bayard, 1810
- Document 6: Frederick Douglass, Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave, Written by Himself, 1845.

Part I: Exploration: Document Analysis

Document 1: Runaway slave ads, 1780–1782

Introduction:

When slaves ran away, slave owners often published classified ads offering rewards for their return. Though the level of detail varies, wanted ads provided small insights into the lives of enslaved individuals, many of whom may have been lost to history otherwise.

Sources:

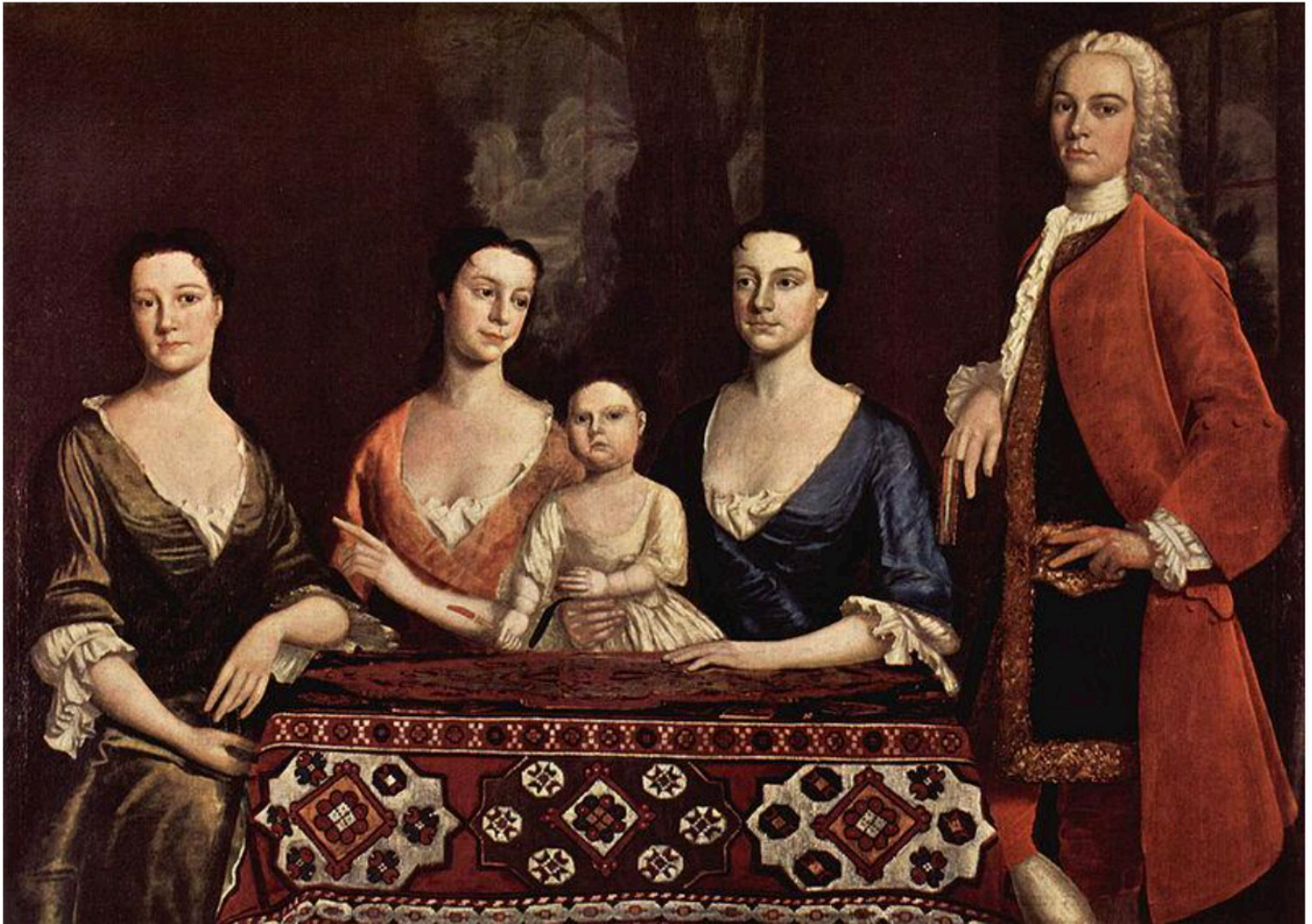
- <http://www2.vcdh.virginia.edu/gos/search/relatedAd.php?adFile=md1780.xml&adId=m1780070003>
- <http://www2.vcdh.virginia.edu/gos/search/relatedAd.php?adFile=vg1782.xml&adId=v1782060105>

Text
Maryland Journal and Baltimore Advertiser (Goddard), Baltimore, July 4, 1780.
ONE HUNDRED DOLLARS REWARD. Stafford County, (Virginia) June 16, 1780. RAN away, from my plantations, in Loudon, a Negro man, named CHARLES, about 35 years of age, and is well known in this and the neighbouring states of Carolina and Maryland, and has waited on me for many years; he is a handsome, genteel, sensible fellow, not very black, an excellent waiter in a house, and a good barber, also a good scytheman, cradler, and ploughman. It is expected he will attempt to make towards Baltimore, or some other sea-port, and pass for a freeman, as he has a pass for that purpose. All masters of vessels and recruiting officers, are forewarned from entertaining him; and the above reward, together with all reasonable expences, will be given to any person, who will deliver him to me in Stafford county. THOMSON MASON.

Text
Virginia Gazette or Weekly Advertiser (Nicolson & Prentis). Richmond, June 22, 1782.
Ten POUNDS Reward. FOR apprehending and delivering to me in Princess Anne county, DINAH, a likely short well made negro girl, about 18 years of age, has a remarkable broad nose. She went off with Cornwallis's army in August last, and I expect she is now lurking in Gloucester. Any reasonable expence exclusive of the reward, will be paid to any person delivering her. SIMON STONE.

1. What do these ads have in common? How are they different?

Document 2: The Petition of Belinda Sutton to The Commonwealth of Massachusetts, 1783



This portrait of Isaac Royall and his family was painted by Robert Feke in 1741. The enslaved individuals, such as Belinda, who made his lifestyle possible are missing from the portrait.

Introduction:

Belinda Sutton was an enslaved woman in the Royall household, the largest slaveholder family in Massachusetts. The Royall family amassed their fortune by trading sugar, rum, and enslaved persons. During the American Revolution, Isaac Royall was a Loyalist and therefore was exiled by Massachusetts in the 1778 Act of Banishment. In 1783, Sutton petitioned the Commonwealth of Massachusetts for an income from his estate. This petition is among the earliest narratives by an African-American woman, and it has been interpreted by some historians as the first call for reparations for slavery. Some scholars believe that an abolitionist named Prince Hall helped Sutton draft her narrative. The Commonwealth of Massachusetts awarded Belinda a pension of 15 pounds 12 shillings per year in 1783. Scholars have since discovered that, despite being granted a pension from this request, Sutton re-petitioned Massachusetts five times over the next ten years because of missed payments.

Source:

<http://www.medfordhistorical.org/medford-history/africa-to-medford/the-mark-of-belinda-sutton/>

Vocabulary	Text
<p>Rio de Valta: the Volta River, in what is present-day Ghana</p> <p>felicity (n): happiness</p>	<p>The Petition of Belinda an Affrican, humbly shews: that seventy years have rolled away, since she on the banks of the Rio de Valta, received her existence – the mountains Covered with spicy forests, the valleys loaded with the richest fruits, spontaneously produced; joined to that happy temperature of air to exclude excess; would have yielded her the most compleat felicity, had not her mind received early impressions of the cruelty of men... for before she had Twelve years enjoyed the fragrance of her native groves, ... an armed band of white men, driving many of her Countrymen in Chains, ran into the hallowed shade! ... She was ravished from the bosom of her Country, from the arms of her friends – while the advanced age of her Parents, rendering them unfit for servitude, cruelly separated her from them forever!</p>
<p>melancholy (adj): sad</p>	<p>Scenes which her imagination never conceived of, – a floating World – the sporting Monsters of the deep – and the familiar meetings of the Billows and the clouds, stove, but in vain to divert her melancholy attention, from three hundred Affricans in chains, suffering the most excruciating torments; and some of them rejoicing, that the pangs of death came like a balm to their wounds. Once more her eyes were blest with a Continent – but alas! How unlike the Land where she received her being! ... she learned to catch the Ideas, marked by the sounds of language only to know that her doom was Slavery, from which death alone was to emancipate her ...</p>
	<p>The face of your Petitioner, is now marked with the furrows of time, and her frame bending under the oppression of years, while she, by the Laws of the Land, is denied the employment of one morsel of that immense wealth, apart whereof hath been accumulated by her own industry, and the whole ugmented by her servitude.</p>
	<p>WHEREFORE, casting herself at your feet if your honours...for the reward of Virtue, and the just return of honest industry – she prays, that such allowance may be made her out of the Estate of Colonel Royall, as will prevent her, and her more infirm daughter, from misery in the greatest extreme, and scatter comfort over the short and downward path of their lives.</p>

1. Why is it important to note that Belinda was enslaved in Massachusetts?
2. How old was Belinda when she was captured by slave traders?
3. What is the “floating World” Belinda writes of in the second paragraph? What does she experience here?
4. What rationale does Belinda give for requesting the income from Isaac Royall’s estate?

Document 3: The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African, 1789

Introduction:

Olaudah Equiano grew up in the West African kingdom of Benin in what is now Nigeria. Kidnapped by African slave traders, he was transported to Barbados in 1756, then to colonial Virginia. His autobiography was published in 1789. Here he describes the Middle Passage.

Sources:

http://www.nlj.gov.jm/rai/CSEC/BookTheme2/The_Interesting_Narrative_of_the_Life_of.pdf

Vocabulary	Text
pestilential (adj): likely to cause disease galling (n): chaffing necessary tubs : tubs used as toilets	At last, when the ship we were in, had got in all her cargo, they made ready with many fearful noises, and we were all put under deck, so that we could not see how they managed the vessel. But this disappointment was the least of my sorrow. The stench of the hold while we were on the coast was so intolerably loathsome, that it was dangerous to remain there for any time, and some of us had been permitted to stay on the deck for the fresh air; but now that the whole ship's cargo were confined together, it became absolutely pestilential The air soon became unfit for respiration, from a variety of loathsome smells, and brought on a sickness among the slaves, of which many died. . . . This wretched situation was again aggravated by the galling of the chains, now become insupportable; and the filth of the necessary tubs , into which the children often fell, and were almost suffocated. The shrieks of the women, and the groans of the dying, rendered the whole a scene of horror almost inconceivable. . . . One day, when we had a smooth sea and moderate wind, two of my wearied countrymen who were chained together (I was near them at the time), preferring death to such a life of misery, somehow made through the nettings and jumped into the sea: immediately another quite dejected fellow, who, on account of his illness, was suffered to be out of irons, also followed their example; and I believe many more would very soon have done the same if they had not been prevented by the ship's crew.

1. What is the “cargo” the author refers to in the first paragraph?
2. Briefly describe the conditions on this ship.
3. In the third paragraph, what do two of the “cargo” do? How does this crew respond? Why would they respond this way?
4. Compare Equiano's account of the Middle Passage with Belinda Sutton's account in Document B.

Document 4: The Old Plantation, c. 1800



The Old Plantation, c. 1800, is a watercolor painting attributed to John Rose, a plantation owner in South Carolina depicting enslaved men and women. The central activity of the painting is debated by historians.

Introduction:

The Old Plantation is a watercolor painting attributed to John Rose, a plantation owner in South Carolina. The enslaved persons shown were likely owned by the artist, and some or all the landscape likely formed part of Rose's plantation. Historians do not agree on the central activity in the painting—some argue that this painting illustrates a marriage ceremony known as “jumping the broom”—a symbolic gesture of binding a couple together in their new life—while others argue that the central figures are merely dancing. The instruments and headdresses worn by the people in the painting are of West African origin.

1. Pick two objects in this painting and briefly explain what these objects may reveal about the lives of the enslaved individuals on this plantation.
2. What might the painting reveal about the artist's objectives in creating it?

Document 5: Benjamin Rush to Samuel Bayard, 1810

Introduction:

Northern cities such as Baltimore, New York, and Philadelphia experienced growth of communities of free black and fugitive slaves in the early nineteenth century. The establishment of black churches provided a forum for political organization, economic cooperation, and resistance. In the following excerpt, Benjamin Rush, a prominent Philadelphia physician and signer of the Declaration of Independence, writes a letter of introduction for a free black minister named Mr. Gloucester. Rush is writing the letter to Samuel Bayard, a resident of Princeton, New Jersey, in 1810.

Source:

<https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/part3/3h469t.html>

Vocabulary	Text
pecuniary (adj): monetary	The bearer of this letter, the Reverend Mr. Gloucester, an [African American] ordained minister of the Presbyterian Church, visits your town in order to obtain pecuniary aid to enable him to purchase the freedom of his wife and children, for which the extravagant sum of 1,500 dollars has been demanded by their master and mistress. The friends of religion and of the poor Africans in Philadelphia have sent 500 dollars to them for that purpose and have subscribed liberally towards building him a church. At present he preaches to crowds of his African brethren in a schoolhouse every Sunday, and to great acceptance. The prospects of his usefulness to them are very great. . . . By the present census it appears that the blacks in our city will amount to more than 2,000 souls. Their late great increase is from migration from the southern states.

1. What does Mr. Gloucester seek to do?
2. According to this letter, who has helped the Reverend Mr. Gloucester to date? What does this reveal about the society of Philadelphia?

Document 6: Frederick Douglass, Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave, Written by Himself, 1845

Introduction:

Frederick Douglass, former slave and celebrated abolitionist, wrote three autobiographies of his life. In Douglass's narratives, the reader is presented with graphic and personal descriptions of life in slavery. These narratives served the cause of abolition by humanizing the experience of slavery in a way that could easily be understood by those far-removed by the experience of plantation life. In the passage below, Douglass described an 1833 incident that changed his view of himself and, therefore, his life. Though this source dates from beyond the time period studied in Chapter 4 (1789–1800), this source reveals that those who resisted work were often severely punished.

Source:

<https://www.gutenberg.org/files/23/23-h/23-h.htm>

Text
If at any one time of my life more than another, I was made to drink the bitterest dregs of slavery, that time was during the first six months of my stay with Mr. Covey [a White overseer and slave-breaker]. . . Mr. Covey succeeded in breaking me. I was broken in body, soul, and spirit. My natural elasticity was crushed, my intellect languished, the disposition to read departed, the cheerful spark that lingered about my eye died; the dark night of slavery closed in upon me; and behold a man transformed into a brute! . . .
Long before daylight, I was called to . . . feed, the horses. . . Mr. Covey entered the stable with a long rope; and . . . he caught hold of my legs, and was about tying me. . . I gave a sudden spring, and as I did so, he holding to my legs, I was brought sprawling on the stable floor. Mr. Covey seemed now to think he had me, and could do what he pleased; but at this moment—from whence came the spirit I don't know—I resolved to fight; and . . . I seized Covey hard by the throat; and as I did so, I rose. He held on to me, and I to him. My resistance was so entirely unexpected that Covey seemed taken all aback. He trembled like a leaf. This gave me assurance. . .
This battle with Mr. Covey was the turning-point in my career as a slave. It rekindled the few expiring embers of freedom, and revived within me a sense of my own manhood. It recalled the departed self-confidence, and inspired me again with a determination to be free. . . It was a glorious resurrection, from the tomb of slavery, to the heaven of freedom. My long-crushed spirit rose, cowardice departed, bold defiance took its place.

1. What does Mr. Covey plan to do to Frederick Douglass in the stable?
2. What is Douglass's response? What does Covey do in turn?
3. Why is this a turning pointing for Douglass?
4. To what extent and in what ways does this first-person account of slavery differ from those of Belinda Sutton (Document B) and Olaudah Equiano (Document C), a half-century earlier?

Part II: Application and Reflection

1. What patterns did you see in the ways enslaved individuals resisted their fate? Point to specific pieces of evidence from the documents to support your answer.
2. What was most shocking to you in these documents?
3. Why is it important to thoroughly examine painful subjects in American history?

Part III Conclusion and Assessment: Thesis

Write a thesis statement that answers the prompt for this document-based question:

Analyze the methods of resistance used by enslaved Africans in the United States c. 1780–1865.