

CH 03 PRIMARY SOURCE EXERCISE - INTRODUCTION

FOCUS QUESTION 5. How did patterns of class and gender roles change in eighteenth-century America?

In the history of British North America in the 1600s and 1700s, the topics of immigration and systems of coercive and unfree labor occupy center stage. The two documents provided in this exercise illuminate the complicated lives that immigrants and indentured servants led in the colonies. The documents also reveal the viewpoints of native-born British Americans towards European and African newcomers, and the sentiment of indentured servants towards the master class of English people.

DOCUMENTS

Document 1 is a "Letter by a female indentured servant" written in September of 1756. A young English girl held as an indentured servant in Baltimore, Maryland, writes a letter to people in England. The letter represents one of thousands of letters written by young English servants living a daily life of difficulty in the British North American colonies. The letter serves as a window into the conditions experienced by indentured servants.

Document 2 is a letter written by Benjamin Franklin, commenting on the increase of German immigrants moving into Pennsylvania in the mid-1700s. Franklin's letter provides insights into the biases of Franklin (and by implication, other English colonists) toward immigrants, the social conditions that immigrants faced, and the new communities that immigrants created in the colonies.

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Read chapter 3 of the textbook, with special attention to Full pp. 118–124; Seagull pp. 123-130.
2. Read Document 1, "Letter by a female indentured servant," September 22, 1756.
3. Read Document 2, Benjamin Franklin's "Observations concerning the increase of mankind," 1751.
4. Answer the questions that follow.

DOCUMENT 1

From "Letter by a female indentured servant." September 22, 1756.

Honored Father,

My being forever banished from your sight, will I hope pardon the boldness I now take of troubling you with these. My long silence has been purely owing to my undutifulness to you, and well knowing I had offended in the highest degree, put a tie on my tongue and pen, for fear I should be extinct from your good graces and add a further trouble to you. . . .

O Dear Father, believe what I am going to relate the words of truth and sincerity and balance my former bad conduct [to] my sufferings here, and then I am sure you'll pity your distressed daughter. What we unfortunate English people suffer here is beyond the probability of you in England to conceive. Let it suffice that I am one of the unhappy number, am toiling almost day and night, and very often in the horse's drudgery, . . . and then tied up and whipped to that degree that you now serve an animal. Scarce any thing but Indian corn and salt to eat and that even begrudged nay many Negroes are better used, almost naked no shoes nor stockings to wear, and the comfort after slaving during master's pleasure, what rest we can get is to wrap ourselves up in a blanket and lie upon the ground. This is the deplorable condition your poor Betty endures, and now I beg if you have any bowels of compassion left show it by sending me some relief. Clothing is the principal thing wanting, which if you should condescend to, may easily send them to me by any of the ships bound to Baltimore town, Patapsco River, Maryland. And give me leave to conclude in duty to you and uncles and aunts, and respect to all friends. . . .

Elizabeth Sprigs.

SOURCE: Elizabeth Sprigs to John Spyer, September 22, 1756, in Isabel M. Calder, Colonial Captivities, Marches and Journeys (New York, 1935), pp. 151–52.

DOCUMENT 2

Benjamin Franklin's "Observations concerning the increase of mankind," 1751.

Why should the Palatine [German] boors be suffered to swarm into our settlements, and by herding together establish their language and manners to the exclusion of ours? Why should Pennsylvania, founded by the English, become a Colony of Aliens, who will shortly be so numerous as to Germanize us instead of our Anglifying them,

and will never adopt our language or customs, any more than they can acquire our complexion?

Which leads me to add one remark: That the number of purely white people in the world is proportionably very small. All Africa is black or tawny. Asia chiefly tawny. America (exclusive of the newcomers) wholly so. And in Europe, the Spaniards, Italians, French, Russians and Swedes, are generally of what we call a swarthy complexion; as are the Germans also, the Saxons only excepted, who with the English, make the principal body of white people on the face of the earth. I could wish their numbers were increased. And while we are, as I may call it, scouring our planet, by clearing America of woods, and so making this side of our globe reflect a brighter light to the eyes of inhabitants in Mars or Venus, why should we . . . darken its people? Why increase the sons of Africa, by planting them in America, where we have so fair an opportunity, by excluding all Blacks and Tawneys, of increasing the lovely White and Red? But perhaps I am partial to the complexion of my country, for such kind of partiality is natural to mankind.

SOURCE: "Observations Concerning the Increase of Mankind, 1751," Founders Online, National Archives, last modified June 13, 2018, <http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Franklin/01-04-02-0080>. [Original source: The Papers of Benjamin Franklin, vol. 4, July 1, 1750, through June 30, 1753, ed. Leonard W. Labaree. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1961, pp. 225–234.] Website: <http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Franklin/01-04-02-0080>