



Dr. Blosa Science

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Comprehension story 28

Read the passage below and answer the questions that follow, using your own words wherever possible.

Historians know too little about the slave culture. A group of people who cannot read and write leave behind few documents to study. Fortunately, during the 1920s a federally funded writer's project collected an oral history of slavery through interviews with hundreds of ex-slaves. Most were very old when interviewed, and their memories had faded somewhat. But their recollections, along with surviving slave songs, folktales, proverbs and stories, tell of rich and complex slave culture. 05

Slaves managed to shape their own lives within the harsh guidelines of slavery. Most lived in small communities or quarters with fellow slaves. There they developed institutions separate from those of white southerners. Their spirituals, slave songs and tales told of an undying hope for freedom and played a central part in the slave culture. Slaves sang not because they were happy or content but they were told to. AND AS Frederick Douglass explained in this excerpt, it was the words and tones of the songs that carried the message of sadness and anger. 10
Slave songs, he said "we were mostly of a plaintive cast, and told a tale of grief and sorrow." In the most boisterous outburst of rapturous sentiment, there was ever a tinge of deep melancholy. 15

...I did not, when a slave, understand the deep meaning of those rude, and apparently incoherent songs. I was myself within a circle so 20

that I neither saw or heard as those without might see and hear. I they told a tale which was then altogether beyond my feeble comprehension; they were tones, loud, long and deep, breathing the prayer and complaint of souls boiling over with the bitterest anguish. Every tone was a testimony against slavery, and a prayer to God for deliverance from chains. The mere recurrence, even now, afflicts my spirit, and while I am writing these lines, tears are falling.

Of course, any direct expression of slaves feeling might have suppressed by powerful owners and overseers. But within their communities and amongst themselves in the fields slaves did sing openly of their despair and suffering. Slaves also developed other aspects of culture that gave them a sense of pride and humanity. Religion among slaves thrived. But it too was often practiced in secret.

A night, deep in the woods behind their quarters, slaves would meet to pray. As more and more restrictive laws were passed, this becomes both more dangerous and more important. It uplifted the tired, beaten spirits of the slaves. It gave them hope.

Other aspects of culture did not develop as fully under the strict codes of slavery. Slave marriages were not recognized by southern law. But most owners encouraged stable marriage on their plantations. Of course, owners had the unquestioned right to break up families. Slaves had to live with this threat. Yet most were able to form lasting marriage and strong families.

Slaves had no legal status. In all southern states they were considered property. They could not own property themselves, marry freely, make contracts, or testify against a white person in court. They could not travel without a pass, or legally possess whiskey or gun. It was against the law for an owner to murder a slave. But severe punishments for disobedience by a slave were legal. Should such a punishment result in death, it was nearly impossible to gain conviction because slave testimony was inadmissible in court.

African American in the northern state could speak openly against slavery. Many did so before abolitionism became an important movement. They organized a large number of antislavery societies long before the creation of the American Ant-Slavery Society. The American Society of Free Persons of Color, formed during the National Negro Convention of 1830 was at the forefront of the abolition movement. 55

These abolitionists varied in their specific ideas. One of the first whom we know much about was Paul Cuffe. Cuffe was born free Massachusetts Bay in 1759. As a youth he went to sea. Gradually he saved enough to buy a ship. He prospered. Eventually he owned a fleet of six merchant vessels. By 1800 he was probably the richest African American in the United States. 60

Cuffe favored the return of African American to Africa. Most colonialists wanted to Africa to get rid of them. Cuffe saw colonization as a way for people to free themselves from prejudice and mistreatment. He transported 38 volunteers to West Africa in 1815 at his own expense. He intended to bring a new group each year, but he died before he could carry out his plan. 65

(Story of America-John A. Garraty)

Questions

- (a) Suggest a suitable title for the passage (02marks)
- (b) What did mean by the following phrases
- (i) “to shape their own lives within the hash guidelines”
(line 09 – 10) (03marks)
- “Every tone was a testimony against slavery...”
(lines 24 – 25) (03marks)
- (c) In not more than 100 words show the mistreatment of slaves indicated in the text. (12marks)
- (d) Explain the meaning of the following words and phrases as used in the passage, using you own words wherever possible
- (i) faded somewhat (line 06) (02 marks)
almost forgotten/rather worn out
- (ii) excerpt (line 14) (02marks)
extract/selection/quotation
- (iii) A plaintive cast(line 17) (02 marks)
lamenting/expression of suffering
- (iv) Boisterous outburst (line 18) (02marks)
Noisy/rowdy/unruly explosion
- (v) tinge (line 19) (02marks)
weak
- (vi) feeble comprehension (line 23) (02 marks)
weak/low understanding
- (vii) suppressed (line 29) (02marks)
not allowed/blocked/inhibited
- (viii) legal status (line 44) (02 marks)
Privileges enjoyed by citizens / Legal status is the status or position held by an entity as determined by the law
- (ix) inadmissible (line 52) (02 marks)
prohibited/barred/not allowed
- (x) prejudice (line 64) (02 marks)
bias/partiality

(20 marks)

Spellings, Punctuation and Grammatical Expression (SPGE) (10 marks)

Suggested answers

- (a) Suggest a suitable title for the passage (02marks)
Slave mistreatment
The savery
- (b) What did mean by the following phrases
- (ii) “to shape their own lives within the hash guidelines”
(lines 09 – 10) (03marks)
They adjusted to the situation/environment they lived in
“Every tone was a testimony against slavery...”
(lines 24 – 25) (03marks)
They sung in tone that depicted pain due to slavery
- (c) In not more than 100 words show the mistreatment of slaves indicated in the text. (12marks)

THE MISTREATMENTS OF SLAVES

The mistreatment of slaves included harsh punishments; had no freedom to marry or their marriages were not recognized; slaves did not have legal status; they were considered properties and were not allowed to move freely without passes. Lastly they were not allowed legally to possess whiskey or guns.

- (d) Explain the meaning of the following words and phrases as used in the passage, using you own words wherever possible
- (i) faded somewhat (line 06) (02 marks)
- (ii) excerpt (line 14) (02marks)
- (iii) A plaintive cast(line 17) (02 marks)
- (iv) Boisterous outburst (line 18) (02marks)
- (v) tinge (line 19) (02marks)
- (vi) feeble comprehension (line 23) (02 marks)
- (vii) suppressed (line 29) (02marks)

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|--------|------------------------|------------|
| (viii) | legal status (line 44) | (02 marks) |
| (ix) | inadmissible (line 52) | (02 marks) |
| (x) | prejudice (line 64) | (02 marks) |
| | | (20 marks) |

Spellings, Punctuation and Grammatical Expression (SPGE) (10 marks)

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Thanks

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