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# Darwin and slavery

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Activity 3: Experiences of a slave auction  
Subject: History / English  
2 x 1 Hour

## Suggested preparation

Presentation:  
[Darwin and slavery](#)

## What do I need?

Extracts from Darwin's *Journal of researches*  
Extract from The History of Mary Prince  
Sound extract from Olaudah Equiano's account:  
[http://mrssammutshistoryspace.weebly.com/uploads/3/8/1/0/38100813/equianos\\_account\\_of\\_being\\_sold.mp3](http://mrssammutshistoryspace.weebly.com/uploads/3/8/1/0/38100813/equianos_account_of_being_sold.mp3)  
Comprehension questions  
Images of a slave auction

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Darwin was greatly affected by the cruelty of slavery that he encountered. Read his journal entry and two first-hand accounts of slave auctions written by Mary Prince and Olaudah Equiano who both became freed slaves. Use these primary sources and the images provided to write an eyewitness account of a slave auction for an abolitionist newspaper.

## What do I do?

1. Read the extract from Darwin's *Journal of Researches* and answer the questions.
2. Read the extract from Mary Prince, listen to the sound file of Olaudah Equiano's account of being sold and the 'Who's who?'. Then answer the questions.
3. Study the images of slave auctions and slave sale notices. Describe the language that is used, what is going on in the paintings, who they were for and how they make you feel.
4. Write down what can be learnt from the different types of historical sources that you have looked at ie: First-hand accounts, sale notices and paintings. How useful is each source for an historian?
5. Based the materials that you have seen, write a short eyewitness account of a slave auction for an abolitionist newspaper.of the language that you have discussed and explored. You can write from the perspective of a person from that time or from a modern perspective.

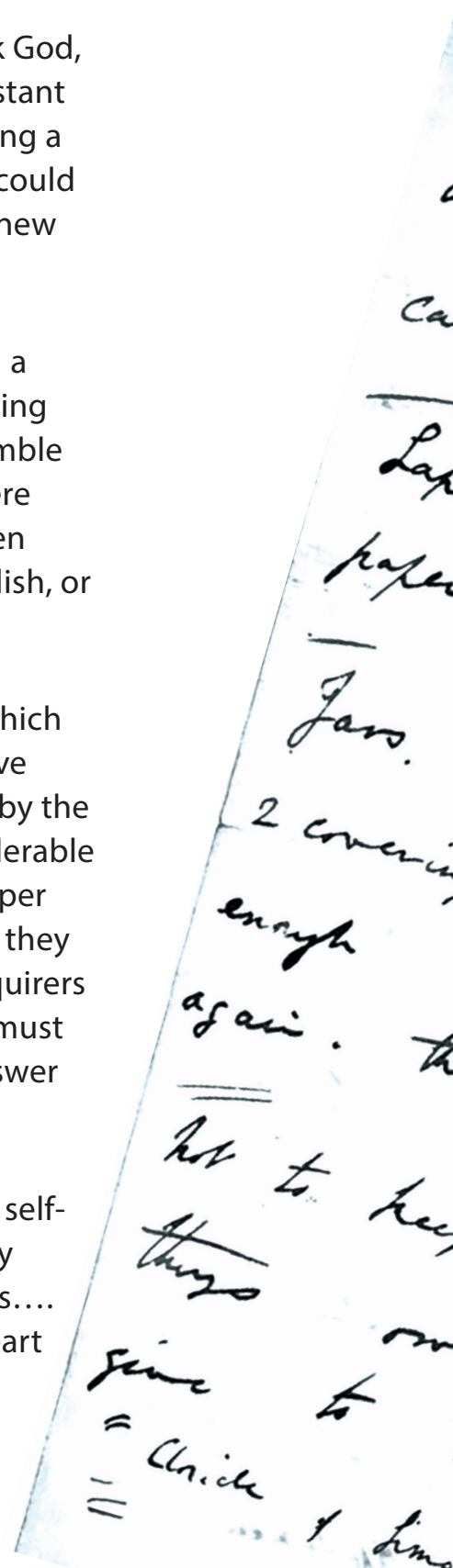
## Journal of researches extracts

On the 19th of August we finally left the shores of Brazil. I thank God, I shall never again visit a slave-country. To this day, if I hear a distant scream, it recalls with painful vividness my feelings, when passing a house near Pernambuco, I heard the most pitiable moans, and could not but suspect that some poor slave was being tortured, yet knew that I was as powerless as a child even to remonstrate...

I have seen a little boy, six or seven years old, struck thrice with a horse-whip (before I could interfere) on his naked head, for having handed me a glass of water not quite clean; I saw his father tremble at a mere glance from his master's eye. These latter cruelties were witnessed by me in a Spanish colony, in which it has always been said, that slaves are better treated than by the Portuguese, English, or other European nations...

...I will not even allude to the many heart-sickening atrocities which I authentically heard of;—nor would I have mentioned the above revolting details, had I not met with several people, so blinded by the constitutional gaiety of the negro, as to speak of slavery as a tolerable evil. Such people have generally visited at the houses of the upper classes, where the domestic slaves are usually well treated; and they have not, like myself, lived amongst the lower classes. Such enquirers will ask slaves about their condition; they forget that the slave must indeed be dull, who does not calculate on the chance of his answer reaching his master's ears.

It is argued that self-interest will prevent excessive cruelty; as if self-interest protected our domestic animals, which are far less likely than degraded slaves, to stir up the rage of their savage masters.... Those who look tenderly at the slave-owner, and with a cold heart at the slave, never seem to put themselves into the position of the latter;—what a cheerless prospect, with not even a hope of change! Picture to yourself the chance, ever hanging over you,



## Journal of researches extracts

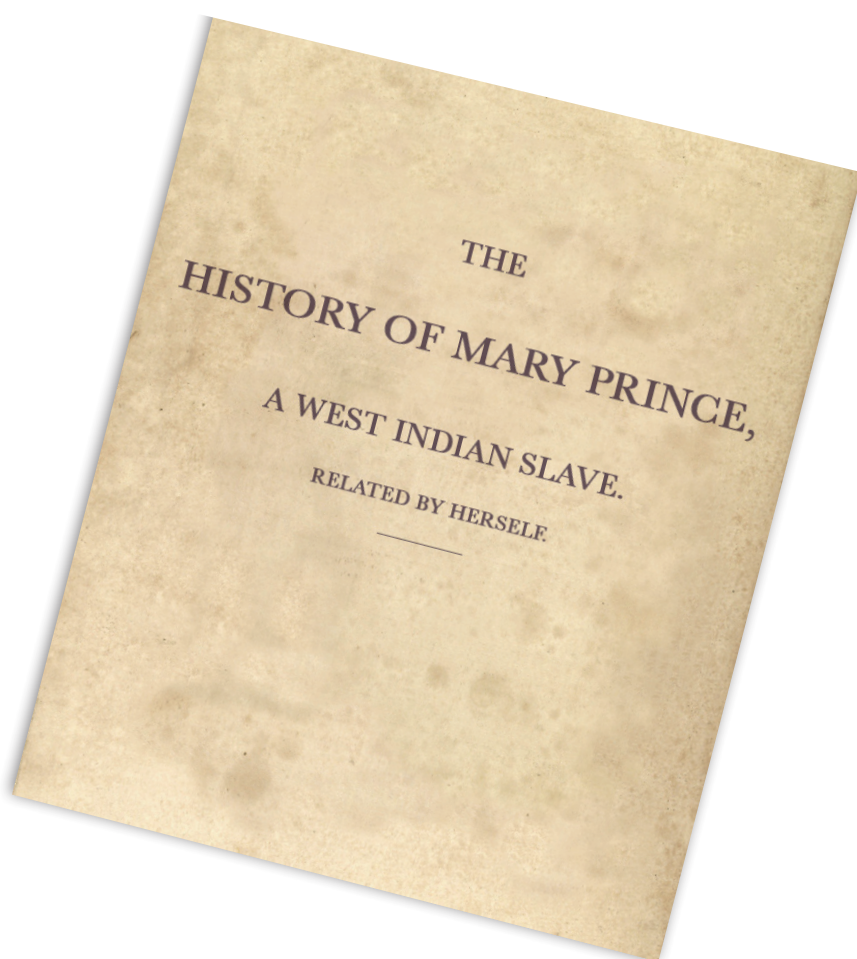
of your wife and your little children—those objects which nature urges even the slave to call his own—being torn from you and sold like beasts to the first bidder! And these deeds are done and palliated by men, who profess to love their neighbours as themselves, who believe in God, and pray that his Will be done on earth! It makes one's blood boil, yet heart tremble, to think that we Englishmen and our American descendants, with their boastful cry of liberty, have been and are so guilty: but it is a consolation to reflect, that we at least have made a greater sacrifice, than ever made by any nation, to expiate our sin...

*From: Journal of researches into the natural history and geology of the countries visited during the voyage of H.M.S. Beagle round the world, under the command of Capt. Fitz Roy, R.A. Charles Darwin, M.A., F.R.S. Second edition, corrected, with additions. John Murray, London, 1845. (pp. 499-500)*

the seeds in the Capsule  
on 2nd: put <sup>over</sup> paper  
dry half put in bladder.  
Jars. first of lead ~ Tin foil. then  
coverings be tied down. then  
Garsell

Extract: *The History of Mary Prince* - Mary Prince. (Penguin, 2000) p.11

'We followed my mother to the market-place where she placed us in a row against a large house, with our backs to the wall...I as the eldest, stood first, Hannah next to me, then Dinah; and our mother stood beside, crying over us. My heart throbbed with grief and terror so violently, that I pressed my hands quite tightly across my breast, but I could not keep it still and it continued to leap as though it would burst out of my body....At length the vendue master who was to offer us for sale like sheep or cattle arrived...He took me by the hand and led me out into the middle of the street, and, turning me slowly round, exposed me to the view of those who attended...I was soon surrounded by strange men, who examined and handled me in the same manner that a butcher would a calf or lamb.'



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## Who's who?

### Thomas Clarkson

Thomas Clarkson (1760-1846) was a leading campaigner against the slave trade in Britain and worldwide. After publishing a pamphlet against slavery in 1786, he took a leading role in the Committee for the Abolition of the Slave Trade. Josiah Wedgwood and William Wilberforce were also members. Clarkson spent years of his life travelling around Britain researching and raising public awareness of the horrors of the slave trade. His actions helped ensure that the 1807 Slave Trade Act was passed.



Image of Thomas Clarkson ©National Portrait Gallery, London. NPG 235. CC BY-NC-ND 3.0

### Caroline Darwin

Caroline Sarah Darwin (1800-1888) was Darwin's sister. He wrote to her whilst on the *Beagle* voyage. She married their cousin Josiah Wedgwood II in 1837.

### Catherine Darwin

Emily Catherine Darwin (1810-1866) was Darwin's sister. In a letter he wrote to her whilst on the *Beagle* voyage, he told her he hoped that England might be the first European nation to abolish slavery.

## Darwin and slavery: Who's who?

### Charles Darwin

Charles Darwin (1809-1882) was a naturalist who established natural selection as the mechanism for the process of evolution. He joined the voyage of HMS *Beagle* when he was 22, a journey he described as the 'most fortunate circumstance in my life'. He wrote to around 2000 correspondents all over the world as a means to inform his research. Most famously he published *On the Origin of Species* in 1859, but he researched and wrote extensively on natural history throughout his life.



### Susan Darwin

Susan Darwin (1803-66) was Darwin's sister. They wrote regularly to each other during the *Beagle* voyage. She conveyed much family news to him and referred to herself as 'Granny' in her letters as she was always giving him advice. She also corrected his grammar and spelling.

### Olaudah Equiano

Olaudah Equiano (born around 1745-1797) was enslaved as a child and taken from Nigeria to North America. He became the slave of a naval captain who renamed him and they travelled extensively. Equiano eventually bought his freedom and travelled to London where he was encouraged by abolitionists to write his life story. *The Interesting Life of Olaudah Equiano* was first published in 1789. It was one of the first publications by an African writer to be widely read in England. Through its success he was able to fund educational and economic projects in Africa and London.



## Darwin and slavery: Who's who?

### Asa Gray

Asa Gray (1810–88) was an American botanist. He wrote numerous botanical textbooks and works on North American flora. Gray was appointed Professor of Natural History at Harvard University in 1842, a post he held until his death in 1888. He was president of both the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and the American Association for the Advancement of Science. Darwin started to write to him in 1855, and they corresponded until Darwin's death, exchanging around 300 letters. Gray was one of Darwin's leading supporters in America. He was also a devout Presbyterian. The longest running and most significant exchange of correspondence for Darwin dealing with the subjects of design in nature and religious belief was with Asa Gray.



### Mary Prince

Mary Prince (born around 1788) was born into slavery in Bermuda. At the age of 12, she was sold for £38. After suffering floggings and hardships from several owners she married a former slave who had bought his freedom. Prince travelled to London, England, in 1828 as a domestic slave but was soon made homeless. She was persuaded to publish her life story as a means to promote the abolition cause. *The History of Mary Prince* was published in 1831. Slavery was illegal in Britain at this time but not in Prince's homeland. It is not known whether she was ever able to return home as a free woman.



### Josiah Wedgwood

Josiah Wedgwood (1730-95) is most famous for his role in establishing the Wedgwood family pottery company but he was also a social reformer. In 1787 he became a leading member of the Society for the Abolition of the Slave Trade and remained active in anti-slavery reform throughout his life. He was close friends with William Wilberforce and Thomas Clarkson; leading abolition campaigners and reformers. Josiah Wedgwood was Charles Darwin's grandfather.

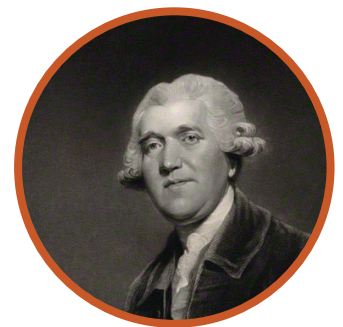


Image of Josiah Wedgwood ©National Portrait Gallery, London. NPG D37630. CC BY-NC-ND 3.0



## Darwin and slavery: Who's who?

### William Wilberforce

William Wilberforce (1759-1833) was a British politician and a leader of the movement to abolish the slave trade. He was an evangelical Christian and with Thomas Clarkson and writer and social reformer Hannah More, and others, joined the Testonites (a group of abolition activists who met in Teston, Kent). Wilberforce led the parliamentary campaign against slavery for 26 years before the Slave Trade Act was passed in 1807. His strongly conservative values meant that his policies for the UK came under attack. Wilberforce died 3 days after hearing that the Slavery Abolition Act of 1833 had been passed.

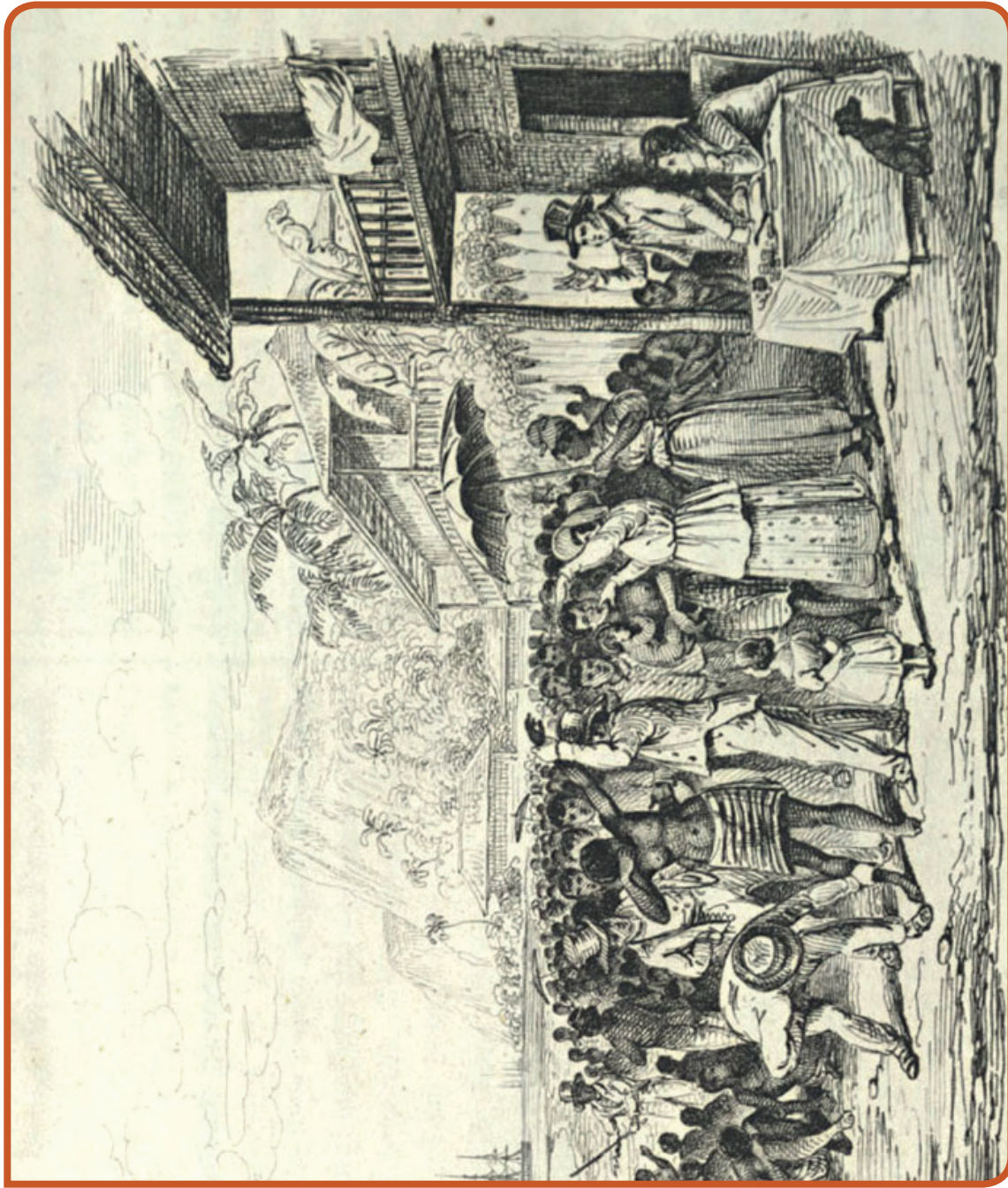


Image of William Wilberforce ©National Portrait Gallery, London. NPG D11346. CC BY-NC-ND 3.0

## Comprehension questions

1. In his *Journal of Researches* Darwin says that some people wrongly believe that 'slavery is tolerable evil'. How does he think that people have come to this conclusion?
2. He says that some believe that slave owners will look after their slaves out of self interest, but how does he counter that argument?
3. What does he suggest that such supporters of slavery should do?
4. What actions add 'fresh horrors to the wretchedness of slavery' in Olaudah Equiano's account of a slave auction?
5. In the extract from *The History of Mary Prince*, what does Mary compare her experience to, when she is forced to go to the marketplace?

## Images of a slave auction



### Slave Auction, Martinique, 1826

Image reference: NW0308, Source: Alcide Dessalines d'Orbigny, *Voyage pittoresque dans les deux Amériques...* (Paris, 1836), facing p. 14, fig. 4. (Copy in Special Collections Department, University of Virginia Library), as shown on [www.slaveryimages.org](http://www.slaveryimages.org), compiled by Jerome Handler and Michael Tuite, and sponsored by the Virginia Foundation for the Humanities and the University of Virginia Library.

## Images of a slave auction

# SALE OF NEGROES,

**Mills, Mules, Hogs,  
FARMING & MINING TOOLS,  
WAGONS AND CARTS.**

Will be sold in Columbia County, at the Columbia Mines, 14 miles North of Thomson, on

**TUESDAY, August 14th,**

the following valuable property of the Columbia Mining Company.

The **GRIST, FLOUR, and SAW Mills**, on Little River, known as the Little River Mills, with four run of Burr Stones. There are 5 3-4 acres of Land, with a Store House, Dwelling House, and all necessary out-buildings on the premises.

Also,--a large lot of Stock Hogs. The Mill has a good run of custom, was established in 1812, and is centrally located.

TERMS:--One-fourth Cash; the balance at twelve months, with interest and approved security.

Also,--Eight first rate Mules, Wagons, Carts, Carry Log, all with iron axles; two sets Blacksmith's Tools, Chains, Ropes, Picks, Shovels, Drills, Axes, and all varieties of Mining Tools; a large quantity of Iron and Steel, and a variety of articles useful to Planters.

**On THURSDAY, August 16th,**

At THOMSON, on the Georgia Railroad, 40 miles above Augusta, will be sold, the following valuable Negroes, belonging to the same concern.

**LITTLE JOE and SIMON, Blacksmiths; WILSON, a Miller; ANTHONY, LITTLE PETER, GEORGE, RANDAL, WILLIAM, and MARCH, Field Hands; CUPID, a Sawyer; MOSES, WATT, and MORRIS, Miners and Blasters; ALFRED and FRANK, Engineers; PETER MUNTZ, a Wagoner; LONG JOE, MAJOR, a Carpenter.**

At the same time and place, will be sold, a variety of articles useful to Mechanics, Miners and Planters.

TERMS:--For sums not exceeding \$100, Cash; over that sum, four months credit, with interest, and approved security.

**B. H. BROOMHEAD, Agent.**

COLUMBIA COUNTY, GA. JULY 20th, 1860.

Constitutional Steam Press, Augusta, Ga.

### Advertisement for Slave Sale, Georgia, 1860

Image reference: NW0338, Source: Dr. Robert T. Vinson, private collection, as shown on [www.slaveryimages.org](http://www.slaveryimages.org), compiled by Jerome Handler and Michael Tuite, and sponsored by the Virginia Foundation for the Humanities and the University of Virginia Library.

## Images of a slave auction

**HEWLETT & BRIGHT.**

**SALE OF**

**VALUABLE**

**SLAVES**

*(On account of departure)*

The Owner of the following named and valuable Slaves being on the eve of departure for Europe, will cause same to be offered for sale, at the NEW EXCHANGE corner of St. Louis and Chartres streets, on *Saturday* May 16, at Twelve o'Clock, *viz.*

1. SARAH, a mulatress, aged 45 years, a good cook and accustomed house work in general, is an excellent and faithful nurse for sick persons, and in every respect a first rate character.
2. DENNIS, her son, a mulatto, aged 24 years, a first rate cook and sailor for a vessel, having been in that capacity for many years on board one of the Mobile packets; is strictly honest, temperate and a first rate subject.
3. CHOLE, a mulatress, aged 36 years, she is, without exception, one of the most competent servants in the country, a first rate washer and ironer, does up lace, a good cook, and for a household wishes a house-keeper she would be invaluable; she is also a good ladies' maid, having travelled to the North in that capacity.
4. FANNY, her daughter, a mulatress, aged 16 years, speaks French and English, is a superior hair-dresser, (pupil of Guillae,) a good seamstress and ladies' maid, is smart, intelligent, and of a first rate character.
5. DANDRIDGE, a mulattoo, aged 26 years, a first rate dining-room waiter, a good painter and rough carpenter, and has but few equals for honesty and sobriety.
6. NANCY, his wife, aged about 24 years, a confidential house servant, good seamstress, mantuamaker and tailoress, a good cook, washer and ironer, etc.
7. MARY ANN, her child, a creole, aged 7 years, speaks French and English, is smart, active and intelligent.
8. FANNY or FRANCES, a mulatress, aged 22 years, is a first rate washer and ironer, good cook and house servant, and has an excellent character.
9. EMMA, an orphan, aged 10 or 11 years, speaks French and English, has been in the country 7 years, has been accustomed to waiting on table, sewing etc.; is intelligent and active.
10. FRANK, a mulatto, aged about 32 years speaks French and English, is a first rate hostler and coachman, understands perfectly well the management of horses, and is, in every respect, a first rate character, with the exception that he will occasionally drink, though not an habitual drunkard.

NOTE: All the above named Slaves are acclimated and excellent subjects; they were purchased by their vendor many years ago, and will, therefore, be severally warranted against all vices and maladies prescribed by law and except FRANK, who is fully guaranteed in every other respect but the one above mentioned.

TERMS.—One-half Cash, and the other half in notes at Six months, drawn and endorsed to the satisfaction of the vendor, with special mortgage on the Slaves until final payment. The Acts of Sale to be passed before WILLIAM

### Advertisement for Slave Sale, New Orleans, May 13, 1835

Image reference: 79a\_slave\_sale, Source: Collection of the New York Historical Society, #46628, as shown on [www.slaveryimages.org](http://www.slaveryimages.org), compiled by Jerome Handler and Michael Tuite, and sponsored by the Virginia Foundation for the Humanities and the University of Virginia Library

## Images of a slave auction



**Sale of an Enslaved Woman and Her Children, Suriname, ca. 1831**

Image reference: H016, Source: Pierre Jacques Benoit, *Voyage à Surinam . . . cent dessins pris sur nature par l'auteur* (Bruxelles, 1839), plate xliii, fig. 89. (Copy in the John Carter Brown Library at Brown University), as shown on [www.slaveryimages.org](http://www.slaveryimages.org), compiled by Jerome Handler and Michael Tuite, and sponsored by the Virginia Foundation for the Humanities and the University of Virginia Library.