

## Life in the American Colonies

### Lesson 1 Colonial Economy

#### ESSENTIAL QUESTION

*How does geography influence the way people live?*

#### GUIDING QUESTIONS

1. *How did the economic activity of the three regions reflect their geography?*
2. *Why were enslaved Africans brought to the colonies?*

#### Terms to Know

**subsistence farming** producing just enough to meet immediate needs

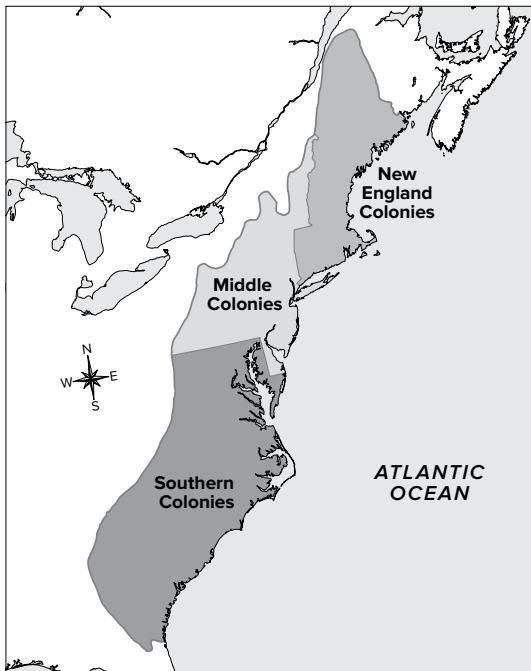
**cash crop** a crop that can be sold easily in markets

**diversity** variety, such as of ethnic or national groups

**triangular trade** trade route between three destinations, such as Britain, Africa, and America

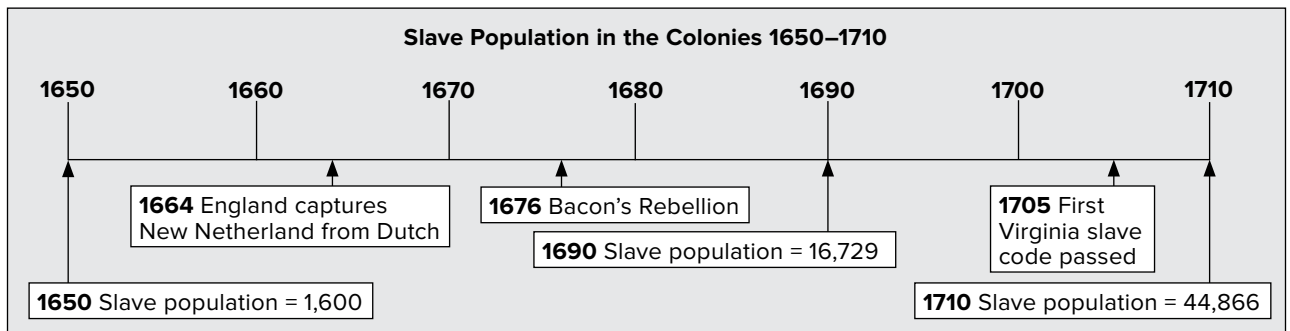
**slave code** rules focusing on the behavior and punishment of enslaved people

### Where in the world?



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### When did it happen?



**Life in the American Colonies**

**Lesson 1 Colonial Economy, *Continued***

**Making a Living in the Colonies**

In Colonial America, most colonists were farmers or had a business linked to farming. For example, a farmer who grew wheat would need someone to mill (grind) the wheat into flour. In each region, the colonists learned how to best use the climate and land.

In New England, winters were long. The soil was poor and rocky. This made large-scale farming difficult for the colonists. Instead, farmers practiced **subsistence farming**. This means that they grew only enough crops to feed their families. They did not have crops to sell or trade. On these farms, the whole family worked—milking cows, planting and picking crops, and so forth.

New England also had many small businesses, like mills for grinding grain and sawing lumber. In large towns, blacksmiths, shoemakers, and others set up businesses.

Building ships and shipping were important industries in New England. The wood needed for shipbuilding came from forests in the region. Ships sailed from coastal cities to other colonies and to other parts of the world. Fishing and whaling were also important industries in New England.

In the Middle Colonies, the soil and climate were very good for farming. The soil was richer and the climate milder than in New England. Farmers were able to plant larger areas and grew more crops. In New York and Pennsylvania, farmers grew large amounts of wheat and other **cash crops**. These were crops that could be sold easily in the colonies and overseas. Farmers sent their wheat and livestock (like sheep and pigs) to New York City and Philadelphia to be shipped to other places. These cities became busy ports.

Like the New England Colonies, the Middle Colonies also had industries. Some were home-based crafts like carpentry and flour making. Others were larger businesses like lumber (wood) mills and mining.

Many German, Dutch, Swedish, and other non-English settlers came to the Middle Colonies. They brought different ways of farming. They also brought cultural **diversity**, or variety, to the Middle Colonies. This diversity did not exist in New England.

The Southern Colonies also had rich soil and a warm climate. There was not much industry in the region. Most Southern colonists were farmers. They could plant large areas and produce large cash crops. London merchants helped them sell these crops.



**Explaining**

1. Why did New England farmers practice subsistence farming?

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**Mark the Text**

2. Underline in the text two small businesses and two important industries in New England.



**Contrasting**

3. How did farms in the Middle Colonies differ from those in the New England Colonies?

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**Defining**

4. What are *cash crops*?

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## Life in the American Colonies

### Lesson 1 Colonial Economy, *Continued*

#### **Contrasting**

5. How were plantations in the Southern Colonies different from small farms?

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#### **Reading Check**

6. Why was agriculture so important to the economy of the Southern Colonies?

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#### **Mark the Text**

7. Circle in the text two examples of important cash crops grown in the Southern Colonies.

#### **Defining**

8. What was the Middle Passage?

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Large farms, called plantations, were often located along rivers. This made it easier to ship crops to market by boat. Most large plantations were near the coast. Plantations were very large, almost like small villages.

In the hills and forests of the Southern Colonies, smaller farms grew corn and tobacco. There were many more small farms than there were plantations. Even so, the plantation owners had more money and more power. They controlled the economy and politics in the Southern Colonies.

Tobacco was the main crop in Maryland and Virginia. Many workers were needed for growing tobacco and preparing it for sale. Southern farmers began using enslaved Africans.

The main cash crop in South Carolina and Georgia was rice. Most Europeans did not know how to grow rice. They relied on the knowledge of enslaved Africans who had lived in the rice growing regions of West Africa. Enslaved Africans often did the planting, processing, and packaging of the rice. Growing rice was harder and more dangerous than raising other crops, such as tobacco. Enslaved workers had to stand knee-deep in mud with no protection from the blazing sun, animals, or insects.

### The Growth of Slavery

There was slavery in West Africa before the Europeans came to the Americas. Some West African kingdoms enslaved people that they defeated in wars. Many were forced to work in mines or farm fields.

In the colonies, many plantation owners wanted to use enslaved Africans. West African slave traders began shipping enslaved people to America on ships. Slave ships traveled from Europe to West Africa to buy or trade for slaves. Next, the ships went to the Americas. Here the Europeans sold or traded the enslaved Africans. Finally, the ships returned to Europe filled with trade goods. This three-sided route (shaped like a triangle) was called the **triangular trade**. The second, or middle, part across the ocean from West Africa was called the “Middle Passage.”

Many Africans died during the Middle Passage. Conditions on the ships were terrible. Many people were often chained together. They could hardly sit or stand. They had little food or water. If they became sick or died, they might be thrown into the sea. If they refused to eat, they would be whipped.

**Life in the American Colonies**

**Lesson 1 Colonial Economy, *Continued***

When the slave ships reached American ports, plantation owners bought the survivors. Slave owners often split up families by selling a husband, wife, or child to another slave owner. Many colonies had **slave codes**. These were rules about the behavior and punishment of enslaved people. Some codes did not allow enslaved people to learn to read or write. The codes set up harsh punishments for people who tried to run away.

On the plantations, some enslaved Africans worked in the houses, but most worked in the fields. Many suffered great cruelty. Owners of large plantations hired bosses to keep the enslaved Africans working hard. A few learned trades, like weaving. Sometimes they set up shops and shared the money they made with the slaveholders. In this way, some earned enough money to buy their freedom.

In the colonies, there were also people who were against slavery. They believed no human had the right to own another. Puritans, Quakers, and Mennonites were among those with this point of view.

//////////////////// Glue Foldable here //////////////////////

**Check for Understanding**

**Why were New England farmers unable to grow cash crops?**

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**Why were enslaved Africans brought to the colonies?**

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**Vocabulary**

9. What is a set of rules that says how enslaved people should behave and be punished?

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**Reading Check**

10. What role did enslaved Africans play in the economy of the Southern Colonies?

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11. Use a two-tab Foldable and place it along the dotted line to cover Check for Understanding. Label the two tabs *Geography* and *Plantations*. Recall and describe how geography led to the development of the large plantations and then describe how the plantations were run. Use the Foldable to help answer Check for Understanding.