Chapter 4
African Enslavement:
The Terrible Transformation

Learning Objectives:

After reading Chapter 4, you should be able to:

1. Understand the effect of the growing slave trade on the African tribes in terms of escalation of tribal warfare, slave raids, changes in tribal population, and culture.
2. Discuss the origins of the African slave trade and why it came to be.
3. Explain how the process of capture in Africa, the terrifying Atlantic journey, and torture were meant to produce a servile, industrious slave with no desire to rebel.
4. Appreciate the kinds of passive resistance demonstrated by African slaves in order to exert some measure of control over their lives.
5. Describe how interpersonal relationships and religion helped Africans endure the oppression of slavery.
6. Discuss how the slave trade developed in the Western Hemisphere.
7. Understand how constant fear of slave revolt prompted the white minority to create rigid systems of law to control every aspect of African labor.

Time Line

1565
African slave labor used to establish Spanish outpost at St. Augustine (Florida)

1625
Brazil led the Western Hemisphere in imported slaves and exported sugar

1640
Virginia passed law preventing blacks from bearing arms

1650
Slavery and sugar production growing quickly in English West Indies; few slaves in North American colonies

1652
Rhode Island colony passed statute limiting all involuntary servitude to no more than ten years
1662
Virginia General Assembly proclaimed that any child born of an Englishman and an African woman would be free or slave depending on the status of the mother; began a tradition of hereditary slavery

1665
Great Plague in England lowered population and created increased demand for alternative labor source

1676
Bacon’s Rebellion in Virginia

1680
Virginia slave law created, spelled out punishments, including death for violent slaves

1691
Virginia statute created, condemning sexual mixing of Englishmen with other races; required freed slaves to be banished from the colony within six months of their release at the former master’s expense; limited the parameters for granting freedom to slaves

1699
Thomas Bray established Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge; established Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts (SPG) in 1701

1705
Virginia Negro Act allowed white indentured servants to sue their masters in court for mistreatment; blacks were not extended the same right

1732
Twenty-year charter for the new territory of Georgia granted to a group of English trustees; first group of settlers arrived in 1733

1735
Georgia proclaimed a free-white colony that prohibited slavery and refused to admit free blacks

1739
Stono Rebellion, largest slave uprising in colonial North America, near Charleston

1741
New York Slave Plot

1750
Free-white experiment in Georgia failed; law passed permitting slavery
Chapter Overview

As the economic and social structure of the colonial world changed, so too did the institution of slavery. Demand grew and the institution increasingly defined itself racially. As profits increased, England entered the slave trade, and Africans, newly enslaved, struggled to make sense of this new, horrible world.

I. The Descent into Race Slavery

A. The Caribbean Precedent

As the need for fully controlled, inexpensive labor emerged in colonial expansion, Europeans devised religious and moral justifications for participation in the African slave trade. Spanish developers introduced black slavery to the Western Hemisphere, specifically in the Caribbean, as Indian populations declined due to disease and labor conditions. Agriculture and mining successes outgrew the ability of Spanish ships to deliver the required number of slaves, and the Spanish government actively sought shippers from the Dutch and other rival nations. Portugal, already delivering slaves to sugar colonies in the Azores, increased its activity in the lucrative slave trade to meet the new demand.

As Portugal developed Brazil, the slave trade naturally followed. Slavery also became the regional work force on English sugar plantations in Barbados. During the earliest British colonies in America, black slaves, due to expense, were an insignificant portion of the labor force, which depended on white indentured labor.

B. Ominous Beginnings

Since the sixteenth century, African men had joined Spanish expeditions into the wilds of the Southeast; some had remained, starting families with natives. African slaves labored to build the Spanish outpost at St. Augustine in 1565. Africans did exist within the colonies of the French, Dutch, and English but not in great number. Most slaves at this time did not come from Africa but were second-generation African Americans from the Caribbean. There was no uniform code regarding the treatment of slaves, and experiences varied widely.
In the Massachusetts Bay area, early Puritan settlers in need of reliable labor began to import a few slaves from the Caribbean and even tried to negotiate a direct trade agreement with Africa. In 1652, Rhode Island passed a law restricting the length of involuntary servitude of any type to ten years.

In 1619, slaves were brought in number to Virginia. A series of Virginia statutes was created during the subsequent decades to systematically strip Africans of any rights and reduce them to mere property. Skin color became the distinguishing identifier of servitude. Throughout the 1640s and 1650s, planters in Virginia began to assume rights to the labor of Indians and Africans for life. Additionally, they claimed rights to any children produced by slave women of color.

C. Alternative Sources of Labor

Enslaved Native Americans were readily used but proved susceptible to European diseases and were harder to identify or capture when they ran away. Also, Indian wars to secure slaves tended to disrupt trade and increased the risks to villages, towns, and outlying farms in all of the colonies. Bacon’s Rebellion and the Great Plague of London sounded a warning to colonial planters that indentured labor from Europe was not an inexhaustible resource. Moreover, abused and cheated indentured servants were quick to report their plight to potential indentures back in England; these potentials would simply book passage to another location.

In contrast, the African slaves had no avenue of redress for the mistreatments they encountered in the colonies and the Caribbean. Thus, no feedback or warnings made it back to Africa to deter relatives or tribesmen from falling into the same trap. Lack of communication perpetuated the Africans’ plight.

D. The Fateful Transition

Although black slaves existed in British colonies, the growth of laws to support a slave system emerged gradually over the decades. Questions about the length of time one would be a slave, the status of slave children, and the legal restrictions regarding slave testimony were decided in colonial courts. Also struck down was the notion that the acceptance of Christianity could save an African from slavery; a Maryland law of 1664 closed that avenue of escape.

In approximately 20 years, English planters had conspired to transform black indentured servitude into hereditary slavery. African slaves, condemned to unpaid labor for life, had no method of complaint when they were punished for misdeeds, real or suggested. Therefore, they found themselves increasingly at the mercy of cruel masters sanctioned by the government to beat them into submission.
II. The Growth of Slave Labor Camps

A. Black Involvement in Bacon’s Rebellion

Bacon’s Rebellion, the major uprising that took place in the Chesapeake region in 1676, had a profound impact on Virginia’s transition to racial slavery. The debacle saw Nathaniel Bacon and a group of aspiring Virginia gentry struggling against Indian groups of the frontier and an entrenched Jamestown oligarchy.

The rebellion underscored the need to find an alternative to the flow of predominately white indentured servants from England. Terms of service only lasted several years and freed servants were still young enough to become competitors to the masters. Those freed men, both black and white, made up the bulk of Bacon’s following.

B. The Rise of a Slaveholding Tidewater Elite

The decision to use black slave labor in the Chesapeake region was based on the desire for profit and dependable long-term laborers. As better living conditions emerged, slaves could be expected to produce children, whose labor could also be exploited or who could be sold for a profit. Slave laborers worked long hours, at tasks specified by owners, and were moved without warning when their labor was desired elsewhere. These conditions were no better than convict labor camps. Africans would routinely be forced to work without pay for life and endure increasingly brutal physical punishment as motivation.

Slave ownership appealed to both the wealthy and those aspiring to wealth. Young white men, like William Byrd of Virginia, could earn enough money in business, purchase a few slaves for resale, and continue expanding their operations to gain wealth and power. Planters in Virginia increased their profits by expanding the head right system, where 50 acres of land were provided for any person who brought a family member or worker into the colony, to include those who bought slaves, thereby increasing their acreage as they increased the workforce.

C. Closing the Vicious Circle in the Chesapeake

The courts and the church also became influential in establishing the accepted conditions of slavery and white labor. Interracial ties became taboo; insistent couples were banished from the dominion. Blacks, regardless of their origins or status, were systematically stripped of any rights they might have thought they possessed.

White indentured servants retained the right to sue their masters for mistreatment according to the Negro Act of 1705, yet Africans had no such ability of judicial appeal. Masters who accidentally killed a slave during the course of inflicting punishment were held free of any felony. The system of government-approved enslaving of Africans was now firmly in place.
III. England Enters the Atlantic Slave Trade

England showed little initial interest in the slave trade, but profits from a growing sugar operation in Barbados quickly convinced Charles II of the slavery system’s merits.

By 1670, the Crown granted a monopoly to the Royal African Company to exploit the African slave trade. The RAC kept up a steady flow of slave ships between Africa and the English colonies. Demand for slave labor, especially in the Caribbean, continued to drive the price of slaves higher. Greed compelled privateers to challenge the RAC monopoly, which ended officially in 1698. In 1713, English companies were contracted to supply African slaves to the Spanish colonies in America and continued to dominate the slave trade for the next three generations.

A. Trade Ties Between Europe and Africa

Dozens of European trading posts were set up all along the sub-Saharan coastline in the two hundred years since the Portuguese had first visited Africa in the 1680s. Local African businessmen formed alliances with Europeans and traded gold and ivory for textiles and alcohol. As Europeans learned African ways, some Africans, like Prince Aniaga of Guinea, became more European. Aniaga visited Paris and even became a respected captain in the French military before deciding to go home.

B. The Slave Trade on the African Coast

Led by the Dutch, most of the European powers had created outposts along an 8,000-mile stretch of the western coast of Africa. Embracing diverse geographic regions, this coastline was home to many distinct cultures of African tribes. Generations of Africans had become accustomed to contact with the Europeans, learning their languages and initiating trade.

Some traders from the interior of the continent, aware of the need for slaves in the New World, would make yearly treks to these coastal outposts with thousands of captive natives from tribal wars to sell to the Europeans. Sold slaves were then ferried across the Atlantic to the American colonies or the Caribbean.

C. The Middle Passage Experience

Lasting as much as two years, the deportation of a captured African to America was a harsh affair usually experienced in five distinct stages, beginning with initial capture in the interior of Africa and relocation to the coastal outposts.
The next stage included sale of the natives by African traders to Europeans. This transaction usually included close inspection of the slaves and identification branding into the skin. Confused and disoriented, slaves would lose track of relatives and friends by the time they reached the Atlantic. Great sailing vessels waited to be filled with slaves offshore.

Once filled, a transport’s captain would make an educated guess about when to sail for America along the middle passage of the Atlantic. Factors such as weather, prior instructions from financiers, advice from local agents, and food supply contributed to a captain’s decision to start the risky voyage.

The African slaves in these ships were kept in deplorable conditions, shackled side-by-side below decks. Filth and disease were the norm on the voyage and many slaves died on the way, only to be tossed overboard by the white crew or used as shark bait to help feed those who would survive.

D. Saltwater Slaves Arrive in America

The slaves unfortunate enough to survive the hellish sea journey were sold to individual planters, merchants, or speculators soon after arriving in America. The healthiest were paraded in their chains for inspection by the wealthy buyers. Those not sold immediately were advertised in the press.

Bought slaves were then transported to their permanent labor camps. Usually arriving in fall or winter, the new arrivals were indoctrinated into the life of a slave during a final stage known as “seasoning.” This process was designed to allow the slave time to recover from the colossal shock of deportation and to heal physically.

IV. Survival in a Strange New Land

A. African Rice Growers in South Carolina

Unlike the Chesapeake region where slavery slowly replaced white labor, South Carolina depended on black slaves from its inception. South Carolina’s climate and its hazards were similar to those in Africa. Working with cattle was also familiar to some slaves, while others were faced with unfamiliar tasks. Slaves were expected to produce their own food, and many turned to rice cultivation, common in their homelands.

Owners recognized the market opportunities of rice cultivation as food for slave populations in the Caribbean and later as a viable export to satisfy the European taste for rice pudding. Another labor intensive African product, indigo, also developed into a highly desirable dye for English textile industries.
B. Patterns of Resistance

South Carolina laws quickly emerged to protect owner interests, similar to the laws found in the Caribbean region. The strict working conditions and subsequent punishments did not develop a totally subservient people. Work slow-downs, faked illness, lost or broken tools, running away, and threats of violence were only some of the acts of resistance that slowly forced individual owners to alter working conditions. Slaves needed to calculate the reaction to such resistance, since punishments could be severe, and included confinement, reduction in food, whipping, mutilation, sale, or even death.

Owners feared their slaves and constantly watched for signs of a violent uprising of numbers of slaves or changes in activity of an angered individual who could strike out by burning fields at harvest time, destroying livestock, intentionally damaging expensive equipment, or murdering white owners or overseers.

C. A Wave of Rebellion

Individual acts of slave protest were common, yet group uprisings also occurred. During the 1730s, rumors of slave uprisings shook French Louisiana. Several suspected plotters were unsuccessfully tortured to force them to reveal the extent of the plot and names of others involved. They were then executed.

The largest colonial uprising, called the Stono Rebellion, occurred in South Carolina in 1739, shortly after the declaration of war between Spain and Britain. Approximately 70 armed slaves burned selected plantations, murdered ten whites, and tried to attract new recruits as they traveled toward the freedom promised in St. Augustine, Florida. Colonists and their Indian allies defeated the rebels before they reached Florida, while additional blacks suspected of rebel sympathies were tortured or killed during the wave of hysteria following the event. Charleston stopped another rumored uprising in 1740 by hanging the 50 suspects as an object lesson to other slaves.

New York also exploded in violent racial activity during fears generated by the Spanish war with England. Suspicious fires resulted in aggressive arrests and 34 executions and the expulsion of 72 free blacks from the town. It is clear that as slavery became imbedded in colonial life, white slave owners and neighboring colonists without slaves had serious concerns about their own safety.

V. The Transformation Completed

Those southern Americans who saw slavery as a viable tool for survival and success tightened the regulations concerning slave behavior, supported costly slave patrols and slave-catching activity, and sought to further control or drive from their midst the small but growing number of
free blacks in their neighborhood. Free blacks in the north also faced increasing discrimination in relation to jobs and housing. The number of slaves also increased in the north, where slaves were most often used as servants, both to alleviate white mistresses from burdensome household tasks and to provide evidence of wealth and culture. Northern speculators and ship owners became wealthy by transporting slaves from Africa and selling them in the south.

A. Uncertain Voices of Dissent

As slavery expanded, many whites saw free blacks as a threat and in 1691, Virginia restricted manumissions. As southern slave colonies oppressed free blacks, in the North, discrimination against African Americans became widespread. Slavery continued and even strengthened in Northern colonies while white Christians lacked the will to fight against slavery. Even critics of the slave system, like Samuel Sewell of Massachusetts, were often ambivalent about the prospects for free blacks.

B. Is this Consistent “with Christianity or Common Justice”?

Although not all Americans condoned slavery, few even among religious leaders spoke out against the growing institution. Some religious leaders and philanthropists such as Thomas Bray promoted Christian instruction for slaves, which received little support among masters. Those who did give permission insisted that slaves be taught about their duties and clearly instructed that rewards or freedom would be found in heaven but not on earth. Among Quakers, individual opposition to slavery existed, but the church supported the individual’s right to own slaves.

C. Oglethorpe’s Antislavery Experiment

In 1731, the London proprietors of Georgia posed an idealistic challenge to southern slavery. The objective of this new colony was to provide a means of rescuing the worthy poor and those in jail for minor crimes by providing small farms as well as transportation to Georgia. In return, these new farmers would produce warm-weather items such as grapes and silk for the English market. This prosperous region would also provide a military buffer between Spanish Florida and South Carolina. The proprietors took no profits from the colony but sought to control all aspects of its growth. Most important, Governor James Oglethorpe was dedicated to the cause of making Georgia a free-white colony with no slavery and no admission of free Africans.

Settlers in Georgia, whether from England, Germany, Switzerland, or Austria, faced the common adjustment problems to weather, geographic conditions, and animal and insect hazards encountered by all other new colonists. Resentment over the lack of a legislature enjoyed by the other English colonies and over the inability to buy or sell land or deed their land to whomever they desired to prevent the accumulation of large estates caused problems. In addition, the banning of slavery in the colony was viewed as a threat by other southern colonies.
D. The End of Equality in Georgia

Finally, a small, well-organized Georgia faction, joined by supporters from South Carolina, encouraged a rift among the proprietors about the appropriate course for the development of the colony. After holding out for two decades, slavery was allowed by 1751, and land-hungry South Carolinians pushed into Georgia to extend their slave empires into the rich, virgin soil. African slaves rapidly became the workers of choice, and Georgia laws controlling slavery mirrored the harsh statutes passed in South Carolina.

Identification

*Explain the significance of each of the following:*

1. The *Asiento*:

2. Bess Key:

3. Aniaga:

4. freedom dues:

5. Reverend Morgan Godwyn:

6. Bacon’s Rebellion:

7. William Byrd:

8. Negro Act of 1705:

9. Barbados:

10. Prince Rupert:
11. Royal African Company:

12. manumissions:

13. triangular trade:

14. “entrepots”:

15. coffle:

16. barracoons:

17. saltwater slaves:

18. “seasoning”:

19. Sullivan’s Island (Charleston):

20. rice:

21. indigo:

22. Stono Rebellion:

23. New York Slave Plot:

24. Thomas Bray:
25. Christian Priber:

26. John Woolman:

27. James Oglethorpe:

**Multiple Choice Questions:**

1. Historians estimate that _____________ people were enslaved and transported against their will to the Caribbean and Central, South, and North America.
   A. 50 million
   B. 100 million
   C. 25 million
   D. 15 million
   E. 10 million

2. England became increasingly involved in the slave trade when the sugar colony of _____________ began its economic take-off.
   A. Barbados
   B. Cuba
   C. Trinidad
   D. Puerto Rico
   E. Haiti

3. The English corporate entity that was given a monopoly on the slave trade was the
   A. Massachusetts Bay Company.
   B. Barbadian Land Company.
   C. Dutch East Indies Company.
   D. Royal African Company.
   E. East Indies Company Ltd.

4. To control access to the slave trade, European powers established dozens of _____________ along the West African coast.
   A. stores
   B. river shanties
   C. markets
   D. forts
   E. entrepots
5. The growth of the slave trade in West Africa paralleled the growth of __________ in the colonies.
   A. inter-colonial warfare
   B. sugar production
   C. tobacco production
   D. disease epidemics
   E. all of the above

6. In their studies of the Middle Passage, historians have been able to document __________ slave voyages.
   A. 1,000
   B. 32,000
   C. 27,000
   D. 51,000
   E. 43,000

7. The final stage of Africans’ journeys into slavery was called ____________ and it gave them time to acclimate to their new worlds.
   A. the Long Dying
   B. seasoning
   C. the transition
   D. Middle Passage

8. The highest proportion of enslaved workers in North America lived in
   A. New York.
   B. Massachusetts.
   C. Georgia.
   D. Virginia.
   E. South Carolina.

9. West African slaves brought with them the profitable staple crop that transformed the South Carolina economy. It was
   A. rice.
   B. tobacco.
   C. indigo.
   D. sugar.
   E. corn.
10. Of the men listed below, who did not dissent on the issue of slavery in the English colonies?
   A. Thomas Bray
   B. William Byrd
   C. Samuel Sewell
   D. Christian Priber
   E. all of the above

MAP QUESTION:

After looking at the information associated with Map 4.2, what general conclusions can you draw about the African slave trade and the European powers that perpetuated it?

CONNECTING HISTORY

Consider the question of slave reparations. In what way could this be accomplished fairly for everyone? Who would foot the bill? Should a generation of taxpayers who have never experienced slavery pay for the sins of a relatively few long-dead planters and merchants? Is granting reparations the only possible solution?

INTERPRETING HISTORY

Considering the time in which the plea to Bishop Gibson was written, what measures could the Church of England have followed to help the plight of the African slaves beyond Christianization? Were any measures feasible, considering the drastic need for labor in the colonies?
Answers to Multiple Choice Questions

1. E
2. A
3. D
4. E
5. B
6. C
7. B
8. E
9. A
10. B