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APUSH – A2

Chapter 12 Summary/Comments

Slavery is atrocious. The degradation of people through enslaving them, in present time, does not appear a suitable price to pay for a stable economy. The 1850s seem almost too recently for a scene like that of Document 8c to have taken place. The auction in Document 8c can be seen as an illustration of the horrible situation Document 7’s author was in. The way whites turned a deaf ear to slavery, and the atrocities that occurred to sustain it. How did people cope with the coercive aspects of the institution that was a slave’s lifestyle? Hopefully these answers will remain in our past.

The roles of religion, musical expression, and family which we all take for granted were twisted for slaves. Document 3 shows the perverse family ties between the master, his family, and the “yaller gal” and her children. The slave owner confronted by his wife responded, “Now, honey, I fotches that gal just for you, ‘cause she a fine seamster.” If slavery wasn’t persistent in society during this time, such a thing would not have occurred, and the bondage of the yaller gal would not have been tolerated.

A slave’s response to slavery varied for each individual. Frederick Douglas explains that some religious colored people were under the delusion that God *wants* them to submit to slavery, but he notes that this revelation stung him. It is terrible to think that some people abided to the notion that their slaveholders were acting under the authority of God (Doc 1, ¶ 1, p. 211). Some of the treatment they were forced to submit to includes but is not limited to “dey’d strip you stark mother naked… den dey tie your hands round de tree, den tie your feets; den dey’d lay de rawhide on you and cut your buttocks open” (Doc 6, ¶ 2, p. 214) and “he thrash ‘em, den tie ‘em behind de wagon and make ‘em run till dey fall on de ground, den he thrash ‘em till dey say dey go without no trouble” (Doc 5, ¶ 2, p. 213).

There were still many varied responses to slavery. One included Josiah Henson’s, who is the preserved author of Document 7. He describes slavery, “The natural tendency of slavery is to convert the master into a tyrant, and the slave into the cringing, treacherous, false, and thieving victim of tyranny” (Doc 7, ¶ 3, p. 215). He later explains that, “I forgave him the causeless blows and injuries he had inflicted on me in childhood and youth, and was proud of the favor he now showed me” (Doc 7, ¶ 4, p. 215). The way Josiah treated his slaveholder is like the behavior of a person with Stockholm Syndrome. Another response to slavery is that of religious control. Document 4 is intriguing because it gives insight on the manipulative and dreadful use of religion in slavery. The person giving responses has been manipulated into becoming a more obedient slave, “Q. What makes you lazy? A. My wicked heart… Q. Who teaches you so many wicked things? A. The Devil. Q. Must you let the Devil teach you? A. No, I must not,” (Doc 4, Questions 13-16).

The culture sprung from slavery is important in understanding the slave experience, and is good natured in showing the hope people enslaved had for liberation. The noteworthy lyrics from the song in Document 2 is known even today, “I thank God I’m free at last.” It is inspiring to know,

[slaves] did many silly things, very well calculated to awaken suspicion. We were at times remarkably buoyant, singing hymns and making joyous exclamations, almost as triumphant in their tone as if we had reached a land of freedom and safety. A keen observer might have detected in our repeated singing of “O Canaan, sweet Canaan, I am bound for the land of Canaan,” something more than a hope of reaching heaven. We meant to reach the *north*- and the north was our Canaan. (Doc 1, ¶ 4, p. 211)

Frederick Douglas is objective in explaining away all the unjust treatment of slaves, and all the “stupid contentment” some slaves had. The difference for men and women in bondage is pointed out in Douglas’ account of Mr. Covey buying a young woman named Caroline for the purpose of using her “*as a breeder*.” As this is read with disgust and shame by both us and people of the north in the time, the same rules of increasing the number and quality of cows applied to slaves (Doc 1, ¶ 3, p. 211).

The precautions scholars should take in evaluating slave culture and history is none; because although the evidence is limited, they all provide valuable information on slave experiences. There were few recorded rebellions, which ended quickly, but slaves were not content with their status. The absence of rebellion is explained through the harsh punishments and control instilled by slaveholders. Slavery is no doubt demoralizing and humiliating, but it is nonetheless a chapter in our history.