



Special Presentation: Slave Catchers, Slave Resisters

For nearly three hundred years, the labor system in the United States was dependent upon holding human beings in bondage and forcing them to work against their will. This system was kept afloat not by the willingness of slaves, but by constant policing and violent enforcement of slave codes and laws. Countless regulations were created to counter the daily resistance and organizing efforts of slaves determined to achieve freedom in any way possible, and militias were established to further police them. *Slave Catchers, Slave Resisters* is a gripping account of the rebellions, runaways, and secret patterns of communications slaves used to break free, and the violent methods their owners used to try to quell rebellion and escape.

Slave Catchers, Slave Resisters captures the drama of the Stono Rebellion of 1739. During this uprising in South Carolina, slaves drew upon African battle techniques, striking fear into the hearts of plantation owners throughout the South as they attempted to break free from slavery forever. In response, harsher laws limiting the movement of slaves were put in place throughout the South. Militias and slave patrols became commonplace, often using extreme violence and intimidation to thwart unruly slaves.

What emerges from this in-depth two hour program is a portrait of a slave society constantly on the brink of disorder. Highly acclaimed scholars of slavery offer an analysis of how studying slave resistance reveals the contradictions inherent in a democratic republic in which some human beings were held as property. As slaves flocked over to British lines during the American Revolution, their unceasing drive toward freedom once again came into stark clarity. *Slave Catchers, Slave Resisters* follows the story of slavery through the nineteenth century as the nation was pushed into full-scale Civil War. Educators and their students will find that this program provides an informative, insightful, and often shocking view of the violence the slave system provoked at every turn.

CURRICULUM LINKS:

Slave Catchers, Slave Resisters would be useful for American History, American Studies, and African American history, and American Culture courses. Due to some sensitive language and violence, we would recommend this program for mature high school studies. Teachers should view the program before screening it to students. This program would also be useful for college level courses on slavery and the Civil War. It fulfills several National Standards guidelines as outlined by the National Council for History Education including: Values, Beliefs, Political Ideas and Institutions, Conflict and Cooperation, Patterns of Social and Political Interaction and Comparative History of Major Developments.

KEY TERMS:

ad hoc	codified	Stono Rebellion
makeshift	maroons	Nat Turner
militia	musket	Lord Dunmore's Proclamation
refined	resistance	
servitude	subsistence	

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What was the role of militias in maintaining the slave system? Who would be a typical member of a slave patrol or militia?
2. How do you think the fact that South Carolina had a majority black population for a period of time shape the way the white population dealt with slaves?
3. One of the historians in the documentary says that "every American was required to be a slave hunter" in order to keep slavery in place. What do you think this means? Do you agree or disagree?
4. Other than the devastating events themselves, what larger effect did the Stono Rebellion have on the slave South?
5. What were some of the laws and regulations established to place further controls on slaves? How were they enforced in both Southern and Northern states?
6. Why were poor white people considered a threat to the slave system? What are some examples of how they could undermine the slave system?
7. How did both the British and the Spanish use slaves to try to gain power in the New World?
8. Which slaves were most likely to run away from plantations? Why were some slaves more likely to flee than others?
9. What was Nat Turner's rebellion? What were the broader effects of this event?
10. How did Northerners play a role in supporting the Southern slave system?
11. Were you surprised to learn that not all blacks were slaves? What was the role of free blacks in both Northern and Southern states?
12. Do you think slave resistance played a role in bringing about Civil War?

EXTENDED ACTIVITIES:

Working With Primary Sources on Slavery

One of the most effective ways to learn about the slave system is to read and analyze primary sources from events related to slavery throughout U.S. history. These sources will provide further insights into the historical contexts in the events in this documentary transpired. These sources provide details and insights into these events, allowing students to imagine these historical moments in their full complexity. The following activities provide just a few examples of the primary sources referenced in the documentary.

1. ***Proclamation of the Earl of Dunmore***

Dunmore's Proclamation invited slaves to join the British Army in exchange for their freedom. At the library or on the Internet, locate a copy of this proclamation and read it carefully. Imagine that you are a newspaper editor on the American side of the Revolution. Write an opinion piece about Dunmore's proclamation and the effects it might have on the outcome of the Revolution. You can also break up into groups of four or five and write a similar proclamation from the American side, imagining how such a document might differ from that of the British.

2. ***David Walker's "Appeal"***

David Walker's "Appeal" highlighted the inhumanity of slavery and asked all slaves to rise up and resist this system. Locate a copy of this document either at the library or on the Internet. Focus on the Preamble, and choose one passage from this introduction that you find most compelling. Recite this passage orally to your larger class or group. You can also write an essay of 1-2 pages describing why you think this passage encapsulates Walker's argument about the corrosive effects of slavery and why it should be ended.

3. ***Fugitive Slave Act of 1850***

This Act enforced stricter regulations on runaway slaves and the obligations of Northerners to return escaped slaves to their owners in the South. Find a copy of this Act or an analysis which describes its stipulations and its relationship to the larger Compromise of 1850. Create a presentation (Powerpoint, if possible) outlining its provisions and key facts and dates associated with it. If a computer presentation is not possible, create a posterboard with this information. Share your presentation with your broader class or group.

Additional Resources

BOOKS:

Berlin, Ira. *Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America* (Belknap, 2000).

Horton, James O. and Lois E. *Slavery and the Making of Modern America* (Oxford University Press, 2004).

Johnson, Walter. *Soul by Soul: Life Inside the Antebellum Slave Market* (Harvard University Press, 2001).

Wood, Peter. *Black Majority: Negroes in Colonial South Carolina from 1670 Through the Stono Rebellion* (W.W. Norton, 1996).

WEB SITES:

The Library of Congress American Memory project has many primary sources and documents related to slavery:

<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/ammem/>

Teaching with Documents, from the National Archives, provides many primary sources and tips for using various kinds of sources in the classroom:

http://www.archives.gov/digital_classroom/teaching_with_documents.html

Helpful links to additional primary sources and background information on slavery:

<http://caho.columbia.edu/main/topics/NCHS-4-2-D/>