



AMERICA ON THE WORLD STAGE

ALBEMARLE | CHARLOTTESVILLE | GREENE | MADISON | ORANGE

A
TEACHING
AMERICAN
HISTORY
GRANT PROGRAM

PROJECT TITLE:	
The Slave Trade: Africa	
AUTHOR: Jared A. Morris	GRADE LEVEL & SUBJECT 6 th grade – American History I

SCHOLARSHIP & RESEARCH

1. Primary Investigative Question(s) –How and why were Africans brought into the Transatlantic Slave Trade?

2. Contextual Essay –

In 1794, hundreds of Gola warriors from the Windward Coast of Africa were captured by the Ibau people, native to the same general area, and sold to Captain James Connolly of the slave ship *Charleston*. Their eventual destination would be South Carolina to work as unpaid laborers or slaves. What was the cause of their capture and sale? A dispute over a speared animal. This description is an example of one of history's most peculiar, important, and terrifying events: The capture of millions of men, women, and children in their native land to be sold, sometimes over and over, until they reach a ship bound for the Americas. In American history classes today, students have very little contact with information about the Transatlantic Slave Trade in Africa. Many have little knowledge of it, except that it existed in the southern states pre-Antebellum. This research looks at the source. What did the slave trade look like in Africa? How and why were people captured and sold? What was happening on the African coast?

Slavery was apart of the African continent long before the Europeans began to spread their influence along the west coast. Arabs of North Africa had for centuries been involved in the trading of African captives. The idea of slaves and slaveholders being distinguished by race is largely a North American, "New World" concept. This is important to note because many students have the concept of slavery being strictly "black and white" engrained in their minds from the beginning of their education.

There were various methods in which Africans were forced into slavery. The idea of Europeans roaming the African jungles capturing groups of people to take to a slave ship is a common misconception. The fact is, very few Africans, in relation to the total number involved, entered into slavery in this fashion. Although Europeans played the integral, and very influential, part of the "buyer, transporter, and financier," most of the acquirers were fellow natives of the African continent. As Herbert Klein states, "The coastline itself was lightly populated and had few slaves. Slaves in numbers sufficient to fill the holds of the slave ships only arrived to the coast via African merchants willing to bring them from the interior." (Klein, 105) The actual acquisition, transport, and sale are areas of the slave trade that are rarely taught in schools.

The transition of an African from freeman to slave can be divided into four stages. Stage One: from Village to Vine, Stage Two: from Vine to Iron, Stage Three: from Iron to Ship, Stage Four: from Ship to No Return. Stage One: The idea of "village to vine" is the African being taken from his or her

society or village and being restrained with some sort of native device or cordage, like a vine. Africans became slaves for various reasons. Being the unfortunate loser in a tribal war was a one of these reasons. The reason for the capture and sale of prisoners of war was quite basic. The winning group could not only weaken their opposition by diminishing their population, but they could also strengthen their arsenal with new weapons procured through the selling of the prisoners to European slave-traders and merchants. A second form was capture. When there were not enough “wars” to satisfy the demand for slaves, treks were made inland to kidnap and capture. As the former slave Olaudah Equiano remembered, “One day, when all our people were gone out to their works as usual and only I and my dear sister were left to mind the house, two men and a woman got over our walls, and in a moment seized us both...” A third way was simply to be sentenced to enslavement by law as a type punishment. This “judicial enslavement” was often corrupt. If the ruler of the village or society saw a material or influential benefit in enslaving some of his own, what would stop them from manipulating the judicial system for that end? Generally, from these three methods, slaves were acquired.

Stage Two: From “vine to iron” is the journey from interior of Africa to a more modern world of tools and weapons of iron. Once a person entered into the “system” as a slave, they traveled their first “middle” passage. This entailed the journey to the coast. Regardless of how the people were acquired, a majority of the enslaved made their way in wooden coffles to some sort of internal waterway, which eventually led to the coastal areas. (A wooden coffle was made up of many yoke-type contraptions used to move slaves through Africa.) On the journey to the coast, a person could be sold numerous times to other Africans or even Europeans venturing inland. Canoes were used to great extent on the waterways leading to the coast.

Stage Three: The idea of “Iron to Ship” is the transition from “African control” to “European control.” The step from “African control” to “European control” must have been a completely terrifying moment. For many, they had never seen Europeans before unless they were familiar with the coastal areas. Once sold, the newly enslaved would feel the iron shackles for the first time. Many believed that they were to be sold to the white men to be eaten. Their experiences on the coast varied in some ways, but all in all were quite similar. Markus Rediker splits this stage into two “arrangements.” “...in the fort trade, ship captains bought slaves from other Europeans who resided in places like the Cape Coast Castle on the Gold Coast (presently Ghana); in the “boat trade,” carried out in many areas where there were no forts, business was often conducted on the main deck of the slave ship after canoes, longboats, and yawls had ferried cargo to and from the shore.” (Rediker, 78) Slave ships could stay at anchor on the coast for many months at a time gathering its “cargo.”

Stage Four: Basically, this is a second part of stage three. From “Ship to No Return” is the entering into the world of the slave ship. As the enslaved were added to the rest of the enslaved on the ship, they were given a number. Their handlers who oversaw their trip to the slave ship would now leave the deck and head back to the coast. This is believed to be one of the most traumatic of the stages, it is at this time one sees fellow Africans leaving them behind, taking the slave’s hope of returning home with them. Nets were secured on the sides of the ship to prevent disheartened slaves from jumping over the sides in attempt for escape or even death. Grown men were usually shackled together two at a time and taken below deck. Children were often permitted to move about the ship. This was sometimes permitted to certain women as well. “Women and children frequently were allowed to move freely on the deck, but slave traders brought out adult men only at specific times.” (Lindsay, 92) On the main deck there was a wall type structure called a barricado. This was used to defend against slave insurrections. The horrors below the main deck are hard to imagine. “The enslaved were spooned together in close quarters, each with about as much room as a corpse in a coffin...the stench, which was already “loathsome,” became “absolute pestilential” as the sweat, the vomit, the blood, and “necessary tubs” full of excrement “almost suffocated us.” (Rediker, 120) It is in this environment that they were ferried across the ocean

The slave trade in Africa produced 12.5 million slaves for the American continents. This number does not include the millions that died on the march to the coast and the millions that died on the slave ships en route. Perpetuated by European and American materialism, West Africa played the role of slave

factory. Through various means, Africans were acquired and moved to the coast where ship after ship would be attempting to meet its quota. This was daily life for millions of people over hundreds of years, and is an aspect of the slave trade that deserves its place in the American History curriculum.

3. Annotated Bibliography –

Rediker, Markus. *The Slave Ship*. (Viking Penguin, a member of the Penguin Group (USA) Inc., 2007)

This book contains amazing accounts of every aspect of the slave trade. In many chapters, it reads like a story and it is hard to put down. The book is so informative but yet very human. From the enslaved to the trader to the sailor to the captain, it is an extensive work of research.

Lindsay, Lisa A., *Captives as Commodities*. (Pearson Education, Inc., 2008)

This book is a concise survey of the Transatlantic Slave Trade. Using charts, graphs, statistics, and primary sources, the book is a great resource when researching this topic. Not only dealing with numbers, the book looks at the personal experiences as well.

Olaudah Equiano, edited by Paul Edwards, *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano or Gustavus Vassa the African*. (First published in 1789, this edition: Heinemann Educational Publishers, 1967, 1996)

This tells the story of Equiano who was taken from his village at age eleven. It is one of the most important first hand accounts of an African's life as a slave. It is a journey from inland Africa to the coast, across the Atlantic to America, and then across again to England.

Klein, Herbert S., *The Atlantic Slave Trade*. (Cambridge University Press, 2010)

This book looks at key areas in the development of the transatlantic slave trade: the demand for labor, the African source, and the European influence. It is a survey filled with charts, statistics and graphs that culminates with abolition, as well as, social and cultural impacts of the trade.

Captive Passage: The Transatlantic Slave Trade and the Making of the Americas. (Smithsonian Institution Press, 2002)

This book is filled with pictures and descriptions of the slave trade starting in with Europeans search for gold in Africa in the 15th century all the way up to the American Civil War. It offers great primary source pictures as well as narratives. It would be a great book to have in a classroom for student use.

Thomas, Hugh., *The Slave Trade: The Story of the Atlantic Slave Trade: 1440 – 1870*. (First Touchtone Edition, 1999)

This book is a narrative starting at the very beginning of the Transatlantic Slave Trade when the Portuguese made their presence known on the west coast of Africa. It is a very descriptive narrative with first hand accounts of people involved in the trade. There is also a useful table of statistics involving the carriers, destinations, places of origin, and the work for which the slaves were to be used.

Anquandah, James Kwesi (Editor)., *The Transatlantic Slave Trade: Landmarks, Legacies, Expectations*. (Sub-Saharan Publishers, 2007)

This is a collection of papers from the proceedings of the International Conference on the Historic Slave Route. The conference was held in Ghana in 2004. The papers vary in topics. Details of village life during the trade is greatly useful especially considering the source of the information. Overall, the papers focus on the African aspect of the slave trade and provide good insight on the effects on these societies during the trade.

Harms, Robert., *The Diligent: A Voyage Through the African Slave Trade*. (Basic Books, 2002)

This is a great account of an actual slaver known as the *Diligent*. From information gathered through first hand accounts, the book takes the reader on a journey from beginning to end. The outfitting of the vessel, acquiring of slaves on the African continent, and the arduous journey across the Atlantic to Martinique all included in this detailed resource. Everyday life for all involved is explicitly expressed and the true tale is highly interesting and horrifying throughout.