

# HISTORIC ROOTS

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# PICTURES OF THE PAST

How often do we think back on some little thing we did or didn't do and wish we could change it? Not just because it would have made our own lives different, but because it would have changed other lives too. There's an old nursery rhyme that speaks to the same point: everything matters.

*For the want of a nail, a horse was lost.  
For the want of a horse, a soldier was lost.  
For the want of a soldier, a battle was lost.  
For the want of the battle, a country was lost.  
And all for the want of a horseshoe nail.*

History was not always written with the little things in mind. For a long time, historians were mostly men from upper class families. What was important to them was what happened to nations and to national leaders. History was the story of kings and leaders, of wars and treaties. It also involved the study of



laws and the men who made them. And it was the story of how the men in power got their power.

This kind of history left out a lot of the world. It focused on Europe and, later, the United States. But even in the countries that it covered, it left out a lot of people. It left out almost all women and most men. When historians wrote about plantations or the leaders of the American South, they did not write the history of the slaves on whose labor much southern wealth was based. They did not seek to learn about poor farmers, struggling to make a living. When they wrote about the growth of

*This notice of a slave auction shows clearly that slaves were bought and sold with no thought given to their feelings or families. They were treated as property.*

**Sale of Slaves and Stock.**

*The Negroes and Stock listed below, are a Prime Lot, and belong to the ESTATE OF THE LATE LUTHER MCGOWAN, and will be sold on Monday, Sept. 30th, 1850, at the Fair Grounds, in Savannah, Georgia, at 1:00 P. M. The Negroes will be taken to the grounds two days previous to the Sale, so that they may be inspected by prospective buyers.*

*On account of the low prices listed below, they will be sold for cash only, and must be taken into custody within two hours after sale.*

No.	Name	Age	Branch	Price
1	Lunesta	27	Prime Rice Planter,	\$1,275.00
2	Violet	16	Housework and Nursemaid,	900.00
3	Lizale	30	Rice, Unsound,	300.00
4	Minda	27	Cotton, Prime Woman,	1,300.00
5	Adam	28	Cotton, Prime Young Man,	1,000.00
6	Abel	41	Rice Hand, Eye-sight Poor,	575.00
7	Tansey	22	Prime Cotton Hand,	950.00
8	Flemestras	39	Good Cook, Sick Room,	400.00
9	Lainey	34	Prime Cotton Man,	1,000.00
10	Billy	50	Handy in Kitchen,	675.00
11	Macebay	35	Prime Man, Fair Carpenter,	900.00
12	Dorcas Judy	25	Seamstress, Handy in House,	800.00
13	Slappy	65	Blacksmith,	375.00
14	Mowden	15	Prime Cotton Boy,	700.00
15	Bills	21	Handy with Males,	900.00
16	Theopolis	39	Rice Hand, Gets Fit,	575.00
17	Cooldige	29	Rice Hand and Blacksmith,	1,275.00
18	Boonie	69	Infirm, Serv,	250.00
19	Infant	1	Strong Likely Boy	600.00
20	Bantson	41	Prime Man, Good with Stock,	975.00
21	Callie May	27	Prime Woman, Rice,	1,000.00
22	Honey	14	Prime Girl, Humming Poor,	850.00
23	Angelina	16	Prime Girl, House or Field,	1,000.00
24	Virgil	21	Prime Field Hand,	1,100.00
25	Tom	40	Rice Hand, Lame Leg,	750.00
26	Noble	11	Handy Boy,	500.00
27	Judge Leah	35	Prime Blacksmith,	600.00
28	Booster	43	Fair Mason, Unsound,	600.00
29	Big Kate	37	Housekeeper and Nurse,	550.00
30	Melie Ann	19	Housework, Smart Yellow Girl,	1,250.00
31	Dreton	36	Prime Rice Hand,	1,000.00
32	Coosing	19	Prime Cotton Hand,	1,000.00
33	Mabel	47	Prime Cotton Hand,	800.00
34	Uncle Tim	60	Fair Hand with Males,	600.00
35	Abe	27	Prime Cotton Hand,	1,000.00
36	Tessie	29	Prime Rice Hand and Cochman,	1,250.00

factories and the men who grew rich and powerful from them, they did not give much more than mention to the men, women, and children whose work, often in terrible conditions, made the growth and the wealth possible. When they wrote about battles, they wrote about generals and armies. They did not write about horse-shoes and horses and soldiers, or about the accidents in battles and in life that can change the course of history.

From their point of view, the path to the present looked pretty straight. This was not a false view of the past. Rulers and leaders, battles and treaties have always been important and have indeed helped form our present. But it is a limited view. If it were a picture, it would be painted on a large canvas. The colors would be bright and separate from each other. The surface would be smooth.

Over the last century, the idea of what makes history (and what has made the present) has changed. Workers, women, immigrants, members of minorities are now studying the the past. In their researches they often look into how ordinary people lived and what they thought. In looking at the details of those lives, they try, and have tried, to create a picture of their times from the bottom up.

The history of World War II, for instance, covers a lot more than battles. In Europe, there was the Holocaust, where millions of ordinary

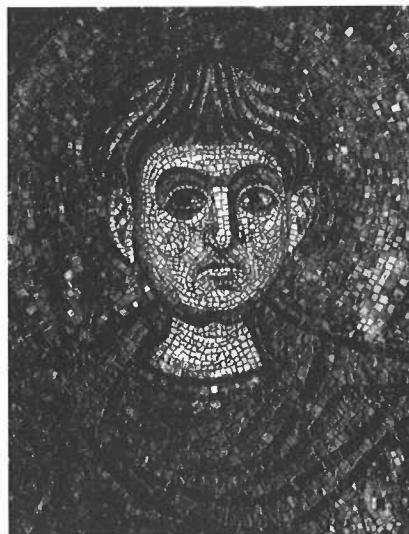


*This poster praises the women who went to work in factories during World War II, while men were overseas in the armed forces.*

people were killed just because of who they were. Other people, thousands of them, helped to capture and kill them. All of those people had stories. And what each of them did, by themselves and together, influenced many other people and their lives, in Europe and beyond.

In the United States, before the war, women, for the most part, were supposed to be wives and mothers. With so many men at war, however, large numbers of women were needed to work in factories. There they made the tanks, planes, weapons necessary to keep the armies going. Working changed the way those women saw themselves. What happened when the soldiers came home and took their jobs back affected individual families. It also affected what American society was like in the 1950s, and it influenced the development of the women's movement in the 1960s.

To understand history, historians now look at small things as well as major events. Letters, diaries, magazines, family photographs, old clothes all help build up a picture of what life was like at a given time. This picture is more detailed and in many ways richer than the older kind of history. This picture of



*Up close you can see the tiny pieces that make up this mosaic. From a distance, the pieces blend together and you see the picture as a whole.*



the past would be a mosaic. It would be a picture made up of tiny details stuck next to each other. The surface of a mosaic is rough and multi-colored. Up close it is hard to see beyond the individual pieces. But from a distance, the whole picture is full of details, shades of color,

and texture.

Obviously, even a mosaic can never create a complete picture of everything that has happened. Details and materials are lost. We don't know the name of the horse in the rhyme or why it lost its shoe. And no two people see the same event the same way. But the more we know about what happened at all levels of society and in all places around the globe, the more we can understand about our past, our present, and the world we live in.

ANN E. COOPER, *Editor*