

INTRODUCTION

Textile dyeing has been practiced since prehistoric times, using colorants extracted from both plant, animal sources and inorganic materials. Indigo and the color it blue produced were highly sought after by dyers worldwide because of the valued medicinal, durability, and colorfast properties.



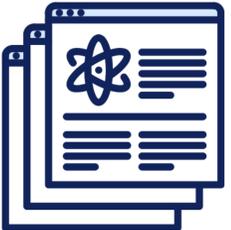
PURPOSE OF STUDY

Shine light on the African and African American contributions to the cultivation of indigo that have gone unnoticed.



METHODOLOGY

Integrative literature review that encompassed Google Search and ProQuest database searches using the following keywords to collect data: *indigo, enslaved, Africa, Africans, African Americans, and Black*



1) Indigo Plant

- Originally cultivated in Asia, Africa and South America
- The color blue was associated with wealth & prestige
- Source of commerce and wealth for African families
- Production requires many acres of land, plenty of labor
- Requires skilled labor with a high degree of technical knowledge to extract dye; had to find the cheapest labor possible to be profitable



2) Cultivation

- Preparation began in December
- Planting began in April
- Indigo would grow until late August, early September w/ 2-8 harvest times
- Enslaved captives harvested as much as 2 acres per day early in the morning or evening
- Cultivated rice on same land during indigo off season



3) Skilled Workers

- Enslaved Senegalese agricultural experience allowed the French settlers to have an early source of wealth from indigo cultivation
- In Hausa-speaking regions male and females assumed different roles to contribute to the production of indigo and the development of dyed products
- Nigerian females used deep circular wells to dye cotton yarn; Nigerian men from certain lineages specialized in textile production as weaving expertise was passed down through generations
- According to the dyer William Partridge in 1824, "It is well known that the African dyers are superior to those of any other part of the globe".



4) Slave Trade

- Louisiana colonists demanded more enslaved Africans throughout 1720's
- Indigo industries flourished in the Caribbean and United State due to access to enslave labor
- 18th century Europeans targeted cultures with indigo knowledge for enslavement on ships destined for British South Carolina and French Louisiana markets



5) Global Trade

- Indigo used as global commodity until 20th century when synthetic dye production began
- Indigo grown by forced labor led to systems of labor exploitation linked across the globe
- North America met British demand for indigo since enslaved Africans became readily available



6) South Carolina

- Elizabeth Lucas-Pinckney, an indigo "expert" from the French West Indies and became an important figure in the development of U.S indigo cultivation with all credit given to Pinckney for managing the harvest herself
- However, Quash, a mulatto enslave carpenter, was instrumental in helping Pinckney achieve success by creating the wooden vats that would produce fine-quality. Other enslaved people contributed resources and expertise to her venture
- The Lucas-Pinckney family records share the name of some enslaved Africans that ran their indigo operation directly and indirectly: Williams, Dick, Mary Ann, Dick, Lynn, Sawney, Indian Peter, Issac, Pompey, Sarah, Mo, Beck, Molly, Nanny, Mary, Peter, Pompey, Douglas, Betty, and little Gulla

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