

Africa and the Slave Trade

Highlights

#1

To what extent was African slavery in place before Europeans “woke up”, “discovered” the Americas and plantation agriculture, and forcibly took enslaved Africans to work on those American plantations?

Pre-Existing Slave Trade

- Trans-Saharan, Red Sea, and East African trade routes had been trading slaves for centuries throughout the Middle East and Northern Africa
 - Mostly women: traded as concubines for harems; domestic servants
 - Some men: soldiers, field workers (salt production and gold mines), caravan laborers
- Europeans tapped into existing routes and supplies of slaves.
 - Used this to justify their own enslavement of Africans in New World
 - Mid 1400s: Europeans begin to utilize slaves in Europe as household servants
- Other forms of servitude used by Europeans:
 - Indentured servitude: Required to work for a master for “X” years in exchange for journey to European colony
 - Impressment: Taking men, usually other sailors, into a navy by force

#2

To what extent was the enslavement of Africans different in North America (what would become the United States) and Latin America and the Caribbean?

Latin America/Caribbean vs. North America

Latin American and Caribbean	North America (British Colonies): Mainly, the exclusively southern colonies
Chattel slavery (slaves as property)	Chattel slavery (slaves as property)
Men outnumber women	Men outnumber women
Slaves lowest social position	Slaves lowest social position
95% of slaves from Africa	5% of slaves from Africa
Sugar plantations dominate	Tobacco then cotton plantations
Population not sustainable (high death rates)	Population sustainable (birth rates exceed death rates)
Mulattos higher status, often times manumitted. Many slaves set free or bought freedom.	Mulattos low status, most remain slaves. Slaves could almost never gain freedom.

#3

What was the gun and slavery cycle?

Effects of Slave Trade on Africa

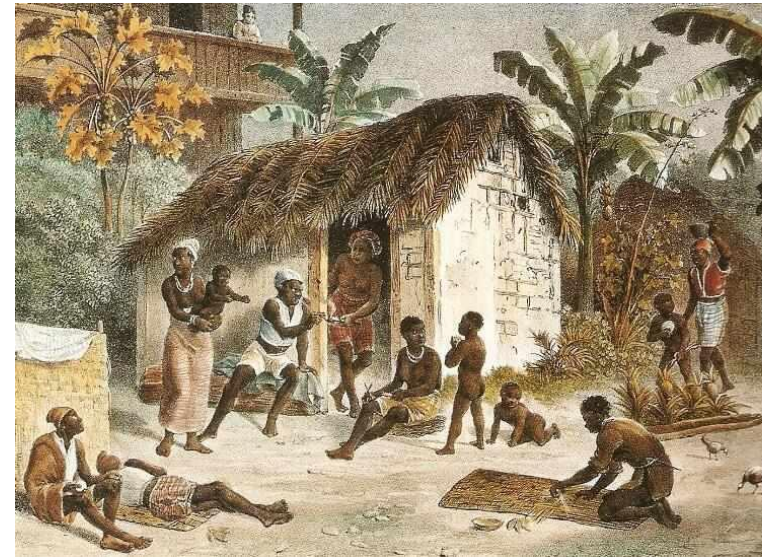
- Endless wars between African kingdoms and tribes promoted the importance of weaponry → sale of captive Africans was a way to obtain European gunnery
- Most powerful African communities quickly became those who were willing to trade slaves with Europeans
 - Obtained in exchange: firearms, iron, horses, cloth, tobacco
- Result: Gun and Slave Cycle
 - Increase firepower allowed African states to expand over neighbors, producing more slaves, which they traded for European guns
 - Result: unending warfare and disruption of societies through slave trade
- Europeans intensified African enslavement that had already existed.

#4

Describe slave society and culture.

American Slave Societies

- Family formation was difficult for slaves as families may be separated at any time
 - Male to female ratio sometimes 3:1
- Slaves did create family units as best they could.
 - Nuclear and extended families
 - Marriage



Religion and Rebellions

- African Religion in the Americas
 - Conversion to Christianity by Europeans
 - African religions continued despite attempts by slave owners to suppress them
 - Often Christianity and African religions (including Islam) were fused
 - “Visions and spirit possession found a place in the Africanized versions of Christianity that formed in the New World”. R. Strayer
 - “Syncretic religions such as Vodou in Haiti and Santeria in Cuba persisted. They derived from West African traditions and featured drumming, ritual dancing, animal sacrifice, and spirit possession. Over time, they incorporated Christian beliefs and practices such as church attendance, the search for salvation, and crucifixes and often identified their various spirits or gods with Catholic saints.” R. Strayer

Religion and Rebellions

- Resistance –
 - Slaves would constantly resist in a variety of ways:
 - Breaking tools, faking ignorance, purposefully working slow, harming master, escaping.
- Rebellions (infrequent)
 - Palmares, 1605-1694: runaway slave kingdom in Brazil that resisted Portuguese and Dutch attempts to destroy it for 100 years
 - Suriname: plantation colony where large numbers of slaves ran off in 18th c. and waged war against captors



Rebellion in later period

- Haitian – 1791 – Slaves won!
- Nat Turner, Virginia, 1831