

# **SOUTH CAROLINA STATE MUSEUM**

## **PRE-VISIT MATERIALS FOR THE MUSEUM LESSON:**

**(Grades 3,4,8)**

### **ANTEBELLUM SOUTH CAROLINA**

#### **TO THE TEACHER:**

The pre-visit materials focus on these topics: the origins of black slavery; the importance of rice, indigo and cotton to the economy of South Carolina; terms and definitions; hand-outs for students.

The docent-taught museum lesson will concentrate on: the impact of cotton in South Carolina, antebellum society, role-playing activity about antebellum society.

#### **GOALS:**

To examine the impact cotton had upon the economy and people of South Carolina.

To discuss the role of Whites and Blacks in antebellum South Carolina.

## SHARE WITH YOUR STUDENTS:

From the beginning of Colonial rule until the end of the Civil War in 1865, thousands of black South Carolinians lived and worked as slaves. Where did the first slaves come from and why did slave labor become important to the economic survival of South Carolina?

Long before the European powers developed overseas colonies, three powerful states developed, then declined, in what is now western Africa. From the 9<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> centuries three African empires dominated the area from the Sahara to the rain forests of the Guinea coast. The economic life of these three states, Ghana, Mali and Songhay, revolved around agriculture, manufacturing and international trade. In this area along the west coast, millions of people were captured, bound with chains and forced onto ships for what was called the “Middle Passage” to the New World and slavery.

Slavery existed in all three empires – as it had in ancient Greece and Rome. Before the 15<sup>th</sup> century, slavery had little or nothing to do with race. Slavery was justified by the rules of war and by the Catholic Church with the Papal Bull (decree) of 1492. With the beginning of the slave trade run by Europeans, race (and in some respects, religion) became the issue. Europeans believed they were superior to Africans. With their more advanced weapons, and occasional cooperation from local African leaders, Africans were rounded up for the slave trade. For a period of 400 years, it is estimated that 13 million people or more were lost to Africa.

European contact with western Africa devastated millions of families. An example of this can be seen in the narrative of the life of Olaudah Equiano. Kidnapped at age eleven, Olaudah was sold to European slave traders that he described as men with “horrible looks, red faces, and long hair.” The conditions aboard the slave ship were terrifying, causing Olaudah to later state: “Every circumstance I met with served only to render my state more painful and heighten my apprehensions and my opinion of the cruelty of the whites.”

Olaudah eventually obtained his freedom and worked tirelessly for the abolition of slavery. Most slaves would have agreed with the poem of Olaudah Equiano:

Well may I say my life has been  
One scene of sorrow and pain;  
From early days I griefs have known,  
And as I grew my griefs have grown.

Dangers were always in my path,  
And fear of wrath and sometimes death;  
While pale dejection in me reign'd  
I often wept, my grief constrain'd.

When taken from my native land,  
By an unjust and cruel band,  
How did uncommon dread prevail!  
My sighs no more I could conceal.

Once the newly captured Africans were inspected, chained and branded, the next step on their way to slavery was to cross the Atlantic Ocean. People from many different locations and speaking many different languages were packed onto shelves in the holds of ships. One captain noted: “They had not so much room as a man in his coffin. . . . It was impossible for them to turn or shift with any degree of ease.” The voyage lasted from six to ten weeks. During this time, slave resistance was common in forms ranging from refusing to eat to revolts and suicide.

Once the slave ship had reached its destination, slaves were then subjected to a “breaking-in” period. Slaves taken to the West Indies were subjected to a one-to-three year period known as “seasoning.” During this time they were given new names, taught the rudiments of the new language and trained to do new work.

Of all the societies that enslaved Africans in the New World, only the one established in what is now the southern United States grew through natural increase. About 400,000 people were brought from Africa to the United States from the early 17<sup>th</sup> Century until 1808; by 1860 the black population had increased to about 4 million.

Slavery had been important to South Carolina since the first Spanish and English settlements. Vasquez de Allyon brought African and Native American slaves to South Carolina when he tried to establish a Spanish settlement in the early 16<sup>th</sup> century. The approximately 100 African slaves escaped. The English used slave labor in the Lowcountry for the cultivation of rice and for raising cattle. Planters knew very little about growing rice and depended upon slaves from West Africa's rice growing region for the knowledge to raise the crop. By the early 1700s the labor of thousands of slaves made rice the most important crop in the Lowcountry.

By the 1740s indigo was introduced as a crop. Grown for use as a blue dye, the production of indigo needed a large labor force. During the Colonial period the British government subsidized the growing of indigo thus making it profitable to local planters. Once the Revolutionary War began, and the government payments stopped, the industry collapsed.

Two types of cotton were grown in South Carolina. The first to be successful commercially was sea island cotton in the 1780s. Cultivated in the loose, sandy soil along the coast, sea island cotton was used mainly for expensive fabric. The seeds, while removed by hand, separated easily from the fibers.

Short-fiber cotton was better suited for cultivation in the Midlands and Upcountry. Because the seeds were hard to separate from the fiber, one slave could only clean about one pound of cotton a day. With the spread of the cotton gin after 1793, cotton became the dominant crop throughout the South. With more cotton being grown, more slaves were needed to tend the fields.

Slavery was an integral part of Southern society, and slaveholding planters dominated the economy, politics, and culture. . . . With the merchants and professionals tied to the slaveholding planters, antislavery sentiment could draw but weak support from the urban elite. . . .in 1790 Negroes composed less than 2% of the population of New England, they composed a third of the population of Maryland. . .8% of the population of New York, but nearly 44% of the population of South Carolina.

Excerpted from Salves Without Masters by Ira Berlin.

## CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

Reading from original sources. Have students read and react to Hand-out #1.

### Terms and Definitions.

#### Terms:

1. **Angola** - A Portuguese colony in southwest Africa where from the mid-17<sup>th</sup> to mid-19<sup>th</sup> centuries thousands of people were captured and sold into slavery. Most slaves from this colony were sent to what is now Brazil.
2. **Antebellum** - Time period in the United States from the end of the Revolutionary War to the Civil War.
3. **“breaking-in” period** - Slaves newly arrived to the New World were forced to assume a new slave name, learn a new language and, in many cases, a new type of work. They were taught how to be a slave.
4. **Cotton gin** - Eli Whitney is credited with its invention. With this machine Fanners seeds could be removed quickly from cotton fibers.
5. **Farmer basket** - A large flat basket use to separate the husk from the rice grain.
6. **Free Black** - While not a slave, such a person had few civil rights. A skilled slave, such as a blacksmith, a tailor, or a carpenter, was sometimes able to earn money to buy his freedom.
7. **Gold Coast (Guinea, Gambia)** - Coastal area of West Africa where the European slave trade flourished for more than 400 years.
8. **Gullah language** - A mixture of many West-African languages and English. It was the dominant language of slaves along the sea islands and coastal regions of South Carolina and Georgia.
9. **Indigo** - Plant grown for use in making a blue dye.

10. **Middle Passage** - Term given to the sea voyage of slaves from Africa to the New World.
11. **Mortar and pestle** - Tools used to grind off the outer husks of rice and to polish the grain.
12. **Planters** - The small group of people who controlled the economy, society and politics of South Carolina. They comprised just 6 ½ percent of the populations and owned large amounts of land known as “plantations.” The wealthiest members of this class owned more than 50 slaves.
13. **Sea island cotton** – Once grown along the South Carolina coast this crop was desirable because it was used in the production of fine fabric.
14. **Stoneware pottery** - A heavy, nonporous type of pottery for every day uses such as storing food or liquids.
15. **Yeoman farmer** - Lived in modest home, farmed and worked in the fields next to their slave/s. While this class of people was important to society, they had less influence on politics and the economy.