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The Transatlantic Slave Trade and American Slavery

Ellen Bucy

The World Wide Web has become an incredibly useful resource in classrooms across America. Search engines such as <http://www.google.com> or “Ask Jeeves” at <http://ask.com> have grown in popularity for students and teachers looking for the population of China, for example, or the story of the discovery of America, or even the languages spoken in New Guinea. The web, however, sometimes provides us with too much information. Typing in “slavery”, returns three hundred web sites that we must sift through, one by one, to find a web site with the information we need. A search for “slavery” also returns information ranging from slavery in ancient Egypt to slavery in America to lyrics to songs containing the word slavery. Even when we stumble upon a good web site, it is often hard to know whether its information is credible.

In my quest for good web sites on colonial slavery, I was interested to find that web sites deal with the Emancipation Proclamation and the years following the Civil War more frequently than with the topic of slavery itself. In other words, the web sites tend to focus on the positive parts of African American history rather than the parts that we, as Americans, would rather forget. Nevertheless, there are a number of excellent web resources specifically covering the Atlantic Slave Trade and the portion of slavery exclusively related to the American colonies.

A number of sites offer compilations of slave narratives. Professor Steven Mintz of the University of Houston edited and organized a collection titled “Excerpts from Slave Narratives” at <http://vi.uh.edu/pages/mintz/primary.htm>. The narratives are divided into sections, such as “Enslavement,” “Conditions of Life,” “Family,” and “Emancipation,” each detailing an aspect of slave life from the perspectives of slaves, slave traders, and physicians.

Both the University of Virginia, at <http://xroads.virginia.edu/~Hyper/wpa/wpahome.html>, and the Library of Congress’s

American Memory page, “Born in Slavery” at <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/snhtml/snhome.html>, feature interviews with former slaves collected by journalists and writers from the Works Progress Administration from 1936-1938. Visitors to the Library of Congress’s site can search for narratives by keyword, narrator, or state. Both sites offer photographs of interviewees, and the University of Virginia site offers links to sound clips of some of the interviews. Both sites transcribe the interviews phonetically, so some narratives are difficult to read with the written dialects.

At <http://www.brycchancarey.com/equiano>, Brycchan Carey, a lecturer in English Literature at Kingston University in the United Kingdom, created a page specifically about Olaudah Equiano, whose life is chronicled in his autobiography, *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano* (1791). The site includes a biography of Equiano, a map of his travels, a bibliography of his studies, excerpts from the autobiography, portraits of Equiano, and related web sites and books. Carey’s home page, <http://www.brycchancarey.com/index.htm> offers a more comprehensive list of links to information about slavery, abolition, and emancipation. The link, “Slavery, Abolition, and Emancipation” leads to more resources on slavery, including books and poems on slavery and information on the lives of two other slaves, Ignatius Sancho and Quobna Ottobah Cugoana.

PBS’s site, “Africans in America,” at <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/home.html>, is based on a series of the same name which first aired in October 1998. The site covers 1450 to 1865—from the beginning of slave migration across the Middle Passage to the abolition movement. It is chronologically divided into four parts: “The Terrible Transformation” (1450-1750), “Revolution” (1750-1805), “Brotherly Love” (1791-1831), and “Judgment Day” (1831-1865). Each part includes a narrative section, a resource bank of people, events, historical documents,

and interviews with modern-day historians, and a teacher's guide, including questions and activities, lesson plans, and a list of related books and web sites.

A few web sites offer collections of original documents related to slavery. The "African American Odyssey" web site, another part of the Library of Congress's American Memory pages, specifically looks at the "peculiar" institution of slavery through paintings and original documents. This site is available at <<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/aaohhtml/exhibit/aopart1.html>>. The Library of Congress divided the site into two parts: Part 1, "The Atlantic Slave Trade" and "Liberation Strategies"; and Part 2, "Flights to Freedom," "The Amistad Mutiny," and "Other Liberation Strategies."

"Third Person, First Person: Slave Voices from the Special Collections Library," at <<http://scriptorium.lib.duke.edu/slavery/>>, is an online version of an exhibit by the same name held at Duke University's Perkins Library from November to December 1995. Included in the online exhibit are maps, letters, and business transactions, many from the William Gibbons Jr. Collection and the Robert Carter papers.

The University of Virginia features Thomas Costa's web site titled, "Virginia Runaways: Runaway Slave Advertisements from 18th Century Virginia Newspapers" at <<http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/subjects/runaways/1730s.html>>. The web site contains hundreds of images of advertisements of runaway slaves in Virginia Newspapers from 1736-1776. The images are very well catalogued and organized, making it easy to browse through the collection. Matthew Mason's and Rita G. Koman's lesson plan (see pages xx-xx) features three of these advertisements.

Created by The Virginia Foundation for the Humanities and The Digital Media Lab at the University of Virginia Library, "The Atlantic Slave Trade and Slave Life in the Americas: A Visual Record", at <<http://gropius.lib.virginia.edu/Slavery>>, is an excellent resource for images. The site includes maps of Africa, the New World, and slave trade routes, as well as photographs and paintings from the Atlantic Crossing to Emancipation.

Gwendolyn Midlo Hall, a prominent scholar, created a web site for her database of genealogical records for Louisiana slaves. The site, available at <<http://www.ibiblio.org/laslave/>>, features images of various documents that can enhance classroom discussions.

Finally, many web sites are created especially for students and teachers, providing interactive student activities and resources and lesson plans for teachers. The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History web site has a teacher's module specifically covering slavery at <<http://www.gilderlehrman.org/teachers/modules7.html>>. Included in the slavery module are a list of primary sources with discussion questions, fact sheets, time lines, lesson plans, maps, resources, and an expansive image bank focused on the Transatlantic Slave Trade.

"Breaking the Silence: Learning about the Transatlantic Slave Trade" provides an excellent resource on the Middle Passage <<http://www.antislavery.org/breakingthesilence/main/04/index/shtml>>. A special link called "Teaching the Middle Passage" is divided into sections including "Africa Before the Transatlantic Slave Trade," "Economics and Organization," and "Life on the Plantations." Each section includes downloadable lesson plans and activities (requires Adobe Acrobat®) as well as "pick and mix" resources such as poems or speeches.

The Discovery Channel also sponsors a web site for students and teachers studying slavery at <<http://school.discovery.com/schooladventures/slavery/>>. "Understanding Slavery" contains narratives titled "A World of Slavery" and "Slavery on Three Continents" and an interactive activity called "Witness a Slave Auction," through which children can learn about all aspects of the slave trading process.

The Colonial Williamsburg History web page, at <<http://www.history.org/History/index.cfm>>, provides a great deal of information and activities on colonial life. The page contains a Teacher Resources section with lesson plans, resources, information about student visits, and some interactive activities. Also, the History Explorer link offers opportunities to "meet the people" of the Williamsburg plantation, including a special section on African Americans. The Electronic Field Trips provide interactive opportunities for students to navigate through Colonial Williamsburg on their own. (Schools must register and pay a fee for Electronic Field Trips programs. For more information go to <<http://www.history.org/history/teaching/eft.cfm>>.)

The Jamestown Virtual Colony web site, at <<http://curry.edschool.virginia.edu/socialstudies/projects/jvc/>>, contains links to lesson plans for teachers, a series of WebQuests about Jamestown called "JamesQuest," as well as teacher resources. A link to the Organization of Society's home page leads to a number of lesson plans on various aspects of life in Jamestown, including a plan for teaching "Indentured Servitude and Slavery."

For those not accustomed to "surfing," finding information on the web can be difficult and burdensome. But with all the information floating from computer to computer, the web can also be an invaluable resource. These web sites are excellent starting points for teachers of slavery. Most of them have links to more sites and more information. The resources are out there; it is just a matter of finding them □.

Ellen Bucy is a senior at Indiana University studying english, journalism, and art history, and serves as an editorial intern with the OAH Magazine this semester.