The Atlantic Slave Trade

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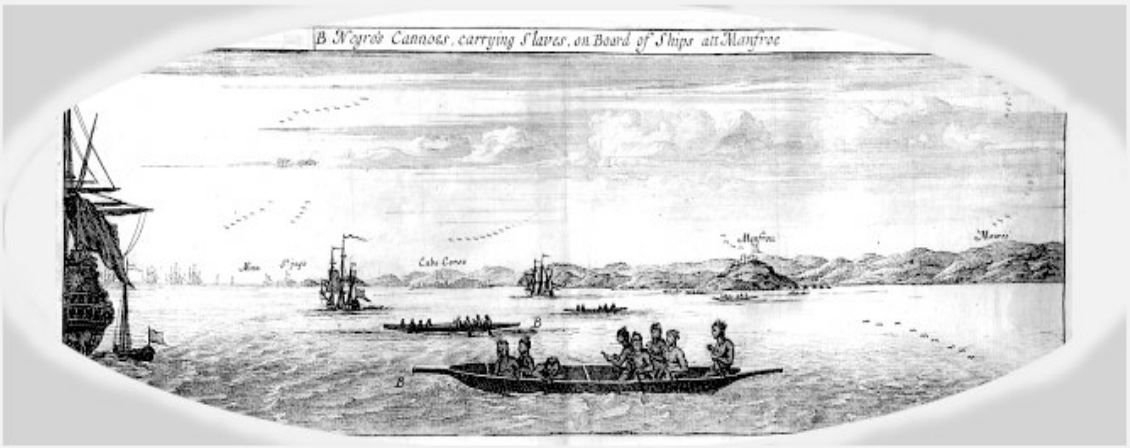
The Atlantic Slave Trade

A Unit of Study for Grades 7–12

Jeremy Ball



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Jeremy Ball developed this unit during the course of his Ph.D. studies in African History at the University of California, Los Angeles. He earned a teaching credential through the Yale Teacher Preparation Program in 1998 and taught at High School in the Community in New Haven, Connecticut and The Buckley School in Sherman Oaks, California.

Both Ross Dunn, Director of World History Projects for the National Center for History in the Schools (NCHS), and David Vigilante, Associate Director, served as developmental editors of the unit. Gary B. Nash, Director of NCHS, offered suggestions and corrections. Marian McKenna Olivas served as the layout and photo editor and created the maps.

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INTRODUCTION

I. APPROACH AND RATIONALE

The Atlantic Slave Trade is one of over sixty teaching units published by the National Center for History in the Schools that are the fruits of collaborations between history professors and experienced teachers of both United States and World History. The units represent specific issues and dramatic episodes in history from which you and your students can pause to delve into the deeper meanings of these selected landmark events and explore their wider context in the great historical narrative. By studying crucial turning points in history, the student becomes aware that choices had to be made by real human beings, that those decisions were the result of specific factors, and that they set in motion a series of historical consequences. We have selected issues and dramatic moments that best bring alive that decision-making process. We hope that through this approach, your students will realize that history in an ongoing, open-ended process, and that the decisions they make today create the conditions of tomorrow's history.

Our teaching units are based on primary sources, taken from government documents, artifacts, journals, diaries, newspapers, magazines, literature, contemporary photographs, paintings, and other art from the period under study. What we hope to achieve using primary source documents in these lessons is to remove the distance that students feel from historical events and to connect them more intimately with the past. In this way we hope to recreate for your students a sense of "being there," a sense of seeing history through the eyes of the very people who were making decisions. This will help your students develop historical empathy, to realize that history is not an impersonal process divorced from real people like themselves. At the same time, by analyzing primary sources, students will actually practice the historian's craft, discovering for themselves how to analyze evidence, establish a valid interpretation and construct a coherent narrative in which all the relevant factors play a part.

II. CONTENT AND ORGANIZATION

Within this unit, you will find: Teaching Background Materials, including Unit Overview, Unit Context, Correlation to the National Standards for History, Unit Objectives, and Introduction to *The Atlantic Slave Trade*; A Dramatic Moment; and Lesson Plans with Student Resources. This unit, as we have said above, focuses on certain key moments in time and should be used as a supplement to your customary course materials. Although these lessons are recommended for use by grades 7–12, they can be adapted for other grade levels.

The Teacher Background section should provide you with a good overview of the entire unit and with the historical information and context necessary to link the **Dramatic Moment** to the larger historical narrative. You may consult it for your own use, and you may choose to share it with students if they are of a sufficient grade level to understand the materials.

The Lesson Plans include a variety of ideas and approaches for the teacher which can be elaborated upon or cut as you see the need. These lesson plans contain student resources which accompany each lesson. The resources consist of primary source documents, handouts and student background materials, and a bibliography.

In our series of teaching units, each collection can be taught in several ways. You can teach all of the lessons offered on any given topic, or you can select and adapt the ones that best support your particular course needs. We have not attempted to be comprehensive or prescriptive in our offerings, but rather to give you an array of enticing possibilities for in-depth study, at varying grade levels. We hope that you will find the lesson plans exciting and stimulating for your classes. We also hope that your students will never again see history as a boring sweep of facts and meaningless dates but rather as an endless treasure of real life stories and an exercise in analysis and reconstruction.

Teacher Background

I. Unit Overview

The Atlantic Slave Trade is divided into five lessons: **Lesson One** explores the origins of the Atlantic slave trade, **Lessons Two** and **Three** focus on the process of enslavement in West Africa and the Middle Passage, The fourth lesson deals with the arrival in the Americas, and **Lesson Five** delves into early attempts to end the slave trade. Students, using primary source materials, examine the differences and similarities between slavery as practiced in the Americas and Africa. The purposes of this unit are to explore the complexity and geographic breadth of the institution of slavery, to examine the experiences of actual participants in the Atlantic slave trade, to evaluate the role of Europe and Africa traders, and to appraise arguments for and against the abolition of the trade.

Lessons in the unit also afford students the opportunity to read and analyze documents written in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The unit also challenges students to develop the skills needed to analyze the reliability of these primary source documents. Students are encouraged to identify the source of the document, the perspective of the individual writing the document, and the recognition of clues that signal the author's purpose.

II. Unit Context

This unit may be used in world history courses for a study of slavery and the trans-Atlantic slave trade. In addition it may be used as part of a study of the Age of Exploration in either world or United States history. The unit may be employed in either a chronological approach or as a thematic study of slavery and the slave trade.

III. Correlation to National History Standards

The Atlantic Slave Trade correlates with the *National Standards for History, Basic Edition* (National Center for History in the Schools, UCLA, 1996), **Era 6** of World History, "Global Expansion and Encounter, 1450–1770." Specific standards addressed by the lessons include **Standard 1A** dealing with the origins and consequences of European overseas expansion, **1B** on encounters between Europeans and the people of Africa and the Spanish and Portuguese colonial empires in the Americas, **4B** on the origins and consequences of the trans-Atlantic slave trade, and **4C** dealing with patterns of change in Africa in the era of the slave trade. The unit may also be used to help achieve several United States History standards. In **Era 1**, "Three Worlds Meet," **Standard 1C** students are to

analyze the varieties of slavery in Western Africa and explore the varying responses of African states to early European trading and raiding on the Atlantic African coast. **Era 2**, "Colonization and Settlement," **Standard 1A** deals with the arrival of Africans in the European colonies in the 17th century and the rapid increase of slave importation in the 18th century and **3C** focuses on African life under slavery.

IV. Objectives

1. To understand the complexity and geographical breadth of the institution of slavery.

2. To identify the major geographical sources and destinations of slaves traded across the Atlantic between Africa and the Americas.

3. To analyze primary sources written by participants in the Atlantic Slave Trade in order to understand the process of enslavement.

4. To explore early attempts to end the slave trade.

V. Lesson Plans

1. Slavery: Definition, Extent, and Justifications (Duration: 2 days)
2. Enslavement (Duration: 2 days)
3. Middle Passage (Duration: 2 days)
4. Arrival in the Americas (Duration: 1 day)
5. Ending the Slave Trade (Duration: 1–2 days)

VI. Introduction to *The Atlantic Slave Trade*

The movement of Africans to the Americas from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries may be accounted as mankind's second-largest transoceanic migration. This migration, along with the concurrent African migration to the Middle East and North Africa, was distinct from other major modern migrations in its involuntary nature, and in the high rates of mortality and social dislocation caused by the methods of capture and transportation. A related migratory pattern, the capture and settling of millions of slaves within Africa, grew up in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Africa as a consequence of the two patterns of overseas slave trade.

The American Perspective

David Eltis posed, in a 1983 article, a striking contrast in the population history of the Americas. By 1820, there had been about 8.4 million African immigrants to the Americas, and 2.4 million European immigrants. But by that date the Euro-American population of some 12 million exceeded the Afro-American population of about 11 million. The rates of survival and reproduction of African immigrants were, apparently, dramatically lower than those of European immigrants. Eltis's contrast drew attention to the demographic comparisons necessary to make sense of this puzzle: the rates of fertility and mortality, the timing and location of immigration, the sex ratios and the social identification of persons.

The migratory history of African slaves, once they landed in the Americas, continued through several further stages. The initial period of seasoning can be considered as migration through a change in status. Further, slaves were physically transshipped, often over considerable distances. Slaves brought by the Dutch to Curaçao and by the English to Jamaica were transshipped to Cartagena, Portobelo, and on to various Spanish colonies. From Cartagena, some slaves were settled in Colombia. A larger number of slaves went to Portobelo in Panama, walked overland, and then went by sea to Lima. Most remained there, but some went into the highlands. Slaves landed in the Rio de La Plata went overland for 900 kilometers to Tucuman and then on for another 600 kilometers to the silver mines at Potosi. In Brazil, with the gold rush in Minas Gerais at the turn of the eighteenth century, slaves were sent overland to the mining areas, 300 kilometers from Rio and a much longer distance overland from Bahia. Slaves entering the Chesapeake and South Carolina came, in significant proportion, after stopping in Barbados. A final stage in the migration of some slaves was their liberation—either by emancipation, self-purchase, or escape.

One reason for emphasizing the number of distinct stages in the migration of Africans is to draw attention to the distinct rates of mortality at each stage. The mortality which is best known is that of the Atlantic crossing. The point here is that slaves who survived the crossing had then to undergo various other types of high mortality: that of further travel within the Americas, that of seasoning in the locale where they were settled, and that of daily existence in slave status, where mortality was generally higher than for equivalent persons of free status. To this list must be added the fact that most slaves were settled in low-lying tropical areas where the general level of mortality was greater than in higher, temperate regions.

Most of the work of slaves could be categorized into the occupations of mining, plantation work, artisanal work, transport, and domestic service. In Spanish America, slaves were concentrated most visibly in mining and artisanal work until the late eighteenth century, when sugar and tobacco plantation work began to dominate Cuba while slavery declined elsewhere. In Brazil, sugar plantation work dominated the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, while mining work expanded greatly in the eighteenth century. The English and French Caribbean focused on sugar production, though coffee and livestock occupied significant numbers of slaves. Tobacco production occupied large numbers of slaves in Bahia and North America; cotton production expanded from the 1760s in Maranhao, and later in the American South.

The rise to profitability of this succession of industries seems to have provided the main "pull" factor driving the movement of slaves to the Americas from Africa. The demand for sugar workers in sixteenth-century Brazil, the seventeenth-century Caribbean, and nineteenth-century Cuba brought a supply response from Africa. That is, African slave sellers made efforts to met the demand. Similarly, the demand for mine workers in eighteenth-century Minas Gerais and New Granada brought an African response. Overall, the African and African-descended population of the Americas grew steadily through the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, though it went into decline for as much as several decades whenever and wherever the import of additional slaves came to a halt.

The African Perspective

From the standpoint of the African continent, the slave trade to the Americas interacted with other migratory movements, including slave trading within Africa. Before the seventeenth century, sub-Saharan African societies lacked the powerful states and the lucrative trade routes necessary to support an extensive system of slavery, so that slavery in Africa was almost everywhere a marginal institution. The exceptions were the large states of the Saharan fringe, notably

the Songhai empire. The trade in slaves to Saharan oases, to North Africa, and to West Asia took an estimated ten thousand persons per year in the sixteenth century. The oceanic slave trade from Africa in the sixteenth century was dominated by the movement of slaves to Europe and to such Atlantic islands as the Canaries and São Tomé.

By the mid-seventeenth century the carrying of slaves to Europe and the Atlantic islands had declined sharply, and the trans-Atlantic trade had expanded to the point where it exceeded the volume of the Saharan trade. The expansion of the Occidental trade brought, as a by-product, the development of an Africa trade: growth in slave exports led to the creation of expanded networks of slave supply, and these permitted wealthy Africans to buy slaves in unprecedented numbers.

The movement of so many slaves to the African coast for export entailed large-scale capture and migration. Distances for the movement of slaves to the coast could be small (an average of less than 100 kilometers for the large number of slaves from the Bight of Benin in the early eighteenth century), or they could be immense (some 600 kilometers for the Bambara slaves from West Africa who formed the nucleus of the Louisiana slave population; similar distances for slaves of the Lunda who passed through Angola on their way to the Argentine). These distances, traveled slowly and over long periods, brought high mortality with them.

This grim tale of slave mortality is not the whole of the story, of course, in that the purpose of the slave trade was to deliver live workers to the purchasers. We should therefore mention, at least, the economic network developed for supply of the trade in Africa. Considerable labor and investment were required to provide transport, finance, food, clothing, lodging, guards, and medicine for the slaves. These systems of slave delivery, though they differed from region to region, became a significant element in the African economic landscape.

The most obvious "push" factors sending African slaves across the Atlantic were war and famine. The savanna areas of marginal rainfall—Angola and the grasslands extending from Senegambia east to Cameroon—underwent periodic drought and famine, and in these times desperate families sold both children and adults. The relation between warfare and enslavement is obvious, but on the other hand there have been two centuries of debate over whether the African wars broke out for purely domestic reasons, or whether the European demand for slaves stimulated additional wars.

Overall, the export of slaves from Africa halted and then reversed growth of the continent's population. During the seventeenth century, such population decline took place in restricted areas of coastal Senegambia, Upper Guinea, and

Angola. After about 1730, the decline became general for the coast from Senegal to Angola, and continued to about 1850. The decline was slow rather than precipitous. Even though the number of slaves exported averaged little more than three per thousand of the African regional population, and even though the trade took more males than females, the combination of the mortality of capture and transportation with the concentration of captures on young adults meant that Africa lost enough young women to reverse a growth rate of five per thousand. The same processes transformed the structure of the population, causing the adult sex ratio to decline to an average of 80 men per 100 women.

A Global Perspective

Despite the immigration of Europeans and Africans, the total population of the Americas declined in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. While estimates of the pre-Columbian populations must remain speculative, the population of the Americas fell from perhaps 80 million to as little as five million persons during the seventeenth century. The chief reason for this massive mortality was the introduction of new infectious diseases from Eurasia and Africa.

The threatened void of population in the Americas encouraged the transformation of African slavery from a marginal institution to a central element in a global system of population and labor. The global market for slaves encompassed the Americas, Africa, the Indian Ocean and Western Asia in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries; it interacted more broadly with the systems of population and labor in the Americas, Europe, and Western Asia. When slave prices rose sharply (as they did at the turn of the eighteenth century) or fell significantly (as they did in the eastern hemisphere in the early nineteenth century), slave laborers were moved in new directions in response to economic incentives. Similarly, free workers on every continent moved in response to these changes in the value of labor.

Before 1600, African migration to the Americas, while it may have exceeded European migration, was small in magnitude. During the time when the Indian population was declining but still large, Africans in the Americas, while usually in slave status, were nonetheless often persons of relatively high value, serving in the military and in artisanal tasks. In Brazil, large-scale enslavement of Indians for work on sugar plantations characterized the late sixteenth century. African laborers, concentrated at first in the skilled occupations on the plantations, gradually displaced the disappearing Indians at all levels of work.

In the seventeenth century, the scarcity of Indian laborers made Africans appear, by comparison, more plentiful. Still, for much if not all of the century,

the addition of African and European immigrants and their progeny was insufficient to offset the decline in Indian population.

By the eighteenth century, all the major population groups—those of Indian, European, African, and mestizo or mulatto ancestry—were growing, though from a very sparse base. However, in this period the large-scale removal of Africans from their homes to serve as slaves in the Americas, with all its attendant carnage, brought population decline for region after region in Africa, and finally for the western African coast as a whole. Consequently, the African addition to the population of the Americas (both by immigration and by natural reproduction) was insufficient to make up for the loss of population in Africa. The centrality of African labor was costly to the slaves, and was costly in the longer run to their societies of origin. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the populations of Europe, the Americas, and Asia grew at unprecedented rates, apparently as a result of certain social changes and perhaps improved public health conditions. In the nineteenth century these rapidly growing populations spun off millions of migrants, who searched near and far for the means to make a better living. For Africa, in contrast, the population remained stagnant or in decline, and labor migration mostly took place, even within the continent, by the forcible means which interfered with population growth.

The transatlantic migration of slaves brought a rich African contribution to the culture of the Americas—in religion, cuisine, pharmacopia, agricultural techniques, dress, language and philosophy. In language the African impact can be seen in two ways. First is in the development of the Creole languages, such as Haitian Creole, Jamaican Patois, Papiamento of the Dutch West Indies, and Gullah of South Carolina. In these languages the vocabulary is both European and African, and the grammar is mostly African. Haitian Kreyol is now a written official language of the country, and the similar Creole of the French Antilles is becoming the leading language of a new wave of multicultural music. Second is the impact of African speech on English, Spanish, French, and Portuguese as spoken in the Americas. The single biggest reason for the differences in these languages on the two sides of the Atlantic is the contribution of African expressions in the Americas.

These and other cultural patterns of the migration can be looked at in two ways. The first is in terms of survivals: that is, the continuity of West African religion in the vodou of Haiti, or of West African cuisine in the gumbo or hot barbecue sauce of the American South. But we can also set African contributions to New World culture in patterns of change and innovation. Here the obvious example is in jazz music, which by definition is always in change, but where the rules for musical innovation can be traced back to Africa.

In addition to the heritage from Africa, the heritage of slavery created distinct patterns of community for Africans in the Americas. Other immigrants, arriving as free persons, had the opportunity to establish their own communities, in which people of similar linguistic and cultural background built up strong local units, usually maintaining some contact with the homeland. These ranged from Swiss farming towns in the American Midwest to Cantonese merchant communities to rural Japanese communities in Brazil. African communities in the Americas were largely prevented from recreating their home societies in this way because they were not free to move, and people of varying ethnic groups were often mixed purposely by their owners to reduce solidarity. As a result, inhabitants of African settlements in the Americas tended to refer back to Africa in general rather than to particular African regions. They thought of a romanticized African past rather than of the latest news because they were cut off from home. Hence, they constructed a new, creolized culture out of the traditions available to them rather than maintain the traditions of a particular Old World region. Quite logically, therefore, the idea of the unity of Africa grew up in the Americas.

Most of the slaves died early and without progeny. In the Americas, much of their produce was exported, consumed, and soon forgotten. Still, ample evidence remains of how slaves constructed cities and cleared farms. Particular emphasis should be given to the value of the work done by African slaves—in the Americas, in Africa, and in the Orient—because the racist ideology in the last 150 years has denied their importance in constructing the world we live in, as well as denying the underdevelopment of Africa that resulted in part from their forced migration. The very term "Western Civilization," which is used to describe the continents of Europe, North and sometimes South America, reflects this denial of Africa's role in the modern world. The term carries with it the implication that the wealth and the achievement of these continents springs solely from the heritage of Europe. The migration discussed above is one of many ways to demonstrate that there is more to the modern world than the expansion of Europe.

Adapted from Patrick Manning, "Migrations of Africans to the Americas: The Impact of Africans, Africa, and the new World," *The History Teacher* 26 (May 1993): 279–296.
A reprint of the full text of this essay also appears in Ross E. Dunn and David Vigilante, eds., *Bring History Alive: A Sourcebook for Teaching World History* (Los Angeles: National Center for History in the Schools, UCLA, 1996), pp. 273–283.

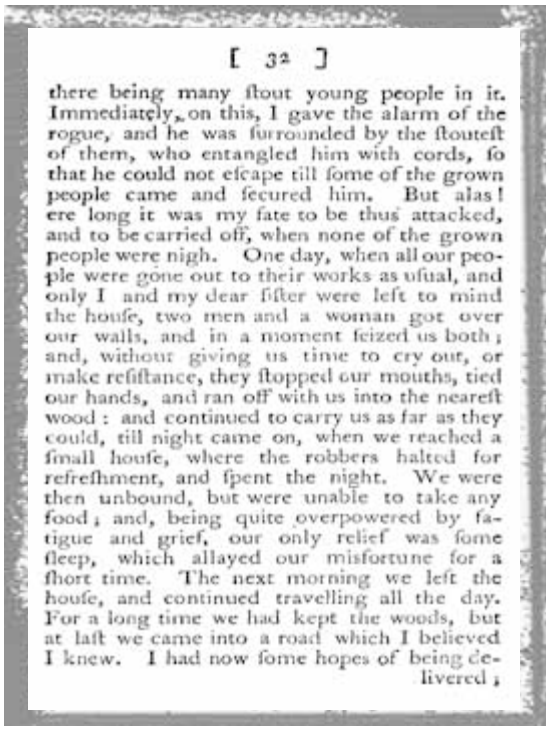
Dramatic Moment

One day, when all our people were gone out to their works as usual, and only I and my dear sister were left to mind the house, two men and a woman got over our walls, and in a moment seized us both, and, without giving us time to cry out, or make resistance, they stopped our mouths, and ran off with us into the nearest wood. Here they tied our hands, and continued to carry us as far as they could, till night came on, when we reached a small house, where the robbers halted for refreshment, and spent the night. We were then unbound, but were unable to take any food; and, being quite overpowered by fatigue and grief, our only relief was some sleep, which allayed out misfortune for a short time. The next morning we left the house, and continued travelling all the day. For a long time we had kept the woods, but at last we came into a road which I believed I knew. I had now some hopes of being delivered; for we had advanced but a little way before I discovered some people at a distance, on which I began to cry out for their assistance: but my cries had no other effect than to make them tie me faster and stop my mouth, and then they put me into a large sack. They also stopped my sister's mouth, and tied her hands; and in this manner we proceeded till we were out of the sight of these people. When we went to rest the following night they offered us some victuals; but we refused it; and the only comfort we had was in being in one another's arms all that night, and bathing each other with our tears. But alas! we were soon deprived of even the small comfort of weeping together. The next day proved a day of greater sorrow than I had yet experienced; for my sister and I were then separated, while we lay clasped in each other's arms. It was in vain that we besought them not to part us; she was torn from me, and immediately carried away, while I was left in a state of distraction not to be described. I cried and grieved continually; and for several days I did not eat any thing but what they forced into my mouth. At length, after many days travelling, during which I had often changed masters, I got into the hands of a chieftain, in a very pleasant country. . . .

I was again sold and carried through a number of places, till, after travelling a considerable time, I came to a town called Timneh, in the most beautiful country I had yet seen in Africa. It was extremely rich, and there were many rivulets which flowed through it, and supplied a large pond in the centre of the town, where the people washed. Here I first saw and tasted cocoa nuts, which I thought superior to any nuts I had ever tasted before; and the trees, which were loaded, were also interspersed among the houses, which had commodious shades adjoining and were in the same manner as ours, the insides being neatly plastered and whitewashed. Here I also saw and tasted for the first time sugar-cane. Their money consisted of little white shells the size of a finger nail. I was sold here for one hundred seventy-two of them by a merchant who lived and brought me there. . . .

At last I came to the banks of a large river, which was covered with canoes in which the people appeared to live with their household utensils and provisions of all kinds. I was beyond measure astonished at this, as I had never before seen any water larger than a pond or a rivulet; and my surprise was mingled with no small fear when I was put into one of those canoes, and we began to paddle and move along the river. We continued going on thus till night; and when we came to land, and made fires on the banks. . . . Thus I continued to travel, sometimes by land, sometimes by water, through several different countries, and various nations, till, at the end of six months after I had been kidnapped, I arrived at the sea coast. . . .

Source: Olaudah Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavas Vassa, the African* (Leeds: James Nichols, 1814), pp. 21–22, 27, 30–31.



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there being many ſtout young people in it. Immediately, on this, I gave the alarm of the rogue, and he was ſurrounded by the ſtouteſt of them, who entangled him with cords, ſo that he could not eſcape till ſome of the grown people came and ſecured him. But alas! ere long it was my fate to be thus attacked, and to be carried off, when none of the grown people were nigh. One day, when all our people were gone out to their works as uſual, and only I and my dear ſiſter were left to mind the houſe, two men and a woman got over our walls, and in a moment ſeized us both; and, without giving us time to cry out, or make reſiſtance, they ſtopped our mouths, tied our hands, and ran off with us into the neareſt wood: and continued to carry us as far as they could, till night came on, when we reached a ſmall houſe, where the robbers halted for refreſhment, and ſpent the night. We were then unbound, but were unable to take any food; and, being quite overpowered by fatigue and grief, our only relief was ſome ſleep, which allayed our misfortune for a ſhort time. The next morning we left the houſe, and continued travelling all the day. For a long time we had kept the woods, but at laſt we came into a road which I believed I knew. I had now ſome hopes of being delivered;

Page print from Olaudah Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African* (Norwich: The Author, 1794).
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Unit Map

Map 1

Lesson One
Slavery: Definition, Extent, and Justifications

A. Objectives

- To define the term 'slavery'.
- To identify the characteristics of slavery in Africa, the Middle East, and the Americas.
- To map origins and destinations of African slaves.
- To explain the legal and illegal means of enslavement.

B. Historical Background

Historians have had a continuing debate about the extent and nature of slavery among sub-Saharan African societies before the advent of the demand for slaves from outside. Exactly when this external demand began is not known. Slaves from sub-Saharan Africa were being traded across the Sahara Desert and throughout the Indian Ocean Basin as far back as at least the seventh century C.E. (The Saharan slave trade is discussed in **Student Handout 1**). The trade in slaves to Europe and European colonies in the Americas began in the mid-fifteenth century with Portuguese explorations along the west coast of Africa. In 1445 the Portuguese built a fort on Arguin Island, off the coast of Mauritania, for the purpose of buying gold and slaves. During the next fifty years, Portuguese sailors made their way down the coast. From 1500, the Portuguese established sugar plantations on the island of São Tomé, off the coast of modern Gabon. They used slaves obtained from the Kongo Kingdom of west-central Africa, just south of the Congo River. During the sixteenth century, the immensely profitable sugar plantations of São Tomé were copied in Brazil and the Caribbean, creating a voracious demand for slave labor. The Atlantic slave trade reached its zenith in the eighteenth century when over 6 million Africans arrived in the Americas. Europeans also carried slaves to their colonies in South Africa and the Mascarene Islands (Mauritius and Reunion) in the Indian Ocean.

Slavery existed in Africa before the arrival of European traders on the coast. In most sub-Saharan African societies wealth was measured in persons. A wealthy lineage or state had large numbers of dependent people. In exchange for a share of their production and protection in times of famine or war, dependents provided labor. In addition to dependents,

lineages and states usually controlled the labor of slaves captured in war or enslaved as a penalty for a crime. Slaves did not share in the rights and privileges accorded to free members of the lineage or state.

In the initial years of Atlantic trade—before the creation of sugar plantations—Europeans were more interested in gold than slaves. As the demand for labor grew, however, Europeans increasingly sought slaves. African traders and political leaders agreed to trade slaves in exchange for prestigious European goods such as cloth and alcohol. With these prestige goods the Africans attracted greater numbers of dependents. Ironically, as power came increasingly to depend on access to European goods, and as it became more difficult to capture slaves from neighboring peoples, many African traders sacrificed the dependents that brought them prestige. West Africans were increasingly caught up in a violent cycle of slave raiding in order that elites might attain prestigious European goods to maintain their power.

The slave trade increased the number of locally held slaves, as societies kept some of them for domestic labor. Most of the slaves that remained in Africa were women, as men made up two-thirds of slaves traded across the Atlantic. The demographic impact of the slave trade is difficult to assess. In the areas where slaving was most intense, populations declined in real terms; in most other areas, population growth was slowed but overall numbers of people did not decrease.

Calculating the exact number of slaves traded in the Atlantic region is difficult owing to its breadth across time and space. The first comprehensive estimate of the trade was Phillip Curtin's *The Atlantic Slave Trade: A Census*, published in 1969. Curtin used actual port and shipping records to estimate the number of Africans landed (alive) on American shores as approximately 9.5 million. Curtin's path breaking research stimulated further work. In 1982 Paul Lovejoy, using Curtin's figures as a starting place, estimated a larger figure. Today Lovejoy's estimate is generally accepted as the best estimate available. The estimates by century of both historians are on the following page.

The statistics point to two important trends. First, the eighteenth century saw the height of the Atlantic slave trade. Second, the trade obviously continued even after the British abolished it in 1807. Even with naval patrols off the African coasts the British could not stop the trade as long as slavery continued in the Americas. The slave trade did not finally end until the abolition of slavery in the Americas, beginning with the British colonies in 1834; the French colonies in 1848; the United States in 1865; and in Brazil in and Cuba by 1888.

Curtin's Estmates (1969)		Lovejoy's Estimates (1982)	
Period	**Volume**	**Period**	**Volume**
1451–1600	274,000	1451–1600	367,000
1601–1700	1,341,000	1601–1700	1,868,000
1701–1810	6,051,700	1701–1800	6,133,000
1811–1870	1,898,400	1801–1900	3,330,000
TOTAL	**9,566,100**	TOTAL	**11,698,000**

Sources: Philip D. Curtin, *The Atlantic Slave Trade A Census* (Madison, Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1969), p. 268; and Paul E. Lovejoy, "The Volume of the Atlantic Slave Trade: A Synthesis" in *Journal of African History* 23 (1982), pp. 494–500.

C. Lesson Activities

1. Ask students to define slavery. Write their explanations on the board. Have students read **Student Handout 1**. Ask students again to define slavery. Write their explanations on the board next to their earlier explanations. On the board create two columns; under one ask students to write characteristics of the slave trade to the Middle East; and under the second ask for characteristics of the slave trade to the Americas. Discuss in what ways slavery as practiced in Africa and the Middle East differed from slavery in the Americas and in what ways it was similar.

2. Ask students to fill in slave origins and destinations on the blank map, **Map 2**. Discuss the origins and destinations of slaves. Using **Graph 2** point out to students the distribution of slave imports to the Americas.

3. Break students into five groups and ask each one to calculate an average yearly number of slave imports to the Americas based on the numbers given in Graph 2. Assign Group 1 to calculate the years 1450–1600; Group 2 to calculate 1601–1700; Group 3 to calculate 1701–1800; Group 4 to calculate 1801–1900; and Group 5 to calculate the entire average 1450–1900.

4. Have students read **Student Handout 2**. Ask them what the author means by "legitimate" or "just" means of enslavement. Ask students what the author means by "illegitimate" or "unjust" means of enslavement.

Discussion Questions:

a. Why—if at all—were distinctions between "legal" and "illegal" means of enslavement were important during the four centuries of the Atlantic Slave Trade?

b. What impact did the growing demand for labor in the Americas have on justifications for slavery?

Slavery Defined

To begin our discussion it is necessary to define slavery. Coming from a Western and particularly North American perspective, we usually think of plantation-style racial slavery common in the Americas. To equate the slavery that existed in most African and Muslim societies with American slavery distorts some significant differences. Of course, slavery differed in practice from one society to the other; even within the United States slaves experienced different work regimes depending upon a number of variables including the attitudes of their master, the kind of work they performed, and where they lived. Whatever the differences, it is possible to agree on a definition to apply to slavery in all of its forms:

> Slavery was one form of exploitation. Its special characteristics included the idea that slaves were property; that they were outsiders who were alien by origin or who had been denied their heritage through judicial or other sanctions; that coercion could be used at will; that their labor power was at the complete disposal of a master; that they did not have the right to their own sexuality and, by extension, to their own reproductive capacities; and that the slave status was inherited unless provision was made to ameliorate that status.
>
> Source: Paul E. Lovejoy, *Transformations in Slavery A History of Slavery in Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1983), p. 1.

Slavery—in its various forms—is ancient. It goes back thousands of years; it existed in ancient Greece, Rome, and Egypt. Slaves have come from various places at different times in history. One source of slaves was sub-Saharan Africa. The export of slaves from sub-Saharan Africa was linked to the expansion of the Muslim Arab empire across North Africa in the centuries after the death of the Prophet Muhammad in 632 C.E. Muslims used their religion (Islam) to justify the enslavement of nonbelieving (i.e., non-Muslim) Africans. Most of these African slaves crossed the Sahara Desert in caravans, or came via the Red Sea and East African coast in boats. They ended up in the countries of North Africa or in the Middle East.

The majority of African slaves were destined for domestic service. Women and children were wanted in greater numbers than men. They were likely to be incorporated into Muslim society. Boys were trained for military or domestic service. Females became domestics, and the prettiest were placed in harems. Slavery in the Middle East was not a self-perpetuating institution, and those born into slavery formed a relatively small proportion of the slave population.

Most children of slaves were assimilated into Muslim society. This explains the absence today of an easily recognizable, socially distinct black population in the Middle East.

On the African side a number of conditions produced slaves for export: warfare, criminal convictions, kidnaping, debt, and drought. African merchants gathered slaves for shipment by boat and caravan to the markets of the north. The export trade was relatively modest for many centuries before the fifteenth century C.E and indeed did not really expand considerably until the nineteenth century. Exports amounted to a few thousand slaves per year at most times, and because the affected areas were often very extensive, the impact was usually minimized.

The slave trade that is by far the best documented is the Atlantic slave trade. One reason is that this trade transported a large number of people—approximately 11 million arrived alive in the Americas—between the mid-fifteenth and mid-nineteenth centuries. Second, the Atlantic slave trade and the type of slavery practiced in the Americas created a large population of African descent. The peak of the trade occurred in the eighteenth century (see **Graph 1**) during which approximately 6 million slaves arrived alive in the Americas.

The Atlantic slave trade differed in some important respects from the trade to the Middle East. First, about two-thirds of slaves traded to the Americas were men. Second, the slavery practiced in America differed from slavery in the Middle East and Africa. The major difference between slavery in Africa and the Americas had to do with the way slaves were used. In European societies, and in the colonies they controlled, slaves were employed in work for which no hired laborer or tenant could be found or at least willing to undertake under conditions that the landowner wished. Consequently, slaves typically had difficult, demanding, and degrading work, and they were often mistreated by exploitative masters who were anxious to maximize profits. With the nearly insatiable demand for labor that grew with European conquest of the Americas and the development of staple agricultural crops, sugar for example, Europeans turned to Africa to provide large numbers of slaves. Europeans wanted to make money out of their American colonies, and they used slaves like machines. Slavery became a permanent, racially exclusive caste. Slave status was passed on to the next generation. Slaves had very few rights and were generally at the mercy of their owners. Perhaps no statistic explains the brutality of American slavery better than the demography of slave immigrants as compared to European immigrants. "By 1820, some 10 million Africans had migrated to the New World as compared to some 2 million Europeans. But in 1820, the New World white population of some 12 million was roughly twice as great as the black." (Patrick Manning, *Slavery and African Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 37.)

This kind of chattel slavery in the Americas differed from what some historians call social or lineage slavery that existed in Africa prior to outside demand for slaves. In the preexisting African forms of slavery, slaves shared with their American counterparts an absence of freedom. African slavery differed from American slavery, however, in two important respects. First, slave status was not permanent. A gradual process of incorporation eventually resulted in the elimination of slave status, so that I might be a slave, but my children, and especially my grandchildren, would not share that status. Second, society was not arranged primarily around the creation of commercial wealth based on mass export of commodities like sugar to distant markets. Slaves might perform tasks disdained by free persons, but they were not worked to death on plantations geared around maximizing profit. Given the nature of African slavery (at least up until the nineteenth-century), some historians question the applicability of the term *slave*. Perhaps the eighteenth-century slave trader turned abolitionist John Newton best explained the distinction between African and American slavery:

> The state of slavery, among these wild barbarous people, as we esteem them, is much milder than in our colonies. For as, on the other hand, they have no land in high cultivation, like our West India plantations, and therefore no call for that excessive, unintermitted labour, which exhausts our slaves; so, on the other hand, no man is permitted to draw blood even from a slave. If he does, he is liable to a strict inquisition. . . . A man may sell his slave, if he pleases; but he may not wantonly abuse him. The laws, likewise, punish some species of theft with slavery; and in cases of adultery, which are very common, as polygamy is the custom of the country, both the woman, and the man who offends with her, are liable to be sold for slaves, unless they can satisfy the husband, or unless they are redeemed by their friends.
>
> Source: John Newton, *Thoughts upon the African Slave Trade* (London, 1788), p. 106.

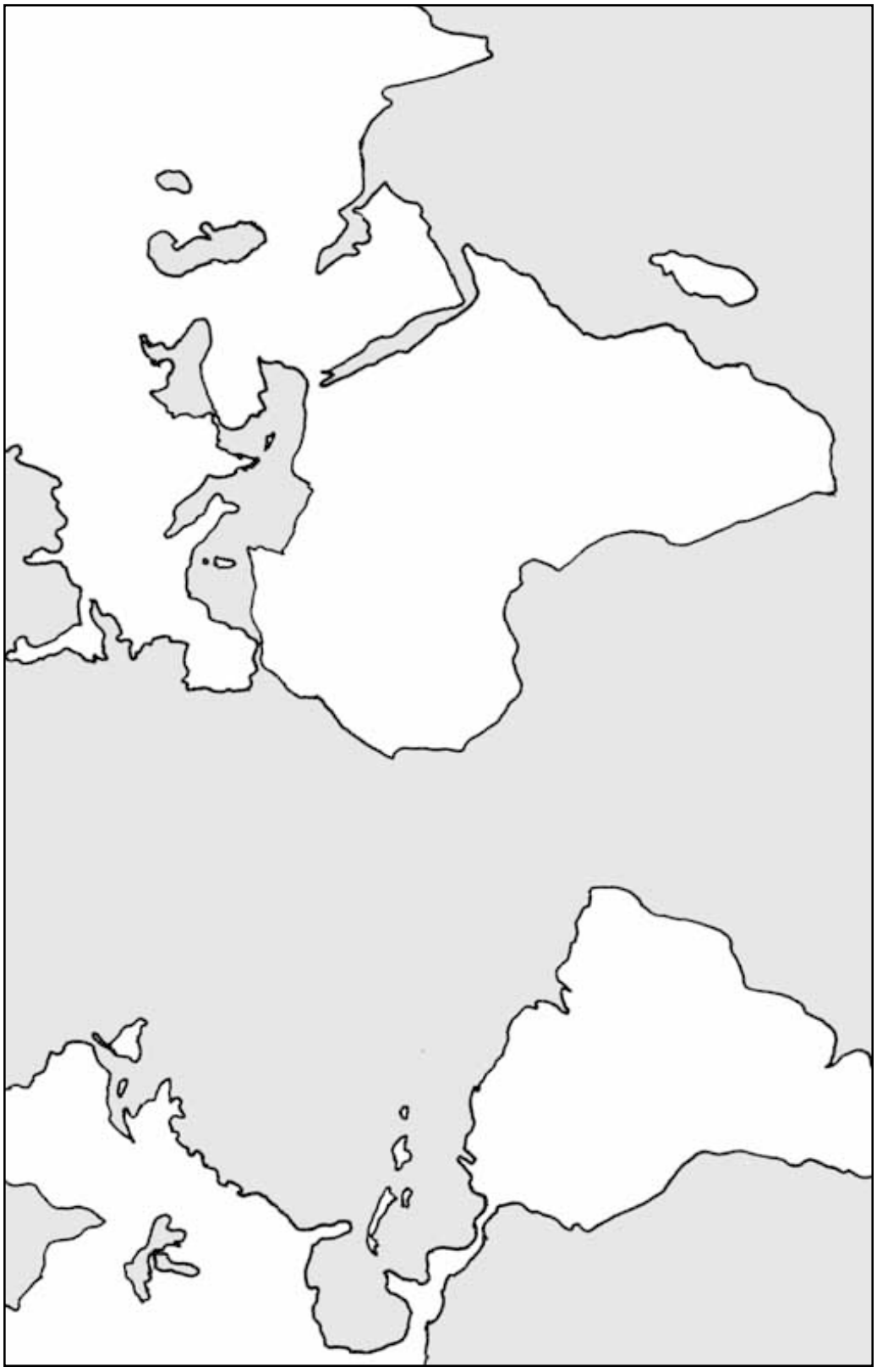
There is no such thing as "good" slavery and "bad" slavery. As our definition makes clear, slavery was a form of exploitation that varied in its conditions. Over the course of the Atlantic slave trade plantation-style production was introduced to parts of Africa. As in the Americas, these African-owned plantations produced for mass export, and slaves faced conditions very much akin to those in the Americas.

The figures below are for slaves landed alive in the Americas. These figures are estimates based on extensive research in shipping and port records. An exact figure for numbers of Africans involved in the Atlantic slave trade is impossible due to the sheer enormity of the trade across time and space, mortality at sea and

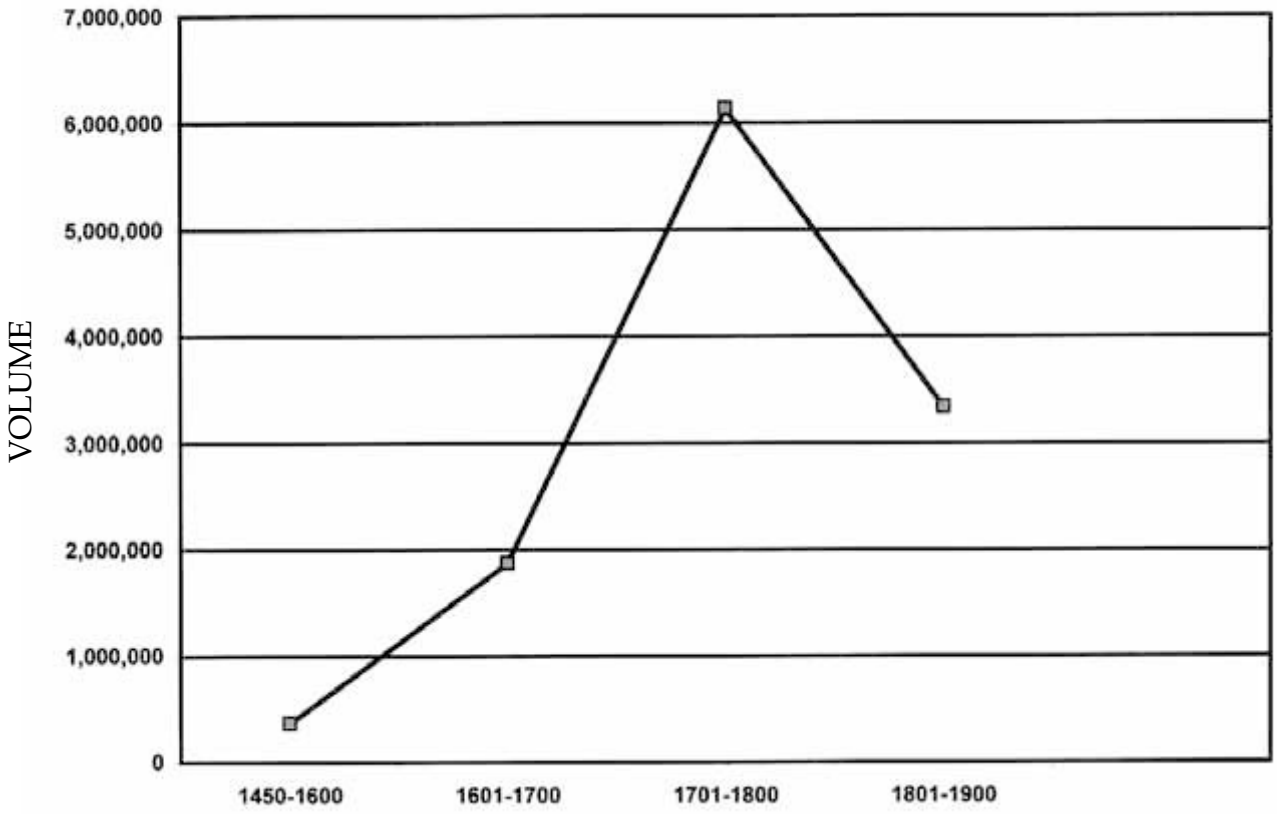
en route to the coast, and a lack of comprehensive records. Over the length of the trade—from the mid-fifteenth to the mid-nineteenth centuries—the average mortality rate on the Middle Passage (the journey across the Atlantic Ocean from the port of embarkation in Africa to port of debarkation in the Americas) was about 20%. The mortality between the point of capture in Africa and embarkation for the Americas was another 20%. Thus, the total figure for Africans captured into slavery was probably closer to 15 million.

Slaves came primarily from West and West-Central Africa including these regions: Senegambia, Upper Guinea, Gold Coast, Bight of Benin, Bight of Biafra, Loango, and Angola. In the nineteenth century significant numbers of slaves came all the way from Mozambique in South-East Africa (See **Map 1**, p. 13). The two major destinations for slaves transported across the Atlantic were Brazil (about 40%) and the Caribbean (about 35%). The North American mainland received only about 5%. Spanish America received about 15% and Europe and islands off the coast of Africa including São Tomé and Cabo Verde received about 2% (see **Graph 1**).

Slave Origins and Destinations

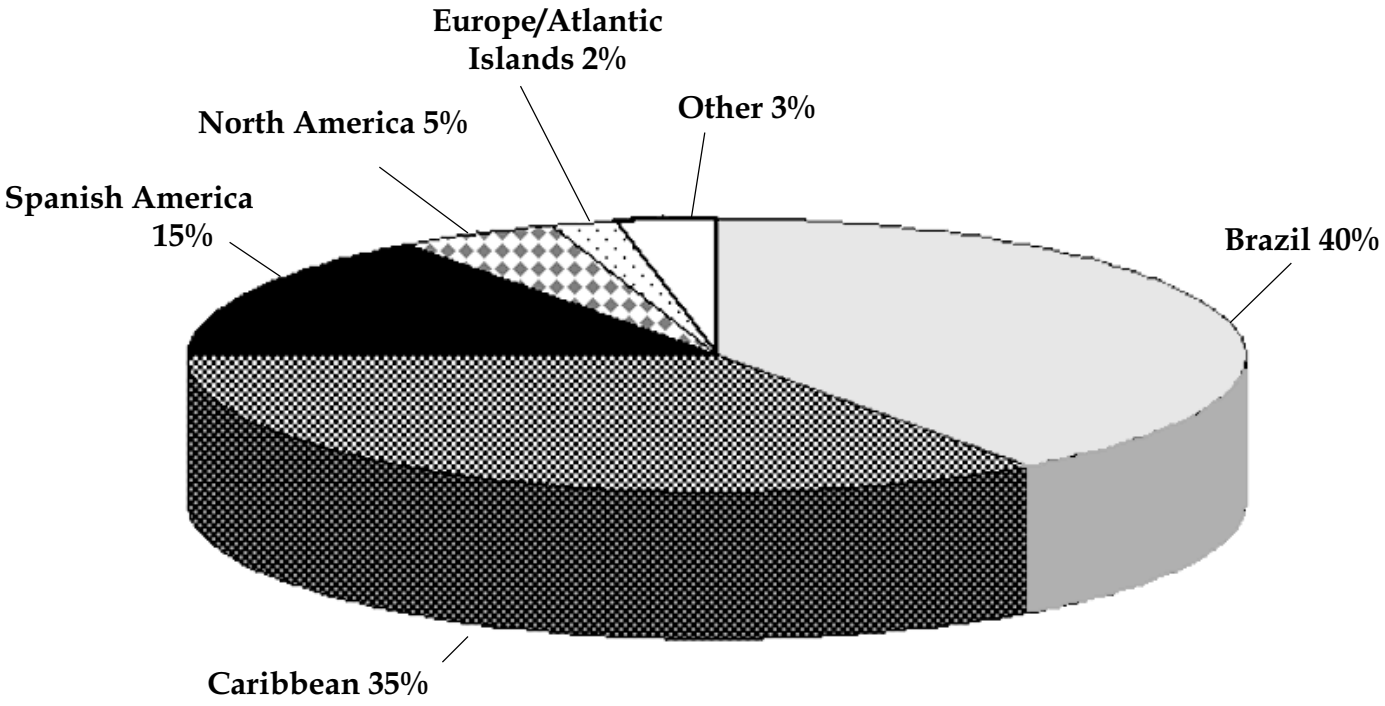


The Volume of the Atlantic Slave Trade



Based on statistics from Paul E. Lovejoy, "The Volume of the Atlantic Slave Trade: A Synthesis" in *Journal of African History* 23 (1982), pp. 494–500.

Destinations of Slaves Brought to the Americas



"Proposal to Your Majesty about Slavery in Lands Conquered by Portugal"

Anonymous, 1612
(Primary Source)

The following selection comes from a letter to King Philip III of Spain (Philip II of Portugal), in about 1612. The letter argues that the legal grounds on which the seventeenth-century Iberian kingdoms (Spain and Portugal) had based their enslavement of Africans were being abused. These legal grounds included: the concept of a "just war" in which "infidels" might be enslaved, the right of a local ruler to enslave his delinquent subjects, the individual's right to sell himself into slavery, and a needy father's privilege of selling his own children. Given the growing demand for labor in the Americas, new justifications for slavery had been invented, including kidnaping. The letter may have come from a priest because the writer expresses concern about the injustice of the enslavement process and the stultifying effect it has on the spread of Christianity.

Modern theologians in published books commonly report on, and condemn as Unjust, the acts of enslavement which take place in the Provinces of this Royal Empire, employing for this purpose the same principles by which the ancient theologians, doctors of canon law, and jurists have regulated legitimate and just acts of enslavement. According to these principles, only infidels who are captured in just wars, or who because of serious crimes have been condemned by their Rulers may be held as legitimate slaves, or if they sell themselves, or if they are sold by their own fathers who have legitimate need. And because, by the use of these four principles, great injustices are committed in the buying and selling of slaves in our Empire, as will late be seen, it is also certain that most of the slaves of this Empire are made so upon other pretexts, of which some are notoriously unjust, and others with great likelihood may be presumed to be so as well. Because on the entire Guinea Coast and at Cape Verde those persons called *tangosmãos* and other dealers in this merchandise, men of loose morals with no concern other than their own interests, commonly carry out their raiding expeditions up the rivers and in the remote interior far from these areas that are frequented by the Portuguese, by His Majesty's officials, and by the priests of those regions. They collect as many pieces (peça; or in other words persons) as they can, sometimes through deception, at other times through

violence, capturing them in ambushes when our ships arrive the natives themselves go out to hunt each other, as if they were stags, with the intention of selling them to us.

At other times our own people enslave many free persons as substitutes for the slaves who flee from them, merely because they are brothers or relatives of the runaways. And this wickedness is carried to the point that even the authorities seize the children and relatives of those who give them reasons to do so.

Also the blacks themselves falsely assert that the persons whom they bring to be sold are captured in a just war, or they say that they will butcher and eat them if they are not purchased. So that, of every thousand slaves who are captured, scarcely one-tenth will be justly enslaved, which is a notorious fact confirmed by all God-fearing men who reside or have resided in those places.

Not even the merchants themselves deny that they collect these slaves in the ways described, but they defend themselves saying that they transport them so that they may become Christians, and so that they may wear clothes and have more to eat, failing to recognize that none of this is sufficient to justify so much theft and tyranny, because as St. Paul says, those who perform evil acts in order to bring about some good are justly condemned before God. How much more is this true in a matter as serious as the freedom of human beings.

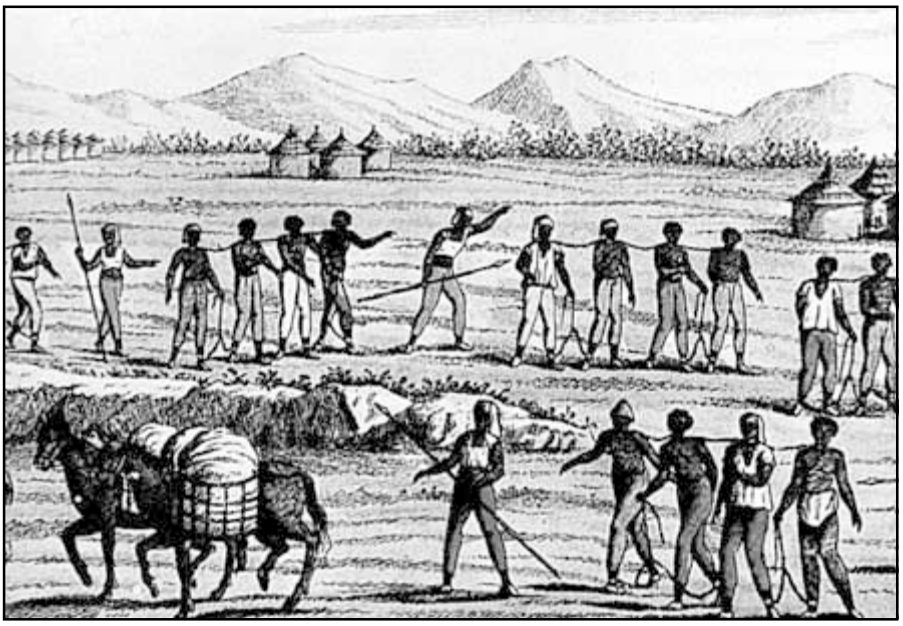
Finally, all these methods of enslavement are notoriously unjust, as are any others that are not those referred to above. And in those places even these may be commonly presumed to be unjust in the following ways:

> Concerning the principle of just war, it is known that, since they are infidels and barbarians, the Kings and private Lords of the entire Conquest [Portuguese colonial conquests in Africa, Asia, and America] are not normally motivated by reason when they make war, but rather by passion, nor do they examine or consult others about their right to do so. Therefore most of their wars are unjust wars carried on merely for greed, ambition, and other unjust causes. Often the same may be presumed about the wars carried on by individual Portuguese captains, because, greedy as they are to capture slaves and other prizes, they often do so without any concern for their consciences.
>
> The principle of condemning persons to perpetual slavery must be looked upon as a very questionable principle in the same places, and especially in Guinea and the land of the Kaffirs [southern and eastern Africa], because of an infinite number of persons are unjustly condemned to servitude for very trifling reasons, or because of some passion of their masters. Because, just as when among us someone displeases a King he is cast out of Court or loses his favored status, among them, his freedom is

attacked, and he and his whole family are enslaved, and all too often with a thousand tricks and much false testimony. . . .

Concerning the other two principles: the need to sell oneself to seek release from an unjust death or some other great misery; or being sold by one's father who is in dire need—these are the causes of many unjust acts of enslavement in those places. Because in some places, as has been said, some persons make a pretense of wanting to eat others, or of wishing to slaughter them, so that they can be sold. Many fathers sell their sons for almost nothing, without being in dire need which might justify such a sale, which is invalid and without any force in law, because the power is not given to a father to sell his minor son, except in dire need, according to common scholarly doctrine. And also in place of their children they sell other relatives who are close at hand, and other strangers using tricks which they invent for the purpose, saying, or making them say, that they are their sons . . . this ill-treatment and enslavement is scandalous to everybody, and especially to those same heathens, because they abandon our religion, seeing that those who are supposed to convert them are the same persons who enslave them in such unjust ways, as is witnessed every day.

Source: "Proposta a Sua Magestade sobre a escravaria das terras da Conquista de Portugal," [A Proposal to Your Majesty about slavery in the Portuguese Dominions], Document 7, 3, 1, No. 8, Seção de Manuscritos, Biblioteca Nacional, Rio de Janeiro, comes from Robert Edgar Conrad, *Children of God's Fire A Documentary History of Black Slavery in Brazil* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1983), pp. 11–15.



Caravans of slaves in Africa being taken to the coast.

Mungo Park, *Viagens, séc. XVIII.* In João Medina, *A Rota dos Escravos: Angola e a Rede do Comércio Negreiro* (Lisboa: Cegia, 1996), p. 154.

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