

THE TRANSATLANTIC SLAVE TRADE

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- Slavery has existed in all times and in all places, though slavery has differed from society to society. Africans have comprised a minority of the world's enslaved populations.
- The "Age of Exploration": Africa had been trading with both Europe and Asia for centuries. Europeans both competed with, and learned from, Muslim Africans in their desire for direct trade with Asia.
- There would have been no widespread enslavement of Africans by Europeans had it not been for the European "discovery," and subsequent invasion and occupation of the Americas.
- The European settlement, or colonization, of the Americas was enormously dependent on African slavery.
- The enslavement of Africans *and* the Atlantic Slave Trade were essential to the development of capitalism in the Western World. Europe's modern economic development was based, in large measure, on the slave trade.
- The slave trade was complex and sophisticated, lasting for more than 400 years.

Slave Exports from Africa

<u>Period</u>	<u>Volume</u>	<u>Percent</u>	<u>Destination of Slaves:</u>	
1450-1600	367,000	3.1	<i>Europe</i>	2%
1601-1700	1,868,000	16.0	<i>U.S.</i>	5%
1701-1800	6,133,000	52.4	<i>Caribbean</i>	42%
1801-1900	<u>3,330,000</u>	<u>28.5</u>	<i>Brazil</i>	38%
Total	11,698,000	100.0	<i>Spanish Am.</i>	13%

- The English mainland colonies (what later became the U.S.) received only a small portion of enslaved Africans forced to migrate in the slave trade (see "Destination of Slaves" above).
- The Trans Atlantic slave trade was dependent on the active participation of African merchants to assist European and American slave traders in the acquisition of slaves. Europeans tapped into an already established slave-trading network in Africa, but altered it significantly in terms of scope and meaning.
- The men, women and children who were forced to migrate in slave ships across the Atlantic came from diverse, complete, and complex societies, communities and families. Most of these people were age 16-20; most slaves (75-80%) were prisoners of war. Their enslavement was traumatic and brutal.
- Mechanics of the Slave Trade:
 - African merchants acquired slaves in the interior of West and West Central Africa.
 - African merchants transported slaves (who were often prisoners of war) to the coast, usually marching them for several weeks in caravans, or transporting them in boats by river.
 - At the coast, slaves were sold to Europeans at special trade facilities called "forts" or "factories." A very sophisticated trade developed over time—licenses and fees paid to African and European elite. Guns, ammunition, textiles, iron goods, and other consumer goods exchanged for slaves.
 - After branding slaves with hot irons on cheeks, hips or shoulders, Europeans loaded these enslaved people in to ships for the voyage across the Atlantic Ocean.
 - This voyage was called the "Middle Passage," because it represented the middle leg of a "Triangular Trade," beginning in Europe where ships were loaded with consumer goods for Africa. Then ships exchanged that cargo for a human cargo, slaves across the ocean (Middle Passage). Finally ships unloaded slaves in the Americas in exchange for colonial raw materials (mostly sugar) and returned to Europe, completing the "triangle." [*trade was far more complex than this, but helps introduce global issues*]
 - The Middle Passage could last anywhere from 15 weeks in the 16th cent. to 6 weeks in the 19th cent. Mortality rates ranged from 10-40%, depending mostly on the length of the voyage and amount of water aboard. There was little air, virtually no light, no toilets, and little food or water. Virtually everyone suffered from dysentery and/or staph infections. These were the leading causes of death also.
 - Resistance and rebellion was frequent, taking many different forms, but almost never successful.
 - When ships arrived in the colonies, slaves were sold to plantation owners by brokerage firms, usually by scramble, less often through direct sale or auction. This was often the first point that most people understood that they were to be slaves; most believed whites were either cannibals or demons.
- **The Trans Atlantic Slave Trade represents the largest forced migration in world history.**

Goree Warehouses, Liverpool, England



Liverpool's extensive growth during the 18th century, due in large measure to profits made in the Atlantic slave trade, brought an increasing demand for storage space. In 1793, in response to this demand, successful merchants built the Goree Warehouses, named after Senegal's Goree Islands off the coast of Africa. When fire destroyed the buildings in 1802, merchants rebuilt the warehouses in 1811, for trade with Africa continued after Parliament brought an end to the British slave trade. Artist Samuel Austin made this engraving in 1829.

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/part1/1h319.html>

[One of the best resources for teaching African American history before 1865 is a 4-part documentary, entitled "Africans in America." The above picture is from the web site that was created to support the documentary. "Africans in America" is available for purchase in VHS and DVD, and all four sections are also available on NC Live]