

# The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade (Part One)

Week Three Lectures



# Things to Recall before Moving Forward

- As has become quite clear throughout our previous lectures, Slavery takes on many forms and is quite diverse. With that being said, there are certain parallels and continuities in the process.
- Remember that indigenous systems of slavery were in existence in many African societies, particularly in West Africa. These forms of slavery transformed in the presence of demand from external merchants and slave traders.
  - The purpose of slavery was changing from one of varied uses that were not inherently tied to slave-labour (such as for sexual reproduction and prestige) to one primarily intended for labour.
- "Societies with Slaves" were transforming into "Slave Societies" (which linked the production of slaves [enslavement] with the large scale sales and use of slaves).
- Finally, while slaves were often the collateral of wars between states and empires, the existence of a "slave market" was a relatively new invention, tied to European presence.

TABLE 3.1. *Estimated Slave Departures from Africa, 1500–1800*

Sector	1500–1600	%	1600–1700	%	1700–1800	%	Total	%
Red Sea	100,000	9.2	100,000	3.6	200,000	2.6	400,000	3.4
Sahara	550,000	50.6	700,000	25.2	700,000	9.0	1,950,000	16.7
East Africa	100,000	9.2	100,000	3.6	400,000	5.1	600,000	5.1
Atlantic	338,000	31.1	1,876,000	67.6	6,495,000	83.3	8,709,000	74.7
TOTAL	1,088,000		2,776,000		7,795,000		11,659,000	

*Source:* Tables 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 3.2 3.3, 3.7. Also see Ralph Austen, “The 19th century Islamic slave trade from East Africa (Swahili and Red Sea coasts): A tentative census,” *Slavery and Abolition* 9, 3 (1988), 21–44; José C. Curto, “A quantitative reassessment of the legal Portuguese slave trade from Luanda, Angola, 1710–1830,” *African Economic History*, 20 (1992), 1–25; Curto, “The legal Portuguese slave trade from Benguela, Angola, 1730–1828: A quantitative re-appraisal,” *Africa* (São Paulo) 16 (1993), 101–16; and Per O. Hernaes, *Slaves, Danes, and African Coast Society. The Danish Slave Trade from West Africa and Afro-Danish Relations on the Eighteenth-Century Gold Coast* (Trondheim: University of Trondheim Press, 1995). It should be noted that slaves destined for the offshore islands of the western African coast and Europe for the period 1600–1850 are not included. The estimated number of slaves leaving western Africa was correspondingly higher. The figures used here rely on the *Slave Trade Database*, which does not account for slaves sent to the offshore islands or Europe in this period. See David Eltis, Stephen Behrendt, David Richardson, and Manolo Florentino, *The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database* (<http://www.slavevoyages.org/tast/index.faces>).

TABLE 3.2. *Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade, 1601–1700*

Period	Number of Slaves	Annual Average
1601–1625	353,000	14,100
1626–1650	315,000	12,600
1651–1675	488,000	19,500
1676–1700	720,000	28,800
TOTAL	1,876,000	

*Source:* David Eltis, Stephen Behrendt, David Richardson, and Manolo Florentino, *The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database* (<http://www.slavevoyages.org/tast/index.faces>).

TABLE 3.3. *Atlantic Slave Trade by National Carrier, 1701-1800*

National Carrier	Number of Slaves	Percent
English	2,545,000	39.2
Portuguese	2,213,000	34.1
French	1,139,000	17.5
Dutch	330,000	5.1
North American	189,000	2.9
Danish	67,000	1.0
Spanish	11,000	0.2
TOTAL	6,494,000	

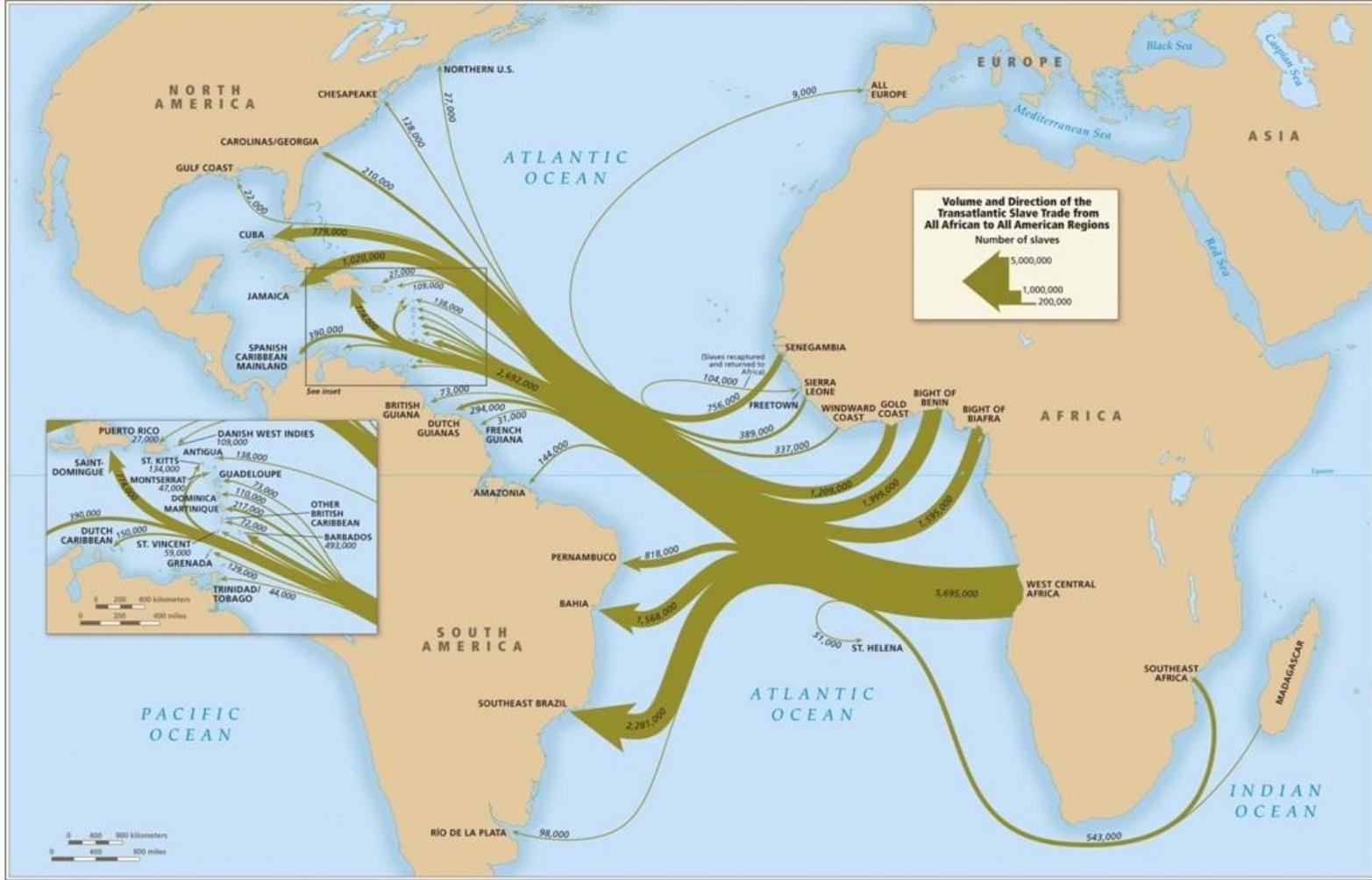
TABLE 3.9. *Estimated Population of Trade Slaves, 1600–1800*

Category	Exported	Retained or Killed	Total
Females (14–30)	2,130,000	2,700,000	4,830,000
Males (14–30)	3,830,000	1,000,000*	4,830,000
Children (under 14)	1,600,000	4,200,000	5,800,000
Mature adults (over 30)	0	3,860,000	3,860,000
TOTAL	7,560,000	11,760,000	19,320,000

*Sources:* Table 3.1 for estimated exports across the Atlantic. Ralph A. Austen, “The 19th century Islamic slave trade from East Africa (Swahili and Red Sea coasts): A tentative census,” *Slavery and Abolition* 9:3 (1988), 21–44; Austen, “The Mediterranean Islamic slave trade out of Africa: a tentative census,” in Elizabeth Savage, eds., *The Human Commodity: Perspectives on the Trans-Saharan Slave Trade* (London; Frank Cass, 1992), 214–48; José C. Curto, “A quantitative reassessment of the legal Portuguese slave trade from Luanda, Angola, 1710–1830,” *African Economic History* 20 (1992), 1–25; Curto, “The legal Portuguese slave trade from Benguela, Angola, 1730–1828: A quantitative re-appraisal,” *Africa* (São Paulo) 16 (1993), 101–16; Per. O. Hernaes, *Slaves, Danes, and African Coast Society. The Danish Slave Trade from West Africa and Afro-Danish Relations on the Eighteenth-Century Gold Coast* (Trondheim: University of Trondheim Press, 1995). The estimated sex ratio of the total population is calculated at 1:1, including 30% children, 20% adults over age 30, and 50% teenagers and adults under 30, in the total population exposed to enslavement. It is assumed that some men were retained as slaves in Africa and that some were able to achieve their freedom through ransoming or other means. It is arbitrarily assumed that one million men who were enslaved did not leave Africa. Of those who did not leave Africa, a significant number were retained in slavery, while many people died during wars and raids associated with enslavement.

# Captured & Retained vs. Captured & Exported

- Regarding Table 3.9, it is important to recognize that the indigenous forms of enslavement were not giving way 100% to the export market.
  - A HUGE amount of slaves were kept in various communities on the West African coast.
  - Some of these slaves were used for domestic labour, others for sexual reproduction, and some grown men were kept for hard labour. Children factored into this as well.
- Furthermore, we must remember that not all of the slaves captured and brought to other locations in West Africa arrived alive.
  - At the West African port of departure, the death rate was approximately 6-10 percent.
  - En route to the coast, as much as 10-14 percent of the captives died.
  - This would mean that the scale of migration would be increased by about 20% just by death.



# Disintegration and Slave Raiding/Warring

Paul Lovejoy argues that one of the difficulties in preventing the expansion of the slave trade was the fact that many of the large states and empires in West Africa had disintegrated into many smaller, competing states.

For example, in 1591, Morocco invaded the Songhay empire, degrading the ability of the leadership to control the export of humans. The same applied to other West African states and Empires, as well as in Ethiopia and East Africa.

Political disintegration, disunity, distrust, and instability often rendered soldiers the most powerful (and de-stabilizing) elements of society. New breeds of horses increased their mobility and ability to capture slaves through warfare and raiding.

# Angola and Kongo Kingdom

The Kingdom of Kongo in Northern Angola eventually became the site of some of the largest export of slaves for the Trans-Atlantic Market.

In the earlier years (1485 to the early-100s), Kongo was a sovereign kingdom engaging in legitimate diplomatic and trade relations with the Portuguese. This "trade" often involved slaves (especially for the plantations at Sao Tome).

The Portuguese took advantage of a civil war in Kongo in the mid-1600s to expand their access to slaves. While their colony was originally just Luanda, the Portuguese expanded their reach and increased slave numbers, ensuring that the Civil War did not end (so long as they were the buyers of slaves for their Brazilian plantations).

# Lovejoy's "Dynamics of Slave Supply" (2012: 83-4)

1. First, "Wars and large-scale slave raiding by centralized states stripped surrounding areas of their populations; these states expanded, but in doing so reduced the possibility of acquiring slaves as the enslavement frontier was pushed back."
2. Second, "Wars between neighboring states in which no single state established its ascendancy resulted in the enslavement of people without the necessity of expanding the enslavement frontier."
3. Third, "The spread of lawlessness, as demonstrated in kidnapping and small-scale raiding, led to the random enslavement of people without the creation of depopulated zones."
4. Fourth, "The spread of enslavement as a punishment for convicted criminals, witches, and other miscreants became a means of supplying slaves from within a society, again without affecting the population density in a dramatic way. The sanctions of religious oracles fitted into this category. Structurally, these methods of enslavement affected the demographic profile of particular areas differently."

# Decentralization and Destabilization

Lovejoy argues that (84-5): "This political fragmentation had its impact on all walks of life. The times were insecure. The enslavement of people was easy. Without centralized authority that could safeguard personal liberties and property over large areas, individuals had to face the risks of travel if they wanted to pursue a commercial undertaking, and communities always feared the dangers of war, kidnapping, and raids. In many cases, it is difficult to separate the desire to capture prisoners for slavery from economic and political rivalries not directly related to enslavement. Nonetheless, warfare was by far the most important source of slaves."

# Obtaining Slaves

It was quite common for slave merchants and traders to wait near army camps, as this was a place to buy slaves cheap. It was rarely the army which actually brought the slaves to the port of departure.

These merchants were often merchants of many products, not just slaves. Especially in the earlier years of the Trans-Atlantic Trade, if there were not ongoing wars, merchants needed to sell other goods, such as manufactured products to stay in business.

Furthermore, like all businessmen, slave traders often acted on credit. This was often done through the use of pawns (often children), expanding this semi-slavery practice.

# The Import Trade

What was brought to Africa to exchange for slaves?

It was originally thought that it was mostly liquor and economically useless items. This is a misconception and not true.

The Trans-Saharan Trade brought in breeding horses, copper, textiles, cowries, silver, paper, and some firearms.

The Trans-Atlantic Trade brought cowries, silver coins, iron bars, copper, brass wire, and textiles. Many of these were local currencies.

The Trans-Atlantic Trade also brought large quantities of firearms, as well as some luxuries like liquor and beads.

# The Nineteenth Century Expansion

By the beginning of the 1800s, the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade was the largest human migration ever to take place. This was due to the growth of the New World plantation economies and the destabilization of African empires and states, enabling the large amount of slaves to be brought to meet this demand.

The Nineteenth century also witnessed the birth of a movement to end slavery: Abolition. We will focus heavily upon this in later weeks.

The abolitionists, however, were pushing "legitimate trade" (i.e. trade in non-slave commodities), believing that this would end slavery within Africa. Alongside this, they would seek to end the shipping of slaves overseas.

This took a lot of time to develop, however, and the slaving "frontier" expanded significantly.

TABLE 7.1. *Slave Departures from Africa in the Nineteenth Century*

Region	Number of slaves	Percent
Atlantic	4,027,000	65.4
Saharan	1,200,000	19.5
Red Sea	492,000	8.0
Indian Ocean	442,000	7.2
TOTAL	6,161,000	