

# The Agricultural South

## MAIN IDEA

In the Southern colonies, a predominantly agricultural society developed.

## WHY IT MATTERS NOW

The modern South maintains many of its agricultural traditions.

## Terms & Names

- cash crop
- slave
- triangular trade
- middle passage
- Stono Rebellion

## One American's Story



Use the graphic organizer online to take notes about Southern society.

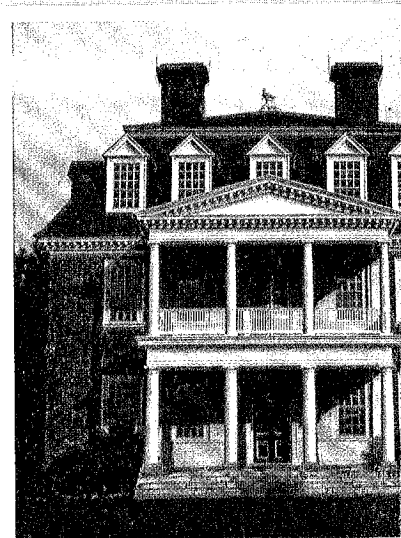
In the fall of 1773, Philip Vickers Fithian left his home in Princeton, New Jersey, to tutor the children of Robert Carter III and his wife Frances at their Virginia manor house. Fithian, who kept a journal of his one-year stay there, recalled an evening walk through the plantation.

### A PERSONAL VOICE PHILIP VICKERS FITHIAN

*“We stroll'd down the Pasture quite to the River, admiring the Pleasantness of the evening, & the delightful Prospect of the River, Hills, Huts on the Summits, low Bottoms, Trees of various Kinds, and Sizes, Cattle & Sheep feeding some near us, & others at a great distance on the green sides of the Hills. . . . I love to walk on these high Hills . . . where I can have a long View of many Miles & see on the Summits of the Hills Clusters of Savin Trees, through these often a little Farm-House, or Quarter for Negroes.”*

—*Journal & Letters of Phillip Vickers Fithian*

Although Fithian's journal goes on to express outrage over the treatment of the slaves, he was fascinated by the plantation system, which had come to dominate the South. The plantation economy led to a largely rural society in which enslaved Africans played an unwilling yet important role.

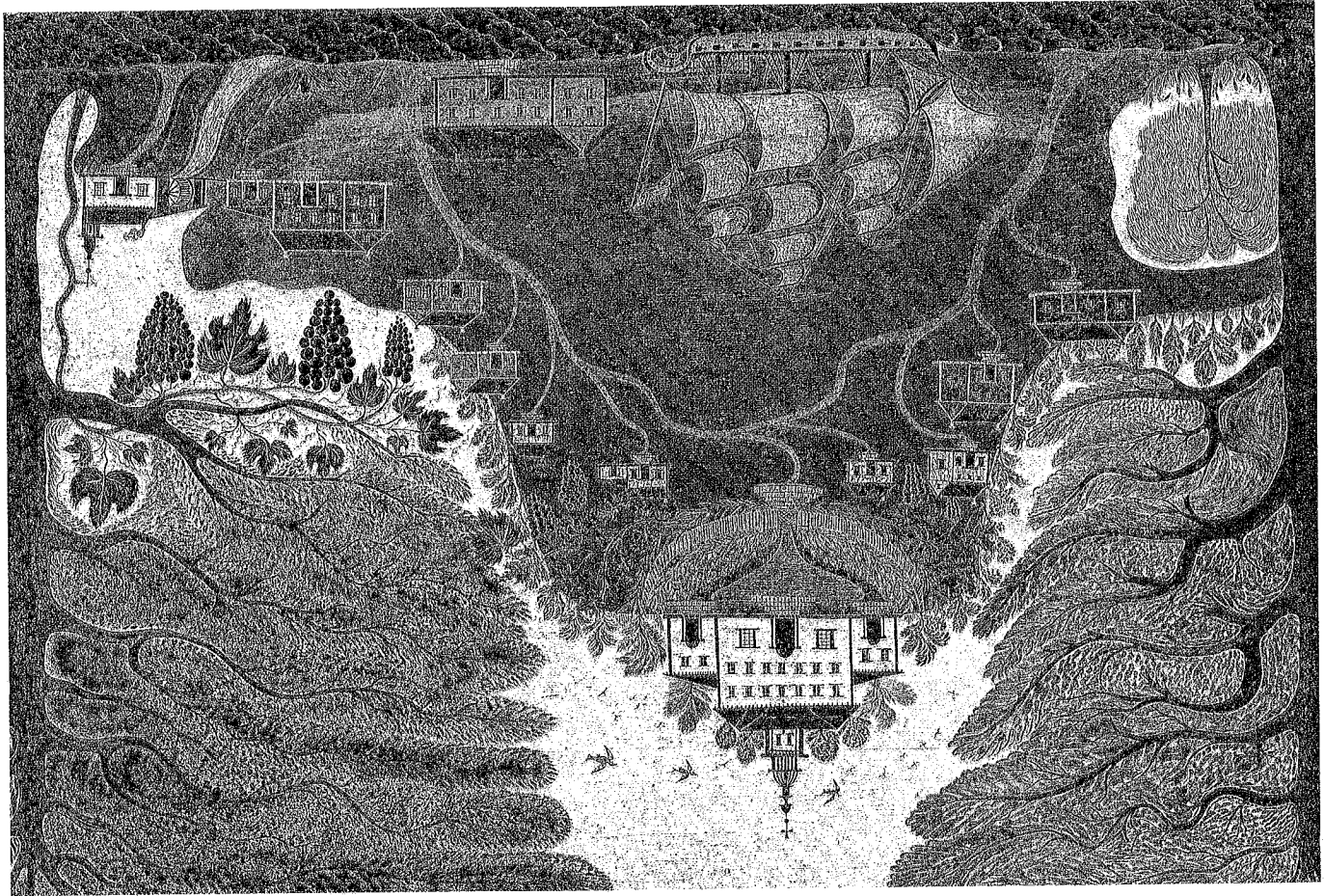


▲ The Shirley plantation house in Virginia is representative of many old Southern mansions. Built in 1723, it was the birthplace of Ann Hill Carter, the mother of Civil War general Robert E. Lee.

## A Plantation Economy Arises

Since the early days of Jamestown, when the planting of tobacco helped save the settlement, the Southern colonists had staked their livelihood on the fertile soil that stretched from the Chesapeake region to Georgia. Robert Carter, like his father and grandfather before him, specialized in raising a single **cash crop**—one grown primarily for sale rather than for the farmer's own use. In Maryland, Virginia, and North Carolina, farmers grew the broad green leaves of tobacco. In South Carolina and Georgia, rice and later indigo were successful cash crops.

This folk art painting shows an aristocratic Southern mansion perched high on a hill, dominating the warehouses, mill, slave quarters, and other buildings that helped make the plantation self-sufficient. Along the river, a ship carries the plantation's products to the wider world.



As the Southern colonies grew in wealth and population, they also grew in diversity. However, not all groups benefited equally from the South's prosperity. **A DIVERSE AND PROSPEROUS PEOPLE** During the 1700s, large numbers of European immigrants traveled to North America in search of a new start. The influx of immigrants helped create a diverse population in both the Northern and Southern colonies. In the South, thousands of Germans settled throughout Maryland and Virginia and as far south as South Carolina. There they raised grain, livestock, and tobacco. A wave of Scots and Scots-Irish also settled in the South, residing mainly along the hills of western North Carolina.

## Life in Southern Society

Throughout the South, plantations developed instead of towns. Because the long and deep rivers allowed access for ocean-going vessels, planters—owners of large profitable plantations—could ship their goods directly to the northern colonies and Europe without the need for city docks and warehouses. Because plantation owners produced most of what they needed on their property, they had little use for shops, bakeries, and markets. There were some cities in the South, including Charles Town (later Charleston), South Carolina, one of the most thriving port cities in the British empire. On the whole, the South developed largely as a rural and self-sufficient society. **A**

**MAIN IDEA**

**Making Inferences**  
**A** How did the geography of the South contribute to the self-sufficiency of Southern plantations?



▲ Detail from *The Country Housewife*, published in London in 1770. Many settlers brought this guidebook with them when they immigrated to the colonies.

While small farmers formed the majority of the Southern population, the planters controlled much of the South's economy. They also controlled its political and social institutions. The activities at the Carter mansion described by Philip Fithian reflected the luxury of planter life. Fithian recalled attending numerous balls, banquets, dance recitals, and parties that continued for several days.

By the mid-1700s, life was good for many Southern colonists, particularly those in the Chesapeake Bay region. Due to a large growth in the entire colonies' export trade, colonial standards of living rose dramatically in the years from 1700 to 1770. Colonists along the Chesapeake, where tobacco prices had rebounded after tumbling during the late 1600s, saw the greatest economic boom. From 1713 to 1774 tobacco exports there almost tripled, and many Chesapeake farmers and merchants prospered. **B**

**MAIN IDEA**

**Analyzing Causes**

**B** Explain how colonial standards of living rose so dramatically in the 18th century.

**THE ROLE OF WOMEN** Women in Southern society—and Northern society as well—shared a common trait: second-class citizenship. Women had few legal or social rights; for instance, they could not vote or preach. Even daughters of wealthy Southern

planters were usually taught only the basics of reading, writing, and arithmetic. Instead, they were mostly educated in the social graces or in domestic tasks, such as canning and preserving food, sewing, and embroidery.

Throughout the day, the average Southern woman worked over a hot fire baking bread or boiling meat. Her outdoor duties included milking the cows, slaughtering pigs for ham and bacon, and tending the garden. She was also expected to sew, wash clothes, and clean. Women of the planter class escaped most of these tasks, as servants handled the household chores. Regardless of class, however, most

NOW
THEN

### TOBACCO AND NORTH CAROLINA'S ECONOMY

Tobacco has long been a key element of the Southern economy. The soil and climate of the South are ideal for growing tobacco, which was first harvested for commercial use in 1612. In recent years, however, tobacco revenues have shrunk as North Carolina lessens its dependence on tobacco and develops a more diversified economy.

The focal point of North Carolina's new economy is the Research Triangle, so called for the cluster of major universities in Raleigh, Durham, and Chapel Hill. These universities cooperate in research and development in many areas, including technology and health care. Other new industries, such as computers and telecommunications, are fueling North Carolina's growth.

### NORTH CAROLINA IN THE COLONIAL ERA

- General farming
- Tobacco
- Rice and indigo

### NORTH CAROLINA TODAY

- General farming
- Cotton
- Cotton and general farming
- Tobacco and general farming
- Special crops and general farming

**Winston-Salem**  
food products  
furniture  
machinery  
tobacco products

**Asheville**  
the arts  
furniture  
lumber  
paper

**Charlotte**  
banking  
chemicals  
computers  
printing  
telecommunications  
textiles

**Greensboro**  
finance  
heavy equipment  
telecommunications

**Raleigh, Durham, and Chapel Hill**  
computers  
instruments  
medicines  
research  
telecommunications  
textiles

**WORLD STAGE**

**SERFS, SLAVES, AND SERVANTS**

Many forms of servitude existed throughout Europe and the Americas well into the 19th century. Serfs were peasants who were considered part of a lord's property. Unlike slaves, who could be moved to different locations, serfs were obliged to remain on the land that they farmed for the landowner. While the institution of serfdom declined in the later Middle Ages, it persisted with remarkable strength in the west and south of England. These were the very regions where many Southern landowners and indentured servants originated.

Serfdom was ended in England in the 1600s, but survived in Russia until 1861. Tsar Alexander's Edict of Emancipation freed the Russian serfs just two years before President Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation began the process of freeing the American slaves.

The English colonists gradually turned to the use of African slaves—people who were considered the property of others—after efforts to meet their labor needs with enslaved Native Americans and indentured servants failed. During the 1600s

## Slavery Becomes Entrenched

While historians estimate that indentured servants made up a significant portion of the colonial population in the 1600s—between one-half and two-thirds of all white immigrants after 1630—their numbers declined toward the end of the century. With continuing reports of hardship in the New World, many laborers in Europe decided to stay home. Faced with a depleted labor force and a growing agricultural economy, the Southern colonists turned to another group to meet their labor needs: African slaves.

Also low on Southern society's ladder were indentured servants. Many of these young, mostly white men had traded a life of prison or poverty in Europe for a limited term of servitude in North America. They had few rights while in bondage. Those who lived through their harsh years of labor—and many did not—saw their lives improve only slightly as they struggled to survive on the western outskirts of the Southern colonies.

**INDENTURED SERVANTS** Also low on Southern society's ladder were indentured servants. Many of these young, mostly white men had traded a life of prison or poverty in Europe for a limited term of servitude in North America. They had few rights while in bondage. Those who lived through their harsh years of labor—and many did not—saw their lives improve only slightly as they struggled to survive on the western outskirts of the Southern colonies.

William Byrd's diary hints at Lucia Parke Byrd's subservient position: "My wife women bowed to their husbands' will. An excerpt from Virginia plantation owner and I had another scold about mending my shoes," Byrd wrote, "but it was soon over by her submission." <sup>©</sup>

and 1700s, plantation owners and other colonists would subject hundreds of thousands of Africans to a life of intense labor and cruelty in North America.

### THE EVOLUTION OF SLAVERY

In the early days of the colonies, the English, like their Spanish counterparts, had forced Native Americans to work for them. However, the English settlers found it increasingly difficult to enslave Native Americans. Aside from being reluctant to learn English labor techniques, Native Americans could easily escape because they had far better knowledge of the local fields and forests than did the colonists.

As the indentured servant population fell, the price of indentured servants rose. As a result, the English colonists turned to African slaves as an alternative. A slave worked for life and thus brought a much larger return on the investment. In addition, most white colonists convinced themselves that Africans' dark skin was a sign of inferiority, and so had few reservations about subjecting them to a life of servitude. Black Africans were also thought better able to endure the harsh physical demands of plantation labor in hot climates. By 1690, nearly 13,000 black slaves toiled in the Southern colonies. By 1750, that number had increased to almost 200,000. <sup>ⓓ</sup>

**THE EUROPEAN SLAVE TRADE** Before the English began the large-scale importation of African slaves to their colonies on the American mainland, Africans had been laboring as slaves for years in the West Indies. During the late 1600s, English planters in Jamaica and Barbados imported tens of thousands of African slaves to work their sugar plantations. By 1690, the African population on Barbados was about

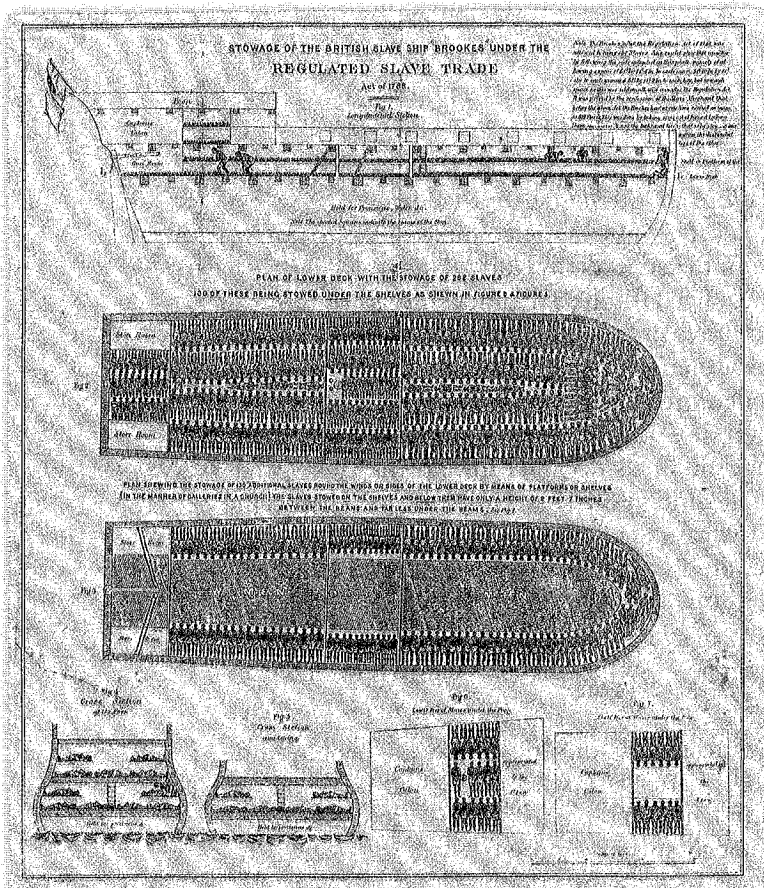
**Causes**  
<sup>ⓓ</sup> What were the main reasons that English colonists turned to African slaves to fill their depleted labor force?

**Analyzing**  
**MAIN IDEA**

**Making**  
**Generations**  
<sup>ⓐ</sup> What roles did women play in the Southern household?

**MAIN IDEA**





▲ This plan and section of the British slave ship “Brookes” was published in London around 1790 by a leading British antislavery advocate named Thomas Clarkson. The image effectively conveys the degradation and inhumanity of the slave trade, which reduced human beings to the level of merchandise.

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**INTERACTIVE MAP**

Learn more about the triangular trade.

60,000—three times the white population.

During the 17th century, Africans had become part of a transatlantic trading network described as the **triangular trade**. This term referred to a three-way trading process: merchants carried rum and other goods from New England to Africa; in Africa they traded their merchandise for enslaved people, whom they transported to the West Indies and sold for sugar and molasses; these goods were then shipped to New England to be distilled into rum. The “triangular” trade, in fact, encompassed a network of trade routes criss-crossing the Northern and Southern colonies, the West Indies, England, Europe, and Africa. The network carried an array of traded goods, from furs and fruit to tar and tobacco, as well as African people. **E**

**MAIN IDEA**

**Developing Historical Perspective**

**E** What parts of the world were involved in the triangular trade?

**THE MIDDLE PASSAGE** The voyage that brought Africans to the West Indies and later to North America was known as the

**middle passage**, because it was considered the middle leg of the transatlantic trade triangle. Sickening cruelty characterized this journey. In the bustling ports along West Africa, European traders branded Africans with red-hot irons for identification purposes and packed them into the dark holds of large ships. On board a slave ship, Africans fell victim to whippings and beatings from slavers as well as diseases that swept through the vessel. The smell of blood, sweat, and excrement filled the hold, as the African passengers lived in their own vomit and waste. One African, Olaudah Equiano, recalled the inhumane conditions on his trip from West Africa to the West Indies in 1756 when he was 11 years old.

**A PERSONAL VOICE** OLAUDAH EQUIANO

“The closeness of the place, and the 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 produced copious perspirations, so that the air soon became unfit for respiration from a variety of loathsome smells, and brought on a sickness among the slaves, of which many died . . .”

—The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano



Whether they died from disease or from cruel treatment by merchants, or whether they committed suicide, as many did by plunging into the ocean, up to 20 percent or more of the Africans aboard each slave ship perished during the trip to the New World.

▲ Olaudah Equiano was kidnapped from Africa and sold to a succession of owners before buying his freedom.

▲ The gourd fiddle and drum, both made by African Americans in which enslaved slaves, reflect ways continued their African traditions.



**CULTURE AND FAMILY** In the midst of the horrors of slavery, Africans developed a way of life based strongly on their cultural heritage. Enslaved people wove baskets and molded pottery as they had done in their homeland. They kept alive their musical traditions and retold the stories of their ancestors. Because slave merchants tore apart many African families, slaves created new families among the people with whom they lived. If a master sold a parent to another plantation, other slaves stepped in to raise the children left behind.

One of the most important customs that Africans kept alive in North America was their dance. From Maryland to Georgia, slaves continued to practice what became known in the colonies as the ring shout, a circular religious dance. While variations of the dance brought to North America differed throughout the regions in West and Central Africa, the dance paid tribute to the group's ancestors and gods and usually involved loud chants and quick, circular steps. Despite the white colonists' efforts to eradicate it, the ritual endured.

The African influence remained particularly strong among the slaves of South Carolina and Georgia. By the mid-1700s, planters in these colonies had imported large numbers of Africans with rice-growing expertise to help develop rice as the colonies' main cash crop. Many of these slaves came from the same region in West Africa.

## Africans Cope in Their New World

The Africans who were transported to North America came from a variety of different cultures and spoke varied languages. Forced to labor in a strange new land, these diverse peoples bonded together for support and fought against their plight in numerous ways.

Slave owners whipped and beat those slaves they thought were disobedient or disrespectful. In Virginia, the courts did not consider slave owners guilty of murder for killing their slaves during punishment. <sup>F</sup>

“He (the slave) is called up in the morning at daybreak, and is seldom allowed time enough to swallow three mouthfuls of hominy, or hoeecake, but is driven out immediately to the field to hard labor, at which he continues, without intermission, until noon . . . About noon is the time he eats his dinner, and he is seldom allowed an hour for that purpose . . . They then return to severe labor, which continues in the field until dusk in the evening.”

### A PERSONAL VOICE JOHN FERDINAND SMYTH

Africans who survived their ocean voyage entered an extremely difficult life of bondage in North America. Most slaves—probably 80 to 90 percent—worked in the fields. On large plantations, a white slave owner directed their labor, often through field bosses. On smaller farms, slaves often worked alongside their owner.

The other 10 to 20 percent of slaves worked in the house of their owner or as artisans. Domestic slaves cooked, cleaned, and raised the master's children. While owners did not subject their domestic slaves to the rigors of field labor, they commonly treated them with equal cruelty. Other slaves developed skills as artisans—carpenters, blacksmiths, and bricklayers. Owners often rented these slaves out to work on other plantations.

Whatever their task, slaves led a grueling existence. Full-time work began around age 12 and continued until death. John Ferdinand Smyth, an English traveler, described a typical slave workday.

**Making Inferences**  
 Why weren't slave owners punished if they killed their slaves?

**MAIN IDEA**

**Background**  
 Rice was an important crop in West Africa for centuries before the slave trade began.

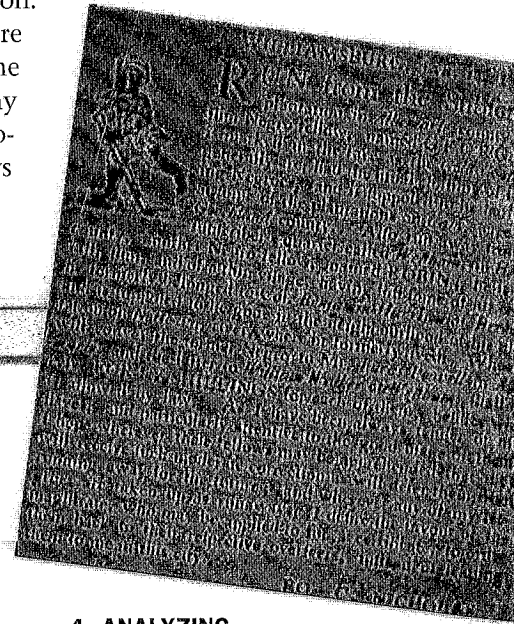
**RESISTANCE AND REVOLT** Enslaved Africans also resisted their position of subservience. Throughout the colonies, planters reported slaves faking illness, breaking tools, and staging work slowdowns. One master noted the difficulty in forcing African slaves to accept their lot, commenting that if a slave “must be broke, either from Obstinacy, or, which I am more apt to suppose, from Greatness of Soul, [it] will require . . . hard Discipline. . . . You would really be surpriz’d at their Perseverance . . . they often die before they can be conquer’d.”

Some slaves pushed their resistance to open revolt. One such uprising, the **Stono Rebellion**, began on a September Sunday in 1739. That morning, about 20 slaves gathered at the Stono River southwest of Charles Town. Wielding guns and other weapons, they killed several planter families and marched south, beating drums and loudly inviting other slaves to join them in their plan to flee to Spanish-held Florida.

By late Sunday afternoon, a white militia had surrounded the group of escaping slaves. The two sides clashed, and many slaves died in the fighting. Those captured were executed. Despite the rebellion’s failure, it sent a chill through many Southern colonists and led to the tightening of harsh slave laws already in place. However, slave rebellions continued into the 1800s.

Despite the severe punishment that escape attempts brought, a number of slaves tried to run away. The runaway notices published in the various newspapers throughout Virginia show that from 1736 to 1801, at least 1,279 enslaved men and women in that state took to flight. Many who succeeded in running away from their masters found refuge with Native American tribes, and marriage between runaway slaves and Native Americans was common.

As the Southern colonies grew, they became ever more dependent on the use of African slavery. This was not the case in the Northern colonies, due mainly to an economy driven by commerce rather than agriculture. This economic distinction spurred the North to develop in ways that differed greatly from the South.



SECTION  
**2**

**ASSESSMENT**

**1. TERMS & NAMES** For each term or name, write a sentence explaining its significance.

- cash crop
- slave

- triangular trade
- middle passage

- Stono Rebellion

**MAIN IDEA**

**2. TAKING NOTES**

Fill in a chart like the one below to show the social order of Southern society. In the tiers, name and describe the different social classes, ranging from most powerful at the top to least powerful at the bottom.

1.	planters
2.	
3.	
4.	
5.	

**CRITICAL THINKING**

**3. DRAWING CONCLUSIONS**

Why were so many enslaved Africans brought to the Southern colonies? **Think About:**

- why Native Americans were not used instead
- why Europeans were not used instead
- the cash crops of the South
- the triangular trade

**4. ANALYZING PRIMARY SOURCES**

The ad shown above is from a Virginia newspaper of the 1730s. What does this ad reveal about the brutality of the slave system?

**5. ANALYZING CAUSES**

Why did fewer cities develop in the South during the 1700s? Use evidence from the text to support your response.