

**ZÁPADOČESKÁ UNIVERZITA V PLZNI  
FAKULTA FILOZOFICKÁ**

**BAKALÁŘSKÁ PRÁCE**

**THE LIFE OF SLAVES IN THE UNITED STATES OF  
AMERICA**

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**BAKALÁŘSKÁ PRÁCE**

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AMERICA**

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## **Poděkování**

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# TABLE OF CONTENT

1. Introduction .....	1
2. History of Slavery.....	4
2.1. Slave Trade with Europeans Countries .....	5
2.2. Slavery in the Caribbean .....	6
3. Slavery in the U.S.....	7
3.1. Legalization of Slavery.....	8
3.1.1. Colonies .....	9
3.1.2. Slave Codes .....	10
3.2. Slave Trade .....	10
3.3. Slave Rebellions .....	12
3.3.1. Stono Rebellion .....	12
3.3.2. Gabriel's Rebellion.....	12
3.4. Abolishing Slavery .....	14
3.4.1 The American Revolution .....	14
3.4.2. The Blacks Against the British During the American Revolution .....	15
3.4.3. Civil War .....	15
4. The Life of Slaves in the U.S. ....	17
4.1. Living Conditions.....	17
4.2. Female Slaves.....	18
4.3. Punishments And Death Penalty .....	19
4.3.1 Death Penalty.....	19
4.3.2. Whipping .....	20
5. The Life of Cudjo Lewis .....	21
5.1. Cudjo's Life Before Enslavement .....	21
5.2. Enslavement .....	21
5.2.1. Voyage to America.....	22
5.2.2. Slavery.....	24
6. The Life of Solomon Northup .....	27
6.1. Enslavement .....	27
6.1.1. Two Strangers.....	28
6.1.2. Transport.....	30
6.2. William Prince Ford .....	31
6.3. John M. Tibbeats .....	31
6.3.1. First Fight .....	32
6.3.2. Departure from John M. Tibbeats .....	33
6.4. Edwin Epps.....	34
6.4.1. Illness.....	34
6.5. Way to Freedom .....	35
7. Conclusion.....	37
Appendix .....	39
References .....	42
Abstract.....	44
Cizojazyčné resumé.....	45

## 1. Introduction

The slavery and racism are a hot topic to this day in the society of the United States of America. The issue is even more discussed as we have seen the protestants marching in the streets for a movement called ‘Black Lives Matter’. This movement’s main goal is to stop the injustice and inequality that concerns people with a dark skin color. This injustice and inequality have been happening in the United States since the sixteenth century when the slavery in North America was being established. And this is what my thesis tends to explore: slavery in the United States, but I will be focusing on the life of slaves as well.

Firstly, I will discuss the phenomenon of slavery itself. I will focus on the very beginning of slavery, mainly on how slaves ended up in the United States, the early settlements, slave trade, rights of slaves, the conflict between other states that were against slavery and were banning it and southern states being pro slavery and fighting back which resulted in civil war. In the second part my focus will be on the life of slaves which includes their life in the home of their slaveholders, how female slaves were treated, their punishments, work and how and if anything changed for them when slavery was banished, and they were ‘free’. For me, the most interesting part is the one concerning their lives as some of the slaves came forward and shared their story and their suffering with the world although not every story can be reliable considering it could have been spread only verbally. Meaning some information could have been modified, added or the opposite – omitted.

The reason why I chose this topic is because I was very interested in it, ever since I was learning about this issue at school, which was in my history class at high school. This topic was remarkably fascinating and sad at the same time. Fascinating mainly for the cruelty that people are capable of and sad because so many innocent people were dragged out of their homelands and from their families and the life, they knew was over. I could not truly understand the reason why the settlers from America committed what they did, and I still cannot to this day, because I do not think they would particularly enjoy if the same thing happened to them. Of course, the slaves’ separation from everything they knew was hard enough, but what was waiting for them was even more horrible considering the brutal conditions during their transport from Africa to America as follows the conditions they had to work and live in. Not mentioning that female slaves were very often sexually abused. So, the destiny of these slave indeed shook me to the core. Once I enrolled at university where I also attended a class concerning American history in which we were discussing slavery and its history, that is when I decided that this was what I want my thesis to cover.

For my thesis I chose multiple books analyzing the issues of American slavery, which I hope, will help me dive deeper in this problematic and maybe understand in a more profound way why slavery happened in the first place. Not only did I choose books on the history of American slavery, but also books surrounding the lives of slaves who were kidnapped from their homes and forced to work in horrible conditions in a completely foreign continent and country for them, where forgetting about their roots was one of the main rules if they wanted to survive.

One of the books I chose is called “From Slavery to Freedom: a history of an African Americans” by John Hope Franklin. I appreciate this book because it covers many topics concerning the slavery in the United States. This work covers for example topics like Ancestral Africa, eighteen century Slave society, Civil War, protest in America concerning slavery or even the perspectives in modern days.

The books concerning the life of slaves are called “Barracoon: The Story of the Last Slave” by Zora Neale Hurston and “Twelve Years a Slave” by Solomon Northup. The Barracoon is based on interviews with an African named Cudjo, and Zora N. Hurston interview him herself when she was in Africa for the first time, and for the second when she came back to finish this interview with Cudjo, and other former slaves from the ship where all of them were. During their time together Cudjo told Hurston everything he could remember starting with memories of his childhood in Africa, the horrors while being held on the ship on their way to becoming American slave to years he spent in slavery until the end of the Civil War.

The second book I have mentioned from Northup is an autobiography too. This book deals with the life of Solomon, he was born as a free African American in the US, but later in his life, he met two men, who captured him and sold him into slavery. He tried to run away multiple times but failed. He was owned by three slaveholders, one treated him kindly, the other two not so much. He escaped hanging and survived a bad cold. He was freed in 1853 thanks to Samuel Bass, Anne Northup, and Henry B. Northup. The same year after his emancipation he wrote and published his book and became a national sensation.

I did not write down all the book or sources I chose for my thesis, just the ones I like the most. Of course, I will also search for more information on the Internet, because as I said before, not all the information from the books concerning the lives of slaves may be true and accurate.

I would be very pleased if my thesis explained this topic to people who would like to know more regarding slavery or even to people who find this topic as interesting as I do. In the end I think that in this rather in-famous part of American history one can also find some glimmers of hope. Yes, horrifying things were happening and yes, many people were wrongfully taken away from their families or even killed during their forced stay in the United States, but this cruelty and wrongfulness also showed, that many people were willing to risk their own life to help slaves with escapes or fighting for their freedom.

Anyway, abolishing slavery meant for black people a lot of milestones such as the first African American Elected official in Michigan in 1868 or the first elected African American President Barack Obama who was in the office from 2009 to 2017.



## 2. History of slavery

Slavery in colonial history of the USA, from 1526 to 1776 was developing in many areas. When the Europeans first arrived to this newly found continent, they were surprised by the fact that someone already lived there – the native Americans. So, we could say that slavery or *oppression*, if you will, was being established when the settlers did not want to cooperate with native Americans and started to kill them or drive them out of their lands. Indian slavery was not that significant as African slavery and ended in the eighteenth century although such slavery was present even in the days of the presidency of Abraham Lincoln in 1863.

Now the slavery of African people was nothing new for this country as for example the Egyptians used to enslave various groups of people, for example the Nubian Blacks. People of different African countries were also enslaved by the Muslims, so unfree status was well-known to Africa. Slavery was also introduced to some European countries during the early Middle Ages. African slaves were introduced to Europe after the fall of Constantinople in 1453, but some of the black people had already gotten there through the Muslim trade (Franklin: 2011, p. 9-10).

Slavery in Africa was nothing unique. African rulers or politicians used slaves as soldiers, workers on fields, etc. Some of these enslaved people were dragged to this situation because they were poor and could not afford to pay for court bills, or they even placed themselves to slavery so they could protect their children in the service of a wealthy slaveholder. In Africa it was also possible to enslaved military and political dissidents, and most of the indigenous enslaved people were women, who were purchased as a servant, concubines, wives, or agricultural workers. Male slaves served as soldiers, attendants, craftsmen, etc. African slave trade preferred women and children mainly because they could be easily assimilated into kinship groups. Women were also highly valued for their natural capacity of reproduction and they hold most of the agricultural labor in Africa (Franklin: 2011, p. 10).

Owning slaves was a sign of wealth and prosperity in Africa, whereas in Europe wealth and prosperity meant owning a property. In African society slaves were able to gain control of their lives and surprisingly even enjoy wealth and have some influence. That means that social relations there were mainly based on community. “ *For example, Igor Kopytoff and Suzanne Miers note that in early Africa, where freedom was equated not with individual liberty but with belonging, holding a subservient but nonetheless protected position within a*

*household unit could in certain instances be perceived more positively than in contexts that link freedom and liberty.’’ (Franklin: 2011, p. 11).*

## 2.1. Slave trade with European countries

As Europeans were travelling abroad, trade ties with Asia and Africa were blooming. This fact brought European goods to people of Africa and in return, Africa supplied them with gold, nuts, fruits, or slaves and later the slave trade became the most valuable and important. But when the Europeans began to explore the New World, their intentions had absolutely nothing to do with slavery. First, they were interested in the exploitation of natural resources, but soon they realized they needed labor and they wanted it very cheaply (Franklin: 2011, p. 23).

The labor was mostly needed on plantations with sugar, coffee, and cotton. To some extent, Africans were familiar with how to take care of these crops, however in the New World the slaves came from the native population of coastal Brazil or Caribbean Islands or Indians. The problem of Indians was the liability to the Europeans diseases and together with hard conditions of labor, the result was that the population of the New World nearly died out (Franklin: 2011, p.25; Klein: 2010, p. 2).

So, slave trade was conducted in European countries no matter of their size. Spain, Netherlands, Portuguese, England, Denmark, Norway, and many others accumulated wealth from the Atlantic slave trade. Trading posts with Europe were also called *slave factories* because the posts were armed and were pretty much forts, these forts eventually became indispensable bases for slave trade. One of the slave factories was in today’s Nigeria, formerly known as the *Slave factory in the Gulf of Guinea*. Slaves were mostly obtained by negotiations, though slave raids by Europeans were also seen from time to time (Solow: 1991, p. 23-24; Franklin: 2011, p. 27).

However, in the sixteenth century Portuguese began battles in West Central Africa that ended after many years. Portuguese often tried to become allies with African factions, like The Kingdom of Kongo or Ndongo. Thus, in this century Portuguese were able to acquire slaves thanks to their alliance and thanks to the result of Kongos extended policies at the expense of its neighbors (Franklin: 2011, p. 29).

Captured Africans were transported to Europe on ships, where they had to face horrible conditions when it came to hygiene, work, or food. The encounter with white people was very traumatic for them. In one autobiography from 1789 slave Equiano described the

terrifying moment, “ I was now persuaded,” he wrote, “that I was got into a world of bad spirits, and that they were going to kill me. Their complexions . . . differing so much from ours, their long hair, and the language they spoke, which was very different from any I had ever heard, ... When I looked round the ship, too, and saw a large furnace of copper boiling, and a multitude of black people of every description chained together, every one of their countenances expressing dejection and sorrow, I no longer doubted of my fate,...I fell motionless on the deck and fainted. When I recovered a little, I found some black people about me, ... I asked them if we were not to be eaten by those white men with horrible looks, red faces, and long hair?” (Franklin: 2011, p. 32).

## 2.2. Slavery in the Caribbean

The Caribbean was firstly colonized in the fifteenth century by Spain, but when Britain was expanding to overseas, they also established a few colonies as the sugar planting and enslavement was blooming. The British Empire enslaved African people, who were brought to their colonies by force and had to work on the plantations. This labor gained the British a fortune.

Slaves, no matter of their sex, had to work on the fields often for sixteen hours a day from daybreak. They only had a 30-minute period for breakfast and 2 hours period during the hottest time of the day, when they often did some lighter activities. Women who were expecting a baby, worked very much till they were going into labor and after the baby was born, they were given a month rest at a maximum. Pregnant women who could not keep up with other workers were hardly punished and women who stopped working to take care of their babies, whom they carried on their backs, were also punished for idling (Franklin: 2011, p. 37; Morgan: 2007, p. 107-109).

Enslaved people constantly fought for their freedom until emancipation in 1834. The most known revolts happened during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries – for example, the Haitian Revolution in 1789, or the Barbados slave revolt led by Bussa in 1816 and slave revolt in Jamaica in 1831 led by Sam Sharpe. These revolts raised awareness in England about the poor conditions enslaved people were forced to live and work in (Franklin: 2011, p. 38-39).

The British slave trade ended in 1807, when trading with slaves was declared illegal, although slavery itself did not vanish instantaneously. Slavery in the Caribbean ended in 1834, which was followed by a legislation passed in the previous year.

### 3. Slavery in North America

From the 1520s till 1860s millions of African were forcibly taken from their homelands and families and transported in considerably poor conditions to a new land, America. Slavery was creation by the European colonization in America and in North America mainly by the British, so slavery was to be found in all their thirteen colonies.

In 1607 the first settlement by the Europeans was established– Jamestown in Virginia. When four years later Jon Rolf introduced tobacco, it quickly became the colony’s economic foundation. And as more labor was needed, the first ‘servants’ were introduced to America. However, as the starting point of slavery is considered the year 1619 when 20 African slaves were brought to the Jamestown colony. Throughout the 17<sup>th</sup> century enslaved African people were seen as a cheaper source of labor than the servants, who were mostly poor Europeans.<sup>1</sup>

During the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century, enslaved people worked mostly on fields with tobacco and rice. But in the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century the land where tobacco used to grow, was nearly exhausted so, the South faced an economic crisis and slavery in the South began to be questionable. However, at the same time the mechanization of textile industry was thriving in England and there was a huge demand for American cotton. In the beginning the South was limited by the difficulty of removing the seeds by hand, but then a schoolteacher, Eli Whitney, invented a machine – called the cotton gin - for easier and more efficient removal of the seeds. Later, the South was producing in a large scale both tobacco and cotton, which depend the reliance on enslaved labor (Morgan: 2007, p. 102-107).

#### 3.1. The legalization of slavery

In the year of 1641, Massachusetts became the first colony to legalize slavery through the passage of The Body of Liberties, where section 91 states “*91. There shall never be any bond slavery, villinage (sic.) or captivity amongst us unless it be lawful Captives taken in just wars, and such strangers as willingly sell themselves or are sold to us. And these shall have all the liberties and Christian usages which the law of god established in Israel concerning such persons does morally require. This exempts none from servitude who shall be Judged thereto by Authority*”<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> History.com Editors, “First enslaved Africans arrive in Jamestown, setting the stage for slavery in North America“, A&E Television Networks August 13, 2019, last edited March 16, 2021. Available at: <https://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/first-african-slave-ship-arrives-jamestown-colony>

<sup>2</sup> Ira Berlin, “Foreword: The Short Course for Bringing SLavery into the Classroom in Ten Not-So-Easy-Pieces“ in Understanding and Teaching American Slavery, ed. Bethany Jay and Cynthia Lysterly (Madison:

After this, throughout the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century more slave codes were set up, they considered, besides other things interracial mixing, liberation of slaves or their mobility. Even though the codification justified the racial basis of slaves, the laws protected mainly the slave masters. In addition to that, this trend started to point on all black people as slaves and on all white people as free. Also, every colony had its own slave codes (Franklin: 2011, p. 55).

### 3.1.1. Colonies

When the Europeans came to America, their intentions were to gain wealth and extend their influence. The Spanish may have been the first ones to explore the New World, but the English established a dominant presence in America by the 1650s. As mentioned before, the first colony was Jamestown in Virginia. In 1750s the English controlled already 13 colonies, but Louisiana and Florida were still under the influence of French and Spanish.

When it comes to Virginia, this state did not have criteria for distinguishing slaves from servants for its first century, some of the slaves even functioned as they were free. While the slaves were working on field for the whites, they could earn their freedom and eventually even become landowners and slave holders. Despite all of this, social differences were still very much seen, as black servants were only listed by their first names, unlikely their owners. In the 1640s is Virginia considered as the first state calling for racial distinction laws (Franklin: 2011, p. 51).

Another settlement was New Netherland, a Dutch colony where slaves could become free as well. Slaves in this settlement were brought from the Caribbean, but later from the Dutch captured Portuguese ports in Africa. Unlikely in Virginia, in New Netherlands slaves' marriages were legal and even a wedding ceremony was approved of. After the English took over this colony, New Netherland was renamed as New York. With the rule of English, the slave codes changed enormously. In the 1680s the possibility for slaves of becoming free almost vanished and fines for slaveholders for freeing their slave were established (Franklin: 2011, p. 52).

The Massachusetts Bay embraced the English culture in a much different way than Virginia did. The colony was established by Puritans who usurped the dominant role in trade from the Dutch and in the 1640s the colony legalized slavery and even established a law that claimed that all captives are lawfully and willingly selling themselves. 30 years later, in the

1670s you automatically inherited the status of slave from your ancestors (Franklin: 2021, p. 54).

### 3.1.2. Slave codes

Each colony, whether French, Spanish, or English had their own slave codes, as there was not a central one. The first slave code was established in the Caribbean, more specifically in Barbados. Those first slave laws were then seen as an example for other colonies, for example for the Colony of Jamaica.

In Virginia, the demand for slave labor was increasing, which meant a bigger percentage of blacks in the population and that was calling for slave laws. In Virginia, the *slave* status was quite complicated as some of the servants could be seen as permanently unfree and others were permitted to own a land, marry and freed when their service was over. But in the 1630s the English began to distinguish between *black slaves* and *white servants*. Later, Virginia accepted laws that severely discriminated the blacks. Interracial marriage was banned, as well as the opportunity for blacks to travel without a written permission. A child who was born to a mother slave automatically became a slave too, with that Maryland went a step further when they established a code, that all African children would automatically have the status of a slave.<sup>3</sup>

In the 1670s Virginia was the first colony to proclaim that it was not a crime to kill an undisciplined slave. In the same decade, Virginia also banned masters from freeing their slaves unless they would be immediately deported from the colony. It was also permitted to banish any whites who married black, Indians, or mulattos (Franklin: 2011, p. 57).

With the transition from a Dutch to English colony, New York established maybe one of the strictest slave laws, after the slave rebellion. The laws enabled slave masters to punish their slaves for their crimes and offenses and slaves found guilty from murder, rape, or assault were sentenced to death. Slaves in New York were also banned to use any kind of gun or other kind of weapon, meeting in a group of 3 or more were forbidden, or were forbidden to walk on the streets after dark without their master and without a candle or a lantern and could not possess any kind of property. Another restriction concerned the court, as Negroes could not

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<sup>3</sup> William Waller Hening, “Statutes at Large; Being a Collection of All of the Laws of Virginia” (Richmond, Va.: Samuel Pleasants, 1809-23), “Vol. II, pp. 170, 260, 266, 270, 2016”. Available at: [https://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/disp\\_textbook.cfm?smtID=3&psid=71](https://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/disp_textbook.cfm?smtID=3&psid=71)

witness in a case involving a white or a black freeman. Slaves were also prohibited to sell their product on markets – violation of this law meant punishment by whipping.<sup>4</sup>

The laws in New England were not as bad as in other British colonies. The slaves could marry, but because the husband and wife were usually not owned by the same master, their marriage was destined to fail. They were often not permitted to have children as their masters could not afford it and the husband and wife were usually not even allowed to see each other. In New England slaves could attend at court and were able to testify or even apply for their freedom. But still many slaves tried to escape, or they assaulted or killed their masters. One of the things that were banned for African slaves was the participation in military (Franklin: 2021, p. 58).

The colony of Carolina (South and North Carolina) also had harsh slave laws. In South Carolina, slaves were not allowed to leave their master's property without being accompanied by a white person and if they tried to escape the colony, they were sentenced to death. Whipping, branding with the letter R, or castration were taken as punishment for not being obedient and committing any kind of crime. The home of slave could be also searched for any kind of contraband, such as weapons or stolen goods – and again the punishment would go from branding, loss of an ear to death. Also, they had to work for free (Franklin: 2011, p. 59-60; <sup>5</sup>).

### 3.2. Slave Trade

Slave trade was both domestic and foreign, which caused a tension between the states of upper and lower South. That was because upper South preferred foreign slaves so then they could supply lower South with their own slaves. And as the cotton business was rising, more slaves were demanded, for example by Louisiana or South Carolina and with the desire of more slaves came hand in hand the desire to feel safer from the whites.

Voyages to America were usually called *middle passages* and it surely was anything but pleasant. Overcrowded ships were, let us say, commonplace. The more slaves were transported the more profit it meant, so it was common that even after the British Empire had to regulate the number of transported slaves to 5 slaves carried for every three tons, some of the traders could not resist to vision of making more money (Morgan: 2007, p. 160).

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<sup>4</sup>New York Slave Laws: Colonial Period. Available at:

<http://law2.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/negroplot/slavelaws.html>

<sup>5</sup> South Carolina Slave Code, Copyright © 2021 Web Solutions LLC. and its Licensors

Available at:<https://law.jrank.org/pages/11670/South-Carolina-Slave-Code.html>

But this tension led to a disagreement because some people saw the foreign trade as more advantageous and as a great opportunity for the economy of their state and its commerce. Other claimed everything could stay secured even without the share from Atlantic slave trade. But during the American Revolution the South experienced a few problems with slaves and their control. However, as the demand for slave labor continued to rise, the decision to leave the Atlantic slave trade intact was made.

The largest number of slaves taken to America was in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and the effects in Africa due to the slave trade were devastating. The more people left Africa, the more lawlessness and violence occurred. Constant fear of captivity and depopulation made the possibility of growing economy and agriculture impossible for western Africa, because most of the enslaved people were young women and men who would normally start a family, but could not due to their enslavement. Only the elderly or disabled people were left behind.

The Atlantic passages were known for its brutality and dreadful conditions. The ships were overcrowded, unsanitary with hundreds of African people stuffed into tiers below the deck for almost 8 000 kilometers long voyage. Usually, they were chained together with not enough space to sit, lay down or any kind of movement, lack of food, oxygen, and unbearable heat. The crew was very aware of these conditions, so they would let enslaved people go up on the deck for a few hours a day. It is estimated, that 15 to 25 percent of enslaved people died during the road. Another problem were diseases, if they occurred on the ship, they usually wiped out the ship's population (Klein: 2010, p. 132-133).

If somebody on the ship died, it was usually not noticed until the next day by the crew, so those left alive were forced to share space with a dead body. Nothing unusual was for Africans to stand in urine, feces, and vomit. Letting the slaves on the deck for a few hours a day was done, because the crew knew, that if they looked a little better, they would sell for a higher price. And when the voyage was coming to an end, the slave would obtain a piece of meat to get some nutrition, so they would not look so malnourished.<sup>6</sup>

Slave were sold on livestock markets. The bidders would look at them and if they would seem to be the perfect match for the job, they would offer a price or they would bid. After that they would go with their new slave master to his residence, where they would work as a servant, horsemen, on fields etc. In other words, the voyage may be over, but the true purgatory was just starting (Klein: 2010, p. 133).

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<sup>6</sup> Thomas Lewis, "Transatlantic Slave Trade", Jul 09 2015, last edited April 06 2020. Available at: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/transatlantic-slave-trade>



### 3.3 Slave rebellions

#### 3.3.1 The Stono rebellion

The Stono rebellion started in 1739 on September 9 in the colony of South Carolina and is considered as one of the largest slave rebellions in all 13 colonies. It was a free Labor Day and about 20 slaves decided to fight for their freedom; they broke out in one of the warehouses, where they killed 2 white guards and declared war against slavery. They put the heads of their victims on the front steps and then continued to other houses killing more people and burnt everything down (Franklin: 2011, p. 77;<sup>7</sup>).

After these actions, they decided to go to colony called St. Augustin in Florida, which was under the Spanish rule and where any fugitives would be proclaimed as free. They managed to keep the rebellion going for several days before it was put down. The main motivation for this rebellion, were slave codes that were established in South Carolina. Slaves were exposed to extremely hard work conditions and punishments and to racial discrimination, abuse, and unhuman treatment (Franklin: 2011, p. 78; <sup>6</sup>).

As another motivation could be considered the vision of the first free black town in Florida, *Garcia Real de Santa Teresa de Mose*, which was established one year before the Stono Revolution. It was the first town of its kind in North America and was found by female and male fugitive slaves. So many slaves from South Carolina wanted to escape there and a few of them did, but even though that in this town lived free-blacks, Florida continued to use slave labor (Franklin: 2011, p. 78).

After the Stono Rebellion, other revolts were occurring independently and many people believed it was because of this one event, but I think it was more because of the hard conditions slaves had to live in. People in South Carolina tried to develop a population of native-born slaves and believed, that slaves would be happier if they grew up already enslaved. Also, the *Negro Act of 1740* passed the legislature, to ensure the safety of whites. Newly, only 10 blacks could be under the supervision of one white on field and slaves were banned from growing their own food, learning, reading, and assembling in groups.<sup>8</sup>

#### 3.3.2. Gabriel's Rebellion

Gabriel, who was a leader of this rebellion, was a skilled black slave working as a blacksmith for his master. This revolt took place in the year of 1800 and ended up with many

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<sup>7</sup> Henry Louis Gates Jr., originally posted on The Root, "Did African-American slaves rebel?", 2014. Available at: <https://www.pbs.org/wnet/african-americans-many-rivers-to-cross/history/did-african-american-slaves-rebel/>

<sup>8</sup> Claudia Sutherland, "STONO REBELLION (1739)", September 18 2018. Available at: <https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/stono-rebellion-1739/>

slaves' executions. Gabriel was living in Virginia and the year before this event, he was judged for an assault on his master and found guilty. His punishment was thirty-nine lashes, and his thumb was branded and perhaps this could be one of the reasons, Gabriel came up with this big revolt (Ford: 2009, p. 49-50).

Gabriel was smart and started to recruit his allies over the next year. He usually invited his fellow Negro men for grog to his room, where he revealed his plans. After he was done talking a few of his supporters were already in the room. Their job was to act like they are joining Gabriel, so the others would not hesitate that much and eventually a few people took his side. Of course, he was not successful everywhere, slaves with families thought they have too much to lose and a few of them lived with their masters in one house and wished no harm to them (Ford: 2009, p. 50).

Gabriel's plan was to gather in the country, kill the whites and then proceed to Richmond, where the urban slaves would join them. Also, one group of slaves would start a fire in one of the warehouses and when the whites would hurry there to stop the fire, another groups of slaves would kill them. After that, they would kidnap Governor Monroe and held him hostage (Ford: 2009, p. 51).

But before everything was set up, the rebellion was already being betrayed by one of the slaves. The slaves said that the plan was set up on August 30, 1800 but it was never put in motion, because of bad weather and was moved onto the next day. When Gabriel's adherents learnt, everything is postponed till Sunday, two slaves Tom and Pharoah, came to their master, Mosby Sheppard and told him everything (Ford: 2009, p. 52).

Once the authorities learnt about this planned rebellion, militia was immediately mobilized, and the rebellious slaves went into hiding or tried to run away. Governor Monroe order a trial for these slaves and the state put a 300 dollars price on Gabriel's head. During the fall of 1800, authorities executed 20 slaves in Richmond and Gabriel was captured. He was convicted and was executed on October 10 (Ford: 2009, p. 52-54).

Even though the rebellion was stopped before it was ever put into motion, the thought of what horrors could happen to the whites frighten them. Certain measures were taken, and the whites never stopped worrying about the big population of black slaves in their city and state. So, to make slavery safer, the laws were tightened up and Monroe himself admitted that till slavery will exists, the whites can never count with the slaves being docile and submissive (Ford: 2009, p. 55).

### 3.4. Abolishing slavery

Before the American Revolution, the British slave trade was at its best and accepted by most of the British educated classes. Mainly because black slaves were understood to be in connection with the devil, the British could clearly see the physical differences between them and African people – the color of their skin, language, attitude and their different beliefs and culture. In other words, white people mostly treated the Africans negatively and discriminated against them, but this attitude started to change during the 18<sup>th</sup> century, when the American Revolution took place (Morgan: 2007, p. 148).

The abolition of slave trade needed to be approved by the British Parliament, but the topic to stop the trade was discussed even across the nation. Even philosophers attacked the idea of slavery and slave trade, naturally, as it was against the basic human rights. They recognized slavery as a state, where enslaved people are denied the right of political and civil liberty, because no one is born as a slave. “*There is not a Negro from the coast of Africa who does not ... possess a degree of magnanimity which the soul of his sordid master is too often scarce capable of receiving.*” (Morgan: 2007, p. 151).

#### 3.4.1. The American Revolution

The Revolutionary War was happening between from 1775 till 1783. It was a war for independence as the British, who were defending the wealth and possessions of the British crown, fought against people from the thirteen American colonies. Without any help, the British would probably win, however the French joined the war in 1778 and took side of the colonists.

The colonists had a conflict with the British for many years and before the war started, the British had tried to raise taxes in the New World which caused multiple protests among the colonists. The British parliament passed that any goods imported in America would be taxed (for example, tea), or paper and documents would be liable to taxes. The most known protest that the colonists performed was the Tea Act.<sup>9</sup>

The Tea Act took place in 1773, because the colonists never agreed to the duty on tea and this act was to show the British their disagreement. This ten culminated into the Boston Tea Party on December 16, 1773, when the colonist boarded the ships of the East Indian company and threw their loads of tea overboard. Britain responded with hard measures with

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<sup>9</sup> HISTORY.com Editors, “Revolutionary War“, October 29, 2009, ed. September 3 2019. Available at: <https://www.history.com/topics/american-revolution/american-revolution-history>

the hopes of suppressing the colonial resistance to the British rule. Two years later, the Revolutionary War started.<sup>10</sup>

#### 3.4.2. The Blacks against the British during the American Revolution

In April 1775, the first battles between the Blacks and British soldiers started. A month later, the Massachusetts Committee in Safety discussed the involvement of Blacks in the armed forces and decided that *“using slaves would be “inconsistent with the principles that are to be supported.”*(Franklin: 2011, p. 90) But the presence of British troops and ongoing battles for independence had negative effect on slavery.

During the American Revolutionary War, many slaves escaped from their masters and started to see the war not only as a battle for independence, but also as a battle between the slaves and their masters. According to Thomas Jefferson’s estimations, more than 30 000 slaves in Virginia escaped in the year of 1778. Jefferson even wrote a letter to his brother saying, that his two neighbors lost every slave they have had. *“Between 1775 and 1783, South Carolina lost 25,000 or more blacks, and during the war, Georgia lost perhaps 75 percent of its 15,000 slaves.”* (Franklin: 2011, p. 92)

#### 3.4.3. The Civil War

When it comes to the Civil War, America was experiencing huge growth, but there were major economic differences between the North and the South. The North had well-established manufacturing and farming was in the hands of small farmers. Unlike in the South, where the economy was based on large farms - which depended on the labor of enslaved people.<sup>11</sup>

Another difference between the North and the South was their opinion on slavery itself. The North was the protagonist of abolishing slavery, but the South was strongly against since their economy was dependent on slave labor. Thus, their economy would be in danger.

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When on March 4, 1861 Abraham Lincoln took the office, the nation was divided as he openly opposed slavery. Even though Lincoln was elected as the sixteenth President of America, before his inauguration 7 states parted from the USA and created the Confederation States of America – South Carolina, Mississippi, Florida, Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, and Texas (Franklin: 2011, p. 209).

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<sup>10</sup> HISTORY.com Editors, “Tea Act“, November 9, 2009, ed. September 9 2019. Available at: <https://www.history.com/topics/american-revolution/tea-act>

<sup>11</sup> HISTORY.com Editors, “Civil War“, October 15, 2009, ed. January 13, 2021. Available at: <https://www.history.com/topics/american-civil-war/american-civil-war-history>

A month later, the Confederate States attacked a federal crew at Fort Sumter in Charleston's harbor, Lincoln defended the fort, but that escalated into depart of 4 more slave states – Virginia, North Carolina, Tennessee, and Arkansas. And this brought the civil war upon the nation (Franklin: 2011, p. 209).

It seemed like the 23 states of the Union would easily triumph against the Confederation. The Union had an enormous advantage with well-established infrastructure, such as railways, however the Confederation was confident in terms of military experiences, with one of the best soldiers and commanders.<sup>10</sup>

After two years of war and unsure future for the African people, the year of 1865 meant a historic day of freedom for them. During the Civil War, nobody gave to the enslaved people any kind of information of whether they will be free, or in order to stop the Civil War and make peace with the Confederation, they would remain as slave in the states of Confederation. On January 1, 1863, the Emancipation Proclamation was passed, and Thirteen Amendment was signed on January 31, 1865. The Thirteen Amendment provides that *"Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction."*<sup>12</sup> The Civil War itself ended on May 9, 1865 (Franklin: 2011, p. 209).

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<sup>12</sup> <https://www.archives.gov/historical-docs/13th-amendment>

## 4. The life of slaves in the United States

The life of slaves was undoubtedly hard and was comprised of “*the material living conditions, the physical environment, the psychological impact, the personal factors in master-slave relationship, the survival of African heritage, and the influence of white American society.* (Parish: 1989, p. 64)”

Their lives also depended on many other factors; one of them was their job. Slaves who worked on plantations, had to work extremely hard from daybreak till sunset sometimes with not enough food for the day. They usually lived in dirty shack with no furniture, or if their master did not provide any kind of housing for them, they had to build their own homes. They could work on a big farm, which meant cruel overseers, but working on a small farm was not any better, as it usually meant not enough food.<sup>13;14</sup>

The overseer was white man who was cruel to slaves and masters often fired the overseer, if the slaves complained about unfair behavior, because masters wanted to protect their “property”. If overseer were fired, driver would take his place, the difference between those two positions is that the driver was one of the slaves. But this fact often led to violence, as drivers were not popular amongst the rest of the slaves.<sup>12</sup>

Slaves who worked on large plantations enjoyed better conditions and some of them even lived in a plantation home. Domestic slaves had the best conditions of them all, as they were living in the best conditions when it comes to housing and received better food. They were, sometimes, allowed to travel with their masters and even social classes were present within the domestic slave community.<sup>12</sup>

### 4.1. Living conditions

The material conditions were just above the bare minimum, but all of that depended on the generosity of their master. Their masters usually provided just the basic level of care, which led to lower life expectancy of slaves than Southern whites. They lived in a poor standard of medical skill, hygiene, and diet (Parish: 1989, p. 65).

Pregnancy and labor were very risky, the birth rate was very high, but so was the infant mortality. The infant mortality sadly reflects the mother’s poor diet, health care quality

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<sup>13</sup> ushistory.org, “27.b Slave Life and Slave Codes“, U.S. History Online Textbook. Available at: [www.ushistory.org/us/27b.asp](http://www.ushistory.org/us/27b.asp)

<sup>14</sup> Scott Michael Rank, Ph.D., “The Living Conditions of Slaves in the American South“, © 2000-2019, Salem Media. Available at: <https://www.historyonthenet.com/living-conditions-of-slaves>

and almost non-existence rest during pregnancy, as even pregnant female slaves were forced to work (Parish: 1989, p. 65).

Masters gave their slaves weekly food rations of salt, corn meal, some meat, pees, flour, sweet potatoes, maize, greens, etc. every Saturday. They usually prepared the breakfast by themselves during the daybreak and ate it in their shack. Another meal of the day was prepared by an elderly slave in the central kitchen and then delivered to the fields. Diet of enslaved people was high in fat and starch and nutritionally deficient, sometimes they ran short on food and had to steal food from their masters. Slaves who worked as servants in master's home, could slip leftovers, but they had to be very careful and not get caught as very hard punishment would be waiting for them (Parish: 1989, p. 66;<sup>15</sup>).

As mentioned before when it comes to housing, the conditions depended on where the slaves were working. If they worked on plantation, they usually lived in a cabin, or old shacks and only one family could live in one cabin. Slave who worked on smaller farms, lived usually in attics, or shed attached to master's house. Their living conditions were in the hands of their master and depended on his prosperity and generosity (Parish: 1989, p. 67).

Clothing was distributed by their masters. The fabric was not of a good quality and was uncomfortable. Domestic slaves had better-quality clothing than field slaves and clothing also reflected positions of slave and a family who owned him. Field slave had the cheapest quality clothes, their clothing had to be durable, because their work on fields was very demanding.<sup>16</sup>

#### 4.2. Female slaves

Slavery was equally brutal for both slave men and slave women. Both genders worked either on plantations or as a home servant and on small farms. Slave women had to perform evenly hard work as male slaves; however, some plantations had established gender division of labor. That meant that certain jobs were meant only for males, or on the other hand for females (Franklin: 2011, p. 142).

The main role of females in Africa was being a mother, but when they were brought to America, their job was not only watching after children, or washing clothes, or cleaning. They had to go to work on fields, sometimes working the same hard jobs as men, but on plantations

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<sup>15</sup> Nicholas Boston, "Living Conditions", © 2004 Educational Broadcasting Corporation. Available at: <https://www.thirteen.org/wnet/slavery/experience/living/history2.html>

<sup>16</sup> Gruber, Katherine. "Slave Clothing and Adornment in Virginia" *Encyclopedia Virginia*. Virginia Humanities, Available at: [https://encyclopediaivirginia.org/entries/slave-clothing-and-adornment-in-virginia/#start\\_entry](https://encyclopediaivirginia.org/entries/slave-clothing-and-adornment-in-virginia/#start_entry)

with gender division labor, they would oversee constructions of they would hoe the fields (Franklin: 2011, p. 142;<sup>17</sup>).

Female slaves worked as nurses, chamber maids and midwives as well. Their work was important for economy, because as women, they were able to work with fabric “ *which included spinning, weaving, needlework, lace-making, sewing, and quilting, provided slaveholders with a reliable commodity, as well as personal clothing and items for use and display in the plantation household.*” (Franklin: 2011, p. 142)

Despite working hard on field or in their master’s household, female slaves had to face the constant threat of being assaulted. Enslaved women had no safeguards, who would keep them safe, so they were very often sexually assaulted by their masters or overseers, and their husbands were powerless and could not protect their wives, as they themselves were slaves. So even if a female slave seemed to agree to the sexual act, she had no other choice.

#### 4.3. Punishments and death penalty

In today’s world multiple kinds of punishments exist, or penalties if you like, that a man could be sentenced to if he committed a crime depending on which crime he committed. It worked the same way in the New World – slaves could be punished by whipping, branding, put in prison, or if they committed a serious crime in the eyes of their master they could be even hanged.

##### 4.3.1 Death penalty

It was a common thing that if white man mistreated a slave, nothing would be done, because most of the town elite were slaveholders themselves, so justice for slaves was ignored but if someone accused a slave of harming a white man/woman he would get a death sentence. Another reason for sentencing an enslaved person to death would be the rebellion or an attempt for an escape. *‘A Virginia slave code from October 1669 addressed the killing of slaves this way: Whereas the only law in force for the punishment of refractory servants resisting their master, mistress, or overseer cannot be inflicted upon Negroes, nor the obstinacy of many of them be suppressed by other than violent means, be it enacted and declared by this Grand Assembly if any slave resists his master (or other by his master’s order correcting him) and by the extremity of the correction should chance to die, that his death shall not be accounted a felony, but the master (or that other person appointed by the master to punish him) be acquitted from molestation, since it cannot be presumed that*

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<sup>17</sup> Jennifer Hallam, “Men, Women and Gender“, © 2004 Educational Broadcasting Corporation. Available at: <https://www.thirteen.org/wnet/slavery/experience/gender/history.html>



*premeditated malice (which alone makes murder a felony) should induce any man to destroy his own estate.* <sup>18</sup>

Punishments served as a tool of obedience and slave-masters were not afraid to be severe. If one slave, in their eyes committed a crime, he was exemplary punished and served as a deterrent example for the others. *“The object of all punishment should be, 1st, for correction to deter the offender from the repetition of an offence, from the fear of the like certain punishment; and, 2nd, for example to all others, shewing them that if they offend, they will likewise receive a certain punishment. And these objects and ends of all just punishments can be better obtained by the certainty than by the severity of punishment.”* (Parish: 1989, p. 35)

#### 4.3.2. Whipping

When it comes to whipping, it was usually done in front of other slaves, because this way the slave-masters showed them how much power over them they are. Slaves were whipped for the least severe crimes, such as leaving their workplace without permission, performing unsatisfactory labor, or if they doubted their master’s authority in any way. Before whipping, men had to take all their clothes down and females were asked to take off their clothes from shoulders to their waist, after that men and women were tied up to the whipping place. Slaves were whipped with whips *“composed of leathern thongs, platted in the common way, and tapers from the end of the handle (within which is a short bit of wood) to the point, which is furnished with a lash of silk-grass, hard platted and knotted, like that of a horse-whip but thicker.”*<sup>19</sup>

Although whipping was used only for the least severe crimes, it was very harmful. It could cause very serious injuries on the back, from bruises to torn skin, blood loss and very often ugly scares were left behind. Whipping was performed on everyone, no matter their age, gender, or state of health.

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<sup>18</sup> The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, “Slave Code“, July 23, 2020. Available at: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/slave-code>

<sup>19</sup> “Whip Used on Slaves, Barbados”, *Slavery Images: A Visual Record of the African Slave Trade and Slave Life in the Early African Diaspora* “. Available at: <http://slaveryimages.org/s/slaveryimages/item/1328>

## 5. The Life of Cudjo Lewis

Cudjo Lewis, real name Oluale Kossola, was the third last known survivor of the trans-Atlantic slave trade, who was transferred to America. He was born in 1841 and died on July 17, 1935. He was brought to the New World on a slave ship called *Clotilda* together with more than one hundred other slaves and landed near Alabama. After the Civil War, Cudjo with many other slaves were set free.

The Story of the ‘Last Black Cargo’ was written by Zora Neale Hurston, when she travelled to interview Cudjo in 1927. She, as a folklorist, ethnographer and cultural anthropologist wanted to learn more about his life. She wanted to know who he was, how did he become a slave, what part of Africa he was from and how he was managing the life as a freeman. She visited Kossola regularly for three months and their friendship was blossoming during this period. Kossola trusted Hurston to such an extent he let her to write a story concerning his life. Hurston conducted multiple interviews, that gave a book-long content of his life (Hurston: 2018, p. 10).

### 5.1. Cudjo’s Life Before Enslavement

He was born in the town of Bantè, where lived the Isha people (a subgroup of the Yoruba people in West Africa). His mother was called Fondlolu, who was his father’s third wife. After Kossola, his mother gave birth to Cudjo’s siblings and on top of that he had twelve more siblings from an extended family. Cudjo’s father was called Oluale, but he was not from a royal family as the name *Olu* (means king or chief) would suggest. However, Kossola’s grandfather was an officer of the king of their town (Hurston: 2018, p. 10).

When was Kossola fourteen years old, he was trained to be a soldier. As a result of that, he had to be skilled in hunting, camping, and tracking. This training was meant to prepare him for a secret man society called *Oro* which was responsible for the safety and dispensation of justice in the town. Five years later, Kossola was supposed to get married, but these plans were never realized as in the 1860s his life was turned upside down (Hurston 2018, p. 10).

### 5.2. Enslavement

Cudjo was transported to America on a ship called *Clotilda* which was built by William Foster and he navigated the ship toward the Bight of Benin. The voyage took 6 weeks, and during its way the ship had to face multiple storms. At the end of the travel, Foster anchored the ship at the port of Ouidah. Pre-arrival, Foster had made a transaction with King Glèlè concerning the enslavement of 110 Africans, with Kossola among them. King Glèlè

made this transaction with Foster for one simple reason – to revenge his father’s death (Hurstun: 2018, p. 11-12).

One morning Kossola woke up to Dahomey’s female warriors who were slaughtering the citizens of his hometown. In interview with Hurston, he recalls that those who tried to escape would be beheaded and how the other day the warriors stopped, to smoke the heads. He could not see the heads of his family and other townspeople’s heads. Cudjo and the others were taken as captives and tied in chains. Then, they marched to the stockades at Abomey. Three days later, they were imprisonment in the barracoons at Ouidah, not far from Bight of Benin (Hurstun: 2018, p. 12).

During his imprisonment, Cudjo feared for his life and was constantly anxious of his fate. He had to face the ocean and its wild waves, even though he had never seen it before. He was taken away from his home, and when he arrived in Alabama, in his mind he was still at the safety of his home, while his body was not. ‘ *There in the barracoon, as there in his Alabama home, Kossola was transfixed between two worlds, fully belonging to neither.* ‘ (Hurstun: 2018, p. 12).

#### 5.2.1. Voyage to America

As mentioned earlier, Cudjo was transported to America on a slave ship called *Clotilda*, it was the last known U.S. slave ship that brought African slaves to the U.S. *Clotilda* was the fastest ship and for that reason, it was chosen to make a trip toward the Bight of Benin. *Clotilda* set sail in and it took her 6 weeks to get at the port of Ouidah. After all of the 110 slaves were on board, the captain, who was also the owner of the ship, William Foster, was ready to leave the port in July 1860. “*De boat we on called de Clotilde. Cudjo suffer so in dat ship. Oh Lor’! I so skeered on de sea! De water, you unnerstand me, it makee so much noise! It growl lak de thousand beastes in de bush. De wind got so much voice on de water. Oh Lor’! Sometime de ship way up in de sky. Sometimes it way down in de bottom of de sea. Dey say de sea was calm. Cudjo doan know, seem lak it move all de time.*“ (Hurstun: 2018, p. 42-43)

When slaves boarded the ship, the crew members told them to take all their clothes off. They were used to being dressed, so they were ashamed they had to be naked on the ship. Afterwards, when they arrived in America, they had to leave the ship naked as well and many Americans were considering them for savages and thinking they do not wear clothes in Africa at all. “*When we ready to leave de Kroo boat and go in de ship, de Many-costs snatch our country cloth off us. We try save our clothes, we ain’ used to be without no clothes on. But dey*

*snatch all off us. Dey say, 'You get plenty clothes where you goin'.' Oh Lor', I so shame! We come in de 'Merica soil naked and de people say we naked savage. Dey say we doan wear no clothes. Dey doan know de Many-costs snatch our clothes 'way from us.' (Hurston: 2018, p. 42)*

Even though *Clotilda* was significantly bigger in size than a normal slave ship would be, the slaves were still cramped on each other. The usual room where slaves were transported was made from 76 to 91 centimeters in height, but in this slave ship it was 152 centimeters in height. However, even if the height was significantly greater, still the lack of movement was obvious (Hurston: 2018, p. 21). *"On de thirteenth day dey fetchee us on de deck. We so weak we ain' able to walk ourselves, so de crew take each one and walk 'round de deck till we git so we kin walk ourselves. "We lookee and lookee and lookee and lookee and we doan see nothin' but water. Where we come from we doan know. Where we goin, we doan know"* (Hurston: 2018, p. 42)

Because *Clotilda* was dismantled, when Foster saw a British cruiser on the horizon going in his course, he quickly hurried to give slaves orders to return to the lower deck. After he anchored the ship, they stayed overnight and the next morning renewed their course. When the voyage was coming to an end, the ship was taken to the Twelve-Mile-Island, where the slaves were transferred to the steamboat and then taken to Alabama River to John Dabney's plantation, where they landed the next day (Hurston: 2018, p.23). *"When it night de ship move agin. Cudjo didn't know den whut dey do, but dey tell me dey towed de ship up de Spanish Creek to Twelve-Mile Island. Dey tookee us off de ship and we git on another ship. Den dey burn de Clotilde 'cause dey skeered de gov'ment goin' rest dem for fetchin' us 'way from Affica soil."* (Hurston: 2018, p. 43)

Slaves were kept at John Dabney's plantation for eleven days and allowed to speak only in whispers and were constantly moved from one place to another. At the end of the eleventh day, clothes were brought to them, then they were transferred to The Bend in Clark County, where Burns Meaher had a plantation. From this place, they were each night lodged under a wagon shed and each morning before the daybreak driven back into swamp, where they stayed until dark (Hurston: 2018, p. 23-24). *"First, dey 'vide us wid some clothes, den dey keer us up de Alabama River and hide us in de swamp. But de mosquitoes dey so bad dey 'bout to eat us up, so dey took us to Cap'n Burns Meaher's place and 'vide us up."* (Hurston: 2018, p. 43)

After a few adjustments, slaves were finally put to work, however not even a year has passed, and the war of Secession broke out. But with the danger from interference, it was decided that all the slaves not sold to Selma, had to be brought to the Meaher plantations at Magazine Point. The Meahers were heavily fined for bringing the Africans and after the liberation came, the village that was built by the slaves gained a name *African Town*, where the once enslaved people lived free. The town is now called Plateau and the dominant tone there is still African (Hurstons 2018, p. 24).

#### 5.2.2. Slavery

Cudjo and the others who were forcibly taken with him away from their home, bore this fact very poorly and did not understand why they must be slaves, when they were born free. *“We very sorry to be parted from one ’nother. We cry for home. We took away from our people. We seventy days cross de water from de Affica soil, and now dey part us from one ’nother. Derefore we cry. We cain help but cry. “Our grief so heavy look lak we cain stand it. I think maybe I die in my sleep when I dream about my mama. Oh Lor’!” (Hurstons: 2018, p. 43)*

When the enslaved Africans got to Meaher plantations, they were not living in a shack nor at their master’s home. They were allowed to sleep underneath the house, not on the ground but on a floor and were given a thin blanket. During the day, they worked on the plantations, where overseer supervised their worked. *“He make a place for us to sleepee underneath de house. Not on de ground, you unnerstand me. De house it high off de grounds and got de bricks underneath for de floor. “Dey give us bed and bed cover, but tain ’nough to keepee us warm.” (Hurstons: 2018, p. 44)*

The overseer was having a whip by himself and whenever a slave was not performing work fast enough or conscientiously enough, he would whip him. Whipping was the most common and most used punishment for the least severe violation of rules (see more in chapter 4.3.2 Whipping). According to Cudjo, one time the overseer tried to whip enslaved women from Cudjo’s community, but other men attacked him because they were protecting one of their own. It was the last time, the overseer tried to punish a woman. *“Cap’n Tim and Cap’n Burns Meaher workee dey folks hard. Dey got overseer wid de whip. One man try whippee one my country women and dey all jump on him and takee de whip ’way from him and lashee him wid it. He doan never try whip Affican women no mo’”. (Hurstons: 2018, p. 44)*

Cudjo and the other slaves were having a hard time keeping with their master’s requirements on the plantation as the work was extremely challenging. They were not used to

working like that and the fact that they were slaves and belonged to somebody was depressing. They could not wrap their head around it; they did not understand why they cannot be free anymore. Also, they had to face racism for the very first time. *“De work very hard for us to do 'cause we ain' used to workee lak dat. But we doan grieve 'bout dat. We cry 'cause we slave. In night time we cry, we say we born and raised to be free people and now we slave. We doan know why we be bring 'way from our country to work lak dis. It strange to us. Everybody lookee at us strange. We want to talk wid de udder colored folkses but dey doan know whut we say. Some makee de fun at us.”* (Hurston: 2018, p. 44)

Cudjo did not have a stable workplace. They were constantly move from one place to another, which was just as physically challenging as the work itself. Most of the time they did not get enough sleep, so they were tired. One day of the week was a free day, it was on Sunday. They were very happy for a day off that they danced like they were back at Africa, but they were told to stop, because they looked like savages. *We workee so hard! De womens dey workee in de field too. We not in de field much. Cap'n Jim gottee five boats run from de Mobile to de Montgomery. Oh Lor'! I workee so hard!...I so tired. No sleepee.”* (Hurston: 2018, p. 44)

Every time Cudjo and the others were getting off the boat and overseer would hurry them up. They cannot be behind and had to move as quickly as possible. To be sure the slaves would obey his commands, he was having a whip stuck in his belt. If slaves did not move by his liking, he did not hesitate to use his whip. *“De whip stickee in his belt. He holler, 'Hurry up, dere, you! Runnee fast! Can't you runnee no faster dan dat? You ain't got 'nough load! Hurry up!' He cutee you wid de whip if you ain' run fast 'nough to please him. If you doan git a big load, he hitee you too.”* (Hurston: 2018, p. 44)

Still, it could be said that they were lucky in a specific way. Their master was kind to them, giving them clothes when needed, giving them food and when he could not feed them, he allowed them to catch a hog. *“Cap'n Jim Meaher send word he doan want us to starve, you unnerstand me, so he tell us to kill hogs. He say de hogs dey his and we his, and he doan wantee no dead folks. Derefo' you know we killee hogs when we cain gittee nothin'.”* (Hurston: 2018, p. 45)

Cudjo was enslaved for five years and six months. They knew that the Civil War was taking place in the 1860s and somebody told them that people from the North are fighting for the freedom of the slaves. But later, nobody tells them anything more, so they think, they

must be fighting for different cause. Then finally on April 12, 1865 a Yankee soldier comes to them and tell them they are free and do not belong to anybody anymore. “*It April 12, 1865. De Yankee soldiers dey come down to de boat and eatee de mulberries off de trees close to de boat, you unnerstand me. Den dey see us on de boat and dey say ‘Y’all can’t stay dere no mo’. You free, you doan b’long to nobody no mo’.*’ Oh, Lor’! I so glad. We astee de soldiers where we goin’? Dey say dey doan know. Dey told us to go where we feel lak goin’, we ain’ no mo’ slave.” (Hurstons: 2018, p. 45)

After their liberation, they could go wherever they wanted. They decided to find a place, where they could build their homes. Even though they had nothing, it they were after many years finally again happy. “*We ain’ got no trunk so we makee de bundles. We ain’ got no house so somebody tellee us come sleepee in de section house. We done dat till we could gittee ourselves some place to go. Cudjo doan keer—he a free man den.*” (Hurstons: 2018, p. 45)

## 6. The Life of Solomon Northup

Solomon Northup was born on July 10, 1807 or 1808 in New York as a free African American, because his parents were freed from slavery by their master. Solomon was a farmer and professional violinist. The case of his kidnapping is the most notorious in the cases of kidnapped free Negroes. He was a farmer around Lake Champlain, New York, until 1841, when his musical talent led him to Washington D.C.

The Northup Narrative is considered as one of the most authentic description of the life in slavery. *“In the year of his rescue, David Wilson took down Northup’s story as “a correct picture of slavery.” It was published that year with the title, Twelve Years a Slave: Narrative of Solomon Northup. The title page announced the author as “a citizen of New York, kidnapped in Washington City in 1841, and rescued in 1853, from a cotton plantation near the Red River in Louisiana,.” (Northup: 2000, p. 5)*

Twelve Years a Slave is considered an important source for school studies, as Solomon wrote this book immediately after his liberation. That means the book does not have any typical errors in detail owing to distant memory. Solomon’s narrative contains important description of internal slave trade, the lives of slave families, slave auctions, the life of slave on Southern plantations, etc. (Northup: 2000, p. 6).

*“In closing his Narrative, Northup comments: “I doubt not hundreds have been as unfortunate as myself; that hundreds of free citizens have been kidnapped and sold into slavery, and are at this moment wearing out their lives on plantations in Texas and Louisiana.” (Northup: 2000, p. 5)*

### 6.1. Enslavement

Solomon Northup was enslaved, when two strangers offered him a job in a circus in Washington D.C. Northup accepted their offer and went away with them, without telling his wife of his children. He thought it would be a temporary job with a good wage. During their route, he was drugged, robbed of his free papers, and sold to the company of Prince, Burch and Co. a well-known company for slave trade (Northup: 2000, p. 4).

During his stay in this company, Northup kept reminding them, he was a free man. For that he was whipped multiple times, until he learned not to mention that fact to anyone. Then Solomon was shipped to the New Orleans market, and while being led to the ship handcuffed with other slaves, *“he reflected that the slaves were moving “through the capital of a nation, whose theory of government, we are told, rests on the foundation of man’s*



*inalienable right to life, LIBERTY, and the pursuit of happiness! Hail! Columbia, happy land, indeed ! (Northup: 2000, p. 5).''*

In New Orleans he was sold by a firm of *Theophilus Freeman* to a slaveholder who owned a plantation. The slaveholder lived on Texas Road, few miles away from Lamourie. Then, he was sold again to another plantation owner near the Red River in Louisiana, where he was enslaved and worked on plantation for twelve years. One day, his friend, a white carpenter wrote a letter for him and with the assistance of local authorities, Northup's real identity was clarified and in 1853 he returned to his wife and children at Saratoga (Northup: 2000, p. 5).

#### 6.1.1. Two strangers

Solomon Northup met two men one morning at Saratoga. When he was approached, he did not recognize the two men and while they were having a conversation, they mentioned multiple times his proficiency in playing the violin, which was suitable for the offered job. The job would take only a short period of time and after a while – the two gentlemen introduced themselves. Their names were Merill Brown and Abraham Hamilton, one was around the age of forty and the other one not more than thirty (Northup: 2000, p. 24).

Mr. Brown and Mr. Hamilton informed Solomon that they were somehow connected to one circus company and allegedly they left the company for a short time, just to explore the north of the country. They offered to Solomon to pay him one dollar each day, if he would accompany them to New York and three more dollars for each night he would play the violin for them. But this offer did not cover his expenses on his way back to Saratoga (Northup: 2000, p. 25).

Northup decided to accept their offer, as he found it interesting and wanted to visit New York himself. The two gentlemen were in a hurry and wanted to leave immediately. Thinking Solomon would be absent for too long, he decided not to write a letter to his wife, Anne. After they drove away from Saratoga, they passed Ballston and arrived at Albany, where Solomon witnessed the gentlemen's first as well as the last performance (Northup: 2000, p. 26).

The next morning Mr. Brown and Hamilton were anxious to reach the circus without any delay, and entering a slave state, they suggested to Solomon to prepare his free papers. After preparing them, they head off to clerk's office, where the papers were checked. Then

they head to Custom House to complete some formalities and with the evidence of freedom, they spent the night at the Gadsby's Hotel (Northup: 2000, p. 27).

When they finally got to Washington, they checked in at a local hotel. The two gentlemen were at the bar, together with Solomon, and constantly asking for drinks. When Solomon started to feel ill, they accompanied him to his room, where his headache started to be unbearable. After a while, Solomon noticed someone had entered his room. It was more than one man, maybe two or three, but being so dizzy, he could not surely remember and was not even sure, if Mr. Brown and Hamilton were there (Northup: 2000, p. 29).

He could hear various voices and he remembered being told that he needed to go to see a doctor. He passed out, not knowing for how long he had been blacked out. Whether it was only one night, a day, or multiple days in a row. However, when he finally gained consciousness again, he was alone in the dark and chained (Northup: 2000, p. 29).

He was handcuffed and felt very faint and weak. There were heavy chains on his ankles, and he was sitting on a bench without any coat or hat. *“One end of a chain was fastened to a large ring in the floor, the other to the fetters on my ankles. “ (Northup: 2000, p. 30).* He did not know where he was, why he is tied up, where his two friends went, nor why he deserved to be treated like a criminal. Every time he tried to move; he could hear the sound of his chains. So, he slowly began to realize he has been kidnapped. His money and freedom papers were gone. (Northup: 2000, p. 30) *“It could not be that a free citizen of New-York, who had wronged no man, nor violated any law, should be dealt with thus inhumanly... I felt there was no trust or mercy in unfeeling man; and commending myself to the God of the oppressed, bowed my head upon my fettered hands, and wept most bitterly. “ (Northup: 2000, p. 30)*

Before Solomon's transportation to the market, he was held in a small dark room. A man who was looking after slaves, asked Solomon how he was doing, and Solomon replied, that he was feeling sick and asked the man why he was being held. The man told Solomon that he was now his slave, because he bought him, but Solomon opposed, he was a free man from Saratoga. The man called Solomon a black liar and a runaway from Georgia. Each time Solomon would defend himself with the words, that he is a freeman he was beaten with a paddle. The paddle ripped his clothing, and because Solomon was chained to the floor, he had no chance in defending himself. Solomon was beaten each time, he replied wrongly on the question of whether he was a freeman. The last time the man asked him, whether he is a

freeman, Solomon remained quiet, which saved him from another beating and he thus learned, he cannot say to anyone he was from Saratoga and free from slavery.

*“All his brutal blows could not force from my lips the foul lie that I was a slave. Casting madly on the floor the handle of the broken paddle, he seized the rope. This was far more painful than the other. I struggled with all my power, but it was in vain. I prayed for mercy, but my prayer was only answered with imprecations and with stripes. I thought I must die beneath the lashes of the accursed brute. Even now the flesh crawls upon my bones, as I recall the scene. I was all on fire. My sufferings I can compare to nothing else than the burning agonies of hell ! At last I became silent to his repeated questions. I would make no reply.”* (Northup: 2000, p. 34)

#### 6.1.2. Transport

Solomon and the others were taken by Burch and Radburn from a slave pen to a steamboat at midnight. They were going over towards Pennsylvania Avenue handcuffed and had to remain quiet. Solomon was ready to make the attempt to run away but being in chains he feared any consequences that could follow. So, they went along the Capitol in Washington D.C., with Radburn in the rear hurrying them up (Solomon: 2000, p. 40).

When they got to the steamboat, they were immediately taken to the lower deck among barrels and boxes of freight. A black servant brought a light and when he rang the bell, the boat started to sail down the Potomac. Neither Solomon, nor the other slaves knew, where they were going (Solomon: 2000, p. 41).

To keep his spirits high, Solomon was, in his head, making plans to run and decided to try at the very first chance he would get. Nobody slept that night, and in the morning, they were called up on the deck to have something to eat. Up on the deck, their handcuffs were taken down, they sat at the table and started to eat. Nobody said a word, only a mulatto woman who was serving them breakfast told them to cheer up a little (Northup: 2000, p. 42).

The same day they arrived at Richmond, Virginia to slave pen that belong to Mr. Goodin. He was looking at Solomon and asked him from where he was, and automatically Solomon answered that he was from New York, which was a mistake. Burch heard him saying that, and when he was alone with Solomon, he threatened him, saying that one more time would cost him his life. He needed to keep Solomon quiet, as it was a crime to enslave a free black man. *“He looked at me a moment as if he was ready to devour me, then turning round went out. In a few minutes he returned., If ever I hear you say a word about New-York,*

*or about your freedom, I will be the death of you—I will kill you; you may rely on that,” he ejaculated fiercely* (Northup: 2000, p. 44).”

## 6.2. William Prince Ford

Solomon’s first owner was William Prince Ford, who lived on the right bank of Red River in Louisiana. He was known for his kindness and by many people known as the worthy minister of God, as he was a Baptist preacher. Even though Solomon was Ford’s slave, Solomon had nothing bad to say about Ford. According to him he never met more “*kind, noble, candid, Christian man than William Ford*”. (Northup: 2000, p. 65)

When W. P. Ford purchased Solomon he gave him a new name *Platt*. He was a wealthy man and owned many slaves on Bayou Boeuf, large establishment on Indian Creek, plantation, and his mansion in the Pine Woods. Solomon was taken to Ford’s house together with a female slave Eliza, who was forcibly taken away from her children. When they arrived, Ford ordered them to rest and the next day they will start working on a mill (Northup: 2000, p. 64-65).

After spending some time with his new master, Solomon thought of revealing his past to W.P. Ford, but decided otherwise, thinking on the horrific consequence that could happened to him. Instead of revealing his secret past, Solomon was becoming a skillful carpenter, as he was working on a construction of a new mill for his new master. All summer he was pilling lumber and chopping logs. Solomon even came up with an idea with could result in his master’s profit. The lumber, they were manufacturing, was transported on land, but Solomon had the idea, to transport it on the water, which would cut the expenses. And his master liked that idea very much (Northup: 2000, p. 71).

In consequences of Ford’s debts, Solomon was sold to John M. Tibeats in the winter of 1842. When purchasing Solomon, Tibeats agreed to pay more form him, than was the amount of the debt. He paid for him four hundred dollars, and Solomon life was now indebted to the mortgage (Northup: 2000, p. 74-75).

## 6.3. John M. Tibeats

John M. Tibeats bought Solomon from W.P. Ford in the winter of 1842. According to Solomon, Tibeats could not compare to Ford, in fact, he was his total opposite. Tibeats was small, spiteful, and quick-tempered. He did not have a permanent home and passed from one plantation to another. He was revengeful and arrogant, refused by the community of whites and not even respected by the slaves. While staying with Mr. Ford, Solomon did not

experience any abuse from his master, but he knew, that was about to change with. Mr. Tibeats. *“I was doomed to endure such bitter trials as the poor slave only knows, and to lead no more the comparatively happy life which I had led in the “Great Pine Woods.” (Northup: 2000, p. 73)*

Solomon left with Tibeats to Bayou Boeuf to finish a contract. Being a Tibeats’ slave, he had to work very hard, from the sunrise till night and was not allowed to idle. However, Mr. Tibeats was never satisfied with Solomon’s work and was always cursing and mean to him. When Solomon finished building a corn mill late at night, he was ordered to rise very early and pick up from Mr. Chapin, an overseer, nails and with them start to putting on the clapboards. This would later result in the first fight between Solomon and Tibeats (Northup: 2000, p. 76).

#### 6.3.1 First Fight

When was Solomon putting on the clapboards, as he was told, Tibeats came to him and started complaining about his work. He asked Solomon, if he did everything Tibeats ordered him to, which he did. He looked at the construction but then *„walked to the keg, looked a moment at the contents, then kicked it violently. Coming towards me in a great passion, he exclaimed, “G—d d—n you ! I thought you knowed (sic.) something.” I made answer: “I tried to do as yon told me. master. I didn’t mean anything wrong. Overseer said—” But he interrupted me with such a flood of curses that I was unable to finish the sentence. At length he ran towards the house, and going to the piazza, took down one of the overseer’s whips. The whip had a short wooden stock, braided over with leather, and was loaded at the butt. The lash was three feet long, or thereabouts, and made of raw-hide strands.“ (Northup: 2000, p. 77)*

As his owner was ready to punish Solomon, he defended himself. He was hitting his owner back and eventually he even started to win in the fight. *“...I had caught him by the collar of the coat, and drawn him closely to me. Reaching down, I seized him by the ankle, and pushing him back with the other hand, he fell over on the ground...,He was completely in my power.,...He struggled with all his power; swore that I should not live to see another day; and that he would tear out my heart. But his struggles and his threats were alike in vain. I cannot tell how many times I struck him. Blow after blow fell fast and heavy upon his wriggling form (Northup: 2000, p. 77-78)”.*

Luckily for Solomon, Mr. Chapin – the overseer, who gave him the nails saw this situation and saved Solomon. He told Mr. Tibeats, he gave him the nails and told him to use

them, so it was his fault and not Solomon's. However, Tibeats did not replied and seemed not to even pay attention to Chapin, as he was maliciously looking at Solomon. Later, Tibeats ordered Solomon to cross his hands. Solomon made clear, there is no need for that, that he will come with him calmly, but one of Tibeats companion came forward and threatened him if he would do as command. Solomon's wrists were tied up and another rope was placed around his neck.

They dragged him towards a tree as he was about to be hanged. However, Mr. Chapin saved Solomon from hanging. *"Gentlemen, I have a few words to say. You had better listen to them. Whoever moves that slave another foot from where he stands is a dead man.,... You, Tibeats, are in the fault yourself. You are pretty much of a scoundrel, and I know it, and you richly deserve the flogging you have received. In the next place, I have been overseer on this plantation seven years, and, in the absence of William Ford, am master here.,...Ford holds a mortgage on Platt of four hundred dollars. If you hang him he loses his debt. Until that is canceled you have no right to take his life (Northup: 2000, p. 80-81)"*.

#### 6.3.2. Departure from John. M. Tibeats

It was William Prince Ford who saved Solomon from the cruelty of John. M. Tibeats. Right after the attempting hanging, Mr. Ford was sent for and informed about what has happened. He accommodated Solomon in his house, and protected him during his recovery, as he feared for his life.

When Solomon met Tibeats again, it was with Ford by his side. Ford made very clear to Tibeats, that he and Solomon cannot live with each other. *' It is evident enough, Mr. Tibeats, that you and Platt cannot live together. You dislike him, and would not hesitate to kill him, and knowing it, he will run from you again through fear of his life. Now, Tibeats, you must sell him, or hire him out, at least. Unless you do so, I shall take measures to get him out of your possession.'* (Northup: 2000, p. 106)

Solomon was sold to Edwin Epps, his third owner, and finally was no more a property of John M. Tibeats. Shortly after he was sold, Tibeats left this piece of country. *' I was now no longer the property of Tibeats—his dog, his brute, dreading his wrath and cruelty day and night; and whoever or whatever my new master might prove to be, I could not, certainly, regret the change...Tibeats soon after disappeared from that section of the country. Once afterwards, and only once, I caught a glimpse of him. It was many miles from Bayou Bœuf.'* (Northup: 2000, p. 110)

#### 6.4. Edwin Epps

Edwin Epps was a six feet tall, heavy-bodied man, with blue eyes and fair hair. When Solomon came to his possession, Epps was fond of a bottle, and judging by his speech, he was not well-educated. He was very noisy and had a hobby in *“dancing with his nigers”* (Northup: 2000, p. 111), or in whipping them just to hear them scream. But when he was sober, he was calm, quiet, and treated his slaves well, not beating them without any reason as he did when drunk.

In his younger years, he used to be a driver and an overseer, but while Solomon was in his possession, he owned a plantation on Bayou Huff Power. Solomon worked on a plantation, he picked cotton or seeding. While working on a field an overseer would watch over them on a horse with a whip in his hands. *“ During all these hoeings (sic.) the overseer or driver follows the slaves on horseback with a whip, such as has been described. The fastest hoer takes the lead row. He is usually about a rod in advance of his companions. If one of them passes him, he is whipped. If one falls behind or is a moment idle, he is whipped.”* (Northup: 2000, p. 113)

Epps’ slaves had to collect two hundred pounds. If slave brought less quantity, he or she was whipped. Also, a new slave, was whipped smartly – to make him or her to pick as fast as possible. Novice was weighed every day, so the master would know his capability in cotton picking. If his or her weight fell short, their master took it as an evidence of being behind and the penalty was a greater number of lashes (Northup: 2000, p. 113).

The accommodation of Solomon was not satisfactory for him either. His bed was a plank twelve inches wide and ten inches long. *“My pillow was a stick of wood. The bedding was a coarse blanket, and not a rag or shred beside. Moss might be used, were it not that it directly breeds a swarm of fleas. The cabin is constructed of logs, without floor or window. The latter is altogether unnecessary, the crevices between the logs admitting sufficient light. In stormy weather the rain drives through them, rendering it comfortless and extremely disagreeable. The rude door hangs on great wooden hinges. In one end is constructed an awkward fire-place.”* (Northup: 2000, p. 118)

##### 6.4.1 Illness

While Solomon arrived at Epps’ he started experiencing first symptoms of approaching illness. Solomon started having chills, which graduated into fever. Solomon was weak and dizzy. On field, he was falling behind his co-workers for what he earned multiple lashes from a driver. One day, Solomon was feeling so weak, he could not even leave his

cabin. He did not receive any drugs or attention from his master. His master came to see him, only after it was told Solomon could die, which his master did not like to hear, as if Solomon would die, he would lose a thousand dollars (Northup: 2000, p. 121).

Epps send Solomon to Holmesville to see a doctor. Doctor told him, that Solomon's illness was the effect of the climate, and chances of dying were considerably high. He orders him a diet, no meat and to eat only so much food to sustain life. After several weeks Solomon recovered, and Epps came to see him. He gave him a sack and ordered him to go cotton picking (Northup: 2000, p. 121).

At the end of Solomon's first workday after being sick, he had to be weighed. He was only 43 kilos, not even half weight of the poorest picker. Epps threatened him with the heaviest whipping, but considering his illness, he decided to pardon his weight. After this, Solomon had trouble to keep up with other slaves on field and with the weight every day, for which he earned himself whipping and fell into disgrace of his master (Northup: 2000, p. 122). *"Practice and whipping were alike unavailing, and Epps, satisfied of it at last, swore I was a disgrace—that I was not fit to associate with a cotton-picking "nigger"—that I could not pick enough in a day to pay the trouble of weighing it, ... Suffice to say I was never permitted to be idle. It was rarely that a day passed by without one or more whippings* (Northup: 2000, p. 122)".

## 6. 5. Way to Freedom

The man who helped Solomon escape slavery was called Samuel Bass. He was a Canadian carpenter and was against slavery. Bass came to visit Epps' farm and confronted him about the fact, that he was a slaveholder. *"I tell you what it is Epps," said Bass, "it's all wrong—all wrong, sir— there's no justice nor righteousness in it. I wouldn't own a slave if I was rich as Cræsus, which I am not, ... Cash down is the only thing that will deliver him from evil. But this question of Slavery ; what right have you to your niggers when you come down to the point?" "What right!" said Epps, laughing; "why, I bought 'em, and paid for 'em."* (Northup: 2000, p. 179)

One day Solomon had a conversation with Bass and told him, he does not belong here. He told him his history, how he was taken captive and what he had been through. Northup asked Bass, if he would deliver a few letters to Solomon's friends, who could forward his free-papers and secure his release. They agreed to meet the next night among the high weeds and Bass wrote down everything needed (Northup: 2000, p. 182).



On January 3, 1853 Bass was approaching Solomon with another man, he was bringing him good news. Bass sent Solomon's letter in August 1852 and after five months he finally got an answer. One of the letters was forwarded to Anne, who asked Henry B. Northup to help her and Solomon with emancipation. Henry mobilized support for Solomon under a statute from 1840, which was designed to rescue New York's citizens, who were enslaved.

With the help of Bass, they were able to locate Solomon, and his freedom was legally obtained on January 4, 1853. Northup was reunited with his family later that month. His rescue was widely publicized. Stopping in Washington, D.C., en route to New York, he brought charges against James H. Birch (referred to as James H. Burch in Northup's narrative), the slave dealer who had incarcerated him. Because of his race, though, he was not permitted to testify, and the case was dismissed after two other slave dealers testified on behalf of Birch. That same year, together with local writer David Wilson, Northup penned his memoir, *Twelve Years a Slave*. The book sold some 30,000 copies in the ensuing three years, and Northup used the proceeds to purchase property in upstate New York, where he lived with his family.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Rachel Cole, Solomon Northup – American farmer and writer, October 01, 2013, ed. July 06, 2020. Available at: <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Solomon-Northup>

## 7. Conclusion

When I chose this topic, I was surely aware of what I was getting into. I knew that this part regarding American history – the enslavement of African people, is not a positive and joyful topic to write on. Still being prepared for that, I was sometimes shocked, what people then were capable of doing and what enslaved Africans were put through.

At the beginning of my thesis, I summarized the general facts concerning slavery itself. I discussed how slaves were transported to the United States of America, what it was like for them to be taken from their homes and families, what kind of conditions they had to face during voyages to the U.S., and how the slave market operated. From what I have read in both autobiographies (*Twelve Years a Slave* – see more in chap. 6, and *Barracoon: The Story of The Last Black Slave* – see more in chap. 5), it was much harder for slaves to accept the fact that they were forcibly taken away from their families, from what they knew, and why they were free and now they belong to somebody and were treated as if they were property rather than a people, than the fact that they had to, for example work hard on fields, or to come in peace with the conditions they were living in.

When choosing this topic, I was familiar with what it was like on slave ships. Slaves had a very limited space, limited portions of food or water, dead bodies around them, and hygiene was not any better either (see more in chap. 3.2. Slave Trade) However, their life was not any better, when they arrived in America. Different states had different slave codes, which meant that for example, in one state slaves were somehow protected by laws, but especially in the South slaves could be killed by a white man, or hanged by their owner, if they committed any offence (see more in chap. 3.1.2 Slave Codes).

If a slave committed a minor offence, he or she was usually whipped, because whipping was the least severe punishment, even if the wounds were telling otherwise. For a more serious crime slave could be hanged (See more in chap. 4.3.1 Death penalty and 4.3.2. Whipping). Female slaves also served their masters as mistresses and were raped in daily bases.

Although, slave feared these punishments, they were still a few slaves who wanted to fight for their freedom. I chose to write about the biggest, or most important slave rebellions. Firstly, I wrote on The Stono Rebellion (see more in chap. 3.4.1 The Stono Rebellion) and on Gabriel's Rebellion (see more in chap. 3.4.2. The Gabriel's Rebellion), which both ended unsuccessfully for the slaves.

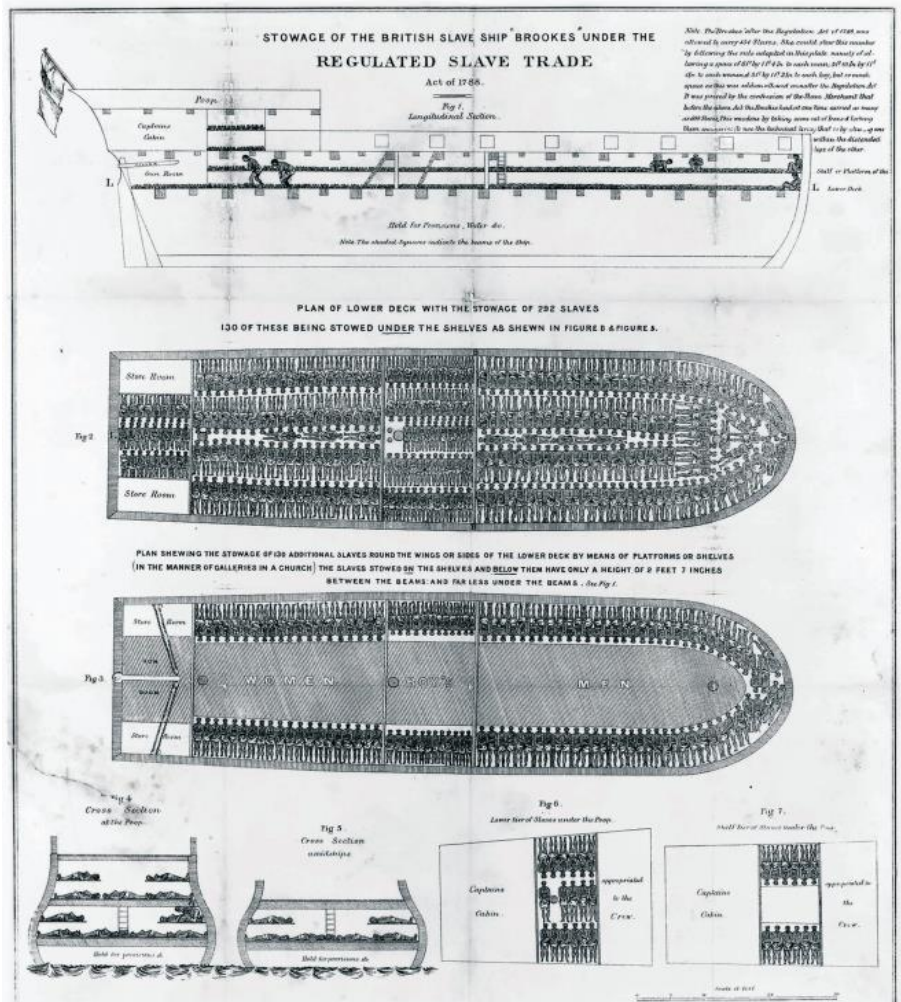
The most interesting part for me, was reading the autobiographies, as they were both dramatically different. The book “Barracoon: The Story of The Last Black Slave” was exploring the life and experience of Cudjo Lewis, who was born in Africa and transported to the US. A typical story of African slave, even though his master was relatively good, it was obvious, from his telling, that slavery took a toll on him. How he was discussing this part of his life, it was noticeable that mentally he has not fully healed from what has happened to him (see more in chap. 5. The Life of Cudjo Lewis).

The second book “Twelve Years a Slave” was a completely different story. Solomon was born a free African American citizen, was captured, and sold into slavery. Solomon did not want to accept the fact that he should belong to somebody after his capture, but later understood it is better to keep his mouth closed. He experienced both kinds of masters, a kind one and two not so much. The second owner despised him and wanted to hang him, unsuccessfully. And his third owner was an alcoholic, who beat him on a daily basis and when Solomon fell sick, he provided him medicine, only because he did not want to lose the money, he paid for him (see more in chap. 6. The Life of Solomon Northup).

Overall, I am very satisfied with the topic I chose, even though sometimes it was hard to read, on all the hardships that slaves were put through. Especially for me, it was quite hard to learn what female slaves had to deal with (see more in chap. 4.2. Female Slaves). I think that what I have learned was quite beneficial. Now I understand better, why slavery is such a dark part of American history.

# Appendix

1. Slave ship – slave ships were designed to fit as much slaves as possible. Taken from: Franklin: 2011, p. 34



### The plan of the *Brookes*

Fig. 1, lengthwise cross section; Fig. 2, lower deck without platforms; Fig. 3, lower deck with platforms; Figs. 4 and 5, breadthwise cross sections; Fig. 6, half-deck without platforms; Fig. 7, half-deck with platforms. The *Brookes*, a 320-ton vessel, was one of the eighteen slave-trading ships examined by a committee that was making recommendations to the English parliament for the regulation of such vessels in 1788. The abolitionists claimed that the *Brookes*, built to accommodate 451 persons, carried as many as 609 slaves on one of its voyages.

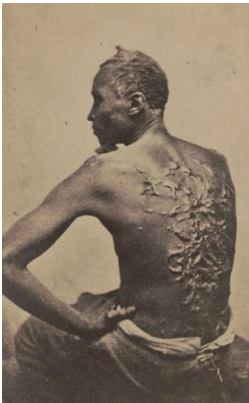
2. Slave Shackles – the middle part goes on a neck of a slave and the other two on his/her hands. Available at: <https://hist1002.omeka.fas.harvard.edu/exhibits/show/bennett-capozzi---senegal/slave-shackles>



3. Whip – used as the least severe punishment for slaves. Available at:  
<http://slaveryimages.org/s/slaveryimages/item/1328>



4. Scars – scars of slaves after constant whipping. Available at:  
<https://www.history.com/news/whipped-peter-slavery-photo-scourged-back-real-story-civil-war>

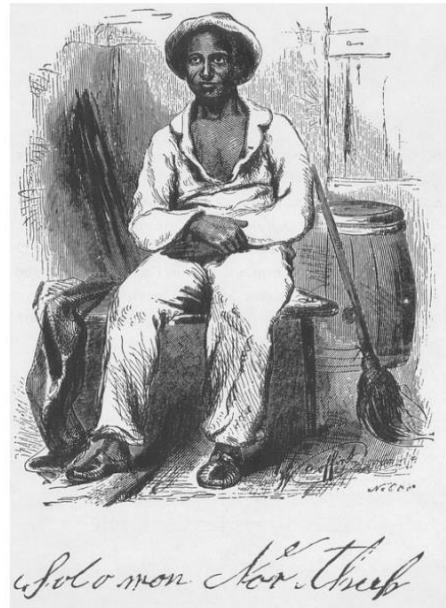
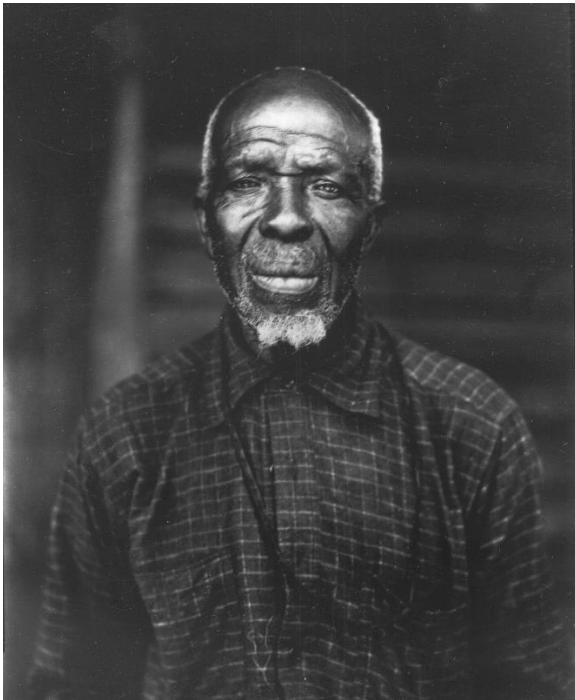


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*Solomon Northup*

**SOLOMON IN HIS PLANTATION SUIT.**

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## **Abstract**

I divided my bachelor thesis called "The Life of Slaves in the United States of America" into two parts. In the first part I was discussing the history of slavery in general, for example I was exploring the slave trade between African countries and Europe. In this part of general history, I also included a chapter concerning the African countries as well, because I found interesting that African people were willing to sell their fellow citizens into slavery and make a profit out of it.

The second part of my thesis discussed slavery directly in the United States. Firstly, I summarized a general history of slavery in America, such as different slave codes in different colonies or how slaves were being transported to America in so called the Middle passages. Then I concentrated on the life of slaves, in general as well, and wrote about the conditions they were forced to live and work in, types of punishments, behavior of the master against female slaves and so on.

In the end of the second part, I was analyzing two chosen autobiographies of slaves, who survived this part of their lives. One book is called "Barracoon: The Story of the Last 'Black Cargo'", by Zora N. Hurston and the second one is called "Twelve Years a Slave" by Solomon Northup. Both of these autobiographies were dramatically different as the main character from the first book was originally from Africa and sold into slavery, whereas the main character from the second book was born in America as a free black man.

## Cizojazyčné resumé

Svou bakalářskou práci s názvem „Život otroků ve Spojených státech amerických“ jsem rozdělila na dvě části. V první části jsem pojednávala o obecné historii otroctví, kde jsem například psala o obchodu s otroky mezi africkými zeměmi a Evropou. Do části těchto obecných dějin jsem zařadila také kapitulu přímo o afrických zemích, jelikož mě zaujalo, že byli Afričané za vidinou zisku ochotni prodat své spoluobčany do otroctví.

Druhá část mé práce se týká otroctví přímo ve Spojených státech. Nejdříve jsem shrnula obecnou americkou historii otroctví, například různá práva otroků v různých koloniích nebo to, jak byli otroci do Ameriky převáženi v tzv. „Middle Passages“. Poté jsem se soustředila na život otroků obecně, v jakých podmínkách byli nuceni žít a pracovat, o typech trestů, chování jejich pána k otrokyním a mnoho dalšího.

Na konci druhé části jsem analyzovala dvě autobiografie otroků, kteří tuto část svého života přežili. Jednu knihu s názvem „Barracoon: The Story of the “ Last Black Cargo“, kterou napsala Zora N. Hurston a druhou knihu „Dvanáct let v řetězech“ od Solomona Notrhupa. Knihy se od sebe v mnohém lišily, nejvíce asi v hlavních postavách, jelikož hlavní postava z první knihy pocházela z Afriky a do otroctví byla prodána. Kdežto hlavní postava z knihy druhé pocházela z Ameriky, kde se narodila jako svobodný Afroameričan.