

# Slave Facts

## **Classes of Slaves**

### **House Slaves:**

- Many were cooks, waiters, butlers, maids, nannies, and coachmen
- Had the most contact with the white family
- Had little contact with field slaves
- Had better food, clothing, and privileges
- They often spied on other slaves to improve their status
- Fear of demotion made them obey their masters
- Masters considered them the most accommodating and submissive
- Some stole from their masters
- The masters' house was called the "Big House"
- Many helped other slaves escape
- Occasionally poisoned their master's food or attacked the master's family

### **Field Slaves:**

- Usually worked from morning until dusk
- Lived in small houses or shacks away from the Big House
- Men, women, and children worked in the fields
- Women left their newborn babies lying on the ground or in a stump while they worked
- Field slaves were usually divided into different groups based on their physical abilities
- Plow gang – black men and strong women would plow the fields
- Hoe gang – black women used the hoe that was considered easier
- Trash gang – small children were responsible for burning brush, sweeping yards, driving cattle, picking cotton, carrying water

### **Punishments:**

- Given for disobedience, running away, reading, working too slowly, practicing religion, to be an example to other slaves
- Some forms of punishment included selling the slaves and separating them from their families
- Most punishments were physical
- Most common punishment was whipping which permanently scarred the backs of slaves
- Some slaves were beaten on the backs with paddles rather than whips which prevented scarring and increased the sale price of the slaves
- Thumb Screw – thick wristband of iron that pulled the thumb back
- Stocks – slaves would be locked in stocks that bound their feet, hands, and head in order to keep them from running away
- Bell – iron collar with a bell that rang every time the person moved
- Gag – iron bar placed across the mouth to the back of the neck
- Gang Chain – pair of slaves chained together and taken to be sold

## **Food:**

- Slaves ate simple food
- Mainly corn, pork, fat and molasses
- Some slaves were allowed to have vegetable gardens of their own, called a truck patch
- Many were allowed to fish in streams and hunt and trap small animals
- Two meals a day – breakfast at twelve noon after working since daylight and supper when the work at the end of the day was finished
- During harvest they were allowed three meals a day

## **Clothing:**

- Simple but sufficient
- Overalls, cotton and woolen shirts, and a hat for protection against the sun and rain
- The little children wore nothing but a shirt
- For the older children, they wore a pair of pantaloons or a gown, according to their gender
- A pair of shoes was provided once a year
- Hats were provided every two – three years

## **Slave Quarters:**

- Slaves lived in log huts
- Wooden floors in many of the huts
- Some had board floors but they were placed directly on the earth
- Everyone lived in a single room
- Beds were made from straw and old rags
- Windows did not have glass panels
- Cabins had fireplaces to cook in and to provide heat

## **Education:**

- A slave was not allowed to learn to read; it was illegal
- Death could be the punishment for teaching a slave to read
- A few slaves taught themselves to read or learned with the help of others
- People feared that slaves who could read would be more rebellious
- At the time of the Civil War, only 1 or 2 percent of slaves were able to read and write
- Illiteracy was one of the worst handicaps of slavery