



## What You Will Learn...

## Main Ideas

1. European diseases wiped out much of the Native American population, causing colonists to look for a new labor force.
2. Europeans enslaved millions of Africans and sent them to work in their colonies.
3. Slaves in the Americas created a distinct culture.

## The Big Idea

Europeans forced millions of African slaves to work in their colonies.

## Key Terms and People

immune, p. 58

Middle Passage, p. 59

African Diaspora, p. 60



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TAKING NOTES

Use the graphic organizer online to take notes on the beginnings of slavery in the Americas.

# Beginnings of Slavery in the Americas

## If YOU were there...

You are an enslaved African living in North America. Your family is all that you have. You help each other, and your family provides some relief from the forced labor and harsh life on the plantation. Still, you long for your freedom. A fellow slave has told you of a plan to escape.

**Will you stay with your family or try to flee?**

**BUILDING BACKGROUND** European settlers in the Americas relied on support from their home countries to establish trade and provide protection. In return, the colonies were expected to produce money for the home country. Many colonies did this through plantations, mines, and other ventures that required a large labor force.

## The Need for a New Labor Force

European diseases had a devastating effect on the Native American population. Measles, smallpox, and typhus were common in Europe. As a result, most adult Europeans were **immune**, or had a **natural resistance**, to them. Native Americans, however, had never been exposed to such diseases and had no immunity to them. As a result, many Native Americans became terribly sick after their first encounters with Europeans. Millions of them died in the years after Columbus reached the New World.

No one knows exactly how many Native Americans died from European diseases, but the loss of life was staggering. Spanish author Fernández de Oviedo reported in 1548 about the destruction of the Native Americans of Hispaniola. He reported that, of the estimated 1 million Indians who had lived on the island in 1492, “there are not now believed to be at the present time . . . five hundred persons [left].” In North America the Native American population north of Mexico was about 10 million when Columbus arrived. This

number would drop to less than a million. The drop in the native population played a major role in the emerging need for an alternative labor force.

Plantation agriculture was a mainstay of the colonial economic **structure**. Spain and Portugal established sugar plantations that relied on large numbers of native laborers. In the 1600s English tobacco farmers in North America also needed workers for their plantations. With a lack of Native American workers, they, too, needed another source of labor. Plantation owners in both North and South America wanted a cheap work force.

Some colonists, including Spanish priest Bartolomé de Las Casas, suggested using enslaved Africans as workers. Africans had already developed immunity to European diseases. The colonists soon agreed that slaves from West Africa could be the solution to their labor needs.

**READING CHECK** Analyzing How did disease contribute to the slave trade?

## The Slave Trade

In 1510 the Spanish government legalized the sale of slaves in its colonies. The first full cargo ship of Africans arrived in the Americas eight years later. Over the next century, more than a million enslaved Africans were brought to the Spanish and Portuguese colonies in the New World. The Dutch and English also became active in the slave trade.

### ACADEMIC VOCABULARY

**structure** the way something is set up or organized

## Middle Passage

Enslavement was a horrible experience for the slaves. Most enslaved people had been captured in the interior of Africa, often by Africans who profited from selling slaves to Europeans. The captives were chained around the neck and then marched to the coast. This journey could be as long as 1,000 miles.

The **Middle Passage** was the voyage across the Atlantic Ocean that enslaved Africans were forced to endure. Africans were packed like cargo in the lower decks of the slave ships. The slaves were chained together and crammed

### Primary Source

#### LETTER

### King Afonso to King Joao III

*King Afonso of the African nation of Kongo wrote a letter to the king of Portugal in 1526 asking him to do what he could to stop the practice of taking African slaves.*

Sir, Your Highness should know how our Kingdom is being lost in so many ways . . . [M]erchants are taking every day our natives, sons of the land and the sons of our noblemen and vassals and our relatives, because the thieves and men of bad conscience grab them . . . [T]hey grab them and get them to be sold; and so great, Sir, is the corruption and licentiousness [law breaking] that our country is being completely depopulated, and Your Highness should not agree with this nor accept it as in your service. And to avoid it we need from those



(your) Kingdoms no more than some priests and a few people to teach in schools, and no other goods except wine and flour for the holy sacrament [religious service].

**—King Afonso of Kongo,**

letter to the king of Portugal, 1526

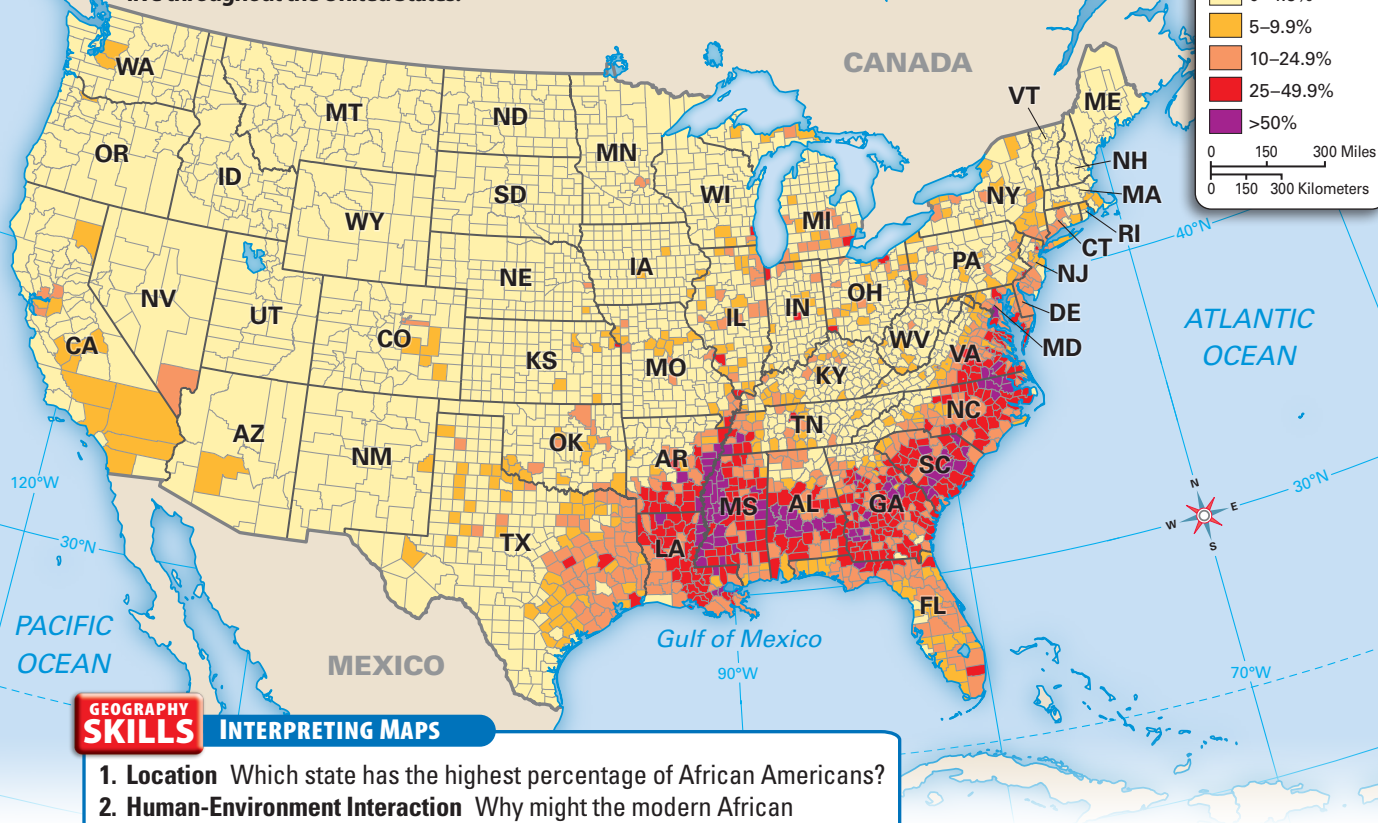
#### ANALYSIS SKILL

#### ANALYZING PRIMARY SOURCES

1. Why does Afonso ask the Portuguese king to help stop the slave trade?
2. What does Afonso request from the king?

## African Diaspora in the United States

The first enslaved Africans to arrive in what is now the United States landed in Jamestown, Virginia, in August 1619. Today, descendants of enslaved Africans and other African Americans live throughout the United States.



### GEOGRAPHY SKILLS

#### INTERPRETING MAPS

- Location** Which state has the highest percentage of African Americans?
- Human-Environment Interaction** Why might the modern African American population be centered in the South?

into spaces about the size of coffins. The height between the decks was sometimes only 18 inches.

### THE IMPACT TODAY

More than half of Brazil's current population is of African descent.

In this confinement, disease spread quickly, killing many Africans. Others suffocated or died from malnutrition. Some slaves took their own lives to end their suffering. It is estimated that one out of every six Africans died during the Middle Passage.

## African Diaspora

Between the 1520s and 1860s about 12 million Africans were shipped across the Atlantic as slaves. More than 10 million of these captives survived the voyage and reached the Americas. The slave trade led to the **African Diaspora**. (A diaspora is the scattering of a people.) Enslaved Africans were sent all across the New World.

More than a third of the enslaved Africans, nearly 4 million people, were sent to Brazil. Most of those slaves were forced to work on Portuguese sugar plantations. Nearly 2 million slaves went to the colonies of New Spain. Some worked on plantations in the Caribbean, while others were taken to the mines of Peru and Mexico. Some 3 million slaves worked in British and French colonies in the Caribbean and Latin America. More than 600,000 slaves went to Britain's North American colonies that later became the United States.

Colonial leaders across the Americas developed laws that regulated slave treatment and behavior. Slaves were given few rights in the colonies. The law considered enslaved Africans to be property. In some colonies, a slaveholder was not charged with



murder if he killed a slave while punishing him. Enslaved Africans, on the other hand, received harsh penalties for minor offenses, such as breaking a tool. Runaways were often tortured and sometimes killed.

The treatment of enslaved Africans varied. Some slaves reported that their masters treated them kindly. To protect their investment, some slaveholders provided adequate food and clothing for their slaves. However, severe treatment was very common. Whippings, brandings, and even worse torture were all part of American slavery.

**READING CHECK** **Generalizing** How were enslaved Africans treated in the Americas?

## Slave Culture in the Americas

Slaves in the Americas came from many different parts of Africa. They spoke different languages and had different cultural backgrounds. But enslaved Africans also shared many customs and viewpoints. They built upon what they had in common to create a new African American culture.

Families were a vital part of slave culture. Families provided a refuge—a place not fully under the slaveholders' control. However, slave families faced many challenges. Families were often broken apart when a family member was sold to another owner. In Latin America, there were many more enslaved males than females. This made it difficult for slaves there to form stable families.

Religion was a second refuge for slaves. It gave enslaved Africans a form of expression that was partially free from their slaveholders' control. Slave religion was primarily Christian, but it included traditional elements from African religions as well. Religion gave slaves a sense of self worth and a hope for salvation in this life and the next. Spirituals were a common form of religious expression among slaves. Slaves also used songs and folktales to tell their stories of sorrow, hope, agony, and joy.

Many slaves expressed themselves through art and dance. Dances were important social events in slave communities. Like most elements of slave culture, art and dance were heavily influenced by African traditions.

**READING CHECK** **Identifying Points of View** Why was religion important to slaves in the Americas?

**SUMMARY AND PREVIEW** After disease wiped out much of the Native American population, colonists turned to slave labor. In the next chapter you will learn about English colonies in the Americas.

## Section 5 Assessment

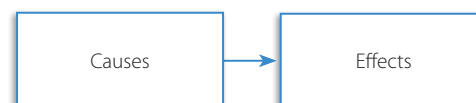
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ONLINE QUIZ

### Reviewing Ideas, Terms, and People

- a. Recall** Why did so many Native Americans die after coming into contact with Europeans?  
**b. Summarize** Why did plantation owners turn to enslaved Africans as a labor force? How did this lead to the creation of the transatlantic slave trade?
- a. Identify** What was the **Middle Passage**?  
**b. Describe** Explain how enslaved Africans were treated after they reached the colonies in the Americas.
- a. Explain** What are spirituals?  
**b. Analyze** How did religion and family provide a refuge from the harsh life enslaved Africans were forced to endure?

### Critical Thinking

- Identifying Cause and Effect** Review your notes on the slave trade. Use a chart like the one below to explain the causes and the effects of the slave trade.



### FOCUS ON WRITING

myWriteSmart

- Writing about Slavery** Add information about the beginnings of slavery in the Americas to your notes. Include notes about slave culture. What refuges did enslaved people have from their suffering?