CHAPTER 20

Africa and the Africans in the Age of the Atlantic Slave Trade

CHAPTER SUMMARY

Much of Africa followed its own lines of development between the beginning of the 15th and 19th centuries. The rise of the West and the Western-dominated economy, however, was a powerful force in influencing the course of African history. The Atlantic slave trade predominated in economic affairs after the middle of the 17th century. The forced removal of Africans had a major effect in some African regions and was a primary factor contributing to the nature of New World populations. African culture became one of the important strands in the development of American civilizations. Despite the rise of the West and the slave trade, nearly all of Africa remained politically independent and culturally autonomous. Among the important trends, Islam consolidated its position in sub-Saharan and east Africa, while in many parts of Africa, independent states formed and expanded.

The Atlantic Slave Trade. The Portuguese inaugurated the pattern for contacts along the African coast. They established trading forts (factories); the most important, El Mina, received gold from the interior. Most forts were established with the approval of African authorities desiring trade benefits. Some of the forts allowed trade to interior states. Portuguese and Afro-Portuguese traders (lançados) followed routes to the interior to open new markets. Missionary efforts followed, particularly to the powerful states of Benin and the Kongo. King Nzinga Mvemba of the Kongo accepted Christianity and, with Portuguese assistance, sought to introduce European influences to his state. The ravages of the slave trade were a major reason for the limited success of the policies. Africa, in general, tried to fit the European concepts they found useful into their belief structures. The Europeans regarded Africans as pagan savages who could adopt civilized behavior and convert to Christianity. The Portuguese continued their southward ventures, in the 1570s establishing Luanda on the Angolan coast among the Mbundu. In the Indian Ocean, they established bases on Mozambique Island and other towns in an effort to control the gold trade coming from Monomotapa. On both coasts, few Portuguese settled permanently. Other Europeans followed Portuguese patterns by creating trading stations through agreement with Africans. In almost all instances, slavery eventually became the principal focus of relationships. Added impetus came from the development of sugar plantations on Portuguese and Spanish Atlantic islands and their subsequent extension to the Americas.

Trend Toward Expansion. Between 1450 and 1850, about 12 million Africans were shipped across the Atlantic: about 10 or 11 million arrived alive. A number equal to one-third of those shipped might have died in the initial raiding or march to the coast. The volume of the trade increased from the 16th to the 18th centuries, with 80 percent of the total coming in the latter century. Brazil received more than 40 percent of all slaves reaching the Americas. The continued high volume was necessary because of high slave mortality and low fertility. Only in the southern United States did slaves have a positive growth rate. Other slave trades—trans-Saharan, Red Sea, and east African—under Muslim control, added another 3 million individuals to the total.

In Depth: Slavery and Human Society. Slavery has existed in both complex and simpler societies from the earliest times. Coerced labor took different forms: indentured servants,
convict laborers, debt peons, chattel slaves. The denial of control over an individual’s labor was the essential characteristic of slavery systems. It was easier to enslave people outside one’s own society, to exploit differences in culture, language, and color. The attitude of Europeans and non-African Muslims thus contributed to the development of modern racism. The campaign against slavery that grew from Enlightenment ideas was an important turning point in world history. Slavery has persisted in a few societies until the present, but few individuals openly defend the institution. African slavery was important in shaping the modern world. It was one of the early international trades, and it assisted the development of capitalism. Vociferous debate continues about many interpretations of the effect of the trade on African and American societies.

**Demographic Patterns.** The Saharan slave trade to the Islamic world carried mostly women for sexual and domestic employment. The Atlantic trade concentrated on young men fit for hard labor in the Americas. African societies who sold slaves might keep women and children for their own uses. The Atlantic trade had an important demographic effect on parts of western and central Africa; the population there in 1850 might have been one-half of what it would have been without the trade. The women and children not exported skewed the balance of the sexes in African-enslaving societies. The introduction of American crops, such as maize and manioc, helped suffering regions to recover from population losses.

**Organization of the Trade.** Control over the slave trade reflected the European political situation. Until 1630, the Portuguese were the principal suppliers. The Dutch became major competitors after they seized El Mina in 1630. By the 1660s, the English worked to supply their plantation colonies. The French became major carriers in the 18th century. Each nation established forts for receiving slaves. Tropical diseases caused both resident Europeans and the crews of slave-carrying ships high mortality rates. The Europeans dealt with local rulers, calculating value in currencies composed of iron bars, brass rings, and cowry shells. The Spanish had a system in which a healthy man was considered a standard unit called an “Indies piece.” Slaves arrived at the coast as a result of warfare and of purchase and movement by indigenous traders. Dahomey had a royal monopoly on slave flow. There have been arguments about the profitability of the slave trade. It has been suggested that its profits were a key element for the rise of commercial capitalism and the Industrial Revolution. Individual voyages certainly did bring profits to merchants and specializing ports. But considerable risks were involved. English profitability in the late 18th century was about 5 percent to 10 percent, about equal to other commercial ventures. The full economic importance is difficult to determine because of its direct links to the plantation and mining economies of the Americas. Goods were exchanged among Europe, Africa, and the Americas in complex patterns. The slave trade surely contributed to emerging Atlantic capitalism, while at the same time making African economies dependent on European trade and linked to the world economy.

**African Societies, Slavery, and the Slave Trade.** The Atlantic trade transformed African patterns of slavery. Africans had developed many forms of servitude in their nonegalitarian societies. With land controlled by the state, slaves were an important way for individuals and lineages to gain wealth and status. Slaves held many occupations. Their treatment ranged from the relatively benign, when they were incorporated into kinship systems, to severe economic and social exploitation, when ruling hierarchies exercised power. The Atlantic trade opened new opportunities to slaveholding societies for expansion and intensification of slavery. Enslavement of women was central to African society. The Sudanic states had introduced
Islamic concepts of slavery. The existence of slavery allowed Europeans to mobilize commerce in slaves by tapping existing structures with the assistance of interested African rulers.

**Slaving and African Politics.** Most of the states of western and central Africa were small and unstable. The continuing wars elevated the importance of the military and promoted the slave trade. Increasing centralization and hierarchy developed in the enslaving societies; those attacked reacted by augmenting self-sufficiency and anti-authoritarian ideas. A result of the presence of the Europeans along the western coast was a shift of the locus of African power. Inland states close to the coast, and thus free from direct European influence, through access to Western firearms and other goods, became intermediaries in the trade and expanded their influence.

**Asante and Dahomey.** Among the important states developing during the slave trade era was the empire of Asante among the Akan people. Centered on Kumasi, Asante was between the coast and the inland Hausa and Mande trading regions. Under the Oyoko clan, the Asante gained access to firearms after 1650 and began centralizing and expanding. Osei Tutu became the asantehene, the supreme civil and military leader of the Akan clans. By 1700, the Dutch along the coast were dealing directly with the new power. Through control of gold-producing regions and slaves, Asante remained dominant in the Gold Coast until the 1820s. In the Bight of Benin, the state of Benin was at the height of its power when Europeans arrived. The ruler for a long period controlled the trade with Europeans; slaves never were a primary commodity. The kingdom of Dahomey among the Fon peoples had a different response to the Europeans. It emerged around Abomey in the 17th century; by the 1720s, access to firearms led to the formation of an autocratic regime based on trading slaves. Under Agaja (1708-1740), Dahomey expanded to the coast, seizing the port of Whydah. The state maintained its policies into the 19th century. Too much emphasis on the slave trade obscures creative processes occurring in many African states. The growing divine authority of rulers paralleled the rise of absolutism in Europe. New political forms emerged that limited the power of some monarchs. In the Yoruba state of Oyo, a council and king shared authority. Art, crafts, weaving, and wood carving flourished in many regions. Benin and the Yoruba states created remarkable wood and ivory sculptures.

**East Africa and the Sudan.** On Africa’s east coast, the Swahili trading towns continued a commerce of ivory, gold, and slaves for Middle Eastern markets. A few slaves went to European plantation colonies. On Zanzibar and other islands, Arabs, Indians, and Swahili produced cloves with slave labor. In the interior, African peoples had created important states. Migrants from the upper Nile valley moved into Uganda and Kenya, where they mixed with Bantu-speaking inhabitants. Strong monarchies developed in Bunyoro and Buganda. In western Africa, in the northern savanna, the process of Islamization entered a new phase, linking it with the external slave trade and the growth of slavery. Songhay broke up in the 16th century and was succeeded by new states. The Bambara of Segu were pagan; the Hausa states of northern Nigeria were ruled by Muslims, although most of the population followed African religions. Beginning in the 1770s, Muslim reform movements swept the western Sudan. In 1804, Uthman Dan Fodio, a Fulani Muslim, inspired a religious revolution that won control of most of the Hausa states. A new and powerful kingdom developed at Sokoto. The effects of Islamization were felt widely in the west African interior by the 1840s. Cultural and social change accelerated. Many war captives were dispatched to the coast or across the Sahara for the slave trade. The level of local slave labor also increased in agricultural and manufacturing enterprises.
White Settlers and Africans in Southern Africa. By the 16th century, Bantu-speaking peoples occupied the eastern regions of southern Africa. Drier western lands were left to the indigenous Khoikhoi and San. Migration, peaceful contacts, and war characterized the relations between the groups. The Bantu peoples practiced agriculture and herding, worked iron and copper, and traded with neighbors. Chiefdoms of various sizes, where leaders ruled with popular support, were typical. New chiefdoms continually emerged, resulting in competition for land and political instability. In the Dutch colony at Cape Town, established in 1652, the settlers developed large estates worked by slaves. Colonial expansion led to successful wars against the San and Khoikhoi. By the 1760s, the Afrikaners crossed the Orange River and met the Bantu. Competition and war over land resulted. Britain occupied the Dutch colony in 1795 and gained formal possession in 1815. British efforts to limit Afrikaner expansion were unsuccessful, and frequent fighting occurred between the Afrikaners and Africans. Some Afrikaners, seeking to escape British control, migrated beyond colonial boundaries and founded autonomous states.

The Mfecane and the Zulu Rise to Power. By 1818, a new leader, Shaka, gained authority among the Nguni people. He created a formidable military force of regiments organized on lineage and age lines. Shaka’s Zulu chiefdom became the center of a new political and military organization that absorbed or destroyed rivals. Shaka was assassinated in 1828, but his successors ruled over a still-growing polity. The rise of the Zulu and other Nguni chiefdoms marked the beginning of the Mfecane, a time of wars and wandering. Defeated peoples fled into new regions and created new states—among them the Swazi and Lesotho—by using Zulu tactics. The Afrikaners’ superior firepower enabled them to hold their lands. The Zulus remained powerful until defeated during the 1870s by the British. The basic patterns of conflict between Europeans and Africans took form during this era.

The African Diaspora. In the Americas, slaves came in large enough numbers to become an important segment of the New World population. African cultures adapted to their new physical and social environments. The slave trade linked Africa and the Americas; it was the principal way in which African societies joined the world economy. Africans participating in the commerce dealt effectively with the new conditions, using the wealth and knowledge gained to the advantage of their states.

Slave Lives. The slave trade killed millions of Africans; family and community relationships were destroyed. As many as one-third of captives may have died on their way to shipping ports; shipboard mortality reached about 18 percent. The trauma of the Middle Passage, however, did not strip Africans of their culture, and they interjected it into the New World.

Africans in the Americas. African slaves crossed the Atlantic to work in New World plantations and mines. The plantation system developed on Atlantic islands was transferred to the Americas. Africans quickly replaced Indians and indentured Europeans as agricultural laborers. Slaves also mined gold and silver and labored in many urban occupations. In early 17th-century Lima, Africans outnumbered Europeans.

American Slave Societies. In all American slave societies, a rough social hierarchy developed. Whites were at the top, slaves at the bottom. Free people of color were in-between. Among the slaves, owners created a hierarchy based on origin and color. Despite the many pressures, slaves retained their own social perceptions: Many slave rebellions were organized on ethnic
and political lines. Slave-based societies varied in composition. Africans formed the overwhelming majority of the population on Caribbean islands; high mortality ensured a large number of African-born individuals. Brazil had a more diverse population. Many slaves were freed, and miscegenation was common. Slaves made up 35 percent of the population; free people of color were equal in number. The southern British North American colonies differed in that a positive growth rate among slaves lessened the need for continuing imports. Manumission was uncommon, and free people of color were under 10 percent of Afro-American numbers. Thus, slavery was less influenced by African ways.

The People and Gods in Exile. Africans worked under extremely harsh conditions. The lesser numbers of women brought to the New World limited opportunities for family life. When a family was present, its continuance depended on the decisions of the owner. Despite the difficulties, most slaves lived in family units. Many aspects of African culture survived, especially when a region had many slaves from one African grouping. African culture was dynamic and creative, incorporating customs that assisted survival from different African ethnicities or from their masters. Religion demonstrates this theme. African beliefs mixed with Christianity, or survived independently. Haitian vodun is a good example of the latter. Muslim Africans tried to hold their beliefs; in 1835, a major slave rising in Brazil was organized by Muslims, Yoruba, and Hausa. Resistance to slavery was a common occurrence. Slaves ran away and formed lasting independent communities; in 17th-century Brazil, Palmares, a runaway slave state under Angolan leadership, had a population of 10,000. In Suriname, runaway slaves formed a still-existing community with a culture fusing west African, Indian, and European elements.

The End of the Slave Trade and the Abolition of Slavery. The influences causing the end of the slave trade and slavery were external to Africa. The continued flourishing of slave-based economies in Africa and the Americas makes it difficult to advance economic self-interest as a reason for ending the slave trade. Africans had commercial alternatives, but they did not affect the supply of slaves. Enlightenment thinkers during the 18th century condemned slavery and the slave trade as immoral and cruel. The abolitionist movement gained strength in England and won abolition of the slave trade for Britons in 1807. The British pressured other nations to follow course, although the final end of New World slavery did not occur until Brazilian abolition in 1888.

Global Connections: Africa and the African Diaspora in World Context. Africa entered the world economy in the slave-trade era. Its incorporation produced differing effects on African societies, but many societies had to adapt in ways that placed them at a disadvantage that facilitated later loss of independence during the 19th century. The legacy of the slave trade, as European rulers practiced forced labor policies, lingered into the 20th century.
CHAPTER 20

TIMELINE

*Insert the following events into the timeline. This should help you to compare important historical events chronologically.*

Portuguese fort at El Mina established
British slave trade abolished
reform among Hausa
Dutch establish colony at Cape of Good Hope
British seize Cape Colony from Dutch
death of Shaka

___ 1481
___ 1652
___ 1795
___ 1804
___ 1815
___ 1828

TERMS, PEOPLE, EVENTS

*The following terms, people, and events are important to your understanding of the chapter. Define each one on a separate sheet of paper.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ahmad Baba of Timbuktu</th>
<th>oba</th>
<th>Monomotapa</th>
<th>polygyny</th>
<th>Voortrekkers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Angola</td>
<td></td>
<td>Afrikaners</td>
<td>candolme</td>
<td>lançados</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boer</td>
<td></td>
<td>obeaah</td>
<td>Khoikhoi</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creole slaves factories</td>
<td></td>
<td>El Mina</td>
<td>Asante</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fulani</td>
<td></td>
<td>Jean Jacques Rousseau</td>
<td>Luo</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indies piece</td>
<td></td>
<td>triangular trade</td>
<td>Fulani</td>
<td>Kongo kingdom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lesotho</td>
<td></td>
<td>Middle Passage</td>
<td></td>
<td>Royal African Company</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suriname</td>
<td></td>
<td>Great Trek</td>
<td>Dahomey</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maroons</td>
<td></td>
<td>William Wilberforce</td>
<td>Nilotic migrations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nzinga Mvemba</td>
<td></td>
<td>Luanda</td>
<td>John Wesley</td>
<td>Swazi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Osei Tutu</td>
<td></td>
<td>asantehene</td>
<td></td>
<td>Cape Colony</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oyo</td>
<td></td>
<td>Cushitic</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>saltwater slaves</td>
<td></td>
<td>Creole slaves</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shaka</td>
<td></td>
<td>Mfecane</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zulu</td>
<td></td>
<td>diaspora</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vodun</td>
<td></td>
<td>Palmares</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
MAP EXERCISE

The following exercise is intended to clarify the geophysical environment and the spatial relationships among the important objects and places mentioned in the chapter. Locate the following places on the map.

Locate the region of the following African kingdoms: Kongo, Asante, Dahomey, Benin, and Sokoto.

What does the location of the emerging states of Africa during the era of the slave trade suggest about the geographical reorientation of African trade? Where were the emerging states located in comparison to the previous kingdoms of Ghana, Mali, and Songhay?
MULTIPLE CHOICE. Choose the one alternative that best completes the statement or answers the question.

1. What European nation first established direct contact with black Africa?
   A) Spain
   B) England
   C) Italy
   D) Portugal
   E) Holland

2. King Nzinga Mvemba of Kongo was noteworthy because he
   A) was the first African monarch converted to Christianity.
   B) successfully defeated the Portuguese at the battle of Kuwezi.
   C) was one of the most powerful advocates of the African slave trade.
   D) eventually conquered the Boers of southern Africa.
   E) was able to exploit trade with the Europeans.

3. How did the Portuguese method of obtaining slaves change in the 15th century?
   A) The Portuguese soon discovered that the military might give them power over large numbers of people who could be reduced to slavery.
   B) Due to the natural increase in slave populations, the demand for slaves dropped, and the trade volume declined.
   C) As a result of reaching the Indian Ocean, the Portuguese were able to obtain slaves from the already established Muslim sources.
   D) The Portuguese began to utilize the trans-Saharan trade route to extract slaves from sub-Saharan Africa.
   E) After initial raids, the Portuguese discovered that trade was a more secure and profitable way to get slaves.

4. The British controlled their share of the Atlantic slave trade through the
   A) East India Company.
   B) Royal African Company.
   C) royal navy.
   D) Virginia Company.
   E) parliament.

5. What was the impact of the slave trade on Europeans sent to Africa?
   A) Most died of tropical diseases.
   B) Europeans established wealthy colonies that expanded through the 17th century.
   C) Europeans were rapidly dispersed throughout the African nations of the interior, frequently intermarrying with the native population.
   D) Europeans sent to Africa often remained for many years, absorbing the African cultures.
   E) A new culture was produced through syncretism and it was transmitted to Europe by those returning.
6. Which of the following was NOT part of the system of “triangular trade”?

   A) Shipment of slaves to the Americas
   B) Exportation of European manufactured goods to Africa
   C) Shipment of North American manufactured products to the Caribbean
   D) Transport of plantation products to Europe
   E) Use of slaves in the Caribbean

7. Where did most of the centralizing states of central and western Africa form in response to the Atlantic slave trade?

   A) Along the coast near the European trade forts
   B) In the savanna region
   C) In the interior along lines of trade to the trade forts, but outside European zones of influence
   D) Near the Swahili trade cities
   E) In the Kongo region

8. What was the African contribution to the “Columbian Exchange”?

   A) Large mammals
   B) Tapioca
   C) Slaves
   D) Manioc
   E) Small pox

9. In what area of Africa was a plantation economy based on slave labor established?

   A) The savanna
   B) The coastal region of east Africa
   C) The Gold Coast
   D) Dahomey
   E) Madagascar

10. The “Middle Passage” refers to

    A) the journey from captivity to the coastline of Africa.
    B) the sale of slaves in the Americas and subsequent transportation to plantations.
    C) the group of slaves permanently in rebellion in Suriname.
    D) the voyage from Africa across the Atlantic to the Americas.
    E) the existence of a slave prior to the inevitable attempt to escape.
SHORT ANSWER. Write the word or phrase that best completes each statement or answers the question.

1. The most important of the Portuguese trade forts along the east African coast was ________, in the heart of the gold-producing region.

2. The Spanish developed a complicated system in which a healthy adult male slave was called a(n) “__________,” while children and women were valued at fractions of that value.

3. During some periods in Africa, there did exist a(n) ________ trade in which slaves were carried to the Americas, sugar and tobacco to Europe, and European products to the coast of Africa.

4. A purifying Sufi variant of Islam had an intense impact on the ________ people, pastoralists who were spread across a broad area of the western Sudan.

5. The rise of the Zulu and other Nguni chiefdoms was the beginning of the ________, or wars of crushing and wandering.

6. ________ successfully resisted the Zulu example by combining Sotho and Nguni speakers and defending itself against Nguni armies.

7. The slave voyage to the Americas, the “__________” as it was called, was a traumatic experience for the slaves.

8. In the Brazilian ________ and in Haitian Vodun, rather fully developed versions of African religion flourished.

9. During the 17th century in Brazil, ________, an enormous runaway slave kingdom with numerous villages, resisted Portuguese and Dutch attempts to destroy it.

10. Under the leadership of ________, an abolitionist movement gained strength in Britain against its opponents made up of merchants and the “West Indies interests.”
TRUE/FALSE. Write ‘T’ if the statement is true and ‘F’ if the statement is false.

1. Port missionaries achieved a major success in Skoto, where they converted the ruler and his family to Christianity.

2. The triangular trade consisted of exchanges of goods traded between Latin America, Europe, and Asia.

3. With control of the gold-producing zones and a constant supply of prisoners to be sold as slaves for more firearms, Asante remained the dominant state of the Gold Coast until the 1820s.

4. The rise of Usman Dan Fodio precipitated the Mfecane in southern Africa.

5. Europeans did establish some plantation-style colonies on islands such as Mauritius.

6. Perhaps the most remarkable story of African resistance is found in the forests of Suriname, a former Dutch plantation colony.

7. Each American slave society recognized distinctions between African-born “mother country” slaves, who were invariably black, and their American-born descendants, the “creole” slaves.

8. After 1834, the Boers staged a great trek far to the north to be free of government interference.

9. Christian missionaries achieved a major success in Kongo, where the ruler and the royal family were converted.

10. The American Slave Company was chartered to supply a source of slaves for the growing British colonies in Barbados, Jamaica, and Virginia.