

Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade

Beginnings

As we have discussed before, the idea of slavery, as in owning humans as property, has been around as long as there have been societies. Every people group on the planet that have had complex, agricultural cities have had some type of slavery.

Africa (aside from in Egypt) was behind Europe & Asia in developing agriculture and therefore was behind Europe & Asia in enslaving of people. During the 600-800 time period, the Muslims came into Africa and began that Trans-Saharan and Trans-Indian Ocean slave trades. Thus, by the time Prince Henry the Navigator of Portugal was leading and prompting exploration near Africa, Africans had a pre-established, robust slave trade network that saw the selling of over 10,000 slaves a year.

At the beginning, when Europeans and Africans make first contact, it is important to understand that the Europeans & Africans were fairly equal in their ability to make goods and overall knowledge. The Europeans did not come in and amaze the Africans with their goods... especially after having dealt with the Muslims from the Middle East. The Europeans had guns... and that was about it in terms of advantages.

Why Did the Europeans Need Slaves?

This is an important question to answer in understanding the Trans-Atlantic slave trade. The Portuguese arrived along the West Coast of Africa in 1494 with two important goals: (1) find gold/make money to be able to trade with India and China while (2) creating problems for the Middle East Muslims. These were the two reasons that had originally led them to explore to begin with. The Portuguese saw this robust Slave trade as a way to make money while taking money from other Muslim Kingdoms.

The reasons changed rapidly in 1502, the realization that Columbus had discovered a the "New World." As the Europeans colonized North & South America, the came



across a number of farmable products that were not available in Europe: sugar and tobacco. It was also an ideal climate for cotton and grapes to make wine. All of these products required extensive maintenance and labor to plant, maintain and harvest. The Europeans were excited about these products for a number of reasons. First, they were products that other Europeans would be interested in buying, easing SOME of the desire for goods from India. Second, it gave them products that other parts of the world would be interested in buying. The Europeans quickly began to setup large plantations with the intention of growing massive amounts of these cash crops.

As Thomas Jefferson once said, “*For in a warm climate, no man will labour for himself who can make another labour for him.*” The Europeans were now creating massive plantations of crops that needed lots of labor. The Europeans had no intention of doing that labor themselves. They viewed themselves as being superior to the natives on the land that had been conquered. Thus, the Europeans tried to put them to work.

The Europeans encountered some problems. First, the natives in the New World had never developed agriculture (except for the Incas in Peru). They did not know how to farm and were not accustomed to the grueling work. Many died. Second, because they had never farmed or domesticated animals, the natives did not have immunity to animal-born disease. The Europeans were already immune to these diseases and did not realize they were carrying those germs with them. Thus, when the Europeans arrived, diseases like Small Pox and Measles spread like wild fire. After Columbus arrived in 1492, Small Pox spread through the Caribbean and across North America, killing over 10 million natives in under 50 years. Similar results were had in South America, too. Third, the natives were familiar with the land, so they could easily run away to places the Europeans could not find them. This all lead to the Europeans’ labor force either dying or running away.



The Europeans began to have a high need for laborers as the natives died off. The Europeans saw the African slave trade as a way to get a labor force who was (a) used to the hot, humid conditions, (b) familiar with the skill sets of farming thanks to the Bantu expansion and thus (c) immune to many of the diseases that had killed the Native Americans. Finally, the African slaves would be on an unfamiliar land, making it difficult to run away. Mix in the Europeans’ feeling that they were already superior to the Africans, and it made for the “perfect” solution to the European labor problem.

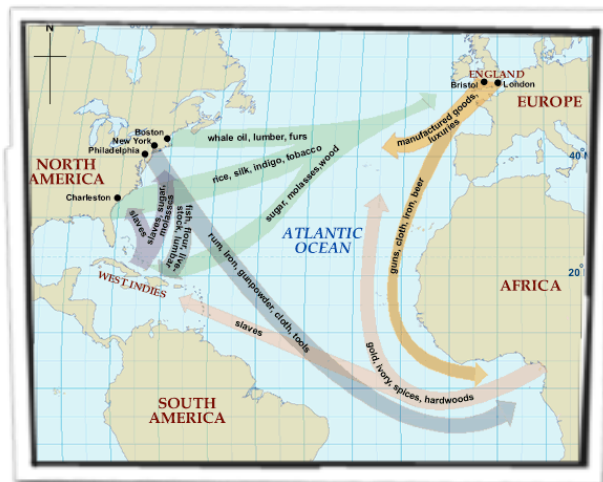
Triangle Trade

The African slave trade became known as the Triangle Trade.

Step 1: European Goods Sold to the Africans for Slaves

The Europeans were typically not the ones capturing slaves. African Kingdoms along the West African coast would kidnap/capture people to be slaves and bring them to the coast to be sold for clothes, guns, or alcohol. African Kingdoms would start fights with each other for the chance to kidnap slaves to get access to these goods.

Step 2: Slaves brought to the New World and Traded for Raw Materials



The ships would bring the slaves from Africa to the New World, with the Caribbean and Brazil being the two main stopping points. The ships would then fill up with Sugar, Cotton, Tobacco, etc made on the large slave plantations.

Step 3: Raw Materials brought back to Europe to be made into goods

From Home to the New World

Between 11-12 Million Africans were enslaved and taken to the Americas. Countless more died before they ever reached the shores of the New World. The process of becoming a slave in the New World followed a typical six step process:

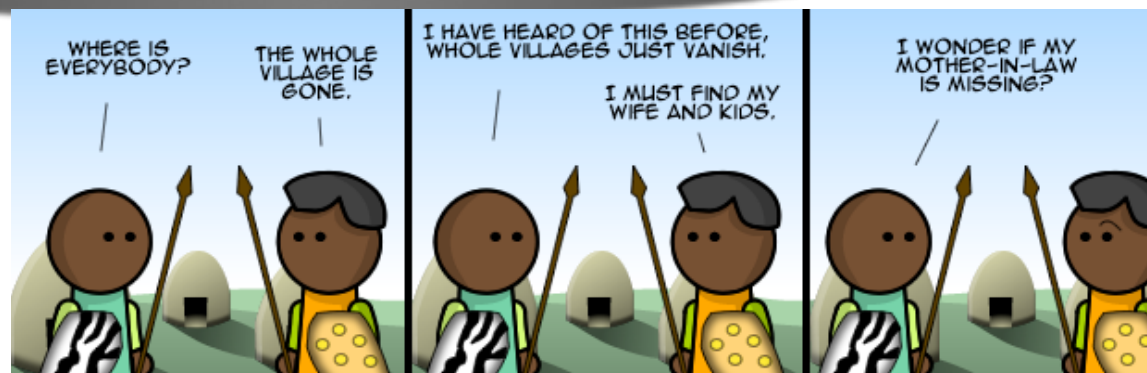
1) *Being Captured*

The local clans and kingdoms would have started wars or skirmishes so that they would take people as slaves. They would come in the early morning (3-4 AM) and raid towns. They would capture people with ropes and nets, shooting those who tried to resist. They would put those they captured into chains and shackles and get them ready to go to the coast.



2) *The Long March*

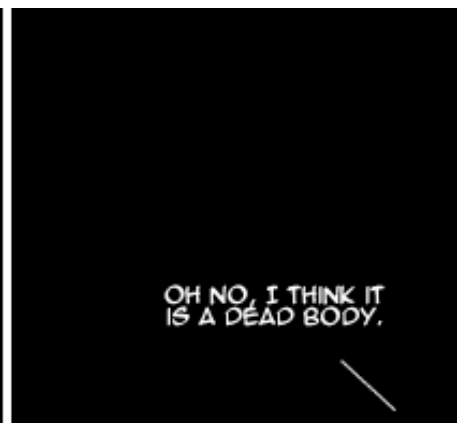
The captives would be marched on average 150 miles to the African Coast, where they would be made ready to be sold. Resistance was met with death. Collapsing from exhaustion meant getting your head smashed in.



3) *The Slave Factory*

Once to the coast, slaves were crammed like sardines into prison cells at a fortress structure known as "slave factories." Here the slaves would wait until the slave ships came. This could be for days... weeks... even months.

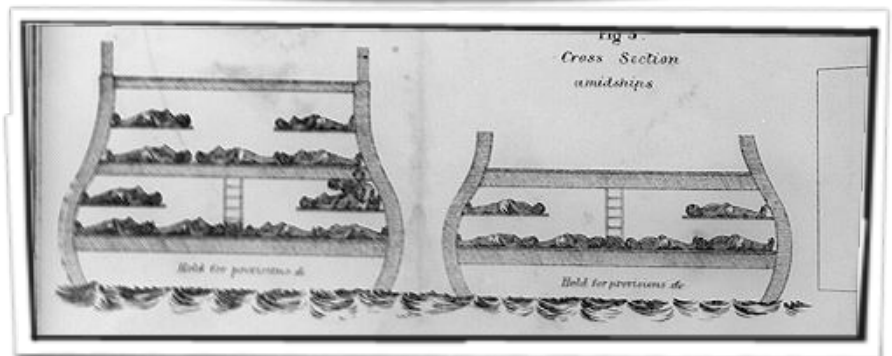
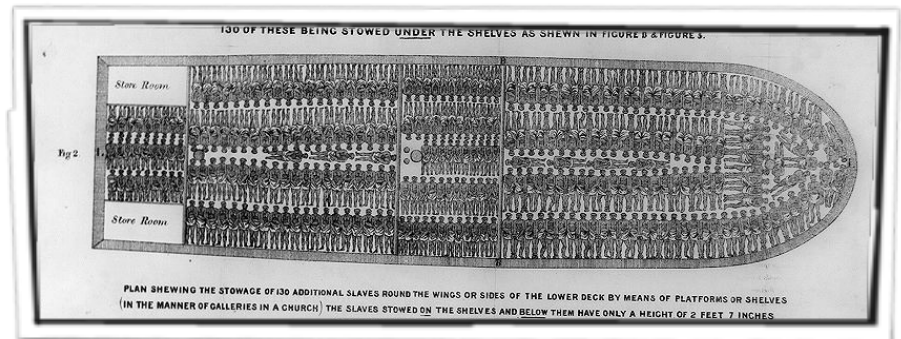




4) The Middle Passage

In the Triangle Trade, the “Middle Passage” was the voyage from Africa to the New World. On this route, the slaves would be chained to the boat under the deck. They would fit 650 slaves into a space built for 400. Here they would stay for 2-3 months as the ship sailed the Atlantic Ocean. The male captives were normally chained together in pairs to save space; right leg to the next man’s left leg — while the women and children may have had somewhat more room. The captives were fed beans, corn, yams, rice, and palm oil. Slaves were fed one meal a day with water, but if food was scarce, slaveholders would get priority over meals. Sometimes captives were allowed to move around during the day, but many ships kept the shackles on throughout the arduous journey.

13% of the captives would die from malnutrition or disease, as they did not have a means of dealing with the human waste. It was said that slave ships smelled so bad, you could smell them coming from a 5 miles away at sea.



The number of dead increased with the length of voyage, since the incidence of diarrhea increased with longer stays at sea as the quality and amount of food and water diminished with every passing day. In addition to physical sickness, many slaves became too depressed to eat or function efficiently because of the loss of freedom, family, security, and their own humanity. This often led to worse treatment like force-feeding or lashings. Some even committed suicide by jumping over board before they arrived in the New World.

5) Seasoning Camps

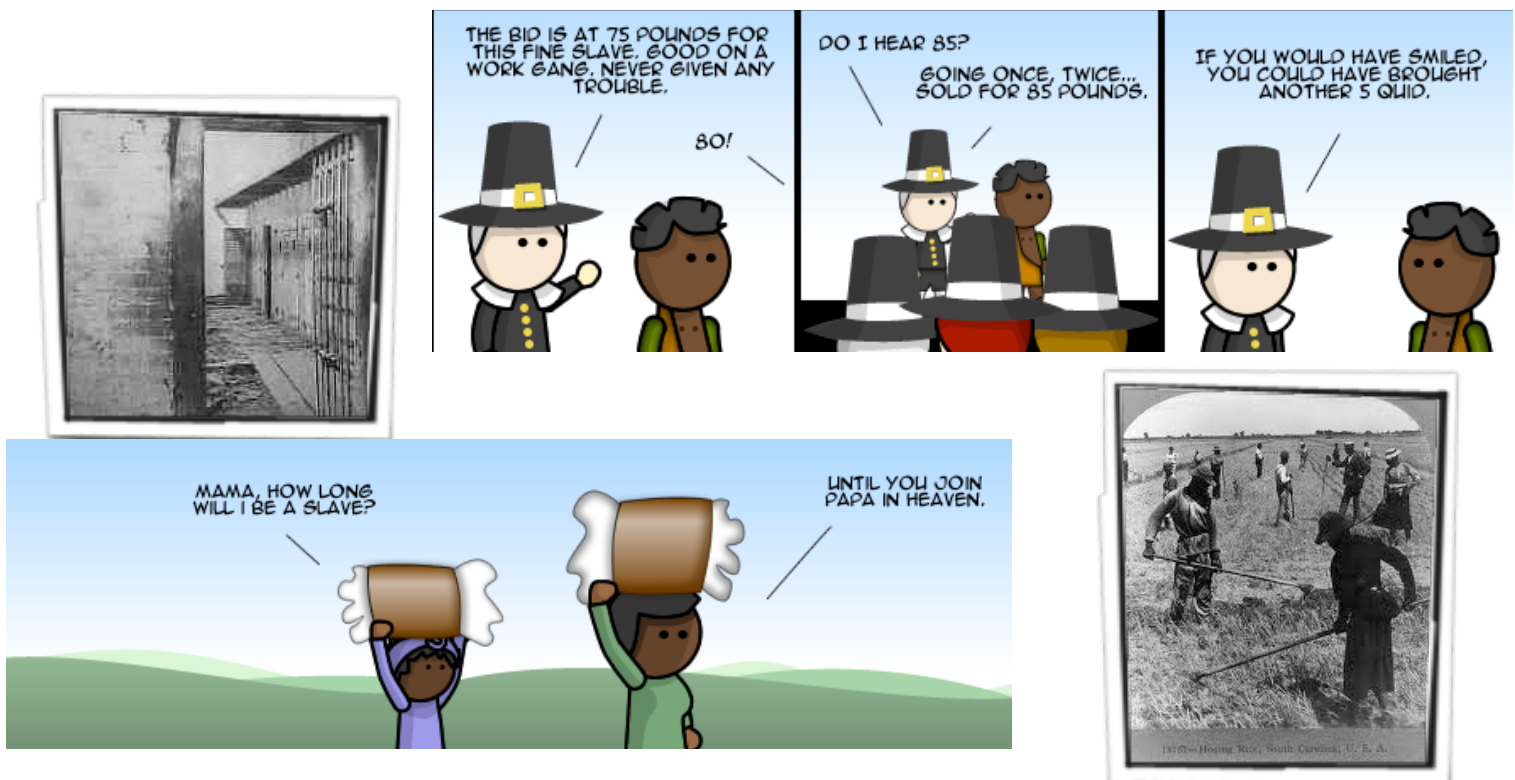
Once across the Atlantic, the slaves then entered “seasoning camps” where the slaves were tortured for the purpose of “breaking” them (like the practice of breaking horses) and conditioning

them to their new lot in life. This included giving the slaves new names as well as beatings. Jamaica held one of the most notorious of these camps. 33% of Africans would have died in the first year at seasoning camps found throughout the Caribbean. Many slaves shipped directly to North America bypassed this process; however most slaves (destined for island or South American plantations) were likely to be put through this ordeal. All in all, 5 million Africans died in these camps reducing the final number of Africans to about 10 million.



6) The Auction

Once in the Americas, slaves were sold, by auction, to the person that bid the most money for them. It was here that family members would find themselves split up, as a bidder may not want to buy the whole family, only the strongest, healthiest member. When the slave ship docked, the slaves would be taken off the ship and placed in a pen like this one. There they would be washed and their skin covered with grease, or sometimes tar, to make them look more healthy. This was done so that they would fetch as much money as possible. They would also be branded with a hot iron to identify them as slaves. Then the slave would be taken off to the plantation, where they and their children and their children's-children's-children would be forced to do back breaking labor for the rest of their lives.



Questions:

Use complete sentences

- 1) When the Africans & Europeans first interacted, who had the more advanced society? *Support your conclusions with facts.*
- 2) Why did the Europeans originally get involved in the Slave Trade?
- 3) What took place in 1502? Why were the Europeans excited about this?
- 4) Put Thomas Jefferson's Quote into your own words. How did this relate to the relationship between the Natives & the Europeans?
- 5) What (three) problems did the Europeans have with using the Natives as a work force? What effect did this have on the African Slave trade? Why?
- 6) What was the Triangle Trade? Create a picture/graphic organizer (using shapes & lines) to explain the describe the Triangle Trade.
- 7) Look at the picture below "Slave Raid." Describe what is going on in the picture (include objects, actions, and emotions).
- 8) What were the Long March & Slave Factories? What role did they play in the Slave Trade process?
- 9) What was the "Middle Passage"? Describe what the conditions were like on the boats. Why would so many people die on the voyage?
- 10) What were the "seasoning camps"?
- 11) What would happen at the slave auctions? What would a slave's life look like after the auction?