

# The Triangular Trade

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

**Introduction:** *The origins of the African Slave Trade can be traced back to the Age of Exploration in the 15th Century. Europeans had become quite addicted to the luxuries of exotic spices, silks and porcelain that could only be found in Asia. Unfortunately for them, Muslim traders had a complete monopoly over the trade routes to the Far East. Unsuccessful in the attempt to break that monopoly, they started to explore water routes that would enable them to bypass the Muslims. The Portuguese took the lead in that exploration and sent voyages down the west coast of Africa in hopes of finding a new route to the source of traded goods. On those voyages they found a new type of good- human beings.*

## The Slave Trade:

- Between 10 and 28 million people taken from Africa
- 17 million Africans sold into slavery on the coast of the Indian Ocean, the Middle East, and North Africa
- 12 million Africans taken to the Americas
- 5 million Africans taken across the Sahara and East Africa into slavery in other parts of the world  
~ BBC News

## Why did the Slave Trade Begin?

Mercantilism in Europe drove European countries to explore the world, establish an empire of colonies, and bring back raw and produced goods to export from the mother country to be used or exported. As European empires expanded to the New World, however, they lacked one major resource - a work force. In most cases the *indigenous* (native) peoples had proved unreliable (most of them were dying from diseases brought over from Europe), and Europeans were unsuited to the climate and suffered under tropical diseases.

Africans, on the other hand, were excellent workers: they often had experience of agriculture and keeping cattle, they were used to a tropical climate, resistant to tropical diseases, and they could be "worked very hard" on plantations or in mines.

## Was Slavery New to Africa?

Africans had been traded as slaves for centuries - reaching Europe via the Islamic-run, trans-Saharan, trade routes. Slaves obtained from the Muslim dominated North African coast however proved to be too well educated to be trusted and had a tendency to rebellion.

Slavery was also a traditional part of African society - various states and kingdoms in Africa operated one or more of the following: chattel slavery, debt bondage, forced labor, and serfdom.

## What was the Triangular Trade?

All three stages of the Triangular Trade proved lucrative for merchants.

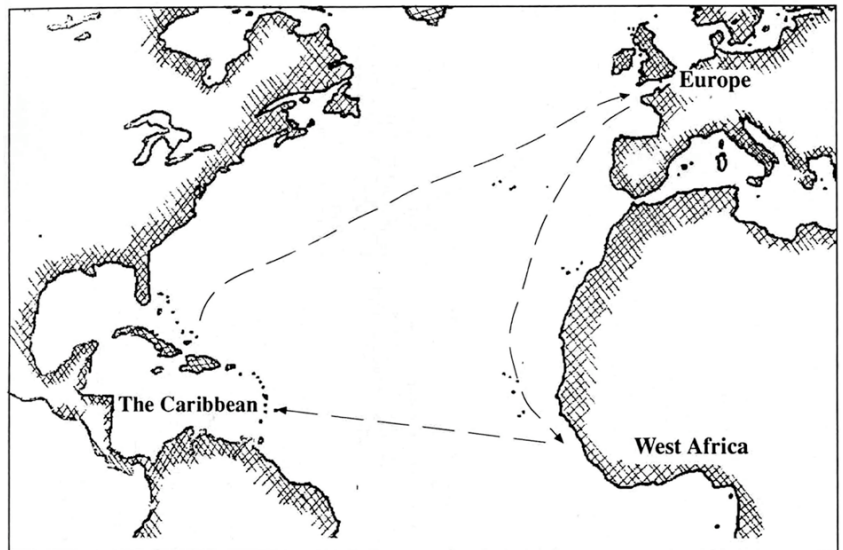
The first stage of the Triangular Trade involved taking manufactured goods from Europe to Africa: cloth, spirit, tobacco, beads, cowrie shells, metal goods, and guns. The guns were used to help expand empires and obtain more slaves (until they were finally used against European colonizers). These goods were exchanged for African slaves.

The second stage of the Triangular Trade, **The Middle Passage**, involved shipping the slaves to the Americas.

The third, and final, stage of the Triangular Trade involved the return to Europe with the produce from the slave-labor plantations: cotton, sugar, tobacco, molasses and rum.

## Who Started the Triangular Trade?

For two hundred years, 1440-1640, Portugal had a monopoly on the export of slaves from Africa. It is notable that they were also the last European country to abolish the institution - although, like France, it still continued to work former slaves as contract laborers, which they called *libertos* or *engagés à temps*. It is estimated that during the 4 1/2 centuries of the trans-Atlantic slave trade, Portugal was responsible for transporting over 4.5 million Africans (roughly 40% of the total).



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1. Plot the 3 stages of the Triangular Trade on the map.
2. The Middle Passage involved shipping slaves from \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_

## **How Did the Europeans Obtain the Slaves?**

Between 1450 and the end of the nineteenth century, slaves were obtained from along the west coast of Africa with the full and active co-operation of African kings and merchants. (There were occasional military campaigns organized by Europeans to capture slaves, especially by the Portuguese in what is now Angola, but this accounts for only a small percentage of the total.)

## **Who Has the Worst Record for Trading Slaves?**

During the eighteenth century, when the slave trade accounted for the transport of a staggering 6 million Africans, Britain was the worst transgressor - responsible for almost 2.5 million. This is a fact often forgotten by those who regularly cite Britain's prime role in the abolition of the slave trade.

## **Conditions for the Slaves**

Slaves were introduced to new diseases and suffered from malnutrition long before they reached the new world. It is suggested that the majority of deaths on the voyage across the Atlantic - the middle passage - occurred during the first couple of weeks and were a result of malnutrition and disease encountered during the forced marches and subsequent interment at slave camps on the coast.

Conditions on the slave ships were terrible, but the estimated death rate of around 13% is lower than the mortality rate for seamen, officers and passengers on the same voyages.

## **Arrival in the Americas**

As a result of the slave trade, five times as many Africans arrived in the Americas than Europeans. Slaves were needed on plantations and for mines and the majority was shipped to Brazil, the Caribbean, and the Spanish Empire. Less than 5% traveled to the Northern American States formally held by the British.

1. What was the triangular trade (describe all 3 sides)?

2. What factors led up to and fueled the Triangular Trade?

3. Based on what you learned about the Triangular Trade, how did trade and travel change the world?