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# Slavery in Colonial America, 1619-1776 (The African American History Series)

Betty Wood

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## Slavery IN COLONIAL AMERICA 1619-1776



BETTY WOOD

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**Betty Wood : Slavery in Colonial America, 1619-1776 (The African American History Series)** before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Slavery in Colonial America, 1619-1776 (The African American History Series):

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. I found this to be a nice supplement to the course itself By Nico Vela Having read this book for a class on Colonial and Revolutionary U.S. History, I found this to be a nice

supplement to the course itself, and very enlightening on a subject that has, apparently, been ignored during the time period.<sup>9</sup> of 11 people found the following review helpful. Good summary of slavery, but her theories are a little iffy. By T. Pangle

The light in which slavery is commonly looked at in the United States is as a precursor to the American Civil War; however, British historian Betty Wood takes a different approach to the institution in the book *Slavery in Colonial America, 1619-1776*. In this text, Wood takes a look at slavery in the colonies and its implications on the American Revolution, as opposed to the Civil War. Wood proclaims that *Slavery in Colonial America* is intended to be a book "for those coming to the subject for the first time" (p. vii); a beginners guide to American slavery. The first part of the book deals with why Africans were chosen as the preferred race of slaves. Author's purpose in writing this book is to show the reader that the colonists in America decided upon African slaves as the basis for the institution based on race, rather than economy. This theory is a little shaky and outdated. It completely disregards the fact that freed blacks also owned African slaves. It is hard as an outsider to look into American society and see anything other than racial tensions, but in early colonial America race was not the most important factor; Christianity most probably trumped race. During the second part of the book, Wood focuses on the question: "could the American Patriots who were demanding their own freedom, and resting their case for that freedom on natural rights and equality of all mankind, legitimately hold 20 percent of the colonial population in perpetual, heritable slavery?" Wood goes into detail to explain how the compromise allowing slavery was labored over in colonial America. She briefs over the American Revolution and focuses on the role of the enslaved people in the conflict, both as aid to the colonists and as aid to the British. Wood shows how the American Revolution and the continuance of slavery shaped the future of the nation. Betty Wood hails from Great Britain and is currently a reader in American history at the University of Cambridge. She has a PhD in history and focuses on slavery, race and gender issues in colonial America. In addition to *Slavery in Colonial America*, Wood published *Slavery in Colonial Georgia, 1730-1775* in 1984, *Women's Work, Men's Work: The Informal Slave Economies of Lowcountry Georgia, 1750-1830* in 1995, *The Origins of American Slavery: The English Colonies, 1607-1700* in 1997 and *Gender, Race and Rank in a Revolutionary Age: The Georgia Lowcountry, 1750-1820* in 2000. She has also co-authored many textbooks dealing with the subject of American slavery and gender. Although Betty Wood has seemed to make the subject of slavery in colonial America her life's work, there is an alarming lack of primary sources in this book. There is a brief section at the end of the book including over twenty primary source documents; however, most of her citations in the bibliographic essay are secondhand. It is doubtful that Wood has slacked in research, it is a plausible conclusion therefore that Wood has skimmed her other books and research and pulled out only the basics of colonial slavery. She did state that this book was a beginner's look at American slavery. She may have simply just found the briefest and most frugal way to tell the bare essentials and give the reader an accurate picture of American colonial slavery without overburdening them with deciphers of primary sources. While Wood makes a blatant statement that she believes race, not economy was the primary reason of choosing Africans for American slavery, many other historians would disagree. Robert William Fogel's *Without Consent or Contract: The Rise and Fall of American Slavery*, as well as his foregoing, notorious duet with Stanley L. Engerman, *Time on the Cross*, went into profound detail describing the economic benefits of slavery as an institution. While spending a very brief time on race, *Without Consent or Contract* demonstrates that racial problems evolved from African slavery, not that racial problems caused the enslavement of Africans. In this case, Betty Wood seems to be looking at the effect and trying to turn it into the cause. In a similarity, both Wood and Fogel agree that politics played a huge role in both the continuance and the demise of slavery. Wood spends a particular amount of time instilling in her reader that revolutionary politicians fought hard to keep slavery alive, whereas Fogel demonstrates that had it not be the veracious political fight against slavery, the institution would have continued to prosper. With the retail price of \$19.95, this book as a beginners guide seems to get the job done. One must be warned that Wood's emotional tongue could mislead people into romanticizing slavery, rather than portraying it as it truly was on the day to day level. There was a lack of depiction of slave life and an abundance of ideological theorization. However, through her work Wood is able to give a very basic description of slavery in colonial America as an institution and describe how it led up to and influence the American Revolution. Teresa Pangle

November 2006  
0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Book for college class. By ghybel1975  
School book, not bad.

*Slavery in Colonial America, 1619-1776* brings together original sources and recent scholarship to trace the origins and development of African slavery in the American colonies. Distinguished scholar Betty Wood clearly explains the evolution of the transatlantic slave trade and compares the regional social and economic forces that affected the growth of slavery in early America. In addition, Wood provides a window into the reality of slavery, presenting an accurate picture of daily life throughout the colonies. As slavery became more ingrained in American society, Wood examines early forms of slave rebellion and resistance and how the reliance on enslaved labor conflicted with the ideals of a nation calling for freedom and liberty. Succinct and engaging, *Slavery in Colonial America, 1619-1776* is essential reading for all interested in early American and African American history.

Betty Wood provides a sweeping survey of slavery across colonial America in this brief, highly readable, and informative volume. She has brought together the diverse strands that make up the tragic history of African enslavement from New England to the Southern colonies and woven them into a compelling narrative. A selection of important primary documents and a bibliographic essay make the volume an ideal introduction for students. (Randy Sparks, director of the Deep South Regional Humanities Center, Tulane University) *Slavery in Colonial America* offers a concise yet incisive introduction to recent research. Illustrated with carefully chosen selections from primary documents, it is well adapted to classroom use. Betty Wood's text offers a thoughtful summary of the main themes bound up with the adoption and renunciation of slavery in colonial America, paying full attention to experiences of the enslaved. Wood situates the development of slavery in British North America within the context of an emerging Atlantic World. (Peter G. Thompson) Betty Wood provides us with a powerful and moving account of colonial American slavery not only as a social institution and a labor system but also as a profoundly human experience of exploitation and endurance. The reader emerges with a new understanding of the complexity of race relations in the 17th and 18th centuries and a new appreciation for the tensions between the rhetoric of freedom and the reality of enslavement. (Carol Berkin, Baruch College and The Graduate Center, CUNY) Finally, the perfect book for teaching undergraduates about colonial era slavery: brief, well-written, up-to-date, and all the useful extras every teacher will want. (Sally E. Hadden, Florida State University) Betty Wood's ambitious reconceptualization of unfree labor in the English mainland colonies, which rightly places the focus on the enslaved and their strategies of survival and resistance, should enlighten specialists and students alike. Wood's engaging prose and elegant organization skillfully contextualizes the thirty-two documents included here and makes this study a natural for classroom use. (Douglas R. Egerton, Le Moyne College) Slavery has a long history in America. Most of that history happened in the colonial period. To understand America we need to understand slavery and to understand slavery we have to know what it was like between 1619 and 1776, when most enslaved persons were African, when the transatlantic slave trade flourished and when relatively few enslaved persons were Christian. Betty Wood, one of the foremost scholars of slavery in this crucial period, has provided us with a brilliant synthesis of the best scholarship on colonial slavery in this much-needed book. *Slavery in Colonial America* is the ideal introduction to the most significant institution in early American history. Its combination of succinct and up-to-date summaries of the salient facts about colonial slavery and aptly chosen documents illustrating the not-very-peculiar institution give students all they need to understand a very important topic. This is the best book in its field and is much welcomed. (Trevor Burnard, University of Sussex) Betty Wood provides a concise yet insightful synthesis of this literature while carefully pointing out some of the more important and significant interpretations along the way. . . . *Slavery in Colonial America* offers both expert and the novice a compelling account of the history of race based slavery throughout the colonial period. . . . While this volume ought to find a wide popular audience, some of the supplementary materials included at the end of the volume, specifically the selected primary documents that correspond with each chapter and the bibliographic essay, make this brief synthesis quite promising for use in the college classroom, where it will allow coming generations of students to grasp the beauty, strength, and horror of the African American experience of race-based slavery throughout colonial America. (Richard Bailey, University of Kentucky) The best book of its type in the field. (History: The Journal Of The American Historical Association) About the Author Betty Wood is a reader in American history at the University of Cambridge and a fellow at Girton College, Cambridge.