

Beginnings of Slavery in the Americas

MAIN IDEA

Slavery in the Americas began in order to provide cheap labor for the colonies.

WHY IT MATTERS NOW

The effects of slavery, including racism, helped shape attitudes and social conditions in the United States.

TERMS & IDEAS

slavery slave codes
African Diaspora racism
middle passage

ONE AMERICAN'S STORY

In 1546, Diego de Campo was the leader of 7,000 maroons, or runaway slaves on the island of Hispaniola. There were only about 1,000 European men on the island.

The Spanish planters greatly feared de Campo. When the Spanish attacked the maroons, de Campo and his followers defeated the Spanish.

Eventually the Spaniards captured de Campo. He offered to lead the fight against the maroons. The Spanish accepted the offer. With de Campo's help, the Spanish defeated the maroons, and slavery in Hispaniola grew. In this section, you will read how slave labor expanded in the Americas.



Colonial troops searched for communities of maroons to destroy them.

Taking Notes

Use your chart to take notes about the origins of slavery.

Event/Idea	Notes
Exploration	
Establishing Colonies	
European Competition	
Columbian Exchange	
Origins of Slavery	

The Origins of American Slavery

By the 1600s, **slavery**, the practice of holding a person in bondage for labor, was firmly established in the Americas. But slavery was not new. Its roots went back to the world's ancient civilizations.

Slavery took many different forms throughout history. In some societies, slaves were mainly domestic servants in wealthy households. Some slaves also labored in mines and fields.

People were often enslaved when they were captured in battle or sold to pay off debts. Some slaves were treated with respect. Some were allowed to marry and own property. The children of many slaves were allowed to go free.

Slavery began to change, however, with the rise of sugar plantations. Europeans had used slaves to grow sugar in the eastern Mediterranean since the 1100s. Then, in the 1400s and 1500s, Portugal and Spain set up sugar plantations on islands in the eastern Atlantic. To work these plantations, they used African slaves bought from traders in Africa.

When the Spanish and Portuguese founded their colonies in the Americas, they brought the plantation system with them. At first they tried to enslave Native Americans to work in the fields and mines. But the Native Americans quickly died from overwork and disease. In some cases, they rebelled with the help of local allies.

The Spaniards then looked to other sources of slave labor, including Spanish slaves, black Christian slaves, and Asian slaves. But there was not enough of any of these groups to meet demand.

Finally, the Spanish and Portuguese enslaved Africans to provide labor. They enslaved Africans for four basic reasons. First, Africans were immune to most European diseases. Second, Africans had no friends or family in the Americas to help them resist or escape enslavement. Third, enslaved Africans provided a permanent source of cheap labor. Even their children could be held in bondage. Fourth, many Africans had worked on farms in their native lands.

Reading History

A. Drawing Conclusions Why did colonists decide that African slaves were more useful than Native American slaves?

The Slave Trade

The slave trade grew slowly at first. In 1509, the Spanish governor of Hispaniola, Diego Colón—Columbus's son—wrote to King Ferdinand to complain about a labor shortage on the island. In response, the king sent 50 African slaves to Hispaniola. The slave trade increased with the demand for slaves to work in the colonies. Eventually the colonies came to depend on slave labor. As one Spanish official in Peru wrote, "The black slave is the basis of the *hacienda* and the source of all wealth which this realm produces."

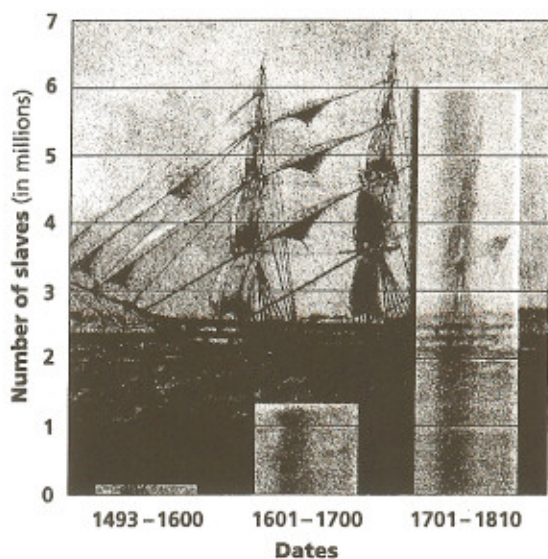
European slave traders carried out the shipment of Africans to the Americas. The rulers of West African kingdoms participated in the trade, too. On the coast of Africa, local kings gathered captives from inland. The local kings then traded these captives for European goods, such as textiles, ironware, wine, and guns.

This trade made the coastal kingdoms rich while weakening inland African societies. In 1526, King Afonso, a West African ruler, protested against the slave trade in a letter to Portugal's king. Afonso wrote, "Everyday these [slave] merchants take our people. . . . So great is this corruption and evil that our country is becoming completely depopulated."

Vocabulary
depopulated: to lose population

CONNECTIONS TO MATH

Slaves Imported to the Americas, 1493–1810



Source: Philip D. Curtin, *The Atlantic Slave Trade*

SKILLBUILDER Interpreting Graphs

1. About how many slaves were imported to the Americas between 1493 and 1810?
2. Why do you think the numbers increased?