New Empires in the Americas

Section 5

MAIN IDEAS

1. European diseases wiped out much of the Native American population, causing colonists to look for a new labor force.
2. Europeans enslaved millions of Africans and sent them to work in their colonies.
3. Slaves in the Americas created a distinct culture.

Key Terms and People

**immune** having a natural resistance to a disease

**Middle Passage** the voyage across the Atlantic that enslaved Africans were forced to endure

**African Diaspora** the scattering of African people due to slavery

Academic Vocabulary

**structure** the way something is organized

Section Summary

THE NEED FOR A NEW LABOR FORCE

Diseases like measles, smallpox, and typhus had afflicted Europeans for many centuries. As a result, Europeans were more **immune** to the diseases. Native Americans were not. Therefore, these European diseases had a devastating effect on the Native American population.

Now the European colonists needed a new workforce for their plantations. Plantations were important to the colonial economic structure. As Africans had already developed some immunity to European diseases, the colonists decided that slaves from West Africa could be the solution to the labor problem.

THE SLAVE TRADE

In 1510 the Spanish government legalized the sale of slaves in its colonies. Over the next century, more than a million African slaves were brought to the Spanish and Portuguese colonies. The English and Dutch were also active slave traders.

How did the lack of immunity to disease affect the Native American peoples?

What factors caused colonists to decide to use African slaves?
Spanish and Portuguese colonies. The English and Dutch were also active slave traders.

Enslaved people were often captured in the interior of Africa, chained, and forced to march up to 1,000 miles to the coast. They were then chained together and packed as cargo in the lower decks of ships crossing the Atlantic Ocean. This voyage was known as the **Middle Passage**. In the crowded ships, disease spread quickly. Many of the slaves died of sickness, suffocation, or malnutrition during the voyage.

Between the 1520s and the 1860s, about 12 million Africans were shipped across the Atlantic as slaves. The slave trade led to the **African Diaspora**. Slaves had few rights in the colonies and were considered to be property. The treatment of enslaved Africans varied, but severe treatment and dreadful punishments were often part of American slavery.

### SLAVE CULTURE IN THE AMERICAS

Slaves in America came from many parts of Africa. They spoke different languages and had different cultural backgrounds, but they also shared many customs and viewpoints. They built a new culture on the things they had in common.

Families were a key part of slave culture, but slave families faced many challenges. A family was often broken apart when members were sold to different owners. Religion was a refuge for slaves. Slave religion was primarily Christian, but it also included traditional elements from African religions. Religion gave slaves a sense of self worth and hope for salvation. Slaves used songs and folktales to tell stories of sorrow, hope, agony, and joy.

### CHALLENGE ACTIVITY

**Critical Thinking: Elaborate** Write a song or folktale that reflects the experiences of enslaved Africans. Your song or folktale should reflect the feelings of sorrow, hope, agony and joy that were included in the songs and folktales of slaves.

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