

PART I

BECOMING AFRICAN AMERICAN

Nzinga Mbemba



to 1500

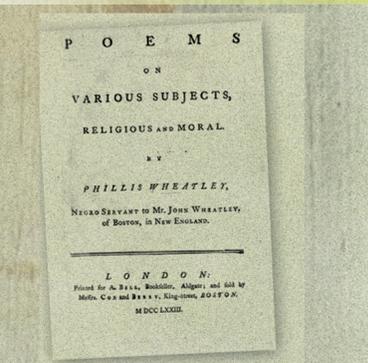
1500–1700

RELIGION



- 300s CE** Axum adopts Christianity
- 750s** Islam begins to take root in West Africa
- 1300s–1500s** Timbuktu flourishes as a center of Islamic learning
- 1324** Mansa Musa's pilgrimage to Mecca
- c. 1500** Portuguese convert Kongo kings to Christianity

CULTURE



- 1600s** African versions of English and French—Gullah, Geechee, and Creole—begin to develop
- 1600s–1700s** African-American folk culture appears among the slaves

POLITICS & GOVERNMENT



- c. 3150–30 BCE** Independence of Ancient Egypt
- 1st century CE** Fall of Kush
- 8th century CE** Decline of Axumite Empire in Ethiopia
- c. 750–1076** Empire of Ghana
- 1230–1468** Empire of Mali
- 1400s–1700s** Expansion of Benin
- 1468–1571** Empire of Songhai
- 1500s** Rise of Akan states
- 1607** Jamestown founded
- 1696** South Carolina Slave Code enacted

SOCIETY & ECONOMY

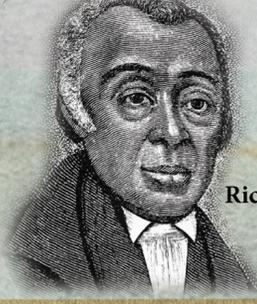


- 10th century** Islamic slave trade across the Sahara and Central Africa begins
- 1472** First Portuguese slave traders in Benin
- 1481** First “slave factory” in Elmira on the Guinea coast
- 1502** First mention of African slaves in the Americas
- 1518** Spanish *Asiento* begins
- c. 1520** Sugar plantations begin in Brazil
- 1619** First African slaves arrive in Jamestown
- 1620s** Chesapeake tobacco plantations increase the demand for slaves
- 1624** First black child reported born in British North America
- 1660s** Chattel slavery emerges in the southern colonies

Phillis Wheatley



Richard Allen



James Forten



1700–1800

1800–1820

Noteworthy Individuals

- c. 1738 First Great Awakening: George Whitefield preaches to African Americans
- 1780 Lemuel Haynes becomes first ordained black Congregationalist minister
- 1794 Mother Bethel Church founded in Philadelphia
St. Thomas's Episcopal Church established under Absalom Jones

- 1808 Abyssinian Baptist Church organized in New York City
- 1811 African Presbyterian Church established in Philadelphia under Samuel E. Cornish
- 1816 African Methodist Episcopal Church established

- King Piankhy of Kush**
(r. c. 750 BCE)
- Sundiata of Mali**
(c. 1235 CE)
- Emperor Mansa Musa of Mali** (r. 1312–1337)
- King Sunni Ali of Songhai**
(r. 1464–1492)
- King Askia Muhammed Toure of Songhai** (r. 1493–1528)

- 1740s Lucy Terry Prince publishes poetry
- 1760 Jupiter Hammon publishes a book of poetry
- 1773 Phillis Wheatley's *Poems on Various Subjects*
- 1775 Prince Hall founds first African-American Masonic Lodge
- 1780 First African-American mutual aid society founded in Newport, Rhode Island
- 1787 Free African Society founded in Philadelphia
- 1791–1795 Benjamin Banneker's *Almanac* published
- 1793 Philadelphia's Female Benevolent Society of St. Thomas founded

- 1818 Mother Bethel Church establishes the Augustine School

- King Nzinga Mbemba (Afonso I) of Kongo** (r. 1506–1543)
- Ayuba Suleiman Diallo of Bondu** (c. 1701–1773)

- 1773 Massachusetts African Americans petition the legislature for freedom
- 1775 Black militiamen fight at Lexington and Concord
- 1776 Declaration of Independence
- 1777 Vermont prohibits slavery
- 1782 Virginia allows manumission
- 1783 Massachusetts allows male black taxpayers to vote
- 1787 Congress bans slavery in the Northwest Territory
- 1789 U.S. Constitution includes the Three-Fifths clause
- 1793 Congress passes First Fugitive Slave Act

- 1807 Britain abolishes the Atlantic slave trade
- 1808 U.S. abolishes the Atlantic slave trade
- 1820 Missouri Compromise
First settlement of Liberia by African Americans

- Jupiter Hammon**
(1711–c. 1806)
- Crispus Attucks**
(1723–1770)
- Benjamin Banneker**
(1731–1806)
- Prince Hall**
(1735–1807)
- Elizabeth Freeman**
(1744–1811)

- Absalom Jones**
(1746–1818)
- Olaudah Equiano**
(c. 1745–1797)
- James Forten**
(1746–1818)
- Peter Salem**
(1750–1816)

- Phillis Wheatley**
(c. 1753–1784)
- Richard Allen**
(1760–1831)
- Paul Cuffe**
(1759–1817)

- Daniel Coker**
(1780–1846)

- Gabriel**
(d. 1800)

- Charles Deslondes**
(d. 1811)

- 1712 New York City slave rebellion
- 1739 Stono slave revolt in South Carolina
- 1776–1783 100,000 slaves flee southern plantations
- 1781–1783 20,000 black Loyalists depart with British troops
- 1793 Eli Whitney invents the cotton gin

- 1800 Gabriel's rebellion in Charleston
- 1811 Deslondes's rebellion in Louisiana

CA. 6000 BCE–CA. 1600 CE

Africa



 Listen to Chapter 1
on MyHistoryLab

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

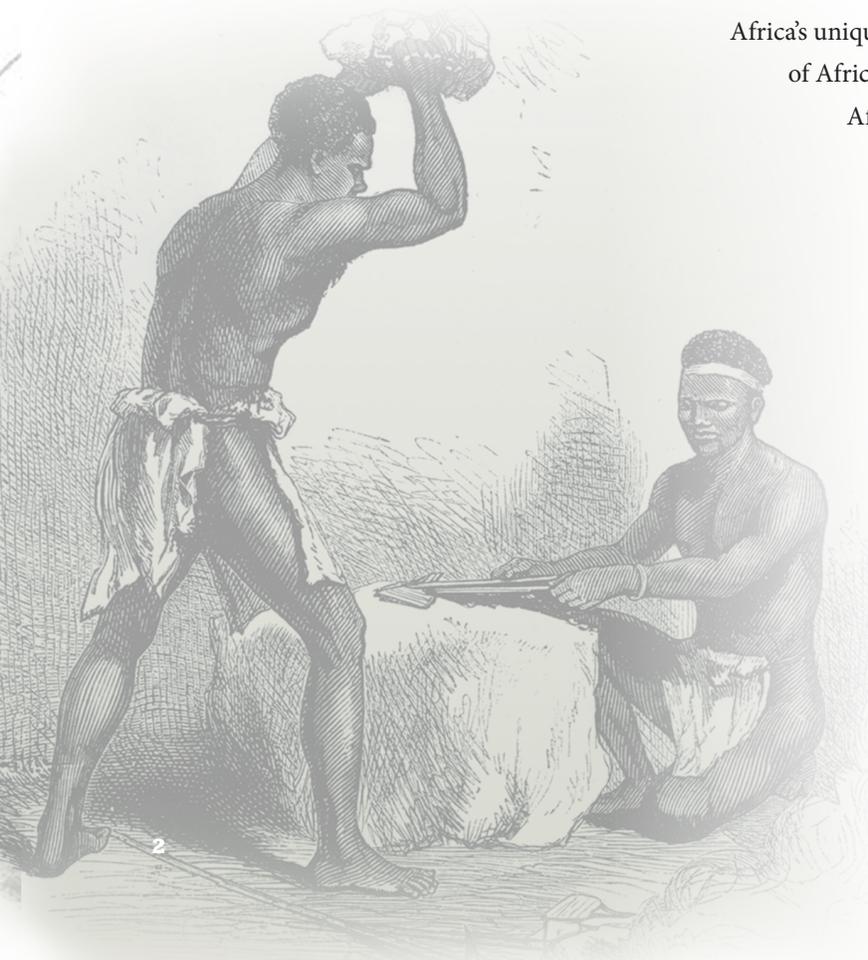
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|-----|---|
| 1-1 | What are the geographical characteristics of Africa? |
| 1-2 | Where and how did humans originate? |
| 1-3 | Why are ancient African civilizations important? |
| 1-4 | Why is West Africa significant for African-American history? |
| 1-5 | What did Kongo and Angola have in common with West Africa? |
| 1-6 | How did the legacies of West African society and culture influence the way African Americans lived? |

These [West African] nations think themselves the foremost men in the world, and nothing will persuade them to the contrary. They imagine that Africa is not only the greatest part of the world but also the happiest and most agreeable.

Father Cavazzi, 1687

The ancestral homeland of most black Americans is West Africa. Other parts of Africa—Angola and East Africa—were caught up in the great Atlantic slave trade that carried Africans to the New World from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries. But West Africa was the center of the trade in human beings. Knowing the history of West Africa therefore is important for understanding the people who became the first African Americans.

That history, however, is best understood within the larger context of the history and geography of the African continent. This chapter begins, therefore, with a survey of the larger context. It emphasizes aspects of a broader African experience that shaped life in West Africa before the arrival of Europeans in that region. It then explores West Africa's unique heritage and the facets of its culture that have influenced the lives of African Americans from the Diaspora—the original forced dispersal of Africans from their homeland—to the present.



West Africans were making iron tools long before Europeans arrived in Africa.

A Huge and Diverse Land

1-1 What are the geographical characteristics of Africa?

Africa, the second largest continent in the world (only Asia is larger), is bounded by the Mediterranean Sea to the north, the Atlantic Ocean to the west, and the Indian Ocean and the Red Sea to the east. A narrow strip of land in Africa's northeast corner connects it to the Arabian Peninsula and beyond that to Asia and Europe.

From north to south, Africa is divided into a succession of climatic zones (see Map 1-1). Except for a fertile strip along the Mediterranean coast and the agriculturally rich Nile River valley, most of the northern third of the continent consists of the Sahara Desert. For thousands of years, the Sahara limited contact between the rest of Africa—known as sub-Saharan Africa—and the Mediterranean coast, Europe, and Asia. South of the Sahara is a semidesert region known as the Sahel, and south of the Sahel is a huge grassland, or **savanna**, stretching from Ethiopia west to the Atlantic Ocean. Arab adventurers named this savanna *Bilad es Sudan*, meaning “land of the black people,” and the term *Sudan* designates this entire region rather than simply the modern East African nation of Sudan. Much of the habitable part of West Africa falls within the savanna. The rest lies within the northern part of a **rain forest** that extends east from the Atlantic coast over most of the central part of the continent. Another region of savanna borders the rain forest to the south, followed by another desert—the Kalahari—and another coastal strip at the continent's southern extremity.

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savanna A flat, nearly treeless grassland typical of large portions of West Africa.

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rain forest A dense growth of tall trees characteristic of hot, wet regions.

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The Birthplace of Humanity

1-2 Where and how did humans originate?

Paleoanthropologists—scientists who study the evolution and prehistory of humans—have concluded that the origins of humanity lie in the savanna regions of Africa. All people today, in other words, are very likely descendants of beings who lived in Africa millions of years ago.

Fossil and genetic evidence suggests that both humans and the forest-dwelling great apes (gorillas and chimpanzees) descended from a common ancestor who lived in Africa about 5 to 10 million years ago. The African climate was growing drier at that time, as forests gave way to savannas dotted with isolated patches of trees.

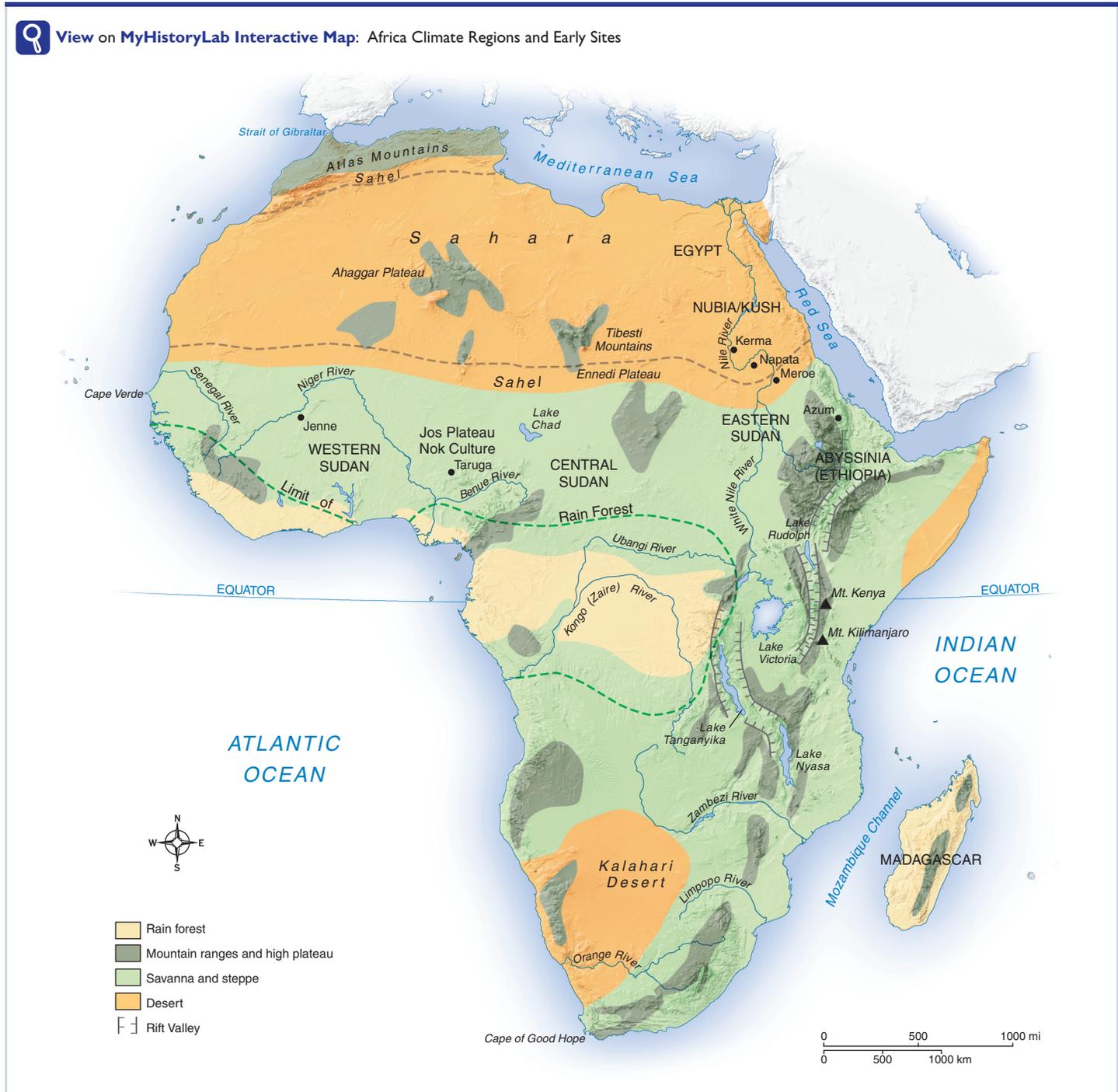
The earliest known *hominids* (the term designates the biological family to which humans belong) were the *Ardipithecines*, who emerged about 4.5 million years ago. These creatures walked upright but otherwise retained primitive characteristics and did not make stone tools. But by 3.4 million years ago, their descendents, known as *Australopithecus*, used primitive stone tools to butcher meat. By 2.4 million years ago, *Homo habilis*, the earliest creature designated as within the *homo* (human) lineage, had developed a larger brain than *Ardipithecus* or *Australopithecus*. *Homo habilis* (*habilis* means “tool using”) used fire and built shelters with stone foundations. Like people in **hunting and gathering societies** today, they probably lived in small bands in which women foraged for plant food and men hunted and scavenged for meat.

Recent discoveries suggest *Homo habilis* may have spread from Africa to the Caucasus region of southeastern Europe. A more advanced human, *Homo erectus*, spread even farther from Africa, reaching eastern Asia and Indonesia. *Homo erectus*, who emerged in Africa about 1.6 million years ago, may have been the first human to use rafts to cross large bodies of water and may have had a limited ability to speak.

Paleoanthropologists agree that modern humans, *Homo sapiens*, evolved from *Homo erectus*, but they disagree on how. According to a multiregional model, modern humans

hunting and gathering societies Small societies dependent on hunting animals and collecting wild plants rather than on agriculture.

View on MyHistoryLab Interactive Map: Africa Climate Regions and Early Sites



MAP 1-1 AFRICA: CLIMATIC REGIONS AND EARLY SITES

Africa is a large continent with several climatic zones. It is also the home of several early civilizations.

What impact did the variety of climatic zones have on the development of civilization in Africa?

evolved throughout Africa, Asia, and Europe from ancestral regional populations of *Homo erectus* and archaic *Homo sapiens*. According to the out-of-Africa model, modern humans emerged in Africa some 200,000 years ago and began migrating to the rest of the world about 100,000 years ago, eventually replacing all other existing hominid populations. Both of these models are consistent with recent genetic evidence, and both indicate that all living

peoples are closely related. The “Eve” hypothesis, which supports the out-of-Africa model, suggests that all modern humans are descended from a single African woman. The multiregional model maintains that a continuous exchange of genetic material allowed archaic human populations in Africa, Asia, and Europe to evolve simultaneously into modern humans.

Ancient Civilizations and Old Arguments

1-3 Why are ancient African civilizations important?

The earliest civilization in Africa and one of the two earliest civilizations in world history is that of ancient Egypt (see Map 1–1), which emerged in the Nile River valley in the fourth millennium BCE. Mesopotamian civilization, the other of the two, emerged in the valleys of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers in southwest Asia. In both regions, civilization appeared at the end of a long process in which hunting and gathering gave way to agriculture. The settled village life that resulted from this transformation permitted society to become increasingly **hierarchical** and specialized. Similar processes gave rise to civilization in other parts of the world. Among them were the Indus valley in India around 2300 BCE, northeast China around 1500 BCE, and Mexico and Andean South America during the first millennium BCE.

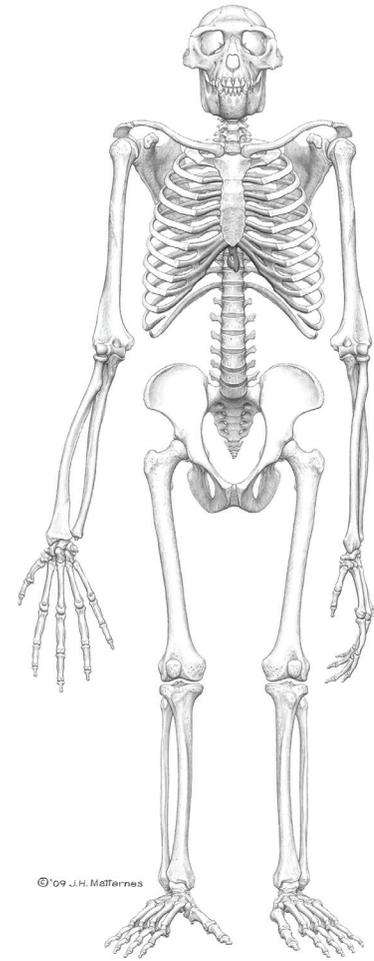
The race of the ancient Egyptians and the nature and extent of their influence on later Western civilizations have long been a source of controversy. That controversy reflects more about the racial politics of recent history than it reveals about the Egyptians themselves, who did not regard themselves in ways related to modern racial terminology. It is not clear whether the Egyptians were an offshoot of their Mesopotamian contemporaries, whether they were part of a group of peoples whose origins were in both Africa and southwest Asia, or whether black Africans were ancestors of both the Egyptians and Mesopotamians. What is clear is that the ancient Egyptians exhibited a mixture of racial features and spoke a language related to the languages spoken by others in the fertile regions of North Africa and southwest Asia.

The argument over the Egyptians’ race began in the nineteenth century when African Americans and white reformers sought to refute claims by racist pseudoscientists that people of African descent were inherently inferior to people of European descent. Unaware of the achievements of West African civilization, those who believed in human equality used evidence that the Egyptians were black to counter assertions that African Americans were incapable of civilization.

During the last two decades of the twentieth century, a more scholarly debate occurred between Afrocentricists and traditionalists. Afrocentricists regarded ancient Egypt as an essentially black civilization closely linked to other indigenous African civilizations to its south. They maintained not only that the Egyptians influenced later African civilizations but also that they had a decisive impact on the Mediterranean Sea region, including ancient Greece and Rome. Therefore, in regard to philosophy and science, black Egyptians originated Western civilization. In response, traditionalists claimed that modern racial categories have no relevance to the world of the ancient Egyptians. The ancient Greeks, they argued, developed the empirical method of inquiry and notions of individual freedom that characterize Western civilization. Not under debate, however, was Egypt’s contribution to the spread of civilization throughout the Mediterranean region. No one doubts that in religion, commerce, and art, Egypt strongly influenced Greece and subsequent Western civilizations.

Egyptian Civilization

Egypt was, as the Greek historian Herodotus observed 2,500 years ago, the “gift of the Nile.” This great river’s gentle annual flooding regularly irrigated its banks, leaving behind deposits of fertile soil. This allowed Egyptians to cultivate wheat and barley and herd goats,



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This drawing is based on a partial, fossilized skeleton discovered at Afar, Ethiopia, in 1994. The anthropologists who found the remains concluded in 2009 that the bones are those of a female *Ardipithecus ramidus* (nicknamed “Ardi”) who lived 4.5 million years ago. Ardi shows that hominids diverged from apes much earlier than previously believed and fortifies existing evidence that human origins lay in Africa.

hierarchical Refers to a social system based on class rank.

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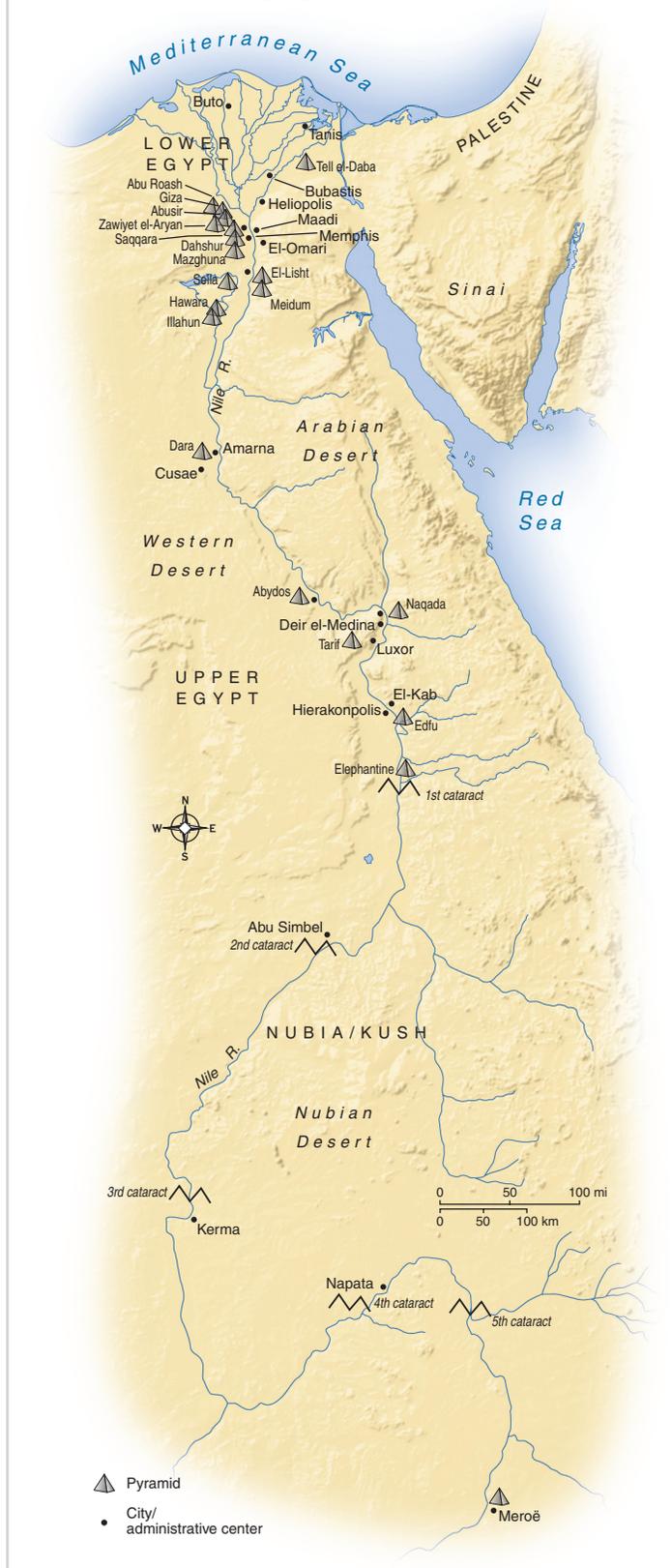
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 **Read on MyHistoryLab Document:** Ibn Battuta Describes a Journey Through Egypt, c. 1325



MAP 1-2 ANCIENT EGYPT AND NUBIA

What does this map indicate about the relationship between ancient Egypt and Nubia/Kush?

sheep, pigs, and cattle in an otherwise desolate region. The Nile also provided the Egyptians with a transportation and communications artery, while their desert surroundings protected them from foreign invasion.

Egypt became a unified kingdom around 3150 BCE. Between 1550–1100 BCE, it expanded beyond the Nile valley, creating an empire over the coastal regions of southwest Asia as well as over Libya and Nubia in Africa. It was during this period that Egypt's kings began using the title *pharaoh*, which means “great house.” After 1100 BCE, Egypt fell prey to a series of outside invaders. With the invasion of Alexander the Great's Macedonian army in 331 BCE, Egypt's ancient culture began a long decline under the pressure of Greek ideas and institutions (see Map 1-2). Finally the Roman Empire conquered Egypt in 30 BCE.

Before decline began, Egypt had resisted change for thousands of years. Pharaohs presided over a hierarchical society. Beneath them were classes of warriors, priests, merchants, artisans, and peasants. Scribes, who mastered Egypt's complex **hieroglyphic** writing system, staffed a large bureaucracy. Egyptian society was also **patrilineal** and **patriarchal**. Royal incest was customary, as pharaohs often chose one of their sisters to be their queen. Pharaohs also had numerous concubines, and other men could take additional wives if their first wife failed to produce children. Egyptian women nonetheless held a high status compared with women in much of the rest of the ancient world. They owned property independently of their husband, oversaw household slaves, controlled the education of their children, held public office, served as priests, and operated businesses. Several women became pharaoh, one of whom, Hatshepsut, reigned for 20 years (1478–1458 BCE).

A complex polytheistic religion shaped Egyptian life. Although there were many gods, two of the more important were the sun god Re (or Ra), who represented the immortality of the Egyptian state, and Osiris, the god of the Nile, who embodied each person's immortality. Personal immortality and the immortality of the state merged in the person of the pharaoh, as expressed in Egypt's elaborate royal tombs. The most dramatic examples of those tombs, the Great Pyramids at Giza near the modern city of Cairo, were built more than 4,500 years ago to protect the bodies of three Egyptian pharaohs, so that their souls might enter the life to come. The pyramids also symbolized the power of the Egyptian state. They endure as embodiments of the grandeur of Egyptian civilization.

Nubia, Kush, Meroë, and Axum

To the south of Egypt in the upper Nile valley, in what is today the nation of Sudan, lay the ancient region known as Nubia. As early as the fourth millennium BCE, the black people who lived there interacted with the Egyptians. Archaeological evidence suggests that grain production and the concept of monarchy may have arisen in Nubia and then spread north to Egypt. But Egypt's population was always much larger than that of Nubia, and during the second millennium BCE, Egypt used its military power to make Nubia an

Egyptian colony and control Nubian copper and gold mines. Egyptians also imported ivory, ebony, leopard pelts, and slaves from Nubia and required the sons of Nubian nobles to live in Egypt as hostages.

Egyptian religion, art, hieroglyphics, and political structure influenced Nubia. Then, with Egypt's decline during the first millennium BCE, the Nubians established an independent kingdom known as Kush, which had its capital at Kerma on the Nile River. During the eighth century BCE, the Kushites took control of upper (meaning southern because the Nile flows from south to north) Egypt, and in about 750 BCE, the Kushite king Piankhy added lower Egypt to his realm. Piankhy became pharaoh and founded Egypt's twenty-fifth dynasty, which ruled until the Assyrians, who invaded Egypt from southwest Asia in 663 BCE and drove the Kushites out.

Kush itself remained independent for another thousand years. Its kings continued for centuries to call themselves pharaohs and had themselves buried in pyramid tombs covered with Egyptian hieroglyphics. They and the Kushite nobility practiced the Egyptian religion and spoke the Egyptian language. In 540 BCE a resurgent Egyptian army destroyed Kerma, and the Kushites moved their capital southward to Meroë. The new capital became wealthy from trade with East Africa, with regions to the west across Sudan, and with the Mediterranean world by way of the Nile River. The development of a smelting technology capable of exploiting local deposits of iron transformed the city into Africa's first industrial center.

Kush's wealth attracted powerful enemies, and in 23 BCE a Roman army invaded. But it was the decline of Rome and its Mediterranean economy that hurt Kush the most. As the Roman Empire grew weaker and poorer, its trade with Kush declined, and Kush, too, weakened. During the early fourth century CE, it fell to the neighboring Noba people, who in turn fell to the kingdom of Axum, whose warriors destroyed Meroë.

Located in what is today Ethiopia, Axum emerged as a nation during the first century BCE as **Semitic** people from the Arabian Peninsula settled among a local black

hieroglyphics A writing system based on pictures or symbols.

patrilineal Descent through the male line.

patriarchal A society ruled by a senior man.

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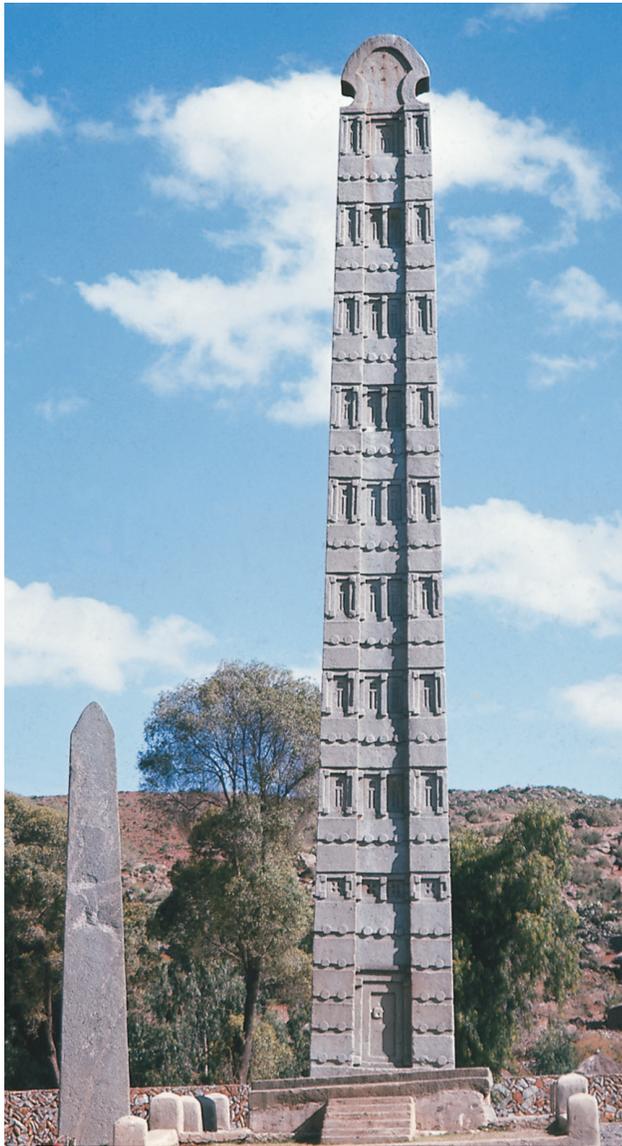
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Semitic Refers to languages, such as Arabic and Hebrew, native to southwest Asia.

 Read on **MyHistoryLab Document**: Herodotus on Carthaginian Trade and on the City of Meroë



The ruined pyramids of Meroë on the banks of the upper Nile River are not as old as those at Giza in Egypt, and they differ from them stylistically. But they nonetheless attest to the cultural connections between Meroë and Egypt.



This giant stele at Axum demonstrates the spread of Egyptian architecture into what is today Ethiopia. Probably erected during the first century CE, before Axum converted to Christianity, this is the last of its kind still standing.

Berbers A people native to North Africa and the Sahara Desert.

population. By the time it absorbed Kush during the fourth century CE, Axum had become the first Christian state in sub-Saharan Africa. By the eighth century, shifting trade patterns, environmental depletion, and Islamic invaders combined to reduce Axum's power. It nevertheless retained its unique culture and its independence.

West Africa

1-4 Why is West Africa significant for African-American history?

For centuries, legend has held that the last kings of Kush retreated across the savanna to West Africa, bringing with them artistic motifs, the knowledge of iron making, and the concepts of divine kingship and centralized government. By the fifth century BCE in what is today Libya, Garamantian **Berbers**—the indigenous people of northwestern Africa—independently introduced pyramids, Egyptian gods, and ancestor worship to the western Sahara region.

But no archaeological evidence supports the Kush kings legend. Instead a distinctive West African civilization had independent roots. Iron-working arose earlier in West Africa than it did at Meroë. The immediate birthright of most African Americans, then, is to be found not in the ancient civilizations of the Nile valley—although those civilizations are part of the heritage of all Africans—but thousands of miles away among the civilizations that emerged in West Africa during the first millennium BCE.

Like Africa as a whole, West Africa is physically, ethnically, and culturally diverse. Much of West Africa south of the Sahara Desert falls within the savanna that spans the continent from east to west. West and south of the savanna are extensive forests. They cover Senegambia (modern Senegal and Gambia), the southwest coast of West Africa, and the lands located along the coast of the Gulf of Guinea. These two environments—savanna and forest—were home to a variety of cultures and languages. Patterns of settlement in the region ranged from isolated homesteads and hamlets to villages, towns, and cities.

West Africans began cultivating crops and tending domesticated animals between 1000 BCE and 200 CE. Those who lived on the savanna usually adopted settled village life well before those who lived in the forests.

The early farmers produced grains—millet, rice, and sorghum—while tending cattle and goats. By 500 BCE, beginning with the Nok people of the forest region, some West Africans produced iron tools and weapons.

From early times, the peoples of West Africa traded among themselves and with the peoples who lived across the Sahara Desert in North Africa. This extensive trade became an essential part of the region's economy and had two other important results. First, it was the basis for the three great western Sudanese empires that successively dominated the region, from before 800 CE until the beginnings of the modern era. Second, it drew Arab merchants, and the Islamic religion, into the region.

Ancient Ghana

The first known kingdom in western Sudan was Ghana (see Map 1-3). Founded by the Soninke people in the area north of the modern republic of Ghana, the kingdom's origins are unclear. It may have arisen as early as the fourth century CE or as late as the eighth century when Arab merchants began to praise its wealth. Its name comes from the Soninke word for king, which Arab traders mistakenly applied to the entire kingdom.

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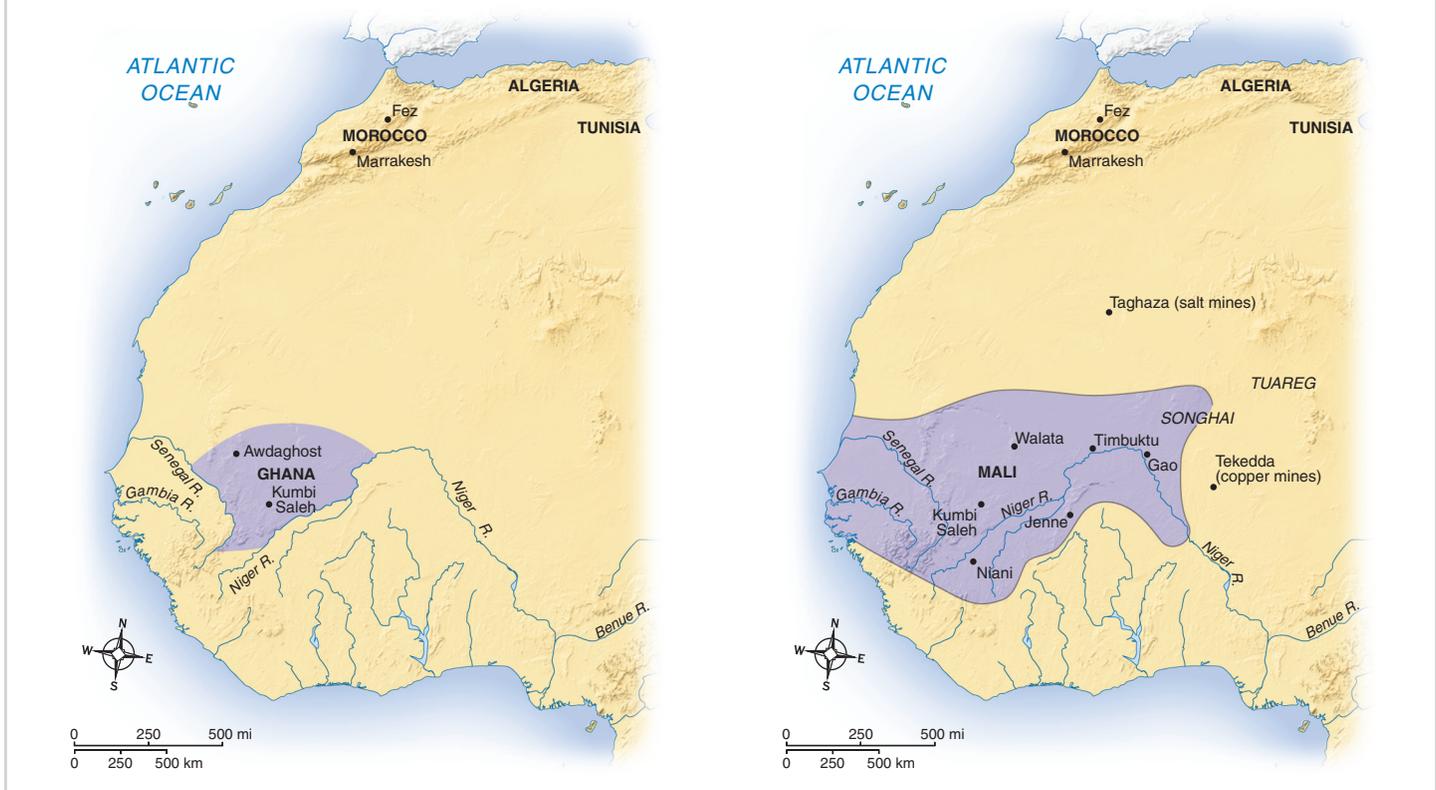
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 Read on MyHistoryLab Document: Ghana and Its People in the Mid-Eleventh Century



MAP 1-3 THE EMPIRES OF GHANA AND MALI

The western Sudanese empires of Ghana and Mali helped shape West African culture. Ghana existed from as early as the fourth century CE to 1076. Mali dominated western Sudan from 1230 to 1468.

What does this map suggest concerning the historical relationship between ancient Ghana and Mali?

Because they possessed superior iron weapons, the Soninke were able to dominate their neighbors and forge an empire through constant warfare. Ghana's boundaries reached into the Sahara Desert to its north and into modern Senegal to its south. But the empire's real power lay in commerce.

Ghana's kings were known in Europe and southwest Asia as the richest of monarchs, and trade produced their wealth. The key to this trade was the camel, introduced into Africa from Asia during the first century CE. The camel's ability to endure long journeys on small amounts of food and water dramatically increased trade across the Sahara between western Sudan and the coastal regions of North Africa.

Ghana traded in several commodities. From North Africa came silk, cotton, glass beads, horses, mirrors, dates, and especially salt—a scarce necessity in the torridly hot western Sudan. In return, Ghana exported pepper, slaves, and especially gold. The slaves were usually war captives, and the gold came from mines in the Wangara region to the southwest of Ghana. The Soninke did not mine the gold themselves. Instead, the kings of Ghana grew rich by taxing the gold as it passed through their lands.

Before the fifth century CE, Roman merchants and Berbers were West Africa's chief partners in the trans-Saharan trade. As Roman power declined and Islam spread across North Africa during the seventh and eighth centuries, Arabs replaced the Romans. Arab merchants settled

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VOICES Al Bakri Describes Kumbi Saleh and Ghana's Royal Court

Nothing remains of the documents compiled by Ghana's Islamic bureaucracy. As a result, accounts of the civilization are all based on the testimony of Arab or Berber visitors. In this passage, written in the eleventh century, Arab geographer Al Bakri describes the great wealth and power of the king of Ghana and suggests there were tensions between Islam and the indigenous religion of the Soninke.

The city of Ghana [Kumbi Saleh] consists of two towns lying in a plain. One of these towns is inhabited by Muslims. It is large and possesses twelve mosques. . . . There are imams and muezzins, and assistants as well as jurists and learned men. Around the town are wells of sweet water from which they drink and near which they grow vegetables. The town in which the king lives is six miles from the Muslim one, and bears the name Al Ghaba [the forest]. The land between the two towns is covered with houses. The houses of the inhabitants are of stone and acacia wood. The king has a palace and a number of dome-shaped dwellings, the whole surrounded by an enclosure like the defensive wall of a city. In the town where the king lives, and not far from the hall where he holds his court of justice, is a mosque where pray the Muslims who come on diplomatic missions. Around the king's town are domed buildings, woods, and copses where live the sorcerers of these people, the men in charge of the religious cult. . . .

Of the people who follow the king's religion, only he and his heir presumptive, who is the son of his sister, may wear sewn clothes. All the other people wear clothes of cotton, silk, or brocade, according to their means. All men shave their beards and women shave their heads. The king adorns himself like a woman, wearing necklaces and bracelets, and when he sits before the people he puts on a high cap decorated with gold and wrapped in a turban of fine cotton. The court of appeal [for grievances against officials] is held in a domed pavilion around which stand ten horses with gold embroidered trappings. Behind the king stand ten pages holding shields and swords decorated with gold, and on his right are the sons of the subordinate kings of his country, all wearing splendid garments and their hair mixed with gold. . . . When the people professing the same religion as the king approach him, they fall on their knees and sprinkle their heads with dust, for this is their way of showing him their respect. As for the Muslims, they greet him only by clapping their hands.

1. What does this passage indicate about life in ancient Ghana?
2. According to Al Bakri, in what ways do customs in Kumbi Saleh differ from customs in Arab lands?

SOURCE: Roland Oliver and Caroline Oliver, *Africa in the Days of Exploration* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1965), 9–10. Reprinted with permission.

in Saleh, the Muslim part of Kumbi Saleh, Ghana's capital, which by the twelfth century had become an impressive city. There were stone houses and tombs and as many as 20,000 people. Visitors remarked the splendor of Kumbi Saleh's royal court. Saleh had several mosques, and some Soninke converted to Islam, although it is unclear whether the royal family joined them. Muslims dominated the royal bureaucracy and introduced Arabic writing to the region.

Commercial and religious rivalries led to Ghana's decline during the twelfth century. The Almoravids, who were Islamic Berbers from what is today Morocco, had been Ghana's principal competitors for control of the trans-Saharan trade. In 992 Ghana's army captured Awdaghost, the Almoravid trade center northwest of Kumbi Saleh. Driven as much by religious fervor as by economic interest, the Almoravids retaliated in 1076 by conquering Ghana. The Soninke regained their independence in 1087, but a little over a century later the Sosso, a previously tributary people, destroyed Kumbi Saleh.

The Empire of Mali, 1230–1468

Following the defeat of Ghana by the Almoravids, western Sudanese peoples competed for political and economic power. This contest ended in 1235 when the Mandinka, under their legendary leader Sundiata (c. 1210–1260), defeated the Sosso at the Battle of Kirina. Sundiata then forged the Empire of Mali.

Mali, which means “where the emperor resides” in Mende, the language of the Mandinka, was socially, politically, and economically similar to Ghana. It was larger than Ghana, however—stretching 1,500 miles from the Atlantic coast to the region east of the Niger

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River—and centered farther south, in a region of greater rainfall and more abundant crops. Sundiata also gained direct control of the gold mines of Wangara, making his empire wealthier than Ghana had been. As a result, Mali's population grew to eight million.

Sundiata also had an important role in western Sudanese religion. According to legend, he wielded magical powers to defeat his enemies. This suggests he practiced an indigenous faith. But Sundiata was also a Muslim and helped make Mali—at least superficially—an Islamic state. As we have mentioned, West Africans had been converting to Islam since Arab traders arrived in the region centuries before. But many converts, like Sundiata, continued to practice indigenous religions. By his time, most merchants and bureaucrats were Muslims, and the empire's rulers gained stature among Arab states by converting to Islam.

To administer their vast empire at a time when communication was slow, Mali's rulers relied on personal and family ties with local chiefs. Commerce, bureaucracy, and scholarship also helped hold the empire together. Mali's most important city was Timbuktu, which had been established during the eleventh century beside the Niger River near the southern edge of the Sahara.

By the thirteenth century, Timbuktu had become a major hub for trade in gold, slaves, and salt. It attracted merchants from throughout the Mediterranean world and became a center of Islamic learning. The city had several mosques, 150 Islamic schools, a law school, and many book dealers. It supported a cosmopolitan community and impressed visitors with its religious and ethnic tolerance. Even though Mali enslaved war captives and traded slaves, an Arab traveler noted in 1352–1353, “the Negroes possess some admirable qualities. They are seldom unjust, and have a greater abhorrence of injustice than any other people.”

Mali reached its peak during the reign of Mansa Musa (r. 1312–1337). One of the wealthiest rulers the world has known, Musa made himself and Mali famous when in 1324 he undertook a pilgrimage across Africa to the Islamic holy city of Mecca in Arabia. With an entourage of 60,000, a train of one hundred elephants, and a propensity for distributing huge

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  **Read on MyHistoryLab Document:** Leo Africanus Describes Timbuktu, c. 1500

  **Read on MyHistoryLab Document:** Al-Umari Describes Mansa Musa of Mali, c. 1330



Mansa Musa, who ruled the West African Empire of Mali from 1312 to 1337, is portrayed at the bottom center of this portion of the fourteenth-century Catalan Atlas. Musa's crown, scepter, throne, and the huge gold nugget he displays symbolize his power and wealth.



MAP 1-4 WEST AND CENTRAL AFRICA, C. 1500

This map shows the Empire of Songhai (1464–1591), the Kongo kingdom (c. 1400–1700), and the major kingdoms of the West African forest region.

How did the western Sudanese empires' geographical location make them susceptible to slave trading?

to regain access to West African gold, sent an army of 4,000—mostly Spanish mercenaries armed with muskets and cannons—across the Sahara to attack Gao, Songhai's capital. Only 1,000 of the soldiers survived the grueling march to confront Songhai's elite cavalry at Tondibi on the approach to Gao. But the Songhai warriors' bows and lances were no match for firearms, and the mercenaries routed them. Its army destroyed, the Songhai empire fell apart. The center of Islamic scholarship in West Africa shifted east from Timbuktu to Hausaland. When the Moroccans soon departed, West Africa was left without a government powerful enough to intervene when the Portuguese, other Europeans, and the African kingdoms of the Guinea Coast became more interested in trading for human beings than for gold.

The West African Forest Region

The area known as the forest region of West Africa extends 2,000 miles along the Atlantic coast from Senegambia in the northwest to the former kingdom of Benin (modern Cameroon) in the east. Among the early settlers of this region were the Nok, who, in what

amounts of gold to those who greeted him along the way, Musa amazed the Islamic world. After his death, however, Mali declined. In 1468, one of its formerly subject peoples, the Songhai, captured Timbuktu, and their leader, Sunni Ali, founded a new West African empire.

The Empire of Songhai, 1464–1591

Like the Mandinka and Soninke before them, the Songhai were great traders and warriors. The Songhai had seceded from Mali in 1375, and under Sunni Ali (r. 1464–1492), they built the last and largest of the western Sudanese empires (see Map 1-4). Sunni Ali required conquered peoples to pay tribute but otherwise let them run their own affairs. Nominally a Muslim, he—like Sundiata—was reputedly a great magician who derived power from the traditional spirits.

When Sunni Ali died by drowning, Askia Muhammad Toure led a successful revolt against Ali's son and made himself king of Songhai. The new king (r. 1492–1528) extended the empire north into the Sahara, west into Mali, and east to include the trading cities of Hausaland. He centralized the administration of the empire, replacing local chiefs with members of his family, substituting taxation for tribute, and establishing a bureaucracy to regulate trade.

A devout Muslim, Muhammad Toure used his power to spread the influence of Islam within the empire. During a pilgrimage to Mecca in 1497, he established diplomatic relations with Morocco and Egypt and recruited Muslim scholars to serve at the Sankore Mosque at Timbuktu. The mosque became a center for the study of theology, law, mathematics, and medicine. Despite these efforts, by the end of Muhammad Toure's reign—members of his family deposed the aging, senile, and blind ruler—Islamic culture remained weak in West Africa outside urban areas. Peasants, who made up 95 percent of the population, spoke a variety of languages, continued to practice indigenous religions, and remained loyal to their local chiefs.

Songhai reached its peak of influence under Askia Daud (r. 1549–1582). However, as the political balance of power in West Africa changed rapidly, Songhai failed to adapt, as it lacked new leaders as resourceful as Sunni Ali or Muhammad Toure. Since the 1430s, adventurers from the European country of Portugal had been establishing trading centers along the Guinea Coast, seeking gold and diverting it from the trans-Saharan trade. Their success threatened the Arab rulers of North Africa, Songhai's traditional partners in the trans-Saharan trade. In 1591 the king of Morocco, hoping

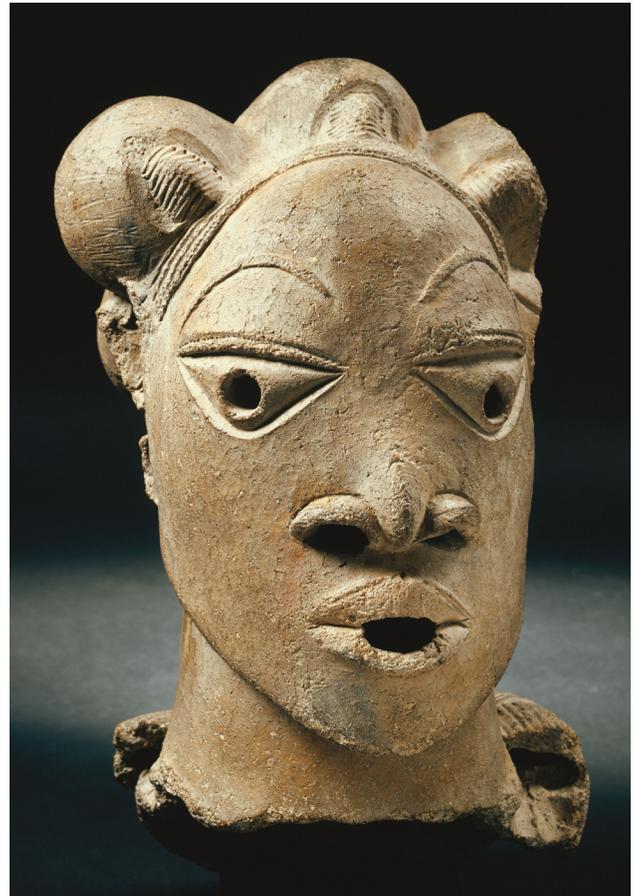
is today southern Nigeria, created around 500 BCE a culture noted for its ironworking technology and its terra-cotta sculptures. But significant migration into the forests began only after 1000 CE, as the western Sudanese climate became increasingly dry.

Because people migrated south from Sudan in small groups over an extended period, the process brought about considerable cultural diversification. A variety of languages, economies, political systems, and traditions came into existence. Some ancient customs survived, such as dividing types of agricultural labor by gender and living in villages composed of extended families. Nevertheless, the forest region became a patchwork of diverse ethnic groups with related but various ways of life.

Colonizing a region covered with thick vegetation was hard work. In some portions of the forest, agriculture did not supplant hunting and gathering until the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. In more open parts of the region, however, small kingdoms emerged centuries earlier. Benin City, for example, dates to the thirteenth century and Ife in Nigeria to the eleventh. Although none of these kingdoms ever grew as large as the empires of western Sudan, some became powerful. Their kings claimed semidivine status and sought to extend their power by conquering and assimilating neighboring peoples. Secrecy and elaborate ritual marked royal courts, which were also centers of patronage for art and religion. Meanwhile, nobility and urban elites worked to limit the kings' power.

The peoples of the forest region are of particular importance for African-American history because of the role they played in the Atlantic slave trade as both slave traders and victims. Space limitations permit only a survey of the most important of these peoples, beginning with those of Senegambia in the northwest.

The inhabitants of Senegambia shared a common history and spoke closely related languages, but they were not politically united. Parts of the region had been incorporated within the empires of Ghana and Mali and had been exposed to Islamic influences. Senegambian society was strictly hierarchical, with royalty at the top and slaves at the bottom. Most people were farmers, growing rice, millet, sorghum, plantains, beans, and bananas. They supplemented their diet with fish, oysters, rabbits, and monkeys.



The Nok people of what is today Nigeria produced terra-cotta sculptures like this one during the first millennium BCE. They also pioneered, between 500 and 450 BCE, iron smelting in West Africa.

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The great mosque in the West African city of Jenne was first built during the fourteenth century CE. It demonstrates the importance of Islam in the region's trading centers.



This carved wooden ceremonial offering bowl is typical of a Yoruba art form that has persisted for centuries. It reflects religious practices as well as traditional hairstyle and dress.

Southeast of Senegambia, the Akan states emerged during the sixteenth century as the gold trade provided local rulers with the wealth they needed to clear forests and initiate agricultural economies. The rulers used gold from mines they controlled to purchase slaves who did the difficult work of cutting trees and burning refuse. The rulers then distributed the cleared fields to settlers. In return the settlers gave the rulers a portion of their produce and provided services. When Europeans arrived, the rulers used gold to purchase guns. The guns in turn allowed the Akan states to expand. During the late seventeenth century, one of them, the Ashantee, created a well-organized and densely populated kingdom, comparable in size to the modern country of Ghana. By the eighteenth century, this kingdom dominated the central portion of the forest region and used its army to capture slaves for sale to European traders.

To the east of the Akan states (in modern Benin and western Nigeria) lived the people of the Yoruba culture. They gained ascendancy in the area as early as 1000 CE by trading kola nuts and cloth to the peoples of the western Sudan. The artisans of the Yoruba city of Ife gained renown for their fine bronze, brass, and terra-cotta sculptures. Ife was also notable for the prominent role women played in commerce. During the seventeenth century, the Oyo people, employing a well-trained cavalry, imposed political unity on part of the Yoruba region. They, like the Ashantee, became extensively involved in the Atlantic slave trade.

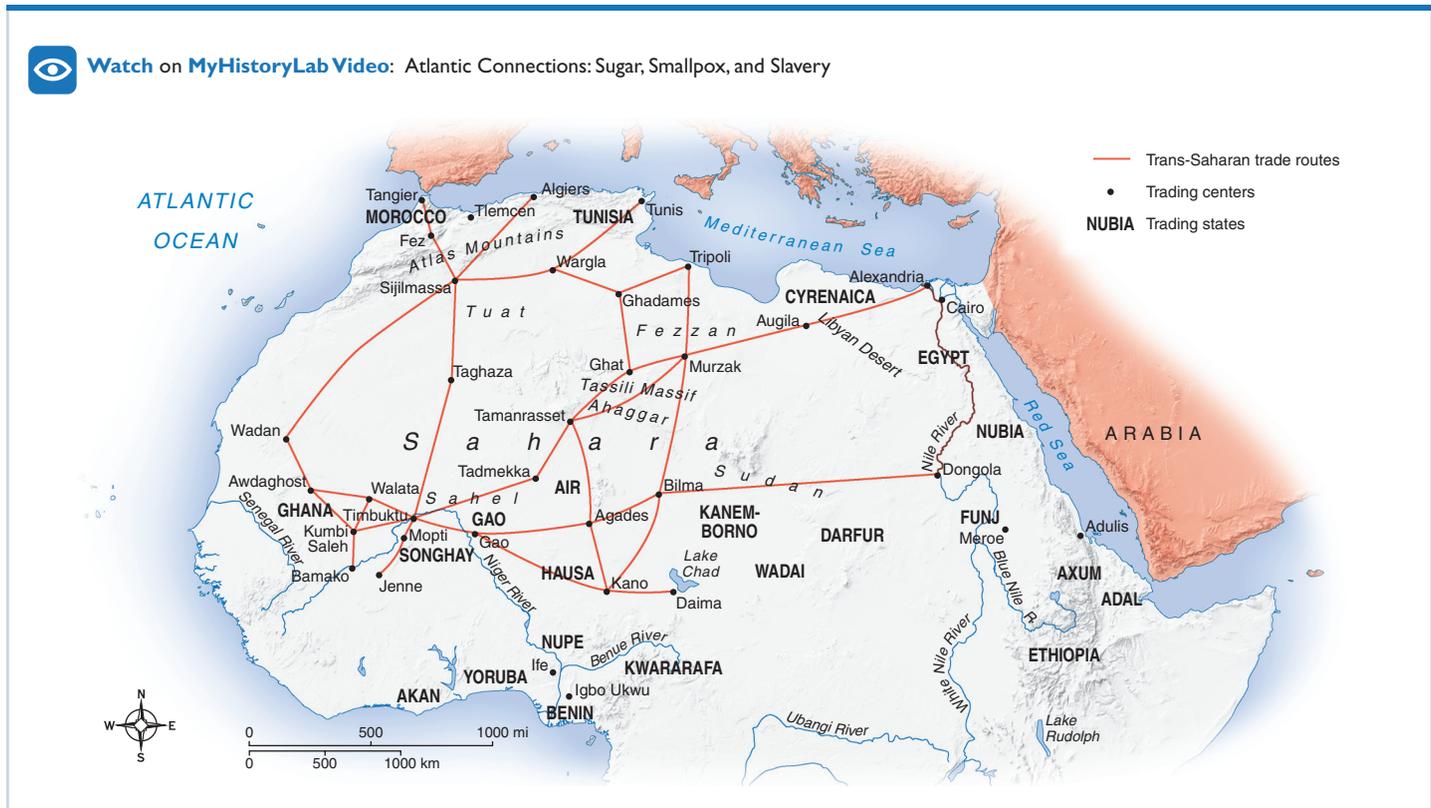
West of the Oyo were the Fon people, who formed the Kingdom of Dahomey, which rivaled Oyo as a center for the slave trade. The king of Dahomey was an absolute monarch who, to ensure the loyalty of potential rivals, took thousands of wives for himself from leading families.

At the eastern end of the forest region was the Kingdom of Benin, which controlled much of what is today southern Nigeria. The people of this kingdom shared a common heritage with the Yoruba, who played a role in the kingdom's formation during the thirteenth century. Throughout Benin's history, the Obas (kings), who claimed divine status, struggled for power with the kingdom's hereditary nobility.

After a reform of its army during the fifteenth century, Benin expanded to the Niger River in the east, to the Gulf of Guinea to the south, and into Yoruba country to the west. The kingdom peaked during the late sixteenth century. European visitors noted the size and sophistication of its capital, Benin City. There skilled artisans produced the fine bronze sculptures for which the region is still known. The city's wealthy class dined on beef, mutton, chicken, and yams. Its streets, unlike those of European cities of the time, had no beggars.

Benin remained little influenced by Islam or Christianity, but like other coastal kingdoms, it joined in the Atlantic slave trade. Beginning in the late fifteenth century, the Oba allowed Europeans to trade for gold, pepper, ivory, and slaves. Initially, the Oba forbade the sale of his subjects, but his large army—the first in the forest region to have European firearms—captured others for the trade as it conquered neighboring regions. By the seventeenth century, Benin's prosperity depended on the slave trade. As the kingdom declined during the eighteenth century, it began to sell its own people to European slave traders.

To Benin's east was Igboland, a densely populated but politically weak region along the Niger River. The Igbo people lived in one of the stateless societies common in West Africa. In these societies, families rather than central authorities ruled. Village elders provided local government, and life centered on family homesteads. Igboland had long exported fieldworkers and skilled artisans to Benin and other kingdoms. When Europeans arrived, they expanded this trade, which brought many Igbos to the Americas (see Map 1–5).



MAP 1-5 TRANS-SAHARAN TRADE ROUTES

Ancient trade routes connected sub-Saharan West Africa to the Mediterranean coast. Among the commodities carried southward were silk, cotton, horses, and salt. Among those carried northward were gold, ivory, pepper, and slaves.

What was the significance of the trans-Saharan trade in West African history?

Kongo and Angola

1-5 What did Kongo and Angola have in common with West Africa?

Although the forebears of most African Americans originated in West Africa, a large minority came from Central Africa. In particular, they came from the area around the Congo River and its tributaries and from the region to the south that the Portuguese called Angola. The people of these regions had much in common with those of the Guinea Coast. They divided labor by gender, lived in villages of extended families, and gave semidivine status to their kings. Also the Atlantic slave trade ensnared them, much as it did the peoples of West Africa.

During the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, a number of states formed in the area to the north and south of what is today the border between the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Angola. Among them were Ndonga, Matamba, Ksanje, and Lunda. By far the most important was Kongo Kingdom, which controlled much of the Congo River system, with its fertile valleys and abundant fish. In addition to farming and fishing, this kingdom's wealth derived from access to salt, iron, and trade with the interior. Nzinga Knuwu was *Mani Kongo* (the Kongolese term for king) when Portuguese expeditions arrived in the late fifteenth century, seeking chiefly to trade for slaves. Knuwu surpassed other African rulers in welcoming the intruders. His son Nzinga Mbemba tried to convert the kingdom to

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VOICES A Dutch Visitor Describes Benin City

Benin City was one of the few towns of the Guinea Coast that were open to European travelers before the nineteenth century. As this account by a Dutch visitor in 1602 suggests, many of them compared it favorably to the cities of Europe.

The town seemeth to be very great; when you enter into it, you go into a great broad street, not paved, which seems to be seven or eight times broader than the Warmoes street in Amsterdam; which goeth right out and never crooks. . . . It is thought that street is a mile long [this is a Dutch mile, equal to about four English miles] besides the suburbs. At the gate where I entered on horseback, I saw a very high bulwark, very thick of earth, with a very deep broad ditch. . . . Without this gate there is a great suburb. When you are in the great street aforesaid, you see many great streets on the sides thereof, which also go right forth. . . . The houses in this street stand in good order, one close and even with the other, as the houses in Holland stand. . . . Their rooms within are four-square, over them having a roof that is not close[d] in the middle, at which place the rain, wind, and light come in, and therein they lie and eat their meat; they have other places besides, as kitchens and other rooms. . . .

The King's Court is very great, within it having many great four-square plains, which round about them have galleries, wherein there is always watch kept. I was so far within the Court that I passed over four such great plains, and wherever I looked, still I saw gates upon gates to go into other places. . . . I went as far as any Netherlander was, which was to the stable where his best horses stood, always passing a great long way. It seems that the King has many soldiers; he has also many gentlemen, who when they come to the court ride upon horses. . . . There are also many men slaves seen in the town, that carry water, yams, and palm-wine, which they say is for the King; and many carry grass, which is for their horses; and all of this is carried into the court.

1. According to the Dutch visitor, how does Benin City compare to Amsterdam?
2. What seems to impress the Dutch visitor most about Benin City?

SOURCE: Roland Oliver and J. D. Fage, *A Short History of Africa* (Penguin Books 1962, Sixth Edition 1988). Copyright Roland Oliver and J. D. Fage, 1962, 1966, 1970, 1972, 1975, 1988. Reprinted with permission.

Christianity and remodel it along European lines. The resulting unrest, combined with Portuguese greed and the effects of the slave trade, undermined royal authority. The ultimate result was the breakup of the kingdom and the disruption of the other Kongo-Angola states.

West African Society and Culture

1-6 How did the legacies of West African society and culture influence the way African Americans lived?

 Watch on MyHistoryLab Video: West African States.

West Africa's great ethnic and cultural diversity makes it hazardous to generalize about the social and cultural background of the first African Americans. The dearth of written records from the region south of Sudan compounds the difficulties. But by working with a variety of sources, including oral histories, traditions, and archaeological studies, historians have pieced together a broad understanding of the way the people of West Africa lived at the beginning of the Atlantic slave trade.

Families and Villages

By the early sixteenth century, most West Africans were farmers. They usually lived in hamlets or villages of extended families and clans called **lineages**. Villages tended to be larger on the savanna than in the forest region, and usually one lineage occupied each village, although some large lineages peopled several villages. Each extended family descended from a common ancestor, and each lineage claimed descent from a mythical personage. Depending on the ethnic group involved, extended families and lineages were either patrilineal or **matrilineal**. In patrilineal societies, social rank and property passed in the male line from

lineage A type of clan, typical of West Africa, in which members claim descent from a single ancestor.

matrilineal Descent traced through the female line.

PROFILE

Nzinga Mbemba (Afonso I) of Kongo



NZINGA MBEMBA, baptized Dom Afonso, ruled as the Mani Kongo (r. c. 1506–1543 CE). His life illustrates the complex and tragic relationships between the African coastal kingdoms and Europeans in search of power, cultural hegemony, and wealth.

Mbemba was a son of Nzinga Knuwu, who, as Mani Kongo, established diplomatic ties with Portugal. Portuguese vessels had first reached Kongo in 1482, and in 1491 the Portuguese king sent a formal mission to Mbanza Kongo (the City of Kongo). Amid considerable ceremony, Knuwu converted to Christianity because conversion gave him access to Portuguese muske-

teers he needed to put down a rebellion. Mbemba served as his father's general in the ensuing successful campaign.

By 1495, internal politics and Knuwu's inability to accept Christian monogamy had led him to renounce his baptism and banish Christians—both Portuguese and Kongoleses—from Mbanza Kongo. Mbemba, who was a sincere Christian, became their champion in opposition to a traditionalist faction headed by his half brother Mpanza. Following Knuwu's death in 1506, the two princes fought over the succession. Mbemba's victory led to his coronation as Afonso and the execution of Mpanza.

By then Mbemba had learned to speak, read, and write Portuguese. He gained at least outward respect from the Portuguese monarchy as a ruler and Christian missionary. Soon hundreds of Portuguese advisers, priests, artisans, teachers, and settlers lived in Mbanza Kongo and its environs. In 1516 a Portuguese priest described Mbemba as “not . . . a man but an angel sent by the Lord to this kingdom to convert it. . . . Better than we, he knows the Prophets and the Gospel of Our Lord Jesus Christ.” Mbemba destroyed images and shrines associated with Kongo's traditional religion, replaced

them with crucifixes and images of saints, built Christian churches in Mbanza Kongo, and had some of his opponents burned.

While seeking the spiritual salvation of his nation, Mbemba hoped also to modernize it on a European model. He dressed in Portuguese clothing, had his sons and other young men educated in Portugal, and began schools for the children of Kongo's nobility. He corresponded with Portuguese kings, and his son Dom Henrique, who became a Christian bishop, represented Kongo at the Vatican, where he addressed the pope in Latin in 1513.

Mbemba put too much faith in his Portuguese patrons and too little in the traditions of his people. By 1508, Portuguese priests traded in slaves and lived with Kongoleses mistresses. This disturbed Mbemba not because he opposed slavery but because the priests undermined his authority. He was supposed to have a monopoly over the slave trade, and he did not want his own people subjected to it.

Mbemba's complaints led to a formal agreement with Portugal in 1512 called the *Regimento*, which only made matters worse. It placed restrictions on the priests and pledged continued Portuguese military assistance. But it also recognized Portuguese merchants' right to trade for copper, ivory, and slaves, and it exempted the Portuguese from punishment under local law. Soon the slave trade and related corruption increased, as did unrest among Mbemba's increasingly unhappy subjects. In 1526, Mbemba created a commission to ensure that only war captives could be enslaved. When this strategy failed, he begged the Portuguese king, “In these kingdoms there should not be any trade in slaves or market for slaves.”

In response, Portugal made alliances with Kongo's neighbors and withdrew much of its support from Mbemba, who died surrounded by scheming merchants, corruption, and dissension. In 1568—a quarter century after his death—Kongo became a client state of Portugal, and the slave trade expanded.

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fathers to sons. In matrilineal societies, rank and property, although controlled by men, passed from generation to generation in the female line. A village chief in a matrilineal society was succeeded by his sister's son, not his own. According to the Arab chronicler Al Bakri, the succession to the throne of the empire of Ghana followed this pattern. But, like the people of Igboland, many West Africans lived in stateless societies with no government other than that provided by extended families and lineages.

nuclear family A family unit consisting solely of one set of parents and their children.

polygynous family A family unit consisting of a man, his wives, and their children.

Within extended families, **nuclear families** (husband, wife, and children) or in some cases **polygynous families** (husband, wives, and children) acted as economic units. In other words, nuclear and polygynous families existed in the context of broader family communities composed of grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins. Elders in these extended families had great power over the economic and social lives of their members. Each nuclear or polygynous family unit might have several houses. In nuclear households, the husband occupied the larger house and his wife the smaller. In polygynous households, the husband had the largest house, and his wives lived in smaller ones. In contrast with ancient Egypt, strict incest taboos prohibited people from marrying within their extended family.

Villagers' few possessions included cots, rugs, stools, and wooden storage chests. Their tools and weapons included bows, spears, iron axes, hoes, and scythes. Households used grinding stones, baskets, and ceramic vessels to prepare and store food. Villagers in both the savanna and forest regions produced cotton for clothing, but their food crops were distinct. West Africans in the savanna cultivated millet, rice, and sorghum as their dietary staples; kept goats and cattle for milk and cheese; and supplemented their diets with peas, okra, watermelons, and nuts. Yams, rather than grains, were the dietary staple in the forest region. Other important forest region crops included bananas and coco yams, both derived from Indonesia.

Farming in West Africa was not easy. Drought came often on the savanna. In the forest, diseases carried by the tsetse fly sickened draft animals, and agricultural plots (because they had to be cleared by hand) averaged just two or three acres per family. Although private landownership prevailed, West Africans generally worked land communally, dividing tasks by gender. Among the Akan of the Guinea Coast, for example, men cleared the land of trees and underbrush, and women tended the fields, planting, weeding, and harvesting. Women also cared for children, prepared meals, and manufactured household pottery.

Women

In general, men dominated women in West Africa. As previously noted, men often had two or more wives, and, to a degree, custom held women to be the property of men. But West African women also enjoyed an amount of freedom that impressed Arabs and Europeans. In ancient Ghana, women sometimes served as government officials. Later, in the forest region, they sometimes inherited property and owned land—or at least controlled its income. Women—including enslaved women—in the royal court of Dahomey held high government posts. Ashantee noblewomen could own property, although they themselves could be considered inheritable property. The Ashantee queen held her own court to administer women's affairs.

Women retained far more sexual freedom in West Africa than was the case in Europe or southwest Asia. Ibn Battuta, a Muslim Berber who visited Mali during the fourteenth century, was shocked to discover that in this Islamic country “women show no bashfulness before men and do not veil themselves, though they are assiduous in attending prayer.” Battuta expressed even more surprise on learning that West African women could have male friends and companions other than their husbands or relatives.

Sexual freedom in West Africa was, however, more apparent than real. Throughout the region **secret societies** instilled in men and women ethical standards of behavior. The most important secret societies were the women's *Sande* and the men's *Poro*. They initiated boys and girls into adulthood and provided sex education. They established standards for personal conduct by emphasizing female virtue and male honor. Other secret societies influenced politics, trade, medical practice, recreation, and social gatherings.

Class and Slavery

Although many West Africans lived in stateless societies, most of them lived in hierarchically organized states headed by monarchs who claimed divine or semidivine status. Most of these monarchs' power was far from absolute, but they commanded armies, taxed

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secret societies Social organizations that have secret ceremonies that only their members know about and can participate in.

commerce, and accumulated wealth. Beneath the royalty were classes of landed nobles, warriors, bureaucrats, and peasants. Lower classes included blacksmiths, butchers, weavers, woodcarvers, and tanners.

Slavery had been part of this hierarchical social structure since ancient times. Although common throughout West Africa, slavery was less so in the forest region than on the savanna. It took many forms and was not necessarily a permanent condition. Like people in other parts of the world, West Africans held war captives—including men, women, and children—to be without rights and suitable for enslavement. In Islamic regions, masters had obligations to their slaves similar to those of a guardian for a ward. They were, for example, responsible for their slaves' religious well-being. In non-Islamic regions, the children of slaves acquired legal protections, such as the right not to be sold away from the land they occupied.

Slaves who served either in the royal courts of a West African kingdom or in a kingdom's armies often exercised power over free people and could acquire property. Also, the slaves of peasant farmers often had standards of living similar to those of their masters. Slaves who worked under overseers in gangs on large estates were far less fortunate. However, the children and grandchildren of these enslaved agricultural workers gained employment and privileges similar to those of free people. Slaves retained a low social status, but in many respects slavery in West African societies functioned as a means of **assimilation**.

Religion

There were two religious traditions in fifteenth-century West Africa: Islamic and indigenous. Islam, which Arab traders introduced into West Africa, took root first in the Sudanese empires and remained more prevalent in the cosmopolitan savanna. Even there it was stronger in cities than in rural areas because it was the religion of merchants and bureaucrats. Islam fostered literacy in Arabic, the spread of Islamic learning, and the construction of mosques. Islam is resolutely monotheistic, asserting that Allah is the only God. It recognizes its founder, Muhammad, as well as Abraham, Moses, and Jesus, as prophets but regards none of them as divine.

West Africa's indigenous religions remained strongest in the forest region. They were **polytheistic** and **animistic**, recognizing many divinities and spirits. Beneath an all-powerful but remote creator god, lesser gods represented the forces of nature or were associated with particular mountains, rivers, trees, and rocks. Indigenous West African religion, in other words, saw the force of God in all things.

In part because practitioners of West African indigenous religions perceived the creator god to be unapproachable, they invoked the spirits of their ancestors and turned to magicians and oracles for assistance. Like the Chinese, they believed the spirits of their ancestors could influence their lives. Therefore, ceremonies to sustain ancestral spirits and their power over the earth became central to traditional West African religions. These rituals were part of everyday life, making organized churches and professional clergy rare. Instead, family members with an inclination to do so assumed religious duties. These individuals encouraged their relatives to participate in ceremonies that involved music, dancing, and animal sacrifice in honor of deceased ancestors. Funerals were especially important because they symbolized the linkage between the living and the dead.

Art and Music

As in other parts of the world, religious belief and practice influenced West African art. West Africans, seeking to preserve the images of their ancestors, excelled in woodcarving and sculpture in terra-cotta, bronze, and brass. Throughout the region, artists produced wooden masks

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assimilation The process by which people of different backgrounds become similar to each other in culture and language.

polytheistic Many gods.

animistic The belief that inanimate objects have spiritual attributes.



This six-string wooden harp is a rare example of the type of instrument West African musicians and storytellers used to accompany themselves.

fetish A natural object or an artifact believed to have magical power. A charm.



Listen on MyHistoryLab Audio: Ghana: Ewe-Atsiagbekor from Roots of Black Music in America

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call-and-response An African-American singing style rooted in Africa. A solo call tells a story to which a group responds, often with repeated lyrics.

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griot A West African self-employed poet and oral historian.

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representing in highly stylized manners ancestral spirits and gods. Wooden and terra-cotta figurines, sometimes referred to as “**fetishes**,” were also common. West Africans used them in funerals, in rituals related to ancestral spirits, in medical practice, and in coming-of-age ceremonies. In contrast to masks and fetishes, the great bronze sculptures of Benin had political functions. They portrayed their subjects, which consisted of kings, warriors, and nobles rather than gods and spirits, realistically.

West African music also served religion. Folk musicians employed such instruments as drums, xylophones, bells, flutes, and mbanzas (predecessor to the banjo) to produce a highly rhythmic accompaniment to the dancing associated with religious rituals. A **call-and-response** style of singing also played a vital role in ritual. Vocal music, produced in a full-throated but often raspy style, had polyphonic textures and sophisticated rhythms.

Literature: Oral Histories, Poetry, and Tales

West African literature was part of an oral tradition that passed from generation to generation. At its most formal, trained poets and musicians who served kings and nobles created it. But it was also a folk art that expressed the views of the common people.

At a king’s court there could be several poet-musicians who had high status and specialized in poems glorifying rulers and their ancestors by linking fact and fiction. Drums and horns often accompanied recitations of these poems. Court poets also used their trained memories to recall historical events and precise genealogies. The self-employed poets, called **griots**, who traveled from place to place were socially inferior to court poets but functioned in a similar manner. Both court poets and griots were men. Women were more involved in folk literature. They joined men in creating and performing work songs. They led in creating and singing dirges, lullabies, and satirical verses. Often these forms of literature used a call-and-response style.

Just as significant for African-American history were the West African prose tales. Like similar stories in other parts of Africa, these tales took two forms: those with human characters and those with animal characters who represented humans. The tales centered on human characters dealt with such subjects as creation, the origins of death, worldly success, and romantic love. They frequently involved magical objects and potions.

The animal tales aimed to entertain and to teach lessons. They focused on small creatures, often referred to as “trickster characters,” who struggled against larger beasts. Among the heroes were the hare, the spider, and the mouse. Plots centered on the ability of these weak animals to outsmart larger and meaner antagonists, such as the snake, leopard, and hyena. These animal characters had human emotions and goals. Story tellers presented them in human settings, although they retained animal characteristics.

In West Africa, these tales represented the ability of common people to counteract the power of kings and nobles. When the tales reached America, they became allegories for the struggle between enslaved African Americans and their powerful white masters.

Technology

West African technology was also distinctive and important. Although much knowledge about this technology has been lost, iron refining and forging, textile production, architecture, and rice cultivation helped shape life in the region.

As we previously mentioned, iron technology had existed in West Africa since ancient times. Smelting furnaces employing bellows turned ore into refined metal. Blacksmiths, who enjoyed an elevated almost supernatural status, produced tools for agriculture, weapons for hunting and war, ceremonial staffs, and religious amulets. These products encouraged the development of cities and kingdoms.

Architecture embodied Islamic and indigenous elements, with the former predominant on the savanna and the latter in the forest region. Building materials consisted of stone, mud, and wood. Builders in dry regions relied on stone and mud to build walls and relied on thatch supported by wooden beams for roofs. In some parts of the savanna, mud plaster

covered stone walls. In other parts, walls consisted entirely of mud brick or packed earth. Public buildings reached large proportions, and some mosques served 3,000 worshippers. Massive stone or mud walls surrounded cities and towns.

Hand looms for household production existed throughout Africa for thousands of years, and cloth made from pounding bark persisted in the forest region into modern times. But trade and Islamic influences led to commercial textile production. By the ninth century CE, large looms, some equipped with pedals, produced narrow strips of wool or cotton. Men, rather than women, made cloth and tailored it into embroidered Islamic robes, shawls, hats, and blankets, which Muslim merchants traded over wide areas.

Of particular importance for African-American history, West Africans living along rivers in coastal regions had produced rice since approximately 1000 BCE. Portuguese who arrived during the fifteenth century CE reported large diked rice fields. Deliberate flooding of these fields, transplanting sprouts, and intensive cultivation were practices that reemerged in the colonial South Carolina low country.

CONCLUSION

In recent years, paleoanthropologists, archaeologists, and historians have revealed much about Africa's history and prehistory, but much remains to be learned concerning the past of this vast and diverse continent. The evolution of humans, the role of ancient Egypt in world history, and Egypt's relationship to Nubia and Kush are topics that continue to attract wide interest.

Although all of Africa contributed to their background, the history of African Americans begins in West Africa, the region from which the ancestors of most of them were unwillingly wrested. Historians have discovered, as subsequent chapters will show, that West Africans taken to America and their descendants in America preserved much more of their ancestral way of life than scholars once believed possible. West African family organization, work habits, language structures and some words, religious beliefs, legends and stories, pottery styles, art, and music all reached America. These African legacies, although often sharply modified, influenced the way African Americans and other Americans lived in their new land. They continue to shape American life.

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CHAPTER TIMELINE

EVENTS IN AFRICA

WORLD EVENTS

10 million years ago

5–10 million years ago
Separation of hominids from apes

4 million years ago
Emergence of *australopithecines*

2.4 million years ago
Emergence of *Homo habilis*

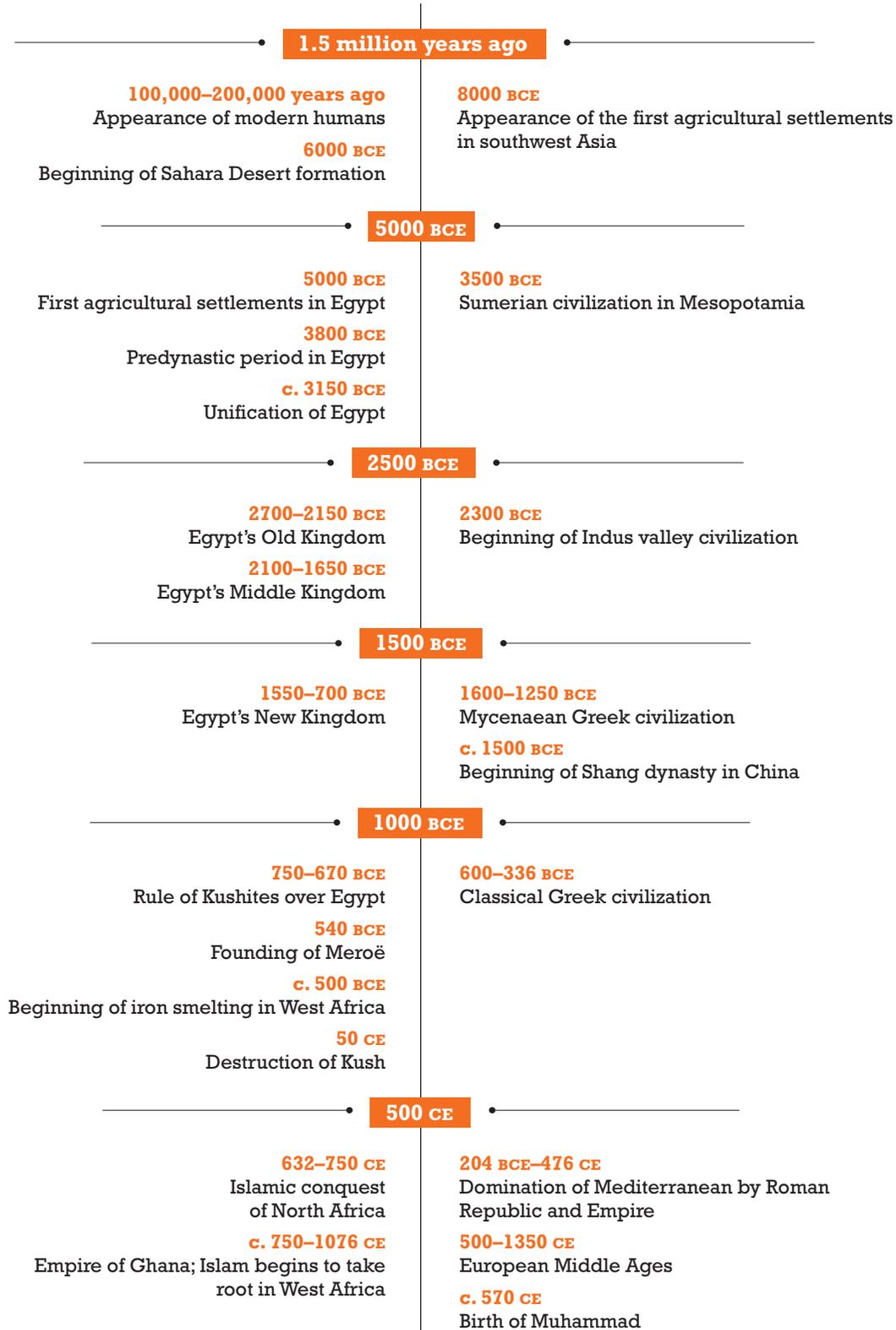
1.7 million years ago
Emergence of *Homo erectus*

1.6 million years ago
Homo erectus beginning to spread through Eurasia

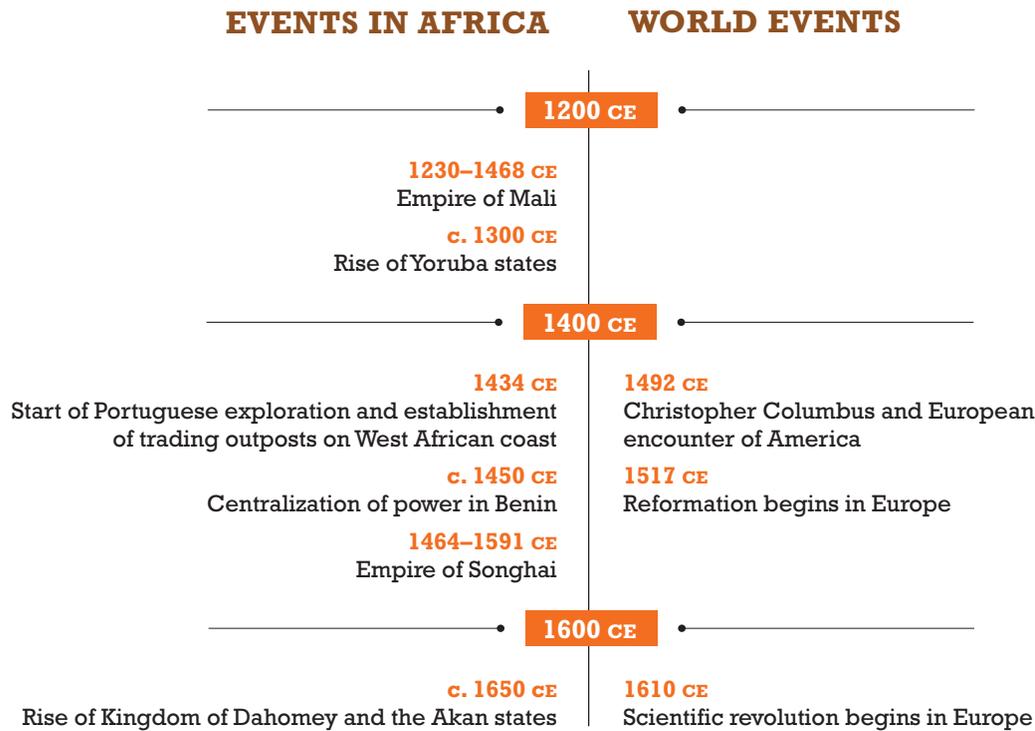
CHAPTER TIMELINE

EVENTS IN AFRICA

WORLD EVENTS



CHAPTER TIMELINE



On MyHistoryLab



Study and Review on MyHistoryLab

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What was the role of Africa in the evolution of modern humanity?
2. Discuss the controversy concerning the racial identity of the ancient Egyptians. What is the significance of this controversy for the history of African Americans?
3. Compare and contrast the western Sudanese empires with the forest civilizations of the Guinea Coast.
4. Discuss the role of religion in West Africa. What was the African religious heritage of black Americans?
5. Describe West African society on the eve of the expansion of the Atlantic slave trade. What were the society's strengths and weaknesses?

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RETRACING THE ODYSSEY

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CA. 1450–1809

Middle Passage

 Listen to Chapter 2 on MyHistoryLab

They felt the sea-wind tying them into one nation of eyes and shadows and groans, in the one pain that is inconsolable, the loss of one's shore. They had wept, not for their wives only, their fading children, but for strange, ordinary things. This one, who was a hunter wept for a sapling lance whose absent heft sang in his palm's hollow. One, a fisherman, for an ocher river encircling his calves; one a weaver, for the straw fisherpot he had meant to repair, wilting in water. They cried for the little thing after the big thing. They cried for a broken gourd.

Derek Walcott, Omeros

The lines by Derek Walcott, a modern black West Indian poet, that open this chapter express the sorrow and loss the Atlantic slave trade inflicted on the Africans it tore from their homelands.

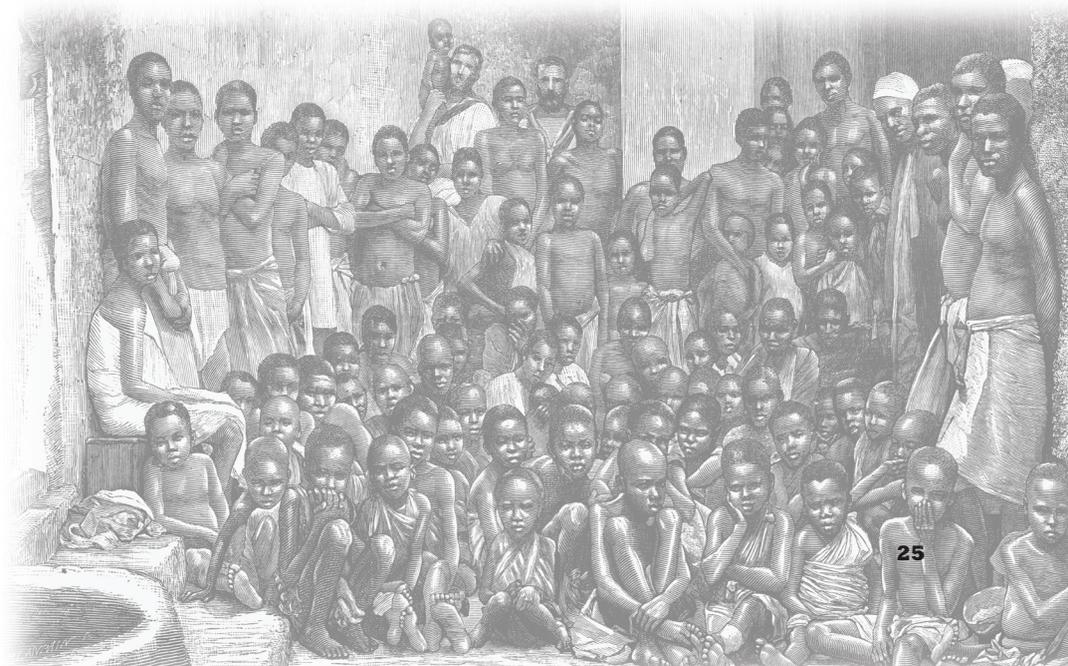
This huge enterprise, which lasted for more than three centuries, brought millions of Africans 3,000 miles across the Atlantic Ocean to the Americas. It was the largest forced migration in history. By the eighteenth century, the voyage across the ocean in European ships called “slavers” had become known as the “Middle Passage.” British sailors coined this innocuous phrase to describe the middle leg of a triangular journey first from England to Africa, then from Africa to the Americas, and finally from the Americas back to England. Yet today Middle Passage denotes an unbelievable descent into an earthly hell of cruelty and suffering. From the Middle Passage the first African Americans emerged.

This chapter describes the Atlantic slave trade and the Middle Passage. It explores their origins both in European colonization of the Americas and in the slave trade that had existed in Africa itself for centuries. It focuses on the experience of the enslaved people whom the trade brought to America. For those who survived, the grueling journey was a prelude to servitude on huge agricultural factories called plantations. Many who became African Americans first experienced plantation life in the West Indies—the Caribbean islands—where a process called “seasoning” prepared them for lives as slaves in the Americas.

After Great Britain banned the Atlantic slave trade in 1807, British warships enforced the ban. The people portrayed in this early nineteenth-century woodcut were rescued from a slave ship by the H.M.S. *Undine*.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

How did the arrival of the Europeans affect Africa?	2-1
How did the slave trade in Africa differ from the Atlantic slave trade?	2-2
What was the “Middle Passage”?	2-3
What was the relationship between the Atlantic slave trade and the Industrial Revolution?	2-4
What happened to Africans after they crossed the Atlantic?	2-5
How did Africans adapt to conditions in the Americas?	2-6
What was “seasoning”?	2-7
How were slaves treated in the Americas?	2-8
Why did the Atlantic slave trade end?	2-9



Middle Passage The voyage of slave ships (slavers) across the Atlantic Ocean from Africa to the Americas.

The European Age of Exploration and Colonization

2-1 How did the arrival of the Europeans affect Africa?

The origins of the Atlantic slave trade and its long duration were products of Western Europe's expansion of power that began during the fifteenth century and continued into the twentieth century. For a variety of economic, technological, and demographic reasons, Portugal, Spain, the Netherlands, France, England, and other nations sought to explore, conquer, and colonize in Africa, Asia, and the Americas. Their efforts had important consequences for these areas.

Portugal took the lead during the early 1400s when its ships reached Africa's western coast. Portuguese captains hoped to find Christian allies there against the Muslims of North Africa and spread Christianity. But they were more interested in trade with African kingdoms, as were the Spanish, Dutch, English, and French who followed them.

Even more attractive than Africa to the Portuguese and their European successors as sources of trade and wealth were India, China, Japan, and the East Indies (modern Indonesia and Malaysia). In 1487 the Portuguese explorer Bartolomeu Dias discovered the Cape of Good Hope at the southern tip of Africa and thereby established that it was possible to sail around Africa to reach India and regions to its east. Ten years later Vasco da Gama initiated this route on behalf of Portuguese commerce. A similar desire to reach these eastern regions motivated the Spanish monarchy to finance Christopher Columbus's westward voyages that began in 1492.

Columbus, who believed the earth to be much smaller than it is, hoped to reach Japan or India by sailing west, thereby opening a direct trade route between Spain and these eastern countries. Columbus's mistake led to his accidental landfall in the Americas. In turn, that encounter led to the European conquest, settlement, and exploitation of North and South America and the Caribbean islands, where Columbus first landed. Columbus and those who followed him quickly enslaved indigenous Americans (American Indians) as laborers in fields and mines. Almost as quickly, many indigenous peoples either died of European diseases and overwork or escaped beyond the reach of European power. Consequently, European colonizers needed additional laborers. This demand for a workforce in the Americas caused the Atlantic slave trade.

The Slave Trade in Africa

2-2 How did the slave trade in Africa differ from the Atlantic slave trade?

Slave labor was not peculiar to the European colonies in the Americas. Slavery and slave trading had existed in all cultures for thousands of years. As Chapter 1 indicates, slave labor was common in West Africa, although it was usually less oppressive than it became in the Americas.

When Portuguese voyagers first arrived at Senegambia, Benin, and Kongo, they found a thriving commerce in slaves. These kingdoms represented the southern extremity of an extensive trade conducted by Islamic nations that involved the capture and sale of Europeans and North African Berbers as well as people from south of the Sahara Desert. Although Arabs nurtured antiblack prejudice, race was not the major factor in this Islamic slave trade. Arab merchants and West African kings, for example, imported white slaves from Europe.

In West Africa, Sudanese horsemen conducted the Islamic slave trade. The horsemen invaded the forest region to capture people who could not effectively resist—often

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Read on MyHistoryLab Document: Willem Bosman Describes the West African Slave Trade, c. 1700

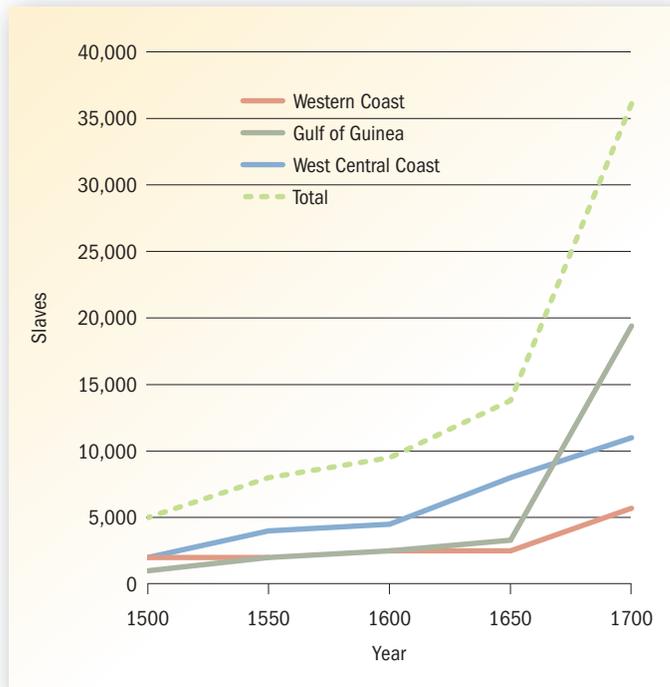


FIGURE 2-1 ESTIMATED ANNUAL EXPORTS OF SLAVES FROM WESTERN AFRICA TO THE AMERICAS, 1500–1700

SOURCE: John Thornton, *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400–1680* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 118.

they belonged to stateless societies. The trade dealt mainly in women and children who as slaves were destined for lives as concubines and domestic servants in North Africa and southwest Asia. This pattern contrasted with that of the later Atlantic slave trade, which primarily sought young men for agricultural labor in the Americas. The West African men who constituted a minority of those subjected to the trans-Saharan slave trade were more likely to become soldiers than fieldworkers in such North African states as Morocco and Egypt.

The demand for slaves in Muslim countries remained high from the tenth through the fifteenth centuries because many slaves died from disease or gained freedom and assimilated into Arab society. The trans-Saharan slave trade therefore rivaled the trade in gold across the Sahara. It helped make such West African cities as Timbuktu, Walata, Jenne, and Gao wealthy. According to historian Roland Oliver, the Atlantic slave trade did not reach the proportions of the trans-Saharan slave trade until 1600 (see Figure 2-1).

The Origins of the Atlantic Slave Trade

2-3 What was the “Middle Passage”?

When Portuguese ships first arrived off the **Guinea Coast**, their captains traded chiefly for gold, ivory, and pepper, but they also wanted slaves. As early as 1441, Antam Goncalvez of Portugal enslaved a Berber and his West African servant and took them home as gifts



West African artists recorded the appearance of Europeans who came to trade in gold, ivory, and human beings. This Benin bronze relief sculpture, dating to the late sixteenth or early seventeenth century, portrays two Portuguese men.

Guinea Coast The southward-facing coast of West Africa, from which many of the people caught up in the Atlantic slave trade departed for the Americas.

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Although the overwhelming majority of Africans who were caught up in the Atlantic slave trade went to the Americas, a few reached Europe. This sixteenth-century drawing by German artist Albrecht Dürer depicts Katharina, a servant of a Portuguese official who lived in Antwerp. Albrecht Dürer (1471–1528). “Portrait of the Moorish Woman Katharina.” Drawing. Uffizi Florence, Italy. Photograph © Foto Marburg/Art Resource, NY.

for a Portuguese prince. During the following decades, Portuguese raiders captured hundreds of Africans to work as domestic servants in Portugal and Spain.

But usually the Portuguese and the other European and white Americans who succeeded them did not capture and enslave people themselves. They instead purchased slaves from African traders. This arrangement began formally in 1472 when the Portuguese merchant Ruy do Siqueira gained permission from the Oba (king) of Benin to trade for slaves, as well as for gold and ivory, within the borders of the Oba’s kingdom. Siqueira and other Portuguese found that a commercial infrastructure already existed in West Africa that could distribute European trade goods and procure slaves. The rulers of Benin, Dahomey, and other African kingdoms restricted the Europeans to a few points on the coast, and the kingdoms raided the interior to supply the Europeans with slaves.

Interethnic rivalries in West Africa led to the warfare that produced these slaves during the sixteenth century. Although Africans initially resisted selling members of their own ethnic group to Europeans, they did not at first consider it wrong to sell members of their own race to foreigners. In fact, neither Africans nor Europeans had yet developed a concept of racial solidarity. However, by the eighteenth century, at least the victims of the trade believed that such solidarity *should* exist. Ottobah Cugoano, who had been captured and sold during that century, wrote, “I must own to the shame of my countrymen that I was first kidnapped and betrayed by [those of] my own complexion.”

Until the early sixteenth century, Portuguese seafarers conducted the Atlantic slave trade on a tiny scale to satisfy a limited market for domestic servants in Portugal and Spain. Other European countries had no demand for slaves because their workforces were already too large. But the impact of Columbus’s voyages drastically changed the slave trade. The Spanish and Portuguese—followed by the Dutch, English, and French—established colonies in the Caribbean, Mexico,

Central America, and South America. Because disease and overwork caused the number of American Indians in these regions to decline rapidly, Europeans relied on the Atlantic slave trade to replace them as a source of slave labor (see Map 2–1). As early as 1502, African slaves lived on the island of Hispaniola—modern Haiti and the Dominican Republic (see Map 2–2). During the sixteenth century, gold and silver mines in Spanish Mexico and Peru, and especially sugar plantations in Portuguese Brazil, produced an enormous demand for labor. Consequently, the Atlantic slave trade grew to huge and tragic proportions to meet that demand.

Growth of the Atlantic Slave Trade

2-4

What was the relationship between the Atlantic slave trade and the Industrial Revolution?

Because Europe provided an insatiable market for sugar, cultivation of this crop in the Americas became extremely profitable. Sugar plantations employing slave labor spread from Portuguese-ruled Brazil to the Caribbean islands. Later, the cultivation of coffee in Brazil and of tobacco, rice, and **indigo** in British North America added to the demand for African

indigo A bluish-violet dye produced from the indigo plant.

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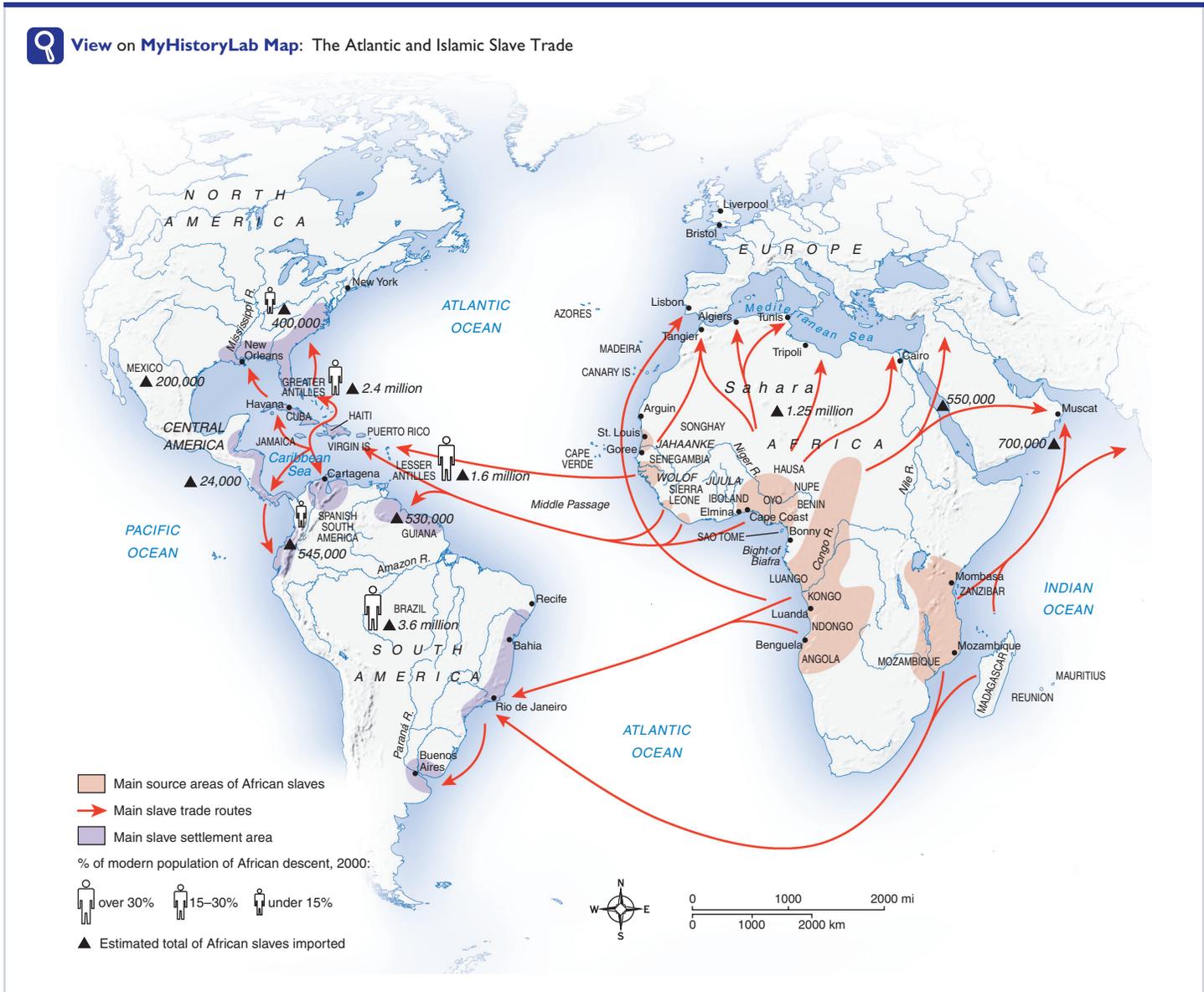
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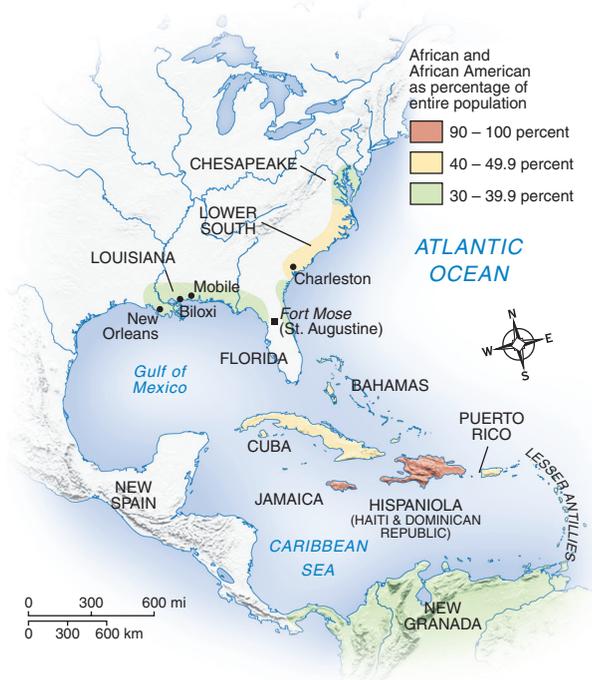
MAP 2-1 THE ATLANTIC AND ISLAMIC SLAVE TRADES

Not until 1600 did the Atlantic slave trade reach the proportions of the Islamic slave trade. The map shows the principal sources of slaves, primary routes, and major destinations.

According to this map, which region in the Americas imported the most slaves?

slaves. By 1510 Spain had joined Portugal in the enlarged Atlantic slave trade, and a new, harsher form of slavery had appeared in the Americas. Unlike slavery in Africa, Asia, and Europe, slavery in the Americas was based on race, as only Africans and American Indians were enslaved. Most of the slaves were men or boys who served as agricultural laborers rather than soldiers or domestic servants. They became **chattel**—meaning personal property—of their masters and lost their customary rights as human beings. Men and boys predominated in part because Europeans believed they were stronger laborers than women

chattel Enslaved people who were treated legally as property.



MAP 2-2 SLAVE COLONIES OF THE SEVENTEENTH AND EIGHTEENTH CENTURIES

This map indicates regions in North America, the West Indies, and South America that had, during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, significant populations of enslaved people of African descent.

What European powers controlled the regions of North America and the Caribbean islands shown in this map?

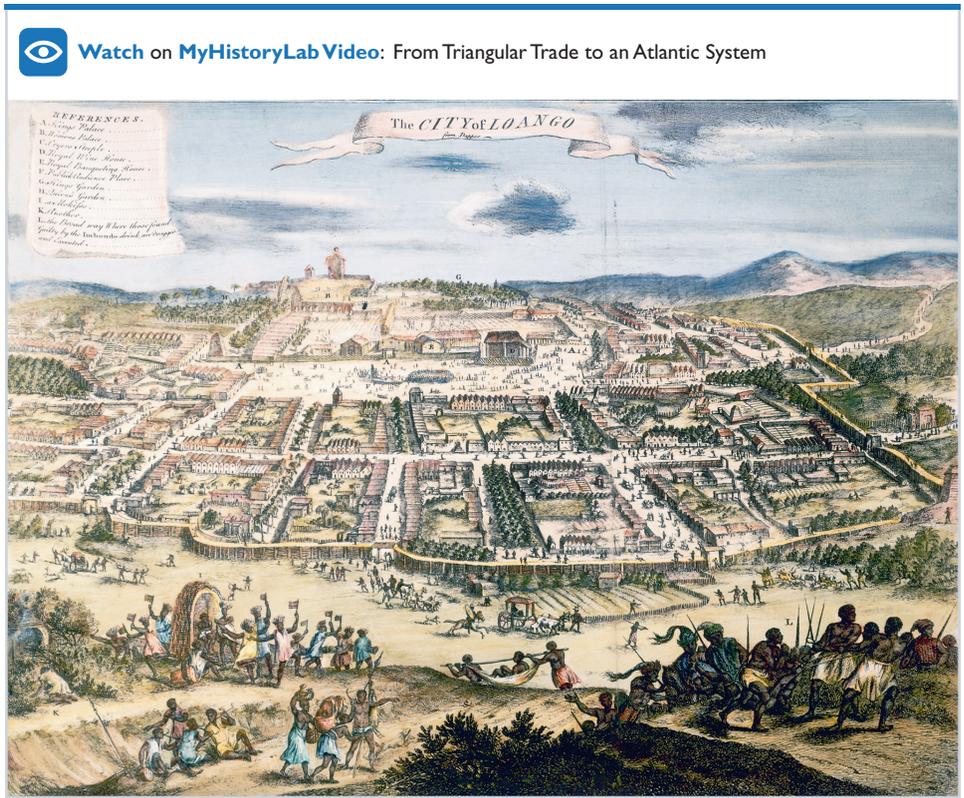
Asiento The monopoly over the slave trade from Africa to Spain’s American colonies.

cash crop A crop grown for sale rather than subsistence.

and girls. Another factor was that West Africans preferred to have women do agricultural work and therefore tended to withhold them from the Atlantic trade.

Portugal and Spain dominated the Atlantic slave trade during the sixteenth century. They shipped about 2,000 Africans per year to their American colonies, with most by far going to Brazil. From the beginning of the trade until its nineteenth-century abolition, about 6,500,000 of the approximately 11,328,000 Africans taken to the Americas went to Brazil and Spain’s colonies. Both the Portuguese and the Spanish monarchies granted monopolies over the trade to private companies. In Spain this monopoly became known in 1518 as the *Asiento* (meaning “contract”). The profits from the slave trade were so great that by 1550 the Dutch, French, and English were becoming involved. During the early seventeenth century, the Dutch drove the Portuguese from the West African coast and became the principal European slave-trading nation. For the rest of that century, most Africans came to the Americas in Dutch ships—including a group of 20 in 1619 who until recently were considered to have been the first of their race to reach British North America.

The Dutch also shifted the center of sugar production to the West Indies. England and France followed, with the former taking control of Barbados and Jamaica and the latter taking Saint Domingue (Haiti), Guadeloupe, and Martinique. With the development of tobacco as a **cash crop** in Virginia and Maryland during the 1620s and with the expansion of sugar production in the West Indies, the demand for African slaves continued to grow. The result was that England and France competed with the Dutch to control the Atlantic slave trade. After a series of wars,



The Portuguese established the city of Luanda in 1575. This eighteenth-century print portrays the city when it was at its height as a center for the shipment of enslaved Africans to Brazil. *The Granger Collection, New York.*

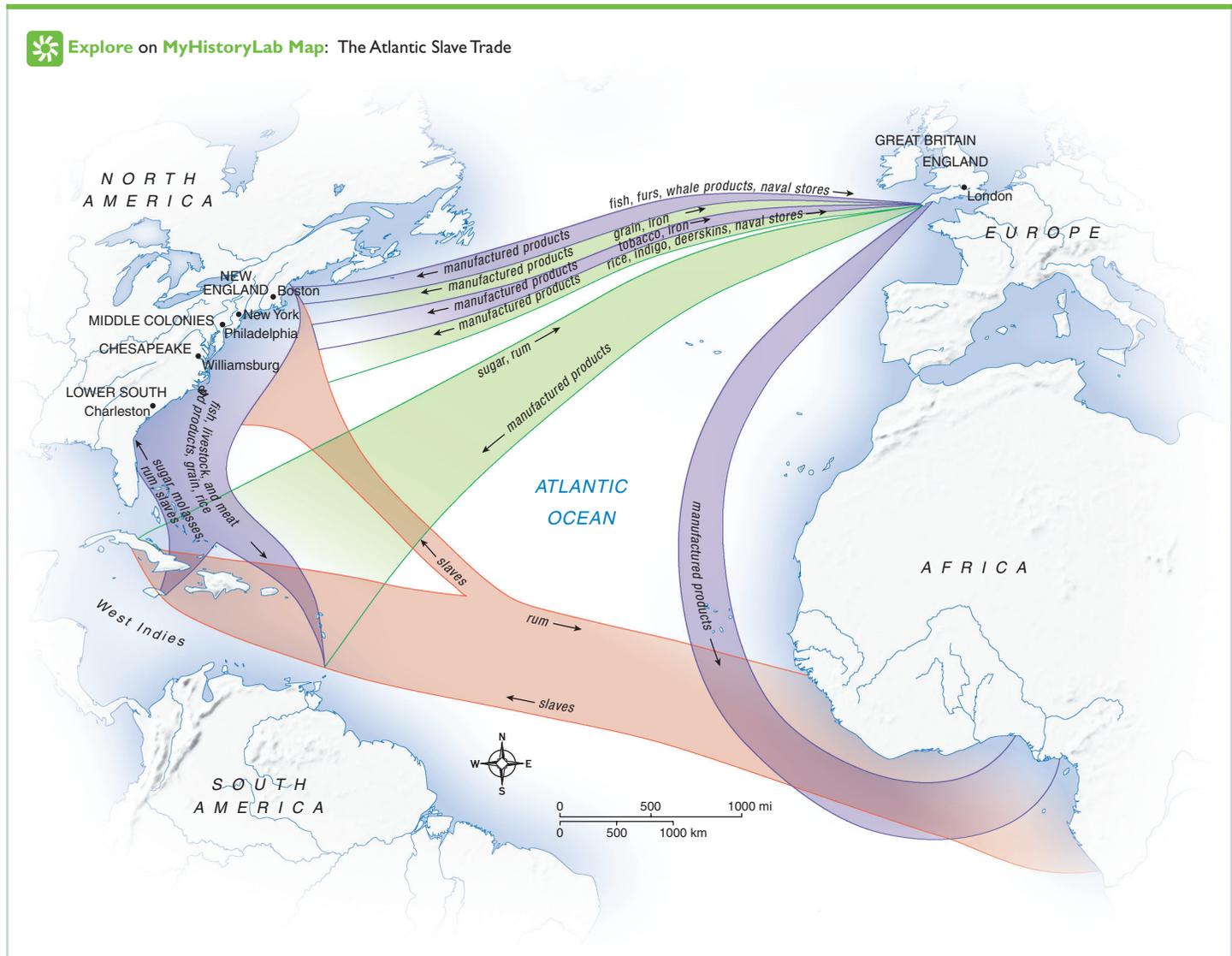
England emerged supreme. It had driven the Dutch out of the trade by 1674. Victories over France and Spain led in 1713 to English control of the *Asiento*, which allowed English traders the exclusive right to supply slaves to all of Spain's American colonies. After 1713, English ships dominated the slave trade, carrying about 20,000 slaves per year from Africa to the Americas. At the peak of the trade during the 1790s, they transported 50,000 per year.

The profits from the Atlantic slave trade, together with those from the sugar and tobacco produced in the Americas by slave labor, were invested in England and helped fund the **Industrial Revolution** during the eighteenth century. In turn, Africa became a market for cheap English manufactured goods (see Map 2-3). Eventually, two triangular trade systems developed. In one, traders carried English goods to West Africa and exchanged



Industrial Revolution An economic change that began in England during the early eighteenth century and spread to Continental Europe and the United States. Industry rather than agriculture became the dominant form of enterprise.

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MAP 2-3 ATLANTIC TRADE AMONG THE AMERICAS, GREAT BRITAIN, AND WEST AFRICA DURING THE SEVENTEENTH AND EIGHTEENTH CENTURIES
Often referred to as a triangular trade, this map shows the complexity of early modern Atlantic commerce, of which the slave trade was a major part.

What does this map suggest about the economy of the Atlantic world between 1600 and 1800?

EXPLORE ON MYHISTORYLAB

The Atlantic Slave Trade

In what ways was British North America involved in the Atlantic slave trade?

The Atlantic slave trade, over a period of three centuries, brought more than 10 million enslaved Africans to the shores of the Americas. The great majority of them lived in Brazil and the Caribbean islands. A significant minority came to the British North American colonies. In the southern British colonies, they produced tobacco, rice, and other staple crops. In the northern colonies, slaves worked on farms and in shops. White colonists bought slaves and participated in the slave trade as sailors, ship builders, traders, and financiers. Slavery influenced the economy, politics, and society that provided the foundations for the United States.

ORIGINS OF AFRICANS IN NORTH AMERICA, 1700–1800

NATIONS PARTICIPATING IN THE SLAVE TRADE, 1700–1800

Region	Nation*
Angola	Britain
Bight of Benin	Portugal
Bight of Biafra	France
Gold Coast	The Netherlands
Senegambia	Denmark
Sierra Leone	British Colonies/North America

*In order of most to fewest number of slaves traded

Explore the Topic on MyHistoryLab

- Comparison** Which colonies, and later states, imported the most slaves? Map the differences among the regions of North America.
- Analysis** How did the ratio of male to female slaves differ across the Thirteen Colonies? Hypothesize the explanations for this distribution.
- Consequence** What were the major economic activities for different regions of mainland British America and the early United States? Consider the connections between slavery and regional economic production.



The slave deck of the bark “Wildfire,” brought into Key West on April 30, 1860.

the goods for slaves. Then the traders carried the slaves to the West Indies and exchanged them for sugar, which they took back to England on the third leg of the triangle. In the other triangular trade, white Americans from Britain’s New England colonies carried rum to West Africa to trade for slaves. From Africa they took the slaves to the West Indies to exchange for sugar or molasses—sugar syrup—which they then took home to distill into rum.

The African-American Ordeal from Capture to Destination

2-5 What happened to Africans after they crossed the Atlantic?

The availability of large numbers of slaves in West Africa resulted from the wars that accompanied the formation of states in that region. Captives suitable for enslavement were a by-product of these wars. Senegambia and nearby Sierra Leone, then Oyo, Dahomey, and Benin, became, in turn, centers of the trade. Meanwhile, on the west coast of Central Africa, slaves became available as a result of the conflict between the expanding Kingdom of Kongo and its neighbors. The European traders provided the aggressors with firearms but did not instigate the wars. Instead, they used the wars to enrich themselves.

Sometimes African armies enslaved the inhabitants of conquered towns and villages. At other times, raiding parties captured isolated families or kidnapped individuals. As warfare spread to the interior, captives had to march for hundreds of miles to the coast where European traders awaited them. The raiders tied the captives together with rope or secured them with wooden yokes about their necks. It was a shocking experience, and many captives died from hunger, exhaustion, and exposure during the journey. Others killed themselves rather than submit, and the captors killed those who resisted.

Once the captives reached the coast, those destined for the Atlantic trade went to fortified structures called **factories**. Portuguese traders constructed the first factory at Elmina on the Guinea Coast in 1481—the Dutch captured it in 1637. Such factories contained the headquarters of the traders, warehouses for their trade goods and supplies, and dungeons or outdoor holding pens for the captives. In these pens, slave traders divided families and—as much as possible—ethnic groups to prevent rebellion. The traders stripped captives naked and inspected them for disease and physical defects. Those considered fit for purchase were branded like cattle with a hot iron bearing the symbol of a trading company.

 **Watch on MyHistoryLab**
Video: African Enslavement: The Terrible Transformation—Overview

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factories Headquarters for a European company that traded for slaves or engaged in other commercial enterprises on the West African coast.

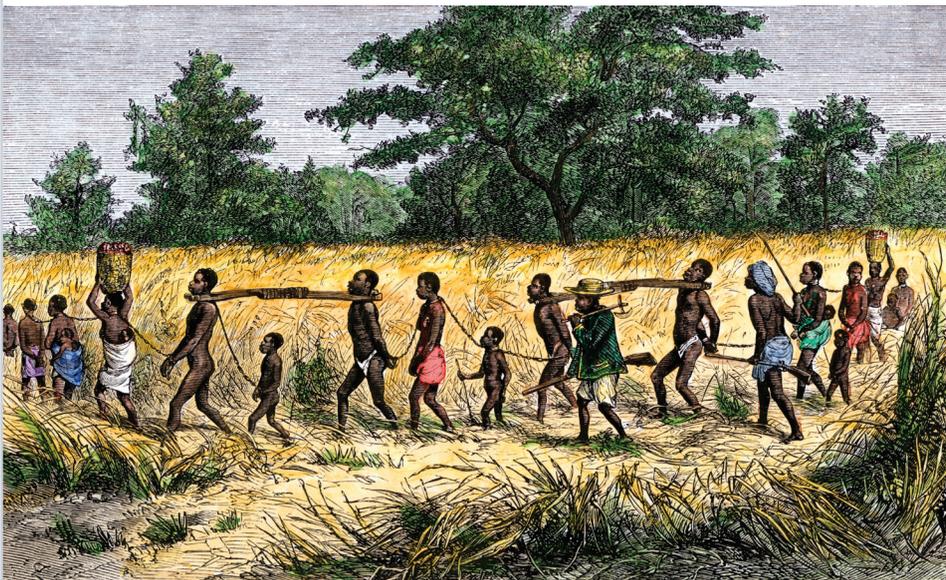
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 **View on MyHistoryLab Closer Look:** The Voyage to Slavery



In this nineteenth century engraving, African slave traders conduct a group of bound captives from the interior of Africa toward European trading posts.

In a rare account of such proceedings from a captive's point of view, Olaudah Equiano described during the 1780s how horrifying such treatment could be. The white slave traders, with their "horrible looks, red faces, and long hair," appeared to be savages who acted with a "brutal cruelty" that went beyond anything their victims had previously experienced. Many of the captives feared the Europeans were cannibals who would take them to their country for food. According to historian Gary Nash, such fears resulted from deliberate European brutalization of the captives, part of an attempt to destroy the Africans' self-respect and self-identity.

The Crossing

After being held in a factory for weeks or months, captives faced the frightening prospect of leaving their native land for a voyage across an ocean that many of them had never before seen. Sailors rowed them out in large canoes to slave ships offshore. One English trader recalled that during the 1690s "the negroes were so wilful and loth to leave their own country, that they often leap'd out of the canoos, boat and ship, into the sea, and kept under water till they were drowned."

Once at sea, the slave ships followed the route Columbus had established during his voyages to the Americas: from the Canary Islands off West Africa to the Windward Islands in the Caribbean. Because ships taking this route enjoyed prevailing winds and westward currents, the passage normally lasted between two and three months. But the time required for the crossing varied widely. The larger ships were able to reach the Caribbean in 40 days, but some voyages could take up to six months.

Both human and natural causes accounted for such delays. During the three centuries that the Atlantic slave trade endured, Western European nations often fought each other, and slave ships became prized targets. As early as the 1580s, English "sea dogs," such as John Hawkins and Sir Francis Drake, attacked Spanish ships to steal their human cargoes. Outright piracy peaked between 1650 and 1725 when demand for slaves in the West Indies increased. There were also such potentially disastrous natural forces as doldrums—long windless spells at sea—and hurricanes, which could destroy ships, crews, and cargoes.

The Slavers and Their Technology

Slave ships (called **slavers**) varied in size but grew larger over the centuries. A ship's tonnage determined how many slaves it could carry, with the formula being two slaves per ton. A ship of 200 tons might therefore carry 400 slaves. But captains often ignored the formula. Some kept their human cargo light, calculating that smaller loads lowered mortality and made revolt less likely. But most captains were "tight packers" who squeezed human beings together hoping that large numbers would offset increased deaths. The 120-ton *Henrietta Marie*, a British ship that sailed from London on its final voyage in 1699, should have been fully loaded with 240 slaves. Yet it carried 350 from West Africa when it set out for Barbados and Jamaica. Another ship designed to carry 450 slaves usually carried 600.

The slavers' cargo space was generally only five feet high. Ships' carpenters halved this vertical space by building shelves, so slaves might be packed above and below on planks that measured only 5.5 feet long and 1.3 feet wide. Consequently, slaves had only about 20 to 25 inches of headroom. To add to the discomfort, the crews chained male slaves together in pairs to help prevent rebellion and lodged them away from women and children.

The most frequently reproduced illustration of a slaver's capacity for human cargo comes from the *Brookes*, which sailed from Liverpool, England, during the 1780s. At 300 tons, the *Brookes* was an exceptionally large ship for its time, and the diagrams show how tightly packed the slaves were that it transported. Although those who wished to abolish the Atlantic slave trade created the diagrams, their bias does not make the diagrams less accurate. In fact, as historian James Walvin points out, the precise, unemotional renderings of the *Brookes's* geometrically conceived design scarcely indicate the physical suffering it caused. The renderings do not show the constant shifting, crushing, and chafing among the human cargo caused by the movement of the ship at sea. Also, during storms the crew often

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slaver A ship used to transport slaves from Africa to the Americas.

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neglected to feed the slaves, empty the tubs used for excrement, take slaves on deck for exercise, tend to the sick, or remove the dead.

Mortality rates were high because the crowded, unsanitary conditions encouraged seaboard epidemics. Between 1715 and 1775, slave deaths on French ships averaged 15 percent. The highest recorded mortality rate was 34 percent. By the nineteenth century, the death rate had declined to 5 percent. Overall, one-third of the Africans subjected to the trade perished between their capture and embarkation on a slave ship. Another third died during the Middle Passage or during “seasoning” on a Caribbean island. It would have been slight consolation to the enslaved to learn that, because of the seaboard epidemics, the death rate among slaver crews was proportionally higher than their own.

As historian Marcus Rediker notes, by the eighteenth century Europeans regarded slavers as “useful machines.” The large three-masted, full-rigged vessels, with their “cast-iron cannon . . . harnessed unparalleled mobility, speed, and destructive power.” They were not only well armed to protect against those who might attempt to steal their human cargo but also built to be durable and stable, although they rarely lasted more than 10 years. By 1750 shipbuilders in Liverpool built slavers to order. The ships combined varieties of wood to produce strength, flexibility, and resistance to tropical ship worms that could bore into hulls. By 1800 they used copper sheathing to provide better protection below water. They used lattice doors, portholes, and funnels to ventilate slave quarters, which became healthier as time passed. They also maintained a special “hardware of bondage,” including iron manacles, shackles, collars, branding implements, and thumbscrews.

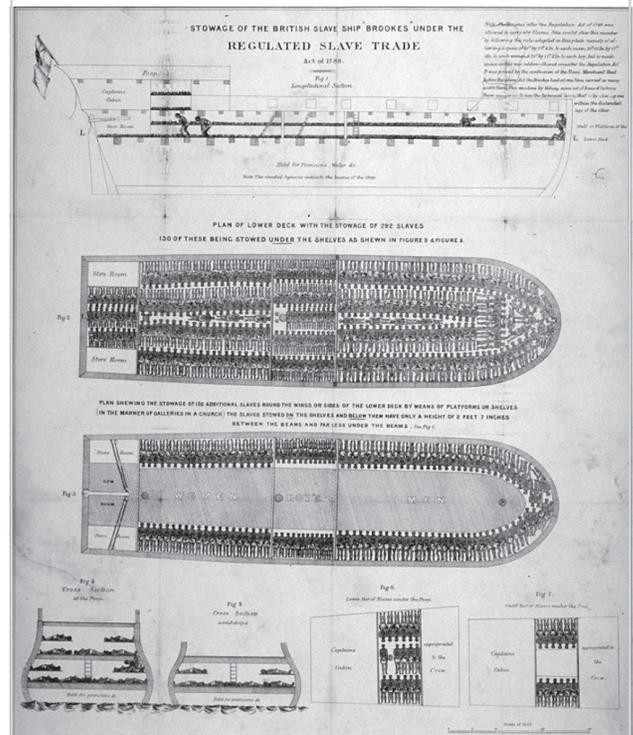
A Slave’s Story

In his book *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano or Gustavus Vassa, the African, Written by Himself*, published in 1789, former slave Olaudah Equiano provides a vivid account of a West African’s capture, sale to traders, and voyage to America in 1755. Although recent evidence suggests Equiano *may* have been born in South Carolina rather than West Africa, scholars respect the accuracy of his account. He tells the story of a young Igbo, the dominant ethnic group in what is today southern Nigeria. African slave raiders capture him when he is 10 years old and force him to march along with other captives to the Niger River or one of its tributaries, where they trade him to other Africans. His new captors take him to the coast and sell him to European slave traders whose ships sail to the West Indies.

The boy’s experience at the coastal slave factory convinces him he has entered a hell, peopled by evil spirits. The stench caused by forcing many people to live in close confinement makes him nauseated and emotionally agitated. His African and European captors try to calm him with liquor. But because he is not accustomed to alcohol, he becomes disoriented and more convinced of his impending doom. When the sailors lodge him with others below deck on the ship, he is so sick that he loses his appetite and hopes to die. Instead, because he refuses to eat, the sailors take him on deck and whip him. Later the boy witnesses the flogging of a white crewman. The man dies, and the sailors throw his body into the sea just as they disposed of dead Africans.

During the time the ship is in port awaiting a full cargo of slaves, the boy spends much time on deck. After putting to sea, however, he usually remains below deck with the other slaves where “each had scarcely room to turn himself.” There, the smells of unwashed bodies and of the toilet tubs, “into which the children often fell and were almost suffocated,” create a loathsome atmosphere. The darkness, the chafing of chains on flesh, and the shrieks and groans of the sick and disoriented provide “a scene of horror almost inconceivable.”

 **View on MyHistoryLab Closer Look: Plan and Sections of a Slave Ship and an Illustration of a Slave Camp**



Plan of the British slave ship *Brookes*, 1788. This plan, which may undercount the human cargo the *Brookes* carried, shows how tightly Africans were packed aboard slave ships.

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When slaves are allowed to get fresh air and exercise on deck, the crew strings up nets to prevent them from jumping overboard. Even so, two Africans who are chained together evade the nets and jump into the ocean, preferring drowning to staying on board. The boy shares their desperation. As the ship goes beyond sight of land, he and the other captives believe they lose “even the least glimpse of hope of [re]gaining the shore” and returning to their country. Equiano, in his first-person narrative, insisted that “many more” would have jumped overboard “if they had not been prevented by the ship’s crew.”

Attempts to keep the slaves entertained and in good humor seldom succeeded. Crews sometimes forced the slaves to dance and sing, but their songs, as slave-ship surgeon Alexander Falconbridge testified, were “melancholy lamentations, of their exile from their native country.” Depression among the Africans led to a catatonia that contemporary observers called melancholy or extreme nostalgia. Falconbridge noted that the slaves had “a strong attachment to their native country” and a “just sense of the value of liberty.”

Although the traders, seeking to lessen the possibility of shipboard conspiracy and rebellion, separated individuals who spoke the same language, the boy described by Equiano manages to find adults who speak Igbo. They explain to him the purpose of the voyage, which he learns is to go to the white people’s country to labor for them rather than to be eaten by them. He does not realize that work on a West Indian island could be a death sentence.

A Captain’s Story

John Newton, a white captain of a slave ship, who was born in London in 1725, provides another perspective on the Middle Passage. In 1745 Newton, as an **indentured servant**, joined the crew of a slaver bound for Sierra Leone. Indentured servants lost their freedom for a specified number of years either because they sold it or because they were being punished for debt or crime. In 1748, on the return voyage to England, Newton survived a fierce Atlantic storm and, thanking God, became an evangelical Christian. Like most people of his era, Newton saw no contradiction between his newfound faith and his participation in the enslavement and ill treatment of men, women, and children. When he became a slaver captain in 1750, he read Bible passages to his crew twice each Sunday and forbade swearing. But he treated his human cargoes as harshly as any other slaver captain.

Newton was 25 when he became captain of the *Duke of Argyle*, an old 140-ton vessel that he converted into a slaver after it sailed from Liverpool on August 11, 1750. Near the Cape Verde Islands, off the coast of Senegambia, carpenters began making the alterations required for packing Africans below deck. Newton also put the ship’s guns and ammunition in order to protect against pirates or African resistance. On October 23 the *Duke of Argyle* reached Frenchman’s Bay, Sierra Leone, where Newton observed other ships from England, France, and New England anchored offshore. Two days later, Newton purchased two men and a woman from traders at the port, but he had to sail to several other ports to accumulate a full cargo. Leaving West Africa for the open sea on May 23, 1751, the ship delivered its slaves to Antigua in the West Indies on July 3.

Poor health forced Newton to retire from the slave trade in 1754. Ten years later he became an Anglican priest, and from 1779 until his death in 1807 Newton served as rector of St. Mary Woolnoth Church in London. By the late 1770s, he had repented his involvement in the slave trade and had become one of its leading opponents. Together with William Cowper—a renowned poet—Newton published the *Olney Hymns* in 1779. Among the selections included in this volume was “Amazing Grace,” which Newton wrote as a reflection on divine forgiveness for his sins. For several reasons, Newton and other religious Britons had begun to perceive an evil in the slave trade that, despite their piety, they had failed to see earlier.

Provisions for the Middle Passage

Slave ships left Liverpool and other European ports provisioned with food supplies for their crews. These included beans, cheese, beef, flour, and grog—a mixture of rum and water. When the ships reached the Guinea Coast in West Africa, their captains purchased pepper,

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indentured servant An individual who sells or loses his or her freedom for a specified number of years.

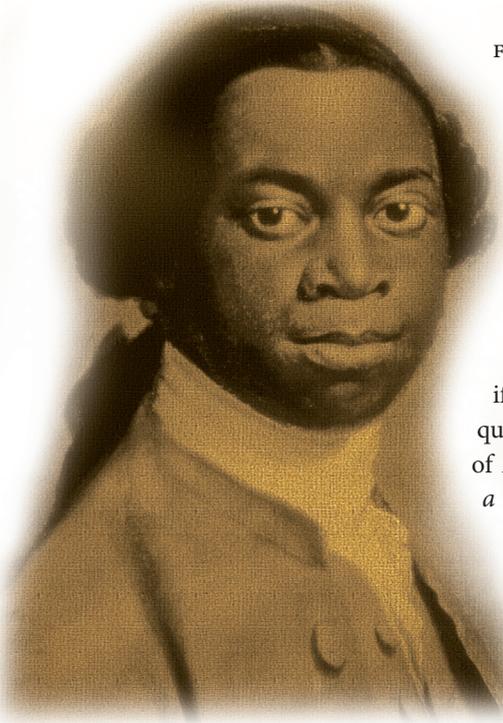
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PROFILE Olaudah Equiano



Portrait of a Negro Man, Olaudah Equiano, 1780s.

SOURCE: EX 17082 *Portrait of a Negro Man, Olaudah Equiano, 1780s* (previously attributed to Joshua Reynolds), by English School (18th century) Royal Albert Memorial Museum, Exeter, Devon, UK/Bridgeman Art Library.

FOR MANY YEARS historians have regarded Olaudah Equiano's autobiography, *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano or Gustavus Vassa, the African. Written by Himself* (1789), as one of the few authentic descriptions of the trade from an African point of view. Recently, however, Equiano's African birth, if not his general accuracy, has been questioned. Vincent Carretta, author of *Equiano the African: Biography of a Self-Made Man* (2005), discovered two documents—a 1759 baptismal record and a 1777 ship muster roll—indicating that Equiano was born in South Carolina in about 1747 rather than—as Equiano claimed—in Nigeria in 1745. It appears that Equiano had not used an African name for himself before he published his autobiography. But, as several scholars have noted, an

African in the Atlantic world during the eighteenth century had good reason to hide his true identity and claim to have been born in America. Even Carretta does not flatly assert that Equiano lied about his African birth. Carretta, in fact, validates Equiano's autobiography by treating Equiano's description of his capture, experience on the Middle Passage, and enslavement “as if it were true.”

Although the controversy over Equiano's birthplace may never be resolved, it is certain that he was a young slave in Virginia when a visiting British sea captain named Michael Henry Pascal purchased him in 1754. Pascal commanded a merchant ship and employed Equiano as his personal servant. Pascal also gave him the name Gustavus Vassa (after the king of Sweden), which Equiano used for the rest of his life. Pascal and

Equiano traveled extensively and served together in North America during the French and Indian War of 1754–1763. As a result, both of them were with General James Wolfe in 1759 at Quebec, Canada, where the British won the decisive battle of the war. Equiano also lived in England, where he received the schooling that allowed him to work as “a shipping clerk and amateur navigator on the ship of his . . . [third] master, the Quaker Robert King of Philadelphia, trading chiefly between [North] America and the West Indies.”

In 1766 growing antislavery sentiment among Quakers led King to allow Equiano to purchase his freedom for 40 pounds sterling. This was more money than most eighteenth-century British laborers earned in a year. Thereafter, Equiano toured the Mediterranean, sailed to the Arctic and Central America, converted to Calvinism, and became a leader in the British movement against the slave trade. In 1787 he helped organize a colony for emancipated British slaves at Sierra Leone in West Africa. Just before embarking for that country, however, dissension and confusion in the enterprise cost him his position as Commissary for Stores for the Black Poor. His autobiography, which he wrote shortly thereafter, proved to be a greater contribution to the anti-slave trade cause. The book also became a major source of income for Equiano.

In April 1792 he married an Englishwoman, Susanna Cullen, with whom he had two daughters. Their marriage notice recognized him “as the champion and advocate for procuring the suppression of the slave trade.” When Equiano died on March 31, 1797, he was, according to Carretta, “probably the wealthiest and most famous person of African descent in the Atlantic world.”

Equiano is significant for his account of the Atlantic slave trade and his service in the British struggle against that trade. His extraordinary life reveals how baseless the assumption was among Europeans and persons of European descent that black people were naturally suited for slavery.

  Read on MyHistoryLab Document: Olaudah Equiano Describes the Middle Passage, 1789

palm oil, lemons, limes, yams, plantains, and coconuts. Because slaves were not accustomed to European foods, the ships needed these staples of the African diet. Meat and fish were rare luxuries on board, and crews did not share them with slaves. In the voyage Equiano describes, crew members at one point caught far more fish than they could eat but threw what was left overboard instead of giving it to the Africans who were exercising on deck. The

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 Read on MyHistoryLab Document: A Slave Tells of His Capture in Africa in 1798



This mezzotint, engraved by J. R. Smith in 1793, follows a 1788 painting by English artist George Morland. The title of the painting is “The Slave Trade.” In what would have been an unusual event, Morland shows English sea captains abducting Africans. The picture reflects moral opposition to the trade.

SOURCE: Copyright The British Museum.

captives “begged and prayed for some . . . but in vain.” The sailors whipped those Africans who filched a few fish for themselves.

The crew usually fed the slaves twice per day in shifts. Cooks prepared vegetable pulps, porridge, and stews for the crew to distribute in buckets as the slaves assembled on deck during good weather or below deck during storms. At the beginning of the voyage, each slave received a wooden spoon for dipping into the buckets, which about 10 individuals shared. But in the confined confusion below deck, slaves often lost their spoons. They then had to eat from the buckets with their unwashed hands, which spread disease.

Although slaver captains realized it was in their interest to feed their human cargoes well, they often skimped on supplies to save money and make room for more slaves. Therefore, the food on a slave ship was often insufficient to prevent malnutrition and weakened immune systems among people already traumatized by separation from their families and homelands. As a result, many Africans died during the Middle Passage from diseases amid the horrid conditions that were normal aboard the slave ships. Others died from depression: they refused to eat despite the crew’s efforts to force food down their throats.

Sanitation, Disease, and Death

Diseases such as malaria, yellow fever, measles, smallpox, hookworm, scurvy, and dysentery constantly threatened African cargoes and European crews during the Middle Passage. Astronomical death rates prevailed on board the slave ships before 1750. Mortality dropped after that date because ships became faster and ships’ surgeons knew more about hygiene and diet. There were also early forms of vaccinations against smallpox, which may have been the worst killer of slaves on ships. But, even after 1750, poor sanitation led to many deaths. It is important to remember that before the early twentieth century, no civilization

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had developed a germ theory of disease. Physicians blamed human illnesses on poisonous atmospheres and imbalances among bodily fluids.

Usually slavers provided only three or four toilet tubs below deck for enslaved Africans to use during the Middle Passage. They had to struggle among themselves to get to the tubs, and children had a particularly difficult time. Those too ill to reach the tubs excreted where they lay, and diseases such as dysentery, which are spread by human waste, thrived. Dysentery, known by contemporaries as “the bloody flux,” vied with smallpox to kill the most slaves aboard ships. Alexander Falconbridge reported that during one dysentery epidemic, “the deck, that is, the floor of [the slaves’] rooms, was so covered with blood and mucus which had proceeded from them in consequence of the flux, 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.”

John Newton’s stark, unimpassioned records of slave deaths aboard the *Duke of Argyle* indicate even more about how the Atlantic slave trade devalued human life. Newton recorded deaths at sea only by number. He wrote in his journal, “Bury’d a man slave No. 84 . . . bury’d a woman slave, No. 47.” Yet Newton probably was more conscientious than other slaver captains in seeking to avoid disease. During his 1750 voyage, he noted only 11 deaths: 10 slaves—five men, one woman, three boys, and one girl—and one crewman. Compared with the usual high mortality rates, this was an achievement.

What role ships’ surgeons—general practitioners in modern terminology—played in preventing or inadvertently encouraging deaths aboard slave ships is difficult to determine. Some of them were frauds. Even the best were limited by the era’s primitive medical knowledge. Captains rewarded the surgeons with “head money” for the number of healthy slaves who arrived in the Americas, but the surgeons could also be blamed for deaths at sea that reduced the value of the human cargo.

Many surgeons recognized that African remedies worked better than European medications in alleviating the slaves’ symptoms. Therefore, the surgeons collected herbs and foods along the Guinea Coast. They learned African nursing techniques, which they found more effective in treating onboard diseases than European procedures. What the surgeons did not understand and regarded as superstition was the holistic nature of African medicine. African healers maintained that body, mind, and spirit were interconnected elements of the totality of a person’s well-being.

The enslaved Africans were often just as dumbfounded by the beliefs and actions of their captors. They thought they had entered a world of bad spirits when they boarded a slaver, and they attempted to counteract the spirits with rituals from their homeland. John Newton noted that during one voyage he feared slaves had tried to poison the ship’s drinking water. He was relieved to discover that they were only putting what he called “charms” in the water supply. Such fetishes, representing the power of spirits, were important in West African religions. What the slaves hoped to accomplish is not clear. But Newton, as a Christian, held their beliefs in contempt. “If it please God [that] they make no worse attempts than to charm us to death, they will not harm us,” he wrote.

Resistance and Revolt at Sea

Although Newton ridiculed African religion, he rejoiced that the slaves were not planning to poison the crew or mutiny. Because many enslaved Africans refused to accept their fate, slaver captains had to be vigilant. Uprisings occurred often, and Newton himself put down a potentially serious one aboard the *Duke of Argyle*. Twenty men had broken their chains below deck but were apprehended before they could assault the crew.

Most such rebellions took place while a ship prepared to set sail. The African coast was in sight, and the slaves could still hope to return home. But some revolts occurred on the open sea, where it was unlikely the Africans, even if their revolt succeeded, could return to their homes or regain their freedom. Both sorts of revolt indicate that not even capture, forced march to the coast, imprisonment, branding, and sale could break the spirit of many captives. These Africans preferred to face death rather than accept bondage.

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VOICES The Journal of a Dutch Slaver

The following account of slave trading on the West African coast is from a journal kept on the Dutch slaver *St. Jan* between March and November 1659. Although written from a European point of view, it describes the conditions Africans faced on such ships.

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We weighed anchor, by the order of the Hon'ble Director, Johan Valckenborch, and the Hon'ble Director, Jasper van Heussen to proceed on our voyage to Rio Reael [on the Guinea Coast] to trade for slaves for the hon'ble company.

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March 8. Saturday. Arrived with our ship before Ardra, to take on board the surgeon's mate and a supply of tamarinds for refreshment for the slaves; sailed again next day on our voyage to Rio Reael.

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17. Arrived at Rio Reael in front of a village called Bany, where we found the company's yacht, named the *Vrede*, which was sent out to assist us to trade for slaves.

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In April. Nothing was done except to trade for slaves.

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May 6. One of our seamen died. . . .

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22. Again weighed anchor and ran out of Rio Reael accompanied by the yacht *Vrede*; purchased there two hundred and nineteen head of slaves, men, women, boys and girls, and set our course for the high land of Ambosius, for the purpose of procuring food there for the slaves, as nothing was to be had at Rio Reael.

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June 29. Sunday. Again resolved to proceed on our voyage, as there also but little food was to be had for the slaves in consequence of the great rains which fell every day, and because many of the slaves were suffering from the bloody flux in consequence of the bad provisions we were supplied with at El Mina. . . .

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July 27. Our surgeon, named Martyn de Lanoy, died of the bloody flux.

Aug. 11. Again resolved to pursue our voyage towards the island of Annebo, in order to purchase there some refreshments for the slaves. . . .

15. Arrived at the island Annebo, where we purchased for the slaves one hundred half tierces of beans, twelve hogs, five thousand coconuts, five thousand sweet oranges, besides some other stores.

Sept. 21. The skipper called the ships officers aft, and resolved to run for the island of Tobago and to procure water there; otherwise we should have perished for want of water, as many of our water casks had leaked dry.

24. **Friday.** Arrived at the island of Tobago and hauled water there, also purchased some bread, as our hands had had no ration for three weeks.

Nov. 1. Lost our ship on the Reef of Rocus [north of Caracas], and all hands immediately took to the boat, as there was no prospect of saving the slaves, for we must abandon the ship in consequence of the heavy surf.

4. Arrived with the boat at the island of Curaco; the Hon'ble Governor Beck ordered two sloops to take the slaves off the wreck, one of which sloops with eighty four slaves on board, was captured by a privateer [pirate vessel].

1. What dangers did the slaves and crew on board the *St. Jan* face?

2. What is the attitude of the author of the journal toward slaves?

SOURCE: Elizabeth Donnan, ed., *Documents Illustrative of the History of the Slave Trade to America*, 4 vols. (Washington, DC: Carnegie Institute, 1930-35), 1: 141-45. Reprinted with permission.

John Atkins, an English slaver surgeon who made many voyages between Africa and the Americas during the 1720s, noted that although the threat of revolt diminished on the high seas, it never disappeared:

When we are slaved and out at sea, it is commonly imagined that the *Negroes*['] Ignorance of Navigation, will always be a Safeguard [against revolt]; yet, as many of them think themselves bought to eat, and more, that Death will send them into their own Country, there has not been wanting Examples of rising and killing a Ship's Company, distant from Land, though not so often as on the Coast: But once or twice is enough to shew, a Master's Care and Diligence should never be over till the Delivery of them.

Later in the eighteenth century, a historian used the prevalence of revolt to justify the harsh treatment of Africans on slave ships. Edward Long wrote that "the many acts of violence they [the slaves] have committed by murdering whole crews and destroying ships when they had it left in their power to do so, have made this rigour wholly chargeable on their own bloody and malicious disposition, which calls for the same confinement as if they were wolves or wild boars."

Failed slave mutineers could expect harsh punishment, although profit margins influenced sentences. Atkins chronicled how the captain of the *Robert*, which sailed from Bristol, England, punished the ringleaders, who were worth more, less harshly than their followers who were not as valuable. Atkins related that

Captain Harding, weighing the Stoutness and Worth of the two [ringleaders], did, as in other Countries they do by Rogues of Dignity, whip and scarify them only; while three others, Abettors, but not Actors, nor of Strength for it, he sentenced to cruel Deaths; making them first eat the Heart and Liver of one of them killed. The Woman [who had helped in the revolt] he hoisted up by the Thumbs, whipp'd and slashed her with Knives, before the other Slaves, till she died.

Other slaves resisted their captors by drowning or starving themselves. Thomas Phillips, captain of the slaver *Hannibal* during the 1690s, commented, “We had about 12 negroes did wilfully drown themselves and others starved themselves to death; for 'tis their belief that when they die they return home to their own country and friends again.” As we previously indicated, captains used nets to prevent suicide by drowning. To deal with self-imposed starvation, they used hot coals or a metal device called a *speculum oris* to force individuals to open their mouths for feeding.

Cruelty

The Atlantic slave trade required more capital than any other maritime commerce during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The investments for the ships, the exceptionally large crews they employed, the navigational equipment, the armaments, the purchase of slaves in Africa, and the supplies of food and water needed to feed hundreds of passengers were phenomenal. The aim was to carry as many Africans in healthy condition to the Americas as possible in order to make the large profits that justified such expenditures. Yet, as we have indicated, conditions aboard the vessels were abysmal.

Scholars have debated how much deliberate cruelty the enslaved Africans suffered from ships' crews. The West Indian historian Eric Williams asserts that the horrors of the Middle Passage have been exaggerated. Many writers, Williams contends, are led astray by the writings of those who, during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, sought to abolish the slave trade. In his view—and that of other historians—the difficulties of the Middle Passage were similar to those of European indentured servants who suffered high mortality rates on the voyage to America.

From this perspective the primary cause of death at sea on all ships carrying passengers across the Atlantic to the Americas was epidemic disease, against which medical practitioners had few tools before the twentieth century. Contributing factors included inadequate means of preserving food from spoilage and failure to prevent freshwater from becoming contaminated during the long ocean crossing. According to Williams, overcrowding by slavers was only a secondary cause for the high mortality rates.

Such observations help place conditions aboard the slave ships in a broader perspective. Cruelty and suffering are, to some degree, historically relative in that practices acceptable in the past are now considered inhumane. Yet cruelty aboard slavers must also be placed in a cultural context. Cultures distinguish between what constitutes acceptable behavior to their own people on the one hand and to strangers on the other. For Europeans, Africans were cultural strangers, and what became normal in the Atlantic slave trade was in fact exceptionally cruel compared to how Europeans treated each other. Slaves below deck received only one-half the space allocated on board to European soldiers, free emigrants, indentured servants, and convicts. Europeans regarded slavery itself as a condition suitable only for non-Christians. And as strangers, Africans were subject to brutalization by European crew members who often cared little about the physical and emotional damage they inflicted.

African Women on Slave Ships

For similar reasons, African women did not enjoy the same protection against unwanted sexual attention from European men that European women received. Consequently, sailors

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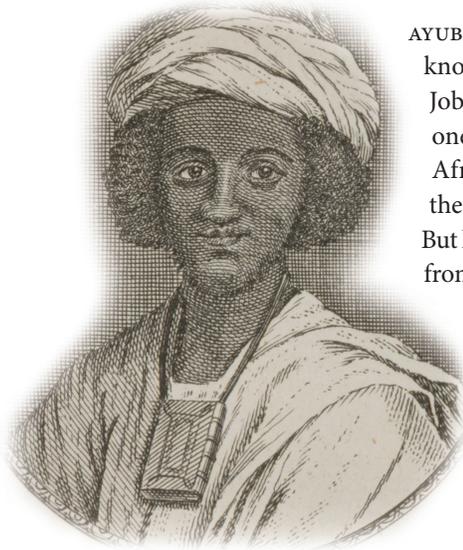
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PROFILE

Ayuba Suleiman Diallo of Bondu



“The Fortunate Slave,” an illustration of African slavery in the early eighteenth century by Douglas Grant (1968).

SOURCE: From “Some Memoirs of the Life of Job,” by Thomas Bluett, 1734. *The New York Public Library/Art Resource, NY.*

AYUBA SULEIMAN DIALLO, known to Europeans as Job ben Solomon, was one of the many West Africans caught up in the Atlantic slave trade. But his experience was far from typical. Because he had family connections, was literate in Arabic, and used his aristocratic personality to gain favor among Europeans, Diallo was able to escape enslavement and return to his native land. His story reveals much about

the bonds of wealth and class in the Atlantic world during the early eighteenth century.

Diallo was born in about 1701 at the village of Marsa located in the eastern Senegambian region of Bondu. His father, the imam of the local mosque and village head, taught him Arabic and the Koran when he was a child and prepared him to become a merchant. That Samba Geladio Jegi, the future king of the nearby kingdom of Futa Toro, was a fellow student suggests the standing of Diallo’s family. Diallo, following Muslim and West African custom, had two wives. He married the first of them when he was 15 and she was 11, the second when he was 28.

In February 1730, Diallo was on his way to the Gambia River to sell two slaves to an English trader when he was himself captured by Mandingo warriors and sold as well. Although the English slaver captain was willing to ransom Diallo, his ship sailed before Diallo’s father could send the money. As a result, Diallo was shipped with other Africans to Annapolis, Maryland, and delivered to Vachell Denton,

factor for William Hunt, a London merchant. Shortly thereafter, Diallo was sold to a Mr. Tolsey, who operated a tobacco plantation on Maryland’s eastern shore.

Although Diallo was “about five feet ten inches high . . . and naturally of a good constitution,” his “religious abstinence” and the difficulties he had experienced during the Middle Passage unsuited him for fieldwork. Therefore, Tolsey assigned him to tending cattle. In June 1731, however, after a young white boy repeatedly interrupted his prayers, Diallo escaped to Dover, Delaware, where he was apprehended and jailed. There, Thomas Bluett, who published in 1734 an account of Diallo’s adventures, discovered that Diallo was literate in Arabic, pious in his religious devotions, and—according to Bluett’s stereotypical notions—“no common slave.” Bluett provided this information to Tolsey, who on Diallo’s return allowed him a quiet place to pray and permitted him to write a letter in Arabic to his father.

The letter reached James Oglethorpe, the director of England’s slave-trading Royal African Company, who arranged to purchase Diallo from Tolsey and in March 1733 transport him by ship to England. Accompanied by Bluett, Diallo learned during the long voyage to speak, read, and write English. In London, Bluett contacted several well-to-do gentlemen who raised 60 pounds to secure Diallo’s freedom and, with the aid of the Royal African Company, return him to Senegambia. Before he left England in July 1734, Diallo had an audience with King George II, met with the entire royal family, dined with members of the nobility, and received expensive gifts.

Diallo’s wives and children greeted him on his return to his village, but much had changed during his absence. Futa Toro had conquered Bondu, and as a result Diallo’s family had suffered economically. In addition, the slave trade in Senegambia had intensified and Morocco had begun to interfere militarily in the region. Grateful to his English friends, Diallo used his influence in these difficult circumstances to help the Royal African Company hold its share of the trade in slaves and gold until the company disbanded in 1752. Able to differentiate between his fortunes and those of others, he retained commercial ties to the British until his death in 1773.

during long voyages attempted to sate their sexual appetites with enslaved women. African women caught in the Atlantic slave trade were worth half the price of African men in Caribbean markets, and as a result, captains took fewer of them on board their vessels. Perhaps because the women were less valuable commodities, crew members felt they had license to abuse them sexually. As historian Marcus Rediker points out, because women and children appeared less likely to revolt, they often had “more freedom of movement on slave ships.” But that very ability to move about made them more vulnerable to sexual assault. The

VOICES Dysentery (or the Bloody Flux)

Alexander Falconbridge (d. 1792) served as ship's surgeon on four British slavers between 1780 and 1787. In 1788 he became an opponent of the trade and published An Account of the Slave Trade on the Coast of Africa. Here he describes in gruesome detail conditions in slave quarters during a dysentery epidemic that he mistakenly attributes to stale air and heat.

Some wet and blowing weather having occasioned the port-holes to be shut, and the grating to be covered, fluxes and fevers among the Negroes ensued. While they were in this situation, my profession requiring it, I frequently went down among them, till at length their apartments became so extremely hot, as to be only sufferable for a very short time. . . . It is not in the power of the human imagination, to picture to itself a situation more dreadful or disgusting. Numbers of the slaves having fainted, they were carried upon deck, where several of them died, and the rest were, with great difficulty, restored. It had nearly proved fatal to me also. The climate was too warm to admit the wearing of any clothing but a shirt, and that I had pulled off before I went down; notwithstanding which, by only continuing among them for about a quarter of an hour, I was so overcome with the heat, stench, and foul air, that I had nearly fainted; and it was not without assistance, that I could get upon deck. The consequence was, that I soon after fell sick of the same disorder, from which I did not recover for several months. . . .

The place allotted for the sick Negroes is under the half deck, where they lie on the bare planks. By this means, those who are emaciated, frequently have their skin, and even their flesh, entirely rubbed off, by the motion of the

ship, from the prominent parts of the shoulders, elbows, and hips, so as to render the bones in those parts quite bare. And some of them, by constantly lying in the blood and mucus, that had flowed from those afflicted with the flux, and which . . . is generally so violent as to prevent their being kept clean, have their flesh much sooner rubbed off, than those who have only to contend with the mere friction of the ship. The excruciating pain which the poor sufferers feel from being obliged to continue in such a dreadful situation, frequently for several weeks, in case they happen to live so long, is not to be conceived or described. Few, indeed, are ever able to withstand the fatal effects of it. The utmost skill of the surgeon is here ineffectual. . . .

The surgeon, upon going between decks, in the morning, to examine the situation of the slaves, frequently finds several dead; and among the men, sometimes a dead and living Negroe fastened by their irons together. When this is the case, they are brought upon the deck, and being laid on the grating, the living Negroe is disengaged, and the dead one thrown overboard. . . .

1. Could slave traders have avoided the suffering described in this passage?
2. What impact would such suffering have had on those who survived it?

SOURCE: Alexander Falconbridge, *An Account of the Slave Trade on the Coast of Africa* (London: privately printed, 1788), in John H. Bracey Jr. and Manisha Sinha, *African American Mosaic: A Documentary History from the Slave Trade to the Twenty-first Century* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2004), 1: 24.

separate below-deck compartments for women on slave ships also made them easier targets than they otherwise might have been.

Historian Barbara Bush speculates that the horrid experience of the Middle Passage may have influenced black women's attitudes toward sexuality and procreation. This, in turn, may help explain why slave populations in the Caribbean and Latin America failed to reproduce themselves: exhaustion, terror, and disgust can depress sex drives.

Landing and Sale in the West Indies

2-6 How did Africans adapt to conditions in the Americas?

As a slaver neared the West Indies, the crew prepared its human cargo for landing and sale. Slaves shaved, washed with fresh water, and exercised. Those bound for the larger Caribbean islands or for the British colonies of southern North America often received some weeks of rest in the easternmost islands of the West Indies. French slave traders typically rested their slave passengers on **Martinique**. The English preferred **Barbados**. Sale to white plantation owners followed.

Martinique An island in the eastern Caribbean Sea that was a French sugar-producing colony from the seventeenth into the nineteenth century.

Barbados An island nation in the Lesser Antilles located to the southeast of Puerto Rico.

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The process of landing and sale that ended the Middle Passage was often as protracted as the events that began it in Africa. After anchoring at one of the Lesser Antilles Islands—Barbados, St. Kitts, or Antigua—English slaver captains haggled with the agents of local planters over numbers and prices. They then determined whether to sell all their slaves at their first port of call, sell some of them, sail to another island, or sail to such North American ports as Charleston, Williamsport, or Baltimore. If the market looked good in the first port, the captain might still take a week or more to sell his cargo. The captain of the *James*, who landed at Barbados in 1676, just as the cultivation of cane sugar there was becoming extremely profitable, sold most of his slaves in three days. “May Thursday 25th . . . sold 163 slaves. May Friday 26th. We sold 70 slaves. May Saturday 27th. Sold 110 slaves,” he recorded in his journal.

Often, captains and crew had to do more to prepare slaves for sale than allow them to clean themselves and exercise. The ravages of cruelty, confinement, and disease could not be easily remedied. According to legend, young African men and women arrived in the Americas with gray hair, and captains used dye to hide such indications of age before the slaves went to market. Slaves were also required to oil their bodies to conceal blemishes, rashes, and bruises. Ships’ surgeons used hemp to plug the anuses of those suffering from dysentery to block the bloody discharge the disease caused.

Humiliation continued as the slaves went to market. Once again they suffered close physical inspection from potential buyers, which—according to Equiano—caused “much dread and trembling among us” and “bitter cries.” Unless a single purchaser agreed to buy an entire cargo of slaves, auctions took place either on deck or in sale yards on shore. However, some captains employed “the scramble.” In these barbaric spectacles, the captain established standard prices for men, women, and children; herded the Africans together in a corral; and then allowed buyers to rush pell-mell among them to grab and rope together the slaves they desired.

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 Read on MyHistoryLab Document: Bryan Edwards Describes the “Maroon Negroes of the Island of Jamaica,” 1807



This nineteenth-century engraving suggests the humiliation Africans endured as they were subjected to physical inspections before being sold.

Seasoning

2-7 What was “seasoning”?

Seasoning followed sale. This term referred to a period of up to two years of **acculturating** slaves and breaking them in to plantation routines. On Barbados, Jamaica, and other Caribbean islands, planters divided slaves into three categories: **Creoles** (slaves born in the Americas), old Africans (those who had lived in the Americas for some time), and new Africans (those who had just survived the Middle Passage). Creole slaves were worth three times the value of unseasoned new Africans, whom planters and Creole slaves called “salt-water Negroes” or “Guinea-birds.” Seasoning began the process of making new Africans more like Creoles.

In the West Indies, this process involved more than an apprenticeship in the work routines of the sugar plantations. It also prepared many new arrivals for resale to North American planters, who preferred “seasoned” slaves to “unbroken” ones who came directly from Africa. In fact, before 1720 most of the Africans who ended up in the British colonies of North America had gone first to the West Indies. After that date, the demand for slave labor in the islands had become so great that they could spare fewer slaves for resale to the North American market. As a result, henceforth most slave imports into the tobacco-, rice-, and later cotton-growing regions of the American South came directly from Africa and had to be seasoned by their American masters. But many slaves still came to North America from the Caribbean, to which they had been brought from Africa or where they had been born.

In either case, seasoning was a disciplinary process intended to modify the behavior and attitude of slaves and make them effective laborers. As part of this process, the slaves’ new masters gave them new names: Christian names, generic African names, or names from classical Greece and Rome (such as Jupiter, Achilles, or Plato).

The seasoning process also involved learning European languages. Masters in the Spanish Caribbean were especially thorough teachers. Consequently, although Spanish-speaking African slaves and their descendants retained African words, they could be easily understood by any Spanish-speaking person. In the French and English Caribbean islands and in parts of North America, however, slave society produced Creole dialects that in grammar, vocabulary, and intonation had distinctive African linguistic features. These Africanized versions of French and English, including the Gullah dialect still prevalent on South Carolina’s sea islands and the Creole most Haitians speak today, could not be easily understood by those who spoke more standard dialects.

During seasoning, masters or overseers broke slaves into plantation work by assigning them to one of several work gangs. The strongest men joined the first or “great gang,” which did the heavy fieldwork of planting and harvesting. The second gang, including women and older men, did lighter fieldwork, such as weeding. The third gang, composed of children, worked shorter hours and performed such tasks as bringing food and water to the field gangs. Other slaves became domestic servants. New Africans served apprenticeships with old Africans from their same ethnic group or with Creoles.

Some planters looked for cargoes of young people, anticipating that they might be more easily acculturated than older Africans. One West Indian master in 1792 recorded his hopes for a group of children: “From the late Guinea sales, I have purchased altogether twenty boys and girls, from ten to thirteen years old.” He emphasized that “it is the practice, on bringing them to the estate, to distribute them in the huts of Creole blacks, under their direction and care, who are to feed them, train them to work, and teach them their new language.”

Planters had to rely on old Africans and Creoles to train new recruits because white people were a minority in the Caribbean. Later, a similar demographic pattern developed in parts of the cotton-producing American South. In both regions, therefore, African custom shaped the cooperative labor of slaves in gangs. But the use of old Africans and Creoles as instructors and the appropriation of African styles of labor should not suggest leniency. Although plantation overseers, who ran day-to-day operations, could be white, of mixed race, or black,

seasoning The process by which newly arrived Africans were broken in to slavery in the Americas.

acculturating Change in individuals who are introduced to a new culture.

Creoles Persons of African and/or European descent born in the Americas.

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 Watch on **MyHistoryLab Video**: Survival in a Strange New Land

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they invariably imposed strict discipline. Drivers, who directed the work gangs, were almost always black. But they carried whips and punished those who worked too slowly or showed disrespect. Planters assigned recalcitrant new Africans to the strictest overseers and drivers.

Planters housed slaves undergoing seasoning with the old Africans and Creoles who instructed them. The instructors regarded such additions to their households as economic opportunities because the new Africans provided extra labor on the small plots of land that West Indian planters often allocated to slaves. Slaves could sell surplus root vegetables, peas, and fruit from their gardens and save to purchase freedom for themselves or others. Additional workers helped produce larger surpluses to sell at local markets, thereby reducing the time required to accumulate a purchase price.

New Africans also benefited from this arrangement. They learned how to build houses in their new land and how to cultivate vegetables to supplement the food the planter provided. Even though many Africans brought building skills and agricultural knowledge with them to the Americas, old Africans and Creoles helped teach them how to adapt their skills and knowledge to a new climate, topography, building materials, and social organization.

The End of the Journey: Masters and Slaves in the Americas

2-8 How were slaves treated in the Americas?

By what criteria did planters assess the successful seasoning of new Africans? The first criterion was survival. Already weakened and traumatized by the Middle Passage, many Africans did not survive seasoning. Historian James Walvin estimates that one-third died during their first three years in the West Indies. African men died at a greater rate than African women, perhaps because they did the more arduous fieldwork.

A second criterion was that the Africans had to adapt to new foods and a new climate. The foods included salted codfish traded to the West Indies by New England merchants, Indian corn (maize), and varieties of squash not available in West Africa. The Caribbean islands, like West Africa, were tropical, but North America was much cooler. Even within the West Indies, an African was unlikely to find a climate exactly like the one he or she had left behind.

A third criterion was learning a new language. Planters did not require slaves to speak the local language, which could be English, French, Spanish, Danish, or Dutch, fluently. But slaves had to speak a creole dialect well enough to obey commands. A final criterion was psychological. When new Africans ceased to be suicidal, planters assumed they had accepted their status and their separation from their homeland.

It would have suited the planters if their slaves had met all these criteria. Yet that would have required the Africans to have been thoroughly desocialized by the Middle Passage, and they were not. As traumatic as that voyage was—for all the shock of capture, separation from loved ones, and efforts to dehumanize them—most Africans who entered plantation society in the Americas had not been stripped of their memories or their culture. When their ties to their villages and families were broken, they created bonds with shipmates that simulated blood relationships. Such social bonds became the basis of new extended families. So similar were these new synthetic families to those that had existed in West Africa that slaves considered sexual relations among shipmates and former shipmates incestuous.

As this suggests, African slaves did not lose all their culture during the Middle Passage and seasoning in the Americas. Their value system never totally replicated that of the plantation. Despite their ordeal, the Africans who survived the Atlantic slave trade and slavery in the Americas were resilient. Seasoning did modify their behavior. Yet the claim that it obliterated African Americans' cultural roots is incorrect. Anthropologist Melville Herskovits in 1941 raised questions about this issue that still shape debate about the African-American experience.

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Herskovits asked, “What discussions of world view might not have taken place in the long hours when [Creole] teacher and [new African] pupil were together, reversing their roles when matters only dimly sensed by the American-born slave were explained [by his pupil] in terms of African conventions he had never analyzed?” How many African beliefs and methods of coping with life and the supernatural were retained and transmitted by such private discussions? How much did African cultural elements, such as dance, song, folklore, moral values, and etiquette, offset the impulse to accept European values?

The Ending of the Atlantic Slave Trade

2-9 Why did the Atlantic slave trade end?

The cruelties associated with the Atlantic slave trade contributed to its abolition in the early nineteenth century. During the late 1700s, English abolitionists led by Thomas Clarkson, William Wilberforce, and Granville Sharp began a religiously oriented moral crusade against slavery and the slave trade. Because the English had dominated the Atlantic trade since 1713, Britain’s growing antipathy became crucial to the trade’s destruction. But it is debatable whether moral outrage alone prompted this humanitarian effort. By the late 1700s, England’s industrializing economy was less dependent on the slave trade and the entire plantation system than it had been previously. To maintain its prosperity, England needed raw materials and markets for its manufactured goods. Slowly but surely its ruling classes realized more profits lay in industry and other forms of trade, while leaving Africans in Africa.

So morals and economic self-interest combined when Britain abolished the Atlantic slave trade in 1807 and tried to enforce that abolition on other nations through a naval patrol off the African coast. The following year, the U.S. Congress joined in outlawing the Atlantic trade. Although American, Brazilian, and Spanish slavers defied these prohibitions for years, the forced migration from Africa to the Americas dropped to a tiny percentage of what it had been at its peak. Ironically, the coastal kingdoms of Guinea and western Central Africa fought most fiercely to keep the trade going because their economies had become dependent on it. This persistence gave the English, French, Belgians, and Portuguese an excuse to establish colonial empires in Africa during the nineteenth century in the name of suppressing the slave trade.

 **Read on MyHistoryLab Document:**
Congress Prohibits Importation
of Slaves (1807)

CONCLUSION

Over more than three centuries, the Atlantic slave trade brought more than 11 million Africans to the Americas. Several million died in transit. Of those who survived, most came between 1701 and 1810, when more Africans than Europeans reached the New World. Most Africans went to the sugar plantations of the Caribbean and Brazil. Only 500,000 went to the British colonies of North America, either directly or after seasoning in the West Indies. From them have come the nearly 40 million African Americans alive today.

This chapter has described the great forced migration across the Atlantic that brought Africans into slavery in the Americas. We still have much to learn about the origins of the trade, its relationship to the earlier trans-Saharan trade, and its involvement with state formation in West and western Central Africa. Historians continue to debate how cruel the trade was, the ability of transplanted Africans to preserve their cultural heritage, and why Britain abolished the trade in the early nineteenth century.

We are fortunate that a few Africans who experienced the Middle Passage recorded their testimony. Otherwise, we would not appreciate how horrible it was. Even more important, however, is that so many survived the terror of the Atlantic slave trade and carried on. Their struggle testifies to the human spirit that is at the center of the African-American experience.

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CHAPTER TIMELINE

SLAVE TRADE

WORLD EVENTS

900–1400

900–1100

Trans-Saharan trade peaks

935

Finalization of the Koran text

979

Sung dynasty unites China

1236

Mongols invade Russia

1337

French–English Hundred Years' War begins

1400–1500

1441

Antam Goncalvez of Portugal captures Africans

1472

Ruy de Siqueira contracts with the Oba of Benin

1445

Gutenberg prints first book in Europe

1453

Fall of Constantinople to the Turks

1468

Fall of the Empire of Mali

1492

Columbus's first voyage to the Americas

1500–1600

1502

African slaves are reported to be on Hispaniola

1518

Spanish *Asiento* begins

1533

Sugar production begins in Brazil

1571

Portuguese colonize Angola

1517

Protestant Reformation

1519

Spanish conquest of Aztecs

1591

Fall of the Empire of Songhai

1600–1700

1610

Dutch drive Portuguese from Africa's west coast

1619

Africans reported to be in British North America

1662

Portuguese destroy Kongo Kingdom

1674

England drives the Dutch out of the slave trade

1607

Founding of Jamestown

1620

Pilgrims reach New England

1688

England's Glorious Revolution

1700–1800

1713

England begins its domination of the slave trade

c. 1745

Olaudah Equiano born

1752

British Royal African Company disbands

1807

Great Britain abolishes the Atlantic slave trade

1808

United States abolishes the Atlantic slave trade

1728

Russian exploration of Alaska begins

1776

American Declaration of Independence

1789

United States Constitution ratified

1815

Napoleon defeated at the Battle of Waterloo

On MyHistoryLab



REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. How did the Atlantic slave trade reflect the times during which it existed?
2. Think about the experience Olaudah Equiano described of a young boy captured by traders and brought to a slave ship. What new and strange things did the boy encounter? How did he explain these things to himself? What kept him from descending into despair?
3. How could John Newton reconcile his Christian faith with his career as a slave-ship captain?
4. What human and natural variables could prolong the Middle Passage across the Atlantic? How could delay make the voyage more dangerous for slaves and crew?
5. How could Africans resist the dehumanizing forces of the Middle Passage and seasoning and use their African cultures to build black cultures in the New World?

RECOMMENDED READING

Barbara Bush. *Slave Women in Caribbean Society, 1650–1838*. 2nd ed. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010. Contains an insightful discussion of African women, their introduction to slavery in the Americas, and their experience on sugar plantations.

Basil Davidson. *The African Slave Trade: Revised and Expanded Edition*. Boston: Little, Brown, 1980. Originally published in 1961, this book has been superseded in some respects by more recent studies, but it places the trade in both African and European contexts.

Herbert S. Klein. *The Atlantic Slave Trade*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999. The most thorough and current study of the subject.

Marcus Rediker. *The Slave Ship: A Human History*. New York: Viking, 2007. Thoroughly and dramatically describes life on board slavers during the eighteenth century.

John Thornton. *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400–1800*, 2nd ed. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998. Emphasizes the contributions of Africans, slave and free, to the economic and cultural development of the Atlantic world during the slave trade centuries.

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RETRACING THE ODYSSEY

The Henrietta Marie. This is a slave ship placed on traveling display by the Museum of Southern Florida in Miami. The *Henrietta Marie* sank in 1701 after delivering slaves to Jamaica.

Chattanooga African American Museum, Chattanooga, TN. The museum includes an exhibit dealing with the Atlantic slave trade.

Black People in Colonial North America



Whereas, the plantations and estates of this Province [of South Carolina] cannot be well and sufficiently managed and brought into use, without the labor and service of negroes and other slaves; and forasmuch as the said negroes and other slaves brought unto the People of the Province for that purpose, are of barbarous, wild, savage natures, and such as renders them wholly unqualified to be governed by the laws, customs, and practices of this Province; . . . it is absolutely necessary, that such other constitutions, laws and orders, should in this Province be made and enacted, for the good regulating and ordering of them, as may restrain the disorderly rapines and inhumanity, to which they are naturally prone and induced; and may also tend to the safety and security of the people of this Province and their estates.

From the introduction to the original South Carolina Slave Code of 1696.

African Americans lived in North America for nearly three centuries before the United States gained independence from Great Britain in 1783. During that long time period, most of them were slaves in British, French, and Spanish colonies. As a result, they left scant written testimony about their lives. Their history, therefore, must be learned through archaeology and the writings of the white settlers who enslaved and oppressed them.

The passage that begins this chapter is an excellent example of what we can learn about African-American history by reading between the lines in the official publications of the colonial governments. As historian Winthrop D. Jordan points out, the founders of South Carolina in 1696 borrowed much of this section of the colony's law code from the British colony of Barbados in the Caribbean.

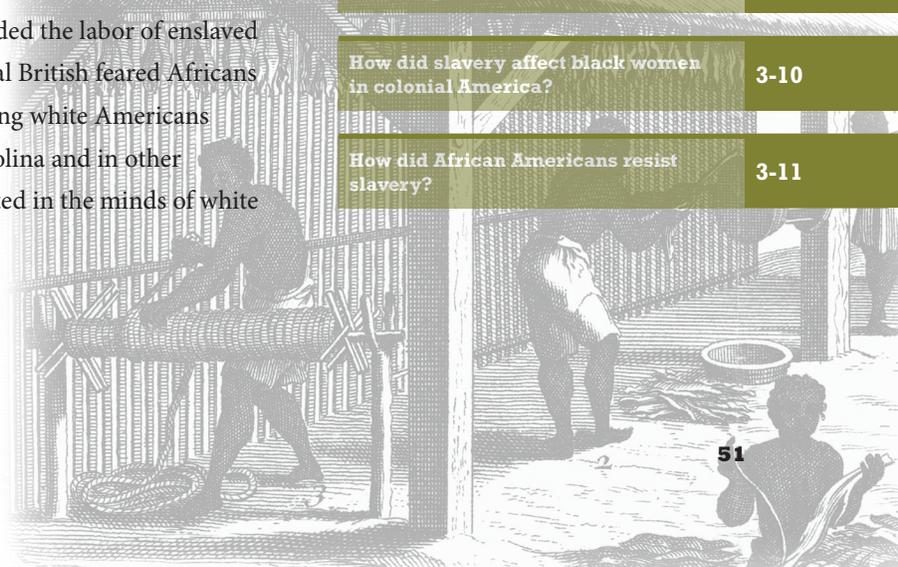
The code indicates that the British Carolinians believed they needed the labor of enslaved Africans for their colony to prosper. It also shows that the colonial British feared Africans and their African-American descendants. This ambivalence among white Americans concerning African Americans shaped life in colonial South Carolina and in other British colonies in North America. The same ambivalence persisted in the minds of white

This eighteenth-century woodcut shows enslaved black men, women, and children engaged in the steps involved in the curing of tobacco.

Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Who were the peoples of colonial North America?	3-1
How did black servitude develop in the Chesapeake?	3-2
What were the characteristics of plantation slavery from 1700 to 1750?	3-3
What factors affected the way slaves lived in early America?	3-4
What role did miscegenation and creolization have in early African-American history?	3-5
How did African-American culture originate?	3-6
How did slavery in the northern colonies differ from slavery in the southern colonies?	3-7
How did the experience of African Americans under French and Spanish rule in North America compare to that in the British colonies?	3-8
What was African-American life like in New Spain's northern borderlands?	3-9
How did slavery affect black women in colonial America?	3-10
How did African Americans resist slavery?	3-11



southerners into the twentieth century. The dichotomy of white economic dependence on black people and fear of black revolt was a central fact of American history and provided a rationale for racial oppression.

The opening passage also reveals the willingness of British and other European settlers in North America to brand Africans and their American descendants as “barbarous, wild, [and] savage.” Although real cultural differences underlay such negative perceptions, white people used them to justify oppressing black people. Unlike white people, black people by the 1640s could be enslaved for life. Black people did not enjoy the same legal protection as white people and were punished more harshly.

This chapter describes the history of African-American life in colonial North America from the early sixteenth century to the end of the **French and Indian War** in 1763.

It concentrates on the British colonies that stretched along the eastern coast of the continent, but also briefly covers the black experience in Spanish Florida, in New Spain’s southwestern borderlands, and in French Louisiana. During the seventeenth century, the plantation system that became a central part of black life in America for nearly two centuries took shape in the Chesapeake tobacco country and in the low country of South Carolina and Georgia. Unfree labor, which in the Chesapeake had originally involved both white and black people, solidified into a system of slavery based on race. Although the plantation system did not develop in Britain’s northern colonies, race-based slavery existed in them as well. African Americans responded to these conditions by interacting with other groups, preserving parts of their African culture, seeking strength through religion, and resisting and rebelling against enslavement.

French and Indian War A war between Great Britain and its American Indian allies and France and its American Indian allies, fought between 1754 and 1763 for control of the eastern portion of North America.

The Peoples of North America

3-1 Who were the peoples of colonial North America?

In the North American colonies during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, African immigrants gave birth to a new African-American people. Born in North America and forever separated from their ancestral homeland, they preserved a surprisingly large core of their African cultural heritage. Meanwhile, a new natural environment and contacts with people of American Indian and European descent helped African Americans shape a way of life within the circumstances that slavery forced on them. To understand the early history of African Americans, we must first briefly discuss the other peoples of colonial North America.

American Indians

Historians and anthropologists group the original inhabitants of North America together as American Indians. (The terms *Amerinds* and *Native Americans* are also used, with the latter term including Inuits [Eskimos].) But when the British began to colonize the Atlantic coastal portion of this huge region during the early seventeenth century, the indigenous peoples who lived there had no such all-inclusive name. They spoke many different languages, lived in diverse environments, and considered themselves distinct from one another. Like other Indian peoples of the Western Hemisphere, they descended from Asians who, at least 15,000 years ago, had migrated eastward by coastal waterways and across a land bridge

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connecting Siberia and Alaska. Europeans called them Indians as a result of Christopher Columbus's mistaken assumption in 1492 that he had landed on islands near the "Indies," by which he meant near Southeast Asia.

In Mexico, Central America, and Peru, American Indian peoples developed complex, densely populated civilizations with hereditary monarchies, formal religions, armies, and social classes. Cultural developments in Mexico and the northward spread of the cultivation of maize (corn) influenced the indigenous peoples of what is today the United States. In the Southwest, the Anasazi and later Pueblo peoples developed farming communities. Beginning around 900 CE they produced pottery, studied astronomy, built large adobe towns, and struggled against a drying climate. Farther east in what is known as the Woodlands region, the Adena culture flourished in the Ohio River valley as early as 1000 BCE and attained the social organization required to construct large burial mounds. Between the tenth and fourteenth centuries CE, what is known as the Mississippian culture established a civilization, marked by extensive trade routes, division of labor, and urban centers. The largest such center was Cahokia—located near modern St. Louis, Missouri—which at its peak had a population of about 30,000.

Climate change and warfare destroyed the Mississippian culture during the fourteenth century, and only remnants of it existed when Europeans and Africans arrived in North America. By that time, a diverse variety of American Indian cultures existed in what is today the eastern portion of the United States. People resided in towns and villages, supplementing their agricultural economies with fishing and hunting. They held land communally, generally allowed women a voice in ruling councils, and—although warlike—regarded battle as an opportunity for young men to prove their bravery rather than as a means of conquest. Gravely weakened by diseases that settlers unwittingly brought from Europe, the woodlands Indians of North America's coastal regions could not effectively resist British settlers during the seventeenth century. Particularly in the Southeast, the British developed an extensive trade in Indian slaves.

Because American Indians were experts at living harmoniously with natural resources, they influenced the way people of African and European descent came to live in North America. Indian crops, such as corn, pumpkins, beans, and squash, became staples of the newcomers' diets. On the continent's southeastern coast, British cultivation of tobacco, another Indian crop, secured the economic survival of the Chesapeake colonies of Virginia and Maryland. Tobacco cultivation also led directly to the enslavement of Africans. The Indian canoe became a means of river transportation for black and white people, and everyone wore Indian moccasins.

The relationships between black people and American Indians during colonial times were complex. Although Indian nations often provided refuge to escaping black slaves, Indians sometimes became slaveholders and on occasion helped crush black revolts. Some black men assisted in the Indian slave trade and sometimes helped defend European colonists against Indian attacks. Meanwhile people of African and Indian descent frequently found themselves in similarly oppressive circumstances in Britain's American colonies. Although white officials attempted to keep them apart, social and sexual contacts between the two groups were frequent. Some interracial black-Indian settlements—and a few black-Indian-white settlements—have persisted to the present.

The Spanish, French, and Dutch

With one exception, European nations sent relatively few settlers to North America. Following Christopher Columbus's voyage in 1492, they recognized the great possibilities for gaining wealth and territory in the Americas. The Spanish, French, and Dutch thought in terms of trade with American Indians and expropriation of Indian labor.

Spain led the way. Beginning shortly after Columbus's first voyage Spanish adventurers, aided by a strong autocratic monarchy and internal peace at home, rapidly built a colonial empire in the Americas. Mining of gold and silver, as well as the production of

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sugar, tobacco, and leather goods, provided a firm economic foundation. But few Spaniards came to the Western Hemisphere. Consequently, Spain's colonial economy rested first on the forced labor of the Indian population and then increasingly on enslaved Africans when the Indian population declined from disease and overwork. African slaves arrived in the Spanish colonies as early as 1526 when Luis Vasquez de Ayllon employed 100 of them in an unsuccessful attempt to establish a settlement near what is now Georgetown, South Carolina. Later overseers in mines and fields often brutally worked Africans and Indians to death. But because the Spanish were few in number, some of the Africans and Indians who survived were able to gain freedom and become tradesmen, small landholders, and militiamen. Often they were of mixed race and identified with their former masters rather than with the oppressed people beneath them in society. African, Indian, and Spanish customs intermingled in what became a multicultural colonial society. Its center was in the West Indian islands of Cuba and Santo Domingo, Mexico, and northern South America. On its northern periphery were lands that are now part of the United States: Florida, Texas, Arizona, New Mexico, and California.

In part because of Spain's predominance and in part because of domestic religious strife, France did not establish a settlement in the Americas until 1604. That settlement centered on the St. Lawrence River and grew into what was known as either New France or Canada. It became a trading empire, based on acquiring beaver pelts and other furs from American Indians. The result was that throughout its existence New France's small French population depended on good commercial and military relations with Indian nations. There never were more than a few thousand slaves in New France, and most of them were Indian war captives. In the huge region of Louisiana, which France claimed from 1699 to 1763 and which stretched from the Gulf of Mexico to the Great Lakes, there were considerably larger numbers of Indian and African slaves. As in the Spanish colonies, although the death toll was extremely high for both groups of slaves, routes to freedom remained open.

Because the Netherlands—the Dutch homeland—spent much of the late sixteenth century in a struggle for independence from Spain, it, like France, did not succeed in establishing a colony in North America until the early seventeenth century. This colony, New Netherlands, centered on the Hudson River. Its chief settlement, New Amsterdam, located on Manhattan Island, later became New York City after the British conquered it in 1664. Like the French, the Dutch focused on the fur trade and attracted few European settlers beyond the area surrounding New Amsterdam. In that region the Dutch West Indian Company established African slavery in 1625. Under Dutch law, slaves retained basic human rights. Those rights and opportunities to work for wages led, as in the Spanish and French colonies, to the early appearance of a free black class.

The British and Jamestown

The Spanish had colonized warm, populous, and wealthy lands. The relatively less powerful French and Dutch acquired lands that were cooler, less populous, and deficient in easily acquired wealth. The British competed with the French and Dutch for these relatively less attractive lands. In addition, the British, like the Africans and the American Indians, were not a single nation. The British Isles—consisting principally of Britain and Ireland and located off the northwest coast of Europe—were the homeland of the English, Welsh, Scots, and Irish. By the seventeenth century, the English dominated the other ethnic groups. But at that time, the Kingdom of England was a poor country notable mainly for producing wool.

England's claim to the east coast of North America rested on the voyage of John Cabot, who sailed in 1497, just five years after Columbus's first westward voyage. But, unlike the Spanish who rapidly created an empire in the Americas, the English were slow to establish themselves in the region Cabot had reached. This was partly due to the harsher North American climate, with winters much colder than in England. In addition, the English monarchy was too poor to finance colonizing expeditions, and social turmoil associated with the Protestant Reformation absorbed its energies.

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Attempts failed in the 1580s to colonize Newfoundland, a large island off the east coast of what is today Canada, and Roanoke Island, a small island off the coast of what is today North Carolina. It took the English naval victory over the **Spanish Armada** in 1588 and money raised by **joint-stock companies** to produce at Jamestown in 1607 the first successful British colony in North America. This settlement, established by the Virginia Company of London, was located in the Chesapeake region, which the British called Virginia—after Queen Elizabeth I (r. 1558–1603), the so-called Virgin Queen of England. The company hoped to make a profit at Jamestown by finding gold, trading with Indians, cutting lumber, or raising crops, such as rice, sugar, or silk that could not be produced in Britain.

None of these schemes succeeded. There was no gold, and the climate was unsuitable for rice, sugar, and silk. Because of disease, hostility with the Indians, and especially economic failure, the settlement barely survived into the 1620s. By then, however, English settler John Rolfe’s experiments, begun in 1612 to cultivate a mild strain of tobacco that could be grown on the North American mainland, began to pay off. Smoking tobacco had become popular in Europe, and demand for it constantly increased. As a result, growing tobacco soon became the economic mainstay of Virginia and the neighboring colony of Maryland.

Sowing, cultivating, harvesting, and curing tobacco required considerable labor. Yet colonists in the Chesapeake could not follow the Spanish example of enslaving Indians to produce the crop. Disease had reduced the local Indian population, and those who survived eluded British conquest by retreating west.

Unlike the West Indian sugar planters, however, the North American tobacco planters did not immediately turn to Africa for laborers. British advocates of colonizing North America had always promoted it as a means to reduce unemployment, poverty, and crime in England. The idea was to send England’s undesirables to America, where they could provide the cheap labor tobacco planters needed. Consequently, until 1700, white labor produced most of the tobacco in the Chesapeake colonies.

Africans Arrive in the Chesapeake

By early 1619, there were, nevertheless, 32 people of African descent—15 men and 17 women—living at Jamestown. Nothing is known about when they arrived or from where they came. They were all “in the service of sev[er]all planters.” The following August a Dutch warship, carrying 17 African men and three African women, moored at Hampton Roads at the mouth of the James River. Historians long believed these were the first black people in British North America. They were part of a group of over 300 who had been taken from Angola by a Portuguese slaver that had set sail for the port of Vera Cruz in New Spain (Mexico). The Dutch warship, with the help of an English ship, had attacked the slaver, taken most of its human cargo, and brought these 20 Angolans to Jamestown. The Dutch captain traded them to local officials for provisions.

The Angolans became servants to Jamestown’s officials and favored planters. For two reasons, the colony’s inhabitants regarded both the new arrivals and those black people who had been in Jamestown earlier to be *unfree* but not slaves. First, unlike the Portuguese and the Spanish, the English had no law for slavery. Second, at least those Angolans who bore such names as Pedro, Isabella, Antoney, and Angelo were Christians, and—according to English custom and morality in 1619—Christians could not be enslaved. So, once these individuals worked off their purchase price, they regained their freedom. In 1623, Antoney and Isabella married. The next year they became parents of William, whom their master had baptized in

Spanish Armada A fleet that unsuccessfully attempted to carry out an invasion of England in 1588.

joint-stock companies Primitive corporations that carried out British and Dutch colonization in the Americas during the seventeenth century.

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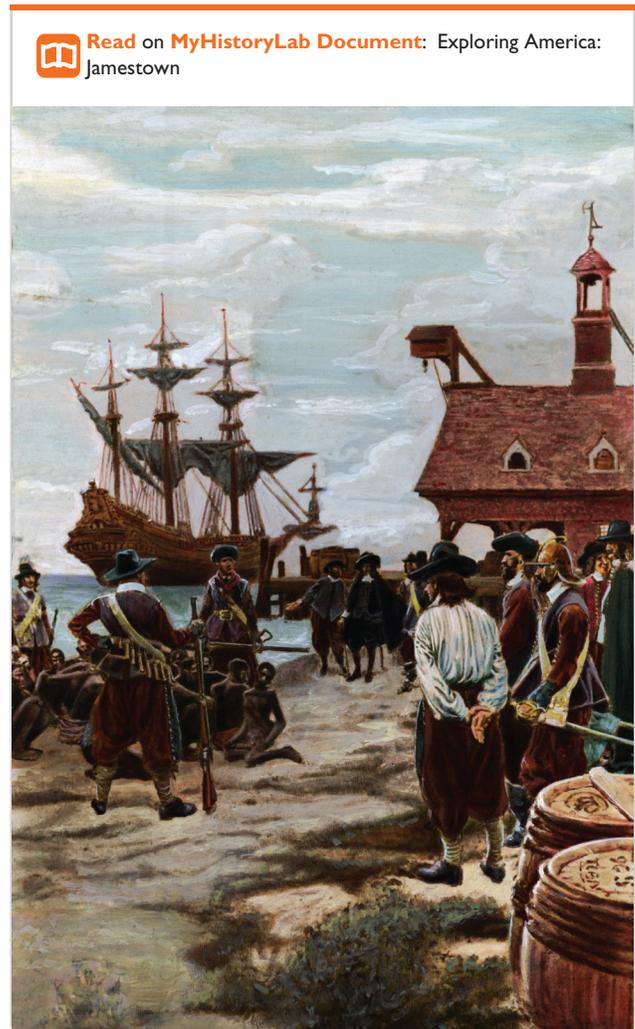
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Black slavery began in the American colonies at Jamestown, Virginia, in August 1619, when a Dutch ship arrived from Guinea carrying 20 African men and women.

Illustration by Howard Pyle. The Granger Collection, New York.

Church of England A protestant church established in the sixteenth century as the English national or Anglican church with the English monarch as its head. After the American Revolution, its American branch became the Episcopal Church.

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the local **Church of England**. William may have been the first black person born in English America. He was almost certainly born free.

During the following years, people of African descent remained a small minority in the expanding Virginia colony. A 1625 census reported only 23 black people living in the colony, compared with a combined total of 1,275 white people and Indians. This suggests that many of the first black inhabitants had either died or moved away. By 1649 the total Virginia population of about 18,500 included only 300 black people. The English, following the Spanish example, called them “negroes.” (*Negro* means black in Spanish.) In neighboring Maryland, established in 1632 as a haven for persecuted English Catholics, the black population also remained small. In 1658 people of African descent accounted for only 3 percent of Maryland’s population.

Black Servitude in the Chesapeake

3-2 How did black servitude develop in the Chesapeake?

As these statistics suggest, during the early years of the Chesapeake colonies, black people represented a small part of a labor force composed mainly of white people. From the 1620s to the 1670s, black and white people worked in the tobacco fields together, lived together, and slept together (and also did these things with American Indians). They were all unfree indentured servants.

Indentured servitude had existed in Europe for centuries. In England, parents indentured—or, in other words, apprenticed—their children to “masters,” who then controlled their lives and had the right to their labor for a set number of years. In return, the masters supported the children and taught them a trade or profession. Unrestrained by modern notions of human equality and democracy, masters could exercise brutal authority over those bound to them.

As the demand for labor to produce tobacco in the Chesapeake expanded, indentured servitude came to include adults who sold their freedom for two to seven years in return for the cost of their voyage to North America. Instead of training in a profession, the servants could improve their economic standing by remaining as free persons in America after completing their period of servitude.

When Africans first arrived in Virginia and Maryland, they entered into similar contracts, agreeing to work for their masters until the proceeds of their labor recouped the cost of their purchase. Indentured servitude could be harsh in the tobacco colonies because masters sought to get as much labor as they could from their servants before the indenture ended. Most indentured servants died from overwork or disease before regaining their freedom. But those who survived, black people as well as white people, could expect eventually to leave their masters and seek their fortunes as free persons.

The foremost example in early Virginia of a black man who emerged from servitude to become a tobacco planter himself is Anthony Johnson (see the Profile). But Johnson was not the only person of African descent who became a free property owner during the first half of the seventeenth century. Here and there, black men seemed to enjoy a status similar to their white counterparts. Free black men in the Chesapeake participated fully in the commercial and legal life of the colonies. They owned land, farmed, lent money, sued in the courts, served as jurors and minor officials, and at times voted.

This suggests that before the 1670s the English in the Chesapeake did not draw a strict line between white freedom and black slavery. Yet, since the early 1600s, the ruling elite had treated black servants differently than white servants. Over the decades, the region’s British population gradually came to assume that persons of African descent were inalterably alien. This sentiment did not become universal among the white poor during the colonial

period; however, it provided a foundation for what historian Winthrop D. Jordan calls the “unthinking decision” among the British in the Chesapeake to establish **chattel slavery**. In this form of slavery, Africans and people of African descent became their master’s private property on a level with livestock.

chattel slavery A form of slavery in which the enslaved are treated legally as property.

Race and the Origins of Black Slavery

Between 1640 and 1700, the British tobacco-producing colonies stretching from Delaware to northern Carolina underwent a social and demographic revolution. An economy once based primarily on the labor of white indentured servants became an economy based on the labor of black slaves. In Virginia, for example, the slave population in 1671 was less than 5 percent of the colony’s total non-Indian population. White indentured servants outnumbered black slaves by three to one. By 1700, however, slaves constituted at least 20 percent of Virginia’s population. Most agricultural laborers were probably slaves.

Although historians debate how this extraordinary change occurred, several interrelated factors brought it about. Some of these factors are easily understood. Others are more complicated and profound because they involve basic assumptions about the American nation.

Several economic and demographic developments led to the mass enslavement of people of African descent in the tobacco colonies. First, during the second quarter of the seventeenth century, Britain’s Caribbean sugar colonies set a precedent for enslaving Africans. Second, fewer poor white people came to the tobacco colonies as they found better opportunities for themselves in other regions of British North America. Third, as Britain gained increased control over the Atlantic slave trade, African slaves became less costly.

These changing circumstances provide the context for the beginnings of black slavery as a major phenomenon in British North America. Yet race and class were crucial in shaping the *character* of slavery in the British mainland colonies. From the first arrival of Africans in the Chesapeake, those English who exercised authority made decisions that qualified the apparent social mobility the Africans enjoyed. The English had historically distinguished between how they treated each other and how they treated those who were physically and culturally different from them. Such discrimination had been the basis of English colonial policies toward the Irish—whom England had been trying to conquer for centuries—and the American Indians. Because the English considered Africans even more different from themselves than either the Irish or the Indians, they assumed from the beginning that Africans were generally inferior.

Therefore, although black and white servants residing in the Chesapeake during the early seventeenth century had much in common, their masters made distinctions between them based on race. The few women of African descent who arrived in the Chesapeake during those years worked in the tobacco fields with the male servants, while most white women performed domestic duties. Also, unlike white servants, black servants usually did not have surnames, and early census reports listed them separately from white people. By the 1640s, black people could not bear arms, and local Anglican priests (although not those in England) maintained that persons of African descent could not become Christians. Although sexual contacts among blacks, whites, and Indians were common, colonial authorities soon discouraged them. In 1662 Virginia’s **House of Burgesses** (the colony’s legislature) declared that “any christian [white person]” who committed “Fornication with a negro man or woman, he or shee soe offending” would pay double the fine set for committing the same offense with a white person.

These distinctions suggest that the status of black servants had never been the same as that of white servants. But only starting in the 1640s do records indicate a predilection toward making black people slaves rather than servants. During that decade, courts in Virginia and Maryland began to reflect an assumption that it was permissible for persons of African descent to serve their master for life rather than a set term. By then black men, women, and children often sold for higher prices than their white counterparts on the explicit provision that black people would serve “for their Life tyme,” or “for ever.”

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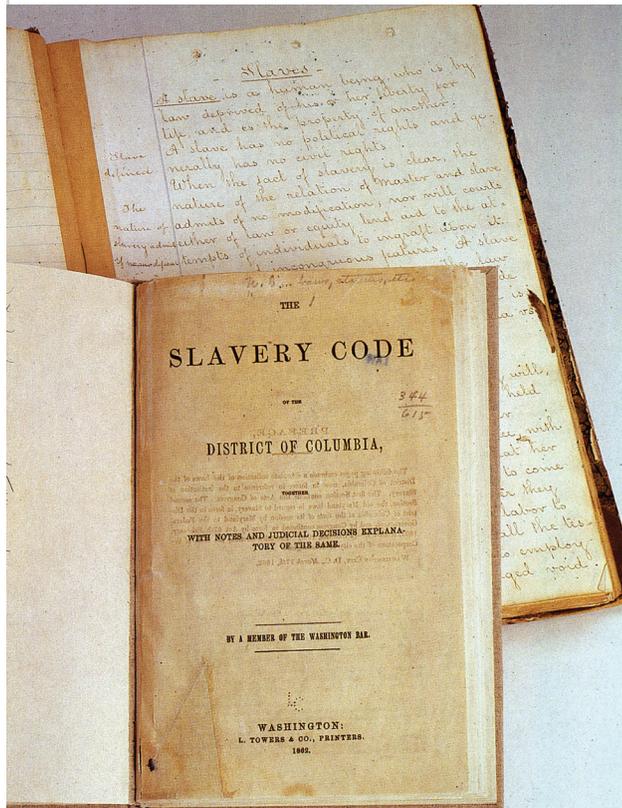
House of Burgesses A representative body established at Jamestown, Virginia, in 1619.



Read on **MyHistoryLab**

Document: Maryland Addresses the Status of Slaves in 1644

 Read on MyHistoryLab Document: The Colony of Virginia Defines Slavery, 1661–1705



Slave codes regulated slaves and asserted the rights of slave owners.

slave codes Sometimes known as “black codes,” a series of laws passed to define slaves as property and specify the legal powers of masters over slaves.

manumission The act of freeing a slave by the slave’s master.

planter elite Those who owned the largest tobacco plantations.

The Emergence of Chattel Slavery

Legal documents and statute books reveal that, during the 1660s, other aspects of chattel slavery emerged in the Chesapeake colonies. Bills of sale began to stipulate that the children of black female servants would also be servants for life. In 1662 the House of Burgesses decreed that a child’s condition—free or unfree—followed that of the mother. This ran counter to English common law, which assumed that a child’s status derived from the father. The change permitted masters to exploit their black female servants sexually without having to acknowledge the children who might result from such contacts. Just as significant, by the mid-1660s statutes in the Chesapeake colonies assumed servitude to be the natural condition of black people.

With these laws, slavery in British North America emerged in the form that it retained until the American Civil War: a racially defined system of perpetual involuntary servitude that compelled almost all black people to work as agricultural laborers. **Slave codes** enacted between 1660 and 1710 further defined American slavery as a system that sought as much to control persons of African descent as to exploit their labor. Slaves could not testify against white people in court, own property, leave their master’s estate without a pass, congregate in groups larger than three or four, enter into contracts, or marry. They could not, of course, bear arms. Profession of Christianity no longer protected a black person from enslavement, nor was conversion a cause for **manumission**. In 1669 the House of Burgesses exempted from felony charges masters who killed a slave while administering punishment.

By 1700, just as the slave system began to expand in the southern colonies, enslaved Africans and African Americans had been reduced legally to the status of domestic animals. The only major exception was that, unlike animals (or masters who abused slaves), the law held slaves strictly accountable for crimes they committed.

Bacon’s Rebellion and American Slavery

The series of events that led to the enslavement of black people in the Chesapeake tobacco colonies preceded their emergence as the great majority of laborers in those colonies. The dwindling supply of white indentured servants, the growing availability of Africans, and preexisting white racial biases affected this transformation. But the key event in bringing it about was the rebellion led by Nathaniel Bacon in 1676.

Bacon was an English aristocrat who had recently migrated to Virginia. The immediate cause of his rebellion was a disagreement over Indian policy between him and the colony’s royal governor William Berkeley. Bacon’s followers were mainly white indentured servants and former indentured servants who resented the control the tobacco-planting elite exercised over the colony’s resources and government. But Bacon also appealed to black slaves to join his rebellion. This suggests that poor white and black people had a chance to unite against the **planter elite**.

Before such a class-based, biracial alliance could be realized, Bacon died of dysentery, and his rebellion collapsed. His uprising nevertheless convinced the colony’s elite that continued reliance on white agricultural laborers, who could become free and get guns, was dangerous. By switching from indentured white servants to an enslaved black labor force that the planters assumed would never become free or have firearms, the planters hoped to avoid class conflict among white people. Increasingly thereafter, white Americans perceived that both their freedom from class conflict and their prosperity rested on denying freedom to black Americans.

Plantation Slavery, 1700–1750

3-3 What were the characteristics of plantation slavery from 1700 to 1750?

The reliance of Chesapeake planters on slavery to meet their labor needs resulted from racial prejudice, the declining availability of white indentured servants, the increasing availability of Africans, and fear of white class conflict. When, following the shift from white indentured to enslaved black labor, the demand for tobacco in Europe increased sharply, the newly dominant slave labor system expanded rapidly.

Tobacco Colonies

Between 1700 and 1770, some 80,000 Africans arrived in the tobacco colonies, and even more African Americans were born into slavery there (see Figure 3–1). Tobacco planting spread from Virginia and Maryland to Delaware and North Carolina and from the coastal plain to the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains. In the process, American slavery assumed the form it kept for the next 165 years.

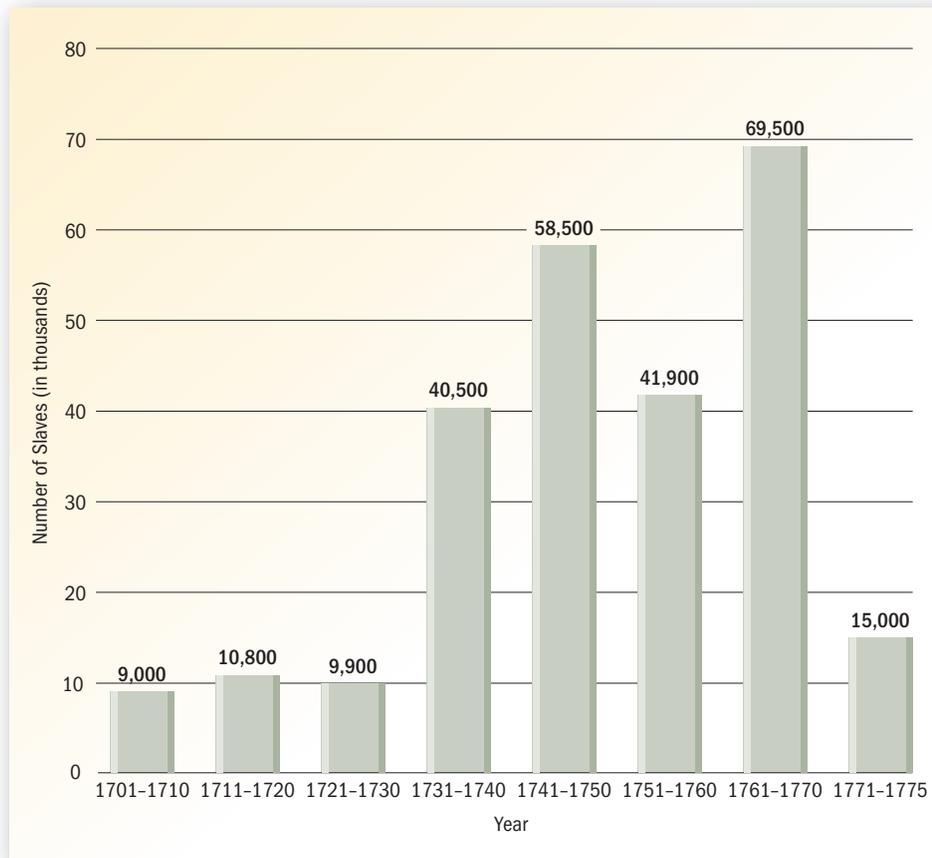


FIGURE 3–1 AFRICANS BROUGHT AS SLAVES TO BRITISH NORTH AMERICA, 1701–1775

The rise in the number of captive Africans shipped to British North America during the early eighteenth century reflects the increasing dependence of British planters on African slave labor. The declines in slave imports during the periods 1751 to 1760 and 1771 to 1775 resulted from disruptions to commerce associated with the French and Indian War (or Seven Years' War) and the struggle between the colonies and Great Britain that preceded the American War for Independence.

SOURCE: From *The American Colonies: From Settlement of Independence*, by R. C. Simmons (© R. C. Simmons, 1976) is reproduced by permission of PFD (www.pfd.co.uk) on behalf of R. C. Simmons.

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PROFILE Anthony Johnson

LITTLE IS KNOWN of the individual Africans and African Americans who lived in North America during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. A lack of contemporary accounts prevents us from truly understanding their personalities. In rare instances, however, black people emerge from bits and pieces of information preserved in court records. This is the case for Anthony Johnson and his family. Their accomplishments cast light on African-American life in the seventeenth-century Chesapeake.

Anthony Johnson arrived at Jamestown in 1621 from England, but his original home may have been Angola. He was fortunate the following year to escape death in an Indian attack on Jamestown. He was one of four out of 56 inhabitants on the Bennett plantation, where he labored, to survive. He was also lucky to wed “Mary a Negro Woman,” who in 1625 was the only woman residing at Bennett’s.

In 1635 Johnson’s master, Nathaniel Littleton, released him from further service. Johnson, like other free men of this time and place, then scrambled to acquire wealth in the form of land, livestock, and human beings. He received his own 250-acre plantation in 1651 under the “headright system,” by which the colonial government encouraged population growth by awarding 50 acres of land for every new servant a settler brought to Virginia.

This meant that Johnson had become the master of five servants, some of them white. His estate was on a neck of land between two creeks that flowed into the Pungoteague River in Northampton County. A few years later his relatives, John and Richard Johnson, also acquired land in this area. John brought 11 servants to the colony and received 550 acres, and Richard brought two and received one hundred acres.

The Johnson estates existed among white-owned properties in the same area. Like their white neighbors, the

Johnsons were not part of the planting elite. But they owned their own land, farmed, and had social, economic, and legal relations with other colonists. Anthony Johnson in particular engaged in litigation that tells us much about black life in early Virginia.

In 1654, his lawsuit against his black servant John Casor and a white neighbor set a precedent in favor of black slavery but also revealed Johnson’s legal rights. Casor claimed that Johnson “had kept him his serv[an]t seven years longer than hee should or ought.” Johnson, whom court records described as an “old Negro,” responded that he was entitled to “ye Negro [Casor] for his life.” Johnson momentarily relented when he realized that if he persisted in his suit, Casor could win damages against him. Shortly thereafter, however, Johnson brought suit against his white neighbor Robert Parker, whom Johnson charged had detained Casor “under pretense [that] the s[ai]d John Casor is a freeman.” This time the court ruled in Johnson’s favor. It returned Casor to him and required Parker to pay court costs.

During the 1660s, the extended Johnson family moved to Somerset, Maryland, where its members had acquired additional land. They were still prospering as planters during the early eighteenth century. Some family members moved on to New Jersey and others to Delaware, where some of them intermarried with the Nanticoke Indians. Historian John H. Russell exaggerated when he claimed in 1913 that black people in the seventeenth century had roughly the same opportunities as free white servants. But industrious and lucky black people at that time could achieve a social and economic standing that became nearly impossible for their descendants.

By 1750, 144,872 slaves lived in Virginia and Maryland, accounting for 61 percent of all the slaves in British North America. Another 40,000 slaves lived in the rice-producing regions of South Carolina and Georgia, accounting for 17 percent. It is important to note that, unlike in the sugar colonies of the Caribbean where white people were a tiny minority, they constituted a majority in the tobacco colonies and a large minority in the rice colonies. Also, most white southerners did not own slaves. Nevertheless, the economic development of the region depended on black slaves.

The conditions under which slaves lived varied. Most slaveholders farmed small tracts of land and owned fewer than five slaves. These masters and their slaves worked together and developed close relationships. Other masters owned thousands of acres of land and rarely saw most of their slaves. During the early eighteenth century, the latter type of masters—great planters—divided their slaves among several small holdings. They did this to avoid concentrating potentially rebellious Africans in one area. As the proportion of newly arrived

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Africans in the slave population declined later in the century, larger concentrations of slaves became more common.

From the beginnings of slavery in North America, masters tried to make slaves work harder and faster while slaves sought to conserve their energy, take breaks, and socialize with each other. African men regarded field labor as women’s work and tried to avoid it. But, especially if they had incentives, enslaved Africans could be efficient workers. One incentive to which both slaves and masters looked forward was the annual harvest festival. These festivals, derived from both Africa and Europe, became common throughout the British colonies early in the eighteenth century.

Before the mid-eighteenth century, nearly all slaves—both men and women—worked in the fields. On the smaller farms, they worked with their master. On larger estates, they worked for an overseer, who was usually white. Like other agricultural workers, enslaved African Americans normally worked from sunup to sundown with breaks for food and rest. Even during colonial times, they usually had Sunday off.

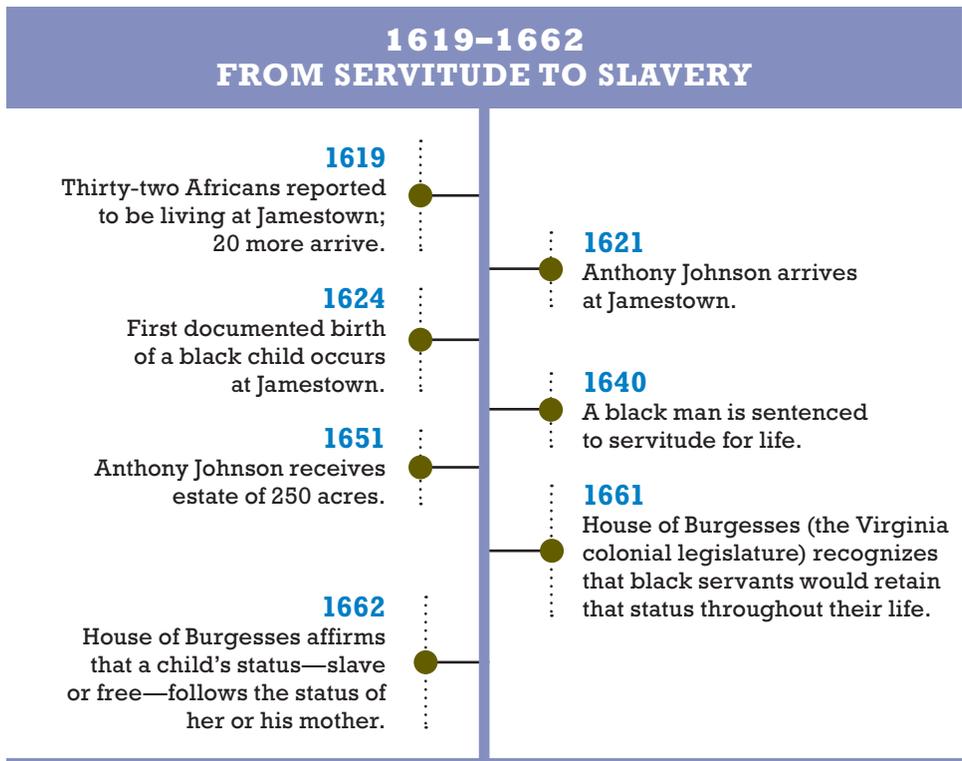
After 1750 some black men began to hold such skilled occupations on plantations as carpenter, smith, carter, cooper, miller, potter, sawyer, tanner, shoemaker, and weaver. By 1768 one South Carolina planter noted that “in established Plantations, the Planter has Tradesmen of all kinds in his Gang of Slaves, and ’tis a Rule with them, never to pay Money for what can be made upon their Estates, not a Lock, a Hinge, or a Nail if they can avoid it.”

Black women had, with the exception of weaving, less access to skilled occupations. When they did not work in the fields, they worked as domestic servants in the homes of their masters, cooking, washing, cleaning, and caring for children. These duties were often extremely draining because, unlike fieldwork, they did not end when the sun went down.

Low-Country Slavery

South of the tobacco colonies, on the coastal plain or **low country** of Carolina and Georgia, a distinctive slave society developed (see Map 3–1). The West Indian plantation system had much more influence here than in the Chesapeake, and rice, not tobacco, became the staple crop.

low country The coastal regions of South Carolina and Georgia.



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MAP 3-1 REGIONS OF COLONIAL NORTH AMERICA, 1683–1763

The British colonies on the North American mainland were divided into four regions. They were bordered on the south by Spanish Florida and to the west by regions claimed by France.

How did African Americans in the British colonies benefit from the close proximity of regions controlled by France and Spain?

The first British settlers who arrived in 1670 at Charleston (in what would later become South Carolina) came mainly from Barbados, a sugar-producing island in the West Indies, rather than from England. Many of them had been slaveholders on that island and brought slaves with them. Therefore, in the low country, black people were never indentured servants. They were chattel from the start. The region's subtropical climate discouraged white settlement and encouraged dependence on black labor the way it did in the sugar islands. During the early years, nearly one-third of the settlers were African, most of them male. By the early eighteenth century, more Africans had arrived than white people. Carolina also became the center of an Indian slave trade. White Carolinians enslaved more American Indians than other British colonists did. During the early 1700s, Indians accounted for approximately one-quarter of the colony's slave population. Although official colonial policy sought to keep Africans and Indians apart, black slaves sometimes helped acquire and transport Indian slaves. Carolina exported Indian slaves to the West Indies and to other mainland British colonies.

By 1740 the Carolina low country had 40,000 slaves, who constituted 90 percent of the population in the region around Charleston. In all, 94,000 Africans arrived at Charleston between 1706 and 1776, which made it North America's leading port of entry for Africans during the eighteenth century. A Swiss immigrant commented in 1737 that the region "looks more like a negro country than like a country settled by white people."

During its first three decades, Carolina supplied Barbados with beef. Therefore, white settlers sought West Africans from the Gambia River region as slaves because they were skilled herders. Starting around 1700, when the low-country planters began concentrating on growing rice, they sought slaves skilled in growing that crop, which had been grown in West Africa for thousands of years. Economies of scale, in which an industry becomes more efficient as it grows larger, were more important in the production of rice than tobacco. Although tobacco could be profitably

produced on small farms, rice required large acreages. Therefore, large plantations similar to those on the sugar islands of the West Indies became the rule in the low country.

In 1732 King George II of England chartered the colony of Georgia to serve as a buffer between South Carolina and Spanish Florida. James Oglethorpe, who received the royal charter, wanted to establish a refuge for England's poor, who were expected to become virtuous through their labor. Consequently, in 1734 Oglethorpe and the colony's other trustees banned slavery in Georgia. Economic difficulties, combined with land hunger among white South Carolinians, soon led to the ban's repeal. During the 1750s, rice cultivation and slavery spread into Georgia's coastal plain. By 1773 Georgia had as many black people—15,000—as white people.

Absentee plantation owners became the rule in South Carolina and Georgia. In these colonies planters preferred to live in Charleston or Savannah where sea breezes provided relief from the heat. Meanwhile, enslaved Africans on low-country plantations suffered a high mortality rate from diseases, overwork, and poor treatment, just as their counterparts did on Barbados

VOICES A Description of an Eighteenth-Century Virginia Plantation

The following eyewitness account of a large Virginia plantation in Fairfax County indicates the sorts of skilled labor slaves performed by the mid-eighteenth century. George Mason, one of Virginia's leading statesmen during the Revolutionary War era, owned this plantation, which he named Gunston Hall in 1758. The account is by one of Mason's sons.

My father had among his slaves carpenters, coopers, sawyers, blacksmiths, tanners, curriers, shoemakers, spinners, weavers and knitters, and even a distiller. His woods furnished timber and plank for the carpenters and coopers, and charcoal for the blacksmith, his cattle killed for his own consumption and for sale supplied skins for tanners, curriers, and shoemakers, and his sheep gave wool and his fields produced cotton and flax for the weavers and spinners, and his orchards fruit for the distiller. His carpenters and sawyers built and kept in repair all the dwelling-houses, barns, stables, ploughs, harrows, gates, &c., on the plantations and the outhouses at the home house. His coopers made the hogsheads the tobacco was prized in and the tight casks to hold the cider and other liquors. The tanners and curriers with the proper vats &c., tanned and dressed the skins as well for upper as for lower leather

to the full amount of the consumption of the estate, and shoemakers made them into shoes for the negroes. . . . The blacksmith did all the iron work required by the establishment, as making and repairing ploughs, harrows, teeth chains, bolts, &c., &c. The spinners, weavers and knitters made all the coarse cloths and stockings used by the negroes, and nearly all worn by the children of it. The distiller made every fall a good deal of apple, peach and persimmon brandy. . . . Moreover, all the beeves and hogs for consumption or sale were driven up and slaughtered there at the proper seasons, and whatever was to be preserved was salted and packed away for after distribution.

1. What does this passage indicate about plantation life in mid-eighteenth-century Virginia?
2. How does the description of black people presented here compare to the passage from the South Carolina statute book that begins this chapter?

SOURCE: Edmond S. Morgan, *Virginians at Home: Family Life in the Eighteenth Century* (Williamsburg, VA: Colonial Williamsburg, 1952), 53–54. Reprinted with permission.

and other sugar islands. Therefore, unlike the slave population in the Chesapeake colonies, the slave population in the low country did not grow by natural reproduction. Instead, until shortly before the American Revolution, it grew through continued arrivals from Africa.

Low-country slave society developed striking paradoxes in race relations. As the region's black population grew, white people became fearful of revolt, and by 1698 Carolina had the strictest slave code in North America. In 1721, Charleston organized a "Negro watch" to enforce a curfew on its black population, and watchmen could shoot recalcitrant Africans and African Americans on sight. Yet, as the passage that begins this chapter indicates, black people in Carolina faced the quandary of being both feared and needed by white people. Even as persons of European descent grew fearful of black revolt, the colony in 1704 authorized the arming of enslaved black men when needed for defense against Indian and Spanish raids.

Of equal significance was the appearance in Carolina, and to some extent in Georgia, of distinct classes among people of color. Like the low-country society itself, such classes were more similar to those in the Caribbean sugar islands than to the mainland colonies to the north. A Creole population that had absorbed European values lived alongside white people in Charleston and Savannah. Members of this Creole population were frequently mixed-race relatives of their masters and enjoyed social and economic privileges denied to slaves who labored on the nearby rice plantations. Yet this urban mixed-race class was under constant white supervision.

In contrast, slaves who lived in the country retained considerable autonomy in their daily routines. The intense cultivation required to produce rice encouraged the evolution of a "task system" of labor on the low-country plantations. Rather than working in gangs as in the tobacco colonies, slaves on rice plantations had daily tasks. When they completed these tasks, they could work on plots of land assigned to them or do what they pleased without white supervision. Because black people were the great majority in the low-country

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plantations, they also preserved more of their African heritage than did black people who lived in the region's cities or in the more northerly British mainland colonies.

Plantation Technology

During the American colonial era, most people of African descent living on southern plantations employed technologies associated with raising and processing crops for distant markets. A minority gained technical skills associated with a variety of trades.

In tobacco-growing regions, the harvest began a process of preparing leaves for market. Slaves hung plants in “tobacco houses,” whose open construction kept out sunlight and rain while allowing breezes to circulate and dry the leaves. After six weeks, slaves removed the leaves and packaged them in wooden barrels for shipment. On low-country rice plantations, slaves built, operated, and maintained irrigation systems. They threshed, winnowed, and pounded rice to remove the husks. At first they performed these labor-intensive operations by hand. By the mid-eighteenth century, however, masters introduced “winnowing fans and pounding mills” powered by draft animals. Also, during the eighteenth century, low-country slave artisans built the vats, pumps, and structures required for turning indigo plants into a blue dye that was popular in Europe. As the indigo fermented in vats—releasing noxious fumes—slaves pumped in water, stirred and beat the plants into pulp, drained away blue liquid, solidified it with lime, dried it, and cut it into blocks.

Enslaved carpenters used a variety of hand tools to construct the buildings required for all these processes. They also built other plantation buildings. Slave sawyers operated water-powered mills to cut lumber. Other slaves made barrels. They cut and prepared oak staves—a process that took three years—trimmed the staves, soaked them, and bound them with iron hoops. Plantation blacksmiths used charcoal-burning hearths and billows to form the hoops from iron ingots and—using tongs and hammers—pounded the hoops into shape on anvils. They used a similar process to fashion nails, axe and hammer heads, hooks, horse shoes, hinges, and locks.

Like carpentry, tanning was essential. But, like indigo production, it was a laborious, smelly, and extended operation. Slaves cooked deer and cow hides in lime to remove fur and then washed off the lime with a mixture of animal dung, salt, and water. They used *tannin*, a chemical found in tree bark, to cure the hides. After drying, softening, stretching, and trimming, slave craftsmen used the leather to make shoes, boots, garments, and other articles.

Slave Life in Early America

3-4 What factors affected the way slaves lived in early America?

Little evidence survives of the individual lives of enslaved black people in colonial North America. This is because they, along with American Indians and most white people of that era, were poor, illiterate, and kept no records. Yet recent studies provide a glimpse of their material culture.

Eighteenth-century housing for slaves was minimal and often temporary. In the Chesapeake, small log cabins predominated. They had dirt floors, brick fireplaces, wooden chimneys, and few, if any, windows. African styles of architecture were more common in coastal South Carolina and Georgia. In these regions, slaves built the walls of their houses with tabby—a mixture of lime, oyster shells, and sand—or, occasionally, mud. In either case, the houses had thatched roofs. Early in the eighteenth century, when single African men made up the mass of the slave population, these structures served as dormitories. Later they housed generations of black families.

The amount of furniture and cooking utensils the cabins contained varied from place to place and according to how long the cabins were occupied. In some cabins, the only furniture consisted of wooden boxes for both storage and seating and planks for beds. But a 1697 inventory of items contained in a slave cabin in Virginia lists chairs, a bed,

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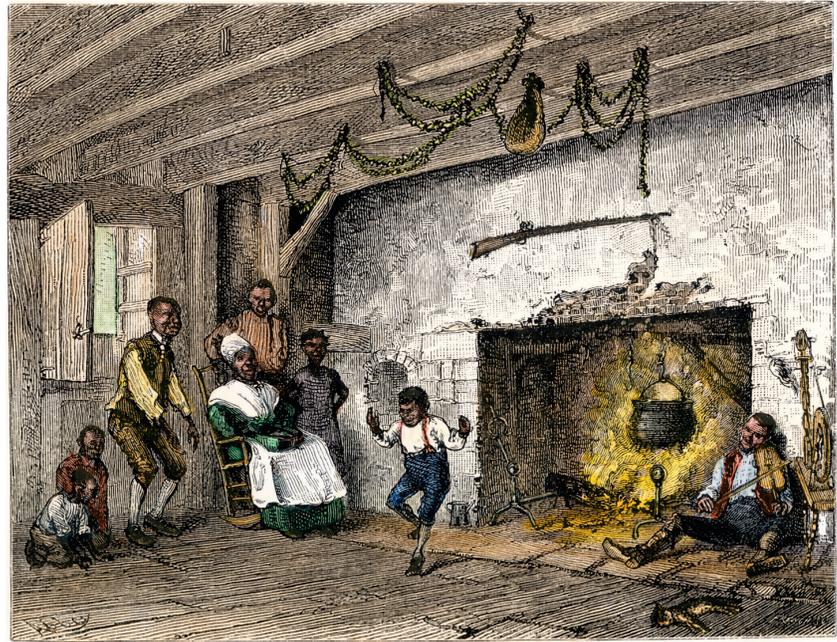
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a large iron kettle, a brass kettle, an iron pot, a frying pan, and a “beer barrel.” Enslaved black people, like contemporary Indians and white people, used hollowed-out gourds for cups and carted water in wooden buckets for drinking, cooking, and washing. As the eighteenth century progressed, slave housing on large plantations became more substantial, and slaves acquired tables, linens, chamber pots, and oil lamps. Yet primitive, poorly furnished log cabins persisted in many regions even after the abolition of slavery in 1865.

At first, slaves wore minimal clothing during summer. Men had breechcloths; women had skirts, leaving their upper bodies bare; and children went naked until puberty. Later men wore shirts, trousers, and hats while working in the fields. Women wore shifts (loose, simple dresses) and covered their heads with handkerchiefs. In winter, masters provided heavier cotton and woolen clothing and cheap leather shoes. In the early years, much of the clothing, or at least the cloth used to make it, came from England. Later, as the account of George Mason’s Gunston Hall plantation indicated, homespun fabric made by slaves replaced English cloth. From the seventeenth century onward, slave women brightened clothing with dyes made from bark, decorated clothing with ornaments, and created African-style head wraps, hats, and hairstyles. In this manner, African Americans retained a sense of personal style compatible with West African culture.

Food consisted of corn, yams, salt pork, and occasionally salt beef and salt fish. Slaves caught fish and raised chickens and rabbits. When, during the eighteenth century, farmers in the Chesapeake began planting wheat, slaves baked biscuits. In the South Carolina low country, rice became an important part of African-American diets, but even there corn was the staple. During colonial times, slaves occasionally supplemented this limited diet with vegetables they raised in their gardens. They planted cabbage, cauliflower, black-eyed peas, turnips, collard greens, and rutabagas.



SLAVES' QUARTERS IN THE CELLAR OF THE OLD KNICKERBOCKER MANSION.

This 1876 drawing romanticizes the home life of slaves. The Knickerbocker Mansion is located in Schaghticoke, New York, and dates to 1770.

Miscegenation and Creolization

3-5 What role did miscegenation and creolization have in early African-American history?

When Africans first arrived in the Chesapeake during the early seventeenth century, they interacted culturally and physically with white indentured servants and with American Indians. This mixing of peoples changed all three groups. Interracial sexual contacts—miscegenation—produced people of mixed race. Meanwhile, cultural exchanges became an essential part of the process of creolization that led African parents to produce African-American children. When, as often happened, miscegenation and creolization occurred together, the result was both physical and cultural. However, the dominant British minority in North America during the colonial period defined persons of mixed race as black. Although enslaved mulattoes—those of mixed African and European ancestry—enjoyed some advantages over slaves who had a purely African ancestry, mulattoes as a group did not receive enhanced legal status.

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Miscegenation between black people and white people, and black people and Indians, took place throughout British North America during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. But it was less extensive and accepted than in sugar colonies in the Caribbean, Latin America, or French Canada, where many French men married Indian women. British North America was exceptional because many more white women migrated there than to Canada, Latin America, or the Caribbean. Therefore, in British North America white men were far less likely to take black or Indian wives and concubines. Sexual relations between Africans and Indians were also more limited than they were elsewhere. This was because the coastal Indian population had drastically declined before large numbers of Africans arrived.

Yet miscegenation between black people and the remaining Indians certainly was extensive in British North America. There were also striking examples of black-white intermarriage. In 1656 in Northumberland County, Virginia, a mulatto woman named Elizabeth Kay successfully sued for her freedom and immediately thereafter married her white lawyer. In Norfolk County, Virginia, in 1671, Francis Skipper had to pay a tax on his wife Anne because she was black. In Westmoreland County, Virginia, in 1691, Hester Tate, a white indentured servant, and her husband James Tate, a black slave, had four children. One was apprenticed to her master and the other three to his.

Colonial assemblies banned such interracial marriages mainly to keep white women from bearing mulatto children. The assemblies feared that having free white mothers might allow persons of mixed race to sue and gain their freedom, thereby creating a legally recognized free mixed-race class. Such a class, wealthy white people feared, would blur the distinction between the dominant and subordinate races and weaken white supremacy. The assemblies did far less to prevent white male masters from sexually exploiting their black female slaves—although they considered such exploitation immoral—because the children of such liaisons would be slaves.

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Read on MyHistoryLab Document: An Architect Describes African-American Music and Instruments in 1818



This eighteenth-century painting of slaves on a South Carolina plantation provides graphic proof of the continuities between West African culture and the emerging culture of African Americans. The religious dance, the drum and banjo, and elements of the participants' clothing are all West African in origin.

Abby Aldrich, Rockefeller Folk Art Museum, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, VA.

The Origins of African-American Culture

3-6 How did African-American culture originate?

Creolization and miscegenation transformed the descendants of the Africans who arrived in North America into African Americans. Historians long believed that in this process the Creoles lost their African heritage. But since Melville J. Herskovits published *The Myth of the Negro Past* in 1941 (see Chapter 2), scholars have found many African legacies not only in African-American culture but in American culture in general.

The second generation of people of African descent in North America did lose their parents' native languages and their ethnic identity as Igbos, Angolans, or Senegambians. But they retained a generalized West African heritage and passed it on to their descendants. Among the major elements of that heritage were family structure and notions of kinship, religious concepts and practices, African words and modes of expression, musical style and instruments, cooking methods and foods, folk literature, and folk arts.

The preservation of the West African extended family was the basis of African-American culture. Because most Africans imported into the British colonies during the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries were males, most black men of that era could not have wives and children. It was not until the Atlantic slave trade declined briefly during the 1750s that sex ratios became more balanced and African-American family life began to flourish. Without that family life, black people could not have maintained as much of Africa as they did.

During the Middle Passage, enslaved Africans created “fictive kin relationships” for mutual support. In dire circumstances, African Americans continued to improvise family structures. By the mid-eighteenth century, however, extended black families based on biological relationships dominated. Black people retained knowledge of these relationships to second and third cousins over several generations and wide stretches of territory. These extended families had roots in Africa but were also a result of—and a reaction to—slavery. West African **incest taboos** encouraged slaves to pick mates who lived on plantations other than their own. The sale of slaves away from their immediate families tended to extend families over wide areas. Once established, such far-flung kinship ties helped others, who had been forced to leave home, to adapt to new conditions under a new master. And kinfolk sheltered escapees.

Extended families also influenced African-American naming practices, which in turn reinforced family ties. Africans named male children after close relatives. This custom survived in America because boys were more likely to be separated from their parents by being sold than girls were. Having the name of one's father or grandfather preserved one's family identity. Also, early in the eighteenth century, when more African Americans began to use surnames, they clung to the name of their original master. This reflected a West African predisposition to link a family name with a certain location. Like taking a parent's name, it helped maintain family relationships despite repeated scatterings.

The result was that African Americans preserved given and family names over many generations. Black men continued to bear such African names as Cudjo, Quash, Cuffee, and Sambo, and black women such names as Quasheba and Juba. Even when masters imposed demeaning classical names, such as Caesar, Pompey, Venus, and Juno, black Americans passed them on from generation to generation.

Bible names did not become common among African Americans until the mid-eighteenth century. This was because before that time masters often refused to allow slaves to be converted to Christianity. As a result, African religions—both indigenous and Islamic—persisted in parts of America well into the nineteenth century. The indigenous religions in particular maintained a premodern perception of the unity of the natural and the supernatural, the secular and the sacred, and the living and the dead. Black Americans continued to perform an African circle dance known as the “ring shout” at funerals, and they decorated graves with shells and pottery in the West African manner. They looked to recently arrived

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incest taboos Customary rules against sexual relations and marriage within family and kinship groups.

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spirit possession A belief rooted in West African religions that spirits may possess human souls.

divination A form of magic aimed at telling the future by interpreting a variety of signs.

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 **Read on MyHistoryLab Document:**
Exploring America: The Great Awakening

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Africans for religious guidance, held bodies of water to be sacred, remained in daily contact with their ancestors through **spirit possession**, and practiced **divination** and magic. When they became ill, they turned to “herb doctors” and “root workers.” Even when many African Americans began to convert to Christianity during the mid-eighteenth century, West African religious thought and practice shaped their lives.

The Great Awakening

The major turning point in African-American religion came in conjunction with the religious revival known as the Great Awakening. This extensive social movement of the mid- to late-eighteenth century grew out of growing dissatisfaction among white Americans with a deterministic and increasingly formalistic style of Protestantism that seemed to deny most people a chance for salvation. During the early 1730s in western Massachusetts, a Congregationalist minister named Jonathan Edwards began an emotional and participatory ministry aimed at bringing more people into the church. Later that decade, George Whitefield, an Englishman who along with John Wesley founded the Methodist Church, carried a similarly evangelical style of Christianity to the mainland colonies. In his sermons, Whitefield appealed to emotions, offered salvation to all who believed in Christ, and—although he did not advocate emancipation—preached to black people as well as white people.

Some people of African descent had converted to Christianity before Whitefield’s arrival in North America. But two factors had prevented widespread black conversion. First, most masters feared that converted slaves would interpret their new religious status as a step toward freedom and equality. A South Carolina minister lamented in 1713, “The Masters of Slaves are generally of Opinion that a Slave grows worse by being a Christian; and therefore instead of instructing them in the principles of Christianity . . . malign and traduce those that attempt it.” Second, many slaves remained so devoted to their ancestral religions that Christianity did not attract them.

With the Great Awakening, however, a process of general conversion began. African Americans did indeed link the spiritual equality preached by evangelical ministers with a hope for earthly equality. They tied salvation for the soul with liberation for the body. They recognized that the preaching style Whitefield and other evangelicals adopted had much in common with West African “spirit possession.” As in West African religion, eighteenth-century revivalism in North America emphasized personal rebirth, singing, movement, and emotion. The practice of total body immersion during baptism in rivers, ponds, and lakes that gave the Baptist church its name paralleled West African water rites.

Because it drew African Americans into an evangelical movement that helped shape American society, the Great Awakening increased mutual black-white acculturation. Revivalists appealed to the poor of all races and emphasized spiritual equality. Evangelical Anglican, Baptist, Methodist, and Presbyterian churches welcomed black people. Members of these biracial churches addressed each other as *brother* and *sister*. Black members took communion with white members and served as church officers. The same church discipline applied to both races. By the late eighteenth century, a few black men gained ordination as priests and ministers and—often while still enslaved—preached to white congregations. They thereby influenced white people’s perception of how services should be conducted.

Black worshippers also influenced white preachers and white religion. In 1756, a white minister in Virginia noted that African Americans spent nights in his kitchen. He recorded in his diary that “sometimes, when I have awakened about two-or three-a-clock in the morning, a torrent of sacred harmony poured into my chamber, and carried my mind away to Heaven.”

Other factors, however, favored the development of a distinct African-American church. From the start, white churches seated black people apart from white people, belying claims to spiritual equality. Black members took communion *after* white members. Masters also tried to use religion to instill in their chattels such self-serving Christian virtues as meekness, humility, and obedience. Consequently, when they could, African Americans established their own churches. Dancing, shouting, clapping, and singing became especially

characteristic of their religious meetings. Black spirituals probably date from the eighteenth century, and like African-American Christianity itself, they blended West African and European elements.

African Americans also retained the West African assumption that the souls of the dead returned to their homeland and rejoined their ancestors. Reflecting this family-oriented view of death, African-American funerals were often loud and joyous occasions with dancing, laughing, and drinking. Perhaps most important, the emerging black church reinforced black people's collective identity and helped them persevere in slavery.

Language, Music, and Folk Literature

Although African Americans did not retain their ancestral languages, those languages contributed to the **pidgins** and creolized languages that became **Black English** by the nineteenth century. It was in the low country, with its large and isolated black populations, that African-English creoles lasted the longest. The Gullah and Geechee dialects of the sea islands of South Carolina and Georgia, which combine African words and grammatical elements with a basically English structure, are still spoken today. In other regions, where black people were less numerous, creole languages did not last so long. Nevertheless, they contributed many words to American—particularly southern—English. Among them are *yam*, *banjo* (from *mbanza*), *tote*, *goober* (peanut), *buckra* (white man), *cooter* (tortoise), *gumbo* (okra), *nanse* (spider), *samba* (dance), *tabby* (a form of concrete), and *voodoo*.

Music was another essential part of West African life, and it remained so among African Americans, who preserved an antiphonal, call-and-response style of singing with an emphasis on improvisation, complex rhythms, and a strong beat. They sang while working and during religious ceremonies. Early on, masters banned drums and horns because of their potential for long-distance communication among slaves. But the African banjo survived in America, and African Americans quickly adopted the violin and guitar. At night, in their cabins or around communal fires, slaves accompanied these instruments with bones and spoons. Aside from family and religion, music may have been the most important aspect of African culture in the lives of American slaves. Eventually, African-American music influenced all forms of American popular music.

West African folk literature also survived in North America. African tales, proverbs, and riddles—with accretions from American Indian and European stories—entertained, instructed, and united African Americans. Just as the black people on the sea islands of South Carolina and Georgia were most able to retain elements of African language, so did their folk literature remain closest to its African counterpart. Africans used tales of how weak animals like rabbits outsmarted stronger animals like hyenas and lions to symbolize the power of the common people over unjust rulers (see Chapter 1). African Americans used similar tales to portray the ability of slaves to outsmart and ridicule their masters.

The African-American Impact on Colonial Culture

African Americans also influenced the development of white culture. As early as the seventeenth century, black musicians performed English ballads for white audiences in a distinctively African-American style. In the northern and Chesapeake colonies, people of African descent helped determine how all Americans celebrated. By the eighteenth century, slaves in these regions organized black election or coronation festivals that lasted for several days. Sometimes called *Pinkster* and ultimately derived from Dutch-American pre-Easter celebrations, these festivities included parades, athletics, food, music, dancing, and mock coronations of kings and governors. Although dominated by African Americans, they attracted white observers and a few white participants.

The African-American imprint on southern diction and phraseology is especially clear. Because black women often raised their master's children, generations of white children acquired African-American speech patterns and intonations. Black people also influenced white notions about portents, spirits, and folk remedies. Seventeenth- and

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pidgin A simplified mixture of two or more languages used to communicate between people who speak different languages.

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Black English A variety of American English that is influenced by West African grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation.

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VOICES A Poem by Jupiter Hammon

Jupiter Hammon (1711–1806?) was a favored slave living in Long Island, New York, when on Christmas Day 1760 he composed “An Evening Thought: Salvation by Christ, with Penitential Cries,” an excerpt of which appears here. A Calvinist preacher and America’s first published black poet, Hammon was deeply influenced by the Great Awakening’s emphasis on repentance and Christ’s spiritual sovereignty.

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Salvation comes by Jesus Christ alone,
The only Son of God;
Redemption now to every one,
That love his holy Word.
Dear Jesus we would fly to Thee,
And leave off every Sin,
Thy tender Mercy well agree;
Salvation from our King.
Salvation comes from God we know,
The true and only One;
It’s well agreed and certain true,
He gave his only Son.
Lord hear our penitential Cry:

Salvation from above
It is the Lord that doth supply,
With his Redeeming Love.
Dear Jesus let the Nations cry,
And all the People say,
Salvation comes from Christ on high,
Haste on Tribunal Day.
We cry as Sinners to the Lord,
Salvation to obtain;
It is firmly fixt his holy Word,
Ye shall not cry in vain.,

1. What elements in Hammond’s poem might have appealed to African Americans of his time?
2. Does Hammond suggest a relationship between Christ and social justice?

SOURCE: Dorothy Porter, ed., *Early Negro Writing, 1760–1837* (1971; reprint, Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 1995).

gang system A mode of organizing labor that had West African antecedents. In this system American slaves worked in groups under the direction of a slave driver.

eighteenth-century English lore about such things was not that different from West African lore, and white Americans consulted black conjurers and “herb doctors.” Black cooks in early America influenced white southern eating habits. Preferences for barbecued pork, fried chicken, black-eyed peas, okra, and collard and mustard greens owed much to West African culinary traditions.

African Americans also used West African culture and skills to shape work habits in the American South during and after colonial times. Africans accustomed to collective agricultural labor imposed the “gang system” on most American plantations. Masters learned that their slaves worked harder and longer in groups. Their work songs were also an African legacy, as was the slow, deliberate pace of their labor. By the mid-eighteenth century, masters often employed slaves as builders. As a result, African styles and decorative techniques influenced southern colonial architecture. Black builders introduced African-style high-peaked roofs, front porches, wood carvings, and elaborate ironwork.

Slavery in the Northern Colonies

- 3-7 How did slavery in the northern colonies differ from slavery in the southern colonies?

The British mainland colonies north of the Chesapeake had histories, cultures, demographics, and economies that differed considerably from those of the southern colonies. Organized religion played a much more important role in the foundation of most of the northern colonies than it did in those of the South (except for Maryland). In New England, where the Pilgrims settled in 1620 and the Puritans in 1630, religious utopianism shaped colonial life.

The same was true in the West Jersey portion of New Jersey, where members of the English pietist Society of Friends (Quakers) settled during the 1670s, and in Pennsylvania, which William Penn founded in 1682 as a Quaker colony. Quakers, like other pietists, emphasized nonviolence and a divine spirit within all humans. These beliefs disposed some Quakers to become early opponents of slavery.

Even more important than religion in shaping life in northern British North America were a cooler climate, sufficient numbers of white laborers, lack of a staple crop, and a diversified economy. All these circumstances made black slavery in the colonial North less extensive than, and different from, its southern counterparts.

By the end of the colonial period during the 1770s, only 50,000 African Americans lived in the northern colonies in comparison to 400,000 in the southern colonies. In the North, black people amounted to 4.5 percent of the total population, compared with 40 percent in the South. But, as in the South, the northern black population varied in size from place to place. By 1770 enslaved African Americans constituted 10 percent of the population of Rhode Island, New Jersey, New York, and Pennsylvania (see Figure 3–2).

New York City had a particularly large black population. This dated to 1626 when the city bore the name New Amsterdam and served as the main port of New Netherlands. By 1638, free and enslaved Africans had become a large part of the city’s cosmopolitan population. They spoke a variety of European languages and converted to a variety of Christian churches. The English conquered New Netherlands in 1664, but as late as the 1810s many African Americans in and about New York City still spoke Dutch. By 1750, black residents constituted 20 percent of the city’s population.

Like all Americans during the colonial era, most northern slaves performed agricultural labor. But, in contrast to those in the South, slaves in the North typically lived in their master’s house. They worked with their master, his family, and one or two other slaves on a small farm. In northern cities, which were often home ports for slave traders, enslaved people of African descent worked as artisans, shopkeepers, messengers, domestic servants, and general laborers.

Consequently, most northern African Americans led lives that differed from their counterparts in the South. Mainly because New England had so few slaves, but also because of Puritan religious principles, slavery there was least oppressive. White people had no reason to suspect that the small and dispersed black population posed a threat of rebellion. The local slave codes were milder than in the South and, except for the ban on miscegenation, not rigidly enforced. New England slaves could legally own, transfer, and inherit property. From the early seventeenth century onward, Puritans converted Africans and African Americans who came among them to Christianity, recognizing their spiritual equality before God.

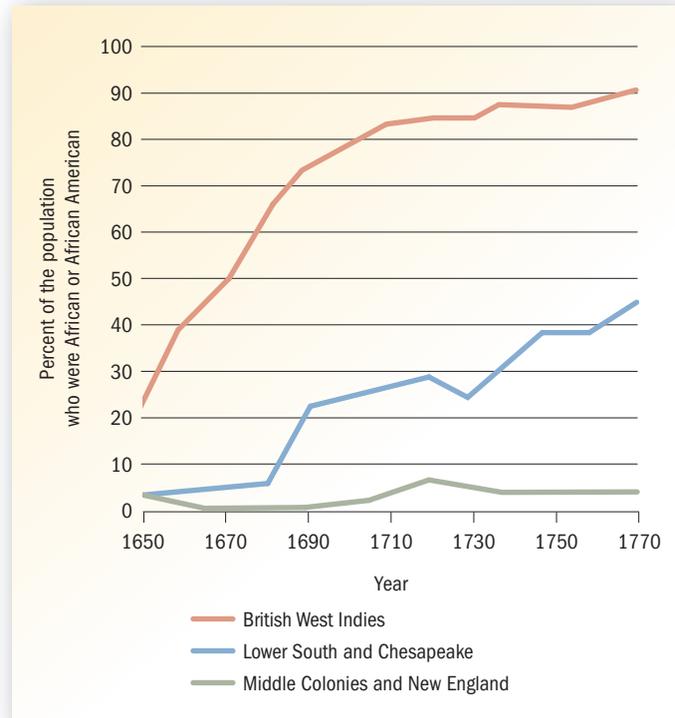


FIGURE 3–2 AFRICANS AS A PERCENTAGE OF THE TOTAL POPULATION OF THE BRITISH AMERICAN COLONIES 1650–1770

SOURCE: Time on the Cross: The Economics of Negro Slavery by Robert W. Fogel and Stanley L. Engerman. Copyright © 1974. Reprinted by permission of W. W. Norton & Company, Inc.



This eighteenth-century drawing of Philadelphia’s London Coffee House suggests the routine nature of slave auctions in early America. The main focus is on architecture. The sale of human beings is merely incidental.

John F. Watson, “Annals of Philadelphia,” being a collection of memoirs, anecdotes, and incidents of Philadelphia. The London Coffee House. The Library Company of Philadelphia.

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In the middle colonies of New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania, where black populations were larger and hence perceived by white people to be more threatening, slave codes were stricter and penalties harsher. But even in these colonies, the curfews imposed on Africans and African Americans, as well as the restrictions on their ability to gather together, were less well enforced than they were farther south.

These conditions encouraged rapid assimilation. Because of their small numbers, frequent isolation from others of African descent, and close association with their masters, northern slaves usually had fewer opportunities to preserve an African heritage. However, there was an increase in African customs among black northerners between 1740 and 1770. Before that time, most northern slaves had been born or “seasoned” in the South or the West Indies. Then, during the mid-eighteenth century, direct imports of African slaves into the North temporarily increased. With them came knowledge of African life. But overall, the less harsh and more peripheral nature of slavery in this region limited the retention of African perspectives, just as it allowed the slaves more freedom than most of their southern counterparts enjoyed.

Slavery in Spanish Florida and French Louisiana

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How did the experience of African Americans under French and Spanish rule in North America compare to that in the British colonies?

Just as slavery in Britain’s northern colonies differed from slavery in its southern colonies, slavery in Spanish Florida and French Louisiana—areas that later became parts of the United States—had distinctive characteristics. People of African descent, brought to Florida and Louisiana during the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries, had different experiences from those who arrived in the British colonies. They and their descendants learned to speak Spanish or French rather than English. They became Roman Catholics rather than Protestants. The routes to freedom were also more plentiful in the Spanish and French colonies than they were in Britain’s plantation colonies.

In 1565 Africans helped construct the Spanish settlement of St. Augustine in Florida, which is now the oldest city in the United States. But the Spanish monarchy regarded the settlement as primarily a military outpost, and plantation agriculture was not significant in Florida under Spanish rule. Therefore, the number of slaves in Florida remained small, and black men served more frequently as soldiers than as fieldworkers. As militiamen, they gained power that eluded slaves in most of the British colonies. As members of the Catholic Church, they acquired social status. By 1746 St. Augustine had a total population of 1,500, including about 400 black people. When the British took control of Florida in 1763, these local people of African descent retreated along with the city’s white inhabitants to Cuba. Only with the British takeover did plantation slavery begin to grow in Florida.

When the French in 1699 established their Louisiana colony in the lower Mississippi River valley, their objective, like that of the Spanish in Florida, was primarily military. In 1720 few black people (either slave or free) lived in the colony. Then, during the following decade, Louisiana imported about 6,000 slaves, most of whom were men and boys from Senegambia. Although they faced harsh conditions and many died, by 1731 black people outnumbered white people in the colony. Some of the Africans worked on plantations growing tobacco and indigo. But most lived in the port city of New Orleans, where many became skilled artisans, lived away from their masters, became Roman Catholics, and gained freedom. Unfortunately, early in its history, New Orleans also became a place where white men exploited black women sexually with impunity. This custom eventually created a sizable

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mixed-race population with elaborate social gradations based on the amount of white ancestry a person had and the lightness of his or her skin. Unlike the case in Florida, Louisiana's distinctive black and mixed-race population did not leave when the colony became part of the United States in 1803.

African Americans in New Spain's Northern Borderlands

3-9 What was African-American life like in New Spain's northern borderlands?

What is today the southwestern United States was from the sixteenth century until 1821 the northernmost part of New Spain. Centered in Mexico, this Spanish colony reached into Texas, California, New Mexico, Colorado, and Arizona. The first people of African descent who entered this huge region were members of Spanish exploratory expeditions. The best known of them is Esteban, an enslaved Moor (the Spanish term for a dark-skinned Muslim) who survived a shipwreck on the Texas coast in 1529 and a brief captivity among Indians. He subsequently joined Spanish explorer Alvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca in an arduous seven-year trek from Texas to Mexico City. Esteban, a skilled interpreter, later explored regions in what are today New Mexico and Arizona. Black men also accompanied Francisco Vásquez de Coronado's 1540–1542 search across the Southwest for the mythical Seven Cities of Cibola as well as Spanish expeditions along the upper regions of the Rio Grande in 1593 and 1598. During the seventeenth century, black soldiers participated in the Spanish conquest of Pueblo Indians. Some black and mulatto women also joined in Spanish military expeditions. The best known of them was Isabel de Olvena, who traveled with an expedition through New Mexico in 1600.

During the colonial era, however, New Spain's North American borderlands had far fewer black people than there were in the British colonies. In part this was because the total non-Indian population in the borderlands was extremely small. As late as 1792, only around 3,000 colonists lived in Texas, including about 450 described as black or mulatto. There were even fewer colonists in New Mexico and California, where people of mixed African, Indian, and Spanish descent were common. Black men in the borderlands gained employment as sailors, soldiers, tradesmen, cattle herders, and day laborers. Some of them were slaves, but others had limited freedom. In contrast to the British colonies, in New Spain's borderlands most slaves were Indians. They worked as domestics and as agricultural laborers or were marched south to Mexico, where they labored in gold and silver mines.

Also in contrast to the British mainland colonies, where no formal aristocracy existed but where white insistence on racial separation gradually grew in strength, both hereditary rank and racial fluidity existed in New Spain's borderlands. In theory, throughout the Spanish empire in the Americas, "racial purity" determined social status, with Spaniards of "pure blood" at the top and Africans and Indians at the bottom. In Texas free black people and Indians suffered legal disabilities. They paid special taxes and could not own guns or travel freely. But almost all of the Spaniards who moved north from Mexico were themselves of mixed race, and people of African and Indian descent could more easily acquire status than they could in the British colonies. In the borderlands black men held responsible positions at Roman Catholic missions. A few acquired large landholdings called *ranchos*.



This image shows the former slave Esteban, who, during the early 1500s, traveled through Texas to Mexico. Later he joined Spanish expeditions that explored what are now New Mexico and Arizona.

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Black Women in Colonial America

3-10 How did slavery affect black women in colonial America?

The lives of black women in early North America varied according to the colony in which they lived. The differences between Britain's New England colonies and its southern colonies are particularly clear. In New England religion and demographics made the boundary between slavery and freedom permeable. There black women distinguished themselves in a variety of ways. The thoroughly acculturated Lucy Terry Prince of Deerfield, Massachusetts, published poetry in the 1740s and gained her freedom in 1756. Other black women succeeded as bakers and weavers. But in the South, where most black women of the time lived, they had few opportunities for work beyond tobacco and rice fields and the homes of their masters.

 **Read on MyHistoryLab Document:**
Lucy Terry Prince, "Bars Fight" (1746)

During the late seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries, approximately 90 percent of southern black women worked in the fields, as was customary for women in West Africa. White women also did fieldwork, but masters considered black women to be tougher than white women and therefore able to do more hard physical labor. Black women also mothered their children and cooked for their families, a chore that involved lugging firewood and water and tending fires as well as preparing meals. Like other women of their time, colonial black women suffered from inadequate medical attention while giving birth. But because black women worked until the moment they delivered, they were more likely than white women to experience complications in giving birth and to bear low-weight babies.

As the eighteenth century passed, more black women became house servants. Yet most jobs as maids, cooks, and body servants went to the young, the old, or the infirm. Black women also wet-nursed their master's children. None of this was easy work. Those who did it were under constant white supervision and were particularly subject to the sexual exploitation that characterized chattel slavery.

European captains and crews molested and raped black women during the Middle Passage. Masters and overseers similarly used their power to force themselves on female slaves. The results were evident in the large mixed-race populations in the colonies and in the psychological damage it inflicted on African-American women and their mates. In particular, the sexual abuse of black women by white men disrupted the emerging black families in North America because black men usually could not protect their wives from it.

Although enslaved black women were more expensive than white indentured servants—because, unlike the children of white indentured servants, their children would become their master's property—slave traders and slaveholders never valued black women as highly as they did black men. Until 1660 the British mainland colonies imported twice as many African men as women. Thereafter, the ratio dropped to three African men for every two women. By the mid-eighteenth century, natural population growth among African Americans had corrected the sexual imbalance.



In this painting African Americans await sale to slave traders, who stand at the doorway on the left.

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Black Resistance and Rebellion

3-11 How did African Americans resist slavery?

That masters regularly used their authority to abuse black women sexually and thereby humiliate black men dramatizes the oppressiveness of a slave system based on race and physical force. Masters often rewarded black women who became their mistresses, just as masters and overseers used incentives to get more labor from field hands. But slaves who did not comply in either case faced a beating. Slavery in America was always a system that relied ultimately on physical force to deny freedom to African Americans. From its start, black men and women responded by resisting their masters as well as they could.

Such resistance ranged from sullen goldbricking (shirking assigned work) to sabotage, escape, and rebellion. Before the late eighteenth century, however, resistance and rebellion were not part of a coherent antislavery effort. Before the spread of ideas about natural human rights and universal liberty associated with the American and French revolutions, slave resistance and revolt did not aim to destroy slavery as a social system. Africans and African Americans resisted, escaped, and rebelled but not as part of an effort to free all slaves. Instead, they resisted to force masters to make concessions within the framework of slavery. They escaped and rebelled to relieve themselves, their friends, and their families from intolerable disgrace and suffering.

African men and women newly arrived in North America openly defied their masters. They frequently refused to work and often could not be persuaded by punishment to change their behavior. “You would really be surpris’d at their Perseverance,” one frustrated master commented. “They often die before they can be conquered.” Africans tended to escape in groups of individuals who shared a common homeland and language. When they succeeded, they usually became “outliers,” living nearby and stealing from their master’s estate. Less frequently, they headed west, where they found some safety among white frontiersmen, Indians, or interracial banditti. In 1672 Virginia’s colonial government began paying bounties to anyone who killed outliers. Six decades later, the governor of South Carolina offered similar rewards. In some instances, escaped slaves, known as *maroons*—a term derived from the Spanish word *cimarron*, meaning wild—established their own settlements in inaccessible regions.

The most durable of such maroon communities in North America existed in the Spanish colony of Florida. In 1693 the Spanish king officially made this colony a refuge for slaves escaping from the British colonies, although he did not free slaves who were already there. Many such escapees joined the Seminole Indian nation and thereby gained protection between 1763 and 1783, when the British ruled Florida, and after 1821 when the United States took control. It was in part to destroy this refuge for former slaves that the United States fought the Seminole War from 1835 to 1842. Other maroon settlements existed in the South Carolina and Georgia backcountry and the **Great Dismal Swamp** of southern Virginia.

As slaves became acculturated, forms of slave resistance changed. To avoid punishment, African Americans replaced open defiance with more subtle day-to-day obstructionism. They malingered, broke tools, mistreated domestic animals, destroyed crops, poisoned their masters, and stole. Not every slave who acted this way, of course, was consciously resisting enslavement, but masters assumed they were. In 1770, Benjamin Franklin, who owned slaves, complained to a European friend, “Perhaps you may imagine the Negroes to be mild-tempered, tractable Kind of People. Some of them indeed are so. But the Majority are of plotting Disposition, dark, sullen, malicious, revengeful and cruel in the highest Degree.” Acculturation also brought different escape patterns. Increasingly, the more assimilated slaves predominated among escapees. Most of them were young men who left on their own and relied on their knowledge of American society to pass as free. Although some continued to head for maroon settlements, most sought safety among relatives, in towns, or in the North Carolina piedmont, where there were few slaves.

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Great Dismal Swamp A heavily forested area on the Virginia–North Carolina border that served as a refuge for fugitive slaves during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.



Read on MyHistoryLab Document: Runaway Notices from the *South Carolina Gazette* (1732 and 1737)



RUN away from the subscriber in *Albemarle*, a Mulatto slave called *Sandy*, about 35 years of age, his stature is rather low, inclining to corpulence, and his complexion light; he is a shoemaker by trade, in which he uses his left hand principally, can do coarse carpenters work, and is something of a horse jockey; he is greatly addicted to drink, and when drunk is insolent and disorderly, in his conversation he swears much, and in his behaviour is artful and knavish. He took with him a white horse, much scarred with traces, of which it is expected he will endeavour to dispose; he also carried his shoemakers tools, and will probably endeavour to get employment that way. Whoever conveys the said slave to me, in *Albemarle*, shall have 40 s. reward, if taken up within the county, 4 l. if elsewhere within the colony, and 10 l. if in any other colony, from
THOMAS JEFFERSON.

Announcement issued by Thomas Jefferson for a reward for a runaway slave, 14 September 1769.



Read on MyHistoryLab Document: James Oglethorpe, The Stono Rebellion, 1739

In colonial North America, rebellions occurred far more rarely than resistance and escape. More and larger rebellions broke out during the early eighteenth century in Jamaica and Brazil. This discrepancy resulted mainly from demographics: in the sugar-producing colonies, black people outnumbered white people by six or eight to one, but in British North America black people were a majority only in the low country. The larger the proportion of slaves in a population, the more likely they were to rebel. Also, by the mid-eighteenth century, most male slaves in the British mainland colonies were Creoles with families. They had more to lose from a failed rebellion than did the single African men who made up the bulk of the slave population farther south.

Nevertheless there were waves of rebellion in British North America from 1710 to 1722 and 1730 to 1741. Men born in Africa took the lead in these revolts, and the two most notable of them occurred in New York City in 1712 and near Charleston, South Carolina, in 1739. In New York, 27 Africans, taking revenge for “hard usage,” set fire to an outbuilding. When white men arrived to put out the blaze, the rebels attacked them with muskets, hatchets, and swords. They killed nine of the white men and wounded six. Shortly thereafter, local militia units captured the rebels. Six

of the rebels killed themselves; the other 21 were executed—some brutally. In 1741 another revolt conspiracy in New York led to another mass execution. Authorities put to death 30 black people and four white people convicted of helping them.

Even more frightening for most white people was the rebellion that began at Stono Bridge within 20 miles of Charleston in September 1739. Under the leadership of a man named Jemmy or Tommy, 20 slaves who had recently arrived from Angola broke into a “weare-house, & then plundered it of guns & ammunition.” They killed the warehousemen, left their severed heads on the building’s steps, and fled toward Florida. Other slaves joined the Angolans until their numbers reached one hundred. They sacked plantations and killed approximately 30 more white people. But when they stopped to celebrate their victories and beat drums to attract other slaves, planters on horseback aided by Indians routed them, killing 44 and dispersing the rest. Many of the rebels, including their leader, remained at large for up to three years, as did the spirit of insurrection. In 1740 Charleston authorities arrested 150 slaves and hanged 10 daily to quell that spirit.

In South Carolina and other southern colonies, white people never entirely lost their fear of slave revolt. Whenever slaves rebelled or were rumored to rebel, the fear became intense. As the quotation that begins this chapter indicates, the unwillingness of many Africans and African Americans to submit to enslavement pushed white southerners into a siege mentality that became a determining factor in American history.

CONCLUSION

Studying the history of black people in early America is both painful and exhilarating. It is painful to learn of their enslavement, the emergence of racism in its modern form, and the loss of so much of the African heritage. But it is exhilarating to learn how much of that heritage Africans and African Americans preserved, how they resisted their oppressors and forged strong family bonds, and how an emerging African-American culture began to influence all aspects of American society.

The varieties of black life during the colonial period also help us understand the complexity of African-American society later in American history. Although they had much in common, black people in the Chesapeake, in the low country, in Britain’s northern colonies, in Spanish Florida, in French Louisiana, and in New Spain’s borderlands had different

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PROFILE Francisco Menendez

TODAY FRANCISCO MENENDEZ is best known—if known at all—as a black pirate who used a Spanish ship to attack British vessels sailing on the Atlantic Ocean. But recent research into his life, and especially his battles on the border between Spanish Florida and British South Carolina, expand and clarify our understanding of African-American life on both sides of that border during the mid-eighteenth century.

Menendez was probably born in central Africa in the early 1700s. Kongolesse soldiers captured him when he was a boy or young man. Shortly thereafter, he converted to Roman Catholicism, took a Portuguese name, and suffered enslavement. Along with thousands of others, he unwillingly crossed the Atlantic Ocean to work in South Carolina's low-country rice fields.

In 1724, Menendez, attracted by Spain's politically motivated offer of freedom to British slaves, escaped to Spanish Florida. He joined the St. Augustine militia, and in 1728 fought bravely in defense of that settlement against British invaders. Menendez's courage gained him promotion to the rank of captain.

Ten years later, Governor Manuel Montiano appointed Menendez to command at *Gracia Real de Mose*. Known as Fort Mose and located north of St. Augustine, the Spanish colonial government created this black settlement to defend Florida against British military threats from the north. Fort Mose's 100 inhabitants promised to “shed their last drop of blood in defense of the Great Crown of Spain and the Holy [Catholic] Faith.”

Menendez led raids from Fort Mose into South Carolina. Such raids, of course, raised the specter of assisted slave revolt and frightened South Carolina's slaveholders and governors.

The Stono Rebellion of September 1739 seemed to confirm such fears when—as the text of this chapter describes—100 armed low-country slaves attempted to march south to Florida and freedom. Although Menendez did not assist this effort, he likely gave aid and comfort to the rebels who reached Fort Mose. Months later, South Carolina militia invaded Florida in force. Under Menendez's command the Fort Mose militia drove the invaders back. But, during the fighting, the South Carolinians destroyed the fort.

Menendez then went to sea in what most likely was an effort to capture food and supplies from British ships. This led in 1741 to his capture under charges of piracy, perhaps to his torture, and—as punishment—his reenslavement. Subsequently, Menendez either escaped or Spanish authorities paid for his release. By 1752, he had resumed his militia duties at a rebuilt Fort Mose. He remained there until 1763, when Spain ceded Florida to Britain as part of the treaty ending the French and Indian War. Menendez and most black Floridians joined a Spanish removal to Cuba. Menendez may have organized a black community on that island and probably died in Havana.

Francisco Menendez's story, set in the eighteenth century, like that of Anthony Johnson's in the seventeenth century, is valuable largely because of its rarity. Sketchy as it is, it humanizes an exceptional individual who lived during a time from which few records of individuals have survived—or ever existed. Menendez's story also provides insight into black life in Spanish Florida and expands our understanding of the Stono Revolt, of the opportunities for freedom that international borders offered to slaves, and of slaveholders' determination to suppress those opportunities.

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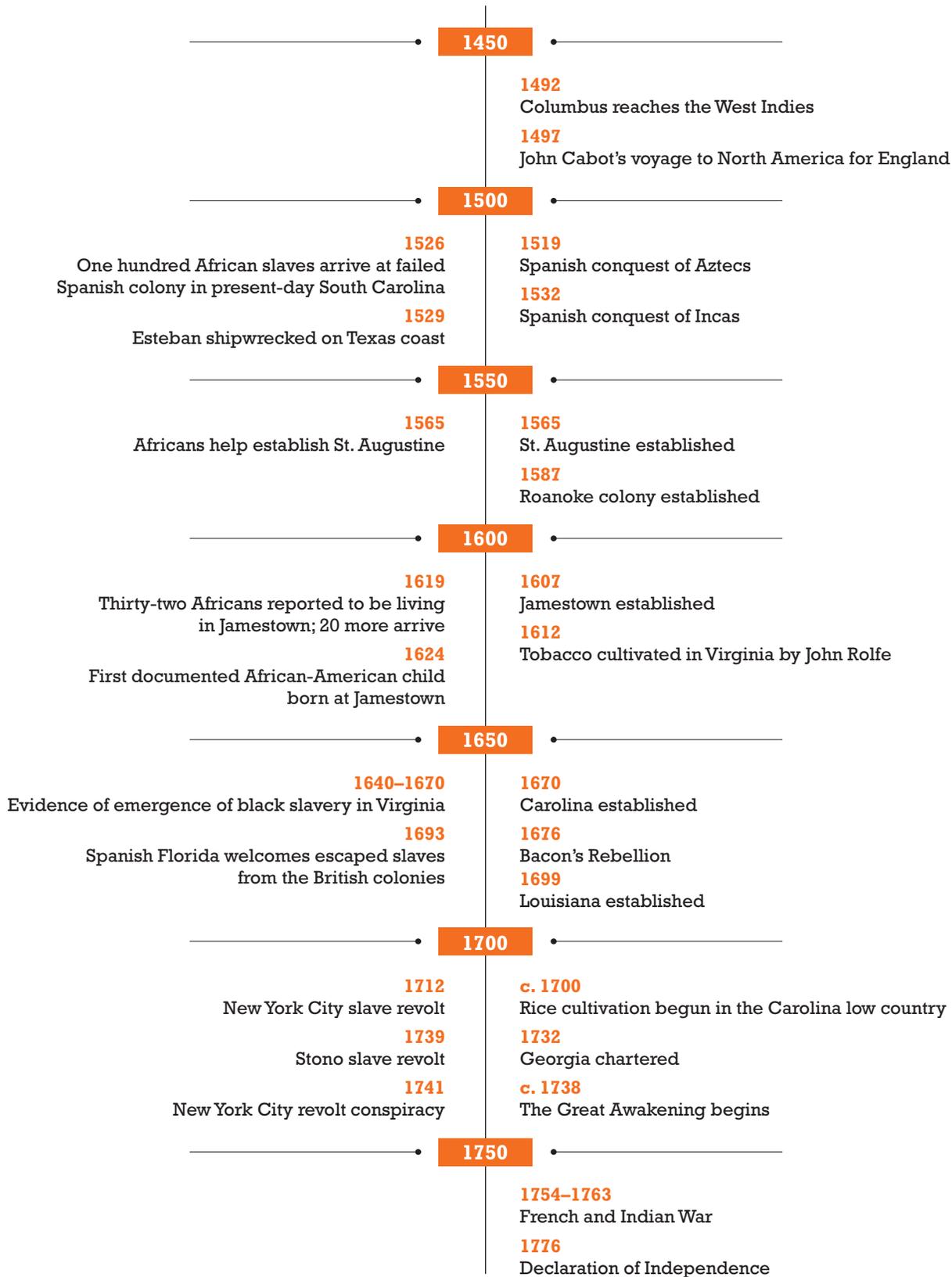
experiences, different relationships with white people and Indians, and different prospects. Those who lived in the fledgling colonial towns and cities differed from those who were agricultural laborers. The lives of those who worked on small farms differed from the lives of those who served on large plantations.

Finally, African-American history during the colonial era raises fundamental issues about contingency and determinism in human events. Did economic necessity, racism, and class interest make the development of chattel slavery in the Chesapeake inevitable? Or, had things gone otherwise (e.g., if Bacon's Rebellion had not occurred or had turned out differently), might African Americans in that region have retained more rights and access to freedom? What would have been the impact of that freedom on the colonies to the north and south of the Chesapeake?

CHAPTER TIMELINE

AFRICAN-AMERICAN EVENTS

NATIONAL EVENTS



On MyHistoryLab



REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Based on your reading of this chapter, do you believe racial prejudice among British settlers in the Chesapeake led them to enslave Africans? Or did the unfree condition of the first Africans to arrive at Jamestown lead to racial prejudice among the settlers?
2. Why did vestiges of African culture survive in British North America? Did these vestiges help or hinder African Americans in dealing with enslavement?
3. Compare and contrast eighteenth-century slavery as it existed in the Chesapeake, in the low country of South Carolina and Georgia, and in the northern colonies.
4. What were the strengths and weaknesses of the black family in the eighteenth century?
5. How did enslaved Africans and African Americans preserve a sense of their own humanity?

RECOMMENDED READING

Ira Berlin. *Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1998. This impressive synthesis of black life in slavery during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries emphasizes black people's ability to shape their lives in conflict with their masters' will.

Winthrop D. Jordan. *White over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro, 1550–1812*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1968. This classic study provides a probing and detailed analysis of the cultural and psychological forces that led white people to enslave black people in early America.

Philip D. Morgan. *Slave Counterpoint: Black Culture in the Eighteenth-Century Chesapeake and Lowcountry*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998. Comparative history at its best, this book illuminates the lives of black people in important parts of British North America.

Oscar Reiss. *Blacks in Colonial America*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1997. Although short on synthesis and eccentric in interpretation, this book is packed with information about black life in early America.

Betty Wood. *Slavery in Colonial America 1619–1776*. Lanham, MD: Roman & Littlefield, 2005. This is a brief history that emphasizes life among the slaves.

Peter H. Wood. *Black Majority: Negroes in Colonial South Carolina from 1670 Through the Stono Rebellion*. New York: Norton, 1974. This is the best account of slavery and the origins of African-American culture in the colonial low country.

Donald R. Wright. *African Americans in the Colonial Era: From African Origins Through the American Revolution*. 2nd ed. Arlington Heights, IL: Harlan Davidson, 2000. Wright provides a brief but well-informed survey of black history during the colonial period.

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Colonial Williamsburg, Williamsburg, Virginia. The “Enslaving Virginia Tour” allows visitors to “explore [the] conditions

that led to slavery’s development in the Jamestown/Virginia colony.”

Charles H. Wright Museum of African American History, Detroit, Michigan. The “Of the People: The African American Experience” exhibit includes material dealing with the memory of Africa and the “survival of the spirit.”