HIS 115A: West African History
The History and Memory of the Transatlantic Slave Trade

Lecture 1 – Introduction to the Study of the TAST in Africa (Thur. 1-10)
2 million years ago is an approximate date for hominid ancestors’ migrations out of Africa.

**Question:** What do historians call the periods in between these dates?

Precolonial Africa, Colonial Africa, Postcolonial Africa/Modern Africa
Understanding Africa in Time
How do historians think about African history?

Precolonial Africa

1870-1900

Colonial Africa

2019

1950s-1970s

Post-Colonial Africa also called Independent Africa
Understanding Africa in Time
How do historians think about African history?

Atlantic Africa – roughly 400 years. However, we will mostly be studying the 18th century or 1700s.
Understanding Africa in Space
How do historians think about African *geography*?

*Environmentally*

Geography plays a big role in African history as well will see. Sometimes these environments span across regions, i.e. Senegambia or the Upper Guinea Coast
Understanding Africa in Space
How do historians think about African geography?

Regionally

Historians commonly discuss Africa in terms of region over country. This is contrast to many journalists or reporters, for example.
A closer look at West Africa
Modern national boundaries
By historically, I mean the way that areas of West Africa are referred to in the documentary record.
Q: What does this have to do with the Transatlantic Slave Trade?
A: The Transatlantic Slave Trade is what linked them

Basic facts of Atlantic Africa from Philip Morgan’s Chapter (2009):

**Exports:** Africans traded gold; ivory; hides; malaguetta pepper; beeswax; tropical gums, nuts, oils, and dyewoods; and slaves

**Imports:** Africans bought textiles, metalwares, alcoholic spirits, tobacco, firearms, and currencies (i.e. bars, rods, and cowries)

**Economic value:** By the peak of the slave trade in the 1780s, the Atlantic African trade was worth 47 millions pounds sterling

**Change Over Time:** By the 1790s, African slaves comprised 90% of total value on all African exports (surpassed gold in 1700)

**Size:** Atlantic Africa encompasses roughly 5,000 kilometers of coastline (3,106 miles) and several hundreds of miles of interior

**Population:** Atlantic Africa had an estimated population of 22-23 million from 1680-1780, falling to maybe 20 million in 1820
The Triangular Trade or Triangle Trade—this map wrongly implies only Britain traded in slaves.

Eric Williams’ thesis—The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade is the pillar supporting all of these industries.

Joseph Inikori’s thesis—This map of the manufacturing trade also reminds us of the “gun-slave cycle”
This is where “Middle Passage” comes from—app. 4-12 weeks, varied over centuries, average 8.5. weeks.
In reality, the trade was much more chaotic than this map—smuggling, inter-colonial, trans-colonial trades.
The Transatlantic Slave Trade is what linked them
All the African slave trades shown together in one map:

**Transatlantic** (~12.5 million over 425 years) – **high volume in a short time span** (2x the volume of the other two trades combined from 1450 to 1800)

**Trans-Saharan** (~9.3 million from at least the 8th century AD to the 1900s)

**East African** (unknown numbers, but perhaps 8 million over 1,200 years)

**Destinations (1519-1867)** – 6.5% British North America; 38.5% Portuguese America; 17.5% Spanish America; 13.6% French America; 18.4% British Caribbean; 2% Dutch West Indies; 3.25% English Americas; 0.3% Danish West Indies. **Note: these numbers are limited by the data of embarkation/disembarkation.**

**Philip Morgan (2009):** “The Atlantic diaspora was the largest in the early modern period, but the other two were also significant. Thus, from the fifteenth to the nineteenth century, for every 100 persons who went across the Atlantic, about 50 left sub-Saharan Africa for the Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean.”
Basic Timeline

The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade

- **869**: Early evidence of African slaves in the Middle East
- **1441**: First known group of African slaves taken to Europe
- **1502**: First known group of African slaves to the Americas
- **1617**: First known group of African slaves to English colony
- **1780s**: The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade reaches its height
- **1803-1814**: First wave of European powers abolish the TST
- **1866**: The last recorded Transatlantic Slave Trade voyage
- **1873**: The Sultan of Zanzibar bans East African Slave Trade
- **To the present**: Any Trans-Oceanic Slave Trading voyages that occur are both illegal and undocumented

**Highlights** – the extended duration of the Transatlantic Slave Trade

**1780s**: This decade was the peak of the TAST, when roughly 866,000 Africans crossed the Atlantic Ocean (Philip Morgan, 2009)
How do we read this graph as an historical source?

1) The Luso-Hispanic Atlantic in the first half
2) The rise of the plantation colonies in the French/English Atlantic—say something about why African slavery rose above other forms of unfree labor.
3) The steep decline in 1850 and the end in 1866
Basic Facts

The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade

**Video of Slave Voyages**

**Duration:** ~ 425 years

**Documented Voyages:** 34,948 – average 8.5 weeks

**People:** 65% male, 35% female, and 21% children

**Estimated Numbers:**
- 21.9 million (enslaved)
- 16.4 million (interior markets)
- 14 million (coastal markets)
- 12.5 million (embarked Africa)
- 11.7 million (disembarked in the Americas)
- 10.5 million (purchased)
- 6.6 million (surviving after 3-4 years)


We have 2,267 documented voyages coming from the US.

Recorded slave-trade journeys from the Voyages: The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database charted as dots. **Time: 2 minutes and 47 seconds.**

**Mention the metaphor of cannibalism.** We can literally see the Americas swallowing up people from Africa...

**My Favorite Quote:** "By 1780, 6.5 million people had crossed the Atlantic to the Americas from Europe and Africa, and of these only 1 million, mostly males, were from Western Europe, the remaining 5.5 million coming from western Africa, about a third of whom were females." (Paul Lovejoy, Transatlantic Dimensions of Ethnicity, 1).

Put a different way, before 1820, 4 Africans arrived in the Americas for every 1 European (Philip Morgan, Africa and the Atlantic, 1).
Video on how to use the database:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1YwVvIHHCw0

**Voyages: The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database** – The database is the product of historians compiling unpublished research since the 1960s. It was first published as a CD-ROM in 1999. The database was continually updated and was launched by Emory University as an open access website in 2006. It is still updated today.
Eric Williams: The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade financed the industrial revolutions of the Western Hemisphere, and it only ended because European and American societies evolved to the point where they could switch to a new and more efficient mode of production—unfree slave labor to free wage labor.

1) Export of relatively cheap foreign labor to the Americas for the production of raw materials
2) The creation of foreign markets for British manufacturers to expand
3) The creation and sustaining of numerous other industries to support Atlantic trade (sailors, boat-builders, coopers, administrators)
4) The same for secondary industries like insurance, mortgaging, banking, investing, loaning, et cetera

Adbul Sheriff: In his book, he directly links the British switch to anti-slavery to the beginning of the colonial era
Conceptual Approaches

What did the Transatlantic Slave Trade mean for Africa?

Here there is disagreement

Rodney – Europeans pressured/compelled Africans to trade in slaves through force, market pressures, the introduction of military technology; Europeans are ultimately responsible for the horrors of the slave trade, and the slave trade underdeveloped Africa during its four centuries of existence.

Thornton – Africans controlled the slave trade and were neither pressured/compelled by Europeans to participate, the slave trade was built on pre-existing ideas of Africa warfare, landownership, and politics, and the slave trade did not under-develop Africa—Africa only became underdeveloped in the colonial period.
So what is slavery?

Working definition: “The practice whereby one person’s status is tied up in their claims or ownership of someone else’s body or status.”

And what is a slave?

Working definition: “Someone who is claimed as property by another person in society and is generally considered to be an outsider.”
Slavery in Africa is:

1. Old
   - Evidence as early as Ancient Egypt (1150-1175 BCE)
2. Diverse
   - Kin, client, pawn, royal servant, concubine, captive...
3. Unique
   - Often own the labor but not the body
   - Not based upon pigmentation or race
   - Often a temporary status
   - Often not an inheritable status
   - Often a social but not necessarily a legal caste
     i.e. own property, have slaves, get an education, work for yourself/enter into contracts, participate in courts, marry, serve in the military
4. Changing

**KIN:** Slave = outsider; a person without kin who by virtue of this fact must be incorporated into the lineage as a dependent. Part of a network of survival.

**CLIENT** = Patron/client relationship – owe a debt to someone you cannot pay off, you might become their servant or “slave” for a period of time.

**PAWN** = In place of yourself or as collateral, send a child to work for or become the wife of a patron to pay off a debt. May be a temporary/able to return on payment.

**ROYAL SERVANTS** = Popular in kingdoms – Benin and Kongo. Royal servants sometimes had ability to gain wealth and status, depending on their job in the hierarchy

**CONCUBINE** = “Married” to someone as a slave (against her will, often as an exchange of money – but not as brideprice, a payment which is different).

**CAPTIVE** = Captured during a raid or warfare. Sometimes this person is killed, sometimes sold as “slave” to others to get rid of him (especially male because they might rise up against their captor), this could be a temporary slave state or could become permanent if sold on to another “foreign” community; treated worse than local slaves.

*African slavery is not chattel slavery*
How might one become a slave in Africa?

– Born or adopted as kin
– Taken in warfare or raid
– Kidnapped
– Punished for a crime
  • Adultery, murder, theft, witchcraft
– Sold to pay for a debt
  • Personal, family, royal
– Enslaved for security
  • Famine, protection, insolvency

Mungo Park’s excerpt from *Travels in the Interior of Africa* (1799)
S.W. Koelle’s excerpt from *Polyglotta Africana* (1854)
The rise of the Transatlantic Slave Trade makes everything worse

1850: At 24 years old, “Nanga... was given in pawn by his mother for a brother of hers, who had been sold on account of adultery: but before he could be redeemed by his mother, he was placed in the hands of the Portuguese in Loando, who at once shipped him.”

Those changes outlast the trade

Note: Image of a slave coffle. Source taken from P.E.H. Hair, “African Narratives of Enslavement,” 43. Nanga is a Lubalo/KIMBUNDU who was born in the town of Mulukala and interviewed in Freetown, Sierra Leone, in 1850. Those changes will outlast that trade – Slavery in Africa continues to expand and intensify long after the TST is abolished.
Additional Facts

- Not all regions participated
- Broad “Catchment Areas”
  - Multiple sales along the way
- Not all enslaved people left
  - Runde in Senegambia
  - “Company or Castle slaves”
  - Ceddo armies in Senegambia
  - Incorporated into households
- Ocean passage only one part
- Perhaps 75% from the interior
  - Dahomean royal law
  - Islamic prohibitions

Thornton – Generally, Africans did not sell people they considered their own
S.W. Koelle – Example of enslaved person who becomes a slave trade in Luanda for the Portuguese

Another example of enslaved people who did not leave the continent is the Chikunda slave armies of East Africa under Portuguese influence—these were slave armies that were controlled by the Portuguese and Portuguese-descended landlords around the Zambezi River in Mozambique, known as Prazeros.
The Diversity of the TAST in West Africa

Political formations

1) Declining Centralized States or Kingdoms:
   - Benin and the Kongo

“There was not one Atlantic slave trade, but many trades wreaking many different effects…” - Historian Toby Green (2011)

Benin – Oba Esigie refused to sell male slaves to the Portuguese in 1516
Kongo – King Afonso’s letters from 1526 lamented the trade
Ndongo and Matamba Kingdoms – Queen Nzinga goes to war against the Portuguese (1624-1657)
Dona Beatriz Kipa Vita Antonian Movement – restore life to Kongo from the Civil Wars (1705-1706)
The Diversity of the TAST in West Africa

Political formations

1) Rising Centralized States or Kingdoms:
   - Futa Toro and Futa Djallon

Marabout leaders (Muslim religious scholars) like Karamoko Alfa in Futa Jallon, Suleyman Bal in Futa Toro, and Malik Sy in Bundu led revolutions against the ceddo warlords—been using armies to terrorize Senegambian hinterland through large-scale man-hunting operations; they formed theocratic states with Islamic hierarchies.

1) Constructed mosques, schools, courts; expanded literacy; translated sacred Arabic texts into languages like Peul; outlawed enslaved of Muslims

Cultural revolution based on slavery: “There is no doubt that the practice of domestic slavery was the root cause of cultural revolution in Futa Jallon” (101)

New leaders like Ibrahima Sory in Futa Jallon (r. 1751) not scholars but commanders of the army, corrupt the marabout movement, misuse the idea of “Holy War” from the Quran, but they kept the outlawing of the enslavement of Muslims so that non-Muslims start converting to save themselves and their families from enslavement.
The Diversity of the TAST in West Africa

**Political formations**

3) Rising Centralized States or Kingdoms:
- Futa Toro and Futa Djallon
- Asante, Dahomey, and Oyo

Asante (Kumasi), Dahomey (Abomey), Oyo (Oyo-Ile)
Tribute, prohibitions against selling firearms
Oyo cavalry units—wage war against Dahomey
Access to the coast—guaranteed credit
Hougbadja origin story—“inside of Dan’s belly”
Osei Tutu of the Oyoko clan – Accepts the Golden Stool (*Sika dwa*) and conquers Denkyira
Golden stool contains the soul or spirit of the Asante people (*Sunsum*)
Kings send sons to Europe to learn English—come back and be *caboceers*
The Diversity of the TAST in West Africa

*Political formations*

2) Decentralized States or Confederacies:
- The Jolof States
- The Fante States
- The Kru people
- The Hausa States

Assafo militia from the *Bron* districts, Omanhen chiefs
Nananom mpow sacred grove
Middlemen between inland empires and Europeans
Jolof revolts in the Spanish Caribbean 1500s-1540s
Coromantee revolts in the English Caribbean 1760s
“John Conue” festival – Junkanoo festival
Common language and cultural connections

*Philip Morgan (2009): “...political fragmentation was still the dominant feature of Atlantic Africa...”* (9)
The Diversity of the TAST in West Africa

*Political formations*

3) Merchant Families or Trade Diasporas:
   - The Afro-Portuguese of southern Senegambia and Sierra Leone
   - The Aro
   - The Swahili

---

*Lancados, tangomaos, intermarriage, New Christians, mixed-race descendants.*
Have sons and daughters to set up a family merchant lineage
Aro or Arochukwu common culture—Aro dialect of Igbo; secret society of Ekpe or Okonko; god Chuckwu; Ikeji or New Yam Festival; the Ihu rite of obeisance
Ibibio and Igbo machete wielding mercenaries do most of the slave raiding for the Aro traders

Other trade diasporas include the Maraka, the Juula, and the Jahaanke. Trading groups include the Slatees, Accanys, Duala.
The Diversity of the TAST in West Africa

Political formations

4) European Colonies before the Colonial Era
   - Sierra Leone
   - Angola (Luanda)
   - Mozambique (Quelimane, Sena)
   - South Africa (Table Bay/Western Cape)

**Imbangala mercenaries led by the Portuguese military.** Angola is the exception to the Transatlantic Slave Trade. Compare to the Portuguese using the Kalonga people as mercenaries in Mozambique, East Africa.

**Generally, Thornton is right**—white men in Africa stayed locked up in their coastal forts or on the decks of their anchored boats. They left the slave trading to Africans or to mixed-race traders. Occasionally, European delegates or explorers went into the interior of the continent but only for specific purposes. The instances where they did interfere with the trade should be seen as abnormal/irregular occurrences (1767 Biafra, 1775 Senegambia with Governor O’Hara arming Moorish Orman raiders)
   - Themes tropical exuberance/white man’s grave
   - They did not have to, the slaves came to them
Students must commit to their region of study in exactly 1 week (*by our class next Thursday*). Students should also be thinking about what specific themes or topics they want to explore.

“There was not one Atlantic slave trade, but many trades wreaking many different effects...” (Toby Green, *The Rise of the Transatlantic Slave Trade*, 14).