AFRICAN AMERICANS

A Historical Perspective

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Note: Biographical information was compiled at the time the individuals contributed to Americans All®.

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## African Americans: The Unwilling Immigrants

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Today’s youth are living in an unprecedented period of change. The complexities of the era include shifts in demographics, in social values and family structures as well as in economic and political realities. A key to understanding young people’s place in both the present and the future lies in history. History is so much more than a collection of facts. When appropriately studied, it is a lens for viewing the motivations, beliefs, principles and imperatives that give rise to the institutions and practices of people and their nations. As our nation’s schools reform their curricula to reflect the diversity of our school-age population, a major challenge arises. Is it possible to teach United States history as a history of diversity without evoking feelings of anger, bitterness and ethnic hatred? Is it possible to diversify classroom resources without generating feelings of separatism and alienation?

Americans All® answers “yes” to both these questions. The Americans All® program has proven that not only is it possible, it is preferable. By choosing to chronicle the history of six diverse groups—Native Americans, African Americans, Asian Americans, European Americans, Mexican Americans and Puerto Rican Americans—the program provides a frame upon which an inclusive approach to education on a nationwide basis can be built.

Nomenclature, regional differences, language and the demands of interest groups will always challenge an evolving diversity-based approach to education. These challenges are by-products of the freedoms that we treasure and strive to protect. This reality necessitates a process that becomes part of the product, however. Americans All® has integrated feedback from a diverse group of scholars in developing this program and maintains open lines of communication for continuous input from educators, parents and community members. The program’s emphasis on six groups is based on historic patterns of migration and immigration. These six groups provide an umbrella under which many other groups fall. By developing 51 customized, state-specific resource packages, the continuing saga of diversity in the United States can and will be told.

Americans All® has succeeded in avoiding the land mines found in victim/oppressor approaches to our diverse history by using a thematic approach. The theme focuses on how individuals and families immigrated to and migrated through the United States (voluntarily and by force). Carefully planned learning activities engage teachers and students in comparative critical thinking about all groups simultaneously. These activities ensure sensitivity to the previously untold stories of women, working-class people and minority and majority groups. Results from the program’s implementation in ethnically and culturally diverse school systems confirm the efficacy of this approach.

We have answered “yes” to the frightening questions about teaching diversity without teaching hate. Our nation’s leaders must now answer even more frightening questions: Can we afford not to teach history that is diverse and inclusive when school dropout rates range from 25 percent to 77 percent among Native American, African American, Asian American, Hispanic and foreign-born youth? Can we afford to continue preparing so many of our nation’s youth for a future of exclusion from the economic mainstream—a future that mirrors a history curriculum that excludes them?

To compound the problem, we must add the very real constraint of urgency. The future of our nation is characterized by computer technology and global interdependence. All students, regardless of their gender or their socioeconomic, ethnic or cultural status, must be helped to see themselves as participants in this human continuum of scientific and mathematical development to both visualize and actualize a place for themselves in our future.

Students need to be challenged to think critically and examine how today’s technology grew out of yesterday’s industrial era, an era spawned by the agricultural accomplishments of prior generations. They need to understand that even the simple tasks of weaving fabric and making dyes from fruits or plants required mathematical and scientific understanding; that today’s freeways grew out of yesterday’s hand-hewn trails; that ancient tribal herbs from many cultures formed the basis of many of today’s wonder drugs; and that it took the agricultural skills of many different peoples to produce the nucleus of today’s complex farming and food industries. Students must also see the relationship between citizenship responsibilities and privileges and understand their own importance in that dynamic.

The Americans All® materials provide diverse and inclusive images of history that can be a catalyst for this type of understanding. Not only is it wise to teach about diversity, using an inclusive approach as modeled in the Americans All® program, it is essential.

Gail C. Christopher
January 1992
The Western Hemisphere’s large African population has had a profound effect on the history and development of many nations. The earliest contingents of this African diaspora may have arrived long before the Viking voyages that initiated the European “discovery” of the Americas. Scholars have uncovered convincing evidence that the Olmecs, who flourished on the Mexican Gulf Coast several centuries before Christ, received cultural influences from and intermarried with Africans who made numerous voyages across the Atlantic.

Approximately 2,000 years later, Christopher Columbus began his third voyage to the Americas with a visit to the Cape Verde Islands, located off the coast of West Africa. The Portuguese had reported stories of African cargo ships sailing far to the west. Columbus learned from the Cape Verdeans that a friendly ocean current made sailing from the West African coast to the Americas far easier than sailing from Europe. The speed of his voyage to the Americas proved that the Cape Verdeans had been correct.

Beginning with the voyages of Columbus, the ancient trade in enslaved people of the “Old World” expanded to a new market, one that promised great wealth from the new crops and precious metals found in the Americas. A cruel and murderous transatlantic trade in enslaved people soon pulled millions of Africans into its vortex, ultimately bringing many to North America, where color was inextricably bound to the condition of enslavement.

Despite their circumstances, African men and women brought to these shores the talents essential to the building of a new civilization. They came from farming and mining communities where they had long practiced skills that colonial Europeans eagerly exploited. In some British colonies officials wrote slave codes to make Africans’ subjugation official and permanent. Such laws created a tradition of resistance against slavery through rebellions, escapes and creative protest.

Thirty million African Americans in the United States are the descendants primarily of the victims of the legal and illegal trade from Africa and the Caribbean to the United States between 1619 and 1865. After slavery, thousands of Africans came voluntarily as free men and women, searching for the same opportunities that attracted millions of people from Europe.

The following essays offer historical perspectives on the African American experience. The first emphasizes the economic and cultural impact of Africans and their descendants in the United States. The second places Africans within the context of the immigrant experience, pointing out that African immigrants have been as ambitious and creative as any others and that their desire to live the American dream remains undiminished.
Introduction

Different forces prompted immigration to the United States for each ethnic group. For the ancestors of most African Americans, the need for workers on plantations drove the immigration process. For nearly four centuries, European slave ships transported captive Africans from their homelands to the Americas. These Africans came to a land of bondage and faced a severe test of their powers of endurance.

Among African Americans the search for freedom in America has continued for generations. Given the grim circumstances of their initial experience, African Americans often escaped or migrated to parts of the nation or to other nations that seemed to offer a better life.

Africans made up a substantial percentage of the population of British colonial America and then the United States. In 1790 the first census revealed that African Americans made up more than 19 percent of the non-Indian population. The southern states, where the economy relied on enslaved laborers, had African majorities in many areas. For several decades captive Africans continued to arrive on slave ships to be sold to plantation owners or local slave merchants in such cities as Baltimore, Charleston and New Orleans.

While European immigrants were coming to America to escape political or religious persecution or to pursue a dream of economic security, Africans came involuntarily and were exploited to produce prosperity for others.

Cultural Isolation

Newly purchased enslaved Africans were not allowed to maintain existing family ties and the cultural traditions of their homelands. Most were young and strong, because the elderly and infirm would not survive the demands of plantation labor. The absence of elders often interrupted the orderly transfer of cultural values from the older to the younger generations. Moreover, American slaveholders were openly hostile toward African cultures because they believed that these were “heathen” and knew that allowing an enslaved community to maintain its own culture would increase the risk of rebellion.

West Africa’s Sophisticated Cultures

The slaveholders’ view of African culture has lingered in the American mind. As the economic rewards of slaveholding grew, American planters, politicians and opinion leaders justified enslaving Africans by demeaning African culture, sometimes claiming that Africans had made no contribution to the progress of humankind.

Europeans who contacted West African communities in the mid-1440s would have known that such claims were untrue. They encountered African civilizations that rivaled any they had seen in other parts of the world. First Portuguese and, later, British, French and Dutch seafarers sailed the coast of West Africa in search of opportunities to trade with the well-developed communities there for gold, textiles, ivory and other valuable products.

Africans of the region some called the western Sudan had produced a series of empires, one succeeding the other, that stood as a testimony to their political, economic and technical sophistication. Ghana, Mali, Songhay and Bornu were the names of some of these confederations, which featured extensive trading networks and complex legal systems.

At the time of European contact, about 50 years before the voyage of Columbus, the Mali Empire had established a trading system along the Niger River through the famous university city of Timbuktu to Cairo, the Egyptian metropolis, and beyond to India and China. The Yoruba and the Hausa of Nigeria had established city-states ruled by royal families under the watchful eyes of a nobility and a court system. The cities were defended by an established militia.

In Hausaland the concept of a monarchy whose powers were limited by a written constitution had developed years before a similar idea took hold in parts of Europe. In some areas Africans chose not to select kings and queens. They practiced a form of democracy called “consensus of the elders,” in which matters were discussed at length by elders, representing their families, until a unanimous vote was achieved.

Among the forest peoples of West Africa, the Ashanti (Asante) were the wealthiest because of the gold they
m ined. Their gold found its way along the trading networks of Africa, Europe and western Asia, where it became the standard of wealth. English travelers eventually called this area the “Gold Coast.” Soon this major source of gold also became a source of enslaved Africans.

Although the 1440s marked a new era in the relationship between Europe and Africa, the two had not been strangers. Some modern scholars believe that ancient Egypt was one of many ethnically and culturally related African communities extending across Africa to the Atlantic Ocean and southward to the source of the Nile River. They assert that ancient Egypt was a thoroughly African civilization whose beliefs and world view came from African roots. Egypt spread these African ideas through its technical and cultural achievements to much of the rest of the ancient world, including the Greeks and, later, the Romans. Clearly, whether Egypt was at its apex of power or part of a foreign empire, the influence of Egyptian culture was always formidable. (Mokhtar, 1981)

The Slave Trade

Despite Africa’s impressive history, tragedy struck after Europeans began taking enslaved Africans across the Atlantic Ocean. Christopher Columbus began the trade on his second voyage to the Americas, which he insisted were the Indies. His first voyage in 1492 had brought him into contact with the Arawak Indians of the Caribbean island of Hispaniola (Quisqueya), today made up of Haiti and the Dominican Republic. Columbus marveled that they were “so naive and free with their possessions that no one who has not witnessed them would believe it.” Under considerable pressure to make his voyages financially profitable for his Spanish backers, especially the king and queen, Columbus attempted to solve this problem by selling the Arawaks into slavery. This trade immediately took a violent toll on the Arawaks, whose civilization disappeared in 1650, when the last Arawaks died on Hispaniola.

The Historical Role of Slavery

The trade in enslaved Europeans, Asians and Africans had begun long before Columbus established a new trading route. Black-skinned Africans were not especially numerous among the slave populations of the ancient and medieval worlds. Europeans, Arabs, western Asians and North Africans traded slaves of all colors. These enslaved people were indigents, criminals, prisoners of war or victims of kidnapping.

Sometimes enslaved people had rights to own property and to establish legally recognized families. Slavery was not always hereditary, so children born to slaves enjoyed a nonslave status in some societies. In addition, the servant-master relationship took many forms. In Europe and Africa, serfdom sometimes replaced slavery. The serf was a possession of the lord of the manor, but he or she could not be sold apart from the land. Although both Europeans and Africans practiced this form of servitude, many Europeans referred to African serfs as slaves. They understood the distinction between slaves and serfs in their own societies, however.

Most African societies had little use for large numbers of enslaved workers. The community or families often owned and worked the land collectively. The practice of enslaving thousands of people, thereby creating a large slave caste, was more characteristic of the Greek and Roman Empires. These European empires created some societies in which slaves were the majority.

The Transatlantic Slave Trade

Europeans did not think of Africans as a primary source of slaves until the fifteenth century. A key event in this shift in thinking occurred in 1455, when the pope issued a papal bull forbidding the buying or selling of enslaved people from “Christian” nations. A few years earlier, the forces of Islam had cut off western Europe’s access to eastern European people for purposes of enslavement. Christian Europeans looked southward to non-Christian Africans as a source of slaves.

As Europeans established economic interests in the Americas, the demand for enslaved Africans increased. Now geography was to play an important part. The voyage from Africa to America, which was aided by
ocean currents, was about half as long as the voyage from Europe to America. Therefore, the West African coast was a convenient stopping point between western Europe and the West Indies.

The high casualty rate among the Arawak Indians enslaved by Columbus proved to be characteristic of most Native American groups enslaved by Europeans. Contact with diseases that were common in Europe, but previously nonexistent in the Americas, devastated the Native American populations. Although captive Africans who were brought to the Americas also died in large numbers, both during the Middle Passage across the Atlantic and later on the plantations of the Americas, their survival rate was better than Native Americans, and slave traders were able to replenish plantations with new enslaved Africans on a regular basis.

Historian Basil Davidson points out that, as the scramble for enslaved Africans among European powers accelerated, attempts by Africans to curtail or end the slave trade became less feasible. Among the African societies that attempted to curtail the trade was Dahomey. Like many other African nations, Dahomey was being pushed toward greater cooperation with the slave trade by the traders’ “one gun, one slave” trading policy. By trading slaves, African communities could acquire the European-made guns they needed to protect themselves from brigands, slave raiders or hostile neighbors.

European slave-trading nations established trading posts—sometimes impressive castles—along the west coast of Africa. So long as they controlled these coastal spheres of influence, they were assured that the raiding parties and agents who went into the interior could bring out captives for sale. These trading posts, and the regular arrival of European ships supplied with guns for sale to Africans, created an epidemic of crime and kidnapping wherever the slave trade reached. Dahomey’s army was able to break through to the so-called “slave coast” in 1727. Before then, more than 20,000 captives per year were taken from the slave coast. After Dahomey took partial control, the number taken dropped to about 5,500. Unfortunately, few other African nations or countries that tried to resist the slave trade were as successful. In the end, the major work of suppressing the trade fell to the people who had profited the most from it and who ultimately controlled it by creating the demand for slaves—the Europeans.

When the transatlantic slave trade ended in 1888, Africa had lost an estimated 50 million to 100 million people. (Davidson, 1961; Rodney, 1974) Perhaps 11 million to 15 million had landed in the Americas after the treacherous voyage in crowded, filthy slave ships. The rest died in the raids and battles or on the long journey to America. About 4 percent of the survivors landed in the British North American colonies or the United States. That group and its descendants became today’s African American population.

The Peak Period

During the nearly four centuries of the transatlantic trade in enslaved Africans, several European nations dominated and profited from the infamous traffic. An agreement with Portugal, mediated by the pope, kept Spain out of the early trade. Still, Spain needed workers for its American colonies. Portugal was able to supply enslaved people for these colonies as well as its own large colony, Brazil.

By the seventeenth century, the Dutch had joined the Portuguese as principal slave traffickers. As the slave trade reached its height during the eighteenth century, the British dominated more than half of the transatlantic trade. Finally, during the last era of the trade in the nineteenth century, wealthy Europeans living in Brazil, Cuba and North America organized the trade.

The peak period for importing enslaved people into British North America and the United States was 1741 to 1810. By this time the slave trade had undergone a number of transitions. After 1770 the trade was concentrated along the central and western coast of Africa. About 59 percent of the captives taken during this period came from West Africa. (Curtin, 1969) During the peak in the slave trade to the United States in the 1770s and 1780s, however, captives came almost entirely from central and southeastern Africa.

Philip Curtin’s estimates of enslaved Africans legally entering the British North American colonies and the United States are as follows:

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<th>Period</th>
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<tr>
<td>1701–1720</td>
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<td>1761–1780</td>
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<td>1781–1810</td>
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The Influence of African Cultures

The evidence indicates that the cultural heritage of African Americans in the United States is not exclusively West African. It also includes a strong influence from central and southeastern Africa. Many of the African words that have found their way into American language came from the Bantu languages of central and southern Africa.

Many historians, anthropologists, sociologists and archaeologists have examined American culture as it has developed since the introduction of Africans in 1619.
Scholars have observed that the foods, music, dances, hairstyles, clothing, fashions, language, planting skills, work habits, folk tales, religious beliefs and folk beliefs of the United States have been profoundly affected by African cultures. Indeed, every part of the Western Hemisphere where enslaved Africans were brought has exhibited African cultural traits or Africanisms. These are most noticeable in nations such as Brazil, Cuba, Haiti, the British West Indies and Puerto Rico, where Africans and their descendants became the majority.

**Contributions to Economic Development**

Because Africans were so numerous in the early colonial history of North America, their contributions were essential to the growth and early economic development of both colonial America and the United States.

The legal trade in enslaved people from Africa to the United States ended before the Industrial Revolution took hold. Therefore, the typical enslaved African entered the Atlantic Coast colonies and states when few sizeable cities existed and very little land had been reclaimed from the forests for agricultural use. Whether Africans lived on large plantations or on small farms, they faced the difficult task of adjusting to bondage in a strange land while building a viable existence under primitive conditions.

Once it became clear to plantation owners that they could not rely on Native American labor and that European indentured servants would insist on their rights to receive freedom and land when their terms of service expired, enslaved Africans became a vital source of labor. According to the 1790 census, Africans constituted more than 39 percent of Virginia’s population. By 1850 the enslaved population was 33 percent in Virginia, 57.6 percent in South Carolina, 55 percent in Georgia and 51 percent in Mississippi. One early observer noted that South Carolina looked very much like an African nation in the early nineteenth century. Historian Peter Wood has pointed out that after numerous attempts at growing rice, European slaveholders in South Carolina were successful only when they relied on the expertise of enslaved Africans.

In contrast to Europeans, Negros from the West Coast of Africa were widely familiar with rice planting. Ancient speakers of a proto-Bantu language in the Sub-Sahara region are known to have cultivated the crop. An indigenous variety . . . was a staple in the western rain-forest regions long before Portuguese and French navigators introduced Asian and American varieties in the 1500s. . . . In the Congo-Angola region, which was the southernmost area of call for English slavers, a white explorer once noted rice to be so plentiful that it brought almost no price. (Wood, 1972)

African expertise in agriculture also benefited plantations that grew cotton, a crop Africans had produced for many centuries. Yams and peanuts were so common that the African words—yam and goober—entered American English.

**Adaptation of Africanisms**

Numerous other Africanisms made their way into American culture, including:

- thousands of terms from either West African or Bantu languages, including tote, O.K., mojo (charm), mosey, mooch, jazz, jambalaya, bozo, banjo, gumbo, mamba (arboreal snake) and zombie (Vass, 1979);
- dishes such as those mentioned above and the dumpling dishes popular in the South;
- instruments such as the banjo and various types of drums;
- the custom of working in labor groups or gangs and singing while attacking a single task;
• folktales such as the *Uncle Remus* tales (taken in part from the Anansi tales and other African folk literature);
• the custom of weaving hair in cornrows; and
• the custom of burying the dead at night. (In many areas enslaved Africans created grave markers with African motifs.)

The fact that enslaved Africans had to devise ways to survive in a new land is often overlooked by historians who have accepted the myth that slaves were “taken care of” by their owners. Such historians as Eugene Genovese and John Blasingame have made it clear that the reverse was more often true. Even enslaved Africans owned by such wealthy and influential Americans as George Washington and Thomas Jefferson constructed their own original dwellings and tended their own family gardens while hunting in nearby forests for meat whenever time allowed. They provided for themselves while working on the slaveholder’s plantation.

**The Significance of Slavery**

Race became a primary factor in the development of slavery throughout the Western Hemisphere. Only Native Americans and Africans faced enslavement; Europeans and their descendants were exempted. In the United States, after a brief experiment with Native American slavery, Africans and their descendants were singled out for slave status. Color and status became firmly linked in the developing American society. Making slavery hereditary denied even the enslaved person’s progeny upward mobility. Slavery was the original cycle of poverty, legislated into existence by colonial and state assemblies and recognized as legal by the Constitution and myriad federal and state laws.

**Slave Codes**

The hundreds of laws that formed the nation’s complex slave codes ensured the slaveholder’s absolute power over the enslaved person. Cases of enslaved Africans suing their owners in court and winning their freedom were rare exceptions. Normally, the enslaved could not testify in court, unless the testimony regarded the trial of another enslaved person. They could not own property, could not legally marry and had no legal right to their children. They could not travel without the written permission of the slaveholder, and they were usually subjected to curfews and other special restrictions that did not apply to free European Americans. Of course, none of the rights of citizenship (freedom of press, speech, religion and assembly or right to petition) applied to the enslaved. With rare exceptions, enslaved Africans were regarded in law as property that could be sold, mortgaged, bequeathed, wagered or given away as lottery prizes.

The Supreme Court’s infamous Dred Scott decision of 1857 was an attempt to settle the question of the legal status of African Americans. The Court ruled that Africans held in slavery were property, not persons, and that slaveholders had the right to transport their property to any part of the Union. This ruling officially struck down antislavery laws in the states that had made slavery illegal. The Court also added, in the same decision, that the framers of the Constitution did not intend for people of African descent to have the rights of citizens. Therefore, free African Americans might have citizenship in the states in which they resided, but they were not citizens of the United States and did not have the rights of United States citizens.

**Slavery’s Influence on African Americans**

It is impossible to determine beyond any doubt how this “peculiar institution” of slavery affected the typical enslaved African. The extremely stern legal system left room for civility, even benevolence, if an owner chose to practice it. The disapproval of European American neighbors and friends may have curbed the cruel behavior of some slaveholders. Also, because an enslaved African was a major investment for the slaveholder, extreme mistreatment was economically unwise. Most slaveholders
were primarily interested in the labor that they could extract from the enslaved African, along with the improvement in their net worth that the birth of enslaved children would bring. In the United States, more than anywhere else in the Western Hemisphere, slave owners relied on the natural increase in the enslaved population.

Slavery, of course, was not without its atrocities. The autobiographies and interviews of enslaved African Americans often depicted the cruelty of jealous, angry or insane masters.

Enslaved African Americans found ways not only to cope but also to maintain their sanity and self-respect. Although many ran away, some led rebellions and others joined secret maroon communities where they conducted an ongoing battle against slavery, most responded to the system in other ways. Herbert Gutman has written about the importance of families among enslaved African Americans, and many historians have cited family ties as an important deterrent to slave escapes and rebellions. John Blassingame has noted that many who escaped enslavement hid in the woods near the plantation to observe whether relatives and loved ones would be punished or sold away by the owner as an act of reprisal.

Rebellions usually had fatal consequences. In Black Resistance/White Law, Mary Frances Berry discusses the use of the military in ending uprisings against enslavement. African Americans who defied slavery through organized rebellion faced the military power of the state, not merely the anger of a slave master.

Those who chose not to risk the steep odds of an escape or a rebellion attempted to negotiate the most tolerable life possible under the circumstances. Most enslaved African Americans lived in large groups of 20 or more. Most slaveholders had neither the time nor the resources to observe them around the clock. There was private family life in the quarters of enslaved African Americans. Songs and folktales were passed from generation to generation. Whatever African cultural traits remained with enslaved African Americans survived in the incubator of this private world. African Americans developed a strategy for relating to European Americans that created the impression of openness and harmlessness while they carefully guarded their own feelings and provided emotional support for one another. In the meantime, some sabotaged farm equipment or damaged crops as secret acts of day-to-day resistance against slavery.

One of slavery’s many ironies is the legacy it left—that of intimacy between enslaved African Americans and free European Americans in the South. In The Strange Career of Jim Crow, C. Vann Woodward reminded southerners that strict physical separation of races was not their tradition. Racial segregation would have made slavery unworkable, especially in the homes of European Americans wealthy enough to have “live-in slaves” for child care and household duties. Enslaved African Americans worked wherever they were needed, and their proximity to European Americans was not as important as their proximity to their work. Tradition and slave codes defined the status of African Americans vis-à-vis all European Americans so clearly that physical closeness was not seen as an automatic threat to the racist social code. Once slavery was abolished, segregation was gradually put in its place to protect the same social code.

**Women’s Work**

The slave system made relatively few distinctions between the work of men and women in the field. Work gangs often included both sexes, and women performed most of the duties required of men. A pregnant woman was allowed to become a “one-half hand” temporarily, but her physical work continued.

According to the research of Deborah Gray White, European American women rarely worked in the fields. Generally, men and African American women did such work, which substantially reduced the public interest in providing protection for African American women as females. Enslaved women were usually expected to work like men. The weaker sex notion did not operate in a system that sought to extract maximum production from each enslaved person.

Interviews with formerly enslaved people indicate that African American women carried out their duties as mothers and homemakers after doing the slaveholder’s work. The tasks associated with “women’s work”—

*Children on a Louisiana plantation, c. 1865*
spinning, knitting, sewing, quilting, washing and house-keeping—also faced these women after long hours of hard physical labor. Given the enormous demands on them, enslaved African American women developed the habit of cooperating in the key areas of homemaking and child rearing in their private quarters. Indeed, cooperative effort characterized life in those quarters. Recipes, folk beliefs, remedies for illnesses, techniques for quilting and making clothes and the like were passed from generation to generation in the struggle to create a tolerable life.

Men and women who were raised by enslaved mothers remembered them with great affection and respect. John Blasingame points out that enslaved women were allowed little time to be with their own children. They had to use their opportunities wisely to prepare their children for the harsh life ahead of them. Enslaved parents were strict disciplinarians, knowing that careless behavior as adults would lead to severe punishment for their offspring. Enslaved mothers went to the fields early in the morning, leaving children who were too young to work in the care of older women. Field workers usually returned at nightfall when their children were ready for bed.

As soon as children qualified as quarter-hands (ages 6 to 10), they worked on most plantations. Children did not usually attract a high price at the slave market. Selling young children separate from their mothers was not a universal practice, though it occurred far more frequently than the defenders of slavery would admit. Teenage girls of childbearing age, on the other hand, were often sold away from their parents, as were strong, young teenage boys. Very few of the famous African Americans who grew up enslaved and later wrote autobiographies had been allowed to live on the same plantation as their mothers beyond their teenage years.

Free African Americans before Emancipation

Slavery was legal in the southern and border states until 1865. By 1846 all the northern states had outlawed human bondage. During the entire period, a minority of the African American population was categorized as free. All African Americans living in the North after slavery was abolished there were classified as free. The majority of the nation’s free African Americans, however, lived in the southern and border states, where most of the African American population remained enslaved.

Creation of Free African American Communities

Several processes created the free African American community. The first racial slavery laws of Virginia and

CAUTION!!

COLORED PEOPLE
OF BOSTON, ONE & ALL,
You are hereby respectfully CAUTIONED and advised, to avoid conversing with the
Watchmen and Police Officers of Boston,
For since the recent ORDER OF THE MAYOR & ALDERMEN, they are empowered to act as
KIDNAPPERS AND
Slave Catchers,
And they have already been actually employed in KIDNAPPING, CATCHING, AND KEEPING SLAVES. Therefore, if you value your LIBERTY, and the Welfare of the Fugitives among you, Shun them in every possible manner, as so many HOUNDS on the track of the most unfortunate of your race.
Keep a Sharp Look Out for KIDNAPPERS, and have TOP EYE open.
APRIL 24, 1851.

A handbill distributed by abolitionists in Boston, April 24, 1851

Maryland exempted from slavery children born of European American mothers and African American fathers. These mulatto offspring were among the first free African Americans. Colonial slaveholders also released enslaved Africans who were old, infirm and no longer profitable as laborers, forcing them to fend for themselves after a life of bondage.

Most of the 5,000 Africans who served with the British forces and in the Continental Army during the American Revolution were promised freedom at war’s end. Sometimes that promise was kept and these soldiers joined the free African American community. The widespread discussion of freedom and democracy stimulated by the American Revolution prompted a sizeable number of slaveholders to release some of their enslaved from bondage during that period. The antislavery rebellion in Haiti made that portion of the island of Hispaniola an independent nation. This forced many of the Africans and mulattos who had sided with the French colonizers against the insurgents to flee to Boston, Baltimore, Charleston and other American cities, where they became a part of the free African American communities.

The number of free African Americans also grew because of occasional private manumissions and incidents
of African Americans purchasing their freedom. Communities of free African Americans in such large cities as Baltimore and Charleston provided convenient places for those escaping slavery to hide and to obtain counterfeit freedom papers and other false documents. Before slavery ended in 1865, free African Americans made up about 10 percent of the South’s African American population.

Free African Americans were an anomaly in the South and the source of considerable anxiety among slaveholders. Denmark Vesey, a formerly enslaved foreign-born African at an independent African American church in Charleston, organized a rebellion against slavery in 1822. Free African Americans served as a constant reminder that bondage was not a universal reality for African Americans. Some southern legislatures eventually moved to reduce or eliminate the free African American population by making manumission more difficult or by requiring those released from slavery to leave the state. Other states passed laws against the entry of free African Americans. Some tried unsuccessfully to make emigration out of the United States a requirement for newly freed African Americans. Other legislation attempted to discourage or prevent fraternization between enslaved and free African Americans. Curfews, segregation laws and other discriminatory legislation usually applied to all African Americans, enslaved and free. These were precursors to the black codes enacted after the Civil War.

Opportunities for large-scale voluntary migration were very limited during the slavery era. European American communities in the North and West were often hostile, and laws severely curtailing African American civil and economic rights were widespread. Nevertheless, secret caravans of African Americans escaping slavery made their way northward on the Underground Railroad to the free states and Canada. African American communities in northern states facing discrimination in education, political rights and job opportunities responded by building their own institutions. They also petitioned and propagandized against both slavery in the South and discrimination in the North.

During the first decades of American independence, Boston and Philadelphia were home to many prominent African Americans, including Richard Allen, an active Methodist lay preacher, and James Forten, a successful sailmaker. However, the race riots of the Jacksonian Era (1830s and 1840s) that occurred in many northern cities, notably Philadelphia, subjected African Americans to arson and mob violence on a frightening scale. Clearly these cities were not safe havens for those migrating out of oppression. As a response to the violence and discrimination, northern African Americans organized civic and religious groups. In the 1790s Richard Allen and Absalom Jones separated their African American congregation from St. George’s Methodist Church in Philadelphia to form two new Christian denominations: the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) and African Methodist Episcopal Zion churches. During that same decade, Prince Hall organized the first African American masonic group. Beginning in the 1830s, African American abolitionists, clergymen and community activists met in national Negro congresses in various northern cities. There they debated the tactics of anti-slavery and civil rights agitation.

The Compromise of 1850 and the Dred Scott decision of 1857 cast a pall on the campaign to abolish slavery. The first increased the power of slaveholders to recapture enslaved African Americans who had run away to the northern states. The second negated antislavery laws throughout the nation. Many African Americans who had escaped slavery and were active in the abolition movement left for England because of the new legislation. Northern African Americans, for whom the Supreme Court decision meant the end of all claims to citizenship, now debated the merits of emigration.

**Emigration to Colonies**

Declining African American fortunes and antislavery sentiment fueled the movement to establish colonies outside the United States for African Americans who desired to leave. At least three American presidents (Thomas Jefferson, Andrew Jackson and Abraham Lincoln) gave serious consideration to the idea of African American emigration.
The American Colonization Society became the instrument for supporting migration out of the United States. Liberia, the West African nation that was born from the society’s efforts, was intended to be a homeland for emancipated African Americans. About 6,000 emigrants relocated there between the 1820s and the 1860s. Thomas Jefferson and Abraham Lincoln envisioned a migration of African Americans out of the United States to a specially prepared colony in the Western Hemisphere. Lincoln eventually supported an effort to relocate African Americans to Haiti in the 1860s. The effort was a disaster. Realizing his mistake, Lincoln arranged to repatriate the few emigrants who had survived the yellow fever that was rampant in the tropics.

Emigration attracted support among African American leaders. Paul Cuffee (ship owner and advocate of African American emigration) had been among the earliest to arrange passage to Africa for those interested. Later, John Russworm (the first African American college graduate and a founder of the first African American newspaper, *Freedom’s Journal*), Lott Cary, Martin Delaney and Alexander Crummell traveled or relocated to Africa. African American emigration later became a primary mission of Bishop Henry Turner of the AME Church, Chief Sam of the Gold Coast and Marcus Garvey, the charismatic African American nationalist.

Emigration was controversial among all Americans. Most southern slaveholders vigorously opposed any movement that would reduce the enslaved population through manumission or emigration. European American southerners who were concerned about future amalgamation of races sometimes supported the American Colonization Society’s program to remove African Americans to a distant land. Although several prominent African Americans supported emigration, more seemed to agree with Frederick Douglass, the most famous African American spokesman of his day, who insisted that fighting for citizenship rights was a better strategy than emigration to Africa.

**Migration Westward**

Africans had participated in the exploration and colonization of the West for centuries. In the early 1500s, many African guides, servants and soldiers had explored North America—from Arizona to the Carolinas—with Spanish expeditions. During the 1770s and 1780s, substantial numbers of Africans and *mulattos* were among the colonists sent to establish Los Angeles, San Diego and other communities along the California coast. In 1772 San Francisco’s military garrison was at least 18 percent African and *mulatto*. By 1777 at least 24 percent of San Jose’s population was *mulatto*. In Santa Barbara the African and *mulatto* population was more than 19 percent in 1785. The majority of the colonists who established Los Angeles in 1781 were Africans and *mulattos*. Overall, about 20 percent of California’s Spanish Era colonists in 1800 were Africans and *mulattos*. Sometimes people of African descent rose to positions of authority. This was true in the case of Pio Pico, a *mulatto* who was the last governor of California under Mexican rule. (Goode, 1974)

Another early African influence in the West occurred when the “Five Civilized Tribes” of the southeastern United States were forced to follow the “Trail of Tears” to reservations in Oklahoma in 1830. All of these Native American tribes took with them enslaved Africans they had purchased. In addition, intermarriage and cross-cultural adoptions were common in these Native American-African societies, which made Africans a substantial percentage of each tribe’s population. By 1865 the Chickasaw Nation consisted of about 5,000 Native Americans and 2,000 Africans. In 1869 the combined population of the Choctaw and Chickasaw Nations was about 17,000. Of that number at least 4,500 were Africans. (Littlefield, 1980) Africans and Native American-African mixed bloods remained a substantial percentage of these Native American nations well into the twentieth century.

Africans in the West played a unique and sometimes dangerous role in mediating between the European and Native American populations. The Africans in the Choctaw and Chickasaw Nations had become familiar with both European and Native American cultures and provided valuable information to Native Americans about the Europeans’ ways. They also often served as translators. That role as go-between was inherited in a different context by the Buffalo Soldiers of the 9th and 10th Calvalries that were sent to the West after the Civil War to help keep Native Americans on the reservations.
and Europeans off the land. Usually neither group appreciated their efforts, but their skill and bravery became legendary.

Every economic endeavor that involved the movement of southerners westward automatically included many African Americans. Before the Civil War, migration to new cotton-growing areas brought enslaved African Americans to Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana and Texas. A large American slaveholding population moved to Texas while it was a part of Mexico, which had outlawed slavery. This created a major dispute. Eventually, the American defeat of Mexico in 1848, and the annexation of Texas, established Texans’ right to own slaves.

Both free and enslaved African Americans worked in the West as cowboys, miners, entrepreneurs and railroad workers. The California gold rush drew many to the West Coast as speculators and workers. In the San Francisco area, William Leidesdorff and Mammy Pleasant became famous for their influence in business and politics. In the Los Angeles area, Biddy Mason (formerly enslaved) became wealthy and famous as the owner of large tracts of prime land.

At the first glow of freedom during the Civil War, thousands of African Americans had left the plantations. The Union Army attracted these formerly enslaved people to its camps as it swept through the South, pushing back Confederate forces. These “contraband,” as the camp followers were called, also served as spies and soldiers. Eventually more than 180,000 African American soldiers served with the Union Army. After the war, these volunteers from the northern states and the escapees who had served with the Union Army were often catalysts for African American migration.

**Reconstruction**

The Union victory in 1865 marked the close of the Civil War. One of the most widely anticipated benefits of emancipation was freedom of movement. No longer confined by law to a slaveholder’s plantation, most formerly enslaved African Americans expected to have the option of migrating. “Vagrancy” laws, debt peonage and the convict-lease system were quickly implemented to curtail the new freedom. African American labor had been the mainstay of the southern economy. Efforts to force African Americans to remain and work in the communities where they had been enslaved often succeeded because their population was destitute, and the “40 acres and a mule” they expected never arrived.

Most American historians view the Reconstruction period as an era of social and political change brought on by “radical” Republican forces in the United States Congress. This was the case for a few years in certain southern states, such as South Carolina and Georgia. In other states, such as Tennessee and Virginia, change was less dramatic. In the case of Texas, proslavery forces delayed the emancipation of slaves until June 19, 1867, which is now celebrated as “Juneteenth” in Texas. Therefore, when and how enslaved African Americans received their freedom depended on where they lived and whether the reforms of the United States Congress were enforced.

Motivated by a desire for revenge against the rebellious South, or by a determination to extend the benefits of democracy to formerly enslaved African Americans, Congress’ “radicals” scrapped President Andrew Johnson’s plan to return the South to its traditional relationship between European and African Americans. Under the president’s plan, African Americans would no longer be subjected to literal slavery, but there would be no commitment to equal civil rights and probably no equal access to public office and political power. In 1867 the leadership of the Reconstruction Congress moved to guarantee the right to vote and hold public office for African Americans in the former Confederate States. The Constitution was amended twice (14th and 15th Amendments) to grant citizenship to African Americans and provide voting rights to African American males. An earlier amendment, passed very soon after the close of the Civil War, brought an official end to American slavery.

The new voting rights yielded two African American United States senators and several congressmen. There were also African American legislators and public officials at the state and local levels in many southern states. For the first time, African Americans served on juries. Now African Americans were free to help repeal the laws that deprived them of an education, denied the rights of assembly and petition, prohibited equal association between races and restricted freedom of movement by African Americans. With the participation of African American elected officials, the South established its first tax-supported public schools, levied a graduated income tax that was based on a citizen’s ability to pay and repealed many of the segregation laws.

The movement for reform in the South depended largely on the support of aging former abolitionists in the North. Ironically, many of the rights they sought for southern African Americans had seldom been granted to African Americans in the North. Mainstream northern public opinion did not support racial equality, which soon became apparent in the negative and stereotyped depictions of African Americans by the northern press. A special second-class citizenship would be the fate of African Americans—a citizenship that would not include equal political rights.
In some ways the end of the experiment in democracy that characterized a part of Reconstruction was a predictable result of Congress’ failure to promote effective land reform. As a matter of federal policy, land taken from European American southerners, even Confederate officers, was eventually returned. Some African Americans received land after the war, but it was generally of lower quality and did not come with the money, tools and farm animals necessary to establish a viable farm. Freedmen knew hard work would be necessary in their effort to establish a new life. They solicited the help of the Freedmen’s Bureau, a federal agency, to establish banks and build schools and hospitals. They also had farming, tool-making, fishing and construction skills that had greatly benefited slaveholders in previous years. However, as southern European American “Redeemers” took back political control of the South, with the blessing of northern politicians who had tired of reform, they prohibited African Americans from practicing the trades and pursuing the occupations that were now reserved for European Americans. This determined effort to force African Americans into a posture of dependence received crucial support from terrorist groups such as the Ku Klux Klan (KKK), which met attempts to challenge this arrangement with lynchings, nighttime raids and other illegal and violent acts.

Despite the determined campaign to keep and exploit African American workers in the South to support the post-Civil War economic recovery, African Americans mounted notable efforts to migrate westward. The 15,000 Exodusters who migrated to Kansas between 1879 and 1880 are the best-known example. Less widely known is the effort of Edwin McCabe in the 1880s and 1890s. This enterprising businessman and publicist led an attempt to obtain statehood for the Oklahoma Territory, which by then had more than 25 all-African American towns. One survey taken in 1890 indicated that Oklahoma’s non-Native American population of 25,000 included 15,000 African Americans. (Hill, 1946) McCabe’s vision was to create a state to which the nation’s African Americans would migrate. In 1892 the movement ended because of conflicts with Oklahoma Native Americans and European Americans. McCabe disappeared soon afterward. Nevertheless, Oklahoma remained a popular destination for African Americans moving west.

The Great Migration

In most accounts of African American history, the first decades of the twentieth century are considered the years of the first wave of the “Great Migration.” The migration extended from 1910, when about 90 percent of the African American population lived in the southern and border states, to the 1970s, when the numbers of African Americans living outside the South and those residing in the South were about equal.
Many scholars have compared this migration to the perilous transatlantic journeys that brought immigrants to the United States from Europe. Although they were traveling within the nation, African Americans from the South moving to the urban population centers in the North were facing markedly altered circumstances. Some came directly from farms, while others came from southern cities. In both cases the uncertainty of life in such rapidly growing industrialized cities as Chicago, Detroit and New York created a formidable challenge to these newcomers.

**Segregation and Terrorism**

Many events spurred the Great Migration. Not the least was what historian Rayford Logan called the "nadir" of the African experience in America, which occurred between the 1880s and the 1920s. In most of the South, the political reforms that brought African Americans their first taste of political power after the Civil War had been short-lived. Unfavorable Supreme Court decisions, coupled with a campaign of terrorism carried out by the KKK and allied groups, soon brought most of the region back to its tradition of exclusive European American control.

The major political parties, North and South, abandoned the ideal of equality in favor of a second-class citizenship for African Americans that permitted and sometimes encouraged segregation and subjugation. Republicans instituted a “lily-white Republican” campaign to remove African Americans from their ranks in order to attract more European American voters. Democrats in the South moved toward “white primaries” that denied African Americans participation in the selection of the party’s candidates and, in most areas, removed African Americans completely from the political process. Populists briefly attracted African American voters to an interracial coalition during the 1880s and 1890s. Yet they eventually expelled these members to counteract charges that they favored equality.

Into this situation stepped Booker T. Washington, an African American leader born into slavery and educated at the Hampton (Virginia) Institute, one of the schools set up during Reconstruction for the education of formerly enslaved persons. By 1895 Washington had become an important figure in the South. That year his famous “Atlanta Compromise” speech at the Atlanta Exposition recommended to European Americans that the South turn to African Americans for labor to spur economic growth, assuring them that African Americans would be faithful workers and would not seek social equality.

European American opinion leaders and press nationwide immediately hailed him as a hero. His policy, called “accommodation” by historians, emphasized self-help and vocational education. Washington was the principal of Tuskegee (Alabama) Institute. His educational philosophy and public statements discouraging agitation for equality and political rights were especially attractive to conservative European Americans in the United States and colonial governments in Africa and the West Indies. Tuskegee became one of many African American colleges in the South to attract substantial numbers of students of African descent from other countries. Native American students also attended Tuskegee and several other historically African American colleges.

Booker T. Washington’s conservative public statements may have been merely a tactic to ease African Americans’ burdens of oppression and terrorism. Unfortunately, his speeches gave the impression that African Americans were satisfied with the rigid segregation that was becoming more common around the nation. The Supreme Court’s *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision of 1896 officially installed segregation as a legal policy by declaring it was constitutional. Now communities around the nation were free to enforce existing segregation ordinances and to create new ones. In 1913 President Woodrow Wilson brought with his Democrat administration a policy of segregating the capital’s government offices and public facilities. Wilson also dismissed thousands of African American federal employees and established a policy requiring that photographs accompany applications for many federal jobs.

An outgrowth of the new “Era of Segregation” was increased violence. Frequent lynchings occurred between the 1880s and 1930s. Even more alarming were mob attacks against entire African American communities,
such as in Atlanta in 1906, East St. Louis, Illinois, in 1917 and Tulsa in 1921. These violent invasions, which left much of the African American community in ruins and many dead, influenced the Great Migration.

**Economic Problems in the South**

Even more important were the economic difficulties that became intolerable to many southern African Americans during 1910 to 1930. Uncertain weather and voracious boll weevils severely damaged southern crops during the early twentieth century. Southerners of all ethnicities moved to the urban areas of the South or to the industrialized cities of the North. This process accelerated during World War I, when immigration to the United States was curtailed and manufacturers were forced to look to the South for workers.

Northern manufacturers sent recruiters and “pass riders” to the South to deliver promises of higher pay and better working conditions. Northern African American newspapers, especially the Chicago Defender, featured headlines describing lynchings and other atrocities against African Americans in the South. At the same time, they extolled the North’s opportunities and less vigorously enforced segregation.

Waves of African American newcomers began to arrive in northern cities. Here are some approximate figures:

- 1910–1920 .................. 300,000
- 1920–1930 .................. 1,300,000
- 1930–1940 .................. 1,500,000
- 1940–1950 .................. 2,500,000

The first wave alone more than tripled the African American population of New York City by 1930 (91,709 to 327,796), while it greatly multiplied the African American populations of Chicago (44,103 to 233,903) and Detroit (5,741 to 120,066).

A smaller but highly significant influx of Africans from the West Indies also arrived in northern cities during this period. Most had left unemployment and crop failures to follow the trail of opportunity northward. For many years, some West Indian Africans had constituted a mobile labor force in the Caribbean region. During the sugar boom of the early 1900s, many went to Cuba as agricultural workers. Others comprised the bulk of the workforce that the United States used to construct the Panama Canal. Florida continued to attract farmworkers from the Caribbean throughout the early twentieth century.

**The Capital of African America**

The Harlem community in New York City provided a lure for enterprising immigrants who sought business and educational opportunities. By 1920 approximately 25 percent of Harlem’s population consisted of immigrants of African descent. According to Wallace Thurman, the African American novelist, these foreign-born newcomers played a central role in the proliferation of African American-owned businesses in the community.

Immigrants of African descent made important contributions to the artistic and political renaissance that centered in Harlem during 1919 to 1929. Harlem had developed into an African American community during the first decades of the twentieth century. African Americans had obtained access by default when the handsome new Harlem community fell victim to overpricing and excessive speculation. The middle-class European Americans, for whom the spacious homes and wide boulevards had been intended, refused to pay the high prices, leaving the community to African American speculators and European Americans who were interested in attracting African Americans to the area. Because of the prices, hard-working African American families often doubled up to afford the rent. No other comparable community was available to African Americans. By 1920 Harlem had become the capital of African America.

The artistic and political renaissance drew many intellectuals from the West Indies. Marcus Garvey, the Jamaican nationalist, directed an international movement from his headquarters in Harlem. Claude McKay, the novelist, and Aaron Douglass, the painter, were born in the West Indies. Arthur Schomburg, the bibliophile

*A street scene in Harlem, c. 1930*
whose collection is the core of the library bearing his name, came from Puerto Rico. In the area of left-wing politics, outstanding immigrants of African descent included Richard B. Moore and Cyril Briggs.

African American migrants from other parts of the United States were most numerous. W. E. B. Du Bois, the foremost African American intellectual of his time, had come to New York City as a founder of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and the editor of Crisis, the organization’s journal. Charles S. Johnson, the sociologist, arrived to become editor of Opportunity, the Urban League’s main periodical. James Weldon Johnson, who grew up in Florida, had come to New York City with his brother, with whom he soon produced several hit songs. He continued his career as a poet and novelist while accepting the position of field secretary for the NAACP. Another Harlem Renaissance leader whose influence would extend to future decades was A. Philip Randolph, a socialist labor organizer and a native of Florida. Langston Hughes, the best-known young African American author, came to New York City from Ohio. Wallace Thurman and Arna Bontemps, also young writers, came from California. Zora Neale Hurston, the anthropologist and novelist, grew up in rural Florida.

**African American Music’s Global Appeal**

The early jazz and blues musicians of the 1920s and 1930s were far better known to the American public than were the writers and political figures of the Harlem Renaissance. As southerners made their way northward, they brought with them the music of the South’s towns, cities and plantations. Jazz had its roots among the street musicians of New Orleans, whose makeshift instruments played melodies and rhythms that reflected African culture. During World War I, James Reese Europe’s military band, which included some of the nation’s best African American musicians, introduced jazz to the French people, who immediately embraced the new music.

A European American jazz band, playing the music it had heard in the streets of New Orleans, brought jazz to Chicago in 1917. Three years later King Oliver, the African American band leader who had gained fame by offering formal training to the young street musicians of New Orleans, moved to Chicago. He soon sent for his most talented protégé, Louis Armstrong, and together they spearheaded a Chicago jazz vogue. Now the music and dances of southern African Americans were no longer represented only in minstrel shows. African American music would quickly become the most popular music in the Western Hemisphere.

By 1920 some of the musicians who had specialized in ragtime, an older African American music form, began to write and perform jazz. The first all-African American musical to become the hit of the season on Broadway, *Shuffle Along*, featured the music of the ragtime musician Eubie Blake. The new musical play gave thousands of European Americans in the New York City area their first exposure to African American culture. In the coming years the city experienced a jazz rage that brought European Americans to Harlem, where they listened and danced to the music of Edward Kennedy “Duke” Ellington and William “Count” Basie, among many others.

The fledgling recording industry provided additional opportunities for the dissemination of African American music. In this case, recordings called “race records” were sold almost exclusively in African American communities.

Southern-born African American blues singers were most popular as race record performers. Blues was a relatively new art form in the United States. First popularized by W. C. Handy, this African American folk music took on many forms, depending on regional tastes. By far the most popular African American recording artist was the blues singer Bessie Smith. Her career began in an African American minstrel show headed by Ma Rainey, another famous blues singer. This company of singers, dancers and comedians traveled throughout the South performing for African American audiences. When a New York City record producer heard Bessie Smith, her fame reached new heights.
Although the female blues singers were more popular, several male country blues singers also reached fame in the 1920s. Among the best known were Robert Johnson and Blind Lemon Jefferson. At this point record companies began combing the South in search of new talent. Advancing technology made it possible to record performances in the field, away from studios. Among the talented blues and folk artists discovered in the 1930s was Huddie “Leadbelly” Ledbetter, the composer of some of the period’s most popular songs.

The large northern cities remained magnets for African American talent for years to come. As the Great Migration brought larger numbers to the urban North, the culture of southern-born African Americans became more visible. Blues and jazz, along with spirituals and African American gospel music, quickly expanded beyond the African American community to influence the entire culture. Before the end of the 1920s, European American musicians were writing and playing their versions of jazz. The European American press declared band leader Paul Whiteman, a European American, the “king of jazz.” George Gershwin transformed the melodies he heard among African American southerners into critically acclaimed compositions. By the 1930s, Benny Goodman, another European American musician, was proclaimed the “king of swing.”

Although the African Americans who had developed the original music seldom received comparable notices during that early period, jazz and blues remained an undeniably African American art form. A parade of African American composers and performers remained at the cutting edge of this rapidly changing music. Consequently, jazz became the American classical music, respected around the world as a major cultural contribution. This occurred in part because of the work of the early African American ambassadors of jazz who went to Europe. Among them were Josephine Baker, who achieved stardom in France. African American musicals such as Shuffle Along and the various versions of the Blackbirds musical review (where the Charleston was first performed) also played in European capitals. Roland Hayes, Paul Robeson and Marian Anderson also gave African American spiritual and folk music global exposure through concert tours.

The direction of American popular music from the 1940s to the 1980s continued to reflect the African American influence. Blues produced both rock ‘n’ roll and rhythm ‘n’ blues. Jazz musicians evolved various styles with names such as fusion, bebop, cool jazz and progressive jazz. During the entire period, the influence of African American music continued to increase around the world.

The Struggle for Civil Rights

African Americans in the North quickly realized they had not reached a promised land. Unemployment struck when World War I ended, and European American soldiers returned to claim many of the jobs that had attracted the African American newcomers to northern cities. In most cities, housing discrimination and restrictive covenants forced African Americans to congregate in a single community. Generally, older housing and crowded conditions prevailed.

The race riots of the “Red Summer” of 1919 were a further reminder to African Americans that racial strife was not confined to the South. Chicago and Washington, D.C., were the scenes of street battles between African Americans and European Americans that lasted several days and left many people injured or dead. African American migrants to the urban North had encountered hostility as they searched for housing and employment. As their numbers grew, their European American neighbors often abandoned neighborhoods to the African American newcomers. Ethnic labor unions excluded African Americans, while urban politicians appealed for African American votes but would not deliver equal services. Gradually the African American inner cities became pockets of poverty, while outlying areas became refuges for the European American middle class. Although ethnic slums were not new in American history, African American leaders concluded that discrimination had created the impoverished African American inner city, not African Americans’ desire to live in separate communities.

The Great Migration was the beginning of the transformation of African Americans from a largely regional population to a force to be reckoned with nationwide. Despite racial conflict, northern cities were less segregated than southern cities, and African Americans who migrated to them usually found life less restricted and jobs and education somewhat more accessible. The two world wars accelerated the mobility of African Americans by encouraging them to leave the South and exposing millions of soldiers who served overseas to the cultures and lifestyles of other nations.

The influence of returning African American soldiers was especially strong at the end of World War II. Although they were rewarded for their service with the education and housing benefits of the GI Bill, these African Americans faced discrimination that denied them access to most schools and homes. This situation led the NAACP and other civil rights groups to challenge the legality of segregation even more vigorously. Finally, in 1954, the Brown v. School Board of Topeka, Kansas, decision declared segregation to be unconstitutional.
Unfortunately, the Supreme Court’s ruling was the beginning, not the end, of the struggle. Determined southern public officials and opinion leaders vowed to defy the ruling. Consequently, decades of boycotts, demonstrations and court cases followed as African Americans fought to make real the rights they had received in theory.

In the South, the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. became the most prominent figure in a movement of nonviolent protest aimed at ending segregation in all phases of American life. As the nonviolent protesters took the movement to the North in 1963, they realized that the problem of racial intolerance was equally troublesome in the cities where African Americans had once come in search of a better life.

When flames rose above several American cities during the 1960s, it became evident to the entire nation that the children of the Great Migration were deeply disappointed with their circumstances. The antisegregation demonstrations of the 1940s to 1960s had produced some changes throughout the nation. Nevertheless, the problems of poverty and undereducation due to discrimination had not been addressed to the satisfaction of urban African Americans in the North and West. While the nonviolent direct action movement of King and his allies enjoyed some important victories in the South, the concepts of the “Black Power” movement seemed to attract northern African Americans. At the center of the Black Power philosophy was the idea of community control. Such leaders as Malcolm X urged African Americans to control the politics and economics of their communities as a strategy in the fight for self-determination and prosperity.

Recent Immigrants

There has been a continuous immigration of people of African descent to the United States from the Caribbean and Latin America. Generally, these immigrants have arrived as workers or students in search of opportunity. They have brought with them different perspectives on race relations, depending on the cultures from which they have come. Spanish-speaking immigrants have brought with them the perspective of societies where mulattos and mestizos represent large and often distinctive social groups. Whether they will conform to the American tradition that labels all people of African descent “black” is still an open question.

In addition to the stream of immigrants from the English-speaking Caribbean, there have been large numbers of immigrants from French-speaking Haiti and Spanish-speaking Cuba in recent years. The 125,000 Marielitos who arrived from Communist Cuba in a boat lift in 1980 included a large number of people of African descent. They joined previous generations of Cuban immigrants. Approximately 400,000 Haitian immigrants live in the United States. Many are refugees from the repressive regimes of François Duvalier and his son, Jean-Claude. Haitians have had a great deal more difficulty obtaining permission to remain in the United States because their home government is not Communist. Despite frequent deportations, however, Haitian immigrants are growing in numbers.

One of the important questions regarding these new groups is whether they will assimilate into larger groups, like the African American population, or remain distinct ethnic groups with their own cultures and languages.

African American Progress

The era of the Great Migration featured important changes in American society, both in the North and South. Although southern African Americans struggled under the discouraging influence of segregation and terrorism, they were building institutions of notable sophistication and importance. The Harlem Renaissance was in reality a nationwide African American renaissance with energetic satellites in Atlanta, Chicago, Durham and Washington, D.C. Booker T. Washington’s emphasis on self-help led to a boom in African American-owned businesses throughout the nation. Racial segregation forced African Americans to provide parallel institutions of all types, including hotels, schools, hospitals, restaurants, funeral homes and cosmetics companies.

An enthusiastic African American middle class quickly developed out of the demand for exclusively African American products and services. Perhaps the most successful African American business was founded by Madam C. J. Walker, an Indianapolis-based pioneer in direct sales. By 1910 she had organized a sales force of thousands of African American women who sold her beauty products door to door but worked for themselves as independent entrepreneurs.

Booker T. Washington’s Negro Business Leagues trumpeted the call for successful farms and businesses. Under Washington’s philosophy, the education of African Americans would focus on producing successful entrepreneurs. Washington advised against African Americans moving out of the South, indicating that their future economic prosperity would be found there. Southern African American colleges, such as Washington’s Tuskegee Institute and the agricultural and mechanical and agricultural and technical schools, emphasized skilled labor and farming. This became the basis of a major dispute between Booker T. Washington and his African American critics, notably W. E. B. Du Bois, who believed a broader education in the liberal
arts tradition would be essential to the creation of African American social and political leaders. The vocational education curriculum of these colleges produced dramatic increases in the numbers of African American-owned farms and businesses. Unfortunately, the simultaneous African American retreat from the political arena left many of those gains unprotected.

With emancipation and education for African Americans came recognition for many important scientific achievements. Elijah McCoy, the inventor whose products were celebrated as “the real McCoy,” created devices important to the progress of American industry, notably an automatic lubrication system used in several types of machines. George Washington Carver, the famous scientist at Tuskegee, revolutionized agriculture in the South. Long dependent on cotton as a cash crop, southern farmers faced ruin as pests, weather and falling prices assaulted them. The thousands of new uses for peanuts, sweet potatoes and other farm products that came from Carver’s laboratory created new markets for these crops and helped direct southern farmers away from a disastrous one-crop economy.

Provident Hospital in Chicago, a teaching hospital founded by African American physician Daniel Hale Williams, was the site of an unprecedented achievement. Dr. Williams was the first to perform open heart surgery successfully in 1893, before the invention of the heart-lung machine. This operation was an emergency procedure in which Dr. Williams operated on the patient’s beating heart. Years later another African American physician, Dr. Charles Drew, discovered that blood plasma could do much of the work for which whole blood had been previously used. This discovery saved many lives on the battlefields of World War II.

The progress African Americans achieved tended to make the policies of segregation and discrimination even more problematic. The search for equality was intensified as growing numbers of African Americans sought access to the American dream that others enjoyed.

A Better Nation for All

African Americans have contributed to American life in many important ways. Among the most important has been their battle to keep the ideals of the nation before the American people. In fighting against slavery, racism and discrimination, African Americans have reminded the nation of its goal to create one people out of many. Most African Americans are descendants of enslaved people who were brought to America, legally and illegally, before the ancestors of most immigrant groups arrived. By the time of the German and Irish immigration of the 1840s and 1850s, the importing of slaves directly from Africa had been outlawed for more than 30 years. The work of enslaved African Americans provided involuntary cheap labor for the United States at a crucial point in its economic development. They also brought skills and know-how that made the nation’s cash crops succeed.

Finally, in their struggle for civil rights, African Americans played a central role in making the United States a better place for its waves of immigrants. As laws that discriminated against Americans on the basis of race, creed or color were struck down, many Americans, both native-born and immigrant, benefited. The persistent efforts of African Americans and their allies have made the light of freedom shine brighter.
Conventional wisdom encourages the belief that people of African descent came to the United States as latecomers, with the only early immigrants arriving as enslaved people and becoming, through acquired status and conditioning, a confined, secluded, homogeneous and subordinate group in society. Yet so much of this conventional thinking is untested and perhaps untrue. Myths, mistakes or misunderstandings, the misconceptions nevertheless play a crucial role in shaping the images held about African Americans and the way they are regarded and treated in everyday life as well as in popular history. One such image ignores the fact that some came to this country knowingly, sometimes more willingly than others, in hopes of bettering their personal, political or socioeconomic condition. Despite their fears as people of color, they came from distant homelands, attracted to the unlimited possibilities promised in the lore of the American way of life.

The “Discovery” of America

Much of the distortion that exists about the African presence in the United States—or America, that land immigrants idealize as the land of freedom, opportunity and prosperity—is related to and generated by the more generally shared claims of the “discovery” of America. Almost universally and in rather dogmatic fashion, historians have credited this feat to Christopher Columbus.

Earlier and recent research supports an increasingly vocalized contention that Africans not only accompanied European explorers and colonists in their expeditions to the “New World” as crew and cargo, but also may have been in the hemisphere and have had navigational knowledge about its existence and location prior to that epoch. With an impressive battery of aids, such as archaeological findings, early navigational maps, oral historical legends and linguistic reconstructions, modern scholars and others have argued the claim of a pre-Columbian knowledge and presence of Africans in the Americas.

These scholars maintain that the Iberians and even earlier European mariners learned of the existence of such lands—and sea routes for reaching them—from their African counterparts, who even then had been engaging in transoceanic expeditions and trade with the Americas. The captain of one ship in Columbus’ first voyage probably was African, and Africans were said to have participated in many of Columbus’ landings.

Evidence of the pre-Columbian presence and contact includes the Negroid features of the Olmec monuments in Mexico; the resemblance in linguistic items, pyramidal structure and artistic forms or designs of Central and South America and the western Sudan; reports in early Spanish chronicles of encounters with “black” people; African artifacts in the American territory; and complementary legends on both sides of the Atlantic of visits by African merchants, deities and dignitaries.

Guyanese scholar Ivan Van Sertima located in the United States Virgin Islands a pre-Columbian dot and crescent script that has been identified as the Tifinag branch of the Libyan script that seemingly testifies to the literacy of some of the early transatlantic visitors. Even though not yet acceptable as indisputable evidence, the findings and pursuit of these studies have unearthed details and provided insight on the trade, navigational and shipbuilding sophistication of Africans prior to
contact with their European conquerers and colonizers in the fifteenth century. Moreover, they heighten the probability of a pre-Columbian African presence in the Americas. (Van Sertima, 1976)

**Africans with Spanish Explorers**

The evidence is much more precise with regard to the early presence of Africans in North America. Africans came, established homes and built parts of this country with the Spanish explorers even before the founding of the first English colonies.

A first effort by the Spaniards, who claimed the East Coast as far north as Connecticut for the Spanish monarchy, was to establish a colony in 1526 at San Miguel de Gualdape (coast of North Carolina). Led by Lucas Vásquez de Alayón, the expedition failed after six months, partly due to Africans escaping the colony and making their homes with local Indians. After Alayón’s death, the ship was remounted and the colonists returned to Hispaniola. Africans there had been replacing the dying native population as enslaved laborers at the suggestion of Dominican Friar Bartholome de las Casas.

The friar’s intervention with the Spanish monarchy on behalf of the native Taíno population on the island of Hispaniola (Quisqueya), today made up of Haiti and the Dominican Republic, and the subsequent importation of Africans to the island, marked the beginning of the trade in enslaved African laborers in the Americas. Of course, the world had experienced slavery before that among such groups as the Romans, the Aztecs and even the Africans themselves. Africans had been enslaved by Arabs and later by the Iberians, who earlier had been slaves and captives of the Romans and Moors. Many of those early forms of slavery, however, were not based on race and did not always constitute a trade. Their victims were sometimes prisoners of war and were not always confined to cruel, perpetual or inherited servility—as was to become true for enslaved Africans in the Americas, especially in the United States. In some cultures enslaved people became part of the captors’ society and even rose to positions of leadership, but in other cultures they became human sacrifices.

From 1527 to 1539, parts of the American Southwest, particularly Arizona and New Mexico, were explored by an enslaved African, Estevanico, or Little Stephen, who served as interpreter and scout for Cabeza de Vaca but subsequently took hold of the party when natives killed its leader. Other Africans were part of the crews and expeditions of Ponce de León, Hernando de Soto and Menéndez de Avilés. Under Spanish leadership free and enslaved Africans helped build and defend San Agustín (St. Augustine, Florida). Founded in 1565, it is considered the oldest continuously occupied European community in the United States.

Even as late as the eighteenth century, Africans continued to play significant roles in the colonization of non-Anglo North America. Jean Baptiste du Sable, a Haitian mulatto fur trader, is credited with being the first permanent foreign resident of Chicago, and Luis Quintero and his wife were among the mulattos and Africans who comprised the racially mixed party commissioned to found the mission of Los Angeles in California, then part of New Spain or Mexico.

**Arrival in English Colonies**

The establishment of English North America was a later development in the colonial history of the United States. Jamestown, Virginia, founded in 1607, would host the plantation as the basic mode of defense, colonization, production and development of the colonial area. Plymouth, Massachusetts, founded in 1620, would give birth to the democratic principles of representative governance and Puritanic religious and moral undertones that would come to characterize American political traditions.

The first Africans to be reported in the English colonies arrived on a Dutch man-of-war in Jamestown in 1619—before the landing of the Pilgrims in Massachusetts! The captain of the vessel offered them for sale with the other cargo, and, like most Europeans coming into the colonies, they were bought as indentured servants. By definition and practice, indentured servants would be freed either through purchasing their own freedom or by completing their period of indenture—at which time they were free to obtain property, marry, purchase other servants and participate in the public affairs of the colony. In 1624 the first African child born in English America was born to parents who arrived on that vessel as indentured servants and was named after the parents’ owner, William Tucker.

With respect to Plymouth, a muster list of the village militia indicates that among the freeholders was at least one “blackamoor,” as Africans were called in recognition of their non-Christian, likely Islamic, practices. The prevailing explanation, amid continued controversy, identifies him as Pierce, a formerly enslaved man from English Jamaica who returned to America via England.

Hence the earliest arrival and birth of Africans in English colonial America were not as enslaved people per se. Slavery became common practice later as certain products of the Americas (i.e., cotton and tobacco in the English colonies) obtained the status of profitable or cash goods in the larger world market, and the colonists found it beneficial to force larger numbers of people to work
the vastly available land cheaply, in servility and for perpetuity.

For the very reasons English colonial planters failed to institutionalize the enslavement of Native Americans and poor European recruits or prisoners, the planters may have succeeded with Africans. They were visible, accessible and different; uprooted from their homelands, traditions and cultures; and unprotected by their governments.

The Slave Trade

Whatever ambivalence may have lingered as to the legal status of Africans vis-à-vis Europeans in the English colonies rapidly began to be clarified by the courts of Virginia in 1640 by punishing African indentured servants with lifetime service. The intentional perpetuity of their enslavement was indicated by legislation in Massachusetts one year later.

By the 1660s intermarriage between Africans and Europeans was being forbidden, and several English colonies made laws bonding the children born to enslaved mothers. The subsequent entry of Africans into the United States formed part of a lucrative and dehumanizing slave trade. This trade began with the forceful or deceptive capture of natives, mostly of the West African coast, regardless of sex, status, age or size; their dreadful transportation in tightly packed vessels across the wretched Middle Passage; and then their seasoning and role as chattel in “New World” markets to European-born or Creole planters, miners, merchants and even missionaries.

Just prior to its final consolidation into a body of sovereign states and territories, the continental United States was composed of colonies of several European nations and tribal lands of Native American nations. Africans were part of the population of all these colonies and even some Indian nations; many had participated in early explorations and colonization, and others were captured or became refugees there. The status of these Africans in the country at that time ranged from free to enslaved, and it may have changed from one status to the other.

The entry of the United States into the slave trade was late and, for the most part, indirect through European companies that gained a monopoly over the trade. The American slave trade drew from the remnants of cargoes from the Caribbean already subjected to selection and seasoning. This was the case of Olaudah Equiano via Barbados and of Joseph Cinque via Cuba, both of whom succeeded in fighting the system and returning to Africa. In fact, many early enslaved Africans of the northern colonies came indirectly from the Caribbean; others came to the Carolinas with their masters from Barbados, Bermuda and the Bahamas in the face of economic crises. Still others came to the Louisiana territory, New Orleans, New York City and Puerto Rico as an aftermath of the Haitian Revolution and Napoleonic War.

Because direct involvement of American slavers came later, European slave traders drew their captives from deeper in the interior, southwestern and even eastern parts of Africa. With United States independence, slavery began to wane in the northern states and, by 1807, England and the United States had discontinued legal slave trafficking and were intercepting the cargoes of the other European slave ships on their way to American ports. These ships continued to carry enslaved Africans to Brazil and Cuba up through the late 1800s. The “legal” importation of enslaved Africans into the United States can be placed at about 1,107,500 between 1640 and 1800, based on Deerr’s estimates. (Curtin, 1969)

Ironically, the ban on trading in enslaved Africans was instituted around the same time the cotton gin increased the competitiveness of American cotton on the world market. Therefore, the smaller farms and plantations of the “Old South” began to yield to the larger plantations in the “Deep South” and Texas, where a larger labor force was needed. Hence, while northern manumission of Africans characterized the period following independence, internal breeding and illegal slave trading emerged as common practices in the South.

An estimated 527,000 illegal enslaved Africans plus numerous free persons from Africa are believed to have...
entered the United States to work the Deep South’s new large cotton plantations. (Curtin, 1969) Additionally, Cape Verdeans—and also people of African descent from the Caribbean and Pacific islands—worked together with African American freedmen and bondsmen as captains and crews of a growing whaling industry that operated on both coasts.

To add further irony to injury, not only did native-born Africans participate as volunteers and conscripts in the Revolutionary War and the War of 1812, but African troops from Haiti were part of the international contingent that participated in the Revolutionary War’s Battle of Savannah and the Battle of New Orleans in the War of 1812—even when slavery of their American peers persisted in the surrounding regions.

**Free Migration During Slavery**

Slavery itself did not officially end in the United States until the 1860s with the Emancipation Proclamation and the victory of northern federal troops over the southern Confederacy. Even through the 220 years in which slavery was practiced legally, foreign-born free Africans entered the country from Africa, the Caribbean and other parts of the world. During all that time, from 1640 through the 1860s, native-born free Africans voluntarily moved and enslaved Africans regularly escaped to other parts of the country, including the adjoining territories that later became states.

These antebellum internal movements took various forms. Many were, by necessity, individualistic and imaginative in nature, such as passing as European, feigning owner-slave relationships and pretending death. All required some degree of caution and disguise to escape the watchful eyes of spies and the owner’s patrollers.

Many fugitives were hunted and returned to the South; some free and foreign people of African descent were enslaved in the process; and several laws and court decisions restricting the freedom of movement of African Americans to and from America, or denying their free status having done so, were issued. Two fugitive precedents, the Negro Seaman Act and the Dred Scott decision, were among those that acknowledged or established appropriate modes for recapturing African Americans who fled in search of freedom.

Larger-scale movements for freedom among African Americans included the Underground Railroad and the contraband camps and fleets through which fugitives abandoned slavery in an organized or collective manner to find freedom—a new life, the promised American life—elsewhere. These movements generated or regenerated the words of the spirituals, with such terms as “River Jordan,” “chariots” and “trains” becoming codes or shared images for freedom and for specific escape routes or destinations. Their destinations were not always within the boundaries of the country or its territories. Some aimed for the outside regions of Florida and Canada—either as part of the railroad, or as refugees after the Revolutionary War and War of 1812 or the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850. Others were among the speculators or ranchers, cattlemen, merchants, conductors, innkeepers, artisans, laborers, guides or drifters who operated along the routes west to California, whether across the country’s midwestern and mountainous trails or farther south across the swampy paths and the railroad route across the Isthmus of Panama.

Others went to Ethiopia, other parts of Africa and several Caribbean and Central American countries as part of colonization and missionary schemes. The West African Republic of Liberia was founded to serve as the home of formerly enslaved African Americans, and communities in the Dominican Republic, Haiti and Trinidad, among others, trace their beginnings to the exodus of African Americans from slavery in the United States.

A long list of African Americans, men and women, proselytized and participated in the flight and fight for their freedom—the American Dream. Among them were Martin R. Delany, Frederick Douglass, Harriet Tubman and Sojourner Truth. European Americans who worked with them included William Lloyd Garrison, Sarah and Angelina Grimke and, of course, John Brown. Less recognized are the movements and actions of free, foreign-born people of African descent and their contributions to the political and economic development of the United States despite the prevalence of its slave system. These included Crispus Attucks, Prince Hall and Samuel Fraunces, the patriots; Denmark Vesey, the insurrectionist; John B. Russworm, the journalist, and Edward Blyden, the scholar (both later becoming colonizationist leaders in West Africa); Jan Matzlieger, the inventor; Arthur Esteves, the businessman; and William Alexander Leidesdorff, the frontier entrepreneur and advance guard in the annexation of California. These African Americans, like other Americans of Caribbean birth, such as Alexander Hamilton and John James Audubon, made important contributions to the history of this country.

**Large-Scale Voluntary Immigration**

With the end of slavery, the coming of Africans to the United States took on a different and still-prevailing form—large-scale voluntary migration in both its internal and international dimensions. The history of this
country has been associated in myth and reality with immigrants coming to its shores, crossing its borders, landing at its airports and, as they made homes to raise families and improve their lives, becoming “Americans.” Not always simply by will or in wonder, sometimes because of conditions, expulsion or inducement, others have come—some even illegally and surreptitiously—in search of the American Dream.

In other cases the broadening jurisdiction of this country by one means or another has led to the absorption of immigrants, their lands and cultures and, therefore, the co-opting of their nationalities and nations and their offspring into the American fold. Understood in the broadest and most benign sense, we are all immigrants.

This logic can be stretched to include even Native Americans, who are believed to have originated as a migrating people from outside this continent. One of the principal modes of peopling the United States has been immigration. Subsequent immigration and internal migratory movements, together with not always subtle labor policies and sometimes blatant legal discrimination, gave configuration to the population mix, cultural dynamics and interaction among the various ethnic or racial communities of the United States. In the process, linkages between the immigrants and those left behind were reinforced or broken. For example, many activities today in Brooklyn are more pan-Caribbean or pan-African than is true in either the Caribbean or Africa, respectively.

**Invisible Immigrants**

Despite the somewhat mythical but generally appropriate claims that we are all immigrants, all citizens and aliens are not always treated equally in society or by the government. As a consequence, certain groups, in this case non-European, have been rendered invisible in much the same manner as African Americans were portrayed by Ralph Ellison in his acclaimed novel, *Invisible Man*, published in 1952. Immigrants of non-European descent have suffered invisibility both by being foreign and by not being of European descent. Hence few Americans can appreciate how long African immigrants have been entering the country. Fewer yet know the story of their presence and participation in shaping and sharing the country—from their immigrant perspectives—in contrast to the usually demeaning treatments and damning reports of the popular media. Most people cannot conceive of how much migration is shared as an experience of African Americans as a whole, whether native- or foreign-born.

Although African immigration into the United States never ceased to take place even during the time of slavery, its greatest manifestation began with the end of slavery. Sociologist Ira Reid shows that in the first decade after slavery, the United States’ foreign-born population of African descent was made up largely of emancipated and illegally imported enslaved people, free and captured contraband, and Africans and their descendants who had sought refuge in Canada to escape slavery. West Indians made up only 15 percent of that population at the time, but they quickly replaced others as the leading component from the following decade onward. (Reid, 1939)

Middle America, particularly the West Indies and the Caribbean basin, has long been seen and treated as an extended or external region of multiple American interest groups—both public and private. It has been the scene of the projection of slavery, a waiting station for contraband slave labor and a refuge for undesired African Americans escaping slavery. It has been the site for transit zones, transportation projects, communication lines, tourist or vacation resorts and political influence and military inter-
vention as well as the site for plantations and other primary production industries of the United States government and people.

With many of these projects that began in the 1840s, it was free Caribbean labor, whether native or immigrant, that was used for construction and maintenance, not the labor of enslaved African Americans.

This was also a time when European American laborers displaced free African American laborers in the cities and dominated the labor market in the industrializing North, depriving local African Americans of their traditional occupational roles. The more generally stagnated southern labor situation persisted even after the end of slavery despite selected gains in the Reconstruction Era. It was the object of striking complaints by Booker T. Washington in his famous speech at the Atlanta Exposition in 1895 and continued until the beginning of World War I.

During the post-Reconstruction period, millions of African Americans were trapped on the land in the South as tenant farmers or sharecroppers and others were curtailed in their urban advancements by Jim Crow laws and separate-but-equal policies, which were reinforced in 1896 by a Supreme Court decision, *Plessy v. Ferguson*. Some African Americans left the South for Kansas, Nebraska, Oklahoma and other states to build their own communities; some had in mind establishing their own state.

Parallel but limited immigrations were also beginning to take place from the Caribbean basin to the United States, largely by people whose countries had shipping-line connections with the United States or who were being displaced by political upheavals. The natives of such countries began to appear in ports and factories or on farms along the southern and eastern coasts. This was true, for instance, of the African American and European American workers for the cigar-making industry who had been transplanted from the Hispanic Caribbean islands to American cities—Baltimore, Boston, Charleston, Philadelphia, New Orleans, New York, Tampa, etc.

## The Move North

With the beginning of World War I and the end of the construction of the Panama Canal, both streams of African Americans—southern migrants and Caribbean immigrants—began to move north to replace northerners departing to serve in the war, fill voids being created by the expanding war industries and substitute for the European immigrant labor streams that were obstructed by the hostilities. The encounter between those two groups—that Oscar Handlin casually called the “newcomers,” and the older resident African American population of the North—gave birth to a new, more complex and cosmopolitan African American community.

The free or voluntary African American movement has tended to be to urban areas as far back as antebellum times, though rural migrating streams have co-existed with urban ones over the years. Yet for both migrating subgroups, New York City has always been the leading destination. By 1930 the city was housing 60 percent of the country’s foreign-born population. The boroughs of Brooklyn and Manhattan outnumbered even Boston and Miami, the runner-up cities.

From the 1920s until the 1960s, Harlem was clearly the mecca for foreign-born people of African descent. They spoke various languages, including French, Portuguese, Dutch and Spanish. They came from Africa, the West Indies, Latin America and the Pacific islands, including the Philippines. During the same period, some native-born individuals chose to go into exile or to take up residence in Africa, Europe and even the Soviet Union. Among them were Henry Ossawa Tanner, Josephine Baker, Dean Dixon, Chester Himes, Richard Wright, James Baldwin and Shirley and W. E. B. Du Bois. From World War I to the Great Depression, Harlem was in vogue and of great vitality for all African Americans. It was also of great theatrical interest and polit-
ical curiosity to European Americans from downtown. It was the seat of the Garvey movement, the largest African American mass movement in the country until the civil rights developments of the 1960s; the setting of the Harlem Renaissance, a period of intellectual and artistic ferment by an engaged African American intelligentsia; starting point of the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, the world’s leading collection of African American historical and cultural material; and the scene of the Antillean Realty Company and the African American ethnic businesses, professional offices and social establishments that gave form and rhythm to the residential patterns and daily life of Harlem. Together they all also gave range and variation to the urban culture of Manhattan.

Brooklyn, at that time, served as a principal residential community for foreign-born people of African descent, who worked in factories or with wealthy families in the other boroughs but chose to buy (or rent) their own brownstone row houses in which to raise their children with discipline, standards and ambitions they brought from their home countries. Smaller repetitions of the same could be found in the Bronx, Queens and across the river in Staten Island where people from St. Martin’s clustered, or along the coast of New Jersey in such industrial towns as Perth Amboy where Anguillans converged.

Immigrant Leaders

Wherever the early generations of African immigrants relocated to, they strove to play significant professional, business and leadership roles and succeeded in doing so disproportionately as alien minorities in the larger African American communities.

Within that impressive litany of leaders there figured such giants as Marcus Garvey, Hubert Harrison and Richard Moore, the orators; J. A. Rogers, W. Domingo and P. M. Savory, the journalists; Juan Hernandez, Bert Williams, Hazel Scott and Eusebia Cosme, the entertainers; Claude McKay and Eric Walrond, the writers; Arthur Schomburg and Kenneth Clark, the intellectuals; Charles Petoni and Mabel Stuaers, the medical practitioners and community leaders; James Watson and David Straker, the jurists; Hope Stevens, the attorney; Hulan Jack, Herbert Bruce and Raymond Jones, the politicians; Cyril Briggs, Frank Crosswaith, Maida Springer-Kemp, Ashley Totten and Jesus Colon, the organizers; Austin Hansen, the portrait photographer; Herbert Julian, the stunt aviator; and Captain Hugh Mulzac, the merchant marine skipper.

It was as if these people possessed in them, long before their arrival here, what Americans call the Protestant work ethic.

Hence, of the seemingly common people, well-known creative writer Paule Marshall, of West Indian parents herself, aptly states: “By dint of hard work, sacrifice and fierce determination and will they acquired the house, the university degree for their children, the car, the fur coat, . . . .” (Marshall, 1987) These, her parents’ peer group, she contends, were people whose presence or worth and whose tremendous human resources America never seemed to acknowledge seriously or use equitably. Yet from them has come a formidable first generation of African American and Caribbean American leaders, such as Shirley Chisholm, Robert Maynard, St. Clair Drake, James Farmer, Malcolm X, Franklin Thomas, Barbara Watson, Lloyd Richards, Gil Noble, Ernie Critchlow, Niara Surdakasa, June Jordan, Cicely Tyson, Sidney Poitier, Harry Belafonte, Clifford Alexander, Earl Graves, Yvonne Braithewaite, Marcus Alexis, Vincent Harding and Colin Powell. To those immigrants of African descent, and these their children, there was an American Dream.

People with Dreams

The United States received approximately 500,000 voluntary immigrants of African descent through Ellis Island, and many more through other places and at different times. A cumulative estimate of immigration statistics suggests more than 1 million African immigrants have legally entered this country since the first third of the nineteenth century. Even before the erection of the Statue of Liberty, the country absorbed many, many more as
Haitian immigrants attempt to enter the United States along the coast of Florida.

enslaved people—without considering their will—and these, with their descendants, generally opted to stay. Yet it cannot be ignored that some felt it necessary to leave, or at least to relocate, even when others were clamoring to enter America. Voluntary African immigration to the United States has not ceased, despite war, depression and restrictive laws. By the 1960s Africans were again entering, both legally and illegally, in great numbers, constituting a major stream in this newest wave of immigrants to the United States—to America, the land of hope. Some of these recent immigrants, such as the Cubans and Haitians, have come as refugees in packed boats, risking their lives to escape crushing economic and political systems. When they arrived, many were detained in camps and then relegated to reside in urban ghettos or work on migrant farms.

In a sense all Americans, whether native- or foreign-born and regardless of race or age, are immigrants constantly searching for and working to make these United States the perfect America of their dreams. However, questions remain regarding these voluntary African immigrants and their American dreams. It leaves one to wonder what their fate might have been had they arrived on these shores as immigrants who were European, or so perceived, rather than people of color.

To reemphasize a point made elsewhere—immigrants, whatever their racial, ethnic or national backgrounds, are neither patterns nor statistics. They are people with dreams and drives, with cultures and purposes. Their presence is not without consequence; they make vital contributions to their new country of residence and identity. (Bryce-Laporte, 1986)
The Americans All® student essays provide background information on Native Americans, African Americans, Asian Americans, European Americans, Mexican Americans and Puerto Rican Americans, as well as on Angel Island, Ellis Island and the Statue of Liberty. Adapted from the Americans All® resource texts, the student essays have been created to meet both the language and social studies requirements of grades 3–4, 5–6 and 7–9. These essays are in blackline-master format and appear in their respective grade-specific teacher’s guides. Learning activities found in each teacher’s guide encourage the use of these student essays both in the classroom and at home.
385. (left) Olaudah Equiano (Gustavus Vassa). Born in West Africa in 1745, he was brought to a Virginia plantation, via the slave market in Barbados, in the mid-1750s. Shortly after, he was sold to a ship’s captain. Vassa spent many years on the sea. He ultimately landed in England, where he learned to read and write. After an unsuccessful attempt to obtain his freedom, he was sold in the West Indies’ slave market to Robert King, a Philadelphia Quaker, who continued his schooling. After saving enough money to buy his freedom, Vassa moved back to England, became active in the abolition movement and published his autobiography in 1789. (right) Joseph Cinque was one of the enslaved Africans who led the mutiny aboard the Spanish schooner Amistad in 1840. The ship was on route from Havana to Principe when the 52 Africans killed the captain and forced the pilot to sail toward Africa. Unfamiliar with navigation, they were unable to stop the pilot from steering a course toward the United States coastline, where an American ship, the Washington, took control of the Amistad from the mutineers. Despite calls from the Spanish government for the return of the ship and its crew, the case was heard in United States courts. Cinque and his followers were acquitted on the charges of piracy and given the freedom they had gained on the high seas. After their release, they went to England and then back to Africa.

386. During the four centuries of the transatlantic slave trade, several European nations dominated and profited from the infamous traffic. Portugal regularly supplied enslaved people for Spain’s colonies as well as its own large colony, Brazil.

387. Slavery existed in Africa in a much different form prior to the coming of Europeans. An enslaved African could marry, own property and even obtain certain legal rights. When Europeans arrived, they began to capture natives of the West African coast, regardless of sex, status, age or size, for removal to America. Europeans transported enslaved Africans in tightly packed vessels. The hold of a typical slave ship was about five feet high, and shelves, extending out approximately six feet on both sides, would be built in the middle. When the bottom of the hold was full, captives would then be packed on platforms. In this environment, they would cross the ocean from Africa to the Americas (the dreaded Middle Passage) to be sold in slave markets to European-born or Creole planters, miners, merchants and even missionaries. This illustration shows the Brookes, a British slave ship, c. 1788.

388. In 1640 the courts of Virginia ruled that indentureship of Africans was a lifetime commitment. Massachusetts followed suit the next year, and by the 1660s intermarriage between African Americans and European Americans was being forbidden. Several colonies ruled that children born to enslaved mothers were also bonded. Enslavement of African Americans had become institutionalized, and the subsequent entry of Africans into the United States formed part of a lucrative and dehumanizing slave trade. This photograph was taken in Louisiana, c. 1865.

389. This photograph was taken in the early 1890s in Mt. Meigs, Alabama, by photographer Rudolf Eickemeyer as part of a series on the rural South after the Civil War. This photograph illustrates how African Americans, once forbidden by slave codes to read or write, responded to their new freedom. By mastering literacy skills, they moved beyond the limits of slavery and built new communities.

390. Harriet Tubman (far left), seen here with a group of former slaves, was one of the most famous women conductors on the Underground Railroad. Called “the Moses of her people,” she was born in Dorchester County, Maryland, in 1823. She escaped from slavery and returned to her former plantation to liberate her immediate family. A dedicated abolitionist, she led 19 separate groups (more than 300 enslaved African Americans) to freedom, often moving the timid forward with the persuasion of her loaded revolver. She served as a spy, nurse and laundress for the Union forces during the Civil War. After the war, she founded two schools, worked for women’s suffrage and opened a home for the aged.
Sojourner Truth was born “Isabella” in Ulster County, New York, in 1797. One of 12 children, she spent her early years in slavery and never learned to read and write. The mother of five children, she was freed by state law as an adult and earned her way into domestic employment. In 1843 she adopted the name Sojourner Truth and traveled through the North, supporting herself with the money she earned by preaching the causes of emancipation and women’s suffrage and by selling her biography, which a friend wrote for her. She was a powerful and an effective speaker. During the Civil War she helped care for wounded soldiers and newly emancipated African Americans, whom she urged to own land and learn to read. Sojourner Truth died in her Michigan home in 1883.

Frederick Douglass (c. 1817–1895), the son of an enslaved African American mother, Harriet Bailey, and an unknown European American father, selected his surname from the hero of the book The Lady of the Lake after his successful escape from slavery in Baltimore in 1838. A powerful speaker, he moved to New Bedford, Massachusetts, and became active as an agent for the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society. After publishing his autobiography, Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, in 1845, he was forced to flee to England, because information in the book would have led to his recapture. After English friends purchased his freedom, he returned to New York and in 1847 established a newspaper, The North Star, which championed the abolitionist cause for 17 years. He was active in the Underground Railroad, urged civil rights for African Americans during Reconstruction and served his country as marshal of the District of Columbia and minister to Haiti. His home in Washington, D.C., is open to the public.

To forge kinship ties, enslaved African American parents taught their children to call enslaved adults “aunt” and “uncle” and younger ones “brother” and “sister.” This made them all members of a broader community that helped sustain them despite the psychologically debilitating effects of discrimination, material privation and physical violence. This is the family tree of Charity Donley of Hallettsville, Texas, who raised her children with the values necessary to overcome Jim Crow laws and practices.

The end of the Civil War created opportunities for African Americans to gain formal training. Young African American children were sent to schools once these became available, because the nation realized that education was one of the keys to gaining a more solid future. Missionaries ran many of these early schools, though the men and women who worked so hard for abolition contributed much to the early schooling of African Americans. Even though academic courses were taught, many of the schools placed a great deal of emphasis on practical training.

Some African Americans lived in the western states when they were still territories, but the large westward migration of African Americans, both free and formerly enslaved, began after the Civil War ended. This exodus was sparked by a desire to find a place where the racial prejudice of the South could be forgotten and where a new life could be carved out. Some, such as this family in Guthrie, Oklahoma, in 1889, turned to farming. Family members could not afford the luxury of large living quarters but consoled themselves in knowing they were free and building a future for themselves.

Prior to the Civil War, Canada was a popular destination for African Americans fleeing slavery. Two of the leading spokespeople for this movement were Henry Bibb and Samuel R. Ward, who established newspapers in Canada. Bibb’s paper, Voice of the Fugitive, was a leading proponent of the Canadian movement. (left) This group of refugees relocated to Windsor, Ontario, Canada, in the mid-1800s. They are (standing) Anne Mary Jane Hunt, Mansfield Smith and Lucinda Seymour; (seated) Henry Stevenson and Bush Johnson. (right) Gilbert Hunt was born into slavery in King William County, Virginia, c. 1780, and was sent as a young man to Richmond to learn the carriage-making trade. He became a skilled blacksmith, married and joined the Baptist Church. Although he was sold to new owners many times, his skills enabled him to remain in Richmond. In 1811 he helped save several people caught in a fire at the Richmond Theatre, one of whom was the daughter of his wife’s owner who was responsible for his learning to read. He saved enough money to buy his freedom in 1829 and then emigrated to Liberia with other free African Americans from Richmond. Not finding Liberia to his liking, he returned to Richmond, served as deacon of the First African Baptist Church and continued to earn his living as a blacksmith. This photograph was taken in Richmond in 1860, three years before his death.
399. (top) This young boy earns his living hauling cotton bales with his donkey-drawn wagon in Camden, South Carolina. (bottom) This group of workers in a cotton field in South Carolina, 1884, gather and prepare bales of cotton to go to market.

400. Bill Pickett (inset), the son of formerly enslaved African Americans, was born near Austin, Texas, in 1870. He worked as a cowboy on several different Texas ranches and, during the 1890s, developed a method of throwing and holding steers by biting into their lower lips. This technique, illustrated here by either Bill or his brother Ben (identity not clear from photo), which simulated the actions of a bulldog, made him famous on the county fair circuit. In the early 1900s, he went on a rodeo tour with his bulldogging performance and finally joined the Miller Brothers’ show, where he stayed until they went out of business in the early 1930s. He retired from active performances in the mid-1920s and spent the next decade as a horse trainer. Ironically, he was killed by a horse on the Miller Ranch in 1932.

401. (top) The West provided more opportunities for free African Americans to achieve success than the South and East because, in many cases, it had an oral, rather than a written, culture. Despite existing racial attitudes, a man could be judged on what he could do in this type of environment. This group of men served as deputy United States marshals. They are: (left to right) Amos Maytubby (a Choctaw), Deputy Marshal Zek Miller, Neely Factor and Bob L. Fortune. (bottom) During the Civil War, African American soldiers served in the armies of the North. Martin R. Delany was the first African American to receive the rank of major. As a result of their service during that war, African Americans were finally named to the Military Academy at West Point and the Naval Academy at Annapolis. Henry O. Flipper became the first African American cadet to graduate from West Point. African American troops fought valiantly during the Spanish-American War, but they were not generally accepted as equals by the service. The first African American to die in that conflict was Elijah B. Tunnell, who left his post as a cook on the U.S.S. Winslow to assist on deck when the ship was disabled by gunfire. African American troops assisted Lieutenant Colonel Theodore Roosevelt and his Rough Riders in the battles of El Coney and San Juan Hill. These soldiers were members of the 10th Cavalry, A Troop, probably stationed at Fort Apache, c. 1890.

402. The Supreme Court’s Plessy v. Ferguson decision of 1896 officially installed segregation as a legal policy by declaring it constitutional. This led many communities around the nation to enforce existing segregation ordinances and to create new ones. A typical example of these ordinances involved both drinking fountains and rest rooms, such as these in the streetcar terminal in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, July 1939. These
dehumanizing laws and practices were finally reversed in 1954, when the Supreme Court ruled in Brown v. School Board of Topeka, Kansas, that segregation is unconstitutional.

403. As the era of slavery came to an end, African Americans realized that one key to upward mobility was their ability to obtain an education. (top) These African American students are studying history at Tuskegee Institute in 1902. (bottom) The faculty and students of Riverside School, San Antonio, Texas, pose for a photo, c. 1890.

404. (top) These children were photographed in Baltimore, Maryland. (bottom) These children were photographed near Hampton, Virginia, c. 1900.

405. This family enjoyed a relatively prosperous life in Virginia, c. 1900. The father, a Hampton Institute graduate, capitalized on his industrial education to provide a good environment for his wife and children.

406. Even after the Civil War, cotton remained a major product in the South. Whether gathering the crop from the field (top, South Carolina, 1884) or spinning the raw material into a finished product (bottom, Florida, 1915), African Americans remained deeply involved in cotton production and contributed a great deal to the industry that helped shape the United States economy.

407. Because of the skills African Americans brought with them from Africa and used during their enslavement experience, they were able to grow various crops. The group working this sugarcane field (left) and the couple plowing a new rice field (right) give evidence of African Americans’ versatility as farmers. Both photographs were taken in South Carolina in 1884.

408. One of the most efficient ways of bringing cotton to market was to load it on a large river barge, such as this one arriving in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. (top) The southern river systems were greatly responsible for keeping the antebellum plantation system active for many decades after the Civil War. (bottom) From the docks, cotton could be taken by wagon to local markets for further distribution, such as this one in Gainesville, Texas. It took the boll weevil and overuse of the soil to limit, finally, the economic power of cotton in the South.

409. African American women kept many of the African traditions alive despite their early experiences in captivity. (left) Two women carry vegetables in baskets on their heads in Florida, c. 1915. (right) Women gather at a street well near an Episcopal church, South Carolina, 1884.

410. Encouraged by articles in the northern African American press extolling economic opportunities and lax enforcement of segregation, many African Americans packed up their belongings and set off for a better life. (top) With their car packed, these young workers are leaving Shawboro, North Carolina, for Cranbury, New Jersey, in July 1940 to pick potatoes. (bottom) Putting all his household belongings into his truck, this unidentified farmer prepares to leave the South.

411. African Americans took jobs in many different trades once they left the South. (top) These stevedores are working on the docks in New Orleans, Louisiana, September 1938. (bottom) Moving into the building trades, these workers stack bricks.

412. Moving to the North enabled many families to start a new life. This photograph was probably taken in Washington, D.C., in 1938.

413. Matthew Alexander Henson was born on an impoverished Maryland tenant farm August 8, 1866, and went to sea at age 12. Nine years later he joined Robert E. Peary, then a young naval lieutenant, on an expedition to survey a canal across Nicaragua. For more than 20 years, Peary and Henson struggled to reach the North Pole, finally succeeding on their seventh attempt. On April 6, 1909, Henson, Peary and four Inuit (Eskimos)—Ootaq, Egingwah, Sipsu and Ooqueah—raised the American flag “on top of the world.” During his adventures in the Arctic, Henson became a legendary figure among the Inuit. He learned to speak their numerous dialects, mastered the art of hunting and could outlast most of them on long treks in the 70-degrees-below-zero temperatures and the howling winds of the Arctic nights. In recognition of his greatest achievement, Henson, who had already received the Congressional Medal of Honor for his Arctic exploits, was awarded the Gold Medal of the Geographic Society of Chicago March 9, 1948. The medal was appropriately inscribed with Peary’s remark: “I can’t get along without him!”

414. Captain Antone T. Edwards (lower left, front) poses with some of the crew of the Wanderer. These men are natives of the Cape Verde Islands, a chain located about 300 miles off the coast of West Africa. Discovered and claimed in the fifteenth century by Portuguese explorers, the islands were populated by colonists and enslaved Africans. A creole society developed in which African and
European elements fused, creating a distinct collective identity. Many Cape Verdeans arrived in New England in the first half of the twentieth century. The early immigrants were mostly males who worked in the maritime industries while supporting families back home. As opportunities to work in land-based industries increased, whole families immigrated and formed new communities.

415. Henry Ossawa Tanner (1859–1937), possibly the best-known African American painter, was the son of a bishop of the African Methodist Episcopal Church. Although his family encouraged him to study theology, he preferred art and studied in Philadelphia and France and made frequent trips to Palestine to gain background for his paintings. His works are naturalistic and center on religious rather than racial themes. Tanner was a sensitive individual who deeply wanted to be recognized for his talent, not his race. When the American media failed to respond, he left the United States for permanent residence in Paris, where he continued to work until his death.

416. Charles Drew (1904–1950) served as chief surgeon of the Howard University Medical School and as chief surgeon and head of staff at Freedmen’s Hospital, both in Washington, D.C. Dr. Drew discovered the method of preserving blood plasma for emergency use. During World War II, he served both the American and British governments in organizing blood-collecting services that resulted in saving thousands of lives. The ability of the military to deliver transfusions to soldiers wounded on the front lines was directly attributed to the work of Dr. Drew. He is credited not only with founding the blood bank, but also with creating pressure to stop the practice of segregating blood by race.

417. The United States has received almost 500,000 voluntary African immigrants through the Ellis Island Immigration Station, with many more arriving through other places and at different times. They came from many lands—Africa, Europe, the Caribbean and the Cape Verde Islands. These immigrants, regardless of their racial, ethnic or national backgrounds, were not just statistics. They were people with dreams and drives, and their cultures made a significant contribution to their new country. Voluntary African immigration to the United States did not cease, despite war, depression and restrictive laws. By the 1960s Africans were again entering, both legally and illegally, to be part of the new wave of American immigration. This photograph is of a boatload of Haitian immigrants attempting to enter the United States along the coast of Florida.
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An urban home, c. 1938

Matthew Henson

The *Wanderer* and its crew

Henry Ossawa Tanner

Dr. Charles Drew

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Top left: The slave deck of the ship Wildfire, brought into Key West April 30, 1860. Library of Congress, photo LC-USZ62-41678

Top right: Guadaloupe women (French West Indies), who arrived April 6, 1911, on the S.S. Korona. Statue of Liberty National Monument, photo 90

Bottom left: Captain Antonie T. Edwards (lower left, front) with some of the crew of the Wanderer. New Bedford Whaling Museum, photo identification unknown

Bottom right: Haitian immigrants attempting to enter the United States along the Florida coast. United States Coast Guard, photo CCGD 7#101679-29, Dan Dewell

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Bull-Dogger, Rodeo Cowboy Collection; (inset) “The Bull-Dogger,” movie poster 1983.023, Rodeo Collection, both courtesy of the Dickinson Research Center, National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum

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Arctic Collection, Dr. Herbert M. Frisby, Banneker-Douglass Museum, identification number unknown
Courtesy of the New Bedford Whaling Museum, identification number unknown
Charlene Drew Jarvis
United States Coast Guard, photo CCGD 7#101679-29, Dan Dewell
The continent of Africa has been marked with lines to show the 1989 borders. Superimposed over those borders are the names of many of the ancient kingdoms that existed prior to European colonization. The shaded areas on the west coast represent the points from which the transatlantic slave trade originated.