

Year 8 HT 3 – The Slave Trade

The slave trade took place from the 16th to the 19th century, with European powers, particularly the British, capturing and transporting millions of Africans across the Atlantic Ocean to the Americas as slaves.

The Slave Triangle, also known as the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade, occurred between the 16th and 19th centuries, when African people were enslaved and transported to the Americas by European traders. The trade was an integral part of the mercantilist economy of Europe and fuelled the growth of the British Empire.

The life of a slave on a slave plantation was extremely difficult and oppressive. Slavery was a system where people were treated as property and forced to work without pay. Slaves were captured in Africa or born into slavery and then sold to plantation owners in the Americas. On a plantation, slaves were subjected to harsh conditions and constant control by their owners. They had to work long hours in fields, planting and harvesting crops like cotton, tobacco, or sugar cane. They endured backbreaking labor, often under the hot sun, with little rest or freedom. Slaves faced physical and emotional abuse, as well as the constant fear of punishment, such as whippings or being separated from their families. They were denied basic rights and often lived in cramped and unsanitary conditions.

During this time period, several pivotal historical events were happening in the UK and around the world, which impacted the slave trade. Here are some of the key events and their significance:

1. The Tudor era (1485-1603): This period saw the beginning of the British involvement in the slave trade, with English sailors voyaging to West Africa to trade goods for slaves. The Tudor era was also a time of exploration, as sailors were seeking new trade routes and discoveries.
2. The English Civil War (1642-1651): This was a period of intense political and social upheaval in the UK. The Civil War was fought between the forces of Parliament and the Royalists, with the Parliamentarians ultimately emerging victorious. This period saw the rise of the Commonwealth and the Protectorate under Oliver Cromwell, which heavily influenced British involvement in the slave trade.
3. The Enlightenment (1715-1789): The Enlightenment was an era of scientific and philosophical advances, with a focus on reason and progress. This period saw the growth of abolitionist movements, with figures such as William Wilberforce campaigning for the end of slavery.
4. The American War of Independence (1775-1783): This conflict had significant consequences for the slave trade, as the slave-owning Southern states of America sought to gain independence from Britain. The British army tried to recruit slaves to fight against American forces, but this led to widespread protests and revolts.
5. The Industrial Revolution (1760-1840): The Industrial Revolution brought about significant societal changes, with the growth of cities and the emergence of new technologies. This period also saw the increase in cotton production, which was reliant on slave-produced cotton from the Americas.
6. The Abolition of the Slave Trade Act (1807): This act, which was passed by the British Parliament, made it illegal to trade slaves between Britain and other countries. This was a significant milestone in the abolitionist movement and led to the eventual end of the slave trade in the British Empire.

In summary, the slave trade was inextricably linked to wider historical events such as exploration, political upheaval, the growth of industry, and the rise of abolitionist movements. By understanding these concurrent historical events, students can gain a deeper understanding of the context in which the slave trade operated, and how it was ultimately abolished.

Further reading:

Fiction:

"Escape from Home" by Avi: This novel follows the journey of a young African girl named Charlotte, who is captured and transported to America as a slave, and her struggle to regain her freedom.

Non fiction:

"The Slave Trade: The Story of the Atlantic Slave Trade, 1440-1870" by Hugh Thomas: This comprehensive book covers the entire history of the Atlantic slave trade and its impact on the world