

The South's People

Essential Question

How did unique elements of culture develop among enslaved African Americans in the South?

Reading Guide

Content Vocabulary

yeoman (p. 407)

spiritual (p. 409)

tenant farmer

slave codes

(p. 407)

(p. 410)

overseer (p. 408)

literacy (p. 412)

Academic Vocabulary

legal (p. 409)

brief (p. 410)

Key People and Events

Nat Turner (p. 410)

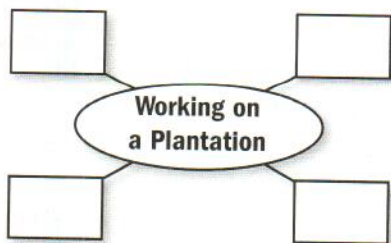
Harriet Tubman (p. 411)

Frederick Douglass (p. 411)

Underground Railroad (p. 411)

Reading Strategy

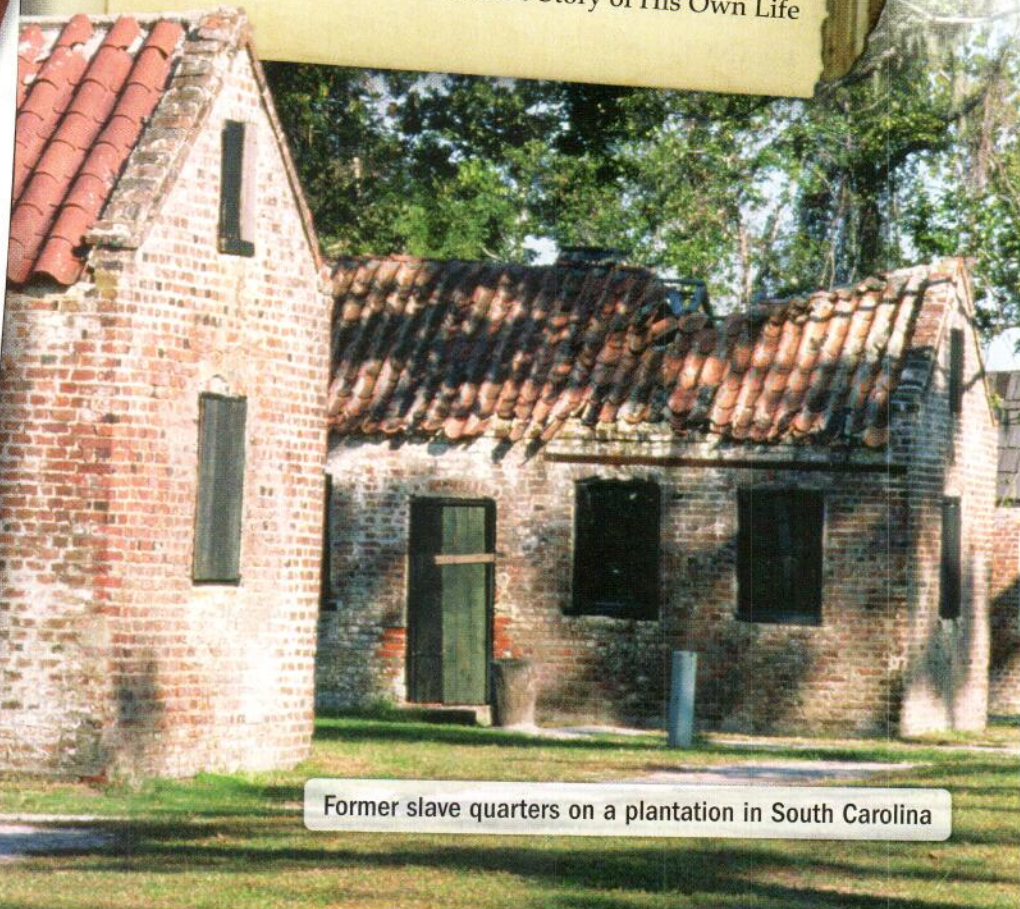
Taking Notes As you read, use a diagram like the one below to describe the work that was done on Southern plantations.



American Diary

"We lodged in log huts, and on the bare ground. . . . In a single room were huddled, like cattle, ten or a dozen persons, men, women, and children. . . . Our beds were collections of straw and old rags, thrown down in the corners and boxed in with boards; a single blanket the only covering. . . . The wind whistled and the rain and snow blew in through the cracks, and the damp earth soaked in the moisture till the floor was miry [muddy] as a pigsty [enclosed area where pigs live]."

—from Father Henson's Story of His Own Life



Former slave quarters on a plantation in South Carolina

Farms and Plantations

Main Idea The South had far more small farms than large plantations.

History and You Would you like to own your own business one day? Read to learn about what it took to keep a plantation operating.

The Southern economy was based on agriculture. Enslaved workers like Josiah Henson were used to farm the land. The South before 1860 is usually portrayed as a land of stately plantations that wealthy white slaveholders owned. In reality most white Southerners were either small farmers without enslaved people or planters with a handful of enslaved workers. Most white Southerners fit into four categories: yeomen, tenant farmers, the rural poor, or plantation owners.

Small Farmers and the Rural Poor

Yeomen—farmers who did not have enslaved workers—made up the largest group of whites in the South. Most yeomen owned land, ranging from 50 to 200 acres (20 to 81 ha). They grew crops for their own use and to

sell, trading produce with local merchants. Yeomen lived mostly in the Upper South and in the hilly areas of the Deep South.

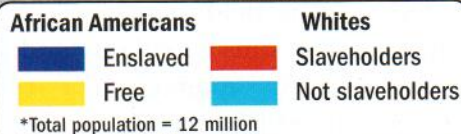
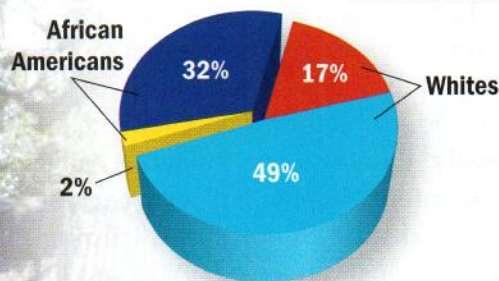
Not all Southern whites owned land. Some rented land or worked as **tenant farmers** on landlords' estates. The majority of Southern whites lived in simple homes—cottages or log cabins. Others—the rural poor—lived in crude cabins in wooded areas. Looked down on by other whites, the rural poor were stubbornly independent. They were proud of being self-sufficient and avoided jobs that were normally done by enslaved people.

Plantations

A large plantation might cover several thousand acres. Plantation owners usually lived in comfortable but not luxurious farmhouses. They measured their wealth partly by the number of enslaved people they controlled. Only about 4 percent of plantation owners held 20 or more enslaved workers in 1860. Most slaveholders held fewer than 10 enslaved workers. A few free African Americans also held enslaved workers. Some free African Americans purchased members of their own families to free them.

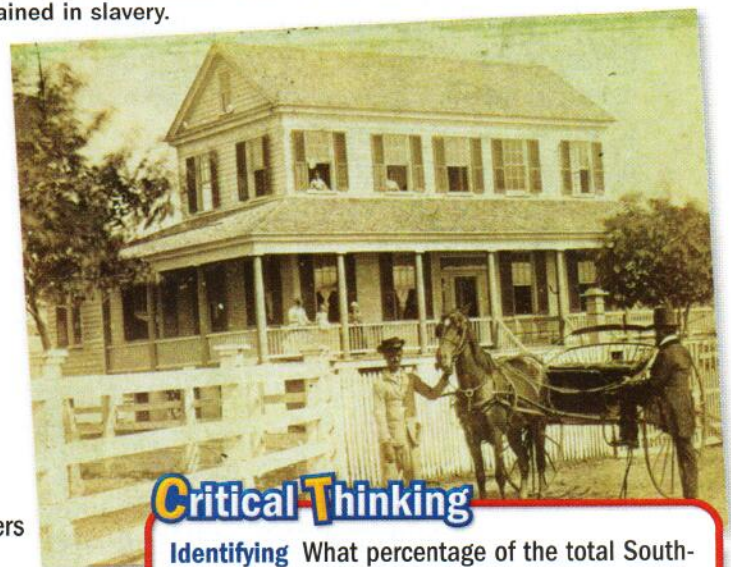
By the Numbers Southern Population, 1860

A Slaveholding Society In 1860 about 400,000 households in the South held enslaved workers. Nearly 4 million African Americans remained in slavery.



Source: Geospatial and Statistical Data Center

The Legree Plantation, Capers Island, South Carolina ▶



Critical Thinking

Identifying What percentage of the total Southern population did African Americans make up?

THEN Enslaved people drew on the rhythms of their African homeland to create uniquely American musical forms. One form was the *work song* or *field holler*. A worker led a rhythmic call-and-response song, which sometimes included shouts and moans. The beat set the tempo for their work.

Conversion of enslaved African Americans to Christianity gave rise to *spirituals*, or religious folk songs. Often spirituals combined a longing for freedom with religious themes, as in “Swing Low, Sweet Chariot.”

“Swing Low, Sweet Chariot”

Swing low, sweet chariot
Coming for to carry me home.
I looked over Jordan and what did I see
Coming for to carry me home
A band of angels coming after me
Coming for to carry me home

“While on their way [to work], they [the slaves] would make the dense old woods . . . [echo] with their wild songs, revealing at once the highest joy and the deepest sadness.”

—Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*

The main economic goal for large plantation owners was to earn profits. Such plantations had fixed costs. These are regular operating expenses that remain much the same year after year—housing and feeding workers, for example.

Cotton prices, however, varied from season to season, depending on the market. To receive the best prices, planters sold their cotton to agents in large cities, such as New Orleans and Charleston. The cotton exchanges, or trade centers, were of vital importance to the cotton economy. The agents extended credit—a form of loan—to the planters and held the cotton for several months until the price rose. Then the agents sold the cotton. Only at that time were the planters paid for their cotton. This system kept the planters in debt.

Plantation Wives

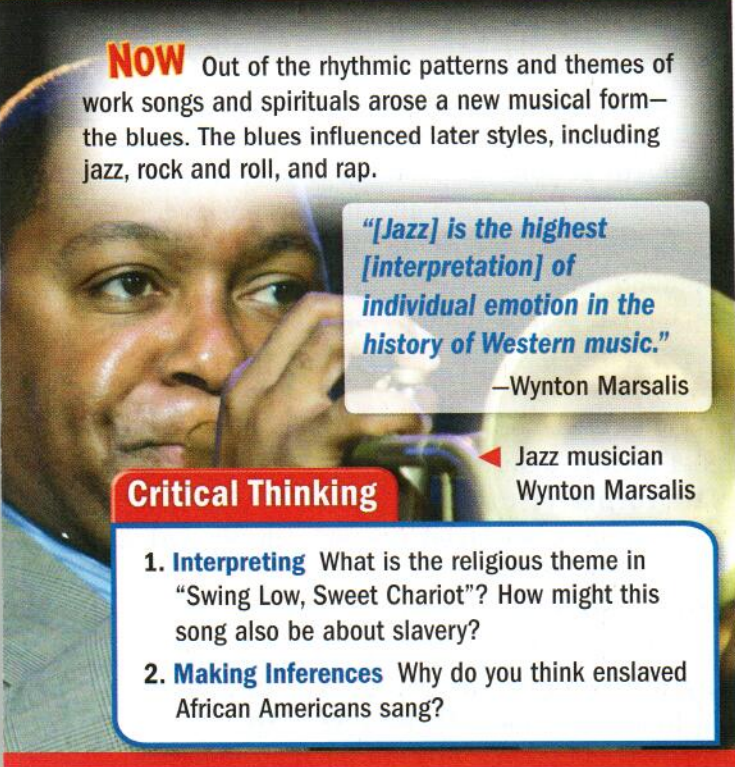
Wives of plantation owners took charge of their households. They supervised the buildings and the fruit and vegetable gardens.

They watched over the enslaved domestic workers and sometimes tended to them when they became ill. In addition, they might keep the plantation’s financial records. Their life was often difficult and lonely. Planters were often absent to deal with cotton agents. Their wives spent long periods alone.

Work on the Plantation

Large plantations needed many different kinds of workers. Some enslaved people did domestic work. They cleaned the house, cooked, did laundry and sewing, and served meals. Others were trained as blacksmiths, carpenters, shoemakers, or weavers. Still others worked in the pastures, tending the livestock. Most enslaved African Americans, however, were field hands. They worked from sunrise to sunset to plant, tend, and harvest crops. An **overseer**, or plantation manager, supervised them.

Reading Check **Identifying** What group made up the largest number of whites in the South?



Now Out of the rhythmic patterns and themes of work songs and spirituals arose a new musical form—the blues. The blues influenced later styles, including jazz, rock and roll, and rap.

"[Jazz] is the highest [interpretation] of individual emotion in the history of Western music."

—Wynton Marsalis

◀ Jazz musician
Wynton Marsalis

Critical Thinking

1. **Interpreting** What is the religious theme in "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot"? How might this song also be about slavery?
2. **Making Inferences** Why do you think enslaved African Americans sang?

Life Under Slavery

Main Idea Despite their hardships, enslaved African Americans found methods to help them cope with their lack of freedom.

History and You Can you imagine moving to a foreign land that has different customs? Read to learn how enslaved African Americans coped with their situation.

Enslaved African Americans suffered hardships and misery. They worked hard, earned no money, and had little hope of freedom. One of their worst fears was being sold to another planter and separated from their loved ones. In the face of these brutal conditions, they had to cope with their situation. Enslaved African Americans maintained their family life as best they could and developed a culture all their own, blending African and American elements. They resisted slavery through a variety of clever methods and looked ahead to the day when they would be set free.

Family Life

Enslaved people had few comforts beyond the bare necessities. Uncertainty and danger were constant threats in their lives. American laws in the early 1800s did not protect enslaved families. A slaveholder's death could lead to the breakup of an enslaved family. A husband or wife could be sold and moved away. Although not recognized by law, marriages between enslaved people occurred. Their marriage vows included the phrase "until death or separation do us part." Couples recognized and lived with the possibility that one of them could be sold.

Enslaved people needed some measure of stability in their lives. They established a network of relatives and friends who made up their extended family. If a father or mother were sold, an aunt, an uncle, or a close friend could raise the children left behind. Large, close-knit, extended families became a vital feature of African American culture.

African American Culture

In 1808 Congress outlawed the slave trade. Slavery remained **legal**, or permitted by law, but no new enslaved people could enter the United States. By 1860, almost all the enslaved people in the South had been born there.

These native-born African Americans held on to their African customs. They continued to perform African music and dance. They passed traditional African folk stories on to their children. Some wrapped colored cloth around their heads in the African style. Although many enslaved African Americans accepted Christianity, they often followed the religious beliefs and practices of their African ancestors as well.

African American Christianity

For many enslaved African Americans, Christianity became a religion of hope and resistance. They prayed intensely for the day when they would be free from bondage.

The passionate beliefs of the enslaved Southerners found expression in the **spiritual**, an African American religious folk song.

The spiritual below, for example, refers to the biblical story of Daniel, who was saved from the lions' den:

PRIMARY SOURCE

"Didn't my Lord deliver Daniel
Deliver Daniel, deliver Daniel
Didn't my Lord deliver Daniel
An' why not-a every man."

—from "Didn't My Lord Deliver Daniel"

Spirituals enabled enslaved people to communicate secretly among themselves. Many spirituals combined elements related to the enslaved people's Christian faith with laments about earthly suffering.

Slave Codes

Between 1830 and 1860, life under slavery became even more difficult. The **slave codes**—the laws in the Southern states that controlled enslaved people—became more severe. Slave codes had existed since the 1700s. One purpose of the codes was to prevent the event that white Southerners dreaded most—the

slave rebellion. For this reason slave codes prohibited enslaved people from assembling in large groups. The codes also required enslaved people to have written passes before leaving the slaveholder's property.

Slave codes made it a crime to teach enslaved people to read or write. White Southerners feared that an educated enslaved person might start a revolt. An enslaved person who could not read and write, whites believed, was less likely to rebel.

Resistance to Slavery

Some enslaved African Americans did rebel openly against their owners. One was **Nat Turner**. He was a popular religious leader among enslaved people. Turner had taught himself to read and write. In 1831 he led a group of followers on a **brief**, or short, violent rampage in Southhampton County, Virginia. Before being captured, Turner and his followers killed at least 55 whites. Nat Turner was hanged, but his rebellion frightened white Southerners. Turner's rebellion led to more severe slave codes.

Primary Source Slave Codes

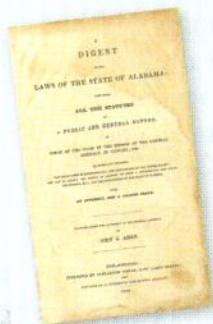
Laws Govern Enslaved Persons Slave codes had governed the relationship between slaveholders and enslaved persons since colonial times. After the 1831 slave rebellion led by Nat Turner, harsher slave codes were enacted. Enslaved people could not own property, enter into contracts, or legally marry. Slave codes also spelled out the many restrictions that applied to free African Americans.

The punishments used against enslaved people included the use of the whip. Some slaveholders resorted to branding. ▶

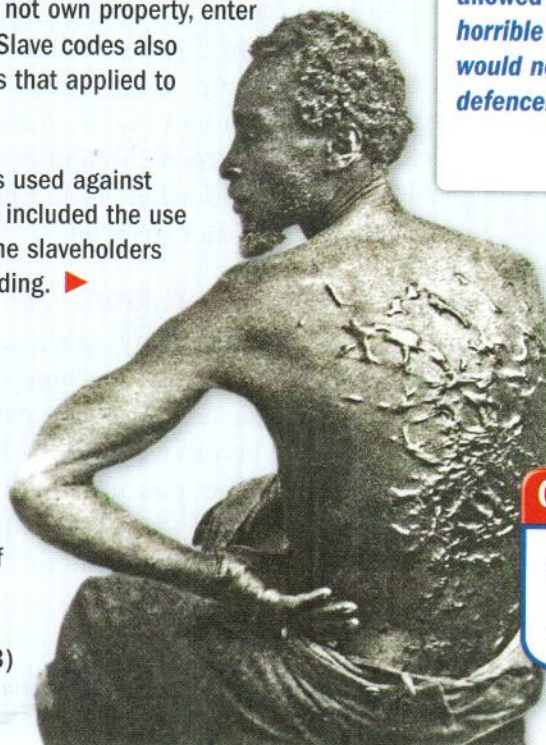
"The scenes that I have witnessed are enough to harrow [plow] up the soul; but could the slave be permitted to tell the story of his sufferings, which no white man, not linked with slavery, is allowed to know, the land would vomit out the horrible system, slaveholders and all, if they would not unclinch their grasp upon their defenceless victims."

—Nehemiah Caulkins,
in *American Slavery As It Is*

Copper slave tags identified enslaved workers when they were hired out. ▶

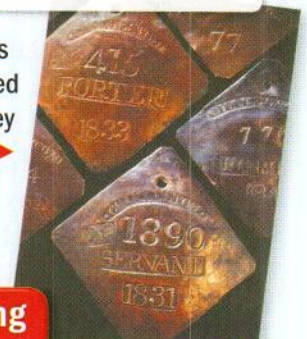


◀ Title page of the slavery code of Alabama (1833)



Critical Thinking

Speculating What effect do you think harsher slave codes would have on enslaved people?



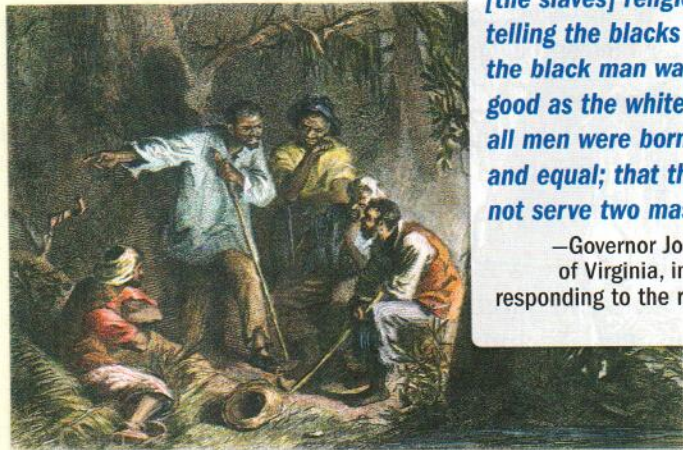
The Nat Turner Rebellion

Violent Uprising In 1831 Nat Turner saw an eclipse of the sun and took it to be a sign from God commanding him to kill his enemies. He and six of his men killed his slaveholder's family and then went from farm to farm, killing all the whites they encountered. Turner and his followers were caught and executed, but slaveholders lived in fear of another violent uprising.

While in jail, Turner was interviewed by Thomas Gray, who recorded his confession. ▶



Nat Turner and his followers meet in the woods to plan their uprising. ▼



"The course has been by no means a direct one. [Northern traders] began first by making [the slaves] religious . . . telling the blacks . . . the black man was as good as the white; that all men were born free and equal; that they can not serve two masters."

—Governor John Floyd of Virginia, in a letter responding to the rebellion, 1831

"And about this time I had a vision, and I saw white spirits and black spirits engaged in battle, and the sun was darkened; the thunder rolled in the heavens, and blood flowed in streams; and I heard a voice saying, ' . . . let it come, rough or smooth, you must surely bear it.'"

—*The Confessions of Nat Turner*

Critical Thinking

- 1. Interpreting** To what "two masters" was Governor John Floyd referring?
- 2. Determining Cause and Effect** According to Floyd and Nat Turner, what were the causes of the rebellion?

Armed revolts were rare, however. African Americans in the South knew that they would only lose. For the most part, enslaved people resisted slavery by working slowly or by pretending to be ill. Occasionally resistance was more active. Some enslaved workers would set fire to a plantation building or break tools. Resistance helped enslaved African Americans tolerate their lack of freedom. Even if they were not free, they could strike back at the slaveholders. Resistance also helped set boundaries that slaveholders would respect.

Escaping Slavery

Some enslaved African Americans tried to run away to the North. A few succeeded. **Harriet Tubman** and **Frederick Douglass** were two African American leaders who were born into slavery. They both gained their freedom when they fled to the North.

Getting to the North was difficult for most enslaved people. Most who succeeded escaped from the states of the Upper South.

The **Underground Railroad** offered aid to enslaved people who had escaped. It was a network of "safe houses" owned by free blacks and whites who opposed slavery.

Some enslaved people sought to find relatives on plantations or to escape punishment. Rarely did they plan to flee to the North. Moses Grandy, who did escape, spoke about the problems runaways faced:

PRIMARY SOURCE

"They hide themselves during the day in the woods and swamps; at night they travel. . . . In these dangerous journeys they are guided by the north-star, for they only know that the land of freedom is in the north."

—from *Narrative of the Life of Moses Grandy*

Most runaways were caught and returned to their owners. Discipline was severe. The most common punishment was whipping.

Reading Check **Explaining** How did the African American spiritual develop?

City Life and Education

Main Idea By the mid-1800s, the South had several large cities, and education had begun to expand throughout the region.

History and You How far do you travel to get to your school? Read to learn why some Southern families may not have been able to send their children to school.

The South was primarily agricultural. It had several large cities by the mid-1800s, however, including Baltimore and New Orleans. The ten largest cities in the South were either seaports or river ports.

Life in Southern Cities

Cities located at the crossroads of the railroads also began to grow. Among them were Chattanooga, Montgomery, and Atlanta. Whites, enslaved workers, and many free African Americans lived in cities.

In the cities, free African Americans had the opportunity to form their own communities. They practiced trades and founded churches and institutions. Free African Amer-

icans' lives were not secure. Their rights were limited. Most states would not allow them to move from state to state. Free African Americans were denied an equal share in economic and political life.

Education

During this era, no statewide public school systems existed. People who could afford to do so sent their children to private schools. Some of the larger cities established public schools. By the mid-1800s, however, education was growing. North Carolina and Kentucky set up and ran public schools.

The South was behind other sections of the country in **literacy**, the number of people able to read and write. One reason for this situation was the South's geography. The South had few people per square mile. Many families could not send their children great distances to attend school. In addition, many Southerners believed that education was a private matter, not a state function.

Reading Check **Identifying** Why did Southern cities such as Atlanta and Montgomery grow?

Section 4 Review

History ONLINE
Study Central™ To review this section, go to glencoe.com.

Vocabulary

- Using complete sentences, define the following terms: **yeoman**, **tenant farmer**, **overseer**, **legal**, **spiritual**, **slave code**, **brief**, **literacy**.

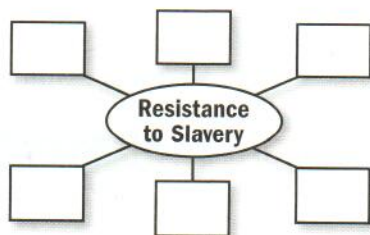
Main Ideas

- Describing** Other than plantation owners, what kinds of farmers existed in the South?
- Discussing** How did the family structure of enslaved African Americans help them survive life under slavery?

- Explaining** Why did education in the South lag behind other areas of the United States?

Critical Thinking

- Organizing** Use a diagram like the one below to keep track of key people, events, and practices in resistance to slavery.



- Persuasive Writing** Write a dialogue between an enslaved husband and wife. One wants to try to escape to the North, and the other argues against doing so.

Answer the Essential Question

- Essential Question** How did unique elements of culture develop among enslaved African Americans in the South?