

## CHAPTER 20

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

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### Chapter Outline Summary

#### I. Africa and the Creation of an Atlantic System

##### A. The Atlantic Slave Trade

Portuguese

factories

entrepots for interior trade, especially gold  
generally with local consent

El Mina

missionaries followed

especially to Benin, Kongo

King Nzinga Mvemba, Kongo

converts to Christianity

moved south

Angola

Luanda, 1570s

Mbundu people

Mozambique

gold trade from Monomotapa

few settlers

Common European pattern

trading stations

slave trade became central

##### B. Trend Toward Expansion

1450–1850

12 million Africans sent across Atlantic

10–11 survive

18th century slave trade

At height, 80 percent of total trade

Muslim areas

trans-Saharan, Red Sea, East Africa

three million slaves traded

##### C. Demographic Patterns

Saharan trade

mostly women

Atlantic trade

primarily young men for hard labor

##### D. Organization of the Trade

Portuguese dominated first

to 1630

Dutch

seized El Mina, 1630

rival Portuguese

English

slave trade from 1660s

French

18th century

Dahomey

royal monopoly on flow of slaves

Economic importance?

same profits as other trade

value tied up with plantation and mining economy

slave trade tied Africa to global economy

## **II. African Societies, Slavery, and the Slave Trade**

African slave traditions changed

intensified use of slaves

### **A. Slaving and African Politics**

West and Central Africa

small, volatile states

warfare endemic

military became important

feeds into slave trade

European influence

coastal states dominate, inland states do not

### **B. Asante and Dahomey**

Asante Empire

Akan people

center at Kumasi

between the coast and Hausaland and Mande regions

1650, Oyoko clan

firearms

centralization, expansion

Osei Tutu

*asantehene*

Dutch

traded directly with Asante

Benin

controlled trade with Europeans, but not slave trade

Dahomey

Fon peoples

center at Abomey

firearms by 1720s

King Agaja (1708–1740)

expansion

took port of Whydah

Other developments

divine right kingship

akin to European absolutism

some states limit royal power

Oyo, Yoruba peoples

king and council

artistic achievements

especially Benin, the Yoruba

### **C. East Africa and the Sudan**

East coast

Swahili trading towns

ivory, gold slaves to Middle East

Zanzibar  
cloves

Interior

Luo dynasties in great lakes area

Bunyoro, Buganda  
monarchies

Northern Savanna  
new Islamization

Songhay broke up in 1500s  
successor states

Pagan Bambara of Segu

Muslim Hausa states in northern Nigeria

Muslim reform movements, from 1770s

Usuman Dan Fodio, 1804

religious revolution

Hausa states

New kingdom of Sokoto

### **III. White Settlers and Africans in Southern Africa**

Bantu into southern Africa by 1500

left arid areas to Khoikhoi, San

agriculture, pastoralism

iron, copper

chiefdoms common

Capetown

Dutch colony, 1652

estates worked by slaves

wars with San, Khoikhoi

by 1760s, encounter Bantu

1795, Britain occupies colony

1815, possession

after 1834, Afrikaners push beyond boundaries

#### **A. The Mfecane and the Zulu Rise to Power**

Nguni people

1818, Shaka creates Zulu chiefdom

1828, assassinated

beginning of mfecane

Mfecane

period of disruption, wandering

defeated into new areas

Swazi, Lesotho

### **IV. The African Diaspora**

Slave trade joined Africa to world economy

#### **A. Slave Lives**

Millions killed

Families destroyed

#### **B. Africans in the Americas**

Plantation system

#### **C. American Slave Societies**

Miscegenation

#### **D. The People and Gods in Exile**

Culture survived when Africans from different ethnic groups end up together

- dynamic, creative
- religion adaptive
- Haitian vodun
- Muslim Africans
- 1835, Brazil
- Muslim Yoruba and Hausa slaves
- Palmares, Brazil
- 1600s, runaway slave state
- Surinam
- fusion culture formed by runaway slaves
- E. The End of the Slave Trade and the Abolition of Slavery
- Slave trade ended outside of Africa
- causes?
  - probably not economic self-interest
  - influence of Enlightenment

## Chapter Summary

**Mahommah Gardo Baquaqua.** The wide-ranging life of Mahommah Gardo Baquaqua encapsulates the currents and issues of his time. From the town of Djougou, in the modern Benin republic in west Africa, Baquaqua was born in the early 1800s. As a war captive, he was enslaved by neighboring Africans, and eventually sold into slavery abroad around 1845. He was taken to Brazil, and then taken to New York. He gained his freedom, helped by abolitionists, and fled to Boston. He later sailed to Haiti, studied in New York, and moved to Canada. In 1854, he published his autobiography, *An Interesting Narrative: Biography of Mohammah G. Baquaqua*. Among other things, he detailed the horrors of the holds of slave ships. His experiences were shared by millions of Africans who suffered in the Atlantic slave trade. Sub-Saharan Africa had previously been little affected by outside economies and cultures. The 19th century saw a burst of Western influence on the continent. The impact was felt differently in different areas, and was not entirely one-way. The forcible spread of Africans around the world also had an impact. This chapter will focus on Africa's increasing global role, but development throughout Africa continued along earlier lines. Islam and Christianity continued to spread; new states arose, and expanded as before. It is difficult to separate continuing developments from those influenced by the outside world. In the chapter that follows, the impact of the slave trade will be the dominant theme.

**Chapter Summary.** Much of Africa followed its own lines of development between the beginning of the 15th and 19th centuries. Islam remained influential, but the rise of the West and the Western-dominated economy became a powerful force altering the course of African history. The slave trade predominated in economic affairs after the mid-17th century. The forced removal of Africans had a major impact 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 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 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 it found useful into its belief structures. The Europeans regarded Africans as pagan savages who could adopt civilized behavior and convert to Christianity. The Portuguese continued their southward ventures, establishing Luanda on the Angolan coast among the Mbundu in the 1570s. 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, between 1550 and 1850, received about 42 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, East African—under Muslim control added another three million individuals to the total.

**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 impact on parts of west 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—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 meant high mortality rates for both resident Europeans and the crews of slave-carrying ships. The Europeans dealt with local rulers, calculating value in currencies composed of iron bars, brass rings, and cowrie shells. The Spanish had a system in which a healthy male was considered a standard unit called an “Indies piece.” Slaves arrived at the coast as a result of warfare, 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 costs and risks were involved. English profitability in the late 18th century was about five 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 between 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 in many societies 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 the 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 west and central Africa were small and volatile. 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 antiauthoritarian 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 therefore free from direct European influence, became intermediaries in the trade and expanded their influence, through access to Western firearms and other goods.

**Asante and Dahomey.** Among the important states developing during the slave trade era was the Asante Empire of 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 on 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 King 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 which limited the power of some monarchs. In the Yoruba state of Oyo a council and king shared authority. Art, crafts, weaving, bronze casting, and woodcarving 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 the trade of ivory, gold, and slaves for Middle Eastern markets. A few slaves went to European plantation colonies. On Zanzibar, 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. The Luo created dynasties in the great lakes region. Strong monarchies developed in Bunyoro and Buganda. In western Africa in the northern savanna, the process of Islamization entered a new phase, linking the area 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, Usman 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 expanding Bantu, followed by competition and war over land. 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. After 1834 some Afrikaners, seeking to escape British control, migrated beyond colonial boundaries and founded autonomous states.

**The Mfecane and the Zulu Rise to Power.** Among the Nguni people in 1818, a new leader, Shaka, gained authority. 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 used Zulu tactics to create new states, among them the Swazi and Lesotho. 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.

**Thinking Historically: 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. Seizing 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 impact of the trade on African and American societies.

**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, utilizing the wealth and knowledge they gained to the advantage of their states.

**Slave Lives.** Slavery and the slave trade killed millions of Africans. Family and community relationships were also destroyed during capture. As many as one-third of captives may have died on their way to shipping ports; shipboard mortality reached about 18 percent.

**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.

**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. In early 17th-century Lima, Africans outnumbered Europeans. Africans formed the overwhelming majority of the population on 18th-century 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 because 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 upon 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 region. African culture was dynamic and creative, incorporating customs from different African ethnicities or from their masters that assisted survival. 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 on to their beliefs; in 1835 a major slave uprising in Brazil was organized by Muslim Yoruba and Hausa. Resistance to slavery was a common occurrence. Slaves ran away and formed lasting independent communities. In 17th-century Brazil, Palmares, a state consisting of runaway slaves, was under Angolan leadership, and had a population of 10,000. In Surinam, 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 major 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. The forced movement of millions of Africans created vibrant new cultural forms in the Americas.

## KEY TERMS

**Factories:** trading stations with resident merchants established by the Portuguese and other Europeans.

**El Mina:** important Portuguese factory on the coast of modern Ghana.

**Nzinga Mvemba:** ruler of the Kongo kingdom (1507–1543); converted to Christianity; his efforts to integrate Portuguese and African ways foundered because of the slave trade.

**Luanda:** Portuguese settlement founded in the 1520s; became the core for the colony of Angola.

**Royal African Company:** chartered in Britain in the 1660s to establish a monopoly over the African trade; supplied slaves to British New World colonies.

**Indies piece:** a unit in the complex exchange system of the west African trade; based on the value of an adult male slave.

**Triangular trade:** complex commercial pattern linking Africa, the Americas, and Europe; slaves from Africa went to the New World; American agricultural products went to Europe; European goods went to Africa.

**Asante:** Akan state among the Akan people of Ghana and centered at Kumasi.

**Osei Tutu:** important ruler who began centralization and expansion of Asante.

**Asantehene:** title, created by Osei Tutu, of the civil and religious ruler of Asante.

**Benin:** African kingdom in the Bight of Benin; at the height of its power when Europeans arrived; famous for its bronze casting techniques.



**Dahomey:** African state among the Fon peoples; developed in the 17th century centered at Abomey; became a major slave trading state through utilization of Western firearms.

**Luo:** Nilotic people who migrated from the Upper Nile regions to establish dynasties in the lakes region of central Africa.

**Usman Dan Fodio:** Muslim Fulani leader who launched a great religious movement among the Hausa.

**Great Trek:** movement inland during the 1830s of Dutch-ancestry settlers in South Africa seeking to escape their British colonial government.

**Shaka:** ruler among the Nguni peoples of southeast Africa during the early 19th century; developed military tactics that created the Zulu state.

**Mfecane:** wars among Africans in southern Africa during the early 19th century; caused migrations and alterations in African political organization.

**Swazi and Lesotho:** African states formed by people reacting to the stresses of the Mfecane.

**Middle Passage:** slave voyage from Africa to the Americas; a deadly and traumatic experience.

**Saltwater slaves:** name given to slaves born in Africa; distinguished from American-born descendants, the *creoles*.

**Obeah:** African religious practices in the British American islands.

**Candomble:** African religious practices in Brazil among the Yoruba.

**Vodun:** African religious practices among descendants in Haiti.

**Palmares:** Angolan-led large runaway slave state in 17th-century Brazil.

**Surinam Maroons:** descendants of 18th-century runaway slaves who found permanent refuge in the rainforests of Surinam and French Guiana.