***America’s History* Author Video: Chapter Three**

**[[BIG IDEA:** How did the South Atlantic System create an interconnected Atlantic world, and how did this system impact development in the British colonies?]]

In Chapter two we discussed the ways in which Native peoples were impacted by colonization. Now we turn to the relationship between ordinary Europeans who came to British North America in search of a better life, and the millions of African slaves who came in bondage.

In Chapter three, we explore the British Atlantic world in depth. At the heart of that world was the South Atlantic System: an agricultural and commercial system that produced sugar, tobacco, rice, and indigo for an international market. All those goods were mostly the product of slave labor, and many of you will already be aware of the way Africans were exploited to make their production possible. Amidst this exploitation, Africans struggled to create and sustain viable African American communities.

But you may not have thought about what this system meant for the people who didn’t work on plantations. What made the economy of Great Britain so robust in this period, and along with it the economies of Pennsylvania, New York, and Massachusetts? The rise of profitable plantations generated capital that could be invested in other areas, and it spurred demand for basic goods. Many of those goods came from other colonies. Island plantation colonies like Barbados and Jamaica got most of their food and lumber, among other things, from mainland colonies like Massachusetts Bay, Pennsylvania, and North Carolina. It took a lot of ships to support this trade, and many of them were built in North American port towns.

So the South Atlantic System created a demand for labor, not just on plantations, but throughout the northern colonies as well. And labor demand meant opportunity for ordinary people: shipwrights in Boston and Salem; masons and joiners in Philadelphia; and ordinary farmers everywhere in the countryside. The South Atlantic System was a vast, complex organism, and its engine was the labor of African slaves. Their work created the favorable conditions that benefitted so many ordinary European migrants to British North America.