

the city for two or three weeks, and frequently die, whereas many a one, if he could pay his debt and were permitted to leave the ship immediately, might recover and remain alive. . . .

The sale of human beings in the market on board the ship is carried on thus: Every day Englishmen, Dutchmen, and High German people come from the city of Philadelphia and other places, in part from a great distance, say twenty, thirty, or forty hours away, and go on board the newly-arrived ship that has brought and offers for sale passengers from Europe, and select among the healthy persons such as they deem suitable for their business, and bargain with them how long they will serve for their passage money, which most of them are still in debt for. When they have come to an agreement, it happens that adult persons bind themselves in writing to serve three, four, five, or six years for the amount due by them, according to their age and strength. But very young people, from ten to fifteen years, must serve till they are twenty-one years old.

Many parents must sell and trade away their children like so many head of cattle, for if their children take the debt upon themselves, the parents can leave the ship free and unrestrained; but as the parents often do not know where and to what people their children are going, it often happens that such parents and children, after leaving the ship, do not see each other again for many years, perhaps no more in all their lives. . . .

It often happens that whole families, husband, wife, and children, are separated by being sold to different purchasers, especially when they have not paid any part of their passage money.

When a husband or wife has died at sea, when the ship has made more than half of her trip, the survivor must pay or serve not only for himself or herself, but also for the deceased. When both parents have died over halfway at sea, their children, especially when they are young and have nothing to pawn or to pay, must stand for their own and their parents' passage, and serve till they are twenty-one years old. When one has served his or her term, he or she is entitled to a new suit of clothes at parting; and if it has been so stipulated, a man gets in addition a horse, a woman, a cow.

## Questions

1. Which aspects of the situation of the German immigrants seem most offensive to Mittelberger?
2. How public and regular does the trade in indentured servants appear to be from his account?

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## 18. Complaint of an Indentured Servant (1756)

*Source: Elizabeth Springs letter to John Spyer, September 22, 1756, Colonial Captivities, Marches, and Journeys, 1935, ed. Isabel M. Calder (New York, 1935), pp. 151–52.*

The letter that follows was written to her father in England by Elizabeth Sprigs, an indentured servant in mid-eighteenth century Maryland. It expresses complaints voiced by many servants from the beginning of settlement. Springs, who had clearly had some kind of falling out with her father, described constant labor, poor food and living conditions, and physical abuse. “Many Negroes are better used,” she added.

Unlike slaves, servants could look forward to a release from bondage after their period of labor was over, and to receiving a payment known as “freedom dues.” Many, however, died before the end of their terms and freedom dues were sometimes so meager that they did not enable recipients to acquire land.

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Maryland September 22, 1756

Honored Father,

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

further trouble to you. But too well knowing your care and tenderness for me so long as I retained my duty to you, induced me once again to endeavor, if possible, to kindle up that flame again.

O Dear father, believe what I am going to relate the words of truth and sincerity, and balance my former bad conduct [to] my sufferings here, and then I am sure you'll pity your distressed daughter. What we unfortunate English people suffer here is beyond the probability of you in England to conceive. Let it suffice that I am one of the unhappy number, am toiling almost day and night, and very often in the horse's drudgery, with only this comfort that you bitch you do not half enough, and then tied up and whipped to that degree that you now serve an animal. Scarce any thing but Indian corn and salt to eat and that even begrudged nay many Negroes are better used, almost naked no shoes nor stockings to wear, and the comfort after slaving during master's pleasure, what rest we can get is to wrap ourselves up in a blanket and lie upon the ground. This is the deplorable condition your poor Betty endures, and now I beg if you have any bowels of compassion left show it by sending me some relief. Clothing is the principal thing wanting, which if you should condescend to, may easily send them to me by any of the ships bound to Baltimore town, Patapsco River, Maryland. And give me leave to conclude in duty to you and uncles and aunts, and respect to all friends.

Honored Father

Your undutiful and disobedient child

Elizabeth Sprigs

### Questions

1. What are Elizabeth Sprigs's main complaints about her treatment?
2. Why does she compare her condition unfavorably to that of blacks?

## 19. Women in the Household Economy (1709)

Source: John Lawson, *A New Voyage to Carolina* (London, 1709), pp. 84-85.

In the household economy of eighteenth-century America, the family was the center of economic life. Most work revolved around the home, and all members—men, women, and children—contributed to the family's livelihood. John Lawson, an English naturalist, came to Carolina in 1700 and traveled over a thousand miles, studying the natural environment and trading with Indians. His *A New Voyage to Carolina* offered a very favorable description of life in the colony. Lawson's account vividly described the lives of free Carolina women and the numerous kinds of labor they performed. The work of farmers' wives and daughters often spelled the difference between a family's self-sufficiency and poverty. Lawson was captured and killed during an Indian uprising in 1711.

THE WOMEN ARE the most industrious sex in that place, and, by their good houswifery, make a great deal of cloth of their own cotton, wool and flax; some of them keeping their families (though large) very decently appareled, both with linens and woolens, so that they have no occasion to run into the merchant's debt, or lay their money out on stores for clothing. . . .

They marry very young; some at thirteen or fourteen; and she that stays till twenty, is reckoned a stale maid; which is a very indifferent character in that warm country. The women are very fruitful; most houses being full of little ones. It has been observed, that women long married, and without children, in other places, have removed to Carolina, and become joyful mothers. They have very easy travail in their child-bearing, in which they are so happy, as seldom to miscarry. . . .

Many of the women are very handy in canoes, and will manage them with great dexterity and skill, which they become accustomed to in this watery country. They are ready to help their husbands in any servile work, as planting, when the season of the weather

requires expedition; pride seldom banishing good houswifery. The girls are not bred up to the [spinning] wheel and sewing only; but the dairy and affairs of the house they are very well acquainted withal; so that you shall see them, whilst very young, manage their business with a great deal of conduct and alacrity. The children of both sexes are very docile, and learn any thing with a great deal of Ease and Method; and those that have the advantages of education, write good hands, and prove good accountants, which is most coveted, and indeed most necessary in these parts.

### Questions

1. What are the most important kinds of work done by Carolina women, according to Lawson?
2. How strict do gender roles appear to have been in early Carolina?

## CHAPTER 4

# Slavery, Freedom, and the Struggle for Empire, to 1763

### 20. Olaudah Equiano on Slavery (1789)

*Source: The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavas Vassa, the African, Written by Himself (London, 1789), Vol. 1, pp. 46–49, 69–72, 83–88.*

Of the estimated 7.7 million Africans transported to the New World between 1492 and 1820, over half arrived between 1700 and 1800. Every European empire utilized slave labor and battled for control of this profitable trade. A series of triangular trading routes crisscrossed the Atlantic, carrying British goods to Africa and the colonies, colonial slave-grown products like tobacco, sugar, and rice to Europe, and slaves from Africa to the New World.

The era's most popular account of the slave experience was written by Olaudah Equiano, the son of a West African village chief, kidnapped by slave traders in the 1750s. In the passages that follow, Equiano describes his capture, encounter with other African peoples with whom he had no previous contact, passage to the New World, and sale in the West Indies. Equiano went on the purchase his freedom. His life underscored the greatest contradiction in the history of the eighteenth century—the simultaneous expansion of freedom and slavery.