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U.S. History Readers: Conflicts and Resolutions

Events Leading to the Civil War

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Events Leading to the Civil War

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Events Leading to the Civil War

As the title implies, this unit deals with the period between 1800 and 1860. It starts with three lesson-chapters on slavery to help students understand what the national debate on the morality of slavery was all about. The first of the chapters on slavery deals with the African background and the experience of Middle Passage, and asks students to answer the arguments used by slave traders to justify their wretched business. The second chapter on slavery asks students whether to accept an abolitionist's or a Southerner's depiction of this institution. The third chapter deals with methods used to control slaves and the responses of four slaves to their situation. A chapter on the Tallmadge Amendment provides an opportunity to stage a debate on the expansion of slavery. The following chapter on the Nullification Crisis focuses on arguments for and against the tariff and an analysis of the nullification doctrine. Both of these chapters reveal how the fissures that divided the Union and eventually led to the Civil War were papered over by compromises. Chapters on the Seneca Falls Convention and removal of the Cherokees focus on problems other than those directly connected to the Civil War, but they cover issues nearly as important today as they were to life in the antebellum period. The question of annexing Texas and the resulting war with Mexico returns students' attention back to the events leading to the Civil War. Subsequent chapters on the Compromise of 1850, the Kansas-Nebraska Act, the election of 1860, and the secession crisis take the unit right up to the war. Each of these chapters ends with questions that encourage informed discussions of the important episodes leading up to this tragic event.

This series of chapters is not to be confused with a traditional text. Instead of striving for complete coverage of the antebellum period, the unit highlights points of conflict and encourages students to see both sides of the controversies that led to this horrendous war. Students are encouraged to develop their own ideas of the relative merits of both sides of the conflict. The series of questions about slavery, tariffs, nullification, territorial expansion, and verdicts of the Supreme Court culminate in an exercise asking students to weigh accusations from both the North and the South that the other was mainly responsible for the War. In the process, student learning is enhanced by the use of graphic organizers, vocabulary lists, and I (Inquiry)-charts. A "For Further Consideration" section in each chapter requires advanced students to do more writing and to use their extra knowledge to enrich class discussion. Many lessons/chapters—like those on the Tallmadge Amendment, the war with Mexico, and the Compromise of 1850—lend themselves to debates and/or simulations. Finally, each lesson includes vocabulary words and key terms in a flash card format; these can be used either for review or reference.

Chapter 1. Africa and the Slave Trade

Teacher Page

Overview:

This chapter tells the story of life in Africa through excerpts from a book by Olaudah Equiano (also known as Gustavas Vassa). Following his escape from slavery, Equiano wrote this book, in which he describes his former homeland, his capture, and his experience during the Middle Passage. Other impressions of Africa are provided in excerpts from a U.S. History textbook. Equiano's description of the Middle Passage is enhanced by an account provided by a doctor on a slave ship. The graphic-organizer question has students describe life in Africa under such headings as culture and civilizations. The "For Further Consideration" section asks students to respond to a slave trader's excuse for peddling human flesh with a speech refuting what this person has to say.

Objectives:

Students will:

- understand that before Europe's intrusions, Africa was far less primitive, and more civilized and enlightened than is commonly believed
- obtain a lasting impression of the terrible conditions on a slave ship
- learn the arguments used by slave traders to justify their profession and use facts to refute these arguments

Strategy:

Before class: Assign the chapter either up to or including the "For Further Consideration" section and inform students they will be expected to write their answers to all the Student Activities questions covering the assigned section(s).

In class: Ask students to give you an idea of what they thought Africa was like before they worked on this assignment. Ask them to tell you what they have learned from the reading that differs from the stereotypes they may have had in mind. (I have found that even fairly sophisticated students have had a very negative picture of Africa, and that what appears in this chapter is somewhat of a revelation to them.) Having completed this exercise, review what students have done to complete their Graphic Organizer, and give them more information if you feel they have left out details on civilizations, farming, orderly government, etc. in pre-colonial Africa.

Let students tell you what was most horrifying about the slave ship and list numerous responses on the chalkboard. After a few minutes, ask how anyone could justify enslavement. Have students who read the "For Further Consideration" section answer that question and encourage students to respond to the slave trader's justification. End class by allowing students to give the speeches they wrote to answer the slave trader's arguments.

Chapter 1. Africa and the Slave Trade I-Chart

	View of Africa in the 1500s	Conditions on slave ships	Arguments of slave traders justifying their occupation
What I already know			
What I learned from Chapter 1, Part I			
What I learned from Chapter 1, Part II			
What I still would like to learn about this subject			

Vocabulary for Chapter 1—Africa and the Slave Trade

exclusion**merchant****flogged****wretched****chafing****development****savage****Benin**

Vocabulary for Chapter 1—Africa and the Slave Trade

The act of leaving or keeping someone or something out	Feeling bad, unhappy, and/or ill	
Person who buys or sells goods, often from one country to another	Painful rubbing that causes damage to skin	Refers to an uncivilized or primitive person
Hit very hard with something—usually a whip	Growth or progress in a specific direction	A country in western Africa

Chapter 1

Africa and the Slave Trade

Introduction

What was life like for millions of Africans before they were captured and marched to slave ships? How bad were the conditions on board these boats loaded with human cargo? Read this chapter and get a partial answer to these important questions from the white and black men who shared these experiences.

Oludah Equiano (Gustavus Vassa)

Oludah Equiano (also known as Gustavus Vassa), the youngest son of a chief, was born in the West African kingdom of Benin. At age 11, he was captured by African slave traders, sold to white men, put on a ship bound for America, and sold several more times. Up to this point, Equiano's story is much like those of about ten million Africans who survived the living hell of the slave ships. But unlike most of the other surviving slaves, Equiano was taught to read and write and was able to earn enough money to buy his freedom. With the help of friends in England, he wrote a book and found someone to publish his story. Parts of his book are printed below:

Equiano's Africa



The kingdom of Benin is divided into many districts. I was born in one of the villages furthest from the capital. The distance from the capital and seacoast must have been great. I had never heard of white men, the sea, or Europe, before I was captured.

My people had little to do with the King of Benin. As far as I could tell, all of the government was run by chiefs or elders of my village. What happens in one village and family is pretty typical for the whole nation. Let me tell you of my life in Africa.

My father was one of those elders or chiefs that I just mentioned. In our language he was called embrenche. It meant a grand person. These embrenche, or chief men, decided disputes, and punished crimes. On such times they gathered together. The trials were usually short. They followed the law of retaliation [revenge]. I remember a man who was brought before my father. He was accused of kidnapping a boy. Although he was the son of a chief, he was ordered to pay back with a man or woman slave.

Economic Life in Africa

When the women are not farming with the men, they spin, [weave] cotton, dye it, and make it into clothes. They also make many different kinds of pottery.

Our way of living was very plain. Our food was mainly cows, goats, and chickens or ducks. These meats are the main wealth of our country, and are used in trade. The flesh is usually stewed in a pan. We use spices such as pepper and salt. Our vegetables are mainly yams, beans, and Indian corn.

Our wants are few and easily supplied. We manufacture a few items, such as cloth, pottery, and tools for war or farming. These we make for ourselves and do not sell. In such a state as this, money is of little use. However, we do have some small pieces of coin. They are made something like an anchor, but I do not remember any more about them. We also have markets, at which I have often gone with my mother. Here we sometimes meet men called Cye Eboe [probably Ibo]. They often bring us firearms, gunpowder, hats, beads, and dried fish. They exchange these articles for sweet-smelling woods, and our salt of wood ashes. They also carry slaves through our land. Before they are allowed to go on, the chiefs check carefully to see how they were obtained.

Our land is unusually rich and fruitful. Agriculture is our main work, and even women and children help farm. Thus we are all used to work from our earliest years. Every one contributes something for the common good. No one is idle, and we have no beggars.

Customs in Equiano's Africa

We are a nation of dancers, musicians, and poets. Every great event, such as a victory in battle, is celebrated in public dances. Songs and music is made that fits the occasion. The people are separated into four parts, and each has a special dance. Each pictures some interesting scene of real life, such as a great victory, a kind of work, or a sad story. People are always making new dances for new events. This gives our dance a spirit which I have never seen elsewhere.

We have simple manners and few luxuries. The dress of men and women are the same. There is generally a long piece of cloth, wrapped around the body. It is usually dyed blue, which is our favorite color. The dye is taken from a berry and is much brighter and richer than any other I have seen.

The head of a family usually eats alone. His wives and slaves also have separate tables. Before we taste food, we always wash our hands. After washing, an offering to the spirits is made by pouring a small part of the drink on the floor. Then food is put in a certain place for the spirits of our departed relatives. We never forget the dead. They watch over us and we watch over them.

We believe that there is one Creator of all things and that he lives in the sun. We believe that he controls the fates. We have never heard of a life ever—after in heaven, but there are some in my village who believe that the soul goes into another body. Those spirits that don't enter another body, such as close relatives, help guard us from the bad spirits of our enemies.

Two West African Empires and One of Its Many Cities

In the year 1513, a young man accompanied his uncle on a long journey across the Sahara desert to the African city of Timbuktu. Years later Leo Africanus, as he was known, described the city in a book he wrote:

The houses here are built in the shape of bells, the walls are stakes or hurdles plastered over with clay and the houses covered with reeds. Yet there is a most stately temple to be seen, the walls whereof are made of stone and lime; and a royal palace also built by a most excellent artist from Granada. Here are many shops of artificers, and merchants, and especially of such as weave linen and cotton cloth...



Mosque at Djenne, sister city to Timbuktu

The inhabitants, and especially strangers that reside there, are exceeding rich, inasmuch, that the king that now has married both his daughters unto two rich merchants. Here are many wells, containing most sweet water; and so often as the river Niger overfloweth, they convey the water thereof by certain sluices into the town. Corn, cattle, milk, and butter this region yieldeth in great abundance...

Africanus undoubtedly knew that Timbuktu was part of the large West African Empire of Songhay. Songhay had conquered its forerunners, Mali, which in turn had conquered Ghana. Askia Muhammad, whose reign extended from 1493–1528, became Songhay's most famed ruler. He devoted his great energies to making his empire stronger, not only through conquest, but by internal improvements as well. He encouraged farming, learning, and commerce. He established schools and universities that attracted scholars from as far away as Asia. He divided his empire into four separate districts, each administered by a member of his family.

One region that Songhay was never able to reach was the kingdom of Benin. Tucked away in a jungle far south of Songhay, Benin dominated the region around the Niger River. A single leader of Benin known as Oba Ewuare, captured over 200 villages and towns, but, according to one author:

Ewuare is remembered as an outstanding ruler not only for his conquests and breadth of contact with the wide world. He also presided over important political developments. For it was under Ewuare ... that the State Council of Benin was formed, together with other new political institutions; and it was from this time that the imperial system of Benin acquired not only a central ruler but also a central government, with officials and departments and regular means of administering the empire.¹

Oludah Equiano Is Captured

Equiano continues his story in his own words:

One day I was left alone at home with only my sister. All the others had gone out to work. Suddenly, two men and a woman got over the walls around our house and captured us both. They stuffed rags into our mouth and rushed us off into the woods before we could cry for help. Here they tied our hands and carried us until night. The next day, they made us walk for the whole day. Thus we continued to travel, sometimes on land and sometimes by water. We passed through many different countries and several nations. At the end of six or seven months after I was kidnapped, I arrived at the sea coast.



Artist's depiction of the slave trade

The first object that greeted my eyes when I arrived at the coast was the sea and a slave ship. The ship was waiting for cargo. Imagine my terror when I was carried aboard the ship. I was handled and tossed to see if I was healthy. I was certain that I had entered a world of bad spirits who would kill me.

I looked around the ship and saw many black people with their faces full of sorrow. I fainted from fear and fell on the deck...

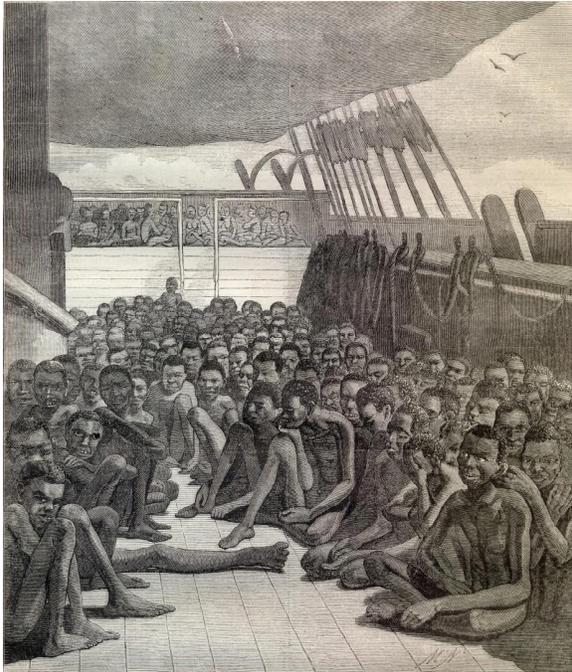
Soon after this, the blacks who brought me on board went off and left me. I now thought that I would never return to my own country. I soon was put down under the decks and there smelled the worst odors I have ever smelled. I became so sick and low, that I was not able

¹ <http://www.raceandhistory.com/historicalviews/edoofbenin.htm> by Osamuyimen Stewart, Nigeria: The Edo of Benin- Stewart wrote: "This posting is a collection of oral tradition passed down to me, my critical evaluation of folklore, and ideas from a variety of written sources."

to eat. Nor did I have the slightest desire to taste anything. I now wished that my life would end. Soon, two white men offered me something to eat. I refused, and was flogged, until I finally agreed to eat something.

I later saw some of the slaves badly cut and whipped every hour for either trying to jump overboard or not eat. This often was done to me. The white people acted in such a savage manner that I thought I would be put to death any minute. They were not only cruel to us blacks, but also to other whites. I saw one sailor beaten so badly that he died as a result. They threw him over the side as if he had been an animal.

The smell in the ship's hold, while we were on the coast, was so bad that it was dangerous to stay there. Some of us had been allowed to stay on the deck. Now the whole ship's cargo was forced into the hold. It was unbearable. We were crowded so close together that we



hardly had room to turn around. It was so hot, that the air became unfit for breathing. This brought on sickness among the slaves. Many died. The chaffing of the chains made things worse. Women shrieked, and dying men groaned. I was brought to such a condition that they took me on deck. Here I was able to recover, but expected that I would die any moment. Every day, others were brought up on deck who already were dead.

One day two of my countrymen who were chained together jumped into the sea. Immediately, another man followed his example. I would have followed, but was held back by the ship's crew. The boats were quickly lowered and the crew chased these

slaves. They saved one from drowning and then almost beat him to death. That was the punishment for preferring death to slavery.

Landing in the Barbados

A great shout went out when we finally sighted shore. When we pulled in, many merchants and planters came on board. They were there to look us over. Later, we were herded in the merchant's yards. On a signal, the buyers rushed into the yards. They chose which human flesh they wish to buy. In this way families and friends are separated often for ever. I remember there were several brothers who were sold to different people. I can still hear their cries at parting.

A Ship's Doctor Describes the Slave Ships

The slave ships lie a mile below the town in Bonny River off the coast of Guinea. Sometimes fifteen sails meet here together. Scarce a day passes without some Negroes being purchased and carried on board.

The wretched Negroes are immediately fastened together, two and two, by handcuffs on their wrists and by irons riveted on their legs. They are then sent down between the decks and placed in a space partitioned off for that purpose. They are frequently stowed so close as to admit of no other position than lying on their sides. Nor will the height between decks allow them to stand.

On board some ships, the common sailors are allowed to have intercourse with such of the black women whose consent they can procure. The officers are permitted to indulge their passions among them at pleasure.

The hardships suffered by the Negroes during the passage are scarcely to be conceived. The exclusion of fresh air is the most intolerable. Whenever the sea is rough and the rain heavy it becomes necessary to shut every means by which air is admitted. The Negroes' rooms very soon grow intolerably hot. The confined air produces fevers... which carry off great numbers of them. The floor of their rooms can be so covered with blood and mucus that it resembles a slaughter house. Last week by only continuing among them for about a quarter of an hour, I was so overcome with the heat, stench, and foul air that I nearly fainted: and it was only with assistance that I could get on deck...

Student Activities

A. Graphic Organizer

Using the following chart, give three examples of life in Africa from three of the following categories: economics, customs, slavery, or civilizations.

Life in Africa

Example	Category 1:	Category 2:	Category 3:
1.			
2.			
3.			

B. Student Exercises

1. Was there anything in this chapter that changed the impressions you had about Africa (e.g., jungle, primitive tribes, no cities of any importance, savage people, etc.)?

2. Describe life on the slave ship by taking information from Olaudah Equiano's and the ship's doctor's account. What did you find most upsetting?