

Table 2.3 African Migrants through the Slave Trade, Exported, and Imported by Region of Destination

	1450–1600	1601–1700	1701–1810	1811–1870	Total
Exported from Africa	367,000	1,868,000	6,133,000	3,330,000	11,698,000
Total arrived at market	274,900	1,341,100	6,051,700	1,898,400	9,566,100
British North America			348,000	51,000	399,000
Spanish America	75,000	292,500	578,600	606,000	1,552,100
British Caribbean		263,700	1,401,300		1,665,000
French Caribbean		155,800	1,348,400	96,000	1,600,200
Dutch Caribbean		40,000	460,000		500,000
Danish Caribbean		4,000	24,000		28,000
Brazil	50,000	560,000	1,891,400	1,145,400	3,646,800
Old World	149,900	25,100			175,000

Sources: Philip D. Curtin, *The African Slave Trade: A Census* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1969), 268; Paul E. Lovejoy, "The Volume of the Atlantic Slave Trade: A Synthesis," *Journal of African History*, 23 (1982), 473–500. See also David Northrup, ed., *The Atlantic Slave Trade* (Lexington, MA: Heath, 1994); Herbert S. Klein, *The Atlantic Slave Trade* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999). James A. Rawley raised Curtin's estimates of imports about 16 percent, thus:

Region or Country	Curtin est.	Rawley est.
British North America	399,000	523,000
Spanish America	1,552,100	1,687,000
British Caribbean	1,665,000	2,443,000
French Caribbean	1,500,200	1,655,000
Dutch Caribbean	500,000	500,000
Danish Caribbean	28,000	50,000
Brazil	3,646,800	4,190,000
Old World	175,000	297,000
Total	9,566,100	11,345,000

James A. Rawley, *The Transatlantic Slave Trade* (New York: Norton, 1981), 428.

Table 2.4 Estimated Immigration to British North America by Race, 1620–1780

Years	European Migrants	African Migrants	Total Migrants
1620–1660	7,000		7,000
1660–1680	60,000	5,000	65,000
1680–1700	35,000	15,000	50,000
Total 1620–1700	102,000	20,000	122,000
1700–1720	32,000	37,000	69,000
1720–1740	70,000	72,000	142,000
1740–1760	35,000	100,000	135,000
1760–1780	67,000	86,000	153,000
Total 1700–1780	204,000	295,000	499,000
Grand Total	306,000	315,000	621,000

Sources: These numbers were taken mainly from the exhibit, "The Peopling of America," at the Ellis Island Immigration Museum, New York Harbor (viewed October 28, 2003); listed consultants: Russell R. Menard and Henry A. Gemery. The numbers here are based on my estimates of the numbers displayed in three-dimensional bar graph form. Gemery and Menard's estimates for Africans are lower than several other demographers'. Accordingly, I have supplemented them with information from Philip D. Curtin, *The Atlantic Slave Trade: A Census* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1969), 140. See also Henry A. Gemery, "Emigration from the British Isles to the New World, 1630–1700: Inferences from Colonial Populations," *Research in Economic History*, 5 (1980), 179–231; Gemery, "European Emigration to North America, 1700–1820: Numbers and Quasi-Numbers," *Perspectives in American History*, New Series, 1 (1984), 283–343; Gemery, "The White Population of the Colonial United States, 1607–1790," in *A Population History of North America*, Michael R. Haines and Richard H. Steckel, Eds., (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 143–190; Philip D. Curtin, *The Atlantic Slave Trade: A Census* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1969), 140; Paul E. Lovejoy, "The Volume of the Atlantic Slave Trade: A Synthesis," *Journal of African History*, 23 (1982), 473–501; Joseph Inikori and Stanley L. Engerman, Eds., *The Atlantic Slave Trade* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1992); James A. Rawley, *The Transatlantic Slave Trade* (New York: Norton, 1981), 167; Michael A. Gomez, *Exchanging Our Country Marks: The Transformation of African Identities in the Colonial and Antebellum South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 20.

pick out those suitable for the purposes for which they require them. Then they negotiate with them as to the length of the period for which they will go into service in order to pay off their passage, the whole amount of which they generally still owe. When an agreement has been reached, adult persons by written contract bind themselves to serve for three, four, five, or six years, according to their health and age. The very young, between the ages of ten and fifteen, have to serve until they are twenty-one, however.

Many parents in order to pay their fares in this way and get off the ship must barter and sell their children as if they were cattle. Since the fathers and mothers often do not know where or to what masters their children are to be sent, it frequently happens that after leaving the vessel, parents and children do not see each other for years on end, or even for the rest of their lives.

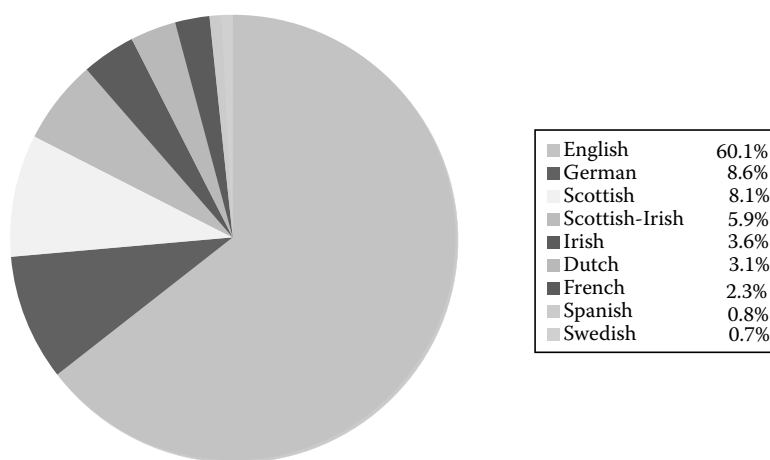


Figure 2.10 Varieties of White people in the 1790 census.

People ... who have children under the age of five, cannot settle their debts by selling them. They must give away these children for nothing to be brought up by strangers; and in return these children must stay in service until they are twenty-one years old.

... When either the husband or the wife has died at sea, having come more than halfway, then the surviving spouse must pay not only his or her fare, but must also pay for or serve out the fare of the deceased.⁶²

Indentured servants were put to every sort of work imaginable: clearing forests, planting and tending crops, working the docks as longshoremen, and body servants to the wealthy. A minority learned skills such as smithy or cooperage, but most just labored with their bodies. The conditions of work were arduous. By the time they had worked off their indenture, many servants were broken wrecks, barely able to work any longer. There was no incentive for masters to treat servants with care or respect, and every incentive for them to work their charges nearly to death. Some colonies passed laws restricting masters from physically abusing indentured servants, but abuses—ranging from overwork to beatings to rape—were common nonetheless. If a servant ran away, extra time was added to his or her term of indenture; in South Carolina, a 1691 law authorized adding a week for every day a servant went missing, and a year for every week absent (in the northern colonies the ratio was usually two to one). Yet White servants did possess some rights; they were not slaves. They could sue and testify in court, though they could not vote. They could not engage in trade, but they could own property. And their children did not inherit their servitude.⁶³ Even so, Mittelberger concluded that his fellow Germans ought not make the immigrant bargain: “So let people stay in their own country and earn their keep honestly for themselves and their families. ... [T]hose people who may let themselves be talked into something and seduced into the voyage by the thieves of human beings are the biggest fools. ... How sad and miserable is the fate of so many.”⁶⁴

From English to American

One of the striking features of seventeenth-century English social life in North America was a gradual but marked transition of identity. English people in America at the dawn of that century had children, and those children had children. Over the course of those three generations, their identity changed: they came to see themselves as, and to call themselves, “Americans.” One can see this in the family of that archetypal American, Benjamin Franklin. Josiah and Anne Franklin came to Boston with three small children, Benjamin’s older siblings, in 1683. They came partly for economic reasons and partly out of a religious motive: Charles II had reclaimed the throne and the Puritan republic had collapsed. Though the Franklins’ migrant motives may have been mixed, their Puritan commitment was not. Among the core Puritan beliefs was the idea that each person had a “calling.” Each had been selected by God for a particular vocation, and it was each person’s duty to pursue that vocation with zeal. Anne and Josiah had several children, and after Anne died Josiah had several more with his second wife Abiah. The last boy was Benjamin, born in 1706, almost a generation younger than his oldest siblings. By the time the young Franklin had lived out his long life and finished his distinguished career, he had helped create not only an American identity through his writings and his publishing, but a separate American nation. Franklin was a typical second-generation child of immigrants. When he ran away from his family at age seventeen and took off for Philadelphia, he began a rebellion against the immigrant generation and a transformation of identity and culture. Where his parents saw themselves as English people in America, Benjamin came to see himself as an American with English origins and ties. And where they believed deeply in the doctrine of the calling—following God with all one’s heart in pursuing one’s vocation—in Benjamin that idea degenerated to a secular ideology of working hard for work’s own sake, and for the pecuniary rewards that would result. Identity was changing, culture was changing, generation by generation. It was not just Franklin, it was people throughout the colonies. As Richard Bushman put it, “Sometime between 1690 and 1765 Connecticut Puritans became Yankees.”⁶⁵

For all that the grandchildren of English immigrants began to call themselves “Americans,” we must remember that they were not the only Americans. There were German Americans, Ulstermen, other European Americans, African Americans, and Native Americans of many tribes (Figure 2.11). Yet there was already in eighteenth-century America an Anglo-American core identity to the Euro-American racial formation that would later emerge.

Out of Africa

David Brion Davis, eminent historian of slavery both in the United States and throughout the world, wrote that “racial slavery and its consequences [are] the basic reality, the grim and irrepressible theme governing the settlement of the Western hemisphere and the emergence of a government and society in the United States that white people have called ‘free.’”⁶⁶ Perhaps Davis erred in ignoring that other grim and irrepressible reality, genocide against Native peoples, but he is not wholly off the mark. These two facts—enslavement of Africans and destruction of the Native

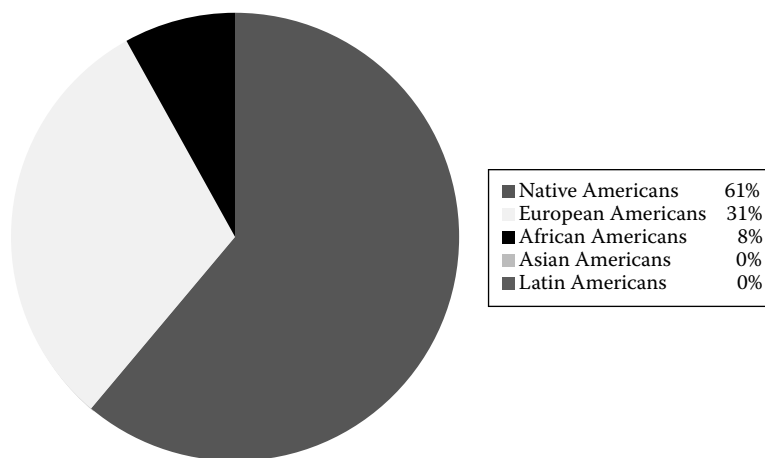


Figure 2.11 Population in 1750 of the territory that would become the United States 3 million people.

peoples of the United States—are the two founding facts of American history and culture. They are surely both central facts in the story of American immigration.

African slaves were immigrants. They came under brutal compulsion. But, as we shall see, they went through many of the same cultural processes of adaptation, accommodation, culture change, and identity transformation as did migrants who were not compelled. Only they were not transformed from English people into Americans; rather, they lost their various African ethnic identities and became Negroes. This was the first fully realized panethnic formation in American history.⁶⁷

To Become a Slave

Picture yourself a child in a West African village, in the rich, populous savannah region known as the Sudan (not to be confused with the modern nation that has since taken that name). This territory of farms and city-states stretched across what is now Burkina Faso, the northern parts of Guinea, Ivory Coast, Ghana, Togo, Benin, and Nigeria, and sections of Mali and Niger. Your family is literate and owns a farm. Your parents are working and you are playing on the edge of the village. Someone grabs you, ties a bag over your head, and whisks you away. You never see your family or home again.

Venture Smith was one such child, taken from his home about 1734 at the age of five. Some strangers came to his town and demanded money and slaves from his father, who was a local hereditary political leader. His father fought them while his wives and children hid.

They then came to us in the reeds, and the very first salute I had from them was a violent blow on the back part of the head with the fore part of a gun, and at the same time a grasp round the neck. Then I had a rope put about my neck, as had all the women in the thicket with me, and was immediately led to my father, who was likewise pinioned and haltered for leading. In this condition we were all led to the camp. The women and myself being pretty submissive,

had tolerable treatment from the enemy, while my father was closely interrogated respecting his money which they knew he must have. But as he gave them no account of it, he was instantly cut and pounded on his body with great inhumanity, that he might be induced by the torture he suffered to make the discovery. All this availed not in the least to make him give up his money, but he despised all the tortures which they inflicted, until the continued exercise and increase of torment, obliged him to sink and expire.⁶⁸

You are chained together in a line with others seized from your neighborhood. Children are tied by ropes at the neck (Figure 2.12). Adults are locked into large wooden collars with spikes protruding a foot or more to impede any attempt to run away. You walk for days, sleeping out in the open. Your captors are Africans, but not people whose language or manners you recognize. You come to a town where they sell you to other slavers. The others from your village are sold to one broker and led away north toward the Sahara. You are sold to another and you keep marching, chained together with other slaves you have not seen before. After several weeks of walking through strange forests you arrive at the largest lake you have ever seen, blue water stretching to the horizon. There your captors throw you into a big cage with dozens of other people. You know no one, but you can understand and talk with a few people. The others are utterly foreign. All are scared.

Olaudah Equiano was another little boy in that situation, seized in 1756, who was traded from hand to hand and walked for months until he reached the Bight of Benin:

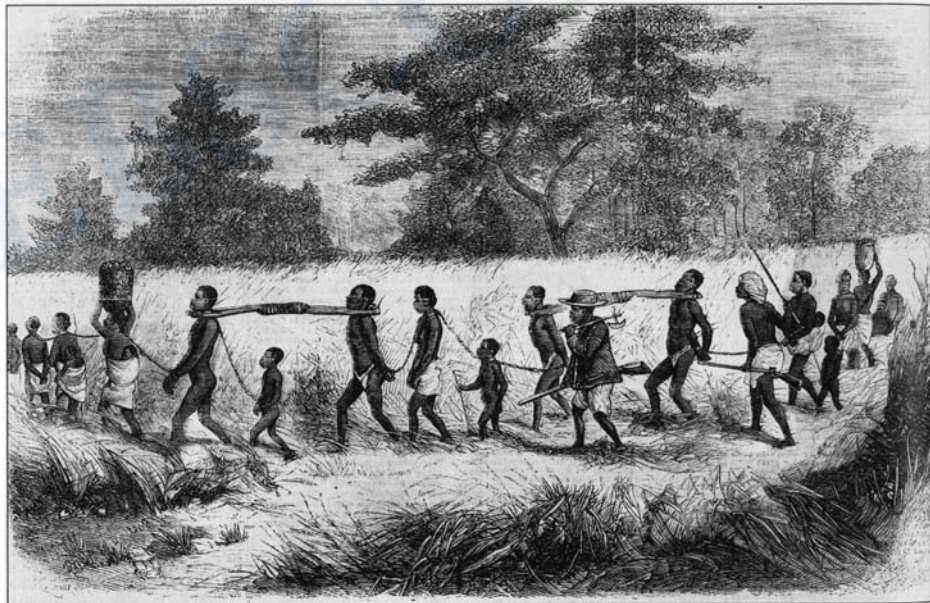


Figure 2.12 Slave coffle.

All the nations and people I had hitherto passed through, resembled our own in their manners, customs, and language; but I came at length to a country, the inhabitants of which differed from us in all those particulars. ...

The first object which saluted my eyes when I arrived on the coast was the sea, and a slave ship, which was then riding at anchor, and waiting for its cargo. These filled me with astonishment, which was soon converted into terror, when I was carried on board I was immediately handled, and tossed up, to see if I were sound, by some of the crew; and I was now persuaded that I had got into a world of bad spirits, and that they were going to kill me. Their complexions, too, differing so much from ours, their long hair, and the language they spoke (which was very different from any I had ever heard), united to confirm me in this belief. ... When I looked round the ship too, and saw a large furnace of copper boiling, and a multitude of black people of every description chained together, every one of their countenances expressing dejection and sorrow, I no longer doubted of my fate; and quite overpowered with horror and anguish, I fell motionless on the deck and fainted. When I recovered a little, I found some black people about me, who I believed were some of those who had brought me on board, and had been receiving their pay; they talked to me in order to cheer me, but all in vain. I asked them if we were not to be eaten by those white men with horrible looks, red faces, and long hair. They told me I was not. ...

I was soon put down under the decks, and there I received such a salutation in my nostrils as I had never experienced in my life: so that, with the loathsomeness of the stench, and crying together, I became so sick and low that I was not able to eat, nor had I the least desire to taste anything. I now wished for the last friend, death, to relieve me; but soon, to my grief, two of the white men offered me eatables; and, on my refusing to eat, one of them held me fast by the hands, and laid me across, I think the windlass, and tied my feet, while the other flogged me severely. I had never experienced anything of this kind before, and, although not being used to the water, I naturally feared that element the first time I saw it, yet, nevertheless, could I have got over the nettings, I would have jumped over the side, but I could not; and besides, the crew used to watch us very closely who were not chained down to the decks, lest we should leap into the water; and I have seen some of these poor African prisoners most severely cut, for attempting to do so, and hourly whipped for not eating.⁶⁹

Thus you begin your journey across the Middle Passage. A strange, translucent creature with long, straight hair comes to the place you are caged, pokes your flesh, and examines your gums. You are stripped naked and your body parts are examined. Money changes hands, you are branded with a hot iron and led away in chains along with most of the others who were in the cage. Placed in a small boat with half a dozen others, you are rowed out to a ship at anchor. You fear that these pale people are going to eat you.

You are taken into the hold and chained in place. You are made to lie on one of three layers of wooden platforms, with other slaves above, below, and alongside

(Figure 2.13). There is only a small clearance between the platforms, so you cannot sit up. You are chained to the people on either side of you, so if you want to turn over, they must turn, too. The ship weighs anchor. You are seasick and vomit and soil yourself. When the weather is good, you are let out on deck twice a day in small, chained groups and carefully guarded while you eat. Then you are returned to the hold. Light barely filters down from the hatch in good weather. If it is stormy, you are in blackness for days on end amid the smells and groans of your fellow captives. Food is passed to you in a bucket, and you defecate the same way. The person on your left dies of dysentery. You are chained to a corpse for several days before the crew takes the body away.

Slave traders were of two minds as to how best to accommodate their human cargo. Advocates of loose packing preferred to bring smaller numbers of slaves on each vessel, feed them better and exercise them, on the theory that more would survive the journey and they would be in better shape on arrival in the Americas, hence they would each command a higher price and the lot would mean a solid profit for the slaver. Tight packers argued it was more efficient to cram as many people as possible into the hold of the ship and throw overboard those who died along the way. Records indicate that 15 to 20 percent of those who boarded ship did not make it to market in the Americas. That was just an average: the mortality rate was higher in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries and then declined over the later centuries as slavers got better at their job.

After weeks at sea, they let you out on deck, chained together in a small group. Exercise and better food make you stronger and, you will learn, more marketable. The ship takes you first to Barbados, an island in the Caribbean. There you are stripped, exhibited, poked, measured, fondled, sold, and transshipped.

Equiano reported:

At last we came in sight of the island of Barbados ... we plainly saw the harbor, and other ships of different kinds and sizes, and we soon anchored amongst them, off Bridgetown. Many merchants and planters now came on board. ... They put us in separate parcels, and examined us attentively. ... We thought by this, we should be eaten by these ugly men, as they appeared to us; and, when soon after we were all put down under the deck again, there was much dread and trembling among us, and nothing but bitter cries to be heard all the night from these apprehensions, insomuch, that at last the white people got some

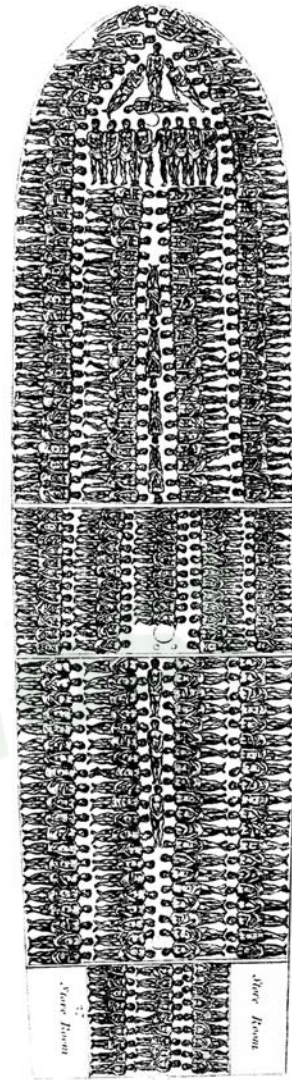


Figure 2.13 Slave ship.

old slaves from the land to pacify us. They told us we were not to be eaten, but to work, and were soon to go on land, where we should see many of our country people. This report eased us much. And sure enough, soon after we were landed, there came to us Africans of all languages. ...

On a signal given (as the beat of a drum), the buyers rush at once into the yard where the slaves are confined, and make choice of that parcel they like best. The noise and clamor with which this is attended, and the eagerness visible in the countenances of the buyers, serve not a little to increase the apprehension of terrified Africans. ... In this manner, without scruple, are relations and friends separated, most of them never to see each other again.⁷⁰

Barbados, Jamaica, and other transshipment points in the Caribbean marked a sharp division of life fortunes for enslaved Africans. By far the majority of male slaves were sent to work in Brazil and the Caribbean. The largest component of a slave's price was the cost of transporting her or him. Because of closer proximity to Africa, it was more efficient in Latin America and the Caribbean to import mainly male workers, work them hard, wear them out, and then bring some more over from Africa. Thus the slave trade brought over more people to Brazil and the Caribbean than to North America. Smaller numbers of slaves were shipped to North America, and a higher percentage of them were women. They were brought, if not to form families, then at least to breed more slaves. This does not mean that the slave regime was gentler in North America nor more humane, just that the economics worked out differently.

Equiano failed to attract a buyer in Barbados and so was shipped on to Virginia:

We were landed up a river a good way from the sea, about Virginia county, where we saw few or none of our native Africans, and not one who could talk to me. I was a few weeks weeding grass and gathering stones in a plantation; and at last all my companions were distributed different ways, and only myself was left. I was now exceedingly miserable, and thought myself worse off than any of the rest of my companions, for they could talk to each other, but I had no person to speak to that I could understand. I was constantly grieving and pining, and wishing for death rather than anything else.⁷¹

Dimensions and Effects

The European slave trade out of Africa was one of the largest people movements in world history.⁷² The best estimates suggest that at least 11.7 million people were shipped out of Africa in the European-conducted slave trade between 1450 and 1870, and that perhaps 9.6 million of them survived to market.

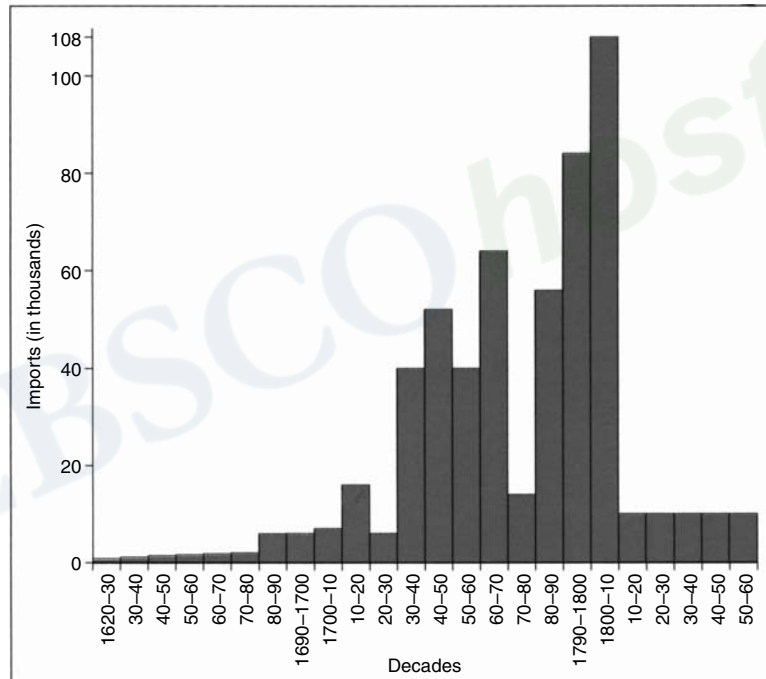
It is worth pointing out that, in terms of absolute numbers, more Africans than Europeans crossed the Atlantic to the Americas until some time in the third decade of the nineteenth century. Table 2.5 shows informed estimates for just those who came to British North America.

Note that, whereas the slave trade to Latin America and the Caribbean was enormous very early, it did not emerge in what would later become the United States

Table 2.5 African Americans as a Percentage of the Combined Black and White Population of the British Colonies, 1660–1780

Year	New England	Middle Colonies	Upper South	Lower South	West Indies
1660	1.7	11.5	3.6	2.0	42.0
1700	1.8	6.8	13.1	17.6	77.7
1740	2.9	7.5	28.3	46.5	88.0
1780	2.0	5.9	38.6	41.2	91.1

Source: John J. McCusker and Russell R. Menard, *The Economy of British America, 1607–1789* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985), 222. I list these as percentages of the “combined Black and White population” because those regions also included Indians, but their numbers were not recorded.

**Figure 2.14** U.S. Imports of slaves per decade, 1620–1860.

until the eighteenth century. But note, too, that far more African migrants than Europeans entered the thirteen colonies between the start of that century and the time of the American Revolution (Figure 2.14).

All these numbers are for those who made it across to the Americas, or who were recorded as having been shipped out of Africa. We have no figures, of course, for those who were smuggled or whose captors kept no records. Likewise, we do not know how many died between their initial capture and taking ship, nor how many

died, were maimed, or rendered homeless by the wars fought to take slaves. Certainly, those numbers must have been enormous. They would probably add many millions to the totals, but we cannot know for sure just how many.

Nor can we measure with any precision the other effects all this had on Africa. As David Northrup put it: "The effects of the slave trade varied widely in Africa. They depended on how long and how much a society was involved, on whether its people were the slave traders or the slaves traded, and on how well a society managed the strains introduced by the trade." Walter Rodney argued that, by the forcible transshipment of millions of human beings and the introduction of an attendant level of violence and civil chaos, "Europe underdeveloped Africa" during the centuries of the slave trade. He contended that, at the start of the slave trade, Europe and Africa were on similar plateaus in terms of population size, infrastructure development, education, health, and other indices of economic and social development. During the period of the slave trade, Europe grew rapidly in all these areas, while Africa stagnated or declined. Rodney attributed Africa's decline to the impact of the slave trade, and credited slave labor with providing much of the capital that later fueled Europe's industrial revolution.⁷³

Rodney may have overestimated the degree to which it was slave labor that formed the capital crucial to fund the European industrial revolution—there was considerable capital formation within Europe as well. But there is no doubt that the European slave trade destabilized numerous societies in West and Central Africa. Settled and prosperous states of the interior fell prey to marauding armies and went into eclipse. They lost a huge portion of their population to death and enslavement. Was it twenty million? Thirty million? We cannot tell. Commerce was interrupted. Kingdoms fell. Small, previously poor states along the coast grew into powerful but unstable, militarized states whose main goal seems to have been to make war on their neighbors, enslave those neighbors, enrich themselves, and avoid being made slaves themselves.

Some may object to calling this the European slave trade. They may say that slavery had long existed in Africa before Europeans arrived on the scene, that the slave catchers and internal slave traders were Africans, that they benefited from the trade, and that European slavers were just latecoming exporters serving an already established African slave system. Yes, there was slavery in Africa, although it looked a good deal more like the personal, family-and-community-connected slavery practiced by Native Americans than it did like gang labor on plantations. Some Africans did indeed prosper as a result of the trade in human lives. But overall, Africa suffered terribly from the European slave trade, and it has not yet recovered. Thus Africa was ushered into a worldwide, capitalist economic system that was beginning to form. It entered on terms of inequality, it became much poorer and less populous relative to Europe, and millions of its people were forced to migrate to the Americas. As the Cheng and Bonacich model described in Chapter 1 suggests, these are linked phenomena.⁷⁴

How "Black" and "Slave" Came to Mean the Same Thing

We have become accustomed to the idea that African-descended people were all slaves, and that slaves were necessarily Black. Yet there is nothing about slavery as a labor system that requires a racial or physical demarcation between slaves and free people. Extensive slave systems existed in ancient China, the Roman Empire, Mesoamerica, and the Middle East without slavery becoming associated with a particular

group marked by ethnicity or physical features. But in North America, by about 1700, it was widely assumed that all slaves would be African in origin, and that Black people normally would be slaves.⁷⁵

In the early decades of British involvement in North America, free English wage earners worked alongside European indentured servants, Native people who were paid or coerced, and slaves who were brought from Africa. The people who funded colonies searched for ways to make their investments pay; in the Chesapeake and Carolina they eventually hit upon staple crops (tobacco, rice, and indigo) that they could grow in large quantities for sale in Europe. These crops required gangs of relatively unskilled workers throughout most of the year, so a large, dependable workforce was essential.

Gradually over the second half of the seventeenth century, as the tobacco economy expanded, slavery became the labor system of choice, and Africans became the slaves of choice. This was not a systematic policy decision, but rather the result of countless individual decisions made by employers at the local level. The demand for labor was so great as the economy expanded rapidly, that free wage laborers could demand a premium and could not be counted on to stay in one place. European indentured servants were not much better. They found it easy to run away from their masters and sell their labor with no questions asked, or to squat on land in the borderlands between European territory and Indian territory. And especially after Bacon's Rebellion, free Whites spelled trouble in the minds of Virginia's leaders. So an element of compulsion came to seem essential. The economic success of slavery throughout Latin America and the Caribbean offered employers an attractive alternate model.

Some Europeans had scruples about enslaving other Christians; enslavement of Turks and other non-Christians captured in war had long been viewed as acceptable in Europe, although it was not practiced on a large scale. The British tried enslaving Native Americans, and for a time there was a brisk trade in Indian slaves, with some tribes like the Creeks and Yamasee growing strong by attacking and selling their neighbors. But Native peoples were at home in North America and could run away easily enough. Moreover, close contact with Europeans caused Indian slaves to die off from European diseases at rates that some employers found unaffordable. Finally, British colonists feared Indian tribes would retaliate with raids against European towns and farms. Tens of thousands of Indians were enslaved, but most of them were transshipped to British colonies in the Caribbean where they had fewer deficiencies as slaves. Deportation was a means of genocide, as those Indians quickly were worked to death in the islands.⁷⁶

In all these regards, Africans made better slaves for the British colonies in North America. Except for a very few from European-colonized areas like Angola, they were "heathen"—that is, non-Christians. As natives of the Old World, they had some immunities to European diseases such as smallpox and cholera that killed Indians in large numbers. As natives of the tropics, they could bear the climate of the Carolina Low Country better than Europeans, and some West Africans had experience with gang labor. They looked very different from Europeans, so they could not run away and easily blend into the European-descended population. If they ran to the frontier, then they would stand out among the Native population. They could not call on Native tribes to make war on their behalf.

These were all parts of the calculus, but what tipped the balance decisively in favor of African slavery was the fact that English people felt less guilty enslaving

Africans than they did enslaving other peoples. They were not Christian brothers and sisters. Long before English people first met Africans, the former group associated the color black with evil, ugliness, sin, and duplicity, just as they associated the color white with beauty, righteousness, purity, honesty, and godliness. Many English people believed that God in the Old Testament had placed a curse on Ham, one of the sons of Noah. People from south of the Sahara had been identified as Hamitic peoples, and in this era many Whites came to believe that slavery was the natural result of God's ancient curse. Finally, English people associated Africans with the animal world. They were frankly amazed by the animals that they found in Africa, especially the great apes. They seem not to have been able to distinguish completely between African apes and African people, and they entertained themselves with lurid descriptions of supposed physical and temperamental similarities between the two, even with tales of interspecies mating. So where English people saw Indians as savage human beings, they saw Africans as beasts.

Of course, not every African in America was a slave. In the early decades, quite a number seem to have achieved freedom after a period of bondage, not unlike White indentured servants. There were always some free people of African descent, and there was a larger amount of social mixing between Black and White free workers on terms of rough social equality in the colonial era than at any time until the last third of the twentieth century.⁷⁷

Virginia laws began to recognize permanent, inherited slave status for African immigrant workers by the 1660s. The decision was a racial one, not mitigated by religion or any other factor. Laws explicitly indicated that conversion to Christianity was not sufficient to alter slave status. By 1705, the identification of Africanity and slavery was complete. Robert Beverley visited Virginia that year and described the situation:

Their Servants they distinguish by the Names of Slaves for Life, and Servants for a time.

Slaves are the Negroes, and their Posterity, following the Condition of the Mother, according to the Maxim, *partus sequitur ventrem*. They are call'd Slaves, in Respect of the Time of their Servitude, because it is for Life. Servants, are those which serve only for a few Years. ... The Male-Servants, and Slaves of both Sexes, are employed together in tilling and manuring the Ground, in sowing and planting Tobacco. ... Sufficient Distinction is also made between the Female-Servants, and Slaves; for a white Woman is rarely or never put to work in the Ground ... Whereas on the other hand, it is a common thing to work a Woman Slave out of Doors.⁷⁸

By the dawn of the eighteenth century, then, the idea was firmly in place that Africans were slaves, slaves were Africans, and European-descended people were something other than either.

Variations on a Theme

The situation for African slaves was not the same everywhere in British North America. African-descended people lived in all the colonies, but their numbers were very small in the northern colonies. In 1770, 14,892 slaves lived in New England,

between New Hampshire and Connecticut. Never more than 2 or 3 percent of the total population of that region, African Americans were mainly sailors, longshoremen, and household servants. More African Americans were free than slave in New England. There were larger numbers of Blacks in the middle colonies. In 1770, New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania were home to 32,843 slaves. African Americans, slave and free, lived particularly around the cities of New York and Philadelphia, where they worked the docks and as industrial laborers. There was a higher percentage of slaves in those places than there was further north: for example, in Philadelphia in 1775, only 14 percent of the Black population was free and the rest were slaves. Thus, slavery was primarily an urban phenomenon in the northern colonies, African Americans lived mainly in cities there, and the numbers of Black people, slave and free, were relatively small.⁷⁹

The southern colonies had urban Africans, too, but far more of them lived in rural areas. Their numbers were vastly larger in those colonies, and an even higher percentage of them were slaves than in the north. In 1770, 322,854 slaves lived in the Chesapeake, and less than 5 percent of African-descended people in that region were free. African-derived slaves amounted to more than 40 percent of the population of Virginia, and two-fifths of the total slave population of the colonies lived in Virginia. The dominant crop in Virginia was tobacco. A tobacco plantation was usually not the huge affair one imagines from movies, but rather consisted of several parts, or quarters, scattered amid other people's farms. Slaves typically lived in small work groups and worked from dawn to dusk. They were bought in small lots from slave ships that traveled the region's navigable rivers deep into the interior, stopping at each plantation to sell a few souls. So in Virginia the various African ethnicities were mixed together quite early. Slavery dominated the Virginia economy, politics, and social life thoroughly.⁸⁰

Contrast that pattern to the one found in the South Carolina low country. South Carolina got started on slavery later than the Chesapeake, but quickly caught up in percentage terms. By 1770, 92,178 slaves lived in South Carolina and Georgia. Rice was the staple crop, and the low country along the coast was covered with large plantations, each with many slaves. The low country, in fact, had a Black majority. There was more urban slavery in South Carolina because there was more urb: Charleston was the sole port, and slave trading went through that city. Slaves in South Carolina tended to be sold in larger lots, which meant that people from a particular African language or cultural group had a greater chance of living together and maintaining culture and identity from the Old World.

Despite such variations in the numbers of Africans in the population in various places, the percentages who were slaves, and the pattern of slavery, it is important to remember that all Americans were complicit in slavery. Slavery was legally established in all the colonies. The ship captains of Boston, Salem, and Providence made their fortunes in the slave trade. The docks and industries of New York and Philadelphia depended on slave labor, as much as did the plantations of Virginia and South Carolina. It is likewise important to remember that Indians as well as Africans were slaves.

From Igbo and Bambara to Negro

A remarkable transformation took place in America before the end of the eighteenth century. Migrants who had come to the colonies as members of a variety of West and

Table 2.6 Origins of African Migrants to North America, by Region in America 1700–1800 and Percent

<i>African Region of Origin</i>	<i>Chesapeake</i>	<i>South Carolina</i>	<i>Louisiana</i>
Mozambique	4	0	2
West Central Africa (Congo, Angola)	16	40	25
Bight of Biafra	38	7	8
Bight of Benin	0	3	25
Gold Coast	16	9	2
Upper Guinea	11	18	6
Senegambia	15	23	32

Source: Helen Hornbeck Tanner, *The Settling of North America* (New York: Macmillan, 1995), 50.

West Central African ethnic groups found themselves treated, not as Igbo or Hausa or Fon, but as Black and slave. By the time their grandchildren came of age, they had largely ceased to identify in terms of various African ethnicities, and they had become simply Negroes.⁸¹

The sources of African migration to North America began in the Senegambia region (surrounding Cape Verde), and as time went on, extended down the coast through Upper Guinea, Sierra Leone, the Gold Coast, the Bight of Benin, the Bight of Biafra, and on to Congo, Angola, and eventually Madagascar. People in West and West Central Africa usually reckoned their identities according to family and lineage, village and town. Some seem to have had senses of themselves as belonging to larger ethnic identities, and certainly they marked one another with broader ethnic labels, which were often associated with linguistic differences. The list of all such groups would be very long; among them would be Fon, Asante, Mandinka, Oyo, Fula, Ewe, Yoruba, Ife, Mande, Kong, Nok, Ukwu, Akan, Fante, Bambara, Igbo, Hausa, Ibibio, Ngwa, Efik, Twi, Baule, Ga, Kissi, Kono, Wolof, Coromanti, Temne, Aja, and many more. Precise percentages for these various ethnic groups are not available, but we do know approximately how many African migrants to North America came from which parts of Africa (Table 2.6).

People from the Senegambia region contributed significant percentages of the African population of all three major slave zones in what would become the United States. They, and people from Upper Guinea, were preferred by South Carolina slavers because they brought knowledge of rice cultivation. West Central Africa contributed a large percentage of Carolina and Louisiana slaves. Igbo and other peoples imported from the Bight of Biafra dominated Virginia's slave population.

The transformation from an African ethnic identity to an American Negro identity began even before the slaves took ship. People began their journey into slavery along with others captured in their own home areas. If they came from near the coast, then they might remain with ethnic compatriots and be shipped together. But peoples like the Bambara and Mandinka, who came from the upper reaches of the Niger River, and the Hausa, who hailed from what is now northern Nigeria, were forced to walk hundreds of miles to the sea. On the way they were mixed with people from other ethnic groups. Upon arrival at the shore, they entered the barracoon stage, when they were placed in forts or cages awaiting sale and shipment. There,

they were part of a mixed multitude whose only common characteristic was that they were Black Africans. They were placed in ships, guarded and abused by White people. Michael Gomez wrote about this process:

Africans of varying ethnicities, who had never considered their blackness a source of reflection let alone a principle of unity, became cognizant of this feature perhaps for the first time in their lives. ... A second factor also encouraged a sense of community among those remaining at journey's end: their very survival. They had survived the death angel's Passover only to enter a whiteman-made Hades on Earth. They had witnessed starvation and suicide. They had endured the dizzying days and the sickening nights and somehow remained. They were those who fought and scratched and clawed their way through, yet comforting one another in their collective despair. They had shared what little they had with those who were on the verge. They had made the necessary sacrifices and had extended themselves in so many charitable acts, large and small, none of which has been preserved for posterity. But that they occurred is beyond doubt, for how else could they have emerged from the belly of the great fish?⁸²

The cross-ethnic bonds that united shipmates formed the beginnings of a panethnic African identity that would grow in America.

In South Carolina, ships' cargoes were unloaded wholesale and plantations were large, so some ethnic contingents remained intact. But in Virginia, shipmates were distributed across the countryside. New slaves in both places were seasoned—that is, trained in the ways of being a slave—by those who had undergone the transformation earlier. Among the things they had to do was learn to communicate. Some Africans clung stubbornly to their native languages, but that was possible only if there were others around with whom they could speak and be understood. Quickly slaves developed pidgin languages to communicate among themselves. Whites heard these as merely English poorly performed, but in fact they seem to have been independent inventions, with grammar and syntax drawn from various West African tongues, but using substantial numbers of words borrowed from English. Using this common language—to respond to the master class, to be sure, but mainly among enslaved Africans of various ethnic backgrounds—hastened the identification between all peoples of African ancestry.⁸³

Religion played a critical role in bringing peoples together in the migrant generation and after. Some groups, such as the Bambara who came through the Senegambia and the Hausa who came via the Bight of Biafra, were mostly Muslims. Islam is a universalist religion that recognizes brother- and sisterhood among all adherents. It was easy for Muslim slaves to see themselves as having a common identity with other Muslims who came from different ethnicities and regions. Later, during the first Great Awakening of the mid-1700s, and especially during the Second Great Awakening that swept America from the 1790s through the 1830s, Christianity became a common denominator that bound African-born and African-descended slaves of many ethnic origins in a sense of community and identity. It is significant that by the time of the Second Great Awakening (which affected Whites as well as Blacks) most European-descended Americans had accepted the idea that they could share their religion with slaves without sharing full social brother- and sisterhood

with them. So active acceptance of Christianity did help create common identity among various sorts of African Americans, even while it did not bridge the racial gap.⁸⁴

Africans took spouses and had children in America. Some could find partners who shared their ancestral ethnicity, but many could not. Groups who came from near the African coast were imported in nearly equal numbers of men and women, but for inland groups like the Bambara, slavers imported only half as many women as men.⁸⁵ That meant mixing and culture change at the point of making families. The advent of children carried the process further. They surely knew their ancestry, heard stories of Africa, and saw more African newcomers around them as they grew up. But like the second generation of any immigrant group, they came to have as much identification with the place where they grew up as with the places from which their parents had come. Some spoke African languages and others spoke mainly the pidgin patois of the quarters. Some worshipped in African ways—this seems to have been the longest-lasting feature of African culture in Black America. But gradually, over the course of the first two centuries of African history in America, and over the first two or three generations in any family, identity shifted.

These people were not becoming undifferentiated Americans. The assimilation theorists are just wrong in casting the issues that way. These migrants did not cease to be foreigners and become raceless Americans. Instead, they entered into a panethnic African or Black racial formation. They were no longer Fon or Fula or Ife; they were Negroes. The varieties among the Black populations of different parts of the country—differences in their ethnic and linguistic backgrounds as well as differences in demography, degrees of freedom, and patterns of slavery—made for very different groups of African Americans early on, as different as the different varieties of Europeans or Native Americans by the time of the American Revolution.⁸⁶ But what is striking about the experience of Africans is the degree to which they had, by that point in their history, accepted the common identity that had been thrust upon them.

African American identity was bolstered in the slavery centuries primarily by a common interest. That is how most ethnic groups begin to form. In this case, the common interest was to survive slavery, humiliation, degradation, and desperation, and to carve out for themselves a place in America. Culture was a mixed bag. Some people continued to speak African languages, at least on their own, when they were out of hearing of the master class. Such languages bolstered their individual ethnicities, but did not foster a common African identity as effectively. But most also spoke a pidgin amalgam of several African languages and English. The same was true of religion. Islam and various localized West African religious practices continued. But some of these were transmuted into hybrid, West-African-derived practices such as hoodoo. Meanwhile other slaves adopted Christianity and adapted it to African cosmologies. In these senses—language and religion—a common African American culture had begun to form. As to institutions, again the analysis is mixed. Slavery was a powerful institution that almost all African Americans shared in common at the beginning of the American Revolution, and that affected those who were nominally free, too. But the slave regime had kept other institutions, even the family, from being fully formed and stable enhancements of community and identity.

Merging Peoples, Blending Cultures

The End of an Age

Ethnic dynamics began to change drastically in the British colonies in North America after the middle of the eighteenth century. The in-migration of thousands of African slaves every year continued. There was a brief, dramatic increase of European migrants as well, both English people and a host of others.⁸⁷ But the situation for Native peoples changed abruptly when the French lost the Seven Years' War in 1763. Suddenly the French were removed from the continent and the British claimed everything east of the Mississippi. That left Native peoples, especially the Iroquois Confederation, unable any longer to play off one European power against the other. Iroquois power declined rapidly, Europeans flooded onto Indian lands, and some Native peoples began to look to move westward, away from the encroaching British. The English government tried to avoid conflict between its subjects and Native peoples by declaring the Appalachian crest a line of demarcation between European and Indian, but Europeans swarmed westward in defiance of the prohibition.⁸⁸

At the end of that war, British soldiers may have engaged in germ warfare against Native people. The Ottawa leader Pontiac led resistance to the British after the French had surrendered. Lord Jeffrey Amherst, after whom the Massachusetts city is named, commanded the army that was tasked with putting Pontiac down. Lord Amherst wrote his subordinate, Col. Henry Bouquet, approving a plan to put smallpox-infected blankets where the Ottawa were likely to find them, for the purpose of introducing the disease into their population. Amherst wrote, "Could it not be contrived to send the Small Pox among those disaffected tribes of Indians? We must on this occasion use every stratagem in our power to reduce them. ... [We must] try Every other method that can serve to Extirpate this Execrable Race." It is unclear whether Bouquet's men did in fact pass out infected blankets, although an epidemic devastated the Ottawas a couple of months thereafter.⁸⁹

The era of the Revolution saw the last large surge of slave immigration. One hundred thousand Africans migrated under compulsion to British North America in the period 1740 to 1760; 86,000 between 1760 and 1780; and 92,000 more between 1780 and 1810. Then the trade declined to an estimated 10,000 per decade through the 1850s. That number has to be estimated because no one kept records—because the importation of slaves was formally outlawed in 1808, though enforcement was lax. The U.S. Constitution enshrined slavery as part of the fundamental law of the republic (see Chapter 3). Among its provisions was Article II, Section 9, Paragraph 1, which read: "The migration or importation of such persons as any of the States now existing shall think proper to admit, shall not be prohibited by the Congress prior to the year one thousand eight hundred and eight, but a tax or duty may be imposed on such importation, not exceeding ten dollars for each person." But sentiment built against the slave trade, based in England and in those parts of the United States that had few slaves. In 1807, Congress passed a measure banning importing slaves into the country; the ban took effect on January 1, 1808. Smugglers continued to bring in African slaves in smaller numbers from that time on until the Civil War, but the era of massive African migration to the United States had ended.⁹⁰

Identity: Black, White, and Red

By the era of the Revolution, America's first racial formation was complete. Scores, if not hundreds, of separate African peoples had blended into one panethnic group. Those who were new to the colonies (later states) may have carried the name Mandinka or Yoruba or Fulani in their own minds, but in the eyes of others—Blacks as well as Whites and Indians—they were just Africans or Negroes. The children and grandchildren of earlier generations of slave migrants no longer identified with the individual peoples of their ancestors, but instead saw themselves and were seen by others simply as Negroes.

The various European peoples had also begun the move toward becoming one panethnic people, the White race. Winthrop Jordan and Theodore Allen, working with very different materials and under very different assumptions, find that English, Scots, Irish, Germans, and others came together and began calling themselves White people in the Chesapeake region by the 1660s, largely in response to their construction of various African peoples as Black. Allen, at least, believes that the transformation was complete by the early eighteenth century.⁹¹ Jon Butler puts the transformation somewhat later, and shifts the point of contrast that drove self-definition from Africans to Europeans. He describes a long process lasting from 1680 to 1760, during which many varieties of European immigrants and their descendants came, in their own minds and in the minds of others, to be Americans. Even as he draws that distinction, however, he is clear that he is talking about White Americans, and that Blacks and Indians were excluded.⁹² David Roediger and Noel Ignatiev would place the decisive period in the formation of the White race later, in the period 1820 to 1850, when the United States was undergoing an industrial revolution and the White working class was affirming its White racial status (and eliding its class consciousness) by setting itself off from the Black working class, slave and free.⁹³ Jordan, Butler, and Allen would seem closer to the truth. It is worth noting (and we will take this matter up in detail in Chapter 3) that the 1790 Naturalization Act specified that only "free, White persons" could become U.S. citizens through naturalization—and from that date forward, all the peoples who are now thought of as White were accorded that privilege, even as Asians, Africans, and Native Americans were denied it.

By the time of the Revolution if not well before, most White Americans had lost any sense of the differences among Rappahanock, Creek, and Narragansett; they were all just Indians in the White mind. It took several generations longer, however, for Native peoples to begin to think of themselves and to act as one, so strong were tribal identities. White people like Lord Amherst may have seen them as all one "Execrable Race," but Indians saw themselves as myriad distinct peoples for years to come.

Assimilation

Last, we come to the issue of assimilation. The assimilation of peoples, one into another, is one of the main themes of this first period of American immigration history. From the beginning of intercontinental contact in America, English people were assimilating and became Indians—think of the Roanoke colony and of many

individual "White Indians." At the same time Indians like Thomas Rolfe, Pocahontas's son, assimilated to become English people in the seventeenth century, and White people in the eighteenth. The other major development on this theme was the legion of other, non-English European Americans who, together with English immigrants and their descendants, by the mid-eighteenth century were assimilating to become White people.

English people were immigrants. They underwent the same processes of culture and identity change over generations as did immigrants from other places. They ceased to be English folk or Yorkshiremen and became, in their own minds, Americans (and White people). Africans, too, were immigrants, for all that they were compelled to come. They, too, underwent immigrant-style culture and identity change. They, however, became not Americans but Negroes. Native Americans were not immigrants, at least not in the period under discussion here. But they are irrevocably part of the immigrant story, if only because they were forced out so that White immigrants could take their places. In the heat of contact, Indians, too, underwent culture and identity change, though of a quite different sort than that experienced by immigrant peoples.