

Vocabulary List: *Slavery in Mississippi*

Abolitionist: a person who advocated for the prohibition of slavery prior to the Civil War.

Agriculture: the act of cultivating land, raising crops, and caring for livestock.

Apprentice: a person who worked for another individual in order to learn a trade.

Attire: clothing.

Auction: a public sale where goods are sold to the highest bidder.

Auction Block: a platform from which an auctioneer sells merchandise including slaves.

Bale: a large bundle or package prepared for shipping, storage, or sale.

Bell: a metal cup-shaped instrument sometimes used to send slaves to work and call them in from the fields.

Big House: slang term to describe the homes of wealthy, slave-owning and plantation families.

Black Confederate Troops: slaves and freed African Americans who served in the Confederate Army during the Civil War as laborers and body servants.

Blacksmith: a person who repairs and makes iron implements and horseshoes as well as shoes horses.

Body Servant: a valet or personal maid.

Bogus: West African term that means deceit or fraud.

Bondage: slavery or involuntary servitude.

Breeches: knee-length trousers commonly worn by men and boys in the 17th, 18th, and early 19th centuries with ornamental buckles or elaborate decoration at or near the bottom.

Bricklayer: the act or occupation of laying bricks in construction.

Brutality: the state of being brutal or savage.

Butler: a male servant who is the head of the household, serves meals, cares for silverware, and controls the wine and liquor cabinets.

Caretaker: a person who is in charge of the maintenance of a building or estate.

Cargo: the lading or freight of a ship or airplane.

Carpenter: a person who builds or repairs wooden structures, such as houses, scaffolds, or shelving.

Carriage: an elegant wheeled vehicle for conveying people that is drawn by horses.

Cart-whip: a heavy, short-handled horsewhip commonly used on slaves.

Chain: connected series of metal rings that were often used to restraint or prevent slaves from escaping.

Chastisement: severe criticism, rebuke, or strong reprimand.

Coachman: a man employed to drive a coach or carriage.

Community: a group of people whose members reside in a specific locality, share government, and often have a common cultural and historical heritage.

Conductor: a person who provides a safe stopping place along the Underground Railroad.

Cook: a servant who prepares meals.

Cooper: a person who makes or repairs casks and barrels.

Cording: cord decoratively covered with yarn or fabric.

Cotton: a soft, white, downy substance consisting of the hairs of fibers attached to the seeds of cotton plants used in the making of fabrics, thread, and wadding. The primary cash crop of Southern farmers throughout the 18th, 19th, and into the 20th centuries.

Cotton Gin: a machine used for separating the fibers of cotton from the seeds.

Cowhide: the hide of a cow or leather made from it.

Culture: the behaviors and beliefs characteristic of a particular social, ethnic, or age group or community.

Dockworker: a person employed on the docks of a port.

Domestic: of or pertaining to the home, household, or household affairs; a servant or slave who works in the home of another.

Dray: a low, strong cart without fixed sides, used to carry heavy loads.

Drayman: a person who drives a dray.

Dred Scott v. Sanford, 1857: U.S. Supreme Court ruling that stated slaves were not U.S. citizens and could not expect any protection from the Federal Government or courts. It also stated that Congress could not ban slavery in a territory.

Driver: supervisor of slaves at work.

Economy: thrifty management and frugality in the expenditure or consumption of money and materials.

Emancipation Proclamation, 1863: freed all slaves within states in open rebellion. It also announced the acceptance of black men into the Union Army and Navy.

Emancipation: the act of freeing from restraint or bondage.

Errand: a short, quick trip to accomplish a specific purpose.

Experience: a particular instance of personally encountering or undergoing something.

Expose: to lay open to danger; to present to view, reveal.

Field Slave: a slave who works in the fields, planting crops or raising livestock.

Flog: to beat with a whip as a punishment.

Footman: a uniformed servant who opens doors to houses and carriages and serves food.

Forks of the Road: slave trading market in Natchez, Mississippi.

Fortification: the art or science of constructing defensive military works.

Free Blacks: African Americans who had been freed from slavery by their owners or purchased their own freedom.

Freedom: the state of being free from external control.

Fugitive: a person who flees from prosecution or intolerable circumstances.

Fugitive Slave Act, 1793: an act used as a partial compromise that denied a fugitive's right to a jury trial. They would be decided by commissioners who received \$5 for released fugitives and \$10 for detained fugitives.

Fugitive Slave Act, 1850: an act that authorized the arrest and seizure of fugitives from their masters and empowered local officials to rule on the matter. It also established a \$500 fine for any person who aided a fugitive.

Gardener: a person who cares for the lawns and gardens surrounding a home.

Gathering: an assembly or meeting of a large group of people.

"Go Down Moses:" African American spiritual.

Gold: a precious yellow metal used for trade and as a monetary standard.

Goobers: peanuts.

Greybacks: an animal with a grey back; possibly a bug.

Gumbo: originally an African term for okra but today a stew-like dish.

Harvest: the gathering of crops.

Horse-whip: a whip used for controlling horses but also for controlling or punishing slaves.

House Slave: slaves who worked in the house as maids, cooks, footmen, valets, butlers, etc.

Hush Puppies: balls of deep-fried cornmeal whose name derived during the nineteenth century.

Illiterate: one who is unable to read or write.

Importation: to bring in merchandise from a foreign country for use or sale.

Impressment: to force someone into public service.

Inferior: to be lower in station, rank, or importance.

Jail: a prison.

Journey: to travel from one place to another.

Jumping the Broom: marriage ritual originating in Africa.

Kansas Nebraska Act, 1854: this act repealed the Missouri Compromise allowing slavery north of the 36°30' latitude. It also stipulated the issue of slavery in each territory would be decided by the residents of each territory.

Kill: to deprive of life or to cause a death.

Kitchen Maid: a female servant who assists a cook.

Knit: to make a fabric by interlocking loops of one or more yarns either by hand with knitting needles or by machine.

Labor: productive activity, especially for the sake of economic gain.

Lady's Maid: slave or servant who is a woman's personal attendant, assisting her with her clothing, personal appearance, and personal needs and errands.

Landsman: an inexperienced sailor or one who has not been to sea before.

Lashes: a swift stroke or blow with a whip given as punishment.

Livestock: the horses, cattle, sheep, and other useful animals kept or raised on a farm or ranch.

Lumberjack: a person who works in the timber industry cutting and preparing lumber.

Malnutrition: lack of proper nutrition.

Manacles: restraint or shackle for the hands.

Manure: animal excrement.

Market: an open place where buyers and sellers meet to trade and buy goods.

Master: the owner of a slave or animal.

Mend: to repair.

Middle Passage: area of the Atlantic Ocean between the west coast of Africa and the West Indies that was the longest part of the journey made by slave ships.

Missouri Compromise, 1820: the first compromise made to attempt to balance the number of slaves and free states. It admitted Maine as a free state and Missouri as a slave state, as well as outlawed slavery above the 36°30' latitude of the U.S. territories.

Missouri Compromise, 1850: replaced an earlier compromise. It added Texas as a slave state and California as a free state, abolished the slave trade in Washington D.C., and set up new fugitive slave laws.

Mistress: a woman who employs or has authority over servants or slaves.

Mule: a work animal commonly used in agriculture.

Mutilate: to injure or disfigure.

Negro Spirituals: songs sung by slaves in the American South.

North Star: the star Polaris, which was used by slaves when escaping to help guide them north towards freedom.

Northwest Ordinance, 1787: adopted by the Confederation Congress in July, 1787. It outlined the process for admitting a new state to the Union and prohibited slavery in U.S. territories.

Nutrition: the act or process of eating to ensure good health.

Occupation: a person's usual or principal work or business, especially as a means of earning a living.

Okay: reportedly an African term meaning “that’s it” or “all right.”

Opposition: a person or group criticizing or protesting something, someone, or another group.

Oppress: to burden with cruel or unjust impositions or restraints.

Overseer: oversaw the actions of field slaves, ensuring they worked to maximum capacity and did not try to escape; most often a white male.

Oxen: a large work animal commonly used in agriculture.

Parlor Maid: a female servant who answers the door and waits on guests.

Petticoat: a decorated underskirt that provides fullness for the overskirt.

Plantation: a unusually large farm or estate in tropical or subtropical areas on which cotton, tobacco, coffee, sugar cane or the like is cultivated, usually by resident laborers.

Plantation Slave: primarily field hands who worked in the fields planting crops such as cotton.

Planter: the owner or manager of a plantation.

Plow: a large agricultural implement pulled by horses, mules, or oxen and used for cutting, lifting, turning over, and pulverizing soil in preparation for planting.

Posse: a group of individuals that an area’s law officer may designate to help maintain law and order and make arrests.

Punishment: to inflict a penalty for an offense.

Quakers: a religious group whose members felt slavery was immoral and helped many slave escape.

Quilt: a handmade cover for a bed.

“Quittin’ Time:” a call signaling the end of the work day.

Raid on Harper’s Ferry, 1859: led by John Brown, a violent anti-slavery advocate, this failed raid on a federal arsenal for weapons was conducted by twenty-one men, five black and sixteen white, most of whom were killed or captured.

Rations: a fixed allowance of food, especially for soldiers or sailors, or for civilians during a shortage.

Respect: esteem for or a sense of the worth or excellence of a person.

Responsibility: the state or fact of being accountable for something within one’s power.

Runaway: one that runs from danger, duty, or restraint.

Rye: a widely cultivated cereal grass used to make flour and whiskey and as a livestock feed.

Safe House: a place along the Underground Railroad where runaway slaves could find food and shelter.

Sanitary: of or pertaining to health or the conditions affecting health, especially with reference to cleanliness and precautions against disease.

Sassafras: an American tree with aromatic bark on its roots used medicinally and for flavoring beverages and confectionery.

Sell: to transfer goods or services in exchange for money.

Skirmish: a fight between small bodies of troops.

Slaughter: the killing or butchering of cattle, sheep, or other livestock for food.

Slave: a person who is the property of another person.

Slave Codes: state laws in early America defining the status of slaves and the rights of masters.

Slave Horn: a instrument that when blown sent slaves to work and called them in from the fields.

Slave Patrols: organized groups of white men who enforced discipline upon black slaves during the 18th and early 19th centuries. They policed slaves on plantations, hunted down fugitive slaves, and punished captured escapees with maiming or death.

Slave Quarters: a segregated area on a plantation where slaves lived. These houses were oftentimes poorly constructed and overcrowded.

Slave Resistance: a slave's attempt to claim some measure of freedom that ranged in forms from feigning illness, breaking tools, and stealing food, to escaping and armed rebellions.

Slave Revolts: a dramatic form of slave resistance consisting of organized, armed rebellions. Noteworthy revolts include those led by John Brown at Harper's Ferry and Nat Turner in Virginia. Because white southerners were vastly outnumbered by their black slaves, revolts were a real fear in the American South and laws were passed to prevent slaves from assembling in large groups or being educated.

Slave Tags: tags worn by slaves made of copper or other metals that identify them as property of certain individuals. Most date from the late 1700s through the end of the Civil War.

Spinning: the act or process of converting staple or short lengths of fiber, such as cotton or wool, into continuous yarn or thread.

Stable Boy: a person who works in a stable, usually with horses.

Station Master: a person who provides a safe stopping place along the Underground Railroad.

Status: the position of an individual in relation to another, especially in regards to social or professional standings.

Sugarcane: a tall grass grown in tropical and warm regions that is the chief source of sugar.

Superior: one who is higher in station or rank.

Sutler: a person who followed an army or maintained a store on an army post to sell provisions to soldiers.

“Swing Low, Sweet Chariot:” African American spiritual.

Teamster: a person who drives a team or truck for hauling, especially as an occupation.

Textile: any cloth or goods produced by weaving, knitting, or felting.

13th Amendment, 1865: this amendment to the U.S. Constitution abolished slavery in the United States of America or any place under their jurisdiction.

Till: to plow the earth in preparation for planting crops.

Tobacco: American plant whose leaves can be prepared for smoking, chewing, and snuff.

Toil: hard, continuous work.

Town Slave: slaves who lived and worked in homes and businesses in urban areas. These slaves knew a trade such as bricklaying or carpentry who could be rented out by their owners to perform these duties for neighbors.

Triangle Trade: Atlantic Ocean trade route between the New World, Europe, and Africa during the 18th century.

Trousers: pants.

U.S. Colored Troops: segregated African American units commanded by white soldiers who fought for the Union Army during the Civil War.

Unjust: unfair.

Underground Railroad: a secret system for helping fugitive slaves from the American South escape to Canada.

Unsanitary: to be unhealthy or unhealthful; to harbor or spread disease.

Valet: slave or servant who is a man’s personal attendant, assisting him with his clothing, personal appearance, and personal needs and errands.

Vegetables: a plant that can be eaten.

Voodoo: a religion with many gods practiced chiefly by West Indians and deriving principally from African cult worship and borrowed elements of the Catholic religion. At times, it is associated with black magic and sorcery.

Wagon: a four-wheeled vehicle pulled by animals such as mules, horses, or oxen.

Washer-woman: a woman who washes clothes and linens for hire.

Weave: to interlace threads or yarns to form a fabric or material.

Wept: cried.

Whip: to beat with a strap, lash, or rod as punishment.

Work: exertion or effort directed towards the completion of a goal or product.

Xenophobe: a person who fears or hates foreign or different people or customs.

Xylophone: a percussion instrument that migrated from Asia to Africa around 500 AD and which became one of the traditional folk instruments of West Africa where it is known by a variety of names including balafon, mbila, gyil, silimba, balo, akadinda, and amadinda.

Yam: plant grown in Africa that was introduced to the American South during the time of slavery.

Yeoman Farmer: a man who owns his own farm.

Yoke: a device used to harness a pair of animals, such as oxen, side by side.

Zeal: to show fervor for a person or cause.

Zealous: devoted or diligent.

Zombie: a word of West African origin referring to the name of a snake god in the voodoo cult.

“Zorters:” exhorters, slaves trained by ministers as local preachers.

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