

KNOWLEDGE BOOK 1: SLAVERY

Topic

Key knowledge

Key words



Slave: A person who is owned by another

Civilisation: A well-developed and orderly society

Prejudice: To dislike someone or something without any good reason.

Inferior: A person who is not considered to be as good as or equal to others.

Racism: The belief that one group of people is superior and better than those of a different 'race' or colour.

Transatlantic slave trade: The forced movement of around 12 to 15 million Africans across the Atlantic Ocean to the Americas and the West Indies, where they were used as slaves. It occurred between the 16th and 19th centuries.

The Thirteen Colonies: The British colonies established in North America between 1607 and 1732.

Colony: An area of land settled by and under the control of people from another country.

Plantation: A large farm or estate where one crop is grown.

Legal rights: Rights that a person has according to the laws of a country: for example, the right to be protected from harm, the right to an education, and so on.

West African Kingdoms

c1500s

The kingdom of the Benin



The kingdom of the Benin

The kingdom of Benin was located in what is now Nigeria. The kingdom was one of the most developed kingdoms in Africa between the 15th and 19th centuries. It was described by early explorers as a very well organised city, clean, free from crime and with happy residents. It was ruled by a king called Oba and there was also a system of government, guilds and law courts. The kingdom became wealthy as a result of trade. The area was known for its gold and bronze, and there were skilled metal workers in the city. The people of Benin also traded ivory, cotton cloth and slaves with other Africans, Arabs and, later Europeans.

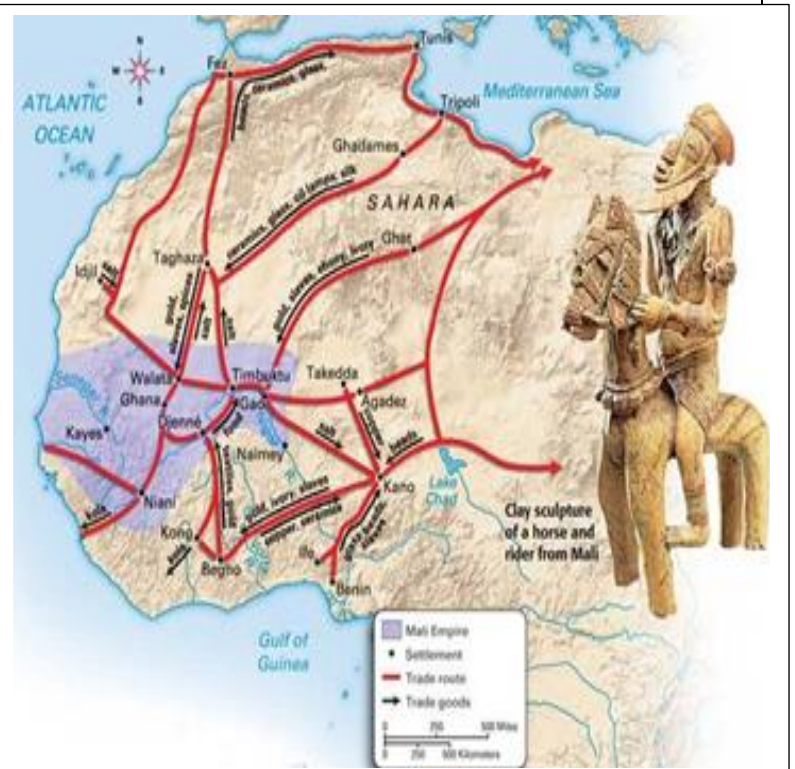
The Songhai Empire



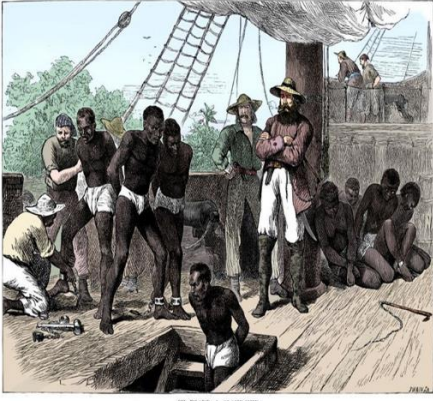
The Songhai Empire

The Songhai Empire is located today in the country of Mali. The main cities of the Songhai Empire were Gao and Timbuktu. These cities are located on the River Niger, providing water for farming and fish. The river was also an important trade route. Gold, copper, ivory and slaves were transported along the river. Goods could then be transported on camels across the Sahara Desert to North Africa and eventually Europe and Asia. In return Songhai traders received salt, pottery, glass, silk, perfumes and spices. People moved along these trade routes so that Arabic, Italian and Jewish merchants also lived in the Songhai Empire.

Culture flourished, rulers encouraged research and study. Timbuktu became a centre of religion and learning



The Transatlantic slave trade

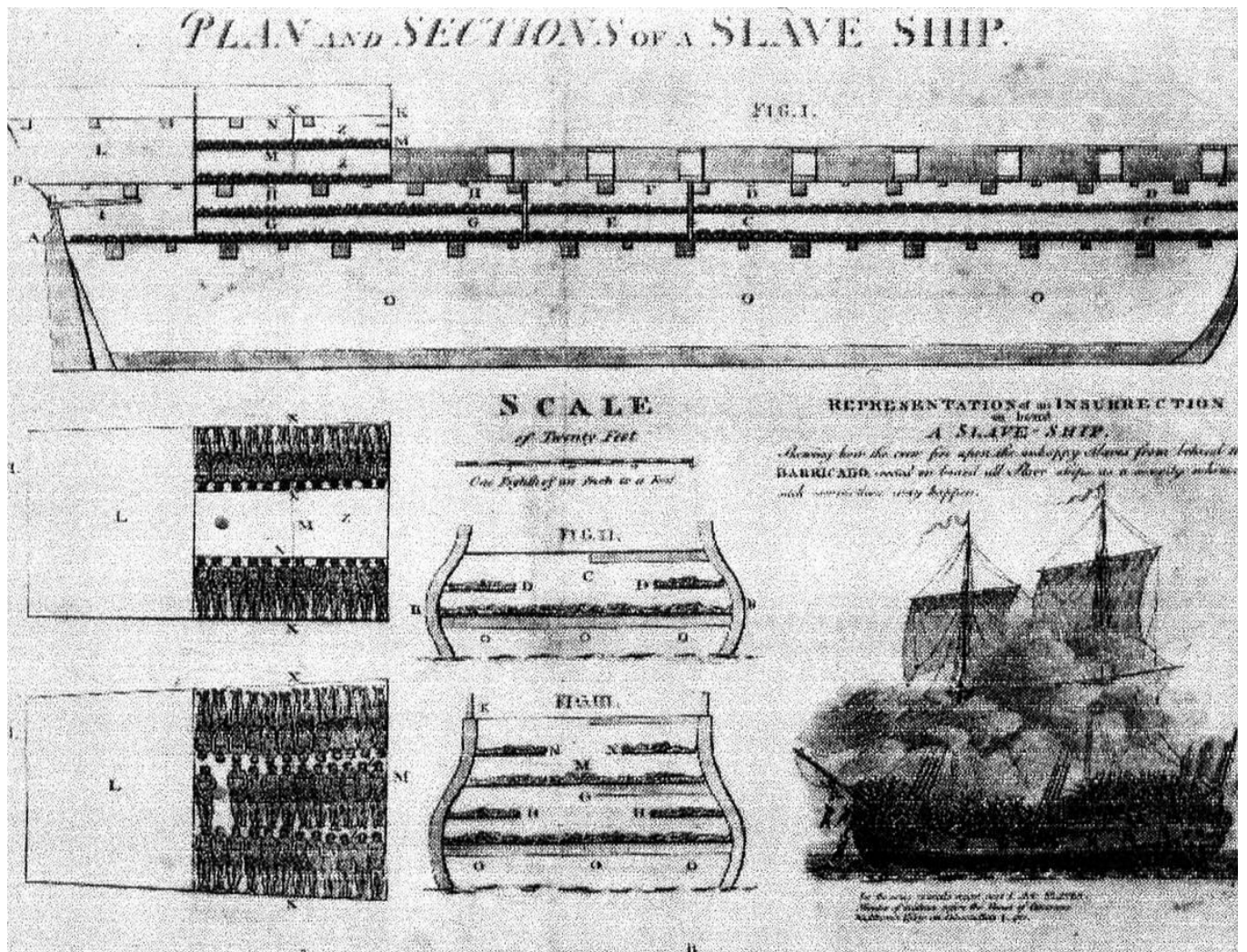


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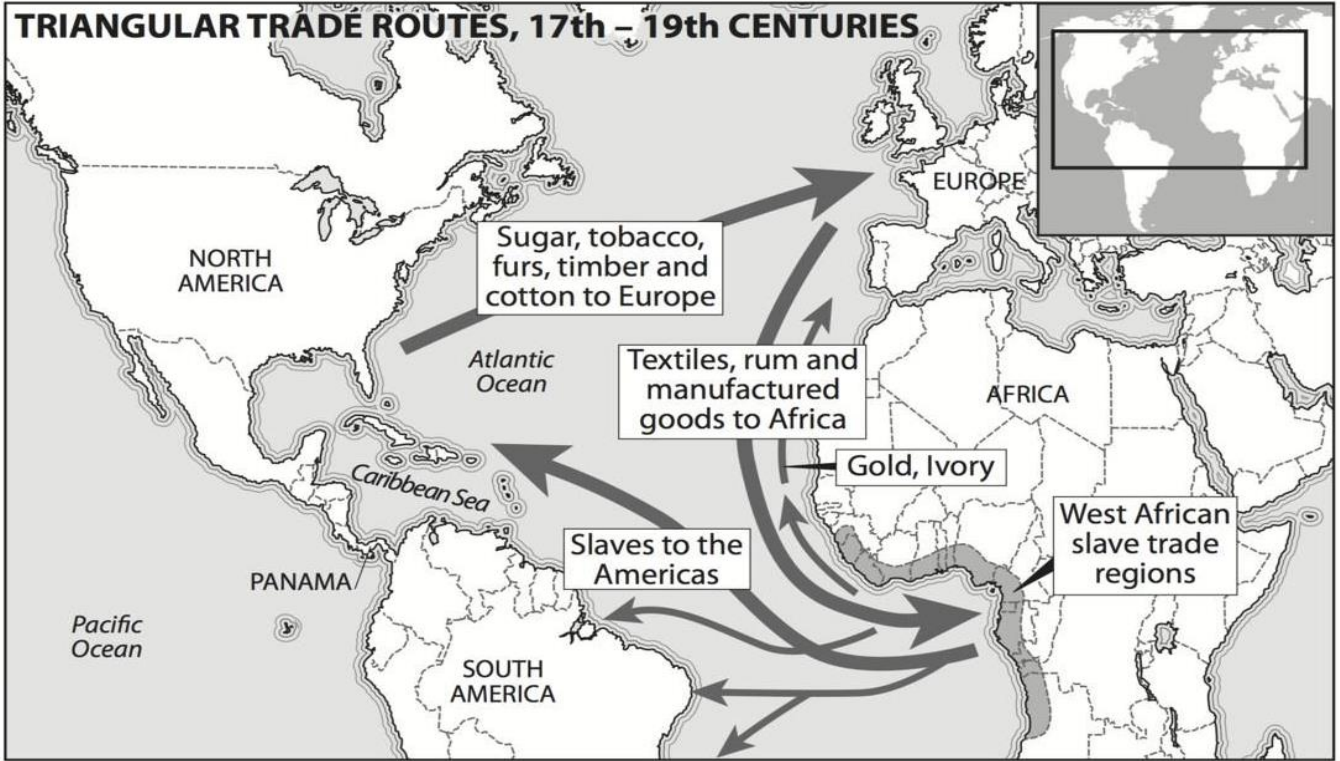
Slave ships were large cargo ships specially converted for the purpose of transporting slaves. Such ships were also known as "Guineamen" because their trade involved trafficking to and from the Guinea coast in West Africa. As many as 20 million Africans were transported by ship. The transportation of slaves from Africa to America was

The Middle Passage was a time of extended suffering for slaves. Many ships' voyages lasted much longer than two or three months. The *James*, a ship commissioned by the Royal African Company, departed from England on April 5, 1675 and did not arrive in Barbados until May 21, 1676.

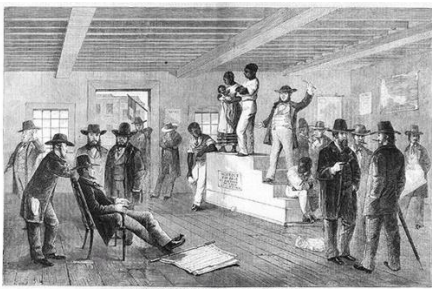
Africans were often kept nearly naked for the duration of each journey, segregated according to sex, and chained together to prevent uprisings and escape attempts. Malnutrition, "tight packing", and diseases such as dysentery and smallpox plagued captive slaves and caused high mortality rates aboard ships.



TRIANGULAR TRADE ROUTES, 17th – 19th CENTURIES



The Slave Auction



Auction: a publicly held sale in which property or goods are sold to the highest bidder

As the slave ships approached the Caribbean, it became important for captains to present the Africans in the best possible condition for prospective buyers. Slaves were scrubbed and their wounds filled with hot tar before auction. The unsold and frail were often sold by scramble auctions, where after agreeing a flat rate, plantation owners would race to grab the best workforce.

TO BE SOLD & LET
BY PUBLIC AUCTION,
On **MONDAY the 18th of MAY, 1829,**
UNDER THE ORDER,
FOR SALE,
THE THREE FOLLOWING
SLAVES,
THE
HENRY, about 60 Years old, an excellent House Servant, of Good Character,
WILLIAM, about 55 Years old, a Kitchen,
NANCY, an excellent House Servant and Nurse,
THEIR WIVES & CHILDREN, and the amount to be made in hand.

TO BE LET,
On the usual conditions of the High Rating Table, in Part, the "Land, Meadow,"
and "Gardens" of
MALE and FEMALE
SLAVES,
OF THE FOLLOWING QUALITIES:
ROBERT, about 40 Years old, a good House Servant,
WILLIAM, about 35 Years old, a Kitchen,
JAMES, about 30 Years old, a Kitchen,
ANN, about 25 Years old, a Kitchen,
MARY, about 20 Years old, a Kitchen,
AND A Males, of the following qualities, to be made Work of the House:
JOHN, about 15 Years old, a good House Servant,
WILLIAM, about 10 Years old, a Kitchen,
AND A Males, of the following qualities, to be made Work of the House:
AND A Males, of the following qualities, to be made Work of the House:
AND A Males, of the following qualities, to be made Work of the House:

Also for Sale, at Eleven o'clock,
Fine Rice, Gram, Paddy, Books, Muslins,
Needles, Pins, Ribbons, &c. &c.
BY ONE O'CLOCK, THIS CELEBRATED ENGLISH HORSE,
BLUCHER,

Stretch:

<https://www.bbc.com/bitesize/clips/z366n39> Middle passage - preparation for sale

<https://www.bbc.com/bitesize/clips/zpww2hv> African slave trade

The Planation



Tobacco, cotton and sugar were grown on large-scale farms called plantations. As European demand for these crops increased, the plantations grew larger and needed more slaves to harvest the crops. 80% of all slaves shipped to the Americas were put to work on plantations. **Field hands** worked long hours in the fields and were punished if they did not work hard enough. Other slaves worked in the house as **domestic servants**, or were used to do **other jobs** around the plantation.

Africans sold as slaves in the Americas had to rely on their owners providing them with housing or building materials, pots and pans for cooking and eating, food and clothing. Many slaves did the best they could with what they were given. Most did not dare complain for fear of receiving a whipping or worse punishment.

Slave living quarters



Housing: Slaves were allocated an area of the plantation for their living quarters. On some plantations the owners would provide the slaves with housing, on others the slaves had to build their own homes. Slaves that had to build their own houses tended to make them like the houses they had had in Africa and they all had thatched roofs. Living conditions were cramped with sometimes as many as ten people sharing a hut. They had little in the way of furniture and their beds usually made of straw or old rags. Slaves who worked in the plantation house generally had slightly better housing nearer to the house and were given better food and clothing than those slaves that worked in the fields.

Food



'Sunday Morning in the Country'; enslaved Africans going to market in Trinidad. Source Richard Bridgens, *West India Scenery...* from sketches taken during a voyage to, and residence of seven years in... Trinidad (London, 1836), plate 15)

Sometimes slaves were given pots and pans for cooking, but more often they had to make their own. The long hours they had to work in the fields meant that they had little free time for making things to improve their living conditions. Some slaves used a hollowed out pumpkin shell called a calabash, to cook their food in. Most plantation owners did not spend more money on food for their slaves than they had to and so the slaves lived on a diet of fatty meat and cornbread.

Stretch: Slavery in Nevis & St Kitts

"Although the volcanic soils of the two islands were highly fertile, plantation owners and managers were so eager to maximise profits from sugar that they preferred to import food from North America rather than lose cane land by growing food. Salted meat and fish, along with building timber and animals to drive the mills, were shipped from New England. Watts 1978, 173; Bridenbaugh and Bridenbaugh 1972, 93-6).

The plantation owners provided their enslaved Africans with weekly rations of salt herrings or mackerel, sweet potatoes, and maize, and sometimes salted West Indian turtle. The enslaved Africans supplemented their diet with other kinds of wild food. Revd Smith observed,

"I have known some of them to be fond of eating grasshoppers, or locusts; others will wrap up cane rats, in bonano [banana] leaves, and roast them in wood embers" (Smith 1745, 232).

On the Stapleton estate on Nevis records show that there were 31 acres set aside for the estate to grow yams and sweet potatoes while slaves on the plantation had five acres of provision ground, probably on the rougher area of the plantation at higher elevations,

where they could grow vegetables and poultry. The plantation owner distributed to his slaves North American corn, salted herrings and beef, while horse beans and biscuit bread were sent from England on occasion.

Although the enslaved Africans were permitted provision grounds and gardens in the villages to grow food, these were not enough to stop them suffering from starvation in times of poor harvests. A law was passed in Nevis in 1682 to force plantation owners to provide land for food crops to prevent starving slaves from stealing food. In the year 1706 there was a severe drought which caused most food crops to fail. Many slaves would have died from starvation had not a prickly type of edible cucumber grown that year in great profusion. (Smith 1745, 208).

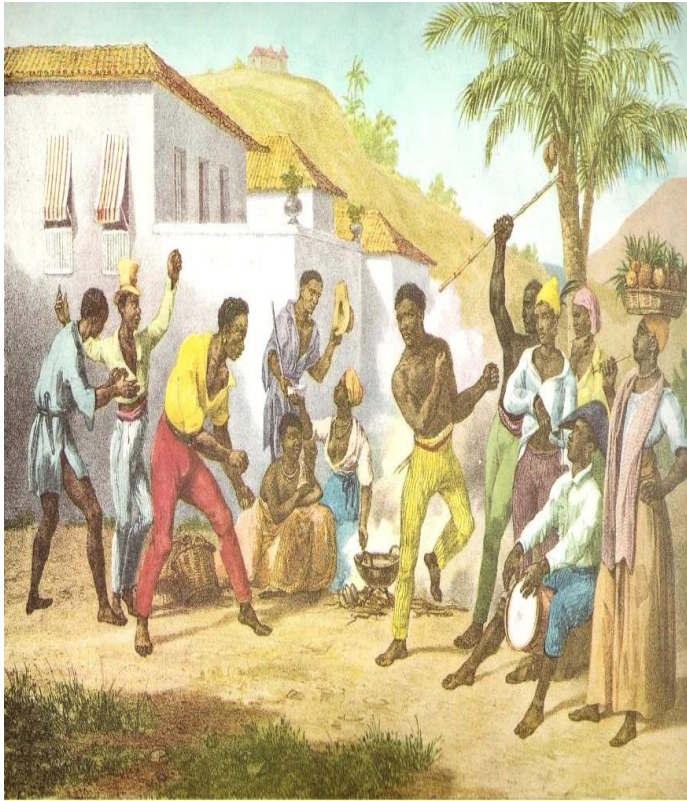
In 1750 St Kitts grew most of its own food but 25 years later and Nevis and St Kitts had come to rely heavily on food supplies imported from North America. (O'Shaughnessy 2000, 71). At the outbreak of the American Revolution in 1776 trade was closed between North America and the British islands in the West Indies, leading to disastrous food shortages. In 1777 as many as 400 slaves died from starvation or diseases caused by malnutrition on St Kitts and on Nevis. (O'Shaughnessy 2000, 161).

Clothing



Slaves would often be given one pair of shoes and three items of underwear a year. Although these and other clothing would be provided by their owner, they were often ill-fitting and made of coarse material.

Free Time



Black Brazilians of unknown condition and origin, watching a Capoeira bout. Painting by Johann Moritz Rugenda (1835). Capoeira is a Brazilian martial art that combines elements of dance, acrobatics and music, and is sometimes referred to as a game. It was developed in Brazil.

Most slaves had to work from sunrise to sunset. Some owners made their slaves work every day, others allowed slaves one day a month off and some allowed their slaves to have Sundays as a rest-day. Slaves would spend their free time mending their huts, making pots and pans and relaxing. Some plantation owners allowed their slaves a small plot of land to grow things to supplement their diet. Slaves were not allowed to read or write, but some were allowed to go to church.



Stretch: Evidence and interpretation.

Consider the selection of visual sources in this knowledge book.

1. What impression do these sources give about slavery? What are the similarities and differences? Are there any particular reasons for these differences?
2. Which sources are most useful to you as a historian investigating slavery?
3. Are some sources more reliable than other? Why?
4. What other types of sources would you have found helpful?

Further stretch - carry out your own research. Find other sources that you think are helpful in deepening your understanding about slavery. Explain your reasoning