

History of Slavery in America OLLI Spring 2021

Week1 Background Origins of Atlantic Slave Trade

Youtube: Ted Ed Anthony Hazard Atlantic Slave Trade

Sources:

Thomas, Hugh The Slave Trade: the Story of the Atlantic Slave Trade 1440-1870

Linda Heywood and John Thornton Central Africans, Atlantic Creoles, and the Foundation of the Americas 1585-1660

Summary: Slavery existed in Africa, Europe, and the Middle East for centuries before the Atlantic Slave trade emerged. The slave trade in Africa developed as Muslim traders spread Islam to North Africa shortly after the death of Mohammed in the 8th century. By the 15th century when the Atlantic slave trade has its origin trade routes existed throughout Africa connecting most of the continent with ports on the Mediterranean, the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean. When the nations of Renaissance Europe sought a source of revenue to address their trade deficits with the nations of the East they lacked a way to access the gold they knew existed in the Kingdom of Mali and other African nations. All ports were controlled by Arab traders who stood to collect the profits from such trades. The Portuguese navigators devised a technique to sail along lines of longitude enabling sailing north to south and returning south to north along the Atlantic coast of Africa. This opened up profitable trade routes for the gold and spices of Africa. Soon the African traders introduced slaves to the European ship captains. Portugal established a slave trade centered in Lisbon. The demand for labor to grow sugar grew along the Canary and other islands in the Atlantic. The maritime powers of Europe established forts along the coast. The forts warehoused captives purchased from the slave traders. European ships from Portugal, Holland, France, Denmark and by the 17th century England could land at a fort and fill a ship with human cargo at one stop. Towns developed along these sites. An Atlantic Creole culture with its own language formed from Portuguese and West African languages developed. The population of Africans and some Europeans populations these coastal towns had more in common with each other than they did with inland populations. They were a truly cosmopolitan population multicultural, multilingual, and in some instances multiracial. These Atlantic Creoles will come to have an important influence on the newly established colonies in 17th century North America.

Essential Understanding:

- Africa and the slave trade before 1450
- Role of Portugal in slave trade with new world
- Development of Atlantic Creole culture

Suggested Supplemental Materials and Activities

Read Homegoing by Yaa Gyasi

Plan a trip to the National Museum of African American History and Culture