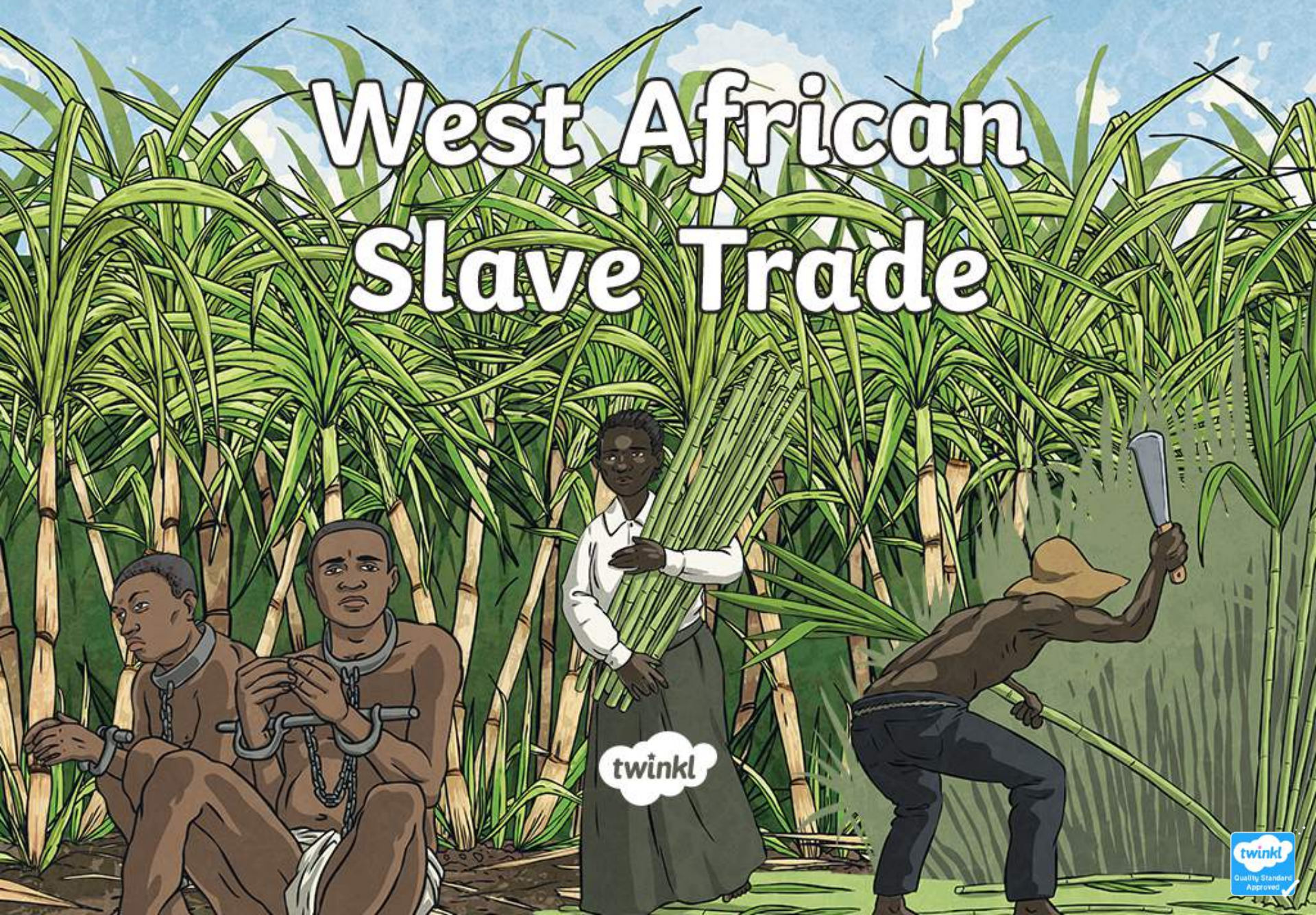


West African Slave Trade



Where is West Africa?

Today the area known as West Africa consists of sixteen countries:

Benin

Liberia

Burkina Faso

Mali

Ivory Coast

Mauritania

Cape Verde

Niger

Gambia

Nigeria

Ghana

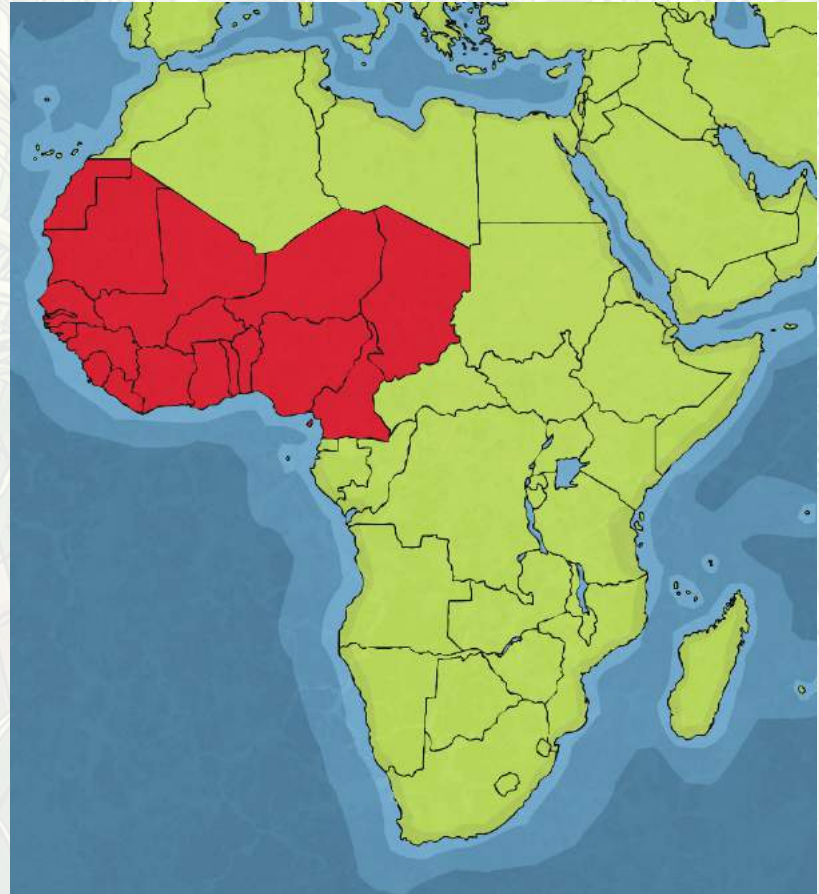
Senegal

Guinea

Sierra Leone

Guinea-Bissau

Togo



West Africa in the Past

Before 1600 C.E., West Africa was made up of three different Kingdoms, Mali, Ghana and Songhai. The people of the Songhai Empire were skilled in medicine, Mathematics and Astronomy.

Craftsmen and artisans produced beautiful artwork throughout this area. They were famous for their bronze, ivory and gold works of art.

They had well-developed and highly organised societies. People spoke many languages and there were many different types of communities in this region.

Three Early West African Kingdoms, 500 to 1600 C.E.



West Africa in the Past

What is a slave?

A slave is someone who is owned by another person or other people. He or she belongs to his or her owner in much the same way as an animal such as a dog, a cat or a cow does. A slave cannot choose to find another employer, but the slave-owner can choose to sell his or her slaves. Slaves are not paid for their work although a slave-owner needs to provide enough food, drink, clothing and shelter so that the slaves can do their work.



Early Slavery in West Africa

Slavery began in West Africa before the first Europeans arrived.

The Africans who employed slaves followed strict rules about looking after them. Slaves had to be treated well and fairly. They could lead their lives like other people. They could marry and even own land and houses. Some slaves were well educated.

In West Africa the slaves were usually people who:

were captured in battle

were criminals

had been chased away by their communities

might later be used as a soldier



The Change Begins

West African slavery started changing at the beginning of the 7th century.

Arab Muslims started raiding and trading for black African slaves in West Africa. Thousands of slaves were sent to North Africa, parts of the Middle East and southern Europe.

Later, kings like Mansa Musa from Mali, raided their weaker neighbours and sold their captives as slaves. They also kept slaves of their own. These powerful rulers with large armies, often used the slaves as soldiers. Slaves worked in the gold mines and farmed the land. Slaves were usually exchanged for horses. Fifteen or twenty slaves were exchanged for one Arabian horse.



The Transatlantic Slave Trade

Ships were used to transport the slaves across the Atlantic ocean. This journey was known as the 'Middle Passage'. It could last four to twelve weeks depending on the origin and the destination of the slave ship.

The slaves were packed in the hold of the ship. Usually only the crew was allowed on the deck of the ship. In the hold the men and women were separated. Boiled rice or corn was the usual food given to the slaves on these journeys. The slaves were only given a small amount of food, so they were underfed.

There were no bathrooms for the slaves and conditions were very unhygienic. Upset stomachs, skin infections and scurvy were the most common illnesses suffered by the slaves. The slave's illnesses were not properly treated and the dead were simply tossed overboard. The death rate on the slave ships was very high, as high as 25%!

Transatlantic means that they traveled across the Atlantic Ocean.



Transporting Slaves to America

European settlers in America needed people in large numbers to work on their huge farms called plantations. Slaves were often bought from African slave traders. The slave trade used the trade routes developed across the Atlantic Ocean. The transatlantic slave trade started in 1619.

These European slave traders were usually powerful men who would barter or exchange household slaves for goods. Slaves were in high demand and these men became very rich from selling slaves. They did not care about the treatment of the slaves they only cared about making money.

Africans were also hunted like animals and taken against their will by the traders. The Africans knew about slave traders and some tried to escape capture by disfiguring themselves, eating dirt and poisoning themselves, or committing suicide. However few managed to escape from the well-organised groups of armed men.

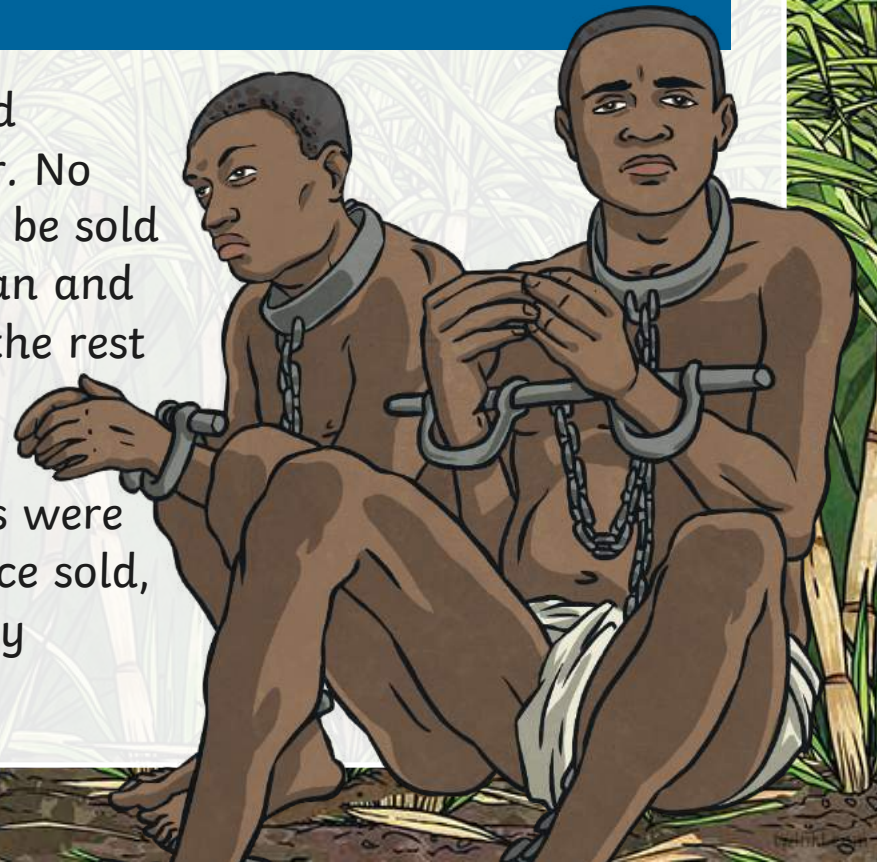
The traders involved in transatlantic slave trade captured at least 14 million people from Africa and sent them, against their will, to work as forced labour in other parts of the world.

Slave Markets

Slave traders set up slave markets at the harbours to sell slaves as they arrived in America.

Whenever ships of slaves arrived from Africa, the plantation owners would hurry to the markets.

Slaves were paraded about, inspected, and auctioned or sold off to the highest bidder. No rule existed that said that families had to be sold as a group, which meant that men, woman and children were sometimes separated from the rest of their family. Slaves that were purchased at these markets would become the property of the owners. Slaves were sold as if they were animals or goods. Once sold, they were often branded to show that they belonged to the new owner.



Why Did They Need Slaves?

The more crops that the plantation produced, the more money the plantation owner received. The plantation owners preferred workers who had no claim to any part of the crops. Ordinary American workers could have claimed some land, but slaves could not own land, which is why slave labour was so attractive to these plantation owners.

As slaves were property, the owners had the power to treat the slaves as they wished. Many owners mistreated and abused their slaves. Corn, pigs and other types of food were provided for slaves, which meant that they did get some good nutrition and were able to remain fairly healthy. However, very few landowners and overseers cared about slaves. Many slaves died because of overwork and cruel punishment. However, the owners didn't care, because as long as there was a good supply of slaves, the plantations could make profits.

Interesting Fact

In the 1600s, the country we know as the United States of America was divided into North and South. People in the South had huge plantations, so they needed many more workers than those in the North did, which is why the white Americans in the South owned slaves while those in the North did not. Later, the North would fight the South in a Civil War, partly over the issue of slavery.

What Work Did The Slaves Do?

Some of the jobs that slaves were expected to do were:

Pick cotton

Working in the dairy

Harvest sugar cane

Cooking

Plant and harvest rice

Washing clothes

Plant and harvest tobacco

Work in mines

Work in the dairy

Work in Coffee plantations

Weave

Carpentry and building



Slave Culture

As part of finding a way to cope with their terrible treatment slaves hung onto and developed their own culture. Slaves were not allowed to speak their own indigenous African languages and were forced to speak English, a language that no one taught them. As they had never been taught English properly, they spoke it as they heard it. They developed their own dialects, which mixed words from their own languages with English. A new and different way of speaking developed in the slave culture.

Slaves were also prevented from practicing their own religions from Africa. The slaves would sometimes hold secret religious services where they could express themselves freely. At these religious services, slaves would combine dancing and singing from their own cultures from Africa with European ways of worshipping. This type of worship became an important part of modern African-American culture.



Slave Songs and Stories

Songs were an important part of communication for slaves. They would use traditional cultural songs when they were traveling on the slave boats to find other members of their tribe or family and to hear if they were still alive. Later at the plantations the slaves sang unique songs that were full of hidden meaning and code, that spoke of coming freedom and the end of slavery. They used the songs to help them get through long hours of tedious work and terrible conditions.

run and relate his adventures to their lives. These stories were written in the way the slaves spoke.

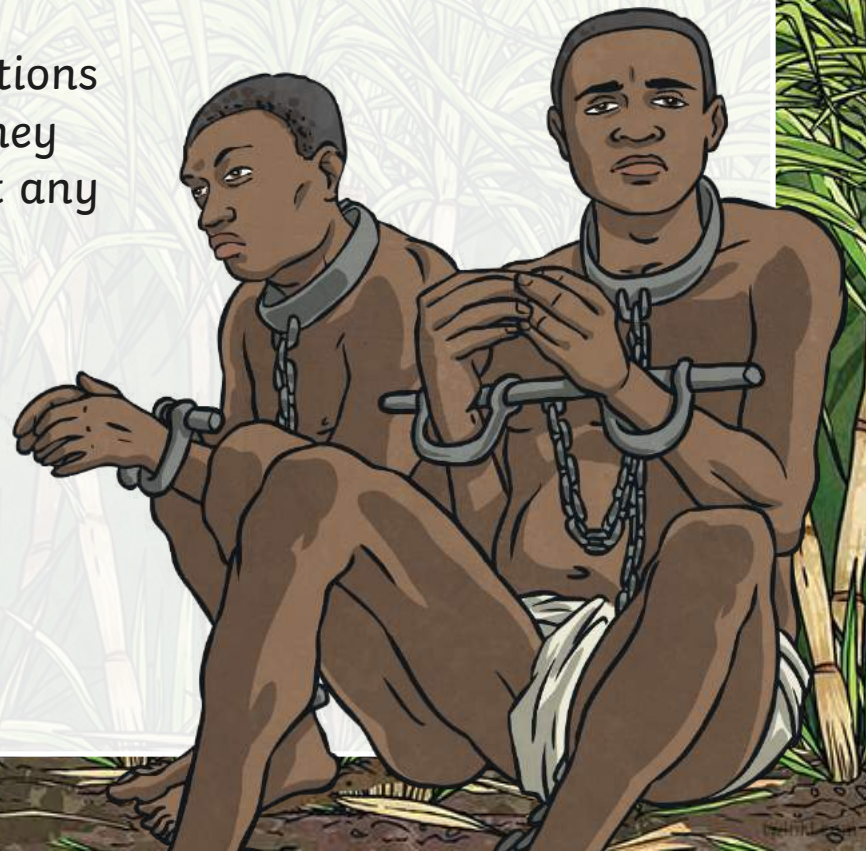
An illustration of a sugarcane plantation. In the center, a white man in a white shirt and dark trousers carries a large bundle of harvested sugarcane stalks. To his right, a Black man wearing a wide-brimmed hat and dark clothing is bent over, using a machete to cut sugarcane stalks. The background is filled with tall sugarcane plants under a blue sky. The ground is covered with cut cane leaves and stalks.

The unique slave culture has been passed down for many generations.

Resistance to Slavery

Resistance to slavery came in a few different forms. Some resistance was from well organized groups such as Amistad mutiny, the Underground Railroad and the efforts of Nat Turner, John Brown, Harriet Tubman and their supporters. However most of the resistance came from individual slaves and slave families.

They fought against their appalling conditions themselves. This was very dangerous as they were severely punished by their owners at any sign that they were rebelling.



Resistance to Slavery

Some slaves tried to show their resistance by deliberately:

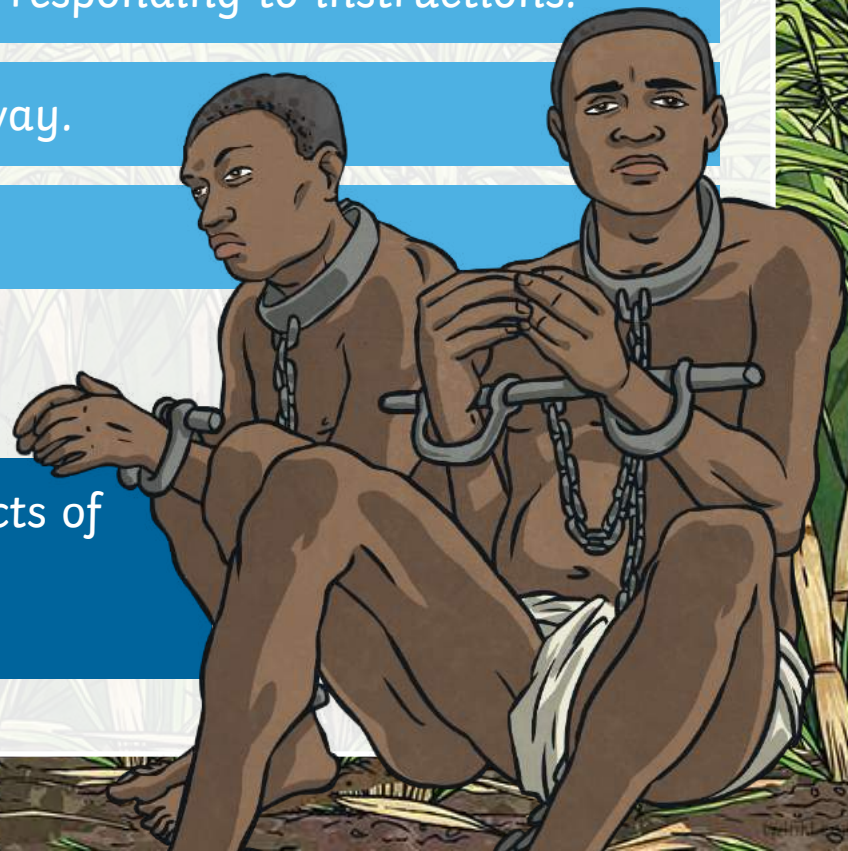
working very slowly and sluggishly, trying to do as few duties as possible.

approaching their work passively and not responding to instructions.

drinking alcohol to make their pain go away.

running away from the plantations.

Slaves started working together to plan acts of resistance, which included burning down plantations or murdering owners.



Important People in the Fight Against Slavery

Nat Turner

Nat Turner was born in Virginia on the 2 October 1800. His mother was a slave on a plantation, so he was born into the life of a slave. Nat's owner, Benjamin Turner, allowed Nat to receive some education. He was taught to read, write and he was taught about Christianity.

As he grew up Nat became very religious and he spent a lot of time reading the Bible. Over the years he worked on a few different plantations. He worked on his owner's brother's plantation (Samuel Turner). Conditions were bad and Nat ran away from the plantation and hid in the woods. After hiding for 30 days he believed that he received a sign from God that he should return to the Samuel's plantation. When Samuel died, Nat became the slave of Thomas Moore and then Thomas's widow after he died. When she married John Travis, Nat Turner went to work on Travis' lands.

Important People in the Fight Against Slavery

In 1831 there was a solar eclipse. Nat saw this as a signal from God that the time to rise up against slavery had come. He gathered several slaves together to join him, who in turn gathered more slaves. A group of 40-50 supporters joined Nat in a violent revolt against the slave masters. They murdered around 55 white men, women and children and stole their guns and horses.

Close to the town of Jerusalem, Nat and his men were stopped by a large group of armed plantation owners. Nat fled and hid in the woods. The slave masters took their revenge and killed any slave that they thought had played a role in the uprising or who they thought may rebel in the future. They slaughtered around 100 slaves.

Important People in the Fight Against Slavery

Eventually Nat and some of his offer co-conspirators were caught on the 30th October 1831. He was given a lawyer, Thomas R Gray, who wrote down Nat's confession. Nat pleaded not guilty, as he was convinced that the uprising was the work of God. Nat was found guilty and he was sentenced to death by hanging.

The rebellion scared Southerners so much that they enacted even harsher laws against slaves and life for slaves became even harder. However, Nat's rebellion did work to spur on the movement in the North against the South and slavery.

Important People in the Fight Against Slavery

Harriet Tubman

Harriet Tubman born around 1822. She was one of nine children born into slavery in Dorchester County, Maryland in America. Harriet did not have an easy life. Her owner's son, Edward, sold three of her sisters to a plantation far away. Physical abuse was a part of daily life for her and her family. She suffered permanent physical injuries from this abuse and carried the scars for her whole life. She even told a story of a day when she was lashed five times before breakfast!

When she was a teenager she was sent to the store for supplies. On the way she saw a slave who had left the field without permission. The slave's overseer demanded that Harriet help him catch the run away. When she refused, he threw a 2,5kg weight at her that hit her in the head. As a result of this injury she suffered seizures, sever headaches and narcolepsy (a sleep disorder) for the rest of her life.

Important People in the Fight Against Slavery

When her father was 45, he was freed from slavery according to his owners will, but he had little option than to continue working for his former owners. Harriet's owners chose not to release her and the rest of her family.

In 1844, Harriet married John Tubman, he was a free black man. At that time in Maryland around half the African-American people were free. Most families contained both free members and slaves. Any children that Harriet had would automatically have become her owners slaves so she decide not to have any children.

Important People in the Fight Against Slavery

In 1849 Harriet decided to try escape to Philadelphia, where she could be free. John, her husband, did not want to make the journey on the Underground Railroad with Harriet, instead he stayed in Maryland with a new wife. Two of her brothers, Ben and Harry escaped with her on the 17 September. However after a reward of 300 dollars was offered for Harriet's return her brothers got scared and returned to the plantation and their lives of slavery.

Making use of the Underground Railroad, Harriet traveled nearly 144 km to the free state of Philadelphia. Instead of staying in the safety of the Philadelphia, she made it her mission to rescue her family and others who still lived as slaves.

Important People in the Fight Against Slavery

In December 1850, Tubman received a warning that her niece Kessiah, along with her two children, was going to be sold. Harriet then helped the entire family make the journey to Philadelphia via the Underground Railway. She was also able to help her family and about 60 other slaves find their way to freedom.

Things changed for the Underground Railroad in 1850 when the Fugitive Slave Law was introduced. This law allowed escaped slaves to be recaptured in the North and returned to slavery.

Police in the North were now forced to help the capture of slaves living free in the North, even though they were against slavery. This meant that Harriet had to re-route the Underground Railroad to Canada, which was against slavery.

Important People in the Fight Against Slavery

During the Civil War Harriet worked for the Union Army as a cook and nurse, as well as an armed scout and spy. She was the first woman to lead an armed expedition in the war. She guided the Combahee River Raid, which freed more than 700 slaves in South Carolina!

The Effect Of Transatlantic Slave Trade On The World

America and Britain

Both America and Britain profited from the slave trade. In America cotton was one of the most financially profitable crops. Cotton farmers relied heavily on the slave labour to work their fields. Slave labour also made it possible for America to have excess crops of rice, wheat and sugar which allowed them to export to other countries for high profits. Slaves were never paid which meant that the farmers were able to produce goods cheaply and enjoy higher profits.

During the time of slavery, trade between America and Britain grew which also boosted the British economy. British industry grew to process the raw materials received from America. Ports like Liverpool, Bristol and Glasgow grew as a result of the ships bringing the imported goods from America.



The Effect Of Transatlantic Slave Trade On The World

West Africa

The negative impact of slavery on West Africa is still felt today. The population of West African countries dropped significantly with high numbers of people being kidnaped and taken as slaves. Many areas were left with so few people they couldn't work the farms anymore and food production fell. This also left these countries with little to sell or trade and their economies were negatively effected.

In other areas over population became an issue as people fled their homelands to avoid the slave traders.



The Effect Of Transatlantic Slave Trade On The World

West African communities were so weak as a result they could not resist being taken over by European colonists. Once the Europeans had control, they forced the farmers to grow products that would fetch a high price in Europe, such as coffee, instead of growing food products that the local population needed for food. The traditional ways of growing crops and trading was forgotten, and large parts of Africa became poorer and poorer.

Slavery also caused an increase in the number of wars between Africans. In order to gain wealth, one tribe might attack its neighbour in order to take prisoners. These prisoners were then sold to slave traders. This caused the further weakening of many West African societies



The End Of Slavery In America

Slavery was made illegal in the Northern states in 1834 but continued in the South. By the late 1850s, people in the Northern states of America came to regard the South as inferior because of its maltreatment of slaves. Eventually the North and South went to war. The Civil War lasted between 1861 and 1865. Up to the end of the Civil War, the economy of America profited very much from the unpaid labour of the slaves.

On the January 31, 1865, the U.S. congress banned slavery as part of the 13th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution.

