

The Family Heritage Series

A weekly discussion of Americanist truths and traditions for those "heirs of all the ages" who will have to preserve that most important inheritance of all — freedom. Produced by the Movement To Restore Decency.



Volume II

Lesson Sixty-Three

Slavery — Old and New

LESSON IDEA

To illustrate, as we begin a series of lessons on the War Between the States, that slavery was — and is — common throughout the world; and that Americans today should feel no special guilt because of conditions that existed in this country more than one hundred years ago.

PREPARATION

Read "During The Week" and be familiar enough with the material in the books mentioned to give your family some idea of the nature and extent of the Communist slave labor system. And, if possible, consult some current periodicals for information on the size of the executive branch of the federal government, as well as the scope and power of some of its agencies.

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ON A MILD October day in 1492 the first black man to enter the Western Hemisphere set foot on an island in the West Indies. He was with the crew of Columbus — and a slave. The natives on the island gazed in wonder — not because they were shocked that Columbus had slaves, but because they had never seen a white man before. Or a black man, for that matter. But one thing that probably did *not* surprise them was the existence of slaves. Enslaving a defeated enemy was as common at that time in the New World as it had been in the Old. In fact, the institution of slavery is older than recorded history and at various times has held black, white, yellow, and red men in its grip.

So there was nothing unique about slavery in America — expect for the idea today that Americans, especially white Americans, should feel guilty about slavery in the United States during the

first one hundred years of our existence. The opinion molders, politicians, and teachers who peddle this idea seem confident that no one will know enough history to dispute their charges. But before any of us are persuaded to carry heavy stones of guilt in our pockets for a condition that existed in this country more than one hundred years ago, let's consult some history lessons on this very delicate subject.

And first let's turn to our Bibles for an account of slavery many thousands of years ago. Do you remember the story of Joseph, the son of Jacob, with the coat of many colors? Do you recall what his brothers did to him because of their jealousy and hatred? [*If this story is not familiar to your family, read Chapter 37 of Genesis aloud. If someone does know the story, have him tell it to the others.*] Yes, Joseph's brothers hated him so much that they sold him as a slave, for twenty pieces of silver. Joseph, of course, was not a black man; nor were his sellers or his new masters.

The Bible tells many stories of slavery. It was common practice in ancient times for the victors of war to make slaves of those whom they defeated, regardless of race or creed. Remember the slave markets of Rome, and the stories of galleys manned and powered by slaves in leg irons?

Did you know that the first Negroes from Africa were sold in Europe five hundred years before Columbus came to the New World? Or that long before the first English colony was established in America, thousands of Negro slaves were owned by wealthy families in the Spanish and Portuguese colonies? That King Philip of Spain and Queen

Anne of England both owned stock in a company formed to buy Negroes in Africa and sell them in the Spanish, Portuguese, and English colonies? And that today there are more slaves in the world than ever before?

Do you know which countries maintain slave systems? [*Discuss the slave labor camps of the Soviet Union and of Red China. The Gulag Archipelago by exiled author Aleksandr I. Solzhenitsyn names and describes the Soviet camps. How and why this slavery system is maintained would make a good research project for preteens or teenagers in the family.*]

Not even the wildest charges about slavery in America two centuries ago can possibly compare with the truth about the physical and mental sadism now being practiced on millions of men, women, and children in Communist countries. We certainly do not mean to excuse slavery, in any form or at any time in history, but we do want to make this point: There is no reason for Americans today to develop a guilt complex about the plantation labor system of the 1800's.

DURING THE DEBATE on independence and again at the Constitutional Convention in 1787, there were strong arguments against slavery. George Mason, a southern patriot, made a long speech on the subject in which he said: "Slavery discourages arts and manufactures. The poor despise labor when performed by slaves. They bring the judgment of heaven upon a country."

James Madison, another southern statesman, declared he "thought it wrong to admit in the Constitution the idea that there could be property in men." Similar voices of protest were raised in both the North and the South during the State conventions called to ratify the Constitution. But many men in the North realized that their southern neighbors depended upon a plantation system of agriculture that demanded enormous manpower, and that there were not enough free men for hire.

George Washington, for example, complained that he was forced to buy laborers for his fields although he would have preferred to hire free men. Was this merely a landowner's excuse? [*Explain that Washington's service during the Revolutionary War would hardly have been possible if he had not*

had laborers working his fields during his absence. From these fields came the resources he needed for supplies, food, and clothing during his six long years of service. The Continental Congress was using every penny it could get to equip and pay the soldiers under Washington's command. The fact that the Commander-in-Chief volunteered to serve without pay and to finance his own expenses until Congress found the funds to reimburse him was an enormous help to the poverty-pressed government of the new nation.]

Washington's personal feelings about slavery were clearly revealed in his last will and testament. He wrote:

Upon the decease of my wife it is my will and desire that all the slaves which I hold in my own right, shall receive their freedom. — And whereas among those who will receive freedom, there may be some, who from old age or bodily infirmities, and others who on account of their infancy, will be unable to support themselves; it is my will and desire that — they shall be comfortably clothed and fed by my heirs while they live. — And I do hereby expressly forbid the sale or transportation out of the said Commonwealth, of any slave I may die possessed of, under any pretense whatsoever.

What does Washington's concern for the aged and the young tell us about his character? Do the alleged civil rights crusaders of our day show any of Washington's compassion? [*Discuss some of the consequences of civil rights demonstrations of the 1960's and the violence that has resulted. Mention the harm that has been done by riots, agitation, bussing children in and out of cities, and more — all for the grand cause of racial equality.*]

FOR SERIOUS STUDENTS

We strongly urge you to read *The Gulag Archipelago* by exiled author Aleksandr I. Solzhenitsyn, because no discussion of slavery can be complete without an understanding of the Soviet system as it operates today. Solzhenitsyn was himself a slave for many years — as were millions of others, some of whom died, some of whom were released broken in body and mind, and some of whom are still in bondage. The story of these individuals and of the political regime that specializes in terror to gain obedience is unforgettable.

