The Triangular Trade

Introduction: The origins of the African Slave Trade can be traced back to the Age of Exploration in the 15th Century. Europeans had become quite addicted to the luxuries of exotic spices, silks and porcelain that could only be found in Asia. Unfortunately for them, Muslim traders had a complete monopoly over the trade routes to the Far East. Unsuccessful in the attempt to break that monopoly, they started to explore water routes that would enable them to bypass the Muslims. The Portuguese took the lead in that exploration and sent voyages down the west coast of Africa in hopes of finding a new route to the source of traded goods. On those voyages they found a new type of good-human beings.

Why did the Slave Trade Begin?

Mercantilism in Europe drove European countries to explore the world, establish an empire of colonies, and bring back raw and produced goods to export from the mother country to be used or exported. As European empires expanded to the New World, however, they lacked one major resource—a workforce. In most cases the indigenous (native) peoples had proved unreliable (most of them were dying from diseases brought over from Europe), and Europeans were unsuited to the climate and suffered under tropical diseases. Africans, on the other hand, were excellent workers: they often had experience of agriculture and keeping cattle, they were used to a tropical climate resistant to tropical diseases, and they could be "worked very hard" on plantations or in mines.

Was Slavery New to Africa?

Africans had been traded as slaves for centuries-reaching Europe via the Islamic-run, trans-Saharan, trade routes. Slaves obtained from the Muslim dominated North African coast however proved to be too well educated to be trusted and had a tendency to rebellion.

Slavery was also a traditional part of African society—various states and kingdoms in Africa operated one or more of the following: chattel slavery, debt bondage, forced labor, and serfdom.

What was the Triangular Trade?

All three stages of the Triangular Trade proved lucrative for merchants.

The first stage of the Triangular Trade involved taking manufactured goods from Europe to Africa: cloth, spirit, tobacco, beads, cowrie shells, metal goods, and guns. The guns were used to help expand empires and obtain more slaves (until they were finally used against European colonizers). These goods were exchanged for African slaves.

The second stage of the Triangular Trade, The Middle Passage, involved shipping the slaves to the Americas.

The third, and final, stage of the Triangular Trade involved the return to Europe with the produce from the slave-labor plantations: cotton, sugar, tobacco, molasses and rum.

Who Started the Triangular Trade?

For two hundred years, 1440-1640, Portugal had a monopoly on the export of slaves from Africa. It is notable that they were also the last European country to abolish the institution—although, like France, it still continued to work former slaves as contract laborers, which they called libertos or engagés à temps. It is estimated that during the 4 1/2 centuries of the trans-Atlantic slave trade, Portugal was responsible for transporting over 4.5 million Africans (roughly 40% of the total).
Why enslave Africans?

- Difficult, if not impossible, to enslave Native Americans
- Whites tended to feel culturally superior to Africans
- Distance of Africa to "New World" tended to make Africans feel disconnected and made it more difficult for them to try to get home. Also they were unfamiliar with the terrain if they did escape
- Whites, as Christians, felt an "obligation" to convert blacks to Christianity from their Muslim faith

Slave Auctions

TO BE SOLD on board the Ship Bancy Island, on Tuesday the 6th of May next, at Abbeley Ferry; a choice cargo of about 150 fine healthy NEGROES, just arrived from the Windward & Rice Coast.

The utmost care has already been taken, and shall be continued, to keep them free from the least danger of being infected with the SMALL-POX, no boat having been on board, and all other communication with people from Charles-Town prevented.

Aubin, Lauren, & Appleby.

M.B. Full one half of the above Negroes have had the SMALL-POX in their own Country.

→ Slaves were better fed as they approached the New World in order to make them more "saleable"

→ Their bodies were oiled down to make their skin look more healthy, and hot tar would be used to fill "imperfections", such as scars from beatings and whippings on board slave ships

→ Slaves would then be sold to the highest bidder
How Did the Europeans Obtain the Slaves?

Between 1450 and the end of the nineteenth century, slaves were obtained from along the west coast of Africa with the full and active co-operation of African kings and merchants. (There were occasional military campaigns organized by Europeans to capture slaves, especially by the Portuguese in what is now Angola, but this accounts for only a small percentage of the total.)

Who Has the Worst Record for Trading Slaves?

During the eighteenth century, when the slave trade accounted for the transport of a staggering 8 million Africans, Britain was the worst transgressor - responsible for almost 2.5 million. This is a fact often forgotten by those who regularly cite Britain's prime role in the abolition of the slave trade.

Conditions for the Slaves

Slaves were introduced to new diseases and suffered from malnutrition long before they reached the new world. It is suggested that the majority of deaths on the voyage across the Atlantic - the middle passage - occurred during the first couple of weeks and were a result of malnutrition and disease encountered during the forced marches and subsequent interment at slave camps on the coast.

Conditions on the slave ships were terrible, but the estimated death rate of around 13% is lower than the mortality rate for seamen, officers and passengers on the same voyages.

Arrival in the Americas

As a result of the slave trade, five times as many Africans arrived in the Americas than Europeans. Slaves were needed on plantations and for mines and the majority was shipped to Brazil, the Caribbean, and the Spanish Empire. Less than 5% traveled to the Northern American States formally held by the British.

1. What was the triangular trade (describe all 3 sides)?

2. What factors led up to and fueled the Triangular Trade?

3. Based on what you learned about the Triangular Trade, how did trade and travel change the world?
NAME__________________________

Triangular Trade

Identifying and Organizing Evidence

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Focus Question: How did the thirteen colonies participate in the triangular trade?