

SLAVERY by Another Name



COMMUNITY VIEWING GUIDE (HAITI)

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INTRODUCTION TO THE FILM

Slavery by Another Name is a ninety-minute documentary based on the 2008 Pulitzer Prize-winning book by Douglas A. Blackmon. The film, produced by *tpt* National Productions and Two Dollars and A Dream, tells how after the Civil War, insidious new forms of forced labor emerged in the North American South, keeping thousands of African Americans in bondage, trapping them in a brutal system that would persist until the onset of World War II. *Slavery by Another Name* tells a sweeping story, spanning eight decades, from 1865 to 1941. It reveals the interlocking forces—racial prejudice, demand for cheap labor and a tainted legal system—that enabled post-emancipation slavery to persist.

For most Americans in the United States, this is entirely unknown history. Narrated by acclaimed actor Laurence Fishburne, *Slavery by Another Name* gives voice to the largely forgotten victims and perpetrators of forced labor and features their descendants living today. The program also includes interviews with Douglas A. Blackmon, leading scholars of this period, including Mary Ellen Curtin, Pete Daniel, Risa Goluboff, Adam Green, and Khalil Muhammad. *Slavery by Another Name* first aired on PBS in 2012 and was an official selection of the Sundance Film Festival of 2012.

USING THIS GUIDE

Thanks to a grant from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, the documentary, *Slavery by Another Name* is now offered in subtitled versions in Haitian Creole, Portuguese, and Spanish, as well as the original English. Translated versions of the Discussion Guide have been customized for use in Haiti, Brazil, and Mexico.

This Discussion Guide is designed to be used in conjunction with viewings of the documentary in a variety of settings. It offers: tips for organizing a viewing/discussion; prompts to get discussion going; suggested topics and questions; and resources for further reading.

For more information and resources related to the film, visit <http://www.pbs.org/sban>.

SLAVERY BY ANOTHER NAME: Post Emancipation Slavery in the United States

One of North Americans' most cherished assumptions: the belief that slavery in the U.S. ended with the Emancipation Proclamation of 1863. However, even as chattel slavery came to an end in the South with the passage of the Thirteenth Amendment in 1865, a new system of involuntary servitude took its place with shocking force, brutalizing, terrorizing and ultimately circumscribing the lives of hundreds of thousands of African Americans in the rural South well into the 20th century.

Post emancipation slavery did not last a lifetime and did not automatically extend from one generation to another. But, writes Douglas A. Blackmon, author of *Slavery by Another Name*, "it was nonetheless slavery—a system in which armies of free men, often guilty of no crimes and entitled by law to freedom, were compelled to labor without compensation, were repeatedly bought and sold and were forced to do the bidding of white masters through the regular application of extraordinary physical coercion."

Three factors contributed to forced labor: new laws that imposed greater restrictions on African American movement, political behavior, and economic activity; a judiciary system that disproportionately targeted, arrested, and incarcerated poor African Americans who could not afford to pay court costs that would have led to their release; and a legal system that sanctioned the control of prisoners by landowners and private businessmen who needed cheap labor.

Even before Reconstruction ended in 1877, many Southern states began enacting an array of laws, Black Codes, intended to re-subjugate newly freed blacks and provide cheap sources of labor. Vagrancy, loitering, riding the rails, changing jobs, even talking too loudly in public – these behaviors and more – all became crimes carrying stiff fines or sentences. Although these statutes made no mention of race, Southerners knew that they were created as instruments of white control. The result was a huge increase in the numbers of blacks arrested and convicted. Those convicted of crimes became prisoners of the county or state.

Initially, to save money on prison construction and later to actually generate revenue, states and counties began leasing "convicts" to commercial enterprises. These included small-time entrepreneurs, provincial farmers, large plantations and corporations. While the Thirteenth amendment to the Constitution indeed banned slavery, there was a loophole: "except as a

punishment for a crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted,” making it legal to lease out convicted prisoners without compensation.

Soon leasing became a highly profitable business. Prisoners were leased to nearly every industry in the South including coal mines, sawmills, railroads, brickworks and plantations. These prisoners lived and worked under unspeakable conditions, often worse than during slavery before the Civil War. Many were tortured or died in captivity. “Convict leasing,” writes historian Matthew Mancini, was “one of the harshest labor systems in American history.”

Forced laborers included untold numbers beyond “convicts.” Many were victims of peonage or debt slavery, an illegal but widespread practice of coerced labor to pay off debts. Others were sharecroppers, farming in return for a “share” of the crop, who frequently did not receive their portion or were told that crops raised were not enough to cover costs and that they would have to work for free to pay off the debt. Still others were victims of laws that made it a crime to leave employment for another job, keeping many blacks working under intolerable conditions rather than face the terrifying possibility of being arrested and sent to a slave mine or forced labor camp.

Forced labor in its various forms helped rebuild the white Southern economy even as it denied generations of African Americans not only the most basic human and legal protections, but also access to wealth. “The systematic subjugation of such a large population of African Americans for so many decades” writes Blackmon “is certainly one of the reasons African Americans lagged behind in advancing and fulfilling the American Dream.”

Despite repeated appeals to the Department of Justice that forced labor constituted slavery, the system was condoned for decades at the highest levels of government and kept alive in part by weariness over the “negro issue” and in part by legal loopholes. Holding laborers against their will was not *technically* a crime, as no actual laws were in the federal statutes banning the practice. “Time and again” writes legal historian Alfred Brophy, “the Justice Department failed to pursue an aggressive policy of prosecutions that could have struck down involuntary servitude.”

In the 1910s, the leasing of convicts to private companies at the *state* level began to be outlawed state by state. *But the leasing of county prisoners by the tens of thousands to rural farms and industries continued* unabated, as did the illegal practice of debt slavery. In the early 1920s, the NAACP found that it was investigating so many cases of slavery in Georgia that it set up a new “underground railroad” to help blacks get out of rural parts of the state. By the middle 1930s, investigations into involuntary servitude and peonage had all but stopped. By the middle 1930s,

five decades of the federal government's inaction took its toll as investigations into involuntary servitude and peonage had all but stopped.

Incredibly, it was not until December 12, 1941, five days after the bombing of Pearl Harbor, that the federal government began to take the first steps that would eventually unravel the practice of forced labor. Concerned that enemy propaganda would focus on America's treatment of African Americans as second-class citizens, the Justice Department under Franklin Roosevelt devised a legal strategy for prosecuting whites who continued to hold slaves. Finally, in 1951, almost ninety years after the passage of the Emancipation Proclamation, Congress passed the first explicit statutes making any form of slavery in the United States indisputably a crime.

ORGANIZING A SCREENING

Hosting a screening can be an effective way to gather people and initiate conversation about this shared history in efforts to better understand our present and to effect change now and in the future.

We offer the following suggestions for the types of groups that might host a screening:

Civil and human rights organizations	Labor associations
Schools and Universities	Sports associations
Community Centers	Families
Criminal justice organizations	Historical societies and archival departments
Cultural organizations and museums	Libraries
Faith-based institutions	Local public media stations

Suggestions for Planning a Screening

Here are some recommendations for hosting a successful screening.

Define the purpose. Prior to planning a screening, define the main objective for the screening. Is it to encourage conversation, to expose this history to those who might be unaware, to incite action? You may have a few goals in mind, so identifying them can be helpful in providing a focus for the event, selecting any partners and determining the appropriate audience.

Identify partners. Working with others has several advantages including identifying space, gathering diverse audiences, and promoting the event. First look at your personal network and already established relationships. Then consider reaching out to local community organizations and institutions and individuals who may be interested in participating.

Secure a location. Consider locations that are centrally located and easy to get to. Partnering can also help to find locations that would be free of charge. Libraries often offer free space to individuals and community groups. Since the documentary is ninety minutes long, you'll want to choose a space where the audience can be comfortable for the entire event. You'll also need to make sure you have the right equipment, including items like a microphone, television or screen and projector, if necessary.

Determine a format. Develop an agenda for the event, even if only used for your purposes. Consider length, as well as time allotted for opening and closing remarks and to discuss, “what next?”

Promote the screening. If the screening is open to the public, promote the screening via email, social networks, word-of-mouth, and flyers. Coordinating an RSVP system can allow you to track the number of estimated attendees and send reminders.

Follow-up. Consider how you will follow-up with audience members. Will it be via email? Will you give active participants an opportunity to gather in the future? Consider providing participants with an evaluation form to rate their experience.

Discussion Prompts

Before screening the documentary, consider holding a pre-viewing discussion that provides initial context and allows participants to consider their connection to the subject matter.

Pre-Viewing Discussion Prompts

These prompts can be used to foster dialogue prior to screening the film to establish context and connect participants to the subject matter.

- What comes to mind when you consider the film's title, *Slavery by Another Name*?
- What do you know about the use of forced labor in the United States and beyond?
- The film tackles a difficult part of U.S. history. What are ways that we can reconcile difficult parts of our history?
- This project is centered on the fact that our individual histories are part of a bigger shared history. What does shared history mean to you? How can we better engage with this larger, shared history in addition to our own personal histories?

After screening the film, prior to delving into a post-viewing discussion, consider providing participants with a few moments to reflect on the documentary and their thoughts surrounding it.

Getting Started Discussion Prompts

The following prompts can help to initiate dialogue after screening the film.

- What's your initial reaction to the film?
- Did anything in the film surprise you?
- Why isn't the history of forced labor more prominently known and discussed? Why are some parts of history better known than others?
- Has anyone researched his or her own family history? What did you find and how did you feel about what you found? How important is it to know your family's history?

Suggested Discussion Topics for U.S. Audiences

FREEDOM

Emancipation turned the former slaveholding world upside down. What do you think life was like for the newly freed slaves? **What do you think life was like for the former slaveholders?**

What were you taught about the Thirteenth Amendment? **Has your understanding of the Thirteenth Amendment changed after viewing the film?** If so, how?

At the end of the Civil War there was a rise in white vigilante groups in the South. What role did violence play in limiting the freedoms of blacks? **How is violence used today to control groups of people?**

Scholar Adam Green notes that, "Reconstruction was an attempt to create a country in which it would be possible to have a biracial and equal citizenship." **In what ways do you think that Reconstruction accomplished this goal** and in what ways did it fall short?

After 1874, there wasn't any sustained federal presence in the South, which meant that African Americans who were trying to embark on their new freedom journey could count on less assistance from the federal government and more animosity from Southern whites. **Should the federal government have done more to protect the new freedoms of blacks?** Do you believe that the federal government is effective in protecting the rights of all citizens today? Why or why not?

RECONSTRUCTION ENDS

The end of Reconstruction ushered in oppressive legislation – such as the pig laws and vagrancy codes – that unjustly targeted African Americans. **How did these laws criminalize black life and aid in the rise of the convict leasing system?** Are there any laws now that you think unfairly target certain groups?

As a result of the vagrancy statutes in Southern states, you could be convicted if you couldn't prove at any given moment that you were employed. **How might this law impact people if it were in effect today?**

Once states realized that they could profit legally from leasing convicts, states throughout the South were engaged in some form of leasing convicts to private industry. **Do you think Southern states should have profited from leasing convicts?** Why or why not? Do you think that states today should profit from the labor of those incarcerated? Why or why not?

CONVICT LEASING/FREE LABOR

Do you think **there were other ways that industrialists like John Milner could have helped to build cities** like Birmingham, Alabama, without the use of forced labor? If so, how?

Ezekiel Archey sent letters that detailed the horrid conditions of the Pratt Coal Mines to the inspector of prisons for Alabama. Have you ever done something that exposed a wrongdoing? If so, **what were the results of your actions?** What are ways that people can speak up about wrongdoings today?

Cristina Comer, a descendant of J.W. Comer, a former slaveholder who practiced convict leasing, says that the family stories she heard were that the Comer men were self-made. When she found out that the Comer men were involved in convict leasing, that image was shattered for her. **Have you ever found out something troubling about your family's history?** If so, how did you reconcile that truth? If not, how do you think you might feel? How can families discuss difficult personal histories?

Exposés of the convict labor system described it as “worse than slavery.” **In what ways was it worse than slavery and in what ways was it similar?** Do you think there are any practices today that could be deemed worse than slavery?

Consider the following statement from historian Adam Green and then respond: “And this [convict leasing] system is one that I think in many ways needs to be understood as brutal in a social sense, but fiendishly rational in an economic sense. Because where else could one take a black worker and work them literally to death, after slavery? And when that worker died, one simply had to go and get another convict.”

CRIMINALIZING FORMER SLAVES

By 1890, the South's state prison population had soared to nearly 19,000 and nearly ninety percent

of those incarcerated were African American. What lingering effects could this hold for The United States now? Do you think there **are any contemporary connections between the criminalization of black life and prison population rates?**

DEBT SLAVERY AND PEONAGE ON TRIAL

Peonage, or involuntary servitude, is a system where an employer compels a worker to pay off a debt with work. Sadly, this type of debt slavery continues to occur in various forms today, such as in Pakistan where some landlords have forced farm workers into labor. **Have you heard of present-day cases of involuntary servitude around the world?** What can people do to raise awareness about this practice?

U.S. Attorney Warren S. Reese also faced many challenges, including severe backlash from powerful businessmen and officials linked to peonage, during his quest to prosecute those involved. **Have you ever been the only one in a large group to speak out** against something that you thought was wrong? If so, what happened and what did you do?

John Davis, a young sharecropper, was falsely accused of a crime, quickly convicted, then sentenced and charged fines and court fees. Because he couldn't pay, he was forced into labor – sold for a profit by a local businessman to a plantation owner. He was forced to sign a contract to work for ten months – which gave his employer the right to whip, confine and trade him as long as his debt was unpaid. Often, it is the most vulnerable citizens who are exploited. **What can be done to protect the most susceptible?**

At the National Archives today, there are more than 30,000 pages of letters from Southerners, many of them addressed to the president, about family members and loved ones trapped in forced labor. But, ultimately many of these letters went unaddressed. **Why do you think the federal government didn't pursue these cases more aggressively?** Do you believe letter-writing is an effective form of protest now? Why or why not?

THE ARREST OF GREEN COTTENHAM

Green Cottenham was a young man who was arrested, convicted of vagrancy, and sentenced to six months' hard labor as the result of \$38 in fines; he died shortly thereafter. Through this project, his

descendants hope that his story will illuminate the lost voices of the thousands of people forced into labor. **What are ways that we can give voice to the forgotten like Green Cottenham?**

At the start of the twentieth century, a new generation of civil rights organizations emerged, including the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, founded by a group of activists that included W.E.B. Du Bois. **Have you been involved with any civil rights organizations?** If so, what was your experience like? What role do can civil rights organizations play today? What issues do you think they should advocate for?

Chain gangs were another form of forced labor that emerged in the South. Convicts were chained together and used to build roads, railroads and other state-run enterprises, often in horrid conditions. **Do you think that prisoners should be used for public works projects?** Why or why not?

Sharecropping was a practice in which a sharecropper agreed to farm the land for a percentage of the proceeds of the sale of crop. Workers became indebted to planters through loans with exorbitant interest rates and, unable to repay the debt, found themselves continuously forced to work without pay. **What do you think are the lingering effects of sharecropping on families who were trapped for years in the practice?**

END OF SLAVERY

An award-winning exposé published in 1923 of convict leasing in Florida inflamed readers because the victim, twenty-two-year-old Martin Tabert, was white. The outcry over Talbert's death helped to end state leasing in Florida. What role can media play in bringing attention to wrongdoings? **Do you think contemporary media is successful in doing so?** Why or why not? Do you think there is more outcry over crimes when the victim is white? If so, how can this inequity change?

Nearly eighty years after the United States ratified the Thirteenth Amendment, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt took steps to enforce it by issuing Circular 3591, which mandated that federal attorneys should aggressively prosecute any case of involuntary servitude or slavery. **Why do you think it took so long for the federal government to take aggressive action?** What can citizens do to put pressure on the federal government to act more quickly to change or enforce policy?

During those eighty years that followed the Civil War, as many as 800,000 people were caught up in one of the forced labor systems. What overall impact does this figure hold?

Scholar Adam Green notes that, "Without the appreciation of this history, you descend into fantasies that black people didn't deserve equal rights because black people – constitutionally, intellectually, morally – are not the equals of whites, period." **How can not knowing the full story of history aid in fostering attitudes that are shortsighted?**

Scholar Kahlil Muhammad says, "We have to recognize that in these awful, ghastly tales of the brutalization of black people in this country, the motivation for that was profit, from small landowners to major corporations. And so at the end of the day, that part of this country's legacy is still with us." **Do you think that this desire for profit is still with The United States today?** If so, in what ways? What would it require for lives to be deemed more valuable than profit?

At the end of the film, descendant Tonya Groomes paraphrases a quote from Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr.: "... the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice." **What does this quote mean to you and how can it be used to encourage** continued action towards defending justice?

SLAVERY AND EMANCIPATION IN HAITI

By Johnhenry Gonzalez and Laurent Marc Dubois

The histories of Haiti and the United States have been intertwined since the eighteenth century when both were colonies of powerful European empires. Slavery shaped both societies deeply, and the institution's legacies persist to this day. At the same time, however, the countries' histories surrounding slavery, emancipation, and race differ significantly.

Haiti was a country born out of a revolution of the enslaved against the French colonials in 1793. Though the French fought back, on January 1, 1804 the independent nation of Haiti was proclaimed. The majority of the population at the time of the revolution was not only enslaved but also African born. And the early leaders of the country were all of African descent, many of them ex-slaves themselves.

In both countries, the transition from slavery to freedom posed a series of social and economic problems. In Haiti the transition occurred long before it did in the United States, starting in 1793 and in a very different world historical context and there were sharp contrasts between the demographics of the two countries and who constituted the leadership class. Nevertheless, there are some striking parallels in the ways that the two governments sought to contain the control the aspirations of former slaves after abolition.

Starting with the earliest decrees of emancipation issued by French authorities in 1793, the rulers of colonial Saint Domingue and independent Haiti perpetually struggled to force legally free people into unfree systems of labor. As in other post-emancipation societies, elite landowners relied on sharecropping arrangements and repressive laws in order to profit from the labor of former slaves. Successive rulers including L g r F licit  Sonthonax, Toussaint Louverture, Jean Jacques Dessalines, Henri Christophe, and Jean-Pierre Boyer all enacted legislation that enshrined the rights of plantation owners and criminalized unattached laborers as "vagabonds," who were subject to arrest and forced relocation to plantation work gangs. Like the vagrancy laws of the Jim Crow south, early Haitian law was designed to curtail the freedom of former slaves and provide elite interests with a profitable and subservient supply of labor.

In Haiti, post-emancipation forced labor reached its harshest extremes in the northern part of the country under the military regimes of Emperor Jean-Jacques Dessalines (1804-1806), and King Henry Christophe (1806-1820). Determined to reconstruct the island's sugar economy, these

rulers used their armies to round up laborers and confine them to plantations where they toiled under the threat of corporal punishment and arrest. In some cases Haitian citizens were forced to work on the same exact plantations where they had been held in slavery under the French. Aware of French plans to re-invade Haiti, Dessalines and Christophe also employed forced labor to construct an imposing system of fortifications — many of which still tower over the Haitian countryside.

But when Haitian governments attempted to apply and enforce such projects, they faced much stronger and ultimately successful opposition on the part of the population. Early Haiti differed immensely from the white-dominated economic and social orders that solidified in other post-slavery societies such as the United States. Nowhere else in the Americas did former slaves and their descendants enjoy as much freedom and opportunity as they did in Haiti. Whereas freed slaves in the Southern U.S. were denied the famous “forty acres and a mule” that could have created a large class of economically independent black farmers, early Haitians were able to set up their own farms on lands that they received from the government, purchased, or claimed informally. During the course of the nineteenth century, Haitians escaped plantation labor by acquiring small patches of land and Haiti became a nation of black landowners.

Unlike the U.S. South with its well organized local governments, police forces, and armed white majority, the early Haitian governments were ultimately unable to restrict people’s mobility or enforce the *vagabondage* laws that officially obliged most Haitians to work on plantations. While plantation owners and government officials compelled Haitian laborers to sign contracts requiring them to work for periods of a year or more, laborers generally fled these unfavorable forms of contractual employment. A long history of popular resistance to servile contract labor is summed up in the Haitian proverb, which roughly translates as “you have signed my name, but you have not signed my feet.”

Over the course of the nineteenth century, a robust agricultural economy emerged in Haiti that combined production for local markets with cultivation of export products, particularly coffee, sold on the international market. Though the practices of labor and land-ownership at the base of this economy varied widely, significant numbers of rural Haitians either owned outright or at least exercised relatively strong control over the land they cultivated, as well as the marketing networks through which they sold their property. Haiti was highly decentralized during the nineteenth century, with eleven regions each with its own port for export. Many rural Haitians were well-armed and ready to defend their access to land against local or federal authorities. The population,

despite many constraints, was able to carve out a space of autonomy that was far greater than that experienced by African-Americans in the U.S. South even after emancipation in 1863.

Paradoxically, the problem of unfree labor has long persisted in Haiti – a country founded on the principles of universal emancipation and black self-determination. Haiti was occupied and administered by the U.S. Marines from 1915 until 1934. Many of the American Marines sent to Haiti would have been accustomed to chain gangs and discriminatory systems of convict labor. The familiarity of the practices depicted in *Slavery by Another Name* probably encouraged the occupiers, who largely viewed Haitians through a deeply racist lens, in their decision to revive an old-world system of forced labor called the *corvée* in the country. They forcibly dragooned thousands of Haitians into road-building projects. This system of involuntary labor drafts helped to fuel an armed insurgency among Haitians who associated American rule with the historical memory of colonialism and slavery. The Marines ultimately suppressed the uprising through a brutal conflict, deploying aerial bombardment against civilians for one of the first times in military history.

A number of U.S. corporations tried to implant themselves in Haiti during this period, with the full support of the Marine administration, expropriating land from many rural Haitians and helping to spur the first waves of migration out of the country. Ultimately, though, few of these larger agricultural projects succeeded, in part because of the resistance of many Haitians to return to plantation labor they considered a dressed-up form of slavery.

The period of the U.S. occupation, interestingly, saw the circulation of stories about zombification. Within Haitian Vodou and the country's culture more broadly, the fear of zombification had long been a way of channeling the historical memory of slavery and of articulating the ultimate fear surrounding the loss of control over oneself. One U.S. writer, William Seabrook, heard that some Haitians believed that some of their countrymen who were working for U.S. corporations were actually zombies. He wrote about this in a popular work which inspired first a Broadway musical and then the first zombie film, so that a Haitian cultural practice ended up feeding American popular culture's engagement with questions of race, exploitation, and alienation.

Over the course of the nineteenth century and into the twentieth, both internal and external pressures on the Haitian economy have led to widespread poverty and extreme inequality. These have given rise to exploitative systems of domestic servitude that endure into the twenty-first century. Whereas early nineteenth century plantation laborers toiled under official laws that bound them to particular workplaces and regulated their treatment, the institution of domestic servitude

has developed informally to become a major feature of the Haitian social landscape. Historically, poor children have been employed in every conceivable form of domestic and agricultural work in exchange for housing, food, and sometimes the opportunity to go to school. Generally these domestic servants or *restavèk* work without pay and some former domestic servants describe the system as a form of slavery. Debates over these forms of labor coercion and exploitation continue in Haiti and its diaspora today.

Discussion Questions Related to Haiti

1. What are the historical differences between Haiti and the United States that created different experiences for people of African descent in the two countries?
2. What are the parallels in the economic history of the two countries, and what are the differences?
3. In what ways do popular historical memory of slavery and colonialism still condition Haiti's relations with foreign powers such as the United States or France?
4. How does the experience of Haitian farmers working in the *demwatye* system compare with that of sharecroppers in the Jim Crow South?
5. Is it appropriate to compare Haitian child domestic servants or *restavèks* to unfree black laborers in the Jim Crow South? Could similar comparisons be made with twentieth-century Haitian migrant laborers in the Dominican Republic?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

To learn more about the film, visit <http://www.pbs.org/tpt/slavery-by-another-name/about/>. To watch *Slavery by Another Name* online, visit <http://www.pbs.org/tpt/slavery-by-another-name/watch/>.

To explore an interactive timeline and map of slavery in America from 1860-1950, visit <http://www.pbs.org/tpt/slavery-by-another-name/slavery-timeline/>.

To learn more about the history presented in *Slavery by Another Name*, visit the theme gallery at <http://www.pbs.org/tpt/slavery-by-another-name/themes/>.

To download *Slavery by Another Name* classroom activity guides and other educational materials, visit <http://www.pbs.org/tpt/slavery-by-another-name/classrooms/>.

For additional resources about this history, visit <http://www.pbs.org/tpt/slavery-by-another-name/additional-resources/>.

You can purchase a copy of the book and film *Slavery by Another Name* by visiting www.pbs.org/sban.

Slavery and Emancipation in the Americas

By Dwayne E. Williams

Where are your monuments, your battles, martyrs? Where is your tribal memory? Sirs, in that grey vault. The sea. The sea has locked them up. The sea is History. - Derek Walcott, "The Sea is History"

For most of recorded human history, the peoples in the Old World and the New World were unaware of each other's existences. They were separated by a seemingly impenetrable border – the Atlantic Ocean. Starting in the late 15th century, however, new developments in seafaring technologies enabled ships to begin crossing the Atlantic with more success. A new Atlantic world was born that would shape and redefine world history. What we now call *Latin America* essentially grew from a mélange of human diasporas, the desire to find and exploit new lands and resources, shifts in ideas about the meaning of race, and the far-reaching impact of disease.

As ships gradually linked communities in West Africa and Europe with the Americas, they came into contact with societies that they had never previously encountered. These new arrivals overcame resistance with physical force, technology and the spread of diseases like smallpox. It is estimated, that in 1500, there were about 50 million Indians in the Americas. By 1600, after 100 years of engagement with Europeans and Africans, this number had been reduced to about 8 million.

The wide array of slave societies that took hold in the Americas was the direct result of colonization. As European nations colonized parts of the Americas, they began to extract gold, silver, and copper as well as commodities such as sugar, coffee, tobacco, and rice. Mines and plantations were labor-intensive endeavors that demanded above all else a seemingly endless supply of workers.

Initially, indigenous people were used as enslaved labor. However, the combination of disease and brutal working conditions, resulted in the death of large numbers of indigenous people and the practice was soon outlawed. The colonial powers, Europeans who spearheaded the effort to establish slave societies in the Americas, experimented with other options for labor, such as indentured servants from Europe. But ironically, there was so much work available and land was so cheap to buy that many indentured servants were able to quickly earn their freedom and even become landowners themselves.

Eventually, the West African coast became the source of laborers who could meet the ferocious demands of the plantation and mining economies in Latin America. Over 12 million Africans from a

wide range of ethnic and linguistic backgrounds were brought to the Americas as forced labor, with Portugal, Spain, England, France, and the Netherlands engaging most vigorously in the slave trade. Ultimately, over 12 million slaves were shipped from Africa to the New World. Of these, more than 4 million were sold to Brazil, and 2.5 million to Spanish colonies including Mexico and Hispaniola (Haiti and Dominican Republic) and other parts of Latin and South America. Almost 400,000 slaves arrived in the United States.

This systematic enslavement of Africans was the largest forced migration in human history.

Emancipation and Freedom in the Americas

The institution of slavery dominated the Americas for the greater part of three centuries. Whereas in North America, slavery was met with objections from at least a few individual voices almost from the start, slavery took a firm hold in Latin America and met little opposition from people of European descent. As late as 1750, not one major institutional church or civic organization, with the exception of the Quakers, had condemned slave trading or slave ownership.

Gradually, in the late eighteenth century, humanitarian and religious objections to slavery did emerge that would greatly influence law and public opinion about the future of the institution of slavery in the Americas. In the newly-formed United States, the contradictions between the calls for liberty and the existence of slavery resulted in the Northwest Ordinance (1787) which barred slavery from the territories north of the Ohio River. Perhaps the most powerful rejection of slavery came not from churches or abolitionists but rather from the slaves themselves. In Haiti in 1791, nearly a half million slaves emancipated themselves by insurrection and revolutionary struggle. Equally significant is that in 1807 and 1808, Britain and the United States outlawed the African slave trade. Soon after, for moral and economic reasons, other European countries all outlawed the slave trade but not slavery.

In the Americas, the push to outlaw slavery and emancipate enslaved populations unfolded initially as a part of the national liberation struggles during the 1820s and 1830s. In 1821, the region that now includes Ecuador, Colombia, and Venezuela adopted a gradual emancipation plan that phased out slavery slowly, concluding in 1845. Two years later, Chile agreed to emancipate its slaves. In 1824 Guatemala became the first Latin American nation to outlaw slavery outright. Soon after, between 1825-1829 Argentina, Peru, Bolivia, Paraguay, and Mexico all abolished slavery. In 1833, Britain emancipated 780,000 slaves, paying 20 million pounds sterling compensation to their owners. In 1848, Denmark and France freed slaves in their colonial empires. Slavery survived in

Surinam and other Dutch New World colonies until 1863 and in the United States slavery survived until 1865. Slavery died an even slower death in other parts of the Americas. Puerto Rico did not end slavery until 1873, Cuba delayed until 1886, and Brazil became the last country in the western hemisphere to abolish slavery in 1888.

In the Americas, emancipation, like slavery, was, to quote the historian Rebecca Scott, “prolonged, ambiguous, and complex.” Even as formerly enslaved populations gained their liberty, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries they constantly faced the challenge of maintaining their autonomy. In some instances they were targeted by local and national officials who aimed to control their labor. These efforts at control came in the form of new laws that proscribed new limits on wages, access to land, and jobs in certain industries.

They also faced competition from new waves of European immigrants who were enticed by the possibilities of new opportunities unavailable to them in their homelands. The liberated slaves responded to these attempts to place new limits on their lives in several ways. In some instances they moved far away from their former masters and formed independent communities. In other instances they formed new civic and religious institutions that were aimed at helping them maintain their self-sufficiency. In all instances, freedom meant negotiating new terms that might grant them greater access to land and capital which they believed would make their lives more secure. Emancipated slaves were prepared to do whatever was necessary to ensure that their freedom remained meaningful.

Yet, the lasting legacy of slavery and emancipation in the Americas has not been a steady triumphant march to independence. Even in the twenty-first century, descendants of slaves remain among one of the most marginalized groups in the Americas. Today they are left with a challenge far greater than merely maintaining control over their labor. The challenge now is negotiating the relationship between race, place, and space in the Americas at a time when the meaning and memory of slavery is fading.

Key Terms

Chain Gangs: Chain gangs were groups of convicts forced to labor at tasks such as road construction, ditch digging, or farming while chained together. Some chain gangs worked at locations near a prison, while others were housed in transportable jails such as railroad cars or trucks. Chain gangs minimized the cost of guarding prisoners, but exposed prisoners to an array of health problems and dangerous working conditions.

To learn more about this theme and watch related video clips, visit:

<http://www.pbs.org/tpt/slavery-by-another-name/themes/chain-gangs/>.

Convict Leasing: Initially, some states paid private contractors to house and feed prisoners. Within a few years states realized they could lease out their convicts to local planters or industrialists who would pay minimal rates for the workers – thereby eliminating costs and increasing revenue. Soon, markets for convict laborers developed, with entrepreneurs buying and selling convict labor leases. Unlike slave owners, temporary employers had only a small capital investment in convict laborers and thus convict laborers were often dismally treated. Even so, the convict lease system was highly profitable for the states and the employers.

To learn more about this theme and watch related video clips, visit:

<http://www.pbs.org/tpt/slavery-by-another-name/themes/convict-leasing/>.

Jim Crow & *Plessy v. Ferguson*: As whites gained control of Southern states' governments when Reconstruction ended, they began to enact laws known collectively as Jim Crow, which oppressed blacks through segregation. Though the 1875 Civil Rights Act had stated that all races were entitled to equal treatment in public accommodations, an 1883 Supreme Court decision clarified that the law did not apply to private persons or corporations. Once the Supreme Court decided that "separate but equal" was legal in the 1896 *Plessy v. Ferguson* case, segregation became even more ensconced in Southern law and strengthened Jim Crow. Poll taxes, literacy requirements, and grandfather clauses obstructed blacks from voting.

To learn more about this theme and watch related video clips, visit:

<http://www.pbs.org/tpt/slavery-by-another-name/themes/jim-crow/>.

Judgments and Contracts: In Southern courtrooms, two main legal methods developed that ensnared men into forced labor. In many cases, defendants were often found guilty of real or

fabricated crimes, and were fined for the crime and additional court fees. When the men were unable to pay, a local businessman would step forward to pay the fines. The defendant would then sign a contract agreeing to work without pay until the debt was paid off. A second method involved a defendant who, when faced with the likelihood of a conviction and the threat of being sent to a far-off work camp, would “confess judgment,” essentially claiming responsibility before any trial occurred. At that point, a local businessman would step forward to act as “surety,” vouching for the future good behavior of the defendant, and forfeiting a bond that would pay for the crime. At that point, the judge would accept the bond, without ever rendering a verdict on the crime. The defendant would then sign a contract agreeing to work without pay until the surety bond was paid off.

To learn more about this theme and watch related video clips, visit:

<http://www.pbs.org/tpt/slavery-by-another-name/themes/false-contracts/>.

Life in the Coal Mine: Coal mines were dangerous for all workers. Collapsing mines, suffocation, gas poisoning, explosions, and heavy machinery accidents were daily dangers. Men often worked standing in water, swinging their sharp pick axes and shoveling coal in the flickering light of their gas head lamps. For those who survived those hazards, long-term exposure to poor air caused chronic lung diseases such as black lung. For convict laborers, conditions were even worse. Poor food rations, cramped sleeping quarters, and inadequate health care led to waves of diseases. Physical punishment for not meeting the required amounts for coal collected or insubordination included whippings, being tied up and tossed into solitary confinement, and water torture. Shackles, chains, and other methods were used to prevent escape.

To learn more about this theme and watch related video clips, visit:

<http://www.pbs.org/tpt/slavery-by-another-name/themes/coal-mining/>.

Peonage (Debt Slavery): Peonage, also called debt slavery or debt servitude, is a system where an employer compels a worker to pay off a debt with work. Legally, peonage was outlawed following the Civil War. However the federal government didn't truly commit to enforcing it until the 1940s. After Reconstruction, many Southern black men were swept into peonage though different methods.

To learn more about this theme and watch related video clips, visit:

<http://www.pbs.org/tpt/slavery-by-another-name/themes/peonage/>.

Black Codes, Pig Laws and Vagrancy Statutes: In state after state, and county after county, after Reconstruction ended, new laws targeted African Americans – and effectively criminalized black life in efforts to restore power to Southern whites. The pig laws enhanced penalties for what had been previously misdemeanor offenses, to felony offenses. In Mississippi for example, theft of a pig worth as little as a dollar could mean five years in prison. With the vagrancy statutes you could be convicted if at any point you could not prove that you were employed.

To learn more about this theme and watch related video clips, visit:

<http://www.pbs.org/tpt/slavery-by-another-name/themes/black-codes/>.

Reconstruction: In the years immediately following the Civil War, from 1865-1877, the South entered a period called Reconstruction. During this time, the Freedmen’s Bureau was created to offer former slaves food, clothing, and advice on labor contracts and the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments were passed in order to attempt to bring equality to blacks. Initially, with federal laws and federal troops offering protection, blacks began to vote and gain political power. Soon after, Southern whites responded with violence and intimidation. In 1877, because of the cost, administrative corruption, Northern exhaustion, and Southern protests, the federal government withdrew from the South, and black disenfranchisement and oppression quickly followed.

To learn more about this theme and watch related video clips, visit:

<http://www.pbs.org/tpt/slavery-by-another-name/themes/reconstruction/>.

Sharecropping: Sharecropping is a system where the landlord allows a tenant to farm his land in exchange for a share of the crop. This encouraged tenants to work to produce the biggest harvest that they could, and ensured they would remain tied to the land and unlikely to leave for other opportunities. High interest rates, unpredictable harvests, and unscrupulous landlords and merchants often kept tenant farm families severely indebted, requiring the debt to be carried over until the next year or the next. Additional laws made it difficult or even illegal for sharecroppers to sell their crops to others besides their landlord, or prevented sharecroppers from moving if they were indebted to their landlord.

To learn more about this theme and watch related video clips, visit:

<http://www.pbs.org/tpt/slavery-by-another-name/themes/sharecropping/>.

Teddy Roosevelt and Progressivism: By the end of the nineteenth century, a new political movement called Progressivism, of which Teddy Roosevelt was an ardent supporter, developed in response to significant economic, social, and political inequalities. Progressives advocated for many different reforms including labor and prison reform, women’s suffrage, public health initiatives, and universal education; the central, shared idea was that the government should lead efforts to effect change.

To learn more about this theme and watch related video clips, visit:

<http://www.pbs.org/tpt/slavery-by-another-name/themes/progressivism/>.

White Supremacists and Terrorism: White supremacy is the belief that white people are superior to other races of people. After Reconstruction, white supremacists formed political and social groups to promote whites and oppress blacks, and to enact laws that codified inequality. The Ku Klux Klan (founded in 1865) and the Knights of the White Camelia were secret groups, while members of the White League and the Red Shirts were publicly known. All four groups used violence to intimidate blacks and Republican voters. Their efforts succeeded, and with the end of Reconstruction in 1877, white supremacy became the reality of the South.

To learn more about this theme and watch related video clips, visit:

<http://www.pbs.org/tpt/slavery-by-another-name/themes/white-supremacy/>.

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