

# Part I Beginnings



## Chapter 1 English and African Background

### **Gregory King's *A Scheme of the Income and Expence of the several Families of England, calculated for the Year 1688***

*Gregory King (1648–1712) was a British political economist. Working for various patrons and administrative offices, King developed a mathematical approach to problems the government needed to address – especially financial and demographic questions. His “Natural and political observations upon the state and condition of England, 1696” was produced for a patron and contained his famous “Scheme” (reproduced, in part, below). The “Scheme” was not published until late in the eighteenth century.*

*The “Scheme” should be read from at least two perspectives: as a description of the social structure of England at the time that colonization of the North Atlantic was progressing rapidly; and as the perception of a well-born, literate Englishman about the “natural” order of his society and the usefulness of particular classes.*

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**Source.** *The Political and Commercial Works of that celebrated Writer Charles D’Avenant, LL.D., Relating to the Trade and Revenue of England, The Plantation Trade, the East Indian Trade, and African Trade*, 5 vols. (London, 1771), II, 184. King’s table had ten columns, of which five have been omitted from this extract; in addition, data from the last three rows of King’s table is summarized in the last three rows above.

**Study.** Peter Laslett, *The World We Have Lost: England Before the Industrial Age* (London: Methuen, 1965, 1984).

*Table 1.1 Gregory King's A Scheme of the Income and Expence of the several Families of England, calculated for the Year 1688*

Number of Families	Ranks, Degrees, Titles and Qualifications	Heads per Family	Yearly Income per Head		Yearly Expense per Head		
			£	s	£	s	d
160	Temporal Lords	40	80	0	70	0	0
26	Spiritual Lords	20	65	0	45	0	0
800	Baronets	16	55	0	49	0	0
600	Knights	13	50	0	45	0	0
3,000	Esquires	10	45	0	41	0	0
12,000	Gentlemen	8	35	0	32	0	0
5,000	Persons in greater offices and positions	8	30	0	26	0	0
5,000	Persons in lesser offices and positions	6	20	0	17	0	0
2,000	Eminent merchants and traders by sea	8	50	0	37	0	0
8,000	Lesser merchants and trader by sea	6	53	0	27	0	0
10,000	Persons in the law	7	22	0	18	0	0
2,000	Eminent clergymen	6	12	0	10	0	0
8,000	Lesser clergymen	5	10	0	9	4	0
40,000	Freeholders of the better sort	7	13	0	11	15	0
120,000	Freeholders of the lesser sort	5 ½	10	0	9	10	0
150,000	Farmers	5	8	10	8	5	0
15,000	Persons in liberal arts and sciences	5	12	0	11	0	0
50,000	Shopkeepers and tradesmen	4 ½	10	0	9	0	0
60,000	Artisans and handicrafts	4	9	10	9	0	0
5,000	Naval officers	4	20	0	18	0	0
4,000	Military officers	4	15	0	14	0	0
500,586		5 ½	12	18	11	15	4
50,000	Common seamen	3	7	0	7	10	0
364,000	Labouring people and out-servants	3 ½	4	10	4	12	0
400,000	Cottagers and paupers	3 ¼	2	0	2	5	0

(Continued)

Table 1.1 (Continued)

Number of Families	Ranks, Degrees, Titles and Qualifications	Heads per Family	Yearly Income per Head		Yearly Expense per Head		
			£	s	£	s	d
35,000	Common soldiers	2	7	0	7	10	0
849,000		3 $\frac{1}{4}$	3	5	3	9	0
[30,000]	Vagrants; as gipsies, thieves, beggars, etc.	1	2	0	4	0	0
500,586	Encreasing the wealth of the kingdom	5 $\frac{1}{2}$	12	18	11	15	4
849,000	Decreasing the wealth of the kingdom	3 $\frac{1}{4}$	3	3	3	7	6
500,586	Encreasing [total] 3,023,700						
849,000	Decreasing [total] 622,500						
1,349,586	Neat totals 2,401,200						

### William Harrison's *Description of England*, 1577

*William Harrison was born in London in 1535, and raised and educated in the city; he then served much of his life as a pastor of a rural parish in Essex. His chronicle of England was in significant measure a product of his own experiences mixing with the peoples of the realm. In Chapter V of the Description, "Of Degrees of People in the Commonwealth of England," he divides the English into four social classes: gentlemen, citizens (of towns, including merchants), yeomen (including craftsmen), and laborers (also including craftsmen). The extract below includes his description of merchants, yeomen, and laborers, groups which would, in the next century, supply most of the English New World settlers.*

In this place are also our merchants to be installed, as amongst the citizens (although they often change estate with gentlemen, as gentlemen do with them, by a mutual conversion of the one into the other), whose number is so increased in these our days that their only maintenance is the cause of the exceeding prices of foreign wares, which otherwise, when every nation was permitted to bring in her own commodities, were far better cheap and more plentifully to be had. . . . I do not deny but that the navy of the land

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is in part maintained by their traffic, and so are the high prices of wares kept up, now they have gotten the only sale of things, upon pretense of better furtherance of the commonwealth, into their own hands, whereas in times past, when the strange bottoms [foreign vessels] were suffered to come in, we had sugar for 4d. the pound that now, at the writing of this treatise, is worth half-a-crown, raisins or currants for a penny that now are holden at 6d., and sometime at 8d., and 10d. the pound, nutmegs at 2½ d. the ounce, ginger at a penny a ounce, prunes at half penny farthing, great raisins three pound for a penny, cinnamon at 4d. the ounce, cloves at 2d., and pepper at 12d. and 16d. the pound. Whereby we may see the sequel if things not always but very seldom to be such as is pretended in the beginning.

The wares that they carry out of the realm are for the most part broad-cloths and kerseys of all colors, likewise cottons, friezes, rugs, tin, wool, our best beer, baize, bustian, mockadoes tufted and lain, rash, lead, fells, etc. [woolen and cotton goods], which being shipped at sundry ports of our coasts, are borne from thence into all quarters of the world and there are either exchanged for other wares or ready money, to the great gain and commodity of our merchants. And whence in times past their chief trade was into Spain, Portugal, France, Flanders, Dansk [Denmark], Norway, Scotland, and Iceland only, now in these days, as men not contented with these journeys, they have sought out the East and West Indies and made now and then suspicious [promising] voyages, not only unto the Canaries and New Spain, but likewise into Cathay, Moscovia [Russia], Tartary, and the regions thereabout, from whence (as they say) they bring home great commodities. But alas! I see not by all their travel that the prices of things are any whit abated. . . . This only I know, that every function and several vocation striveth with other which of them should have all the water of commodity run into their own cistern.

Yeomen are those which by our law are called *legales homines*, freemen born English, and may dispend of their own free land in yearly revenue to the sum of 40s. sterling, or £6 as money goeth in our times. . . . The truth is that the word [yeoman] is derived from the Saxon term *aeoman*, or *geoman*, which signifieth (as I have read) a settled or staid man, such I mean as, being married and of some years, betaketh himself to stay in the place of his abode for the better maintenance of himself and his family, whereof the single sort have no regard but are likely to be still fleeting, now hither, now thither, which argueth want of stability in determination and resolution of judgment for the execution of things of any importance. This sort of people have a certain pre-eminence and more estimation than laborers and the common sort of artificers, and these commonly live wealthily, keep good houses, and travail

to get riches. They are also for the most part farmers to gentlemen . . . or at the leastwise artificers; and with grazing, frequenting of markets, and keeping of servants (not idle servants as the gentlemen do, but such as get both their own and part of their master's living) do come to great wealth, insomuch that many of them are able and do buy the lands of unthrifty gentlemen, and often, setting their sons to the schools, to the universities, and to the Inns of the Court, or otherwise leaving them sufficient lands whereupon they may live without labor, do make them by those means to become gentlemen; these were they that in times past made all France afraid. And albeit they be not called master as gentlemen are, or sir, as to knights appertaineth, but only John and Thomas, etc., yet have they been found to have done very good service; and the Kings of England in foughten battles were wont to remain among them (who were their footmen) as the French kings did amongst their horsemen, the prince thereby showing where his chief strength did consist.

The fourth and last sort of people in England are day laborers, poor husbandmen, and some retailers (which have no free land), copyholders, and all artificers, as tailors, shoemakers, carpenters, brickmakers, masons, etc. As for slaves and bondmen, we have none; nay, such is the privilege of our country by the especial grace of God and bounty of our princes that if any come hither from other realms, so soon as they set foot on land they become so free of condition as their masters, whereby all note of servile bondage is utterly removed from them, wherein we resemble (not the Germans, who had slaves also, though such as in respect of the slaves of other countries might well be reputed free, but) the old Indians and the Taprobanes [Ceylonese], who supposed it a great injury to Nature to make or suffer them to be bond whom she in her wanted course doth product and bring forth free. This fourth and last sort of people, therefore, have neither voice nor authority in the commonwealth, but are to be ruled and not to rule other; yet they are not altogether neglected, for in cities and corporate towns, for default of yeomen, they are fain to make up their inquests of such manner of people. And in villages they are commonly made churchwardens, sidemen [church official], aleconners [ale inspectors], now and then constables, and many times enjoy the name of headboroughs.

**Source.** William Harrison, *The Description of England* (1577), ed. Georges Edelen (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, for the Folger Shakespeare Library, 1968), pp. 115–18.

**Study.** Keith Wrightson, *English Society, 1580–1680* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1982).

## Gomes Eanes de Zurara's Chronicle of the Initial Portuguese Voyages to Sub-Saharan Africa

*Gomes Eanes de Zurara (1410–73/4) was the chronicler for the Portuguese Crown of the initial fifteenth-century voyages made to western Sub-Saharan Africa (south, geographically, of Cape Bojador). He wrote within the chivalric tradition, and saw these voyages as an extension of the war against Islam in Spain and northern Africa. Unlike later chroniclers of French, Spanish, and English exploits Zurara had little concern with an accurate description of the lands and peoples the Portuguese encountered, unless such a depiction helped him describe the valor of Portuguese soldiers or the greatness of Portuguese rulers (João I, and his third son, Henrique, known as “Henry the Navigator”). His account, Crónica dos feitos de Guiné, was written in 1453.*

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CHAPTER LX. *How those caravels arrived at the river of Nile, and of the Guineas that they took.*

Now these caravels having passed by the land of Sahara . . . came in sight of the two palm trees that Dinis Diaz had met with before, by which they understood that they were at the beginning of the land of the Negroes. And at this sight they were glad indeed, and would have landed at once; but they found the sea so rough upon that coast that by no manner of means could they accomplish their purpose. And some of those who were present said afterwards that it was clear from the smell that came off the land how good must be the fruits of that country, for it was so delicious that from the point they reached, though they were on the sea, it seemed to them that they stood in some gracious fruit garden ordained for the sole end of their delight. And if our men showed on their side a great desire of gaining the land, no less did the natives of it show their eagerness to receive them into it; but of the reception they offered I do not care to speak, for according to the signs they made to our men from the first, they did not intend to abandon the beach without very great loss to one side or the other. Now the people of this green land are wholly black, and hence this is called Land of the Negroes, or Land of Guinea. Wherefore also, the men and women thereof are called “Guineas,” as if one were to say “Black Men.” And when the men in the caravels saw the first palms and lofty trees as we have related, they understood right well that they were close to the river of Nile, at the point where it floweth into the western sea, the which river is there called the Senegal. . . .

*CHAPTER LXIII: How the Caravels set forth from the river, and of the voyage which they made.*

ALL these secrets and marvels did the genius of our prince bring before the eyes of the people of our kingdom, for although all the matters here spoken of concerning the marvels of the Nile could not be witnessed by his own eyes, for that were impossible, it was a great matter that his ships arrived there, where 'tis not recorded that any other ship of these parts had ever come. And this may truthfully be affirmed according to the matters which at the beginning of this book I have related concerning the passage of Cape Bojador, and also from the astonishment which the natives of that land showed when they saw the first ships, for they went to them imagining they were fish, or some other natural product of the sea. But now returning to our history, after that deed was thus concluded, it was the wish of all the three captains to endeavour to make an honourable booty, adventuring their bodies in whatsoever peril might be necessary.

And because there were so many of those blacks on land that by no means could they disembark either by day or night, Gomez Pirez sought to show that he desired to go among them on peaceful terms, and so placed upon the shore a cake and a mirror and a sheet of paper on which he drew a cross. And the natives when they came there and found those things, broke up the cake and threw it far away, and with their assegais they cast at the mirror, till they had broken it in many pieces, and the paper they tore, showing that they cared not for any of these things.

“Since it is so,” said Gomez Pirez to his crossbowmen, “shoot at them with your bows that they may at least understand that we are people who can do them hurt, whenever they will not agree to a friendly understanding.” But the blacks seeing the others’ intention, began to pay them back, launching at them also their arrows and assegais, some of which our men brought home to this kingdom. And the arrows are so made that they have no feathers, nor a notch for the string to enter, but they are all smooth and short, and made of rushes or reeds, and their iron points are long and some are made of wood fixed in the shafts, which are like the iron spindles with which the women of this country spin. And they use also other little harpoons of iron, the which darts are all equally poisoned with plants. And their assegais are each made with seven or eight harpoon-like prongs, and the plant they use is very venomous.

So all the captains there: agreed to make sail, with the intention of entering into the River of Nile, but no one was able to light upon it save Lawrence Diaz . . . And he, because he was alone, did not dare enter into the river, but he went with the little boat to the place where they took the blacks on the outward voyage; howbeit he turned back without doing anything

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worthy of mention. And since he did not fall in with the convoy again he came straight to Lagos. And in this wise Gomez Pirez lost the company of the other caravels; and following his course towards Portugal, after taking in water at the isle of Arguim, he came to the Rio do Ouro, and sailed as far up the port where he had been the preceding year with Antam Gonçalvez and Diego Affonso, and there presently the Moors came, and in taking security of them he learnt there were no merchants there. But they sold him a black for a price of five doubloons . . . [and] he [said] he would return there, when he would find blacks in abundance, and gold, and merchandise by which he might gain much profit.

**Source.** Gomes Eannes de Azurara, *The Chronicle of the Discovery and Conquest of Guinea*, trans. Charles Raymond Beazley and Edgar Prestage (New York: B. Franklin, 1963). Based on *Crónica dos feitos de Guiné*, the original English edition of which was published by the Hakluyt Society, no. 95. The author's name is most often today listed as Gomes Eanes de Zurara.

**Study.** Kenneth Baxter Wolf, "The 'Moors' of West Africa and the Beginnings of the Portuguese Slave Trade," *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, 14 (1994), 449–69.

### Oludah Equiano Recounts his Life in Africa before Being Captured by Slave Traders, 1789

*Oludah Equiano wrote The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Oludah Equiano in London in 1789 in part as a protest against the slave trade. Equiano was born in Africa around 1745. He was captured, enslaved in Africa, then sold into the Atlantic slave trade. When no one purchased him in Barbados in 1756, he was taken to Virginia, bought by a planter, and then sold to a ship's captain. There he learned to read (taught by a servant) and to navigate, and he would spend much of the next decade at sea, enslaved but with considerable autonomy. Being allowed to trade on his own account, Equiano would be able to buy his freedom in 1766. He would eventually move to London and become involved in evangelical politics and abolitionism. Equiano's Narrative contains some unattributed passages from the accounts of others (standard practice at the time), and as Vincent Carretta's remarkable biography of Equiano demonstrates, Equiano may also have fashioned part of the narrative of his life from the memories of other Africans whom he knew, but this in no way diminishes his telling of his life as, to use Carretta's term, a "self-made man," moving between the worlds of slavery and freedom, Africa and Europe, Old World and New.*

*The excerpt below comes from the 1791 American edition of Equiano's Narrative.*

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Chapter 1. The author's account of his country... That part of Africa, known by the name of Guinea, to which the trade for slaves is carried on, extends along the coast above 3400 miles, from the Senegal to Angola, and includes a variety of kingdoms. Of these the most considerable is the kingdom of Benin, both as to extent and wealth, the richness and cultivation of the soil, the power of its king, and the number and warlike disposition of the inhabitants. It is situated nearly under the line, and extends along the coast about 170 miles, but runs back into the interior part of Africa to a distance hitherto I believe unexplored by any traveller; and seems only terminated at length by the empire of Abyssinia, near 1500 miles from its beginning. This kingdom is divided into many provinces or districts: in one of the most remote and fertile of which, called Eboe, I was born, in the year 1745, in a charming fruitful vale, named Essaka. The distance of this province from the capital of Benin and the sea coast must be very considerable; for I had never heard of white men or Europeans, nor of the sea: and our subjection to the king of Benin was little more than nominal; for every transaction of the government, as far as my slender observation extended, was conducted by the chiefs or elders of the place. . . .

As our manners are simple, our luxuries are few. The dress of both sexes is nearly the same. It generally consists of a long piece of calico, or muslin, wrapped loosely round the body, somewhat in the form of a highland plaid. This is usually dyed blue, which is our favourite colour. It is extracted from a berry, and is brighter and richer than any I have seen in Europe. Besides this, our women of distinction wear golden ornaments; which they dispose with some profusion on their arms and legs. When our women are not employed with the men in tillage, their usual occupation is spinning and weaving cotton, which they afterwards dye, and make it into garments. They also manufacture earthen vessels, of which we have many kinds. Among the rest tobacco pipes, made after the same fashion, and used in the same manner, as those in Turkey.

Our manner of living is entirely plain; for as yet the natives are unacquainted with those refinements in cookery which debase the taste: bullocks, goats, and poultry, supply the greatest part of their food. These constitute likewise the principal wealth of the country, and the chief articles of its commerce. The flesh is usually stewed in a pan; to make it savoury we sometimes use also pepper, and other spices, and we have salt made of wood ashes. Our vegetables are mostly plantains, eadas, yams, beans, and Indian corn. The head of the family usually eats alone; his wives and slaves have also their separate tables. Before we taste food we always wash our hands: indeed our cleanliness on all occasions is extreme; but on this it is an indispensable ceremony. After washing, libation is made, by pouring out a

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small portion of the drink, in a certain place, for the spirits of departed relations, which the natives suppose to preside over their conduct, and guard them from evil. They are totally unacquainted with strong or spirituous liquours; and their principal beverage is palm wine.

As we live in a country where nature is prodigal of her favours, our wants are few and easily supplied; of course we have few manufactures. They consist for the most part of calicoes, earthen ware, ornaments, and instruments of war and husbandry. But these make no part of our commerce, the principal articles of which, as I have observed, are provisions. In such a state money is of little use; however we have some small pieces of coin, if I may call them such. They are made something like an anchor; but I do not remember either their value or denomination. We have also markets, at which I have been frequently with my mother. These are sometimes visited by stout mahogany-coloured men from the south west of us: we call them Oye-Eboe, which term signifies red men living at a distance. They generally bring us fire-arms, gunpowder, hats, beads, and dried fish. The last we esteemed a great rarity, as our waters were only brooks and springs. These articles they barter with us for odoriferous woods and earth, and our salt of wood ashes. They always carry slaves through our land; but the strictest account is exacted of their manner of procuring them before they are suffered to pass. Sometimes indeed we sold slaves to them, but they were only prisoners of war, or such among us as had been convicted of kidnapping, or adultery, and some other crimes, which we esteemed heinous.

**Source.** Olaudah Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African, written by himself* (New York, 1791), pp. 3–4, 8–10, 13–14; reprinted from the 1789 London edition.

**Study.** Vincent Carretta, *Equiano, the African: A Biography of a Self-Made Man* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2005).

**Further exploration.** Vincent Carretta’s primary goal in writing a biography of Equiano was not to “prove” that his narrative was an accurate account of his life, but Carretta did try to verify as much of Equiano’s account as possible, and, in particular, tried to establish whether the voyages Equiano mentioned in the narrative actually took place (and thus whether he was where he said he was when he said he was). In answering this type of question, historians can use David Eltis et al., *The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade: Database on CD-ROM* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), which includes records of more than 27,000 trans-Atlantic slave ship voyages made between 1595 and 1866. The interactive format of the database allows users to ask questions about slaving voyages by time and place. Most university libraries have the database.

### Discussion Questions

- 1 In what ways does William Harrison's *Description of England* reinforce or challenge Gregory King's *Scheme... of the Several Families of England*? What conception of "class" do these descriptions suggest literate English people held?
- 2 Which people from the two authors' descriptions would be most likely to be involved in exploration and colonization efforts?
- 3 Compare the two descriptions of African society – one by a European and the other by an African. How do they differ? In what ways are they similar?
- 4 These accounts range chronologically from the sixteenth to the late eighteenth century. In what ways do the documents themselves reveal that they are drawn from different periods of colonial history?
- 5 Keep these descriptions in mind as you read subsequent documents. How did New World English and African settlements differ from the portraits presented here of Old World society?