

IN THE BEGINNING

There were no slaves on the first English ships to reach North America in 1607. Yet by 1860, there were four million African-American slaves in the United States. Between settlement and the Civil War, a cruel system of unfree, unpaid labor developed in one of the most democratic societies in the world.

Africans were first brought to Virginia in 1619. By then, African slaves were already working the mines and sugar cane fields of the Caribbean and South America. As the slave trade developed in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the exchange of people and goods across the Atlantic shaped the “New World” societies in the Caribbean and the Americas. In North America, Africans were first sold as indentured servants, who might earn their freedom with seven years of unpaid labor. African and white indentured servants grew tobacco for the first Virginia planters and made up a major portion of the workforce.

By 1700 the southern colonies were expanding. As health conditions improved in the colonies and indentured servants lived long enough to claim land and demand rights as citizens, tensions emerged between the wealthy settlers and the growing number of freed servants. White indentured servants became more scarce, and planters turned to slavery to solve both their labor problem and the tensions between the wealthy and poor. Planters used Africans' black skin and non-Christian religion to justify lifetime bondage and codified racial difference and race-based slavery by passing a series of laws that regulated slavery. During the next century, thou-

sands of African women, men, and children were brought to America and sold as slaves.

In their homelands, Africans had been farmers and cattleraisers, hunters and traders, skilled weavers and ironmakers. Others were musicians, priests, and poets. Captured and taken across the sea, they brought with them a host of languages, religions, and cultures. Though much was lost, slaves adapted African traditions to life in America. By 1776, a distinct African-American culture had emerged.

"The stench of the hold was loathsome. . . The ship was so crowded that each scarcely had room to turn himself. . . This wretched situation was aggravated by the galling of the chains and the filth. . . The shrieks of the women and the groans of the dying rendered the whole a scene of horror. . ."

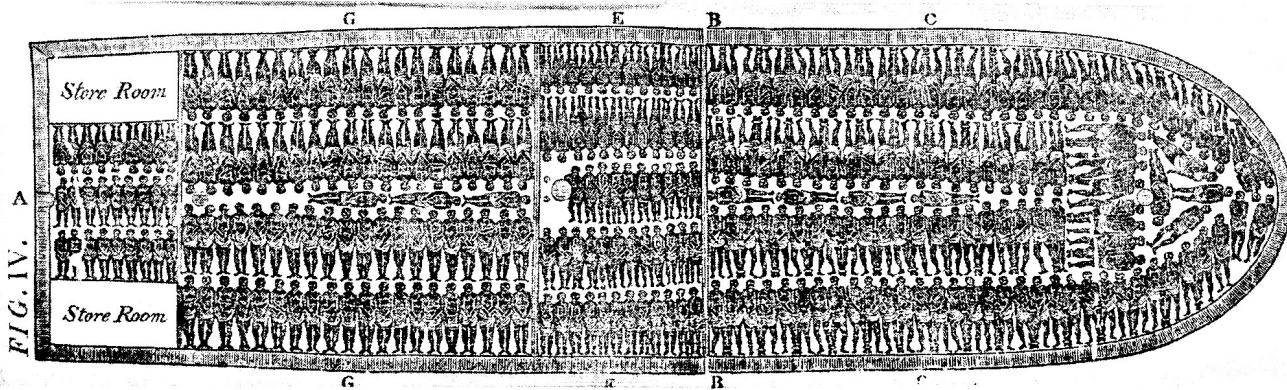
—EX-SLAVE OLAUDAH EQUIANO, 1789

When the American Revolution began, there were almost half a million slaves in the thirteen colonies. During the war, 5,000 slaves joined the Revolutionary forces in a bid for their freedom. Thousands of others fought for the British, who also offered liberty in exchange for military service. As many as 50,000 slaves seized the opportunity to run away.

After the Revolution, the Founding Fathers not only failed to end slavery, they actually strengthened it. The Constitution protected the importation of new slaves until 1808. And it promised that federal armed forces would put down slave rebellions. White liberty and black slavery were etched into

bondage is a synonym for slavery

codified = put into law



The Middle Passage.

Africans crossed the Atlantic squeezed into the cargo holds of slave traders' ships. Sometimes more than half died before the voyage was over.

Thomas Clarkson, *The History of the Rise, Progress, and Accomplishment of the African Slave-Trade by the British Parliament* (1808)

The U.S. Economic Addiction to Slavery

"In The Beginning"

1. After 1700, why did Southern planters make a change from indentured servants to slaves as their main labor force?
2. How did planters try to justify the slavery of Africans?
3. In what ways did enslaved Africans seek their freedom?
4. How did the U.S. Constitution strengthen slavery?
5. In what year was the last slave in North freed?

"King Cotton"

6. Why did slavery become more profitable after the 1790s?
7. How did changes in the demand for cotton affect the lives of slaves?
8. What percentage of the world's cotton did the South produce in 1860?
9. In what ways did slavery economically benefit not just the South but the North as well?