

SLAVERY AND STATES' RIGHTS IN TEXAS

Enslaved persons were first brought to Texas as far back as the 1500's when the Spanish landed in the Americas. The Spanish enslaved Africans and Native Americans to work on the Spanish mission farms, on ranches (haciendas), and in the gold and silver mines. The Spanish also used slave labor on the vast sugar plantations they started in the Caribbean, Central and South America. As Anglo settlers arrived in Texas beginning in the 1820's, many of these settlers from the United States (especially those from the Southern states) brought slaves with them. In 1860, when the Texas seceded from the United States, the number of slaves in Texas was listed as 182,566. This was out of a total population in the state of 604,215. Therefore, enslaved persons made up about 30% of the total population.

Texas established a plantation system that was important to the economy. Most Texas plantations grew cotton as a cash crop for export to the North and to countries in Europe (mostly Great Britain). In both of these places, the cotton was used in the textile mills to make cloth. Slaves were the key to the plantation system. They provided the hours and hours of physical labor needed to plant, tend and harvest cotton.

Slaves were not considered citizens. They were considered property that could be bought and sold. The price of a male field hand (someone who worked the plantation fields) was high – usually between \$1,000 and \$2,000. Some enslaved persons were more skilled in occupations such as blacksmithing, carpentry, brick-making and building, and sold for even more money. Treatment of slaves depended on the overseer and the master – but even under the best conditions, slavery was wrong. By definition, slaves were not free people!

Most Texans did not own slaves at all. Of the slave owners in Texas, only about 1% had large numbers of slaves. These large planters, however, had money and influence and controlled the state's economy and government. Even though most Texans did not own slaves (80 – 85%), these same Texans supported the idea of slavery. Like most whites in the South, they defended slavery as necessary for the plantation economy and because they probably hoped that one day they would be rich and powerful enough to also be plantation owners. These white citizens believed that the Southern economy needed what they called the "prop" of slavery.

Many people, especially in the North, opposed slavery and wanted it to end. They were called *abolitionists*. There were not many abolitionists in Texas. There were some German and Mexican Texans, who were called Unionists, who were against slavery. When the Civil War started, some of these people joined the Union army to fight for the United States (Union). There were other people who did not necessarily speak out against slavery but would eventually oppose the War. Sam Houston was one of these people.

There were a few Free Blacks in Texas at the time of the Civil War. They lived and worked much as other Texans on farms, on ranches or in the cities. These Free Blacks were considered by some to be a threat to the "system" and were sometimes not treated fairly. In 1860, there were only 355 Free Blacks in Texas.

In the years between 1850 and 1860, many Southern states, including Texas, began to argue for something called *States' Rights*. States' Rights was an interpretation of the United States Constitution that said a state had the right to decide which federal laws it agreed with and therefore, which ones that state would follow. This argument had been around for awhile, but began to be used more and more as states were faced with the idea of abolishing slavery. Texas government leaders argued that each state had a right to choose to leave the United States, since each state had *freely chosen* to join the United States in the first place. Southern leaders stated that if the federal government passed laws against slavery, that would violate their *states' rights* and therefore, those states could *legally secede* from the Union.

In November, 1860, Abraham Lincoln was elected President of the United States and Southern leaders (Texas included) thought this meant that slavery would be abolished. Soon after Lincoln's election, seven Southern states – including Texas – seceded and formed the Confederate States of America.

Name _____ Date _____ Period _____

QUESTIONS TO GUIDE YOUR READING – Answer in the space provided or on your own paper.

1. When and by whom were enslaved persons first brought to Texas?

2. What was the extent of slavery in 1860? (How many slaves were there?)

3. Why did Southerners defend slavery? Why did non-slave owners defend slavery?

4. How were personal rights of enslaved persons violated?

5. Who opposed slavery?

6. What part of the population was Free Black? What problems did they encounter?

7. What does the term *states' rights* mean?

8. How did Southern whites use states' rights to argue about slavery and secession?

9. When Lincoln was elected President of the United States, what did Southerners fear?

10. What happened in the United States after Lincoln was elected?