

The Transatlantic Slave Trade

While Portuguese explorers were busily seeking routes to India, the Spanish were attempting to colonize the Americas and the Caribbean. Some settlers were trying to become wealthy off of the land in the New World. Some set up mines in the Andes Mountains, while others started plantations in order to grow sugar.

Initially, these European settlers forced the native peoples to work in the mines or on plantations, but many of the natives were killed by disease. Europeans began looking for new sources of labor in Africa. As more plantations were established, the demand for slave labor increased. In South America, Europeans wanted slaves to work on plantations that grew sugar and coffee. In the American colonies, they wanted slaves to work on plantations that grew rice and tobacco. In later years, American plantations also grew cotton.

In the 1600s, the Portuguese were in Brazil, the English and the French were colonizing North America and the West Indies, and Spain had colonies in Central and South America. All of these European colonies needed laborers, and they imported Africans as slave labor.

Mostly, traders would purchase Africans who were taken as captives during wars in Africa. Some African rulers became rich selling their prisoners of war into slavery. In fact, part of the western coast of Africa became known as the “Slave Coast” because there were so many slaves bought and sold there. Portugal established a colony mainly for the purpose of buying Africans in order to enslave them. This Portuguese colony was in Angola.

African traders would bring groups of chained Africans to trading ports. While there, European merchants would barter their goods and services for slaves. Merchants would trade their textiles, alcohol, and other wares for people. In alter years, merchants sometimes exchanged guns for slaves. These guns were then used in wars in Africa.

This method of bartering led to what became known as “the triangular trade.” It was called this because ships frequently made three journeys. First, they would travel to Africa with goods they could exchange for slaves. Next, they would cross the Atlantic and sell slaves for other goods, like tobacco and sugar. Lastly, they would return to Europe and sell the goods they received for a nice profit.

Name _____

Date _____

The Transatlantic Slave Trade (Cont'd)

Africans sold into slavery had a difficult voyage across the Atlantic. This voyage was called the Middle Passage. Ships would carry anywhere from 150 to 600 slaves. The journey would sometimes take more than 90 days. Throughout the journey, the slaves would be forced to live in cramped conditions, often lying side by side. Additionally, slave traders often branded their slaves with hot irons and forced male slaves to wear heavy chains. It is said that one out of every ten slaves died during the Middle Passage.

Between 1520 and 1870, it is estimated that over ten million Africans voyaged across the Atlantic to become slaves. Most of these voyages went to Latin America and the Caribbean. The institution of slavery really only took hold in the English colonies that eventually became the United States after the founding of Jamestown.

Name _____

Date _____

The Transatlantic Slave Trade Questions

Multiple Choice:

1. Europeans began looking for new sources of labor in:
 - a. Russia
 - b. China
 - c. Cuba
 - d. Africa

2. Part of the western coast of Africa became known as the _____ because there were so many slaves bought and sold there:
 - a. Slave Coast
 - b. Gold Coast
 - c. Turkish Coast
 - d. Southern Coast

3. Europeans wanted slaves to work on _____ that grew sugar and coffee:
 - a. plantations
 - b. ships
 - c. Jamestown
 - d. markets

4. It is said that one out of every _____ slaves died during the Middle Passage:
 - a. five
 - b. twenty
 - c. fifty
 - d. ten

True or False:

- ____ 5. While Portuguese explorers were busily seeking routes to India, the Spanish were attempting to colonize the Americas and the Caribbean.

- ____ 6. Portuguese colony for slave trading was in Andes.

- ____ 7. African traders would bring groups of chained Africans to trading ports.

- ____ 8. Africans sold into slavery had a comfortable voyage across the Atlantic.

- ____ 9. Ships would carry anywhere from 150 to 600 slaves.

Name _____

Date _____

The Transatlantic Slave Trade Answers

Multiple Choice:

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