

Chapter 5 Essays Overview

The domestic slave trade in the United States is sometimes called the “second Middle Passage” because approximately 1 million African American men, women, and children were sold from the upper south to the deep south. In his sweeping study of slavery and the lives of enslaved people, historian Ira Berlin follows the trajectory of slaves sold in the domestic slave trade. Berlin calls attention to slaveholders’ continuous struggles to control and dominate their slaves. From the 1830s until the Civil War, slaves were uprooted from their families and communities in places such as Virginia, Maryland, and Tennessee and sold to traders and slaveholders in places such as Georgia, Mississippi, Louisiana, and Texas. Among the enslaved, the phrase “sold down the river” referenced both the Mississippi River, a principal artery of the slave trade, and the dislocation and grueling labor of deep south cotton and sugar plantations. The domestic slave trade and the exploitation of slave labor on cotton plantations fueled the rise of American capitalism and the international expansion of American commerce. The second essay, by Daina Ramey Berry, focuses on the social and economic value of enslaved women’s labor in the domestic slave trade. Enslaved women and girls routinely worked alongside men and boys in the fields, performing the same physical labor as their male counterparts. Enslaved women and girls, however, also worked in a range of other occupations typically associated with women, including spinning, weaving and sewing, cooking, cleaning, and midwifing. Enslaved women’s skills as agricultural laborers as well as their ability to perform other types of labor determined how they were valued and priced in the domestic slave trade.

Chapter 6 Essays Overview

Free African Americans existed as a civic anomaly in antebellum America, legally free but denied the full rights and privileges of freedom and citizenship. Free black people challenged prevailing stereotypes and myths about black inferiority and thus were often perceived as a threat to the stability slavery. Historian Patrick Rael traces the emergence of a collective self-identification among free black men in the antebellum north. Free African Americans in northern settings embraced American ideals of freedom and equality and used them as the foundation for political protest against slavery and racism.

Historian Wilma King reveals the ways in which free black women engaged in antebellum social and political life. Free black women, like their male counterparts, viewed education as a valuable resource and tool for individual enrichment and community advancement. King’s essay also points to the importance of education among the enslaved, who were denied access to literacy by southern state laws and customs. Promoting education and establishing themselves as writers, intellectuals, or orators allowed free black women to create important roles for

themselves in free black communities and the larger, American society.

What features distinguished free black communities in the northern United States from those in the southern states and elsewhere in the Americas? How did slavery in the north affect free black communities in northern locations? How did free African American men and women respond to the dominant, American racial hierarchy and ideology of black inferiority? In what ways did the social and political outlook of free African American men and women differ or overlap?

Chapter 7 Essays Overview

Enslaved people pushed against the limits of their master's authority and the wider institution of slavery in myriad ways. Slaves' resistance might take the shape of working slowly, burning a meal, breaking tools, or simply feigning ignorance. Enslaved people also demonstrated their opposition by pilfering food, running away, and fighting back against violent slaveholders. The late Stephanie Camp highlights the importance of recognizing the ways in which enslaved people found pleasure in each other's company. Drawing on scholarship that has demonstrated the intersections of race and gender, Camp focuses primarily on enslaved women. Recognizing the complexity of enslaved people's lives and their bodily experiences, Camp argues, allows for a fuller appreciation of their humanity. Sylviane Diouf's study of runaway slaves focuses on "maroons," slaves who escaped to remote locations where they often created self-sustaining communities. Maroons claimed their freedom on their own terms rather than seeking a place in the dominant society. The history of maroon communities in the United States has been the subject of scholarly debate as many scholars dismissed the notion that the southern states were home to these autonomous enclaves of self-liberated people. Maroon communities in Jamaica and Brazil, by contrast, have been studied extensively. Historian Sylviane Diouf adds a new dimension to the study of slave resistance by highlighting maroons in the United States.

In what ways did slaves and slaveholders struggle for control over enslaved people's bodies? What did each party seek to gain? Was pleasure a form of resistance? What did enslaved people hope to achieve through marronage, or hiding out for extended periods of time? What threats did they pose to individual slaveholders and slavery?