

Africa and the Atlantic Slave Trade, 1400–1800



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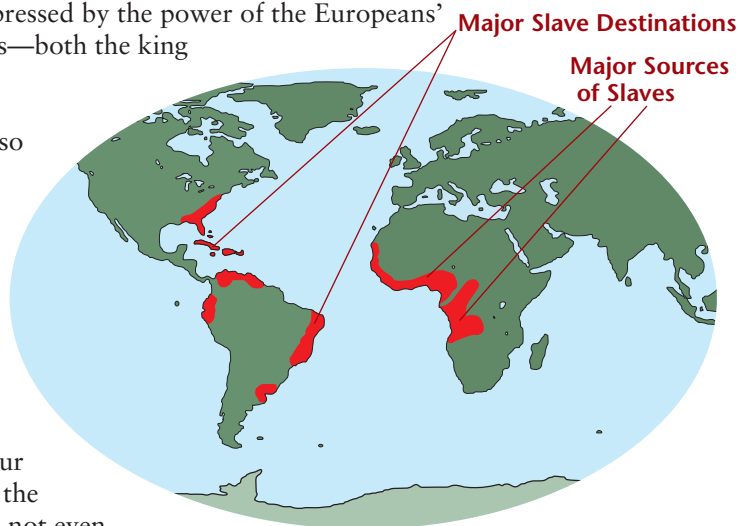
Njinga Of Ndongo

In the fifteenth through nineteenth centuries, African realms were ravaged and transformed by the Atlantic slave trade. In this famous image Anna de Sousa Njinga, ruler of the realm of Ndongo, meets with Portuguese officials while using a servant as a throne to maintain her royal dignity.

In 1482, the central African kingdom of Kongo received some unexpected visitors. Portuguese sailors, searching for a route from the Atlantic to the Indian Ocean, sailed up the Congo River, and later met Kongo's king, known as the manikongo ("lord of Kongo"). Intrigued by his visitors' technology and goods, and perhaps hoping for their help against his local foes, the manikongo opened trade with the Portuguese. He even sent his royal prince to Lisbon to study their language and religion. These ties proved useful in 1491, when Portuguese forces, their banners emblazoned with Christian crosses, helped the manikongo crush a local revolt. Impressed by the power of the Europeans' faith—or at least by the power of their firearms—both the king and the prince soon converted to Christianity.

The prince, who later became Manikongo Nzinga Mbemba (*'n-ZIHN-gab 'm-BEM-bah*), also known by his Christian name as King Afonso I (1506–1543), eventually had reason to regret the Portuguese connection. Despite his devotion to the Christian faith, his people resisted conversion, and profit-minded Portuguese began to carry off Kongolese men to work as slaves on overseas sugar plantations. In 1526 he wrote to the king of Portugal, complaining that the slave traders "are taking every day our natives" and that "our country is being completely depopulated." But the slave trade continued to grow, as Afonso could not even stop his own subjects from trading captured Africans for European guns and goods.

The Kongo story is but one example of the transformation that began in coastal Africa during the fifteenth century. As Europeans arrived by sea, Africans often welcomed them, engaging at first in commercial and cultural exchanges based on mutual interests. But as Europeans started sugar plantations—first on islands off the African coast and later in American colonies—these exchanges increasingly centered on the capture and sale of slaves. For Europeans the slave trade, and the sale of goods produced in the Americas by African slaves, brought wealth, comfort, and growing global power. In Africa, however, the Atlantic slave trade fueled violence and greed, upset traditional economic patterns, disrupted family life, and transformed the political landscape. Although the sale of slaves also enriched and empowered some Africans, it condemned millions of others to brutal bondage.



Africa's Diverse Societies

In the early fifteenth century, before the European intrusion, Africa's many cultures reflected its geographic diversity (Map 23.1). Most Africans, however, belonged either to urban cultures that centered on commerce and Islamic faith, or to village societies that focused on farming and worshipped local gods and spirits.

FOUNDATION MAP 23.1 Fifteenth Century African Connections

Africa's challenging environments often made maintaining connections difficult. Note, however, that in the fifteenth century, as in centuries past, Muslim trade routes connected Islamic West Asia and North Africa by land across the Sahara Desert with West Africa's wealthy kingdoms, and by sea with East Africa's commercial city-states. In the middle of that century, Portuguese voyages down Africa's west coast began to create new connections that eventually would link West, Central, and South Africa with Europe and the Americas. How were Africa's connections shaped by its climate and geography?



North Africa was fully incorporated into the Islamic world, connected by sea with the Mediterranean basin and by camel caravan trade routes with West Africa across the Sahara Desert. Egypt, where farming flourished in the Nile Valley, was North Africa's most populous and prosperous realm, linked commercially and culturally with both Islamic West Asia and sub-Saharan Africa.

Trade and Islam link North Africa and West Africa

West Africa was partially Islamic. Its thriving cities were typically Muslim commercial and cultural centers, but most of its people lived in farming villages and worshipped diverse local deities. Mali, West Africa's most powerful kingdom, had long prospered from its rich gold mines and its role in the lucrative trans-Saharan trade.

East Africa's coast was lined with bustling commercial city-states that were deeply influenced by Islamic faith, Indian Ocean trade, and Swahili culture, which blended Arabic and African features. In the East African interior, however, farmers and hunters retained their traditional worship of spirits in nature, while to their north Ethiopians still practiced an ancient form of Christianity.

East African culture blends Arabic and African features

Central and South Africa, not yet influenced by either Muslims or Christians, were populated mostly by farmers and herders who worshipped various nature spirits and gods. These regions included numerous **stateless societies**—independent villages and federations of villages ruled by local patriarchs and chiefs—as well as several sizable states. One was the kingdom of Kongo, a prosperous agricultural realm near the mouth of the Congo River. Another was the kingdom of Zimbabwe (*zim-BAHB-wā*), south of the Zambezi (*zam-BĒ-zē*) River, which supplemented its cattle-based wealth with gold mined for sale along Africa's east coast.

Like their counterparts in Asia and Europe, then, fifteenth-century Africans lived in a broad range of societies. Some people were educated and cosmopolitan city-dwellers, connected by faith and commerce with others in distant lands. Most, however, were farmers and herders, unaware of the world beyond their own clans and villages. In the centuries that followed, numerous African societies were disrupted and transformed by the emergence of a global economy based on overseas commerce. Central to that commerce was traffic in human beings.

Slavery and the Slave Trade in Africa

Since ancient times, many societies throughout the world had practiced some form of **slavery**, an institution in which some people owned other human beings and used them for their labor. Often slaves were prisoners of war or victims of raids who were forced to serve their captors. Some were criminals or debtors placed in bondage to pay off crimes or debts; others were children sold into servitude by destitute and starving parents. Some slaves were domestics, or household servants; others worked on farms, in mines, or on construction projects building roads and other public works. All slaves, however, were at the mercy of their masters, who ranged from benevolent to inhumanly harsh.

In Africa, as elsewhere, slavery had emerged in ancient times, both in the Nile Valley and in the vast grasslands that stretched across the continent south of the Sahara Desert. With the opening of trans-Saharan trade routes by the second century C.E. and formation of Muslim trade networks five centuries later, African slaves became an

important commercial commodity, not just in Africa but throughout much of the Islamic world (Chapter 13).

African Slavery

Some African societies measure wealth in slaves

Scholars disagree as to how widely slavery was practiced in Africa: some say it was extensive, and others claim it was relatively rare. Most likely the use of slaves in Africa, as in other parts of the world, was common in some regions and uncommon in others. By the tenth century, however, slavery was common enough in some parts of Africa that prosperous people measured their wealth in slaves—rather than in land or in livestock, which served as standards of wealth in other societies.

African slavery was often harsh, involving long hours of forced labor, but it was not necessarily a permanent condition. Slaves in Africa were typically prisoners of war, but debtors, widows, paupers, or outcasts might also be driven into bondage by social pressures or economic need. Slaves were often able to buy or earn their freedom; they could also marry free people and have free children. Although Africans were usually enslaved by a clan other than their own, slaves were not set apart by their appearance, since their skin color and other physical features differed little from those of their African owners.

The Trans-Saharan Slave Trade

The opening of caravan routes across the Sahara Desert by the second century C.E. added a new dimension to African slavery. Along with copper, gold, and salt, slaves became a central feature of the trans-Saharan trade. Merchants traveled from the Mediterranean world to purchase slaves in West Africa; then they transported them across the desert and sold them in North Africa.

Islamic connections expand the trans-Saharan slave trade

The Islamic conquest of North Africa in the seventh century expanded the trans-Saharan slave trade, incorporating it into the larger Muslim world that eventually extended from Spain to India. In time Muslim merchants transported as many as ten thousand African slaves a year to destinations in Islamic lands. The city-states of East Africa, once they came under Muslim control, also became involved in the trading of slaves.

African Slaves in the Islamic World

Wealthy Muslims prize African women as domestic slaves

In Islamic lands the most common form of slavery was domestic servitude, in which slaves served in the homes of wealthy families, tending to their personal needs. The majority of these slaves were women, who typically performed household duties and sometimes also served as concubines. Widely perceived as exotic commodities purchased from distant lands, Africans were highly prized as slaves in many Islamic countries, often serving as a symbol of their owner's wealth and prestige.

The lot of these enslaved Africans was difficult, but their servitude was not necessarily perpetual or hereditary. When a slave woman had a child by a Muslim master, for example, by Islamic tradition she and her child typically became free. Furthermore, since Islam discouraged the enslavement of Muslims, slaves could

sometimes secure their own freedom, or at least that of their children, by adopting the Islamic faith.

Still, although Islam asserted the equality of all human beings before God, the presence in many Islamic lands of numerous black African slaves led some Muslims to link dark skin with servitude. One of those who did so was the writer and traveler Ibn Khaldun (*ib'n khabl-DOON*), who wrote in the fourteenth century that black Africans tended to accept servile status because they had a “low degree of humanity.” Depicting slaves as less than human no doubt helped many Muslims—and later many Christians—to sidestep religious teachings telling them to treat fellow humans with dignity and respect.

But slavery in the Muslim world was not based mainly on skin color. In addition to enslaving Africans, Muslims also enslaved hundreds of thousands of captives from among the Mediterranean peoples of Southern Europe and the Slavic peoples of Russia and Eastern Europe. Indeed, over the centuries, so many Slavs were captured and sold into servitude that the word *slave* itself probably derives from the ethnic term *Slav*.

By the fifteenth century, commerce in African slaves was long established. Particularly in West Africa, rulers and traders often acquired captives from local people or neighboring lands, then sold them to Muslim merchants for transport to faraway places. So accustomed were West Africans to such commerce that their leaders and merchants did not hesitate to sell slaves to Europeans, who in the mid-fifteenth century began to appear in sailing ships along the West African coast.

Muslims import slaves from Europe and Russia

The Atlantic Slave Trade

The European visitors who first arrived in West Africa did not come to purchase slaves. The Atlantic slave trade, like the European conquest of the Americas (Chapter 19), was an unforeseen outgrowth of European efforts to discover an all-water trade route from Western Europe to southern and eastern Asia.



Portuguese slave trading post at El Mina on the Gulf of Guinea.

The Africans and the Portuguese

In the early fifteenth century, decades before Europeans arrived in the Americas, the Portuguese had started sailing south along the coast of Africa in search of a sea route to Asia. As they sailed farther with each successive voyage, they set up trading posts along the coast to do business with Africans. By mid-century, West African merchants were trading their gold, salt, ivory, and pepper for such European items as firearms, cloth, ironware, and copper goods. By the 1480s, African kingdoms along the Gulf of Guinea (*GIH-nē*) and in west central Africa had likewise opened trade with the Portuguese. Thus, by 1497–1498, when Portugal’s Vasco da Gama finally sailed all the way around the tip of Africa and northeast to India, various peoples along Africa’s coast had established contact with visitors from Europe.

At first, eager to bypass the Muslim merchants who controlled the trans-Saharan trade, West Africans gladly did business with the newcomers who arrived by sea. These newcomers brought attractive new goods, including guns, textiles, and tools, and frequently offered better terms than the Muslim overland traders. Pleased to have a

Africans trade with Portuguese for new goods and guns

new outlet for their products, and above all to get European firearms, African leaders bartered with the Portuguese and welcomed their trading posts.

The commerce thus created, at least in the beginning, appears to have been based on mutual interest and respect, each side treating the other as a valued trading partner. But as the coastal commerce came to center increasingly on African slaves, this mutual interest and respect began to disappear.

Sugar and the Slave Trade

Almost from the outset the Portuguese trafficked in slaves, shipping their first human cargoes from West Africa in the early 1440s. These newest victims of the ancient trade came to be used, not as household servants like most slaves sent to Muslim lands, but as field laborers on sugar plantations.

By this time demand for sugar was increasing rapidly. Popularized in the Christian West through contacts with Muslims during the crusades and Spanish Reconquista (Chapter 16), sugar provided huge profits to its suppliers. In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, sugar cultivation was attempted in Spain and Portugal and on Mediterranean islands. But sugar cane, which requires vast amounts of sunshine and water, a 12-month growing season, and intensive labor, was not well suited to Europe. So in the latter half of the fifteenth century, profit-minded Portuguese set up sugar plantations off the African coast, on tropical islands such as Madeira (*mah-DĀ-rab*), São Tomé (*SOU'n too-MĀ*) and Príncipe (*PRĒN-sē-pē*) (Map 23.1). To work these plantations they used African slaves, who were accustomed to living and working in a very hot climate.

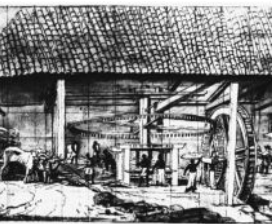
It was not until the sixteenth century, however, with the European colonization of the Americas, that the Atlantic slave trade really took off. The Portuguese colony of Brazil, with abundant sunshine and rainfall, proved an ideal place to grow sugar cane, and thousands of workers were needed to cultivate, harvest, and process it. Portugal, with a small population and its own labor shortage, simply could not supply enough workers to fill the growing need. Portuguese paupers and convicts sent to Brazil to work on sugar plantations usually perished quickly due to heat, humidity, and tropical diseases. Efforts to use Amerinds as laborers likewise proved futile, as they perished in vast numbers from diseases such as smallpox carried by Europeans (Chapter 19).

But Africans were accustomed to hot climates and resistant to tropical diseases, so the Portuguese soon began transporting large numbers of them from the west coast of Africa to Brazil's sugar plantations. Before long West Africa, the Gulf of Guinea coast, and the Congo River region had all become major sources of slaves. In the 1570s Portugal built a large trading port named Luanda (*loo-AHN-dub*) a few hundred miles south of the Congo River, establishing there a colony that came to be called Angola. By the 1600s Angola had become a major source of slaves, and slaves had become the main item of commerce on the West African coast.

The Atlantic Trading System

Portugal's domination of the slave trade did not last. As other Europeans saw the huge profits supplied by slave-grown sugar, they too began to get into the act. By the seventeenth century, the Spanish, French, English, and Dutch had set up sugar plantations on

Slave plantations support growing sugar trade



Sugar plantation, Brazil.

Brazilian sugar plantations import African slaves

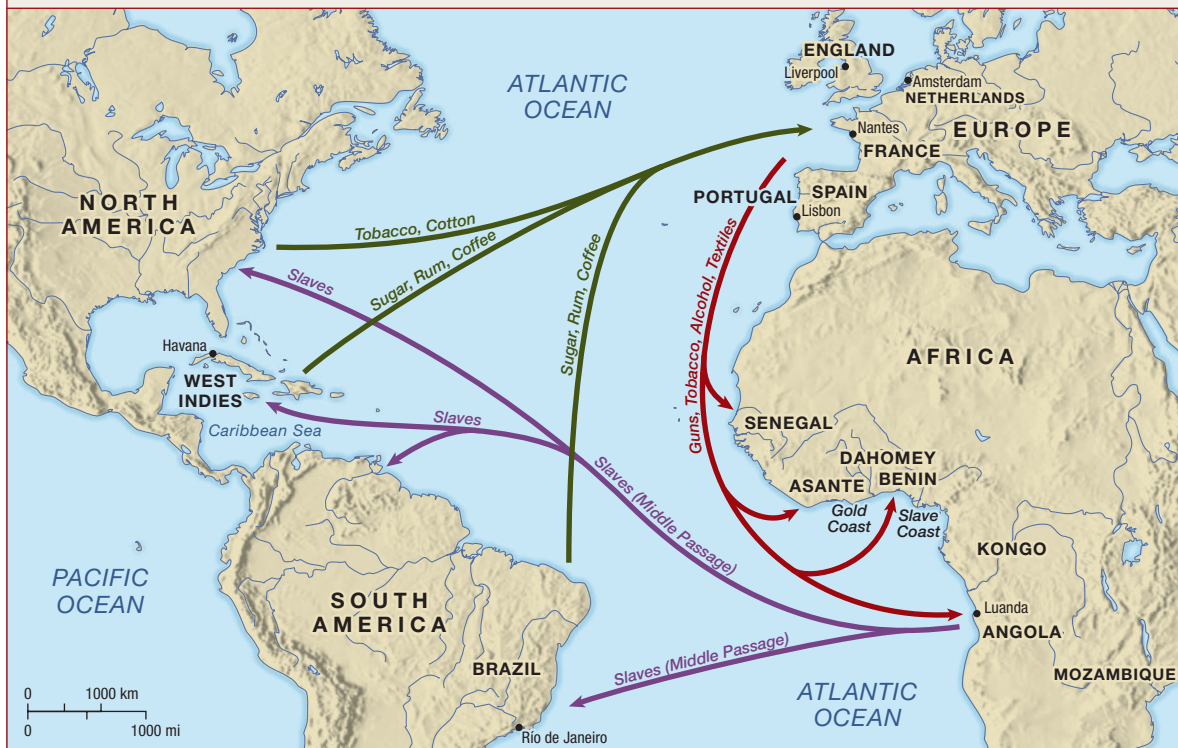
Caribbean islands, which, like Brazil, had the abundant sunshine and rainfall needed to grow sugar. At first the Portuguese supplied these plantations with most of their African slaves. After 1650, however, the English and the Dutch, and later the French, also played key roles in shipping slaves.

The Atlantic commerce that developed has been described as a **triangular trade** (Map 23.2). From bustling European ports such as Lisbon, Nantes, Amsterdam, and Liverpool, ships sailed to Africa bearing guns and textiles, and sometimes also alcohol and tobacco products. There, at coastal trading posts, traders aboard the European ships exchanged these goods for slaves. Then the ships, callously laden with human cargo, crossed the Atlantic to the slave centers of the Americas. There the captives were sold and the ships were loaded with goods—such as sugar, coffee, tobacco, and rum (an alcoholic liquor distilled from sugar cane)—produced in the Americas by slaves. Finally the traders returned to Europe, where they sold these goods at huge profit, a portion of

Triangular trade links Europe, Africa, and the Americas

Map 23.2 The Atlantic Slave Trade in the Sixteenth Through Eighteenth Centuries

In the sixteenth through eighteenth centuries, European merchants developed a lucrative Atlantic trading system centered on African slaves. Notice that Europeans shipped guns and other products to Africa, traded them there for slaves, then transported the slaves to the Americas to produce sugar, coffee, tobacco, and other goods, which were sold back to Europe at immense profits. Why were slaves so central to this commerce? How did this commerce contribute to Western Europe's wealth and power?



which could be used to buy goods for their next trading trip to Africa. This commerce was controlled mainly by Europeans, who supplied the ships and pocketed most of the profits, but many African slave traders profited as well.

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the slave trade exploded. Overall volume increased exponentially, from about 300,000 captives shipped from Africa during the 1500s, to more than six million in the 1700s. Although sugar was the main commodity produced by slave labor, African slaves also worked in silver and gold mines and on coffee plantations in Spain's American empire, and on tobacco (and later cotton) plantations in England's North American colonies. By the time the slave trade was curtailed in the nineteenth century, an estimated eleven to twelve million people had been shipped as slaves from Africa to the Americas, and another one to two million had died along the way. More than four million Africans went to Brazil, and another six million to destinations in the Caribbean. About half a million (less than five percent) went to English North America, which would later become the United States.

The Capture and Transport of Slaves

The victims of these slaving ventures suffered a fate that defies imagination. Their hardships began with their capture in Africa, increased during their transport to the coast, and intensified further with their sale to Europeans and shipment across the Atlantic.

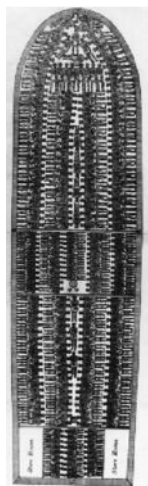
Some of the captives were already slaves who had been sold by their African masters; others were people seized by slave hunters hired by African merchants or local rulers. Most, however, were probably captured soldiers who had been enslaved as prisoners during African wars. African rulers, who generally sought to avoid enslaving and selling their own people, instead enslaved and sold their captive prisoners to acquire wealth and guns.

Captives typically were shackled and chained together, then marched to the coast in long processions. Many either died of exhaustion or took their own lives on the way; others arrived at coastal trading posts dispirited, famished, and diseased. Since relatively few Europeans traveled into Africa's interior, where tropical heat and diseases threatened their lives, this first part of the process was carried out mostly by Africans.

Once the captives reached the coast they were herded naked into wooden cages, examined to determine if they were fit for hard labor, and then sold to Europeans, who branded them with hot irons and crowded them on ships for transport overseas. As the middle part of their three-part journey—from Africa's interior to its coast, from there across the sea to the Americas, and from American ports to plantations or mines—this oceanic crossing was called the **Middle Passage** (Map 23.2).

Packed into ships in layers like freight, with scarce room to move or even sit up, as many as six hundred captives might be carried in a vessel barely 100 feet long. Their skin was rubbed raw by the wooden planks on which they lay and the chains that bound them during the three- to six-week voyage. The air stank with sweat and the stench of the tubs of urine and excrement into which they relieved themselves. Typically between 10 and 20 percent of the captives died on the trip, some from malnutrition, some from suffocation, some from the stifling heat, and some from the diseases that

African rulers trade captives for wealth and guns



Loading plan for a slave ship

spread unchecked among them. Ship captains, who routinely overcrowded their vessels to ensure a big profit despite the high death toll, callously disposed of corpses on the way by casting them overboard. Some captives also jumped overboard, ending their lives to escape their unbearable fate.

African Slaves in the Americas

When survivors of the Middle Passage arrived in the New World, their situation scarcely improved. At slave markets in port towns such as Havana in the West Indies or Rio de Janeiro in Brazil, merchants and plantation owners poked and prodded the Africans, carefully inspecting them as if they were farm animals up for sale. Once purchased, the slaves were transported to plantations or mines, where they were subjected to relentless hard labor and often physical abuse.

In contrast to the slaves in Islamic lands, many of whom were women, most of the Africans shipped across the Atlantic Ocean were men. Selected for their size and strength, the field slaves who labored on sugar plantations were often simply worked to death. Most of them died within five or six years, usually from exhaustion or disease, but sometimes also from beatings inflicted by their masters. Rebellions by slaves were typically put down with European firearms, and escape attempts by slaves also frequently proved futile, since runaways were easily recognized as slaves because of their black skin.

In spite of all these hardships, Africans endured in the Americas. On plantations they formed their own communities, supporting each other and adapting their African cultures to their new surroundings. When compelled by their owners to adopt Christianity, for example, slaves found ways to make this religion their own. They incorporated African spiritualism, music, and dance into their Christian worship, and frequently assigned to Christian saints some traits of African gods. Some runaway slaves, often called **maroons**, fled to the wilderness and established independent communities, where they lived by farming and hunting, maintained many African customs, and forcibly resisted recapture. Despite oppression and abuse, transplanted Africans and their descendants, later collectively called the **African diaspora**, managed not only to adapt to their new homelands but also to create their own new cultures (Chapter 30).

Riches, Race, and Racism

Slavery and the slave trade brought substantial economic benefits to Europe. Slave labor helped exploit the abundant resources of Europe's American colonies, thereby contributing vastly to Europe's wealth and power. Indeed, cheap raw cotton supplied by slave plantations later helped support an Industrial Revolution that catapulted Western Europe to world domination (Chapter 27).

African slavery in the Americas also enabled many Europeans to indulge in new pleasures and comforts. Thanks largely to the Atlantic trading system, middle class Europeans were increasingly able to enjoy such commodities as sugar, coffee, tobacco products, and comfortable cotton clothing—undeterred by the fact that they were supplied through the suffering of African slaves.



Slave market in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

Africans adapt their cultures to life in the Americas

To rationalize the inhumane treatment of so many millions of people, many Europeans and European Americans depicted Africans as inferior beings, or even as a subhuman species. Africans were portrayed as primitive pagans who had little capacity for government, education, or advancement, and who willingly accepted slavery because they lacked intellect and ambition. Some Europeans even asserted that the captives were no worse off as slaves than they had been as villagers in their native Africa.

In time such attitudes, along with encounters among diverse cultures fostered by the opening of the Atlantic, nurtured the notion of **race**. This concept divided human beings into categories called “races,” based on external appearance, especially skin color. Like earlier notions of nobility and caste, race had little biological basis; it rested instead on arbitrary classifications that some groups used to assert their superiority over others. The result was the rise of **racism**, the belief that race was the main determinant of human traits and abilities, with white Europeans often claiming a greater capacity than others for intellectual and cultural advancement. In the nineteenth century, racial thinkers codified these concepts into an elaborate pseudo-scientific system, later used by German Nazis and others to rationalize the suppression and destruction of people they deemed undesirable.

Race reinforces European suppression of Africans in America

Long before these developments, however, the Atlantic slave trade had come to be based on race and rationalized by racism. Race reinforced the enduring suppression of Africans in the Americas, where the parents’ slave status was almost always inherited by their children, dooming each new generation to live and die in bondage. And even when some Africans in the Americas managed to gain their freedom, they were still often targets of racial discrimination. The racial slavery that emerged in the Americas was thus more harsh and dehumanizing than the traditional slavery long practiced in Africa and the Islamic world.

The Transformation of Africa

The Atlantic slave trade’s impact on Africa varied from place to place. The coastal areas where the commerce was conducted, and the nearby lands where the slaves were captured, were the regions most directly affected. Because of their proximity to the Americas, the states of West Africa and the Guinea Coast, as well as the central African regions of Kongo and Angola, supplied the largest number of slaves. Eventually, as these areas were depleted of able-bodied men, by the nineteenth century even East Africa became a source of captive laborers bound for the Americas.

Guns and trade shift power from Africa’s interior to its coast

In the sixteenth through eighteenth centuries, as Africa’s coastal kingdoms gained weapons and riches from their commerce with Europe, power and wealth shifted away from the continent’s interior to its seaboard. This change was especially apparent in West Africa, where the cities and states of the interior, whose wealth depended on the trans-Saharan trade, declined as commerce shifted from the Sahara to the Atlantic. But the impact of the Atlantic trade was also felt elsewhere in Africa. New African powers emerged, their wealth enhanced by the sale of slaves and their might by guns acquired from Europeans in exchange. European countries also set up colonies on the African coast. By the nineteenth century, when the slave trade was outlawed, many parts of Africa had been politically and economically transformed.

The Reorientation of West Africa

The West African interior, made up mostly of extensive grasslands stretching south from the Sahara Desert, had long been one of Africa's wealthiest regions. From the thirteenth through fifteenth centuries, the kingdom of Mali had dominated the grasslands of the western Sudan, along the Senegal (*SEN-ih-gahl*) and upper Niger (*NI-jur*) rivers (Map 23.1). Profiting from the trans-Saharan caravan trade in gold, salt, ivory, and slaves, and from the resulting commercial and cultural connections with the rest of the Islamic world, Mali had amassed extensive power and prosperity (Chapter 13).

In the centuries that followed, however, West Africans increasingly sold such commodities to European traders who arrived by sea, rather than to Muslim merchants who came across the desert in camel caravans. The consequent growth of the shore trade, and the corresponding decline of the overland trade, reoriented West Africa's economic focus and shifted its political balance of power from the interior to the Atlantic and Gulf of Guinea coasts.

THE SONGHAÏ AND KANEM-BORNU EMPIRES. The transformation of West Africa began with the rise and fall of Songhai (*SAWN-GĪ*), a newly emergent regional power that conquered the declining Mali kingdom in the fifteenth century (Map 23.3). Armed with a swift horse cavalry and a fleet of river boats, a Songhai ruler named Sonni Ali (*saw-NEĒ ah-LĒ*), who reigned from 1464 to 1492, overran Mali and brought under his control the whole upper Niger River region. His successor Askia Muhammad al-Turi (*ah-SKĒ-ah moo-HAH-muhd ah-TOO-rĒ*), reigning from 1493 to 1528 as Muhammad I Askia, further expanded the Songhai Empire. Under him it became a vast, prosperous realm that extended well over a thousand miles from east to west, controlling the region's gold and salt mines and its trans-Saharan trade. Intent on imposing his Islamic faith, Askia appointed Arab Muslims as judges and officials, imported Islamic scholars and lawyers, and used his immense treasury to build a multitude of mosques.

In the early sixteenth century, under Askia's capable leadership, the great Songhai Empire was West Africa's largest, wealthiest, and mightiest state. It had strong armies, stable institutions, a cosmopolitan culture, and a flourishing trade in gold, salt, and slaves. To those who dwelt or did business in its thriving cities, it would hardly have seemed possible that Songhai's days were numbered.

But numbered they were. The empire's strength began to decline after 1528, when Askia Muhammad al-Turi was murdered by one of his sons. The state was weakened by further succession struggles, often involving intrigues and assassinations, and by the steady shift of trade from the Sahara to the coast. Stability was restored for a while in mid-century, but in the 1580s a new succession crisis led to full-fledged civil war.

Meanwhile, Morocco, an independent Muslim realm on Africa's northwest coast fortified by commercial connections with nearby Spain and Portugal, sought to expand its share of the trans-Saharan trade. Armed with European cannons and firearms, and aided by Spanish and Portuguese mercenary soldiers, the Moroccans took advantage of Songhai's turmoil. In 1591 they crossed the desert with a vast camel caravan and battled the Songhai army at Tondibi (*tawn-DEĒ-bĒ*), a town north of Gao, the Songhai capital. Although outnumbered ten-to-one, the Moroccans used their guns to great advantage. They crushed the Songhai forces, then sacked the great cities of Gao and Timbuktu, reducing the Songhai Empire to a modest domain.



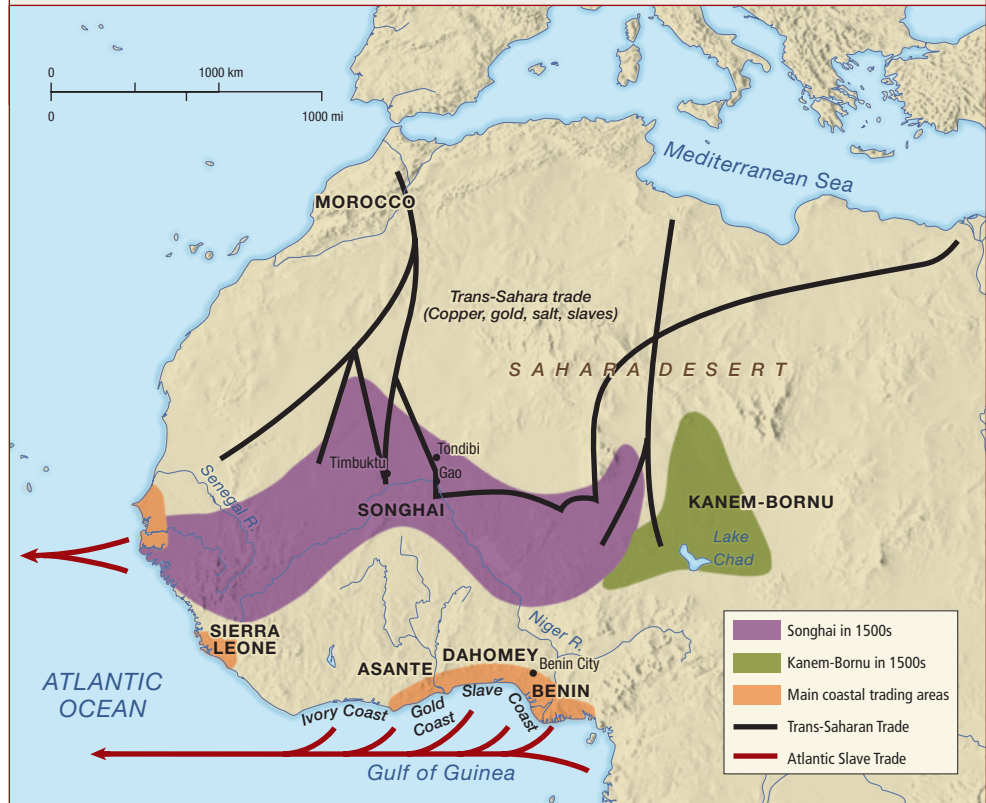
The city of Timbuktu, a center of trans-Saharan trade.

Songhai Empire connects much of West Africa

Morocco battles Songhai for trans-Saharan trade

Map 23.3 West Africa and the Guinea Coast, 1500–1800

In the 1500s, West Africa's largest and wealthiest realms were the Songhai and Kanem-Bornu empires, which reaped large profits from the trans-Saharan trade. Note, however, that with the growth of the Atlantic slave trade over the next few centuries, commerce shifted south to the Gulf of Guinea coast, where new kingdoms emerging in those centuries gained wealth and power from the sale of slaves. How were the Songhai and Kanem-Bornu empires affected by this shift in commerce?



Songhai declines as trading patterns shift

Although Songhai's fall was not directly caused by the growth of the Atlantic slave trade, the shift in trade patterns benefited coastal countries such as Morocco, while undermining the once-vibrant economy of the West African interior. Over the next few centuries, as the interior's commerce further declined, its urban centers gradually turned into obscure backwaters. By the 1800s, when French explorers and soldiers arrived in the dusty remnants of these once-great cities, the tales they heard of bygone empires with fabulous wealth and heroic kings seemed too fantastic to believe.

Idris Alawma unites Kanem-Bornu and expands Islam's role

As Songhai declined, new regional powers arose. To the east, in the region around Lake Chad, a dynamic Muslim warrior named Idris Alawma (*id-RĒS ah-LAW-mah*), aided by firearms and a camel cavalry, united the local kingdoms of Kanem (*KAH-nem*) and Bornu (*BOR-noo*) into a modest empire, which he ruled from around 1570 to the early 1600s. Taking advantage of Songhai's decline, he enhanced the wealth of his

realm by expanding its participation in the trans-Saharan trade. A devout Muslim, he also took great pains to implant his faith, building numerous mosques, replacing local customs and laws with Islamic courts and judges, and vigorously combating adultery and obscenity.

The Kanem-Bornu Empire survived its founder for almost a century. Then, around 1700, weak rulers and extended famine combined to reduce its power. Like Songhai before it, Kanem-Bornu also suffered from the declining importance of the trans-Saharan trade, as commerce shifted southward from the Sahara to the Gulf of Guinea Coast, which increasingly served as a source of goods and slaves for the Atlantic trade.

THE SLAVE TRADE'S IMPACT ON THE GUINEA COAST. South of Songhai, near the Guinea Coast, the sweeping grasslands of the western Sudan give way to dense tropical forests. This region's dominant power, largely untouched by outside influence until the Portuguese arrived in 1485, was the kingdom of Benin (*beb-NĒN*), centered on the mouth of the Niger River (Map 23.3). The kingdom's magnificent capital, known today as Benin City, had miles of walls and moats, a sumptuous palace, guilds of artisans and artists, and rows of splendid houses along wide clean streets that were virtually free of clutter and crime. Unchallenged by Islam, whose reach had not extended that far south, the oba (or king) of Benin also served as head of the local religion; by the 1600s the obas were even deemed by their people to have supernatural powers. Using their exceptional authority, they sought to protect their realm from European exploitation, restricting but not fully banning the overseas slave trade. Although Benin subsequently declined, the hundreds of exquisite iron, ivory, brass, and bronze sculptures and plaques that it left behind testify both to its cultural wealth and to the remarkable skill of its artisans and artists.

To the west of Benin, along the Gulf of Guinea, were lands that Europeans dubbed the Slave Coast, Gold Coast, and Ivory Coast, based on their principal exports. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, some African kingdoms in this region achieved great wealth and power, largely by trading African slaves, gold, and ivory for European firearms. Especially prominent were Asante (*ab-SAHN-tā*), which derived great wealth both from its goldfields and from the sale of slaves, and Dahomey (*dah-HŌ-mē*), whose powerful armies were equipped with muskets and fortified by formidable women who served as palace guards and soldiers.

These riches and weapons then enabled the rulers to expand their own realms and acquire more slaves, establishing a ruthless but very effective cycle. To hold their own, neighboring states had little choice but to get their own guns by trafficking in slaves. As a result, although trade with Europe brought wealth and power to some African kingdoms on the Guinea Coast, those who reaped the greatest rewards were the ones most willing to collaborate with Europeans by selling African people into bondage.

The Depopulation of Central Africa

Central Africa, a hot, humid region encompassing both the Congo River basin's equatorial rain forests and the great tropical grasslands to their south, had little contact with the larger world prior to the 1480s. Central African people were mostly farmers, living mainly in small states and stateless societies centered on villages and clans, although one large state, the Kongo Kingdom (Map 23.4), had emerged by the fourteenth century. The

Benin rulers resist European exploitation



Bronze sculpture from Benin.

New African powers emerge from the Guinea Coast trade

Map 23.4 West Central Africa and the Slave Trade in the Fifteenth Through Eighteenth Centuries

In the fifteenth through eighteenth centuries, West Central Africa served as a major source of slaves bound to work on sugar plantations, first on offshore islands such as Príncipe and São Tomé, and later on plantations in the Americas. Note that millions of Africans were captured in the interior, transported to the coast in chains, and then crammed into ships and brutally transported across the Atlantic. Why did some Africans capture and sell other Africans into slavery?



Kongo king embraces Portuguese commerce and Christianity

Portuguese buy slaves from warlords, bypassing manikongo

European intrusion, which began with the arrival of Portuguese explorers in the last few decades of the fifteenth century, in time had a devastating impact on the entire region, especially on the areas closest to the Atlantic coast.

CHRISTIANITY, SLAVERY, AND THE KONGO KINGDOM. Of all the peoples of Africa, none received Europeans more warmly than those in the Kongo Kingdom, and none suffered more severely for their efforts. Prior to 1482, this central African realm was largely isolated from the outside world, unaware that Europe even existed. In that year, however, Portuguese navigator Diogo Cão (*dē-Ō-gō COW*), also called Diogo Cam, searching for a waterway connecting the Atlantic and Indian Oceans, sailed up the Congo River.

As related at the outset of this chapter, the Kongolese king, known as the manikongo, established good relations with the Portuguese, and the Kongo's crown prince even went to Lisbon to learn Portuguese ways. After returning to Kongo he became a Christian and, as King Afonso I (1506–1543), the new manikongo sought to convert his people to the Catholic faith. With firearms provided by his Portuguese friends, he also endeavored to increase his power and expand his kingdom.

In the long run his efforts failed. Although many members of the Kongo elite embraced the new religion, most Kongolese people continued to worship their traditional gods. Furthermore, the Portuguese traders who came to Kongo were more interested in profiting from commerce than in spreading their faith. As Kongo lacked gold and other valuable trade goods, they turned their attention mainly to procuring slaves.

At first Afonso himself provided the slaves, most of whom were prisoners captured in battles won by using guns supplied by the Portuguese. In time, however, the Portuguese began bypassing Afonso, buying slaves from Kongolese warlords and conducting slave raids that carried off Kongolese subjects. Turning against the slave trade, in 1526 the Christian manikongo wrote to the king of Portugal, asking for help in stopping the enslavement of the Kongolese people (see “Excerpts of Letters from the King of Kongo to the King of Portugal”).

Document 23.1 Excerpts of Letters from the King of Kongo to the King of Portugal

In 1526 the king of Kongo, Nzinga Mbemba, also known by his Christian name as Afonso I, wrote several letters to the king of Portugal asking for help in suppressing the slave trade, which was destroying his kingdom. The excerpts below provide a poignant African perspective on the impact of the slave trade and the behaviors of Europeans and Africans involved in this enterprise.

Sir, Your Highness should know how our Kingdom is being lost in so many ways . . . , since this is caused by the excessive freedom given by your agents and officials to the men and merchants who are allowed to come to this Kingdom . . . , doing a great harm not only to the service of God, but the security and peace of our Kingdoms and State as well.

And we cannot reckon how great the damage is, since the mentioned merchants are taking every day our natives, sons of the land and the sons of our noblemen and vassals and our relatives, because the thieves and men of bad conscience grab them wishing to have the things and wares of this Kingdom which they are ambitious of; they grab them and get them to be sold; and so great, Sir, is the corruption and licentiousness that our country is being completely

depopulated. . . . That is why we beg of Your Highness to help and assist us in this matter . . . , because it is our will that in these Kingdoms there should not be any trade of slaves nor outlet for them. . . .

Moreover, Sir, in our Kingdoms there is another great inconvenience which is of little service to God, and this is that many of our people, keenly desirous as they are of the wares and things of your Kingdoms, which are brought here by your people, and in order to satisfy their voracious appetite, seize many of our people . . . , and take them to be sold to the white men who are in our Kingdoms. . . .

And as soon as they are taken by the white men they are immediately ironed and branded with fire, and when they are carried to be embarked, if they are caught by our guards' men the whites allege that they have bought them but they cannot say from whom, so that it is our duty to do justice and to restore to the freemen their freedom, but it cannot be done if your subjects feel offended, as they claim to be. . . .

SOURCE: *An African Voice of Protest: Letters to the King of Portugal*, compiled by Sara Lyons Watts. http://www.wfu.edu/~watts/w04_Africa.html

Disillusioned with the Portuguese, Afonso also restricted the activities of Christian missionaries, whom he had initially welcomed. But the traffic in slaves continued, largely because neither Afonso nor his successors could prevent their people from dealing directly with the Europeans. By the century's end, as both their subordinates and their enemies openly defied them, the manikongos had clearly lost much of their clout.

In the next century, desperate to free themselves from Portugal's domination, the manikongos allied themselves with the Dutch, who were beginning to move in on the African trade. In 1665, however, the Portuguese defeated the Kongo forces and beheaded the manikongo. After that, the once-powerful Kongo Kingdom steadily disintegrated into smaller domains, mostly controlled by African warlords who were willing to cooperate with the Portuguese. By that time, however, the bulk of the slave trade had shifted to the south, where Portugal had created a colony called Angola.

THE ANGOLA SLAVE COLONY. To the south of the Kongo Kingdom, among a people called the Mbundu (*'m-BOON-doo*), a centralized state known as Ndongo (*'n-DAWN-gō*)



King of Kongo receives Dutch ambassadors.

emerged in the late fifteenth century. Since its ruler was called the *ngola* (*'n-GAW-lah*), the Portuguese, who were beginning to arrive in the region, referred to it as Angola.

Portuguese start a slave colony called Angola

In the sixteenth century this realm was raided regularly by intruders from Kongo, who carried off the Mbundu as slaves and sold them to Portuguese traders. In time, however, as Brazil's sugar fields expanded and the demand for slave labor grew, the Portuguese increasingly sought to secure new sources of slaves. In 1571 they decided to make Angola their colony, and four years later, on its coast, they founded the port of Luanda.

Njinga of Ndongo resists European domination

But Portuguese attempts to exploit the interior met with fierce opposition. Beginning in the 1620s, Anna de Sousa Njinga (*AH-na duh SOO-sub 'n-JIHN-gah*) emerged as the ruler of Ndongo, after her father was deposed as king. Since the realm had no experience with female monarchs, Njinga of Ndongo, as she is commonly called, took on the attributes of a king (see page 556). She dressed as a man, commanded her armies in combat, and reportedly even traveled with her own set of male concubines, clothed as women to stress her kingly status. She also engaged in the slave trade, using it to equip her troops with European firearms, and stubbornly fought Portugal's efforts at colonial expansion. In these struggles she allied for a time with the Dutch, who temporarily gained control of Luanda from 1641 until 1648.

Despite Njinga's resistance, however, the Portuguese ultimately prevailed. First they drove out the Dutch, and then, in the 1650s, they forced Njinga to sign a treaty granting Christian missionaries access to her lands. After her death in 1663, the Portuguese extended their control over the interior, finally conquering the Kingdom of Ndongo in 1683.

Angola's population depleted by slave trade

The result was catastrophic for the Mbundu peoples. Angola emerged as Portugal's primary source of servile labor, supplying an estimated three million slaves, most of them taken to Brazil. These captives constituted more than a quarter of all the slaves shipped across the Atlantic during the duration of the slave trade. Countless Mbundu villages were pillaged of their young males; not until the nineteenth century did the region's population recover. Angola remained under Portuguese rule until 1975.

The Contest for East Africa

East African cities thrive on Indian Ocean commerce

On the other side of the African continent, the situation differed substantially (Map 23.5). Africa's east coast had long been dominated by prosperous Swahili city-states such as Mogadishu (*mo-gah-DE-shoo*), Mombasa (*möm-BAH-sah*), Zanzibar, and Kilwa. Built on coastal islands and peninsulas, these thriving commercial cities controlled the nearby mainland and carried on a lucrative Indian Ocean trade with Arabia, Persia, and India. Although the city-states had not united into a strong political empire, each exercised considerable commercial power, trading local products such as ivory, ebony, leopard skins, and cotton for porcelains, glassware, pottery, and cloth from the east. The coastal cities also dealt in slaves, brought to them from the interior, and gold, mined in southern Africa and transported up the coast to Kilwa, which by the fifteenth century had emerged as the wealthiest and grandest of the Swahili states.



View of Kilwa.

COMMERCE, CHRISTIANITY, CONFLICTS, AND COLONIES. At first East Africa was little affected by the Atlantic trade. Although Vasco da Gama had stopped there on his way to India in 1498, the Portuguese who followed him in the next few centuries showed

little interest in using this region as a source of slaves for the Americas. The Americas, after all, were a long way from East Africa, which already had a thriving Indian Ocean trade that the Portuguese were eager to exploit. Not until the nineteenth century, when the slave trade was banned and curtailed by ships that patrolled the West African coast, would captives from East Africa be shipped in large numbers to the Western Hemisphere (Chapter 30).

The European impact on East Africa was nonetheless profound. In the early 1500s, in an effort both to expand Christianity and to gain control of the Indian Ocean trade, the Portuguese bombarded the Swahili ports, subjected some of them to tribute, and eventually erected imposing stone fortresses at places such as Kilwa and Mombasa. A substantial part of the coastal trade thus temporarily fell under Portuguese domination.

Portuguese domination, however, did little to advance either Christianity or commerce in East Africa. The Swahili cities, managed by Muslims for centuries, steadfastly refused to adopt the Christian faith. Offended, no doubt, by the Christian militancy and domineering trade policies of the Portuguese, many Africans in the interior refused to do business with them. Shipping and commerce steadily dwindled until 1698, when Arab raiders from Oman in eastern Arabia combined with local Africans to drive out the Portuguese. The Omani Arabs then established a thriving commercial center, complete with flourishing slave markets, on the island of Zanzibar. This center then dominated East African trade until the mid-nineteenth century, eventually furnishing numerous captives for the overseas slave trade.

In southeast Africa, the main attraction for the outsiders was the gold that had long been mined in the kingdom of Zimbabwe, located in the African interior south of the Zambezi River (Map 23.5). In the fifteenth century that kingdom had split apart, with much of it eventually coming under the control of a series of rulers who took the title Mwene Mutapa (*'m-WĀ-nā muh-TAH-pah*), meaning “master conqueror.” In time they established a federation

Map 23.5 East African Commerce and Connections, 1500–1800

For centuries, East Africa's coastal city-states were linked with southern Asia, culturally and commercially, by Muslim sea routes. Note, however, that in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the Portuguese forcefully intruded in this region, subjecting some of the city-states to tribute, establishing connections with Christian Ethiopia, and eventually creating in southeast Africa a colony called Mozambique. How did the Portuguese intrusion affect East African commerce? How did East Africans respond to the Portuguese intrusion?



of tribute-paying states, known as the Mutapa kingdom, whose wealth was based, like that of Zimbabwe, on the lucrative gold trade.

In the early sixteenth century, lured by the glitter of this gold, profiteers from Portugal began moving inland, rather than simply conducting coastal trade as they had elsewhere in Africa. After setting up a naval base in 1505 at a place on the coast called Mozambique (*mō-zahm-BĒK*), they soon established settlements along the Zambezi River. These efforts brought them into contact and conflict with the Mutapa kingdom, whose people for decades resisted all efforts to conquer and Christianize them.

In 1575, however, in a bid to acquire European weapons, the reigning Mwene Mutapa signed an agreement allowing the Portuguese to mine his gold in return for providing him with firearms. Eventually, as its rulers made further concessions, the Mutapa realm was reduced to the status of a Portuguese vassal state. In the 1630s, when a revolt arose against the foreign overlords, Portugal crushed the rebels and extended its control over the entire region.

Thus there developed in southeast Africa a large Portuguese colony known as Mozambique. Eventually, in addition to providing gold, it also became a significant source of slaves. Like Angola in the west, it would remain under Portugal's sway until 1975, long after both the Atlantic slave trade and Portuguese prowess were gone.

Mozambique becomes a large Portuguese colony

THE BATTLES FOR ETHIOPIA. No African domain was more distinctive—or more fascinating to European Christians—than the empire of Ethiopia, which bordered on the southern Red Sea across from the Arabian Peninsula. In the fourth century the Ethiopians had adopted Coptic Christianity, a creed that was considered Monophysite (*muh-NOFF-ih-sit*), or “single-nature,” holding that Jesus Christ was only divine, rather than both human and divine as other Christians believed (Chapter 10). Since that time the Ethiopians had clung resolutely to their traditional faith, even after they were cut off for centuries from the rest of Christendom by Islamic expansion. Although they were mostly farmers, Ethiopians did conduct commerce, including some traffic in slaves, with the Muslim world.

In the twelfth century, European crusaders were enthralled by rumors of a wealthy Christian kingdom in the East, allegedly led by a powerful king-priest known as Prester John, said to command a sizable army capable of crushing the Muslims. Three centuries later, despite the obvious improbability that he could still be alive, Portugal sent expeditions to East Africa to search for this mythical Christian monarch. So intoxicating was the legend that, when a Portuguese mission arrived in Ethiopia in 1520, its connection with that ancient Christian kingdom evoked as much excitement in Europe as Columbus's voyages to the Americas had elicited in the 1490s.

At first the new connection proved fortunate for Ethiopia. In 1529 and 1531, a neighboring Muslim warlord attacked and laid waste to the realm, forcing many Christians to adopt Islam. But the Ethiopians appealed for help to the Portuguese, who in time sent an expedition to the rescue. Although the head of this mission, Vasco da Gama's son, was captured and beheaded by Islamic forces, a joint Ethiopian-Portuguese force finally vanquished the Muslims east of Lake Tana in 1543 (Map 23.5).

Later, however, the European ties proved troublesome, especially when Jesuits came to Ethiopia seeking to replace its Coptic Christian faith with the “dual-nature” Roman Catholic version, which held that Jesus Christ was both human and divine. In the 1620s, the Jesuits even managed to convert the emperor, who then tried to impose his new faith

Christian Ethiopians defeat Muslims with Portuguese help

on his subjects. But the Coptic Christians rebelled, ousting this ruler in 1632, and soon thereafter his successor expelled the Jesuits and most other outsiders. Henceforth, through centuries of chaos and regional conflict, the Ethiopians maintained both their independence and their Coptic creed, resisting the intrusions of both Muslims and European Christians.

South Africa and the Dutch

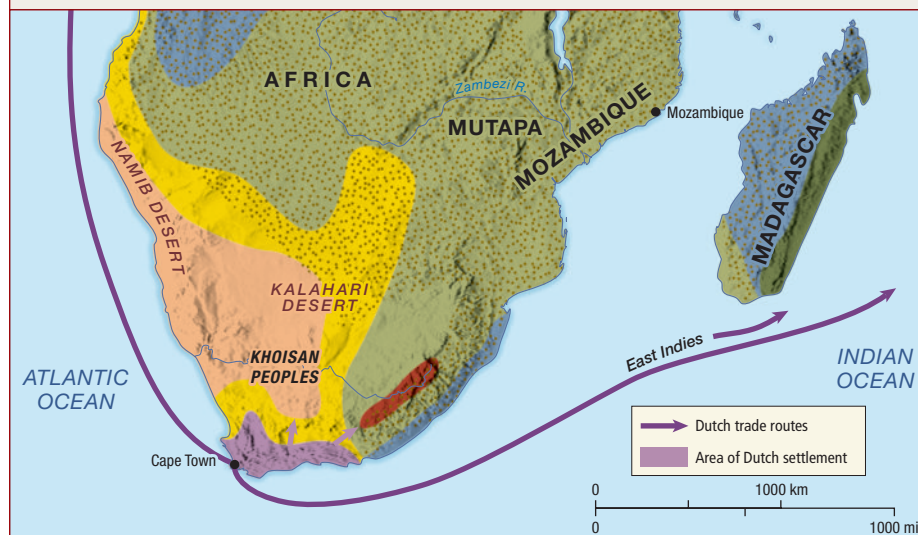
The southernmost part of Africa, remote from both Europe and Asia, was initially spared from outside intrusion. Its indigenous inhabitants spoke unique languages, now called **Khoisan** (*KOY-sahn*), distinguished by clicking sounds. The Khoisan-speaking peoples were mostly farmers and herders, although some still lived in hunter-gatherer societies. Their lives remained undisturbed, even when the Portuguese began sailing around South Africa in the late 1400s, because at first the Europeans did not try to colonize the region.

In 1652, however, on the southeast coast, the Dutch East India Company set up a way station for Dutch ships traveling back and forth between Europe and the East Indies. That settlement, later called Cape Town (Map 23.6), gradually grew into a small colony, as the mild South African climate and rich soil attracted a number of settlers from the Netherlands.

South African colony helps Dutch connect with the East Indies

Map 23.6 South Africa and the Dutch Incursions, 1652–1806

Due to its great distance from both Europe and Asia, South Africa was largely spared from outside incursions until the mid-seventeenth century. Observe, however, that in 1652 the Dutch set up an outpost at Cape Town to serve as a stopping point for ships en route to and from the East Indies, and that Dutch farmers called Boers eventually came from Europe to settle on surrounding lands. What impact did the Dutch settlers have on Khoisan-speaking African peoples who had long lived in this region?





Dutch fort at
Cape Town.

The arrival of the Dutch eventually proved disastrous for South Africans. At first the immigrants lived mostly near the coast, but as time went on Dutch settlers called Boers (*boorz*), a Dutch term meaning “farmers,” began moving north into the interior, using their guns to defeat and displace the Africans who lived there. The Khoisan speakers were driven off their lands, and most were either enslaved or exterminated.

The Dutch controlled South Africa until 1806, at which point the colony passed into British hands. By then it had become a racially stratified society, dominated by Dutch South Africans who called themselves Afrikaners.

The Impact on Africa of the Atlantic Slave Trade

Although each region of Africa was affected differently by the European intrusions, the overall impacts on the continent were extensive and profound. Traditional trade patterns were disrupted or destroyed, replaced by exploitative systems that typically favored those who trafficked in slaves. Historic states and kingdoms were weakened and undermined, while rulers who seized slaves and sold them for firearms grew in power and wealth. Wars, rebellions, and slave hunts abounded, as ruthless and ambitious Europeans and Africans sought to fill the insatiable demand for servile labor in the Americas.

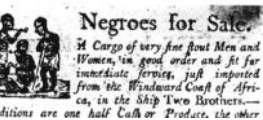
Demographic Dislocation

The demographic dislocation caused by these events was monumental. During the course of the Atlantic slave trade, which flourished from the sixteenth through the early nineteenth centuries, sub-Saharan Africa may well have lost more than fifteen million people. As noted above, eleven or twelve million were shipped as slaves to the Americas, one to two million more died along the way, and another several million were transported to North Africa and Asia, mostly by Muslim merchants.

Historians differ in assessing the impact of these losses. Some believe that they were catastrophic, contributing greatly to Africa’s destitution and the destruction of its traditional cultures. Others contend, however, that in the long run the decline was offset by the impact of nutritious new crops, such as sweet potatoes, peanuts, and maize, brought over from the Americas. Especially important in this regard was **cassava** (*kuh SAH-vuh*), also called manioc (*MAN-ē-ock*), a large hardy plant from the American tropics, whose edible portion grows below the ground, much like a carrot or potato. Cassava can be cooked or eaten raw, ground into flour for bread, processed into tapioca and starch, and even used to make an alcoholic drink. Brought to Africa from Brazil, most likely by Portuguese traders, it was widely adopted by African farmers because of both its hardiness and its ability to feed more people per acre than most other major crops. Such new crops, according to some historians, helped to substantially increase Africa’s food supply and thus over time its population, offsetting its vast loss of people to the Atlantic slave trade.

Disruption of Family Life

Thus, unlike the Amerinds, whose population never fully recovered from the demographic disaster of the sixteenth century (Chapter 19), many African societies in time regained the population they had lost as a result of the European intrusions. Nothing,



Notice announcing a
shipment of African
slaves.

New crops from the
Americas help offset
population loss

however, could offset the suffering of the slaves or the disruption of families decimated by the loss of their loved ones.

In Africa, as elsewhere, the lives of most people centered on their families and clans. Although some people dwelt in cities and pursued specialized professions, most Africans were farmers and herders, living with their kinfolk in small villages, and raising crops or grazing livestock on the surrounding lands. Men did most of the heavy field work, but women and children often helped with the sowing and tilling. A man's prestige was typically based on his physical prowess, while a woman's status was based on her bearing of children.

Africans typically connected in families and clans

As in most agricultural societies, African marriages were arranged by the parents, and wives were generally subject to their husband's authority. **Polygyny**, the practice by which a man has more than one wife at a time, was relatively common in some parts of Africa, even before the advent of the Atlantic slave trade. In Africa, as elsewhere, the bride's family often gave the groom a dowry. In some African cultures, however, the husband's kin were expected to provide a **bridewealth**—a payment from the groom to the parents of the bride to compensate them for the loss of their daughter and assure them that he would treat her well. This practice suggests that women there were highly valued.

The Atlantic slave trade ravaged many millions of African families. During the centuries of its operation, families were robbed of the labor and talents of many of their most productive members. Since American plantations demanded mostly men, the population remaining in West and Central Africa was predominantly female, disrupting the traditional gender balance. In these regions polygyny persisted, and probably even expanded, since the number of available brides for a long time exceeded the supply of available grooms. In East Africa, conversely, polygyny was less pronounced, since much of this region's slave trade was conducted with the Muslim world, where female slaves were frequently preferred.

Atlantic slave trade ravages African families

African Slaves and the Global Shift in Wealth and Power

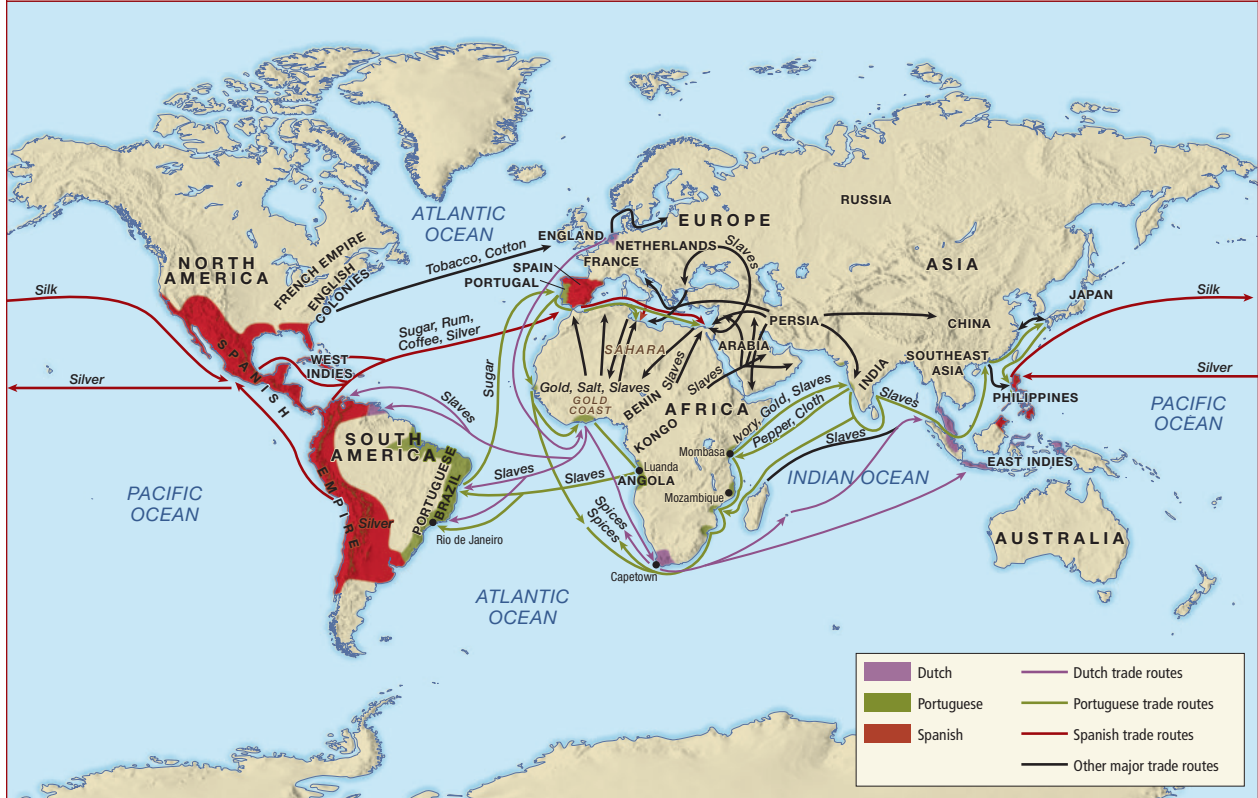
In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, when Portuguese sailors were laying the foundations for the Atlantic slave trade, the Muslim world and China were the main centers of commerce, wealth, and power. Indian Ocean trade, conducted mainly in Muslim ships, linked East Africa, Arabia, Persia, India, Southeast Asia, and the East Indies, while other land and sea routes connected this commerce to China, North Africa, West Africa, and Europe. The Chinese dominated trade in East and Southeast Asia, with other countries paying tribute to China for the privilege of partaking in its commerce.

In the sixteenth through eighteenth centuries, however, Europeans not only intruded into Indian Ocean commerce but also opened sea routes across the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, creating history's first truly global networks of regular connections (Map 23.7). The Atlantic Ocean, hitherto the western edge of international commerce, gradually became its center. And the nations of Western Europe, hitherto small states that dwelt on the periphery of international trade, now became the primary carriers of oceanic commerce, the rulers of great world empires, and the main centers of a global economy. As trade shifted westward from the Indian Ocean to the Atlantic, wealth and power shifted westward to the Europeans.

Commerce expands from regional to global networks

Map 23.7 Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century Commercial Networks

By the mid-seventeenth century, the Atlantic slave trade was part of a growing global commercial network. Notice that the Portuguese, Spanish, and Dutch in this century dominated global trade routes, though the English and French had also set up colonies and were taking part in this trade. Which of this network's key commodities, as listed on this map, were produced through the labor of African slaves?



African slaves enhance Europe's commercial wealth

Central to this process were African slaves, who produced much of the sugar, rum, and coffee, mined much of the silver, and later grew much of the tobacco and cotton that fueled Europe's growing global commerce. This commerce in turn helped produce the wealth that sustained the armies, navies, weapons, and bases that projected European power across the globe and paid the officials who ran Europe's global dominions. By 1800 Europe was on its way to world domination, based in part on the servitude and suffering of countless African slaves.

Chapter Review

Putting It in Perspective

The European intrusion in Africa, and the resulting Atlantic slave trade, forged connections and sparked conflicts among cultures that had hitherto been unaware of one another. Diverse societies in Europe, Africa, and the Americas were linked together in an exploitative enterprise that brought great wealth and power to some and enhanced the material comfort of many, while subjecting millions of others to misery. The ancient practice of slavery, typically oppressive and often cruel, was transformed into something that was even more onerous and ominous: a system of subjection that was racial, perpetual, and hereditary. African societies were also transformed, with power and wealth going mostly to those Africans who sold other Africans into bondage. The soil and resources of the Americas were exploited by Europeans, using the labor of unprecedented numbers of captive slaves. And even Europe, though materially enriched, was morally diminished by its leading role in one of history's most infamous atrocities: the forced relocation and brutal exploitation of millions of human beings.

Indeed, in the long run, the slave trade's social impacts may have been the most destructive of all its effects. Millions of victims were torn from their homelands and taken to distant lands under relentlessly cruel conditions. Millions perished in the process; others survived to endure harsh lives in alien surroundings, with their descendants also sentenced to continued enslavement. Others, meanwhile, profited from these endeavors, and even sought to excuse their actions by denying the humanity of those whose lives were destroyed. And even after the commerce in slaves and slavery itself were ended, a bitter legacy of racism and resentment continued to infect the societies of Africa, Europe, and the Americas, connected for centuries by the Atlantic slave trade.

Reviewing Key Material

KEY CONCEPTS

stateless societies, 559	race, 566
slavery, 559	racism, 566
triangular trade, 563	Khoisan, 575
Middle Passage, 564	cassava, 576
maroons, 565	polygyny, 577
African diaspora, 565	bridewealth, 577

KEY PEOPLE

Nzinga Mbemba (Afonso I), 557, 570	Sonni Ali, 567
Ibn Khaldun, 561	Idris Alawma, 568
Askia Muhammad al-Turi (Muhammad I Askia), 567	Diogo Cão, 570
	Njinga of Ndongo, 572

ASK YOURSELF

1. How did the Atlantic slave trade originate? Why did Europeans use slaves from Africa to work their sugar plantations?
2. How did slavery in the Americas differ from the slavery practiced in Africa and the Muslim world?
3. What were the main impacts of the Atlantic slave trade on West Africa, Central Africa, and East Africa? Why did it have such a different impact on each of these regions?
4. Why did triangular trade patterns emerge in the Atlantic basin? What were the benefits and detriments of this trade for people in Europe, in Africa, and in the Americas?
5. How did the Atlantic Slave Trade contribute to a global shift in wealth and power?

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Key Dates and Developments

1300s	Kongo Kingdom emerges	1575	Mutapa kingdom allows Portuguese to mine gold
1400s	Mutapa Kingdom emerges	1591	Moroccans crush the Songhai Empire
1440s	West Africans begin selling slaves to Portuguese	1623–1663	Njinga reigns in Ndongo
1468–1473	Sonni Ali defeats Mali and creates the Songhai Empire	mid-1600s	English and Dutch move in on the Atlantic trade
1482–1483	Kongo Kingdom first visited by Portuguese	1652	Dutch begin Cape Town settlement in South Africa
1503–1507	East African cities attacked by Portuguese	1698	Arabs from Oman drive Portuguese out of East Africa
1520	Ethiopia visited by Portuguese mission	1700s	Height of Atlantic slave trade
1529–1541	Muslims and Portuguese struggle over Ethiopia		
1570s	Angola colony started by Portuguese		