

SLAVERY IN AFRICA AND BEYOND



Slave market in early medieval Eastern Europe, by Sergei Ivanov. So many Slavs were enslaved for so many centuries that word 'Slav' became synonymous with slavery. The derivation of the word slave encapsulates a bit of European history and explains why the two words (slaves and Slavs) are so similar.



Persian slave in the Khanate of Khiva, 19th century.

HISTORY OF SLAVERY

Slavery is the condition of a human who is legally the property of another, can be bought or sold, is not allowed to escape and must work for the owner without any choice involved. The most crucial aspect is a communally recognized right by some individuals to possess, buy, sell, discipline, transport, liberate, or otherwise dispose of the bodies and behaviour of other individuals. An integral element is that children of a slave mother automatically become slaves. It does not include historical forced labor by prisoners, labor camps, or other forms of un-free labour in which workers are not considered property.



Slaves working in a mine. Ancient Greece.



Serfdom in feudal England (miniature from Queen Mary's Psalter, ca. 1310).

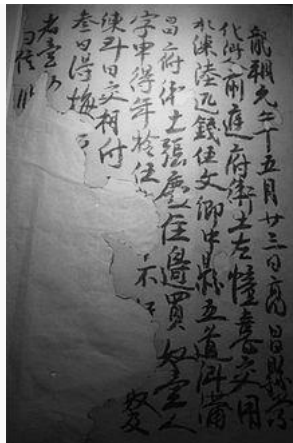
Evidence of slavery predates written records, and it has existed in many cultures. Slavery is rare among hunter-gatherer populations, as it is a system of social stratification. Slavery typically requires a shortage of labour and a surplus of land to be viable. Mass slavery also requires economic surpluses and a high population density to be viable. Due to these factors, the practice of slavery would have only proliferated after the invention of agriculture during the

Neolithic Revolution about 11,000 years ago. The Code of Hammurabi (c. 1760 BC) refers to it as an established institution.



C. 1480 BC, fugitive slave treaty between Idrimi of Alakakh and Pillia of Kizzuwatna (in today Turkey).

Economists have attempted to model the circumstances under which slavery and its variants (such as serfdom) appear and disappear. One observation is that slavery becomes more desirable for landowners where land is abundant but labour is scarce, such that rent is depressed and paid workers can demand high wages. If the opposite holds true, then it becomes more costly for landowners to have guards for the slaves than to employ paid workers who can only demand low wages due to the amount of competition. Thus, slavery gradually decreased in Western Europe as the population grew, so that around the year 1500, it had virtually died out, though it was a normal phenomenon practically everywhere else. Europeans reintroduced it in the Americas as large areas of new land with few people became available.



A contract from the Tang dynasty that records the purchase of a 15 year-old slave for six bolts of plain silk and five Chinese coins.

Slavery is more common when the labour done is relatively simple and thus easy to supervise, such as large scale growing of a single crop. It is much more difficult and costly to check that slaves are doing their best and with good quality when they are doing complex tasks. Therefore, slavery was seen as the most efficient method of production for large scale crops like sugar and cotton, whose output was based on economies of scale and fetched high prices in the world market. This enabled a gang system of labor to be prominent on large plantations where field hands were monitored and worked with factory-like precision. Each work gang was based on an internal division of labor that not only assigned every member of the gang to a precise task but simultaneously made his or her performance dependent on the actions of the others. The hoe hands chopped out the weeds that surrounded the cotton plants as well as excessive sprouts. The plow gangs followed behind, stirring the soil near the rows of cotton plants and tossing it back around the plants. Thus, the gang system worked like an early version of the assembly line later to be found in factories.



A Guarani family captured by slave hunters in South America, by Jean Baptiste Debret.

France, Spain, Britain, Portugal, the Netherlands and a few others, built worldwide empires based primarily on plantation agriculture using slaves imported from Africa. However, these powers took care to minimize the presence of slavery in their homelands. Britain played a prominent role in the Atlantic slave trade, especially after 1600 until the early 19th century, though there the trade of slaves had been made illegal in 1102. As a result of the War of the Spanish Succession, the United Kingdom obtained the monopoly of transporting captive Africans to Spanish America. The profits of the slave trade and of West Indian plantations amounted to 5% of the British economy at the time of the Industrial Revolution.



Slavery in Brazil, by Jean Baptiste Debret.

Throughout slavery's history have existed movements to free large or distinct groups of slaves. However, abolitionism should be distinguished from efforts to help a particular group of slaves, or to restrict one practice, such as the slave trade. The Greek Stoics advocated the brotherhood of humanity and the natural equality of all human beings, and consistently critiqued slavery as against the law of nature. In 9 AD Emperor Wang Mang abolished slave trading (although not slavery) in China. The Spanish colonization of the Americas sparked a discussion about the right to enslave native Americans. A prominent critic of slavery in the Spanish colonies was the priest Bartolomé de las Casas, who opposed the enslavement of Native Americans, and later also of Africans in America. One of the first protests against the enslavement of Africans came from German and Dutch Quakers in Pennsylvania in 1688.



The work of the Mercedarians was in ransoming Christians slaves held in Muslim hands, 1637.



The ransoming of Christians slaves held in Turkish hands, 17th century.

During the "Age of Revolutions" (c. 1770–1815), an estimated three-quarters of all people alive were trapped in bondage against their will either in some form of slavery or serfdom. One of the most significant milestones in the campaign to abolish slavery throughout the world occurred in England in 1772, with British judge Lord Mansfield, whose opinion in *Somerset's Case* was widely taken to have held that slavery was illegal in England. This judgment also laid down the principle that slavery contracted in other jurisdictions (such as the American colonies) could not be enforced in England. A similar case took place five years later and ruled slavery to be contrary to the law of Scotland.



Well-dressed plantation owner and family visiting the slave quarters in Northern America.



Slave being whipped in Brazil, during the heyday of gold exploration in Minas Gerais, 1770.

In 1785, English poet William Cowper wrote: "We have no slaves at home – Then why abroad? Slaves cannot breathe in England; if their lungs receive our air, that moment they are free. They touch our country, and their shackles fall. That's noble, and bespeaks a nation proud. And jealous of the blessing. Spread it then, And let it circulate through every vein." Following the work of campaigners in the United Kingdom, such as William Wilberforce and Thomas Clarkson, the Act for the Abolition of the Slave Trade was passed by Parliament on 25 March 1807, coming into effect the following year. The act imposed a fine of £100 for every slave found aboard a British ship. The intention was to outlaw entirely the Atlantic slave trade within the whole Empire. Britain, which held extensive, although mainly coastal colonial territories on the African continent, imposed similar restrictions upon other western nations, taking a prominent role in combating the international slave trade. The significance of the fact lays in the number of people hitherto sold and carried by British slave vessels: 41% of the total. This made the British empire the biggest slave-trade contributor in the world, so that the abolition act was all the more damaging to the global trade of slaves. In 1820 U.S.A. made slave trading piracy, punishable by death; in 1827, Britain made the same. Between 1808 and 1860, the West Africa Squadron seized approximately 1,600 slave ships and freed 150,000 Africans who were aboard. Action was also taken against African leaders who refused to agree to British treaties to outlaw the trade, for example against "the usurping King of Lagos", deposed in 1851. Anti-slavery treaties were signed with over 50 African rulers. Slavery itself was abolished in the British Empire with the Slavery Abolition Act 1833. In 1839, the world's oldest international human rights organization, Anti-Slavery International, was formed in Britain by Joseph Sturge, which worked to outlaw slavery in other countries.



A painting of the 1840 Anti-Slavery Conference.

Moralistic reform, not economic incentive, was primarily responsible for abolition: the continuing profitability of slave-based plantations and the threats of race war slowed the development of abolition movements during the first half of the 19th century. These movements were strongest in Britain, and after 1840 in the United States; in both instances they were based on evangelical enthusiasm that stressed the horrible impact on the slaves themselves. The Northern states of the USA abolished slavery between 1777 and 1804. Britain ended slavery in its empire in the 1830s. Although the trans-Atlantic slave trade ended shortly after the American Revolution, slavery remained a central institution in the Southern states of the USA, from where it expanded with the westward movement of

population: 1,000,000 slaves were moved west from the Old South between 1790 and 1860. By breaking up existing families and forcing slaves to relocate far from everyone and everything they knew, this migration replicated (if on a reduced level) many of the horrors of the Atlantic slave trade. However the plantation economies of the southern United States, based on cotton, and those in Brazil and Cuba, based on sugar, expanded and grew even more profitable so that slavery was unlikely to disappear. Slavery remained profitable in the 1830s because of innovations in agriculture. Only the bloody American Civil War ended it in the USA in the 1860s when slaves had grown to 4 million; in Cuba and Brazil it ended in the 1880s because it was no longer profitable for the owners.



The Brazilian slave-hunter, by Johann Moritz Rugendas, 1823.



The public flogging of a slave in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. By Jean Baptiste Debret, 1834–1839.

On December 10, 1948, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which declared freedom from slavery is an internationally recognized human right. Article 4 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states: No one shall be held in slavery or servitude; slavery and the slave trade shall be prohibited in all their forms. Mauritania abolished it in law in 1981 and was the last country to do so.



"Bound slave" by Lehnert & Landrock, Tunisia circa 1900.

The issue of an apology is linked to reparations for slavery and is still being pursued by a number of entities across the world. The UK government issued a "public statement of sorrow" over slavery on November 27, 2006, and a formal apology on March 14, 2007. On July 30, 2008, the USA House of Representatives passed a resolution apologizing for American slavery and subsequent discriminatory laws. In June 2009, the USA Senate passed a resolution apologizing to African-Americans for the "fundamental injustice, cruelty, brutality, and inhumanity of slavery".



Peter, a man enslaved in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. This famous photo (1863) was distributed by abolitionists.

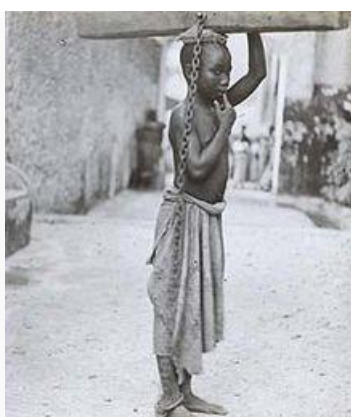
Though slavery is no longer legal anywhere in the world, the number of slaves today remains as high as 12 million to 29 million. The weighted average global sales price of a slave is calculated to be approximately \$340, with a high of \$1,895 for the average trafficked sex slave, and a low of \$40 to \$50 for debt bondage slaves in part of Asia and Africa. Worldwide slavery is a criminal offense but slave owners can get very high returns for their risk. According to researcher Siddharth Kara, the profits generated worldwide by all forms of slavery in 2007 were \$91.2 billion. That is second only to drug trafficking in terms of global criminal enterprises. The weighted average annual profits generated by a slave in 2007 was \$3,175, with a low of an average \$950 for bonded labor and \$29,210 for a trafficked sex slave. Approximately 40% of all slave profits each year are generated by trafficked sex slaves, representing slightly more than 4 % of the world's slaves.



Francis Bok, former Sudanese slave. It is estimated that as many as 200,000 people had been enslaved during the Second Sudanese Civil War. The slaves are mostly Dinka people.

SLAVERY IN AFRICA

In many parts of Africa slavery was endemic and part of the structure of everyday life as they were in much of the ancient world. The nature of the slave societies differed greatly across the continent. There were large plantations worked by slaves in Egypt, Sudan and Zanzibar, but this was not a typical use of slaves in Africa as a whole. In most African slave societies, slaves were protected and incorporated into the slave-owning family. Slavery came in different disguises in different societies: there were court slaves, slaves incorporated into princely armies, domestic and household slaves, slaves working on the land, in industry, as couriers and intermediaries, even as traders. When the Arab slave trade and Atlantic slave trade began, many local slave systems changed and began supplying captives for slave markets outside of Africa.



Photograph of a slave boy in Zanzibar, c. 1890. 'An Arab master's punishment for a slight offence'. It is estimated 65% up to 90% of the population of the island was enslaved.

Several historians have made important contributions to the global understanding of the African side of the Atlantic slave trade. The black slave market was supplied by well-established slave trade networks controlled by local African societies and individuals. Several African nations such as the Calabar and other southern parts of Nigeria had economies depended solely on the trade. African peoples such as the Nyamwezi of Tanzania would serve as middlemen or roving bands warring with other African nations to capture Africans for Europeans. Historians estimate that 90 percent of those shipped to the New World were enslaved by Africans and then sold to European traders. "Without complex business partnerships between African elites and European traders and commercial agents, the slave trade to the New World would have been impossible, at least on the scale it occurred." By arguing for African agency, these historians ultimately ascribe to African merchants a shared responsibility for the slave trade.



Cowry shells were used as money in the slave trade.



Two slightly differing Okpoho manillas used to purchase slaves.

Its end and the decline of slavery were imposed upon Africa by outside powers. European colonial rule and diplomatic pressure slowly put an end to the trade, and eventually to the lawfulness of slavery itself. The King of Bonny (now in Nigeria) was horrified at the conclusion of the practice: "*We think this trade must go on. That is the verdict of our oracle and the priests. They say that your country, however great, can never stop a trade ordained by God himself.*" In the 1840s, King Gezo of Dahomey said: "*The slave trade is the ruling principle of my people. It is the source and the glory of their wealth...the mother lulls the child to sleep with notes of triumph over an enemy reduced to slavery...*" During the 1870s, European initiatives against the slave trade caused an economic crisis in Sudan, precipitating the rise of Mahdist forces. Mahdi's victory created an Islamic state, one that quickly reinstated slavery. The slave trade represented the major source of revenue for the state of Bornu as late as 1898.

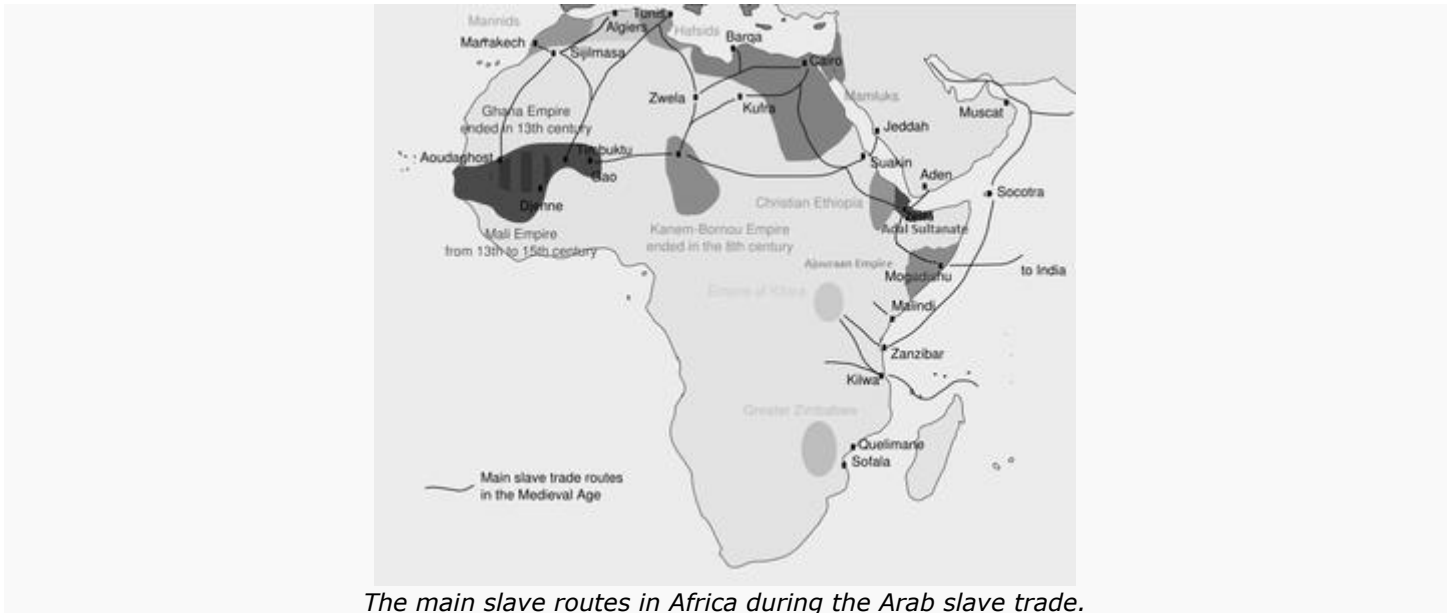
The continuing anti-slavery movement became an excuse and a *casus belli* for the European conquest and colonisation of much of the African continent. In the late 19th century, the Scramble for Africa saw the continent rapidly divided between Imperialistic European powers, and an early but secondary focus of all colonial regimes was the suppression of slavery and the slave trade. By the end of the colonial period they were mostly successful in this aim, though slavery is still very active in several areas of Africa even though it has gradually moved to a wage economy. Indeed, slavery persists in Africa until the present day, and it commonly appears in states, such as Chad, Ethiopia, Mali, Niger, and Sudan, in places where law and order have collapsed.



Three people in chains, probably somewhere in East-Africa. By 1900, slaves comprised up to one-third of Ethiopia's population. Emperor Haile Selassie officially abolished slavery in 1942.

ARABS' SLAVE TRADE

The African continent was bled of its human resources via all possible routes. Historians estimate that, while approximately 7 to 12 million African slaves were taken to the Americas, of whom some 15 percent died during the terrible voyage, 10 to 18 million Africans were taken by Arab slave traders across the Red Sea, Indian Ocean, and Sahara desert between 650 and 1900. Likewise, more than 2 million Africans died on the ship before reaching the destinations in the Arab world, therefore the slave traders would obtain the same amount of Africans in order to make up for the loss. Some historians conclude that the total loss in persons removed, those who died on the arduous march to coastal slave marts and those killed in slave raids, far exceeded the 65–75 million inhabitants remaining in Sub-Saharan Africa at the trade's end.



The main slave routes in Africa during the Arab slave trade.

To a smaller degree, Arabs also enslaved Europeans: between the 16th and 19th centuries more than 1 million of them were captured by Muslim corsairs (mainly from Algeria) and sold as slaves. Male slaves were often employed as servants, soldiers, or laborers by their owners, while female slaves, were long traded to the Middle Eastern countries and kingdoms by Arab and Oriental traders, as concubines and servants. In contrast to the Atlantic slave trade where the male-female ratio was 2:1 or 3:1, the Arab slave trade usually had a higher female to male ratio instead, suggesting a general preference for female slaves. Sex and reproduction served as incentives for importing female slaves, though many were also imported for performing household tasks. Swiss explorer Johann Burckhardt wrote: "I frequently witnessed scenes of the most shameless indecency, which the traders, who were the principal actors, only laughed at. I may venture to state, that very few female slaves who have passed their tenth year, reach Egypt or Arabia in a state of virginity." It was also not uncommon to turn enslaved males, both African and European, into eunuchs via castration to serve as guardians to the harems. The Arab slave trade originated before Islam and lasted more than a millennium. As recently as the 1950s, Saudi Arabia's slave population was estimated at 20% of the population.

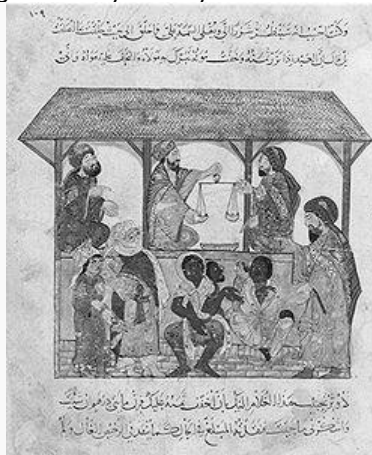


Turks' advances resulted in many captive Christians being carried deep into Muslim territory.



Crimean Tatar raiders enslaved more than 1 million Eastern Europeans.

The term Arab when used in historical documents often represents a cultural term rather than a "racial" term, and many of the "Arab" slave traders such as Tippu Tip and others were indistinguishable from the "Africans" whom they enslaved and sold. The Arab slave trade from East Africa is one of the oldest slave trades, predating the European transatlantic slave trade by 700 years, but toward the 18th and 19th centuries, with the rise of the Oman sultanate based in Zanzibar, the flow of slaves increased enormously due to demands by Arabs, Portuguese, and French: as many as 50,000 slaves were passing through the city each year.



13th century slave market in the Yemen. This country officially abolished slavery in 1962.

Slave traders and raiders moved throughout eastern and central Africa to meet the rising demand for enslaved men, women and children. Arab traders brought Africans across the Indian Ocean from present-day Mozambique, Tanzania, Kenya, South Sudan, Ethiopia, Eritrea and elsewhere in East Africa to present-day Turkey, Iraq, Iran, Kuwait and other parts of the Middle East and South Asia (mainly Pakistan and India). The increased presence of European rivals along the East coast led Arab traders to concentrate on the overland slave caravan routes across the Sahara from the Sahel to North Africa. So, the trade continued and even increased as new sources of enslaved people became available. The slave trade within Africa also increased. The British Navy could suppress much of the trade in the Indian Ocean, but the European powers could do little to affect the land-based intra-continental trade. Some descendants of the African slaves still exist in the Middle East and are aware of their origins, though their numbers were greatly reduced as many men were castrated by their Arab masters.



Arab enslavement of the Dinka people from Sudan.



19th-century engraving of Arab slave-trading caravan transporting African slaves across the Sahara

Unlike the trans-Atlantic slave trade to the New World, Arabs supplied African slaves to the Muslim world, which at its peak stretched over three continents from the Atlantic (Morocco, Spain) to India and eastern China. So, it is sometimes called 'Islamic' slave trade, though a religious imperative was not the driver of the slavery. However, if a non-Muslim population refuses to adopt Islam or pay the *jizya* protection/subjugation tax, that population is considered to be at war with the Muslim "umma" and therefore it becomes legal under Islamic law to take slaves from that population. Propagators of Islam in Africa often revealed a cautious attitude towards proselytizing because of its effect in reducing the potential reservoir of slaves. So, Somalia did not supply slaves - as part of the Islamic world Somalis were at least nominally protected by the religious tenet that free Muslims cannot be enslaved - but Arab dhows loaded with human cargo continually visited Somali ports.



Dhows were used to transport African slaves to Middle East and South Asia.

Prices varied according to the slave's quality. Thomas Smee, the commander of the British research ship *Ternate*, visited the market of Zanzibar in 1811 and gave a detailed description: "The show' commences about four o'clock in the afternoon. The slaves, set off to the best advantage by having their skins cleaned and burnished with cocoa-nut oil, their faces painted with red and white stripes and the hands, noses, ears and feet ornamented with a profusion of bracelets of gold and silver and jewels, are ranged in a line, commencing with the youngest, and increasing to the rear according to their size and age. At the head of this file, which is composed of all sexes and ages from 6 to 60, walks the person who owns them; behind and at each side, two or three of his domestic slaves, armed with swords and spears, serve as guard. Thus ordered the procession begins, and passes through the market-place and the principle streets... when any of them stikes a spectator's fancy the line immediately stops, and a process of examination ensues, which, for minuteness, is unequalled in any cattle market in Europe. The intending purchaser having ascertained there is no defect in the faculties of speech, hearing, etc., that there is no disease present, next proceeds to examine the person; the mouth and the teeth are first inspected and afterwards every part of the body in succession, not even excepting the breasts, etc., of the girls, many of whom I have seen handled in the most indecent manner in the public market by their purchasers; indeed there is every reasons to believe that the slave-dealers almost universally force the young girls to submit to their lust previous to their being disposed of. From such scenes one turns away with pity and indignation."



The Slave Market, painting by Jean-Léon Gérôme, c. 1884.

Arab slave traders differed from European ones in that they would often conduct raiding expeditions themselves, sometimes penetrating deep into the continent. In the 1860s, David Livingstone wrote of this trade: "*To overdraw its evils is a simple impossibility.... We passed a slave woman shot or stabbed through the body and lying on the path. [Onlookers] said an Arab who passed early that morning had done it in anger at losing the price he had given for her, because she was unable to walk any longer. We passed a woman tied by the neck to a tree and dead.... We came upon a man dead from starvation.... The strangest disease I have seen in this country seems really to be broken*

heartedness, and it attacks free men who have been captured and made slaves." He estimated that 80,000 Africans died each year before ever reaching the slave markets of Zanzibar, East Africa's main slave-trading port. Such report stirred up the interest of the British public, reviving the flagging abolitionist movement. The Royal Navy throughout the 1870s attempted to suppress "this abominable Eastern trade", at Zanzibar in particular. In 1873, British Consul sir Bartle Frere, convinced the Sultan to forbid the slave trade. The erection of the Anglican cathedral on the closed slave market was a monument to joint missionary-government effort. But it was general conviction that East Africa's only choice was between European rule bringing civilisation and Arab rule maintaining slavery.

EUROPEANS' SLAVE TRADE

Prior to the 16th century, the bulk of slaves exported from Africa were shipped from East Africa to the Arabian peninsula. During that century, Europe began to outpace the Arab world in the export traffic, with its slave traffic from Africa to the Americas, but also to Europe and Southern Africa. The Spanish were the first to use African slaves in the New World on islands such as Cuba and Hispaniola, starting in 1501. Charles I of Spain in 1518 agreed to ship slaves directly from Africa. In America, slavery was the engine that drove the mercantile empires of Europe. The largest number of slaves were shipped to Brazil. In the eighteenth century, there and in modern Panama, Colombia, and Venezuela, free blacks outnumbered slaves, in contrast with Cuba and present-day Haiti. But slavery appeared, as universal and immutable as human nature.



Lady in litter being carried by her slaves, Brazil, ca. 1860.



White boy with a slave maid, Brazil, 1860.

The crossing of the Atlantic to the Americas, endured by slaves laid out in rows in the holds of ships, was only one element of the well-known triangular trade engaged in by Portuguese, Dutch, French and British. Ships having landed slaves in Caribbean ports would take on sugar, indigo, raw cotton, and later coffee, and make for Liverpool, Nantes, Lisbon or Amsterdam. Ships leaving European ports for West Africa would carry printed cotton textiles, copper utensils and bangles, pewter plates and pots, iron bars more valued than gold, hats, trinkets, gunpowder and firearms and alcohol. At each unloading, a profit was made.



The inspection and sale of a slave.

The Atlantic slave trade peaked in the late 18th century, when the largest number of slaves were captured on raiding expeditions into the interior of West Africa. These expeditions were typically carried out by African kingdoms. They would sell their captives or prisoners of war to European buyers. This was a common practice among Africans and Arabs. However, as the Atlantic slave trade increased its demand, local systems which primarily serviced indentured servitude became corrupted and started to supply the European slave traders, changing social dynamics.

It also ultimately undermined local economies and political stability as villages' vital labour forces were shipped overseas as slave raids and civil wars became commonplace. Crimes which were previously punishable by some other penalty became punishable by enslavement. The prisoners and captives that were sold were usually from nearby or enemy ethnic groups. They were not considered as part of the tribe and kings did not have a particular loyalty to them. At times, kings and chiefs would sell criminals into slavery so that they could no longer commit crimes in that area. Most other slaves were obtained from kidnappings, or through raids that occurred at gunpoint through joint ventures with the Europeans. But these rarely entered the interior of Africa, due to fear of disease and moreover fierce African resistance. The slaves were brought to coastal outposts where they were traded for goods. Then they were shipped to the colonies of the New World. Some African kings, however, refused to sell any of their captives or criminals. King Jaja of Opobo, a former slave himself, completely refused to do business with slavers. Ashanti King Agyeman Prempeh (b. 1872) also sacrificed his own freedom so that his people would not face collective slavery.



Slave traders in Gorée, Senegal, 18th century.

EFFECTS

K. Marx in his influential history of capitalism, *Das Kapital*, claimed that '...the turning of Africa into a warren for the commercial hunting of black-skins, signalled the rosy dawn of the era of capitalist production.' He argued that the slave trade was part of what he termed the 'primitive accumulation' of European capital, the 'non-capitalist' accumulation of wealth that preceded and created the financial conditions for Britain's industrialisation. E. Williams wrote about Africans' contribution on the basis of profits from the slave trade and slavery, arguing that those profits were used to help finance Britain's industrialisation. He argues that their enslavement was an essential element to the Industrial Revolution, and that European wealth was, in part, a result of slavery, but by the time of its abolition it had lost its profitability and it was in Britain's economic interest to ban it.

Other researchers strongly contested what has come to be referred to as "Williams' thesis": D. Richardson has concluded that the profits from the slave trade amounted to less than 1% of domestic investment in Britain, and economic historian S. Engerman found that even without subtracting the associated costs of the slave trade (e.g., shipping costs, slave mortality, mortality of whites in Africa, defence costs) or reinvestment of profits back into the slave trade, the total profits from the slave trade and West Indian plantations amounted to less than 5% of the British economy during any year of the Industrial Revolution. Historian R. Pares dismissed the influence of wealth generated from those plantations upon the financing of the Industrial Revolution, stating that whatever substantial flow of investment from West Indian profits into industry there was occurred after emancipation, not before.

Most scholars found that the slave trade had a detrimental effect on Africa's long-term economic growth and development. It ultimately undermined local economies and political stability as villages' vital labour forces were shipped overseas as slave raids and civil wars became commonplace. With the rise of a large commercial slave trade, driven by European needs, enslaving an enemy became less a consequence of war, and more and more a reason to go to war. The slave trade impeded the formation of larger ethnic groups, causing fractionalisation and weakening the formation of stable political structures. It also reduced the mental health and social development of African people.

In contrast, J. D. Fage asserted that slavery did not have a wholly disastrous effect on those left behind in Africa. Slaves were an expensive commodity, and traders received a great deal in exchange for each enslaved person. At the peak of the slave trade, hundreds of thousands of muskets, vast quantities of cloth, gunpowder, and metals were being shipped to Guinea. Most of this money was spent on British-made firearms (of very poor quality) and industrial-grade alcohol. Trade with Europe at the peak of the slave trade—which also included significant exports of gold and ivory—was some 3.5 million pounds per year. By contrast, the trade of the United Kingdom, the economic superpower of the time, was about 14 million pounds per year over this same period of the late 18th century. As P. Manning pointed out, the vast majority of items traded for slaves were common rather than luxury goods. Textiles, iron ore, currency, and salt were some of the most important commodities imported as a result of the slave trade, and these goods were spread within the entire society raising the general standard of living.

The demographic effects of the slave trade are among the most controversial issues. Tens of millions of people were removed from Africa, and what effect this had on Africa is an important question. W. Rodney argued that the export of so many people had been a demographic disaster and had left Africa permanently disadvantaged when compared to other parts of the world, and largely explains that continent's continued poverty. He presents numbers that show that Africa's population stagnated during this period, while that of Europe and Asia grew dramatically. According to him all other areas of the economy were disrupted by the slave trade as the top merchants abandoned traditional industries to pursue slaving and the lower levels of the population were disrupted by the slaving itself. Others have challenged this view.



Slaves captured from the Congo aboard an Arab slave ship intercepted by the Royal Navy (1869).

J. E. Inikori argued the history of the region shows that the effects were still quite deleterious: the African economic model of the period was very different from the European, and could not sustain such population losses. Population reductions in certain areas also led to widespread problems. He also noted that after the suppression of the slave trade Africa's population almost immediately began to rapidly increase, even prior to the introduction of modern medicines. Shahadah also stated that the trade was not only of demographic significance in aggregate population losses but also in the profound changes to settlement patterns, epidemiological exposure and reproductive and social development potential. In addition, the majority of the slaves being taken to the Americas were male. So while the slave trade created an immediate drop in the population, its long term effects were even more drastic.

M. Karenga said the main effects of the African slave trade were "the morally monstrous destruction of human possibility involved redefining African humanity to the world, poisoning past, present and future relations with others who only know us through this stereotyping and thus damaging the truly human relations among people of today". He stated that it constituted the destruction of culture, language, religion and human possibility.