

The Transatlantic Slave Trade

Between the 16th and 19th centuries, Europeans forcibly removed millions of people from their homes in West Africa and transported them across the Atlantic Ocean in awful conditions. These people were sold into a life of enslavement in the Americas. They were forced to work with no pay and many were treated poorly. This was known as the transatlantic **slave trade**. This period of history resulted in the deaths of millions of African people.

The Triangular Trade



The transatlantic slave trade is often referred to as the Triangular Trade. There were three parts to the trade.

1. Firstly, large ships travelled to West Africa carrying goods such as cloth and guns. These goods were exchanged for men, women and children who had been taken from their villages.
2. During the **middle passage** across the ocean, conditions were dangerous to health. The overcrowded and dirty ships spent months crossing the ocean and many people died. When the ships arrived, their passengers were sold at **auction** and set to work.

Thus, African people were bought and sold as if they were no more than an item in a shop. They were now enslaved people who were forced to work growing crops with little chance of payment or freedom.

3. Lastly, the third stage involved the ships returning with goods grown by the African people. These goods (such as sugar and cotton) were sold to the people of Britain and other European countries. The triangle was complete and the process would begin again.



What Was Life like for Enslaved People?



After they had been taken from their homes, up to 700 villagers were forced onto huge ships. Many of them had never seen the sea before. They were chained together with little room to move.

If they survived the **middle passage**, they were sold into slavery. People were separated from their friends and family. They were told to forget their earlier life and they were given a new name. On the plantations, enslaved

people worked for 14 hours or more each day. If they made a mistake, or if they tried to resist or fight back, they were beaten. As a result, many enslaved people rebelled. Some even gained freedom and fought for an end to enslavement.

Olaudah Equiano's Story

Olaudah Equiano (1745-1797) was kidnapped in West Africa and sold as an enslaved person. Fortunately, he was able to survive and pay for freedom. He became an abolitionist – someone who was fighting for an end to enslavement – and travelled to Europe to share his autobiography. It was published over 200 years ago and contained details of his dreadful experiences during the journey across the Atlantic and of enslavement. Due to its honesty, it prompted many readers to question the concept of enslavement and therefore became a powerful argument for its abolition.

Did You Know...?

Olaudah Equiano toured Britain so he could share his story. He talked in Birmingham, Nottingham, Manchester, Sheffield and Cambridge.

Abolition at Long Last

Eventually, British citizens began to recognise that enslaving people was unethical. In 1807, the Houses of Parliament outlawed enslavement. It was also abolished in the same year, but that didn't mean it 'disappeared' straight away. It wasn't for another 26 years, in 1833, that enslaved people began their freedom across the British Empire.

In the USA, enslavement continued even after its **abolition** because there was lots of disagreement. Plantation owners in southern states became very wealthy due to the labour of enslaved people but those in the north disagreed with it. As a result, the American Civil War (1861-1865) happened.

The civil rights movement of the 1960s arose because of the continued **segregation** of Black and White Americans over 100 years after enslavement was officially ended.

Glossary

abolition	The action of abolishing a system – in this case, enslavement.
auction	A public sale where goods are sold to the highest bidder.
cargo	Goods carried on a ship, aeroplane or lorry.
middle passage	The journey that captured Africans took across the Atlantic Ocean, under unsanitary conditions.
plantation	An estate on which crops, such as coffee, sugar and tobacco, are grown.
slave trade	Selling and buying human beings and taking away their human rights and freedoms.
segregation	The enforced separation of different ethnic groups in a country.
unethical	Morally wrong and unacceptable behaviour.

Retrieval

- 1) During which period in history was the transatlantic slave trade? Tick one.
 - During the 20th century
 - 1 000 years ago
 - Before the 15th century
 - Between the 16th and 19th centuries
- 2) Which statements describing The Triangular Trade are true? Tick two.
 - There were four parts to the trade.
 - Goods were exchanged for men, women and children.
 - Goods were sold at auction.
 - Sugar and cotton were sold to people in Britain and other countries

Words in context

- 3) Find and copy the word which describes what happened to the enslaved person's friends and family'.

Inference

- 4) Why do you think that many enslaved people rebelled against their situation?
- 5) Eventually, people in Britain began to recognise that enslavement was unethical. Why do you think it took so long for enslavement to be abolished? Use evidence from the text.

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