

Chapter 1 Essays Overview

The academic field of African American history has its own history of creation and change over time. Historian Darlene Clark Hine traces the emergence of the field of African American women's history in the 1980s. Up to that time, most scholars focused on the lives of African American men and presented men's experiences as universal or representative. Of course, Hine notes, black women had a history but their history had not been extensively researched and considered on its own terms. Reflecting on her own family's history, Hine points to the continued social and political relevance of African American history.

In the second essay, Yale historian Jonathan Scott Holloway writes about the early years of his career as a history professor. Holloway links his experiences to the intellectual and political ferment of the 1960s that prompted both the admission of black students to historically white colleges and universities and also the development of black studies courses and programs. During this period, predominantly white colleges and universities began hiring black academics to teach these new courses. Holloway reflects on the place of black faculty and black studies in the academy.

What goals and ideals motivated young black scholars in the second half of the twentieth century? How did that generation of scholars change the field of African American history? Do you see connections between Hine's and Holloway's research interests and the work of pioneering scholars such as W. E. B. DuBois, Carter G. Woodson, and Mary McLeod Bethune?

Chapter 2 Essays Overview

The brutal trans-Atlantic voyage known as the Middle Passage brought millions of Africans to the Americas as chattel slaves. New York University historian Jennifer Morgan explores the place of African women and children in the larger history of the trans-Atlantic slave trade and Middle Passage. She begins by questioning long-standing assumptions that the majority of African captives were men and shows that the combined number of African women and children captives was larger than that of men. European slave traders held clear ideas about the profits and risks associated with purchasing women, but their access to female captives was often shaped by conditions within African societies. African women, like men, brought personally and culturally valuable knowledge and memories with them to the Americas. The Middle Passage and chattel slavery, however, profoundly and violently changed enslaved women's experiences of pregnancy, childbirth, and parenting.

In the second essay, historian Robert Harms of Yale University details the Middle Passage on the French slave ship *The Diligent*. Using documents written by the ship's captain and other slave traders, Harms presents a detailed account of captives' daily experiences at sea.

How were African women treated in the trans-Atlantic slave trade and Middle Passage? How did African women and men respond to their captivity and enslavement? What were the conditions on slave ships and why were they altered when the ships neared American ports?

Chapter 3 Essays Overview

Enslaved Africans and African Americans played vital roles in shaping domestic and international geopolitics during the age of the American Revolution. Historian Laurent Dubois explores the complex, international history of the Haitian revolution and demonstrates the vast web of connections that linked slaves, slaveholders, and political leaders across the Atlantic. Slavery throughout the Americas was characterized in large measure by violence and death, especially in the French sugar colony of St. Domingue. Dubois reveals the strategies enslaved Africans used to coordinate their large-scale revolution to liberate themselves and destroy slavery. Shared African spirituality and extensive networks of communication helped make their political revolution possible. Leaders of the Haitian Revolution espoused ideals of liberty, equality, and citizenship that resonated with their European and American counterparts but were also a source of grave concern to American and European slaveholders.

In the second essay, Douglas Egerton focuses on the intellectual and political debates among English colonists over the meanings of liberty and slavery in the British empire. Colonists theorized their political standing within the empire and employed a rhetoric of tyranny and slavery to describe their sense of alienation. Some colonial leaders struggled with the contradictions embedded in their simultaneous commitments to liberty and chattel slavery and racial hierarchy. Others, however, were untroubled by the paradox. Throughout the revolutionary era, enslaved people discerned the potential to take bold political actions in pursuit of their own liberty.

What did early American opponents of slavery find most troubling about the institution of human bondage? How did enslaved people adapt patriot discourse and ideals of individual liberty in the United States? What ideas and actions, if any, distinguished the Haitian Revolution from the American and French Revolutions? What ideas and actions, if any, connected these revolutions? Why was the Haitian Revolution so alarming to white Americans?

Chapter 4 Essays Overview

Africans survived the Middle Passage and brought a wealth of cultural knowledge and skills to the Americas. The violence and inhumanity of the Middle Passage and enslavement did not strip Africans of their own sense of humanity, resiliency, or determination. Historian Michael Gomez explores the ways in which enslaved people safeguarded and recreated elements of their African past even as they were forced to adapt to the harsh conditions of servitude. Africans and African American slaves created worlds, or meaningful communities and relationships, for

themselves and did their best to keep them apart from the world dominated by slaveholders. Enslaved people created their own culture that blended elements from their diverse African ethnic and cultural backgrounds with the dominant Euro-American culture.

Historian Lawrence Levine focuses on the formation of African American folk culture in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Enslaved Africans from diverse ethnic, geographic, religious, and social backgrounds identified familiar values, beliefs, and practices that they melded to create a distinctly African American culture. Levine highlights the ways in which culture change over time and place as enslaved people created modes of self-expression through spiritual practices, music, and dance. While slaveholders and other white observers often looked askance at African American cultural expressions and described black people's religion, music, and art in derogatory terms, Levine reveal the historical richness and significance of these cultural expressions. Enslaved people articulated their spirituality, secular ideas, humor, and aspirations through music and other cultural forms. Through cultural creations, they expressed the full range of their humanity in ways that often escaped the notice or understanding of slaveholders.

What types of cultural practices did enslaved Africans and African Americans preserve and adapt in America? What strategies did they employ to ensure the survival of African knowledge and cultures? Did white observers recognize the cultural history or the significance of the African cultural traditions embraced by enslaved people? Why or why not? Why was it important to enslaved Africans and the American-born descendants to preserve African knowledge, culture, and history?