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)
Understanding Africa in Time
How do historians think about African history?
Understanding Africa in Time
How do historians think about African history?

- 2 mya: Precolonial Africa
- 1870-1900: Colonial Africa
- 1950s-1970s: Post-Colonial Africa
- 2019

Timeline showing the different eras of African history.
Understanding Africa in Time
How do historians think about African history?

- 2 mya
- 1870-1900
- 2019

- Precolonial Africa
- Atlantic Africa
- Colonial Africa
- Post-Colonial Africa

1440-1860
1950-1970
Understanding Africa in Space
How do historians think about African geography?

Environmentally
How do historians think about African geography? 

Regionally
A closer look at West Africa
Modern national boundaries
Understanding Africa in Space
How do historians think about African geography?

Historically
So what is Atlantic Africa?

Working definition: “The regions of western Africa that became inextricably linked with Europe and the Americas in terms of their historical development from about the mid-fifteenth to the mid-nineteenth centuries.”
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
Basic Facts

The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade

Video of Slave Voyages

Duration: \( \sim 425 \) 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)
The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database has information on almost 36,000 slaving voyages that forcibly embarked over 10 million Africans for transport to the Americas between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries. The actual number is estimated to have been as high as 12.5 million. The database and the separate estimates interface offer researchers, students and the general public a chance to rediscover the reality of one of the largest forced movements of peoples in world history.
Conceptual Approaches

What did the Transatlantic Slave Trade mean for Europe and the Americas?

Here there is agreement

Eric Williams’ *Capitalism and Slavery* (1944)

Adbul Sheriff’s *Slaves, Spices & Ivory in Zanzibar* (1987)
Conceptual Approaches

What did the Transatlantic Slave Trade mean for Africa?

Here there is disagreement

Walter Rodney’s *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (1972)

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
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
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
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
The Diversity of the TAST in West Africa

Political formations

1) Declining Centralized States or Kingdoms:
   - Benin and the Kongo
The Diversity of the TAST in West Africa

*Political formations*

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

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

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

3) Merchant Families or Trade Diasporas:
   - The Afro-Portuguese of southern Senegambia and Sierra Leone
   - The Aro
   - The Swahili
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)
SO... ATLANTIC AFRICA IS A DIVERSE PLACE

WHAT PART OF IT WILL YOU STUDY?