

**REGIONAL  
EXTENSION****7****The African Slave Trade**

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For nearly 400 years, Europe, Africa, and the Americas were linked by a trade in human lives—the transatlantic slave trade. Millions of Africans were taken from their homes, transported across the Atlantic, and forced into slavery. The following article discusses various aspects of the slave trade.

**The Economic Basis**

The European colonists who followed in the wake of Columbus saw that in those parts of the land where the soil, climate, and topography were right for growing tropical and semitropical crops, the possibility existed for large-scale plantation farming. The products of these plantations—sugar, tobacco, rice, cotton, among others—could be exported and sold at great profit in European markets, where such items were considered highly desirable luxuries.

Portuguese, Spanish, English, French, Dutch, and Danish colonists flocked to the shores of the Caribbean and to North and South America. However, to work their huge plantations, they needed a huge labor force—much larger than the native populations could supply. To meet this need, people from Africa were enslaved, and for the first time in history, the buying and selling of human beings on a large scale became an important part of international trade.

The new transatlantic slave trade differed in both quality and quantity from any form of slavery that had existed previously. Never before had vast numbers of people been treated as a commodity, as goods to be exported and imported, as things instead of people. Because the African slaves were viewed as objects and not people, the belief grew that their slavery was not a temporary legal condition, as had been the case in all previous views of slavery. Instead, the Africans' slavery was seen as a permanent status based on African birth or heritage. This attitude became the basis for inhumane treatment of the slaves and for the racial prejudice that developed in the United States and in certain European countries and their colonies.

**The Triangular Trade**

A typical slave trading arrangement followed a triangular pattern. On the first leg of the journey, a ship called a slaver was loaded with salt, cloth, weapons, hardware, beads, and rum. It sailed from a port in Europe to a port in Africa, usually one along the western coast. There, the ship's captain traded the cargo for Africans who had been enslaved.

On the second leg of the journey, the grueling "middle passage" that lasted 10 or more weeks, the Africans were loaded into the slaver's hold and shipped across the Atlantic. Often in chains, they were packed so tightly that they could not even lie down. Once in the New World, Africans were either sold immediately to plantation owners or placed in stockades to be auctioned off when the demand was greater.

To conclude the triangular trade, exotic plantation products such as sugar, molasses, tobacco, and rum were loaded into the slaver's now-empty hold and shipped to Europe to be sold.

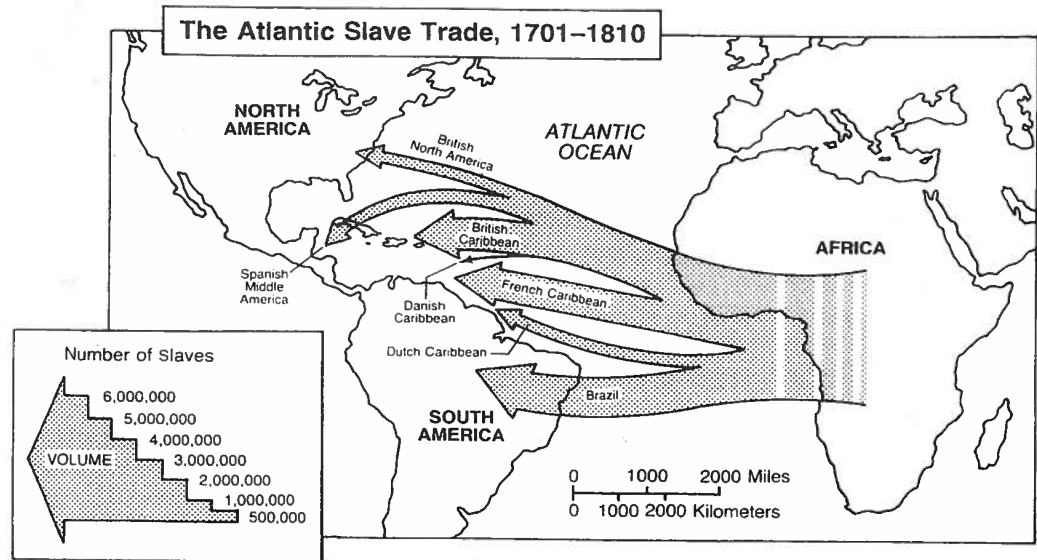
**Number and Destination**

The number of human beings victimized by the slave trade was very high. Although estimates vary, at least 10 million Africans were supplied to plantations in the Western Hemisphere over a 400-year period, not counting the ones that died along the way—according to estimates, 15 to 25 of every 100 people loaded onto the ships.

The map on the next page shows the volume and destination of the African slave trade from 1701 to 1810. As you can see, the greatest numbers were carried to the Caribbean and to Brazil, where the largest plantations were located. Smaller numbers were sent to British North America and Spanish Middle America.

Not until the early nineteenth century did the slave trade begin to diminish, thanks partly to growing sentiment against the traffic in human beings and partly to the fact that the technology of the Industrial Revolution was making slavery obsolete. The trade was made illegal in the United States and in Britain's colonies in 1807. In 1833 the British parliament passed a law abolishing slavery in all British territories.

Britain tried to force other nations to follow its example by posting British warships to patrol the coasts of Africa and to seize slavers and free their human cargoes. But many slavers continued to slip through the British blockade. The slave trade did not completely end until the New World countries passed laws freeing their own slaves, as did the United States in 1865 and Brazil in 1888.



Use information from the article and the map to complete the activities. Write your answers on a separate sheet of paper.

### A. Geography Focus

- Location** Why did the African slave trade rely largely on ports located along the west coast of Africa?
- Place** Which three areas shown on the map had the largest influx of African slaves between 1701 and 1810? About how many enslaved people were brought into each of these regions?

### B. Critical Thinking

- Making Comparisons** Describe how the African slave trade differed from earlier forms of slavery.
- Drawing Conclusions** How did the Industrial Revolution help to end the slave trade?
- Drawing Inferences** By 1810, two million African Americans lived in the United States. Why did three fourths of them live in the South?

# The Triangular Trade

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

**Introduction:** The origins of the African Slave Trade can be traced back to the Age of Exploration in the 15th Century. Europeans had become quite addicted to the luxuries of exotic spices, silks and porcelain that could only be found in Asia. Unfortunately for them, Muslim traders had a complete monopoly over the trade routes to the Far East. Unsuccessful in the attempt to break that monopoly, they started to explore water routes that would enable them to bypass the Muslims. The Portuguese took the lead in that exploration and sent voyages down the west coast of Africa in hopes of finding a new route to the source of traded goods. On those voyages they found a new type of good- human beings.

## The Slave Trade:

- Between 10 and 28 million people taken from Africa
  - 17 million Africans sold into slavery on the coast of the Indian Ocean, the Middle East, and North Africa
  - 12 million Africans taken to the Americas
  - 5 million Africans taken across the Sahara and East Africa into slavery in other parts of the world
- ~ BBC News

## Why did the Slave Trade Begin?

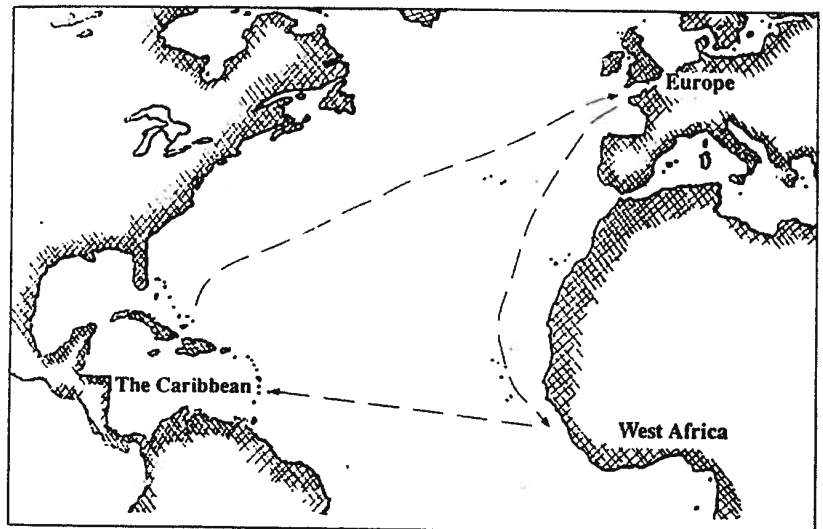
Mercantilism in Europe drove European countries to explore the world, establish an empire of colonies, and bring back raw and produced goods to export from the mother country to be used or exported. As European empires expanded to the New World, however, they lacked one major resource - a work force. In most cases the *indigenous* (native) peoples had proved unreliable (most of them were dying from diseases brought over from Europe), and Europeans were unsuited to the climate and suffered under tropical diseases.

Africans, on the other hand, were excellent workers: they often had experience of agriculture and keeping cattle, they were used to a tropical climate, resistant to tropical diseases, and they could be "worked very hard" on plantations or in mines.

## Was Slavery New to Africa?

Africans had been traded as slaves for centuries - reaching Europe via the Islamic-run, trans-Saharan, trade routes. Slaves obtained from the Muslim dominated North African coast however proved to be too well educated to be trusted and had a tendency to rebellion.

Slavery was also a traditional part of African society - various states and kingdoms in Africa operated one or more of the following: chattel slavery, debt bondage, forced labor, and serfdom.



## What was the Triangular Trade?

All three stages of the Triangular Trade proved lucrative for merchants.

The first stage of the Triangular Trade involved taking manufactured goods from Europe to Africa: cloth, spirit, tobacco, beads, cowrie shells, metal goods, and guns. The guns were used to help expand empires and obtain more slaves (until they were finally used against European colonizers). These goods were exchanged for African slaves.

The second stage of the Triangular Trade, **The Middle Passage**, involved shipping the slaves to the Americas.

The third, and final, stage of the Triangular Trade involved the return to Europe with the produce from the slave-labor plantations: cotton, sugar, tobacco, molasses and rum.

## Who Started the Triangular Trade?

For two hundred years, 1440-1640, Portugal had a monopoly on the export of slaves from Africa. It is notable that they were also the last European country to abolish the institution - although, like France, it still continued to work former slaves as contract laborers, which they called *libertos* or *engagés à temps*. It is estimated that during the 4 1/2 centuries of the trans-Atlantic slave trade, Portugal was responsible for transporting over 4.5 million Africans (roughly 40% of the total).

1. Plot the 3 stages of the Triangular Trade on the map.
2. The Middle Passage involved shipping slaves from \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_

## How Did the Europeans Obtain the Slaves?

Between 1450 and the end of the nineteenth century, slaves were obtained from along the west coast of Africa with the full and active co-operation of African kings and merchants. (There were occasional military campaigns organized by Europeans to capture slaves, especially by the Portuguese in what is now Angola, but this accounts for only a small percentage of the total.)

## Who Has the Worst Record for Trading Slaves?

During the eighteenth century, when the slave trade accounted for the transport of a staggering 6 million Africans, Britain was the worst transgressor - responsible for almost 2.5 million. This is a fact often forgotten by those who regularly cite Britain's prime role in the abolition of the slave trade.

## Conditions for the Slaves

Slaves were introduced to new diseases and suffered from malnutrition long before they reached the new world. It is suggested that the majority of deaths on the voyage across the Atlantic - the middle passage - occurred during the first couple of weeks and were a result of malnutrition and disease encountered during the forced marches and subsequent interment at slave camps on the coast.

Conditions on the slave ships were terrible, but the estimated death rate of around 13% is lower than the mortality rate for seamen, officers and passengers on the same voyages.



Middle Passage: Body Positions of Slaves on the Slave Ship Aurore

## Arrival in the Americas

As a result of the slave trade, five times as many Africans arrived in the Americas than Europeans. Slaves were needed on plantations and for mines and the majority was shipped to Brazil, the Caribbean, and the Spanish Empire. Less than 5% traveled to the Northern American States formally held by the British.

1. What was the triangular trade (describe all 3 sides)?

2. What factors led up to and fueled the Triangular Trade?

3. Based on what you learned about the Triangular Trade, how did trade and travel change the world?

# MAP OF THE TRANSATLANTIC SLAVE TRADE

