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If working and living conditions were harsh, so too were the general health conditions of early America, and many servants did not survive their terms. In spite of these hardships, indentured servants willingly provided the main source of labor for the southern colonies in the seventeenth century. Few economic opportunities and possibilities for social advancement existed for these people in England, whereas in the colonies, once the period of servitude had ended, one's origin presented no insurmountable stigma. Clearly, there was a real chance for betterment in the New World. As a result of such opportunities, it has been estimated that at least half, and perhaps two-thirds, of all the white laborers in the colonies before the American Revolution arrived as indentured servants.

In addition to the volunteer white labor force, the English occasionally kidnapped people and sent them to America. To use the colonies as a dumping ground for convicts, and between 1718 and 1775 the courts banished at least 50,000 individuals to the colonies. Although England believed that this practice was a good way to get rid of undesirable prisoners, some of the colonists thought otherwise. In 1751 the Virginia Gazette complained that these people were "Serpents" and declared, "In what can Britain show a more Sovereign contempt for us than by emptying their jails into our settlements?" Several colonies passed laws attempting to halt the shipment of convicts to America, but England disallowed them. Not all colonists opposed the incoming convicts; some planters welcomed persons of "evil fame" as cheap labor.

DEVELOPMENT OF SLAVERY AND RACISM

The desire for economic gain dominated American society for centuries. Almost every major movement or recruitment of peoples from outside the colonies or the United States would be rationalized on the grounds of adding needed laborers, who would work wages so low that extraordinary profits could be achieved. During the colonial era changes in British government policies dictated the need for even cheaper labor, and this in turn resulted in the importation of African slaves on a grand scale.

Before the 1650s Virginia tobacco growers had been selling their produce to the mother country as well as to other nations but in 1650 and 1651 Parliament passed the first of the Navigation Acts which regulated trade within the empire. Seeking to strengthen the English economy and to weaken competing Dutch shipping, the laws limited colonial exports to English ships. These acts also restricted the sale of colonial tobacco to Britain, Holland, and other parts of Europe and ultimately led to lower tobacco prices. The Dutch had often purchased inferior grades of colonial tobacco, but after the Navigation Acts not only were they eliminated from the trade but the British demanded only the first-quality leaf. The Dutch had often purchased inferior grades of colonial tobacco, but after the Navigation Acts not only were they eliminated from the trade but the British demanded only the first-quality leaf. During the 1650s and early 1660s overproduction also contributed to lower prices and reduced profits. Moreover, the fixed terms of English indentured servants resulted in a continual turnover of workers and a need to train new ones. This in itself would have been a major burden, but upon the restoration of the monarchy in England in 1660, Charles II and his ministers concluded that the country was no longer overpopulated. Having decided that it would be unwise to continue to allow members of the work force to terminate their servitude, as did indentured servants, they inaugurated a policy to discourage emigration.

These factors—the Navigation Acts, lower tobacco prices, and difficulties in obtaining additional indentured servants for England—combined to make the colonists, especially the owners of large southern plantations, favor importation of African slaves. In 1662 the British government granted a monopoly in the slave trade to the Royal African Slave Company, thus initiating a new policy of bringing in blacks to help lower the costs of producing tobacco, rice, indigo, and other colonial staple crops. She would not terminate their servitude, as did indentured servants; she would increase and multiply, thereby guaranteeing a permanent
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work force, and their purchase price and maintenance costs would dettract only minutely from the ultimate wealth they would contrib:ute to their masters. With such obvious economic advantages, moral concerns, if any, disappeared quickly. Entrepreneurs, in the seventeenth century or later, have rarely allowed moral scruples to affect the way they utilized people for economic profit. More often than not some heretofore unfamiliar minority group has appeared on the scene to provide the needed brawn. As a nation, the United States has always been fortunate that in times of its greatest needs conditions in other countries, or other sections of the nation, have been conducive to migration.

According to a number of scholars, some of the first Africans who arrived in Virginia in 1619 were treated not as slaves but as indentured servants. The colony had not grown sufficiently to envision the need for many blacks, and even though white Englishmen still came, large numbers of Africans seemed unnecessary. Although well entrenched in South America and the West Indies, the practice of slavery was not common in the British colonies of North America in the 1620s and 1630s but evolved as the decades passed. Before the 1660s, neither Virginia nor Maryland, the original southern colonies, formally recognized slavery. Prior to the enactment of Virginia's first slave codes in that decade the status of blacks had not been consistent, although court documents and other written records indicate that they stood apart from white servants. Thus social and economic practice and a growing number of legal restrictions preceded the first slave codes.

The southern governments expanded their codes throughout the remainder of the colonial period by placing a tight system of control over slaves. The colonists decided that conversion to Christianity did not bring freedom, and they made the status of the child follow that of the mother—a decision prompted by the fact that most interracial sexual unions were of white males and black females. In the eighteenth century new laws made the manumission or freeing of slaves by individual owners more difficult. Slaves also lost their right to hold property and to testify in court and came to be considered increasingly as property, not persons.

As white men enslaved blacks, they also regarded them with suspicion, fear, and contempt. We know little of how Africans viewed whites during the colonial period but we have much evidence of the growing racism among whites. Even before the explorations of Africa, Europeans, especially the English, believed that black connoted evil, and white, purity. The Oxford English Dictionary indicated that before the sixteenth century black meant "soil, dirty, foul . . . atrocious, horrible, wicked." To the first Europeans who explored Africa and encountered blacks the difference in pigmentation made a profound impression, and, in the long
run, skin color, more than any other factor, defined the relationships between blacks and whites.

Europeans also noted other differences. Africans were not Christians, and whites gradually began to consider blacks, as they considered Indians, savage and uncivilized. They started describing Africans as beasts and noted the resemblance they saw between them and the chimpanzees discovered in the African explorations. White men also viewed blacks as lustful, sexual beings. These ideas eventually led to the ethnocentric conclusion that their darker pigmentation symbolized the innate inferiority of blacks.

At first slavery grew slowly. In 1650 blacks comprised less than 5 percent of England's North American colonies, and by 1671 Virginia counted only 2,000 slaves in a population of 40,000. During the eighteenth century the number of slaves increased rapidly and on the eve of the American Revolution they constituted 22 percent of the colonial population. Most of these slaves lived in the southern colonies, particularly Maryland, Virginia, and South Carolina, where in 1770 they accounted for 40 percent of the total population. Virginia alone had 188,000 slaves or about half of the slave population of the United States. South Carolina also had large numbers of slaves, especially in the counties surrounding Charleston. Blacks outnumbered whites by two or three to one in some regions, and throughout the eighteenth century the black population outnumbered the white in South Carolina. This was also true of other areas in the tidewater regions of the Chesapeake Bay colonies.

Colonial slaves labored in nearly all occupations. Blacks had been imported for the cultivation of rice, indigo, sugar, and tobacco, but the slaves engaged in other tasks as well. They worked as carpenters, cooper, tailors, cooks, blacksmiths, personal servants—indeed they labored in most of the South's occupations. For those few who lived in towns such as Williamsburg, Charleston, or Baltimore, a variety of skilled trades might be learned. In Charleston, for example, urban craftsmen sometimes trained slave apprentices, who then could be sold to the plantations for higher prices than common laborers. In the same city some blacks worked as fishermen, a skill they may have brought with them from Africa.

But skills acquired by slaves did not mitigate the harshness of colonial slavery. Life was cruel for black as well as white servants or offenders. Branding and public whipping provided common punishments for law breakers and the slave might receive even more severe punishments. One observer noted of an especially brutal planter in the 1730s, "Colonel Lynch cut off the legs of a poor negro, and he kills several of them every year by his barbarities." Colonial documents record cases of maiming of slaves through castration, nose-slitting, and the chopping off of hands and ears. Such brutalities became less common in the eighteenth century but rebellious slaves could always expect the worst. Slaves also worked long and hard and they always had to fear that their families could be destroyed by sales of one or more of its members. During periods of great tension, particularly when fears of slave insurrections were high, the laws and their execution could be especially fierce.

In addition to harsh physical labor extracted from slaves and their inferior status, the owners attempted to impose English culture on the Africans. Historians know little about how much African culture slaves retained in colonial America, but judging from the more abundant sources of the nineteenth century and scattered earlier records, blacks managed to hang on to many of their ways and blend their heritage with that of the English to form an African-American culture. For example, part of the "seasoning" process involved teaching English to the slaves; most learned the language but many flavored the new tongue with African words. In the Sea Islands along the South Carolina coast, the blend produced Gullah speech, which still survives. The slaves also withstood many of the early efforts to Christianize them, for they brought with them complex religious ideas that resisted destruction. Eventually, especially after the Great Awakening of the 1740s, Christianity made inroads on African religions and customs concerning life, death, and belief, but by the time of the Civil War black religion was a blend of African beliefs and white Christianity, not a carbon copy of the latter.

White men feared the newly arrived Africans who seemed to resist slavery more than those who had been born in the United
States. One South Carolina planter remarked, “The Negroes that most commonly rebel, are those brought from Guinea, and who have been inured to War and hardship all their lives; few born here, or in the other Provinces, have been guilty of these vile Practices.” Planters, although eager to exploit African labor, feared having too many blacks in their area, possibly out of their direct control. They saw runaway and rebellious slaves as not only a labor loss but a threat to white supremacy.

The most menacing form of resistance was open rebellion and while insurrections were not common in the American South, a number occurred during the colonial era. Among the most famous was the Stono Rebellion in South Carolina. This 1739 uprising took the lives of approximately twenty-five whites and twenty-five blacks, damaged property, and frightened the colony. Whites took up arms to crush the revolt; afterward they attempted to bring the slaves under a tighter rein. Yet even more controls and a greater imposition of English culture on blacks brought no guarantee of security. Some of the most assimilated slaves, the artisans, led one of the most famous rebellions in Virginia in 1800.

Other slaves disrupted the system by refusing to work hard, breaking tools, destroying crops, stealing, feigning illness, or running away. But the chance of a successful escape was slight, and most blacks had to cope with bondage as best they could. If their master was well off or kinder than most, there might be leisure time, better food, clothing, and housing, and concern for individual welfare. Regardless of their treatment, however, slaves found comfort in their religion, music, and, above all, their families. Slave families had no legal standing but nonetheless provided the close human relationships necessary for survival.

The Northern colonies also developed slave societies, but slavery never became central to their economies. Forty percent of the southern population consisted of black slaves compared with only 5 percent in the North. About 10 percent of Rhode Island’s mid-eighteenth-century residents, and a slightly higher proportion of New York’s inhabitants, were slaves. Northern regulations, and slavery generally, proved less harsh than in the South. In New England slaves were considered property but had more protection as persons than bondsmen and bondswomen in the South. As property, New England slaves resembled southern slaves—they could be bought, sold, and inherited and they faced restrictions, such as curfews. Still, as persons they were entitled to jury trial, could testify against whites in some cases, and were able to acquire property. In the North, New York and New Jersey were the most oppressive. The slave codes there resembled those in the South. New Yorkers also shared the fear of rebellion, especially after an uprising in 1712, and like southern whites, they retaliated with severe repression. Whether in the North or South, however, slavery provided cheap labor and often significant profits for the growing colonial society.

A few blacks obtained their freedom during the colonial era. Some had entered as indentured servants, such as those arriving in 1619, and became independent when they served out their indenture. Others were freed by their masters or managed to purchase their liberty. Their numbers remained small, and in 1770 only about 5 percent of the African Americans were free. Mostly they became modest farmers but in some colonial towns they earned their livings by pursuing a trade or working as day laborers. Everywhere free African Americans were regarded as second class citizens with limited legal rights.

Except in South Carolina, where the whites remained a small minority among large numbers of Indians and blacks, colonial Americans seem to have paid little attention to contacts between the two non-European peoples. In South Carolina, however, the colonists feared that Indians and slaves might combine forces and destroy them, or that the tribesmen would offer a haven for runaways. To prevent these occurrences, whites spread tales of Indian torture and atrocities among blacks, and at the same time paid the nearby Indian tribes to return escaped slaves. At other times colonial officials, lacking sufficient white manpower, reluctantly armed some blacks for campaigns against the Indians. This policy also made future cooperation between the two groups even more difficult. Whether or not the possibility of Indians and blacks
launching a race war against whites actually existed, South Carolinians thought it did. Their policies offer yet another example of how the Anglo-Europeans dominated and used the other two races for their own benefit.

EUROPEAN MINORITIES

Blacks and Indians were not the only minorities to be exploited in colonial America. Europeans, although welcomed for their wealth or potential labor, also suffered from English domination. Nevertheless, both the Scotch-Irish and the Germans played significant roles in the development of colonial society, especially during the eighteenth century, when nearly a half-million of them arrived in America. In 1683, Francis D. Pastorius led the first German families to Philadelphia, responding to William Penn's advertising campaign and the promises of religious tolerated and personal freedom. For the next century Germans poured into the English colonies, the largest number settling in Pennsylvania. By the 1760s they comprised a third of that colony's population. From there some migrated slowly to the south and west, settling in Virginia, the Carolinas, and Georgia. To the north, Germans moved into New York, particularly along the Hudson Valley.

This flood of non-English immigrants eventually caused friction and difficulties. Some of this resulted from long-held bitterness toward people from competing European nations, but many of the problems grew from local issues in the American colonies. Although it is not possible to consider all the nationalities and scattered settlements, the situation in Pennsylvania shows how negative feelings toward non-English peoples developed. There the Germans—incorrectly called Pennsylvania Dutch—were divided into several groups. Those who attracted the most attention were the so-called sect Germans: Amish, Mennonites, Moravians, and Dunkers. These people were pacifists and sided with the Quakers in matters of military service and defense.

Most Germans, aside from wanting to maintain their own language and customs, agreed with other pioneers about the need for strong action against the Indians. But they mainly wanted to be left alone. When the Quaker-dominated legislature refused to pass laws committing the colony to fighting in King George's War during the 1740s, Benjamin Franklin and other non-Quaker leaders tried to organize an unofficial militia for defense against the French and the Indians. They appealed unsuccessfully to the Germans for cooperation. This aloofness to the war between Britain and France convinced some Pennsylvanians that the Germans were unpatriotic and a potential danger to the colony.

The pacifist Germans in particular encountered hostility from other settlers as well as from colonial officials. The Moravians, or Brethren as they called themselves, had been forced out of Georgia during the 1730s for refusing to bear arms. A few years later New York authorities suspected their missionaries of persuading the Indians to join the French against the English and forced the Moravian mission in Dutchess County to close. Then in 1747 Governor William Gooch of Virginia denounced the Brethren for their pacifism. As a result of these difficulties the Moravians received a promise from Parliament that they would not have to bear arms or take oaths in legal matters. After that they fared slightly better. By the 1770s the pacifist groups included no more than 10 percent of the German population in Pennsylvania, and they aroused less antagonism from the rest of the colonists.

Pennsylvania leaders suspected and feared the Germans not only because some refused to fight but also because they rejected Anglo-American customs and the English language. German immigrants separated themselves from the English-speaking population whenever possible during the middle decades of the eighteenth century, causing suspicion and some bitterness. Benjamin Franklin denounced them as "Palatine Boors" and in a fit of exasperation asked, "Why should Pennsylvania, founded by the English, become a Colony of Aliens, who will shortly be so numerous as to Germanize us instead of our Anglifying them?"

To break down the language and cultural barriers in the colony, English-speaking leaders organized a Society for the Propagating of Christian Knowledge among the Germans. This association pro-
FORGING A NEW NATION: THE SOUTH

Quakers, particularly in New England and Pennsylvania, acted first, but even those in the South began to manumit blacks wherever the law permitted it.

SOUTHERN ANTISLAVERY FALTERS

The ideology of the Revolutionary era buttressed the cause of those who opposed slavery. Emancipationists frequently used the ideas of the Declaration of Independence, and early state constitutions and laws included sentiments about the rights of man. Critics noted that equality and slavery were incompatible. One Massachusetts judge observed, "The idea of slavery is inconsistent with our own conduct and our constitution... There can be no such thing as perpetual servitude of a rational creature." Black military participation in the Revolution also encouraged some colonies to consider emancipation. Some northern states granted freedom to black soldiers but the South rejected such proposals. Lord Dunmore, the British governor of Virginia, also promised freedom for those blacks who had fought with the Loyalists, but the English did little to live up to this promise.

In the South many planters, like Thomas Jefferson, held slavery to be morally wrong. Yet Jefferson owned numerous slaves and depended on them for plantation labor. He was not sure that whites and blacks could live together in freedom, and when he thought of emancipation he hoped for colonization outside of America. In the end Jefferson, like so many of the South's leading planters, made few concrete proposals to end slavery. He freed Sally Hemings and her children, who may have been his also, and carried his ambivalent feelings about slaves to his grave.

Other Southern planters also considered freeing their bondsmen. In the upper regions of the South, Maryland and Delaware enacted laws encouraging manumission. As a result, the number of free blacks in those states increased significantly. Virginia and North Carolina passed similar laws but fewer individuals released their bondsmen and bondwomen. South Carolina and Georgia, on the other hand, maintained their traditions.

SOUTHERN ANTISLAVERY FALTERS

Economic factors largely account for the failure of antislavery in the southern states. The slaveholders depended on their chattels for labor and were unwilling to make a large financial sacrifice in the cause of human freedom. After the Revolution planters hoped that with English control and restrictions gone the West would be open for expansion and foreign trade in tobacco would be more profitable. Yet it was cotton that formed the base for southern expansion and became the cornerstone of the region's economy. Eli Whitney's invention of the cotton gin in 1793 made it economically profitable to grow short staple cotton in much of the South. Americans produced only 13,000 bales of cotton before its invention but by 1860 output had increased to about 4,500,000 bales annually. As the nineteenth century wore on English and Northern mills became ready consumers of American-grown cotton.

Not everyone raised cotton. In the older states, diversified farming and other staple crops remained important. Substantial production of rice in South Carolina, sugar in Louisiana, and tobacco and hemp in North Carolina, Tennessee, and Kentucky indicates existing dependence on cash-crop agriculture. In addition, farmers also raised cattle, hogs, corn, and other foodstuffs to feed their people.

Some whites urged moving to a more diversified economy, especially manufacturing, and the South did witness the spread of cotton mills, iron works, and other industries before the Civil War. The mining of gold and lead also grew as did timber and turpentine production. To serve these industries and to help move people and goods more easily some people earned their living building or operating canals and railroads. Nevertheless, the South lagged behind the rest of the nation in both industry and transportation because it devoted most of its capital to land and slaves for agriculture.

As a result, the South had few major cities before the Civil War. Some towns grew into small cities in the early nineteenth century, but the region could boast of few urban centers when compared with the free states. Of the cities in the future Confederacy, only
New Orleans had a population of over 100,000 people and in 1861 it was the only Southern community large enough to rank among the nation's nine largest cities. Although a few Southern towns served as important regional centers of trade, banking, and even some manufacturing, the region remained overwhelmingly rural throughout most of the nineteenth century.

SOUTHERN FREE BLACKS

With improved prospects for expansion of cotton-growing areas many whites grew even more firm in their beliefs about the necessity of retaining slavery. At the same time, however, they felt uncomfortable with free blacks in their midst and sought ways of removing them. One popular notion espoused by many whites, including Abraham Lincoln, was an organization to support it: the American Colonization Society. Formed in 1817, some of its proponents saw it as a way to eradicate slavery; they reasoned that white Americans might favor abolition if the nation could deport all blacks to Haiti or Liberia in Africa. Others ignored slavery and just wanted to rid the nation of free blacks. Even the antislavery Republican party, founded in 1854, had its share of colonizers. Senator James Doolittle of Wisconsin said it would keep "our Anglo-Saxon institutions as well as our Anglo-Saxon blood pure and uncontaminated," while others said it "would relieve us from the curse of free blacks."

Because of its expense and opposition from free blacks, the colonization movement had little success. Instead whites enacted laws aimed at excluding African Americans. Using charges often leveled at minorities throughout American history, legislators complained that their states would become "an asylum for all the old and decrepit and broken down negroes that may emigrate or be sent to it," or "the Liberia of the North." With votes supporting these attitudes by large majorities several states barred the entrance of free blacks while others required them to post bonds guaranteeing good behavior. When legislation failed to keep blacks out of their communities, angry whites sometimes resorted to violence and periodic race rioting erupted in the antebellum period. Perhaps the worst episode occurred in Cincinnati when, in 1829, mobs of whites assaulted blacks, burned their homes, and drove about half of them out of town. Many of the escapees fled north to Canada.

In the South free blacks lived on the margin of society. Virtually "slaves without masters," the 250,000 free African Americans living there in 1860 found themselves with few legal and social rights. They could not vote, except in Tennessee, North Carolina, and parts of Louisiana, and during the 1830s both Tennessee and North Carolina disfranchised them. Through custom and by law the white South heaped restrictions on them, especially after the 1830s. After the Civil War free blacks were banned from the schools, the militia, public places, and some types of employment and were subject to curfews, registration systems, and verbal and physical abuse. They could make contracts, be married, sue, and hold property, but generally they could not testify against whites in the courts or sit on juries. They also faced harsh penalties for criminal offenses.

It is not surprising that blacks lived at the fringes of the economy and that most existed in or near poverty. Only a few managed to become successful planters. Most of those in rural areas barely scratched out a living, and if they owned land, it was usually a small amount. The landless frequently became hired hands or casual laborers. The cities offered more opportunities, but here too the former slaves faced discrimination and often found jobs only as unskilled laborers or as domestics. In 1831 Savannah banned blacks from becoming apprentices in the trades of "Carpenter, Mason, Bricklayer, Barber, or any other Mechanical Art or Mystery," and later extended the list. In spite of such discrimination some free blacks did become skilled workers. The Deep South's most prosperous African Americans lived in New Orleans. There, proportionately more of them than Irish or German immigrants were skilled workers, and some even became successful businessmen and professionals.

Free blacks formed their own social institutions. The church was
especially important then as it is in our own times. African Americans, most of whom are Protestant fundamentalists, have always been especially comfortable in their own churches and their ministers were, and are, expected to assume leadership positions vis-à-vis white society. Many of the most respected African-American leaders of the twentieth century, for example, included the Reverends Martin Luther King, Sr., and Jr., the Reverend Jesse Jackson, and even Black Muslim minister Louis Farrakhan. In the antebellum South, of course, whites were suspicious of, and passed laws to restrict, black religious life. Blacks also organized schools, clubs, and cultural groups and sought to improve and educate themselves but none of these competed with their own local churches as places for worship, relaxation, and institutions where the most important issues facing the community were discussed.

SLAVERY IN THE OLD SOUTH

White Americans tried to ship free blacks back to Africa, but they could not end slavery. Antislavery agitation failed nationally, although the Northern states did abolish the institution. In 1787 the Northwest Ordinance outlawed slavery in what became Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, and Wisconsin, but at the same time slave owners could bring their human property into the region south of the Ohio River. The Constitution prevented the banning of the international slave trade for twenty years. Thus until 1808 Americans continued to import blacks legally from Africa or the West Indies. Even after Congress prohibited the trade, smuggling continued for several more decades. These latter-day importations had less effect than the natural increase in the domestic population. By 1860 nearly four million slaves lived and worked in the South.

One of the most repulsive aspects of slavery was the interstate sales of human beings. Planters who occupied the best lands of the Gulf states after Indian removal, and who wanted to purchase slaves, did so from dealers in the Eastern seaboard states or the Upper South. Estimates of the interstate slave trade are not precise, but Virginia, the largest seller, provided roughly 300,000 slaves to the Gulf states between 1830 and 1860, and hundreds of thousands more were sent south from more Northern slave states such as Maryland and Kentucky. Even defenders of slavery considered public auctions of slaves a necessary evil and sometimes looked down on the dealers. The buyers usually wanted “prime fields” (young healthy males), but women and children were also sold in the marketplace. Occasionally slave owners made some effort to keep marriages intact, but the South did not have legal safeguards to prevent the separation of husbands and wives. Families, as opposed to marriages, were even more vulnerable to the slave trade. Most sellers tried to keep mothers and children together but once the young ones passed the age of thirteen, they were sold separately and without regard for their parents and kin.
The traumatic experience of being bought and sold like cattle has been immortalized in black folklore with songs like “No More Auction Block for Me.”

For the planter brought slaves with him to the new cotton lands of the Deep South he was apt to destroy families. Frequently husbands and wives lived on different plantations, and if a planter migrated and took his male slave along, the slave’s wife and children on another plantation remained behind. This happened frequently in the antebellum South as planters seeking new opportunities took hundreds of thousands of slaves with them to the Deep South. Thus whether by sale or migration the massive movement of slaves between 1820 and 1860 proved especially difficult for the black family.

Whether slaves were sold, carried by the owners, or simply born in the newer regions of the South, slavery expanded rapidly in the Gulf states. At the time of the American Revolution over half the slave population lived in Maryland and Virginia; by 1860, although Virginia still had the largest number of slaves, these two states accounted for only 15 percent of the bond servants. Alabama and Mississippi, two states that did not come into the Union until after the War of 1812, ranked closely behind Virginia. Of the nearly four million slaves in 1860, about half dwelled in the cotton kingdom.

At the time of the Civil War only about one quarter of the South’s white families owned slaves and most of these owned only a few. Twelve percent of the owners had more than 20 slaves, and a small minority owned large numbers: 3,000 families had more than 100 slaves and a few families more than 500. Some of these large owners held several plantations, using overseers to run them. Most bondsmen and bondwomen lived on plantations having 20 or more slaves. These were usually the large cotton plantations in Alabama, Mississippi, and other cotton-growing regions (where according to the 1850 census, more than two thirds of the South’s 2.5 million slaves worked), rice plantations in South Carolina, and sugar plantations in Louisiana. In the cities concentration happened less often than in the countryside and only a few owners had large numbers of slaves.

Although most slaves lived on cotton plantations not all toiled in the fields. A minority became skilled workers such as carpenters and blacksmiths. Some cooked food; others cared for children or were servants in the master’s house. Overseers were usually white, but the bulk of the drivers, who supervised the slaves in the fields, were black. Plantations usually grew their own food and raised their own cattle and hogs, and slaves cared for the food crops and raised the livestock. During the off season even the hands who usually worked in the tobacco, rice, sugar, and cotton fields helped with domestic chores and the maintenance of the plantation, including such jobs as construction and repair of fences and buildings. Of course, on the smaller farms having only a few slaves, blacks engaged in a wide variety of tasks.

Slaves also labored in the Old South’s industries. They could be found in iron foundries and tobacco plants in Virginia, hemp factories in Kentucky, sugar mills in Texas and Louisiana, rice mills
talk about freeing slaves. During the nineteenth century Southerners again tightened their grip over this “peculiar institution.” By the 1830s fear of slave revolts, such as Nat Turner’s in Virginia in 1831, and the rise of abolitionism in the North hardened white attitudes. The South became more militant in defending slavery, increasingly viewing the system as a benefit to both white and black, a blessing sanctioned by God. Southern voices of criticism against slavery became fewer and fainter, while the belief in black inferiority reinforced the white man’s view that servitude was an appropriate condition for blacks. “He the negro is but a grown up child, and must be governed as a child,” wrote George Fitzhugh, one of the better-known defenders of the institution. “The negro race is inferior to the white race and living in their midst,” he continued, “they would be far outstripped or outwitted in the chaos of free competition. . . . The negro slaves of the South are the happiest, and in some senses, the freest people in the world.”

In the antebellum South the slave codes became increasingly more repressive to make the slave stand in fear of the white man. As one judge said, “The power of the master must be absolute, to render the submission of the slave perfect.” Slaves could not possess firearms or leave the plantation without permission. It was illegal to teach them to read and write, and they could not hold "meetings without having a white person present. They could not insult or strike whites or testify against them in courts. Separate laws and courts dealt with slave offenses and for certain crimes blacks sometimes received more severe sentences than white people did. Whipping was the most common form of public punishment for slaves, though South Carolina permitted branding until 1833, and there were cases after that of slaves having their ears chopped off. Alabama permitted up to one hundred lashes on the bare back of a slave for forging a pass. For some offenses death was permissible.

The harshness of the law was somewhat mitigated by the profit motive, by planter paternalism, and in some cases by the slaves' legal status as persons. Slaves were defined as property but con-
sidered persons too. For example, the malicious killing of a slave was considered murder, and some codes regulated the hours of labor and told masters to provide a proper diet. These provisions were partly motivated by self-interest and partly by the fact that white Southerners recognized blacks as human beings. The killing of a slave was both the taking of a life and the destruction of a valuable piece of property. When a slave was executed for a capital crime the state generally compensated the owner for his loss. Occasionally masters discharged overseers who were too brutal; some masters even sued overseers for injuring their slave property; and on occasion the state prosecuted overseers for killing or maiming slaves.

In practice the slaveholders controlled the legal process, and the courts offered meager protection for people in bondage. If the owners' power made for only a slight legal protection as persons, it also enabled masters to disregard such features of the codes as the ban on teaching slaves to read and write. The practice of hiring out and living away, although frowned on and illegal in many places, was nonetheless common in the cities. A Savannah grand jury maintained that the practice of slaves being able "to hire their own time or labor for themselves" was "an evil" that "is striking directly at the existence of our institutions." But that same city had slaves who hired out, including one who "hired his time of his master at two hundred and fifty dollars a year, which he paid in monthly installments. He did what he called job work, which consisted of undertaking jobs, and hiring men to work under him," and he had seven or eight other blacks, "all hired to help remove the cotton in wheelbarrows."

The practice continued because masters found it profitable to hire out their bondsmen and employers needed skilled or even unskilled laborers for short periods. The skills workers possessed made them valuable enough for owners to overcome their fears about the lack of controls under the hiring-out system. Some city governments rented slaves for municipal projects, such as building streets and removing garbage. Others, however, owned their own workers. One historian has noted that the city of Savannah even used its slaves as firemen and they were reported to be the pride of the town. "We suppose that there are no more efficient or well managed companies in the United States," boasted the local newspaper.

Evidence exists that urban slaves had better shelter than those living on the plantations in run-down cabins but usually their housing was crowded, drafty, dirty, and lacked adequate furniture. Some visitors found the slave quarters "in the most decayed and deplorable condition," and "built of logs, with no windows—not opening at all, except the doorway, with a chimney of sticks and mud." Kind and prosperous planters provided their slaves with sturdy whitewashed log cabins and privacy.

Diet, medical care, and clothing varied, but they were frequently inadequate. Frederick Douglass said that as a child in slavery he was "kept almost in a state of nudity; no shoes, no stockings, no jacket, no trousers; nothing but coarse sack cloth or town-linen, made into a sort of shirt, reaching down to my knees." Usually adults had better clothes and many had special attire for holidays. In the cities one could find well-dressed slaves, the household servants of rich townfolk and planters. Masters tried to provide a healthy diet but some relied on cornmeal, salt pork, hominy, and fatback. More fortunate slaves had their own gardens and hence ate better food. Because the black population grew rapidly through natural increase in the antebellum South there must have been a certain minimum standard of living, but the life expectancy of slaves was less than that for whites.

Most slaves worked from sunup to sunset. During the harvest season they toiled even longer; in the off season plantation repair and maintenance chores kept them busy. Those working in industries and mining had few seasonal adjustments and seldom got relief. Usually owners allowed their slaves to rest on special occasions, like Christmas and after the harvest, and some gave Sundays and occasional Saturdays as holidays too. Pregnant women received time off just before and after the birth of a child, but the young mother had to be back in the fields, or at the "Big House," within days after the delivery.
How masters extracted labor from, and disciplined, their slaves was crucial to the daily life of the individual. Stories about physical cruelty abound. Force characterized the system on the large plantations of the Deep South. One former bondsman recalled, “I have seen slaves whipped and I was whipped myself. I was whipped particularly about a saddle I left in the night after using it during the day. My flesh was cut so bad that the scars are on me to this day.” Cruel masters also stingily rationed food and shelter, did not allow slaves to leave the plantations, and used dogs to hunt runaways. A few even maintained jails for the slaves and took care to give public whippings as an example for the others.

Yet many masters tried to avoid brutality and ex-slaves recalled those who did not use force. An Alabama bondsman recalled, “Us lucky, ‘cause Massa Cole don’t whip us.” Even some who used the lash urged caution. A Louisiana planter observed, “I object to having the skin cut, or my negroes marked in any way by the lash... I will most certainly discharge any overseer for striking any of my negroes with a club or the butt of his whip.” Others avoided the whip either because they found such brutality repugnant (“The overseer whose constant and only resort is to the lash... is a brute, and deserves the penitentiary”) or because they favored different methods of control. Instead of punishment they offered inducements—better housing, food, and clothing. They allowed slaves to grow and even sell their own food.

Owners and overseers sometimes used their power to take sexual advantage of slave women. At one extreme the sexual bond was accompanied by deep feelings; some men kept mistresses to whom they were strongly attached. In New Orleans the practice was quite open; elsewhere it was done quietly. Sometimes the mixed offspring of these unions were educated and freed. One wealthy Virginia planter made his paramour head of the household. He tutored and freed their four children. When his daughter married a slave he purchased the husband’s freedom and gave them land, and at his death willed his property to his three sons. This planter was uncommon but it was not unusual. A large proportion of the free black population had white ancestors.

At the other extreme masters could force themselves on unwilling slaves, and some looked on blacks as fair game, for, as Frederick Douglass said, the “slave woman is at the mercy of the father, sons or brothers of her master.” Nor could the male slave protect his wife, sister, or mother without risking severe punishment. Most interracial sexual unions were of white males and black females. White females and black males sometimes became attached but such unions were considered taboo in the Old South.

Miscegenation and the lack of legal status of the family did not mean that all slaves lived without one. To be sure, some masters cared little about morality or stable families. In fact, they realized the promiscuous behavior often produced children, increasing the plantation labor force. But most owners wanted reliable workers and when they thought that monogamy encouraged stability they promoted such relationships. If they thought that loose arrangements did not upset the routine of the plantation, however, they ignored the slaves’ sexual practices. Some whites, of course, were deeply religious and paternalistic, and assumed responsibility for slave conduct and morality. These masters insisted on sexual purity, family stability, and monogamy; slaves had their own ideas on these subjects.

Control over family life was part of the general power owners possessed. Masters ruled and ultimately slaves had to come to grips with that fact. Many appeared cooperative, even passive and docile. Southern whites liked to think that their charges were happy, faithful, and loyal. They frequently saw this “Sambo” type as the typical plantation “darkie.” In his extreme form “Sambo” had no thoughts of freedom and was willing to sacrifice his life for the beloved master and mistress and their family. Although there were some passive slaves, many hid their true feelings about their hatred of slavery and whites and only appeared to be loyal and contented. When their chance came, many of these supposedly contented slaves fled; or in the case of the Civil War, they joined the Union army. Even the house servants, supposedly favored and more trustworthy, sometimes left their masters when they had the opportunity. Thus slaves could exhibit both a willingness to accept
their status and the will to resist it. A few resisted violently and Nat Turner led a revolt that sent chills throughout the South. Literate and skilled, Turner believed that he “was ordained for some great things in the hands of the Almighty.” In 1831 he led a revolt that massacred several white families before armed whites crushed it. Turner and forty followers were either executed or murdered because of the rebellion.

Many slaves were neither Sambos nor rebels. They were sullen and resentful or were alternatively sullen and cooperative. They broke tools, worked slowly and inefficiently, killed livestock, and sometimes made life difficult for their owners. A few even sued, sometimes successfully, for their freedom on the grounds that they were illegally being held in bondage. Most slaves were efficient workers, however, even though they might have yearned for independence because if they resisted openly they risked punishment. When life became especially unbearable they ran away. Slave patrols and the long distance to the free states hindered the fugitives’ flight. Running away also meant the loss of loved ones who would probably never be seen again. Yet, although the numbers are not known exactly, thousands did break away. Until the United States took Florida that area offered a haven, especially among the Indians there, but most runaways followed the north star to either the free states or Canada.

Despite their intense desire for liberty, most slaves obeyed their masters and accommodated themselves to the “peculiar institution.” Some even developed close ties with their owners. There were slaves who, when given the chance, did not flee. Some were too old with no place to go; others had relatively kind masters for whom they had feelings of affection. Whites later exaggerated the loyalty of slaves, especially that of the black “mammies” who raised the masters’ children, but close bonds often existed between such black women and those whom they nurtured.

Often, household workers and personal attendants received better treatment than the field hands. More privileged slaves sometimes even identified with their oppressors. The black drivers, for example, gained power and status while household servants received fancy clothes. One slave recalled when he got new clothes: “I had known no comforts, and had been so cowered and broken in spirits by cruel lashings that I really felt lighthearted at this improvement in my personal appearance, although it was merely for the gratification of my master’s pride; and I thought I would do all I could to please my Boss.” Others received money, gifts, better food, and fewer restrictions.

Like everyone else, not all African Americans possessed sterling character. More than a few informed on others who were also in bondage. They turned fugitives in, or reported plots or revolts to the master. Perhaps it was a personal conflict that motivated some to expose others, or perhaps they were seeking special privileges or rewards. Angry slaves called these bondsmen “white folks’ servants” because “they are just the same as white men.” Having such trusted help, masters were known to leave the plantations under their care and reward them for work well done when they returned. Yet privileged status did not end their longings for emancipation. If the white South feared their slaves’ desire for freedom, they rarely acknowledged it.

The slaves did not organize their lives solely according to white peoples’ dictates. They possessed a rich African heritage, which when combined with New World experiences formed an African-American way of life. At the forefront of their American values stood God and a fundamentalist Protestant faith that focused on a Christianity of work and obedience. The slaves harmonized aspects of different African religions with these teachings and blended them into a faith more suitable to their needs. Black spirituals envisioned ultimate redemption and recognition of personal worth. Old Testament themes of the release of the Hebrew children from bondage, of David’s triumph over Goliath, and of Daniels’ deliverance from the Lion’s Den dominated their prayers:

He delivered Daniel from de lion’s den
Jonah from de belly ob de whale,
And de Hebrew children from de fiery furnace,
And why not every man?
In other cases African culture resisted any fusion with Christianity or the white world. African beliefs in magic, voodoo, and conjurers survived into the nineteenth century and through these mediums some slaves tried to retaliate against oppressive whites. Owners could control the legal status and much of the physical life of the slave but not necessarily his mind or culture. A conjurer who allegedly could affect whites as well as blacks was a powerful person, a supernatural defense against the harshness of slavery. One slave recalled that “I was led to believe that I could do almost as I pleased without being flogged.” When threatened by his master with a beating, “I did not believe that he could do it, while I had this root and dust, and as he approached me, I commenced talking saucy to him.”

Folk tales also played an important part in slave culture. Some of the oral traditions told of the African past and tribal religion, but most were secular, taught a moral, and emphasized survival. The most famous of the narratives concern “Br’er Rabbit,” the shrewd bunny who managed to outwit his foes. Scholars have traced these animal trickster stories to Africa, but they were well suited to a slave society. Faced with white power the blacks, like “Br’er Rabbit,” had to be cunning to endure. “De rabbit is de slickest o’ all de animals de Lawd ever made. He ain’t de biggest, an’ he ain’t de loudest but he sho’ am de slickest.” Clearly the folk tales and other forms of slave culture pointed to ways of dealing with a harsh world. As one scholar observed,

In their religious songs and sermons slaves sought certainty in a world filled with confusion and anarchy; in their supernatural folk beliefs they sought power and control in a world filled with arbitrary forces greater than themselves; and in their tales they sought understanding of a world in which, for better or worse, they were forced to live. All forms of slave folk culture offered their creators psychic relief and a sense of mastery.

If religion, magic, music, and stories gave slaves a sense of themselves, so did the most important institution of slavery—the family. The power of the master to make and break families should not lead us to minimize their importance. While some masters stressed family life, the bondsmen had their own reasons for doing so and managed to establish rules for courtship, sex, and marriage. Slaves, for example, did not marry their blood cousins. The sexual code among slaves accepted prenuptial sex along with fidelity in marriage.

Most slaves lived in two-parent households. Of course the master and overseer supervised slave families but the slaves themselves could and did socialize their children. If the father lived on another plantation, relatives played a more significant role in the life of the mother and her children. Aware of the importance of their family and kin, slaves used family names for their children’s first names. But unlike whites they never named children after their mothers. Some slaves even used surnames that differed from those of their masters. The choice of names shows how the bondsmen regarded their families.

POOR WHITES

Blacks were not the only poor people in the antebellum South. Many white farmers had neither slaves nor decent land and lived in wretched poverty in the piney-wooded or swampy areas. Unskilled urban workers as well as those who toiled in the industries of the Old South also had little wealth. Industrial workers labored long hours for low wages, faced occupational hazards, and lived in crowded housing. The Irish who toiled on canals and railroads, as well as other white laborers in the mines, were among the lowest paid workers in America.

The vast bulk of this white population descended from colonial stock, as few immigrants came to the Old South. In 1860 the slave states possessed about 500,000 immigrants, who barely accounted for 13 percent of the nation’s foreign-born. The South’s major ports, Baltimore and New Orleans, attracted many of these foreigners, while the states of Maryland, Missouri, Louisiana, and Texas contained most of them. Germans, who favored Maryland, Missouri, and Texas, and the Irish, who dwelled in Louisiana and
Georgia, constituted most of the foreign-born population, although ethnic enclaves could be found in Alabama and Mississippi as well. About 30,000 central European Jews also found their way to the South and many of the rural hamlets received visits from Jewish peddlers who later became small shopkeepers. Louisiana, with about 8,000 of them, contained the largest number of Jews in the antebellum period.

Most immigrants chose to settle outside the South because the shipping routes generally took them from Europe to Northern ports like Boston and New York, and because they believed that the free states provided more economic opportunities. The newcomers did not want to compete with the plantation system and slave labor. Furthermore, by the time of the mass immigration after 1845, they knew that most of the best cotton land of the Old South had been gobbled up by the old-stock whites. Of course, there were still opportunities in the South. Germans settled in Texas, for example, because land was available there; both the Irish and Germans worked in the cities; and the Irish also found jobs building canals and railroads.

The nativism (hostility to foreigners) of pre-Civil War America, most pronounced in the free states, might have discouraged immigrants from settling there, but the slave states also had their share of bigotry. In some areas Southerners detested the Irish because of their Catholicism, and they scorned both the Germans and the Irish because of their clannishness. Some Southerners blamed the massive immigration to the North after 1840 with tipping the population balance in favor of the free states, to the detriment of regional interests, and many were apprehensive about the immigrants' views toward slavery.

In particular, the antislavery sentiments of German settlers alarmed native whites and caused them to suspect the newcomers. In the 1850s German radicals in Louisville denounced slavery, while in San Antonio another group of Germans called the institution "an evil, the removal of which is absolutely essential according to the principles of democracy." Most Germans in the South, however, accepted the dominant views and denounced Republicans. Generally, Irish and Germans were known to dislike both blacks and abolitionists. If Germans did not own many slaves it was not because they abhorred the institution, but rather because they settled in areas unsuitable for cotton production, or were urban dwellers.

Whether foreign or native born, urban or rural, rich or poor, controlling Southerners had one thing in common—the color of their skin. "Through some poor whites refused to fight for slavery during the Civil War, an overwhelming majority of the region's population still believed in white supremacy, Indian removal, and slavery."

The differences between the North and South became more pronounced after 1830 with the rise of antislavery sentiment above the Mason-Dixon line and the growing divergence of the economies of the two sections. It was the struggle over slavery, however, and especially slavery in the territories, that would eventually split the nation. Gradually, these immigrants lost their cultural distinctiveness and accepted the attitudes of the majority society. In that process their descendants became natives who themselves looked down on later newcomers to America.