



Centers of the Slave trade from Ancient Egypt to the 19th Century

African Slave Trade

The enslavement of black Africans has been part of African history since the time of the pharaohs of Ancient Egypt. Stone carvings of temples built more than 4,000 years ago show black slaves from southern Egypt and Nubia (now the Sudan). Egyptians began trading slaves with western Asia from ports at the mouth of the Nile. In ancient times, black slaves from Africa were also shipped to the Middle East from ports along the Red Sea (such as what is now Djibouti). In addition, blacks from sub-Saharan Africa were transported from trade centers along the Niger River (such as Timbuktu) by camel caravans to ports along the north coast of Africa. After the Arab conquest of North Africa, the trans-Saharan trade in slaves increased. Arabs also established ports along the coast of East Africa, such as Mogadishu on the Horn of Africa, Mombasa in what is now Kenya, and the island of Zanzibar in what is now Tanzania. Slaves were brought to the coast to be sold to Arab merchants who transported them to serve Arab owners on the Arabian Peninsula. A few black Africans served as slaves in western Europe during the Middle Ages. (The word slave is derived from the Slavs -- the primary source of white slaves in Europe in ancient times.) However, the large-scale enslavement of black Africans did not begin until the Portuguese established trading ports along the coast of West Africa. In 1441, Portugal brought the first cargo of African slaves to Portugal from the port of Arguin. The port of Bissau was later established farther south at the mouth of the Gambia River. After [Vasco da Gama](#) reached the Indies in 1498 (by sailing south around the tip of Africa), the Portuguese captured the Arab port cities on Africa's East Coast and took over their slave trade. With the rapid expansion of the trans-Atlantic slave trade in the 16th century, Spain, France, England, and The Netherlands established ports in West Africa to receive slaves from the interior and ship them to South America, the Caribbean, and North

America. So many ports were established near each other on the southern coast of the bulge of West Africa, that these areas were called the Gold Coast (now Ghana) or the Slave Coast (now Togo, Benin, and Nigeria). When slave traders began looking for new sources of slaves, they looked to Central Africa. Major ports were established at Cabinda at the mouth of the Congo River, and at Benguela in what is now Angola. The Portuguese also sent slaves to the Western Hemisphere from ports at Quelimane at the mouth of the Zambesi River and from Mozambique, Zanzibar, and Mombasa. The trans-Atlantic slave trade ended in the 19th century; however, some slavery continues in Africa and some black Africans are still captured and sold into slavery in the Middle East.

MAP: Question 1

What city located in the interior of Africa served as a center of the slave trade?

Question 2

What ports were established by Arab slave traders, but later taken over by the Portuguese?

Question 3

Why did black Africans allow themselves to become enslaved? Consider cultural and military factors.

Question 4

What was the extent of the slave trade in the 16th, 17th, and 18th centuries? How did it impact the history of Africa?