

Slavery is a painful topic for American students, who can respond to its discussion with apathy, guilt, denial, and/or anger. It can be difficult to consider the effects of modern slavery on contemporary society. Linking the history of ancient slavery to that of the Americas opens up possibilities for a rich discussion in the classroom. The fact that ancient slavery was not based on racial differences allows not only for a more complex and nuanced understanding of the racializing of slavery in modernity, but also permits a consideration of the Aristotelian justification for natural slavery, used by American ante-bellum proponents of the enslavement of Africans. Slave narratives of the present and the ante-bellum past can stimulate further consideration of similarities between slavery in antiquity and modernity/post-modernity-- sexual vulnerability, bodily suffering, dishonor; and of structural differences between slavery in the economies of Greece and Rome and in capitalism. Questions for discussion might include the representation of slaves in ancient works of art, in Greek and Roman comedy, and in such films and television productions as "Spartacus", "Gladiator," "300," "Rome."