

Focus On Geography

Geography and Regional Economies

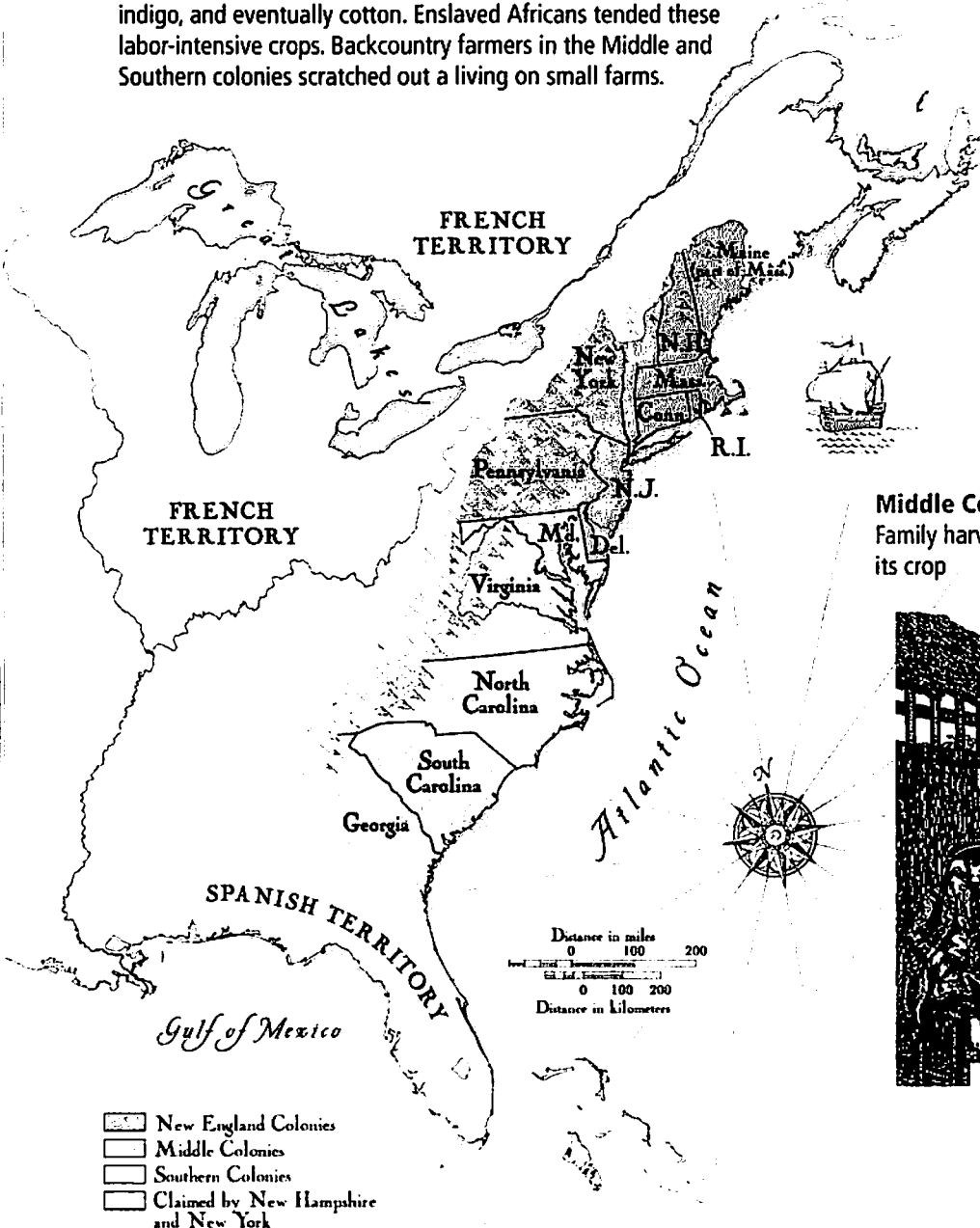
The geography of a region determines what type of housing people build, what type of clothing they wear, and how they make a living. Each region of the 13 colonies developed an economy based on its geography.

New England's geography lent itself to fishing, lumber, and small-scale farming. Trade and commerce took hold in the New England city of Boston and in other towns along the coast. For their thriving wheat, rye, and barley crops, the Middle Colonies became known as the "breadbasket" of colonial America. Flour and other products were shipped to England and the West Indies from busy ports in New York and Philadelphia. Large plantations in the South grew tobacco, rice, indigo, and eventually cotton. Enslaved Africans tended these labor-intensive crops. Backcountry farmers in the Middle and Southern colonies scratched out a living on small farms.



▲ New England Colonies

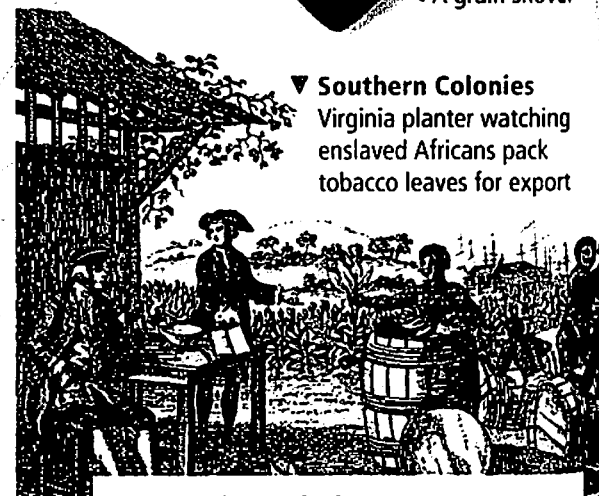
Fishing for cod off the coast of New England



▲ Middle Colonies

Family harvesting its crop

◀ A grain shovel



▼ Southern Colonies

Virginia planter watching enslaved Africans pack tobacco leaves for export

Geography and History

- How did geography affect the economy in each of the three regions?
- How do you think geography affects your town or city?



Connect to Illinois

The Importance of Lake Michigan as a Natural Resource

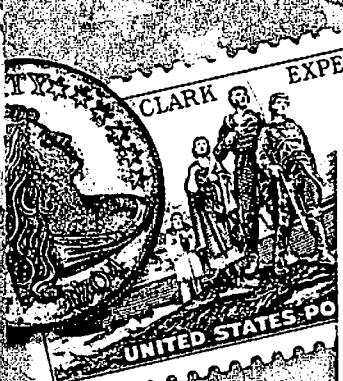
Before the United States was explored and settled by Europeans, many native peoples enjoyed the land's valuable natural resources. Lake Michigan, the largest lake located completely in the United States, is one example of an Illinois natural resource that has been treasured for thousands of years.

Native Americans who settled in the area that is now Illinois depended on Lake Michigan for everything from transportation to food. They hunted along its shores, harvested wild rice, and fished for whitefish. In the 1630s, Illinois Indians moved into the area, setting up winter hunting camps on nearby waterways. By the late 1600s, The Illinois Confederation, a group of tribes, was fighting the Iroquois and other Native Americans for control of the bountiful region.

The first European to travel on Lake Michigan was the French explorer Jean Nicolet, who was sent by his country to scout the area in 1634. The French claimed the Illinois country early in the 1670s, and although they came into conflict with the native peoples, French fur traders managed to establish friendly relations with some of them. Many married Native American women, whose kinship ties helped with their husbands' fur trading.

However, one tribe in particular, the Mesquakie (or Fox), did not welcome the French settlers. Starting in 1712, they battled the French and their native allies for many years. Finally the Fox settled elsewhere, allowing Lake Michigan to once again be used by French traders. The French did not enjoy this peace for long, however, as they lost Illinois to the British at the end of the French and Indian War in 1763.

As you will read, the value of natural resources like Lake Michigan would often inspire wars of empire as European powers claimed vast regions of North America for themselves. In only a few decades, Americans colonists would find themselves fighting fiercely for these same resources.



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