



Colonial town

# Colonial America



Reader

Great Awakening



Colonial farming



English settlement



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# Colonial America

Reader



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# Colonial America

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# Chapter 1

## The Thirteen Colonies

**The English Colonies** By 1750, there were thirteen English colonies on the East Coast of what would become the United States. Settlements had spread from the Atlantic Ocean as far west as the Appalachian Mountains, and the population was quickly climbing toward two million. Almost every week, a ship arrived with more immigrants. The American colonists were mainly ordinary people—farmers and people from small towns in England and other countries in Europe. About one person in five was enslaved, many having been forcefully removed from their homes in Africa.

### The Framing Question

How were the New England colonies, the Middle colonies, and the Southern colonies both similar and different?

### The Southern Colonies

You have learned about the founding of Virginia. As the 1600s progressed, more English colonies were established along the Atlantic coast. In 1634, a settlement neighboring Virginia formed on the northern shore of the Chesapeake Bay and was named Maryland. Roman Catholics, who were treated poorly in England, found a refuge in Maryland. South of Virginia, a permanent settlement formed near present-day Charleston, and the colony of Carolina was created. In 1710, it was split into North Carolina and South Carolina. These colonies came to be called the Southern colonies.



The English colonies were diverse. Depending on the region, people spoke different languages and practiced different religions and customs.

The colonies were established for different reasons and in different ways. Some were charter colonies, meaning a monarch had granted a charter to a joint-stock company to set up a colony. Others were governed by a governor on behalf of a monarch, making them royal colonies. The last type of colony was called a proprietary colony. These areas were gifted by a monarch as a reward or payment.

### The Thirteen Colonies



The English colonies comprised three distinct regions.



And to these four Southern colonies another was added. In 1732, General James Oglethorpe, a prominent member of the English **Parliament**, was appointed to head a new colony to the south of South Carolina. It would be called Georgia, after the English king at the time, King George II. In 1733, Oglethorpe founded Savannah on the Atlantic coast, near the mouth of the Savannah River.

England used the new colony to serve two purposes. For one, it would be a **buffer zone** between the profitable colony of South Carolina and Florida to the south. Florida was controlled by England's enemy, Spain. Second, Georgia was founded as a colony for prisoners and **debtors**, to give prisoners from England a fresh start in life.

Mild winters and fertile soil made the southern coastal area excellent for farming. The Southern colonies relied heavily on cash crop agriculture and became economically successful as a result. The earliest English colonists may not have found gold the way that the Spanish had, but they still found wealth. English wealth came from the land in the form of tobacco, rice, and a blue-dye-producing plant called indigo. All of these crops were labor intensive, which led to a grim reality behind the region's economic success. Wealthy English gentlemen who established plantations and adventurous Europeans willing to be indentured servants did play their part in the Southern colonies' prosperity. But the bulk of the work was performed by the enslaved people of Africa who were brought to North America against their will. Once there, they were forced to do work such as planting, weeding, harvesting, and processing the crops without pay.

## Vocabulary

**Parliament**, n. in Great Britain, a group made up of representatives and the king or queen that makes the laws for the country

**buffer zone**, n. a neutral area that separates rival nations or factions

**debtor**, n. a person who owes money

## The New England Colonies

As you have discovered, religion played a key role in the founding of the New England colonies. Each was founded by people who fled or were forced out

of their homeland because of religious differences. The Pilgrims, the Puritans, Roger Williams, and Thomas Hooker all wanted to build a society that could worship in the way they believed was correct.

Besides the desire to practice their chosen religion, the colonies of New England shared other features in common. In contrast with the Southern colonies, the soil in the New England colonies was not well suited to growing crops, and the winters were long and cold. Most New England families produced only a little more than they needed to feed themselves. They traded the food that remained. However, the region was rich in other ways. Its great forests and long coastline with natural harbors for ships made shipbuilding, fishing, whaling, and commerce important parts of New England's economy. As a result, the New England colonies attracted many European immigrants.

<b>Population Growth in the New England Colonies</b>						
<b>Colony</b>	<b>1650</b>	<b>1660</b>	<b>1670</b>	<b>1680</b>	<b>1690</b>	<b>1700</b>
Connecticut	4,139	7,980	12,603	17,246	21,645	25,970
Massachusetts (including Plymouth)	15,603	22,062	35,333	46,152	56,928	55,941
New Hampshire	1,305	1,555	1,805	2,047	4,164	4,958
Rhode Island	785	1,539	2,155	3,017	4,224	5,894

**The population of the New England colonies grew quickly.**

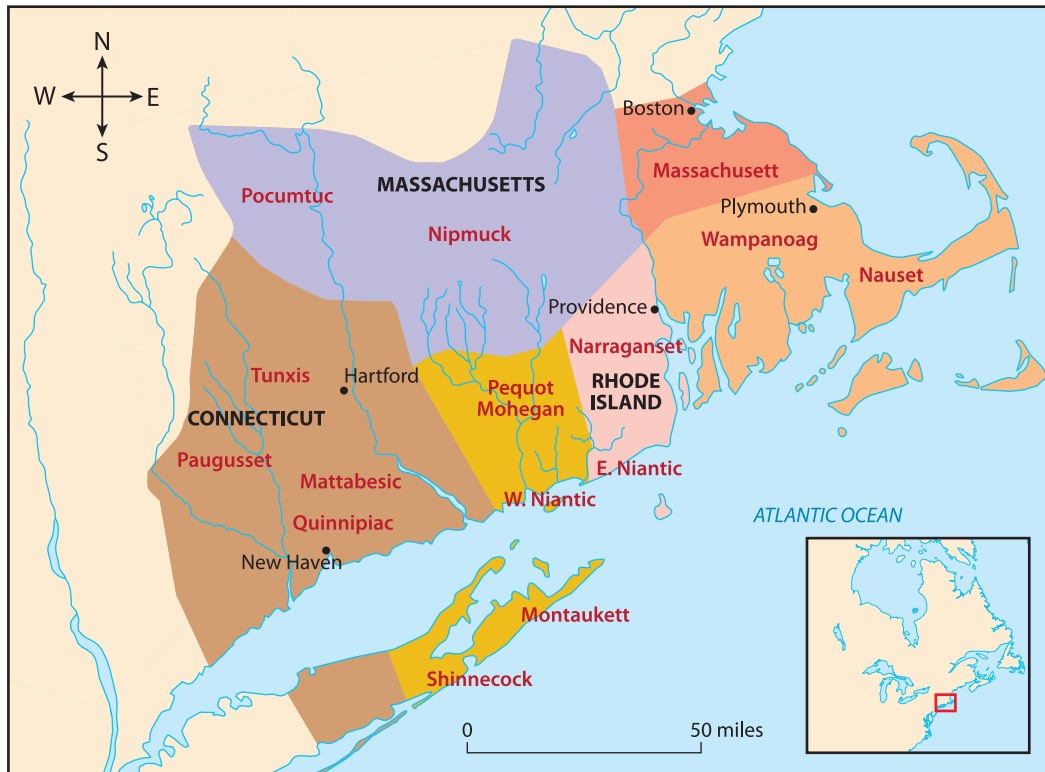
Education was very important in the New England colonies. The Puritans held a strong belief in teaching everyone, boys and girls alike, to read and write. Even though this was very unusual at the time, they thought it was important that people be able to read the Bible for themselves. The first schools for children in America were started by the Puritans. They also wrote the first schoolbook for children in America, called *The New England Primer*. It contained rhymes that taught the alphabet and spelling words. The primer also contained many prayers, poems, and questions about the Bible.

Students were expected to answer the questions and recite their lessons perfectly, or they risked punishment.

Slavery was practiced in every New England colony, but the enslaved population in New England was far smaller than in Southern colonies, where many field workers were needed. Slave labor was used on farms, in trades, and within people's homes. Although it was technically illegal to teach enslaved people how to read and write, enslaved workers in New England were more likely to learn compared to those in the South. Some enslaved workers in New England regained their freedom and then lived and worked as free people.

All the New England colonies were of course home to Native Americans. However, King Philip's War (1675–76) had greatly diminished the Native American population of New England. In the mid-1700s, English colonists continued to expand their settlements, and Native Americans continued to resent the English presence.

### Native American Groups in New England, 1675



Numerous Native American groups lived in New England when English colonists arrived.

## The Middle Colonies

The area between the New England colonies and the Southern colonies consisted of the Middle colonies of New York, New Jersey, Delaware, and Pennsylvania. Early on, the Netherlands and Sweden had established colonies there. But by the late 1600s, all the Middle colonies were controlled by England.

Most people in the Southern and New England colonies came from England or Scotland. But people in the Middle colonies came from all over Europe. Some were Quakers, who were persecuted in England, and others were Mennonites, who were treated unfairly in Germany. The region was also where most Jewish colonists lived. The first synagogue established in North America was located in New York City. By 1750, the

Middle colonies had already established a reputation for religious toleration. It was the most diverse region in all of colonial America. To get along, people in the Middle colonies learned to respect each other's religions, cultures, and languages.



**Even though it was not easy to live in the colonies, many people believed they would have a better life.**

Nevertheless, when immigrants arrived in the colonies, they preferred to settle near people who were from the same country or followed the same religion. This made them feel more comfortable in a strange new land. They could speak their own language and follow their traditional ways of life. They wore the same kinds of clothing they had worn in their homeland and built the same kinds of houses. In time, however, something interesting and important happened. Different immigrant groups began to borrow and share ideas with each other. This was also true for those brought against their will from parts of West Africa and the West Indies. They, too, brought with them rich cultural heritages and a range of skills that contributed enormously to the colonies.

Colonists from different countries brought unique skills with them. Often, people from Germany were skilled farmers. The Dutch were very good at building wagons and farming equipment. Those from Sweden knew how to build strong log houses. The colonists taught these skills to each other. This mixing of cultures helped the Middle colonies grow and prosper.

Like the New England colonies, the Middle colonies had large forests that provided lumber for building houses and ships. Unlike New England, the Middle colonies had rich soil and a milder climate. Summers were warm and rainy, and many kinds of crops grew well there. Farmers grew a variety of fruits and vegetables. They were able to produce enough to feed their families and have a large surplus that could be sold overseas for a profit. Over time, some farmers grew cash crops like wheat, rye, and oats. Because the Middle colonies grew such large amounts of grains, they were called the “breadbasket colonies.” Rivers played a key role in producing and transporting grains. Water-powered mills were used to grind wheat into flour. The Delaware and Hudson Rivers



Because of the climate and soil, wheat and other grains were easy to grow in the Middle colonies. As a result, the Middle colonies attracted many immigrants eager to farm the fertile soil or start businesses of their own.

were then used to transport the crops and flour to markets in port cities like Philadelphia and New York City. Farmers sold to merchants, who would then ship the crops and flour to other colonies or to England and other countries in Europe.

The Middle colonies had the greatest number of free African Americans of any region in colonial America. Most lived in larger cities and towns, as the Middle colonies had some of the most populous cities in colonial America.

## An Agrarian Society

Most people living in the thirteen colonies were farmers. This made land ownership an important part of colonial life. How land was distributed varied across the colonial regions. In New England, groups coming to the colonies were given a plot of land to form a town. The town's leaders were responsible for laying out the town and dividing the land among its inhabitants. They also decided what land to give each individual or family. New England towns had a town center and common lands shared by all townspeople to graze their livestock.

Land distribution and ownership was very different in the Southern colonies. People living in this region developed larger tracts of land to grow cash crops. Over time, indentured servants who had served out their contracts were given land. Colonists in Virginia spread westward from the coast along the James River.

**Yeoman** farmers became the largest population in all colonial regions. A small part of the population, primarily in the Southern colonies, became large landowners who owned plantations. Enslaved workers did the bulk of the work on these large plantations. They did everything from planting and harvesting to woodwork and metalwork, in addition to carrying out domestic chores in the large plantation homes. Life for enslaved workers was extremely difficult; you'll learn more about the institution of slavery and its effects in the next chapter. Although farming was the main economic activity in the colonies, artisans played an important role in colonial society. They were found in all colonial

### Vocabulary

**yeoman**, adj.  
describing a person who owns and cultivates a small farm

regions, mostly in coastal towns and cities. Artisans were responsible for providing valuable goods and services, including shipbuilding, carpentry, shoemaking, baking, and silversmithing. Some colonial artisans were master craftspeople who had studied and practiced their trade for many years. To learn a trade, children as young as thirteen worked as an apprentice for a master. Apprentices were similar to indentured servants. They worked for a set number of years without earning a wage. Journeymen were former apprentices who could work for wages. Depending on the trade and their skill level, some artisans could grow very wealthy. Their goods were sold mostly to people locally but also to people in other colonies.

## Women and Children in the Colonies

In the early years of the Southern colonies, women worked alongside men to get new settlements off the ground. They worked in the fields and helped with construction projects. Over time, women's roles in the South shifted; as in Europe, they managed the household and servants, although enslaved women continued to work in the fields. Meanwhile, in New England, Puritan societies maintained traditional gender norms from the start. For the most part, women were expected to care for the family and the family home. Despite some regional differences, women in all three colonial regions educated their children, cooked and baked, sewed clothing, and made other goods like soap and candles. Some middle-class women living in towns helped their husbands run businesses. Life for colonial women was often challenging. They were prevented from voting and had limited property rights. Childbirth could also be very dangerous at this time.

Colonial children played an important role in society. Most children learned at home instead of in a formal school. Puritan children might attend a dame school run by a woman teacher out of her home for several years. Regardless of the region, boys had more educational opportunities than girls. Beyond reading, writing, and arithmetic, colonial children learned skills that would help them in adulthood. Boys often learned a trade or how to run a business, while girls learned how to run a household.

## Self-Government in the Colonies

If the colonists had bumper stickers in the mid-1700s, one of them surely would have said, “Proud to be British.” As members of the British Empire, the colonists received the protection of the British navy and special trade agreements with other parts of the empire. They also enjoyed the benefits of **self-government**.

Self-government had existed in England for several hundred years. Wealthy landowners elected people to represent them in the English Parliament. This lawmaking body had little power at first. Over time, it gained the ability to make decisions about taxes and spending.

When the English first settled in North America, they brought with them the idea of self-government. They began electing **representatives** to their own **assemblies**. It’s important to note that only white men who owned enough property could vote. That meant that women, free and enslaved Africans, and Native Americans could not participate in government.

Self-government varied from colony to colony. You may remember that the Pilgrims signed the Mayflower Compact when they first arrived at Plymouth Rock in 1620. The ideas in this document established the concept of the town meeting in New England. Colonists in New England met regularly in town meetings to discuss and vote directly on local laws. In the South, the Virginia House of Burgesses became the very first legislature in the English colonies. Much like Parliament, it was made up of elected and appointed representatives.

The colonists recognized that it was Parliament’s job to oversee the British Empire and to pass laws that **regulated** trade across the empire.

### Vocabulary

**self-government**, n.  
the ability of people to rule themselves and make their own laws

**representative**, n.  
a person who speaks or acts on behalf of someone else

**assembly**, n.  
a group of people that makes laws

**regulate**, v.  
to control or place limits on



However, they came to believe that their own elected assemblies should be allowed to make decisions about everyday life in the colonies.

As subjects of the British Empire, the colonists also believed that they were entitled to the same rights and liberties as people living in England. Some of these rights and liberties came from two important documents. The first was the Magna Carta, or Great Charter. In 1215 CE, wealthy barons forced the English king to sign this document. The Magna Carta limited the power of the king. Most importantly, it demonstrated that the king was not above the law and must obey the laws.

The second document was the English Bill of Rights of 1689. This bill provided protections against unfair actions by the government, including abuses of the power to search and jail people without cause. The English Bill of Rights also protected liberties such as the right to gather peacefully and the right to petition the government for a change in a law. These ideas about the rights of the governed were reinforced by the Enlightenment, an intellectual movement that began in Europe and spread to the colonies during the 1700s. The Enlightenment strongly influenced how American colonists thought about government and about their rights.

## The Great Awakening

As you have read, many colonists came to North America in search of religious freedom. Life in the colonies, however, became more **secular** over time. The Enlightenment was partly responsible for this change. Enlightenment thinkers encouraged people to question their beliefs and authority figures, including church leaders.

Some church leaders began to worry that people had strayed too far away from religion. A **Protestant** religious revival began to sweep parts of Europe and the colonies in the 1720s, and it lasted through the 1740s.

### Vocabulary

**secular**, adj. not religious

**Protestant**, adj. describing a Christian church that separated from the Catholic Church



Preachers like George Whitfield gave stirring sermons to large crowds in fields and pastures.

Preachers like Jonathan Edwards and George Whitfield began holding revivals across the colonies. They preached to large crowds outdoors as well as inside churches. They encouraged people to avoid sinful behavior and to be “reborn” in their faith.

The Great Awakening had a large effect on colonial society. Not everyone agreed with its teachings. This led to divisions within Protestant **denominations** and the creation of new ones.

### Vocabulary

**denomination**, n.  
a branch of a religion

New universities like Princeton and Rutgers, both in New Jersey, were also founded at this time to train “awakened” clergy. Perhaps one of the most important effects of the Great Awakening was that it contributed to a growing American identity. Many people across all of the colonies were influenced by the Great Awakening. This gave them a sense of community with colonists in other regions and from different backgrounds.

## PRIMARY SOURCE: FROM THE JOURNAL OF SARAH KEMBLE KNIGHT (1704)

*Sarah Kemble Knight was a colonist living in New England during the early 1700s. In 1704, she traveled by horseback from Boston, Massachusetts, to New Haven, Connecticut. Her journal provides a unique glimpse into what conditions were like for travelers at this time.*

They are governed by the same laws as we in Boston, or little differing, throughout this whole colony of Connecticut. And much the same way of church government, and many of them good, sociable people, and I hope religious too: but a little too much independent in their principles, and, as I have been told, were formerly in their zeal very rigid in their administrations towards such as their laws made offenders, even to a harmless kiss or innocent merriment among young people. Whipping being a frequent and counted an easy punishment, about which as other crimes, the judges were absolute in their sentences.

## PRIMARY SOURCE: FROM “POSITIVE INFORMATION FROM AMERICA” (1683) BY FRANCIS DANIEL PASTORIUS

*In this excerpt, German immigrant Francis Daniel Pastorius describes Pennsylvania upon his arrival.*

Philadelphia daily increases in houses and inhabitants. . . . Furthermore here and there other towns are laid out; for the Society is beginning to build about an hour and a half from here one bearing the name of Frankford, where they have [built] a mill and a glass factory. Not far from there . . . lies our Germantown, where already forty-two people are living in twelve dwellings. They are mostly linen weavers and not any too skilled in agriculture. These good people laid out all their substance upon the journey, so that if William Penn had not advanced provisions to them, they must have become servants to others. . . . Of [Germantown] I can say no more at present than that it lies on black fruitful soil and is half surrounded with pleasant streams like a natural defense. . . . Every family has a house lot of three acres.

# Chapter 2

## The Institution of Slavery in North America

**A Brutal Institution** Slavery existed before the Age of Exploration and North American colonization. For millennia, people throughout the world enslaved those they conquered. Slavery was part of African life before Europeans arrived.

### The Framing Question

How and why did slavery spread in North America?

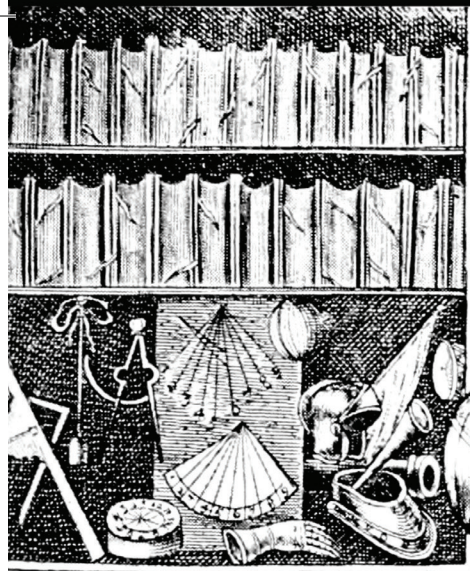
### Vocabulary

**chattel slavery**, n.  
private ownership of people

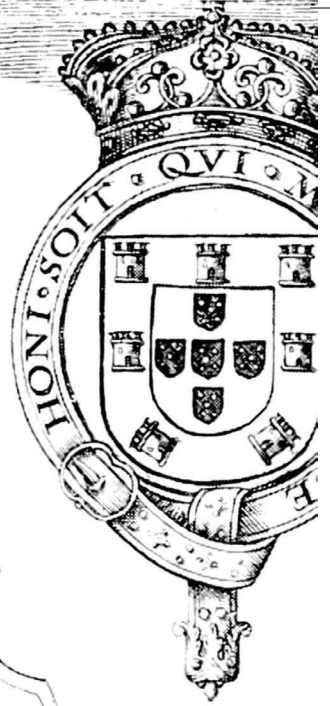
But Europeans used their power and wealth to spread the practice of **chattel slavery** on a vast scale. In doing so, they dramatically changed the lives of millions of people.

### The Beginnings of the Slave Trade

European involvement in the African slave trade began to grow after the year 1415 CE, when the Portuguese seized the city of Ceuta on the North African coast. Prince Henry of Portugal financed several Atlantic voyages to West Africa. He aimed to benefit financially from the region's rich resources. Prince Henry is also known to have played a large role in developing the Atlantic slave trade—the



PRINCE HENRY  
OF  
PORTUGALL



Prince Henry of Portugal, also known as Henry the Navigator, seized the city of Ceuta.

CEU

**inhumane** practice of buying and selling enslaved people. During the next hundred years, thousands of Africans were taken to become enslaved workers in parts of Europe and on islands in the Atlantic.

### Vocabulary

**inhumane**, adj.  
cruel, lacking mercy

In the 1400s CE, Portuguese and Spanish explorers came upon several groups of islands in the Atlantic Ocean. Colonists quickly settled on these islands. Portugal built colonies on Madeira, São Tomé, and the Azores. Spain colonized the Canary Islands. Spanish and Portuguese colonists realized that the land and climate on these islands would be good for growing sugar. Sugar was



This view of Elmina Castle, built in 1482 CE by the Portuguese in present-day Ghana, shows the courtyard of the female slave quarters. Here, enslaved Africans awaited shipment to the Americas.

in high demand in Europe. For growing sugar to be a profitable business, huge fields of sugarcane had to be planted and harvested. This required lots of workers. For Spanish and Portuguese plantation owners, large numbers of enslaved African people provided the needed labor. As sugar plantations sprang up, the demand for enslaved workers grew.

## Slavery in the New World

After Christopher Columbus came upon the islands of the Caribbean Sea, the Spanish colonized the region. They established colonies throughout the Americas. In Mexico and Peru, the Spanish mined vast amounts of gold and silver. They enslaved Indigenous people to work in the mines. The islands of the Caribbean were not rich in mineral wealth, but the land and climate were well suited for growing sugar and other crops.

The Spanish brought experts to Hispaniola and other islands to help set up sugar plantations.

The Spanish plantation owners wanted cheap labor. At first, they planned to use local people to work on the plantations. But disease and war, both of which were brought to the islands by the Europeans, killed many Indigenous people. As had been the case in the Azores and the Canary Islands, enslaved people from Africa provided a cost-effective answer for people who cared only about profit.

The Spanish were not the only Europeans who made use of this solution. Portuguese colonists found that sugar was well suited to the coastal regions of Brazil. They imported people to use as enslaved labor on sugar plantations there. In the 1600s, England colonized several islands in the Caribbean, including Barbados. Eventually, British planters also used enslaved people from Africa to work on their sugar plantations. Sugar made the planters rich. But the sugar growers created another business that could increase their wealth—importing and trading human beings.

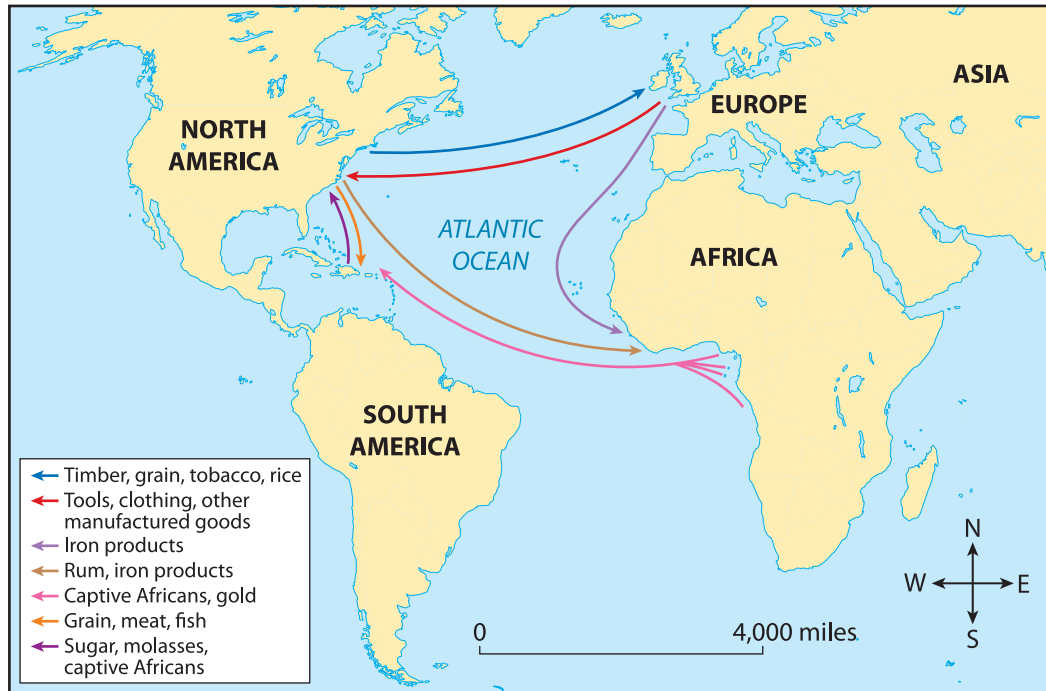
## The Atlantic Slave Trade

The Portuguese were the first Europeans involved in the Atlantic slave trade. While exploring the African coast, they found people they could purchase and enslave. When Portugal's power collapsed, the Dutch took over not only the spice trade but also much of the Atlantic slave trade.

By 1655, the Dutch were transporting a growing number of enslaved people across the Atlantic each year. When England seized control of New Netherland in 1664, there were Dutch-speaking Africans in the colony.

The slave trade was one side of a trading triangle. One segment of the triangle brought raw materials like timber, tobacco, grain, sugar, and rice from the plantations of the Americas to Europe. Another segment of the triangle carried finished goods from Europe to Africa. These included items

## The Triangular Trade



Enslaved persons were bought and sold like commodities and shipped across the Atlantic as part of the triangular trade.

such as iron, guns, gunpowder, knives, cloth, and beads. The final segment transported enslaved people from Africa to the Caribbean islands. Later, enslaved Africans were shipped by the thousands to the English colonies in North America.

## The Middle Passage

Africans typically passed through several stages in their journey into slavery in the Americas. The unlucky were captured, occasionally by European kidnapers and slavers but usually during wars among African peoples. The prisoners were marched in chains to a seaport on the coast of West Africa. There, they were packed into ships for the journey across the Atlantic. Those who survived the journey were sold at a slave market in a seaport in the Americas and transported to plantations.



The trip across the Atlantic Ocean was known as the Middle Passage. It was a terrible, dehumanizing experience. Slave ships usually carried between 150 and 600 Africans. Enslaved people were treated like **cargo**, not people. They were chained on platforms. Each person had a space about six feet long (1.8 m) and sixteen inches wide (41 cm). As the ships passed through **tropical latitudes**, temperatures in the hold would rise to more than one hundred degrees Fahrenheit (thirty-eight degrees Celsius).

### Vocabulary

**cargo**, n. goods transported by ship, plane, or truck

**tropical latitudes**, n. areas around the equator that remain warm all year

The journey across the ocean took between two and four months, depending on the weather and the destination. Illness and death were common occurrences. So were mass revolts and suicides by captives unwilling to endure the horror of the journey and the unknown awaiting them. With people packed in close quarters, disease spread easily. Historians estimate that about 15 percent of enslaved Africans, or 1.5 to 2 million people, did not survive the terrible journey.

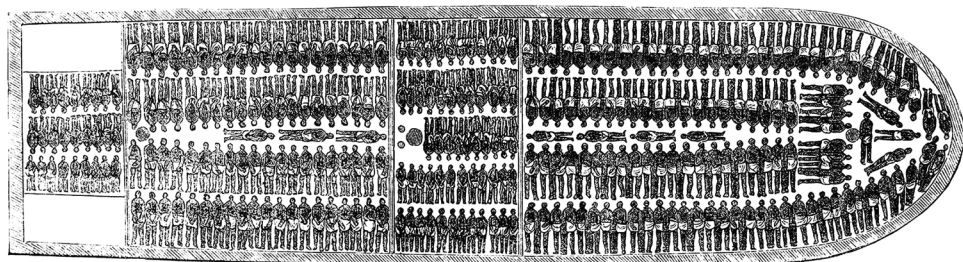


FIG. I.—PLAN OF LOWER DECK OF A SLAVER, UNDER THE REGULATED SLAVE TRADE ACT OF 1788.

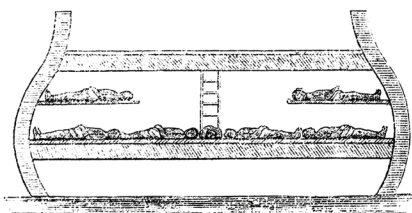


FIG. II.—CROSS SECTION AMIDSHIPS.

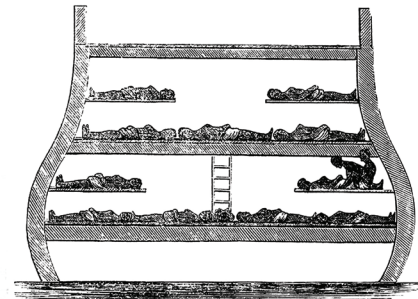
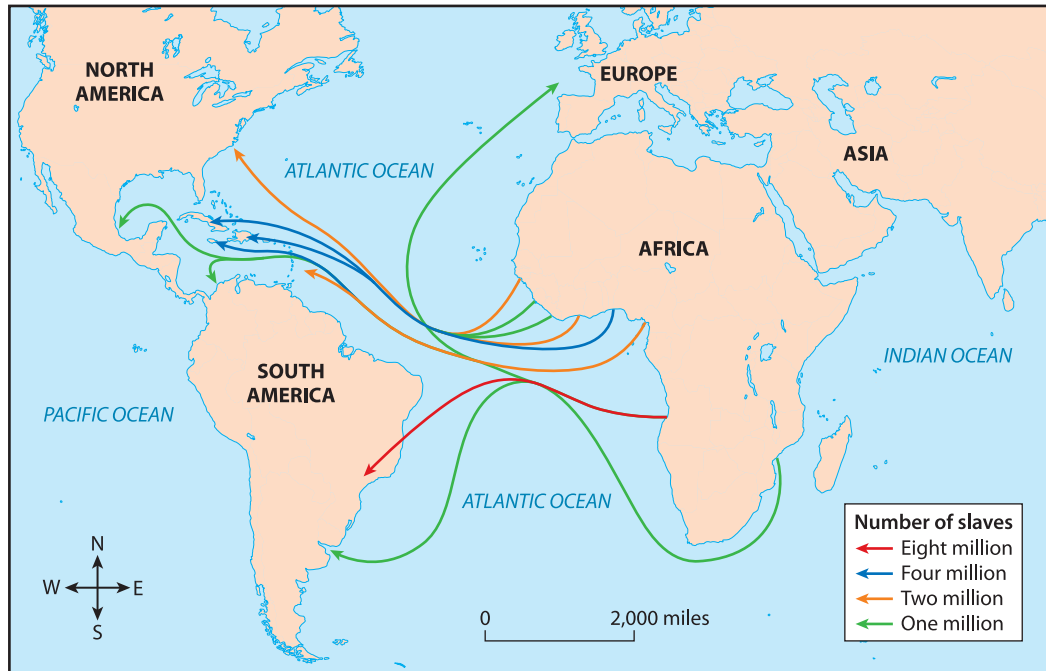


FIG. III.—CROSS SECTION AT THE POOP.

This diagram shows the layout of a slave ship that would have been used for the Middle Passage.

## Transatlantic Slave Trade



The transatlantic slave trade resulted in the forced migration of millions of Africans.

The Atlantic slave trade lasted nearly three hundred years. In that time, European slave traders made approximately fifty thousand voyages. They forcibly carried many millions of enslaved Africans across the Atlantic.

## Slavery Begins in the English Colonies

In 1619, a Dutch ship sailed into the mouth of the James River in the English colony of Virginia. On board were Dutch pirates who had captured a shipload of imprisoned Africans from a Spanish vessel. Now the Dutch sailors were traveling north and needed supplies.

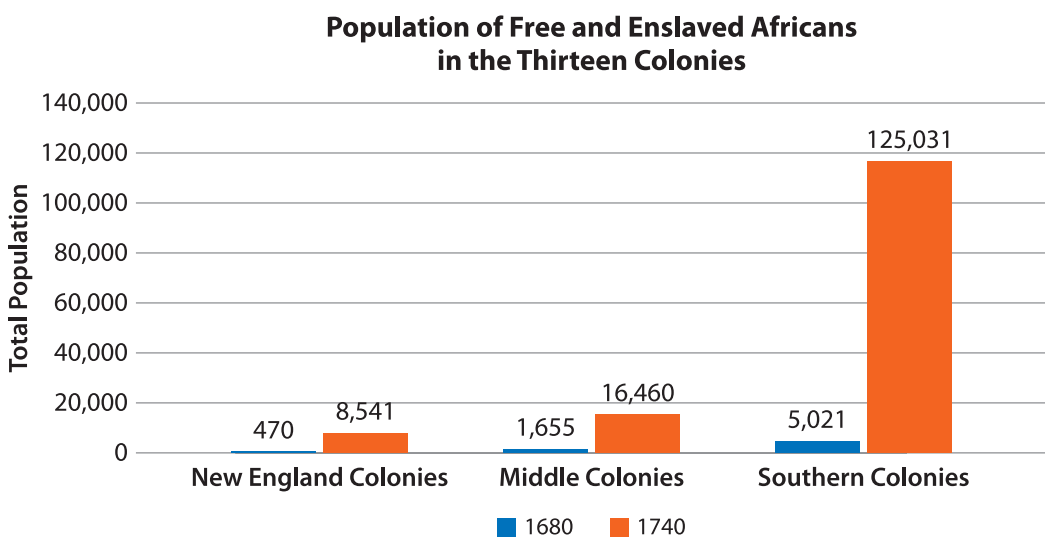
The pirates traded these people for food. These were the first Africans in the English North American colonies. Whether these Africans became indentured servants or enslaved workers remains unclear. It is known that some did eventually regain their freedom and own land.

It should be noted that the English colonists were already familiar with slavery. The English in Virginia and in other colonies had enslaved Native

Americans for their labor. But the arrival of enslaved Africans in Virginia began an expansion of both slavery and the slave trade. Within a few decades, colonies began passing laws that more clearly defined the institution of slavery. In 1641, Massachusetts became the first colony to legally recognize slavery. Slavery came to be defined along racial and religious lines as well as heredity. By the 1700s, Virginia and Maryland had passed increasingly harsh, dehumanizing laws, and many colonies had legalized the use of brutal punishments against enslaved people.

## Slavery Grows in the Colonies

In the colonies of North America, the demand for enslaved people grew later than in other parts of the world. This demand varied according to the region. For example, the soil was not very good in New England, and the winters were cold. These conditions were not well suited to growing cash crops, so there was no need for a large labor force. Even so, slavery did exist on a small scale in the New England colonies. Enslaved Africans worked in many different roles in this region. Women worked primarily as domestic servants. Men worked as farm laborers and tradespeople.



The number of free and enslaved Africans in the thirteen colonies grew significantly between 1680 and 1740.

The New England colonies, especially Massachusetts and Rhode Island, benefited from the slave trade. The first enslaved Africans in Boston arrived in 1638, an event recorded in John Winthrop's journal. It did not take long before the ports of Boston and Rhode Island grew wealthy from the triangular trade, largely from the export of rum. Rum was used to trade for enslaved Africans. It was made from sugar and molasses grown by enslaved African laborers in the Caribbean. Rhode Island's government passed a ban on slavery in 1652, but it was not enforced. Roughly half of all voyages from the English colonies to Africa in the 1700s departed from Rhode Island.

As in New England, slavery existed in the Middle colonies, but the region's economy did not depend on it. In New York City, for instance, a large slave market existed on Wall Street along the East River, and more than 40 percent of households held slaves. Enslaved Africans did household chores, worked on docks in the harbor, and planted fields. Slaveholders also hired out slaves. The enslaved person did the work, and the slaveholder collected the wage.

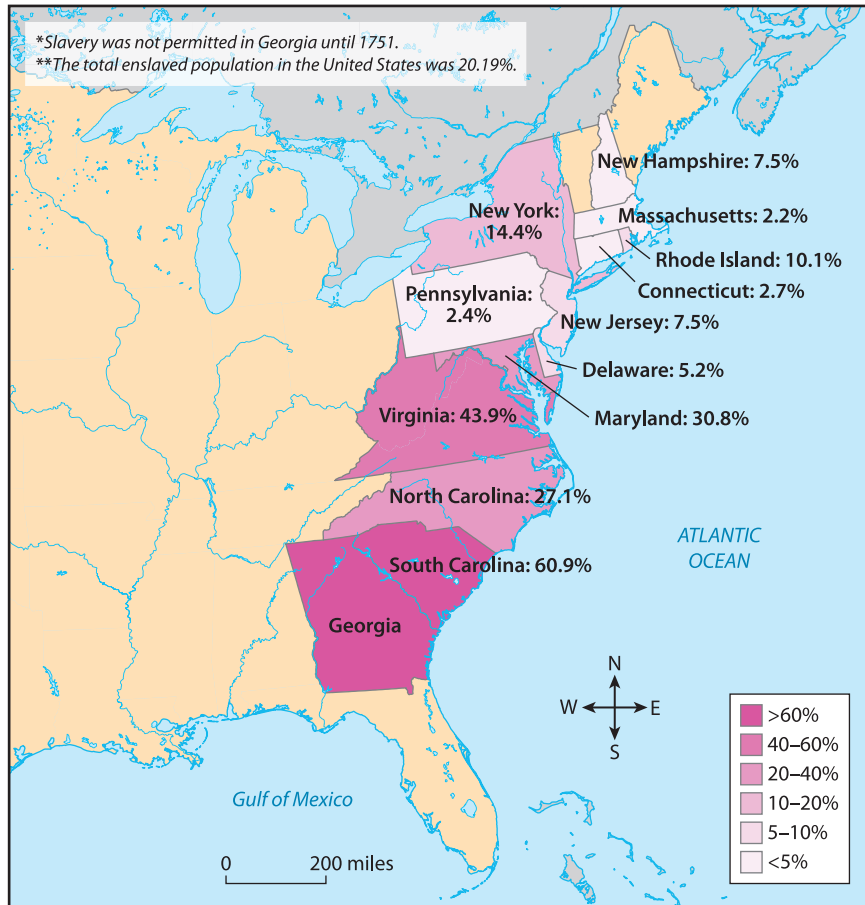
Many people in the Middle colonies opposed slavery. In 1688, a group of Quakers signed the Germantown Quaker Petition. This document protested slavery in Pennsylvania. Slavery was also opposed by other religious groups. In 1712, Pennsylvania's colonial government made importing enslaved Africans illegal. The law did not ban the institution of slavery, and it was overturned by Queen Anne, the queen of Great Britain and Ireland, within a year.

Unlike the New England and Middle colonies, by the 1700s the South had become highly dependent on the institution of slavery. Hiring and paying indentured servants, who would leave when their contracts expired, was expensive. Buying an enslaved workforce from Africa was more profitable. Through the 1700s, as more and more land in Maryland, Virginia, and North Carolina was used for growing tobacco, growers **procured**

### Vocabulary

**procure**, v. to gain possession of

## Enslaved Population in the Thirteen Colonies, 1750



Enslaved populations in 1750 were higher in the Southern colonies than in the Middle and New England colonies.

more and more enslaved persons to work their fields. During the same period, South Carolinians turned to enslaved African labor to work their rice and indigo plantations. These parts of the South had developed a slave-based economy.

### Plantation Life and Resistance

A life of slavery and hard labor began at the slave markets or auctions. As enslaved people were bought and sold, families were frequently broken up; children were separated from their parents, and husbands from wives.

The life of an enslaved person was extremely hard—and not just physically. Enslaved people had no rights at all. They could not travel without permission.

They could not testify in court, so they could not testify against any harsh treatment. And many colonies also had laws that made it illegal to teach enslaved people to read or write.

There was resistance to the practice of slavery, and that resistance came in various forms. A number of enslaved people organized rebellions or attempted to escape. The Stono Rebellion of 1739, for example, was one of the largest slave rebellions in the thirteen colonies. The rebellion itself occurred southwest of Charleston, South Carolina. Other effective ways to rebel were subtler and harder to detect, including working slowly, becoming suddenly unwell, or “accidentally” breaking tools.

## Keeping African Culture Alive

The term *slave* cannot fully define the human beings who worked in the fields planting and harvesting crops, or built fences, or even cared for plantation owners’ children.

Though they were categorized as enslaved workers, those who came from Africa once had independent lives there. They might have been farmers, engineers, artisans, musicians, or artists. Such skills and talents were brought to the colonies and used on the plantations. Skilled craftspeople continued to make complex metalwork that incorporated African designs. Women wove ornate baskets and rugs and sewed quilts that were both functional and decorative. These skills were handed down to their enslaved children and grandchildren.

Working in the fields from sunup to sundown was grueling, but it was not all of life. After working all day under someone else’s control, enslaved people returned to their cabins in the slave quarters, where they created a community that was their own. The cabins themselves were usually small, wooden structures with a chimney and wood or dirt floors. They were either very cold or very hot, depending on the season. They were cramped, especially if more than one family lived in a single cabin. Families of enslaved people usually had some simple pieces of furniture and perhaps a pot for cooking. But in these



**Enslaved Africans in the American colonies adapted their crafts and traditional designs to local materials.**

simple dwellings, the enslaved told and retold stories and folktales handed down from earlier generations. In many of these stories, a weak character outwits a strong one. They kept African music and dance alive, and some continued to hold on to the religious beliefs and practices of their ancestors in Africa. Even enslaved people who became Christians, as most did, often mixed in some African religious beliefs and customs with their new beliefs. And as they blended elements of African cultures with American culture, they created something new and different—an African American culture.

## PRIMARY SOURCE: OLAUDAH EQUIANO DESCRIBES THE MIDDLE PASSAGE

*At the age of eleven, Olaudah Equiano was captured and sold into slavery. He eventually regained his freedom and wrote The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano. Equiano's autobiography details the horrors of slavery, including his experience on the Middle Passage.*

At last, when the ship we were in had got in all her cargo, they made ready with many fearful noises, and we were all put under deck, so that we could not see how they managed the vessel. But this disappointment was the least of my sorrow. The stench of the hold while we were on the coast was so intolerably loathsome, that it was dangerous to remain there for any time, and some of us had been permitted to stay on the deck for the fresh air; but now that the whole ship's cargo were confined together, it became absolutely pestilential. The closeness of the place, and the heat of the climate, added to the number in the ship, which was so crowded that each had scarcely room to turn himself, almost suffocated us. This produced copious perspirations, so that the air soon became unfit for [breathing], from a variety of loathsome smells, and brought on a sickness among the slaves, of which many died, thus falling victims to the [irresponsible greed], as I may call it, of their purchasers. This wretched situation was again aggravated by the galling of the chains, now become insupportable; and the filth of the necessary tubs, into which the children often fell, and were almost suffocated. The shrieks of the women, and the groans of the dying, rendered the whole a scene of horror almost inconceivable.



## PRIMARY SOURCE: ACT FOR PREVENTING REBELLIONS (VIRGINIA, 1680)

The frequent meeting of large numbers of African slaves under the pretense of feasts and burials is considered dangerous. To prevent this in the future, it is enacted by the king and with the consent of the general assembly that it shall not be lawful for any African or other slave to carry or arm himself with any weapon. Nor may he go or depart from his master's property without a note from his master. Such permission will not be granted except for specific and necessary occasions. And every African or slave who is guilty of not having a note shall be sent to the constable. The constable will be required to give the African twenty lashes. The constable will then return him to his master.

It is further declared that if any African or other slave shall lift his hand in opposition against any Christian, he shall be given thirty lashes for each offense. If any African or other slave hides from his master or resist lawful authorities, it shall be lawful to kill the African or slave who resists.

# Glossary

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## A

**assembly, n.** a group of people that makes laws (12)

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## B

**buffer zone, n.** a neutral area that separates rival nations or factions (5)

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## C

**cargo, n.** goods transported by ship, plane, or truck (21)

**chattel slavery, n.** private ownership of people (16)

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## D

**debtor, n.** a person who owes money (5)

**denomination, n.** a branch of a religion (14)

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## I

**inhumane, adj.** cruel, lacking mercy (18)

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## P

**Parliament, n.** in Great Britain, a group made up of representatives and the king or queen that makes the laws for the country (5)

**procure, v.** to gain possession of (24)

**Protestant, adj.** describing a Christian church that separated from the Catholic Church (13)

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## R

**regulate, v.** to control or place limits on (12)

**representative, n.** a person who speaks or acts on behalf of someone else (12)

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## S

**secular, adj.** not religious (13)

**self-government, n.** the ability of people to rule themselves and make their own laws (12)

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## T

**tropical latitudes, n.** areas around the equator that remain warm all year (21)

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## Y

**yeoman, adj.** describing a person who owns and cultivates a small farm (10)



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