

Section

1

European Exploration and Colonization

The Slave Trade

The origins of the **Atlantic slave trade** and its long duration were products of Western Europe's expansion of power that began during the fifteenth century and continued into the twentieth century. For a variety of economic, technological, and demographic reasons, Portugal, Spain, the Netherlands, France, England, and other nations sought to explore, conquer, and colonize in Africa, Asia, and the Americas. Their efforts had important consequences for these areas.

Portugal took the lead during the early 1400s as ships from its ports reached Africa's western coast. Portuguese captains hoped to find Christian allies there against the Muslims of North Africa and to spread Christianity. But they were more interested in trade with African kingdoms, as were the Spanish, Dutch, English, and French who followed them.

Even more attractive than Africa to the Portuguese and their European successors as sources of trade and wealth were India, China, Japan, and the East Indian islands (modern Indonesia and Malaysia). The desire to reach these eastern regions motivated the Spanish monarchy to finance Christopher Columbus's westward voyages that began in 1492.

Columbus, who believed the earth to be much smaller than it actually is, hoped to reach Japan or India by sailing west. His mistake led to the European conquest, settlement, and exploitation of North and South America and the Caribbean islands, where Columbus first landed. Columbus and those who followed him quickly enslaved indigenous Americans (American Indians) as laborers in fields and mines. Almost as quickly, large numbers of indigenous peoples either died of European diseases and overwork or escaped beyond the reach of European power. Consequently, European colonizers needed additional laborers. This demand for a workforce in the Americas caused the Atlantic slave trade.



Reading Check

How did the arrival of the Europeans affect Africa?

GUIDE TO READING

- ▶ How did the arrival of the Europeans affect Africa?
- ▶ How did the slave trade in Africa differ from the Atlantic slave trade?
- ▶ How did European demand for sugar contribute to the growth of the Atlantic slave trade?

KEY TERMS

- ▶ Atlantic slave trade, p. 37
- ▶ chattel, p. 41
- ▶ *Asiento*, p. 43
- ▶ triangular trade systems, p. 44



This sixteenth-century drawing by German artist Albrecht Dürer depicts Katharina, a servant of a Portuguese official who lived in Antwerp.

The Slave Trade in Africa

Slave labor was not peculiar to the European colonies in the Americas. Slavery and slave trading were ancient phenomena that existed in all cultures. Slavery had existed in Africa for thousands of years, and slave labor was common in West Africa.

When Portuguese voyagers first arrived at Senegambia, Benin, and Kongo, they found a thriving commerce in slaves. These kingdoms represented the southern extremity of an extensive trade conducted by Islamic nations that involved the capture and sale of Europeans and mixed-race North Africans called Berbers, as well as black people from south of the Sahara Desert. Although Arabs nurtured antiblack prejudice, race was not the major factor in this Islamic slave trade. Arab merchants and West African kings, for example, imported white slaves from Europe.

Insofar as it affected West Africa, the Islamic slave trade was conducted by Sudanese horsemen. The horsemen invaded the forest region to capture people who could not effectively resist—often they came from stateless societies. The trade dealt mainly in women and children, who as slaves were destined for lives as concubines and domestic servants in North Africa and southwest Asia. This pattern contrasted with that of the later Atlantic slave trade, which primarily sought young men for agricultural labor in the Americas. The West African men who constituted a minority of those subjected to the trans-Saharan slave trade were more likely to become soldiers for such North African states as Morocco and Egypt than field workers.

The demand for slaves in Muslim countries remained high from the tenth through the fifteenth centuries because many died from disease or were freed and assimilated into Arab society. The trans-Saharan slave trade therefore rivaled the extensive trade in gold across the Sahara and helped make such West African cities as Timbuktu, Walata, Jenne, and Gao wealthy. According to historian Roland Oliver, it was not until 1600 that the Atlantic slave trade reached the proportions of the trans-Saharan slave trade (see Figure 2-1).

The Origins of the Atlantic Slave Trade

When Portuguese ships first arrived off the Guinea Coast, their captains traded chiefly for gold, ivory, and pepper, but they also wanted slaves. As early as 1441, Antam Goncalvez of Portugal enslaved a Berber and his West African servant and took them home as gifts for a Portuguese prince. During the following decades, Portuguese raiders

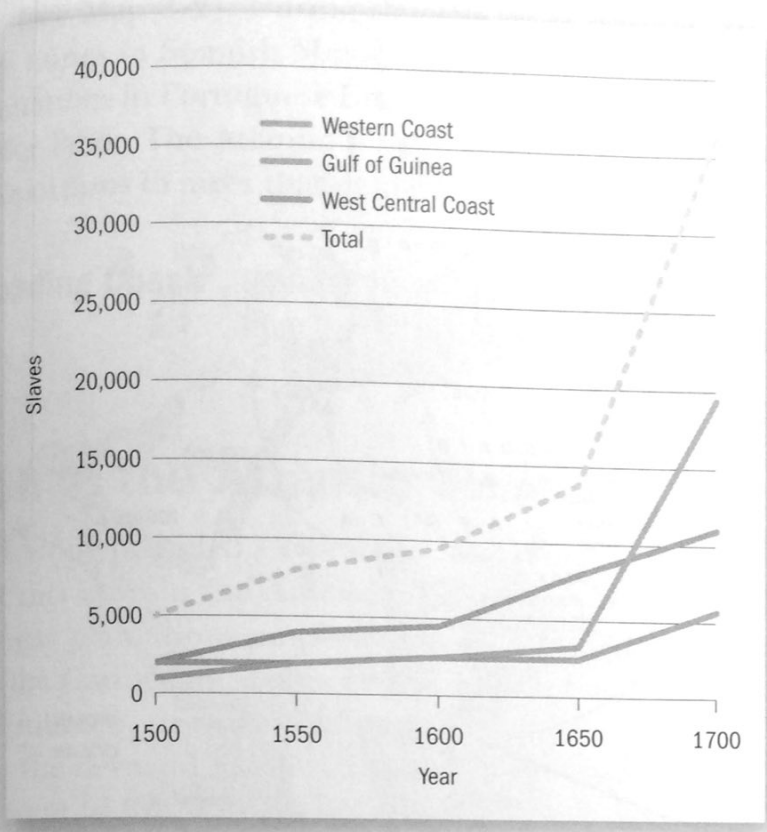


FIGURE 2-1 Estimated Annual Exports of Enslaved Africans from Western Africa to the Americas, 1500-1700.

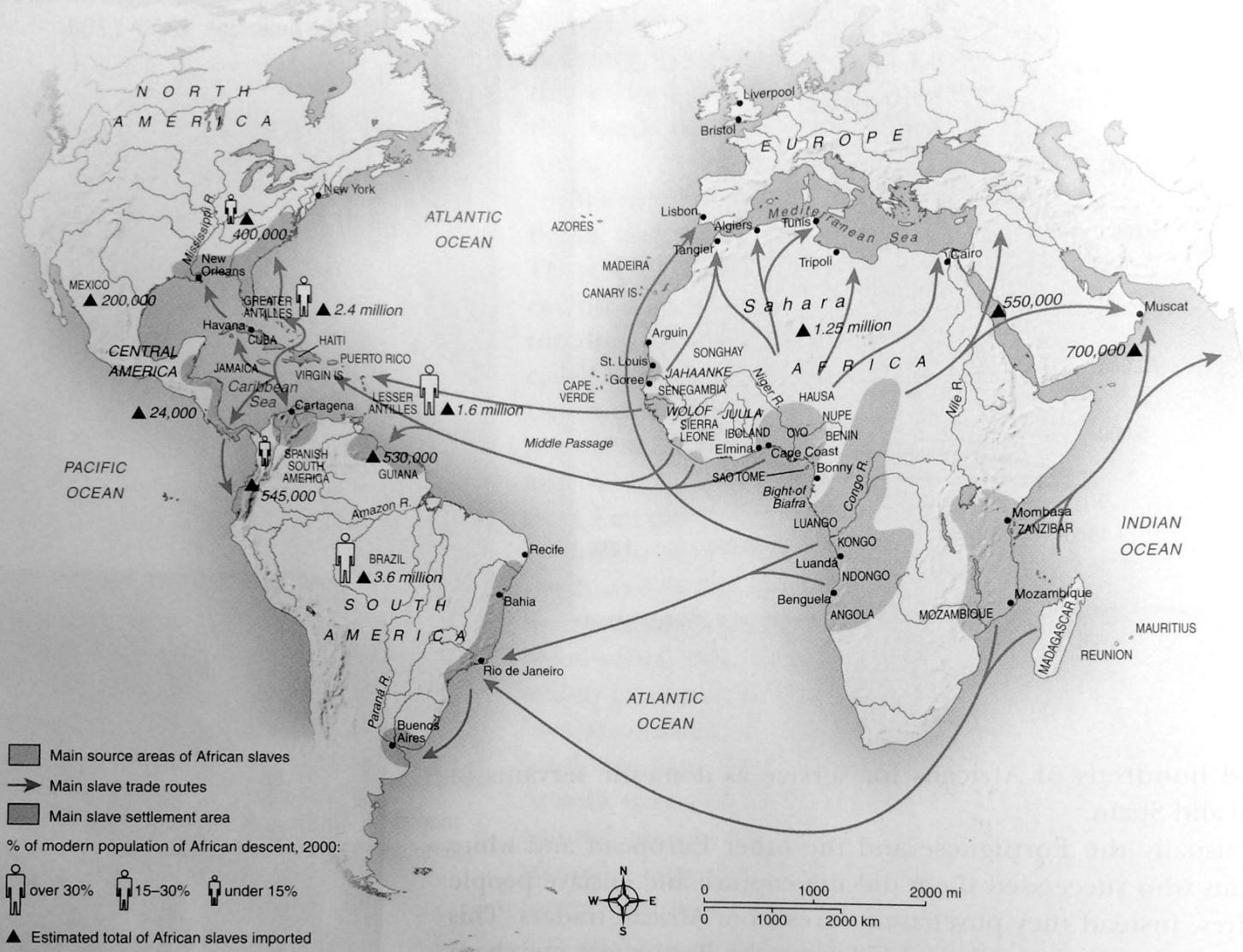
captured hundreds of Africans for service as domestic servants in Portugal and Spain.

But usually the Portuguese and the other European and white Americans who succeeded them did not capture and enslave people themselves. Instead they purchased slaves from African traders. This arrangement began formally in 1472 when the Portuguese merchant Diogo Siqueira gained permission from the Oba (king) of Benin to trade for slaves, as well as gold and ivory, within the borders of the Oba's kingdom. Siqueira and other Portuguese found that a commercial infrastructure already existed in West Africa that could distribute European trade goods and procure slaves. The rulers of Benin, Dahomey, and other African kingdoms restricted the Europeans to a few points on the coast, and the kingdoms raided the interior to supply the Europeans with slaves.

Interethnic rivalries in West Africa led to the warfare that produced these slaves during the sixteenth century. Although Africans were initially reluctant to sell members of their own ethnic group to Europeans, they did not at first consider it wrong to sell members of their own race to foreigners. In fact, neither Africans nor Europeans had yet developed the concept of racial solidarity. By the eighteenth century, however, at least the victims of the trade believed that such solidarity *should* exist. Ottobah Cugoana, who had been captured and sold during that century, wrote, "I must own to the shame of my



West African artists recorded the appearance of Europeans who came to trade in gold, ivory, and human beings.



MAP 2-1 The Atlantic and Islamic Slave Trades

The Atlantic slave trade reached the proportions of the Islamic slave trade in 1600.

? According to this map, which region in the Americas imported the most slaves?



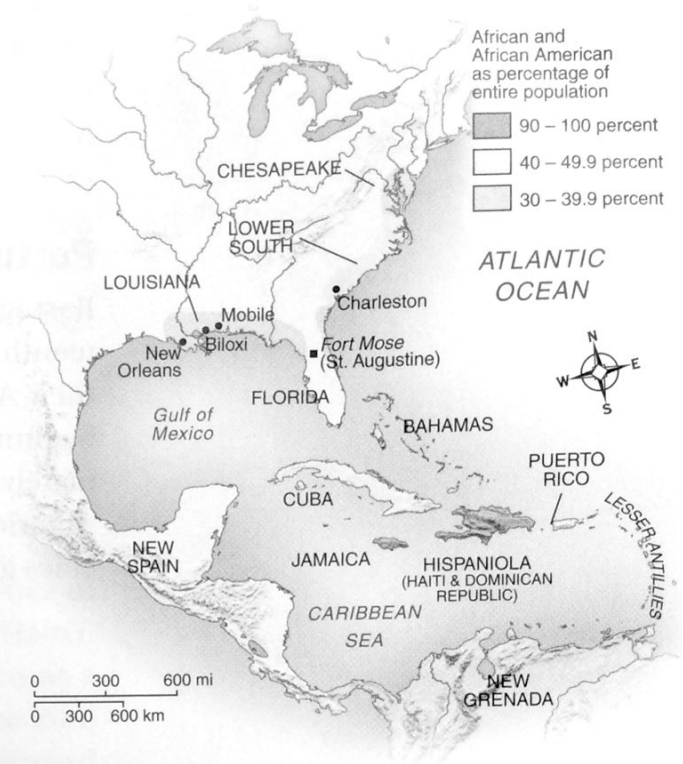
Explore this map online at www.prenhall.com/aah/map.2.1

countrymen that I was first kidnapped and betrayed by [those of] my own complexion.”

Until the early sixteenth century, Portuguese seafarers conducted the Atlantic slave trade on a tiny scale to satisfy a limited market for domestic servants on the Iberian Peninsula (Portugal and Spain). Other European countries had no demand for slaves because their own workforces were already too large. But the impact of Columbus's voyages drastically changed the trade. The Spanish and the Portuguese—followed by the Dutch, English, and French—established colonies in the Caribbean, Mexico, and Central and South America. As the numbers of American Indians in these regions rapidly declined, Europeans relied on the Atlantic slave trade to replace them as a source of slave labor (see Map 2-1). As early as 1502, African slaves lived on the island of Hispaniola—modern Haiti and the Dominican

Republic (see Map 2-2). During the sixteenth century, gold and silver mines in Spanish Mexico and Peru and especially sugar plantations in Portuguese Brazil produced an enormous demand for labor. The Atlantic slave trade grew to huge and tragic proportions to meet that demand (see Table 2-1).

Reading Check How did the slave trade in Africa differ from the Atlantic slave trade?



Growth of the Atlantic Slave Trade

Because Europe provided an insatiable market for sugar, cultivation of this crop in the Americas became extremely profitable. Sugar plantations employing slave labor spread from Brazil to the Caribbean islands (West Indies). Later the cultivation of tobacco, rice, and indigo in British North America added to the demand for African slaves, although far more Africans went to Brazil than ever reached North America. By 1510 Spain had joined Portugal in the enlarged Atlantic slave trade, and a new, harsher form of slavery had become established in the Americas. Unlike slavery in Africa, Asia, and Europe, slavery in the Americas was based on race; most of the enslaved were males, and they were generally employed as agricultural laborers rather than soldiers or domestic servants. The enslaved also became **chattel**—meaning personal property—of their masters and lost their customary rights as human beings. Men and boys predominated in part because

MAP 2-2 Slave Colonies of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries

This map indicates regions in North America, the West Indies, and South America that had significant populations of enslaved people of African descent.

? What European powers controlled the regions of North America and the Caribbean islands shown in this map?

TABLE 2-1 Estimated Slave Imports by Destination, 1451-1870

Destination	Total Slave Imports
British North America	500,000
Spanish America	2,500,000
British Caribbean	2,000,000
French Caribbean	1,600,000
Dutch Caribbean	500,000
Danish Caribbean	28,000
Brazil	4,000,000
Old World	200,000

Source: Hugh Thomas, *The Slave Trade: The Story of the Atlantic Slave Trade, 1440-1870* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997), 804.

Europeans believed they were stronger laborers than women and girls. Another factor was that West Africans preferred to have women do agricultural work and therefore tended to withhold them from the Atlantic trade.

Portugal and Spain

Portugal and Spain dominated the Atlantic slave trade during the sixteenth century. They shipped about two thousand Africans per year to their American colonies, with by far the most going to Brazil. From the beginning of the trade until its nineteenth-century abolition, approximately 6,500,000 of the approximately 11,328,000 Africans taken to the Americas went to Portugal's and Spain's colonies. Both of these monarchies granted monopolies over the trade to private companies. In Spain



The Portuguese established the city of Luanda in 1575 as a center for the shipment of enslaved Africans to Brazil.

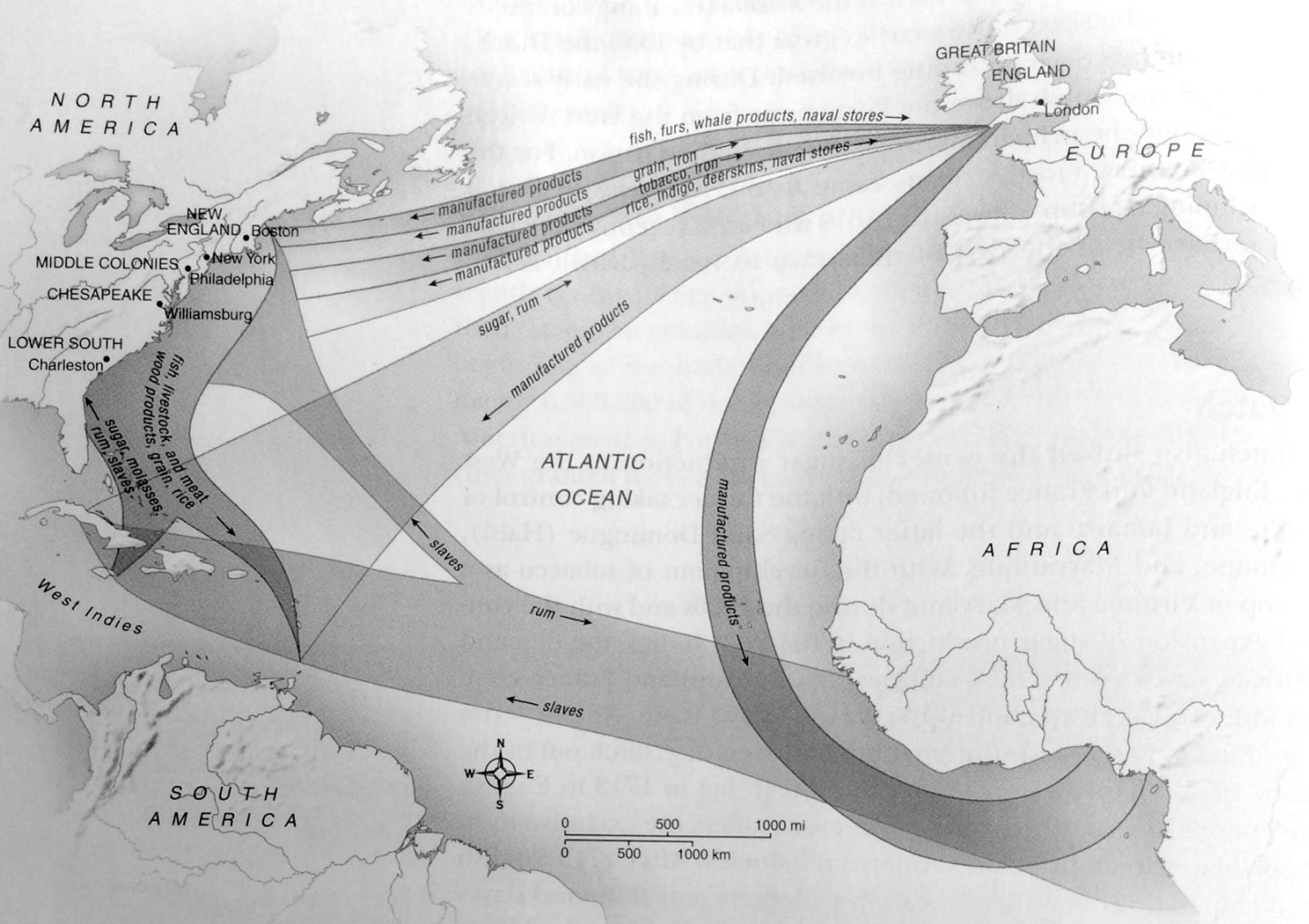
this monopoly became known in 1518 as the *Asiento* (meaning contract). The profits from the slave trade were so great that by 1550 the Dutch, French, and English were becoming involved. During the early seventeenth century, the Dutch drove the Portuguese from the West African coast and became the principal European slave-trading nation. For the rest of that century, most Africans came to the Americas in Dutch ships—including a group of twenty in 1619 who until recently were considered to have been the first of their race to reach British North America.

The Dutch

The Dutch also shifted the center of sugar production to the West Indies. England and France followed, with the former taking control of Barbados and Jamaica and the latter taking Saint Domingue (Haiti), Guadeloupe, and Martinique. With the development of tobacco as a cash crop in Virginia and Maryland during the 1620s and with the continued expansion of sugar production in the West Indies, the demand for African slaves grew. The result was that England and France competed with the Dutch to control the Atlantic slave trade. After a series of wars, England emerged supreme. It had driven the Dutch out of the trade by 1674. Victories over France and Spain led in 1713 to English control of the *Asiento*, which allowed English traders the exclusive right to supply slaves to all of Spain's American colonies. After 1713 English ships dominated the slave trade, carrying about twenty thousand slaves per year from Africa to the Americas. At the peak of the trade during the 1790s, they transported fifty thousand per year.



Africans working on a sugar plantation in the West Indies.



MAP 2-3 Atlantic Trade among the Americas, Great Britain, and West Africa during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries

Often referred to as a triangular trade, this map shows the complexity of early modern Atlantic commerce, of which the slave trade was a major part.

? What does this map suggest about the economy of the Atlantic world between 1600 and 1800?

Economics of the Slave Trade

The profits from the Atlantic slave trade, together with those from the sugar and tobacco produced in the Americas by slave labor, were invested in England and consequently helped fund the industrial revolution during the eighteenth century. In turn, Africa became a market for cheap English manufactured goods (see Map 2-3). Eventually, two **triangular trade systems** developed. In one, traders carried English goods to West Africa and exchanged the goods for slaves. Then the traders carried the slaves to the West Indies and exchanged them for sugar, which they took back to England on the third leg of the triangle. In the other triangular trade, white Americans from Britain's New England colonies carried rum to West Africa to trade for slaves. From Africa they took the slaves to the West Indies to exchange for sugar or molasses—sugar syrup—which they then took home to distill into rum.