

# 3

## THE SLAVE TRADE

### FIND OUT

Why did Europeans become interested in Africa?

Why were millions of Africans sent as slaves to the Americas?

How did the Atlantic slave trade affect Africa?

**Vocabulary** abolition, diaspora

In the mid-1700s, 11-year-old Olaudah Equiano was kidnapped from his home in Nigeria and sold to slave traders. Bound in chains, he and hundreds of others like him were marched to the coast. There, a slave ship waited at anchor, ready to carry its human cargo to the Americas.

Olaudah Equiano lived many years as a slave in the Americas before he was able to buy his freedom. Later, he wrote a book describing the terrors of his voyage into slavery.

“I was immediately handled, and tossed up to see if I were sound, by some of the crew, and I was now persuaded that I had gotten into a world of bad spirits, and that they were going to kill me. Their complexions, too, differing so much from ours, their long hair, and the language they spoke . . . united to confirm me in this belief. . . .

The closeness of the place and the heat of the climate, added to the number in the ship, which was so crowded that each had scarcely room to turn himself, almost suffocated us. ”

From the 1500s to the 1800s, slave traders sent an estimated 10 to 15 million Africans

across the Atlantic to the Americas. In some areas, the slave trade had an unsettling impact. This deadly commerce in human beings came to dominate relations among Europe, Africa, and the Americas.

### Exploring the Coast of Africa

The first direct contacts between Europeans and the peoples of West Africa occurred in the early 1400s. By then, Portugal's Prince Henry was looking for a sea route around Africa to India. He sent explorers to map the coast of West Africa. Prince Henry also hoped to find the kingdoms of West Africa, which had large resources of gold.

Gradually, Portuguese sailors explored the African coast. In 1488, Bartholomeu Dias rounded the southern tip of Africa. Ten years later, Vasco da Gama followed Dias's route and reached India by sea.

The Portuguese and other Europeans built small trading stations on the coast. They traded with the peoples of West Africa, exchanging iron and copper for fish, sugar, ivory, gold, and pepper. The Europeans also brought Christian missionaries, who set out to convert Africans to Christianity.

### Trade in Human Beings

During the 1400s, Europeans bought a few Africans as slaves and carried them to Europe. The demand for slaves was limited, however, until Europeans began to settle the Americas. European rulers required a large labor force to make their American colonies profitable. At first, they used Native Americans to mine gold and silver and to work their plantations, but many died. (See page 460.) Europeans then looked to Africa. They thought that Africans would be able to survive in the tropical climates of the Caribbean and Central America.

**Slavery in Africa.** Forcing people into slavery did not begin in the 1500s. In Africa, as elsewhere around the world, slavery had existed since ancient times. Most slaves in Africa were people who had been captured in war. Others had sold themselves into slavery during times of famine.

In many African societies, slaves were part of the community. They were treated as servants rather than property. According to an Ashanti saying, "A slave who knows how to serve inherits his master's property." In time, slaves or their children often became full members of the society.

**The Atlantic slave trade.** Europeans, however, introduced slavery on a massive scale. At the height of the slave trade in the 1700s, up to 60,000 Africans a year were packed into the airless holds of slave ships. Many did not live through the "middle passage" across the Atlantic. This vast, forced migration moved the surviving Africans thousands of miles from their homes.

As the demand for slaves grew, so did the profits to be made from the slave trade. By the 1600s, a trade network, with people as cargo, linked Africa, Europe, and the Americas.

Racism quickly took root. Many whites in Europe and the Americas came to look on Africans as inferior humans. Some even tried to back up their bias with so-called "scientific proof" of racial differences. Racism was used to justify treating Africans as property.

**Slaves for guns.** European slave traders relied on local African rulers to supply them with slaves. They paid for slaves with guns and other manufactured goods. Armed with guns,

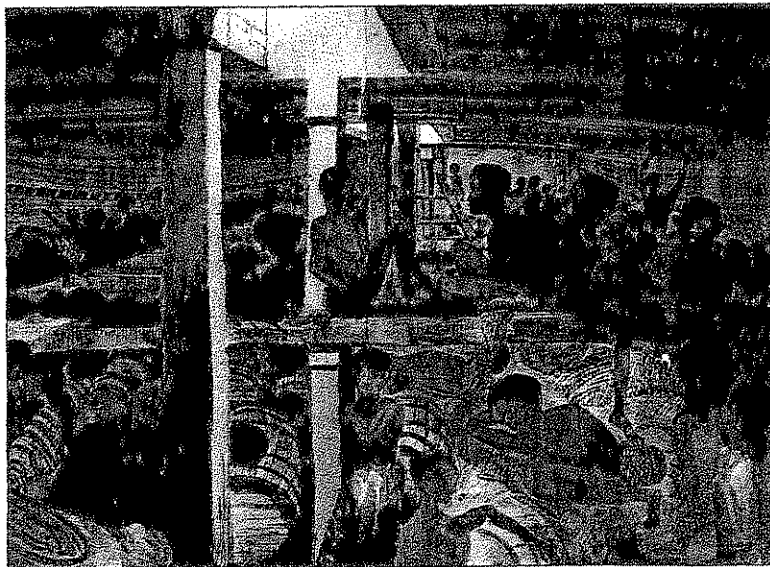
African slave traders attacked villages, taking many prisoners.

Many captives resisted, but only a few escaped. Once on board ship, some Africans tried to organize rebellions. Others jumped overboard to avoid a life of slavery. Many died of diseases that spread rapidly in the filthy, crowded conditions of a ship's hold. The Atlantic slave trade lasted about 400 years. During that time, it may have caused the deaths of as many as 20 or 30 million Africans.

### Ending the Slave Trade

"It is our will that in these kingdoms there should not be any trade of slaves nor outlet for them." King Affonso, a Christian African ruler, made this proclamation in 1526 to the Portuguese government. Affonso had seen the misery of the slave trade, but his efforts to stop it failed.

Some people in Europe spoke out against slavery. However, their voices also went unheeded. In the 1700s, a few important European thinkers began to talk about human rights and to oppose slavery. Abolition, or the movement to end slavery, slowly gained force. The Quakers, a religious group, were strong supporters of abolition. Later, in Britain and the United States, many free blacks such as



**The Middle Passage** This rare painting, done by an English officer on a slave ship, shows human cargo crammed in the hold of a ship. In a desperate attempt to escape their captors, some Africans jumped overboard.

**Human Rights** What human rights guaranteed by the Bill of Rights of the United States Constitution were denied to those who were enslaved?

Olaudah Equiano and Frederick Douglass struggled tirelessly against slavery. By telling about their own experiences, they exposed the evils of the system.

In 1807, Britain outlawed the slave trade. Later, the British convinced other nations to accept the ban. Many people, however, broke the law and continued to ship Africans to the Americas illegally. Also, the ban on the slave trade did not end slavery. Under pressure from abolitionists, Britain outlawed slavery in its empire in 1834. Slavery, which contributed to the outbreak of the Civil War, continued in the United States until 1865.

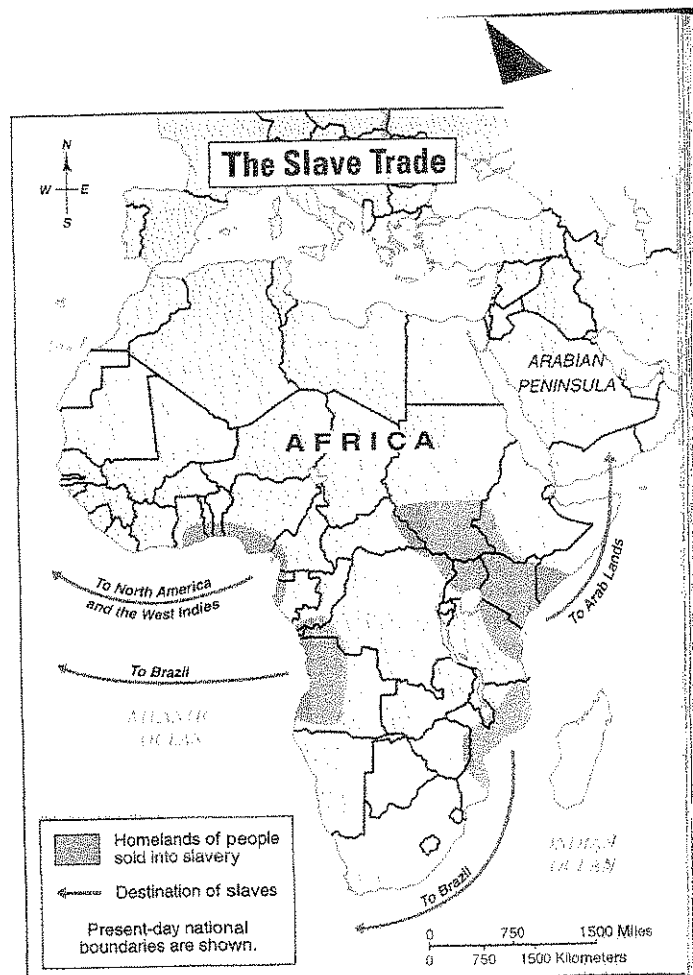
### Effects of the Slave Trade

As European nations began to industrialize, slavery became less profitable. Instead of slaves from Africa, Europeans needed Africa's raw materials for their factories. However, 400 years of the slave trade had a lasting effect on Africa as well as on other areas of the world.

In some parts of Africa, the slave trade had little or no impact. In other areas, however, it disrupted whole societies. Sometimes the slave trade encouraged wars and increased tensions among neighboring peoples. In West Africa, for example, the rulers of the Ashanti and Dahomey attacked their neighbors to take slaves. They exchanged slaves for guns, which they used to dominate trade and build strong states.

When slave raiders attacked small communities, economic life suffered. Raiders seized healthy young men and women. Without strong hands to plant and harvest, the community faced disaster. No one knows how many small communities may have disappeared in this way.

The slave trade also thrived in East Africa. There, some African rulers delivered captives to Arab merchants, who sent their human cargoes to the Middle East and North Africa. As in West Africa, the slave trade in East Africa led to the rise of strong new states. During the late 1800s, Mirambo, ruler of the Nyamwezi, built a centralized state. He traded slaves for guns and extended his power over a large region of what is today Tanzania. At about the



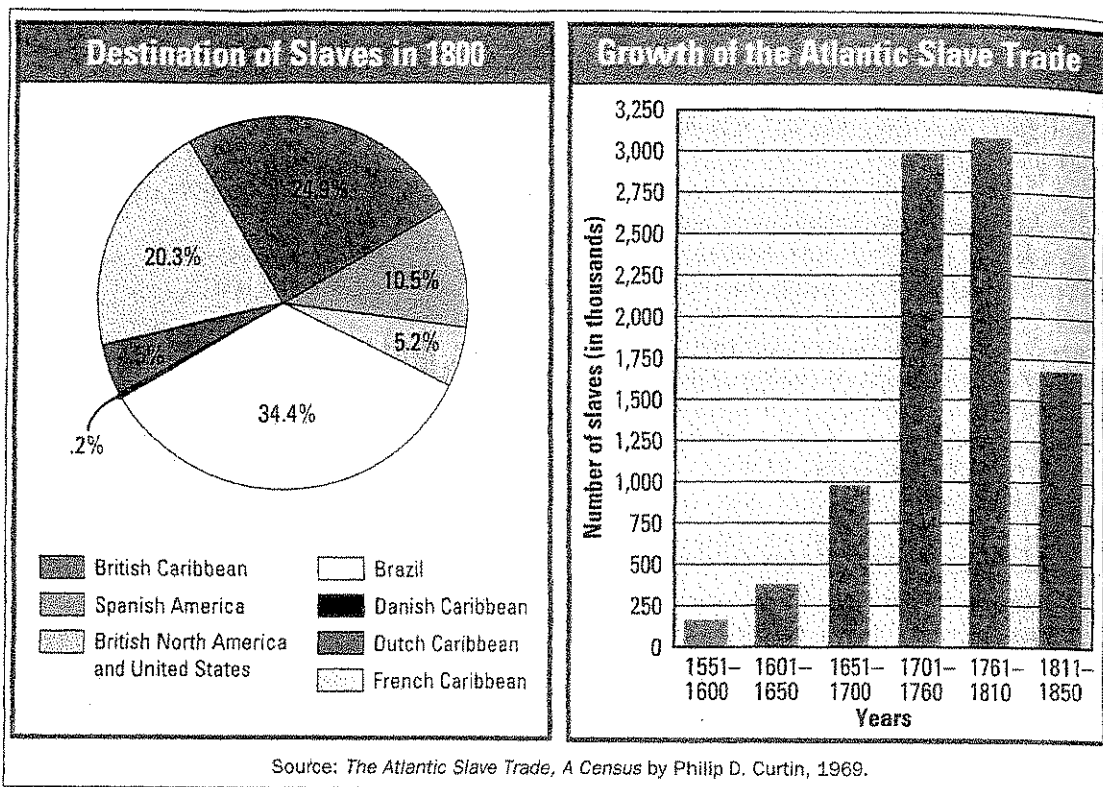
### MAP STUDY

Millions of Africans were captured and sold into slavery from the 1500s to the 1800s. This trade in enslaved Africans caused great suffering and lasting hardships in African societies.

- 1. Region** Which regions of Africa were the homelands of most of the people who were enslaved?
- 2. Movement** (a) What were the destinations of the slave trade? (b) Describe the route of the slave trade from East Africa to Brazil.
- 3. Applying Information** Why do you think that the Atlantic Ocean became the main route of the slave trade?

same time, Tippu Tib organized an empire in the eastern Congo (today Zaire). It was built on the ivory trade and the slave trade.

**African diaspora.** The slave trade sent millions of Africans overseas. This scattering



**Graph Skills** Statistics about the number of enslaved Africans who were brought to the Americas are very rough estimates. Historians have worked with sketchy records to recreate a picture of the Atlantic slave trade.

► To which three areas were the largest number of slaves sent in 1800? Approximately how many enslaved Africans were brought to the Americas between 1761 and 1810?

of people, called a diaspora (dī as puh ruh), brought great suffering to those who were taken captive. The survivors, however, struggled to hold on to their culture. The African diaspora spread the ideas, customs, and beliefs of African peoples to other regions of the world. African musical traditions, proverbs, foods, religious beliefs, and artistic styles all enriched the cultures of these regions. (See Global Connections on page 154.)

**Sierra Leone and Liberia.** As slavery was abolished, some Africans returned to the continent where they or their ancestors had been born. In 1787, the British set up a colony in West Africa for freed slaves. The colony was called Sierra Leone. Later, free blacks from the United States organized Liberia. Liberia became independent in 1847, despite many

obstacles. At this time, Europeans were expanding their influence all across Africa.

## SECTION B REVIEW

1. **Identify:** (a) Mirambo, (b) Tippu Tib.
2. **Define:** (a) abolition, (b) diaspora.
3. What motives led Europeans to explore the coast of Africa in the 1400s?
4. **Understanding Causes and Effects**
  - (a) How did scarcity of labor in the Americas encourage the Atlantic slave trade? (b) Explain one other cause of the slave trade.
5. **Writing Across Cultures** List two ways in which slavery and the slave trade affected Africa. List two ways in which they affected the United States.