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# Diaspora Africans and Slavery

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## Introduction

Pioneer scholar W. E. B. Du Bois gives us a compelling description of the modern black diaspora. "Raphael painted, Luther preached, Corneille wrote, and Milton sung; and through it all, for four hundred years, the dark captives wound to the sea amid the bleaching bones of the dead," he stated in *The Negro* (1915), "for four hundred years the sharks followed the scurrying ships; for four hundred years America was strewn with the living and dying millions of a transplanted race; for four hundred years Ethiopia stretched forth her hands unto God." This essay will focus primarily on the several centuries of the slave trade that transported millions of Indigenous Africans across the Atlantic Ocean to the lands often called the "New World" by European explorers. In fact, the so-called "New World" was inhabited by Indigenous peoples of color who lived in the Caribbean and the Americas for millennia prior to contact with European explorers. Enslavement of Africans did not begin with the Atlantic slave trade, as a larger and longer in duration slave trade of captured Africans into the Mediterranean world existed and constituted African enslavement in the Mediterranean world of Islam in Muslim societies (see John Hunwick and Eve Troutt Powell).

While this article explores *what* happened that created an African diaspora which provided the labor power to fuel the Atlantic economy's emergent capitalism, the question we will begin with is *why* was there a sustained European intrusion into Indigenous peoples' lands and a subsequent devastating impact on Indigenous peoples and their plant, mineral, and metallurgy knowledge systems? Why were Indigenous Africans, Amerindians, and First Nation peoples of the Americas pulled into a centuries-long and downwardly spiraling vortex of conquest, genocide caused by gross violations of their human persons, popula-

tion decimation caused by diseases, enslavement, and expropriation of the very land on which they had lived for centuries? And, why do so many of the descendants of Indigenous peoples remain marginalized and oppressed in the predominantly white settler societies in which they live today?

People have encountered each other for centuries, usually peacefully, through trading activities, and violently, through warfare. As people have interacted one with another, those engagements have been often influenced by powerful ideas that have provoked deeply transformative social changes. Living within a settler society like the United States, it is easy to overlook that the very land that we stand on and all of North, Central, and South America, the Caribbean in the Western Hemisphere, and Australia and New Zealand have been taken from other peoples in the name of "discovery." We speak easily, and sometimes proudly, of Columbus' discovery of the New World because the language of "discovery" and the greatness it suggests in creating something for us to learn about in classrooms leaves little room for alternative understanding. But, "discovery" has served as erasure or belittlement of Indigenous peoples and much of their knowledge systems. Indigenous peoples, including the enslaved Africans, were slaves, "units of production," chattel who produced the commodities that made Europeans and Americans invested in slavery wealthy and powerful.

*The Age of Discovery* that we have inherited was created by a pervasive physical domination of Indigenous peoples. Ideas and doctrines dating to the past five centuries have necessitated and normalized expropriation and ownership of everything belonging to Indigenous peoples—including their very persons. The *Doctrine of Discovery* was created by a series of papal bulls and by Western European monarchies seeking to explore and lay claim to the territories occupied by others, and to capture and subdue their persons and confiscate their possessions. The doctrine, by force of longevity, is now rooted in international law, and the actions it has shielded have been responsible for establishing the religious, legal, and physical authority for the transatlantic slave trade, the assault on and decimation of Indigenous peoples, and the expropriation of their lands, labor, plants, metals, religious beliefs, and knowledge production. *The Doctrine of Discovery* is firmly rooted in the legal systems of white settler societies, including the American secular legal system.

What is the *Doctrine of Discovery*? In the fifteenth century, as European explorers sailed to unfamiliar lands, a series of papal bulls issued by Catholic popes provided sanction and opened the way for white Christian explorers financed by Western European rulers to explore, conquer, and subdue, reduce to slavery, and even vanquish all non-Christians they encountered as they journeyed to unfamiliar places in search of profitable trade routes and new sources of wealth. Con-

sequently, the charters that provided authority in a world ruled by religions, the subsequent body of laws in secularized white settler nations that furthered and currently maintain continued domination of Indigenous peoples, and the actual behaviors and social practices of subordination and enforced dependency of Indigenous peoples have come to be known in their impact in our world as the *Doctrine of Discovery* (see Miller, Ruru, Behrendt, and Lindberg; Maaka and Andersen).

*The Doctrine of Discovery* was formulated first by the Roman Catholic Church and the monarchs of Portugal and Spain; the monarchs of England, the Netherlands, France, and others asserted their interests subsequently. The doctrine was used as the basis of laws governing contacts between Europeans and non-Europeans, and Christians and non-Christians. The doctrine's embrace of a mandate to spread European laws, religion, and culture that served as the foundation for the *Doctrine of Discovery* dates to the Medieval Period. Pope Urban II issued the papal bull *Terra Nullius*, which translated refers to "empty land." The Catholic Church in its power as the supreme moral authority in Europe in an age when it ruled by asserting itself as the representative of God on Earth gave *Terra Nullius* to Europe's Christian kings. The edict asserted the right of Christian monarchies to undertake "discovery" and ownership of non-Christian lands and everything therein of wealth building value. As non-Christian peoples dwelled on what the papacy and Christian kings and princes deemed "empty land," they too were to be "discovered" and brought under the authority of the monarchies and the Catholic Church (see Miller, LeSage, and Escarcena).

The *Doctrine of Discovery* received renewed papal attention once Portugal and later when Spain sailed westward into the Atlantic Ocean, landed, and claimed for themselves the lands that are today called the Canary Islands, the Azores, Cape Verde, and Madeira. The *Doctrine of Discovery* and its relevancy for forcing an Indigenous people to labor for Christian overlords seeking wealth outside of their home boundaries was foremost when Portugal established sovereignty over the land and the peoples of the Canary Islands. By the early fifteenth century, Portugal oversaw the rise of profitable sugar cultivation on the islands. Continuing the search for riches and trade routes to the East in the 1430s, the Portuguese arrived off the coast of West Africa to begin a trading center. Having defeated the Moors at Ceuta in North Africa, the Portuguese began a quest for "discovery" and conquest along the West African coast, having reached Senegal in 1435, Cape Bojador in 1443, Sierra Leone in 1446, Guinea in 1455, and the Congo in 1481 (see Williams). Arguably, in 1441, the Atlantic slave trade began when Portuguese explorer Antao Goncalvez kidnapped 12 Africans from a market on the Guinea Coast and presented them as a gift to Prince Henry the "Navigator" in Portugal, noting that there were many more where those Africans came from. Pope Alexander VI's Bull of January 1455, *Romanus*

*Pontifex*, had granted Portugal "exclusive rights" in West Africa, when in fact the Portuguese had already been planting their flags along the West African coast for some years prior to receiving the papal bull (see Russell-Wood).

On January 8, 1455, after the fall of Constantinople to the Ottomans, Pope Nicholas V issued another papal bull *Romanus Pontifex* that authorized Portuguese King Afonso to "invade, search out, capture, vanquish and subdue all Saracens and pagans whatsoever ... to reduce their persons to perpetual slavery"; and further, to seize all of their property (see Davenport). In 1472, the Portuguese, who by then had been in the islands off the West African coast and in places along the African mainland for decades, began slave trading African peoples in Benin. Anticipating the interests of rival European rulers, by 1481 the Portuguese built the first of the "slave factories" in Elmina on the Guinea Coast and through aggressively pursuing a greedy trade in African human flesh jump-started the formation of what became known as the Atlantic World Economy (see Russell-Wood).

Following Portugal's lead into the Transatlantic Slave Trade, the Spanish, Dutch, English, French, and for a time the Swedish, Danish, and the German Kingdom of Bradenburg captured and traded African peoples into the Transatlantic Slave Trade, thereby establishing sites of "discovery" that suppressed millions of Indigenous peoples. Columbus sailed to the Caribbean, was greeted by Indigenous peoples and in short order asserted a claim of discovery and sovereignty over them, claiming the Caribbean islands already inhabited by Indigenous peoples the lawful possession of the Crown of Spain. Spain then quickly requested papal approval of Columbus' "discoveries," and any future discoveries, and on May 3, 1493, Pope Alexander VI issued the papal bull *Inter caetera I*, which accorded to Spain exclusive rights to the lands Columbus had laid claim to in the New World (see Williams; Gibson).

According to scholars of the period, the population of Hispaniola fell from 250,000 persons to 50,000 within the initial 20 years of Spanish colonization; the decimation was caused by gross violations of the Indians' persons, and by their lack of immunity to diseases carried by the European conquerors. We should understand what many scholars have provided hard evidence for, namely that in the New World the decimation of the Tainos, and other Caribbean, Central American, and South American Indians, and other Indigenous peoples constitutes a holocaust (see Miller, Lesage and Escarcena, 836–37; Gibson; Williams; Dunbar-Ortiz; Maaka and Andersen).

The Atlantic Triangular Trade created vast fortunes for those European monarchs who held slave-trading monopolies, and for those involved financially in the slave trade, and plantation production of profit-making agriculture-based commodities (sugar, tobacco, cotton, coffee, indigo, and to a lesser extent rice). The slave trade furnished

Europe with the capital that fueled capitalism's growth and wealth generation for white peoples in the West and in Asia and Australia in the East, the formation of financial institutions to fund the slave trade, the creation of European colonial empires, and eventually even the Industrial Revolution. Therefore, in the Atlantic Ocean Economy in the West, and in the Asian Lands Economy in the East, the European *Doctrine of Discovery* amassed a momentum that was unstoppable after the fifteenth century (see Kupperman; Williams; Lindsay; Wesseling).

The series of edicts codifying Christian European rights over all non-Christian peoples, the *Doctrine of Discovery*, its intentions, and the spirit and letter of its edicts constitutes an ideological tour de force that has undergirded the legal relationships between many nation states and Indigenous peoples all over the world for at least the past five centuries. At its root the *Doctrine of Discovery* created the Atlantic world economy with its racial slavery and the expropriation of the metal, mineral, and plant wealth and knowledge production of Indigenous and Peoples of Color. The *Doctrine of Discovery* functioned as Christian religious imperialism in that the doctrine applied only when Christian nations came into contact with non-Christian peoples; Indigenous peoples could not travel to areas inhabited by white Christians and claim their lands for themselves. In sanctioning European discovery and legal ownership of all lands not owned by other European nations, an assumption prevailed that Indigenous peoples could not own the land or their persons because they were not Christians (see Ojibwa).

Elsewhere, the "discovery," conquest, and subjugation of Indigenous peoples in the North Atlantic, and the kidnapping, enslavement, and transporting of Indigenous Africans to the British North Atlantic colonies created empire building after England, The Netherlands, France, and Spain sent explorers and then settlers to what was taken from Indigenous peoples and became the United States and Canada. By that time the *Doctrine of Discovery* presented a sustained momentum of its own without relying on religious authorization; even Russia pressed a discovery and conquest agenda. It is also important to note that the Protestant Reformation emboldened European Protestant rulers whose embrace of Protestant Christianity in their actions did not necessitate the approval of the Catholic Church. In defying the pope's edicts and the wishes of neighboring European monarchs, Protestant Christian monarchs launched themselves into the Age of Discovery and embraced the *Doctrine of Discovery* as their own mandate. To confiscate Indigenous lands and either massacre or drive Indigenous peoples onto reservations, the assault on North Atlantic world Indigenous peoples by European colonial leaders and later American settlers was grotesque and sustained (see Pagden, 63–80).

When Thomas Jefferson served as Secretary of State in 1792 he asserted that the *Doctrine of Discovery* extended to the new federal

republic from its origins in Great Britain's "discovery" and sovereignty to the United States. Decades later, several years before pursuing Manifest Destiny by declaring war against Mexico, the political and judicial leaders of the United States of America wrote the *Doctrine of Discovery* into American law in order to deny land rights to Indigenous peoples. In *Johnson v. McIntosh* (1823) a landmark, precedent-setting Supreme Court decision that is still used against Indigenous litigants, Chief Justice John Marshall writing for a unanimous Court insisted that the United States should not recognize any land titles obtained from Indigenous peoples prior to the nation's independence. The *Doctrine of Discovery* remains firmly anchored in American secular law at this moment (see Newcomb; Dunbar-Ortiz; Miller, Ruru, Behrendt, and Lindberg; Maaka and Andersen; and see, *City of Sherrill v Oneida Indian Nation of New York* (2005)).

It is important to note that white skinned Europeans began in their exploration of the lands beyond their borders to meet and assert dominion over brown, black, and beige peoples in the name of discovery, sovereignty, and conversion to Catholicism. Prior to the Atlantic slave trade, the concept of "race" in European intellectual circles embraced an ideal including all of humanity (despite Europe's long internal history with religious intolerance towards the Jews, Roma, and Animists who lived within their own borders). The idea of "race" took on decidedly different interpretations as barbarous physical subjugation either drove some Indigenous peoples to extinction in the Caribbean or created a body of slave law that used "race" to distinguish the characteristics of the enslaved African peoples who were pushed into intergenerational (perpetual) enslavement in the New World (see Augstein; Fredrickson; Mills).

Still later, when Protestant Christians entered the slave trade they initially did so with no regard for religious conversion of the Africans or the Indigenous peoples they dominated. For instance, where the Catholic Church posited that the slave had a soul that with baptism belonged to the Catholic Church, the Protestants who became the dominant slavers in North America argued that the slave was chattel like an animal and had no soul; consequently, baptism was irrelevant. It was not until the second half of the seventeenth century that Protestant slaveholders in the North Atlantic British colonies were coerced by anti-slavery advocates into petitioning the English king to allow the baptism of enslaved Africans. The king responded allowing the baptism of the enslaved, while asserting that such acts would not alter their chattel status. Hence, at exactly the same time as Europeans began claiming greater freedoms for themselves in their home countries, they instituted exploitative forced work systems for the Africans they "discovered," even when they baptized those persons as Christians (Bernasconi and Lott; Higginbotham).

The monarchs of many Western European nations participated in the slave trade, specifically Portugal, Spain, England, France, the Netherlands, Denmark, and Germany. Royal families recruited other elites and established "chartered" companies (early corporations) that promised a monopoly of profits related to the company's slave trading activities. The stock issuing financial ventures established to dominate the slave trade by Western nations were named The Royal African Company; The Royal French Guinea Company; Company of Royal Adventurers Trading to Africa; The Dutch West Indies Company; The Danish West Indies Company; The French West Indies Company; The Senegal Company; The Swedish African Company; The Havana Company; The Virginia Company; The Hudson Bay Company; The Guinea Company; Casa dos Escravos (Lisbon); The German Kingdom of Bradenburg; and The South Seas Company.

Building on Africans' forced migration and bondage in the Western Hemisphere, this chapter discusses the evolution, nature, and destruction of slavery in the North Atlantic colonies that became the United States.

Racial slavery spread with the white conquest of the New World, where mining and labor-intensive cash crop agriculture required a massive exploitation of laborers. The biggest portion of exploited labor came from the conquered Aztecs, Incas, and other Indigenous Peoples (Amerindians) who fell to European firearms. During the first century of white-red contact, Indigenous peoples were also decimated (from a population of 100,000,000 to 10,000,000) by white-borne diseases like malaria, measles, and smallpox. They slaved in the gold and silver mines of South America, while often attacking their captors and escaping in familiar terrain. As the Amerindians perished in lowland and coastal areas, the conquerors brought white "indentured servants" and black slaves to replace them. Servants earned their transportation by a contract of indenture to labor for a term of several years, routinely seven. By 1650, some 849,000 whites (Portuguese, Spanish, English, French, and Dutch), compared to 384,000 captive blacks, inhabited the Americas. Better wages in England and Europe, however, reduced supplies of cheap servant workers so white colonists imported more and more captives from Africa, swelling the enslaved population.

Colonists emphasized the advantages of doing so. For example, blacks could be held in perpetuity. Runaways, because of their black skin, would be recognizable among whites. Blacks were considered cannibals and "pagans" (worshipers of ancestors or tribal gods). The rules of Christian conduct did not include such "heathens." Presumed mentally inferior but physically superior, Africans could be disciplined harshly, and the brutal treatment meted out to Amerindians and enslaved Africans went largely unreported on back in European social circles. Furthermore, white colonists began to invent myths and stereotypes

about the captive Africans in their midst; African populations were believed to be immune to tropical diseases, tolerant of inclement weather, and inexhaustible. When African death rates soared in the Caribbean, whites ignored the reality that many Africans were being worked to death by the demands placed on their life force; this was particularly the case in areas where whites drove the enslaved hard to maximize profits from sugar cultivation (see Williams).

Slavery anchored merchant capitalism; it's labor intensive manpower fueled the colonies' economies. Sugar cane was the major crop of the Portuguese in Brazil. Regions of Bahia and Pernambuco in the north and Rio de Janeiro in the south produced the bulk of it. By the 1580s, Brazil was the chief sugar producer and in turn made the 1600s "the century of sugar." Tobacco and sugar cane were cultivated in the British Caribbean (Barbados, Jamaica), as were coffee and cotton. Such crops necessitated strong backs and hands and Atlantic slavers supplied them, preferring to capture African males more so than females. The enslaved were abused and severely overworked. The historian Basil Davidson quotes a British eyewitness in the Dutch West Indian colony of Suriname whose comment applied to other places as well. "Plantation mortality was so high, he found, that the 'whole race of healthy slaves, consisting of 50,000, are totally extinct once every twenty years.'" Few slave owners cared as long as they made money. Profit had become their *sine qua non*. The slave trade escalated and the physical deprivations that the enslaved endured intensified as the European appetite for sugar and tobacco exploded and commodity prices for those items soared.

Even as it framed cultural exchanges between Europeans, Indians, and Africans, slavery was dehumanizing. Interracial sexual contacts generated groups of mestizos (European-Indian), mulattoes (European-African), and mustees (African-Indian) in all areas of the hemisphere. In the Spanish and Portuguese domains, the Catholic Church sought "to mitigate the evils of slavery" by teaching the humanity of the slave. But slaves faced harsh conditions—frequent flogging, unhealthy clothing, poor diet, and insufficient housing. Bondwomen were exposed to rape and, despite the hardships of childbirth and mothering, labored with men in the fields. In many colonies the blacks outnumbered whites. "Black Codes," such as the French Code Noir of 1685, were intended to restrict slaves' mobility (by requiring passes), to crush rebelliousness (by hanging insurgents), establish intergenerational slavery (a black or mulatto child born to an enslaved woman followed the status of its mother regardless of whether the father was also enslaved or a white man), and to enforce white supremacy (by forbidding assaulting, disobeying whites) (see Sue Peabody and Keila Grinberg). Indeed, as time passed, by the nineteenth century white colonists established an inter-

nal slave trade in a number of countries in the Americas (see Johnson, 2004).

Many of those enslaved accommodated under threat of physical violence or food deprivation, but records show that many resisted. White laws revealed persistent angst about rebellious slaves, usually males (females were unwilling to leave their children behind) who ran away intermittently. Some instigated bloody insurrections that took white lives and instilled fear. In 1620, Santo Domingo fugitives created a Maroon colony (refuge for enslaved rebels) and started three uprisings. When the British captured Jamaica from the Spanish in 1655, numerous enslaved blacks fled to the mountains. Once there, they repeatedly attacked or robbed plantations and retreated to their mountain refuges. Also, we have evidence that there were 493 known slave revolts on Atlantic slave ships destined for the New World—contrary to the carefully crafted myth of the docile slave invented by whites who supported slavery (see Eltis).

## Resistance and Rebellion: A Recurring Response to Oppression

***Major Caribbean Slave Revolts:***

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|---|---|
| 1700–75; 1795–96 | Maroon Wars, Jamaica |
| 1735–36 | Tackey's revolt, Antigua & Barbuda |
| 1760 | Tackey's revolt, Jamaica |
| 1791–1804 | St. Domingue/Haiti Revolution and wars (the enslaved destroyed the invading armies of France, Spain, and Britain) |
| 1795–97 | Fedon's rebellion, Grenada |
| 1816 | Bussa's rebellion, Barbados |
| 1823 | Demerara revolt, Demerara |
| 1831–32 | Baptist war, Jamaica |

***Major North American Slave Revolts:***

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|---|---|
| 1626 | Bacon's Rebellion, Virginia |
| 1712 | Slave plot, New York City |
| 1739 | Stono Rebellion, South Carolina |
| 1795/1811 | Pointe Coupee slave rebellions |
| 1800 | Gabriel Prosser's revolt, Virginia |
| 1822 | Denmark Vesey's insurrection plot, South Carolina |
| 1831 | Nat Turner's revolt, Virginia |

Slavery's development in the Caribbean islands greatly shaped North American slavery. Both systems fed raw materials, commodities, and capital into Britain's manufactures. The bulk of the enslaved transported to the thirteen seaboard colonies controlled by the king of England originated in the Caribbean, which provided the first ports of call for slave ships and received a third of North America's agricultural produce until 1815. On island plantations the new or "saltwater" enslaved underwent "Seasoning," which happened in two ways: by placing newcomers with enslaved veterans to learn work routines, and by a "breaking in" regimen. "Breaking in" involved overwork, torture, and sometimes death. Bondsmen and women succumbed to whipping and disease as well. Many were killed fleeing their tormentors and the white patrollers who were hired by slaveholders to scour the countryside looking for runaway captives.

## Slavery in the United States

Black bondage in the British colonies that became the United States spanned two and a half centuries, far more than the 153 years since the Thirteenth Amendment to the US Constitution decreed freedom from slavery. Slavery evolved in the colonial period, continued during the American Revolution, expanded throughout the South following the invention of the cotton gin, and became the single largest contributor to the nation's Gross National Product (GNP) between 1830 and 1860. More than any other activity yielding profit, by the first third of the nineteenth century, the enslaved and the commodities they produced —especially cotton—were the most valuable contributors to wealth building in the nation (see Johnson 2013). In *The Half Has Never Been Told*, Edward E. Baptist argues that slavery created a veritable empire in America: "From the 1790s to the 1860s, enslavers moved 1 million people from the old slave states to the new. They went from making no cotton to speak of in 1790 to making almost 2 billion pounds of it in 1860. Enslaved African Americans built the modern United States, and indeed the entire modern world, in ways both obvious and hidden" (p. xxiii).

Long before the British settled at Jamestown, Virginia, in 1607, Africans came to North America. In 1526, about 400 Spaniards with 100 slaves arrived on the coast of the Cape Fear River. But their settlement failed due to famine, internal strife, and a slave uprising. Survivors decamped for Santo Domingo, even as the rebel slaves fled among the Amerindians. Enslaved Africans serviced subsequent Spanish expeditions, helping to settle St. Augustine, Florida, in 1565. In 1584, the British planted a colony at Roanoke Island, but in 1591 rescuers found the site deserted. Sir Francis Drake's fleet, carrying 300 Amerindian and

200 African prisoners, rescued settlers around 1588, but during that rescue the Amerindians and Africans escaped.

Succeeding generations of Africans would not escape as readily. In 1619, two white Virginians, Governor George Yeardley and Abraham Pierson, a merchant, purchased all twenty captive Africans held onboard the *White Lion*, a ship that docked in Jamestown in exchange for corn and supplies. According to records, once among the white colonists, the Africans (seventeen men and three women) worked as servants on the large plantations that both men owned. At that time Jamestown was one of the few colonies that had not legalized slavery, as the plantation owners worked the blacks like servants. Indentured whites customarily got freedom dues (clothes, and a few acres of land) after completing their work terms. White servants were also able to assimilate and prosper, but this pattern began to elude the "black indentured servants." Deemed different in ways that suggest the emergence of racist thinking, beginning in 1639 blacks were forbidden to possess firearms.

Virginia's pioneer Africans and their posterity thus had a bleak future. There were only 23 of them among 2,000 whites in 1623, as June Purcell Guild explains. The black population grew not only by births, but also by the importation of captured Africans, totaling 300 in 1649. Before the middle of the seventeenth century racism emerged; black servants in Virginia were considered subhuman, and they met with harsher discipline and served longer indentures. White prejudice targeted them, as was the case in 1640 when a judge rendered a decision regarding John Punch. John Punch, a black man, ran away with two white men from their indentured service on a plantation in Virginia. The trio were captured and returned to stand before a judge who ordered all three men flogged. Further punishment by the judge required the two white men to serve some additional time, but they were to be released once their work obligations were fulfilled. But, when the judge directed his attention to the additional punishment for John Punch, he ordered him to serve the plantation owner for the remainder of his "natural life," with no opportunity ever for freedom. Clearly, by 1640 John Punch's "race" determined the legal treatment he received. Scholars note this point as evidence of the different and unequal treatment—the emergence of racism and the condition of lifelong servitude for blacks in Virginia (see Higginbotham).

Statuses of "negroe" and "slave" soon overlapped, even while Anglicans had begun to evangelize blacks. In 1641, Boston colony authorized slavery in the *Bill of Liberties*. But, white plantation slaveholders who appointed themselves as the Virginia House of Burgess led the way by creating a body of "slave law" that served as the template for other colonies. In a matter of a few decades, colonial slave law established several important objectives: the enslaved were to be branded as the

chattel property; the children of enslaved women were never to be free, regardless of paternity; slavery was to be intergenerational as the status of slave passed through one's mother; slaveholders were to exercise "absolute authority"—the power to maim or kill without penalty or prosecution; baptism was never to alter the status of "slave"; and, slave codes and runaway slave laws were to be strictly enforced (see Higginbotham).

*In the Matter of Color: Race and the American Legal Process*, federal judge and legal scholar A. Leon Higginbotham, Jr. located the legislative statutes by which colonial slaveholders crafted a "racial" slave society. In 1662, Virginia ruled "that all children borne in this country shall be held bond or free only according to the condition of the mother." Freedom was denied to Christianized blacks in 1667: "It is enacted and declared by this grand assembly, and the authority thereof, that the conferring of baptism doth not alter the condition of the person as to his bondage or freedom." Blacks comprised 2,000 taxables or five percent of inhabitants in 1671. Both in 1670 and 1682, the legislature authorized that "all persons of non-Christian nationalities thereafter coming into the colony, whether they came by sea or land and whether or not they had been converted to Christianity after capture ... were slaves for life." Maryland passed a similar statute in 1663.

North America was a closed society. Some revisionist historians argue, as does Gary B. Nash, "that slavery in Spanish and Portuguese America was never as harsh as in Anglo-America nor were the doors to eventual freedom so tightly closed." Revisionists contend that Africans had religious protections and frequently commingled with whites in Brazil and Cuba. The enslaved could achieve manumission (liberation from slavery) in Venezuela, form autonomous enclaves, and become valued members of the larger society. The enslaved in British America, by contrast, "lost all of their rights" and were "treated as mere chattel property." Britons disdained slave manumissions, enacted anti-miscegenation statutes, insisted on intergenerational enslavement through black women's wombs, and despised the free black caste, so argues Ibram X. Kendi in his magnificent volume *Stamped from the Beginning: The Definitive History of Racist Ideas*.

The number of blacks in North America increased steadily in the 1600s. Slavery advanced through Virginia, Maryland, the Carolinas, and Georgia, into New York, Delaware, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and New England—covering a broad landscape. By the century's end, there were nearly 25,000 enslaved Africans and Creole American-born blacks, largely male and perhaps a tenth of all colonists. Southern regions domiciled the largest proportion of the enslaved. Large plantations dotted the Chesapeake, Tidewater, and Low Country. Producing "money crops," the enslaved worked on satellite farms or quarters in squads (tobacco) and by assigned tasks (rice, indigo). Owing to a

warmer climate and willful neglect, masters' maintenance expenses were minimal. Fewer of the enslaved were used in the middle colonies of New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Delaware. Their farms were usually small, except in plantation locations along the Hudson and Delaware Rivers. Northerners utilized comparatively few of the enslaved in their region's business and commerce. Enslaved blacks were least numerous in New England, where family farming prevailed. In 1700, New Englanders held fewer than 1,000 enslaved blacks, many of them in households of well-to-do merchants.

The black presence grew steadily in the eighteenth century. The greatest numbers of Africans arrived between 1721 and 1780, when a decreasing male-female imbalance permitted them to build families and become self-reproducing. In 1708, Virginia counted 12,000 black slaves and added over 1,000 a year thereafter. In 1743, the colony recorded 42,000 captive blacks; by 1756 it reported 120,000. The population was almost evenly divided between blacks and whites in 1775. South Carolina's white and black races were numerically even in 1708. Yet, by 1765, South Carolina tabulated 40,000 whites and 90,000 blacks. The black majority endured brutal repression.

Bondage fueled the Atlantic slave trade still further. Between 1715 and 1750, some 2,500 enslaved Africans were imported annually. The annual importation of captives averaged 7,500 in the 1760s. Economic expansion was clearly wedded to this trafficking, as the profits generated by unpaid slave labor served to create a slaveholding aristocracy whose wealth rivaled that of European elites. The trafficking in African flesh persisted in spite of the Declaration of Independence, which, capturing the spirit of the Enlightenment Movement, defined liberty as an "inalienable" human borderlands by the late 1780s (see Allen). As a matter of fact, the 1787 United States Constitution supported black enslavement in five sections of the document: Article 1, Section 2; Article 1, Section 8; Article 1, Section 9; Article IV, Section 2; and, Article IV, Section 4. Among the pro-slavery issues that the noted paragraphs addressed were: that the new republic's Constitution shielded the slave trade from intrusion until 1808, sheltered black enslavement via the three-fifths compromise (affirmative action for the master class) that used black men bodies to establish white political representation in Congress, provided for apprehending slave runaways, and collected slave importation taxes to provide funding for the federal government's role in suppressing slave insurrections (see Wiecek; Goldstone).

The engine fueling slavery in the United States was the Industrial Revolution, especially its cotton market, which created the Empire of Cotton (see Johnson). Demand by overseas and New England textile industries, plus the invention of the cotton gin in 1792, made the South cotton's leading supplier. This quickened slavery, despite soil exhaustion in parts of Maryland and Virginia, as it crisscrossed the Louisiana

Purchase of 1803 and ushered in the Cotton Kingdom. It spurred the removal of probably 1.5 million enslaved blacks from the Upper South to the Lower South by 1850. Consequently, despite the 1808 federal ban on the foreign slave trade, illegal importing and domestic trading of slaves escalated. Even though most northern states outlawed slavery or chose to gradually emancipate enslaved blacks, many northern merchants, banks, insurance companies, and mill owners were deeply immersed and complicit in American slavery (see Farrow, Lang, and Frank).

Domestic traders clustered in Maryland and Virginia (sites of a slave surplus). After 1815, firms in Baltimore, Alexandria, and Richmond sold the enslaved at prices ranging from $350 in Virginia to over $500 in Louisiana. Prices averaged $1,000 in Virginia and $1,500 in Louisiana by 1860. Local newspapers advertised slave auctions, escapes, and arrests. Auction blocks, jails, pens, and coffles were universal sights. Some traffickers profited by hiring out or renting blacks. Others specialized in transport by coffle, flatboat, or wagon. Belying the stereotype of their docility, many of the enslaved wore neck, hand, or foot irons lest they should abscond. Chastised and flogged for disobedience, they were sometimes maimed for resisting separation especially from kin.

Planters abetted "slave breeding." Some Virginians did so to offset losses from exhausted soil and falling prices. Thomas R. Dew, professor of moral philosophy at William and Mary College, described Virginia in 1832 as "a negro raising state." Between 1830 and 1860, it sold "nearly three hundred thousand [slaves]—almost the whole of her natural increase" (see Kenneth M. Stampp). One planter told northern visitor Frederick Law Olmsted that his bondwomen were "uncommonly good breeders," their babies being "worth two hundred dollars" the moment they "drew breath." Coaxed by rewards like extra rations and habitually raped, many enslaved black females "became mothers at thirteen and fourteen years of age," and many birthed more than ten children. Every infant a black woman birthed was enslaved and saved the slaveholder the expense of purchasing another black person. Enslaved women worked as reproducers and field workers, a double duty labor requirement, that often took a toll on their health and nursing ability; infant mortality in the slave quarters was very high.

The enslaved shouldered the Southern economy, making Southern slaveholders among the fifth richest group of men in the world. The enslaved population increased from about 700,000 in 1790 to 3.2 million in 1850 and reached 4 million by 1860. In 1850, approximately 500,000 of the enslaved resided in towns and cities. Over 2 million were cotton cultivators. Others of the enslaved cultivated corn, tobacco, rice, and sugar cane. Usually, whip-wielding white overseers and black drivers watched cotton and sugar cane cultivation worker "gangs." The average slave toiled from daybreak until dark, typically on a farm. Rice

producers adhered to a “task system.” It set the slave's daily work (so many rows to hoe or drain) and rewarded its completion. To wit, an enslaved man or woman could finish their task by midday, then leave the field to tend their garden plot or pursue other self-help activities that did not violate the slaveholders' rules. Besides shouldering the burdens of fieldwork, the enslaved did a plethora of manual jobs and services. They worked in heavy industries—timber and construction; gold, coal, salt, iron, and lead mines; iron furnaces and tobacco factories; cotton presses and sawmills; road, railroad, and shipbuilding. Enslaved men also performed skilled crafts like blacksmithing and carpentry, and some black women made quilts.

A white minority dominated slaveholding, traditionally in the South's “Black Belt.” Known for its black soil, cotton, and black-majority counties, this vast region swept through Virginia, the Carolinas, Georgia, Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, Tennessee, Louisiana, Arkansas, and Texas. One tenth of the region's white families owned enslaved blacks. Of all slave-owning whites, some 10,000 owned 50 or more slaves per family; 3,000 possessed 100 or more slaves per family. About three-fourths of whites had no familial or ownership ties to slavery. The “typical” white Southerner was a yeoman farmer and a non-slaveholder, but white skin accorded him significant social and psychic benefits. He may have been poor, barely better off materially than the members of the small free black caste that lived in his state, but he was white.

Slavery functioned principally: (1) to maintain a forced labor arrangement, using coercion and terror; (2) to perpetuate a caste structure of masters, non-slaveholders, slaves, and free blacks; and (3) to regulate race and class relations, using racist ideology to justify black subordination and white deference. Free blacks were allowed to own slaves and many did so to ransom or protect kinfolk. However, some elite free blacks (a minuscule number) did so for profit (see Kende).

White masters routinely maltreated slaves. For example, by isolating the house slave from the field hand, the master attempted to weaken slaves' solidarity. While the master's informant against field hands normally was a loyal domestic slave, they did not give scores of plots away, even as they were surely aware of the conspiracies. The enslaved suffered extreme privation, yet they shared resources to subsist. They also invented strategies to mask their feelings, survive, and fight back. Their quarters consisted of a single or double row of cabins near the overseer's house. Ordinarily, a slave cabin was drafty, unfurnished, and overcrowded. Field hands regularly went barefooted and ragged, even in the winter. The enslaved received weekly rations of hominy and cornmeal, sometimes with fatback bacon or salt pork. So they hunted, fished, and tended small gardens to provide supplemental food.

Legally, the slave was a chattel. The enslaved could not be parties in lawsuits, except indirectly when a free person sued on their behalf.

They could offer testimony in court only against other blacks. The enslaved were forbidden to enter agreements for exchanging goods and services. Nor could they own property by law. Their marriages had no legal standing. But laws safeguarded the master's interests. For instance, states assessed severe penalties for theft or arson by the enslaved. When a slave was executed for a capital crime, states ordinarily paid the owner a slave compensation amount from tax revenues. Owners decided if and when to hire out or sell the enslaved. Used as collateral for loans, the enslaved could be taken by creditors instead of cash payments. Slave families often would be severed and sold to liquidate a master's estate.

Southern planters dreaded the idea of black freedom. During the First Emancipation in the North (1780–1846), they decided to outlaw manumission. Lower South states such as Alabama and Georgia outlawed it in the early 1800s, declaring freedmen to be a menace to those who were enslaved. The border state of Maryland avoided such a declaration but insisted that manumitted blacks must not become public charges when they were old or sick. In the Upper South, both Virginia and North Carolina mandated that manumitted blacks leave these states or be reenslaved. Owners could still manumit slaves and relocate them to a free state by will, but this code was repealed in the 1840s and 1850s. Violators risked prosecution and expulsion.

The enslaved comprised an oppressed lot. They were imprisoned on plantations, unless given permission to leave. Any white person could arrest a slave, particularly one traveling without a pass or "freedom papers." Forging papers and possessing a firearm were felonies. Nor could the enslaved visit whites and free blacks or receive them as visitors. It was unlawful to teach the enslaved to read and write. They were never to strike whites, an offense punished by lashing or worse. Humane masters let the enslaved worship on their own, travel, trade, hunt with guns, or hire out. Some even allowed the enslaved to learn and to live autonomously. These benevolent acts were limited and overwhelmed by rampant inhumanity.

Armed force and slavery reigned side by side. Every county maintained a patrol to prevent the enslaved from congregating, arming, or revolting. All adult white males had to serve. The patrols as a rule depended on the poorer whites, which resented wealthy masters and their slaves. States did not regulate plantations or convict masters for abusing slaves, who were, said the Chief Justice of the US Supreme Court in 1857, "so far inferior that they had no rights that the white man was bound to respect" (see Henry Steele Commager).

## The Response to Slavery

Culturally, enslaved blacks bridged two worlds. Torn from their

motherland, called by the poet Countee Cullen "women from whose loins I sprang when the birds of Eden sang," they became strangers in America. Cullen saw himself as "one three centuries removed from the scenes his fathers loved." The enslaved were mainly of West African origin in the Gold Coast, Bight of Biafra, and Congo-Angola subregions. Yoruba, Akan, and Bokongo were among the largest of their many tribes or ethnic groups. Africans and Creoles (American-born slaves) invented ways to communicate, cooperate, and resist. They braved oppression by methods that varied from accommodation and conformity to defiance and insurgence. Their resilience under adversity is hard to imagine today.

Slaves were complex, "a troublesome property." Supposedly childlike and obedient, they resorted to running away, malingering, sabotage, theft, poisoning, arson, and fighting. They endured and opposed domination, indirectly and directly. Facing brutal subjugation, the mass of bondmen and women took "the middle ground, in which conformity is often a self-conscious strategy and resistance is a carefully hedged affair that avoids all-or-nothing confrontations" (see James C. Scott). Many masters insisted that slaves were contented. But we must ask: why was slave society an armed camp? Why codes and compensations? Why overreact to rumors of insurrection? Why suppress freedom of thought? What an ex-slave termed "yearnings to be free" frightened and provoked slaveholders.

Africans so yearned for freedom during their captivity. In Africa, mostly the war prisoners of better-armed tribes, they were traded to European traders. Captives chanted songs expressing their sadness and suffering. They also committed suicide, fought openly, or otherwise rebelled. Their blood streaked the caravan routes from the interior to the coast. Rebellions broke out in holding pens or barracoons, in the dungeons of slave forts, at loading docks, and aboard ships on the Gambia River and Atlantic Ocean. Their transatlantic "middle passage" lasted three to four months, with 25–40% of slaves dying from illnesses, mutinies, and suicides. Survivors clung to native customs or Africanisms, like naming children by the days of the week to remember time and place. Affirming themselves, the enslaved rebelled in Columbia (1550) and Brazil (1630).

The enslaved in North America drew on that African heritage for affirmation. African "feasts and burials" were common. After watching a slave funeral in colonial Virginia, one Briton observed: "They sing and dance and drink to the dead his new home, which some believe to be in old Guinea" (see June Purcell Guild). At this solemn ritual they could share memories of home, plan to flee and hide among the Amerindians, or conspire to revolt. In any case, black gatherings troubled whites. As early as 1644, the Virginia assembly passed a resolution "concerning the riotous and rebellious conduct … of Negroes." It resolved in 1680

**Major terms and concepts:** African diaspora, Doctrine of Discovery, Amerindians, indenture, "Slave Laws," "Black Codes," Maroon colony, "salt water" slaves, "Seasoning," Manumission, "money crops," pro-slavery clauses, slave resistance, Haitian Revolution, Cotton Kingdom, "task system," "Black Belt," "peculiar institution," First Emancipation, slave compensation, extended family, Africanisms, "invisible institution," Abolitionist Movement, Underground Railroad, general emancipation.

## The New World Slave System

In 1492, a half-century after the Portuguese began trading enslaved Africans into nations of the Mediterranean basin, Christopher Columbus claimed "discovery" of the Caribbean for Spain. In 1500, Pedro Alvares Cabral claimed Brazil for Portugal. Spanish explorer Juan de Ponce de León landed on the coast of North America in 1513, while Vasco Nuñez de Balboa crossed the Isthmus of Panama and reached the Pacific Ocean. By 1519, Hernán Cortés had disembarked in Mexico with an army that through arms and the spread of diseases unfamiliar to the indigenous population overran the Aztec Empire.

These events linked Africa, Europe, and the New World; areas of the Caribbean; and North and South America, with the approximately 12.5 million captive Africans taken from Africa, 10.8 million of whom escaped death and survived the Middle Passage from 1441 to 1888. Death claimed many lives during the Middle Passage. Death rates were astronomical on slave ships until 1750, owing to malaria, yellow fever, measles, smallpox, hookworm, scurvy, and dysentery; at least one-third of all Africans taken from west coast of Africa perished during the Middle Passage (see Sowande M. Mustakeem). Captive Africans were taken from eight regions today identified as Senegambia, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Ivory Coast, Ghana, Togo, Republic of Benin, southwestern Nigeria, southeastern Nigeria, Cameroon, West Central Africa, and Southeast Africa.

The destinations of African captives: 43% were taken to Brazil, another 44% of the enslaved were taken to the English, French, and Spanish colonies in the Caribbean to cultivate sugar and coffee, 7% of captives were taken to the mainland South American colonies, only 4% lived their lives in the British North Atlantic colonies, and 2% of captives remained in Africa. Further numerical data reveals the following specific data on the destinations of enslaved Africans: British North America—500,000; Spanish Caribbean, North and South America—2,500,000; British Caribbean—2,000,000; French Caribbean—1,600,000; Dutch Caribbean—500,000; Danish Caribbean—28,000; Portuguese Brazil—4,000,000; and Old World (Europe)—200,000 (see Lisa A. Lindsay).

“the frequent meeting of considerable numbers of negro slaves under pretense of feasts and burials is judged of dangerous consequence.”

Freed blacks, meantime, aspired to get ahead. On Virginia's Eastern Shore, some prospered as artisans, buying tracts of farmland and servants of both races. They were parties in contracts and lawsuits. Anthony Johnson owned 250 acres and therewith was qualified to vote. Manumitted around 1635, Johnson then acquired land and livestock in Northampton County. As his herds multiplied, he bought a dozen black and white laborers. His home and plantation burned in 1653, but he petitioned the court for tax relief. Granting it, the justices excused Johnson's wife and two daughters “from paying ‘Taxes and Charges in Northhampton County’ ... for ‘their natural lives’” (see T. H. Breen and Stephen Innes). Other free black landowners included Benjamin Doyle, 300 acres in Surry County; John Harris, 50 acres in New Kent County; and Phillip Morgan, 20 acres in York County.

Bondpeople persevered. They forged an Afro-American “slave culture” grounded in an extended family. Parents, children, grandparents, other blood relatives, and fictive kinpeople formed help and nurturing networks (see Herbert G. Gutman). They hid their aspirations from whites. In candle-lit cabins Africans and Creoles agreed, disagreed, negotiated, and conspired to be free. They partnered in the fields, creating pidgin languages not understood by slaveholders. Slave communities gave them sanctuary from auctions and toil, a space in which to socialize. They chose leaders, practiced mutual aid, and taught job skills and coping strategies to their children. Through oral traditions (African trickster tales), folklore narratives, and work songs, they instilled values of pride, sharing, and solidarity (see Lawrence W. Levine).

Christianity was a vital source of black aspiration and inspiration. Hundreds of the enslaved converted during the southern sweep of the “Second Great Awakening,” a massive revival begun in the 1790s. Methodists and Baptists, who welcomed poor folk, attracted large numbers of slave converts. Enslaved blacks made Christian faith and worship their “invisible institution.” They worshiped at “hush harbors,” secluded clearings in gullies, ravines, or woods. In towns they congregated in church houses. Revivals and Sunday services were “occasions for socializing, news gathering, and picnicking as well as for prayer” (see Albert J. Raboteau). Black exhorters and preachers told the faithful about the gospel of liberty. Worship featured testifying, ring shouts, and spirituals. The spiritual “O Canaan, sweet Canaan, I am bound for the land of Canaan” meant not only deliverance in heaven but also freedom on Earth.

Learning, too, was a stepping stone to liberation. The bondman and woman who could read and write were shining lights in the community. His master's wife taught the young Maryland slave Frederick Douglass. “The argument which he so warmly urged, against my learn-

ing to read, only served to inspire me with a desire and determination to learn," Douglass recalled later. "In learning to read, I owe almost as much to the bitter opposition of my master, as to the kindly aid of my mistress. I acknowledge the benefit of both" (see Michael Meyer). Masters impeded attempts to educate blacks but knew that training could make them more profitable. Scores of bondmen were trained in skilled crafts and industries, including metallurgy and woodworking that their forebears brought from Africa. Such skills diversified slaves' labor (many were hired out) and nurtured their autonomy.

Christian missions promoted slave literacy and salvation. In 1620, the English clergy pledged to ameliorate the plight of those "in bondage beyond the seas." This ministry was intact a century later when Thomas Bray founded the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts. An arm of the Anglican Church, the society raised funds, trained teachers, and opened schools for Amerindians, the enslaved, and free blacks in Charleston, Savannah, and parts of Georgia. Quakers embraced and energized this cause. Between 1764 and 1785, they launched a Virginia mission school and trusteeship to train blacks for manumission. Presbyterians took similar steps. They sponsored John Chavis, a free black Revolutionary War veteran, at Princeton Seminary in the 1790s. Chavis rose to be a prominent minister and schoolmaster to whites and free blacks in North Carolina until 1831, when the state's slave code silenced black preachers.

Literacy and slavery were incompatible, of course. Education was denied to enslaved Africans and Creoles because it could inspire freedom. The educated slave contradicted masters' caricatures of a dissembling "Sambo" or "Mammy." Harriet Ann Jacobs, an enslaved literate North Carolina woman, personified the contradiction. Taught to read and sew by her mistress, she defied a licentious master by hiding from him for seven years before fleeing to the North. Her narrative, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl, Written by Herself* (1861), showed black ideals of dignity and self-determination. Still, authorities suppressed dissident slaves, for whom there was no mercy. Rape and murder of whites, arson, and conspiracy were punished by execution. From 1705 to 1865, Virginia sentenced thousands of the enslaved to whippings or other corporal punishment, deported at least 983, and put 1,237 to death (see Philip J. Schwarz). Owners of executed slaves were compensated.

Slaves authored an enduring tradition of struggle. Generations sang "O Freedom, O Freedom over me; and before I'll be a slave I'll be buried in my grave and go home to my Lord and be free." In 1712, New York City authorities burned thirteen at the stake, hanged eighteen, and deported eighty enslaved blacks for torching buildings and killing nine whites. Fear prompted the assembly to impose a heavy tax on slave imports. Elsewhere, in South Carolina bondmen killed three whites in 1720. In 1730, a bondman revealed his brethren's plot to capture

to be harsher. Laws were enacted to ban free blacks from entering the state, to close Charleston's AME Church, to silence black preachers, and to prohibit slave importation. Turner's insurrection happened within seventy miles of Richmond and incited widespread fear. A mystic and lay preacher, he exerted great influence over his peers. So, on a divinely appointed night, he and his followers invaded plantations, killing sixty whites before militias retaliated. Militias killed more than a hundred blacks. Turner, thirteen enslaved men, and three black freemen were tried and hanged.

Resistance escalated. The enslaved purchased and stole freedom. Using earnings from hiring out, a craft, or vending, many paid their owners' asking price. North Carolina slaves Elizabeth Hobbs Keckley and Lunsford Lane liberated themselves and family members by "bill of sale." Frederick Douglass, Harriet Jacobs, and Harriet Tubman escaped, like 100,000 others between 1810 and 1850. Some of the enslaved fled slavery on their own, but most received help from black and white conductors and stations on the fabled *Underground Railroad*. Perhaps 40,000 fugitives traveled through Ohio alone. Fugitive and narrator William Wells Brown saw them "running from under the stars and stripes, and taking refuge in the Canadas; ... some leaving their wives, some their husbands, some leaving their children, some their brothers, and some their sisters" (see Paul Jefferson). They represented an estimated loss of $30,000,000 to slaveholders, who demanded stricter federal enforcement of the Fugitive Slave Act (1850). Most bondmen, women, and children could not escape, but they longed to break their shackles. Earlier slave uprisings forecast abolitionist John Brown's aborted insurrection at Harpers Ferry in 1859.

## Antislavery and Emancipation

Accelerated by the activism of African Americans and their allies, events sweeping from the 1830s to 1861 sharpened conflict over the "peculiar institution." The outcome was Southern secession, the Civil War, the destruction of slavery, and the constitutional emancipation of four million black folk, freeing "a larger number of slaves than lived in all other New World slave societies combined" (see Ira Berlin et al.). Early efforts to ameliorate and contain slavery set the stage for those consequences. Opposition to bondage was deep-rooted, with the enslaved and free blacks playing critical roles in organized antislavery.

Religious dissenters were crucial. As the enslaved hoped and masters feared, a few religious groups condemned slavery as immoral. Quakers helped to lead the cause. They ceased slave trading and, by the 1760s, slaveholding. Forming an abolition society in 1775, the Quakers supported free black petitioners and runaway bondmen during the Revolutionary War. In the North, ill suited for a slave economy of scale, the

First Emancipation had begun. A gradual process, it lasted until 1846. Vermont authorized abolition in 1777; Massachusetts and Pennsylvania in 1780; New Hampshire in 1783; Rhode Island and Connecticut in 1784; New York in 1799 and 1827; and New Jersey in 1804 (see Arthur Zilversmit). At the same time, with passage of the Missouri Compromise, Congress barred slavery in the territory north of the Ohio and east of the Mississippi Rivers.

Antislavery societies seized the moment. They publicized slavery's injustices and strengthened their ties to British abolitionists such as Olaudah Equiano, whose influential *Narrative* traced his journey from kidnapping in Africa at age eleven and New World bondage to buying his freedom. "Tortures, murder, and every imaginable barbarity and iniquity, are practised upon the poor slaves with impunity," he asserted. "I hope the slave trade will be abolished" (see Robert J. Allison). Antislavery societies assisted runaways, provided schooling for blacks, and, at times, promoted colonization of freed blacks, and mobilized through their churches, clubs, and fraternal orders. Like shipbuilder Paul Cuffee of Westport, Massachusetts, many free blacks were back-to-Africa pro-colonizers.

However, sailmaker James Forten of Philadelphia rejected colonization because it would remove free from unfree African Americans. Frederick Douglass counted himself among the anti-colonizers. Anti-colonizers were the larger and more militant group. Airing "the contagion of liberty" born of Haiti's independence, they demanded abolition of slavery and denounced the American Colonization Society (ACS). Founded in 1816, ACS enlisted rich slaveholders among its members and established the African colony of Liberia (1821). The anti-colonizers also monitored congressional debates on the Missouri Compromise (1820), which admitted Missouri as a slave state and Maine as a free state, easing sectional tension even as abolitionism grew. By 1827 it consisted of 154 organizations, dozens of them black. Freedom and slavery were antithetical, abolitionists argued, widening the North-South divide. They challenged America to insure liberty to all.

Abolitionists were increasingly outspoken: "Remember Americans, that we must and shall be free," warned North Carolina-born free black Boston resident David Walker, in *Walker's Appeal*, which Southern legislatures suppressed (see Charles M. Wiltse). Walker excoriated ACS colonizing, arguing that "America is more our country than it is the whites'—we have enriched it with our blood." Invoking "a God of justice," he called upon the enslaved to wage a violent revolt. African emigration and individual manumission were like telling "a man whose house is on fire to give a moderate alarm," declared William Lloyd Garrison, a white Bostonian and publisher of *The Liberator*, the leading abolitionist journal. "I do not wish to think, or speak, or write, with moderation" (see Truman Nelson). He vowed "no union

with slaveholders." In 1833, two years after Nat Turner's rebellion and the year Parliament approved compensated emancipation in the British West Indies, Garrison and other radicals founded the American Anti-Slavery Society (AAS). It not only accepted women and blacks into membership, it also crusaded for immediate and uncompensated emancipation. Within a decade AAS distributed a million pieces of literature, chartered 1,350 branches, and recruited 250,000 members, Frederick Douglass being one of the most outstanding.

The movement exacerbated intersectional politics. When disputes about moral suasion versus political action split Garrisonians, opponents vilified them as "abolition tyrants." Activists such as Douglass still were the conscience of 1840s and 1850s third parties—Liberty, Free Soil, Republican—while the stirring orations of abolitionist Sojourner Truth or the freedom lawsuit of the enslaved Dred Scott intensified the "irrepressible conflict." To Southern planters, John Brown's raid and 1860 election of a free-soil Republican president confirmed the North's scheme to dominate the Union. They opted to protect their region and slave property and retain the ability to expand slavery westward by seceding from the Union.

Secession, the cornerstone of the Confederate States of America, ignited the Civil War. "One section of our country believes slavery is right, and ought to be extended, while the other believes it is wrong and ought not to be extended," explained President Abraham Lincoln. He proposed to disturb neither existing slavery nor the domain of free labor but to preserve the Union. But abolitionists, as Douglass put it, envisioned "the complete and universal abolition of the whole slave system" (see Gary B. Nash et al.). The enslaved prayed that they were on the verge of "being free." An ex-slave woman remembered "the whisperings among the slaves—their talking of the possibility of freedom." Vindicating her, the Union defeated the Western world's most powerful planter class and forced emancipation.

Emancipation involved the interplay of the enslaved's initiative and Union strategy. Masters were upset as so-called docile slaves ran to Union lines, almost 30,000 by 1862. Called "contrabands," thousands more came, worked for wages, and helped prod Lincoln and Congress to confiscate Confederates' slaves; to emancipate the enslaved in the District of Columbia and allocate funds for colonizing them; to authorize recruitment of black soldiers; to secure diplomatic recognition from England and France (neither recognized the Confederacy); and, after a major victory on the battlefield, to declare the Emancipation Proclamation (1863). Though it exempted 800,000 slaves in Union-loyal Border States, Lincoln called it "an act of justice, warranted by the Constitution upon military necessity." As news of his words "forever free" spread, slaves' defections rose. Black enlistments in the Union Army and Navy totaled 200,000. Still, most blacks were not liberated until the final de-

feat of the Confederacy and adoption of the Thirteenth Amendment in 1865.

Freed people provided abundant evidence of their expectations. They undertook "a dress rehearsal for Reconstruction" in missionary and government experiments. In the Union-occupied Sea Islands of South Carolina and Georgia, among other places, they embraced free labor arrangements. They grasped the opportunity to earn wages and acquire land; to attend schools and worship in their own churches; to reunite slave families and develop black institutions. These experiences deepened their commitment to self-help and empowerment. In 1865, they hailed General William T. Sherman's Field Order Number 15, distributing Confederate lands to 40,000 freedmen, women, and children in forty-acre lots. Although the measure was rescinded, they fully expected "that, in short, we be dealt with as others are—in equity and justice" (see Thomas R. Frazier). With that hope, they determined to struggle for equality in modern America.

## Summary

Underlining the above discussion is the importance of a theoretical approach emphasizing cultural encounter and fusion. New World slavery constructed a crucible of interaction between Amerindians, Europeans, and Africans. In the Caribbean and South America, as in the British North American colonies and eventual United States, red, white, and black peoples interacted in slave-based societies where whites exercised racial hegemony.

The hemispheric perspective provided in this chapter considers Africans' and African Americans' experience in and contribution to those multiracial interactions. Scholars continue to explore the encounters, but no longer in terms of whether Africans were stripped culturally and then acculturated. As illustrated in Joseph E. Holloway, ed., *Africanisms in American Culture* (1990), they focus on the provenance, retention, and fusion of African culture in the Americas. Portia K. Maultsby, Beverly J. Robinson, and Robert L. Hall explore West African music, folklore, and religion in slaves' history. John E. Philips demonstrates that African retentions influenced the making of white America's customs (like cooking) and institutions. *Slave Culture* (1987) by Sterling Stuckey traces Africans' resilient values and worldview.

This chapter points to the *Doctrine of Discovery*'s role in setting European monarchs on the path of domination of indigenous peoples in Africa, the Caribbean, the Americas, and Australia and New Zealand, and it emphasizes the evolution, character, and destruction of black bondage in the colonies and states that became the United States. Prior to the large-scale importing of Africans, whites did not hesitate to enslave the New World's indigenous peoples. As the Amerindians battled and

escaped from the white conquerors, millions died in European-borne epidemics of malaria, measles, and smallpox. White servants also were too few to supply the mines and fields, so employers turned to Africa. Considered subhuman but robust, easily identified by their ebony and brown skin, African laborers were held in intergenerational servitude. Touted as an inexhaustible source of labor, they were the "final solution" to whites' labor problem in the New World and North America after 1619.

Slavery proved to be most profitable in the American South, creating an Empire of Cotton that extended to international markets. Enriching owners of especially cotton, but also tobacco, indigo, and sugar plantations, it chained generations of Africans and their descendants to a yoke of unpaid labor. The numbers of the enslaved on the mainland increased slowly not only by natural birth rate, but also by the slave trade increasing imports annually to 1650. Within a half-century there were about 25,000 enslaved Africans and American-born Creoles in British North America (nearly a tenth of the total population), and more than four million by 1860. In northern colonies, including New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Delaware, farms were generally small and the numbers of the enslaved minimal. Indeed, businessmen viewed slave labor as an obstacle to commerce and industry. In 1700, New Englanders owned fewer than 1,000 of the enslaved, and many of them were houseworkers. Plantations dominated the Chesapeake and southern Low-Country, enslaving tens of thousands. Enslaved South Carolinians outnumbered whites 90,000 to 40,000 in 1765 alone. The enslaved were deemed essential to the planters' wealth and to the culture of white supremacy.

Black captivity lasted in spite of the Declaration of Independence, which defined liberty as an inalienable human right, and the US Constitution (via the three-fifths and other clauses). Slaves were classified as chattels; legally, they could not sue, own property, make contracts, marry, or learn to read and write. They could travel only by permission. Slavery's cruelty was palpable in the courts: when a bondman was executed for a capital crime, the state compensated his slaveholder.

Denying the humanity of Africans and African Americans, slavery served three major functions: to maintain forced labor, commonly by brutalizing enslaved men and women; to sustain a caste order of masters, non-slaveholding whites, the enslaved, and free blacks; and to regulate race and class relations, using racism to enforce black subordination and white deference. Slavery thus evolved through nearly 250 years as an economic, political, and social superstructure that perpetuated planter domination, white supremacy, and black subjugation in the United States.

Culturally, the enslaved straddled two worlds. Uprooted from Africa, yet retaining many of their native traditions, they experienced subjuga-

tion and isolation in America. Captive blacks responded with resilience, entwining African survivals and American realities. Their responses varied on a continuum from abject acquiescence and passive resistance to confrontation and insurgency. The organized antislavery movement owed its effectiveness to individuals, groups, and organizations, white and black, from colonial times. It burgeoned during the American Revolution and First Emancipation, as well as in the national crisis of Southern secession, war, and the Emancipation Proclamation. It foreshadowed the Thirteenth Amendment, which ensured slaves' general emancipation, and the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments that laid the foundation for racial equality and participation in democratic processes.

## Study Questions and Activities

1. Forced displacement and isolation proved to be central mechanisms in New World enslavement of Africans. What are some other factors that explain why they were enslaved?
2. On the North American mainland, how and why did African slavery become so important in Southern colonies and states?
3. By what means did African American slaves seek survival and liberation?
4. Slaves and free blacks' actions propelled the issues that culminated in the Civil War and Thirteenth Amendment. Do you agree or disagree? Provide evidence for your position.
5. Annually, thousands of Americans visit the African diaspora landmark on the Island of Gorée, Dakar, Senegal. Discuss pros and cons of having a national slavery monument or museum in America.

## Glossary

**Abolitionist Movement**: Biracial antislavery crusade (1831–1865) pursuing immediate abolition without compensation to masters.

**African Diaspora**: Dispersion of Africans throughout the world from ancient to modern times, mainly by slave trading and slavery; emphasis on transatlantic trade and its consequences in the Western Hemisphere (1441–1888).

**Africanisms**: Beliefs and customs of African origin; enabled slaves and free blacks to create African American culture and establish themselves as an integral part of a varied cultural mix in the Americas.

**Amerindians**: Indigenous peoples of the Americas; their civilizations and kingdoms thrived before the arrival of white colonists.

**Black Belt**: Region stretching through densely black counties from Virginia to Texas; center of cotton production and the antebellum slave system.

**Black Codes**: Laws regulating slaves and free blacks in slave colonies and states.

**Cotton Kingdom**: Expansion of cotton cultivation and slavery in the Lower South (1800–1860) along with the US textile industry.

**Extended Family**: Adaptation of African kinship; connecting the nuclear slave family to blood and fictive kin (grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins) in order to form a supportive network—locally and between plantations.

**First Emancipation**: Gradual freeing of slaves in northern states (1780–1846) by constitutions, courts, and legislatures.

**General Emancipation**: Thirteenth Amendment (1865), emancipating all slaves in US states and territories.

**Haitian Revolution**: The 1791 overthrow of slavery on the French island of St. Domingue culminating in independence (1804); fearful of its influence on slaves, the US refused to recognize the black republic until 1862.

**Indenture:** Servant's contract to work a fixed number of years for transportation and upkeep.

**Invisible Institution**: Black religion under slavery; slaves' conversion to and hidden practice of Christianity.

**Manumission**: Formal release of the slave by the slaveholder, usually in a deed or will.

**Maroon Colony:** Rebel slave community, typically in a remote or hazardous area.

**Money Crops**: Sugar, coffee, tobacco, corn, indigo, wheat, rice, and cotton were major ones; required intensive labor; their marketing helped to propel capitalism and slavery.

**Peculiar Institution**: Moniker for slavery in the American South; system of unfree labor, racial caste, and master-class domination; context of African American culture, agency, and freedom struggle.

**Proslavery Clauses**: Article I, sections 2, 8, 9, Article IV, section 2 of the US Constitution, legalizing slavery.

**Saltwater slaves:** New imports of enslaved Africans in the transatlantic slave trade.

**Seasoning**: Slavemaking on plantations; work routines, breaking the will of new slaves.

**Slave Compensation**: Market price of an executed bondman or woman, payable to the master; allocated from tax revenues of the colony or state.

**Task System**: Incentive-based labor practice started on rice plantations; slaves who completed assigned tasks could leave the fields by mid-afternoon to help themselves.

**Underground Railroad**: South-to-North support networks for runaway slaves; some runaways authored narratives and became abolitionist leaders.

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Charleston. Under pretense of holding a “dancing bout” in St. Paul's Parish, blacks gathered together, ready to seize arms, but the militia defended the armory. Most of the rebels were killed and a few escaped. The Stono Rebellion of 1739 in South Carolina incited white panic across the South. Led by African-born Jemmy, about twenty enslaved black men marched toward Spanish Florida, beating drums, burning houses, killing white people, and adding recruits. While they camped, a white posse ambushed and killed most of them.

The “inalienable rights” of the American Revolution forecast gradual emancipation in the North amidst widening slave unrest in the South. Many of the enslaved ran to the British lines as Lord Dunmore's Proclamation promised freedom to them. Patriot masters manumitted many of the enslaved. Probably 100,000 slaves of British Loyalists and American Patriots were freed by flight, manumission, and evacuation with the British Army at the war's end. Others bolted into Canada or to Florida among the Amerindians. Those blacks were inspired who learned of the slave rebellion in the French colony of St. Domingue. Also known as the Haitian Revolution, it began in 1791. Headed by Toussaint L'Ouverture, the enslaved rose up against the whites and won their freedom in 1793 and independence by1804. Numerous slaveholders embarked for Cuba, New Orleans, Savannah, Charleston, and Baltimore. France abandoned military plans to reclaim St. Domingue (renamed Haiti) and consented to a US purchase of Louisiana. The advent of an independent black republic, “the child of a revolt, had an emboldening effect on the slaves in the United States” (see Benjamin Quarles).

Major slave conspiracies in the United States developed under the leadership of Gabriel Prosser in Richmond (1800), Denmark Vesey in Charleston, South Carolina (1822), and Nat Turner in Southampton County, Virginia (1831). Gabriel's conspiracy morphed on the plantation of Thomas Prosser, a few miles from town. Emulating the rebels on St. Domingue, he and 110 bondmen made a vow to fight for liberty or death. They planned to capture the armory and strategic buildings, believing that 50,000 slaves would join the battle. But one slave told his master; a fierce storm arose on the target date and the federal cavalry decimated them. After speedy trials, Gabriel and three dozen of his brethren died on the gallows. Vesey purchased his freedom in 1800 with winnings from a lottery. An exhorter in the local African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church, he had been to St. Domingue and, like Toussaint, wanted to liberate his people. Accordingly, he set a judgment day against slaveholders. Insurgents planned to take over and torch Charleston. Then, after seizing all ships, they would sail to the West Indies. But a spy disclosed the plot and caused a bloody backlash. Authorities hanged Vesey alongside thirty-four others and deported thirty-seven to slavery in the Caribbean, which was known