

Introduction

History of the Atlantic Slave Trade

Introduction

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

Portugal

Trafficking of human beings did not begin with the Portuguese in the 1400s. Indeed, slavery had existed throughout the world since ancient times. When the Portuguese arrived in West Africa, they found a flourishing slave trade; one that existed between the sub-Saharan African states as well as one that existed between Sub-Saharan Africa and North Africa. Those slaves often even found their way to the Middle East. Recognizing the potential profit in such a trade, the Portuguese initially tried to capture Africans through raiding expeditions along the coast.

Faced by tremendous opposition from the natives, the Portuguese decided to develop a trading system with the Africans in which they traded as equals. Using the Africans' already successful and time-tested trading patterns, the Portuguese soon established a thriving commerce in slaves as well as gold and ivory. By the end of the 15th Century, they had built a fort on Africa's Gold Coast and been granted exclusive rights to the slave trade by the Pope. They supplied the Spanish and Portuguese settlements in Central and South America and the Caribbean with African slaves throughout the 16th Century.

Spain

Spain, which was excluded from colonizing Africa by a Papal Act of 1493 and the Treaty of Tordesillas in 1494, was only able to carry slaves to the colonies. By 1518 the demand for slaves in the Spanish New World was so great that King Charles I of Spain sanctioned the direct transport of slaves from Africa to the American colonies. In 1538 the Spanish Government began to issue individual licenses to traders to supply slaves to their colonies. This process became too cumbersome and Spain soon changed its method and instead sold the right to import slaves (*asiento*) to a single contractor.

Holland

After Holland became independent of Spain in the late 16th Century, it concentrated on seizing control of commercial routes to the New World. The Dutch West India Company was organized in 1621 and held a monopoly over the African trade and the trade with Dutch Colonies in the New World. Because the English were preoccupied by a Civil War at home, the Dutch were able to provide a real challenge to the Portuguese. Most of the Africans that went to the American colonies during the 17th Century were taken on

Dutch Ships. Dutch slave traders were able to make tremendous profits before their influence declined by the end of the 17th Century.

England

English participation in the slave trade came later. It wasn't until Captain John Hawkins made several voyages to Africa in the mid-16th Century that they began to see the real benefit of participation. Despite his initial success, the English did not become fully active in the trade until the Spanish Armada was defeated and the Spanish stranglehold over the Atlantic broken.

In many European nations, the monarch had to give formal permission (a Royal Charter) for overseas trade to be considered legal. England was no different. There, merchants petitioned the King to form joint companies that would have sole rights to trade with a particular area. In 1618, the Company of Adventurers of London was established which had a monopoly over the gold and ivory trade on the West African Coast. Despite their interest in the profits that the trade could bring them, political instability kept England's participating minimal until 1692. With the restoration of the throne in that year, the king chartered the Royal African Company.

The company that had the most influence and participation in the African Slave Trade was the Royal African Company. The Royal African Company jealously guarded its monopoly over the trade and successfully drove the French and Dutch out of West Africa. As the sole legal provider of slaves to the colonies, the Royal African Company established and administered trading posts on the West African coast and was authorized to seize English ships, other than their own, involved in the trade. Eventually the Royal African Company's monopoly was ended in 1698. From that time on, private traders were allowed to operate freely in and out of Africa on the basis of a 10 percent duty on the value of their cargoes. England obtained the *Asiento* through the 1713 Treaty of Utrecht that negotiated the end of the War of Spanish Succession and gained the right to take slaves to the Spanish Colonies for 30 years. With this, England completely dominated the African Slave Trade.

As the profitability of the slave trade became more apparent, independent British merchants began to clamor for their right to participate in it. In 1750, Great Britain passed an act allowing for free and open trade in Africa.

Conclusion

By the 18th Century, European merchants controlled over 1,000 miles of the West African coast and the transatlantic slave trade that accompanied it. Between the 14th and 18th Centuries, at least 10 million African captives were transported across the Atlantic. Half of the enslaved were transported in the 18th century alone on ships owned by the Portuguese, British, and French. Brazil and the Caribbean islands took receipt of approximately 90% of the Africans who survived the Middle Passage.

Name _____

The Atlantic Slave Trade

Source	Who is involved?	What is being traded?	What is the benefit to the Exporter?	What is the benefit to the Importer?
Letter from William Fitzhugh				
The Trade in Loango				
The Slave Ship				
Rum				
Sugar				
Saint Domingue				
The North American Colonies				

Slaves in a Caribbean Sugar Cane Mill				
King Alfonso of Kongo				
Hoeing Rice				

**Letter from William Fitzhugh (Virginia Planter and Merchant) to Mr. Jackson
(Portsmouth, New Hampshire), 1683**

Mr. Jackson:

As to your proposal about the bringing in Negroes next fall, I have this to offer and you may communicate the same to your owners and Employers, that I will deal with them for so many as shall amount to 50,000 lbs of Tob'o [tobacco] and cask [rum] which will be about 20 hhds. [hogsheads, large containers] under the condition and at these ages and prices following, to say- to give 3000 lbs Tob'o for every negro boy or girl, that shall be between the age of Seven and Eleven years old; to give 4000 lbs Tob'o for every youth or girl that shall be between the age of 11 to 15 and to give 5000 lbs Tob'o for every young man or woman that shall be above 15 years of age and not exceed 24, the said Negroes to be delivered at my landing some time in September next, and I to have notice whether they will so agree some time in August next. And I do assure you and so you may acquaint them that upon your delivery and my receipt of the Negroes, according to the ages above mentioned and that they be sound and healthfull at their Delivery, I will give you such sufficient caution for the payment of the Tob'o accordingly by the 20th Decr. then next following as shall be approved of. The ages of the Negroes to be judg'd and detemin'd by two or three such honest and reasonable men here as your self shall nominate and appoint....

William Fitzhugh

Source:

Emert, Phillis, ed. Colonial Triangular Trade: An Economy Based on Human Misery. Carlisle, Massachusetts: Discovery Enterprises, Ltd., 1995.

The Atlantic Slave Trade - Primary Source B

Excerpt from:

The Trade in Loango
By Abbe Proyart

...Though the different kingdoms of which we are speaking be not far distant from each other; the manner of valuing goods and turning slaves to account is not uniform among them...in the kingdoms of Kakongo and n'Goio, they reckon by goods; and in Loango by pieces; what they call goods, is a piece of cotton or Indian cloth ten or fourteen ells long. The negroes before striking a bargain go and mark off at the captain's store...the pieces of stuffs they choose to take; and he who has sold four slaves at fifteen goods a head, goes to receive sixty pieces of the stuffs marked off. In the kingdoms where they buy by goods it is customary to give for each slave what is called 'the over and above,' which commonly consists of three or four guns and as many swords; fifteen pots of brandy, fifteen pounds of gunpowder, and some dozens of knives. If these artless be not always given them, others are substituted as an equivalent.

At Loango they reckon by pieces, and every sort of goods is entered in a line of the account with the stuffs to form the piece; thus, when they say a slave costs thirty pieces, it does not mean he cost thirty pieces of stuffs, but thirty times the ideal value which they think fit to fix on, and call a piece; so that a single piece of stuff is sometimes estimated at two or three pieces, as sometimes several objects must form a single piece...

I have paid at Ma-nboukou, for the slave Makviota, twenty two years of age, whom he has sold me at thirty pieces,

An indienne of fourteen ells valued at two and a half pieces.....	2 ½
Two guineas (blue cotton cloths) Each valued at two and a half pieces.....	5
A girdle of red cloth estimated at a piece.....	1
Two common guns, valued at two pieces.....	2
Two barrels of gunpowder, valued at two pieces.....	2
Two swords, valued at each a quarter of a piece.....	½
Two bars of iron, valued at a piece.....	1
Four barrels of brandy, valued at four pieces.....	4
Ten strings of bugles (glass beads), valued at half a piece.....	½

Miscellaneous items.....	11 ½
Total.....	30 pieces

I have paid moreover to the broker for his trouble the value of six pieces in guns, powder, swords, and brandy.

Besides the pieces determined on for each slave, the captain must also, ere the bargain be closed, make a present to... the brokers who have served him best, and whom he is very glad to attach himself: these presents are made in coral, services of plate, carpets, and other moveables, more or less precious....

Source:

Emert, Phillis, ed. Colonial Triangular Trade: An Economy Based on Human Misery. Carlisle, Massachusetts: Discovery Enterprises, Ltd., 1995.

The Slave Ship
Henrich Heine

Six hundred niggers I bought dirt-cheap
Where the Senegal River is flowing
Their flesh is firm, and their sinews taught
As the finest iron going.

I got them by barter, and gave in exchange
Glass beads, steel goods, and some brandy;
I shall make at least eight hundred percent
With but half of them living and handy.

Source:

Emert, Phillis, ed. Colonial Triangular Trade: An Economy Based on Human Misery. Carlisle, Massachusetts: Discovery Enterprises, Ltd., 1995.

Rum

In 1770, just before the American Revolution, rum represented over four-fifths of New England's exports. About eleven million gallons of Rhode Island rum were exchanged for slaves in Africa between 1709 and 1807, with about 800,000 gallons being the annual average marketed in the last years before 1807...A specially strong "Guinea Rum" was distilled in Newport for the Africa Market. The rum trade on the coast of West Africa was by then a "virtual monopoly of New England." In 1755, Caleb Godfrey, a slave captain from Newport, Rhode Island, bought four men, three women, three girls, and one boy for 799 gallons of rum, two barrels of beef, and one barrel of pork, together with some smaller items...The Africans with whom Rhode Island captains had traded, especially along the Gold and Windward coasts, had also become addicted to North American rum, a fact which gave captains from Rhode Island a definite advantage...

Source:

Thomas, Hugh. The Slave Trade- The Story of the Atlantic Trade: 1440-1870. New York: Simon & Shuster, 1997.

Sugar

Sugar had been widely known and consumed in medieval Europe, but its high price and exotic origin meant that it was considered as either a spice or a drug...It had reached Christian Europe via the Islamic world, and it had been a crusader dynasty...who had made the first attempt to domesticate it for production on Cyprus. But sugar cane is native to the tropical monsoon regions of Southeast Asia from New Guinea to the Bay of Bengal, and to reach its mature height of 8 feet, it needs the combination of drenching, daily rainfall and hot temperatures. It was precisely the difficulty of establishing it in the drier Mediterranean regions, under optimal growing conditions, that kept yields relatively low and prices comparatively high. So for centuries sugar remained a drug or a spice, in both cases an exotic luxury rather than a daily commodity. But its Portuguese shippers and growers, abetted by Dutch and Jewish traders and refiners, were constantly moving west, out into the warmer...latitudes of the Atlantic...In search of the perfect combination of heat and rain. Famously...they found what they were looking for in the former Portuguese colony of Brazil.

But there was something else that sugar cane needed if its golden juice was going to pay off, and that was intensive, highly concentrated, task-specific applications of manpower. For the cane was an unforgiving and volatile crop. It could not be farmed and harvested in a single growing year since it took at least fourteen months to ripen. But once it had reached maturity, the cumbersome grass needed to be harvested quickly to prevent the sugar going starchy. Once stripped and cut, the cane in its turn had to be speedily taken to the ox-powered vertical crushing rollers before the sucrose concentration of the juice self-degraded. Every subsequent stage of production-the boiling of the juice, the arrest of the boiling process at the precise moment for optimum crystallization, the partial refining in clay-stopped inverted cone moulds, the lengthy drying process-demanded the kind of strength, speed and stamina in tropical conditions that indentured white Europeans or captive Native Americans were ill equipped to provide.

Source:

Schama, Simon. A History of Britain, Volume II: The Wars of the British, 1603-1776. New York: Hyperion, 2001.

**Saint Domingue
(Modern Haiti)**

“By the middle of the eighteenth century, it was clear that Saint Domingue was the dominant island in the Caribbean. It was the greatest sugar-producing colony in America, it now held the largest West Indian slave population, and it was also quickly becoming the world’s largest producer of coffee, which had only been introduced into the island in 1723. By the late 1780’s Saint Domingue planters were recognized as the most efficient and productive sugar producers in the world. The slave population stood at 460,000 people, which was not only the largest of any island but represented close to half of the 1 million slaves then being held in all the Caribbean colonies...In any one year well over 600 vessels visited the ports of the island to carry its sugar, coffee, cotton, indigo, and cacao to European consumers.”

Source:

Klein, Herbert S. The Atlantic Slave Trade. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.

The North American Colonies

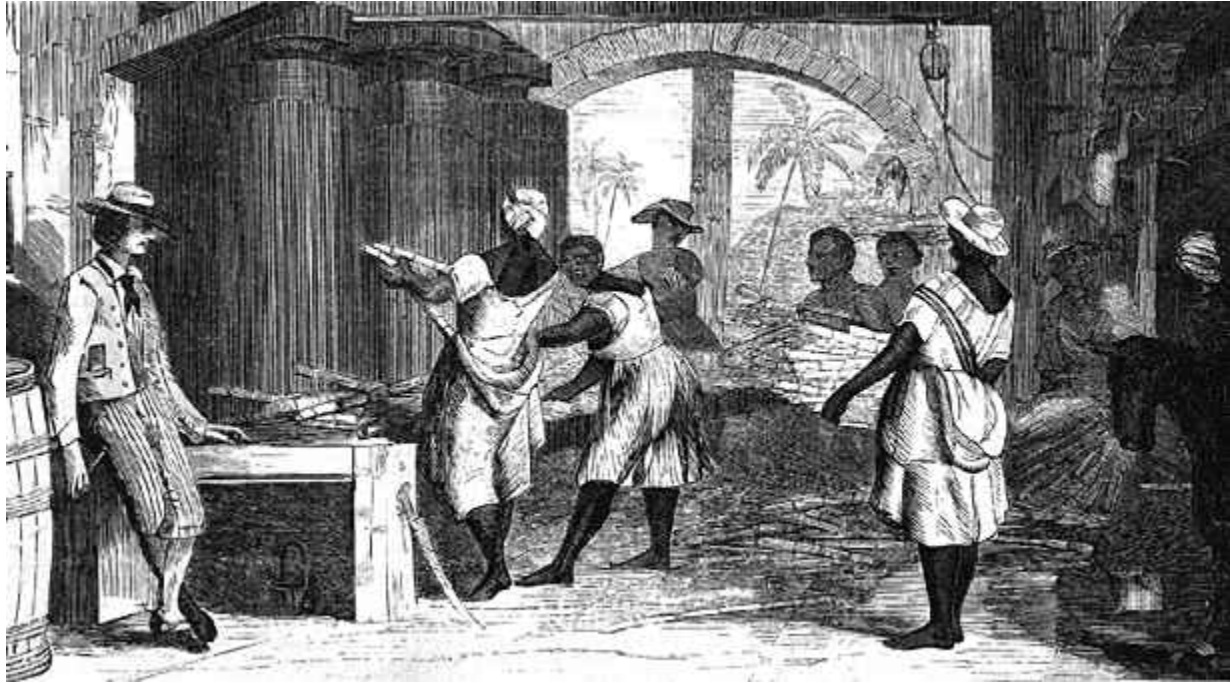
“The Chesapeake became the primary tobacco producer for the world, exporting some 38 million pounds by 1700 and effectively liquidating English West Indian production. It was also the most important slave zone in continental North America, holding some 145,000 slaves (or 60 percent of the total in the thirteen colonies) by 1750. The Georgia-South Carolina region became a major rice producer on coastal plantations, with some slave-produced indigo in backland areas. The slave-based rice plantations absorbed 40,000 slaves by mid-century. By 1790 there were an impressive 698,000 slaves in what was now the United States, 94 percent of who were in the so-called southern states from Maryland south....

...But rice and tobacco would soon pale in significance to the production of cotton. Although long-and short-staple cotton had been grown in the southern region for some time...only the introduction of mechanical cleaning of the short-staple and heavily seeded cotton in the 1790's with the cotton gin permitted cotton planting to penetrate into the interior of the county and also to become a competitive crop on the world market. Starting in the rice regions, cotton spread inland quickly, and as early as the 1830's half of the cotton was being produced in the newly settled regions of Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana... By the middle of the nineteenth century this was the largest single export from the United States, more valuable than all other exports combined, and it was an overwhelmingly slave-produced crop. Moreover, U.S. cotton dominated the world market and reduced cotton production for export in most of the other American regions.”

Source:

Klein, Herbert S. The Atlantic Slave Trade. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.

Slaves in a Caribbean Sugar Cane Mill



http://encarta.msn.com/media_461539907_761595721_-1_1/Slaves_in_a_Sugarcane_Mill.html

The Atlantic Slave Trade - Primary Source I

King Alfonso of Kongo

“No king in all these parts esteems Portuguese goods as much as we do. We favour the trade, sustain it, open...roads, and markets where the pieces [slaves] are traded.”

Grant, R. The African-American Slave Trade. New York: Barrons, 2002.

Hoeing Rice
Southern United States, 19th Century



HOEING RICE.

<http://hitchcock.itc.virginia.edu/Slavery/details.php?filename=NW0301>