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## The Southern Colonies

By Sharon Fabian

The Southern Colonies are one of the three groups that made up the original thirteen colonies. The Southern Colonies include Maryland, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia.

Like the New England Colonies and the Middle Colonies, the Southern Colonies had their own character. The character of the Southern colonies developed from its people, its geography, and its climate.

The founders of the Southern Colonies came to America seeking wealth in the form of land ownership. Some were rich aristocrats from England who became owners of huge tracts of land in America. Some were owners of large businesses such as the Virginia Company, which founded Jamestown.

These landowners recognized that the Southern Colonies were rich in farmland. The coastal plains and the rolling hills were perfect for raising crops. The rich soil and the warm weather helped the crops thrive.

They established very large farms known as plantations. Each plantation required many, many workers. Growing the crops was nearly a year-round job in the warmer colonies, and there were lots of other jobs to do on a large plantation too.

Plantation owners could not find enough workers among the European immigrants to the United States. Most of these immigrants wanted to farm their own land, not work for someone else. The Native Americans were not interested in taking jobs on the plantations either.

The plantation owners found the solution to their labor shortage on a Dutch slave ship. They purchased their first slaves in Jamestown in



1619.

According to some histories, these first African Americans were known as indentured servants rather than slaves. Either way, they were forced to work on the plantations. Many more Africans followed in their footsteps as the years went on.

By the 1660's, states were passing laws that made slavery legal. These laws stated that slaves were the property of their masters, just like houses and farm animals. The slave codes, as they became known, also stated that any children born to a slave woman were automatically slaves too. They stated that slaves would stay slaves for their entire lives.

As terrible as slavery seems today, there was little opposition to it in colonial times. Immigrants to America had come from a society where rich people controlled the wealth and where poor people did the work. That did not seem unusual to the American settlers.

There were some things about American slavery that were unusual even then. The enslavement of people based solely on their race was a sad new development. So was the enslaving of people for their entire lifetime. A few people raised their voices against slavery early on, but for the most part slavery did not meet any real opposition for many years. The plantation system would continue to operate with rich plantation owners and slave labor for more than 200 years.

In fact, the plantation system would continue to grow until it became the basis for the economy of the Southern Colonies. Crops of tobacco, sugar cane, cotton, indigo, and other goods were exported from the plantations to England year after year.

Today, descendants of the colonial slaves, plantation owners, and other people of the Southern Colonies live and work in the southern United States. Their lives are still affected in many ways by the system of slavery begun so many years ago by settlers who came here to profit from the rich American land.



