

Slavery 1451–1810

TYPES OF BONDAGE PRIOR TO WEST AFRICAN SLAVE TRADE

Muslim Slaves

During the Christian Reconquest of Spain (13th–15th centuries) many captured Muslims were enslaved. In continuing conflicts between North African Muslims and Christians of Spain and Portugal it remained common for those captured by either side to be sold into slavery. In Spain and Portugal many thousands of slaves were employed in domestic and agricultural roles.

Indentured Laborers

European peasants seeking an escape from rural poverty could sign a contract (or indenture) with a plantation owner giving up their personal freedom for a fixed period of work in the Americas (usually 2–7 years). They received a small wage and had the opportunity to become independent farmers after the term of their indentures had ended. Many died in the harsh conditions or were cheated out of their wages.

Serfs

Most European peasants of the Middle Ages were serfs. They were bound to the land and could not leave the manor on which they were born. Some serfs were granted land by the lord of their manor in return for services; others worked the lord's land in return for a place to live.

Early African Slaves

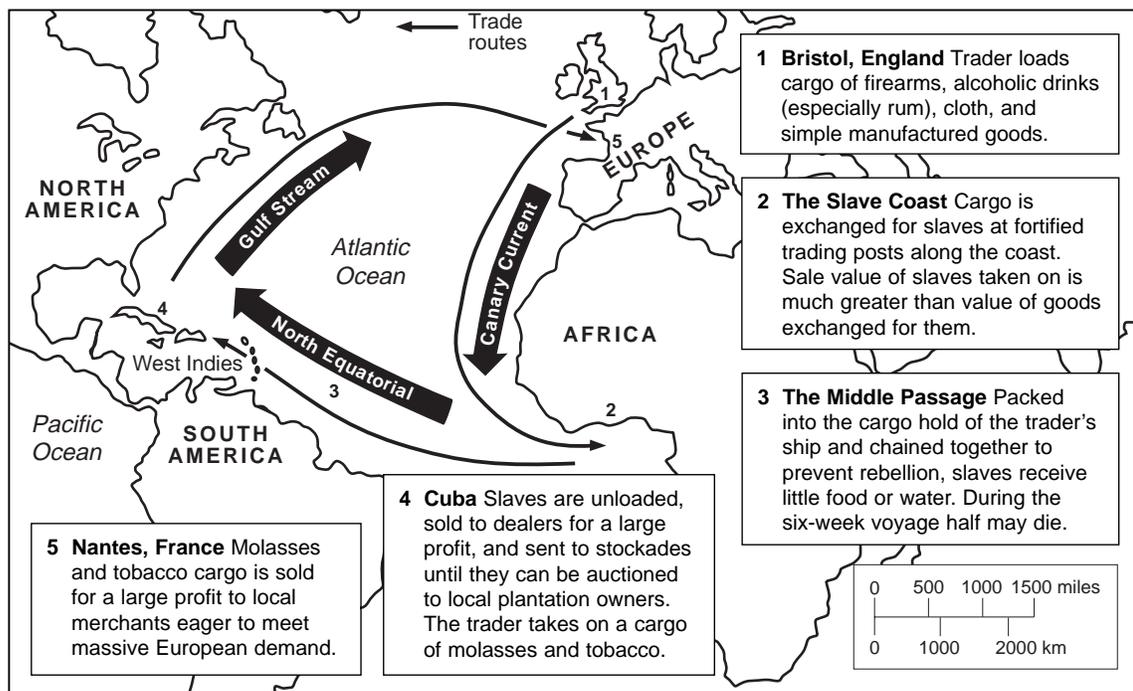
From the 13th century, Europeans employed African slaves bought from Arab traders on sugar plantations in the Mediterranean. During the 15th century, the Portuguese established sugar and coffee plantations on islands off the West African coast and used slaves obtained through trade with African kingdoms.

Native American Slaves

Early European colonists in the Americas enslaved large numbers of native peoples to work on plantations. Many thousands died from diseases.

THE WEST AFRICAN SLAVE TRADE

During the 17th century, England, France, and the Netherlands came to dominate the slave trade. They supplied slaves from West Africa to plantation owners in their own colonial possessions in America and to the large Spanish American possessions. Taking advantage of the circulation of Atlantic Ocean currents and winds, traders followed a triangular route; they carried a profitable cargo on each leg of the voyage.



ESTIMATED NUMBER OF SLAVES IMPORTED (in thousands)

