

# SECTION 1 The Southern Colonies

## Guide to Reading

### Main Idea

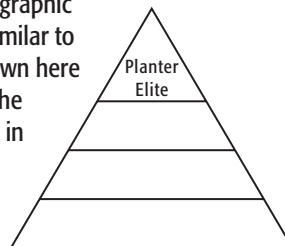
The Southern Colonies developed labor-intensive agricultural economies that relied heavily upon enslaved labor.

### Key Terms and Names

cash crop, plantation, indentured servant, Eliza Lucas, gentry, subsistence farming, William Berkeley, Royal African Company, Middle Passage, slave code

### Reading Strategy

**Organizing** As you read about the development of Southern society, complete a graphic organizer similar to the one shown here describing the social order in the South.



### Reading Objectives

- **Describe** the Southern economy and the plantation system.
- **Outline** the development of slavery in the South.

### Section Theme

**Geography and History** Patterns of land use affected the history of Virginia's colonial government.

### Preview of Events

◆ 1620

◆ 1619

First Africans arrive in North America

◆ 1660

◆ 1676

Bacon's Rebellion

◆ 1700

◆ 1705

Virginia creates slave code

◆ 1740

◆ 1740s

Indigo first cultivated in South Carolina

## ★ An American Story ★

William Byrd II, a wealthy eighteenth-century Virginia planter, played a central role in his colony's government. In addition to serving as colonel of the county militia and as a member of the House of Burgesses, Byrd founded the city of Richmond and experimented with a variety of crops on his plantation. His wealth gave him the leisure to pursue cultural interests, and he amassed over 4,000 books—the biggest private library in the colonies. He left behind several diaries detailing life on Southern plantations. On January 27, 1711, he noted:

☞ I rose at 5 o'clock and read two chapters in Hebrew and some Greek in Lucian. I said my prayers and ate boiled milk for breakfast. . . . I settled several accounts; then I read some English which gave me great light into the nature of spirit. . . . In the afternoon my wife and I took a little walk and then danced together. Then I read some more English. At night I read some Italian and then played at piquet [a card game] with my wife. . . . I said my prayers and had good health, good thoughts, and good humor, thank God Almighty.☞

—quoted in *The Growth of the American Republic*



William Byrd's  
Westover plantation

## The Southern Economy

The wealth of Westover, Byrd's plantation, was built in large part on the labor of enslaved Africans. In Byrd's Virginia, a class of wealthy planters stood on society's top rung, while enslaved Africans were at the bottom. In between were many farmers who owned small farms and held few or no slaves.

From the earliest days of settlement, the Southern Colonies developed an economy based on commercial agriculture. A few years after the founding of Jamestown, tobacco



became the South's first successful **cash crop**, or crop grown primarily for market. Tobacco became the main cash crop grown in Virginia and Maryland and, to a lesser extent, North Carolina. Rice and indigo became the main cash crops in South Carolina. These cash crops needed the right kind of climate and techniques to be cultivated. These requirements led to the rise of **plantations**, or large commercial estates where many laborers lived on the land and cultivated the crops for the landowner.

### **GEOGRAPHY**

**Tobacco and the Chesapeake** Between 1620 and 1660, the demand for tobacco in Europe was greater than the supply. This kept the price high, ensuring that most tobacco planters could make money even if they grew only a small amount. Those who could grow and harvest a large quantity of tobacco could become wealthy.

Growing tobacco required intensive manual labor. Each plant had to be carefully nurtured before being cut and hung up to cure. After curing, the leaves were packed into hogsheads—huge wooden barrels—that, once filled and sealed, often weighed close to 1,000 pounds (454 kg). The amount of labor needed to grow tobacco meant that to become wealthy, a tobacco farmer needed a large work force to cultivate a large crop.

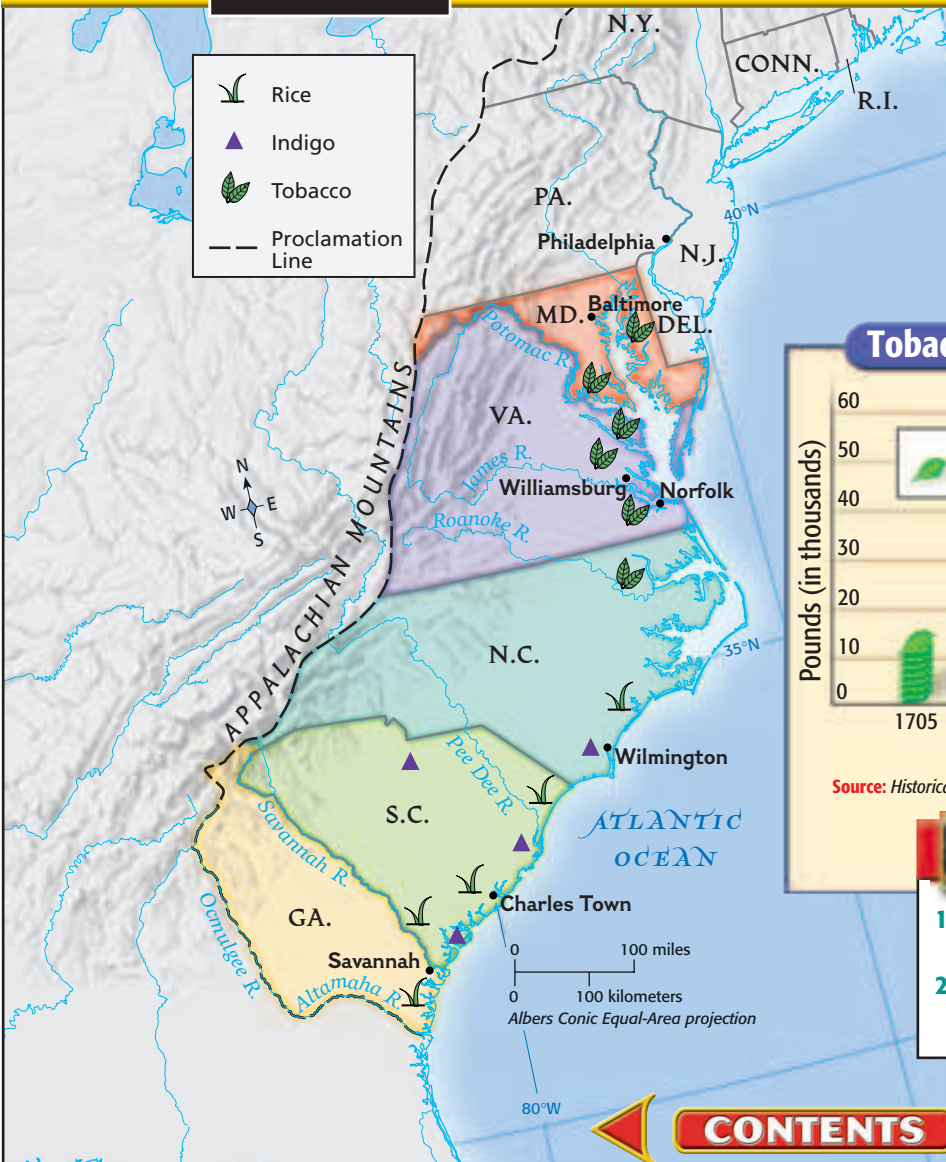
The geography of the Chesapeake Bay region was perfectly suited to tobacco farming. The bay acted like a wide road. Numerous inlets and navigable rivers connected to the bay. If tobacco farmers located their farms next to a river, they could ship their crop from their own wharves. The colonists built very few roads or towns because they had no need to move goods overland. Instead, merchant ships made their way up the rivers from farm to farm, picking up tobacco and selling supplies.

**NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC**

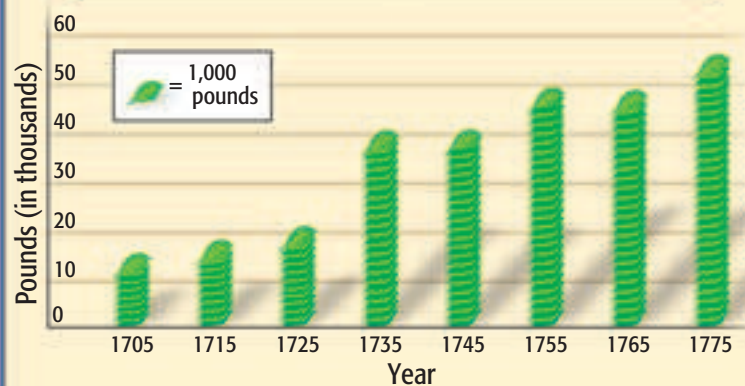
## Southern Agriculture, 1750



Rice  
 Indigo  
 Tobacco  
 Proclamation Line



### Tobacco Imported by England, 1705–1775



Source: *Historical Statistics of the United States: Colonial Times to 1970.*

### Geography Skills

- Interpreting Maps** Why were tobacco and rice farms located next to rivers?
- Interpreting Charts** Approximately how many pounds of tobacco did England import in 1735?



## History Through Art

**The Ideal Plantation** This painting depicts the well-structured plantation as a world unto itself. Centered around the family home, the plantation's fields, support houses, and merchant ships unite to serve the needs of the plantation.

[Why did plantations develop in the South?](#)

**Indentured Servants** In the early days of Virginia and Maryland, there was plenty of land for tobacco farmers but not enough labor to work it. England had the opposite problem. Many poor tenant farmers had been forced off the land during the enclosure movement, creating high unemployment and a large number of people willing to sell their labor for a chance to come to America and acquire their own land. To pay for their passage, these people agreed to become **indentured servants**.

In this system, colonists in America agreed to pay the cost of transporting the servants to the colonies and promised to provide food, clothing, and shelter to them until their indentures, or labor contracts, expired. In exchange, the servants agreed to work for the owner of their contract for a specific number of years. These contracts usually specified four years, but some were for seven years or even more if the indentured servant arrived as a child.

For much of the 1600s, indentured servitude was a very good system for tobacco planters. Indentured servants could produce five times the price of their contracts in tobacco in the first year alone. Under the headright system, every indentured servant transported to America also earned the landowner another 50 acres of land. As large numbers of indentured servants arrived in Virginia and Maryland, tobacco production rose steadily.

**Rice and Indigo in South Carolina** South of Virginia, the proprietors of South Carolina had hoped their colony's warm climate would permit the cultivation of sugarcane as a cash crop. When

sugarcane failed, the settlers also tried and failed to cultivate rice. This venture also failed, because the settlers did not know how to properly harvest rice. In addition, the extreme humidity, swamps, mosquitoes, and muddy fields of the lowlands where rice had to be planted discouraged cultivation.

In the 1690s, a new type of rice was introduced, and the planters—many of whom had come from Barbados and Jamaica where slavery was common—decided to import enslaved Africans to cultivate it. West Africans had cultivated rice for centuries. Although their techniques were very labor-intensive, they knew how to harvest rice and remove the hull. Rice rapidly became a major cash crop in South Carolina and, to a lesser extent, in Georgia.

In the early 1740s, South Carolina began to develop another cash crop called indigo. Indigo was used to make blue dye for cloth—a dye much in demand in Europe. Previously, planters in South Carolina had tried to grow indigo without much success. Then, in the early 1740s, 17-year-old **Eliza Lucas**, began experimenting with the plant. Lucas discovered that indigo needed high ground and sandy soil, not the wetlands that suited rice.

Indigo was a good second crop for the rice plantations. It could be grown on land unsuitable for rice, and it required care and harvesting only in seasons when the enslaved workers were not busy with rice.

 **Reading Check** **Describing** Why did attempts to grow rice in South Carolina fail at first?

## Southern Society

Although many immigrants to the Southern Colonies hoped to become wealthy, very few did. The nature of the plantation system tended to create a society with distinct social classes. Planters who could afford to bring in many slaves or indentured servants received much larger land grants. With their large labor force and land area, they could produce a much larger crop. The money they earned enabled them to acquire still more workers and to extend their estates up and down the rivers of a region. The result was a society where a wealthy elite controlled most of the land and relied upon the labor of others to work it for them.

**The Planter Elite** The wealthy landowners, sometimes referred to as the Southern **gentry** or the planter elite, enjoyed enormous economic and political influence. They represented their communities in the governing councils and assemblies, commanded the local militias, and served as county judges.





With few towns or roads in the region, the plantations of the Southern gentry had to function as self-contained communities. The residents lived near each other in a group of buildings, including the planter's great house, stables and barns, and the workers' cabins. Plantations often had other facilities such as schools and chapels, and workshops for blacksmiths, carpenters, weavers, coopers (barrel makers), and leather workers.

In the 1600s, most plantations were small, rough estates. In many cases, they were little more than stump-filled clearings where the planters and their indentured servants worked side-by-side under very difficult conditions. Many became sick and died. Even in the late 1600s, plantation workforces rarely exceeded 30 people. The great houses on most of these early plantations were small, with only four to seven rooms.

In the early 1700s, as wealthier planters in Virginia and Maryland switched from indentured to slave labor, the size of their plantations began to grow. As their wealth and property increased, the gentry began to build large brick mansions with imposing steps and doorways and elaborate gardens. They also tried to copy the fashions and lifestyle of England's upper class. No longer did they labor in the fields with their workers. Instead, the gentry hired overseers to manage the enslaved Africans, while they looked after accounts and other business matters on the plantation.

As the wealth of the planter elite increased, so too did their leisure time. The gentry often amused themselves by hunting and fishing, and by gambling on horse races, cards, and dice. Some, like William Byrd, enjoyed intellectual pursuits such as reading or practicing music.

**Backcountry Farmers** Close to half the indentured servants who came to the Chesapeake region in the 1600s died before gaining their freedom. Of those who became free, less than half acquired their own land. Although land itself was very easy to acquire, settlers had to pay for the deed and land survey and also had to pay for tools, seeds, and livestock. Many could not afford these costs, and instead they became tenant farmers, working lands that they rented from the planter elite.

Despite such difficulties, some former indentured servants did acquire their own land. Although wealthy planters owned most of the land along the rivers, most landowners in the colonial South were actually small farmers living in the "backcountry" farther inland. These farmers are sometimes referred to as **yeomen**, to distinguish them from the gentry.

The backcountry farmers worked small plots of land and lived in tiny one- or two-room houses with few furnishings. Although these farmers grew some tobacco, they also practiced **subsistence farming**, or farming only enough crops to feed their own families. Subsistence crops included corn, beans, potatoes, barley, and rye. Hogs and other livestock were allowed to run wild until needed for meat.

By the 1670s, the colonial South was a sharply divided society, with a small group of wealthy planters at the top and many poor backcountry farmers, landless tenant farmers, servants, and enslaved Africans at the bottom. Eventually, this uneven distribution of wealth and power led to rebellion.

 **Reading Check** **Discussing** What led to the rise of the planter elite in colonial Southern society?

## Bacon's Rebellion

By the 1660s, wealthy planters led by the governor, **Sir William Berkeley**, dominated Virginia's society. Berkeley controlled the legislature through his

### Picturing History

**Bacon's Rebellion** This uprising pitted backcountry farmers against Virginia's ruling gentry. **Was Nathaniel Bacon a backcountry farmer? How would you describe his depiction in this engraving?**



CLICK HERE

HISTORY  
Online

### Student Web Activity

Visit the *American Vision* Web site at [tav.glencoe.com](http://tav.glencoe.com) and click on **Student Web Activities—Chapter 3** for an activity on the colonial life of the English settlers.

appointments to the colony's governing council and gifts of land to members of the House of Burgesses.

Once Governor Berkeley had assembled a majority of supporters in the House of Burgesses, he exempted himself and his councilors from taxation. Convinced that voting should be reserved for the wealthy, Berkeley also arranged for the House of Burgesses to restrict the vote to people

who owned property, cutting the number of voters in Virginia in half. All of these developments angered the backcountry and tenant farmers. Ultimately, however, it was the governor's Native American policies that sparked a revolt.

**Crisis Over Land** The most important issue for most colonists was to acquire land. Many indentured servants and tenant farmers wanted to own farms eventually. Backcountry farmers wanted to expand their holdings. By the 1670s, most remaining land was in areas claimed by Native Americans in the Piedmont, the region of rolling hills between the coastal plains and the Appalachians.

Most wealthy planters lived near the coast in the region known as the **Tidewater**. They had no interest in the backcountry and did not want to endanger their plantations by risking war with the Native Americans. Therefore, they opposed expanding the colony into Native American lands. This stand angered the backcountry farmers.

In 1675 war erupted between backcountry settlers and the Susquehannock people of the region. Governor Berkeley tried to calm things down. He refused to sanction any further military action against the Native Americans. Instead he asked the House of Burgesses for money to build new forts along the frontier—the westernmost point of colonial settlement.

**Nathaniel Bacon Leads a Revolt** In April 1676, a group of backcountry farmers met to discuss the situation. At the meeting was a well-to-do planter named Nathaniel Bacon, who had recently purchased a large tract of land near the frontier. Although he was a member of the governor's council, Bacon took up the cause of the backcountry farmers. Native Americans had recently attacked his plantation, and he wanted to do something.

Bacon organized his own militia and attacked the Native Americans. Governor Berkeley decided to call new elections. He needed an assembly supported by the voters to calm the situation. The newly elected House of Burgesses authorized Bacon to raise a force

## African Culture Crosses the Ocean: A Woman's Song

On a steamy March day in 1997, in the tiny town of Senehun Ngola in Sierra Leone, West Africa, Mary Moran, an African American from Georgia, first met Baidu Jabati, a Sierra Leonean. The two women had something amazing in common: a song each woman had known all her life.

In an emotional meeting, Moran and Jabati shared the song that the female ancestors of each of them had passed down for more than 200 years. Although the melody of the American version had changed, the words of this song in the Mende language of Sierra Leone probably came to America's South on the slave ships that sailed from West Africa in the 1700s.

The women in Mary Moran's family had passed the song down through the generations. Over time, the true origin of the song was lost. Although she had sung the song all her life, Moran never knew what its words meant. She imagined that it was an old African song.

Wanting to trace her family's history, Moran consulted with ethnomusicologists, who study folk music. Moran discovered that her family's song came from southern Sierra Leone and that it was traditionally sung at funerals. Jabati, who had inherited the traditional duty to sing at funerals, said that meeting Moran would have been better only if her ancestors could have been there also for the joyous occasion.



Mary Moran (center) at a Sierra Leone market

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of 1,000 troops to attack the Native Americans. The assembly then restored the vote to all free men and took away the tax exemptions Berkeley had granted to his supporters.

Despite these reforms, Bacon was not satisfied. In July 1676 he returned to Jamestown with several hundred armed men and seized power, charging Berkeley with corruption. Berkeley fled Jamestown and raised his own army. The two sides battled until October 1676, when Bacon, hiding in a swamp, became sick and died. Without his leadership, his army rapidly disintegrated.

**Slavery Increases in Virginia** Bacon’s Rebellion convinced many wealthy planters that the best way to keep Virginian society stable was to have land available for the backcountry farmers. From the 1680s onward, Virginia’s government generally supported expanding the colony westward, regardless of the impact on Native Americans.

Bacon’s Rebellion also accelerated an existing trend in Virginia—the use of enslaved Africans instead of indentured servants to work the fields. In the 1680s, after the rebellion, the number of Africans brought to the colony increased dramatically.

Planters began to switch to enslaved Africans for several reasons. Enslaved workers, unlike indentured servants, did not have to be freed and therefore would never need their own land. In addition, when

cheap land became available in the 1680s in the new colony of Pennsylvania, fewer English settlers were willing to become indentured servants.

At the same time, the English government adopted policies that encouraged slavery. English law limited trade between the English colonies and other countries. Before the 1670s, if settlers wanted to acquire enslaved Africans, they had to buy them from the Dutch or Portuguese, which was difficult to arrange. In 1672, however, King Charles II granted a charter to the **Royal African Company** to engage in the slave trade. With an English company in the slave trade, it became much easier to acquire enslaved people.

 **Reading Check** **Examining** What government policies caused some backcountry farmers to rebel?

## Slavery in the Colonies

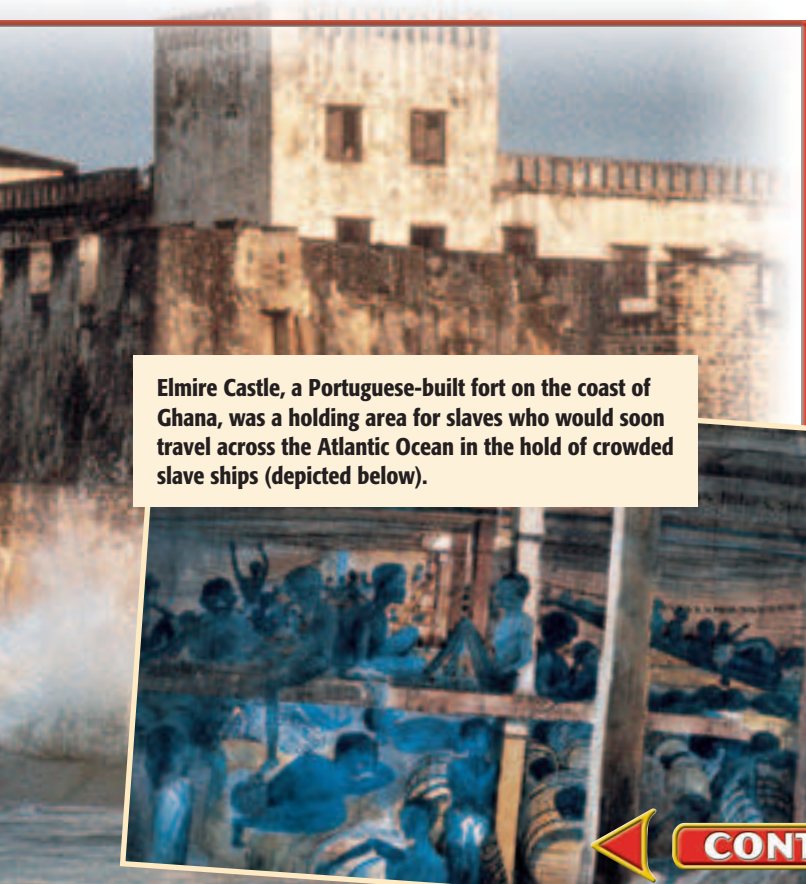
For enslaved Africans, the voyage to America usually began with a march to a European fort on the West African coast. Tied together with ropes around their necks and hands, they were traded to Europeans, branded, and forced aboard a ship. Historians estimate that between 10 and 12 million Africans were forcibly transported to the Americas between 1450 and 1870. Of those 10 to 12 million, roughly 2 million died at sea.

**Olaudah Equiano**, also known as Gustavus Vassa, was kidnapped from his West African home by other Africans in the 1760s. He was then traded to Europeans and shipped to America. Years later, after winning his freedom, he wrote a memoir. In it, he described the terrible journey across the Atlantic, known to Europeans as the **Middle Passage**:

“At last, when the ship we were in had got in all her cargo, . . . we were all put under deck. . . . The closeness of the place, and heat of the climate, added to the number in the ship, which was so crowded that each had scarcely room to turn himself, almost suffocated us. . . . [This] brought on a sickness among the slaves, of which many died. . . . The shrieks of the women, and the groans of the dying, rendered the whole a scene of horror almost inconceivable. . . .”

—from *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa the African*

Chained and crammed into the ships’ filthy holds for more than a month, prisoners like Equiano could hardly sit or stand and were given minimal food and drink. Africans who died or became sick were thrown overboard. Those who refused to eat were whipped.



**Elmire Castle, a Portuguese-built fort on the coast of Ghana, was a holding area for slaves who would soon travel across the Atlantic Ocean in the hold of crowded slave ships (depicted below).**



### Picturing History

**Olaudah Equiano** Fortunate to eventually win his own freedom, Equiano still suffered the brutal journey to the American colonies and years of slavery. [How did Equiano end up on a slave ship bound for the United States?](#)

Of the 8 to 10 million Africans who reached the Americas, approximately 3.5 million went to Brazil, and another 1.5 million went to the Spanish colonies. The British, French, and Dutch colonies in the Caribbean imported nearly 4 million others to work on their sugar plantations. Approximately 500,000 Africans were transported to North America before the slave trade ended in the 1800s.

When the first Africans arrived in Virginia in 1619, English law did not recognize chattel slavery, where one human being is said to be owned by another. As a result, slavery developed slowly in the Chesapeake

colonies. The first Africans brought to Virginia and Maryland were treated in a manner similar to indentured servants, and children born to Africans were not always considered enslaved.

Some of the first enslaved Africans obtained their freedom by converting to Christianity. To many English settlers in the early 1600s, enslaving Africans was acceptable not because of their race, but because they were not Christians. As the number of Africans increased in Virginia and Maryland, their status changed. In 1638 Maryland became the first British colony to formally recognize slavery when it denied Africans the same rights as English citizens. Beginning in the 1660s, new laws in Virginia and Maryland gradually lowered the status of all Africans, regardless of their religion, and changed slavery into a hereditary system based on race.

Finally, in 1705, Virginia pulled all of these different laws together into a **slave code**—a set of laws that formally regulated slavery and defined the relationship between enslaved Africans and free people. Other colonies created their own slave codes. Over time slave codes became increasingly strict. Africans were denied the right to own property or to testify against a white person in court. Their movements were regulated, and they were often forbidden to assemble in large numbers. By the early 1700s, slavery had become a recognized and generally accepted institution in colonial society, particularly in the Southern Colonies, where the labor of hundreds of thousands of enslaved Africans played a vital role in the growth of the plantation economy.

**Reading Check Explaining** How did the concept of slavery in the Southern Colonies change over time?

## SECTION 1 ASSESSMENT

### Checking for Understanding

- Define:** *cash crop, plantation, indentured servant, gentry, subsistence farming, Middle Passage, slave code.*
- Identify:** Eliza Lucas, William Berkeley, Royal African Company.
- Explain** why South Carolina began producing indigo.

### Reviewing Themes

- Geography and History** How did the geography of the Chesapeake region affect its economic development?

### Critical Thinking

- Contrasting** How did the economies of the Chesapeake region and South Carolina differ?
- Analyzing** How did the slave trade develop in the Americas?
- Categorizing** Use a graphic organizer similar to the one below to list the causes of Bacon's Rebellion.



### Analyzing Visuals

- Analyzing Art** Study the painting on page 87 depicting Bacon's Rebellion. What motivated Nathaniel Bacon to lead his rebellion against the Virginia gentry?

### Writing About History

- Descriptive Writing** Imagine you are a backcountry farmer in Virginia. Write a letter to your local newspaper describing how you feel about Sir William Berkeley and the policies he instituted.