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Content Module Topic
Contributions of Enslaved and Free Africans
to Economic Development

Glossary

People

Thomas Day (1748-1789): Early figure in the British movement for abolition, author of the first novel specifically written for children, and of “The Dying Negro (1773),” which was a response to a story about a slave who had committed suicide rather than be sent to the colonies, and is the first poetic attack on slavery. <http://www.brycchancarey.com/slavery/dying.htm>

Thomas Day (1801-1861) One of the first cabinet-makers to use steam-powered tools, Day was a free person of color who emigrated to Liberia, but came back to Caswell County, North Carolina in the 1820s. By the 1850s, his furniture-making enterprise was the largest in North Carolina. Much of his furniture survives today. Day provides an interesting route into the lives of free persons of color in antebellum North Carolina. See also http://www.thomasday.net/more_on_thomas_day.html.

Frederick Douglass (1818-1895) Former slave who escaped from slavery in Baltimore to become author of *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* (1845), one of the most important texts in the literature of American autobiography, Douglass was a tireless advocate of the abolition of slavery and a fearless interpreter of the dynamics of slave society. His papers are available online at <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/doughtml/doughome.html>.

Jupiter Hammon (1711-1806?) Perhaps the first published African-American poet, Hammon’s *Evening Thoughts: Salvation by Christ, with Penitential Cries* appeared as a broadside in 1760. Hammon was born into slavery in New York, on Long Island. Unlike his contemporaries in the South, Hammon and other slave children on the manor where he grew up received a basic education in the rudiments of reading and writing. In all, Hammon published nine pieces of prose and verse, including sermons in which he refers to blacks who died in the Revolutionary War, and makes a plea for the creation of a “virtuous black nation.” In contrast to Phyllis Wheatley’s apparent acquiescence to slave society, Hammon was an advocate for manumission and for political and social autonomy for blacks.

Equiano, Olaudah (1745-1797) Born in present-day Benin and enslaved at the age of 11, Equiano experienced slavery as it was practiced both in Barbados and in Virginia before buying his freedom in 1766 and going to live in London. His autobiography, *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African, Written by Himself* (London, 1789) is one of the first major slave narratives, and expresses a strong sense of African-American cultural identity. The autobiography is also a powerful source of information on the nature of the “Middle Passage” between Africa and the colonies of the Americas.

Phyllis Wheatley (1753-1784) Probably the best-known of eighteenth-century African - American writers, Wheatley was a talented writer of Neoclassic verse. Kidnapped in Africa when she was about seven, she endured the Middle Passage, and was sold as a slave in Boston to Susanna Wheatley. Wheatley was highly educated, and conversant with Latin and with the Bible, and began to write in 1765, with the encouragement of members of the Wheatley family. She first published poems in a Rhode Island newspaper in 1767, at age 14. Her mistress arranged for the publication of a volume of verse in London in cooperation with the Countess of Huntingdon in 1773. Wheatley was freed in the same year. Her poem “On Being Brought from Africa to America” (1773) is one of the first manifestations of a concrete sense of African-American racial identity. Poems from the Philadelphia (1786) edition of her work may be found at <http://darkwing.uoregon.edu/~rbear/wheatley.html>.

Eli Whitney (1765-1835) Yale-educated inventor of the cotton gin in 1793. Whitney was visiting a Georgia plantation when he made the invention that ensured the expansion of slavery at the very moment—that of the American and French Revolutions—when other forms of unfree labor, such as indentured servitude, were dying out. Whitney’s invention, combined with his theories of mass production, which were never quite realized in his lifetime, but which were essential to the Industrial Revolution, also produced one of the paradoxes of U.S. History: a pre-modern form of unfree labor—slavery—was used as the agent of a quintessentially modern phenomenon—that of industrialization. Slave labor on the huge cotton plantations of the Old Southwest, particularly, (Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, Arkansas, Texas) tended to be gang-based and more inhumane than anywhere else in the South except the rice plantations of the Low Country in South Carolina.

Terms

The Middle Passage The brutal passage between Africa and the European colonies of the Americas made by anywhere from 9-11 million unfree Africans. Historians estimate that somewhere around 15 percent of the slaves died from disease or suicide. Most slaves ended up in the sugar plantations of the West Indies or Brazil. Between 1708 and 1735, about 85,000 Africans were brought to the tiny sugar island of Barbados alone. See <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/part1/1p277.html> for more information on the Middle Passage.

Slave Codes First adapted from existing slave codes that had originated in Barbados in the 1660s, the slave codes of the British colonies in North America were never systematically drafted. Rather, the colonies continued to borrow from one another. Codes like the South Carolina Slave Act of 1712 and the South Carolina Slave Code of 1740 tended to be enacted for practical reasons—to deal with a crisis or to codify existing, and sometimes contradictory, legislation. The S.C. Slave Code of 1740, for example, was a response to the Stono Rebellion of 1739. The Codes regulated everything from the dress to the movements of slaves, and they also at least implicitly regulated the actions of their owners. The existence of the Codes is paradoxical: they existed within the legal system, but they existed to declare both the necessity of a slave-based labor system and to affirm that Africans were inherently incapable of living under the rule of the traditions of English common law. The S.C. Slave Act of 1712 asserts that the "plantations" of "this province" cannot be "well and sufficiently managed and brought into use" without the "labor and service of negroes (sic)." At the same time, it asserts that the slaves are of "barbarous, wild, savage natures" that render them "wholly unqualified to be governed by the laws, customs, and practices of this Province..."