“Africans in Colonial Florida”

Summary

Students will learn about the contributions made by enslaved and free Africans to the development of colonial Florida under Spanish and British rulers. They will also discuss the differences in attitudes toward slavery among the Spanish and the British. Finally, students will then create a timeline. Students should know after completion of this lesson that slavery was, and still is, a horrible wrong inflicted on many different groups of people in the past. With that said, the institution of slavery in Spanish Florida was very different from the English view, which later became the view of the American South.

Objectives

1) Students will take notes on contributions made by free and enslaved Africans to the establishment of the Spanish colony of Florida;
2) Students will create a timeline detailing contributions of free and enslaved Africans to colonial Florida from the 1500s to 1784;
3) Students will compare and contrast Spanish attitudes toward slavery and Africans with attitudes of the British, who controlled Florida from 1763-1784.

U.S. History Event

This lesson concentrates on the contributions made by Africans, both free and bonded, in the settlement of Florida to 1784. Students should be able to understand the differences in the treatment of slaves and the tasks assigned to them between the Spanish and the British. They should also be able to describe the reasons why such attitudes were taken.

Grade Level

Middle school or high school

Materials

Each student will need a copy of Graphic Organizer #1 (Timeline), the timeline information sheet, and colored pencils (for process assignment). You will need transparencies for notes and Pictures A-C with enclosed questions found after Teacher’s Guide, an overhead projector with a screen, and transparency pens for class notes.

Lesson Time

This lesson could be completed in a 45-minute class period. If you are on a block schedule, you may allow students the opportunity to begin their processing assignment.
Lesson

Lesson Procedures

The following procedures for this lesson may be adapted to fit individual classroom needs. Please be sure to look over all materials before implementation due to the sensitive nature of the topic. Students should know after completion of this lesson that slavery was, and still is, a horrible wrong inflicted on many different groups of people in the past. With that said, the institution of slavery in Spanish Florida was very different from the English view, which later became the view of the American South.

1.) Begin the lesson with one of the following preview activities:

A) Write the word “Slavery” on the front board in large letters, or on an overhead transparency. As students walk into the room, have them write the word “slavery” and what comes to mind. Have students share responses for a few minutes to open class. Create a “KWL” chart on the front board about slavery (master copy provided with this lesson). Have students fill in the “K” part with things they know about slavery already. Next, allow them to give some ideas about what they hope to find out about slavery under the “W” heading.

B) Make a transparency of Picture A-1-1 and show it to the class as they walk into the room. Have students describe it in writing. If time permits, allow students to make a quick sketch of the picture. Then lead a brief discussion of the picture. Some questions to ask could include, “What do you see in this picture?” “What color are the people in the picture?” “How do these people seem to be reacting to their predicament?” “Did the people in the picture do anything to be put in the position they find themselves in?”

2.) Explain to students that they will now participate in a discovery dealing with the African experience in colonial Florida, from the era of exploration in the 1500s to the British territorial period ending in 1784. Students should keep in mind the reason why natives were not good candidates for forced labor (they died in great numbers due to exposure to European diseases), which resulted in Africans being imported into Florida. Students should also remember the reasons why Spanish attitudes toward slavery and freed Africans developed (colonial Spanish government needed laborers that wouldn’t run away and people who would stay and defend the new settlements from raiding parties; also, Catholicism deemed slavery a temporary condition).

3.) Students should be encouraged to take notes on this lesson in their notebook while actively engaging in class discussion. Use the Teacher’s Guide to highlight the main ideas of the lecture. Note: the information in the Teacher’s Guide is meant to serve as background information for you. It is not meant to be read as a script, but rather to be a source from which you can extract the most relevant points to teach your students, depending on what you believe is the most important and what should be emphasized in your class.

4.) While sharing the pertinent information on the topic with your students, show the pictures included with the information using a transparency and ask the questions provided (to make a transparency of a picture, click on the URL, then print the picture; next, make a copy on a transparency).

5.) Pass out the Timeline Information Sheet to each student. Students will fill in the blanks of the timeline information during class, then construct their own illustrated timeline.
**Picture A-1-1: Africans making the “Middle Passage”**

What do you see in this picture? Do you think any of these people chose to be on this boat? How do you think they feel? Do you think some of them may try to escape?


This is a picture of Africans who have probably been captured by other Africans from a different tribe and sold to white slave traders on the coast of Africa. From there, the newly-captured slaves are herded onto a boat in chains and begin the months-long journey to the Americas, called the Middle Passage. The slave traders packed the slaves tightly below deck, and in the case of very large shipments of human cargo, even above deck as well. The close conditions and lack of light, food, and water caused almost half of the slaves to die. Other slaves attempted to escape by jumping overboard, believing that in death the waves would carry them back to Africa. Still others died by trying to fight the ship’s crew.

**The Exploration of Florida (early 1500s-1565):** Historians cannot agree on who was the first to “discover” Florida. Native American tribes, such as the Calusa, the Tocobaga, the Apalachee, the Timucuan, and the Tequesta had occupied the peninsula for thousands of years before Florida’s original tourists appeared from the horizon (the Seminoles, Indians escaping from white settlement in Georgia and Alabama, did not appear in Florida until two hundred years after the first Europeans arrived). But recent historical data leaves more questions than answers about who was next.

While there is some speculation that other explorers may have “found” Florida just after Columbus first traveled to the New World in 1492, Juan Ponce de Leon gets most credit for discovering Florida in 1513 because he was on an official exploratory voyage for Spain and actually recorded his find.

While scholars argue over who can claim the title of Florida’s official discoverer, one group of people who proved very significant in the early days of exploration are almost never mentioned: Africans. Over five hundreds years after the first Africans arrived in the New World, however, not much is known about their experience. Below are several accounts in which Africans, originally brought from Africa as slaves, contributed to the establishment of Spain’s New World empire.

- The original plan of the Spanish conquistadores was to enslave Native Americans in the work of establishing empire. This failed because the native population was dying at a rapid pace due to exposure to European illnesses. The solution was to import more slaves from Africa. The first slaves in the New World arrived in 1501 in the Spanish settlement of Santo Domingo (present-day Dominican Republic). Many more followed in the next few years. However, even though slavery was a terrible institution, many African slaves were given opportunities to work themselves out of slavery.

- Most African slaves were taken in the western part of Africa. There, many tribes were skillful with metals, masonry, and carpentry. These slaves proved very valuable in the New World. However, since most of the surrounding area was wilderness, it was very easy for slaves to escape and find refuge with the local natives. This proved very costly. To entice them to stay, the Spanish authorities adopted a very lenient policy towards their slaves.
Spanish attitudes about slavery were heavily influenced by the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church. These views were very different from attitudes forming about slavery in the rest of Europe at the time, especially in Protestant England. The Spanish believed that all people, slave or free, had a soul that was redeemable. Further, they thought that slavery was an unnatural condition, and by no means a permanent situation. Slaves were merely ordinary people caught in an unfortunate situation and whose humanity ought to be recognized. Furthermore, any slave accused of a crime received a trial equal to that of a Spanish citizen. The Church and the Spanish Crown encouraged the freeing of bonded servants. Any slave could be freed as long as they proved their worth to society and professed the Catholic faith. The beating of slaves was frowned upon. Freed Africans were even allowed to intermarry with “pure” Spaniards. It is important to realize that none of this is to say that Africans were treated equally, but there was a significant free black caste that evolved under the Spanish government in the New World.

Very quickly, slaves and freed Africans proved their worth to the establishment of Spain’s empire. Juan Garrido and Juan Gonzalez, two free Africans, accompanied Juan Ponce de Leon on his expeditions to Florida in 1513 and 1521. Garrido was especially valuable as a speaker of native languages and, upon Ponce de Leon’s death, accompanied Hernando Cortes in his conquest of the Aztecs in Mexico.

Lucas Vazquez de Ayllon departed Hispaniola in 1526 with 600 Spanish men, women, and children, as well as the first contingent of African slaves to set foot in the present-day United States. They established the settlement of San Miguel de Guadalupe near Sapelo Sound in Georgia. Some of the slaves were skilled artisans and household servants, but others were undoubtedly used to do the backbreaking work of clearing the wilderness. Disease, starvation, fighting with the local Guale Indians, and Ayllon’s death undermined the expedition, and the survivors fled back to Hispaniola. But not before several slaves who had escaped took up residence with the Guale, becoming the first “maroons” (from the Spanish “cimarrones,” or “runaways”) in the United States. The failed settlement of San Miguel de Guadalupe would become more famously known as the first European settlement in what would later become known as the United States.

In 1528, Panfilo de Narvaez lands somewhere near what is now Tampa Bay with six hundred Spaniards and an unknown total of Africans in an attempt to establish a settlement in Florida. Among the Africans was a slave named Estevanico. He had been captured in Morocco in 1513 and brought to the New World by his master, Andres Dorantes. The settlement was quickly hit by hurricanes and supply losses. The entire enterprise failed miserably. Four survivors spent the next eight years wandering along the Gulf Coast, eventually reaching Mexico and the Pacific Ocean. One of the survivors was Estevanico. He had helped to ensure the survival of his party by quickly learning the tongues of the native Americans they encountered and negotiating for food and other materials.

Hernando de Soto outfitted ships in Spain in 1539 for an expedition to explore Florida and the southeastern United States. Accompanying de Soto were free and bonded Africans. As with many other expeditions, this too resulted in failure. Bernaldo, a slave of Pedro Calderon, one of de Soto’s captains, survived the many bloody battles with local natives, severe hunger, long marches through mosquito and snake-infested swamps, and a voyage down the Mississippi River in hastily-built boats. After four years, Bernaldo and the other survivors had traveled six hundred miles and through ten of the United States. They finally made it to Mexico City in 1543 “dressed only in animal skins.”

It should be noted that Africans and Native Americans were not the only people enslaved by the Spanish in the New World. Criminals were often sentenced to a number of years as slaves, working alongside the afore-mentioned groups. Other groups who were targeted were Arabs, North Africans, Mediterraneans, Greeks, Portuguese, and gypsies.
• Since de Narvaez’s failed attempt at Tampa Bay, a few other efforts were made by Spain to colonize Florida. All met with the same result: failure. Florida possessed no great mineral wealth or native civilizations to justify its settlement. What it did possess was a strategic location. Spain’s treasure-laden fleets of galleons had to pass Florida from the Caribbean Sea on the way home. Also, Spain’s colonies in South America, Mexico, and the Caribbean Basin were effectively defenseless against attacks from pirates or privateers. For these reasons, Florida was of vital interest to the Spanish royal government. With the establishment of a French Protestant base near present-day Jacksonville in 1562, Spain renewed its efforts. In 1565, Pedro Menendez de Aviles, commander of the entire Spanish fleet in the Caribbean, quickly smashed the French fort, killed the French settlers (unless they professed to be Catholic), and established a new settlement just below the mouth of what the French had named the “River of Dolphins.” This river was renamed the St. John’s, and the settlement was named Saint Augustine.


What do you see in this picture? Do you think that a lot of work was required to build this structure? Who do you think was involved in the construction of this fort? Do you think that Africans were used in its construction? Do you think that they would have felt that they were contributing to the establishment of the Spanish Empire in Florida?

Florida in the First Spanish Colonial Era (1565-1763): With the establishment of St. Augustine, the first permanent European settlement in what would later become the United States, over 600 Spaniards and 50 African slaves settled in the area. There were also repeated attempts to establish a settlement in western Florida, notably near present-day Pensacola. These efforts consistently failed because of severe weather, Indian attacks, and a lack of organization on the part of the Spanish government. In the early 1700s, Pensacola was finally established, but as a colonial outpost, it remained small and isolated until decades after Florida became an American territory in 1821. And while Pensacola’s population did grow exponentially prior to the American Civil War, its slave population did not. But because of its direct Spanish influence, West Florida held the same attitudes toward slaves and slavery as was found in East Florida later.

Things were not easy for any of the settlers in the new community of Saint Augustine. For one thing, English privateers, also known as “sea dogs,” like Sir Francis Drake constantly attacked the Spanish fleet traveling north along Florida’s coast in search of loot. These privateers also raided Spanish settlements in the Caribbean and along the Florida coast. Also, the same diseases that were responsible for killing several hundred thousand natives in Florida proved fatal for many Africans in St. Augustine. By 1618, there were only eleven slaves left in the settlement. The Spanish colonial government in St. Augustine imported hundreds of slaves as a result for the remainder of the seventeenth century.

Holding on to that investment caused a new set of problems. With the continued decimation of the native populations in the interior of Florida, the peninsula was almost deserted except for the Spanish stronghold south of the entrance to the St. John’s River. This vast unclaimed wilderness proved a tempting destination for many slaves. A great number escaped into the wilds of Florida, which resulted in a labor shortage in the new colony. More important to the colonial government may have been the loss of potential defenders of St. Augustine against British invaders. So steps were taken by the Spanish authorities to ease some restrictions on African slaves for two reasons; Spain needed the manpower to develop St. Augustine quickly, and St. Augustine needed military defenders to protect their tenuous foothold on the Atlantic coast. As a result, slaves were given opportunities to work on religious holidays for money, performing tasks ranging from clearing land to metalwork and masonry. Free and enslaved blacks helped to build the Castillo de San Marcos, the city’s sea walls, and other necessary structures. With the money earned with these extra jobs, they were able to buy themselves out of slavery, purchase land, and possibly own their own slaves. Another accommodation made for
the slaves’ benefit was the development of a task-oriented work system. Instead of slaves working from sunrise to sunset to maximize their efficiency, slaves were given quotas of work output everyday. Once that quota was reached, slaves were free to attend to their own affairs for the remainder of the day. Some fished and tended to individual gardens, while others hired themselves out for other jobs. And the workweek was reduced from six days a week to only five or five-and-a-half days.

Not to say that being a slave in Spanish Florida was rosy. Africans were still believed to be part of a “vile” race, and were often punished more severely for crimes than Spaniards were. Black women were denied the limosna, a portion of money given needy white women or widows. However, things could have been far worse for the slaves as well. In the new English colonies of Virginia, the Carolinas, and Georgia, African slaves were treated far more harshly. This was because of the added emphasis on race that the English placed on slavery. English slaveholders in the Carolinas, and later Georgia, believed that Africans were degraded members of a despised race, less than human, who God had placed on this planet to serve white men. The English also did not acknowledge the Spanish view in racial categories and social statuses for mixed offspring of Africans and whites. To the English, one was either white or black, with no in-between. Also, English settlers believed that slaves were considered property, not people. Hardly any slaves were freed because they weren’t given the opportunities that the Spanish slaves were given. Beatings were common, and many slaves in the English colonies died from exposure, disease, and hunger. For these reasons, many slaves in the Carolinas and later Georgia made the decision to escape south to Florida.

This enraged the English colonial governments. They already despised the Spanish for intermarrying with Africans. Now their workforce was leaving by the hundreds to brave the swamps of the South for a chance to make it to Florida. In 1683, in order to increase its own population in case of an attack by the English, the government in Florida decreed that any former English slave could live in Florida as a free person if they professed their faith in the Catholic religion. As a result, between 1683 and the 1730s, hundreds more slaves from English plantations in the South fled to Florida.

One such slave was Francisco Menendez. Captured in West Africa and held as a slave on a Carolina plantation before escaping across the St. Mary’s River to Florida, Menendez approached the Spanish government in 1738. With the population of free blacks in St. Augustine reaching over 100, Menendez asked for and received permission to build the first incorporated black community in North America. The Spanish government understood the need to placate their growing population of free blacks in order to make them eager to defend St. Augustine from English attackers. So Gracia Real de Santa Teresa de Mose, more commonly known as Fort Mose, was established two miles north of St. Augustine. It had 38 households of men, women, and children. The people of Mose lived on wild turkey, deer, oysters, fish, turtles, sea fowl, and vegetables. They made their homes from the hardwood forests surrounding the areas, and even built a small Catholic church. The walls of the fort enclosing the village at Mose were made of dirt and woven palmetto fronds.

In 1740, the English raided Fort Mose and several other communities on the St. John’s River in response to the Spanish government’s decision to offer freedom to Africans who had fled south to Florida. The black settlers fled to the Castillo de San Marcos. English forces occupied Fort Mose for a few months before being driven out by a joint force of black and Spanish soldiers led by Francisco Menendez, who then petitioned the Spanish king for the rank of captain and the salary that went with the title.
What do you see in this picture? Why is everything written in English? Why has Florida been broken into large pieces? What do the heavy dark lines represent? Do you think that it would be difficult to draw a map of something that had not been completely explored and settled?

Picture from [http://www.keyhistory.org/flbrmap1763.jpg](http://www.keyhistory.org/flbrmap1763.jpg)

Florida in the English Colonial Period (1763-1784): In 1763 the English were finally able to accomplish through diplomacy what they had been unable to do militarily in the previous century: gain Florida as a territory. They gained was remarkably vacant, however. The total population of Florida in 1763 consisted of less than 4,000 Spanish subjects. The territory stretched from St. Augustine in the east to present-day Mobile, and south to the Keys.

The English first reorganized the territory into two parts: East Florida (all land east of the Apalachicola River to the Atlantic Ocean) and West Florida (all land west of the Apalachicola River to Mobile Bay). English authorities were eager to attract new settlers to occupy and defend their new possession. While West Florida remained little unchanged from the first Spanish colonial period and could still not boast of much in population, many settlers did come to East Florida from the Carolinas, Georgia, and England. More than a hundred estates were established along the St. John's River as far south as present-day New Smyrna. And with this growth came an increase in the English form of slavery. The former Spanish three-caste system of whites, free blacks, and slaves, with recognition of varying degrees of mixed blood was replaced by the English two-caste policy of whites and enslaved blacks.

Thousands of slaves were imported from Africa or brought south from other English colonies to toil in the large indigo and rice fields of these huge plantations. Later, corn, cotton, oranges, and sugarcane became major cash crops for the English colonists as well. Trees were cut down and turned into timber and naval supplies. All of this labor required slaves. Governor James Grant encouraged more slave imports, saying “Africans are the only people to do the work in warm climates.” Due to this influx of Africans into East Florida, by the later stages of the American Revolution in the 1780s, blacks outnumbered whites in East Florida by three to one. To differentiate between enslaved and free blacks, freed slaves were required to wear silver armbands that were engraved “free.”

Because of the harsh working conditions and even worse treatment by their white masters, many slaves attempted to escape into Florida’s wild interior. When successful, they joined with Florida’s newest native inhabitants, the Seminoles. These natives were former Creek Indians who had moved south from Georgia and Alabama to occupy lands vacated by the former native inhabitants and to escape mounting pressures from white settlers further north. In fact, the name Seminole comes from the English version of the Spanish word *cimarron*, or “runaway.” These natives welcomed escaped slaves as allies, allowing them to live in their own communities as long as the blacks provided the Seminoles with military service and annual tribute of crops.

In 1775, war erupted between England and thirteen of its North American colonies along the eastern seaboard of North America. In this American Revolution, East and West Florida, the 14th and 15th colonies, remained loyal to England. Georgia patriots took this as a reason to invade Florida and raid plantations in northeastern Florida. Plantation owners looked to their slaves and free blacks for military assistance. These Africans fought hard in the hope that freedom would be their reward. But despite their voluntary service and bravery, white leaders fearful of slave rebellions or attacks from Indians loyal to the patriot cause began to adopt more strict slave codes similar to those found in the Carolinas. Some blacks fought for the patriots at that point.
**Activities**

**K-W-L Chart - “Slavery”**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What do you <strong>Know</strong> about slavery in Florida?</th>
<th>What do you want to learn about slavery in Florida?</th>
<th>What did you <strong>Learn</strong> about slavery in Florida?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

![Image of a black and white drawing of a person]
Timeline Information Sheet

Use your class notes to fill in the missing information on this sheet. Then, write the letter of each entry on your timeline with the appropriate year. Next, draw and color a symbol for each entry that represents that entry (you should be able to remember the entry by looking at the corresponding symbol).

A. 1501- Spanish settlers bring _______________ slaves to the New World.
B. 1513-Free Africans Juan Garrido and Juan Gonzalez de Leon accompany ___________ __________ in his exploration of La Florida.
C. 1526- First enslaved Africans brought to North America by Lucas Vazquez de Allyon expedition; established settlement of San Miguel de Gualdape in present-day ____________; this is the first European settlement in the geographic United States.
D. 1528- Panfilo Narvaez attempts to settle area near ___________ ______ with 600 people, including slaves. Lack of supplies and hurricanes doom venture.
E. 1536- Four survivors of the doomed Tampa Bay settlement end up in ____________ __________ after walking through wilderness for eight years. Estevanico, an African slave, ensures their survival by learning to communicate with natives along the way.
F. 1539- ____________ __________ explores Florida and much of the present-day southeastern United States with the aid of free and enslaved Africans.
G. 1565- _________________, the oldest permanent city in the USA, established by Spain. It is home to over 600 people, including 50 African slaves. Some of these slaves immediately escape into the surrounding wilderness.
H. 1683- Spanish government in Florida grants freedom to all runaway slaves from ____________ colonies to the north if slaves agree to convert to Roman Catholicism.
I. 1683-1738- Hundreds of slaves from _______________ and the _______________ escape to Florida as a result of Spanish government’s decision.
J. 1738- Francisco Menendez, an escaped slave from the Carolinas, agrees to help defend Florida from the British in exchange for freedom. Establishes ___________ ___________, the first free black settlement in the present-day USA, two miles north of St. Augustine.
K. 1740- ____________ invaders capture Fort Mose; blacks and Spaniards recapture it a few months later.
L. 1763- Spain trades Florida to _______________ in exchange for Havana, Cuba, which Spain had lost during the Seven Year’s War; as a result, large rice and indigo plantations pop up along the St. John’s River in East Florida; thousands of slaves are imported from Africa or brought south from other colonies.
(Answers to Timeline Information Sheet)

A. African
B. Ponce de Leon
C. Georgia
D. Tampa Bay
E. Mexico City
F. Hernando de Soto
G. St. Augustine
H. English, or British
I. Georgia, the Carolinas
J. Fort Mose
K. English, or British
L. England, or Great Britain
**Homework Assignments (Processing):** these are ideas to for you to use; you may offer all as an assignment and have your students pick one, or create your own.

1.) Have students create their own illustrated timeline using the Timeline Information Sheet given out in class. Students will draw and color a symbol for each entry that reflects understanding of the topic. For instance, maybe a quick sketch of the Castillo de San Marcos for the establishment of St. Augustine in 1565. Another option is to have students pick one or two entries and create elaborate pictures for those entries. **Option:** allow students to find and cut out pictures from magazines and the Internet.

2.) On a grading scale of “A” to “F”, ask your students to grade Spain and England separately on a variety of categories. Explain to students that just as they are all graded on different subjects every few weeks, they should grade Spain and England on the following categories: (a) policies and attitudes toward slavery and blacks in general; (b) emphasis on immigration; (c) entrepreneurship and development of resources; and (d) religious instruction of Africans. Each colonial government should receive an individual grade, and the student should be able to present evidence explaining their decision.
Assessment

**Assessment Questions:**

1.) How did the Spanish system of slavery in Florida evolve as the result of the physical geography of Florida combined with traditional Spanish views and the threat of invasion by enemies of Spain?

2.) True or false. The Spanish government’s decision to grant freedom to all runaway slaves who professed to be Catholic was a major source of friction between Florida and the English colonies of Georgia and the Carolinas.

3.) What were the major differences and similarities between the Spanish system of slavery and slavery in British Florida?

4.) For what reasons did the Spanish colonial government never succeed in establishing agriculture as the primary business in Florida?

5.) True or false. St. Augustine is the oldest permanent city in the United States, but San Miguel de Gualdape near present-day Sapelo Sound in Georgia was settled first.
Resources

http://www.millennium-exhibit.org/time3.htm


