

AFRICAN AMERICAN HISTORY

Reader and Workbook

Richard Beck

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I would like to extend a note
of thanks to my wife Carol,
whose patience saw me
through this project, and
to Mae Zlotnik, for her help
and support when it was needed.



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Lesson 1. Slavery in the Old World

1. **Vocabulary:** New words found in the reading section

- A. prehistoric
- B. inhabitants
- C. customs
- D. feudalism
- E. serf
- F. debtor

2. **Sentences:** New words used in sentences

- A. Prehistoric people traveled from place to place and did not keep a record of their lives.
- B. The inhabitants of ancient cities were both people who were free and slaves.
- C. The people living in a place together usually have similar customs.
- D. Feudalism was the social organization found in Europe during the Middle Ages.
- E. A serf was bound to the land and came with the land when it was sold.
- F. Debtors, criminals, and abandoned children were often made slaves.

3. **Important Ideas:** As you read this selection, look for the following information.

- A. Slavery has been a part of civilization since humans first learned to plant crops and began living in one place.
- B. When slavery first began, it was not associated with particular races or groups of people.
- C. While slavery was often cruel, the lives of the slaves were protected by laws and customs.

4. **The Reading Selection:** Slavery in the Old World

While many people in the U.S. think of African-Americans when they hear the word *slavery*, human bondage has existed for thousands of years. Almost every group of people of every color has known slavery at some time in their history. However, slavery developed differently in various times and places. Prehistoric people who moved from place to place hunting, fishing, and gathering food had no need for slaves. Once people became settled and began to harvest crops and produce food, the extra labor provided by slaves became useful.

The first slaves were captured during periods of war between various tribes. When foreign enemies were conquered, the inhabitants of the captured cities were often made slaves. Slave owners did not consider slaves to be inferior because they knew that if a battle was lost, they too might become slaves. Later in history, debtors, criminals, and even abandoned children were made slaves. The people in ancient Egypt, Africa, Greece, and Rome were both slaves and slaveholders.

Over a long period of time, various laws and customs were established dealing with slavery and the lives of slaves. Although slaves were often branded and made to wear special costumes, the life of a slave was often not much harder than that of a free farmer. Masters were limited in their rights of life

and death over a slave, and slaves could on occasion own property and purchase their freedom. Since the rich owners of the slaves preferred a life of leisure, the slaves who did most of the work became skilled craftsmen, teachers, and even minor officials. The trade in slaves, and the surplus products produced by the slaves, soon played an important role in the economy of these ancient places.

In the Roman Empire slavery was cruel, and there were many slave revolts. Slaves were among the first Christians, eagerly accepting the idea of a better life after death. In the later Roman Empire, many Christians owned slaves; the Bible did not prohibit a person owning other people. It was a frequent practice to free at least some of one's slaves in one's will.

With the fall of the Roman Empire and the safety it had offered, many people sought the protection of landowners, who were the wealthiest citizens of the time, since most people did not own land. Under this system, known as feudalism, a person became a serf. He was bound to the land, and in return for his labor, he was given protection and some rights by the landowner. He could not be sold as personal property or his family broken up, but if the land was sold, the serfs were sold with the land.

With the growth of cities during the Middle Ages, the need for slaves declined, although some slavery was still practiced. Christians made slaves of Jewish and Muslim people, while Christians became slaves where they were not in control. In the fifteenth century, with the growth of trade to the New World and the European rediscovery of West Africa, slavery of Africans increased on a large scale.

5. Review: Assessing what you have read

A. Multiple Choice: Choose the letter that best completes each statement.

- ___ 1. This selection as a whole tells us that:
- a) only Africans became slaves
 - b) slavery has existed as long as people have been on earth
 - c) most groups of people have known slavery at some time in their history
 - d) slaves were always treated badly
- ___ 2. There was a need for slaves when people:
- a) traveled from place to place
 - b) gathered their food from nature
 - c) spent their time hunting and fishing
 - d) began to plant crops and live in one place
- ___ 3. In ancient days slaves:
- a) were equal to their owners
 - b) could often buy their freedom
 - c) were not allowed to become skilled craftsmen
 - d) had no rights under the law
- ___ 4. In the Roman Empire:
- a) slaves were never allowed to become Christians
 - b) the Bible made slavery a sin
 - c) some Christians owned slaves
 - d) slavery was abolished

- ___ 5. By the Middle Ages in Europe:
 - a) slavery remained the same
 - b) slavery increased
 - c) feudalism began to replace the slave system
 - d) many people still owned individuals as personal property
- ___ 6. By the Middle Ages people could still become slaves because of their:
 - a) religion
 - b) color
 - c) race
 - d) birthplace
- ___ 7. After people began to settle in the New World, most of the slaves were:
 - a) Native Americans
 - b) Africans
 - c) Asians
 - d) Christians
- ___ 8. Slavery increased greatly in the fifteenth century when:
 - a) prehistoric people began to harvest crops
 - b) Europe rediscovered West Africa
 - c) Greece and Rome went to war
 - d) the Middle Ages began

B. True-False: On the basis of the reading selection, determine whether the following statements are true or false.

- ___ 1. The first slaves were captured during periods of war between various tribes.
- ___ 2. Debtors, criminals, and abandoned children were made slaves.
- ___ 3. Slavery and the slave trade did not play an important role in the economy of ancient places.
- ___ 4. Slavery in ancient Greece was cruel.
- ___ 5. A serf had no rights under the system of feudalism.
- ___ 6. The inhabitants of ancient cities were both slaves and free people.
- ___ 7. Slavery has existed since the days of prehistoric people.
- ___ 8. The life of a slave was much harder than that of a free farmer.
- ___ 9. Only Africans have been slaves throughout human history.

C. Vocabulary Check: Match each vocabulary word to its definition.

- | | |
|--------------------|---|
| ___ 1. prehistoric | a) the people living in a particular place |
| ___ 2. customs | b) the social system of Europe in the Middle Ages |
| ___ 3. feudalism | c) the common habits of a group of people |
| ___ 4. serf | d) before the time of written records |
| ___ 5. inhabitants | e) a person bound to the land |
| ___ 6. debtor | f) a person who owes money |

D. Essay Topics

1. Describe how the life of a slave was often not much harder than that of a free farmer.
2. Explain the various reasons throughout history why one group of people enslaved another group of people.

Lesson 2. The African Heritage

1. Vocabulary: New words found in the reading section

- A. nomadic
- B. pharaoh
- C. migrating
- D. civilization

2. Sentences: New words used in sentences

- A. Camels are used by nomadic people who live and move around in the desert.
- B. The pharaoh in Egypt was the ruler of his country.
- C. Migrating people bring their ideas and customs to new places.
- D. The people in Egypt formed a great civilization.

3. Important Ideas: As you read this selection, look for the following information.

- A. History and geography have kept us from knowing much about Africa until recently.
- B. Africa is the birthplace of humankind and of early great civilizations.
- C. Black people of Africa played an important role in the development and spread of Egyptian civilization.

4. The Reading Selection: The African Heritage

For a long time Africa was known as the “dark continent” because Europeans did not know much about its land or people. Surrounded by the Atlantic Ocean on the west, the Indian Ocean on the east, and the Sahara Desert on the north, its history and culture long remained a mystery to outsiders. Climate, threat of disease, and geography protected the area south of the Sahara for thousands of years. Only recently has Africa begun to yield the secrets of its ancient civilizations. Our knowledge today is still not complete, but many old and incorrect ideas concerning this continent are changing.

Africa is considered to be the birthplace of humankind. More than a million years ago, prehistoric people there gathered food, hunted, and fished. They were nomadic, moving whenever the food supply was low. They traveled through the Sahara area, which was once covered by great rivers and green fields.

Who were these people who moved north from Africa, and what did they look like? There is no clear answer to that question. The idea of race is a modern one that did not exist for the ancients. Scientists agree that the concept of race has no biological meaning, with blacks and whites sharing the majority of their physical characteristics with each another. The ancient people of Africa, Asia, and the Mediterranean lived and worked together in the great river valleys in Egypt and Mesopotamia, and it was a mixed population that gradually got darker the further south you went.

The Sahara area became a desert about 6,000 years ago, and the people who remained in Egypt formed a great civilization. Egypt is called “the gift of the Nile” because the Nile River, which runs through it from south to north, overflows its banks every year and deposits rich soil on the land. Along the river in

about 4000 B.C., people began to plant and harvest crops and produce surplus food. They learned how to make paper from reeds and to fashion leather, jewelry, pottery, and metal. They invented a calendar to keep a record of the seasons in order to plant and harvest crops. Counting surplus food led to writing, and dividing the population into various special groups led to the development of a strong central government. At the top was the pharaoh, a king whom the people thought of as a god. There is evidence that black people played an important role in all parts of Egyptian civilization. Using color in their paintings, the Egyptians portrayed themselves as dark-skinned, while foreigners were painted white. At various times it is clear that blacks were slaves, craftsmen, government officials, priests, and rulers.

The Egyptians looked southward for conquest. Their expeditions took them up the Nile River and along the coast of the Red Sea to Kush. Egyptian traders and soldiers went into the “land of the burnt faces” that was inhabited by black people. The Egyptians brought with them gold and slaves and gave their ideas and inventions to the people of Kush. In the eighth century B.C., the people of Kush, also called Nubians, were strong enough to gain control of Egypt and to rule the entire area. The Kushites developed a system of writing in which the letters could be connected, and they became skilled in the making of iron tools and weapons. When the Egyptians were overthrown by the Romans, it was the people of Kush, migrating south and west, who carried many of the ideas of the Nile River civilization to the people of southern and western Africa. Eventually, our ancestors established populations throughout the world.

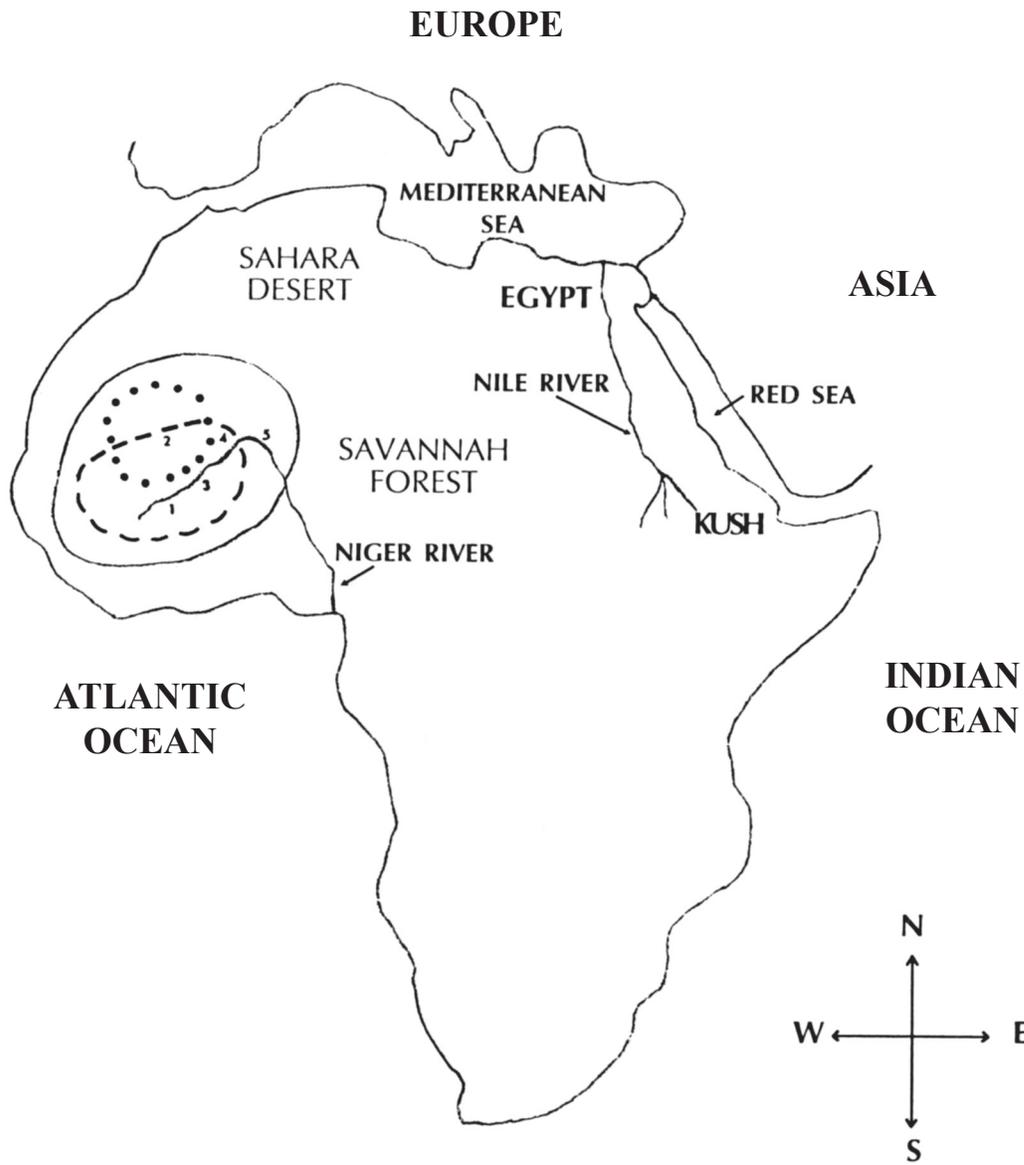
Case Study: Early Humans in Africa

A. “The many new discoveries [that] have been made...make it possible to state without doubt that man...evolved in Africa.... Sometime in the distant past, the ancestors of man split off from the ancestors of the great apes on the evolutionary ‘tree.’ Recent evidence about this separation dates back to about 20 to 25 million years ago.... The next evidence in the story of man’s evolution [dates] between 12 and 14 million years ago. Once again the evidence comes from East Africa.... Associated with the remains of this fossil ancestor, we found a stone that had clearly been carried to the spot and later buried under some five hundred feet of soil and rock. It had been used to batter bones and break them open.... There is a big gap between this point in the story and next discoveries. They also come from Kenya.... Associated with these fossils were numbers of primitive stone tools.... Thus the making of stone tools for chopping and cutting purposes can now be shown to extend back to more than 2.5 million years in Africa.” (from Evelyn Jones Rich and Immanuel Wallerstein, *Africa: Tradition and Change*)

B. “In Africa during the period from about 100,000 to about 30,000 years ago, the discovery of the use of fire, the invention of the handle or two-piece tool, and the beginning of navigation, and probably of fishing, revolutionized life.... About 50,000 years ago...men largely abandoned the African grasslands and moved near the rivers.... African rivers...are rich in fish, but they are less attractive to wade in, because of the abundant crocodiles. So for fishing, some form of raft or boat was desirable, and...these people already had a form of water transportation. To catch fish they had spears.... So by...10,000 or earlier...man in Africa could depend on a reasonable food supply.” (from Oliver Davies, “Life and Development Among the Earliest Humans in Africa in Tarikh,” Vol. I, No. 3, 1966)

C. “Until about 5,000 B.C. the entire continent of Africa still lingered in the Stone Age.... None of its inhabitants practiced any agriculture whatsoever or possessed any domestic animal, save perhaps the dog.... Ancient Egypt acquired agriculture and domestic animals from Southwest Asia.... Agriculture was independently developed at about the same time by the Negroes of West Africa. This was, moreover, a genuine invention, not a borrowing from another people.” (from George Peter Murdock, *Africa: Its Peoples and Their Culture History*)

Early African Kingdoms



Cities

1. Niani
2. Koumbi
3. Jenne
4. Timbuctu
5. Gao

Empires

- Ghana
- Mali — — —
- Songhay _____

5. Review: Assessing what you have read

A. Multiple Choice: Choose the letter that best completes each statement.

- ___ 1. This selection as a whole tells us that:
- a) Africa has never had great civilizations
 - b) the people of Africa have played an important role in world history
 - c) Africa is an easy place to travel in
 - d) Africans never learned the art of writing
- ___ 2. Africa was long known as the “dark continent” because:
- a) its people were dark-skinned
 - b) the soil was a rich black color
 - c) the forest permitted no light to enter
 - d) Europeans were ignorant about the land and people
- ___ 3. Humankind had its beginning in:
- a) the Mediterranean area
 - b) the Middle East
 - c) Africa
 - d) America
- ___ 4. Egypt is called “the gift of the Nile” because:
- a) the river empties into the Mediterranean Sea
 - b) it is a long river
 - c) the river runs through the desert
 - d) the river floods and deposits rich soil along its banks every year
- ___ 5. Which of the following was not developed by the ancient Egyptians:
- a) jewelry, pottery, and glass
 - b) paper from reeds
 - c) a system of writing
 - d) a strong central government
- ___ 6. Black people from Kush:
- a) always ruled as pharaohs in Egypt
 - b) conquered Egypt from the Romans
 - c) carried Egyptian civilization to other parts of Africa
 - d) were only slaves in Egypt

B. Map Study: Using the information on the map, answer the following statements as true or false.

- ___ 1. A person traveling up the Nile River from Egypt to Kush would be heading south.
- ___ 2. The Sahara Desert is in the southern part of Africa.
- ___ 3. The Indian Ocean is located on the west coast of Africa.
- ___ 4. Kush is located by the Mediterranean Sea.
- ___ 5. Kush is located south of Egypt.

C. Vocabulary Check: Match each vocabulary word to its definition.

- | | |
|---------------------|--|
| ___ 1. nomadic | a) a place with government and culture |
| ___ 2. pharaoh | b) traveling to a specific place |
| ___ 3. migrating | c) wandering around |
| ___ 4. civilization | d) ruler |

D. Essay Topics

1. Explain why Europeans were not familiar with African culture and history until fairly recently.
2. In what ways do we know about the lives of people who did not leave written records?