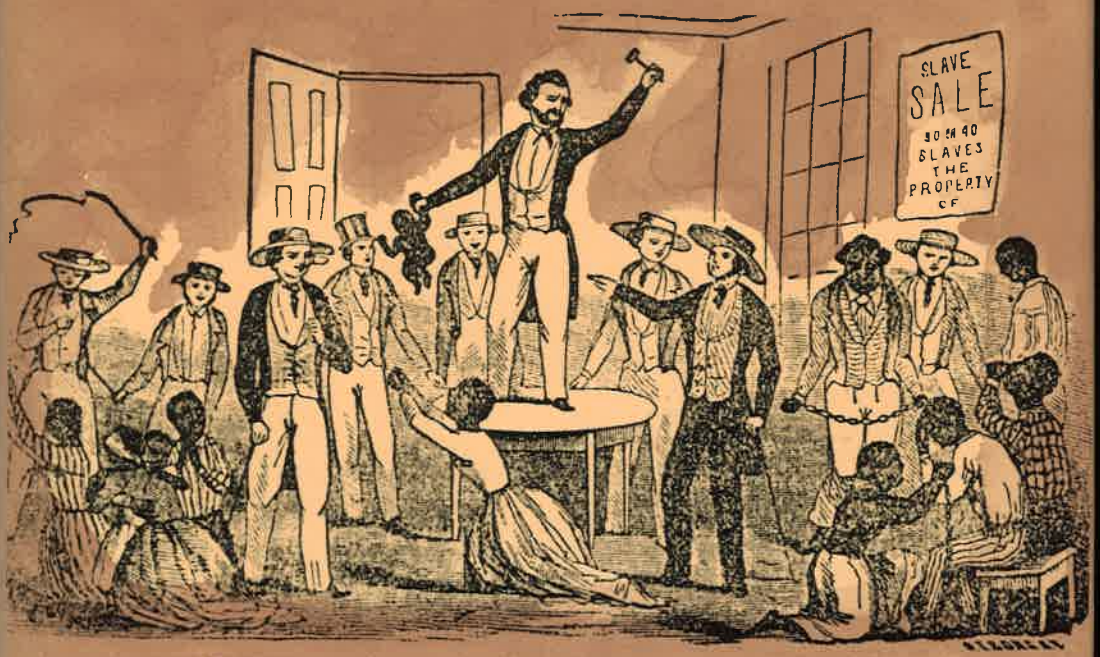
American Slavery

1619-1877



Peter Kolchin

ALSO BY PETER KOLCHIN

First Freedom: The Responses of Alabama's Blacks to Emancipation and Reconstruction (1972)

Unfree Labor: American Slavery and Russian Serfdom (1987), Winner of the Bancroft Prize for 1988

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BY

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For Michael and David

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Origins and Consolidation

I

ALTHOUGH AMERICANS LIKE to think that the United States was "conceived in liberty," the reality is somewhat different. Almost from the beginning, America was heavily dependent on coerced labor, and by the early eighteenth century slavery, legal in all of British America, was the dominant labor system of the Southern colonies. Most of the Founding Fathers were large-scale slave owners, including George Washington, "father of his country," Patrick Henry, author of the stirring cry "Give me liberty or give me death," and Thomas Jefferson, who proclaimed in the Declaration of Independence that "all men are created equal." Indeed, eight of the United States's first twelve Presidents, in office for forty-nine of the new nation's first sixty-one years, were slaveholders. When, beginning about 1830, a small band of abolitionists boldly proclaimed that slavery was a dreadful sin, the majority of Americans, North as well as South, regarded them as fanatics whose provocative rantings threatened the well-being of the Republic.

During the century and a half between the arrival of twenty blacks in Jamestown in 1619 and the outbreak of the American Revolution in 1776, slavery—nonexistent in England itself—spread through all the English colonies that would soon become the United States (as

well as through those that would not). It grew like a cancer, at first slowly, almost imperceptibly, then inexorably, as colonists eager for material gain imported hundreds of thousands of Africans to toil in their fields. During the eighteenth century, slavery became entrenched as a pervasive—and in many colonies central—component of the social order, the dark underside of the American dream.

II

IN ORDER TO UNDERSTAND the unfree origins of the United States, it is useful to put American developments in a broader world context, for until the nineteenth century unfree status of one type or another—slavery, serfdom, peonage—was the lot of much of humankind. Scholars have documented a staggering variety of "slaveries" that served a multitude of diverse purposes. To those accustomed to thinking of slaves as agricultural laborers and house servants, it may be startling to learn that slaves have also served as warriors, government officials, wives, concubines, tutors, eunuchs, and victims of ritual sacrifice. In many pre-modern societies there were high-status slaves who exercised considerable authority; such elite slaves ranged from stewards who managed vast agricultural estates in China and early-modern Russia to high government officials in Rome and the Ottoman Empire. Throughout much of Asia, Africa, and Latin America, slaves served in the armed forces, at times—especially in the Islamic world—achieving high rank and wielding considerable power.

Slavery has also varied widely in terms of gender and ethnicity. If throughout the Western Hemisphere demand was greatest for young men to serve as physical laborers, in most of Africa and the Near East female slaves were more highly prized than male, both because of their widespread use as wives and concubines and because in many societies women traditionally served as the main agricultural producers. In ancient times, military victors frequently killed some or all of the vanquished adult males but enslaved the women and children.

Often slaves have differed physically from their masters, and racial contrast proved highly useful to American masters in legitimizing their position, but such distinction has by no means been universal. Somehow masters had to create a "we–they" dichotomy necessary

to distinguish those who might legitimately be enslaved from those who could not, but in the absence of racial contrast, other attributes, such as religion and nationality, could serve the same purpose: both Muslims and Christians traditionally believed that only heathens (non-Muslims and non-Christians, respectively) could be enslaved, and numerous groups enslaved those from other countries, tribes, or nationalities while sparing members of their own communities. But even ethnic distinction was not essential to slavery; sociologist Orlando Patterson has found that in about one-quarter of fifty-seven slaveholding societies he studied, at least some masters and slaves shared the same ethnic identity.

Although slavery has exhibited such extraordinary diversity over time and space that it might seem virtually impossible to generalize about its nature, a particular type of slavery, which exhibited certain common features, emerged in the Western (that is, European-derived) world in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Most prevalent in the New World (the Americas), although it also existed in other areas of European colonization (such as South Africa), this modern Western slavery was a product of European expansion and was preeminently a system of labor. It emerged to meet the pervasive labor shortage that developed wherever landholders tried to grow staple crops—sugar, coffee, tobacco, rice, and later cotton—for market in areas of population scarcity. Spreading slowly at first, it assumed enormous proportions in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and helped propel the economic transformation of the leading colonial powers, especially Great Britain.

This new system of bonded labor was distinguished by both its scope and its ethnic composition. It was closely associated with the spread of the plantation as a productive unit ideally suited for the regimentation of agricultural labor and hence the large-scale cultivation of staple crops; although slaves in the Americas served in diverse capacities, New World slavery was preeminently geared to such commercial agriculture. The Southern United States represented the northernmost outpost of this plantation system, which reached its apogee of organizational development on the large sugar estates of Jamaica, Saint Domingue (later called Haiti), Cuba, and other Caribbean colonies. Equally important was the new ethnic composition of modern Western slavery: despite some exceptions —a small although by no means negligible number of Indian slaves, a smaller number of Indian and black slave owners—most slaves

were Africans and their descendants, whereas most masters were Europeans and their descendants. This ethnic contrast did not totally define the character of New World slavery, for diverse conditions and traditions fostered major variations among slave societies in both slavery and race relations; the very understanding of the terms "white" and "black," for example, differed in Brazil, Jamaica, Louisiana, and Virginia. Nevertheless, at both the global and the individual level, the racial character of New World slavery was significant: that slavery was predicated on new, unequal relationships between Europe and Africa and between white and black.

Whatever the variations among New World slave societies, their orientation around commercial agriculture gave them an essential unity and made them part of an economic order. Slaves were brought to the Americas for their ability to work; slavery there constituted, first and foremost, a system of labor. As such, it had more in common with the serfdom that was emerging in Russia and some other parts of Eastern Europe than with many of the pre-modern slaveries mentioned above. It is within the context of this modern Western slavery that the development of American slavery is best understood.

III

COLONIAL AMERICA WAS overwhelmingly agricultural. Although some early migrants hoped to become fabulously wealthy without having to work, by finding gold or discovering the fabled Northwest Passage to the Pacific, it soon became clear to settlers that survival depended on working the land. Colonial Americans, like other people of their time, expended much of their energy feeding themselves, but they also found the land well suited to growing a variety of crops greatly in demand abroad, and it was these crops—the most important of which were tobacco in the upper South and rice in the lower South—that provided the basis for much of their wealth. (Sugar, a still more valued commodity, became the staple crop of the Caribbean islands.) Cultivating these crops, however, required labor; in an environment where land was plentiful and people few, the amount of tobacco or rice one could grow depended on the number of laborers one could command. The desire to develop commercial agriculture under conditions of population scarcity gave

rise in North America—as it did in the Caribbean and in South America—to forced labor.

This development was not so wrenching for the settlers as one might expect, for they were used to a highly stratified world in which the rich and powerful savagely exploited the poor and powerless. "Gentlemen" not only expected to receive the deference of their social inferiors but were willing to expend considerable force to ensure it. Historian Lawrence Stone has aptly noted the pervasive use of physical punishment to maintain order and authority in early-seventeenth-century England: "Whips and stocks were used by the Crown upon its lesser subjects, by the nobleman upon his servants, by the village worthies upon the poor, by the dons upon the undergraduates, by the City Companies upon the apprentices."[1] The contemporary equivalent of a shoplifter might be whipped, branded with the letter "T" (for "thief"), pilloried in the stocks, or transported to America. In many ways the world from which early colonists came was a world of pre-modern values, one that lacked the concepts of "cruel and unusual punishment," equal rights, and exploitation; it was a world that instead took for granted natural human *in*equality and the routine use of force necessary to maintain it. In short, it was a world with few ideological constraints against the use of forced labor.

The precise form that this forced labor took in colonial America, however, was by no means predetermined. The initial demand for labor was precisely that—for labor—and was largely color-blind. In addition to paying freely hired workers wages that were unusually high by European standards, the seventeenth-century colonists experimented with two other sources of unfree labor—Indians and Europeans—before their widespread importation of Africans.

English attitudes toward the native inhabitants of America were complex. Idealization of "noble savages," far less prevalent than it was among the French in Quebec, coexisted with interest in Christianizing "pagans" and the dominant goal of repressing, expelling, or killing "beasts" viewed as threats to civilization. Indians also served as slaves, at first usually victims of military defeat or kidnapping but subsequently also bought and sold on the open market. Such slaves were most numerous in South Carolina, where the governor estimated in 1708 that there were 1,400 Indian slaves in a population of 12,580, but they could be found in all the English colonies. Small numbers of Indian slaves persisted into the nine-

teenth century; others intermarried with Africans, and their descendants blended into the black population.

For a variety of reasons, however, Indian slavery never reached very substantial proportions on the British-controlled American mainland. Colonists complained that Indians were "haughty" and refused to work properly. Behind such complaints lay the very real refusal of many Indian men to perform agricultural labor, traditionally seen by them as women's work, and to engage in disciplined, supervised labor, to which they were unaccustomed. Equally important, the Indians used their familiarity with the terrain to escape and conspire against their captors. Because it has historically been difficult to enslave people on their home turf, the English found it convenient to export Indians captured in battle rather than hold them locally; in 1676, for example, after Massachusetts settlers crushed the bloody Indian uprising they termed King Philip's War, the head of the rebel leader Metacom was exhibited on a pole as an example to other would-be insurrectionists, but many of his followers (including his wife and son) were sold as slaves to the West Indies. Finally, there were simply not enough Indians in the colonies to fill the settlers' labor needs. Many—in some areas most—died in massive epidemics that swept through a population without immunity to such European diseases as smallpox and measles, while others perished in battle. Ultimately, the policy of killing the Indians or driving them away from white settlements proved incompatible with their widespread employment as slaves.

Far more common—indeed, the basis of the seventeenth-century work force in the southern two-thirds of the English mainland colonies—were European laborers. Most came as indentured servants. Indenturing (or apprenticing) children, youths, and less often adults to "masters" was widely practiced in seventeenth-century England and served a variety of functions from poor relief to job training and labor procurement. In the colonies, however, indentured servitude was transformed into an institution whereby Europeans desiring to come to America but unable to afford passage sold themselves into temporary slavery in exchange for free transatlantic transportation; especially in the South, where it served to provide large quantities of cheap labor to eager landowners, it lost much of its protective and educative function and assumed a harsher, more rapacious character. Terms of indenture varied considerably: most servants came voluntarily, but some arrived in America after being

kidnapped or sentenced for criminal behavior; most adults served four or five years, but children often served seven years or more; and both adults and children found their servitude extended for criminal behavior (including disobedience, flight, and childbearing). During their indenture, servants were essentially slaves, under the complete authority of their masters; masters could (and readily did) apply corporal punishment to servants, forbid them to marry, and sell them (for the duration of their terms) to others.

Indentured servitude flourished because it simultaneously met the needs of labor-hungry colonial landowners and those of would-be European migrants. Landowners saw servitude as a gold mine. It not only offered a solution to their labor problem but also enabled them to increase their landholdings further, for most early colonies provided those who paid for people's transatlantic passage with a "headright" or land allotment—often fifty acres—for each person (including oneself) transported. When John Carter imported eighty indentured servants in 1665 to work for him in Virginia, he received a headright of four thousand acres. In short, indentured servitude provided the emerging colonial gentry relatively cheap labor, more land, and the honor that accrued to those with authority over other humans.

To laborers, servitude held out an equally alluring attraction: the chance to escape hardship—poverty, hunger, unemployment, overpopulation, prison, or political turmoil—and to start anew in a distant, wonderful land. Although in the eighteenth century servant ranks were swelled by emigrants from Ireland and Germany, as well as by convicts transported in lieu of lengthy prison terms or death, most early servants were English, and came voluntarily. Severe economic dislocations in England in the first half of the seventeenth century—combined with the political disruption of the 1640s and 1650s that saw civil war culminate in the beheading of King Charles I, the dictatorship of Oliver Cromwell, and the restoration of the monarchy in 1660 under Charles II—produced an abundant supply of would-be servants. They were overwhelmingly composed of young men (male servants outnumbered female by more than three to one) from the bottom half of the social order; although they came from diverse backgrounds, only a shared sense of desperation born of absent opportunity can explain their willingness to leave everything they had ever known for years of uncertain servitude in America.

Once in the colonies, indentured servants had diverse experiences. Some, especially in New England, engaged in (or were taught) skilled trades such as blacksmithing and carpentry; well into the nineteenth century, apprenticing children to artisans remained a way of providing for their education. Others worked as domestics. Most seventeenth-century servants, however, wound up as agricultural laborers, especially in the tobacco fields of Virginia and Maryland. They lived hard lives under the authority of men anxious to get as much work out of them as possible before their terms of service were up. Many ran away, an offense that—if they were apprehended—brought its perpetrators whippings, brandings, bodily mutilations, and extended terms of servitude. Many others succumbed to the new environment; recent evidence suggests that in the mid-seventeenth-century Chesapeake colonies almost half of all servants died while still under indenture. Some of those who survived eventually became independent craftsmen or landowners, but more still never achieved independence: unable to find wives because of the paucity of women, they remained single, continued to work for their better-established neighbors, and often lived in those neighbors' households as well. (Women servants who survived their indentures generally faced a brighter future than men; the surplus of males enabled most women to marry and many to improve their status by marrying "up.") Not all indentured servants were recent immigrants: within the colonies men and women were bound out for indebtedness and crime, and a small floating underclass of laborers lived perpetually in the margins of servitude, serving multiple terms of indenture.

IV

THROUGHOUT MOST of the seventeenth century, indentured servants filled the bulk of the colonies' labor needs. Although a Dutch captain sold twenty Africans in Virginia in 1619, and small numbers of blacks trickled into the mainland colonies over the following decades, until the 1680s the non-Indian population of the British mainland colonies remained overwhelmingly white. So long as a ready supply of indentured labor continued to exist, colonists saw little reason to go to the expense and bother of importing large numbers of Africans, who, unlike English laborers, had to undergo

prolonged adjustment to alien conditions—strange masters had unusual customs and spoke an unintelligible language—before becoming productive members of the work force. Equally important, because the Portuguese and Dutch dominated the African slave trade until the British triumph in the Anglo-Dutch war of 1664–67, the English colonists found slaves expensive and hard to obtain.

Beginning in the 1680s, however, the mainland colonies underwent a massive shift from indentured to slave labor. Some simple statistics drive home the point. Between 1680 and 1750, the estimated proportion of blacks in the population increased from 7 percent to 44 percent in Virginia and from 17 percent to 61 percent in South Carolina (see table 1). "They import so many Negros hither," wrote Virginia planter William Byrd II in 1736, "that I fear this Colony will some time or other be confirmed by the Name of New Guinea."[2]

This shift, which has been documented most carefully for the Chesapeake colonies, was the product of a fundamental change in the relative supply of indentured servants and slaves, in the face of escalating colonial demand for labor. Because servants were held only temporarily and then freed, a rapidly growing colonial population required an equally rapid growth in the number of indentured immigrants for servants to remain a constant proportion of the population. Between 1650 and 1700, the population of Virginia more than tripled; if indentured servants were to continue providing the bulk of the agricultural labor force, servant immigration would have had to triple, or come close to tripling, too.

In fact, at the same time that colonial demand for labor was surging, a sharp *decrease* occurred in the number of English migrants arriving in America under indenture. White immigration into the Chesapeake colonies—most of it indentured—peaked between 1650 and 1680 and then declined sharply. In some areas the decline was dramatic. In York County, Virginia, for example, the ratio of servants to slaves plummeted from 1.9 in 1680–84 to 0.27 in 1685–89 and 0.07 in 1690–94; within a decade, indentured servants had almost totally disappeared from the county. The flow of servants did not entirely end: during the first half of the eighteenth century, transportation of convicts to Maryland increased substantially, Pennsylvania attracted a huge wave of indentured Germans, and some English servants continued to come voluntarily. By the end of the seventeenth century, however, it was clear that indentured Euro-

peans could no longer fill the labor needs of the Southern colonies.

Changing conditions on both sides of the Atlantic were responsible for this development. In England, the restoration of the monarchy in 1660 was followed by both political stabilization and an economic upturn. Wages rose, employment opportunities improved, agricultural productivity increased, and the population—which began to grow somewhat more slowly than it had earlier—no longer appeared excessive, as it had to many English observers in the first half of the century. In the colonies, opportunities for unskilled immigrants declined in the late seventeenth century, as land became more densely settled and hence less readily available. (In part for this reason, indentured servants who came to America from England in the eighteenth century tended to be substantially more literate and more skilled than those in the seventeenth.) A downturn in tobacco prices beginning in the early 1680s may also have discouraged merchants from importing servants into the Chesapeake. In short, for a variety of reasons, selling themselves into indentured servitude in America no longer seemed like a very attractive proposition to many English subjects.

In the face of this rather sudden decline in the supply of European servants, labor-hungry Chesapeake landowners looked elsewhere for replacements. Fortunately for them, the late seventeenth century witnessed not only a decline in the availability of European laborers but also an increase in the availability of African. British naval superiority brought with it dominance of the African slave trade, a dominance symbolized by establishment of the slave-trading Royal African Company in 1672 and receipt of the royal *Asiento* (or right to supply the Spanish colonies with slaves) in 1713. Although most British-traded slaves continued to go to the sugar islands in the Caribbean, where demand for them was greatest, mainland colonists found their supply of Africans eased as well. Historian Russell Menard has calculated that between 1674 and 1691, the ratio of slave prices to servant prices (measured in constant British pounds) fell steadily, from 2.88 to 1.83. Under these conditions, colonists who could no longer secure an adequate supply of white indentured servants were quite willing to use black slaves in their place.

With large-scale importation of Africans under way, landowners had additional, if subsidiary, reasons for preferring slaves to servants. Slaves were held permanently rather than for a few years, and female

slaves passed their status on to their children. Thus, although they cost more to purchase than servants, as the ratio of slave prices to servant prices declined slaves increasingly seemed like a better long-term investment, especially to the wealthiest planters, who could most easily afford their initial cost and who therefore led the switch from indentured to slave labor. Basic demographic changes among the black population (discussed more fully in chapter 2, section III) reinforced this preference. Early African residents of the Chesapeake colonies had relatively few children in America and suffered from exceedingly high mortality rates that made them risky investments. A modest decline in those rates by the late seventeenth century was followed by a sharp increase in fertility rates in the early eighteenth; as a result, whereas in the seventeenth century the slave population failed to reproduce itself and had to be replenished in much the same way the servant population did, in the eighteenth century it became a self-perpetuating labor force. An initial investment in slaves bought a lifetime (and more) of labor.

Slaves also offered masters a reduced level of successful flight, an important consideration everywhere but especially in Virginia, where, in the wake of the abortive rebellion led by Nathaniel Bacon in 1676, planters were increasingly concerned about controlling unruly laborers. Both slaves and servants ran away and, when caught, received for their efforts a wide range of nasty punishments, including whippings, bodily mutilations, and—for servants—lengthened servitude. Eighteenth-century colonial newspapers (there were none in the seventeenth century) were filled with advertisements for fugitives, both white and black; a typical notice from the *Pennsylvania Journal* of September 26, 1751, advertised for return of "an Irish Servant Man, Named Christopher Cooney, of Short Stature, pale Complexion, short brown Hair"; the listing noted that he "has a Scarr on his left Cheek, near his Nose, has lost one of his under fore Teeth, has had his Right Leg broke, and walks with his Toes turning outwards."[3] But because of their color, slaves found it much more difficult than servants to escape. Despite brandings and mutilations designed to mark them as bound, once beyond the immediate vicinity of their servitude servants were often able to establish themselves as free; because blacks were presumed to be slaves unless they could show otherwise, they found unauthorized movement more difficult. Racial distinction, in short, facilitated enslavement.

V

THE EARLY RELATIONSHIP between slavery and race has prompted considerable historical debate. Some scholars have stressed the existence of racial prejudice among the English before their resort to African slavery, and have argued that it was this prejudice that led to the enslavement of Africans in America. Others have seen racism largely as a function of slavery, maintaining that people held as slaves came to be seen as slavish by nature. Although in their baldest form these two positions—enunciated most starkly in the 1950s by Carl N. Degler on the one hand and Oscar and Mary F. Handlin on the other—seem to be mutually exclusive, there is considerable evidence to support modified versions of both, and when properly reformulated they are not so incompatible as they first appear; perhaps for this reason, the debate has gradually lost much of its acrimony. Indeed, what we now know suggests that the most appropriate question is not whether slavery caused prejudice or prejudice caused slavery (a false choice, since the evidence sustains neither of these two conjectures) but rather how slavery and prejudice interacted to create the particular set of social relationships that existed in the English mainland colonies.

The initial demand for labor that eventually led to slavery was, as we have seen, color-blind. The colonists came from a hierarchical society that lacked the modern world's clear demarcation between free and unfree status. They saw nothing particularly noteworthy about some people working—even under constraint—for the well-being of others, and they experimented with forced labor of Indians and Europeans before resorting to that of Africans. The turn to Africans came not because of any ideological concerns but because the flow of indentured white labor seemed to be drying up.

Research by scholars such as Winthrop D. Jordan has clearly demonstrated that well before the shift from indentured to slave labor the English already harbored three stereotypes about Africans that facilitated their enslavement by setting them off as different (and hence liable to different treatment). First, they were "black," or so they seemed; it is highly significant that the English saw Africans as black and themselves as white—in both cases inaccurately—for associated with the former term were numerous pejorative meanings ranging from dirty to immoral, whereas the latter carried equally positive connotations of purity, virtue, and godliness. Second, they

were "savage" or "uncivilized"; that is, their culture was very different from that of Europeans and appeared to the English to be manifestly outlandish and inferior. Third, they were "heathens," an attribute that may have been the most important of all, for in an era when being the wrong kind of Christian put one in mortal danger in most of Christendom (including most of the English colonies), being a non-Christian automatically put one beyond the pale.

Clearly, the English were struck by differences between themselves and Africans, and negative stereotypes of Africans helped shape race relations in America during the early years of slavery. The significance of those stereotypes for the introduction and maintenance of slavery must not be exaggerated, however, for none of them proved essential; indeed, it soon became clear that diminution and even removal of the three perceived differences that set Africans apart from Europeans provided little basis for questioning slave status. Thus, the emergence through interracial sexual contact of light-colored slaves who lacked the stigma of blackness did not necessitate their manumission, any more than did the emergence of "acculturated" slaves who lacked the African's "savagery." At first it appeared that religious convergence might prove more of a stumbling block, and some planters withheld Christian instruction from Africans in the belief that their conversion might require their emancipation. Such fears were put to rest during the last third of the seventeenth century, however, when one colony after another passed laws making it clear that "the conferring of baptisme doth not alter the condition of the person as to his bondage or ffreedome"; in other words, Christians could be held as slaves.[4]

Furthermore, if Africans appeared to be fundamentally different, throughout much of the seventeenth century they received treatment only marginally different from that afforded other members of the "lower ranks." Brutal repression of "rowdy" elements in Britain as well as savage colonization of Ireland preceded the English assault on Native Americans and enslavement of Africans, and demonstrate the insufficiency of race as an explanation of policy toward blacks. If the English regarded Africans as inferior by nature, members of the English gentry regarded their own lower classes—and the Irish—in much the same way: they were ignorant and "brutish" and required physical repression to keep them in line. The Irish were widely perceived as wild, degraded, and of questionable Christianity, "more uncivill, more uncleanly, more barbarous and more

brutish in their customs and demeanures, then in any other part of the world that is known."[5]

Within the colonies, there was often little clear demarcation between blacks and lower-class whites during the first decades of settlement. Indentured servants were subject to many of the same constraints as slaves, and the two groups often lived together, worked together, played together, and sometimes slept together and ran away together. Landowning Virginians feared the "giddy multitude" (or rabble), but this was a rather heterogeneous lower-class group of servants and slaves, whites and blacks that seemed to threaten the social order. Until the very end of the seventeenth century, blacks remained too few in number to constitute a distinct threat of their own.

In all the mainland colonies, seventeenth-century race relations showed a flexibility that would later seem astonishing. This flexibility was evident in Massachusetts, where slaves never formed more than a tiny fraction of the population and most blacks were house servants or skilled workers, but it also existed in the mainland colony with the highest proportion of slaves, South Carolina, where blacks served as trappers, hunters, guides, and fishermen, and, as historian Peter Wood put it, "servants and masters shared the crude and egalitarian intimacies inevitable on a frontier."[6] Historians T. H. Breen and Stephen Innes have demonstrated that "in seventeenth-century Northampton County, Virginia . . . Englishmen and Africans could interact with one another on terms of relative equality for two generations." Between 1664 and 1677, at least 13 (out of 101) blacks became free landowners, most through self-purchase; in 1668, some 29 percent of blacks in the county were free.[7] In short, there was not yet an impenetrable barrier separating the races. Although almost all blacks came to the colonies as slaves, most whites came as unfree laborers, too, and there was much that united them.

Even in these early years, however, the treatment of black laborers differed from that of white in important respects. They required more "breaking in"—in terms of language, customs, work habits, and simple obedience—especially by the late seventeenth century, when most came directly from Africa without undergoing "seasoning" in the West Indies, as had previously been common. Although some Africans seem to have served, like whites, as temporary indentured servants during the first half century of English settlement in America, most, unlike whites, already served for life. But most

important, whereas the great majority of European migrants came to America voluntarily, none of the Africans did.

More than anything else, it was the involuntary nature of blacks' migration to America that dictated their growing separation from the white labor force. As historian Edmund S. Morgan pointed out, desire to attract continued white immigration imposed limits on the severity of treatment of indentured servants, especially with the slackening of European arrivals after the 1670s, and prevented those servants from being reduced to the ranks of slaves. Gradually, the status and treatment of European migrants improved. An increasing proportion were literate and possessed skills that enabled them to take advantage of opportunities offered by the burgeoning colonial economies; in the eighteenth century, unlike the seventeenth, few white servants in the South (and virtually no women) engaged in agricultural labor. That was now the lot of blacks, who as involuntary migrants did not have to be lured to America by attractive conditions.

As the status of white migrants gradually improved, that of blacks in America became more clearly defined as well. Whereas the legal status of the few blacks who resided in the colonies remained uncertain prior to the 1660s, a spate of legislation passed during the subsequent century regulated the condition of the growing population of black slaves and set them off from white settlers. These acts established that slaves—and the children of slave women—would serve for life; limited the rights of slaves and even of free blacks (they could not vote, testify in court against whites, or marry whites); prohibited slaves from carrying arms or leaving home without written permission; discouraged masters from freeing slaves by a variety of provisions including requiring legislative approval for each act of manumission and requiring manumitted slaves to leave their home colony within six months; and mandated severe corporal punishment for those who dared challenge white authority. Because slavery was absent in England, the slave law that developed in her overseas possessions was (unlike that of the Spanish empire) entirely a product of colonial legislation, with each colony passing its own slave laws. The timing and substance of these laws consequently varied somewhat. Virginia's first major slave code, enacted in 1680, was strengthened in 1705; South Carolina's perfunctory code of 1690 was superseded by that of 1696 and then overhauled in more comprehensive legislation of 1712, which in turn was substantially revised in 1740. Both colonies, like others, continued to enact new

legislation on a piecemeal basis. By the middle of the eighteenth century, however, slavery was solidly entrenched, both in fact and in law, as the labor system of the Southern colonies and was legally established in the Northern colonies as well.

Ironically, racial lines hardened despite a growing convergence between white and black. Over the generations, interaction between Africans and their descendants on the one hand and Europeans and their descendants on the other sharply reduced the cultural—and sometimes the physical—gap between the races (see chapter 2). But even as this process occurred, most white Americans came to assume that blacks were so different from whites that slavery was their natural state. (Such sentiment would receive far more detailed expression in the nineteenth century when the abolitionist onslaught provoked an elaborate justification of slavery.) As Virginia planter Landon Carter put it in 1770, "Kindness to a Negroe by way of reward for having done well is the surest way to spoil him although according to the general observation of the world most men are spurred on to diligence by rewards."[8] Whereas a century earlier, freedom was a vague concept and the lot of most laborers, white and black, was to one extent or another unfree, now the assumption among whites was practically universal that blacks were slave and whites free.

VI

IN FULL SWING by the late seventeenth century, the British-operated slave trade was a big business in the eighteenth. Many of the foremost families in England (and New England) grew rich off it. Leaving a home port such as Liverpool or Boston with a cargo of weapons, manufactured goods, and rum, a slaving ship would proceed to the west coast of Africa, where these items were exchanged for slaves to be sold in the mainland or island colonies (or elsewhere; in the eighteenth century, the British provided slaves to much of the New World). Successful voyages brought large profits, but the risks were also great: sea travel was hazardous under the best of circumstances, and on most ships between 5 and 20 percent of the slaves (and crew) died in transit. (Mortality rates gradually declined over the course of the eighteenth century.) Exceptional circumstances—attack by pirates, bad weather—could jeopardize

an entire cargo. Even insurance, which during the eighteenth century covered an increasing proportion of traders against unforeseen losses, provided uncertain protection; in 1781, running short on water, the captain of the *Zong* ordered 132 Africans thrown overboard, because his insurance covered death from drowning but not from starvation.

Most American slaves came from the coastal region of West Africa. European and American traders dubbed this region "Guinea" and assigned various portions of it descriptive designations such as Ivory Coast, Gold Coast, and Slave Coast that suggested the nature of their appeal. A much smaller number of American slaves—although perhaps as many as 40 percent of those brought to South Carolina—came from the Congo/Angola region farther south. Enslaved Africans belonged to a multiplicity of nationalities with diverse languages, customs, and political structures, although the bulk of slaves came from three distinct geographic zones—upper Guinea, lower Guinea, and Congo/Angola—each of which was marked by loose cultural and linguistic commonality. As historian Daniel C. Littlefield has shown, both the slave traders and their American customers were (unlike their nineteenth-century descendants) conscious of the slaves' diverse ethnic origins, and showed marked preferences—based in part on perceived physical distinctions and in part on ethnic stereotyping that could vary from place to place—for certain nationalities. Among South Carolina slave owners, for example, big, strong, dark slaves from Gambia and the Gold Coast were most in demand; "Coromantes and Whydahs, because of their greater hardiness, were supposed to be especially desirable as field hands, whereas Ibos, Congos, and Angolas, allegedly weaker, were said to be more effective as house servants."[9]

More mundane considerations, however, of which the most important was simple availability, determined the geographic origins and ethnic composition of slaves shipped across the Atlantic. Seeking to avoid contact with the inhospitable African environment, European traders operated from a series of "factories" or forts along the coast, each headed by a "factor." They received, especially in the early years of the slave trade, considerable cooperation from African rulers and merchants; although ultimately traffic in slaves was based on force, and the transatlantic trade led to increasing disruption of African societies, Africans—no strangers themselves to slavery—joined Europeans in buying and selling human property. The African

2

The Colonial Era

I

THROUGHOUT ITS HISTORY, American slavery evolved and changed. Although the process of evolution was continuous, it is convenient for analytical purposes to divide that history into two broad chronological periods, colonial (lasting until about 1770) and antebellum (beginning about 1800), separated by the era of the American Revolution. Although colonial slavery lasted more than twice as long as antebellum, the latter has received substantially more attention from historians, in part because the sources available for studying it are more abundant and in part because in the middle of the nineteenth century slavery became the central issue in a national political debate that led to a bloody civil war. Recently, however, scholars have begun to subject colonial slavery to more intense scrutiny, in the process making clearer how slavery changed over time.

The colonial era saw the emergence in America of a true slave society, the transformation of a society in which some people (relatively few, at first) were slaves into one in which slave labor formed the basis of the economy and social order. At first, novelty and experimentation characterized social relations: first- and second-generation slaves confronted first- and second-generation masters,

most of whom were new not only to slavery but also to one another and indeed to America. Gradually, social patterns hardened: as masters and slaves were born into slave relations, behavior that had once been tentative and experimental became established and routine. At the same time, despite the persistence of pronounced regional variations, American slavery as a whole acquired some common features that distinguished it in significant ways from slavery elsewhere.

II

AMERICAN SLAVERY developed within a particular environment, conditioned by particular demographic patterns. Imported and held for their ability to work the land, slaves lived under varied conditions, shaped by the demands of cultivating a diversity of staple crops. Nevertheless, the basic population mix—the ratios of blacks to whites and of slaves to non-slaves, the size of slaveholdings—provided a rough commonality to the slaveholding environment of colonial America that belied specific regional differences. Because that environment was distinctive, American slavery differed in important respects from the slavery that existed elsewhere in the New World.

As the eighteenth century progressed, American slavery developed a mainstream with a distinctive demographic configuration. Rooted in the South, this slavery was characterized by the prevalence of small to medium-sized plantations and by the presence of large numbers of both slaves and free whites. Unlike the North, where slavery was increasingly marginal, the South developed as a true slave society, in which slavery served as the bedrock of the economy and of the social order. Unlike much of the Caribbean, however, the South emerged as a slaveholding society in which whites constituted a significant proportion of the population—the majority in the South as a whole—and non-slaveholders made up a majority of the white population.

The contrast between the South and the Caribbean is instructive. In much of the Caribbean, where sugar was the dominant cash crop, blacks outnumbered whites by up to ten to one and slaves were typically held in very large units. Because sugar cultivation required substantial investments in expensive refining machinery as well as in land and labor, sugar plantations were usually very large-scale

operations; on the eve of emancipation in Jamaica, more than three-quarters of all slaves lived on holdings of over 50 slaves and about half lived on holdings of over 150.

In the American South, where tobacco (and later cotton) was the most important staple crop, the situation was very different. Because there were few economies of scale in growing tobacco, small holdings were common, and even on larger plantations the actual cultivation of tobacco was frequently organized in smaller units. Blacks constituted a minority of the population (about 35 percent in 1790), and even in the lower South formed only about half the population (see tables 1 and 3). The only colony (and state) to have a substantial black majority was South Carolina, and even there the majority never approached the overwhelming ten-to-one ratio present in Jamaica, Antigua, and Saint Domingue; at the peak of black predominance in the 1720s and 1730s, blacks outnumbered whites in South Carolina by about two to one. The great majority of American slaves lived on holdings of under fifty. To be sure, there were other slave societies in which small holdings prevailed; in much of Brazil the ratio of slaves to masters was quite similar to that in the South. Nevertheless, by international standards American slaves lived on small holdings, dispersed among many whites with whom they came into frequent contact.

Of course, significant regional variations marked the conditions under which slaves lived and worked; at opposite extremes, there were exceptions to the prevalent pattern of numerous slaves living on modest-sized holdings. In the North, slaves were few and slaveholdings were typically tiny. Despite the existence of large slave-based estates in New York and Rhode Island, most Northern slaves were held in very small groups—usually no more than three or four slaves per owner—and worked as farmhands, servants, craftsmen, and general laborers. Consider New York, which throughout the eighteenth century had far more slaves than any other Northern colony. The 33 slaves residing in Orange County in 1702 were owned by 15 families; the 29 slaves in Dutchess County in 1714 had 13 different owners. As late as 1790, about one white household in five in New York City owned slaves, but three-quarters of these slaveholding households contained only one or two slaves each. Under such circumstances, most slaves lived and worked in close proximity to whites, and their labor required little organization or regimentation.

At the opposite extreme was the low country of South Carolina (and, after the middle of the eighteenth century, Georgia), the area of the American mainland where slaveholding patterns most closely approached (without, however, reaching) those of the Caribbean. Because rice planters had to invest in complex irrigation systems needed alternately to flood and drain the land, rice, like sugar, was most efficiently cultivated on a large scale. Spurred by cultivation of rice—and, at the end of the eighteenth century, Sea Island cotton—slavery was more pervasive and slaveholdings were on the average much larger in the low country than anywhere else in America. As early as 1726, only a generation after the beginning of substantial rice cultivation, slaves made up more than 70 percent of the population in South Carolina's St. George Parish, and two-thirds of those slaves lived on holdings of more than 25. By the end of the eighteenth century, slaveholding was much more concentrated, with slaves composing about 84 percent of the low country's rural population and holdings with hundreds of slaves common; in 1790, the 11 parishes that made up the Charleston District contained 79 holdings with 100 or more slaves. Absenteeism was common among wealthy planters, many of whom preferred to spend their time in increasingly elegant Charleston rather than among "brutish" Africans on their isolated estates.

These conditions gave rise to widespread use of the "task" system, under which each slave was assigned a job in the morning and was free to stop work upon its completion. Unable or unwilling to engage in minute supervision of agricultural operations, absentee planters often allowed their low-country slaves an unusual degree of self-management, with estates left in the hands of trusted black "drivers" who were in effect overseers, and who operated under the loose control of white "stewards," each of whom supervised several estates.

The task system, which emerged over the course of the eighteenth century and reached its full fruition in the antebellum period, was significant both for the autonomy that it provided low-country slaves and for its atypicality. Along the coast of South Carolina and Georgia, more than anywhere else on the mainland, slaves developed their own "internal economy" based on flexible work schedules and the ability to accumulate and dispose of their "own" property on their "own" time; as historian Philip D. Morgan, who has pioneered in exploring this internal economy, noted, "on a much reduced scale,

there were lowcountry slaves who resembled the protopeasants found among Caribbean slaves."[1] But although its proponents argued that the task system provided slaves with powerful incentive to hard work, most Southern slave owners viewed the self-management and economic independence that it fostered among slaves as subversive of the discipline, order, and dependence essential to slave labor. For this reason, although planters elsewhere in the South occasionally experimented with the task system, and many masters introduced limited task features while maintaining gang labor—for example, assigning daily tasks to gangs—the task system as a whole never became widespread outside the South Carolina and Georgia low country.

Indeed, it is important to keep in mind the unusual nature of low-country slave conditions when considering the South as a whole. Even in the colonial period, the low country contained only a small fraction of America's slaves; in 1750, South Carolina and Georgia together counted about 40,000 slaves, or about 17 percent of those in the American colonies. (Most of these 40,000 lived in the low country, but a small number resided in the South Carolina backcountry, where the population was overwhelmingly white and slaveholdings were typically small.) By contrast, 144,872 slaves, or about 61 percent of the American slaves, lived in Virginia and Maryland. As slavery expanded westward in the antebellum years, low-country conditions became far more atypical, significant primarily for representing an extreme variant in the range of American slave relations.

Much more representative of normal American slaveholding patterns were conditions in the upper South, where most slaves lived on small and medium-sized units. Many of these slaves had masters of relatively modest means; more than half the Chesapeake slave owners in the early eighteenth century owned fewer than five slaves. Of course, to say that a majority of slave owners were small slave owners does not imply that a majority of slaves had such owners; from the *slave's* perspective, owners with ten or more slaves were more typical than owners with one to five. (For more detailed information on the distribution of slaveholding, see chapter 4, section III). But relatively few slaves experienced life on very large plantations, because even those slaves owned by the wealthy planters who increasingly dominated society in Virginia (and to a lesser extent Maryland and North Carolina) were frequently *held* in smaller groups.

During the first half of the eighteenth century, planters with numerous slaves typically divided their holdings between a home plantation staffed by abundant supplies of servants and artisans and up-country "quarters" where, under the supervision of overseers, groups of perhaps eight to ten slaves cultivated tobacco (and later, increasingly, wheat). (These "quarters" must not be confused with the slave quarters that slaves inhabited on large plantations; in the antebellum period, the term "quarters" almost always referred to the slave quarters, not to the small up-country holdings that shared the term in the colonial Chesapeake.) At the time of his death in 1732, Robert "King" Carter was probably the wealthiest man in Virginia, with 390 slaves of working age; these slaves, however, were located on 48 different holdings, with only 23 residing on his home plantation. Newly imported Africans often received their training in the quarters, where overseers could resort to extreme measures to break the recalcitrance of those who resisted new ways, while planters filled their home plantations with "country-born" slaves or Africans who had learned to conform to what was expected of them. Multiple holdings remained widespread among the "gentry" in the second half of the eighteenth century, but with fewer Africans arriving in the Chesapeake, planters felt less compelled to keep their slaves divided into very small groups, and the size of holdings increased; in 1770, Robert Carter III (King Carter's grandson) kept about 100 slaves at his home estate of Nomini Hall and had some 250 more scattered among 12 plantations in 4 counties. In 1774, Thomas Jefferson held 45 slaves on his Monticello plantation and 142 others on 6 additional holdings; in 1786, George Washington kept 67 of his 216 slaves (the majority of whom were legally the property of his wife, Martha) at his Home House, with the remainder located on 5 other plantations.

If one important characteristic of American slavery was the presence of a substantial number of slaves living dispersed among many whites on relatively small holdings, a second was the high proportion of *non-slaveholding* whites. Although the South was a slaveholding society, substantial numbers of Southerners had no direct interest in or experience with slavery. Non-slaveholding whites were most numerous in the backcountry; in 1790, 77 percent of the backcountry households in South Carolina were without slaves, and slaveholding was even less prevalent in backcountry Virginia and North Carolina. Even in the plantation regions, however, large numbers of whites

held no slaves; during the second half of the eighteenth century, between one half and two-thirds of the white households in the tidewater region of Virginia and Maryland owned slaves, with a gradual increase in the proportion of slave owners occurring in the years preceding the Revolution. In the South as a whole, slave owners always constituted a minority of the white population.

The substantial presence of white non-slaveholders in the slaveholding South had dual implications. On the one hand, it tempered the slave owners' dominance of society and introduced a source of potential political conflict among white Southerners, especially after the rise of republican (and, later, democratic) sensibilities beginning in the 1760s. Although slave owners managed—through a combination of political compromise and ideological broadside—to contain the threat of a major anti-slavery campaign by fellow Southerners, planters could never be totally sure of non-slaveholders' loyalty to the social order. On the other hand, the large number of non-slaveholding whites undercut the opportunity for slaves to engage in various skilled jobs—precluding the emergence of the kind of buffer class of free mulattoes that existed in an overwhelmingly black slave society such as that of Saint Domingue, a class that performed various support and managerial tasks and shielded planters from their African laborers—and hardened the racial line between white and black. Non-slaveholding whites could be intensely jealous of those they perceived as haughty aristocrats, but they also were highly susceptible to racist appeals to white solidarity: they may have been poor, but at least they were white.

III

TWO DEVELOPMENTS of signal importance combined with the demographic configuration outlined above to shape the evolution of slavery during the century preceding the American Revolution: the simultaneous emergence of an American-born master class and of an American-born (or creole) slave class. The former went hand in hand with the triumph of resident over absentee behavior among slave owners, while the latter accompanied a fundamental demographic transformation that in turn stipulated far-reaching changes in the lives of the slaves. Both developments contributed to the increasingly distinctive character of American slavery.

The resident orientation of American slave owners must be seen in the context of the widespread absenteeism that prevailed elsewhere—among slave owners in Jamaica, Saint Domingue, and much of Brazil, as well as among serf holders in Russia. Masters in those countries often looked upon their holdings primarily as investments to be milked, investments that needed little of their attention so long as they provided the requisite income. Often such slave owners lived far from their slave property—perhaps in a colonial city, or in the mother country of England or France—and visited their plantations only occasionally, receiving periodic reports on them from stewards. Other planters spent a number of years supervising their holdings in the colonies and then retired at a relatively young age to their estates in the mother country.

Whether or not they lived on their slaveholdings, however, such planters were likely to possess an absentee *mentality*; their hearts would be elsewhere, and they would show relatively little interest in the day-to-day chores of plantation administration. The huge numerical preponderance of unassimilated Africans rendered a West Indian plantation an inhospitable environment for most British planters; as historian Richard Dunn put it, "The West Indian slave masters could not expect to assimilate or acculturate such a huge alien population. If they wished to preserve their own identity, they had to segregate themselves socially and culturally from the blacks." A similar condition prevailed in Russia, where, as Daniel Field noted, the serf owner "was almost an outsider even on his ancestral estate."[2]

American masters were rarely outsiders on their estates. With some exceptions, they lived on their farms and plantations and involved themselves on a regular basis with the lives of their slaves. Of course, some masters found it necessary to be away from home for prolonged periods of time, and others chose to be. But such absenteeism, which was especially prevalent in the South Carolina and Georgia low country, was not typical of the South as a whole. Even more important, it did not vitiate the resident *mentality* of slave owners who considered their holdings home even when they were away, and took a lively interest in their management. Far more than the typical Jamaican, Cuban, Haitian, Russian, or even Brazilian master, the typical American was actively concerned with managing his slaves.

The emergence of this resident mentality constituted one of the most important developments of colonial society. From the begin-

from natural increase as well as slave importation. Despite regional variations, by the outbreak of the War for Independence slaves throughout the United States were predominantly—in most states overwhelmingly—American-born, and were more than reproducing themselves.

By the end of the colonial era, a mature slave society with several noteworthy features had coalesced. These features included an American-born, largely resident master class; a creole, self-reproducing slave class; relatively small slaveholdings; and a large white population, a high proportion of which was composed of non-slaveholders. Together, these features set the contours for the evolution of American slavery and of master–slave relations. They also provided the particular setting within which Africans became Americans.

IV

MOST SLAVES in colonial America were either Africans or the children and grandchildren of Africans. Their enslavement by Europeans and the children and grandchildren of Europeans created a complex set of overlapping relationships: complementing the master–slave relationship was that between whites and blacks, Europeans and Africans, Christians and "pagans." Colonial slavery thus required of its participants—both masters and slaves but especially the latter—a major cultural adjustment.

This process has given rise to an important debate among scholars over the "Americanization" of Africans. Crudely put, the debate has pitted those who believe that in America slaves quickly abandoned most of their African ways and adopted the dominant culture of their new land against those who stress the continuing African cultural legacy among black Americans. The former view, which for many years prevailed among scholars, was most forcefully propounded by sociologist E. Franklin Frazier, who maintained that "probably never before in history has a people been so nearly completely stripped of its social heritage as the Negroes who were brought to America." The opposing position, vigorously espoused during the 1940s and 1950s by anthropologist Melville Herskovits, for many years found fewer academic adherents but has in the past

two decades received support from black nationalists eager to celebrate African culture; the most sweeping recent case for the African character of black life in America was made by Sterling Stuckey, who insisted that down to the Civil War "the great bulk of the slaves were scarcely touched by Christianity" and slave culture was essentially African.[5]

Although this debate is likely to continue, for it is fueled by strong ideological passions, it is clear by now that the "Americanization" versus "African survival" dichotomy is misleading. The descendants of Africans brought to America were neither Africans nor cultural carbon copies of white Americans. They were influenced by—and in turn influenced—the behavior of their masters, but their customs, beliefs, and values were distinctive because so, too, was their history. On the basis of shared experiences as slaves, together with a common African background, they created a new, African-American, culture.

Africans brought involuntarily to America remained basically Africans at heart. They found their new environment—strange masters, language, customs—confusing, and longed for the homes and loved ones they had left behind. Many at first refused to accept the permanence of their new situation, showing their resistance in a variety of ways from flight to sullen noncompliance with orders, and often receiving for their efforts a range of harsh punishments designed to promote more cheerful obedience. Although most new slaves eventually adapted to the unwanted conditions in which they found themselves and came to recognize the inevitability of their slave status, they rarely accepted its legitimacy. Remembering his youth in South Carolina at the turn of the nineteenth century, Charles Ball, a fugitive slave who published his autobiography in 1837, sharply differentiated African from American-born slaves: Africans, he wrote, "feel indignant at the servitude that is imposed upon them, and only want power to inflict the most cruel retribution upon their oppressors . . . They are universally of opinion, and this opinion is founded in their religion, that after death they shall return to their own country, and rejoin their former companions and friends."[6]

African identity among blacks was, ironically, a product of their presence in America. Newly imported slaves came from diverse countries with a variety of languages and customs and at first lacked a sense of being Africans. In America, however, the contrast that

was most striking was between black and white, African and European, and a generalized African identity came to assume greater salience than that of any particular African nationality.

One reason this was so was that despite specific differences in language and customs, on a broader level the slaves shared many elements of a common cultural background. They came from a pre-modern world that lacked the distinction between natural and supernatural, secular and sacred, a world in which the individual lived in close relationship with ancestors, spirits, and gods (often associated with various natural phenomena) and believed in the existence of a more remote High God who ruled over all. It was a world in which ancestor-spirits watched over their descendants and made sure they followed traditional customs (hence the importance of proper burial), and in which priests and witch doctors cured illness and injured enemies. It was a world that emphasized family and community, accepted polygynous marriage, was unfamiliar with private ownership of land, took for granted non-rational causality, placed great importance on taboos and ritual, and operated in conformity with a slow, cyclical sense of time in which patience was a virtue. The existence of this common cultural background—which shared some notable characteristics with the pre-modern background of the English settlers but in other respects was strikingly different—meant that even as specific ethnic attributes faded in America, a general African approach or style survived.

The American legacy of this common African heritage is evident in numerous elements of black culture, from music to magic. African communality persisted in the antiphonal, call-and-response pattern that pervaded the music of American slaves (and their descendants) as they sang of their work and religious faith or as they passed secret messages disguised as harmless song. The influence of African artistic traditions was evident in the folk art of black Americans, particularly in the colonial period, in creative expressions as diverse as textile designs, quilting patterns, and styles of wood carving and basket weaving. Folk medicine, charms, and love potions easily survived the passage from Africa to America, and every large plantation was likely to have its conjurer (whose authority was often considerable among whites as well as blacks). The ring shout, a combination of dance and song in which participants moved with increasing fervor in a counterclockwise circular direction, persisted

in much of the South. And most of all, the slaves maintained their traditional religious sense of a world without sharp demarcation between the sacred and secular, a world of pervasive spiritual presence; this sense would find new expression in the Christianity that American blacks adopted and shaped to their own needs during the last century of their bondage.

Specific cultural practices of the newly imported slaves proved less enduring. Despite regional variations—the old ways were most resilient in isolated areas with an overwhelmingly black population—everywhere a basic discontinuity shaped the early history of blacks in America. This discontinuity was most immediately physical or geographic: Africans were ripped from everything they knew and deposited as unwilling inhabitants in a strange new world. It was also to a substantial degree cultural, for blacks found that it was impossible to continue as before under the changed conditions they faced in America. The descendants of Africans brought to America were not themselves Africans.

Africa grew increasingly remote to a black population that was more and more preponderantly creole. The children of Africans imported to America, like other second-generation Americans, rarely spoke more than a few words of their parents' native language. Similarly, as historian Albert J. Raboteau noted, "in the United States the gods of Africa died."[7] Blacks born in America did not think of themselves as Ibos or Angolas and often were unaware of their specific ethnic roots.

The descendants of Africans brought to America were Americans. They were not, however, the same as other Americans, for out of their African heritage and their distinctive history they fashioned a new, African-American culture. The process of creating this culture was by no means linear; the pace varied over both time and space in conformity with diverse conditions. (Periods of increased slave imports from Africa, for example, saw renewed African cultural influences as well.) Nor did the process occur in isolation from whites: African-Americans emerged as a people through intense interaction between black and white Americans, an interaction that saw significant cultural influences in both directions. If in some respects blacks and whites inhabited very different worlds in colonial America, those worlds were closely intertwined and bore more in common than was readily apparent to the inhabitants of either.

music. Although Sunday dances at Congo Square persisted, they did so in radically altered form; what had begun as an African tradition had been transformed into an African-American one.

Of course, regional differences affected the growth of African-American culture and society. The small size and dispersed nature of the slave population in most of the North—as well as in much of the Southern backcountry—facilitated rapid acculturation and encouraged the emergence of considerable individual autonomy among blacks, whose freedom of movement appeared to pose little threat to the social order. At the same time, however, the paucity of blacks limited the ability of slaves to associate with one another, restricted community development, and often forced spouses to live apart from each other because they had separate owners.

At the opposite extreme, slaves in the South Carolina and Georgia low country lived in unusual isolation from whites and absorbed Euro-American ways much more slowly—and partially—than most American slaves. The overwhelming preponderance of blacks, continuing heavy infusion of Africans, geographic isolation, and owner absenteeism combined to limit contact between white and black and to permit the emergence of a new culture centered on a new language: Gullah. Both the language and the culture developed out of a complex interaction among two major groups of Africans (from Guinea and the Congo/Angola region), African-Americans, and white Americans and served to set low-country blacks off from others on the American mainland. Into the twentieth century, the language of the Gullah people, especially on the Sea Islands off South Carolina and Georgia, remained largely unintelligible to both whites and blacks unfamiliar with it.

Despite the existence of these contrasting regional patterns, slave life in colonial America was marked by a number of common developments that differed more in timing and intensity than in direction. The growth of African-American society went through three basic stages. If this trend was most clearly evident in the upper South, where the majority of slaves lived, it was present in the lower South (and to a considerable extent in the North) as well.

Until the end of the seventeenth century, there were few blacks in any of the colonies (and many of those had spent time in the West Indies before coming to the mainland). As a result, those blacks lived in an overwhelmingly white society (upon which they had relatively slight influence), had little opportunity to interact on a

widespread basis with other blacks, and went through a rapid period of acculturation.

During the first half of the eighteenth century, heavy importation of Africans produced an agricultural laboring class that from Maryland south was increasingly made up of blacks. The increased number of blacks made possible an expanded social life among slaves; for the first time they could form widespread social ties—of marriage and friendship—with one another (although the excess of males over females among Africans precluded marriage for some men). At the same time, the surge in African imports slowed the rate of black acculturation and produced substantial anxiety among whites about the stability of the social order.

Gradually, as Africans had children of their own in America and new imports declined as a proportion of blacks in the colonies, a predominantly African laboring population became one of African-Americans. As we have seen, this basic transformation occurred at different times in different colonies, beginning earlier and proceeding faster in the upper South than in the lower. By the outbreak of the Revolution, about 80 percent of blacks in America and as many as 90 percent of those in the upper South and in the North were American-born; even in the lower South, creoles constituted a substantial majority of the population. Accompanying this demographic transformation was the formation of a new African-American society. Social stability increasingly replaced the turbulence associated with earlier boom times, slaves developed their own complex familial and social structures, and an African-American culture emerged under conditions that in most areas allowed both increased privileges for acculturated blacks and close interaction between black and white.

VI

THREE ESSENTIAL DEVELOPMENTS marked the transition from African to African-American and the growing complexity of slave society in America. The first was the growth of black families. The second was the growing occupational diversity and socioeconomic differentiation within the slave body. The third was the beginning of a long process whereby blacks in America were introduced to—and appropriated as their own major elements of—Protestant Christianity. Although none of these elements was totally absent among

Africans in America, all were facilitated by (and indices of) the emergence of a stable, American-born, and increasingly acculturated slave population.

The establishment of slavery in America entailed the destruction of families, as Africans—mostly young men—were torn from their loved ones at home and placed among strangers. Newly imported slaves rarely lived in families; indeed, they often lived in sex-segregated barracks. Although many Africans eventually found spouses and produced children of their own, their opportunities for family formation remained limited. Many lived on small holdings where there were few eligible mates, and African males outnumbered females by margins of two to one. Nor were most planters solicitous of the family rights of new slaves, for whom they had developed few ties of affection and in whom they were interested almost solely as instruments for the accumulation of wealth.

The emergence of a predominantly creole slave population changed all this. Many slave owners came to take greater interest in the lives (and general welfare) of American-born slaves—with whom they had sometimes grown up—than in those of newly purchased Africans who appeared strange and "savage" (see section VII, below). More important still, the growing number of blacks in America, the increased size of holdings, and the more equal sex ratios provided greater opportunities for finding spouses than had previously existed. During the half century before the War for Independence, second- and third-generation American slaves built a new system of family relations to replace that shattered by the slave trade; basic family patterns that would persist through the antebellum period became established, patterns that resembled in broad outline those found among white Americans but that differed from them in important specifics (see chapter 5, section III). Recent historians have properly stressed the degree to which the slaves themselves created, re-created, and defended their families, often against overwhelming odds. One reason they were able to do this, however, lies in the favorable demographic patterns they encountered (unlike slaves in, for example, Jamaica, Saint Domingue, or nineteenth-century Cuba).

Some occupational diversity among slaves existed from the very beginning. In the frontier conditions of early South Carolina, shortage of skilled personnel encouraged the use of slaves in a variety of positions—as guides, hunters, trappers, sailors, and lumberers—

many of which would later be seen as inappropriate. In the Northern colonies, where demand for agricultural labor was limited, many slaves worked in skilled crafts or domestic service; this was especially true in cities such as New York and Boston. And everywhere, small numbers of slaves—including especially high concentrations of children and of older slaves incapacitated for field work—served as domestics.

Africans were imported, however, for their physical labor, and throughout the South the vast majority cultivated crops on farms and plantations. The intense demand for agricultural labor resulting from the tobacco and rice booms, the absence (with the exception of Charleston) of a significant urban population, the relatively small size of holdings (especially in the upper South), and the perception among whites that Africans were uncivilized savages who needed training in the most rudimentary of skills combined to limit sharply opportunities for non-agricultural employment. Women as well as men labored in the fields; as early as 1722, in the revised version of his *History of Virginia*, Robert Beverley noted that "slaves of both sexes are employed together in tilling and manuring the ground," whereas "a white woman is rarely or never put to work in the ground."[9]

Gradually, as a higher proportion of slaves became acculturated to Euro-American ways and as creoles became the dominant element in the black population, occupational diversity among slaves increased. Emergence of larger slaveholding units made possible greater division of labor and prompted demand for more domestic servants by planters eager to attain—and show off—an aristocratic way of life. As the upper South's tobacco boom turned to tobacco crisis in the third quarter of the eighteenth century, demand for labor waned and opportunities for male slaves to engage in non-agricultural work increased. (This trend was accentuated during the Revolution; see chapter 3, section III.) In South Carolina, the growth of Charleston, the colonial South's only major urban center, created new demand for house servants and craftsmen, while the growing economic autonomy of slaves who worked on the task system led to limited but real slave property accumulation—and differentiation—in the low country.

Although the proportion of slaves engaged in specialized, non-field labor varied, depending on factors as diverse as region, size of holding, nature of local economy, and whim of owner, it increased

throughout the South over the course of the eighteenth century. Whereas there were only 4 craftsmen among the 525 male slaves listed in estate inventories in four Maryland counties before 1710 (a minuscule 0.76 percent), there were 13 out of 213 (6.10 percent) in the 1720s, with carpenters most numerous. During the second half of the eighteenth century, skilled employment among slaves became far more common, especially on the "home" holdings of wealthy planters, who typically relied on their own slaves for virtually all their non-agricultural needs. In 1786, for example, the 41 adult slaves who resided at George Washington's Home House included 4 carpenters, 4 spinners, 3 drivers and stablers, 2 smiths, 2 seamstresses, a waggoner, a carter, a gardener, and many domestic servants.

The proportion of slaves engaged in skilled occupations was greater still in the South Carolina and Georgia low country, where the paucity of white labor dictated heavy reliance on blacks and large slaveholdings facilitated division of labor. One English observer in the 1770s, noting the slaves' "amazing aptness for learning trades," suggested that "many owners, from motives of profit and advantage, breed them to be coopers, carpenters, bricklayers, smiths, and other trades."[10] He was right, although "train" or "encourage" would have been more accurate than "breed." The growth of non-agricultural employment among slaves was especially marked in the second half of the eighteenth century; according to recent calculations by Philip D. Morgan, the proportion of "skilled" workers among adult male slaves inventoried in South Carolina grew from 15.5 percent in the 1750s to 28.6 percent in the 1790s. Most numerous among such skilled slaves were woodworkers, watermen, house servants, and drivers.

Women had far fewer occupational opportunities, and the vast majority of adult women continued to perform agricultural labor; the proportion of South Carolina's adult female slaves with skilled occupations rose from 2.7 percent in the 1750s to 8.5 percent in the 1790s, but even then reached a level less than one-third that of men. The principal alternative to field work for women was domestic service (a collection of jobs by no means limited to women). Especially on large estates, women served as cooks, washers, personal servants, and less often as nannies and wet nurses, and many slaveholders of even relatively modest means kept at least one servant. In the late eighteenth century, the decline of the upper South's

tobacco economy freed larger numbers of plantation women to engage in domestic production, principally through spinning and weaving; as historian Carole Shammas has recently shown, it was in part for this reason that the proportion of working women engaged in house service on nine large Virginia plantations increased from less than 15 percent before 1760 to about 25 percent in the late eighteenth century and 33 percent in 1800.

It would be a mistake to overemphasize the social divisions between "skilled" slaves and those who worked in the field, or to see the former as a kind of slave "aristocracy." Most slaveholding units were much too small to permit the development of sharp stratification among slaves, and ties of kinship and friendship often bound field laborers to craftsmen and house servants. Furthermore, specialized occupations were often held only temporarily: children who were too young and the old and infirm who were too weak to perform heavy agricultural labor were routinely assigned to house service or gardening chores, while other jobs were doled out as rewards for good behavior or performance. The existence of this occupational mobility militated against the emergence of separate slave strata and acted to reinforce a powerful sense of oneness in oppression that slaves shared regardless of their immediate condition.

It is also important to realize that slaves with specialized occupations did not necessarily receive better treatment than their brothers and sisters in the fields. Although they usually enjoyed more privileges—often including exemption from backbreaking labor, a chance to nibble delicacies cast from the master's table, and the opportunity to travel away from home—they also faced unusual obstacles. Because they were more noticeable than most slaves, and more was expected of them, they were more likely to arouse the ire of their masters or other authorities. House servants were in a particularly vulnerable position, for there were innumerable opportunities to displease one's master, and planter diaries are filled with entries like William Byrd's from 1709: "I had another quarrel with my maid Anaka," or "I beat Anaka for letting the child piss in bed," or "Eugene was whipped for pissing in bed and Jenny for concealing it."[11] Anaka, Eugene, and Jenny must have yearned for the anonymity of ordinary slaves whose behavior did not receive such close scrutiny.

Of course, the very term "skilled" was something of a misnomer—non-agricultural jobs did not necessarily require the pos-

session of greater skills than field labor—that served to lump together categories of slave occupations with divergent tendencies. House servants were often the most dependent of slaves, for their work revolved around their need to please their masters, whereas craftsmen could enjoy an unusual measure of independence from immediate white supervision. "Skilled" slaves were by no means a monolithic group.

The increase in occupational diversity that occurred over the course of the eighteenth century was a general indication of the maturing of both slavery and African-American society. If African slaves were overwhelmingly young males imported for their labor power, males whose opportunities for family and social life were often severely limited and who almost always were consigned to toil in the tobacco and rice fields, creole slaves represented a more stable and balanced population. They lived in families, developed increasingly complex forms of social organization, and adjusted, albeit not always easily, to the world in which they found themselves. At the same time that they enjoyed greater opportunities for social life of their own, they were also able to interact more with the whites around them.

Exposure to the religion of their masters represented an important part of that process. Perhaps in no respect did colonial and antebellum slavery differ so much as in that of slave religion. For much of the colonial period, both blacks and whites resisted the efforts of a few missionaries to convert "pagans," and the great majority of slaves remained untouched by Christianity. A serious movement to bring Christianity to the slaves, however, gathered force in the middle of the eighteenth century and grew in intensity for more than a century, a movement embraced with fervor by growing numbers of blacks. By the late antebellum period, Protestant Christianity lay at the heart of the slave community.

Africans in America usually clung to their native religions. Slave autobiographer Charles Ball recalled that his grandfather, a native African brought to Calvert County, Maryland, about 1730, insisted "that the religion of this country was altogether false, and indeed, no religion at all"; when the younger Ball was sold to a South Carolina planter in the early nineteenth century, he found his new home populated by numerous Africans, some who prayed to good and evil African gods and others "who must have been, from what I have

since learned, Mohamedans."[12] The preservation of traditional ways was easiest in areas of heavy African concentration, but virtually everywhere most newly imported slaves maintained the religious beliefs, if not always the practices, of their native lands.

One reason they were able to do so was that for many years white Americans showed little interest in proselytizing among blacks. At first many slave owners worried that they might have to free slaves converted to Christianity. Some masters—and other whites as well—were simply indifferent to the religion of their slaves, or indeed to religion in general; throughout much of the colonial period it was relatively easy in the South, unlike New England, to pay little attention to religion. But numerous slave owners were actively hostile to those who would preach to their slaves, fearing that the Christian message of the equality of all souls before God would produce unrest; as the ministers of the South Carolina Society for the Propagation of the Gospel lamented in 1713, "The Masters of Slaves are generally of Opinion that a Slave grows worse by being a Christian; and therefore instead of instructing them in the principles of Christianity which is undoubtedly their duty, they malign and traduce those that attempt it."[13]

Toward mid-century, this aversion of both white and black to slave conversion began to change. The Great Awakening of the late 1730s and early 1740s, the first of a series of religious revivals that swept across America, created new interest among whites both in religion and in converting slaves to Christianity; of even greater impact were the evangelical revivals of the 1770s and 1780s. Although some evangelicals—including at first George Whitefield—were critical of slavery, their main impact was not in fostering opposition to the institution but in persuading white Southerners of their "Christian duty" to instruct blacks in the "truths" of the Gospel and treat their slaves in a "Christian" manner. Evangelicals actively sought out black as well as white converts and accepted them as spiritual equals. This "mission to the slaves" aroused considerable opposition among many whites (as well as support from those who believed that "Christianity has a tendency to tame fierce and wild tempers") and did not reach full fruition until the period 1820–60; still, as historian John B. Boles noted, "the half-century following 1740 was the critical period during which some whites broke down their fears and inhibitions about sharing their religion with the slaves

in their midst, and some blacks—only a few at first—came to find in Christianity a system of ideas and symbols that was genuinely attractive."[14]

Increasing numbers of slaves found the message of evangelical Protestantism appealing. Focus on the conversion experience rather than on formal theology heightened the accessibility of Christianity to slaves (and to poor whites as well). The message of the spiritual equality of all before God, and the willingness of Baptists and Methodists to welcome the humble and downtrodden, blacks as well as whites, as "brothers" and "sisters" in their churches, proved attractive to those more used to hearing the language of the lash than the word of God from whites. But equally important was the growth of a substantial group of creole slaves who lacked their parents' ties to (and memories of) Africa and whose greater fluency in English reduced linguistic barriers to conversion. American-born slaves were, unlike Africans, likely targets for conversion.

As early as 1710, Virginia planter William Byrd noted in his diary, "After church I invited nobody home [evidently it was usually his practice to entertain on Sundays] because I design to break that custom [so] that my people may go to church." Although such interest in exposing slaves to Christianity was rare in the early eighteenth century, it became common in the second half of the century, especially in the upper South. "I give leave to all to go to Church who are so inclined," recorded Landon Carter in 1775; his requirement that those "who are not so inclined" must stay home and work no doubt served as a catalyst to his slaves' religiosity. Carter's behavior at this time was relatively passive: he allowed his slaves to go to church but seemed unconcerned with their spiritual development and lamented in 1776 that his overseer had "turned a Baptist, and only wants to convert my People." Soon thereafter, however, Carter himself "turned a Baptist," and turned as well to the religious instruction of his "people."[15] On the eve of the American Revolution, the stage was set for the massive conversions that would take place in the interracial revival meetings that swept much of the South in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

The Christianization of American blacks was an uneven process: it proceeded in fits and starts, was welcomed by some (whether slave or slave owner) more readily than others, and generally progressed least rapidly in areas of heavy black and African concentration, such as the South Carolina and Georgia low country. Still, over the course

of the eighteenth century, an increasing proportion of slaves were exposed to—and embraced—the religion of their masters. In their hands, it did not remain entirely the same as the religion of the masters; as we shall see (in chapter 5, section IV), black Christianity came to differ from that of whites in a number of important ways and served to meet the needs of an oppressed people. But in the broad view, these differences were of nuance rather than essence (and resembled differences among various Christian denominations); from the vantage point of other religions, black and white Christians clearly shared the same basic faith—and usually (under slavery) shared the same religious services as well. Christianization represented a major guidepost in the slaves' journey from African to African-American.

VII

BORN IN VIOLENCE, slavery survived by the lash. Beginning with the initial slave trade that tore Africans away from everything they knew and sent them in chains to a distant land to toil for strangers, every stage of master–slave relations depended either directly or indirectly on physical coercion. The routine functioning of Southern farms and plantations rested on the authority of the owners and their representatives, supported by the state, to inflict pain on their human property. Plenty of pain was inflicted.

Slave owners directed especially repressive measures against Africans, for newly imported slaves offered pervasive resistance to the conditions under which they found themselves. They ignored the Anglicized names their owners awarded them; they refused to perform the new tasks they were assigned; they ran away; and they sometimes lashed out in anger at their oppressors, inflicting injury and even death. New slaves, in short, needed to be "broken in," made to accept their status, a goal that required close supervision, routine application of the lash, and willingness to take draconian measures against those who refused to toe the line.

Slaves who transgressed could look forward to a wide range of gruesome punishments—most imposed informally by owners and overseers but some officially meted out upon sentence by special slave courts that existed in all the Southern colonies—including branding; nose slitting; amputation of ears, toes, and fingers (and

monarchy and hereditary privilege. It is hardly surprising that these modern Renaissance thinkers also questioned slavery.

In America, these were also the men who led the movement for independence and have often been referred to as Founding Fathers. Usually members of the colonial elite, they included lawyers such as John Adams and self-educated artisan-intellectuals such as Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Paine. In the South, however, they were most often wealthy planters. An extraordinary generation of planter-politicians—historian Clement Eaton termed it the "great generation"—led the American states to independence, created a new government, and dominated that government during its early years. Although they ranged from Maryland to Georgia, they were most concentrated in Virginia; one thinks immediately of George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, and Patrick Henry (all among the largest slave owners of their day) but could easily add others, such as George Mason and Edmund Randolph. Although these leaders were part of an international community of intellectual-statesmen that even before the outbreak of the American Revolution had come to challenge the legitimacy of slavery, that Revolution would soon lead them to push their challenge substantially further.

III

THE REVOLUTIONARY WAR had a major impact on slavery—and on the slaves. Wartime disruption undermined normal plantation discipline, and division within the master class offered slaves unprecedented opportunities that they were not slow in grasping. The Revolution posed the biggest challenge the slave regime would face until the outbreak of the Civil War some eighty-five years later; indeed, it appeared for a while as if the very survival of slavery in the new nation was threatened.

The British wasted little time in reaching out to the slaves as potential allies against the American rebels. On November 7, 1775, Virginia's Governor John Murray, Earl of Dunmore, issued a proclamation offering freedom to all slaves who would bear arms against the rebellion. Throughout the South, the offer raised understandable panic among slaveholders already fearful for the loyalty of their slaves; "if the Virginians are wise," noted Washington, "that arch traitor . . . Dunmore should be instantly crushed."[6] Similar concern

was evident farther south; three months earlier, Patriots in Charleston had hanged and burned a free black harbor pilot suspected of helping slaves flee to British ships.

As this incident suggests, despite varying responses Americans were unable to come up with a satisfactory way of blunting the British appeal to their slaves. Virginia planter Robert Carter III warned his people that a British victory would result in their being sold into a far more oppressive slavery in the West Indies. A very different approach came from South Carolina Colonel John Laurens, who for both idealistic and pragmatic reasons proposed enrolling up to five thousand slaves in the Patriot army, with freedom promised for them at the war's end; the proposal—scaled back to three thousand slaves—won the eventual endorsement of the colonel's prominent father, Henry Laurens, but was defeated by the South Carolina legislature early in 1782. Some slaves did serve in the Patriot army: Maryland specifically authorized slave enlistments, and several states (North and South) allowed slaves to serve in place of their masters, usually with informal promises of subsequent freedom; New York offered freedom to slaves in return for three years of military service, with a compensatory land bounty to be paid to their owners. Small numbers of *free* blacks served in all states except South Carolina and Georgia, and a few bondsmen enlisted, pretending to be free. Most slaves, however, saw little reason to believe that the War for Independence was their war; it was important to them because it provided many with a new opportunity to escape their own thralldom, not because it pitted the forces of freedom against those of despotism.

Unable or unwilling to compete with the British for the loyalty of their slaves, Southern masters struggled to preserve a threatened way of life. In the Chesapeake region, British depredations of 1775, 1777, and 1781 intensified the existing economic crisis and induced some planters to flee with their slaves to the security of the backcountry or to Kentucky and Tennessee. Wartime destruction was greater still in the South Carolina and Georgia low country. First loyalist planters saw their property plundered by rebel forces; many Tories were able to evacuate their slaves to safer locales (including the West Indies), but others lost some or all of their holdings. Patriots suffered a similar fate after the British captured Savannah in 1778 and Charleston in 1780, and many of the loyalists returned—temporarily, it turned out—to reclaim their slaves. (Some of these slaves

wound up fighting the Patriots. At least forty-seven blacks served the British in a Hessian regiment; others worked as scouts, guides, and laborers.)

The destruction, confusion, and loss of authority that accompanied the war provided slaves with numerous opportunities to escape bondage. The absence of able-bodied white males and the proximity of enemy forces produced an abrupt decline in discipline on many farms and plantations throughout the South; slaves were emboldened, and masters complained of a breakdown of order and deference. No mass uprising of slaves occurred in the United States during the American Revolution, the way it did in Saint Domingue during the French, for American slaves lacked the overwhelming numerical advantage enjoyed by their Haitian cousins. Tens of thousands of slaves did, however, take advantage of the wartime disruption to run away. The fugitives faced varying fates.

Dunmore's proclamation unleashed massive flight among slaves in the upper South. On June 25, 1776, nine of Landon Carter's slaves, whom he denounced as "accursed villains," ran away at night, "to be sure," the planter guessed, "to L[or]d. Dunmore"; later he heard a rumor that minutemen shot and killed three of the fugitives. In part because the British governor lacked a land base after December 1775, only a relatively small number of slaves—the usual estimate is eight hundred—reached his forces, and most of these died from disease (especially smallpox); when Dunmore's fleet left the Potomac on August 6, 1776, it carried with it some three hundred fugitive slaves. But these represented only a small fraction of the slaves who had fled, and slaves continued throughout the war to seize any opportunity to run away. Jefferson's "Farm Book" lists some thirty slaves of his who escaped in 1781, with various descriptions such as "joined enemy" or "caught smallpox from enemy & died."[7] Most fugitives fled individually or in very small groups, to avoid detection, but the turmoil and weakened authority that accompanied the Revolution made possible, for the last time until the Civil War, coordinated escapes of whole families and larger groups as well. Upon occasion the population of entire plantations, including all eighty-seven slaves owned by John Willoughby in Norfolk County, Virginia, ran away.

Because disruption was even greater in the lower South, so, too, was opportunity for flight. The scope of both is evident in testimony at the 1807 inventory of a deceased South Carolina planter's estate

explaining why his slaves had decreased in number from 172 in 1776 to 132 in 1789: 64 slaves had disappeared one night in 1779, and there followed "years of general . . . calamity, . . . in which all but the particular friends of the British thought themselves fortunate if they could raise provisions, and save their negroes from being carried off."[8] When British forces evacuated Savannah and Charleston at the end of the war, some ten thousand blacks accompanied them. An uncertain future awaited them (and the thousands more removed from New York City): some died, some gained their freedom, and others wound up as slaves elsewhere (usually in the British West Indies).

Estimates vary on the number of people who escaped slavery during the Revolution. Allan Kulikoff has recently suggested that about five thousand slaves from the Chesapeake area and thirteen thousand from South Carolina reached the British, with smaller numbers from North Carolina and Georgia, for a total of some 5 percent of all Southern blacks. (These would have constituted considerably more than 5 percent of black adults and of black males, however, since young adult males were disproportionately represented among the fugitives.) But this figure represents only the tip of the iceberg. Many other slaves fled their owners but did not go over to the British. The extent of the loss to slave owners in the lower South is indicated by the sharp decline between 1770 and 1790 in the proportion of the population made up of blacks (almost all of whom were slaves): from 60.5 percent to 43.8 percent in South Carolina and from 45.2 percent to 36.1 percent in Georgia. Philip D. Morgan has estimated that during the Revolution, South Carolina lost about 25,000 slaves (or about 30 percent of the state's slave population) to flight, migration, and death. When one adds to these imprecise estimates the slaves who were freed by emancipation in the North and private manumissions in the South, one can begin to see the magnitude of the jolt the Revolution provided to American slavery.

The Revolutionary era also brought significant changes to the lives of slaves who did not run away, as both masters and bondspeople strove to make sense of radically new conditions. Some, especially in the North and the upper South, received (or were promised) their freedom (see section IV). Increased autonomy also characterized the daily lives of the majority of Southern blacks who remained slaves. This autonomy took strikingly different forms, however, in the upper and lower South.

In the Chesapeake region, the war dealt an added blow to the already faltering tobacco economy and thus accentuated the surplus of slaves. Slack demand for slaves had many consequences, ranging from the proliferation of private manumissions to the cessation of African imports, but one of the most important was a relaxation in the severity of the slave regime and increased opportunity for individuals—especially males—to escape field work and engage in skilled occupations. In Maryland, according to historian Lorena S. Walsh, "ordinary field hands spent more time in self-sufficient activities such as gardening, hunting, and fishing," while agricultural diversification led to a proliferation of new jobs. "By the end of the century many men were performing a greater variety of tasks," she concluded, "and even on large plantations they sometimes worked on special projects by themselves or with only one or two mates and not always under constant supervision."[9] This relaxation was also facilitated by the increasingly creole character of upper-South slaves, whose behavior no longer seemed so "outlandish" to whites as did that of Africans. The largely acculturated slave population enjoyed considerably more "breathing space" than had Africans whose breaking in was thought to require careful supervision of every move.

Slaves who earned the trust of their masters often received increased freedom to dispose of their "spare" time. Those with particular skills were sometimes allowed to hire themselves out, contracting on their own and paying their masters a fixed weekly fee from their earnings, the remainder of which they kept. Far more common were slaves whose masters, having too many hands, hired them out for odd jobs or seasonal work. Although slaves who were hired out were not necessarily treated better than those who were not—hirers has less direct financial incentive than did owners to take good care of their laborers—slave hiring provided slaves with new experiences, contacts (white and black), and knowledge, and broadened their horizons. Trusted slaves visited friends and relatives on nearby holdings and also increasingly interacted with whites in the revival meetings that converted whites and blacks alike to evangelical Christianity. Increased freedom of action for slaves went hand in hand, ironically, with growing contact between white and black.

This loosening of controls in no way implies that slaves had come to accept their servitude, except in the sense that they made the best of the circumstances in which they found themselves. They continued to run away, with fugitives now for the first time having

the prospect of securing freedom in the North. And the Gabriel Prosser conspiracy of 1800, a carefully planned but abortive uprising in which thousands of blacks were to attack Richmond, shows the potential for armed rebellion in even the most trusted, "acculturated" slaves. In a number of ways the Prosser uprising, nipped in the bud after being revealed to authorities by a black informer, bears the mark of the Revolutionary age, for if the uprising's planning was facilitated by the easy association and relaxed controls prevalent at the time, its leaders seem to have been influenced by the era's rhetoric of liberty. Perhaps too much should not be made of the conspirators' ideology. Blind hatred of slavery—and of those responsible for it—motivated participants far more than abstract theories of the social good; as one recruit coolly stated, "I could kill a white man as free as eat." Still, a number of reports indicated that the rebels had planned to spare Quakers, Methodists, and Frenchmen because they were "friendly to liberty."[10] Clearly, many black Virginians were aware of the "outside" world—and of the contradiction between the "liberty" their masters invoked and the slavery they practiced.

Slave autonomy in the lower South manifested itself very differently. The coastal low country of South Carolina and Georgia was dominated by a black majority—with a heavy African component—who often saw little of their owners. In two ways the Revolution acted to accentuate this distinctive pattern. Wartime disruption and the military obligations of whites increased the existing tendency toward owner absenteeism and further isolated the slave population from white Southerners; as one historian put it, "wartime anarchy created a power vacuum in the countryside that allowed slaves to expand their liberty."[11] A postwar surge in slave arrivals from Africa, prompted in part by a conscious effort to make up for the heavy wartime losses and in part by a determination to secure as many laborers as possible while the federal government still tolerated the importation of slaves, reinforced this black isolation and sharply differentiated the low country from the Chesapeake, where the turn of the nineteenth century was a time of growing cultural interaction between white and black. During the late eighteenth century, notable features of low-country slave life—owner absenteeism, slave isolation, the task system, the internal slave economy—became more pronounced, even as Gullah took root as the embodiment of the region's cultural distinctiveness.

The Revolutionary era, in short, saw the further differentiation of upper from lower South, although increased slave autonomy characterized both sections. In the Chesapeake region, an overwhelmingly creole slave population lived in close physical and cultural contact with whites, many of whom exercised relatively loose control over their slaves and expressed heightened concern for their physical and spiritual well-being. In the coastal region of the lower South, most blacks lived in a world of their own, largely isolated from whites, and developed their own culture and way of life; into this world poured tens of thousands of Africans imported in a last surge by labor-hungry planters anxious to beat the anticipated cutoff of the slave trade in 1808. Although these regional distinctions would persist in the nineteenth century, the contrast between upper South and lower South would never be so great as it was during the years immediately following the War for Independence.

IV

THE REVOLUTIONARY ERA also saw an increasing gap between the South as a whole, where slavery survived the challenge to its legitimacy and remained firmly entrenched, and the North, where slavery gradually gave way to freedom, albeit a severely restrictive freedom. Because the Revolution was waged for "liberty," and generated an enormous amount of rhetoric about despotism, tyranny, justice, equality, and natural rights, it inevitably raised questions about slavery, questions that seemed all the more pertinent in view of the determined efforts of slaves to gain their own freedom, and it is no accident that the United States was the first country to take significant (although ultimately limited) action against the peculiar institution. Patriots commonly denounced the "slavery" they suffered at the hands of the British, and insisted that they would rather die than remain slaves; although there was considerable hyberbole in this rhetoric—clearly Patriots did not believe that they were slaves in the same sense their own chattels were—the irony of fighting a war for liberty at the same time that they held one-third of their own population as slaves was not lost upon them. They might not have liked the way British Tory author Samuel Johnson phrased the matter when he asked rhetorically, "How is it that we hear the loudest *yelps* for liberty among the drivers of negroes?" but they were acutely aware of the problem.[12]

Whites in the Revolutionary era were by no means united on the question of slavery. A few Americans became abolitionists, arguing for the immediate and unconditional freeing of all slaves; although abolition societies emerged in the South as well as the North, they were heavily dominated by Quakers and became progressively rarer as one moved farther south. Others took action to end their own association with what they regarded as an immoral practice, providing freedom for their slaves either immediately or (like George Washington) in their wills. Even among the great majority of slave owners who never freed their slaves, however, there was widespread unease about an institution that seemed backward and unenlightened. Many agreed with Thomas Jefferson that slavery was wrong, both for moral and practical reasons, and would if properly curtailed suffer a gradual and peaceful death.

Indeed, the Founding Fathers took a series of steps designed to bring about slavery's gradual demise. As children of the Enlightenment, they typically abjured hasty or radical measures that would disrupt society, preferring cautious acts that would induce sustained, long-term progress; rather than a frontal assault on the peculiar institution, they favored a strategy of chipping away at it where it was weakest. Still, there seemed reason to believe—although time would ultimately prove otherwise—that these acts had contained American slavery and put it on the road to gradual extinction.

Much of the action on slavery during the Revolutionary era occurred at the state level. In the upper South, the state legislatures of Virginia, Maryland, and Delaware revised their laws on manumission, making it easier during the 1780s and 1790s for masters to free their bondspeople. (From 1723 to 1782, private acts of manumission had been illegal in Virginia.) In those states (and to a lesser extent in North Carolina and in the new state of Kentucky), prompted by both principled opposition to slavery and a reduced demand for labor stemming from the downturn in tobacco cultivation, growing numbers of slave owners took advantage of the new laws to free some or all of their slaves. Some masters manumitted only a few select favorites; others, such as George Washington, John Randolph, and Robert Carter III, provided in their wills for the freedom of all their slaves, thereby securing emotional benefit without suffering financial loss. (Legal complications, however, pre-

vented most of Randolph's and Carter's slaves from ever receiving their freedom, and Washington lacked the legal authority to free the numerous "dower Negroes" belonging to his wife, Martha, from a previous marriage; of 277 Washington slaves, 124 belonged to George at the time of his death in 1799, while 153 belonged to Martha.) A smaller number of slaveholders—often Quakers—followed to the end the logic of their antislavery convictions and freed all their slaves immediately. Acts of private manumission freed thousands of blacks in the upper South following the Revolution, and for the first time, especially in Delaware and parts of Maryland, seemed to threaten the very survival of slavery; in Delaware, three-quarters of all blacks were free by 1810 (see table 2 and section V, below).

Farther north, state action was more decisive. Because slaves in the Northern states formed only a small proportion of the population and constituted a minor economic interest, abolishing the peculiar institution in an era that celebrated liberty and natural rights proved relatively easy, although often painfully slow. During the three decades following the outbreak of the Revolutionary War, every Northern state initiated complete slave emancipation. The process varied considerably. In some states, emancipation was immediate: the Vermont constitution of 1777 prohibited slavery, and soon thereafter Massachusetts courts, reacting to a series of freedom suits brought by blacks themselves, interpreted that state's constitution as outlawing slavery, too; as the state's chief justice put it in 1781, "there can be no such thing as perpetual servitude of a rational creature."[13] In most Northern states, however, especially those with a significant slave population, emancipation was gradual, so as to provide as little shock to society (and the masters' pocketbooks) as possible. According to Pennsylvania's law of 1780—the first of five gradual-emancipation acts passed by Northern states—all future-born slaves would become free at age twenty-eight. New York's law of 1799 freed future-born boys at age twenty-eight and girls at twenty-five; New Jersey's act of 1804 (the last emancipation act of a Northern state) was similar, but provided that boys would receive freedom at age twenty-five and girls at twenty-one. Because these gradual-emancipation laws freed no one actually in bondage at the time of their passage, and freed children subsequently born into slavery only when they reached adulthood, the North contained a small number of slaves well into the nineteenth century. By 1810, however, about

three-quarters of all Northern blacks were free, and within a generation virtually all would be.

Complementing the abolition acts of individual Northern states was legislation by Congress to restrict the geographical scope of slavery. Because the western territories were largely unsettled (except by Indians), the movement to prohibit the spread of slavery there did not challenge vested interests in the same way that the movement to abolish slavery in existing states did, and received considerable support from those convinced that slavery, although wrong, could not be immediately ended in the South. In 1784, a bill drafted by Jefferson, which would have barred slavery from all the western territories after 1800, was defeated by a single vote. Three years later, the Northwest Ordinance did abolish slavery in a vast area north of the Ohio River known as the Northwest Territory, including the present states of Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, and Wisconsin.

The African slave trade, viewed as deplorable even by many defenders of slavery, was also the object of considerable legislation, at both the state and the national level. Widespread opposition to the trade in the North and upper South led the second Continental Congress to pass a resolution opposing slave imports in 1776, and a number of states (including Virginia in 1778) banned such imports on their own. In the upper South, economic depression sharply reduced the demand for new slaves, and the happy convergence of economic interest with principle easily carried the day. Farther south, however, in South Carolina and Georgia, planters suffered from an acute shortage of labor and bitterly resisted what they considered the hypocritical efforts of those who now had enough slaves suddenly to force others to do without.

Although advocates of the slave trade represented a small minority among the Founding Fathers, they were powerful enough to force a compromise on the question at the Constitutional Convention of 1787: the new Constitution prohibited Congress from outlawing the slave trade for twenty years. During this period, labor-hungry planters in the lower South imported tens of thousands of Africans; indeed, more slaves entered the United States between 1787 and 1807 than during any other two decades in history. Still, the general understanding among those who were politically active was that Congress would abolish the slave trade at the end of twenty years, an expectation that was borne out by congressional legislation passed

in 1807 and taking effect in 1808. In their usual cautious, roundabout manner, the Founding Fathers succeeded in ending the importation of Africans to the United States; many believed, incorrectly, that this ending would doom slavery in the United States as well.

The Constitutional Convention showed the Founding Fathers at their most cautious with respect to slavery. In drafting the Constitution, they carefully avoided the word "slavery," resorting to a variety of euphemisms such as "other persons" and "person[s] held to service or labor." At the same time, they acceded to slaveholding interests by recognizing the right of masters to reclaim fugitives and by unanimously accepting a compromise formula whereby for purposes of congressional representation a slave would count as three-fifths of a free person, thereby substantially augmenting the political power of the Southern states. In the future, both supporters and opponents of slavery would wrap themselves in the Constitution and claim to be expressing the views of the Founding Fathers. In fact, although most of the decisions taken by the delegates at the Constitutional Convention represented compromises rather than clear-cut victories for pro-slavery or anti-slavery forces, on balance the Constitution bolstered slavery by throwing the power of the federal government behind it.

Still, to many informed Americans in the 1790s, time seemed to be on the side of reason, reform, and progress. The Northern states were in the process of abolishing slavery within their borders. Congress had acted to guarantee that the Northwest would be forever free. The laws of several Southern states had been changed to facilitate private manumissions, and hundreds of slave owners in the upper South were taking advantage of these laws to free some or all of their chattels. And although importation of new slaves remained legal in South Carolina and Georgia, a compromise had been worked out that would end such importation in 1808. In short, a moderate opponent of slavery—like many of the Founding Fathers—had good grounds for being cautiously optimistic. Slavery appeared to be in full retreat, its end only a matter of time.

V

THE REVOLUTIONARY and post-Revolutionary years saw the emergence, for the first time, of a large community of free blacks. They

escaped slavery in a variety of ways, ranging from state-enacted emancipation in the North to private manumissions and flight in the South. Some in the upper South were the beneficiaries of sweeping acts by individual slaveholders who, prompted by newly felt moral qualms, freed all their bondspeople; others were objects of selected manumissions by less idealistic masters—most commonly in the upper South but also in the lower South—of particular favorites (including their own children); others still, especially in the border states, were discharged from bondage because they were old and no longer able to perform useful labor. Slaves who were able to earn money could sometimes purchase their own freedom. Fugitives escaped slavery by fleeing to the North, especially from the border states of Maryland, Delaware, and Kentucky, and by blending with free blacks in cities such as Baltimore and Charleston. In addition, during the 1790s and 1800s, hundreds of free, light-skinned refugees from Saint Domingue entered the United States, concentrating in Charleston, Savannah, and New Orleans, much to the alarm of local whites.

In sheer numbers, the growth of the free black population was staggering. Although statistics on free blacks before the Revolution are lacking, it is clear that there were few; as late as 1782, only about 1,800 out of 220,582 black Virginians—less than one percent—were free. Between 1780 and 1810, however, the number of free blacks in Virginia surged, reaching 12,766 (4.2 percent) in 1790 and 30,570 (7.2 percent) by 1810. In the United States as a whole, the number of free blacks rose to 59,466 (7.9 percent of all blacks) in 1790 and 186,446 (13.5 percent) in 1810. Over half these free blacks were concentrated in the upper South, where more than 10 percent of all blacks were free by 1810. As a proportion of the black population, however, free blacks were most numerous in the North; by 1810 three-quarters of Northern blacks were free, and by 1840 virtually all were. In the lower South, by contrast, the number of free blacks grew far more modestly, from 1.6 percent of the black population in 1790 to 3.9 percent in 1810. At the latter date in South Carolina and Georgia, only about 2 percent of all blacks were free. (For statistics documenting this section, see table 2.)

It was this post-Revolutionary beginning that provided the basis for the South's free black population in the antebellum period, for after 1810, few slaves were freed. The proportion of blacks who were free grew slightly in the upper South, from 10.4 percent in

1810 to 12.8 percent in 1860, primarily because of a surge of manumissions in Delaware, which by the mid-nineteenth century had become virtually a free state, and in Maryland, which, as historian Barbara J. Fields has shown, was threatening to do so; in 1860, 91.7 percent of Delaware's and 49.1 percent of Maryland's black population was free. In the lower South, by contrast, the proportion of free blacks decreased after 1810, as state after state passed new laws restricting manumission and harrassing those who had been manumitted, and after 1840 the absolute number decreased as well. By 1860, only 1.5 percent of deep-South blacks were free, and half of these lived in Louisiana. In Mississippi, free blacks constituted only 0.2 percent of the population. The great majority of free blacks in the antebellum South were descendants of those who received their freedom between 1780 and 1810.

There were significant regional variations in the status and character of the free black population, both between North and South and within the South. Northern blacks, although free, were objects of both legal discrimination and vicious hostility. Excluded from most public schools, denied the right to vote (except in Maine, Vermont, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, and—if they could meet a property requirement—New York), forbidden by (sporadically enforced) law from entering many states, jeered at and at times physically attacked by whites who refused to work with them or live near them, blacks quickly came to appreciate the difference between freedom and equality. Although their legal rights were usually greater than those of free blacks in the South, and a few of them achieved wealth and prominence, most Northern blacks were relegated to menial occupations such as day laborers and domestic servants. They constituted a highly urban population: more than three-fifths lived in cities at a time when fewer than one-fifth of all Americans did.

Although there were relatively few free blacks in the deep South, their condition was, ironically, in many respects better than that of those in the upper South. An unusually high proportion of them were elite people of "color"—neither physically nor mentally black—who set themselves apart from the mass of slaves. This was especially true of descendants of French and Spanish colonists who lived along the Gulf of Mexico and called themselves "Creoles" to indicate their ancestry. (White descendants of the French and Spanish commonly referred to *themselves* as "Creoles" and refused to use

the term to apply to people of African origin. Note that in both of these cases, the meaning of "Creole" differs substantially from that of "creole," used earlier in this book.) In Mobile, Pensacola, and especially in New Orleans, these light-skinned Creoles prided themselves on their wealth, breeding, heritage, and membership in exclusive organizations such as Mobile's Creole Fire Company Number 1 and New Orleans' octoroon balls. Refugees from Saint Domingue brought similar attitudes with them when they settled in New Orleans, Savannah, and Charleston.

The free black population in the lower South, unlike that in the North or upper South, was overwhelmingly light-skinned; in 1860, the census categorized about three-quarters of lower-South free blacks (and more than four-fifths of those in Louisiana) as mulattoes. A majority of these "free colored" were, like their cousins in the North, urban dwellers, although the South was, overall, overwhelmingly rural. Although most of them could hardly be termed wealthy—and many supported themselves through a variety of menial occupations including day labor, domestic service, and prostitution—they occupied many skilled positions, and held a near monopoly on some important service occupations such as barbering. A significant minority, both urban and rural, *were* wealthy. In Louisiana's Natchitoches Parish a colony of free Creoles, descended from an eighteenth-century French settler and an African slave, grew and flourished until by 1860 it contained 411 persons who owned 276 slaves; equally remarkable was the free South Carolina family whose patriarch, cotton gin maker and planter William Ellison, owned 63 slaves in 1840.

The position of elite free blacks in the deep South was never secure, but because they were few in number and seemed so different from the mass of slaves—a difference they strove to accentuate—they usually received at least grudging toleration from prominent whites whose favor they strove to curry. In southern Louisiana especially, but to a lesser extent elsewhere along the Gulf Coast as well as in Charleston and Savannah, many whites followed a practice common in much of Latin America but rare in most of the United States of distinguishing between mulattoes, especially their own sons and daughters, and blacks. As a Louisiana judge ruled in 1850, in allowing a free Negro to testify against whites, many of the state's free population were "respectable" as well as "enlightened by education, and the instances are by no means rare

in which they are large property holders . . . , such persons as courts and juries would not hesitate to believe under oath."[14]

The vast majority of the South's free blacks, however—about 85 percent—lived under very different circumstances in the upper South. They were darker, poorer, less urban, and less educated than those farther south; only about one-third were mulattoes or resided in cities. They typically lived on the margins of society, as farmhands, casual laborers, and occasionally small landowners, shunned by most whites and isolated from most slaves. Those who lived in cities—Baltimore and Washington, D.C., contained most of the region's urban free blacks—worked as domestics, day laborers, factory hands, and artisans and usually lacked the elitist pretensions evident in the lower South. Where they were able, they often fraternized with (and sometimes married) slaves.

Wherever they lived, free blacks faced hardship, persecution, and physical insecurity, all of which grew after 1850 as the Fugitive Slave Act increased the risk in the North of being kidnapped into slavery and concerted action in the South threatened more stringent enforcement of existing restrictive legislation; in the deep South, free blacks were sometimes pressured into enslaving themselves to masters of their own choice, and the free black population actually declined. Faced with such implacable white hostility, free blacks turned increasingly inward to their own community organizations, the most important of which were the independent "African" churches that emerged in the 1780s and 1790s; in Philadelphia, for example, the Free African Society, a quasi-religious organization founded in 1787 by former slaves Richard Allen and Absalom Jones, spawned a number of churches, the most influential of which was Allen's Bethel Church, which in 1816 expanded to form the African Methodist Episcopal Church. Overwhelmingly Baptist and Methodist, African churches flourished openly in major cities of the North and were sometimes tolerated in the urban South. Free blacks also set up schools for their children (usually clandestinely in the South) and formed a wide variety of mutual-aid associations to provide members with benefits such as burial and insurance.

During the crisis of the 1850s, free blacks not only turned inward but also increasingly looked outward, as some concluded that white America would never provide a hospitable environment and viewed with increasing favor the prospect of emigration to Liberia. Although only a small number of blacks actually moved to Africa, the heightened interest in emigration was a sign of the growing pessimism that gripped many free blacks during the 1850s, for emigrationist sentiment has always been a key index of black attitudes toward white America, rising during times of particular hardship and receding during periods of hope and progress.

Most free blacks, however, rejected the notion of emigrating to Africa, for they saw themselves as (and indeed were) quintessentially American and looked upon Africa as a distant and savage land. (The idea of sending blacks "back" to Africa drew more support from whites who sought to remove a thorn in the side of the slave regime or to "purify" America than from blacks who sought to improve their status.) In the North, they fought for their own rights by holding "colored conventions" in which they promoted common interests and cautiously demanded equal treatment, and they worked as abolitionists to promote the rights of those blacks still in slavery; in 1829, David Walker stirred (and in some cases alarmed) free blacks throughout America with his "incendiary" booklet *An Appeal to the Colored Citizens of the World*, in which he denounced slavery as a crime against humanity and called for its violent overthrow. Despite all the disabilities they faced, even in the South free blacks were sometimes able, as historian Loren Schweninger has recently demonstrated, to acquire impressive quantities of wealth, often with the help of particular whites who acted as their sponsors and protectors. Although most free blacks in the South remained propertyless, one of every six rural family heads in Maryland and Virginia owned land in 1860, and one in seven urban families in the upper South owned real estate.

However oppressive "freedom" was for blacks in America, it remained far preferable to slavery. Blacks made this preference clear when they "voted with their feet": tens of thousands put themselves in mortal peril to escape slavery, but virtually none voluntarily gave up freedom for bondage.

VI

DESPITE THE HOPES AROUSED during and immediately after the American Revolution, Southern slavery survived the era intact. The reform spirit had never spread very far in the lower South, where most slave owners seemed far more concerned with securing addi-