



Enslaved and Imprisoned

LOUISIANA STATE MUSEUM

The Cabildo: A History of People and Power in Louisiana – Post-video Activity

Watch the video at: https://youtu.be/3ul_PT0lcho

Primary Source Analysis and Research Prompt

Objective: By examining historical newspaper ads featuring enslaved people who ran for their freedom, students will learn about the experiences of enslaved people in the United States and how individual citizens and government institutions upheld systems of slavery.

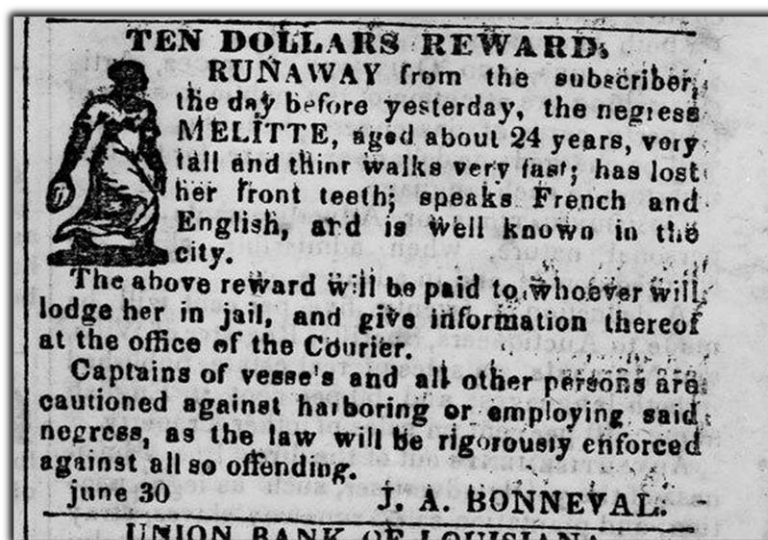
Louisiana Student Standards for Social Studies: 7.1.1, 7.1.5, 7.3.5, 8.1.1, 8.2.6, C.5.3, US.1.1, US.1.5

Enslaved prisoners at the Cabildo

French colonists built a prison on the site of the present-day Cabildo complex in 1730. Several renovations took place over time, but part of the site would be used as a prison for the next 180 years. Until the 1864 Louisiana Constitution outlawed slavery, people who tried to escape slavery could be imprisoned at the Cabildo if they were captured.

Escaping from slavery required courage. Enslaved people could face serious punishment or even death if caught. Slaveholders often placed ads in the newspaper asking for help capturing those who had escaped. The ads offered rewards, threatened punishment, or both. Today, these ads can teach about the lives of enslaved people. They also show how government institutions and private citizens upheld the institution of slavery in various ways.

Read this newspaper ad from the collections of the Louisiana State Museum:



J.A. Bonneval, "Ten Dollars Reward."
Le Courier de la Louisiane, 1837.

- What did you learn about Melitte from this newspaper ad?

- What does this ad tell us about the experiences of enslaved people?

- How does this ad encourage newspaper readers to uphold slavery? Identify a positive incentive and a negative incentive.

- From the newspaper ad, where do you see evidence of the government’s role in maintaining the institution of slavery?

Freedom on the Move Project

Freedom on the Move is an online database of historical newspaper ads that were created by slaveholders trying to find people that had escaped slavery.

Read about the project: <https://freedomonthemove.org/#about>

Research - Search the database: <https://app.freedomonthemove.org/>

- Using the database, find another ad from a newspaper in New Orleans, Louisiana. What is the name of the newspaper? What is the date of the ad?

- What did you learn about the enslaved person described in this ad?

- Did this ad mention holding the enslaved person in a jail or prison? _____

- Did the ad offer a reward for returning the enslaved person? Did it threaten punishment for helping them? If so, describe here.

- These newspaper ads were written by slaveholders and do not offer a full picture of the enslaved individuals. What type of information is NOT included in the ad? Why do you think this information was not included?

Freedom on the Move describes the importance of this project on its website:

We are compiling thousands of stories of resistance that have never been accessible in one place. Created to control the movement of enslaved people, the ads ultimately preserved the details of individual lives—their personality, appearance, and life story. Taken collectively, the ads constitute a detailed, concise, and rare source of information about the experiences of enslaved people.

- Why do you think newspaper ads are an important historic resource? How can this information be used to learn about the past and understand the present?

Be a citizen historian!

You can help Freedom on the Move build a better database! Create an account to help them transcribe historic ads. This will help other students and researchers like you! Follow this link to get started:

<https://app.freedomonthemove.org/crowdsourcing>

Further reading

We can learn a lot about enslaved individuals' acts of resistance from ads such as these. However, reading or listening to the stories written by enslaved people teaches us much more about the experiences of slavery. You can find many of these primary sources at Documenting the American South, a digital publishing initiative sponsored by the University Library at the University of North Carolina at

Chapel Hill. Browse their collection of “North American Slave Narratives” here:
<https://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/texts.html#B>

Check out some of these narratives to get started:

- Douglass, Frederick. *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave* (1845). Documenting the American South. University Library, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1999. <https://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/douglass/douglass.html>.
- Jacobs, Harriet. *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl, Written by Herself* (1861). Documenting the American South. University Library, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2003. <https://docsouth.unc.edu/fpn/jacobs/jacobs.html>.
- Northup, Solomon. *Twelve Years a Slave: Narrative of Solomon Northup, a Citizen of New York, Kidnapped in Washington City in 1841, and Rescued in 1853, From a Cotton Plantation Near the Red River in Louisiana* (1853). Documenting the American South. University Library, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1997. <https://docsouth.unc.edu/fpn/northup/northup.html>.