

TEACHER INFORMATION SHEET

Enslavement in the New World

Grades 9-12

These five broad concepts should be discussed with your students before visiting the exhibition, *Bandits & Heroes Poets & Saints – Popular Arts of the Americas*

- Slavery occurs when one person legally has power over the life and labor of another. Enslaving others is almost as old as human civilization. Many ancient cultures such as Greece, Rome, Egypt, and China participated in different forms of enslavement. The enslaved were often prisoners of war, or criminals being punished for a crime.
- From 1500 to 1870, the Portuguese forced five million enslaved Africans to Brazil, and a half million to the United States during the Atlantic slave trade. Africans were treated like chattel or property; they worked extremely long hours and were given meager food, clothing and housing.
- Plantation owners had the right to buy and sell family members. He could punish disobedient or rebellious behavior by whipping, shackling, hanging, branding, beating or killing them. Sexual exploitation and rape of enslaved women were common; many fought back and many died resisting. Fearful that they would plan escapes and rebellions, slaveholders would not generally allow the enslaved to learn to read and write.
- Enslavement continued to be the backbone of colonial Brazilian economy. By 1600, Brazil became the largest sugar exporter in the world with over 3000 sugar plantations called *engenhos* (en-JEN –yoos) across Brazil. The British in the American colonies used enslaved labor to produce cotton. By 1791, America produced two million pounds of cotton; however, the conditions on the plantations in both countries were miserable and inhumane.

- Some enslaved people obtained their freedom and were instrumental in connecting with such groups as: free Africans, Europeans, Quakers, Catholic and Protestant clergy to assist others to gain their freedom. Enslavement was abolished in the United States in 1865 and in Brazil in 1888.

Some Pre-visit Activities for Students:

- Walk in the footsteps of an enslaved person, a free African, or a European American abolitionist during the 18th century. Choose one and describe your feelings as that person.
- View the entire **YouTube** video: **Brazil: An Inconvenient History**. A BBC production is an important documentary highlighting Brazil's history in the trade in enslaved Africans from the 1500s to the abolition in 1888. 55 minutes.
- Refer to the Lesson Plan and Student Handouts on African Retentions, and ask students to read the three short excerpts from the Student Information Sheet: Our African Past: Oladauh Equiano, R.H. Stone and Antonio de Castro Alves. Answer questions for each excerpt.
- Students may read excerpts from slave narratives such as:

Frederick Douglass. *My Bondage and My Freedom*. New York: Arno, [1855] 1968.

Henry Box Brown. *Narrative of the Life of Henry Box Brown, Written by Himself*. Philadelphia: Historic Publishers [1851] 1969.

Harriet Jacobs. *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*. Detroit: Negro History Press, [1861] 1969.

For Teachers:

- Read the Teacher Information Sheets on: African Retentions in the Americas to review some of the retained elements or practices from African culture that are present today in Brazil and America.