



The Atlantic Slave Trade

1500-1850

The Atlantic slave trade involved the largest intercontinental migration of people in world history prior to the 20th century

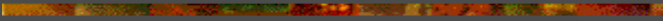


Ask yourself:

What is slavery? Why did/does it
happen?

When it all started...



- The fifteenth century:
 - It was then that ship design made it possible for sailors from the Mediterranean to make long journeys down the coast of Africa and ultimately across the Atlantic to the Americas.
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World Map Circa 1570

This Dutch map of the world dates from the last half of the 16th century, a time when the slave trade was expanding rapidly. The Portuguese monopoly on the trade had been broken by the British, and other nations including Holland, France, Denmark, and the American colonies joined in transporting slaves from Africa to the New World.

Africa Prior to the Slave Trade

Current Era

700-800

Islam spreads into West Africa across the Sahara desert

c750

Kingdom of Ghana at its strongest

1200-1400

Kingdom of Great Zimbabwe

c1350

Kingdom of Mali

c1400

Kingdom of Ife

1440-1606

Kingdom of Benin

1464

Sonni Ali the Great becomes ruler of the Kingdom of Songhay

1486

Portugese traders make contact with Benin

1640

Beginning of civil war in Benin

1680

Asante states come under the rule of one king

1730

Oyo Kingdom at the height of its power

1818

Shaka becomes leader of the Zulu Kingdom

When the Atlantic slave trade began, institutions already were in place to provide slaves in exchange for commodities. Only the European shippers and the American destination were different.

Who was involved in slavery?

- Before 1500: Sumeria, China, Greece, Rome, Islamic empire
- Groups trading slaves after 1500: Spain, Portugal, Britain, Dutch, French
- Most of the slaves transported in the Atlantic slave trade were adult men.
- Nearly all persons transported across the Atlantic in the slave trade came from the **coast and interior of west and west central Africa**, between the Sénégal River in the north and southern Angola in the south.
- Perhaps one-third of all slaves came from 800 km (500 mi) on either side of the Congo River and another one-third from the area that today is Benin and Nigeria.
- 10 million slaves were moved between 1500 and 1800.



What happened?

Triangular trade

1. European goods (guns) to Africa
2. Slaves from Africa to Americas
3. Goods from Americas (tobacco, sugar) to Europe

To get slaves, Europeans needed something to trade.

Europeans and Africans established a systematic way of trading that changed little over several centuries.





Slaves are depicted here carrying sugarcane for processing in the rollers of a sugarcane mill. Most of the more than 10 million Africans brought to the Americas as slaves spent their days as farm laborers. Many toiled long, strenuous hours on the sugar plantations and other agricultural estates that sprang up in the warmer climates of the western hemisphere.

How did the slave trade work?

- Africans developed various ways to get slaves and move them to the coast.
- Across the interior of West Africa, Muslim families organized slave caravans and moved them from the interior to the coast.
- Along the Gold and Slave coasts (an area now comprising the nations of Ghana, Togo, Benin, and Nigeria) the rulers of large states such as Ashanti, Dahomey, and Oyo obtained slaves through taxation, which was provided by the rulers of less powerful states in exchange for protection or as a symbol of allegiance.
- East of the Niger Delta, African trading groups would get and sell people into slavery.
- By the 18th century private Portuguese, mulatto (individuals of mixed African and European descent), and African traders were taking trade goods to interior markets and returning with slaves.

Salaga, in northern Ghana, was the site of a major slave market. Today, there are still descendants of people who were slaves. The history is vivid in peoples' minds.

OUAMKAM BAYOU

"Ouamkam means bathing. Bayou means slave. So literally it means 'Bathing slaves.' This is the place where all the slaves were bathed. They would bathe them here, rub them with shea butter and make them shine, and they gave them food to eat, to make them look big; then they'd take them to the slave market for sale."

The Market

- At various points along the coast, buyers and sellers met and struck deals.
- Europeans examined slaves; Africans looked over merchandise; and then the parties haggled to set the values of each.
- The assortment of the Europeans' trade goods was always an important factor. Any notion that Africans were duped into accepting trinkets of little value is incorrect. Most knew what they wanted and could hold out for good terms.
- Typical commodities exchanged for slaves included cloth, metals and metalware, firearms and gunpowder, spirits, cutlery, coins, decorative wear, horses, salt, shells, and paper.
- The prices Europeans paid for slaves rose steadily through the years. An English buyer could obtain a healthy slave for 5.5 pounds worth of commodities in 1690 and 14 pounds worth in 1760. The same slave sold in Virginia for 15 pounds in 1690 and 45 pounds in 1760.

Mohammed Ibrahim Babatu, the deputy head teacher of a Junior secondary school in Yendi, lives in Ghana.

"In our curriculum, we teach a little part of the history of our land. Because some of the children ask questions about the past history of our grandfather Babatu.

Babatu, and others, didn't see anything wrong with slavery. They didn't have any knowledge of what the people were used for. They were only aware that some of the slaves would serve others of the royal families within the sub-region.

He has done a great deal of harm to the people of Africa. I have studied history and I know the effect of slavery.

I have seen that the slave raids did harm to Africa, but some members of our family feel he was ignorant...we feel that what he did was fine, because it has given the family a great fame within the Dagomba society.

He gave some of the slaves to the Dagombas and then he sent the rest of the slaves to the Salaga market. He didn't know they were going to plantations...he was ignorant..."



The Middle Passage: the trip to the Americas

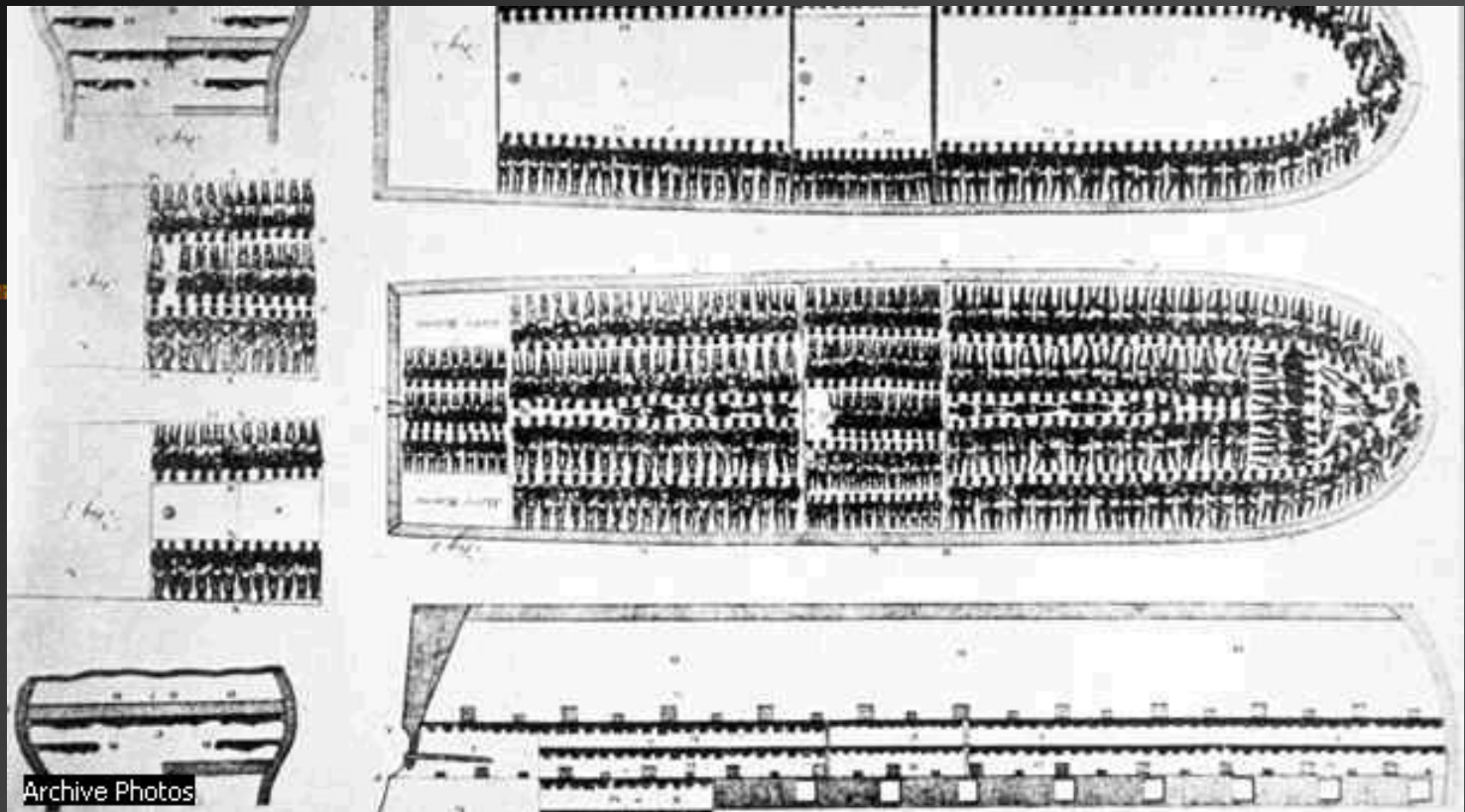
- High death rates: On average, 16 percent of the men, women, and children involved perished in transit.
 - 25 to 60 days, depending on origin, destination, and winds
 - Horrible conditions
 - Death due to sickness, suicide or malnutrition- or being thrown overboard
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Olaudah Equiano gave the first eyewitness account of life on a ship from a slave's point of view.

"I was soon put down under the decks, and there I received such a salutation in my nostrils as I had never experienced in my life: so that, with the loathsomeness of the stench, and crying together, I became so sick and low that I was not able to eat, nor had I the least desire to taste anything. I now wished for the last friend, death, to relieve me; but soon, to my grief, two of the white men offered me eatables; and on my refusing to eat, one of them held me fast by the hands and laid me across I think the windlass, and tied my feet, while the other flogged me severely. I had never seen among any people such instances of brutal cruelty; and this not only shewn towards us blacks, but also some of the white themselves. One white man in particular I saw, when we were permitted to be on deck, flogged so unmercifully with a large rope near the foremast, that he died in consequence of it."



British America - 6%
 Spanish America - 17%
 Major Slave Trading Region



Slaves Packed on a Slave Ship

Crowded, unsanitary conditions were the rule for slaves bound for the Americas on slave ships. Human cargo was often packed so tightly that it was impossible to move. The slave trade proved a lucrative business for more than 200 years. More than 10 million Africans were forcibly transported to the Americas before the importation of slaves was abolished in the United States in 1808.

Why were slaves needed?

Plantations

- great demand for labor developed on plantations spread about the Atlantic, especially in the tropics of the Western Hemisphere.
 - Most of the plantations produced sugarcane for Europe, but planters eventually grew such other products as coffee, cocoa, rice, indigo, tobacco, and cotton.
 - The Atlantic slave trade became an integral part of an international trading system.
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Why not Native Americans or other whites?

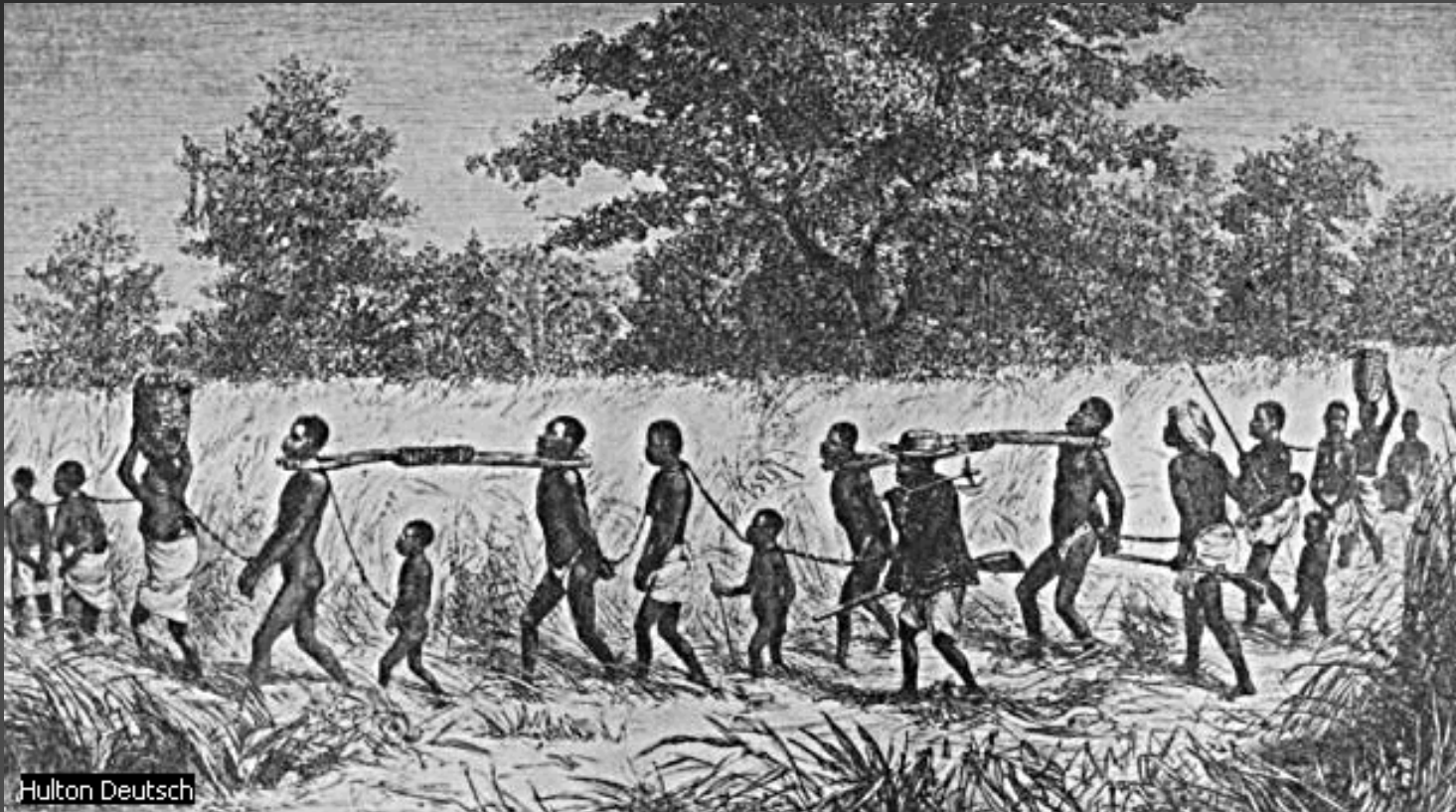
- Native Americans were the obvious choice, but they died rapidly from such diseases as smallpox, mumps, and measles.
- Native Americans could run away with ease: Their homes were usually close by, they were familiar with the land, and they knew how to survive on indigenous plants and animals.
- European indentured servants—criminals sentenced to labor or men obligated to work for a set time in exchange for ocean passage—also fell victim to diseases, mostly tropical malaria and yellow fever. They could also escape and easily blend in as members of the colony's white ruling class.

Why Africans?

- Africans were different: They came from an environment where those who survived into adolescence acquired some immunity to such “Old World” diseases as smallpox, mumps, and measles, as well as to such tropical maladies as malaria and yellow fever.
- This meant they lived three to five times longer than white laborers under the difficult conditions on plantations, and longer still than Native Americans.
- Also, when Africans ran away they could neither go home nor be mistaken for members of the planters’ society.
- Through most of the years of the Atlantic trade, prices for Africans remained favorable in relation to the price of the crops they produced. They were, thus, the best economic solution for plantation owners seeking inexpensive labor.

Slavery in Central Africa About 1800

More than ten million slaves were transported against their will to the Americas during the nearly three centuries of the Atlantic slave trade. This illustration depicts Africans traders escorting fettered slaves to coastal shipping ports to be sold to European traders.



A basic tenet of the slave trade was that Europeans were the shippers only. They were not welcome inland and were generally forbidden to become involved in African politics.

Consequently Europeans established outposts on islands or coastal ports where they dealt with neighboring African merchants and rulers.

This will lead to imperialism throughout the 1800s.

Caribbean

"Poor Daniel was lame in the hip, and could not keep up with the rest of the slaves; and our master would order him to be stripped and laid down on the ground, and have him beaten with a rod of rough briar till his skin was quite red and raw... This poor man's wounds were never healed and I have often seen them full of maggots...He was an object of pity and terror to the whole gang of slaves, and in his wretched case we saw, each of us, our own lot, if we should live to be as old."

A saltworks in the West Indies, described by former slave Mary Prince, *The History of Mary Prince*.



America

"When their day's work in the field is down, the most of them have their washing, mending and cooking to do, and having few or none of the ordinary facilities for doing either of these, very many of their sleeping hours are consumed in preparing for the field the coming day; and when this is done...they drop down side by side on one common bed - the cold damp floor..."

A plantation in the deep south, described by former slave and abolitionist Frederick Douglass, The Narrative Life of Frederick Douglass.





Brazil

"The men and women who created this first great sugar boom in the world lived well. Many stories are told of the opulence of the planters in old Brazil, their tables laden with silver and fine china bought from captains on their way back from the East, doors with gold locks, women wearing huge precious stones, musicians enlivening the banquets, beds covered with damask; and an army of slaves of many colours always hovering."

Excerpt taken from Hugh Thomas, The Story of the Atlantic Slave Trade.



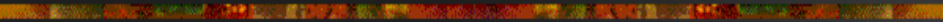
Effects

Short term

- Families torn apart and lives destroyed
- Population in Africa: not enough men, not enough laborers
- War
- Corruption
- Case study: Benin
- Lost culture
- Religious changes

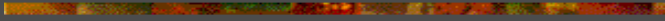
Long term

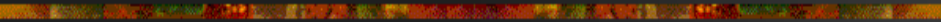
- European influence
- European imperialism
- Racism
- Mixed ethnicities across the globe
- Loss of heritage for many of African descent
- Issues of reparations
- Population shifts



Antislavery sentiments began to appear in Europe in the 18th century with roots in Christian religious principles and in the egalitarian philosophy that emerged during the Age of Enlightenment.

By 1750 abolitionists were devoting money and time toward ending the slave trade and slavery itself.





"I can't think there is any intrinsic value in one color more than another, that white is better than black, only we think it so, because we are so, and are prone to judge favorably in our own case..."

Captain Thomas Phillips, in his account of his life published in 1694.

