



# Strange New Land: African Americans 1617-1776: 2 (The Young Oxford History of African Americans)

*Peter H. Wood*

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For Africans who survived the trans-Atlantic journey and were forced to disembark at one of the many ports along the coast of Britain's North American colonies, what lay before them was indeed a strange new land. Although forms of bondage had existed in West and Central Africa long before the trans Atlantic slave trade began, human beings were rarely the main commodity at the marketplace. Here in the modern world, the enslaved African was inspected, assessed, auctioned, bought, sold, bartered, and treated in any manner the owner saw fit. Slaves did not always cooperate. They fought and ran away, or made the business of commercial farming more difficult by not working efficiently. In spite of their condition and despite different ethnic backgrounds and languages, enslaved Africans forged a strong sense of community. The Africans learned the English language and made it their own. They learned Christianity and transformed it. Others held fast to Islam or combined their own spiritual beliefs with the faith of their masters. And all around them they heard talk of liberty and freedom, of the rights of man. Not surprisingly, many enslaved Africans embraced the idea of liberty as a fundamental right, and some even petitioned colonial administrators, insisting on that right. But the majority simply stole themselves and headed to Northern cities where slavery was less visible and where they might blend in more easily. *Strange New Land* explores the history of slavery and the struggle for freedom before the United States became a nation. Beginning with the colonization of North America, it documents the transformation of slavery from a brutal form of indentured servitude to a full-blown system of racial domination. More importantly, it surveys black social and cultural life, illustrating just how such a diverse group of people from the shores and hinterlands of West and Central Africa became a community in North America that survives and flourishes today.

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