

# The “Middle Passage”: The Enforced Migration of Africans across the Atlantic

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## Abstract

The enforced migration of Africans to the Americas in conditions of slavery lasted from the middle of the sixteenth century until the 1860s and constituted the largest movement of people across the Atlantic until the middle of the nineteenth century. Referred to as the notorious “Middle Passage” because of the terrible conditions on board slave ships, this migration involved at least 12 million people and was a major factor in the economic and demographic development of the colonies in the Americas, including the Caribbean region and Latin America, as well as North America. Merchants from Europe and the Americas were responsible for transporting and otherwise subjugating the enslaved Africans, who came from many parts of Africa, but mostly from the coastal regions of Sierra Leone and Guinea, modern Ghana, Nigeria, Angola and Congo—regions known as the upper Guinea coast, the Gold Coast, the Bights of Benin and Biafra, and west central Africa. The enslaved population included large numbers of specific ethnic groups, especially Akan, Gbe, Yoruba, Igbo, Ibibio, Kongo, and other Bantu-speaking people from west central Africa. Because of this concentration, many features of African culture, including religion, cuisine, and music, were transferred to the Americas and had a profound impact on the cultural amalgamation and transformation that occurred in the Americas, at least until the middle of the nineteenth century, when the transatlantic trade in slaves came to an end as a result of international pressure and the eventual emancipation of the enslaved population.

## A defining migration

The transatlantic movement of enslaved Africans to the different parts of the Americas was the defining migration of the Western Hemisphere after 1492, influencing all parts of the Atlantic world, from western Europe to the Pacific shores of the Americas. The resulting migration created the African Diaspora, as it has become known. The settlement of Africans and the history of their descendants included many people who were in fact of mixed racial background, incorporating people of European and Amerindian background, and more recently people of Asian background as well. Between 1500 and 1860, about 12 million people are known to have left the shores of Africa destined for the Americas, and to a much lesser extent to Europe, although not everyone made it alive, and some died soon after arrival. Despite heavy loss of life during what has been called the “Middle Passage,” many more Africans crossed the Atlantic than Europeans. The transportation of enslaved Africans constituted the largest single migration of people before the middle of the nineteenth century. From the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries, the great majority of people moving from the Old World to the New World were black people. When gender is taken into consideration, then it can be said that far more black girls and women were forcibly taken to the Americas than the number of European girls and women who migrated, at least before the middle of the nineteenth century. It follows, therefore, that the immigrant women who mothered America were disproportionately of African descent, and that they came under conditions of slavery, and not voluntary migration.

While there is considerable debate over attempts to estimate the number of enslaved Africans who crossed the Atlantic, the broad parameters of this massive demographic movement are well understood, in large part because of a concerted effort of scholars to track every voyage that took Africans to the Americas (Eltis, Behrendt, Richardson, and Klein, 1999—it should be noted that this database is being expanded; also see Eltis, 2001). W. E. B. Du Bois recognized the basic problem of estimating the number of people in his pioneering Harvard dissertation of 1895 (Du Bois, 1895). Subsequently Philip D. Curtin reviewed the stereotypes and guesses that had characterized the study of the slave migration, demonstrating the possibilities of reasonably accurate estimates, despite warnings by David Henige of the inevitable difficulties of using incomplete and often inaccurate information (Curtin, 1969; Henige, 1986; also see Inikori, 1981, pp. 10–22). The trade lasted about 400 years, from the late fifteenth century until the middle of the nineteenth century. As shown in Table I, which charts the movement of 11.3 million people of the estimated 12 million who left Africa, it can be seen that the demographic movement was largely confined to the period 1700–1860 with over half (53.8 percent) of all Africans transported across the Atlantic in the eighteenth century, and another 30.6 percent transported in the nineteenth century.

Table I

Slave Exports from Africa: The Atlantic Migration

Period	Number of Enslaved Africans Identified	Percent
1450–1600	409,000	3.6
1601–1700	1,348,000	11.9
1701–1800	6,090,000	53.8
1801–1867	3,466,000	30.6
<b>Total Known Population</b>	11,313,000	

Source: Paul E. Lovejoy, *Transformations in Slavery: A History of Slavery in Africa* (Lovejoy, 2000a, p. 19)

That is, the number of people in the first 200 years or so of this migration was relatively small, with less than four percent of the total number of people moved before 1600, and about 12 percent moved in the seventeenth century, and much of this number transported in the late seventeenth century. The vast majority of enslaved Africans crossed the Atlantic from the last two decades of the seventeenth century through the middle of the nineteenth century, a period of 170 years. Undoubtedly, these estimates will be revised, but it is unlikely that the revisions will alter the conclusion that the overwhelming majority of Africans came to the Americas after 1700.

In the context of the transatlantic migration of enslaved Africans, the size and significance of immigration to North America has to be kept in perspective. For the transatlantic trade as a whole, for an estimated 11.8 million people who were sent into slavery from Africa, less than one twentieth (or five percent) of the total reaching the Americas came to what is now the United States. Ten times as many went to Brazil alone, with the Caribbean islands receiving about the same numbers. Nonetheless, the number of people today who trace African ancestry in the United States is so large that it can seem as if the size of the initial migration was much larger than was actually the case.

In order to understand the movement of such a large population across the Atlantic, it is essential to recognize that it was initiated by European countries, although the migration could not have taken place without the cooperation and full involvement of African countries. Otherwise there would not have been a migration in which there were many more Africans than Europeans in the early centuries of the colonization of the Americas, including North America. Moreover, how else can it be explained that many more African females arrived in the Americas than European women than by looking for African reasons as well as European designs, for it is African women who were most crucial in the demographic growth of the Americas. Among immigrants, African women more likely mothered the generations born in the Americas before the end of the nineteenth century than European women, because there were more African women than European women before the large scale migration of Europeans after the middle of the nineteenth century.

Table II

Proportion of Females among Enslaved Africans Crossing the Atlantic (percent)

Region	1651–1675	1676–1700	1701–1725	1726–1750	1751–1775	1776–1800	1801–1825	1826–1850	1851–1867
Senegambia	–	27.0	31.0	21.3	37.8	31.6	46.8	32.6	–
Sierra Leone	–	23.2	31.9	–	41.4	34.8	32.0	28.1	–
Windward Coast	–	–	–	39.7	38.4	33.0	26.3	25.7	–
Gold Coast	42.7	46.8	32.9	32.2	37.9	34.2	28.1	28.7	–
Bight of Benin	41.3	41.0	36.0	40.8	46.2	34.3	24.3	34.9	27.7
Bight of Biafra	50.3	41.1	48.3	24.6	39.9	42.6	35.0	34.3	–
West Central	–	40.1	26.2	32.8	32.5	35.2	29.1	26.8	24.7
South East Africa	–	–	–	47.3	–	28.5	30.5	19.4	13.2
Origin Unknown	38.5	40.6	34.5	33.6	43.4	30.1	31.3	24.8	27.3
<b>Average</b>	45.0	41.3	33.9	33.8	38.5	45.1	31.2	31.7	24.5

Data derived from: David Eltis, Stephen Behrendt, David Richardson, and Herbert Klein, *The Atlantic Slave Trade: A Database on CD-Rom* (Eltis, et al., 1999)

As Table II demonstrates, there were many more African males taken to the Americas than females, whether women or girls. Slave traders generally tried to get twice as many males as females, but their ability to attain these quotas varied over time and over geographical regions of the African coast. In the earliest periods, when the numbers of Africans crossing the Atlantic were relatively few, the proportion of females was very high, between 41 and 45 percent, but for the first two-thirds of the eighteenth century the proportion was about one-third, and in the nineteenth century it was even less, perhaps 31 percent. In the last quarter of the eighteenth century, when the slave trade was at its height, the proportion of females was about 45 percent, as in the early period (Eltis and Engerman, 1992; Eltis and Engerman, 1993; Geggus, 1989). Moreover, an analysis of where girls and women came from overwhelmingly shows that they were from areas close to the Atlantic coast, especially in the cases of the Bight of Biafra, the Bight of Benin before about 1800, the region of Sierra Leone, and the Angola and Congo regions of west central Africa. Hence the mothers of the generations of blacks born in the Americas usually came from coastal areas of Atlantic Africa rather than from the interior.

## Regional origins of the migration

The regional origins of the enslaved population in Africa are outlined in Table III. The enslaved population came from all parts of the Atlantic coast of Africa, from Senegambia to southern Angola, and some enslaved people came from southeastern Africa, especially in the nineteenth century.

Table III

Regional Origins of Enslaved Africans Destined for the Americas

(Sample size: 7,911,688)

Region	1601–1650	1651–1700	1701–1750	1751–1800	1801–1850	1851–1867
Senegambia	536	17,836	54,714	139,977	30,440	–

Sierra Leone	–	2,834	4,962	132,378	66,076	898
Windward Coast	–	180	9,092	135,653	16,454	–
Gold Coast	82	35,478	155,631	345,886	80,597	–
Bight of Benin	519	134,219	374,509	399,630	209,612	12,795
Bight of Biafra	488	48,897	92,854	581,187	217,488	295
West Central	51,775	45,343	310,203	696,868	898,272	54,665
South East Africa	244	7,289	8,991	38,032	225,947	10,557
Origin Unknown	16,917	106,959	771,812	557,010	691,281	117,747
<b>Total Sample</b>	<b>70,561</b>	<b>399,242</b>	<b>1,781,305</b>	<b>3,027,302</b>	<b>2,436,321</b>	<b>196,957</b>

Data derived from: David Eltis, Stephen Behrendt, David Richardson, and Herbert Klein, *The Atlantic Slave Trade: A Database on CD-Rom* (Eltis, et al., 1999)

Based on records for about eight million people, there are some clear patterns that help to explain the probable cultural and ethnic backgrounds of the displaced population (for a discussion of ethnicity and the origins of enslaved Africans, see Lovejoy, 2002, pp. 9–42; Law, 1997b; Hair, 1967; Hall, 2005; Gomez, 1998; Bühnen, 1993). The most important feature of the demographic structure is the central role played by the west-central African regions of Angola and the Kingdom of Kongo. This region was important very early in the trade, when the numbers of Africans were relatively small by comparison with the period after the late seventeenth century, and west central Africa remained an important source of people until the end of the trade in the nineteenth century. Together, perhaps as many as 40–45 percent of all enslaved Africans came from this region, and since people in this area spoke one or another of the closely related Bantu languages, they shared many cultural features.

The second most important source of slaves was the region of the Bight of Benin (the “Slave Coast” of European accounts but often referred to as the “Mina” coast), stretching westward as far as the Gold Coast. But this area, unlike west central Africa, only became important at the end of the seventeenth century and was associated with the political history of various states in the interior of the Gold Coast and the Bight of Benin, including the Akan states (Akwamu, Asante, for example) and the Gbe states (Ouidah, Allada, and Dahomey). Moreover, by the end of the eighteenth century, large numbers of Yoruba also came from this region, especially as a result of the consolidation of Oyo in the interior. The Bight of Biafra—the region of the Niger River delta and the Cross River estuary—became important in the 1730s and remained a significant source of immigrants for the slave trade for about 100 years. Most of the people of this area were Igbo or spoke Igbo as a second language, although a significant minority of the people were Ibibio.

Other areas of the coast—Senegambia, Sierra Leone, the “Windward” Coast between Sierra Leone and the Gold Coast—were important at specific periods, usually relating to political events in the interior and along the coast. However, the total number of enslaved persons from these parts of western Africa was relatively small by comparison with the Bight of Benin, the Bight of Biafra, and west central Africa. Finally, the enslaved population from southeastern Africa was culturally and linguistically similar to other parts of Bantu Africa. It should be noted that the coastal origins of a large percentage of the enslaved population is unknown. However, circumstantial evidence allows for a reasonably accurate understanding of the ethnic and cultural backgrounds of the enslaved population.

As noted above, the proportion of males and females among the deported population is known with some precision, the ratio of two males for every female being the standard aim of many European slaving firms, although the proportions changed over time and by coastal region. Moreover, it is also possible to know the approximate age composition of the enslaved population. There were many children—meaning those below the age of puberty—but very few infants. As shown in Table IV, the number of children, and especially boys, increased over time, and many of the enslaved during the last decades of the trade were children.

Table IV

Proportion of Children among the Enslaved Africans Crossing the Atlantic (percent)

Region	1651–1675	1675–1700	1701–1725	1726–1750	1751–1775	1776–1800	1801–1825	1826–1850	1851–1867
Senegambia	–	5.4	9.1	12.0	30.2	16.7	25.7	19.7	–
Sierra Leone	–	7.3	6.5	–	34.3	25.5	41.1	41.9	–
Windward Coast	–	–	–	35.3	42.7	24.9	34.5	29.3	–
Gold Coast	6.4	8.8	17.5	15.1	21.4	19.4	38.0	46.2	–
Bight of Benin	6.5	12.3	19.6	26.1	19.3	14.5	22.5	36.1	18.8
Bight of Biafra	12.8	9.7	23.9	18.4	34.3	19.7	29.7	39.3	–
West Central	–	19.8	24.5	32.1	30.4	18.3	41.0	52.9	41.6
South East Africa	–	–	–	–	–	29.6	47.0	62.4	–
Origin Unknown	9.1	18.1	22.9	23.7	27.1	34.5	46.0	29.6	–

<b>Average</b>	10.5	11.3	19.3	22.6	28.8	22.2	42.6	40.7	35.9
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Data derived from: David Eltis, Stephen Behrendt, David Richardson, and Herbert Klein, *The Atlantic Slave Trade: A Database on CD-Rom* (Eltis, et al., 1999)

The proportion of children was relatively small in the early period, before the great expansion in numbers after the end of the seventeenth century, being five to ten percent of the enslaved population for many places in the seventeenth and even the early eighteenth centuries. However, the proportion of children in the nineteenth century from both west central Africa and southeastern Africa was over 40 percent and in the last decades of the trade as high as 60 percent, and the greatest numbers were boys.

## The Middle Passage

Many accounts describe the horrors of the notorious “Middle Passage.” Conditions onboard ship were usually crowded; sickness was a major problem, killing many of the enslaved and the crews of the slave ships as well, and shortages of food and drinking water were chronic. Misjudgments in rations, weather problems, and slave resistance onboard ships could affect the length of the passage and the conditions of the people onboard. The conditions of the Middle Passage are best described by contemporary accounts, including the testimonies for the British Parliamentary Enquiry into the conditions of the slave trade in 1789—see the various testimonies in the *House of Commons Sessional Papers of the Eighteenth Century* (Lambert, 1975). Of the surviving memories, those of Olaudah Equiano (Equiano, 1789/1995) who was enslaved when he was 11 and shipped from the Bight of Biafra in 1754, and Mahommah Gardo Baquaqua (Law and Lovejoy, 2001), who left the Bight of Benin in 1845, are particularly graphic; the fictionalized rendition of the journey by Barry Unsworth in his award-winning novel, *Sacred Hunger*, is also included here (Unsworth, 1992).

Statistics on mortality during the crossing of the Atlantic demonstrate that death rates were very high.

Table V

Mortality among the Enslaved Population of the Middle Passage (Percent)

Region	1601–1650	1651–1675	1676–1700	1701–1725	1726–1750	1751–1775	1776–1800	1801–1825	1826–1850	1851–1867
Senegambia	–	–	11.7	10.5	9.6	14.7	12.2	8.4	9.5	–
Sierra Leone	–	–	14.5	10.0	–	15.9	5.7	6.0	6.3	–
Windward Coast	–	–	–	–	6.0	13.0	4.4	2.5	7.1	–
Gold Coast	–	6.0	22.4	14.1	16.0	14.2	8.0	6.1	11.1	–
Bight of Benin	–	22.8	23.4	16.3	15.3	15.3	8.8	5.8	7.3	10.1
Bight of Biafra	–	–	32.9	35.3	42.1	22.8	14.5	16.0	15.8	–
West Central	29.2	–	13.3	13.6	10.7	9.3	7.0	7.6	6.9	13.1
South East Africa	–	–	–	26.0	–	–	27.5	21.0	13.9	30.4
Origin Unknown	16.4	17.7	27.2	13.6	18.5	14.1	15.7	16.5	22.8	20.6
<b>Average</b>	26.2	20.3	21.7	15.8	14.5	14.2	9.9	10.0	9.4	16.1

Data derived from: David Eltis, Stephen Behrendt, David Richardson, and Herbert Klein, *The Atlantic Slave Trade: A Database on CD-Rom* (Eltis, et al., 1999)

As revealed in Table V, the percentage of slaves onboard ship who died fluctuated considerably, depending upon the fortunes of individual ships, the part of the African coast from which the enslaved came, and the period under consideration. In general, death rates declined over time, as European slaving firms introduced some measures to lower the incidence of death—in the interest of profits, of course, because dead slaves were worth nothing. Death rates declined from approximately 26 percent of the people on the ships in the first half of the seventeenth century to 15 percent or so for much of the eighteenth century, declining to 10 percent or less at the height of the trade in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Death rates increased again at the end of the slave trade because of efforts to stop the trade and the extra pressure that put on slave merchants to get their human cargoes to the Americas. The Bight of Biafra and southeastern Africa sustained the highest death rates, in part because of the much longer voyages that were necessary to take slaves from these regions to the Americas. As can be seen from Table VI, the length of voyages varied considerably, but again, trips became shorter as time passed, and there were improvements in ship design and construction that made for faster sailing times.

Table VI

Length of the “Middle Passage” (days and half days)

Region	1651–1675	1676–1700	1701–1725	1726–1750	1751–1775	1776–1800	1801–1825	1826–1850	1851–1867
Senegambia	–	43.5	47.5	41.5	54.5	42.5	52.5	36.5	–

Sierra Leone	–	55.5	45.5	74.5	58	43	45.5	40.5	–
Windward Coast	–	–	54.5	87	65	49.5	44	47	–
Gold Coast	–	82	68.5	94	85	67.5	48.5	30.5	–
Bight of Benin	100.5	91	84	107	120	89	42	36	45
Bight of Biafra	166	89	87	117.5	83.5	66	48	42	–
West Central	165	82	69	70.5	68	58	39	34	46
South East Africa	–	–	–	–	146	121	78.5	62	75
Origin Unknown	–	65.5	82	91.5	85	66	52	46	64
<b>Average</b>	133	78	74.5	87	80.5	64	51	39.5	49

Data derived from: David Eltis, Stephen Behrendt, David Richardson, and Herbert Klein, *The Atlantic Slave Trade: A Database on CD-Rom* (Eltis, et al., 1999)

In the second half of the seventeenth century, it took an average of 133 days to cross the Atlantic from Africa, while in the first half of the eighteenth century it usually took 75–80 days, and then only 50–65 days in the last part of the century. In the period 1820–1850, the time was reduced to 40–50 days. The voyages from the Bight of Biafra in the period 1730s–1750s took almost 120 days, while traveling from southeastern Africa in the second half of the eighteenth century could take up to 146 days. The longer individuals were on the slave ships, in the terrible conditions that prevailed, the more likely they would die (for a discussion of mortality, see Klein and Engerman, 1997; Cohn, 1985; Curtin, 1968; Miller, 1980; Miller, 1988a; Miller, 1988b; Sheridan, 1981; Behrendt, 1993; Morgan, 1997).

Because many more female Africans crossed the Atlantic than European women, the “new” societies of the Americas, sometimes called “creole,” were largely African in demographic structure. Even when the African component was not dominant, it was usually strong. In North America, the settlement of Europeans and Africans overlapped and were complementary with each other, but even so, the number of African women was still significant in terms of the impact on how they gave birth to the new generations. And it must be remembered that the Native American population, although suffering demographic loss of enormous proportions, nonetheless also contributed to the “new” societies of the Americas. Furthermore, people of African and Native American origins intermingled, generating composite and dynamic communities that owed little if anything to European influence. Most important, these migrations and the intermingling of populations involved individuals; they were people whose history, sometimes even on the individual level, can be known. The scale of the migration, and the tremendous suffering and the terrible destruction it entailed, should not disguise the importance of the individual experiences that went into the construction of the African diaspora and hence the development of the countries and societies of the Americas.

Enslaved Africans, therefore, were essential in the settling of the Americas after the demographic upheaval caused by the European conquest of the Americas. The movement of people of African descent to the Americas was a central dynamic of the resettlement of the Americas after the disastrous decline in the Native American population. As a slave migration, the African exodus was based on coercion and was not voluntary. The reliance on coercion and the perpetual threat of violence defined the African American experience within a colonial, exploitive setting. Africans, and their descendants, were subjected to layers of colonialism and victimization, being forcibly moved from Africa to the Americas and required to remain in the Americas as slaves for generations. Despite this oppression, the enslaved population managed to resist and otherwise survive bondage in numerous ways, from open revolt to sabotage to apparent collaboration. Individuals found ways to express themselves, and despite the oppressive conditions, Africans and their descendants reestablished old practices and formulated new communities in which religious expression, music, and folklore had a prominent role, prompting a series of cultural renaissances in Brazil, Cuba, and elsewhere.

## Effects of migration on the Americas

Based on coercion, the slave trade was a dynamic force in the development of colonialism in the Americas. The migration of Europeans, especially from England, France, Spain, and Portugal, and involving Catholics and Protestants, Christians and Jews, determined who would be sent to the Americas and therefore set the parameters of the African migration. At the time, people of European stock controlled all of the Americas but almost no parts of Africa, except in coastal Angola and Cape Town, South Africa. The principal population movements were across the Atlantic, and the settlement of the colonial territories in the Americas was by immigrants from the Old World, both Europe and Africa. The colonialism that emerged as a result of the international slave trade differed from the later colonial period in Africa. In the era of the international slave trade, European countries did not occupy Africa itself but instead purchased enslaved individuals and transported them to the Americas. That is, the slave trade enabled Europeans to take foreign peoples and forcibly resettle them as slaves.

The forced migration of Africans across the Atlantic was part of an important historical development that resulted in the consolidation of a single “world” around the Atlantic, including western Europe, western Africa, the Caribbean islands, and mainland North and South America. In its broadest outline, the emergence of this Atlantic world led to the dominance of Europe and the industrialization of northwestern Europe. Africans provided much of the labor for this emerging world order, especially in the production of tropical and cash crops and also in mining gold and silver, and in the transportation associated with producing these commodities. Slave labor was the mechanism by which those in political power and with access to economic resources could further amass wealth and influence. While some African merchants and political officials benefited from their cooperation in this concentration of wealth, in general wealth ultimately flowed into the hands of the political and economic elites of Europe, and the benefits to African merchants and officials were incidental. Hence the overwhelming impact of involvement in the rise of the modern Atlantic world was negative for Africa—a loss of population, particularly the able-bodied, and relatively marginal commercial gains for a small elite.

The movement of enslaved Africans to North America was part of a broader context of African migration in the Atlantic world and the emergence of what has been called “Atlantic Africa” or the “Black Atlantic”—for the initial conception, see Paul Gilroy’s *The Black Atlantic* (Gilroy, 1993). The experiences of African Americans in North America had similarities and differences from the broader history of the “Black Atlantic,” notably in relation to the origins of people and the timing of their arrival and therefore the nature of the cultural and social impact of Africans on the development of North America. Although the North American experience of Africans and their descendants was unique in time and place, enslaved Africans were also common in the Islamic world, including the Sahara, North Africa, and the Middle East. They were found on the islands of the Indian Ocean, as well as in Persia and Muslim India, and they were known throughout Europe, as far as Russia. These markets for enslaved Africans depended upon commercial networks into Africa that enabled the evacuation of the enslaved and the importation of commodities needed for the exchange. The internal political and social conditions within the continent of Africa allowed the enslavement of people and their sale and exploitation, whether locally or through export to distant lands. That the international slave trade to North America was part of the much larger slave trade, therefore, must be kept in mind in assessing the impact of slavery on Africa and Africans. Moreover, the role of Indian textiles, cowrie shells as a currency, and the relationship between Hispanic America and Asia in the flow of silver, raise questions about the extent to which the Atlantic world was part of the whole world.

The first encounters between western Europe and western Africa set the stage for the development of the Atlantic slave trade. We can trace the origins of the Atlantic trade to the fifteenth century, and the movement of Portuguese ships down the Atlantic coast of Africa in an effort to bypass Muslim-dominated North Africa and access gold, spices, and other commodities wanted in Europe. Atlantic trade grew out of the confrontation between Christian Europe and Islamic North Africa and the Middle East, which led to maritime discoveries and technological improvements in shipping that made the Atlantic more easily navigable. For the first 100–150 years of European trade on the Atlantic coast of Africa, the slave trade was marginal, both in terms of the number of enslaved people who were taken to Europe and then, after the middle of the sixteenth century, increasingly to the Americas. Initially, Portuguese shipping was involved in the transport of a variety of trade commodities, and enslaved Africans were only one of these. Other European countries, especially England and the Netherlands, became involved early, but primarily as pirates preying on Portuguese shipping and raiding the mainland of Africa. Early concentration of European activity was confined to Senegambia (in the interior in the regions of Bure and Bambuhu) and also on the Gold Coast because of the presence of gold. The Portuguese also developed commercial and diplomatic relations with the Kingdom of Benin and the Kingdom of Kongo, initially on the basis of equality, and only after considerable time was this relationship transformed. The Kingdom of Kongo, which became Christian, was tied to and eventually undermined by Portugal and the infectious spread of slave trading, while the Kingdom of Benin moved to restrict Portuguese influence and limited the extent of the slave trade.

## Organization of the slave trade

The organization of the trade changed over the course of time but can be divided into three periods: 1450–1650, 1650–1807, and 1807–1867. The first period was formative and dominated by the Portuguese. The second period, from the middle of the seventeenth century until the abolition of the slave trade in 1807 by Britain and in 1808 by the United States, witnessed the rise of the plantation economies of the Caribbean, and was dominated first by the Dutch and then the French and the British. This was the period of greatest and most extensive exploitation of enslaved African labor. In the final period, after British and American abolition, enslaved Africans went primarily to Cuba, Puerto Rico, and Brazil. The slave trade continued among the islands in the Caribbean, and within the United States, after the ending of the “legal” transatlantic slave trade, and hence the demographic impact of the trade continued well into the nineteenth century, even though direct arrivals of enslaved Africans from Africa was confined almost entirely to Cuba, Puerto Rico, and Brazil.

The Portuguese dominated the first period. Some slaves were moved along the shores of western Africa, for retention and use within Africa, and some were taken to Portugal and Spain. Already by the 1490s, before Columbus reached the Caribbean, one tenth of the population of Lisbon, then one of the largest cities in Europe, was of African origin. Other slaves were taken to islands off the African shore, including the Madeiras, the Cape Verde, and especially the island of São Thomé, where the Portuguese established sugar plantations using enslaved labor on a scale that foreshadowed the development of plantation slavery in the Americas. Enslaved Africans were already being taken to the Americas; they were part of every expedition into the regions that became the Spanish colonies, and after the 1540s they were taken to Portuguese Brazil to grow sugar, as they had been doing on São Thomé. The Spanish used Africans to grow sugar on Hispaniola, and to mine for gold as well; and they were forced to drain the shallow lakes of the Mexican plateau, completing the subjugation of the Aztecs.

Sugarcane was introduced into Hispaniola and then Brazil in the sixteenth century, thereby jumping the Atlantic as part of an exchange of food crops and commodities that increased demand for tropical goods and therefore the need for labor. In all these activities, enslaved Africans were used as a principal source of labor, as well as sometime military employment. The transfer of sugarcane was the most important development and would lead to the enslavement of millions of Africans, but many other crops, including indigo, rice, tobacco, coffee, cocoa, and cotton were introduced, with varying degrees of success but always with the input of enslaved African labor. However, before the middle of the seventeenth century, the total number of enslaved Africans that were taken away from western Africa was relatively small, especially in comparison with the great expansion in slavery thereafter. Even in this early period, however, the number of enslaved Africans being forced to cross the Atlantic was greater, by far, than the numbers of Europeans voluntarily doing so.

In this early period, before about 1650, the regions in Africa that were affected by the demand for slaves were relatively restricted, and consequently the corresponding impact was limited. Nonetheless, the impact was real, and it was connected with important developments in western Africa. Slaves came from the far-western coast, in the area of the Senegal and Gambia Rivers, often referred to as “Senegambia.” Culturally and linguistically unified via Islam and Manding culture and language, the region had an ancient and glorious history, centered on the ancient kingdom of Ghana and the medieval empires of Mali and Songhay. The early history of Atlantic Africa is closely tied with the history of these empires in the interior of Senegambia, because of the gold trade. West African gold was the principal source of gold for the Islamic lands of North Africa and also for western Europe before the exploitation of gold from the Americas after approximately 1500. In West Africa, gold reached the Mediterranean and hence Europe from Songhay, having been obtained in the headwaters of Senegambia, in Bure and Bambuhu, and also in the Volta basin, south of Jenne and Timbuktu. The arrival of the Portuguese on the Gold Coast in the 1470s tapped these inland sources and gave the coast its name, while the other sources of gold were accessible to the Portuguese along the Senegambian coast. Gold, not slaves, was the quest, but any trade was developed, including malaguetta pepper that would not last long as a delicacy of the European market (it was replaced instead by black pepper from Asia).

By the middle of the seventeenth century, the demand for labor in the Americas was expanding rapidly, and this demand increasingly meant enslaved African labor. The corresponding impact on Africa was intensified as more parts of western Africa were brought into the orbit of transatlantic slavery. This second period lasted until 1807–1808, when the British and Americans abolished the slave trade, thereby beginning a period of contraction in the use of slave labor and the eventual emancipation of those in slavery in the Americas. Inevitably, this demand, and the opportunities provided by attempting to supply that demand, resulted in numerous innovations, encouraged opportunists and entrepreneurs, and resulted in deceptions and barbarities, upon which the slave trade ultimately rested.

There were African collaborators in the slave trade, in addition to the elites and thieves who managed to enslave people in wars and through judicial actions and corruption. Merchants made money from slavery, and they invested in slaves, even marrying or taking as concubines women they had bought or otherwise acquired as gifts. These profiteers were collaborators in the international slave trade, relying on enslavement and its threat as mechanisms of social control in hierarchical regimes dominated by Muslim and non-Muslim men. There were religious brotherhoods in the Islamic lands and in diasporic Muslim communities and other secret societies of the most powerful, which were able to interpret their actions and decrees in religious form that related to ancestral rights and the domain of gods. Wherever the transatlantic slave touched western Africa, there were men, and a few women, ready to profit through deception and clever organization. Control of trade was a serious issue, tied to political control.

The final period of the transatlantic trade in humans lasted until the 1860s. In this period, Brazil, Cuba, and Puerto Rico were the principal destinations for enslaved Africans, since slaves could no longer legally be brought into North America, British or French colonies in the Caribbean, or the independent countries of Spanish America. Despite this restricted market, the numbers of enslaved Africans did not decline until the late 1840s. The trade raged on, despite efforts of British anti-slave-trade patrols and the efforts of abolitionists to expose abuses and thereby close the trade down. The dominant issues in Africa related the jihads of West Africa and the resulting turmoil in the affected coastal regions as well as the impact of the demand for slaves on the turbulent polities of Bantu Africa, both inland from Angola and from Mozambique. This later impact affected the distribution of children and youth, with the propulsion of boys into the external trade, largely to Brazil but also to Cuba, and the retention of girls in the rapidly expanding households of specific “ethnic” groups such as the Cokwe and Yao.

As this overview of the three periods of the slave trade suggests, there were distinct national trades, in which specific western European countries dominated or otherwise established a niche. Moreover, within the various European countries one or two ports tended to monopolize the trade, which demonstrates a concentration in insider knowledge about trade, since the principal merchants knew each other. Similarly, on the African side, most slaves were traded in only a few ports. Of these, Luanda in Angola, Ouidah (Whydah) in the Bight of Benin, Bonny in the Bight of Biafra, and the adjacent trade “castles” at Koromatin and Winneba on the Gold Coast, stand out as the points of departure for the greatest number of enslaved Africans bound for the Americas; these points probably accounted for at least one-third of all Africans sent to the Americas. Other major ports included Old Calabar in the Bight of Biafra; Benguela in southern Angola; Cabinda, to the north of the Congo River; and Lagos, important in the Bight of Benin in the nineteenth century. These ports of departure accounted for more than half of all the enslaved Africans who were sent to the Americas.

The trade, and the way in which the transport of enslaved Africans to the Americas was funneled through relatively few ports that were controlled by relatively few merchants, whether in Europe, Africa, or the Americas, has important implications. The experiences of individuals, including what they were exposed to, the types of information to which they had access, and the cultural and personal bonds that were established and recognized even before boarding ships for the Americas must be considered. While enslaved individuals came from widely different backgrounds, and the number of “ethnic groups” and identifying markers were extensive, certain ethnicities and languages, usually in pidgin and creolized forms, as well as religion, were maintained, sometimes exaggerated and manipulated, but always interpreted in the context of adjustments to slave life in the Americas.

## **Patterns of cultural continuity**

These patterns of cultural and historical continuity and rupture can be discerned because people reached the Americas as commodities. The records of this trade are extensive and revealing. There were various national companies, sanctioned by royal decree and parliamentary order; there were private companies; and there were merchants who could turn into pirates. A portion of the trade was nominally covered by the Spanish *asiento*, which gave monopoly rights to companies to transport slaves to the Spanish colonies. The trade involved much smuggling, as well as the fulfillment of contracts. The English trade was handled through the Royal African Company, but interlopers undermined the monopoly. Ships from Bristol and especially Liverpool came to dominate the British trade in the eighteenth century; they not only challenged the interests of the Royal African Company and London in the establishments on the Gold Coast and in the Gambia, but the new merchants also opened up markets, especially in the Bight of Biafra and the northern Angola coast. Each country, and each port, experimented in an effort to win a share of the trade. Sometimes this competition required the maintenance of trading depots, often called factories or trading castles, which was the case on the Gold Coast and in the Bight of Benin, as well as in the less important ports along the upper Guinea coast and in Senegambia. The rule of thumb seems to have been the availability or likely access to gold. European establishments were not found in the Niger Delta or the Cross River, both in the Bight of Biafra, where gold was not available.

The credit that ran the trade tended to flow outward from Europe; that is, European merchants came to West Africa, and in order to buy enslaved people, they had to do it by providing credit. This credit was on goods advanced in lieu of payment in slaves. There were considerable risks involved in trade. In the first place, there were risks because the commodity in question was human, and humans had agency that could result in flight, assassination, suicide, or other calamity for the owner. People could disappear with the goods and never produce what was stated in the contract—slaves. There were also risks because trade was across political and cultural frontiers in which recourse to courts and governments in the event of commercial dishonesty and loss was less than perfect. There was no international court or diplomatic system that could handle abuses of trade, let alone the violations of human rights involved in slavery itself.

The trade was important in terms of the development of modern, capitalist institutions and practices, from modern banking to insurance. Lloyd’s of London became a major insurance company in the course of doing business with slave traders, as well as anyone else willing to

pay/play the rates. One of the best sources for knowledge of the British slave trade is the records kept by Lloyd's. Technical advances and increasingly sophisticated commercial and banking practices were developed in the slave ports of Europe—Lisbon, Amsterdam, London, Nantes, Liverpool, and Bristol. The merchants who were involved were centered at the major European ports, where credit flowed and the commodities of trade were available. These merchants in the European ports came from a variety of backgrounds themselves, featuring upstart entrepreneurs, diasporic Huguenots, Jews, “New Christians” (Jews or Moors recently converted to Christianity), and Scots. Individuals moved into the margins, hoping to survive and make money. There was a fine line between piracy, entrepreneurship, kidnapping, and slave driving.

In order to guarantee that commercial contracts would be honored, European merchants resorted to a variety of measures, some of them experimental and sometimes tied to African institutions and practices that shaped the commercial exchange in ways that were not recognized in other parts of the Atlantic world. There were local taxes and customs that had to be honored. For example, in some places, such as Old Calabar and in the minor ports of the upper Guinea coast, European ship captains accepted human beings, often relatives of local merchants and officials, as collateral for credit; these were human pawns that could be enslaved if debts were not paid (Lovejoy and Richardson, 2001). In other places, such as in Angola and Senegambia, European merchants married or otherwise cohabited with local women, who sometimes amassed considerable fortunes as agents and merchants in their own right. Their offspring, mulatto and sometimes using Portuguese or other European names, became an intermediate class of merchants along the coast, especially concentrated along the upper Guinea coast as far as Senegambia and in Luanda, Benguela, and their commercial outposts in the interior of Angola.

The principal goods of trade sent to Africa in exchange for slaves can be divided into three groups: items used as money, such as cowries, strips of cloth, iron bars, copper bracelets called “manilas,” and even silver coins and gold; consumer goods, especially textiles, alcohol, and a great range of items used as jewelry; and military wares. In general, these imports did not replace African production but rather supplemented output. The import of money increased circulation in the market and therefore tended to promote trade in all goods, not just slaves. Since many of the monies were in fact commodities that had other uses as well, their commodity value could also be realized. Hence, cloth strips, imported via Europe from India, were used as currency in Senegambia, along with gold and other mediums, but the cloth could be and was made into clothing. Local textile production was not undermined; people just had more cloth. The demand for textiles seems to have been virtually inexhaustible, and the more variety the better. Similarly, iron was fashioned into small hoe-shaped pieces of money in the interior of Sierra Leone, but the money could be combined and used to make real hoes or any other iron implement. Even cowries could be strung into necklaces and used to adorn hair, costumes, and baskets. But their principal use remained the role as money, which was acquired through the exchange for slaves.

Military wares, especially firearms, were sometimes important, especially in the nineteenth century and in places such as the Gold Coast in the eighteenth century. However, the importance of the guns in enslavement can be exaggerated. Before the nineteenth century, firearms were not always that effective, especially in tropical areas where the problem of keeping powder dry was serious. Firearms were important on the Gold Coast in the crucial wars of the eighteenth century that enslaved many people and eventually resulted in the political ascendancy of Asante. Firearms were not significant in the rise of Oyo as the dominant slaving power in the interior of the neighboring area inland from the Bight of Benin. Oyo relied on its cavalry and the relative military advantage horses gave in a region in which horses had to be imported from further inland via Oyo's commercial partners. The export of slaves enabled the import of money, in the form of cowries, and consumer goods, especially textiles, for reexport inland for horses. Imported textiles did not replace or otherwise undermine local production of textiles, which was a major industry throughout the interior and often used imported fabrics as a source of thread for embroidery on locally produced cloth.

Alcohol was an important item of trade in Angola, and it was a luxury almost everywhere. Although Muslims were not a significant market, and indeed shunned alcohol, the coastal elites wanted Brazilian rum and French brandies. These were even sent into the interior but usually diluted with distance. Nonetheless, as with many textiles, alcohol was an imported item for conspicuous consumption. There were local alternatives, but the issue was not one of substitution, only cumulative effect. As with textiles, where people wore more clothing if they could afford it, other people drank more if they could afford it.

The slave trade was demand driven; people who could afford it wanted labor and did not care how the labor was obtained. The trade was also greed driven. Individuals became involved because they could benefit, from theft, plunder, kidnapping, ransoming, and the sale of humans as commodities. Such an approach to acquisition means that people took advantage of political misfortune, religious differences, legal technicalities, economic crisis, and outright callousness to exploit individuals who were helpless. Such a realization returns us to the specific circumstances of enslavement, the events and places where the reduction to slavery was achieved.

The specific events in Africa that resulted in the transportation of Africans to the Americas and the corresponding methods of enslavement fall into different categories. One category involves war, slave raiding, and political struggle, which probably accounted for the great majority of those who were enslaved and taken to the Americas. Among the most important wars that resulted in massive enslavement, including the export of war prisoners to the Americas, the ransoming of prisoners, and the use of captives as slaves within Africa itself, included the Akan wars of the late seventeenth and first half of the eighteenth centuries that grew out of a power struggle among various states in the hinterland of the Gold Coast, including Akwamu, Akyem, Denkyira, Fante, and Asante, with Asante emerging as the dominant state. Similarly, the consolidation of Oyo as an imperial power after 1650 involved wars with the Bariba and Nupe to the north and other Yoruba states to the south (see, for example, van Dantzig, 1975; Law, 1978). War also affected the balance of power among the various Gbe groups, leading to the emergence of Allada as a small kingdom on the lagoons behind the coast, and the rise of Dahomey in the early eighteenth century. Dahomey defeated Allada in 1724, occupied the port of Ouidah in 1727, and was in turn forced to pay tribute to Oyo thereafter. These wars accounted for the deportation of many people along the coast of the Bight of Benin.

The Kongo civil wars that lasted intermittently from about 1680 through 1740 also caused instability that led to the enslavement of many people who were deported to the Americas. One group of victims included the followers of the Antonian martyr, Beatrice of Kongo, who tried to end the civil wars through pacifist protest, but with tragic consequences. Yet another series of wars related to the spread of militant Islam across West Africa began in the Senegambia region in the late seventeenth century. These wars marked the emergence of Futa Jallon as a jihad state in the highlands of modern Guinea and the foundation of Futa Toro on the Senegal River in the late eighteenth century. The jihad movement continued into the nineteenth century, especially with the outbreak of war in 1804 in the Hausa states under the leadership of

Sheikh Usman dan Fodio. These wars in turn exacerbated political tensions in Oyo, which resulted in a Muslim uprising and the collapse of the Oyo state between 1817 and 1833. One of the consequences of this collapse was the migration southward of refugees, the founding of new strongholds, and intensified warfare among those attempting to resurrect or otherwise replace the collapsed Oyo state. The most notable of these new centers (Ibadan, Abeokuta, and Ijebu) periodically engaged in hostilities even after the end of the transatlantic trade in slaves in the 1860s.

In addition to these major upheavals, there are many examples of more localized fighting and warfare all along the Atlantic coast, and sometimes European powers intervened on one side or another, often with the aim of obtaining slaves directly in the encounters or indirectly through the political rewards expected for military assistance. In Angola, moreover, Portugal established a permanent colony at Luanda in the 1590s, and later at other points along the Angolan coast, especially at Benguela in the south. The permanent military presence of Portugal was reflected in alliances and joint military ventures with allies in the interior, with the result that Portugal—more than any other European country—was actually directly involved in the enslavement of Africans. Unlike in Angola, the other wars that produced captives for the slave trade almost always involved African rivals, with little if any direct European participation. Nonetheless, the importation of firearms was an important contributing factor to the intensity of many of the wars and therefore must be recognized as a factor in the increased numbers of people who were enslaved, especially after 1700 (Miller, 2001, pp. 21–69; Thornton, 1980).

There were also people enslaved as a result of judicial and religious sanctions and punishment that removed criminals and social misfits, or those deemed to be so, from society through enslavement and banishment. In many places people were used as pawns in credit arrangements, and while those people being held were almost always protected from enslavement by relatives and customary practices that guaranteed the safety of such dependents, there were nonetheless situations in which the arrangements were not honored, and pawned individuals, especially children, were “sold” or otherwise removed from the watchful eyes of relatives and communities. Similarly, there are cases of relatives and other members of communities who for one reason or another were deemed rebellious or uncooperative and were therefore expelled from their homes through enslavement.

Inevitably, there were serious issues of trying to justify enslavement in Africa. People tried to protect their own communities, and various governments and institutions developed means and policies to limit the impact of slavery. Kin were particularly worried about enslavement through kidnapping, which in most places was considered illegal. Also, Muslims were concerned about protecting the freedom of their co-religionists; those who had been born free were supposed to remain so, although that was not always the case. Sometimes captives were ransomed and thereby avoided enslavement, but such actions only encouraged the taking of prisoners in order to obtain the ransom. People, whether Muslims or not, tried to safeguard their own but tragically were not always able to do so.

As a result of these pressures, the slave trade, including the transatlantic trade especially, had a dramatic impact on Africa, which can be seen on the personal, family, communal, and continental levels. Various biographical accounts have survived that demonstrate the trauma of enslavement and the corresponding impact on the families of the enslaved. Mahommah Gardo Baquaqua, who was enslaved in the interior of the Bight of Benin in the early 1840s, was ransomed once by his family, only to be enslaved another time, spirited to the coast, and sold to Brazil. His older brother had earlier been enslaved, but he was more fortunate and was also ransomed by his kin. The impact is clear: it cost this family a lot of money to protect its own, and then not fully successfully. Similarly, in many places in western Africa, the level of insecurity that could lead to enslavement increased in response to the pressures of the transatlantic trade in enslaved Africans.

The demographic impact of the slave trade on Africa was severe, especially in those areas most fully drawn into the orbit of transatlantic slavery. The death and destruction from war and kidnapping was extensive, as far as can be deduced from the examples that have survived. The old and the very young were often killed or left to starve in the famines that often followed the destruction of military action. Moreover, among those who were enslaved or held for ransom, mortality rates appear to have been high, because people were force-marched long distances. Since many of those who were enslaved were destined to remain in Africa or to be sent across the Sahara to North Africa rather than to the Americas, the full impact of the slave trade and slavery in Africa was even more severe.

It must be emphasized that slavery intrinsically calls forth resistance. Distinctions can be made between moments of open rebellion and the apparent willingness to acquiesce in servitude to avoid punishment or to obtain minor rewards as inducements for appropriate behavior. Resistance also includes expressions of community and coordinated activity, whether expressed through music, dance, religion, belief, food, or language. Resistance implies agency and identity and therefore highlights the individual and group responses to slavery. In North America, the experiences of enslaved Africans and their descendants manifested resistance through flight, uprising, and murder. The African population coalesced around several religious traditions that had been transferred from Africa and succumbed to the Christian evangelical movements of the late eighteenth century that swept England and North America. The presence of *obeah*, *vodun*, and even Islam reflect the persistence of African traditions in the face of slavery. Musically, there can be no question of the enduring African heritage related to the expressions of the oppressed, their religion, and culture.

## Migration

The causes of the migration can be traced to internal African political and social conditions in those parts of western Africa where the enslaved trace their origins. Of course, the European demand for labor for the development of the modern Atlantic world in which European countries, especially Portugal, Spain, Britain, France, and the Netherlands, transported enslaved Africans to their American colonies, was essential. Without that demand, there could not have been a transatlantic slave trade, but there also had to be a willingness to sell, which was related to politics, greed, and power. But that does not explain the willingness of European countries to allow the exploitation of people who were perceived to be different and to allow a racist ideology, nor does it absolve those who participated in the exploitation of people as slaves for any reason and whatever the conditions. However, to understand how this happened, one must examine the conditions in Africa.

First, let us look at the internal political and social conditions in Atlantic Africa, which requires a brief historical overview of the sections of the African coast from where the enslaved traced their origins, from Senegambia in the northwest, south along the Guinea coast to the Bights of Benin and Biafra, and south further along the Loango coast to Kongo and Angola. The political map reveals a dominant pattern for this

broad stretch of coast from the sixteenth to the mid nineteenth centuries—the whole period of the transatlantic slave trade—and that pattern is one of small, centralized states and local federations that governed through secret societies. Even the largest states, such as Asante and Oyo, were reasonably small by modern standards. The consequence of this political fragmentation was the failure to generate methods of government to resist the slave trade. Personal gain and the interests of a small elite supported the slave trade. It is not surprising that the slave trade was closely associated with the political wars of these states and benefited the commercial elites that dominated the trade routes, ports, and secret societies of the federated regions where centralized state institutions were lacking.

The migrating populations can be identified as having their homes in western Africa, from a broad belt along the Atlantic from Senegambia to Angola. The overwhelming majority of enslaved Africans came from two stretches of coast; about nine out of every ten people came either from the region of modern Ghana through Nigeria, known then as the Gold Coast, the Slave Coast or the Bight of Benin, and the Bight of Biafra, or they came from the coast to the north and south of the Congo River in what is today Congo and Angola. There were some enslaved Africans who came from what are now Sierra Leone, Guinea, Senegal, and the interior regions behind the coast, but they were a small minority of the total migration. The presence of Muslims, often known as Mandingo, is widely known, as is also the presence of Bambara in Louisiana, and rice cultivators from upper Guinea in lowland Carolina, who were brought from the upper Guinea coast and Sierra Leone.

## **Africans in North America**

Hence, the origins of the North American population of Africans can be traced to all the regions of Atlantic Africa. Aside from Mandingos and Bambaras, there were Igbo from the Bight of Biafra who were found in the upper South, while Kongo from the Angola/Congo region were found in all parts of North America. Because of the demographic study of the slave trade, we now have a relatively clear idea of when people came to North America from Africa, from where on the African coast they left, their numbers, the ports of disembarkation, and the relative proportions of men, women, and children and how these figures changed over time. From such information and its correlation with known historical events and contexts in Atlantic Africa, it is possible to impute and sometimes to substantiate through recorded experiences of individuals, the processes and, indeed, the events that account for the actual people who were enslaved and sold to the Americas. Biographical material exists in many forms and is scattered throughout the diaspora. North America stands out because of the richness of available texts—narratives by and about individuals, some of whom were actually born in Africa, but more often were of the second generation, but who nonetheless continue traditions from their African background.

The principal conditions shaping the forced migration of those who ended up as the black slaves of America related to violence and the threat of violence, from the time of enslavement until death, whether along a trade route, onboard a slave ship, or on a plantation in the Americas. Violence could also, and often did, assume sexual dimensions, rape being common. Sexual violence was extended in Islamic lands to castration, but there was essentially no difference in the ways in which women, and boys onboard ship, were treated—the sexual and personal identity of the individual was denied and only existed for the pleasure of the slave owner or his proxy. Avoidance of violence and resistance to violence were therefore determining characteristics of the responses of the enslaved Africans to the experiences of migration. Individuals attempted to avoid violence through varying degrees of accommodation and co-option that complicates the story of how people resisted bondage.

The types of violence that Africans who were enslaved actually experienced can be classified by context. It appears that a great number of individuals were enslaved in war, either because they were engaged in the actual conflict as soldiers or were civilians captured as the spoils of victory. States and secret societies also organized raids and seizures that resulted in enslavement that suggests degrees and forms of government and hence also can be classified as “political,” since such actions may disguise enforcement of law, collection of taxes, or abuse of public office. Manipulation of law, legal procedure, and religious sanction in the form of enslavement also represents a form of public and hence customary, if not constitutional, will. In some cases, those people held as collateral for a loan were sold into slavery to recover the debt, whether or not this was legally acceptable in the local context. Sometimes people seized in wars or raids were already slaves; often military campaigns allowed the ransoming of captives, which was most likely for those who were free and owned property or who had families who could pay the redemption price.

The forced movement of enslaved Africans was a fundamental component to the economic development of the frontier of European settlement in the Americas. In North America and elsewhere in the Americas, the use of terror was basic to this mechanism of labor supply. Africans went to areas that were developing economically, often leaving in their wake areas of economic dislocation and desolation in Africa that were a result of slave wars. North America was typical in this regard, since African slave labor was central to several of the most important colonies, particularly South Carolina, Virginia, and Maryland and, indirectly, through commerce in other colonies, such as Massachusetts, New York, and Pennsylvania.

The enforced destination of the migrants was to areas where their labor would produce economic development, most importantly to plantations and farms for work in cash-crop agriculture, but also in mining. Africans found themselves in towns and ports as domestic servants; many Africans were urban residents with skilled or semiskilled occupations. They were essential to commerce, serving as porters and teamsters. In eighteenth-century North America, enslaved Africans were concentrated in the agricultural lowlands of South Carolina and Georgia, especially on the Sea Islands, growing rice, lowland cotton, indigo, and other products. In the tidewater region of Virginia and Maryland, they were employed on tobacco farms, while in Louisiana they grew sugarcane. Enslaved Africans and their descendants constituted a sizable portion of the population of New York, Philadelphia, Charleston, and New Orleans, and they were found in numerous towns. Indeed, enslaved Africans were almost everywhere that European settlement was found, so that slaves worked farms and plantations in upstate New York, Rhode Island, and New Jersey, not only in the South. Moreover, any reasonably prosperous family had slaves as domestic servants, whether in Quebec, Boston, Virginia, or New Orleans.

The two most important concentrations of enslaved Africans in North America, the tidewater area of Virginia and Maryland and the lowlands of South Carolina and Georgia, accounted for at least two-thirds of the slaves brought into North America before the end of legal imports of enslaved Africans in 1808 (Anstey, 1975). On the basis of data on the voyages of slave ships, it is possible to assess the scale and direction of this migration.

Table VII

## Origins of Enslaved Africans Shipped to North America

Region of Origin	Carolinas/Georgia	Virginia/Maryland	North America Other	North America
Senegambia	29,139	14,491	7,166	50,786
Sierra Leone	19,899	2,134	720	22,753
Windward Coast	11,029	2,867	401	14,297
Gold Coast	20,263	6,898	1,802	28,963
Bight of Benin	2,971	1,966	1,984	6,921
Bight of Biafra	13,370	28,542	–	41,912
West Central	47,585	11,072	1,629	60,286
South East Africa	1,118	1,347	295	2,760
Origin Unknown	43,921	47,249	8,897	100,067
<b>Total Sample</b>	189,295	116,566	22,894	328,755

Data derived from: David Eltis, Stephen Behrendt, David Richardson, and Herbert Klein, *The Atlantic Slave Trade: A Database on CD-Rom* (Eltis, et al., 1999)

The largest number of Africans in the lowlands of the Carolinas and Georgia came from the Bantu-speaking areas of west-central Africa, representing perhaps one-third of the total number of African immigrants arriving there (34 percent). A substantial number, perhaps 20 percent, came from the area of Senegambia, while the Gold Coast and Sierra Leone each accounted for about 14–15 percent of the total number of enslaved immigrants. There were also substantial numbers of people from the Bight of Biafra and the Windward Coast. By contrast, the greatest number of slaves in the tidewater areas of Virginia and Maryland came from the Bight of Biafra, which accounted for approximately 39 percent of immigrants whose African origins are known. Senegambia accounted for perhaps 21 percent of immigrants to the tidewater, while another 17 percent came from the Bantu regions of west-central Africa. The Gold Coast was also important, with perhaps 10 percent of immigrants coming from there.

### Homelands of immigrants

An examination of the two major importing regions together reveals that 90 percent of the African immigrants in the two major settlement areas came from only four regions in Africa. The largest number came from west-central Africa, where languages and cultures were closely related. Many more of these Africans ended up in the lowlands of the Carolinas and Georgia than in the tidewater, but they were prominent in both regions, representing perhaps 29 percent of all immigrants to both regions. The second largest group of immigrants, approximately 18 percent of African arrivals, came from the Bight of Biafra; these people were mostly Igbo and Ibibio in origins, or in the course of the Atlantic crossing became associated with these predominant groups. While people from the Bight of Biafra were found in both the lowcountry and the tidewater, they were proportionately more numerous in Virginia and Maryland, where they constituted the largest single group. The third largest group, approximately 13 percent, came from the Gold Coast, where Twi was the common language, and most people were identified as Akan. Finally, there was a considerable concentration of people from Sierra Leone, approximately 10 percent of all African immigrants, but they were almost entirely concentrated in the lowlands of the Carolinas and Georgia.

Several distinctive patterns emerge from this demographic profile, although only the broad contours are understood, because the African origins of a substantial number of immigrants, approximately one-third of all immigrants, are not known. Nonetheless, the region of west central Africa stands out; this large region had a population that was closely related in language and culture, often referred to as “Bantu” and incorporating people who spoke Kikongo, Kimbundu, or a similar language. People from west central Africa were heavily represented in the African population of large parts of the Americas, especially Brazil. Hence, North America conformed to this pattern, and it is likely that a significant proportion of arrivals in North America whose origins are not known also came from west central Africa. The predominance of these closely related Bantu-speaking peoples had an important impact on the religion and culture of the enslaved population in North America and elsewhere.

Second, the Senegambia region was prominent in North America, much more so than virtually anywhere else in the Americas, with the possible exception of the small French islands in the Caribbean. Since Senegambia was a region strongly influenced by Islam, more so than any other coastal area of origin for enslaved Africans, there appear to have been more Muslims or people who had been exposed to Islam in North America than anywhere else in the Americas, except for Bahia and other parts of Brazil. The importance of Senegambia was especially pronounced in Louisiana, since many people identified as Bambara and Mandingo went to Louisiana, but they were also clearly present in both the lowcountry of the Carolinas and Georgia and in the tidewater region of Virginia and Maryland. Among those African immigrants who can be identified as coming from Senegambia, adult Muslim males stand out most prominently. Indeed, there are very few references to Muslim women, which reflects what is known about the slave trade in the interior of West Africa, where exports to the coast from the interior were almost entirely males.

Third, the upper South had a considerable concentration of people from the Bight of Biafra, although there were substantial numbers of Biafran immigrants in the lowlands of the Carolinas and Georgia too. It is likely, moreover, that a large portion of the immigrants whose African origins are not known actually came from the Bight of Biafra, since British trade grew substantially in the Bight of Biafra in the

eighteenth century, and Britain was the biggest supplier of slaves to North America, sometimes indirectly through trans-shipments from Jamaica and Barbados. Nonetheless, the size of the population of Igbo and Ibibio origin was substantial, apparently enough to evolve a distinct subculture among the enslaved population. The Bight of Biafra stands out in the demography of the eighteenth-century slave trade because of the relatively high numbers of women in comparison with all other parts of the African coast. Women from the Bight of Biafra were particularly important in giving birth to a new generation in the Americas, in sharp contrast with the virtual lack of women from Muslim areas.

The fourth concentration of peoples included those from Sierra Leone and adjacent parts of the so-called Windward Coast. They were heavily concentrated in the low country and especially in areas of rice cultivation. While there were some people from this stretch of the African coast in the tidewater region, they were relatively few in number and probably not enough to have as strong an impact on culture and change as in the Carolinas and Georgia.

Noticeably absent or of minor importance is the region of the “Slave Coast” —the Bight of Benin—even though this was one of the most important sources of enslaved Africans for the Atlantic crossing. The region included Yoruba, Ewe/Fon/Allada (so-called Gbe languages) and other people brought from the interior, including Muslims, and the fact that almost none of these people were to be found in North America marks an important difference between the origins of Africans in North America and elsewhere. While the Bight of Benin accounts for some immigrants, they are very few by comparison with their substantial importance in Cuba, Trinidad, and Brazil.

Although the demographic figures are revealing in many respects, the statistics alone disguise the odyssey undertaken by each individual who was forced to cross the Atlantic on a slave ship. Ethnic and regional categories can provide a setting in which to examine the slave trade, but the personal histories of individuals are essential in examining the impact of the slave trade and slavery on society, both in Africa and in the Americas. Biography reveals the experience of African Americans as they became part of the diaspora in North America. It is fortunate that autobiographical and biographical accounts have been recorded for several thousand individuals, and while most accounts relate the experiences of individuals in the nineteenth century, there are some accounts of individuals born in Africa in the eighteenth century that inform our understanding of the defining period of the African diaspora. Biography presents the voices of the enslaved, whether born in Africa or not, and such information as can be derived from these accounts can be supplemented with information contained in fugitive-slave advertisements, plantation inventories, and probate records. Biographies provide information on the direct impact of the transatlantic slave trade on people.

The discussion of Muslims is enhanced by several biographies that have survived. For example, Muhammad Kaba Saghanughu of Jamaica lived on one plantation, Spice Grove, from 1777 until his death in 1845. He was the leader of the Muslim community in Jamaica, at least since the 1820s, and was author of an important treatise on prayer that reaffirms the allegiance of the Jamaican Muslims to the Qadiriyya brotherhood. Similar biographical accounts of Muslims have survived from North America, Trinidad, and Brazil.

## Resistance to slavery

Similarly, there are ethnic components to various rebellions and acts of resistance that have to be put in the context of the African background. See, for example, the acts of slave resistance that had clear “ethnic” dimensions, such as the Stono Rebellion, Gabriel’s Rebellion, the Bahia Muslim uprising of 1835, and the St. Domingue revolution, with its Kongo background. Similar “ethnic” connections to resistance existed elsewhere. Therefore, the major characteristics of the international slave trade, and especially the place of North America in that trade, are complex. Because of the scale of the migration, and the complexities of the individual experiences that made up that exodus, it is difficult to summarize. However, with respect to North America, the following points are important:

1. The international slave trade to North America, as between Africa and other parts of the Americas, and indeed including the slave trade in the Indian Ocean and the Islamic world at the same time, treated human beings as commodities, buying and selling individuals like any other property. Unlike in other slave systems, however, racial distinctions were used to keep the enslaved population in bondage in the Americas, with the corresponding development of racialized attitudes and racism.
2. The enslaved Africans brought to North America, as elsewhere in the Americas, were considered to be first and foremost workers, and the degree of power concentrated in the hands of slave owners meant that the enslaved could be worked harder and longer than other laborers. Such exploitation was decidedly to the disadvantage of the health and welfare of the enslaved Africans, who received no wages, minimal clothing and housing, and often had to work overtime to grow food or earn enough to buy food.
3. The degree of power concentrated in the hands of slave owners in North America, as was the case in all slave-based societies, allowed excessive degrees of corporal punishment, the perpetuation of sexual abuse and exploitation, and disregard for kinship, especially in not recognizing relationships arising from paternity. The status of children followed the slave status of the mother, no matter who the father was.
4. Methods of social control were intrinsically associated with racial perceptions, although how racialism developed and how it differed over time and place are important considerations. In North America, any person of identifiable African descent, no matter the degree of “white” ancestry, was deemed “colored,” “Negro,” or “black,” thereby constituting a racial caste, but in other parts of the Americas, racial distinctions were often more complex.
5. The interests of slave owners were in the maximization of profits, which resulted in treating enslaved people as chattel. This treatment was sometimes further mitigated by psychopathic behavior, social perversity, and political expediency that increased the arbitrariness of master–slave relations.

The most enduring consequence of the migration for the migrants themselves and for the receiving communities was the development of racism, which affected the evolution of a sense of an African American community, with its particular cultural manifestations, attitudes, and expressions. The legacy is apparent in music and art, with considerable impact on religion, cuisine, and language. A literary tradition, which began in song and rhythm, is also noteworthy.

There were enduring consequences of the migration on the communities that suffered the loss of population in Africa. Transformations of

society and economy were caused by involvement in enslavement, slave trading, and the use of slaves locally within Africa. Places of refuge for those attempting to escape enslavement were developed on such islands of safety as Ganvie, a community built on stilts in the middle of Lake Noue on the lagoons of the Bight of Benin. An enduring legacy of resistance can be seen in the music and art of African immigrants, and in their identification with ethnicity, religion, and race, reflecting common bonds with the cultures of the people who remained in Africa.

The cultural and religious impact of African immigration during the slavery era affected music and expression. It is known that music patterns and rhythms are old, and while the evolution of new styles and changes in instrumentation have affected music, the interconnection of the transatlantic world shows that migrations involve people but also culture. A perspective that does justice to the African background of the modern world demonstrates that “American” culture is not “European” or “African” but its own form, created in a political and economic context of inequality and oppression in which diverse ethnic and cultural influences can be discerned. Moreover, it is clear that influences were both European and African, and in some contexts, Amerindian. Undoubtedly, the transatlantic slave trade was the defining migration that shaped the African diaspora. It did so through the people it brought, and especially the women who were to give birth to children of the new African American population. In North America, those women include many who can be identified as “Igbo” or “Ibibio” but almost none who were Yoruba, Fon or Hausa, who constituted the slave population leaving the Bight of Benin. There were a considerable number of women in the cargoes leaving west-central Africa, so that “Bantu” women, from matrilineal societies, constituted a considerable portion of the fertile population of slave women. Similarly, the immigrant population from Sierra Leone also appears to have had a relatively high proportion of females, which was reflected in fertility rates. These were the women who gave birth to African American culture and society.

The interpretative issues that need to be discussed in presenting the theme of the transatlantic slave trade to the general public and to educators include responsibility, resistance, and reparations. On issues of responsibility, there have to be considerations of who was responsible for the enslavement of individuals in Africa, and whether this enslavement was done through means that were thought to be legal or illegal, whether during acts of war and the taking of political prisoners, or in kidnapping and arbitrary seizure arising from debt or acts perceived to be witchcraft. Responsibility must also be assessed in terms of the merchants and government officials who knowingly or unwittingly sold individuals as slaves for transport across the Atlantic or the Sahara to distant places and unknown hardships and suffering. Responsibility also rests on the shoulders of the merchants and ship crews who carried enslaved Africans to the Americas under barbaric and cruel conditions onboard ship and to the plantation owners and others whose economic prosperity depended upon the exploitation of slave labor. Ultimately in the period of slavery and the slave trade, the Atlantic world that included North America arose on the shoulders of African labor, and its development, achieved in the context of slavery and its aftermath, had a clear effect on the modern world economy.

## Multimedia

### Diagram of the Liverpool slave ship *Brookes*, 1789.

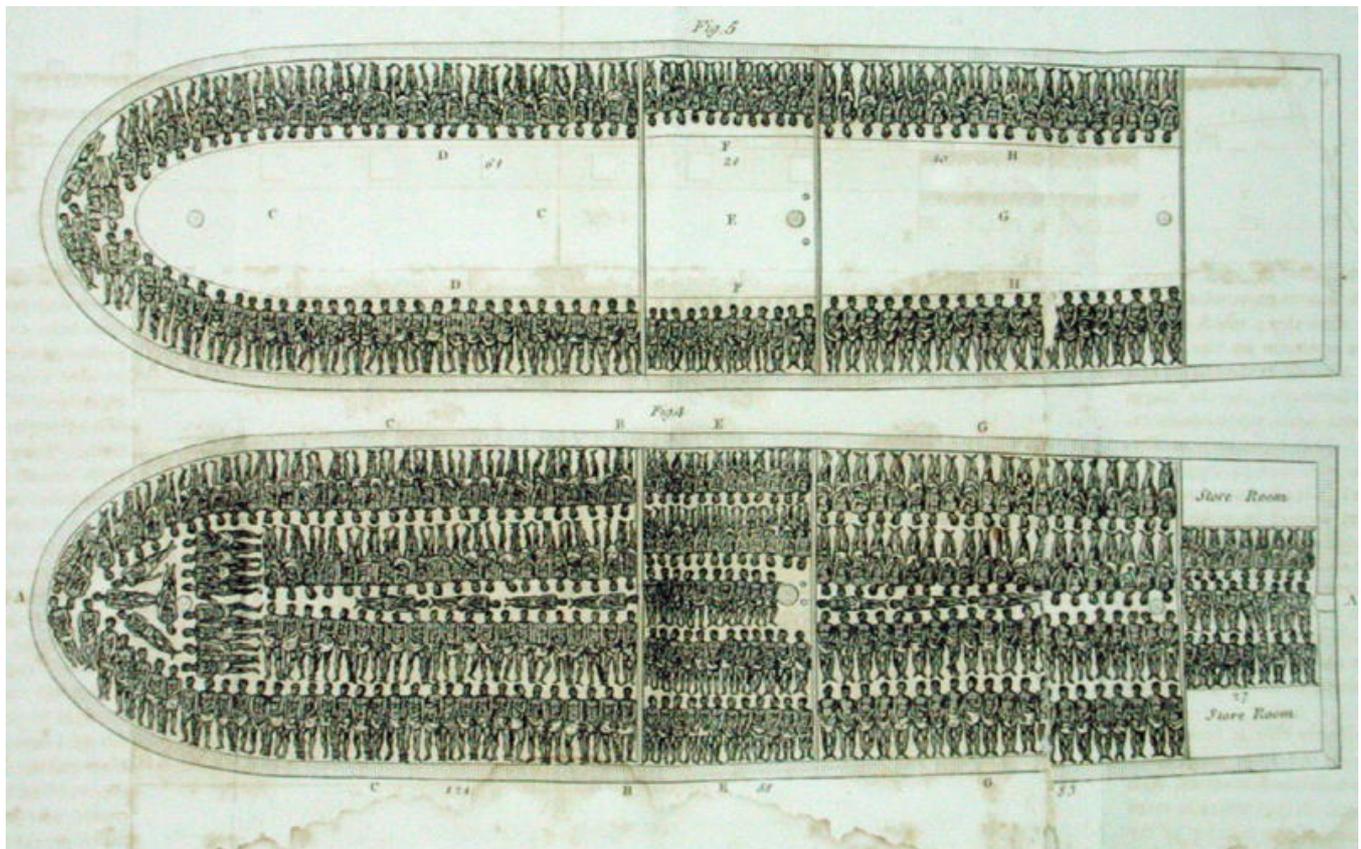


Image copyright © Bridgeman Art Library

Diagram of the Liverpool slave ship *Brookes*, 1789. In the late eighteenth century the British Parliament passed legislation restricting the number of Africans that a slave ship or slaver could carry. The *Brookes* was limited to a cargo of 454, although abolitionists noted that it occasionally carried more than 600 persons. The infamous “Middle Passage,” the transatlantic voyage from Africa to the Americas, lasted anywhere from 21 to 90 days, unless ships lost their way or insurrections on board ship interfered with the passage. In many cases, the slaves

were chained to low-lying platforms stacked in tiers, with an average allotment of 6 feet by 16 inches for each individual.

**Slave quarters, Savannah, Georgia, c.1860.**



Image copyright © Bridgeman Art Library

A stereoscopic view of slave quarters in Savannah, Georgia, c.1860. On the eve of the Civil War, the South had a population of approximately 9 million people, one-third of whom were slaves. The majority of the white population was made up of yeomen farmers who owned land but no slaves.

**Male slave in leg chains, Louisiana, c.1850.**



Image copyright © Getty Images

Male slave in leg chains, Louisiana, c.1850. Runaways were a constant problem for any slave-based society. Other forms of resistance

included working slowly or inefficiently, purposefully misunderstanding instructions, breaking tools, injuring farm animals, feigning illness, and open violence. One scholar has estimated that more than 250 uprisings or attempted uprisings involving 10 or more slaves occurred in the United States in the two centuries before the Civil War.

**Four black boys work in a Louisiana sugarcane field, c.1900.**



**Image copyright © Getty Images**

Following the Civil War, the economy of the South was devastated; plantation owners needed labor while freedmen needed employment. In order to remedy this situation the sharecropping system was developed in which a white landowner would rent small tracts of land to black and poor white farmers. Since capital was in short supply, the landowner would place a lien on a portion of the tenant farmer's crop as rent. Sharecropping was wrought with pitfalls, as the staples favored for production—cotton, tobacco, and sugar—quickly depleted the soil of its nutrients. Many landowners took advantage of uneducated freedmen and charged interest rates as high as 60 percent. The result of this type of economic arrangement was debt peonage for many African American tenant farmers and their families. Similar circumstances occurred in other post-emancipation areas.

**Two slave boys, c.1870.**



Image copyright © Getty Images

Two slave boys, c.1870. By the late nineteenth century, the only places in the Western Hemisphere with slavery were Puerto Rico, Cuba, and Brazil. Puerto Rico abolished the institution in 1873 and Cuba followed suit thirteen years later. Brazil kept slavery a little longer, as a thriving world market for coffee helped revitalize its economy. Meanwhile Great Britain, a world leader in the antislavery movement, had increased diplomatic pressure on the Brazilian government to end the institution.

**African slave traders transport captives, Congo Free State, 1890.**

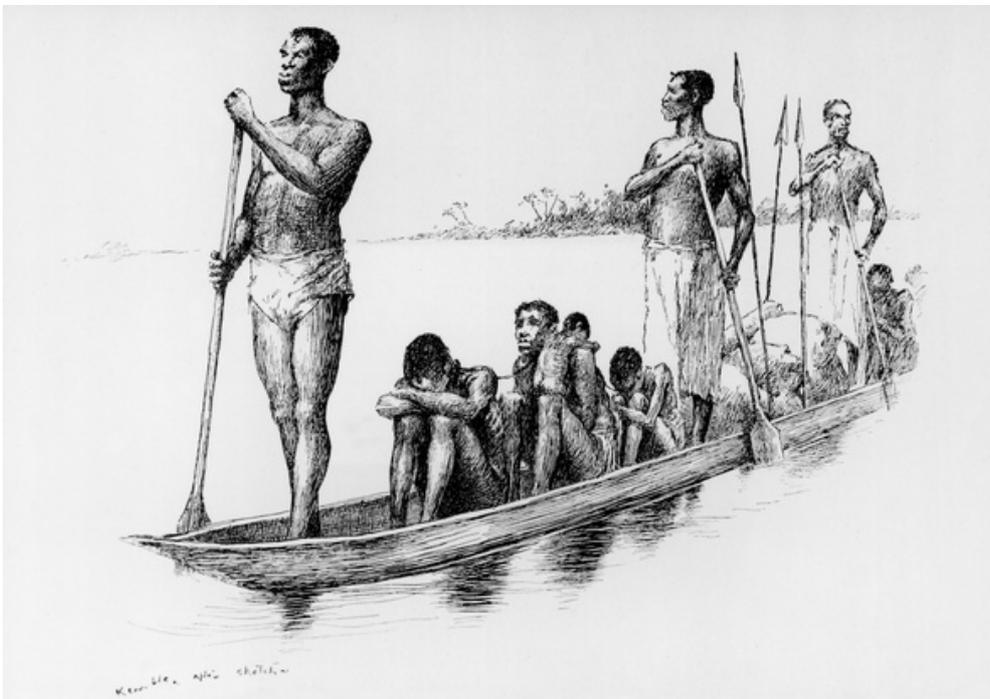


Image copyright © Getty Images

Illustration of African slave traders transporting shackled captives in a dugout canoe to sell them downriver as slaves, Congo Free State, 1890. The original drawing was made by Edward W. Kemble for an article called "The Slave-Trade in the Congo Basin" that appeared in *Century Magazine* (April 1890). Many parts of Africa retained slavery as late as the end of World War I, and in some places as late as the 1990s. In 1926 the Slavery Convention, an initiative of the League of Nations, outlawed global slavery. The United Nations also made a concerted effort to rectify this lingering social ill by explicitly banning it in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948).

## The Royal Navy captures a slave dhow near Zanzibar, December 1887.



Image copyright © Getty Images

Illustration of Lieutenant F. F. Fegan of the Royal Navy and his men capturing a Muslim trading vessel, known as a dhow, with 53 slaves in the Indian Ocean, near Zanzibar, December 1887. Zanzibar, an island off the coast of present-day Tanzania, was the base of operations for the Arab sultanate of Oman after Sa'id ibn Said moved his court there in 1824. The Omani Arabs and their Swahili partners established a flourishing plantation economy producing cloves both on Zanzibar and nearby Pemba.

### Chronology

- 1441** The explorer Antam Goncalves seizes Moors near Cape Blanc in West Africa and carries them back to Portugal as slaves.
- 1442** The Portuguese build forts along the western coast of Africa and begin to engage in a slave trade.
- c.1445** The Portuguese introduce slavery to the Madeiras, and by 1501 there are 2,000 slaves working on sugar plantations on the islands.
- 1490** The Portuguese and Kongolese nobles begin to cultivate sugar on the island of São Tomé, using African slaves from Kongo.
- 1491** The Castilians begin to grow sugar on the Canary Islands, at first using enslaved natives and later enslaved Africans acquired from the Portuguese.
- 1501** Nicolás de Ovando, the colonial governor of Hispaniola, receives authorization from the Spanish Crown to import enslaved Africans; the first group arrives the following year.
- 1506** Using slave labor, the Spanish begin to produce sugar in the Greater Antilles.
- 1510** The Portuguese ship enslaved Africans to Brazil to labor on sugar plantations.
- 1521** December: The first recorded incident of a slave insurrection in the Western Hemisphere occurs when enslaved Africans rise up on Hispaniola.
- 1542** Spain outlaws the enslavement of Amerindians, and as a result, the African slave trade intensifies.
- 1619** August: The first blacks arrive at the British colony of Jamestown. Although they are not termed “slaves,” they are considered to be war captives and thus subject to indefinite servitude.
- 1621** Willem Usselinx and other Dutch merchants charter the Dutch West India Company to establish colonies and transport slaves to the New World.
- 1629** The French begin to import enslaved Africans into St. Kitts.
- 1630** English settlers use enslaved Africans to cultivate sugar on Barbados.

- c.1660 There are approximately 100,000 enslaved Africans in the West Indies but only about 5,000 in the North American mainland colonies.
- 1672 The Royal African Company is granted a monopoly over the English slave trade.
- 1700 An estimated 28,000 enslaved Africans are in the British North American colonies.
- 1750 The British North American colonies have approximately 236,000 slaves.
- 1778 A special commission established by the British Parliament begins to investigate the conduct of the transatlantic slave trade.
- 1787 Under Article I, Section 9 of the US Constitution, the transatlantic slave trade was prohibited as of 1808.
- 1807 British Parliament prohibits the transatlantic slave trade; the ban takes effect on March 1, 1808.
- 1807-1808 USA Congress bans the transatlantic slave trade to the United States and its territories; the ban takes effect on January 1, 1808.
- 1814 The Netherlands officially ends its involvement in the transatlantic slave trade.
- 1817 At the prompting of the British government, Spain and Portugal each agree to end the transatlantic slave trade north of the equator.
- 1817 The French government officially ends its participation in the transatlantic slave trade.
- 1820 The Spanish government abolishes the transatlantic slave trade south of the equator.
- 1829 Mexico abolishes slavery.
- 1830 Brazil signs a treaty with Great Britain and Portugal ending its participation in the slave trade south of the equator; the treaty is not consistently enforced.
- 1833 August 1: The British Parliament passes the Emancipation Act, abolishing slavery throughout the British Empire. Within five years all slaves in British colonies—but not British Territories—are freed.
- 1839 Under the Palmerston Act, the British Royal Navy is given the right of search and seizure of ships suspected of carrying enslaved Africans, and subsequent negotiations with particular countries, including Portugal, the United States, and others extended this right of search can search Portuguese vessels and ships of other countries suspected of carrying slaves to the Americas.
- 1848 The French government abolishes slavery in all its colonies, but slavery continued unabated in French Africa.
- 1851 The Queiróz Law outlawed the African slave trade to Brazil.
- 1860 The Netherlands enacts a statute abolishing slavery in all Dutch colonies; the law takes effect in 1863.
- 1867 The transatlantic slave trade, in operation since 1502, ends when the last shipload of African slaves arrives in Cuba. It is estimated that a total of 12 million Africans were sent to the New World as slaves.
- 1873 The Spanish government abolishes slavery in Puerto Rico.
- 1886 The Spanish government abolishes slavery in Cuba.
- 1888 May 13: Brazil is the last country in the Western Hemisphere to end slavery; the *Lei Aurea* (Golden Law) frees approximately 750,000 Brazilian slaves.

## Glossary

**Abolition.** The movement to abolish slavery that began in various countries in the eighteenth century. Though slave trading was outlawed by Great Britain and the United States in 1807 and abolished in British colonies in 1838, slavery was declared illegal by various states in the US, beginning with Vermont in 1777, before it was finally abolished throughout the country in 1865; and slavery was abolished in Brazil in 1888.

**Akan.** Ethnic term for people in modern Ghana, including Asante (Ashanti), Fante, and others who speak the Twi language.

### **Baquaqua, Mahommah Gardo.**

African Muslim slave who converted to Christianity. Baquaqua lived in the area south of the great bend of the Niger River in the early nineteenth century. An attendant to a local king, Baquaqua was seized by rivals and sold into slavery. He arrived in Pernambuco, Brazil, in the 1840s, but later he was taken to New York where he was able to gain his freedom through the efforts of local abolitionists. Baptist missionaries helped educate him. Samuel Moore published his memoirs in 1854.

**Birth:** [date unknown]

**Death:** [date unknown]

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Law, Robin and Paul E. Lovejoy (eds) (2001), *The Biography of Mahomah Gardo Baquaqua: His Passage from Slavery to Freedom in Africa and America*, Princeton, NJ: Markus Wiener Publishers.

**Bight of Benin.** Region of the coast of southwestern Nigeria, Republique du Benin, and Togo; also called the “Mina” Coast and the “Slave Coast.”

**Bight of Biafra.** Region of the Niger River delta and the Cross River basin of southeastern Nigeria and Cameroon.

**Cowries.** Small sea shells from the Indian Ocean used as money in West Africa, and also used in making jewelry.

**Creole.** A term often referring to people born in the Americas, of African, European, or mixed background; also, by extension, people born in port towns around the Atlantic, including Africa; also, a linguistic term referring to the mixed languages of such populations.

**Curtin, Philip D.**

Herbert Baxter Adams Professor Emeritus in the Department of History at Johns Hopkins University. Curtin received his PhD from Harvard University (1953) and has been a pioneer in African history and comparative world history. While teaching at the University of Wisconsin, he established a graduate program in African studies and mentored some of the most prominent Africanists of today. Curtin is also a former president of the American Historical Association. Among his many works are *Two Jamaicas: The Role of Ideas in a Tropical Colony, 1830–1865* (1955), *The Atlantic Slave Trade: A Census* (1969), *Cross-Cultural Trade in World History* (1984), *The Rise and Fall of the Plantation Complex: Essays in Atlantic History* (1990), and *The World and the West: The European Challenge and the Overseas Response in the Age of Empire* (2000).

**Birth:** 1922

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Curtin, Philip D. (2005), *On the Fringes of History: A Memoir*, Athens: Ohio University Press.

**dan Fodio, Sheikh Usman.**

Fulani religious and political leader. A teacher of Islam, Usman had many followers among the Fulani and Hausa peoples of present-day Nigeria. In the late 1790s the Sultan of Gobir, fearful of Usman’s power, revoked many of the concessions granted to his Muslim community at Degel. This event sparked a jihad or holy war (1804–1808) and resulted in the defeat of the Gobir ruling dynasty. Around 1809 Usman established the Sokoto caliphate and devoted his remaining years to teaching and writing. His son Muhammad Bello succeeded him as caliph in 1817.

**Birth:** December 1754 in Maratta, Gobir, Hausaland (present-day Nigeria)

**Death:** 1817, Sokoto, Fulani empire

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Last, Murray (1967), *The Sokoto Caliphate*, New York: Humanities Press.

**Gbe.** A linguistic term referring to several related languages in the Bight of Benin, including Fon (Dahomey), Allada, Ewe, and Mahi.

**Gold Coast.** The region of modern Ghana, named because of gold available in the interior.

**Jihad.** Muslim holy war, specifically the wars of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in West Africa, including those founding the states of Futa Jallon, Futa Toro, and Sokoto.

“**Middle Passage.**” A reference to the transatlantic crossing of enslaved Africans.

“**Mina” Coast.** A term referring to the “Slave Coast” or Bight of Benin and the Gold Coast, named after Elmina Castle, built by the Portuguese in 1482 for use in gold trade and later used to warehouse slaves for transport across the Atlantic.

**Manilas.** Bracelets imported into the Bight of Biafra and used as money.

**de Ovando, Nicolás.**

The first Spanish governor of the West Indies (1501–1509) and a knight of the military Order of Alcántara. Ovando developed the *encomienda*, a system of forced Indian labor, on Hispaniola, but his brutal exploitation of the native population led to his recall by Crown authorities.

**Birth:** c.1451 in Brozas, Castile, Spain

**Death:** c.1511

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Lamb, Ursula S. (1949), “Nicolás de Ovando, Comendador Mayor of Alcántara and Governor of the Indies,” PhD dissertation, University of California, Berkeley.

**Senegambia.** The region incorporating the Senegal and Gambia Rivers in the western Sudan.

“**Slave Coast.**” The area of West Africa from what is now Ghana to southwestern Nigeria, which served as the principal trading center for African slaves from about 1550 to about 1750.

**Unsworth, Barry.**

British novelist who is known for his historical themes. Unsworth graduated from the University of Manchester in 1951. During the 1960s he served as British Council lecturer at the Universities of Athens and Istanbul. His *Sacred Hunger* (1992) is the story of two cousins and their

involvement in the Atlantic slave trade. Unsworth's graphic description of the Middle Passage in this novel earned him the Booker Prize in 1992. Among his other works are *Mooncranker's Gift* (1973), winner of the Heinemann Fiction Award, and *Pascali's Island* (1980) and *Morality Play* (1995), both Booker Prize nominees.

**Birth:** August 10, 1930 in County Durham, England

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**Usselinx, Willem.**

Antwerp merchant and entrepreneur. The son of a mercantile family, Usselinx spent time in Spain, Portugal, and the Azores Island for his education. He traveled to Holland in 1591 with the idea of developing a Dutch company to establish overseas colonies and compete with Spain for the control of the rich resources in the Americas and Africa. The result of his efforts was the founding of the Dutch West India Company in 1621.

**Birth:** [date unknown]

**Death:** [date unknown]

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## Recommended reading

**Key:** ★ = Required reading

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Colclanis, Peter A. (ed.) (2005), *The Atlantic Economy during the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries: Organization, Operation, Practice, and Personnel*, Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press. ISBN: 1570035547

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