

many, Switzerland, and France. Far fewer than one in ten of the immigrants were English. What is now the United States was a society of immigrants before it was a nation.

If the origins of migrants were diverse, so were their conditions of life. The statuses of immigrants varied greatly—unfreedom, semifreedom, and autonomy. Many Europeans arrived as indentured servants or “redemptioners” that required them to labor a period of time (in effect, to pay off their passage to the colonies) for propertied gentry who aspired to greater wealth in the empire. Others were lured to the colonies with promises of freedom to practice their own religions or of better conditions of life, which they often realized. For most Africans, the migration was a forced journey that typically ended in slave communities in the rapidly growing southern colonies. In sum, the British American colonial empire was an atypical society for many reasons that were linked to migration. Composed of people of diverse origins, it was a place celebrated by some for its great freedoms and cursed by others for its brutal slavery.

DOCUMENTS

As the following documents reveal, migrants to the British American colonies arrived in dissimilar circumstances and for a variety of reasons. The first two documents illustrate the different contexts of the journey to the colonies. Olaudah Equiano, in a rare 1757 narrative of a slave, describes the terror of enslavement in Africa, the journey to the West Indies, the bewilderment of slavery, as well as its cruelties. Gottlieb Mittelberger, in a work dating from 1750, shows that immigration from Germany was difficult as well, especially regarding what he calls the “commerce in human beings” known as the redemptioner migration. The second pair of documents illustrate how labor was defined by condition and race. William Moraley (1743), himself an indentured servant, and Peter Kalm (1750) depict the condition of slaves, indentured servants, and free laborers, and they both observe how race had become inextricably tied to status of freedom or slavery. The final three documents, however, show how immigrants also saw the possibilities of the colonies. A government official in northern Ireland, in a letter penned in 1728, bemoans the “evils” of migration as the residents from this region flee its oppressions. Benjamin Franklin (in 1794) illustrates how opportunity exists for laborers to gain a competence. And, in 1736, a land speculator writes to his agent in Europe in the hopes of attracting immigrants to develop his vast tracts of rich land.

Olaudah Equiano, an African, Recounts the Horror of Enslavement, 1757

... One day, when all our people were gone out to their works as usual, and only I and my dear sister were left to mind the house, two men and a woman got over our walls, and seized us both, and they stopped our mouths, and ran off with us into the nearest wood. Here they tied our hands, and continued to carry us as far

From Olaudah Equiano, *The Life of Olaudah Equiano*, 1789.

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oon was transformed into a e Americans, whose numbers continued to oppose colonial Africans arrived in Virginia llowed them from Africa— he mid-seventeenth century, n the Atlantic seaboard that And the migration from Eu- peans of non-English back- remarkable in the eighteenth nd black people resided in the mated half-million people glish. Rather, according to an birth, one-fifth were from ple from what is today Ger-

as they could, till night came on, when we reached a small house, where the robbers halted for refreshment, and spent the night. We were then unbound, but were unable to take any food; and, being quite overpowered by fatigue and grief, our only relief was some sleep, which allayed our misfortune for a short time. The next morning we left the house, and continued travelling all the day. . . . When we went to rest the following night they offered us some victuals; but we refused it; and the only comfort we had was in being in one another's arms all that night, and bathing each other with our tears. But alas! we were soon deprived of even the small comfort of weeping together. The next day proved a day of greater sorrow than I had yet experienced; for my sister and I were then separated, while we lay clasped in each other's arms. It was in vain that we besought them not to part us; she was torn from me, and immediately carried away, while I was left in a state of distraction not to be described. I cried and grieved continually; and for several days I did not eat any thing but what they forced into my mouth.

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The first object which saluted my eyes when I arrived on the coast was the sea, and a slave ship, which was then riding at anchor, and waiting for its cargo. These filled me with astonishment, which was soon converted into terror when I was carried on board. . . . I was now persuaded that I had gotten into a world of bad spirits, and that they were going to kill me. Their complexions too differing so much from ours, their long hair, and the language they spoke, (which was very different from any I had ever heard) united to confirm me in this belief. . . . When I looked round the ship too and saw a large furnace of copper boiling, and a multitude of black people of every description chained together, every one of their countenances expressing dejection and sorrow, I no longer doubted of my fate; and, quite overpowered with horror and anguish, I fell motionless on the deck and fainted. When I recovered a little I found some black people about me, who I believed were some of those who brought me on board, and had been receiving their pay; they talked to me in order to cheer me, but all in vain. I asked them if we were not to be eaten by those white men with horrible looks, red faces, and loose hair. They told me I was not; . . . Soon after this the blacks who brought me on board went off, and left me abandoned to despair. I now saw myself deprived of all chance of returning to my native country, or even the least glimpse of hope of gaining the shore, which I now considered as friendly; and I even wished for my former slavery in preference to my present situation, which was filled with horrors of every kind, still heightened by my ignorance of what I was to undergo. I was not long suffered to indulge my grief; I was soon put down under the decks, and there I received such a salutation in my nostrils as I had never experienced in my life: so that, with the loathsomeness of the stench, and crying together, I became so sick and low that I was not able to eat, nor had I the least desire to taste any thing. I now wished for the last friend, death, to relieve me; but soon, to my grief, two of the white men offered me eatables; and, on my refusing to eat, one of them held me fast by the hands, and laid me across I think the windlass, and tied my feet, while the other flogged me severely. I had never experienced any thing of this kind before; and although, not being used to the water, I naturally feared that element the first time I saw it, yet nevertheless, could I have got over the nettings, I would have jumped over the side, but I could not; and, besides, the crew used to watch us very

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closely who were not chained down to the decks, lest we should leap into the wa-
ter: and I have seen some of these poor African prisoners most severely cut for at-
tempting to do so, and hourly whipped for not eating. This indeed was often the
case with myself. In a little time after, amongst the poor chained men, I found
some of my own nation, which in a small degree gave ease to my mind. I inquired
of these what was to be done with us; they gave me to understand we were to be
carried to these white people's country to work for them. I then was a little revived,
and thought, if it were no worse than working, my situation was not so desperate:
but still I feared I should be put to death, the white people looked and acted, as I
thought, in so savage a manner; for I had never seen among any people such in-
stances of brutal cruelty; and this not only shewn towards us blacks, but also to
some of the whites themselves. One white man in particular I saw, when we were
permitted to be on deck, flogged so unmercifully with a large rope near the fore-
mast that he died in consequence of it; and they tossed him over the side as they
would have done a brute. This made me fear these people the more; and I expected
nothing less than to be treated in the same manner. I could not help expressing my
fears and apprehensions to some of my countrymen: I asked them if these people
had no country, but lived in this hollow place (the ship): they told me they did not,
but came from a distant one. "Then," said I, "how comes it in all our country we
never heard of them?" They told me because they lived so very far off. I then asked
where were their women? had they any like themselves? I was told they had "and
why," said I, "do we not see them?" they answered, because they were left behind.
I asked how the vessel could go? they told me they could not tell; but that there
were cloths put upon the masts by the help of the ropes I saw, and then the vessel
went on and the white men had some spell or magic they put in the water when
they liked in order to stop the vessel. I was exceedingly amazed at this account,
and really thought they were spirits. I therefore wished much to be from amongst
them, for I expected they would sacrifice me: but my wishes were vain. . . .

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. . . At last we came in sight of the island of Barbadoes, at which the whites on
board gave a great shout, and made many signs of joy to us. We did not know what
to think of this; but as the vessel drew nearer we plainly saw the harbour, and other
ships of different kinds and sizes; and we soon anchored amongst them off Bridge
Town. Many merchants and planters now came on board, though it was in the
evening. They put us in separate parcels, and examined us attentively. They also
made us jump, and pointed to the land, signifying we were to go there. We thought
by this we should be eaten by these ugly men as they appeared to us; and, when
soon after we were all put down under the deck again, there was much dread and
trembling among us, and nothing but bitter cries to be heard all the night from
these apprehensions, insomuch that at last the white people got some old slaves
from the land to pacify us. They told us we were not to be eaten, but to work, and
were soon to go on land, where we should see many of our country people. This re-
port eased us much; and sure enough, soon after we were landed, there came to us
Africans of all languages. We were conducted immediately to the merchant's yard,
where we were all pent up together like so many sheep in a fold, without regard to
sex or age. As every object was new to me every thing I saw filled me with sur-
prise. What struck me first was that the houses were built with stories, and in every

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Gottlieb Mittelberger, a German, Describes the Difficulties of Immigration, 1750

When the ships have weighed anchor for the last time, usually off Cowes in Old England, then both the long sea voyage and misery begin in earnest. For from there the ships often take eight, nine, ten, or twelve weeks sailing to Philadelphia, if the

From Gottlieb Mittelberger, *Reise nach Pennsylvania [Journey to Pennsylvania]*, 1756.

But most of all they
and exclaim: "Oh! If only
call out: "Ah, dear God,
fresh drop of water." Most
Most of them become ho
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groaning, crying, and la
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When at last after the land, when one gets to see the land he had longed so passionately for, he is not able to look at the land from the same perspective thanks to God. The glimpses are half-dead of illness.