*Source: Wikimedia Commons (Dutch National Archives/public domain)*

**Extension:** What do you think that Eric Williams meant in the last sentence of this extract – and why do you think he called his book *Capitalism and Slavery*?

Why did English plantation owners decide to use enslaved people from Africa instead of indentured servants or convicts from Britain?

1.

2.

3.

4.

How did the royal family help the transatlantic slave trade to develop?

What were the problems for the plantation owners posed by indentured servitude?

1.

2.

3.

How many indentured servants sailed from Bristol to the New World between 1654 and 1685?

How were people kidnapped and forced to become indentured servants?

**Vocabulary**

**Capitalism** – a system where companies and individuals try to make money

**Broiling** – extremely hot

**Succumbed to** – died from the effects of something

**Excessive** – too much

**Labour** – hard work

**Rigours** – harsh conditions

**Liberty** – freedom

**Binding** – tying

**Stipulated** – written down as part of an agreement

**Convict** – a person found guilty of a crime

**Plied with** – given a lot of

**Enticed** – tempted

**Vexatious** – annoying

**Procured** – obtained

**Patronage** – money and support

**Commerce** - trade

In this section, Williams describes two groups of people who came to work on plantations after the indigenous Americans. What was different about how each group ended up going to the Americas?

**Indentured servants:**

**Convicts:**

After 1600, England, France and Holland began to challenge Spain and Portugal and claim their place in the sun. The Negro, too, was to have his place, though he did not ask for it: it was the broiling sun of the sugar, tobacco and cotton plantations of the New World…

The first instance of slave trading and slave labour in the New World involved not the Negro but the Indian. The Indians rapidly succumbed to the excessive labour demanded of them, the insufficient diet, the white man’s diseases and their inability to adjust themselves from a life of liberty to… the rigours of plantation slavery.

The immediate successor of the Indian, however, was not the Negro but the poor white. These white servants included a variety of types. Some were indentured servants, so called because, before departure from their homeland, they had signed a contract [called an indenture], binding them to service for a stipulated time in return for their passage… Others were convicts, sent out by the deliberate policy of the government, to serve for a specified period…

A regular traffic developed in these indentured servants. Between 1654 and 1685 ten thousand sailed from Bristol alone… Kidnapping was encouraged to a great degree and became a regular business in such towns as London and Bristol. Adults would be plied with liquor, children enticed with sweets. The kidnappers were called ‘spirits’, defined as ‘one that taketh upp men and women and children and sells them on a ship to be conveyed beyond the sea’…

The institution of white servitude, however, had grave disadvantages… The supply [of servants] was becoming increasingly difficult, and the need of the plantations outstripped English convictions. In addition, merchants were involved in many vexatious and costly court cases arising from people stating their willingness to emigrate, accepting food and clothes in advance, and then suing for unlawful detention. On the plantations, escape was easy for the white servant…

For the surplus population needed to people the colonies in the New World, the British turned to Africa, and by 1680 they already had positive evidence, in Barbados, that the African was satisfying the necessities of production better than the European… the Negro was slave for life… Racial differences made it easier to justify and rationalise Negro slavery… the Negro slave was cheaper. The money which procured a white man’s service for ten years could buy a Negro for life… As the governor of Barbados stated, the Barbadian planters found by experience that ‘three blacks work better and cheaper than one white man’… Bristol, the centre of the indentured servant trade, became one of the centres of the slave trade… The Royal Family gave their patronage to the Royal Africa Company [a company set up in 1672 to take enslaved people from West Africa to the Americas]… England was ready to embark wholeheartedly on a branch of commerce whose importance to the sugar and tobacco plantations in the New World was beginning to be fully appreciated. The origin [of the slave trade] can be expressed in three words: Sugar, Tobacco and Cotton.

Why did the indigenous Americans (wrongly called Indians by the Europeans at the time) not survive for long on the plantations?

1.

2.

3.

4.

Which three European countries began to challenge Spain and Portugal’s domination of the New World in the seventeenth century?

1.

2.

3.



**Extract from *Capitalism and Slavery* by Eric Williams** (1944, University of North Carolina Press, pp. 3–29)