

Plantation owners—who were almost always men—traveled often in order to ensure fair dealings with traders. Their wives often led difficult and lonely lives. They took charge of their households and supervised the buildings. They watched over the enslaved domestic workers and sometimes tended to them when they became ill. Women also often kept the plantation's financial records.

Keeping a plantation running involved many tasks. Some enslaved people cleaned the house, cooked, did laundry and sewing, and served meals. Others were trained as blacksmiths, carpenters, shoemakers, or weavers. Still others tended livestock. Most enslaved African Americans, however, were field hands. They worked from sunrise to sunset to plant, tend, and harvest crops. An **overseer** (OH•vuhr•see•uhr), or plantation manager, supervised them.

#### **PROGRESS CHECK**

**Identifying** What group made up the largest number of whites in the South?

## The Lives of Enslaved People

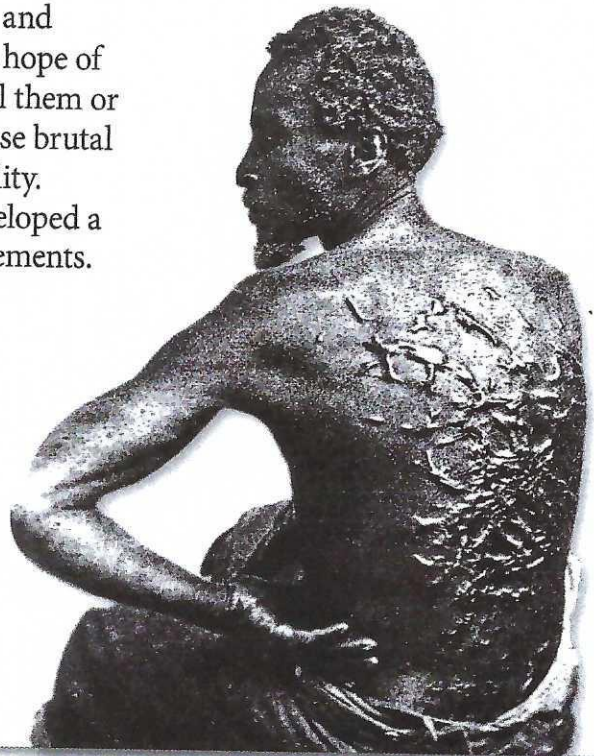
**GUIDING QUESTION** *How did enslaved African Americans try to cope with their lack of freedom?*

The fate of most enslaved African Americans was hardship and misery. They worked hard, earned no money, and had little hope of freedom. They lived with the threat that an owner could sell them or members of their family without warning. In the face of these brutal conditions, enslaved African Americans tried to build stability. They kept up their family lives as best they could. They developed a culture all their own that blended African and American elements. They came up with clever ways to resist slavery.

### African American Family Life

The law did not recognize slave marriages. Still, enslaved people did marry and raise families, which provided comfort and support. Uncertainty and danger, however, were always present. There were no laws or customs that would stop a slaveholder from breaking a family apart. If a slaveholder chose to—or if the slaveholder died—families could be and often were separated.

The punishments used against enslaved people included whipping, which could leave terrible scars.



**overseer** plantation manager



## Connections to TODAY

### American Music

From the rhythmic patterns and themes of work songs and spirituals arose a new musical form—the blues. The blues influenced later styles, including jazz, rock and roll, and rap.



Wynton Marsalis is a modern-day jazz musician whose music has its roots in work songs and spirituals.

In the face of this threat, enslaved people set up a network of relatives and friends. If an owner sold a father or mother, an aunt, an uncle, or a close friend stepped in to raise the children left behind. These networks were a source of strength in the lives of enslaved people. Large, close-knit extended families became an important part of African American culture.

### African American Culture

In 1808 Congress banned the import of slaves. Slavery remained **legal**, but traders could no longer purchase enslaved people from other countries. Some illegal slave trading continued, but by 1860, almost all the enslaved people in the South had been born there.

Though most enslaved people were born in the United States, they tried to preserve African customs. They passed traditional African folk stories on to their children. They performed African music and dance.

Enslaved people also drew on African rhythms to create musical forms that were uniquely American. One form was the work song, or field holler. A worker led a rhythmic call-and-response song, which sometimes included shouts and moans. The beat set the tempo for their work in the fields.

### African American Religion

Many enslaved African Americans followed traditional African religious beliefs and practices. Others, however, accepted the Christian religion that was dominant in the United States. Christianity became for enslaved people a religion of hope and resistance. Enslaved people prayed for their freedom. They expressed their beliefs in **spirituals**, African American religious folk songs. The spiritual below, for example, refers to the biblical story of Daniel, whom God saved from being eaten by lions:

#### PRIMARY SOURCE

“Didn’t my Lord deliver Daniel  
Deliver Daniel, deliver Daniel  
Didn’t my Lord deliver Daniel  
An’ why not-a every man.”

—from *Didn’t My Lord Deliver Daniel*

### Reading **HELP**DESK



**spiritual** an African American religious folk song

#### Academic Vocabulary

**legal** permitted by law