

The differences trans-saharan slave trade and similarities between the trans-atla...



The African Slave Trade has affected a very large part of the world. This phenomenon has been described in many different ways, such as slave trade, forced migration and genocide. When people today think of slavery, many envision the form in which it existed in the United States before the American Civil War (1861-1865): one racially identifiable group owning and exploiting another. However, in other parts of the world, slavery has taken many different forms. In Africa, many societies recognized slaves merely as property, but others saw them as dependents whom, eventually might be integrated into the families of slave owners.

Still other societies allowed slaves to attain positions of military or administrative power. Most often, both slave owners and slaves were black Africans, although they were frequently of different ethnic groups.

Traditionally, African slaves were bought to perform basic or domestic labour, to serve as wives or concubines, or to enhance the status of the slave owner. Traditional African practices of slavery were altered to some extent beginning in the 7th century by two non-African groups of slave traders: Arab Muslims and Europeans.

From the 7th to the 20th century, Arab Muslims raided and traded for black African slaves in West, Central, and East Africa, sending thousands of slaves each year to North Africa and parts of Asia. From the 15th to the 19th century, Europeans bought millions of slaves in West, Central, and East Africa and sent them to Europe; the Caribbean; and North, Central, and South America. These two overlapping waves of transcontinental slave trading made the slave trade central to the economies of many African

states and threatened many more Africans with enslavement, and can to be known as the Trans-Saharan and Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade.

The merchants who traded slaves on the coast to European ship captains – for example the Vili traders north of the Congo, the Efik in the Bight of Biafra, and behind them the groups that supplied the slaves, such as the Kingdom of Dahomey, the Aro network, and further south, the Imbangala, all had strict conceptions of what made an individual eligible for enslavement. Among such criteria were constructions of gender, definitions of criminal behaviour, and conventions for dealing with prisoners of war.

The make-up of slaves purchased on the Atlantic coast thus reflected who Africans were prepared to sell as much as whom Euro-American plantation owners wanted to buy. But the victims of the slave trade also had a major impact on the trade. Probably about one in ten slaving voyages experienced major rebellions, of which the attempts to control increased the costs of a slave voyage to the point where far fewer slaves entered the traffic than would have been the case without resistance. In addition, vessels from some regions on the coast appear to have been more prone to experience slave uprisings than those from other regions.

The rebellion-prone areas were precisely those regions, broadly comprising Upper Guinea – Senegambia, Sierra Leone, and the Windward Coast, which had the least participation in the slave trade as they had a royal ban on the export of Benin slave men. In Africa, as in many places around the world, early slavery likely resulted from war groups taking captives. Such captives were of little use, and often some bother, when kept close to their homes

because of the ease of escape. Therefore, they were often sold and transported to more distant places.

Warfare was not the only reason for the practice of slavery in Africa, however. In many African societies, slavery represented one of the few methods of producing wealth available to common people. Throughout the African continent there was little recognition of rights to private landholding until colonial officials began imposing European law in the 19th century. Land was typically held communally by villages or large clans and was allotted to families according to their need. The amount of land a family needed was determined by the number of labourers that family could marshal to work the land.

To increase production, a family had to invest in more labourers and thus increase their share of land. The simplest and quickest way to do this was to invest in slaves. To help service this demand, many early African societies conducted slave raids on distant villages, this was with the idea of having Africans work for Africans but ones of a different ethnic background, and after slavery was abolished by Europe domestic slavery grew, many slaves were made to work on clove plantations in Zanzibar for example.

Women constituted the majority of early African slaves. In addition to agricultural work, female slaves carried out other economic functions, such as trading and cotton spinning and dyeing. They also performed domestic chores, such as preparing food, washing clothes, and cleaning. Powerful African men kept female slaves as wives or concubines, and in many societies these women stood as symbols of male wealth. Male slaves

typically farmed and herded animals. Those who belonged to wealthy families and especially of ruling lineages of states also worked as porters and rowers, and learned crafts such as weaving, construction, and metalwork. Domestic slaves worked for the royal families, some male, and fewer female, slaves held positions of high status and trust within their societies. In pre-colonial states in the interior of West and Central Africa, slaves often served as soldiers and confidants of high officials. With their necessarily limited ambitions and dependence on their masters, slaves were considered the ideal persons to be close to men in power.

In a few cases, female slaves assumed power and influence as well. For example, in the 19th century in the West African Kingdom of Dahomey (now southern Benin), women served in the royal palace and formed the kingdom's soldier elite. Kinship has always been extremely important in Africa as an essential component of a person's identity and ability to survive in society. Traditionally, those without kin were essentially lost-not considered real persons by society. Slaves, taken in battle or in slave raids, were cut off from their kin.

In some societies, however, slaves were viewed as dependents, and could, over time, become identified as members of their owners' extended families. Many African societies decreed that children of slave owners by their slaves could not be sold or killed. Also, after three or four generations, descendants of slaves could often shed their slave status. Thus slavery, on one hand, cut people off from their kin but, on the other hand, provided them with the possibility of becoming attached to other families and, after several generations, reintegrated into the web of kinship.

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None of the above possibilities should suggest that enslaved Africans liked what was happening to them, accepted slavery willingly or normally rose quickly in status. However, early African traditions of slavery appear more benign when compared to the institutionalized systems of slave trading that would develop later. As African states began providing slaves for export by Arabs or Europeans, slavery became much more central to the economies and politics of those states and more of a threat to Africans in general.

Around the 15th century BC, Egypt's New Kingdom enslaved non-Africans, such as Jews from Palestine, through warfare and imported them to the Nile Valley. As an African importer of non-African slaves, however, ancient Egypt is a notable exception to the rule. Africa's role in the history of transcontinental slave trading has generally been as a provider or exporter of slaves for use outside of Africa. The spread of Islam from Arabia into Africa after the religion's founding in the 7th century AD affected the practice of slavery and slave trading in West, Central, and East Africa.

Arabs had practiced slave raiding and trading in Arabia for centuries prior to the founding of Islam, and slavery became a component of Islamic traditions. Both the Qur'an, the sacred scripture of Islam, and Islamic religious law served to codify and justify the existence of slavery. As Muslim Arabs conquered their way westward across North Africa in the 7th and 8th centuries, their victorious leaders rewarded themselves with Berber captives, most of whom were eventually enrolled in Muslim armies. Over time, large segments of North Africa's Berber population converted to Islam.

The religion spread to the camel herders of the Sahara Desert, who were in contact with black Africans south of the Sahara and who traded small numbers of black slaves. Muslim Arabs expanded this trans-Saharan slave trade, buying or seizing increasing numbers of black Africans in West Africa, leading them across the Sahara, and selling them in North Africa. From there, most of these slaves were exported to far-off Asian destinations such as the eastern Mediterranean, Anatolia (in present-day Turkey), Arabia, Persia (present-day Iran), and India.

The trans-Saharan slave trade grew significantly from the 10th to the 15th century, as vast African empires such as Ghana, Mali, Songhai, and Kanem-Bornu developed south of the Sahara and marshalled the trade. Arab slave raiders also penetrated south, up the Nile River to present-day Ethiopia, capturing thousands of slaves and sending them down the Nile to Egypt. Over the course of more than a thousand years, the trans-Saharan slave trade saw the movement of at least 10 million enslaved men, women, and children from West and East Africa to North Africa, the Middle East, and India.

The slaves and their descendants contributed to the harems, royal households, and armies of the Arab, Turkish, and Persian rulers in those regions. Between the 7th and the 15th century, the trans-Saharan slave trades spurred the gradual expansion of slavery within Africa. The slave trades contributed to the development of powerful African states on the southern border of the Sahara. The economies of these states were dependent on slave trading. Neighbouring states competed with one another for trade, leading to wars, which in turn led to the capture of more slaves.

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Slave raiding in West, East, and Central Africa became more common and wide-ranging. When European explorers and traders arrived in West Africa beginning in the 15th century, they found and began using well-established slave-trade networks. While the trans-Saharan slave trade continued until the early 20th century, it was overshadowed by the Atlantic slave trade after the 15th century. The Atlantic slave trade dwarfed the trans-Saharan and East African trades in terms of volume of export, impact on African practices of slavery, and lasting effect on Africa in general.

The Atlantic slave trade developed after Europeans began exploring and establishing trading posts on the Atlantic (west) coast of Africa in the mid-15th century. The first major group of European traders in West Africa was the Portuguese, followed by the British and the French. In the 16th and 17th centuries, these European colonial powers began to pursue plantation agriculture in their expanding possessions in the New World – North, Central, and South America, and the Caribbean islands, across the Atlantic Ocean.

As European demand grew for products such as sugar, tobacco, rice, indigo, and cotton, and as more New World lands became available for European use, the need for plantation labour increased. West and west central African states, already involved in slave trading, supplied the Europeans with African slaves for export across the Atlantic. Africans tended to live longer on the tropical plantations of the New World than did European labourers, who were susceptible to tropical diseases and Native Americans who were extremely susceptible to “ Old World” diseases brought by the Europeans from Europe, Asia, and Africa.

Also, enslaved men and women from Africa were inexpensive by European standards. Therefore, Africans became the major source, and eventually the only source, of New World plantation labour. The Africans who facilitated and benefited from the Atlantic slave trade were political or commercial elites—generally members of the ruling apparatus of African states or members of large trading families or institutions. African sellers captured slaves and brought them to markets on the coast.

At these markets European and American buyers paid for the slaves with commodities—including cloth, iron, firearms, liquor, and decorative items—that were useful to the sellers. Slave sellers were mostly male, and they used their increased wealth to enhance their prestige and connect themselves, through marriage, to other wealthy families in their realms. The Africans who were enslaved were mostly prisoners of war or captives resulting from slave raids. As the demand for slaves grew, so did the practice of systematic slave raiding, which increased in scope and efficiency with the introduction of firearms to Africa in the 17th century. By the 18th century, most African slaves were acquired through slave raids, which penetrated farther and farther inland. Africans captured in raids were marched down well-worn paths, sometimes for several hundred miles, to markets on the coast. From the mid-15th to the late-19th century, European and American slave traders purchased approximately 12 million slaves from West and west central Africa.

A small percentage of these slaves, particularly in the early years of the trade, were sent to Europe, especially to Spain and Portugal. Most, however, were shipped across the Atlantic for sale in Portuguese-administered Brazil; <https://assignbuster.com/the-differences-trans-saharan-slave-trade-and-similarities-between-the-trans-atlantic/>

the British, French, Dutch, and Danish islands of the Caribbean; Spanish-controlled South and Central America; and the British North American mainland (later the United States and Canada). The Atlantic crossing, known as the Middle Passage, was nightmarish for slaves, who were poorly fed, subject to abuses at the hands of the crew, and confined to cramped storage holds in which diseases spread easily.

Historians estimate that between 1.5 and 2 million slaves died during the journey to the New World. The Atlantic slave trade differed from previous practices of slavery and slave trading in Africa in its huge scope and its importance to the economies of world powers. While traditional African slavery was practiced largely to help African communities produce food and goods or for prestige, slave labour on European plantations in the New World was crucial to the economies of the colonies and therefore to the economies of the colonial powers.

This global economic demand for African slaves altered African practices of slavery. In much of Africa, slavery became a more central, structural element of African life, as rulers and wealthy elites sought to accumulate more and more slaves, for sale as well as for their own use. In addition to the systematic and institutional practice of slave raiding, other practices were introduced in African states to bring in even more slaves, including enslavement as punishment for crimes and religious wrongdoing.

As a result, by the 19th century vast numbers of black Africans in West and Central Africa faced the threat of being enslaved. While the Atlantic slave trade was dying down around 1850, the trans-Saharan and East African slave

trades were at their peaks. In the 1850s the Ottoman Empire nominally outlawed slavery in much of the Islamic world, but this had only a minor effect on the slave trade. One of the main justifications European powers gave for colonizing nearly the entire African continent during the 1880s and 1890s was the desire to end slave trading and slavery in Africa.

By the start of the 20th century, European forces had defeated most African slave trading states, and the trans-Saharan slave trades came to an end.

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