Transatlantic Slave Trade
Ancient World Civilizations

• Assyria
• Babylonia
• China
• Egypt
• India
• Persia
• Mesopotamia

• Slavery was a universal institution in the ancient world but it was a dominant labor force only in a small number of societies.
• First true slave society - Ancient Greece (6th to 4th Century)
Old World vs. New World Slavery

• Classical world and medieval slavery was not based on racial distinctions.
• Ancient world did not necessarily view slavery as a permanent condition.
• Slaves did not necessarily hold the lowest status in early civilizations.
• Slaves in the old world often were symbols of prestige, luxury and power (true even in the new world prior to European Colonization).
How was slavery justified?

- Early civilizations - accident or bad luck.
- Aristotle - notion of the “natural slave”
  - Aristotle views slaves as the means by which the master secures his livelihood. He defends slavery by noting that nature generally consists of ruling and ruled elements: some people are slaves by nature, while others are masters by nature. It is thus unjust to enslave, through war or other means, those who are not slaves by nature. Though being suited to mastery or slavery is generally inherited, slavery is just only when the rule of master over slave is beneficial for both parties.
How was slavery justified?

• **Christian world - ‘Curse of Ham’**
  - The Book of Genesis records an instance of Noah cursing his son Ham's descendants to be slaves. Although there is no biblical evidence that Ham was the "father" of African peoples, various Jewish, Christian and Islamic writers came to believe that he was, and their association helped to justify centuries of African enslavement.

• **18th Century European - pseudo-scientific racism.**
  - Scientific racism refers to the use of science (or the veneer of science) to justify and support racist beliefs. The concept goes back at least to the early eighteenth century, though it gained most of its influence in the mid-nineteenth century. Works like Gobineau's *An Essay on the Inequality of the Human Races* (1853-1855) attempted to frame racism within the terms of biological difference among human beings.
Why was Africa vulnerable to the Slave Trade?

- Political Fragmentation
- Sailing Routes
- Availability of People (high birth rate)
- Civilizations and Skills (metalworking, farming, herding)
- No diplomatic repercussions.
Why not Native Americans?

- Disease
- Knowledge of terrain
- Different agricultural skills
- Supply deficit
- Native American women worked - not men!
Countries Participating

- Britain
- Denmark
- France
- Holland
- Portugal
- Spain
- Norway
Why did European powers eventually turn to African labor?

- Labor supply was insufficient. Epidemics reduced the native population by 50% - 90%.
- Evidence of deeply held racist sentiment. Racism was a consequence of racial slavery as well as a cause.
- In English colonies the supply of servants decreased.
Geography of Slavery

- Enslaved Africans mostly came from the area stretching from the Senegal River in Africa to Angola.
- Europeans divided the area into five regions:
  - Upper Guinea Coast
  - Ivory Coast
  - Lower Guinea Coast
  - Gabon
  - Angola
Regional Divisions in Africa

- Upper Guinea Coast (bound by the Senegal and Gambia Rivers)
- Ivory Coast (Central Liberia)
- Lower Guinea Coast (Divided into the Gold Coast on the west, the Slave Coast and Benin)
- Gabon
- Angola
Why Africa?

- Sailing Routes
- Lack of familiarity with the Americas
- Availability of people
- Civilizations and Skills
  - Metal Working
  - Farming
  - Herding
- No diplomatic repercussions
Two main patterns of Triangular Trade

- Rum from New England to West Africa
- Slaves to Sugar Islands
- Molasses home to the New England distilleries
- Manufactured goods from England to Africa
- Goods exchanged for slaves taken to West Indies. Profits used to purchase sugar (and other goods) for England.
Middle Passage
Origins of the Infamous Middle Passage

- The middle leg of a three part voyage.
- Began and ended in Europe.
- Carried cargo of iron, cloth, brandy, firearms, gunpowder
- Landed on Africa’s Slave Coast and exchanged cargo for Africans
- Set sail for the Americas, where slaves were exchanged for sugar, tobacco, molasses.
- Finally brought the ship back to Europe.
Middle Passage 1600 - 1850’s
The Capture

- Approx. 60 forts built along the west coast of Africa.
- Walked in slave caravans to the forts some 1000 miles away.
- Selected by the Europeans and branded.
- One half survived the death march.
- Placed in underground dungeons until they were boarded on ships.
Middle Passage Statistics

• 10-16 million Africans forcibly transported across the Atlantic from 1500-1900.

• 2-3 million died during the Middle Passage (approx. 25%)

• Another 15-30% died during the march to the coast.

• For every 100 slaves that reached the New World, another 40 died in Africa or during the Middle Passage.
Middle Passage (The Voyage)  
Conditions on Board the Ship

• Slaves chained together and crammed into spaces sometimes less than five feet high.
• Slavers packed three or four hundred Africans into the ship cargo holds.
• Little ventilation, human waste, horrific odors. Unclean.
British Slave Ship
Middle Passage

- Tight packing - belly to back, chained in twos, wrist to ankle (660+), naked.
- Loose packing - shoulder to shoulder chained wrist to wrist or ankle to ankle.
- Men and women separated (men placed towards bow, women toward stern).
- Fed once or twice a day and brought on deck for limited times.
Middle Passage

- Journey lasted 6-8 weeks.
- Due to high mortality rate, cargo was insured (reimbursed for drowning accidents but not for deaths from disease or sickness).
- Common to dump your cargo for sickness or food shortages.
- Slave mutinies on board ships were common (1 out of every 10 voyages across the Atlantic experience a revolt).
- Covert resistance (attempted suicide, jumped overboard, refusal to eat).
Destination of Captives

- Caribbean 40%
- Brazil 40%
- Latin America 10%
- British North America 10%
Between 1650 and 1860, approximately 10 to 15 million enslaved people were transported from western Africa to the Americas. Most were shipped to the West Indies, Central America, and South America.
Growth of African American Population

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Percent Free</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1820</td>
<td>1.77 million</td>
<td>13% free</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1830</td>
<td>2.33 million</td>
<td>14% free</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1840</td>
<td>2.87 million</td>
<td>13% free</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1850</td>
<td>3.69 million</td>
<td>12% free</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1860</td>
<td>4.44 million</td>
<td>11% free</td>
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</tbody>
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Slave Exports and Profits

• Early 18th Century - 36,000 per year
• During 1780’s - 80,000 per year
• Between 1740-1810 - 60,000 captives/year on average.
• 17th Century - slaves sold in the Americas for about $150
• Slave trade illegal in Britain in 1807, US 1808, France 1831, Spain 1834.
• Once declared illegal prices went much higher. 1850s prime field hand $1200 - $1500 (about $18,000 in 1997 dollars).
Slave Resistance: Passive and Active Resistance

- Breaking tools
- Faking illness
- Staging slowdowns
- Committing acts of arson and sabotage
- Running away
- Underground Railroad
Slave Revolts

- Late 18th century slave revolts erupted in Guadeloupe, Grenada, Jamaica, Surinam, Haiti, Venezuela, Winward Islands
- Within the United States slave revolts were common as well. Richmond, Virginia, Louisiana, Charleston, South Carolina.

- Denmark Vesey
- The Amistad
- Nat Turner
Aftermath of Slavery in the U.S.

- Abolition of slavery did not mean former slaves had achieved full freedom.
- Reconstruction
- 4 million freedmen (no education, no money, no land, no tools)
  - Freedmen’s Bureau
  - Sharecropping/ Tenant Farming
- Black Codes
- Jim Crow Laws
## Legacy of Slavery

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agriculture</th>
<th>Food</th>
<th>Dishes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>● Rice</td>
<td>● Spices (red pepper, sesame, cajun)</td>
<td>● Gumbo, jambalaya</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Sweet Potatoes</td>
<td>● Okra, black eyed peas</td>
<td>● Ash and hot cakes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Herding</td>
<td>● Rice</td>
<td>● Sweet potato pie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Basketry</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>● Working Style (cooperative labor)</td>
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<tr>
<td>● Planting (heel to toe)</td>
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</tbody>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Music</th>
<th>Religion</th>
<th>Tales and Words</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>● Banjo</td>
<td>● Call and response patterns</td>
<td>● Trickster takes (Anansi the Spider, Brer Rabbit, Bugs Bunny)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Drum</td>
<td>● Emotional services</td>
<td>● Words like bogus, bug, phony, yam, tote, gumbo, tater, jamboree, jazz.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Blues/Jazz</td>
<td>● Multiple spirits and souls</td>
<td>● Creole Language</td>
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<tr>
<td>● Call and response</td>
<td>● Voodoo</td>
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<tr>
<td>● Spirituals</td>
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