

1680

Virginia passes first slave code

1735

Slavery banned in Georgia

1739

Stono Rebellion

1740

South Carolina revises and strengthens slave laws

1750

Georgia ban on slavery lifted

1680**1705****1730****1755**

3 African Americans in the Colonies

SECTION PREVIEW

Objectives

- 1 Describe how slave traders brought Africans to the Americas.
- 2 Describe the lives of African Americans (free and enslaved) in the colonies.
- 3 Explain how slaves reacted to laws restricting their actions.
- 4 **Key Terms** Define: Middle Passage; mutiny; Stono Rebellion.

Main Idea

Africans, brought across the Atlantic Ocean as slaves, helped build England's American colonies while enduring harsh and often brutal treatment.

Reading Strategy

Reinforcing Key Ideas Create a chart with the following regions as headings: South Carolina and Georgia; Virginia and Maryland; New England and Middle Colonies. As you read the section, fill in information about the lives of slaves in each of the regions.

Not counting Native Americans, about one out of every five people living in British North America by the middle of the 1700s was of African descent. As in the case of all immigrants, the experiences of African Americans in the colonies varied depending on where they lived. Yet the stories of Africans, uprooted from their homeland and sold into slavery, had many elements in common. One African who later told his story was Olaudah Equiano.

Olaudah Equiano

AMERICAN BIOGRAPHY

Olaudah Equiano was born around 1745 in the country of Benin. He wrote in his autobiography decades later that the land of his youth was “uncommonly rich and fruitful” and “a nation of dancers, musicians and poets.” As a child, he learned “the art of war” and proudly wore “the emblems of a warrior” made by his mother.

When Equiano was ten, his world was shattered. Two men and a woman kidnapped him and one of his sisters while their parents

were working. Separated from his sister, Equiano was enslaved to a series of African masters. About six months after he was kidnapped, Equiano was sold and put aboard a British slave ship bound for the Americas. In his autobiography, he wrote:

“The first object which saluted my eyes when I arrived on the coast was the sea, and a slave ship which was then riding at anchor and waiting for its cargo. These filled me with astonishment, which was soon converted into terror when I was carried on board.”

—Equiano’s Travels, 1789

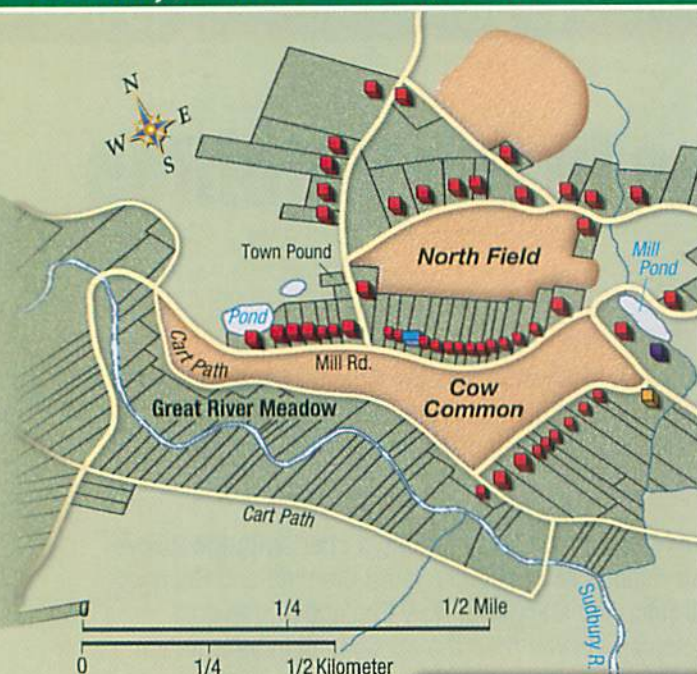


Olaudah Equiano
(1745?–1797)

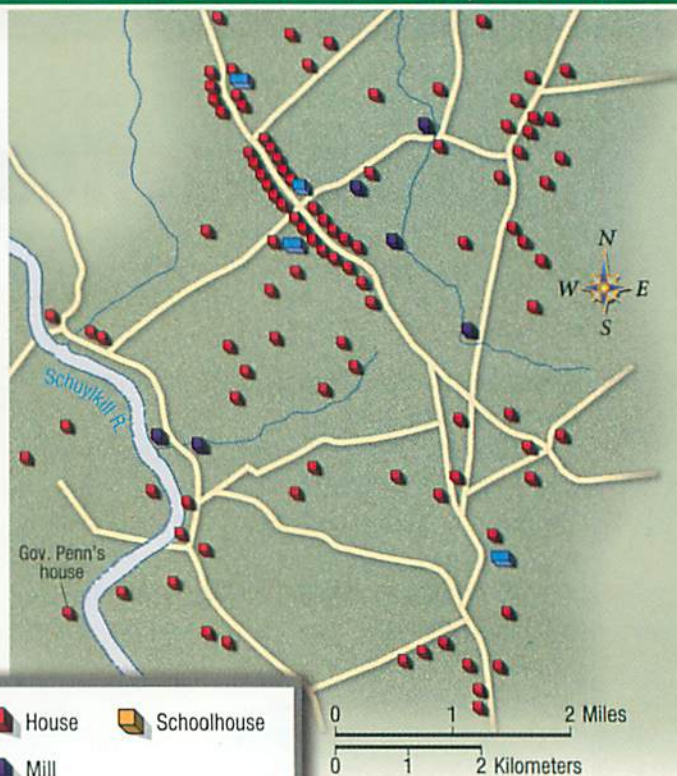
During the **Middle Passage**, Equiano witnessed many scenes of brutality. (The Middle Passage was one leg of the triangular trade

Sudbury, Massachusetts, 1656

Germantown, Pennsylvania, 1772



New England towns were more close-knit than those of Pennsylvania.



side of the lower Delaware River. Penn founded Pennsylvania, which he saw as a "Holy Experiment," a place of religious freedom and social equality. Penn negotiated land treaties with Native Americans and then brought over Quaker settlers from England.

A Diverse Settlement

Pennsylvania drew Quakers from Wales, Germany, and other American colonies. Many moved to Philadelphia, the fast-growing city and the nucleus of the colony. Others came to farm the rich lands in the Great Valley to the west of Philadelphia.

The colony soon started recruiting non-Quakers interested in cheap land and religious tolerance. The German Lutherans, Scotch-Irish Presbyterians, and Swiss Mennonites tended to settle on farms some distance apart in the southeastern region of the colony. As the map of Germantown shows, the large villages and towns that dotted the region differed in one important way from New England towns—they featured churches or meetinghouses of several different Christian groups.

By 1750 Pennsylvania had developed a character marked by prosperity, individualism, and religious tolerance. It also reflected the cultural diversity of several ethnic groups. The colony differed greatly from Puritan New England, where the population was homogeneous, more rooted in the doctrines of a single church, and less tolerant of religious variation of any kind.

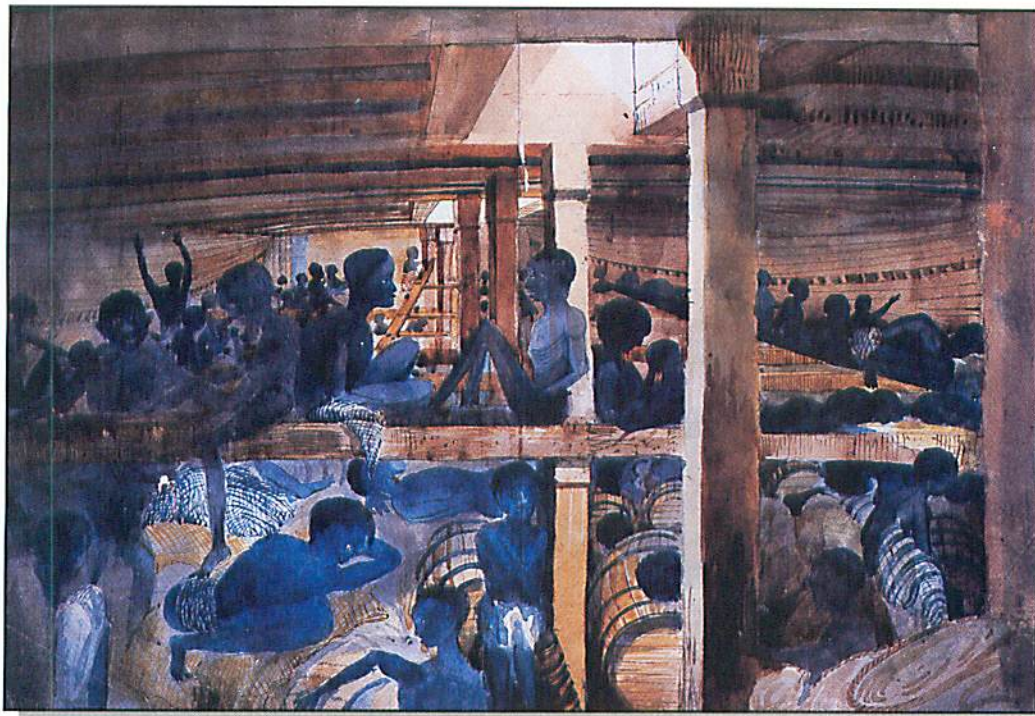


GEOGRAPHIC CONNECTIONS

1. Explain how the Puritan settlers influenced the character of the New England Colonies.
2. What was the main difference between the New England and Pennsylvania colonies?

Themes in Geography

3. **Place** Look at the settlement pattern on each map. How are the religious and cultural values of each region reflected in the location of people's houses?



"No eye pities; no hand helps," said a slaver describing the treatment of his human cargo. An eyewitness painted this scene aboard a slave ship in 1846.

Geography What was the Middle Passage?

between the Americas, Europe, and Africa. The Middle Passage is also used to refer to the forced transport of slaves from Africa to the Americas.) Although historians differ on the actual figures, from 10 to 40 percent of the Africans on a slave ship typically died in the crossing. Sick and frightened about what lay ahead, they were forced to endure chains, heat, disease, and the overpowering odor caused by the lack of sanitation and their cramped, stuffy quarters. As Equiano wrote, "Many a time we were near suffocation from the want [absence] of fresh air, which we were often without for whole days together." Conditions were so grim on Equiano's voyage that two people committed suicide. A third was prevented from doing so and then whipped.


Occasionally, enslaved Africans physically resisted during the Middle Passage by staging a **mutiny**, or revolt. The slave traders lived in continual fear of mutinies, and crews were heavily armed. Statistics about the British slave trade show that a rebellion occurred every two years on the average. Many of these were successful.

Equiano's ship finally arrived at a port on the island of Barbados, in the West Indies, where the Africans were sold at a public auction. Most went to work and die in the sugar plantations of the West Indies. Equiano noted that the sale separated families, leaving people grief-stricken and alone.

“In this manner, without scruple [concern], are relations and friends separated, most of them

never to see each other again. I remember in the vessel in which I was brought over, in the men's apartment there were several brothers who, in the sale, were sold in different lots; and it was very moving on this occasion to see and hear their cries at parting. O, ye nominal Christians [Christians in name only]! might not an African ask you, Learned you this from your God, who says unto you, Do unto all men as you would men should do unto you?"

—Olaudah Equiano

In 1766 Equiano was taken to Virginia, where he later bought his freedom. Migrating to Great Britain, he found work as a barber and a personal servant and became active in the antislavery movement. 

Slavery in the Colonies

The experiences of Africans varied greatly in colonial times. Slavery was legal everywhere, but the number of slaves in each region and the kind of labor they performed differed widely from region to region.

South Carolina and Georgia Much of the seaboard region of South Carolina and Georgia is formed by a coastal plain called the low country. Planters found the low country ideal for growing rice and indigo. Slaves there labored under especially brutal conditions. High temperatures and dangerous diseases



This authentic watercolor depicts a scene at a South Carolina plantation in the late 1700s. The musical instruments and the dance form were derived from the Yoruba people of West Africa. **Culture** How does this painting document the character of African American culture on South Carolina plantations?



made life particularly difficult. Charles Ball, an African American whose account was published in 1836, described the situation as it had existed for well over a century:

AMERICAN VOICES

“The general features of slavery are the same every where; but the utmost rigor [strictness] of the system, is only to be met with on the cotton plantations of Carolina and Georgia, or in the rice fields which skirt the deep swamps and morasses of the southern rivers.”

—Charles Ball

African Americans made up the majority of the population in South Carolina and Georgia. Because rice was grown most efficiently on large estates, this region had more plantations with more than one hundred slaves than anywhere else in the colonies. Since wealthy planters often chose to spend most of their time away from their isolated estates, slaves generally had regular contact with only a handful of white colonists.

The lack of interaction allowed slaves in South Carolina and Georgia to preserve some of their cultural traditions. Many had come to the region directly from Africa. They continued to make the crafts of their homeland, such as baskets and pottery. They played the music they loved and told the stories their parents and grandparents had passed down to them. In some cases, they kept their culture alive in their speech. The most well-known example is the Gullah language, a combination of English and African. As late as the 1940s, speakers of Gullah

were using four thousand words from the languages of more than twenty-one separate groups in West Africa.

The skills that African Americans brought with them to South Carolina and Georgia also deeply affected the lives of their masters. African Americans had superior knowledge of cattle herding and fishing. Because many had grown rice in their homelands, they had practical know-how about its cultivation.

Strong African kinship networks helped people not only survive slavery but also preserve their traditions. Africans highly valued family relationships. When separated from their blood relatives, slaves created new relationships with one another by acting as substitute kin. In these relationships, people behaved as if they were brothers or sisters or aunts or uncles, though in fact they were not.

In these and many other ways, the slaves in South Carolina and Georgia made the best of a horrible situation. Forced to come to North America, they found strength in each other's company and in the memory of their African origins.

Virginia and Maryland The lives of slaves in Virginia and Maryland differed from those of African Americans in South Carolina and Georgia in four ways:

(1) Slaves in Virginia and Maryland made up a minority rather than a majority of the population.

(2) Relatively few slaves came to Virginia and Maryland directly from Africa.

(3) Slaves performed different work. Cultivating tobacco, the major crop, did not take as much time as growing rice, so slave-owners put enslaved African Americans to work at a variety of other tasks.

(4) African Americans in Virginia and Maryland had more regular contact with European Americans. The result was greater integration of European American and African American cultures than in South Carolina and Georgia. In the latter half of the 1700s, slaves in Virginia and Maryland blended the customs of African and European origin. They mingled the African and the European in everything from food and clothes to religion.

The high costs of importing slaves from Africa led some Virginia and Maryland planters to encourage their slaves to raise families. It was in their economic interest to allow African Americans a fuller family and community life. Over time, therefore, some slaves were able to form fairly stable family lives, though they still lived in constant fear of being sold and separated from their families.

Some male slaves in Virginia worked away from plantations as artisans or laborers in Richmond and other towns. As long as they sent back part of their wages to the plantations, they lived fairly independently of their master's control. They were, however, still subject to harsh laws that controlled what they could do. In addition, their children were born enslaved.

New England and the Middle Colonies

About 400,000 African Americans lived in the Southern Colonies by the late 1700s. In contrast, there were only about 50,000 African Americans in the New England and Middle colonies combined. These colonies north of Maryland had a more diverse economy than that of the Southern Colonies. As a result, African Americans in the New England and Middle colonies had more freedom to choose their occupations than did African Americans in the Southern Colonies.

Throughout the 1700s, farms in the New England and Middle colonies were much smaller than those in the Southern Colonies and did not require as many slaves for field work. It was more common to find slaves in this region working in the cities as cooks, housekeepers, or personal servants. Male slaves often worked in manufacturing and trading or as skilled artisans. They also worked in the forests as lumberjacks. Because

African-American Population, 1690–1750

Year	New England Colonies	Middle Colonies	Southern Colonies
1690	905	2,472	13,307
1700	1,680	3,361	22,476
1710	2,585	6,218	36,063
1720	3,956	10,825	54,058
1730	6,118	11,683	73,220
1740	8,541	16,452	125,031
1750	10,982	20,736	204,702

Source: *Historical Statistics of the United States, Colonial Times to 1970*



Interpreting Tables The growth in the number of African Americans, although relatively small in the 1600s, jumped considerably in the early 1700s. **Geography** In which group of colonies did the number of African Americans increase most sharply?

shipbuilding and shipping were major economic activities, some African American men worked along the seacoast. As dockworkers, merchant sailors, fishermen, whalers, and privateers, they contributed to the growth of the Atlantic economy.

Free Blacks

Most African Americans in the colonies were enslaved. It was not until after the American Revolution that the free black population in the Northern and Southern colonies grew significantly. Some slave laws discouraged people from freeing slaves. Owners had to get permission from the legislature before freeing any of their slaves. The laws also demanded that freed slaves leave a colony within six months of gaining freedom. Despite the obstacles, those slaves who earned money as artisans or laborers had the possibility of saving enough to purchase their freedom.

Free African Americans did much of the same kind of work as enslaved African Americans. They were, however, probably worse off materially. Free blacks endured poorer living conditions and more severe discrimination than slaves who were identified with specific white households. Free blacks also faced limited rights. They could not vote, testify in court against whites, or marry whites.

TO BE SOLD on Thursday next, at public vendue,
TEN LIKELY
GOLD COAST NEW NEGROES,
Just imported from the West-Indies,
Consisting of eight stout men and two women.
To prevent their receiving the infection of
the smallpox, they have been kept constantly
on board the vessel since they arrived, where
they will be sold.—Any person inclining to
purchase them at private sale may apply to Messrs. Johnson
and Wylly.



RUN AWAY from the subscriber, a NE-
GROE MAN named FRANK, who car-
ried off a gun and shot pouch with him. He
is a likely well made stout fellow, speaks bro-
ken English, with the Spanish accent, having
been several years at the Havana.—Whoever
will deliver him to Mr. George Baillie in Sa-
vannah, or to me in Augusta, shall receive 20s. reward, be-
sides all charges.

JAMES GRAY.



These advertisements, which appeared in the *Georgia Gazette* in 1764, reflect the status of slaves as property as well as the rebellious spirit of many of the enslaved. **Economics** How were economic incentives used to reclaim runaway slaves?

Laws and Revolts

Laws controlling the lives of slaves varied from region to region. Every colony passed its own slave laws, and colonies revised these laws over time. Settlers in Georgia, for example, barred slavery from the colony in 1735 but lifted the ban in 1750. Virginia enacted its first major slave code in 1680. South Carolina passed fairly weak regulations in 1690 and then revised its

laws in 1696, 1712, and 1740, each time strengthening the restrictions placed on slaves.

Generally, slaves could not go aboard ships or ferries or leave the town limits without a written pass. Crimes for slaves ranged from owning hogs and carrying canes to disturbing the peace and striking a white person. Punishments included whipping, banishment to the West Indies, and death. Many of these laws also applied to free African Americans and to Native Americans.

Laws restricting the movement of slaves made organizing slave rebellions extremely difficult. Because slaves could not travel or meet freely, they had only limited contact with slaves in other areas. A few early documented cases of slave revolts do stand out. In 1739, several dozen slaves near Charleston, South Carolina, killed more than twenty whites in what is known as the **Stono Rebellion**. The slaves burned an armory and began to march toward Spanish Florida, where a small colony of runaway slaves lived. Armed planters captured and killed the rebels. In New York City, brutal laws passed to control African Americans led to rebellions in 1708, 1712, and 1741. After the 1741 revolt, thirteen African Americans were burned alive in punishment. African Americans undertook almost fifty documented revolts between 1740 and 1800.

More commonly, African Americans resisted slavery through a series of silent acts, such as pretending to misunderstand orders or faking illness. While these actions could not give them freedom, they did grant the slaves a small degree of control over their own lives.

SECTION 3 REVIEW

Comprehension

- Key Terms** Define: (a) Middle Passage; (b) mutiny; (c) Stono Rebellion.
- Summarizing the Main Idea** In what way did the skills that slaves brought from Africa allow the colonies of South Carolina and Georgia to prosper?
- Organizing Information** Create a Venn diagram comparing the lives of slaves in South Carolina and Georgia with the lives of slaves in Virginia and Maryland.

Critical Thinking

- Analyzing Time Lines** Review the time line at the start of the section. Write a phrase or sentence that connects each entry to the entry that follows it.
- Identifying Central Issues** In what ways was Olaudah Equiano's experience similar to that of other enslaved Africans?

Writing Activity

- Writing an Expository Essay** Slaves did not often openly rebel against their situation. Write a brief essay explaining some of the reasons for their actions.