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The “People’s House”? Uncovering Slavery in the NC State Capitol

Overview

This lesson addresses slavery, race, and power through the North Carolina State Capitol. It shows what information can be found about the enslaved African Americans who constructed the Capitol building in the 1830s using primary sources from the period. This lesson is designed to fit into discussions of American slavery with tangible, concrete examples from North Carolina. It also seeks to show how the search to uncover the lives of enslaved people is an often difficult process that pieces together information from many sources.

Grade

American History, High School

NC Essential Standards

- AH1.H.2 Analyze key political, economic and social turning points in United States History using historical thinking.
 - AH1.H.2.2 Evaluate key turning points from colonization through Reconstruction in terms of their lasting impact (e.g., conflicts, legislation, elections, innovations, leadership, movements, Supreme Court decisions, etc.).
- AH1.H.4 Analyze how conflict and compromise have shaped politics, economics and culture in the United States.
 - AH1.H.4.1 Analyze the political issues and conflicts that impacted the United States through Reconstruction and the compromises that resulted (e.g., American Revolution, Constitutional Convention, Bill of Rights, development of political parties, nullification, slavery, states’ rights, Civil War).
- AH1.H.5 Understand how tensions between freedom, equality and power have shaped the political, economic and social development of the United States.
 - AH1.H.5.1 Summarize how the philosophical, ideological and/or religious views on freedom and equality contributed to the development of American political and economic systems through Reconstruction (e.g., natural rights, First Great Awakening, Declaration of Independence, transcendentalism, suffrage, abolition, “slavery as a peculiar institution”, etc.).
- AH2.H.5 Understand how tensions between freedom, equality and power have shaped the political, economic and social development of the United States.
 - AH2.H.5.1 Summarize how the philosophical, ideological and/or religious views on freedom and equality contributed to the development of American political and economic systems since Reconstruction (e.g., “separate but equal”, Social Darwinism, social gospel, civil service system, suffrage, Harlem Renaissance, the Warren Court, Great Society programs, American Indian Movement, etc.).

Materials

- Printed copies of documents for the primary source activity
- Optional - screen on which to display primary source documents for discussion

Duration

60 minutes

Historic Information relevant to lesson

Slavery

Slavery was part of life in North Carolina since the state's first settlement by Europeans. During the colonial period, North Carolina originally lacked the extensive inland development of other colonies, and most of its population was located in eastern port cities. Wilmington, a town on the Cape Fear River, was an important port for slave ships. By 1767, about 40,000 enslaved people resided in the colony of North Carolina. Ninety percent of these people were field workers or others who worked in agricultural jobs, with the remaining percentage engaged in domestic work or trades like butchering, carpentry, and tanning.

Colonial laws tightly controlled the lives and movement of enslaved people. In 1741, laws were passed in North Carolina preventing enslaved people from raising their own livestock or from carrying guns without permission, even for hunting. There were also strict laws around manumission - the freeing of enslaved people. In 1790, a ban on importing enslaved people to North Carolina was lifted, and the state's enslaved population quickly increased. By 1800, there were around 140,000 Black people living in North Carolina, most of whom were enslaved, but a small number of which were Free Blacks.

As the state developed through the nineteenth century, slavery in the eastern and coastal areas often involved large-scale commercial plantations, while in central and western North Carolina, enslaved people were essential in smaller farm-based agriculture and small manufacturing industries. Often enslaved people lived and worked in smaller groups, as over half of the state's enslavers enslaved five or fewer people. Because of this, an enslaved person in North Carolina might have been required to have many different types of skills, working in agriculture or other types of jobs at different times of the year.

Construction of the North Carolina State Capitol

After the State House of North Carolina was lost in a fire in 1831, the North Carolina General Assembly of 1832-1833 ordered that a new Capitol be built as an enlarged version of the old State House - that is, a cross-shaped building featuring a central, domed rotunda. This project was a large-scale, multiyear undertaking for the state, and was to be constructed on Raleigh's central square using locally quarried stone. Besides stone masons, the work required brick makers, quarrymen, carpenters, plaster workers, and general laborers. In the 1830s, many of these jobs were filled by enslaved African Americans. Throughout the 1830s, enslaved men were named on the Capitol's construction project as quarry men or general laborers. These men were not enslaved by the Capitol or by the state, but officials associated with the project - commissioners appointed to oversee the building's construction - rented the labor of enslaved people from local enslavers. Enslavers were then compensated by the state for the work of their enslaved people. These enslaved men would work either at the building's construction site in

Raleigh's city center or at the state-run quarry, positioned about a mile and a half southeast of the construction site.

The Use of Slavery in Construction Projects

During the nineteenth century, major construction projects utilized the labor of enslaved African Americans. These types of projects included schools, universities, civic structures, and other public buildings. [This list](#) includes some famous landmarks that were constructed using enslaved labor. In 2005, [the University of North Carolina beginning acknowledging](#) the institution's links to slavery, both during and after construction. The White House was constructed using the labor of enslaved men. Here's what [the White House Historical Association says](#) about the use of enslaved labor in that project:

"Stonemason Collen Williamson trained enslaved people on the spot at the government's quarry at Aquia, Virginia. Enslaved people quarried and cut the rough stone that was later dressed and laid by Scottish masons to erect the walls of the President's House." The construction of the White House was a comparable situation to that of the NC State Capitol: a large, public structure where locally quarried stone was used and white stone masons were present.

Lesson

Before the lesson, review Historic Information above.

Introduce key terms for discussion:

- *The People's House* - a nickname for the State Capitol
- *Enslaved person* - A person who was enslaved through the actions of others. It is important to discuss history using language that is empathetic and humanizing. In our interpretation of slavery, we strive to use words like "enslaved person," rather than "slave." The use of the term "enslaved person" remembers humanity first. This was not just a "slave," this was a person - with dreams, thoughts, fears and feelings, with likes and dislikes, with family and friends - who was enslaved by the actions of other people.
- Primary Source document - an artifact, document, diary, manuscript, autobiography, recording, or any other source of information that was created at the time under study

Begin this lesson with a writing prompt or discussion:

Consider the US Constitution. The preamble begins with the phrase "We the people." Who were "The People" when the constitution was written? What does "The People" mean now? How has this changed over time?

Consider the NC State Capitol:

The NC State Capitol is often referred to as "the People's House," but access to the building has evolved and looked very different over time. When this building was constructed, the "we" in people referred to a very specific group - white men who owned property, men who could vote and be elected to serve here. Over time, the definition of "the people" has expanded, but there have been other times where it has noticeably shrunk or contracted.

Continue with as much or as little discussion of the relevant historic information before continuing with primary source activity.

Primary Source Activity

Reading the Capitol's history by considering an 1834 publication from the Capitol's Commission

Intro to this activity:

This building was constructed from 1833 - 1840. The Civil War happened in the 1860s - but what can you tell me about the 1830s? Who was in charge of society in the 1830s, who were the leaders of our country? White men. This building was constructed to be a space used by white men, because they were those in power. But who constructed it? In the 1830s in the southern United States, most construction projects were completed using the labor of enslaved people. The enslaved men that constructed the Capitol primarily lived nearby in Raleigh, generally right around downtown.

A primary source is a document or other source of information that was created at the time under study. We work hard to piece together the lives of the people who worked in the Capitol, including the people who were enslaved. Sometimes it's difficult to retrace the full lives of enslaved people, as they were most likely being written about by their enslavers. Little is known about the day to day realities of the individuals who staffed the Capitol, but some of what we know comes from the pages of this document.

Report of the Commissioners Appointed to Superintend the Re-building of the State Capitol was published in 1834 and lists the full names of workers on the Capitol's construction project. It also shows who on the project was an enslaved person. Because it provides the full names of the enslaved men who worked to construct the Capitol, this document is a valuable starting point for research.

It is accessible online in its full form here:

<https://digital.ncdcr.gov/digital/collection/p249901coll26/id/3504/>

Today, we are focusing primarily on two pages of this document (shown below with title page 1):

REPORT

COMMISSIONERS

APPOINTED TO SUPERINTEND

The Re-building of the State Capitol.

December 4th, 1834.

RALEIGH:

EMILIO WHITE, PRINTER TO THE STATE,

1834.

LIST OF LABORERS
 Employed at the State Capitol, Raleigh.

Names.	Wages per day.	Names.	Wages per day.
Bob Pulliam, slave,	\$0 50	Ingram Coman, slave,	50
Joseph Exum	50	Andrew Whitaker, Slave,	50
Joshua Allen	50	Alfred Wheaton, slave,	50
David Watford	50	John Bell	50
Eli Greigson	50	Bailus Bell,	50
Ginsgow Saunders, slave,	1 00	Hugh Harp,	25
Peter Saunders, slave,	15	Warren Harp,	50
Washington Saunders, slave,	20	Willis Dunson,	50
Nat Peck, slave,	40	Billy Dunson,	50
Washington Hill, slave,	30	Robert Cooke, slave,	50
John Geedy, slave,	40	Frank Whitaker, slave,	50
Anderson Phillips, slave,	50	Pompey Hunter, slave,	50
Sam Haywood, slave,	50	Sato Galea, slave,	50
Philip Haywood, slave,	50	Anthony Galea, slave,	50
Bob Hinton, slave,	50	Jordan Spruill, slave,	50
Ephraim Baker, slave,	50	Young Evans,	55
Buck Baker, slave,	50	Daniel Evans,	50
Arthur Baker, slave,	50	Lewis Ward, slave,	50
Alston Tucker, slave,	50	Nathan Stozet, slave,	50
Sandy Haywood, slave,	50	Isham Young, slave,	50
Cato Haywood, slave,	50	Hinton Gowans	50
Joseph Haywood, slave,	50	Lemuel Wardrobe,	50
Moses Haywood, slave,	50	Elisha Williams, slave,	50
Phill Hawkins, slave,	50	John Haywood, slave,	50
Henry Haywood, slave,	50	Tim Harrison, slave,	50
Roch ester Haywood, slave,	50	Anderson Haywood, slave,	50
Peter Haywood, slave,	50	William Rhodes,	50
Al'es Hutchings, slave,	50	Gideon Hayes,	50
William Ford, slave,	50	Willis Moss,	50
Henry Ford, slave,	50	Alfred Davis,	50
Henry Blount, slave,	50	Boston Finch, slave,	50
Tom Bauls, slave,	50	Wylie Simmons,	50
George Stone, slave,	50	Ivan Robin-on, slave,	50
Nelson Stone, slave,	50	Sam Richardson,	50
David Stone, slave,	50	Joseph Thomas, slave,	50
Isham Terrell, slave,	50	Horace Thomas, slave,	50
Tom Williams, slave,	50	Madison William, slave,	50
Junius Brickie, slave,	50	Jack High, slave,	75
John Coman, slave,	50	Roger Kelly, slave,	75
Henderson Coman, slave,	50	Ashton's horse and cart,	1 25

LIST OF QUARRY-MEN AND OTHERS,

EMPLOYED AT THE
Quarry for the State Capitol, Raleigh.

Names.	Wages per day.	Names.	Wages per day.
Eleazer Colburn, Master		Robin Stone, slave	50
Workman	\$2 25	Reuben Stone, slave	50
Merritt Dilliard, overseer	2 00	Giles Stone, slave	50
Daniel Young, slave	75	Peter Smith	50
Friday High, slave	60	Anderson Haywood, slave	40
John Dilliard, slave	50	Wiley Cotton, slave	50
Burrell Dilliard, slave	50	Daniel Cotton, slave	50
Dilliard's Horse and cart	1 12½	Buck Cotton, slave	50
William Ralph	1 25	Isam Harrison, slave	50
Clarkson Adams	1 25	Peter Harrison, slave	50
Neil Brown	1 00	Redick Atkins	50
Jesse Johnson	50	Weeley Pulliam, slave	50
Jacob Johnson	40	Ned Hotchins, slave	50
Michael Hasfey	50	Evans Williams, slave	50
Henry Vandergriff	75	August Williams, slave	50
Joseph McAdams	1 00	William Cross	50
Alexander Blake	1 00	Ned Peck, slave	1 25
Jackson Mitchell	50	Henry Marshall, slave	1 00
Michael McAllister	1 00	Dick Stille	50
Patrick Rogers	1 00	Levi Miller	50
Michael Rogers	1 00	Willie Young	50
Joshua Thompson, slave	75	Bond's Horse and Cart	1 12½
Clayton Cannon, slave	90	Womble's Horse and cart	1 25
Stepney Cannon, slave	50	Sam Hutchins, slave	40
John Noyes, slave	50	Jesse Wigs	50
John M'Pheeters, slave	50	George Andrews, slave	75
Simon M'Pheeters, slave	50	Sampson Cotton, slave	50
Jesse Jenkins	50	One horse used at Quarry,	
Rowland Jones	50	cost	82 50
Prince Craven	50	One Yoke Oxen do.	40 00
Sara Coman, slave	50	Ditto. do.	45 00
Ned Dunston	50		

LIST OF CARPENTERS AND BLACKSMITHS

Employed at the State Capitol, Raleigh.

Carpenters' Names.	Wages per day.	Blacksmiths' Names.	Wages per day.
Anderson Nicholson,	1 50	Nathan Hart,	2 50
Robert Nicholson,	50	Silas Burns,	2 00
John J. Briggs,	1 25	Silas Barr,	2 00
Thomas Briggs,	25	Robert Murray,	3 00

Page 7

Let's ask some questions about this document and pages 6 & 7.

- Question: What types of work does it show enslaved people were involved in?
- Answer: It shows them as general "laborers" or "quarrymen."

- Question: What do you notice about the wages that each person is paid?
- Answer: With few exceptions, enslaved men were compensated around \$.50 or less per day. The day's use of several horses and carts were valued more highly - at \$1.25 each.

- Question: Did enslaved people keep the earnings they made?
- Answer: Enslaved men were not allowed to pocket their earnings. Receipts in the State Archives of North Carolina show us that their enslavers kept their compensation, as the enslavers were renting the labor of their enslaved people to the Capitol project.

- Question: Let's think about some of the individuals listed here. Several have surnames associated with prominent white Raleigh families, including Haywood, Blount, Hunter, and Saunders. Why would they have these last names?
- Answer: It is possible that white members of these families owned enslaved people and were renting their labor to the commissioners of the Capitol's construction project.
- So to review, this document shows us the following things:
 - Lists the full names of workers on the Capitol's construction project
 - Shows who on the project was an enslaved person
 - Specifies what type of work enslaved individuals were doing - as general "laborers" or "quarrymen"
 - Shows how their labor was valued by the leaders of this project
 - With few exceptions, enslaved men were compensated around \$.50 or less per day.
 - The day's use of several horses and carts were valued more highly - at \$1.25 each.
 - Typically enslaved people were not allowed to pocket their earnings.


Let's look at one individual and go through the search for him in other primary sources!

Glasgow Saunders was listed on the 1834 Report of the Commissioners appointed to superintend the re-building of the State Capitol. The report shows us that Glasgow was highly paid for this project; his labor was valued at \$1.00 per day, double what the labor of most of the enslaved men generated. Listed below Glasgow are two other names: Peter Saunders and Washington Saunders. These two were compensated significantly less than Glasgow and the other enslaved men, only 15 and 20 cents respectively.

So we ask...

- Who were these two individuals?
- Were they related to Glasgow?
- Were they his sons or his apprentices, perhaps both?
- Did Glasgow bring them onto the project to work with him?
- And who was Glasgow?

LIST OF LABORERS
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David Waitford	50	John Bell	50
Eli Greigson	50	Bailus Bell,	50
 Glasgow Saunders, slave,	1 00	Hugh Harp,	25
Peter Saunders, slave,	15	Warren Harp,	50
Washington Saunders, slave,	20	Willis Dunston,	50
Nat Peck, slave,	40	Billy Dunston,	50
Washington Hill, slave,	30	Robert Cooke, slave,	50

This image shows Glasgow, Peter, and Washington on the 1834 list.

Glasgow Saunders was likely enslaved by Romulus Saunders during the 1830s (there are some indications that Glasgow might have been enslaved by someone else in Raleigh during the early 1800s, but we can't be certain about this). We know Romulus Saunders was involved in the Capitol's construction project because of other documents found in the State Archives of North Carolina.

Raleigh 27 July 1837
L No 30.
Glasgow Saunders
19.50
15.00

34.50 \$ 34.50
Pay this
D. Paton

This receipt, found in the State Archives of North Carolina, from "27 July 1837" allocates \$34.50 compensation for Glasgow's labor and is signed by David Paton, the chief architect of the Capitol project. It tells us that Glasgow's enslaver was being compensated for his labor.

Cate Scott - Will oblige me by calling and
receipting for the wages of my hands at
the State House for the month of
Dec. 29-37
R M. Saunders

This receipt from the Capitol's construction (also located in the State Archives of North Carolina) shows Romulus Saunders being compensated for the labor of people that he enslaved who were working on the Capitol project. The receipt states, "[...] Scott - will oblige me by calling and receipting for the wages of my [...] at the State House for the month [...] December 29 37 R.M. Saunders."

