

## The Search for Cheap Labor

**KEY QUESTION** Why did planters turn to slavery?

In the early Southern Colonies, there were few Africans, either enslaved or free. In 1665, fewer than 500 Africans had been brought into Virginia. At that time, African and European indentured servants worked in the fields together.

In the 1660s, the labor system began to change as indentured white servants left the plantations. Their terms of service were finished, and many moved west in order to buy their own farms. At the same time, fewer European laborers were emigrating to the Southern Colonies. Landowners had to find another source of labor.

**Planters Turn to Slavery** At first planters tried to enslave Native Americans. But many Native Americans either died of diseases brought by Europeans or were able to escape into the forests that they knew so well.

To meet their labor needs, the planters turned to enslaved Africans. As a result, the enslaved population grew rapidly. By 1750, there were over 235,000 enslaved Africans in America. About 68 percent lived in the Southern Colonies. By 1750 enslaved Africans made up about 40 percent of the South's population.

As the slave population increased, laws were passed to define slavery and to control the growing numbers of people being held against their will. Local militia patrolled the countryside to check that any traveling Africans were carrying passes. Slave quarters were checked regularly for weapons.

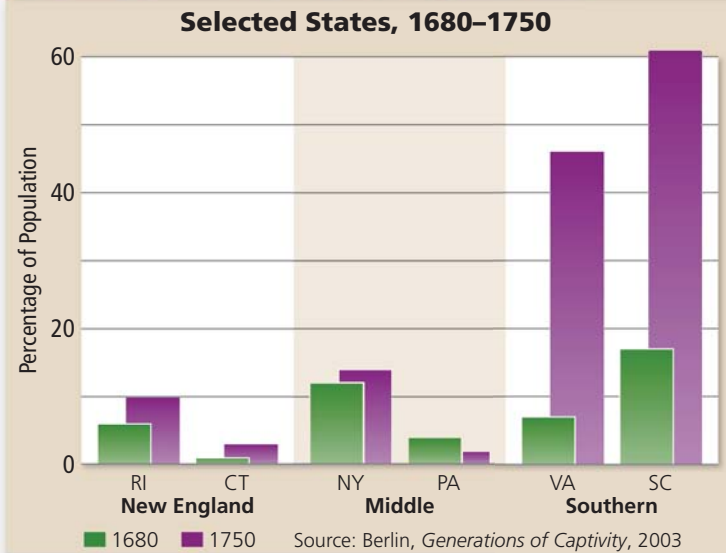
**Living in Slavery** On large Southern plantations, slaves usually toiled in groups of about 20 to 25 under the supervision of **overseers**. Overseers were people who watched over and directed the work of others. Enslaved people performed strenuous and exhausting work, often for 15 hours a day at the peak of the harvest season. If slaves did not appear to be doing their full share of work, they were often whipped by the overseer. If they defied their masters, they could be tortured or mutilated.

Enslaved people usually lived in small one-room cabins with straw for bedding. For a week's food, a slave might receive only around a quarter bushel of cornmeal and around 3 pounds of pork. Some planters allowed their slaves to raise their own food.

In spite of the brutal living conditions, Africans preserved many customs and beliefs from their homelands. These included music, dances, stories, and, for a time, African religions—including Islam. African kinship customs became the basis of African-American family culture.

**CAUSES AND EFFECTS** Explain why planters turned to slavery.

## COMPARING *Slave Populations*



**CRITICAL VIEWING Analyze Charts** What percentage of the population was enslaved in the South in 1710?