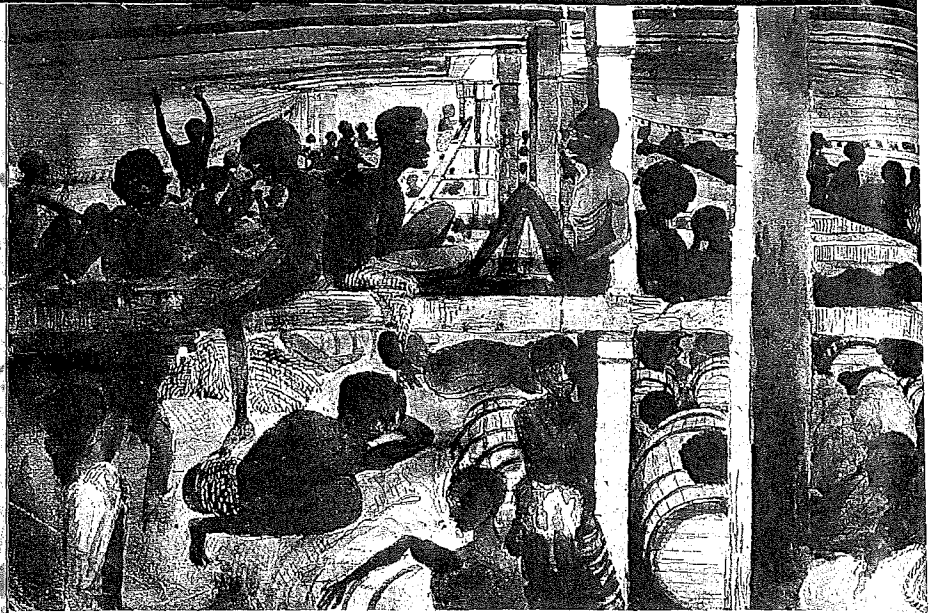


## CHAPTER

# 4

### SECTIONS

- 1 Slave Raids in West Africa
- 2 The Middle Passage
- 3 West Africa After the Slave Trade



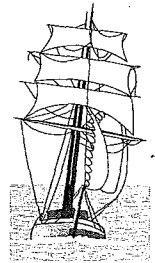
Africans on a slave ship

# The Atlantic Slave Trade

(1500–1760s)

### THINKING ABOUT THE CHAPTER

**How did the Atlantic slave trade rob Africans of their most basic human rights?**



In 1493, a strange parade made its way through Seville, Spain. Christopher Columbus proudly marched through the city's streets displaying objects from his first voyage across the Atlantic—colorful parrots, exotic plants, and people he called Indians. A 19-year-old student, Bartolomé de Las Casas (bahr-toh-loh-MAY de lahs KAH-sahs), watched the procession with great interest.

In 1502, Las Casas himself traveled to the Americas as a conquistador. His bloody conquests in the Caribbean won him a huge estate and the labor of many Native American slaves. Ten years later, he became the first Roman Catho-

lic to be ordained a priest in the Americas. In 1514, Las Casas read a passage in the Bible that convinced him "that everything done to the Indians thus far was unjust." He spent the rest of his life trying to end the enslavement of Native Americans.

However, Las Casas did not oppose the idea of slavery completely. In 1517, in order to help Native Americans, he persuaded the king of Spain to substitute African labor for Native American labor in the Americas.

When Las Casas died at 92 in 1566, he left behind a book called *History of the Indies*. It remained unpublished for more than 300 years. When people finally read it, they learned that Las Casas had repented his decision to enslave Africans. By that time, however, the Atlantic slave trade had changed the history of three continents.

## 1 SLAVE RAIDS IN WEST AFRICA

How were West Africans rounded up for sale as slaves?

Just before dawn broke, wooden drums sounded the alarm. Enemies had surrounded the village. Warriors grabbed their weapons, but it was too late. Intruders armed with heavy wooden clubs, spears, and bows and arrows overran the compound. Some villagers fled. Others fought back. Most fell stunned by well-aimed blows to the head. When the battle ended, the invaders joined the captured villagers together neck to neck with heavy logs and ropes.

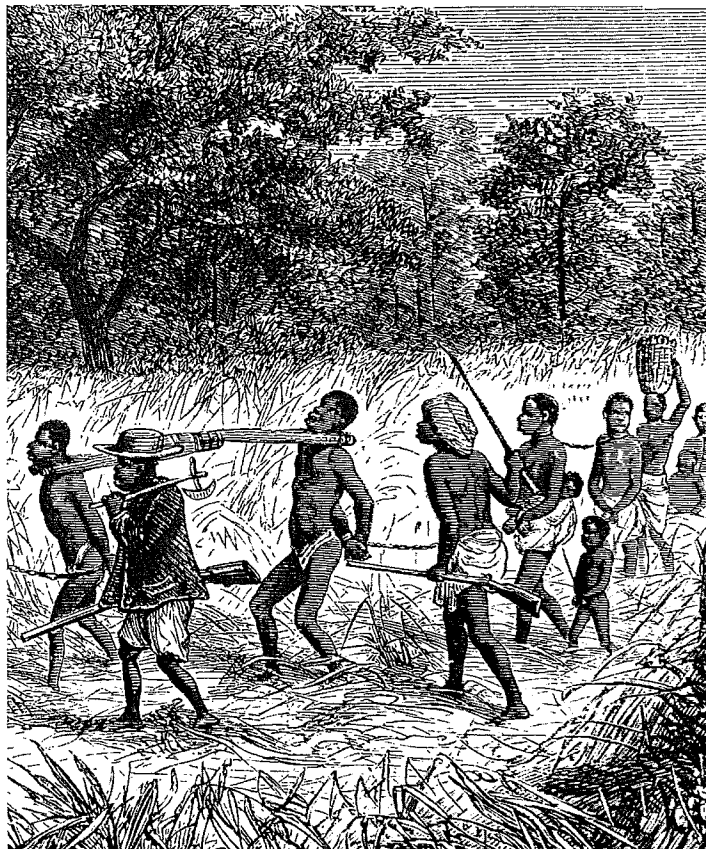
The villagers had fallen victim to African slave-traders from the Atlantic coast. The traders marched them barefoot over mountains, through forests, and along

rivers. Those who rebelled were killed. Those who fell ill were left to die along the trail. Near the end of the journey, the slave traders fattened the survivors with yams, melons, and dried fish. They covered bruises on the captives with powder and rubbed palm oil into their skin until it glistened.

The African slave-traders marched their captives to a slave-trading station along the coast. Here a silent trade began. White slave-traders examined the captives and piled up bundles of red and blue cotton cloth in payment. The African traders pushed these goods away. The white traders added a few guns, some gunpowder, and a keg of rum. When there was enough, the deal was sealed.

**Profit in Enslaved People.** Starting about 1500, such cooperation between African and European slave-traders took

African slave traders march captives toward the coast for sale. What European trade item in the picture made it easier to round up captives?



## SNAPSHOT OF THE TIMES

- 1492–1493** Columbus makes his first voyage to the Americas.
- 1502** Atlantic slave trade begins.
- 1517** Bartolomé de Las Casas asks Spain to replace Native American labor with African labor.
- 1624** Queen Nzinga begins battle against Portuguese slave-raiders.
- 1700–1800** Atlantic slave trade reaches its peak.

place time and time again in the Atlantic slave trade. At first, the Portuguese and Spanish controlled much of the European side of the trade. But other nations wanted a share of the profits, too. Soon, the English, the Dutch, the French, the Prussians, the Swedes, and other Europeans entered the slave trade.

By the 1600s, merchants from all over western Europe had formed slave-trading companies. Their agents built what became known as “slave factories” in harbors along the West African coast. The factories were made up of supply warehouses, living quarters for Europeans, and pens for the captured Africans.

Africans from thousands of villages passed through these factories. They included Yorubas, Mandingos (man-DING-gohs), Hausas, Fantis (FAHN-tees), Ashantis (uh-SHAHN-tees), Dahomeans (duh-HOH-mee-uhns), Binis (BEE-nees), and more. All had been seized in savage raids that destroyed villages, killed resisters and broke up families forever.

While European merchants liked to fill their ships quickly, they feared transporting a large number of Africans who spoke the same language. People who could communicate could also make plans. To prevent rebellions, they tried to keep captives from the same region in separate holding pens, whenever possible. Whip-carrying guards terrorized captives and sometimes branded them with hot irons before loading them on ships for the next leg of their journey to the Americas—the Middle Passage.

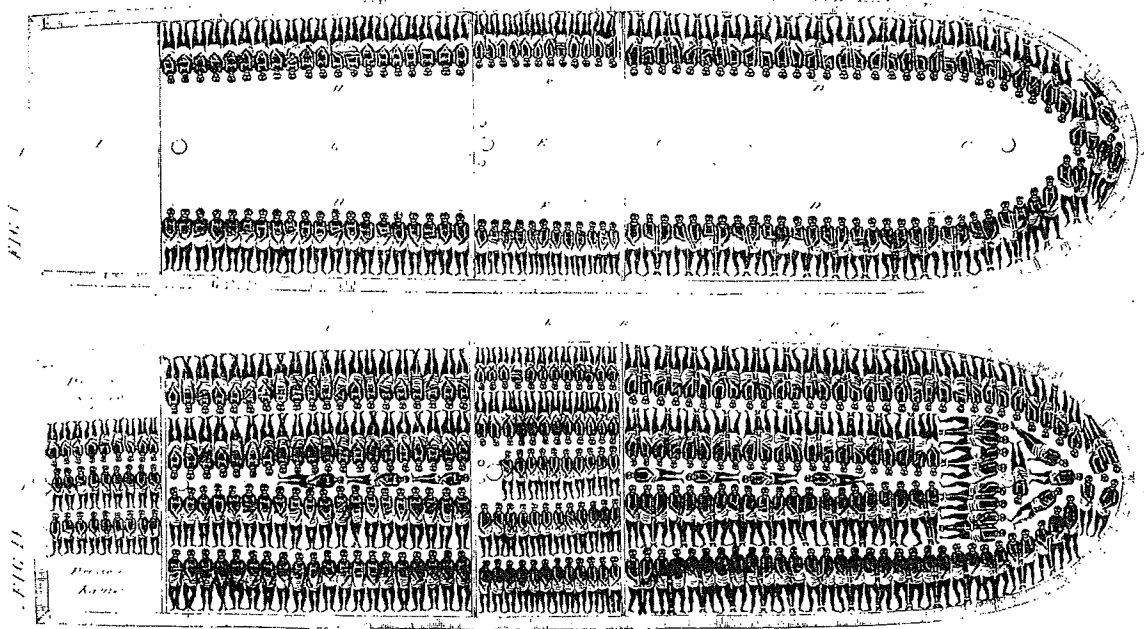
### **Taking Another Look**

1. How were West Africans captured for the Atlantic slave trade?
2. What happened to African captives at the factories along the Atlantic coast?
3. **Critical Thinking** The Atlantic slave trade helped cause wars both between European nations and between African peoples. Explain why this might have been so.

## **2 THE MIDDLE PASSAGE**

- ▼ What were some of the cruelties experienced by Africans during the Middle Passage?

The men who fastened irons on the mothers took the children out of their hands and threw them over the side of the ship into the water. Two of the women leaped overboard after the children. . . . One of the two women . . . was carried down by the weight of her irons before she could be rescued; but the other was taken up by some men in a boat and brought on board. This woman threw herself overboard one night when we were at sea.



This loading plan of a slave ship shows how the greatest number of Africans were squeezed onto a ship to make the transatlantic voyage as profitable as possible.

This was only one of the horrors described by an African who survived the Middle Passage—the long, nightmarish trip across the Atlantic. Other Africans recalled equally terrible scenes: brutal whippings, forced feedings, and the smell of death and filth in disease-ridden cargo holds. Hundreds of Africans lay wedged together, bound by chains, and praying that death would come to them, too.

**The Cruelty of the Voyage.** The holds of most merchant ships measured only about 5 feet (1.5 meters) high. But this space was cut in half by a shelf that extended about 6 feet (1.8 meters). The Africans were chained by the neck and legs to the shelf or to the deck below and had only about 20 to 25 inches (50 to 64 centimeters) to sit up. On storm-tossed seas, they banged into one another, and the chains cut deeply into their flesh.

Sanitary facilities were crude. The foul odor of a ship carrying enslaved Africans could be smelled for miles downwind.

Diseases—hookworm dysentery, malaria, smallpox, yellow fever, and the like—swept through the ships. Some ships lost half their human cargo during the Middle Passage. The death rate averaged between 13 and 20 percent. Amid the suffering, many Africans went mad. Some killed each other fighting and clawing for breathing space.

To run a successful business, ship captains needed to deliver a majority of live captives to buyers in the Caribbean islands and the mainland Americas. Accordingly, the crews brought the Africans on deck in shifts for fresh air and food and forced exercises. They fed the captives cornmeal, bean pulp, or stewed yams. Next, came the “dancing of the slaves.” A piper or fiddler played a tune, while sailors with whips

made the Africans dance around deck to strengthen their battered legs and arms.

**Resistance and Rebellion.** Africans did not submit easily to such brutality. From the start of the voyage to the end, they fought back, preferring death to the inhumanity of the Middle Passage. Some threw themselves overboard when they came up to be fed. Others refused food and medicine. Sailors pried open clenched jaws or broke teeth to pour food down the throats of resisting Africans. But some of them still managed to starve themselves to death.

The crew aboard most slave ships lived in constant fear of rebellion. "If care not be taken," wrote one sailor, "they [the Africans] will mutiny and destroy the ship's crew." Ship diaries document 55 uprisings aboard ship by Africans between 1699 and 1845 and mention hundreds of attempted uprisings.

### **Taking Another Look**

1. How did the Middle Passage brutalize Africans?
2. How did Africans resist the Middle Passage?
3. **Critical Thinking** What lasting effect do you think the experience of the Middle Passage had on Africans after they came to the Americas?

### **3 WEST AFRICA AFTER THE ▼ SLAVE TRADE**

▼ How did the Atlantic slave trade affect the development of West Africa?

▲ The Portuguese slave-traders ▲ described her as an Amazon—a ▲ member of a mythological ancient ▲

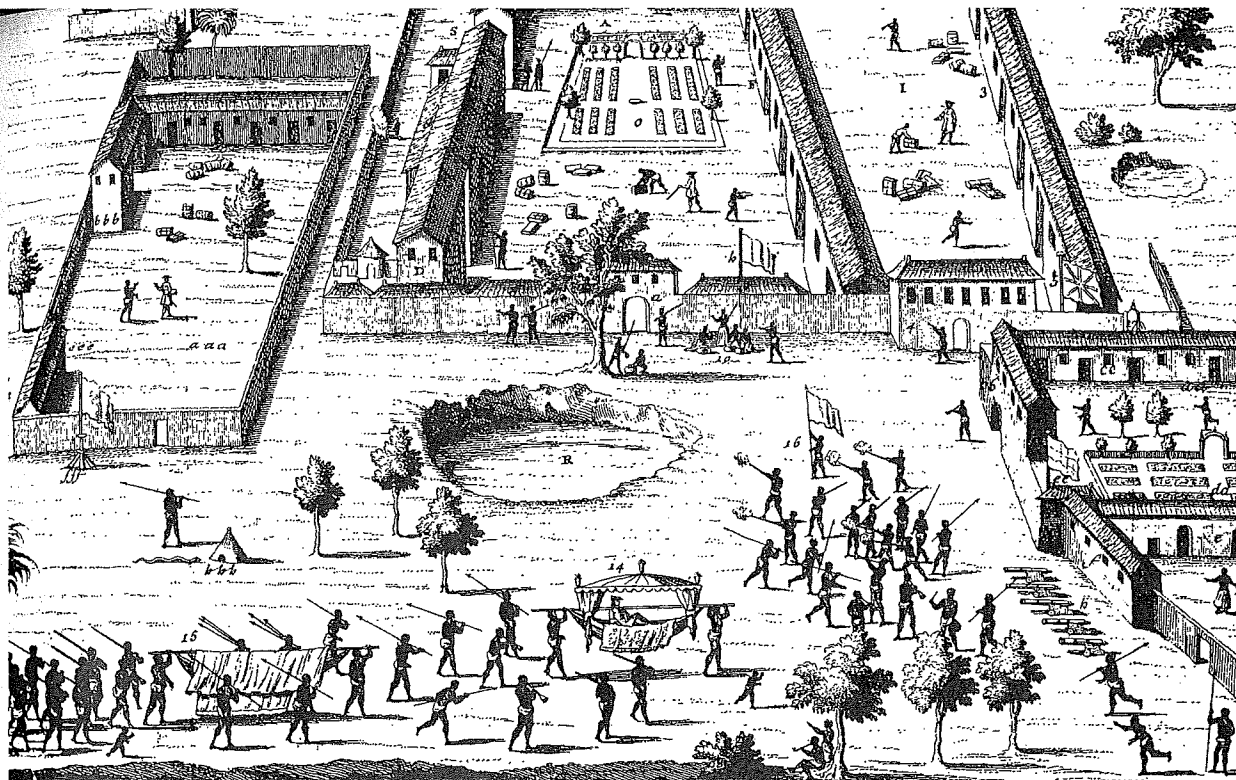
▲ race of female warriors. The people ▲ of Matamba saw her as a hero. Her ▲ name was **Queen Nzinga**. She ▲ came to power in 1624 and ruled the ▲ state of Matamba, in what is now ▲ Angola, until 1663. She used her ▲ power to launch a war against the ▲ Portuguese for enslaving her bro- ▲ ther. She battled slave-traders for ▲ nearly 30 years and greatly disrupted ▲ the inland slave trade. In 1656, the ▲ Portuguese negotiated a treaty with ▲ her. It remained in effect until Nzinga's death at 83. ▲

Other West African leaders tried to fight slavery, too. But European guns and the greed of African slave-raiders defeated them in the end. By the 1700s, most West Africans found themselves victims of a system that spelled tragedy for West Africa's future.

**The Weakening of West African Society.** For more than 300 years, the slave trade plundered West Africa. The area suffered an enormous loss of population. At least one African died for every one who reached the coast alive. Estimates for the total number of Africans lost to the West African slave trade ranged from 25 to 50 million. Slave traders showed no respect for rank or skills. Noble and peasant, artisan and laborer—all might find themselves lashed together in the Middle Passage.

African slave traders eager for profit from European trade captured more and more people over the years. Local warfare spread, and standing armies expanded. Wars were fought for the purpose of gaining captives to sell as slaves. By the mid-1700s, gunsmiths in Birmingham, England, were making more than 100,000 guns a





European goods were brought to West Africa through slave factories and trading forts like this one.

year for the trade with Guinea (GIN-ee) alone. The splendor that was Africa under Ghana, Mali, and Songhai was destroyed.

**Effects on West African Economies.** The large scale exchange of humans for manufactured goods created a vicious cycle of economic dependence in Africa. Europeans used their profits from African slave labor to invest in trade and industry in their own countries. The cheap goods that Europeans exchanged for slaves discouraged West Africans from developing further their own manufacturing and from seeking commerce beyond the slave trade. As a result, when European interest in enslaved Africans declined in the late 1800s, West Africans no longer had the economic strength to stop Europeans from stripping the region of its natural resources. More than 300 years of European domination left the region economically undeveloped and financially bankrupt.

### Taking Another Look

1. What were the effects of the Atlantic slave trade on West Africa?
2. How did the Atlantic slave trade disrupt the West African economy?
3. **Critical Thinking** Why do you think Europeans in the slave trade might want to consider their victims as “something less than human”?

### LOOKING AHEAD

The white view that Africans were something less than human grew out of the whites’ need to justify the African slave trade. Wrote one British author in the 1700s: “The Africans are . . . little better than the lions, tigers, leopards, and other wild beasts, which that country produces in great numbers.” Such racist ideas about Africans were among the most evil legacy of the slave trade.

## FOCUS ON

## WEST AFRICA TODAY

A woman applies a paste made of red clay and water to repair the wall of her family compound in a Soninke village in Mauritania. Another woman rushes to work in a modern office building in downtown Accra, capital of Ghana. Young boys in a rural village in Togo learn to make spearheads. A student takes a physics course at Lagos University in Nigeria. Such scenes—a mixture of past and present—typify the West Africa of today.

West Africa bears the cultural marks of its thousands of years of history. Once the home of ancient African kingdoms, West Africa fell prey to European conquerors in the 1800s. After World War II, West African colonies shook off European rule and formed 16 independent nations (see map, page 428). Official languages include French, English, and Portuguese. But hundreds of African dialects can be heard across the region—Twi, Hausa, and Fanti, for example. Religions are equally diverse, with people practicing Islam, forms of Christianity, and many African religions.

Today, about 200 million people live in West Africa. Once stripped of its people by the slave trade, the region now faces overpopulation in some areas. It also faces the struggle of trying to modernize while not giving up its traditions.

## CLOSE UP: Chapter 4

### The Who, What, Where of History

1. Who was Prince Henry the Navigator?
2. Where was the Slave Coast?
3. Who were the conquistadors?
4. What does the term *indentured servant* mean?
5. Who was Bartolomé de Las Casas?
6. Where were most European slave factories located?
7. What was the Middle Passage?
8. Who was Queen Nzinga?

### Making the Connection

1. What was the connection between the death of large numbers of Native American laborers and the Atlantic slave trade?
2. What was the connection between the slave trade and later European domination of Africa?

### Time Check

1. When did the Atlantic slave trade begin?
2. During what years did the Atlantic slave trade flourish?

### What Would You Have Done?

1. If you had been an African trader, how would you have responded to a request by a European merchant to become partners in the slave trade?
2. If you had been Queen Nzinga, what terms would you have demanded from the Portuguese in a treaty?

3. Imagine you are an English sailor in 1701. You have agreed to sail on a ship going to Africa and then the Americas. Just before the ship sails, you learn it will carry enslaved Africans. What will you do? Explain.

### Thinking and Writing About History

1. Imagine that you are an African noble visiting Spain in 1517. Write a letter to the Spanish king giving your reactions to Bartolomé de Las Casas's idea of using more African labor in the Americas.
2. Imagine that you are an African who was captured and brought to the Americas as a child. After many years, you have gained your freedom. A newspaper that opposed slavery asks you to describe your voyage across the Atlantic. Write a brief account of your Middle Passage.
3. Imagine you are a West African historian teaching at a university in present-day Ghana. Write a brief lecture on the effect of the slave trade on the region.

### Building Skills: Understanding Cause and Effect

Most things that occur in your life happen for a reason or reasons. Sometimes it's very easy to see why an event takes place. The fire alarm goes off because someone pulls it. The pulling of the handle is the *cause*; the alarm is the *effect*.

When events take place over a long period of time, it is sometimes harder to identify causes and effects. One day you notice that a classmate looks different.

What are the *causes* for the *effect* of your classmate's appearance? He explains that it has been a gradual process. For about four months, he's been eating only healthful foods, drinking lots of water, and exercising every day. He's also gotten a new haircut. These several causes created the effect of his appearance.

Some effects in history had very obvious causes. Bartolomé de Las Casas suddenly began to work against the use of Native Americans as slaves. The *cause* was a passage he read in the Bible; the *effect* was a change of opinion.

Other events in history occur because of several causes working together. Below is a list of possible causes for this effect: West Africans were unable to resist European domination in the 1800s. On a separate sheet of paper write the numbers of the items that were not causes of this effect.

1. West Africans lacked armies.
2. Some Africans organized rebellions aboard slave ships.
3. West Africa suffered enormous population loss because of the slave trade.
4. The slave trade destroyed the order of society in West Africa.
5. Queen Nzinga battled the Portuguese and their slave traders for nearly 30 years.
6. Africans fought each other to acquire more captives to sell as slaves.
7. In the 1500s, Europeans searched for an all-water route to Asia.
8. West Africans became dependent on European goods.