

Atlantic Slave Trade

Theme: Slavery as a product of globalization, its effects on Africa and the Americas, and the impact of Enlightenment ideas on eventual abolition

History of African Slavery

- ✓ Slavery has existed since antiquity
- ✓ It became common in Africa after the Bantu migrations spread agriculture to all parts of the continent
- ✓ Most slaves in Africa were war captives
- ✓ Once enslaved, an individual had no personal or civil rights
- ✓ Owners could order slaves to do any kind of work, punish them, and sell them as chattel
- ✓ Most slaves worked as cultivators
- ✓ African law did not recognize individual land ownership so wealth and power in Africa came from not owning land but by controlling the human labor that made it productive
- ✓ Slaves were a form of investment and a sign of wealth

Islamic Slave Trade

- ✓ After the 8th Century, Muslim merchants from north Africa, Arabia, and Persia sought African slaves for trade in the Mediterranean basin, southwest Asia, India, and as far away as southeast Asia and China
- ✓ The Islamic slave trade lasted into the 20th Century and resulted in the deportation of as many as 10 million Africans

European Slave Trade

- ✓ By the time Europeans arrived in Sub-Saharan Africa in the 15th and 16th Centuries, the slave trade was a well-established feature in African society
- ✓ A detailed system for capturing, selling, and distributing slaves had been in place for over 500 years
- ✓ With the arrival of the Europeans and the demand for slaves in the Americas, the slave trade expanded dramatically

Portuguese Slave Trade

- ✓ Portuguese began capturing slaves in Africa in the 15th Century, but quickly learned it was easier to buy them
- ✓ In Europe, slaves usually worked as miners, porters, or domestic servants since free peasants and serfs cultivated the land
- ✓ When the Portuguese discovered the Azores, Madeiras, Cape Verde Islands, and Sao Tome in the 15th Century they were all uninhabited
- ✓ The Portuguese population was too small to provide a large number of colonists
- ✓ The sugar plantations required a large labor force - Slaves filled this demand

Slave Trade and Sugar

- ✓ By the 1520s some 2,000 slaves per year were shipped to Sao Tome
- ✓ Some thereafter, Portuguese entrepreneurs extended the use of slave labor to South America
- ✓ Eventually Brazil would become the wealthiest of the sugar-producing lands in the western hemisphere

Slavery Expands

- ✓ As disease reduced the native populations in Spanish conquered territories, the Spanish began relying on imported slaves from Africa

- ✓ In 1518, the first shipment of slaves went directly from west Africa to the Caribbean where the slaves worked on sugar plantations
- ✓ By the 1520s, the Spanish had introduced slaves to Mexico, Peru, and Central America where they worked as cultivators and miners
- ✓ By the early 17th Century, the British had introduced slaves to North America

Triangular Trade

- ✓ The demand for labor in the western hemisphere stimulated a profitable three-legged trading pattern
- ✓ European manufactured goods, namely cloth and metal wares, especially firearms, went to Africa where they were exchanged for slaves
- ✓ The slaves were then shipped to the Caribbean and Americas where they were sold for cash or sometimes bartered for sugar or molasses
- ✓ Then the ships returned to Europe loaded with American products

Capture

- ✓ The original capture of slaves was almost always violent
- ✓ As European demand grew, African chieftains organized raiding parties to seize individuals from neighboring societies
- ✓ Others launched wars specifically for the purpose of capturing slaves

Middle Passage

- ✓ Following capture, slaves were force-marched to holding pens before being loaded on ships
- ✓ The trans-Atlantic journey was called the "Middle Passage"
- ✓ The ships were filthy, hot, and crowded
- ✓ Most ships provided slaves with enough room to sit upright, but not enough to stand
- ✓ Others forced slaves to lie in chains with barely 20 inches space between them
- ✓ Crews attempted to keep as many slaves alive as possible to maximize profits, but treatment was extremely cruel
- ✓ Some slaves refused to eat and crew members used tools to pry open their mouths and force-feed them
- ✓ Sick slaves were cast overboard to prevent infection from spreading
- ✓ During the early days of the slave trade, mortality rates were as high as 50%
- ✓ As the volume of trade increased and conditions improved (bigger ships, more water, better nourishment and facilities), mortality eventually declined to about 5%
- ✓ The time a ship took to make the Middle Passage depended upon several factors including its point of origin in Africa, the destination in the Americas, and conditions at sea such as winds, currents, and storms.
- ✓ With good conditions and few delays, a 17th-century Portuguese slave ship typically took 30 to 50 days to sail from Angola to Brazil.
- ✓ British, French, and Dutch ships transporting slaves between Guinea and their Caribbean island possessions took 60 to 90 days.
- ✓ As larger merchant ships were introduced, these times reduced somewhat

Arrival

- ✓ When the slave ship docked, the slaves would be taken off the ship and placed in a pen
- ✓ There they would be washed and their skin covered with grease, or sometimes tar, to make them look healthy (and therefore more valuable)
- ✓ They would also be branded with a hot iron to identify them as slaves

Auctions

- ✓ Slaves were sold at auctions
- ✓ Buyers physically inspected the slaves, to include their teeth as an indication of the slave's age
- ✓ Auctioneers had slaves perform various acts to demonstrate their physical abilities

Volume of the Slave Trade

- ✓ Late 15th and 16th Century... 2,000 Africans exported each year
- ✓ 17th Century... 20,000 per year
- ✓ 18th Century... 55,000 per year
- ✓ 1780s... 88,000 per year
- ✓ All told, some 12 million Africans were transported to the western hemisphere via the Atlantic Slave Trade
- ✓ Another 4 million died resisting capture or during captivity before arriving at their destination

Plantations

- ✓ Most African slaves went to plantations in the tropical or subtropical regions of the western hemisphere
- ✓ The first was established by the Spanish on Hispaniola in 1516
- ✓ Originally the predominant crop was sugar
- ✓ In the 1530s Portuguese began organizing plantations in Brazil and Brazil became the world's leading supplier of sugar
- ✓ In addition to sugar, plantations produced crops like tobacco, indigo, and cotton
- ✓ All were designed to export commercial crops for profit
- ✓ Relied almost exclusively on large amounts of slave labor supervised by small numbers of European or Euro-American managers

Slavery in the Caribbean and South America

- ✓ Disease, brutal working conditions, and poor sanitation and nutrition resulted in high mortality rates
- ✓ Owners imported mainly male slaves and allowed few to establish families which resulted in low reproduction
- ✓ To keep up the needed numbers, plantation owners imported a steady stream of slaves
- ✓ Of all slaves delivered to the western hemisphere, about 50% went to Caribbean destinations
- ✓ About 33% went to Brazil
- ✓ Smaller numbers went elsewhere in South and Central America

Slavery in North America

- ✓ Diseases took less of a toll in North America and living conditions were usually less brutal
- ✓ Plantation owners imported large numbers of female slaves and encouraged their slaves to form families and bear children
- ✓ Only about 5% of slaves delivered to the western hemisphere went to North America

Forms of Resistance

- ✓ Work slowly
- ✓ Sabotage
- ✓ Runaway
- ✓ Revolt
- ✓ Slaves outnumbered the owners and supervisors so revolt was always a threat
- ✓ While causing much destruction, revolts were usually able to be suppressed because the owners had access to arms, horses, and military forces

Saint-Dominique

- ✓ The only revolt to successfully abolish slavery as an institution occurred on the French sugar colony of Saint Dominique in 1793
- ✓ The slaves declared independence from France, renamed the country Haiti, and established a self-governing republic in 1804

Impact of Slave Trade in Africa

- ✓ Mixed
- ✓ Some states like Rwanda largely escaped the slave trade through resistance and geography
- ✓ Some like Senegal in west Africa were hit very hard
- ✓ Other societies benefited economically from selling slaves, trading, or operating ports
- ✓ As abolition took root in the 19th Century some African merchants even complained about the loss of their livelihood
- ✓ On the whole, however, the slave trade devastated Africa
- ✓ The Atlantic Slave Trade deprived Africa of about 16 million people and the continuing Islamic slave trade consumed another several million
- ✓ Overall the African population rose thanks partly to the introduction of more nutritious food from the Americas
- ✓ The slave trade distorted African sex ratios
- ✓ Approximately 2/3 of all exported slaves were male
- ✓ Slavers preferred young men between the ages of 14 and 35 to maximize investment potential and be suitable for hard labor
- ✓ The sexual imbalance in some parts of Africa such as Angola encouraged polygamy and caused women to take on duties that had previously been the responsibility of men
- ✓ The slave trade brought firearms to such African societies as Asante, Dahomey, and Oyo and this increased violence
- ✓ In the 18th Century, Dahomey expanded rapidly, absorbed neighboring societies, and fielded an army that was largely a slave-raiding force

African Diaspora

- ✓ Obviously, the main contribution slaves brought to the western hemisphere was an incredible amount of labor, without which the prosperous new societies could not have developed
- ✓ However they brought other contributions as well:
- ✓ Slaves built hybrid cultural traditions made up of African, European, and American elements
- ✓ Influenced language by creating tongues that drew on several African and European languages
- ✓ Impacted on cuisine by introducing African foods to Caribbean and American societies
- ✓ For example, combined African okra with European-style sautéed vegetables and American shellfish to make gumbo
- ✓ Introduced rice cultivation to tropical and subtropical regions
- ✓ Fashioned distinctive crafts such as pottery and baskets
- ✓ Many slaves were either Christians when they left Africa or converted to Christianity after their arrival in the western hemisphere
- ✓ Their Christianity was not exactly like European Christianity and made considerable room for African traditions
- ✓ Associated African deities with Christian saints
- ✓ Relied heavily on African rituals such as drumming, dancing, and sacrificing animals
- ✓ Preserved their belief in spirits and supernatural powers and made use of magic, sorcery, witchcraft, and spirit possession