

Abstract the
plantations required a
vast amount



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Abstract

This paper seeks to highlight on the issue of The Atlantic Slave Trade in relation to factors that led to the Atlantic Slave trade, how the Atlantic slave trade operated, effects of the Atlantic slave trade and finally end of the Atlantic slave trade.

The Atlantic Slave Trade

The Atlantic Slave Trade was one of the most inhumane forms of slavery. It should, however, be noted that it was neither the first nor the only slave trade[1]. By The eighteenth century, a large percentage of the European population was descendants of slaves. Slavery was not only about the Africans who endured the Atlantic Slave Trade.

The most common slavery worldwide was domestic slavery. The rich in the society owned slaves in their homes. In some societies, the more the slaves one had, the higher his or her social status became. Africans had been undergone slave trade for many centuries, reaching Europe through trans-Saharan and Islamic-run trade routes[2]. Slavery was a tradition in many African societies. Various kingdoms took part in debt bondage, serfdom and chattel slavery.

The most severe forms of the slave trade existed in West Africa. An example is the Atlantic Slave Trade, which reduced human beings to commodities. The trade began in the mid-fifteenth century, and was at its peak by the eighteenth century. [3]Europeans had become involved in the extensive gold and salt trade across the Sahara Desert. This was extremely cumbersome since they depended on African merchants to act as middle-men.

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The Africans would bring them gold from the West African Kingdoms via the Sahara Desert. The Europeans wanted to seek direct access to the gold trade in West Africa and to the spice islands of south-east Asia[4]. European Empires were expanding at an extremely fast rate. However, they lacked a vital resource to match their fast-growing economy. They did not have a work force.

In many cases, the natives were unreliable since most of them succumbed to illnesses brought over from Europe. The Europeans, on the other hand, did not adjust well to the climate. Tropical diseases affected many of them. Africans, however, proved to be excellent workers.

They had vast experience in farming, tropical diseases did not affect them, and they could be forced to work on plantations and mines. Many crops could not be grown in Europe. Exporting them to Europe from the New World was more economical. The plantations required a vast amount of labor in order for any profits to be realized[5]. Free Europeans easily owned land since cheap land was available. This led to increased labor shortage since not many Europeans were available to work in the farms. What began as a harmless gold and spice trade ended up giving rise to the slave trade. [6]The Atlantic Slave Trade operated like a triangle which involved Africa, Europe and the Americas.

All the three stages of the Triangular Trade proved to be economically beneficial to the merchants. The first stage was from Europe to Africa. Transportation of manufactured goods was from Europe to Africa. These included tobacco, cowry shells, guns, cloth and metal goods. Kings used

guns to expand their kingdoms and acquire more slaves. In exchange for the goods, the European merchants obtained African slaves. Some of the slaves were captives or prisoners of war. The community did not regard these slaves as part of them.

The kings could, therefore, not defend them. [7]The community sold criminals as slaves to prevent them from committing more crimes. Others were victims of kidnappings and raids.

The merchants matched the slaves to the West African coast for sale, and kept them in large forts known as factories. Here, they waited to be shipped to the Americas. The living conditions in the factories were pathetic. The rooms were dark and dirty. Food and drinks were scarce. Most of them died while in these factories. The European merchants used to wait for the slaves at the coast. This is because they feared contracting tropical diseases.

They also feared resistance from the native communities. The second stage of the Triangular Trade, also called the middle passage, was from Africa to the Americas. Slave ships transported them to the Americas. Chains bound the slaves to each other, and they were stacked in spaces with no space for standing. They lay on their backs with their heads between their neighbor's legs. In such situations, epidemics broke out. Infected slaves were thrown overboard in an attempt to control the spread of diseases.

On arrival, the slaves worked on plantations and mines. They were not only sent to North America but also to the east coast of South America and the Caribbean islands. Those shipped to South America and the Caribbean islands lived in seasoning camps where they were tortured to prepare them

for their new life. In these camps, many died due to dysentery. The most famous of these camps was in Jamaica[8]. The third stage was from the Americas back to Europe.

The merchants carried with them produce from the plantations. These included rum, sugar, cotton and tobacco. [9]Africa, as well as Europe, felt the effects of the slave trade. The demand for slaves increased due to the continued European colonization of the New World. This, in turn, increased the inter-ethnic war in West Africa. Some African kingdoms even resorted to selling their own people so as to obtain the goods from the Europeans. Slave trade led to the birth of a number of powerful kingdoms. They used advanced iron technology to capture more slaves and sell them at a profit to the European merchants.

The population in the raided areas significantly declined. The shortage of men led to reversal of roles in these societies. Women performed duties initially reserved for their brothers and husbands[10]. Some scholars believe that the constant violence and inhumanity experienced in this era contributed immensely to the present beliefs in witchcraft. In many West African cultures, witches kidnap individuals so as to enslave them. The goods brought from Europe enabled the African states to develop artistic traditions using expensive material. The Europeans, on the other hand, benefited greatly from the trade. The agricultural profits funded the industrial revolution.

The population also grew tremendously. It also gave rise to the present day racism. The Atlantic Slave Trade finally came to an end after four hundred years of existence.

There were several factors that contributed to this. There was an increasingly growing public revulsion against slavery. A major contributor to this was Olaudah Equiano, born in present-day Nigeria and sold as a slave to the Americas. He managed to buy his freedom and published a book on his experience as a slave.

This had an enormous impact on the world's opinion on the slave trade. There had also been a successful revolt in Haiti which made people in the Americas realize that slavery could be challenged. The Industrial Revolution in North America and Europe also contributed. Many advocated for free rather than forced labor since slavery was an economic liability.

Britain became the first European country to ban the slave trade[11]. Other European countries quickly followed suit. In addition, Britain dispatched war ships to the Atlantic Ocean so as to counter the slave ships from West Africa.

The freed slaves settled in Liberia and Sierra Leone in West Africa. In the United States, however, slavery still existed until the year eighteen sixty four. The Atlantic Slave Trade is, therefore, of significant importance to the history of Africa and the world at large. It had a marked impact on the social, economic and political growth of many countries in the world[12].

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