Slavery in Texas

Main Ideas

- 1. Slaves performed many jobs on plantations.
- 2. Some Texans argued against slavery.

Why It Matters Today

Slaves in Texas—as in other southern states—had no civil rights. Use current events sources to learn about a civil rights struggle in the world today.

Key Terms

- spirituals
- abolition

TEKS: 4C, 8A, 17C, 19B, 21B, 21C, 21E, 22D

myNotebook

Use the annotation tools in your eBook to take notes on slavery in Texas.

The Story Continues

Slaveholder James Johnson of Travis County saw a chance to make some money. As was common in the days of slavery, it involved breaking up a family. Nonetheless, he hired out a slave named Esther and her child to Ashbel Smith in Houston. Esther's husband, Jesse, desperate to be with his family, ran away to Houston. When Johnson caught up with him, he promised that Jesse could stay in Houston. But when Johnson instead started to take Jesse back to Travis County, Jesse ran away again.

★ Slave Labor

Slaves like Jesse and Esther made up much of the East Texas population. As you have read in previous chapters, most Texas slaves worked on farms. On small farms slaves performed a wide variety of tasks. On large plantations, though, most slaves had specific jobs. Most plantation slaves—men, women, and even children—worked in the fields. For them, work began at daybreak. They ate breakfast in the fields and then plowed, planted, or harvested. Men usually did the heaviest work, such as plowing. Lunch was eaten near the workplace. There was little time to stop, particularly during harvest time, because planters expected slaves to pick many pounds of cotton every day. On average, an adult male slave could pick 150 to 200 pounds of cotton per day. Besides field work, men built and repaired fences, dug and cleaned out ditches, and hauled wood. Women often worked as cooks, laundresses, or seamstresses.



By 1850, slaves made up almost 20 percent of the population of Austin, Galveston, and Houston. Slaves who lived in towns did many jobs. Men worked as carpenters or blacksmiths, while women were cooks, babysitters, or housekeepers. Slaves also helped build the state's transportation system, including its docks, railroads, roads, and warehouses. Some slaveholders hired out slaves to work for others, and a few were allowed to keep part of their wages and buy their freedom.

Reading Check Categorizing What jobs did enslaved men and women on plantations and in cities do?

Interpreting Visuals

Slave life. Picking cotton was a common job for Texas slaves. What characteristics of slave life can you identify in this painting?

★ Slave Culture

The life of a slave was hard. Slaves worked at least six days a week, but most had Sunday off. They spent any spare time doing personal chores or tending to their gardens. Some slaves even worked extra jobs after completing their regular duties. They used the income to buy food, clothes, or gifts for family members.

The food and shelter available to slaves were often poor. A typical breakfast might include corn bread, coffee, and sometimes bacon. Lunch and dinner generally consisted of corn and bacon or some other type of pork. Some slaves did grow vegetables, such as sweet potatoes, to add some variety to their diets. Others trapped wild game or caught fish. Home was generally a small cabin with crude furniture. Slaves' clothing was generally made of rough, cheap fabric. Their shoes were stiff and often did not fit properly.

During their rare leisure moments, slaves visited with their families and friends, telling stories or playing games. They might hold dances, family gatherings, or picnics. Some slaveholders allowed slaves to attend a church on Sundays, while others forbade it. However, some slaves continued to worship even when it was forbidden.

CONNECTING TO Literature

African American **Folktales**

Folktales are traditional stories, usually told by one person to another. Some tales passed on moral lessons, while others were told simply because they were entertaining. Folktales were popular in slave communities in Texas. J. Mason Brewer collected stories from African Americans throughout Texas. In many of these stories, a dog spirit would appear to help people in need. In one story, a woman returns from the grave in the form of a ghost dog to give her daughter medicine. Why were folktales important to enslaved Texans?

Music and religion were important in slave communities. They gave many African Americans strength to face the hardships of enslavement. Slaves sang songs while working in the fields, and after work they played instruments such as fiddles or banjos. Urban slaves started the first African American churches in Texas. Music was a major part of the worship service. Spirituals—religious folk songs—rang through black churches, carrying messages of hope and faith. One song said, "When we all get to Heaven, They'll be no slaves no more!"

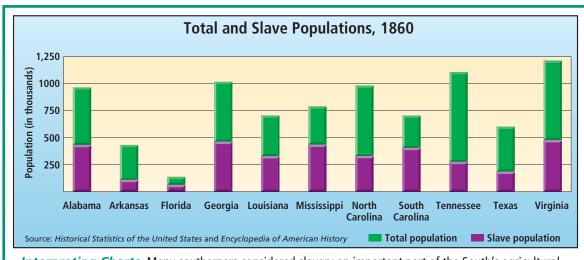
Reading Check Finding the Main Idea Why was religion an important part of many slaves' lives?

★ Slave Escapes and Rebellions

Some Texas slaves were willing to risk their lives to escape slavery by fleeing to Mexico where slavery was illegal. Because of the likelihood of capture, however, most slaves did not try to run away. As a warning to all slaves, slaveholders severely punished those who attempted to escape. Many slaves also did not want to leave their families behind.

Some white Texans, particularly in areas with large slave populations, feared the possibility of slave rebellions. Few such rebellions ever occurred, though. One slave uprising was planned in 1856 in Colorado County. A group of slaves acquired guns, planning to rebel and escape to Mexico. Before the rebellion could take place, slaveholders learned of the plan. They hanged and whipped to death several slaves. In 1860, rumors spread that an outbreak of fire in North Texas was part of a slave plot. Although no uprising occurred, many African American and white Texans were executed for the supposed plot.

Reading Check Analyzing Information Why did most slaves not try to escape?



Interpreting Charts Many southerners considered slavery an important part of the South's agricultural economy. Which states had a larger percentage of slaves than Texas?

★ Debating Slavery

As you have read, planters dominated the Texas legislature during the early statehood period. To protect their livelihood, these planters passed laws to strictly control slave life. Slaves could not own property or marry, and people could be punished for hiding a runaway slave. Slaveholders and others defended the system, noting that it supported the South's economy. Without slavery, they argued, the cotton industry would fail.

Some Texans supported **abolition**, or an end to slavery. Some opposed slavery for moral or religious reasons, believing that it was wrong for one person to own another. They pointed out the cruelty of ripping families apart, a pain many slaves knew all too well. Other abolitionists opposed slavery for political reasons, arguing that it went against the ideals of democracy and freedom. In addition, a few Texans believed that slavery was hindering the state's economic progress. They wanted to diversify the state rather than continue to focus so heavily on agriculture.

Among those who opposed slavery in Texas were many Mexican Americans and European immigrants. For instance, Elise Waerenskjold, a Norwegian-born writer and journalist, spoke out against slavery. She argued that slavery could not last, because it was built on injustice.

Abolitionists were generally not welcome in Texas, and many were harassed or attacked for expressing their opinions. Stephen Andrews, a Houston lawyer, was one such abolitionist. In the 1840s he announced a plan to buy slaves so that he could give them freedom. As a result, he was forced to leave the state. Teacher and missionary Melinda Rankin, too, was forced to flee Texas.

Reading Check Contrasting What were some of the arguments for and against slavery?

2. Summarizing



African Traditions

Texas slaves maintained many African traditions. African Americans passed their traditions along to younger generations through songs, stories, and family history. As a result, slaves' music and dances were similar to those in Ghana, Nigeria, and other African nations. Slaves also used African farming techniques. Today some African Americans remember their heritage by celebrating Kwanzaa, a seven-day festival based in part on traditional African harvest festivals. How did slaves maintain their African traditions?



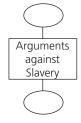
spirituals

abolition

1. Define and explain:

Section 4. Review

Copy the graphic organizer below. Use it to describe the major arguments against slavery.



3. Finding the Main Idea

- What was work and daily life like for slaves in Texas?
- Why did most slaves not run away, and why were rebellions rare?

4. Writing and Critical Thinking

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ONLINE QUIZ

Identifying Points of View Imagine that you are an abolitionist living in Texas. Write a letter to a friend explaining why you oppose slavery.

Consider the following:

- the living conditions of slaves
- · the treatment slaves receive