

This portrait of Olaudah Equiano dates from the 1780s. The iron shackles shown at the right were used to bind slaves during the slave trade.



### WITNESS HISTORY AUDIO

#### Forced Into Slavery

“The first object which saluted my eyes when I arrived on the coast was the sea, and a slave ship which was then riding at anchor and waiting for its cargo. These filled me with astonishment, which was soon converted into terror when I was carried on board.”

So wrote Olaudah Equiano. In the 1750s, when he was 11 years old, Equiano was seized from his Nigerian village by slave traders. He was then transported as human cargo from West Africa to the Americas.

**Focus Question** How did the Atlantic slave trade shape the lives and economies of Africans and Europeans?

## The Atlantic Slave Trade

### Objectives

- Explain how triangular trade worked.
- Understand the nature of the Middle Passage and describe its effects.
- Analyze the impact of the Atlantic slave trade.

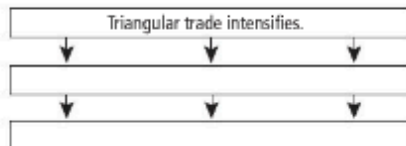


### Terms, People, and Places

Olaudah Equiano      Middle Passage  
triangular trade      mutiny

### Note Taking

**Reading Skill: Recognize Sequence** Use a flowchart like the one below to record the events that led to millions of Africans being shipped to the Americas.



### Vocabulary Builder

**commodity**—(kuh MAHD uh tee) *n.*  
anything bought and sold

Enslaved Africans like **Olaudah Equiano** formed part of an international trade network that arose during the 1500s. The Spanish were the first major European partners in the slave trade, buying slaves to labor in Spain’s South American empire. As other European powers established colonies in the Americas, the slave trade—and with it the entire international trade network—intensified.

### Triangular Trade Across the Atlantic

The Atlantic slave trade formed one part of a three-legged international trade network known as **triangular trade**. This was a triangle-shaped series of Atlantic trade routes linking Europe, Africa, and the Americas.

**Shipping People and Goods** Triangular trade worked in the following way. On the first leg, merchant ships brought European goods—including guns, cloth, and cash—to Africa. In Africa, the merchants traded these goods for slaves. On the second leg, known as the **Middle Passage**, the slaves were transported to the Americas. There, the enslaved Africans were exchanged for sugar, molasses, and other products manufactured at plantations owned by Europeans.

On the final leg, merchants carried sugar, molasses, cotton, and other American goods such as furs, salt fish, and rum made from molasses. These goods were shipped to Europe, where they were traded at a profit for the European **commodities** that merchants needed to return to Africa.



**Industries and Cities Thrive** Triangular trade was immensely profitable for many people. Merchants grew wealthy. Even though there were risks such as losing ships at sea, the money to be made from valuable cargoes usually outweighed the risks. Certain industries that supported trade thrived. For example, a shipbuilding industry in New England grew to support the shipping industry. Other colonial industries, such as fishing, raising tobacco, and processing sugar, became hugely successful.

Thriving trade led to successful port cities. European cities such as Nantes, France, and Bristol, England, grew prosperous because of triangular trade. In North America, even newly settled towns such as Salem, Massachusetts, and Newport, Rhode Island, quickly grew into thriving cities. Even though few slaves were imported directly to the northern cities, the success of the port cities there was made possible by the Atlantic slave trade.

 **Checkpoint** How did triangular trade affect colonial economies?

 **INFOGRAPHIC**

## The Middle Passage: A Forced Journey

The Middle Passage was a crucial part of triangular trade (inset map). Most slaves did not tell about their passage—many died, and those who survived faced lives of bondage in the Americas. But some Europeans recorded their impressions about the slave trade. And a few remarkable slaves learned to read and write, making their stories part of history.

A historic drawing shows how slaves were packed into tiny spaces in the ship's hold. ▼

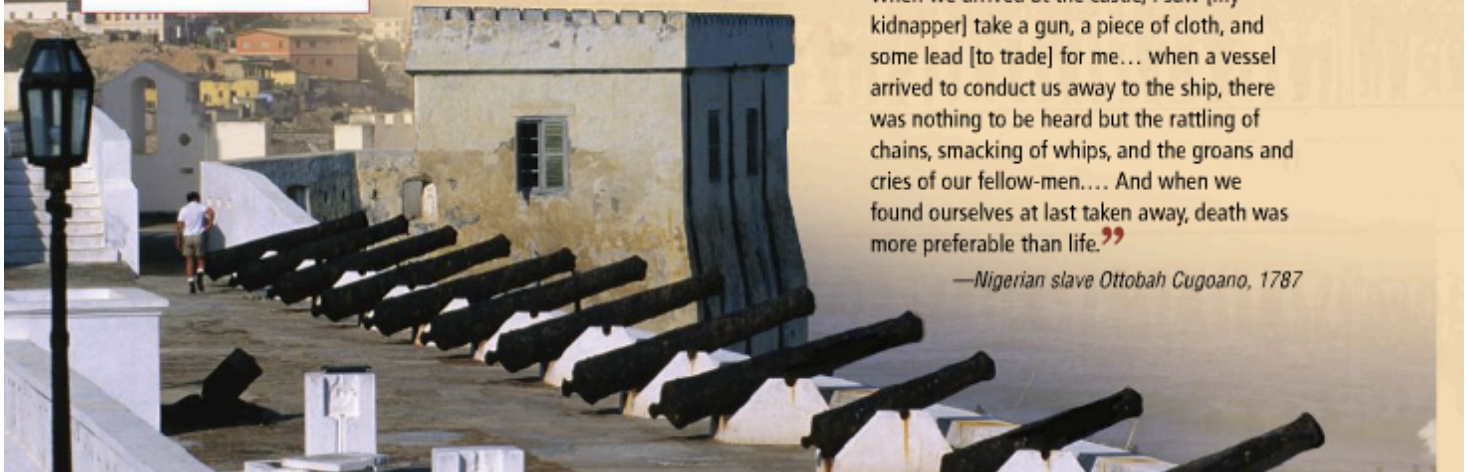


**History Interactive**  
For: Interactive triangular trade  
Web Code: nap-1541

A slave "castle" in Ghana ▼

“When we arrived at the castle, I saw [my kidnapper] take a gun, a piece of cloth, and some lead [to trade] for me... when a vessel arrived to conduct us away to the ship, there was nothing to be heard but the rattling of chains, smacking of whips, and the groans and cries of our fellow-men.... And when we found ourselves at last taken away, death was more preferable than life.”

—Nigerian slave Ottobah Cugoana, 1787





## Horrors of the Middle Passage

To merchants, the Middle Passage was just one leg of triangular trade. For enslaved Africans, the Middle Passage was a horror.

**The Trek to the Ships** The terrible journey began before the slave ships set sail. Most Africans were taken from inland villages. After they were enslaved, they were forced to march to coastal ports. Men, women, and children were bound with ropes and chains, often to one another, and forced to walk distances as long as a thousand miles. They might be forced to carry heavy loads, and often the men's necks were encircled with thick iron bands.

Many captives died along the way. Others tried to escape, and were often quickly recaptured and brutally punished. Those who survived the march were restrained in coastal holding pens and warehouses in slave shipping ports such as Elmina, Ghana, or Gorée, Senegal. They were held there until European traders arrived by ship.

### Vocabulary Builder

**restrain**—(rih STRAYN) *v.* to keep under control; to keep from action



▲ Olaudah Equiano published his autobiography in 1789.

“This work is so hard that any slave, newly put to it, in the course of a month becomes so weak that often he is totally unfit for labour. If he falls back behind the rest, the driver keeps forcing him up with the whip.”

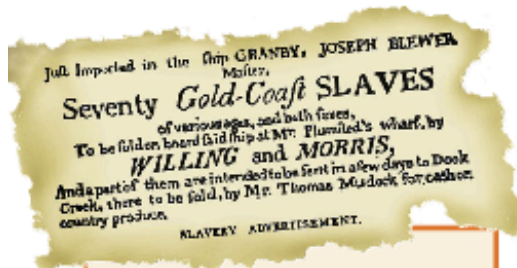
—Ashton Warner, early 1800s

An 1823 painting shows slaves laboring on the island of Antigua. ▶



### Thinking Critically

- Map Skills** What were slaves exchanged for in the West Indies?
- Draw Inferences** Why are there so few first-person slave narratives?



William Cowper wrote the following poem in the 1700s. How does he use irony to express his disapproval of the slave trade?

**Primary Source**

“I own I am shocked at the purchase of slaves,  
And fear those who buy them and sell them are knaves;  
What I hear of their hardships, their tortures and groans,  
Is almost enough to draw pity from stones.  
I pity them greatly, but I must be mum,  
For how could we do without sugar and rum?”

**Aboard the “Floating Coffins”** Once purchased, Africans were packed below the decks of slave ships, usually in chains. Hundreds of men, women, and children were crammed into a single vessel for voyages that lasted from three weeks to three months. The ships faced many perils, including storms at sea, raids by pirate ships, and **mutinies**, or revolts, by the captives.

Disease was the biggest threat to the lives of the captives and the profit of the merchants. Of the slaves who died, most died of dysentery. Many died of smallpox. Many others died from apparently no disease at all. Whatever the cause, slave ships became “floating coffins” on which up to half the Africans on board died from disease or brutal mistreatment.

Some enslaved Africans resisted, and others tried to seize control of the ship and return to Africa. Suicide, however, was more common than mutiny. Many Africans believed that in death they would be returned to their home countries. So they hanged themselves, starved themselves, or leapt overboard.

**Checkpoint** How did enslaved Africans resist captivity?

## Impact of the Atlantic Slave Trade

The slave trade brought enormous wealth to merchants and traders, and provided the labor that helped profitable colonial economies grow. Yet the impact on Africans was devastating. African states and societies were torn apart. The lives of individual Africans were either cut short or forever brutalized.

Historians still debate the number of Africans who were directly involved in the Atlantic slave trade. In the 1500s, they estimate about 2,000 enslaved Africans were sent to the Americas each year. In the 1780s, when the slave trade was at its peak, that number approached 80,000 a year. By the mid-1800s, when the overseas slave trade was finally stopped, an estimated 11 million enslaved Africans had reached the Americas. Another 2 million probably died under the brutal conditions of the Middle Passage between Africa and the Americas.

**Checkpoint** How did the slave trade affect Africans?

## SECTION 4 Assessment



**Progress Monitoring Online**

For: Self-quiz with vocabulary practice  
Web Code: naa-1541

**Terms, People, and Places**

1. What do each of the key terms and people listed at the beginning of the section have in common? Explain.

**Note Taking**

2. **Reading Skill: Recognize Sequence** Use your completed flowchart to answer the Focus Question: How did the Atlantic slave trade shape the lives and economies of Africans and Europeans?

**Comprehension and Critical Thinking**

3. **Synthesize Information** What role did each of the following play in triangular trade: a New England merchant, an African slave, and a Southern plantation owner?
4. **Recognize Assumptions** What European assumptions about Africans does the Atlantic slave trade show?
5. **Predict Consequences** Would the growth of the American colonies have been different if there had been no Atlantic slave trade? Explain.

**Writing About History**

**Quick Write: Gather Evidence to Support a Thesis Statement** Once you have written your thesis statement, gather specific evidence—facts and quotes—that support it. For example, assume for this section that your thesis statement concludes that the African slave trade was the most influential event of the age of exploration. Gather specific evidence from the section that supports this statement.