

African slaves trade



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Task- What were the main features of African slave trade and what effects did it have on Africa? Solution- The New World which favored labor intensive agriculture , demanded a huge and vast supply of workforce for timely production and sale of cotton , tobacco and sugarcane in the European markets. There was a desperate need of a large amount of cheap labor with strong backs. The African slaves offered a fairly inexpensive solution. Also the European empire was expanding in New World at a pace faster than ever before. The tropical climate was unfavorable for the Europeans , however quiet suitable for the Africans which led to the initiation of slave trade. African slave trade involved the kidnapping , gathering and sale of African blacks to other places. The main centers of sale were Middle East and North Africa. The slave trade had started as early as the 14th century but the one from West Africa to America began in the 16th century and lasted till 19th century. In mid 18th century this trade to the New World reached its peak when millions of blacks crossed the gigantic Atlantic Ocean to reach to the Americas and spend their lives in shackles. According to africanhistory.about.com during the 18th century , the slave trade accounted for the transport of a staggering 6 million Africans. The main reason behind the initiation of slave trade was the economic conditions of various countries. The benefits of the slave trade made it globally widespread as the African slaves were sold to the European nations for bartered goods. Thus , this evil business proved to be very lucrative. Though slave trade played a vital role in settling the New World and brought prosperity to Europe , it also brought along a lot of suffering and misery to the African population. The Africans themselves played a crucial role in pushing their fellow countrymen in the inhuman world of slave trade. The African rulers and businessmen to a large

extent were responsible for the exile and misery of Africans. During the initial stages of slave trade, most European traders captivated Africans by raiding the coastal areas. Later African rulers also followed in as they also conducted raids and sold the captives to Europeans. African traders, military aristocrats and businessmen all became wealthy in this business. They showed no signs of mercy. Most slaves were prisoners of wars or those acquired through kidnappings. At times kings would also sell the gamblers and criminals of the society with an intention to lower the crime rate.

Disputes within families also pushed many innocent people in this horrifying business. Middle passage was a part of the slave trade across the Atlantic in which hundreds of thousands of Africans were taken from Africa to the New World. Cargo carrying African captives were exchanged with goods from European markets. The Europeans in turn would further sell these captives for raw materials. African captives that were captivated included both sexes. The conditions of Middle Passage were terrible, inhuman and horrific. Most male captives were chained and put very close to each other with an aim of maximizing cargo capacity. The space for movement or answering nature's call was so meager that the captives had to urinate and defecate in the confines of that place. It is clear that the stench was unhygienic, horrendous and nerve-racking. And under hot and humid conditions, it was an unimaginable and unexplainable nightmare. Female captives on the other hand were usually confined to the upper deck. Their role on the ship was to provide entertainment to the crew of the ship and cook food for the opposite sex. Some captives opted for suicide instead of living in shackles and leaped into the Atlantic ocean. The journey of middle passage across Atlantic was quiet long and difficult. It took about 3-4 months. Captives who survived,

refused the rotten food. The crew forced the food inside their cavity by knocking their front teeth and inserting a funnel. Thus, for some captives the middle passage marked the onset of a torturous life in an unknown place full of hunger and brutality and for others it meant the end of life. The slave trade in Africa had a very devastating and detrimental effect on the development and growth of the entire continent. It had profound effects on all aspects of growth. Shipping of vital forces overseas led to economic breakdown and political unrest. The cultural development was distorted. The trade led to the formation of a number of small groups which weakened the formation of a large and stable political body. The Africans had very little contact with the outside world as there was absolutely no exposure to new ideas and technology. Slave trade proved to be a demographic disaster as tens of thousands of people were removed from their homeland. Rampant kidnappings and wars between civilians became common. There was a lot of unrest, hostility and suspicion. The growing uncertainty of life paved way for false myths and superstitious beliefs and rituals as people thought that salvation could only be achieved from the spiritual world. The crippling psychological impact of the slave trade cannot be ignored. People were living under constant anxiety and fear of being kidnapped, captivated and sent to unknown places. Thus, during the slave trade tens of millions of people including men, women and children were transshipped from a life of relative plenty to a life of suffering, brutality and utter degradation so as to meet the labor needs of the state. It left a deep impact on the civilization of Africa, the after-effects of which can be seen and felt till date. Works cited Boddy-Evans; Aistair. "The Trans-Atlantic Slave trade" africanhistory. about.com, n. d., Web. 16 Feb. 2011.

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