

Name _____



Forced to Work

During Colonial America, labor was essential for growing crops, building settlements, and expanding trade. At first, indentured servants from Europe worked on farms and plantations, but over time, enslaved Africans became the main source of labor. This change was driven by the transatlantic slave trade, which brought millions of enslaved people to the Americas.

The Transatlantic Slave Trade

The transatlantic slave trade was part of a system called the Triangular Trade. European traders brought manufactured goods (such as cloth and weapons) to Africa, where they exchanged them for enslaved people. The enslaved people were then transported across the Atlantic Ocean on a journey called the Middle Passage. Conditions on the ships were terrible, and many people died before reaching the American colonies. Those who survived were forced to work without pay.

Labor in the Southern Colonies

In the Southern colonies, large plantations needed many workers to grow cash crops like tobacco, rice, and cotton. At first, plantation owners used indentured servants—poor Europeans who agreed to work for several years in exchange for land or freedom. But as the demand for labor grew, plantation owners turned to enslaved Africans because they could be forced to work for life.

Labor in the Northern Colonies

The Northern colonies had smaller farms, but they still relied on enslaved labor, especially in cities where enslaved people worked as blacksmiths, carpenters, and household servants. Some colonies also built ships that were used in the slave trade.

Lasting Impact

The use of enslaved labor made some people in the colonies very wealthy, but it caused terrible suffering for the enslaved people. Over time, more people began to question the morality of slavery, leading to movements to end slavery in the United States. However, the effects of the transatlantic slave trade still shape American society today.

