



DBQ THEME: SLAVERY IN THE UNITED STATES

DIRECTIONS:

This task is based on the accompanying documents (1–9). Some of these documents have been edited to help you with the task. The essay is designed to test your ability to work with historical documents and your knowledge of slavery. Carefully analyze the documents as you complete **Part A**. Your responses should help you to write the essay in **Part B**.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT:

From the earliest colonial times to 1865, slavery existed in the United States. During that time, millions of men, women, and children were denied almost all basic human rights. Slaves had no freedom, no power to control their own lives, no ability to protect family members from harsh treatment, no means to keep their families together. Many of the human rights that slaves were made to live without are so basic that free people often take them for granted. It is important for Americans in the twenty-first century to study this period of our history and understand how people could inflict such hardship and injustice on others.

TASK:

- Describe the ways in which slaves were denied their basic human rights.
- Explain at least two reasons why slaveholders denied slaves their basic human rights.

PART A—SHORT-ANSWER SECTION

The following documents relate to slavery in America. Examine each document carefully and answer the questions that follow.

Document 1: A Speech by Frederick Douglass (1850)

A master is a person who claims and exercises a right of property in the person of his fellow man. He does this with the force of law and the blessing of Southern religion. The law gives the master absolute power over the slave. He may work him, hire him out, sell him, and in certain circumstances, kill him . . . The slave is a person without any rights . . . his name is disrespectfully inserted in the master's account book, with horses, sheep and pigs. In law, the slave has no wife, no children, and no home. He can own nothing, possess nothing, acquire nothing, but what must belong to another. To eat the fruit of his own labor is considered stealing . . .

To ensure good behavior, the slaveholder relies on the whip; to make the slave humble, he relies on the whip; to take the place of wages as motivation to work, he relies on the whip; to destroy his manhood he relies on the whip, the chain, the gag, the thumb-screw, the pillory, the knife, the pistol and the bloodhound. These are the necessary parts of the system . . .

1. Name at least two human rights that are denied to slaves, according to Frederick Douglass.

(2)

2. Give two reasons why slaveholders would beat their slaves.

(2)

SLAVERY IN THE UNITED STATES

Document 3: Georgia Asks for Slavery (1738)

The colony of Georgia was founded in 1732, and the leaders of the colony decided in 1735 that slavery should be illegal there. Many colonists were unhappy about this decision and requested a change in this policy several times. Georgia eventually accepted slavery in 1749.

At this time, timber is the only thing we have here which we can export and only because we have to cut it down for planting our land, yet we cannot manufacture it for a foreign market, but at double the expense of the other colonies; for instance, in South Carolina, which is only twenty miles from us, because they are allowed to use Negroes, can load vessels with that product at one half of the price that we can do; and what would convince persons to bring ships here, when they can be loaded with one half the expense so near us? Therefore, the timber on the land is only a problem to those that have it, though of very great value in all the other colonies where Negroes are allowed, and therefore labor is cheap.

It is very well known that the Carolinas can raise everything that this colony can, and because their labor is so much cheaper, they will always ruin our business . . .

1. According to this document, why do the citizens of Georgia want slavery?

(1)

2. Name at least one job that slaves would be doing in Georgia, according to this document.

(1)

Document 4: Voyage to America on a Slave Ship

I was soon put down under the decks, where I was met with the most terrible odor. With the stench and crying together, I became so sick and low that I was not able to eat, nor had I the least desire to taste anything. But soon, to my grief, two of the white men offered me food, and upon my refusing to eat, one of them held me fast by the hands and tied my feet, while the other whipped me severely. I had never experienced anything like this before, and although I feared the water, if I were able to get over the nettings, I would have jumped over the side, but I could not . . .

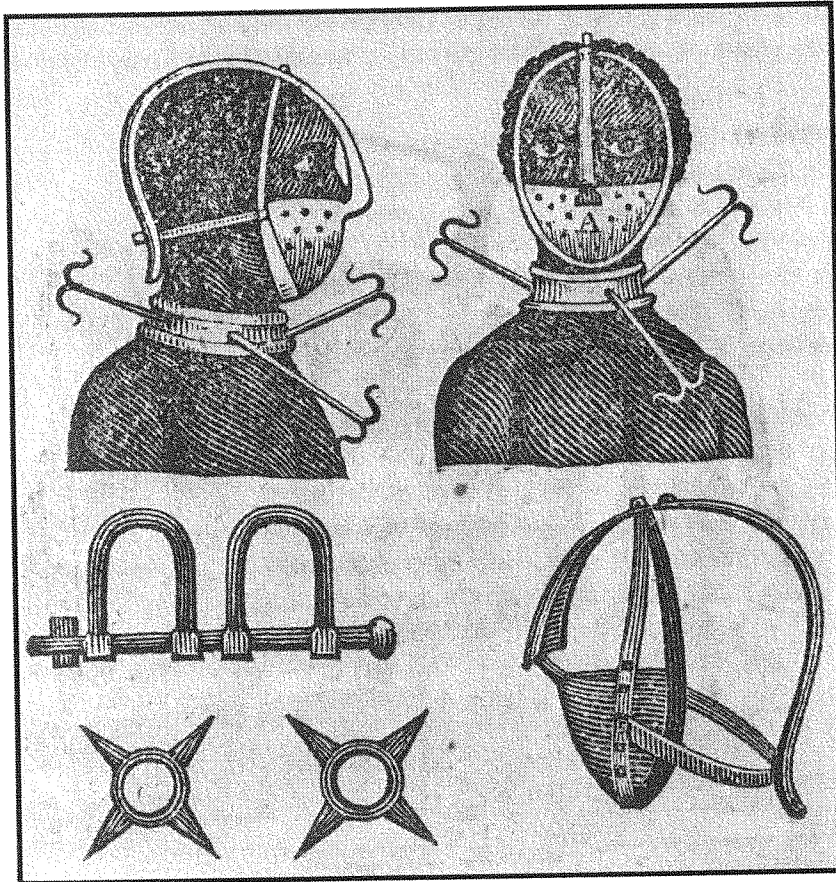
One day, when we had a smooth sea and moderate wind, two of my wearied countrymen, who were chained together, preferring death to a life of misery, somehow made it through the nettings and jumped into the sea. Immediately another quite dejected fellow, who on account of his illness was allowed to be out of irons, also followed their example. There was such a noise and confusion among the people of the ship to stop and get the boat to go after the slaves. Two of the wretches were drowned, but they got the other, and afterwards whipped him unmercifully for preferring death to slavery.

1. Why did some of the people jump overboard?

(1)

SLAVERY IN THE UNITED STATES

Document 5: Devices of Slavery



Courtesy Library of Congress

The illustration above includes an iron mask and collar, which were sometimes used by slaveholders. The collar was designed to prevent field workers from running away and the mask made it impossible for them to eat the crops they were raising. All of these devices caused pain to those who were forced to wear them.

1. Name two reasons why slaves were forced to use the iron mask and collar?

(2)

2. Why were these devices unpleasant for slaves to wear?

(1)

Document 6: A Speech Defending Slavery (1835)

The following passage is taken from a speech given by Governor George McDuffie of South Carolina. The speech was given to the state legislature in response to the growing evidence of abolitionists in that state.

No human institution, in my opinion, is more clearly consistent with the will of God than slavery. That the African Negro is destined to occupy this condition of servitude is not less clear. It is marked on the face, stamped on the skin, and shown by the inferiority of this race. They have all the qualities that fit them to be slaves, and not one of those that would fit them to be free men. Until the "African can change his skin," it will be useless to try by any human power, to make free men of those whom God has doomed to be slaves . . .

Other consequences of freeing slaves may be shown to every abolitionist in Europe or America. It is clearly shown that the production of cotton depends, not so much on soil and climate as on the existence of slavery. In the places where it grows, not one half the quantity would be produced but for the existence of slavery; and every realistic planter will agree in the opinion that if all the slaves in these states were now freed, the American crop would be reduced the very next year from 1,200,000 to 600,000 bales.

1. What was McDuffie's economic argument for slavery?

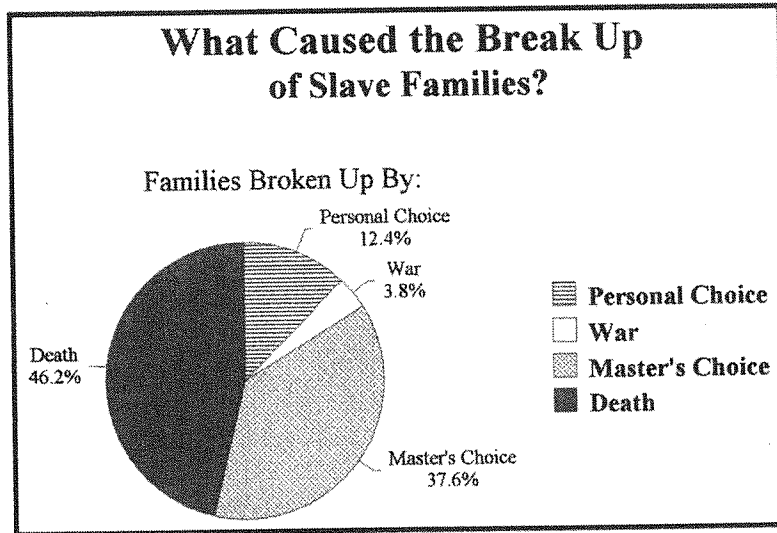
(1)

2. What was McDuffie's racial argument for slavery?

(1)

SLAVERY IN THE UNITED STATES

Document 7: Keeping Slave Families Together



Source: Blasingame, John W., *The Slave Community*

The data above are based on a sample from Mississippi, Tennessee, and Louisiana. Of the 2,888 families included in the survey, 2,494 (86%) were broken up by one of the four factors listed above.

1. What are the two main reasons for the break-up of slave families?

(2)

2. What can be said about the part the master played in the break-up of slave families?

(1)

Document 8: Photograph of a Slave Who Was Whipped (1863)



Courtesy National Archives

Beatings with a whip were a common form of punishment used on slaves. The slave shown above was unable to work for two months after receiving the beating that left these scars on his back.

1. What does this photograph suggest about how slaves were treated?

(1)

SLAVERY IN THE UNITED STATES

Document 9: Description of a Slave Auction

Little Randall was made to jump and run across the floor, demonstrating his activity and condition. All the time the trade was going on Eliza was crying aloud, and wringing her hands. She begged the man not to buy him, unless he also bought herself and her daughter Emily. She promised, in that case, to be the most faithful slave that ever lived. The man answered that he could not afford it, and Eliza burst into grief. . . . She wanted to be with her children, she said. . . . Over and over again she told them how she loved her boy. But it was of no avail; the man could not afford it. The bargain was agreed upon, and Randall must go alone. Then Eliza ran to him, embraced him passionately, kissed him again and again and told him to remember her—all the while her tears falling in the boy's face like rain. "Don't cry mama. I will be a good boy. Don't cry," said Randall, looking back as they passed out of the door. What became of the lad, God knows.

1. Explain why Eliza couldn't keep her family together.

(1)