

SECTION 3

The Southern Colonies

SETTING THE SCENE

Read to Learn . . .

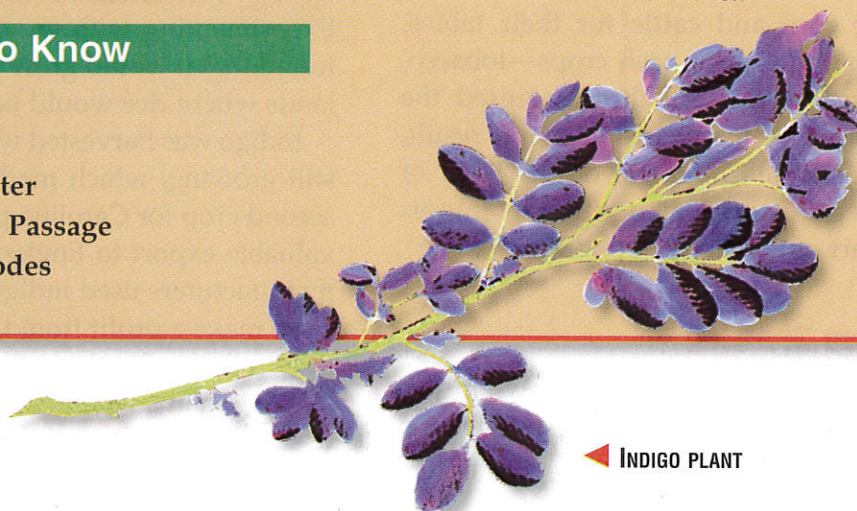
- ★ what the economy of the Southern Colonies was based on.
- ★ how Southern planters came to depend on enslaved labor.
- ★ what life was like on a plantation.

Places to Locate

- ★ Chesapeake Bay
- ★ Potomac River
- ★ James River
- ★ Savannah River
- ★ West Africa

Terms to Know

- ★ urban
- ★ rural
- ★ Tidewater
- ★ Middle Passage
- ★ slave codes



◀ INDIGO PLANT

Life in the Southern Colonies of Virginia, Maryland, North and South Carolina, and Georgia differed in several ways from that in the other regions. City, or **urban**, life was important in the Middle Colonies. In contrast, the South was mainly **rural**—mostly farms, with few towns and only one large city, Charles Town.

As in New England, the first settlers in the Southern Colonies were English. Many, however, were wealthy aristocrats and friends of the king. They belonged to the Anglican Church. Later settlers came from other parts of Britain—Scotland and Ireland—and from France.

★ An Agricultural Economy

Most settlers in the Southern Colonies made their livings from the land, but they belonged to two very different groups. A few wealthy planters owned thousands of acres. They made up a rich, upper class. The rest were farmers—the lower class—who owned small farms or worked for a large planter. Their lives were more like those of small farmers in the other colonies.

The land along the region's southern coast had long, hot, humid summers, mild winters, and heavy rainfall. Besides



Picturing History

▲ **SHIPPING TOBACCO** Planters shipped barrels of tobacco to Europe and the West Indies. Along what tidal rivers was most tobacco shipped?

raising corn and cattle for their tables, farmers grew three cash crops—tobacco, rice, and indigo. All three required the hard work of many people. As a result, planters came to depend on the labor of enslaved Africans who were an important part of the colonial population.

Tobacco Growing

Tobacco was the first crop grown in Virginia to bring farmers a profit. Later the crop spread to North Carolina and Maryland. A few Southern planters who owned thousands of acres grew half of all the tobacco shipped to England each year. Families with smaller farms of 100 or 200 acres (41 or 81 ha) grew the rest.

Large plantations covered acres of land along **Chesapeake Bay**. They hugged the banks of slow-flowing tidal rivers, including the **Potomac**, the **James**, and the **York**. This part of Virginia came to be called the **Tidewater**, because ocean tides affected the rivers for miles upstream. Most plantations had their own docks on the rivers. Planters could ship barrels of tobacco downstream to the coast and then directly to England. For this reason, the Southern Colonies had fewer major port cities than the New England or Middle Colonies.

Rice and Indigo

Around 1680 a ship captain brought some rice seed to South Carolina from the African island of Madagascar. Planters in South Carolina and Georgia found that the swampy coastal lands near the **Savannah River** were perfect for growing rice. By the 1720s, some rice planters introduced an irrigation system that increased the size of their crops.

Another important crop in South Carolina was indigo, a plant used to produce a rich blue dye. One planter who promoted this crop was Eliza Lucas. Her father, governor of the West Indies island of Antigua, left Eliza Lucas to manage the family plantation in South Carolina. Experimenting with growing indigo, she found that it would grow well in the highlands where rice would not.

Indigo was harvested while the rice was still growing, which made it a profitable second crop for Carolina planters. It was a valuable export to England, where textile manufacturers used indigo to dye cloth.

To make a profit from the kind of crops grown in the Southern Colonies, planters needed many laborers. At first planters used indentured servants, both African and European, to work in the fields. Soon, however, most of the workers were Africans brought from the West Indies. Many already had experience growing rice in Africa. About this time planters began to treat Africans as slaves for life—as property that could be owned—rather than as servants who would be free after several years.

★ The African Population

By 1760 there were about a quarter of a million Africans in the colonies. Enslaved Africans were shipped directly from **West Africa** to the American colonies. Most enslaved Africans—more than 200,000—worked in the fields and houses of the

Southern Colonies. Smaller numbers of Africans and people of African descent lived in New England and the Middle Colonies. Some were enslaved, working as household servants or on farms. Others were free people who worked as artisans or sailors.

The Slave Trade

As soon as European settlers built plantations in the Americas and the Caribbean islands, they began to depend on workers brought by force from Africa. Most came from West Africa. By the 1700s slave traders, often armed with European guns, reached deeper into the African continent. They raided villages and kidnapped men, women, and children to satisfy the demand for workers.

The Africans were brought to America or the West Indies in small, overcrowded

ships. Africans later told their story of the horrors and brutality of the **Middle Passage**, the route between Africa and America. Slave traders viewed the people as cargo, not human beings, packing in as many as possible to increase the profits from the trip. People were chained and packed together in dark, filthy, cramped compartments. Sometimes there was not room enough to stand or even sit up. Many died from ill treatment and lack of fresh food and water.

Many colonists did not think that slavery was wrong. The need for laborers was more important than the welfare of the Africans. Some believed that they were doing Africans a favor by teaching them Christianity and forcing them to forget African culture.

Around the early 1700s, some colonies made these attitudes law. They passed **slave codes**, laws that denied enslaved



▲ **SLAVES BELOW DECK OF ALBANEZ** by Francis Maynell, 1846 From 1600 to 1850, nearly 15 million enslaved Africans were brought to the Americas on ships. What laws denied Africans most of their rights?

Africans most of their rights. Under the codes enslaved people were looked on as both persons and property. Under some slave codes, enslaved people could not carry weapons or hold meetings. In most places, it was against the law for them to learn to read and write.

Reactions to Slavery

Some enslaved Africans tried to run away from slaveholders, and a few found refuge with local Native Americans. Most runaways, however, were later caught and returned to their slaveholders. Those who were not caught had little chance of making a life for themselves. European colonists were suspicious of any African they did not know. Rebelions and resistance by the enslaved occurred both on slave ships and on plantations.

Free Africans

Some enslaved Africans became skilled workers, such as carpenters or seamstresses. Generous slaveholders might allow them to work for other families and keep part of the money. Sometimes a worker earned enough money to buy his or her freedom and perhaps that of a spouse or child. Some slaveholders gave

trusted servants their freedom. Eventually, small communities of free Africans grew up in towns and cities throughout the colonies.

★ The Southern Plantation

Every American colony had a wealthy upper class. The rich planters of the South developed their own way of life on their plantations.

A plantation centered on the “big house,” or the family mansion. Often it stood on a hill, overlooking a river. A typical plantation house had two stories and was built of brick. Through its tall windows could be seen a graceful staircase in the entrance hall. To avoid the danger of fire, the kitchen was in a separate building. Other small buildings clustered around the mansion, including barns, laundries, and stables. At some distance away were the small cabins of the slave quarters.

Most of the plantation workers were enslaved men and women. Many were field-workers who planted and tended crops. Others were artisans such as blacksmiths and shoemakers, while still others worked as servants in the mansion. These workers made the plantation self-sufficient, supplying almost all its needs.

★ SECTION 3 REVIEW ★

Checking for Understanding

1. **Identify** Chesapeake Bay, Potomac River, James River, Savannah River, West Africa.
2. **Define** urban, rural, Tidewater, Middle Passage, slave codes.
3. **What** were the three important cash crops of the Southern Colonies? Why were enslaved Africans important to farmers?
4. **Describe** how enslaved Africans could gain their freedom.

Critical Thinking

5. **Making Comparisons** What were some major ways in which the Southern Colonies were different from New England? How were these two regions alike?

ACTIVITY

6. Imagine that you are someone from New England visiting your cousins on a farm in the Carolinas. Write a letter to a friend at home describing your visit.