CHAPTER

Slavery and Empire

1441–1770
CHAPTER OUTLINE

THE BEGINNINGS OF AFRICAN SLAVERY
Sugar and Slavery
West Africans

THE AFRICAN SLAVE TRADE
The Demography of the Slave Trade
Slavers of All Nations
The Shock of Enslavement
The Middle Passage
Arrival in the New World
Political and Economic Effects on Africa

THE DEVELOPMENT OF NORTH AMERICAN SLAVE SOCIETIES
Slavery Comes to North America
The Tobacco Colonies
The Lower South
Slavery in the Spanish Colonies
French Louisiana
Slavery in the North

AFRICAN TO AFRICAN AMERICAN
The Daily Life of Slaves
Families and Communities
African American Culture
The Africanization of the South
Violence and Resistance

SLAVERY AND EMPIRE
Slavery the Mainspring
The Politics of Mercantilism
Wars for Empire
British Colonial Regulation
The Colonial Economy

SLAVERY AND FREEDOM
The Social Structure of the Slave Colonies
White Skin Privilege
African Slaves Build Their Own Community in Coastal Georgia

Africans labored in the steamy heat of the coastal Georgia rice fields in the middle of the eighteenth century, the breeches of the men rolled up over their knees, the sack skirts of the women gathered and tied about their hips, leaving them, in the words of one shocked observer, “two-thirds naked.” Upriver, groups cut away cypress and gum trees and cleared the swampland’s jungle maze of undergrowth; others constructed levees, preparing to bring more land under cultivation. African slave drivers, whips at the ready, supervised the work. An English overseer or plantation master might be seen here and there, but overwhelmingly this was a country populated by Africans.

These plantations were southern extensions of the South Carolina rice belt. Although slavery was prohibited by Georgia’s original charter of 1732, the restriction was lifted two decades later when Georgia became a royal colony. By 1770, 15,000 African Americans (80 percent of the region’s population) were enslaved on several hundred coastal rice plantations owned by a small planter elite.

Rice was one of the most valuable commodities produced in mainland North America, surpassed in value only by tobacco and wheat. The growth of rice production was matched by an enormous expansion in the Atlantic slave trade, and during the eighteenth century, rice planters engaged in what one historian calls a “veritable orgy” of slave trading. Although the number of slaves who were “country born” (native to America, and thus born into slavery) grew steadily over the century, on rice plantations the majority were what were known as “saltwater” Africans.

These men and women had endured the shock of enslavement. Ripped from their homeland communities in West Africa by slave raiders and brutally marched to coastal forts, they were subjected to humiliating inspections of their bodies and branded like animals, then packed into the stinking holds of ships and forced into a nightmarish passage across the Atlantic Ocean during which many died. Unloaded on a strange continent, the survivors were sold at dockside auctions, then once again marched overland to their destinations. On the rice plantations of isolated coastal Georgia, enslaved Africans suffered from overwork and numerous physical ailments, the results of poor diet, minimal and inappropriate clothing, and inadequate housing. Mortality rates were exceptionally high, especially for infants. Colonial laws permitted masters to discipline and punish slaves indiscriminately. Harsh punishments were imposed on slaves who were suspected of taking food, agitated for reforms, or plotted revolts. They were whipped, confined in irons, mutilated, sold away, or murdered.

Like slaves everywhere in the Americas, many ran away. Readers of Savannah newspapers were urged to look out for fugitives: Statira, a woman of the “Gold Coast Country” with tribal markings on her temples, or “a negro fellow named Mingo, about 40 years old, and his wife Quante, a sensible wench about 20 with her child, a boy about 3 years old, all this country born.” Some fled in groups, heading for Indian settlements in northern Florida, or toward St. Augustine, where Spanish authorities promised them safe haven. Some struck out violently at their masters: a group of nine Africans from a Savannah plantation killed their master and stole a boat, planning to head upriver, but were apprehended as they lay in wait to murder their hated overseers.

So some slaves resisted, but the majority of Africans and African Americans remained imprisoned within the heartless world of slavery. Plantation slaves married, raised children, and over time constructed kinship networks. They passed on African names and traditions and created new ones. The slaves of coastal Georgia combined elements of African languages and English, creating dialects that allowed people from many different African ethnic groups to communicate with one another. Common African heritage and their slave status were the foundations of the African American community.
African Americans reworked traditional African dance, song, and story to fit their enslavement in the New World, just as they reestablished traditional arts, such as woodworking, iron making, and weaving. Through their culture, the slaves shared a powerful awareness of their common oppression. They told or sang dialect tales of mistreatment, as in this song of Quow, the punished slave:

Was matter Buddy Quow?
I ble Obesha bang you . . .
Dah Backrow Man go wrong you, Buddy Quow,
Dah Backrow Man go wrong you, Buddy Quow.

What's the matter Brother Quow?
I believe the overseer's beat you . . .
The white man's wronged you, Brother Quow,
The white man's wronged you, Brother Quow.

The history of African Americans includes the story of the Atlantic slave trade, the plunder of Africa, and the profits of empire. But it is also a story of the making of families, kin networks, and communities under the most difficult of circumstances. They “labor together and converse almost wholly among themselves,” a minister wrote of low-country slaves. “They are, as 'twere, a nation within a nation.”

KEY TOPICS
- The development of the slavery system
- The history of the slave trade and the Middle Passage
- Community development among African Americans in the eighteenth century
- The connections between the institution of slavery and the imperial system of the eighteenth century
- The early history of racism in America

THE BEGINNINGS OF AFRICAN SLAVERY

Household slaves had long been a part of the world of Mediterranean Europe. War captives were sold to wealthy families, who put them to work as servants or artisans. In the fifteenth century, Venetian and Genoese merchants led the traffic in captured Slavic peoples—the word “slave” derives from “Slav”—as well as Muslims and Africans. Many Europeans were disturbed, however, by the moral implications of enslaving Christians, and in the early fifteenth century the pope excommunicated a number of merchants engaged in selling such captives. Africans and Muslims, however, were sufficiently different in religion to quiet those concerns.

One of the goals of Portuguese expansion in the fifteenth century was access to the lucrative West African trade in gold, wrought iron, ivory, tortoiseshell, textiles, and slaves that had previously been dominated by the Moors of northern Africa. The first African slaves arrived in Lisbon in 1441. European traders found it most efficient to leave the capture of men and women for slavery to Africans, who were willing to exchange the captured slaves for European commodities. By the mid-fifteenth century, the Portuguese were shipping a thousand or more slaves per year from Africa. Most of them were sent to the sugar plantations on the Portuguese island colony of Madeira, off the coast of northern Africa.
CHAPTER 4 SLAVERY AND EMPIRE, 1441–1770

Sugar and Slavery
Sugar and slaves had gone together since Italian merchants of the fourteenth century imported the first cane sugar from the Middle East and set up the first modern sugar plantations on the islands of the Mediterranean. African slaves came to the Americas with the introduction of sugar production. Columbus brought sugar cane to Hispaniola, and soon sugar plantations were in operation. Because disease and warfare had devastated the indigenous population, colonists imported African slaves from Spain. Meanwhile, the Portuguese, aided by Dutch financiers, created a center of sugar production in northeast Brazil that became a model of the efficient and brutal exploitation of African labor. By 1600, some 25,000 enslaved Africans labored on the plantations of Hispaniola and Brazil.

Skilled at finance and commerce, the Dutch greatly expanded the European market for sugar, converting it from a luxury item for the rich to a staple for ordinary people. Along with other tropical commodities such as tobacco, coffee, and tea, sugar helped sustain workers through the increasingly long working day. Once the profitability of sugar had been demonstrated, England and France sought West Indian sugar colonies of their own. With the Spanish preoccupied on the big islands of Cuba, Hispaniola, Jamaica, and Puerto Rico, English and French settlers began constructing plantations and importing slaves to the islands of the Lesser Antilles. By the 1640s, English Barbados and French Martinique had become highly profitable colonies. Lusting for more, in 1655, the English seized the island of Jamaica, and by 1670, the French had taken over the western portion of Hispaniola, which they renamed St. Dominique (present-day Haiti). By then, Caribbean sugar and slaves had become the centerpiece of the European colonial system.

West Africans
The men and women whose labor made these tropical colonies so profitable came from the long-established societies and local communities of West Africa. In the sixteenth century, more than a hundred different peoples lived along the coast of West Africa, from Cape Verde south to Angola. In the north were the Wolofs, Mandingos, Hausas, Ashantis, and Yorubas; to the south were the Ibos, Sekes, Bakongos, and Mbundus.

In all these societies the most important institution was the local community, organized by kinship. West Africans practiced a marriage system known as polygyny, in which men often took a second or third wife. This produced very large composite families with complex internal relationships. Because of cultural restrictions on sexual relations, however, West African women bore fewer children than typical European women, and many enjoyed considerable social and economic independence as traders. Communities were led by clan leaders and village chiefs. Disputes were arbitrated by local courts.

West African societies were based on sophisticated farming systems many thousands of years old. Africans practiced shifting cultivation: they cleared land by burning, used hoes or digging sticks to cultivate fields, and after several years...
moved on to other plots while the cleared land lay fallow. Men worked at clearing the land, women at cultivation and the sale of surpluses. Farming sustained large populations and thriving networks of commerce, and in some regions kingdoms and states developed. Along the upper Niger River, where the grassland gradually turns to desert, towns such as Timbuktu developed into trading centers. There were also a number of lesser states and kingdoms along the coast, and it was with these that the Portuguese first bargained for Africans who could be sold as slaves.

Varieties of household slavery were common in West African societies, although slaves there were often treated more as members of the family than as mere possessions. They were allowed to marry, and their children were born free. “With us they did no more work than other members of the community, even their master,” remembered Olaudah Equiano, an Ibo captured and shipped to America as a slave in 1756, when he was a boy of eleven. “Their food, clothing, and lodging were nearly the same as [the others], except that they were not permitted to eat with those who were born free.” When African merchants sold the first slaves to the Portuguese, they must have thought that European slavery would be similar. But as Equiano declared: “How different was their condition from that of the slaves in the West Indies!” Yet the West African familiarity with “unfree” labor made it possible for African and European traders to begin the trade in human merchandise.

The African Slave Trade

The movement of Africans across the Atlantic to the Americas was the largest forced migration in world history (see Map 4-1). Africans made up the largest group of people to come to the Americas before the nineteenth century, outnumbering European immigrants by the ratio of six to one. The Atlantic slave trade, which began with the Portuguese in the fifteenth century and did not end in the United States until 1807 (and continued elsewhere in the Americas until the 1870s), is the most brutal chapter in the making of America.

The Demography of the Slave Trade

Although there is much dispute over the numbers, the consensus among scholars today is that slave ships transported from 10 to 12 million Africans to the Americas during the four-century history of the trade. Seventy-six percent arrived between 1701 and 1810— the peak period of colonial demand for labor, when tens of thousands were shipped from Africa each year. Of this vast multitude, about half were delivered to Dutch, French, or British sugar plantations in the Caribbean, a third to Portuguese Brazil, and 10 percent to Spanish America (see Map 4-2 on page 97). A much smaller proportion—about one in twenty, or an estimated 600,000 men, women, and children—were transported to the British colonies of North America. With the exception of the 1750s, when the British colonies were engulfed by the Seven Years’ War, the slave
trade continued to rise in importance in the decades before the Revolution (see Figure 4-1 on page 98).

Among the Africans brought to the Americas, men generally outnumbered women two to one. Because most Africans were destined for fieldwork, this ratio probably reflected the preferences of plantation owners. The majority of captured and transported Africans were young people between the ages of fifteen and thirty. Nearly every ethnic group in West Africa was represented among them.

**Slavers of All Nations**

All the nations of western Europe participated in the slave trade. Dutch slavers began challenging Portuguese control of the trade at the end of the sixteenth century, and Holland became the most prominent slave-trading nation during the sugar boom of the seventeenth century. The English also entered the trade in the sixteenth century with the African voyages of John Hawkins. The Royal African Company, a slave-trading monopoly based in London, was chartered in 1672, but in 1698, England
threw open the trade to independent merchants. Soon hundreds of ships from Bristol and Liverpool were competing with those from London. As a result, the number of slaves shipped to North America skyrocketed. The Dutch and Portuguese, however, continued to play important roles, alongside slave traders from France, Sweden, and several German duchies.

For the most part, the European presence in Africa was confined to coastal outposts. By the early eighteenth century, more than two dozen trading forts dotted the 220 miles of the Gold Coast alone. As the slave trade peaked in the middle of the eighteenth century, however, trading posts gave way to independent European and American traders who set up operations with the cooperation of local headmen or chiefs. This informal manner of trading offered opportunities for small operators, such as the New England slavers who entered the trade in the early eighteenth century. Many great New England fortunes were built from profits in the slave trade.

**THE SHOCK OF ENSLAVEMENT**

The slave trade was a collaboration between European or American and African traders. Dependent on the favor of local rulers, many colonial slave traders lived permanently in coastal outposts and married African women, reinforcing their commercial ties with family relations. In many areas, their mixed-ancestry offspring became prominent players in the slave trade. Continuing the practice of the Portuguese, the grim business of slave raiding was left to the Africans themselves. Slaves were not at all reticent about condemning the participation of their fellow Africans. “I must own to the shame of my own countrymen,” wrote Ottobah Cugoano of Ghana, who was sold into slavery in the 1750s, “that I was first kidnapped and betrayed by those of my own complexion.”

Most Africans were enslaved through warfare. Sometimes large armies launched massive attacks, burning whole towns and taking hundreds of prisoners. More common were smaller raids, in which a group of armed men attacked at nightfall, seized everyone within reach, then escaped with their captives. As the demand for slaves increased in the eighteenth century with the expansion of the plantation system in the Americas, these raids extended deeper and deeper into the African interior. The march of captives to the coast was filled with terrors. One account describes a two-month trip in which many people died of hunger, thirst, or exhaustion, and the whole party was forced to hide to avoid being seized by a rival band of raiders. The captives finally arrived on the coast, where they were sold to an American vessel bound for South Carolina.

Enslavement was an unparalleled shock. Venture Smith, an African born in Guinea in 1729, was only eight years old when he was captured. After many years in North American slavery, he still vividly recalled the attack on his village, the torture and murder of his father, and the long march of his people to the coast. “The shocking scene is to this day fresh in my mind,” he wrote, “and I have often been overcome while thinking on it.”

On the coast, European traders and African raiders assembled their captives. Prisoners waited in dark dungeons or in open pens called “barracoons.” To lessen the possibility of collective resistance, traders split up families and ethnic groups. Captains carefully inspected each man and woman, and those selected for transport were branded on the back or buttocks with the mark of the buyer. Olaudah Equiano remembered that “those white men with horrible looks, red faces, and long hair, looked and acted . . . in so savage a manner; . . . I had never seen among

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### Map 4-1

Slaves were transported through the Middle Passage, a leg of the Triangular Trade. In the late 1600s, the American colonies saw a decline in the immigration of English servants. The labor shortage was filled by the English Royal African Company, which began importing slaves directly to North America in the 1670s. Slaves were expensive, but they could be kept in the fields for longer hours, with fewer days off than indentured servants.

### Map 4-2

**Slave Colonies of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries**

By the eighteenth century, the system of slavery had created societies with large African populations throughout the Caribbean and along the southern coast of North America.
any people such instances of brutal cruelty.” Equiano’s narrative, published in 1789 after he had secured his freedom, is one of the few that provide an African account of enslavement. He and his fellow captives became convinced that they “had got into a world of bad spirits” and were about to be eaten by cannibals. A French trader wrote that many prisoners were “positively prepossessed with the opinion that we transport them into our country in order to kill and eat them.”

**THE MIDDLE PASSAGE**

In the eighteenth century, English sailors christened the voyage of slave ships as the “**Middle Passage,**” the middle part of a trading triangle from England to Africa to America and back to England. From coastal forts and barracoons, crews rowed small groups of slaves out to the waiting ships and packed them into shelves below deck only six feet long by two and a half feet high. “Rammed like herring in a barrel,” wrote one observer, slaves were “chained to each other hand and foot, and stowed so close, that they were not allowed above a foot and a half for each in breadth.” People were forced to lie “spoon fashion,” and the tossing of the ship knocked them about so violently that the skin over their elbows sometimes was worn to the bone from scraping on the planks. “It was more than a week after I left the ship before I could straighten my limbs,” one former slave later remembered.

One ship designed to carry 450 slaves regularly crossed the Atlantic tightly packed with more than 600 slaves.

Their holds filled with human cargo, the ships headed toward Cape Verde to catch the trade winds blowing toward America. A favorable voyage from Senegambia to Barbados might be accomplished in as little as three weeks, but a ship departing from Guinea or Angola and becalmed in the doldrums or driven back by storms might take as much as three months.

Most voyages were marked by a daily routine. In the morning the crew opened the hatch and brought the captives on deck, attaching their leg irons to a great chain running the length of the bulwarks. After a breakfast of beans the crew commanded men and women to jump up and down, a bizarre session of exercise known as “dancing the slave.” A day spent chained on deck was concluded by a second bland meal and then the stowing away. During the night, according to one seaman, there issued from below “a howling melancholy noise, expressive of extreme anguish.” Down in the hold, the groans of the dying, the shrieks of women and children, and the suffocating heat and stench were, in the words of Olaudah Equiano, “a scene of horror almost inconceivable.”

Among the worst of the horrors was the absence of adequate sanitation. There were “necessary tubs” set below deck, but Africans, “endeavoring to get to them, tumble over their companions,” as one eighteenth-century ship’s surgeon wrote. “And as the necessities of nature are not to be resisted, they ease themselves as they lie.” Crews were to swab the holds daily, but so sickening was the task that on many ships it was rarely performed, and Africans were left to wallow in their own wastes. “The floor,” wrote an English ship’s surgeon, “was so covered with blood and mucus that it resembled a slaughter house. It is not in the power of human imagination to picture to itself a situation more dreadful or disgusting.” When first taken below deck, Equiano remembered, “I received such a salutation in my nostrils as I had never experienced in my life,” and “became so sick and low that I was not able to eat.”
According to Atlantic sailors, they could “smell a slaver five miles down wind.” In these filthy conditions, many captives sickened and died. Others contracted dysentery, known as the “flux.” Frequent shipboard epidemics of smallpox, measles, and yellow fever added to the misery. The dying continued even as the ships anchored at their destinations. Historians estimate that during the Middle Passage of the eighteenth century, one in every six Africans perished.

The unwilling voyagers offered plenty of resistance. As long as ships were still within sight of the African coast, hope remained alive and the danger of revolt was great. One historian has found references to fifty-five slave revolts on British and American ships from 1699 to 1845. Once on the open sea, however, the captives’ resistance took more desperate form. The sight of the disappearing coast of Africa “left me abandoned to despair,” wrote Equiano. “I now saw myself deprived of all chance of returning to my native country, or even the least glimpse of hope of gaining the shore.” He witnessed several of his fellow Africans jump overboard and drown, “and I believe...
many more would very soon have done the same if they had not been prevented by the ship’s crew.” Captains took the precaution of spreading nets along the sides of their ships. “Could I have got over the nettings,” Equiano declared, “I would have jumped over the side.”

**Arrival in the New World**

As the ship approached its destination, the crew prepared the human cargo for market. All but the most rebellious individuals were freed from their chains, and were allowed to wash themselves and move about the deck. To impress buyers, captains might parade Africans off the ship to the tune of an accordion or the beat of a drum. But the toll of the Middle Passage was difficult to disguise. One observer described a disembarking group as “walking skeletons covered over with a piece of tanned leather.”

Some cargoes were destined for a single wealthy planter, or consigned to a merchant who sold the captives in return for a commission; in other cases the captain himself was responsible. Buyers painstakingly examined the Africans, who again suffered the indignity of probing eyes and poking fingers. This caused “much dread and trembling among us,” wrote Equiano. In ports such as Charleston, sales were generally made by auction, or by a cruel method known as the scramble—the prices were set in advance, the Africans driven into a corral, and on cue the buyers rushed among them, seizing their pick. The noise, clamor, and determination of the buyers, Equiano remembered, renewed all the terrible apprehensions of the Africans. “In this manner, without scruple, are relations and friends separated, most of them never to see each other again.” Bought by a Virginian, Equiano was taken to an isolated tobacco plantation where he found himself unable to communicate with any of his fellow slaves, who came from other ethnic groups.

**Political and Economic Effects on Africa**

Africa began the sixteenth century with genuine independence. But as surely as European empires grew strong as a result of the slave trade, so Africa grew weaker. For every individual taken captive, at least another died in the chronic slave raiding. Death and destruction spread deep into the African interior. Coastal slave-trading kingdoms drew slaves from central Africa. But these coastal states found that the trade was a viper that could easily strike back at them. “Merchants daily seize our own subjects, sons of the land and sons of our noblemen, they grab them and cause them to be sold,” King Dom Affonso of the Kongo wrote to the Portuguese monarch in the sixteenth century. “And so great, Sir, is their corruption and licentiousness that our country is being utterly depopulated.” Many of the new states became little more than machines for supplying captives to European traders, and a “gun-slave cycle” pushed them into a destructive arms race with each other.

Even more serious was the long-term stagnation of the West African economy. Labor was drawn away from farming and other productive activities, and imported consumer goods such as textiles and metal wares stifled local manufacturing. African traders were expert at driving a hard bargain for slaves, and over several centuries, they won increasing prices for slaves. But even when they appeared to get the best of the exchange, the ultimate advantage lay with the Europeans, who received wealth-producing workers in return for mere consumer goods.

This political, economic, and cultural demoralization paved the way for the European conquest of Africa in the nineteenth century. The leaders of West Africa
during the centuries of slave trading, writes the Nigerian poet Chinweizu, “had been too busy organizing our continent for the exploitative advantage of Europe, had been too busy with slaving raids upon one another, too busy decorating themselves with trinkets imported from Europe, too busy impoverishing and disorganizing the land, to take thought and long-range action to protect our sovereignty.”

The Development of North American Slave Societies

New World slavery was nearly two centuries old before it became an important system of labor in North America. There were slaves in each of the British colonies during the seventeenth century, but in 1700, slaves accounted for only 11 percent of the colonial population (see Figure 4-2). During the eighteenth century, slavery expanded greatly, and by 1770 there were 460,000 Africans and African Americans in British North America, more than 20 percent of the population.

Slavery Comes to North America

The first Africans in Virginia arrived in 1619 when a Dutch slave trader exchanged “20 and odd Negars” for badly needed provisions with planter John Rolfe. But because slaves generally cost twice as much as indentured servants, yet had the same appallingly short life expectancy in the disease-prone Chesapeake region, they offered little economic benefit. Consequently, over the next several decades, tobacco planters employed far more indentured servants than slaves. Servants and slaves on seventeenth-century Virginia and Maryland plantations worked together, ate and slept in common quarters, and often developed intimate relationships. The Chesapeake was what historians term a society with slaves, a society in which slavery was one form of labor among several.

Under these circumstances the status of black Virginians could be ambiguous. An interesting case illustrates the point. In 1654, the African John Castor told a local court that “he came unto Virginia for seven or eight years of indenture, yet Anthony Johnson his Master had kept him his servant seven years longer than he should or ought.” Johnson claimed that “he had the Negro for his life.” The court decided in the master’s favor. But strange to say, Johnson himself was of African descent. He had arrived as a slave in 1621, but by hiring himself out during his free time, had earned enough to gain freedom for himself and his family. Eventually he succeeded in becoming a landowner. “I know myne owne ground and I will worke when I please and play when I please,” Johnson declared. Colonial records reveal that other Africans acquired farms, servants, and slaves of their own. Many slaves were Christians, and since religious difference had traditionally been a justification for slavery, this raised doubts about whether they could legally be kept as slaves. Moreover, sexual relations among Africans, Indians, and Europeans produced a sizable group of free people of mixed ancestry known as mulattoes. It was only later that dark skin came automatically to mean slavery, segregation, and the absence of the rights of freemen.

In the last quarter of the seventeenth century, however, the Chesapeake went from being a society with slaves to a slave society, in which the dominant form of labor was slavery. In the first place, there

HOW DID slavery in the North differ from slavery in the South?

AP* Guideline 3.4

FIGURE 4-2
Africans as a Percentage of Total Population of the British Colonies, 1650–1770 Although the proportion of Africans and African Americans was never as high in the South as in the Caribbean, the ethnic structure of the South diverged radically from that of the North during the eighteenth century.

was a decline in the immigration of English servants. Previously it had been possible for former indentured servants to migrate westward and claim small plots on which they grew tobacco. But after the 1660s, most of the arable land had fallen into the hands of the planter elite. “There has not for many years,” Virginian Edward Randolph wrote in 1696, “been any vast land to be taken up.” English immigrants turned away from the Chesapeake to colonies such as Pennsylvania, where there was more opportunity. The labor shortage was filled by the English Royal Africa Company, which began importing slaves directly to North America in the 1670s. Slaves were expensive, but they could be kept in the fields for longer hours, with fewer days off. By 1700, there were 5,000 slaves in Virginia, and people of African descent made up 22 percent of the population of the Chesapeake.

There were no English legal precedents for enslaving people for life and making that status inevitable and inheritable. So as the proportions of slaves in the colonial population rose, colonists wrote slavery into law, a process best observed in the case of Virginia. In 1662, the planter assembly declared that henceforth children would be “bond or free only according to the condition of the mother.” As one historian writes, this statute was “the great planters’ first move in the direction of asserting their authority over the progeny of enslaved women.” Five years later they passed a law that Christian baptism could no longer alter conditions of servitude. Thus were two important avenues to freedom closed. The colony then placed life-threatening violence in the hands of masters, declaring in 1669 that the death of a slave during punishment “shall not be accounted felony.” Such regulations accumulated piecemeal until 1705, when Virginia gathered them into a comprehensive slave code that became a model for other colonies.

The institution of slavery was strengthened just as the Atlantic slave trade reached flood tide at the beginning of the eighteenth century. More Africans were imported into North America during the decade between 1700 and 1710 than the entire previous century. The English colonies were primed for an unprecedented growth of plantation slavery.

**The Tobacco Colonies**

During the eighteenth century, the European demand for tobacco increased more than tenfold, and it was supplied largely by increased production in the Chesapeake. Tobacco was far and away the single most important commodity produced in eighteenth-century North America, accounting for more than a quarter of the value of all colonial exports.

The expansion of tobacco production could not have taken place without a corresponding growth in the size of the slave labor force. Unlike sugar, tobacco did not require large plantations and could be produced successfully on small farms. But it was a crop that demanded a great deal of hand labor and close attention. As tobacco farming grew, slaveholding became widespread. By 1770, more than a quarter million slaves labored in the colonies of the Upper South (Maryland, Virginia, and North Carolina), and because of the exploding market for tobacco, their numbers were expanding at about double the rate of the general population.

Shipments from Africa accounted for a portion of the growth of the slave population. From 1700 to 1770, an estimated 80,000 Africans were imported into the
tobacco region. But natural increase was even more important. In the Caribbean and Brazil, where profits from sugar were extremely high, many planters literally worked their slaves to death, replenishing them with a constant stream of new arrivals, mostly men, from Africa. In Virginia, however, significantly lower profits led tobacco planters to pay more attention to the health of their labor force, establishing work routines that were not as deadly. Moreover, food supplies were more plentiful in North America and slaves better fed, making them more resistant to disease. By the 1730s, the slave population of the Chesapeake had become the first in the Western Hemisphere to achieve self-sustained population growth. Natural increase gradually balanced the sex ratio among slaves, another encouragement to population growth. Planters came to recognize that they stood to benefit from the fertility of their slaves. “A woman who brings a child every two years [is] more valuable than the best man on the farm,” wrote Virginia planter Thomas Jefferson, “for what she produces is an addition to the capital.” By the 1750s, about 80 percent of Chesapeake slaves were “country-born.”

The Lower South

The Chesapeake did not become a slave society until almost a century after its founding. But in South Carolina, settlement and slavery went hand in hand, and the colony was a slave society from the beginning. The most valuable part of the early Carolina economy was the Indian slave trade. Practicing a strategy of divide and conquer, using Indian tribes to fight one another, Carolinians enslaved tens of thousands of native people before the 1730s, shipping many to slave markets in the Caribbean, employing others raising cattle or felling timber. In 1713, colonists attacked the Tuscarora tribe, killing at least a thousand warriors and enslaving a thousand women and children. In retaliation, the Yamasee tribe staged...
a general uprising in 1715 that nearly defeated colonial forces. Only by enlisting the aid of the Cherokees was South Carolina able to turn the tide.

By the time of the Yamasee War, however, planter preference had turned toward African rather than Indian slaves. Rice production was rapidly becoming the most dynamic sector of the South Carolina economy (see Table 4.1), and with their experience in agriculture, West Africans made much better rice workers than Indians. Another important crop was added in the 1740s, when a young South Carolina woman named Elizabeth Lucas Pinckney successfully adapted West Indian indigo to the low-country climate. The indigo plant, native to India, produced a deep blue dye important in textile manufacture. Rice grew in the lowlands, but indigo could be cultivated on high ground, and with different seasonal growing patterns, planters were able to harmonize their production. Rice and indigo were two of the most valuable commodities exported from the mainland colonies of North America. The boom in these two crops depended on increasing numbers of African slaves. Before the international slave trade to the United States ended in 1808, at least 100,000 Africans had arrived in South Carolina. It is estimated that one of every five ancestors of today’s African Americans passed through Charleston on the way to the rice plantations.

By the 1740s, many of the arriving Africans were being taken to Georgia, a colony created by an act of the English Parliament in 1732. Its leader, James Edward Oglethorpe, hoped to establish a buffer against Spanish invasion from Florida and make it a haven for poor British farmers who could then sell their products in the markets of South Carolina. Under Oglethorpe’s influence, Parliament agreed to prohibit slavery in Georgia. Soon, however, Georgia’s coastal regions were being colonized by South Carolina planters with their slaves. In 1752, Oglethorpe and Georgia’s trustees abandoned their experiment, and the colony was opened to slavery under royal authority. The Georgia coast had already become an extension of the Carolina low-country slave system.

Tobacco plantations in the Chesapeake were often small affairs, but rice plantations required a minimum of thirty slaves and more commonly had fifty to seventy-five, which meant large black majorities in the colonies of the Lower South. By 1770, there were nearly 90,000 African Americans in the Lower South, about 80 percent of the coastal population of South Carolina and Georgia. In the words of one eighteenth-century observer, “Carolina looks more like a negro country than like a country settled by white people.” The African American communities of the Lower South achieved self-sustained growth in the middle of the eighteenth century, a generation later than those in the Chesapeake.

**Slavery in the Spanish Colonies**

Slavery was basic to the Spanish colonial labor system, yet doubts about the enslavement of Africans were raised by both church and crown. The papacy denounced slavery many times as a violation of Christian principles. But the institution of slavery remained intact, and later in the eighteenth century, when sugar production expanded in Cuba, the slave system there was as brutal as any in the history of the Americas.

The character of slavery varied with local conditions. One of the most benign forms operated in Florida. Slaves could be found in many Florida settlements, but the conditions of their servitude resembled the household slavery common in Mediterranean and African communities more than the plantation slavery of the British colonies. In 1699, in an attempt to undermine the English colonies of

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Tobacco</th>
<th>Rice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<tr>
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<td>51,339</td>
<td>16,667</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1775</td>
<td>55,968</td>
<td>57,692</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 4.1 TOBACCO AND RICE EXPORTS TO ENGLAND (in thousands of pounds)**
the Lower South, the Spanish declared Florida a refuge for escaped slaves from the British colonies, offering free land to fugitives who would help defend their colony. Over the next half-century, refugee Indians and fugitive Africans established many communities in the countryside surrounding St. Augustine. North of the city, Fort Mose was manned by Negro troops commanded by their own officers. By 1763, 3,000 African Americans, a quarter of them free, made up 25 percent of St. Augustine’s population.

In New Mexico, the Spanish depended on Indian slavery. In the sixteenth century, the colonial governor sent Indian slaves to the mines of Mexico. The enslavement of Indians was one of the causes of the Pueblo Revolt (see Chapter 3). During the eighteenth century, the Spanish were much more cautious in their treatment of the Pueblos, who were officially considered Catholics. But they captured and enslaved “infidel Indians” such as the Apaches or nomads from the Great Plains, using them as house servants and fieldworkers.

French Louisiana

Slavery was also important in Louisiana, the colony founded by the French in the lower Mississippi Valley in the early eighteenth century. After Robert Sieur de La Salle’s voyage down the Mississippi River in 1681–82, the French planned colonies to anchor their New World empire. In the early eighteenth century, French Canadians established bases at Biloxi and Mobile on the Gulf of Mexico, but it was not until 1718 that they laid out the city of New Orleans on the Mississippi Delta. The French Company of the Indies imported some 6,000 African slaves, and planters invested in tobacco and indigo plantations on the Mississippi River in the country of the Natchez Indians. But in 1629, the Natchez and the slaves together rose in an armed uprising, the Natchez Rebellion, that took the lives of more than 200 French settlers, 10 percent of the population. Although colonial authorities were able to put down the rebellion—crushing and dispersing the Natchez people—the Louisiana French pulled back from a total commitment to slavery.

After the Natchez Rebellion, Louisiana’s economy grew more diversified. Several thousand French colonists established farms and plantations on the Gulf Coast and in a narrow strip of settlement along the Mississippi River. African slaves amounted to no more than a third of the colonial population of 10,000. It was not until the end of the eighteenth century that the colony of Louisiana became an important North American slave society.

Slavery in the North

Slavery was a fundamental, acceptable, thoroughly American institution. Although none of the northern colonies could be characterized as a slave society, slavery was an important form of labor in many areas. Over the course of the eighteenth century, it grew increasingly significant in the commercial farming regions of southeast Pennsylvania, central New Jersey, and Long Island, where slaves made up about 10 percent of the rural residents. In the vicinity of Newport, Rhode Island, the proportion of slaves in the population reached nearly 25 percent, a concentration resulting from that port’s
dominance in the midcentury slave trade. The area was unique for the large slave gangs used in cattle and dairy operations in the Narragansett country, some of which were as large as Virginia plantations. Elsewhere in the New England countryside, slavery was relatively uncommon.

It was widespread in all the port cities, however, including Boston. There was “not a house” that “has not one or two,” a visitor to that city wrote in the 1680s, and a visitor to Philadelphia about the same time noted that slaves were bought “by almost everyone who could afford [them].” Slave ownership was nearly universal among the wealthy and ordinary among craftsmen and professionals. By 1750, slaves and small free black populations made up 15 to 20 percent of the residents of Boston, New York City, and Philadelphia.

The Quakers of Pennsylvania and New Jersey, many of whom kept slaves, were the first colonists to voice antislavery sentiment. In 1715, John Hepburn of New Jersey published the first North American critique of slavery, but his was a lonely voice. By midcentury, however, there was a significant antislavery movement among the Quakers. In Considerations on the Keeping of Negroes (1754), John Woolman urged his readers to imagine themselves in the place of the African people. Suppose, he wrote,

that our ancestors and we had been exposed to constant servitude in the more servile and inferior employments of life; that we had been destitute of the help of reading and good company; that amongst ourselves we had had few wise and pious instructors; that the religious amongst our superiors seldom took notice of us; that while others in ease had plentifully heaped up the fruit of our labour, we had received barely enough to relieve nature, and being wholly at the command of others had generally been treated as a contemptible, ignorant part of mankind. Should we, in that case, be less abject than they now are?

In 1758, the Philadelphia Friends Meeting voted to condemn slavery and urged masters to voluntarily free their slaves. It was not until the Revolution, however, that antislavery attitudes became more widespread in the colonies.

African to African American

The majority of Africans transported to North America arrived during the eighteenth century. They were met by a rapidly growing population of country-born slaves, or “Creoles” (from the French créole and Spanish criollo, meaning “born” or “raised”), a term first used by slaves in Brazil to distinguish their children, born in the New World, from newly arrived Africans. The perspective of Creoles was shaped by their having grown up under slavery, and that perspective helped them to determine which elements of African culture they would incorporate into the emerging culture of the African American community. That community was formed out of the relationship between Creoles and Africans, and between slaves and their European masters.

The Daily Life of Slaves

Because slaves formed the overwhelming majority of the labor force that made the plantation colonies so profitable, it is fair to say that Africans built the South. As an agricultural people, Africans, both women and men, were accustomed to the routines of rural labor, and this was put to use on the plantations. Most Africans were field hands, and even domestic servants labored in the fields when necessary.
Masters provided their slaves with rude clothing, sufficient in the summer but nearly always inadequate in the winter. Cheap garments, made from what was called “Negro cotton,” was not only a means of saving money, but underscored the inferior status of slaves. At Mount Vernon, George Washington doled out a single set of clothes for each of his slaves. They were expected to last through a full year of field labor. Within months the garments were reduced to mere rags.

On small plantations and farms, which were typical in the tobacco country of the Chesapeake, Africans might work side by side with their owners and, depending on the character of the master, might enjoy a standard of living not too different from those of other family members. The work was more demanding and living conditions less sustaining on the great rice and indigo plantations of the Lower South, where slaves usually lived separately from the master in their own quarters. But large plantations, with large numbers of slaves, created the concentration of population necessary for the emergence of African American communities and African American culture. This was one of the profound ironies of American slavery. On the great plantations, life was much harder, but slaves had more opportunity for some autonomy.

**Families and Communities**

The family was the most important institution for the development of African American community and culture, but *slave codes* did not provide for legal slave marriages, for that would have contradicted the master’s freedom to dispose of his property as he saw fit. “The endearing ties of husband and wife are strangers to us,” declared a group of Massachusetts slaves who petitioned for their freedom in 1774, “for we are no longer man and wife than our masters or mistresses think proper.” How, they asked, “can a slave perform the duties of a husband to a wife or parent to his child? How can a husband leave master to work and cleave to his wife? How can [wives] submit themselves to their husbands in all things? How can [children] obey their parents in all things?”

Planters commonly separated families by sale or bequest, dividing husbands and wives and even separating mothers from their children. Charles Ball was separated from his wife and children when his master sold him to a rice planter in Georgia. “My heart died away within me,” Ball remembered vividly, “I felt incapable of weeping or speaking, and in my despair I laughed loudly.” He was sent away, his hands bound, the same day he learned of his fate, and on his journey he dreamed his wife and children were “beseeching and imploring my master on their knees.” He never saw them again. Another planter sold the children of a slave mother, allowing only that her infant could “suck its mother till twelve months old,” but then the child was also to be sold.

Despite the barriers, however, during the eighteenth century slaves in both the Chesapeake and the Lower South created the families that were essential for the development of African American culture. On large plantations throughout the southern colonies, travelers found Africans living in family households. In the Lower South, where there were greater concentrations of slaves on the great rice plantations, husbands and wives often lived together in the slave quarters, and this was clearly the ideal. On the smaller plantations of the Upper South, men often married women from neighboring farms, and with the permission of both owners, visited their families in the evenings or on Sundays.

Generally, slave couples married when the woman became pregnant. “Their marriages are generally performed amongst themselves,” one visitor to North Carolina

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**Mum Bett, also known** as Elizabeth Freeman, was born into slavery in a Massachusetts household in about 1742. As a young woman she was subjected to the violent abuse of her mistress, who struck her with a hot shovel, leaving an indelible scar. Fleeing her owner Mum Bett enlisted the aid of antislavery lawyer Thomas Sedgwick, who helped win her freedom in 1772. This miniature was painted by Sedgwick’s daughter Susan in 1811. Courtesy of Massachusetts Historical Society.

*Slave codes* A series of laws passed mainly in the southern colonies in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries to defend the status of slaves and codify the denial of basic civil rights to them.
wrote of the Africans he observed in the 1730s. “The man makes the woman a present, such as a brass ring or some other toy, which she accepts of, [and] becomes his wife.” Common throughout the South was the postnuptial ritual in which the couple jumped over a broomstick together, declaring their relationship to the rest of the community. This custom may have originated in Africa, although versions of it were practiced in medieval Europe as well.

Recent studies of naming practices among eighteenth-century African Americans illustrate their commitment to establishing a system of kinship. Frequently sons were named for their fathers, perhaps a way of strengthening the paternal bonds of men forced to live away from their families. Children of both sexes were named for grandparents and other kin. African names were common; names such as Cudjo (Monday), Quow (Thursday), or Coffee (Friday) continued the African tradition of “weekday” names. Later in the century, Anglo names became more general. Margery and Moody, slaves of Francis Jerdone of Louisa County, Virginia, named their six children Sam, Rose, Sukey, Mingo, Maria, and Comba, mixing both African and English traditions. Many Africans carried names known only within their community, and these were often African. In the sea island region of the Lower South, such names were common until the twentieth century.

Emotional ties to particular places, connections between the generations, and relations of kinship and friendship linking neighboring plantations and farms were the foundation stones of African American community life. Kinship was especially important. African American parents encouraged their children to use family terms in addressing unrelated persons: “auntie” or “uncle” became a respectful way of addressing older men and women, “brother” and “sister” affectionate terms for agemates. Fictive kinship may have been one of the first devices enslaved Africans used to humanize the world of slavery. During the Middle Passage, it was common for children to call their elders “aunt” and “uncle,” for adults to address all children as “son” or “daughter.”

African American Culture

The eighteenth century was the formative period in the development of the African American community, for it was then that the high birthrate and the growing numbers of country-born provided the necessary stability for the evolution of culture. During this period, men and women from dozens of African ethnic groups molded themselves into a new people. Distinctive patterns in music and dance, religion, and oral tradition illustrate the resilience of the human spirit under bondage as well as the successful struggle of African Americans to create a spiritually sustaining culture of their own.

Eighteenth-century masters were reluctant to allow their slaves to become Christians, fearing that baptism would open the way to claims of freedom or give Africans dangerous notions of universal brotherhood and equality with masters. One frustrated missionary was told by a planter that a slave was “ten times worse when a Christian than in his state of paganism.” Before the American Revolution, the majority of black southerners practiced some form of African religion. Large numbers of African Americans were not converted to Christianity until the Great Awakening, which swept across the South after the 1760s (see Chapter 5).

One of the most crucial areas of religious practice concerned the rituals of death and burial. In their separate graveyards, African Americans often decorated...
graves with shells and pottery, an old African custom. African Americans generally believed that the spirits of their dead would return to Africa. The burial ceremony was often held at night to keep it secret from masters, who objected to the continuation of African traditions. The deceased was laid out, and around the body, men and women would move counterclockwise in a slow dance step while singing ancestral songs. The pace gradually increased, finally reaching a frenzied but joyful conclusion. As slaves from different backgrounds joined together in the circle, they were beginning the process of cultural unification.

Music and dance may have formed the foundation of African American culture, coming even before a common language. Many eighteenth-century observers commented on the musical and rhythmic gifts of Africans. Olaudah Equiano remembered his people, the Ibos, as “a nation of dancers, musicians, and poets.” Thomas Jefferson, raised on a Virginia plantation, wrote that blacks “are more generally gifted than the whites, with accurate ears for tune and time.” Many Africans were accomplished players of stringed instruments and drums, and their style featured improvisation and rhythmic complexity, elements that would become prominent in African American music. In America, slaves re-created African instruments, as in the case of the banjo, and mastered the art of the European violin and guitar. Fearing that slaves might communicate by code, authorities often outlawed drums. But using bones, spoons, sticks, or simply “patting juba” (slapping their thighs), slaves produced elaborate multirhythmic patterns.

One of the most important developments of the eighteenth century was the invention of an African American language. An English traveler during the 1770s complained he could not understand Virginia slaves, who spoke “a mixed dialect between the Guinea and English.” But such a language made it possible for country-born and “saltwater” Africans to communicate. The two most important dialects were Gullah and Geechee, named after two of the African peoples most prominent in the Carolina and Georgia low country, the Golas and Gizzis of the Windward Coast. These Creole languages were a transitional phenomenon, gradually giving way to distinctive forms of black English, although in certain isolated areas, such as the sea islands of the Carolinas and Georgia, they persisted into the twentieth century.

The Africanization of the South

The African American community often looked to recently arrived Africans for religious leadership and medical magic. Throughout the South, many whites had as much faith in slave conjurers and herb doctors as the slaves themselves did, and slaves won fame for their healing powers. This was one of many ways in which white and black southerners came to share a common culture. Acculturation was by no means a one-way street; English men and women in the South were also being Africanized.

Slaves worked in the kitchens of their masters, and thus introduced an African style of cooking into colonial diets already transformed by the addition of Indian crops. African American culinary arts are responsible for such southern culinary specialty perennials as barbecue, fried chicken, black-eyed peas, and collard greens.
And the liberal African use of red pepper, sesame seeds, and other sharp flavors established the southern preference for highly spiced foods. In Louisiana, a combination of African, French, and Indian elements produced a distinguished American regional cuisine, exemplified by gumbos (soups) and jambalayas (stews).

Mutual acculturation is also evident in many aspects of material culture. Southern basket weaving used Indian techniques and African designs. Woodcarving often featured African motifs. African architectural designs featuring high, peaked roofs (to vent the heat) and broad, shady porches gradually became part of a distinctive southern style. The West African iron-working tradition was evident throughout the South, especially in the ornamentation of the homes of Charleston and New Orleans.

Even more important were less tangible aspects of culture. Slave mothers nursed white children as well as their own. As one English observer wrote, “each child has its [black] Momma, whose gestures and accent it will necessarily copy, for children, we all know, are imitative beings.” In this way, many Africanisms passed into the English language of the South: goober (peanut), yam, banjo, okay, tote, buddy. Some linguists have argued that the southern “drawl,” evident among both black and white speakers, derived from the incorporation of African intonations of words and syllables.

African American music and dance also deeply affected white culture. These art forms offer a good example of mutual acculturation. At eighteenth-century plantation dances, the music was usually provided by Africans playing European instruments and their own, such as the banjo. African American fiddlers were common throughout the South by the time of the Revolution, but the banjo also became the characteristic folk instrument of the white South. Toward the end of the evening, the musicians were often told to play some “Negro jigs,” and slaves were asked to demonstrate the African manner of dancing. Dancing provided slaves with a unique opportunity to express themselves. “Us slaves watched white folks’ parties where the guests danced a minuet,” an old South Carolina slave woman recalled, “then we’d do it too, but we used to mock ’em, every step.” Whites in turn attempted to imitate African rhythmic dance styles. A slave named Dick related how his master loved to listen to him play the banjo and watch the slave women dance on moonlit nights. The master himself “could shake a desperate foot at the fiddle,” said Dick, attempting to outperform the slaves at the “Congo minuet.” In such a back-and-forth fashion, the traditions of both groups were gradually transformed.

**Violence and Resistance**

Slavery was a system based on the use of brute force and violence. The only way to make slaves work, planter Robert “King” Carter instructed his overseer, was “to make them stand in fear.” Humane slave masters like George Washington did not wish to be harsh. He sought, as he wrote it, “tranquility with a certain income.” But the tranquility of Mount Vernon rested on the constant threat of violence. Washington ordered his overseers to carefully monitor the work of the slaves and punish their offenses with regular whippings. Even the most cultured plantation owners thought nothing about floggings of fifty or seventy-five lashes. “Der prayer was answered,” sang the slaves of South Carolina, “wid de song of a whip.” The threat of violence was omnipresent. And some masters were downright sadistic—stabbing, burning, maiming, mutilating, raping, and castrating their slaves.

Former slave David George, who was born and raised on a Virginia plantation, wrote a searing account of plantation violence. “My oldest sister was called Patty. I have seen her several times so whipped that her back has been all corruption, as though it would rot. My brother Dick ran away, but they caught him. . . . After he had received 500 lashes, or more, they washed his back with salt water and whipped it in, as well
as rubbed it in with a rag. . . . I also have been whipped many a time on my naked skin, and sometimes till the blood has run down over my waist band. But the greatest grief I then had was to see them whip my mother, and to hear her, on her knees, begging for mercy.”

Yet African Americans demonstrated a resisting spirit. In their day-to-day existence they often refused to cooperate: they malingered, they mistreated tools and animals, they destroyed the master’s property. “Let an hundred men shew him how to hoe, or drive a wheelbarrow,” wrote one frustrated planter, “he’ll still take the one by the bottom, and the other by the wheel.” Flight was also an option, and judging from the advertisements placed by masters in colonial newspapers, even the most trusted Africans ran away. “That this slave should run away and attempt getting his liberty, is very alarming,” read the notice of one Maryland master in 1755. “He has always been too kindly used” and was “one in whom his master has put great confidence, and depended on him to overlook the rest of the slaves, and he had no kind of provocation to go off.” An analysis of hundreds of eighteenth-century advertisements for runaways reveals that 80 percent were young men in their twenties, suggesting that flight was an option primarily for unattached males.

Runaways sometimes collected together in communities called “maroons,” from the Spanish *cimarron*, meaning “wild and untamed.” Slaves who escaped from South Carolina or Georgia into Spanish Florida created maroon communities among the Creek Indians there. These mixed African and Indian peoples came to call themselves “Seminoles,” a name deriving from their pronunciation of “cimarron.” Maroons also lay hidden in the backcountry of the Lower South, and although they were less common in the Upper South, a number of fugitive communities existed in the Great Dismal Swamp, the coastal region between Virginia and North Carolina.
The most direct form of resistance was revolt. The first notable slave uprising of the colonial era occurred in New York City in 1712. Taking an oath of secrecy, twenty-four Africans vowed revenge for what they called the “hard usage” of their masters. They armed themselves with guns, swords, daggers, and hatchets, killed nine colonists, and burned several buildings before being surrounded by the militia. Six of the conspirators committed suicide rather than surrender. Thirteen were hanged, another was starved to death in chains, another broken on the wheel, and three more burned at the stake. In 1741, New York authorities uncovered what they thought was another conspiracy. Thirteen black leaders were burned alive, eighteen more hanged, and eighty sold and shipped to the West Indies. A family of colonists and a Catholic priest, accused of providing weapons, were also executed.

A series of small rebellions and rumors of large ones in Virginia in the 1720s culminated in the Chesapeake rebellion of 1730, the largest slave uprising of the colonial period. Several hundred slaves assembled in Norfolk and Princess Anne counties, choosing commanders for their “insurrection.” More than 300 escaped en masse into the Dismal Swamp. Hunted down by Indians hired by the colony, their community was soon destroyed. Twenty-nine leaders were executed and the rest returned to their masters.

There were also isolated but violent uprisings in the Lower South, where slaves made up a majority of the population, in 1704, 1720, and 1730. In 1738, a series of violent revolts broke out throughout South Carolina and Georgia. Then in 1739, a group of twenty recently arrived Angolans sacked the armory in Stono, South Carolina. They armed themselves and began a march toward Florida and freedom. Beating drums to attract other slaves to their cause, they grew to nearly one hundred. They plundered a number of planters’ homes along the way and killed some thirty colonists. Pausing in a field to celebrate their victory with dance and song, they were overtaken by the militia and destroyed in a pitched battle. That same year there was an uprising in Georgia. Another took place in South Carolina the following year. Attributing these revolts to the influence of newly arrived Africans, colonial officials shut off the slave trade through Charleston for the next ten years.

Wherever masters held slaves, fears of uprisings persisted. But compared with slave colonies such as Jamaica, Guiana, or Brazil, there were few slave revolts in North America. The conditions favoring revolt—large African majorities, brutal exploitation with correspondingly low survival rates, little acculturation, and geographic isolation—prevailed in only some areas of the Lower South. Indeed, the very success of African Americans in British North America at establishing families, communities, and a culture of their own inevitably made them less likely to take the risks that rebellions required.
Slavery and Empire

Slavery contributed enormously to the economic growth and development of Europe during the colonial era, and it was an important factor in Great Britain just before the Industrial Revolution of the eighteenth century. Slavery was the most dynamic force in the Atlantic economy during that century, creating the conditions for industrialization. But because slave-owning colonists single-mindedly committed their resources to the expansion and extension of the plantation system, they derived very little benefit from the economic diversification that characterized industrialization.

Slavery the Mainspring

The slave colonies—the sugar islands of the West Indies and the colonies of the South—accounted for 95 percent of the exports from the Americas to Great Britain from 1714 to 1773. Although approximately half of all Great Britain’s American colonists lived in New England and the mid-Atlantic, the colonies in those regions contributed less than 5 percent of total exports during this period (see Table 4.2). Moreover, there was the prime economic importance of the slave trade itself, which one economist of the day described as the “foundation” of the British economy, “the mainspring of the machine which sets every wheel in motion.” The labor of African slaves was largely responsible for the economic success of the British Empire in the Americas.

Slavery greatly contributed to the economic development of Great Britain in three principal ways. First, slavery generated enormous profits that became a source of capital investment in the economy. The profits of individual investors in the slave system varied widely. But as the British economist Adam Smith wrote, “the profits of a sugar plantation in any of our West Indian colonies are generally much greater than those of any other cultivation that is known either in Europe or America.” Economic historians estimate that annual profits during the eighteenth century averaged 15 percent of invested capital in the slave trade, and 10 percent in plantation agriculture. Some of the first of England’s great modern fortunes were made out of slavery’s miseries.

The profits of the slave trade and slave production contributed greatly to the accumulation of capital. Although economic historians differ in their estimates, profits derived from the triangular trade in slaves, plantation products, and manufactured goods (see Map 4-3) furnished from 21 to 35 percent of Great Britain’s fixed capital formation in the eighteenth century. This capital funded the first modern banks and insurance companies, and eventually found its way into a wide range of economic activities. Merchant capitalists were prominent investors in the expansion of the merchant marine, the improvement of harbors, and the construction of canals.

**Slavery and Empire, 1441–1770**

**CHAPTER 4**

**113**

Slavery the Mainspring

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**Table 4.2**

**British Colonial Trade in the Americas, 1714–73**

<table>
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<tr>
<th></th>
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<th>%</th>
<th>Imports from Britain £</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>96,808</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lower South and Chesapeake</td>
<td>47,192</td>
<td>31.2</td>
<td>27,561</td>
<td>25.7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Middle Colonies and New England</td>
<td>7,160</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>37,939</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>151,160</td>
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Second, slavery contributed to the economic development of Great Britain by supplying the raw cotton essential to the Industrial Revolution. In 1787, slave plantations in the Caribbean supplied 69 percent of the raw cotton for British mills. The insatiable demand for cotton led to the development of the cotton gin and the rise of cotton plantations in the United States (see Chapter 11). And third, slavery provided an enormous stimulus to the growth of manufacturing by creating a huge colonial market for exports. From 1700 to 1740, the growth in American and African demand for manufactured goods (principally textiles, metal products, and ship’s wares) accounted for nearly 70 percent of the expansion of British exports.

The multiplier effects of these activities are best seen in the growth of English ports such as Liverpool and Bristol. There the African and American trades provided employment for ships’ crews, dockmen, construction workers, traders, shopkeepers, lawyers, clerks, factory workers, and officials of all ranks down to the humblest employees of the custom house. It was said of Bristol that “there is not a brick in the city but what is cemented with the blood of a slave.” In the countryside surrounding Liverpool and elsewhere, capital acquired through slavery was invested in the new industrial methods of producing cotton textiles, the beginning of the Industrial Revolution.
THE POLITICS OF MERCANTILISM

When imperial officials argued that colonies existed solely for the benefit of the mother country, they had in mind principally the great wealth produced by slavery. To ensure that this wealth benefited their states, European imperial powers created a system of regulations that became known as mercantilism. The essence of mercantilist policy was the political control of the economy by the state. First advanced in France in the seventeenth century under the empire of Louis XIV, mercantilist policies were most successfully applied by Great Britain in the eighteenth century. The monarchy and Parliament established a uniform national monetary system, regulated wages, encouraged agriculture and manufacturing with subsidies, and erected tariff barriers to protect themselves from foreign competition. England also sought to organize and control colonial trade to the maximum advantage of its own shippers, merchants, manufacturers, and bureaucrats.

The mercantilists viewed the economy as a “zero-sum” game, in which total economic gains were equal to total losses. As an English mercantilist put it, “there is but a certain proportion of trade in the world.” Profit was thought to result from successful speculation, crafty dealing, or simple plunder—all considered forms of theft. The institution of slavery confirmed the theory, for slavery was nothing more than a highly developed system by which some people stole the labor of others. The essence of the competition between states, the mercantilists argued, was the struggle to acquire and hoard the fixed amount of wealth that existed in the world. The nation that accumulated the largest treasure of gold and silver specie would be the most powerful.

WARS FOR EMPIRE

The mercantilist era was thus characterized by intense and violent competition among European states. Wars usually arose out of Old World issues, spilling over into the New World, but they also originated in conflicts over the colonies themselves. In the Anglo-Dutch Wars of the 1650s through the 1670s, England successfully overtook Holland as the dominant Atlantic power. Then, beginning with King William’s War (1689–97), England and France (generally allied with Spain) opened a long struggle for colonial supremacy in North America. (For discussion of these conflicts, see Chapter 3.)

OVERVIEW

THE COLONIAL WARS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>War</th>
<th>Years</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Queen Anne’s War</td>
<td>1702–13</td>
<td>England fights France and Spain in the Caribbean and on the northern frontier of New France. Part of the European conflict known as the War of the Spanish Succession.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>War of Jenkins’s Ear</td>
<td>1739–43</td>
<td>Great Britain versus Spain in the Caribbean and Georgia. Part of the European conflict known as the War of the Austrian Succession.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>King George’s War</td>
<td>1744–48</td>
<td>Great Britain and France fight in Acadia and Nova Scotia; the second American round of the War of the Austrian Succession.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>French and Indian War</td>
<td>1754–63</td>
<td>Last of the great colonial wars pitting Great Britain against France and Spain. Known in Europe as the Seven Years’ War.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The fighting took place mainly at the edges of the empire, on the frontiers separating Spanish Florida from British Georgia and New France from New England.

Colonial wars in the southern region had everything to do with slavery. The first fighting of the eighteenth century took place during Queen Anne’s War (known in Europe as the War of the Spanish Succession), a conflict that pitted Great Britain and its allies against France and Spain. In 1702, troops from South Carolina took the war as an opportunity to invade Florida, plundering and burning St. Augustine in an attempt to destroy the refuge for fugitive slaves there. A combined French and Spanish fleet took revenge in 1706 by bombarding Charleston. Great Britain emerged the victor in the general war, and in 1713, as part of the Peace of Utrecht, Spain ceded to the British the exclusive lucrative right to supply slaves to its American colonies.

The entrance of British slavers into Spanish ports also provided an opportunity for illicit trade, and sporadic fighting between the two empires broke out over this issue a number of times during the next two decades. But Robert Walpole, British prime minister from 1721 to 1748, saw distinct advantages for his nation in the continuation of peace. The Spanish empire in America was now open to British traders, he argued, and while “it is true that treasure is brought home in Spanish names, . . . Spain herself is no more than the canal through which all these treasures are conveyed all over the rest of Europe.” A faction in the House of Commons, however, demanded elimination of the Spanish threat. In 1739, at their urging, a one-eared sea captain by the name of Jenkins testified before Parliament about the indignities suffered by British merchant sailors at the hands of the Spanish. In a dramatic flourish, he produced a dried and withered ear, which he claimed they had cut from his head. A public outrage followed, forcing Walpole to agree to a war of Caribbean conquest that the British called the War of Jenkins’s Ear.

English troops allied with Creek Indians invaded Florida once again, laying waste the last of the old mission stations but failing to capture St. Augustine. In response, Spanish troops, including several companies of African Americans, invaded Georgia. Although the Spanish were defeated seventy-five miles south of Savannah, the campaign produced an agreement on the boundary between British Georgia and Spanish Florida that today still separates those states. Elsewhere the British were not so lucky: in the Caribbean the imperial fleet suffered disaster at the hands of the Spanish navy.

In the northern region, the principal focus of this imperial struggle was control of the Indian trade. In 1704, during Queen Anne’s War, the French and their Algonquian Indian allies raided New England frontier towns, such as Deerfield, Massachusetts, dragging men, women, and children into captivity in Canada (see Chapter 5). In turn, the English mounted a series of expeditions against the French fort at Port Royal in Acadia, which they captured in 1710. At the war’s conclusion in 1713, France was forced to cede Acadia, Newfoundland, and Hudson Bay to Great Britain in exchange for guarantees of security for the French-speaking residents of those provinces. Nearly thirty years of peace followed, but from 1744 to 1748, England again battled France in King George’s War (known in Europe as the War of the Austrian Succession). The French attacked the British in Nova Scotia, Indian and Canadian raids again devastated the border towns of New England and New York, and hundreds of British subjects were killed or captured.

The French, allied with the Spanish and Prussians, were equally successful in Europe. What finally turned the tide of this war was the capture in 1745 of the French fortress of Louisburg on Cape Breton Island by an expedition of Massachusetts troops.
in conjunction with the royal navy. Deprived of the most strategic of their American ports, and fearful of losing the wealth of their sugar islands, the French agreed to a negotiated settlement in 1748. But despite the capture of Louisbourg, the war elsewhere had been fought to a stalemate, so the treaty restored the prewar status quo, and Louisbourg was returned to France. This disgusted the merchants of New England, who wanted to expand their commercial influence in the maritime colonies, and left the North American conflict between France and Britain still simmering. Significantly, however, this was the first time that the concluding battle of a European war had been fought on North American soil, and it was a harbinger of things to come: the next war was destined to start as a conflict between French and British colonists before engulfing Europe (see Chapter 6).

**British Colonial Regulation**

Mercantilists used means other than war to win the wealth of the world. In the sixteenth century, the Spanish monarchy created the first state trading monopoly—the Casa de Contratación—to manage the commerce of its empire. It was widely emulated by others: the Dutch East Indies Company, the French Company of the Indies, the English East India Company, the Hudson’s Bay Company, and the Royal African Company.

English manufacturers complained that merchant-dominated trading monopolies too frequently carried foreign (particularly Dutch) products to colonial markets, ignoring English domestic industry. Reacting to these charges, between 1651 and 1696 Parliament passed a series of Navigation Acts, creating the legal and institutional structure of Britain’s colonial system. The acts defined the colonies as both suppliers of raw materials and as markets for English manufactured goods. Merchants from other nations were expressly forbidden to trade in the colonies, and commodities from the colonies had to be shipped in vessels built in England or the British colonies themselves.

The regulations specified a list of “enumerated commodities” that could be shipped only to England. These included the products of the southern slave colonies (sugar, molasses, rum, tobacco, rice, and indigo), those of the northern Indian trade (furs and skins), and those essential for supplying the shipping industry (pine masts, tar, pitch, resin, and turpentine). The bulk of these products were not destined for English consumption; at great profit they were reexported elsewhere.

England also placed limitations on colonial enterprises that might compete with those at home. A series of enactments—including the Wool Act of 1699, the Hat Act of 1732, and the Iron Act of 1750—forbade the production of those goods in the colonies. Moreover, colonial assemblies were forbidden to impose tariffs on English imports as a way of protecting colonial industries. Banking was disallowed, local coinage prohibited, and the export of coin from England forbidden. Badly in need of a circulating monetary medium, Massachusetts minted its own copper coin, and several colonies issued paper currency, forcing Parliament to explicitly legislate against the practice. The colonists depended mostly on “commodity money” (furs, skins, or hogsheads of tobacco) and the circulation of foreign currency, the most common being the Spanish silver *peso* and the German silver *thaler* (or “dollar”). Official rates of exchange between commodity money, colonial paper, foreign currency, and English pounds allowed this seemingly chaotic system to operate without too much difficulty.

As the trade in colonial products increased, most Britons came to agree with Prime Minister Robert Walpole that it made little sense to tamper with such a prosperous system. Walpole’s policy was later characterized as one of “salutary neglect.”
Any colonial rules and regulations deemed contrary to good business practice were simply ignored and not enforced. Between 1700 and 1760, the quantity of goods exported from the colonies to the mother country rose 165 percent, while imports from Britain to North America increased by more than 400 percent. In part because of lax enforcement, but mostly because the system operated to the profit of colonial merchants, colonists complained very little about British mercantilist policies before the 1760s.

**The Colonial Economy**

Despite the seemingly harsh mercantilist regulations, the economic system operated to the benefit of planters, merchants, and white colonists in general. Southern slave owners made healthy profits on the sale of their commodities. They enjoyed a protected market in which competing goods from outside the empire were heavily taxed. Planters found themselves with steadily increasing purchasing power. Pennsylvania, New York, New England, and increasingly the Chesapeake as well, produced grain, flour, meat, and dairy products. None of these was included in the list of enumerated goods, and could be sold freely abroad. They found their most ready market in the British West Indies and the Lower South. Most of this trade was carried in New England ships. Indeed, the New England shipbuilding industry was greatly stimulated by the allowance under the Navigation Acts for ships built and manned in the colonies. So many ships were built for English buyers that by midcentury, nearly a third of all British tonnage was American made.

The greatest benefits for the port cities of the North came from their commercial relationship to the slave colonies (see Figure 4-3). New England merchants had become important players in the slave trade by the early eighteenth century, and soon thereafter they began to make inroads into the export trade of the West Indian colonies. It was in the Caribbean that northern merchants most blatantly ignored mercantilist laws. In violation of Spanish, French, and Dutch regulations prohibiting foreign trade, New Englanders traded foodstuffs for sugar in foreign colonies. By 1750, more than sixty distilleries in Massachusetts Bay were exporting more than 2 million gallons of rum, most of it produced from sugar obtained illegally. Because the restrictive rules and regulations enacted by Britain for its colonies were not enforced, such growth and prosperity among the merchants and manufacturers of the port cities of the North prospered.

By the mid-eighteenth century, the Chesapeake and Lower South regions were major exporters of tobacco, rice, and indigo, and the Middle Colonies were major exporters of grain to Europe. The carrying trade in the products of slave labor made it possible for the northern and Middle Colonies to earn the income necessary to purchase British imports despite the lack of valuable products from their own regions. Gradually, the commercial economies of the Northeast and the South were becoming integrated. From the 1730s to the 1770s, for example, while the volume of trade between Great Britain and Charleston doubled, the trade between Charleston and northern ports grew sevenfold. The same relationship was developing between the Chesapeake and the North. Merchants in Boston,
Newport, New York, and Philadelphia increasingly provided southern planters not only with shipping services but also with credit and insurance. Like London, Liverpool, and Bristol—though on a smaller scale—the port cities of the North became pivots in the expanding trade network linking slave plantations with Atlantic markets. This trade provided northern merchants with the capital that financed commercial growth and development in their cities and the surrounding countryside. Slavery thus contributed to the growth of a score of northern port cities, forming an indirect but essential part of their economies.

**SLAVERY AND FREEDOM**

The prosperity of the eighteenth-century plantation economy thus improved the living conditions for the residents of northern cities as well as for a large segment of the white population of the South, providing them with the opportunity for a kind of freedom unknown in the previous century. The price of this prosperity and freedom, however, was the oppression and exploitation of millions of Africans and African Americans. Freedom for white men based on the slavery of African Americans is the most important contradiction of American history.

**THE SOCIAL STRUCTURE OF THE SLAVE COLONIES**

Slavery produced a highly stratified class society. At the summit of power stood an elite of wealthy planters who held more than half the cultivated land and over 60 percent of the wealth. Although there was no formal colonial aristocracy—no royal recognition of rank—the landed elite of the slave colonies sought to present itself as one. Binding themselves together through strategic marriage alliances and carefully crafted business dealings, dressing themselves in silk, lace, and powdered wigs, staging elaborate public rituals designed to awe common folk and slaves, they made up what one historian calls an “interlocking directorate.”

**QUICK REVIEW**

Colonial Exports
- Chesapeake colonies: tobacco.
- South Carolina: rice and indigo.
- Middle Colonies: wheat.

**HOW DID slavery shape southern colonial society?**

**GUIDELINE 3.4**

The New England artist John Greenwood painted this amusing view of New England sea captains in Surinam in 1757. By the early eighteenth century, New England merchant traders like these had become important participants in the traffic in slaves and sugar to and from the West Indies. Northern ports thus became important pivots in the expanding commercial network linking slave plantations with Atlantic markets.

John Greenwood, Sea Captains Carousing in Surinam, 1758. Oil on bed ticking, 95.9 × 191.2 cm. The Saint Louis Art Museum, Museum Purchase.
The typical wealthy Virginia planter lived in a Tidewater county; owned several thousand acres of prime farmland and more than a hundred slaves; resided in a luxurious plantation mansion, built perhaps in the fashionable Georgian style; and had an estate valued at more than £10,000. Elected to the House of Burgesses and forming the group from which the magistrates and counselors of the colony were chosen, these “first families of Virginia”—the Carters, Harrisons, Lees, Fitzhughs, Washingtons, Randolphs, and others—were a self-perpetuating governing class. A similar elite ruled the Lower South, although wealthy landowners spent little time on their plantations. They lived instead in fashionable Charleston, where they made up a close-knit group who controlled the colonial government. “They live in as high a style here, I believe, as any part of the world,” a visitor wrote.

A considerable distance separated this slave-owning elite from typical southern landowners. About half the adult white males were small planters and farmers. But while the gap between rich and middling colonists grew larger during the eighteenth century, the prosperity of the plantation economy created generally favorable conditions for the landowning class as a whole. Slave ownership, for example, became widespread among this group during the eighteenth century. In Virginia at midcentury, 45 percent of heads of household held one to four slaves and even poorer farmers kept one or two.

Despite the prosperity that accompanied slavery in the eighteenth century, however, a substantial portion of white colonists owned no land or slaves at all. Some rented land or worked as tenant farmers, some hired out as overseers or farm workers, and still others were indentured servants. Throughout the plantation region, landless men constituted about 40 percent of the population. A New England visitor found a “much greater disparity between the rich and poor in Virginia” than at home.

White Skin Privilege

But all the white colonists of eighteenth-century North America shared the privileged status of their skin color. In the early seventeenth century, there had been more diversity in views about race. For some, black skin was thought to be a sign of God’s curse. “The blackness of the Negroes,” one Englishman argued, “proceedeth of some natural infection.” But not everyone shared those views. “I can’t think there is any intrinsic value in one colour more than another,” a second Englishman remarked, “nor that white is better than black, only we think it so because we are so.”

As slavery became increasingly important, however, Virginia officials took considerable care to create legal distinctions between the status of colonists and that of Africans. Beginning in 1670, free Africans were prohibited from owning Christian servants. Ten years later, another law declared that any African, free or slave, who struck a Christian was to receive thirty lashes on his bare back. One of the most important measures was designed to suppress intimate interracial contacts between white servants and enslaved Africans. A 1691 act “for prevention of that abominable mixture and spurious issue which hereafter may encrease in this dominion” established severe penalties for interracial sexual relationships.

Class Discussion Question 4.7

Thomas Jefferson placed this advertisement in the Virginia Gazette on September 14, 1769. Americans need to seriously consider the historical relationship between the prosperity and freedom of white people and the oppression and exploitation of Africans and African Americans.

Virginia Historical Society.
Such penalties were rarely applied, however, to masters who had sexual relations with their slave women. Because by law the children of slave women were born into bondage, many plantations included light-skinned slaves who were the masters’ kin. Recent tests of descendants’ DNA have confirmed that Thomas Jefferson was probably the father of several children by his slave Sally Hemings. Hemings herself was the slave child of Jefferson’s father-in-law, and thus the half sister of Jefferson’s deceased wife. Less well known is the fact that at Mount Vernon, the household slave Ann Dandridge was the daughter of Martha Washington’s father. Hemings and Dandridge may have been kin to wealthy planters and future presidents, but they spent their entire lives as slaves. Slavery, as one historian has written, “required certain evasions, denials, and psychological cruelties.”

Relationships between free whites and enslaved blacks produced a rather large mixed-ancestry group known as mulattoes. The majority of them were slaves; a minority, the children of European women and African men, were free. According to a Maryland census of 1755, more than 60 percent of the mulattoes of that colony were slaves. But they also made up three-quarters of the small free African American population. This group, numbering about 4,000 in the 1770s, was denied the right to vote, to hold office, or to testify in court—all on the basis of racial background. Denied the status of citizenship enjoyed by even the poorest white men, free blacks were an outcast group who raised the status of white colonials by contrast. Racial distinctions were a constant reminder of the freedom of white colonists and the debasement of all blacks, slave or free.

Racism set up a wall of contempt between colonists and African Americans. Jefferson wrote of “the real distinctions which nature has made” between the races. “In memory they are equal to the whites,” he wrote of the slaves, but “in reason much...
A Musical Celebration in the Slave Quarters

This anonymous watercolor, discovered in South Carolina, dates from the last quarter of the eighteenth century. It offers a wonderfully detailed depiction of Africans or African Americans gathered together in the slave quarters celebrating with music. This is clearly a community celebration, involving several families. Seated on the right, two men play instruments that suggest continuity with the African heritage. One plucks on something that looks like a banjo, and indeed, the banjo can be traced back to West Africa. “The instrument proper to them,” Thomas Jefferson wrote of his slaves, “is the banjar, which they brought hither from Africa.” The other man plays a drum that resembles the gudugudu, a small wooden kettledrum from Nigeria played with two long thin rawhide sticks. The dancing man with the carved stick may indicate that this is a wedding ceremony that involves jumping the broom, an African custom for newly married couples. One planter’s description of a slave dance seems to fit this scene: the men leading the women in “a slow shuffling gait, edging along by some unseen exertion of the feet, from one side to the other—sometimes courtesying down and remaining in that posture while the edging motion from one side to the other continued.” The women, he wrote, “always carried a handkerchief held at arm’s length, which was waved in a graceful motion to and fro as she moved.” The painting is a tribute to the celebration of life amidst adversity.

WHY DO you think the plantation master is omitted from this painting?

Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Folk Art Museum, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, VA.
inferior.” He gave no consideration to the argument of freed slave Olaudah Equiano that “slavery debases the mind.” Jefferson was on firmer ground when he argued that the two peoples were divided by “deep rooted prejudices entertained by the whites” and “ten thousand recollections, by the blacks, of the injuries they have sustained.” Perhaps he knew of these feelings from his long relationship with Sally Hemings. “I tremble for my country when I reflect that God is just,” Jefferson concluded in a deservedly famous passage, and remember “that his justice cannot sleep forever.”

**Conclusion**

During the eighteenth century, nearly half a million Africans were kidnapped from their homes, marched to the African coast, and packed into ships for up to three months before arriving in British North America. They provided the labor that made colonialism pay. Southern planters, northern merchants, and especially British traders and capitalists benefited greatly from the commerce in slave-produced crops, and that prosperity filtered down to affect many of the colonists of British North America. Slavery was fundamental to the operation of the British empire in North America. Mercantilism was a system designed to channel colonial wealth produced by slaves to the nation-state, but as long as profits were high, the British tended to wink at colonists’ violations of mercantilist regulations.

Although African Americans received little in return, their labor helped build the greatest accumulation of capital that Europe had ever seen. But despite enormous hardship and suffering, African Americans survived by forming new communities in the colonies, rebuilding families, restructuring language, and reforming culture. African American culture added important components of African knowledge and experience to colonial agriculture, art, music, and cuisine. The African Americans of the English colonies lived better lives than the slaves worked to death on Caribbean sugar plantations, but lives of misery compared with the men they were forced to serve. As the slaves sang on the Georgia coast, “Dah Backrow Man go wrong you, Buddy Quow.”

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**AP* DOCUMENT-BASED QUESTION**

**Directions:** This exercise requires you to construct a valid essay that directly addresses the central issues of the following question. You will have to use facts from the documents provided and from the chapter to prove the position you take in your thesis statement.

Isolate and identify those environmental, economic, and political factors that promoted the survival of slavery as a viable institution in the southern colonies.

**Suggested Answer:**

Successful essays should note:

- The economic factors and higher productivity of slavery—longer hours and fewer days off than indentured servants (Document A)
- Mercantilist regulations benefited planters; slave products became profitable under British law (Figure 4-3)
- New England shipbuilding stimulated high trade volume for the Navigation Acts and the Triangular Trade, and it linked slave plantations to the Atlantic market (Map 4-3)
- Warm southern climate was conducive to the profitable and highly demanded products of sugar and tobacco, making slave-grown products economical (See The Lower South)
• Court rulings—John Punch 1619 first slave, three men attempt to run away as indentured servants and were caught, the two white men were forced to serve for additional years, Punch was black and punished to life in servitude. Racism assisted court rulings promoting black servitude.
• The status of children born to slaves was based on their mother’s status. Whether their father was slave or free was irrelevant. (See Slavery Comes to North America)
• Slaves were distinguished based on their skin color and, unlike English indentured servants, had nowhere to run (could not return to Africa easily) or an easy way to assimilate into English society, based on their skin color, culture, religion, and native language.
• In the late 1600s, the importation of indentured servants to the Americas declined, further promoting slavery to fill the gap in the labor supply (See Slavery Comes to North America and Figure 4-2).

**Document A**

A common laborer, white or black, if you can be so much favored as to hire one, is 1s. sterling or 15d. currency per day; a bungling carpenter, 2s. or 2s. 6d. per day, besides diet and lodging. That is, for a lazy fellow to get wood and water, £19 16s. 3d. current per annum; add to this £7 or £8 more and you have a slave for life.

—Rev. Peter Fontaine of Westover, Virginia to Moses Fontaine, 1757

Reverend Fontaine is very clear in his letter to his brother that the use of slaves in Virginia was a decision of pure economics. Look at his arguments concerning the cost of free labor as opposed to slave labor. At first the indentured servant system was the preferred form of labor, but turn to pages 80–81 for the discussion of Bacon’s Rebellion to learn why Virginia planters changed their minds.

**How did Bacon’s Rebellion create a political justification for the use of slavery in Virginia?**

On page 92 read the discussion of Georgia plantation slaves in the 1750s to learn why “saltwater” slaves were preferred for rice cultivation. The painting on page 95 shows gangs of slaves preparing land for cultivation in the Caribbean, but it could just as easily be Virginia, South Carolina, or Georgia for tobacco, rice, or indigo. The print below shows slave women preparing tobacco fields.

**Why would slave labor be more economical than free labor?**
Document B

Look at the painting of colonial goods being unloaded in London on page 112. Turn to the chart on page 118 and compare the kinds of colonial products that were shipped from the Chesapeake and the Lower South to England with the kinds of goods that were shipped from the Middle Colonies and New England to the mother country.

- Which group of goods would most likely be better and more economically produced by slave labor? Why?

Now turn to the table on page 113 detailing British trade to and from the colonies between 1714 and 1773.

- Which trade was more financially rewarding, that of New England and the Middle Colonies to Britain or that of the Chesapeake and the Lower South to Britain? Why?
- Under the mercantile system, what made the goods of one group of colonies so much more valuable?
- What in the environment of the Chesapeake and the Lower South made certain crops viable that could not be grown in the more northern colonies?
- How would these factors affect the importance of slavery as a system of labor in the South?

AP* PREP TEST

Select the response that best answers each question or best completes each sentence.

1. An important element in the development of the African slave trade was the:
   a. English occupation of South Africa early in the sixteenth century.
   b. demand for workers in the new manufacturing cities of Europe.
   c. European accord with Islamic states to outlaw enslaving Muslims.
   d. reluctance of the Catholic Church to allow enslavement of Christians.
   e. immense degree of religious tolerance throughout Europe.

2. The majority of people who came to America prior to 1800 were from:
   a. Africa.
   c. Spain.
   d. France.
   e. Prussia.

3. The vast majority of Africans bound into slavery were:
   a. from the region along the southern coast of the Mediterranean Sea.
   b. captured by European raiding parties working on behalf of slave trading companies.
   c. initially indentured servants who were never given their freedom.
   d. captured by other Africans who traded their victims to Europeans.
   e. members of warring factions who were captured by European troops.

4. In the account of his enslavement, Olaudah Equiano states that:
   a. he knew when he boarded the slave ship that he was going to be carried to a plantation in America.
   b. most of the slaves were able to escape by jumping off the ship before it sailed away from Africa.
   c. the ship’s crew did not care one way or the other if the slaves lived or died during their journey.
d. he believed that many more slaves would have tried
to kill themselves if they had been able to.
e. the conditions on the slave ship were surprisingly
pleasant.

5. One result of the slave trade was:
a. that it prepared the continent to defend itself against
further European infringement.
b. the creation of powerful and independent nations
in Africa.
c. the advantage it gave Africa in diplomatic relations
with Europe.
d. the tremendous wealth it generated throughout the
interior of Africa.
e. debilitating social and economic dislocations in
West Africa.

6. One reason that South Carolina embraced African slav-
ery early in the colony’s history is:
a. there were no Indians in the region that could be
forced into slavery.
b. the role that Africans played in the production of
indigo and rice.
c. the expansion of tobacco production in the state
could not have taken place without corresponding
growth in the size of the slave labor force.
d. that Europeans could not survive in the heat and
humidity of the region.
e. the importance of large-scale cotton production in
the American South.

7. During the colonial era of North America, slavery was:
a. limited to the South.
b. restricted to agriculture.
c. on the decline everywhere.
d. restricted to rural areas.
e. present in all areas.

8. The growth of the African American community was
based on:
a. the gradual elimination of African culture in favor of
European customs and traditions.
b. the emphasis masters placed on Christianity and the
decline of African religious influences.
c. the new compassion masters felt as they came to real-
ize the inherent brutality of slavery.
d. the prominence of family life being superseded by an
emphasis on the African American community at large.
e. the relationship between Creoles and Africans and
between the slaves and their masters.

9. The identity that African Americans developed during
the eighteenth century:
a. occurred because most of the slaves already spoke the
same African language.
b. revealed the resilience of human beings in respond-
ing to the tragedy of enslavement.
c. was truly American because the slaves were com-
pletely isolated from African traditions.
d. was initially based on the common religion that the
slaves brought with them from Africa.
e. was based on a universally shared experience regard-
less of the region.

10. In British North America, slavery:
a. discouraged economic diversification that character-
ized the development of industry.
b. encouraged Americans to develop factories to
process the raw materials slaves produced.
c. created a dynamic economy that quickly surpassed
that of England, Spain, and France.
d. retarded economic growth to such a degree that
England had to subsidize most colonies.
e. did not generate the sufficient profits needed to
secure capital for investment in the economy.

11. The fundamental principle of mercantilism is that:
a. individuals should be free to pursue their own eco-
nomic interest to ensure the wealth of the nation.
b. free and open trade is the best way to guarantee the
economic activity that makes a nation powerful.
c. the wealth of a nation is based on the amount of the
gold and silver specie that a nation accumulates.
d. there is no real correlation between government poli-
cies and the economic success of the nation.
e. open competition weeds out weaker nations, allowing
those superior nations to take control of markets.

12. The eighteenth-century plantation economy:
a. generated tremendous wealth for some white
southerners but had little substantive effect on the
American economy.
b. allowed for equal economic involvement across disparate socioeconomic lines.
c. was regressive and so retarded economic development in the South that the region suffered from endemic poverty.
d. began to decline in influence as American attitudes toward freedom led to increasing demands to eliminate slavery.
e. created widespread wealth for many white Americans and an unprecedented opportunity for freedom.

13. One result of slavery in the colonies was:
   a. a highly stratified class structure.
   b. total equality for all adult white males.
   c. a greater role for women in society.
   d. a decline in traditional social values.
   e. the elimination of the bureaucratic elite.