

# History of Islam

An encyclopedia of Islamic history

## The Atlantic Slave Trade

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It is ironic that what started as a religious Crusade ended up in the enslavement of a continent. The cruel and inhuman Atlantic slave trade was a culmination of religious, political and social developments in Western Europe and North Africa. The literature on this subject is vast and has been extensively analyzed both from European and African perspectives. Here we look at it through the prism of Muslim history, examining how the slave trade was influenced by events in North Africa and how it influenced Muslim societies in West Africa.

Nothing in human history compares with the Atlantic slave trade (1441-1840) in its magnitude, cruelty or sustained brutality. Slavery was not a new institution invented in the Middle Ages. In ancient times, the losing side in war was enslaved and made to pay for its misfortune with servitude. Slavery was common in the Roman world. In the 10<sup>th</sup> century, the Vikings captured men and women in their raids in northern Europe and sold them off in the bazaars along the Volga River and the Caspian Sea. The Turks (900-1200) acquired European slaves, trained them in the arts of war and made them a part of the standing Turkish armies. Some of the slaves rose to become kings and ruled as Mamlukes of Egypt and India. Most of the Ottoman Janissaries (1300-1600) were recruited as bonded men from Europe. In the 9<sup>th</sup> century, a large number of slaves were imported into southern Iraq from Zanzibar and put to work to clear the local swamps. These were called the Zanj. (The word *zanjir*, meaning an iron shackle or chain, used in Farsi, Urdu and Central Asian languages derives from the word zanj).

In the 15<sup>th</sup> century, the Crusades were very much alive in the western Mediterranean. The elimination of the Muslim presence in Spain was a prime objective of these Crusades. The Muslims maintained a toehold in Granada, on the southern tip of the Iberian Peninsula. Gradually, as political and social disintegration enveloped the Maghrib, the Iberian Christian powers expanded their horizons. In the first stage, important coastal towns in Morocco were occupied and trade was monopolized. In the second stage, the Maghrib was bypassed along the Atlantic coast, the slave trade began, and direct trade relations were established between Europe and West Africa. In the third stage, Granada was conquered, America was discovered, Africa was circumnavigated and direct European trade was established with India. In the final stage, slavery reached its peak, robbing Africa of millions of men, women and children. In the process, the political landscape of Europe went through successive transformations from feudal to mercantile to an industrial setting, paving the way for the colonialism of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

It is not commonly appreciated that the first target of slavery in West Africa were the Moors (the Portuguese and the Spanish referred to all Muslims regardless of racial differences as Moors). A description of the first raids has come down to us through the writings of the Portuguese writer Azurara. In 1441, a certain young Portuguese captain Golcalves sailed along the coast of southern Morocco and Mauritania gathering ivory, animal hide and sea lion oil for sale in Lisbon. In a chance encounter, he met up with a Muslim couple, wounded the man with a javelin and took them both aboard ship as slaves. At that time the jurisdiction over the Portuguese colony of Tangier was with Prince Henry, an enthusiastic supporter of a naval thrust along the Atlantic seacoast to outflank the Maghrib. The couple was presented to Henry. Sensing an opportunity to capture more slaves, he authorized an ambitious raid the same year under a seasoned and experienced captain Tristao who was familiar with the Atlantic coast of West Africa.

Captains Golcalves and Tristao netted more than a dozen Muslims and enslaved them. Elated, Henry wrote to Pope Eugene IV who gave a decree that capturing the Moors as slaves was a part of the Crusade and whoever sailed south in this pursuit would receive ablution of his sins (1442). This was the origin of the slave trade, which began with Portuguese piracy on the Moroccan coast in 1441. The process was systematized in 1444 when the Portuguese Lagos Company was chartered under the patronage of Prince Henry.

At first, the capture of a few slaves did not cause a stir in Lisbon. There were already many Muslim slaves in Portugal and Spain, just as there were Christian slaves in North Africa, captured in the frequent wars between the Christians and Muslims. The slaves on both sides were kept as domestic servants, subject to the norms of the respective cultures. But as the benefits of owning slaves became obvious to the richer merchants of Lisbon, and with the trade sanctified by the Pope, investment in slave ventures increased. In 1443, an expedition was financed and organized explicitly to capture more Muslims. The Maghrib was in an advanced state of political disintegration and the presence of these predatory ships was hardly noticed in the palaces of the Emirs, busy plotting against each other. By 1465, Portugal was transporting more than a thousand slaves a year from southern Morocco, Mauritania and Sene-Gambia.

The Portuguese continued their relentless advance along the African coast. In 1456, they were at the mouth of the Gambia River. Here, they exchanged Andalusian silk, crude arms and horses for African gold, ivory and slaves. To protect their shipping, they built strong forts in Sene-Gambia, Cape Verde, Sierra Leone, Sao Thome, Sao Jorge and Accra, Ghana. These were the first of the Portuguese forts that were to ring the Indian Ocean in the early part of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, including Goa (India), the Straits of Hormuz (Persia), and Malacca (Malaysia). The delta of the Gambia River was an important outlet for products of the Mali Empire. Many of the inhabitants of the area were Muslim who carried on a thriving trade with North Africa along the trans-Saharan routes. Now, the trade flowed directly to Europe, bypassing the Maghrib and contributing to its decay.

In the Sene-Gambia delta, the Portuguese heard about the rich lands further south. The Ivory Coast lay along the shores of the modern nations of Sierra Leone and Liberia. Further south, along the shores of Ghana, lay the Gold Coast. By 1465, Portuguese ships traversed these shores and appeared at the important trading post of Benin, in modern Nigeria. Benin was a major supply point for black pepper (the Benin pepper) and slaves. Within the next ten years Angola was visited. Slaves were bought in Sene-Gambia, Benin and Angola in return for horses and Andalusian garments.

By 1490, more than 3,000 slaves a year were transported to Portugal from Africa. Most were kept in Lisbon, but some were transported to Spain. Many of these helpless men and women were Muslim. We base this observation on the fact that the entire coast from Mauritania to the delta of Sene-Gambia lay in

the Islamic belt. Further south, the predominantly Muslim Fulani and Hausa tribes carried on a brisk trade with Benin at the mouth of the Niger River, and were often caught in the web of the slave trade. In 1455 the Portuguese could boast that it was possible to buy eighteen Moors in West Africa in exchange for one Andalusian horse!

The news of these Portuguese exploits was heard in neighboring Spain, which felt left out of the spoils. Spain was hampered at this time by internal convulsions. There was friction between Castile and Aragon. The war with Granada was ongoing. So strong was the Portuguese position in relation to Spain that in 1468, King Henry of Portugal laid claim to the throne of Castile. After some skirmishes, open warfare was avoided by the intervention of the Pope. The kingdom of Spain was consolidated with the marriage of Ferdinand of Castile and Isabella of Aragon. In 1492, Ferdinand conquered Granada, and in a voyage financed by Isabella, Columbus discovered America. Spain now felt strong enough to challenge Portugal for the African trade. However, since the Portuguese were the first on the scene, the Papal Bulls solidified their claims to the shores of West Africa. Tensions between Spain and Portugal increased leading again to intervention by the Pope.

The medieval Popes claimed the right to dispose of conquered Muslim territories as well as the lands newly discovered by Europeans. The legal basis was the Donation of Constantine. Under supervision of the Vatican, Spain and Portugal negotiated a treaty dividing up the world into spheres of influence. A Papal Bull sanctified the Treaty of Tordesillas (1494). It placed the line of demarcation between Spanish and Portuguese territories 370 leagues (approximately 800 miles) west of the Cape Verde Islands. West Africa, the Indian Ocean and Brazil were allocated to Portugal. Spain received Europe, the Mediterranean, East Asia and the Americas (except Brazil).

In spite of its strong Crusader underpinnings, there was nothing unusual about the African slave trade until 1492. It fit a pattern that had existed for centuries wherein slaves from Europe were sold in Egypt, Central Asia and India, while slaves from sub-Saharan Africa were sold in North Africa, Spain and India. The slave trade declined towards the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century because the European market was saturated. Lisbon had about ten thousand Muslim and African slaves and could use no more.

The discovery of America changed this picture. It transformed what was up till then a small trade in ivory, gold and slaves into an intricate global web of trade, piracy and politics. The initial objective of Spain in her American colonies was gold. In their hunt for precious metals, the Spanish obliterated the ancient civilizations of the Aztecs of Mexico, the Mayans of Guatemala and the Incas of Peru. Ninety percent of the men were killed while the women died as a result of slavery and diseases brought in by the Europeans. Within a span of ten years, from 1500 to 1510, the population of Cuba decreased from about one million to twenty thousand. When the Mayan gold was exhausted, the Spanish went after the silver mines of Mexico. The residual indigenous population was enslaved and put to work in the silver mines. Working conditions were so harsh that by 1520, the American colonies were almost drained of their native manpower.

It was about this time that a new crop, unknown in the Americas up until then, was introduced into the New World. The discovery of America had resulted in a vast interchange of agricultural products between the New World and the Old. The potato, tomato and red pepper traveled from the Americas to Europe and Asia, while sugar and cotton went in the other direction.

The introduction of sugar transformed America, Europe and Africa alike. Its impact on history was far greater than that of Mayan gold treasures or the rich silver mines of Mexico. To understand how it happened, it is important to know the process of sugar extraction. The word sugar derives from the

Sanskrit word *su-ka-ra*, meaning a sweet substance. Sugarcane is a tropical crop, which originated in the Indo-Gangetic plains in ancient India. Until the 16<sup>th</sup> century, it was imported in small quantities into Europe by Muslim merchants and their Venetian partners, and found its way to the dining tables of the rich. When direct European contacts were initiated with India (1496), it became more readily available. Demand multiplied. The islands of the West Indies, and some in the Atlantic Ocean off the coast of Africa, were ideally suited to grow sugar cane, a crop that is labor intensive. Native American labor had been exhausted. Moreover, the Native Americans were not suited for the kind of backbreaking work required on the sugar plantations. So, labor had to be imported.

At first, Muslim slaves from Portugal and Spain were imported, but it was soon realized that Europe could not meet the increasing demand for labor. African labor was ideally suited for this task. A two-way exchange of sugar for labor began. As demand for sugar increased, so did the demand for African slave labor. The first shipload of sugar from Cuba arrived in Spain in 1515. In 1518, the first shipload of slaves arrived in Cuba from West Africa.

Sugar processing yields molasses as a by-product. Fermented molasses yield rum. Molasses were processed into rum in the factories that sprang up in New England, as well as in England, Holland and France. Much of the rum was consumed in Europe. From there, some of it found its way to West Africa. European merchants paid for the slaves with rum, guns, horses, and industrial products from southern Spain, and fine muslin cloth imported from India. Guns were in demand by the African slave agents who used them to hunt for more slaves. Both guns and rum were destabilizing factors in West Africa. It was a recipe for men to get drunk and kill each other. There were enormous profits to be made at each stage of the sugar-molasses-rum-gun-slave transaction. In the process, Europe and America grew rich as Africa bled in agony.

The slave trade was not a business for the common man. Since it required enormous capital, it remained the privilege of emperors, noblemen, interlopers and scoundrels. Portugal wanted to keep a monopoly on this trade and sought justification of its position in its early discoveries as well as in the Papal Bulls. But the lure of profits was too great to keep interlopers out. French and English pirates were active against Portuguese shipping throughout the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Rich merchants in London, Liverpool, Paris, and Amsterdam financed the expeditions. On occasions, even their monarchs participated.

To simplify the complex interplay between the Muslim Maghrib, Christian Europe and Africa, we have divided the slave trade into seven periods. The first period started with the Portuguese capture of slaves in southern Morocco (1441) and ended with the discovery of America in 1492. The second period lasted until 1541, when Sultan Muhammed al Mahdi of Morocco recaptured the powerful fort of Santa Cruz and drove the Portuguese from the Atlantic coast of his country. This event slowed the growth of Portuguese power but did not eliminate it. The third phase lasted until 1578 when the Moroccans crushed the Portuguese at the Battle of al Qasr-al Kabir and brought an end to Portuguese ambitions in North Africa. The period 1578 to 1640 was marked by Dutch ascendancy in the Atlantic and the Indian Oceans. During 1640-1713, there was a bitter struggle between the Dutch, the French and the British for control of trade routes; it ended with the ascendancy of the British. The last period 1713 to 1818 saw the Atlantic slave trade at its height and the systematic transfer of millions of Africans to the Americas.

The coast of Guinea was known as Ghenoa in Arabic and its geography was well documented by Leo Africanus, a North African Muslim who was captured by the Crusaders, brought to Rome, baptized and who rose to become one of the most respected historians of the era. The initial products sought by the Portuguese were fish, palm oil, silver, indigo, cotton, silk, amber, wax and hides. By 1470, the slave trade on the Guinea coast had come alive. In 1486 the coast of Benin opened up for the supply of Benin black

pepper and slaves. The Benin black pepper stayed in great demand in Europe until 1506 when the supply of black pepper from India overwhelmed this trade. The Portuguese made few inroads into the interior of Africa, staying close to the coast and establishing strong points on the islands off shore.

The Portuguese claimed a monopoly on trade with the areas they had discovered and the Papal Bulls sanctioned this monopoly. Prince Henry, who was the Governor of the Portuguese colony of Tangier, provided the encouragement for the exploration of the African coastline. Henry died in 1460; King Alfonso in Lisbon was less interested in Africa than was the Prince. He gave a contract out to one Fernao Gomes for trading with Guinea with the stipulation that he was to explore at least 300 miles of coastline beyond the coast of Sierra Leone each year. Gomes did a good job and expanded Portuguese explorations all the way to the shores of Angola.

The Portuguese monopoly was challenged by other European powers. In 1474, the Genoese, who were active on the Mediterranean coast of the Maghrib, made it to the coast of Guinea. But the most determined challenge came from Spain. In 1454, Castile laid a rival claim to exclusive trade with Guinea. The rival claims were submitted to the Vatican for arbitration, which went in favor of Portugal. The Spanish claims were revived in 1475 under King Ferdinand of Castile who built a powerful fleet in Seville to wrest control of the Canary Islands. War ensued (1475-1479) and in the outcome Spain obtained rights to the islands while trade with West Africa remained a Portuguese monopoly. The rivalry heated up again after the discovery of America (1492) but was resolved by the Treaty of Tordesillas (1494) dividing up the world between Spain and Portugal.

The first batch of slaves for transportation to the West Indies was purchased in Lisbon in 1510. The conquest of Granada (1492), and the brutal Inquisition that followed, had generated many slaves and no doubt many of the early slaves exported to America were Spanish Muslims.

In both Portugal and Spain, it was the kings who had titles to the trade monopolies. The Spanish monarch instituted a registration process in 1475 to keep newcomers and interlopers out. In 1481, the King of Spain personally administered the contracts. The slave trade was highly profitable for the monarchs because they derived a duty from every slave ship. It provided more steady income than trade in gold, ivory or Benin pepper.

By 1540, the export of slaves from West Africa reached 10,000 annually. The island of Sao Thome served as a major slave depot until 1578. Some African captives were shipped directly from the Guinea coast to the West Indies and Brazil. Others were brought to Seville and Lisbon and processed for reshipment. In addition, the Portuguese engaged in local slave trade, taking slaves from Benin in Nigeria and selling them further south in Angola, and vice versa, in exchange for rice and other supplies. The forced migration of men, women and children caused enormous human suffering in the coastal regions.

The period 1541-1578 was characterized by increasing armed conflict and social dislocation in West Africa. The Sambas, a warlike tribe, ravaged the land (1540-1570). The resulting social dislocations made it easier for rival chiefs to capture men, women and children, bring them to the coast of Sene-Gambia and sell them to the Portuguese. Further to the interior, the powerful Songhay Empire extended its borders northwards into Mauritania occupying the important salt mines of Tagadhir. This led to skirmishes between the Moroccans and the Songhays, increasing the social dislocations in northwest Africa.

Portuguese power along the Atlantic coast of the Maghrib was arrested by the victory of Sultan Muhammed at the Battle of Santa Cruz (1541). The English, whose interests lay in the reduction of Portuguese influence in West Africa, helped the Sultan in this battle by supply him with artillery.

Following this victory, the Portuguese were expelled from the Moroccan coast except for the port cities of Tangier and Ceuta.

During the same period, the determined resistance of the Ottoman navies contained the growth of Portuguese power in the Indian Ocean. The Portuguese did not have the resources to protect their possessions extending over 10,000 miles, from Brazil to Indonesia. The English and the French exploited this weakness, each motivated by different social and political impulses. France was allied with the Ottomans against a coalition of the Hapsburgs of Vienna and the Empire of Spain. Interlopers regularly embarked on missions against Portuguese shipping while official France looked the other way. Meanwhile, the English cities of London and Liverpool, seething with migrant farmers from the interior, became havens for enterprising pirates. The rich merchants and noblemen financed the piracy. London, Liverpool, Antwerp, Amsterdam and Nantes emerged as principal finance centers of Western Europe. The cities of North Africa also participated in this trade, although financiers from Genoa and Venice supplied the capital for North African participation and were its principal beneficiary.

Between 1500 and 1530, hundreds of Portuguese ships were captured and looted. As early as 1530, William Hawkins of England raided the Ivory Coast. The raids were repeated in 1553 under Thomas Wyndham, and in 1554 under John Lock. On occasions, the English and the French cooperated with each other. King John III of Portugal tried both diplomacy and war to stop the piracy. He wrote to Queen Mary of England (1555) and King Francis of France (1559) demanding reparations for the seized ships. When that did not work, he allied himself with Emperor Charles V of Spain, who sent armed convoys to protect the Portuguese merchant fleet. The Pope also applied pressure. None of these approaches worked. In 1565, John Hawkins raided as far south as the coast of Sierra Leone, collected 150 slaves, added 300 more in alliance from a local chieftain and returned to Liverpool.

The English, to further their trade interests, maintained good relations with the Sa'adids of Morocco and helped them in their frequent skirmishes with the Portuguese. Ambassadors were exchanged and trade relations were established between Sultan Muhammed al Sa'adid and Queen Elizabeth I of England. The Moroccans exported salt, sugar, pepper and nuts to England while importing English wool, guns and cannon. When Portugal threatened war, Queen Elizabeth I, who had her hands full with the Scots at that time, temporarily put a stop to attacks on merchant ships (1568-1571), but the slave trade continued.

The lure of pepper from India, of slaves from the Guinea coast and of silver from the Americas was too great, and the potential for profits too large, for any monopoly to work and to keep the interlopers out. The breakdown of the monopolies accelerated after 1559, a trend accentuated by religious wars in France, Holland and northern Germany between the Catholics and Protestants.

It was at this time that the Dutch entered the competition for slaves. Holland was a part of the checkerboard of dukedoms in northern Germany and was nominally under Hapsburg control. In 1519, the Spanish King Charles V was crowned as the Holy Roman Emperor by the Pope and assumed titular control over Christendom. Taking advantage of internal rivalries between various dukedoms, Spain had acquired Holland as a colony. In 1572, the Dutch threw off the Spanish yoke and became independent. Antwerp was a major trade depot for both Spain and Portugal, and the Dutch inherited the trading legacy as well as ship building technology from the Iberians. When a power vacuum developed in the Mediterranean following the destruction of the Spanish armada by the English (1588), the Dutch were in a position to move in.

Spain tried a blockade of Dutch ships around the coasts of France and Portugal. This only forced the Dutch to extend the reach of their raids. By 1630, the Dutch had destroyed the Portuguese stranglehold on the East Indies trade, and had driven Portugal from strong points in West Africa, North America,

Brazil, India, Malaya and Indonesia. Later, in 1640, Portugal gained its independence from Spain, and was able to recapture some of these trading posts as well as its old colonies in Brazil.

By 1600 the Atlantic slave trade had taken on the character of organized international trade. As sugar plantations grew in the Americas, so did the demand for slaves. Indeed, slaves had become a "commodity" wherein profits depended on timeliness and speed of delivery. The European slave traders had their counterparts on the African coast. The coastal chiefs controlled the trade, employing slave catchers who raided several hundred miles into the interior and hauled in the captives. Competition was intense. The demand was met by tribal wars, which generated a steady stream of slave captives. After the disintegration of Songhay (1592), slave raids were conducted along the Niger River as far inland as Timbaktu and Gao. There were many Muslims among the slaves. An examination of Mexican records shows the names of Mandigoes from Guinea, Yorubas from Nigeria and Bambara from Niger. Thousands were also brought in from East Africa. These included Kaffrarians from Mozambique, Melin from Melindi, as also Muslims from Shofala and Kilwa. Some were captured as far away as Malaya, Sumatra and China. Many were bought and sold several times.

The slave trade was paid for by barter. The Europeans brought in tobacco, rum, firearms, steel bars, beads and re-exported linen from India. The transactions on African soil were peaceful and on equal terms. But once the captives boarded the slave ships, the treatment changed. Ownership was inscribed by red-hot iron on the chests of men or the breasts of women to designate whether they belonged to the British, French or Dutch companies.

Although English pirates raided the West African coast as early as 1434, and harassed Portuguese and Spanish shipping throughout the latter part of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, it was not until 1640 that England entered the Atlantic slave trade in earnest. Initial raids on Spanish shipping had yielded valuable silver which helped prop up the English currency. Indeed, much of the rivalry between European powers in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries can be explained by their desire to protect their currencies. At the time, gold and silver were the international standards of exchange in Europe and Asia. Commodities were exported in return for gold and silver. Exports increased the supply of precious metals, which backed up the currencies. Imports had the opposite effect. Spain had grown rich and powerful on the supply of Mexican silver. England, by comparison, had lost much of its silver to imports from Morocco and Holland. By 1560, when Elizabeth I ascended the throne of England, the pound had lost much of its value. The English pirates temporarily saved the day for England, and the British pound regained its value. A replenished currency made it possible for England to expand its ambitions towards the lucrative Indian Ocean trade.

The same logic and the same forces were operational in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The Dutch had displaced the Portuguese in the Indian Ocean. The English and the French had to buy their pepper from the Dutch. In the process, Holland accumulated more silver while the supply of precious metals in England and France diminished.

Trade with India, West Africa and the Americas required enormous capital. Ships had to be built, soldiers hired, fortifications erected and depots maintained in distant lands. The overhead was high. Initially, only the kings, noblemen or rich merchants could supply this capital. The Dutch were the first Europeans to open up this trade for broader participation.

In 1602 the Dutch East India Company was formed which enabled a broader spectrum of merchants to invest in the profitable Indian Ocean trade. *The evolution of this one institution, the joint stock company, was the single most important development in the world in the 17<sup>th</sup> century.* It enabled Western Europe to harness

its energies towards the development of trade with Asia, Africa and America, while the rest of the world remained bogged down with disputes about kingship and land turf. Ultimately, it proved to be the means by which Europe conquered and colonized much of the world. By the year 1660, the Dutch had already accumulated the experience of sixty years in the formation and operation of trading companies. The British and the French realized that in order to compete they too must form similar trading companies. The French West India Company was organized in 1664. England organized the Royal African Company in 1672.

The period 1670 to 1713 was marked by intense rivalry between the Dutch on the one hand and the English and the French on the other. The Dutch suffered from the same handicap as had the Portuguese in the previous century, namely, their resources were insufficient to hold a vast world empire. England and France had more manpower and more material resources than the Dutch. Individual merchants as well as pirates found it profitable to beat the Dutch monopoly and transport slaves directly from West Africa to the West Indies.

The English came up with further innovations in the organization of trading corporations. The Dutch trading companies had displaced the monarchs of Spain, but they too tried to maintain a monopoly on this trade. By contrast, the English opened up their trading companies to all merchants. This had the effect of discouraging piracy. Given a stake in the overall profits, British interlopers found it more advantageous to join this new company than to fight it. In 1750, the old Royal African Company was dissolved and replaced by a new corporation called the Company of Merchants Trading in West Africa.

By 1713, the Dutch were exhausted and many of their holdings on the coast of Africa and in the Indian Ocean had fallen to their enemies. England established itself on the southern coast of Guinea in West Africa around the modern nations of Ghana and Nigeria, while the French won the northern coasts around Senegal and Gambia. In 1713, the British and the French won concessions from Spain to supply slaves to the Spanish colonies in America. Between 1713 and 1763, France and England fought for the possession of trading routes and for colonies in America and India. The British, with their superior business acumen, triumphed. In 1757, the Battle of Plassey near Calcutta sealed not only the fate of the French effort in India but of India itself.

As the British gained dominance of the oceans, the Atlantic slave trade gathered momentum. English and French immigration to the American colonies increased, and with it the cultivation of sugarcane and cotton. Demand for slaves outpaced their supply. Whereas the total number of slaves shipped from West Africa to Portugal between 1441 and 1500 was about 30,000, the number between 1700 and 1800 was close to seven million. The total number displaced from all of Africa between 1441 and 1840 exceeded ten million. Untold numbers died at sea. The sick were cast overboard; women abused. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when the British navy imposed a search and impound policy towards slave ships, entire "cargoes" were thrown overboard to prevent the ships from being impounded. Many more millions were killed in the tribal wars that were fought in Africa to capture the slaves. When all these numbers are added up, a conservative figure for the total casualties of the Atlantic slave trade would be fifteen million. (To bring these numbers into perspective, the total population of England around the year 1600 was estimated at six million.)

More than 60 percent of the captives were from West Africa, a region under Islamic influence for centuries. The others came from Angola in West Africa and Mozambique in East Africa, which became the primary sources for slaves sent to Brazil. It may be deduced that up to twenty percent of all slaves

transported to the Americas were Muslim. Africa was denied the energy of its young men and its young women. Instead, they became a line item in the enormous capital-accumulation taking place in Europe and the Americas.

The capture of slaves was not without resistance. The indomitable human urge for freedom does not give in easily. In 1502, the Africans attacked Fort Sao Jorge. In 1536, there was an African revolt on the island of Sao Thome. In 1570 the Fort of Sao Jorge was again attacked and would have fallen had it not been for the cannon of the Portuguese. There are numerous recorded cases of Muslim slaves organizing resistance to slavery in Brazil, in the West Indies, and in the southern United States.

History itself was a casualty of the Atlantic slave trade. The hapless men, women and children, chained, stuffed like sardines in ships, marked with red hot iron like cattle to be sold in the bazaars of Charleston and New Orleans, changed the self-image of Europe and Africa alike. Conflicts between slave and master were inevitable in this inhuman environment. Attitudes hardened, perceptions were corrupted, and images were distorted. Just as Europeans thought of Africans as cannibals, the Africans thought they were being transported to America to be roasted and eaten. In this crucible was bred the doctrine of racial superiority of Europe.

Oppression cannot be institutionalized without moral justification. A sociology of domination emerged in 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century Europe and America, condemning the black man to an inherently inferior position and providing a moral justification for his enslavement. The oppressed and the oppressor both suffered. The casualty was the slave, the slave catcher and the slave owner. Christian and Muslim together paid the price.

The slave trade broke down African social structures. Until the 15<sup>th</sup> century, East Africa was a part of the iron culture linking the lands of the Indian Ocean. West Africa was linked to the Mediterranean by trade routes across the Sahara. The slave trade interrupted the natural evolution of African culture. The captured Africans were not the savages and cannibals that they were portrayed to be. They were masons, carpenters, jewelers, and scholars like the people of Asia and Europe. Centralized empires existed in Mali, Songhay, the Congo and Rhodesia. No such centralized authority could emerge after the European intervention.

From a Muslim perspective, the slave trade destroyed trading patterns in the Maghrib, enslaved many Muslims both in West and East Africa, marginalized West Asia by circumventing its trade routes, and ultimately led to its colonization.

The importance of the Atlantic slave trade decreased as the industrial revolution gathered momentum. Unit labor costs became much lower for machine labor than they were for human labor. The overhead for the transportation of slaves was high and profitability of the trade decreased. The slave trading nations realized that there were more profits to be made by colonization and by peaceful trade than by the slave trade. Towards the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, a minority opinion in England and in the United States spoke up against this inhuman trade. They were helped in their cause by the Industrial Revolution. The British Parliament abolished the slave trade in England in 1772. Denmark passed similar legislation in 1803. The United States abolished it in 1808, and Holland in 1818.

Even as the curtain fell on the Atlantic slave trade, a scramble ensued for colonies and raw materials required for the industrial infrastructure of Europe. Illegal traffic persisted until 1840. To stop it, Britain entered into mutual search treaties with other maritime nations of the Atlantic to search America-bound ships for human cargo. This effort was only partially successful, so the British navy undertook to patrol,

search and confiscate any ship with contraband slave cargo. It was not until 1850 that the Atlantic slave trade finally came to an end. Abraham Lincoln abolished slavery in America in 1863. The survival and prosperity of Africans in the New World is a testament to the triumph of human endurance and of the indomitable spirit of humankind.

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